**THE POINT OF NO RETURN**

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to the exterior of the School of Friendship during the day, seen from one side. Derpy Hooves wings into view—wearing her brown/white delivery uniform, hauling a sizable carton, and leaving a scatter of letters in her wake. Cut to the front doorstep, where Spike sits reading a comic book; the sound of the gray mare’s hurtling descent clues him in to duck just in time to avoid intercepting the freight with his head.*)

**Spike:** Whoa!

(*Derpy zooms o.s. past him, a hearty impact shaking the camera to mark her wipeout as the correspondence settles to the step around the baby dragon. He leaves the comic on the stones.*)

**Spike:** (*calling toward doors*) Twilight! Mail’s here!

(*In close-up, they are pushed open by Twilight Sparkle’s magic; she ambles out, but stops short with a popeyed gasp. A quick zoom out frames the carton now resting intact on its side, while Derpy has gone face-first into one of the lampposts that flank the step. She slides slowly down into a crumpled heap at its base.*)

**Twilight:** (*trotting out*) Are you all right?

(*Derpy responds by standing up, dislodging the mail that has fallen on her, and flipping the parcel upright.*)

**Derpy:** I just had a really heavy delivery today. (*Spike zips eagerly over to it.*)

**Spike:** (*rapid fire*) Is it a deluxe set of special-edition Ogres and Oubliettes figurines that I’m totally surprised by and haven’t been hinting that I need forever? (*Hug the cardboard.*)

**Derpy:** Well…it’s for Twilight.

**Spike:** (*crushed*) Awww…

**Twilight:** (*to Derpy*) Thank you.

**Derpy:** (*flying off*) You’re welcome! (*Twilight studies the carton.*)

**Twilight:** (*to Spike*) Huh. It’s from Princess Celestia. (*He belches up a scroll.*)

**Spike:** (*sighing, catching it*) So is this. (*snarky*) Really? She couldn’t have put it into the box?

(*It is plucked away and opened with Twilight’s field; he hovers by her shoulder for a better angle.*)

**Twilight:** (*reading*) “My dearest Twilight: I have been conducting a thorough cleaning of the castle, and I came across a few items of yours in your old room. I thought you might want them back.” (*laughing, setting it aside*) I didn’t even know I’d left anything!

(*Another bit of power pops the flaps to reveal a mélange of items, the topmost of which is a picture frame lying on its face. She levitates this out, the camera tilting up to follow it and put her out of view.*)

**Twilight:** (*from o.s., warmly*) Awww, look! (*Back to her and Spike; she maneuvers it toward them.*) Remember this? It’s the macaroni picture frame Cadence helped me make when I was a filly.

(*A shot from over Spike’s shoulder brings it fully into view: himself and the other four members of the Sparkle household, several years before the present. The border of the frame is covered with glued-on pieces of the uncooked pasta, one of which chooses this moment to jump ship.*)

[*Animation goof: Twilight is depicted without her cutie mark, even though she got it on the day she hatched Spike—see “The Cutie Mark Chronicles.”*]

**Spike:** (*dryly*) Who could forget a masterpiece like that? (*Twilight shoves it into his hands and brings out a small figurine of Starswirl the Bearded.*)

**Twilight:** My G-One Starswirl figure! (*Pass it to Spike; now a bundle of scrolls floats up.*) And some of my favorite school scrolls!

(*These too wind up in the number-one assistant’s hold, dumping him to the step with the sheer weight, and one more drifts out of the carton’s scrambled contents and is opened.*)

**Twilight:** And here’s my extra-*extra*-credit report on the impediments of using magic in everyday chores. (*She reads silently as Spike digs himself out.*) Ha! Still so true.

**Spike:** (*climbing up side of carton*) Is my Smash Fortune comic in there? I’ve been looking for that for years.

(*Gravity drags him in with a yell. After a bit of subsurface rummaging, one set of violet claws lifts a very thick book into view.*)

**Spike:** (*from below, muffled*) Or this.

(*As soon as Twilight lets her old report drop, she claps eyes on the newly discovered item and proceeds to freak out.*)

**Twilight:** (*grabbing it*) Oh no, oh no, oh no! (*Spike gets his head up.*)

**Spike:** What’s wrong? It just looks like an old library book.

**Twilight:** (*brandishing it*) Exactly! It belongs to the Canterlot Library! (*flipping pages*) That means it’s…

(*She magically slips a check-out card from a pocket glued to the front inside cover, the camera zooming in to a close-up. It bears several rows that each display a pony’s cutie mark and two dates, one accentuated by a red check-mark—when it was borrowed and returned. The bottommost occupied row, however, shows only the borrow date and Twilight’s mark.*)

**Twilight:** (*horrified*) …overdue!

(*She grimaces at her prodigality as the view fades to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to Twilight and Spike, the latter now out of the carton, on the School’s front step. She paces worriedly, the book held aloft in her magic.*)

**Twilight:** You don’t understand, Spike! I have a perfect library book return record!

**Spike:** (*clearing throat, smirking*) *Had* a perfect record.

**Twilight:** (*moaning*) I’ve never turned in a book even a minute late! And this one has been overdue since I left for Ponyville!

(*She casts her mind back over the years, the view undergoing a wavering dissolve to the upper reaches of the rotunda in the Canterlot Library—Moondancer’s favorite hangout, as seen in “Amending Fences.” The camera tilts down to frame a younger Twilight approaching the circulation desk, saddlebags on back and a stack of three books floating in her hold. A close-up picks out her lack of wings—this is from a time rather far back in the day—and the volumes settle to the surface. A wrinkled, pale blue-violet hoof lances into view to do its thing: flip a front cover open, stamp the card inside, close it again. Younger TS floats each of the first two up as it is processed, then grins and opens a bag to load them in. Now the pony on the job steps into view—elderly earth pony mare, faded brown eyes behind pince-nez spectacles, mane/tail loosely tied back and striped in white and light gray, pale green shirt collar secured with a deep pink ribbon tie. This is Dusty Pages, who gives the same treatment to the third book—the one giving the present-day Twilight so much grief. It too is lifted away as she speaks in a genial tone, the camera shifting to pick out her cutie mark of an open book sitting under clouds of dust.*)

**Dusty:** Make sure you bring this one back on time. We’ve got a long waiting list of ponies who can’t wait to read it.

**Younger TS:** (*closing bag*) I promise I won’t let you down.

**Dusty:** (*chuckling, winking*) Of course you won’t, dear. If there’s anypony I can trust to take care of a book, it’s you, Twilight Sparkle. After all, you still hold the “Best Book Borrower” title.

(*On the end of this, both mares back out of view and the camera zooms in to a close-up of a framed picture on the wall behind the desk, previously hidden by Dusty’s form. It presents a close-up of Younger TS, grinning from ear to ear and holding a book. A gleam of light plays across its glass cover before the camera cuts back to them.*)

**Younger TS:** (*blushing*) Ooooh, I hope I do forever!

(*She walks off with a grin. Dissolve to a long shot of the upper portion of a tower—the one that she used as her living quarters and library in “Mare in the Moon” before being relocated to Ponyville—and zoom in slowly.*)

**Younger TS:** (*voice over*) SPIIIIKE!

(*Inside, on the top floor, she paces among the shelves of books and scientific instruments as Spike’s younger self woozily climbs the stairs. Impaled on his tail is a crumpled gift box—the present he had intended to give to Moondancer at the party Younger TS blew off. Recall that Younger TS had thrown open the balcony doors in her search for him, knocking him silly and ruining the gift. She is no longer wearing her saddlebags.*)

**Younger TS:** Quick! Find me that old copy of *Predictions and Prophecies*. (*puzzled*) What’s that for? (*He pulls the box loose.*)

**Younger SP:** Well, it *was* a gift for Moondancer, but…

(*The bottom falls out, dumping the damaged teddy bear within to the floor.*)

**Younger TS:** Oh, Spike… (*knocking books off a stack with her head*) …you know we don’t have time for that sort of thing.

(*On the end of this, cut to a close-up of the soon-to-be-missing book as it is bunted across the room, sliding to a stop under a couch. A wavering dissolve brings the focus back to Twilight in the present.*)

**Twilight:** (*floating it up*) And then Celestia sent me to Ponyville and I forgot all about this! Dusty Pages prided herself that no books were damaged or lost on her watch—and I’ve failed her! I’ve failed myself!

**Spike:** I take it we’re going to Canterlot?

(*In very short order, the Princess’s field plops saddlebags onto her back and crams the wayward tome into one of them. She rockets into the air without another word.*)

**Spike:** (*groaning testily*) The sooner the better, I guess.

(*He throws his own wings into gear and goes up after her. Wipe to a stretch of calm sky and tilt down to follow their descent toward the front steps of the Canterlot Library. Almost as soon as hooves and feet touch the road, Twilight looks furtively around herself, gasps, and drags Spike close with a foreleg. The two dive into a nearby bush, from which they peek out at the locals going about their business, and keep their voices down through the following except where noted.*)

**Spike:** Uh…why are we hiding? Don’t you want to return your book?

**Twilight:** Yes, but what if somepony sees me in there? I’m the Princess of Friendship. Everywhere I go, ponies recognize me. I’ll stick out like a sore hoof!

**Spike:** (*laughing, normal volume*) Princess Twilight Sparkle in a library? Stop the presses!

**Twilight:** A late book is a big deal, Spike. What if Dusty Pages revokes my library card?

(*During this second sentence, she levitates out a light violet wallet emblazoned with her cutie mark and floats a card from it: her goofily grinning face and mark, a bar code, open-book logo. Spike’s flat look earns him a cheek-mashing grab as she puts the card away. Normal speaking volume resumes at this point.*)

**Twilight:** Or bans me from ever entering the building again? (*He slowly extricates himself as the wallet sinks into the foliage.*)

**Spike:** Don’t you already have most of those books in your collection at home?

**Twilight:** (*beaming*) Yes, but the ones in there have a special Canterlot Library-ey smell!

**Spike:** (*puzzled*) You sniff books? (*A unicorn mare happens by.*)

**Twilight:** You don’t?

(*She ducks away, leaving the little guy to take the brunt of the mare’s very funny look before she backs off warily. Only after she has cleared the area does Twilight put her head up with a sigh.*)

**Twilight:** I used to live in a library. If I’m not a good example of proper book-borrowing behavior, then what kind of princess am I? (*Spike flies up to lay a reassuring arm across her shoulders.*)

**Spike:** One that makes mistakes like everypony else. Trust me—once you return that book, you’ll feel way better.

**Twilight:** (*smiling*) Thanks, Spike. (*She steps into the clear…*) Let’s go!

(*…only to yelp and jump back into the bushes as another mare trots by. Again, she waits until the coast is clear before re-emerging, this time with a chagrined little giggle, and trotting off. Spike drops in behind, flying slowly and emitting a weary groan. Cut to the upper reaches of the Canterlot Library rotunda and tilt down slowly to frame the front doors at the far side. Spike is hovering just inside, and he makes his leisurely way to the circulation desk as Twilight executes a quick series of teleports to carry her from the threshold all over the place, stopping near him. The librarian on duty is a dark gray unicorn mare, bespectacled and considerably younger than Dusty. With a sharp gasp, Twilight levitates a potted plant to hide her face and steps up; Spike’s face falls at this latest evidence of her paranoia gone off the rails.*)

**Twilight:** (*clearing throat, deep voice*) I have a book to return?

**Librarian:** (*perkily*) Princess Twilight? (*Twilight peeks out, crestfallen…*) So good to see you! (*…and lets the plant drop with a moan.*) Need some recommendations from the New Release section?

(*A cart of books parked nearby draws a happy gasp from the violet mare and makes her forget her trepidation.*)

**Twilight:** (*own voice, magically lifting one free*) Is that the new edition of Mooncurve’s *Seven Theories on Bending Time*? (*flipping pages*) I have been waiting for the release sin—

(*An impatient claw tap on the shoulder jolts her back to the task at hand, and she closes the cover and slides it back into place.*)

**Twilight:** Uh, I mean, uh, no books today. (*Laugh.*) Thanks.

(*A collective gasp of alarm from every patron within earshot—they know her entirely too well to take this as business as usual, it seems.*)

**Twilight:** But I do need to speak with Dusty Pages about a… (*Clear throat; lower volume.*) …sensitive matter.

**Librarian:** Dusty who?

**Twilight:** (*normal volume, giggling weakly*) Dusty Pages? The head librarian? She’s worked here forever.

(*Magic pops a saddlebag flap, brings up the overdue book, and floats a photo of Dusty from among the pages. The items are packed away again on the next line.*)

**Librarian:** I’m sorry, Princess. I don’t know her. Now, was there some other way I can help the library’s Best Book Borrower?

(*On the end of this, she backs away slightly to show the framed picture honoring Twilight—heavily cobwebbed and almost totally obscured by dust, but still where it had hung when Dusty ran the desk. A quick exertion of the librarian’s field brings up a feather duster to clean off the glass; the sight of the old picture brings a very shaky laugh from its subject, and Spike holds up a comic book in front of his face and hers for a bit of privacy. Hushed tones for the next three lines.*)

**Spike:** Just ask her where to return an overdue book! It’s no big deal! It happens all the time!

**Twilight:** Not to me, it doesn’t!

(*The periodical is repositioned just so as the perplexed librarian stares across the desk.*)

**Twilight:** (*sighing heavily*) Fine.

(*A suddenly-made mental connection pops her eyes wide open and snaps her up to full volume.*)

**Twilight:** Fine! Oh, no! I didn’t even think about the late fine! (*Comic down as she continues.*) A book out this long will probably cost a thousand bits!

(*The little guy cuts to the chase by digging said book out of her bags.*)

**Spike:** (*plunking it on desk*) She…I mean, *we* have an overdue book.

**Librarian:** (*laughing*) Well, that’s no problem at all. In fact, it happens all the time. (*She ducks behind the desk…*)

**Spike:** (*to Twilight*) See?

(*..and comes up, using horn-power to set a full card catalog drawer in front of herself.*)

**Librarian:** (*floating several cards out, looking them over*) I’ll just find it in the card catalog. Uh…number one-eight-nine-oh-five— (*dropping all but one card*) —got it!

(*Her airy chuckle gives way to a pained grimace.*)

**Librarian:** Oh, wow, yeesh. I haven’t seen a book this late in… (*adjusting glasses*) …well, ever.

(*She clears her throat, her perky tone instantly giving way to a scowling, humorless demeanor, and sets the last card down.*)

**Librarian:** You need to go and see First Folio in the Grossly Overdue Book Return Office for Ponies Who Should Know Better.

**Twilight:** (*cowed*) Don’t pull any punches with those names, do you?

(*Her field tucks the book away in her saddlebags.*)

**Spike:** (*to librarian*) And that office would be…?

**Librarian:** In the basement… (*whispering*) …because of the shame!

(*She turns away to return to her duties, and Twilight resignedly bangs her head on the counter. Wipe to an overhead view of Princess and dragon plodding glumly down a stone-lined passage. The camera points at them from just above a network of overhead pipes and structural beams, then shifts to a profile and pans to follow their progress. Storage cabinets and doors with small barred windows line the walls, and cobwebs and other signs of disrepair are present in abundance. Spike gets caught up in one mass of sticky strands.*)

**Spike:** Whoa. (*It takes him some effort to break loose.*) Looks like nopony ever goes down here.

**Twilight:** (*sourly*) Nopony except undependable rule-breakers who deserve all the horrors this hallway holds! (*Spike flies to catch up.*)

**Spike:** (*brightly*) And their faithful dragon companions. (*Gaze ahead intently.*) Uh…

(*Dead ahead of them, at the end of the corridor, is a door illuminated by a solitary hanging lamp. A sheet of paper is attached.*)

**Spike:** …hey. (*pointing to it*) It looks like First Folio left a note on the door.

**Twilight:** (*very snarky*) “Abandon hope, all ye who enter”?

(*Close-up of the door as Spike flies to it and lands. Now the tacked-on note can be seen more clearly: a written message and a picture of a knife, fork, and plate.*)

**Spike:** (*reading*) “Out to lunch on Restaurant Row.” (*shrugging*) Guess we’ll have to try back later. (*He starts to leave, but Twilight reaches into view to stop him.*)

**Twilight:** (*from o.s.*) No. (*Longer shot, framing both.*) I can’t wait another minute to return this book! In the time it took us to get there, I racked up another… (*She runs a few numbers in her head.*) …seventeen bits in late fees! (*resolutely*) We’re going to lunch! (*Away she goes.*)

**Spike:** Good, ’cause I’m starving!

(*He licks his chops eagerly, gets a nasty look from the boss, and thinks better of it.*)

**Spike:** Oh. You mean to find First Folio. (*Twilight gallops off; he hustles to catch up.*) Can we at least get takeout?

(*Dissolve to the exterior of the Tasty Treat, the restaurant that figured prominently in “Spice Up Your Life.” Zoom in slowly and cut to inside; the place is doing a brisk business, and Twilight and Spike have just come in.*)

**Twilight:** Tell me if you see any librarian-type ponies.

**Spike:** Twilight, we tried this at three other restaurants already!

**Twilight:** And my late fines are already up another twenty-six more bits!

(*She tromps into the dining room; he follows, sobbing quietly, but gets flagged down by two mares as he passes their table.*)

**Mare 1:** Waiter, we’re ready to order.

**Spike:** Oh! Uh, I’m not actually a—

**Mare 1:** Three samosas, two curry specials—do you think that’s enough for the two of us?

**Spike:** Hm. (*He takes out a notepad and quill.*) Well, I would probably order some naan as well, for the table? (*Jot a note.*)

**Mare 1:** Sounds great.

[*Note: Samosa and naan are two common items in Indian cuisine. The former is a dish consisting of a pastry shell that is typically stuffed with a savory vegetable filling and deep-fried. The latter is an oven-baked flatbread that can be eaten by itself or with various toppings.*]

(*The sight of Spike being pressed into waiter duty is enough of a puzzler for the visiting Princess, but the next voice she hears really freezes up the gears. On the start of the next line, she pivots toward its source and finds the speaker standing on the other side of the room.*)

**Moondancer:** Twilight? Is that you?

**Twilight:** (*instantly perking up*) Moondancer! How have you been? (*crossing to her; slightly forced tone*) I’m just visiting. No real reason. Heh.

**Moondancer:** Well, it’s good to see you. (*gesturing over shoulder*) I’m just meeting my friend, First Folio, for lunch.

(*The mention of that name puts a scare into Twilight. Cut to another table, where a severe-faced older unicorn mare is sitting. First Folio has a white coat with a very faint brown tinge, a curly mane/tail in two shades of blue, a square jaw, red-gold eyes framed by half-moon glasses on a chain around her neck, a medium blue blouse with a lighter collar secured by a brooch, and a cutie mark of a quill in an inkwell.*)

**Moondancer:** (*crossing to table*) Do you want to join us?

**Twilight:** (*excitedly*) First Folio? Yes! (*composing herself*) I mean, thank you.

(*Moondancer takes a seat at First speaks up, her voice that of a good-humored academician—a marked contrast with the set of her features.*)

**First:** Princess Twilight! Good to meet you! Did you know your picture is still up in our library as the Best Book Borrower?

**Twilight:** (*a bit uneasily*) Yeah. I was hoping I could talk to Dusty Pages about that. (*Surprise from both diners.*)

**Moondancer:** Oh! Uh, Dusty Pages left the library moons ago. Didn’t you know?

**Twilight:** (*shaking head*) Mmm-mmm. (*She sits at the table.*)

**First:** (*sympathetically*) Oh, I heard she was forced to leave. (*Twilight’s eyes pop.*) It’s so sad. She loved the library.

**Twilight:** Wait. Forced to leave? (*Close-up of First and Moondancer.*)

**First:** (*nodding*) Yeah-huh, uh-huh, yeah. She had a perfect librarian record— (*viciously*) —until one careless pony didn’t return a book. Ruined it all.

**Moondancer:** Are you okay, Twilight?

(*Pan to the third mare, whose train of thought has just derailed and gone over the cliff. Her sweat glands, on the other hand, are in fine form and working overtime.*)

**Twilight:** (*weakly*) Uh-huh. Would, uh, you excuse me?

(*She peels out in a cloud of dust. Across the way, Spike has donned a white apron marked by a pink heart, served the two mares who mistook him for a waiter, and is about to dish up the entrée for a customer at the next table over. As Twilight gallops by, she grazes the baby dragon and sets him spinning in place; however, he comes out of it without spilling a crumb from his tray. He has put away his pad and quill.*)

**Spike:** (*to third customer*) That’s why you only order spicy if you can take it.

(*Setting her food on the table, he peels off his apron and tosses it aside while jogging after Twilight. Outside the Tasty Treat, she pelts up the alley toward the main thoroughfare with him scrambling to catch up.*)

**Spike:** Twilight, what’s wrong? (*Both stop.*)

**Twilight:** (*floating book out of bags*) Dusty Pages isn’t working at the library anymore because I didn’t return this book! Spike, I think I got her fired!

(*Fade to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to a busy Canterlot street. Twilight gallops down the block; Spike flies close behind for a few dozen yards, but stops short.*)

**Spike:** (*calling ahead, pointing to one side*) Twilight, the library is that way! (*He gives up and zooms after her.*)

**Twilight:** Change of plans! We’re going to Dusty’s house. She used to invite me over for tea all the time!   
**Spike:** But what about your late fees?

**Twilight:** They’re not as important as making things right. (*She pulls ahead.*)

**Spike:** Wait! So you’re *not* gonna return the book? (*He catches up.*)

**Twilight:** No. (*Turn a corner.*) Dusty Pages is. It’s my fault she lost her job, so if I give her the book, she can get her old job back.

(*They approach a house liberally decorated with signs that prohibit a wide range of activities, judging from the red slashes and X’s overlaid on pictograms.*)

**Twilight:** It’ll fix everything!

(*Stop at the doorstep. Deep breath. Two careful knocks, offering a pleasant grin. The door is thrown open so a bulky, pale blue earth pony stallion can step out and put every iota of his surly attitude on display.*)

**Stallion 1:** (*pointing to one sign*) Didn’t you see the sign?

(*Twilight glances off that way; close-up of it—a circle-and/slash over a pony knocking at the door, briefcase standing in easy reach.*)

**Stallion 1:** (*from o.s.*) No sales-ponies! (*Cut to Twilight and Spike.*)

**Twilight:** (*smiling*) Oh! I-I’m not selling anything.

**Stallion 1:** No carolers either! (*Cut/pan among the signs, putting him o.s.*) No surveys, no petitions, no free literature!

(*The doorstep again; he backs up past the threshold and starts to close the door, but she stubbornly exerts her aura to counter him. Muscle and magic strain against each other for a moment, but she wins and yanks it fully open, dropping him to his haunches.*)

**Twilight:** No problem. I’m just looking for somepony who used to live here. I’m pretty sure this was her house.

**Stallion 1:** Dusty Pages?

**Twilight:** Yes!

**Stallion 1:** Hold on.

(*He stands up and ducks into the house, while Twilight and Spike trade hopeful grins. A few seconds later, the occupant comes out toting a rather large sack; as he speaks, he hefts this to show a stamp and postmark on the side.*)

**Stallion 1:** She moved to…Silver somethin’. Shoals…Seas…Surfer…w-whatever. When you find her, give her this!

(*He empties the sack, dumping its freight—dozens of scrolls and letters—all over Spike. As the scaly violet/green head breaks through to daylight, the empty is thrown down to cover it.*)

**Stallion 1:** It’s been stackin’ up for years! And tell her to *change her address!*

(*He jumps angrily in place on these last three words, then slams the door in the pair’s faces. They exchange looks that telegraph their combined worry over having to both prolong their search and drag this mess along. Dissolve to a long overhead shot of Canterlot as they fly off, Spike toting the refilled sack, then cut to them in midair as they stop. Twilight’s magic produces a map from her saddlebags, and after a quick bit of study, she darts down and Spike follows. Cut to a pair of small houses standing side by side on a grassy ridge; Twilight comes in gracefully for a landing, having stowed the map, but Spike plops heavily onto his belly. A light violet hoof knocks at one door, and its owner grins broadly at the answering mare and floats up her photo of Dusty. Receiving only a head shake, Twilight turns away to the other house as the door closes and repeats the performance, with the same result. The photo goes back in the bags, the map comes out, and a quill checks off one spot—an island.*)

(*Wipe to the pair flying over water, Twilight having put everything away and Spike now straining somewhat to keep pace with her. Another midair stop, a look at the map, another location checked off, and the camera zooms in to an extreme close-up of a cluster of mountain peaks and a snaking railroad track. Dissolve to a grimy earth pony stallion pushing a cart filled with crystal/gem shards along a track in a mine tunnel. He wears a hard hat outfitted with a headlamp, as does Twilight when she and Spike fly in to intercept him. She has her photo at the ready for his consideration, but he shakes his head.*)

(*From here, wipe to Gallus, Silverstream, and Smolder sitting in a cluster of chairs within the School’s library. The orange dragon is enjoying a cup of tea, and the other two are having a conversation that is interrupted by a tap on the hippogriff’s shoulder. Pan slightly back to frame Twilight now standing behind her, hard hat gone; out with the photo, which is met with only a confused shrug. The next dissolve shifts the view to a slow pan across a sprawling apartment complex that stands on a lakeshore. Twilight and Spike wing their way toward this and land by a sign on the front lawn, the photo packed away once more.*)

**Twilight:** (*reading*) “Silver Stable Community. For the Best Golden Years.” This *has* to be it!

**Spike:** I hope so.

(*He pulls out the map, now covered with red check marks except for this vicinity.*)

**Spike:** It’s the last “Silver” spot on the map we haven’t looked.

(*Away with it. The two regard the front doors with concern; cut to just inside them as Twilight’s magic opens one and she steps in. Spike follows her in the air, grunting as he strains to keep the dead weight of the sack clear of the floorboards, but he perks up with a gasp. Cut to a slow pan across the area they have just entered—a spacious lobby in which a few elderly ponies are snoozing on couches. The walls are lined with photos, and a flight of stairs leads up to a balcony; at both levels are doors that each bear a pony’s photo. Behind a desk at the far end, a receptionist mare sits reading a book.*)

**Spike:** (*flying into view after Twilight*) Whoa-ho! This place is—

**Twilight:** —terrible! I know! There’s not a single bookshelf in sight! Poor Dusty. (*They reach the desk; she addresses herself across it.*) Excuse me?

**Receptionist:** (*brightly*) Yes! How may I help you? (*Close the book.*)

**Twilight:** (*floating/showing photo of Dusty*) Do you have a resident named Dusty Pages?

**Receptionist:** (*pointing off to one side*) Oh, yes! Her apartment is in the next complex, ground floor. (*Photo back in saddlebags.*)

**Twilight:** (*walking that way; Spike follows*) Thank you!

(*The receptionist goes back to her book. Wipe to a two-story building adjacent to this one, each level lined with doors and windows similar to a hotel whose rooms open directly to the outside. Twilight and Spike approach and make their way along the ground-floor walk.*)

**Twilight:** I can’t believe that my carelessness sent her here, when she could be happily surrounded by millions of wonderful-smelling books!

**Spike:** You realize that might just be a “you” thing, right?

(*She shoots him a sour look as they move on past a door set with Dusty’s picture. One hasty backpedal and gasp later, she is standing before it; Spike takes his time reversing gears.*)

**Twilight:** There she is! Here we go.

(*A deep breath to steel herself, and she knocks firmly and puts on a smile that Spike matches as he lets the sack drop and lands. As the seconds pass with no response, the mare melts into disappointment and briefly levitates a pocket watch, whose ticking comes through loud and clear in the silence. Her nerves finally get the better of her, and she voices a frustrated yell and pulls her cheeks while dropping to her haunches.*)

**Spike:** She’s bound to be back soon. Maybe we should just wait here. (*Twilight stands up with new resolve.*)

**Twilight:** No! We are fixing this *now!* (*Emphatic stomp on the last word.*) This place isn’t that big. We can find her!

(*The hooves get moving; the scaly stevedore scowls and drags the sack along. Wipe to a longer shot of the lakeshore, framing more of the Silver Stable community and a pier that juts into the water. Three oldsters have set up easels here to do a little painting: one stallion and two mares, with Granny Smith’s cousin Apple Rose among their number. Twilight and Spike step out along the planks toward them, Spike again airborne.*)

**Twilight:** Sorry to interrupt your *plein air* painting, but we’re looking for Dusty Pages. Have you seen her?

[*Note: She has used a French term that refers to painting outdoors, rather than in a studio.*]

**Apple Rose:** Sure have.

(*Twilight grins in anticipation of further details, but none are immediately forthcoming. She cycles a deep breath through her lungs to get her impatience under control before speaking again.*)

**Twilight:** Aaaaand…?

**Apple Rose:** She had to leave early to get to her *Bonne Vie de Thé* session.

**Stallion 2:** Which is right before she leads the woodworking class with me. Then she’s on to windsurfing.

**Apple Rose:** Ooh, and don’t forget theater rehearsal. Dusty’s playing the lead role— (*grumpily*) —again.

[*Note: The activity name she has mentioned loosely translates from French as “Good Life of Tea.”*]

**Stallion 2:** Then there’s her band practice later.

**Twilight:** Thank you!

(*She and Spike hustle toward dry land as the three seniors resume their artistic endeavors.*)

**Spike:** Wow. Dusty sounds like one busy pony.

**Twilight:** Oh, she’s just filling her days with distractions to cover the pain of losing the best job ever! (*firmly*) But not for long!

(*She strides ahead, leaving her assistant to aim a rather fed-up look to no living thing in particular. Dissolve to three ponies doing a sequence of slow stretching exercises in front of Dusty’s apartment complex; one of these is Granny’s aunt Applesauce. They take a break on the arrival of Twilight and Spike; the photo of Dusty is floated out of the saddlebags and shown to one, who shakes her head and points across the lawn. Pan quickly in that direction and stop on a swinging, creaking wrought-iron gate—they have apparently just missed the elusive retiree, and Twilight lets both her head and the photo drop.*)

(*The entire image slides out of view and is replaced by a workshop in which four ponies are busying themselves with assorted carpentry projects. Twilight teleports herself and Spike in among them and approaches Mr. Waddle, only to get a head shake and a hoof pointed toward a door that is just now swinging shut—another near miss. It is promptly yanked open by Twilight’s magic, and Princess and porter hurry out to continue their search. Cut to just outside the building; they stop on the threshold for a quick glance over the surrounding terrain, but she is dismayed to find neither hide nor hair of her target.*)

(*This view slides away, yielding to another pier at which rowboats and windsurfing boards have been parked. The sack of mail has been set down so Twilight and Spike can survey the water; the Princess shades her eyes for a moment to get a better look, then smiles in triumph. Wipe to two life-jacketed elders steering the boards; one does a blissful loop-the-loop off a wave before Twilight and Spike pull up on a rig of their own. Both are wearing the protective gear and shed their respective cargoes. Twilight waves for attention and floats out her photo of Dusty, but the two seniors shake their heads and let the breeze carry them ahead. When she turns her attention away from steering to peer in another direction, the board capsizes and dumps both her and Spike into the lake; the photo; however, remains high and dry in her field as both heads break the surface. Spike grins over the mishap, while Twilight shoots him a really filthy look. Both faces shift to panic an instant before a huge wave washes over the screen.*)

(*The water drains away to present an auditorium set up a theater-in-the-round performance. Three costumed, masked ponies are rehearsing a scene on the central stage when Twilight and Spike open the doors and enter; both are dry, without their life jackets, and equipped with their luggage. She addresses the trio and floats up her photo—now soggy, stained, and wrinkled from the windsurfing fiasco—but each in turn shakes his/her head while unmasking. The third, a stallion, proves to have an elongated, pointed nose that exactly matches the contours of his mask. One purple eye begins to twitch uncontrollably as a roll of the green ones gives away Spike’s growing exasperation.*)

(*Dissolve to just behind Twilight, photo packed away, as she butts her way through a pair of closed doors to enter a bar/lounge area. Here, a five-pony combo is performing a lively honky-tonk tune on a small stage—trumpet, saxophone, upright bass, drums, and Dusty on acoustic guitar. The mane/ tail are cut shorter and no longer tied back, but the other features and accessories mark her as the missing mare—who proves to be no slouch on the six-string.*)

**Twilight:** (*ecstatically*) Dusty Pages! Finally! Come on, Spike!

(*She starts across the room, but he leaves the sack at the door and circles through the air to cut her off.*)

**Spike:** Wait. She looks pretty happy up there.

(*Now she really gets into the act, jumping off her stool and flopping to the stage on her back as she scrubs at her guitar.*)

**Twilight:** Trust me, it’s all an act. She’ll be a lot happier when I deliver the good news that she can go back to working at the library.

(*She moves ahead again on the end of this, ignoring Spike’s stony glare, and ends the run-through by levitating all the instruments out of the players’ reach.*)

**Twilight:** (*brightly*) Care to take five, everypony? (*The gear is set back down.*)

**Dusty:** (*recognizing her*) Ah! Twilight Sparkle? My stars! (*A smiling nod sends the other four off the stage.*) It’s so wonderful to see you. (*descending to floor*) What are you doing here? (*Spike drags the sack over…*)

**Twilight:** I’ve been looking all over Equestria for you! (*…and dumps it out.*) I need to tell you something.

**Dusty:** Well…you brought my mail! (*hugging her*) Oh, thank you.

(*The hug tightens a notch, lifting its recipient off her hooves and threatening to squeeze all the air out of her lungs until she gently pushes Dusty back.*)

**Twilight:** No. I mean…yes, we did. But that’s not why we’re here. I let you down, and I can’t forgive myself until I set things right.

**Dusty:** I don’t remember you doing anything wrong.

**Twilight:** You told me to take special care of a book I checked out from the Canterlot Library, a-and I never brought it back!

(*The faded eyes behind the pince-nez go very wide at this admission, and the mouth underneath them pulls in a stunned gasp.*)

**Dusty:** It was you that had that book out? The one that broke my perfect record? (*Twilight nods sadly and levitates it from her bags.*)

**Twilight:** But now you can bring it to Canterlot Library and get your job back!

**Dusty:** (*suddenly angry, shaking head*) No, thank you! I don’t ever need to see that library again!

(*She pushes the offending volume away, forcing Twilight to grab it with a foreleg, and gathers up her spilled mail.*)

**Dusty:** Now if you’ll excuse me— (*hauling it away*) —I have somewhere to be.

(*All too soon, there is nothing left to mark her presence except a trail of dropped scrolls and envelopes. Fade to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to the bar in the lounge area. The rest of the combo has gone back to rehearsing, having shifted to jazz; Spike snaps his fingers in time while sipping at a juice box, but Twilight has gone face-first on the bar. She lifts her noggin to fire a glare toward the stage, having put her saddlebags aside.*)

**Twilight:** Do you mind?

(*A brief pause, a happy shake of the drummer’s head, and the four finish their tune at a lower volume. Face meets bar top again.*)

**Twilight:** I don’t understand. (*Up.*) If Dusty Pages won’t go back to Canterlot Library and explain everything, then she won’t be able to get her job back. Even worse, her record will remain imperfect. (*Close-up of Spike.*)

**Spike:** And yours will, too? (*Zoom out to frame both.*)

**Twilight:** Well, yeah! But that doesn’t matter anymore.

**Spike:** (*dryly*) Really?

**Twilight:** Well, maybe a little bit. (*A thought flashes through her mind.*) Oh, no! Bits! The late fines! How much do I owe now?

(*The faithful companion fishes up an abacus, spends a few seconds working the beads back and forth, and finally pushes the whole thing aside.*)

**Spike:** Uh, you don’t want to know. (*Twilight groans and pulls a foreleg down her face.*)

**Twilight:** It would have been worth all the bits in Equestria if I’d made things right with Dusty. I wish I knew why she won’t go back.

**Spike:** Why don’t you ask her?

**Twilight:** She didn’t seem to want to talk.

**Spike:** But you surprised her, and she probably had something else on her schedule. That thing is packed. (*He hovers off his stool to face her.*) Come on. What have you gotta lose?

**Twilight:** Now that I’ve messed up this much, nothing. (*She finds her nerve.*) You’re right, Spike. (*smiling; the musicians start up again*) It’s worth a try. (*Hop off the stool.*) Where do you think she went? Crochet? Bingo?

(*Wipe to an overhead shot of a clearing filled with obstacles constructed from hay bales, barrels, and crates. Cylindrical containers filled with various produce items are placed here and there, and a few ponies in helmets/goggles/protective equipment are glancing suspiciously across the turf. The splatters on both them and the barricades give the whole thing away as the pony equivalent of a paintball battle, using thrown fruits and vegetables as the ammunition. Twilight and Spike step out from the surrounding trees to find the battle well and truly joined, the former toting her bags and the latter hovering by her side.*)

**Twilight:** A squishy-fruit food fight tournament?!?

(*Three rounds land just short of their position; Spike whips out a small white flag on a stick and waves it furiously.*)

**Spike:** Hey, everypony! We come in—

(*Before he can finish the thought, a tomato is flung his way; Twilight ducks, but he takes it in the back and is driven o.s, the flag clattering to the ground.*)

**Spike:** (*flying back*) —uh, pieces.

(*A split-second later, both of them have been plastered head to toe in an onslaught of mushy foodstuffs. Twilight kick-starts her horn and teleports both of them off the battlefield, leaving the mess behind to collapse into a swampy heap on the grass. They materialize behind a rocky outcropping and risk a glance over/around it toward the free-for-all.*)

**Twilight:** STOOOP!! We just want to talk to Dusty Pages for a moment. (*A few more throws, not aimed at her.*) Pleeeeease?

**Dusty:** (*from o.s.*) TIIIIME OOOOUUUUT!!

(*Cut to her on the end of this line—suited up like the others, no longer hauling her old mail, and standing on a tree limb. Biting into a rope tied off to a higher branch, she slides down and makes a solid four-point landing in front of the two visitors as the fusillade stops. She has removed her pince-nez to accommodate the goggles.*)

**Dusty:** (*smiling*) Next time, you should rent gear.

**Spike:** We’re not actually here for the game.

**Twilight:** I was hoping you’d give me another chance to talk to you about the library book.

**Dusty:** (*sighing*) This really means a lot to you, doesn’t it?

**Twilight:** (*nodding*) Mmm-hmm. I know I ruined your life by not returning my book on time, and I will do anything I can to make it up to you—even promise to never take a book out of the library again, if that’s what it takes.

(*A collective gasp from the other combatants—her reputation as a bookworm has preceded her all the way out here, it seems. What follows is a cheery giggle from the old librarian that completely floors Twilight and Spike.*)

**Spike:** *That* is not the reaction we expected.

**Dusty:** Twilight, dear, you’ve got it all backwards. I’m not upset with you.

**Twilight:** You’re not?

**Dusty:** No. If I’m mad at anypony, it’s me.

(*She walks off, the pair following with visible confusion. A few steps bring her to a fallen log; she sits, putting her helmet/goggles aside and donning her pince-nez, and pats the wood in silent, smiling invitation. Twilight and Spike cross to her, the saddlebags levitating away; on the start of the next line, they sit to either side of Dusty and the camera zooms in slightly.*)

**Dusty:** All those years I spent hiding away in that library, trying to be perfect. When your book never came in, I felt something exhilarating!

**Twilight:** What was it?

**Dusty:** Freedom.

**Spike:** From books?

**Dusty:** From perfection. I was too stubborn to know when to call it quits. (*to Twilight*) It took your mistake to make me realize that I wasn’t living the life I wanted.

**Twilight:** You mean you weren’t fired? You left the library because you wanted to?

**Dusty:** (*patting Twilight’s back*) Twilight, your late book was the best thing that ever happened to me. Now I’m not afraid to try things I might fail at. In fact, sometimes messing up teaches me more than getting it right.

**Twilight:** (*smiling, floating book up*) You’re sure you don’t want to return it and get that perfect record back?

(*It ends up stopping a wayward shot, which leaves it spattered with yellowish gunk and causes Twilight to cry out in horror. Dusty, on the other hand, actually seems relieved.*)

**Dusty:** Oh, good. It was a yellow one. You can still see the words.

**Twilight:** But it’ll have a stain!

**Dusty:** Well, that doesn’t change the truth inside it. (*puzzled*) Wait. Did you even read that thing?

**Twilight:** (*blushing, sheepishly*) Actually, uh, no. I guess I didn’t.

(*She floats it up; cut to her perspective as she wipes some of the pulp off the cover.*)

**Twilight:** (*reading title*) *Perfection.* (*Back to her and Dusty.*)

**Dusty:** And the next part?

**Twilight:** (*reading, squinting closely) The Impossible Pursuit*.

(*The full import of those four combined words sends her brain into a stall, but Dusty and Spike just laugh it up until she recovers with an embarrassed little smile.*)

**Twilight:** Oh. That might have been useful to look at earlier.

(*She offers a self-deprecating grin. Dissolve to the exterior of the Canterlot Library, zooming in slowly, then cut to a small office crowded with books and files. First sits behind the desk—her workspace in the basement corridor that Twilight and Spike visited in Act One—and is reading over a document held in her magic. The offending Princess stands facing her, Spike seated on an adjacent stool, and the damaged book rests on the desk with all the loose pulp cleaned off. Twilight has donned her saddlebags.*)

**First:** Mmm-hmm…your total late fees come to… (*Twilight sweats profusely.*)

**Twilight:** However much it is, I’ll cover it. Uh, do you have a monthly payment plan?

(*The page is lowered so the square-jawed unicorn can look her dead in the eye.*)

**First:** …twenty-eight bits. (*Twilight and Spike gasp as one.*)

**Spike:** That’s it?!?

**First:** (*smiling*) Yeah-huh. Most ponies don’t know it caps at a month— (*winking*) —probably ’cause we don’t tell them.

(*A little snort of laughter; now a much-relieved Twilight telekinetically brings a scatter of coins from her saddlebags and stacks them on the desk.*)

**First:** Thank you. Your account is back to normal—although we will be taking down your “Best Book Borrower” picture.

**Twilight:** (*leaning on desk, laughing nervously*) Um, is that really necessary? It just seems so permanent. I mean, I did return the book, after all. (*Spike clears his throat pointedly.*) Okay…letting the perfection go. (*Deep breath.*) You want me to re-shelve this for you?

**First:** No. It’s an old edition. We’ve already replaced it with a new copy.

**Spike:** In that case, can we keep it? (*Twilight grins hopefully.*) It might be a good reminder to have around.

(*The grin becomes just a tiny bit strained as he offers a smug one of his own and nudges her knowingly.*)

**First:** (*levitating book off desk*) You’re sure? It’s got a stain.

**Twilight:** (*smiling genuinely*) That’s what makes it perfect.

(*She extends her power to pull it close so one foreleg can gather it in as a hard-won trophy of her sojourn. Fade to black.*)