



By Bob From Bottles

“Is my horn on straight?” Apple Bloom asked.

Scootaloo stopped struggling with her outfit and looked at Apple Bloom. “It was until you started touching it,” she said, then resumed trying to fit into her all-black clothes.

Apple Bloom looked into the dressing room’s mirror and tried to get the headband with a plastic horn back in place. She had been excited when this year’s play turned out to be a retelling of a Lady Blue Petal story. She had been even more excited when she got picked to play the lead. The stories of the heroic unicorn knight had always been some of her favorites.

The pictures of Lady Blue Petal from the books were amazing. They always featured her standing in heroic poses while wearing her ornate metal barding that had been painted white to match her coat. Drawings of blue flowers, the same color as her mane and tail, lined the armor’s edges. Her sword looked equally ornate as she held it high with her magic, letting it shine in the sun, ready to smite the foes who would dare to threaten the ponies of the world.

Apple Bloom’s costume and sword, on the other hoof, had been made by the students in her school. It still looked nice, and she appreciated the effort, but since none of her classmates knew how to make metal barding, or even normal barding, they had decided to create a cloth caparison instead. The result looked more like a dress version of the classic armor. The sword had been cut from cardboard and painted to look at least somewhat like its picture.

“Finally,” Scootaloo said with relief. “These outfits the running crew are supposed to wear are ridiculous.”

“I think they’re cool. Y’all look like ninjas runnin’ around in black so you can’t be seen.”

“Uncomfortable ninjas that are sweating to death. I think I’ll leave the hood off until we start. Whoever designed this outfit definitely wasn’t a pegasus. The wing holes are too far back.”

“And the tail hole is extra large. Are you sure you don’t have it on backwards?”

Scootaloo stared blankly for a moment before sighing in frustration. She wrapped her tail in its cover, then bit onto her hood and slung it over her back. "I'm not even going to try to straighten this out. Come on, let's go on stage. I want to do another check of the set before we start."

The Ponyville schoolhouse's outdoor theatre buzzed with activity behind its curtains as the ponies went about their last-minute preparations for tonight's performance. Several students practiced their lines one last time, while others busied themselves getting the props set up just right. A lone stallion stood on the walkway over the stage and tested the lights, one of the few jobs that wasn't being performed by a student.

Sweetie Belle stared at the back of the stage curtains. The muffled sounds of the audience talking and the band warming up could be heard coming from the other side. Despite the hooded cloak she wore, she felt very exposed. She gulped and walked to where her two friends chatted with each other. "Apple Bloom?" she asked. "Are you feeling... nervous at all?"

Apple Bloom thought a bit before answering. "Nah," she said. "I'm pretty excited. Why? Are you nervous?"

"Kind of," Sweetie Belle admitted.

"You shouldn't be. You were great at rehearsals. Besides, this ain't any different than the last time we were on stage."

"Yeah, but last time, I was too busy with the props and trying to keep the set from collapsing to really have time to worry about the audience."

"No need to worry about that tonight!" Scootaloo said proudly. "The running crew will be taking care of all the behind the scenes stuff. We did an amazing job getting the set together. Everything is built solid."

To emphasize her point, Scootaloo knocked on one of the cardboard trees, which then fell over. She glanced between her friends and laughed nervously. "Some of the background trees are... a little unbalanced. Try not

to lean on them... or touch them. Probably best to just avoid being near them, if at all possible.” Scootaloo bit onto the base of the tree and began righting it.

Apple Bloom looked back at the nervous Sweetie Belle and said, “Let me teach you a little trick to stop stage fright. Just imagine everypony in the audience is wearin’ only pants.”

“What? Why?”

“Because it would look silly! If everypony in the audience looks silly, then you don’t have to worry about lookin’ silly yourself.”

“My Mom wears pants, and she doesn’t look silly.”

“Only pants?” Apple Bloom asked with a grin.

“...Nnoooo,” Sweetie Belle said slowly.

“And that’s the secret!”

Sweetie Belle still looked doubtful. “Is that what you do?”

“Well... no,” Apple Bloom said, then blushed a little in embarrassment. “You see, I, uh... I like to pretend. I imagine I really am Lady Blue Petal, and that the things we’re doin’ up on stage really is real.”

Scootaloo finished pulling the tree back onto its wobbly stand and said, “No offense, Apple Bloom, but that just seems weird.”

Apple Bloom blushed more. “Yeah, kinda... but it’s fun and keeps me too busy to worry ‘bout bein’ scared.”

“I think I’ll just stick with the pants thing,” Sweetie Belle said.

“Heads up. Incoming trouble,” Scootaloo said with a nod towards two approaching fillies.

Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon both wore simple-looking clothing. The look of annoyance on their faces didn’t match the kindly-villager roles

they would be playing tonight. "Hello, Apple Bloom," Diamond Tiara said as she got close. "Ready to be laughed off stage again?"

"Still sore you didn't get to be the lead? It must be so awful playing an innkeeper," Apple Bloom said while rolling her eyes.

"Actually, I find it very ironic that the innkeeper has a much better singing voice than the hero. I can't wait to see the audience react to you drawling your way through your songs. My song, however, will be leaving the audience in tears."

"Tears of pain or tears of misery?" Apple Bloom said with a smile.

Diamond Tiara narrowed her eyes and said, "Let's go, Silver Spoon. These losers are going to break my concentration."

Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo waited for the bullies to be out of sight before they started laughing.

"That was painful trying not to laugh," Scootaloo said as she wiped away a tear and got her laughter under control. "Every time I see her, I keep remembering the look on her face when she found out that Silver Spoon was the only one that voted for her to play Blue Petal."

"Yeah, but I only won 'cause nopony else 'sides the two of us wanted to be the lead," Apple Bloom said.

"That's because Blue Petal sings in almost every song," Sweetie Belle said.

"Eh, maybe. I still think you should have tried for the lead, Sweetie Belle. You're a much better singer than me."

A look of horror came over Sweetie Belle's face. "What? No way! Even imagining the whole audience with pants on their heads wouldn't be enough to stop my stage fright, then!"

"Attention everypony!" Cheerilee said as she walked onto the stage. The students stopped what they were doing and lined up in front of their teacher. "Curtains are coming up in five minutes. I'm so proud of what a

good job you have all done. Don't worry if you make a mistake or forget a line. I'll be out front and ready to help you if you need it. Just remember to do your best! Those of you in the first act, find your places. Running crew be ready with the trees. Ohhh, this is so much fun! You're all going to be wonderful!"

Cheerilee walked off stage, and the students hurried into their positions.

"Break a leg, Apple Bloom. I'll see you in the second act," Sweetie Belle said as she walked away to join the other actors.

Scotaloo sighed as she looked at her hood. "Guess it's time to start sweating," she said, then fit the hood over her head the correct way. She disappeared behind a tree that wobbled slightly before getting pulled back into place.

Apple Bloom walked over to her starting spot. She closed her eyes and took a deep calming breath. When she opened her eyes again, she could no longer see the stage. Instead, a great forest stretched around her. Ahead of her, the trees finally started to thin out, and a valley could be seen beyond the forest's edge. It looked like the sun had just risen over the horizon.

Lady Blue Petal was ready for her adventure.

"Welcome everypony to this year's school play!" Cheerilee announced happily from center stage. The audience cheered and stomped their hooves in applause. Cheerilee waited for the audience to quiet before continuing. "Tonight, we have a very special performance: a retelling of the classic Lady Blue Petal story, 'The Trials of the Hero'!"

The pianist in the band began playing a soft melody to accompany Cheerilee's words. "Our story takes place in a fanciful land that is plagued by troubles. The ponies of this land were miserable, for they were under constant attack from the forces of darkness. One day, tired of watching the world live in fear, a few brave ponies stepped forth. Through their actions, the armies of darkness were pushed back, and the world became a safer

place. These ponies became known as the First Heroes. However, theirs is another story.

“Many, many years have passed since the defeat of the darkness, and the First Heroes have all been laid to rest. Evil has begun to slowly return to the world, and in order to keep it from gaining strength, new ponies have taken on the mantle of the hero. One such pony was Lady Blue Petal.

“Blue Petal adored the legends of the First Heroes and had decided to model her life after theirs. Ever since she could remember, she had helped those in need. With every heroic deed or evil foe vanquished, she would become more and more renowned.

“However, Blue Petal wasn’t without faults. As her fame grew, so did her ego, until she lost sight of what being a hero truly meant. The ponies in need became nothing more than stepping stones for her to achieve further greatness. It got to a point where only the most heroic of deeds were enough for Blue Petal, and many ponies with lesser troubles had to go without the hero they so desperately needed.

“But fear not, ponies of the world, for our once-noble hero has not yet been lost to us. Sometimes, it takes a little reminder from our past to steer us back on to the proper path.”

Cheerilee stepped from the stage, and the curtains behind her opened to reveal a forest of painted, cardboard trees. Apple Bloom walked onto the set.

“We join Blue Petal as she begins a new adventure in search of heroic deeds to perform. Her hopes were high as she...”

Blue Petal’s hopes were high as she traveled through the forest. She felt good having the sun shine on her now that the trees had finally thinned out enough. Her white ornate barding, that totally did not look like a dress, seemed to glow in the early morning light.

Blue Petal found herself on an adventure, trying to find new ponies in trouble, so that she could show the world some amazing heroic deeds. Maybe even get a few more books written about her. The valley on the other side of this forest had been rumored to be a pure and clean place full of happy ponies living in their happy homes and going about their happy lives. It practically screamed to the world for all the villains to come attack it and turn it into their new base of evil operations. This seemed like a prime opportunity for some heroics, and Blue Petal was going to be sure to get in on it. She quickened her pace, eager to exit the forest and see the devastation that had befallen these poor, helpless ponies. Hopefully, the valley was still under attack, so she could get straight to the evil-flank kicking.

The trees cleared away as Blue Petal rushed into the valley. The sight before her was worse than she had imagined. There were no fires. There were no marching evil armies, or even standing-still evil armies. No fire-breathing dragons causing trouble, or lakes of acid, or oppressive-looking castles, or wild animal attacks. She looked around and was disappointed that she hadn't even received a decent greeting by a band of roaming bandits.

This place really was nothing more than a happy valley. In the distance, sat a village, surrounded by farmland, that looked as happy as everything else around it. Blue Petal sighed and walked towards the village. Hopefully, word had just gotten out that she was coming, and this was all some sort of act.

A thought had been bothering Blue Petal for some time, and entering this valley had just confirmed it: she was being followed by an invisible band. They weren't bad as far as invisible bands went. They had a violin, a lyre, a trumpet, and a piano. They were all in tune and worked well together as they played an uplifting tune. Blue Petal found herself not caring that there was nothing heroic to do at this very moment. The sky was clear and the weather perfect. It was the start of what would be a wonderful day. She could feel it.

The music following Blue Petal sounded very happy and was building in strength. She wondered if she should— no... she couldn't just start singing for no reason. Could she? The music seemed so light-hearted and inviting. It would be a shame not to have some vocals to go with it. Well...

as long as nopony else was around, she might as well humor the band. It might just get them to leave her alone.

Blue Petal: Today is going to be — such a wonderful daaaaay!
(Apple Bloom) Everythin' will be great. All will be goin' *my* waaaay.
 There are no dark clouds that I can see.
 The birdies and critters are singin' for me.
 Yes, today is going to beeeeeeee — a wonderful day!

Even if this valley is so happyyyy,
There's probably still some evil drawin' neeeeear!
I will keep an eye out the ap-proa-chin'-doom,
So I can give it a beat-down most seveeeeere!

Blue Petal felt so liberated singing for no reason and couldn't help but smile. She wanted to share her happiness, but the village was too far away to hear her. She knew she had to share this feeling with someone, and if no ponies were close, then it would have to be nature.

“Good mornin', Mr. Sun!” Blue Petal yelled to the sky. “Thank you for this wonderful day!”

“You're quite welcome,” the sun answered unexpectedly.

Blue Petal raised an eyebrow. Most ponies didn't expect the sun to answer back. Of course, most ponies also didn't speak to the sun in the first place. For all she knew, this could actually be normal. She didn't know what confused her more: that the sun could apparently talk, or that it had a Trottingham accent. Still, why waste a chance to say you spoke with the sun?

“Hey, Mr. Sun. Would you like to sing with me?”

“I would love to!”

Sun: I can see you down there — having a wonderful daaaaay!
(Pipsqueak) Going on another adventure with-*out* delaaaay.
 There's so much joy that we can share.
 Let's sing all day without a care.
 I can see what you have theeeeeeeeere — a wonderful day!

Blue Petal laughed with joy and said, “Yes, Mr. Sun, it sure is a wonderful day. After all...”

Blue Petal: How can it not be wonderful with a heroooo?
 Stridin’ proudly ‘cross the countrysiiiiide?
 Everypony knows that I am the-best-there-is!
 My countless deeds are known both far and wiiiide!

“Oh... that’s, er, nice,” the sun said. “Excuse me, o great hero, I’m... going to go somewhere less full of themselves— I mean stuffy. I’ll be over there.”

Blue Petal watched the sun move across the sky until she could no longer see it. This seemed to have no effect on the time of day, though. She decided this must have just been one of those oddities of nature, and hopefully nothing to worry about.

The music kept playing, and Blue Petal’s mood kept feeling better. She had gotten closer to the village, but they still wouldn’t be able to hear her at this range. She looked around for someone else that could sing with her, then heard a chattering sound coming from a nearby tree. She looked up and saw a squirrel sitting on the highest branch. She decided to perform a test.

“Well hello there, Mrs. Squirrel,” Blue Petal said.

“Hi there!” the squirrel answered.

Blue Petal nodded. Her test had been conclusive. She decided not to question her new-found ability to communicate with nature and instead asked, “Would you like to sing with me?”

“Oh, wow! Would I?” the squirrel said happily.

Squirrel: I’m having so mu— Ahhh!
(Archer)

Blue Petal watched in horror as the squirrel lost her balance and fell from the branch. The squirrel cried out in pain as she hit the branch below

her and then continued falling. Fate was a cruel mistress today as Mrs. Squirrel unluckily hit every single branch on her way down the tree. She tumbled helplessly through the air before finally hitting the ground with a thud. The poor critter laid on her back, silent and unmoving.

The invisible band respectfully stopped playing. The whole world seemed to go quiet as it mourned the loss of Mrs. Squirrel.

Apple Bloom stared down at the upside-down Archer. Thankfully, the fake-branch platform had only been a few inches above the stage. Archer had no injuries and looked more embarrassed than anything. Her costume hadn't been so lucky, though; her paper squirrel tail had gotten bent at a right angle.

"Oh, my!" Cheerilee said as she rushed on stage. "Archer? Are you alright?"

"Yes, Ms. Cheerilee," Archer said as she got back up.

"Are you sure? We could—"

"The show must go on!"

"Well... OK, then. Let's start again with your lead-in, Apple Bloom," Cheerilee said, then exited the stage.

Mrs. Squirrel twitched once, then sprang back to her feet. She was alive! Truly a miracle, and it needed to be celebrated the only way Blue Petal knew how: with song!

"Would you like to sing with me?" Blue Petal asked the squirrel again.

"Oh, wow! Would I?" the squirrel said happily.

Blue Petal noticed that the squirrel's tail appeared to be broken. Her will had to have been the thing of legends to be able to move around, let alone want to sing, under what could only be excruciating pain.

Squirrel: I'm having so much fun — it's a wonderful daaaay!
(Still Archer) Any problems that I have will work *out*
somewaaaaay!
It feels so great being in the sun.
I want to jump and climb and run.
Do you know what is fuuuuuuun? — A wonderful day!

"Yes, Mrs. Squirrel. I do know what is fun," Blue Petal said.

Blue Petal: All the ponies in this valley cheerin' for meeee!
As I tell them of my many noble deeeeds.
My heroic actions put me on top-of-the-charts!
Squirrel: (I think that's something your ego far exceeds.)

Blue Petal blinked. "Uh... what was that last part, Mrs. Squirrel?" she asked.

"Nothing! Good day to you, mighty hero," the squirrel said as she giggled and ran away, hopefully to seek medical attention.

Today truly was a wonderful day for Blue Petal. The sun was warm, bright, and not in the sky anymore. The birds were singing. She was singing. That squirrel had also been singing. It seemed in this valley that the hills really were alive with music. Blue Petal couldn't help but worry that maybe there had been something wrong with the flowers she had eaten for breakfast.

The village was very close now. It appeared to have only a few dozen buildings that had mostly been constructed along one main road. The houses were made from wood and thatch, and Blue Petal could see a blacksmith, a general store, and an inn. She noticed no fences or other easily defensible structures seemed to exist.

Blue Petal knew she would have her work cut out for her getting this place ready for the inevitable attack, but for now, she just felt overjoyed that

ponies started pouring out of the village to greet her. Now, she had so many ponies to sing with. It was time for the big finale.

“Hello ponies of this happy village I don’t know the name of,” Blue Petal said with a wave.

A villager who sounded oddly similar to the sun said, “It’s called Happy Village!”

“What a coincidence! Are you having a wonderful day?”

“Yes, I am,” the same villager replied.

“Such a wonderful day,” another villager said.

“Best day in years,” yet another said.

“Then, sing with me!” Blue Petal cried out as the villagers surrounded her.

All: We just can’t help but smile — at this wonderful daaaay!
No worries! No work! No school! It’s a day to plaaaay!

Villager 1: I feel like I could run a mile!

Villager 2: It’s time to show off my new hairstyle!

Old villager 1: Pull up a chair and stay awhile.

Two fillies: Come play with us in our sand pile!

Old villager 2: Has anyone seen my blue reptile?

Villager 1: Don’t mind grandpa, he’s gone senile.

All male ponies: We just can’t help but smile.

All female ponies: We just can’t help but smileeee.

All: Just watch and you will seeeee,
With one hundred percent certaintyyyy,
Today is going to beeeeeeee!
A wonderful day! (You got that right)
A wonderful day! (An absolute delight)
A wonderful day! (From morning until night)
Today is a wonderful day!

With the impromptu musical number over, the ponies of Happy Village went back about their business. Overwhelming happiness aside, Blue Petal had to get serious. This valley was a ripe fruit about to fall into the watching clutches of evil, and she was going to be the one to save it.

The first villager who had greeted Blue Petal had remained outside. He walked up to her and said, "So, what brings you around these parts, stranger?"

"Stranger?" Blue Petal said with a raised eyebrow. "I'm the travelin' big-time hero, Lady Blue Petal! Haven't you heard of me?"

"I'm sorry. I don't think I have. We don't get out much, and traders only visit us no more than twice a year."

Blue Petal gasped. This village may have been secluded, but to have never heard of her? She found that hard to believe.

"Are you sure you haven't heard of me? I've not only been voted the best hero in the world five times runnin', I've also got three gold metals in epicness, a first place trophy in trophy-having, and a master's degree in awesomeneering."

The villager tried to smile politely. "Oh? I-is that all?"

"Well, those are just the awards. If we want to talk celebrity endorsements, we'll be here all day. Anyway, the point is: you got troubles, I'm here to solve 'em."

"Well, that's wonderful. We may be a small village, but we always have things needing to get done. Come inside. I'm sure we can find some work suitable for you."

Blue Petal smiled. It was time for her to show these ponies what being a big-time hero was all about.

The audience applauded when the lights darkened on stage. The band played some transitional music while the running crew hurried about

in the darkness. The running crew switched the painted background, moved the props, and got everything ready for the next scene.

“And so, Lady Blue Petal entered Happy Village in search of heroic deeds to perform,” Cheerilee said to the audience. “But, could such a small village contain the big action she craved? And how would these ponies react once they found out what a big-time hero Blue Petal thought herself to be?”

Blue Petal felt incredibly bored as she followed behind the villager. She had tried to be polite at first, but this villager would just not stop talking.

“—and so that’s the reason why we called this place Happy Village even though, statistically speaking, we are only at an average level of happiness when compared to other villages of similar size. Come to think of it, that’s also probably the reason why only earth ponies live here,” the villager said.

“Uh huh.”

“And over here we have our library. Well, I say library, but it’s actually being rented out at the moment. Oh! Funny story about what happened to the previous librarian. You see—”

“Mr. Villager-whose-name-I-never-learned, weren’t we supposed to be talkin’ about the heroic deeds you needed me for?” Blue Petal asked.

“Oh! How rude of me. I completely forgot to introduce myself. My name’s Village Greeter.”

Blue Petal stopped walking. “Really? Your name’s— you know what? Never mind. It was obviously fate. So, heroic deeds?”

“Well... I’m not too sure how heroic they are, but there are plenty of jobs that need doing,” Village Greeter said. “We have a new barn that still needs to be painted. Old Lady Hill is getting on in years and could use some help with her cleaning. Let’s see... there’s always wood to chop, or weeds to pick, or—”

“Sorry, Village Greeter, I think there may be some confusion. I’m looking for *heroic* deeds. You know, beating-up behemoths, overthrowing overlords, rescuing royalty. Non-alliterative deeds work too, but they don’t sound as good in song.”

“I, uh... I can ask around, but... I’m pretty sure all our royals are in safe keeping. I’m not sure if you’ll find what you’re looking for here. This really is a quiet vil—”

“HELP!” a filly’s voice yelled, in the distance.

“There we go!” Blue Petal said excitedly as she quickened her pace. “Sorry to run, but somepony needs a hero!”

Blue Petal saw a panicked filly running down the street. She positioned herself in the filly’s way and struck a dramatic pose. She put on her best heroic smile and said, “It sounds like you need a hero!”

The filly looked up at Blue Petal with hope in her eyes. “Yes! Yes, I do need a hero!” she said.

Blue Petal sat down and put of hoof on the filly’s shoulder. “OK, kid. Calm down. What are we dealing with here? A volcano? Rabid snakes? Aliens?”

“Worse!”

Blue Petal found herself beginning to smile. “You accidentally broke a seal on some ancient evil, and now its corruption is seepin’ out? The world is going to end in three days, and you’re a time traveler sent here to stop it?”

“Even worse!”

Blue Petal’s heart pounded. This was it. The great evil that would doom this valley had started, and she was here to stop it. She took a few breaths to steady herself. Her face changed into a look of pure determination. “Lead the way, I’m here to help.”

The filly smiled wide and ran off. Blue Petal gave chase, but the filly stopped after only a few dozen feet. The filly looked eagerly at a tree in a little flower garden, but Blue Petal couldn't see anything out of the ordinary.

"So... is the tree evil?" Blue Petal asked in confusion. "Or maybe it's a good tree that's been corrupted by evil. It's a bit small to be a world tree, but I suppose they all had to be little at some point."

"It's not the tree," the filly said. "It's my cat!"

Blue Petal's steely resolve faded and started to be replaced with depression. She looked up at a cat laying on a branch. It appeared to be asleep.

"Is... is the cat is evil?" Blue Petal asked hopefully, even though she realized this was likely just an overreacting filly.

"No! My cat is stuck and needs to be rescued!"

The cat's tail twitched slowly as it purred softly. Blue Petal sighed and said, "Sorry, kid, but this is a job for your local fire department. Or at least somepony with a ladder and a high endurance to cat scratches."

"Y-... you're not going to save my cat?" the filly asked slowly as her eyes started to tear up. "I thought you were a hero!"

"I am. A big-time hero, to be precise. I only help with big problems. Now, if your cat was stuck on a manticore... or if your cat was a manticore, then I could help you."

The filly ran off and started yelling for help again. Blue Petal shook her head, turned, and began walking down the street in hopes of finding somepony that actually required her services. She didn't get far before a mare stepped in front of her.

"Excuse me?" the mare asked. "Did I hear you say that you were a big-time hero?"

"The biggest of the big-time heroes," Blue Petal said proudly.

“What’s that? Is it any different from a normal hero?”

Blue Petal looked at the mare funny. Did she really just ask what a big-time hero was? That was like asking if flowers smelled good. Or what color the grass was. Or why apples were the greatest fruit ever. It was something every foal should have learned even before they knew their own names.

Blue Petal then realized that this village wasn’t just secluded; it was downright deprived. She had to correct this oversight.

“Ma’am, you appear to be confused,” Blue Petal said, then noticed a small crowd gathering around her. She decided to speak extra loud and set everypony straight at once. “Big-time heroes are way different than normal heroes. A normal hero will solve your little problems, but a big-time hero will solve every problem you have, even the ones you don’t know about yet! We do this by getting rid of your big problems so that the crushin’ weight of hopelessness doesn’t drag you down. Once the big problem is gone, the rest of your life feels better by comparison.”

The mare’s face lit up. “Really?” she asked. “You can solve all of my problems?”

Blue Petal opened her mouth to remind the mare that she only solved the big problems when a sense of foreboding came over her. The pianist had started to play with a lot of enthusiasm and was soon joined by... was that a banjo? When did the invisible band get a banjo player? Were invisible auditions going on?

The overexcited ponies seemed to be everywhere.

Mare: You’re a big-time hero? Can you help me move my shelf?

Fancy stallion: Hello there, big-time hero. Will you do all our jobs yourself?

Mare: Can you mop my floor?

Stallion 2: Or fix my door?

Mare 2: Mind my store?

Stallion 2: I need help more!

Colt: That’s what a big-time hero is? Then help me do my chore!

“Whoa now!” Blue Petal said as she backed away from the ever-increasing crowd. “I think there’s still a whole lot of confusion goin’ on here. Let me see if I can clear it up.”

Blue Petal: I am a big-time hero, but I can’t be bothered with small things.

And as a big-time hero, I’m very choosy with my helpings.
I’m afraid it’s true,
But I can’t help you,
With every issue,
And little snafu.
I am a big-time hero, and big deeds is what I do.

Mare 3: If you’re a big-time hero, can you help me with my plants?
Blue Petal: (Uh... no.)
Fancy Stallion: If you’re a big-time hero, can you help me find romance?
Blue Petal: (Sorry.)
Fancy Stallion: Then can you help me,
With my goatee?
Mare: Or my laundry?
Panicked pony: I saw a bee!
Filly from before: Please help me big-time hero, my cat is still stuck in a tree!

Blue Petal: I’m a big-time hero, but your problems aren’t big enough!
As a big-time hero, my deeds need to be challengin’ and tough.

Please don’t complain,
Let me explain,
It’s about the fame,
I stand to gain,
Panicked pony: I need a big-time hero now! The bees got in my mane!

“I, uh... suggest you go dunk your head in some water, then,” Blue Petal said.

The pony with bees crawling in his mane nodded once and ran away. The rest of the crowd looked confused and began whispering to one

another. Blue Petal placed a hoof on her forehead and sighed. These ponies just didn't get it.

Blue Petal: Now, you still seem not to get it in your head.
 I only do the big jobs, not the small.
 When you become a famous hero with the life that I have
 led,
 You learn that, frankly, it's impossible to do it all.

 And so it is the only jobs I do are the big ones,
 So that my deeds will be known far and wide.
 And now I hope you can understand my reasons,
 For being picky on where my heroic talents are applied.

 As a big-time hero, my jobs need to be boisterous and
 grand.

 As a big-time hero, I need to be known 'cross the land!
 Now, I beg pardon,
 But I need action.
 Need to be the one,
 That gets things done.
 I am a big-time hero, the greatest hero under the sun!

Mare 2: So, if you're a big-time hero, you'd defeat the monsters in
the night?

Blue Petal: (You got it!)

Fancy Stallion: And if you're a big-time hero, you'd save the land
from a deadly blight?

Blue Petal: (Now we're talkin'.)

Mare: You'd battle armies?

Stallion 2: And cross the seas?

Colt: Fight yetis?

Panicked pony: Destroy the bees!

Blue Petal: Yes! That's a big-time hero, so what troubles can I ease?

 The crowd looked between each other, then started walking away.

 "Hey!" Blue Petal yelled at the departing ponies. "Don't you need a
big-time hero for anythin'?"

“Sorry, big-time hero,” a mare called back, “this is a *small* village that only has *small* problems. Let us know when you actually decide to help with something.”

Blue Petal’s mouth hung open. What was with this village? Everywhere that she had gone before had showered her in endless praise. How could there not be a single thing wrong that required a big-time hero? Had she been wrong about this valley? She decided to get to the bottom of this.

“Excuse me, sir?” Blue Petal said to a passing pony. “There’s not any other villages near here are there? Like maybe one being attacked by bandits? Or one being attacked by monsters? Or one being attacked by monstrous bandits who, as a surprise twist, turns out to be the original villagers under a curse, and that the villagers in the village were actually the real monstrous bandits all along?”

“No. This is the only village around for many miles. Good day,” the pony said, then hurried on his way.

Blue Petal walked up to another pony. “Excuse me, miss? This may be a personal question, but you would tell me if you were a cockatrice in disguise, right?”

The mare glanced around and saw no other ponies that Blue Petal could be speaking to. “Yeah. I guess so,” she said.

“So, are you?”

“A cockatrice in disguise?”

“Yes.”

The mare started backing away. “I’m walking away now. Please don’t follow me.”

Blue Petal sighed and continued walking down the street.

“Blue Petal felt tired after she had searched the village but found no problems requiring a big-time hero,” Cheerilee said. “It had been a long journey to reach this valley, and she felt that a little relaxation was needed. A hot meal and somewhere to rest her hooves would be welcomed.

“The ponies of this village seemed to have no need of her services, and it appeared that there really was no encroaching evil. Worse, though, was the odd way the villagers had reacted to her. Didn’t they know that big-time heroes are only supposed to help with big problems?

“Blue Petal soon found the inn she had seen earlier and stepped inside. It was there that a past long forgotten began catching up with her.”

“Take a seat, and I’ll be with you in a moment,” a voice called from the kitchen after the bell above the door jingled.

After only one hoof inside the inn, Blue Petal instantly felt better about her day. Ponies sat at tables or at stools set up along a long counter. Delicious looking soups, salads, and sandwiches were being eaten, all while friendly conversations and laughter were shared. Several ponies gave Blue Petal a warm smile as she passed. A fireplace crackled merrily against the wall. They even had a pianist playing— no... that was just the invisible band that wouldn’t stop following her.

Blue Petal felt only one thing seemed out of place in the room, and that had to have been the unicorn stallion, wearing a full suit of gray-colored armor, who sat on one of the stools. White or black armor made it easy to tell someponies alignment. Gray, on the other hoof, required more investigating. Blue Petal took a seat at the stool next to the knight and gave a relaxed sigh.

“Nice place they got here,” Blue Petal said in an attempt to be friendly.

The knight said nothing.

“So, what’s good to eat here? I notice a lot of bowls of soup on the tables. Seems like you finished yours. Was it tasty?”

The knight did not reply.

“Do you have to take your helmet off to eat or is there a hatch the opens up? I suppose you could use a straw.”

Blue Petal watched the unmoving knight.

“Strong silent type, huh? I can respect that. Or are you missin’ your tongue? I once knew a pony that had his tongue removed because he had annoyed everypony around him with his constant jabberin’.”

Blue Petal waited for the knight to say something. After a moment of silence, she began suspecting this knight was nothing more than a suit of armor somepony set up as a joke.

“Snips,” Apple Bloom whispered, “it’s your line.”

“I thought you had five lines before I answered,” Snips whispered back.

“What? Oh! Darn it. I skipped the second one. Um... just say your line, and we’ll keep goin’.”

“Oh... uh... a lesson you ignored, it seems,” the knight said.

“There we go! Got you talkin’. So what brings you around these parts?”

The knight got up and started to leave.

“Hey, what’s the matter, Mr. Knight-I’ve-never-met-before? Was it something I said?”

The invisible band suddenly stopped playing. The knight reached the door but didn’t go through it. Blue Petal could sense the tension in him and

prepared to grab her sword. The knight turned his head and looked at her. Blue Petal's ears flattened, and she shied away. His glare made her feel like a little filly about to get scolded.

"Never met before?" the knight said with fury in his voice. "Blue Petal... you are the worst pony I have ever known."

Blue Petal felt like she had been smacked. "What? I—"

"I used to look up to you. Do you have any idea how hard it's been seeing what you've become?"

"W-what do you mean? The only thing I've become is a hero."

The knight shook his head slowly. "Pathetic. I don't know if I should be sad or angry at how blind you are. I'm beginning to wonder if any of those stories about you are true, or if you just claim others' actions as your own."

Blue Petal got up and tried her best to stare down the knight. "Never! Everything I've done, I've done on my own. I would never steal the credit from somepony else!"

"I wish I could believe that. Do you know what I did when I arrived in this village, yesterday? I spent the whole day helping the villagers fix the roofs that had been damaged in the last storm. Not because I was asked to, but because it needed to be done, and I was able to help. I spoke to and shared laughs with many of the villagers. They offered me a room and a meal for my help, but that wasn't my reward. My reward was knowing I helped somepony. How many ponies have you helped since arriving?"

"Well... none, yet. But, that's only because I haven't found anypony needing my particular brand of heroics."

"Goodbye, Blue Petal," the knight said, then walked out the door.

"Sheesh. What's his deal?"

"That's the Stone Knight, or so he calls himself. He came here looking for the Forest of Trials," a voice from behind Blue Petal said.

Blue Petal turned around to see who had spoken. A mare that must have been the innkeeper stood on the other side of the counter. She wore a plain brown dress, an apron, a smug look, and completely unfitting to her role, a tiara. Blue Petal found herself hating this innkeeper instantly, for some reason.

"The forest of what?" Blue Petal said as she returned to her stool. Her eyes kept moving to the tiara.

"The Forest of Trials. Supposedly, anypony that enters the forest will get presented with three trials to test their special qualities. If they pass, then they're declared a... a... a super hero."

"A super hero?" Blue Petal said as she stared at the innkeeper flatly. "Are you sure you don't mean a true hero?"

"You know what I mean," the innkeeper snapped, then grabbed a cloth to start washing the counter.

Blue Petal put a hoof on her forehead and sighed. "A true hero? What's the difference between that and a regular hero?"

"A true hero is a hero who has discovered what it is that makes them a hero. They become a shining light that beats against the darkness, unable to be corrupted no matter how hard evil tries."

Blue Petal rubbed her chin. "That does sound interestin'."

The innkeeper finished her washing and turned with the damp cloth in her mouth. It whipped into Blue Petal's horn, causing it to break off and land on the countertop.

And thus, Lady Blue Petal the unicorn knight became an earth pony.

"Oops. Sorry, Apple Bloom," Diamond Tiara whispered with no hint of sympathy.

Apple Bloom blushed as the audience chuckled. She picked up her headband and started putting it back on. "You did that on purpose!" she whispered.

Diamond Tiara placed a hoof on her chest and feigned shock. "I'd never. Why would you say such a thing?"

Blue Petal screwed her horn back in. Luckily, it had been detachable for just such an occurrence.

"Very interestin' indeed," Blue Petal said as she watched the innkeeper for any sudden movements. "But, I already know what makes me a hero."

"Really? And what is that?"

"Well... let's see. Being brave, for one. I also know a thing or two about swingin' a sword. Oh! I'm also plenty good with children—"

"Why won't anypony save my cat!" a filly yelled from outside the inn.

"Most children, anyway. Uh... what else?"

"That's all you can come up with?"

"I just have too many good qualities, is all. It's hard work choosing the best of the best. What qualities make you special, if you think it's so easy?"

"Why, being the best at everything, of course."

"That's not your line!" Blue Petal whispered loudly.

The innkeeper ignored Blue Petal and said, "But, we aren't talking about me. What is it that makes you a hero? The Forest of Trials will tell you. Don't you want to find out? Hit it, Sam!"

The invisible pianist complied, hitting the keys most professionally. Apparently, his name was Sam, and he was a traitor.

Innkeeper: What is a painter, if they are not creative?
(Diamond Tiara. Without their voice, what would a singer be?
She needs more Every profession has their own required talents.
practice.) This includes heroes too. Wouldn't you agreeeee?

The other patrons of the inn started to hum along and harmonize with the music better than the innkeeper could. Blue Petal felt very outnumbered.

Innkeeper: Whaat maakes youu special?
What makes you great?
Makes them adore you,
Can't ignore you,
Want to celebrate?

Please tell me.
I want to knooooow.
What is it about you,
All throughout you,
That makes a hero?

The innkeeper hopped onto the countertop and twirled as she danced in time to the music. Blue Petal could only stare in disbelief as the ponies around her mimicked the innkeeper's dance. They were too well choreographed for this to be spontaneous. The other patrons were no longer satisfied with only humming and began singing along as well.

All but Blue Petal: Some ponies are amazing at the arts.
Some ponies, they are better when baking.
There are ponies that are superior at playing sports,
When it comes to where your talents lie, there is no
fakiiiiing.

Be they lovers, be they fighters,
Be they scholars who pull all-nighters,
Be they givers, be they takers,
Knocker-downers or the makers.

What about you?

Let's hear you speeeeeak.
What's inside you?
Please describe you.
What makes you unique?

The patrons and innkeeper settled down and returned to their places.
Blue Petal considered looking for another inn.

Innkeeper: Without their speed, a runner is not so grand.
And a dancer? They aren't so hot without their moves.
What is it that's so special about a hero?
What is it about their selves that the world approoooves?

So tell me, hero.
Please set me straight.
Why do they love you,
Thinking of you,
On you, they fixate?

I'm just not sure.
Let me be fraaaank.
Why do they need you,
Always heed you,
When you're a blank flank?

Blue Petal stared in shock. Had the innkeeper just insulted her through song by calling her a blank flank? Had she actually had the nerve to call the greatest hero to have ever lived a blank flank? Lady Blue Petal, who had a cutie mark of a shining sword sheathed in a wreath of blue flowers, was a blank flank? It was laughable, and it infuriated her.

"Well then," Blue Petal said through her teeth. "I think I'll have to go check out that forest for myself and see if I can find out what makes me such a great hero."

"It's just south of the village. You can't miss it," the innkeeper said with a wicked smile.

Blue Petal got up and, while resisting the urge to set the innkeeper on fire with her magic, went out the door. If she ever turned evil, this innkeeper had just made the top of her list.

The curtains closed as Cheerilee walked across the stage. She frowned briefly at what had just happened. Putting her smile back on, she turned towards the audience and said, "Blue Petal was confused with the way the villagers and the Stone Knight had reacted to her. It reminded her of days long past when she had first set out to be a hero. She had tried to start at the top, but she was unable to convince anypony that such a young filly could be a real hero. She had been forced to help with the little things, and in doing those little things, she had learned the joy of helping those in need.

"It had been a long time since Blue Petal had need of doing the little things. As she had traveled across the land, she had inspired more and more ponies to become heroes too. Like her, they also started small. With the little things mostly taken care of, she had all the time she needed to focus on the big things. It felt good being recognized for her deeds, but it had felt better just seeing the joy she brought others.

"The Stone Knight's words had hurt Blue Petal because she had realized that, at some level, they were true. She had to get to the Forest of Trials. She had to prove that she still had whatever it was that made a pony a hero.

"After Blue Petal exited the inn, she took a detour and walked to the small garden with the tree. A filly sat beneath the branches, every so often wiping the tears from her eyes. Several ponies covered in scratches looked sadly at the filly, but they kept their distance from the cat with the sharp claws. Blue Petal reached out with her magic, gently lifted the sleeping cat through the air, and placed it next to the filly.

"One little thing, and it brought so much joy."

Cheerilee smiled to herself for a moment before continuing. "And so ends the first act of tonight's play. I hope everypony is having fun. Don't wander too far, we'll be starting act two in ten minutes."

“Dumb Diamond Tiara! She’s gonna ruin everythin’!” Apple Bloom said. She, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo stood together while the running crew rapidly changed the set for the next act.

“Her singing hurt my ears,” Scootaloo said. “At least, that’s it for her part until the end.”

“And who knows what she’s plannin’ for that? I can ignore her makin’ fun of me, but we all worked really hard at this. She’s ruinin’ the play because she didn’t get her way.”

“I need to go help get the next act set up. Maybe we can find Ms. Cheerilee and get her to talk with Diamond Tiara?” Scootaloo said, then ran off to move props.

Apple Bloom just shook her head. The damage had already been done. She only hoped the rest of the night went well.

“Maybe you’ll feel better after a drink of water?” Sweetie Belle suggested.

“Yeah... I am thirsty. All that singin’ is hard work. I don’t know how you make it look so easy,” Apple Bloom said as she followed Sweetie Belle to a table full of cups of water. “Your scene is soon. How you doin’? Still nervous?”

“A little, but I think I’ll be OK.”

“Just remember: pants,” Apple Bloom said with a wink, then drank her water.

“Riiiiight,” Sweetie Belle said slowly, still unsure if her friend was being serious or not.

“Watch where you’re going!” Silver Spoon’s voice yelled.

Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle turned to see Silver Spoon and Diamond Tiara glaring angrily at Dinky.

“I said I was sorry,” Dinky said and backed away a step.

Diamond Tiara turned her nose up into the air and said, “Ignore her, Silver Spoon. She’s just a crybaby.”

“I am not!”

Diamond Tiara smirked. “Are so. That’s why you got cast as the cat filly and the lost child, because you’re so good at crying. Too bad that’s all you’re good at. You barely even get to sing more than one line.” Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon laughed. Dinky’s cheeks turned red as she fought back tears.

“The nerve of her!” Apple Bloom said, then started marching towards the bullies. “I’m gonna give her a piece of my mi—”

“And the only reason you even got a singing part was because we got sick of listening to your whining about not getting the lead!” Dinky yelled as loud as she could. The stage got silent as everypony turned towards the three fillies.

Diamond Tiara had a look of shock that quickly changed to anger. “What? Now listen here you little—”

“No, you listen! You’re making a mockery of this play by using it as your own personal tool to take out your frustrations on others! You keep bragging about your ‘beautiful’ singing voice, yet you were off-key for half of your song, just like in rehearsal. You added your own lyrics that, not only, didn’t fit with the musical accompaniment, they didn’t even fit contextually with the story!

“We are supposed to be a team. Every one of us is important. If we weren’t, we wouldn’t even be on stage! Perhaps if you spent less time worrying about how important your part is and more time actually trying to make this play a success, you would find that sometimes it’s about putting the enjoyment of others above your own selfish desires. Gee, maybe

somepony should put on a play teaching a lesson similar to that? Oh, wait. We are! Now, if you'll *excuse* me, I need to go get ready for my next part."

Dinky walked past Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon, who were too stunned to move. The giggling of several cast and crew got Diamond Tiara to snap out of her shock. She glared angrily at those that had laughed. The other students quickly found jobs that needed to be done.

"Yeah? Well, you're... you're just a loser!" Diamond Tiara yelled, though Dinky had already left the stage for the dressing rooms. "All of you are a bunch of losers! Who needs this stupid play? I'm going home."

"But what about the final scene?" Silver Spoon asked. "We're in it."

"Stay with the losers if you want, then," Diamond Tiara yelled as she left the stage.

Silver Spoon looked around at the set, sighed, and chased after her friend.

"Wow," Scootaloo said as she walked up to Apple Bloom. Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle only nodded in agreement.

"You know," Apple Bloom said. "Suddenly, I'm feelin' pretty good 'bout the rest of the play."

"Everypony please find your seats. The next act is about to begin," Cheerilee said. The few ponies that were standing quickly returned to their seats. Once everypony had settled and the noise stopped, the curtains opened. The scene appeared to be the edge of a forest. Several cardboard trees were set up along the right side of the stage. Cheerilee began speaking.

"Blue Petal left Happy Village and traveled south to the nearby forest. Along the way, something consumed her thoughts. Something she hadn't felt in a long time: doubt. She was still a hero, wasn't she? Ponies cheered for her. They shouted their love for her. They sold her merchandise on the street corners. Didn't that mean something?

“Blue Petal had felt good when she had helped the filly get her cat back, but that feeling was soon replaced with sadness. When was the last time, before today, she had helped somepony, not because it would bring her fame and glory, but because they had just needed help? She couldn’t remember.

“The Forest of Trials loomed before her. Was she a hero? She would soon find out.”

Blue Petal found herself in front of the Forest of Trials. Two things ran through her mind. The first thing was: how exactly did this work? Were there some magic words to speak or a toll to pay? Did she just wonder inside? There should at least have been a sign to direct her or something. So far, the customer service at the Forest of Trials stunk.

The second thing that ran through Blue Petal’s mind was: this had to be the smallest forest in the history of forests. She was pretty sure she could run around it in less than five minutes. The trees were densely packed and little light could be seen inside. It would either take magic or some serious upkeep for a forest like this to be alive.

As Blue Petal wandered around the outside of the forest, looking for whatever could signify the entrance, she saw a familiar face. Or a familiar helmet, at least.

“Hey there, Mr. Stone Knight,” Blue Petal said. “Imagine meeting you here. Actually, the odds were pretty good considerin’ how I knew you were comin’ here. So, you’re a hero too, I take it?”

“I never felt the need to refer to myself as such,” the Stone Knight said in a gruff tone. “I’m just a pony that enjoys helping others. What are *you* doing here?”

“Thought I might check out this Forest of Trials thing. Maybe head inside. Trial it up or somethin’,” Blue Petal said, then quietly added, “See if I still have what it takes to be a hero.”

“What was that?”

“What was what?”

The Stone Knight sighed and walked towards the forest. “You better think hard about what you’re trying to accomplish before deciding to follow me,” he called back before disappearing between the trees.

Blue Petal stared at the forest. It was time to prove she was still a hero. “Well, OK then,” Blue Petal said. “I’ll just head inside. One hoof in front of the other. Just, uh... walk right in... I guess.”

Blue Petal took a step forward and stopped. She looked around her, then back at the forest. “That’s what I’ll do. Walk right in. No pony to stop me.”

A few more steps and Blue Petal stopped again. “Yep... no pony at all. I mean, if some pony wanted to stop me, now would be the time. Not that I’m scared, mind you. Nope... not scared at all to find out my life may have been a lie up to this point.”

The forest remained silent. Blue Petal swallowed nervously and took another step forward.

“Who approaches the Forest of Trials?” a voice bellowed from within the trees.

“Lady Blue Petal, um... approaches. I, uh, I can turn back if the forest only admits one at a time. Maybe come back tomorrow?”

A unicorn mare dressed in a blue cloak stepped out of the forest. She walked until she stood right in front of Blue Petal and said, “Welcome, Lady Blue Petal, I am...” Her voice trailed off as something seemed to catch her eye.

Apple Bloom watched as Sweetie Belle’s head slowly turned and stared out at the audience. Sweetie Belle closed her eyes and took a deep

breath. She opened her eyes again and stared intently at the audience. After a few seconds, she smiled.

“That does look silly,” Sweetie Belle whispered.

Apple Bloom smiled back.

“I am the keeper of the Forest of Trials,” the mare said as she snapped back to reality. “Do you wish to prove that you are a hero?”

Blue Petal thought hard before answering. “I do.”

“Then, enter the forest. Inside, you will find three trials that test for the qualities of a true hero. Be warned. Once you enter, you may not leave the forest until you pass or fail each of your trials. The trials will be difficult, but you only need to pass one in order to be declared a true hero.”

“Only one? That doesn’t sound too hard.”

“Have you ever heard of anypony passing the trials?”

“Well, no... but I never heard of anypony failing either. Actually, I never even heard of this place until today.”

The keeper smiled. “That is because the names and deeds of those that fail are erased from history. The memories of the failed heroes fade into obscurity. Do you still wish to enter?”

Blue Petal gulped and took a step back. Her heroic deeds were all that she had. Without them, she would just be an everyday pony. However, if she did fail, wouldn’t she want the world to forget about her?

Blue Petal took on a look of determination. “I’m goin’ inside. I’m goin’ to pass every trial you throw at me and show the world that I am still a hero!”

“Very well. The Forest of Trials accepts you. Enter when ready.”

Blue Petal walked to the forest's edge, then stopped. She looked back at the keeper and said, "Before I enter, I have two questions."

"Ask."

"I'm sorry if this is rude, but it'll bother me to no end if I don't find out. Isn't the Forest of Trials a little small to be considered a forest?"

The keeper looked away while rubbing the back of her neck with a hoof. "Yeah... it is," she said with embarrassment. "However, it sounds better than Wood of Trials, and Grove of Trials was already taken."

"Fair enough," Blue Petal said. "Then, for my second question. Do I... know you from somewhere?"

The keeper looked a little panicked. "N-no, I, uh... just have a really common face."

"OK, then. If you say so." Blue Petal gave one last look at the familiar mare's face, then entered the forest.

"Please succeed, Blue Petal. The world can't lose you, yet," the keeper said almost too quietly to be heard.

———

Even though the thick branches overhead blocked out almost all sunlight, everything around Blue Petal could somehow still be seen easily. She wandered through the forest for what felt like an hour and came to realize that one of two things must have been happening. Either the forest had been magically enchanted to be much bigger on the inside than out, or she was hopelessly lost and going in comically small circles.

No trials had presented themselves, yet. Blue Petal tried to stay focused, but the lack of action had begun to bore her. She stopped walking and looked around. It could have been possible that the first trial had already started. Perhaps this was a test of patience? She resolved to keep her mouth shut and not complain, just in case.

Blue Petal started to move again when a loud crack sounded throughout the forest. She turned quickly and saw one of the great trees beginning to lean towards her. The bark splintered along the base of the tree as its massive roots twisted and snapped, tearing forth from the earth. Blue Petal dove out of the way of the falling trunk, barely escaping being crushed, as the tree landed with a mighty crash. The forest shook, and the sounds of fleeing wildlife could be heard.

Blue Petal's heart felt like it might beat out of her chest. She slowly got up and examined the fallen tree that had nearly claimed her life. Only the sound of her heavy breathing could be heard in the now eerily quiet forest.

"Oops! Sorry, Apple Bloom," Scootaloo said from behind the fallen cardboard tree. "It got away from me." She bit on to the tree and began pulling it back up.

Suddenly, the tree lurched and rose from the ground. The roots regrew and dug into the earth. In a matter of seconds, the tree had righted itself. The only signs it had ever fallen were some leaves and broken branches along the forest floor.

Blue Petal raised an eyebrow at the tree. Perhaps this had been a test, and she had passed her 'not being crushed by a tree' trial? She doubted it. This seemed more like a completely random occurrence. At least, the tree's strange action meant this really was a magical forest, and that she wasn't going in circles. She continued on and soon came across a clearing with an earth pony stallion in it.

The massive stallion stood easily a head taller than Blue Petal. She hoped this could finally be a trial giver. She also hoped that his trial didn't involve hoof wrestling. The trial giver stared at what appeared to be boulders broken into smaller pieces. Blue Petal stepped forward, thankful to once again be in the sunlight. The trial giver sensed her approach and turned towards her.

“Well, now,” the trial giver said slowly. “It looks like I have another hero to test.”

“Uh, yeah,” Blue Petal said warily. “What do I have to do for this trial?”

“This is a trial of strength. Only the strongest ponies deserve to be called a hero, don’t you agree?”

“I guess. Strength can be helpful at times.”

The trial giver nodded. “Yep. So to test your strength, we’re going to have a boulder smashing contest! We’re testing physical strength, though. So no magic.”

Blue Petal stared with her mouth open. A boulder smashing contest? She doubted she could even smash a small rock without using magic. Maybe if she had a large hammer, but something told her this stallion intended it to be done by hoof. She looked at the pile of broken stones.

“Uh, beg pardon. I’m all ready for this contest, lookin’ forward to it really, but your boulders appear to already be, well, smashed.”

The trial giver gasped and looked at the broken boulders. “Oh no!” he said. “You’re right! But... but... how can we have a test of strength without boulders to smash? It’s just not possible!” The trial giver frowned and sniffled.

“Hold on! No need to get upset,” Blue Petal said. She really didn’t want to have to comfort this massive stallion if he started crying. She wandered the clearing and looked around her. “There has to be something around here we can use.”

A part of the clearing that had been covered in shadows grew brighter. Blue Petal looked at it and smiled. “Hey,” she called out, “come take a look at this!”

The trial giver stood next to Blue Petal, and together they stared at a line of four circular, solid-stone pillars that were about twice as tall as a

normal-sized pony. Blue Petal looked at the trial giver and said, "What if, instead of a boulder smashing contest, we had a pillar pushing contest?"

The trial giver brought a hoof to his chin. "Hmm... I don't know... I suppose it could work. They look really heavy. Let me see if they're even pusher-overable." He walked to the open space in the middle of the pillars and began warming up his muscles.

Blue Petal raised an eyebrow as she watched the strangely acting trial giver. There wasn't a pillar in front of him, only open air. What did he think he was doing? The trial giver reared up on his hind-legs and brought his front hooves forward. His hooves struck out and stopped against something invisible. The whole world seemed to shake.

Blue Petal stared in horror as the trial giver stood on his hind-legs and pushed on the air. This must have been one of the fabled world pillars that held up existence. She hadn't meant for him to push this pillar over. What would even happen if he succeeded? She had to stop this madness.

"Uh? Snails?" Apple Bloom whispered.

Snails had his eyes closed as he pushed as hard as he could against the metal bar coming out of the stage. His face looked strained as beads of sweat formed along his brow.

"That's the bar holdin' up the walkway over the stage. I don't think the pony doin' the lights will be too happy if you manage to push it over."

Snails stopped pushing and looked up. The lighting technician had his front legs wrapped around the walkway's railing. He glanced down nervously at Snails.

Snails blushed. "Whoops, sorry," he said, then moved to one of the stone pillar props.

Having tested his strength against the world pillar and thankfully not knocking it over, the trial giver looked ready to begin. He reared up again and smashed his front hooves against the pillar, easily knocking it down.

Trial giver: Run ton riddleton town!
(Snails) I knock the pillars down!

The invisible band began playing a slow song with a heavy beat. Blue Petal wondered if they were taking the trials too. She hoped they passed. It would be nice having the only heroic invisible band in the world following her.

Trial giver: Well now, little pony,
I hope that you can see,
When it comes to massive strength,
The strongest here is me.

But, I'm feeling fair,
So I'll tell you what I'll do,
If you can push over just one pillar,
Then, a hero, I will name you.

But hurry, little pony,
I'm afraid you don't have long,
This trial will come to its end,
When I finish with my song.

To make his point, the trial giver shoved another pillar, easily making it fall.

Trial giver: Run ton riddleton tall!
I make the pillars fall!

Blue Petal rushed to one of the pillars and began pushing with all her might. It wouldn't even budge an inch. The trial giver laughed and walked past her to another pillar.

Trial giver: Come on, little pony,
You don't look that weak.
Although you're smaller than me,

You still have a good physique.

Push with all your might!
Show me strength that will astound!
Hurry up and complete the trial.
Push that pillar to the ground.

It's simple, little pony,
Let me show it to you again.
You just need a little muscle,
And that is how you'll win.

The trial giver used only one hoof and effortlessly toppled his pillar. Blue Petal moved to her pillar's side and tried to get a better angle on it. She gritted her teeth and pushed as hard as she could.

Trial giver: Run ton riddleton topple
 I make the pillars, uh... topple.

The trial giver grinned at Blue Petal. "Good thing this isn't a singing contest, or I might have lost," he said.

"Yeah... good... thing," Blue Petal said as she continued her struggle.

Trial giver: What's wrong, little pony?
 Is my trial just too tough?
 Are your forelegs feeling weak?
 Have you finally had enough?

The trial's at its end,
My song is almost done.
I've knocked over three pillars,
and you're still working on the one.

I'm sorry, little pony,
But today is not your day.
You have failed your first trial,
Now, step out of my way.

Blue Petal gave one final push before taking her forelegs off the pillar. She watched sadly as the trial giver pushed it over with ease.

Trial giver: Run ton riddleton tover!

“Who knocked my pillars over!” a voice yelled, echoing throughout the forest.

Blue Petal and the trial giver froze. The voice had sounded very angry. The forest shook, and a tree could be heard falling, in the distance. The trial giver had gone very pale.

“Oh no! Oh nooo! That’s the forest witch! These must have been her pillars!” the trial giver said, then laid down behind Blue Petal and placed his front hooves over his head. “You got to hide me!”

“I think you may be a little too big to hide easily,” Blue Petal said. “There must be something we can do. Let’s put the pillars back up!”

Blue Petal turned her head as the sound of another tree falling echoed throughout the forest. That tree had sounded much closer.

“She’s too close! She keeps yelling at me not to touch her stuff, but I don’t know what stuff is even hers! She’ll turn me into a frog this time for sure.” The trial giver suddenly stopped shaking and looked up at Blue Petal. “Say you did it!”

“What? I don’t want to be a frog either!”

“This would be your first offense. She’ll go easy on you. If you do it, I’ll say you passed the trial. Pleeeease? I don’t want to be a frog! They’re all slimy, and hoppy, and I’d have to find a princess to change back, and—wait... are you a princess?”

“Pretty sure I’m not.”

“And I’d have to find a princess to change back, and flies taste bad, and—”

Another tree fell, this time at the edge of the clearing. An old mare of small stature walked around the fallen tree. Blue Petal stared at her. Wasn't that just the forest-keeper unicorn now wearing a black cloak? No. The age was too different. Perhaps a mother or grandmother, then? Blue Petal stopped her internal debate over family resemblances and tried to just not show any fear under the angry mare's glare.

"Who was it that knocked over my pillars?" the witch yelled again.

The trial giver nudged Blue Petal and looked up at her with pleading eyes. Blue Petal took a step forward. "I know who knocked over your pillars," she said.

The witch stomped up to Blue Petal and looked her in the eye. "Well? Who was it?"

"It was... the thing is... i-it was..."

Blue Petal tried to say that she had been the one to knock over the pillars, but every time she started to speak, she heard the voice of the Stone Knight in her head. He had accused her of claiming other's actions as her own. It was a lie, and she wouldn't make it true, even if it meant failing.

"It was him," Blue Petal said.

The witch stepped around Blue Petal and grinned evilly at the trial giver. "I hope you like the color green," she said as her horn glowed bright.

"Stop! It's wasn't his fault!" Blue Petal said as she stepped in front of the witch. She wasn't about to let anypony get turned into a frog today.

"He knocked over my pillars. You said so. How is it not his fault?"

"Because he wanted to have a boulder smashin' contest, but there were no more boulders to smash. I saw the pillars and suggested pushin' them over. We didn't know they were yours. I'm sorry," Blue Petal said, then hung her head.

"You take full responsibility for his actions?"

Blue Petal looked back at the trial giver who still quivered in fear. “I do.”

The witch glared at the trial giver. “You! Get out of here!”

The trial giver nearly stumbled several times as he got up and ran away. The witch circled around Blue Petal a few times, all the while cackling to herself. “First things first,” the witch said as she looked at the pillars. The pillars shakily rose into the air and wobbled a bit before setting back upright, except for the far-right pillar that continued to dangle helplessly in the air.

The witch stared at the dangling pillar for a moment before turning back to Blue Petal. “Uh... n-now then. For your punishment! You’re not going to believe what I’m going to do to you.”

Blue Petal gulped but stood her ground.

“Nothing!”

Blue Petal stared in disbelief as the witch cackled with glee. “You’re not going to punish me?”

“Nope. I see no need to. That was the first trial, and it seems like you failed. Too bad, it was the easiest of the three, after all.”

The witch cackled again as she left the clearing. Blue Petal sighed. Things were not looking good if this trial really had been the easiest. She wasn’t going to give up, though. There were still two trials to go.

A snapping sound came from the dangling pillar as it fell back to the forest floor, then toppled over into the pillar next to it. Blue Petal watched as, one by one, the pillars fell over again. She decided to leave before the witch could blame her.

Blue Petal walked deeper into the forest. The canopy seemed even thicker here, dimming what little light she had so that it seemed like night. It may very well have already been night, for all she knew.

Thoughts of the first trial weighed heavily on Blue Petal's mind. The first trial giver would be safe from the witch's wrath, so long as he kept from touching any more of her things. Though Blue Petal had failed the trial, she still felt good. She had helped somepony. She would take this good feeling into the second trial and take on whatever the forest threw at her. She felt ready for anything.

"Hif fare! Arf ou rea-y for or fecondf frial?" a voice said from Blue Petal's side.

Blue Petal spun, ready to fight off the ambush, but stopped when she saw only a filly standing next to her. The filly wore green, brown and black clothing that covered everything except her eyes. She seemed almost invisible when placed against the forest's background.

"Forry," the filly said, "did lf fare ou?"

"Uh, what was that?" Blue Petal said with a hoof raised to her ear.

Twist rubbed her hoof against the cloth around her mouth and gasped for air as she freed herself. "Sorry, Apple Bloom," she whispered with her lisp. "It's hard to talk in this thing."

The filly cleared her throat and said, "What I tried to say was, 'Sorry, did I scare you?'"

"Nah, it's hard to scare me. I was more startled than anything."

The filly half-closed her eyes and gave Blue Petal a knowing smile. "Oh, of course. I should have known it would be hard to scare such a great hero. I'll try harder next time."

“Next time? Is this some sort of fearlessness trial? Because I warn you, I would consider the use of caterpillars cheatin’.”

“Caterpillars?”

“Big, fuzzy ones,” Blue Petal said, then shivered. “They just give me the willies.”

The second trial giver giggled. “No caterpillars,” she said. “This trial is all about speed.”

Blue Petal felt relieved. She was much better at being fast than at strength. “So, are we going to have a race? Let me do some stretches first if we are.”

“No racing. We’ll be doing something much simpler.”

“Oh? And what will that be?”

The trial giver reached out and touched her hoof to Blue Petal’s nose. “Tag!” she announced. “You’re it!”

More giggling came from the trial giver as she sped into the forest. “Catch me and you pass the trial!” she called back. “And remember, no magic!”

Blue Petal smiled. She had won many blue ribbons in playing tag during her time in school. This trial giver didn’t know what she gotten herself into.

Apple Bloom chased Twist back and forth across the stage, much to the audience’s delight. A few times a fake tree or rock got knocked over, but the running crew quickly righted them again.

“Blue Petal chased after the trial giver for what seemed like hours. She had thought herself good at playing tag, but the trial giver proved to be a difficult opponent. Many times Blue Petal had thought she had won, only

to find out that she had tagged a disguised bee's nest or fallen into a pit trap," Cheerilee said.

Apple Bloom slowly crept towards a tree that Twist had run behind moments before. Suddenly, Twist appeared from the opposite side of the stage, looked at the audience, and raised a hoof to her lips. The audience tried to keep from laughing as Twist slowly positioned herself behind Apple Bloom and shouted, "Look out! There's a big fuzzy caterpillar in your mane!"

Blue Petal rolled on the ground frantically. "Get it off! Get it off! Get it off!" she screamed.

The trial giver laughed until tears ran down her face. Blue Petal got up and blushed. It seemed like the whole forest had started laughing at her.

"So, give up?" the trial giver asked.

"Never! How much time do I have left?"

"Oh, there's no time limit. We'll play until you stop chasing me."

"Good. Just give me a minute to catch my breath."

"OK, don't keep me waaaitiiiiing," the trial giver taunted before running off.

Blue Petal sighed. She wasn't going to win this trial with speed alone. She needed a plan. There had to be a way to beat the trial giver at her own game.

It took some time, but Blue Petal had finished putting her plan into action. She had removed her barding and propped it up on some fallen branches in an attempt to trick the trial giver into thinking it was her. Just a few minutes after she had finished, the trial giver took the bait and started

to creep towards the barding. Now, it was Blue Petal's turn to sneak up on someone.

It was the perfect plan. Just ten more feet and Blue Petal would win. She had to move fast, but not so fast that she made noise. It would not be long before the trial giver discovered the trick, and Blue Petal could not afford to let this opportunity slip away. She closed the distance to about eight feet. It was then that she briefly heard the sound of crying come from deeper within the forest.

Blue Petal slowed for a moment, but continued on. It was probably just the wind. Again, she heard the crying, this time big choking sobs from a young pony. It definitely wasn't the wind, but only six feet remained until she caught the trial giver. This was her best chance to win. Once she had passed the trial, she could run to see where the crying was coming from. She tried to ignore the sound that seemed to be tearing at her heart and quickened her pace. Then, she heard a wavering voice cry out for their mommy.

Blue Petal stopped, looked towards the direction of the crying, and walked that way.

It took a while for Blue Petal to find the filly, even with how loudly she cried. The forest seemed to echo here, and more than a few times she had gotten herself turned around. The filly sat against a tree, hooves over her eyes, and tears running down her checks.

"Are you alright?" Blue Petal asked softly as she got closer.

The filly gave a startled yell and moved away from Blue Petal.

Blue Petal stopped moving. "It's OK. I'm here to help you. My name's Blue Petal. What's yours?"

"G-Gentle Stream..."

"Well that's a lovely name. What are you doing here all by yourself, Gentle Stream?"

Gentle Stream sniffed and rubbed her eyes, but the tears didn't stop. "I w-was having a picnic wi-with my Mommy. S-she took a nap afterwards, and I..." Her voice broke, and she started crying louder.

Blue Petal moved a little closer and said, "Go on... what happened?"

"I... I saw a butterfly a-and I followed it, but... but..."

"But you got lost and couldn't find your way back?"

Gentle Stream nodded and whimpered. "I looked... but I can't find her. S-she's not... any... w-where."

Blue Petal sat across from the filly. "I'm sure she's lookin' for you right now. But, if you keep movin', she will have a harder time findin' you."

Gentle Stream started crying harder when she realized she had been making things more difficult for her mother. Blue Petal attempted to make soothing noises to calm the filly, to little effect. She frowned sadly and said, "If you'd like, I can sit with you until your mother gets here."

Gentle Stream responded by hugging against Blue Petal and crying into her side. Blue Petal felt miserable watching the crying filly, but didn't know what to do other than wait. She was good with children. She had to do something to try and stop the filly's tears.

Blue Petal began humming a tune that she made up as she went along. Gentle Stream quieted but kept sobbing. Blue Petal soon found a melody she liked. It was so familiar to her, but she didn't know where— she gasped.

She remembered where this song had come from. It was a lullaby her mother had sung for her whenever she was feeling sad. She felt terrible that she had forgotten it but was overjoyed that it was all coming back to her.

Blue Petal resumed humming with more enthusiasm. She smiled when the invisible lyre and violin players joined in and added their melody

to her own. She would help Gentle Stream dry her eyes. Blue Petal breathed deep, then sang slowly and softly.

Blue Petal: Do you know what I want?
 What I'd really like to do?
 It's to hold you close,
 And spend some time with you.

Tell me about your day,
And everythin' you've seen,
From mornin' until night,
And everythin' in between.

Did you make any new friends?
Did you let them in your heart?
Can you still feel them close,
Like you're never far apart?

Will you show me how to laugh?
Will you let me see your smile?
Can you dry all of your tears,
If only for awhile?

Do you see all of your dreams,
Floating in the stars above?
Will you listen to my hopes?
Can you feel all my love?
Can you find happiness inside you?
Do you know what it's made of?

Dry your eyes my dear... I will always be near...

Do you know what I want?
What I'd really like to try?
It's to be with you,
And sing this lullaby.

Blue Petal kept humming softly now that Gentle Stream slept quietly against her. She looked up as the trial giver appeared from behind a tree.

The trial giver tilted her head in confusion as she walked silently towards them. She looked down at the filly, then up at Blue Petal. "I found your barding," the trial giver whispered. "What are you doing?"

"Waiting for her mother," Blue Petal whispered back.

"It's been a while since you've chased me, are you giving up?"

"What? I— no."

"Then come on. Leave her here and chase me," the trial giver said as she hopped around in excitement.

"But... if I move, she'll wake up. And if I leave her, she'll start to cry again."

The trial giver rolled her eyes and walked away a few steps. "Well, if you don't get up and start chasing me now, then I'll declare this trial over. You'll fail."

Blue Petal frowned. She couldn't hate the trial giver for forcing this choice, even if it did seem unfair. She was just doing her job, after all. However, Blue Petal had a job to do too.

"Then, I guess I fail," Blue Petal said with a sigh. "I'll just have to try extra hard on the last trial."

"Be careful, that last trial is a doozy. Bye, hero. It was fun playing with you," the trial giver said with a wave before she wandered off into the forest.

Blue Petal found herself once again alone with the sleeping filly. She hummed for a little while longer, but then her ears perked up. She thought she had heard somepony calling out. She remained quiet and listened harder.

"Gentle Stream!" the not-so-distant voice said. "Where are you?"

"Over here!" Blue Petal yelled.

The filly started awake and said, "Mommy?"

"Gentle Stream? Is that you?" the voice said closer still.

Gentle Stream got up and shouted, "I'm over here, Mommy! I'm over here!"

A mare in a green cloak stepped around a tree. Gentle Stream took off running, and soon the two were locked in an embrace. Blue Petal couldn't help but smile. She also couldn't help but stare at the mare. The keeper of the forest hadn't been kidding when she said she had a common face.

The mare nuzzled her daughter, then looked up at Blue Petal with tears in her eyes. "Thank you," she said. "Thank you so much. I don't know what I would have done if I had lost her."

Blue Petal got up and dusted herself off. "All in a day's work, ma'am. Are you two OK with findin' your way out?"

"Yes. I know the path back to the village."

"That's good. You be careful about chasing butterflies, Gentle Stream."

"I will," Gentle Stream said. "Thank you."

Blue Petal turned to go, but then looked back at the mare. "One more thing," she said. "It's probably not a good idea to have picnics in an enchanted forest. You might leave and find a hundred years have passed... or that everypony has forgotten about you."

"Blue Petal said her good-byes to the mother and daughter and returned to her barding. Much to her horror, the trial giver had covered it in fuzzy caterpillars. It took a long time for Blue Petal to work up the nerve to remove them," Cheerilee said.

“As Blue Petal wandered through the forest, she found herself feeling worried, but not about having failed two of the three trials. Instead, her thoughts drifted to her time before becoming a hero. She found it difficult to remember those times clearly. She remembered her mother, her home, and the trouble she would get into as she tried to learn how to be a hero, but there was something that was missing. She had a friend growing up, but she couldn’t remember his face or name no matter how hard she tried.

“When was the last time she had visited her home? Had she just left and never came back? Had she really forgotten her best friend? The answers to these questions disturbed Blue Petal. Her thoughts were interrupted as the forest cleared and a giant castle loomed before her.”

The castle had seen better centuries. Some of its towers had collapsed and taken other parts of the castle with them. Most of the walls still standing had stones missing from them, and it seemed the only reason the castle hadn’t completely fallen over yet, was because of the large amount of moss holding everything together. Still, Blue Petal couldn’t help but be impressed that such a giant castle had been fit inside of this tiny forest.

Blue Petal looked up at the night sky above her. Every so often, the rumbling of far-off thunder could be heard. Two torches burning on the castle’s outer walls provided the only light available. Blue Petal smiled. She couldn’t asked for a more appropriate setting for the final trial that would decide her fate.

The castle’s doors opened, and a mare in a dark cloak stepped out. This mare, thankfully, didn’t appear to be related to the forest keeper. She walked a few steps, then stopped, her eyes widening.

Blue Petal waited patiently, but the mare didn’t say or do anything.

Ruby stood across from Apple Bloom and stared at the audience. She seemed too far gone for the pants trick to be effective. Apple Bloom

glanced nervously at Cheerilee, who walked across the stage until she stood behind Ruby.

“Welcome, Blue Petal,” Cheerilee said quietly to Ruby.

“Welcome, Blue Petal!” the trial giver said quickly while still staring at nothing.

“Are you prepared for the final trial?” a disembodied voice asked.

“Are you prepared for the final trial?” the trial giver mimicked with her voice rising in pitch.

Blue Petal blinked. If this was a trial in not getting confused, she was doomed. “Uh... y-yeah, I’m ready. What is it I have to do?”

“The third and final trial is a test at combat.”

“The third and final trial is a test at combat!”

Blue Petal decided to ignore the high-pitched, hyperventilating trial giver and speak with the voice actually pronouncing her words instead.

“Well, that’s great! I’m very good at combat,” Blue Petal said, then became wary. “We are talkin’ about normal combat, right? Not like, food-eating combat, or spelling-bee combat?”

The trial giver made a high-pitched squeak and ran into the castle. Blue Petal shuffled nervously and wondered if she should follow. A ghostly light appeared where the trial giver had been standing and formed into a fuchsia-colored mare. At this point, nothing seemed to surprise Blue Petal anymore.

“It is a sword fight,” the mare said, “but it will be more difficult than any fight you’ve ever faced before.”

Blue Petal had faced many tough fights in her life. She wondered how much worse this one could be. As if to answer her unspoken question, the

invisible band began playing. Was this ghostly mare going to sing? With the trial giver having run away, wouldn't it be a good idea to skip to the fight?

The ghostly mare slowly shuffled around Blue Petal in time with the music. Her rhythmic movements almost seemed a dance.

Third trial giver: I hope that you are ready, Blue Peeetaaal.
(Now played by Cheerilee) For I don't think you quite realize your fate.
To pass your final test,
Your opponent you must best.
Inside these castle doors, they do await.

This may be too much for you, Blue Peeetaaal.
For your chance of winning here is very faint.
Inside there's no retreat,
You will only find defeat.
Your opponent is not known for his restraint.

But listen to me closely, Blue Peeetaaal.
For there is another path that you don't know.
This trial, I can end,
And the rules, I can bend,
So that the world will still call you 'hero'.

The music continued to play as Blue Petal thought things over. She knew that any offer too good to be true, usually was, or at least came with a very steep price that only seemed insignificant at the time. "What do you mean by 'bend'?" she asked cautiously.

"If you fail, the world's memories of you fade, but I can change that so that different memories are taken. You won't even have to take the trial. Accept my offer, and I'll guide you out of the forest."

"What memories are we talkin' about?"

The ghost gave Blue Petal an unnerving smile. "Your memories. Specifically, the ones from before you became a hero and the ones you've had since coming to this valley."

Blue Petal's eyes widened. She tried to speak several times before words came out. "You can't take those! They're mine!"

The ghost laughed. "Are they really that precious to you? How often have you even thought about them before coming to this valley? Don't you hate the way they make you feel? Confused, doubtful, sad. You never felt that way when you were out being a big-time hero. Wouldn't you like to go back to that?"

Third trial giver: Weren't you so much happier, Blue Peeetaaal.
Don't you like the ponies shouting out your name?
A hero quite supreme.
This could all just be a dream.
Come with me and forget about this game.

So now you know my offer, Blue Peeetaaal.
The choice that is correct can't be ignored.
So tell me what you choose.
Do you go inside and lose,
Or do you wish your happiness restored?

Blue Petal thought about the ghost's proposal, then shook her head and said, "It's like you're not even giving me a choice. Losing or happiness? Who in their right mind would choose losing?"

"Then, what is your choice?"

Blue Petal found herself getting angry. "Isn't it obvious? I want happiness!"

The ghost remained quiet for a bit. "Very well. I'll take your memor—"

"You leave my memories right where they are! Weren't you listenin'? I chose happiness! My memories may make me confused, or doubt myself, or even a little sad, but only because I've realized what a fool I've been! I helped ponies today for no reason other than because they needed it. I'm the happiest I've been in a long time. I'd rather the world forget about me than give up a single memory from today!"

Blue Petal marched passed the stunned ghost and up to the castle doors.

“But the world’s *not* goin’ to forget about me,” Blue Petal said. “I’m takin’ the final trial, and I’m goin’ to pass it!”

Blue Petal proudly walked through the castle doors and slammed them behind her, causing the rotted door frame to collapse outward. She looked out the gaping hole in the wall.

“Uh... sorry ‘bout that,” Blue Petal said.

The curtains closed, and the running crew began changing the scene for the next act. Apple Bloom walked over the fallen door frame.

“Sorry, Ms. Cheerilee. I musta slammed it too hard,” Apple Bloom said.

“That’s alright,” Cheerilee said with a smile.

“Wow... I didn’t know you had such a nice singin’ voice.”

Cheerilee blushed a little and said, “Well, this isn’t the first musical I’ve been in. Can you go check on Ruby for me? I’ll come see her myself after I speak to the audience.”

“You got it,” Apple Bloom announced, then ran off behind the set.

Cheerilee walked around the curtain and out in front of the applauding crowd. She said, “And so, Blue Petal entered the castle to face her final trial. It was there that her greatest challenge awaited. However, Blue Petal wasn’t the only hero who had entered the forest that day. A difficult choice was about to be presented not only to her, but to another as well.

“Act two has come to its end. Please take a moment to get up and stretch. Act three will begin in ten minutes.”

Apple Bloom walked behind the set and found Ruby sitting down with a few of the other actors.

"I'm sorry. I really messed up," Ruby said when she saw Apple Bloom. "I was fine when there was a bunch of us on stage, but when it was just the two of us... and then I started thinking about singing... and there were so many ponies watching us."

"That's OK. The important thing is you tried," Apple Bloom said. The other actors nodded in agreement.

"How bad was it after I left?" Ruby asked.

"Not bad at all. Ms. Cheerilee knew your lines. She even sang!"

Ruby looked relieved. "That's good, I was afraid I ruined everything. But, what about the next act? I'm supposed to sing in that one, too! I... I don't think I can."

"Maybe Ms. Cheerilee can sing again?" Sweetie Belle suggested.

"I would prefer not to, if it can be avoided," Cheerilee said as she walked up to the actors.

"But you're so good at singin'," Apple Bloom said.

"Thank you, but this is supposed to be your play. Also, it's a bit hard to switch between narrating and singing. Does anyone else know the lyrics to the next song and think they can sing it?"

Twist's face lit up, and she raised a hoof as far into the air as she could. "Ooh! Ooh! I know the lyrics!" she said.

"Wonderful! One problem solved, and it brings me to the next problem. Has Diamond Tiara or Silver Spoon come back yet?"

“I saw them walking around without their costumes,” Pipsqueak said. “I asked if they were still going to perform, but they just called me a loser and walked away.”

“Oh dear... I’ll have to see if I can talk with them. Does anyone know Diamond Tiara’s lyrics for the end?”

Again, Twist raised her hoof into the air. “I do. I memorized the whole play!”

Cheerilee smiled. “Wonderful! Let’s find you some villager clothes, an apron, and a cloak. Come on everypony, the show is not over yet!”

Apple Bloom took a sip of water from her cup and noticed Snips and Snails walking towards her. Snails had changed back into his villager clothes, and Snips still wore his Stone Knight costume.

“Hi, Apple Bloom,” Snips said. “Ready for our big scene together?”

Apple Bloom finished her water and set her cup down before replying. “Lookin’ forward to it. A little bit of sword fightin’ action will be fun.”

Snips and Snails snickered at each other. “Not that scene,” Snips said.

Apple Bloom raised an eyebrow. “What do you mean? Are you talkin’ ‘bout the song at the end?”

“No,” Snips said while trying not to laugh. “Never mind. Break a leg!”

“Uh, you too,” Apple Bloom said, then shook her head as the two colts walked away.

“Welcome back, everypony! It’s time for the third and final act of our play,” Cheerilee said as the curtains opened to reveal the inside of the castle.

“Blue Petal walked through the musty old castle and soon came across a large, open room. It was there that her third trial awaited.”

Blue Petal walked down the musty hallway and into a large, open room. Much to her relief, this room appeared to be in at least somewhat better condition than the rest of the castle and suitable for combat. Fighting while a building collapses around you may look awesome, but it's incredibly stressful.

The room still had its problems, though. The windows that weren't shattered were so dirty they couldn't be seen out of. The furniture laid in broken heaps that cluttered the floor. The wall decorations had long since rotted away. Somepony had even left an old suit of armor sitting in the middle of the room.

“I just can't seem to get away from you today, can I?” the Stone Knight said as he turned around.

“Hey there, Mr. Stone Knight. I almost thought you were just a suit of armor, you were so still,” Blue Petal said.

“I guess you must be my opponent for the third trial. How fitting.”

“Wait, we're supposed to fight each other? Isn't there somepony else we could fight instead?”

“No! It is you two that shall fight!” a voice said with a lisp. Blue Petal and the Stone Knight turned to see the third trial giver, that now looked very much like the second trial giver, standing near the far wall. “This is a trial of swordplay. You may use your magic, but only to hold your sword. The trial is confined to this room and lasts until one of you is defeated.”

“At last, a trial I can agree to,” the Stone Knight said. “Draw your sword, Blue Petal. I'm going to enjoy this.”

The Stone Knight grabbed his sword with magic and held it before him. Blue Petal didn't want to fight but drew her sword anyway so that she was not defenseless.

Scotaloo moved next to Apple Bloom and set a harness on her back. A long wire came off the harness and dangled in front of Apple Bloom's face. Scootaloo bit onto Apple Bloom's sword and attached it to the end of the wire, so that it looked like it was being levitated.

"Hold up, Mr. Knight," Blue Petal said as her opponent advanced. "I don't think this is the way two heroes should be acting."

"A hero? *A hero?* Don't you dare tarnish that name further by referring to yourself as such! Blue Petal, in the name of all true heroes, I will end you!"

The Stone Knight roared, and the invisible band played quickly. Blue Petal wished it had been a slow song. A fast tempo guaranteed a fight would soon start. The Stone Knight swung his sword and began trading blows with Blue Petal.

Stone Knight: on your behalf, (Snips) to do!	You're a hero? Don't make me laugh. I have to say That you have forgotten everything you're supposed
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I can't believe my eyes. You are something I despise.
You think you actually act noble and behave true?

You're not a hero, for you can't see, your own inability,
To do the right thing only just because it's right!
Don't you see how you act, with all the fame that you
attract?

Well, let me tell you that I find it a horrid sight.

I try to ignore and to be tough, but I've finally had enough,
Of watching you stain our reputation and our name.

No more boasting, no more gloats, and the displays that it promotes.

The honor of every true hero, I will reclaim!

Blue Petal fought but found herself being pushed back. The Stone Knight definitely knew how to handle a sword. She could probably beat him if she gave it her all, but she didn't want to hurt him. He had been right. She hadn't been acting like a hero at all. She had let her fame blind her to the horrible path she had been walking. The problem was, she had already had this startling revelation in the forest, and apparently he hadn't been around to see it.

"Please stop, Mr. Knight," Blue Petal said as she hopped over a broken chair to gain some ground. "We can talk this over, put aside our differences, maybe even become friends. I'm sure we'll be laughing about this tomorrow. Yikes. You don't seem ready to start laughing."

The Stone Knight had stopped and seemed to be seething. "Friends?" he spat. "Why would I want to be friends with you? I already know how you treat them! I've already been tossed aside by you!" The Stone Knight began undoing the straps on his helmet.

"What are you—" Blue Petal started to say but stopped when the knight had removed his helmet. She tried to keep herself from screaming.

The memories came pouring back. Every guilty thought she had chosen to ignore until it had been forgotten. Her family, her home, everyone who had been important to her until she had left them behind in her misbegotten attempt to become the greatest hero ever known.

Blue Petal remembered her best friend. His face. His name. Every moment they had shared together. She had completed her training at a very young age and set out into the world first. Before she had left, she made a promise. She promised that she would return a hero and help her friend become just as great as her.

Blue Petal stared at the unicorn with the light-gray coat and charcoal mane. "Palisade," she said at barely more than a whisper.

"So you finally remember me," Palisade said.

“I’m so sorry.”

Palisade hesitated for a moment before resuming his attack. Blue Petal fought back her tears. She had to do something, say something, to get Palisade to stop attacking and listen to her.

Blue Petal: I was a hero, but I can see, there has been something wrong with me.
 I understand the way I have been actin’ has been wrong!
 Let me tell it to you straight, my own ego, I would inflate.
 I was boastful, shameful, and more than a little bit headstrong.

 This can’t be how our friendship ends. I want to make amends!
 I have learned much from this forest, magical and strange.
 I’ve failed these trials, therefore, a hero I am no more.
 Please believe me when I say that I have change’d!

“What do you mean you failed?” Palisade said. He had stopped attacking, for the moment, but still held his sword at ready.

“I have failed the first two trials, and I’m failing this one now. Trial giver! I give up! I am defeated,” Blue Petal yelled.

“Blue Petal... I don’t understand. You realize what this means don’t you? Memories of everything you’ve done, good or bad, will be erased from the world. It’ll be like you’ve never existed.”

“After what I’ve learned about myself today, being forgotten would be a mercy. I’ll start over from the beginning. Do things right this time. My only regret is that now, you’ll be the one to forget me.”

Blue Petal looked into Palisade’s eyes and saw that the malice in them had faded slightly. At least now Blue Petal might have a chance to talk to him. Laughter echoed through the halls. Blue Petal looked at the trial giver who now seemed to be made from swirling shadows. The music slowed and turned ominous.

Third trial giver: Perhaps you don't understand, all the magics of this land (It's Twist's turn) The spells that bind yourselves to these very halls.
If you wish to leave, then my blessing, you must receive,
Which I will not give until your opponent falls.

"Falls?" Blue Petal questioned.

The trial giver laughed once more and said, "In a word: dead. Now, get back at it. I'd prefer death by multiple stab wounds, but I suppose any type of death will do. Bonus points if you surprise me."

"You're crazy! I refuse to keep fighting," Blue Petal said.

"A-as do I," Palisade said, though he appeared reluctant.

"Do you now?" the trial giver said. "Do you really bear no more ill will towards Blue Petal? Have you forgiven her transgressions so easily?"

Palisade screamed in pain. Blue Petal came near him and asked, "Palisade? What's wrong?"

Palisade's sword swung, and Blue Petal barely dodged in time. "Blue Petal... r-run!" Palisade said. "I... can't stop... myself."

"Leave him alone!" Blue Petal yelled at the trial giver but received only laughter in return. She tried to use her magic to hold Palisade down but found it blocked. A look behind her confirmed her next suspicion: the hallway she had come from had vanished. It seemed the trial giver's rules weren't made to be broken.

The music's tempo picked back up as Palisade charged. His sword came down hard, but Blue Petal managed to deflect it. His attacks were relentless, and she soon found herself only parrying while she retreated. She had several close calls as she tried to find ways to disarm Palisade without causing him lasting harm. With each failure, her hopes of a peaceful resolution faded. She felt herself starting to tire and knew she had to do something soon. As much as she hated to admit it, this fight would only have one outcome: one of them would die.

Palisade's eyes looked around wildly as his body fought without his control. He seemed to be trying to resist the trial giver's spell but was having no luck breaking free. "Blue Petal," he said.

Palisade: Please take this fight seriously, or I'm afraid that it will be,
Your life that is taken from you this night.
It seems it is too late, this trial is now our fate.
Who becomes a hero will be settled by this fight!

Blue Petal met Palisade's eyes. She saw all his fear, regrets, loneliness, pain, and hatred. Whether she had meant to or not, she had done this to him. It was almost too much for her to bear. She gritted her teeth and focused with renewed determination. She would find a way to help her friend no matter what.

Blue Petal: Palisade, listen to me, please! I know of your worries,
To bear your pain this long has been very brave.
Though the price may be steep, a promise I will keep.
If only one of us can live, then it's you, I save!

Blue Petal stepped inside Palisade's reach and didn't try to dodge his sword thrust. She wrapped a foreleg over his back and pulled him into an embrace. He struggled for a moment until he realized what was happening, then the tension slowly faded from his body.

"Blue Petal," Palisade said as he pressed his neck harder against hers. "I couldn't stop. I—"

"Shh... I forgive you."

Blue Petal broke the embrace and looked into Palisade's eyes. It hadn't been enough. He still had some pain he wasn't letting go of. She had been so close, too. She smiled weakly before collapsing to the floor. Palisade stared down at his fallen friend and the sword protruding from her breastplate.

"No! What have I done?" Palisade said as he pulled his sword from Blue Petal and threw it away.

“You have passed the trial. Congratulations, *hero*,” the trial giver said with another laugh.

“I’m no hero. What kind of hero slays his best friend? I’m a monster! I’m—”

“Palisade,” Blue Petal said weakly. She wasn’t about to let the trial giver undo her work.

Palisade sat down by Blue Petal. He turned her on her back and looked into her face. All the light seemed to fade from the room except for one beam shining on them.

Blue Petal sucked in air until it hurt. She had one breath to do this in.

Blue Petal: Do you know what I want?
 What I’d really... like to do?
Palisade: (Blue Petal, stay with me. I’ll find help.)
Blue Petal: It’s to apologize... for...
 Forgetting about... you.

 I’ve... caused so much pain,
 Even though I’ve... said sorry.
 Can you... find it in your... heart,
 To f-forgive... m-... me...?

“It hurt so much seeing what you had become, but it hurt more knowing you forgot your promise to return to me,” Palisade said. “I forgive you. I really do! It shouldn’t have ended this way. I went too far. I’m sorry.”

Blue Petal stared up at Palisade with half-opened eyes and saw the friend she remembered staring back. She felt happy, even though her vision had begun to fade away into darkness. She had helped one last pony before she went. Palisade wrapped his forelegs behind her neck and began slowly lowering his mouth to hers.

“Snips?” Apple Bloom whispered before his lips got too close. “I know in the stories that Blue Petal and Palisade went on to be lovers, but I

swear, if you kiss me instead of huggin', I will buck you so hard in the face that you'll be eatin' all your meals through a straw for the rest of your life."

Snips gulped. One look at Apple Bloom's face revealed it was not an idle threat. He hugged Apple Bloom and quickly broke away in case he had done it for too long.

With one last hug, Blue Petal closed her eyes and waited to fade away. Much to her relief, it was apparently true that you stopped feeling pain when you were dying. That sword had hurt a lot.

Blue Petal turned her thoughts to Palisade and her happiness for him. He would go on to be a great hero. Maybe she would get a memorial for this? Nothing big, though. Just a simple plaque that read something like, "Here lies Blue Petal, yadda yadda yadda. Died to save her friend, blah blah blah."

Death seemed to be taking a long time to come. Blue Petal felt she may have closed her eyes too soon. She would just feel silly if she opened them again, though.

"This is really touching, but you can both get up now," a voice said.

Blue Petal opened her eyes. She and Palisade were back in the forest. She got up and checked herself over. "My wound is gone!" she announced happily, then looked at the keeper of the forest standing near her.

The keeper smiled and said, "Congratulations, Blue Petal. Congratulations, Palisade. You have both passed the Trials of the Hero."

"We did?" Blue Petal asked. "But, I thought— Ooooh... it was one of those 'say you're testing one thing, but you're actually testing another thing' deals. Very clever, keeper."

The keeper grinned. "Yes, I gave you trials to test for responsibility, compassion, and acceptance. With one extra lesson at the end for Palisade to teach him forgiveness."

Palisade blushed and said, "I'm a bit embarrassed that I had to be taught those lessons."

"Me too," Blue Petal said. "All I have to say about this is: ow! Did I really need to get stabbed to learn a lesson?"

The keeper looked a little panicked. "S-sometimes pain is an excellent teacher?"

"I was dying!"

"Um... sometimes death is an excellent teacher?"

"Kinda hard to learn much when you're dead. 'Cept maybe what you should have done differently, so that you didn't wind up dead in the first place."

"I wasn't really going to let you die," the keeper said while shuffling a hoof.

"I know. I'm just giving you a hard time. Thanks, keeper."

The keeper looked relieved until she noticed Blue Petal staring at her. "Is everything alright?"

"I still can't get over the feeling that I've seen you before."

"Perhaps you remember my picture from the story books?"

"From the story books?" Blue Petal asked, then gasped. She bowed low and kicked Palisade when she noticed he wasn't bowing too.

"What was that for?" Palisade asked when he lowered into a bow.

"This is one of the First Heroes' spirits! The one in the blue armor. I'm sorry spirit, but I never learned your name."

“Nopony remembers my name,” the spirit said. “I would rather be remembered for my deeds, anyway. And stop bowing before me, I’m not that special.”

Blue Petal and Palisade got up. “Not that special?” Blue Petal asked with her mouth hanging open. “You and your friends pushed back the darkness and saved the world!”

“Yes, Blue Petal, not that special, because we didn’t do a very good job of stopping the darkness. It is returning. In a few more years it will be released again. The spirits of other First Heroes and I have been seeking out potential candidates to lead the fight. The others thought you and Palisade too far gone, but I had hoped to bring you back. I created this forest and these trials, then guided you to them, with hopes of redeeming you. I’m pleased that you both did an excellent job proving me right.”

Blue Petal looked around at the forest and asked, “So, is this place some kind of illusion?”

“Sort of. It’s actually a dream the both of you are sharing.”

Blue Petal shook her head and smiled. “Now things make sense. The valley, the village, this forest. It was all a dream!”

“Actually, just the forest isn’t real. You really did come to the valley and stay briefly at Happy Village. I just had the villagers let you know about a Forest of Trials so that you would go looking for it, and I could put you into an enchanted sleep.”

Blue Petal frowned and raised an eyebrow at the keeper. “Wait a second... I’m not zonked out in the middle of some field somewhere, am I?”

“Uh...”

Blue Petal stared flatly at the spirit who refused to meet her gaze. “I am, aren’t I?”

“Maybe...”

Blue Petal sighed, and the spirit looked embarrassed. "So long as I'm not in an inappropriate pose or covered in caterpillars, I guess I forgive you."

"Don't worry, you aren't. Goodbye you two. It's time to wake up. Remember, the world will need you in a few years."

The spirit waved goodbye as the world seemed to fade away to blackness.

Blue Petal squinted her eyes as something bright shined on them. She raised a hoof to block the light and slowly opened her eyes. The sun had risen over the horizon, and its light had just reached her. She looked at the field around her and saw that Happy Village was not too far away. She heard a noise nearby and turned her head to see Palisade lying near her, also starting to wake up. The sky was clear and the weather perfect. It was the start of a wonderful day. She got up and spun around to take in the sights around her.

Blue Petal: Palisade,
 Come look and see!
 All around you. I think you'll agree.
 It's a wonderful day. I have never felt so aliiiiive!

 Come with me,
 There's much to do.
 A brand-new day for us to presue.
 So much to make up for. I feel like I've been reviiiive'd!

Palisade got up and stood next to Blue Petal. He looked around with a sense of wonder on his face.

Palisade: You are right,
 I feel it too.
 A brand-new beginning. For me and you.
 The weights have been lifted. I feel as if I have been
freeeeeed!

Here, we go.
Look at us now.
Thank you, spirit. You've saved us somehow.
We'll remember your lessons. We'll be sure to
suceeeeed.

Both: I can't wait to let everyone seeeee,
The new hero who is meeee.
Today is going to beeeeeeee! — A wonderful day!

Blue Petal and Palisade smiled as they ran as fast as they could. The world seemed to fly by, and soon the village was all around them. They slowed and looked at all the ponies going about their morning business.

Blue Petal took a deep breath and shouted, "Hello, Happy Village!"

"Well, hello again, big-time hero," Village Greeter said.

"Please don't call me that. Just call me Blue Petal."

"As you wish, Blue Petal."

Village Greeter: I can feel it everywhere — it's a wonderful daaaay!
(Pipsqueak) No mater if something goes wrong, it will *be*
okaaaaay.

Lady Blue Petal, you're looking fair.
I must say you two make quite a pair.
I can feel it everywhееееееее — a wonderful day!

I hope you've enjoyed your time spent in this valleyyyy!
It seemed you had a lot stuck on your miiiind.
I know that we villagers may just be-sim-ple-folk,
But, we still know how to relax and to unwiiind.

Blue Petal laughed, then said, "It has been a long time since I relaxed. It felt good. I'm sorry about before. I really am here to help if needed."

"I need help!" a filly's voice said from below. "My cat is stuck in a tree again."

“I’ll handle this one, Blue Petal,” Palisade said as he walked off with the happy filly.

Blue Petal continued walking down the street until she came to the inn she had stayed at before. The innkeeper stood outside the door but no longer seemed hostile. She waved to Blue Petal and gave a friendly smile.

Innkeeper: What we have here — is a wonderful daaaay!
(Recast to Twist) Let me know if you ever need a place to staaaay!
 I’m glad your head is finally clear.
 And I do mean that most sincere.
 I know what we have heeeeeeeere — a wonderful day!

 I see now what it is that makes you speciiiaal.
 Your ability to overcome the trials that you faaaace.
 I was a little worried that you would-not-re-turn,
 But, I’m glad you found the virtues that you
misplaaaace’d.

“So am I,” Blue Petal said. “Thank you for telling me about the Forest of Trials. I needed that.”

“My pleasure,” the innkeeper said, then walked back inside.

“Bees! So many bees!” a panicked pony yelled.

Blue Petal held out a hoof and stopped the pony from running. She walked to his side and glared angrily at his mane.

“Hey, you bees!” Blue Petal yelled. “You get out of this pony’s mane this instant! Don’t you buzz at me. I’ll come in there and force you out myself if I have to!”

The pony stood rigid as the bees flew out of his mane. He carefully reached a hoof behind his neck, and a smile spread across his face. “Thank you,” he said. “You don’t know h—”

“And as for you!”

The pony shut his mouth and looked nervous.

Blue Petal lowered her voice and gently said to the pony, "I know it might smell nice, but things like this wouldn't happen if you stopped using a honey-based shampoo."

"Right. Sorry to cause trouble," the pony said sheepishly before calmly walking away.

Blue Petal: Today is going to be — such a wonderful daaaay!
 So much left to do, but it'll be goin' *my* waaaay.
 I feel like my mind is free.
 It took awhile, but I can finally see,
 Today is going to beeeeeeee — a wonderful day!

 Though I may have found what makes a heroooo.
 I still have actions that must be undooooone.
 There are many ponies that need an a-po-lo-gy.
 Starting with my hometown as number oooooone.

Palisade ran past Blue Petal with a cat in his mane. "Sharp claws! Sharp claws!" he yelled with his voice higher-pitched than normal.

"Help!" the filly chasing Palisade said. "My cat is being stolen!"

Blue Petal stepped in front of Palisade as he came back around. She poked the cat gently with her horn, which caused it to hop off into the filly's waiting forelegs.

"Are you OK?" Blue Petal asked.

Palisade stopped panting and looked at Blue Petal. "I am now," he said.

Blue Petal watched what must have been every villager gather around her. It looked like this was the big finale.

All: It's so very true — this is a wonderful daaaay!
 The heroes are back on the path after being *led*
 astraaaay!

Blue Petal and

Palisade: There is so much to do.
(To each other) Now that I've refound you.

All: Just watch and you will seeeee, (A Wonderful!)
With one hundred percent certaintyyyy, (A Wonderful!)
Today is going to beeeeeeee!
A won-der-ful daaaaaaaaay!

The curtain closed. Apple Bloom's heart pounded hard as she grinned. They had done it. It was over. Sure, there had been a few mistakes, but the audience must have enjoyed it with how loudly they cheered.

Every filly and colt that had been part of the production came on stage and lined up in a row. They quietly congratulated each other on a job well done. Apple Bloom looked down the line at her friends, who smiled back at her. She noticed Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon standing at the end as if they hadn't abandoned the play in the middle. Apple Bloom decided to ignore them like always. They may have been jerks, but they still deserved credit for what little they did. Just so long as they didn't try anything funny.

The curtains opened once more to renewed applause. The students bowed and smiled at the audience.

Cheerilee came up on stage. Her face beamed with happiness as she looked at all her students proudly. She held up a hoof, and the audience quieted.

"And so ends our story," Cheerilee said. "Blue Petal and Palisade went on to have many more adventures, but always on their minds were the words of warning from the spirit. They knew they had to prepare for the return of the darkness. However, that is a story for another day.

"Thank you, everypony for your show of support. We hope you enjoyed this year's play. Now, let's give another round of applause for our

actors, stage crew, musicians, and everypony else that made tonight possible!”

The students bowed once more to the sound of cheering and applause.

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*The End of  
An Imaginative Performance*

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