

BRIDLE GOSSIP

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Prologue

(Opening shot: fade in to the sun shining brightly in a clear sky during the day. Tilt down toward ground level.)

Twilight Sparkle: *(from o.s.)* Wow, what a gorgeous day!

(Stop on her; out for a walk through a tree-lined stretch of Ponyville, with Spike on her back.)

Spike: Rainbow Dash must've gotten up early for once and cleared all the clouds away.

(Long overhead shot of the town square; she heads toward the pavilion. Not a single other pony is in sight.)

Twilight: I bet all of Ponyville is gonna be out enjoying the sunshine. *(Close-up; she looks around.)* What? Where is everypony?

(Her perspective panning across one street as a tumbleweed drifts by. One pony slams the upstairs shutters closed, while another yanks her daughter in off the front step and closes the door. Back to Twilight and Spike.)

Spike: Is it some sort of pony holiday?

Twilight: Not that I know of.

(Cut to just inside a closed window as they pass; the next two lines are muffled by the glass.)

Spike: *(not yet in view)* Does my breath stink? *(Now in view, he blows out fire and sniffs.)*

Twilight: Not more than usual. *(Outside again.)*

Spike: Is it... *(frightened)* ...zombies?

Twilight: Uh, not very likely.

Spike: Not likely...but possible?

(She stops abruptly and looks ahead; a cut to her perspective shows that she is facing Sugarcube Corner's front door, the top half of which is open to reveal the lights out. The camera pans slowly

away from it, but Pinkie Pie sticks her head into view before it can pass out of frame. She keeps her voice down on the following three lines.)

Pinkie: Twilight!

(Quick pan to re-center the door; she ducks away again and reappears.)

Pinkie: Spike! *(ducking down, beckoning with hoof)* Come here!

(Side view of the puzzled unicorn and her rider.)

Pinkie: *(from inside, beckoning)* Come here! *(Head pokes out.)* Hurry! Before she gets you!

(This time when she pulls her head back, Twilight follows it inside and the door's top half closes behind her. Snap to black, with a light beam clicking on a second later to illuminate the two new arrivals. Twilight shields her eyes from the glare, which passes away from them as Spike speaks.)

Spike: Who? The zombie pony?

(Cut to Pinkie, who has the light in hoof—a small firefly lantern—and trains it on herself.)

Pinkie: *(shuddering mightily)* Zombie pony?

(Back to Twilight and Spike. He hunkers down and grabs hold of her even more tightly than he is doing right now, prompting an irritated glare.)

Twilight: Spike, there are no zombie ponies. *(He gets off.)* Pinkie, what are you doing here alone in the dark?

Pinkie: *(from o.s.)* I'm not alone in the dark.

(Zoom out slightly, the lights coming up enough to reveal Applejack, Apple Bloom, Fluttershy, Rainbow Dash, and Rarity gathered behind her on the shop floor. She gasps; close-up.)

Twilight: *(cocked eyebrow)* Okay, then, what are you all doing here in the dark?

Applejack: *(from o.s.)* We're hidin' from *her!*

(On this last word, cut to her at a window and pointing out. She nudges the curtain open so all can get a closer look, with the exception of Fluttershy. In the middle of the deserted street, a four-legged figure in a hooded cloak paws at the dirt. A ground-level close-up of the legs reveals them as light gray with irregular stripes in a darker hue and hoof tips so deep as to be nearly black; one foreleg is encircled by several gold hoops. The cloak is brown and covers the rest of the body. As the seven onlookers stare intently out through the glass, the figure turns its head toward the camera in close-up, exposing its dark gray nose/mouth and a pair of glowing yellow eyes under the hood.)

(Inside Sugarcube Corner, five ponies and one dragon recoil away from the mirror with a cry of fear, but Twilight just throws a quizzical look over her shoulder at them. Snap to black.)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(Opening shot: fade in to the skeptical Twilight. Bloom, standing near her, uses Spike's head as a hoof-rest to help get her toward eye level.)

Bloom: Did you see her, Twilight? Did you see...Zecora? *(Applejack leans down to her.)*

Applejack: Apple Bloom! I told you never to say that name!

Twilight: Well, I saw her glance this way—

Pinkie: Glance *evilly* this way!

Twilight: —and then a bunch of you flip out for no good reason.

Applejack: No good reason? *(pulling Bloom closer)* You call protectin' your kin no good reason? *(letting her go, patting her head)* Why, as soon as my sister saw Zecora ridin' into town, she started shakin' in her little horseshoes!

(These words establish the familial relationship between the two Apples. She shakes said sister back and forth on the word "shakin'" to make the point. Close-up of the little redheaded filly.)

Bloom: *(voice vibrating)* Diiid nooot! *(Applejack stops.)*

Applejack: *(from o.s., picking her up)* So I swept her up and brought her here...

(By the end of this, the camera has shifted to frame Bloom atop her.)

Bloom: I walked here myself!

Applejack: ...for safekeepin'. *(Bloom jumps down.)*

Bloom: Applejack, I'm not a baby! I can take care of myself!

Applejack: Not from that creepy Zecora.

Fluttershy: She's mysterious.

Rainbow: Sinister.

Pinkie: *(eyes going wide)* And spooooky!

(Twilight, clearly unconvinced, takes another look out the window—and promptly finds herself at the bottom of a six-pony-and-one-dragon crush doing likewise. The brown-cloaked figure of Zecora puts down the hood in a close-up, exposing a dark-gray/white striped, Mohawk-like mane and gold hoops in the ears. These markings and the dark stripes on her light gray coat confirm her as a zebra. Her face is turned away from the camera; o.s. gasp from the group. Cut to just outside the window, with Fluttershy again not among the spectators. The next two lines are muffled by the glass.)

Twilight: Will you cut that out?

Rarity: Just look at those stripes. So garish. *(Inside again.)*

Twilight: She's a zebra. *(Cut to Pinkie, Rainbow, Rarity, and Spike.)*

Others: *(remaining three o.s.)* A what?!?

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* A zebra. And her stripes aren't a fashion choice, Rarity. *(getting in her face)* They're what she was born with.

(She backs off; Rarity cries out and faints.)

Applejack: Born where? I never seen a pony like that in these parts... 'cept *her!*

Twilight: Well, she's probably not from here, and she's not a pony.

(Cut to Zecora in the street; she has resumed her pawing at the ground.)

Twilight: *(from o.s. inside)* My books say that zebras come from a faraway land.

(Inside again on the end of this, the camera pointing between Rainbow and the upright Rarity toward Spike as he slips into the kitchen.)

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* But I've never seen her in Ponyville. Where does she live?

Applejack: That's just it. She lives in...the Everfree Forest!

(A thunderclap shakes the room, scaring the daylight out of her and the two grown ponies nearest to her, Fluttershy and Pinkie. Bloom is thrown a bit off balance, but does not freak out.)

Twilight: *(angrily, toward kitchen)* Spike!

(In the other room, the noise proves to have been caused by a couple of pans he dropped while getting a snack for himself.)

Spike: Uh, sorry. *(Cut to Applejack.)*

Applejack: The Everfree Forest just ain't natural. The plants grow... *(Pan to Fluttershy.)*

Fluttershy: Animals care for themselves... *(Cut to Rainbow.)*

Rainbow: And the clouds move...

Applejack, Fluttershy, Rainbow: ...all on their own!

(Rarity cries out and faints again. Cut to an unimpressed Twilight, then to Pinkie on the next line.)

Pinkie: And that wicked enchantress Zecora lives there doing her evil...stuff! Oh, she's so evil, I even wrote a song about her!

Rainbow: *(wearily)* Here we go.

Fast 4, no particular key and not much regard for meter

Pinkie: *(dancing in front of Twilight on hind legs)*
She's an evil enchantress, she does evil dances
(grabbing Twilight, turning own eyes into hypnotic spirals)
And if you look deep in her eyes, she'll put you in trances
(Cut to Bloom in the jittering Applejack's grasp; she soon pushes free.)
Then what will she do? She'll mix up an evil brew
And she'll gobble you up in a big tasty stew
(jumping up to stand on table)
So...watch out!

Song ends

(She strikes the best two-legged menacing pose she can and heaves for breath.)

Twilight: Wow. Catchy. *(Pinkie gets down and smiles.)*

Pinkie: It's a work in progress.

Twilight: *(crossing room)* This is all just a lot of gossip and rumors. Now tell me— *(Cut to Fluttershy and Rainbow; she continues o.s.)* —what exactly have you actually *seen* Zecora do?

Rainbow: Well...once a month, she comes into Ponyville.

Twilight: Ooooh!

Rarity: *(from o.s.)* Then... *(Cut to her, back upright.)* ...she lurks by the stores.

Twilight: Oh, my!

Fluttershy: And then, she digs at the ground.

Twilight: Good gracious! *(Bloom eyes her with slight unease.)* Okay, I'm sorry, but how is any of this bad? Maybe she comes to town to visit.

Bloom: Yeah! Maybe she's just tryin' to be neighborly.

Twilight: And maybe she's not *lurking* by the stores, maybe she's *going* to them, lurk-free, to do some shopping? *(Zoom in slowly on Bloom.)*

Bloom: Yeah! Everypony likes to shop. You know what I think?

Applejack: Apple Bloom! Hush and let the big ponies talk.

Bloom: I *am* a big pony. *(She clomps away, discomfited.)*

Rainbow: What about digging at the ground? *(Bloom crosses to a corner.)* You got to admit, *that's* weird.

Fluttershy: What if she's digging for innocent creatures?

(Now Pinkie starts singing and cavorting in the background, a cappella, as Twilight and Applejack discuss.)

Twilight: I am sure there's an explanation for everything Zecora does.

(Back to Fluttershy and Rainbow, Applejack in corner; Pinkie falls silent.)

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* And if anypony here were actually brave enough to approach her— *(Zoom in on Bloom.)* —she would find out the truth.

(As the sounds of further argument are heard from the other side of the room, Bloom tosses her head back defiantly and opens the door near her.)

Bloom: *(to herself)* Well, I'm brave enough. I'm gonna find out myself.

(Cautious but determined, she steps out of the building. Out in the street, she peeks around a corner at the distant figure of Zecora, whose hood is back up. After ducking back with a sudden gasp, she risks another look and hurries across the way, emerging closer to Zecora in an alley between two houses. Zecora finishes her digging and has a quick look over her shoulder before walking off; this shot reveals gold hoops around her neck as well as her foreleg. Bloom gets another furtive look at the departing out-of-towner from the alley and some bushes, working her way closer.)

(Cut to just outside the Sugarcube Corner window, with the silhouettes of Twilight and Pinkie visible inside. Zoom in slowly; their next words are muffled by the glass.)

Twilight: You ponies are being ridiculous!

Pinkie: Well, I heard that Zecora eats hay.

Twilight: Pinkie, I eat hay! You eat hay! *(Cut to Applejack and Pinkie inside.)*

Pinkie: Yeah, but I heard it's the evil way she eats hay.

Applejack: Hey! Where's Apple Bloom?

(Cut to the open exit door and zoom in quickly.)

Fluttershy: *(from o.s.)* The door's open! *(Cut to her, Rainbow, and Rarity.)*

Rarity: She went outside!

Rainbow: And Zecora's still out there!

Applejack: That silly little filly! I told her to stay put!

(All four charge out; Twilight starts after them, but halts.)

Twilight: *(addressing herself o.s.)* Spike.

(Camera shift: he is now out of the kitchen, carrying one pan and wearing a second, dirty one on his head.)

Twilight: You stay here in case Apple Bloom comes back. *(She gallops out.)*

Spike: *(saluting)* Will do!

(Wipe to Zecora as she walks along a path leading from the meadowlands on the outskirts of Ponyville into the Everfree Forest. Zoom out to frame more of the area and the sky, whose color indicates that it is now late afternoon. Bloom puts her head up from a bush and hesitantly trots out to follow the zebra. Close-up of her hooves, which stop at the edge of the shadows cast by the wild overgrowth, and zoom out. After a nervous look ahead and a hard swallow, she draws herself up to full height and gallops in with fresh resolve.)

(Cut to a thick expanse of plants with vivid blue leaves and zoom out to frame them lining the path Zecora is following. Bloom keeps her distance; back to the zebra.)

Applejack: *(from o.s.)* Apple Bloom?

(Zecora looks back; pan to Bloom, who does likewise with a startled gasp. She finds all six mares a short distance behind her, with a stretch of plants between her and them.)

Applejack: You get back here right now!

(Now Zecora speaks for the first time, in a throaty voice of African origin, while slowly backing up into a sudden spurt of mist behind her.)

Zecora: Beware! Beware, you pony folk!
Those leaves of blue are not a joke!

(Applejack skids in to get her head underneath Bloom and flip her up onto her back.)

Applejack: You—you keep your creepy mumbo-jumbo to yourself, you hear?

(Yells of agreement from Pinkie, Rarity, and Rainbow.)

Pinkie: *(singing)* She'll gobble you up in a big tasty stew— *(Cut to Twilight on the end of this.)*

Twilight: Oh, brother.

Zecora: *(disappearing into mist)* Beware! Beware!

(Rainbow is now standing in a patch of the blue-leaved plants.)

Rainbow: Yeah, back at you, Zecora! You and your lame curse are the ones who better beware!
(Bloom glares at her.)

Applejack: *(to Bloom)* And you! Why couldn't you just listen to your big sister?

Bloom: I...I...

Applejack: Who knows what kinda nasty curse Zecora coulda just put on you?

Pinkie: Just like in my song!

(All mares have now found themselves among the strangely hued vegetation, and Pinkie starts to sing again while jumping around in it.)

Pinkie: Evil enchantress, with the dances, and the trances— *(Cut to Twilight on the end of this.)*

Twilight: You guys, there's no such thing as curses!

Rainbow: *(flying low through plants)* Well, that's interesting to hear— *(tapping Twilight's horn)*—coming from Miss Magic-Pants herself.

Twilight: My magic, *real* magic, comes from within. It's a skill you're born with. Curses are artificial, fake magic. *(Cut to Fluttershy and Pinkie; Rainbow flies by, silently mocking her as she continues o.s.)* It's conjured with potions and incantations, all smoke and mirrors meant to scare.

(Back to Twilight after she finishes.)

Twilight: But curses have no *real* power. They're just an old pony tale.

(Her eyes pop suddenly; in a longer shot, the others are walking out of the forest, through a patch of plants that has seemingly grown to fill most of the open area. Applejack hangs back, not noticing that Bloom has climbed down and is nowhere in sight.)

Applejack: Just you wait, Twilight. *(walking off)* You're gonna learn that some pony tales really are true.

(Zoom in briefly on Twilight, then dissolve to the exterior of the library that night and continue the zoom. All the lights are out; dissolve to an overhead view of Twilight asleep in bed and zoom in once more. The following two lines echo in her head.)

Pinkie: She's an evil enchantress, she does evil dances—

Zecora: Beware! Beware!

(As the unicorn shifts in her sleep, the color drains out of the scene and images from her dreams—in full color—float and waver across. The echo continues for the next seven lines.)

Pinkie: If you look deep in her eyes, she will put you in trances—

Rainbow: Yeah, was that supposed to scare us?

Rarity: Wicked, wicked zebra!

Fluttershy: She's good...with a curse.

Pinkie: Then what will she do?

Applejack: Just you wait, Twilight. Some pony tales really are true.

Pinkie: Then she'll gobble you up in a big tasty stew *(She vanishes.)*

So...watch out!

(The last image is that of Zecora, approaching the camera, with her hood up and her eyes glowing yellow, as she laughs madly. Once the glare has nearly filled the screen, dissolve to a full-color overhead shot of Twilight still asleep. She tosses briefly in an uneasy doze, grabbing at her pillow.)

(Another dissolve brightens the room with morning light and brings the crowing of a rooster. Twilight's mane is badly disheveled, hiding her horn from view; cut to an extreme close-up of her face as she forces her eyes open.)

Twilight: *(groaning)* What a dream. Curses, schmurses.

(She gets up and plods over to a vanity, getting a good look at the state of her mane.)

Twilight: Whoa! *(chuckling, levitating a hairbrush)* Maybe Zecora cursed my hair.

(She smiles and laughs as the brush does its work on her bangs, but her levity ends with an inarticulate noise of surprise and a gasp. A close-up reveals that although her bangs have been sorted out, her horn is covered with blue spots and droops as though it has been turned to rubber.)

Twilight: Or she cursed my horn!

(Snap to black.)

Act Two

(Opening shot: fade in to an open book atop a pile. Twilight reaches into view and closes it; cut to a slow pan across the library's reading room, most of whose books have been thrown about the place.)

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* No, no, no, no, no! *(Cut to her on the last "no," eyeing another one.)* None of these books have a cure! *(groaning, crossing room)* There has to be a real reason for this! An illness? An allergy?

(Spike has pulled down a green-bound book with a plant on its cover and is perusing it closely.)

Spike: A curse!

Twilight: I said a *real* reason. Something that points to something real.

Spike: How about this one? *(He shows her the cover; she squints at it.)*

Twilight: *Supernaturals?* Spike, the word "supernatural" refers to things like ghosts and spirits and zombies— *(Back to him; she continues o.s. and pushes the book away.)* —which are as make-believe as curses. *(Shift to frame both again.)* This book is just a bunch of hooley!

(He ponders this for a moment.)

Spike: But what if you're wrong, Twilight? What if this really is a—

(Quick pan to Pinkie, who has entered the library. Her tongue is covered with the same blue spots as those on Twilight's horn and has swollen so badly that it protrudes from her mouth. As a result, her speech is nearly unintelligible and accompanied by frequent sprays of saliva that collect in a pool before her.)

*** *All lines in square brackets indicate the best translation of her words.* ***

Pinkie: [A curse!]

Spike: A purse? How could it be a purse?

Twilight: Pinkie! What happened?

Pinkie: [It was Zecora!] *(Cut to Spike, being drenched by spit; she continues o.s.)* [She put a curse on us!]

Spike: Hey, say it, don't spray it, Pinkie!

(Something thumps against the building hard enough to shake it.)

Rainbow: *(from outside)* Ow!

(Pan to a nearby window, where she rams against the glass in a display of poor flight control that is unusual even for her. A close look reveals that her wings have been turned upside down.)

Rainbow: *(between thuds, with occasional grunts)* She's...trying to say, ow...Zecora...

(This latest hit misses the window but hits the wall hard enough to crack it. Next to the window is a door, which gets knocked off its hinges by a lunge that sends her hurtling upside down across the room.)

Rainbow: ...she slapped us all with a... *(Crash from o.s.)* ...ow!

(She has fetched up on her back by the shelves and is tangled up in the ladder that was propped against them.)

Rainbow: ...curse!

Rarity: *(from o.s.)* I'm afraid I have to agree.

(Quick pan to her, now also in the library. Her mane, tail, and coat have grown and matted into thick dreadlock-like strands that give her a distinct resemblance to either a sheepdog or a walking mop. She blows uselessly at the purple hair hanging in her face, prompting cries of shock from Twilight and Spike. As Rainbow drags herself and the ladder over to the others, Applejack's head appears in the foreground to address them. Her voice is considerably higher-pitched than normal, as if she has been inhaling helium.)

Applejack: I hate to say I told you so, Twilight, but I told you so!

(On the end of this, zoom out to show that her entire body has shrunk so much that she can easily balance on another pony's rump—even a filly like Bloom, on whom she happens to be standing at the moment. A gasp from Twilight and Spike.)

Applejack: It's a curse, I tells you!

Twilight: But...Fluttershy seems just fine!

(Cut to Rarity and the yellow pegasus, now also in the library next to Rarity and looking slightly

upset.)

Rarity: Yes. There doesn't seem to be a thing wrong with her.

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* Fluttershy? Are you okay?

(Fluttershy turns her face away; shift to frame both.)

Twilight: Is there something wrong with you? *(Nod.)* Would you care to tell us? *(Eyebrows lower.)* So...you're not gonna tell us. *(Nod.)* "Yes, you're not," or "yes, you will"? *(Head shake.)*

(Applejack rushes across the table in the center of the room.)

Applejack: Good gravy, girl! What's wrong with you?

(There follows a full two seconds of total silence, after which Fluttershy speaks—in a slow, deep, gravelly male voice.)

Fluttershy: I don't want to talk about it.

(Rainbow's wings flap randomly, causing her to tumble to the floor as Spike laughs uproariously. He completely ignores the angry look Twilight aims at him.)

Spike: This is hilarious! Look at all of you! We got...

(Cut/pan to each victim in turn.)

Spike: *(from o.s.)* ...Hairity, Rainbow Crash, Spittie Pie, Apple Teeny, Flutterguy... *(To Twilight.)* ...and... *(Cut to frame both.)* ...uh...I got nothin'. *(aside, pointing at her)* Twilight Sparkle. I mean, seriously, I can't even work with that.

Twilight: *(chuckling sarcastically)* This is no joke, Spike. Now start looking for more books so I can find a cure!

(His eyes have been drawn to her overly flexible horn, prompting him to bite back a fresh laugh. Getting it under control, he goes to the bookshelves.)

Spike: Awww... *(Rainbow pulls loose from the ladder and hovers unsteadily.)*

Rainbow: I think we'll find a cure to this curse at Zecora's place!

Twilight: It's not a curse!

(Rainbow rockets backward; loud crash o.s. Applejack takes her place.)

Applejack: I agree with Dash. *(Rainbow keeps veering around crazily.)* We'll go to Zecora's and force her to remove this hex.

Twilight: It's not a hex either!

(The group launches into a six-way argument, with only Bloom abstaining as she watches from the outer edge of the room.)

Bloom: *(to herself)* This is all my fault. If I hadn't followed Zecora in the first place, none of this woulda happened. *(walking away)* I just gotta fix this. *(She passes the table Applejack is standing on.)*

Applejack: *(to herself)* Now where does she think she's goin' this time?

(A couple of leaps over the disarrayed literature put the miniature mare in her little sister's tail without being noticed. Cut to just outside the doorway as Bloom leaves and zoom in.)

Rainbow: *(from inside, not visible)* I don't care what you say, Twilight! It's time to pony up and confront Zecora!

(Cut to her and the other four full-size mares on the end of this.)

Rainbow: Come on, girls! *(Her perspective of them.)* Are you with me?

Pinkie: [I am!]

Rarity: And I as well!

Fluttershy: Oh, I don't know. Seems awfully dangerous. *(Spike laughs.)*

Rainbow: How about you, Applejack? *(seeing her not on the table)* Applejack?

(All now take notice of her absence. Cut to the table and zoom in.)

Pinkie: *(from o.s.)* [She's gone!] *(Rarity cries and examines a hoof frantically.)*

Rarity: Oh, somepony stepped on her!

(All start checking their own hooves; Twilight's eyes constrict to points, and she glances at her own rump.)

Twilight: Or sat on her?

(The others follow suit. Rainbow has the next bright idea.)

Rainbow: Rarity's hair! *(Pinkie digs through the matted strands.)*

Rarity: *(amid startled yelps)* Oh!...Oh!...Pinkie, what are you doing?...Really!...You ever hear of personal space?

Pinkie: *(shaking head)* [Nope!]

Twilight: Apple Bloom is gone too!

Rainbow: I bet they went after Zecora!

Twilight: Well, we'd better go find them. *(She heads for the door; Rainbow tumbles down.)*
Come on, girls. Let's go!

(Rarity tries to follow, but cannot due to the hair caught under Pinkie's hoof.)

Rarity: *(straining to pull loose)* Oh, dear!...Oh, this is so unseemly!

(She finally yanks loose and stumbles after Twilight, with Fluttershy and Pinkie coming next.)

Rainbow: *(from o.s.)* Hey!

(Cut to her, skidding upside down along the floor.)

Rainbow: A little help here?

Fluttershy: Oopsie. *(She and Pinkie hoist Rainbow between their heads.)* Sorry.

(They toss her upward for a proper flying start, but she zooms ahead and slams into something instead.)

Rainbow: *(from o.s.)* Ow!

(She has managed to hit the wall above the door she broke down. Peeling herself loose—and revealing a pegasus-shaped indentation in the plaster—she zooms out.)

Fluttershy: *(addressing herself o.s.)* Uh, Spike? *(Cut to him, studying an open book; she continues o.s.)* Are you coming?

Spike: Nope. Uh... *(grabbing a quill)* ...gotta stay here and look for a cure.

(Fluttershy and Pinkie exit; after they are gone, he gasps with a sudden inspiration and the camera zooms out slowly.)

Spike: Twilight Flopple!

(He writes this down. Dissolve to a long shot of Bloom galloping straight into the Everfree Forest. She stops upon hearing her sister's voice.)

Applejack: *(hidden in Bloom's hair)* Stop right there! *(She pops out from the red mane.)* Turn around right now, missy!

(Instead of doing as she is told, Bloom aims a mischievous smile up toward the top of her head.)

Bloom: No.

Applejack: No?! You can't ignore a direct order from your big sister!

(She finds herself tossed loose, caught in Bloom's teeth, and deposited on a convenient branch.)

Bloom: *(laughing)* Sorry, Applejack— *(walking away)* —but I'm the big sister now.

Applejack: Apple Bloom, you come back here right this instant! I'm gonna tell Big Macintosh on you!

(The threat has absolutely no effect, and she is left stranded on her branch—too high to jump down, too far to leap across to the ridge Bloom stood on to place her here.)

Applejack: Oh, pony feathers.

(Dissolve to the forest entrance, with Twilight leading Fluttershy, Pinkie, and Rarity in at full gallop.)

Twilight: Come on, girls, we've got to get to Zecora's. *(now o.s.)* Hurry!

(Rarity trips over her own hair and skids face-first through the dirt, embedding dirt and leaves into the thick strands. She cries out and lurches up again.)

Rarity: Easier said than done! *(Off she goes; here comes Rainbow, looping all around.)*

Rainbow: Hey! Wait for me!

(A large bush takes the brunt of her crazed flying; her progress through it is marked by shouts of pain and the yowling of at least one cat resting inside. She emerges from the other side, smashing into an o.s. tree with enough force to topple a large piece of it backward into view. Pan ahead to show her lying upside down amid the underbrush near the impact point and groaning woozily; the land details indicate that she has hit the tree where Applejack was stranded. As she tries to lift her head, the tiny earth pony pops head and forelegs out of her mouth.)

Applejack: Rainbow! *(pulling loose, dropping o.s.)* Thank Celestia!

(The sounds of some quick construction float up.)

Applejack: *(from o.s.)* There's no time to lose!

(At ground level, she puts the finishing touches on a bridle made from a stick, a leaf, and a length of vine. She shoves the stick in Rainbow's mouth as a bit, with the leaf serving as a nose band and the vine as reins; the capsized pegasus grumbles angrily around the stick.)

Applejack: I need to get to Zecora's, pronto! *(She climbs onto Rainbow's stomach and snaps the reins.)* Giddyup, pony!

Rainbow: Ex-cuse me?

Applejack: *(digging a hock into Rainbow's gut)* Yee-haa!

(That startles her mount into a vertical takeoff.)

Rainbow: *(muffled)* What the—? *(She loops herself upright and flies left o.s.)*

Applejack: *(from o.s.)* No, Rainbow Dash! Other way!

(Now upside down again, Rainbow flies across and right o.s. Wipe to a totem-like animal carving

in a considerably more foreboding patch of the forest and zoom out; it stands outside a massive tree whose limbs and roots have contorted with extreme age. Several bottles hang on strings from the branches, and set into the trunk are a couple of windows and a door with a leafy mask mounted above it. Twilight, Fluttershy, Pinkie, and Rarity peek across the clearing at the structure.)

Rarity: Ugh! I look horrible!

Pinkie: (*lifting hair off her face*) [This place looks horrible!]

Rarity: (*following her gaze*) Oh, my.

(Longer shot of the tree as Twilight eases toward it.)

Rarity: (*from o.s.*) That place really *does* look horrible.

(Rarity is first to follow her, now free of all the crud; cut to just inside one window as all four ponies get a good look. Cut to their perspective on the next line: candles, jugs, more masks on the walls, bottles strung from the ceiling. The walls are covered with thatched-reed mats, making the place resemble a hut more than a typical house.)

Rarity: Nice decorations—if you like creepy!

(The door opens to admit Zecora, seen without her cloak for the first time. She has dark blue-green eyes and a short, tight braid/knot at the base of her tail. She carries a bottle in her teeth; the ponies duck away with a gasp, and she tips the contents into a boiling caldron. As the four risk another look, the zebra speaks an incantation in an African-sounding language; Pinkie reacts with overexcited rancor.)

Pinkie: [She stole my song! She stole my song!]

Rarity: She stole your song?

Twilight: Oh, Pinkie. Doesn't sound anything like your song.

(The inarticulate pink pony struggles for words—due more to being flustered than to her tongue—and finally throws herself at Fluttershy's hooves.)

Pinkie: [Please!]

(Taking the full brunt of the two entreating blue eyes in her face, Fluttershy sighs wearily and begins to sing in her newfound basso. Pinkie mimes along with the words.)

Jazz feel, bongo/finger-snap/pizzicato bass accompaniment, slow 4 (E major)

Fluttershy: She's an evil enchantress and she does evil dances
And if you look deep in her eyes, she will put you in trances
Then what will she do? She'll mix up an evil brew
Then she'll gobble you up in a big tasty stew

So...watch out.

Song ends

(Zoom out to frame Rarity watching the performance.)

Rarity: You saw those terrible things. Now do you believe us, Twilight?

(Twilight thinks hard for a second. Cut to the interior of the house and pan from one detail to the next as she names them.)

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* Scary-looking masks, confusing incantations, and a great big bubbling caldron? *(Back to her; she sighs heavily.)* Everything is pointing to Zecora being...bad. *(smiling)* Or...what if Zecora's just making soup?

(Inside, Zecora gets a whiff of the steam and licks her lips. This shot reveals a cutie mark consisting of a spiral sunburst. Zoom out slowly; she does not notice the four ponies at the window.)

Zecora: Mmm...the perfect temperature for ponies, I presume.
Now, where is that little Apple Bloom?

(Zoom in quickly to a close up of a suddenly-panicked Twilight.)

Twilight: Or...what if she's making Apple Bloom soup?

(Snap to black.)

Act Three

(Opening shot: fade in to just outside Zecora's window, with the four ponies still hunched in around it.)

Twilight: What if she's making Apple Bloom soup?

(After a very long beat, all four scream in terror and are joined by Rainbow's yell as she does a wild loop-the-loop overhead. Applejack gets her under control and steers her in for a landing.)

Applejack: I'm comin' for you, Apple Bloom!

(The flipped steed and her minuscule rider go crashing through the door of the house, another yell mingling with Zecora's native-language outburst. More whacked-out flying ensues.)

Applejack: Whoa there! *(A bottle is smashed.)* Easy, Rainbow Crash!

(Zecora trades yells with the pair for a few moments longer before Twilight bashes the door open, pawing the step as if ready to charge with the other three behind her.)

Twilight: What have you done with Apple Bloom? *(Zoom out to frame Zecora.)*

Zecora: *(looking elsewhere)* No! No!

(She lapses into her own tongue as Rainbow barrels across the place one more time. Cut to a close-up of a whirling lasso and zoom out to frame it in Applejack's hoof; her rope has shrunk along with the rest of her. The loop sings out and snags Zecora's ear, and its expert thrower soon leaps aboard to grapple with that bit of her head. The zebra is more concerned with the midair chaos than with having a pony twisting her ear; finally she addresses the four who have now entered her domicile.)

Zecora: Ponies! What is this you—

(Rainbow knocks the caldron over; zoom in to extreme close-up of Zecora.)

Zecora: No! You know not what you do!

(Cut to the trickling green contents, which ooze toward the five full-sized sets of hooves; she continues o.s.)

You've gone and spilled my precious brew!

Twilight: We're on to you, Zecora! I didn't want to believe that you cursed us, but the evidence is overwhelming!

Rarity: You made me look ridiculous!

Fluttershy: You made me *sound* ridiculous! *(Pan to Pinkie.)*

Pinkie: [You made me *speak* ridiculous!]

Twilight: You ruined my horn!

Zecora: How dare you!

(Cut to one wrecked area of the house, then to the dumped green concoction.)

Zecora: *(from o.s.)* You destroy my home, destroy my work,

(Cut to frame the whole group.)

Then rudely accuse *me* of being a jerk?

Rainbow: You put this curse on us, now you're gonna un-curse us!

(The furious zebra stands all the way up, causing the ponies to recoil with a gasp.)

Zecora: It is unwise to venture down this road.

Your actions will make my anger explode!

Twilight: *(menacingly)* Where is Apple Bloom?

(She lunges forward and ends up in head-butting standoff with Zecora—but the next word causes the spectators to turn toward the door.)

Bloom: *(from outside)* Zecora!

(The missing filly walks in, safe and sound and with a pair of saddlebags on her back.)

Bloom: I think I found all the things you asked for. *(She gets an eyeful of the trashed interior.)*
What in Ponyville is goin' on here? *(Applejack gasps.)*

Applejack: Apple Bloom! *(Cut to Bloom; she continues o.s.)* You're okay!

Bloom: Why wouldn't I be? *(Twilight moves to guard her.)*

Twilight: *(rapid fire)* Because Zecora is an evil enchantress who cursed us and was gonna cook you up into soup!

(During the previous, cut to the properly confounded little pony, then to the accused, who manages a grin. This gives way to laughter from both her and Bloom, leaving Twilight at a loss. Close-up of her.)

Bloom: *(from o.s.)* Oh, Twilight... *(Cut to her.)* ...did those silly fillies finally get in your head? You know there's no such thing as a curse.

Twilight: Apple Bloom, sweetie, you can't just stand there and tell me this isn't a curse. *(She points at the other afflicted on "this.")*

Bloom: *(crossing to Zecora)* This isn't a curse.

Zecora: If you will remember back,
The words I spoke were quite exact.

(Wavering dissolve to a flashback of her in the forest, warning the group.)

Zecora: Beware! Beware, you pony folk!
(Dissolve to the blue plants surrounding Bloom's hooves; she continues o.s.)
Those leaves of blue are not a joke!

(Dissolve back to Bloom's hooves on the hut floor and tilt up to frame her.)

Bloom: It was a warnin', about that blue plant. It's called "Poison Joke."

Zecora: That plant is much like poison oak,
(chuckling) But its results are like a joke.
(Applejack pokes out of her mane.)

Applejack: What in the hay does that mean?

Zecora: It means this plant does not breed wrath.
Instead, this plant just wants a laugh.

Applejack: Will *somepony* please talk normal?

Twilight: I think what she's saying is that when we ran in to save Apple Bloom, we ran into the Poison Joke.

(During this line, the view undergoes a wavering dissolve to a flashback of them standing before the stretch of blue foliage. Zoom out, then dissolve to a pan across the full-sized five in their

present goofy conditions, reaching her last. Rainbow has shed the makeshift bridle that Applejack rigged up to help guide her in.)

Twilight: All of our problems are just little jokes it played on us.

Applejack: *Little jokes?!? Very funny. (Each speaker steps forward in turn.)*

Rainbow: Okay, fine. But...what about the caldron?

Fluttershy: And the chanting?

Rarity: And the creepy décor?

(Zecora eyes a couple of masks that have wound up on the floor.)

Zecora: Treasures of the native land where I am from.

(Close-up of one, shifting to the other as she continues o.s.)

This one speaks “hello,” and this, “welcome.”

Rarity: Not welcoming at all, if you ask me.

(Pan to another sculpture as she speaks—an alligator-like creation with vines for hair, lying amid smashed bottles.)

Zecora: The words I chanted were from olden times—
Something you call a nursery rhyme.

(On “you,” she points ahead and the camera cuts to a puzzled Twilight on the receiving end.)

Twilight: But—the caldron! The Apple Bloom soup? *(Back to Bloom, who has shed her bags.)*

Bloom: Looky here, Twilight. That pot of water wasn’t for me, it was for all these herbal ingredients.

(Cut to an open book on a table; Twilight walks over to skim it.)

Bloom: *(from o.s.)* The cure for Poison Joke is a simple all-natural remedy. *(Cut to her, lifting Applejack on one hoof.)* You just gotta take a bubble bath.

Twilight: But I tried to find a cure in all my books and couldn’t find anything.

(Close-up of this one, which displays the vine-haired mask seen in the corner.)

Twilight: *(from o.s.)* What book has this natural remedy?

(One striped hoof reaches into view and closes it. The cover is green and shows a plant—an exact duplicate of the one Spike found in the library.)

Zecora: *(from o.s.)* Here is the book, you see? *(Cut to frame both.)*
Sad that you lack it in your library.

Twilight: *(chastened)* Actually, I *do* have this book, but I didn’t look inside because the title was so...weird. *(Zecora opens it; she reads the title.)* *Supernaturals. Natural Remedies and Cure-Alls*

That Are Simply Super. I...I...I'm so sorry, Zecora. I had the answer the whole time, if only I'd bothered to look inside.

Zecora: (*chuckling, looking over the group*)

Maybe next time, you will take a second look
And not judge the cover of the book. (*Bloom laughs.*)

[*Animation goofs: Her saddlebags and Rainbow's bridle reappear briefly during the previous sequence.*]

Twilight: Zecora, would you be kind enough to mix up another batch of the herbal bath?

Zecora: Mix it up, I certainly will,
Yet I am missing an herb from Ponyville.

Bloom: But whenever Zecora comes to town, all the shops are mysteriously closed.

Twilight: Oh! Well... (*smiling*) ...I think we can help you with that.

(Dissolve to an overhead view of the town square, which is now filled with activity. Zoom in and cut to three earth pony mares standing outside the herb/flower shop. They are the same ones who collapsed in the street during the rabbit stampede of "Applebuck Season"—Daisy, Lily, and Rose. Daisy points down the street; close-up of her.)

Daisy: Look, Rose! How awful! (*Pan to Rose.*)

Rose: The wicked enchantress has cursed them all! (*Zecora and the ponies come along the street.*)

Lily: The horror! The horror!

(She bails out to the accompaniment of panicked screams. Rose bolts into her house, slamming the door; the other two charge toward the shop.)

Daisy: Run!

(The door slams behind them, but she opens it a crack in answer to Twilight's knock.)

Twilight: Daisy, we need to talk.

(Dissolve to a close-up of the side of a large hot tub and tilt up. Fluttershy and Rarity are enjoying the bath, the latter restored to normal appearance. A rack of towels stands behind the pair. On the next line, zoom out to frame Twilight off to one side in the tub.)

Twilight: (*voice over, dictating*) "Dear Princess Celestia..." (*She dunks her head.*) "My friends and I all learned an important lesson this week."

(A whoop causes Fluttershy and Rarity to look upward as a growing shadow falls over them—and here comes Pinkie from above for a belly flop.)

Twilight: (*voice over*) "Never judge a book by its cover." (*Huge splash; both Twilight and*

Pinkie come up healed and laugh.) “Someone may look unusual or funny or scary, but you have to look past that and learn who they are inside.”

(Longer shot of the room. A semicircular platform runs around the back half of the tub, with a set of steps leading up to it from the floor. Zecora and Bloom are standing up here, while Rainbow hovers nearby with her wings back on straight; a potted plant and a bucket filled with bottles of bath additives sit with the towel rack. The accessories indicate that this place is a spa. As Twilight continues, the three not in the water add more herbs to it, Zecora and Bloom smile at each other, and Rainbow lowers herself into the tub with a relaxed sigh.)

Twilight: *(voice over)* “Real friends don’t care what your cover is. It’s the contents of a pony that count. And a good friend, like a good book, is something that will last forever. Your faithful student, Twilight Sparkle.”

(An earth pony mare joins Zecora and Bloom on the platform. Her coat is light blue, her mane and tail pink and glossy, and her eyes bright blue with very light blue shadow on the lids. The mane is held back with a broad white headband, and she sports a close-fitting shirt collar in the same color set with a pink gem and has a lotus-blossom cutie mark. The voice of Lotus carries a heavy Eastern European accent; her words indicate that she works at this facility.)

Lotus: Miss Zecora, I would love to get the recipe for this bath. It’s simply luxurious!

(The zebra smiles proudly in close-up.)

Bloom: *(from o.s.)* Applejack! *(Smile fades; pan/tilt down to her.)* Hey! Where’s Applejack?

(The five bathing ponies look frantically around themselves in the water, but stop at the sound of her voice—returned to its original pitch.)

Applejack: *(from o.s.)* I’m right here...

(Pan/tilt down to floor level, where she has grown back to normal size and is sitting with her rump wedged into a teacup. She got her own small bath and has quickly felt its effects.)

Applejack: ...*little* sis. I ain’t tiny no more.

Rarity: Oh, I have never felt so lovely in all my life!

(Pinkie pops up next to her and starts yakking at full speed—and, for good or ill, completely intelligibly.)

Pinkie: Oh, my gosh! I never realized how horrible it is, not to be able to talk! *(Cut to Rainbow, who covers her ears with a groan; she continues o.s.)* I mean, I love talking so much, and when I couldn’t talk anymore, my tongue was all— *(Back to her, she sticks it out.)* —it was the worst! Don’t you agree, Fluttershy?

(Fluttershy turns this over for a moment or three, then opens her mouth and speaks.)

Fluttershy: Yes.

(That one word, in her normal sweet voice, confirms the effectiveness of Zecora's remedy on all six mares. As the camera zooms out slowly, revealing lounge chairs and a mirror at the periphery of this tub room, Pinkie aims a sidewise glance at the camera and the other five have a laugh with Bloom and Zecora. Fade to black.)