

A BIRD IN THE HOOF

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Prologue

(Opening shot: fade in to the exterior of Fluttershy's cottage during the day. Zoom in slowly and cut to a close-up of a mouse sitting in a tiny wheelchair on a rug inside. One leg is heavily bandaged.)

Fluttershy: *(jumping down to it)* There you go, Mr. Mousey.

(A nudge from her nose sends the chair rolling over to a hole in the wall, where mate and child eagerly welcome the patient home. Fluttershy's shadow falls over them; cut to her on the next line.)

Fluttershy: Now you stay off that leg and do everything I told you, and it'll be just like new in no time at all. *(It waves to her.)* Aw, you're welcome. Happy to be able to help.

(As soon as the mouse is wheeled inside, cut to Fluttershy's rabbit Angel, carrying a pocket watch and moving at a flat-out run. One look at the watch face triggers a pop-eyed panic, and he leaps ahead to head-butt Fluttershy's flank. After Angel peels his face up from the floor, the camera cuts to a close-up; he points to the timepiece and shakes it vigorously.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* You found a watch?

(Head shake; now the forelegs spread and move as if ticking off seconds.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* You want to be a watch?

(Ears droop in frustration. Another head shake, and Angel runs in place.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* You're running! *(Cut to her.)* Running out of time? No...you're...late?

(This gets a big smile and nod from the white fuzzball, who points out the open front door as a clock tower chimes four in the distance. On the second strike, the camera cuts to a closer shot of the tower; on the third, to a close-up of the face; on the fourth, back to Fluttershy's puzzled expression. She snaps to with a sharp gasp.)

Fluttershy: I'm late for a very important date! The big brunch for Princess Celestia at Sugarcube Corner!

(With one last frantic gesture, Angel collapses in a faint.)

Fluttershy: *(pacing)* Oh, the Princess is here in Ponyville for a party, and we all promised we'd be there! But I'm not there! *(checking herself in a mirror)* Oh, do I look all right? *(checking a rack of dresses)* Do I need to bring anything? *(huddling on floor)* Maybe I shouldn't go.

(The dresses in question are the ones that Rarity designed for the group to wear at the Grand Galloping Gala. Evidently they have been moved here for safekeeping after the parasprite disaster in "Swarm of the Century." A trumpet fanfare scares a little yelp out of her and gets her upright again.)

Fluttershy: It's starting! I'm missing it!

(She races out past Angel, who has also reached vertical and hops away with a slightly disgusted groan. Before he can get too far, she zips back.)

Fluttershy: Oh, thanks, Angel. *(She goes, then returns again.)* I mean, if you hadn't reminded me, I might have not remembered, and then I wouldn't be there and everypony'd be wondering where I was, and—

(The fed-up rabbit administers a few swift thumps to her foreleg with one of his hind feet.)

Fluttershy: Oh, right. *(rushing out)* I'm late!

(This time, she actually does make it out the door, which Angel slams and latches. Even this does not stop the flustered pegasus from trying to get back in, judging from the door's rattle.)

Fluttershy: *(from outside, through door)* Oh, okay, then, See you later.

(The ears sag again as he lets off a sigh that might best be translated as: "Remind me again why I put up with her?" Fade to black.)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(Opening shot: fade in to the exterior of Sugarcube Corner, seen from across the street, and zoom in. Two of Princess Celestia's pegasus guards are on duty at the door, and a close-up frames impassive expressions that would give the Beefeaters in London a run for their money. Behind

them, the front door's top half is open; Rainbow Dash pokes her head up here from inside, eyes them mischievously, and jumps out onto the step.)

Rainbow: So, what do I have to do to get to be one of the Princess's royal guards, anyway? *(No response; she nudges one's foreleg.)* Is the pay good?

(Still nothing, so she shifts her attention to the other.)

Rainbow: Hel-looooo? Anybody home?

(The stallion does not stir as much as an eyebrow, so Rainbow raises the stakes by making a string of goofy faces. Nothing.)

Rainbow: Ooooooh, you're good. *(Pause.)* Too good. I'm bored.

(She flies back into the bakery; a moment later Fluttershy races up.)

Fluttershy: Phew! Made it!

(As she heads toward the door, each guard puts out one wing, crossing them to block the entrance. Fluttershy gasps.)

Guard 1: Halt!

Guard 2: Who goes there?

Fluttershy: *(gulping, backing off)* No one. Never mind. I'll go home.

(Twilight Sparkle and Pinkie Pie walk past behind the door, the former stopping and catching sight of her friend slinking off.)

Twilight: It's all right, sirs. She's on the list.

(The wings are folded away and Fluttershy smiles gratefully. Cut to just inside the front door as she enters; the shop floor has been set up for a party, with treats, presents, and decorations.)

Fluttershy: Thanks, Twilight.

Twilight: I'm so glad you could make it, Fluttershy. It wouldn't be the same without you.

(Cut to a close-up of four small pies or tarts on a tray. A lick of green flame washes over to brown them perfectly in seconds, and a longer shot frames Spike in the kitchen on baking duty. Wearing a chef's hat and apron, he hits a desk bell on the counter; Mr. Cake leans into view, grabs the tray edge in his teeth, and takes it away so Spike can fire up another batch. Out on the crowded shop floor, Mr. Cake balances the tray on his head as he navigates the room; Mrs. Cake brings a tray of cupcakes to Celestia, who sits at a long table near the back.)

Mr. Cake: How's everypony doing? Good? Good. *(Zoom in on the table.)*

Mrs. Cake: Anything else we can get for you, dearie? *(catching herself with a yelp)* I-I mean, esteemed guests? *(Mr. Cake joins her.)*

Celestia: Everything is fine, Mr. and Mrs. Cake.

(Her relaxed demeanor contrasts sharply with the couple's sudden uptight affect. Cut to Twilight and Fluttershy as they cross the floor; the former glancing nervously about with a fixed grin on her face.)

Fluttershy: Sorry I'm late. I had to finish taking care of a patient first.

Twilight: Oh, you and your tender loving care of little animals. *(Close-up.)* I just know Princess Celestia's gonna love that about you. *(sweating heavily)* I mean, I hope she will, I mean, of course she will. *(Pan to Fluttershy.)*

Fluttershy: Wow, Twilight. I thought I was the only one who got nervous at social gatherings.

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* Oh, it's not that. *(They stop; cut to frame both.)* I just want the Princess to approve of my friends.

Fluttershy: But she's met us all before. *(They start off again.)*

Twilight: And read about you in my letters. But this is the first time she's spent any real time with you. I want everypony to make a good impression.

Fluttershy: Well, I'm sure you have nothing to worry about. Besides, it's just a casual get-together, right?

Rarity: *(from o.s.)* Don't touch me!

(Surprise from both the pegasus and a knot of party guests in the vicinity of the white unicorn, who is decked out in her self-designed dress for the Grand Galloping Gala.)

Rarity: Watch the dress! *(to a guest carrying a cup of tea)* Careful, you're gonna spill that on me!

(Mrs. Cake brings the tray of cupcakes to Rarity.)

Rarity: Ooh, ooh, that looks delicious! What is it? *(unhinged)* Oh! Does it stain? Keep it away from me! *(She cowers on the floor.)*

Fluttershy: Or perhaps not that casual.

(Now the camera cuts to Applejack at a table loaded with savories of all types, most of which look to be made from Sweet Apple Acres' produce. She has removed her hat and tied a napkin around her neck, but so far her nerves have kept her from eating a bite.)

Applejack: *(sweating)* Uh, which is the salad and which is the appetizer again? *(Her perspective, panning across the spread.)* And which am I supposed to eat first?

(Back to her; she leans openmouthed toward a salad, then a sandwich, then a fritter, then gives up and pushes the food away.)

Applejack: Aw, never mind. I'm not hungry.

(Cut to Twilight and Fluttershy, watching this display of gluttony's polar opposite, and zoom in.)

Fluttershy: It's okay, Twilight. So our friends' manners aren't perfect. I doubt the Princess will even notice.

(Pinkie's gleeful, giggly bounds across the room put the lie to that assertion.)

Pinkie: Woo-hoo! Cupcakes, candies, and pies, oh my!

(She leaps past tables loaded with the first two treats in time with this line, then picks up a pie and smacks herself in the side of the head with it. Cut to a chocolate fountain on a table, with assorted fruits laid around it for dipping; her quivery moan is heard from o.s., and she puts her head up behind the table.)

Pinkie: Chocolate fountain-y goodness!

(She shoves her entire head into the flow for a moment, lets the chocolate harden, then eats as much of it as she can as the flakes crumble away to leave her face clean of pie residue. At the seat of honor, Celestia levitates a cupcake and is about to bite down before the hyperactive pink pony zips up to her along the table.)

Pinkie: You gonna eat that?

(Without waiting for an answer, she chomps the whole thing out of the air, scattering a few dishes but not perturbing Celestia much, if at all. The Cakes, on the other hand, get a real scare—he recoiling, she gasping in horror—and Mrs. Cake dashes over to grab Pinkie's tail in her teeth and yank her away.)

Pinkie: Hey!

(Just as quickly, Mr. Cake rushes in, with a fresh cupcake and teacup on a tray in his teeth, and serves the ruler.)

Mr. Cake: A thousand pardons, Your Majesty. *(He backs off.)*

Celestia: That's quite all right. Thank you.

(This time, she successfully levitates both items, takes a bite, and sips her tea without interruption. The moment her empty cup clinks back down onto its saucer, both Cakes spring into action.)

Mrs. Cake: Empty teacup at four o'clock!

Mr. Cake: I see it, honey bun! *(He swiftly refills it.)*

Celestia: Oh! Um...thank you.

Mr. Cake: Not at all, Your Highness.

(The regal pony's next sip brings Mrs. Cake galloping with a teapot of her own to refill.)

Celestia: Thank you again.

Mrs. Cake: Oh, but of course, Your Majesty.

(This sequence repeats itself twice more, with first the stallion and then the mare topping off the cup. After a quick sidewise glance, she levitates it again but only pretends to take a sip; when Mr. Cake instinctively leans in with the pot, the tea slops over the brim.)

Celestia: Gotcha!

(The bakery owners smile sheepishly at having fallen for this joke. Pan to Twilight and Fluttershy at one end of the table; the unicorn sinks down with a scared little moan, while the pegasus stares intently past her.)

Celestia: *(from o.s.)* And what about you, dear? *(Cut to her.)* Fluttershy, is it?

Fluttershy: Me? Oh, yes, Your Highness.

Celestia: I understand from Twilight Sparkle's letters that you enjoy tending to the needs of woodland creatures. *(Cut to Fluttershy.)*

Fluttershy: Yes, I love to take care of animals.

Celestia: *(from o.s.)* As do I.

(Cut to frame both of them, Twilight, and Applejack farther down the table. A gold birdcage stands empty next to Celestia.)

Celestia: As Princess, I care deeply about all creatures great and small.

(The cage surprises the other three ponies by emitting a choking cough and a spurt of feathers seemingly from nowhere. Zoom in as it repeats the performance. On the next line, cut to Fluttershy, then to Celestia and pan to the malfunctioning piece of equipment.)

Celestia: Nothing means more to me than the well-being of all my subjects.

(More feathers go flying as the source makes its presence known: a very sickly, emaciated pink bird that rises up from the cage's deep bottom to land on the perch. It had been merely hiding out of sight. The head wobbles and droops, and one pale blue eye is slightly bugged out compared to the other one.)

Celestia: *(from o.s.)* Ah! Philomena, my pet! *(leaning into view)* You're awake. Do say hello to our gracious hosts.

(The bird responds by shedding a few more feathers, coughing in innovative ways, and twisting her head around to stare up at the ceiling.)

Fluttershy: *(slightly horrified)* Oh...my.

Celestia: *(as Fluttershy hunkers down)* She is quite a sight, isn't she?

Fluttershy: I...I... *(Cut to the cage; she continues o.s.)* ...I've never seen anything like it.

(The bird's cough is followed by a guard approaching to whisper directly into her owner's ear.)

Celestia: Really? *(He nods.)* Well, if I must.

(Cut to Fluttershy and Rarity at one end of the table.)

Celestia: *(from o.s.)* I'm sorry, everypony. *(To Twilight, drinking tea, and Fluttershy.)* I'm afraid I have to cut the party short.

(Her faithful student nearly chokes on or spits out her mouthful.)

Celestia: The Mayor has requested an audience with me. Royal duty calls. Thank you for a wonderful time. It's been a joy getting to know you all better.

(She makes her stately exit, followed by the guard, as the crowd of guests bows her out of Sugarcube Corner. Fluttershy's attention, however, is fixed on the raggedy Philomena, whose eyes squeak audibly when she blinks them. Close-up of Applejack.)

Applejack: Phew! Now I can eat somethin'! *(Zoom out; the spread of food is still before her.)* I'm starved!

(Before she can dig in, Mr. Cake walks across, grabbing one corner of the tablecloth in his teeth and bundling every last item up into it. The hungry pony stares sadly at the now-cleared table and moans. Across the room, the orderly exit of guests is broken up by Pinkie turning cartwheels toward the door; laughing and whooping, she knocks a couple of them through it.)

Rarity: *(from o.s., menacingly)* Stay right where you are. *(Pan to her, backing up toward the door.)* All I want is a clear path to the exit. Nobody move, and my dress won't get hurt! Stay back! Back, I say!

(Cut to a close-up of a sizable stack of leftovers and zoom out to frame the lot balanced precisely on Applejack's nose. She too leaves the premises, hat back on and napkin still tied, and licking her chops at the idea of finally being able to get a decent meal. Twilight and Spike are left alone on the shop floor, the dragon still wearing his chef's hat and apron.)

Twilight: *(sighing)* Well, Spike, I don't know for sure how things went with the Princess, but at least no big disasters happened.

(Quick pan to Philomena's cage, now really empty except for a few loose feathers and with its door standing open. Zoom in slowly and snap to black.)

Act Two

(Opening shot: fade in to the interior of Fluttershy's cottage. The door opens to admit her, carrying the distressed bird on her back. A pet-sized bed sits in one corner of the room.)

Fluttershy: Oh, you poor little thing! How did you ever get in such bad condition?

(Close-up of her couch; she sets Philomena on it.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* Don't you worry, Philomena. *(Head flops onto the cushions.)* I'll nurse you back to health— *(Cut to frame her as well.)* —as a favor to the Princess, who's obviously just far too busy to care for you properly.

(Out comes a hacking cough/feather-shed combo that leaves the pet's neck bent double again, putting Fluttershy at a moment's loss.)

Fluttershy: I'm sure the Princess will appreciate the help.

(Back to Philomena on the end of this; she reaches into view to lift the head back up. Another spasm sends it bending over backwards.)

Fluttershy: Oh, my! *(picking her up)* I'd better get you to bed right away.

(Close-up of the small bed as Philomena is placed into it and covered with a blanket.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* There.

(Picking up a thermometer in her mouth, she slips into the patient's beak. A second later the mercury shoots up and Philomena goes beet-red from overheating, sweat and steam pouring from her head. Fluttershy gasps, yanks the blanket away, and sets an ice pack on the boiling-hot skull. The temperature quickly drops in response, but now Philomena gets a case of the shivers and goes ice-blue, her pupils turning to ice cubes as well.)

(Another gasp from Fluttershy; the ice pack is removed and the blanket replaced, causing her to boil over again. The two are switched time after time in an increasing tempo, the thermometer cycling faster and faster until its bulb shatters. Fluttershy's ministrations end with the blanket on and the ice pack off.)

Fluttershy: This is far worse than I thought. What you need is some medicine—stat!

(What she gets is a cough that sends the remains of the thermometer flying past her head. Wipe to a close-up of a table; a saucer with a very large capsule is placed on it.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* Here you go, Philomena. This will fix you right up.

(Philomena gives it a cautious sniff and makes a sound of disgust, letting her tongue hang out of her beak. She perches on the end of the couch now, facing Fluttershy across a small table.)

Fluttershy: Dr. Fluttershy expected that.

(Grabbing a bag of birdseed, she dumps enough onto the saucer to completely bury the capsule. Now, after a cautious lick, Philomena attacks the food with gusto, digging down into it like a jackhammer. Close-up of the pegasus' smug expression.)

Fluttershy: *(aside)* Always works.

(She quickly changes gears with a surprised little gasp; on the saucer, the birdseed is gone but the medicine remains untouched.)

Fluttershy: Almost always.

(The decrepit thing coughs and drops a few more feathers onto the table. Wipe to a bowl of hot soup standing on the carpet, and zoom out as Fluttershy leans down to blow on it.)

Fluttershy: *(pushing it across)* There's nothing like homemade soup to cure what ails you.

(After a skeptical look, Philomena turns her head away petulantly.)

Fluttershy: Come on now. You're not gonna get better if you don't cooperate. *(She pretends to sip the soup.)* Mmmmm, see? It's delicious. *(Close-up of Philomena; she continues o.s.)* Good and good for you.

(No go, so the aspiring veterinarian picks up the bowl.)

Fluttershy: Here comes the choo-choo train. *(Philomena again; she shifts the bowl around and continues o.s.)* Chugga-chugga-chugga-chugga, woo-woo!

(Her attempts to present the meal from different angles cause the bird to twist her head around so many times that her neck ends up kinked like an over-wound clockspring. Eventually she pops into the air, her body spinning to unwind the neck, and pitches face first into the bowl.)

Fluttershy: Oh, dear! *(Head lifted.)* Don't worry, Philomena. I know what'll make you feel better. Wait right here. *(trotting away)* I have just the thing.

(The forlorn cranium crashes back into the soup. Wipe to a close-up of its owner, nibbling a few pellets from a leaking bag of mouse food by the fireplace/stove.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* Look, Philomena!

(Zoom out to frame her as she approaches with a hummingbird perched on one raised foreleg.)

Fluttershy: I brought a fellow feathered friend by to cheer you up. Hummingway here was sick once too, but he let me help him and got better in no time. *(nuzzling his cheek)* Didn't you, boy?

(Hummingway makes a tiny "mmm-hmm" sound and nods in agreement. Back to the floor; he lands by Philomena, who has gone back to eating the mouse chow.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* Say hello to your new friend Philomena.

(The little bird jumps onto Philomena's back and nuzzles against her neck, humming a welcome.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* Aw, look. *(Tilt up; he flies across the room.)* I think he likes you.

(He meets her in midair; she vocalizes the first five notes of the original My Little Pony theme/jingle, and he responds with the next five.)

Fluttershy: Your turn now, Philomena.

(She hovers down near ground level, with Hummingway perching on her head.)

Fluttershy: Go ahead. You can do it.

(Philomena's gut begins to rumble, and when Fluttershy vocalizes the first five notes again, she takes a direct hit to the face from the load of half-digested birdseed that the patient heaves up.)

Fluttershy: *(wiping herself off)* Um...good try?

(Wipe to the cottage's bathroom, which boasts its share of birdhouses and mouse holes to match the rest of the domicile. Fluttershy has filled the bathtub, wrapped Philomena in towels, and stood her on a towel rack.)

Fluttershy: I know what'll clear up that tickle in your throat. *(approaching a radiator)* A humidifier!

(She gives the valve a turn, releasing clouds of steam into the room, and takes a deep breath of her own.)

Fluttershy: Refreshing. How's that feeling for you now, Philomena? *(Close-up of the bird; she continues o.s.)* Better?

(Philomena takes a breath of her own as Fluttershy gives her a huge, wide-eyed, encouraging grin—and then it comes out as the same half-strangled cough. The hapless caretaker moans sadly, and Philomena sheds a few more feathers.)

Fluttershy: *(forcing a smile)* That's okay. I know lots of other ways to take care of you. Don't worry. You're gonna get better. How about...

(Wipe to the fireplace/stove, where a fire is now burning and candles and incense have been lit. Pan to Philomena in a basket among this lot; Fluttershy leans down to her.)

Fluttershy: ...aromatherapy?

(The sickly avian gets a lungful of the vapors, pale blue eyes widening, then sneezes violently and loses some more plumage to Fluttershy's dismay. Cut to the running, steaming bathtub faucet, which shuts off just before the camera cuts to frame Philomena in the tub and Fluttershy at its side.)

Fluttershy: Warm bath?

(All this does is cause Philomena's body to bloat up to tub-filling proportions as she absorbs all the water like a sponge. There go some more feathers. Cut to a close-up of her head, back down to normal size—but now her eyes are crossed, in addition to one being bugged out.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* Ointment?

(A bit is squirted on, but Philomena has a very bad reaction, breaking out in a full-body rash and shedding some more. Wipe to a close-up of Fluttershy's nervous, sweating face; she wears a doctor's reflector strapped to her forehead.)

Fluttershy: Scalpel!

(It is passed to her from o.s, and she works for a moment.)

Fluttershy: Surgical tape!

(Cut to a longer shot; she also has a stethoscope around her neck, and Angel, also wearing a reflector, is in charge of the implements. He slaps the requested roll of tape into Fluttershy's hoof, and she works intently for a second.)

Fluttershy: Feathers!

(Now Angel gives her a basket of the ones Philomena has been constantly shedding, then mops the sweat from her brow as she works again. When she finishes, the camera cuts to just behind her and she moves aside to expose her work: Philomena, sitting on the floor, with feathers taped back on to cover any bare spots. Needless to say, the results are far from convincing, and she coughs and lets her head flop over onto the floor. The rash from the ointment has cleared up. In the next shot, Fluttershy and Angel have done away with their reflectors and the stethoscope.)

Fluttershy: Oh, Philomena— *(Head up.)* —I thought it would be easy to nurse you back to

health. But I've tried everything I know, and look at you. *(She lifts Philomena on a foreleg.)*
You're worse than ever!

(Comes a knock at the door; she slides over to it at lightning speed, no longer carrying the bird. Before she can get a hoof to the handle, it bursts open and Twilight walks in.)

Twilight: Hi, Fluttershy. I just wanted to drop by and say thank you so very much for making such a good impression on the Princess today.

(She stops short with a huge gasp; cut to Philomena, sitting on the little table by the couch.)

Twilight: What is Celestia's pet doing here?!

Fluttershy: I couldn't leave the poor thing there. *(Cut to the bird; she continues o.s.)* She needed my help. *(Zoom out to frame both ponies.)*

Twilight: *(panicked)* Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. *(hoof to face)* This is bad!

Fluttershy: How could I just walk away and not do anything?

Twilight: But-but she doesn't belong to you! *(Philomena keels over.)*

Fluttershy: I had to do *something!*

Twilight: Without telling anypony? Without asking permission?!

Fluttershy: But— *(The supine bird coughs...)*

Twilight: I know you had good intentions— *(...and slides off the table.)* —but you have got to return the Princess's pet!

Fluttershy: But—

(The debate ends when Philomena climbs partway back up with a wheezing inhalation.)

Fluttershy: *(sighing)* You're right. Okay, let's— *(The breath comes out as a cough.)* —go.

(She gets a basket from the floor; Twilight gets her teeth on the ailing bird's tail and yanks her away. In no time, she is in the basket, now on Fluttershy's back, and the lid is clapped down.)

Twilight: *(galloping to door)* If we hurry, we can put her back before anypony even realizes she's missing.

(She hits the door with a burst of telekinesis to open it, but freezes in place with a gasp and a start that makes her tail stand out straight. On the step are the two pegasus guards who kept watch over Sugarcube Corner during the brunch. Twilight bites down on her lower lip so hard that she might draw blood at any moment. Snap to black.)

Act Three

(Opening shot: fade in to the two impassive guards, who advance slowly into Fluttershy's cottage.)

Guard 1: We were told we could find Twilight Sparkle here.

Guard 2: We regret to inform you, miss— (*Cut to Twilight, grinning fixedly, and Fluttershy; he continues o.s.*) —that the royal pet has gone missing.

Twilight: Really! (*Wheezing from Fluttershy's basket.*) You don't say!

(She manages a couple of little giggles to try and mask the sound, but the lid-lifting hack that follows it is a real stretch. Zipping to Fluttershy's side, she works up a few coughs to try and pass the noises off as her own; every time the basket sounds off, she turns her own up a notch. Eventually she nudges Fluttershy's flank, prompting her to join in; the two guards trade a puzzled look as both let it die down. Twilight's next two lines are delivered in a fake hoarse tone of voice.)

Twilight: It's that dry night air. (*Grin; sweat rolls down.*)

Fluttershy: But it's daytime.

Twilight: Well, day air's even drier! (*laughing, pushing guards out*) You guards better be on your way if you're gonna find the Princess's missing pet—Philomena, was it? Thank you ever so much for keeping me in the loop. Bye!!!

(She magically slams the door and turns away from it, heaving for breath, before risking a look out the window to make sure the guards are really leaving. Close-up as she turns back toward the room.)

Twilight: Phew! (*Eyes pop.*) What are you doing? (*Cut to Fluttershy, on her way toward the door.*)

Fluttershy: Going to return Philomena, remember? (*Twilight blocks the way.*)

Twilight: We can't now!

Fluttershy: Why not?

Twilight: (*really freaking out*) You have no idea what the Princess is gonna do if she finds you're the one who took her pet, do you?!?

Fluttershy: Do you?

Twilight: Well...no. But it can't be anything good!

(Wavering dissolve to a close-up of a very despondent yellow pegasus, zooming out to frame her sitting on her haunches in a dim, foreboding wasteland. The entire view is shot in soft focus, marking it as her imagination.)

Twilight: (*voice over*) She might banish you from Equestria!

(Cut to an open dungeon cell; Fluttershy peeks out from within.)

Twilight: (*voice over*) Or throw you in a dungeon!

(The door slams shut and Fluttershy gasps. Cut to her in the wasteland again; on the next line, a cage drops from above to pen her in.)

Twilight: *(voice over)* Or banish you and then throw you in a dungeon *in* the place that she banishes you to! *(Close-up of Fluttershy.)*

Fluttershy: *(pushing bars aside)* You really think the Princess would do that?

(During this line, the scene undergoes a wavering dissolve back to reality, again framing Fluttershy in close-up. She then begins to pace the floor.)

Twilight: Okay, granted, that probably won't happen—but do you want to take any chances?

Fluttershy: All that really matters to me is that poor little Philomena here gets well.

(The critter in question pops out of the basket with a wheeze that leaves her hanging headfirst over the edge.)

Twilight: That's very noble of you. I'll write to you when you're banished— *(panicking)* —unless I'm banished too, somewhere there's no post office. Then you'll have to write to me. Deal?

Fluttershy: Please, Twilight. You just have to help me get Philomena healthy, and *then* we can return her to the Princess...

(During the previous, she pivots to give the unicorn a close look at Philomena. Extreme close-up of her sweaty brow and bloodshot, oozing eyes.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* ...and everything will be fine. *(Longer shot, framing all three.)*

Twilight: Did you give her any kind of medicine?

Fluttershy: I tried to, but she wouldn't take it.

Twilight: *(groaning loudly, Philomena falls out)* Then you have to *make* her take it! You can't be such a pushover, Fluttershy! You need to show this patient who's the boss! Make her straighten up and fly right!

Fluttershy: She can't fly!

(Twilight rummages around for a second and comes up with the capsule Philomena refused to take earlier on.)

Twilight: No excuses!

(A push on one taloned foot causes the beak to open as if it were a hinged trash can lid, and the medication is dropped in and swallowed.)

Twilight: Done! Okay, what else?

Fluttershy: Uh, well, she keeps pulling her feathers off—the ones that haven't fallen out yet from all the coughing, I mean.

(Close-up of Philomena on the end of this; she is indeed nipping at her own feathers. Twilight's solution is to clap on a conical collar, the sort used to keep dogs from trying to chew at an injured spot.)

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* There you go.

(Philomena tumbles over; cut to frame all three. She tries to pull the collar off.)

Fluttershy: I don't think she likes it. *(Start walking, head doubled over with collar scraping floor.)*

Twilight: Tough love, baby! You want her to get well, don't you? *(Roll across behind them.)*

Fluttershy: Of course, but—

Twilight: Next!

Fluttershy: Well, she desperately needs some bed rest, but I can't get her to stay put.

(When the patient walks past, Twilight plunks a hoof down on the collar edge to stop her and flip her backward. The camera now cuts to Philomena's perspective of the violet unicorn, framed by the collar edge.)

Twilight: *(reverberating slightly)* One step ahead of you.

(Wipe to a covered item whose shape, stand, and falling feathers mark it at the birdcage in which Philomena was first seen. Fluttershy crosses to it as the cloth bulges out in places from the bird's attempts to break through it; angry noises are heard from beneath as well.)

Fluttershy: It's for your own good, Philomena, I promise. *(Zoom out; Twilight is looking at the soup Fluttershy made.)* Please just relax and try to get some sleep.

Twilight: What's this soup over here? Smells delicious.

Fluttershy: I made it for Philomena, but she wouldn't eat it. *(Close-up of the bowl, which levitates off the table.)*

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* Oh, she'll eat it, all right.

(Zoom out to frame her; half-crazed smile and all; a turn of her head brings the bowl over to the cage and whisks the cloth away. As soon as she pops the latch on the door, Philomena jumps out with a screech and runs off, knocking the soup to the floor. The collar is now gone.)

Twilight: Hey! Where are you going?

(Cut to just outside the open front door as the escapee heads out through it.)

Fluttershy: *(dashing out, Twilight following)* No! Philomena! Come back!

(Wipe to Philomena running through the park outside Ponyville. The two mares chase her to a tree and around it several times, the speed increasing until none of them can be seen under the thick cloud of dust thrown up by the chase. Tilt up from this to the branches; Philomena has taken refuge here and runs off along a limb. At ground level, Twilight and Fluttershy skid to a stop and head off in a new direction indicated by the unicorn.)

(Cut to a Ponyville street; the two guards are showing a sketch to a stallion, and a close-up shows it to be a decent rendition of the sickly Philomena. The stallion shakes his head. On a park bench, a figure sits and reads a newspaper that hides all but its fingers and feet. Twilight and Fluttershy race past, then double back and stop at the bench. The newspaper is lowered to reveal Philomena, with a bushy brown mustache hung over her beak as a ridiculously transparent disguise. However, it is enough to fool the two mares, as they cough a bit to see if the “innocent” bystander might recognize it as a tip to Philomena. After the bird shrugs and goes back to the paper, Twilight and Fluttershy trade a puzzled look and gallop off again.)

(Back in town, the two guards look back and forth as Philomena runs past behind them, pursued by the pair of mares. The bird has shed her disguise, and Twilight tiptoes past while Fluttershy flies as stealthily as she can. In an alley between two buildings, each of which has two doors facing the other, Philomena peeks out from the front right door and runs to front left, staying just ahead of Twilight. There follows a frenetic back-and-forth between the four doors, with both Twilight and Fluttershy trying to catch the runaway until they crash headlong into each other. Philomena bails out.)

(Now Twilight and Fluttershy gallop through the town square and past the pavilion. Philomena emerges from behind a flagpole and goes the other way just before the guards walk up and stick their sketch of her onto it. After they have gone, she returns and draws a bushy mustache and eyebrows onto the picture to throw off her trackers, then runs off again.)

(As Twilight and Fluttershy gallop along, Rainbow flies to catch up.)

Rainbow: What are you two doing? Are you having a race? Oh, can I play? One-two-three-go!

(She streaks ahead; the other two throw each other a slightly confused look and carry on. Pan slightly ahead of them to a fountain decorated by a rearing-pony statue. Applejack, Pinkie, and Rarity are here, Pinkie eating a cupcake as Applejack balances an apple on her nose. The farmer has done away with the napkin tied around her neck from Act One, and the designer has changed out of her Gala dress. In close-up, Pinkie is suddenly lifted off her hooves by Fluttershy, the camera zooming out to frame both. Fluttershy is checking the ground beneath for any sign of Philomena and has Pinkie balanced on her back.)

Fluttershy: Excuse me.

Pinkie: Hi! *(Cut to Applejack and Rarity; the former no longer has the apple.)*

Twilight: *(from o.s., grabbing Rarity)* Beg your pardon. *(She lifts the white unicorn and looks underneath.)*

Rarity: Put me down! *(Twilight does so.)*

Applejack: What in tarnation? *(The group again; Pinkie is back on the ground.)*

Fluttershy: Sorry, but we’ve gotta find— *(Quick pan back to the guards, now nearby and looking upward.)*

Guard 2: The Princess’s pet bird!

(Cut to the base of the fountain and tilt up to the statue’s head. Philomena is perched here,

having lost all her feathers except for a few fragments and still coughing wretchedly. On the next line, cut to an overhead view of Applejack, Fluttershy, Pinkie, and the guards.)

Fluttershy: Philomena, come down from there! You'll hurt yourself!

(Close-up of one last tail feather as it pops loose, then zoom out to frame the stricken Philomena. She hacks and wheezes her way through a string of full-body convulsions and ends up collapsed on her back atop the statue. After an uncomfortably long pause, she snaps upright and delivers an encore that sends her into a headfirst dive toward the ground.)

Fluttershy: I'll catch you!

(Applejack and Pinkie gasp as she zips ahead. The camera cuts back and forth between the plummeting plucked bird and the frantically galloping pegasus. Before the race between gravity and leg power can be decided, though, Philomena is enveloped in a burst of flame. Fluttershy gasps in pure shock and throws herself into a slide that would have earned a nod of approval from Willie Mays. When she stops with front hooves outstretched, the fire dies out and all she catches is a little pile of ashes. The other five ponies gasp—Rainbow having joined the group at the fountain—and the catcher does everything she can to keep from bursting into tears on the spot. However, the little whimper from her throat clearly tells that she is losing the battle as the ashes trickle to the ground.)

(With the guards staring aghast, the situation takes yet one more bizarre turn when Celestia walks onto the scene.)

Celestia: *(sternly)* What is going on here?

(They bow and back off. Cut to a pan across the row of the other six, starting at Pinkie's end and panning to Fluttershy's; all bow except this last, who regards the ashes despairingly.)

Celestia: *(from o.s.)* Twilight? *(Twilight straightens up.)*

Twilight: Yes, Your Majesty? There's been a terrible accident. *(Fluttershy steps ahead.)*

Fluttershy: It's all my fault. *(Twilight steps ahead.)*

Twilight: No, Princess. Fluttershy didn't know any better. It was *my* fault. *(Fluttershy.)*

Fluttershy: *I'm* the one who did it. *(Twilight.)*

Twilight: But you were only trying to help.

Fluttershy: Some help I was.

Twilight: Will you let me do this? She'll go easier on me!

Fluttershy: But it's my fault!

Twilight: No, it's *my* fault! *(Pinkie pops up.)*

Pinkie: Nope, it's my fault!... Wait. What are we talking about?

(She zips away, completely missing the violet unicorn's grimace.)

Fluttershy: *(stepping ahead to Celestia)* Thanks for trying to protect me, Twilight, but, Princess

Celestia, I'm the one who took your pet bird. *(Cut briefly to the concerned Celestia, then back as she continues.)* I really was only trying to help the poor little thing. Then I was gonna bring it right back to you, honest.

(Close-up of the pile of ashes on the grass by the fountain. Celestia's gold-shod front hooves step into view next to them; zoom out to frame her as Fluttershy approaches.)

Fluttershy: So, if you want to banish me and then throw me in a dungeon in the place that you banish me to... *(lowering her head)* ...then that's what I deserve.

(The sovereign eyes the contrite yellow pony for a moment before turning her attention back to the earthly remains of her prized pet. Closing her eyes, she lowers her head toward the pile—then opens them and cheerfully addresses it.)

Celestia: Oh, stop fooling around, Philomena! You're scaring everypony.

(The ashes waft into the air seemingly on their own, bringing gasps from the four uninvolved ponies, and reconstitute themselves into a bird. Not the sickly, molting, cross-eyed wreck that drove Fluttershy up the wall, though; this one has plumage of red, orange, and gold, long tail feathers, and an impressive size and wingspan. The new bird briefly silhouettes itself against a burst of light as stunned gasps float up from below, then soars down toward them.)

Ponies: *(from o.s.)* Ooooh...wow... *(It swoops down, trailing licks of fire from its wings.)*

Fluttershy: I don't understand! *(It lands on Celestia's foreleg.)* What is that thing? What happened to Philomena?

Celestia: This *is* Philomena. *(Close-up of the bird; she continues o.s.)* She's quite a sight, as I said, but nothing unusual for a phoenix. *(leaning into view)* Isn't that right, Philomena?

(Her pet lets off a happy little cry. Cut to Fluttershy.)

Fluttershy: A...a phoenix? *(The head leans down to look her straight on and nods.)*

Celestia: *(from o.s.)* A phoenix is a majestic and magical bird.

(Nod; cut to a longer shot, framing all three again.)

Celestia: While it appears healthy and happy most of the time—

(Philomena lifts off from the foreleg; cut to her as she circles high above.)

Celestia: *(from o.s.)* —every so often it must renew itself by shedding all of its feathers and bursting into flame.

(She lifts her own head into view on the end of this to watch the airshow; another happy cry floats down, and she leans toward Fluttershy.)

Celestia: (*whispering*) Rather melodramatic, if you ask me. (*straightening up; normal volume*) It then rises from the ashes, fresh as a daisy. (*The phoenix perches back on her foreleg.*) All just a normal part of the life cycle of a phoenix.

(*Close-up of the orange-feathered head.*)

Celestia: (*from o.s.*) I'm afraid mischievous little Philomena here took the occasion to have a little fun with you, Fluttershy.

(*Philomena covers her head with one wing on this line, embarrassed at being called out; cut to Fluttershy as she is lowered to the pony's level.*)

Celestia: (*from o.s., sternly*) Say you're sorry, young lady. (*A whimper from the bird.*)

Fluttershy: So—aren't you gonna banish me, or throw me in a dungeon— (*Cut to a befuddled Applejack and Rainbow; pan to Rarity as she continues o.s.*) —or banish me and then throw me in a dungeon in the place that you banish me to?

(*Back to Twilight, Fluttershy, Celestia, and Philomena.*)

Celestia: (*smiling*) Of course not, my little pony. (*Philomena lifts off.*) Where on earth would you get such an idea?

(*Zoom in on the two locals, who trade an anxious glance and then smile.*)

Fluttershy: I guess I have some imagination.

Twilight: Fluttershy really did do everything she could to try to take care of Philomena for you.

Celestia: And I do appreciate that your heart was in the right place, child. But all you had to do was ask me, and I could've told you Philomena was a phoenix and saved you all this trouble.

Fluttershy: I know. I shouldn't have jumped to conclusions. Next time I'll ask before taking matters into my own hooves. (*Twilight reacts with mild surprise.*)

Twilight: Should I write you a letter about that lesson, Princess?

Celestia: No, that's quite all right. (*Philomena perches on her back; Celestia glances toward her.*) I think I can remember.

(*Now the two guards bring over the birdcage as the reborn pet swoops into the sky; one long red feather drops back and sticks behind Fluttershy's ear, shaft first. She looks up to the hovering Philomena, who coos softly.*)

Fluttershy: It's beautiful. Thank you, Philomena. No hard feelings.

(*As the bird swoops off again, Rainbow eyes the two stolid-faced guards.*)

Rainbow: Hmmm...

(*Getting a sudden inspiration, she flies up to whisper to Philomena and gets a nod in response.*)

The phoenix perches on top of her cage and spreads her wings just enough to tickle the guards' noses; they try to hold their composure, but soon lose it in roaring fits of laughter. She trades a midair high five with the sky-blue prankster.)

Rainbow: Yeah!

(Her own laughter mingles with a raucous caw from her accomplice. Twilight, Fluttershy, and Celestia are next to join in, followed by all the other ponies in an overhead shot and slow zoom out. Fade to black.)