
my LITTLE PONY
FRIENDSHIP is MAGIC
SEASON SIX
PART ONE
Transcripts

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

<u>Act One</u>

(*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

THE CRYSTALLING—PART TWO

Written by Josh Haber
Produced by Devon Cody
Story editing by Josh Haber
Supervising direction by Jim Miller
Directed by Denny Lu, Tim Stuby

Transcribed by Alan Back (ajback@yahoo.com)

Note: All mentions of Crystal Empire ponies other than previously established characters refer to crystal ponies in their brightly colored, non-crystalline appearance (see note at beginning of Part One).

Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to a "Previously on My Little Pony" title card, then cut to Starlight Glimmer in the library of the Castle of Friendship—Part One, prologue.*)

Starlight: I still can't believe you're letting me stay here— (*losing steam; Twilight Sparkle crosses to her*) —as your pupil.

(*The Castle balcony, Act One: Twilight turns joyously to Spike, having received her invitation to the Crystalling ceremony for the new baby of Shining Armor and Princess Cadence.*)

Twilight: Shining Armor's a father! I'm an aunt! (*She addresses Starlight.*) Your first friendship lesson is going to be…

(*Act Three: Starlight and Sunburst sit uneasily in his living room over a pot of tea. Zoom in slowly.*)

Twilight: (*voice over*) …reuniting with Sunburst!

(*Earlier in the act: he peeks nervously out from the front entrance.*)

Sunburst: (*stammering*) Uh—uh, yes, that's me, yep. (*Chuckle.*) Important wizard.

(*Act Two: the newborn Flurry Heart coos happily in her bed, wings and horn fully exposed for the first time.*)

Twilight: (*voice over, incredulously*) The baby is an alicorn?

(*Act Three: Flurry tows Pinkie all over the nursery in midair, firing off random spells that Twilight has to shoot down on the fly.*)

Pinkie: (*voice over*) So she could be a super-strong flyer *and* have crazy baby magic!

(*On the second half of this line, cut to the square beneath the Crystal Castle as Flurry lets go with an epic tantrum that nearly overpowers Twilight, her friends, and the royals from both here and Canterlot. The Crystal Heart shatters to pieces.*)

Twilight: (*from o.s.*) Without the Heart— (*Cut to her at one of the arch curtains and zoom in as she magically opens it to show winter on the way.*) —the Crystal Empire's about to be buried under a mountain of ice and snow!

(*Long overhead shot of the Crystal Empire on the end of this, the black storm clouds inexorably advancing from all sides. In the square, all gasp before the view snaps to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of the wrecked Heart and zoom out slowly.*)

Rarity: (*from o.s.*) So…not only can we not take part in a fabulous ancient ceremony…

(*The camera motion frames her and the rest of the group in a semicircle around the mess on the end of this.*)

Rarity: …but we're also about to be frozen solid!
Twilight: Without the Crystal Heart's magical protection, the entire city's about to become a winter wasteland.
Applejack: But…what about when King Sombra ruled the Crystal Empire and the Crystal Heart was missin'? The city wasn't covered in snow then. (*Rarity nods; Cadence moves closer, floating Flurry along and followed by Shining.*)
Twilight: The Heart wasn't missing. It was still in the castle. King Sombra had just hidden it.
Princess Celestia: I'm afraid Twilight is correct, and the storm clouds are already forming.

(*Cut to a curtain being held open with her magic. Snow and black clouds are on their way through a threatening gray sky, and lightning starts to crackle among them. Rainbow Dash flies up into view.*)

Rainbow: I can totally fly up there and bust those puppies, no problem!

(*She readies for a fast takeoff, but gets only a faceful of fabric when the curtains close to block her off.*)

Celestia: (*from o.s.*) I wouldn't advise it, Rainbow Dash. (*Cut to her and the others; Rainbow wings back to them.*) Those storm clouds are not like the ones you know.
Princess Luna: This far north, the weather has a will of its own. And now it will only grow stronger, enveloping everything in its path.
Cadence: Including the Crystal Empire!
Twilight: (*crossing to her*) And us along with it!

(*Her grimace is matched by the one on Pinkie's face when the perky pink pony zips over to wrap both forelegs around her neck and shiver mightily. Terror begins to write itself across the faces of the other four from Ponyville. Wipe to Spike at a table in Sunburst's house, running a concerned eye over the very long scroll that Twilight put together as a plan for Starlight's first friendship lesson.*)

Spike: There's gotta be something!

(*Pan from him to the long-estranged friends, Sunburst sitting on a stool before a book stand.*)

Sunburst: I-I know Princess Twilight is keen on the two of us rekindling our friendship, but…i-it's been so long. I don't see how anything on that list is going to help.
Starlight: (*smiling*) I know, right? It's not like there's some spell that would magically compel us to pick up where we left off.
Sunburst: (*smiling, adjusting glasses*) Hm. Actually, there's several. (*climbing off stool, levitating/opening several books*) Mistmane's Material Amity, Rockhoof's Rapport… (*seeing Starlight unimpressed, losing steam*) …Flash Prance's Fellow…ship…

(*Letting one book slam shut, he clears his throat softly.*)

Sunburst: But I-I get the feeling the Princess isn't looking for a spell.
Starlight: (*giggling*) Definitely not.
Spike: (*from o.s.*) Got it! (*Cut to him, now wrapped up in the coils of Twilight's parchment and reading from it.*) "And if all else fails, ask them to share an embarrassing moment from their past, maybe even something they regret."

(*Wrong answer, judging from the looks on both unicorns' faces.*)

Sunburst: (*stammering, sweating, adjusting glasses*) I don't see how that would help.
Starlight: Uh…y-yeah! (*Weak laugh.*) We should just get out of your mane. (*walking past him toward front doors*) It's pretty obvious this isn't going how Twilight hoped, and I'm sure you have plenty of important work to do.

(*Her field opens the door on the end of this, while simultaneously towing a very puzzled Spike along. Sunburst turns toward them with a trace of bewilderment.*)

Sunburst: What?…Oh! Right. Yes. (*He floats and opens a book with a laugh.*) No rest for the wizardly.

Starlight: (*aside*) Come on, Spike!

(*She backs out, taking the groaning dragon with her, and shuts the door. A few trailing feet of parchment end up being yanked out through the gap between the bottom edge and the floor. Cut to a long overhead shot of the Empire, the foreboding black clouds continuing their advance, then to an extreme close-up of the bottom edge of one arch curtain. A frigid gust of wind stirs the heavy textile, sending a few snowflakes in for good measure; pan to Twilight cringing before the arctic blast.*)

Twilight: There must be a spell that can restore the Crystal Heart!
Celestia: Perhaps.
Luna: But it isn't something that either of us know.
Cadence: The library here at the castle is nearly as extensive as the one in Canterlot. (*She uses her magic to pass Flurry over to Shining.*) There's a good chance we can find something there.
Twilight: (*to Celestia, Luna*) Can you hold off the storm?
Luna: Yes, for a time, but…even our magic will eventually succumb to the power of the frozen north. (*Celestia rises into the air.*)
Celestia: We will do what we can— (*Luna ditto.*) —but you must hurry.

[*<u>Continuity error</u>: In "The Crystal Empire," the library was in a separate building from the Crystal Castle.*]

(*Outside the curtains, the crowd that had gathered to hear Cadence's remarks in Part One, Act Three has not dispersed—if anything, it has grown a bit despite the blowing snow. The stage she used is still in place, with its heart-shaped frame as backdrop. Pan/tilt up slightly to follow Celestia and Luna taking flight into the teeth of the oncoming blizzard, over the rooftops that are already accumulating drifts, then cut to the older sister as she shifts to a hover. A golden beam from her horn blasts away the nearest clouds, and Luna is quick to reach her side and kick in a blue beam of her own. The immediate vicinity is now clear, but as soon as they fly o.s., the clouds begin to move in again.*)

(*Cut to Twilight, who peeks out through the curtains for a moment before dropping to ground level to face the others.*)

Twilight: I don't know how long it will take to find the right spell, but you should probably tell the crowd outside to get somewhere warm.
Cadence: (*walking up through them*) And try not to mention the Crystal Heart. We don't want to start a panic.
Applejack: Yes, ma'am. (*to the others*) Come on, girls!

(*She and Fluttershy gallop for the exit, with Rainbow on the wing.*)

Twilight: (*crossing to the rest*) I'm gonna need all of your help. The Crystal Library is enormous.
Shining: You can count on us, Twilie.

(*He and Pinkie grin confidently, with Flurry adding a cheerful blabber of her own—and then her horn glows and she teleports out of sight. An instant later she reappears to clamp all four tiny hooves firmly onto the pink face; Pinkie rears up with a yell, instinctively yanks her off, and throws her aside. Both new parents' brains seize up, and Shining goes into a diving catch with forelegs outstretched. It would be a perfect save, except for the fact that Flurry winks out just short of making contact with the two reaching hooves. He stands up, incredulously regarding the empty space where his daughter should have ended up.*)

Shining: Where'd she go?!?

(*He and Cadence look frantically around themselves; no luck until a distant squeal from the o.s. Flurry gets their attention. They, Twilight, Pinkie, and Rarity cast eyes in all directions, trying to get a fix on the source; Cadence is first to zero in on its general area, indicating a staircase.*)

Cadence: This way!

(*She leads a charge back into the Crystal Castle. Wipe to Spike and Starlight, trudging despondently along a snow-blown street; Spike has extricated himself from the overlong scroll and wound it up.*)

Starlight: Well, Spike, looks like my biggest fears came true. I wouldn't be surprised if Twilight decides to give up on me entirely.
Spike: Aw, it's not your fault. I'm the one who said all we needed was this list.

(*Shooting it the dirtiest look he can drum up on no notice, he blows a burst of fire and torches it to ash.*)

Starlight: It's not the list, Spike, or you, or Twilight. I'm the one Sunburst doesn't want to be friends with.
Spike: I don't remember him saying he didn't want to be friends.
Starlight: He didn't have to say it.

(*Both stop and she lets her head dip even lower toward the crystalline street surface. Spike circles to face her straight on.*)

Spike: Well, Twilight obviously thinks you're worth being friends with— (*winking, hugging her*) —and I do too.
Starlight: (*smiling*) Oh, thanks, Spike. At least I have two friends, even if one of them has dragon breath.

(*Her answering wink is met with a mildly puzzled look from the reptilian green eyes. Spike exhales a couple of times and sees the clouds of mist that form due to the plummeting air temperature.*)

Spike: Uh, that's not dragon breath. It's freezing!

(*Only now does the unicorn fully comprehend the big chill coming through the realm.*)

Starlight: Oh. You're right! But…I thought the Crystal Heart was supposed to keep the cold weather out.
Spike: It is—unless something's happened! Come on!

(*During the end of his line, a nearby mare who has been watering some flowers is more than a bit surprised to discover that the water pouring from her can has frozen solid. Starlight and Spike race off as the camera tilts up to frame the Crystal Castle nearby; the clouds have spread to the point that the patch of sky above it is the only clear area. As they continue to thicken, the camera cuts to the stage and its crowd of spectators. Applejack and Fluttershy stand on the street to address them, with Rainbow hovering above.*)

Rainbow: (*echoing slightly*) We're just saying that it might not be the best idea to stay outside. (*A mare in a lawn chair speaks up.*)
Lawnchair: (*indignantly*) I camped out all night for this spot. I'm not about to just give it up! (*Others nod agreement.*)
Fluttershy: Still, when you think about it, the view is just as good a little further back, like…inside your house?

(*This sets off confused murmurs among the throng, at least until a stallion wearing a cap and shirt covered with souvenir patches leaps in.*)

Patches: The Crystalling ceremony is one of our most sacred traditions. And when that foal is held before the Crystal Heart, I plan to be as close to the action as possible!
Applejack: Honestly, I don't know if there's gonna be a Crystallin'. (*Long profile shot of the area; pan slowly toward the crowd.*) The truth is, the baby's an alicorn and her magic's plumb crazy, so…y-you might not want to be that close after all. (*Cut to Lawnchair.*)
Lawnchair: (*impressed*) A baby alicorn? (*Soft gasp.*) Wow! I can't wait to see that!
Patches: Oh, those little wings are probably so cute! (*A stallion with a red cap and an ornate, doubled handlebar mustache pipes up.*)
Mustache: I know, right?
Rainbow: (*no echo*) Look. I am a hundred percent sure the Crystalling isn't happening.

(*The glare from a not-too-distant blast washes over the scene, scaring the daylights out of the three out-of-towners. All yes turn upward; cut to their perspective of the Crystal Castle, which gets repeatedly perforated when bursts of Flurry's magic punch out holes in the walls from within. At ground level, the crowd watches in awe at the impromptu light show.*)

Mustache: (*skeptically*) No Crystalling, huh? Then why are they starting a fireworks show?

(*Wild cheering breaks out, prompting Rainbow to clap a front hoof to her face in disgust and drop into a huddle with eyes covered. Fluttershy pats her head consolingly. Cut to within the*

massive Crystal Library; Twilight is going through books at a table on the ground floor, while Cadence hovers at a higher level and is floating others off the shelves.)

Shining: (*from o.s., exasperated*) Young filly… (*galloping after Flurry as she flies across*) …come back here!

(*The wayward tyke emerges from an aisle several yards back for another pass, prompting Rarity to peek out after her and Pinkie to start a hopping pursuit.*)

Pinkie: Come to your Auntie Pinkie Pie!

(*Close-up of Twilight, magically opening/closing books in time with the following list and skimming their contents A few scrolls litter the table as well.*)

Twilight: *Bridle Buck's Boat Chants…* (*Flurry flies past behind her.*) *…Hayhoof's Intonements…* (*Shining gives chase.*) *…Mystic Maps and Mazes…* (*Groan; she addresses herself overhead.*) …anything up there? (*Flurry teleports up next to Cadence and flies off.*)
Cadence: Not yet! (*moving along one shelf*) I'm not even sure how these are organized!

(*Whatever system might once have been in place, "having one's daughter suddenly materialize among the books" was surely never meant to be part of it. This, however, is exactly what happens before Cadence's eyes; the worried mother reaches for the filly, only to see her sneeze off a blast that she barely ducks in time. The recoil drives Flurry back into the shelves, wiping out a decent chunk of them, and a pop of magic from within the hole marks her teleporting exit. She poofs back in, right behind Twilight, and starts flying circles around the beleaguered bookworm. After a couple of circuits, she peels out to stay ahead of the charging Shining.*)

Cadence: Shining Armor? I thought *you* were taking care of the baby!
Shining: (*skidding around a corner*) I'm trying!

(*Another sharp turn, another pair of arcane pops, and the rambunctious filly has transported herself back to the corner she just took. She veers gleefully along the aisle for several dozen yards; suddenly her face registers surprise, and a cut to her perspective picks out Rarity jumping into her path with a levitated butterfly net.*)

Rarity: Gotcha!

(*Back to Flurry, who continues her headlong flight toward the net and then pops out of being.*)

Rarity: Oh! (*Reappear behind her, get moving again.*) Or not.

(*Cut to just inside an open set of double doors, the camera pointing out into a corridor of the Crystal Castle. As Spike and Starlight walk in, a squealing Flurry zooms past with Pinkie galloping madly after her. After both have passed o.s., an errant magic blast lances across the screen and Shining peels out to keep ahead of the flying filly. The unicorn and dragon stare*

mutely at a scene of chaos that would make Discord very proud indeed: Cadence using her magic to sling book after book off the shelves, Twilight reading at top speed as the literature piles up on her table, Flurry doing the backstroke behind her and diving down a flight of stairs. Pinkie hurtles down after her, but loses traction with a yelp and skids into an o.s. crash. An instant later, the pink pony is upright and chasing Flurry all over again; now a runaway magic shot rips across, forcing Spike and Starlight to hit the deck so they can keep their heads on their necks.)

Starlight: What is going on? (*Here comes Flurry, towing Pinkie by one hind leg.*)
Pinkie: You want the long or the short version?
Starlight: (*really puzzled*) Short?
Pinkie: (*rapid fire*) The baby's an alicorn and she accidentally destroyed the Crystal Heart, so Twilight and Cadence are looking for a spell to put it back together and save the Crystal Empire from turning into a giant wasteland of ice and snow. (*Starlight shoots upright.*)
Starlight: (*floored*) Oh.

(*Spike stands up next, his mind equally tied in knots. Now Shining gets into position and leaps up to catch Flurry, but she gives him the slip and lets go of Pinkie so that all he gets is a couple of pink hind legs to the chin. The two adult ponies tumble senseless to the floor as the foal who made fools of them glides away. Up above, Cadence gasps softly and magically pulls a book from the shelves—gold accents on cover and spine, held shut with a locking clasp, cover depicting two unicorn horns crossed behind a shield marked with a horseshoe.*)

Cadence: What about this? (*She brings it down to Twilight.*) *Trotter's Tome of Reliquary*?

(*Exerting her field to replace Cadence's, the violet Princess effortlessly pops the clasp, opens the book, and flips pages. One particular passage brings a smile to her face, and she whirls it to face Cadence.*)

Twilight: I think this is it!
Cadence: (*reading*) "Spell of Relic Reconstitution"! (*Gasp.*) I can't believe we found it!
(*Twilight pulls it back and closes it.*)
Twilight: It's a good thing, too. Without this, I don't know what we'd do.

(*Flurry teleports onto the table, laughing merrily and scattering one stack of books everywhere. She clears out with barely any time to spare before Pinkie vaults across, both of them very nearly wiping out the venerable volume. The agile earth pony finally brings the flyer down, only for the latter to sneeze both of them backwards and shoot off a beam; cut to Rarity, a hand mirror in her magic grip. She shifts it just enough to reflect the spell…and then Shining throws up a quick shield to bounce it away again…and Starlight does the same to protect herself and Spike…and it scores a perfect bullseye on the crucial book. Twilight saves herself by diving under the table, but the beam bores through from front to back and singes the spine of one tome on the shelves behind her. She straightens up with a horrified gasp; cut to just behind the back cover, the camera pointing through the very new and very large hole. Pinkie has come up to a haunch-sitting*

position with Flurry gathered under one foreleg, and Cadence and Starlight move closer to deliver a pair of gobsmacked stares.)

Pinkie: Oops.

(*Snap to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to an extreme close-up of the wrecked book, still floating in Twilight's magic with her disbelieving face framed through the hole.*)

Twilight: That spell was the only thing we found in the whole library that was even close to what we needed!
Starlight: (*crossing to her*) I'm so sorry, Twilight!
Twilight: It's not your fault, Starlight. (*flipping pages; ashes fall out*) None of us were expecting any of this.
Cadence: Do you think you can remember the spell?
Twilight: I only read it through once! (*Here come the others; Shining floats Flurry from Pinkie's back to his own.*)
Rarity: Well, if anypony can exactly remember something she read for the first time two minutes ago, it's you, Twilight.
Twilight: I'll try, but I'm not sure how long it'll take.

(*She has barely opened the trashed trove of magical know-how when a frigid gust blows through the area. It is coming in through a large hole in the wall—the one created by the recoil from Flurry's sneeze near the end of Act One. Clouds start to blot out the visible patch of sky as Pinkie straightens up into view.*)

Pinkie: Is "quickly" an option?
Cadence: I'll help if I can, but we should evacuate the city just in case. (*floating Flurry onto her back*) You need to lead everypony to the train station before the tracks freeze over.
Shining: We will. But between you and Twilight— (*lifting her chin*) —I'm sure you'll remember the spell.

(*After a shared tender smile and crossing of horns, the view cuts to just outside the library's closed doors. They burst open, a determined Shining charging toward the camera with an equally single-minded Pinkie and Rarity right behind. Just before the stallion's form can completely fill the screen and black it out, cut to Twilight at her loaded table. She lets the book drop in favor of a scroll.*)

Twilight: (*unrolling it, floating up a quill*) I only hope this spell is the one we need.

(*As soon as the parchment touches the tabletop, she gets her quill in motion, thinking carefully over every word.*)

Starlight: Is there anything I can do?
Twilight: I don't think so. I'm just sorry about your lesson.
Starlight: (*sighing*) That doesn't matter now. Sunburst and I don't have anything in common anyway. He's a big important wizard, and I'm re-learning everything I ever thought I knew.

(*She ends this line with her head propped dejectedly on her front hooves at the edge of the table. Zoom out slightly as Cadence crosses to her.*)

Cadence: (*puzzled*) Sunburst? I don't recognize the name, but…if he's an important wizard, you should bring him here. Maybe he'll know what to do if the spell fails.
Starlight: (*gasping, perking up*) Of course! (*She gallops off.*)
Twilight: You better go with her, Spike.

(*One quick nod later, the fired-up baby dragon is hustling out after Starlight. The sound of distant thunder causes Twilight, Cadence, and Flurry to cringe; through an upper-story window, Celestia and Luna can be seen still fighting off the encroaching storm clouds and slowly losing. A flash of lightning hides them from view for a moment; when it clears, the last sliver of visible sky is overrun, and them with it.*)

(*Wipe to just inside the front entrance of Sunburst's house. One door flies open to admit Starlight, Spike, and quite a bit of snow, and they have to put real effort into forcing it shut against the relentless wind.*)

Starlight: Sunburst! (*He is levitating several books.*) Haven't you looked outside?

(*He does so, the camera cutting to a window and panning slightly to frame him as the sound of tumbling reference works drifts up from the floor.*)

Sunburst: Snow? Uh, that's not right. (*Celestia and Luna fly past.*) Uh, the Crystal Heart—
Starlight: (*from o.s.*) —is gone! (*Cut to frame all three.*) The baby—Shining Armor and Cadence's baby—it's an alicorn!

(*That throws him for about three loops and almost makes him disregard the glasses sliding down his nose.*)

Sunburst: (*pushing them up, smiling*) Really?
Starlight: (*freaking out*) Really! And her magic is a little berserk and, well, I guess she destroyed the Heart! But Twilight thinks she can fix it and Princess Cadence thought you could help! (*His eyes pop; he glances nervously around himself.*)
Sunburst: Me?
Starlight: (*smiling*) Of course! (*advancing on him*) You're an important wizard in the Crystal Empire! It just makes sense!

(*He backs up before her steps until his rump hits a very full bookcase.*)

Sunburst: (*very unsure, shelving/rearranging books with magic*) Right…right…right, right, right. You know, I'd like to help, I-I really would. I-I just have so much, um, important wizard work to do around here.
Starlight, Spike: Huh?

(*Cut to a long shot of the stage and zoom in slowly. Applejack, Fluttershy, and Rainbow are still down in front and facing a crowd that has stubbornly refused to disperse. Zoom in slowly.*)

Applejack: (*voice raised, echoing slightly*) You can't stay here! (*Front row.*)
Mustache: (*with increasing fervor*) Did I mention this was a royal Crystalling? When the Crystaller holds the young one aloft, all of the Empire will share their joy and light— (*Pan slowly toward Lawnchair and Patches.*) —and the Crystal Heart will beat stronger than it ever has before!
Patches: (*tearing up*) It really is a moving ceremony. (*He wipes his eyes dry; Rainbow shivers.*)
Fluttershy: I *really* don't think it's going to happen.
Rainbow: Come on! It's freezing out here!
Lawnchair: (*irritated*) Uh, this is the Crystal Empire. We've seen snow before. (*Nods from Mustache and Patches.*)
Shining: (*from o.s.*) Not like this!

(*General alarm from the crowd. On the start of the next line, tilt up from the Ponyville trio to frame him stepping to center stage.*)

Shining: We don't have time to argue! Princess Cadence has decided to evacuate the city! (*A round of gasps.*)
Mustache: But—the Crystalling!
Shining: I don't know if we'll ever have another Crystalling again! The Crystal Heart…is shattered!

(*Now they finally start to understand just how far from perfect this day is turning out, and shocked gasps and murmurs ripple from front row to back.*)

Lawnchair: It's not safe here!
Applejack: (*sighing exasperatedly*) That's what we've been tryin' to tell you!

(*Shining leads the spectators in a full-speed bug-out, with Applejack/Fluttershy/Rainbow bringing up the rear. Wipe to a close-up of a rather irked Starlight.*)

Starlight: Sunburst, I know you're busy, but did you hear what I said? (*He is still rearranging his books.*)
Sunburst: (*disdainfully*) Oh, I heard you, but—but like *I* said, when you're an important wizard, the work just piles up. (*Several end up in one neat stack.*)

Starlight: *Sunburst!*

(*With a sigh, the stallion floats his glasses off and brings up a cloth to polish them, abandoning the high-handed tone of voice.*)

Sunburst: Look, Starlight. I want to help, I do. But I can't. (*Glasses on.*) I wish I could. (*Starlight rests a front hoof on his shoulder.*)
Starlight: What do you mean?
Sunburst: Fixing an ancient relic? I-I can't even come close to doing something like that!
Starlight: But I-I thought you were an important wizard!

(*The strain on his face gives away the pitched battle roaring through his mind, and the ragged outburst that is his next line tells the result all too clearly.*)

Sunburst: Well, you were wrong, okay?!? I'm not an important wizard! (*tears running from eyes*) I'm not even a wizard at all!

(*He gallops further into the house, seeing nothing of the world-class grimaces that weld themselves onto the faces of his two visitors. Snap to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of the path leading to Sunburst's house, now half-buried in snowdrifts. Zoom in slowly, then cut to Starlight and Spike peeking worriedly around a corner inside. A zoom out frames a very despondent Sunburst in the fore behind his table, his back turned to the pair.*)

Sunburst: I know it's hard for you to understand, but not all of us end up achieving greatness. (*Starlight's eyes pop.*)
Starlight: What? (*She and Spike step toward him.*) Why wouldn't I understand that? (*She hops onto a stool to sit across from him.*)
Sunburst: (*bitterly*) Really? (*He turns to face her.*) You're the protégé of the Princess of Friendship! I don't think she picks just anypony for that! (*Cut to Starlight; Spike pops up next to her.*)
Spike: Technically, she's more of a student that a protégé.

(*A slightly dirty sidewise look from the blue eyes makes him think better of any further wisecracks and duck away again.*)

Sunburst: (*from o.s., sighing*) Whatever. (*Cut to frame both ponies.*) I'm sorry I'm not the big important wizard you were expecting.
Starlight: Sunburst, I-I don't care if you're a wizard or not, I'm just surprised. You always knew so much about magic. I mean, look at all these books!

(*He spares them a glance, then turns a very jaundiced pair of eyes back toward her.*)

Sunburst: Yeah, well, reading about magic is one thing, but you don't know what it was like at magic school! (*thumping table, jostling teapot*) To know so much and not be able to do any of it!

(*Now it is Starlight's turn to fight a brief, fierce war in her own mind as the camera zooms in slowly. It too ends with a torrent of barely controlled words, this one tinged with irritation and anger.*)

Starlight: (*pointing*) Well, *you* don't know what it was like to be left behind, and then getting so bitter that you steal the cutie marks from an entire village, and then get defeated by Twilight and her friends! So you travel through time to get back at them, but they beat you again and teach you about friendship, but… (*voice breaking, tears running freely*) …you're so terrified ponies will find out what you did that you can't make any friends!

(*A deafening silence takes hold as she wipes her eyes and Sunburst just stares, his power of speech completely wiped out by this confession. His glasses slide slowly down to the end of his nose; he takes his time getting them settled, then finally restarts his tongue.*)

Sunburst: Did you really travel through time?
Spike: (*to Starlight, elbowing her in the side*) See? I told you he'd be impressed. (*She grins hesitantly; Sunburst gets down off his stool.*)
Sunburst: I'm sorry we lost touch. (*She does likewise.*) Maybe if I *had* reached out, you could've helped me at magic school and I could've helped you to…
Starlight: …not become totally evil?

(*That bit of self-deprecation earns her a genuine grin from her old friend, coupled with yet another nudge at his glasses.*)

Starlight: (*sighing*) Let's just say I know what it's like to have something you're not exactly proud of.
Sunburst: When you showed up thinking I was some big wizard… (*Close-up; he sighs.*) …I'm sorry. (*She steps closer.*) I should've told you the truth.
Starlight: (*smiling, touching his shoulder*) It's fine. At least we worked it all out. I think Twilight would be proud of us.
Spike: (*from o.s.*) Well… (*Cut to him, looking out the window.*) …if you ever want to tell her about it, we should probably leave now! (*Starlight gasps sharply, panic setting in.*)
Starlight: (*to Sunburst*) I forgot to tell you! They're evacuating the city! (*pushing him toward the door; Spike follows*) You need to get to the train station, unless you've got a spell here that will drive back the frozen north and fix the Crystal Heart so the baby can have her Crystalling?

(*A moment's thought touches off a brainstorm under the messy red-orange mane.*)

Sunburst: The Crystalling! (*galloping back to bookshelves*) Of course!

(*It is the work of only a moment for him to levitate half a dozen books, open them, and get them floating around himself in a circle for a lightning-fast cram session. A skeptical Starlight and a flummoxed Spike watch from the doorway.*)

(*Wipe to a patch of whirling black clouds. A beam from Luna's horn slashes the gloom to connect with one spot, but it has no visible effect; zoom out to show both her and Celestia pouring power into the blizzard. The elder sister is having just as much luck as the younger, and both are speckled with snow from head to tail and grunting with exertion.*)

Celestia: Push them back, my sister!

(*The Herculean effort is for naught, as the clouds swiftly expand to engulf them bodily. Tilt down to frame a long overhead shot of a street intersection; Applejack's orange-tan speck and Shining's white one head up a mad dash to get the heck out of Dodge. At street level, these two stop briefly amid the frantic exodus.*)

Shining: (*pointing ahead*) THIS WAY!!

(*They get their legs working again. Losing traction on the ice-slicked roadbed, one mare skids and slides across to go face-first into a snowbank. Fluttershy comes in for a landing to help her get upright, and both go straight into a full-tilt gallop. Up above, Rainbow is zipping here and there, knocking out every cloud she can lay a hoof on; the area is soon clear, but the ice building up on her coat/mane/wings is giving her bad trouble. Grunting and straining, she gives up on the whole flight thing and drops into a gallop with Applejack and Shining.*)

Applejack: Just a little bit further, y'all! The station's just ahead!

(*Her eyes widen a bit in surprise as she looks ahead down the road; cut to her perspective. Three hazy figures are approaching along the frost-glazed street, which quickly resolve into Starlight, a saddlebag-toting Sunburst, and Spike. The trio, the royal sisters, and the fleeing equines meet in the middle of the road.*)

Starlight: (*voice raised*) We have to go back!
Sunburst: (*ditto*) I know how to stop this!

(*The camera cuts to Celestia and zooms in slowly as she smiles serenely and Luna throws her a quizzical sidewise glance. From here ,wipe to Twilight and Cadence standing over the shards of the Heart; the violet Princess has her quill and scroll floating at eye level and is scribbling notes, while the pink one paces fretfully. Zoom in slowly, then cut to a close-up of Twilight as she finishes writing and sends the quill away.*)

Twilight: (*very unsure*) Uh…I think that's everything? (*Cadence's magic takes hold and she skims the page.*)
Cadence: It looks right to me, but… (*She passes it back.*) …there's only one way to find out.

(*A few quick steps, and she has backed off to a safe distance so that Twilight has room to crank up her horn and fire a beam into the crystal stalagmite that had supported the Heart from below. The glittering fragments rise slowly into the air, arranging themselves into its rough shape between the points of the stalagmite and the stalactite that extends down from above, and Cadence lets fly with a bolt of her own. The power of the combined spells slowly forces the pieces together; they are lost under a moment's glare, which fades to leave the pieced-together Heart ringed in a two-layer aura. Zoom out to show both Princesses smiling up at the end product of their repair—which promptly flares out and goes to pieces again, running the happy mood. Twilight has put her scroll away.*)

Twilight: The spell failed. (*hanging head*) I don't know what else to do! (*Sound of curtains opening.*)
Celestia: (*from o.s.*) An old student of mine believes he does.

(*On the end of this line, cut to her and Luna leading the rest of the gang in—the other five Ponyville mares, Spike, Shining, and Starlight and Sunburst just visible at the back. Both sisters and the flying Rainbow are still crusted with snow. Celestia has parted the curtains with her magic to admit the group, and lets them fall together afterward. She and Luna step aside so that Sunburst can approach the broken Heart and give it a good close look.*)

Sunburst: (*incredulously*) The baby did this?
Twilight: (*floating scroll up to show him*) I've tried putting it back together with—
Sunburst: (*floating it closer, now all business*) —the Spell of Relic Reconstitution. (*crumpling/tossing it*) That won't do it. (*floating a book from his saddlebags*) The Crystal Heart's been around for millennia. (*Open; flip pages.*) Restoring a relic like this is magic way beyond one spell. You need to combine it with something else. (*Pass to Twilight.*) Something unique to the relic itself.

(*He smiles; she gets her magic onto the book and reads closely.*)

Sunburst: (*encouragingly*) Something that strengthens it and provides it with power?

(*The gears under the striped dark blue mane spin at several hundred thousand RPM for a long moment, after which she eases the book down and puts on a beaming smile.*)

Twilight: The Crystalling! (*All gather closer; Rainbow, Celestia, and Luna are now thawed out.*)
Sunburst: Combining that spell with the light and love of everypony gathered for the ceremony, together with… (*stepping to Starlight/Spike with two scrolls, showing her the book*)
…Somnambula's Weather Abjuration to clear away the snow…

(*Her field takes the tome from him; now he pivots to Shining and Cadence, the latter cradling Flurry, and offers them one of the scrolls.*)

Sunburst: …and a little Fledgling's Forbearance for the parents…

(*As he speaks, his field pops the seal and unrolls the scroll, and Shining takes hold so he and Cadence can read it over. Sunburst chuckles a bit and bends down to stroke Flurry's cheek, eliciting a happy babble.*)

Sunburst: …that should curb the little one's power fluctuations. (*She squeals and grabs his nose; pan to Cadence.*)
Cadence: You must be Sunburst. Starlight said you were a powerful wizard.
Starlight: (*backing off*) Oh, I'm no wizard. (*Adjust glasses.*)

(*Varied reactions of shock and puzzlement from the others, including more than a few jaws that suddenly go slack. Starlight even goes so far as to drop the book Sunburst passé to her.*)

Starlight: But he's studied magic his whole life! You should see his house! And since nopony has any better ideas— (*smiling uneasily*) —what do we have to lose?

(*There follows a very long pause, during which Celestia nods and Cadence telekinetically trades Flurry for the re-rolled scroll Shining was given. The tension ends with his smile and nod.*)

Shining: (*to Sunburst*) I had planned on asking Twilight to be our Crystaller, but since it seems like she'll be busy…

(*Flurry is floated over into the sock-marked forelegs.*)

Sunburst: I'd be honored. (*He enjoys having his glasses pulled on.*)
Twilight: Well, what are we waiting for?

(*With the exception of Twilight, Celestia, Luna, and Starlight, all gallop/fly/run for the nearest set of curtains, which Cadence and Shining pull open with their fields to let them out into the snow. Sunburst has ditched his saddlebags. Once they are gone and the gap is closed, pan back to the other four at ground zero; Starlight has the book in her aura again. Once they have taken up positions around the Heart, Twilight lets a new spell surge into the stalagmite support and the pieces begin floating off the ground. Just as before, they assemble into a roughly correct shape between the upper and lower crystal points. She groans and sweats with the strain, sparks dropping from her horn, and two panels slide in from opposite sides to fill the screen. Celestia is on the right side, Luna on the left, and both let one rip; cut to a close-up of the Heart as their beams strike home with Twilight's. It has drifted slightly out of position, but the triple whammy nudges it back and sets the entire area vibrating. After a final moment's perusal of the pages, a very apprehensive Starlight lets the book drop and cuts loose with a blinding beam of her own, causing the tremors to intensify.*)

(*Cut to street level outside the arches. Despite the efforts to get the locals to safety, they have gathered right back in front of the stage. Tilt up slightly to frame it fully as the rest of the crew emerges up here, Sunburst carrying Flurry in his forelegs, then cut to a close-up of the filly. Her parents lean down into view from opposite sides to put a tender kiss on each cheek and touch their horns together over her head. A spark kindles at the points and grows into a brilliant*

yellow gleam that surrounds her form and causes her to float, giggling, out of Sunburst's hold. She stops a few feet up as Rarity advances while levitating the case of crystal shards she presented for Shining's inspection in Part One, Act Three. She opens it, and the glow of Sunburst's horn lifts one free—the Crystal of Purity she had intended to have Shining select.)

Sunburst: Citizens! May I present the newest member of the Crystal Empire!

(*Tilt up quickly to said citizen, who spreads her wings to full extension and laughs merrily, then zoom out quickly to a long shot of the stage and the crowd. Cheers and whoops from high and low alike. Lawnchair has done away with her seat and is standing upright.*)

Mustache: (*voice breaking*) She's beautiful! Oh, it's just so moving!

(*Spectators bow one after another, each sending a bright blue glow radiating out from his/her position across the crystalline pavement. Within seconds, the energy races through every main road and side street in the Empire; a grinning Sunburst floats the Crystal of Purity down and touches one end to the road. It slowly absorbs every last scrap of the new power, and the camera cuts to within the arches as he gallops in with it riding overhead. All four horned mares still have their spells going full blast and keep at it as he goes up for what must surely be the highest and longest jump of his life. He slam-dunks the supercharged shard into the indentation at the top of the Heart, causing it to blaze white, and the four on the ground cut their spells. When the radiance fades away, the Heart can be seen to be once again whole, unblemished, and spinning in its proper place. Gleaming with a renewed light, it sends out a pulse that washes over all five ponies to bestow the translucent cut-crystal appearance manifested by the locals when they are in their highest spirits. It does the same to the group on the stage, then Flurry hovering above it—the yellow glow having faded from her body—and finally the crowd in the street, now standing up again. The snow, ice, and storm clouds are instantly swept away, and the citizens cheer and cavort in celebration.*)

(*Cut to a screenful of clouds. A multicolored beam flashes upward through the miasma, causing it to retreat and evaporate so that a long overhead shot of the fully restored Empire is visible. At stage level, Flurry descends slowly into the waiting hooves of her parents, who nuzzle her joyfully.*)

Lawnchair: Best Crystalling ever!

(*Mustache and Patches nod. Cut to within the arches; the onstage delegation comes down off the stage and is met by Twilight as Spike holds the curtains open. Pan from them to Starlight and Sunburst, watching from a short distance.*)

Starlight: For a pony who isn't great at magic— (*turning to him*) —you did pretty well.
Celestia: (*from o.s.*) Indeed. (*Cut to her and Luna. The Heart's glow has faded out.*) I'm glad to see you found a way to share your unique gift, Sunburst. You may be more of a wizard than you think.

(*He and Starlight share a silent laugh. Dissolve to a long shot of the Empire's train station under a sunlit blue sky and zoom in slowly on the platform. The Ponyville contingent is here, as are Cadence, Shining holding Flurry, Starlight, and Sunburst; all have reverted to their normal appearances. A train has just pulled in, and two new arrivals are crossing the platform—the parents of Twilight and Shining.*)

Mr. Sparkle: You would not believe the crazy weather that delayed our train. (*Close-up of the couple; he chuckles.*) Came out of nowhere.
Mrs. Sparkle: (*crossing to Cadence*) But it was all worth it to see this peaceful little angel. (*peering at a napping Flurry*) Aww, so sweet. (*reaching toward her*) Come to your grand-mare.

(*The angel in question cracks one eye opens and copies the gesture with a giggle. Cut to Twilight and her five friends.*)

Applejack: (*knowingly*) Yeah. Peaceful now, anyway.
Twilight: I suppose that spell really did the trick.

(*Their reverie is cut off by the sound of Flurry winding up for a sneeze; cut to her, then back to the six as they cry out and dive for cover. The sneeze is a lulu—except unlike the one that touched off the whole mess in Part One, Act Three, this one does nothing worse than make a lot of noise and cause Flurry's wings to flare. She immediately tucks them back in and settles down again, and the panicked mares pull themselves back together with some disbelief. Even Cadence and Shining have winced away in expectation of a catastrophe, but they relax upon figuring out that it has not come.*)

Shining: We have Sunburst to thank for that.
Cadence: I hope he takes his role as Crystaller seriously. Something tells me the baby will need a pony like him to look to for magical advice.
Mrs. Sparkle: (*floating Flurry to her foreleg*) Cadence, darling, aren't we gonna name the poor little dear, or are we gonna spend the entire visit just calling her "the baby"?
Cadence: We were thinking…Flurry Heart.
Shining: (*glancing toward others*) You know, to remember the occasion.
Rarity: (*giggling*) Goodness! How could anypony forget? (*Twilight leans close to Flurry.*)
Twilight: I think it's lovely.

(*Kiss on the cheek, bringing a gurgle. Cut to a longer shot of the platform and zoom in on Starlight and Sunburst, who hang back on the far corner as the others gather around the filly. The mare rests a front hoof on her old friend's shoulder.*)

Starlight: Well, I think you're the Crystal Empire's big important wizard— (*removing hoof*) —whether you like it or not.
Sunburst: Well, I don't know if I'll have time for any wizarding. I'm a Crystaller now. That's a big responsibility.
Starlight: I can't think of anypony more qualified. Just promise you'll stay in touch?
Sunburst: Hmph. Like I'd ever lose touch with my oldest friend.

(*They embrace, the camera zooming out to frame the train's first few cars. Twilight has already boarded and is looking on from a window. She pulls her head in quickly, a disquieting thought having occurred to her; cut to a close-up of her on a seat.*)

Spike: (*from o.s.*) What's wrong, Twilight? (*Longer shot; he sits across from her.*)
Twilight: (*hanging head*) I don't know, Spike. I think I have a lot to learn about being a teacher.
Spike: What are you talking about? Your lesson went perfectly! (*Close-up; he counts on his fingers.*) Starlight and Sunburst got over their past and rekindled their friendship.
Twilight: (*from o.s.*) No thanks to me. (*Both again.*) I know a lot happened. I just wish I could've given my pupil the attention *she* deserves.

(*On the end of this line, the sound of a door opening is heard and the camera pans to the end of the car, where Starlight has just come in through its entrance. She takes a seat facing Fluttershy.*)

Spike: Well…I know she needed to be put on the right path. (*Whistle sounds; engine revs up.*) But giving her the space to make her own decisions worked pretty well. (*smirking*) Isn't that how Celestia taught you? (*Twilight mulls this over a bit.*)
Twilight: You know… (*smiling, laughing a bit*) …I never thought about it. But I guess it is. (*The train starts to roll.*)
Spike: Maybe you're a better teacher than you thought.

(*Both glance in Starlight's direction; cut to her. She sees Sunburst waving to her from the platform and responds in kind, and she, Twilight, and Fluttershy trade warm smiles at the thought of this long, strange trip having come to a successful conclusion on multiple levels. Cut to a long shot of the Empire, the Heart's variegated beam of good vibes still shooting skyward as the train rolls away, and fade to black.*)

(*The usual closing theme does not accompany the credits. In its place is a portion of the background score, beginning with the presentation of Flurry to the crowd and ending with Sunburst' use of the Crystal of Purity to absorb their light. However, it has been transposed down one half-step. Majestic orchestral feel, strings/brass/light percussion, brisk 4; starting in D flat major and modulating to B major, with the final chord in A major.*)

THE GIFT OF THE MAUD PIE

Story by Josh Haber, Michael P. Fox, Wil Fox
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Produced by Devon Cody
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Supervising direction by Jim Miller
Directed by Denny Lu, Tim Stuby

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to a train rolling through the countryside during the day. Zoom in and cut to a couple of passengers reading inside. Pinkie Pie pops up between the pair, startling them and several other riders considerably as she hops about.*)

Pinkie: (*singsong, with growing excitement*) We're going to Manehattan, we're going to Manehattan, we're going to Manehattan!

(*She ends with a bend-over-backwards maneuver that brings her face to face with Rarity, who is using her magic to work a file across one hoof.*)

Rarity: (*nonchalantly*) Yes, yes, Manehattan. The height of sophistication, elegance, culture. (*She sets the file down and blows away some dust, then smiles.*) Since my boutique in Canterlot has been doing so nicely, it only makes sense for me to open one there as well. (*Up with the file for a moment; Pinkie bounds upright with a squeal.*)
Pinkie: We're almost there! Why doesn't your face look like this?

(*She demonstrates "this" by stretching her own cheeks back until every tooth is exposed in an ear-to-ear grin, adding another little squeal to drive the point home.*)

Rarity: Oh, Pinkie, dear, this is just a business trip for me. (*Pinkie rearranges her face into a frown.*) I need to scour the city for the most perfect location for my new shop. (*Another pull, and the frown becomes a bored one.*) And while it's lovely how excited you are, there's absolutely no chance of me getting swept into the—

(*Any further words are lost under a lung-bursting gasp as she catches sight of Manehattan's high rises passing by her window. Cut to just outside, the reflections playing across the glass as she stares raptly out with a new enthusiasm of her own.*)

Rarity: —energy! The beauty!

(*Long shot of the skyline, panning slowly along the bridge over its river or bay as the train chugs across it.*)

Rarity: (*voice over*) The majesty of the greatest city in all of Equestria!

(*Cut to just outside the glass doors of the train station. Rarity, visible through panes, flings them open with her magic and sighs contentedly as Pinkie catches up to her.*)

Rarity: This city is simply *amazing!*

(*She delivers this last word in a singsong tone, the camera zooming out quickly across the busy street in front of the station.*)

Rarity: It's just…everything…ever! (*Back to the pair.*)
Pinkie: And it's about to get "everything-ever"-er! (*pointing down the steps*) Because guess who I see!

(*All four eyes turn toward street level and lock onto her sister Maud, standing stolidly and solidly on the sidewalk to gaze back up at them.*)

Pinkie: (*hopping down steps, forming each letter with her body*) M! A! U! D! (*now next to her; close-up*) You know what that spells?
Maud: It spells "Maud."

(*Pinkie cranks off a big squeaky grin, and the camera zooms out quickly to show that Rarity has descended the steps as well. The trusty party cannon is now down here with them, its barrel pointed skyward, and Pinkie sets off a blast of confetti and streamers that catches every equine in the vicinity off guard. Every one, that is, except for her older sister.*)

Pinkie: (*jumping up, hanging in midair*) Maud, Maud, Maud! (*She touches down and pulls both Rarity and Maud into a hug.*) Yay!

(*Her goofy grin is met by a hesitant one from Rarity and not a flicker from Maud. Fade to black.*)

OPENING THEME

<u>Act One</u>

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of the horse-head sculpture that has appeared prominently atop the city skyline in past episodes. On the start of the next line, tilt down to the three mares making their way along a sidewalk. The cannon is out of sight.*)

Rarity: Oh, you Pie sisters have just about the sweetest family traditions. (*to Pinkie*) Every year, you set aside a special day to spend with each of your sisters?
Pinkie: Yep! I do separate trips with each one. (*Hop.*) And we make it super-fun by picking a different location every year.

(*A colt on a skateboard rolls by in the foreground; behind him, the view wipes to them walking past a theater.*)

Pinkie: We see the sights all day and then swap gifts at sunset. And since Maud's getting her rocktorate nearby, we figured this would be the perfect spot for PSSSD.

(*Pronounced as "pssst," but with a D sound on the end instead of a T. Misinterpreting it, Rarity leans in toward Pinkie in close-up.*)

Rarity: (*whispering*) Okay, what's the secret?
Pinkie: Huh?
Rarity: (*normal volume*) You just said "pssst." (*Stop; Pinkie puts a hoof to Rarity's chest.*)
Pinkie: No, silly. Not "pssst," "PSSSD."

(*She emphasizes the D to make the distinction clear.*)

Pinkie: P-S-S-S-D. Pie Sisters' Surprise Swap Day.

(*Throwing a foreleg out to her other side, she is more than a little surprised to find it resting on the shoulders of a rather large, beefy, grumpy stallion. He snorts out steam, and a longer shot picks out the fact that Maud is no longer walking with the pair. She removes her foreleg with a sheepish giggle; Rarity glances back the way they came, the camera panning slightly to stop on the third mare, who has taken an interest in a rack of postcards at a newsstand. Her pet rock Boulder rests on one upraised front hoof.*)

Rarity: Maud!
Maud: Boulder promised his cousin a postcard.

(*She lifts it a bit higher, as if to let it get a better view of the uppermost portion of the display.*)

Rarity: (*to Pinkie*) Well, I'll just leave you two to your PSSSD. (*Same emphasis that Pinkie used.*) And now I am off to scout possible locations for my new boutique.
Pinkie: Before you go, can I ask you a quick question?
Rarity: Oh, of course.
Pinkie: (*begging, throwing herself down to grab Rarity's foreleg*) *Will you please help me?!?!?*

(*The spectacle attracts the attention and silent disapproval of a couple of passersby.*)

Rarity: (*uneasily, singsong*) Only if you let go of my leg and stand up. (*Pinkie does so; the others disperse.*)

Pinkie: Every year, Maud's PSSSD gift always blows mine away, but this year is going to be different. For the first time, I'm finally getting her a gift that's as good as the one she always gets me.

(*She fishes around in her mane; cut to Rarity as a sheet of paper is pulled out and shown to her. During the next line, cut to her perspective and tilt down. It is an advertising flyer for various styles of small bags and topped by a graphic of a stone.*)

Pinkie: (*from o.s.*) There's a specialty store here in Manehattan that sells nothing but rock pouches. (*Cut to frame her and Rarity.*) A rock pouch would be perfect for Boulder, and I know Maud will love it. (*She pulls the ad back.*)
Rarity: Why, Pinkie! That really *is* the perfect gift for Maud!
Pinkie: (*tucking it into her mane*) I know, right? Problem is…

(*Cut to Maud, still giving Boulder the grand tour of the postcard rack. On the start of the next line, zoom out quickly to put Pinkie and Rarity in the fore.*)

Pinkie: …I still need to buy one and the store's downtown! (*Rarity puts a thoughtful hoof to her chin.*)
Rarity: Hmmm…and you want to get a pouch for Maud without ruining the surprise. (*An idea hits.*) Well, luckily for you, I know exactly what you should do. Why not sightsee on a path that leads right to the pouch store? That way, Maud won't get suspicious. I'll come with you and distract Maud so…
Pinkie: …I can sneak away to pick out a rock pouch! (*Gasp.*) And if you're coming with us, you can look at boutique locations along the way! (*Zoom out slightly; she bounces up off the sidewalk.*) IT'S THE PERFECT PLAN!!

(*As her hooves hit the concrete, those last two words echo up and down the block, prompting a few surprised/angry/annoyed reactions. Pinkie hastily claps her front hooves over her mouth until the closest onlookers have cleared out, then drops back to all fours.*)

Rarity: Y-Y-Yes, yes, let's not get too excited until you actually get a pouch for Maud.
Pinkie: Of course. Got it. Absolutely. (*Maud rejoins them, no longer carrying Boulder.*)
Maud: Nothing moved him.

(*After a long, silent moment, the pink pony breaks out in a gigantic smile and stretches out her forelegs to encircle Maud's neck.*)

Pinkie: Maud, I'm giving you the greatest PSSSD gift in the history of ever!

(*She ducks o.s. for a split second and comes back with her cannon, shooting a salvo over the street. Dissolve to a simplified Manehattan map with several key landmarks picked out; a red line traces a path through the streets from the train station to the shore, then becomes a dotted line as it goes into the water. It stops at the pony equivalent of the Statue of Liberty, whereupon the view dissolves to a long shot of the actual site and zooms in slowly.*)

Rarity: (*voice over, sighing blissfully*) What a spectacular view!

(*Close-up of the crown; Rarity and Maud are visible at the windows of its observation deck, and Maud is holding Boulder.*)

Rarity: You really *can* see everything from here.
Maud: Especially the glaciation of the sloping strata. It's breathtaking.

(*Zoom out quickly on the start of the next line to frame Pinkie rising through the air with the help of a bunch of balloons. Her cannon is a few yards below and getting a lift of its own.*)

Pinkie: But not half as breathtaking as the gift I'm giving you!

(*Fire. Dissolve to the map; a dotted line doubles back to the shore, and it goes solid again to trace out a path that stops at an image of Rarity's face. Another dissolve shows the three mares wedged into the extremely narrow aisle of an empty store. Boulder rests on the floor.*)

Rarity: I-It certainly is…ugh!…cozy, but this simply won't do. Working in a space this small would make me lose my mind!
Pinkie: Just like Maud's gonna lose her mind when she sees the gift I'm giving her!

(*The cannon's muzzle extends up into view behind the trio, and Rarity winces away from it in fearful anticipation. Cut to the street outside the store, which is jammed tightly between two other buildings; the door is open, but the block-shaking explosion hides the mares inside from view behind a cloud of confetti. Dissolve to the map, where the line snakes over to the pony counterpart of Rockefeller Center and its large outdoor ice skating rink, then to a long shot of the building. Tilt down slowly to the rink itself, populated by skaters and hockey players who clear out to give a view of Rarity and Maud approaching from opposite sides. The unicorn has donned a dress over a sparkly full-body leotard, but the earth pony is still wearing only her plain frock and is not carrying Boulder. Rarity takes a breath to speak, but she is cut off when Pinkie skids into view and stops, showering her with ice shavings kicked up by the blades. The peppy pony has donned a short-sleeved winter coat and knit cap. As she speaks, her cannon slides backwards into view and stops in front of her.*)

Pinkie: Whatever you were about to say isn't nearly as good as the gift I'm giving Maud!

(*Here comes another shot, whose recoil sends the artillery piece skidding back and o.s.*)

Maud: You'll be pleased with yours too.

(*She skates off and, as Rarity shakes herself clean, does a jump with a half-turn that brings her down to glide backwards on one hind leg. The fashionista's mouth falls open at this display of her prowess, but Pinkie just smiles and takes it all in stride. Dissolve to the map; now a pink*

crayon reaches into view and draws a path from the rink to an icon of a portly stallion dressed in a chef's white toque and apron—a restaurant.)

Rarity: (*voice over, crossly*) Pinkie, put down that crayon!

(*Cut to one side of an outdoor table at this establishment. Pinkie and Rarity are seated at it, Rarity having defrosted herself, and the map and crayon are being used by the curly-maned goofball. These two have changed out of their skating duds, and Maud will be seen likewise in a moment.*)

Rarity: The Cantering Cook isn't that kind of restaurant!

(*Pinkie hastily spits the crayon away; there is the sound of it splashing down somewhere o.s. Zoom out quickly to show all three at this table, one of several on a rooftop patio decorated with ivy-covered arches and strings of paper lanterns. Boulder rests in front of Maud, and the crayon has landed in another customer's bowl of soup.*)

Rarity: (*sighing happily*) A pony could get used to eating at places like this.
Maud: I know. It's the only restaurant in the city with nepheline syenite in their bathroom tiles.

(*Caught hopelessly off guard by this bit of geological esoteric, Rarity tries to hide her befuddlement behind a big grin and stammering giggle.*)

Rarity: Well, isn't that something? (*stilted*) You know what, Pinkie Pie? (*floating a menu up to block them both from Maud's view*) Uh…uh, maybe you could help me figure out what to order.

(*Cut to their side of the impromptu barrier. The next three lines are spoken in hushed tones.*)

Pinkie: We're so close to the pouch store! It's just a block away! I can practically smell it from here—if I knew what a pouch store smelled like.

(*Maud's side: Rarity risks a quick glance over the top edge, then ducks down. The gray mare's demeanor betrays no hint that she has caught on.*)

Rarity: (*from behind menu*) Okay. Remember the plan. (*Cut to her and Pinkie.*) I will stay here and distract Maud, while you go get a pouch.
Pinkie: Gotcha! (*Down goes the menu; she grins fixedly.*)
Rarity: (*stilted*) Oh, why, thank you for the kind assistance, Pinkie Pie. (*winking, poking her*) And now I know exactly what to order.
Pinkie: (*ditto*) You are very welcome, Rarity. (*backing away from table*) Now pardon me whilst I go wash my hooves.

(*She bumps into a unicorn stallion waiter, knocking down both him and the covered tray of food he is carrying in his magic, and completely freaks out.*)

Pinkie: Sorry!

(*And with that, she bugs out fast enough to bash a pony-shaped hole through the double doors leading into the kitchen. The customer who got the crayon in his soup, also a unicorn stallion, levitates it out with some consternation. Cut to a close-up of Maud and zoom out slightly as Rarity leans across to get a look at Boulder.*)

Rarity: So, Maud— (*pointing at it*) —that Boulder of yours is such an interesting… (*Clear throat.*) …character. You must tell me—how did the two of you first meet? (*Grin.*)
Maud: It was a dark and stormy night. (*Cut to Rarity; she continues o.s.*) Little did I know that my life was about to change forever.

(*The grin becomes noticeably strained as its wearer realizes that she is about to get a lot more than she bargained for. Dissolve to the map, a red line tracing from the Cantering Cook to a drawstring pouch icon—the store whose ad Pinkie showed to Rarity earlier. It shakes to the sound of a ringing cash register, and another dissolve brings up a close-up of a purple pouch with yellow stars/dots and trim on display. A gasp from the o.s. Pinkie; zoom out to put the camera just inside the store window, with her peering at the item from the sidewalk. Her next words are muffled slightly by the glass, and she briefly mashes her face against it as she speaks.*)

Pinkie: Look at that hand-stitched, ten-thousand-thread-count, velvet-lined rock pouch! Maud will love it! I need it!

(*Out on the sidewalk. This pouch is one of many up for sale, and there is a small sign hanging on the door. She slides over her and tries to enter, only to end up mashed spreadeagle against its surface when it fails to open. An instant later she is up on her hooves.*)

Pinkie: Hm. Must be stuck.

(*Only now does she take notice of the sign, and she leans in to run a critical eye over the text.*)

Pinkie: (*reading*) "Took a sudden vacation to Canterlot with my grand-niece. Back in a few moons." (*small voice*) Oh, no. (*Straighten up; panic grows.*) Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no!

(*She gets herself under a vague semblance of control.*)

Pinkie: Well, maybe, just maybe, he's already back from vacation and just forgot to take the sign down.

(*The second half of this line is delivered up close to a couple of passersby, first a filly whose mother does not approve of the interruption, then a mare who gallops off in fright. Pinkie has dropped to her haunches by this point; cut to inside the store, the camera pointing out through the door's glass panel as she stands up to pound on it with enough force to shake the shelves.*)

Pinkie: (*muffled by glass*) Hello, Mr. Pouch Store Owner! I'd love to hear all about your sudden vacation to Canterlot with your grand-niece while buying a pouch for my sister, please!

(*During this line, cut to the sidewalk, where the mother and daughter have flagged down a police officer, an earth pony mare, and the mother is telling her of the incident. The muffled tone ends at this change of camera angle. The officer glances toward the store, as do a couple of passing stallions; from here, cut to Pinkie and zoom out as she steps partly into view.*)

Officer: Miss! (*Pinkie turns toward her…*) The store's clearly closed. (*…and leans over.*)
Pinkie: But it can't be! It just can't be! If I can't get that pouch, then not only am I not getting my sister the greatest present in the history of PSSSD— (*shaking her*) —but now I have no PSSSD present for my sister at all!

(*Her ears droop in brain-crushing terror before the view snaps to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to the kitchen entrance of the Cantering Cook. The doors have been repaired, and the stallion with the soup has set Pinkie's crayon aside and is enjoying his meal again. Out comes the waiter she knocked out, floating a fresh tray and looking rather out of sorts. On the start of the next line, pan to Rarity and Maud still at their table.*)

Maud: And Boulder's been by my side ever since.
Rarity: (*woodenly*) Wow. What a surprisingly suspenseful and compelling story. I completely get what you see in him now. (*She gasps as Pinkie trudges over, then works up a big smile.*) Pinkie Pie! You're back! (*Sit.*) Oh, your hooves must be sparkling clean!
Pinkie: Huh?…Oh, right.

(*Setting her knees on the table edge, she props her head on her front hooves and lets out a loud groan. Maud stares impassively, while Rarity smiles and addresses herself o.s.*)

Rarity: *Garçon*! (*Longer shot; she is calling the waiter.*) One super-deluxe, two-mile-high, hot fudge sundae, stat!

(*He hurries toward the kitchen, darts back a moment later, and uses his field to slam the requested dessert onto the table. It is a monstrosity of ice cream, whipped cream, and chocolate sauce, studded with cherries and whole unpeeled bananas, and it stands several feet tall in a bowl as wide as the table. Just as with the menu dodge, Pinkie and Rarity take advantage of it for a conference.*)

Rarity: (*hushed*) What happened? Did you get a pouch for Maud? (*grabbing Pinkie's cheeks*) Tell me everything!

(*As soon as she lets go, the party planner sucks in every molecule of air her lungs will hold, then several hundred trillion more on top of that, and opens the floodgates.*)

Pinkie: (*rapid fire*) The door to the rock pouch store was locked because the owner's on a sudden vacation to Canterlot with his grand-niece for a few moons, and so there's no way I can get the perfect present for Maud and now I don't have any present for her at all, so it'll be the worst Pie Sisters' Surprise Swap Day ever!

(*With the torrent of words at an end, she hitches in a huge breath and buries her face in the colossal sundae. The mound of sugary goodness does very little to muffle the ensuing sobs. Rarity glances around the periphery, sees Maud deadpan as always, and throws her a placating little grin before giving Pinkie's head a telekinetic yank out of the ice cream. The crying stops.*)

Rarity: Oh, not to worry, dear. I'll just have to help you find a new present for Maud. We have plenty of time before your gift exchange at sunset, and all of Manehattan to explore. We're bound to find something Maud would like, maybe even more than a rock pouch.
Pinkie: (*smiling*) You're right! Thanks, Rarity!

(*Dissolve to an extreme close-up of a stretch of piano keys A couple of hooves reach into view from above to step on these, causing them to light up and play the opening bars of the show's theme. The relative scale indicates that this is a giant instrument, and a longer shot reveals that it is a keyboard laid on the floor of a toy store. A stallion and filly are playing the music, but get knocked down when Pinkie slides across on her hocks. She has cleaned herself up.*)

Rarity: (*from o.s.*) Maud…

(*Pan to these two, standing near a group of giant stuffed animals. Maud has put Boulder away.*)

Rarity: …I can't help but notice you're staring at that marvelous giraffe. I was just wondering—any chance you could see yourself with it?
Maud: Only if I had a mirror.

(*The unicorn uses a fixed grin to hide her disbelief at the earth pony's literal-mindedness. A rain of gems tumbles over the screen, the view wiping behind them to show them in a jewelry store. The designer has donned a dark gray dress, pearl necklace, and tiara and re-styled her mane.*)

Rarity: Now, Maud… (*magically lifting her necklace higher*) …I know you're a big fan of rocks. So get your camera ready—

(*Zoom out to frame the entire showroom, filled with all manner of expensive baubles in display cases that have caught Pinkie's attention. Rarity's outfit can be seen to include opera gloves now. As she continues, the camera cuts to close-ups of various merchandise.*)

Rarity: —because these are the most spectacular rocks in all of Manehattan! (*Cut to within one case, pointing out at Rarity and Maud.*) Surely there must be something here that catches your eye.

(*As a fully bedecked Pinkie leans in close, her sister pulls Boulder out and holds it up to one ear for a moment, as if listening to it whisper. She lowers it before speaking.*)

Maud: (*hushed*) Boulder says they're all too…stuck-up.

(*Rarity rolls her eyes in mild disgust at this assessment. Dissolve to a close-up of a string of pennants stretched overhead and tilt down to ground level. They span the air above a busy expanse of outdoor market stalls. Maud stands in the foreground, holding Boulder and not doing much of anything else until Rarity leaps into view some distance back and gives a shrill whistle. Once all eyes turn toward her, the camera cuts to a slow pan across Rarity's figure—hooves planted wide, grim determination writ large on her face, her finery and outfit gone and her mane back to its usual style.*)

Rarity: All right. You and me, Maud— (*Close-up.*) —you and me.

(*The view narrows to a horizontal slit that frames her narrowed blue eyes, and a similar transition picks out Maud's half-lidded blue-green ones. She has put Boulder away again. Fullscreen: the camera rests just behind the latter, pointed down the aisle toward Rarity.*)

Rarity: What do you think about…this? Or this? Or this?

(*Each "this" is accompanied by her dash to a stall and telekinetic showing of a different item, zigzagging toward Maud. The camera then cuts to a close-up of the unflappable mare, whose eyes just flick back and forth to follow the items being flung about.*)

Rarity: (*from o.s.*) Or this? Or this? Or this? Or this? (*Extreme close-up.*) This? This? This? This? This? This? This? This? This?

(*She speeds up into a machine-gun tempo, the rattle of flying objects matching her for a while before dying out. Maud's eyes turn toward the ground at this point.*)

Maud: I like…that.

(*Cut to frame both. Rarity has collapsed at her hooves, in front of a mountain of assorted items.*)

Rarity: (*frantically, snapping upright, hooves to Maud's chest*) What is it? You have to tell me! (*floating a scooter out*) Was it this bike?

(*Close-up of Maud. Each named item is presented in quick succession.*)

Rarity: (*from o.s.*) This lamp? This grappling hook? (*She zips into view.*) What do you like?

Maud: (*pointing*) I like that fissure in the sidewalk.

(*Blue eyes turn toward the ground; cut to a close-up of the crack in question, with a few tufts of grass growing through.*)

Maud: (*leaning down to it*) It's an elegant example of thermal expansion and soil settlement.

(*By the time she stands upright, two things have happened. One, she has a camera at the ready, attached to a holder around her neck, and she snaps a picture. Two, Rarity looks about one good push away from a full-scale major mental malfunction. The glare from the camera flash clears to give an extreme close-up of the crazed blue eyes, and Rarity backs away to present her contorted face in vivid detail. Incoherent mumblings escape her lips and she claps front hooves to temples as a steam whistle builds in pitch within her mind. Finally she manages to get a word out.*)

Rarity: *WHAT?!?!?* (*Maud walks off, her camera packed away.*) But I—all of this, and she likes a *crack?!?*

(*She keels over in a faint just before Pinkie sticks her head out of the mass of discards.*)

Pinkie: Did she like anything? (*Rarity stands up.*)
Rarity: (*hushed*) That sister of yours is simply impossible to shop for! There's nothing she needs or wants!
Maud: (*from o.s., calling out*) Boulder! (*Cut to her, hoof cupped to mouth.*) Boulder! (*Pinkie and Rarity look her way.*) Where'd you run off to? (*Pause; she looks off to one side.*) There you are.

(*Cut to a close-up of the missing stone, on a counter with several silly-faced pet rocks. On the start of the next line, she reaches into view to scoop it up and the camera pans slightly to frame her.*)

Maud: Sure wish I had something to carry you around in.

(*Now it is Pinkie's turn to flip her lid, bounding up out of the junk pile and hanging in midair as items go flying in all directions.*)

Pinkie: A ROCK POUCH WAS THE PERFECT GIFT FOR MAUD!! (*She comes down to earth with a moan.*) And I know she would've loved the one I saw in the window! It had double stitching, a red drawstring—
Rarity: (*looking away, smiling*) —and ochre-flecked velvet lining with reinforced triple-crosshatched seams?
Pinkie: (*glumly, nodding*) Yep. That's the pouch.

(*The unicorn's smile has become a grin. It takes a second for her words to sink in through the layers of magenta mane and pink–coated skull.*)

Pinkie: Wait. How'd you know?

Rarity: (*pointing*) Because I'm looking at one just like it!

(*The lighter blue eyes pop in surprise. Cut to just behind the pair and zoom in quickly on a figure at the far end of the aisle, moving at a leisurely pace along the sidewalk. Light yellow earth pony stallion; unshaven; two-tone gray slicked-back mane and short tail; blue eyes; gold tooth, medallion, and ear stud; short-sleeved reddish-pink shirt; brown belt; cutie mark of several gold coins. The very pouch that Pinkie noted in the store window is hooked onto the belt like a saddlebag, the camera cutting to a close-up of it and then back to Pinkie and Rarity.*)

Rarity: Maybe if you catch up with him, you could ask—

(*The rest of the suggestion dies on her lips as the pouch hunter disappears in a pink blur and whips over to intercept the stallion.*)

Pinkie: Excuse me, sir. (*bending to eye the pouch*) I couldn't help but notice your nifty rock pouch. Is there any chance you'd be willing to part with it? (*Straighten up partway.*) I really need it. Like, really, really, *really!*

(*"Goldie" speaks in the manner of a sleazy street hustler.*)

Goldie: So, uh, let me get this straight. (*holding pouch up*) You, uh, really, really need this pouch, huh?
Pinkie: I believe I said "really, really, *really.*" (*She stands up to full height.*)
Goldie: (*bouncing it on hoof*) Well, you know, pouches like this are really hard to come by these days. (*It goes back on the belt.*) But I might be able to part with it—for the right price.
Pinkie: (*eagerly*) So you'll sell it to me, and I'll finally be able to give my sister the perfect Pie Sisters' Surprise Swap Day present? (*hopping in place*) Ooh, thank you, thank you, thank you!

(*She demonstrates her gratitude by wheeling the party cannon into view and letting him have it point-blank.*)

Goldie: (*shrewdly*) Hmmm!

(*Cut to inside the barrel, the camera pointing toward the muzzle as he peers in.*)

Goldie: (*echoing slightly*) That's one sweet party cannon you got there! (*Outside; he removes the pouch from his belt.*) Tell you what. I'd be more than happy to give you the pouch for the low, low price of…that cannon.

(*At the mention of those last two words, Pinkie's face twists into a paroxysm of horror and she hugs the firing piece reflexively to herself.*)

Pinkie: My…my…party cannon? (*He takes a step closer.*)

Goldie: Well, if you really want to give that sister of yours the perfect present— (*Her eyes go big and shiny; face goes slack.*) —then you'll have to give up your party cannon. (*He backs up o.s.*) So, what do you say? (*Cut to him, holding the pouch.*) The pouch for the cannon.

(*He sneers, knowing that he has his target hopelessly over a barrel, and his gold tooth gives off a sinister little gleam. Pinkie's chin quivers like a jackhammer, her teeth threatening to chew her lower lip to shreds. Snap to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of the sidewalk crack that fascinated Maud so much.*)

Maud: (*from o.s., pointing at it*) Do you see the exposed chalcedony in the fissure?

(*Cut to her, hunched down over the fault, and a thoroughly bemused Rarity.*)

Rarity: (*looking closer, hesitantly*) Probably? (*Zoom out as a thoroughly dispirited Pinkie joins them.*)
Pinkie: Whatcha guys looking at?
Rarity: (*sighing with relief*) You're back! (*to Maud*) Darling, I want to get one more picture of you with that astounding fissure in the sidewalk. (*floating up camera*) And the inspiration just struck me for the perfect shot! Uh, be a dear and…go stand behind it.

(*The geology nut takes up the indicated position, accompanied by a zoom out as Rarity brings the camera up to her eye.*)

Rarity: Okay! Now just, uh, back up a little bit. (*Maud does so; another zoom out.*) Little more. (*Again; cut to Rarity.*) And now just a little, eh…twenty yards more.

(*Cut to Maud, who complies with this request; she is nearly to the sidewalk at the other end of the row of stalls.*)

Rarity: (*from o.s.*) Perfect! (*Long shot of all three.*) Hold that pose! I think we've found your new holiday card!

(*Leaving the camera hanging in midair, she turns to her downhearted fellow traveler.*)

Rarity: (*hushed*) So, how did it go? Tell me, tell me, tell me!
Pinkie: Well, I got the rock pouch for Maud, and…that's really the only thing that matters.
Rarity: (*normal volume, touching Pinkie's shoulder*) Oh, I am so glad to hear that! She's going to absolutely love it! (*Pinkie turns away and rests her forelegs on a counter.*)
Pinkie: Yep.
Rarity: (*dryly*) "Yep"? That's it? You got your sister the greatest PSSSD present in the history of ever, and all you have to say is "yep"?

Pinkie: Yep.
Rarity: But…you're Pinkie Pie. You're supposed to be all…

(*The following is delivered in her best impression of the pink wacko, trotting energetically in place and bouncing wildly about like a four-legged Superball.*)

Rarity: …"Oh, I'm so excited I got the rock pouch! And I know I say 'excited' a lot when I'm actually just kind of excited, but this time I'm really excited about how excited I am about being this excited over the rock pouch!" (*Normal tone, all four hooves back on the ground.*) And then you fire off your party cannon. (*Pause.*) Say, where *is* your cannon? (*Another pause; she gasps sharply.*) Did you lose it? (*pulling Pinkie around to face her*) Is your party cannon lost somewhere in the big city?
Pinkie: Well…I wouldn't say it's lost. (*turning away*) I mean, I know where it is, it's just… (*She trails off into a crushed sigh.*)
Rarity: I can clearly see that something's bothering you, and I want to help. But I can't help you unless you tell me what the problem is.
Pinkie: Oh, there's no problem. It just turns out that the going rate for a rock pouch in Manehattan is one party cannon. Who knew? (*Rarity's eyes pop at this bit of news.*)
Rarity: *You gave away your cannon?!?* But—but that party cannon is your everything! You absolutely love that cannon! (*turning Pinkie to face her*) How could you possibly part with something that means so much to you?

(*The gloomy-faced trader pushes the white hoof down from her cheek.*)

Pinkie: (*smiling sadly*) Well, I finally got Maud a gift that's just as good as the one she always gets me. And that's all that really matters.
Rarity: Well, I guess I understand—maybe.
Pinkie: (*brightening a bit*) Maud's going to be so excited. (*rising to hind legs*) I can't wait to see the look on her face when she sees the pouch.

(*Zoom out slightly as the older sister joins them, carrying Boulder.*)

Maud: I know. The camera loves Boulder.

(*Pinkie and Rarity trade a smile. Wipe to a pan through a park, in which ponies are amusing themselves in various ways, including rides on the swan-shaped boats floating along a stream that runs through the green space. The three mares have spread a picnic blanket at the bank and are sitting on it; both Boulder and Maud's camera have been put away, and Pinkie is back to her happy self. Stop on them.*)

Rarity: After the day we've had, I'm probably looking forward to the swap part of the Pie Sisters' Surprise Swap Day even more than the two of you. (*Giggle.*) And I'm not even a Pie sister. (*to each in turn*) I can't wait one more second to see the wonderful gifts you've gotten each other!

Pinkie: Well, you're going to have to. We don't just swap, silly. We always sing the Pie Sisters' Surprise Swap Day Song first. (*Rarity's smile slips a bit.*) Ready, Maud?
Maud: As I'll ever be.

Cheerful piano melody with cymbal/snare drum, brisk 4 (C major)

Pinkie: (*trotting behind Maud*) It's the Pie Sisters' Swap Day Song

Song ends

(*She gestures toward her sister; zoom in on the latter.*)

Maud: Hey.
Pinkie: Okay, time to swap presents!

(*Reaching out of view, she brings back a box wrapped in striped paper that bears a pattern of little Maud-faces. This is set down on the blanket in front of Rarity, and Maud counters with a tall cylindrical gift wrapped in plain brown paper and tied with twine. Each sister then picks up the gift meant for her, and Pinkie stands up to eye hers critically.*)

Pinkie: Hmmm…

(*Look at it high and low, pick it up, give it an experimental shake; meanwhile; Maud just gives hers the barest nudge. Rarity's anticipation yields to apprehension as she glances from one side to the other, seeing Pinkie run her tongue down the full length of her gift that is now lying on its side. When the stress finally gets too much, Rarity voices a rising growl and the camera zooms out quickly from an extreme close-up of her face to frame all three. Pinkie's gift is upright again.*)

Rarity: JUST OPEN THEM ALREADY!!

(*Maud goes first, tearing off the paper and pulling out the treasured pouch.*)

Maud: Thanks.
Pinkie: (*tearing up*) I knew you'd love it! It was all worth it! Look how happy she is!

(*Cut to the stoic sister on the end of this; she places Boulder into the pouch.*)

Pinkie: (*to Rarity*) And I couldn't have done it without you. (*They embrace.*) Thank you, Rarity.

(*The tender moment ends abruptly when she shoves the unicorn aside.*)

Pinkie: Okay, time to open your present to me!

(*One deft motion strips away the paper and twine, exposing a cardboard canister with a lid on its upper end. She pops this off and squinches one eye shut to peek inside, then lets both eyes run over the contents with a surprised little yelp.*)

Pinkie: You did it again! You got me the best present in the history of PSSSD! (*Gasp; Rarity looks in, clearly not catching on.*) This is perfect! This is amazing! (*trotting/jumping in place*) This is incredible! I love it, I love it, I love it!

(*Once she settles back to all fours, she too registers some confusion.*)

Pinkie: What is it?
Maud: It's little pieces of cupcake-scented paper. You know—

(*Close-up of the open container, showing the multicolored bits inside.*)

Maud: (*from o.s.*) —confetti, for your cannon. (*Pinkie tears up all over again at the sight.*)
Pinkie: (*wiping eyes*) Maud, you know me so well. (*She stands up…*) You really are the most thoughtful gift-giver in the world! (*…and bounds across to deliver a monster hug.*) I'm gonna love it five-ever! That's even longer than forever.

(*Pronounced with emphasis on the first syllable to make the numerical pun. The hug tightens a notch, with an ecstatic little hum for good measure, and Rarity cannot help but smile warmly at the sisters. Dissolve to a stretch of unoccupied park land; Rarity and Maud walk into view, the latter with her new pouch hooked on her belt, and look upward.*)

Rarity: You're right.

(*Zoom out quickly to a long shot. They have arrived at a collection of boulders half-buried in the ground, surrounding a massive monolith that resembles a mountain summit flipped over and rammed into the grass at an angle.*)

Rarity: That *is* impressive. But it's no fissure in the sidewalk.

(*In close-up, Maud leans down with Boulder in her teeth and sets it on the nearest rock.*)

Maud: Play nice.
Rarity: Oh, I'm so relieved to see that you like the pouch, especially considering what Pinkie Pie had to give up for it.

(*Realizing that she has just spilled part of her friend's secret, she sucks in a sharp gasp.*)

Rarity: Oh! (*Hoof to mouth.*)
Maud: What?

Rarity: (*hastily*) I mean, forget I said that. I mean, I-I'm-I'm-I'm glad to see that you like the pouch. You can remember that part. Just forget the second part. You know, the—the second part where I said that Pinkie Pie had to give something up and—

(*This time, she cuts off her indiscretion with a shocked yelp and shudder.*)

Rarity: (*hastily*) I should just stop talking now. Nothing!

(*She catches her lower lip in her teeth as Pinkie's laugh from o.s. wipes the tension away, and the party mare bounds into view to scatter confetti from her canister.*)

Pinkie: Yay! I love my sister and my new confetti! (*Off she goes.*)
Maud: (*to Rarity*) Why isn't she using her party cannon?

(*The mare on the wrong end of this question stammers a bit, trying to think of a way out, and finds one by scraping a front hoof over the dirt to sully it.*)

Rarity: (*stilted*) Ooh, wow! Look how filthy my hooves are! I really should go wash them.

(*Off she goes at a full gallop away from Maud, the camera following—only to stop dead upon finding the unsmiling mare standing in her way.*)

Maud: Where's her cannon?
Rarity: (*backing fearfully away*) No, no. Stop…stop giving me that look. I can't take it!

(*Cut to a close-up of Maud on the end of this; "that look" is no different from her usual flat expression. Rarity promptly caves in with a pained moan.*)

Rarity: (*rapid fire*) Pinkie Pie feels badly that the gifts that she always gives you are never as good as the ones that you give her!
Maud: What?
Rarity: (*more normal cadence*) That's why she was willing to give up her party cannon for the pouch! (*Maud glances at it.*)
Maud: She gave up her party cannon?

(*A look behind herself leads into a quick pan that stops on Pinkie, sitting on her haunches in the grass and halfheartedly taking a pinch of confetti to blow off her hoof.*)

Rarity: (*from o.s., voice raised*) Pinkie Pie! (*Pinkie looks up; cut to a long shot of Rarity and Maud.*) You might want to come over here for a second!

(*Her front hoof is clean now. The cannon-free mare trots across, a knowing smile on her face and no longer toting the confetti container.*)

Pinkie: I think I know what this is about. You guys want to ride the swans. Well, there's swan *boats*— (*winking*) —but there *are* real swans here we can ri—

(*One older sister gets into her face, close enough to touch noses with her.*)

Maud: You gave away your party cannon?

(*One younger sister averts her eyes to look at Rarity, standing a few paces back and doing her best to keep her dignity.*)

Rarity: She broke me.

(*If there is any hint of disapproval on the gray face, it is a model of subtlety and imperceptibility.*)

Pinkie: (*stammering*) It's just…it's just…it's just…you always give better gifts than me! That's why I had to get you the perfect gift.

(*Maud lets her head dip and walks off as Rarity returns.*)

Pinkie: (*calling after Maud*) Are your hooves dirty?

(*Cut to behind the aspiring rock scientist, who keeps moving steadily away from the camera along the path.*)

Pinkie: (*from o.s., shrilly*) *Where are you going?!?* (*Stop; glance over shoulder.*)
Maud: To get your cannon back.

(*Off she goes, leaving the other two to trade hopelessly puzzled glances and trot after her. Dissolve to a stretch of the skyline, the sky having deepened into late afternoon, and tilt down to street level. Maud walks point for the trio on the sidewalk, but stops after a few steps; the others follow suit.*)

Maud: (*pointing across street*) There.

(*Pan quickly to Goldie on the opposite side, covetously running a polishing cloth over the cannon barrel, and zoom in to a close-up.*)

Pinkie: (*from o.s.*) Yep, that sure is the pony I got the pouch from. (*The three again.*)
Rarity: That's amazing! (*to Maud*) How did you know where he'd be?
Maud: Maud Sense. (*Rarity is left totally bewildered as she crosses the street.*)
Pinkie: (*to Rarity*) Runs in the family.

(*As the sleazy stallion continues his polishing job, one gray hoof taps his rump to get his attention. He shoots an irritated glare behind himself and spots Maud.*)

Maud: (*holding up pouch*) I'd like to return this pouch for my sister's party cannon, please.
Goldie: Sorry, missy. All sales are final.

(*The camera pans to follow him as he trundles the device along the sidewalk—but it and he stop short upon finding the implacable mare now standing right in front of him at the street corner.*)

Maud: (*a tiny fraction more insistently*) I'd like to return this pouch for my sister's party cannon, please.
Rarity: (*stepping into view, playing along*) Oh, I've never seen her like this. (*pointing toward Maud*) Look at the fire in her eyes! (*Cut to Maud; she continues o.s.*) You'd better do what she says! (*Back to her and Goldie.*)
Goldie: (*confused*) "Fire in her eyes"?

(*The drama queen utters a panicked little squeak and clutches at him for protection.*)

Rarity: Did she just clench her jaw? I think she clenched her jaw!
Goldie: I didn't see. (*A slow blink from Maud sets her off all over again.*)
Rarity: Oh, no! When she clenches her jaw— (*ominously, turning his face to her*) *—you know what that means!*
Goldie: (*scared*) W-What? What's it mean? (*She lets go.*)
Rarity: Trust me, you do not want to know!
Maud: I'd like to return this pouch.
Goldie: (*stammering, making the trade*) Here! Take it! Take it! Please! (*He hunches down, covering his eyes and sweating.*) Just relax that jaw of yours and turn down that fire in your eyes!

(*The gibbering, sobbing hustler is in no position to see either Rarity's satisfied smile or Pinkie's hopping, bubbly approach. Dissolve to a different sidewalk on which Maud is walking; the party cannon rolls up next to her, ridden by Pinkie. Goldie's polishing cloth, which he left on the barrel, has been discarded.*)

Pinkie: Maud! (*hugging cannon*) I'm so happy you got me my party cannon back! (*firing*) Yay!

(*The recoil has tossed her into the air, where she hangs for a moment, suddenly worried.*)

Pinkie: Uh-oh. I just realized something. (*She lands.*) 'Cause you gave back the pouch for my cannon, this is now the second gift you've gotten me today— (*Close-up.*) —and it's something I really, really wanted. (*Smile.*) You did it again. Your gifts are always better than mine. Next year I'm gonna have to really step it up and— (*A gray hoof corks her mouth.*)
Maud: (*from o.s.*) Pinkie— (*Cut to frame both.*) —gift-giving isn't a competition. (*She takes the hoof away.*) It's an expression of love, and you always make sure to give your gifts with lots of love. That's why I'll always love them— (*Pinkie smiles.*) —and you, five-ever. That's even longer than forever.

(*Same "forever" pronunciation that Pinkie used in the park. Maud's mouth curves up into a faint smile, which is all the prompting Pinkie needs to voice a contented little squeal and wrap her up in a hug. Here comes Rarity.*)

Pinkie: There you are! You've sure been washing your hooves for a long time. We've got a train to catch here!
Rarity: I know, but there is one more sight you two simply must see before we leave.

(*Dissolve to the map on which the trio's previous journeys had been charted out. The Rarity-face icon has been crossed out—a rejection of the cramped shop as a location for her new boutique—but a second one has appeared between the shore and the park. A red line traces to it from a nearby intersection as the camera zooms in, and the view then dissolves to a close-up of the entrepreneur standing before a locked wrought-iron gate set in a stone archway. The door behind it, and the windows to either side, have been boarded up.*)

Rarity: *Voilà*! Welcome to the future home of…Rarity for You! What do you think of the place? Is this the right location?

(*Cut to Pinkie and Maud, looking on and without the party cannon in evidence.*)

Rarity: (*nervously, leaning toward them*) Did I pick a good spot?
Maud: No.

(*The white face falls at this judgment; cut to a long shot of the mares. The building in question has three stories and stands on a block marked with billboards advertising jewelry and hats. A second door, positioned near one corner, has not been blocked off. The sun has dipped a little farther behind the rooftops.*)

Maud: You picked the perfect spot. (*Close-up of them, Rarity now grinning proudly.*)
Pinkie: You know, I think this might be my favorite PSSSD ever! But I can't wait until next year's PSSSDWR! (*Grin.*)

(*The sounds of these last two letters are individually appended to the pronunciation of "PSSSD."*)

Rarity: (*puzzled*) Wait. "PSSSDWR"? What's that?
Pinkie: P-S-S-S-D-W-R. It's a new tradition that Maud and I came up with. (*to her*) Pie Sisters' Surprise Swap Day…
Maud: …with Rarity.
Rarity: Ooh! (*Giggle; tear up briefly.*) Why, that's the sweetest… (*Panic takes hold.*) …oh, no. (*Back away hurriedly.*) Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no. I know how good you two are at giving gifts. I'm going to have to get you both something amazing— (*hooves to temples*) —and I only have a year to do it!
Pinkie: (*crossing to her, lifting her chin*) Oh, Rarity, it doesn't matter what you get us. (*They embrace.*) As long as you give your gift with love, it'll be perfect.

(*She tips a wink to her sister, who returns it in her typical unhurried fashion, and Rarity sighs contentedly as the two pull apart.*)

Rarity: Why, thank you, Pinkie.
Pinkie: Buuuut now that you mention it…

(*And off she goes to fetch the shooting iron in an instant.*)

Pinkie: …I *could* use more confetti for my party cannon. (*winking at Maud*) You wouldn't believe how much of that stuff I go through in a day.

(*One final burst rings out, showering the colorful bits over the Manehattan city block at sunset, and the view fades to black.*)

(*The usual closing theme does not accompany the credits. In its place is an extended portion of the background score, heard during the map-tracing journey from the ice skating rink to the Cantering Cook. Lush, gentle orchestral melody with woodwinds/strings and very light percussion; leisurely 4; played twice, first in G major and then in E flat major.*)

ON YOUR MARKS

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to the exterior of the Cutie Mark Crusaders' clubhouse during the late afternoon. Zoom in slowly to the sound of a gavel banging within.*)

Apple Bloom: (*from inside*) Hear ye, hear ye! (*Close-up of her at the lectern inside.*) The first post-cutie-mark meetin' of the Cutie Mark Crusaders is now in session!

(*Her big grin slips into bewilderment as the camera zooms out to frame her two best buddies rapturously regarding their own hard-earned cutie marks—Scootaloo standing, Sweetie Belle sitting on her haunches. After a few seconds' worth of indignant glaring, she clears her throat loudly to snap them out of it. The attempt is only half-successful, though; Sweetie whips her head up, while Scootaloo turns briefly in place to keep an eye on her own haunch.*)

Sweetie: O-Oh! I'm sorry, Apple Bloom. (*dreamily, standing up*) I was distracted by the radiance of my cutie mark. Uh, did you say something?
Scootaloo: (*same tone, crossing to lectern*) I mean, it's pretty amazing how the colors just pop off your flank. It's kinda hard to look aw— (*She runs headfirst into it.*)
Bloom: Look. I know our cutie marks are amazing, but…is that all we're gonna do now? (*She hops out from behind.*) Just spend our days starin' down at our own flanks?
Sweetie: (*sighing sadly*) I guess not.

(*The blissful expression that steals across her face, and the turn of her eyes toward her own haunch, give the lie to her words. Across the room, Scootaloo has remained firmly in her reverie.*)

Scootaloo: (*buzzing wings, circling again*) Yeah, I suppose that could get real boring.

(*The yellow filly finally succumbs to the shared vibe.*)

Bloom: Yeah.

(*And then she kicks herself out of it with a vigorous head shake.*)

Bloom: This is ridiculous! We need to go out and do somethin'! (*The others come around.*)
Sweetie: Wow! You're right! (*Close-up of Bloom.*)
Scootaloo: (*crossing to her*) Yeah! We need to go try new stuff like we used to!
Bloom: Exactly!
Sweetie: (*from o.s.*) Like square dancing!

(*Cut to her, now decked out in a sparkly cowgirl outfit with boots on all four hooves. She tries out a few steps and tips a wink to the camera.*)

Scootaloo: (*from o.s.*) Or mountain climbing!

(*Pan quickly to her, sporting a short-sleeved shirt, lederhosen, and a Tyrolean hat as she lets go with a sonorous yodel. On the start of the next line, a second pan shifts the view to Bloom, clad in a mash-up of the two outfits: Scootaloo's shirt and lederhosen shoulder straps, Sweetie's skirt, and headwear with the Tyrolean's crown and the cowboy's brim in place of her bow. She wears boots on only her hind legs.*)

Bloom: Or square dancin' on the mountain we just climbed!

(*She proceeds to demonstrate both activities at once by dancing and yodeling; when she finishes with a wink, the other two jump over to her.*)

Crusaders: Yeah!
Bloom: And the more things we try, the more chances we'll have to finally get our cutie marks! (*hurrying off*) Come on!

(*The other two stay put, aiming thoroughly puzzled looks after her and then at each other.*)

Sweetie: Um… (*Bloom stops at the door.*) …Apple Bloom?

(*As the very weirdly dressed filly pulls the door partway open, Scootaloo and Sweetie pull their clothing far enough back to expose the shields emblazoned on their haunches. Their expressions might best be translated as "are you <u>that</u> flipping dumb?" She catches the hint, drags her skirt up to get a good look at her own mark, and lets a supremely embarrassed grin and blush stand as her response. Fade to black.*)

OPENING THEME

<u>Act One</u>

(*Opening shot: fade in to a slow tilt down the length of a sheet tacked up on the wall inside the clubhouse. It is the one seen at the start of "Crusaders of the Lost Mark," covered with drawings of activities that have all been crossed out—failed past attempts at earning their marks.*)

Bloom: (*from o.s.*) Wow. Did we really only ever do things just to get our cutie marks?

(*Cut to the trio, now sitting on their haunches and free of their outfits. Bloom's bow is back in her usual place.*)

Sweetie: I don't know. Maybe?
Scootaloo: Aw, come on. We did lotsa stuff that didn't have anything to do with getting a cutie mark.
Sweetie: Of course we did.
Bloom: Absolutely!

(*All three begin to think back, the view undergoing a wavering dissolve to a white-ringed, softly focused flashback of Bloom's very brief foray into hang-gliding during "Call of the Cutie." A flash, and the Crusaders stand over the wreckage of Fluttershy's table in "Stare Master," hammers in mouths and doctor's reflectors strapped to foreheads. Another flash shows them trying their hooves at deep-sea diving in "The Show Stoppers"; from here, a wavering dissolve shifts the action back to a very chastened trio in the present.*)

Sweetie: Hm. (*Close-up; she stands up.*) So now that we don't have to *do* stuff to get our cutie marks, what is it that the Cutie Mark Crusaders actually do?

(*Zoom out; the others are up, and all three think hard before Bloom breaks out in a grin.*)

Bloom: We do exactly what we got our cutie marks in!
Crusaders: Helping other ponies!
Scootaloo: Ponies without cutie marks! (*Sweetie zips over to her.*)
Sweetie: Or ponies who've forgotten their special purpose! (*Bloom pops up between them.*)
Bloom: Exactly! (*She puts a foreleg over each set of shoulders.*) We just have to find ponies who need our help!

(*The clubhouse exterior; she gallops down the ramp.*)

Bloom: Come on!

(*The others are quick to follow her through the trees. Dissolve to an extreme close-up of Big Macintosh's cutie mark, the muscles beneath it flexing as he makes his way across the Sweet Apple Acres grounds, then cut to a wagon piled high with apples. He walks up, a full tub balanced on his head; as soon as he dumps the contents in, Sweetie puts her head up over the rear gate to address him. It is now the following day.*)

Sweetie: But are you sure you feel content?

Macintosh: (*passing her, smiling*) Ee-yup. (*He hitches himself up; Scootaloo is now on his head in place of the tub.*)
Scootaloo: Not even a tinge of dissatisfaction?
Macintosh: Nope.

(*Once he gets the wagon moving, inertia causes her to lose her grip on the orange mane and tumble to the ground. She and Sweetie scramble to pull even with him, and Bloom gets out in front and walks backwards to face him.*)

Bloom: Not even the slightest naggin' sensation that you don't really know what your purpose is in life, or why you have a big apple as a cutie mark?

(*Not paying attention to where her hooves are touching down, she trips on an unseen obstacle and falls to the ground. The other two fillies stop short, and Macintosh rears up sharply to avoid crushing his little sister with a hoof or wheel. The wagon flips forward just long enough to disgorge its entire freight of applies, which bury the red workhorse from top to bottom. He shoves his head up to clear air, spits out the fruit lodged in his mouth, and gives the Crusaders a fed-up glare through narrowed green eyes.*)

Macintosh: Nope.

(*Cut to the downcast trio, zooming in slowly, then wipe to a slowly turning ceiling fan. The camera is pointing up at it, and Bloom's determined, smiling face pops into view in close-up.*)

Bloom: The important thing to remember is that there is no rush. (*Scootaloo joins her.*)
Scootaloo: The three of us tried for the longest time, but it just comes when it comes. (*Sweetie ditto, between them.*)
Sweetie: And it's totally normal to feel confused and maybe even a little lost. But being a blank flank is nothing to be ashamed of. (*Scootaloo pushes them aside.*)
Scootaloo: So if you're having even the slightest problem—
Sweetie: —or concerns or questions—
Bloom: —we want you to know that we are here to help.

(*The sound of a new voice catches them off guard; they turn in its direction, and the camera cuts to the speaker at the doorway of this room on the start of the next line.*)

Mrs. Cake: I don't think they're too worried about it yet.

(*The open toybox and the crib at which the Crusaders are standing establish this exchange as taking place in Sugarcube Corner. A few happy coos float up from between the barred sides, the fillies glancing in with some befuddlement; cut to their audience—Pound and Pumpkin, the latter deciding to suck on a front hoof rather than worry about her special talent at this point.*)

(*Wipe to a close-up of old Mr. Waddle sitting in an exam room as a unicorn doctor walks up, levitating the business end of a stethoscope to place against his chest. The latter's eyes flick*

downward, taking note of the hopefully smiling Crusaders seated before him, but a zoom in on the doctor's haunch picks out the stethoscope cutie mark on display past the hem of his lab coat. All three young faces fall at the sight.)

(*Wipe to a busy office in the town hall. Several unicorns are floating scrolls overhead, and one at a time they unroll these for Mayor Mare to sign with a quill held in her teeth, then roll them up and carry them off. Here come the Crusaders, surprising the elected official noticeably; the camera zooms in to a close-up of the tan haunch and the blue-ribboned scroll on display there. Realizing that they have again made a fruitless trip, the little ponies back glumly out the way they came in, Sweetie pulling the door shut with her magic.*)

(*Wipe to them walking along a Ponyville street. They stop short with expectant grins as Filthy Rich walks by, a bulging money bag held in his mouth, and the camera zooms in quickly to a close-up of the three small ones that make up his cutie mark. General dejection all around.*)

(*Wipe to the three on the move down another block. They stop short again, finding a unicorn mare blowing a bubble from the wad of gum she is chewing. It pops, leaving a smear of pink goo across her nose and lips, and the camera moves on to her cutie mark—a gumball machine. Yet another round of disappointment.*)

(*Another wipe brings them to the meadows outside Ponyville proper. This time, the object of their focus is a white stallion whose well-coiffed mane/tail/mustache are dark brown with a few scattered lighter strands. He wears a bow tie striped in red, white, and blue like a barber pole, and a tilt down from his face reveals the crossed comb and scissors of his mark. Crushed at having found yet another pony whose talent is clear to see, they take their leave of him.*)

(*Dissolve to the exterior of the Ponyville schoolhouse and pan slowly toward the playground. Bloom lies gloomily across one of the swings, Sweetie sits in another, and Scootaloo sits on her haunches facing them.*)

Bloom: This is gonna be a lot harder than I thought.
Sweetie: Who knew there were so few ponies worried about their cutie marks?
Scootaloo: (*kicking at the dirt*) Kinda makes you wonder why *we* made such a big deal out of it for so long.

(*This remark earns her a pair of quizzical glances.*)

Scootaloo: What?
Bloom: (*hopping off swing*) The point is, helping ponies with cutie mark problems is what makes us special.
Sweetie: But if we can't find anypony with a problem… (*Zoom out to frame the others on the start of the following; Scootaloo now standing.*)
Scootaloo: …maybe *we're* not special. (*Long silence.*)
Bulk Biceps: (*from o.s.*) YEAH!!

(*All three heads turn, surprised; pan quickly to the beefy white pegasus, sitting hunched atop the remains of a piece of playground equipment that has buckled under his weight. The Crusaders approach.*)

Bulk: I know exactly what you mean. You can't find a cutie mark problem. I have a cutie mark problem. It's so confusing, and I feel like the solution is staring me right in the muzzle.

(*He points a hoof at his own to emphasize this last, after which the fillies trade a round of smiles at having had an answer dropped into their laps.*)

Bulk: (*puzzled*) What?

(*Wipe to a head-on close-up of him, now smiling and with his tiny wings spread out full.*)

Bulk: I see why you guys hang out here!

(*Zoom out slightly to show him now inside the clubhouse and taking up almost its entire width. Bloom and Sweetie are each jammed in between one muscular flank and a wall.*)

Bulk: It's cozy!
Scootaloo: (*with effort, shoving up past his shoulder*) The Crusader clubhouse is a safe place, Mr., um, Bulk. (*Cut to Sweetie.*)
Sweetie: A place where we've faced all kinds of cutie mark problems. (*Pan to Bloom.*)
Bloom: A place where we'll go on to solve even more, startin' with yours! (*Scootaloo shoves in next to her.*)
Scootaloo: No matter how long it takes!
Sweetie: Or how hard it is.
Bloom: We'll solve it because that's what we do!
Crusaders: Yeah!

(*Extreme close-up of Bulk's chest. Three small hooves reach into view from either side, but cannot quite touch due to their owners being pinned against the walls. After a few of their grunts and groans float across, the camera cuts to frame all four again.*)

Bulk: YEAH!! (*The others back off.*)
Sweetie: So what's your cutie mark problem?
Bulk: Oh! Right. (*pivoting to show his mark*) Uh, well, my cutie mark is a dumbbell. But I've lifted every dumbbell in Ponyville! (*Pout.*)
Scootaloo: Have you tried lifting other things?
Bulk: You mean, *not* dumbbells?
Sweetie: Yeah.
Bloom: Yeah.
Bulk: YEAH!!

(*An overly enthusiastic stomp causes a good bit of the floor to collapse, dropping him o.s. and leaving the Crusaders stunned at the edges. A thud and grunt mark his meeting with the ground, but he quickly puts his head back up.*)

Bulk: I mean, no. I hadn't thought of that. YOU GUYS ARE AWESOME!!

(*Delivered with enough volume to set the structure vibrating. Bulk promptly ducks away again, then punches his head up through an intact patch of floorboards.*)

Bulk: But…what happens when I run out of other stuff? (*Sweetie thinks for a second.*)
Sweetie: I guess you could teach other ponies to lift things?
Bloom: Yeah!
Scootaloo: Yeah!
Bulk: YEAH!! Wow! You three really have a knack for this! (*Down again.*)
Sweetie: That *was* easy!
Bloom: Maybe *too* easy. (*She crosses to Sweetie.*)
Scootaloo: What do you mean?
Bloom: Well, it's lookin' like cutie mark problems are few and far between.
Sweetie: And…?
Bloom: And what if we never find another one?
Scootaloo: Well… (*Bloom rounds on her.*)
Bloom: And even if we do, we could solve it so quick, it'll be like it never happened in the first place!
Sweetie: So?
Bloom: So… (*Zoom in slowly, her eyes widening in terror.*) …then the Cutie Mark Crusaders don't have any reason to exist!

(*Her unease quickly spreads to the orange and white faces, and the zoom continues for a moment before the view snaps to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of a crayon drawing tacked up on the clubhouse wall. It presents three interlocking circles, each marked with a different graphic: the Crusaders' cutie marks, a clock, and a pegasus glancing worriedly over his shoulder at his mark.*)

Sweetie: (*from o.s.*) The problem boils down to this.

(*A conductor's baton floats into view, held in her magic grip, and taps the marks. Zoom out to frame her standing on a platform alongside the diagram; Bloom crosses to her on the next line.*)

Sweetie: We don't need to go out and do things anymore to get our cutie marks. (*Toss the baton aside.*)
Bloom: Right, and— (*Scootaloo jumps onto her back.*)

Scootaloo: Ponies with cutie mark problems are hard to find.

(*Close-up of the pegasus circle on the end of this; she points to it, then jumps off Bloom. The floor is now seen to be whole again.*)

Bloom: Exactly. But even when we find problems— (*pointing to the overlap of all three circles*) —we're so good at solvin' them that most of the time, there's nothin' for the Cutie Mark Crusaders to do. So…

(*She darts across the room and pulls a cord with her teeth, unrolling a detailed wall map of Equestria. A split-second later she is behind the lectern next to it.*)

Bloom: …I thought we should start figurin' out ways to search all of Equestria for cutie mark problems.
Scootaloo: That kinda seems like a lot.
Sweetie: I don't think Rarity would let me travel to the far reaches of Equestria looking for cutie mark problems.
Scootaloo: Yeah. I'm sure we'll come across them in Ponyville. And when we do, we'll totally solve them because we're so awesome at it!

(*She and Sweetie trade a high-five with an enthusiastic grunt, then turn their grins toward a suddenly dispirited Bloom.*)

Bloom: But…what do we do until then?
Sweetie: Maybe whatever we want?
Bloom: What do you mean?
Sweetie: Well, we used to only do stuff to get our cutie marks or fulfill our destiny. But now we don't have to. (*Cut to Bloom; zoom in slowly.*)
Bloom: So…we can do things just for fun?

(*She comes down from the lectern, instantly all smiles.*)

Bloom: Are you girls thinkin' what I'm thinkin'?
Scootaloo, Sweetie: Sure am!

(*The next three lines are delivered simultaneously, accompanied by a cheerful jump.*)

Bloom: Makin' potions!
Scootaloo: Scootering!
Sweetie: Singing!

(*Only after all twelve hooves touch wood again do they realize just how badly they have their wires crossed. Dissolve to a long overhead shot of Sweet Apple Acres, with a long, looping ramp leading toward the main barn, and pan to its other end as a crash-helmeted Scootaloo rolls up on her scooter.*)

Scootaloo: (*addressing herself back o.s., miming actions*) Just remember—stomp, kick, and roll. After this, you two are gonna love scootering as much as me!

(*Cut to the other two Crusaders on this hilltop. She has been speaking to them, and they have their own helmets and scooters in easy reach but are clearly ill at ease over trying this new activity. Bloom dons her headgear with a weak smile.*)

Bloom: If you say so. (*Sweetie floats hers onto her own head; Scootaloo faces forward.*)
Scootaloo: Ready? (*performing actions*) Stomp, kick, and roll!

(*The sequence launches her off the hill and down the ramp, but neither of the others does anything more than watch as she whoops her way through the crazy turns. Entering a loop-the-loop, she jumps straight up and lets her scooter complete the circle, dropping back on as it emerges to continue the run without losing any momentum. Now she enters the final uphill run, which stops several yards short of the upper hayloft window, and launches herself across the gap. She lets go of the handlebars, and she and the scooter—both silhouetted by the sun—hurtle across the empty space in slow motion. Normal speed resumes as she re-establishes her grip, and she makes a perfect four-point landing in the loft and comes to a stop in a cloud of dust. Zoom out slightly until the camera is just outside the window.*)

Scootaloo: Ta-da!

(*She gives a "your turn" gesture; cut to Bloom and Sweetie at the top of the hill. Both have mounted their scooters, but have much less luck in getting themselves started. The earth pony topples to one side, while the unicorn rolls back and drops out of sight. Bloom, now covered in leaves, pokes her head up from the underbrush with a sheepish chuckle.*)

Bloom: I don't think I did it right.

(*To which her winged counterpart responds with a glare and crossed forelegs. Wipe to the exterior of the Carousel Boutique, zooming in slowly to the sound of a note being blown on a pitch pipe—a B—then cut to a close-up of Sweetie inside. She is at a music stand, and she floats the pipe down from her mouth. Her helmet is gone, and those of the other two will be as well when they are seen next.*)

Sweetie: (*singing, holding each note out*) Do…mi…so…

(*"Do" rhymes with "so" here, as is customary when singing a musical scale. After the first note, the camera cuts to a longer shot that frames Bloom and Scootaloo before her, at a stand of their own. Sweetie's three notes are B, E flat, and F sharp—the essential tones of a chord in B major.*)

Sweetie: It's just a simple harmony.

(*She levitates a sheet from her stand to theirs. Red-gold and violet eyes pop in perplexity, and a close-up of the stand reveals why: the music they have just received is crammed tight with enough notes to drive any virtuoso performer into a screaming fit. Zoom out slightly to frame them staring at it, knowing they have no chance to make this lot sound good. They trade a fearful glance, then turn toward Sweetie's beaming grin as she floats out the baton she used at the start of this act.*)

Scootaloo: Harmony, huh? (*Tap baton on stand.*)
Sweetie: (*waving it to set tempo*) And-a-one, and-a-two, and-a-one, two, three!

(*The next three lines are sung and delivered together.*)

Bloom: So…
Scootaloo: Mi…
Sweetie: Do…

(*Of the three, only Sweetie has managed to hit the correct pitch and a decent tone; the other two are hopelessly out of tune and have all the finesse of a jackhammer breaking concrete. The vocally gifted unicorn grimaces mightily…*)

Scootaloo: Wow! That *was* simple!

(*…and then snaps the baton in half. Wipe to the exterior of Zecora's hut in the Everfree Forest and zoom in slowly.*)

Bloom: (*from inside*) It's just a dash…

(*Close-up of a bowl of dirt on the floor inside. As she continues, one drop each of two different liquids falls onto the surface and is absorbed.*)

Bloom: (*from o.s.*) …and a drop, and a drip.

(*Cut to frame all three Crusaders sitting on their haunches. Several bowls, a mortar and pestle, and racks of corked test tubes are laid out here, and the aspiring potion brewer completes her demonstration by spitting aside the now-empty tube she has just used. Zecora surveys a shelf behind them, then turns toward Bloom with a smile as a seedling sprouts from the dirt and grows a shiny red apple. Scootaloo and Sweetie reach to the racks; cut to Bloom.*)

Bloom: Just a dash, and a drop, and a drip.

(*Followed by a mild explosion from her o.s. pupils' directions; cut to them. The smoke clears to show them covered with soot and with manes/tails blown straight back. Scootaloo spits out the tube still in her mouth, and Bloom grimaces and drops her head while the zebra stares with consternation. Dissolve to a stretch of clubhouse wall, panning slowly across the numerous*

taped-up pages showing activities that have all been crossed out, and stop on one that shows a pony plummeting on the end of a bungee cord during the next line. It has not been marked out.)

Bloom: (*from o.s.*) And even though Scootaloo thinks bungee jumpin' is the bee's knees…

(*She leans into view to strike it off with a red marker in her teeth, then backs o.s. again. Pan to a second drawing, a beekeeper's hat and veil surrounded by the buzzing flyers.*)

Bloom: (*from o.s.*) …Sweetie Belle would rather *keep* bees. (*Lean in, mark it off, spit out the marker.*) Of course, I'm allergic.

(*Longer shot of the interior. The rejected ideas stretch across most of the available space on at least three walls, and a few other candidates are strewn on the floor. Scootaloo and Sweetie are here, both cleaned up from their potion-making mishap.*)

Bloom: Who'd have thought it would be so hard to find somethin' for us all to do together?
Scootaloo: Well, I know this might sound crazy, but…what if we *didn't?*
Bloom: Didn't what?
Scootaloo: Do things together…well, do *everything* together.

(*That comment causes Bloom's brain to seize up for a fraction of a second; she comes out of it with an indignant scowl.*)

Bloom: (*stomping for emphasis*) But we're the Cutie Mark Crusaders!
Scootaloo: And we always will be. (*eyeing bungee-jumping picture*) But I *really* want to bungee-jump! The speed! The height! The fall!
Sweetie: And I know you two aren't interested, but…I want to try crochet.
Scootaloo: Isn't there something *you've* always wanted to do on your own?

(*The red-maned filly finds herself pinned by two eager grins; zoom in slowly on her as she ponders the question for a moment.*)

Bloom: I don't know. I-I guess I figured we'd always do stuff together. But bungee jumpin' sounds just as scary as crochet sounds borin'.
Scootaloo: That's okay. Sweetie Belle and I can do the things *we* like, and you can do whatever *you* like.
Sweetie: Just as soon as you figure out what it is. (*Both grin again; cut to Bloom.*)
Bloom: (*uncertainly*) I guess. (*Sound of hooves moving across floor.*)
Scootaloo: (*from o.s.*) Great!

(*Bloom shoots a surprised glance across the room and finds the other two now at the door.*)

Scootaloo: (*opening it; Sweetie exits*) Then we can meet back here and talk all about what we've done!
Bloom: But I don't know what it'll be! (*Sweetie pokes her head back in.*)

Sweetie: You'll find something. (*Out again.*)
Scootaloo: Something awesome!

(*She disappears in an orange blur. Cut to just outside the open door and zoom in slowly on Bloom as she lets go with a heavy sigh.*)

Quiet acoustic guitar melody, moderate 4 (D major)

Bloom: Well, I guess now I have to.

(*She sits down on her haunches, tail curled around her hind legs and bow drooping glumly.*)

Bloom: I never imagined myself out on my own
(*Pan across the pictures scattered across the floor; she pulls an archery sheet aside to expose one of a ballerina mare.*)
Tryin' to find out what's next for me
(*Move to the window; Scootaloo and Sweetie are galloping off.*)
The Cutie Mark Crusaders have always been my home
(*Turn away.*) Maybe now there's more that I could be

(*As the camera zooms out very slowly, the background dissolves to a stretch of riverbank and a life jacket appears on her.*)

Strings in

Bloom: I guess as time goes by
(*A similarly attired stallion leans down to tighten her jacket's belt with his teeth, and she boards an inflatable raft. Four others are already in.*)
Everypony has to go out on their own
(*The raft sets off down the river.*)
Maybe someday I'll have to try
(*It picks up speed over a set of drops, nearly throwing her clear; she is the only one of the five not enjoying the ride.*)
Somethin' new that's just for me, a little somethin' that could be
(*They reach calm water again.*)
Just my own, and I won't feel so left behind

Strings out; woodwinds and glockenspiel accents in

(*The next bump does pitch her out of the raft. Dissolve to a close-up of a large vat of grapes. She jumps in, having shucked her life jacket and set her bow back in place, and smiles back at <u>Berry Punch</u> and <u>Cherry Berry</u> across from her. All three put their hooves to work pulping the fruit.*)

Bloom: We used to say that we'd be always side by side

(*A few overly exuberant stomps bounce her off the vat's edge and over the side; once she gets her wits back about herself, she regards her purple-splotched limbs with sad wonder.*)

Maybe things are changin' and this could mean goodbye

Strings, light piano/cymbal accents in

(*Zoom in on her and dissolve to a close-up of a stallion standing before a canvas on an easel. He daubs paint from his hooves onto it, and the view cuts a slow pan across an art studio where he and several others are painting their own renditions of Tree Hugger—Fluttershy's hippie friend introduced in "Make New Friends but Keep Discord"—who stands on a box at the center of the room, balancing on one hind leg and raising her forelegs above her head. Bloom is among the group, having cleaned off the grape gunk.*)

Bloom: I always thought our friendship was all I'd ever need

(*Seeing her own crude depiction side by side with another artist's more accurate, vividly colored one takes all the starch out of her.*)

We've always been crusadin', what else is there for me?

(*Zoom in and dissolve to a close-up of her mixing a bowl of batter with a spoon held in her mouth. She is now in a kitchen, and several other fillies are working on culinary projects of their own, including Diamond Tiara, Silver Spoon, and Twist.*)

Bloom: I guess as time goes by

(*She looks up with a grin; cut to within an oven, where a pie is baking up. The door opens so she can look in at it; outside, she whisks it out with a potholder in her teeth, sets it on a counter, and brings up three forks.*)

Everypony has to go out on their own

(*No other ponies are immediately ready to share the dessert, but behind her, Diamond is chomping into the pie she has helped make and Silver feeds a bite to the third filly in their group. Zoom out to put the deflated Bloom in the fore, trudging away.*)

Maybe someday I'll have to try

(*Dissolve to her in the street, walking away from this particular shop and with the forks no longer in her mouth. Crayon-drawn images of pastimes pop into being around her: soccer, fishing, knitting, carpentry.*)

Somethin' new that's just for me, a little somethin' that could be
Just my own, and I won't feel so left behind

(*She stops on a bridge over a stream and sits disconsolately on her haunches, the mental pictures fading away. Cut to a long shot of her, the sun shining brightly overhead, and zoom out slowly.*)

Song slows to an end

(*Close-up. A mare's voice with a heavy Russian accent perks up her eyes, ears, and bow.*)

Voice: (*counting in time*) And one-two-three-four, two-two-three-four, one-two-three-four, two-two-three-four…

(*During this line, the camera cuts to just behind Bloom, framing a two-story building with a prominent roof skylight and attached house. A sign over the door bears the image of a dancing pony in a tutu—a dance studio. Close-up of this detail, tilting down to frame Bloom now standing below it in wonder and smiling, then, on the last bar of counting, cut to within the studio itself. Three colt/filly pairs are receiving instruction, clad in sleeveless white shirts and dark purple pants; the fillies also wear leg warmers in front and toe shoes in back. Their teacher is a pale violet earth pony mare; two-tone blond mane/tail tied back, the former with a pink ribbon; red-violet eyes with pink shadow; dark purple, short-sleeved top; pink belt; white skirt that hides her cutie mark; leg warmers on all four limbs. She has barely gotten the last "four" out before Bloom barges in, startling the entire class to a dead stop.*)

Bloom: Whatever kinda dancin' y'all are doin', you're doin' it together! And I want in!

(*Her high-wattage grin is met by total silence from all seven, and she quickly drops it and tamps down her enthusiasm.*)

Bloom: I-I-I mean, uh… (*Clear throat; teacher crosses to her.*) …would it be okay if I enrolled in this dance class?
Teacher: Well, let's see what you can do. We have a recital at Town Hall tonight, and a spot just opened up. (*whispering*) Tender Taps is a little too shy to perform.

(*She points across the room, Bloom's eyes following. Cut to Tender Taps, a colt sitting on his haunches in a corner and dressed as the others in the class. Earth pony; orange coat nearly the same shade as Scootaloo's; short, two-tone violet mane/tail. He turns away from the wall, showing violet eyes in a very scared face, and manages the barest hint of a wave that Bloom returns.*)

Teacher: But if you're ready to step into a partnered routine…?
Bloom: That sounds an awful lot like friendship! And I'm ready for anything I don't have to do by myself.
Teacher: Well, then! Dancing with partner will be perfect.

(*At a clap of her front hooves, one colt goes into a warp-speed pirouette in the middle of the floor and deftly drops out of it to make a three-point landing, holding a foreleg out as invitation for Bloom to join him. She beams and crosses to him, placing one of her front hooves in his, and finds herself being danced back and forth across the studio. He then sends her into a spin that turns her into a whirling blur of yellow, red, and pink.*)

Bloom: Whoooooaaaaa…

(*The two end up facing away from each other in opposite directions, he with a foreleg extended to his side. Once Bloom gets her equilibrium back, she seizes it and takes the lead for a few*

steps. The other students twirl away, and colt and filly do likewise toward different corners, inadvertently chasing them.)

Bloom: Whoa!

(*One equine slams into another, with the predictable result that all six students wind up in a semiconscious heap in the middle of the floor.*)

Bloom: (*from within pile*) Whew! (*She pokes up behind them.*) I feel like that went pretty good, but let's give it one more whirl, because it's important that I do a good job partnering with my new group of friends.

(*As the teacher approaches, the other six gather behind her and Bloom's grin goes bye-bye at the general tone of disapproval on every face.*)

Teacher: Eh, now I'm think of it, you might be better as soloist.

(*The newcomer's spirits sink another notch or ten at this failure to find a good group activity. Fade to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to the exterior of the studio and zoom in slowly.*)

Teacher: (*from inside, sighing*) Partnering is a little advanced for you.

(*Inside, she stands facing Bloom as the other students work on their steps.*)

Teacher: But there's still lot you can do on your own.
Bloom: I'm sorry, but…doin' stuff on my own is exactly what I *don't* want.

(*She clumps dejectedly toward the door, not noticing Tender's glance in her direction from his spot facing the wall. Outside, she opens the door and emerges onto the road as he peeks after her, having shed his practice outfit. It takes him no time at all to pull in alongside her; now his haunch can clearly be seen as unmarked. When he speaks, his voice carries exactly none of the overwhelming timidity that he displayed in the studio.*)

Tender: Sorry it didn't work out.
Bloom: Tryin' different things with my friends was always fun, even when we were terrible. (*Both stop.*) Now it's just terrible.
Tender: (*circling to face her*) You weren't that bad. You just need to learn a few things on your own. Being a soloist can be fun.

(*He shows off a couple of slow-tempo steps, then leaps to a clear patch of the road and goes into a frenetic tap dance on his hind legs, adding a bit of humming just for the fun of it. His next move is to launch himself toward a lamppost and swing around it, and he wraps up by jumping clear and sliding past Bloom on his hocks with a laugh. In a trice he is back up to all fours.*)

Tender: You just have to do it with feeling.

(*Now he breaks into a gallop toward a closed door, runs a few feet up its height, and pushes off into a deft backflip. Landing in a hind-leg split, he spreads his forelegs wide with an ecstatic grin; Bloom boggles at the spectacle, but deflates with a sigh.*)

Bloom: Thanks, but…without my friends…I don't think I'll ever feel again. (*trudging past Tender*) Good luck at the recital.
Tender: Oh, I'm not gonna do that. (*He stands up.*) I mean, I want to. It's kind of all I think about. (*eyeing his haunch*) I bet someday my cutie mark will even be about performing! (*Face falls.*) But I-I could never dance in front of an audience the way I do in class. (*shivering*) That's t-t-t-t-terrifying!
Bloom: (*not stopping*) Yeah, okay. Nice meetin' you.
Tender: (*sadly*) You too.

(*He tap-dances his way off the street. Dissolve to the exterior of the clubhouse and zoom in slowly as Scootaloo and Sweetie gallop toward it from opposite directions. The pegasus wears her helmet, safety goggles, and a vest with harness, and the unicorn's neck is draped in an overlong, multicolored, ragged scarf. The latter races up the ramp, but stops just short of the top at Scootaloo's words.*)

Scootaloo: Sweetie Belle! You are not gonna believe this, but I think I like bungee jumping even more than scootering! (*She starts up.*)
Sweetie: Seriously? That's amazing! (*magically lifting scarf ends*) Look what I did! (*Close-up of Scootaloo.*)
Scootaloo: (*forcing a smile*) Wow! Uh…that's…um…
Sweetie: (*from o.s., cheerfully*) Horrible! (*Cut to her.*) But it was so much fun! Rarity showed me how, even though she says— (*mimicking Rarity's diction, letting ends drop*) —"Crochet is knitting's poorer cousin." (*own voice*) But I *loved* it!
Scootaloo: Awesome!

(*They start for the door. Cut to the dimly lit interior of the clubhouse; in the near-darkness, Bloom sits on her haunches facing the walls covered with rejected activity pictures. Quite a few have dropped to the floor around her. A shaft of light falls onto her and widens, thrown by the opening door, and the two adventurers step into view. Scootaloo has removed her helmet and goggles.*)

Bloom: (*glancing toward them, frighteningly calm tone*) Oh. Hello, girls. (*viciously*) Have fun pursuin' your own interests?

(*They are positively floored by this drastic mood shift.*)

Scootaloo: Apple Bloom? What are you doing sitting in the dark?
Sweetie: Yeah. We thought you'd be out looking for things you'd like to do. (*Bloom stands up.*)
Bloom: (*chuckling dementedly*) Oh, I did. I looked all over town. (*increasingly unhinged, shading eyes*) I looked, and I looked, and I looked, and you know what I found?

(*The other two can manage only a petrified little head shake before she lunges toward them in undiluted fury.*)

Bloom: *Nothing!*

(*One windowshade flies up, flooding the room with sunlight that washes out the screen. Fade in immediately to Scootaloo and Sweetie shading their eyes from the glare; when they dare to look across the space, their eyes bug out at the sight of X'ed-out pictures papering every wall, the ceiling, and most of the floor. One mentally strained earth pony stands at the heart of the disorder; overhead shot as the others cautiously advance toward her.*)

Scootaloo: You tried every one of these? (*Close-up; Bloom nods bitterly.*)
Bloom: And each one just made me feel more alone than the next! I don't see how I'm supposed to be happy that we're not hanging out anymore!
Scootaloo: (*from o.s.*) Wait. (*Cut to her and Sweetie.*) I never said that. (*as Sweetie nods assent*) I just said we don't have to do *everything* together.
Sweetie: Like when there's something one of us wants to do that the others don't.
Bloom: (*taken aback*) Oh. Well, I guess that changes things.
Scootaloo: I can't believe you thought we didn't want to hang out anymore.
Sweetie: I can't believe you tried all this stuff and didn't find one thing you liked.
Bloom: Well…

(*She turns to the ballerina drawing she had considered in Act Two, now marked out like all the others.*)

Bloom: …I kind of liked dancing, mainly because it looked like somethin' you couldn't do alone, but…I wasn't very good at it.
Sweetie: (*rolling eyes good-naturedly*) Well, you don't have to be good at something to have fun. (*Scootaloo nods.*)
Scootaloo: And being good doesn't always mean you will.
Bloom: (*wearily*) I know. (*smiling*) I met the best dancer in the world, but…he was so shy, he couldn't bring himself to perform, even though he really, really wanted to.

(*Scootaloo and Sweetie trade a look at this bit of news.*)

Sweetie: I don't suppose this dancing pony had a cutie mark, did he?

(*Bloom finds herself facing a pair of knowing grins. Cut to just behind the heads of these two and zoom in slowly as her jaw drops and her brain latches on to Sweetie's unspoken suggestion. From here, dissolve to an auditorium in which a stage with a projecting runway has been set up. A stallion and mare do a dance routine under the spotlights for an audience in bleacher-style seats. Tender watches happily from the floor, but a door being thrown open jolts him out of the mood. He has donned his dance outfit.*)

Bloom: (*from o.s.*) You're here!

(*He looks behind himself, the camera panning slightly to frame all three Crusaders at the doorway. Scootaloo has now removed all of her bungee-jumping gear, but Sweetie continues to wear her misshapen scarf.*)

Spectator: Shhhh!

(*The dance ends and the performers bow for the cheering audience as Tender walks toward the trio. Cut to the backstage area; he opens a door and leads them in. The teacher and her other students are fully suited up, and the ones who just finished their routine come in from the stage.*)

Tender: What are *you* doing here?
Bloom: You told me that you wanted to perform more than anything, but I was too caught up in myself to listen. (*grabbing his shoulders*) You're the best dancer I've ever seen, and I'm here to convince you to get out on that stage.

(*He turns from her point-blank stare to regard the teacher, who is waving her charges toward the stage entrance, and indecision takes hold all over again. This camera angle exposes the mare's cutie mark as a cluster of horseshoes arranged in a dance-step diagram.*)

Tender: Um, didn't I also tell you that dancing in front of other ponies is t-t-t-t-terrifying?

(*Accompanied, as before, by a shiver on this last word to hammer the point home. He eases toward a gap in the curtains, getting a clear view of one audience section.*)

Tender: I don't know if you noticed— (*pulling curtain back farther*) —but that auditorium is full of other ponies! (*He lets it drop back.*) I can't go out there! What if I'm bad? (*Bloom whisks over to him.*)
Bloom: We can go on together. No matter what, you'll look good dancin' next to me.

(*As the crowd begins to cheer again, he risks a peek through the gap and sees yet more of the packed house, then lets the curtains fall shut.*)

Tender: (*sighing*) All right. I'll do it. (*panicky*) But I don't have my costume and the backdrop is all wrong and we don't have time to change it!

(*A calculating look passes between the three fillies in response to his full-body shiver.*)

Bloom: Leave everything to us.

(*He can only stare at his unlikely rescuers, jaw hanging slightly agape as he tries to sort out this very weird turn of events. The view dissolves to a close-up of him in the same place and position, but his dance togs have been switched for a lumpy, badly crocheted blue shirt—clearly one of Sweetie's first essays in the craft. An equally lousy hat is settled onto his head thanks to her magic.*)

Tender: (*very nervous*) I don't know about this.

(*On the start of the next line, zoom out to frame Bloom and Sweetie alongside. The yellow filly has been outfitted in a purple top and removed her bow, and the now-scarfless unicorn floats a matching, tall conical hat atop the red mane.*)

Sweetie: Don't worry. You'll be just fine.

(*She directs a wave overhead; cut to a catwalk, on which Scootaloo and a dreadlocked pegasus stallion stand at the ready. Both are wearing safety goggles, vests, and harnesses, and Scootaloo has her helmet on as well. Hanging from the underside of the catwalk is a scenery flat that consists of a sheet of cloth with a hastily drawn sun and clouds over a flower-covered hill. The winged filly returns Sweetie's wave.*)

(*At floor level, the three fillies from the teacher's class trot cheerfully into the backstage area and past Bloom and Tender, having played their part.*)

Bloom: Here goes nothin'.

(*Overhead, Scootaloo dives off the catwalk, descending on the end of a bungee cord hooked to the back of her vest. She snags the bottom edge of the flat, yanks it up and out of view, and makes a second trip to lower one showing the Manehattan skyline. Once she is back on her perch, she and the stallion trade a high five—doubtless he has been giving her a few lessons.*)

(*Bloom trots onto the stage and takes up a position just left of center, opposite the side from which she entered. When a whole lot of nothing happens for several seconds, she beckons frantically toward that end; her scared-stiff dance partner hazards the briefest glance around the curtains, then moves on to stand across from her. Violet eyes pop to pinpoints, taking in the spectators arrayed silently in the room, and Tender sweats freely and forces down a swallow.*)

(*Bloom taps off a couple of beats and points to him, but his hooves remain glued to the stage. Another couple of taps, another gesture, and he finally starts to move—but only a few tentative steps before he freezes in place again. She grimaces toward Sweetie in the wings, gets a hopelessly confused shrug in return, and realizes that she has no choice but to kick the performance off herself. Dancing around Tender in a swift, sloppy semicircle, Bloom advances toward the front of the stage; in close-up, she keeps going for several more feet until the camera*

zooms out to reveal that she has gone off the end of the runway. Only after she realizes this slip-up does she stop and allow gravity to yank her down to the floor. As she peels herself up off the tiles, she finds the audience laughing heartily at her unintended pratfall. Her next move is to haul herself partly over the runway's edge and address Tender with a smile.)

Bloom: (*whispering loudly*) You can't be any worse than I was!

(*The colt fights a fierce internal battle between hooves and nerves, the former winning as one foreleg starts to tap. The other one joins in soon enough, and the hind legs get into the act. All four limbs pick up speed, merging into an orange blur that carries the now-grinning Tender across the stage. He shifts between two and four legs, causing the audience to shift from laughter to awed murmurs, and Bloom allows herself a smirking grin from her vantage point. Just as he did with the closed door while talking with her in the street, he races toward the scenery flat and up it, pushing off into a backflip. He slides to a stop on his hocks and heaves for breath in the sudden complete silence that has fallen over the joint; it is broken just as abruptly when the patrons go into a round of wild cheering.*)

(*Tender stands up, looking about himself with first disbelief and then gratitude, and spots Bloom hanging on at the edge. A flash of white from his haunch draws his gaze back, and the camera zooms in as it disappears to show a top hat sitting in a spotlight beam—one cutie mark, hot off the press. He jumps for joy and goes into an impromptu victory dance, adding an ecstatic whinny to top it off, and Bloom throws him a joyful grin in close-up. Zoom in slowly on her and dissolve to an extreme close-up of Tender's mark.*)

Tender: (*from o.s.*) I can't believe it!

(*Zoom out; he now stands outside the town hall and has ditched Sweetie's dreadful costume.*)

Tender: It's just what I always imagined it would be! And if it weren't for all of you—

(*Cut to the Crusaders, also out here and out of their respective outfits; Bloom wears her bow.*)

Tender: (*from o.s.*) —I wouldn't even have it.
Scootaloo: No problem.
Sweetie: It's what we do. (*Bloom crosses to him.*)
Bloom: I only wish I'd realized what you needed right away, instead of mopin' around for no reason.
Tender: (*lifting her chin*) Well, either way, I hope you keep dancing.

(*A couple of quick steps and a "take it" gesture, and she tries a few taps of her own.*)

Bloom: You know, I just might. It sure is a lot of fun, and…I'm pretty confident I can only get better. (*He grins and nods; she turns to Scootaloo and Sweetie.*) I'm sorry I was so silly about us all doin' our own things. (*smiling*) If we hadn't, I might have never even tried dancing.
Tender: Or find out I needed help.

Sweetie: With each of us going out and trying things on our own, we'll be three times as likely to find ponies to help.
Scootaloo: And trying new stuff might even make us better at helping them, like how I used my bungee jumping to change the sets.
Sweetie: Or my crochet to make the costumes. (*Tender shows his mark off to a couple of passing mares.*)
Bloom: Well, one thing is for sure—the Cutie Mark Crusaders will never be the same.

(*This pronouncement leaves the other two-thirds of the triumvirate visibly ill at ease until she pops up between them with a smile, throwing a foreleg around each set of shoulders.*)

Bloom: We'll be better!

(*Cut to a patch of sky, with one white, one yellow, and one orange foreleg reaching into view for a three-way high five.*)

Crusaders: (*from o.s.*) Yeah!

(*Fade to black.*)

(*The usual closing theme does not accompany the credits. In its place is the music that played as the background for Tender's dance routine. Energetic big band jazz on horns and percussion, fast 4, E minor; the final chord adds a harp flourish and holds on B major without resolving into the main key.*)

GAUNTLET OF FIRE

Written by Joanna Lewis, Kristine Songco
Produced by Devon Cody
Story editing by Josh Haber
Supervising direction by Jim Miller
Directed by Denny Lu, Tim Stuby

Transcribed by Alan Back (ajback@yahoo.com)

Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to an extreme close-up of several gems embedded in a rock face. These become enveloped in a magic glow and are pulled loose; zoom out to reveal the caster as Rarity, wearing a hard hat accessorized with her cutie mark and a large blue bow. She and Spike are in a cavern; he holds a basket full of precious stones, and the area is only illuminated by the headlamp on her hard hat. She tilts her head upward, the camera following the motion to stop on a cluster of bats hanging upside down from the ceiling. Each has its claws clamped onto a projecting jewel, and Rarity's beam dissipates just short of reaching them with its full intensity.*)

(*At ground level, she swivels her head intently to look in Spike's direction and the gems she has just harvested land in his basket with the faintest clink. He licks his chops at the idea of being able to turn them into a gourmet meal.*)

Rarity: The last time I was here, I woke them and ended up with a mane full of bats. (*She flicks her mane worriedly and sighs.*) Thanks for being my basket holder, Spike.
Spike: (*surprised*) Basket holder? I thought I was your bodyguard!
Rarity: Wh—? Oh! (*chuckling*) Yes, yes. That of course, too. (*She floats some more gems out of the rock.*) Oh, for once I wish unicorn magic wasn't so…luminescent.

(*She looks up; cut to the bats. A bright gleam from somewhere below camera level causes pair after pair of beady black eyes to open.*)

Rarity: (*from o.s.*) Spike! (*Back to her.*) You'll wake the bats! Turn that off!

(*Cut to the little guy, who has set the basket down and begun to glow over every inch of his body—this was what roused the nocturnal flyers. He scratches madly at himself as the camera zooms in slowly.*)

Spike: I can't!

(*A pained groan, a gasp from the mare, and the bats come down in a swarm thick enough to fill the screen. Wipe to black as the last of them pass.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of the Castle of Friendship during the day and zoom in slowly.*)

Twilight Sparkle: (*voice over*) I'm so glad you two could come!

(*Cut to the dining room. She and Princesses Celestia and Luna are seated around the table, on which a spread of pastries and tea has been laid out. The zoom continues.*)

Luna: Of course. We so rarely get a chance to relax and just visit.
Celestia: There's usually some crisis we have to deal with. Somepony always needs our help. But today—
Rarity: (*from outside, shrilly*) HEEEEEEEELP!!

(*Pan quickly to the room's closed doors, which burst open to admit the prospecting unicorn. She still wears the hard hat and is now good and filthy, with Spike riding on her back. They have disposed of the basket of collected gems, and she has extinguished her headlamp.*)

Rarity: (*floating him forward*) Twilight! There's something wrong with Spike!

(*She gallops in; close-up of a patch of tabletop as her magic clears the dishes and sets him down on his back. He continues to glow and scratch.*)

Twilight: (*from o.s.*) What's wrong? (*Cut to frame all five; he sits up.*)
Spike: (*between grunts*) I don't know! All of a sudden, my scales just started glowing and burning!
Luna: Little is known about dragon culture, but this is a phenomenon we've seen before. It is the call of the Dragon Lord.
Celestia: Dragons glow whenever the Dragon Lord has need of them in the Dragon Lands.
Spike: Great. (*Grunt.*) How do I make it stop?
Luna: The only way to end the summons is to answer it. You must journey to the Dragon Lands and see what is expected of you.
Rarity: B-But…but… the Dragon Lands are full of…dragons! And they're ghastly creatures!

(*That assessment earns her a very funny look from the one in the room. She shoots him an embarrassed little grin and crosses to him in close-up.*)

Rarity: (*lifting his chin*) Oh, oh, not you, of course, Spikey-wikey. But remember that rotten Garble? (*Spike swallows fearfully.*)
Spike: How could I forget? He would've burnt us to a crisp if you weren't there.

(*A reference to the events of "Dragon Quest."*)

Spike: If I have to go to the Dragon Lands… (*Zoom out to frame Twilight as well; he stands up.*) …would you two come with me?
Twilight: (*excitedly, rearing up for a moment*) Ooh! Oh, my goodness, I'd love to! We are sadly lacking any information on dragon culture and customs. I could research them, maybe even write an article! This could be my chance to make a great contribution to the knowledge of Equestria!

(*She caps off this bit of aspiratory exposition with a pleased grin, not immediately catching the quizzical looks coming her way from the rest of the group. When she finally takes notice, she shifts down a gear or three.*)

Twilight: (*laughing sheepishly*) And be there for Spike, of course.
Celestia: Be very careful. The Dragon Lands are particularly dangerous for ponies. It would be wise to be discreet.
Rarity: (*clapping front hooves*) Ooh! I'm sure I still have the dragon costume we used the last time we snuck into the Dragon Lands. (*Giggle.*)
Twilight: I think we might want something a little more practical this time.

(*Wipe to a close-up of Spike, now sitting atop a rock surface and shivering with fear. A zoom out reveals his perch as the upper face of an outcropping with two pairs of eyeholes cut into its front, one above the other. Rarity is in the upper spot of this camouflage, Twilight the lower. They are on a rocky, broken plain, and a gloomy gray sky stretches above them as animal growls and howls echo in the distance.*)

**** All lines marked with one asterisk (*) are delivered from within the mares' disguise. ****

*** Rarity:** Hmm…well, it may be practical, but this disguise isn't flattering in the slightest.
*** Twilight:** (*hushed*) It's not supposed to be flattering— (*A glowing dragon wings slowly past.*) —it's supposed to blend in.
Spike: Shhh!

(*Cut to a slow pan across the stark landscape before them. Several dragons of varied shapes, sizes, and colors have already landed before a tall formation that has eroded into the rough shape of a natural throne, and a few more join them. All are lit up under the influence of the Dragon Lord's summons. As one walks past the fake rock, here comes the surly red Garble with a couple of buddies.*)

Garble: Hey-hey, look! It's our old friend Sparkle-warkle.
Spike: (*acidly*) It's Spike.
Garble: Are you sure your pony friends didn't give you a pony name?
Spike: It's nice to see you too, Garble. (*The red face leans into his.*)
Garble: I didn't say it was nice to see you. It's not. (*pushing Spike off the rock*) I don't like you. (*He hops on.*) Was I not clear about that?

(*The recipient of this verbal abuse can muster no immediate response. Inside the fake rock, Garble's weight has half-caved in the top, squashing Twilight and Rarity and eliciting a distressed moan from the latter. She has cleaned herself up, is no longer wearing her hard hat, and has climbed onto Twilight's back. Cut to Spike, his dander up.*)

Spike: Hey! That's my rock!
Garble: (*mockingly*) Oh, really? Then why aren't you sitting on it?

(*Laughter from the other nearby dragons, which ends as if slashed off with a knife when a colossal shadow falls over the group. Spike takes a very scared step back toward his pony friends, after which the camera cuts to a close-up of an immense red-orange wing with a couple of splits in its webbing. The bones are covered in blue-gray hide, and they pull in to furl the wing partially. A massive tail is seen next, its tip and hide matching these colors and showing more rips and nicks. Darker diamond-shaped markings are visible on the tail hide as the appendage curls down to hang over the side of the stone throne. In close-up, the head attached to these body parts straightens up into view: male, irregular yellowed teeth, broad horns that sprout from atop the head and curve down behind it to jut forward below the chin, a crown of jagged red crystals perched between the horns' bases. A thick gold band encircles one of the horns, which go from tan at the base to pinkish-red at the tip. This is Torch, the Dragon Lord, and the lines on his forehead and around his eyes speak to his age. His eyes are initially closed, but he opens them to expose fiery red-orange irises and pupils that narrow to reptilian slits as he pulls in a breath. He speaks with a broad, gravelly Australian accent, his first line carrying enough force to shake the whole area. Unlike the others in attendance, he is not glowing.*)

*** *Any lines of his that are capitalized and end with two exclamation points (!!) are accompanied by these tremors.* ***

Torch: DRAGONS OF EQUESTRIA!! (*Zoom out quickly to frame the entire gathering.*) HEAR ME!!

(*This camera motion exposes a dark gray armored vest with gold accents covering his torso, and also picks out his vast size relative to the others—at least twice the height/length of even the biggest. A tiny, glimmering, light blue-green speck can be seen hovering next to his head.*)

Torch: I have been Dragon Lord for longer than many of you can remember, and my reign has been extraordinary!

(*Close-up; the speck can now be barely discerned as another dragon.*)

Torch: AGREE WITH ME!!

(*They do so, shouting approval—except for Spike—and a chant of "Torch! Torch! Torch!" starts to float up. Torch lets it continue for a few seconds, then holds up a hand to silence them.*)

Spike: (*pointing*) Who is *that?*
Garble: It's Dragon Lord Torch, dummy.
Spike: No, next to him.

(*Cut to a close-up of the mighty Torch and zoom in on the blue-green dragon. Female, haughty expression, with narrowed red eyes, violet head spines and wing/tail webbing, short horns that descend down the sides of her head and end in a short curve under the jawline. Her hide sports diamond markings similar to Torch's.*)

Garble: (*from o.s.*) That's his daughter, Princess Ember. (*Back to him and Spike.*) I wouldn't even look at her if I were you— (*Close-up of a shaking Spike; he continues o.s., pointing into the violet face.*) —unless you want Torch to eat you.

(*Spike forces down a gulp as the clawed red hand is withdrawn; tilt up to Twilight's vantage point.*)

*** Twilight:** (*whispering*) This is fascinating! (*Cut to her and Rarity inside the blind.*) Dragons are notoriously reckless, but they do whatever the Dragon Lord says.

(*Cut to Torch and Princess Ember.*)

Torch: Unfortunately, according to dragon law, it is time for me to step down. Sad, I know. (*He glares at the silent throng.*) BE SAD!!

(*They do so, weeping and wailing for a moment before he resumes.*)

Torch: This is why I have summoned you—to compete for the throne in the Gauntlet of Fire!

(*Cheers and whoops all around, but Spike grimaces and starts to sweat rivers, every fiber of his body quaking with abject fear.*)

Torch: Whomever has the strength and fortitude to retrieve this Bloodstone Scepter from the heart of the Flame-cano will be crowned LORD OF THE DRAGONS!!

(*He holds up this item in time with mentioning it: violet shaft topped by a large, vivid red gem, and dwarfed to the size of a toothpick by the colossal thumb and forefinger pinched around it. A flick of those digits sends the Bloodstone Scepter hurtling through the overcast skies to plunge neatly into a fractured summit that glows with a lurid red light from within. Zoom out to show it as the topper of a twisted peak on a fog-shrouded island; both it and the surrounding ocean are liberally studded with red crystal growths at crazy angles. A solid jet of flame roars skyward from the shattered upper end—this is the Flame-cano, and a red shock wave emanates out from it before the blast gives way to a tired dribble of smoke. The wave washes over the gathered dragons, extinguishing their glow, and Spike looks himself over with surprise when his own fades out as well. Cut to Twilight and Rarity within their blind.*)

Twilight: (*whispering*) When the Scepter disappeared, the dragons stopped glowing. We are learning so much!

(*She floats up a notebook and quill and begins to write. Zoom in slowly on Rarity as she tries desperately to stifle an impending sneeze, triggered by the non-business end tickling her nose, then cut to outside. Garble has kept his seat atop the ersatz monolith throughout all of this, and he and the other dragons in the vicinity are caught off guard by the sound of a very demure nasal explosion from within it.*)

Spike: (*hastily, wiping nose*) Uh…uh, 'scuse me!

(*He has tried to pass the sneeze off as his own; evidently it works, as Garble jumps down with visible revulsion.*)

Garble: Ugh! You even sneeze like a pony.
Torch: The Gauntlet is dangerous, for *I* designed it myself. Only dragons with my ferocity, strength, and determination will be able to finish.

(*Cut to a closer shot of him on "strength" and "determination," then cut to frame the entire multitude once he finishes his sentence with a chuckle.*)

Torch: We will gather at the cliff when the sun is at its peak! (*Cheers.*)
Spike: (*to Twilight/Rarity*) I don't want to be Dragon Lord *or* dragon toast, and I stopped glowing. So let's sneak outta here!

(*He starts pushing the "rock" away toward whatever might pass for an exit out of this realm, but Torch takes notice with a surprised grunt.*)

Torch: Where do you think you're going, little dragon?

(*The rest of them quickly clear out to one side or the other, leaving said little dragon very painfully exposed on the stony terrain. He stops pushing and turns back to face Torch.*)

Spike: Oh, uh…hi, Your Lordship! Uh, I was…just going home. (*Torch leans down to face him straight on.*)
Torch: You don't get to leave unless *I* say you can!

(*As Spike just stands there, paralyzed with fear, Ember descends to stand next to him. She is perhaps twice his height when standing on her hind legs, and her voice suggests that she is only a few years older.*)

Ember: Dad, look at him. (*patting his head*) He's just a runt. Besides, he doesn't even want to compete. Let him go.
Torch: He is rather tiny. (*Chuckle.*) I could squish him with my pinky claw.

(*And he drives the point home by extending that digit with another derisive laugh. Spike tries to join in the mirth, but a glare from Ember shuts him up in a hurry.*)

Torch: (*no longer smiling*) That wasn't a joke, it was a fact. When I want you to laugh, I will say, "BE AMUSED!!"
Spike: Of course, Your Lordship. I, uh, guess I don't understand dragon customs—another reason why I shouldn't compete.
Torch: (*grumbling a bit*) Hmph. Very well, little dragon. I release you.
Spike: Thank you— (*to Ember*) —and thank *you*.

(*A wink in her direction is met with a slightly disgusted eye roll, and they part ways, he pushing the disguised ponies away and she darting toward her father. However, Torch snaps one huge hand shut to pluck her out of the air.*)

Torch: Where do you think *you're* going?

(*The scaly palm is so huge that it might take three or more of her to reach from the wrist to the base of the middle finger.*)

Ember: To prepare for the Gauntlet.
Torch: No, you're not! You're not much bigger than that runt I just sent home!
Ember: (*flying up to his face*) But…I'm smarter than most of these boulder-heads and you know it!
Torch: Being smart won't help you win this Gauntlet! It was designed for a big strong dragon to win, because it takes a big strong dragon to lead! Besides…I SAID NO!!

(*Those three words pitch her backwards several yards; she rights herself in midair and glares at him with all the fury that a teenage daughter can drum up.*)

Ember: (*growling*) I hate when he does that!

(*She flies off in a huff. Tilt down quickly to ground level, where the contenders are trash-talking each other and psyching themselves up. A light violet female voices a scoffing laugh in close-up.*)

Violet: When I become Dragon Lord, I will make burps an official greeting.
Male voice: Ha!

(*Zoom out; the speaker, a brown male, stands alongside.*)

Brown: You? Please. When I win, I will pillage Equestria for all their pillows. (*Violet rolls her eyes.*) Why should these ponies be comfortable while *we* sleep on rocks? (*Garble pushes them aside.*)
Garble: That's nothing. When I'm in charge— (*smacking one fist into other palm*) —the first thing I'll do is get revenge on those puny ponies. They'll regret they ever crossed Garble! (*pacing; they fall in behind him*) We'll take whatever we want from Equestria and burn the rest.

*** Twilight:** (*whispering*) Oh, my gosh!
*** Rarity:** Ooh, I can't believe I'm saying this, but I hope that burping dragon wins.
Spike: (*from o.s.*) None of them can win! (*Cut to him.*) Equestria's in big trouble if any of them are in charge!
*** Twilight:** (*normal volume*) But what can we do?
Spike: (*resolutely*) There's only one thing to do, and only I can do it. I have to win the Gauntlet of Fire!

(*Cut to inside the blind, the two mares voicing a stereo moan of worry; Twilight has put away her notebook and quill. Snap to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to Spike facing his two undercover traveling companions. They are now alone on the rocky expanse, and Twilight and Rarity shuck off their disguise to stand side by side.*)

Rarity: What do you mean, you have to win the Gauntlet?
Spike: It's the only way to protect Equestria from the dragons. You heard them. They have horrible plans for ponies if they win! So somehow, I have to do it.
Twilight: There has to be another way. It's too dangerous. (*Rarity nods agreement.*) Besides, if you win, you have to stay here!
Spike: (*sadly*) I know. But there's no other way to keep my friends safe.

(*Blue and purple eyes alike water up as their owners trade an apprehensive look, which shifts into quiet smiles and nods. Both blink away the tears before facing Spike again.*)

Twilight: Well, if you're staying to compete— (*stomping for emphasis*) —then we're staying to cheer you on.

(*The pint-size competitor aims a grateful smile up at her. Dissolve to a long shot of the flame-cano on its island and pan across the ocean to stop on a cliff at the shore. Torch towers over the dragons gathered at the edge, and a close-up shows them all with their backs to the water as he glares down at them—including Spike in the very front row. With the exception of him and Garble, nearly every one of them has donned armor of some sort.*)

Torch: I thought I released you, tiny one.
Spike: I decided to compete. I am a dragon, after all.
Garble: (*scoffing*) Are you sure? You can't even fly!

(*Cut to a slow pan across the rest of the gang. The general reaction is one of unbridled derision, but a green one whose body is mostly hidden behind gold/brown armor remains noticeably silent. All others follow suit when Torch begins to speak.*)

Torch: (*from o.s.)* All dragons are welcome to compete— (*Cut to him.*) —but they do so at their own peril. Flying to Flame-cano Island is the first of many challenges you will face in your quest to find the Bloodstone Scepter.

(*The behemoth unleashes a roar and a gout of flame that barely clears the entrants' heads, startling them into a liftoff and flight toward the distant island. Spike and Garble remain at the cliff's edge, the latter holding out a hand to shake.*)

Garble: Good luck! (*Spike reaches for the hand; it is yanked away.*) Just kidding. I hope you lose.

(*A lash of the red tail sends Spike over the precipice with a scream, and Garble takes wing as he plunges into the water. The little dragon gets his head above the surface and spits out a mouthful.*)

Spike: (*very snarky*) Thanks, Garble! I was planning on swimming anyway!

(*So he gets his stubby arms and legs to it, only for a mass of seaweed and driftwood to float into view after him. The strands are spaced far enough to allow a clear partial view of Twilight's and Rarity's faces.*)

Rarity: You can do it, Spike!

(*They poke their heads out to deliver a pair of encouraging grins, and he counters with one of his own. Before they can go much farther, a massive red/orange eel-like creature bursts up through the water to project a jet into the sky. One flyer is hit dead on and tumbles down, while another dodges to keep moving ahead. The beasts piston up and down, firing off their jets and hitting their marks, and one of them surfaces in extreme close-up. Fade to black, then snap immediately to Garble as he takes a glancing hit. Thrown off balance, he pitches backward into the silent, gold-armored dragon; the latter drops like a rock, but Garble gets his bearings and darts away. The splashdown occurs only a few feet in front of Spike, and the re-disguised Twilight and Rarity gape at the sight through their seaweed guise as the figure sinks slowly into the depths.*)

Spike: He's gonna drown! (*He dives in.*)
Twilight: Spike!

(*The patch of water has gone deadly calm in far too short a time, and it stays that way until a stream of bubbles begins to float up and burst. A shadowy figure rises after them, resolving into Spike and the mystery dragon just before they too make it up to the air. Spike heaves for breath, having towed this one up by the helmet, and he continues the lifesaving haul-off toward Flame-cano Island as Twilight and Rarity paddle after him. Fade to black.*)

(*The view splits horizontally and widens as if it were an eye opening—the rescued dragon's perspective. The view is of Spike and Twilight/Rarity—blurry at first, but quickly coming into focus—and the next words take a moment to reach full clarity.*)

Spike: Hey! Are you okay?

(*Long overhead shot of the four, now on the shore of the island. He stands over the prone figure, whose green coloration has given way to the blue-green/violet colors of Ember—evidently she had applied dye to herself, only to have it wash away. As her spasming lungs force out a cough, Spike removes the helmet to expose her face and bring the incognito act to a full stop. Each gasps upon recognizing the other.*)

Spike: Princess Ember!
Ember: (*standing up*) What do you think *you're* doing?
Rarity: Only saving your ungrateful scales!

(*Stitching on a nervous grin, Spike moves over a notch to block Ember from getting a clear view of the two half-hidden ponies. The maneuver has exactly zero effectiveness.*)

Ember: (*pushing him aside, moving closer*) Did that seaweed just talk?

(*One good yank at the green fronds, and the white and light violet heads are fully exposed, the mouths curving up into a pair of tentative little grins.*)

Ember: *Ponies?!?* What are *they* doing here?
Spike: They're my friends.
Ember: (*skeptically*) Friends? Dragons don't do friends.
Spike: Well, this dragon does.
Ember: Whatever. (*grabbing helmet back from Spike*) I don't care, as long as none of you get in my way. I have a Gauntlet to win.
Spike: But I thought your dad said that—
Ember: (*hotly*) I don't care what my dad said. (*walking away a few steps*) I'll show him, and every dragon who thinks I'm just some little princess, there are better things than being big and strong.

(*A huffing exhalation startles her into silence and causes all eight eyes to flick upward in sudden apprehension. High overhead, a thick, spiky tail attached to a dark gray body heaves a boulder off a cliff to score a direct hit on Garble. The weight carries him down, bouncing off one of the red crystals that jut from the water, and it slams down onto the sand in front of the pony/dragon quartet, with him pinned underneath. He strains to lift it free, without success, and Twilight quickly magicks the seaweed back onto herself and Rarity as Ember dons her helmet again. Spike, meanwhile, takes cover behind the two mares.*)

Garble: Don't leave me here, Spike!

(*Who promptly hurries over and rolls away the stone, at which point his foe voices a mocking laugh and stands up.*)

Garble: Knew you'd do it. (*poking top of Spike's head*) Your pony friends made you soft.

(*A tail sweep buries the little guy in sand, leaving only two irritated green eyes to glare out.*)

Spike: Uh-huh. (*Eyes narrow.*) You're welcome.
Garble: For what? I didn't say "thank you."

(*He stops short and sniffs intently at the air just above Spike's head for a second.*)

Garble: Wow. You even smell like ponies. (*Another sniff; he glances in a different direction.*) Or is it coming from over there?

(*He lets his nose do the leading as Spike pushes his head out of the sand, and it leads him straight to the two undercover equines. In close-up, he sniffs the area directly in front of them but does not catch sight of either face through the seaweed fronds before one gold-armored hand plants itself on his snout to stop him; zoom out to frame Ember.*)

Ember: (*deep voice*) Uh, that's just me. I, uh, robbed some ponies on my way over here.
Garble: Huh! I like your style. Have I met you before? (*peering closely at her*) You kinda look like— (*Spike, now fully cleaned up, inserts himself between them.*)
Spike: —my, uh, old neighbor, uh…

(*Pan quickly to an empty stretch of beach in time with his first word, then to a tumble of boulders for his second.*)

Spike: (*from o.s.*) …uh, Sandy…Rockbeach!

(*Back to the group. The sound of a distant impact is heard; cut to the cliff-dwelling beast that shot him down.*)

Garble: (*from o.s.*) Stupid slingtails knocked me down. (*The group again.*) But I've wasted enough time making small talk. Get it? (*laughing, poking/shoving Spike*) Because you're too small to win this! (*walking off*) I'm funny.

(*He lifts off, Ember waiting until he has cleared out to remove her helmet and address Spike in her normal tone of voice.*)

Ember: Why did you cover for me? You could've had one less competitor.
Spike: I could ask you the same thing. You could've told Garble about my friends.

(*Comes now the sound of a distant scream from overhead; the two look up in time to watch Garble dodging the anti-aircraft assault from the slingtails as other dragons are not so lucky.*)

Ember: (*scared*) Yikes. That looks rough. (*composing herself*) But… (*Sigh.*) …that's what makes it a challenge.
Spike: Are you kidding? Those boulders are *huge!* (*He thinks a bit, then smiles.*) Hey! What if we work together?

(*The red eyes narrow suspiciously.*)

Spike: You fly me up there, and I'll help you look out for boulders, like a second set of eyes.
*** Rarity:** Pssst!

(*He moves toward the conglomeration of aquatic foliage and limbs, only to see it collapse as soon as he touches it.*)

*** Rarity:** (*from o.s., whispering*) Spike!

(*Pan quickly to a hollow tree stump with two pairs of eyeholes—Twilight on bottom, Rarity on top as when they were using the rock disguise. A jutting limb waves to get his attention, and he crosses to her section in close-up.*)

*** Rarity:** (*normal volume*) Are you sure it's a good idea to team up with Ember? You don't know her too well.
Spike: I do know she coulda told Garble about you, but she didn't. I think we can trust her.

(*Zoom out. Twilight has emerged and is sitting on top of the stump, reading her notebook.*)

Twilight: Her behavior does seem contradictory to everything I've noted about dragons so far.
Ember: (*from o.s.*) Hey! You! Little fella! (*Pan quickly back to her.*) I've thought about it—(*Sigh.*) —and your plan makes sense. Let's do it. (*He zips across to her.*)
Spike: Really? Great! It's a deal!

(*The hand he holds out to shake gives her great pause, but eventually she pinches its forefinger between her own forefinger and thumb and works it ever so slightly up and down. The niceties observed, she lets go and brandishes her helmet to back him off a step.*)

Ember: Just so you know, this doesn't mean we're gonna pick flowers or exchange necklaces or whatever pony friends do. (*She stalks off.*)
Twilight: (*to Spike; he/she/Rarity wave to each other*) Good luck. We'll meet you at the top.

(*He hurries after his new partner. Wipe to her in flight and no longer carrying or wearing her helmet, with Spike seated on her back and facing rearward. They dodge and weave past both a rain of boulders and the poor saps who have been hit dead on, and in short order they are cruising past the slingtails' cliff. Up and up they go, Spike spotting an incoming launch from their six-o'clock position.*)

Spike: Pull up! There's one on your tail!
Ember: (*doing so*) Whooaa…

(*The rock hurtles toward the camera to black out the screen. Snap immediately to the two still on the move as a fresh one is lobbed up.*)

Spike: Go left!

(*She does so; it is a clean miss, but a couple of other dragons go down for the count. Cut to Garble, who catches sight of Spike and Ember beginning to close in on him, then to the mouth of a broad, high-ceilinged cave on one clifftop. The scarlet delinquent flies into the blackness, while Ember comes in for a landing and Spike hops off her back.*)

Spike: So what do we do now?
Ember: (*pointing ahead*) I think we go through there.

(*Two other contenders have barely made it inside before a mighty jet of flame erupts from within. Once it ceases, they flap slowly out—whimpering, smoking, and nicely charred from head to tail. Spike and Ember trade nervous glances, suddenly very worried about their personal safety, but are interrupted by a yelp from the o.s. Rarity; zoom out to frame the fake trunk now standing alongside them.*)

*** Rarity:** Oh, that looks scary. (*Pause; the side limb waves.*) I-I mean, you can do it!
Ember: Listen, Spike. I wouldn't have made it this far without you. (*smiling*) So I guess, if you want to, we could keep working together. (*catching herself*) I mean, just until I get through that tunnel.
Spike: (*giving thumbs-up*) Okay! (*They run toward the cave.*)
*** Twilight:** We'll be right behind you.

(*Wipe to an overhead shot of Ember and Spike on the move through the crystal-studded interior of the cave. Pan to follow them for a brief distance; a crash is heard from o.s., and the camera cuts to a head-on view of them as they hit the brakes, surprised. A zoom out puts them and a couple of other dragons at the entrance to a new chamber, blocked by sets of stalactites and stalagmites that repeatedly slam together like a set of jaws. The camera then cuts to behind this bunch and frames several unfortunates who are clinging for dear life to the rocky projections as they piston up and down—the victims of incredibly bad timing.*)

(*Spike and Ember trade a determined nod, and he jumps onto her back for the takeoff. They swerve and pivot to avoid the chomping formations, cycling both horizontally and vertically now. Garble is not far behind them, clearing the hazards with ease until getting pinned in a vertical set; he strains ineffectually to get loose, but can only glower after his two prime opponents as they reach the exit from this funhouse. Spike is moving under his own power again. One last heave pops Garble free, and he thuds down to the cave floor on his face, the impact doing nothing whatsoever to improve his attitude. He is on his feet and racing after them in a trice.*)

(*Cut to Spike and Ember, now jumping and ducking their way through a passage in which huge crystal spikes punch back and forth at crazy angles. The baby dragon pauses to catch his breath, but the respite is short-lived; he gasps and dives ahead to knock Ember away from a spike that comes down from the ceiling .Once he is sure that neither of them has been skewered by the thrust, he helps her to her feet and they push on. Pan back from this spot to stop on Garble, who climbs over one spike only to get immediately plowed away by another. It retracts from the wall it has just thrust into, exposing a fresh, dragon-shaped hole in the stone face, and he emerges with a woozy groan to hit the floor.*)

(*Cut to an exit from this area and zoom out quickly as Spike and Ember step out. Before them is a multi-tiered expanse of lava pools, with streams overflowing from higher to lower levels. In close-up, they are distracted by a relieved sigh from the o.s. Rarity; on the start of the next line, zoom out to show two broad stalagmites now poking up from the floor nearby. The separate pairs of eyeholes pick out Twilight in one, Rarity in the other.*)

*** Rarity:** You made it! Oh, we were so worried! (*The dragons smile.*)
Spike: About us? Bah. That tunnel was cake!

(*He immediately gives the lie to this boast by keeling over in a dead faint.*)

Ember: Wait. How did you two get through?

(*Before either of the interlopers can come up with a plausible answer, a sudden tremor nearly shakes them off their hooves. Rarity cries out in surprise as she slowly totters toward the brink.*)

Spike: (*running to her*) Rarity!

(*He barely makes it in time to pull her back from a spurt of molten rock. A few more panic-stricken exclamations give way to coherent sentences.*)

*** Rarity:** Oh, thanks, Spike! (*Twilight joins them; he sighs.*)
Spike: It was nothing.
Ember: (*from o.s.*) Nothing? (*Cut to frame her with them.*) You just risked everything to save her. And they're putting themselves in danger just to support you!
Spike: Well, that's just what friends do. Don't you have anyone who looks out for you?
Ember: Not really—unless I count you. (*icily*) Which I don't. Because we were only helping each other get through the tunnel, and now we're through the tunnel, so…that's it.
Spike: Wait. What do you mean?
Ember: (*pointedly*) Well, there's only one winner, one Scepter, and one Dragon Lord. So, I guess it's every dragon for themselves.
Spike: (*deflated*) Oh. So we…aren't really friends?
Ember: Maybe if we were in pony land. But, like I said— (*turning away*) —dragons don't do friendship.

(*She lets the violet-shaded wings carry her off over the lava pools without another word, leaving her former number-one assistant to aim a hurt gaze toward the ground. Fade to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a deep fissure or crevasse carved into the mountainside, spanned by passages high and low and marked by the glowing mouths of caverns. Hazy sunlight shines in from the far end. Spike and his friends are visible in the distance, crossing a natural bridge; his next line echoes across the space.*)

Spike: (*sourly*) I can't believe Ember ditched me. (*Close-up of the trio.*)
*** Rarity:** Oh, you're better off. She was only looking out for herself. She's just like all the other dragons.
Spike: She's not, though. I know it! (*All stop; he turns to face the pair.*) She saved me, even when she didn't have to. I don't care what she says. (*walking on*) That makes us friends.

(*The mares get their legs in gear again as the view dissolves to the same stretch of territory, with Spike now leading the way at ground level.*)

*** Twilight:** (*as all walk into view and stop*) Is it just me, or have we seen this crevasse three times already?
Spike: It's kinda hard to tell. They all look the same… (*pointing ahead*) …except for this one! Look!

(*Stubby violet legs carry him ahead with all speed, the mares following, and they halt at one end of an arching span. Zoom out quickly to frame this new space: a vast interior chamber, glowing an ominous orange with the lights of fires hidden behind the mineral growths from floor and ceiling. The remaining path twists and turns through its ascent to a small plateau topped by a mass of red crystals.*)

Spike: We made it! (*Close-up of the three.*) I can't believe I'm the only dragon to make it this far!
Garble: (*from o.s.*) You're not!

(*All six eyes turn fearfully toward that voice; pan to frame the coward, bully, cad, and thief standing at the entrance to this cavern. He gets in Spike's face in much less time than it takes to yell for a bouncer.*)

Garble: (*grabbing his head spines*) And I'm not losing to a puny, pony-loving dragon like you!

(*The dragon in question is unceremoniously hoisted off his feet. Cut to just below bridge level and zoom out to emphasize just how far down the floor—and the nasty big pointy teeth of its stalagmites—really are, then to Twilight and Rarity. The unicorn cries out in terror.*)

*** Rarity:** We have to do something!
*** Twilight:** Look!

(*And here comes Ember, swooping down to hit Garble broadside and plow him away to solid ground so that he knocks Twilight and Rarity over like bowling pins. He loses his grip on Spike, who drops screaming over the edge, but two blue-green hands clamp onto his midsection and carry him off.*)

Spike: Ember! I thought it was every dragon for themselves! (*She lands and sets him down.*) Why did you save me?
Ember: That's what friends do, and…I am. I mean, *we* are. I never should've left you back there. (*groaning*) Please don't make me talk about my feelings!

(*Cut to Twilight and Rarity, lying dazed and halfway out of their capsized stalagmites.*)

Garble: (*from o.s.*) What the—?

(*He lands in front of them, startling them upright and awake in one terrible instant, and lets his mouth curve into a savage grin. Snarling softly, he begins to back them up across the cliff; extreme close-up of one of Twilight's rear hooves as it touches the edge and dislodges a few pebbles. Pan from here to Spike and Ember, who have stopped partway across the path leading to their goal.*)

Ember: Spike! Get the Scepter!

(*As he charges ahead, she doubles back to lay a flying tackle on Garble and pin him against a wall, back first. The red dragon looks past her and spots the violet one closing in on the crystal mound; his fury renewed, he manages to throw Ember aside and dart in. Before he can get a finger on Spike, though, he is yanked back hard—the Princess now has him by the tail and is hauling him up, up, and away. Spike is now close enough to the plateau to see the Scepter resting among its chaotic conglomeration of crystals.*)

(*Garble counters Ember's strike by locking both hands around her throat and hurling her and himself to the ground. Spike glances between the Scepter and the fight, and lets a new, unshakable resolve take hold in his mind. One nimble leap carries him back to the brawlers, and a second launches him over the pinned Ember to land on Garble's head so he can grab an ear and pull hard. The diversion lasts only a moment, though, and Garble yanks him free and pitches him to the edge of the bridge. Clawed violet fingers dig into the stone and hold on for dear life as Garble starts to force Ember backwards.*)

Garble: I am sick and tired of you two helping each other! Dragons don't do helping!
Ember: These dragons do!

(*Scrambling up and over his head, she gets a firm grip and flips him over her back. He lands dazedly on his own in front of Twilight and Rarity, who applaud this display of camaraderie*

skillfully combined with finesse and force. The festivities are cut short by the laughter and chatter of many approaching dragons, and both quickly levitate their stalagmite disguises back over themselves. Just as Spike loses his hold, Ember's hand lances into view to grab his and drag him up. At her encouraging smile, he runs the last few yards to the plateau, bounds up over the crystals, and regards the Scepter. The green eyes widen and an awed little moan escapes his throat as he puts a hand to the shaft and lifts the prize free, pointing the bloodstone at its head over the cavern.)

(*The great gem emits a brilliant red fire, which washes over Spike's body, and his pupils briefly dilate to the point that they nearly fill his eye sockets. He now shifts his grip to hold the Scepter upright, and it sends a jet of flame toward the ceiling as the camera zooms out across the cavern. A red pulse washes over the entire space, followed by a blinding white glare that washes out the screen. Snap to several dragons watching Flame-cano Island from the surrounding ocean; the energy and shock wave pour from the warped summit even at this distance.*)

(*Inside the cavern, the late arrivals can only watch in stunned silence—but Garble takes advantage of the light show to start sneaking up on Ember in close-up. The light show has now stopped.*)

Spike: (*from o.s., echoing*) *Leave her ALONE!!* (*He instantly shifts to total confusion.*)
Garble: (*walking past her*) What? (*Cut to Spike; he continues o.s.*) *You?!?* You have the Scepter?

(*Overhead shot of the three, the camera just behind the little guy.*)

Garble: But—that means that you're—
Ember: —the Dragon Lord. (*bowing*) Dragon Lord Spike.

(*The others copy her gesture, Garble last of all and only with a reluctant groan.*)

Garble: (*petulantly*) Dragon Lord Spike.
Spike: That's right! Uh…now go start your long journey home! (*smiling smugly*) And give every dragon you see on the way a hug. Don't tell them why.
Garble: Aww, but that'll be super-embarrassing!
Spike: (*pointing Scepter at him*) I command you to do it!

(*Grumbling at top volume, the defeated upstart heads for the exit but stops to hug a rather large one first. It breaks out into a big toothy grin.*)

Garble: (*under his breath, lifting off*) Aw, I can't believe this! (*Spike crosses to Ember.*)
Ember: "Dragon Lord Spike." Hm. Has a nice ring to it.
Spike: (*passing Scepter to her*) "Dragon Lord Ember" sounds a lot better.

(*Red flames lick over her body as she takes hold, just as they did to him when he picked it up. She is caught more than a bit off guard by the handoff.*)

Ember: What? No. (*holding it out to him*) You're the Dragon Lord now.
Spike: The Dragon Lord is whoever brings the Scepter back to your father. Besides, you'll make a great leader. I was just doing this to protect the ponies, but I know you'll protect them just as well as I would've.
Ember: You sure about this?
Spike: Absolutely. My home is in Equestria with my friends.
Ember: (*smiling*) Well, you'll have at least one friend here too.

(*The smile disappears as he darts forward to hug as much of her as he can grab.*)

Ember: What are you doing?
Spike: It's called a hug.
Ember: Oh. I don't know if I like it… (*smiling*) …but okay.

(*The embrace tightens as she blushes and gives his head a few indulgent pats.*)

*** Twilight, Rarity:** Aww…

(*They lean their "heads" together to share in the moment as best they can. Dissolve to a long shot of Torch sitting alone on his rough throne under the perpetually gloomy sky. He is shaken out of his funk by a gleam from behind him o.s.; the source proves to be the Scepter in Ember's grip as she leads the rest of his subjects down from the clouds. All of them have removed whatever armor they were wearing. Torch regards them with sheer disbelief; extreme close-up of his narrowed eyes.*)

Torch: Ember? *You?* (*Cut to her, hovering.*)
Ember: I know you didn't think I could do it, but I did.
Torch: I expressly told you NOT TO DO IT!! Because you're not—
Ember: I'm not big and strong! I know. But you know what? I won anyway. So maybe it takes more than just being big and strong to be a good Dragon Lord!

(*Grunts and nods of agreement from the crowd lead him to soften his attitude greatly.*)

Torch: I was wrong, Ember. You might not be big, but you are strong, and smart, and perhaps that counts for more than I thought. And you will make an excellent leader.

(*She perches on the tip of the horn that protrudes upward from the end of his snout.*)

Ember: Thanks, Dad. (*to the crowd*) AGREE WITH HIM!! (*Puzzled grunts in response; she smiles.*) Just kidding. That's not gonna be my thing.

(*Now Torch lets go with a belly laugh.*)

Torch: Dragons! Hear me! I present to you our new Dragon Lord…Ember!

(*Enthusiastic cheers rise as she slowly hovers off his face and waves to her new subjects. The celebration gets a monkey wrench thrown into it when Garble wings into view and hugs the end of the massive blue-gray snout.*)

Torch: Hmm? What is the meaning of this?
Garble: I can't tell you!

(*Ember allows herself a chuckle at this unexpected side effect of Spike's one and only royal order. Cut to him, Twilight, and Rarity on the road for home, the latter two having shed their stalagmite covers.*)

Twilight: You did well, Spike. With Ember as Dragon Lord, the ponies'll be safe and you've gained us a powerful ally.
Spike: And a new friend. (*Close-up of Twilight.*)
Twilight: Plus, Ember said I could write to her anytime I have questions about dragon culture. (*floating her notebook up*) With this much information, I'll be able to write a whole book on dragons! (*Pan to Rarity.*)
Rarity: And I gained tons of ideas for a new line of camouflage clothing! I think I'll call it "Camo-Maud"!

(*All three share a laugh, silhouetted by the setting sun, and the view fades to black.*)

(*The usual closing theme does not accompany the credits. In its place is a portion of the background score, beginning with the start of the dragons' flight to Flame-cano Island and ending with Ember's plunge into the water. Urgent, driving melody with full orchestration; brisk 4 with triplet feel; D minor, with the final chord in A major.*)

NO SECOND PRANCES

Written by Nick Confalone
Produced by Devon Cody
Story editing by Josh Haber
Supervising direction by Jim Miller
Directed by Denny Lu, Tim Stuby

Transcribed by Alan Back (ajback@yahoo.com)

Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to the dining room of the Castle of Friendship. The décor has been modified slightly from past scenes set in this area by the addition of two purple banners hanging on the back wall, on opposite sides of a tall oval window. One shows a profile close-up of Twilight Sparkle, the other Princess Celestia; the images are oriented so that they face each other. The real Twilight walks toward the table, magically pushing a cart loaded with plates and silverware, while Starlight Glimmer stands across the way from her. Once she has the cart in place, she shuts off her horn, nips one plate in her teeth, and sets it on the table in close-up; after a critical glare, she nudges it slightly and smiles.*)

Twilight: First lesson of the day—we very carefully set the table without using magic, so that—*yikes!*

(*She dives to avoid a levitated hailstorm of utensils and china, which assembles itself into a perfect place setting in no time flat. Once the bombardment dies down, she straightens up and finds no fewer than four settings now on the table, with a stack of spare plates in the middle and Starlight floating the last spoon down into its spot. The unicorn cracks off a bashful grin.*)

Twilight: Did you—how? When? What?
Starlight: (*puzzled*) What?
Twilight: (*irritated*) I said "no magic." You were supposed to do it by hoof so I could work in a friendship lesson.
Starlight: Oh! I heard "set the table" and just kinda went for it.
Twilight: Well, if you *hadn't* used magic, you'd have heard me say…uh…

(*Close-up of the setting in front of her.*)

Twilight: (*from o.s., pointing out items.*) …this plate represents your head, this spoon is your heart, and the knives… (*Cut to frame her, seen over Starlight's shoulder.*) …are sharp. Always be careful with knives.

(*Big grin, followed by a heavy sigh.*)

Twilight: (*tapping silverware*) The metaphors make more sense when you're actually setting the table.
Starlight: Should I…change it back?
Twilight: I just want to make sure you're ready for this dinner. Princess Celestia will be joining us tomorrow night to see how the friendship lessons are going.
Starlight: If it's just you, me, and Princess Celestia, why are there four seats?
Twilight: (*crossing to her*) Well, the whole point is for you to bring a new friend. That way, the Princess will see for herself just how far you've come— (*smiling slyly, nudging her*) —and how good a teacher you have.
Starlight: Well, I can't choose. I like all your friends.
Twilight: That's the best part! You have to make a new friend!

(*Her ear-to-ear smile is met with a very uneasy look from the student.*)

Starlight: New friends? (*with forced confidence*) Hey! Maybe I'll just force friendships by magically enslaving the entire population of Ponyville! (*Big grin.*)
Twilight: (*annoyed*) Starlight!
Starlight: (*normal tone*) Kidding!

(*A toothy grin and shaky chuckle do very little to allay Twilight's vexation. Snap to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to a slow pan along a busy Ponyville street during the day. Starlight trots into view.*)

Starlight: Let's see…make new friends in Ponyville, the friendliest place in Equestria. (*Head-on close-up.*) Shouldn't be hard.

(*The sudden appearance of Pinkie Pie to one side brings her up short.*)

Pinkie: Need to make a new friend, huh? (*She mashes her cheek up against Starlight's.*) I know just the pony for you!

(*An instant later, she has whisked the unicorn away. Wipe to the kitchen of Sugarcube Corner, where they arrive just as quickly.*)

Pinkie: Ms. Starlight Glimmer, meet Mrs. Cake!

(*Starlight aims a timid smile across the room; cut to a longer shot that frames the blue baker, who is standing on a box behind a counter to ice a cake. Once she finishes the top edge, she sets down the bag in her mouth that she has been using to dispense the sweet stuff.*)

Mrs. Cake: (*flicking away some extra*) How are you, dearie?
Starlight: (*eagerly*) Are you baking? Can I help?

(*The glow of her horn brings out implements and ingredients from their storage spots all over the kitchen and whirls them together in midair. The end result is a three-tiered cake iced in blue-green and violet, with pale blue-green on the top edge of each tier and plenty of stars up and down the sides. It floats above the three mares as Mrs. Cake resumes her decorating.*)

Pinkie: Wow, Mrs. Cake! Look what your new friend made you! (*Close-up of Mrs. Cake: the bag is set down again.*)
Mrs. Cake: (*laughing absentmindedly*) "New friend." I like the sound of—

(*She pulls in a sharp gasp as the camera zooms out quickly to show Starlight's cake now hovering overhead.*)

Mrs. Cake: Howza-wowza! (*indignantly, sputtering a bit*) Are you trying to put me out of business with your fancy magica-thingie-whatsit cake?

(*Cut to Pinkie and Starlight. Both faces fall as the latter lets her horn wind down; there is a loud splat followed by a string of surprised noises, and Pinkie covers her mouth with a hoof as Starlight cringes mightily.*)

Starlight: Sorry.

(*Back to Mrs. Cake; the whole thing has come down squarely on her head, leaving her thoroughly spattered. Pinkie zips over to lick away the dollop of icing that has made its way down to cover one eye, getting a few crumbs on her own face in the bargain.*)

Pinkie: In her defense, it *is* delicious!

(*And she backs up her claim by stretching her neck upwards for a moment so she can get a chomp out of the bottom two layers. Starlight, meanwhile, does her best to rearrange her features into a placating little grin. Wipe to an extreme close-up of one tree trunk in the Sweet Apple Acres orchards. The scarlet hind legs of Big Macintosh rise into view and slam against the wood, setting off a fall of apples as the camera pans slowly across the field. The motion brings Applejack and Starlight into view, topping a nearby hill, on the start of the next line.*)

Applejack: I think I have just the pony for you, Starlight. Meet Big Mac.

(*Now standing among full baskets, the stallion pivots to face the pair.*)

Macintosh: Ee-yup.
Applejack: He's not much of a talker. (*She and Starlight cross to him.*)
Macintosh: Nn-nope.
Starlight: Oh, that's too bad. I love a good conversation.

(*She kicks her horn into gear, ignoring the odd look from the younger sibling, and fires a beam that lances its way down the older one's throat. He shakes his head vigorously to get his senses back in order, Starlight just smirking at Applejack, and begins to speak—but not in his usual slow, deliberate cadence.*)

Macintosh: (*with increasing speed and panic*) Ee-yup-yup-yup-yup-yup-yup-yup-yup-yup-yup, yeah, yeah, yeah, you did something! Whoa! What's happening? I feel really weird. I'm talking so much, and I'm so articulate! Enunciating with such precise pronunciation!

(*He corks the torrent of words with a hoof for a second, then continues.*)

Macintosh: Annie Apple awoke and accidentally ate an auburn azalea.

(*Every syllable of this tongue twister comes through with crystal clarity, but the overall effect is to frighten him into a yell of pure terror.*)

Macintosh: (*galloping away*) MAKE IT STOOOOOP!!

(*Applejack directs an infuriated little growl toward Starlight.*)

Starlight: I can't be friends with somepony who doesn't talk. (*The growl intensifies.*) And I guess my first instinct shouldn't be to magically command ponies to act the way I want them to?

(*Again; now Applejack leans hard into her face.*)

Starlight: (*annoyed, trotting after Macintosh*) All right, I'll change him back!

(*Wipe to a close-up of several fabric rolls on a rack within a room of the Carousel Boutique. On the start of the next line, Rarity's magic pulls one away and floats it across, the camera panning to frame her in the ground-floor showroom. She has her reading glasses on.*)

Rarity: (*wrapping fabric around her neck as a scarf*) The trick to finding a new friend is to render yourself radiant.

(*She trots across the floor, passing Starlight on a small platform in front of a mirror.*)

Rarity: First impressions count a great deal, you know.
Starlight: I'm glad you all got past my first impression.

(*The designer returns, having shed the impromptu scarf and retrieved a measuring tape that she puts to work on the other mare.*)

Rarity: Well, everypony deserves a second chance. (*Gasp.*) Ooh, now, I have a top-notch idea. (*floating cloth swatches, wrapping Starlight up*) I'm thinking pastel silk here and here, with crinoline underneath. (*They are pulled away.*)
Starlight: You really think a new outfit will help me meet ponies?
Rarity: (*passing behind a folding screen*) Oh, with the right outfit you can do *anything*, darling.

(*By the time she emerges on the end of this, she has shed the glasses and donned a two-tone deep pink dress with light pink fur trim at the shoulders, a necklace of white pearls and a foreleg bracelet of pale blue ones, and roses in her mane and on the necklace.*)

Starlight: When will it be ready?
Rarity: Three weeks. (*Starlight's face falls.*)
Starlight: Dinner's tomorrow.
Rarity: Well, then. How about a hat from the… (*Clear throat.*) …clearance bin?

(*Pan quickly across the room to the bin in question, which sits next to a bucket of yarn balls and fabric and a few crumpled papers scattered on the floor. Starlight's aura brings up a brimless, cylindrical fur pillbox decorated with long, pale blue/yellow plumes and tries to settle it on her head at a rakish angle. It is a bit too small, though, and when she tries to magically stretch it to fit, the point of her horn rips through the material. A frustrated groan follows.*)

Starlight: Maybe not.

(*To which Rarity just rolls her eyes at this abuse of millinery. Wipe to a close-up of a hovering Rainbow Dash somewhere outside Ponyville.*)

Rainbow: (*chuckling a bit*) Nopony's gonna make friends with you because of your outfit.

(*A longer shot frames her and the pinkish-violet unicorn out here, the latter having shed the ruined hat.*)

Rainbow: (*looping to Starlight's other side*) The only thing you want a new friend draped in is coolness.
Starlight: Like you?
Rainbow: Yeah, but you already know me, so…

(*A bit of thought leads to a brainstorm; she pulls in a happy gasp and leans closely enough to shower Starlight with saliva on her next word.*)

Rainbow: Spitfire! (*Chuckle; Starlight wipes herself off.*) Sorry.
Starlight: Who's that?

Rainbow: (*scoffing*) Only the Wonderbolt-iest pony in the Wonderbolts! Come on. I'll introduce you.

(*She rockets away, nearly blowing the unicorn's mane off her head and generating a sonic boom whose shock wave washes over the landscape. As Starlight scrubs at an ear, Rainbow zooms right back to her.*)

Rainbow: You coming or what?
Starlight: I guess my first question would be…"What's a Wonderbolt?"

(*Those three words hit the daredevil like a twenty-pound sledgehammer upside the head, if her incredulous gasp is any indication.*)

Rainbow: You've never heard of the Wonderbolts? Where have you been?
Starlight: (*chuckling lamely*) Enslaving villages, I guess.
Rainbow: (*settling slowly to ground*) Riiiiight.

(*Wipe to a close-up of Fluttershy's rabbit Angel on a picnic blanket, lying on his back and very happy to be having his belly rubbed by Starlight. She chuckles as the camera zooms out to frame her.*)

Starlight: You're adorable!

(*She straightens up and walks off, leaving little pink hearts to float up from the blissful fuzzball's face.*)

Starlight: But probably not what Twilight had in mind.

(*A longer shot frames Fluttershy arriving for a get-together with assorted forest critters, big and small. Having just missed Starlight's departure, she sets down a plate of carrots and sighs dejectedly. Dissolve to a stretch of park land filled with ponies occupying themselves in assorted ways; Starlight walks into view along a path and voices a loud groan.*)

Starlight: What is going on? This is Ponyville! (*She regards her reflection in a fountain.*) If I can't make a friend here, there's gotta be something wrong with me! (*Sigh.*) Okay. Calm down. Nobody makes friends with a total stress case.

(*Glances around the area pick out, among other things, Bon Bon and Lyra Heartstrings flying a kite and a filly getting a garland of flowers levitated onto her head.*)

Starlight: Stop stressing… (*Zoom out quickly.*) *…STOP STRESSING!!*

(*This brings all the equines in the immediate vicinity to dead silence; realizing that all eyes have now turned her way, she bugs out of the park. In close-up, she comes to a stop and lets her head droop in defeat, but is interrupted by the jingling of a bell on a door. The camera pans slightly to*

follow her glance across the stream to the source: the Ponyville Spa, whose front door Bulk Biceps has just opened so a customer can exit. The massive pegasus is dressed in the jersey and headband he wore while on duty there in "Castle Sweet Castle.")

(*After he shuts the door, the camera cuts to a close-up of the sign hanging above it—heart-shaped, depicting a mare with long flowing mane/tail and a horseshoe amid a cluster of flowers. Pan/tilt down to show Starlight walking up; she smiles at the sight and quickens her pace toward the establishment. A dissolve puts her on a lounge chair inside, being attended by Lotus and a second earth pony mare as Bulk walks past in the fore. This other mare has a lavender coat, blue-green eyes with pale green shadow, and a pink mane/tail that she wears shorter than Lotus and tied back. Her cutie mark shows two small tea candles, and she wears a white collar and headband to match the other employees. Starlight lies on her back, her head and shoulders propped up at an angle; a mud mask has been slathered onto her face, and cucumber slices cover her eyes. Behind her, part of a second customer's towel-wrapped head can be seen. Zoom in slowly.*)

Starlight: (*sighing contentedly*) This is just what I needed.

(*On the next line, the second head turns ever so slightly, also showing cucumber-covered eyes and a mud-masked face. However, a sliver of uncovered, bright blue coat also becomes visible; this, combined with the voice, is enough to give away the speaker's identity.*)

Trixie: (*sighing*) Tell me about it. (*Close-up of Starlight.*)
Starlight: You ever have one of *those* days?
Trixie: For me, they're all one of those days. (*Starlight giggles.*) I'm gonna start coming here every time I visit Ponyville.
Starlight: I'm not from here, either. I've been trying to make friends, but it's not easy. They're not saying it, but I think everypony knows about my past. I may have been a tiny bit…completely and utterly evil?
Trixie: Ponies judge me on my past, too.

(*Now Starlight floats the cucumbers off her eyes so she can glance past the edge of her chair.*)

Starlight: Finally, a pony I can relate to.

(*Dissolve to a slow pan across the place settings on Twilight's dining room table. The utensil farthest to the right is slightly out of place.*)

Twilight: (*from o.s.*) Soup spoon, salad fork, pasta spoon, strawberry pick…

(*This last item gets a magical nudge to put it back in alignment; cut to her standing at the table.*)

Twilight: I'm beginning to think that after friendship, the greatest magic of all… (*giddily*) …is proper silverware placement! (*Giggle; sound of a galloping approach.*)
Starlight: (*from o.s.*) Twilight! Guess what!

(*Cut to her, barreling in from the hallway and with her cucumbers and mud mask gone.*)

Starlight: I made a new friend!
Twilight: That's fantastic news! (*Close-up of each in turn.*)
Starlight: She's great!
Twilight: Great!
Starlight: She's powerful!
Twilight: (*puzzled*) Powerful?
Starlight: She's—
Trixie: (*from o.s., smugly*) Hello…

(*Pan away from Starlight to frame the blue unicorn standing in the doorway. She too has shed her spa accoutrements, and her starry hat/cape and jewel brooch are firmly in place, with the hat tilted forward to shadow her eyes.*)

Trixie: …Princess.

(*In close-up, she tosses her head back ever so slightly to reposition the hat and expose all of her smirking countenance. Starlight grins broadly back at her, while Twilight boggles helplessly, her mind officially blown.*)

Twilight: *Trixie?*

(*Snap to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to the three and zoom in slowly. Trixie has advanced a few steps into the dining room.*)

Starlight: You know each other? (*Close-up of Twilight.*)
Twilight: (*icily*) You could say that. (*Trixie sidles up alongside.*)
Trixie: We've…had our differences. What matters is, Twilight gave me a second chance, and I appreciate it.

(*The Princess in residence manages a tight little grin, after which Trixie trots to the table and begins to float up pieces of silverware for a little tinkering.*)

Twilight: So, um, what brings you to Ponyville?
Trixie: (*full ham mode*) The Great and Powerful Trixie has come to perform a new stage show of grand illusion! I'm calling it… (*Close-up.*) …"The Humble and Penitent Trixie's Equestrian Apology Tour"!
Starlight: (*whispering, to her*) That's kind of a mouthful.

Trixie: (*ditto*) It's a working title. (*Wink.*)
Twilight: (*from o.s.*) Starlight? (*Cut to her.*) A moment? (*more sharply*) Over here?

(*The latter's hesitation earns her a swift magical yank across the room, and Twilight puts a foreleg across her shoulders to pull her close.*)

Twilight: (*whispering*) I know I said "make friends with anypony," but…well, with Trixie's past and your past, I'm not so sure she's the best first friend.

(*Starlight risks a quick look across the room and gets a knowing look and gesture from Trixie.*)

Starlight: But whatever she did, you've forgiven her, right?
Twilight: (*normal volume*) Of course. It's just…she wasn't the nicest pony.
Starlight: (*pointedly*) Well, you did say "anypony," and I just assumed that you trust me to make my own friends, the way Princess Celestia trusted *you*.

(*Her last word comes with a hoof poked into the violet chest for emphasis. Close-up of Twilight.*)

Twilight: (*sighing heavily*) You're right. I trust you. Just be back in time for the dinner.
Starlight: (*from o.s., gasping happily*) Thanks, Twilight!

(*Pan slightly to follow the purple eyes toward the door, where Starlight now stands to wave goodbye as Trixie crosses to her.*)

Starlight: You won't regret it!

(*Off she goes at a gallop, the blue performer stopping her leisurely walk just long enough to flip a sardonic salute.*)

Twilight: (*softly*) I hope not.

(*She turns toward the table; cut to a close-up of the place setting where Trixie was standing and zoom out. Standing on the plate is a crude sculpture in her likeness, constructed of bent silverware and using a napkin for the cape. Twilight eyes it for a moment before letting go with a slightly disgusted sigh and plying her field to start dismantling the thing.*)

(*Dissolve to a stretch of park land, where Trixie is in the process of setting up a stage. A trunk sits open before her, and she floats a piece up onto the frame over the stage to serve as a sort of proscenium—the star-tipped wand from her cutie mark, framed by a crescent moon and a burst of energy. She has shed her cape and hat, and Starlight is watching the work in progress.*)

Trixie: This magic show's gonna be the greatest thing Ponyville's ever seen!

(*As she keeps at it, suspicious whispers begin to pass among small groups of onlookers; they fall silent and walk away once she takes notice, though.*)

Trixie: (*with a trace of bitterness*) Everypony always says they'll give you a second chance, but deep down, they never forget. (*She tacks up a length of bunting.*)
Starlight: That's what I'm worried about. (*Trixie sighs.*) What is it?
Trixie: I heard what Twilight said about me, and…she's right. I *wasn't* very nice. So I'd understand if you didn't want to be friends.
Starlight: (*laughing*) Are you kidding? You're the first pony I've met who has any idea how I feel.

(*The performer's mouth turns up into a half-smile, but it lasts only long enough for her to look frantically around herself as if to make sure no eavesdroppers are close by. Once she is satisfied, she throws a calculating smile toward Starlight.*)

Trixie: Can you keep a secret?
Starlight: (*a bit uneasily*) What are friends for?
Trixie: The things I've done, I did them because I was jealous of Twilight. She's just the best at everything! And I wanted to beat her at *something!*
Starlight: Your secret's safe with me.
Trixie: (*smiling*) Thanks. Want to help me unpack my wagon?

(*A grin passes from one face to the other. Dissolve to the two walking through Ponyville.*)

Trixie: I spend a lot of time on the road with my wagon, so it might be a *tad* messy.
Starlight: Maybe I can help. I'm pretty good at organizing stuff. Magic props, brainwashed crowds… (*Both giggle.*)
Twilight: (*from o.s.*) Psssst!

(*Starlight stops in her tracks and begins to look around for the source of the disruption, while Trixie continues unchecked.*)

Twilight: (*from o.s.*) Psst!

(*She closes in on a couple of bushes.*)

Twilight: (*from "o.s."*) Pssssssst!

(*The winged unicorn's face breaks through the nearest patch of leaves, hoof to lips.*)

Twilight: (*softly*) Shhh!

(*Her "play along" grin prompts Starlight to straighten up and address Trixie, now a good distance along the road.*)

Starlight: Uh, I'll catch up! (*Trixie stops.*) I think there's something in my hoof.
Trixie: Sure. The wagon's right around the corner.

(*As she trots away, an irked student turns back to her mentor, who keeps her voice down for her next three lines while Starlight decides not to bother.*)

Twilight: So, how's it going with your new friend?
Starlight: (*sourly*) Great. Thanks for asking in a completely not-creepy way.
Twilight: (*straightening up, leaves on head*) Because you know, if it isn't working out for any reason, I could introduce you to my friend here.

(*She indicates the unoccupied bush on the end of this line.*)

Starlight: (*dryly, sticking a hoof in to "shake"*) Nice to meet you.
Twilight: No, no! (*poking bush*) You can come out now.

(*And up comes the bobbing head of DJ P0N-3, headphones in place and blaring at a thoroughly unreasonable volume.*)

Twilight: (*to Starlight*) You like music, right? DJ P0N-3'd be the perfect friend for tonight's incredibly important dinner with Celestia.

(*On the end of this, cut to an extreme close-up of the off-white face, each violet sunglass lens reflecting one of the other two mares. The camera then cuts back to them.*)

Twilight: You know, if you decide to make a last-minute change. (*Chuckle.*)
Starlight: (*accusingly*) So back at your castle, when you said "I trust you," you meant "I don't trust you."
Twilight: (*laughing airily*) Who can really say who said what? I know I can't. (*to DJ P0N-3*) Can you?

(*The remix mistress just gives her a funny look, then steps out of the bush and walks away.*)

Twilight: (*touching Starlight's shoulder*) Starlight, I'm just trying to look out for you.
Starlight: (*sighing, pushing hoof away*) I appreciate it, but you're wrong about Trixie. She's just like me. We have a real connection.
Twilight: That's kind of what I'm afraid of. (*looking off elsewhere, smiling suddenly*) Oh!

(*Cut to Derpy Hooves in flight and waving toward the pair.*)

Twilight: (*from o.s.*) What about her?

(*Her attention distracted, the cross-eyed pegasus runs headfirst into a bread shop's hanging sign and ends up flat on the ground. Back to Twilight and Starlight.*)

Starlight: Please, Twilight! I know you're trying to help, but… (*walking a few steps away*) …I need to make friends on my own if I'm going to become a better pony.

Twilight: (*sliding her bush closer*) But do you really think Trixie's the one to help you with that?

(*That query hits about five raw nerves.*)

Starlight: Wow. Trixie was right. You're not really giving her a second chance. I wonder what that says about how you feel about me.

(*She gallops off, leaving one gobsmacked Princess in her wake. An irritated little huff catches her ear; pan quickly to the source—Cranky Doodle Donkey, sitting on a nearby bench and looking quite out of sorts. Birds peck at the popcorn kernels he has scattered from a bag, and one promptly swoops down to carry off his blond toupee.*)

Twilight: (*from o.s.*) Oh! (*Back to her; Starlight, in the background, stops.*) Now he'd be perfect!

(*The focus shifts from her to Starlight, who lets go with an exasperated groan before putting her hooves in gear to follow Trixie's exit. Dissolve to an overhead shot of the blue mare's wagon parked in a clearing—a rather nicer-looking model than the one that got crushed by the Ursa Minor in "Boast Busters." One trunk is already resting on the grass, and Starlight steps out from the rear door to set down another one with her telekinesis. A dark-colored vertical cabinet has already been set out. At ground level, she magically flips open the trunk she has just brought out as Trixie drags some more cargo along by a strap in her teeth.*)

Starlight: I was thinking. (*Trixie stops and lets go.*) You said Twilight is better than you at everything, but that's not true. You're better at magic.
Trixie: Only when I'm wearing a soul-sucking evil amulet. So— (*Cut to Starlight, surprised; she continues o.s.*) —I don't think that counts.

(*A reference to her use of the Alicorn Amulet in "Magic Duel." The next shot frames both unicorns.*)

Trixie: (*smiling*) Funny story. Don't need to get into it.
Starlight: (*laughing a bit*) I meant stage magic.
Trixie: (*magically opening a trunk*) Well, of course. (*Props float out—cards, hoops, wand, string of handkerchiefs.*) Great? Yes. Powerful? Obviously. But I'm not the *best*. (*They drop back into the trunk; zoom in slowly.*) As great and powerful as I am, there is one trick I've never been able to do—the Moon-Shot Manticore Mouth Dive!

(*The scene undergoes a wavering dissolve to a black-and-white silent movie, with holes for the camera sprockets visible at both sides of the screen and plenty of smudges and dust spots in evidence. A unicorn stallion stands on a stage before a crowd, with a short curly mane/tail and a cutie mark that cannot be immediately distinguished. He wears shackles on all four hooves and a collar around his neck, and as Trixie continues, he easily breaks the chains connecting these to the heavy staples mounted on the planks.*)

Trixie: (*voice over*) Only one magician has ever pulled it off—my hero, Hoofdini.

(*The crowd applauds. Cut to Hoofdini, now free of the shackles and collar and wearing an old-style leather aviator helmet. As he stuffs himself rump first into the muzzle of a cannon, his cutie mark can be clearly seen—an open padlock with the key inserted into the hole in front. As the narration progresses, the cannon tilts up and fires him into the air, and the camera cuts to a close-up of a roaring manticore—the lion/bat/scorpion cross-breed seen in "Elements of Harmony." This specimen in this film differs from the previous one in two respects: smaller ears and a pair of curved goat horns. It stands on the stage, held in place by a leash connected to the collar it wears.*)

Trixie: (*voice over*) You are supposed to blast yourself into the open mouth of a hungry manticore.

(*Hoofdini's shot is right on target, and the beast gets right to work chewing up this tasty magical morsel.*)

Trixie: (*voice over*) After the manticore chews you up and swallows you—

(*Once it has done so, pan to a cabinet that is a duplicate of the one Trixie brought with her, this one wrapped with several turns of heavy chain held by a padlock.*)

Trixie: (*voice over*) —you magically step out of a box on the other side of the stage.

(*The whole thing promptly falls apart to reveal Hoofdini, no longer wearing the helmet and without so much as a tooth mark on him.*)

(*He takes a bow as the audience cheers wildly, and the film goes blank and jumps the sprockets. Dissolve back to Starlight and Trixie.*)

Trixie: Completely unharmed!
Starlight: (*taken aback*) That sounds very—
Trixie: Dangerous?
Starlight: (*smiling*) I was gonna say "cool"!
Trixie: I knew I liked you for a reason.

(*She holds up a front hoof; extreme close-up of it and one of Starlight's as they clack together for a high five, then cut to a longer shot of them.*)

Trixie: I don't know how he did it. (*looking in one trunk*) If I tried it, I'd get chewed up and swallowed by that manticore.
Starlight: Not if you could use *real* magic. (*Trixie straightens up, rolling her eyes.*)
Trixie: Obviously. Way to rub it in.
Starlight: No! I mean, I could help. You could start the trick— (*Trixie paces a bit.*) —and right before you got chewed up— (*levitating her*) —I could use magic to save you—

(*The mare poofs out of sight; cut to an extreme close-up of the cabinet, whose door opens under Starlight's control. As she continues, Trixie reappears within it.*)

Starlight: (*from o.s.*) —and make you appear in the black box!
Trixie: (*bewildered*) I guess that would work. (*Starlight crosses smugly to her.*) But if you made one mistake, I'd be a goner.
Starlight: (*laughing*) When it comes to magic, I don't make mistakes. Maybe I could be your…magic show-helper pony.
Trixie: We call it "assistant" in the magician biz. And…nopony's ever offered to help before.
Starlight: Well, I'd be honored. (*Trixie crosses to the wagon's rear door.*)
Trixie: You may have just made my Great and Powerful Magic Show even better— (*floating out a rolled poster*) —which I didn't even think was possible!

(*Unrolling it in midair, she reveals an image of herself—cape, no hat, holding a glowing red ball marked with stars. Her own eyes stare intently out from the background, and lines of text at top and bottom frame the tableau.*)

Trixie: We're gonna blow them away tonight!

(*Whereupon the brand-new assistant puts a weary hoof to her face.*)

Starlight: Oh, I can't! (*woodenly*) Tonight's this incredibly important dinner with Twilight.
Trixie: (*instantly deflated*) Oh.

(*The poster rolls itself up and floats back into the wagon.*)

Starlight: Can I vent for a minute?
Trixie: What are friends for?
Starlight: Even after Twilight says she trusts me, she clearly doesn't trust me enough to choose my own friends. (*Groan.*) I guess you were right. No second chances.
Trixie: Huh. I wish I could say I was surprised. Well, lucky for *Princess Twilight*, I have *my* magic show tonight.

(*Stepping down from the door, she decides to play the "woe is me" angle for all she can.*)

Trixie: If you have to go to the dinner, I'd completely understand. (*overwrought*) I just hope I find a way to survive the Moon-Shot Manticore Mouth Dive without my new assistant.

(*As she departs, the camera zooms in to a close-up of said assistant, torn between conflicting loyalties. Snap to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of a unicorn-mare ice sculpture standing on the now-fully-loaded table in Twilight's dining room. Water drips off the slowly melting surfaces as the camera cuts to one conspicuously empty seat and pans to frame both Twilight and Celestia, seated side by side and regarding it with clear concern. The smaller Princess grimaces, having cleaned the leaves off her head from her Act Two surveillance of Starlight, while the larger lets her eyes drift impatiently up toward the ceiling. After a second of tension thick enough to cut with a chainsaw, Twilight somehow stitches a grin onto her face.*)

Twilight: (*chuckling lamely*) Starlight Glimmer should be here any minute. Any…minute…now.

(*Celestia says nothing, but floats a fork up from her place for a good close inspection.*)

Twilight: How about I introduce everyone? (*Down with the fork.*) Our friendship lessons are going *so* well. (*gesturing toward other end of table*) She made three new friends!

(*On the start of this last sentence, cut to Cranky, Derpy, and DJ P0N-3 at the opposite side of the table. The bird that stole Cranky's toupee is now wearing it and standing on his head, a full-mouthed Derpy waves over a plate of muffins, and DJ P0N-3's headphones continue to blare. When the camera cuts back to the Princesses, Celestia is far from impressed but Twilight soldiers on.*)

Twilight: She has such great taste in friends. I don't know where she would've learned that. (*Chuckle.*)
Cranky: (*from o.s.*) Starlight Glimmer? (*Cut to frame all five.*) I thought you said "nose hair trimmers"! What's going on? (*banging table*) I'm hungry! And my nose is too hairy.

(*He lets off an indignant little bray as Celestia trains two thoroughly displeased eyes on the host of this derailed dinner function.*)

Twilight: (*forcing a laugh*) Cranky Doodle! You're so funny! (*to Celestia, backing away*) If you'll excuse me, I'm gonna check the kitchen. Maybe she got lost amongst the, uh… (*Chuckle.*) …artichokes!

(*With just a hint of hyperventilation, she sprints out of the dining room, leaving Celestia to face the unlikely trio across the full width of the table. Wipe to Twilight trotting through Ponyville; night has now fallen.*)

Twilight: Starlight? Has anyone seen Starlight Glimmer? I'm looking for her!

(*She breaks into a gallop. Cut to an overhead shot of the stage Trixie was setting up in Act Two—now fully dressed with curtains and bunting, a giant copy of her show poster at either end. A star-spangled cannon sits several yards behind the knots of spectators, angled upward and aimed toward the stage. Applejack and Pinkie are among the group, and Twilight steps into view in the foreground overlooking the gathering. Cut to a profile view of her and zoom in as the purple eyes narrow viciously.*)

Twilight: Trixie!

(*Ground level; the two earth ponies make their way toward the edge of the stage. Pinkie has cleaned her face since taste-testing Starlight's cake in Act One.*)

Pinkie: So *this* is the Humble and Penitent Trixie's Equestrian Apology Tour?
Applejack: Ain't that a mouthful of molasses.

(*Pan quickly to the closed curtains, through which the blue head pokes out to glare at them.*)

Trixie: It's a working title!

(*Back she goes. Cut to the prop-filled backstage area; she gasps happily, Starlight here with her.*)

Trixie: This is gonna be the greatest night of my life! (*catching herself*) Excuse me. *Our* lives.
Starlight: Ah, I'm so glad we're not at that boring dinner.

(*The chipper mood gets pounded flat by the sound of Twilight clearing her throat. Cut to just behind Starlight and Trixie, the camera aimed between their heads to frame the winged unicorn at a backstage entrance. She is absolutely not amused.*)

Twilight: You just decided to skip our dinner without telling me? (*walking in slowly*) Are you aware that at this very moment, Princess Celestia is waiting for you at a table… (*Close-up; she leans into Starlight's face.*) *…with exquisite silverware placement?!?*
Starlight: Y-Yes, but—
Twilight: This is exactly why I didn't want you to make friends with Trixie. (*Cut to frame all three on the start of the next line.*)
Trixie: Aha! (*advancing on Twilight*) You still don't trust me. But guess what, *Princess?* (*She gets in Twilight's face.*) It doesn't matter if you want to give me a second chance or not. (*Back up next to Starlight.*) Starlight had to choose between you and me, and she chose me! Your pupil chose me! So, ha! I win!

(*The sudden change of Starlight's expression speaks to a sudden malfunction in her mental machinery.*)

Starlight: You win? That sounds like you just made friends with me to beat Twilight.
Trixie: Exactly!

(*The machinery now coughs up a few rather important components, but it takes Trixie a few seconds to realize her misstep and pivot toward Starlight.*)

Trixie: Wait! I mean, no! I got caught up in the moment. I like you. Beating Twilight is just a bonus.

(*This time, the slip sets in much faster; she lets out a gasp and claps a hoof to her face.*)

Trixie: Oh, saying that didn't help, did it? (*Starlight's eyes fill with tears.*)
Starlight: (*voice breaking*) I should've known. Nopony else in Ponyville wanted to be my friend. Why would you?

(*Outside, she bounds away through the backstage entrance and gallops off.*)

Trixie: (*trotting a few steps after her*) Wait! It's not like that! I *am* your friend! (*She lets her head drop with a moan.*)
Twilight: (*bitterly, stepping to entrance*) Well, you won. I hope you're happy!
Trixie: (*sighing*) Looks like the Great and Powerful Trixie is back to a solo show. (*She puts a hoof to her forehead.*)
Twilight: Trixie?

(*The blue magician turns scornfully toward her.*)

Trixie: Which is exactly the way she likes it! Thank you, Princess Twilight, for getting rid of that annoying pony who wanted to be my first friend! (*walking in, as Twilight steps out*) I am not sad at all!

(*At the top of the steps, she pauses and wheels to face the Princess with brimming eyes.*)

Trixie: (*voice breaking*) I definitely don't feel like my heart is breaking into a million pieces!

(*In she goes, magically pulling a curtain shut across the doorway. Zoom out to frame Twilight, who turns away to give a moment's hard thought to this badly wrecked venture in friendship, then dissolve to the stage. A sizable crowd has gathered now, and the curtains open to reveal the caped-and-hatted silhouette of Trixie standing behind them. The gap closes as a spotlight flicks on to illuminate her fully—but her usual theatrical flair is utterly gone.*)

Trixie: (*woodenly*) Come one, come all! Come and see the Pathetic and Friendless Trixie's "Way to Go, Dum-Dum, You Really Messed It Up This Time" Repentance Tour!

(*There follows a round of confused mutterings among the audience, goading her to a supremely annoyed glare.*)

Trixie: (*shrilly*) IT'S A WORKING TITLE!! (*woodenly*) Behold, your fears come true!

(*The curtain behind her is reeled up to expose two items: the tall cabinet from her set of props, and…*)

Trixie: A pony-eating manticore!

(*Same features as in the black-and-white film. Secured by a leash running from the stage to the collar around its neck, the best roars loudly enough to shake the camera and spook Fluttershy into grabbing at Applejack for protection. Uneasy murmurs rise around them.*)

Trixie: For tonight, the Great and Powerful Trixie will be performing the Moon-Shot Manticore Mouth Dive! (*Awed gasps; Fluttershy covers her eyes; Trixie crosses to the cabinet as she continues.*) Now, now, save your gasps for when I defy the beast's jaws of doom and appear inside that black box.

(*Now she breaks out of her monotonic delivery and shows a flash of true sadness.*)

Trixie: I was supposed to perform this trick with my great and powerful assistant, who was also my great and powerful friend.

(*Overhead shot of the stage, zooming out as she jumps down and the crowd parts to give her a clear approach to the cannon. The camera motion frames Starlight in the fore, sitting morosely on her haunches at the same vantage point Twilight used earlier in this act. The unicorn wipes away a tear as her mentor steps up.*)

Twilight: Starlight, when I first came to Ponyville, Princess Celestia gave me room to make my own decisions, and my own friends. I need to give you the same freedom. I shouldn't have tried to pick and choose your friends for you.

(*Close-up of the cannon muzzle. Trixie has climbed in, her head and forelegs protruding, and she tosses her hat down; she levitates a conical crash helmet onto her head in its place and secures its chin strap.*)

Twilight: Just like me, you have to make your own decisions— (*smiling*) —and your own friends.

(*Starlight straightens up slightly as the cannon pivots on its base to change the firing angle.*)

Starlight: But…what if Trixie really *was* using me just to one-up you?
Twilight: From what I've seen, she's the real thing.

(*The firing-piece locks on target, and a spark from the performer's horn lights the long fuse at the breech.*)

Twilight: But it's not my place to judge. It's all up to you.

(*The manticore roars. The fuse continues to burn. Cut to Trixie and zoom in slowly.*)

Trixie: Starlight, if you're out there, and you still want to be friends, let's be great and powerful together.

(*Tucking her forelegs in, she lets herself slide fully into the cannon barrel and out of view. A moment later, she emerges just far enough to show her face.*)

Trixie: (*softly, reverberating slightly*) Please?

(*The fuse burns through its final length and she is launched in a high arc over the spectators. One more roar prompts a scream of sheer terror from the equine projectile; she has just enough time to cover her eyes before dropping neatly into the open mouth. The powerful jaws instantly slam shut, and the manticore swallows without chewing, thumps a paw to its chest, and produces a sonorous belch. Gasps and popeyed stares from the audience, accompanied by Fluttershy moaning and crumpling bonelessly to the ground. A flash of magic from within the cabinet quiets them in a blink, the spotlight shifting onto it and away from the manticore. Then, just as in the Hoofdini film, the entire contraption collapses in pieces to the floor. Inside is Trixie, now wearing her usual hat instead of the helmet; both it and her cape are badly ripped and damaged, her mane is a frightful wreck, and she herself looks as if she just went three rounds with the heavyweight champion of the world.*)

Trixie: (*very woozy*) Behold…the Pate and Growerful…Triskie…

(*This is as far as she gets before keeling over in a dead faint; the audience gapes openmouthed at the feat as Fluttershy gets partway up to her hooves, risking a look through only one eye. Once all are satisfied that the main attraction has not been turned into a main course, she pops the rest of the way up and joins them in a round of hearty cheering. Onstage, Trixie begins to come around and is most perplexed to find Starlight helping her up. The pinkish-violet unicorn tips a wink to the blue one, who smiles gratefully in return and swiftly regains her old over-the-top delivery.*)

Trixie: And now, I'm proud to introduce my great and powerful assistant… (*softly, to Starlight*) …and best friend… (*full volume, to crowd*) …Starlight Glimmer!

(*Another round of applause, and all three on the stage—magician, assistant, manticore—take a bow as the curtain comes down. The creature is left outside, while the two mares are behind; cut to backstage as they embrace warmly. A panicked Twilight chooses this moment to butt in from the backstage entrance.*)

Twilight: Trixie!
Trixie: (*acidly*) What do *you* want?
Twilight: (*stepping in*) I was wrong. I'm sorry. (*smiling*) And I have to hand it to you. (*touching Trixie's shoulder*) I could never have pulled off a trick like that.

(*A warm smile makes its way onto Starlight's face, and Trixie's acerbic tone melts away.*)

Trixie: Thank you… (*She floats her hat off and bows.*) …Princess.

(*Cut to a close-up of the curtains. Both unicorns put their heads out, side by side, and in a longer shot, the camera tilts up into the sky as Trixie's magic sends up a salvo of brightly colored fireworks to close out the show. Fade to black.*)

(*Snap to the unicorn ice sculpture on Twilight's dining room table—or rather, what remains of that detailed work. Only the legs, belly, and tail are still intact, everything else having melted away. A longer shot frames the four abandoned dinner guests positioned exactly as they were when Twilight bailed out: Celestia at one side of the table and facing Cranky, Derpy, and DJ P0N-3 at the other. The only difference from then to now is that the unicorn's headphones have gone quiet.*)

Cranky: (*to Celestia*) How do you get your hair to do that all the time?

(*Referring to the manner in which her mane/tail constantly billow as if blown by an ethereal wind. Her only response is a fed-up sigh and eye roll before the view fades to black.*)

(*The usual closing theme does not accompany the credits. In its place is the tune that played as accompaniment to Trixie's silent-film flashback. Jaunty piano melody with acoustic guitar and wood-block percussion accents, brisk 4, C major.*)

NEWBIE DASH

Story by Dave Polsky, Dave Rapp
Written by Dave Rapp
Produced by Devon Cody
Story editing by Josh Haber
Supervising direction by Jim Miller
Directed by Denny Lu, Tim Stuby

Transcribed by Alan Back (ajback@yahoo.com)

Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to an overhead shot of a stretch of Ponyville during the day. The camera is positioned next to the upper stories of the town hall and aimed toward the Castle of Friendship in the distance. Rainbow Dash swoops lazily into view, heading in the crystal edifice's general direction; close-up of her.*)

Scootaloo: (*from o.s.*) Hey! Rainbow Dash!

(*The blue pegasus stops short and glances quizzically toward ground level. Cut to her perspective of the orange one, rolling to a stop on her scooter and waving with her crash helmet on. Zoom in quickly to a close-up, then cut to ground level.*)

Rainbow: (*touching down*) Hiya, Scootaloo! What's up?
Scootaloo: The Rainbow Dash Fan Club just decided. Everypony's coming to see you when the Wonderbolts' new tour comes through Ponyville!
Rainbow: Well, it's great that you guys are going to the show, Scoot, but I won't actually be performing in it. Reservists aren't in the show unless one of the real Wonderbolts can't fly. (*Chuckle.*) I'll probably be working crowd control or something.

(*This gives Scootaloo pause, but her mouth promptly turns up into a sly little smile.*)

Scootaloo: You're still gonna be wearing a Wonderbolts uniform, though, right?
Rainbow: A reservist's one, yeah.
Scootaloo: Hmm…that's good enough for me!

(*Any further discussion is pre-empted by a sound very much like that of an approaching jet airplane, accompanied by a minor tremor. Scootaloo gasps and all four eyes flick skyward in time to see the specks of three high-altitude pegasi cruising over the block and leaving short gray contrails behind themselves. A close-up picks out three Wonderbolts in flight suits and goggles—Spitfire, Fleetfoot, Soarin'. The mare in charge catches sight of the two spectators, then signals to each of the others in turn; they zoom on ahead as she drops into a backflip dive, coming out of it to hover a few feet above the road. When she touches down, it is in a three-point*

stance and with enough force to throw out a small shock wave and earthquake. Scootaloo has shed her helmet and dismounted her scooter by this point.)

Scootaloo: (*awestruck*) Whoa!
Spitfire: Rainbow Dash! (*propping goggles on forehead*) Glad we found you. (*crossing to her*) We need you in the show when we get to Ponyville—*flying.*

(*Rainbow's face displays remarkable efficiency in rearranging itself into a slack-jawed, bug-eyed expression of total shock.*)

Scootaloo: But she's only in the Reserves!
Spitfire: Not anymore, kid.
Rainbow: (*shakily, hitching in breath*) You mean…? (*Scootaloo gasps.*)
Scootaloo: (*hugging her*) Rainbow Dash, you're finally a full-fledged Wonderbolt! (*giggling, punching at air*) Woo-hoo! Yeah, Rainbow Dash! Woo!

(*Throughout this outburst, and the bit of giddy trotting in place that follows it, the recipient of this instant promotion shows not a whit of response, her mind still completely shorted out. Spitfire gives a dry little chuckle.*)

Spitfire: What she said.

(*Cut to a close-up of the stunned blue face, zooming in as the mouth slowly stretches into one of the biggest, shiniest-eyed grins of her life, and fade to black.*)

OPENING THEME

<u>Act One</u>

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of Rainbow's cloud house, zooming in slowly, then cut to her living room. Glass-topped coffee/side/end tables, couch, armchair, expansive window with blue curtains showing a pattern of yellow lightning bolts. Twilight Sparkle, the rest of her friends, and Spike are sitting/standing/lying around the place, and a half-filled, open suitcase rests on the coffee table. A rainbow blur makes two passes, depositing more items in the case and nearly separating manes from scalps, after which Rainbow returns at a more sedate pace.*)

Rainbow: Uh, anypony seen my wing balm? (*flexing feathers*) I don't want to be stiff when I show up at Wonderbolt headquarters. (*Spike digs up a small container from the couch.*)
Spike: Got it!

(*She barrels into him with enough momentum to knock both him and the balm into her suitcase, then claps the lid shut. It bulges noticeably as she crosses the room again.*)

Twilight: Do you have time to tell us what happened, Rainbow Dash?
Rarity: Ooh, yes! (*Spike emerges dazedly.*) We must know every detail.

(*Pinkie Pie drops into view, slamming the lid shut under her weight and driving him down all over again; his arms protrude and twitch helplessly.*)

Pinkie: Start from when you were a foal, and you first knew your destiny was to become a Wonderbolt!

(*Rainbow, now hovering in the doorway with a foreleg propped against the frame, chuckles faintly.*)

Rainbow: (*settling to ground*) Well, not much to tell, really. Spitfire told me the Wonderbolts need *me* to go on tour with them.
Fluttershy: That's really great. I know how long you've been waiting for a spot to open up. (*Applejack nods.*)
Rainbow: (*pacing, as Spike climbs out and closes the suitcase*) Yep, Firestreak decided to retire and teach full-time. (*Close-up.*) Cloudsdale Flight School will probably be churning out Wonderbolts with him there. (*buffing a hoof on her chest*) But guess who was at the top of the reserve list?
Pinkie: (*from o.s.*) Ooh, ooh, I know!

(*Cut to frame her, now at the center of the floor and frantically waving a foreleg for attention.*)

Pinkie: Pick me!
Rarity: So what do you do now, Dashie?
Rainbow: I have to report to Wonderbolts headquarters this afternoon. (*flying to front doors, carrying suitcase*) It's only two days 'til tour starts, and I need to learn the routine.

(*Zoom out quickly to frame more of the room as the doors burst open from outside. The hyperactive pink mare is on the front step, having instantly procured a huge cake, gifts, and balloons.*)

Pinkie: You're leaving already?

(*She hops over the threshold with a distraught little yelp, revealing that the balloons are tied around the barrel of her party cannon.*)

Pinkie: But we barely started your congratulation party! (*flopping onto haunches*) I haven't even thought about your going-away party yet.
Rainbow: (*smiling*) Pinkie, I'm not leaving Ponyville. (*Pinkie perks up a bit.*) I just have to train for this show. (*The others gather around.*)
Fluttershy: I hope everything goes well. Sounds like an awful lot of pressure— (*close-up; holding up a pair of goggles*) —having to learn everything so quickly. (*Rainbow reaches into view with a wing and takes them.*)

Applejack: Yeah. Good luck, Dash.
Rainbow: (*from o.s.*) Luck?

(*A disdainful little chuckle punctuates this query. Cut to her, holding the goggles above her head with her wings and stretching the strap. She has set down the luggage.*)

Rainbow: Save that for the rest of the team. (*They are snapped into place.*) Now that my awesomeness has finally been recognized— (*doing a loop-the-loop*) —the other Wonderbolts will have to keep up or eat my cloud trail.
Twilight: Everypony knows you're a great flyer, Rainbow Dash, but so are the rest of the Wonderbolts. (*Cut to Rainbow, propping goggles on forehead; she continues o.s.*) It *might* be more challenging than you think.

(*The new Wonderbolt settles onto her hooves with a slightly deflated sigh.*)

Rainbow: You're right. I mean, do I show up wearing sunglasses or not? Sunglasses *are* automatically cool, but anypony can put them on. (*Another sigh.*) Maybe I'd stand out more if I didn't.

(*Here come six looks of assorted worry, unease, and exasperation from the rest of the bunch. Wipe to an overhead shot of a plateau on a rocky outcropping that juts up into the clouds. As in "Wonderbolts Academy," a paved runway splits the flat surface, and buildings have been constructed in the surrounding clouds on one side. Here, though, hoops stand on poles as part of a training course, and a rainbow waterfall feeds a stream over which the runway has been constructed. Nearly every building sports a shield or coat of arms above its door; the entrance of the largest is framed by a rainbow that curves down into a cloud and lightning bolt on either side, running through a shield at the apex that bears the team's logo of a winged bolt. As the camera zooms in slowly, fully kitted-out Wonderbolts fly/walk through the area and Rainbow and Spitfire move along one edge of the runway. A close-up of these two reveals that the new arrival no longer has her suitcase or goggles, and the boss still has her eyewear on her forehead.*)

Spitfire: Team briefings are every morning at oh-seven-twenty.
Rainbow: Because there were twenty ponies in the original E-U-P Guard that became the Wonderbolts.
Spitfire: (*not impressed*) Right. (*smiling*) And I know you've seen the Academy bunks—

(*Longer shot; they are now across from the largest building.*)

Spitfire: —but these are the official Wonderbolts barracks. (*Close-up of Rainbow, starting forward eagerly.*)
Rainbow: Built by Admiral Fair Weather himself!

(*She topples unceremoniously forward and down o.s.; an overhead shot discloses the hoof that Spitfire has planted on her tail to halt her just short of stepping onto the runway.*)

Spitfire: Don't forget rule number one, newbie. (*She tugs Rainbow back.*) Always check both ways before crossing the runway.

(*She proceeds to do so; finding the coast clear, she flaps across with her hooves barely clearing the pavement. Now Rainbow glances to either side of herself and also sees nothing coming for several hundred feet in either direction.*)

Rainbow: Uh, sure, but… (*starting across*) …nopony else is here.
Spitfire: They will be. And most of the Wonderbolts like to make a flashy entrance, so stay alert.
Rainbow: Right. No problem.

(*She touches down and gazes proudly at the imposing barracks, whose front entrance Spitfire has now reached. Wipe to a trophy case inside; Rainbow leans excitedly into view toward it.*)

Rainbow: Whoa!

(*Zoom out. The case stands at one end of a squad bay, a single room whose two long walls are lined with beds; banners hang from the ceiling, portraits on the walls, and a statue of a Wonderbolt emerging from a lightning bolt is at the far end. Spitfire approaches from behind.*)

Rainbow: Is that General Flash's cap?
Spitfire: And the original crest with the Wonderbolts' motto on it.
Rainbow, Spitfire: "*Altius Volantis*—Soaring Higher!"
Rainbow: (*backflipping to Spitfire's other side*) Wow!

(*Pulling in a giddy gasp, she instantly shifts gears to try and compose herself.*)

Rainbow: I mean, huh. Cool.
Spitfire: Okay, newbie. We've got a show in two days, which means *you* gotta hustle your haunches to learn this routine. (*pacing*) You got five minutes to get dressed and get outside to meet the rest of the team. (*Close-up of Rainbow.*)
Rainbow: Yes, ma'am! I'll have all the moves down by the end of the day! (*Zoom out to frame Spitfire.*)
Spitfire: Let's hope so. We're all expecting you to make quite an impression.

(*With that, she takes wing and rockets out of the squad bay. In close-up, Rainbow allows herself a little grin that is one step away from becoming a full-scale fit of schoolgirl-like squealing. The image dissolves to one of her face in the same pose, reflected in a mirror and mostly covered by the blue/yellow flight suit and goggles she has yearned to don for five seasons and change. Zoom out to frame her admiring herself in the glass.*)

Rainbow: Looking good!

(*Turning away, she puts her goggles up.*)

Rainbow: Okay. You're about to take your first flight as an actual Wonderbolt. (*Deep breath.*) No pressure.

(*A quick bit of stretching to limber up the legs and wings, ending with her standing on her hind legs.*)

Rainbow: (*punching at air*) Just gotta go out there and knock 'em off their hooves. (*now pumped up*) Okay, Wonderbolts. (*pulling goggles down*) Get ready to meet your most awesome member ever!

(*As she starts to move out, the view wipes to the edge of the runway. She comes in for a landing on the grass and begins to walk across the pavement to where Spitfire is talking with two other Wonderbolts, one of them being Surprise—white mare, swept-back yellow mane/tail, goggles up to expose red-violet eyes. In the far distance, two more flyers angle down sharply toward the runway; Spitfire is first to catch sight of them and of Rainbow, who has neglected to look both ways.*)

Spitfire: (*to Rainbow*) Hey! Look out!
Rainbow: Huh?

(*She freezes, each lens reflecting one of the incoming pegasi all too clearly, and hurls herself toward Spitfire's side with a yell just in time to avoid being hit broadside. The dive carries her o.s., triggering a camera-shaking crash and sending a spatter of gunk back onto the runway. Pan slowly in the direction from which it came, revealing a fresh trench carved into the grass and speckled with bits of garbage. It hops over the rainbow stream and stops at a freshly capsized trash can that now contains Rainbow in addition to most of its original load of refuse. As the lid rattles to rest, the befouled flyer pokes her head out with a woozy moan, her goggles having been shoved up to her forehead by the hit. Two jumpsuit-clad forelegs plant themselves directly in front, and a cut to Rainbow's perspective shows that they belong to Spitfire, who shakes her head disapprovingly. A chorus of raucous laughter rings out; cut to a longer shot of the crash site as a good half-dozen more Wonderbolts gather in. Three of them are Fleetfoot, Soarin', and Surprise, and a fourth is Misty Fly, the cream-colored mare who was part of the contingent in "Rarity Investigates!" All have their goggles up, and Misty's eyes—not see in her previous appearance—are now revealed as green.*)

Misty: (*sardonically*) Whoa. Most awesome entrance by a newbie ever.
Soarin': Are you okay, Rainbow Dash?
Fleetfoot: More like Rainbow *Crash!*

(*The group breaks into a fresh round of laughter as the mortified Rainbow lifts her head clear of the ground. A slow zoom in on her is followed by a wavering dissolve to the Cloudsdale flight camp she attended as a filly—see "The Cutie Mark Chronicles" and "The Cutie Re-Mark." The flashback is rendered in soft focus and faintly ringed with white, and the camera zooms in slowly on a group of foals gathered on the runway as Filly RD flies toward them, keeping her altitude.*)

Filly RD: Okay, flight school. Get ready for Rainbow Dash!

(*Her first day of attendance, no doubt. The self-introduction fails to wow most of the other students—which include Fluttershy, Dumbbell, Hoops, and Score. All of the foals have yet to earn their cutie marks. Filly RD starts into a loop-the-loop, but it turns into a yelling, flailing tumble that causes her to bang her head on a floating cloud hoop and plummet gracelessly out of the air. The fall bounces her back and forth between two adjacent structures and ends with her landing squarely in a fetid, overfull trash can. It topples onto its side, rolling onto the runway and leaving a trail of slop until one filly mercifully puts a hoof out to stop it. As the red-violet eyes counter-rotate in their sockets, the camera cuts to just behind her head and points out of the can to frame the approach of the mocking Colt Hoops.*)

Colt Hoops: More like Rainbow *Crash!*

(*Close-up of the luckless filly, who looks as if she would rather be hauled away to the city dump than listen to another second of the laughter ringing in her ears. She struggles mightily to hold back tears as the young voices begin to snicker and chant this nickname; the camera cuts here and there, showing that Filly FS is the only one fully abstaining from the joke. Zoom in on Filly RD, now out of the can and sitting gloomily on her haunches; a wavering dissolve brings the scene back to the here and now. Rainbow is now standing upright, her low spirits quickly giving way to indignation that she directs at Fleetfoot, Misty, and Soarin'.*)

Rainbow: Hey! You guys buzzed me on purpose! (*Spitfire steps in.*)
Spitfire: Not quite. You forgot rule number one, newbie.

(*The observers all rise off the ground behind her—now only five instead of six; one of the two previously unnamed Wonderbolts has cleared out.*)

Others: Always check both ways before crossing the runway. (*Close-up of Rainbow.*)
Rainbow: Yeah, well…I was just…testing you guys!

(*Sarcastic chuckles float down in response; cut to a slow pan across the hovering pegasi, then tilt quickly down to Spitfire.*)

Spitfire: All right, nopony got hurt and we got a lot to do. (*flying toward runway*) So let's forget about this and get flying!

(*The veterans fall in behind her, Misty hanging back for a moment.*)

Misty: Classic rookie move, Rainbow *Crash.* (*flying off*) That was amazing.

(*The rookie in question scowls to herself and plods away. Dissolve to Spitfire standing on a cloud, behind a megaphone on a pole driven into the white stuff. Six Wonderbolts hurtle past her, leaving dark gray cloud trails; well after they have gone, Rainbow—properly cleaned*

up—follows the same course and spreads one of her own. All except Spitfire have goggles over eyes now.)

Spitfire: (*amplified*) Higher, Crash! You're breaking formation!

(*In close-up, Rainbow kicks her wings into overdrive to catch up. A winged lightning-bolt logo floats across the screen; behind its trailing edge, the view wipes to another stretch of sky. All seven flyers streak past, then double back in a complicated slalom maneuver.*)

Soarin': (*passing Rainbow*) Check your nine, Crash!

(*Caught off guard by this sudden bit of correction, she stops short and then rockets after him. The logo floats past again, the view wiping behind it to a long overhead shot of the runway. Zoom in as Rainbow, Misty, and Surprise zoom down toward it, then cut to a head-on view. The last two of this trio cut a sharp turn, Rainbow lagging well behind; their new trajectory carries them past Spitfire and her megaphone, now at ground level.*)

Spitfire: (*amplified*) Tighter, Crash! Get in there!
Rainbow: (*growling, to herself*) My name's not Crash!

(*Pulling even with the others, she bumps Surprise hard enough to send herself and the white mare tumbling and yelling into a nearby cloud. Surprise is first to emerge completely, voicing a dry chuckle as Rainbow pokes her head up.*)

Surprise: Coulda fooled me.

(*"Crash" pushes her goggles up and lets her whole face fall in dejection. The logo floats past once again; behind it, wipe to a locker room in which the Wonderbolts—goggles either on foreheads or removed entirely—are stowing gear and taking care of post-practice business. Rainbow trudges in just far enough to peek around the doorway, only for Fleetfoot to arrive from the other direction, goggles off and a towel draped around her neck.*)

Fleetfoot: Hey, Crash. I know it was a tough day today, but don't worry. You'll get the hang of it.
Rainbow: (*grinning, walking in*) Tough day? Please. If I can pull off a Sonic Rainboom, I can learn this routine. (*Cut to her, opening a locker.*) I'll have it down cold tomorrow—probably even come up with a couple of improvements.
Spitfire: (*from o.s.*) Rainbow Dash!

(*Back to the doorway. The captain has arrived and is standing on her hind legs, leaning against the doorframe with forelegs crossed and not looking too happy. Fleetfoot backs away.*)

Spitfire: Over here! (*Rainbow flaps over to her.*)
Rainbow: Yes, ma'am!
Spitfire: (*smiling a bit*) I'm glad you're still here.

Rainbow: Oh, yeah? Did you want some ideas on how to make the show extra-awesome? (*The smile fades.*)
Spitfire: (*dropping to all fours*) Not quite. I know you've been a reservist for a while— (*It returns.*) —but the 'Bolts have a few of their own rules you might not know about.

(*Cut to a close-up of Rainbow's apprehensive expression and zoom out to show four others looking on. All are smiling except the dour-faced Misty, who allows herself a bit of mirth as she hefts a bucket of water and scrub rag and Soarin' holds up a pushbroom. In close-up, Rainbow boggles as the latter item is held out to her.*)

Spitfire: (*from o.s.*) Like, worst flyer of the day— (*Cut to her.*) —has to clean up the whole compound. (*The others start for the door.*) Better get to it, Crash.

(*As the other four fly out around her, she hovers slowly backwards after them and lets her own levity shift into a look of unsmiling sternness. Rainbow voices a fed-up little sigh.*)

Rainbow: (*softly, to herself*) My name's not Crash.

(*Snap to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of Rainbow's cloud house in the starry evening sky. She flies into view toward it, having changed out of her flight suit and goggles; cut to the front entrance as she lands on the step. The dispirited pegasus pushes the doors open, only to find the muzzle of Pinkie's party cannon aimed directly into her face. She takes a point-blank salvo of confetti/streamers/balloons and gapes at who is behind it: all five of her friends and the Cutie Mark Crusaders.*)

All eight: SURPRISE!!
Rainbow: (*shaking herself clean*) What?

(*She walks in, finding the whole place liberally bedecked with party decorations.*)

Crusaders: Hooray, Rainbow Dash! Our favorite Wonderbolt!

(*On the end of this, tilt up to frame an overhead banner they have drawn: the blue daredevil fully suited up and in flight, leaving a rainbow contrail and surrounded by lightning bolts. Back to Rainbow, who stares at the work as Twilight crosses to her.*)

Twilight: We know you're probably tired, Rainbow Dash, but Pinkie wanted to throw you a real party. (*Pinkie pops up between them.*)
Pinkie: Your "Best Day Ever" party!

(*The end of this line becomes amplified due to the megaphone that she produces from nowhere and aims into the blue face. She puts it away just as quickly.*)

Rainbow: (*chuckling weakly, pacing away from her*) Yeah. It was something, all right. (*She finds herself stopped by Applejack.*)
Applejack: Well, we can't wait to hear all about it!
Rainbow: (*flying away with another chuckle*) And I'd love to tell you, I really would, but— (*reaching top of stairs*) —I'm pretty beat.

(*An expansive yawn and stretch to drive the point home.*)

Rainbow: You know, from all the excitement of my big day? (*The others gather at the foot of the staircase.*)
Fluttershy: Um, is something wrong, Rainbow Dash?
Rainbow: What could be wrong? I'm finally a Wonderbolt, which means everything has to be totally, perfectly awesome.

(*All of her false breeziness evaporates by the time she reaches her last word, which is delivered in a full-body, haunch-sitting slump with chin propped on front hooves.*)

Rarity: Oh, no! Something *is* wrong. What happened, darling? (*Zoom in slowly on Rainbow.*)
Rainbow: I told you, it's nothing! (*slowly losing steam*) I mean, maybe some of the Wonderbolts started calling me "Rainbow Crash."
Fluttershy: Oh, no! Isn't that the same terrible nickname those bullies in flight school used to call you?

(*Rainbow's only response is a piteous little nod and whimper.*)

Twilight: Why would they call you that?
Rainbow: Well, I… (*softly, quickly*) …kinda sorta fell into a garbage can. (*Cringe; whimper. Twilight makes a sound of disgust.*)
Pinkie: Well, look at the bright side. (*Close-up.*) At least they didn't call you "Rainbow *Trash*."

(*She finds her mouth corked with an orange-tan hoof in a trice.*)

Applejack: So you started off on the wrong hoof. I bet every new Wonderbolt has a tough first day.
Rarity: (*from o.s.*) Mmm-hmm! (*Cut to her.*) What you need is to find a positive way to stand out. (*A flick of the purple mane.*) As soon as you're known for something else, that nasty old nickname will be forgotten.

(*Cut to a close-up of Rainbow, now allowing herself a hopeful smile, and zoom out to frame Twilight hovering alongside.*)

Twilight: Rarity's right. Why don't you think of the Wonderbolts like us? (*pointing down the stairs*) We're a team.

(*Cut to a slow pan across the other four mares, all smiling up in her direction.*)

Twilight: (*from o.s.*) But we all stand out in different ways.

(*The pegasus mulls this over for a second, then stands up with a big smile and spreads her wings.*)

Rainbow: That's it! (*She zooms down to the ground floor.*) I'm gonna stand out in a different way, just like you guys!

(*Five mares and three fillies become very concerned at the slightly garbled message she has received.*)

Rainbow: Goodbye, Rainbow Crash—hello, Captain Awesome!

(*She rockets out the door, leaving the eight guests to wonder silently at just how badly this might go. Dissolve to the exterior of the Wonderbolts' barracks at sunrise of the following morning, zooming in slowly, then snap to black. The view splits horizontally, the gap widening as if it were an opening eye to give a blurry close-up of the speedster's face—the perspective of a pony who is just waking up. As the black recedes fully, the image resolves into an unusually perky Rainbow, her forelock styled to resemble Pinkie's curly one somewhat.*)

Rainbow: (*energetically, like Pinkie*) Good morning, everypony!

(*Longer shot; she is standing on the bed of Soarin' to stare him dead in the eye. As she speaks, she works her way back and forth along the squad bay, the camera zooming out in steps to show the rest of the team in their racks and jolted awake. Balloons, flowers, and bunting have been added to the décor, and all are out of uniform.*)

Rainbow: Who's ready for a fantastic day of flying? I know I am! I just couldn't be more excited for the big show tomorrow. Are you guys excited? I'm excited! Actually, I'm always excited. Some ponies even call me… (*Close-up.*) …"Dynamic Dash"!

(*A balloon rises in front of her face and pops, the view instantly shifting to a longer shot.*)

Rainbow: Because I'm so full of energy all the time!

(*The cheerful verbal assault comes to a close as she lets her tongue hang out and pants like a dog. Here comes a slightly irked Fleetfoot, towel around shoulders.*)

Fleetfoot: Uh, Wonderbolts don't get excited, *Crash*. (*flying past her*) You gotta keep a level head to fly the way we do.

(*Rainbow pulls her tongue back in and lets her head droop with a heavy sigh. An instant later, she comes up smiling and tosses her head so that the multicolored forelock falls into Applejack's tousled style.*)

Rainbow: (*drawling, like Applejack*) Well, of course I know *that*.

(*She crosses to Fleetfoot, who is now brushing her teeth at a sink.*)

Rainbow: But the truth of the matter is, you should be excited! (*crossing to Soarin', out of bed, and Surprise*) It's the dream of near every little pegasus pony to grow up and fly with the Wonderbolts. (*hovering higher*) And here you all are doin' it! (*Fleetfoot crosses to them.*)
Fleetfoot: So are you.
Rainbow: (*settling to floor*) True. (*Close-up of her as she continues.*) Go ahead and call me "Forthright Filly" if you want, but shee-yucks. I like to tell it like it is. And I believe a pony ought to appreciate hard work payin' off like this, because bein' a Wonderbolt is somethin' special.
Misty: (*from o.s.*) We know.

(*The slam of a door jolts her out of this Southern-fried silliness, and the camera cuts to a long shot of the squad bay—every team member gone except for her, every bed neatly made. The one hoof she has raised echoes hollowly against the floor when she brings it down, and she swiftly takes wing with a fresh smile. Wipe to an overhead shot of the plateau, later in the day; a couple of suited Wonderbolts stand by the runway, and two more cleave the sky as they fly past. In close-up, Spitfire looks over a clipboard held in one wing as two stallions await her verdict; all three have goggles on foreheads. Behind her, here comes a still-undressed Rainbow, face buried in a book and heavy eyeglasses perched on her nose. The flyer-turned-egghead lowers the book, exposing the tape being used to hold the specs' broken bridge together. Her forelock is back to its usual windblown style.*)

Rainbow: (*scholarly tone, like Twilight*) You know, I was just reading about how dihedral wing angles can help increase stability in banking turns. (*She pulls out a stack of papers.*) It made me think that pre-flight checklists could really help increase our efficiency.

(*They are passed over to Spitfire, the camera panning slightly to frame the three thoroughly unimpressed veterans and put Rainbow out of view.*)

Rainbow: (*from o.s.*) So I went ahead and made them for everypony!

(*Without a word, the yellow-orange mare tips her clipboard so that the new pages slide off to the ground. Back to Rainbow, no longer holding her book.*)

Rainbow: I'm always finding so much interesting information in books. In fact, a lot of ponies call me "Reading Rainboom."

(*Her big grin and her glasses are both swept off her face the moment Spitfire shoves a megaphone into it and starts to bellow.*)

Spitfire: (*amplified*) WE ALL KNOW HOW WINGS WORK, NEWBIE, AND WE ALREADY HAVE CHECKLISTS! *NOW GET OFF THE RUNWAY!!*

(*Rainbow shakes some sense back into herself, shifting from contrition to elation at just under the speed of light. Now her forelock rearranges itself into a familiar gentle curl that partly hides one eye. Spitfire has disposed of the megaphone now.*)

Rainbow: (*meekly, like Fluttershy*) I'm so sorry. I was just trying to help because I care about all of the Wonderbolts oh so much. Yes-sirree. Just call me "Care Mare."

(*Spitfire instead chooses to shoot her a withering glare.*)

Rainbow: Um, but if you're busy now, I can just come back later. (*The glare is backstopped by a growl.*) Or, you know, not at all.

(*She bails out in a blur. Wipe to the locker room, where Soarin' is up on his hind legs to put his things away in an upper-level locker. Across the aisle, Blaze—the light yellow mare seen in "Rarity Investigates!"—is giving Fleetfoot a massage. He is dressed with goggles up, they are not, and a fully suited-up Rainbow—with goggles up and her mane back to its usual appearance—pokes her head into view for a quick look-see. Spotting the three, she ducks out of sight. Where Blaze's eyes had been hidden behind her lenses in her earlier appearance, they can now be seen as purple.*)

Rainbow: (*softly, to herself, normal voice*) Okay.

(*A bit of deft wing-work, and she has achieved an approximation of the elegant curls in Rarity's forelock. A bit of practice at batting her eyes, and she strolls up to Soarin'.*)

Rainbow: (*refined, like Rarity*) I must tell you how much I just *love* these uniforms. (*poking him in the chest*) Why, ever since I was a foal, I've admired the mixture of bold lines and classic contours. They don't call me "Rainbow *Fash*" for nothing.
Soarin': (*hopelessly puzzled*) Uh-huh…?
Rainbow: The "Fash" is for fashion. (*Bat the eyes.*)
Spitfire: (*from o.s.*) Crash!

(*The inept flirter turns to the team leader, who stands by a row of lockers with only a towel over her shoulders. Rainbow's mane and voice revert to normal.*)

Spitfire: I'm not sure why you're acting like this, but you need to stop.
Rainbow: (*scratching back of neck*) I was just, you know, trying to show everypony all the awesome ways I can contribute to the 'Bolts.

Spitfire: I know you're excited to find your place on the team, but just focus on the routine for now, okay?
Rainbow: Yes, ma'am!
Spitfire: (*smiling*) Maybe this will help motivate you.

(*She thumps the nearest locker with a knee, causing it to swing open. Among the items taped up inside is a photo of Rainbow's friends, marking this locker as hers. Hanging from a hook is a dark gray bomber jacket lined with gray-green fleece; her popeyed expression suggests that it was not there the last time she went for her gear. As she leans in for a better look, a close-up clearly picks out the gold Wonderbolt logo on one side of the zipper, and two patches on the other side. One is styled as a name tag; the other shows her cutie mark slamming into a red STOP sign and breaking its pole. She pulls the jacket down and grins exultantly over it, but grimaces mightily upon noticing the patch; close-up of it, zooming in.*)

Rainbow: (*from o.s., incredulously*) "Crash"? (*Back to her and Spitfire.*) Couldn't you just put my regular name on it?
Spitfire: That's not how it works around here. We all have our nicknames on our jackets. (*calling across room*) Right, Clipper?
Rainbow: (*bewildered*) Clipper?

(*The camera pans to follow Rainbow's bewildered look and stops on Soarin', now hovering to get to his locker.*)

Soarin': Right, Boss! (*He slams the door and flies off.*)
Spitfire: (*pacing past Rainbow*) Now it's official. Welcome to the Wonderbolts, Crash!

(*Allowing herself a satisfied chuckle, she completely misses the venomous little snarl that Rainbow utters as she throws the jacket back into her locker. Cut to within, the camera pointing out at her.*)

Rainbow: (*reverberating slightly*) If I don't come up with something unforgettable to add to the routine, I'm gonna be Rainbow Crash for the rest of my life!

(*She slams the door shut to black out the screen.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a small dark cloud floating incongruously in a tract of otherwise-tranquil daytime sky. Rainbow flies into view with goggles still on forehead, looks furtively around, and pushes it away; tilt down to a stretch of park land outside Ponyville that has been set up for the Wonderbolts' performance. Bleacher seating, banners and strings of pennants, tents, loudspeakers, and so forth. Cut to one section of bleachers, where Applejack, Rarity, and the Crusaders have already found seats; Twilight, Fluttershy, and Spike promptly join them. The unicorn mare has donned a broad-brimmed sun hat and a pink scarf for the occasion.*)

Scootaloo: This is gonna be so amazing!
Spike: I know! I'm almost as excited as Pinkie Pie!

(*The fun-loving pony chooses this moment to arrive—by rising up from floor level so that he finds himself lifted on her head.*)

Pinkie: I can't wait to see Rainbow Dash's first performance as an honest-to-goodness Wonderbolt! I hope there's cotton candy! (*She whisks away, taking Spike with her.*)
Fluttershy: We should all remember to be extra-supportive for Rainbow Dash, too.
Rarity: Excellent point. It's simply dreadful that she's had such a rough start after finally achieving her dream.
Twilight: Rainbow Dash is a pretty resilient pony. I'm sure she's shaken off her tough first day and turned it around by now.
Applejack: Speakin' of… (*addressing herself o.s.*) …hey, Dash! (*Rainbow flies over.*)
Rainbow: Oh, perfect! (*Foreleg around Scootaloo's shoulders.*) Hey, can I borrow Scootaloo?
Scootaloo: Me? What for?
Rainbow: (*trying to sound casual, chuckling*) Oh, I just needed some help and figured the president of the Rainbow Dash Fan Club was the right pony for the job.
Twilight: I thought the Wonderbolt Reserves were here to help.
Rainbow: Oh…uh, yeah, they're all busy doing, uh, official Reserves stuff. But don't worry! (*hoisting Scootaloo up*) With Scootaloo's help, everything's gonna be awesome. Better than awesome!
Rarity: Does—does that mean practice went well yesterday?
Rainbow: (*flying off*) Gotta go!

(*Thoroughly confused glances pass among the remaining six. Cut to a long shot of a cliff overlooking the venue and zoom in slowly. A wooden ramp similar to a ski jump has been built to follow the contour of the slope that leads down to the edge. Rainbow airlifts Scootaloo into view and sets her down; close-up of them.*)

Scootaloo: What are we doing up here, Rainbow Dash?
Rainbow: (*pulling her closer, winking*) I just need a small favor from you that's really gonna make this show something special. (*gesturing with a wing*) Now, the Wonderbolts are gonna fly over this ridge right before the finale of the show.

(*Lifting off, she ducks behind the foliage of a nearby tree and brings out the dark cloud she snagged earlier. This is positioned to float over the low end of the ramp.*)

Rainbow: (*miming actions*) I'll fly by last, and when I signal you, you zip up the ramp on your scooter and kick the storm cloud into my path.
Scootaloo: What? (*Cut to Rainbow; zoom in slowly.*)
Rainbow: That kick will shoot off a lightning bolt right behind me, making me look totally awesome! And then I'll do some incredible Rainbow Dash flying with it to create the coolest,

show-stopping-est, lightning-tastic light show anypony has ever seen! (*Her eyes shine and quiver at the prospect.*)
Scootaloo: (*from o.s.*) Are you sure about this?

(*Cut to the unconvinced little pegasus; Rainbow swoops down to shove her scooter into her grip.*)

Rainbow: (*giddily*) Uh-huh. It's gonna be so awesome—and nopony will ever call me "Rainbow Crash" after this!

(*Three fully suited-up Wonderbolts flash past overhead.*)

Rainbow: Oh! (*She puts on her goggles.*) Gotta go! Be ready for me, okay, Scootaloo? (*Takeoff.*)
Scootaloo: (*hesitantly*) Um…okay?

(*She is left standing on the ridge with a "how did I end up in this mess?" expression writ large on her face. Cut to a couple of the loudspeakers, which vibrate to the sound of a stallion announcer's voice being broadcast to the crowd.*)

Announcer voice: Mares and gentle-colts! Fillies and foals off all ages! Look to the skies and prepare to be awestruck by the incredible flying prowess of…*the Wonderbolts!*

(*During this line, the camera cuts here and there among the spectators and finally tilts up from them to frame a septet of flyers, including Rainbow, making a pass overhead. Lightning crackles through their gray cloud contrails, and a close-up picks out the front three as Spitfire, Fleetfoot, and Misty. All seven go into a turn and pull away slightly, with Rainbow bringing up the rear. The next move brings them toward the crowd, passing low enough to thoroughly wreck mane/tail styles for a second and nearly blow Rarity's sun hat off her head. Naturally, the crowd goes wild; Rarity readjusts her hat as Twilight helps Fluttershy back up to her seat.*)

Fluttershy: I hope Spike and Pinkie Pie are done getting their snacks, or they're gonna miss Rainbow Dash.
Rarity: Oh, don't worry, Fluttershy. Nothing would keep Pinkie Pie from missing this. (*Chuckle from Applejack.*)
Applejack: Except maybe cotton candy.

(*Elsewhere on the grounds, Spike watches the formation whiz past. He and Pinkie have in fact wound up at a cotton candy stand, and the proprietor is half-hidden from view, turned away from them to work the machine. Light blue coat; fluffy, two-tone light pink mane/tail; a cone of the sweet stuff as a cutie mark; striped yellow shirt with apron.*)

Spike: Come on, Pinkie! The show's starting!
Pinkie: One second! (*to vendor*) Just a little bit bigger, please, but hurry!

(*A pivot reveals the light blue eyes and bearded/mustachioed face of an earth pony stallion, who holds out a generous serving of his product on a paper cone.*)

Pinkie: Bigger!

(*His eyes pop in surprise. High overhead, the Wonderbolts have split into two groups—four, including Rainbow, and two; the seventh member is no longer with them—who describe crisscrossing flight paths for a few pegasi watching from a nearby cloud. The four go into a near-vertical ascent, losing no speed and drawing awed murmurs from the ground-based audience. At the peak of their rise, they come to a stop and languidly flip 180 degrees to go into a headfirst power dive, which paints shock and fear across every face until they pull up just short of the dirt. Cheers.*)

Twilight: That was amazing! She's doing great!

(*Cut to Pinkie and Spike.*)

Pinkie: (*spreading forelegs wide*) *BIGGER!!*

(*The interior of the stand is now hidden from view by a single gargantuan mass of pink sugary goodness; Spike grumbles to himself as it bulges out over the counter. On the scene, two Wonderbolts start into a horizontal collision course. A close-up picks out Fleetfoot, the view narrowing as a second panel expands upward from the bottom of the screen to show Spitfire as the other. The view returns to fullscreen as they close the final yards, but just as they are about to wipe each other out, both rotate by 90 degrees so that they pass cleanly back-to-back, the tops of their manes almost brushing together. Rainbow and another mare copy the maneuver, then Misty and Soarin', and all six regroup for a leisurely descent at Spitfire's cue.*)

(*Almost immediately after dropping below the bottom edge of the screen, though, they rise again as a group—but Rainbow, in the rear, drops out of her slot and slams on the brakes. She flips a hoof signal off to one side; cut to Scootaloo, wearing her helmet and poised with her scooter at the top of the ramp Rainbow built on the cliff. The older daredevil flies off.*)

Scootaloo: (*very uneasily*) I hope this works.

(*Push off. Pick up speed on the downhill run. Hit the launch. At the peak of the resulting leap, she lashes out with a hind leg and delivers a sideways kick to the storm cloud Rainbow parked over the ridge. It begins to drift away, and she lands on the grass just beyond the end of the ramp. Rainbow, meanwhile, has rejoined the formation and is flying even with Soarin'. He is a bit confused to see her peel off without warning, and once the remaining five have landed to the crowd's delight, he taps Spitfire to get her attention. Silence gradually falls as all ten goggle-covered eyes train themselves on the wild blue yonder—and the crackling cloud that is now on an intercept course with Rainbow.*)

(*She lets off a panicked yell and manages to stop just short of making contact with the charged-up surface, and she is quick to start into a full retreat. A nearby tree is just as quick to ruin that plan, though, and her descent through its branches is marked by thuds, yelps, and a plethora of dislodged leaves and small animals. A round of gasps from the crowd, accompanied by disbelieving stares from Spitfire and Soarin' with their goggles up; Rarity puts a hoof over Sweetie's eyes to shield her from any particularly graphic unpleasantness.*)

(*A badly dazed Rainbow emerges from the tree with a bird's nest on her head, and the occupants and all their buddies deliver a swift pummeling with beaks and wings. She peels out with most of them in hot pursuit, but two stay behind to catch the nest—and the egg it contains—when it falls free of the varicolored mane. Now a flailing, screaming mess in a ripped, scuffed flight suit, she flies directly into a string of pennants hung up between two poles. This stretches like a giant rubber band, bringing her gradually to a stop and then snapping back to launch her into a head-over-hooves tumbling arc. This time, her momentum is stopped by the tree on the cliff; Scootaloo is still here, her scooter and helmet now gone. The impact leaves Rainbow hanging upside down from the lowest branches, groaning out her pain for the filly to hear with full clarity.*)

(*The respite ends as quickly as it began, as the boughs snap upward to launch the hapless showboater into a new flight path with all the grace and artistry of a concrete block thrown off a very high roof. Losing her goggles in the process, she screams her way up to the semicircular lower surface of a cloud and skids through it like an upside-down half pipe. Miraculously, she recovers from this utter fiasco and ends up flying a level course—until the storm cloud drifts past and zaps a bolt of lightning directly into her haunch. Now dazed, singed, and trailing puffs of black smoke, she plunges out of the sky.*)

(*Cut to a profile close-up of Pinkie on the move, with a most disgruntled Spike sitting on her back and holding a cotton candy cone. Even though the bulk of it is cut off by the top edge of the screen, enough is visible to suggest the sheer magnitude of the purchase.*)

Pinkie: Hope I'm not too late.

(*She blows out a contemptuous little breath before a zoom out tells the rest of the story—the thing is roughly three times her height and double her length.*)

Pinkie: I wonder what took that pony so long.

(*Cut to the stand; both it and the exhausted vendor are now well and truly bedecked with the brightly colored gunk, to the consternation of a waiting mare and filly. Now Pinkie and Spike return to the bleachers, the mare paying no mind whatsoever to the crowd's terrified expression or the wings Fluttershy has raised to cover her own eyes; Rarity has uncovered Sweetie's now. Pinkie stops short of her seat just in time for Rainbow to complete her headlong, screaming approach and slam squarely into the expanse of sweet fluff, which explodes in all directions on impact. Most of the ponies in attendance end up wearing a dollop or two; zoom out to put*

Rainbow in the fore—sprawled out, groaning, and nearly hidden under several tufts. She lifts her head wearily as Pinkie gallops up in the background and rises to her hind legs.)

Pinkie: That was AMAZING!! (*Here comes Spitfire to the crash site, followed by Fleetfoot and Soarin'. Goggles up; all three are clean.*)
Spitfire: (*sourly*) Way to go, Rainbow Crash.

(*The wiped-out flyer just lets her face flop back into the cotton candy. Dissolve to a tent, from which a mare in a nurse's cap emerges to hold the flap open so Rainbow can step out. She has hosed off and traded her flight suit and goggles for bandages on head, chest, and hooves, and she sighs heavily while plodding across the grass. It does not take long for the rest of the squad to cut her off, contempt and anger showing in exceptional detail on every face due to their goggles being raised.*)

Spitfire: You gonna tell us what just happened, newbie?
Rainbow: (*sighing*) I'm so sorry.
Spitfire: I should hope so. You changed the routine without consulting me and put other ponies at risk. I've drummed flyers out of the 'Bolts for less.
Rainbow: (*hanging head*) I know— (*Zoom out slowly.*) —and I'm ready for whatever punishment you want. You guys were right to call me "Rainbow Crash." I've always been a standout flyer, but since I joined the Wonderbolts, I've only stood out for making mistakes. (*Sigh.*) It's been my dream my whole life, but I guess maybe I'm not Wonderbolt material after all.

(*The performers behind her trade a smile, and Soarin' is quick to thump his wing against hers.*)

Soarin': Are you serious? You're the most talented flyer we've ever had!
Fleetfoot: And you've saved all of Equestria, like, a dozen times.
Rainbow: I-I…
Spitfire: (*smiling, poking her with a wing*) Of course you're supposed to be a Wonderbolt. We've been waiting for a spot to open up ever since you joined the Reserves.
Rainbow: But…you guys all called me "Rainbow Crash."
Soarin': Yeah, so? My nickname's "Clipper." You know why they call me that?
Rainbow: Uh…'cause you're as fast as a ship?
Soarin': (*bashfully*) Because I clipped my wing on a flagpole as I was landing on my first day. (*Chuckle.*)
Rainbow: Huh.

(*Now she finds Fleetfoot and Misty smiling across at her with a degree of real warmth and good humor.*)

Fleetfoot: "Flatfoot." My first day, I misjudged my landing and came down right on Spitfire's hoof. (*Misty stifles a giggle; pan slowly across the others.*)
Misty: "Dizzy."
Surprise: "Slowpoke." (*A white-coated, two-tone-blue-maned mare speaks next.*)

White mare: "Hoof-in-Mouth." (*Stop on Spitfire.*)
Spitfire: You don't want to know what they call me.

(*But she leans over to whisper in Rainbow's ear, so softly as to be indecipherable. The red-violet eyes pop wide as a little grunt of disbelief escapes the mouth under them.*)

Rainbow: Whoa. That is *so* much worse than "Crash."
Spitfire: (*rolling eyes*) Right?
Rainbow: So does this mean I'm…still on the team?
Spitfire: You think you can be part of this team and not constantly try to showboat?
Rainbow: I promise! I spent my whole life trying to be a standout flyer, but now that I'm a Wonderbolt, it's time to be okay with fitting in.
Spitfire: Good. (*starting to laugh*) Because I really didn't want to miss the chance to tease you for *years* about this catastrophe! I mean, that crash was epic!

(*Good-natured chuckles and remarks fly among the group as Rainbow smiles, realizing that they have begun to accept her as one of the gang. The mirth gets chopped off when Spitfire jabs a wing into the blue chest, instantly all business.*)

Spitfire: But you're on probation for a month! (*She leans hard into Rainbow's face, forcing her to her haunches.*) Got a problem with that?
Rainbow: No, ma'am.

(*The boss ends the conversation by shoving Rainbow's missing goggles into her hoof and stalking away. For her part, the chastised rookie throws a shaky, grateful smile and lets it shift into a relieved grin as her eyes shift toward the sky. Tilt up to follow her enraptured gaze into the starlit expanse of sunset, then dissolve to the full moon in the night sky and tilt down to the now-empty show venue. Most of the banners and pennants have fallen loose, and Rainbow is alone on the grounds, sweeping up debris and no longer carrying the goggles. Here come her friends and Scootaloo, all clean of cotton candy shrapnel and finding her in good spirits despite the scut work.*)

Twilight: Hey, Rainbow Dash. We just wanted to check on you. Are you doing okay?
Rainbow: I'm doing great, thanks!
Scootaloo: Sure you don't need any help?
Rainbow: Nah. This mess is my responsibility and I've gotta clean it up myself. And after this—(*Twilight and Scootaloo trade a puzzled look.*) —Spitfire's got me cleaning the Wonderbolts compound for the next month.

(*She nips one end of a pennant string in her teeth and deposits it in the trash can she has been using.*)

Scootaloo: So why are you in such a good mood? (*Close-up of Rainbow.*)
Rainbow: (*gleefully*) Duh! Because I'm a Wonderbolt!

(*She cranks off an uninhibited grin, spreading her wings wide. The view dissolves to a profile close-up of her face in the same pose, but clad in her flight suit with goggles on forehead. The golds and pinks of a sunrise sky shine behind her, and a zoom out frames her, Spitfire, and Soarin'—fully kitted out—flying side by side under the huge image in freeze frame. Fade to black.*)

A HEARTH'S WARMING TAIL

Written by Michael Vogel
Produced by Devon Cody
Story editing by Josh Haber
Supervising direction by Jim Miller
Directed by Denny Lu, Tim Stuby

Transcribed by Alan Back (ajback@yahoo.com)

Note: All lines marked with one asterisk (*) are delivered as a voice over.

Background song lyrics are in square brackets.

Prologue

Majestic orchestral instrumentation, bright 4 (D major)

(*Opening shot: fade in to a thick bank of clouds and zoom out slowly to ground level, framing the snow-covered Ponyville town hall and surrounding houses. It is early evening, and ponies dressed for the cold are hard at work putting up decorations and lights for Hearth's Warming Eve. A wagon pulls away from the camera, with the Cutie Mark Crusaders riding in the back.*)

All: Ponies' voices fill the night, Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again
(*The pullers turn out to be the parents of Rarity and Sweetie Belle. Lemon Hearts levitates a mistletoe sprig over herself and a stallion and gives him a kiss on the cheek; both blush.*)
Happy hearts so full and bright, Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again
(*Cut to the topmost spire of the Castle of Friendship, topped with a bow, and zoom out as a pegasus wraps it with a ribbon. The sky has cleared—later evening now.*)
Oh, what a sight, look at the light
(*Another one adds red ribbon to an unmarked candy cane as Octavia directs a group of carolers.*)
All for tonight, Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again

(*Rainbow Dash flies past, towing a cloud; behind its trailing edge, the view wipes to a hovering Fluttershy directing the work with hoof signals.*)

Fluttershy: Clouds arranged so they're just so
(*Zoom out. Three other pegasi each set one near the spire.*)
All: Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again
Rainbow: Gonna make some awesome snow
(*She bounces from one to the next, setting off the flurries.*)
All: Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again

(*They rest side by side on a cloud, watching more lights go up over a path.*)

Fluttershy, Rainbow: The chill wind blows, making a show
Snowflakes aglow
(*Three fillies build a snow pony as three mares work on decorating a tree.*)
All: Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again

(*A pegasus loops past, hauling a length of red/green-striped cloth that fills the screen. It is pulled away, the view now having shifted to the upper reaches of the edifice's well-bedecked entrance hall. Zoom out to ground level; the ponies are hard at it, and Twilight Sparkle flies a wreath across overhead.*)

B major

(*Pinkie Pie, wearing jingle bells around her midsection, plunks a stocking cap on Cranky Doodle Donkey's head.*)

Pinkie: A day that's filled with songs to sing
(*Ponies trot past, bringing a surprised smile to the old face.*)
All: Ding, dong, ding-dong-ding
(*Applejack has brought in a pie cart and is unloading it alongside a table set with Sugarcube Corner goodies, brought by Mr. and Mrs. Cake.*)
Applejack: Cakes and pastries we shall bring
(*Lights are strung up among the many bells.*)
All: Ding, dong, ding-dong-ding

(*<u>Berry Punch</u> gets a steaming mug of cider ladled up from a pot in the nearest fireplace and wastes no time in sipping away.*)

All: We're so busy making merry, windigos should all be wary

Modulate to E major

Stallions: As our mighty voices carry
(*Minuette and a pegasus haul in a tree by wing and telekinesis.*)
All: Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again

C major

(*Pan to Rarity, seated on her haunches next to bolts of fabric and stitching a snowflake pattern onto one piece with a needle held in her aura.*)

Rarity: Decorations we shall make
(*Banners are quickly strung from one column to the next.*)
All: Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again
(*The finished product—a stocking cap—finds its way onto a stallion's head.*)
Rarity: Perfection you just cannot fake

(*Tilt up to the top of a tree, where Derpy Hooves flies in—lights around her neck, ornament in teeth, star-shaped topper on head.*)
All: Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again
Rarity: Not one mistake, don't let that break
(*The ornament hits the floor and shatters. Instant exasperation.*)
Oh, goodness' sake
(*Derpy gives an embarrassed smile and shrug.*)
All: Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again

(*A wreath-carrying pegasus mare flies up past the camera, the view wiping behind her to the closed front doors. These swing inward, pushed by two other flyers, to make way for Big Macintosh and the wagon-load of presents he is bringing in. The first syllable of the next line overlaps with the last syllable of the preceding one.*)

All: Happy [happy] Hearth's Warming [Hearth's Warming Eve]
(*Granny Smith pops up and begins tossing gifts, flattening one pony; next Derpy gets a brainstorm and sits on the uppermost bough of the tree to top it herself.*)
Happy [happy] Hearth's Warming Eve
(*Overhead shot of the area, seen from a balcony.*)
Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again

Song ends

(*Starlight Glimmer steps into view at the rail, not exactly seeming to be in the holiday spirit, and is soon joined by a cheerful Twilight and a present-carrying Spike.*)

Twilight: Hey, Starlight! Ready to celebrate your first Hearth's Warming Eve here in Ponyville?
Starlight: I was thinking I might just skip it.

(*That declaration draws a stereo gasp of undiluted shock from Princess and assistant alike, and the bottom of the gift box falls open to let a candy cane plop down on the carpet. Snap to black.*)

OPENING THEME

<u>Act One</u>

(*Opening shot: fade in to the balcony doorway. Spike straightens up incredulously into view.*)

Spike: Skip Hearth's Warming Eve?!? (*Longer shot of the three; he has set his present down.*)
Starlight: I just find it all a little…silly. (*pacing*) It's mostly a day dedicated to presents and candy, isn't it? (*He catches up, circling to face her.*)
Spike: And why would you deny yourself presents and candy? (*Both stop.*) That's crazy talk!

(*Twilight's magic takes hold to drag him away; now the winged unicorn steps up to the plate.*)

Twilight: I *think* what Spike means to say is, Hearth's Warming is about more than presents and candy. It's a time to spend with friends and family— (*Spike hurries back to them.*) —when we celebrate a very important day in Equestria's history.
Starlight: I think to most ponies, it's just an excuse for silly songs and fun— (*pacing*) —not a day to remember some old story.

(*A moment of quick thinking on Twilight's part leads her to teleport into Starlight's path, startling her into a halt.*)

Twilight: Maybe you just haven't heard the right Hearth's Warming Eve story yet.
Starlight: (*as if reciting from memory*) Earth ponies, pegasi, and unicorns sing songs around a hearth to fight back an eternal winter caused by the mythical windigos? (*Dismissive laugh.*) Every foal and filly knows that story.
Twilight: Not that one. My favorite holiday story—*A Hearth's Warming Tail*.
Spike: Ooh, I love that one!

(*He throws a hopeful grin at the less-than-enthused unicorn. Dissolve to a close-up of one shelf within the Castle library. Twilight's field pulls a book loose and floats it away, steering it toward herself on a couch nearby. Spike sits next to her, and Starlight is across the way in one of two armchairs, facing her across a low table stacked with books. A reading lamp on a pole glows warmly.*)

Twilight: This is the story of a powerful unicorn named Snowfall Frost— (*Book opens in front of her.*) —who hated Hearth's Warming Eve. (*Zoom in slowly.*) It all began many moons ago in Canterlot.

(*The scene undergoes a wavering dissolve to a winter nighttime cityscape full of holiday decorations and gently glowing windows. Ponies hustle and bustle in all directions, their general manner of dress suggesting the Victorian era in English history; the architectural style reinforces this impression. Zoom in slowly.*)

*** Twilight:** Every home in Canterlot was filed with holiday spirit.

(*Dissolve to a long shot of one particular building that sports only a couple of lit windows and exactly zero festive paraphernalia. The zoom continues.*)

*** Twilight:** Every home, except one.

(*Cut to a cluttered worktable inside; a small weight is levitated onto one pan of a balance scale, evening it out against a rock in the other. During the next line, the stone is floated away and the camera zooms out to frame Snowfall—portrayed by Starlight. Seen from behind in close-up, she wears a magenta formal jacket over a white shirt and dark purple collar band.*)

*** Twilight:** It was said of Snowfall that she was almost as studied as Starswirl the Bearded.

(*Snowfall pivots partway toward the camera, revealing scornful blue eyes behind a pair of tiny pince-nez glasses with light orange frames. The collar band disappears behind a ruffled white ascot, and her forelock is in the divided style that she—or rather, Starlight—used at both ends of Season 5. The rock still in her magical grip, she crosses this workroom toward a caldron heating in the fireplace, revealing white spats on her rear hooves. An open book rests on a stand near the hearth, shelves of bottles and books stand at the walls, and tumbles of literature litter the floor. During the next line, she magically flips pages and peers closely at one that shows a pictorial equation: rock plus unicorn horn magic equals gold—an alchemical transmutation. This fireplace, and every other one seen in the story, uses glowing orange crystals rather than flames as a source of heat and light.*)

*** Twilight:** (*with growing fervor*) Almost, since everypony knows that Starswirl was an expert at everything from transfiguration, dimensional calibration, teleportation—

(*Freeze frame, with the colors partially fading and going white around the screen edges.*)

*** Spike:** (*impatiently*) We get it. Starswirl's awesome.
*** Twilight:** Right. The point is… (*Normal color and motion resume; Snowfall smiles smugly.*)
…Snowfall was also a powerful unicorn.

(*Said unicorn moves closer to the cauldron, now seen to contain a bubbling green mixture.*)

*** Twilight:** She wanted to be perfect.

(*The rock, now suspended just above the surface, begins to sparkle and turn gold from top to bottom as she grits her teeth with the effort of the spell.*)

*** Twilight:** Anything that got in the way of that was a waste of time.

(*Such as the clangor of a bell being rung outside. She cries out in surprise, letting the rock drop and the spell dissipate so that it is its old mineral self by the time it shatters on the floor. Cut to the street; three stallions pass, ringing hoof-held bells, as she glares from a closed upper-story window.*)

Snowfall: (*slightly muffled by glass*) Well, that batch is ruined. (*addressing the room*) Snowdash!

(*Inside: the pony in question—played by Rainbow—flies into the workroom. Snowdash wears a violet vest over a long-sleeved light yellow shirt and a red-orange bow tie. The sleeves are held by violet garters and cuffs, and each foreleg spots a dark purple sock with a hole at the hoof's front edge. Her mane is cut short and parted in the middle, but her tail is as unruly as ever.*)

*** Twilight:** Snowdash was Snowfall's loyal assistant. (*She touches down.*)
Snowdash: What do you need?

Snowfall: (*floating a broom to her, crossing o.s.*) Get this mess cleaned up. Those foolish ponies were ringing those blasted bells outside the window and I lost my concentration.
Snowdash: (*very snarky, to herself, sweeping up*) Whoa. Ponies actually enjoying Hearth's Warming Eve. Where did they get that crazy idea?
Snowfall: (*from o.s.*) Today is nothing to celebrate. (*Cut to her, approaching the worktable.*) Hearth's Warming Eve is a menace! A dangerous day for all of Equestria. (*She goes back to work.*)
Snowdash: Dangerous? It's awesome! It's the day we remember how unicorns, pegasi, and earth ponies came together in friendship to defeat the windigos! (*Snowfall grimaces.*)
Snowfall: That silly legend is the problem! (*mockingly, crossing to a countertop*) Telling everypony that singing songs and being nice will solve anything? (*fiercely*) I've spent years studying magic, and that's not how it works.

(*She adds a stomp on the end of this to hammer the point home. Cut to Snowdash, broom and dustpan in hoof now.*)

Snowdash: I think you might be missing the point. (*Snowfall teleports over and leans into her face so hard that Snowdash flops onto her back.*)
Snowfall: Work hard, learn, and use your skills to better Equestria! *That's* a worthy goal for anypony. (*Back off; return to table; float up a mortar and pestle.*) But by all means, if you want to go home early, ignore all of the work you have, and spend the rest—

(*On the end of this, cut to Snowdash, hunkered down to sweep the rock fragments up into the dustpan held by the handle in her teeth. She instantly drops gear and pops into the air.*)

Snowdash: *Sweet!*

(*She bugs out, leaving Snowfall to voice a disgusted groan and watch her race down the street as a babel of cheerful voices floats up.*)

Snowfall: I *hate* Hearth's Warming Eve! All of Equestria would be better off if we just skipped the day altogether!

Quiet, ominous string/woodwind melody with light percussion accents
Deliberate 4 (A flat minor)

Snowfall: (*mockingly*) "Happy Hearth's Warming," they say in the street
(*Closing the curtains with magic, she paces back toward the fireplace and up/over a stack of books.*)
(*sourly*) "Happy Hearth's Warming," they think they're so sweet
Words said so often that they lack any meaning
(*Float a couple of containers off a shelf.*)
Why should I join in when I could be intervening?
(*crossing room again, retrieving more ingredients*)
Everypony loves this curséd holiday

(*A sweep of one foreleg clears the worktable, and a cup is thrown down; various liquids are poured in, their colors merging to a sickly green.*)

But would they be better off with it out of the way?

(*The concoction belches up a cloud of vapor that fills the screen, and she emerges with the cup in her magical grip to approach the camera.*)

G minor

Snowfall: Well, okay

Brass/percussion in for one bar, then drop back

(*When the inside of her mouth fills the screen, fade to black and snap to just outside her front door. She peeks out and uses her aura to yank off the wreath that has been hung on it.*)

Snowfall: Say goodbye to the holiday

(*Duck back in with it; slam the door; walk down the block.*)

With my magic I'll erase it

(*Remove the bows that a mare has been hanging up over the windows. Elsewhere, a joyful Pipsqueak receives a doll from his parents.*)

The greatest gift that I give today

(*She strolls by, plucking it from his grip.*)

And everypony will have to face it

Brass in

(*Now she watches the goings-on from her balcony, seen in an overhead view; the focus shifts from the other ponies to her.*)

No more little games for you to play

(*Head-on view: she has several stolen items under her power.*)

After you say goodbye to the holiday

Percussion in (C minor)

(*She wheels toward the house; cut to inside as the door flies open and she enters, dumping the loot and slamming it shut. A moment later, she is at the fireplace and floating the items up.*)

Snowfall: Goodbye, Hearth's Warming, you had a good run

Goodbye, Hearth's Warming, it's over, you're done

(*Everything splashes into the caldron at once, triggering a wisp of vapor within which the ghostly images of a wreath and gift float up.*)

Finally set free from your forced celebrations

(*A glare from her sends them tumbling away.*)

No need to reply to your trite invitations

(*Pace the floor, levitating a calendar whose top page shows a wreath; this is ripped away.*)

Calendar shorter by a single day

(*Several bottles float off the shelves to hover nearby.*)
Is my magic up to the test?
(*A quick flip of book pages, stopping at the transmutation spell she was trying earlier.*)
Time to see, I can't delay

G minor

(*Back to the caldron; the stoppers are pulled and the components poured in.*)

Snowfall: Say goodbye to the holiday
Prepare the spell, no hesitation
(*She leans over the brew, letting the sluggishly bubbling surface reflect her determined visage.*)
All memories shall fade away
(*A cloud of blue vapor rises, forming into two windigos that drift toward the camera.*)
See Equestria's new transformation

(*Fade to black, then snap to the specters looming large and circling above her.*)

Snowfall: No more shall anypony say
(*Extreme close-up.*)
(*spoken, softly*) "Happy Hearth's Warming"

(*A devious giggle, and the camera zooms out slowly as she raises her forelegs in triumph.*)

Snowfall: After today

(*The windigos plunge back into the caldron, and she steps up to gaze into it with a look of fierce pride. Zoom in slowly.*)

All parts drop out except for a quiet string accompaniment

Snowfall: (*softly*) After today

Song ends on one final sustained chord
(*The scene fades to black around her grim-set blue eyes as the chord is held out, and the eyes themselves vanish when it cuts off.*)

<u>Act Two</u>

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of Snowfall beaming savagely over the caldron and zoom out slowly.*)

Snowfall: Once the spell is cast, all of Equestria will be better off. (*She turns to face the room.*) And they'll have *me* to thank for it!

(*As in the Act One pause, the color fades and the screen edges go white in a freeze frame.*)

*** Starlight:** Wait a minute!

(*Cut to her, Twilight, and Spike in the Castle library. The baby dragon has procured a mug of hot chocolate.*)

Starlight: Snowfall doesn't like Hearth's Warming Eve, so she decides to cast a spell to get rid of it altogether? That seems a little extreme. (*Close-up of Spike.*)
Spike: Says the pony who tried to make everypony the same by replacing their cutie marks with equals signs?

(*As he takes a sardonic sip, one light violet wing snaps out to hide him from view. Zoom out to frame its owner.*)

Twilight: (*glaring at him, retracting wing partway*) I *think* what Spike is trying to say is that everypony has their reasons for doing things, even Snowfall. (*pointedly, to him*) And if I could continue the story, we might just find out what they are.

(*He pushes the wing back the rest of the way and offers a contrite smile.*)

Spike: Proceed. (*Twilight rolls her eyes good-naturedly and turns back to the book.*)
Twilight: (*reading*) "Snowfall was all set to cast her spell that would erase Hearth's Warming Eve for all time—"

(*Cut to the freeze frame.*)

*** Twilight:** "—when a voice from the hearth caught her attention."

(*Normal color and motion resume with the start of the aforementioned voice—which belongs to Applejack and reverberates slightly in the space.*)

Voice of Applejack: You sure you want to go through with this?

(*Caught totally off guard, Snowfall sucks in a little gasp as a green apple floats up from the caldron.*)

Snowfall: Who's there?

(*The fruit pops in a burst of droplets and is followed by the translucent, pale gray-tinted head of the blond workhorse rising from the pot. Her hat has had some stitching and a snowflake pin added, and her mane is in two braids. She is…*)

Applejack: The Spirit of Hearth's Warmin' Past, that's who!

(*"Past," for short. The unicorn mage boggles at the new arrival, who rises fully out of the caldron and drifts down to a four-point landing. Her clothing consists of a long-sleeved white blouse under a sleeveless dress styled with a fringed hem; the sleeve cuffs, neckline, and skirt all carry snowflake accents. With a little grin, she starts to back Snowfall up across the workroom.*)

Past: And you and me have got to have us a little chat.
Snowfall: A spirit! (*skeptically, passing a hoof through the chest*) I didn't cast any spirit-summoning spell. What are *you* doing here?
Past: (*walking through Snowfall, front to back*) You don't think a spell like that would get by without some powerful forces noticin'? You've got our attention, Snowfall Frost.

(*The ethereal contact causes bits of Snowfall's mane/tail to stand up on end briefly and throws a good shiver into her. Past stops to gaze out the window.*)

Past: And *we've* got some pretty strong opinions on this spell of yours. (*Cut to Snowfall.*)
Snowfall: "We"?
Past: (*from o.s.*) They'll be along in a bit. (*Cut to frame both.*) For now, it's just you and me. Let's get a move on. (*Back to Snowfall; she continues o.s.*) We got a ton to see and barely any time to see it.

(*This last pronouncement is accompanied by a top hat floating onto the holiday hater's head—magenta to match her jacket, dark purple band for the one at her collar. It moves on its own, as Snowfall's horn is not lit.*)

Snowfall: (*chuckling disdainfully*) I'm not going anywhere. (*turning to fireplace*) I've got a spell to cast, and I *don't* need a history lesson about Hearth's Warming Eve. (*The window is now open.*)
Past: We aren't goin' to the past to learn about the holiday. We're goin' to learn about *you*.

(*With one deft throw of a lasso, she proves herself just as adept at roping as her present-day counterpart—perhaps even more so, as it flies toward Snowfall under its own power. The loop snags its target around the midsection, and she is jerked toward the window with a cry of surprise. Cut to just outside it; Past soars out to trot through the night, while the yelling Snowfall is hauled along on the end of the suddenly animate rope. Motes of light and bursts of vapor appear around the pair, and an aurora borealis forms in the clouds. The reverb is gone from Past's voice when she begins to sing.*)

Light bluegrass melody with acoustic guitar/banjo/mandolin/bass/violin, percussion accents
Brisk 4 (B flat major)

Past: As a young thing, life sure is somethin'
(*A flash of white fills the screen and fades to show them descending toward a small village.*)
You go makin' choices large and small

(*They circle a large tree, which shrinks down to a sapling before they land. A faint glow suffuses Snowfall's form.*)

Always growin' like a seedlin', and playin' is like dreamin'

(*Stop on the last hill before the village. The lasso is gone from Snowfall's midsection.*)

And before you know it, big and tall

Stoptime, with woodwind/brass accents

And every little bitty choice you make

Stoptime/accents end

(*They make their way down the road and among the houses, all tricked out with simple Hearth's Warming finery.*)

Sends you down a path to who you are today

So let's take a little trip down memory lane

(*They watch as three foals across the central square to rendezvous with a filly who can only be Snowfall's younger self, wearing a sailor-suit dress and hat—this trip has gone into the past. She rears up happily at their arrival.*)

And see just what the past has to say

Past: Aw, look how cute you were! Looks like you're not too upset it's Hearth's Warmin' Eve, either.

All parts out except mandolin/guitar/strings; tempo slows

(*Cut to a string of lights being hung up by Filly SF's magic and tilt down to the four foals. She begins floating gifts out of a nearby cart to give to the others.*)

Past: The seeds of the past, they grow pretty fast

(*Snowfall regards the tableau glumly in close-up; zoom in slowly.*)

Just look at who you were back then

(*Filly SF hustles by, floating a box of decorations; she and it pass through the adult unicorn's insubstantial image.*)

The seeds as they grow, look what they can show

Reveal the truth time and again

Music pauses

(*Both glance off to one side, the camera panning in that direction to pass through a sudden blaze of blue-green light. Behind this, the view wipes to a schoolhouse classroom, which Filly SF is entering with her box in tow. Setting it down, she begins to float and hang up items; in profile close-up, the edge of a dark gray garment and a gray muzzle set in a disapproving frown advance into view in front of her. On the start of the next line, the camera cuts to a head-on view of this figure, Professor Flintheart. Unicorn stallion; gray coat; lined face; gray-black cloak over a severe suit jacket in a slightly lighter hue; straight, lank, dark gray mane/tail; deep magenta eyes. Filly SF has inadvertently hung an ornament on the end of his horn. Flintheart speaks with a gravelly British accent and an utterly humorless tone.*)

Flintheart: Just what do you think you're doing, Snowfall?
Filly SF: Decorating the classroom for Hearth's Warming Eve, Professor Flintheart. (*He floats the ornament away; now pale gray shirt sleeves are visible under the jacket.*)
Flintheart: You said you wanted to learn to be a powerful unicorn, did you not?
Filly SF: I do!
Flintheart: And what is the way that one becomes a powerful unicorn?

(*The youngster clears her throat and gathers herself proudly to recite from memory.*)

Filly SF: Work hard, learn, and use your skills to better Equestria.

(*Grin. Cut to Snowfall and Past, now on the scene. The latter throws a cocky smile to the former, who lets her mouth and ears droop dejectedly at having heard the old adage come out of her own mouth. She manages a weak grin before Flintheart resumes his drubbing of the filly.*)

Flintheart: And how do these help you to learn magic?
Filly SF: I want to be strong enough to stop windigos and help ponies!
Flintheart: That's just a story we tell little ponies. Real magic takes time to learn.

(*The merest flick of effort is all he needs to crush the ornament and drop its shards into her box, much to her dismay. She gazes up at him with big sad blue eyes as his field pulls down a bow and drops it back in.*)

Flintheart: It's your choice. (*turning away*) Spend your time learning to become a powerful unicorn, or— (*kicking box toward her*) —play with your toys and make nothing of yourself.

(*Exit the straitlaced instructor, every hoof clacking decisively against the floorboards. Zoom in slowly on the crushed Filly SF.*)

Music resumes: mournful string/woodwind backing for vocals, slow 4 (B flat major)

Past: Then some distress, words so careless
Standin' there, you don't know what to do
(*The pinkish-violet face hardens and she walks off past the two visitors.*)
Feeling helpless, you can't make it hurt less
(*Cut to the other three foals playing outside, seen through the window, and zoom out to frame her looking on morosely.*)
So you go and change your point of view

Strings/brass/woodwinds build; faster tempo (F minor)

(*They gallop toward her; cut to outside as she glowers, turns away, and magically yanks the shade down.*)

Past: And in that moment, though you didn't know it

(*Inside, the decorations hit the trash can and book/quills land on the desks.*)
Your defense is set up, walls you build to last
(*Filly SF bends her entire mental focus to the new pile of heavy reading.*)
Leading to the pony you've become today
(*Zoom out as Snowfall and Past watch ruefully from opposite sides.*)
And the spell you're about to cast, it all comes from your past

Quiet solo acoustic guitar with backing strings, slow 4 (B flat major)

Snowfall: The seeds of the past, we grow up so fast
(*All four blue eyes fill with tears; Filly SF pauses to wipe hers clear, then glares anew at her books.*)
Some hurts never go away
Past: The seeds as they grow, this we can't let go
All tied to this one holiday

Song ends

(*Fade to black as they drift away from the camera.*)

(*The screen splits horizontally and expands as if it were an opening eye to give a blurry close-up of the caldron on Snowfall's fireplace—this is her perspective, back in the workroom. The image gradually comes into focus, and the camera cuts to a profile of her standing before the vessel. The ethereal glow around her form is gone, and she hitches in a little breath and looks fearfully around the place. Not another soul is present, living or otherwise.*)

Snowfall: Spirit? W-What am I supposed to…

(*She loses her power of speech upon looking off to one side, and she steps cautiously that way as the camera zooms out slightly. The thing that has caught her attention is a colossal present nearly twice her height and as wide as she is long. After a long, tense moment, the top of the box bursts open, instantly shredding the ribbon and paper, and a blast of confetti and streamers rains down over the workroom as a black silhouette with white-glowing eyes stands up from within with forelegs spread wide. The curly forelock instantly gives this one away as Pinkie, but details of her outline suggest a fur-trimmed garment.*)

Pinkie: (*reverberating slightly*) Snowfall Frost! It is I…

(*The lights come up on the pink nut as she leans down over the edge of the huge box. From this angle, a yellow robe trimmed with paler fur at cuffs and collar is readily visible, along with a cotton candy circlet nestled in her mane and studded with assorted candies.*)

Pinkie: (*spookily, no reverb*) …the Spirit of Hearth's Warming Presents! (*Snowfall backs up a step, then collects herself enough to be confused.*)
Snowfall: Um, don't you mean "present," like the time?

(*"Presents" instantly zips down to her, revealing a candy-cane-striped belt with a piece of candy as a buckle, and holds up a stuffed bird doll.*)

Presents: No! Toys, Hearth's Warming dolls—here, want a cupcake?

(*During this line, she ducks back and forth to give one of each to Snowfall: the bird, a crude likeness of her old friend Sunburst, and the sweet treat. The unimpressed unicorn ends up holding all three in her magic.*)

Snowfall: Fine. Presents.

(*Close-up of a trash can; all three are dumped in, and the camera zooms out to frame her.*)

Snowfall: All of the pointless things that ponies waste their time on.
Presents: (*from o.s.*) Oh, Snowfall. (*hopping around her to can*) It's not what the gift *is* that matters— (*She fishes the goodies back out.*) —it's what the gift *means*. (*Close-up of Snowfall, putting hoof to face wearily.*)
Snowfall: It doesn't *mean* anything. It's just stuff.
Presents: (*from o.s.*) Exactly! (*She cuddles the cupcake lovingly.*) Sometimes a cupcake means "I love you." (*Switch for the bird.*) Or a toy means "Hi! How you doin'?" (*For a book; toss it over her shoulder.*) And sometimes a book means "Your mane looks amazing!" (*A scarf flutters down across her shoulders.*) And sometimes a scarf means…

(*Wrapping it around her neck, she finds herself at a rare loss of words for a second.*)

Presents: …well, scarf usually means "You look cold." That one's easy.
Snowfall: I don't understand anything you're saying.

(*Before Presents can explain any further, she undergoes a series of full-body jitters and shudders that float her clear of the floor.*)

Snowfall: What's happening to you?
Presents: My "Spirit of Hearth's Warming Presents" Sense is going off! (*Close-up; the scarf is gone, as are the shakes.*) That means a song is coming on!

Bouncy Dixieland jazz combo melody, energetic swinging 4 (A major)

(*Reaching up past the top edge of the screen, she pulls a new scene down like a windowshade. One very surprised unicorn finds herself being shoved out her front door and toward the camera by the hyperactive spirit. Fade to black as her face fills the screen, then snap immediately to the pair proceeding down a street filled with revelers and a few floating presents.*)

Presents: Take a look at everything around you
(*A piled-high dessert platter is set on a cart and hauled away.*)

All the smells that surely will astound you
(*She bounds over to a group setting up decorations, then returns with a wreath to hang around Snowfall's neck.*)
Open up your heart, it will surround you
In the magic of Hearth's Warming Eve

(*Wipe to a shivering, raggedly dressed mare; Twinkleshine floats a mug of hot chocolate to her, and the camera zooms out to frame Snowfall and Presents watching. Snowfall has shed the wreath.*)

Presents: The little things that make it better
(*Foals sing carols for an elderly mare at her doorstep.*)
Little ponies spreading cheer
(*Presents gives each of the next three items to a different recipient.*)
Give a toy, a hug, a sweater
Memories that last all year

(*Snowfall tries to sneak away, only to find Presents right in her way; another escape is similarly cut off, and the pink mare shows off a gift in each of the three named sizes.*)

Presents: The present's always filled with presents
Large, medium, and small
(*A flick of her hoof causes tap shoes to appear on the rear hooves of Featherweight, who leans on a crutch and shivers in the cold.*)
Sometimes the most important things
Aren't very big at all

Stoptime (B major)

(*Mare and colt go into an eight-bar tap dance, first separately, then together, after which the camera tracks around a properly bewildered Snowfall and stops as she finds Presents beckoning to her from outside a brightly lit window.*)

Stoptime ends

Presents: What a party, there's so much to see here
(*Snowfall hesitantly approaches.*)
Can't believe you didn't want to be here
(*Close-up of the glass, showing a lively gathering within, and zoom in slowly; their reflections slowly fade from the surface. Near the back of the room, Snowdash is laughing with Flutterholly and Merry, portrayed respectively by Fluttershy and Rarity. Patterned white dress with green trim for the yellow mare, with part of her mane in a coiled braid atop her head; red gown and hat with purple sashes for the white one.*)
You'd have had a blast, I guarantee here
(*Inside, Snowdash gathers the other two into a hug.*)

This is the spirit of Hearth's Warming Eve

(*Now inside, Presents pulls a mug of cider for herself, clunks it with that of another stallion, and both drink.*)

The cider's flowing, this is living

(*She dances on a stage on which Octavia bows a violin and DJ P0N-3 works a gramophone; the unicorn wears a set of earpieces similar to those on a doctor's stethoscope.*)

Come on and feel the beat

(*A unicorn stallion floats a present to a mare, who passes it to Presents, who tosses it onto a giant stack.*)

Life is better when you're givin'

(*Snowdash gives a box to another pony, who tosses it over so that it balances on Presents's nose; she flicks it up to the pile.*)

Each time you do, it feels so sweet

(*Now she pops up here and there from the accumulation of boxes, eventually appearing at the summit and surprising Snowfall greatly.*)

Presents: The present's always filled with presents
So come on, open your eyes
Spend time with ponies just like you
And watch your spirits rise

(*A shift, and her precarious perch tumbles apart so that she surfs down on the topmost box; the avalanche blacks out the screen.*)

The present's always filled with presents

(*Snap to a quick pan down a line of ponies, each of whom catches one.*)

Take a look around

(*One lands neatly in front of Snowfall; it trembles a bit, and Presents bursts out and bounds away.*)

The reason for the holiday
Is quite easily found
Yes, the reason for the holiday
Is quite easily found

(*She holds the last word out as the camera zooms out to an overhead shot of the entire party, then pops up right in front of the camera.*)

A cappella

Presents: And the reason is to be with your friends

Song ends with a stinger

(*She throws out a load of confetti; as it disperses, the view wipes behind it to a close-up of a beaming Twilight on her couch.*)

Twilight: (*imitating Presents, same melody as her last line*)
And the reason is to be with your friends

(*Her expression shifts into one of puzzlement; cut to the trio around the library table. Starlight smirks at her from its other side.*)

Twilight: (*normal voice*) What?
Starlight: You know you're doing your Pinkie Pie voice, right?
Twilight: (*blushing, smiling sheepishly*) I was not!

(*But she chooses to hide her face behind her book in close-up. Zoom out to the sound of Spike's stifled laughter, framing him, as she lowers the literature.*)

Starlight: (*from o.s.*) So… (*Cut to her.*) …what happens next? (*Back to Twilight, floating the book up.*)
Twilight: Well, the party was— (*Zoom out quickly to frame Spike.*)
Spike: Wait! Can we take a quick break? (*lifting his mug, now empty*) I need to refill my cocoa.
Twilight: (*groaning loudly, rolling eyes*) Fine.

(*Cut to just outside the library entrance and zoom out slowly as he darts into the hallway and she steps to the threshold.*)

Twilight: But hurry up! We're almost to the best part!

(*Snap to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of Spike climbing back up onto the couch, freshly recharged mug in hand. He blows to cool off the contents.*)

Spike: Okay. (*Cut to him, Twilight, and Starlight all back in their seats.*) I'm ready.

(*Up comes the book, and a wavering dissolve shifts the action back to the shindig.*)

*** Twilight:** The party was in full swing. (*Zoom in slowly on a doorway; Flutterholly and Merry step through to meet Snowdash.*)
Merry: Snowdash!
Snowdash: (*listlessly*) Hey, Merry.
Merry: Why, whatever is the matter, darling?
Flutterholly: Was it the eggnog? Oh, I knew I put in too much cinnamon.
Snowdash: (*perking up, hovering*) Oh, no, the eggnog was awesome, Flutterholly. I'm just mad at somepony who was complaining about how awful Hearth's Warming Eve is.
Merry: I don't suppose that pony's name starts with "Snow"…

Flutterholly: …and ends with "Frost"?
Snowdash: She said Hearth's Warming Eve is just an excuse to party— (*Others gather around; zoom out slowly.*) —and we would all be better off spending time working to make Equestria a better place.
All others: BOOOOO!!

(*During this round of derision, cut to just inside the front window. Presents and Snowfall are both outside again, the latter staring dumbstruck as the former gives her a knowing nudge and wink. After this, cut back to Flutterholly and Merry.*)

Merry: What does Snowfall think a better Equestria looks like?

(*Zoom out to frame a vexed Snowdash, having styled her forelock to match Snowfall's and donned a pair of pince-nez.*)

Snowdash: Ponies working hard, learning, and using their abilities for the benefit of Equestria.

(*The two on the floor giggle at the impression, but the genuine article is genuinely chastened—at least until a snowball smacks against the windowpanes, barely missing her. Young laughter rings through the night; cut to the source—a trio of foals having winter fun in the street. One puts the finishing touches on a snow pony, while another shakes off snow from the hit delivered by the third. Zoom out to put a newly annoyed Snowfall in the fore. The next two lines are slightly muffled by the windowpanes.*)

Merry: (*from inside*) It looks like we've got everything on Snowfall's list right here.

(*Cut to Snowfall's perspective of her and Flutterholly on the end of this, seen through the window.*)

Flutterholly: I think a perfect Equestria looks a lot like a Hearth's Warming Eve party.

(*Longer shot, behind Snowfall; the curtains are pulled shut to cut off her view and she turns away. In close-up; tears begin to well in her eyes. Here comes Presents up alongside, her mouth curved into a knowing smile.*)

Presents: Me too! (*Face falls; the tears vanish.*) Too bad it's going to be the last one ever!

(*She repeats the last word three more times, her voice steadily decreasing in volume as she backs into a thick patch of fog that has begun to roll in.*)

Snowfall: (*scared, advancing into it*) Spirit? What do you mean? What's going to happen?

(*The fog has now thickened enough to blot out all details of her and the houses. Cut to her, slowly backing up through a thinned patch; the ground under her hooves is now blanketed with snow, and an unforgiving wind howls across the drifts. Presents is gone. Snowfall comes up short*

upon noticing that a tendril of the vapor is winding its way around her form, and a longer shot picks out a hooded silhouette that stands perhaps three times her height. A horn juts from the head bent down toward her, and the thickened fog is issuing from the hem of the cloak that covers every bit of the towering form except for two dark, shod, raised forelegs within the folds.)

Snowfall: Who are you?

(*A head-on shot of the apparition, seen from over her shoulder, picks out the barely visible shape of a crescent-moon brooch at the throat. The voice, when it comes, is an otherworldly, reverberating variation of Princess Luna's.*)

Luna: I am the Spirit of Hearth's Warming Yet to Come.

(*"Yet to Come," for short. She spreads her wings on the end of this; cut to Snowfall.*)

Snowfall: (*shielding her face*) Are you here to show me what future Hearth's Warming Eves are like?
Yet to Come: (*from o.s.*) No. (*Back to her.*) For there are no more Hearth's Warming Eves for me to show.
Snowfall: Why not?

(*The dark figure straightens up to full height, eyes burning white under the hood.*)

Yet to Come: You will succeed in erasing the holiday— (*She lights the end of her horn, fully illuminating her face.*) —as you wished.

(*The added light shows the color of her cloak not as a solid black, but rather as the same dark blue-violet of her coat, with black patches on hood/collar/haunch to match the background of her cutie mark.*)

Snowfall: And what happens?

Ominous string melody with brass/percussion accents, ponderous 4 (A minor)

(*Zoom in between and past them, toward a scattered few chimneys and rooftops that protrude from the frozen expanse, and pan slowly along the ravaged cityscape. The odd reverb is gone from the spirit's voice now, but her words still echo slightly.*)

Yet to Come: I see a cold wind blowing through
I see days neither fun nor free
(*Snowfall turns fearfully toward her and backs away from an accusing hoof toward the edge of a cliff.*)
I see a future caused by you
I see a path not meant to be

(*The unnerved unicorn gets even more shaken up by a snowy gust of wind that roars up from the abyss behind her. Now Yet to Come swirls her front hooves in the air to generate a wisp of vapor that resolves into a spectral pegasus mare and stallion who dance above the snow.*)

Intensity slowly builds

Yet to Come: The future should be filled with magic
(*They bow to each other.*)
Dreams and wishes brought to life
(*She leans into view in the fore, the scene darkening behind her.*)
But the days ahead are dark and tragic
No time for hope when all is strife

(*The dancers dissipate at her gesture; now she leans down over Snowfall.*)

Yet to Come: Whatever might have been, all the dreams that ponies share
(*She sweeps past the camera.*)
Because of you, Snowfall Frost, now the future is a cold nightmare

Song ends, but music continues to build

(*Zoom out quickly as two windigos swoop down from the clouds and arc back upward.*)

Snowfall: Windigos? They aren't real! It's just a little fillies' story!
Yet to Come: They are all too real, Snowfall. (*leaning down to her*) And your actions will allow them to return. (*Straighten up; drift slowly back into the storm.*) The future of Equestria shall be bathed in a blanket of eternal snow!

(*Overhead close-up of the horrified Snowfall, zooming out slowly as the windigos circle through the unceasing blizzard.*)

Snowfall: No! I-I never meant for this to happen! I-I didn't understand! I didn't see how important Hearth's Warming Eve was! (*She prostrates herself in the snow.*) Please, Spirit! I haven't cast the spell yet! Is there still time? I'M SORRY!!

(*She covers her face with her front hooves as her last two words echo through the night. Fade to white.*)

Music ends

(*Fade in to a close-up of her in the same position, with the floorboards of her workroom replacing the snowdrifts now. She uncovers her eyes and, after a moment to confirm that she is no longer lying in the middle of an apocalyptic winter storm, dares a look around the place while propping herself up on her forelegs. Cut to just outside one window, which she opens to the*

sound of a ringing bell, the holder is a stallion, one of several grown ponies and foals gathered in the street below. Snowfall regards them with newfound joy.)

Snowfall: There's still time!

(*She ducks back into the workroom. Wipe to a pan through the party that Presents took her to visit in Act Two and stop on Flutterholly and Merry. They start toward the door at the sound of a knock; cut to just behind Snowfall, now standing at the door, as they open it and regard her with sudden shock.*)

Merry: Oh, my.
Flutterholly: Snowfall Frost?
Snowfall: (*a bit shyly*) I was hoping I wasn't too late for the party? (*floating several presents into view*) I brought gifts.

(*There comes the scratch of DJ P0N-3's gramophone needle being yanked off the record, and the over-flying Snowdash is so floored that she spits out the mouthful of cider she has been working on. She has rearranged her mane back into its usual style and ditched the pince-nez she used to imitate her employer.*)

Snowdash: Boss? (*Snowfall steps in.*)
Snowfall: I was wrong earlier, about Hearth's Warming Eve. It's not all about singing and presents. The singing and presents are all about celebrating the ponies in our lives. (*Snowdash settles to the ground; Snowfall approaches her.*) The ponies we should listen to more often.

(*The blue face comes over in an accepting smile.*)

Snowfall: Our friends.

(*She distributes wrapped goodies to Flutterholly, Merry, and Snowdash with her magic.*)

Snowdash: Wow.

(*Balancing her gift on a front hoof, she rips the paper away with her teeth to find a corked bottle. Close-up of this, showing a label marked with a yellowed, creased clipping of...*)

Snowdash: (*from o.s., slightly deflated*) Dragon toenail?

(*Back to her; Flutterholly and Merry gather in closer.*)

Snowdash: (*forcing a smile*) Uh…thanks?
Snowfall: (*smiling sheepishly*) I was…in a hurry. I'll do better next time.
Snowdash: (*laughing, hovering; bottle on floor*) You kidding? No one's ever given me dragon toenail before! It's awesome! Now come get some eggnog!

(*She flies off and returns with a mug. Zoom out slowly.*)

*** Twilight:** And from then on, it was always said of all the Hearth's Warming Eve celebrations— (*Snowfall takes the drink in her aura.*) —Snowfall's was the Hearth's Warming-est.

(*Wavering dissolve back to a close-up of her in the library.*)

Twilight: (*reading*) "The end." (*Her magic closes and lowers the book.*) Well, that's it.

(*She hops off the couch to cross the room, followed by Spike, who leaves his mug on the table.*)

Twilight: (*to Starlight*) Thanks for letting me read you the story. Guess you can call it a night. (*The book goes back on the shelf.*) Spike and I are heading downstairs, and if you wanted to, you'd be welcome to join us.

(*As Princess and dragon head for the door, the camera zooms out to put her student in the fore. The focus shifts to her, deep in thought and doubt. Dissolve to the balcony on which she watched the festivities during the prologue; she steps onto it from the nearest doors, magically opening them, and props her forelegs on the rail for another look. Twilight is now among the merrymakers, a mug of cider held in her aura, and she looks up toward Starlight.*)

Twilight: Welcome to the party! (*raising mug*) Happy Hearth's Warming, Starlight.
Starlight: (*smiling*) Happy Hearth's Warming, Twilight.

Warm string/woodwind accompaniment, leisurely 4 (C major)

(*Starlight trots down the stairs to the entrance hall and accepts a mug offered by Rarity.*)

Starlight: Hearth's Warming Eve is filled with presents, some take you by surprise (*She taps it against Twilight's.*)
A story shared by your good friends that makes your spirits rise (*She walks by the Apples' pie cart, no longer carrying the drink, as Applejack flips one onto the pile from her head, then passes a pile of gifts presided over by Pinkie and Rainbow. A jingle bell is tied to the end of the fluffy magenta forelock.*)
Sometimes you just let go of the past, enjoy the present while it lasts (*Rainbow flies across to plug two strings of lights together and lift them off the floor.*)
And really it's not that much to ask with good friends by your side

Full orchestra in

(*Behind the multicolored tail, the view wipes to the upper reaches of the hall. Strings of crystal lights wink on at all heights as the camera tilts down—including the ones wrapped around Derpy's midsection. Still perched atop the tree whose ornament she broke in the prologue, the*

cross-eyed pegasus literally glows from one end to the other due to both these lights and the star topper on her head.)

Same melody/tempo as last verse of prologue

(*Starlight gets a loop of jingle bells placed around her neck.*)

Starlight: Now it's time to celebrate
All: Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again
(*She magically passes a cupcake to Apple Bloom from the Cakes' table.*)
Starlight: All together, feeling great
All: Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again
(*Rarity floats a holly sprig and nestles it by Fluttershy's ear; Applejack and Pinkie flip items off their heads to each other—a cupcake, which Pinkie catches in her mouth, and a small gift that lands on Applejack's head.*)
Starlight: Can't hardly wait, we'll party 'til late
(*Twilight/Rainbow/Spike gather, the dragon gulps down the contents of a gift bag filled with gems.*)
Our favorite date
(*Pan across the entire octet; Pinkie now has bells around her neck as well.*)
All: Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again

(*The first syllable of the next line overlaps the last syllable of the previous. Zoom out slowly.*)

All: Happy [happy] Hearth's Warming [Hearth's Warming Eve]
Happy [happy] Hearth's Warming Eve

(*Cut to a long shot of the Castle and zoom out slowly.*)

All: Hearth's Warming Eve is here once again

Song ends

(*At the same time, the moon blazes white to fill the screen, which then snaps to black.*)

(*The usual closing theme does not accompany the credits. In its place is the Dixieland melody from the final verse of Presents's song in Act Two.*)

THE SADDLE ROW REVIEW

Written by Nick Confalone
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Story editing by Josh Haber
Supervising direction by Jim Miller
Directed by Denny Lu, Tim Stuby

Transcribed by Alan Back (ajback@yahoo.com)

Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to a stretch of road in Ponyville, the camera angled up from ground level to point toward the sky over a row of houses. It is daytime, and Rainbow Dash flaps into view, short of breath and leading Twilight Sparkle, Applejack, Fluttershy, and Pinkie Pie in a mad dash toward the Carousel Boutique in the not-too-far distance.*)

Rainbow: Come on! If we hurry, we can get there before the paper's even delivered to Rarity's house!
Pinkie: (*singsong*) Maybe she won't read the article…
Applejack: I'm pretty sure Rarity's gonna read a review of her new boutique in Manehattan.

(*Identified as "Rarity for You" at the end of "The Gift of the Maud Pie."*)

Rainbow: I still can't believe we all just blabbed everything that happened to that reporter!
Fluttershy: I just hope it doesn't end up being an article about how her friends almost ruined the opening.

(*They skid to a stop at their friend's front door.*)

Twilight: I think you're all overreacting. Rarity's our friend. If anypony is gonna understand, it'll be her.

(*She raises a hoof to knock, but a magic glow takes hold of the door from within and swings it open to expose one rather put-out white unicorn.*)

Rarity: I was wondering when all of you were going to show up.

(*The other five gasp in unison; she surprises them again by breaking out into an ear-to-ear smile and levitating a newspaper up from floor level.*)

Rarity: Now we can all read the review together!

(*She wheels into the showroom, taking the paper with her and missing the uneasy glances that her friends shoot to each other. Cut to a profile close-up of her crossing the floor, and zoom out to show the others following at a distance on the start of the next line.*)

Rainbow: Um, I have an idea. (*All stop.*) How about we *don't* read it?
Twilight: (*magically pulling paper to herself*) What she means is, before you read it, we should probably tell you about—
Rarity: (*taking it back*) No, no, darling. (*opening it*) Please, no spoilers.
Fluttershy: But—
Rarity: (*fiercely*) *NO SPOILERS!!*

(*Rancor instantly shifts to a blissful grin as she buries her face in the pages. More worried looks pass among the other five mares before the view snaps to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of Rarity's reading glasses resting on a stool. These are floated up and onto her nose.*)

Rarity: (*adjusting paper*) Now, is everypony ready to hear what I'm sure is a stellar review that describes in stunning detail exactly how each of you contributed to the successful opening of Rarity for You?

(*Apparently not, if their grimaces—and Fluttershy's high-speed bug-out—are any indication. The yellow pegasus ends up peeking out from among the rack of dresses that the group wore to the Grand Galloping Gala in "The Best Night Ever." Rarity gives her a puzzled look, then clears her throat and turns her attention to the newsprint.*)

Rarity: (*reading*) "Many a pony has tried their hoof at joining the ranks of the elite fashion trendsetters currently ensconced in the boutiques of Manehattan's famed Saddle Row." (*Giggle.*) "Some might say it's the ultimate achievement in Equestrian fashion, and never before has a reporter been granted such unfettered behind-the-scenes access until now."

(*These last two words are punctuated by a giddy rise in her voice and a huge grin.*)

Fluttershy: I wish it had been more fettered. (*Rarity blows out a breath.*)
Rarity: Uh… (*Mumble through a few lines.*) …oh! (*reading*) "I sat down with—" (*Giggle.*) "—Rarity and her friends after the opening to get the inside scoop. And what a scoop it was!"

(*Dissolve to a booth in a restaurant, where a unicorn waitress has floated up a teapot to refill one of the two customers' cups. Night has fallen beyond the windows. As she finishes pouring*

and turns away, the camera pans to another booth in which Rarity sits facing an older earth pony stallion. Tan coat; light yellow-brown eyes; short salt-and-pepper mane/tail/mustache;, white dress shirt with loosened, striped red necktie and rolled-up sleeves. A cutie mark of a notepad and pencil is just visible beyond the hem of the shirt. The pad resting before him on the table marks him as a reporter, and his accent and cadence point to him as a Manehattan native—the action has shifted to the big city. He has a cup of coffee, while she has tea.)

Reporter: Okay, kid. You successfully opened a shop in Manehattan, and that's no mean feat. Most ponies might wonder what it feels like. (*Cut to Rarity; he continues o.s.*) Here's how it's gonna be. (*She reacts with surprise; cut to frame both again.*) I'm gonna interview you and your friends so I can paint a picture of how it all came together. A word picture, mind you, not an actual picture. Any questions?

(*Cut to his perspective of her.*)

Rarity: Well, I was wondering how—
Reporter: Let's get started! (*Both again.*) Ms. Rarity, you got shops all over Equestria, but this was your first time trying to make it in the big city. What made you think you could tackle it on your own? (*His perspective of her.*)
Rarity: Well, I wouldn't say "all over Equestria." I just have two other boutiques, one in my hometown of Ponyville and one in Canterlot. (*Chuckle.*) Uh, still, when I decided to open this one, I was nothing but confident.

(*In the instant it takes for a desk bell to ring, she has been replaced by Twilight, who sips tea from a cup held in her magic.*)

Twilight: Let's just say that if I could choose, I probably wouldn't do it that way again.

(*Embarrassed grin and barely audible chuckle. Now Pinkie takes her place, the table cluttered with a slice of cake, two cupcakes, and a gargantuan ice cream sundae.*)

Pinkie: Weeeellll…it wasn't the funnest party ever.

(*A sour-faced Applejack's turn, with nothing before her but a piece of pie.*)

Applejack: It was a plum-puckered, pig-pushin' disaster!

(*A very casual Rainbow is up now, with a cup of soda on the table and one foreleg propped on the seat back.*)

Rainbow: After a lifetime of awesome, I think everypony's allowed to mess up every now and then, right?

(*The sound of pencil scratching on paper brings up a load of apprehension.*)

Rainbow: Wait. Are you writing this down?

(*Now Fluttershy appears in the seat; nothing before her except silverware.*)

Fluttershy: (*toying with fork*) Um, it didn't go exactly how I thought it would, but it, um, started out all right.

(*She offers up a tentative little grin. Dissolve to the sun shining brightly in the daytime sky over the Manehattan rooftops and tilt down to ground level, bringing Rarity into view during the next line. A jewelry shop stands out prominently on this block.*)

Rarity: (*over her shoulder*) Welcome to Saddle Row!

(*Long shot, seen from across the street: she leads the other five down the sidewalk. High-class establishments, all of them.*)

Rarity: An entire street lined with the most fashionable boutiques in all of Equestria! (*Close-up.*)
Applejack: If it's supposed to be the most fashionable block of shops, where's Stinky Bottom's Discount Hat Emporium?
Rarity: (*dryly*) I suppose it didn't make the cut. (*She stops short with a giddy gasp and points ahead.*) Here it is!

(*Long overhead shot of the group. They have stopped in front of the three-story building that Rarity chose for her new shop at the end of "The Gift of the Maud Pie." Two changes have been made to the place since then: the boards over the ground-floor windows and central door, and the wrought-iron gate barring that door, have been removed. The other door, near one corner, remains as it was.*)

Rarity: Rarity for You!

(*Cut to just inside the door as she opens it. Bits of debris litter the floor, and a cloud of dust is stirred up by the motion. She smiles proudly into the space, but none of the others share her high spirits—and a series of cuts around the area tells why. Cobwebs have built up in nearly every nook and cranny, including the once-impressive brass chandelier; one end of a wall-mounted shelf breaks loose; a mouse squeaks and scampers its way out from behind a crate and a fallen curtain rod resting in a corner. The six mares enter cautiously, all but Rarity taken aback at the overall decrepitude.*)

Twilight: Rarity, it's lovely. But are you sure you'll be ready to open tonight?

(*So the action has shifted to a still earlier time frame than the restaurant interviews. Bending over a counter, Pinkie gets a lungful of its deep-drifted dust and lets off a sneeze that propels gray clouds of the stuff to fill the screen. When the view clears, it has shifted to the other five, now caked with dust to various degrees; Fluttershy has taken the worst of it, coated from head to tail. The other four shake themselves clean in short order.*)

Rarity: No need to fret over a mere moderate amount of preparation. My clothes arrive soon, my sales associate after that—

(*Cut to Fluttershy, beginning to scrape herself off.*)

Rarity: (*crossing to her, levitating a pushbroom*) —and with a little…dusting… (*pacing, passing brooms to Twilight/Applejack/Rainbow*) …we'll be ready for the grand opening tonight.

(*The budding cleanup is interrupted by the boisterous, gravelly voice of an older stallion with a heavy Russian or Eastern European accent.*)

Stallion voice: Rarity!

(*Cut to the open from door, Rarity looking toward it with some trepidation at two new arrivals. One, the speaker, is Mr. Stripes: bulky earth pony; white coat; deep purple eyes; short, two-tone violet mane/tail/mustache/goatee; heavy beard stubble and eyebrows; white-striped blue track suit jacket zipped over a lighter blue shirt; towel and gold medallion around neck; cutie mark of three two-tone striped violet stars. The other is his daughter Plaid: gangly orange-tan earth pony mare; eyes and long, curly, slightly messy two-tone mane/tail in lighter hues than his, with the mane tied back in a ponytail using a furry green scrunchie; light blue jacket with overlapping plaid/stripe patterns and a vivid magenta fur collar; prominent eyebrows; braces; severe overbite; cutie mark of a plaid-patterned magenta heart.*)

Mr. Stripes: Is so good to see you! Your store, it's going to be a very good place, I think. (*Chuckle.*)

(*Cut to the reporter's booth in the restaurant: his perspective of Rarity, who is using her magic to steep a tea bag in her cup.*)

Rarity: Mr. Stripes owns the building. He's a very pleasant landlord. (*Float the cup up.*) Although he can be pushy at times.

(*She puts on a thoroughly unconvincing smile to cover a beat of tense silence.*)

Rarity: Okay, all the time.

**** From here on in, the words "The booth" at the beginning of a stage direction indicate a cut back to this spot in the restaurant, seen from the reporter's perspective. ****

(*The shop again.*)

Mr. Stripes: You've met my daughter? The apple of my ear. The hay in my hoof. (*leaning in close*) You will let her work with you.

Rarity: (*suddenly unnerved, giggling weakly*) It's just… (*Slow pan across the room; all the others are tidying up, and Fluttershy is now entirely clean.*) …I'm dreadfully busy preparing for tonight's grand opening— (*He glares at her.*) —as you can see, uh…
Mr. Stripes: (*smiling*) There are only two things I love more than being pushy. (*pulling Plaid closer*) One is my daughter.

(*Profile close-up of Rarity's face; he holds a tiny couch, armchair, and table up on one hoof.*)

Mr. Stripes: (*from o.s.*) The other is miniature doll furniture. (*Zoom out; he leans menacingly toward her.*) And I would sell my entire mini-furniture collection to make my daughter happy. (*putting set down, smiling, throwing foreleg around her shoulders*) You understand?

(*Plaid chips in a grinning eyebrow waggle, but Rarity is not swayed by this ham-hoofed appeal to emotion and uses her magic to push Mr. Stripes's leg away.*)

Rarity: I'm sorry. I just don't think it's going to be possible.
Mr. Stripes: Let me say another way. (*leaning into her face, all cheer gone*) Hire her or I raise rent until you no can afford. (*Tight little grin.*)
Rarity: Oh! Uh, welcome aboard!

(*Plaid moves a bit closer to Rarity and gestures for her to lean in. Once a white ear is within easy whispering range, she speaks up—excitedly, with a tiny bit of a lisp and enough volume to make Rarity wince. No foreign accent, though.*)

Plaid: First idea! Instead of clothes, we sell glow-in-the-dark teeth! Like this.

(*A few overly enthusiastic chomps demonstrate the concept.*)

Plaid: *But* they glow in the dark! (*Rarity scrapes up a humoring smile.*)
Rarity: Golly, what a splendid idea! (*Weak chuckle.*)

(*The booth: she sits with teacup on table and claps hooves to temples, caught up in the throes of supreme frustration.*)

Rarity: Glow-in-the-dark teeth! (*propping head on hooves*) What was she thinking?

(*Slow pan across the shop; the other five are policing it up as she opens the curtain to a back room and steps behind it. A cry of fright brings the group up short.*)

Rarity: (*from behind curtain*) Fluttershy! Your assistance is required in the stockroom, post-haste!

(*The animal lover lets her broom drop and gallops toward the curtain; cut to its other side as she opens it and slips in. A look of wonder snaps onto her face; cut to a close-up of a blue-eyed raccoon on the floor, scrabbling at the side of a barrel and trying to jump up to its top. On the*

start of the next line, zoom out to frame more of this stockroom; Rarity balanced precariously atop the barrel on her haunches, the raccoon jumping into the outstretched paws of a second, a third one lounging nearby, and Fluttershy smiling warmly in the critters' general direction. The room is in the same disarray as the rest of the shop, including a rusty water heater.)

Fluttershy: Aww, hello!
Rarity: (*whispering*) But what are they doing here?

(*Fluttershy cocks her head to catch a quick round of chittering, then turns back to Rarity.*)

Fluttershy: Smoky made too much noise eating garbage, so Soft Pad's mother made them move out of the trash can.

(*The booth: she sits flanked by the three animals, all drinking soda and eating fries.*)

Fluttershy: Then Smoky Junior found a nice home in the crawlspace behind the building. (*petting the blue-eyed one's head*) But Mr. Stripes demolished it, so they were temporarily camped out in the back until they found a new place to live. (*Grin.*)

(*The shop again. Rarity's magic yanks the curtain open and she hurries out of the stockroom.*)

Rarity: No, no, no. I can't have a family of rubbish-scented raccoons living in my boutique!

(*There now comes an electronic, bass-heavy dance groove from somewhere overhead, muffled by the ceiling as it sets the chandelier vibrating.*)

Rarity: (*uneasily*) Uh…did you hear that?

(*The booth: she sighs wearily, a teacup sitting forgotten on the table.*)

Rarity: (*very snippy*) Turns out there's a club pony party palace upstairs.

(*In a microsecond, she is replaced by a madly grinning Pinkie and her tea by plates of carrot dogs and pizza.*)

Pinkie: (*leaning over table*) Turns out there's a club pony party palace upstairs!

(*The exterior of the building, seen from across the street; the music is audible even at this distance. Rarity storms out of the central door and in through the corner one, the camera tilting up toward the top floor to the almost inaudible sound of stepping hooves. Evidently this door gives onto a stairwell that allows access to the rest of the building. Cut to the entrance to the "party palace"—a dance club done out in shades of blue and violet—where a heavyset earth pony stallion is on guard duty. The music comes through loud and clear now. Light blue-gray coat, short blue tail/beard/mustache, earpiece radio, scalp shaved bald, dark gray suit jacket over a white dress shirt and light blue tie, cutie mark of a closed padlock, eyes hidden behind*

opaque black sunglasses. Spots of light play over the walls and floor as Rarity trots determinedly up to him and glances past. What she finds are three mares getting their groove on in the middle of the dance floor while DJ P0N-3 works her turntables on a stage stacked with speakers. When Rarity tries to advance, though, the guard blocks her with a foreleg and pushes her back.)

Rarity: (*voice raised*) I'm sorry! Could you please ask her to turn it down? (*No response.*) Could you ask her to turn it down, please? (*Silence again; she drops onto her haunches, begging.*) Turn it down, *pleeeease!*

(*Two garishly dressed earth pony mares, whose outfits and mane styles are straight out of the 1980s, trot up and are promptly allowed through the velvet rope to reach the dance floor.*)

Rarity: (*sobbing*) Oh, please!

(*She can only stare and glower as the stallion clips the rope back into place. The booth: she is back in the seat with her tea, and Pinkie's food is gone. She voices a disdainful little scoff.*)

Rarity: Foals today listen to their so-called music far too loud. (*She makes air quotes on "so-called music," then smiles.*) I realize that makes me sound like an old mare. (*indignantly, knocking cup over*) But this is business!

(*Cut to the shop, the music having stopped. In close-up, Applejack hunches down to the floor, the handle of a dustpan in her teeth; debris is swept into it, but the start of a new track jolts the room so badly that she spills the lot and a few bits of plaster patter down from the ceiling. Cut to Rainbow, hovering near the chandelier.*)

Rainbow: I wish we were having as much fun as they are. (*Overhead shot of Twilight—with the broom—and Applejack, now upright.*)
Twilight: Well, sweeping can be fun too.

(*She begins to chant "sweep, sweep, sweep" in time with the music, plying the broom across the floor and even giving it a twirl for effect. Neither Applejack nor Rainbow can quite wrap their heads around her affinity for turning housework into a club craze. The booth: daredevil and workhorse sit side by side, and Rainbow takes a pull from the cup of soda that has replaced Rarity's tea.*)

Rainbow: Only Twilight could make a dance remix about sweeping. I mean, how lame is that?
Applejack: Yeah. It wasn't even catchy. (*Rainbow pushes the cup aside.*)
Rainbow: Nope.

(*High five. Back to the shop; Twilight is still at it, and the other four who are still on the premises drop in behind her to help with the cleanup. Applejack—no longer toting the dustpan— and Rainbow are the only ones who join in on "sweep, sweep, sweep" with Twilight, clearly enjoying themselves and giving the lie to their restaurant denial. Fluttershy does not, due to the broom handle in her teeth, and Pinkie is having too much fun hovering just off the ground and twirling*

her tail like a helicopter rotor so that it skims the floor. Rarity returns, very much out of sorts, and the others fall silent.)

Rarity: Apparently DJ P0N-3 has a residency at the party palace upstairs, but security won't let me speak to her!

(*A goose-like horn blast scares a yelp out of her.*)

Rarity: What in the name of Celestia was *that?!?*

(*The booth: now Plaid is in the hot seat and has put on dangling earrings in the shape of teaspoons. The table is littered with juice boxes instead of Rainbow's soda.*)

Plaid: You know how most stores have a little jingle bell when the door opens? (*Clear throat.*) I thought we should have something with a little more pizzazz! So I installed one of Daddy's antique horns.

(*Cut to a spot just inside the shop entrance, the camera positioned near the top of the open door. The horn she mentioned has been attached up here, and the closing door squeezes its rubber bulb to generate the obnoxious honk. As it happens a few more times, zoom out quickly to frame Plaid swinging the door; Rarity cringes at the sound, and Plaid waves to her and steps away. The employee is not wearing the spoon earrings now.*)

Rarity: (*shuddering a bit*) We'll have to do something about that— (*All her friends except Pinkie gather in; only Twilight still has her broom.*) —after I think of a way to quiet down that music—and after I finish designing the window display!

(*A rumbling crash shakes the camera and startles all five, bringing a yelp from the fashionista for good measure. As Pinkie hover-sweeps her way back into view, eyes turn toward the door and the camera cuts to a blue-uniformed delivery stallion who is wheeling the last of several dented boxes into a pile that now stands in the corner. He dumps them off as an incredulous Rarity approaches the disordered shipment. Her magic extends to cover the top of one box; cut to within it, the camera pointed up toward the flaps as they swing open and she peeks in.*)

Rarity: (*suspiciously*) Wait…is this my merchandise shipment from Ponyville? (*Outside the box again; she turns to the stallion.*) It's completely disorganized!

(*With the barest of shrugs and not a word, he rolls his cart out the door, leaving her to put hooves to temples and sputter out her frustration. The next arrival is a thoroughly disheveled Coco Pommel—eyes watery, cheeks flushed, nose reddened by having been blown or wiped repeatedly in a short time. Suffering from either a cold or a nasal allergy, she lets go with a major-league sneeze almost as soon as she steps in the door.*)

Rarity: Gesundheit! (*realizing who it is*) Ooh, Miss Pommel! (*crossing to her*) I'm so glad to see you! Now as the sole sales associate at Rarity for You, I hate to add to your already-overflowing

plate of responsibilities— (*smiling coaxingly*) —but it looks as though we have just a tad more to do before tonight than I thought.
Coco: Actually, I— (*Another sneeze.*) —I can't work tonight.
Rarity: Oh? Why not?

(*The booth: now Coco sits here, with Plaid's juice boxes gone and replaced by a mound of wadded-up tissues. She blows her nose loudly on the fresh one she has pulled from a handy box. Back to the shop: she lets go with a third sneeze, this one directly into Rarity's face, and the unicorn floats up a tissue to wipe herself off.*)

Rarity: Feel better, my sweet. (*Drop it; touch her chest gently.*) We'll manage without you— (*turning away, confidence gone*) —somehow. (*increasingly unhinged*) And we'll manage glowing teeth and car horns and disorganized clothes and dance music—am I forgetting anything?

(*As she reels off this list, the camera cuts to the following: a grinning Plaid, the horn above the door, the pile of tumbled boxes, and finally back to her, crumpling to her haunches and clapping hooves to temples. Coco has departed by this point. Her query is answered in the affirmative when the three raccoons from the stockroom scamper and chitter across the room right in front of her. Zoom in to a close-up, one eye starting to twitch alarmingly, then cut to a long shot of the building, seen from across the street. Zoom out slowly.*)

Rarity: (*from inside, sobbing*) WHAT AM I GOING TO DO??

(*The outburst causes passersby to stop and stare, and a stallion pulling a carriage even comes to a screeching halt. Snap to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to the booth. A worried-looking Twilight is now on the receiving end of the interview, and the table is clear.*)

Twilight: Well, opening a store in Manehattan is a pretty big deal. (*tapping front hooves together*) It's natural that Rarity would be a *little* stressed about how it was going—since it wasn't going well. (*smiling*) Still, I think she handled it all right.

(*Cut to the shop; Rarity stands up into view, fully primed for a complete freakout; the music from upstairs has stopped.*)

Rarity: (*overwrought*) The dream is doomed! Doomed, I tell you! (*sobbing*) Doomed!

(*She pitches to the floor; the other five gather across from her. Twilight has stowed her broom.*)

Twilight: I know things haven't gone perfectly so far, but we've done this kind of thing before. If we all work together, w— (*Rarity stands up.*)
Rarity: I appreciate the offer, but this is Manehattan. To make it in the fashion scene here, everything has to be perfect!

(*Outside, overhead view: she steps out the door, the camera zooming out.*)

Rarity: The perfect location! (*Inside again.*) The perfect clothes! The perfect opening!
Twilight: Maybe we should just postpone. (*Rarity gets in her face.*)
Rarity: *Postpone?!?* Darling, tonight is the last night of the fall season. If we don't open tonight, it won't be…
Twilight: (*sighing*) …perfect.
Rarity: Yes. (*smiling fiercely*) I know what needs to be done. I just need more of me! Oh, how I wish I could make copies of myself.

(*The booth: here sits Pinkie, equipped with a mammoth stack of pancakes and a pitcher of maple syrup whose contents have already been liberally applied.*)

Pinkie: (*very hesitantly*) Yeah. Making copies of yourself always sounds like a great idea, but before you know it, you're locked in a room with fifty Pinkie Pies watching paint dry.

(*A reference to the final test in "Too Many Pinkie Pies," to determine which Pinkie was the real one. The peppy pony scoops half the pancakes into her mouth, letting her cheeks bulge out and a dribble of syrup ooze down her chin; behind her, the back of a head of frizzy magenta mane topped by a dark blue fedora can now be seen. This head turns slightly, exposing a duplicate of Pinkie's face—possibly a fugitive clone created in the Mirror Pool during that earlier episode.*)

(*Cut to the shop.*)

Twilight: We *can* do this, and we can stay true to your vision.
Rarity: You'd…do that? (*smiling*) Fluttershy, you'll handle those…strong-smelling raccoons for me?
Fluttershy: Of course!
Applejack: Leave Plaid Stripes to me. I'll handle her and her, uh…"good" ideas. (*Pinkie zips up past her.*)
Pinkie: Ooh, ooh, ooh! (*hopping in place*) And I can go upstairs to that nonstop party and have tons of fun and eat some cake and set up party cannons and—

(*She reins herself in at a pointed throat-clearing from Rarity.*)

Pinkie: (*a bit glumly*) —and then make them be quiet.
Twilight: (*crossing to boxes*) I'm pretty sure I know somepony who wouldn't mind organizing this merchandise shipment for you.

(*Five very puzzled stares come her way.*)

Twilight: I'm talking about myself.

(*The stares continue to be very puzzled.*)

Twilight: Oh, *please* let me organize it! (*Big grin.*)
Rarity: This all sounds splendid! But I don't even have a single employee, and I'll need the best of the best.
Rainbow: Leave the hiring to me. (*Rarity squeals happily and paces a bit.*)
Rarity: This is it, my dears! If you can handle these problems, I'll focus on the designs for the front window display. We'll show Manehattan what Rarity for You is all about!

(*The others cluster around her for a six-way group hug.*)

Rarity: Oh, what would I do without you?

(*The booth: Rainbow sits here now with a cup of soda, one foreleg draped lazily over the seat back. Pinkie's pancakes are gone, as is the copy of her in the next booth.*)

Rainbow: What would she do without us? Huh—let me think. (*overwrought, imitating Rarity, leaning across table*) "Darlings, I'm absolutely doomed! Doomed! Doomed!" (*own voice, laughing, leaning back*) I sounded just like her.

(*Just as in Act One, the sound of pencil on paper makes her goofy, casual air vanish in a tick.*)

Rainbow: Hey, you're not writing this down, are you?

(*Cut to the sidewalk outside the shop. Through one of the ground-floor windows, a small door leading from the shop floor into the display area is ajar; a pony mannequin stands in here, and Rarity steps in with a full box in her magical hold.*)

Rarity: (*setting it down, slightly muffled by glass*) Now for the perfect window display.

(*The door closes; cut to her within, floating a notepad and quill out of the box.*)

Rarity: Hmmm…

(*Wipe to a close-up of DJ P0N-3 at her decks upstairs. She starts a new track, setting the original three dancers on the floor into motion all over again, as the door guard stands impassively at his post. The two club-goers who showed up during Rarity's Act One visit are no longer present. Zoom out quickly to frame Pinkie hiding behind a large urn next to a column and glancing furtively in his direction. She lets out a pained little squeal.*)

Pinkie: I can't *really* stop a super-fun party in the middle of mega-happy fun times, can I? (*pained*) Oh, what would Rarity want?

(*A little pinkish-red Rarity poofs into being on her left, wearing devil horns and a point at the end of her tail and holding a trident. The gems in her cutie mark are yellow rather than blue.*)

Devil Rarity: Keep that party going 'til the break of dawn!
Pinkie: (*brightening*) Really?

(*Now a pale yellow one appears on her right, sporting a halo on a wire above her head and a set of fully operational wings strapped to her midsection. Her cutie mark is normal.*)

Angel Rarity: Indubitably! And as for the roof, get jiggy! Raise it, Pinkie! Raise it like you've never raised it before!
Pinkie: (*trotting toward dance floor*) Ah! If you say so! (*Devil Rarity jabs the trident into her mane and yanks her back.*)
Devil Rarity: Oh, please, Pinkie Pie. Never in a million years would I say such balderdash.

(*She disappears, and her angelic counterpart shrugs and does likewise when Pinkie throws her a puzzled look. The party planner utters a dejected little moan, but quickly comes up with a calculating smile and trots up to the guard. Up comes one broad hoof, prompting her to slide to a halt, but that smile stays in place.*)

Pinkie: (*holding up a record*) Obviously DJ P0N-3 only plays the sickest of beats.

(*Close-up of the unmoving face on the end of this; she waves the vinyl before his nose.*)

Pinkie: (*limbo-dancing under the velvet rope*) I just wouldn't want her to miss out on the coolest new music, straight from the back-alley underground zip-zap party scene!

(*A moment later, she has reached the DJ booth and is holding up the record.*)

Pinkie: I'd play the whole thing if I were you— (*DJ P0N-3 takes it with her magic.*) —no matter what other ponies think.

(*After a bit of thought, the turntablist swaps one of her current discs for the new one. The music stops with a loud needle scratch and is replaced by a subdued bossa nova rhythm that brings the dancers to a dead stop. Pinkie walks backwards across the dance floor on her hind legs.*)

Dancers: Awww…

(*Wipe to the sidewalk just outside the front door. Three variously dressed mares stand before Rainbow, two earth ponies and a unicorn, each holding a sheet of paper in hoof or magic, as the case may be—a résumé or help-wanted notice, perhaps.*)

Rainbow: Rarity for You is only hiring the best of the best. And to me, that means the fastest!

(*Cut to the trio, trading slightly perplexed looks, and zoom out to frame her.*)

Rainbow: Now, uh, before we begin…

(*Turning her head briefly away from them, she makes a sound that can be best translated as…*)

Rainbow: (*softly, to herself*) Am I doing this right? What would Rarity want? (*An idea hits; she turns back to them.*) New plan!

(*Which involves her taking off in a multicolored blur and returning a second later to hover before them. All three have put their paperwork away by this point.*)

Rainbow: (*pulling out a scrap of cloth*) Who can be the first one to tell me what fabric this is?

(*Close-up of it, zooming out to frame the speaker on the start of the next line, Blue Bobbin. She is one of the earth ponies: light blue coat; violet eyes behind small, gray-tinted glasses; two-tone bright pink mane/tail, the former gathered into a messy bun at the back of her head; patterned white blouse; dark magenta necklace with three strands; cutie mark of a needle and thread.*)

Blue: (*bored*) That's organza.
Rainbow: Are you sure?
Blue: It's a thin, plain weave, sheer fabric traditionally made from silk, so… (*smiling smugly*) …yeah.

(*The amateur hiring manager finds herself at a loss in the face of this bit of textile knowledge. The booth: she and the soda she was working on during her last interview are both present.*)

Rainbow: I don't know the first thing about clothes. Pretty much all I can do is look at something and tell you if it's clothes or not. (*pointing down at seat*) This chair? (*Scoff.*) Not clothes.

(*The shop: close-up of Plaid. The top floor has gone quiet.*)

Plaid: See if you can keep up with me here. What are all clothes made of?
Applejack: Uh…fabric?
Plaid: BINGO!! But not in this store. (*shaking head*) Uh-uh! Not anymore!
Applejack: (*really confused*) Oh, no?
Plaid: (*foreleg on Applejack's shoulder*) Two words for you—spoon clothes. All our clothes will be made of spoons! (*Zoom in on Applejack as she sighs heavily.*)
Applejack: (*to herself*) What would Rarity want?

(*A little smile comes across the birdcatcher-spotted face as an idea takes hold under the brown hat and blond mane.*)

Applejack: You know, I like you, Plaid Stripes. If it were up to me, we'd have a spoon clothes store right next to Stinky Bottom's Discount Hat Emporium. (*She pulls her hat off.*) But it ain't up to me. So, the answer is no.

(*Tears gather in Plaid's eyes as she worries her lower lip to try and keep her composure. The booth: Applejack sits across the table, a piece of pie replacing Rainbow's soda.*)

Applejack: Personally, I think spoon clothes ain't such a bad idea. Useful, too. Eatin' soup, stirrin' gumbo, diggin' little holes…

(*The shop: close-up of Twilight at a wheeled rack loaded with dresses. She levitates another one up on its hanger and sets it neatly in place.*)

Twilight: There!

(*Zoom out quickly. She stands between two long racks and a scatter of boxes. There is a rough but easily discernible progression of colors based on the visible spectrum: red/orange/yellow/green on the left rack from front to back, blue/indigo/violet on the right from back to front. The cobwebs and detritus have been cleaned up from the whole place now.*)

Twilight: Perfect! (*She looks around herself and thinks a bit.*) Although… (*Close-up.*) …what would Rarity want? Maybe she wouldn't like it done by color. (*beaming*) Guess I have to start over!

(*A flare from her horn sends several dresses billowing across the screen. Behind their hems, the view wipes to the still-messy stockroom, where the blue-eyed raccoon—Smoky Junior—is being tucked in for the night by the other two, Smoky and Soft Pad.*)

Fluttershy: (*from o.s., a bit shakily*) Hello, Smoky? Soft Pad? (*They look up.*) Smoky Junior? (*So does this one; cut to her walking in, face downcast.*) I have some…interesting news. I…oh…I'd like you all to stay here forever, but… (*to herself*) What would Rarity want?

(*The tears that start to brim up in her eyes point to how quickly she figures out the answer and how much she does not like it.*)

Fluttershy: (*sobbing*) You have to move out!

(*That edict sets a new record for the shortest time to bring a raccoon family up to a screeching rage. Wipe to a close-up of the head of the pony mannequin in the front window; it wears a hat, which Rarity's magic floats off. On the start of the next line, cut to a longer shot from the sidewalk that frames her, bringing up others from the pile of garments at her hooves and testing them out.*)

Rarity: (*slightly muffled by glass*) A window display *is* the first thing customers see. And if they like it, they'll walk inside and experience the glory that is my boutique.

(*Inside, a shuddering Rainbow hovers before the three candidate mares, a pile of fabric samples draped over her forelegs.*)

Rainbow: I don't know which one of you to hire!

(*Applejack, her hat on, backs up before Plaid and her irate father.*)

Rainbow: (*throwing her load onto the trio*) Just keep guessing fabrics!
Plaid: (*as Applejack runs into some boxes*) Daddy, Rarity's friend doesn't like my ideas!
Mr. Stripes: Spoon clothes! Is good idea!

(*Pan across the shop and stop on Pinkie, who has returned after her trip upstairs and is sitting on her haunches. Down through the ceiling comes the thump of DJ P0N-3's dance mix.*)

Pinkie: Oh, no! (*hunching down, covering ears*) Not a shopping music mash-up!

(*Now Fluttershy races by, chased by the raccoons and circling around Twilight—who is half-buried in dresses she stripped off the shelves.*)

Fluttershy: I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!

(*The pursuit ends with her standing on the counter to get out of their reach. As Twilight gawks at a degree of utter chaos that would have given Discord a good laugh, the glow of Rarity's magic asserts itself around the knob of the door leading into the window display area where she has been working. Zoom in quickly to a close-up of this, then cut back to Twilight, who pulls in a sharp gasp. The action and sound shift to slow motion as she launches herself across the room…and the knob rattles and the door starts to swing open…and eyes turn toward the hurtling Princess…and normal speed resumes as Rarity prepares to step back in.*)

Rarity: How's it—

(*Any further words turn into a muffled cry of surprise as Twilight slams the door shut and leans her whole weight against it. The booth: a sweetly smiling Fluttershy is taking questions, with Applejack's pie gone and just the silverware before her.*)

Fluttershy: When you write the story, could you maybe skip over the part where we locked Rarity in the window display?

(*The smile turns into an unstable grin, giggle, and darting of the eyes that would have drawn approval from Twilight herself. Snap to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to an extreme close-up of the doorknob, glowing and rattling under Rarity's power. However, a chair has been wedged underneath it to keep the door closed. The upstairs music has stopped for the moment.*)

Rarity: (*muffled, through door*) Hello? (*Zoom out.*) The door appears to be stuck! (*The other five trade panicked looks.*)
Twilight: Yep! We're working on it!

(*Cut to the unicorn's side of the door; she has cut off her spell.*)

Rarity: Hmm. (*turning to mannequin*) Well, I shouldn't let this time go to waste.

(*She has placed yet another hat from her collection on its head, and she drapes a matching short cloak around the body. In the shop, the Stripes father and daughter are arguing with each other, and the three job candidates are trading heated words of their own after digging themselves out from the fabric Rainbow dumped on them. Meanwhile, the raccoons are running wild as DJ P0N-3's beats kick up again.*)

Twilight: How did this happen? (*Cut to Pinkie; music stops.*)
Pinkie: I shut down the party. (*Pan quickly to Applejack.*)
Applejack: I told Plaid Stripes no. (*To Fluttershy.*)
Fluttershy: I asked the raccoons to leave. (*To Rainbow.*)
Rainbow: I asked a lot of fabric questions.
Applejack, Fluttershy, Pinkie, Rainbow: Just like I thought Rarity would want!

(*The root of their four-way blunder starts to become apparent to all of them.*)

Twilight: Rarity asked us to help her with everything because she knows all of us so well. (*to Fluttershy, pacing a bit*) She knows how much you care for animals. She'd trust you to solve the problem your way. (*addressing the group*) Maybe we should all do the same. Doing this our way *is* what Rarity wants. It's not too late. Let's all dig in and we can fix this.

(*A quick zoom out to frame the entire room shows them just how tall an order this will be as the music resumes. By this point, the raccoons are hanging from the chandelier and swinging it back and forth.*)

Twilight: (*nervously*) Before Rarity finds out how bad we messed up.

(*Dissolve to the raccoons, now back in the stockroom and glumly packing their belongings into a suitcase for their impending departure. A contrite Fluttershy steps up as the lid is closed; the overhead thump has cut out.*)

Fluttershy: I'm sorry I asked you to leave. (*smiling*) The place is yours, if you want to stay. (*They brighten greatly.*) Though I would like to ask you all just one favor.

(*All three furry faces shift into suspicious glares. Wipe to Pinkie crossing the dance floor upstairs—now totally empty, silent, and without its usual light show. DJ P0N-3 sits slumped over her console.*)

Pinkie: I'm sorry I made you play that un-fun, super-boring music.

(*She gets only a halfhearted shrug in reply. Profile close-up of Pinkie, smiling even as she starts to slide backwards.*)

Pinkie: But if you're up for it, I have an idea to make the party even better!

(*On this last word, zoom out to show that her source of locomotion is the door guard, who has her tail in his teeth and is dragging her out of the joint. Under the black-rimmed violet sunglasses, DJ P0N-3's mouth curves into a smile. From here, wipe to Rainbow and the three job candidates standing on the sidewalk outside the shop.*)

Rainbow: Okay. I don't get fabric— (*spreading/retracting wings*) —but I *do* get speed. And I need somepony fast enough to help all the customers Rarity's gonna have. Soooo… (*hovering, pointing down the block*) …first one to the river and back gets the job!

(*Her encouraging grin is met by a round of thoroughly confounded glances that pass between the three mares.*)

Rainbow: It's a race! Go!

(*The two earth ponies get to galloping, but the unicorn sets out at a much more sedate pace. Wipe to Twilight, back at the job of organizing the racks; she magically slips a dress onto a hanger and sets it in place, then rolls that rack out of the way and brings in another one. At the sound of Applejack's throat clearing, the camera pans toward the sound to stop on her, Mr. Stripes, and Plaid near the counter. All three are rather more civil than they were during the previous free-for-all.*)

Applejack: (*removing hat*) Mr. Stripes, I owe your daughter an apology. (*donning it*) She's got good ideas, and I should give 'em a chance. So here's what I'm thinkin'.

(*The exterior of the shop, seen from across the street. Day fades to night, the ground-floor windows now glowing invitingly and the silhouettes of mannequins on display. In close-up, Rarity's magic slips a ribbon onto the collar of one dummy's blouse and ties it in a bow; zoom out through the window to frame her standing among three of them. One is a pegasus, hanging from the ceiling.*)

Rarity: (*slightly muffled by glass*) Perfect!

(*Inside the display area; she tries the doorknob with her aura but still cannot get it to budge. Having had quite enough of this confinement, she backs up a few steps and charges, fully intent*

on ramming the door with her shoulder. Before she can make contact, though, Twilight's field pulls the door open, leaving her to tumble face first to the floor when the camera cuts to the other side. The details of the floor and display pedestal behind the two suggest that the place has undergone a considerable sprucing up, and the chair that had jammed the knob is gone.)

Twilight: (*trying to sound casual*) Wow! Looks like we fixed that door just in time!

(*She helps the white unicorn up to get a good look around the shop, prompting a stunned gasp. Zoom in slowly.*)

Rarity: Oh! What's all this?

(*Cut to her perspective, panning slowly around and cutting here and there. Curved racks of dresses hang at the walls; shelves above them are stocked with other accessories; floor-level platforms have shoes on display; an elevated platform at the back is set up with a DJ turntable and speakers; multi-level pedestals display dressed mannequins and purses. The whole place is done in subdued shades of blue and violet, and rows of pin spotlights shine straight down from the ceiling. Not a trace of the original disrepair or decay can be seen.*)

(*The booth: Twilight sits here smugly, the table cleared of the previous silverware.*)

Twilight: The whole place organized by style, cross-referenced by size, and reverse-indexed by fabric. She'll be able to find anything in three seconds flat! (*Deep breath; she props her head on a hoof.*) It was some of my best work.

(*Cut to a portrait of Rarity's head on a wall and zoom out. It hangs behind a semicircular sales counter, and she gazes wonderingly at it while her five friends gather a step behind.*)

Rarity: (*turning to hug Twilight*) Oh, I knew I could count on you! (*Step back.*) All right. I suppose this is the moment of truth.

(*She moves to the door and pulls it open with her magic—and instead of the squeeze-bulb horn Plaid installed, she hears the tinkling of a small bell. Zoom out slightly as she looks upward, the camera motion exposing the hardware change. She grins back toward the others; cut to just outside as she turns her attention to the street.*)

Rarity: Rarity for You is now open!

(*A round of soft giggles and chatter surprises her; zoom out slightly to show a few customers standing in line along the storefront. A quick pan follows, showing that the queue stretches most of the way down the block; a squirrel stands at the very end of it, but clears out when the last stallion waves it off angrily. Inside, Rarity steps aside and backs up next to Rainbow as the ponies begin to file in.*)

Rarity: Oh, dear. I wasn't quite prepared for such a crowd. How will I handle them all?

(*On the end of this, Blue steps calmly up to a stallion who has stopped cold and is casting his eyes uncertainly about. Her previous bored tone gives way to friendly one.*)

Blue: My name's Blue Bobbin. I'll be your personal shopping assistant this evening. (*She leads him into the showroom.*)
Rainbow: Right this way, everypony—

(*She glances behind herself, the camera zooming out to frame the other two candidates standing and smiling in one corner.*)

Rainbow: —and one of our talented sales-ponies can help you out.

(*She grins at Rarity, whose slightly flummoxed expression turns into a smile. The booth: the speedster slumps over the table with a cup of soda.*)

Rainbow: Honestly, they were all pretty slow. But they finished the race! Plus, they knew a lot more about fabric than I did. So, I hired them all!

(*The shop: Rarity hustles toward a knot of customers, but she and they are all caught off guard when the lights dim, the pin spots brighten, and a soft, lively electronic groove kicks up. Looking across the showroom, Rarity finds DJ P0N-3 now working the sound system—and the door guard from upstairs keeping watch over the steps that lead up to her platform. Fog-machine clouds billow across the floor as the spots rove back and forth; once the view clears, the three dancers from the club can be seen moving to the beat. Rarity's mouth falls open in shock; she looks fearfully around herself, but is met with the sight of the unicorn shopping assistant escorting a customer toward the sales counter and magically towing two dresses along. The entrepreneur smiles as Pinkie slides backwards over to her with a grin, drops onto her haunches, and twirls her front hooves in rhythm.*)

(*The booth: Pinkie sits amid a plethora of empty, dirty dishes and Rainbow's soda is gone.*)

Pinkie: The way I see it, Rarity designs fashion, DJ P0N-3 designs beats. (*She puts her front hooves together.*) What better combination than a boutique dance club?

(*The waitress who appeared in the first restaurant scene in Act One stops briefly to drop off the check. One look drains all the levity out of the pink face, and she slides the paper toward the reporter with a big dopey grin—evidently the meal is a bit too pricey for her to cover.*)

(*The shop: Rarity makes her way through the crowd, but is a bit caught out upon passing one of the three raccoons. It is walking on its hind legs, dressed in a shirt, tie, vest, and apron, and carrying a tray of small bowls. A nearby stallion is equally puzzled at the unorthodox waiter.*)

(*The booth: Fluttershy sits here now with the three raccoons, none of them dressed, and the dishes have been cleared to make way for a whole pie.*)

Fluttershy: (*pushing it to them*) After a quick bath, they were more than willing to help.

(*Matched only by their willingness to attack the dessert. The shop: the stallion eyes the bowls in close-up, each filled with a blue liquid and topped with a sprinkling of herbs.*)

Stallion: Ah! A blue corn reduction with shallot *confit*! But how can I possibly enjoy it without a—

(*Zoom out slightly; one of Plaid's forelegs extends into view, wearing a mitt fitted with three spoons.*)

Plaid: (*from o.s.*) Spoon?

(*Cut to her, now wearing the spoon earrings from her Act One interview. Each foreleg sports one of these mitts, and she has donned a pair of yellow-framed sunglasses whose lenses are shaded in a gradient from violet down to yellow. She brandishes the eating utensils like a ninja with highly questionable fashion sense.*)

(*The booth: here sits Applejack, the whole pie gone and replaced by a single slice. She lets off a short chuckle.*)

Applejack: Told you spoon clothes ain't such a bad idea.

(*The shop: extreme close-up of one bowl as a spoon scoops up some of the contents, then cut to the stallion. He now wears a band around one front hoof with three spoons attached, and he tastes the concoction and smiles.*)

Stallion: Mmm…exquisite!

(*Long overhead shot of the gathering; zoom out slowly.*)

Stallion: This is the most whimsical and wonderfully fashionable boutique I've ever seen!

(*As excited chatter breaks out among the patrons, the camera cuts back to floor level; Rarity smiles warmly at her good fortune, then lets herself tear up at the sight of her five friends gathering before her.*)

Rarity: (*voice over, reading*) "In the end, Rarity's grand opening was a smashing success."

(*Dissolve to her with the newspaper in the present, as seen at the start of Act One.*)

Rarity: (*reading*) "True, it got off to a rocky start, but somehow this ragtag group of ne'er-do-wells—" (*lowering paper*) —ooh, heavens, I think he means you!— (*raising paper,*

reading) "—came together and created the perfect boutique. A vision of Rarity, combined with the expertise of her friends."

(*Cut to the others on the end of this; she giggles softly, after which the view shifts back to her. In this shot, Fluttershy has come out from the rack of dresses underneath which she had previously hidden herself.*)

Rarity: (*reading*) "This reporter, for one, is a believer."

(*Lowering the paper and magically removing her reading glasses, she fixes the others with a questioning look.*)

Rarity: Why didn't you tell me there were so many problems? (*Twilight and Pinkie cross to stand on one side of her.*)
Twilight: We all figured you had enough on your mind.
Applejack: (*moving to Rarity's other side with Fluttershy/Rainbow*) And we didn't want you to think that the openin' wasn't perfect.
Rarity: (*giggling*) Ne'er-do-wells or not, I know I can always count on all of you. (*Group hug.*) And nothing could be more perfect than that.

(*"Iris out" to black.*)

(*"Iris in" to the booth, where Plaid sits slurping soup loudly, using one of her spoon mitts and wearing the matching earrings, but not the shaded sunglasses. The bowl rests on the table in place of Applejack's pie. She throws a big, goofy, brace-faced grin to the camera before the view snaps to black.*)

APPLEJACK'S "DAY" OFF

Story by Neal Dusedau, Michael P. Fox, Wil Fox
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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to the exterior of the Ponyville Spa during the day. Zoom in slowly and cut to a screenful of steam, which slowly dissipates to yield a close-up of Rarity in a sauna room inside. The prim unicorn sits wearing her favorite robe, a towel across her eyes, and a blissful smile on her face. As she voices a contented sigh, the camera zooms out to frame the entire room. A door opens to admit Aloe.*)

Aloe: Um…Miss Rarity? Eh, how much longer are you planning to stay in here, darling? (*Cut to Rarity; she flips the towel off her eyes and catches it.*)
Rarity: Oh, dear! I-Is somepony else waiting?
Aloe: (*from o.s.*) Oh, no, no. (*Both again.*) I-I just don't want you to get all—what is word?—pruney.
Rarity: Oh! Uh, well, I'm just waiting for Applejack. It's been so long since we've had a relaxing day at the spa together. I'm quite certain she'll be along any moment.

(*With a smile and nod, Aloe backs out and shuts the door. Rarity floats the towel up and drapes it over her entire head, a fresh billow of steam clouding the view. It clears away in time with the door opening to let in Applejack, who has donned a robe of her own and ditched her hat in favor of towels wrapped around her mane.*)

Applejack: Hey there, Rarity! (*sitting next to her*) I really tried to get here earlier. I just can't believe how much time my chores are takin' up these days. At least now we'll finally get to spend some quality spa time together, right?
Aloe: (*from o.s.*) Okay, fillies, that's it! (*She is now at the door.*) We're closing up for the day.

(*Away she goes, shutting the door and missing the swift deflation of the workhorse's mood.*)

Applejack: Aw, shucks, Rarity. I guess I missed the whole day. I sure am sorry.

(*The towel over her friend's visage is levitated away, revealing that everything from the neck up—including the horn—is now a wrinkled, waterlogged mess. Rarity lifts an open pocket watch on a front hoof and regards it gloomily.*)

Rarity: Me too.

(*The timepiece is lowered, and the eyelids come down for a squelchy blink that brings an almighty grimace to the orange-tan face. Snap to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to the sun shining above a treetop in Sweet Apple Acres, the camera pointing up toward it from somewhere above ground level. Tilt down to bring Twilight Sparkle and Rarity into view, coming up over a rise in the path and followed by Spike toting a tall, tottering stack of empty pie pans. The white mare, walking ahead, has shed her spa robe and pocket watch and properly dried herself out from the sauna mishap. Twilight catches up after a few steps.*)

Twilight: Hi, Rarity!
Rarity: Morning, Twilight, Spike. (*noticing his load*) Good heavens, that's a lot of empty pie plates.
Spike: (*trying to sound casual*) Uh…yeah! We were just heading to pick up some fresh pies. (*Chuckle.*) I don't know why we keep running out at the Castle.

(*A second chuckle is followed by a stumble that brings him within an ace of littering the road with cookware, but he gets everything re-balanced with an embarrassed little grin. The Princess rolls her eyes with a smile.*)

Spike: What are you gonna get?
Rarity: Applejack, actually— (*sourly*) —although I'm quite sure she'll be too busy once again.
Twilight: What do you mean?
Rarity: (*dejectedly*) Oh, nothing. It's just that Applejack and I haven't had one of our spa days in ages.
Twilight: You two really should set aside some time.
Rarity: Darling, I have been trying for *moons!* But Applejack is so busy these days, it's next to impossible.
Twilight: Wow. I didn't realize Applejack had so much to do.

(*They approach the main barn; cut to Applejack in the kitchen—hat on, robe and towels gone, and deep into a round of apple pie production. The sound of a buzzer draws her away from a bowl of dough and over to the oven, which she opens so she can pull out a set of finished pies on a tray, using a potholder in her teeth to move the lot safely. A slam of the oven door, and the freight of steaming desserts is deposited on a free patch of kitchen countertop space. She slides one pie onto a towel just big enough to hold it and starts across the kitchen with it; cut to just*

outside the sill of one open window as she sets it down alongside a second one and pulls the cloth away. Steam curls up from both crusts as she leans proudly over them and the camera zooms out slightly.)

Spike: (*from o.s.*) Hey, Applejack! (*Longer shot; here he comes.*) Another order of pies, please.
Applejack: Sure thing, Spike!

(*The empty pans are handed over, then returned in no time flat with a full load of apple goodness. However, the added weight sets him to stumbling and yelping backwards as a visibly irked Rarity strolls up to take his place.*)

Rarity: I don't suppose those pies are the last chore on the schedule for today?

(*She pronounces the first syllable of "schedule" as an "sh" sound, typical for speakers of British English, rather than the "sk" favored by American speakers.*)

Applejack: (*groaning, clapping hoof to face*) Land sakes! Is it time for our spa day already?

(*To which Rarity's only response is a very dirty look.*)

Applejack: (*hesitantly, smiling*) Rarity, why don't you go on ahead and I'll meet you there?

(*The dirty look persists and is followed up with a scoffing sigh.*)

Rarity: Please, Applejack, let's not kid ourselves.
Applejack: Well, it ain't 'cause I don't wanna, but the work on the farm has just been takin' up more and more of my time. (*Twilight joins them.*)
Twilight: I hate seeing you two not spending time together. Can't you get somepony else in your family to take over for a bit?
Applejack: (*sighing*) Wish I could. But Granny, Big Mac, and Apple Bloom all have chores of their own. And today they're all busy takin' the harvest to market.

(*The winged unicorn's face splits in a grin of sudden inspiration.*)

Twilight: I know we're not farmers, but I'm sure Spike and I could handle things for a little while.
Applejack: (*uncertainly*) Maybe…
Twilight: Is there one chore we could do? (*Close-up of Applejack.*)
Applejack: Well… (*smiling*) …I suppose if you two got started on feedin' the pigs, I could maybe leave for an hour? (*Rarity leans eagerly toward her.*)
Rarity: Ooh! An hour of spa perfection? I can work with that!
Twilight: (*from o.s.*) Perfect! (*Cut to her.*) You head off to the spa, and Spike and I'll take care of things here.

(*The growing clatter of pans is heard under the end of this, and here comes Spike right on cue—still managing strangled little cries of panic as he does his best to keep the pies from hitting the ground. Just as he and they topple backwards o.s., Twilight fires up her horn and the camera zooms out to frame all four. Dragon and desserts are all floating overhead in a cloud of her magic, but Applejack is far from reassured at the last-second save.*)

Spike: Uh…yeah. We totally got everything covered.

(*The earth pony turns her face away from the window, not quite managing to hide her cringing expression. Dissolve to the four standing outside a fence that encircles an outbuilding topped with several little pig-shaped carvings; several of these animals are penned in, wallowing gleefully in mud, and feed troughs stand ready. The pies have been stowed away, and Applejack holds a scroll in a front hoof. Holding this out to Twilight, she sighs heavily.*)

Applejack: Okay. This list pretty much covers everything you need to know to feed the pigs.

(*The intended recipient floats the scroll away in a magic glow, only to have it yanked right back again.*)

Applejack: But, uh, maybe I should go over it with you just to— (*The aura whips it out of her grasp.*)
Twilight: Applejack, please. (*passing it to Spike*) If there's a list involved, I am one hundred percent on top of it.
Applejack: (*forcing a smile*) Uh…right.

(*She and Rarity set off across the grounds; cut to Twilight, waving goodbye.*)

Twilight: And don't worry about things here! Spike and I have totally got this! I mean, it's just feeding the pigs. How hard can it be?

(*A scaly violet hand reaches into view to tap her on the haunch.*)

Spike: (*from o.s.*) Uh, Twilight?

(*Purple eyes pop wide as they flick toward the ground; cut to a longer shot of the pair. Spike has unrolled the document so that it stretches several feet across the dirt and grass, and both are taken aback by the extent of it.*)

Twilight: (*small voice*) Whoa.
Applejack: (*to Rarity*) I'm glad we're doin' this, Rarity. I've been putting work before our spa time for too long. I know we've only got an hour, but I can't wait to have a steam.
Rarity: A steam is just the start. I know exactly what we'll do, and an hour will be perfect.

(*Wipe to the pigs in their wallow, seen from just beyond the top of their surrounding fence, and zoom out to frame Twilight and Spike on the start of the next line.*)

Twilight: Okay, Spike, ready with that list?
Spike: Ready!
Twilight: Let's do this!
Spike: (*reading*) "Step one—open the gate."

(*Twilight swings a gate in the fence wide open, eliciting exactly no additional reaction from the porkers whatsoever, and gives Spike a quizzical glance.*)

Spike: Okay… (*reading*) "Step two—close the gate."
Twilight: Huh?
Spike: (*pointing to one line*) Mmm—that's what it says.

(*So Twilight pulls the gate shut. Again the pigs do nothing of interest.*)

Spike: (*reading*) "Step three—walk away."
Twilight: (*really confused*) Walk away? (*leaning toward him*) Really?

(*His only response is a noncommittal shrug and grunt. Wipe to Applejack and Rarity walking side by side down a Ponyville street.*)

Applejack: I just hope Twilight and Spike can handle things until I get back.
Rarity: Now, Applejack, if we are really to enjoy this time together, you simply must give yourself over to the idea that you are off duty and try to relax. (*Close-up of Applejack.*)
Applejack: I know. (*smiling*) You're right. I really am glad we're doin' this. And as long as it's only an hour, I-I'm sure everything will be just fine. (*Zoom out to frame Rarity.*)
Rarity: Exactly! (*pulling ahead*) Now, kindly step this way. (*gesturing toward the Ponyville Spa*) Relaxation awaits.

(*Both mares close the gap between themselves and the building; cut to just inside the front door as Rarity's magic takes hold and swings it inward to admit them. A cut to their perspective and slow pan discloses a waiting room filled with customers; the lavender mare attendant from "No Second Prances," with a cutie mark of two tea candles, is behind the reception counter. Among the crowd is Rainbow Dash—reading on a couch, dressed in a robe and hind-leg slippers styled with the head of her tortoise Tank. Zoom in quickly on her to the sound of Rarity's sharp, incredulous gasp.*)

Rarity: Rainbow Dash!

(*Rainbow drops her book with a stunned neigh and tries for a moment to disappear by mashing herself in the couch cushions.*)

Rarity: What are you doing here?

(*Back to the two new arrivals, who giggle to themselves at this unexpected discovery.*)

Applejack: Yeah! I didn't think spa treatments were your thing, exactly.
Rainbow: *What?!*

(*She shucks off her robe and pitches it away, but the slippers stay in place as she hops down from her seat. A quick bit of hind-leg shaking sends them flying as Applejack and Rarity cross to her.*)

Rainbow: (*hovering briefly, stammering a bit*) Oh, they're totally not—at least not the frou-frou kind.

(*Earth pony and unicorn voice an "is that so?" noise in unison.*)

Rainbow: Yeah, I, uh… (*poking at a spot under one wing*) …I think I tweaked something at Wonderbolts practice the other day. (*with bravado*) I just came in for a deep-tissue sports massage.

(*And here comes Lavender, who speaks with a heavy Eastern European accent similar to Aloe and Lotus.*)

Lavender: Ah, Miss Dash. I am so sorry, but we are running just a tad behind, and we are not quite ready to start your pampered muscle massage and indulgent hooficure just yet.

(*Phenomenally bad timing for Rainbow, perhaps, but Applejack and Rarity smile at the revelation—the latter with just a hint of wicked enjoyment. The speed demon claps a hoof to her face.*)

Rainbow: Oh! (*Lame chuckle; she turns to Lavender.*) I-I'm pretty sure that wasn't what I signed up for.
Lavender: (*checking a clipboard*) But they are your usual—
Rainbow: (*hastily*) And it seems like you're really busy today anyway. I'll just come back tomorrow. (*to Applejack/Rarity*) Uh, see you two later! Have fun! (*whispering, to Lavender*) But put me down for the same thing.

(*Her wink being acknowledged with an understanding nod, she swoops overhead toward the exit. Lavender turns to resume her work.*)

Applejack: (*chuckling, making air quotes with hooves*) Too bad Rainbow Dash just *hates* those "frou-frou" spa treatments. She could've joined us for a nice steam. Hoo-wee! I can't wait.
Rarity: (*giggling*) Indeed. Although if they couldn't fit Dashie in, I wonder just how far behind things *are* running. Obviously we're on a very tight schedule.

(*Pronounced as before. She leads Applejack toward a curtained-off doorway; cut to the other side as she steps through and runs flat into the rump of a pony standing just within. Regaining her senses, she pulls in a deep gasp before the camera pans ahead of her. The one she ran into is*

Caramel, his mane wrapped in towels, and he is only the last in a very long line of clients that stretches along the hall.)

Rarity: (*trying to play it off*) Oh, well, maybe not everypony is waiting for the steam room.
Caramel: Oh, no, no, that's exactly what we're waiting for. Oh, I hope you're not in a hurry.

(*Zoom in on Applejack and Rarity as they trade apprehensive little grimaces, then snap to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to the line, which snakes around a corner; Applejack and Rarity are visible in the far distance.*)

Applejack: So everypony here wants a steam bath? (*General grumbling assent; close-up of the two.*)
Rarity: Well, the solution is obvious. (*smiling*) We'll simply have to start our short time at the spa with something else. (*She starts forward; Applejack bars her path with a foreleg.*)
Applejack: Huh! Nothin' doin'! I came here to have a steam, and that's just what I'm gonna get.
Rarity: But—but—it'll take most of our hour just to get through this line!

(*Aloe steps through the curtain, all smiles.*)

Aloe: Rarity! My favorite customer! (*She plants a kiss on each white cheek, then turns to hug Applejack.*) And Appleyack!

(*The farmer is caught out by this sudden display of affection, but manages a smile and a pat on the back before the pink mare pulls away.*)

Aloe: Well, it certainly has been a long time since you two were here together. So lovely to have you back.
Rarity: Well, I wish I could say the same.

(*She points an irritated foreleg ahead of herself, the camera zooming out quickly along the line until it stops at the corner.*)

Aloe: Oh, yes, the wait time for the steam room certainly has been getting worse lately. (*Close-up.*) *But* I'm sure we'll be able to accommodate your usual treatments.
Applejack: Not without my steam!
Rarity: (*aside, to Aloe*) Apparently Applejack won't consider starting her time at the spa without a steam, and we only have an hour.
Aloe: That is a problem. (*Applejack strides grimly ahead.*)
Rarity: Applejack, where are you going?

(*Cut to a closed door at which the line terminates. The pony at the head of it is Spoiled Rich, Diamond Tiara's mother. Applejack rounds the corner, Rarity and Aloe a few seconds back.*)

Applejack: Um…why are y'all just standin' here?
Stallion customer: (*groaning*) Just waiting for the steam to build up.
Spoiled: Without steam, a steam room's just a room, and I've got plenty of those at home— (*very snooty*) —because *I* live in a mansion.

(*There follows a collective eye roll at this shameless display of chutzpah. Once it wears off, Applejack steps over to run a critical eye over a valve on a pipe bend that protrudes from the wall on the far side of the door. Mounted above it is a pressure gauge whose needle is at the bottom of the scale and not moving one iota. A hoof tap against this causes a momentary spurt of steam and a brief, small waver in the reading.*)

Aloe: It *has* been taking longer for the steam to reach the Ponyville Day Spa quality. We even had to add a warm-towel service.

(*The end of her words is underscored by the grinding of wheels against floor, and a zoom out frames a unicorn stallion attendant using his magic to push a cart stacked with steaming towels to the head of the line. Mint-green coat, medium blue eyes, darker blue mane/tail, white collar and headband to match those worn by other employees, cutie mark of a bucket of water being poured out to evaporate into steam. Green seems a little bit dispirited.*)

Aloe: So sorry for the delay, everypony! Please help yourselves.

(*In a split second, the patrons have picked the cart clean. In another one, the used towels have been thrown back on board—and an errant one has fluttered down to cover his face. He levitates it away and onto the pile and magically rolls the lot away, face now broadcasting a distinct degree of disgruntlement. Cut to a spot near the head of the line, every stallion and mare wearing a nice toasty towel up top, and pan to Applejack and Aloe.*)

Applejack: So if you're not gettin' enough steam— (*glancing overhead*) —that must mean there's not enough hot water.

(*Overhead shot of the hall. She is eyeing a steam pipe that runs along the ceiling. Rarity moves a bit closer.*)

Rarity: Oh, Applejack, honestly. (*Ground level; she floats out her pocket watch and checks it.*) Can't we just start with a hooficure? (*Applejack starts to pace.*) We're going to run out of time!

(*Realizing that neither Applejack nor Aloe is paying her any mind, she tucks the watch away and moves along with them. Cut to a doorway through which the line extends; the procession traces back and around the nearest corner, working its way through the building to follow a serpentine pipeline.*)

Applejack: Hmmm…

(*Now she breaks into a purposeful trot, eyes fixed on the ceiling as she passes an open room in which Mrs. Cake is getting a massage from Lavender, then one in which Mr. Cake is getting his back worked on by Bulk Biceps—dressed in the jersey and headband he sported in "Castle Sweet Castle"—and feeling every bit of the pain that goes with it. The pipe runs through the wall above a closed door, which Applejack opens; cut to a head-on view of her, eyes going wide with surprise as she steps through to the sound of rumbling machinery. Zoom out quickly to show that she has entered a boiler room whose walls are lined with pipes. She descends a flight of steps, Rarity and Aloe following at a distance, and breaks into a gallop along a utility corridor. All three come to a stop at an elbow in the overhead pipe; she looks one way, then another, and points along its length.*)

Applejack: Hah! Now what do we have here?

(*Cut to the answer, which proves to be a laundry room in which Green is magically loading a batch of towels into one of the washer/dryer units that line one wall. Opposite these is a row of manually cranked wringers mounted on tubs; the back wall plays host to shelves stacked high with neatly folded towels.*)

Rarity: (*from o.s., dryly*) The laundry room, of course.

(*Cut to the trio. She brings her watch out to check the time, then puts it away.*)

Rarity: And at this point, I'm considering soaking my hooves in one of the machines so my time here isn't a total loss!
Aloe: The Ponyville Day Spa prides itself on sanitary conditions, and fresh linens are integral part.
Applejack: Well, sure, but—have you *always* run every single one of these here machines full-bore, all day, every day?
Green: (*Eastern European accent*) The answer is no. But ponies sure do love that warm-towel service.

(*Accompanied by the following. Use his field to close the machine he was loading. Move down to another one. Cut to within it as he magically opens its door and takes hold of the freshly dried linens within. Once he finishes, the camera cuts to the laundry room again and the towels whisk into the air, neatly folding and stacking themselves before settling onto the cart and being rolled toward the camera. Fade to black as they fill the screen, then snap to the room as he disappears around a corner. Applejack trots across the floor to stare after them, deep in thought.*)

Applejack: Hmmm…

(*Off she goes, trailed by Rarity and Aloe. Seeing him push the cart out of the boiler room and down the hall, she wastes no time in closing the gap. As the wheels squeak along the floor, he levitates a towel into each of the rooms occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Cake. An over-shoulder glance*

informs him of the trio's close pursuit; they freeze and offer up a round of innocent smiles/grins—and one forced-casual wave from Applejack. He gives them a suspicious glare as he continues his rounds, and they keep a more respectful distance.)

(*Now he passes through a doorway and rounds a corner, coming up on the line of sauna enthusiasts. As they catch sight of him, he stops and glances back at the three mares in close-up, the camera panning slightly to put his cart out of view.*)

Green: Eh, you are all wanting towel?
Applejack: (*pointing*) Looks to me like you don't have any left.

(*A pan ahead reveals that her assessment is on the money; all his immaculately folded towels are gone, having been wrapped onto heads. They are quickly replaced by a blizzard of crumpled ones—and as before, one drapes itself over his face. He levitates it away with a sour look.*)

Green: Well, like I said, warm towels are big hit.

(*He swings the cart away, but Applejack is more interested in a valve on a pipe that runs up the wall, with little spurts of steam chuffing out around it. The green eyes go wide with a sudden realization, and the camera zooms in quickly to an extreme close-up of one pupil. Its highlight reflections fade from view, replaced by a quick series of black-and-white images: the valve…a shivering customer…the cart, stacked with fresh towels…a load of used ones being flung into a washer/dryer and the lid slamming shut before the camera follows its steam line at high speed to stop on the zeroed-out pressure gauge she noted outside the sauna. From here, zoom out quickly to frame Applejack, bewilderment giving way to a new determination.*)

Applejack: I think I've figured out the problem! (*pointing to valve*) You've got a small leak.

(*Pan quickly to the gauge, its needle starting to rise slowly.*)

Applejack: (*from o.s., tapping it*) And that means the steam takes just a little longer to build up. (*To the head of the sauna line.*) And while ponies wait— (*Their towels cool off and they shiver; she leans into view.*) —they get cold.

(*Pan quickly to the upper end of a stack of ready towels, which swiftly becomes a mound of used ones as they take advantage of the offering.*)

Applejack: (*from o.s.*) Cold ponies start wrappin' themselves in towels…

(*To the laundry room; the put-upon Green levitates them into a machine as she leans into view.*)

Applejack: …and all those dirty towels have to be cleaned.

(*Cut to inside the rig; the door is slammed shut and the drum begins to fill with water. During the next line, the camera pans to an adjacent unit full of hot vapor and towels.*)

Applejack: (*from o.s.*) Because Ponyville Day Spa prides itself on cleanliness.

(*The door is opened and the laundry is levitated out; cut to Green maneuvering the steamy freight around a corner. He stops short, finding Applejack, Rarity, and Aloe standing in his way. Long pause.*)

Green: (*hesitantly*) Eh, what?
Applejack: (*pacing*) Basically, losin' steam makes you use more towels. That means you do more laundry, which uses up the hot water you need to make more steam— (*He pulls the cart back and out of sight.*) —so the problem just keeps gettin' worse.

(*The issue begins to dawn on the waiting customers, sparking a round of smiles and understanding murmurs.*)

Aloe: Ahhhhh! I had no idea. (*Close-up of Rarity.*)
Rarity: (*a bit snippy*) Wonderful. Now that we've solved the great steam mystery, we can finally get back to our…

(*She cuts herself off upon floating up her pocket watch and reading off the time. What she sees causes her to pull at her cheeks in supreme frustration, the watch falling away.*)

Rarity: …significantly less than an hour of relaxation.

(*Hooves let go of face, which scrunches up in what might be an attempt to hold back angry tears.*)

Applejack: (*from o.s.*) Rarity, are you kiddin'? (*Cut to her.*) I can't just leave things like this. (*She turns to the leaky valve, all business.*) I'm gonna need my tools.

(*The fussy unicorn utters a vexed sigh and rolls her eyes. Dissolve to a close-up of Applejack's hind legs and tilt up to her midsection. She is standing up on these two limbs, and she snaps on a tool belt and fills its pockets with useful implements. Once safety goggles go on over the steely green eyes, she stands on all fours, ready to tackle the malfunctioning utility system.*)

(*After a tap on the bad valve, and with a captive audience, Applejack brings up a magnifying glass to scrutinize it even more closely than before. In the background, Rarity loses interest and walks off; cut to an extreme close-up of a cucumber slice, which falls away from the camera to cover one eye. The other is already equipped in this fashion, a mud mask is slathered onto the white face, and she relaxes on a lounge chair. Extreme close-up of a wrench tightening a bolt on the valve housing; one by one, the jets of steam hissing out around it cease, and the pressure gauge begins to rise—a leak remedied.*)

(*Cut to a close-up of Lotus, the handle of a file gripped in her teeth, and zoom out to show her working on Rarity's rear hooves. The unicorn allows herself a serene little grin at this bit of*

pampering. Meanwhile, Applejack has now applied several turns of cloth wrapping to the valve housing. A hard pull on the free end in her teeth quiets still more leaks, and the gauge rises again. Extreme close-up of one of Rarity's closed eyes, the cucumbers and mud mask gone; a mascara brush is applied to the lashes, and a zoom out shows her now lying on her belly so Lavender can put it to work. She sighs in supreme relaxation and bliss.)

(*Cut to a close-up of the repaired valve.*)

Applejack: (*from o.s.*) Whoo! (*Aloe steps up for a look.*) Now that that leak's fixed— (*Zoom out; she stands just behind.*) —ponies won't get so cold they use up all those towels. (*Rarity steps up, far from happy.*) And without all that laundry, there'll be plenty of hot water for all the steam anypony could want.

(*Close-up of the gauge, zooming out to show Green smiling at it with his cart.*)

Green: (*trotting giddily in place*) And I only have to be doing wash once a day!

(*The sauna door opens, letting out a cloud of steam, and he bolts in to take advantage of the services. Once the door has closed again, cut to Applejack and Aloe, the former shucking the last of her repair gear.*)

Aloe: Wow, Appleyack! Have you ever considered a career in the spa industry? I'm sure I can find something for you.
Applejack: (*laughing*) No, thanks. I'm just relieved I can finally relax in the steam. (*Cut to a still-irked Rarity; she continues o.s.*) What do you say, Rarity?
Rarity: Mmm—it sounds lovely, Applejack, but— (*floating up pocket watch*) —unfortunately, you spent so much time fixing the steam room, we don't have any time left to use it.

(*The blue eyes send out an icy glare as the chronograph is tucked out of sight.*)

Rarity: (*to Aloe*) Honestly, how in Equestria did it never occur to you to check for leaks?
Aloe: There's just so many other things to worry about. I suppose we get used to the way things are, and we don't realize there was problem.
Rarity: You obviously need an outside eye to evaluate the situation. It's lucky for you Applejack is too stubborn to relax.

(*The backhanded compliment throws the apple expert severely off balance.*)

Applejack: Uh—I'm sorry, Rarity. We'll just have to do this another day. Twilight and Spike should be done feedin' the pigs by now.
Rarity: Twilight is a very capable pony. I'm sure she can figure out what to do next.
Applejack: (*needled*) Look, I know Twilight's a princess and an alicorn, but she *isn't* a farmer. I've been doin' farm work my whole life, and I'm not sure it's somethin' you can just figure out.
Rarity: (*taken aback*) Of course. (*Gasp.*) Why don't we pop back so you can explain to Twilight what to do next, and then we'll come back here and pick up where we left off? (*Grin.*)

Applejack: (*tentatively*) Well, I suppose I could try, assumin' everythin' went well so far.
Rarity: (*laughing airily*) Oh, Applejack, honestly. How could it not?

(*Dissolve to an extreme close-up of a shucked ear of corn dangling on the end of a rope, somewhere within Sweet Apple Acres. A quick pan brings Twilight into view, tongue clamped in teeth as she holds one end of a long pole in one foreleg. A bucket of slops is hooked onto the other, one hind leg is raised, and the other serves as her only precarious balance point. A rope is looped around her midsection to complete this bizarre set of circumstances. From here, tilt quickly up to a pulley attached to the end of a horizontal beam; the rope runs up and over this, trailing back toward the ground under the beam. One last pan/tilt down puts the free end of the rope in Spike's hands; he stands in the barnyard, straining to keep his boss's weight up while Applejack's checklist lies open behind him.*)

Spike: Wouldn't it be easier to just fly?
Twilight: I told you, Spike. We're following Applejack's list to the letter, and Applejack doesn't fly!

(*Zoom out to frame all of her. The one hind leg is atop one of the posts in the fence that encircles the pigpen, and the ear of corn hangs from the free end of the pole she holds. Gravity and bad balance finally do her in, the pole and slop bucket flying as she pitches forward with a yell. Her number-one assistant loses his grip on the rope and realizes, too late, that he has put one foot within its loose coils. He is hauled up by that ankle much too fast for his liking.*)

Spike: Whoa!

(*Twilight plunges toward the hardpan, but stops inches short of a very painful belly flop. She moans wearily to herself as Applejack and Rarity return, and a cheerfully grunting pig regards her from its upside-down position in the mud. A zoom out tells the rest of the tale: Spike has managed to grab the fence's upper rail and act as the anchor point.*)

Applejack: I'm sorry, Rarity, but I think I'm gonna have to finish these chores myself.

(*Rarity makes her extreme discontent known with a soft growl before the view fades to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of the pigpen and the whacked-out apparatus Twilight and Spike have been using. The beam to which the overhead pulley is attached juts from above the hayloft window in one end of the main barn. Zoom in slowly.*)

Rarity: Twilight, darling! How in the world did you end up there?

(*Twilight gets her wings and magic going to gain a bit of altitude, untangle both ends of the rope, and float Spike back outside the fence.*)

Twilight: Spike and I were just trying to follow Applejack's list as closely as possible. (*Spike settles down to read it over.*)
Spike: Mmm—maybe not the best plan. (*Twilight flies over to the other two mares.*)
Twilight: I'm sorry, Applejack, but we never even got started feeding the pigs.
Applejack: (*pacing past her*) That's all right, Twilight. I know you did your best.

(*Picking up the slop bucket by its handle in her teeth, she sets it on a post.*)

Applejack: I guess a list can't really capture all the ways I have of doin' things.
Twilight: At least you two got to spend some time at the spa together.
Spike: Yeah! That must have been super-relaxing.
Rarity: (*snarky*) Well, if watching Applejack fix plumbing counts as relaxing, then yes.
Twilight: What about your hour of spa perfection?
Rarity: As it turns out, the Ponyville Day Spa had a few problems with their steam room, and *somepony* refused to relax until she had fixed them!

(*Applejack straightens up, having coiled the rope that Twilight and Spike were using.*)

Applejack: (*irked*) I'm sorry, but I just couldn't let those spa ponies go another minute puttin' up with problems they didn't even know they had!

(*The fashionista rolls her eyes disgustedly; now Applejack rises to her hind legs and lets the front two rest on the top rail of the fence gate.*)

Applejack: (*opening/closing it*) Somehow they just got used to a huge bottleneck of ponies standin' around waitin'. But I took one good look at that spa jam, and I knew I had to do somethin'.

(*She begins to follow the curve of the fence.*)

Applejack: Sometimes the simplest things can just derail a whole operation.

(*Stopping at a particular spot, she leans over the barrier and lets her forelegs and tongue flail everywhere, making a plethora of silly faces and noises that the pigs utterly ignore. After several seconds of this, she reverts to her normal demeanor and circles back toward the others.*)

Applejack: Whether it's a leaky pipe or doin' too much laundry. You can't just stick to the same old way of doin' things and expect them to get better.

(*Another stop, which leads into an impression of a strutting, squawking chicken. She keeps up the flightless-avian gymnastics as she continues.*)

Applejack: I mean, thinkin' you can is just plumb ridiculous, right?

(*Her next move is to nip the coiled rope in her teeth and gallop away. Cut to Twilight, Rarity, and Spike, all utterly confounded by these most unusual displays; Applejack's chuckle floats across to them, and the camera zooms out to frame her during the next line—standing on the end of the pulley beam. One end of the rope is around her midsection, the other is tied off to the pulley, and the pole with the ear of corn lies within easy reach.*)

Applejack: It's funny when you realize the extra work they were doin' was actually makin' things worse.

(*A pull tightens the knots; then, as the other three gape in utter shock, she dives off the beam with the pole. She ends up describing a lazy arc over the pigpen and swinging the corn to get its inhabitants' attention. Within moments they are all up and stampeding across the pen to keep after it. The vibrations of their passage dislodge the slop bucket Applejack set on a post, so that it tumbles and empties itself into a feed trough, and just as suddenly they have doubled back to gorge themselves. Close-up of Applejack as she swings slowly to a halt.*)

Applejack: I mean, I guess it's possible to get stuck in a routine where you're doin' all this extra stuff and not realize it, but I can't for the life of me think of how. (*perplexed*) Why are y'all starin' at me like that?

(*Skeptical/puzzled sidewise looks pass between the other two equines as the baby dragon gazes silently across, his mind blown by this highly unorthodox technique.*)

Rarity: Um…are you certain everything you just did is entirely necessary to feed the pigs?
Applejack: What? Of course! (*She tosses the pole aside and starts to untie herself.*) Why would I be doin' it if it weren't?

(*With the knots undone, she drops to the ground. Again the blue and purple eyes betray their owners' disbelief at her tactics.*)

Applejack: (*resting forelegs on fence gate*) See, this gate here used to squeak so loud, the pigs would run to the other side of the pen and never come out. (*opening/closing it*) So I open and close it to let them know it's safe.
Twilight: But it doesn't squeak anymore.
Applejack: Of course not. I fixed that ages ago.

(*She gallops to another spot, near the pigs—now wallowing in the mud again—and waves her forelegs at them.*)

Applejack: Then, I realized puttin' a little fright into 'em got 'em all hustlin' out of the pen.
Spike: They don't look scared to me.
Applejack: Well, no, they got used to it. (*circling back toward the others*) Which is why I started doin' the chicken dance— (*miming it*) —to show 'em that if they didn't get to eatin' their food, the chickens would.

(*Gallop off; cut to the end of the roof beam. Now she is back up here, tied off to the rope.*)

Applejack: 'Course, bein' a chicken, I couldn't very well open the gate. (*She drops into a dangle, corn-laden pole in hoof.*) Gettin' the food bucket to spill into the trough was just a happy accident, because one time I left it there by mistake.
Twilight: Uh, Applejack? It seems like everything you're doing is to fix things that aren't really problems anymore.

(*These words, and Rarity's silent nod, touch off a brainstorm under the blond mane.*)

Applejack: Well, I'll be. (*Rarity circles toward her.*)
Rarity: Hmm. (*smiling*) Maybe it isn't so hard to get stuck doing extra work after all.
Applejack: Huh. I wonder if I've been doin' that around here with anythin' else.
Rarity: (*all business*) Well, there's only one way to find out!

(*Cut to the four inside a henhouse. A basket of birdseed rests on the floor in front of Applejack, now free of the pulley rope. She tips a quantity out in front of one chicken, which hops out of its nest to eat, and she leans in to collect the now-exposed eggs into a bowl. The process is repeated at a second nest, after which Twilight and Rarity trade calculating smiles and Spike does a little thinking of his own. Clock wipe to a close-up of a pile of seed being dumped out from a bag held by Spike, then zoom out. He and Twilight are now standing outside the henhouse; she uses her magic to slide the door open, and the whole flock charges out in a mass of squawks and feathers to chow down. Inside, Rarity points out the ease with which Applejack can now take up eggs from all the nests, and the latter nods gratefully as she catches on.*)

(*Wipe to the quartet in a field. Applejack stands by a valve on an irrigation pipe, one of several that run in all directions through the plowed tracts. The feed and eggs have been left behind. She moves about, manipulating valves in sequence to send the water through one branch line first, then through both it and another one. After shutting the system down, she trots off and the camera pans to Twilight/Rarity/Spike. The two mares trade "I think we can do better than this" looks, while the dragon allows himself a bewildered shrug. Clock wipe to a slow pan through the field, Twilight standing by a valve at a pipe junction and Spike watching. Her magic spins the wheel open; at a different spot, Rarity uses hers to work the nearest valve as Applejack observes wonderingly. The upshot is to set the sprinklers going in several lines at once, prompting a mildly soggy wink from Twilight and a happy dance from Spike. Applejack beams at the result and gives Rarity a satisfied nod at the efficiency boost.*)

(*Dissolve to an extreme close-up of a hole in a chicken-wire fence. Applejack holds a piece up, trying to make it fit despite the mismatch in shape and mesh size, and the camera zooms out to frame all of her. The fence has already had one rough-edged repair job done on it, and the cutters and roll of fresh wire lying nearby tell of the effort she has put in to get this far. A snipped-out scrap of material has fallen near the cutters. Pan from her to Twilight/Rarity/Spike looking on; the first two trade slightly exasperated glances, Rarity throwing in an eye roll. Soon enough, Applejack has the patch crimped roughly into place, and she wipes her brow for a respite. It lasts only for a moment until the sound of rattling chicken wire surprises her back to*

herself; the source is the fresh roll, which has been levitated and unrolled in Rarity's magic so the cutters can snip off a fresh length. The section of fence between two posts is neatly pulled away and the new one set in its place, and Applejack crosses to her, faces broadcasting pride and appreciation.)

(*Dissolve to a slow pan across the grounds, seen from a nearby hilltop, and stop on Applejack eyeing the scene. She gives a relieved sigh and turns to glance over her shoulder.*)

Applejack: Thanks, y'all. (*crossing to Twilight/Rarity/Spike*) I guess I just got so used to doin' everythin 'a certain way, I didn't realize there were any problems. (*Close-up of Twilight.*)
Twilight: Having a friend look at what you're doing with an outside eye can really help. (*Pan to Rarity.*)
Rarity: (*nodding*) Mmm-hmm. And I suppose if it weren't for our unsuccessful time at the spa, none of us would've realized it.
Twilight: Well, now that your chores are streamlined, what are you gonna do with all the extra time?
Applejack: (*knowingly*) I think I have a few ideas.

(*Rarity, catching her meaning, lets a big grateful smile take hold on her face. Dissolve to the waiting room of the Ponyville Day Spa—previously known as the Ponyville Spa. Lavender is on duty at the reception counter as the door opens to admit Applejack and Rarity. It closes behind them as they cross the floor.*)

Applejack: (*sighing*) Think you can come up with enough things for us to do now that we have more time to relax?
Rarity: Oh, please. I could plan a week's worth of treatments. (*Applejack chuckles.*)
Applejack: Well, let's just start with the rest of the day for now. After all the work we just did on the farm, I am ready for some serious relaxation.

(*Their mutual smile of understanding is cut off by a sigh from a very familiar, raspy voice.*)

Rainbow: (*from o.s.*) Thanks for letting me know there was an opening.

(*Cut to her stepping out through a curtained doorway with Aloe—back in the robe and Tank-head slippers she sported during her too-brief visit in Act One.*)

Rainbow: I don't know if I could make it without my pampered muscle massage.
Aloe: Don't worry about it. Shall I put you down for another one tomorrow?
Rainbow: Oh, absolutely! Sometimes a girl just has to pamper herself, am I right?
Rarity: (*from o.s., singsong*) You certainly are!

(*Red-violet eyes pop in surprise as Rainbow pulls in a panicked gasp; pan to Applejack and Rarity, each adopting a slightly teasing smile/grin at this revelation.*)

Rainbow: (*sputtering a bit*) Oh, hey! I-I was just, uh, uh…

Applejack: (*leaning across, nudging her*) …gettin' a "sports pamperin'"?

(*She backs off with a good-natured chuckle, leaving the Wonderbolt to grin sheepishly and rub the back of her neck. Rarity adds her own soft laugh.*)

Rarity: Don't worry, Rainbow Dash. We were just heading in for some pampering ourselves. You could always join us.
Applejack: That is, if you don't mind sufferin' through one or two frou-frou treatments.
Rainbow: (*mock serious tone*) Uh, I suppose I could take it… (*All three head in.*) …you know, for you ponies.

(*All three laugh as the view fades to black.*)

FLUTTER BRUTTER

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to a house in a Cloudsdale neighborhood during the day. The lawn, street, and roof are constructed from clouds, and more of them fill a flower box at the front window and grow as bushes at the building corners, but everything else about the structure is solid enough. Rainbows curl through the lawn as fences on either side. Zoom in slowly, then cut to the kitchen inside on the start of the next line. The speaker is a pale yellow pegasus mare with red mane/tail in a neatly curled style and red-violet eyes behind large square glasses. She wears a pearl necklace in a slightly darker shade than her coat, as well as matching small flower-shaped earrings, and she speaks in a soft, gentle voice akin to Fluttershy's. Next to her, a light green pegasus stallion enters: very pale gray mane/tail/mustache, the first combed into a small pile atop his head; blue-green eyes; blue sweater over a white shirt. The next words mark these two as Fluttershy's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Shy; her cutie mark is hidden completely by her folded wings, while his leave only the edge of a small white cloud exposed.*)

Mrs. Shy: We're so happy you could come have lunch with your father and me, Fluttershy.

(*Longer shot: their daughter and Rainbow Dash sit in chairs across the table from them. Each seat has a little tuft of cloud for a cushion.*)

Fluttershy: I'm so glad you asked.
Rainbow: And it was super-awesome of you to invite me too. (*Mr. Shy circles and sets down a plate of food in his teeth.*) Things have been so busy with the Wonderbolts lately, it's great to get a chance to relax someplace quiet.
Mr. Shy: That's exactly what I intend to do now that I've retired. In fact, I converted the back house to showcase my cloud collection.

(*His voice is as quiet as Mrs. Shy's, and his approach with the plate fully exposes his cutie mark as a trio of white clouds. As he speaks, he points toward the window and the camera cuts to it, picking out a small round outbuilding whose door is open. Through this and the windows, shelves containing jarred bits of cloud in various shapes and forms can be seen; a flowerbed grows close to the base of the wall. The camera then cuts back to him and Fluttershy.*)

Mr. Shy: I have my clouds, your mum has her flowers, you've got your animals, and your brother…

(*He lets the sentence die in a bit of clearly unpleasant thought; after a mildly tense second or two, Mrs. Shy carries on with it.*)

Mrs. Shy: Zephyr Breeze has his… (*Muffled sigh.*) …interests. (*Chuckle.*)
Rainbow: I'll say! Remember when he was convinced square clouds were gonna be the next big thing? (*Hearty snicker.*)
Mrs. Shy: He's matured a lot since then. (*Mr. Shy circles back to her.*)
Mr. Shy: (*as they join hooves*) Actually, it's funny you bring Zephyr up.

(*Tentative grins from both elders bring a puzzled frown to their daughter's face. It shifts into a look of muted horror.*)

Fluttershy: Oh, no! Not again!
Mrs. Shy: It's just for a little while, dear, 'til he gets back on his hooves. (*Fluttershy puts a hoof to her face in disgust.*)
Rainbow: Wait. You don't mean—

(*The front door bursts open to admit the fourth family member. Zephyr Breeze is a tall, long-legged pegasus stallion whose coat is a bit darker than Mr. Shy's. His mane and tail are pale blond, the former tied into a messy topknot, the eyes are vivid violet, and an artfully cultivated case of five o'clock shadow decorates his face. A carryall bag hangs across his back, mostly covering his cutie mark, and he announces himself in a loud, gratingly boisterous voice.*)

Zephyr: Guess who's home! (*Laugh.*) That's right, big sis, it's your one and only favorite little brother, *moi*.

(*Said big sister can only manage a grimacing little moan and sink behind her chair as Rainbow's expression sours and the parents' grins become noticeably strained. Fade to black.*)

OPENING THEME

<u>Act One</u>

(*Opening shot: fade in to an extreme close-up of a Jell-O mold on the kitchen table. Zephyr's bag slams down, splattering most of it, and the camera zooms out to frame Fluttershy eyeing the wreck with great consternation. He zipz over to her.*)

Zephyr: Hi, Flutter-Butter! (*hugging her*) How's the bestest big sister ever? (*No immediate response.*) Hey! Where's the love? How about a little excitement to see your baby brother?

(*His mark is fully revealed in this sequence: a feather and a gust of wind. Now he shifts into a hearty noogie that leaves the pink mane thoroughly disheveled; once he steps off, she pulls it back into some sort of order.*)

Fluttershy: I'm just surprised. When you left, you said mane therapy was your calling.

(*Cut to the other side of the table during this line; now Zephyr has pulled both parents in for a hug, one foreleg for each. His eyes pop at the mention of this vocation and he loosens his grip. Part of Mrs. Shy's cutie mark can now be seen as a couple of flowers.*)

Zephyr: Oh, it is, sis, it is. You would not believe how much stress ponies hold in their manes! (*Circle back to her; he lifts a length of hers.*) Everything gets limp and unmanageable. (*pacing behind, piling her mane into a topknot*) No offense, but brushing alone won't solve the problem.

(*The pink mass of hair falls loose into an unruly curtain that hides her face.*)

Fluttershy: (*dryly, pushing it back into place*) What went wrong?
Zephyr: Nothing went wrong *per se*.

(*Cut to her. As he continues, he knocks a full plate away from in front of her and slides an open book across to take its place. The pages flip to stop on a group of photos: close-up shots of individual ponies' faces, their manes done in an assortment of styles.*)

Zephyr: (*from o.s., disdainfully*) It's just, the powers that be were so locked into their required styles, and you know me.

(*He reaches into view to flip the book shut, revealing a silhouette of a mare's head on the cover; cut to him.*)

Zephyr: I've got my own style, and I think they were a little threatened.

(*Rooting around in his bag, he sets a plastic pony head in front of Mr. and Mrs. Shy. Clearly intended for practice in mane styling, the artificial tresses rooted into the scalp have been worked into a haphazard mishmash of colors and styles that no sane pony would even think of using all at once. They recoil a bit as one garishly colored strand falls off, but Mrs. Shy gamely tries to work up a supportive smile.*)

Mrs. Shy: O-Oh, this is…lovely, dear.

(*Rainbow is a bit more forthcoming with her assessment, making a gagging sound and miming the action of shoving a hoof down her throat. Zephyr leans over to her next and shifts to a tone that is far more smarmy than debonair.*)

Zephyr: (*laughing knowingly*) Well! If it isn't "Rainbow's the Best Flyer That Ever Was" Dash.
Rainbow: (*very snarky*) Oh, *this* oughta be good.

Zephyr: (*pulling up a chair very close*) Sorry, I-I shouldn't tease you. (*sitting*) I know the whole "super-awesome flyer" bit's just to impress me.

(*That gets a shocked little neigh out of her.*)

Zephyr: Still, thanks for showing up for my homecoming. (*patting her hoof*) It's—it's sweet.

(*He backs off, totally missing the strangled little sound of combined disbelief and revulsion that escapes her lips, and moves for a look around the rest of the kitchen.*)

Zephyr: I kinda thought there'd be more ponies here. I mean, what about your party planner friend, um…Sprinkle Pie! She coulda turned this into a real house par-tay, am I right? I mean, this place could use it.

(*Cut to Fluttershy, whose irked glare and one lowered eyebrow broadcast her general opinion of her sibling's interruption.*)

Zephyr: (*from o.s.*) Draaa-aaab! (*Pan to Mr. and Mrs. Shy.*)
Mrs. Shy: (*chuckling weakly, stammering*) I-I…
Mr. Shy: We *have* been meaning to redecorate.

(*Across the way, the unfocused son has already taped up a few photos of himself on the pantry doors.*)

Zephyr: (*chuckling disdainfully, crossing kitchen*) Dad, please. When I get all my stuff back in here, you won't even remember what this boring old place looked like.

(*After a brief stop in the doorway to the living room and a flick of his eyes across the space, he ambles around the frame and out of sight. In short order, he returns pushing an armchair with his head.*)

Fluttershy: (*under her breath, annoyed*) Um, Mom, Dad, can I talk to you for a second?

(*The elders trade a concerned look. Cut to just outside the kitchen entrance as they emerge.*)

Mrs. Shy: What is it, honey? (*Fluttershy follows them, using her normal voice.*)
Fluttershy: I'm not so sure letting Zephyr move back home is a good idea. I know you both want to help, but don't you remember last time?
Mrs. Shy: Zephyr's just trying to find his place, dear.
Fluttershy: (*sighing*) I know. It just seems like his place always ends up being *your* place. And then he…sort of…makes you do everything for him.
Mr. Shy: Well, we may not be as bold as you, Fluttershy, but don't you worry. We know how to stand up for ourselves.

(*He and his wife beam at each other, but Fluttershy's face gets her profound degree of skepticism across without a word. Cut to a close-up of Rainbow, lounging in an armchair and trying to concentrate on the Daring Do book she holds. A sliver of Zephyr's flank and wing can be seen at an uncomfortably close distance just to one side.*)

Zephyr: (*from o.s.*) And they were all like—

(*Zoom out. They are in the living room, and he sits on the chair's arm with one front hoof draped nonchalantly over its back.*)

Zephyr: —"We love your free spirit, Zeph, and it would be wrong to cage that. Go follow your dreams!"

(*The dangling foreleg works its way down behind her head; without missing a beat, she shoves him hard enough to dump him onto the floor. The unshaven face shifts from popeyed surprise to a come-hither smile as the rest of the family walks in.*)

Rainbow: (*dryly*) Zeph was just telling me all about the ins and outs of mane therapy school.
Zephyr: It's all so political. (*standing up, pacing*) I just could not take it! (*Cut to Fluttershy and the parents.*)
Fluttershy: (*pointedly*) Well, maybe if you stuck with it for more than a few weeks? (*That eyebrow comes down again.*)
Zephyr: (*from o.s.*) Sorry, sis. (*Back to him, now standing by the fireplace.*) But when something's not the right fit, this pony's gotta fly.

(*He slides a framed black-and-white photo of himself onto the mantelpiece, pushing some small animal sculptures to one end. One of them falls and breaks, but he takes no notice of Fluttershy's and Rainbow's joint dissatisfaction.*)

Zephyr: Anyway, good talk, Rainbows. I am so touched you came to see me, really. I hate to deprive you of my presence, but this Breeze needs his Z's.
Rainbow: You know it's the middle of the day, right? (*He pauses on his way up the stairs.*)
Zephyr: I know. (*dramatically*) Siesta!

(*Zoom out to frame the other four looking on from the general area of Rainbow's chair.*)

Zephyr: I'm just going to assume you made up my room the way I like it, right, Mom?

(*Up he goes, but he pokes his head back into view an instant later.*)

Zephyr: Oh! I almost forgot. All my stuff is out front. Want to grab that for me, Pops? (*Laugh.*) Thanks.

(*Gone again. Rainbow is first to give voice to the lack of good vibes with an irritated sigh.*)

Rainbow: Same old Zeph.

(*Between the pink mane and blue-green eyes, the brows on the yellow face lower a notch. Dissolve to an overhead shot of a Ponyville street; these two fly into view side by side, neither in good spirits and Rainbow no longer carrying her book.*)

Rainbow: I know you weren't expecting to see your brother, but you've been kinda quiet—even for you.
Fluttershy: I'm sorry, but I am just so… (*Grunt.*) …so…*peeved* right now!

(*Rainbow's eyes pop at this pronunciation, and Fluttershy claps her own front hooves over her mouth with a stunned gasp. Down below, a mare quickly covers the ears of the nearest filly and glares up at her, prompting her to hitch in a panicked little breath.*)

Fluttershy: Oh! Excuse my language.

(*They fly over Applejack and a hopping Pinkie Pie, both of whom stop and turn in their direction.*)

Pinkie: (*singsong, dropping to haunches, waving*) Rainbow Dash! Fluttershy! It's me, Pinkie Pie! (*shrilly*) YOUR FRIEND!

(*Seeing her buddy a little downcast at having been so easily ignored, Applejack wedges a front hoof in her teeth and uncorks a loud whistle. Rainbow comes to a quick stop, but Fluttershy—now a few yards back—fails to hit the brakes in time and rams into her from behind. The two come in for a landing; Pinkie is now up to all fours again.*)

Fluttershy: Oh, um, sorry about that.
Rainbow: We just had lunch with Fluttershy's parents, and you'll never guess who showed up. (*Fluttershy cringes.*)
Pinkie: Ooooh!

(*A bit of fishing around in her mane produces a wallet, which she opens to let a long string of photos in plastic sleeves fold out. Cut to the first one she names, then tilt down to each other one in turn; each is pointed out with a bright pink hoof.*)

Pinkie: (*from o.s., with growing excitement*) Mayor Mare? Cranky Doodle Donkey? Cheese Sandwich? (*Longer shot; she shoves the photos into Rainbow's face.*) *Ms. Harshwhinny?!?*

(*The blue flyer brings the impromptu exhibition to an end by pushing the wallet down and o.s. with a little smile.*)

Rainbow: Zephyr Breeze.
Pinkie: (*calmly*) Ohhhh, that makes more sense.

Applejack: And from the look on your face, I'm guessin' it's for another one of his "extended stays"? (*Fluttershy slaps a hoof over her own face.*)
Rainbow: (*aside, to Applejack*) She's a bit *peeved*.

(*The same mare and filly from a moment ago have chosen just this instant to pass in the background. This time, both of them shoot the speaker a dirty look at the mare pushes the filly ahead and out of view.*)

Fluttershy: Zephyr's my brother and I love him, but he's never learned to do anything for himself. And I don't know why my parents keep letting him trot all over them!
Applejack: Well, if your parents won't stand up for themselves, maybe *you* need to stand up for them.
Fluttershy: You know, you're right.

(*She lifts off. Dissolve to an overhead shot of her parents' lawn as she wings into view to touch down at the house's front door, then cut to a profile close-up. She does the breathing exercise Twilight Sparkle has sometimes used to calm herself down—inhale with one front hoof to chest, then exhale while pushing it away from herself—and gathers her courage to knock at the door. Before hoof can meet wood, though, there is a loud crash from o.s. Cut to just behind one front corner as she pokes her head around it for a look, then zoom in as her features rearrange themselves into an expression of utter horror and she sucks in a sharp gasp. A cut to her perspective discloses the source of the commotion as the outbuilding or back house, whose flowerbed has been well and truly trashed with empty/broken jars from Mr. Shy's cloud collection, to the dismay of Mrs. Shy. Her husband, meanwhile, has an empty jar in his grip and is flapping overhead, trying without success to re-capture one of the clouds. Other contained specimens rest near Mrs. Shy as she pulls a jar out of the flowers, and Zephyr tosses another one out an open window from inside in close-up. Lightning cracks across the screen from wherever it lands o.s.*)

[*Animation goof: Mrs. Shy's wings are missing in this shot, but the omission does expose a third flower in her cutie mark that had been previously hidden by them.*]

Fluttershy: (*from o.s., exasperated*) *Zephyr Breeze!* (*He looks out.*)
Zephyr: Oh, hey, sis! (*Move to the door, meeting her level gaze.*) Come to see me work my magic and turn this place from drab to fab, huh? (*turning inside*) Well, watch and learn. (*Another jar is tossed out, breaking.*)
Fluttershy: Can't you see what you're doing?
Zephyr: Yeah. (*pushing several others out the door*) I'm getting rid of this old stuff so I can turn the back house into my art studio. I decided I'm gonna be a sculptor! (*Mrs. Shy straightens up, holding an uprooted plant.*)
Fluttershy: I'm talking about Mom's flowers.
Zephyr: She's gonna move them so I can have my mediation patio here. She loves replanting stuff— (*sweetly*) —don't you, Mom?

(*The bespectacled mare manages a weak grin even as the bloom falls off the plant she holds. Now Fluttershy kneels down among the litter of cracked and discarded jars.*)

Fluttershy: (*picking one up*) And Dad's been collecting his favorite bits of cloud from the factory since before you were born.

(*Extreme close-up of a rumaway wisp as Mr. Shy catches it in a jar, using the wall to pin it down, and slides a base in to secure it. Zoom out to frame all of him.*)

Mr. Shy: The very best from every production run since my first day on the job.

(*He proceeds to bobble and drop the container, which shatters on impact with the ground, and sighs sadly as the cloud floats away.*)

Mr. Shy: But why hold onto the past, really?
Fluttershy: (*to Zephyr*) You can't just fly in and change everything Mom and Dad have built here. (*Mr. Shy descends to the others.*)
Zephyr: But this is the only place big enough for my studio-slash-meditation garden. (*Pause.*) Ooh! Unless I do it in the living room.

(*Zoom out quickly through a window and stop in this particular space, then cut back to Mr. and Mrs. Shy—more than a bit distraught by this suggestion. On the start of the next line, zoom out to frame Fluttershy addressing them from the fore.*)

Fluttershy: I know speaking up for yourself can be hard— (*Behind her, Zephyr stops on his way into the house.*) —believe me. But Zephyr will never stand on his own if he can lean on you.
Zephyr: Don't be so dramatic, sis! (*sliding to their parents, pulling them closer*) Mom and Dad just want to let me be me, right? I can do plenty on my own.
Fluttershy: I agree— (*sternly*) —which is why you should move out.

(*The grinding halt that her words trigger under the blond topknot brings up only a choked little grunt.*)

Zephyr: (*hamming it up*) Oh. Well…I mean…I-I totally would. But… (*pulling Mrs. Shy even closer*) …I don't think that's what Mom and Dad want. (*to them, hurt tone*) It's not, is it?

(*Here comes a heavy-caliber pout, which leaves both parents at a loss for words.*)

Mrs. Shy: Uhhhh…
Mr. Shy: (*as both back off from Zephyr*) You know we love you, son, but your sister has a point.

(*Another mental two-by-four upside the head, followed by two very watery eyes.*)

Zephyr: (*voice breaking*) Sure. I mean, I really just came back here to keep you guys company, but…whatever's best for the family. (*plodding toward front door*) I just…I just gotta grab a few essentials.

(*He stops to scoop up a squirrel lawn gnome from the walk.*)

Mrs. Shy: And…you definitely have somewhere else to go?

(*Fluttershy puts out a hoof to keep her back; now Zephyr has picked up a second gnome, this one styled as a rabbit.*)

Zephyr: (*laughing shakily, stacking both together*) Of course! There's plenty of ponies who'd love for a little Breeze to blow their way.

(*As he retreats into the house, the other three family members trade worried glances, with tears welling up behind Mrs. Shy's square lenses. Dissolve to the exterior of Fluttershy's cottage, zooming in slowly; on the start of the next line, cut to the kitchen table inside. Her rabbit Angel is perched on it, waiting for a carrot on a plate that she brings over; Rainbow has pulled up a chair of her own.*)

Rainbow: So where's Zeph gonna go now? (*Fluttershy sets the plate down.*)
Fluttershy: I'm not sure. (*Close-up.*) Oh, I hope I did the right thing.
Rainbow: (*from o.s.*) Are you kidding? (*Cut to her.*) One hundred percent!
Zephyr: (*from o.s., singsong*) Hey, siii-iiis!

(*The red-violet eyes go wide at that voice. Zoom out to put an equally gobsmacked Fluttershy in the fore, then cut to behind her. The top half of the nearest door is open, and the no-count little brother sticks his head in, throws the bottom half open, and strides in. His carryall is slung up over one shoulder.*)

Zephyr: Your new roomie's here!
Rainbow: (*to Fluttershy*) Okay, maybe like seventy percent.

(*A fed-up frown rivets itself onto the yellow face before the view snaps to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to one of the side windows of Fluttershy's cottage, seen from outside. Zoom in slowly.*)

Fluttershy: (*from inside, firmly*) Um, Zephyr! (*Close-up of her.*) When Mom and Dad told you to find someplace else to live, I don't think they meant here.
Zephyr: (*from o.s.*) Well—

(*Cut to frame all three ponies and Angel at/on the kitchen table; Zephyr lets his bag drop to the floor.*)

Zephyr: —it's not their house, so by definition— (*fishing in it*) —it's someplace else.

(*The white fuzzball stops his chompers from sinking into the carrot Fluttershy gave him when Zephyr sets his filched rabbit lawn gnome on the table. Angel gives it a nasty look, and the one Rainbow sends out from her chair is no better. This does not stop the slacker stallion from sidling up to her.*)

Zephyr: Am I right, Rainbows? (*He throws a foreleg across her shoulders.*) Stop ogling me and help settle this.

(*The gesture causes her whole face to freeze in an expression of gape-mouthed horror, with one eye caught in mid-twitch. He does her the courtesy of easing her jaw shut, then crosses the room as she manages a truly disgusted sigh.*)

Rainbow: You know what? I totally forgot that I promised to help Pinkie Pie…sprinkle…something.

(*Long shot of the cottage exterior as she rockets skyward from it in a Technicolor blur—getting out while the getting is good—then cut back to the kitchen. Zephyr spoons up a carrot from a pot on the stove as Fluttershy glowers at him.*)

Fluttershy: You said you had plenty of places to go!
Zephyr: (*noncommittally, twirling a hoof*) Ehhhh…
Fluttershy: (*sighing, hoof to face*) Fine. You can stay here— (*He is across the room in a blink.*)
Zephyr: (*hugging/lifting her*) You're the best! We're gonna have so much fun.
Fluttershy: —on one condition. (*Cut to just behind her shoulder.*)
Zephyr: Totally. Anything. (*Zoom in to an extreme close-up.*)
Fluttershy: (*now o.s., jabbing a hoof against his nose*) You have to get a job.

(*His face falls as she removes the appendage, and he sets her back down so that they end up sitting on their haunches to face each other.*)

Zephyr: (*laughing*) Cracking the whip, huh? (*standing, mussing her mane*) You always were kinda bossy.
Fluttershy: (*menacingly, clearing her field of vision*) Zephyr Breeze! (*She stands, her mane restoring itself.*)
Zephyr: Kidding! Get a job. Absolutely.

(*He walks out of the kitchen, turns past the doorway to pass out of view, and—just as at the homestead—promptly returns pushing a piece of furniture with his head. In this case, he has appropriated Fluttershy's couch, prompting the owner to aim a hacked-off look over her shoulder at the goof-off.*)

(*Dissolve to a stretch of peaceful sky and tilt down to the sound of a rooster's crowing. It is now sunrise of the next day, and the camera stops on an overhead shot of a Ponyville street. Fluttershy walks resolutely down the block, leading a slumped, cavernously yawning Zephyr past a foal on a morning paper route.*)

Zephyr: Where are we going so early? (*close-up; smoothing topknot*) You have no idea how bad morning sun is for your mane!
Fluttershy: (*smirking*) Remember how we talked about you getting a job?
Zephyr: It was just yesterday, and it's totally on my to-do list— (*stopping/chuckling; she continues on*) —but you can't expect me to find something befitting my awesomeness overnight.

(*Big sister stops at the front door of the Carousel Boutique.*)

Fluttershy: I thought you might say that.

(*Her knock brings Rarity out almost before she can put her hoof back down on the step; Zephyr just boggles at the unicorn's alacrity.*)

Fluttershy: So I did it for you.
Zephyr: What?!?

(*Wipe to a workroom inside. A couple of undressed pony mannequins stand off to one side, and three rolls of white fabric hang from horizontal racks. A length of each has been unrolled to trail across the floor; here, three bowls of dye have been set up on a dropcloth to keep the carpet clean. Rarity stands alongside the assembly, as do the flasks from which the dyes were poured.*)

Rarity: (*pointing to rolls, then bowls*) *These* fabrics all need to be dyed *those* colors. Do you think you can handle that? (*Cut to Fluttershy and Zephyr, also in here.*)
Zephyr: (*mumbling, scratching back of neck*) Um…I don't know…

(*The next cut frames Rarity just inside the door of this room, which proves to be her upper-story workroom and living space.*)

Rarity: (*as Fluttershy crosses to her*) You get started while Fluttershy and I head to the store for more supplies. (*exiting*) Ta-ta!
Fluttershy: Good luck!

(*A snap of teeth on knob, and she has yanked the door shut to leave one very apprehensive pegasus alone with the equipment. He stands rooted to the spot as Rarity's cat Opalescence wanders over, dips a paw into one bowl, and shakes the liquid off to leave a vivid spatter across some of the cloth. The performance touches off a calculating grin on the stubble-marked green face. From here, dissolve to the exterior of the Carousel Boutique, seen from a short distance away as Fluttershy and Rarity approach. The yellow mare has a shopping bag balanced on her back; the white one floats a second along in her magical grip.*)

Fluttershy: Thanks for giving my brother a job. I just hope he's up to the task.
Rarity: (*laughing*) Oh, darling, dyeing fabric is the simplest thing.

(*Cut to just inside the closed door of the upper-story room, which opens under her control to admit the pair.*)

Rarity: You just dip cloth in a bo—

(*She trails off into a stricken gasp matched by Fluttershy's own as the bags hit the ground. Cut to their perspective, panning slowly across. The entire workspace is a shambles: mannequins festooned with swatches of garishly colored cloth and dye splotches, one with a crude face drawn on; the three fabric rolls and the dropcloth liberally splattered; a fourth roll partly unfurled across the carpet; trails of varicolored hoof prints leading here and there; a few attempts at tie-dyeing hung up on a spare rack to dry. From here, cut back to Fluttershy and Rarity, who can only gape at Rarity's four-poster bed—and Zephyr draped across it, humming idly as he lies on his belly to do a bit of reading. It takes him a second to pick up on their return.*)

Zephyr: (*hopping off*) Rarity! You're back!
Fluttershy: (*levelly, softly*) What did you do?
Zephyr: Since you talk to animals all the time, I just figured it runs in the family, so why not outsource this stuff, you know?

(*A crazed screech rips the air, courtesy of one or more of the small animals that promptly rampage through the area—bird, rabbit, squirrel, all trailing pigment-soaked scraps. The two ground-based critters leave streaks of dye on the carpet in their wake.*)

Zephyr: (*nudging Fluttershy*) Turns out the animal communication thing isn't genetic.
Rarity: (*indignantly, facing him down*) Zephyr, I asked *you* to do this job, not to pawn it off on innocent woodland creatures! (*He quails a bit.*)
Zephyr: Okay. (*pushing her back gently*) I guess you have some feelings about this, but you should know it's basically your cat's fault for walking by and giving me the idea.

(*On the end of this line, cut to the feline in question—her normally immaculate white coat now heavily gunked up with dye and her tail sporting rainbow stripes. She licks at a paw as he leans down to her.*)

Zephyr: But I'm actually kinda into this look. (*She snarls and swipes at him; he quickly backs up to Rarity.*) So I guess what I'm saying is… (*holding up dye-stained cloth*) …you're welcome.

(*She launches into a sputtering fit that lasts for some moments before any coherent words make their way out.*)

Rarity: (*knocking cloth to floor*) Zephyr, this is just unacceptable!
Zephyr: (*affronted*) Wow. I guess I know when my efforts aren't appreciated.

(*Out he goes, with Rarity voicing a hearty groan and magically slamming the door shut behind him. Fluttershy can only offer a timid little blush and giggle for subjecting her friend to his incompetence. Wipe to an extreme close-up of the top of one of the green stained-glass windows within the Castle of Friendship and tilt down toward ground level. The camera motion brings Zephyr into view, staring awestruck up along its height.*)

Zephyr: Whoa! Those are *tall!*
Twilight: (*from o.s.*) I'm glad you noticed—

(*Longer shot. They are in the throne room, along with Fluttershy and Spike.*)

Twilight: —because they're your new job.
Zephyr: Wha—? (*to Fluttershy*) You said you were taking me to tea with the Princess!
Fluttershy: Actually, I said *I* was going to tea with the Princess. *You're* going to work.

(*She and the Princess head for the door, but stop short as he hurries across to them.*)

Zephyr: Sis, come on!
Twilight: Don't worry, Zephyr. It'll be easy. (*Long shot of all four. The central map table is bare.*) I just need a pegasus pony to fly up and wipe each window down from top to bottom. (*Close-up.*)
Spike: And I'm here to make sure you do it right.

(*Here comes an ingratiating grin from the green stallion. Dissolve to the closed throne room doors, seen from inside; Twilight's magic opens them so she and Fluttershy can step in, and the camera zooms in to a close-up as the yellow and light violet faces break into expressions of great joy. A cut to the room itself picks out a full contingent of clean windows and Zephyr relaxing on one throne, seen from behind and leisurely strumming at a ukulele.*)

Twilight: (*walking into view with Fluttershy*) Wow, Zephyr! (*Cut to the table; he is in her seat.*) This looks amazing!
Zephyr: Well, you know, like you said, it was easy. (*Fluttershy shifts from elation to puzzlement.*)
Fluttershy: Where's Spike?
Spike: (*from o.s., distant*) Up here!

(*All three pairs of eyes flick toward the ceiling, one pair registering a healthy dose of panic at having been bowled out. Cut to a close-up of the baby dragon, squeegee in hand and hanging by a rope looped around his midsection; he spins to face the room, a bucket in his free hand.*)

Twilight: You were supposed to supervise, not do all the work!
Spike: I *was* supervising, and then Zephyr asked me about different cleaning techniques and which one was best, and if I could…

(*The nature of the slugabed's con game finally makes itself apparent to him.*)

Spike: (*angrily*) Hey! *I* did all the work!

(*Cut to Twilight and Fluttershy, glaring daggers in Zephyr's direction.*)

Zephyr: (*from o.s.*) Don't let him fool you. (*Cut to him, backing out the doors without his ukulele.*) Old Spike is quite the taskmaster.

(*Having gained the hallway, he peels out and leaves his big sister to deal with the gimlet-eyed looks coming her way from the edifice's two residents and offer up a sheepish blush and grin. Wipe to the siblings moving through one street's hustle and bustle, Fluttershy in a visibly sour mood. It is now later in the day.*)

Zephyr: Oh, come on, sis! I had to ask Spike to make sure I was doing it right. (*She whirls to jab a hoof into his chest.*)
Fluttershy: You didn't do it at all!

(*Pivoting away from him, she takes a deep breath with one front hoof raised and continues in a much calmer voice as she sets it back on the ground.*)

Fluttershy: Well, I guarantee there won't be any fooling around on the next job.
Zephyr: (*puzzled*) Next job?

(*Right on cue, Rainbow swoops down overhead and past them. He gets the daylights scared out of him, but she stands tranquilly in place even as her mane/tail are blown wildly about for a moment and leaves swirl across the ground.*)

Rainbow: (*from o.s.*) That's right, Zeph! (*Cut to frame her, hovering and dipping closer to point at him.*) You're coming with me!
Zephyr: (*smoothly*) You don't have to come up with some excuse to hang out with me, Rainbows. Let's just go for a fly and see where the day takes us. (*She snarls to herself and touches down.*)
Rainbow: We're going to Wonderbolts headquarters. (*advancing slowly on him, poking his chest, pacing away*) And I am gonna give you a job so simple and straightforward, not even *you* can weasel your way out of it!

(*After moving out of view, she flies quickly in to stare him down point-blank.*)

Rainbow: And the second you try, I'm gonna zap you with a storm cloud! Got it?
Zephyr: Oh, I got it. (*foreleg around shoulders, pulling her close*) I can already feel the electricity between us.

(*Fluttershy is left with no words to describe the sleazy Lothario tactics, but she somehow works up a humoring smile for the incensed Rainbow. Dissolve to an extreme close-up of a wadded-up*

piece of paper, which she nips away with her teeth, and cut to a longer shot. She is back in her cottage's living room, and the paper goes into a nearby trash can. It is one of several that litter a blanket spread over her couch—no bonus points for guessing who put it there; ditto for the self-aggrandizing photos on the wall and end table. The rest of the junk is swept into the can with a wing, and she sets the disorganized throw pillows back where they belong on the couch. As she catches a fold of the blanket in her mouth and pulls the whole thing straight, the sound of the door opening cuts in.)

Zephyr: (*from o.s.*) Rainbow Dash is crazy!

(*Cut to just behind the yellow pegasus; the door is open across from her, and Zephyr stands in it with scuff marks all over his body. His mane/tail are charred, smoking, and standing straight out as if he had just stuck a fork in a light socket—clearly Rainbow made good on her threat.*)

Zephyr: Okay, she expects me to do stuff right when she asks me to do it! (*stomping*) It's insane!
Fluttershy: (*bitterly*) So you just quit, again?
Zephyr: (*flopping onto couch*) "Escaped" is more like it. (*pulling blanket over himself*) Besides, what was I supposed to do?
Fluttershy: Keep trying? Finish something for once? Maybe that way you'd actually find something you like to do!
Zephyr: That all sounds fine for *your* friends, but it's just not me.
Fluttershy: Then I'm sorry, Zephyr, but I don't think you can live here.

(*Teeth lock on the blanket and fling it away; instantly Zephyr starts to shiver, but he stops upon realizing that she is not buying the act one bit.*)

Zephyr: (*climbing off couch*) Fine. I'll just go live in the woods like my fore-ponies before me.

(*The carryall is grabbed up; a photo comes off the wall; the lawn gnome is snatched away, angering Angel, who had been offering it a bowl of salad. He licks his chops at the prospect of more for himself, but Zephyr takes the food as well, leaving him to fall flat on his face as he leans in to eat. Cut to the exterior of the cottage as he strides away over the stream that runs through the property; Fluttershy watches him from the front door.*)

Zephyr: Guess the only Breeze this Zephyr can count on is his own!

(*Cut to a close-up of Fluttershy, who hangs her head sadly at this latest round of family dysfunction. Zoom in slowly and snap to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a patch of floor inside the cottage. Fluttershy leans into view, the handle of a dustpan in her mouth, and a broom sweeps into view toward it to add to its freight of*

food scraps. A longer shot puts her in the kitchen with Rainbow, the latter wielding the broom as the former turns to dump the load into her trash can and set the pan on top.)

Rainbow: Aw, cheer up, Fluttershy. I know it was hard, but you did the right thing. You couldn't let Zephyr pull the same stuff on you that he's always pulled on your folks.
Fluttershy: (*uncertainly*) I guess so.

(*A burst of urgent cheeping draws her attention off to one side; pan in that direction to stop on a bird perched in an open window. She turns toward it.*)

Fluttershy: Oh, hello, Constance. (*It tweets into her ear; she reacts with surprise.*) Oh? (*More.*) Oh, dear.

(*Her concerned look is met by a contemptuous grimace from Rainbow. Dissolve to a close-up of Zephyr's plastic mane-styling practice head—now further marked with a purple hoof print—somewhere in the Everfree Forest and zoom out slightly as he leans into view toward it. The coat scuffs have been augmented with random spatters of mud, and the mane/tail charring have given way to blond tangles with leaves caught in them. Completing the air of general dilapidation are an excess of facial stubble and two violet eyes that have shrunken to half-deranged points.*)

Zephyr: See, Wigford?

(*Longer shot: he has set up housekeeping in a small clearing, and the head stands on a pole driven into the ground. Around him are a ring of stones for a campfire site; his bowl of salad and a few mushrooms; a potted plant and stack of books; family photos taped up on a tree trunk; and a random agglomeration of sticks and fronds over a patch of leaves as a thoroughly substandard attempt at a lean-to. He has ditched the carryall.*)

Zephyr: The Breeze needs nopony!

(*Close-up of the salad/mushrooms and book stack.*)

Zephyr: (*from o.s., pointing at them*) We've got food… (*The lean-to; ditto.*) …shelter…

(*Now he crosses to the cold fire ring; a dirty, battered cooking pot stands alongside.*)

Zephyr: …just need to put the old kettle on.

(*Getting the handle in his teeth, he sets it atop the accumulated tinder in the ring, then straightens up with two rocks held in his front hooves. These are tapped lightly together and tossed down, where they utterly fail to touch off a blaze; he leans down over the ring with a petulant glare.*)

Zephyr: Come on, sticky-sticky. Make with the sparks.

(*His next brilliant idea is to clamp his teeth onto one end of a twig and bang the other against the pot a few times. This gets him nothing but a broken piece of wood and a capsized vessel that spills its contents into the ring. Letting the stub fall, he straightens up; now a self-portrait can be seen propped against a tree stump on this side of the campsite.*)

Zephyr: Ugh! What's a pony gotta do to find a decent stick around here?

(*He kicks the piece away, only for it to bounce up off the ring's stones and smack him in the nose. The mishap sends him into a sudden rage, and he begins to wreck the site piece by piece as the camera zooms out. Fluttershy and Rainbow are a few yards away, watching through a gap in the trees. Rainbow's next two lines are delivered in hushed tones.*)

Rainbow: I know he needs to learn to do things for himself, but—
Fluttershy: (*sighing*) I can't let him live like this.

(*With a final, feral yell, he bucks the main support pole of his lean-to, snapping it and causing the rest of it to collapse and bury him.*)

Rainbow: Actually, I don't think he'd make it through the night.

(*Fluttershy lets her head dip slightly in resigned acceptance of her brother's total ineptitude at looking after himself. Cut to an extreme close-up of the ruined lean-to; she steps up and prods a particular spot, and Zephyr's head breaks through with a gasp. After his eyes return to full focus, he takes in the sight of both mares now standing before him.*)

Zephyr: (*trying to sound casual*) Fluttershy! Hey! I was just, um, cozying up in my sleeping bag. (*He pulls the scattered fronds farther over himself.*) Ready to call it an early night. Such an exhausting day, you know?

(*The messy green head hits the bed of leaves and the violet eyes close in feigned sleep, but neither mare is even remotely convinced. Once he gives it up and cracks one eye open, Rainbow gestures toward a patch of sunny blue sky visible through the forest canopy.*)

Rainbow: It's noon.
Zephyr: (*grinning weakly*) You know me. Siesta.

(*A random branch topples over and clunks him squarely over the head, wiping out his artificial bonhomie and bringing him dangerously close to the verge of tears.*)

Zephyr: Ugh. I can't do this. (*covering eyes*) I can't do anything. (*Fluttershy steps over and lifts the branch away.*)
Fluttershy: Zephyr, you're smart and talented. (*sitting on haunches*) You *could* do anything if you just tried.

Zephyr: And what if I give everything I have and still fail? Honestly, I think it's better not to try at all.
Rainbow: But then you won't ever do anything.
Zephyr: I don't expect you two to understand. I mean, when have you ever failed? You've literally helped save Equestria, like, a dozen times. (*Fluttershy stands up.*)
Fluttershy: And I was worried that I'd fail every time. Sometimes you have to do things, even though you might fail.
Zephyr: But failing is the worst! (*She leans down to him.*)
Fluttershy: And quitting doesn't feel much better, does it?
Zephyr: (*reluctantly*) No. (*She straightens up.*)
Fluttershy: So here's the deal. You can come back with me, but you have to do *exactly* what I say. No exceptions.

(*The humbled free spirit looks to her, then to Rainbow, and finally resigns himself to it.*)

Zephyr: I will literally do anything you ask me, if it means I don't have to stay here.

(*A hopeful smile passes between the two mares. Dissolve to a hallway in the upper story of Fluttershy's cottage; she leads a freshly-cleaned Zephyr along the way as Rainbow brings up the rear.*)

Fluttershy: (*to him*) Okay. You know what you have to do, right?
Zephyr: Beg for help, then quit when I get frustrated.

(*He tacks on a goofy little grin, only to get a double-barreled look of purest venom from Fluttershy and Rainbow.*)

Zephyr: (*laughing*) Just kidding! Total opposite of that. Got it.

(*Cut to a close-up of a shut door, which swings open to expose all three in the hallway—the view has shifted to inside a room. One stallion on the verge of a panic attack musters the courage to enter at Fluttershy's gentle gesture.*)

Rainbow: (*to her, skeptically*) You think he can do it?

***Gentle acoustic guitar melody, leisurely 4 (D flat major*)**

Fluttershy: Everypony has times in their lives
When their hearts are filled with doubt
(*Zephyr finds his practice head and an assortment of mane care products set up at a vanity mirror. The hoof print has been cleaned off its "face."*)
Zephyr: Frustration builds up inside
And it makes you want to shout
Mandolin, backing strings, bass, light percussion in (E flat major)
(*Fluttershy and Rainbow step in and guide him toward the counter.*)

Rainbow: But if you just take that first step
The next one will appear
(*His book of mane style photos from Act One is set down and opened.*)
Fluttershy, Rainbow: And you find you can walk, then run, then fly
(*Both drift slowly out of view as Zephyr regards himself in the glass. Overhead shot of the room; they circle above him. Zoom out slowly.*)

Guitar/mandolin out; flute, drums in with piano accents

Into the stratosphere

(*Dissolve to a close-up of him; they land to either side and give him an encouraging nudge.*)

Fluttershy, Rainbow: You've got to give it your best
So you can pass the test
Give it everything that you've got
(*He begins to pick up implements from the counter.*)
And we know you can win
You just have to begin
(*Vertical panels slide in from above/below on either side of him, leaving the screen tiled with images of all three.*)
Have to give it your very best shot

(*Sweating bullets, Zephyr drops the comb in his teeth and pushes their two panels out of view.*)

Mandolin, additional woodwinds in

Zephyr: There are times when you want to give up
(*walking out*) When you think that you can't go on
(*He backs up hastily before their unexpected advance.*)
Fluttershy, Rainbow: But if you fight through with all of your might
You will find that you can't go wrong
(*Still sweating, he eyes the head's crazy-quilt style and takes up his comb in his mouth to try and bring a little sense to it.*)
That you could do it all along

All instruments out except mandolin/strings

(*Snap to black, against which a spotlight flicks on to pick out Fluttershy.*)

Fluttershy: Everypony has times in their lives
When their hearts are filled with doubt
(*Rainbow stands up in the fore, visible even without a spot.*)
Rainbow: But if you just give it your all
You'll start to work it out

Bass/percussion in (F major)

(*Close-up of Zephyr, who plies a pair of scissors with gusto; bits of fake hair fly back at him.*)

Zephyr: And I know I can't give up too soon
Get myself in the zone
(*The clippings pile up near his book of photos.*)
And I find I can walk, then run
Trumpet in
Fluttershy, Rainbow, Zephyr: Then fly
Zephyr: And I can do it on my own
Woodwinds in
(*He punctuates the end of this line with a little grunt of pride, after which two vertical panels slide in from opposite sides to fill the screen—Rainbow at left, Fluttershy right.*)
Fluttershy, Rainbow: You can do it on your own

(*These are pulled away to give a view of the mirror; the head is missing, but Zephyr pops into view and holds it up—with a mare's style that is a bit rough around the edges, but still shows an honest effort and a decent bit of potential on his part.*)

Zephyr: I can do it on my own
(*softer, leaning it gently against his forehead*)
I can do it on my own

Song ends

Zephyr: I did it. I actually finished something! By myself!
Rainbow: And it looks exactly like it's supposed to.
Fluttershy: I knew you could do it, Zephyr.
Zephyr: (*grinning*) I didn't! (*gently*) But I do now. Thanks for believing in me, sis. (*They embrace.*)
Fluttershy: That's what big sisters are for.
Rainbow: So, uh, Zeph, now that you've accomplished this, what's next?
Zephyr: (*gleefully, rearing up briefly*) Anything I want! I mean, the sky's the limit, right?

(*The two-mare cheering section gives him a hard look, which does wonders to tamp down his momentary flare of manic energy.*)

Zephyr: But…you know, I've got some baby steps in mind.

(*Grin. Dissolve to a close-up of Rainbow seated at the kitchen table in Mr. and Mrs. Shy's house, pushing away a plate flecked with food scraps.*)

Rainbow: Thanks for dinner, Mr. and Mrs. Shy. (*Chuckle.*) It was great, as usual. (*Cut to them, sitting across from her with dirty plates of their own.*)
Mrs. Shy: Thank *you*, dear, for not giving up on Zephyr. After all these years of pining for him— (*taking Mr. Shy's hoof*) —it must be so satisfying to see him on the right track.

(*The daredevil is so floored by her hint of any sort of attraction between them that she can only choke out a tiny noise of pure shock. Fluttershy is quick to lean in and take up the slack.*)

Fluttershy: Have you heard from Zephyr? Is he doing well?
Mr. Shy: I tell you, he's a brand new pony, so full of drive and determination.
Rainbow: (*chuckling*) That's great.

(*And here he comes, throwing the front door open and parading in. He has donned a dark gray mortarboard cap and graduation gown over a white dress shirt collar and red necktie, and a red stole hangs around his shoulders. The next line is delivered in his original boisterous manner.*)

Zephyr: Guess who graduated from mane therapy training!

(*The cap is pulled off and scaled across the kitchen to land on Rainbow's head at a very cockeyed angle; she laughs and flips it back from her eyes as Fluttershy grins.*)

Rainbow: Awesome! (*Mr. and Mrs. Shy cross to him.*)
Mr. Shy: Congratulations, son. (*They embrace; Rainbow puts the cap back on Zephyr's head.*)
Mrs. Shy: (*touching his face*) You look so handsome!
Fluttershy: (*approaching*) I'm so proud of you, Zephyr.
Zephyr: It was only a matter of time before they recognized my true genius.

(*A squint-eyed, sidewise look from the big sister prompts him to dial down the bravado.*)

Zephyr: But actually doing the work probably helped. (*She grins.*) And I wouldn't have if it weren't for you. (*They hug.*)
Fluttershy: Oh, I just gave you some encouragement. You did this on your own.
Zephyr: And honestly, right now I feel like I can do anything. (*Pause.*) Except find a place. (*pulling both parents closer*) I can still crash here for a few days, right?

(*These two are rather taken aback, but both Fluttershy and Rainbow react with good-natured "here we go again" smiles—the former adding an eye roll, the latter a little shake of her head. Fade to black.*)

SPICE UP YOUR LIFE

Written by Michael Vogel
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Story editing by Josh Haber
Supervising direction by Jim Miller
Directed by Denny Lu, Tim Stuby

Transcribed by Alan Back (ajback@yahoo.com)

Notes: In describing song cues and instrumentation up to this point, I have been able to name instruments with which I am familiar. However, I must admit to a near-total ignorance of Indian music, which forms the basis for the song in this episode. Anyone who knows more about this field than I do is welcome to make suggestions or corrections, which I will consider for inclusion in the transcript.

Unless specifically stated otherwise, all mentions of ponies in Canterlot refer to unicorns.

Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to the strings of glowing gems that hang from the tree-stump chandelier in the throne room of the Castle of Friendship. On the start of the next line, tilt down to frame Twilight Sparkle and her five friends in their seats around the central map table, which is bare. Spike stands at its center, glaring down at the lustrous surface, and Starlight Glimmer stands between Twilight and Rainbow Dash.*)

Twilight: As you've all probably noticed— (*Spike bends to tap at a spot.*) —it's been quite some time since the map has sent us on a mission of friendship.
Spike: Yeah! Ever since Starlight messed with it to go back in time and tried to change history. (*Starlight manages a strained, sheepish grin.*)
Twilight: (*sourly*) Yes, since then. (*smiling*) But as part of her studies— (*She and Starlight smile at each other.*) —Starlight's been assisting me. And together we think we've come up with a spell that will get it working again.

(*Varied positive reactions around the table; as Spike scratches at it, he is pulled away in his boss's magic and she leaves her seat.*)

Twilight: Now, without further ado…

(*She and Starlight fire up their horns, a tendril of energy swirling up from each. Tilt up to show them intertwining in a helical pattern that terminates in a brightly glowing ball just below the chandelier, then cut to frame the whole room. Beams lance down from this to connect with the cutie marks on the six thrones, each in its occupant's coat color, and these in turn fire out arcs of*

power that meet at the center of the table. Zoom in as blinding white light spreads out to cover the surface and subsides to reveal the map that the group relied on for their missions throughout Season Five. Flickers of static give way to the unblemished scale model, followed by awed murmurs from the group, and the camera cuts to a close-up of one spot as the cutie marks of Twilight and Fluttershy pop into being above it. When the thrones and the room proper are seen next, the rest of the magical light show is gone.)

Pinkie Pie: (*from o.s.*) Fluttershy and Twilight in Appleloosa! (*They vanish; cut to her.*) No… (*Her mark and Rainbow's appear.*) Me and Rainbow Dash in Las Pegasus! (*Gone.*) No…

(*The stretch in front of Twilight/Rainbow/Starlight; the marks of the first two wink in over a stretch of mountains.*)

Pinkie: (*from o.s.*) Rainbow Dash and Twilight in Yakyakistan! (*Gone again.*) No… (*Two copies of Twilight's mark show up together elsewhere.*) Twilight and Twilight in Twilight's castle!

(*As soon as these go bye-bye, the camera cuts to the slightly hyperventilating pink mare, who sees a copy of her own mark float slowly toward her.*)

Pinkie: Me…me… (*Squeal.*) …me… (*Rarity's three blue gems drift after the balloons.*) …and Rarity! Ooh!

(*Close-up of the map; the two images make their way over the miniature countryside.*)

Pinkie: (*from o.s.*) I hope it's some faraway place that nopony has gone before! (*Cut to her and Rarity.*)
Rarity: (*laughing*) Well, maybe not *too* far away. An adventure somewhere that has modern conveniences would be preferable.

(*Close-up of the mountain on which Canterlot is built; the marks settle down and begin to circle it, prompting a deep gasp from the o.s. unicorn. Zoom out to frame her.*)

Rarity: Canterlot! This is wonderful! I can check the boutique! Perhaps there'll be some social events that we can attend! (*Gasp.*) I'll have to pack extra outfits!

(*During her next-to-last sentence, the camera cuts to her perspective and pans slowly across five mares and one dragon, all of whom display assorted degrees of irritation at her narrow mental focus. The only one not seen in this shot is Pinkie. After she finishes, cut back to her, now absolutely enraptured by the idea of visiting the royal city.*)

Rarity: What will I wear? (*Pan to Pinkie, a trifle confounded.*)
Pinkie: You know, some ponies get excited about the silliest things.

(*She punctuates the end of this observation with an eye roll and grin. Fade to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of a train chugging toward Canterlot during the day. Zoom in slowly and dissolve to Pinkie and Rarity making their way down one of the opulent streets—one hopping, the other opting for a sedate walk.*)

Rarity: (*sighing placidly*) Now then. As far as finding a friendship problem— (*Close-up; Pinkie stops.*) —I suggest we start at the castle and begin to question the proper— (*Zoom out; Pinkie leans toward her.*)
Pinkie: Oh, Rarity. You don't *find* a friendship problem, it finds *you!* We just need to go with the flow and eventually, *ka-blam!* (*poking at her forehead*) We get friendship problem-ed right between the eyes.
Rarity: Well, this *is* a team effort. So if you feel we should go with the flow, then with the flow we shall go. (*Pause.*) Where is the flow saying we should go?
Pinkie: You know Canterlot. What do *you* think we should do?
Rarity: Hm. Take your pick. Culture, *couture*, cuisine.

(*The growl of an empty stomach interrupts her suggestion spree, and an extreme close-up reveals it as Pinkie's. Zoom out to frame both as she offers an embarrassed grin.*)

Rarity: Oh, my. Well, it sounds like your stomach is saying we should flow towards some lunch? I know just where to go!

(*Clock wipe to the pair at the end of a different block, several of whose businesses sport a sign above their doors that shows three horseshoes.*)

Rarity: Restaurant Row! (*Cut to a slow pan down the busy street; she continues o.s.*) The absolute best place for fine dining in all of Equestria. (*Back to Pinkie.*)
Pinkie: Oooooh! So many choices! Where should we go? (*zipping from one to another*) This one? That one? Those ones? (*She hops back to Rarity.*)
Rarity: (*pointing up overhead*) Any establishments that have *this*.

(*Cut to her perspective of "this"—the three-horseshoe sign over the door—and zoom in slowly.*)

Rarity: The three-hoof rating. (*Back to her and Pinkie.*)
Pinkie: Um, whose hooves?
Rarity: Why, Zesty Gourmand, the Queen of Cuisine. When it comes to food, she is the ultimate authority in Canterlot, and thus all Equestria. She judges a restaurant on cuisine, décor, and presentation. Without her approval, a restaurant simply cannot survive.
Pinkie: What's so important about her approval?

Rarity: Zesty grew up around fine dining, and everypony hangs on her every word when it comes to cuisine.
Pinkie: Wow! (*rising briefly onto hind legs*) Then the food here must be amazing! (*Rarity moves toward the door…*) Lead the way, partner! (*…and magically opens it.*) Whee!

(*With a giggle, she hops along to fall in behind. Wipe to the two inside, seated facing each other in one of several booths, as a well-dressed waiter stallion floats a covered serving dish on the table. Square-themed paintings hang on the wall, and each booth is appointed with a cubical overhead light and an identically styled lamp on the wall end. Close-up: the top is lifted away to expose two plates that each carry the same three bite-size morsels and a drizzle of sauce. An awed gasp from the o.s. Rarity; zoom out slowly as both lean over the food, Pinkie more perplexed than appreciative.*)

Rarity: Oh, my! (*The waiter's magic settles one plate in front of her.*) Such presentation!

(*The other is set in front of Pinkie and the tray is levitated away, and the white mare wastes no time in bringing one bite up with her field and chewing blissfully. Her reverie yields to a confused stare as the flavor hits her tongue.*)

Rarity: Oh. (*Smack lips, then smile weakly.*) Ah, yes…very nice.

(*Across the way, Pinkie solves the dual problem of an empty stomach and a lack of a horn by simply slamming her whole face onto her plate. When she yanks free a split-second later, popping loose like a giant suction cup, she is chewing all the cuisine in one thoroughly uncivilized mouthful. It too disagrees with her palate, but she manages to swallow the lot and let her tongue loll out with a sound of disgust.*)

Pinkie: Maybe I'm not in the mood for… (*whispering, pointing at plate*) …whatever this is? Can we try someplace else?

(*The waiter is now standing close enough to hear every word of this last, but limits his reaction to a lowered eyebrow and the faintest of frowns. Clock wipe to the pair in a booth at another restaurant; except for the slightly different color scheme, and the fact that the lights and paintings are now circle/sphere-themed, it is identical to the first. The waiter on duty here is even a dead ringer for the one there, apart from a different coloration that matches this place. As before, Pinkie and Rarity sit with small empty plates before them and Pinkie chews over whatever they have been served here, finally voicing an opinion once she swallows.*)

Pinkie: Yecch. (*Rarity throws a placating grin to the waiter.*) Maybe one more stop?

(*Another clock wipe. Another nearly identical establishment, but with triangular paintings and trapezoidal light fixtures. Another waiter who matches the first two except for his colors. Another two empty little plates. This time, a mortified Rarity averts her eyes as Pinkie finishes chewing the latest offering and again lets her tongue hang out.*)

Pinkie: Blecch! (*pushing plate away*) Nope!

(*Clock wipe to the pair on the sidewalk, Rarity closing the door of this restaurant with her aura.*)

Pinkie: Maybe instead of trusting somepony else's hooves, *I* should pick the next place?
Rarity: (*groaning loudly*) Very well.

(*The pink nose sniffs the air, back and forth, and the blue eyes pop wide open over a joyous smile as she starts to hop away. Her movements take her to a chow house on the other side of the street, then to a spot very close to the camera—just in time to get a lungful of an aroma that begins to waft in from somewhere o.s. A gasp, a grin, and she hops off toward the source; cut to within a side alley as she bounds in, followed by Rarity. Pasted on the wall is a small sign that depicts the silhouette of an elephant's head; an arrow is painted next to this, pointed down the alley. In short order Pinkie has gone as far as she can along this path, due to the fact that it ends at the front entrance of a building whose architectural style strongly resembles that of India. The color scheme displays warm reds, oranges, and yellows, with gray accents to match the elephant head painted above the open front door. A red/yellow blossom forms its backdrop, and a spoon is clutched in the trunk; above it, a plain square of wood has been nailed up. The smell that attracted Pinkie is emanating from within.*)

Rarity: (*puzzled*) The Tasty Treat. It's very…rustic. (*whispering*) It looks like it hasn't even been rated!

(*On the end of this, cut to a close- up of the unmarked square and zoom in as she points at it. The camera then cuts back to the two.*)

Pinkie: Thank goodness!

(*She hops into the place with a giggle, and Rarity goes in after her with some trepidation and telekinetically shuts the door behind herself. Cut to a close-up of her, looking around with a degree of unease that gradually deepens into borderline horror, then cut to her perspective. The dining room is laid out with an abundance of low stools and couches around small tables, and multicolored canopies hang from the ceiling. At the far end, next to the kitchen entrance, is a reception counter backed with a copy of the elephant-head graphic above the front door. Several of the pictures on the walls show pachyderms as well. The overall effect, accentuated by the exotic table lamps and overhead light fixtures, is that of an indulgent lounging chamber in an Indian rajah's palace. Pinkie has already seated herself at one of the tables, and she waves as the camera zooms in slowly. The rest of the place is bereft of customers.*)

(*Cut to the table as Rarity cautiously steps up and sits, misgivings coming through loud and clear in her every move.*)

Rarity: Are we sure they're open? (*Pinkie sniffs deeply.*)
Pinkie: Mmm…it smells open!

(*A clatter of cookware snaps her back to the here and now, and a deep orange mare emerges from the kitchen. She wears a light yellow garment very similar to the "kurti" of Indian culture. Close-fitting, round-edged collar; half-length sleeves for the forelegs; hem falling at her midsection; blue edging, with small red dots around each sleeve cuff. A red scarf or kerchief with gold ornaments at the edges is tied at the collar; she also wears jeweled gold earrings and a plainer gold headband to hold back the thick curls of her two-tone, dark grayish-purple mane. A few strands have sprung loose both here and from her tail, held with a jeweled red band at its base. She has red-violet eyes rimmed in black and a cutie mark of a blue-violet crocus blossom, and a few red bracelets encircle one hind leg. This is Saffron Masala, whose irritated expression quickly shifts into one of bewilderment upon catching sight of the new arrivals. She gasps softly before smiling and speaking with an Indian accent.*)

Saffron: Are you here for lunch?
Pinkie: Yes indeedy!
Saffron: (*crossing to table*) I'm Saffron Masala, the chef here at the Tasty Treat, the most exotic cuisine in Canterlot. Would you like to hear about the specials?
Rarity: We're actually in a bit of a hu—
Pinkie: Yes, please!
Saffron: (*proudly*) We have a curried oat cake!
Pinkie: We'll take one!
Saffron: Uh, and a grass sandwich that has been marinated overnight in a mustard-Dijon dressing.
Pinkie: How can we say no to *that?*
Saffron: (*to Rarity*) A-And for you?
Rarity: (*hastily*) Oh, me? Oh, I'm fine, thank you.

(*Saffron heads for the kitchen to put the order in.*)

Rarity: (*under her breath, singsong*) No rating!

(*To which Pinkie only sighs, just before a heavyset stallion in a very bad mood plods past the table with a groan. His coat is slightly lighter than Saffron's, with a hint of brown, and his two-tone mane/tail are short, thick, and dark red-brown, with heavy eyebrows and a little mustache to match. Same eyes; same kurti-styled garment, but this one is brown with simple yellow edging at neckline and cuffs; a green necklace peeks out from beneath the collar. His cutie mark is a bowl of yellow rice with spices sprinkled around it. This is Coriander Cumin, Saffron's father, and he too has a pronounced Indian accent. As he speaks, he levitates stools and sets them upside down on the tables.*)

Coriander: (*to himself*) I told her not to cook anything, anyway, they won't—
Pinkie: Hiya! What's your name?
Coriander: Coriander Cumin.
Pinkie: Are you a chef here too?
Coriander: My daughter cooks. I host! (*He crosses to the other side…*)
Pinkie: Then why are you stacking chairs? (*…and resumes his work.*)

Coriander: Without customers, I have nopony to host for! So, I stack. (*Saffron returns, three plates floating in her hold.*)
Saffron: Father, stop it! Don't close up the restaurant around our guests!
Coriander: What does it matter? When they leave, nopony else will be coming in! (*Cut to the table; Saffron serves Pinkie and Rarity.*)
Saffron: Well, your attitude isn't going to bring anyone in! (*moving o.s. toward him*) Can't you at least pretend to be positive?

(*She is just in time to miss Pinkie's full-face attack on her plate as in the first restaurant she and Rarity tried for lunch. A few loud slurps, and she comes up for air with half the food gone.*)

Pinkie: So-o-o good! (*Down she goes again to assault the remains.*)
Coriander: (*from o.s.*) You are doing enough pretending for the both of us! (*Cut to them, framed between the two visitors' heads.*) Nopony here wants to try anything new! I know when to throw in the towel! (*Head-on view of Pinkie and Rarity.*)
Rarity: Um, Pinkie, perhaps we should excuse ourselves.

(*The equine vacuum cleaner straightens up and scoops the last fragment off her plate.*)

Pinkie: Oh, Rarity! (*holding it out to her*) Try this!

(*So the image-conscious pony takes a little nibble and is surprised by the taste.*)

Rarity: Ooh! (*Coriander paces past.*)
Saffron: (*following*) Maybe if you would listen to my ideas for once!
Coriander: (*sarcastically, turning to her*) Oh, yes! I did not move halfway across Equestria for my daughter that I never listen to!

(*The table; Pinkie's eyes pop and she spits out whatever she has been chewing on.*)

Pinkie: (*hushed*) Rarity! (*poking her own forehead*) I think that friendship problem just ka-blammed us right between the eyes! (*Rarity's perspective of the arguing duo.*)
Rarity: (*pointing at them*) These two? Ooh, I don't know, darling. (*Back to her and Pinkie.*) The food *is* excellent, but…I'm not sure there's much you and I can do to help them.
Coriander: (*from o.s.*) Pfft! What would you have me do? (*Cut to frame all four; he is addressing Saffron.*) We can't even get Zesty Gourmand to come to our restaurant! She took one look at how empty it was and said it wasn't even worth rating!
Rarity: (*throwing forelegs up*) *That's it!*
Pinkie: (*mimicking her*) Yes! (*Very long pause.*) Uh, what's it? (*All four legs come down.*)
Rarity: The flow *has* led us here! This is our mission! (*They cross to Coriander and Saffron.*) We are going to get *you* a three-hoof rating and save your restaurant! I can get Zesty Gourmand here.
Pinkie: (*gasping happily*) And I can pack this place with ponies!
Coriander: Hmph! And how do you intend to do such a thing?
Pinkie, Rarity: Just leave it to us!

(*Daughter grins; father just raises one very heavy, very quizzical eyebrow. Fade to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to the dining room. As Saffron paces the floor nervously, Coriander levitates a stack of plates into a box and Pinkie licks clean the one on which her lunch was served.*)

Saffron: Father, will you *please* stop packing things! (*Close-up of Coriander.*)
Coriander: When the lovely pony comes back and says she couldn't convince Zesty Gourmand to come visit us, we will need to pack all this up! (*adding another plate to box*) I'm just getting a head start. (*Pan to Pinkie on the next line.*)

Pinkie: You really don't know Rarity.

(*Comes now the sound of the door opening; cut to the lovely pony standing just inside, having shut it behind herself.*)

Rarity: (*singsong*) I've done it!
Pinkie: (*smugly*) See?
Rarity: (*crossing to them; Saffron joins the group*) It took all of my charm and cajoling, but I was able to convince Zesty Gourmand to come and try the food!
Saffron: What is the catch?
Rarity: Ah…yes. Well, um, there is a bit of a challenge. The only time she can make herself available is…tonight.
Coriander: (*walking off*) Pfft! Oh, yeah, right.
Saffron: (*to Rarity*) What is it? (*Zoom in on them and Pinkie.*)
Rarity: Zesty rates a restaurant on cuisine, décor, *and* presentation—and she has *very* specific tastes. If she's coming tonight, there *is* quite a bit of work that needs to get done.
Pinkie: Like what?
Rarity: Oh, a tweak here, a tuck there, some slight modifications to the menu. (*Laugh.*) We just need the place to feel more cosmopolitan.
Coriander: Pfft!
Saffron: Father, after Rarity went to all of this trouble for us, can't we at least try?
Rarity: Why don't I stay behind with Coriander to get the restaurant ready for Zesty's arrival? (*to Pinkie*) You and Saffron can try and drum up some business.
Pinkie: (*saluting*) One packed restaurant, coming right up!

(*The newly appointed street marketing team heads o.s. toward the exit.*)

Rarity: (*crossing floor*) Coriander, I understand your trepidation. But I promise you, we will get those hooves by making this place feel just like all of the other restaurants on Restaurant Row!

(*The sound of the opening door is heard under her last words; after she finishes, cut to Pinkie and Saffron on the front steps. The unicorn pulls it shut with her field.*)

Saffron: (*sighing*) I hope my father doesn't drive Rarity crazy.
Pinkie: (*as they descend the steps*) It'll be fine. Rarity's gonna make sure that the Tasty Treat is the most unique and beautiful restaurant in Canterlot. (*They start off up the alley.*) Not like all those stuffy places on Restaurant Row.

Upbeat pop shuffle melody dominated by Indian instruments, brisk 4
(Modulate between A major and A minor)
Instrumentation drops back as Rarity begins to sing

(*Dissolve to Coriander seated at a table inside and zoom in slowly as Rarity sits next to him; a few documents are spread out on the table.*)

Rarity: Here's what I know, if you want to succeed
(*She floats the pages up; each bears the coveted three-hoof mark and a photo of a different restaurant aspect—food, interior design, waiter.*)
You must follow the trends, that's the key
If you want to show that you've got what it takes
You must be what they want you to be

Instrumentation strengthens with bass guitar, then drops back somewhat for next verse

(*The door swings open under magical control, and the unicorn responsible—a paint-smeared stallion in overalls and cap—strides in. Two others, a stallion and mare, follow him and start floating tables out of the way and preparing to work. The mare dips a brush in a bucket and quickly paints over the entire screen, the view changing with every streak to show Saffron out in the street. Pinkie steps up from behind her, showing that she has donned a bright yellow kurti and magenta scarf to parallel Saffron's outfit.*)

Pinkie: Here's what I know, your food is so good
The flavor's so fancy and free
(*She produces a stack of flyers and an arrow sign marked with the Tasty Treat's logo, and passes the first of these items into Saffron's levitating hold.*)
You just need to show that unique sense of taste
(*spinning sign*) Go on, be yourself, let them see

(*It zooms past the camera; behind its tail, the view wipes to a split-screen view of her and Rarity striding toward center in the Tasty Treat. Rarity's half is being overhauled to show the three-horseshoe logo, while Pinkie's has the original color scheme and elephant head.*)

Instrumentation strengthens

Pinkie, Rarity: It's gonna work, I know it's gonna work

(*Coriander moves toward Rarity, Saffron toward Pinkie.*)

It's gonna work out just fine, trust me

(*Rarity's design card floats by; behind it; wipe to her and Coriander and zoom out as she uses her field to pull down all the canopy hangings.*)

It's gonna work, I swear it's gonna work

(*One stretch is yanked past the camera; behind it, wipe to Pinkie and Saffron in the street, putting the word out to the passersby.*)

It's gonna work out just fine, you'll see

(*One after another, they turn up their noses and walk away, dropping or ignoring the proffered flyers. Rarity's waiter card floats by, the view wiping behind it to show her eyeing it and a vest/shirt/bow-tie combo matching the one worn by the stallion in the photo. Both items hover in her field, and the camera zooms out as she passes the clothes to Coriander.*)

Instrumentation drops back

Rarity: You need to change if you want to compete

(*A changing-room curtain is floated down around him.*)

But fear not, for I know what to do

(*It is whisked away; now he is wearing the fancy duds and his mane/tail/mustache have been re-styled, much to his surprise. She floats the cover off a dish on a table to show some of the Tasty Treat's usual fare. This is swiftly replaced with a plate that matches her food card: the avant-garde "meal" she and Pinkie got at the avant-garde slop chutes in Act One.*)

I know it feels strange, but trust me, when we're done

(*She levitates the new food up so he can try it.*)

We'll make sure that you're a hit too

Bass out

(*Pinkie's arrow sign drifts past; behind it, wipe to her hopping around Saffron on hooves and rump, a rubber pig snout briefly covering her nose. The flyers and sign are out of sight.*)

Pinkie: Don't ever change, being different is good

(*Slow pan along a row of waiter stallions, all identical and floating covered dishes as they stand in front of their restaurants.*)

Don't let what others do be your cue

(*She pops up in the fore.*)

Never rearrange 'cause somepony said you should

Just trust your heart, it will know what to do

Instrumentation strengthens

(*The same split screen as in the first chorus, with Pinkie and Rarity advancing toward center from their respective sides.*)

Pinkie, Rarity: It's gonna work, I know it's gonna work
(*Here come Coriander and Saffron as before; the stallion is back to his original appearance.*)
It's gonna work out just fine, trust me
(*The two halves slide apart to show Pinkie and Saffron working the street—spinning the sign and throwing flyers to the crowd.*)
It's gonna work, I swear it's gonna work
(*More noses are turned up; more hooves depart; more papers hit the dirt. The logo above the Tasty Treat's door is floated down into a pile of scraps as Rarity and Coriander watch from the steps. The exterior paint job has been stripped off except for orange/magenta trim around the window frames and the edge of the roof.*)
It's gonna work out just fine, you'll see

Instrumentation drops back slightly

(*Pan quickly to Pinkie and Saffron, without their materials.*)

Pinkie: Be unique
(*To Rarity, straightening the bow tie of the upscale waiter duds Coriander has put on again.*)
Rarity: Just be the same
(*To Pinkie.*)
Pinkie: Trust your heart
(*To Rarity, now standing on a street.*)
Rarity: You'll make your name

(*Two horizontal panels slide into view from opposite sides to fill the screen: Rarity and Coriander on top, Pinkie and Saffron on bottom. From here, cut to each in turn, showing off her idea of the optimum décor.*)

Pinkie, Rarity: We'll help you every step of the way
(*Two vertical panels slide in, each showing half of one mare's face so that they merge to form a complete white/pink visage. They are quickly replaced by father and daughter in the same style.*)
Because we know what you need to do and you should know it too

Instrumentation strengthens

(*The same split screen as in the first two choruses, with Pinkie and Rarity advancing toward center from their respective sides.*)

Pinkie, Rarity: It's gonna work, I know it's gonna work
(*Here come Coriander and Saffron as before; Coriander is back to his original appearance.*)
It's gonna work out just fine, trust me
(*The panels slide apart; now Rarity addresses Coriander, with his new-and-improved appearance. Another slide frames Pinkie and Saffron outside.*)
It's gonna work, I swear it's gonna work
(*The remodeling crew exits the restaurant.*)

It’s gonna work out just fine, you’ll see

(*Pinkie, meanwhile, has taken up a bullhorn to bring in the crowd as Saffron passes out flyers. Inside, five nouvelle-cuisine plates are set down in a row; outside, five locals spurn the ads held before them. Cut to a long shot of the dispersing would-be patrons and zoom out slowly to put Pinkie and Saffron in the fore. The sun has begun to set, and Pinkie is carrying her arrow while Saffron’s hooves are empty—the flyers have ended up on the street and sidewalk.*)

Song ends in A major

Saffron: (*sighing exasperatedly*) The day is almost over, and we haven’t found any ponies! What will we do?
Pinkie: Try harder! (*moving to center of street*) Fillies and gentle-colts! (*spinning sign*) Check out the super-stupendous and amazing cuisine of the Tasty Treat! Grand re-opening tonight!

(*A weary Saffron and two skeptical mares gather in around her, both of whom were among Rarity’s customers in “Canterlot Boutique.” One is the yellow-orange mare with a makeup compact cutie mark; the other is the pale pinkish-gray one with a mark of red chili peppers and seeds.*)

Makeup mare: How many hooves does it have?
Saffron: (*smiling eagerly*) No hooves yet, but hopefully soon. (*The two onlookers are not impressed.*)
Pepper mare: (*as both walk off*) Well, when it gets rated, let us know.
Pinkie: (*growling, throwing sign down*) Those stupid hooves!

(*Caught on a chance air current, the cardboard arrow describes a high, fluttering arc over the street and embeds itself, point down, in front of a set of dark blue-green hooves in close-up. A wristwatch encircles one foreleg, and a matching belt secures the hem of a light green shirt with white edging. A stallion’s voice with a Minnesota accent speaks up.*)

Stallion: Oh, look at this, hon!

(*Longer shot: he is an earth pony with a short, two-tone dark gray mane/tail/mustache and golden brown eyes, and the garment is a golf shirt. Next to him stands a yellow-orange earth pony mare in a green blouse over a white top; two-tone curly orange mane/tail, the former topped by a red baseball cap; green eyes behind horn-rimmed glasses; cutie mark of an orange slice. Her voice carries the same accent as his; this, combined with their general appearance and the fanny packs strapped around both midsections, suggests that they are tourists on a visit. The stallion’s cutie mark cannot be seen due to her position blocking a clear view of his haunch.*)

Tourist mare: Oh, the Tasty Treat. Do you think that’s a restaurant, sugar? (*Saffron crosses to them; Pinkie zips over.*)
Pinkie: Yes! Yes, it is!

Tourist stallion: We came to Canterlot from Whinnyapolis to be adventurous, but so far, the food in all these hoity-toity places tastes like somepony cooked up nothin' with a side of nothin'.
Saffron: (*bowing, gesturing*) Well, please, come try the Tasty Treat. (*They start in that direction.*) I think it's going to be exactly what you're looking for.

(*Zoom in to a close-up as she and Pinkie trade a beaming high five, then dissolve to an extreme close-up of a bottle of window cleaner being magically manipulated by Rarity to spray a glass pane. A rag floats up to wipe, accompanied by a contented sigh from the o.s. fashionista; on the start of the next line, tilt down to frame her. She has been cleaning one of the front windows, through which the sky is seen in an evening shade.*)

Rarity: This is going to be exactly what Zesty is looking for!

(*Sound of the door opening; cut to it. In walk Pinkie and Saffron, the latter now carrying the sign and setting it down.*)

Saffron: Father, we're ba—

(*The greeting dies in her throat, replaced by a double gasp of utter shock.*)

Pinkie: (*levelly*) Rarity, what did you do?

(*Cut to their perspective of the dining room. It has been refitted to become a near-exact duplicate of the three high-end joints from Act One, with small square tables and stools lining both sides and diamond-shaped paintings on all the walls. Cylindrical overhead lights and table lamps provide the illumination, and Coriander stands before the reception counter at the far end—having put on his vest/shirt/bow tie and fixed up his coiffure. A plate of the bite-size food hovers in his field.*)

Coriander: (*woodenly*) Welcome to the Tasty Treat. You can eat here if you want, or not. Who cares?

(*Back to the door, now closed; Rarity has joined Pinkie and Saffron for a look around, and the sign is out of sight.*)

Rarity: I know. Isn't it perfect? Zesty is sure to love it.
Pinkie: I thought we were trying to make this the most unique and beautiful restaurant in Canterlot, not make it exactly like every other restaurant!
Rarity: (*laughing airily*) We want to help our friends by getting them three hooves. That will only happen if this *is* like every other restaurant.

(*Four eyes give her a very confused look just before Coriander reaches them, plate aloft. Saffron cannot believe the sight of it.*)

Saffron: Father! (*Close-up of it; she continues o.s.*) What is *this?!?* (*Cut to a horrified Pinkie.*)

Pinkie: Not that! Anything but that!
Coriander: This is what we must cook if we want to succeed here!
Saffron: (*voice shaking*) This isn't what I wanted! (*taking hold of plate, floating it away*) I wanted Canterlot to like us for us! (*Pinkie rounds on Rarity.*)
Pinkie: Rarity, how could you ruin the restaurant? (*Rarity sputters through her disbelief.*)
Rarity: We've helped *save* the restaurant. Now, where are the other guests? How many other ponies are coming?

(*Pinkie and Saffron exchange an unsettled sidewise glance before responding.*)

Pinkie, Saffron: Two.
Rarity: *Just two?!?* I thought you said you could pack a place with ponies, no matter what!
Pinkie: *You* said you would make the restaurant better! (*Rarity gasps.*) So I guess we both didn't know what we were talking about!

(*A series of staccato knocks at the door frightens a gasp out of Rarity.*)

Rarity: Zesty Gourmand! Everypony, places!

(*Moving almost too fast to follow, Saffron dashes to the kitchen, Coriander to his post by the reception counter at the far end. Pinkie and Rarity turn their faces apprehensively toward the door, and the white unicorn exerts her magic on the knob and slowly pulls it open. Cut to an extreme close-up of four light gray forelegs clad in black sleeves as they step to the threshold and stop for a moment, then zoom out as they enter. Zesty Gourmand is a mare clad in a white dress shirt buttoned up to the neck and a dark gray overcoat draped loosely over her form; the black sleeves continue up under the hem, suggesting a form-fitting bodysuit. Her gaunt face is set in an expression of quiet, unrelenting scorn, and her gray-violet eyes flick back and forth under a cropped two-tone mane of palest grayish-pink. The tourist couple from Whinnyapolis peek in eagerly behind her; she takes no notice of them, instead letting her mouth curve up into a cruel little smile. Rarity forces down a terrified swallow alongside Pinkie's fixed grin, and the view snaps to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to the dining room. Zesty sits at one table, her overcoat draped over the seat back; Pinkie and Rarity stand alongside, and the tourists sit at the next table. Coriander trudges into view.*)

Coriander: (*woodenly*) Welcome to the Tasty Treat. What can I get you this evening?

(*This shot exposes the food critic's tail, as short as her mane. She speaks with a jaded British accent in close-up.*)

Zesty: I hardly think it matters, but by all means, try your best to impress. (*Cut to frame all on the next line.*)
Tourist mare: Well, we'll both try the special this evenin', maybe with a little kick to it, eh? Yah, we've been craving some food with actual taste.

(*An eye roll and imperious little wave send Coriander backing up; cut to just inside the kitchen as he enters, Pinkie and Rarity close behind. Shock quickly registers on all three faces.*)

Coriander: Saffron Masala! What are you doing?!?

(*Cut to just behind him, framing her hard at work over the stove and with ingredients zooming toward a soup pot under her control.*)

Saffron: (*letting them drop in*) I'm trying to save our reputations! (*Taste from the ladle.*) I've given it at least a little bit of flavor. (*Stir with magic; Rarity crosses to her.*)
Rarity: No, no, no, no, no. Th-That's not what Zesty wants! (*Pinkie joins them.*)
Pinkie: What kind of food expert doesn't want flavor? That's insane!

(*The brimming ladle is levitated out and emptied into a bowl held up in a pink hoof.*)

Pinkie: (*setting it on her head*) I'm taking this out there!
Rarity: Nooo! Zesty will hate it!

(*Cut to the other side of the doorway; Pinkie pushes through its curtain and starts her approach, only for Rarity to whisk out in a white blur and pivot to cut her off. Coriander and Saffron put their heads out to look on.*)

Rarity: You are going to ruin this for them!
Pinkie: (*trotting past her*) No! I'm trying to fix it after *you* ruined it!

(*Both white forelegs come down on the fluffy pink tail to pin it to the floor, but inertia carries the bowl off Pinkie's head.*)

Pinkie: Wha—? (*Cut to it, arcing high in slow motion.*)
Pinkie, Rarity: (*from o.s., normal speed*) NOOOOO!!

(*Back to them on the end of this, the slow motion ending at this point. A loud splat marks the bowl's return to earth and sends a few droplets pattering onto Rarity's face as both of them grimace fearfully. Cut to the Whinnyapolis couple, liberally besmirched and more than a bit flummoxed, and pan to Zesty—wearing the rest of the soup on her face and the bowl cocked over one ear. The narrowed gray-violet eyes glare out through the muck with enough silent disgust to bore a hole through at least two inches of bulletproof glass.*)

Zesty: (*setting bowl down*) I think we are done here.

(*She maneuvers a napkin up to wipe her face clean, lets it drop on the table, floats her coat back on, and is on her way out before any of the others can say a word. Cut to her approaching the closed front door.*)

Rarity: (*hurrying after her, now clean*) Zesty! Please wait! (*Zesty stops.*) Allow me to explain!
Zesty: Rarity, when it comes to fashion, you are adequate. But take some advice from a friend. (*Pinkie joins them.*) Keep your opinions out of restaurants. Substandard food, laughable service, and I would think even *you* could recognize that the décor here is trying desperately, while desperately failing.

(*On the end of this, Coriander and Saffron leave the kitchen to join the tableau.*)

Zesty: Recommending a disreputable place such as this could do serious damage to your social standing.
Pinkie: (*needled*) Disreputable?! You mean a place with food that actually tastes *good?*
Zesty: Anypony can throw ingredients together and create an obvious taste that uncultured ponies like those two can register.

(*On the end of this, she points toward the tourists and the camera cuts to them.*)

Tourist stallion: (*miffed*) Hey! (*Back to Pinkie/Rarity/Zesty.*)
Zesty: But it takes a true culinary artist to create a subtle taste. The barest hint of a sensation. (*magically opening door, backing through it*) That's what *I* bring to Canterlot. *That's* art.

(*She shuts the door, leaving the proprietors and the well-intentioned rescuers to let their heads droop as their spirits sink into their hooves. Dissolve to Pinkie, Rarity, and Coriander sitting glumly around one table; Pinkie has shed her kurti and scarf, and Coriander's shirt is wrinkled. The tourists have departed. Zoom in slowly.*)

Pinkie: I'm *so* embarrassed.
Rarity: I don't know that there are words to adequately express how truly sorry we are.
Coriander: The worst has happened. (*Close-up.*) No use crying over spilled food now.

(*Three bowls of soup drift into view, two continuing toward Pinkie/Rarity's side and the third landing in front of him.*)

Saffron: (*from o.s., gently*) Here. (*Zoom out; she moves up alongside him.*) This always cheered me up when I was younger. (*Coriander draws in a wondering little gasp.*)
Coriander: My spicy flat noodle soup!

(*He takes the bowl in his aura and slurps it down, while Pinkie bends over to try hers and Rarity spoons it up with a utensil in her grip.*)

Rarity: Mmm…mmm…oh, my! This is truly delightful!

Pinkie: Mmm…this is the best thing you've made so far! And I thought the food before was the best!

(*There is a tiny, happy hitch in Saffron's voice.*)

Saffron: That's all I've ever wanted to do, Father—make food for the ponies of Canterlot like the food we made together when I was younger! (*They clasp front hooves, one each.*)
Coriander: (*tenderly*) It has been so long since we cooked together. (*Chuckle.*) Remember how you used to hide the ingredients you did not like?

(*The memory brings a round of laughter from both of them as Rarity lets her spoon clink back into her bowl, a thought occurring to her.*)

Rarity: You know what? Who cares what some stuffy unicorn thinks of the food here? It's exquisite!
Pinkie: That's true.

(*Rarity levitates one of her cards over—the one showing the tiny frou-frou food.*)

Rarity: (*crumpling it, sending it away*) And you don't need three silly hooves in your window to prove it.
Pinkie: That's double-true!
Rarity: (*climbing off her stool, pacing*) You just need ponies in here to give it a chance! Ponies that will tell everypony else in Canterlot that the Tasty Treat has the best food in the city!
Pinkie: That's true times three! (*Rarity paces back to the table.*)
Saffron: But…without Zesty's approval, nopony will even try our food.
Rarity: (*chuckling deviously*) Oh, yes, they will. (*all business*) Pinkie! We *are* the perfect team for this. We were just doing the wrong jobs. *I* will go out and bring the crowd. You stay here and make sure this place is every bit as unique and rustic as it was the moment we walked in. (*Cut to Coriander and Saffron.*)
Coriander: (*nervously*) And? What about us?
Rarity: You two? You are going to *cook*. Make whatever you want— (*Pinkie grins ear to ear.*) —and make a lot of it! (*Zoom in on her.*) I intend to bring a crowd!

(*Dissolve to two stallions talking over a window table in a restaurant. Rarity pops up just outside, holding Pinkie's arrow sign for the Tasty Treat and enticing them to abandon their spots. Her first words are muffled slightly by the glass, but the rest come through clearly once the camera cuts to her in the street—now wearing a pair of signs like a sandwich board and walking to point the way. A wipe then follows this; now she has one sign stuck to her flank and the other balanced on her head and is walking backwards to guide a growing crowd toward the eating house.*)

Rarity: Would the owner of one of the premier boutiques in Canterlot put her stamp of approval on something that wasn't fabulous?

(*Cut to a couple of trash cans behind the building, one of which is already stuffed to bursting with scrapped textiles from the ill-advised makeover. Pinkie has a lamp balanced on her head and easily flips it into the empty one; inside, she watches proudly as one member of Rarity's work crew levitates the original canopy hangings back up to the ceiling. Around them, the accompanying décor is well on its way to being re-established, and a table is quickly slid into place and a lamp re-hung. She restores one of the elephant pictures to its spot on the wall; in the kitchen, Coriander—looking like his old self—and Saffron keep an eye on a boiling pot, which sits under several order tickets taped up on a shelf. After she floats a few ingredients over and plunges them in, he gives her a contented smile, looks around with a degree of puzzlement, and magically lifts the pot away. The movement exposes a small canister of spice, prompting Saffron to snicker—a play on her old trick of hiding unwanted ingredients. Setting the pot back on the stove, he brings this up and sprinkles in a bit of the contents and the two trade a high five.*)

(*Dissolve to Pinkie and Rarity standing in the dining room and zoom out to show it exactly as it was before they hit the scene. The unicorn, having shed her signs, makes with the magic to do one final adjustment.*)

Rarity: It's almost time! (*Coriander and Saffron cross to them.*) Is everypony ready for the grand re-re-opening?
Saffron: Before we open, my father and I just wanted to say…thank you for all of your help. We've both been so stressed about the restaurant succeeding that we forgot what it was we loved about it in the first place.
Coriander: Cooking is something we used to love to do together. No matter what happens next— (*They nuzzle affectionately.*) —thank you for reminding us of that.
Pinkie: (*warmly*) Oh, you guys! Group hug!

(*The other three are only too happy to oblige her, with many laughs and chuckles and giddy squeals. Zoom in as they break apart.*)

Pinkie: Now come on! We've got a party to throw!

(*She flashes over to the door and pulls it open, immediately rewarded with an influx of ponies who rapidly spread across the place as they talk amongst themselves. Coriander and Saffron step out from the kitchen.*)

Coriander: Welcome to the Tasty Treat! (*He floats bowls of soup to three mares at one table.*) Make yourselves comfortable!

(Rarity uses her magic to tie a napkin around a stallion's neck. Outside, Zesty strides regally past the mouth of the alley in which the restaurant stands, but stops as the aromatic vapors drifting forth from the open door reach her nose. The exterior décor, like the interior, has been restored to its original style with two changes. One, the primary wall color is now magenta; two, the blank placard above the logo, indicating no rating, has been removed. Inside, Saffron has stopped by a table of four.)

Saffron: (*floating bowls to them.*) Please! Feel free to sample the food! (*Sound of the door opening.*)
Zesty: (*from o.s., flabbergasted*) What's this? (*Dead silence falls; cut to her.*) What is everypony doing here? This place has no hooves! (*pacing*) It is not in keeping with the level of cuisine that *I* have set for Canterlot! Nopony told you this place was acceptable!

(*An off-white mare with a two-tone light brown mane speaks up.*)

Customer: Uh, Rarity and her friends said it was good? *They* told us.
Zesty: *They* told you? And who are *they* to tell *you* anything? Rarity can tell you what hats to wear with which skirts. Her friend can tell you how to maintain a tragic look for a frizzy mane. (*Close-up.*) They *can't* tell you what food you can eat! (*Zoom out to floor level as Pinkie and Rarity step into view.*)
Rarity: No, we can't. (*Cut to them.*) And neither can you! Nopony has the right to tell these ponies what to think. Zesty, you have very— (*fumbling a bit for her next word*) —specific—
Pinkie: And very strange!
Rarity: —yes, and very strange opinions about food, and that's your right.

(*Cut to Zesty on the end of this, then back to the two non-monochrome mares.*)

Rarity: But just because you like your food a certain way, there is no reason to tell these ponies that they need to do the same.

(*Pan from them to a light tan stallion. Brown mane/tail/mustache/eyebrows; heavy beard stubble; dark green eyes; glasses; striped red apron over a white chef's jacket; spatula cutie mark.*)

Chef stallion: Rarity is right! I, for one, think the food here is delicious! I own the Smoked Oat on Restaurant Row! I *hate* the food we make! From now on, it's all smoked, basted, and grilled!

(*A quick pan brings the camera to a chubby, deep pinkish-violet earth pony mare. Deep pink eyes; untidy, two-tone pink mane/tail; dark gray apron over a white chef's jacket; Bundt cake cutie mark.*)

Chef mare: This food is an inspiration! I own the Bake Stop. I'm going to bake my mother's Bundt cake the way *she* made it—full of flavor!

(*These two announcements set off a round of cheers all over the room, but Zesty is unmoved.*)

Rarity: Zesty, are you sure you wouldn't like to try the food? (*pointedly*) Ignoring a unique and fresh establishment such as this could do serious damage to your social standing.

(*The combination of having her own words and attitude thrown back in her face, and the acid glare that Pinkie is aiming squarely at her from a step behind Rarity, is enough to make the haughty connoisseur glance around herself in sudden indecision. She snaps to with a scoff and*

strides for the door with all the dignity she can muster, magically opening/slamming it to mark her final word as she goes. Dead silence for perhaps one second, followed by wild cheers and applause and a high-five between Pinkie and Rarity. Coriander and Saffron step over to them.)

Saffron: Thank you so much!
Coriander: You are both truly amazing.

(*The Ponyville two flash their happiest grins, but are surprised by the sudden flaring of their cutie marks to indicate "mission accomplished." They smile at their own haunches, the camera panning quickly from gems to balloons; a moment later, both have quieted down.*)

Pinkie: Nothing can stop the dynamic duo of Pinkie and Rarity!

(*They embrace and the hum of pleasant background noise resumes, the camera zooming out slowly to frame more of the lively gathering. Dissolve to the exterior of the Tasty Treat, the zoom out continuing, and fade to black.*)

STRANGER THAN FAN FICTION

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to a screenful of piled-up boulders, one of which rumbles and falls away to expose Daring Do pushing it from behind. The light from a partially exposed doorway shines over her and the rubble as the camera zooms in slightly and she aims a satisfied smile ahead of herself. A moment later, she is trotting through a cavern studded with clusters of glowing crystals on walls and floor and onto a narrow stone bridge that spans a broad abyss to reach a small outcropping. One patch crumbles away under her hoof, bringing her up short and sending her into a brief fit of hyperventilation. After a worried look at the collapse, she glares ahead and spots a jeweled gold bauble stuck into a rough pedestal-shaped formation. Zoom in quickly to an extreme close-up of this, showing it as a stylized reptilian head with pale green gems set in eyes and mouth, then cut back to Daring. Her eyes widening at the sight of this treasure, she regains her resolve and continues her walk across the bridge.*)

(*Now, though, the stone blocks fall away one after another, almost as soon as she steps off them. She makes the mistake of hesitating for a moment; the one on which she is standing drops out, and she nearly plunges into the depths with a yelp before her front hooves find a purchase on the remaining surface. A great heave of legs and wings carries her up and ahead to solid ground, so that she belly-flops onto the stone in front of the pedestal. Lifting her head, she pushes her pith helmet back from her eyes just in time to see a hissing cobra rear up and spread its hood. In no time flat, far too many of its buddies have gathered around Daring and begun to close in from all sides, the camera zooming in slowly on the suddenly unnerved explorer.*)

(*From here, cut to a close-up of a wide-eyed, equally shaken Rainbow Dash. She comes out of it with a slightly peeved glance off to one side, and a longer shot establishes this new location as the bedroom of her cloud house. She is standing on her hind legs next to her dresser, one of whose drawers is ajar, and an open suitcase lies half-buried under a couple of bush shirts and a pith helmet on the floor. The object of her annoyance is Twilight Sparkle, who sits on her haunches with a book held in her magic and rolls her eyes wearily.*)

Rainbow: Well, don't stop there! (*dropping to all fours*) You read, I pack. That's the deal.
Twilight: I'm sorry, Rainbow Dash. (*smiling briefly, taking book in hoof*) I just keep thinking about how much fun you're gonna have at the Daring Do convention. I wish Princess Celestia didn't need my help with the friendship summit in Griffonstone.

Rainbow: Don't worry. (*The book shuts itself and floats into the case.*) I'll make sure A.K. Yearling signs your book.

(*She closes the lid on the end of this, exposing a larger version of Daring's compass-rose cutie mark on the outside.*)

Rainbow: (*giddily*) I can't believe she's gonna be there! (*Close-up.*) She never goes to conventions!

(*Big grin, counterpointed by a heavy sigh from the o.s. Twilight; cut to her, now really deflated, then to both. The pegasus prudently decides to dial her enthusiasm back a notch.*)

Rainbow: Which, I guess, will be cool for all those other fan-ponies. But since you and I know A.K. Yearling personally… (*knowingly, throwing foreleg around Twilight's shoulders*) …*and* we know that she's secretly Daring Do herself… (*letting go; Twilight stands up*) …it's no big deal. This convention'll be fun— (*Close-up.*) —but it's nothing to get *too* excited about.

(*Cut to a close-up of her in a different place, helmet firmly plunked over the multicolored mane and with the edge of her shirt's collar peeking into view at screen bottom. An ear-to-ear grin is plastered across the sky-blue face.*)

Rainbow: (*breathlessly, putting hooves to cheeks*) So excited!

(*The movement exposes a bracelet around one foreleg—the equivalent of an admission badge on a lanyard—and the camera zooms out to frame the whole place as she looks expectantly around. She is now in a convention hall set up with tables offering all manner of Daring-related merchandise. Dozens of attendees, all wearing bracelets like Rainbow's and many sporting their own renditions of the intrepid adventurer's trademark outfit, mill about at the tables and in the aisles that have been left clear between them. Rainbow trots excitedly in place as the view fades to black.*)

OPENING THEME

<u>Act One</u>

(*Opening shot: fade in to the hall. Rainbow has left her spot, but the camera cuts to her and pans slowly to follow her along one aisle, gazing in wild wonder at the joy she has found. A light grayish-blue earth pony stallion, with a sunburst cutie mark and a wireless microphone headset, zips in to intercept. He wears a green golf shirt, the same shade as Daring's iconic garment and marked with an emblem of her face, and his tone is that of a fast-talking sales rep.*)

Sales stallion: You look like a pony who'd be up for an all-inclusive, one-of-a-kind adventu-cation—

(*He throws a foreleg across her shoulders and hefts a saddlebag full of brochures on the end of this. Close-up of an open one, showing pictures of ruins similar to the ones Daring has explored in previous episodes.*)

Sales stallion: (*from o.s.*) —where you get to live the Daring Do experience! (*Rainbow casually pushes him back.*)
Rainbow: No, thanks. Did that already.

(*Which she and her friends did, in "Daring Don't." She heads off across the floor; cut to the upper portion of a booth and tilt down as she steps into view. It is a mockup of the floor-tile trap Daring had to pass in "Read it and Weep," with each tile showing an animal—including the rats that were the safe spots.*)

Rainbow: Ahhhh…

(*She deliberately chooses a trapped tile and steps on it, setting off blasts of vapor and red/orange/yellow streamers from the wall. These retract into their holders as Rainbow grins at the spectacle. Cut to a close-up of her.*)

Rainbow: This is the— (*Zoom out quickly, a stallion, Quibble Pants, now stands alongside.*)
Rainbow, Quibble: —awesomest thing ever!

(*He is an earth pony, dressed identically to her except for a couple of pins added to his shirt, and he has strapped a pair of cardboard wings to his flanks. His coat is orange-brown, perhaps a shade darker than Daring's, and his mane/tail are a bit shorter than hers but showing the same variegated gray/black stripes. The eyes are bright blue, and his cutie mark is hidden for the moment by his fake wings. All four eyes pop wide open as their owners each realize they are not alone, but the initial surprise melts away as Quibble gestures to the tiles.*)

Quibble: Now *this* is something that only a true fan can appreciate. (*Close-up of the first row.*)
Rainbow: (*from o.s., gesturing toward them*) They even put the tiles in the right order! (*Cut to Quibble.*)
Quibble: (*chuckling*) Good catch. Oh, I'm Quibble Pants. Nice to meet you.
Rainbow: Rainbow Dash. (*They each extend a foreleg and tap hooves.*) Nice costume.
Quibble: You too.
Rainbow: Thanks. (*removing helmet; he eyes it*) The hard part was figuring out the right—
Rainbow, Quibble: —number of arrow holes.
Quibble: (*with growing zeal, removing own helmet*) Be-be-because on page eighty-four of *Sapphire Stone*, i-it describes her dodging a, quote, "score of arrows shooting forth from holes in the very walls," unquote. But then, on page one hundred and seven, Daring Do says she, quote, "barely made it past the trap's *barrage* of arrows," unquote. (*Rainbow grins broadly as he continues.*) But clearly Daring Do is embellishing a-and the correct number of arrows is…

(*Close-up of both helmets being held out, side by side to give a good clear view of the tiny pockmarks that perforate both surfaces.*)

Rainbow, Quibble: (*from o.s.*) *…twenty!*

(*They do indeed have this many holes, arranged in almost the exact same pattern. Zoom out as both aficionados regard the headwear proudly, then shift into grins and laughter. From here, wipe to a slow pan that follows them down one aisle, helmets back on; they break into a trot and pull ahead, ending up at a large standee display of Daring being menaced by her nemesis Ahuizotl. The heads have been cut away to allow attendees to put their own through for picture-taking purposes, and Rainbow takes the hero's role, scowling up at Quibble as he adopts a fierce expression. Both have removed their helmets. There is the flash of a camera going off, and they quickly trade places, with Rainbow crossing her eyes and letting her tongue loll out for a bit of fun that surprises Quibble. After a second flash, she devolves into snickering and he gets a good laugh out of it.*)

(*Wipe to the pair making their way through an obstacle course: climbing up platform steps, then crawling up through an inclined tube. Rainbow is first to reach the top, swinging away on a rope and letting go to drop o.s.; a shower of rocks is kicked up by her plunge, and Quibble grins to himself as he gets hold of the rope. He has shed his cardboard wings at this point. Down below, the daredevil pokes her head up from the rocks just as he falls into them, and he grabs one to pitch at her head. It connects and bounces away harmlessly—only rubber—and she gleefully tackles him into the pile. The initial ascent gives the first clear view of Quibble's cutie mark: an empty speech bubble.*)

(*Another wipe frames them walking the floor. He stops short and points at one booth; she turns her head to follow the gesture, and the camera cuts to a close-up of the indicated item. It is a pillow whose case bears an image of a rather put-out Daring, bound with rope to leave only her head and the tips of her rear hooves exposed. Zoom out as they regard it, he with a smile, she with considerable trepidation; his smile shifts a bit and he half-shrugs and shakes his head as if to say," What are you gonna do?"*)

(*Wipe to Rainbow, who buys a Daring figurine from a vendor and turns around to face Quibble as he strides up holding one of his own. Close-up of the two items being raised aloft—identical in every detail—and zoom out quickly to frame the new owners, who beam at each other and laugh.*)

(*One last wipe shifts the action to a concession stand, where a sour-faced unicorn mare attendant levitates a drink onto the counter for Minuette and a filly accompanying her. As soon as two straws are plunked into the liquid, the blue mare grips it in her aura and the two walk away with it. Pan to Rainbow and Quibble, seated side by side and enjoying refreshment of their own.*)

Rainbow: (*sighing*) I am *so* glad I ran into you. And even though I knew the convention would be totally awesome, it's more fun when you're with someone who *really* knows Daring Do. (*He nods on the end of this.*)
Quibble: I know what you mean. It's so hard to find a pony who really gets it.

(*As the attendant backs up out of view with another drink in tow, Rainbow pulls out a brochure and runs an eye over it.*)

Rainbow: Huh, that's weird. We've only done stuff from the first trilogy. After lunch, we should probably start working our way back through the other books.

(*Quibble stops pulling at his drink and waves a disdainful hoof toward her.*)

Quibble: Whoa, whoa, whoa. There are no "other books." (*Close-up of a puzzled Rainbow.*)
Rainbow: Of course there are. *Daring Do and the Trek of the Terrifying Towers*, *Daring Do and the Many Faces of—* (*An orange-brown hoof plugs her mouth.*)
Quibble: (*from o.s.*) Um, p-please…please don't. (*Pan to him, pinching the bridge of his nose disgustedly.*) Just don't even mention the titles. (*withdrawing hoof*) I-I-I'm not saying those books don't exist, I'm saying… (*with great contempt*) …that I refuse to acknowledge them.
Rainbow: (*cuttingly*) Why?
Quibble: (*pounding counter*) 'Cause they're horrible! I-I mean, there isn't a single thing after *Ring of Destiny* that is even remotely in the realm of the possible!
Rainbow: (*ditto, upsetting her drink*) *What?!?* I know for a fact that everything in every one of those books is one hundred percent possible!
Quibble: Uh, and how could you possibly know that?
Rainbow: (*stammering a bit*) Uh…I just do.

*** *Until further notice, Quibble punctuates his words with an occasional sarcastic chuckle.* ***

Quibble: Well, that's a compelling argument!
Rainbow: Why would you even come to this convention if you hate Daring Do so much?
Quibble: I don't hate Daring Do. The first series was smart a-and cool and an amazing nod to old-time serialized adventure books— (*Cut to Rainbow, throwing him a nasty look; he continues o.s.*) —that somehow manages to be self-reflexive and ironic— (*Back to him.*) —while at the same time celebrating the art form without a hint of cynicism. (*vehemently, sliding his cup aside*) Which is why I came here to ask A.K. Yearling, muzzle to muzzle, why she sold out and dumbed down the rest of her books in-into just a series of impossible action sequences!
Rainbow: (*pinning his hoof to the counter*) Okay, now I *know* you're crazy. A.K. Yearling is awesome, and every Daring Do book that comes out is better than the last!
Quibble: (*standing up, stammering a bit*) Wow. O-Okay, yeah, I-I'm, I'm sorry, but I could never be friends with somepony who's willing to believe impossible stuff is possible as long as Daring Do does it!

(*Zoom out slightly on the end of this as several onlookers gather around the contenders. Cut briefly to a few of them and back during the next line.*)

Rainbow: That's okay, because I could never be friends with somepony who's so focused on things being possible that he's willing to turn his back on the coolest hero of all time!
Quibble: Fine! (*She leans into his face.*)
Rainbow: Fine!

(*They turn and stalk away in opposite directions, leaving a crowd that has been stunned into silence—and a concession stand attendant aiming a schadenfreude-saturated smile their way. Dissolve to a hotel lobby, where a unicorn sits reading a newspaper in one of the armchairs and a bellhop crosses in the background. The front desk is positioned on the landing of a grand staircase that leads up to the second floor, and Rainbow stands before it to address the well-dressed stallion manager on duty. She has removed her shirt and admission bracelet. Zoom in slowly.*)

Rainbow: Look. Just tell A.K. Yearling that Rainbow Dash is here— (*Close-up.*) —and I need her help to convince a know-it-all pony that everything Daring Do's ever done actually happened.

(*The end of this is punctuated by a series of hoof taps against the countertop, and she follows it all up with her most winning grin. All she gets, though, is a blink from the truly unimpressed manager; she backs off with a glower until a very familiar voice catches her off guard.*)

A.K. Yearling: (*from o.s., hushed*) Rainbow Dash?

(*The blue pegasus turns toward the sound and brightens upon seeing the renowned author's approach.*)

Rainbow: A.K.! I've gotta talk to you. It's an emergency. (*Yearling glances furtively around herself.*)
Yearling: (*whispering*) Not here!

(*She hustles Rainbow away in a blur of vivid and muted colors, the manager showing no reaction beyond another mildly vexed blink. Even when Rainbow returns to deliver her best "I told you so" grin, he limits himself to an eye roll. After she clears out again, the view cuts to within a hotel room, whose door bursts open so Yearling can shove her inside. Close it, peek through the peephole, and finally turn to the new arrival.*)

Yearling: (*hushed*) Now tell me what's going on! Is it Caballeron? Did you see him?

(*Referring to the rival archaeologist who targeted her in "Daring Don't." She proceeds to close the window curtains.*)

Rainbow: (*perplexed*) What? No. But there *is* a pony downstairs who thinks everything you've written after the first trilogy is totally unrealistic and terrible.

(*Cut to under a bed; Yearling leans down, pulls the spread up, and peers into this space.*)

Rainbow: (*from o.s.*) And I need you to help me prove to him that it's all totally possible.

(*On the end of this, tilt up as she straightens to full height; next, the camera cuts to frame her crossing to Rainbow. The bed is one of two in the room.*)

Yearling: I've got bigger problems on my hooves than dissatisfied fan-ponies.

(*Reaching into the neckline of her cape, she brings out the gold bauble that Daring was after in the passage Twilight read to Rainbow during the prologue. She is wearing it on a cord as a pendant, and the section embedded in the rock is a short cylinder with zigzag grooves standing up from the surface. The very sight of it causes Rainbow's pupils to grow until they nearly fill her eyesockets—another mass-market exploit proven to be real.*)

Rainbow: (*awed*) Whoa. (*Close-up of it, zooming in slowly.*)
Yearling: (*from o.s., hushed*) The Amulet of Culhuacan—and Caballeron wants it. (*Cut to frame both; she continues smugly.*) But the Amulet's only a key. (*Soft giggle; she pulls a scroll from the nightstand.*) The real treasure is hidden in a lost temple.

(*She spreads it out on the floor to show a map.*)

Yearling: (*hushed*) The Seven-Sided Chest of Chicomoztoc.

(*Close-up of the drawing, panning slowly from one end to the other. A path leads from a city, across a bridge over a bay—this must be Manehattan—and through varied unforgiving terrain to stop at an imposing, blocky structure.*)

Yearling: (*from o.s., normal volume*) Caballeron wants to sell it to the highest bidder, of course— (*Cut to her.*) —which is why I need to find it first.
Rainbow: *Yes!* (*doing a loop-the-loop*) Sounds like another awesome Daring Do adventure! (*She touches down.*) But what are you doing here?
Yearling: Since I haven't found the temple yet, it's the safest place for me and the Amulet. (*tucking it under her cape*) It's crawling with security, and if I get into trouble…

(*Ground level, the camera framing Yearling from the neck down and all of Rainbow. The cape slithers to the floor, exposing Daring's bush shirt and cutie mark, and the fan-pony puts on a shiny-eyed grin and very nearly starts bouncing off the walls from sheer nervous glee. Cut to just in front of the globetrotter, the hat and glasses lying abandoned as well, and tilt up slowly as she nudges her helmet into place. The Amulet is hidden under her shirt.*)

Daring: …I can just blend in with all the Daring Do cosplayers.
Rainbow: How can I help?
Daring: Just keep your eyes out for anything suspicious.
Rainbow: (*saluting*) Got it!

(*She peels out and o.s., leaving the sound of the slamming door to mark her exit. Daring rolls up the map, only to be interrupted by a knock and then Rainbow opening the door to poke her head in.*)

Rainbow: Does a pony who only likes your first trilogy qualify as suspicious?

(*To which Daring responds with a high-powered scowl that is all Rainbow needs to shift into a sheepish little laugh.*)

Rainbow: Just checking.

(*Back out; close the door. Dissolve to the convention hall, where Rainbow walks cautiously down one aisle with red-violet eyes on high alert, then cut to Dr. Caballeron himself standing next to one booth. He puts a hoof to his face with an exasperated sigh and turns to address himself o.s.*)

Caballeron: I find all this fanfare around my archenemy… (*A costumed filly passes him.*)
…disturbing.

(*Elsewhere, the sales stallion has just passed a brochure into a unicorn's telekinetic grip. He turns to offer one to Caballeron and his hench-pony Biff, one of the three who worked for him in "Daring Don't," as the two walk up. Caballeron snatches it and throws it aside after a cursory glance.*)

Caballeron: I mean, where is the booth for Caballeron?

(*Without a word, the sales stallion points back the way they came. Cut to a booth topped by a large skull headdress and decorated with small glowing skulls; available here are costume items to match the ones he wears—including heavy false eyebrows and stubble makeup, if the three ponies standing out front is an accurate indication. The genuine article is quite put out at the display.*)

Caballeron: I do not see the likeness.

(*The soft clop of approaching hooves draws his attention; cut to a longer shot. He and Biff are joined by Withers and Vest, the other two hired goons from "Daring Don't." Vest has a Daring pillow draped across his back, which Caballeron knocks to the floor with a fed-up sweep of his hoof.*)

Caballeron: Come. (*leading them away*) Let us find Daring Do and the Amulet of Culhuacan. (*They pass Rainbow at a booth, but neither spots the other.*) I don't want to spend any more time in this place than I have to!

(*She turns away from the goods and heads in the other direction, a fraction of a second too late to catch sight of Daring's past rival. As she eases through the crowd, giving the camera a good*

view of the admission bracelet she has now donned, she stops short. Cut to her perspective of a poor copy of Caballeron's gold-skull cutie mark pasted onto a pony's haunch and zoom in quickly to a close-up. The view then cuts back to her as she zips over to confront its wearer, who faces away from the camera for the moment. A push rotates this pony 90 degrees toward her—a mare in Caballeron cosplay, stubble and all, who gives her a really dirty look. She offers up a placating grin and backs up, only for her rump to collide with that of Quibble.)

Quibble: (*very snarky*) Well, if it isn't the pony who knows impossible things can happen because she just does.
Rainbow: Ugh! (*She gets in his face, becoming very snippy.*) Sorry, Quibble. I've got more important things to do than argue with a pony who thinks "awesome" means "unrealistic."

(*She turns away, lashing him in the face with her tail.*)

Quibble: (*hurrying to catch up*) No! Wait! I want to hear more about how you're one hundred percent sure that in *Curse of the Jungle Queen*, Daring Do could survive a sixty-story drop— (*She winces; both stop.*) —from the top of a waterfall after sustaining a broken wing in a Category Six rapid!
Rainbow: (*rolling eyes*) Ugh! (*She wheels back to him.*) Obviously her wing wasn't brok—

(*The rest of the word is cut off sharply as her eyes pop and she shifts position to look past him.*)

Rainbow: Caballeron!

(*She gallops off; he holds his place, not realizing that the bad guy and his crew are coming up the aisle behind him.*)

Quibble: See, now that's a *great* character. Solid backstory, good motivations— (*Rainbow peeks up from behind a table.*)
Rainbow: No, no, no, no. (*turning his head to see*) Caballeron is right there!
Quibble: (*rolling eyes, not buying it*) Of course he is.

(*Zoom out; he points across the way at a stallion wearing the outfit.*)

Quibble: He's also over there…over there… (*faking fear*) oh, ooh, over there…

(*The second "over there" is accompanied by a cut to a filly taking a picture of a Daring cosplayer next to Derpy Hooves in a sloppily assembled Caballeron rig. The third: cut to a vendor selling a shirt to a Caballeron stallion. Finally, the real villain leads Biff and Vest past in front of Rainbow and Quibble, along with a hench-pony not previously seen. Gray coat, dark blue eyes, short brown tail and mustache, head shaved bald, dark gray bush shirt trimmed in an even darker shade, hairy chest, prominent scars, cutie mark that matches one of the shirt's pockets.*)

Quibble: …and over there. (*Rainbow trots out to follow them.*) Where are you going?

(*Cut to a loading dock at the rear exterior of the convention hall. Rainbow opens the door from inside for a look and trots onto the platform, followed by Quibble.*)

Quibble: And we're out here because…?
Rainbow: Daring Do told me that Caballeron came to this convention to steal the Amulet of Culhuacan, and I just saw him and his hench-ponies come this way! (*Close-up of Quibble.*)
Quibble: Okay, I'm gonna head back inside. (*sourly*) There's just a little too much crazy out here for the both of us.

(*Zoom out slightly to frame Withers and Vest standing to either side and pulling a large sack down over his entire form. Rainbow gasps sharply, turning her head in his direction; cut to her perspective, now filled by the images of these two captors, Caballeron standing with them, and Baldy and Biff whisking a sack toward her and the camera. Fade to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to a screenful of sacking, which is yanked away to expose a close-up of Rainbow and a covered lump next to her. She loses her admission bracelet in the process. Baldy leans into view just long enough to nip a fold of the remaining material in his teeth and pull it free, revealing the hindquarters of an upside-down Quibble. Visible behind them are trees and open-fronted tents with cots inside, suggesting a wilderness campsite, and a longer shot of the area confirms it as the overly critical stallion flops onto his belly. All four of Caballeron's thugs are standing watch over the two prisoners. The campsite is set up in a small clearing, with a central fire ring and logs lying half-buried in the dirt to use as seats.*)

Caballeron: (*from o.s.)* I do not know what Daring Do is playing at— (*emerging from trees*) —but if she told you two fan-ponies of my plan to steal the Amulet, *you* must work for *her*. (*Rainbow and Quibble stand up, the latter a trifle annoyed.*)
Rainbow: Caballeron! Hah! What do you have to say now, Quibble?
Quibble: This was your plan to prove the Daring Do books are realistic? You bought a Daring Do Experience adventu-cation. Really?
Rainbow: (*taken aback*) What? No! Oh, look around us! (*gesturing to each in turn*) Hench-ponies? Caballeron? The jungle it took forever to get to? This is the real deal!
Quibble: Right. We're actually being held captive by Caballeron. (*sourly*) Please! (*pointing at him*) This guy's accent is all over the place! (*to him*) Eh, no offense.
Caballeron: (*to himself, rubbing forehead*) Ay…
Quibble: So what's the setup here? You've kidnapped us and taken us to the middle of nowhere because…?
Caballeron: The temple of Chicomoztoc is somewhere in this jungle. When I find it, the Seven-Sided Chest is as good as mine! (*Biff and Withers flank Quibble.*) I just need the Amulet of Culhuacan to unlock it.
Quibble: Uh-huh, and Daring Do has the Amulet, so you came up with this over-complicated plot to lure her into the jungle and exchange it for us.

Caballeron: I wouldn't call it over-complicated, but…yes.
Quibble: Okay, we're done here. (*walking away*) Great work, seriously. *Very* believable.

(*A gesture from Caballeron sends Biff bounding off after Quibble, who has now passed o.s. There follows the sound of a quick, short scuffle, after which the would-be escapee is plunked back in front of Caballeron on his haunches. His snark has not diminished one iota through all of this.*)

Quibble: Listen, pal. You can keep her money, but I'm not— (*Caballeron slaps his pointing hoof down.*)
Caballeron: —going anywhere! (*Rainbow is herded over.*) You may not approve of my plan, but *I'm* the mastermind here!
Quibble: (*aside to Rainbow, singsong*) Debatable.
Caballeron: And I say you will remain here until Daring Do comes to rescue you! And if she wants you back in one piece, she will give me the Amulet! (*to the others*) Tie them up!

(*Cut to Rainbow and Quibble, now seated back to back on their haunches. Baldy and Biff get the ends of a long chain in their teeth and wrap it around them, cinching it tight in such a way as to trap the blue flyer's wings. In the fore, a device is held into view on Caballeron's hoof: cylindrical, gold end caps, body consisting of four parallel rings marked with various symbols. The shackle is gold with a steel hinge in the middle, designed to evoke the idea of a bird with spread wings; and is attached to one end cap; the free wingtip is sprung away from the other. It is a combination lock, intended to open if the rings are turned to display the correct sequence of symbols, and its introduction throws a bit of a scare into Rainbow.*)

Rainbow: The Griffon's Lock!
Caballeron: You know of it. Further proof that you are an agent of Daring Do!
Quibble: (*to Rainbow*) Or an avid reader.

(*Caballeron snaps it into place, passing the shackle through the chain links and securing it to the free end cap.*)

Caballeron: And now I will continue my search for the temple. (*smug, menacing tone*) Don't go anywhere.

(*A chuckle blooms into a full-throated laugh as he strides away into the jungle, and Rainbow begins to struggle against the chains as Quibble addresses her.*)

Quibble: Listen. If I pretend to believe this nonsense is real, will you call off the Hench-Pony Repertory Theater over there?
Rainbow: (*sighing*) They're not gonna listen to me. They abducted us both!
Quibble: Oh, wow. So you're gonna stick with that script. Oh, okay, fine. We're…we're in a Daring Do adventure.

(*A nip at his shirt allows him to get one of its pins in his teeth, and a quick turn of the head sends it across the open area to clink against a stone. The sound brings Baldy on the double.*)

Baldy: What was that?
Quibble: (*loudly, woodenly*) Daring Do, thank goodness! We're over here!
Baldy: Fan out! We can't let Daring Do rescue these two!

(*Exeunt the quartet, in different directions; Rainbow goes back to the job of trying to free herself.*)

Quibble: (*laughing heartily*) All four? I mean, shouldn't at least one of them stay behind to guard us? Oh, oh, wait. Uh, no, because then it wouldn't be a *terrible Daring Do adventure!*
(*Close-up of Rainbow; the lock's rattling is heard.*)
Rainbow: It doesn't matter. We'll never solve the Griffon's Lock before they get back.

(*The snap of a releasing mechanism. The rattle of chain links hitting the ground. A longer shot shows both of them now free, Quibble standing upright and holding that very device. He bounces it contemptuously on his front hoof.*)

Rainbow: Okay, that *was* pretty good. (*He tosses it away; she stands up and pulls at his foreleg.*) Quick! We've gotta get out of here and warn Daring Do! (*He throws off her grip.*)
Quibble: (*pacing, stammering a bit*) No way. Just point me to the hotel and…you can play fan-pony and hunt treasure out here all day long.
Rainbow: (*sighing*) Fine! Let's just say this *is* a Daring Do adventu-cation. The only way to get back to the convention is to go through it. So just follow me and I'll lead you out. Deal?

(*Glaring around the campsite, he searches for a really crushing remark but manages to get out no more than a fragment of a word before letting it collapse into a supremely frustrated groan.*)

Quibble: Fine! (*They start walking.*)
Rainbow: (*under her breath*) Maybe if I just leave you in the jungle, it'll convince you.

(*Dissolve to a screenful of thick undergrowth. During the next line, it is parted from behind by a Rainbow, followed by Quibble. Vexation and triumph are respectively writ large across the two faces.*)

Quibble: …which would make Daring Do left-hoofed, which we know is false, and that is *everything* that's wrong with *Daring Do and the Trek to the Terrifying Tower*. (*Rainbow growls softly to herself.*) Now, the problems with the next book are ev—

(*She cuts him off with a wing clapped across his mouth and the camera zooms out to put them at one end of a rope/plank bridge strung across a ravine. Only after she lowers the feathers does the camera shift to present the entire creaking span under a green-tinted daytime sky.*)

Quibble: Oh, right. What Daring Do adventure would be complete without the precarious rope bridge?

(*Back to them. Rainbow takes a few tentative stomps on the first board, stirring up a bit of dust, and starts across once she is satisfied that the wood is sound. The disdainful stallion follows a few paces behind.*)

Quibble: Look, I'm all for making things feel as real as possible— (*Both stop.*) —but are these adventu-cation ponies sure this thing is safe?
Rainbow: (*pointedly*) Is it too realistic for you? Wouldn't want *that* on a Daring Do adventure, would we?
Quibble: If this were really a Daring Do adventure, I'm sure I'd step on the wrong plank at exactly the wrong mo—

(*He trails off into a yell of terror as the one he has just rested his front hooves on gives way, dumping him halfway through the bridge. Rainbow whirls toward him with a gasp, grabs his tail in her teeth, and pulls with all her strength. A raging river can now be seen far below.*)

Quibble: (*sighing, forcing a smile*) Good thing this is all just a pretend adventure. At least we know all of this struggling won't make the bridge fall apart.

(*As if the Fates were waiting for this very cue, one of the main support ropes frays and breaks. The entire structure flips to leave him dangling headfirst over the river.*)

Quibble: You need to get your money back.

(*And here goes the other rope; the two halves of the bridge fall away, each swinging toward its cliff end, and he drops loose and out of sight with a panicked scream. Rainbow rockets down after him, biting down on the free end of a rope still looped around the orange-brown body. Instead of hauling him back up, though, she continues her headlong flight toward the surging currents even as he redoubles his yells. A few plank fragments hit the water just before she pulls up, leveling off so that Quibble finds himself doing a bit of unorthodox water skiing thanks to her motive power and the wood still under his rear hooves. An approaching waterfall causes the blue eyes to pop wide in apprehension, but Rainbow nimbly loops her end of the rope around a branch that projects over the brink. Inertia carries him into empty space, the rope going taut and snapping to send him on a hollering flight over the jungle that exhibits not a whit of grace or poise. Quibble bounces down the tops of several palm trees, then lands on another one that bends double under his weight before dumping him onto the ground and rebounding. By this point, the rope around his midsection has fallen away. The supine stallion is quickly joined by a very smug Rainbow.*)

Rainbow: Hah! How's *that* for "not possible"? (*He stands up, sweating buckets and on a full adrenaline rush.*)
Quibble: That was…*awesome!* I…I-I-I thought we…and then *you*…and the flying! Wow, and I was like, "Where are you going?" A-And then, then you swerved, and I was, I was, I was on the water and then…and the, and the rocks… (*Brief incoherent babble.*) …*wow!*
Rainbow: Yeah. If you read that in a book, you might even think it was unrealistic.

(*He drops right back into overly critical mode.*)

Quibble: Okay, I'll give you that one. I-I mean, we could have been done for.

(*It takes a second for the full meaning of those last six words to take hold in his mind; when they do, his eyes go wide and he clutches frantically at Rainbow.*)

Quibble: We could have been done for! What…what kind of adventu-cation is this? I-I mean, that's…that's just bad business! What…what are these ponies thinking?!?
Caballeron: (*from o.s.*) Right now? (*He emerges from a bush.*) We are thinking that we should thank you for escaping.

(*A gesture brings Biff on the jump to tackle Rainbow, while a lasso settles around the neck of the thoroughly ill-spirited Quibble. Vest crosses to him, with the rope's free end in his teeth, and within moments Biff has Rainbow properly tied and clamped his jaws on her rope.*)

Caballeron: For you have led us directly to the lost temple of Chicomoztoc!

(*As he finishes, the camera shifts to frame the entire group—now joined by Baldy and Withers—and zooms out. They are alongside the base of the waterfall, and an imposing stone structure styled after those of ancient Central American civilizations stands across the river from them. Built into the cliff face, it corresponds to the end of the trail on the map Daring showed to Rainbow in Act One. Caballeron laughs exultantly, the camera cutting back to a close-up of the two captives. Rainbow's face goes slack with undiluted shock, but Quibble looks as if he has been presented with a cheap, badly prepared meal. Zoom in slowly and snap to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of a stretch of interior wall marked by a piece of gold/stone artwork. Baldy steps up for a better look, lantern in teeth, and Caballeron moves in as well as the camera zooms out slightly.*)

Caballeron: (*calling behind himself*) Make sure they are secure this time!

(*Longer shot: the wall bears a mural of ponies circling a gold yin/yang design and hovering near a large starburst in one corner. A staircase leads down into this corridor, and the entire raiding party is advancing along here. The rope around Quibble's neck has been cinched up, and those around Rainbow have been rearranged into a loop at her throat and a set of wing bindings; the free ends are held in the mouths of Vest, Biff, and Withers, respectively.*)

Caballeron: We can't have them escaping again! (*Rainbow pulls against her leash and lunches toward him.*)
Rainbow: You'll never get away with this!

Caballeron: Won't I? You've led me to the temple, and Daring Do is too noble to let harm befall her companions— (*to Quibble*) —so the Amulet is as good as mine.

(*The bottomless pit of snide cracks comes up dry for once.*)

Caballeron: What? No witty remarks this time about how silly my plan is? (*All stop.*)
Quibble: This isn't the official Daring Do Experience adventu-cation, is it?
Rainbow: Finally!
Quibble: (*poking at Caballeron's chest*) It's some cheap knockoff run by a bunch of incompetent ponies that have no idea how to execute this adventure with any level of safety!

(*The big boss can manage no response except for a helplessly bewildered glance in Rainbow's general direction that might translate as "this guy can't be for real, can he?" She, in turn, just groans and slaps a hoof to her face; next Quibble leans indignantly toward Vest.*)

Quibble: What was that with the bridge?!? We were in serious danger! I-I'm reporting you all to…well, I don't know who I'm reporting you to, but it's gonna be somepony important!

(*A moment later, he has removed the rope from his neck and is carrying it along as he paces past the others.*)

Quibble: (*tossing it aside, wheeling to face Rainbow*) Oh, and this cut-rate excuse for an experience hasn't proved anything except that I'm right! It has all the hallmarks of a lame Daring Do adventure!

(*On the end of this, cut to a close-up of his hooves as he stomps the right front one down for emphasis. The patch of stone beneath it sinks slightly into the floor, the trigger for chunks to pop out of the wall so that torrents of mud can start pouring in. Cut to a close-up of Rainbow, her face all consternation.*)

Rainbow: Uh…Quibble? (*His hoof reaches into view to cover her mouth.*)
Quibble: (*from o.s.*) No! I'm talking! (*Cut to him; he backs off as more mud gushes forth.*) Generic jungle locations? Check. Overly complicated villain plot. (*A falling rock barely misses him.*) Check! Random coincidences that conveniently get us to the next big set piece? Check!

(*On the last "check," cut to a close-up of his hooves as he stomps the left front one down—and it too presses a hidden release stone. This time, the effect is to cause the section of floor immediately behind him to slide away; he does not notice, but Caballeron does.*)

Caballeron: Watch where you are stepping, you fool! (*Quibble gets in his face.*)
Quibble: Listen, buddy. (*poking at his chest*) I don't take orders from some second-rate performer who learned acting from the Supervillain School of Bad Accents.

(*Caballeron actually starts to back down, showing genuine fear—whether of Quibble's growing venom, or the mud still pouring unchecked into the corridor, is anyone's guess. During the next*

line, a shape slowly rises behind the stickler from the area where the floor dropped out. It is covered in brown slop, vaguely reptilian, and easily two or three times his height, with most of its bulk ultimately cut off by the top edge of the screen.)

Quibble: (*really worked up*) The only thing this mess is missing is some giant Ahuizotl-wannabe monster, and I have a feeling that would be a bit too much for you bargain-basement adventurers to pull off!

(*He is so caught up in his own brilliance that he utterly fails to notice that Caballeron and the hench-ponies are busy clearing out of the place, leaving the still-tied Rainbow behind. She is scared out of her wits, but he only turns to take notice after a few globs of mud spatter down around him. What he finds is a massive, gray-spotted, green crocodilian beast with gold spines running down its back and gold bracelets on both forelegs. The underbelly is a lighter greenish-brown, and green/brown fringes frame two very angry blue-gray eyes as mud drains off its hide. This is Cipactli.*)

Quibble: Huh?

(*The toothy maw opens wide, unleashing a deafening roar and a shower of spittle and blowing his mane back. A note of true fear begins to set in over his entire personage.*)

**** From here on in, the snarky laugh is gone from his voice. ****

Quibble: Um…you're real. (*It growls and starts to advance on him.*) This is real.

(*Now Rainbow darts in to pull him to safety, an instant before the powerful jaws can slam shut on his head. She has shaken off the rope around her neck, but her wings are still bound, and the two gallop like sixty down the corridor.*)

Quibble: *THIS IS REAL!!*

(*The hench-ponies race through a chamber and up a staircase. Caballeron follows, but stops a few steps up so he can pull a lever on the wall, bringing down a stone slab to seal the exit behind his savagely grinning visage. Rainbow and Quibble throw themselves against it, to no avail, and glance fearfully back toward the approaching, screeching Cipactli. Just as it is about to overrun them in the muddy expanse, Daring swings across on a vine and pulls them both away. When Quibble musters up the courage to uncover his eyes, he finds the adventurer smiling smugly down at him through her fringe of six-toned gray/black forelock. The arcing trajectory carries them up to an elevated doorway, where she lets go of the vine and they of her, and she wastes no time in releasing Rainbow's bindings in close-up.*)

Daring: I told you to warn me of anything suspicious— (*Zoom out slowly; Quibble goggles wordlessly at the pair.*) —not run off on an adventure without me! (*Rainbow rubs the back of her neck nervously.*)

Quibble: Wh…whoa, whoa! Y-You're real! (*to Rainbow*) You're, you're…you're friends with her?

(*Cut to Rainbow and Daring. The blue pegasus answers him by draping a wing across the orange-brown one's back and stitching on the king daddy of all smug expressions. Daring just throws her a very funny look and shrugs the wing away.*)

Daring: Uh, we'll have to do introductions later. Right now we have to—
Quibble: (*from o.s., panicky*) Uh, g-get outta here, yes.

(*Cut to him, staring at the doorway and the rapidly rising mud in which Cipactli is now swimming about.*)

Quibble: Thank you!
Daring: Actually, no.
Quibble: *What?!?* (*She stuffs a hoof in his mouth to shut him up.*)
Daring: We can't leave without the treasure.

(*Floor level in the chamber, the camera pointing up at the trio as they move to the edge of their vantage point.*)

Daring: And we should probably get to it before our friend gets any higher.

(*Said "friend" chooses this moment to let off a hungry-sounding roar and splash in the murky torrents, which rise to fill the screen. Dissolve to a wall panel that shows three ponies with a sunrise as their backdrop. To the sound of turning gears, this pivots 180 degrees around a vertical axis down its middle to deposit the three in this new place—a trick door built onto a turntable. As they turn away from the wall, Rainbow is first to find her tongue.*)

Rainbow: (*awestruck*) Whoa…

(*Her perspective of the chamber, panning from one side to the other. They are facing a semicircular line of seven doors, each with its own particular artwork; overgrowths of roots and vines hang down from ceiling to floor, snaking into a small central pool of lily pads and blooms.*)

Daring: (*from o.s.*) Seven doors, seven locks. (*She leans into view.*) One of them leads to the treasure. (*All three again.*) I'd rather not think about what the others lead to.
Quibble: (*sourly, stepping forward*) Yeah, yeah, the classic "pony and the tiger" bit. All you have to do is—
Rainbow: Um, maybe you should let Daring Do figure it out?
Quibble: (*backing away from the mares*) Oh, excuse *me.*

(*These two advance a bit—Rainbow hovering, Daring on hooves and leaning down to scrutinize the conundrum. As she strokes her chin thoughtfully, Quibble breaks the silence.*)

Quibble: (*under a cough*) Not that one.

(*One double hairy eyeball later, Rainbow and Daring move off across the chamber and stop at a particular door. Daring pulls the Amulet out of her shirt collar, still strung around her neck, and gets the head in her teeth. As she begins to crane her neck toward the door, she is again interrupted by the know-it-all, who voices a drawn-out half-whine that is the universal equivalent of "You sure about that?" Letting the Amulet drop free, Daring turns to Rainbow.*)

Daring: Is he always like this?
Rainbow: Yeah. Buuuut he's usually right. (*Quibble idly buffs a hoof on his shirt.*)
Daring: (*sighing, to him*) Which lock do *you* think it is?
Quibble: (*groaning wearily*) Finally. (*pacing*) Look. Each door has another door that matches.

(*His perspective, pointing at one of the seven and panning to another, identical one as he speaks.*)

Quibble: These two both have earth ponies fighting serpents. (*To a third, then a fourth.*) These two have pegasi fighting griffons. (*To a fifth, then a sixth.*) These two have unicorns fighting bears…

(*Cut to the odd one out; he crosses to it and points.*)

Quibble: …but this one… (*Grimace; Daring catches on and smiles.*)
Daring: …has an alicorn on it! (*She and Rainbow cross to it; now he allows himself a smug smile.*) It's the only one without a match.

(*Cut to within its keyhole, the camera pointing out at an extreme close-up of her peering eye. The next two lines are slightly muffled by the stone.*)

Daring: How did I miss that? (*She backs away and Quibble moves into view on the next line.*)
Quibble: I've been asking myself that ever since Book Four.

(*That jibe does nothing to win him any points with either mare. Outside the keyhole again: Daring flies over to the door, Amulet in teeth and off the cord, and slots the cylindrical end into the winged unicorn's eye. There is the snap of a catch being released, and the entire eye recedes into the door surface. Cut to its other side as the passage grinds open to frame her; the other two fall in wonderingly behind as she steps confidently through.*)

Quibble: The Seven-Sided Chest of Chicomoztoc!

(*On the end of this, cut to a close-up of this item within and zoom in slowly. It is a small, flattish container whose lid forms a shallow pyramid, and it rests on a stone pedestal under a shaft of sunlight. A sweep of Daring's wing carries it away for a closer look, the camera cutting to her and then zooming out to frame Rainbow on the next line.*)

Quibble: (*from o.s., uneasily*) Uh, guys…

(*Cut to him, having retreated out to the chamber and aiming a very scared eye at the mud that has pushed the turntable door open and begun to pour in. He grimaces mightily toward the others, the filth still brimming up toward the doorway through which they exited Cipactli's chamber. All three gather at the edge, Daring having stowed the Chest away, as the beast cruises back and forth.*)

Rainbow: (*hyperventilating*) The way out is totally covered! How are we gonna get out of here?

(*Daring looks this way and that, then upward, and points toward the ceiling.*)

Daring: There!

(*Cut to just behind her and Rainbow and tilt up, framing a skylight opening far above.*)

Quibble: Uh, seriously, do you ever *not* escape out of the top of a temple?

(*Suddenly finding himself on the business end of a double-barreled "shut it" glare, he wisely takes the hint and backs away fearfully.*)

Daring: We'll have to carry Mr. Adventure Critic out with us!
Rainbow: We won't be fast enough! We'll never make it!
Quibble: (*now o.s.*) Guys!

(*Cut to him, now standing alongside one of the vines that have spread throughout this entire edifice. He grabs a length in his teeth and pulls, snapping it so that several coils tumble down to drape loosely around his neck, and offers the faintest hint of a smile to a mildly ticked-off Daring.*)

Quibble: I think Rainbow Dash and I have this covered.

(*The blue daredevil surprises her literary hero by flashing a savage grin and spreading her wings. Wipe to the uppermost reaches of the chamber, now almost totally filled. Rainbow and Daring zoom across, barely clearing the surface and each with one end of a vine tied around her midsection. They are towing a gleefully grinning Quibble, up on his hind legs for a second round of water skiing and being pulled by the vine around his shoulders. Cipactli is not far behind them, however, and they cut a sharp corner to head toward the skylight only to find the monster bursting upward with a roar dead ahead. The next three lines are shouted so as to be heard over the rushing liquid.*)

Quibble: Go around! You can't go over him! (*Pan to Rainbow and Daring.*)
Daring: Go over him? Are you crazy?
Rainbow: If Quibble says "go over him," we go over him!

(*Here comes a final roar from Cipactli, answered by Quibble's scream of abject terror, and then the monster's lunge. It gets nothing for its trouble but a mouthful of mud, as the two pegasi go into a sharp climb and pull him clear with almost no room to spare. He rakes his way up the golden spines and is flipped off the tail as it sinks into the depths.*)

(*Cut to the jungle surrounding the temple as the three burst forth from the roof and arc toward the trees with all the grace and artistry of a brick flung into a lake. They plummet out of sight, a rustle of leaves and a scatter of birds marking their touchdown; cut to them in a half-dazed pile on the ground, Quibble at the bottom.*)

Quibble: (*starting to stand, lifting the others*) You two are insane!

(*By the time each gets upright in turn, they have disposed of the vines they used to make good their escape.*)

Rainbow: You *said* "go over him"!
Quibble: I *said* "go around him"!
Daring: (*hushed, covering each mouth with a wing*) And *I* said "be quiet"!

(*Caballeron leads Withers and Vest through the undergrowth.*)

Caballeron: This way! I heard them! (*Quibble peeks up from behind a nearby bush.*)
Quibble: (*to Rainbow, Daring*) Okay, I got it. Let's create a fake treasure out of mud and rocks, give *that* to Caballeron, and then when—
Daring: (*smiling, lifting a stone*) Not every Daring Do plan has to be super-complicated.

(*The missile is thrown to smack against an outer wall, bringing Caballeron at a gallop. Followed by his two goons, he utters a loud, frustrated groan.*)

Caballeron: I swear I heard them!

(*And a sizable portion of the wall comes crumbling down to reveal Cipactli inside—plenty steamed over either the disturbance, having lost out on a free lunch, or both. It uncorks a roar that shakes the whole area and spooks all three stallions into a shrilly screaming bug-out, and it decides to go after them for good measure.*)

Caballeron: *I'LL GET YOU, DARING DOOOO!!*

(*As the echo of his words fades away, the camera pans/tilts down slightly to frame the edge of a nearby pond. Three cut reeds project upward from the surface, and three heads quickly bob up with the lower ends in their mouths—having used them as breathing tubes. Quibble is first up to dry land so he can give his an appraising glance. He is already dry, as will the other two be when they come up without their reeds.*)

Quibble: Eh, not particularly original or inspired, but it worked. (*He lets it drop.*)

Daring: Who are you again?
Rainbow: He's a fan.
Daring: (*not fully convinced*) Uh-huh. There's some stairs on the other side of the temple that lead out of the ravine. (*smiling*) I suggest you two take them and head west.
Rainbow: What about you?
Daring: (*pulling the Chest out of her shirt*) I've gotta get this to a museum. Thanks for your help. (*tucking it away*) I couldn't have done it without you—both of you.

(*She takes off in a smear of faded colors, leaving Quibble to deal with the turnabout of having an insufferably smug smile aimed at him by Rainbow. He offers a conciliatory grin, and the two begin to walk.*)

Rainbow: So…?
Quibble: (*grudgingly*) So…maybe the later books *are* slightly more realistic than I gave them credit for. Still don't like them. (*Both stop.*)
Rainbow: (*affronted*) What?!? How can you—
Quibble: Wait! Hold on. Before we get in another fight, I…I think I've finally figured it out! *I* love the Daring Do that solves puzzles and uses her brain to get out of tough situations, and she did way more of that in the original trilogy.

(*Cut to Rainbow, not quite buying it.*)

Quibble: (*from o.s., pointing to her*) *You* love the Daring Do that is brave and awesome and comes out on top, no matter what the odds.
Rainbow: O…kay? (*He withdraws the hoof; cut to frame both.*)
Quibble: And that's okay. We might never agree on what makes Daring Do cool, but…*you* are…definitely cool. (*suddenly nervous; she smiles*) I-I mean, the way you saved me on the bridge…heh, wow! And escaping from the temple…you, Rainbow Dash, are *awesome*.
Rainbow: (*scratching back of neck*) Well…I-I-I'm not the one who can locate a treasure in half the time Daring Do can. You may have terrible taste in books, but you're pretty awesome yourself.

(*The words have barely left her mouth before their full meaning hits her like a two-by-four to the head.*)

Rainbow: In a brainy, egghead, puzzle-solving kinda way. Heh.
Quibble: I guess we don't have to agree on everything to get along. (*offering a front hoof*) Friends?
Rainbow: Definitely friends.

(*Just as when they first met at the convention, they tap hooves. With the matter closed, they start walking again toward the riot of jungle vegetation spread before them. Zoom out slowly, framing a sky that has gone gold in the sunshine of late afternoon.*)

Quibble: Uhhh…do you think A.K. Yearling would consider letting me write the next book? I…yeah, I think I can make things *way* clearer. I mean, for instance—

(*Fade to black on the end of this line.*)

(*Instead of music, the credits are accompanied by the following dialogue, delivered in voice over.*)

Quibble: —in the second adventure, there's this side character. I don't want to kinda name it right now, because it's sort of this thing that I've already written a lot of fan fiction on. I don't want you to—not that I'm saying that you would steal it, but I am saying that this would totally go along my whole thing about puzzle-solving, except what if each puzzle that was solved, uh, unlocked a new karate move? Think of it that way, right? And I mean I'm kind of a "Yearlite" myself, so I'm sure she'd be open to—
Rainbow: (*very slightly annoyed*) Uh, Quibble?
Quibble: Sorry.