**DARING DON’T**

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of a drawing attached to a tree trunk during the day. It depicts two images of a bird flapping its wings—up in the top one, down in the bottom. Each is marked with an arrow to show the direction of the flap. Zoom out to frame it at the base of a limb on which Fluttershy is standing; in front of her is a nest containing two hatchlings. Motioning for their attention, she flaps her own wings to demonstrate—this is a flying lesson—and hovers above the limb. A “now you try” gesture to the babies is followed by a puzzled look passing between the two, after which they get their own pinions going and unsteadily rise from the nest.*)

(*Cut to a close-up of a beaming Fluttershy and zoom out quickly as the multicolored blur of Rainbow Dash’s flight streaks around the tree.*)

**Rainbow:** (*excitedly*) Four more months, four more months, *four more months!*

(*On the last repetition, she plows the yellow pegasus up and away from the tree so that they end up above the Ponyville rooftops.*)

**Rainbow:** I bet you’re excited, huh?

**Fluttershy:** Oh…my. I, uh… (*slowly flying away*) …I could be excited. I don’t really know. I wasn’t really think— (*Rainbow zips over to cut her off.*)

**Rainbow:** Come on! You gotta be excited!

**Fluttershy:** (*clutching her tail*) Oh, well, I guess maybe I’m a little kinda sort of excited.

**Rainbow:** (*grabbing Fluttershy’s shoulders*) I thought so!

**Fluttershy:** Yeah. So, um…why am I excited?

**Rainbow:** (*clapping*) Because the next Daring Do book is coming out exactly four months from today! (*doing a backflip*) *That’s* how exciting it is! (*zipping around Fluttershy, punching at air*) So, what amazing, incredible, awesome adventure do you think Daring Do will have in her next book, huh? Will she…

(*The scene dissolves to a jungle landscape, in which Daring Do—the orange-brown pegasus mare whose adventures Rainbow began to follow in “Read It and Weep”—moves some undergrowth aside to watch a step-pyramid temple in the near distance. The daytime sky is a weird shade of green, and Daring appears in the same position as Rainbow. The right-wing injury she had suffered in the book Rainbow was reading back then has healed.*)

**Rainbow:** (*voice over*) …at long last stalk the fortress of Talacon… (*Several stallions in Central American tribal garb appear on the terraces, produce bows/arrows, and open fire.*) …only to be forced to contend with its dreaded and impenetrable arrow defense?

(*Daring spins 180 degrees, putting her rump toward the temple, and whirls her tail to produce a monochrome rainbow twister that sucks up all the projectiles.*)

**Rainbow:** (*voice over*) And if so, could her skill, quick wits, and courage possibly carry the day?

(*One downward swing slams the arrows harmlessly against the grass; now she launches herself toward the foes with a fierce grin and an extended foreleg.*)

**Rainbow:** (*voice over*) Or…will her next adventure bring her face to face with the vast and horrible Ahuizotl himself?

(*The end of this line is marked by a close-up profile of that blue-furred foe’s two-tone, elongated, snarling face—also first seen in “Read It and Weep.” Daring goes nose-to-nose with him, the camera zooming out to show him standing atop the temple. Ahuizotl lets go with a roar forceful enough to hurl her backwards amid a scatter of leaves and send her pith helmet flying off.*)

**Rainbow:** (*voice over*) Would she cower? (*She catches the helmet and dons it.*) Turn tail and run? (*Diving charge, swerving around a hail of thrown weapons.*) Or…would she fly at him full-bore— (*Her perspective; Ahuizotl is doing the hurling.*) —knowing full well against all odds that the greatest challenge she’d ever faced— (*Back to Daring.*) —was still sure to be no match for—

**Ahuizotl:** (*gasping, Fluttershy’s voice*) Look out!

(*The mental picture disappears in a puff of smoke, and Fluttershy—mow holding Ahuizotl’s pose, but in midair—sidesteps to avoid taking a flying tackle from Rainbow. The blue pegasus barrels past, followed by a thud and a scatter of leaves; cut to a close-up of her, now scuffed up and badly dazed from the impact, and zoom out. The two chicks Fluttershy was teaching to fly are doing a slow circle above her head, and a longer shot reveals that she has landed in their nest.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*to birds, landing on branch*) Oh, I’m not so sure she’s gonna last another four months.

(*Fade to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to the door to the library.*)

**Rainbow:** (*hopping toward it, now cleaned up*) Three months and twenty-six days, three months and twenty-six days, three months and twenty-six days!

(*Cut to just inside; she opens the door and steps in.*)

**Rainbow:** Hey, Twilight! Aren’t you excited that—

(*She gets no farther before the end of a party favor unrolls toward her, sounding off. A cut to the reading room shows it to be in the mouth of Pinkie Pie, wearing a balloon-marked fez and hanging upside down from the ceiling. Fluttershy and Rarity are here as well—the former wearing a flowered top hat, the latter a tiara—and Twilight Sparkle is fully seen when Pinkie hoists herself out of view. The Princess wears a starry party hat over her horn, glowing to levitate a cup. Cakes and treats are laid out on the central table, and balloons are hung up everywhere; Rarity holds a few as well.*)

**Twilight:** So glad you finally made it! (*Applejack dances a bit, wearing a huge red cowboy hat decorated with white apples.*)

**Rainbow:** What’s everypony doing here?

**Pinkie:** We’re having a holiday party! (*She blows a party horn in Rainbow’s face, showering her with confetti/streamers.*)

**Rainbow:** So what holiday would today be?

**Pinkie:** National Random Holiday Party Day! Woo-hoo! (*Rarity crosses to them, floating her own drink; she has put her balloons away.*)

**Rarity:** I’ve never heard of it either… (*Sip.*) …but the punch is quite tasty.

**Pinkie:** You might say the secret ingredient is…

(*She looks furtively around herself before leaning in close and addressing herself directly into Rainbow’s ear.*)

**Pinkie:** (*whispering loudly*) …a secret! (*Big squeaky grin; she darts away.*)

**Rainbow:** How come nopony bothered to invite me? (*Applejack comes up on her other side.*)

**Applejack:** I came to invite you personally, but it seems you were a speck too busy readin’ the last Daring Do book for the *twelfth time!*

**Rainbow:** Yeah, well, in three months and twenty-six more days— (*taking a cup from a tray Twilight is floating*) —I’ll be able to read the next one. (*She drinks.*)

**Twilight:** Oh! Haven’t you heard? The release of the next book got pushed another two months.

(*The adventure-novel fan nearly chokes on her punch upon hearing this, then spits the whole mouthful into Twilight’s face.*)

**Rainbow:** *Two more months?!?* I’ve been waiting so long already! (*jittering, sweating*) I don’t think I can take another two months. I’ll never make it!

(*She makes her point by flopping spreadeagle, flat on her face.*)

**Fluttershy:** Yeah. I can vouch for that.

(*The yellow mare ducks away just before the pink one lowers her head into view and plunks a striped party hat onto the Technicolor mane. She then pulls herself up and o.s.; Rainbow peels her face up off the floor.*)

**Rainbow:** Did they give a reason?

**Twilight:** The publisher just said author A.K. Yearling won’t be able to finish the book for another two months. (*She floats up a tray of…*) Cupcakes?

(*Pinkie is first to take advantage of the offer, chomping one right off the tray in one bite; now Rainbow stands up with a grumpy little whicker.*)

**Rainbow:** How could *you* possibly know that before me? I’m the series’ biggest fan!

**Twilight:** I’m just as big a fan as you. In fact, I’m the one who first introduced you to the books, remember?

**Rainbow:** (*sheepishly*) Oh. Right.

**Twilight:** A.K. Yearling just might be my favorite author. I know everything about her. (*Close-up.*) Where she grew up… (*Pan toward an irritated Rainbow.*) …where she studied literature… (*now o.s.*) …where she wrote the first Daring Do book…

(*Something clicks in the blue cranium.*)

**Rainbow:** Where she lives? (*Cut to Twilight.*)

**Twilight:** Uh…no. (*rubbing chin*) Though I could probably find out somehow. Why?

**Rainbow:** (*with increasing fervor*) Don’t you get it? The new book is obviously delayed because she needs help dealing with whatever everyday nonsense is distracting her from spending her every living breathing second writing!

(*She punctuates these last five words with a series of hoof thumps against the floor.*)

**Rainbow:** So I… (*catching herself*) …I mean, fans like me… (*Cut to an unimpressed Twilight, rolling eyes and shaking head; she continues o.s.*) …can get to read the next book ASAP! (*To Applejack and Rainbow.*) Think about it! We could help her with her laundry, buying her groceries, cooking her meals, whatever!

(*She pronounces the acronym as “A-sap.” During her enumeration of helpful activities, she first throws a foreleg around Applejack’s shoulders, then flicks Pinkie’s forelock, and finally addresses the entire group while standing on her hind legs. Finally stopping to let her mind cool down just slightly, she drops back to all fours.*)

**Rainbow:** Now who wouldn’t appreciate that?

**Twilight:** Hmmm…I don’t know. What she probably wants most of all is respect for her privacy. (*Rainbow flies in her face.*)

**Rainbow:** She can always just say no.

(*Touching down again, the blue flyer puts a foreleg around Twilight’s shoulders and smiles toward the others. Cut to Applejack, Fluttershy, and Pinkie, whose uncertainty yields to a round of agreeing smiles and nods. The librarian lets off a weary little moan as Rainbow’s smile turns into a grin.*)

**Twilight:** I suppose you’re right.

**Rainbow:** Of course I am.

(*She flies o.s. at speed, her party hat falling off, but doubles back a moment later.*)

**Rainbow:** (*winking*) So how’s about getting that address?

(*This just earns her a very annoyed look. Dissolve to a slow pan over a map of the area, with a red line starting at the library and meandering its way out of Ponyville through the surrounding countryside. It describes a number of sharp turns and loops, more or less following the local railroad line for a time before veering across it and into a mountain range. From here, the view dissolves to a close-up of a paintbrush in a pony’s teeth, being dragged along the ground to mark out that self-same red line. A zoom out identifies the painter as Pinkie, who is walking backwards to do this job with a can of paint balanced on her back. She is moving through a heavily forested area and has shed the fez she wore during the party; when the others are next seen, they will have ditched their hats and Applejack will have her brown one back on.*)

**Twilight:** (*from o.s.*) You see what I mean? (*Pan ahead to her, Applejack, and Rarity.*) Why would she live in this remote part of Equestria, except to keep folks from intruding on her privacy? We should respect— (*Rainbow, fully keyed up, zips out from among the trees.*)

**Rainbow:** I think I spotted the house! We’re super-close! (*pointing ahead*) This way!

(*She flies ahead, all others following except for Twilight. Fluttershy is now with them, and Pinkie has disposed of her can and brush.*)

**Twilight:** Wait!

(*Seeing that there is no reasoning with these five, she trots after them. Up ahead, they have gathered behind a clump of bushes, staring concernedly ahead; she pulls up in time.*)

**Twilight:** Oh, no! What happened?

(*Cut to a long shot of a thatched-roof cottage in a small clearing. The place is a wreck: assorted belongings strewn about the yard, stove-in water barrel lying on its side, door bashed off the hinges, open front window, side window shutters askew. Zoom in during the next line.*)

**Rainbow:** (*from o.s.*) Apparently somepony has intruded on her privacy pretty hard already.

(*A precariously balanced chair topples onto its back. Cut to just inside the door; Rainbow’s head pops up outside to peek through its window, and her knock causes it to tumble free of the frame. All heads but Fluttershy’s quickly peek in, the camera cutting to a slow pan across the thoroughly ransacked interior.*)

**Applejack:** (*from o.s.*) Hoo-wee! Somepony really trashed this place! (*Stop on Pinkie, eyeing a fallen book.*)

**Pinkie:** (*pointing at it*) Hmmm…maybe.

(*She instantly pops up from an accumulation of detritus with an upside-down cooking pot on her head for a helmet.*)

**Pinkie:** Orrrr… (*rapid fire, sliding down stair banister with blanket, holding up books/papers*) …maybe A.K. Yearling’s just a terrible, horrible, unbelievable slob!

(*She cheerfully flings the lot every which way; now Rarity eyes a shattered mirror.*)

**Rarity:** I hope A.K. Yearling’s all right. (*Twilight regards a pile near the lit fireplace.*)

**Twilight:** Oh, no! What if something terrible happened to her? (*Rainbow pops up from the mess.*)

**Rainbow:** (*scrabbling at papers*) I know! There might be no more books!

(*Realizing that she has again let her enthusiasm get the better of her, she calms down.*)

**Rainbow:** (*paper wad falling off her*) Uh, but of course I’d be worried about her, too. (*Nervous chuckle.*)

(*An older female voice, more than a little irritated, catches her completely off guard. On the next line, the camera zooms out slightly to frame a shadowed silhouette standing at what used to be the front door. It is so dimly lit that the only discernible features are a cape covering all her body except her front hooves, a pair of very large eyeglasses, and a cloche hat that covers nearly her entire head.*)

**Voice:** What are you all doing here?

(*Rainbow, shocked beyond words, swivels her head to look at the figure straight on. In close-up, the mare advances into the light; the glasses are red-framed, the cape purple with pale yellow collar trim, the hat gray with a light pink ribbon band. The faded orange-brown coat and red-violet eyes match the colors of Daring as shown on the cover of the first novel Rainbow read in “Read It and Weep,” and a few locks of dark gray mane peek out from under the hat.*)

**Rainbow:** (*from o.s., stammering*) Uh…A…K… (*Back to her.*) …Year…ling?

(*Big, squeaky, dopey look of admiration. The other five—Fluttershy now among them, hunkering in a corner—are caught out by A.K. Yearling’s sudden appearance.*)

**Twilight:** We didn’t do this! We swear!

**Yearling:** (*trotting into room*) What have you done to my house? (*She dives to a carpet Applejack is standing on.*)

**Applejack:** We didn’t do this, Ms. Yearling. (*A nip and yank at the edge whip the cloth away to send her tumbling.*) Whoa!

(*Yearling shifts her focus to an overturned table near Twilight and starts to rummage around it.*)

**Twilight:** We’re awfully glad to see you’re all right.

(*Across the way, Rainbow is next to a writing desk piled high with books and is standing on another one, pawing at some notes on the floor. Hearing the sound of approaching hooves, she gets hers away from the papers and looks away with an innocent whistle. Yearling darts over here and digs around in the clutter, throwing several books down.*)

**Rainbow:** Okay, clearly this isn’t the best time, but I just gotta say how much we all *really* love your books.

(*Her ingratiating chuckle has no effect on the put-out writer, who spots the book under the blue hooves and yanks it out hard enough to dump Rainbow backwards. The cover of this one is marked by a gold circle containing a horseshoe, and Yearling grins upon spotting this even as a loud crash marks Rainbow’s graceless touchdown. She ends up sprawled on the scramble of table and books near Twilight.*)

(*The book is set down in close-up, revealing symbols etched into the three gold bands of its binding. Yearling reaches into view and rotates each one in turn so that the symbols line up, and the horseshoe glows white in response; by turning it 90 degrees, she releases the three bands so that they swing loose. The book opens along its binding—a trick safe—and a large-diameter gold ring floats out, featureless and glowing warmly. Yearling picks it up and sighs with relief, holding it up to frame her face.*)

**Yearling:** It’s safe.

(*It is tucked away inside her cape as a dumbstruck Twilight and Rainbow look on; next she starts to put the discarded volumes back on the desk.*)

**Rainbow:** (*to Twilight*) Great! Maybe now would be a good time for me to ask her how we can help move the new book along a little faster: Chop-chop!

(*During this line, she crosses to the desk and nudges its typewriter not so subtly toward the author, who glares as the blue front hooves tap together. Now Twilight steps up behind her friend.*)

**Twilight:** Rainbow Dash!

(*She gets her horn warmed up and steps back o.s. as its aura wraps around a suddenly surprised Rainbow.*)

**Twilight:** (*from o.s., dragging her away*) A minute, please!

(*Outside, the winged unicorn trots out and releases her magical hold, dumping Rainbow to the ground. Close-up of the pair.*)

**Twilight:** A.K. Yearling has made it pretty clear that she wants to be left alone. We need to respect her wishes. (*Pinkie pops up between them.*)

**Pinkie:** (*pointing up toward roof*) You should tell that to those guys.

(*On the end of this, zoom out to frame all six now out here; eyes turn in the direction she has indicated, and the camera pans/tilts up quickly to the roof. Three earth pony stallions are up here by an open window. One is dark gray with a scar across one of his light blue eyes, a red-brown mane, prominent eyebrows and sideburns, and a brown vest. A second is light gray with short black mane/tail, magenta/gray shirt collar and lapels with a white tie, and black sunglasses; his cutie mark is an explosion. The third is khaki with pronounced stubble; a short red scarf over dark gray lapels; short, dark brown mane/tail; brown eyes; dark gray fedora with white band; cutie mark of “!?” against a red-brown starburst. These last two are Withers and Biff, respectively. All three dive in through the window, one by one.*)

(*Inside, Yearling sets a loose board out of the way and straightens the broken mirror. The three new intruders’ reflections appear in the glass, but she just regards them incuriously and shows no more reaction when they step up to hem her in. She turns to face them, making no move for the longest time—and then the camera cuts to Biff just as her cape goes flying into his face. Vest—whose cutie mark now can be seen as a group of symbols often used in comic strips to stand for bad language—gets the cloche thrown into his. Just as quickly, the red-framed glasses are thrown at Withers, landing on his nose and knocking off his eyewear. His eyes are revealed as being green.*)

(*In extreme close-up, two orange-brown hooves step forward across the floorboards. Zoom out to frame their owner in full—green bush shirt, pith helmet tilted forward over the face, six-tone gray/black mane and tail, compass-rose cutie mark, gold ring hooked over one spread wing. The helmet is flipped back to reveal the face of Daring, whose red-violet eyes and sour expression tell just how little she thinks of all this unwelcome company. She drops into a fighting crouch, showing that like her literary counterpart, both wings are whole and healthy. Cut to just inside the window, where Twilight and Rainbow are watching, and zoom in. They turn to each other, their minds blown.*)

**Twilight, Rainbow:** A.K. Yearling *is* Daring Do!

(*They look in again before the view snaps to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to the showdown in the cottage. Biff tries to sneak a little closer, toward the ring Daring is holding, but a glare back at him stops that idea.*)

**Twilight:** (*from o.s.*) A.K. Yearling and Daring Do are one and the same! (*The window; she smiles hugely.*) My mind is officially blown! (*Rainbow gives her a nudge.*)

**Rainbow:** Ah, come on. I knew it all along.

(*The bookworm rolls her eyes as if to say, “Who are you kidding?” However, the exchange goes no further, as Daring backs up into view with ring in teeth; Vest clamps his around it as well. The tug-of-war lasts only a fraction of a second before she lets go, socks him in the chest, and delivers a backflip kick that sends him reeling. The ring goes flying across the room, and all six Ponyville mares gather at the window as she dives across to catch it.*)

**Applejack:** Amazin’!

(*Withers—now wearing his own sunglasses again—grabs Daring’s tail in his teeth, but she bucks him away and flies off.*)

**Rarity:** Incredible!

(*The adventurer slides backwards to a stop, faced down by Biff and Vest; the latter leaps at her only to get bucked out of the building. Biff throws himself at her, leading to a lively brawl that is soon joined by Withers, and the ring is thrown up onto a ceiling light fixture. This whirls about its pivot and pitches the artifact neatly into the fireplace. All three robbers stop their assault and nervously gather around the hearth as the metal goes red-hot from the flames licking at it. Biff nudges Vest impatiently, but before the thug can even bend his neck down, the end of a bullwhip lashes into view and snags the ring. The handle is in Daring’s teeth; a flick of her head sends the item across the room, where it bangs into a beverage pitcher on a table and lands next to it. The vessel overturns, spilling its contents onto the ring and cooling it down.*)

**Pinkie:** Wow! So much action!

(*Daring launches herself toward it, the three stallions close behind, and doubles back with ring in teeth.*)

**Pinkie:** Whee!

(*Now she backs up toward the stairs, also carrying a chair to fend off the trio.*)

**Rainbow:** Daring Do!

(*The sound of her own name breaks Daring’s concentration and gives her adversaries the opening they need to rush her all at once. She spits the ring out; it tumbles over to the steps leading in from the front door, and a khaki hoof tinged with gray descends to pin it in place. As the sounds of the free-for-all die away, the camera slowly tilts up to frame this new arrival. Earth pony stallion with green eyes; a slicked-back, dark gray mane with a streak of lighter gray, heavy stubble, prominent eyebrows, and a cutie mark of a gold skull with a gem inserted in one of its eyesockets. He wears an off-white shirt with sleeves rolled up and a reddish-brown ascot with white polka dots. This is Dr. Caballeron, who lifts the ring on a foreleg and twirls it idly. He speaks with a pronounced South American accent and a tone of mocking gentility.*)

**Caballeron:** Many thanks, Daring Do. As you’ve probably surmised, our earlier search for this treasure was unsuccessful. (*The others have Daring pinned down; she has lost her helmet.*) So kind of you to find it for us.

(*She breaks loose and tries to stand, only for one foreleg to give out and drop her again.*)

**Daring:** Give it back, Caballeron!

(*Now, for the first time since the ponies entered the forest, the sky can be clearly seen—the same odd shade of daytime green from Rainbow’s vision of the next book in the prologue.*)

**Caballeron:** (*offended*) That’s *Dr.* Caballeron to you. (*The window; Rainbow clutches excitedly at an irked Twilight.*)

**Rainbow:** He’s from Book Four. *Daring Do and the Razor of Dreams*. He wanted to partner with Daring Do on her adventures.

**Twilight:** (*animatedly*) I know, but she refused! I can’t believe it. The real Daring Do, and the real Caballeron! (*Daring stands up, with effort, to address Caballeron.*)

**Daring:** So let me guess. Ahuizotl has put you up to this. You’re stealing the ring to give to him, so his hold on the fortress of Talacon will be good for eight centuries as foretold by prophecy! (*Caballeron steps a little closer on the end of this.*)

**Caballeron:** Close! But, no. (*turning away, holding up ring*) I’m going to sell this to him, make a bundle— (*Cut to the six visitors; he continues o.s.*) —and retire from archaeology in splendor.

(*The turn exposes his tail for the first time—cut short, styled similarly to his mane and with the same two-tone gray coloration. At the scene, Daring’s leg crumples under her again; Biff and Withers grab hold to both support her and hold her back.*)

**Daring:** Caballeron, you fool! (*He flips the relic up to settle around his neck.*) You’re dooming the valley to eight centuries of unrelenting heat!

**Caballeron:** (*trotting out*) To market, hench-ponies!

(*They dump her on the floor and set out after him. She stands again; grunting and wincing as the bad leg refuses to play nice, she starts to limp across the room. Close-up of Fluttershy.*)

**Fluttershy:** Uh, should we go in and help her, maybe? (*Zoom out to frame the whole group.*)

**All others:** Oh! Right.

(*Back to Daring, who is tying a splint onto the limb. Rainbow is the first one in; cut to a close-up. She gasps upon seeing the injury and holds out a foreleg to help Daring up.*)

**Rainbow:** Are you okay?

**Daring:** (*from o.s., slapping it aside*) I got this. (*The others pop up behind Rainbow.*)

**Fluttershy:** Um, she was just trying to help, Miss Do.

(*Back to the injured pegasus on the end of this. The lost helmet is set back in place at last, its brim framing two eyes set in a hard squint.*)

**Daring:** Daring Do doesn’t need help. (*limping past them*) She handles her business herself.

(*And she ignores the worried looks coming her way. Cut to the exterior of the cottage as she flaps out the front doorway and lifts off; some moments later, Rainbow flies out as well, but stops just past the threshold to address herself inside.*)

**Rainbow:** We gotta go help! (*The others step out.*)

**Twilight:** You heard her! She says she works alone!

(*The camera pans slightly to focus on each speaker during the following exchange, the others’ heads turning as if watching a tennis match.*)

**Rainbow:** How can we just stand by and do nothing? You know what’s at stake here. (*touching down*) Ahuizotl has sought control of the Tenochtitlan Basin since Book Three!

**Twilight:** True. But in Book Four, she defeated Ahuizotl and secured control of the Amulet of Atonement, dispelling the dark magic of the Quetzalcoatl Empress, and thus protecting the Basin with the Radiant Shield of Rasdon.

**Rainbow:** But the Radiant Shield of Rasdon is vulnerable to the dark enchantment of the Rings of Scorchero!

**Twilight:** But are you forgetting that the Rings were scattered to the four corners of Tenochtitlan, thus rendering the dark enchantment powerless?

**Rainbow:** Only if you assume that the Rings have yet to be retrieved, and the ring Caballeron just stole isn’t the last to completely restore the Dark Tower and its cruel hold on Tenochtitlan! Did you ever think of that?

**Pinkie:** (*to Twilight*) You got to admit, Rainbow Dash makes a pretty good point. (*Rainbow hovers over the group.*)

**Rainbow:** We gotta help Daring Do retrieve the ring for safekeeping before it’s too late! (*Close-up of Twilight.*)

**Twilight:** (*sighing heavily*) Okay. But sounds to me like we’re in waaay, way, way over our heads. We’re going to need a carefully thought-out plan.

(*Her cogitation is cut short by the sound of Rainbow’s sudden departure; cut to her on the start of the next line.*)

**Rainbow:** I’m coming, Daring Do!

**Twilight:** (*calling after her*) That’s not a plan!

(*Dissolve to an overhead shot of the reckless pegasus on the move over the forest.*)

**Rainbow:** (*looking around*) Come on, come on, come on…

(*She brings herself up short; cut to her perspective of Daring sneaking out from behind a bush. The latter’s bum leg is healed up.*)

**Rainbow:** Bingo! (*Back to her, diving in.*) Here I come, Daring Do— (*steadily getting more worked up*) —to join an adventure with the greatest, bravest, coolest, most incredible hero I could ever…

(*A sudden attack of nerves causes her to slam on the brakes and hitch in a breath.*)

**Rainbow:** Okay, maybe I just need a sec. (*She drops to ground level and trots after Daring, regaining her composure.*) Just another adventure. No big deal.

(*Another sudden stop; now she smacks herself across the face.*)

**Rainbow:** Get a grip! (*jumping ahead*) I got this. (*Nerves hit; she backs up.*) Though doing it alongside Daring Do… (*grinning hugely, jumping around*) …wow! Maybe I could get my picture taken with her, or an autograph—

(*She gives herself another belt in the kisser to snap herself out of it and touches down.*)

**Rainbow:** There you go again. (*trotting ahead*) She’s just a pony like any other pony. (*Confident smile, but the giddiness starts to leak through.*) A pony who stops entire armies of bad guys with nothing more than her bare hooves, and an attitude, and—

(*On the mention of “bare hooves,” she stops and eyes her own; the cutoff is accompanied by a third pop in the chops. This one leaves a welt on her cheek.*)

**Rainbow:** Ow! (*rubbing it*) Heh. That’s starting to hurt.

(*But probably not as much as getting jumped by Daring, who slams her helmet down on the multicolored mane to blind her. The two pegasi tumble and bounce across the grass; soon Daring pins Rainbow down, and the camera cuts to the former as she stands up.*)

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

(*Longer shot; the weather pony, now sitting on her haunches, yanks the helmet off her head.*)

**Rainbow:** Stop! (*She holds it out.*)

**Daring:** Oh. (*disgustedly*) It’s just you. (*Helmet goes back on; she turns to leave, but Rainbow stands up.*)

**Rainbow:** Wait! Don’t go!

(*After a moment’s pause, the winged archaeologist decides to ignore this entreaty and stalks away. Rainbow whirls around to have a quick conference with herself.*)

**Rainbow:** Think fast. This is your big chance to impress her with your quick wit and courage.

(*Daring is now moving ahead in a crouch, inspecting the ground for tracks or marks, and takes cover briefly behind a tree. Following a quick peek around it, she ducks away and moves out again, only to be brought up short by the sudden emergence of Rainbow from the underbrush.*)

**Rainbow:** (*nervously*) I am suuuuuch a huge fan.

(*She adds a long chuckle to finish the thought, but Daring—now standing upright—just utters an irritated sigh and starts ahead without a word. A few steps later, the overeager fan bounces up in her way.*)

**Rainbow:** Wait, wait, wait! (*grabbing her shirt*) Let me help you! (*She catches herself, then brushes Daring off and straightens her helmet.*) I promise I can be a huge, huge help if you just give me a chance.

(*Cut to a close-up of the fed-up adventurer’s face and zoom in by steps on the second and third of the following words. The red-violet eyes steadily narrow to a glare of naked hostility.*)

**Daring:** I—work—alone. (*She walks past Rainbow, who drops onto her hocks.*)

**Rainbow:** But why won’t you let me team up with you— (*crawling after her*) —just this once?

**Daring:** My work always involves secrets. (*Rainbow stands up.*) And since you never know who you can trust, it’s best never to trust anypony.

**Rainbow:** (*hurrying to catch up*) But just because you can’t trust *some* doesn’t mean *nopony* can be trusted.

**Daring:** Look, I don’t have time to argue—

**Rainbow:** Neither do I. (*zooming ahead and o.s.*) Let’s go!

(*The wake of her headlong flight nearly drags Daring’s helmet off her head.*)

**Daring:** (*sighing disgustedly, under her breath*) I can’t believe I’m even talking to her.

(*She trudges off. Dissolve to a stretch of star-filled night sky and tilt down to ground level, the camera ending up behind some bushes. Through an opening, Caballeron and his three goons can be seen at a campsite set up in a clearing. Rainbow and Daring ease up and pull the leaves aside for a better look, exposing the hay bales on which the four stallions are chowing down.*)

**Rainbow:** Looks like they decided to have an early dinner before making their way back down the hill to the marketplace in town.

(*Daring turns away from her on the end of this, then scoops up a hoof-load of mud and smears it liberally over her cheeks.*)

**Rainbow:** Oh, I see! You’re gonna ambush them like you did in Book Four at the Haravian caves!

(*During this line, the traveler pulls her helmet off and the camera cuts to a close-up as it is set down and mashed under a hoof.*)

**Rainbow:** (*hovering excitedly*) Or maybe that neat trick you did in Book Three— (*swinging at air*) —where you swoop in and knock three guys down with one swing! Or maybe—

(*Daring straightens up and gives her a “shut it” glare; she swiftly does so.*)

**Rainbow:** (*whispering*) Okay. I’ll be quiet now. Just watching very quietly. Heh. Shh.

(*Daring moves off; she touches down and glances over to the intrepid pegasus, who has ducked down so that her head is just o.s.*)

**Rainbow:** So what kind of ambush are you gonna use, then?

(*Up comes the vexed orange-brown face—now disguised with a layer of grass and leaves stuck on the mud to resemble a beard, and topped by the flattened helmet. Without turning back toward Rainbow, she holds up a bulging bag of coins.*)

**Rainbow:** (*awestruck*) Wow!

(*The camera shifts to ground level, framing Caballeron and company at their dinner. Daring’s front hooves plant themselves in the foreground as the bag drops between them, bringing the meal to an abrupt halt as they gather to make sure they are not dreaming. She affects a British accent for the following line.*)

**Daring:** I have been led to believe you have in your possession an item of significant importance— (*Caballeron zips over to her.*) —that might be— (*Here come the others.*) —for sale.

**Caballeron:** Oh! Uh…well…I did have another buyer lined up— (*holding up the stolen ring*) —but he’s not here, so— (*extending it to her*) —sounds like we have a deal.

(*The transaction is rudely interrupted by a rising, reverberating growl of fury that sends the three hench-ponies bugging out and makes Caballeron cower in fear. Next comes a forest-shaking tremor whose source quickly makes the scene—Ahuizotl, shoving trees aside to get at the campsite.*)

**Ahuizotl:** CABALLERON!!

**Daring:** (*to herself, normal voice*) Ahuizotl!

**Ahuizotl:** (*holding out tail hand*) The ring!

(*His treacherous business associate gasps in fright, lets it drop, and scoops up the cash before galloping for his life. Daring and Ahuizotl eye it, then each other; she is first to move, shedding her fake beard and mashed hat and locking her teeth onto the relic. Ahuizotl voices a frustrated roar and dives at her as Rainbow watches from the bushes.*)

**Rainbow:** Be cool, Rainbow Dash…be cool…

(*Easier said than done; she throws her forelegs over her eyes.*)

**Rainbow:** She’s got this… (*Daring backs up slowly before Ahuizotl’s slinking approach.*)

**Ahuizotl:** The ring, Daring Do. Give it… (*pounding ground; she leaps backward*) …to me!

(*She lands neatly and hooks it around a foreleg, all cockiness.*)

**Daring:** Now, Ahuizotl… (*slipping it around her neck*) …you know I love you, but I can’t give you the ring ’til I’ve properly proposed.

(*That crack earns an appreciative little smirk from her fan; meanwhile, Ahuizotl chuckles as he straightens up onto his haunches.*)

**Ahuizotl:** Interesting, because my friends here have a proposal of their own.

(*A finger snap from his tail hand brings out a familiar quartet of big cats—lynx, tiger, panther, leopard: four of the five heavies he sent after her in “Read It and Weep.” As they make their displeasure very clear, the white kitten who was also in on the fun emerges and yowls with arched back, swiping a set of claws at the air. Rainbow sweats buckets from her hidden front-row seat…Daring slowly backs up to face down the five toughs…and the camera suddenly zooms into an extreme close-up of her face, the light picking out her narrowed eyes.*)

**Daring:** *Bring it!*

(*First up is the panther, whose charge is met by an uppercut that sends it flying backwards to hit the deck headfirst. She has barely come down from the strike before the tiger lunges in; jumping over its attempt to grab her, she stomps it in the head and pushes off to launch a flying kick. The leopard takes this one in the mush, and she comes down to mix it up with the lynx; the kitten just stands and watches. Close-up of Rainbow.*)

**Rainbow:** (*fearfully*) Come on, Daring Do! (*pounding front hooves on ground*) Come on!

(*The sounds of the fight stop suddenly; she stands and her gaze on something ahead of herself, and the camera zooms out to frame Daring’s helmet lying on the ground. It is back to its normal, un-mangled state. Cut to the free-for-all, in which the hatless globetrotter is easily holding her own.*)

**Rainbow:** (*from o.s.*) Daring Do! I’ve got your hat! (*Cut to her, holding it up.*) You want me to toss it? (*No response.*) Daring Do! (*Zoom out to a long shot.*) Daring Do!

(*Ahuizotl, in the fore, takes note of her presence. Cut to Daring, still swatting away her attackers; she stops at the sound of Rainbow’s cry, and the yelling blue flyer is held aloft by the villain’s tail hand. Daring freezes in her tracks, giving the four big cats plenty of time to hit her broadside; one angry kitten with a black eye charges in after them to get her own piece of the action. By the time the dust clears, Daring is securely trussed up from neck to rear hooves and grunting against her bonds. The tiger hoists her up in its teeth while Ahuizotl crosses the clearing to the cats.*)

**Rainbow:** Don’t worry, Daring Do! I’ll come help you! (*She is flung backward o.s.*) Whoa!

(*Cut to her, landing the wrong way in the bushes with a grunt, then to Daring.*)

**Daring:** Don’t bother!

(*The group moves out, heading toward a temple either identical or very similar to the one Rainbow envisioned in the prologue—the fortress of Talacon.*)

**Daring:** (*viciously*) I’d say you’ve already helped plenty!

(*The overly ardent reader peeks after them.*)

**Rainbow:** (*crushed*) What have I done?

(*Zoom in slowly and snap to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of Rainbow, still way down in the dumps, ad cut to a longer shot. She sits listlessly on her haunches in a small clearing as the others gallop to her; Rarity gasps. The sky has gone lurid green again, indicating that it is the following day.*)

**Rarity:** Thank goodness you’re all right!

**Twilight:** Quick! Where does it hurt?

**Rainbow:** (*hooves to chest*) In here. Daring Do and the ring have been captured by the dreaded Ahuizotl, and it’s all my fault. (*She slumps down; others gasp in shock.*)

**Twilight:** Dash, I’m sure whatever you did was an honest mistake.

**Rainbow:** Whatever. (*standing, walking off*) Let’s just go home.

**Applejack:** We can’t go back now! Looks a mite like she needs our help more than ever! (*Rainbow stops.*)

**Rainbow:** Trying to help is how I got in this mess in the first place. (*walking on*) You were right, Twilight. We shoulda stayed out of this. (*Twilight catches up to her.*)

**Twilight:** Look. There is more going on here than meets the eye. In every Daring Do book, there always is. We can’t turn our backs on her.

**Rainbow:** She doesn’t want my help, Twilight.

**Twilight:** (*smiling shrewdly*) Perhaps, but she might need it anyway.

**Rainbow:** No. My hero’s way better off without me.

(*Now Applejack zips over to cut them both off and nudge her in the chest.*)

**Applejack:** This don’t sound like you. (*Here comes Pinkie.*)

**Pinkie:** (*hugging Rainbow*) Where’s the Rainbow Dash who would help anypony at the drop of a hat? (*Rarity joins in.*)

**Rarity:** Or a pith helmet, as the case may be?

**Rainbow:** (*grumpily, pushing Pinkie off*) She’s here where she’s got no business being. (*walking off*) She should be at home. (*Fluttershy aims a worried look after her.*)

**Twilight:** It’s fine to look up to Daring Do, but you’ve put her so high up on a pedestal— (*Rainbow stops.*) —you can’t even see your own worth anymore! She’s in the fortress, and we’re here. And we wouldn’t be who we are if we didn’t go in after her.

(*Cut to the heartbroken pegasus, who turns her face away.*)

**Twilight:** (*from o.s.*) And neither would you. (*Long shot of the group; she steps toward Rainbow.*) So, are you with us or not?

(*The drooping blue head comes up slightly and swivels back so two uncertain red-violet eyes can gaze back toward the others. Zoom in to a close-up of her face, then dissolve to a long shot of all six on the move toward a set of natural terraces. Pan along their length to frame the upper reaches of the fortress where Daring was taken, then tilt down along its height into complete blackness. As the tilt continues, the view lightens into a tall chamber whose open ceiling allows a broad view of the sky. Spiked posts stand in all four corners, and a doorway and ledge are set into the wall a few feet down from the ceiling. At a still lower height is Daring, her back against an adjoining wall and her hooves clamped down to hold her in a spreadeagle position. A large circular port is set at this height directly underneath the doorway. The room contains a depth of water, and a brief cut to within it clearly picks out the vicious-looking toothed fish swimming lazily around in it. Daring boggles at the sight before the view cuts back to her.*)

**Daring:** (*struggling against clamps*) Surrender now, Ahuizotl, or I’ll be forced to take you down! (*He steps to the doorway and laughs exultantly.*)

**Ahuizotl:** (*holding up ring*) Oh, Daring Do, I will so miss your amusing laughter jokes. Now, I must leave to commence the ring-placing ceremony— (*lifting it; tilt up to ceiling and blazing sun*) —to unleash eight hundred years of unrelenting, sweltering heat!

(*The captive grimaces mightily at this announcement; now Ahuizotl pulls a nearby rope and laughs madly. Water gushes into the room through the port underneath the doorway as he waves goodbye and clears out. The fish start jumping, but Daring keeps her cool and starts her muscles working on the clamps again. After a second or two, the stone to which one hind leg is attached comes loose, dragging the limb toward the rising water and those very hungry fish. Now properly scared, she pulls again and gets her other hind leg free in the same way; a foreleg is next, leaving her full weight and that of the three blocks dangling from the other one. A heave, a grind of stone sliding on stone as sweat pours down the orange-brown face, and she drops away from the wall. Her wings cannot provide enough lift to keep her from sinking toward the water; before she can become fish bait, though, Rainbow swoops across to hoist her out.*)

**Rainbow:** Gotcha!

(*She pumps her wings like mad to haul up pegasus and masonry, not helped a bit by the fact that Daring is too stunned to use her own.*)

**Rainbow:** You can flap too, you know!

(*She finally does, adding enough lift to allow Rainbow to set her on the ledge, and stomps a bit to break one block and throw off its clamp.*)

**Daring:** (*very snarky*) I was just about to save myself, you know. (*She crushes the other three.*)

**Rainbow:** Of course. I just thought you might need this.

(*On this last word, the camera cuts to a close-up of the missing helmet being slid over to stop in front of Daring’ s hooves. Tilt up to her face, which shifts from annoyance to mild puzzlement and back as she picks it up.*)

**Daring:** (*putting it on*) Have I mentioned yet that I work alone? (*Rainbow sidles over to her with a smirk.*)

**Rainbow:** Have I mentioned yet that you’re lucky *I* don’t?

(*Daring rolls her eyes with a weary sigh and forces a small grin onto her face, and she gallops away from the intended deathtrap with Rainbow flying close behind. The two round a corner into a different passage; dissolve to the sun at full brightness in the sullen forest sky. Ahuizotl lifts his head and forelimbs into view, extending them toward the blinding orb, and two sets of hooves raise the ring to frame it as well. Cut to a longer shot of the area: a long chamber with an altar at one end, on which he is standing under a skylight. Stallions line both sides of the central aisle leading to this; they are dressed in Central American tribal garb and face paint and are armed with spears, whose shafts they are pounding against the floor. In front of Ahuizotl is a stone spindle inscribed with runes and supporting a tower of gold rings whose diameters steadily decrease from bottom to top. These are the Rings of Scorchero; the last, smallest one is being held up by two stallions who are balancing partway up the tower on opposite sides. Cut to the head of the aisle and pan quickly to an entrance at the opposite end; Rainbow’s five friends poke their heads in around the frame. Cut to Ahuizotl, laughing wildly.*)

**Applejack:** (*from o.s.*) Drop the ring, Ahui…

(*Zoom out to frame her in the fore on the end of this, then cut to the five now inside.*)

**Applejack:** …whatever your name is!

(*There follows a massed charge straight down the aisle; Ahuizotl grunts in surprise.*)

**Ahuizotl:** (*to his two assistants*) Place the ring, quickly!

(*Here comes Pinkie, doing a high-speed version of her normal hopping until she gets close enough to the altar to take it in one leap. She ends up on top of the spindle, knocking the ring-holders away and letting the item drop around her neck and work its way down to her midsection. After a quick bit of loop-de-hooping, she shucks it back along her body length and lets it fly off her hind legs; a quick jump off the spindle puts her out of reach of Ahuizotl’s tail hand.*)

**Ahuizotl:** *Take it!*

(*Pinkie’s flip sends the ring over to Applejack, who bucks it away and dives aside to let two of the enemies ram each other head-on. She catches it in her teeth, but only gets a few steps before a thrown spear trips her up; the ring clatters to the floor and is picked up by a goon once the spear has been removed. An expert throw sends it toward Ahuizotl’s outstretched hand, but Fluttershy inserts herself in its path and ends up holding the booty. She flies frantically across the chamber, Ahuizotl gaining ground all the time, and lets it drop onto Twilight’s horn as she gallops in the opposite direction. The winged unicorn skids to a stop, fires up her horn, and teleports away to achieve the same result as Applejack’s dive.*)

(*Reappearing at a side entrance, she gets her hooves moving as two other toughs charge after her. Rainbow and Daring peek out from here and survey the brawl.*)

**Daring:** Come with me!

(*Near the spindle, Twilight flips the ring up for a mouth-catch by Applejack; both drop out of sight just before the two pegasi put their heads out from behind the stack. Close-up of Daring.*)

**Daring:** Help me get all these rings off!

(*Pan to Rainbow; she gets her hooves under the first few and begins to hoist them with some effort, assisted by the o.s. Daring. Up above, the top ring sails toward Fluttershy but is intercepted by an upward spear thrust. It slides down toward the stallion holding the weapon, but Applejack kicks the shaft out of his grip and again gets the ring in her mouth, earning an angry glower. At the altar, several rings have been flung off, but the remaining ones are large enough that Rainbow and Daring must lift and throw them off one at a time. The following exchange is delivered with some effort on both parts.*)

**Daring:** If we can remove the giant ring at the bottom, the whole fortress will collapse! (*They start to haul it up—the only one left.*)

**Rainbow:** Was this your plan all along?

**Daring:** I had to find a way to get into the fortress.

**Rainbow:** You did it on purpose? But…but I thought—

**Daring:** Didn’t count on how heavy this ring would be, though. Guess having a little help can be handy sometimes.

(*The blue face breaks into a grateful smile. Meanwhile, the top ring rolls across the floor toward Pinkie, but a stallion hip-checks her out of the way and flicks it to one side. It sails over spears and enemy/friendly hooves alike and finally comes to a stop—in the grip of Ahuizotl’s tail hand. He lifts it with a laugh of crazed triumph, paying no mind to the rumbling that has started up. The rest of the ponies, however, notice it in short order and stop tussling over the scattered rings with a round of very scared glances. Bits of crumbling stone rain down around Rainbow and Daring as they ever so slowly raise the bottom ring toward the spindle’s peak. Once Ahuizotl finally turns his attention toward the pair, he aims one emphatically pointed finger their way.*)

**Ahuizotl:** *STOOOP HEEERRR!!*

(*Three of his minions close in on the altar; cut to Daring as their spears poke up toward her; she grunts and parries one with a hind leg.*)

**Daring:** You could flap too, you know!

(*Having her own words thrown back at her sparks Rainbow to throw her wings into overdrive, and soon they have the ring almost at the top.*)

**Rainbow:** Ponies! Run! This place is going down!

(*Exeunt all others, post-haste. The great ring is finally hoisted up and off the spindle, which cracks and disintegrates into sparkling dust, and the pair airlift it out through the skylight. Ahuizotl makes one last desperate grab up through the boiling dust, but gets only a handful of air before falling back into the murk. Cut to the bottom of the stairs leading up from the base of the fortress and zoom out to frame all of the structure as the seven mares race/fly to safety. The entire structure crumbles to pieces behind them, throwing up clouds of dust that fill the screen.*)

(*The view clears to a pan across the brand-new rubble, from which various servants begin to emerge dazedly, and stops at the point where Ahuizotl’s tail hand breaks through to daylight.*)

**Ahuizotl:** (*from below*) DARING DO!! (*He climbs up.*) I WILL HAVE MY REVENGE!!

(*The bottom ring is flung down, shattering to bits on the ground, and Daring gives Rainbow a genuine smile for the first time. Instead of the previous greenish tint, the sky now shows the pinks and golds of sunset.*)

**Daring:** Could never have done this without you, Rainbow Dash.

(*She holds out a hoof to shake, but gets an enthusiastic hug instead and returns a smile and a little nuzzle. When Rainbow shows no signs of releasing her hold after some seconds, the explorer gently extricates herself.*)

**Daring:** (*laughing a bit*) I’ve got a book to finish!

(*She flies off, Rainbow waving goodbye.*)

**Rainbow:** (*voice over, dictating*) “Just had the coolest adventure with the coolest pony ever!” (*She flies down to her waiting friends.*) “Came this close to blowing it because I got so wrapped up in how awesome she was—” (*They gather in for a group hug.*) “—I almost forgot about how awesome *I* was.”

(*Dissolve to her, hovering in front of an open book on a stand and writing in it with a pencil in her teeth. This, then, would be the journal that Twilight proposed they start keeping at the end of “Castle Mane-ia.” The covers are purple; the back one displays the six-pointed star jewel that had been set in the tiara Twilight received when she was crowned. On the front is an upward-pointing horseshoe, with a smaller copy of the jewel nestled in its crook and some smaller spots of different colors along its length.*)

**Rainbow:** (*voice over*) “Good thing I didn’t, ’cause it gave me a chance to show how important it is to put your trust in somepony else.”

(*A knocking disrupts her concentration; she looks off in its direction, and the camera cuts to a pair of closed double doors flanked by Greek-style columns. A statue of a Wonderbolt in flight stands on a nearby pedestal. Rainbow flies over to the doors—this is the front entrance of her cloud house—and one of them opens to reveal a mail-carrier pegasus stallion on the step.*)

**Mail carrier:** (*pulling a box from his saddlebags*) Package from A.K. Yearling.

**Rainbow:** (*instantly excited*) Sweet! The new book a week before anypony else gets it!

(*One quick snatch, and she has the box and is hunched down to the floor, eagerly shredding the paper wrapping. Up she comes with a gasp that pulls in enough air to inflate a small blimp.*)

**Rainbow:** (*flying all around, holding book*) Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh!

(*Cut to a close-up of its front cover: Rainbow and Daring fleeing from the fortress, a brilliant spot of light shining from its pinnacle, to stay ahead of a swarm of bats. Daring, front and center, is in her usual outfit, while Rainbow wears a baseball cap and satchel—she has evidently been written into the story. The night sky above adventurer and sidekick is a lurid shade of red and marked by Ahuizotl’s narrowed eyes. The title can be made out easily enough: Daring Do and the Ring of Destiny. Zoom in slowly and “iris out” to black.*)