

BETWEEN DARK AND DAWN

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Prologue

(Opening shot: fade in to a tract of land within the Sweet Apple Acres orchards. A series of o.s. impacts shakes the area hard enough to bring apples down from the trees, and a growing clatter of hooves heralds the arrival of Twilight Sparkle, her friends, and Spike. Rainbow Dash and the little dragon are the only two of the seven flying instead of galloping.)

Twilight: Remind me how this happened again?

(All stop short as a long, pale blue, tentacle-like appendage lashes down to uproot one tree and drag it away. A longer shot picks it out as the tongue of an enormous turtle, several times taller than the ponies and wide enough to block the path on which they stand. The hide is dark gray, the underbelly and beak in lighter hues, and its shell bears the striated greens of a springtime meadow, as well as clumps of trees and bushes. Daytime sky is visible above the behemoth as it chomps down the tree—leaves, apples, and all. Tilt up slowly.)

Applejack: And why there's a giant turtle eatin' my family's entire summer crop?

Fluttershy: Oh, dear! *(Rainbow lands.)* Mr. Tortoise-Snap said he was hungry, but he promised me he would only take a few small bites.

Rainbow: *(flying forward)* I don't think that thing knows what "small" is.

(The turtle—Mr. Tortoise-Snap—stomps ponderously toward the group, swallowing his mouthful and shaking the earth with every step. The prehensile tongue flicks out to grab another tree, wrapping around Spike as well; he is reeled in screaming along with it.)

Rarity: *(darting ahead)* Spikey-wikey!

(He can manage only another yelp as the great beaked mouth munches into the boughs. Cut to a long shot of a determined Twilight addressing the others and zoom in to a close-up.)

Twilight: Applejack and Pinkie... *(Vertical panels of these two slide in to frame her.)* ...you distract him. Rainbow Dash, Rarity, and Fluttershy...

(Triangular panels of these three slide in to cover them and fill the corners, leaving her visible at the center.)

Twilight: ...let's save Spike.

(Each pair/trio smiles fiercely as she issues their orders; the two groups peel off to opposite sides as Twilight charges up the middle. Pinkie Pie takes up a position halfway down Mr. Tortoise-Snap's length and glances back toward Applejack, who nods in response as she backs up to a tree. A solid buck brings down a shower of apples, which the party aficionado catches and throws with blinding speed. It takes several seconds for the massive beast to stop chewing on the tree and look their way with a puzzled grunt; now Rainbow swoops in toward the head, carrying Rarity who is in turn towing a spool of ribbon. A few tight loops around the beak, and the designer has tied it shut with a large bow. These two peel out and are promptly replaced by an irate Fluttershy.)

Fluttershy: Mr. Tortoise-Snap, I'm only asking nicely once. *Let my friend go!*

(He grumbles and pulls in his tongue despite the bindings, and Fluttershy pats his beak to coax a smile out of him. The tree and Spike fall away, both liberally smeared with bluish saliva; Spike struggles in vain to deploy his befouled wings, but Twilight easily catches him and brings him down to the other four. She sets him down and curves back to Fluttershy almost in one motion.)

Twilight: And now a simple teleportation spell should— *(She warms up her horn, but stops short as the area darkens under sudden shadow.)*

Princess Celestia: *(from o.s., imperiously)* HALT, INTERLOPER!

(All eyes turn toward the sun, which is now partly blotted out by the hovering figures of this sovereign and her sister.)

Princess Luna: Stay back, friends! My sister and I will take care of the beast!

(They dive, strafing Mr. Tortoise-Snap with spells but not seeming to score any actual hits.)

Rainbow: *(annoyed, landing next to Applejack/Pinkie/Rarity/Spike)* All the times we've actually needed their help, and they show up for *this*?

(The two winged unicorns warm up their horns and corkscrew their way toward the top of the shell in opposite directions, finally releasing the magic in a blue/yellow detonation that vanishes its wearer without a trace.)

Twilight: *(landing)* That's just what I was about to do! *(Celestia and Luna descend.)*

Luna: *(laughing)* Goodness, sister! That was fun! *(Celestia grins; both fly to the group.)*

Celestia: No need to thank us. To be honest, we've recently realized we like being part of the action.

Luna: Experiencing life instead of just dreaming about it.

Celestia: And making a difference outside the throne room.

(Both giggle lightly, not paying the slightest mind to the dumbstruck/distraught/hacked-off expressions on the spectators' faces. Zoom in to a close-up of Twilight and Applejack.)

Applejack: *(aside, to Twilight)* Y'all think they're gonna be doin' this a lot?

(The resident Princess can only offer a brain-locked grimace. Fade to black.)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(Opening shot: fade in to a slow pan through Ponyville proper as residents go about their daily routines. The camera passes a bridge that spans the stream running through the town, and Fluttershy and her rabbit Angel begin to cross. Cut to an extreme close-up of yellow hooves and fuzzy white paws on the stones, one of which cracks loose and falls away under the pressure of a step, then to a longer shot as it splashes into the water. Fluttershy and Angel peer down through the gap; zoom in on them.)

Fluttershy: Oh, my! We'd better ask somepony to fix that hole. It seems very dangerous.

Luna: *(from o.s.)* Which is why...

(They glance up; cut to the royal sisters silhouetted against the sun.)

Luna: ...we're here!

(They launch themselves into a screaming dive, and Fluttershy barely has enough time to get herself and Angel back to dry land before they are at ground level. Luna's magic heaves the entire bridge away, supports and all, and Celestia brings hers into play to replace it with a more ornate model. Ponies gather to see the end result, chattering and stomping applause as Celestia and Luna trade a high five. Fluttershy and Angel react with some bafflement, but the rabbit slaps on a big dopey grin and both hesitantly join in the ovation.)

(Wipe to the moon in the night sky and tilt down to an overhead shot of a forest path. The Cutie Mark Crusaders, sporting their Filly Guide uniforms as seen in "28 Pranks Later" along with a healthy degree of irritation, walk along as Rainbow zips back and forth up ahead and tries to make sense of the map she holds.)

Rainbow: *(groaning)* I-I can't read this thing! *(turning it, throwing it down)* How am I supposed to lead a Filly Guides hike if the map makes us more lost? *(A sudden strong wind sings along the path.)*

Celestia: *(from o.s.)* Did somepony say... *(Her silhouette and Luna's descend from the moon on this last.)* ...“lost”?

Luna: Not for long!

(She laughs heartily as the two come around and train their power of their horns on a stand of trees just off the path. The four non-royals hit the dirt an explosion rips through the undergrowth; when the smoke clears, a campsite can be seen in a clearing immediately beyond. They stand up, just as bewildered as the Filly Guides who have already set up their gear, and Rainbow grimaces skyward toward the well-meaning “heroes.”)

(Wipe to the kitchen of Sugarcube Corner during the day. Pinkie stands at the counter, mixing a bowl of batter with a set of hoof-cranked beaters. She stops to lick them clean, but the sudden arrival of Mrs. Cake from outside startles her into getting her tongue caught in the rig.)

Mrs. Cake: Oh, now, this is just terrible! *(Pinkie yanks free and shoves the beaters into the bowl.)* Miss Cheerilee ordered cupcakes for school today, and I forgot to make the order!

Pinkie: Eh, no biggie. We can—

(Any further words are lost under a room-shaking crash and a blast of debris from the general direction of the door Mrs. Cake used. The dust clears to show the younger baker wearing a generous portion of it jammed around her neck and the older one hunched fearfully down behind the counter. Cut to Celestia and Luna, who are hovering in the very large hole they have just bashed in the wall.)

Celestia: Students going hungry? Not on our watch!

Luna: Let us bake, sister!

(They ignite horns and intertwine their left forelegs, straining a bit against one another as if hoof-wrestling, and the view shifts back to the counter. Mrs. Cake gapes at the regal intervention, but Pinkie voices a soft, shocked gasp as ingredients and tools float away under the pair's influence. She reaches futilely to stop them, then shifts to a sullen grimace as globs of batter start flying. Dissolve to a long shot of the Castle and School of Friendship and zoom in slowly.)

Applejack: *(voice over)* And then they carried Granny Smith across the street!

(Cut to her, standing at the edge of the central table in the throne room. Its magical map is not on display.)

Applejack: There wasn't even any traffic! *(Fluttershy steps into view next to her.)*

Fluttershy: It's not that we don't appreciate their help. *(Here comes Rarity.)*

Rarity: But suddenly Celestia and Luna seem to think we can't do *anything* on our own! *(Rainbow hovers to them.)*

Rainbow: How are we supposed to learn to be rulers of Equestria with them fixing every teensy problem for us?

(Long overhead shot of the room. Pinkie sits in a throne near these four, and they are addressing Twilight and Spike. She stands at the opposite edge of the table, he on the table itself, and both he and Pinkie have put themselves back in order from their respective mishaps.)

Twilight: Maybe the Princesses changed their minds. *(hunching down fearfully)* Maybe they don't think we're up to the responsibility of protecting Equestria after all! *(Close-up of her and Spike.)*

Spike: *(hovering off table, patting her head)* Or maybe this week's just a one-time thing that'll never happen again.

(Referring to the sisters' plan to eventually retire and put Twilight and company in charge of Equestria, as described in "The Beginning of the End." She is booted out of her fretting by the sound of the doors opening and closing. Cut to the entrance, where Celestia and Luna have just arrived and are showing off a pair of devil-may-care grins.)

Celestia: Ah! A strategy meeting! What is the danger this time? A rampaging beast? Evil spell? Friendship problem?

Luna: We're ready to do whatever we can.

Twilight: *(with a slightly forced grin)* Great. *(They walk in.)* But is something wrong? It's just... *(Spike lands.)* ...you've been helping us an awful lot, and we know you have way more important ruler-y things to do, so... *(Pause.)*

Luna: We've spent more than enough time in the throne room. Real life is happening out here.

Twilight: Wait. That's what this is about? You're...sick of being princesses?

Celestia: *(as she and Luna cross to the table; all gather around, Spike hovering)* Not exactly. Battling the Everfree Forest alongside Starswirl made us realize what we've missed out on.

(A flare of her magic brings up the map and sends a miniature sun arcing over it from one side to the other.)

Celestia: So instead of spending the day ruling... *(Luna creates a moon to run the same path.)*

Luna: ...and the night patrolling dreams...

Celestia: ...we wanted a chance to do the things *you* do. *(She dispels the map.)* Save the day! Adventure with friends! Shampoo anteaters. *(Cut to her; Twilight/Fluttershy/Applesjack, and Spike.)*

Spike: I'm pretty sure Fluttershy's the only pony that does that. *(The yellow mare blushes; Rainbow zooms into the center of the gathering.)*

Rainbow: Well, there are way more fun things to do than... *(Dismissive chuckle.)* ...follow us around.

Pinkie: *(from o.s.)* Ooooh! *(Cut to her and Rarity.)* You should make a list of all the stuff you never tried but always wanted to! *(She whips out a quill and a very long scroll.)* There's a lotta little things out there to do!

(Cut to the sisters; Celestia grasps both items in her magic, and both smile after a beat of intense pondering.)

Celestia: What an intriguing idea! *(She drops them.)* Only it's much harder to justify a vacation from the castle when it's not an emergency we're responding to.

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* Don't worry. *(Cut to frame all nine.)* We'll cover your palace duties.

(Her friends and number-one assistant are definitely not prepared for this claim. Unfazed, she leads Celestia and Luna toward the doors.)

Twilight: It'll be a good chance for us to practice for when you retire.

Luna: Well, if you're sure you don't mind the extra effort.

Twilight: Psssh!

Celestia: *(overjoyed, patting her shoulder)* Thank you, Twilight! What a relief to know the Royal Swanifying Ceremony is in good hooves. *(She exits with Luna on the end of this, adding a laugh.)*

Applejack: *(to Twilight)* The what, now?

(Dissolve to a balcony of Canterlot Castle. Celestia's bedchamber is visible through the open doorway, and she paces while taking notes with a levitated quill/scroll. Zoom in slowly.)

Celestia: *(dictating)* "Fun not yet had."

(Cut to within the room; Luna lounges on the bed.)

Celestia: *(jittering in place)* Ooh, I can't wait to start planning our time off!

Luna: The chance to do whatever we want! *(expectantly)* And you know what that means.

(The screen splits diagonally, Celestia in upper left, Luna in lower right. The next two lines overlap.)

Celestia: Adventure!

Luna: Relaxation!

(Both pairs of eyes pop in surprise, the panels sliding away to frame them in fullscreen again. Celestia's energy rolls up the scroll and vanishes it and the quill.)

Luna: W-Well, it's just that I— *(Jump down from the bed.)* —I spend each night in everypony's intense dreams, so I could use some real-world downtime.

Celestia: *(laughing gently)* I understand. But for me, every day *is* real-world. Meetings and decrees and meetings about decrees and decrees about the meetings... I crave excitement!

Luna: *(hesitantly)* Uh, I'm...not sure how we can both be happy. *(smiling, revitalized)* Unless... *(Celestia matches her with a gasp.)*

Celestia: ...we take turns doing what we like!

Celestia, Luna: *(high-fiving)* Sister trip!

Luna: And I have the perfect accessories for us to wear! Wait right here!

(She vacates the premises in a pop of blue light and returns in like manner in an eyeblink, holding two garish flowered shirts folded against her chest. These are unfurled and lifted in her magic, causing the older sister's features to shift into a look of mild horror at the prospect of having to actually put one on. However, she quickly hides her reaction behind a big shaky smile.)

Celestia: Oh! *(Laugh.)* We'll be...twinsies. *(Luna giggles through her teeth and trots in place, a ball of nerves.)*

Luna: Just like regular pony tourists. *(She pulls one shirt toward herself.)* I knew you'd love it.

Celestia: I have a few things for us too.

(As she flies o.s., Luna drops to her haunches and pulls the garment on over her head while letting the other crumple to the floor. The Princess of the Night gets a very big surprise in the form of a fully packed bundle of camping equipment being flung her way. She catches this, nowhere close to figuring out the rationale for it, and the camera cuts to just behind her. Celestia has returned with a second pack, a big grin, and a pair of sunglasses that she floats into place on her own face.)

Celestia: Sunglasses! Bug spray! Ice boots! Hoof sanitizer! And travel snacks!

(Each item after the first is brought up in her aura as she names it, with a burst from the spray and a dose of the sanitizer poured onto a gold-shod hoof, and the shades end up propped on her forehead as she finishes. The snacks are in a small bag, which is promptly torn open and the contents emptied onto a hoof for Luna's consideration in close-up—a pile of small nuggets. Lick up a few, chew, swallow, and gag at the taste; zoom out slightly to frame Celestia, who has removed her sunglasses and set her pack aside.)

Celestia: You have to add water. What do you think?

Luna: *(smiling, pulling her close; the snacks spill away)* It's perfect, sister.

(Celestia is just a hair caught out at this opinion, but readily smiles and returns the hug. Dissolve to the city's main gates, standing open with their drawbridge lowered across the river. The sisters are on their way out, wearing the shirts and with packs on backs. Celestia has tied her mane into a loose ponytail that still billows on its own, while Luna has opted for a more compact one; both have gathered their tails into a bun and shed all of their regalia. Twilight and company have come to see them off, including Spike, and two Royal Guard troops are standing watch.)

Celestia: And here are instructions of how to prepare for the Royal Swanifying.

(Her telekinesis plucks a scroll from her gear and drops it into Spike's hands.)

Twilight: If it's written down, I'm sure we can handle it. Have fun.

Luna: One more thing. We're leaving you in charge of raising the sun and moon while we're gone.

(Collective gasp of disbelief from the Ponyville bunch, followed by Twilight's very uneasy, near-inaudible giggle. On the next line, Celestia floats out a round device resembling a makeup compact, with a merged sun and crescent moon on its case and a red gem at the sun's center.)

Celestia: We have put a small part of our power in this amulet. *(Cut to Twilight/Spike; she continues o.s. and moves it closer.)* You can activate it with your magic at any time.

(It ends up resting on the violet Princess's hoof as she finishes and receives an apprehensive look from the purple eyes.)

Celestia: *(leaning into view)* Preferably dawn and dusk. *(Twilight offers a shaky grin; she backs off and Pinkie leans in.)*

Pinkie: Ooooh! That's not a terrifying level of responsibility or anything.

(Twilight throws her a nasty over-shoulder glare before stepping confidently forward.)

Twilight: We won't let you down, Princesses.

(They grin at each other over this reassurance, Luna trotting giddily in place to boot, and both put their tails to the gates and get on the road. Once they are far enough out of range, Twilight stops waving after them and turns nervously to Spike, having stowed the amulet.)

Twilight: Please tell me that scroll says what the Royal Swanifying is! *(He opens it and reads.)*

Spike: Apparently it's a celebration of all the swans in the royal lake. *(A few drift up to the drawbridge.)* We round 'em up, parade 'em through the streets, and finish with a party in the castle.

(The birds let go with a burst of grating squawks, scaring him away from the edge and back toward the others.)

Rainbow: One question. *Why?!?!?*

Twilight: It doesn't matter. This is our chance to show Celestia and Luna we'll do whatever the job requires. If they can take care of all this themselves, then I know we can—together. *(Next two lines overlap.)*

Fluttershy: Um...hmm.

Rarity: *(halfheartedly)* Ah. Jolly good. *(The ponies head into Canterlot.)*

Spike: *(dryly, flying after them)* You are definitely not reading the scroll I am.

(Fade to black.)

Act Two

(Opening shot: fade in to Celestia and Luna on the move, with Canterlot visible in the distance behind them. Luna has retrieved the list Celestia started and is holding it open in her magic to run an eye over it. Pan slowly to follow them and put the opulent city out of view.)

Celestia: Remember, sister, from now on we are regular carefree ponies!

(But the behavior of others in the area puts the lie to her words. Murmurs of excitement ripple up and down the way, a pegasus stallion plummets out of the air and lands on his back in an enraptured swoon, and a mare hefts a camera to take a picture. Profile close-up of Luna.)

Luna: We're leaving the princess life behind, and we're not even going to fly!

(Zoom out quickly on this last word, Celestia having been caught in the process of lifting off. She plants her hooves back on the path with a sheepish smile.)

Celestia: Of course. *(laughing)* How new and different! *(poking Luna's nose)* It's just like Pinkie Pie said.

Jaunty banjo/mandolin melody with bass guitar, light percussion/woodwinds, acoustic guitar/brass accents; bright 4 (B flat major)

Celestia: There's a lotta little things you gotta do in this world
(Luna shows off the full length of the scroll.)

Luna: There's a lotta little things you gotta try
(The parchment is swung toward the camera so that it fills the screen. One line of writing straightens out into a gentle curve, and a dissolve turns it into a meadow path along which the sisters are trotting. The pronounced curvature of the land remains, as if Equestria were a very small planet, and they pass individuals who have figured prominently in various past episodes.)

Celestia: Just a pack of punchy plunges other ponies all take

Luna: That a princess pony passes right by

Strings in

(Dragon Lord Ember flies past the camera in close-up; behind her, the view wipes to a cottage set up as a tourist attraction. The sisters gallop toward it, and in short order a unicorn stallion is carving a wooden statue of them—with Celestia's likeness sporting a set of comically protruding, uneven teeth.)

Celestia, Luna: No pony knows you like your little sister
(Noting Celestia's less-than-amused look, Luna gets the hammer and chisel in her magical grip and touches up the statue to be a little more realistic.)

No pony is a better confidant
(Pan quickly to Celestia; she levitates a camera and, after a bit of coaxing, snaps a picture of Luna posing in front of a giant wooden horseshoe as if straining to lift it. Both have set their packs aside.)

Nopony is truer than the one you are
(Luna telekinetically plucks several postcards from a rack in a gift shop, only to get one end of an oversized shoe looped around her neck. It is under Celestia's control, and she uses it to pull Luna in for a laugh.)

Nopony else here I could want

Strings out; handclaps in

(One picture a time is dropped into view to fill the screen. Celestia facing down a bugbear as Luna watches through binoculars... the two sisters, now grown to giant size, menacing city-dwelling ponies on land and in air...attired as glamorous socialites, they pose for the crowd on a flatbed wagon pulled by an impassive chauffeur/bodyguard. From this last, cut to Celestia in full princess mode, looking out from the open gates of Canterlot. She steps forward, but is stopped by a portcullis crashing down and the drawbridge being pulled up.)

Celestia: You can't saunter on a sojourn hid behind castle walls
(Luna, hovering on a beach, conjures up her throne and sits; it sinks wholly into the sand, taking her with it.)

Luna: You can't throw a throne down on the beach
(Close-up of Celestia, back in vacation mode and relaxing against piles of peaches as her magically held quill checks off an item on the list. She rolls it up as the camera zooms out to frame Luna playing a banjo; the peaches are in a fully loaded wagon being hauled along, and they have hitched a ride.)

Celestia: So we're gonna be absconding

Luna: Do a little vagabonding

Celestia: And this bucket list is gonna be a peach

(Her energy snags one fruit and brings it up for an indulgent chomp, and more of them rain past the camera to wipe the view to a dark cavern. In close-up, Luna has donned a vest and a hard hat with a headlamp and is entranced by a family of bats hanging upside down from the ceiling. Celestia, similarly equipped, leans into view from farther back and waves to get her attention. Both have shed their packs.)

Strings in; handclaps out

Celestia, Luna: Nopony knows you like your older sister
(Pan quickly to them, caving gear gone and shirts/packs on as they marvel at the sights of the Bridleway theater district in Manehattan at night. Celestia gallops away without warning; cut to her in a toy store, levitating every oversized stuffed animal in sight toward herself as a fluffy cocoon. Luna smirks, then grins at the extent of her sister's plush-infused silliness.)

Nopony is a better confidant
(Several of them tumble down, wiping the view to the pair attending an outdoor magic show in Las Pegasus. Big Bucks and Jackpot, the performers who appeared in "Grannies Gone Wild," send up a cascade of vivid fireworks that burst to form flashing gems and outlines of the two royals in the night sky.)

Nopony is truer than the one you are
Nopony else here I could want

Half-time feel

(Dissolve to them trotting across Equestria, rendered in its small-planet version. Celestia has quill and list in her magic as Luna takes a picture with the camera in hers.)

Celestia, Luna: There's a lotta little things you gotta try in this world
(Put the camera away; Luna's energy starts to flag and she slows to a walk, Celestia racing ahead.)

There's a lotta little things you gotta see
(Luna arrives at a riverbank and drops to her haunches; the gear is laid down and a book is floated up.)

Luna: But just reading by a river and resting our hooves
Would practically be perfect for me

(She barely has time to open the cover before a white hoof drags her bodily away.)

Half-time feel ends (C major)

(Pan quickly to the Princesses riding the Wild Blue Yonder roller coaster in Las Pegasus, as seen in "Grannies Gone Wild." Celestia is loving every high-velocity thrill, but Luna would be scared clean out of her socks if she were wearing any.)

Celestia, Luna: Nopony knows you like your sister
(They rocket past the camera, triggering a wipe to a theatrical performance before a packed house, which they are watching from a private box. Celestia is bored out of her gourd, but Luna is absolutely engrossed in the drama and dries her eyes on the billowing, ponytailed mane.)

Nopony is a better confidant
(Wipe to a very scared, life-jacketed, helmeted Luna sitting in an open barrel as a waterfall thunders behind her—Neighagara Falls, as seen in "Once Upon a Zeppelin." A similarly attired and situated Celestia claps on the lid to seal her in, then floats a lid onto her own barrel as a goat attendant steps up.)

Nopony is truer than the one you are
(Inside the barrel, Luna fears for the worst and gets it in the form of an impact that tumbles her head over hooves.)

Nopony else here I could want

Handclaps in

(Zoom out slowly from the entire natural wonder. Water gushes over the screen and drains to show a tranquil stretch of river at the base of the falls. A second goat pushes a barrel onto dry land with its head, while the tops fly off two others bobbing in the current. Celestia emerges perfectly dry and ready for more, but Luna half-falls out as a sopping-wet mess and finds herself

being dragged along in a nimbus of sunny yellow magic. Cut to a stretch of ocean; the two mares plunge below the surface, now clad in swimwear, and find themselves ringed in by grinning sharks that throw a scare into only Luna.)

Celestia: You can't venture on adventures if you're taking a nap
(One passes the camera; wipe behind it to a close-up of an uneasy Luna in helmet, harness, and vest. In her teeth is a bar attached to a rope, similar to those used by water skiers. Zoom out to frame Celestia similarly kitted out; the two are taking a midair ride on the backs of a squad of flight-suited Wonderbolts.)

You can't check things off your checklist while you sleep
(Luna loses her nerve and grabs at the back of her "mount," setting off a massed dive. Clouds fill the screen and clear to show the two back in their shirts and packs, starting into a rocky uphill climb; Celestia carries the list in her field and darts ahead as Luna plods wearily along.)

Celestia: So let's take another hill

Luna: Sometimes you can be a pill

B flat major

And why's the way ahead always so steep?

Song ends with a stinger *(Luna collapses at the same time)*

(Dissolve to the throne room in Canterlot Castle, the camera trained on the closed doors at the end opposite the seats of power. These are opened in a magical grip to reveal three unicorns standing just outside: Fancypants, Jet Set, and Upper Crust.)

Fancypants: *(stepping in)* Princesses, we are here to—

(He stops short, the monocle dropping from his shocked eye, and the others ease in.)

Fancypants: Oh.

(Cut to just behind him, framing Twilight and company gathered at the base of the dais. Rainbow hovers a few feet up, and Spike is going over the scroll Celestia left the group upon her departure.)

Applejack: Well, we're fillin' in for Their Majesties. *(The visitors advance, Fancypants using magic to run a polishing cloth over his monocle.)* What can we help y'all with?

Fancypants: I say, how irregular. *(He pockets the cloth and sets the lens back in place.)* Well, then. We offer our assistance as heads of the Royal Swanifying Committee.

Rarity: Ah! What a relief! *(Twilight shoots her an annoyed look, then faces forward with a smile.)*

Twilight: Thank you, but we have it all covered.

Fancypants: *(unconvinced)* Really? *(adjusting monocle)* Well, good luck with that.

(Exeunt the trio, turning their noses up disdainfully and leaving seven unnerved Ponyville residents on/above the red carpet. The one with wings and a horn quickly finds puzzled/flabbergasted/angry looks on the faces of the other six.)

Twilight: If we ask for help, it's just like admitting we're not as good at the job as Luna and Celestia are. Besides, how hard can throwing a swan party be?

Pinkie: *(hopping to Spike, grabbing scroll with forelock)* Yeah! All we have left to do is— *(rapid fire, skimming it)* —polish the armor, bubble the punch, glitter the carpets, puff the pastry, float the floats, and carpet every road in Canterlot. *(The others are completely floored by this list of tasks; she resumes at normal speed.)* Should I keep reading?

(The degree of vexation that the others are directing toward Twilight rises noticeably, but she has only a nervous little giggle as a counter. Dissolve to a close-up of Luna uneasily lowering the sister's to-do list, held in her horn's light, as she stands next to Celestia somewhere in the great outdoors.)

Luna: Uh, Celestia? Since we're both a little tired— *(Zoom out slowly.)* —maybe the first thing we do shouldn't be *too* wild?

Celestia: Exactly what I was thinking.

(Neither is wearing her pack in this shot. Cut to the older sister in vest/helmet and riding across a canyon on a...)

Celestia: ZIIIIIP LIIIIINE!!

(Behind her comes a freaked-out Luna wearing her own rig. Wipe to a souvenir stand, where a unicorn mare floats a shirt off a line for her earth pony friend to look over. Both are wearing vests, but not helmets. Confusion spreads from one face to the other, and a zoom out discloses the reason: Luna, staggering dizzily toward the display. They back away as she clutches at an awning post for support and levitates her helmet off, exposing the disheveled state of her ponytail and forelock. A coffee mug drifts up to her eye level, held in her sister's power; she grimaces upon getting a good look, and the camera cuts to a close-up of her own photo printed onto the ceramic. She has been captured in mid-ride, lips and eyelids peeled back by the rushing winds.)

Celestia: *(pulling it back, her helmet gone)* Now every time we have tea, we can remember this magical day!

(She brings out a second mug emblazoned with her own, speed-distorted, considerably happier countenance. Luna turns hastily away and floats up the list and quill to mark off an item.)

Luna: Well, I'm glad you enjoyed yourself. *(Vanish both items.)* But now we're going to do something I've always wanted to do, but never could because of my night shift.

(Celestia hugs her close, bringing over the Luna mug and a teddy bear and jamming a baseball cap onto the blue-violet head so that the horn punches through.)

Celestia: *(eagerly)* Is it another zip line? *(Long pause.)*

Luna: Nn-no.

(Wipe to the pair in the Ponyville post office, shirts on and packs gone; her mane is back in order, the cap is gone, and she is considerably more enthused than Celestia as they wait in line. A brown/white-uniformed Derpy Hooves is working the counter.)

Luna: It's the post office! *(Trot in place.)*

Celestia: It is indeed.

(A pegasus stallion enters, but skids openmouthed to a stop upon getting a good look at them and backs cautiously away.)

Luna: Just think! All the mail in Ponyville goes through here! Isn't that amazing?

(She claps a postcard onto the counter as Derpy slots a letter into the rack behind her. The crossed amber eyes widen upon recognizing just exactly who the customer is.)

Luna: One stamp, please!

(Celestia glances away in a mildly disgruntled fashion, but Derpy salutes and rummages around the counter, sending a hailstorm of office supplies up past Luna's grinning face. The requested item is produced, and Luna's field brings it up so she can lick it and affix it to the card. Derpy gets the piece of correspondence in her teeth and passes out of sight into the depths of the post office.)

Luna: *(expectantly)* Wait for it...

(Celestia levitates a pocket watch whose ticking rings out loudly as she scrutinizes its face. After a few seconds, the sound of an opening door is heard and a blue-uniformed unicorn delivery stallion enters. The watch is put away, and he produces a stack of letters from his saddlebags using his aura, sorts through them, and comes up with a card that he passes for Celestia to take in hers. He leaves to return to his duties as she flips it, the picture giving it away as the one Luna just sent.)

Celestia: You didn't need a stamp if you were just going to give this to me.

Luna: *(proudly)* Yes, but *I* didn't give it to you. A mail pony took it from me, searched to find who it was meant for, and gave it to you!

(She ends with a two-hoofed poke at Celestia's chest.)

Luna: It's about the process!

(Elder sister just rolls her eyes at this grandiose treatment of such a mundane institution. Wipe to a dim cavern whose walls/floor/ceiling are studded with fearsomely sharp stone projections. Celestia and Luna descend into view in the far distance, harnessed to ropes and wearing vests and headlamp-fitted hard hats instead of their shirts/packs.)

Celestia: *(echoing)* Did you know that nopony has ever explored the bottom of these caverns?

(The whole place shakes to the tune of a grating roar; close-up of them, stones grinding together in the background like gnashing teeth.)

Luna: *(dryly)* I wonder why.

(Many more extend into view to block them from sight. Wipe to an extreme close-up of the Princess of the Night as a cluster of tiny, multicolored diamonds is painted below one eye.)

Luna: I have always wanted to try this!

(Longer shot: she is in the hot-tub room of the Ponyville Spa, being waited on by Bulk Biceps and Lotus, and has ditched her spelunking equipment in favor of a radical makeover. The mane and tail have both had light blue streaks dyed into them and are teased out and loosely tied back with brightly hued scrunchies; neon-colored bracelets adorn the forelegs, a matching pendant hangs from a pearl necklace at the throat, and the hind legs sport fur-trimmed warmers. She leaps from the massage chair on which she has been reclining and strikes pose after pose as spotlights play across her form.)

Luna: Isn't this wonderful, sister?

(A flare of light fills the screen and clears to give an extreme close-up of the white face, not at all in a good mood as a teardrop is painted on below one eye. A zoom out puts her in another one of the massage chairs, with Aloe tending to her: jagged purple shoes on all four hooves, a matching studded collar, mane/tail straightened out and dyed in streaks of blue-violet and dark gray, multiple ear piercings.)

Same melody as earlier song, but played on banjo, bass guitar, muted brass with string accents
Slower 4 (B flat major)

(The open list is pulled past the camera; behind its trailing edge, wipe to Luna peeking fearfully over the edge of a cloud. Celestia hurls herself into empty air with gusto, wrapping her sister in a telekinetic aura and dragging her along for the ride. Both are wearing helmets and vests along with their new duds.)

Celestia: There's a lotta little things you gotta do in this world
(They splash into a body of water; Celestia celebrates the dive, but a discomfited Luna floats her helmet off to find her mane a dripping mess. Both sisters' face paint has run down their cheeks.)

Luna: There's a lotta little things you oughta view

(Pan quickly to her, clean, dry, and back to her original tourist appearance; she stares ahead, intently pondering something that proves to be an abstract painting in an art gallery when the camera cuts to behind her. A similarly situated Celestia sits on a bench and dozes off, leaning against the nearest mare and knocking a brochure from her hooves. The latter grins shakily and yanks out a camera to capture the moment.)

Celestia: And our “little lotta” lists may be a little bit long
(The flash fills the screen and clears to show Celestia in harness, vest, and headlamp/hard hat, doing a little rock climbing. A line runs down from her rig; tilt down to frame Luna dangling unwillingly from its lower end and wishing she could be anywhere else.)

Luna: *(sighing)* And might take a lotta bother to do

Light percussion in

(Pan quickly to the two travelers in shirts and packs, picking their way along a downhill jungle trail. Luna’s horn-power brings the rolled list from her bags and passes it up front for Celestia to unroll it with hers.)

Celestia, Luna: But I’m sure it gets better later on

Celestia: And after darkest night, a new dawn
(Luna exerts power to pull it back.)

Luna: It’s my turn to do the choosing
(Celestia takes it again; Luna grimaces.)

Celestia: After river rapid cruising
(A tug-of-war ensues.)

Celestia, Luna: This adventure isn’t too fun to be
(It splits down the middle, leaving both to topple backward, off the opposite edges of a small spit of land where they have stopped, and into a muddy swamp.)

On

Song ends

(They turn their faces pointedly away from one another. Dissolve to a Canterlot Castle ballroom, which Twilight and the gang are busily setting up for a full-scale shindig. Spike is checking items off on a clipboard he holds, and Twilight positions a bicycle pump with her field and puts hooves to work on the handle. Its discharge hose runs into a large basin full of punch, and her exertions cause masses of air bubbles to rise to the surface. The doors behind her are magically opened to admit Fancypants, Jet, and Upper.)

Fancypants: Princess Twilight! *(They step in; she stops pumping and turns to them.)* It has come to our attention that you don’t intend to serve watercress as the Royal Swanifying Ceremony!

Twilight: There’s not enough in the castle kitchens to— *(She falls quiet at his raised hoof.)*

Fancypants: Don’t tell *me*, tell *him*!

(He steps aside on the end of this to show a fourth member of his “committee”: a swan that voices its displeasure with a string of loud squawks. The resident Princess cringes at the sound; cut to just outside one window as Fancypants leads her over to it.)

Fancypants: And you *must* do something about the garbage piling up outside!

(As he finishes, the camera zooms out to expose a massive accumulation of unsavory refuse—bagged, in cans, and loose—in the castle courtyard. Having drawn clouds of flies, it stands perhaps three times as tall and broad as the two work-vested, hard-hatted ponies standing in front of it with protest signs in hoof. Two others wearing tool belts stand and stare impatiently at them; one of these has a plank slung over one shoulder.)

Fancypants: The street sweepers are on strike, and the royal carpeters can’t do their jobs!

(The piece of wood is thrown down in disgust; back to Twilight/Applejack/Pinkie in the ballroom.)

Applejack: *(to Pinkie)* Did you even know there *were* royal street carpeters?

Fancypants: *(from o.s.)* Oh, dear.

(Pan to him, Rarity, and a hovering Spike at a snack table; the dragon has ditched his clipboard. Fancypants’s magic pulls at the tablecloth hem.)

Fancypants: *(disdainfully, dropping it and dusting off his coat)* I do hope those aren’t the final decorations for the gala. *(Rarity and Spike start, affronted.)*

Rarity: How rude!

Twilight: Thank you for your constructive criticism— *(levitating him/Jet/Upper out)* —but we really don’t have time to chat, so...

(The great doors are slammed shut behind the alarmed unicorns as she waves goodbye, but any feigned cordiality goes out the window with one jittery glance toward the room. Dissolve to Celestia and Luna, cleaned up from their mishap in the swamp and sitting sourly on a picnic blanket in a clearing. They have their backs to one another and pointedly avoid even the briefest of eye contact, sparing backward glances only for the basket resting between them so they can levitate sandwiches out of it. Zoom in slowly and cut to Celestia swallowing a bite.)

Celestia: *(sarcastically)* Well, I hope you’re enjoying yourself on your super-relaxing picnic, sister. *(She chomps into her sandwich; Luna stands up with a scoff.)*

Luna: I would be— *(pivoting to show burrs matted across her haunch)* —if you hadn’t made us hike through a million prickly bushes!

(Her field picks one loose as she speaks; Celestia’s then rips others away to set off a groan of discomfort.)

Celestia: *(turning to her; dropping sandwich)* Well, they hurt less than that horrible howling you dragged us to!

Luna: *(floating up a picture of an opera singer)* That was Ponygliacci, and it's an opera!

(She storms back to her side of the blanket, leaving Celestia to snatch the sheet down and glower after her.)

Luna: *(sitting, back to Celestia)* And you made us leave early even though it was still my turn! *(Up come the parts for another sandwich.)*

Celestia: Oh, just face it, Luna! *(standing, stomping)* You are *never* happy! *(The food falls to the blanket; Luna stands and rounds on her. Zoom in slowly.)*

Luna: Because you don't want me to be happy. I always have to do things *your* way. I bet you wish I'd never come back so you could still rule day *and* night!

Celestia: *(scoffing, stomping)* You think I like that kind of pressure? Being responsible for every little thing in Equestria *and* you? What I'd like is a SISTER I CAN DEPEND ON!

(These last five words are delivered in the booming Royal Canterlot Voice; all capitalized words in the next four lines are similarly spoken.)

Luna: *(mane falling free)* YOU MEAN BOSS AROUND?

Celestia: CALM DOWN, LUNA!

Luna: NO! And don't you dare use your Canterlot Voice on me! I think this adventure would be better if I did it by MYSELF! *(She puts her back to Celestia.)*

Celestia: FINE! *(magically re-packing basket, voice shaking)* I just remembered something I forgot I always wanted to do.

(She lifts off just enough to let her power spread over the blanket, yank it out from under Luna, and fold/pack it away.)

Celestia: *(flying off with basket)* Be alone! *(Luna trudges away.)*

Luna: *(voice breaking, tearing up)* Guess we have the same thing on both of our lists, then!

(Tears start to run down the blue-violet cheeks. Fade to black.)

Act Three

(Opening shot: fade in to the upper reaches of the Canterlot Castle ballroom, now hung thick with red banners. Rainbow frantically flies across to string up a two-tone blue one; from here, tilt down to frame the rest of the Ponyville contingent, sans Pinkie, working full tilt to reset the gathering space. Twilight positions a table and sets a basket on it, and Applejack pitches a load of assorted fruits into this and bucks in one last loose apple.)

Applejack: *(calling across room)* Pinkie! You got those appetizers yet?

(Pan quickly to the heretofore-missing mare, who is working a giant masher like a pogo stick to pulverize a tub full of avocados. A crate and bag of spares are on hand, as is a large bowl of tortilla chips.)

Pinkie: STILL MASHING THE GUACAMOLE!!

(Rarity gallops past, a pair of glittery tablecloths moving under her control, and arrives at a table on which Spike is standing to lay out silverware. Its cloth is yanked out, leaving him a whirling, yelling blur in midair, and he comes down on his belly and ends up covered by one of the replacements.)

Rarity: So we're just going to have to do with sequins!

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* Um, sorry for the bad news, but...

(Cut to her, holding a basket of flowers and hovering to point out a window.)

Fluttershy: ...the courtyard is full of swans waiting to get in!

(Twilight moves up for a closer look and is promptly greeted with a flock of the angry, honking birds. Rainbow loops down to her.)

Rainbow: And we're nowhere near ready!

Twilight: How do Celestia and Luna rule a kingdom *and* get all this done by themselves every year?

(A rich chuckle from the o.s. Fancypants cuts in; the three turn in its direction and find him reading a newspaper at one of the tables.)

Fancypants: Oh, how droll. *(Spike flies over.)*

Spike: Uh, what's the funny part, exactly?

Fancypants: *(folding/setting paper down, crossing to them)* The Princesses never do all the ceremony planning by themselves.

Twilight: They...don't?

Fancypants: Oh, goodness, no. *(magically stirring/lifting a cup of tea)* That's what the gala planning committees are for. No pony could handle all *this*.

(Taking an indulgent sip, he extends his field to pull up a section of the tablecloth and peers closely at it.)

Fancypants: Are those...sequins? *(The others gather in around Twilight.)*

Rarity: Still rude.

Twilight: Ooh! New plan, everypony! We're going to delegate!

(Zoom in to a close-up of her fiercely grinning face on this last word, then cut to a long overhead shot of the courtyard. The trash piles have multiplied, and swans are milling around in the chaos)

of strikers and onlookers. Twilight and company pour out onto the balcony; close-up of a mortified Upper.)

Rainbow: *(from o.s.)* Uh, you! *(She flies into view.)* You're on food duty!

(The snobby are tossed off a nod and trots to it; meanwhile, Rarity jumps down the last few steps of a flight to stop in front of Jet.)

Rarity: I need gemstones! *(Smiling, he gallops off.)* And purple satin!

(Fluttershy places herself in just the right spot for Fleur to back up into her.)

Fluttershy: *(guiding her away)* Tell the ponies at the gates that there's a slight delay on the gala! Oh, um, if it's not too much trouble, I mean.

(She trots placidly over to Applejack and one of the fetid mountains.)

Applejack: Uh, now who can we get to clean up all this garbage?

(A couple of thundering impacts very nearly shake them off their hooves; cut to a close-up of Pinkie riding atop some curved craft.)

Pinkie: *(singsong)* I'm delegating!

(Zoom out quickly to a long shot of the mare and her conveyance—Mr. Tortoise-Snap, the cause of this new commotion. She sits on the leading edge of the massive turtle's shell as he calmly chows down on the trash. Twilight lets her eyes rove across the courtyard and finds that the bedlam is rapidly being brought under control, and a quietly smiling Fancypants steps up without his newspaper or tea.)

Twilight: So *this* is how you rule Equestria!

(The dapper stallion offers a small nod of approval. Dissolve to Luna relaxing on a beach chair, her shirt/pack gone and her mane tied back again; a pair of sunglasses rest on one arm. She accepts a drink from a waiter, holding it in her magic, and takes a long pull from its straw before setting it on the other arm and leaning back with a contented sigh, forelegs behind head.)

Luna: *(floating shades on)* Things are so much more relaxing without my bossy sister.

(She is jolted out of her blissful reverie by the passage of two laughing mare/filly pairs whose similar colorations suggest close blood relationships. Extreme close-up of the black lenses, which reflect the first pair having fun building a sand castle at the shore. Luna lowers them with a hoof, exposing two incredulous blue-green eyes, and she turns glumly away from the activity in a longer shot.)

(Wipe to Celestia and a mare in mid-skydive, both clad in helmets, jumpsuits, and packed parachutes on backs; Celestia is also wearing goggles.)

Celestia: Who needs a gloomy sister moping around all the time, anyway?

(Her partner taps the side of her own helmet and shrugs to indicate that she has not been able to hear a word of this. Celestia fires up her horn to pull her ripcord and is yanked upward by the force of air resistance against her opening chute. The other deploys hers after falling several hundred feet more, giving Celestia an exceptionally clear view of her and Luna's grinning/laughing faces on its canopy. The white Princess voices an annoyed little huff.)

(Wipe to a close-up of Luna sitting bolt upright in bed with a cry of pain, no longer wearing her shades. The area around her nose and mouth is tinged an angry red, and a similar hue stains the tips of her ears and traces down the length of her throat. A longer shot puts her in a hospital bed and covered with red patches; a unicorn nurse mare has brought in jars of cotton balls and a bowl of ointment and is deploying these items in her magic to dress the injuries.)

Nurse: Honestly, Princess, didn't you wear any sunblock?

Luna: That's a thing? *(Sigh.)* Celestia would've warned me—if she were here.

(Major-league sunburn, then. She flops miserably onto her belly and covers her head with her pillow. This move exposes a huge overcooked expanse on her back that prompts the nurse to simply pour the contents of her bowl over it. Wipe to a moonlit stretch of dense forest, against which a map is held up in Celestia's influence—her perspective. She turns it this way and that with a slightly impatient sigh.)

Celestia: Now, was it two left turns and a right, or— *(Long shot of her amid the thickets, wearing pack and shirt.)* —two right turns and a left? Heh.

(Something shadowy flashes past in the fore, her unsteady confidence evaporating in nearly the same moment.)

Celestia: Luna always handled directions.

(A snapping twig sets every nerve to vibrating at its highest octave...teeth clench at the pinnacle of brain-freezing fear...and then a perfectly ordinary chicken waddles out of the bushes. It offers a few bemused clucks and pecks at the dirt for food, but Celestia responds to the yardbird's arrival by backpedaling to the nearest tree and lifting off to wrap all four legs around a sturdy branch.)

Celestia: *(shivering, barely able to speak)* And scared away the chickens!

(She hitches in a breath and squeezes both eyes shut as if wishing that a rotisserie might instantly spring from the earth and cook this one whole. Dissolve to Luna on the move in the forest, wearing her own shirt and gear and perusing a map suspended in her horn-glow. Her sunburn

has healed up. She stops and looks up, the camera zooming out to frame Celestia trying to puzzle out her own map as she walks the path. The older sister only notices the younger upon looking up.)

Celestia: Oh! (*Laugh; both roll/stow their maps.*) I thought climbing Mount Filly-mane-jaro was on my list.

Luna: I'm not copying you. (*reluctantly, scratching back of head*) I just wanted to watch the sunrise.

Celestia: (*chuckling*) Ah! I'm, uh, here for the moonset. (*Long pause.*) So, uh, how did the rest of your day go?

Luna: (*forced casual tone*) Oh, amazing! Yeah, uh, fan-fantastic. Best ever, really.

Celestia: (*ditto*) Yeah! Me too. Mm. (*Another long pause.*)

Luna: You...you can walk with me, you know, if—if you want, I mean.

Celestia: (*scoffing softly*) Oh, well, since we're going the same way...

(She trails off into a chuckle, and the sisters fall to walking side by side, carefully avoiding eye contact. Dissolve to a long overhead shot of a cliff jutting upward toward the crescent moon and zoom in slowly as they climb toward its edge, then cut to them—now smiling warmly.)

Luna: This is so beautiful. It must be amazing in the sunlight.

Celestia: The night's pretty special, too.

(A bit of magic removes and sets aside both their packs, and they sit down on their haunches to stare up at the darkened expanse of the heavens. A shooting star streaks across the night.)

Celestia, Luna: Lucky star! (*They stare at each other and drop their heads.*)

Luna: You taught me to look for those when I was a filly.

Celestia: (*chuckling, nudging her*) Hope I wasn't too bossy doing it.

Luna: You know, being with your sister all the time is hard, but...

(Now she activates her horn to loosen her mane from its ponytail and let her mane stream out.)

Luna: ...being without her? It's even harder.

Celestia: I do know. (*She copies the action and sighs.*) And I wouldn't trade you for any of the adventures on my list.

(A white wing pulls the younger sovereign closer.)

Luna: Not even your zip line?

(Celestia answers that one by levitating her portion of the list they tore in half during their Act Two plop into the swamp, crumpling it into a ball, and disintegrating it.)

Celestia: Not even my zip line.

Luna: I'm sorry I said those things before. Sometimes it's just...tough being the little sister.

Celestia: It's not always easy being the big sister, either. I'm sorry too.

(There follows a long, forgiving hug, which gives way to a double look up at the sky just in time for the sunrise—with one minor complication: the moon does not shift even a particle.)

Luna: *(with growing disbelief)* Wh—? The sun and the moon together? At the same time?

Celestia: *(smiling)* Now where have I seen that before?

(They bend down and o.s., raising their haunches to that their cutie marks stand side by side, then straighten up with a laugh. The actual heavenly bodies have other ideas, though, zipping back and forth all over the sky and perturbing their full-time controllers no end.)

Luna: *(softly)* Whoa. *(Very long pause.)*

Celestia: You think maybe Twilight's having trouble with the amulet?

Luna: We should probably go help her.

(They take flight. Cut to Twilight standing on a Canterlot Castle balcony, magically holding the amulet Celestia gave her in Act One and wrenching fruitlessly at it.)

Spike: *(from inside)* Okay, okay. *(He flies out to her, carrying a small tool.)* I think I got it!

(Land.) Sunburst says we just need to reset the amulet with this!

(The grin she throws him is equal parts glee and derangement; in close-up, she seizes the tool in her aura and applies it to the casing.)

Spike: *(from o.s.)* Turn the screw on the back...

(Which she does—a full turn with enough force to pop the amulet apart into a tangle of gears and warped springs. Spike flies over to her.)

Spike: ...uh, no more than one half-turn.

(A frightened little moan escapes through his boss/sister's tight-locked teeth. Cut to a long shot of Canterlot under the pinballing sun and moon.)

Twilight: *(from balcony, echoing)* DOES ANYPONY HAVE SOME TAPE?

(Here come Celestia and Luna, wringing every iota of airspeed from their feathers that they can get. Fade to black.)