**THE MANE ATTRACTION**

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of a long staircase that arcs gracefully down from a curtained entrance. The pin spotlight shining on it from above suggests a stage, and a set piece of a giant candy apple on a stick is tipped upright with ropes to stand near the one already in place. The camera zooms out slightly to frame more of the setup: a bank of overhead spotlights, a mirrored disco ball, apples on both sides of the stairs, and Applejack directing three ponies in the heavy lifting. Rainbows and stars form the rest of the backdrop.*)

(*Cut to a stretch of daytime sky, where Rainbow Dash flies up with the end of a string of pennants in her teeth. She hooks it to a pole and looks across the way, where Cloudchaser is securing the other end, and Applejack smiles her satisfaction from ground level. Each pole is hung with a banner that shows a heart between two diamonds. Fluttershy and Rarity are using mouth and magic, respectively, to string bunting along the edge of a runway that projects outward from the stage. After getting the farmer’s approval, they turn to other work and she checks a clipboard held at eye level in Amethyst Star’s field. A nod, and the unicorn departs with the board as two pegasi fly a pennant string overhead and Twilight Sparkle approaches. Towers of speakers have been set up on the grass at either end of the stage, which projects from a band shell styled as a giant apple. All of this work is taking place in a meadow among the Sweet Apple Acres orchards. During this scene, various shots show more lights mounted on pennant-decorated poles that stand in the grass.*)

**Twilight:** Wow, Applejack! Are you sure you’ve never managed a concert before?

**Applejack:** Well, it turns out doin’ up a concert’s the same as settin’ up a rodeo.

**Twilight:** And thanks to Pinkie’s connections organizing the Ponypalooza Rock Concert— (*floating up a very long scroll*) —we’ve got quite a lineup for the Helping Hooves Music Festival.

[*Note: She is referring to the events of the book Pinkie Pie and the Rockin’ Ponypalooza Party!*]

(*The bottom end of the document is shoved/crumpled upward by Pinkie Pie’s head when she straightens up into view.*)

**Pinkie:** Twilight! Applejack! Rainbow Dash! Rarity! Fluttershy! Spike! Pinkie Pie!

(*She zips to each other pony and dragon in turn as she names them—Spike relaxing on a lawn chair and reading a comic book—and ends by addressing her own reflection in close-up. A zoom out on this last reveals that she is grinning at her image in a pane of mirror glass being carried by two stallions.*)

**Pinkie:** Oh, wait, that’s me. (*The other six gather in.*) Everypony!

**Twilight:** What is it, Pinkie?

**Pinkie:** I have the most amazing news ever. (*She whisks to Twilight and throws a foreleg around her neck.*) It is totally gonna freak your frizz!

**Rainbow:** Well, spill it, Pinkie!

**Pinkie:** (*pacing past them*) It wasn’t easy. In fact, it was terribly difficult. (*with growing excitement*) But I have managed to book *the* biggest pony pop star in all of Equestria as the main attraction of the Helping Hooves Music Festival!

(*She finishes this line by standing right in front of Applejack and popping her hindquarters into the air, as if ready to buck a tree.*)

**Applejack:** Sapphire Shores? (*Pinkie drops back to all fours.*)

**Pinkie:** (*disdainfully*) Sapphire Shores? Please! (*pacing*) Sapphire Shores is merely the *second*-biggest pony pop star in Equestria. (*She stops at a distance, facing away from them.*) I have booked the one, the only…

(*Zoom in to a close-up as she pivots back toward the group, eyes going big and shiny.*)

**Pinkie:** …*Countess Coloratura!*

(*Cut to a slow pan across the other five mares—four awestruck, one not catching on.*)

**All others but Applejack:** Ahhhh…

**Applejack:** Who in the hay is Countess Coloratura?

(*Comes now a round of incredulous gasps from virtually every other pony on the premises, and Applejack abruptly finds herself at the center of a great many popeyed stares. Pinkie, still at a distance, shows her disbelief through her mane/tail, which pop upward from head and rump to form an even messier tangle of curls than usual.*)

**Pinkie:** My frizz has been freaked!

(*Snap to black.*)

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to Pinkie, who briefly sits down on her haunches and pulls her mane back into place as Applejack crosses to her.*)

**Applejack:** Pinkie Pie, who is this Countess Coloratura pony?

**Pinkie:** (*standing up, fixing tail, scoffing*) I just told you that she’s the biggest pony pop star in Equestria! How, how, how, how, *how* have you not heard of her?

(*She punctuates each “how” by leaning closer to Applejack and pushing/tipping her backward until she is on her back, with Pinkie standing on her belly to stare her down at point-blank range. The apple expert is not fazed in the slightest.*)

**Applejack:** Don’t know. (*pushing Pinkie off, standing up*) Though I did know a gal named Coloratura when I was just a filly. (*snorting laughter, to Twilight/Rarity*) Wouldn’t it just be the funniest thing if that Coloratura and this Coloratura were the same Coloratura?

(*She finishes this line by transferring her attention to Pinkie, who responds to her final chuckle with an icy glare.*)

**Pinkie:** (*stepping closer*) Do you mean to tell me that you actually know Countess Coloratura?

**Applejack:** (*pacing*) Well, I don’t think it’s the same pony, since my friend wasn’t any sorta highfalutin countess.

**Pinkie:** Do you remember her cutie mark?

**Applejack:** Sure do. It had this super-colorful buncha musical notes that just shimmered in the light.

**Pinkie:** You mean…*like* *this?!?*

(*She punctuates the last two words by pivoting 180 degrees to bring her left flank, which has been turned away from the camera, into view. Taped over the three balloons on this haunch is a photograph, and a quick zoom in frames a pale grayish-green haunch with a mark of a yellow star from which five eighth notes in different colors protrude. A black spiked band encircles the base of a three-tone, dark gray tail, and the ragged hem of a dark purple garment with lighter streaks is also visible. Cut to frame both ponies, Pinkie aiming an irritated hoof at the picture as Applejack takes it in with a smile of recognition.*)

**Applejack:** Well, fancy that! That there’s the very same cutie mark!

**Pinkie:** Do you have any idea the number of hoops I had to jump through to get her to perform at the festival?

(*This time, she underscores her vexation by turning back to Applejack and—with only the bare minimum of forward motion—stretching her neck as if it were made of rubber until she can glare down at her friend. Applejack collapses to her haunches, shrinking into herself until her hat falls off, and can only shake her head timidly. The elastic mare snaps back, falling to her own haunches as Applejack stands up.*)

**Pinkie:** A whole lot of hoops! That pony is very demanding!

**Applejack:** Naw. (*Pinkie stands up.*)

**Pinkie:** (*mimicking her*) Y-aww! (*Cut to Twilight and Rarity.*)

**Rarity:** I completely understand. We *artistes* require certain necessities in order to do our best work. (*Close-up of Applejack; her hat is back on.*)

**Applejack:** This was clearly some sorta misunderstandin’, ’cause Ra-Ra was just as down-home as me. (*Zoom out to frame the other five mares, Spike, and a few more ponies.*)

**Crowd:** *Ra-Ra?!?*

**Applejack:** Even that big name was too fancy for her, so I shortened “Colo-*ra*-tu-*ra*” to “Ra-Ra.”

(*The scene undergoes a wavering dissolve to a lakeside camp for foals: cabins, canoe with dock, flagpole. Youngsters play in the water and on the shore as the camera zooms in slowly. On the start of the next line, cut to four of them engaged in a tug-of-war, all in khaki shirts and red neckerchiefs. A young Applejack is at one end, paired with an earth pony filly whose coat, mane/tail colors, and cutie mark give her away as Coloratura. The mane and tail are three shades of dark gray and styled in loose corkscrews, and the eyes are a deep blue-green. She and Applejack wear khaki caps, as does one of their two opponents, and a mud pit stands between the teams.*)

**Applejack:** (*voice over*) We had the best time at Camp Friendship.

(*A hard yank deposits Filly AJ and Filly CO in the muck, but they come up smiling.*)

**Applejack:** (*voice over*) Ra-Ra was just so easygoin’. (*They gallop off the dock and dive into the lake.*) We were like two apples from the same branch.

(*Both heads break the surface, soaked but clean of mud, and they get into a splash fight. From here, dissolve to a stage on which an acoustic guitar rests in a stand. Filly AJ and Filly CO are up here, now dry and stepping to the edge for an audience of campers and counselors gathered around a fire.*)

**Applejack:** (*voice over*) Ra-Ra and I prepared this song for the camp talent show. (*Filly AJ picks up the guitar and sits on her haunches.*) When we performed— (*Close-up; Filly CO’s face betrays her jitters.*) —she belted it out, singin’ in the most colorful, clear voice I’d ever heard.

***Quiet acoustic guitar melody, lively 4 (E flat major)***

**Filly CO:** Equestria, the land I love

A land of harmony

(*Slow pan across the other foals, who gradually stop whatever they are doing and pay rapt attention.*)

Our flag does wave from high above

(*Her cutie mark emits a gleam of yellow light, its reflection playing in the pupils of her stunned accompanist.*)

For ponykind to see

***Much stronger vocals (A flat major*)**

(*The glow fades away.*)

**Filly CO:** Equestria, a land of friends

Where ponykind do roam

They say true friendship never ends

Equestria, my home

***Song ends***

(*Setting down the guitar, Filly AJ turns to an iron triangle hanging from a nearby pole and rings it once with a striker rod in her teeth. There follows a round of appreciative reactions from the campers, and Filly CO’s eyes fill with happy tears as she and Filly AJ trade grins and embrace.*)

**Applejack:** (*voice over*) After camp, we wrote to each other for a bit, but—

(*A wavering dissolve begins during this line and shifts the action back to the present.*)

**Applejack:** —then we lost touch. (*smiling*) But Ra-Ra always did want to go to Manehattan to try and make it big. (*puzzled*) But a demandin’ diva?

(*She shakes her head a bit, as if trying to dislodge that concept from the neurons under the blond mane and brown hat, then smiles.*)

**Applejack:** Just you wait, Pinkie. Once Ra-Ra gets here— (*foreleg across Pinkie’s shoulders*) —you’ll see she’s just a plain old pony like you and me. (*All other eyes pop in surprise.*)

**Pinkie:** I don’t have to wait. (*eyes shining*) She’s here!

**Applejack:** Really?

(*Coming over the last rise is a colossal brown crystal with a cluster of smaller ones near its upper end, carried on poles by a quartet of earth pony stallions. Manes and tails are cut short, all four wear dark gray vests with studs along the edges, and one also sports matching bands on his forelegs. The most unconventional vehicle is set down, and jets of steam hiss out from the edges between the front faces before they fold outward, one of them becoming a set of steps. Brilliant yellow light spills over the grass, silhouetting a figure within as it reclines on a couch; behind it is a backdrop panel decorated with Coloratura’s cutie mark. Banks of speakers pop out from the base on either side, and yellow panels emerge from the rear to form a stylized starburst.*)

(*The shadowy figure stands up on the couch, showing a mane tied into a high ponytail and a tail tied at the base. Both are straight, the tail dragging the ground and the mane nearly doing likewise. As the figure steps forward, the camera cut to an extreme close-up of four pale grayish-green hooves, the front two adorned with spiked bands, matching sleeve cuffs attached to a purple garment, and blue bracelets. The end of the mane waves into view as well—white, with streaks of violet, light pink, and pale pinkish-blue—and the camera zooms out to frame the owner of these body parts in full detail upon reaching the ground. The garment is a jacket with studs along its hem and upturned collar, over a blue top; she wears studded and blue necklaces to match her foreleg accessories, heavy black eyeliner/mascara, and a translucent, dark gray veil over her nearly emotionless face. Only the eye/coat colors and cutie mark give any hint that this is the same Coloratura who went to camp with Applejack as a filly. The streaks in her tail run down the side nearest her rump, and only the violet mane streak is visible throughout its entire thickness; its other streaks are only on the interior surface facing her body. She tosses her head, flipping her ponytail from one side to the other, and all the spectators except Applejack look fit to burst with excitement. Zoom in slowly.*)

**Applejack:** (*dumbfounded*) Ra-Ra?

(*Snap to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to the tableau of Coloratura facing the crowd. Her conveyance glimmers silently in the background for a long moment before Pinkie goes into a peal of ecstatic squealing and laughter, falling to her haunches and instantly bounding up to her hind legs. She has removed the photo of Coloratura’s cutie mark from her left haunch.*)

**Pinkie:** Countess Coloratura!

(*Those two words are about all she manages to get out before going over in a dead faint. Now a pale bluish-white, bespectacled earth pony stallion with brown eyes strides imperiously through the gathering. Seen in profile from the knees/hocks up, he has a curly mane/tail that show two shades of light pink and are carefully trimmed and styled, and he has heavy eyebrows and wears a blue suit over a white shirt, red necktie, and yellow vest. This is Svengallop, whose voice manages to be both overbearing and slightly effeminate at the same time. Behind him comes Coloratura, with a litter-carrier ahead and behind. During the next line, each of these four bounces briefly upward at the same point, generating a series of squeaks that marks the contact of hooves on the supine Pinkie.*)

**Svengallop:** Clear the way! Step back! Keep your hooves and tails to yourselves! (*Flashbulbs pop.*)

**Applejack:** (*softly, to herself*) No. That can’t be her.

(*Cut to just in front of the stage, where Coloratura and Svengallop have stopped to survey the facilities. The sound of Applejack’s throat clearing catches their ears; zoom out to frame her now standing alongside.*)

**Applejack:** (*to Coloratura*) Um, hi. Remember me? We met at Camp Friendship? I-I gave you the nickname “Ra-Ra”?

(*The veiled face scrunches in thought, then breaks into a smile.*)

**Coloratura:** AJ?

**Applejack:** Yeah! (*Chuckle.*) Howdy, Ra-Ra!

(*Svengallop whispers in Coloratura’s ear for a second; the pop star nods in silent assent, then pokes a front hoof against Applejack’s cheek. When the appendage is withdrawn, there is a horseshoe imprinted below one green eye in red ink—due to the rubber stamp Coloratura has attached to her hoof. Svengallop holds an ink pad at the ready.*)

**Coloratura:** Hoofsies! (*Giggle.*)

(*Lowering the pad, Svengallop gestures in another direction and Coloratura follows.*)

**Rarity:** (*from o.s.*) Ooh! (*Pan slightly to frame her coming up to nudge Applejack knowingly.*) You got hoofsies from Countess Coloratura!

(*Close-up of Applejack; a hand mirror is levitated under Rarity’s control so she can see the mark clearly.*)

**Rarity:** (*from o.s.*) Look! (*Mirror down; zoom out to frame her. Giddy little squeal.*) She clearly thinks you’re very special!

**Coloratura:** (*from o.s.*) Hoofsies!

(*Cut to her, standing at the head of a line of mares; Svengallop has the ink pad out again.*)

**Coloratura:** (*stamping Lyra’s cheek, then another mare’s*) Hoofsies! Hoofsies! (*Giggle.*)

**Applejack:** (*to herself, dryly, rubbing hers clean*) Yeah. Real special.

(*Coloratura administers one more, after which one litter-carrier moves up to cut off the line. Svengallop has put away the ink pad.*)

**Svengallop:** (*removing/tossing stamp, leading her off*) Now *that’s* how you make an entrance! Big! Bold! Absolutely stunning! (*dismissively, rolling eyes*) Though it was muddied a bit with your interaction with that dusty farm pony. Do you actually know her?

**Coloratura:** Oh, yeah! That’s my childhood filly-friend AJ. She was the one that started calling me Ra-Ra.

**Svengallop:** Oh, yes. How cute and… (*disgustedly*) …common. (*haughtily*) Of course, *I* was the one that started calling you “Countess,” and just look at how you’ve moved up in Equestria since then. Why— (*Close-up of Coloratura; zooming in slowly; he continues o.s.*) —you’ve gotten everything you’ve ever wanted, hmm?

(*Cut to frame both again; he looks off behind himself.*)

**Svengallop:** Speaking of which— (*stomping impatiently*) —where is the pony Pinkie Pie?

**Pinkie:** (*from o.s.*) Ooh! (*She trots up, pulling a wagon loaded with goodies.*) I’m the pony Pinkie Pie, Mr. Manager, sir!

**Svengallop:** Do you have the water imported from Rainbow Falls that I requested for Countess Coloratura?

**Pinkie:** (*holding up a crate of bottles*) I have twenty glass containers full, right here. (*He takes a close look, then grimaces.*)

**Svengallop:** Did I not tell you to provide straws in all of Countess Coloratura’s beverages?

**Pinkie:** Uh, I don’t think so. (*She sets the crate down and smiles.*) But lucky for you, I have the biggest straw collection in Equestria! (*pulling a flexible straw from her mane*) I call this straw… (*Extreme close-up of it; she continues o.s.*) …Fernando.

(*She waggles her eyebrows knowingly at the less-than-impressed manager, who trots past her to check over the rest of the wagon. The camera pans to follow him toward the rear, putting Pinkie out of view.*)

**Svengallop:** Hmph. Let us confirm that you acquired the rest of the items that Countess Coloratura requested *before* she performs her run-through, shall we? (*She pops out from this end, having unhooked herself and ditched the straw.*)

**Pinkie:** Ooh! We shall! (*Close-up of a vase of flowers.*)

**Svengallop:** (*from o.s., pointing to it*) Floral arrangements from the Royal Canterlot Gardens…

(*Pan to him, opening a glass case to expose a stack of éclairs within.*)

**Svengallop:** …chocolate éclairs made by Gustave LeGrand… (*peering at a bowl of jewels*) …a selection of crystals from the Crystal Empire…

(*Close-up of two bowls of cherries, one full of red fruit, the other yellow.*)

**Svengallop:** (*standing up into view behind them*) …freshly picked cherries from Cherry Jubilee’s farm, separated red from yellow?

**Pinkie:** Abso-tutely!

**Svengallop:** (*to Coloratura, crossing to her*) Well, by some miracle, your requests have been reasonably met, so let us move on. To rehearsal!

(*These two trot purposefully away, Pinkie stopping briefly as she follows, having harnessed herself to the wagon again.*)

**Pinkie:** See, Applejack? (*singsong*) Demanding! (*Pan to Applejack and Rarity.*)

**Applejack:** Pinkie’s right, Rarity. The Ra-Ra I knew didn’t hide behind a veil, givin’ out fake stamp kisses, sippin’ up imported water, and needin’ her cherries separated.

**Rarity:** Oh, I do understand. Sometimes it’s hard to see our friends change.

**Applejack:** She’s become a whole other pony!

**Rarity:** Trust me. (*gesturing toward stage*) Once you see Countess Coloratura perform, you simply won’t believe it!

(*Cut to a dimly lit backstage area, with a sliver of sky visible beyond part of the backdrop. At Svengallop’s impatient beckoning, three of the litter-carriers fall in line before him. He glances toward the opening, and the view fades to black.*)

***Staccato synthesizer chords accented by bass/snare drum beats, fast 4 (D flat minor)***

(*The lights pulse on and off, illuminating the stage as Coloratura emerges at the top of its staircase. She tosses her head to flip her ponytail back and forth as she descends toward the fog-machine mist that billows everywhere.*)

**Coloratura:** Time for the spectacle, time for the show

The lights are bright and the colors glow

***Closed hi-hat in***

I’m not just anypony, I think you know

The time is now, it’s about to blow

(*Pillars of flame roar up on either side and lasers sweep the air, her mane/tail blowing straight up due to air nozzles set into the stage. The lights come up full at this point, with a scatter of spotlights flaring like flashbulbs, and her voice becomes electronically distorted and stutters with the music. Fade to black for an instant.*)

***Thumping synth dance melody with drums***

(*A flash, and the view fades in to the three litter-carriers who were backstage with Svengallop, now acting as backup dancers. The fourth is on the other side of the stage, along with two more earth pony stallions in similar attire.*)

**Coloratura:** Razzle-dazzle, glitz and glam

Turn it all up, it’s a spectacle

(*Brief stutter on the end of this line. She is briefly lost under a burst of fog.*)

Razzle-dazzle, glitz and glam

Turn it all up

***A cappella***

It’s a spectacle

***Music resumes***

(*The lighting effects throw sparkles over the apple/star/rainbow backdrop.*)

Give me more razzle-dazzle

Glitter eyes, big surprise, lights, cameras

(*A costumed, heavily made-up unicorn stallion fires a spell onto her throat, causing her next long, held-out phrase to take on the electronic warble and stutter again over four bars. The six backup dancer stallions continue to do their thing.*)

**Coloratura:** Razzle-dazzle, glitz and glam

Turn it all up, it’s a spectacle

(*Brief stutter on the end of this line.*)

Hear the applause, here to impress

Not just a pony

***A cappella***

(*Zoom in to a close-up as she holds her final pose.*)

I am the Countess

***Song ends***

(*Cheers and whoops erupt from o.s. Fade to black, then in to the jubilant spectators and the very gobsmacked Applejack. Zoom in to a close-up.*)

**Applejack:** Rarity was right. I *don’t* believe it.

(*Onstage, the backup dancers exit toward the wings as Svengallop approaches Coloratura. The special effects have been shut off.*)

**Svengallop:** Oh, my shining star! Thanks to the sparkling costumes, dazzling choreography, and brilliant vocal effects that *I* designed— (*Laugh.*) —your performance was spectacular, Countess Coloratura!

**Coloratura:** (*chuckling nervously*) Oh, thank you, Svengallop!

(*As she speaks, the camera pans/zooms out to put her out of view and frame Applejack. The slight frown on the orange-tan face broadcasts her discomfort all too clearly as she turns to Rarity.*)

**Applejack:** Correct me if I’m wrong here, but that feller isn’t actually complimentin’ Ra-Ra. He’s complimentin’ all the bells and whistles he’s piled on to make her Countess Coloratura.

**Rarity:** (*airily*) Oh, no, no, no, no, no. You don’t understand, Applejack. Creating all those elements is a lot of work, and Countess Coloratura’s performance wouldn’t exist without them.

**Applejack:** (*walking away*) If you ask me, that wouldn’t necessarily be a bad thing.

(*The fashion-forward unicorn has no immediate response. Cut to Coloratura and Svengallop.*)

**Coloratura:** (*wearily*) Oh, if we’re all done here, I’d love to go back to my trailer and rest, Svengallop. (*Zoom out quickly; Pinkie stands behind Svengallop, holding a clipboard. She is free of her wagon.*)

**Pinkie:** Actually, right now you’re scheduled for your meet-and-greet with the school ponies.

**Svengallop:** (*groaning*) I can totally get you out of meeting with the school ponies, Countess.

(*On the end of this line, the camera pans slightly to show Applejack watching from just beyond the runway’s end, and the focus shifts to clearly show her disbelief at his words. In close-up, her face rearranges into a mid-level grimace.*)

**Coloratura:** (*from o.s.*) Absolutely not! (*Applejack smiles broadly; back to the pair.*) My favorite part of any event is meeting with the school ponies.

**Applejack:** (*from o.s.*) The school ponies’ll be so happy to hear that, Ra-Ra.

(*Zoom out on the end of this to frame her, now up onstage to lead her away. Both mares completely miss the disapproving glare originating from behind Svengallop’s lenses. Cut to a small stage set up not far from the main barn at Sweet Apple Acres, with a simplified version of the full-scale backdrop. A table has been set up with a quill and inkwell for autographs, and Coloratura stands among a crowd of school-age foals that includes the Cutie Mark Crusaders. Photo Finish stands near the stage, one camera set up on a tripod and a second around her neck; each goes off as the camera zooms in slowly during the next line. Coloratura is in much better spirits than she was immediately following the rehearsal.*)

**Coloratura:** Ponyville school ponies! As part of the Helping Hooves Music Festival, I’m holding a contest where some of *you* will get a chance to sing with me onstage at the concert tomorrow! Sound fun?

(*Close-up of her on the second half of this; Sweetie Belle and a colt step up, and she puts a foreleg around each one’s neck. Their classmates cheer and whoop it up as both Photo and Featherweight snap pictures.*)

**Coloratura:** All right! Now who wants more hoofsies?

(*As she finishes, the camera pans away from the stage to show Applejack looking on with a relieved smile. More shutter clicks and cheers are heard.*)

**Applejack:** Now *that’s* more like the Ra-Ra I remember.

**Pinkie:** (*from o.s., pleadingly*) But…I got everything you requested!

(*The workhorse looks behind herself, catching sight of Pinkie and Svengallop beyond a horseshoe-shaped hedge arch. Pinkie has put away her clipboard.*)

**Svengallop:** *That* was for Countess Coloratura. *This* is for me! And what *I* want is premium oats!

**Pinkie:** (*brightening*) Oh! Well, we have lots of tasty oats right here in Ponyville.

(*Cut to Svengallop on the end of this; a plate of the grains in question is held up to him, but he is far from pleased.*)

**Svengallop:** (*knocking them away*) I would not feed those to a chicken! (*They are all over Pinkie’s mane/tail, the plate in her mane. He circles around her.*) I want top-of-the-line Appleloosan oats!

(*Zoom out to put Applejack in the fore, eavesdropping from behind the arch.*)

**Svengallop:** Next, it appears that we are surrounded by apple trees.

(*Close-up of the listener during this line, face twisting into a very dirty look, the back to the manager and temporary flunky—her mane/tail now clean.*)

**Svengallop:** Bring me five hundred pre-peeled, pre-cored apples, and I want those things in twenty-four hours!

(*Zoom in quickly to a close-up of Pinkie as her face falls and her eyes go big and sad.*)

**Pinkie:** But that’s impossible! (*He leans into her face.*)

**Svengallop:** Do you want me to pull Countess Coloratura from your little podunk charity show? Because I will!

(*Giving her one last withering glare, he struts off. Here comes Applejack.*)

**Pinkie:** Applejack, Svengallop just made all of these new demands and he said—

**Applejack:** I heard, Pinkie, but don’t you fret. (*smiling, looking toward foals’ stage; zoom in on it*) I’ll talk to Ra-Ra and fix things right up.

(*At the scene, she steps up just in time for Apple Bloom to gallop excitedly toward her. Coloratura follows at a more sedate pace, then Scootaloo and Sweetie.*)

**Bloom:** Did you see, sis? Did you see?

**Coloratura:** Is this the little sister you wrote to me about, AJ?

**Bloom:** Hold on, Applejack. You wrote to Countess Coloratura…*about me?!?* (*Close-up of Coloratura.*)

**Coloratura:** AJ said you were the best little sister ever, Apple Bloom.

(*Zoom out quickly to put all three Crusaders in view around her. Jaws drop, eyes bug out, powers of speech are lost, and Bloom thoroughly fails to respond to Applejack’s hoof waving in front of her face.*)

**Applejack:** (*laughing a bit*) All right now. (*closing Bloom’s mouth; all three start to move*) You best get along, little ponies.

(*As the Crusaders leave the stage, Bloom chooses to do so in reverse so she can keep her admiring eyes fixed on the veiled pop star. Sweetie follows suit and Scootaloo swivels her head to maintain her gaze, prompting a giggle from Coloratura in close-up.*)

**Applejack:** (*from o.s.*) Uh…hey, Ra-Ra? (*Zoom out to frame her approaching as she continues.*) You mind if I talk to you about your manager?

**Coloratura:** Sure. What about him?

**Applejack:** (*scratching back of neck*) Well, while you were meetin’ with the school ponies, he was demandin’ all sorts of stuff from Pinkie Pie.

**Coloratura:** Svengallop works very hard as my manager, AJ, so if he needs some things when we’re on the road, I-I don’t see anything wrong with that.

**Applejack:** Well, do you see somethin’ wrong with him tellin’ Pinkie that if she doesn’t get those things by tomorrow, he’d pull you from our charity festival?

**Coloratura:** (*taken aback*) What? But…he knows how important charity is to me, and leaving the festival would completely ruin my image.

**Applejack:** I’m afraid Svengallop doesn’t give a pickled pippin about your charity work.

**Coloratura:** (*needled*) That’s not true! Svengallop has always supported me in all my interests. (*leaning toward Applejack*) You’re just saying those things because you’re jealous.

**Applejack:** Jealous of what? (*flicking Coloratura’s veil*) A pony who hides behind a veil so thick, she can’t see when somepony’s usin’ her? (*chuckilng dryly*) No, I’m not jealous of that, Ra-Ra!

**Coloratura:** I am not Ra-Ra! I am Countess Coloratura! And while *we* may have been friends when we were young— (*walking away*) —we have clearly gone in different directions!

(*Cut to a close-up of Applejack and zoom out slowly as concern and sadness mingle in her eyes, then snap to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of a device set on the ground just outside the Sweet Apple Acres barn. It consists of an upside-down bucket with a spike extending upward from the bottom, a pair of bicycle pedals on the sides, and a blade on a post that angles slightly toward the spike. A pile of apples lies nearby, and Applejack impales one on the spike and works the pedals, turning the apple so that the blade removes the skin. Tilt up to her severely disgruntled expression.*)

**Applejack:** It just ain’t right! He’s manipulatin’ her, and she’s just not seein’ it! (*Pinkie leans into view, apple slices and bits embedded in her uncombed mane.*)

**Pinkie:** Enough stewin’.

(*Longer shot: her tail is in as sorry a state, and two piles of peeled apples are in the barnyard—one cored, the other not. She holds an un-cored one over a second device: cylindrical, with a pedal on each side and the top of a shaft just visible within.*)

**Pinkie:** (*tossing apple onto shaft*) More peelin’!

(*A press on the pedals causes the shaft to retract into the rig; when she steps off, the cored apple is ejected into the pile of finished goods. Applejack stops her peeling work and stands up.*)

**Applejack:** Sorry, Pinkie, but there is no way I’m lettin’ that lousy Svengallop use my friend like that!

(*As she strides off across the yard, Pinkie lets go with a dispirited moan and collapses into the mass of peeled, un-cored apples. Wipe to the edge of the main stage; Applejack walks up as Coloratura signals to two of her backup dancers.*)

**Applejack:** (*voice raised*) Countess Coloratura! (*Who turns to her with a smile.*)

**Coloratura:** Wow, AJ! You said my real name.

**Applejack:** (*normal volume*) I said your *new* name, but I *saw* the real you hangin’ out with those school ponies yesterday. (*Coloratura moves a bit closer.*) And I know somepony that’d prefer if you stopped doin’ those little events.

**Coloratura:** (*groaning*) Not this again.

**Applejack:** Come on now. You just gotta give me a chance to prove what I’m sayin’ is true.

**Coloratura:** And just how are you going to do that?

**Applejack:** Do exactly what I say. We’ll see if that Svengallop truly has your best interests at heart.

(*Cut to a close-up of Coloratura on the end of this, her heavily made-up eyes rolling as if to say, “The things I put up with.” A dissolve shifts the view to a point several feet above ground, the camera aimed at the tracts of apple trees as two spotlights are magically maneuvered through the air. Pan to follow them toward the stage.*)

**Coloratura:** (*from o.s.*) Svengallop?

(*The pan stops; she is addressing the wings, Rarity is levitating the equipment, and Fluttershy and Rainbow are moving a strip of bunting into position up top as Twilight directs them. Big Macintosh steps behind one of the speaker towers.*)

**Coloratura:** Svengallop? Where are you, Svengallop? (*He leaps into view, all smiles.*)

**Svengallop:** Here I am! Did you need something?

**Coloratura:** (*hesitantly*) Yes. I was…considering…m-maybe canceling the contest with the school ponies?

**Svengallop:** (*beaming, adjusting collar*) Countess, this is wonderful! I’ve been waiting forever for you to cancel that pointless school pony contest.

**Coloratura:** You…have?

**Svengallop:** (*scornfully*) You do it at every charity event and it does absolutely nothing to promote the Countess Coloratura image that *I* built! (*Chuckle.*) Consider it canceled. (*addressing himself toward the wings*) Pinkie Pie!

(*The normally perky pink party pony zips into view, gasping for breath and with her mane/tail still an apple-spattered mess.*)

**Pinkie:** Yes, Svengallop, sir? (*She coughs up an apple core.*)

**Svengallop:** We are making some adjustments to the show. (*walking past her*) Follow me.

(*As Pinkie does so, Coloratura aims an apprehensive look over the grass. Now standing out here at close range, Applejack just smiles and nods before pivoting to throw a hoof signal to Twilight, who has taken up a hovering position just past one end of the stage. The winged unicorn acknowledges and flies out of sight behind the display; cut to an overhead shot of the backstage area as she stealthily eases into view with horn aglow. A trailer is parked back here, and scenery flats are stacked up near a tented annex meant to serve as the performers’ entrance. A makeup counter with mirror has been set up out here as well. Svengallop steps into view from behind the trailer, followed by Pinkie; the latter stumbles and falls, and the camera cuts to a close-up of him as she stands.*)

**Svengallop:** Cancel the contest for the fillies and schedule me a spa treatment. Now that I don’t have to oversee a rehearsal with those brats— (*adjusting collar, fluffing mane*) —I have time for the works. (*Chuckle; he glowers toward Pinkie.*) You know the drill. Deliver, or the diva ditches your dippy charity!

(*He straightens up with a smug little smile; cut to a visibly displeased Coloratura on the runway as he walks out to her.*)

**Svengallop:** (*cheerfully*) Okay, Countess Coloratura. All taken care of. (*The sound system crackles to life.*)

**Voice of Svengallop:** (*on speakers*) You know the drill.

(*Hearing his own words being broadcast in public is enough to scare the daylights out of him. Cut to just behind the two ponies, facing the stage—on which a giant projection screen has now been hung up, covering most of the backdrop. Twilight’s spell is playing over the screen, giving a bird’s-eye view of Svengallop’s browbeating, and every equine watching it is either disbelieving or disgusted.*)

**Svengallop:** (*in playback*) Deliver, or the diva ditches your dippy charity!

**Coloratura:** (*voice breaking a bit*) So that’s how you’ve been managing things?

**Svengallop:** Yeah, so, what’s the problem?

**Coloratura:** (*advancing on him, slowly building anger*) The problem is, is you’ve been using my name to intimidate ponies to get what you want! (*Stomp.*)

**Svengallop:** But I work incredibly hard for you! I deserve everything I get!

**Coloratura:** But not because you scare ponies into thinking I won’t perform for their charities otherwise! I would never do that to my fans—which is why you should have known that I would never cancel the school ponies’ contest! (*She adds a stomp for emphasis on the second “never.”*)

**Svengallop:** (*circling around her*) Hmph. All this charity and school pony contest nonsense is just remnants of that boring little Ra-Ra I met back in Manehattan!

**Coloratura:** You clearly don’t understand the real me! (*She throws her veil back.*)

**Svengallop:** Heh! That’s a joke! (*circling again*) I made you somepony! What can you even do without me? Good luck, Countess Coloratura! (*viciously*) Good luck!

(*He heads for the wings, nose turned up over an expression of the purest contempt, as Applejack walks on to console the instantly despondent performer.*)

**Applejack:** Oh, Ra-Ra, I’m so sorry. Are you gonna be okay for the concert tonight?

**Coloratura:** (*smiling weakly*) Of course. After all— (*Zoom in to a close-up.*) —the show must go on.

(*Cut to a close-up of her distraught reflection in the mirror of the backstage makeup counter. She has dialed back the eye makeup by several notches, and her mane/tail are now dyed in several shades of purple, done in an artfully messy wave, and set with small blue gems. The tail is bound with a feathered clip, and she wears a similarly styled purple top with feathers above each eye and a flower brooch at her throat. The evening sky is visible behind her.*)

**Coloratura:** Oh my gosh, Rarity.

(*Zoom out slightly as she begins to trot back and forth, exposing Rarity’s image in the glass; the unicorn uses her magic to steer a small “fascinator” hat after her. The motion reveals jeweled, silver-tipped purple shoes on all four hooves.*)

**Coloratura:** Svengallop’s right! This is gonna be a disaster! I’m gonna be terrible! (*Applejack, reflected in the mirror, approaches Rarity.*)

**Applejack:** Can you give us a minute, Rarity?

**Rarity:** Certainly.

(*She and her image both exit the vicinity, taking the fascinator, and Applejack starts to move. Cut to a longer shot of the backstage area, framing the two old friends. Coloratura’s shoes can now be fully seen as platforms.*)

**Applejack:** Now, why’s it gonna be so terrible?

**Coloratura:** Because Svengallop was in charge of everything. The lights, the visuals, the sound. Without Svengallop, I have nothing!

**Applejack:** Now, now, don’t go gettin’ yourself into a tizzy there, Ra-Ra. (*pacing past mirror; Coloratura follows*) Svengallop turned you into Countess Coloratura and acted like your friend so he could enjoy the perks that came with bein’ a star. But the *real* perk of friendship is gettin’ to see your friend bein’ true to theirself.

(*Close-up of the mirror; which already shows Coloratura’s uncertain visage in profile. Applejack’s reassuring one emerges from beyond the opposite edge.*)

**Applejack:** And Ra-Ra, when you’re simply yourself, you’re the brightest star I’ve ever seen shine.

(*The performer’s mouth curves up into a small smile at these words, and Applejack backs off to give her a bit of space to think. Zoom in slightly and dissolve to a patch of starry night sky, then tilt down to a long shot of the stage and the capacity crowd eagerly waiting for the main event. A curtain has been drawn closed to leave only the edge and the runway visible beyond the band shell, and a spotlight flicks on to pick out Twilight as she emerges to a round of applause. The projection screen that she and her friends used to expose Svengallop’s improprieties has been removed.*)

**Twilight:** (*amplified*) Good evening, everypony! (*Close-up.*) Welcome to opening night of the Helping Hooves Music Festival! Now it my great honor to introduce you to our headlining act— (*backing off to one side; spot follows*) —Countess Coloratura!

(*To a fresh swell of applause, the curtain opens to reveal an opaque fabric scrim, in front of which a grand piano has been placed with Coloratura standing at the keys. The original stage setup can be dimly discerned through the cloth. Zoom in slowly as a second spot illuminates Coloratura fully: simple, sleeveless, dark gray dress with a lace-trimmed collar and translucent skirt, eye makeup and feathers removed, no shoes, mane/tail back to their natural three-tone dark gray and styled in the corkscrews she wore as a filly, without the added gems. The only significant change from then to now is that her eyebrows have thickened a bit. Any trace of her over-the-top Countess persona is gone from her voice and bearing.*)

**Coloratura:** (*amplified*) This song may be familiar, but yet it’s totally different—kind of like me, Ra-Ra.

(*Puzzled murmurs ripple through the crowd before the camera cuts to a long shot of the stage. Zoom in slowly as she begins to play; the audience has now gone completely silent.*)

***Quiet piano melody, brisk 4 (A flat major*)**

(*A series of dissolves/pans frames her from various angles at closer range.*)

**Coloratura:** I’m here to show you who I am

Throw off the veil, it’s finally time

***Strings in***

There’s more to me than glitz and glam, oh

And now I feel my stars align

(*One by one, unicorns in the audience kindle spots of light at the tips of their horns in a silent salute. Behind the scrim, the faint silhouettes of a backing orchestra slowly rise into view on a hidden platform.*)

***Vocals build power***

**Coloratura:** For I had believed what I was sold

I did all the things that I was told

But all that has changed and now I’m bold ’cause I know

(*The lights behind the scrim come up to clearly frame the musicians’ outlines: violins, cellos, guitar, harps, conductor.*)

That I am just a pony

I make mistakes from time to time

But now I know the real me

And put my heart out on the line

And let the magic in my heart stay true

(*She stretches “true” out into a two-bar phrase.*)

And let the magic in my heart stay true

(*Again; cut to the Crusaders in the audience, gathering into a three-way nuzzle.*)

Just like the magic inside of you

***Intensity builds***

(*The stage again.*)

**Coloratura:** And now I see those colors

Right before my eyes

I hear my voice so clearly

And I know that it is right

I thought I was weak, but I am strong

They sold me the world, but they were wrong

And now that I’m back, I still belong ’cause I know

(*Zoom in to an extreme close-up of her cutie mark, which blazes up just as it did when she sang at Camp Friendship, then cut to a long shot of the stage and zoom out as the audience erupts in applause.*)

That I am just a pony

I make mistakes from time to time

(*The Crusaders are right in the thick of it; behind them, enough of Pinkie’s mane is in view to show that she has managed to clean herself up from the apple-peeling/coring marathon.*)

But now I know the real me

(*Applejack’s eyes slowly fill with joyful tears as the camera zooms in slowly on her.*)

And put my heart out on the line

(*The stage again; Coloratura’s mark and the audience go quiet again, and her own tears flow unchecked.*)

And let the magic in my heart stay true

(*Two-bar phrase on “true.”*)

And let the magic in my heart stay true

(*Again.*)

Just like the magic inside of you

***Much softer***

(*The orchestra is lowered out of sight.*)

Just like the magic inside of you

***Song ends on a held-out note and chord***

(*Zoom in slowly to a close-up of Coloratura as the music dies away. The moment she takes her front hooves off the piano keys and drops to all fours, she is met with a thunderous round of cheers and applause. She steps away from the instrument and along the runway, the spotlight following.*)

**Coloratura:** (*amplified, voice trembling*) Thank you, everypony! (*Crowd quiets down.*) When I arrived at the Helping Hooves Music Festival, I had forgotten who I really was. (*gesturing to one side*) But then an old friend reminded me what real friendship is about, and she told me that if I was true to myself, I couldn’t go wrong.

(*During the first half of this last sentence, the camera cuts to Twilight and company, gathered behind the Crusaders alongside the runway, and zooms in on Applejack. Smiling eyes turn her way as the full weight of the star’s words sinks in. For the second half of the sentence, cut to just behind the cowboy-hatted head to frame Coloratura looking directly at her.*)

**Coloratura:** (*amplified*) So I have a very special surprise for her. (*Cut to the Crusaders; she continues o.s.*) Apple Bloom? Sweetie Belle? Scootaloo? Come on up!

(*They gallop toward the stage as the grown mares look on warmly, and are front and center with her in a blink as a second spotlight kicks on to illuminate the entire tableau.*)

***Same melody as her song in Applejack’s Act One flashback***

***Quiet piano/string/acoustic guitar arrangement with glockenspiel accents***

***Lively 4 (E flat major)***

(*A giant flag of Equestria is lowered behind them to cover the scrim, as seen in “Hearth’s Warming Eve” and “Hearthbreakers.”*)

**Coloratura, Crusaders:** Equestria, the land I love

A land of harmony

Our flag does wave from high above

For ponykind to see

***Brass/percussion in; stronger vocals (A flat major)***

(*Applejack is surprised to find Coloratura’s hoof extended toward her, but smiles and takes hold for a boost onto the runway.*)

**Coloratura, Crusaders:** Equestria, a land of friends

Where ponykind do roam

They say true friendship never ends

Equestria, my home

***Song ends***

(*And the crowd goes wild all over again. Applejack gets another surprise in the form of an iron triangle being levitated by Sweetie, and the camera zooms in on the two old friends as Applejack gives a knowing smile and rings it with her hoof as she did at Camp Friendship. Coloratura puts a foreleg around her shoulders and pulls her close, both faces breaking into blissful smiles, and the view fades to black.*)