

A HORSE SHOE-IN

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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 Starlight Glimmer seated at the desk in her office, hovering a watering can to irrigate a potted plant that sits before her.)

Starlight: I think you really spruce up the office, Miss Philodendron. *(Gasp; set it down.)* Oh! I'm gonna call you Phyllis! *(baby talk, patting it)* Don't you look good, Phyllis? *(A knock; she continues in this vein.)* Come in!

(She catches herself with a hasty cough at the sound of the doors opening and steps out from behind the desk. This shot reveals that she has replaced the office's couch with a couple of low-slung armchairs.)

Starlight: I mean, uh, come in! *(Twilight Sparkle and Spike enter.)*

Spike: Uh, were you just talking to someone? *(Starlight's magic slides Phyllis to the opposite end of the desk.)*

Starlight: No. Why? *(Nervous laugh.)*

Twilight: Starlight, I have something very important to discuss with you.

Starlight: If this is about leaving early yesterday, I didn't have any students on my schedule—*(sitting on haunches, then standing again)*—and Trixie was having a magical emergency which actually turned out to be nothing s—

(She adds quotation marks with her hooves on “magical emergency,” then gets the end of her explanation cut off by a bubbly giggle from the headmare.)

Twilight: It's not anything like that!

(Her number-one assistant steps forth, producing a scroll from behind his back and opening it to unfurl several feet of parchment.)

Spike: *(clearing throat, reading)* “Twilight Sparkle, the Princess of Friendship, in light of her impending ascension to the throne of Equestria, and in anticipation of her many duties and

responsibilities forthwith, does hereby intend to make good on her previous offer to you, Starlight Glimmer, of replacing her as headmare of the School of Friendship.”

(By the time he finishes, he has reeled through the entire length of the document and piled it up on the floor. Starlight’s eyes pop as the full import of this declaration settles in.)

Twilight: I want you to take over the School when I move to Canterlot.

Starlight: I know! *(Flop to haunches.)* It’s just so... *(pulling cheeks back into a smile)* ...amazing! *(Stand.)* I’m a little...do you think I’m really up for it? Of course you do. I’ve covered for you every time you’ve had to run off and save Equestria, but... *(To haunches again, stretching cheeks.)* ...I mean, yes, of course! Thank you!

(The torrent of verbiage leaves Twilight so far off balance that she is completely unprepared to get hit with a flying, squealing tackle-hug by the unicorn. Spike gets swept into it with just as much warning, Starlight gripping him and Twilight strongly enough to nearly pop their eyeballs from the sockets.)

Twilight: *(strangled)* You’re welcome, and I can’t think of anypony who’d be better for the job! *(Starlight lets go.)*

Starlight: I’m a little nervous, and excited, and mostly just nervous. *(All three straighten up; Spike gathers the scroll and carries it o.s.)*

Twilight: I understand. Of course I’ll have lot of important responsibilities as ruler of Equestria, but I’ll always be available to help whenever you need.

(The end of this sentence overlaps with a heave from Spike’s gut; pan slightly to frame him belching up a scroll, which he catches and opens. After a bit of silent reading, he raises his eyes to Twilight.)

Spike: Are you supposed to be at a royal etiquette lesson with Celestia and Luna right now?

Twilight: *(stunned)* Right! Uh, can’t underestimate the important responsibility of royal napkin placement!

(She teleports away, Spike departs, and Starlight crosses to her desk.)

Starlight: Wow. *(leaning against it)* I mean, no biggie, right, Phyllis? *(stretching forelegs, knocking it off)* I’ve totally got this.

(The smash of ceramic against floor takes a second or two to filter into her mind, the camera panning/tilting down to show the new mess. Starlight offers an embarrassed little laugh, and the view fades to black.)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(Opening shot: fade in to Starlight and Trixie walking along a corridor within the School, the blue mare without her trademark hat and cape.)

Trixie: You know I'm nothing but proud that you've been officially offered the position of headmare. *(She stops; Starlight continues on.)*

Starlight: *(uncertainly)* Thanks? *(Trixie moves again, but stops as she continues.)*

Trixie: *But* I can't help wondering if it's gonna cut into our social schedule.

(The pinkish-violet legs lock up.)

Starlight: What do you mean?

Trixie: *(catching up; Starlight starts to walk again)* Take now, for example. Instead of heading to the delightful lunch I had planned, we're striding with determination toward what I can only assume is Twilight's office. *(Both stop.)*

Starlight: *(sitting on haunches)* Obviously our lunch is super-important, but so is taking over the School. And the only pony who's really run the School of Friendship is the Princess of Friendship. *(Stand.)* And I'm worried about doing it all alone, so I want to get as much advice from Twilight as I can while she's still here. *(She starts walking.)*

Trixie: But Twilight's never really done anything alone. She always has her friends.

(The moving mare stops short and turns back to her with a smile.)

Starlight: But that just gave me an idea! Thanks, Trixie! You can give good advice when you don't mean to. *(Off she goes with renewed vigor.)*

Trixie: *(bewildered)* Uh, thanks? *(calling after her)* Are we still doing lunch?

(Cut to Twilight sitting at the desk in her office. A stack of napkins rests within easy reach, and she is intently folding one this way and that with her magic. It eventually assumes an ornate three-dimensional shape, but comes undone almost as soon as she sets it down. A frustrated grimace comes over her face as the sound of the opening door drifts to her and Starlight steps in.)

Twilight: Getting royal place settings just right is a lot harder than it looks. *(She starts fiddling with the napkin again.)*

Starlight: Okay! Uh, I know how busy you are, but I wanted to talk to you about running the School because honestly, I was a bit worried about taking it over all on my own. *But* I just realized, *you* never did it alone.

Twilight: *(setting napkin down; it unfolds again)* Having a friend help out is pretty great.

(Seeing her friend's displeasure at another failed folding effort, Starlight kick-starts her own horn. Close-up of the napkin as her spell connects and folds it into a bird shape.)

Starlight: *(from o.s.)* Exactly! *(Back to her and Twilight.)* So...what do you think about me hiring a vice-headmare to help run things?

Twilight: I trust you to run the School any way you want. And if that means hiring a vice-headmare, I think it's a great idea.

Starlight: Really?

Twilight: Like you said, I've always had ponies around to help. And don't worry. You can always call on me to—

(In walks Spike, no longer dragging around either of the scrolls he dealt with in the prologue.)

Spike: Uh, Twilight? Uh, Rarity says you were supposed to be at the boutique five minutes ago for your second fitting for the coronation gown.

Twilight: Ugh! How many fittings are there gonna be?

Spike: *(shrugging)* A lot?

Twilight: *(to Starlight, stepping out from desk)* Anyway, good luck finding your vice-headmare. *(touching her shoulder)* I know you'll pick the right pony for the job.

(She teleports away, and Starlight makes to follow Spike out of the office but stops when Trixie puts her head in.)

Trixie: Wow. *(stepping in)* I heard the whole thing, and all I can say is, "I am humbled."

Starlight: Uh, why?

Trixie: I hadn't ever considered it, but hearing you say it out loud made me realize what a great and powerful vice-headmare I'll be! *(Sidle up to Starlight; throw a foreleg around shoulders.)* Plus, we get to work *and* socialize at the same time!

Starlight: *(with a humoring smile)* Uh, well, sure, that would be fun, but— *(Pull free.)* —I can't just give you the job.

Trixie: *(dropping to haunches, playing it off)* Oh! Oh, oh, no. Of course not. I imagine there's a lengthy process to go through before you inevitably hire the best pony for the position. Wink.

(Accompanied by hoof quotation marks on "process" and "best pony," and capped off with a wink on the last word.)

Starlight: Exactly. I'll probably interview several ponies. *(Trixie stands up.)*

Trixie: Of course. *(slyly)* Several. *(Finish with a...)* Wink.

Starlight: Why do you keep saying "wink"? *(Trixie sits again.)*

Trixie: I'm not saying "wink." *(Another...)* Wink.

(This one is met by an uneasy little laugh from the headmare-to-be. Dissolve to an overhead shot of her in the entrance hall, facing a line of five ponies: Spoiled Rich, Doctor Whooves in a white shirt collar and green bow tie, Octavia, Big Macintosh, and Trixie in her hat and cape. Standing by Starlight is a chart on an easel, which shows a triangle divided into three horizontal bands of different colors. On the next line, cut to a slow pan across the quintet.)

Starlight: I'm glad you all decided to be part of the search for the School of Friendship's vice-headmare.

Spoiled: (*stepping forward*) Honestly, if you're looking for somepony to fund-raise, I can bring in enough bits to have several buildings named after me.

Starlight: (*scratching back of head*) Well, that's not the primary responsibility of the vice-headmare. (*smiling*) But a-anypony is welcome to apply. I think the selection process I've come up with is pretty special. (*Zoom in on Trixie.*)

Trixie: (*whispering loudly*) Albeit unnecessary. (*She adds a...*) Wink!

Starlight: (*clearing throat impatiently*) Since you all have to prove you have what it takes to be vice-headmare, I've designed the interview in three stages.

(*A pointer rod drifts up under her control to indicate the bottommost zone of the triangle.*)

Starlight: Each stage will test a different skill the vice-headmare needs.

(*Close-up of the sheet, tilting slowly up as each portion is tapped.*)

Starlight: (*from o.s.*) Only those who do well will move through the stages until finally the best candidate rises to the top. (*Back to the group.*) So... (*Banish the pointer.*) ...without further ado, it's time for Stage One—substituting for the teachers.

(*Pan slowly down the line of candidates, who murmur among themselves with varied degrees of anticipation and apprehension, and stop on Trixie at one end.*)

Trixie: Once the students get a sample of my great and powerful instruction, they might not want to go back to the regular faculty.

(*An irked eye roll from Macintosh, her neighbor, followed by a long groan from Starlight. The chart drifts past the camera in close-up; behind it, the view wipes to Starlight looking in through the open doorway of Rarity's classroom with a clipboard and pencil in her aura. Macintosh hunches down on the central raised platform, assiduously stitching a length of fabric with a mouth-held needle, as the designer and several students watch—including a seated Ocellus. A tug at the thread snaps it, and the broad red stallion lets the needle drop as the changeling leans in to see what he has wrought.*)

Ocellus: Wow! That seam is so straight! (*standing*) You really learned how to sew from mending apple sacks on the farm?

Macintosh: Ee-yup!

(*Satisfied, Starlight jots a note and moves on. Wipe to her approaching the open doors of the gym; Spoiled stands at the center of the floor to address a class.*)

Spoiled: Obviously loyalty is the foundation of friendship and trust.

(*Inside, Rainbow Dash hovers over a gathering that includes Yona.*)

Spoiled: But nothing gets more loyalty than a big stack of bits. (*holding up a book*) This book on business will teach you all how to earn your own. (*She opens it.*) Chapter One—Equity.

(Unnerved by the display of snobbish avarice, Starlight backs out of view while writing at her clipboard. Wipe to her on the move through a corridor; she breaks into a gallop upon hearing the strains of an orchestral melody and is soon at the doorway of Pinkie Pie's classroom. Here, Octavia is playing her cello and leading a group of laughing students—including Silverstream on saxophone—through a lively rehearsal. Everything proceeds normally until Pinkie pops up in the back row and uncorks a room-shaking blast from the yovidaphone she tried to master in "Yakity-Sax." Octavia loses hold of her bow, but flips her cello onto its side and begins to play it like a bass guitar, missing not a single beat and drawing appreciative laughs from the young musicians. A pleased Starlight takes notes and backs off from the doorway.)

(Wipe to Fluttershy's classroom; she and several of her students, including Sandbar, observe as Whooves finishes setting up an experiment on the front desk. He has donned a lab coat and a pair of safety goggles, and Starlight keeps an eye on things from the balcony. A Bunsen burner heats a flask of liquid, causing it to boil and generate vapor that runs through a tube to inflate a balloon attached to the free end. This grows large enough to tip a board on which an electric fan rests, turning it on so that it spins a pinwheel standing upright in a flowerpot. Wedged among the vanes is a ball, which falls loose in the rotation and lands on the grips of an open pair of scissors. The blades snap together, cutting a string that holds one end of a pivoting rod in place; the other end supports a small weight hanging from a rope that is looped around the handles of a pair of pliers. With the string gone and the rod free to turn, the weight descends and the tension in its rope forces the handles together, squeezing the rubber bulb of an eyedropper held in the pliers' jaws. It dispenses a drop of liquid neatly into the mouth of a baby bird in a nest, drawing a round of awed murmurs and enthusiastic applause from the students. Fluttershy directs a smiling nod to Starlight, who makes a note of the proceedings.)

(Wipe to yet another classroom whose attendees include Gallus. Trixie lounges behind the front desk, bored half out of her mind as she holds an open book at eye level in her corona. She is wearing her hat, but not her cape.)

Trixie: In the pre-Equestria era, year thirteen-twenty-two, Abraxias the Bold did... (*mumbling, flipping ahead*) ...ooh, a bunch of boring stuff... (*Again.*) ...for a really long time. (*Close the book.*) Okay, I know history's important— (*Float it away.*) —but I never learned any of it, and look how I turned out.

(Unenthused mumbles from the class; pan slowly across the desks, Gallus having fallen asleep at his, then cut back to the substitute teacher as an idea occurs to her. A dissolve shifts the view to Starlight walking into the room; she stops short at the sound of many young voices mumbling in their sleep, and a shot of the whole area informs her that the entire class has dozed off. Trixie, lying atop the front desk on her back, wakes up from her own nap.)

Trixie: (*hushed, winking*) Wiiiiink!

(And she is off to dreamland again; Starlight voices an annoyed grunt and writes on her clipboard. Wipe to a close-up of the triangle chart, now set up in her office and with photos of Macintosh, Octavia, and Whooves attached to its middle zone, and zoom out. Starlight is seated at her desk with clipboard/pencil put away, Phyllis has been re-potted, and the chart is off to one side.)

Starlight: Okay, Phyllis. Obviously those three are moving on.

(Close-up of two other snaps on the desk—Spoiled and Trixie.)

Starlight: *(from o.s.)* But what about the rest? *(Spoiled's picture floats up; back to her, turning it to face Phyllis.)* Mmm-hmm. I think we're in agreement on this one.

(It is deposited in a file folder marked with a red circle-and-slash, and the photo of Trixie rises next, drawing an apprehensive sigh from the soon-to-be-former guidance counselor.)

Starlight: I know what you're gonna say, but it would be so much fun to have my vice-headmare be a friend! *(Tentative smile.)* She just needs a little more hoof-holding that some of the others, but i-i-it could still work out. *(Smile fades.)* Right?

(The plant offers no verbal response as the doors open to admit Trixie, wearing neither hat nor cape.)

Trixie: *(crossing to desk)* Starlight, I've given this a lot of thought. And even though I still believe naps are a valid use of class time, you'll be the one running the School. So if you say "no naps," then no naps. And I know I can be a little stubborn and not the best listener— *(leaning across desk)* —but I just can't wait for us to tackle this job as a team. Two great and powerful friends taking on the world! And I know you still have to go through all this interview stuff— *(She adds a...)* —wink!—but I just had to tell you how excited I am!

(Hoof quotation marks on "interview stuff"; she caps off the monologue by trotting excitedly out of the office and magically pulling the doors shut.)

Starlight: *(smiling weakly, floating up the photo)* See? I told you it could work.

(She sticks it crookedly to one side of the three definite contenders, but Phyllis' assessment consists of shedding one leaf. Starlight groans softly, and the view fades to black.)

Act Two

(Opening shot: fade in to Starlight addressing the remaining four candidates in the entrance hall. Octavia no longer has her cello with her, Trixie is in her hat and cape, and Whooves has shed his lab coat and goggles.)

Starlight: All right, remaining vice-headmare candidates. Welcome to Stage Two. (*Slow pan across them; she continues o.s.*) All of you are here because you performed well— (*Stop on Trixie.*) —or well enough—

(*The blue mare grimaces at this addendum; back to Starlight.*)

Starlight: —to face your next challenge—parent-teacher conferences! (*trotting out past them*) The vice-headmare will need to be a master communicator, and I can't think of a better test of that than meeting with our students and their parents or guardians. (*They follow her; profile close-up of Whooves.*)

Whooves: I eagerly look forward to sharing my love of science with both progeny and progenitors. (*Pan to Octavia.*)

Octavia: Indeed. An orchestra is made up of different parts, and good communication is the key to harmony. (*To Macintosh.*)

Macintosh: Ee-yup. (*Cut to Trixie, who has stopped.*)

Trixie: A lifetime onstage has taught me that good communication is essential to holding your audience's attention— (*full ham mode, spreading cape wide on hind legs*) —which is why Trixie is also known as a great and powerful communicator.

(*It takes her a moment to figure out that the rest of the group has left the entrance hall and move after them, a sour look taking hold on her face. Dissolve to the library, the camera positioned to frame Octavia addressing Ocellus and her parents in one corner, and Macintosh with Silverstream and her father Skybeak in another. The heads of Yona's parents are visible at a third corner in the foreground, and Starlight keeps an eye on the proceedings with clipboard and pencil at the ready.*)

Octavia: Life at the School of Friendship is like a song. (*Close-up of her group.*) And although she started out singing her part *pianissimo*, Ocellus is now soloing *fortissimo*.

Ocellus's father: That's good, right?

Octavia: (*laughing*) Indeed.

(*Pleased looks pass between all three changelings; on the start of the next line, pan to the table where Yona's family is seated. The young yak is with them, and Whooves is in charge of this particular meeting.*)

Whooves: The science curriculum at the School is somewhat lacking, but Yona has taken to the subject like a yak to smashing. (*He thumps a hoof on the table to emphasize this last, then stands up to his hind legs.*) If fostered, I believe she could easily blaze a trail and expand our understanding of science itself.

Yona's parents: (*standing on hind legs*) Yaks best! Yaks best! Yaks best!

(*Cut to Starlight on the second repetition, the pencil doing its thing, then back for the third as they toss Yona upward and catch her. Next, the camera follows the mare as she crosses to another table—Trixie seated with Gallus and old Gruff.*)

Trixie: Gallus is a fantastic student. *(hushed)* He's even taught me a thing or two about napping.

Gruff: *(yawning)* Is that why you're puttin' *me* to sleep?

Trixie: *(needled, normal volume)* Um, excuse me?

Gruff: I don't know why I have to come to these things.

Trixie: Well, most parents or guardians want to be involved in our students' lives! *(leaning across table)* Maybe we should find a different representative from Griffonstone to be Gallus's guardian! *(Gruff copies the gesture.)*

Gruff: Oh, that'd be great. If you find one, *LET ME KNOW!!*

(The illusionist has to grab at her hat to keep it from being blown off by the force of these last three words. Cut to a badly rattled Starlight, who starts toward the group but stops short at the sound of the next voice.)

Skybeak: *(from o.s.)* I'm so confused.

(Pan to him, Macintosh, and Silverstream; he is addressing the workhorse.)

Skybeak: You're saying Silverstream is exuberant?

Macintosh: *(nodding)* Ee-yup.

Skybeak: *And* enthusiastic?

Macintosh: *(with very slight hesitation)* Ee-yup.

Skybeak: But aren't those the same? *(Macintosh has no immediate response.)* And are they good? I mean, you could be trying to tell me she's unfocused, but then you might just be explaining that you appreciate her high energy. *(A grinning wave from his daughter.)*

Macintosh: *(sweating, stammering badly)* Nope...uh, yup...uh, maybe?

Skybeak: Uh, there seems to be a lot of nuance here, and I just want to make sure I understand exactly what you're saying. So what are you saying?

Macintosh: Uh...

(Now good and scared, he waves to get Starlight's attention; she starts toward him, but freezes at Gruff's next words. On the start of the next line, pan to the acrimonious face-off between him and Trixie, Gallus's facial expression suggesting a wish to disappear forever into the loaded bookshelves.)

Gruff: Gallus doesn't need to know I'm proud of him, and he certainly doesn't need me trekking all the way to Ponyville!

Trixie: Good, because you're no longer welcome!

Gruff: Oh, well, fine with me!

(He wheels away from the table and takes flight as Starlight crosses to Trixie, no longer toting her pencil and clipboard.)

Starlight: Trixie, what happened?

Trixie: I'm not sure. *(smugly)* But we'll have one less conference to worry about next semester.

(Zoom in on Starlight, who claps a disbelieving hoof to her face and pulls it all the way down to her chin, the skin and muscles snapping back to form an irritated scowl. From here, dissolve to her behind the desk in her office and zoom in slowly. Macintosh sits facing her in one of the low armchairs.)

Starlight: I really appreciate your honesty, Big Mac, and you're right. Parents expect a lot of detailed communication when it comes to their kids. And if you aren't comfortable with that, vice-headmare probably isn't a job for you.

Macintosh: Yeah, nope.

(The two shake hooves with a smile to indicate no hard feelings, and he stands up from the chair and heads for the exit. Starlight plies her field to detach his photo from her chart and drop it into the "rejected" file where she consigned Spoiled's image in Act One. Now Trixie opens the doors, bare of hat and cape.)

Trixie: *(trotting in; doors close behind her)* Starlight, I know why you wanted to see me, and you don't have to worry.

Starlight: Uh, good! *(Trixie sits in one of the chairs.)*

Trixie: *(levitating photos out of the reject folder)* It's thoughtful that you'd want to check in on me after my shocking confrontation with Grandpa Gruff, but never fear. I shall recover.

Starlight: *(shifting them back in)* Trixie, that's not exactly what I wanted to talk to you about. You can't get into a shouting match with parents or guardians. For the final stage of the interview process, you'll each have to put together a field trip. And if you really do want the job, I need yours to be exceptional— *(floating Trixie's picture off the chart)* —because if I had to pick a vice-headmare right now— *(resting it on folder)* —it wouldn't be you.

Trixie: *(smiling knowingly)* Oh, I see what you're doing. Obviously you're not gonna give the job to somepony else, but you want to see my best. Well, message received! *(She leans in with a...)* Wink.

(...and then backs off as Starlight lets go with a loud, fed-up groan.)

Starlight: Trixie, I—

(She gets no further before the one-mare ego trip is up on her desk, clad in hat and cape.)

Trixie: *(full ham mode)* The Great and Powerful Trixie is about to pull out all the stops!

(Punctuated by an expansive gesture that knocks Phyllis off the desk; only a last-second telekinetic grab by Starlight reels the plant in and sets it down out of reach.)

Trixie: *(poking Starlight's nose)* I hope you're ready for the most exceptional field trip to ever grace this school!

(A smoke bomb hovers out of an inside pocket under her control and is dashed against the desk, sending up a dense blue-violet cloud that dissipates well before she can crawl down to the floor and slink away.)

Starlight: *(to Phyllis)* Is it wrong for me to think she might actually pull it off? *(No response; she moans sadly and slumps down, chin on desk.)* Don't answer that.

(Dissolve to an auditorium filled with murmuring students, seen from a balcony level. Octavia stands before the closed curtains, cello and bow in hoof, and Starlight picks her way through the floor-level seats with clipboard/pencil in her magical grip. Zoom in slowly and cut to Gallus, who yawns expansively and gets a dirty look from the nearest mare.)

Starlight: Not looking forward to the performance?

Gallus: *(resting chin on talons)* I know Octavia loves music, but a field trip to a classical music performance isn't my idea of an exciting time.

(Octavia poises her bow over the strings as the lights abruptly come down and the curtains are reeled back to expose three new elements. Two of these are a stool and music stand; the third is DJ P0N-3, stationed at a set of turntables amid a formidable range of speakers. The earth pony shoots a calculating glance to the unicorn, who nods and pushes a pair of slider controls up to maximum, and fluid cello lines merge with thundering synthesizer chords and percussion rhythms as the show begins in earnest. A multicolored light show plays over them both, sending a pulse of intense pink energy over the audience and prompting wild cheers and applause. Even Gallus finds himself unable to tear his eyes away, Starlight smirking from her vantage point behind him. Strings and records and electronics are all brought to bear.)

Gallus: *(grinning)* Okay, I take it back.

(He starts pumping a taloned fist to the beat. Wipe to Whooves leading Starlight and a delegation of students, one of whom is Smolder, through his laboratory as seen in "Slice of Life." The dragon starts out hovering, but touches down on the next line.)

Whooves: When I heard we'd be arranging field trips, I knew right away I wanted to take you all to my lab. I can think of no better trip than one through the quantum field.

(The audience finds itself hopelessly lost.)

Whooves: *(holding up a clock)* I am referring to time travel. *(Big grin; Starlight cringes and he drops it.)* I've been working on a temporal transportation device!

(A few trotting steps bring him to something covered with a large tarp. Grabbing a mouthful of cloth, he yanks this away to expose an ordinary wooden chair that has had quite a few not-so-ordinary accessories taped on. A clock on the front legs; perforated ladles to serve as arms, one with an attached kitchen timer; teapot and coffee mugs on the top corners of the back; canister vacuum cleaner standing behind the lot, with a taped-on jar of liquid from which an

armature extends with an upside-down colander—a helmet for whatever poor sap might choose to sit here. The group’s response is considerably less than animated.)

Smolder: A chair? (*Whooves tosses the tarp away and motions for her to sit.*)

Whooves: (*checking a pocket watch full of gears*) And three...four...five...congratulations! You are now five seconds into the future! (*holding it up, foreleg across her shoulders*) You see, we are all already time travelers, hm? Who’s next?

(Long, uneasy silence.)

Smolder: Uh, now what?

Whooves: (*deflating*) Oh. I hadn’t actually thought that much beyond this.

(The dragon voices an exasperated groan, and a less-than-amused Starlight lets her pencil do the talking across her board. Wipe to the classroom in which Trixie turned a history lesson into a group nap; Starlight stands at the back, and Yona has replaced Gallus among the pupils. A great blast of blue-violet smoke erupts from the front desk and clears to present Trixie standing atop it, coughing madly to air out her lungs and then clearing her throat.)

Trixie: Ponies and other students, welcome to the greatest and most powerful field trip of your lives!

Yona: Where Yona and friends going?

Trixie: I am thrilled you asked, because today we’re not doing a normal old boring field trip where you go somewhere.

Yona: So...not field trip. (*Slow pan.*)

Trixie: *Au contraire.* I could have easily taken you to Froggy Bottom Bog—(*sitting on haunches*)—but we don’t need to leave the comfort of the classroom for our field trip. (*Stand again.*) I can bring the field trip to us!

(A flare from her horn causes a small tract of swampland to materialize directly above her head and crash down, covering the entire front end of the classroom. She remains untouched by the resulting splatter of muck due to a spherical force field she has erected around herself, and she dispels this in time with a round of delighted gasps and murmurs. A hanging beehive is knocked loose by her head when she takes a bow; this lands on a mossy stone and fractures, and a most unfriendly yellow glow kindles within. Trixie aims a questioning glance toward the spot, but her eyes widen in brain-freezing fear as the source emerges—a blue/white/yellow-crackling swarm of very angry flash bees, which waste no time in chasing her off the desk.)

Starlight: (*dropping clipboard/pencil*) Trixie, what did you do?! (*Trixie peeks out from behind a tree.*)

Trixie: Well, I found the perfect little patch of bog to teleport into the School.

(She ducks to avoid the bees’ lunge, which chars a large hole in the bark.)

Trixie: I guess I just didn't consider the possibility that a hive of flash bees might have nested there!

(One buzzes into the foreground and unleashes a sting whose high voltage fills the screen with its blinding white intensity. Snap to black.)

Act Three

(Opening shot: fade in to the upper reaches of the transported bog area as the flash bees surge into view, then cut to a long shot of the classroom. They split up to harass as many students as possible, sending them into a screaming, fleeing panic; Starlight just stares, paralyzed with fear, but Trixie jumps down to a clear patch of floor. Any thoughts of making a stand go bye-bye when a few dozen of the pests charge her, eliciting several yelps and leaving her coat and clothing badly scuffed and her mane frazzled and charred.)

Trixie: Who told you bees to nest in my patch of field trip bog?

(She pulls a smoke bomb from an inside pocket on the end of this and lets fly, followed by a magically propelled second, but stops with a third in hoof as the fumes boil toward her. The flash bees' discharges have turned them into an out-of-control thunderhead, and the students race out the door to keep ahead of it. Starlight and Trixie are the only two left in the place.)

Starlight: Trixie, go with the students. I'll handle this.

Trixie: I was only trying to give them an exceptional field trip experience— *(smiling)* —which you have to admit I did. *(Both mares yell and dodge the swarm's next rush.)*

Starlight: We'll talk about it later!

(Trixie pelts toward the door, while Starlight holds her ground and cranks off a spell whose power whites out the screen. Fade in to a close-up of the broken hive, tendrils of black smoke wafting up from the interior, then cut here and there to various spots of the ruined classroom. After a cautious peek in to make sure the coast is clear, Trixie re-enters.)

Trixie: Um, Starlight?

(The pinkish-violet mare sits up to her haunches, smeared with tree sap and sporting plenty of charred spots all over her own coat/mane/tail, and throws off the remains of a desk and stool. The icy set of her features says more than any words could.)

Trixie: Hey there. So, um...they're gone?

Starlight: Yes.

Trixie: Nice teamwork! Am I right?

Starlight: *(voice trembling with rage)* Are you kidding? *(standing, backing her down)* I don't know what team you're on, but it isn't mine. *(Trixie stumbles and lands sitting on a rock.)* This was a disaster, it was dangerous—

Trixie: I think the words you're looking for are "great and powerful."

(Hoof quotation marks on these last three, after which Starlight completely blows her top.)

Starlight: *It wasn't even acceptable!* You went from not taking it seriously to blowing things so out of proportion, you put everycreature in danger! And I wanted to work with a friend so much, I ignored the fact that you would never be right for the job!

Trixie: I'm confused. What are you saying? *(Cut to Starlight.)*

Starlight: I'm saying you'll never be vice-headmare!

Trixie: *(from o.s.)* But— *(Cut to her.)* —but I thought you created the position for me.

Starlight: Why would you think that?! *(leaning into Trixie's face)* I created the position because I need *help!* But I can't think of any way that you would ever help me! *(She turns away; Trixie stands up.)*

Trixie: Twilight's friends always helped her.

Starlight: *(laughing sourly)* Oh, that's because Twilight's friends are *competent!* They care about what they're doing, *and* they know how to do it!

(Stomp for emphasis on this last, sending a jolt of real hurt into the conceited unicorn's mind.)

Trixie: *(crossing to door)* Well, I guess I won't take up any more of your time, Headmare Starlight.

(Out in the corridor, she races away to keep the approaching Twilight from seeing the tears that have pooled in her violet eyes. The Princess reaches the door just in time to see a large goblet of mud fall from the ceiling and land squarely on Starlight's head, sending her down to her haunches.)

Twilight: Starlight? *(stepping in)* I just thought I'd check in to see how the search for a vice-headmare was going.

(Without even the slightest hint of visible effort, she casts a spell whose white glare fills the screen. The view clears to present a close-up of a fully cleaned Starlight, who hesitantly swivels her head this way and that with a relieved smile. On the start of the next line, zoom out to frame the entire classroom, which is now back in order and entirely free of flash bees, bog muck, and any other bits of non-standard-issue wildlife and habitat.)

Starlight: A lot better now.

Twilight: *(puzzled)* Okay? *(Cut to just outside one window.)*

Starlight: *(sitting at sill, head on hooves)* I really wanted it to be a friend, so I ended up pushing aside some pretty big signs that it wasn't gonna work out. *(Inside again.)*

Twilight: Not everypony is right for every job. *(She sits by Starlight.)* But everypony has something to contribute. *(Rest a hoof on the unicorn's back.)* The trick is figuring out what. *(Outside the window.)*

Starlight: What if you and your friend can't figure it out?

Twilight: If you have a job to do, you have to decide what's best and be upfront and honest, even if that means you can't work with a friend on it. *(Inside; she allows herself a hint of a smirk and a cocked eyebrow.)*

Starlight: Soooo...I guess that means talking to them at the beginning, instead of stringing them along until you get so frustrated you totally lose it and say a bunch of really awful things?

Twilight: Pretty much.

(Starlight can manage nothing beyond a defeated sigh. Dissolve to her approaching Trixie's wagon, parked outside the Castle of Friendship; she knocks on the swing-out windows at the front end, whose curtains are partly open.)

Starlight: Trixie? I know you're in there.

Trixie: *(from within, muffled by door)* Well, you're wrong!

(Her magic jerks the curtain shut; the visitor circles to an open side window as three things issue from inside—a clatter of glassware, a cloud of purple smoke, and a violent coughing fit.)

Starlight: I'm sorry for all those things I said. I just really wanted it to work out, even though I knew it probably wouldn't. I should've said something sooner.

Trixie: *(from within, very snippy)* Obviously we can't have what we want— *(A hoof pokes over the sill.)* —because I'm terrible at everything and could never help you with anything. *(The appendage is withdrawn.)*

Starlight: You aren't terrible, and you have a lot of great qualities—maybe not vice-headmare qualities, but “great and powerful friend” qualities.

(Trixie's aura opens the front-end windows and unfolds a step for Starlight's use; cut to the dim interior of the wagon, the itinerant performer crashed out in a hammock. She has cleaned up after her run-in with the flash bees, but is not wearing her hat or cape. Full lighting switches on as Starlight enters.)

Starlight: Well, you really stand by the ponies you care about. Gallus even said no creature's ever stuck up for him the way you did with Grandpa Gruff. *(Trixie turns two baleful eyes toward her.)* It would've been nice to run the School together, but not everypony is right for every job. *(She moves a bit closer; Trixie is now sitting up.)*

Trixie: I know how you take your responsibilities seriously, and maybe I shoulda known I wasn't exactly a perfect fit. *(Hop down off the hammock.)*

Starlight: If it makes you feel any better, nopony was.

Trixie: What do you mean?

Starlight: Well, Doctor Whooves has decided to go back to his experiments, and Octavia is worried the responsibilities of vice-headmare will take too much time away from her music. Maybe getting a vice-headmare was a bad idea.

Trixie: Starlight, obviously you'd like some help, and hiring a vice-headmare *is* a great idea.

Starlight: But who could it be?

Trixie: Well, you need somepony who's responsible, like you. And detail-oriented, like Twilight. And...smart, obviously. It is a school, after all.

(By the time she finishes listing these attributes, she has levitated three smoke bombs from a nearby box, stacked them on a front hoof, and dropped to her haunches. She then commences to juggling them.)

Starlight: It would be nice if I got along with them, since having it be a friend can't work out. *(Trixie has a brainstorm and catches the balls.)*

Trixie: Maybe it can.

(She reflexively raises her forelegs, tossing the bombs up without fully letting her brain have a say in the matter, and has just enough time for one scared grimace before they shatter on the floor and detonate. A cloud of blue-violet smoke rises past the camera, the view wiping behind it to Starlight's office. The grinning guidance counselor is seated behind the desk, Trixie smiling from her spot alongside the chair, and Sunburst paces before them.)

Sunburst: And I knew as soon as I read Trixie's scroll that it was the exact right thing for me to do.

Starlight: But...what about being Flurry Heart's Crystaller?

Sunburst: Well, honestly, now that Flurry Heart's a little older, there really isn't much for me to do outside of the occasional tradition or festival. A-And working at a school is what I always thought I'd do—I mean... *(Close-up; he leans across the desk toward her.)* ...if you'll have me.

Starlight: Are you kidding? *(grabbing his hoof)* You're hired! *(Pan to Trixie on the next line.)*

Trixie: I had a feeling this would work out.

Starlight: *(hugging her with gusto; Trixie's eyes bug out)* Oh, Trixie, thank you so much!

Trixie: Between being insightful when I want to be, and giving good advice when I don't mean to, I suppose I can be a pretty good friend. *(Something clicks in Starlight's mind.)*

Starlight: More than that, actually. You really did give good advice— *(circling to Sunburst)* —a-and you helped me talk through the problem of finding the right pony for the job, and we know you care about the students.

Trixie: *(full ham mode)* Trixie, the Great and Powerful Advice-Giver, Problem Talk-Through-er, and Student Care-About-er! *(Pause.)* Eh, I think I'll go with "friend."

Starlight: "Friend" is perfect—but there's a position at the School you might be right for, too. What would you say to being the School of Friendship's new student counselor?

(The blue mare mulls this over and comes up into a smile.)

Trixie: I'd say this office needs a bit of redecorating. *(levitating Phyllis off the desk)* Potted plants scream "desperation."

(It is unceremoniously dumped into the trash can.)

Starlight: *(anguished, eyes tearing up)* PHYLLIS, NO!!

(Snap to black.)