

~ *Finale* ~

Fluttershy, Rarity and their friends stood now around what was left of the refreshments table offered earlier in the evening, subtly eavesdropping on a conversation taking place on the opposite side of the room.

Or not so subtly in the case of Pinkie Pie, who was watching the Princesses and the 'Opera Ghost' intently through a pair of opera glasses she had 'found' earlier, and relaying the conversation back to the others as well as her lip-reading skills allowed.

"Princess Celestia is saying something about how they can't just ignore what he's done, but that his motives were pure, and she and Luna will show leaning on ice." Pinkie said. Twilight arched an eyebrow at her.

"No, wait, lenience." Pinkie added, correcting herself.

"Ah, right." Twilight nodded, mentally filling in the blanks.

"Oh, I do hope they're not too harsh on him..." Fluttershy interjected, glancing nervously at the Princesses.

"Fluttershy, dear, he *did* scare the singers, antagonize the actors and terrorize the theatre." Rarity replied. "(*And destroy my dress*)," she added, under her breath.

"I suppose, but he just seemed so... Lonely."

"Ain't like it weren't self-inflicted, sugarcube." Applejack added, gulping down a mouthful of *hors d'oeuvres*. "Sure, he had a hard run of it back then, but y'don't jus' go crazy an' choose to live under a theatre 'cos y'got rejected."

Fluttershy opened her mouth to say something, but then just nodded, meekly. All six turned their attention back to the Princesses and the mule, watching quietly while the conversation slowly drew to a close. Eventually, Princess Celestia turned to look at them all, and smiled. She, her sister, and the mule all walked over to the group.

Fluttershy was first to speak.

"So? What's going to happen to him?" she asked, nervously.

"Oh, I thought I'd banish him and then lock him in a dungeon in the place that I banished him to." Celestia replied, smirking. Fluttershy looked shocked, paused, and then blushed.

“Stop teasing her, sister!” Luna said, cutting in. “Fear not, the mule will not be so harmed. In fact, we were most impressed with his performance, and have decided to...”

The six ponies and one mule leant in closer.

“... Give him community service. As a composer for our Royal Opera.”

The mule looked utterly taken aback. His jaw dropped, and his eyes widened.

“And I choose to appoint him as an advisory for the renovations.” Celestia added. Luna looked at her with a raised eyebrow.

“What renovations?” she asked, confused.

“To the lake, of course! I’d forgotten how beautiful it was down there, and it’s been centuries since it was open to the public. I think it’s about time we restored it to its former glory, but the decision is ultimately down to you, sister. You *are* the patron of the arts, after all.”

Luna blinked a few times, and broke out into a broad grin, momentarily forgetting herself and leaping at her sister, wrapping her forelegs around her neck.

“Oh, thank you! You don’t know how much that means to me! After all these years...-” she paused, looking around her. Blushing a little, she disentangled herself from her sister and adopted a more regal posture.

Rarity delicately cleared her throat. “Begging your pardon, your highnesses, but that does seem a bit... lenient.” Applejack and Rainbow Dash both nodded at the sentiment.

“In time, all his misdeeds against the Opera, its employees and its patrons, will be repaid.” Celestia responded. “His work will pay for the repairs to the auditorium, and beyond that, he will do all that is necessary to repair the damage he has caused. All he can do is ask for forgiveness, it is up to us to grant it.”

Rarity nodded, although it was perhaps obvious to one as well-trained in reading expressions as the Princess that she was not altogether convinced.

“Besides... I recall being told that our Ghostly friend has amassed quite a fortune in ‘salary’ over the years...” Celestia added, looking back at the mule. “I think that it should account for most of what he owes, would you not agree?”

“... Yes, Princess,” Rarity replied.

“Now, with that settled, I believe there is still a final act to perform, is there not?” Luna said,

smiling. "At least, providing there aren't any more interruptions!"

Some months later, Fluttershy, Rarity and their friends returned to the Opera. Fluttershy had been invited to play the lead role in the inaugural performance of the new Grand Auditorium. They were met by Falsetto, who led them to the new entranceway; a brightly light tunnel that spiralled downwards, towards the centre of the mountain. Carved all along the walls were images with a distinctly nautical theme, and brass seaponies held aloft glass lanterns that cast a warm glow over polished stone.

Shortly, the group emerged in the vast cavern that had once been the underground lake. The scene before them was utterly transformed from the dark and ultimately damp cave it had been before. The vast dome had been left untouched, the natural curvature and shape of the stone preserved along with its myriad constellations of studded gemstones. The only light in the auditorium came from the enchanted glow of the gems, as well as a great sphere of pearl, that hung suspended from the ceiling on a length of chain. Below, the shores of the lake had been built up, carved, paved and tiered. Curved rows of seats led down in concentric semi-circles to a thick wall of marble that held back the lake.

The lake had been tamed, the waterfall now ran down the side of the cavern, no longer the loud roar it had been before, but a peaceful and comforting stream that provided a background to the performance. In the centre of the lake was a great platform, around which the waters of the lake had been directed into a large ring, a canal that encircled the marble of the platform stage and lapped against it. Pillars, stretching from the stage to the cavern roof, held curtains of rich velvet, the colour of midnight, and studded with diamond. Fluttershy was led away along the shore by Falsetto, while an impeccably dressed usher showed the rest to their seats.

She was taken to a little dock at the edge of the rows of seats, where several small, but elaborately shaped boats were moored. Standing in one was a very familiar face indeed.

"My angel of music, it is good to see you again." he said, in a voice that carried much greater happiness than the same voice that Fluttershy had first heard speaking to her those months ago. She smiled and stepped carefully into the boat, which pushed off from the dock.

As the Ghost pushed the boat along the ring-shaped canal with a pole, Fluttershy saw another platform approaching, hidden from the audience by the stage itself. The steps led down into the water, and she noticed several less ornate boats tied up along its length. The Ghost masterfully brought the little boat alongside, and helped Fluttershy off, following shortly after.

Together, they walked along to what had previously been the natural tunnel that served to drain the lake, the Ghost's home and hiding place. It had now been transformed into a bustling backstage, where everypony was running to and fro, preparing for the performance that was

soon to begin.

“I will see you on the stage, my dear Fluttershy. Astound them for me!” the Ghost said to her as he walked away down a separate corridor towards his own rooms. Fluttershy nodded, smiling, and was quickly led towards her room by a stagehoof.

She took a deep breath as she opened the door, her costume already awaiting her. One final performance.

“Honey, I can’t see,” said a whispered voice from near the front row.

“Do you think we’re here to see the opera? We’re sitting *behind the Princess!*” another voice hissed back.

“How does her mane *do* that, anyway?”

“*Shush!*”

Princess Celestia smirked. The front row was so much better than the Royal Box. Beside her sat Princess Luna, elegantly adorned in a new gown for the occasion, and beside the both of them sat Twilight, Applejack, Rarity, Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie.

The general chatter of the audience died as the conductor raised his baton. Elsewhere, a unicorn technician dimmed the lights of the starscape above, and the pearl moon waned to merely a crescent.

The orchestra swelled as the curtain was drawn back. Boats appeared from either side of the stage and began a slow circuit around it, bearing the chorus singers as they lent their voices to the music. As the dancers streamed onto the stage, spinning and pirouetting, Fluttershy appeared, walking to the centre of the platform to thunderous applause. She felt the last traces of her fear fly away on the notes as they rose to the high, vaulted ceiling of the auditorium, and, spreading her wings, she sang.

The months she had spent at the Opera had been some of the strangest of her life, trailing ghosts, uncovering secrets and, above all, conquering her own fears of performing. She now stood among professionals with years of training behind them, and sang as they did, not for themselves, but for the love of the art.

The newspapers of Canterlot had been filled with stories of the mysterious ‘ghost’ for months after that fateful night, but now the upper classes of Canterlot knew the Opera Ghost not as a spectre or a terror that haunted the Royal Opera House, but rather as the embodiment of everything that the Opera had become.

In time, ponies would come to forget the strange case of the Opera Ghost, but for one pony in particular, the memory stayed with her forever.

Her Phantom of the Opera.

~ *Fin* ~

<<- [Act II: Scene III](#)