

THE MEAN 6

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Prologue

(Opening shot: fade in to the exterior of the School of Friendship during the day and zoom in slowly. On the start of the following line, cut to Twilight Sparkle in her office; she glances nervously at a levitated pocket watch as her friends and Starlight Glimmer look on with concern. Pinkie Pie sits behind Twilight's desk, while Rarity sits on a stool and Rainbow Dash hovers overhead; the others are standing.)

Twilight: *(moaning)* I've been planning this retreat for weeks and we're already ten minutes behind! *(viciously, tucking watch away)* Where is that photographer?!

Mare voice: *(muffled, frantically)* Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no!

(The doors are flung open and the speaker scrambles in—a pale greenish-gray unicorn with two-tone red-brown mane/tail, medium green eyes, and a cutie mark of a ladybug and a scatter of seeds. A camera is clamped in a jointed holder around her neck.)

Photographer: I'm so sorry! Can you forgive me? I don't expect you to forgive me. *(softly)* Forgive me? *(Big grin; Twilight groans loudly.)*

Starlight: *(crossing to her, chuckling)* Of course. I'll help you set up your—

Photographer: *(ignoring her, calming down)* Princess Twilight, thanks so much for this. The Canterlot Historical Society is thrilled to document the friendship work your teachers do. Let me just pretty you all up.

(She whisks from one instructor to the next, plucking a loose hair from each head and mumbling to herself as she goes. In the process, she briefly causes Fluttershy's mane to pop into a shape matching Pinkie's, interrupts the pink pony in the midst of sampling a batch of cupcakes, and mashes Applejack's hat onto her face after levitating it off to retrieve a hair. The sequence stops with a close-up of the still-hovering Rainbow, who winces at the sound of a strand being plucked.)

Rainbow: Ow!

(Zoom out; she wheels to glare down at the overeager mare, who has just helped herself to the varicolored tail hairs.)

Rainbow: Hey! *(She rubs her rump.)*

Photographer: Don't want a single hair out of place, do we? *(crossing off)* This is for the history books. *(She stops amid the group.)* Now...

(The camera shutter and flash fire off in rapid succession, capturing the images of Twilight and her friends no matter how unready they happen to be or how much the picture-taking rattles them. Applejack has her hat back on straight by the time her turn comes. Almost too quickly to follow, the photographer has the six photos in her field and is sweeping them into a stack.)

Photographer: Well, that's that. *(turning to doors)* Bye! *(Pinkie slides in, standing on her hind legs to block the way.)*

Pinkie: WAAAAIT!! *(pointing)* You forgot Starlight!

(Cut to the guidance counselor, who has indeed gone totally unnoticed.)

Pinkie: *(from o.s., pointing to her)* She needs a picture too! *(Starlight grins; cut to the visitor, suddenly disinterested.)*

Photographer: 'Kay.

(She snaps a picture, barely even troubling to aim the camera, and pulls it free with a smile when it pops out.)

Photographer: Now I'll get out of your manes. I know how busy you are.

(Out she goes, leaving seven extremely confused mares in her wake. Cut to a patch of woods not far from the School as the shutter-happy unicorn trots into it, a sinister smile now plastered across her face. Once satisfied that she is out of sight and earshot, she pulls out her first six snapshots and extends her field to hold and flip through them in midair. The hairs she plucked are brought up next in a clump.)

Photographer: *(softly)* Now I have everything I need.

(Her horn winks out just long enough to let the items fall to earth, then blazes anew to send up a wash of lurid green fire around herself. It subsides to reveal the pocked form of Chrysalis, appearing as she did when she fled her now-former hive in Part Two of "To Where and Back Again," but with one minor change. The crown-like cluster of antennae that she lost when her throne was obliterated has regenerated itself. Her crazed, exultant laugh rings through the woodland before the view snaps to black.)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(Opening shot: fade in to a ground-level view of a misty forest path as Chrysalis's hooves advance along it, then cut to a small clearing ringed by six gnarled, moss-overgrown trees. As she speaks, she attaches one photo and its corresponding hair to each tree.)

Chrysalis: Yes, I know. We have been planning this for quite some time. *(Laugh; she caresses Applejack's picture.)* Oh, thank you, Applejack. My spell can create a copy of anypony I desire. All I need is an image and a piece of the pony. *(Sniff the hair; horn warms up.)* Oh, and this.

(A blast lances into the twisted wood just below the snap, burning a copy of the earth pony's cutie mark into the bark; now Chrysalis glances off in a new direction.)

Chrysalis: Why copies, Rarity? *(pacing to that tree)* Because Princess Twilight and her friends control the Elements of Harmony, the most powerful weapon in all Equestria.

(She brands Rarity's three gems onto the trunk.)

Chrysalis: *(prancing to Pinkie's tree, cheery staccato enunciation)* Which means you will be able to use them too!

(The party pony's mark is burned into the surface, after which she slides over to Fluttershy's picture, hugging the tree and resuming her normal speech pattern.)

Chrysalis: And serve me.

(Three butterflies are scored onto the bark.)

Chrysalis: *(scornfully, moving to Rainbow's photo)* Together, we will destroy Twilight Sparkle and her meddlesome friends!

(After her horn carves the cloud/lightning-bolt combo, she lunges toward Twilight's tree, the last one she has not yet visited.)

Chrysalis: Of course I haven't forgotten Starlight Glimmer! She stole my hive. Turned my subjects against me. So I'll take her *friends* away while she watches, and then I'll destroy her!

(A peal of wild laughter rings out as she chars the trunk with the Princess's mark. Now she returns to the center of the clearing, the camera zooming out slowly.)

Chrysalis: With the Elements under my control, I'll build a new hive of earth ponies, unicorns, and pegasi— *(igniting horn; a circle of green runes glows on the grass around her)* —and I will rule as Queen once again!

(Six beams sing out from the tip, one punching into each of the photo/hair pairings, and six more flow from one to the next to trace a hexagonal perimeter around the clearing. These energies

fade away after a long moment, giving way to glowing fissures that race up the six trunks and cause them to peel apart as if they were ears of corn being shucked. As Chrysalis's anticipating eyes dart from one ravaged tree to another, six forms composed of that same sick green light stand up from the interiors with terrible slowness. The camera pans across these as the radiance fades away to yield duplicates of Twilight and her friends; the manes are slightly ruffled, the colors faded, and the facial expressions are nowhere close to friendly. The Applejack clone has a few rips in the brim of her hat, and the irises in each pair of eyes are a single color, with none of the light-to-dark shading visible in the originals.)

(There are a few differences in the cutie marks as well. The arrangements of the three elements in the marks of Applejack, Fluttershy, and Rarity—apples, butterflies, gems—has been inverted, and both the apples in the farmer's mark and her mane/tail ties are green rather than red. Rainbow's mark is upside down, and the white star overlaid by the pink one on Twilight's haunch has gone that same color to leave a twelve-pointed pink star at the center. Pinkie's mark is the only one that cannot be clearly seen at the moment.)

(Stop on Twilight, whose mouth curves up into a cruel smile, and dissolve to a stretch of sunny sky above the treetops. Tilt down toward ground level on the start of the next line, framing the six genuine articles and Starlight moving through a tranquil stretch of forest. Twilight leads them, using a magically held quill/scroll to take notes, Rainbow flies above the group, and a visibly unenthused Starlight lags well behind, trailing a load of cargo as it is towed along.)

Twilight: Hmmm...at least our retreat isn't too far behind schedule. Get ready for fun!

Rainbow: Are we talking *fun* fun, or learning pretending to be fun?

Twilight: Both! We've all been so busy teaching, we've hardly had a chance to hang out with each other. (*giddily; Rainbow smiles*) And I may have scheduled some friendship activities as well.

Pinkie: (*hopping forward to them*) Count me in! We can do friendship trust falls and pony pyramids—oh! And hide-and-seek!

(She punctuates this list by leaning her weight against Rainbow, standing on her front hooves atop the blue back, and finally darting away.)

Pinkie: (*now o.s.*) Quick! Find me! (*Cut to Fluttershy.*)

Fluttershy: Well, I love the idea of some quiet time with my best friends. (*She stops short when Pinkie bursts out of the undergrowth with a boisterous shriek.*)

Pinkie: Found me!

(Elsewhere, Applejack and Rainbow are hauling loads of equipment—a full cart and a pair of small saddlebags, respectively—as a rather puzzled Rainbow pulls in to hover alongside.)

Rainbow: Rarity, why is Applejack carrying all your stuff?

Rarity: Oh, that's not mine. Yes, I used to overpack a tad, but now it's just the essentials for me. I'm a simple filly.

Applejack: *(giddily, as Rainbow touches down)* Normally I wouldn't lug so much gear, but did y'all know this is Starlight's first time campin'?

(All three pairs of eyes turn back the way they came, the camera panning to frame the laggard unicorn.)

Starlight: *(stopping)* I just never really felt the need to...hang out in nature? *(waving flies away)* Home has books, tea, fewer bugs, a roof...

Applejack: That attitude right there is why I brought the whole kit and caboodle. *(All stop; she pulls at a length of camouflage-patterned cloth.)* I'm givin' Starlight the full Apple family campin' experience!

(As she finishes, she yanks it loose and tosses it up so that it drapes itself over the lackadaisically passing Starlight in the fore and fills the screen. The view clears to show it piled on the ground in a wriggling heap, from which Starlight's head, legs, and tail eventually emerge to leave her standing and wearing it as a poncho. She is far from amused.)

(Cut to Twilight and Fluttershy walking side by side, the former having stowed the quill/scroll she was using earlier.)

Fluttershy: Um, where *are* we camping?

Twilight: Right next to the Elements that brought us all together in the first place—the Tree of Harmony.

(On the end of this line, the camera describes a long arc that takes it up to treetop level and down again, stopping in the unwholesome clearing that served as ground zero for the creation of the mares' doubles.)

*** For the remainder of this episode, duplicates will be denoted with a 2 at the end of their names. ***

(Applejack-2 sits on her haunches, glaring at a stretched-out Pinkie-2 on the ground as Fluttershy-2 lies nearby on her belly; Rainbow-2 lounges on a clump of twisted tree roots, chewing a stalk of wheat; a scowling Rarity-2 approaches the four as Chrysalis stands up to address the five. Twilight-2 is nowhere near this area for the moment. Like their faces, the voices of all six are devoid of any hint of geniality. Now Pinkie-2's cutie mark can be clearly seen, the arrangement of the three balloons inverted relative to the original source.)

Chrysalis: Listen to your Queen! We must retrieve the Elements of Harmony! *(Pinkie-2 sits up.)*

Pinkie-2: Hunting down some lame Elements? *(Fluttershy-2 steps over to her.)* This is the worst day ever!

(The faded pink mare gets a dirt clod kicked into her eye and has to wipe it away on the next line.)

Fluttershy-2: No. Now it's the worst day ever! (*Nasty chuckle; Rarity-2 crosses to Chrysalis.*)

Rarity-2: Those Elements are mine! (*planting hoof on a loose stone*) Along with this rock! Oh, and that twig. (*She pins it down as well.*)

Applejack-2: (*slyly, tapping hat*) I got all kinds of Elements right here under my hat. I'll let you see 'em for five bits. (*Rainbow-2 spits out her stalk with a scoff.*)

Rainbow-2: Losers.

(*The boss is very much taken aback by this display of bad behavior, but she gets a further surprise when Twilight-2 steps in.*)

Twilight-2: Why didn't you just attack them?

Chrysalis: (*needed*) Excuse me?

Twilight-2: You were close enough to pull hairs from their manes. Why not just take your revenge then?

Chrysalis: They've defeated my army. I know better than to strike alone. (*Twilight-2 smirks.*) I need—

Twilight-2: (*mockingly*) —friends?

Chrysalis: Servants! And the power of the Elements!

Twilight-2: (*sardonically*) Right. So where are these Elements of Harmony?

Chrysalis: (*pacing past her*) The location of the most powerful weapon in Equestria isn't something made known to just anypony. (*She leans into Twilight-2's face.*) I learned they were hidden somewhere in this forest.

Twilight-2: (*sourly, passing her*) Yeah, well, it is a big forest.

(*The banished changeling can only snarl to herself in barely contained fury. Wipe to Twilight and company making their way through the inviting forest—all but Pinkie, that is, who whisks back from somewhere up ahead to intercept. She is up on her hind legs.*)

Pinkie: Everypony, stop! (*smiling, turning on all fours to a rosebush*) And smell these roses! (*She takes a deep sniff...*) Ahhhh.

(*...then throws herself onto the bush and rolls across it.*)

Pinkie: (*blissfully*) Oh, yeah.

Twilight: (*laughing weakly, but a bit unnerved*) All right, roses, fun. Now, let's try and stay on schedule.

(*They carry on; cut to a close-up of Rarity, who stops and pats at her slightly frizzed mane with mild consternation. Zoom out to frame Applejack also halted nearby.*)

Rarity: Applejack, darling, anything in that wagon for mane maintenance?

(*The blonde unhitches herself and steps back to look over the freight she has been pulling—camping-related tools, one and all.*)

Applejack: *(rummaging)* Uh, let's see here, uh, all right. *(pulling out a bandana)* I got a bandana.

Rarity: An entire wagon and no anti-frizz. Darling, you're not even prepared. *(Applejack, miffed, returns it to the cart.)*

Applejack: I *am*—for campin'. *(Glance back along the trail.)* How you doin', Starlight?

(Pan in that direction to frame the first-time camper—face scuffed, knit cap now covering her mane, camouflage boots on all four hooves, lantern hung around neck, laboring to move under the weight of the camping gear piled high on her back. She stubs a hoof with a grunt and comes within an ace of measuring her length on the forest floor, but recovers her balance just in time.)

Starlight: *(sourly)* Great.

(Up ahead, Fluttershy's forward progress is stopped when a bit of plaintive cheeping reaches her ears. The source proves to a sad-eyed bird on the grass just past the edge of the trail, and it tells her its story with sound and gesture as the others keep moving.)

Fluttershy: Oh, no! You and your sister fell out of your nest and got separated? That's terrible!

(Close-up of it, the edge of one yellow wing being held flat at its level.)

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

(It hops on. Back to her; it shifts up toward the joint as she moves toward the trees.)

Fluttershy: I'm sure your home isn't *too* far away.

(Her quill and scroll at the ready again, Twilight leads most of the others along the trail; Rarity's mane/tail are back to their usual impeccable state. Pinkie is not hoofing it with them, but instead has found a loop of vine dangling from a tree branch just up ahead and is using it as a swing. Her rear hooves knock against the parchment on one upward arc, very nearly smashing into Twilight's face to boot; the latter voices a startled squawk and quickly floats her implements out of reach.)

Twilight: Pinkie! *(The swinging halts.)* If we keep stopping to have fun, we're never gonna get to the fun things *I*'ve got planned!

Pinkie: *(gasping softly)* Good point! Last one to the Tree of Harmony is a parasprite!

(She peels out in a cloud of dust and a merry squeal, leaving the thwarted expedition guide to let out a soft, exasperated sigh. Wipe to the overgrown forest area, where Chrysalis and Twilight-2 step out from behind some bushes just before Pinkie-2 throws herself into view to land on her belly.)

Pinkie-2: I'm soooooo bored. *(rolling onto back)* Are we there yet?

Twilight-2: Where yet? We don't even know where we're going! *(Applejack-2 joins them.)*

Chrysalis: *(annoyed, leading Twilight-2 ahead)* The quicker we search the forest, the quicker we find the Elements. *(Pinkie-2 tries halfheartedly to rise, but gives up.)*

Applejack-2: I know where the Elements are. *(pointing to a rock, as Fluttershy-2 trudges up)* This, uh, here boulder just told me. *(smirking; they move on)* I swear.

(The faded yellow pegasus stops short at the sound of a plaintive cheep from ground level, and a longer shot reveals the source as a bird identical to the one who got a lift from the real Fluttershy—its sister, based on her translation.)

Fluttershy-2: You tried to fly out of the nest, you fell and got lost?

(It chirps an affirmative, only to receive a venomous cackle in reply.)

Fluttershy-2: Hope you like walking!

(The mockery continues as she nudges it roughly away with her head. Now Rainbow-2, flying lazily at the back of the procession, stops for a midair stretch and yawn.)

Rainbow-2: Come get me when I should care.

(Off she goes on a new heading; Chrysalis rounds on Applejack-2 and Rarity-2.)

Chrysalis: *(half-growling)* Where are the others?!

Applejack-2: *(eyes darting nervously)* Uh...a, uh...a bugbear in...plaid socks flew down and, uh, gra—and grabbed 'em, then disappeared. Huh. Craziest thing I ever did see.

Chrysalis: Turn around. We're going back.

Twilight-2: No. Keep searching. I'll find the others. We can accomplish more if we split our resources.

(A long, penetrating stare from Chrysalis as she considers this proposal.)

Chrysalis: Very well. You have my permission.

(Faded violet wings spread to take the impostor away on the start of her search. She waits to speak until she is well out of earshot.)

Twilight-2: Permission? You need us way more than we need you, *Your Majesty*.

(These last two words are infused with every drop of contempt she can gin up.)

Twilight-2: The others are fools, but with me to lead them, there's no reason we can't find the Elements and keep the power for ourselves!

(She cruises on through the foreboding woodland as the view fades to black.)

Act Two

(Opening shot: fade in to a clear spot as Twilight-2 touches down. A rustle in the nearby undergrowth prompts a soft gasp; she pivots toward it, warming up her horn, only for Pinkie to leap out and tackle her joyfully to the ground.)

Pinkie: You're it! *(puzzled)* Hey, how'd you get ahead of me? You're fast. *(Twilight-2 extricates herself and stands up.)*

Twilight-2: I'm looking for Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash.

Pinkie: *(pointing behind herself)* Aren't they back there?

Twilight-2: They are?

Pinkie: Sure, unless they're already at the Tree of Harmony.

Twilight-2: *(really confused)* What is the *Tree* of Harmony?

(The medium blue eyes throw her a very strange look for a moment.)

Pinkie: *(slyly)* O-ho-ho! This is one of your activities, right?

(A wink and brief rear-up on "activities," after which she shifts to her normal bubbly demeanor.)

Pinkie: Like a friendship quiz? It's the crystal tree that holds the Elements of Harmony. Boom.

Twilight-2: *(gasping, smiling savagely)* Where is it?

Pinkie: *(slamming a front hoof to the ground)* Bzzt! It's at the bottom of the stairs in the ravine by the Castle of the Two Sisters. *(Rear up; cross forelegs smugly.)* A double boom.

Twilight-2: How do you know? You've seen it?

Pinkie: *(nodding, on all fours)* Mmm-hmm. *(Twilight-2 turns away with a nasty smile...)*
Honestly, Twilight, these questions are super-easy.

(...then rubs the tips of her wings together as she sets off into the brush. Dissolve to a close-up of an empty nest as Fluttershy flies up to return the bird she found to it.)

Fluttershy: Right where you belong.

(Receiving a grateful hug to her cheek—as much of her as the little avian can grip with its spread wings—she drops back to the forest floor. The rescue mission has carried her into a much less hospitable area.)

Fluttershy: Oh, dear. This isn't where *I* belong. *(Soft gasp.)*

(Through a gap in the canopy, she spots Rainbow-2 pulling into a hover.)

Fluttershy: Oh, Rainbow Dash! I'm so glad you're here! I was lost.

Rainbow-2: Bummer! Later.

(Off she goes. Long pause.)

Fluttershy: What just happened?

(Wipe to Applejack, Rainbow, Rarity, and Starlight all calling Fluttershy's name in various directions from the trail and zoom out. A rather put-out Twilight stands a few paces ahead, having put away her quill and scroll.)

Twilight: *(groaning)* Fantastic. First Pinkie races ahead of us, and now Fluttershy's lost somewhere behind us! My retreat is off to a *great* start. *(Applejack unhitches herself from her cart.)*

Rarity: It's not like Fluttershy to disappear like this.

Applejack: We'll split up and search for her. We can all meet back at the Tree. *(holding a compass out to Starlight)* Starlight, take the navigation gear and—

Starlight: *(hastily)* —go with Rarity? Great! Rainbow Dash, you can go with Applejack. *(Chuckle.)*

Twilight: I'll find Pinkie Pie.

(She starts on ahead as Applejack stows the compass, whirls the cart 180 degrees, hitches herself up, and heads back the way they came with the rest of the gang. Dissolve to a close-up of Pinkie-2 lying spreadeagle on the grass.)

Pinkie-2: Bored, bored, bored. *(Chrysalis lands next to her.)*

Chrysalis: This is ridiculous! *(glaring down at her)* Where are my other minions?

Rarity-2: *(from o.s.)* Probably plotting to steal my things!

(Cut to her on the end of this, up on her hind legs and using her body to shield a pile of random leaves/rocks/vines from any potential marauders. She voices a feral snarl before Applejack sidles up to the slightly unnerved changeling.)

Applejack-2: *(pointing overhead)* They're at a secret party up in that there tree—uh, run by a squirrel, uh, named, uh...uh, Jerome. But, uh...y-you need a password to get in.

(Having had quite enough of apathy, cupidity, and mendacity for the moment, Chrysalis snarls and lifts all three in her magic.)

Chrysalis: Enough!

(They are flung away to hit the ground on their backs, but get no respite before the pockmarked hooves slam down by their heads and she leans in close. Lank blue-green mane strands flop about her slit-pupiled green eyes.)

Chrysalis: You will go out there and find the others. You will bring them back here, and we will steal the Elements of Harmony so I can destroy Starlight's life like she destroyed mine! *(through gritted teeth)* Understand?

(The three manage to nod and squeak out their assent.)

Applejack-2: *(aside)* The party password is “rutabaga.”

(One of those eyes twitches uncontrollably as Chrysalis perhaps begins to think about stuffing this one back in the tree to cook a little longer. Dissolve to a close-up of the bird Fluttershy-2 found and refused to help; as it struggles to climb a tree on its own, she leans mockingly into view over it.)

Fluttershy-2: Why don’t you fly up to your nest? Oh, that’s right. You can’t!

(Her cackle and glare float up as the bird reaches its sibling’s nest and is helped in, the latter voicing its opinion to the pegasus.)

Fluttershy-2: *(dismissively)* Oh, nopony asked you.

(Landing on the trail, she throws a filthy look to the various small animals that peek out from branches and burrows.)

Fluttershy-2: I hope you all freeze this winter!

(Her unappetizing laughter rings out once more as she stomps a couple of flower patches into the dirt and trots away, the creatures retreating into their hiding places. As soon as she and they are out of sight, Fluttershy emerges onto the path and hovers up to the nest to address the bird she returned to it.)

Fluttershy: Hello again, little friend. I think I may be walking in circles.

(It wastes no time in giving her a piece of its fine feathered mind, prompting a shocked gasp from her.)

Fluttershy: Oh, my! Where did you learn that kind of language?

(Touching down again, she turns fearfully to the critters that have peeked out to glare at her.)

Fluttershy: Um, excuse me...

(She gets no farther before being met with a cacophony of angry chitters, squeaks, growls, and other general noises of great displeasure. The overall effect is to make the animal lover drop into a whimpering huddle with her front hooves over her eyes. Cut to Applejack and Rainbow on the lookout, the former’s cart standing idle and unhitched.)

Rarity-2: *(walking into view)* Finally you’ve found her.

Rainbow: Me? We’re looking for Fluttershy.

Applejack: Where's Starlight?

Rarity-2: Well, if I knew that...

(Her retort evaporates on her tongue as a gleefully avaricious grin splits her face, her attention zeroing in on the load of camping supplies. An instant later she is diving in among the lot and knocking the other two away.)

Rainbow: Hey!

Rarity-2: This is mine! And this as well! Oh, and this is absolutely mine!

(Accompanied by grabbing/levitating a spyglass, compass, and fishing rod, in that order.)

Applejack: *(standing up)* Rarity, what in the hay are you gonna do with a fishin' rod?

Rarity-2: *(casually, stroking it)* I don't know... *(scowling)* ...but I wants it!

(The snort that escapes the nostrils over her bared teeth throws a real scare into Applejack and Rainbow, the former removing her hat to shield her face as the latter hovers a bit closer for protection. Wipe to Rarity and Starlight on the move; the unicorn-turned-pack-mule catches a hoof n a rock and goes down, prompting the fashionista to stop and give her a smile.)

Rarity: Starlight, darling, you're a gloriously bad camper. And coming from me, that is saying a lot. *(She extends a foreleg.)*

Starlight: *(grasping it, allowing herself to be pulled partway up)* I know. Want to break it to Applejack for me? *(Applejack-2 peeks up from the brush.)*

Applejack-2: Who's breakin' what now?

(The interruption startles Rarity into pulling her hoof away and leaving Starlight to slam back down. Now the ersatz farmer steps out.)

Applejack-2: *(to Starlight)* Who're you? *(Starlight stands up.)*

Starlight: Very funny, Applejack. Still me under all this gear—Starlight.

Applejack-2: Starlight? How 'bout that. *(trotting ahead)* Y'all better come with me. It's, uh, dangerous out here. *(Rarity's next words stop her.)*

Rarity: Applejack, darling, are you all right? *(poking at her mane)* You look a little peaky. And where's your wagon?

Applejack-2: Uh...stolen! *(grabbing her briefly)* I—I barely got away. *(starting away)* Follow me and I'll tell you all about it.

(Despite obvious reservations, Rarity follows the lead; Starlight, meanwhile, is too fatigued to apply any critical reasoning and just plods along behind. Dissolve to Pinkie-2 sitting dourly on a tangle of tree roots that protrude from the water at the edge of a swamp as Twilight flies to her.)

Twilight: Pinkie! There you are! What are you doing?

(She gets no response except for a foreleg pointed toward the water, whose surface distends with a swelling gas bubble that presents distorted reflections of both faces. Purple eyes flick worriedly toward the joyless countenance before it bursts.)

Pinkie-2: You call *that* a pop? Ugh!

Twilight: I thought you were racing to the retreat.

Pinkie: *(hopping off roots and o.s.)* Please. Why would I waste my time on a boring, lame, no-fun retreat?

Twilight: *(stunned)* What?

(She glumly settles into Pinkie-2's place and watches the murky ripples for a moment until a familiar sky-blue reflection passes across them.)

Twilight: *(standing, waving toward sky)* Rainbow Dash! I think something's wrong with Pinkie! *(It proves to be Rainbow-2, who does not even slow down.)*

Rainbow-2: Not my problem.

(But Twilight gets one of her own when she loses balance and traction and topples into the swamp. The splash leaves her groaning weakly and covered in muck. A fresh bubble grows to fill the screen, then pops to yield a head-on close-up of Twilight-2 and Pinkie traveling through the forest.)

Pinkie: And then we all grew super-long manes with all kinds of colors! And your castle grew out of the ground and everypony was like, "Whoa!" And then we sang this song about rainbows and—

(First sentence: she briefly adopts the powered-up appearance she gained during the showdown with Lord Tirek in Part Two of "Twilight's Kingdom." Second: she holds up a small model of the Castle of Friendship for a moment. Third: she hops to Twilight-2's other side. The high-speed recap grates on the duplicate's nerves with increasing severity, to the point that she is grinding her teeth by the time Pinkie cuts herself off with a sharp gasp and clutches at her for support. Cut to Fluttershy, lying crumpled and sobbing by herself in the spot where the forest creatures told her off, as Pinkie hurries to her.)

Pinkie: Fluttershy! What's wrong!

(The yellow pegasus lifts her face, revealing eyes that brim with tears.)

Fluttershy: Everycreature is mad at me!

Pinkie: *(gasping)* What? That can't be right!

(She helps Fluttershy up to a sitting position and assumes one of her own to comfort her friend; Twilight-2 observes with an annoyed grumble and steps toward them.)

Twilight-2: Can we hurry this up? We're on a schedule here!

Pinkie: Twilight, your schedule can wait! Fluttershy's upset.

Twilight-2: Well, tell her to get over it! I'll go get the others. *Stay here!*

(Almost as soon as she has trotted off, a shadow in the same shape as her head and mane falls over them from o.s. and the voice of the real Twilight is heard—only slightly less irked than her double.)

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* Oh, great.

(Cut to frame all three; she has cleaned up from her fall and is addressing Pinkie.)

Twilight: You upset Fluttershy too? *(Pinkie stands up and leans hard into her face.)*

Pinkie: You know what, Twilight? *(poking her in the chest)* Maybe if you weren't so worried about schedules, you'd realize you're the one ruining the retreat for your friends!

(This verbal jab brings a gasp and tears in the purple eyes.)

Twilight: Well, if my friends don't care about the retreat I planned for them, maybe they should have stayed home!

Fluttershy: Can't we all just get along?

(Wipe to a gloomy stretch of forest as Twilight-2 storms into view.)

Twilight-2: *(to herself)* Keep it together. You can do this. You need those imbeciles if your plan is gonna come together.

Chrysalis: *(from o.s.)* Your plan?

(These two words stop Twilight-2 in her tracks and prompt a soft gasp as the mastermind steps into the open.)

Twilight-2: Uh, *the* plan. I'm just trying to do your bidding... *(bowing)* ...Your Majesty.

Chrysalis: Grub-sitting you six is nothing like controlling my hive! Give me one good reason why I shouldn't just destroy you all and start over!

Twilight-2: *(raising her eyes)* Because I know where the Elements of Harmony are. *(smiling wickedly)* You need me.

(Chrysalis is briefly thrown off guard by this assertion, but breaks into an oily laugh as she realizes that this scheme may yet play out in her favor. Zoom in slowly and fade to black.)

Act Three

(Opening shot: fade in to a crazed Rarity-2, walking along with seemingly every item from Applejack's cart held in her aura.)

Rarity-2: *(gathering them closer to herself)* Mine! Mine! *(giggling dementedly)* Mine!

(Right behind her are Applejack, pulling the empty cart and wearing her hat again, and a flying Rainbow; pan to them.)

Rainbow: *(hushed, to Applejack)* I'm guessing some kind of curse? Maybe Poison Joke?

Applejack: *(ditto)* Well, somethin' sure ain't right.

Rarity-2: *(from o.s.)* What are you plotting back there?

(They stop, caught off guard; she glares back over her shoulder at them.)

Rarity-2: I can hear you, you know! *(Wheel to face them.)* Don't think you're going to steal my things!

(She races off with the plunder, only to plow headlong into a jumble of hanging vines and wind up firmly entangled with a few items while the rest scatter on the ground.)

Applejack: Hang on. *(Unhitch; rummage in cart.)* I got a shovel we can use to whack those vines out of the way.

(Rainbow casts an eye toward the wipeout and smiles, having noticed that very tool caught in the greenery. Her attempt to retrieve it is cut off by Rarity-2's next words, the camera cutting to Applejack and back on the following.)

Rarity-2: I knew it! I knew you wanted it all for yourselves! You can't have it!

(A few of the strands supporting her weight choose this moment to snap, dumping her to the ground, but she is upright in a blink and yanking at Rainbow's tail.)

Rarity-2: It's mine, you hear me?! *(Grab everything up again.)* ALL MINE!!

(Her last word trails off into a totally unhinged laugh as she barrels off through the woods, leaving two hopelessly perplexed ponies to stare after her. Dissolve to Applejack-2 leading Rarity and Starlight, the orange glow of sunset playing across the slivers of sky visible between the twisted trees.)

Applejack-2: So there I was, just me and, uh, a bucket of honey—yeah, yeah, that's the ticket. *(turning to face them; all stop)* Uh, but I—I survived all by myself in this here forest for a...a hundred and twenty-seven hours. *(They resume walking.)*

Rarity: Really? I can't believe you've never told us that story before.

Starlight: *(wearily)* She's making a point. *(to Applejack-2; all stop again)* We get it. You're the greatest camper in the history of Equestria.

Applejack-2: Well, I sure don't need any of that silly stuff *you're* luggin' around.

Starlight: *(needled, scoffing)* The things *you* gave me are silly?

Applejack-2: *(chuckling faintly)* Just look in a mirror. Guess I shoulda told you that before, huh?

(Her derisive laugh causes Starlight to gasp in shock, tear up, and throw her knit cap down at the faded orange-tan hooves. The mane beneath it is left in total disarray.)

Starlight: *(casting off gear and poncho, voice breaking)* Glad I was so entertaining for you!

(By the time she has shucked the load, her mane is back in order and her face is clean of the scuffs that have dotted it throughout most of this long march. The boots are last to go, after which she trots away and Rarity fixes Applejack-2 with a level gaze of barely restrained hostility.)

Rarity: I'm going to make sure that she doesn't break a hoof out there, and then you and I are going to have a serious talk.

(She sets off after Starlight, just barely missing the arrival of Chrysalis and the rest of the doppelgangers.)

Chrysalis: Finally! There, that's all of you. *(Pinkie-2 sits sullenly on her belly.)* No pony leaves without my say-so.

Applejack-2: *(to Rarity-2)* Now wait a second. Weren't you just—

(A green blast rips toward her and she ducks barely in time to keep her head on her shoulders. The torn cowboy hat falls off, and she swallows hard as Rarity-2's stolen goods hit the dirt.)

Chrysalis: The time for my revenge on Starlight Glimmer has come! *(menacingly, to Twilight-2)* Let's see if you're telling the truth about this Tree.

(She laughs exultantly as the camera tilts up past the treetops toward the sinking sun. From here, dissolve to Starlight pelting along a trail.)

Rarity: *(from o.s.)* Starlight! *(She gallops into view, in pursuit.)* Oh, please stop running!

(A quick downward glance informs the fleeing unicorn that she is about to go off the edge of a precipice. She skids to a stop with inches to spare, but Rarity fails to catch the hint and slams into her with a panicked squeal. Both mares tumble over the edge and o.s., the camera shifting to follow their yelling, sliding drop over this ridge and out of sight again. Clouds of dust boil up from the impact and clear to show them both momentarily knocked out cold, but the sound of weeping from the o.s. Fluttershy snaps them back to consciousness.)

Twilight: *(from o.s., crossly)* Of course I care about Fluttershy!

(Overhead shot of her and Pinkie facing off as Fluttershy huddles miserably into herself and the two unicorns step up.)

Pinkie: Then you've got a super-weird way of showing it!

Rarity: Wh—what in Equestria is going on here?

Pinkie: *Twilight* is so into her *retreat* that she doesn't even care if her friends are upset! (*mockingly*) She just wants us to stay on schedule!

(*She drops to her haunches and adds air quotation marks with her front hooves for “retreat.”*)

Twilight: Well, I'm sorry, Pinkie. If I knew you thought this was a boring, lame, no-fun retreat, I wouldn't have invited you in the first place!

Pinkie: *I never said that!*

(*The Princess finds herself at a loss for words as Applejack arrives, pulling her cart.*)

[*Animation goof: Applejack alternates between being hitched to her cart and unhitched during the following sequence.*]

Applejack: Sorry, y'all. (*Rainbow flaps sullenly behind her.*) We woulda been here sooner, but we had to take the long way after *Rarity* ran off with all my stuff.

Rarity: Wh—? I most certainly did not!

Applejack: What? You know I ain't no liar! (*pointing to Starlight*) Where's all your gear?

Starlight: Why? So you can laugh at me some more?

Rainbow: Hey, hey, we're all friends here.

(*Only now does Fluttershy stand up, pushing Pinkie and Starlight off to either side.*)

Fluttershy: *Friends?!?* (*tearing up*) You left me alone in the woods!

(*As she breaks into a fresh gale of sobs, the camera cuts to a close-up of Twilight's grimacing face and zooms in to the sound of a multi-way argument that rapidly frays her last good nerve.*)

Twilight: EVERYPONY, QUIET!!

(*All six shut up and pay attention, finding her rancor switched out for a patient smile.*)

Twilight: Listen. We know each other really well—the great stuff, and how to get on each other's nerves too.

(*Her perspective, panning slowly across the other six as their expressions begin to soften.*)

Twilight: I wanted a fun trip with my friends, but instead I got carried away with plans and ruined everything. (*Back to her.*) If you want to forget it all and head home, I won't be offended. I just want us to stop fighting.

Applejack: (*to Starlight*) Hey. Sorry if I got carried away with all that campin' stuff.

Starlight: I'm sorry too. I should've just told you I'll never like camping. Also, I'll never like camping.

Rarity: Well, if we're all being honest... *(pulling off one saddlebag)* ...I can't survive with just this tiny yet fashionable little saddlebag! *(crying)* I miss my things!

Pinkie: *(taking Twilight's hoof)* I'm sorry that you thought that I thought your plan was lame. Your plans are the most un-lamest!

(She pulls the Princess into a hug as Rainbow wings over to the pair.)

Rainbow: And I always have fun when we're all together, even if it's learning pretending to be fun.

Twilight: So...does that mean you still want to have the retreat? *(Applejack, Rarity, and Starlight crowd in.)*

Applejack, Pinkie, Rainbow, Rarity, Starlight: Yes!

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* If... *(Cut to her, sitting a short distance away.)* ...everypony likes me again.

(She gets her answer in the form of a laughing tackle that leaves all seven on their backs, their typical bright spirits fully restored. Rarity has both bags on their strap again.)

Twilight: Let's get to that Tree. I have the whole campsite set up and ready.

(Dissolve to the bottom of the ravine near the Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters, or of the Two Sisters, under a moonlit night sky. The Tree of Harmony glows serenely in its cavern, and a semicircle of tents has been erected along with a few other outdoor conveniences. Chrysalis and her six not-so-faithful underlings are making their way down the flight of steps that lead in here from the surface; cut to a closer shot as they descend the final stretch.)

Pinkie-2: Ugh! What's this garbage?

Applejack-2: Badger installation art. You see—

Chrysalis: JUST RETRIEVE THE ELEMENTS!!

(With a spatter of malicious laughter, Fluttershy-2 and Rarity-2 set to the job of wrecking the campsite with gusto. Pinkie-2 merely slithers along the ravine floor, while Rainbow-2 apathetically kicks over one tent.)

Rarity-2: *(giggling dementedly, gathering items in her magic)* Mine!

Twilight-2: *(pulling Pinkie-2 upright)* Once we get the power of the Elements— *(The others gather in.)* —no creature, not even Her Majesty, can tell us what to do. Just follow my lead. Got it?

(Rarity-2 has dropped everything she swiped. They trot snickering into the cavern, not noticing that Chrysalis has been in earshot the entire time.)

Rarity-2: *(pointing)* Ooh! *(Her perspective; she points toward the blue Generosity gem.)* That one's mine!

(A brief flare of black plays over its surface. Back to the group; she starts toward the tree with a cackle, but trips on Fluttershy-2's extended foreleg and ends up flat on her face.)

Fluttershy-2: Oops. I'd say sorry, but I'm not.

(The unicorn drags her down into a tussle, all the others but Twilight-2 moving toward the Tree.)

Twilight-2: Stop it, fools! *(Kindness blinks black.)* We need the Elements to take out Chrysalis!

(Applejack-2 begins to buck the crystalline trunk, while Pinkie-2 hammers at it with her front hooves. Twilight-2 is the only one of the group to notice the shadow of Chrysalis falling over them, and she utters a soft, frightened gasp before the camera cuts to the boiling-mad despot at the mouth of the cavern.)

Chrysalis: How dare you! I created you!

(She uncorks a blast from her horn; Twilight-2 conjures up a hemispherical shield around herself to block it, but is still pushed back toward the Tree. As Applejack-2 keeps bucking, now hard enough to shake the whole thing, the Honesty gem flashes black; Laughter does likewise in response to Pinkie-2's strikes and crazed mirth. Rainbow takes no part in the battering, but instead settles down at the base of the trunk for a nap, triggering Loyalty to sound off. Twilight-2's straining face curves into a cruel little grin, and she pulls her shield's power back into her horn and projects it as a beam to push back the one Chrysalis has sustained against her. The sweating, fanged face goes slack with the terrible realization that her plan has completely backfired; as the beam drives itself toward her horn, the camera cuts to the Tree. The Magic gem at the center of its trunk goes dead black and stays that way, tendrils of that same color snaking out to extinguish the other Elements of Harmony. Wisps of whitish energy snake out from all six, each snaring the corrupted copy of the pony who represents it. Twilight-2 is last to be caught up, her magic and Chrysalis's winking out as she gasps in surprise and annoyance—and all are reeled in and suspended helpless for the boss to see in full detail as they begin to wither and sag.)

Twilight-2: Imbeciles! You ruined everythiiiiiiiiing!

(The end of her last word is lost under an almighty flare of white light that washes out the screen. When it subsides, the view has shifted to a close-up of one patch of the Tree's still-glowing roots. Six small chunks of gnarled wood clatter down among them, each the faded color of one duplicate's coat—all that remains of the heartwood from which they were formed.)

Chrysalis: *(contemptuously, walking toward Tree)* Servants always fail you in the end.

(The gleam and the black both fade away, leaving the Tree and the Elements safe and sound.)

Chrysalis: Just wait, Starlight. *(Extreme close-up.)* I will have my revenge!

(Dissolve to an extreme close-up of Twilight's face, eyes flicking around herself in mild confusion, and zoom out as she pulls in a gasp.)

Twilight: *(weakly)* Are you kidding me?

(Longer shot: the seven mares have found the remains of the campsite. Applejack is no longer towing her cart. Pinkie surveys the damage for a long moment before breaking into a gale of laughter.)

Pinkie: This was the worst day EVER! *(The others join in.)*

Starlight: Come on, everypony. We can fix this campsite in no time.

Applejack: Spoken like a true camper.

Starlight: Eh, don't push it. *(Chuckling, she and Applejack get to work.)*

Twilight: You know, if we can survive a day like this—

(All others start tidying up as the camera zooms out to a long shot of the ravine and the night sky.)

Twilight: —I think our friendship is strong enough to handle anything the world can throw at us.

(Unseen by the group, the tiny black speck of Chrysalis's form lifts off from the forest and flees into the night, disappearing against the brightness of the full moon. Fade to black.)