**THE LAST LAUGH**

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long shot of the Castle and School of Friendship during the day. Rainbow Dash barrels into view, making a beeline for one of the former structure’s balconies; cut to a set of closed doors inside as she bursts in and stops dead, looking confusedly around herself. The camera angle changes to frame a rather bored Twilight Sparkle, Applejack, Fluttershy, Rarity, and Spike standing/lounging on the floor in the throne room, the central table bare of its magical map.*)

**Rainbow:** (*flying toward them*) I thought Pinkie Pie said to get here right away. (*Close-up of Applejack.*)

**Applejack:** She sure had a burr in her britches about somethin’. (*Pan to Spike.*)

**Spike:** So where is she?

**Pinkie Pie:** (*from o.s.*) Pfft! Yeah!

(*The reptilian green eyes go very wide at the sound of her voice; zoom out to frame the speaker now lying insouciantly on the table.*)

**Pinkie:** What is taking her so long? (*She straightens up with a giggle.*) Just kidding. (*Spike hops onto the table.*) You guys really need to look behind you once in a while.

**Twilight:** (*from o.s.*) Uh, Pinkie? (*Cut to frame all seven.*) You said you had something important to tell us?

**Pinkie:** Not tell you, so much as show you. (*dramatically*) In fact, what you’re about to see may shake the very foundations of your perception for all time!

(*Close-up of it being held aloft for the others’ consideration—a cupcake topped with yellow-orange frosting and a cherry. Long, uncomprehending pause.*)

**Fluttershy:** Um…a cupcake?

**Pinkie:** (*from o.s.*) Yes! (*Back to her.*) But wait. There’s more!

(*One pink hoof presses down on the bright red fruit, causing the frosting to pop loose on a hinge as a single solid piece. Up comes a picture of Cheese Sandwich, the traveling party-thrower who made his way through Ponyville in “Pinkie Pride,” marked with a line of printed text. It bobs on the end of a spring and is accompanied by a burst of confetti and streamers. Pinkie backs out of view.*)

**Pinkie:** (*from o.s.*) It’s an invitation to visit the Cheese Sandwich Amusement Factory!

**Spike:** (*flying up, inspecting it*) Cheese Sandwich opened a factory? (*The group again.*)

**Applejack:** (*teasingly*) Heh. What do they make there? Rubber chickens? (*Spike sits on the table with the thing.*)

**Pinkie:** That’s ridiculous! They make *way* more there than just rubber chickens! (*Giggle.*)

**Rarity:** Gosh, Cheese hardly seems the factory type. I just assumed he’d continue to wander Equestria throwing parties. Still, you must be excited to see him.

**Pinkie:** I am! I can’t wait to tour his factory, catch up, have him tell me my life’s purpose, swap gag tips—

**Applejack:** Whoa, whoa, whoa. What did you say? (*Close-up of Pinkie.*)

**Pinkie:** Uh, catch up? I mean, it *has* been a while. (*Zoom out to frame Twilight on the next line.*)

**Twilight:** I think Applejack’s asking about the part about Cheese Sandwich and your life’s purpose?

(*The levity drains right out of Pinkie as her eyes widen.*)

**Pinkie:** Oh, that. Yeah. It’s just…all of you have found your thing. (*Cut to Twilight; she continues o.s.*) You’re gonna rule all of Equestria… (*To Rainbow.*) …Rainbow Dash is a Wonderbolt… (*Zoom out to frame Fluttershy.*) …Fluttershy has her animal sanctuary… (*Back to her and Rarity.*) …Rarity has her boutiques… (*She slides over to Applejack and pulls the brown hat forward.*) …Applejack has that hat…

(*Accompanied by the following from the addressed mares, in order: a smile, a confident midair pose, a blush, a smile, a quizzical look as Applejack sets herself right.*)

**Pinkie:** …and the farm, so that’s like…*two* things.

(*The orange-tan face relaxes into a smile.*)

**Pinkie:** (*flopping onto table*) I don’t even have one.

(*She takes the cupcake back from Spike with a sigh and bites down, ignoring the crunches that tell her it is absolutely not meant to be eaten.*)

**Pinkie:** (*popping it open again*) When I first got Cheese’s invite, I was a little jealous. (*Her perspective of the photo and her friends.*) It felt like even he was moving on to bigger and better things— (*Pull it down and o.s.*) —and everypony was leaving me behind. (*Back to her, brightening as she sits up.*) But then I realized, Cheese Sandwich is a party pony just like me. If he figured out his purpose, he can help me figure out mine!

**Twilight:** I think talking to Cheese Sandwich is a great idea, but the only pony who can really find your life’s purpose is you.

**Pinkie:** (*leaning down into her face*) I know, silly. That’s why *I’m* going to visit Cheese Sandwich’s factory so *I* can ask him to help *me*. (*Back off; take another chomp of the cupcake.*)

**Spike:** Uh, Pinkie? Are you sure this is edible?

**Pinkie:** (*cheerfully*) I am not!

(*But that does not deter her from biting and chewing with gusto. The other five mares trade knowing smiles—with a few cocked eyebrows mixed in—as the view fades to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to a long cinderblock wall plastered with posters that depict Cheese in the midst of various goofy activities. It runs parallel to a road, along which Pinkie hops into view; she stops after several yards and runs an eye over one sheet.*)

**Pinkie:** Yep. Anypony with a smile like that— (*Close-up of the nearest poster, zooming out to frame her.*) —is exactly the kind of pony I want helping me!

(*She moves on, a split second before one corner peels away from the wall, and approaches a set of wrought-iron gates at which two uniformed earth pony security guards are stationed—one stallion, one mare. The hazy silhouette of a factory building can be seen through the bars, topped by the rise of twin smokestacks. The guards move to block Pinkie’s approach to the gates.*)

**Pinkie:** Oh, hey, guys. Pardon me. (*trying to push past them, with some effort*) Just gonna…squeeze by…

**Stallion guard:** Can we help you? (*He pushes her back.*)

**Pinkie:** You sure can! I’m here to see Cheese Sandwich!

**Mare guard:** Cheese Sandwich doesn’t see anypony!

**Stallion guard:** This factory is shut tight. Nopony ever comes out and nopony ever goes in, including you! (*Cut to the dismayed Pinkie; he continues o.s., waving her away.*) So move along.

**Pinkie:** Oh, that’s a shame. To think I came all this way because of this personal invitation from Cheese Sandwich himself.

(*She produces the remains of her ersatz cupcake as she speaks; the two guards start in surprise at the picture when it pops free of the housing.*)

**Mare guard:** You…you have an invitation? (*Both smile.*)

**Stallion guard:** Well, why didn’t you say so?

(*He slams a hoof down on a large button, setting off sirens and red strobe lights mounted on the wall, and Pinkie grins from ear to ear as the gates swing open so she can enter the property. She has put her invitation away.*)

**Mare guard:** (*petulantly*) Next time, I get to push the button!

(*The commotion stops. Inside, the factory stands at the far end of a walled-in concrete yard, shorter stacks extending skyward from the rooftops at either end. A few random crates, oil drums, and dumpsters are scattered here and there, but Pinkie finds herself the only living thing in the vicinity.*)

**Pinkie:** Ooooh! Desolate-y! (*She stops at a set of doors and raises her voice*) Hello? Anypony there?

(*The entrance opens on its own, exposing an industrial interior illuminated by hanging light fixtures. She has no time to offer any critique before a long red carpet comes bouncing out toward her, unrolling as it goes. Yelping in fear, she peels out to keep from being struck by the runaway textile, only to trip and fall. Cut briefly to her perspective, framing a set of four legs standing before her on it—greenish-gray, the front pair in long dark gray sleeves that end in white shirt cuffs, the whole backed by a straight, dark gray tail—then back to her. Once she realizes that this new figure is not about to eat her, she opens both eyes to look fully at it and the camera shifts back to her perspective, tilting up from ground level. The grinning, yellow-orange face is that of Cheese, but the eyes are a bit too dark a green. In addition, he has traded the poncho, flat-crowned hat, and yellow shirt he wore at different times in “Pinkie Pride” for a cardigan worn over a white turtleneck.*)

**Pinkie:** Cheese!

(*Profile of both; she stands up to hug this very odd figure—tall, with a cutie mark of a soaked, dripping blanket.*)

**Pinkie:** I’m so happy to see you!

(*The grin does not waver in the slightest until the figure yanks its entire face off as a rubber mask, with holes cut for the wearer’s eyes. Balding earth pony stallion, the remains of his mane matching his tail, pince-nez glasses before green eyes set in a critical expression. This is Sans Smirk, who speaks in a precise, analytical tone of voice.*)

**Sans:** Hmmm. This should have gotten a big laugh. I wonder if we need to add more carpet rolls.

(*Two employees in white lab coats, hoof booties, and mane-covering shower caps emerge carrying clipboards. One, a unicorn, is carrying his with magic and extends his hold over the mask.*)

**Sans:** I suppose it could be the mask. (*His perspective, pointing to the nose.*) Let’s try taking the nostril flare down ten percent. Thoughts? (*Drop it, framing Pinkie.*)

**Pinkie:** I have a thought. Who are you? (*Cut to frame all four.*)

**Sans:** So sorry. (*shaking hooves with her; the unicorn drops the mask on his own back*) Sans Smirk, vice president of amusement integration. Mr. Sandwich is very excited you’re here. If you’ll just follow me, it’s a short trip through the factory to Cheese’s office.

(*He and the employees start back into the plant.*)

**Pinkie:** Wow. A whole factory dedicated to gags! (*Jump in place.*) Ooh! I bet this is the funnest place ever!

(*She races after them along the red carpet; cut to just inside the entrance doors as she throws them open. Eagerness quickly gives way to bewilderment.*)

**Pinkie:** Huh.

(*Zoom out quickly to frame the entire area. Except for two ponies in white off to one side, all the employees here are dressed in yellow raincoats and hard hats and are preparing items for shipping as they move along conveyor belts.*)

**Pinkie:** (*leaning on one belt; it drags her along*) Maybe the fun is behind all this boring-looking factory stuff.

(*The stallion overseeing this bit of the operation is more than a little shocked to see her riding the belt and being dumped into a large carton at its end. A canister drops in next, bonking her in the back of the head.*)

**Sans:** (*crossing to her*) The fun *is* the factory stuff. We take a fairly serious approach to comedy here. Observe.

(*He walks off, Pinkie hopping out of the box and after him. They arrive at a workstation staffed by a mare who is inspecting a trick squirting flower.*)

**Sans:** (*stilted*) Oh, look. A pretty flower.

(*He leans in to sniff it, gets a burst of water in the face, and offers Pinkie a satisfied smile.*)

**Pinkie:** The squirting flower’s a classic. (*Sans nods; she gets an idea.*) Ohhhh! (*Grab it and put it on.*) What if the flower was part of a shirt, but the flower didn’t squirt? (*Drop to haunches.*) The shirt did!

(*Widened eyes from the listeners are quickly replaced by smiles of agreement.*)

**Sans:** That is literally the funniest thing I’ve ever heard.

**Pinkie:** (*laughing, standing, removing flower*) Oh, come on. (*Sans dries himself with a proffered towel.*) That’s just off the top of my head. (*Close-up; she tosses the flower and sits on a stool.*) You probably get, like, seventeen thousand ideas like that from Cheese every minute.

(*Sans’s next words throw a monkey wrench into her thoughts. On the start of the next line, cut to frame him addressing a worker and jotting notes on a pad.*)

**Sans:** We’d have to use a series of interconnected tubes in the fabric. (*to Pinkie*) What do you think of this?

(*He holds up a whoopee cushion on one front hoof and mashes it with the other to set it off.*)

**Pinkie:** I think it’s a whoopee cushion.

**Sans:** (*coaxingly*) Yes? (*Three white-clad workers gather in at his nod.*)

**Pinkie:** (*standing on stool*) But what if you made the embarrassing sound come from somepony else? (*Cut to her audience of four.*)

**Sans:** *I* sit on it, but the sound comes from *you*. We could call it the “Ventriloquoopie Cushion.”

(*Murmurs of assent; notes are taken.*)

**Pinkie:** (*from o.s.*) So… (*She hops off the stool and begins to pace.*) …which way is Cheese’s office again?

**Sans:** Right, of course. It’s been quite a while since we’ve had the opportunity to work with true comic inspiration like this.

**Pinkie:** What about Cheese? (*Green eyes pop.*)

**Sans:** Oh! One more thing.

(*He brings over a banana peel on a wooden stand, protected by a glass bell jar.*)

**Sans:** Our Super-Slip banana peel. (*setting it down*) Still in development, but we think it’s pretty special.

(*As soon as he lifts the cover away, the peel drops to the floor and skids crazily away, leaving behind a thin trailing layer of pulp. It veers down the aisle formed by two adjacent conveyor belts and is briefly lost to sight, with only the yells and stumbles of the ponies on duty to mark its progress. Once the peel emerges into the clear, it launches itself up an impromptu ramp consisting of a board propped against a barrel, smacks into a wall, and ricochets neatly back onto its stand. Sans claps the bell jar back in place.*)

**Sans:** So…too slippery?

**Pinkie:** (*chuckling deviously*) What if, instead of slipping, you were sticking? One step on *this* banana peel, and you can’t get it off! (*giggling, poking Sans’s nose*) *That’s* funny.

**Sans:** Wow. Just…wow. You’re exactly the pony Cheese Sandwich needs to see.

**Pinkie:** Great! (*She trots after him; they head up a staircase.*) Because *he’s* exactly the pony *I* need to see.

(*Cut to just inside a closed door in a darkened room. It swings open to admit a shaft of light and Pinkie’s cheery face, the latter of which shifts to confusion without touching the clutch.*)

**Pinkie:** Uh…hello?

(*Her perspective. She has arrived in a large office whose floor is littered with piles of novelties and joke items, including a large cardboard cutout of Cheese in his golf shirt off to one side. The far wall is taken up almost completely by a set of floor-to-ceiling windows. An imposing desk is placed before this, its chair swiveled to face away from the camera. Only a dark-maned head and the tips of two ears can be seen; the occupant speaks in a low, somber male voice.*)

**Occupant:** Pinkie, I’m…I’m glad you came.

(*The camera shifts to point at her from the desk, one edge of his head just in view—yellow-orange, with a curly brown mane tied back.*)

**Pinkie:** (*smiling, walking in*) Of course I did! Your factory is… (*Sans appears at the door.*) …*biiiiig!* It really seems like you’ve found your purpose, which is perfect, since I came here for help.

**Occupant:** That *is* perfect.

(*He turns to face her, confirming what has been hinted at by their exchange—it is Cheese in the horseflesh, but with not a trace of his old goofy demeanor. He is wearing a heavy, dark gray turtleneck.*)

**Cheese:** I knew I could count on you to help me.

**Pinkie:** Well, that’s triple-perfect because—uh, wait. Why do you need my help?

**Cheese:** Because, Pinkie, I…

(*The office lights come on in response to his clap.*)

**Cheese:** (*freaking out*) …I’ve completely lost my laugh!

(*The visiting party pony draws in a lung-bursting gasp of unadulterated horror. Snap to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to an overhead shot of the office. Large posters of Cheese and his favorite trick items adorn the walls.*)

**Pinkie:** You lost your laugh? (*Close-up; Sans crosses the floor.*) Is that some kinda joke? Because it’s not a funny one.

**Cheese:** It’s not a joke. And even if it was, I… (*propping head on a front hoof*) …I wouldn’t be able to laugh at it.

**Pinkie:** (*approaching desk*) Riiiiight.

(*She loops a foreleg around a can standing on the desk, the camera now framing her and Cheese.*)

**Pinkie:** Why don’t we continue this discussion over some delicious canned peanut brittle, hmmm?

(*As soon as she pops the top, spring-loaded snakes go flying.*)

**Pinkie:** Aha! (*One bounces off Cheese’s nose; no response.*) Wow. (*tossing can aside*) You *did* lose your laugh! That’s horrible!

**Sans:** (*from o.s.*) Sorry to interrupt… (*Pan slightly to frame him walking up, notepad in hoof.*) …but it occurs to me that a seven percent tighter wind on the snake springs would yield a twelve percent increase in giggle output.

(*His analysis earns a very hairy eyeball from Pinkie.*)

**Cheese:** This is why we’re a team. Sans here has always been able to eke every last laugh out of my gags, which—which is a help, since I haven’t come up with any good ones in a while.

(*He lets his head thump onto the desk as Sans tucks the pad away.*)

**Pinkie:** Wait. So you can tell if a gag is funny or not, you just can’t laugh at it?

**Cheese:** (*sobbing, eyes tearing up*) Yes! And it’s torture!

(*Now he lets his entire front half flop bonelessly across the wood.*)

**Pinkie:** (*raising his chin*) How did this happen?

(*He gives up any vestiges of dull restraint and lets real anguish come through in his words.*)

**Cheese:** I don’t know. (*He sits up.*) Back when I was a party pony, I—I laughed at everything.

(*Dissolve to him on the move through Equestria at sunset, wearing his old poncho and hat. Boneless Two, the cowboy-hatted rubber chicken he began to use after giving its predecessor to Pinkie in “Pinkie Pride,” rides floppily in the saddle attached to the poncho.*)

**Cheese:** (*voice over*) I spread my party cheer wherever it was needed.

(*He happens upon an outdoor gathering for adults and spots three fillies lying on the grass, bored out of their skulls. One of them is Kettle Corn, who earned a haiku-writing cutie mark in “Marks and Recreation.” On the next line, Cheese darts over to the tree, having changed into his yellow shirt; spins her in place; presses a bat into her hooves; and points her toward a star-shaped piñata hanging from a tree.*)

**Cheese:** (*voice over*) I even started making individual one-of-a-kind novelty gags for each and every one of my parties.

(*As the other two youngsters follow, he carries Kettle over on his back so she can get the height boost needed to bash away at the thing. It resists stoutly, but the same cannot be said of the bat; which snaps in half after a few hits to release a shower of candy. The fillies laugh as it rains down past the camera, the view wiping to a long shot of all four having a grand old time. A prod at his shoulder brings Cheese out of his mirth, and he finds a unicorn mare dropping a few coins to him with her telekinesis.*)

**Cheese:** (*voice over*) Soon it seemed like everypony in Equestria wanted one.

(*Pan away to frame a sizable line of clamoring customers, all with legal tender at the ready, then cut back to him as a toothy grin bisects his face. A dissolve puts him in a small workshop whose walls are plastered thick with diagrams and notes. Supplies, scraps, and finished products litter the floor and the table at which he is toiling. He takes a moment to mark off a couple of items on a checklist, then tests a joy buzzer on himself. Finding the device powerful enough to frizz out his mane and send sparks crackling up and down his body, he voices a laugh.*)

**Cheese:** (*voice over*) It was more work than my hooves could handle— (*His face falls and he unrolls the list to its full, daunting length.*) —but I didn’t want to disappoint all those smiling faces. (*Sound of a door opening from o.s.*) Luckily…

(*Pan quickly to Sans, who has just let himself into the workshop and is holding a rolled paper under one foreleg. On the next line, the balding stallion unrolls this to show it as a blueprint for the factory.*)

**Cheese:** (*voice over*) …Sans Smirk came to me with the idea for a factory. A gag factory.

(*Dissolve to a long shot of the facility itself, a rainbow arcing past the smokestacks as the two stand facing it. Cheese grins and throws a foreleg around Sans’s shoulders. On the next line, one of the posters on the perimeter wall is rolled upward to cover the screen and camera zooms out to frame the pair out here, saddlebags filled with other copies.*)

**Cheese:** (*voice over*) I could finally keep up with demand and make everypony happy.

(*Dissolve to the production floor, yellow-clad workers going hard at it, and tilt up to frame Cheese looking on contentedly from his office windows.*)

**Cheese:** (*voice over*) Soon we were sending gags all over Equestria.

(*Dissolve to him and Sans standing over one belt, their bags gone. One item at a time is advanced and given a quick test by Cheese, who nods approval so Sans can mark it on a clipboard. A mare passes him an aerosol can, which sprays a burst of “silly string” into his face without the button being pressed. This too gets the nod, and she returns to her station as he wipes himself clean. Throughout this entire sequence, his face displays a certain degree of weariness instead of a smile, which has instead found its way over to Sans. Zoom in slowly as his eyes pop and a great unease takes root.*)

**Cheese:** (*voice over*) But then, one day, my laugh was…just gone.

(*Dissolve to a close-up of him in the present—same pose—and zoom out.*)

**Cheese:** I haven’t left the factory since. (*covering eyes*) I-I don’t want anypony to see me like this. (*tearing up*) I-I-I mean, look at me! (*gesturing to one side*) Boneless Two doesn’t even recognize me anymore!

(*Pan quickly in that direction to a dim corner of the office. The pliable poultry sits on a swivel chair among a scatter of props, its cowboy hat gone, and pivots slowly to present its back to the tableau.*)

**Cheese:** So…can you help me, Pinkie? (*hunching down*) W-What do you think?

**Pinkie:** (*firmly*) I think I’ve got two words for you. Knock, knock.

**Cheese:** Uh, who’s there?

**Pinkie:** Boo!

**Cheese:** Boo who?

**Pinkie:** (*smiling*) Don’t cry, because I’m gonna get you your laugh back!

(*Wipe to them and Sans out in the yard, Cheese on a stool and Sans holding his notepad.*)

**Pinkie:** Let’s start with something small. Excuse me, Mr. Smirk, but is there something in my…*eye?*

(*She turns briefly away from him as she asks the question, then finishes it by turning back to him wearing a big grin and a pair of joke glasses whose googly eyes dangle from springs.*)

**Sans:** Top-notch eye googling, Miss Pie. (*Cheese just grunts dispiritedly.*)

**Pinkie:** (*removing/tossing glasses*) Why, thanks, Sans, old pal! (*extending a hoof to shake*) Put ’er there!

(*He does so and immediately falls victim to that industrial-strength joy buzzer, dropping his pad. The jolt leaves his mane standing up in spiky, crackling tufts, but Cheese just crumples a little further into himself.*)

**Pinkie:** (*laughing, putting buzzer away; Sans straightens his mane*) Oh, sorry about that. Let me make it up to you. (*Hop away a short distance.*) How about some…

(*She reaches o.s. and produces a cream pie.*)

**Pinkie:** …pie?

(*Almost as soon as she starts back toward the stallions, she loses her balance and tumbles across the yard, ending up with the tin stuck on her face. Sans, having recovered his pad, stares as it falls free and the pink joker beams through the mass of smashed pastry and filling. She takes a bow and quickly licks herself clean as Sans takes notes, but the bit fails to get even a flicker from Cheese.*)

**Sans:** (*dictating*) “Googly eye to hoof buzzer to pie-face pratfall.” (*He kisses his own hoof loudly.*) Masterful.

**Cheese:** (*shrugging*) Eh.

**Pinkie:** Come on! Those classic bits put Rainbow Dash’s funny bone in a cast for a week!

**Cheese:** Don’t blame yourself, Pinkie. Whatever I got, I got it bad.

**Pinkie:** Hmmm…maybe we need to start even smaller.

(*Uncertain yellow-orange frown meets confident pink grin before the view undergoes a clock wipe to an open patch of the factory floor. Pinkie paces into view, wearing a gray track-suit jacket and a darker headband, as Cheese and Sans watch. The bespectacled stallion no longer has his pad.*)

**Pinkie:** You can’t run before you can walk, and you can’t laugh before you can smile. (*pointing to Cheese*) And your smiler’s all outta whack. (*Cross to him.*) Now, let’s see what we’re working with. Gimme your biggest, bestest smile!

(*She demonstrates with a grin that shows off every one of her teeth; Cheese responds with a couple of badly lopsided attempts that suggest facial paralysis or nerve damage.*)

**Cheese:** (*strained, sweating*) Am I doing it? Am I smiling? I feel like I’m smiling!

**Pinkie:** (*uneasily, trying to humor him*) Almost. (*A nervous little laugh; he relaxes.*) Maybe I just need to spot you for a rep or two.

(*A quick hop carries her to one side; standing a foot or two behind his shoulders, she seizes the corners of his mouth and begins to stretch and knead as if his face were a wad of pizza dough. She ends by holding them pulled up as far as possible.*)

**Pinkie:** (*straining*) Okay! You got this! It’s all you! Ready?

(*But as soon as she lets to and backs off, both cheeks sag down past the jawline like deflated balloons.*)

**Cheese:** Anything?

(*Pinkie allows herself no more than a disappointed moan as he shakes his face back into order with a grunt.*)

**Pinkie:** I’m not giving up on you yet, Cheese. (*pacing*) I know there’s something somewhere that’ll make you laugh. I just have to figure out where to look.

**Sans:** I would like to take this opportunity to point out that we are in a *gag* factory.

(*Cut to within a brightly lit area, the camera pointing at a pair of closed double doors. Sans opens one and leads Pinkie in, followed by Cheese.*)

**Sans:** This is where the magic happens.

(*Zoom out on this line to a long shot of this area—a sizable laboratory, with white-clad researchers bustling about. From here, cut to a unicorn mare using her field to manipulate pliers on a disassembled toy snake as an earth pony coworker takes notes.*)

**Sans:** (*from o.s.*) Research and Development. (*Whoopee cushions are tested by dropping various weights onto them.*) It’s where we figure out the science of funny. (*Back to him and Pinkie, now crossing the room.*)

**Pinkie:** How do you science funny?

**Sans:** Of course, there’s no one-size-fits-all joke, no grand unified gag theory.

(*They and Cheese stop at a counter set with a pie, a toy snake, and two cans of peanut brittle—one rather larger than the other.*)

**Sans:** But if we figure out the funny of one gag, we can combine it with the funny of another gag and make a third, funnier gag.

(*He indicates the pie, small can, and large can in order during the previous line. Pinkie opens the lid on this last item and is promptly hit in the face by a pie in a spring-loaded tin—a meeting of the pie-in-the-face and trick-snakes-in-a-can japes. Puzzled, she wipes herself clean.*)

**Pinkie:** I…guess that makes sense. (*She crosses to a blackboard and reads.*) “Rule of threes.” Hmmm… (*counting off lines of text*) …one, two, three. Yep, that math checks out. (*crossing to Cheese*) Hmmm…at this point, I’m willing to give anything a try.

(*Wipe to her suiting up in white lab coat and hard hat, then to the factory blueprint being unrolled on a countertop. As other researchers gather to watch with curiosity piqued, she gets a pencil in her teeth and begins to sketch. The end result, hidden from view by the camera angle, draws a round of appreciative murmurs. Cut to a door and welcome mat that have been set up in the middle of the lab; Cheese approaches with great trepidation, followed closely by Pinkie who circles around to face him. The door has been left slightly ajar, swung in toward his side with a bucket balanced on the top edge. Cheese pushes the door closed and is rewarded by having the bucket fall upside down on his head. It is empty, but a high-velocity upward jet of water from the mat blasts it away and leaves the victim thoroughly soaked. Pinkie’s stifled laugh evaporates at his failure to get a rise out of the revamped joke, and the workers mumble concernedly as they take notes.*)

(*A blueprint page unrolls past the camera, wiping the view to a close-up of a mare showing off a fountain pen to Pinkie. The visitor shakes her head and talks/gestures a bit, earning an enthusiastic smile, and is soon hopping over to Cheese with the writing instrument balanced on a hoof. She squirts a dollop of ink onto his sweater; the stain quickly vanishes—disappearing ink—and the camera zooms out slightly to frame Sans watching. Pinkie turns to face him just as no fewer than half a dozen splotches appear all over his cardigan; she snickers to herself, but again Cheese gets no joy in this new twist on a classic prank.*)

(*A gush of ink washes over the camera lens, draining away to present a close-up of Pinkie poring over sheets of notes as translucent images of her calculations drift past and the camera zooms in slowly. After some seconds, she throws aside the pages she holds with a frustrated grunt and the superimposed lines disappear. She addresses Cheese across a countertop while Sans watches from one end with the ink gone from his clothing.*)

**Pinkie:** I don’t understand! We’ve tried everything. (*tossing pages/items over shoulder*) Stand-up, classic gag, physical humor, prop comedy, vaudeville, surrealist alt-scene character pieces—*nothing’s worked!*

(*What she throws, in order, are as follows. A sheet colored as a brick wall; one showing a pie; one that briefly sticks to her hoof; a watermelon; a top hat; a picture of a man with face blanked out and a leaf attached to his hatband.*)

**Sans:** It seems we’ve exhausted every avenue that even the science of comedy can provide.

**Cheese:** That’s it, then. (*He plods toward the doors.*)

**Pinkie:** What do you mean?

**Cheese:** (*sighing*) I appreciate everything you’ve done, Pinkie, but if *you* can’t make me laugh, nopony can.

**Sans:** But, sir, you can’t just surrender.

**Cheese:** It doesn’t look like I have a choice. I need to figure out how to live without a laugh. (*sighing, exiting*) I know you tried your best, but it’s time you went home.

(*Pinkie sucks in a terror-stricken gasp and claps both front hooves to her mouth.*)

**Sans:** (*adjusting his glasses*) I too am horrified.

(*Fade to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to the lab, which has taken on a rather less chipper mood in light of the failed attempts to bring Cheese around. Pinkie has shed her white coat and hard hat.*)

**Pinkie:** So that’s it? You’re all just giving up?

**Sans:** I’m afraid Mr. Sandwich is right. You are the funniest pony in Equestria. And if you can’t bring back his laugh, it is surely gone forever.

**Pinkie:** But…Cheese was just as funny as me. I…I can’t believe that’s all gone.

(*The factory floor; the doors open and she and Sans step out.*)

**Sans:** None of us can. I shudder to think what will become of the factory.

**Pinkie:** (*aghast*) You’re not gonna close down, are you? I thought this place was Cheese’s life’s purpose!

**Sans:** It certainly was mine. But if Mr. Sandwich has finally given up, there’s only so long we can retool his old ideas before we run out of gags to produce. (*They reach the front entrance.*) I don’t suppose…you’d consider working here? Your fresh take on our classic gags rivals Mr. Sandwich in his prime.

**Pinkie:** I need to find my life’s purpose, but I don’t think that’s it. (*hopping in place*) I’m a party pony. I need to make ponies happy in real time.

**Sans:** (*opening doors*) Ah, yes. In our early days, nothing brought Mr. Sandwich more pleasure than seeing the laughter his gags brought to ponies first-hoof.

**Pinkie:** Guess it’s back to the drawing board.

(*She hops out; cut to just outside the doors.*)

**Sans:** Well, there will always be a place for you here if you change your mind.

(*A thought flashes through the curly-topped cranium, whose owner freezes in midair.*)

**Pinkie:** Hold on. (*She turns to face Sans and touches down.*) What did you just say?

**Sans:** “There’ll always be a place for you here”? (*She zips back to him.*)

**Pinkie:** No, no, no, no, before that.

**Sans:** “Back to the drawing board.”

**Pinkie:** (*scoffing*) That was me!

**Sans:** “Nothing brought Mr. Sandwich more pleasure than seeing the laughter his gags brought to ponies first-hoof”?

**Pinkie:** (*beaming*) Yes! That! We’ve been going about this all wrong! We don’t need to make Cheese laugh, *he* needs to make *us* laugh!

(*She bugs out, leaving only a cloud of dust and a very puzzled stallion in her wake. Cut to a despondent Cheese sitting in his darkened office, facing the windows; she bursts in, the lights instantly coming on.*)

**Pinkie:** Cheese! I figured it out! (*He turns to her, surprised.*) I know why you can’t laugh!

**Cheese:** What? Why?

**Pinkie:** (*crossing to him*) You started this factory because you didn’t want to disappoint smiling faces, but in here, you can’t see any! (*Sans arrives, slightly out of breath.*)

**Sans:** It does make a certain sense, sir. Spreading laughter has always brought you joy.

**Cheese:** (*stepping away from his chair*) But spreading laughter is what this factory does.

**Pinkie:** Except you don’t *see* it! You’re a party pony like me! You need to make ponies smile in person!

(*Whipping back to the door, she leads Sans in by a foreleg as a few employees peek in.*)

**Pinkie:** (*pushing Sans toward Cheese*) Here. Just try it!

**Cheese:** (*tentatively*) Okay…um… (*Clear throat.*) …why did Boneless Two cross the road?

(*The business-minded stallion offers no response beyond a little “get on with it” gesture.*)

**Cheese:** To prove to Boneless One he wasn’t a chicken.

**Sans:** (*adjusting glasses*) Very funny, sir. Excellent joke. (*catching himself*) Oh! I mean…ha, ha, ha? (*Pinkie rises to fix him with a venomous glare.*)

**Pinkie:** Really?

**Sans:** (*adjusting glasses*) Sorry. Not much of a laugher.

**Pinkie:** (*to Cheese, smiling*) Here, try me. (*singsong*) I promise I’ll laugh. (*Big grin; close-up of him.*)

**Cheese:** Pinkie, you laugh at everything. I appreciate what you’re doing, but I think it’s a cost laws. (*stammering, catching himself*) A lost cause.

(*The sound of soft snickering draws his focus toward the door.*)

**Cheese:** What was *that?*

(*The answer, as revealed when most of the crowd backs off, is one badly unnerved stallion.*)

**Stallion employee:** (*entering office*) I’m—I’m sorry, but when you swapped the letters of those words, it was just a bit— (*The boss leans close to give him a searching look.*)

**Cheese:** Funny?

**Stallion employee:** (*nodding*) Uh-huh.

***Quiet piano/string chords, slowly building intensity, moderate loose 4 (A major)***

**Cheese:** So you’re saying it’s a mix-up of the sounds that I just made

That coaxed the snicker from your throat in a delicate cascade

If I did it one more time, if I reproduced that feat

Mixed up some letters here and there, you’d lelly-baff *tout de suite*?

(*French for “right away.” He holds out the last note, eliciting a round of chortles from the group at the door for his deliberate mangling of “belly laugh.”*)

***Banjo/tuba/drum/clarinet/accordion polka melody, fast 4***

(*Hopping onto his desk, he does a quick change into a yellow suit jacket and top hat, with a white shirt and blue tie that matches the hatband, and unties his mane. The old Cheese has now fully returned, in both attitude and appearance.*)

**Cheese:** Then that’s all I need to do, it’s who I need to be

I thought I needed laughter, but it has to come from me

(*He squirts Sans with a trick flower and ties his own forelegs in a knot for Pinkie’s amusement.*)

Squirting flowers and knobby knees

(*Pop up from a box of trick items and hold up a diploma.*)

Rubber chickens, my expertise

(*Lead Pinkie, Sans, and several workers along the balcony outside his office; pull the hat off to release a blast of confetti over all.*)

If you want laughter, then stick with Cheese

(*He gets plenty of it from those up here and at the conveyor belts, and he dons his hat and somersaults down the stairs.*)

**Pinkie:** Yeah!

***Cheese occasionally shifts from singing to speaking at the end of a line***

(*A giant switch is pulled, bringing a torrent of balloons and funny props down from a chute.*)

**Cheese:** I s’pose now I should amp things up to get the thing I’m after

Move whole syl-*la*-bles around and change em-*pha*-sis to get laughter

(*Balance on a beach ball, then hop off and bounce it off his back so he can hold it up.*)

Can’t stop now, I’m on a roll, I’ve almost got it back

(*Jump back on and bounce it around until it pops on a loose tack, blasting confetti everywhere.*)

Bright folks like you aren’t subject to my play-on-words attack

(*The paper bits clear to show him walking against the motion of one conveyor as if it were a treadmill.*)

**Cheese:** With something else I’ll have to play

(*Sit.*) To get me where I’m going

(*He falls off the end and lands on an inflatable pool float.*)

**Pinkie:** Whatcha gonna do?

***Classical feel; no percussion***

(*He comes up in a loose outfit and cap somewhat similar to the clothing worn by opera clowns, his eyes covered by a mask with a long, beak-like nose.*)

**Cheese:** (*falsetto*) Some *commedia dell’arte*

(*Switch masks as the workers laugh uproariously.*)

(*normal*) To get the laughter flowing

***Polka***

(*Balloons fly up past the camera; behind them, wipe to the factory floor. He rolls into view on a unicycle, back in his yellow suit/hat and juggling props; a football helmet is perched on the hat’s crown.*)

**Cheese:** And it’s what I need to do, it’s who I need to be

(*He jumps off and ditches the small items in favor of dancing with Pinkie.*)

I thought I needed laughter, but it has to come from me

(*March across the space, leading her and a line of workers; helmet gone.*)

Follow right behind, if you please

(*They imitate his silly walk, and all tumble when the Super-Slip banana peel from Act One skids under their hooves.*)

Walk this way and I guarantee

(*Somersaults and flips carry him into the lab.*)

If you want laughter, then stick with Cheese

(*spoken*) Accordion solo! (*Pinkie throws him a squeezebox.*)

**Pinkie:** Shred it, Cheese!

(*He whoops and begins to play and gambol his way around the facility, stopping ever so briefly to kick a switch that activates a machine to deliver pie after pie to an automated catapult. An occasional laugh punctuates the mayhem as the desserts go flying and he climbs up onto a pony-shaped mannequin set up in front of a target. One near miss…two…three…and then he takes a direct hit to the face that he is only too happy to lick off.*)

(*His tongue carries a wad of filling past the camera, the view wiping behind it to the factory floor; he jumps down onto a crate, no longer playing his accordion. One catch of a thrown cane later, he is up on his hind legs and doing a soft-shoe number.*)

**Cheese:** And it’s what I need to do, it’s who I need to be

I thought I needed laughter, but it has to come from me

(*Now wearing only a pair of overalls, he plops his rump onto a whoopee cushion to fire it off.*)

Whoopee cushions and dungarees

(*Jump down off a stack of crates and use a pointer to pick out key concepts on a blackboard.*)

I know jokes like my ABC’s

(*Toss the rod aside; spin the board on its frame.*)

If you want laughter, then stick with Cheese

(*The flip side presents an equation in pictorial form: rubber chicken plus laugh equals cheese. The nearest workers proceed to laugh themselves silly.*)

***Half-time feel; rock ballad with added bass guitar (B minor)***

(*Dissolve to Cheese standing under a spotlight, back in his suit and hat and holding a microphone. He slides to the edge of the illuminated circle on his hocks. A translucent Pinkie appears for the duration of each of her lines, equipped with her own mic.*)

**Cheese:** And now my biggest test, the hardest fish to fry

**Pinkie:** Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh

(*Another spot picks out Sans.*)

**Cheese:** A mind so analytical, a sense of humor dry

(*Pinkie throws sparkles over herself and Sans.*)

**Pinkie:** (*spoken in rhythm*) So dry

(*Now Cheese pops up behind Sans from various angles.*)

**Cheese:** To make you laugh would prove to me that this

experiment’s done

**Pinkie:** Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh

**Cheese:** Something ridiculous and not too smart, something

like a pun

***Music pauses***

(*He crosses to the staid stallion without his mic.*)

**Cheese:** Hey, Sans! How did the laughing bird’s eggs hatch? (*Quizzical look.*) They cracked up!

(*A drum sting is heard as the camera zooms in to a close-up of Sans, who suddenly finds himself struggling to limit his reaction to a silly smile.*)

**Sans:** Sir, that is so ridiculous!

(*He gives up the fight and dissolves into a gale of full-throated laughter.*)

***Half-time feel ends; polka (D flat major)***

(*Pinkie bounds across to embrace Cheese.*)

**Cheese:** Then that’s all I need to do, that’s all I need to see

(*He leaps onto a crate surrounded by jubilant workers.*)

I thought I needed laughter, but it had to come from me

(*A kick line forms on one conveyor.*)

**All:**  Squirting flowers and knobby knees

(*He juggles rubber chickens as Boneless Two rolls past on a chair and two mares spring back and forth.*)

Rubber chickens and dungarees

(*Gathering Pinkie and Sans in close, he puts googly-eye glasses on the former and Groucho Marx glasses on the latter.*)

If you want laughter, then stick with Cheese

(*Zoom out quickly to frame the three now standing atop a mountain of crates. Red carpets snake down on the three sides not facing the factory wall. As Pinkie and Sans slide/roll down the ones to either side, he tumbles along the one in front and comes up on his hocks, forelegs raised in blissful triumph.*)

***Song ends***

(*Laughter rings throughout the building as Sans removes his joke specs and gets a helping hoof up from his boss.*)

**Sans:** It’s so good to have you back, sir. Finally we can get the factory back to how things used to be.

**Cheese:** Sans, my good pony, I don’t think I could run this factory anymore.

(*Sans reacts with visible shock at this pronouncement; cut to Cheese’s perspective of him.*)

**Cheese:** (*pointing at him*) But you can!

**Sans:** W-Without you? (*adjusting glasses*) I-I-I don’t understand.

(*Cut to frame both; the yellow-clad party pony reels the pink one toward himself.*)

**Cheese:** Pinkie was right. (*Pan away to a knot of workers goofing around; he continues o.s.*) *This* is what I need! (*Back to the trio.*) I just can’t have funny ideas. (*Pinkie removes her silly glasses.*) I need to wander the land and see ponies laughing at them! You can run the factory, but I need to live!

(*He holds the last word out in an operatic tenor, shucking off his fancy duds and instantly back in his old poncho and hat.*)

**Cheese:** (*pointing over shoulder*) And don’t think I’ve forgotten about you, little buddy!

(*Pan quickly in that direction to stop on Boneless Two, slumped in a swivel chair and facing into the corner. A half-turn allows it to face him straight on, the miniature cowboy hat plunked back on its head at last. Cheese scoops it up and expertly tosses it to land on the poncho’s saddle.*)

**Cheese:** I knew you’d be on board. (*He heads for the open front doors, followed by Pinkie and Sans, and addresses Sans.*) Don’t worry. Out in Equestria, I’ll have more great ideas for gags, and I’ll send them all to you!

**Sans:** Sir, are you sure this is what you want to do?

**Cheese:** Of course! (*rising briefly to hind legs*) It’s my life’s purpose!

**Pinkie:** Hey! That’s what *I* came here looking for!

**Cheese:** You did? (*laughing*) Well, come on! Let’s figure it out!

(*The flighty pink mare considers the issue for a moment, letting her eyes rove across a factory floor now filled with merrymaking employees and a grinning Sans, and finally speaks as the camera zooms in.*)

**Pinkie:** Actually, I think I’m good.

(*Around her grinning visage, the background dissolves to her seat within the Castle’s throne room.*)

**Pinkie:** And then I said goodbye, and then I came here! (*Longer shot, framing a very slightly bored Applejack and Rarity on their thrones.*) Oh, and then I gathered you all together and started telling you about it. First I said— (*Twilight hastily stands up from her throne to cut off the tale.*)

**Twilight:** Well, that sounds like quite a trip. (*Cut to Fluttershy in her seat.*)

**Fluttershy:** And…Cheese Sandwich just left his own factory? (*One more shot frames Rainbow in attendance.*)

**Pinkie:** Yep! But I think Sans Smirk’s hooves were the perfect ones to leave it in. As much as Cheese was born to wander Equestria and make ponies laugh in person, Sans was born to run that factory.

**Applejack:** And you don’t sound so worried about findin’ your life’s purpose anymore.

**Pinkie:** Nope! I figured out Cheese and I are pretty much the same.

(*Close-up; behind her, a cart at the wall is loaded with trick cans of peanut brittle.*)

**Pinkie:** We both need to see ponies laughing to feel fulfilled, and I already do that. My life is purposing itself all over the place! (*Big grin.*)

**Rarity:** (*laughing*) I agree completely.

**Pinkie:** Thanks. Oh, I almost forgot! (*grabbing one can from the cart; pan from it to her*) I got you all a little something from my trip. Who likes peanut brittle?

(*The grin returns as she begins to pry the lid loose. Cut to a long shot of the Castle’s upper stories; a mighty explosion of confetti shakes the whole edifice and streams from the windows, accompanied by hearty laughter from those within. Zoom out slowly and fade to black.*)