

THE CRYSTALLING—PART ONE

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Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all mentions of Crystal Empire ponies other than previously established characters refer to crystal ponies in their brightly colored, non-crystalline appearance.

Prologue

(Opening shot: fade in to an overhead shot of a corridor within Twilight Sparkle's castle—the Castle of Friendship, as named by Spike at the end of Part Two of “The Cutie Re-Mark.” Starlight Glimmer walks slowly down its length, turning her head back and forth to eye the sets of identical double doors that line both walls, and sighs to herself. Even from this distance, a marked change in the style of her mane can be discerned since the end of that earlier episode: her forelock curls past one side of her horn instead of hanging in straight bangs divided by it.)

Starlight: Okay. Library, library...where did they put the library?

(In close-up, she peeks through one open door. She looks to either side of herself, the camera alternating between the unicorn and her perspective of each stretch of this new corridor—nothing but closed, unmarked doors reaching into the distance—and lets off a mildly irritated sigh.)

Starlight: This castle looked a lot smaller from the outside.

(She walks up to one set of doors at random and exerts her magic over them. Cut to a close-up as they swing open to reveal a bathroom; Spike is in here, standing on a stool to reach the sink and brush his teeth. A towel is wrapped around his waist—fresh out of the shower—and a band of cloth around his head keeps his spines back. His next two lines are slightly garbled by his mouthful of toothpaste foam.)

Spike: *(waving)* Morning, Starlight! *(Zoom out to frame her, staring popeyed.)*

Starlight: *(averting gaze)* Whoops! *(Her aura yanks the doors shut.)* Sorry, Spike! I guess I'm still trying to find my way around. You don't happen to know where the library is, do you? *(He opens the door and points with his toothbrush.)*

Spike: Next door on the left.

(Duck back in. Slam the door. The camera pans slightly to follow Starlight's eyes in the direction he has indicated—to yet another pair of undifferentiated doors.)

Starlight: Oh. *(calling over shoulder)* Thanks!

(Cut to Twilight standing at a table in the library, levitating the top end of a scroll that rests among a couple of books and marking off items with a quill. As she speaks, the camera zooms out slightly and one of the closed doors swings open under Starlight's influence to admit her.)

Twilight: Acceptance, mmm-hmm...altruism, definitely. *(seeing her; lowering quill/scroll)*
Starlight! Good morning! Come in!

Starlight: *(walking in)* Sorry I'm late. I got a little turned around. I still can't believe you're letting me stay here— *(losing steam; Twilight crosses to her)* —as your pupil...after everything I did.

Twilight: Well, I'm not one to dwell on the past, and neither should you. *(Both cross to the table.)* The Castle is your home now. *(floating up quill/scroll)* And as far as being my pupil goes, I was just trying to figure out what your first friendship lesson should be.

(Said pupil is more than a bit caught out by the sheer number of entries that she can easily see on the unrolled portion. Twilight lets everything drop to the table.)

Starlight: Oh! Well, it looks like you're really narrowing it down.

Twilight: *(briefly floating it up again)* Oh, these are just the A's. *(gesturing to one side)* After this, I move on to the B's.

(Pan quickly in that direction and stop on another table stacked high with documents and practically ringed in by other piles on the floor. A few scrolls are scattered among the plethora of paperwork. Pan slightly to bring a grinning Twilight into the fore, then cut to Starlight, whose blue eyes shrink almost to panic-stricken points. Her teeth have joined in on the act, nibbling fearfully at her lower lip, but she somehow forces the lower half of her face into a terrified approximation of a grin at the thought of what this first lesson might entail. Zoom in slowly and fade to black.)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of the Castle, seen from a distance near the edge of Ponyville during the day. Zoom in slowly past the equines going about their business.)

Starlight: *(voice over)* I know I'm just learning about friendship—

(Cut to the piles of documents in the library.)

Starlight: *(walking into view, floating several up)* —but I didn't think there were this many lessons for anything. *(stacking them)* How do we choose? *(Here comes Twilight to take this bunch; Starlight levitates some others.)*

Twilight: Maybe I should pare things down a bit before we go through them.

(A split-second grimace gives way to a quick zip across the way so she can put a foreleg across Starlight's shoulders with a grin and take hold of the latest floating set of pages.)

Twilight: Why don't you join the others in the throne room? They're planning our trip to the Crystal Empire— *(setting them down)* —when Shining Armor and Princess Cadence have their baby.

Starlight: Throne room. Got it!

(Recall that this upcoming birth was the secret that the royal couple revealed in "The One Where Pinkie Pie Knows." Out goes Starlight at a full gallop, only to put her head back in the doorway with great puzzlement a second later.)

Starlight: Um...which way is the throne room?

(Her sheepish chuckle is followed by the Princess' indulgent sigh and eye roll. Dissolve to an overhead shot of the throne room and its central map table, now bare. All of the seats are occupied except those of Twilight and Spike. Zoom in slowly.)

Rainbow Dash: Well, I think we should leave ASAP.

(Pronounced "A-sap." One door swings open under Starlight's magical grip and she enters.)

Rainbow: I don't want to miss the Crystalling. *(Cut to table level.)*

Fluttershy: But, um, shouldn't we wait for the invitation?

Applejack: Frankly, I'm not exactly clear on all the customs and traditions of the Crystal Empire, especially when it comes to a Crystalling. *(Starlight crosses to her.)*

Starlight: What's a Crystalling?

Rarity: Well, that's just it, darling. Princess Cadence and Shining Armor's baby is due any day, and we're still not sure. The Crystal Empire was gone for a thousand years. A lot of their customs are a bit murky.

Applejack: We know it's got somethin' to do with the new baby— *(Pinkie Pie pops up at point-blank range.)*

Pinkie: And a party! *(Huge grin.)*

Fluttershy: —and the Crystal Heart— *(Pinkie pops up behind her; she cowers away in her seat.)*

Pinkie: And a party! *(Rainbow flies over to Applejack and Starlight.)*

Rainbow: —and some kinda cool energy. *(Pinkie steps into the fore to face them, standing on the table.)*

Pinkie: Aaaand... *(Head-on view; she throws confetti.) ...a party!*

(Her go-to idea thoroughly fails to impress either Rainbow or Starlight; the pegasus gives the unicorn a “what are you gonna do?” smile and shrug.)

Spike: *(from o.s.)* It’s not hard to understand.

(Here he comes into the throne room, fully in order after his morning ablutions; the towel and cloth are gone, and he carries a scroll under one arm.)

Spike: Most things in the Crystal Empire aren’t.

(Hopping onto his own small throne, he unrolls the document on the next line to reveal a ruby-eyed drawing of himself standing proudly beneath the floating Crystal Heart.)

Spike: *(smugly)* Like how I’m a big hero there, for example.

(Cocksure grin; cut to his perspective, panning slowly across the table. Varied reactions of subdued amusement, annoyance, and confusion, with Rarity desperately trying to stifle a guffaw. Pinkie pops up in the fore to give him a very hairy eyeball; cut back to the baby dragon, who suddenly thinks better of stroking his own ego and stows the drawing away again.)

Spike: *(scratching back of neck)* Eh, plus I’ve had to help Twilight do a lot of research on Crystallings.

(Now he reaches down behind the table and brings up an ornately decorated, two-handled ceramic urn, which he sets on the table. It is colored in shades of light violet, purple, and ice-blue, and the portion turned toward the camera depicts a unicorn stallion and winged unicorn mare with a newborn foal, against the backdrop of the Heart and flanked by two armored guards. Close-up of this.)

Spike: *(from o.s.)* Whenever a baby is born in the Crystal Empire, the parents bring it before the Crystal Heart.

(A turn; the new father stands alone, horn aglow as he inspects four crystal fragments floating before him. He faces one row of guards; a second row is behind him.)

Spike: *(from o.s.)* They get the purest shard of crystal they can find—

(Turn again; father and mother, with the Heart as backdrop, stand before a winged unicorn princess mare as she bows to them.)

Spike: *(from o.s.)* —then pick a Crystaller to present the baby—

(Turn again; backed by the Heart, the princess holds the infant up before a jubilant crowd.)

Spike: *(from o.s.)* —to everypony who comes.

(As he continues, he turns the pot again to reveal the entire tableau: parents, child, princess, bowing subjects, all under the Heart's gleam.)

Spike: *(from o.s.)* Then they all share the light and joy they feel, feeding it into the crystal—

(One more turn; now the Heart glows even more brightly and the onlookers rejoice.)

Spike: *(from o.s.)* —that joins with the Heart and increases its power. *(Zoom out to frame him.)* And this is gonna be a royal Crystalling, so pretty much the whole Empire will show up. That hasn't happened in a millennia [*sic*].

(He sets the pot out of sight behind the table edge as Starlight crosses to him.)

Starlight: What do you mean, it increases the Crystal Heart's power?

Spike: The energy it uses to protect the Crystal Empire, I guess.

Starlight: Protect it from what? *(Overhead shot of the group. Zoom out slowly; Rainbow now stands next to Applejack.)*

Spike: I...didn't help Twilight with that part.

(He manages a weak little grin. Dissolve to a close-up of one stack of documents on a table in the library. Twilight's magic floats the topmost one away; a longer shot frames her seated at the table and running a critical eye over the page. She brings up another one from a second stack as Starlight tentatively enters through the open doors.)

Starlight: Hey, Twilight, can I ask you something about the Crystal Empire?

Twilight: *(crossing to her, bringing three sheets along)* Oh! Funny you should mention it, because I just narrowed your first friendship lesson down to three options.

(On the end of this line, she separates the documents in midair and turns them to face Starlight.)

Twilight: And one of them is in the Crystal Empire!

Starlight: *(eagerly)* Really? *(Twilight nods, stacking the papers and turning them toward herself.)*

Twilight: I found out that's where the first pony you ever cared about lives! *(Huge grin; focus shifts to Starlight.)*

Starlight: *(to herself, puzzled)* Sunburst?

(“The Cutie Re-Mark,” Part Two: this was the colt she knew in her youth, whose discovery of his talent set her on the path to trying to eradicate cutie marks. Zoom in slowly on her increasingly worried countenance, which begins to slide dangerously close to a nervous breakdown as the sweat begins to pour down.)

Twilight: *(walking o.s., voice fades away slowly)* Of course, that's just one idea. We could also go to Griffonstone. Making friends with a griffon is a challenge all by itself! Or we could tag along with the CMC's the next time they try to help a pony who can't figure out why they're special.

(By this point, her words have been almost totally drowned out by a high-pitched ringing in Starlight's ears. The unicorn snaps back to herself at the next word, delivered at normal volume and with full clarity.)

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* Starlight?

(Zoom out quickly to frame both. The Princess has rested one front hoof lightly on her student's chest.)

Twilight: Is something wrong?

Starlight: *(hastily)* What? O-Oh, no. *(Chuckle.)* Those all sound great. *(Big strained grin.)*

Twilight: I know! I guess you were right. *(trotting away)* It is gonna be hard to choose one!

Starlight: *(chuckling weakly, to herself)* Yeah.

(She worries her lower lip for a moment before the view dissolves to her in a corridor. Opening one set of doors with her magic, she is immediately buried under a tumble of brooms and cleaning supplies—a janitorial closet. Putting her head up from the mess, she levitates it all back where it came from and slams the doors shut before trudging glumly across to a different doorway. Cut to the other side as her field pushes them open, then zoom out quickly to show Spike standing on a stool and flexing his muscles in a mirror. She reacts with silent shock; once he takes full notice of her, he drops the pose and gives her a sheepish grin and wave.)

Starlight: *(groaning, walking off)* I am never gonna find my way around this place! *(Cut to her walking along the corridor.)*

Spike: *(catching up)* Gee, Starlight, what's wrong?

Starlight: I don't know, Spike. Twilight's figuring out what my first friendship lesson is, and...I guess I'm not exactly thrilled with the options... *(Profile close-up.)* ...well, with one of them.

Spike: *(from o.s.)* Which one? *(Cut to frame both again.)*

Starlight: Reuniting me with my first friend. *(He stops; she moves on.)*

Spike: What's so terrible about that?

(Now she comes to a halt and lets go with a heavy sigh, looking toward the ceiling as the camera tilts up to follow her eyes. The view blurs and undergoes a wavering dissolve to her and Sunburst as foals, sitting on a blanket under a tree in their village. Colt SU reads from a book held easily in his telekinetic grip, while Filly SG struggles to lift one of several toy blocks. Neither one has a cutie mark yet.)

Starlight: *(voice over)* When we were foals, Sunburst knew everything there was to know about magic.

(Her power fizzles out and the block drops away; a split-second later, Colt SU has shifted his book in front of her face. A quizzical glance from her is met with a big grin that quickly brings one to her face, and he moves the tome back to himself as she gives the blocks another try and manages to get all of them circling above her head. Wipe to a close-up of a full glass falling onto a stretch of floorboards and spilling its contents, then cut to the two friends seated at a kitchen table. Filly SG's mouth wobbles at the mess she has made.)

Starlight: *(voice over)* He always knew just what to do.

(Without missing a beat, Colt SU maneuvers a cloth down to sop up the spill. Filly SG gives him a grateful smile, replaced by a look of surprise as Colt SU shows her the scroll he has been reading. The rag ends up wadded into a floating ball; now the filly strains her magic and catches Colt SU off guard by kicking a bevy of cleaning supplies into gear. The kitchen quickly fills with soap suds, which float upward past the camera and clear away to show the entire room now squeaky clean. Every dish washed, every surface sparkling and free of splatters, every item now neatly put away—including the supplies and the dropped glass. The two foals exchange warm smiles at this display of gonzo scrubbing.)

(Wipe to a close-up of Filly SG, backing up fearfully across a living room as a tower of books topples toward her—the run-up to Colt SU gaining his cutie mark, as in Part Two of “The Cutie Re-Mark.”)

Starlight: *(voice over)* And he was always there to help me.

(His magic seizes the tomes and sets them circling around himself as he floats in midair, golden light shining from his body in a brilliant corona. They are slotted home on the shelves, the sparkling sun appears on his haunch, and she stares dumbstruck as he bumps her aside in his gleeful race out the front door. Out in the street, his father levitates him off the ground so all the onlookers can get a clear view and Filly SG moves a bit closer.)

Starlight: *(voice over)* I guess it's not surprising that Sunburst got his cutie mark in magic and went off to Princess Celestia's school.

(On the latter part of this line, the entire crowd sets off to celebrate, leaving the filly standing dejectedly alone on the stoop.)

Starlight: *(voice over)* But when he left... *(Spike steps into view, surprising her past self.)*

Spike: *(rapid fire)* ...you blamed cutie marks and stripped a whole village of theirs, and when Twilight and the others stopped you, you went back in time and almost destroyed Equestria.

(A poof of smoke behind him, and the scene has shifted back to the corridor in the Castle.)

Starlight: Not really stuff I'm super-eager to tell Sunburst about. I mean, he's probably some big important wizard now, and... *(Long shot of the pair.)* ...I can't even find my way around Twilight's castle. *(She hangs her head.)*

Spike: Well, if Sunburst is that good at magic, maybe he'd appreciate your, uh... *(Clear throat.)* ...exploits. *(Close-up; he steps closer.)* You should talk to Twilight about it. I'm sure she'd want to hear what you have to say.

Starlight: I know. *(slightly panicked; close-up)* But I don't want her to think I'm not ready to learn, or that I'm not grateful for everything she's doing.

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* Spike! *(Zoom out quickly to frame Starlight and Spike.)* Come quick!

(Dragon and unicorn trade a slightly puzzled look. Cut to the smiling Princess on a balcony, front hooves propped on the railing as a breeze toys with her mane. The other two move to the doorway leading out here; Twilight's smile becomes a beam, and she raptly watches something making its way over Ponyville on the strengthening air currents. It resolves into a single large snowflake, and she stretches out one wing to catch it as the wind dies away and Starlight and Spike step out. In close-up, the flake proves to contain a sheet of paper at its center, folded into a hexagon; the flaps unfold one by one to reveal a written message tucked inside.)

Spike: It's a Crystalling invitation! *(Twilight now has it in her magic grip.)*

Twilight: Shining Armor's a father! I'm an aunt! *(She cuts the spell and crosses to him and Starlight.)* Well, this settles it. Since we're going to the Crystal Empire, your first friendship lesson is going to be... *(Starlight's face falls at the inevitable knowledge of her next words.)* ...reuniting with Sunburst!

(She and Spike head blissfully back into the Castle, the Princess completely oblivious to the unease that has settled onto the blue-eyed face. Zoom in slowly.)

Starlight: *(smiling weakly)* Great.

(The smile turns into a shaky grin, then a fresh bout of lower-lip chewing. Snap to black.)

Act Two

(Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of a train chugging through the snowy outlands of the Crystal Empire during the day. Zoom in slowly, then cut to a close-up of a very uneasy Starlight watching the scenery roll by, seen from outside one window. Inside, she and Twilight's contingent of friends are on the padded bench seats: Twilight sitting with Starlight and reading a book on baby care held in her aura, Applejack sitting next to a large cloth-covered bundle topped with a bow, Fluttershy looking out the window, Pinkie slumped down next to a couple of gift boxes and bored out of her skull, Rainbow napping, Rarity sitting next to Fluttershy and across from Applejack. Starlight turns away from her window to look them all over, after which the camera cuts to Fluttershy and Rarity. This shot frames the stuffed doll that the pegasus has brought along, a copy of her rabbit Angel, and the horseshoe decoration that the unicorn is stitching onto a blanket. Pan from them to the seats that Applejack and Rainbow are sharing, back to back; the daredevil is now half-sitting up, and she lets go with a yawn and stretch.)

Rainbow: Um, Applejack? *(pointing to the bundle)* What is that?

Applejack: Oh, just a little somethin' for the young'un.

(She gets teeth on the cloth and backs o.s., nipping it away to expose a wooden cradle with a cloth canopy built over the head end. The material has an apple pattern, and one more fruit is carved into the footboard.)

Applejack: *(from o.s.)* Made from genuine Sweet Apple Acres apple trees. *(Cut to frame it and her; Fluttershy/Rainbow/Rarity gather around.)* We make 'em for all the Apples, and anypony related to Twilight is practically family. *(Twilight smiles warmly at this, having put her book down.)*

Rainbow: *(flying slowly past, nonchalantly)* Yeah, it's okay—but it's no Cloudsdale mobile!

(Applejack pronounces a long "I" on the last syllable of "genuine," and Rainbow does the same with "mobile." Dipping a hoof down to floor level, the blue flyer produces a mobile hung with rainbows, clouds, and lightning bolts. Twilight has put her book away.)

Rainbow: Bam! *(Pinkie darts over to a look.)*

Pinkie: Ooooh! Pretty!

(She gives it a nudge, which is all it takes for one piece to fall off, a sound of shattering glass floating up from below o.s. to mark its unfortunate encounter with the floor. The pink party pony gives a big dopey grin; cut to Applejack. She pronounces "mobile" as Rainbow did.)

Applejack: Well, a mobile is real nice, as long as you have somethin' to lay in so you can look at it. *(She rocks the cradle a bit.)*

Rarity: *(floating its quilt away, replacing it with her blanket)* And a fetching blanket to keep you warm.

(The farmer's eyes pop at this unexpected change of bedding, but she quickly shifts into a humoring smile. Cut to Twilight and Starlight.)

Twilight: I'm sure Shining Armor and Princess Cadence will love all our gifts, but I think they're more happy we'll be attending the baby's Crystalling.

Pinkie: *(from o.s.)* Ooh! *(Zoom out; she hops in front of the pair.)* I can't wait to see all that light and love make the Crystal Heart even more sparkly and shiny!

Twilight: Actually, Pinkie— *(Close-up of her.)* —the Crystal Heart is an ancient and powerful relic. Without its magic, the Crystal Empire would be lost to the frozen north. *(Zoom out slightly to frame Starlight.)*

Starlight: *(fake worried tone)* Wow. This Crystalling sounds pretty important. I'd understand if you wanted to...you know...wait to do a different friendship lesson when we get back. *(Big placating grin and shrug.)*

Twilight: Are you kidding? This trip is perfect! Not only do I get to see the baby and take part in the ceremony that helps maintain the magic of the Crystal Empire— *(Foreleg around Starlight's shoulders, unnerving her all over again.)* —but I'm starting my new pupil off with the most amazing friendship lesson ever! *(pulling her close)* I can't wait!

(After a very long, very awkward moment, the pupil extricates herself from the embrace with a shaky smile.)

Starlight: Right. Me neither.

(As Twilight brings up her baby-care book, Starlight glances desperately across the way; cut to Spike sitting in front of her, previously hidden from view by the camera angles. He gestures impatiently toward Twilight—“just spit it out already!”—and she works up the nerve to speak.)

Starlight: Actually, Twilight, I am a little worried about meeting Sunburst.

Twilight: *(putting book away)* Oh, trust me. I know what it’s like to see old friends, but I’ll be right there to help things along.

(A reference to the events of “Amending Fences.” Cut to a less-than-reassured Starlight, then zoom out to frame both mares on the start of the next line, Twilight unrolling a scroll that stretches for yards along the aisle. None of the other seven passengers can believe what they are seeing.)

Twilight: I’ve broken the whole lesson down into a few easy steps to ensure this reunion goes off without a hitch.

(To which Starlight can only voice an uneasy chuckle in response. Cut to the Empire’s train station as the gang pulls in; a slightly fuzzed-out Shining Armor stands among a scatter of ponies on the platform. Once the train has come to a stop, the nearest car door slides open and the Ponyville bunch starts to emerge; Pinkie hops along with gift box on back, while Rainbow flies out carrying her mobile. Twilight floats her scroll along as a very down-in-the-mouth Starlight keeps pace. Fluttershy hangs back inside the car.)

Twilight: Step one—head to Sunburst’s house and get you two started on the right hoof. *(Profile close-up of the pair.)* Step two—get to the castle with enough time to visit the ba—

(She is so caught up in her checklist that she does not notice Shining Armor standing directly in her path until she has run flat into him. He is absolutely fried: mane/tail in disarray, face covered with stubble, eyes and voice betraying a major-league lack of sleep. Both shake their heads clear as her scroll hits the platform; she is first to come up with a happy gasp.)

Twilight: Shining Armor!

Shining: Twilight! *(They embrace.)*

Twilight: I didn’t know you were meeting us!

Shining: Of course I am! *(Applejack steps up behind him, without her cradle.)* It’s me, right here. Here I am. *(Rainbow ditto; mobile gone.)* Why wouldn’t I come meet my sister? *(Applejack smiles; Rainbow stifles a laugh.)* Though we have met before. *(Chuckle.)*

Twilight: Are you all right?

Shining: *(a bit unhinged)* Never better! Being a father is amazing, and wonderful, and amazing! And confusing, and amazing! But surprising too, you know? I mean, not that you'd know...you wouldn't know, I know...you know?

(He ends this mental belch with a half-crazed grin that does absolutely nothing to reassure any of the travelers. Fluttershy and Rarity have now joined them on the platform. When he continues, the manic tone is gone from his voice and only exhaustion remains.)

Shining: Sorry. I haven't really slept since Cadence had the baby. *(Pause.)* Come to think of it, she hasn't either. It sure would be great to get a break. *(Grin.)*

Twilight: Oh, of course! I-I don't know what I was thinking! You two probably need all kinds of help. *(turning to Starlight)* I'm sorry, Starlight, but I guess combining your first lesson with this visit wasn't such a good idea.

Starlight: *(forcing a smile)* Oh! Uh, don't be ridiculous! You're an aunt now. That's way more important than some friendship lesson. *(Grin.)*

Twilight: I just wish there was a way to do both.

(A rattle of parchment interrupts right about now; cut to the source—Spike, rolling up the scroll.)

Spike: Maybe there is! *(to Twilight)* You've already done the work for Starlight's lesson with this list. *(glancing at Starlight)* All we have to do is follow it.

(One pinkish-violet hoof claps to her face in disgust, and one blue eye shoots daggers at the overly helpful number-one assistant from behind it.)

Twilight: Spike! You're a genius!

Starlight: *(laughing)* Yeah! *(under her breath, very snarky)* Genius. *(All gather around; Pinkie no longer carries her present.)*

Twilight: Then it's settled. Shining Armor and I will head straight to the castle, and you two can head straight to Sunburst's.

Spike: *(saluting)* Aye-aye, Princess! *(Cut to Twilight and Starlight.)*

Starlight: *(weakly)* Uh-huh. *(An encouraging nod from Twilight sets her on her way.)*

Twilight: *(turning to look behind herself)* All right, big brother. Let's go see this amazing baby pony.

(A loud snore causes the purple eyes to pop in confusion, and a longer shot tells the tale: he has fallen asleep on his hooves. His drowsy mumbling brings gentle smiles to the six mares' faces. Dissolve to a street within the Empire proper; Starlight and Spike walk along, the former having opened the scroll to full length so he can look it over.)

Spike: I know you're a little worried about this reunion, but I'm sure Twilight's got everything covered.

Starlight: Everything except how I'd rather do absolutely anything else.

Spike: Well, I bet she's taken that into account too. *(reverently, tapping scroll)* It's all part of the lesson. Trust the lesson.

Starlight: *(not convinced)* Right.

(A sudden smile whips across her face, followed by a calculating look. As the little guy reaches the statue built in his honor, she hustles up to it.)

Starlight: *(pointing at it)* Hey! I-Is that...you? *(He stops.)*

Spike: Oh! Yep. It sure is. *(eyeing scroll, walking on)* Now, according to the list, Sunburst's house is— *(The next words stop him again.)*

Starlight: Why is there a statue of you in the Crystal Empire? *(A mare zips up to her.)*

Mare 1: Because Spike the Brave and Glorious saved all of us from King Sombra! *(Another one gallops over.)*

Mare 2: And then again during the Equestria Games!

Starlight: Really? *(Now a stallion pipes up.)*

Stallion: Really. *(to Spike)* Big fan.

(The half-pint hero takes a front hoof in both of his hands to shake, after which the stallion goes on his way. The entire display of adulation has put a sneaky smile on Starlight's face.)

Starlight: *(laughing a bit)* Um, when were you gonna tell me about this?

Spike: Nah, it's no big deal. *(Four ponies quickly cluster around him.)*

Ponies: It most certainly is!

(They clear out just as quickly as they arrived, leaving Starlight to cock a knowing eyebrow toward the dragon. During the next line, she floats a stool into view to sweep him off his feet so that his rump lands on it, then telekinetically rolls up the scroll.)

Starlight: That's it! We're not going anywhere until I get the whole story.

(The parchment drops into his hands, and she maneuvers a box of popcorn into her grip and sits down on her haunches for a good listen. A crowd quickly congregates around them. From here, zoom out and tilt up to frame the upper reaches of the Crystal Castle a short distance behind the nearest row of buildings.)

Shining: *(voice over, fully awake)* Before we go in...

(Cut to him and the Ponyville mares gathered outside a closed set of double doors in one corridor.)

Shining: ...I should probably tell you—seeing the baby might be a bit of a shock.

(Cut to the other side of these doors; his sister's field takes hold. The start of the next line is heard from outside and muffled slightly until she gets them open and walks in.)

Twilight: Come on, big brother. I've met babies before.

(As the others follow her in, the camera zooms out to frame more of this room—a nursery, whose walls are painted with clouds and stars. A wardrobe with butterflies on the doors stands to one side. Princesses Celestia, Luna, and Cadence are on hand, the new mother looking about as wiped out as her husband.)

Twilight: I expect meeting this one won't be any different.

(A close-up of the bed picks out the newborn, a white unicorn filly with a gently curling mane shaded in blue and violet. She is sleeping peacefully, swaddled so that only her forelegs and the front half of her head are exposed. Of note is the fact that her horn is considerably longer than that of the average baby unicorn. This is Flurry Heart. After a couple of seconds, the camera cuts to just behind her head, framing six female faces brimming with warmth and tenderness for this new life. It all goes straight out the window when the wrappings fall away and two broad wings, white shading to pink, unfurl themselves from within. Of the six flabbergasted mares, Twilight is the only one to get out any audible reaction, in the form of a shocked gasp. A head-on shot frames Flurry in full detail: light blue eyes, matching diaper, a wingspan that is easily double her body length. Her eyes are not solid-colored like those of other newborn ponies seen to this point, but rather have a distinct sclera/iris/pupil to match those of older ones. The winged unicorn neonate gurgles happily.)

Twilight: Of course, I could be wrong.

(Snap to black.)

Act Three

(Opening shot: fade in to an extreme close-up of Flurry and zoom out slowly as she works herself up to complete wakefulness and cheerfully gets to work sucking on a front hoof.)

Twilight: *(incredulously)* The baby is an alicorn? *(Cut to Shining and Cadence standing next to the bed.)*

Cadence: *(tiredly)* It looks that way. *(Cut to Twilight/Fluttershy/Rarity.)*

Rarity: But—but—but I thought alicorn wings had to be earned by accomplishing some great, princess-worthy deed! *(Twilight nods.)*

Applejack: *(from o.s.)* Yeah. *(Cut to her.)* How can you just be born with 'em?

Celestia: The birth of an alicorn is something Equestria has never seen.

Luna: It is beyond even our understanding.

Fluttershy: *(aside, to Rarity)* That's not very reassuring. *(Pinkie pops up between them.)*

Pinkie: Wow! A unicorn *and* a pegasus! *(zipping over to the bed)* So she could be a super-strong flyer *and* have crazy baby magic! *(Flurry burbles up at her.)*

Rainbow: *(doing a loop-the-loop)* Well, I know all about super-strong flying.

Twilight: And I can help keep tabs on her magic.

(The baby goes into the windup for a sneeze; when it comes, though, not one pony in the room is ready for the result. A wide-angle pink/yellow beam hurtles straight up from her horn, shaking the room; its glare bright enough to dim the rest of the nursery until it cuts off. A few fragments of masonry clatter down from above as twenty stunned eyes turn toward the ceiling; cut to a point in midair, the camera pointing up toward where it used to be. The blast has ripped a hole through the next several floors up, and a very scared mare peeks down over one edge. Zoom out to ground level, putting the Ponyville crew in the fore as the focus shifts to them. They stare down at the camera, absolutely floored by this very weird turn of events; now Flurry yawns and settles herself back down for another nap.)

Celestia: *(stroking her mane)* It appears her magic is more powerful than that of a newborn unicorn. *(Cut to Luna, looking out a window, on the next line.)*

Luna: The crowds have already started to gather.

(They have indeed, making their way in ones and twos toward the Crystal Castle. Comes now the sound of a deep inhalation, followed by a balloon expanding to fill most of the screen. It is the work of Pinkie, who ties it off and grabs the string to let it lift her off the floor.)

Pinkie: This Crystalling is gonna be some party! *(Pop; she thumps down on her haunches.)*

Cadence: *(as Flurry sucks on her front hoof)* Do you think we should call it off?

Rainbow: *(flying to her, scoffing a bit)* Um, we've all faced a lot worse than baby magic.

Rarity: I can't imagine canceling such a beautiful and important ceremony over something so potentially adorable.

(All her friends except Twilight quickly group up around her, voicing assent.)

Celestia: In light of the little one's abilities— *(Luna crosses to the bed.)* —this Crystalling might be more important than ever. *(to Cadence)* Perhaps you should address your subjects and remind them of that.

Cadence: *(nodding)* Hmm.

(She plants a kiss on Flurry's forehead, prompting her daughter to wake up and gurgle a bit, and then makes for the door with Celestia and Luna right behind. Pan from them back to the bed, where Shining has zonked out half-slumped over the headboard and is snoring vigorously.)

Twilight: *(poking him, waking him up)* Shining Armor! Do you have everything you need for the ceremony?

(A half-asleep huff, and full consciousness hits him like a two-by-four to the head. The blue eyes shrink to freaked-out points.)

Shining: Huh? Oh, no! *(He flashes away and starts trotting madly in place and pacing.)* I still have to interview the honor guards, choose the Purity Crystal, and pick a Crystaller!

(Dropping to his haunches, he looks about an inch away from going into the worst crying jag of his life.)

Twilight: *(calmly, touching a shoulder)* All right, take it easy. Pinkie can stay here with me and keep an eye on the baby.

(If the fact that Flurry has gleefully latched onto Pinkie's squeakily grinning face is any indication, these two have already hit it off like gangbusters.)

Applejack: *(indicating Fluttershy/Rainbow/Rarity)* And we'll all help you with everythin' else.

(Another snore drifts across to them, due to Shining now passed out on the floor under the eye of one very concerned little sister. He goes right back to mumbling in his sleep.)

Rarity: *(dryly)* That is, if you can stay awake long enough to tell us how.

(Dissolve to an overhead shot of the Spike statue and zoom in slowly on its subject addressing the crowd that has come to hear his tale. Starlight has procured a lounge chair and is relaxing in it with her popcorn, and he is now sitting on Twilight's scroll while perched on his stool.)

Spike: And that's how we found the Crystal Heart, defeated King Sombra, and saved the Empire. *(The colts and fillies cheer; cut to two of them.)*

Fillies: We love you, Spike!

Filly 1: Yeah! Tell the one about the Equestria Games!

Spike: Well, as much as I love reliving my heroic deeds— *(pulling scroll out from beneath himself)* —Starlight and I have an important lesson to do— *(She forces down her mouthful.)* —by order of the Princess of Friendship.

Fillies: *(crushed)* Awww...

Starlight: Aw, come on, Spike. I want to hear about the Games too. *(Lip-nibbling grin; Spike autographs a picture for a filly and she gallops off.)*

Spike: I know you're nervous about seeing Sunburst. *(unfurling scroll)* But it says right in Step Three to, uh... *(reading)* ...“deal with your fears by facing them, not by putting it off.” *(She shoots him an irritated look and sighs, throwing her popcorn aside.)*

Starlight: Let's go get this over with.

(One hop takes her down off the lounge chair. Dissolve to a house that stands at the end of a path running between two buildings. Its roof is styled as an orange wizard's hat that has taken a few good hits, and a stylized sunburst design is worked into the front doors. She plods toward it, followed by Spike with the rolled-up scroll in hand. Cut to the door and zoom in slightly as she mounts the stoop and raises a hoof to knock.)

Spike: Wait! *(She stops short with a soft gasp.)*

Starlight: What?

Spike: *(opening scroll)* Knocking on the door isn't the next thing on the list!

Starlight: Seriously?

Spike: I know Twilight can be a little nitpicky, but this is your first lesson as her pupil—*(holding up scroll)*—and it’s important that we do it right.

Starlight: *(rolling eyes wearily)* Fine. What’s the next thing on the list?

Spike: *(clearing throat, reading)* “Before they see each other, make sure to highlight the importance of the meeting.”

Starlight: I’m pretty sure we can skip that.

Spike: I don’t know. I mean, if we skip it, the whole lesson could go south. *(increasingly panicked)* And then you might end up taking a giant step backwards instead of forwards! Maybe you’ll never be able to learn anything about friendship at all!

(She cringes at the thought, and he jumps up the stoop to grab her cheeks.)

Spike: *(hushed, ominously)* It’s almost like your whole future depends on this moment. *(He backs off, then eyes the scroll with a smile.)* “Highlight the importance of the meeting.” *(marking a box)* Check! *(laughing a bit)* I can’t believe you wanted to skip that.

(Realizing that she has at last run out of dodges, Starlight moves a step closer to the doors in the manner of one afraid that they might suddenly fall on her, eat her, or do something else extreme. She taps a front hoof against the wood once, twice, thrice, and backs off to await a response. None is forthcoming for some seconds; she glances down at Spike, who just shrugs helplessly. As Starlight turns to descend the stoop, one door swings inward by just a fraction.)

Starlight: *(hesitantly)* Sunburst?

(The outline of a head extends itself partway into view from the dimly lit interior. Although the illumination is not enough to make out all details, a disheveled mane can be discerned, along with a pale “blaze” stripe down the nose to match the one Colt SU had and the gleam of two round lenses before the eyes. The inhabitant speaks up with a slightly apprehensive male voice.)

Sunburst: Yes?

(The stallion moves a bit farther into the light, confirming his identity. Same yellow-orange coat; same red-orange mane grown out longer and gone a little scruffy at the forelock, with a long goatee; same blue-green eyes behind pince-nez eyeglasses. A clasp styled after his cutie mark is fastened across the throat, holding a cloak in place.)

Sunburst: What can I do for you?

Starlight: *(fumbling for words)* It’s...it’s me, Starlight. We used to be friends?

(The mental gears under the unkempt mane hit overdrive for a long moment, after which he steps out to the stoop with a smile. His cloak is dark blue, with lighter trim and star decorations.)

Sunburst: *(stammering a bit)* Oh, of course! Starlight! *(Chuckle.)* My goodness, it’s been a long time! What, uh, what have you been up to?

Starlight: *(laughing, trying to play it off)* Me? Oh, you know, some of this, some of that. Different...stuff? Right now I'm sort of Twilight Sparkle's new pupil. *(His eyes widen.)*

Sunburst: The Princess of Friendship?

Starlight: *(chuckling)* Yeah. That's actually kind of why I'm here. I-I mean, I know you're probably very busy.

Sunburst: What do you mean?

Starlight: W-Well, I figured after magic school, you'd go on to do important wizard work, but—

Sunburst: Oh! No. *(catching himself)* Y-Yes! Uh—uh, yes, that's me, yep. *(Chuckle.)* Important wizard. Really busy with lots of, uh, w-wizarding stuff.

(He nudges his glasses with a hoof. Long pause.)

Sunburst: Right. Uh, well...good to see you.

(Duck back into the house. Shut the door. Leave Starlight to trade a hopelessly bewildered look with Spike.)

Spike: Huh. Maybe we should've skipped highlighting the importance of the meeting after all.

Starlight: *(hurrying down stoop, forced cheerful tone)* Well, I guess that's that. *(He stops her.)*

Spike: Starlight, come on! We have to at least explain what Twilight wants.

(Letting off a loud, resigned groan, the mare finds herself being pushed back to the doors. The bulldozing baby dragon leaps down the stoop as she knocks again; out comes Sunburst, just in time to be on the receiving end of Starlight's very tentative grin.)

(Dissolve to an overhead shot of a small stage set up in front of one of the arches that form the supports for the Crystal Castle. Its backdrop is a heart-shaped frame carved from light blue crystal and topped by a six-pointed gold star, and a curtain is drawn behind it to close off the area beyond the arch. Celestia, Luna, and Cadence stand up here to address the small crowd that has gathered; Cadence is now properly groomed. Zoom in slowly.)

Cadence: *(echoing slightly)* Dearest citizens, I am sure you are all just as thrilled and ready for this Crystalling as myself and Shining Armor.

(Cut to just behind the group at ground level on the end of this. Cheers rise from the spectators once she finishes, and the camera pans slightly away from the stage to frame Shining—still a complete mess—having pushed the edge of the curtain aside so he can peek out. He lets it drop with an almighty cringe and turns to six armored, buzz-cut, stolid pegasus stallion guards standing at attention. None wear helmets, and except for the mane/tail colors, they are completely identical. Only after he hitches in a huge breath does he find his power of speech.)

Shining: I'm not ready! *(Down comes Rainbow, holding a pair of helmets.)*

Rainbow: Take it easy. Just pick whoever looks the most like honor guard material.

Shining: *(taking them in his magic)* Right...right.

(He makes his choice by ramming the helmets onto the heads of two pegasi at random—with the minor technical hitch that they come down backwards. The chosen guards stumble haphazardly away, and the others back off with expressions to suggest that they would rather pull latrine duty for a month than accept this assignment. Throwing them an apologetic grin, he plods away.)

Shining: I'm sorry. *(Stop in front of Applejack/Fluttershy/Rainbow.)* Fatherhood is way more stressful than I ever thought.

Fluttershy: I can only imagine.

(On the start of the next line, pan slightly to frame Rarity here as well; she levitates a small flat case in front of herself.)

Rarity: Now I know choosing the Crystal of Purity is a very important decision. *(Case opens, revealing five identical ice-blue ones.)* So...

(Cut to a slow pan across an extreme close-up of the five gleaming pieces.)

Rarity: *(from o.s.)* ...I have gone through the trouble of arranging them in order from “incredibly pure” to “outrageously pure.” *(Back to her; Fluttershy takes a step closer.)*

Fluttershy: Um, Rarity? Don't they all sort of look the same?

Rarity: *(nudging case down)* Oh, well, to the untrained eye, perhaps. *(floating it toward Shining)* What do you think, Shining Armor?

(As it reaches him, a close-up betrays the panic and worry and panic and nerves and panic and terror and utter, soul-smashing panic playing at top volume through his mind. He gibbers incoherently for a moment before the camera zooms out quickly to frame all five as he rises to his hind legs and claps front hooves to temples.)

Shining: I DON'T KNOW!!

(He collapses into a shivering heap, and Rarity closes her case.)

Rarity: *(whispering, to Fluttershy)* I hope Twilight and Pinkie are having better luck with the baby!

(Wipe to an unoccupied stretch of the nursery. Flurry's happy gurgles are heard just before Pinkie passes the camera back and forth in close-up, seen from the shoulders up with forelegs extended up and o.s. The visible flapping of wings suggests that she is holding Flurry overhead to play “airplane.”)

Pinkie: Well...at least she's having...fun!

(Which she is, as seen in a close-up—but said fun is also accompanied by a few errant magic shots. Twilight cancels one out with a diving blast from her own horn, and the extent of the game becomes clear; Flurry is flying under her own power and taking Pinkie along for the ride.)

Pinkie: Whee!

(Filly and passenger laugh their way through another circuit of the room, with Twilight shooting down the beams that lance every which way.)

Twilight: Pinkie, hold her still! *(Pinkie is dragged across, now standing on her hind legs.)*

Pinkie: I'm tryyyyiiinnng!

(The full-grown Princess can only duck the latest shot and gnaw her lower lip as sweat begins to run down her face. Dissolve to Starlight and Sunburst seated on stools at a table in his house, with a teapot and cup/saucer set out. Every shelf is crammed with books, and many more are stacked up in nearly every available square inch of floor area. Other magic-related items take up whatever bits of storage space they can find. Zoom in slowly as the two sit in silence, Starlight avoiding direct eye contact as she pulls the teacup toward herself. Roughly seven seconds pass, feeling like a month and a half before Sunburst speaks up.)

Sunburst: So...the Princess of Friendship wants you and I to be friends again?

Starlight: *(chuckling airily)* I know. Weird, right?

Sunburst: Mmm—I don't understand. Did something happen to you after I left for magic school?

Starlight: What?

(In a fit of panic, she bangs the table but gets the cup and pot under her magic control before either can overturn. She pours herself some tea.)

Starlight: No! *(trying to calm herself down)* I-I don't see what that has to do with anything. Why would you even ask that?

(Probably because the tea has begun to slop over the side of the cup. He says nothing.)

Starlight: I-I mean, did something happen to *you* after you left for magic school?

(On "you," she whirls the pot to point the spout toward him, then sets it down hard enough to shake the cover loose.)

Sunburst: *(caught off guard, shaking head clear)* What? Uh...no. *(stammering)* Like you said, I'm a... *(Clear throat; adjust glasses.)* ...i-important...wizard.

(Pan away from this uneasy reunion to frame Spike, hiding out of sight behind a pile of books.)

Spike: *(very worried, going over scroll)* I'm sure there's something on Twilight's list that can help here!

(Wipe to a close-up of the Heart, spinning between its upper and lower anchor points in the square directly beneath the Crystal Castle. All of the arches leading into to this area have been curtained off. Shining is off to one side in the background, with Rarity levitating a brush to get his mane/tail sorted out. She has put away her case of crystals. Pan slightly to bring these two, Applejack, Fluttershy, and Rainbow into view, the focus shifting to them; Shining takes a few deep breaths to get himself under control. A close-up reveals that he has had time to get a proper shave and rest up a bit. Once the three-tone blue hair is in decent shape, the sound of a door opening is heard and the camera pans to frame Celestia, Luna, and Cadence emerging from the royal residence. Shining gallops over to meet Cadence as she reaches the bottom of the steps.)

Shining: Okay. I chose the honor guard, picked the Purity Crystal, and I know exactly who I want to be our Crystaller. *(scratching chin)* So, all we need is...

Cadence: *(dryly)* The baby?

(Bingo. Hubby dearest lets go with a panicked neigh...)

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* We're here!

(...then shifts into a relieved sigh and smile at the sound of Flurry's laugh. Out comes his little sister, floating both Pinkie and Flurry along within a bubble of magic. The pink pony is still hanging on for dear life and having no luck whatsoever bringing the filly down to earth.)

Pinkie: She's a reeeeeally strong flyer!

(Cadence warms her horn up and pulls them apart into separate bubbles, letting Twilight keep Pinkie as she gets a grip on Flurry. The filly begins to whimper piteously at being separated from her caregiver/playmate, who gets set down and released. All four Princesses, one stallion, and five Ponyville fellow travelers gather with clear concern over the impending meltdown—and it comes in the form of a top-of-her-lungs wail that bursts Cadence's bubble and sends shock waves over the entire square. Manes are blown back, eardrums resonate as hooves are clapped over them, and the ponies strain to keep their position in the face of this sonic battering.)

(As her cry dies away, the Heart spins down to a dead stop; cracks spread in every direction over the surface, and the relic shatters into a rain of glittering splinters that tinkle to the pavement. There follows a round of stunned gasps as a sadly burbling Flurry descends to rest on her mother's outstretched foreleg. Applejack is first to step over to the ruined relic in close-up.)

Applejack: I'm guessin' that's gonna make it hard to do the Crystalling.

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* It's worse than that.

(Cut to her, standing next to the curtains over one arch, and zoom in slowly.)

Twilight: *(magically opening them)* Without the Heart, the Crystal Empire's about to be buried under a mountain of ice and snow!

(Beyond the aperture, the locals stare dumbfounded at the dark storm clouds and strong winds that have begun to roll in from the horizon at alarming speed. Cut to a long overhead shot of the Empire, the menacing weather slowly closing in from all sides, then back to the entire group save Twilight. Amid the stares that betray shock and fear and completely blown minds, the camera zooms in quickly to an extreme close-up of Flurry held close to Cadence's chest. She gurgles placidly, totally oblivious to the apocalypse she has just inadvertently let off the leash. Cut to a "To be continued..." title card, then directly to the closing credits.)

(The usual closing theme does not accompany the credits. In its place is the madcap melody that played while Twilight and Pinkie were trying to get Flurry under control in the nursery. B flat major, lively 4, cheerful woodwind/brass/strings with light percussion.)

Continued in Part Two