

## **DARING DOUBT**

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### **Prologue**

*(Opening shot: fade in to the exterior of Rainbow Dash's cloud house during the day. Fluttershy arcs toward it, reading intently from a book and with saddlebags slung up; cut to just inside the front doors, which the blue pegasus flies to open at the sound of the yellow one's knock. Fluttershy, standing on the step, is so engrossed in her reading—a Daring Do tale, judging by the cover art—that Rainbow has to push the book down from her face to make eye contact.)*

**Fluttershy:** Oh! *(stepping in, closing book and door)* I just stopped by to thank you for letting me borrow your Daring Do books. I loved them! *(Rainbow touches down.)*

**Rainbow:** Wait 'til you get to *Daring Do and the Riddle of the Sphinx!*

**Fluttershy:** *(slipping book into her bags)* This is actually my second time through! I read them all, from *Daring Do and the Sapphire Statue* to *Daring Do and the Fallen Idol!*

**Rainbow:** *(baffled)* *Fallen Idol?* *(shaking head)* That's not in the series.

**Fluttershy:** Oh. It just came out last week. Maybe that's why you haven't heard of it?

**Rainbow:** *(hovering)* No way Daring Do's biggest fan—me—would miss a book coming out. Besides, A.K. Yearling always sends me a copy.

**Fluttershy:** *(pulling book out)* Well, I'm happy to let you borrow mine until yours arrives.

*(It is snatched from her grip and brought up close to the red-violet eyes.)*

**Rainbow:** *(reading cover)* “The true story of the thieving fraud known as Daring Do”? *What?!?* Why would A.K. Yearling write that about herself? *(Fluttershy moves in for a look.)*

**Fluttershy:** Oh! It looks like she didn't!

*(Close-up of the book.)*

**Fluttershy:** *(from o.s., pointing to text in bottom corner)* This book says it's by Groom Q.Q. Martingale. *(Both mares again.)*

**Rainbow:** Who?

**Fluttershy:** I guess he's a new writer.

*(Turning away in midair, Rainbow flips through a few pages.)*

**Rainbow:** (*scornfully*) A bad one! (*reading*) “The only thing worse than Daring Do’s destruction of temples is her cruelty to the mild-mannered Dr. Caballeron”?

**Fluttershy:** It was written from his point of view. (*Rainbow pivots back to her.*) I figured it was an artistic choice.

**Rainbow:** (*closing book*) More like a disaster! Listen. (*opening, reading*) “Daring Do isn’t just a fictional character from over-the-top adventure stories.” (*with growing apprehension*) “I’ve met her, and she is a real live pony!” (*Slam it shut.*) That’s supposed to be a secret! (*Throw it aside with a savage snarl.*) We’re the only ones who know Daring Do is really A.K. Yearling in disguise! (*Fluttershy paces after it.*) But if other ponies read this book, how long will it take them to figure that out? We have to go warn her! (*exasperatedly*) Fluttershy!

(*Across the way, the meek mare has gone right back to the pages; Rainbow once again has to push the book down from her face to get her attention.*)

**Fluttershy:** Hmm? Oh. Sorry.

(*She returns it to her saddlebags and offers a big, dopey, embarrassed grin. Fade to black.*)

## OPENING THEME

### Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to the entrance hall of the cloud house as Rainbow hovers into view, holding up an advertisement. Front and center is a picture of A.K. Yearling, wearing her cape and glasses but not her cloche hat and sitting among stacks of books, quill in hoof.*)

**Rainbow:** A.K. Yearling is signing all her books at the bookstore today. (*stuffing it under a wing*) We can warn her about what’s going on!

**Fluttershy:** (*holding up book*) Don’t you think you should read Martingale’s book first, just to hear both sides of the story?

**Rainbow:** Uh, why? The only true thing in that pack of lies is that Daring Do is real.

**Fluttershy:** There’s also a lot of insight into Dr. Caballeron’s life choices. Did you know he’s actually a history professor and amateur birdwatcher? (*Rainbow leans into her face.*)

**Rainbow:** Are you serious right now? A random writer trashes our friend and exposes her secret, and you want to talk about BIRDS?!?

**Fluttershy:** (*whispering*) Also spider cruelty.

**Rainbow:** What?!?

**Fluttershy:** (*opening book, showing a picture of Daring pushing through thick cobwebs*) You have to admit, Daring Do wrecks a lot of spiderwebs in her adventures. (*Lower it.*)

**Rainbow:** In order to save precious artifacts from the bad guy—who, you seem to have forgotten, is Dr. Caballeron! Are you sure you read the same series I did?

*(Dissolve to just inside the closed door of another building, which opens to admit Fluttershy and Rainbow, and zoom out. The stacked/shelved volumes filling the floor, and the poster set up on a folding stand, give it away as the bookstore in which Yearling is signing. Fluttershy still has her bags on, but has put the Martingale book away.)*

**Rainbow:** Wow. At least A.K. Yearling's true fans know Martingale's book is bogus.

*(Fluttershy registers a degree of worry; cut to just behind the pair. They are at the end of a line of ponies decked out as Daring to varying degrees of accuracy, the non-pegasi wearing fake wings attached to their bush shirts, and the faces all broadcast confusion and hostility. Yearling is setting up a table and poster, her cloche gone as in the ad Rainbow showed to Fluttershy.)*

**Fluttershy:** I'm not sure those are all fans.

*(Cut here and there among the queue during this line, picking out the general air of disquiet, then to the table. Almost as soon as Yearling has seated herself in a chair, the first stallion slams a hoof onto the edge with enough force to rattle all the books piled on it.)*

**Stallion 1:** Why didn't your books say Daring Do is real? This changes everything! *(Another one speaks up from farther back.)*

**Stallion 2:** *(stammering a bit)* And why do you only write about her good side? Is she bribing you?

**Stallion 1:** *(checking his copy—actually Martingale's book)* On page five-thirty-one, it says Daring Do kicks puppies!

**Filly:** *(shocked)* She does?

**Yearling:** *(pounding table)* What?! No! Look, are any of you here for my actual book signing?

*(A chorus of murmured responses in the negative.)*

**Stallion 2:** Uh-uh. Frankly, I don't even know how you can call it fiction if it's all real. *(scoffing)* You're as much of a fake as Daring Do!

*(The others voice agreement in a decidedly less-than-friendly tone and exit with him, tossing their books to the floor and closing the door behind them under the next line.)*

**Rainbow:** *(to Yearling)* Uh, I guess we're a little late to warn you about the new book, huh?

*(They step up to the table as the shunned author heaves a sigh.)*

**Yearling:** I always feared that someday everypony would learn Daring Do was real.

**Fluttershy:** But why? Aren't you proud of your adventures?

**Yearling:** Of course! But I'm not in it for the fame. The stories just seemed too good to keep to myself. I wish I knew who this Martingale author was, and why he's determined to ruin my character—and me!

**Fluttershy:** Maybe we can ask him.

*(She steps aside, giving the camera a clear view of the front window—and a second bookstore directly across the street from this one. Posters and banners depicting the cover art of Martingale’s book have been pasted/strung up on the windows and over the door, and one more ad has been set out on the sidewalk with a folding stand. Rainbow rushes to the window for a better look at the sizable line of ponies waiting to get in. The architecture of this building and its surroundings suggests that these events are occurring in a city such as Manehattan, rather than Ponyville.)*

**Rainbow:** No way! He’s doing a signing across the street?

**Yearling:** You’d better go without me. *(raising/lowering glasses)* I can’t risk the chance Martingale might recognize me as Daring Do.

*(The ace flyer nods agreement; cut to the exterior of the second bookstore as she flies in through the front doors, followed by Fluttershy, then to inside. The first threads expertly through the line, while the second bumps into one pony after another.)*

**Fluttershy:** Oops! Um, sorry. Uh, excuse us.

*(By the time she gets in the clear, Rainbow has hunkered down behind a spare table to scope out Groom Q.Q. Martingale in the horseflesh, seated at the next one over. His coloration and facial features are a match for those of Dr. Caballeron, Daring’s archaeological rival, but he wears a gray cap and a thick beard/mustache in two lighter shades. A patch of blue shirt fabric is visible from this angle as he listens to a customer. Both mares peek up from behind the stacked books they are using as a blind, and Rainbow gasps sharply at what she sees. Cut to Martingale and the tough-looking assistants who flank his table as he waves to the departing bibliophile; now a pair of white suspenders can be seen running over his shoulders. Fluttershy and Rainbow keep their voices down for the next three lines.)*

**Rainbow:** *(from o.s.)* That’s not Martingale, it’s Dr. Caballeron in disguise! *(Back to the pair.)* Now it all makes sense! Daring Do’s arch-nemesis created a fake author self so he can write books that make him sound like a hero! Who does that?

**Fluttershy:** Uh, A.K. Yearling?

**Rainbow:** This is totally different.

*(The next customer has barely made it away from the table before she flies across to face Martingale straight on; normal speaking volume resumes.)*

**Rainbow:** Well, well, well. *(leaning across table)* Up to your old tricks again, huh? Just like in Somnambula— *(pounding it)* —spreading lies to make Daring Do look bad!

*(A reference to the events of “Daring Done?” Fluttershy hustles in, bumping her aside and placing her book before Martingale with a sweet little smile.)*

**Fluttershy:** Would you sign our book?

*(Martingale's voice is an exact match for Caballeron's.)*

**Martingale:** I am just a simple author, telling it like it is. Uh, who should I make it out to? *(He takes pen in teeth.)*

**Fluttershy:** Fluttershy, with two T's.

*(Her fellow pegasus glares daggers at her and knocks the copy aside with a scoff before Martingale can get more than one or two characters down.)*

**Rainbow:** We know who you really are! *(indicating ponies in line)* And unless you want us to tell all of them, you'd better answer some questions!

**Martingale:** *(standing up, addressing crowd)* I'm afraid that's all we have time for today. *(Chuckle.)*

**Customers:** *(dejectedly)* Awww...

**Martingale:** But please take a free copy of my book on your way out.

*(Cheers ring out as they race up to the table and clamor to catch the books being thrown by the assistants. The camera angle now picks out the blue pants Martingale wears, a darker hue than his shirt. Rainbow rises to a hover above the hubbub, looking this way and that for any sign of her quarry, and hits paydirt upon zooming off down one aisle; her next words freeze him in his tracks.)*

**Rainbow:** We aren't gonna let you get away with this, Caballeron!

**Martingale:** Get away with what? I'm merely telling my side of the story. *(Fluttershy flies over, holding her book.)*

**Rainbow:** You mean lying!

**Martingale:** You think everything in A.K. Yearling's books are true [*sic*]? *Daring Do and the Quetzal's Quest*—she states that the fangthorn flowers are red. In fact, they are blue!

**Fluttershy:** *(to Rainbow)* It's true! They are!

**Rainbow:** *(scoffing)* That sounds like more of an editor's mistake.

**Martingale:** Still, if that is wrong, is it not possible that other, bigger things are too? *(pointing)* Take a look. It's in my book.

*(Fluttershy offers it to Rainbow, who angrily shoves it back.)*

**Rainbow:** But I don't have to take *your* word for it! *(flying away)* Come on, Fluttershy!

*(Her fellow traveler makes to follow, but stops at the sound of Martingale's defeated moan; he drops to his haunches as she stashes the tome in her bags.)*

**Fluttershy:** Is something wrong?

**Martingale:** *(voice breaking)* It is terrible being misunderstood. It is true in the past, I have not been as nice to Daring Do as I should, but I have my reasons. *(He wipes away tears as she lands before him.)*

**Fluttershy:** Want to talk about what happened? *(He composes himself.)*

**Martingale:** My team and I were only ever interested in researching artifacts and taking them to our museum where other ponies could study them.

*(The entire bookstore slides out of view on the second half of this line, taking him with it and revealing an archaeological dig site laid at the base of desert cliffs. The view takes on a slightly washed-out coloration with occasional flickers and specks of static, as if it were being played from an old film reel. Caballeron and three of the hench-ponies who have done his bidding in the past—Biff, Withers, and Vest—have already unearthed a few buried items and are searching for more. The boss makes the next find, digging up a cracked pottery jar that brings smiles from the underlings. Tilt up quickly to the ridge behind them; Daring stands up here, silhouetted by the harsh daytime sun, and throws herself into a dive.)*

**Martingale:** *(voice over)* But Daring Do always seemed to get there first— *(She snatches the jar and pulls up.)*—with her own plans!

*(Caballeron pleads with her from ground level, but is soundly rebuffed; the item goes into a pouch hanging at Daring's flank.)*

**Martingale:** *(voice over)* I offered to team up with her, but she refused.

*(She flies away. Cut to the exterior of her—or Yearling's—secluded forest cottage. Caballeron and company gather at the window to peek in and spot her placing the jar among the antiquities that fill the mantel above her fireplace.)*

**Martingale:** *(voice over)* She had her own ideas of where the treasures belonged.

*(The narrative is interrupted by the arrival of a full-color Fluttershy, who casts a shadow over the scene as if it were being projected on a movie screen.)*

**Fluttershy:** Daring Do *did* have a lot of artifacts on her shelves at home.

*(As she continues, cut to her facing down Martingale in the bookstore.)*

**Fluttershy:** But didn't you try to sell them to the highest bidder?

**Martingale:** Only because I had to.

*(The "film" resumes: Biff and Withers restrain Daring as Caballeron flips the golden Ring of Scorcher she had hidden—see "Daring Don't"—from a table and down around his neck.)*

**Martingale:** *(voice over)* Since Daring Do kept taking our artifacts and the museum closed!

*(She throws off the two thugs and lunges at all three, filling the screen with a cloud of dust to mark their bust-up. This floats up past the camera, wiping the view to a long shot of a pile of rubble that might once have been a temple or tower.)*

**Martingale:** *(voice over)* We were desperate for money to keep it open.

*(Daring's jungle enemy Ahuizotl drags himself up to daylight from amid the crumbled slabs, voicing a feral roar. Zoom out quickly to frame Caballeron and his crew watching fearfully from the underbrush and Daring doing likewise from the air, all keeping quite a bit of distance between him and themselves. The pegasus has recovered a sizable diamond from the site, and she throws her wings in gear to make good her escape.)*

*(Dissolve to Fluttershy and Martingale in the bookstore.)*

**Fluttershy:** She *does* destroy a lot of ancient sites, not to mention the homes of the animals that live there.

**Martingale:** *(standing up)* And I felt it was my duty to tell the world. *(sitting/standing again, smiling)* Thank you for listening and understanding. Ms., uh...?

**Fluttershy:** Fluttershy. Two T's.

**Martingale:** And I am Dr. Caballeron.

*(These words are accompanied by the stripping away of his beard/cap/shirt/suspenders/pants to leave the treasure-seeker standing in his usual shirt and ascot.)*

**Caballeron:** “Martingale” is merely a *nom de plume* to build my brand. *(crossing to Fluttershy)* You know, my team could use an insightful pegasus like you, Fluttershy. Have you ever thought of being...an adventurer?

**Fluttershy:** Who me?

*(A big grin steals across her face at the thought. Wipe to the exterior of the bookstore, Rainbow pacing impatiently above the sidewalk for some seconds. The door finally opens and Fluttershy steps out.)*

**Rainbow:** Finally! What took you so long? *(Close-up of Fluttershy.)*

**Fluttershy:** I decided to find out which author is really telling the truth, so I joined Dr. C's Tenochtitlan expedition!

*(She gestures toward the doors on the end of this, the camera panning to frame the emerging Caballeron, Biff, Withers, and Vest. The four stallions pause for the briefest instant so Caballeron can toss a smirk back toward Rainbow, then set off down the sidewalk with Fluttershy.)*

**Rainbow:** *(mind blown)* Say whaaaaat?

*(Fade to black.)*

Act Two

*(Opening shot: fade in to a rather gloomy-faced Yearling, still at her book signing in the first store Fluttershy and Rainbow visited. The filly who was so distraught over the mention of Daring Kicking Puppies stands facing her, front hooves propped on the edge.)*

**Filly:** So Daring Do doesn't kick puppies?

**Yearling:** That was one time! Accidentally! *(Sound of the door opening.)*

**Rainbow:** *(from o.s., out of breath)* A.K.! *(Cut to frame her hovering above the table.)* You have to help me! Groom Q.Q. Martingale is really Dr. Caballeron, and he has Fluttershy! The book thing was his new plan to ruin Daring Do's reputation, *and* he's trying to make my friend a criminal! They're off to Tenochtitlan right now!

**Yearling:** He must be after the Truth Talisman of Tonatiuh! It requires the wings of a pegasus to retrieve it!

**Rainbow:** That's gotta be why Caballeron tricked Fluttershy into joining his gang!

**Yearling:** *(standing up, pounding table)* Then it's up to us to stop him!

*(She pulls her cape off and throws it toward the camera; by the time it drifts away, she has changed into her trusty bush shirt and pith helmet and ditched her glasses. Daring stands tall and resolute.)*

**Filly:** *(awestruck, hooves to cheeks)* Whoa...

*(Wipe to a close-up of a map held by Caballeron, outlining a route that winds through forests and mountains before ending at a tower. This is lowered to show a patch of thick vegetation, which he parts with a hoof to reveal the end of the line on a cliff top not too far off. Caballeron grins avariciously at the sight and beckons the crew ahead, having pocketed the map; cut to Biff, Withers, and Vest moving stolidly through the jungle and pan to a smiling Fluttershy keeping pace. She still has her saddlebags and has donned a bucket hat. A step by Withers crushes a flower and brings a reproving look from Caballeron.)*

**Caballeron:** Watch where you put your hooves, everypony. We do not want to disturb the fragile jungle ecosystem.

**Fluttershy:** Oh, that's so thoughtful.

**Caballeron:** *(lifting a vine out of Fluttershy's way)* Yes, unlike Daring Do, who slashes plants aside with her cruel machete.

*(Up ahead, Vest plucks a large, yellow-spotted red fruit from a tree in a clearing.)*

**Fluttershy:** Thank you.

*(Close-up of the big stallion, who prepares to bite down on his find only for a spear to shoot it out of his grip and impale it on the trunk. A furious Caballeron jumps toward him.)*

**Caballeron:** Fool! Don't you know that's poison?

*(Realizing that Fluttershy has seen the whole thing, he backs off with a hasty smile.)*

**Caballeron:** Uh, I don't want you to get hurt, my friend. *(Chuckle.)*

**Vest:** But I'm hungry.

**Fluttershy:** Oh! *(Now all five are in the clearing.)* I can help with that.

*(She produces a wrapped bundle from her bags and spreads it on the ground: apples and bottles of their juice laid out on a picnic blanket.)*

**Fluttershy:** Here.

**Caballeron:** *(puzzled; Vest licks his chops)* You are...willing to share?

**Fluttershy:** Of course! That's part of the fun of having an adventure with friends.

*(The general confusion lasts for only a second or two before all four plunderers dig in with relish. A rattle of leaves draws Fluttershy's attention; pan quickly to a stretch of bushes, from which a roaring panther leaps out. A snarling lynx emerges from another direction, a growling leopard from a third, and the ponies gasp in fright and forget their snacks as the predators close in. A fourth feline joins the party, this one a small and fluffy white kitten that balances on top of the panther's head. Caballeron smiles at it, but backs off in a hurry when it utters a maddened yowl and swipes its claws at him. The stallions bug out, Caballeron grabbing Fluttershy's foreleg to pull her along, but she skids to a stop and turns to face the cats as the hench-ponies dive into the bushes for cover.)*

**Caballeron:** Fluttershy! Run! *(Head-on shot of the pack; he continues o.s.)* These ferocious beasts want to eat us for dinner!

*(Back to the pegasus, who has barely even blinked.)*

**Fluttershy:** That's a common misconception. Have you ever tried just talking to them?

**Caballeron:** That's crazy! *(jumping into bushes)* You're on your own!

*(The quartet's perspective, Withers parting the leaves to see the cats bearing down on Fluttershy.)*

**Withers:** She's a goner. *(Head-on shot: now Biff peeks through the hole.)*

**Biff:** I can't watch!

*(He squeezes his eyes shut, but puts the lie to his words almost immediately by reopening one and then letting both pop wide in surprise. Their perspective again: instead of being torn limb from limb, Fluttershy has all four cats totally at ease with a combination of nuzzling and petting.)*

**Fluttershy:** We're very sorry for coming into your territory. We're just passing through. *(The stallions again, all positively dumbstruck with heads out of the bushes.)*

**Caballeron:** How did you do that?

**Fluttershy:** Everycreature likes to be listened to. You just need to take the time to understand them.

**Caballeron:** (*emerging*) You are more talented than I realized.

**Fluttershy:** Thanks. I'm having the best time with you all!

*(Little smiles of genuine appreciation work their way onto the miscreants' faces. Wipe to a close-up of Rainbow in flight through the jungle.)*

**Rainbow:** Fluttershy must be having the worst time with Caballeron's goons! (*Pan ahead to Daring.*)

**Daring:** We need to catch up to them before they reach the Truth Talisman!

**Rainbow:** Why? What's so special about it?

**Daring:** It has the power to make the pony holding it tell the truth, but Caballeron only wants it because it's made of solid gold. He'll melt it down and use it to get rich. (*Rainbow pulls even.*)

**Rainbow:** So if this talisman is so important, why didn't you already save it? You said only a pegasus can get it, right?

**Daring:** Yes, but the temple traps are far too dangerous to face without a map, and maybe even with one.

*(She pulls ahead, leaving Rainbow to swallow fearfully and pump her wings to catch up. Wipe to a head-on shot of Caballeron and company; he stands in the fore, studying his map carefully, and looks up with more than a little unease. A cut to behind them and tilt up tells the reason: a very narrow, very steep staircase rising hundreds of feet up the side of the tower on his map. Its pinnacle is nearly lost in the sun's yellow glare. Down below, Caballeron rolls up the sheet.)*

**Biff:** Boss, h-how about we take the shortcut?

**Caballeron:** (*rounding on him, pocketing map*) How about you be quiet!

*(The rebuke drops the tough to his haunches, but Fluttershy's silent presence lends him the resolve to stand and fix said boss with a level glare. Caballeron takes notice and quickly lets his anger subside.)*

**Caballeron:** I-I mean...no, thank you, Biff. Let's just follow the map. (*He, Withers, and Vest move out; Biff sits again.*)

**Biff:** (*to Fluttershy*) Aw, I'm supposed to be Dr. C's second in command. He never listens to me!

**Fluttershy:** (*walking past him*) Well, keep trying. I believe in you.

*(Her encouragement prompts the big guy to smile and stand up for the climb. In due time, all five have made it to the topmost level.)*

**Caballeron:** At last!

*(Zoom out to a long overhead shot. The flat roof on which they are standing might once have played host to a garden, but is now choked with wildly overgrown trees and other plant life. A*

*circular area in the middle is bare, cracked stone ringed by the shattered remains of several pillars; a stubby, indented one juts from the center.)*

**Caballeron:** Now we simply have to wait for the sun to reach its highest point.

*(Cut to it during the previous line, then back to the five adventurers. Caballeron crosses to the center of the circle, the shadow cast by this pillar slowly contracting.)*

**Caballeron:** And our path will be revealed.

*(Behind him, Withers flops onto his back in the grass for a rest, not noticing the cobweb-covered hive suspended directly overhead. Cut to an overhead close-up as he waves a few of its denizens away from his face—the gray, red-streaked flyders that wreaked havoc during “Campfire Tales.”)*

**Fluttershy:** *(from o.s., urgently)* Withers, don't move.

*(Longer shot, zooming out, he is too scared to do anything but stare up over his sunglasses at the growing swarm, while Fluttershy crouches facing him with a short length of bamboo in easy reach. Biff and Vest bug out and Caballeron watches, transfixed, as she picks up the item and blows into one end. The resulting flute-like tone draws all the flyders away from Withers, and he too scrambles to safety as she gets upright and leads the swarm to the edge of the roof with additional notes. One more sends them right back to the hive; Withers laughs in relief, and Caballeron once again smiles at the mare's unexpected talents.)*

*(Wipe to the base of the tower, the camera pointing up toward the roof. Rainbow and Daring steps into view and turn their eyes upward.)*

**Daring:** There they are! We can catch them before they enter the temple!

*(Eight hooves pelt toward the treacherous staircase, but only two wings get airborne for the flight up due to a length of vine that lashes into view from behind and snags Daring. She is pulled to the ground with a yell; Rainbow gasps, doubles back, and starts tearing at the bonds.)*

**Daring:** Get back, Rainbow Dash! It's Ahuizotl!

*(And here comes a second vine to tie up the Wonderbolt. A bulky shadow throws itself over the two prone forms, accompanied by a low, unsettling chuckle, and the camera cuts to Ahuizotl with the free ends of both vines in one hand.)*

**Ahuizotl:** Daring Do, my old nemesis. *(with growing rage)* You may have outsmarted my jungle cats, but you cannot escape me!

*(He slams his free hand to the turf on this last word, setting off a small tremor.)*

**Rainbow:** (*struggling*) We didn't see any cats! We're just here to rescue Fluttershy!

*(Daring flips herself end-over-end so she can bite down on a small stone lying nearby and put it to work sawing through the vines holding her.)*

**Ahuizotl:** Hmmmm...it must be a coincidence that only a pegasus can retrieve Tonatiuh's treasure. And there are two of you here.

*(An instant after he slams a palm to the dirt, the archaeologist breaks loose and spits out the stone with a savage grin. Ahuizotl tries to mash her into the forest floor, but she is a shade too quick in getting airborne and gone. Sinking her chompers into Rainbow's wrappings, Daring rockets up the stairs to tow her along. Ahuizotl can do nothing but voice his frustration in a jungle-shaking roar.)*

*(Wipe to an overhead shot of the roof, then cut to an extreme close-up of the base of the central pillar, whose shadow has now disappeared entirely—the sun is directly overhead. With a devious smile, Caballeron pulls out a small ceremonial mask carved from crystal and fits it into a depression atop the pillar. It sinks in, becoming flush with the stone surface, and a shaft of sunlight strikes it with an intensity that forces Fluttershy and Caballeron to avert their eyes as it grows to white out the screen. Fade in almost immediately to an overhead shot; the beam has split into a slowly rotating pattern similar to a wagon wheel, and Fluttershy takes a step back from the outer edge as one radial spoke traces past her. Caballeron follows her cue, jumping off the stone circle to join the other four an instant before the whole thing splits down the middle and begins to grind open. Within seconds, the pillar is left standing alone on a central plinth, at the center of a spiral staircase that winds down into darkness. The rotating pattern vanishes at the same time, and the sun's motion begins to cast a shadow from the pillar over the stairs.)*

**Caballeron:** (*galloping toward stairs*) Quickly! Before the sun moves any closer!

*(The party of five sprints down...the bright sunbeam stops...and the halves of the great stone hatch begin to close as a freed Rainbow and Daring gain the roof. They streak down through the opening with inches to go; Daring's helmet falls off, but she zips back to pull it through with only the barest whisper of a split second to spare. They find themselves in a torchlit circular chamber with several identical closed doors.)*

**Rainbow:** Phew! (*Daring puts her helmet back on.*) That was cutting it close.

**Daring:** (*trotting across*) And without a map, we'll have to guess which way to go.

*(The blue mare falls in as she opens one particular door, which closes by itself once they are out. Dissolve to a close-up of another door, which grinds upward in its frame to open a way for Caballeron and his crew. He casually brushes a spiderweb out of his path, then stops short and stars wide-eyed at the thing before him—a broad gold necklace with a clasp formed from a string of yellow pearls. Three gems are set into a stylized dog's face—rubies for the eyes, an emerald in the open mouth—and the item is suffused with a yellow-green light. A longer shot puts the group in a large chamber, at the edge of a deep pit from which a lurid orange glow is emanating; the*

*necklace hovers high above a small pedestal at its center. They have found the Truth Talisman of Tonatiuh.)*

**Caballeron:** *(hamming it up)* Oh, no! I knew the Truth Talisman could not be moved by magic, but I never realized we'd have to fly to retrieve it! *(sobbing, flopping to floor)* Our journey has been for nothing!

**Fluttershy:** *(trotting ahead)* Don't be upset. I can get it.

**Caballeron:** Oh, Fluttershy, you are too kind. But I could never ask that of you! It might be dangerous.

**Fluttershy:** *(firmly)* I want to do it, for all of you— *(glancing at hench-ponies)*—my new friends, and to protect a historical treasure.

*(She easily flies up to the Talisman and hooks a foreleg through it, the aura fading away—but the moment she does, the whole place starts to do the mambo and spurts of lava erupt from the pit. Fluttershy cries out and tries time after time to get out of danger, but the fountains of molten rock keep cutting off her escape. Biff is first to recover his senses, darting to a pillar at the perimeter and straining to tip it over—no good.)*

**Biff:** Gimme a hoof here!

*(Vest hops onto his back, and Withers clammers onto Vest's and gets a boost up to a higher ledge. He manages to dislodge a chunk of the masonry at this level; it lands flat in front of Caballeron, jutting over the edge of the pit, and he jumps on and gallops out toward the imperiled mare. The geysers keep bringing her up short, and one last mighty burst sends her plummeting with a scream. Cut to an extreme close-up of her, momentum abruptly reducing itself to zero, and zoom out as she fearfully takes in her surroundings. The only thing keeping her out of this extreme fondue pot is Caballeron's hoof, looped through the strap of her saddlebags. He drags her up and onto the makeshift bridge, which immediately begins to crack under the force of the lava jetting up on either side. All three thugs are back on the floor now, and Biff frantically waves for Fluttershy and Caballeron to get moving; they make it back to solid ground just before the whole bridge goes into the drink, and the lava quickly calms down.)*

**Withers:** We did it!

**Vest:** You're safe!

**Fluttershy:** Thanks, everypony!

*(She passes the Talisman to Caballeron, who eagerly lets it fall around his neck.)*

**Daring:** *(from o.s.)* Give us the Talisman, Caballeron! *(Longer shot; she and Rainbow have reached this chamber.)*

**Rainbow:** We're not taking no for an answer!

**Fluttershy:** *(crossing to them)* Wait! You don't understand! My friends are researchers! They only want to study the Talisman and keep it safe in a museum. Right, Dr. C?

**Caballeron:** *(sweating; it and his eyes flare yellow-green)* Uh...no.

**Fluttershy:** *(gasping)* But...but...you said— *(She drops to her haunches, stunned.)*

**Daring:** Now that he's holding Tonatiuh's talisman, he has to tell the truth!

**Rainbow:** Admit it, Caballeron! You're only pretending to like Fluttershy because she has the wings you needed to steal the Truth Talisman! *(She leans in, nose to nose.)* Isn't that right?

**Caballeron:** *(flare)* No! I-I admit, that was the original reason, but my hench-ponies and I have come to value your friendship and kindness.

*(Nods from said hench-ponies leave one pegasus smiling and two others very confused—no points for guessing which is which.)*

**Rainbow:** Didn't see that coming. *(An o.s. rumble and growl from Ahuizotl.)* Or that!

*(Pan quickly to the blue meanie entering through another doorway.)*

**Ahuizotl:** More intruders? And you dare to steal Tonatiuh's talisman? Guardian-goyles, attack!

*(One, two, three stone statues on the upper ledges come to life. These are pony-shaped, with fangs and bat wings, and all four legs end in sets of claws rather than hooves. The eyes glow a featureless red, and they wear tribal necklaces, headdresses, and foreleg bracelets. The guardian-goyles menace the seven interlopers with low, rumbling growls, while Ahuizotl laughs maniacally and backs out through the doorway he used to get in here. The pull of a lever seals both this exit and the one employed by Caballeron and company. One of the three golems charges at the camera, the view fading to black as its open mouth fills the screen.)*

### Act Three

*(Opening shot: fade in to the face-off. The hench-ponies flee before one guardian-goyle's screeching airborne charge, while the other four hit the deck to keep their heads intact.)*

**Caballeron:** *(dodging another rush)* Fluttershy! Can't you ask them to stop, like the jungle cats? *(She stands up and addresses one menacing Daring.)*

**Fluttershy:** Um, excuse me? Uh, guardian-goyles?

*(For her trouble, she gets a clawed swipe that comes within a flicker of removing her bucket hat, her mane, and at least half of her skull. The thing shifts its focus from her to Rainbow.)*

**Daring:** It's no good! They're only stone and magic, not alive! *(It lands with its tail to her.)* I encountered some like this in Marapore!

**Caballeron:** Ah, yes. I seem to recall similar creations in Flankladesh.

**Rainbow:** So? How do you get rid of them? *(One set of stone jaws very nearly takes her tail off.)*

**Daring:** I-I know they don't like bright light!

**Fluttershy:** There's none of that in here!

**Daring:** Not yet! Caballeron! Do you still have the Diamond of Lapis Lux?

**Caballeron:** *(eyes/Talisman flaring, struggling for words)* Yes! I-I mean...yes! I-I mean...

*(Giving up on his effort to hide the truth, he voices a loud groan.)*

**Caballeron:** Ay-ay! *(pulling a diamond from his pocket)* How did you know I stole it?!

**Daring:** Lucky guess. Hold it high!

*(He does so; she pulls out a flashlight, switches it on, and trains its beam on the gem. The light refracts through the facets and emerges in narrow, concentrated rays that sweep across the chamber. The guardian-goyles snarl and screw up their eyes, rising back to their original perches and returning to their original inanimate state. With the hazard gone, Daring shuts off her flashlight and Caballeron lowers the stolen jewel.)*

**Fluttershy:** Wow! You two make a great team!

**Rainbow:** *(landing next to them)* Yeah, I'm not sure how I feel about that. *(Daring straightens up, the flash packed away.)*

**Daring:** Feel later! Now it's time to escape!

*(She throws her weight and a couple of kicks against one sealed exit, to no avail. Caballeron has now re-pocketed the diamond.)*

**Biff:** If we want to get out of here, we're all gonna have to work together!

**Caballeron:** That's...uh, actually a good idea.

**Fluttershy:** *(to Rainbow/Daring)* See? Told you he'd listen.

**Daring:** *(to Caballeron)* A truce until we escape? But how can we trust you?

**Caballeron:** *(flare)* I cannot lie. Now, all together!

*(All seven ponies put their backs into it—the stallions at ground level, the mares near the top—and succeed in tipping over the slab closing off one doorway. Dust boils up to fill the screen, then clears to present a view of the chamber from within the passage they have just opened. They hustle through, but stop in their tracks at the sound of a file's soft rasping and Ahuizotl's tuneless humming. Cut to him in the next room, doing a little touch-up work on his fingernails; he drops the file with a shout and whirls to face the group on all fours.)*

**Ahuizotl:** You again!

*(A rising growl escapes his lips as he hoists Caballeron bodily off the ground with his tail hand and beckons for the loot to be handed over. Instead, Caballeron removes the Talisman and throws it to Daring, who hovers up to catch it around her neck.)*

**Ahuizotl:** *(dropping Caballeron)* If I wanted to play games, I would get out my pinochle deck!

*(The stallion ends up somewhere behind him, near an open passageway at the wall opposite the others. Ahuizotl makes a grab for Daring, who reverses to stay clear and spots the egress.)*

**Daring:** This way!

*(She flies point to lead the others, getting them away just in time to avoid Ahuizotl's leap, and Caballeron falls in with them. However, the blue beast barricades the exit with his body; Daring goes into a sharp ascent just shy of a collision and hurls the Talisman back across the chamber.)*

**Daring:** Rainbow Dash!

*(Cut to the speedster on the end of his; she catches it and is almost immediately forced to lift off so that Ahuizotl cannot grab her.)*

**Rainbow:** *(eyes/Talisman flaring)* I'm gonna need the deluxe spa package after this adventure. *(pointedly, to Fluttershy)* Uh, that doesn't leave this temple.

*(The bauble is pitched down to the yellow pegasus, who spends a moment admiring it instead of paying attention to the hulking adversary who is banging his fists together. The game of keep-away resumes, with passes from Fluttershy to Biff to Withers to Vest; all get moving toward the doorway except for this last, who backs up toward the wall with his mind completely frozen up by fear. Only a grab for his throat gets his hooves moving in the right direction and at a high enough speed. Cut to within the passage, the camera pointing out toward the chamber, as he skids to a stop near the rest of the equine septet.)*

**Vest:** *(flare)* That's it! I'm quitting the hench-pony business to finally follow my dreams of becoming an opera star!

*(This admission surprises not only him, but the other six when the camera cuts to them. Though safe in the passage, they can go no further due to the wall of blocks closing it off.)*

**Vest:** *(sheepishly, passing Talisman back to Caballeron)* Uh, maybe you should hold this.

*(No sooner has the boss got it back around his neck than the whole place shakes; on the start of the next line, cut to frame Ahuizotl reaching in after the group.)*

**Ahuizotl:** You cannot hide in there forever! It's a dead end!

*(He backs away with a deranged laugh; cut to him slamming his weight against the chamber wall, then to the group again as stone fragments rain down from his onslaught, which continues during the following exchange.)*

**Daring:** Ahuizotl won't give up until he catches us!

**Fluttershy:** *(smiling)* I think our problem is the solution! *(She turns toward the chamber.)*

**Rainbow:** Uh, did you forget there's a monster out there that wants to crush us?

**Fluttershy:** But why? No pony ever asked Ahuizotl what *his* side of the story is. He must have a reason for being so upset.

**Rainbow:** Or maybe he's just a bad guy! Do I need to remind you he tried to squash Daring Do, like, a hundred times?

**Caballeron:** *(flare)* And me as well. I was so scared, I had to change my ascot. *(Vest grins; he rips the Talisman off with a yell and throws it away.)* Curse this truth-teller!

*(Fluttershy catches it on the fly...)*

**Fluttershy:** Understanding begins with listening.

*(...and lifts off into the chamber as Rainbow and Caballeron exchange “she’s done for” looks. Cut to Ahuizotl, who is bracing to ram another shoulder into the wall; he checks himself upon spotting Fluttershy.)*

**Ahuizotl:** Ah. *(socking one fist into other palm)* Prepared to meet your doom?!

**Fluttershy:** Um...not really. *(sitting on haunches, holding up Talisman)* Just here to ask—why are you chasing us, Mr. Ahuizotl?

*(The forthrightness of her question stuns him into a moment’s silence, while the other six ponies look on from the relative safety of their dead end. When he continues, any trace of rancor is gone from his voice.)*

**Ahuizotl:** *(sitting, taking Talisman; it and his eyes flare yellow-green)* Well, the thing is, I’m in charge of protecting this jungle. *(scratching head)* If another artifact goes missing on my watch, I’m going to be in *so* much trouble with the other guardian creatures!

**Fluttershy:** *(moving closer, patting an elbow)* Oh, that sounds like a lot of responsibility.

**Ahuizotl:** *(sputtering)* It is! *(Cut to a chastened Caballeron and Daring; he continues o.s, voice slowly breaking.)* And those two have taken so many relics from my land, my job is on the line! *(Back to him and Fluttershy; he lays the Talisman down.)* So maybe I am a little violent and ferocious, uh...can you blame me?

*(He accepts a proffered handkerchief, blows his nose loudly, and wipes away tears as the two rivals step back into the chamber. Each one places a front hoof on the item, bringing a smile back to the elongated face.)*

**Daring:** *(flare)* The only reason I’ve been taking the artifacts is because I thought I was protecting them.

**Caballeron:** *(flare)* I was stealing them to get rich.

*(And those words get an instantly hacked-off Ahuizotl’s mug thrust hard into his own.)*

**Caballeron:** *(flare; smiling hastily)* Uh, but I never realized you had a noble cause. I thought you were just being a monster.

*(The big galoot backs off with a resigned sigh, having put the hanky aside.)*

**Ahuizotl:** I get that a lot. *(Caballeron and Daring are now sitting with hooves off the item.)*

**Rainbow:** *(trotting out to them, sitting)* Maybe there is something to this whole “listening to everypony” thing.

**Fluttershy:** It doesn't always mean they're telling the truth, but everycreature deserves kindness.

**Ahuizotl:** True. And because you returned the Talisman and took the time to understand me... *(He zips over to a lever protruding from the wall.)* ...I will let you all go.

*(A pull with his tail hand, and the circular stone hatch in the roof grinds open; now he crosses to the group and sits facing them. The hench-ponies have now left the passage as well.)*

**Ahuizotl:** On one condition! *(He picks up the Talisman.)* You swear to never steal artifacts from the Tenochtitlan Basin again!

*(It is held out toward the veteran adventurers, each of whom places a hoof on it.)*

**Caballeron, Daring:** *(eyes/Talisman flaring yellow-green)* I promise!

**Daring:** I'll even write that in my next book. *(Ahuizotl withdraws the Talisman.)*

**Caballeron:** *(taken aback)* Your next book? You mean you're actually A.K. Yearling?

**Daring:** Don't tell anypony!

**Caballeron:** That gives me an idea.

*(And Ahuizotl's brain has started to work as well, if the finger tapping against his chin is any indication. Dissolve to the bookstore in which Yearling held her signing; she and Caballeron, the latter once again in disguise as Martingale, are sitting side by side at a table with books on display and absolutely no takers.)*

**Rainbow:** *(trotting to them)* Hey, what's going on? I thought your first co-written novel would bring out a ton of fans.

*(Close-up of the unlikely collaborators and their work, whose cover shows Caballeron and Daring standing back to back between spiked walls and smiling. Yearling smiles, while Martingale scowls behind his fake beard/mustache.)*

**Yearling:** *(pointing)* We've been upstaged by a new author.

*(Her hoof is directed out the shop window, through which the second bookstore can be seen across the street. Rainbow pivots to see that the posters and banners celebrating Martingale have been replaced with a set glorifying Ahuizotl—he has decided to get into the literature game. Inside, the former monster sits behind a table far too small for his king-size physique, it is stacked with books, and he has donned a pair of reading glasses to address the enraptured foals seated on the floor facing him. Zoom out slowly.)*

**Ahuizotl:** *(reading from a copy)* “And so the noble Ahuizotl bravely toiled day and night to protect the jungle's precious artifacts.”

*(Fade to black as he finishes this sentence.)*