**SOUNDS OF SILENCE**

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of the Castle and School of Friendship during the day and zoom in slowly.*)

**Twilight Sparkle:** (*voice over, excitedly*) I can’t believe you two are going on a friendship quest!

(*Cut to a set of closed doors within; her magic opens them to admit her, Applejack, and Fluttershy from the other side. The flares on the haunches of these last two give away the summons they have received for a new mission.*)

**Twilight:** This is amazing!

(*Longer shot: they are entering the throne room, whose central table is displaying its magical map. Images of the trebled apples and butterflies are circling above a particular mountain.*)

**Applejack:** What do you mean, Twilight? We’ve been on one together before.

**Twilight:** Exactly! This is the first time the map has teamed up the same ponies for a second quest! (*Applejack and Fluttershy smile.*)

**Fluttershy:** That *is* special.

**Applejack:** Heh. (*nudging her; Twilight backs o.s.*) Must be ’cause we’re extra-good at solvin’ friendship problems.

**Twilight:** (*from o.s.*) I hope so— (*All three again; she turns to the map.*) —’cause it looks like this one might be a little tricky. You’re going to the Peaks of Peril.

**Fluttershy:** (*terrified*) The Peaks of P-P-P-P-Peril?

**Applejack:** Ah, it’s just a name. It doesn’t mean anythin’.

**Fluttershy:** Like how Cloudsdale is in clouds, and the Crystal Empire is made of crystal?

**Applejack:** Fair point. So what can you tell us about the place, Twilight?

**Twilight:** Only what Rockhoof told me. Back in his day, nopony knew much about the Peaks of Peril— (*floating a shield forward*) —except for the legend on this ancient shield.

(*It is circular, with a chipped brass rim, and depicts two ponies chasing each other’s tail around its center. One is rendered in medium browns, with a single convoluted horn arcing back from the center of the forehead—not too dissimilar from a straightened-out deer antler. The other, in blues/pinks/violets, has pure white eyes and horn, hooves tipped in flame, and a mane of streaming fire. Both have long, lion-like tails ending in tufts that match the manes, patches of scales on the back that are partly hidden under the manes, and flowers and licks of flame adorning their respective edges of the shield. Close-up of the brown one, on the upper half.*)

**Twilight:** (*from o.s., pointing to it*) It says a group called the kirin used to live there, known for their kindness and truth-speaking. (*Cut to Applejack and Fluttershy.*)

**Applejack:** Now we know why the map called us! (*Wink.*)

**Twilight:** (*from o.s.*) Unfortunately, other creatures also lived there.

(*The shield is turned to put the other creature topside.*)

**Twilight:** (*from o.s.*) The nirik—fearsome beasts of pure fire! (*Zoom out to frame her on the end of this.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*shuddering*) Maybe you should go instead of me, Twilight. (*Nervous giggle; the shield is down.*)

**Twilight:** Sorry, Fluttershy. Flanks don’t lie.

(*The yellow mare glances worriedly at her pulsing mark in close-up; zoom out to frame all three again.*)

**Applejack:** (*foreleg across shoulders, pulling her close*) Ah, I’m sure the two of us’ll get that friendship problem solved no matter what kinda creature has it.

(*Fluttershy can manage only the shakiest of giggles in response before the view fades to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to a stretch of railroad track and a station that consists of only a row of flat rock slabs for a platform and a ramshackle ticket booth roofed with corrugated tin. These stand in the middle of an arid plain against a backdrop of a cluster of craggy mountain summits—the Peaks of Peril—and a red/white-striped barricade is set up to mark the end of the line. A train pulls into view and hisses to a stop, then reverses course to leave Applejack and Fluttershy on the platform. Zoom out as they regard the summits and a gust of wind kicks up to play havoc with leaves and manes alike; their cutie marks have gone quiet.*)

**Applejack:** Guess nopony else is goin’ out as far as we are. (*The wind dies out.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*shivering*) Maybe they know something we don’t.

**Applejack:** Now, Fluttershy, I’ve told you a dozen times. There’s nothin’ to be sca—

(*A stooped, emaciated silhouette emerges from behind her as she speaks, and it cuts her off with a wheezing yell that sets both mares to screaming in fright for a moment. Once they have themselves under control, it speaks up with the gravelly voice of an old stallion.*)

**Silhouette:** I’m sorry.

(*He steps fully into the light: blue uniform jacket, white dress shirt, red tie, red-striped blue peaked cap, ticket-dispensing machine slung around neck. He is an earth pony, with a gray-green coat, untidy short blond mane/tail/beard with plenty of chin stubble, one brown eye open considerably wider than the other, and one snaggle tooth protruding from his lower jaw. Fluttershy screams again and dives behind Applejack as he approaches, only risking a glance once he has stopped moving.*)

**Fluttershy:** You really startled us. (*Shiver.*)

**Ticket seller:** Oh, it’s just that I’m not used to seeing anypony taking the train to… (*ominously*) …the end of the line. The final destination. The last stop!

**Applejack:** (*pushing him back*) We get the picture. Why?

(*This shot frames his cutie mark as a pair of tickets.*)

**Ticket seller:** (*glancing toward Peaks*) Nothing but uncharted terrain and wild beasts out that way.

(*He launches into a gale of demented laughter that instantly has both travelers wondering when the next express back to Ponyville is due, and he keeps it up while backing into the booth and letting the door swing shut behind him. Even this is not enough for him to get it all out of his system, as he shoves his face up against the window and cackles some more while pulling down its shade to mark it as closed for business. The overall effect is to leave Fluttershy a huddled, shaking ball of nerves with forelegs gripping a slightly rattled Applejack.*)

**Applejack:** (*gently dislodging her*) Well, maybe there’s a little somethin’ to be scared of.

(*They set out toward the badlands that ring the Peaks. Dissolve to them at the edge of a stream; Applejack leaps from the bank to a flat outcropping of rock with a grunt and motions for Fluttershy to follow. The yellow wings carry the latter close enough for Applejack to pull her onto the perch, and the camera pans/tilts up to follow the workhorse as she starts to bound up the ledges that make up the Peaks’ foothills. From here, dissolve to an extreme close-up of a patch of mud as her hooves splat down into it, then cut to a longer shot. Now picking her way through a patch of swampland, Applejack is quickly set upon by a swarm of flying insects; unable to wave them off, she uncorks a frustrated groan and gallops off through the muck with them in hot pursuit.*)

(*Dissolve to a deep crevasse, the camera pointing straight up toward the edges from several feet below the surface. Applejack steps up and hurls herself across the gap, barely catching the other edge with her forelegs and pulling herself up as dislodged rock fragments tumble away. The mud is gone from her hooves now. Yet another dissolve brings up a tract of underbrush; she bulldozes through this from behind and into view—dirty, mane/tail badly disordered, short of breath. Ahead of her is a set of near-vertical rock faces, broken only by the very occasional ledge and a tangle of long vines that reach nearly all the way down.*)

**Applejack:** Those must be the Peaks of Peril. Whoo. (*glancing behind herself*) Tough goin’, huh, Fluttershy?

(*The name has barely left her mouth before the green eyes pop in absolute disbelief—no sign of her traveling companion anywhere.*)

**Applejack:** (*voice raised*) Fluttershy?

(*A longer shot gives away absolutely no sign of the prodigal pegasus, and Applejack drops her head with a frustrated grumble and starts plodding back the way she came. Dissolve from one obstacle to the next, in reverse order: she makes a yelling jump over the crevasse, squelches through the swamp while groaning and trying in vain to fend off the insects, and jumps back down the ledges toward the stream—losing her hat in the process. It lands in the water and floats to the opposite edge, fetching up near a tall stalk festooned with white-edged flowers in a vivid shade of blue. A squirrel nips this up in its teeth and brings it to Fluttershy, who has procured one of her own, and three others of its own kind. She passes hers over so the squirrel can stash them both in a stockpile behind a tree root.*)

**Fluttershy:** There. That should be enough flowers to keep your tree cozy.

(*One orange-tan hoof plants itself in the fore; cut to frame an irate Applejack facing her, the sodden and filthy hat lying within easy reach.*)

**Applejack:** Fluttershy!

(*Teeth lock onto the crown and flip the headwear back up to its usual perch.*)

**Applejack:** (*advancing toward Fluttershy*) What are you doin’?! This is no time for visitin’ varmints! We’re on a friendship quest, remember? (*The squirrels, spooked, chitter and gather around Fluttershy’s legs.*)

**Fluttershy:** Yes, but actu— (*Applejack leans into her face.*)

**Applejack:** *Come on!* We’re burnin’ daylight! (*She starts to push Fluttershy forward with her head.*)

**Fluttershy:** I know, but what I found out is that— (*Applejack stops and circles to face her.*)

**Applejack:** Now we gotta get up that peak! I figure if we use some rope and elbow grease, we can make it up half—

**Fluttershy:** (*supremely fed up*) *APPLEJACK!! CAN YOU PLEASE LISTEN TO ME?!?*

(*This outburst stuns the blonde into silence, broken only by Fluttershy clearing her throat. She continues in a calmer tone, but one that will brook no malarkey.*)

**Fluttershy:** What I’m trying to say is, the squirrels told me a shortcut they take to the kirin village.

(*Dissolve to a different stretch of the Peaks’ base, this one marked by a large, moss-grown stone slab that juts upward from the bushes. Fluttershy flies to this and tips it over to one side with a bit of effort as a now-clean and noticeably chastened Applejack trots up. A narrow passage now stands exposed, and Fluttershy pulls some of the plant life away to widen the entrance a bit.*)

**Applejack:** Oh. (*Chuckle; Fluttershy flies over to her.*) Sorry, Fluttershy. I s’pose I got a little too caught up in the adventure.

**Fluttershy:** Oh, that’s all right. (*leading her in*) If you hadn’t come back to get me, I probably would’ve talked to the squirrels all day.

(*Cut to within the passage during this second sentence—the two mares find their voices echoing and the space barely wide enough to squeeze through—then to its exit after she finishes. Both freeze in their tracks with a gasp, the camera cutting to just behind them and zooming out. What they have found is a village whose abundant greenery stands in sharp contrast to the near-lifeless plains that surround the Peaks. Huts and houses with arched roofs covered by sod and palm leaves; market stalls boasting a variety of produce; a few dwellings constructed in trees and connected one to the next by rope/plank bridges; a small fountain gushing merrily in a pool at the center of it all; a stream coursing along the perimeter and past Applejack and Fluttershy. The earth pony stares slack-jawed as a butterfly comes to rest on the pegasus’ nose, bringing a giggle—but it bugs out at the sound of rustling leaves that freaks Fluttershy out all over again.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*clutching at Applejack*) I hope that’s not a nirik.

(*Her breath catches in her throat as both glance apprehensively back the way they came. A pony-shaped silhouette jumps from one tree to another…a different one peeks out from behind a trunk…two move in toward the edge of the clearing in which Applejack and Fluttershy stand. Slow pan.*)

**Applejack:** Show yourself!

(*Ground level. From the bushes, a member of the kirin race—as depicted on the shield Twilight used for illustration during the prologue—steps out. Tall, mare, light grayish-brown coat, two-tone gray-green mane whose curling volume merges with a ruff of similarly colored hair around the throat, tufts of this same hair at the end of the tail and on the back of each hind leg, pale yellow back scales matching the hoof tips and the hide that extends from the hairline as a “blaze” stripe down the bridge of the nose. The ears fade to pale yellow at the tips, the horn is striped in two shades of deep red and framed by a small golden headpiece, and two dark red eyes with pale green shadow gaze impassively toward the newcomers. A glance across the way informs Fluttershy that quite a few other kirin in a range of colors have gathered to observe the proceedings, none wearing any ornamentation or nearly the same height—this one, Rain Shine, is their leader. All have the same general horn coloration, but different stripe patterns, and all but Rain have tufts on the backs of their forelegs that match their coats. Fluttershy shudders audibly as they slowly close in and takes cover behind Applejack.*)

**Applejack:** (*to Rain*) Well, hi! I’m Applejack, and this here’s Fluttershy.

(*The latter manages a timid wave, Applejack adds a slightly fearful grin, but there comes not a word. In fact, the kirin’s total lack of response suggests that they may not have understood the greeting or even been able to hear it. Now Fluttershy slaps on an unsteady grin and steps out.*)

**Fluttershy:** If you have any friendship problems, we’re here to help.

(*Nothing but a few quizzical tilts of heads this time.*)

**Applejack:** (*to Fluttershy*) Huh. Quiet bunch, ain’t they?

(*She clears her throat and addresses the kirin again, but at a slightly slower cadence and increased volume.*)

**Applejack:** We’re from Equestria, and we’re plumb tickled to meet y’all. (*No response; she loses some of her nerve.*) S-So, uh, what are your names?

(*Still nothing.*)

**Applejack:** (*very slowly and loudly, pointing to herself and Fluttershy*) Applejack. Fluttershy. (*normal cadence/volume*) Remember?

**Fluttershy:** (*to her*) Maybe they don’t understand us.

(*With a grimace, Applejack whips over to Rain.*)

**Applejack:** (*very, very slowly and loudly*) Do you understand Ponish?

(*A response at last, in the form of a solemn nod.*)

**Fluttershy:** Ohhh! But you don’t speak? (*Head shake.*)

**Applejack:** (*normal voice*) Don’t, or won’t?

**Fluttershy:** Will you excuse us for a moment?

(*Grinning stupidly at the kirin, she ushers Applejack out of their circle and hunches down for a little one-on-one.*)

**Fluttershy:** You have to ask yes-or-no questions, or they won’t answer.

**Applejack:** Uh, like talkin’ to Angel bunny?

**Fluttershy:** Not exactly. I can always tell what Angel is feeling, but these kirin don’t show anything. (*Applejack claps a hoof to her forehead and loses her cool.*)

**Applejack:** Well, how are we gonna solve a friendship problem if none of ’em will tell us what it is?

(*She and Fluttershy grimace at the realization of just how big a challenge the map has laid on them. Zoom in slowly and fade to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of the village, zooming in slowly, then cut to the central fountain. One kirin levitates a bucket to fill it, channeling the magic through the lighter stripes on that antler-like horn, then carries it off with handle in teeth as another trots past. Pan to follow this latter past a tree, where Applejack and Fluttershy move up to do a bit of field observation.*)

**Applejack:** These kirin are quieter than an apple blossom on snowfall. Still, there’s gotta be some way to make ’em speak.

(*She trots scowling ahead as Fluttershy chews her bottom lip fearfully. Cut to a stallion using his magic to sprout a seed; the sound of Applejack’s genial chuckling cuts in, and he glances back at her from the corner of his eye as she walks up.*)

**Applejack:** Beautiful day, ain’t it?

(*Now finding herself fully on the receiving end of his dispassionate gaze, she lets her big grin collapse in an irritated huff and turns her attention to a mare who is telekinetically lifting a piece of fruit from a stall.*)

**Applejack:** Knock-knock. (*The kirin stares at her and sets the fruit aside.*) Now you say, “Who’s there?”

(*Nothing but a confused inclination of the head.*)

**Applejack:** Police! (*whispering*) “Police who?” (*aloud*) Police say somethin’!

(*Her lopsided grin gets her exactly nowhere before the kirin excuses herself. Now Applejack hops onto a stump on one bank of the stream, near a scatter of kirin engaged in assorted small pursuits.*)

**Applejack:** Uh-oh. I feel a sneeze comin’ on! (*exaggeratedly*) Ahhhh-CHOOOOO!!

(*Inauthentic as the expulsion may have been, it does send the trusty brown hat flying off her head for a moment. What it fails to do is garner even a flicker of recognition from the locals in the area. Close-up of Applejack.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*from o.s.*) Gesundheit. (*Zoom out to frame her standing by the stump.*)

**Applejack:** (*groaning, sitting on haunches*) Don’t any of y’all talk?

(*Rain and a couple of others answer by backing off to either side of a path that leads into shadow and gesturing toward it. A close-up and slow zoom in past the pointing hooves reveals that this route leads to a rather wilder area of surrounding forest and has not been at all well maintained. Applejack’s eyes pop at the sight, her mouth curving into a determined smile.*)

**Applejack:** Now we’re gettin’ somewhere.

**Fluttershy:** (*shivering*) A dark spooky path that leads into unknown territory?

**Applejack:** (*patting a shoulder*) Tell you what, sugar cube. You stay and see if you can get anythin’ out of these here kirin. I’ll go try and find one that talks. (*She sets off.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*relieved*) Phew! (*calling after Applejack*) Be careful! And watch out for niriks!

(*She adds an S on the end of “nirik” to signify the plural, where Twilight did not in the prologue. Almost instantly, she finds herself on the receiving end of a mare’s point-blank scrutiny. She tries her best to grin, but gives it up when a stallion fixes his eyes on her from another angle. After a moment’s lip-chewing, the grin returns in a much less assured form that is not at all helped by her frightened shivers.*)

(*Dissolve to Applejack walking the forest path. A rustle in a clump of bushes brings her to a quick halt; the cause proves to be a squirrel jumping out to the open ground, but even this is enough to make the earth pony cry out in shock. It does nothing more than quickly pat down the fur of its face and head, putting her a bit more at ease when the camera cuts back to a head/shoulders close-up.*)

**Applejack:** (*wiping forehead*) Phew!

(*She pivots away from the bushes, the camera panning slightly to follow the motion and frame the face of a kirin mare who was definitely not there a few seconds ago. Pale off-white coat, red-brown mane and neck ruff, light green back scales and facial blaze, golden brown eyes shadowed in a pale brownish-gray, ears tipped in a slightly darker hue. Applejack lets off another scared yell and rears up briefly upon getting an eyeful of this one.*)

**Applejack:** Oh. Hey, you seen a kirin that talks? (*The kirin shakes her head.*) Any idea where I should look?

(*The head cocks to one side.*)

**Applejack:** (*frustrated, throwing hat down*) Oh, for the love of Celestia! Can’t you just say *somethin’?*

(*She sits despondently down on her haunches, eyes cast toward the ground, so that she misses the broad grin that steals across the face of the other mare, Autumn Blaze.*)

**Autumn:** (*laughing*) Gotcha!

(*Her voice is pleasant and playful, a bit throaty, and Applejack stares popeyed and gets upright during the next line, which carries a distinct scatterbrained vibe.*)

**Autumn:** Sorry, sorry, but that was too good. (*She floats Applejack’s hat lopsidedly back into place.*) Oh, you don’t know how much I miss jokes. High-larity. Am I pronouncing that right? (*Applejack adjusts it.*) Some words I haven’t said in a will—while, while. (*offering a hoof to shake*) Hi. I’m Autumn Blaze.

(*Applejack has barely touched it with one of her own before she finds the other off-white foreleg lying chummily across her back.*)

**Autumn:** (*pacing around her*) You’ve just arrived, and perhaps you’re tired or hungry or reflective and want to sleep and eat and journal, which you should do of course, but first—oh! (*hugging her*) Oh, what joy to talk with another creature, it’s been so long. You must tell me *everything* about you, there’s so much to say, so much to do! (*Bound past her.*) Oh, look at me, I’m going on and you haven’t seen—I mean, *have* you seen—what, um, what am I saying? Of course you haven’t, so just—I, yeah, I will j—follow me.

(*She trots placidly along the path, leaving one hopelessly flummoxed apple expert rooted in place.*)

**Applejack:** (*hoof to forehead*) That…was somethin’, all right.

(*She hustles after Autumn. Dissolve to an overhead shot of the two following a trail that rises to a clifftop on which a small house stands, cobbled together from an assortment of materials. Autumn bounds nimbly to the brink and pauses to let Applejack catch up. A gentle wind whistles through the trees, toying with manes and stray leaves, and Applejack’s jaw drops as the camera cuts to just behind the two. Before them, a vivid rainbow arcs majestically from one side of a stream to the other on the plains surrounding the Peaks. Zoom in slowly.*)

**Applejack:** (*awestruck*) Oh, wow… (*Soft gasp; head-on view of the pair.*) …this is amazing!

**Autumn:** Oh, you think so too? (*reverently; zoom in slowly on her*) The way the light shimmers off everything, like—like it all suddenly woke up the moment you saw it, and you realize—maybe the water and the mountains and the forests and the—yes, the rainbow and the stars in the sky are all looking back at you thinking the same thing, that we are a part of the everything. That maybe there’s just one thing and we are all it.

(*She wraps up this bit of philosophizing with a hopeful grin.*)

**Applejack:** (*scratching back of head*) I was gonna say it’s pretty, but—yeah.

(*She trots to follow Autumn’s humming bound and sniff at a tuft of flowers.*)

**Autumn:** Mmmm… (*walking backwards, leading Applejack along cliff; her energy returns*) …and this is just the first stop on a journey of amazing things to see, smell, tiptoe through, oh, I haven’t been able to share all of this with anypony in forever since they all took that vow of silence. So it’s a lot for me to, you know, pro-cess…process…uh, deal with.

(*Her first pronunciation of “process” puts a long O on the first syllable, while her second one makes the vowel short. Applejack shakes her head clear from this latest verbal fusillade.*)

**Applejack:** Whoa there. Vow of silence?

**Autumn:** (*sadly*) That’s, uh, that’s why they asked me to leave.

**Applejack:** I hope it’s not a sore subject, but…you mind explainin’ why y’all went quiet in the first place?

**Autumn:** It’s a long story.

**Applejack:** (*sighing*) You’d rather not talk about it?

**Autumn:** No.

**Applejack:** I-I underst—

***Brass fanfare, loose majestic tempo (F major)***

**Autumn:** (*beaming, twirling away on hind legs*) I’d rather sing

(*Butterflies swirl around her as she holds out the last word for several seconds.*)

***Bubbly string/mandolin/percussion melody with high woodwinds and low brass, moderate 4***

(*She prances among the insects and a plethora of baskets, fruits/vegetables, and hanging towels that have all had smiling faces drawn on them, and vocalizes for two bars. Butterflies then flit past the camera in extreme close-up, the view wiping behind them to frame kirin conversing and working animatedly among treetops and at ground level.*)

**Autumn:** The kirin used to speak and sing, we weren’t always quiet

(*Autumn, standing at a microphone on a stage, delivers a punchline that gets her audience roaring with laughter.*)

We told stories and funny jokes, my stand-up was a riot

***Mandolin out; acoustic guitar in***

(*Two get into a war of words over a vase, yanking it back and forth with their auras; smoke begins to dribble up from one horn.*)

But then one day a fight broke out and hurtful words were said

(*Licks of red/blue/pink flame wash upward over both, turning them into the nirik that decorated Twilight’s shield in the prologue. Deep gray-magenta bodies, hooves tipped with red fire, manes and tail/hind-leg tufts of the red/blue/pink, glowing white eyes topped by burning brows that shade from white to light blue, horns shading from deep magenta at the base to white at the tip, gray back scales faintly tinged with pink, mouths filled with nasty big pointy teeth. The vase shatters on the ground, forgotten in the face-off.*)

Flaring tempers were inflamed, destruction quickly spread

***Brief, sinister brass/percussion flourish; guitar out***

(*Zoom out; one after another, the kirin in the vicinity undergo their own transformations.*)

And flaming red from head to head even burnt our bread

***Mandolin in***

(*A burst washes over the screen and subsides to give a close-up of a smoking, overdone loaf held aloft by her; zoom out to frame her and Applejack.*)

**Autumn:** Sorry, I forgot how much I love rhyming. Where was I? (*tossing it aside*) Oh, right!

***Bass guitar in***

(*The blackened bakery product falls past the camera, triggering a wipe to a burned-out waste that used to be the village. All the kirin have reverted to their natural forms, but the arguments continue.*)

**Autumn:** My happy village lay in ruins, relationships got worse

Spoiler alert, we quickly learned that words could be a curse

***Mandolin out; guitar/piano in***

(*Rain gets quite fed up with all this nonsense in close-up, Autumn singing for her on the next line. The background dissolves to a patch of lush vegetation, and a zoom out frames her on one bank of a stream fed by a waterfall. Nirik have lined up on the path, which is lined with rune-inscribed standing stones on both banks.*)

“No more talking!” yelled our leader, the last thing said aloud

(*They submerge themselves completely one at a time, sending up clouds of steam as the flames are doused, and emerge as stone-faced kirin on the opposite bank.*)

Into the Stream of Silence we stepped as a crowd

(*A dissolve restores the wrecked village to its previous beauty, but a mildly vexed Autumn sits down on one of the paths.*)

The water cooled emotions, and peace was soon restored

***Stoptime***

But with no way to speak my thoughts, I got super-bored

***Original instrumentation resumes; stoptime ends***

(*Eight pastel-colored boxes slide into view from the edges of the screen, forming a three-by-three grid with her face at the center. A different symbol appears in each—smiley-faced jar, apple, flower, smiling sun wearing sunglasses, rainbow, squirrel, candle, butterfly.*)

**Autumn:** Seriously, there’s only so long that Sudoku can keep you entertained!

***Bass, full brass/strings/percussion in; mandolin/winds out***

(*The boxes fall away to leave her sliding down one rainbow and up another to launch herself onto a ridge, where rain begins to fall.*)

**Autumn:** ’Cause rainbows won’t light up the sky unless you let it rain

(*She ponders her reflection in the skin of a bright red apple hanging from a branch; a worm is burrowing into the opposite side.*)

And shiny apples sometimes come with worms

(*Noticing the critter, she makes a disgusted face and hurries away. Next she slips behind Applejack and pulls the orange-tan cheeks back to stretch the mouth into a toothy grin followed by an equally exaggerated grimace.*)

No, you can’t give up your laughter ’cause you’re scared of a little pain

(*She lets go and Applejack rubs one cheek, a foreleg falling across her shoulders to pull her close.*)

It’s a lesson that the kirin never learned

***Original instrumentation resumes with bass***

(*Pan quickly to Autumn walking glumly along the edge of the village, the sun and moon cycling quickly through the sky to mark the passage of a couple of days.*)

**Autumn:** I was stuck in silent prison with the voices in my head

(*Tripping on a wayward root, she tumbles to the base of a ridge and ends up in a patch of flowers—the same one Fluttershy was gathering for the squirrels in Act One.*)

’Til I tripped over my salvation in a helpful flowerbed

***Mandolin out***

(*She shakes her head clear and smiles at the discovery. A rain of blooms wipes the view to a close-up of a teapot stuffed with them, which pours into a waiting cup; both are under her magical control. She glugs it down and immediately finds her voice restored.*)

I found a cure to clear my pipes, and I became quite chatty

(*Popping up from a quick sequence of angles both mundane and improbable, she quickly manages to irritate every neighbor within earshot.*)

With years and years of stored-up words, I drove my village batty

***Intensity builds (D minor)***

(*One, listening from a window, slams it shut and prompts a yell of frustration. Her next effort—offering newspapers to the passersby—meets with just as little success.*)

They didn’t like my jokes and songs and daily dose of news

(*Acting, oration, tossing flyers to the crowd.*)

The plays I wrote, the speeches spoke, variety reviews

(*One flutters past the camera; behind it, wipe to a caped mare wearing a white mask over the right half of her face and stalking a cavern lair. A zoom out and tilt up shows this area as beneath a stage on which a theatrical performance is being held; a large chandelier hangs overhead.*)

Or the story about the kirin who hid below an opera stage

***Music pauses***

**Autumn:** (*rapid fire*) And fell in love with this opera singer, and he wore a freaky half-mask thing and he played the organ a lot and got all broody because the singer was in love with another dude, so he took her away on this underground gondola?

(*Accompanied by the following. The masked figure stares intently at the show from atop a prop tree, focusing on one mare in the troupe; she scowls in close-up and hammers the keys of an organ to produce jarring chords; she wraps herself in the stage curtains, then rises slowly past the stage edge and yanks the performer from the dewy-eyed gaze she is sharing with a colleague; the masked figure rows the performer—now passed out—along a subterranean river in a swan-shaped boat. The camera finally zooms out from this last scene to put it on a stage, with Applejack and Autumn as its sole audience.*)

***Music resumes; brief flourish, then original instrumentation/style/key and added bass***

**Autumn:** I mean, who doesn’t love musical theater?

(*Applejack ducks and covers as the chandelier swings down past the camera. Behind it, wipe to a close-up of Rain and zoom out to frame Autumn standing before her, ringed by the other kirin.*)

**Autumn:** The village leader made it clear, I had to make my choice

(*One hoof points imperiously at the group, then toward the shadowy path leading out of town.*)

I could stay and live with them, or I could keep my voice

(*Cut to Autumn dejectedly walking out a door, her field maneuvering a small wagon filled with possessions and failing to drag out a couch that is too wide to fit. After a few tries, she abandons the effort.*)

So I came here but left the couch alone, they’re hard to move

(*Cut to her sitting on the cliff in front of her ramshackle new home, zooming out slowly, then to her and Applejack.*)

With just the view for company until you heard me groove

(*She throws a foreleg around the farmer’s shoulders and gestures o.s.*)

(*spoken*) Take it away, boys!

(*Cut to her “backing band” of smiley-faced inanimate objects, none of which does a very good job of taking it away, then pan quickly to her and Applejack galloping/leaping side by side. Rainbows spread in the wake of their passage; these stop when they do, replaced by an instant thunderstorm.*)

***Piano, full brass/strings/percussion in; mandolin out***

**Autumn:** ’Cause rainbows won’t light up the sky unless you let it rain

(*Close-up of a burning candle; zoom out to show her holding it for Applejack.*)

And candles just won’t glow until they’re burned

(*She blows it out, then hops onto a rock and pushes away from it to bound past Applejack.*)

No, you can’t give up your laughter ’cause you’re scared of a little pain

(*Her tail swishes past the camera, the view wiping behind it to an overhead shot of her yard as she and Applejack gallop into view and up a pole that leads to an elevated platform.*)

It’s a lesson that my village never learned

No matter how hard I schooled them, fear of hurt is still what ruled them

Sometimes you gotta let it rain

(*She holds this last word out as the camera zooms out to a long shot of the abode, a swarm of butterflies taking flight. After she lets it go, the view cuts to a close-up; tears have collected in the golden brown eyes.*)

***Quiet chord***

**Autumn:** Yeah, sometimes you’ve gotta let it rain

***Song ends***

(*She wipes her eyes and smiles, watching a couple of the little guys flutter toward Applejack; one lights briefly on her nose, but she shakes it away as the meaning of Autumn’s tale sinks in.*)

**Applejack:** (*scoffing*) I can’t believe it! Nopony should give up feelin’ their feelin’s just to keep from gettin’ angry!

**Autumn:** That’s what I said! Well, you know, when I started talking again.

(*A moment’s thought, and Applejack gasps and smiles under the influence of a sudden brainstorm.*)

**Applejack:** I bet this here’s the problem that Fluttershy and I came to help y’all with!

**Autumn:** (*excitedly, circling around her*) Really? Who’s Fluttershy? Oh! Did you name your shadow? Mine’s called “Silhouette Gloom of the Sundown Lands.”

(*She waves to it, projected across the platform.*)

**Applejack:** (*uneasily*) Riiight. (*all business again*) Well, I’m thinkin’ if we just go talk to the other kirin, we can get ’em to welcome you back proper-like. (*Surprise on Autumn’s part.*) Maybe even convince ’em to take your cure!

**Autumn:** (*grinning, clapping*) Oh, yes, yes, of course! (*deflating*) Oh, just one small thing. The antidote for my anecdote? It’s gone.

**Applejack:** There’s no cure left?!

**Autumn:** (*turning away, sitting on haunches*) I used the last of the Foal’s Breath flowers to make it, and I—I haven’t seen them bloom since.

(*Recall, though, that the coloration of the flowers Fluttershy gathered in Act One matched those that went into the brew. Applejack sighs and pulls a hoof down her face.*)

**Applejack:** Well, this wouldn’t be a friendship quest if it was easy. (*She descends the pole and gallops off, voice fading out.*) I’m gonna start by gettin’ your friends to welcome you back!

(*The four-legged motormouth watches this exit with some concern and lifts a foreleg, on whose hoof tip she has drawn a face and wedged in a twig to serve as a horn.*)

**Autumn:** (*to it*) You know, between you and me, I’m not sure she’s gonna convince them. (*deep voice, shaking hoof side to side*) Nope. (*own voice, whispering*) But I hope she does.

(*The hoof “nods.” Fade to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to the village as Applejack gallops in.*)

**Applejack:** Fluttershy! (*She makes a beeline for the pegasus.*) Guess what!

**Applejack, Fluttershy:** I figured out the friendship problem! Me too! Go ahead!

(*They break out of the inadvertent synchronization with a laugh.*)

**Applejack:** Bet that’s a problem the kirin never have.

**Fluttershy:** (*giggling*) No.

**Applejack:** Anyhow, we gotta get ’em all talkin’ again.

**Fluttershy:** (*shocked, shaking head*) Oh, no, no, no, no, no! We can’t ever let that happen!

**Applejack:** I thought you said you figured out the friendship problem. Was somethin’ lost in translation?

(*Fluttershy beckons her over to a rock face, the camera positioned to keep it mostly out of view for the moment.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*pointing to it*) The kirin are usually peaceful and kind.

(*Close-up of the surface, painted to show several of them against the natural landscape. They are getting along well, but a slow pan brings an arguing pair into frame with a spot of bright pink fire kindling between them, followed by a knot of nirik.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*from o.s.*) But when they get mad, they turn into niriks—creatures made of fire and vengeance. (*Back to her and Applejack.*)

**Applejack:** Heh. That seemed less scary when it was in a song.

**Fluttershy:** The last time they all argued, they got so angry they accidentally destroyed their whole village. So the kirin decided to make sure it would never happen again.

**Applejack:** But that’s no reason to stop talkin’.

**Fluttershy:** Yes, it is!

(*Kirin begin to gather unnoticed around the pair, whose tempers grow increasingly frayed during the following exchange.*)

**Fluttershy:** Fire is dangerous, especially in a forest like this. Why, think of all the animals it could hurt.

**Applejack:** Not if they don’t turn into fire-breathin’ nirik in the first place.

**Fluttershy:** And how can you be sure that won’t happen?

**Applejack:** There’s gotta be a better way than givin’ up all your feelin’s!

**Fluttershy:** Applejack! You’re not listening!

**Applejack:** ’Cause you’re not talkin’ any sense!

(*Now staring each other down at point-blank range, they quickly trade rancor for worry once they notice the locals closing in from all sides.*)

**Fluttershy:** Um, w-what are they doing?

(*She yelps in surprise as the horns fire up to hoist and carry both of them.*)

**Applejack:** Hey! (*Fluttershy tries briefly to break loose; no dice.*)

**Fluttershy:** Maybe they got worried because we were arguing with each other!

**Applejack:** Aw, shucks! (*to the kirin*) We were just havin’ a normal civil disagreement, honest!

**Fluttershy:** W-Where are they taking us?

(*Both struggle against the hold as they are brought to the Stream of Silence, as seen in Autumn’s Act Two song.*)

**Applejack:** To the Stream of Silence! If we hit that water, we’ll never be able to talk or feel anythin’ ever again!

(*Fluttershy can only gasp as the kirin lower them toward the current. With just inches left to go, though, a weirdly distorted voice from o.s. brings the intended immersion to a screeching halt.*)

**Voice:** Put them down!

(*All eyes turn back along the path they have followed to reach this spot, and the camera tilts up slightly and zooms in quickly on a rise where a nirik is standing in all its incendiary fury. It gallops down, cutting a tight circle around Applejack and Fluttershy to put a wall of red/blue flames between them and the kirin. Both are released and drop to their haunches, Fluttershy scared out of her wits and whimpering with hooves over eyes.*)

**Applejack:** It’s all right. I think I know this one, and she’s tryin’ to help.

(*The pegasus lowers her hooves in time to see the nirik breach the barrier and consume itself in fire, which subsides to leave Autumn. The drawn/twigged face on her hoof that she used to talk to herself in Act Two has been removed.*)

**Autumn:** Well, yeah. Can’t have them silence the only friend who’ll speak to me.

**Fluttershy:** (*really puzzled*) She talks?

**Applejack:** (*aside, to her*) You have no idea. (*addressing both*) Fluttershy, meet Autumn Blaze.

(*The kirin extends a hoof to shake, but Fluttershy is slightly put off by the fact that it happens to be on fire. Once Autumn blows to extinguish it and sits on her haunches, Fluttershy is more than happy to accept the greeting.*)

**Fluttershy:** Well, thank you for that…um, wall of fire…but I thought niriks were dangerous when they’re angry. How did you know you could control your temper? (*Autumn thinks briefly.*)

**Autumn:** I didn’t. (*The flames slowly die off as the camera zooms out.*) I-I guess anger’s like other feelings. It’s not about having them, it’s what you do with them.

(*She stands and flicks out one last spot with her tail as she finishes.*)

**Applejack:** And givin’ up happiness to keep away anger is no kinda life.

**Fluttershy:** I never thought of it that way. I can’t imagine not being able to talk to my animal friends.

(*Autumn addresses one kirin in the crowd.*)

**Autumn:** Fern Flare, you used to love to laugh at everything. (*To Rain.*) And Rain Shine, you sung [*sic*] the most beautiful harmonies. Don’t you miss it?

(*The tall mare rubs one foreleg against the other as a pang of regret strikes. Now Applejack and Fluttershy get up and step toward the group in an overhead shot and slow pan.*)

**Applejack:** I know you’re worried about fightin’, but friends can disagree without causin’ a ruckus.

**Fluttershy:** Everypony gets mad sometimes. (*Close-up of her and Applejack.*) Even Applejack and I argue.

**Applejack:** (*needled*) What? When do we ever argue?

**Fluttershy:** (*pointedly, clearing her throat*) On the way here, *and* about the kirin being silent, *and* right now!

(*They glare daggers at each other, Applejack adding a huff and glower for good measure, but break it off with a laugh as the kirin stare in uncomprehending fear. Close-up of Applejack.*)

**Applejack:** We don’t always see eye to eye, but we never let that get in the way of our friendship. (*Pan to Fluttershy.*)

**Fluttershy:** And if you’re really angry, then take some time away to be a nirik where it won’t hurt anypony.

(*The listeners glance uncertainly among themselves, followed by one mare stepping forward and making a series of hoof gestures.*)

**Applejack:** I-I think they’re tryin’ to say somethin’. (*Autumn moves up; point to the open mouth.*)

**Autumn:** Okay. Are you hungry? (*Spread forelegs wide, miming a shout.*) Oh, no! Some kirin trapped in a well? (*Point up to one side with both.*) Okay. Baby. (*The mouth again.*) Baby fish. (*Shake head; make as if speaking.*) Ba—ba—no. Baby fish mouth? (*Another head shake, followed by a point and a few random flails.*) Uh, something? Anything? Ugh, just write it down! (*Impatient groan.*) This is making me furious!

(*Her eyebrows and the tip of her horn ignite, the eyes themselves go white, and the teeth sharpen of their own accord.*)

**Autumn:** (*catching herself, calmly*) Would you excuse me? I’ll be right back.

(*Almost as soon as she has trotted out of view behind one of the larger stones that line the bank, a blast of fire and her yell—in the distorted voice she used as a nirik—both float upward. She returns as a kirin, the fit of pique having passed as swiftly as it came.*)

**Autumn:** You were saying?

(*The gesticulating mare gets right to the meat of it by tapping Autumn’s nose, then pointing at her own open mouth.*)

**Autumn:** (*with sudden realization*) Ohhhh! (*Clap forehead with a little snort.*) You want the cure for the Stream of Silence!

**Fluttershy:** That’s wonderful! (*Applejack’s face falls.*) Uh, isn’t it?

**Applejack:** Well, it would be, except there aren’t any flowers left to make the cure.

**Fluttershy:** Are you sure?

**Autumn:** Oh, beyond sure. Believe me, I’ve had a lot of alone time lately. I searched the entire forest seventy-three and a half times. (*to herself*) Although I wonder if that second half could make a difference.

(*She breaks into a gallop, leading all the others away from the Stream and leaving two rather confused ponies at the bank.*)

**Fluttershy:** Hmmm…I wish she’d told us what kind of flowers she’s looking for. (*They begin to scout the area.*)

**Applejack:** They’re called Foal’s Breath.

**Fluttershy:** I’ve never heard of that.

(*Now a squirrel hops onto one of the stones and gets Applejack’s attention by chittering and pointing.*)

**Applejack:** Uh, Fluttershy? Little help?

(*The rodent carries on in more detail, and Fluttershy smiles and gasps as the message comes through loud and clear.*)

**Fluttershy:** He says he knows where to find Foal’s Breath!

**Applejack:** (*to squirrel*) Well, what are we waitin’ for? Lead the way!

(*The squirrel hops off the stone and o.s., the pair following. Dissolve to a pan that follows it across a patch of ground toward the cache of flowers that Fluttershy helped the squirrels collect in Act One. Applejack and Fluttershy are shown a sprig once they arrive.*)

**Fluttershy:** (*gasping deeply*) *That’s* what Foal’s Breath looks like?

**Applejack:** Autumn Blaze never would’ve made it past the Peaks to search here. (*She doffs her hat.*) I owe you an apology.

**Fluttershy:** Why? (*On it goes.*)

**Applejack:** (*touching Fluttershy’s chest*) ’Cause if your kindness hadn’t made you stop to help the squirrels, we never would’ve found this here flower.

**Fluttershy:** And if your honesty hadn’t convinced the kirin to talk, we wouldn’t need to find it.

**Applejack:** (*chuckling*) Guess it’s a good thing the map sent both of us, huh?

(*They embrace as the view wipes to the village end of the shortcut passage that Fluttershy found in Act One. She and Applejack emerge at a gallop, the workhorse toting a tied sheaf of Foal’s Breath on her back and with the free end of its rope in her teeth, and stop to present their find to Autumn.*)

**Autumn:** (*gasping happily*) You found them? Where were they? Tell me everything and feel free to add complicated descriptions and comedic tangents. (*Big grin.*)

(*A slightly weary look passes between the two foragers, prompting her to curb her enthusiasm.*)

**Autumn:** Oh. Right. First things first.

(*Her magic takes hold of the blooms. Cut to the upper reaches of the village’s central fountain as they are tossed in, rope and all, and scatter to follow the gushing waters—which turn a vivid blue to match. One kirin after another steps up to lap at the floral tincture…Autumn fearfully nibbles her lower lip in close-up as she, Applejack, and Fluttershy watch…and then all three faces brighten at the sound of assorted voices speaking aloud for the first time in who knows how long. Some get the rust out by talking, others by singing a few notes, and a smiling Rain crosses to Autumn to speak in a compassionate, slightly tremulous tone.*)

**Rain:** Autumn Blaze, you have given us a gift—the realization that anger is within us, but it is our choice how we let it out. We would very much like it if you came back to live with us. I can’t say how much we’ve missed your beautiful voice.

***Same melody/instrumentation/key/tempo as the final chorus of Autumn’s Act Two song***

(*Butterflies flood past the camera.*)

**Autumn:** ’Cause rainbows won’t light up the sky unless you let it rain

(*She leaps away; close-up of a candle being lit by a shot of nirik fire, then zoom out. She has heated up the tip of one hoof to get the job done, and she winks to the two kirin watching.*)

And candles just won’t glow until they’re burned

(*Off she goes, bounding nimbly over the surface of the fountain pool; the hoof-fire is out. One onlooker splashes another in the face, drawing a laugh.*)

No, you can’t give up your laughter ’cause you’re scared of a little pain

(*Autumn turns a lazy circle and stops facing a proud Rain.*)

It’s a lesson that my village never learned

***G major***

(*She leaps into the fountain and gambols about, catching two kirin with the splash.*)

**Autumn:** Oh, yes, ’cause rainbows won’t light up the sky unless you let it

(*One hoof partly blocks the discharge nozzle to send up a high-pressure fan, which disintegrates into a shower that patters down on one and all. Flecks of varicolored light play through the torrent and coalesce into a misty rainbow.*)

**Autumn:** Rain

***Song ends***

(*Applejack and Fluttershy throw each other a grin upon discovering that their cutie marks are flaring to denote a successful mission. Cut to a point between them, one yellow and one orange-tan hoof slapping together in extreme close-up for a high five, and snap to black.*)