**HORSE PLAY**

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to the exterior of Canterlot Castle during the day and zoom in slowly.*)

**Twilight Sparkle:** (*voice over, excitedly*) Princess Celestia, I-I have an idea for your ones-versary!

(*Cut to the throne room. Princess Celestia stands in the seat of power, facing Twilight and Spike one level down on the dais. A basket of fruit rests in front of the little dragon.*)

**Celestia:** (*puzzled*) My ones-versary?

**Twilight:** The one thousand, one hundred eleventh-year anniversary of when you first raised the sun.

**Spike:** (*gesturing at basket*) Good thing Pinkie Pie reminded us. We would’ve forgot to celebrate. (*Twilight nods.*)

**Celestia:** You’re not the only ones. What did you have in mind?

**Twilight:** To commemorate your first sunrise, I’ve written a play. We’d like to perform it at my School of Friendship, if you don’t mind.

(*The solar sovereign gives her audience a huge surprise by giggling like a nut and trotting wildly in place for some moments.*)

**Celestia:** Ooh! (*Spread wings; stand up to full height.*) Mind? (*Happy gasp.*) Of course not! (*leaping to floor, prancing from side to side*) Oh, I think a play is a fantastic idea!

**Spike:** (*to Twilight*) Did she just…prance? (*A solemn nod as Celestia composes herself.*)

**Celestia:** Oh, forgive me for getting so excited. It’s just…when I was a filly, my friends often put on plays.

(*On the second half of this line, she crosses to one of the room’s stained-glass windows and magically changes it to show a moving image of a group of foals acting out a scene. Young laughter echoes faintly under her next words.*)

**Celestia:** (*wistfully*) Oh, it was so wonderful—everypony coming together to create a magical experience to share with others. I’ve always believed theater brings out the best in us and forges a special bond of friendship.

(*She reverts the window to normal and Twilight draws a surprised gasp.*)

**Twilight:** I didn’t know you used to act!

**Celestia:** Oh, not me. I was always too busy with my magic lessons to be part of any plays myself. But still, it’s something I always wished I could experience.

**Twilight:** And you still can. (*bowing*) Princess Celestia, we would be honored if you would be the star of our play. (*Celestia’s and Spike’s eyes pop.*)

**Spike:** Wait, what?!?

(*Fade to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to the three.*)

**Celestia:** (*badly rattled*) You want me to star in your play?!

**Spike:** (*dryly, to* Twilight) Yeah. When did that happen, exactly? (*She levitates him off the floor.*)

**Twilight:** (*to Celestia*) If you’ll excuse us for a second.

(*A few steps carry/float them far enough away for a private talk, the next five lines being delivered in hushed tones.*)

**Twilight:** Don’t you see? (*He is set down.*) It’s perfect! Princess Celestia has always wanted to be in a play, and this one’s about her!

**Spike:** I guess, but how are we supposed to give her directions? She’s the ruler of Equestria.

**Twilight:** She’s also our friend. Celestia’s always kind to everypony. So if we have a chance to finally do something for her, we should.

**Spike:** Hmmm…

**Twilight:** Come on. How many times has Celestia helped us? (*Celestia eases up behind her.*) Guided us? Been a warm, calming voice over our shoulder?

**Celestia:** Twilight.

(*A double yell of surprise is the predictable result.*)

**Twilight:** Yes, Princess Celestia?

**Celestia:** Your invitation is very kind, but are you certain it’s wise? I have no acting experience at all.

**Twilight:** Experience? Psssh! You’ll be playing yourself, and we’ll all help you. Please? It’d mean so much to the students if you were in our show.

**Celestia:** Well…if you’re sure…

(*The light violet face, meanwhile, has nearly split itself in half with a toothy, hopeful grin. It shifts to a smug little smile as she turns to Spike.*)

**Spike:** (*shrugging, smiling*) Yeah, what she said.

**Celestia:** (*rearing up, spreading wings*) Then I would be delighted to join your theater troupe.

(*Dissolve to an amphitheater that stands off to one side of the School of Friendship, seen from roof height. It stands on a lower level of terrain than the plateau on which the main building is constructed, and the vertical face of that raised portion serves as the back wall. Pinkie Pie, seen in a very long shot, drifts down to the ground with the help of a freshly deployed umbrella as a burst of confetti and streamers rains down around her.*)

**Pinkie:** Woo-hoo!

(*The camera tilts down slightly to follow her descent, framing the rest of Twilight’s friends working on various tasks on/above the stage. Applejack is painting a cloth backdrop of a night sky; Fluttershy and Starlight Glimmer are checking something at one end of the stage; Rainbow hangs a spotlight; Rarity ha a sewing machine set up and is making costumes, having already filled a wheeled rack. Various other supplies are set up here and there, Pinkie’s party cannon rests on the grass in front of the stage, having just fired into the air, and strings of small lights dangle from the roof. Curved rows of seats face the work n progress. Pinkie touches down, annoying Applejack considerably due to the colorful paper bits that patter into the blond mane/tail and onto the paint job.*)

**Pinkie:** Confetti is ready.

(*Standing up to her hind legs for a moment, she pitches the umbrella aside with a joyous whoop; Applejack spits her paintbrush away, the confetti falling from her.*)

**Applejack:** Wormy apple cores, Pinkie! How many times have I told you to keep your special effects away from my sets?

**Pinkie:** Three hundred twenty-seven. (*Pause.*) Oh! Unless you just did. Then it’s three hundred twenty-eight.

(*Her squeaky grin is met by Applejack’s exasperated groan and eye roll in close-up. On the start of the next line, pan to frame Starlight walking alongside Fluttershy and flipping through a copy of the script held in her field.*)

**Starlight:** I can’t believe you’ve memorized your lines already, Fluttershy!

**Fluttershy:** Once you get past terrifying, paralyzing stage fright, the rest is easy. Now I just hope Princess Celestia says we can do our play.

(*A scoff from the o.s. Rarity as Starlight nods; pan quickly to the white unicorn. This shot is close enough to pick out the measuring tape that hangs from her shoulders.*)

**Rarity:** (*pushing rack toward them*) As soon as she sees these fabulous costumes, all she’ll be able to say is “*Brava!*”

(*As Rainbow continues rigging up the lights and Pinkie starts rooting around inside the barrel of her cannon, Twilight and Spike make their way down the aisle that runs between the seating sections.*)

**Rainbow:** Heads up! Here comes our answer! (*She drops to a hover above the others; Pinkie climbs out. Starlight has put away her script.*)

**Twilight:** Wonderful news, everypony!

**Applejack:** (*rearing up briefly*) Yee-haa! We get to put on our show?

**Twilight:** Even better. Princess Celestia’s gonna be our star!

(*The five mares on/above the stage voice a unison gasp of pure disbelief.*)

**Spike:** (*dryly*) Yeah, that’s how I felt too.

**Rainbow:** (*excitedly*) Celestia? Starring in our play? This is huge!

**Twilight:** Well, she was a little nervous at first, but I told her not to worry. With us helping, it’ll all go smooth as—

**Rarity:** (*panicked*) Silk!

(*She darts away, the tape dropping from her shoulders, and starts digging frantically through a trunk filled with fabric scraps.*)

**Rarity:** I must find the silk! If Celestia’s going to be in our play, we have to take everything up to the next level!

(*Cut to the rack; her magic yanks all the garments off the hangers and stuffs them into a handy trash can.*)

**Rarity:** (*from o.s.*) None of these old ideas will do! (*Pinkie emerges halfway from it in a confetti blast.*)

**Pinkie:** Yeah! (*throwing a couple aside*) Forget my regular party cannon. For princess-size effects, we’re gonna need Big Bertha!

(*Almost as soon as she drops back into the can, she is rolling a ridiculously long-barreled artillery piece in front of the stage. This monstrosity is striped in two shades of deep pink and has yellow edging at the joints holding it the barrel together.*)

**Applejack:** (*growling*) PINKIE!

**Pinkie:** (*innocently*) What?

**Rainbow:** (*to Twilight*) Our play is gonna be amazing! I gotta tell everypony I know— (*winking*) —and even the ones I don’t!

(*She exits the scene straight up, setting off a Sonic Rainboom for good measure.*)

**Applejack:** (*to the others*) Why in tarnation are y’all gettin’ so starstruck? We’ve met Princess Celestia before, plenty of times.

**Starlight:** Those were formal things. Galas, world saving—this is different! (*Close-up.*) Imagine doing sweaty warm-ups with a princess. (*She levitates a handkerchief to wipe her nose.*) Blowing your nose in front of a princess. (*Send it away.*) Sitting around just… (*fearfully*) …talking with a princess.

**Twilight:** (*from o.s.*) I’m a princess. (*Cut to frame her, Starlight, and Spike.*) You talk to me. (*Grin.*)

**Starlight:** (*airily*) That’s different. You’re not a *princess* princess.

**Twilight:** (*sourly*) Uh, thanks. (*smiling; Rarity rejoins the others on the stage*) Celestia wants to experience the special friendship that theater ponies have. (*Cut to Applejack/Fluttershy/Rarity/Starlight; she continues o.s.*) To give her that, you just need to be yourselves.

**Fluttershy:** (*very slightly scared*) You…you really think so?

**Applejack:** (*pacing, chuckling*) Ah, quit frettin’. It’s only a couple of pals gettin’ together to put on a ones-versary play. What could go wrong?

(*Dissolve to a long shot of the amphitheater. Curtains have been drawn closed, leaving only a lectern visible at stage right, and both the “Big Bertha” cannon and Pinkie’s regular one have been taken away. Twilight and Spike sit side by side in director’s chairs to face the stage, and Spike uses a megaphone to amplify his voice. From this distance, a purple beret is visible on his head.*)

**Spike:** Places, everypony! We’re here to rehearse *A New Day in Equestria*!

(*Head-on close-up of the pair; he has also donned a white dress shirt and tan pants, and the edges of a magenta vest, a darker-shaded necktie, and dark gray shoes are visible behind the megaphone. Twilight clears her throat pointedly, prompting him to throw her a nasty look and bring the item to his lips again.*)

**Spike:** Directed, written, and produced by Twilight Sparkle. (*She beams and conjures up a copy of the script.*)

**Twilight:** Page one, Act One, Scene One! Action!

(*As the camera zooms in on the stage, the curtains open to expose Fluttershy stepping to front center. A trapdoor is set into the planks directly behind her, and the night-sky backdrop Applejack was painting has been hung up still farther back. It is now clean of Pinkie’s confetti.*)

**Fluttershy:** Once upon a time, before Celestia, Equestria was suffering terrible hardship.

(*Five of the mares’ six students emerge from the wings, all in variously colored/decorated robes/manes/tails and with unicorn horns strapped to their foreheads. Ocellus, Smolder, and Yona enter from stage right, Gallus and Silverstream from stage left; Gallus wears booties on all four limbs to match his robe. They end up in a loose semicircle behind the trapdoor.*)

**Fluttershy:** Raising the sun every morning was so hard, it took five great sorcerers plus Starswirl the Bearded to do it.

(*On the end of this, she backs o.s. to stage right so Sandbar can enter across from her. He is garbed as the great mage, with a horn and appropriately colored fake mane/tai/beard/mustache. One after another, the six lower their horns and strain as if trying to cast a mighty spell. Fluttershy, now standing at the lectern, directs a nod past them that is picked up by Pinkie, who stands at a control panel in the wings behind Sandbar. A pull on a lever opens the trapdoor and starts a large yellow/orange-tiled sphere rising slowly out of it on a pole. Longer shot of the stage, leaving Fluttershy out of view; the six slowly raise their horns as if directing the great orb into the heavens.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*from o.s.*) And every day, the unicorns helping Starswirl would use so much magic— (*It stops; all but Sandbar keel over.*) —they lost their powers forever. (*Close-up; slow pan.*) Things looked bleak. Soon, Equestria would lose all its magic users!

(*During this last sentence, Gallus cracks one eye open, struggles not to laugh at Silverstream’s goofy expression with eyes crossed and tongue hanging out, and manages to play dead again. The hippogriff catches on and snaps her own eyes closed. Back to Fluttershy.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*dramatically*) Then, the land would be covered in darkness for eternity.

(*She throws a wink to Pinkie, who pulls a second lever to retract the ersatz sun and close the hatch.*)

**Twilight:** (*to Spike*) Even I can’t believe how good my play is! The sets, the props, the outfits—they’re all great! (*Spike nods.*)

**Spike:** And…here comes the best part.

(*The next shot frames Fluttershy and Sandbar, with Celestia waiting in the wings at stage right.*)

**Fluttershy:** But then, a student named Celestia discovered she had the power to raise the sun herself *without* draining her magic.

(*During this line, the Princess grins and waves to Sandbar, then emerges onto the stage at his answering nod. Her next grin/wave are aimed at the o.s. Twilight, but no words are forthcoming for some short time. When the camera cuts to Twilight and Spike, the former has done away with her script.*)

**Twilight:** Um…that’s your cue, Celestia!

**Celestia:** Oh! (*Laugh.*) Right. Of course.

(*After clearing her throat, she continues in a tone soft enough to make Fluttershy sound like a bellowing foghorn by comparison. Despite the lack of decibels, she still manages to ham it up.*)

**Celestia:** It is time for a new day in Equestria.

(*Director and assistant trade hopelessly confused looks.*)

**Spike:** Um, what?

**Celestia:** (*normal volume*) Oh, I-I-I said… (*softly*) …“It is time for a new day in Equestria.”

(*Now Twilight’s face is so slack with shock that it might fall clear off her skull—but she somehow gets it under control and into a humoring smile.*)

**Twilight:** And your delivery was…great! But maybe you should try it a tiny bit louder, for the ponies in the back row.

**Celestia:** (*normal volume, laughing*) Oh, yes, yes, my Royal Canterlot Voice. Thank you for the reminder, Twilight.

(*The six students gather in around her, just in time to take the full brunt of her booming voice and get knocked silly all over again. Twilight and Spike fare no better, and much of the surrounding countryside does a little dancing of its own to boot.*)

**Celestia:** IT IS TIME FOR A NEW DAY IN EQUESTRIA!!

(*Birds are spooked into flight as the echoes fade away; on the stage, Sandbar woozily crawls a foot or two toward her before collapsing.*)

**Celestia:** (*normal volume*) Oh! (*laughing*) Goodness! This theater does have strong acoustics. M-My apologies. I’m still learning to hone my craft.

(*Down on the grass, Twilight has come up in a hover and is telekinetically setting her chair upright. Spike is taking care of his own the hard way, having dropped his megaphone.*)

**Twilight:** (*as both sit*) No, no, you’re doing…fine! Why don’t we try it one more time, just like you’re talking to me? (*The students stagger upright and away.*)

**Celestia:** (*stilted*) It is time for a new day in Equestria.

**Twilight:** A bit more energy.

**Celestia:** (*very quickly*) It’s time for a new day in Equestria!

(*The faces of Applejack, Pinkie, and Starlight poke out from the wings, set in grimaces of shock and horror.*)

**Celestia:** (*normal cadence*) Uh, how was that? (*Close-up; zoom out to frame the approaching Applejack on the start of the next line.*)

**Applejack:** Uh, honestly—

(*She gets cut off abruptly when Twilight teleports onto the stage with a forced grin and claps a hoof over her mouth.*)

**Twilight:** Great! Wow! It’s hard to believe you’ve never done this before! Let’s move on to the dance number!

(*She completely misses the caustic glare coming her way from the apple farmer. Dissolve to a close-up of Spike on the stage, his back to the seats, and waving his fingers to keep time. The camera then shifts to an overhead shot that frames the seven actors lined up across the width of the backdrop, Celestia at one end. An urgent old-time piano melody is playing in a fast 4.*)

**Spike:** (*in rhythm, miming named actions*) Again! Step, buck, leap, touch! Again! Step, buck, leap touch!

(*“Touch” involves planting all extremities on the stage at once. The students quickly catch on to the sequence, but Celestia is hopelessly out of sync.*)

**Spike:** Got it? Moving on! (*in rhythm*) Five, six, seven, eight!

(*Cut to the wings, stage left, on the end of this. A worried Starlight approaches Twilight, who has floated up the script for a quick read. Out in front, the rickety dance rehearsal goes on, with Celestia no longer making any effort to duplicate their moves.*)

**Celestia:** (*even more stilted than before*) Come on, Starswirl! Throw off that musty hat and let’s have a—a dance!

(*A quick nip, and she has tossed Sandbar’s hat to land on one of the levers Pinkie was using to control the prop sun. Twilight and Starlight start in fright as its weight engages the mechanism, opening the trapdoor under the students and dropping them out of sight with a six-part yell as the music stops. There follows a loud crash, a cloud of dust, and a shower of orange shards that marks the destruction of the sphere. The view slowly clears to show the hapless scholars below the stage, groaning amid a scramble of mussed wigs and costumes, bent prop horns, and the debris of the wrecked set piece. Celestia has escaped the ignominious plunge.*)

**Celestia:** Oh, dear. (*addressing herself o.s.*) I think we have a problem!

**Applejack:** (*whispering, to Twilight/Starlight*) Yeah. Our lead actress is a disaster!

(*Fade to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to Applejack, Fluttershy, Pinkie, Rarity, Starlight, and Spike backstage. Twilight paces back and forth past them, hyperventilating to beat the band and no longer toting her script.*)

**Twilight:** What are we gonna do? If I tell Celestia she’s terrible, it’ll hurt her feelings and I’ll be a bad friend. But if I keep her in the show, she’ll be the laughingstock of Equestria and I’ll be a worse friend!

**Applejack:** (*stepping forward*) You need to tell Celestia the truth, Twilight.

**Twilight:** (*sardonically*) Any other suggestions?

**Spike:** Why don’t we just cancel the show? (*Twilight leans into his face.*)

**Twilight:** (*acidly*) *Real* suggestions?

**Spike:** No, think about it. (*Twilight backs off.*) Right now, most of Equestria doesn’t even know we’re doing a ones-versary play. If we shut it down—

**Rarity:** (*catching on*) —nopony will ever miss it! (*Pan slowly across the group on the next line.*)

**Starlight:** So they’ll never find out Princess Celestia’s a bad actress!

**Fluttershy:** And she won’t be embarrassed! (*Stop on her and Pinkie, who is trotting gleefully in place but stops.*)

**Pinkie:** Ah! It’s the perfect plan!

**Rainbow:** (*from o.s.*) All right! (*She swoops in above the group.*) I just finished telling everypony to come to our play!

**Twilight:** (*stricken*) You…did?

**Rainbow:** Yeah! You shoulda seen how excited they got when they found out Celestia was in it! They said they’d tell their friends, and then their friends would tell *their* friends—everypony in Equestria’s gonna see this thing!

(*Finally taking notice of the dismayed expressions that have rooted themselves onto the other faces, she settles to the stage and turns to face Twilight.*)

**Rainbow:** Uh, did I miss something?

**Twilight:** Just a bright light of hope being snuffed. But that’s okay. (*resolutely, stomping the stage*) If we can’t cancel the show, I know what I have to do.

**Applejack:** (*pointedly*) Be honest with Celestia and give the lead role to somepony else?

**Twilight:** Not a chance.

**Applejack:** Twilight, you know truth is a huge part of friendship.

**Twilight:** And so is making another pony’s dreams come true. Look. I promised Celestia that this time she could be a part of the play, instead of just watching it. And I plan to keep that promise.

**Fluttershy:** But…how?

(*Dissolve to a long shot of the School and zoom in slowly.*)

**Celestia:** (*voice over*) *You* want to give *me* acting lessons?

(*Cut to her, Twilight, and Spike walking along a hallway inside. Spike has shed his director outfit.*)

**Twilight:** (*hastily*) No, no, no, no, no, no, no. (*Laugh; normal cadence.*) More like a special workshop with other actors, to…take your performance from good to flawless. (*Spike shoots her a concerned look.*)

**Celestia:** Thank you so much, Twilight! This is what I always knew theater must be about—that special stage-pony bond of shared trust and honesty. (*They arrive at a set of closed doors.*)

**Spike:** (*forcing a smile*) Yeah! (*Chuckle; glare at Twilight.*) *That’s* what it is.

(*He clears his throat as his boss’s magic wraps around the doorknobs; cut to the other side as they swing open. This is Twilight’s lecture hall, as seen near the end of Part Two of “School Daze,” and two other ponies are already present on the stage in front of its blackboard—members of the Method Mares troupe seen in “Made in Manehattan.” One is Onstage, the gray earth pony stallion in an overcoat and turtleneck, while the other is Raspberry Beret, the pink mare in a turtleneck and magenta beret.*)

**Twilight:** Princess Celestia, meet Method Mare performers Onstage and Raspberry Beret!

(*Each dips his/her head upon being named, and in short order Celestia is descending to them.*)

**Onstage:** (*overdone French accent, as he and Raspberry bow*) *Avec* pleasure, Your Majesty.

**Celestia:** (*slightly awestruck*) The pleasure is all mine. (*Laugh.*) If there’s anything I can do to become a better Equestrian thespian, I will. What do you have planned?

**Onstage:** (*in his normal British accent*) Well, I thought we’d make it up as we go along… (*Chuckle.*) …otherwise known as… (*overdone French; he and Raspberry strike a pose*) …improvisation!

**Raspberry:** Yes, and we can start as soon as we get out of this box.

(*Recall that her accent is similar to his. As she finishes, both she and Onstage start to circle in place, poking their front hooves against a set of imaginary walls that have them closely penned in on all sides.*)

**Celestia:** (*confusedly, circling behind them*) What box?

(*On the sidelines, Twilight voices a queasy little moan while Spike uses a quill and clipboard to take notes. Wipe to the rest of the gang, save Pinkie, to either side of the open trapdoor on the stage. Pink hooves toss chunks of the smashed prop sun up from below. A few houses have been constructed to stage right as a background.*)

**Twilight:** (*trotting into view, moaning fretfully*) How’s it going over here?

**Rainbow:** (*pointing at pieces*) That sun will never rise again. (*Below stage level; all six peer in worriedly as Pinkie straightens up to face them.*)

**Pinkie:** That’s why I have something even better!

(*One fluid blur of motion allows her to climb out; cut to the group as she pulls one end of a long string into view. A gargantuan yellow balloon tied to the other end drifts into view above the mares.*)

**Rarity:** (*gasping happily*) It’s the perfect substitute!

(*But only for the short time it takes to float up and burst against the stalactites that project from the natural-rock ceiling. The balloon sounds off like the world’s largest whoopee cushion as the contents rush out, and it veers crazily overhead before dropping neatly through the trapdoor. Now the camera has backed up far enough to pick out the cans of paint standing by the house backdrops.*)

**Rarity:** (*faintly*) It *was* the perfect substitute.

(*Twilight lets go with an exasperated sigh and stalks away. Wipe to her lecture hall; she poofs in here to sit next to Spike, who is still taking notes as Celestia, Onstage, and Raspberry continue their work down in front.*)

**Twilight:** (*to Spike*) *Please* give me something to be happy about!

(*The baby dragon gestures silently with his quill.*)

**Onstage:** Let’s try… (*Brainstorm; happy gasp.*) …visualization! (*Deep breath; point toward Celestia/Raspberry*) And…you’re skiing!

(*Cut to these two. His fellow actor quickly shifts gears, rising to her hind legs and swaying back and forth as if maneuvering down a slope, but Celestia just stares dumbly at her.*)

**Raspberry:** Whoosh! Whoosh! (*on one leg*) Oh, it’s so snowy today. (*shivering*) Brr! I’m getting chilly! (*Laugh.*)  
**Celestia:** Should I get you a blanket?

**Onstage:** (*from o.s.*) All aboard!

(*Cut to him, sitting on a chair and tapping a second one.*)

**Onstage:** (*as Celestia sits*) The Ponyville Express is leaving the station! (*imitating train sounds*) Woo-woo! Chugga-chugga-chugga-chugga-chugga-chugga-chugga-chugga-chug! (*Cut to Celestia on the end of this.*)

**Celestia:** It is? But I don’t see anything. (*Raspberry comes up on her other side.*)

**Raspberry:** Let’s be weeping willows in the wind! (*on hind legs, bending back and forth*) We are strong in adversity, yet supple as we bow to fate. (*Drop to her hocks.*)

**Onstage:** (*to Celestia*) Well, what do you feel?

**Celestia:** Nnnnn-nothing. (*Sudden realization.*) Oh! The classroom floor under my hooves! (*Twilight cringes…*) Does that count?

(*…and claps a hoof to her face in undiluted disbelief. Cut to Pinkie at the backstage trapdoor controls; she is reading the script, but throws it aside with a big grin the moment Twilight teleports in next to her.*)

**Twilight:** (*flatly*) Do I want to know?

(*The pink pony yanks a lever down, triggering a single enormous marshmallow to rise from the open trapdoor on the pole that had supported the prop sun. The other mares are busy at various jobs around the stage.*)

**Pinkie:** Wait for it…

(*“It,” in this case, involves the sugary mass catching fire and throwing flaming flecks all over the place. Some strike and char the backdrop houses Applejack is painting.*)

**Applejack:** (*snarling, with growing rage*) Pinkie Pie!

(*She snatches the handle of a nearby water bucket in her teeth and slings the contents over the marshmallow, dousing it to leave only a lump of charcoal impaled on the pole. The gout of excess liquid arcs across the stage and catches both Twilight and Pinkie in the face.*)

**Pinkie:** Whaaat? It’s realistic! The sun is just like a burning marshmallow!

(*Big grin. Wipe to a close-up of a badly rattled Spike in the lecture hall. Onstage’s hind legs are visible to one side of him, and a soaked Twilight steps up on the other to drip on his head. He glances up at her as the camera zooms out and she uses a quick spell to dry herself out. Cut to Celestia and Raspberry on the stage and zoom in slowly, the Princess gesticulating expansively as the actor sits facing her.*)

**Twilight:** (*from o.s.*) What are they doing now? (*Cut to frame all five; Raspberry is completely lost.*)

**Spike:** (*sighing*) The simplest acting exercise they could think of—a game of charades. (*Back to Celestia.*)

**Raspberry:** (*from o.s.*) A puppy…a duckbilled platypus… (*Back to her.*) …antidisestablishmentarianism! Oh, I give up! What?!?

**Celestia:** (*smiling*) My love for Equestria and all the ponies in it! Twilight— (*Raspberry puts a fed-up hoof to her face.*) —you felt what I was emoting, didn’t you?

**Twilight:** (*very hesitantly, forcing a big shaky smile*) Yeah!

**Spike:** (*dryly, to Onstage*) Now that’s the best acting we’ve seen all day.

(*Dissolve to a long shot of the amphitheater, the curtains closed to leave only the lectern visible at stage right. Night has fallen, and Princess Luna makes her way down the aisle to sit among the audience, which is of considerable size and murmuring expectantly. Backstage, Twilight has twitched one curtain aside far enough to get a good look at the packed house.*)

**Twilight:** (*slightly unhinged*) Okay!

(*She paces past Applejack, Fluttershy, Rainbow, Rarity, Starlight, and Spike with quill/scroll in hand.*)

**Twilight:** I tried, and tried, and tried. But we have to face facts. We can’t make Celestia an actress, so there’s only one thing to do!

**Applejack:** Tell her the truth, finally? (*Twilight’s eyes shrink to points.*)

**Twilight:** *No!*

(*She darts away, missing the five mares’ defeated sighs, and conjures up a copy of the script while standing by the trapdoor controls.*)

**Twilight:** I’ve rewritten the script to give Celestia a more artistic part, with no lines. (*Pinkie stretches her head into view.*)

**Pinkie:** And to make sure the show’s a hit— (*Script poofs away; she hops to the panel.*) —I’ve whipped up the biggest, bestest, flashiest fake sun EVER!

(*On the end of this, she jumps up and yanks one lever to send a glare of white light spilling over herself and Twilight from somewhere out of view. Twilight gasps, the other six do likewise when the camera cuts to them, and a longer shot of the entire stage reveals the reason: a gigantic ball of lit fireworks, sloppily taped together and hanging from the rafters above the now-closed trapdoor. Applejack has repaired the damage done to her backdrop-house paint job by the flaming marshmallow, which has been removed.*)

**Twilight:** (*uneasily*) Uh, Pinkie, that looks…unsafe.

**Pinkie:** Why would untested magic fireworks that I bought in a back alley from Trixie at midnight be unsafe?

(*The violet Princess can muster no answer before the whole mess ignites in a blinding flash and a wall of smoke. Ponies and dragon bug out to avoid stopping bottle rockets with their faces, the pyrotechnics bursting to yield showers of sparks in various colors and designs. Twilight glances fearfully upward to find one final leviathan of a rocket emblazoned with Trixie’s cutie mark, hanging from the ceiling with the fuse burning fast. Cut to an extreme close-up of her panic-stricken face, one eye squinched shut and the spark reflected in the other. Out in the audience, Luna is having a pleasant chat with Fleur when a muffled explosion from behind the curtains very nearly tears them off, shaking the entire stage and the vicinity. It is accompanied by a roll of smoke, scorch marks that stain the stage from beneath the curtain, and several muted yells of fright.*)

(*Cut to a screenful of haze, which clears to give an extreme close-up of Twilight lying on the stage floor and coughing to clear her lungs. Most of her horn is badly charred and smoking, and a longer shot tells that most of the stage setup has fared exactly as well. As Twilight sits up to her haunches, a wall of sparks styled as Trixie’s smugly grinning face—framed by her wizard’s hat and cape collar—drifts down and faces away behind her. As for the others: Fluttershy huddles in terror, hooves over eyes as Starlight tries to comfort her. A hovering Rainbow stares at the smoldering remains of the backdrop houses, which Applejack gallops in to extinguish with a bucket of water. Rarity blows out a small flame licking at her rack of costumes. Spike has ended up clutching at one of the overhead spotlights. Another one crashes down to the stage; in close-up, Pinkie leans in to blow the smoke and soot away from the shell-shocked Twilight’s horn as the camera zooms in slowly. An eye twitch yields to a scowl of purest fury, which in turn gives way to a feral scream at the top of her lungs that prompts the others to start backing away*)

**Twilight:** I can’t take it anymore! (*stomping*) It was supposed to be a simple play! Just one simple play! And then everything goes wrong, from the stage to the props, right down to the *WORST LEAD ACTRESS IN EQUESTRIA!!*

(*She heaves for breath as the night-sky backdrop gives up the ghost and slithers off its supports to pool on the stage. Cut to the other seven, gathered off to one side and gasping in fright, then back to Twilight. Catching on to the vibe that something might be very, very wrong, she pivots to check behind herself and finds a poleaxed Celestia waiting in the wings. She gasps deeply and tries to keep herself from bursting into tears, the camera zooming in slowly before the view fades to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to the entire group, a gobsmacked Celestia advancing slowly toward her fellow Princess.*)

**Celestia:** Twilight, if you honestly felt I was a bad actress, why didn’t you tell me?

**Twilight:** I-I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean to insult your acting! It’s just I…I got so stressed! (*She huddles down before Celestia’s gimlet-eyed glare.*) But that’s no excuse for what I said. You have every right to be upset with me.

**Celestia:** (*sharply*) I’m not upset because you insulted my acting. (*Twilight stands up.*)

**Twilight:** You’re not?

**Celestia:** I’m upset because in all the time we’ve known each other, I thought I taught you about the importance of friendship, trust, and honesty! (*She takes wing and departs.*)

**Twilight:** Celestia! Wait! (*She tries to follow, only for Pinkie to tackle her out of the air.*)

**Pinkie:** No! You can’t fly away now! (*pointing toward curtain*) Look!

(*Cut to Fluttershy, who has pulled the edge of the curtains back for a nervous peek at the audience.*)

**Fluttershy:** Ponies are taking their seats for the show!

**Rainbow:** (*laughing, pulling her head back from another gap*) Standing room only! Did I do a good job of advertising for this thing or what?

(*Sour looks from Applejack, Rarity, Starlight, and Spike take the starch out of her in a blink.*)

**Rainbow:** Sorry.

**Starlight:** We can’t put on a show with no lead actress!

**Applejack:** (*to Twilight, helping her up*) You go find Celestia. We’ll figure out a way to stall this thing ’til you get back.

(*Her confidence restored, the violet mare lifts off and flaps away after her mentor; cut to Applejack and Pinkie watching her go.*)

**Spike:** (*from o.s., sarcastically*) Good luck. (*Cut to him looking through the curtain; he lets it drop back.*) Nopony’s gonna volunteer to try to tame *that*.

(*The remaining mares slowly hem him in from all sides, Rainbow and Rarity fixing him with knowing looks at uncomfortably close range.*)

**Rarity:** No*pony*, indeed.

(*Finding himself well and truly caught, the little guy grimaces and does his best to swallow down his fear even as sweat begins to trickle down his face. Cut to him out in front of the curtain, a spotlight pinning him in place as surely as if his feet were riveted to the stage. The spectators have gone dead silent.*)

**Spike:** So… (*Chuckle; clear throat.*) …uh…who likes juggling?

(*He produces half a dozen bowling pins from behind his back with a forced, terrified grin. Dissolve to a patch of night sky and pan slowly as Twilight bursts upward through a cloud.*)

**Twilight:** Princess Celestia! (*Zoom out slightly; she is some distance back from Celestia.*) Please wait! Can we talk?

**Celestia:** I’m afraid I haven’t much to say, Twilight.

(*She zooms ahead, but Twilight wastes no time in pulling even.*)

**Twilight:** All right, then, just listen. You’ve guided me since I was a filly. You’ve given me knowledge, and advice, and friendship. Just once, I wanted to be able to give something back to you. (*Celestia flicks an eye back toward her; she moves closer.*) I know what I did was wrong. I should’ve told you the truth. But I promised you could be in our play. (*circling to Celestia’s other side*) I-I had to make it work. Nothing would make me feel worse than knowing I disappointed you.

**Celestia:** You really mean that?

(*A moment’s ascent, and she has knocked through a cloud from below and sat on it; Twilight pops up a moment later.*)

**Twilight:** Of course! (*sitting to face her*) I look up to you more than anypony I’ve ever met. I hate to let you down—like I did.

**Celestia:** (*sighing heavily*) You had good intentions, Twilight. But you know that the truth is always better than a well-meant lie. Didn’t Applejack remind you?

**Twilight:** (*sighing*) About a hundred times. And now, because I didn’t listen to her, I’ve ruined your whole ones-versary.

**Celestia:** (*smiling*) Well, I don’t know about that. Isn’t there an old saying—“the show must go on”? (*standing*) There may be a way for us to save the play yet. (*Twilight follows suit.*)

**Twilight:** But how? I mean, if I’m being completely honest… (*An almighty grimace.*) …you’re not an actress. (*Strained grin.*)

**Celestia:** No, but I *am* a princess.

(*Wipe to a length of closed curtain, through which Spike bursts into view in an unsuccessful attempt to avoid the tomatoes being flung his way by the booing crowd on the far side. He winds up sprawled out on his face and has lost his bowling pins.*)

**Spike:** Good news—free food!

(*And with that, he pulls the splattered remains of one fruit off his head and chomps it down.*)

**Spike:** Bad news—this play is officially a disaster.

(*The next words draw all eyes toward the backstage entrance, where Twilight and Celestia are ambling in.*)

**Celestia:** Fortunately, I know a thing or two about how to deal with those.

**Starlight:** (*relieved*) You came back!

**Celestia:** Yes, but let’s celebrate later. Right now, we have a show to do!

**Rarity:** But—but—but how? The audience is about to riot! We have no backdrop! And our lead actress is—

(*Pinkie corks the incipient meltdown with a hoof and lets Rarity see her flick two scared blue eyes in Celestia’s direction and back. The meaning is all too clear: “don’t finish that sentence if you know what’s good for you!” After the hoof is removed, Rarity stammers her way to a halt with one of the shakiest grins ever to cross her face.*)

**Celestia:** —no longer in that role. (*all business*) Rarity, Applejack, Pinkie Pie, Twilight, go calm the audience. Let them know the play will start in just a minute.

(*Twilight teleports away as the other three named mares trot purposefully off.*)

**Celestia:** Rainbow Dash, bring us some clouds and place them behind the stage.

(*Rainbow nods and flies out the backstage entrance; within seconds, she has made several round trips to deposit enough clouds back here for a pile that stands at least twice Celestia’s height. Spike watches the deliveries, now clean of tomato residue from the audience’s earlier pelting.*)

**Celestia:** There. That’s our new backdrop. Starlight, do you have a copy of the script? (*Starlight conjures one up…*) Spike, you narrate the play. (*…and crosses to Spike with it.*)

(*He catches it with a smile. Now Fluttershy is the only pony who has not yet moved.*)

**Celestia:** Fluttershy will be our new lead.

**Fluttershy:** (*increasingly unnerved*) Oh, my. *Me?* Playing *you?* While you watch me playing you? Oh, no. Oh, no. (*sitting on haunches*) I think my stage fright is coming back.

(*She pulls out a paper bag and starts to hyperventilate into it.*)

**Celestia:** Visualize with me. (*Fluttershy calms down, drops the bag, and closes her eyes.*) You’re a princess. (*Zoom in slowly.*) Regal. Commanding. Confident. Feel the rising sun’s warmth. (*A small smile on the yellow face as Celestia taps her.*) Equestria needs you.

(*The blue-green eyes open and Fluttershy—now much more composed—nods serenely up at her. Wipe to a long shot of the stage, the improvised cloud backdrop visible through the opening curtains. Spike stands near stage right, a few feet from the lectern at that end, and is no longer carrying his script. Zoom in slowly; the original night-sky backdrop and houses are gone, and Twilight and Celestia become visible in the wings just behind the lectern.*)

**Spike:** (*crossing to it*) Once upon a time, before Celestia— (*Spotlights flick on.*) —Equestria was suffering a terrible hardship. (*Close-up as he reaches it.*) Raising the sun every morning was so hard that it took five unicorn sorcerers plus Starswirl the Bearded to do it.

(*On the end of this line, the six students emerge onto the stage. All but Sandbar are in the same groupings and locations as they were in the Act One rehearsal, while he walks in at center through the massed clouds. Their costumes are rather the worse for wear after all the rehearsal mishaps, and the audience yuks it up heartily at their bedraggled appearance.*)

**Mare:** You call *those* great sorcerers?

**Twilight:** (*to Celestia*) Oh, no! Hecklers! What should we do?

(*Sweat streams down Spike’s face as he looks desperately to his notes for guidance; Celestia leans in close as the jeering subsides.*)

**Celestia:** (*whispering*) Spike! Improvise! (*She backs off; he gets himself under control.*)

**Spike:** (*to audience*) Uh, yes! And…uh…raising the sun each day was super-draining. But you can see that for yourselves, right? I mean…

(*Cut to a slow pan along the youths, who seem to be taking this in stride.*)

**Spike:** (*from o.s.*) …do these six guys look beat-up or what? Starswirl’s so stressed, he’s got kinks in his horn!

(*Cut to the audience as they voice another round of laughter, this one free of malice.*)

**Spike:** (*from o.s.*) But that’s okay.

(*Back to the six; now Fluttershy advances regally through their ranks, wearing scaled-down copies of Celestia’s tiara, necklace, and shoes and a white horn. Her mane/tail have been dusted with tiny stars and dyed to match the pastel hues of the real McCoy.*)

**Spike:** (*from o.s.*) ’Cause it turns out Celestia had the special power to raise the sun all by herself!

**Fluttershy:** It’s time for a new day in Equestria!

(*She holds a confident pose, but it dissolves into apprehension after nothing happens for a long moment.*)

**Twilight:** (*to Celestia, groaning*) In all the commotion, we forgot we don’t have a sun! What do we do?

**Celestia:** (*smiling*) We play charades.

(*As Fluttershy grimaces and begins to shake in her gold shoes, the sovereign raises her face and one foreleg toward the sky. The pegasus follows suit; cut to the audience as a warm light spreads slowly to envelop them. Murmurs of awe and appreciation ripple through the seats as the camera cuts to a long shot of the amphitheater—and the actual sun rising over the hills behind it. Backstage, Twilight beams up at Celestia, whose horn is aglow to kick off the new day just a bit ahead of schedule; the crowd now cheers and squeals with delight, including all four members of the Method Mares.*)

**Onstage:** (*to Raspberry*) My goodness! I had no idea this production would have such elaborate special effects!

(*Once the sun has fully risen, a flare of white shifts the view to an extreme close-up of Celestia’s hooves stepping through the loose roses that now lie scattered across the stage. On the start of the next line, cut to frame her and the approaching others and zoom out slowly.*)

**Celestia:** Judging by how many flowers the audience threw, it seems our play was a success. (*She levitates and bundles a few.*)

**Fluttershy:** I just feel bad you never got a chance to actually be in it.

**Celestia:** You shouldn’t. (*Cut to Fluttershy; she continues o.s., floating the roses to her.*) I never felt I had to be onstage to be a part of the show. (*Back to her.*) All I ever wanted was to share an honest bond of creativity, artistry, and happiness with my friends, and that’s exactly what I got to do.

**Twilight:** Thank you for saving our play, Princess Celestia.

**Celestia:** You’re welcome, Twilight. But from now on, none of you will have to call me “Princess” anymore. (*Mild consternation among the group.*)

**Twilight, Spike:** Huh?

**Spike:** Wait, what? We don’t?

**Celestia:** No. I had so much fun tonight, I’ve decided to give up my crown, step down from the throne, and devote all of my time to the theater!

**Twilight:** (*sputtering badly*) You…*what?!*

(*Celestia leans down to her with a wink and smile.*)

**Celestia:** Gotcha! Maybe I’m not such a bad actress after all.

(*She backs off, a smile returning to the violet face. Cut to a long shot of the stage, zooming out slowly as all share a good laugh over the prank. A set of curtains is pulled shut over the scene, and the view fades to black.*)