

FADE IN - Edge of Whitetail Woods - Autumn Day

Fade in to afternoon sun. It is clear outside, with no clouds or chance of rain. Pan down to the very edge of Whitetail Woods, looking out from the woods towards the horizon. Ponyville can be clearly seen from the distance.

APPLEJACK, TWILIGHT, SPIKE, RARITY, and RAINBOW DASH move in from over a hill, all of the ponies trotting (Save for RAINBOW DASH, who is flying) towards Whitetail Woods. Each of them are carrying an array of tin buckets and taps. SPIKE is on TWILIGHT's back, holding her array of sap gathering instruments.

Cut to APPLEJACK, leading the group. She looks back to the others following her.

APPLEJACK

I can't thank y'all enough for helping me today. With Big Mac busy, it would've taken me forever to get this sap on my own!

TWILIGHT, with SPIKE on her back, moves into the shot.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

Of course Applejack! Everpony knows that your family's maple syrup is the best in Equestria.

Zoom out so that RARITY is shown in the shot.

RARITY

And besides, darling, it's no real bother. For all you've done for everypony in town, it's the least we can do to help!

RAINBOW DASH lowers into the shot, hovering between APPLEJACK and RARITY.

RAINBOW DASH

Yeah! But, uh, why isn't Pinkie Pie helping? She loves sap, doesn't she?

//should AJ roll her eyes or look forward with a sour expression?

APPLEJACK

That's the problem. She loves sap... just a mite bit too much. The last time she agreed to help, by the time we got back to Ponyville we had hardly any sap left! But I have the perfect pony to keep her busy 'til we get back.

CUT TO: FLUTTERSHY’S HOUSE, INTERIOR, DAY

A birthday party is being held at FLUTTERSHY’S house, courtesy of PINKIE PIE. Littered across the den are shreds of confetti, loose animals, and a banner that spells ‘Happy Birthday Angel.’ The party is for ANGEL, FLUTTERSHY’S pet rabbit. He is sitting at a dinner table, arms crossed and an oversized birthday hat on his head. He tries to lift it up, but it slumps back down over his eyes. His frown grows as the shot zooms out, a worried FLUTTERSHY and a giddy PINKIE PIE are seen observing the scene. GUMMY, PINKIE’s pet crocodile, is resting on her head, mouth agape.

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS PATH, EXTERIOR, DAY

APPLEJACK grins and closes her eyes in confidence.

APPLEJACK

Eeyup.

Cut to TWILIGHT, who looks back to SPIKE, arching a brow. SPIKE shrugs.

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS CLEARING, EXTERIOR, DAY

The group reaches their destination, a lush clearing surrounded by trees and fallen leaves.

APPLEJACK

Here we are!

They all begin to set aside their tools and get to work planting the taps onto the trees and hanging the buckets. This is particularly easy for RARITY and TWILIGHT, due to unicorn magic. After SPIKE sets aside the bucket he was holding, he hurries up to APPLEJACK, excited.

SPIKE

Is there anything I can do to help, Applejack?

APPLEJACK

Uh...

APPLEJACK shifts her eyes a bit, trying to let SPIKE off as gently as she could.

APPLEJACK

You can... Uh... Well, this is more of a big pony's job.

SPIKE looks down, disappointed. APPLEJACK bites her lip and RAINBOW DASH, turning her head after hanging her buckets, walks to the two.

RAINBOW DASH

Come on, Spike. I can show you around the woods while they get everything set up. I already got my part done.

SPIKE

Really!? Awesome!

RARITY and TWILIGHT look back from the trees they were planting taps in.

RARITY

Are you sure about that, dear?

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

I don't want Spike getting lost or hurt. What if something happens?

DASH scoffs and waves a hoof, as is her nature.

RAINBOW DASH

Oh stop worrying, Twilight. This isn't Everfree forest or anything.

RAINBOW DASH points to a small random animal that's acting cute.

RAINBOW DASH

If this is the worst this place has to offer, we'll be fine!

RAINBOW DASH smiles and tosses SPIKE on her back.

RAINBOW DASH

After all, what's the worst that could happen?

RAINBOW DASH and SPIKE exit the scene as they fly into the woods. A shadow of a DEER [REDWOOD] is seen where they once were, the antlered shadow lifting its head to look towards the viewer

CUT TO - Intro

PUT INTRO HERE

=ACT ONE=

FADE IN - Deep Whitetail Woods, Interior, Day

RAINBOW DASH, with SPIKE on her back, lands deeper into Whitetail Woods. It is darker here, with thicker trees blocking out some of the sunlight. Rays of light break through the leaves and give the area a warm glow.

SPIKE

I just don't see what the big deal is! How's this really such a 'big pony's' job? Doesn't Applejack trust me?

SPIKE gets his feet back on the ground and both he and RAINBOW DASH walking through the woods side by side. SPIKE folds his arms, looking away from RAINBOW DASH.

RAINBOW DASH

Well, it's not that she doesn't trust you or anything. It's just that... uh...

SPIKE

What? It's just what?

RAINBOW DASH

Well... You aren't built for this kinda work, ya know?

Move camera shot to SPIKE. SPIKE flexes his hands, looking down at them.

SPIKE

But... I have opposable thumbs! Doesn't that count for anything?

SPIKE's face smooshes onto RAINBOW DASH's flank, bouncing him back. He looks back to her, annoyed.

SPIKE

Hey, why'd you—whoa?

SPIKE looks up, looking amazed at the sight he beholds. Camera zooms out to show RAINBOW DASH has the same expression. Before them is REDWOOD, a towering, intimidating buck, looking down at the two of them.

REDWOOD is a stern, fatherly figure. He cares about his family, especially his only son, but is unable to show it. He is suspicious of outsiders, especially ponies, and worries about them taking his son from him.

Cut to an establishing shot, where all three are on the screen, to emphasize the size difference between REDWOOD and RAINBOW DASH. SPIKE moves back beside RAINBOW DASH and the two stare at REDWOOD, with SPIKE glancing to RAINBOW DASH for a moment. Before either can speak, REDWOOD takes charge of the conversation.

REDWOOD

Where is my son?

His tone is calm and authoritative. SPIKE and RAINBOW DASH share a look. SPIKE shrugs. RAINBOW DASH seems to be at loss for words. She turns back to REDWOOD.

RAINBOW DASH

Uh... We haven't seen any deer around, but we can keep an eye out. What's he look like?

SPIKE looks back to REDWOOD and nods as RAINBOW DASH talks. REDWOOD narrows his eyes, leaning in toward RAINBOW DASH.

REDWOOD

You're lying, pony. Where is he?

RAINBOW DASH backs up and REDWOOD follows her, maintaining his looming position over her. She finds her back against a tree, with REDWOOD mere inches from her face.

RAINBOW DASH

Look mister, I don't know what you're talking about!

REDWOOD grits his teeth in frustration. Cut to between REDWOOD's front legs, RAINBOW DASH seeming so much smaller as REDWOOD digs a hoof into the ground. But SPIKE moves between them. Cut to a side view, SPIKE getting into REDWOOD's face, REDWOOD backing up in surprise. He points a finger at REDWOOD, not in the mood to see his friend bullied.

SPIKE

Leave her alone! She said she doesn't know anything!

REDWOOD blinks, but narrows his eyes again. SPIKE's burst of courage suddenly fades from

him as he too backs away, moving beside RAINBOW DASH. RAINBOW DASH looks to those sharp antlers and then back to SPIKE and whispers to him from the corner of her mouth.

RAINBOW DASH

(whisper)

Spike, run for it!

SPIKE glances to RAINBOW DASH, arching a brow. He also whispers.

SPIKE

(whisper)

What?

RAINBOW DASH looks slightly more panicked and speaks from the corner of her mouth again, but louder.

RAINBOW DASH

(whisper)

Run!

SPIKE shakes his head.

SPIKE

(whisper)

I can't—

Having enough, RAINBOW DASH bursts into a full yell as she takes flight.

RAINBOW DASH

RUN!

REDWOOD backs away in surprise as RAINBOW DASH yells. She takes off behind him and REDWOOD automatically follows her with his eyes. REDWOOD turns back to where SPIKE was to find nothing in his place. REDWOOD snorts and whirls around to face RAINBOW DASH.

REDWOOD

You won't get away from me!

REDWOOD bolts off after her.

Cut to SPIKE running away into the forest. SPIKE looks back to see if he is being chased. When he does so, he trips over an errant root, falling down a small incline and into some bushes.

CUT TO - FOREST CHASE SCENE, EXTERIOR, DAY

Camera focuses on RAINBOW DASH as she zooms through the woods, swerving through the trees as she tries to reach her friends. The camera then faces her. She's confident that REDWOOD can't possibly keep up. She moves to the left and to the right, where REDWOOD is clearly seen closing ground. She looks back, shocked that the deer could keep up with her. REDWOOD zig-zags through the trees with such speed that it puts RAINBOW DASH's agility to shame.

She looks ahead with a shocked expression on her face, pushing herself to go faster. But REDWOOD is still closing in on her. Cut to a close up shot on REDWOOD, gritting his teeth and looking determined, then cut to a close up shot on RAINBOW DASH with a worried expression.

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS CLEARING, EXTERIOR, DAY

Cut to close up shot of a hammer, radiating with a violet magic aura, hammering a tap into a tree. It is moved out of the shot and a bucket is placed on said tap with a similar aura. Pans out to TWILIGHT SPARKLE, satisfied with her work. She looks behind her to RARITY, who is still trying to hammer in her tap. TWILIGHT SPARKLE approaches her.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

What's wrong, Rarity?

RARITY gasps in surprise, turning around to TWILIGHT SPARKLE, but sighs, smiling casually to mask her paranoia.

RARITY

Oh no, nothing's wrong. Just... don't want to force it, is all. You know, with all that sap. Flying everywhere. In my hair, possibly.

RARITY sighs, closing her eyes and shaking her head.

RARITY

(muttered)

It would be impossible to get out...

RARITY looks back to TWILIGHT SPARKLE.

RARITY

I would simply have to cut it. And that, Twilight, would be a disaster.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE raises a brow, speaking in her flat, sarcastic tone.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

Well we don't have all day, Rarity.

RARITY nods.

RARITY

Right, right of course... I promised to help, so I will do just that!

She turns back to the tap, levitating it and the hammer with her magic. She brings the tap to the tree and lifts the hammer to the tap.

RARITY

Slowly... gently now...

Close up of the hammer nearing the tap.

Close up on RARITY's face, biting her lip. Another close up on the hammer and tap. Just as the hammer is about to touch the tap, zooming out from RARITY, RAINBOW DASH bursts through the trees over her. RARITY flinches, dropping the hammer and tap. She ducks down, covering her head with her hooves.

REDWOOD barrels after RAINBOW DASH, but trips over RARITY, stumbling through the clearing, his legs getting stuck in sap buckets. He loses his balance, trips, and falls, face planting in front of RAINBOW DASH. Sap quickly oozes under him, sticking the buck to the ground. Several droplets of sap almost collide with RARITY, but she sees them and dodges heroically to the side with her typical horror scream.

RAINBOW DASH

What the hay is your problem?!

REDWOOD

You think this sap'll stop me? I—

REDWOOD attempts to lift himself from the sap, but he snaps back onto the ground like a rubber band.

REDWOOD

Oof!

The rest of the ponies, TWILIGHT SPARKLE, RARITY, and APPLEJACK, go to RAINBOW DASH's side.

APPLEJACK

What in tarnation is going on here, Rainbow?

RAINBOW DASH looks to APPLEJACK while pointing a front hoof at REDWOOD.

RAINBOW DASH

Ask him! He's the one that came outta nowhere, acting crazy!

REDWOOD tries to lift himself from the sap once more, struggling harder now. His voice is strained.

REDWOOD

When I get out of here—

MAPLE LEAF

(offscreen)

Calm down, love.

The ponies look to the voice as it starts talking and see a smaller doe, MAPLE LEAF, emerging from the shrubbery.

MAPLE LEAF is REDWOOD's caring wife. Much calmer and more collected than her husband, she acts as his mediator. Like REDWOOD, she cares dearly for their son, but is able to more clearly show it.

REDWOOD

These ponies, they took—

MAPLE LEAF interrupts him.

MAPLE LEAF

They took nothing, dear. You just overreacted, as usual.

MAPLE LEAF looks to the ponies with a gentle smile.

MAPLE LEAF

Forgive my husband. He can be a bit... pushy at times.

MAPLE LEAF leans her neck down to REDWOOD to help him up. Cut back to the ponies.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

I don't mean to interrupt, but what exactly is going on? Why was he chasing Rainbow Dash?

Cut back to MAPLE LEAF, who looks back to the ponies. REDWOOD, now free from the sap, also gets up. REDWOOD looks away from the ponies as he stands, averting his gaze in embarrassment and contempt.

MAPLE LEAF

Oh it isn't anything personal to any of you. It's just that our son is missing in the woods and he... well, jumped to conclusions. But we...

She looks to REDWOOD, who focuses back onto the group before him.

MAPLE LEAF

...thought maybe you could help us find—

RAINBOW DASH gasps.

RAINBOW DASH

Ohmygosh, Spike! He's still in the woods!

She tries to fly off, but APPLEJACK snatches her by the tail.

APPLEJACK

Hold on there, Rainbow Dash. Y'all ain't goin' in there alone!

The other ponies, as well as REDWOOD and MAPLE LEAF, look to APPLEJACK.

APPLEJACK

We ain't gonna find him, or yer son, if we all just rush around without any kinda plan. We oughta split into groups.

MAPLE LEAF smiles at REDWOOD before looking back to APPLEJACK. REDWOOD clears his throat, stepping forward.

REDWOOD

Very well then. I will lead a group towards our home in the hills, across the river. Our son may have returned while we were searching.

RAINBOW DASH flies in to get in REDWOOD's way.

RAINBOW DASH

Hey! It was YOUR fault that Spike's lost! You should be looking for him too!

REDWOOD presses his head onto RAINBOW DASH's, pushing her back with some resistance.

REDWOOD

My family comes first. We will find your dragon AFTER we find him.

RAINBOW DASH starts pushing back.

RAINBOW DASH

Well I—

RAINBOW DASH is interrupted when MAPLE LEAF interjects, putting a hoof on their heads...

MAPLE LEAF

I believe you two should find them both...

...and smooshing them together.

MAPLE LEAF

together!

REDWOOD and RAINBOW DASH turn to MAPLE LEAF in surprise.

REDWOOD AND RAINBOW DASH

What?!

MAPLE LEAF nods, smiling.

MAPLE LEAF

You both lost them. It's only right that you find them together.

She turns to the other ponies, specifically to TWILIGHT SPARKLE, who looks lost in worry.

MAPLE LEAF

I'll go with... What's your name, pony?

TWILIGHT SPARKLE is shaken from her own thoughts and collects herself.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

OH! It's Twilight. Twilight Sparkle.

MAPLE LEAF nods.

MAPLE LEAF

Right then. Ms. Sparkle and I will go to the lower roads. You two...

She points a hoof to APPLEJACK and RARITY.

MAPLE LEAF

*...can go down the river. Rainbow Dash can go with Redwood to our home. We meet back here.
Understand?*

Cut to APPLEJACK.

APPLEJACK

Got it!

Pan to RARITY.

RARITY

Got it!

And then finally to RAINBOW DASH and REDWOOD, who are looking away from each other.

REDWOOD AND RAINBOW DASH

(Grumbles)

Got it.

Fade into a new shot. MAPLE LEAF and TWILIGHT SPARKLE go in one direction, APPLEJACK and RARITY go in another, and REDWOOD and RAINBOW DASH, still glaring at each other, set off as well. Several cuts are made as TWILIGHT SPARKLE, APPLEJACK, and RARITY call out for Spike.

APPLEJACK

Spike?

RARITY

Spike?!

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

Spiiiiike!

FADE OUT

=END ACT ONE=

=ACT TWO=

FADE IN: WHITETAIL WOODS, SHRUBBERY BUSH, EXTERIOR, DAY

Fade in and pan down to a collective of bushes and shrubberies. They are fading into shades of orange due to the autumn season. One of the bushes near the center begins to rustle, as TWILIGHT SPARKLE's last line echos into the area.

SPIKE emerges from the bush, still woozy from the fall but otherwise fine. He groans, but shakes it off when he hears TWILIGHT SPARKLE's voice.

SPIKE

Is... is that you, Twilight?

A rustle is heard, causing SPIKE to perk up and look around nervously for the source of noise.

SPIKE

W-who's there?

The sound returns and SPIKE ducks back into his bush. He hears the noise coming closer, his eyes darting left and right in a vain attempt to find whatever seemed to be tracking him down. He closes his eyes. Orange, pony-shaped hooves trot to SPIKE's bush, visible underneath. They pause, digging their hooves into the ground, before trotting away. SPIKE opens one eye to see if the coast is clear.

Pan slightly to the right, where TREEBARK is ducked down with SPIKE, a curious expression on his face.

TREEBARK

What are you doing in the bushes?

SPIKE

GYAAAAAH!!

SPIKE yelps, leaping out of the bush and into a glade, stumbling onto his bottom. TREEBARK's head pokes out of the top of the bush.

TREEBARK is a young colt, around SPIKE's age, that is the adopted son of REDWOOD and MAPLE LEAF. With two carved wooden antlers adorning his head, he thinks he is a deer. He is

headstrong and curious, but tries to mask his insecurities about his identity with self denial and a 'tough guy' attitude.

SPIKE looks up at TREEBARK, then sighs with relief, standing himself back up and dusting himself off.

SPIKE

Oh! Haha, you scared me there! I thought you were one of those big deer running around or something!

TREEBARK raises a brow, then sinks back into the bush, before jumping out of the bush and in front of SPIKE.

TREEBARK

Hey, I AM a deer! Just as much of a deer as you are a talking lizard!

SPIKE recoils backward, blinking.

SPIKE

Lizard?! My name's Spike, and I'm a dragon, thank you very much! And what makes you think you're a deer, anyway? You sure don't look like one.

TREEBARK blinks and tilts his head.

TREEBARK

Well, my mom and dad are deer, and uh, I have four hooves, I have a tail, aaand I eat grass. So yes, deer. That's what I am. What makes you think you're a dragon, huh? You sure don't look like one, either!

SPIKE furrows his brow, determined to defend his honor as a dragon as he puffs out his chest.

SPIKE

Well, my...

SPIKE pauses, and fumbles with the words as he realized he could not exactly repeat what TREEBARK replied with.

SPIKE

Ah, forget it.

SPIKE drops the subject, knowing he won't get anywhere with it.

SPIKE

So what's a... majestic deer like yourself doing here?

TREEBARK answers quickly, plainly somewhat nervous about the subject.

TREEBARK

Well, 'Spike,' I am patrolling these forests. And what are you doing here?

SPIKE is just as quick to answer, also somewhat nervous.

SPIKE

Oh, you know. The same. Uh... Exploring stuff. Yeah.

SPIKE looks around shiftily. TREEBARK smirks.

TREEBARK

You're lost, aren't you?

SPIKE furrows his brow, reacting defensively.

SPIKE

No, of course—

SPIKE sighs in defeat.

SPIKE

Yeah...

TREEBARK lifts up his head in pride.

TREEBARK

*Well you're lucky I know this forest like the back of my hoof. I can take you right to my parents;
I'm sure they'll know what to do. Follow me!*

TREEBARK starts walking offscreen. SPIKE looks back to the bushes, uncertain, before TREEBARK calls back to him.

TREEBARK
(offscreen)

You coming or not?

SPIKE quickly follows.

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS, GORGE, EXTERIOR, DAY

TREEBARK encounters a gap of land. It is small, an easy jump. SPIKE catches up.

SPIKE

Hey-hey! I don't even know your name!

TREEBARK grins. He easily crosses the gap before turning around to look to SPIKE.

TREEBARK

Name's Treebark! Now try to keep up, this jump is pretty hard.

TREEBARK watches SPIKE get ready to jump. Just as SPIKE leaps and makes it across, TREEBARK gets curious.

TREEBARK

So what is a dragon doing here, anyway?

SPIKE

Just helping my friends collect sap, is all.

TREEBARK blinks.

TREEBARK

Friends? Other dragons?

SPIKE

No, they're ponies.

TREEBARK

Really? Ponies? I've never seen a pony before. What're they like?

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS, FALLEN LOG, EXTERIOR, DAY

SPIKE and TREEBARK are passing a fallen log blocking the path. TREEBARK, again, easily jumps over the log.

SPIKE

Well... They're colorful, and uh, have big hooves, and some of them can fly. I'm surprised you haven't met any!

TREEBARK looks to his hooves as SPIKE mentions them, looking concerned before he sees SPIKE get on top of the log.

TREEBARK

Well uh.... My dad told me I shouldn't talk to them if I ever saw one. He said they could be dangerous.

SPIKE is on top of the log, about to get down, before he bursts out laughing, causing him to lose balance and fall. He gets up, still giggling.

SPIKE

Pfffhaha, dangerous? Seriously!? They're about as dangerous as a cupcake!

TREEBARK blinks.

TREEBARK

What's a cupcake?

An awkward pause.

SPIKE

Uh... Never mind.

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS RIVER, EXTERIOR, DAY

SPIKE and TREEBARK stop at a dangerous looking river rapid. The water is flowing through several rocks that seem ideal to be used as stepping stones.

TREEBARK

Be real careful, here. My dad always said that this river is dangerous.

SPIKE looks to TREEBARK.

SPIKE

Shouldn't we go around, then?

TREEBARK just jumps onto the first stone.

TREEBARK

I do this all the time! Just uh, don't tell my dad when you meet him.

TREEBARK turns back and leaps on the next stone, then the next. SPIKE looks down at the first stone.

SPIKE

If you say so...

SPIKE nervously puts a foot on the first stepping stone. Then the next, then the next, following TREEBARK's pace.

TREEBARK

See? Easy.

SPIKE is on the second to last stepping stone, looking up to TREEBARK as he takes another step.

SPIKE

Yeah, it's not so—whoa!

Not watching where he was stepping, he slips. He instinctively grabs one of TREEBARK's antlers to keep his balance. TREEBARK freaks out, quickly stepping back and dragging SPIKE to the other side with him.

TREEBARK

Hey, watch the antlers!

TREEBARK uses a hoof to adjust the antler back to its original, proper position. SPIKE huffs

and folds his arms.

SPIKE

Well sorry! Just trying to save my life, is all!

TREEBARK calms down, feeling guilty with how he reacted.

TREEBARK

I know, I know... It's just, my dad carved these for me. I don't want anything to happen to them.

He rubs one of his antlers, looking away from SPIKE.

SPIKE

Why would you need carved antlers? Aren't they supposed to grow in on their own?

TREEBARK recoils slightly, not used to having that pointed out.

TREEBARK

Well, yeah. But these are just... temporary!

SPIKE raises a brow.

SPIKE

Temporary?

TREEBARK nods, but seems a bit unsure himself.

TREEBARK

You know, until my real ones grow in.

SPIKE

Seems like a lot of trouble if they'll just grow in anyway. You said your dad carved them, right?

TREEBARK nods, turning his head back to Spike.

TREEBARK

Yeah, from the tallest oak tree, he said.

SPIKE smiles.

SPIKE

He must really care for you.

TREEBARK, reminded of REDWOOD, gets irritated.

TREEBARK

If he cared, he would let me have more fun! But no, he never lets me do anything!

SPIKE looks away, reminded of APPLEJACK.

SPIKE

Yeah, I know what that's like... But maybe he's just worried about you.

SPIKE looks back to TREEBARK. TREEBARK sighs.

TREEBARK

Yeah, maybe... I just hope he won't be too mad when I get back.

SPIKE blinks, surprised.

SPIKE

Why would he be mad?

TREEBARK looks away.

TREEBARK

We kinda... had a fight. Then I left without telling them.

A pause.

SPIKE

I'm sure they'll be—

TREEBARK interrupts, his tone now much more upbeat.

TREEBARK

We're home!

CUT TO: TREEBARK'S HOME, EXTERIOR, DAY

TREEBARK's home is a moss covered stone structure that looks like it was built decades ago. TREEBARK climbs the steps to the open entrance to the building, while SPIKE wipes the dust covered stone wall, inspecting the mess.

SPIKE

Geez, ever hear of spring cleaning?

TREEBARK, halfway up the stairs, looks down to SPIKE.

TREEBARK

We just migrated back from our old home and haven't had the chance to clean up yet. Mom, dad, I'm home!

TREEBARK peeks his head inside.

CUT TO: TREEBARK'S HOME, INTERIOR, DAY

The interior of the home is dim, the only light being from the open entrance. TREEBARK looks around. No signs of life inside.

TREEBARK

Mom? ...Dad?

TREEBARK enters the building. SPIKE follows him inside. TREEBARK's ears droop.

TREEBARK

...Where'd they go?

FADE IN: WHITETAIL WOODS RIVER, EXTERIOR, DAY

Fade in to a small muddy pony hoofprint and clawprint left by TREEBARK and SPIKE, respectively. Pan up to APPLEJACK and RARITY, looking down at the tracks. APPLEJACK raises a brow at the pony-shaped hoofprints that TREEBARK left behind.

APPLEJACK

Well, they've obviously been this way.

Pan out from APPLEJACK and RARITY to show the river rapids. The tracks stop on one end of the river and continuing on the other side.

RARITY

Hm. How ever are we going to get across?

APPLEJACK looks to the right, spotting a few stepping stones that span across the river, the same ones TREEBARK and SPIKE used earlier.

APPLEJACK

Them stones would do a good job, I reckon.

APPLEJACK trots towards the stepping stones, about to hop across, when RARITY calls out to her.

RARITY

Wait! The mud!

APPLEJACK steps back in surprise, slipping onto her backside. She looks back to the river.

APPLEJACK

Good eye, Rarity. That ground's too wet for us to safely get over there; we might slip right in!

RARITY nods, acting as if that was her idea from the beginning.

RARITY

Well, I was more concerned about getting muddy... but your reasoning is good, too.

APPLEJACK frowns and furrows her brow, but gets up.

APPLEJACK

C'mon. We can find another place to cross.

APPLEJACK and RARITY exit scene. Pan camera up to the afternoon sun. Fade out.

FADE IN: WHITETAIL WOODLAND PATH, EXTERIOR, DAY

Pan camera down to a forest path. MAPLE LEAF and TWILIGHT SPARKLE are searching the woods for SPIKE and TREEBARK. While MAPLE LEAF is diligent, TWILIGHT SPARKLE

seems distracted by her own worries.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

Stupid, stupid, stupid... Should never have let him go...

MAPLE LEAF grins, looking back to TWILIGHT SPARKLE.

MAPLE LEAF

While it's always good to see a young mother worried about her fawn, you really should calm down. I'm sure he'll be fine.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE perks up and quickly tries to shoot down the idea, embarrassed.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

Mother? Oh no no no, it isn't like that.

MAPLE LEAF raises a brow.

MAPLE LEAF

Oh? Then what is he to you?

TWILIGHT SPARKLE searches for the words.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

Well... He's... He's my number one assistant!

MAPLE LEAF's smile fades and she looks back down the path.

MAPLE LEAF

Oh? If he's just your number one assistant, why are you so worried?

TWILIGHT SPARKLE pauses, looking contemplative.

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS ROCKY PATH, EXTERIOR, DAY

Cut to a rocky path lined with evergreen trees. REDWOOD and RAINBOW DASH are also searching the woods, with RAINBOW DASH hovering behind REDWOOD. She has her front legs folded, looking slightly bored thanks to her search partner. She tries to spark conversation, looking at REDWOOD to think of something to say. Her eyes focus on his antlers.

RAINBOW DASH

So... What's it like, having antlers?

REDWOOD does not respond. RAINBOW DASH furrows her brow, but tries to stay civil.

RAINBOW DASH

What about living out in the woods? How's that workin' out for you?

No response. RAINBOW DASH grits her teeth and flies in front of REDWOOD, glaring at him.

RAINBOW DASH

Listen pal, I'm not about to get slowed down by some old grump! I don't have to go with you at all! If you're going to just play the silent treatment, I'll go look for Spike on my own. Probably find him faster, too!

REDWOOD blinks in surprise before narrowing his eyes. He seems ready to snap, but then sighs.

REDWOOD

I... apologize. After my son ran off, I wasn't sure what to do. If only we didn't have that foolish argument... But I thought that you, as a pony, might have taken him.

RAINBOW DASH folds her front legs.

RAINBOW DASH

Why would me being a pony matter?

REDWOOD dips his head down, a sorrowful look on his face.

REDWOOD

Because... He may find more in common with you.

RAINBOW DASH raised a brow, puzzled.

RAINBOW DASH

What do you mean by that?

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODLAND PATH, EXTERIOR, DAY

Cut back to MAPLE LEAF, who looks to TWILIGHT SPARKLE.

MAPLE LEAF

Just because Spike isn't related to you does not mean he can't be family. Look at my son, Treebark.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE raises a brow.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

What about him?

MAPLE LEAF smiles, turning her head to TWILIGHT SPARKLE.

MAPLE LEAF

Why, he's a pony.

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS ROCKY PATH, EXTERIOR, DAY

RAINBOW DASH is shocked, as REDWOOD confessed that TREEBARK is a pony offscreen.

RAINBOW DASH

A pony?!

REDWOOD nods, but does not look at RAINBOW DASH.

REDWOOD

Aye, a pony. Like you.

RAINBOW DASH flies around REDWOOD, suspicious of him as she tries to get more information.

RAINBOW DASH

Where'd you find him? How'd you raise him?!

REDWOOD gives an annoyed glance to RAINBOW DASH.

REDWOOD

With love and care, the same as any parent. We found him in the woods as a mere foal. After a

year of fruitless searching for his parents, we decided to keep him as our own. We raised him as we would a fawn, never wanting anything but for him to be happy.

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS ROCKY PATH, EXTERIOR, DAY

Cut back to TWILIGHT SPARKLE and MAPLE LEAF.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

...So why didn't you tell him the truth?

MAPLE LEAF stops, turning to face TWILIGHT SPARKLE directly.

MAPLE LEAF

Redwood wanted him to feel like he belonged. He may be a strict father, but he just wants the best for our son. Sometimes, though, I wonder if he clings a bit too tightly...

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS ROCKY PATH, EXTERIOR, DAY

Back to REDWOOD and RAINBOW DASH.

REDWOOD

... I'm sorry. But you have to understand. He's family to me. He's the only child I have. I can't risk losing him.

There is a small pause as RAINBOW DASH realizes that REDWOOD is just a caring father, the same as any other father out there.

SPIKE

(offscreen)

Rainbow Dash!

Cut to entrance of TREEBARK's house. SPIKE is at the entrance of TREEBARK's home, waving to the offscreen RAINBOW DASH happily. TREEBARK emerges from the home beside SPIKE.

Cut to RAINBOW DASH and REDWOOD. RAINBOW DASH's pupils grow large. Zoom in on RAINBOW DASH, showing her facial expression.

Cut back to SPIKE, who is walking to RAINBOW DASH.

SPIKE

You don't know how ha—

SPIKE is tackled by RAINBOW DASH, a streak of rainbow trailing behind her. She lifts SPIKE up, hugging him tightly.

RAINBOW DASH

I'm so sorry, Spike! I can't believe I just abandoned you like that!

SPIKE coughs and tries to pry her off.

SPIKE

It's...

He strains harder, lightly sweating.

SPIKE

...all...

SPIKE pops out of RAINBOW DASH's tight grasp and lands on his bottom, though unharmed.

SPIKE

...right! Thanks for finding me, Rainbow. It means a—Oh Celestia!

SPIKE notices REDWOOD, who stares down at him as he did in their last encounter. SPIKE seems terrified.

RAINBOW DASH

Don't worry, Spike. We're cool now. Was all a big misunderstanding, right big guy?

A pause. SPIKE sighs and relaxes. TREEBARK enters the scene and approaches REDWOOD. REDWOOD looks down at him, a soft smile on his face. But that smile fades as REDWOOD clears his throat. He speaks formally, but stumbles with his words, conflicting with his inner emotions.

REDWOOD

Hello, um... son. It is... good to see you well.

TREEBARK's own smile fades and he looks down, disappointed with the greeting.

TREEBARK

Oh... hey, dad.

REDWOOD notes the disappointment. He looks uneasy, not knowing how to act in such a scenario.

REDWOOD

Come along then. Your mother must be worried sick by now.

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS CLEARING, EXTERIOR, DAY

RARITY, APPLEJACK, TWILIGHT SPARKLE, and MAPLE LEAF all return to the clearing. They seem disappointed.

APPLEJACK

You two have any luck?

TWILIGHT SPARKLE shakes her head, looking down.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

No...

MAPLE LEAF looks up.

MAPLE LEAF

Oh Treebark, where could you be...?

RARITY moves beside her, giving her a reassuring hoof pat on her shoulder.

RARITY

Don't worry, darling. If anypony can find find Spike or your son, it would be Rainbow Dash.

RAINBOW DASH

(Offscreen)

Did somepony call for the most awesomest pony ever?

Cut to RAINBOW DASH, with SPIKE, REDWOOD, and TREEBARK behind her.

MAPLE LEAF

Treebark!

MAPLE LEAF rushes to TREEBARK, nuzzling him affectionately. REDWOOD simply stands beside the two, his soft smile returning.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

Spike!

TWILIGHT and SPIKE hug each other happily. RARITY joins the group hug.

RARITY

Spiky!

APPLEJACK smiles at the reunions, before noticing TREEBARK specifically. Her eyes narrow.

APPLEJACK

Hold on, now. Is that there a—

RAINBOW DASH's hoof clamps over APPLEJACK's mouth to muffle her. MAPLE LEAF and REDWOOD look to the two quizzically. RAINBOW DASH laughs nervously.

RAINBOW DASH

Hehehe, don't mind her.

Agitated, APPLEJACK pulls RAINBOW DASH's hoof away.

APPLEJACK

Now just hold on a minute—

RAINBOW DASH clamps her hoof down on her mouth again, leaning in to APPLEJACK.

RAINBOW DASH

(whispered)

Applejack, don't say it.

Again, APPLEJACK pulls off the hoof.

APPLEJACK

Say what? That he's a po—

RAINBOW DASH immediately clamps APPLEJACK's mouth again.

RAINBOW DASH

(whispered)

Yes, that! He doesn't know!

APPLEJACK jerks back, surprised.

APPLEJACK

(whispered)

What do you mean, he don't know? How couldn't he know?!

RAINBOW DASH and APPLEJACK look up to TREEBARK before RAINBOW DASH smiles awkwardly and looks to TWILIGHT.

RAINBOW DASH

We'll uh... we'll be right back.

RAINBOW DASH scoots APPLEJACK away from the rest of the group. TWILIGHT SPARKLE looks to RARITY, shrugs, and the two follow. SPIKE joins them.

Cut to Redwood and Maple Leaf.

REDWOOD

I think I've had enough ponies for one day. Come along, Maple Leaf, Treebark. It is time to—Treebark?

REDWOOD and MAPLE LEAF look around the clearing, seeing no sign of TREEBARK. They share a longsuffering look.

MAPLE LEAF AND REDWOOD

Not again...

Cut to some other small clearing. The ponies and SPIKE are standing in plain view. A pair of

antlers slowly lift out of some bushes. TREEBARK's eyes can be seen in the shadows of a bush.

APPLEJACK

What's wrong with you? You know that ain't a deer, Rainbow! What's he doing with them?

RAINBOW DASH hovers off the ground.

RAINBOW DASH

They're his family, Applejack. It's not your place to tell him what he is, it's theirs!

APPLEJACK meets her gaze, stomping a hoof.

APPLEJACK

That ain't right! The truth is being kept from that poor colt... Somepony has to tell him who he really is!

SPIKE attempts to interject.

SPIKE

I'm not so sure—

RAINBOW DASH moves in front of him, interrupting his sentence.

RAINBOW DASH

You just want to drag him back to Ponyville with us, don't you?

APPLEJACK is taken aback by the statement.

APPLEJACK

What?! I know better than anypony the value of family!

RAINBOW DASH moves in closer to APPLEJACK.

RAINBOW DASH

Then why are you so insistent we tell him, huh?

RAINBOW DASH is shoved off by APPLEJACK. APPLEJACK gets angry.

APPLEJACK

Well, maybe that would be for the best! He ain't one-a them, Rainbow! Maybe he'd be happier if he knew!

RAINBOW DASH

You wouldn't know that!

APPLEJACK

No, but I do know the truth. And I do know that I can't let that colt live a lie!

RAINBOW DASH

He's happy here, Applejack! Would you want to risk taking that from him?

APPLEJACK

He ain't onna them, Rainbow Dash! He don't belong with them!

Both glare at each other. When they hear a snuffle, they all turn to the source: SPIKE, his hands balled up into a fist as he tries to hold back his emotions. APPLEJACK immediately looks ashamed.

APPLEJACK

Spike, I...

APPLEJACK cuts off and looks away, unsure of what to say. RARITY glares at her before turning a kind eye to SPIKE. RARITY approaches him, a comforting hoof offered.

RARITY

Spike, are you alright?

SPIKE closes his eyes and turns to the woods, darting off into the forest. RAINBOW DASH and APPLEJACK gasp.

APPLEJACK AND RAINBOW DASH

Spike!

=END OF ACT TWO=

=ACT THREE=

RARITY

We have to go after him!

APPLEJACK and RAINBOW DASH both leap to action, starting to run off after him. However, TWILIGHT SPARKLE grabs them both with magic, holding them back.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

Let him go, girls. He needs to be with somepony that understands.

FADE IN: WHITETAIL WOODS RIVER, EXTERIOR, SUNSET

The camera first focuses on the raging river before zooming out and panning over to reveal SPIKE sitting on a log near the edge of the river, staring into the raging river, his hands holding up his head. He sighs dejectedly right before TREEBARK walks into the shot.

TREEBARK

What's wrong?

SPIKE's eyes flick to TREEBARK for a second before he looks back to the river and drops his hands from his chin, putting them on the log on either side of himself.

SPIKE

...Nothing. I just... heard something I didn't want to hear.

TREEBARK nods, looking away solemnly.

TREEBARK

Yeah, I know that feeling...

A pause. SPIKE glances back to TREEBARK. Unaware that TREEBARK knows the truth, he asks him a question.

SPIKE

Treebark, have you ever felt... I dunno, different from everypony else?

TREEBARK sighs and joins SPIKE on the log, sitting next to him and also looking into the river.

TREEBARK

I've... Yeah, I have.

A pause.

TREEBARK looks over to SPIKE, glancing to his antlers and tapping them. SPIKE looks up to them as TREEBARK speaks.

TREEBARK

Wanna know how I got my antlers?

SPIKE

Sure, I guess.

The screen fades to a simple, papercraft styled fields of green. A paper crafted TREEBARK frolics with other paper fawns.

TREEBARK

Well, when I was younger, I used to always play with the other fawns.

The fawns disappear, one by one, leaving TREEBARK alone.

TREEBARK

But, when the time came that we were supposed to grow our antlers... Mine never came.

TREEBARK

Well, my dad noticed this too. He took me to the tallest oak tree in the entire forest!

TREEBARK

And he started hitting it! He rammed his antlers again and again, until a large branch fell from the tree.

TREEBARK

So he carved my antlers from that branch. I guess... He just wanted what was best for me.

There's a short pause. SPIKE sniffs and gives a soft smile. TREEBARK chuckles, but looks back to the river, his expression growing darker.

TREEBARK

But... He did it to hide the truth from me too, I guess...

SPIKE

I'm sure he has his reasons. Those antlers are proof that he cares for you.

TREEBARK

Yeah, you're right.

SPIKE frowns, and looks back to the river too.

SPIKE

I guess Twilight's the only family I really have. She's always been there for me, helping me when I need it, giving me advice, things like that. Almost... like a mother, in a way.

TREEBARK looks to SPIKE and breaks in.

TREEBARK

Should I go with them?

SPIKE blinks.

SPIKE

Huh?

TREEBARK

The ponies. If I'm one of them, should I go with them? Live with them?

SPIKE shakes his head, looking almost angry.

SPIKE

No... No! Of course not! It isn't anything like that!

TREEBARK

But I'm not a—

SPIKE gets up, fists clenched. For once, TREEBARK was actually surprised that he felt SPIKE towering over him.

SPIKE

It doesn't matter what you are. Pony, deer, whatever! What matters is where you think YOU belong.

SPIKE beats a hand to chest.

SPIKE

I might be a dragon, and I might feel different sometimes, but I know those ponies are my friends, and they care about me. And I won't let what I am change that.

SPIKE rubs his arm on his nose, sniffing again as he dries his last few years. TREEBARK looks to SPIKE, still trying to take what he said all in. SPIKE gets up.

SPIKE

Come on, your dad's probably worried.

TREEBARK opens his mouth to reply, but the mud under the log they are sitting on slips from their weight, sending the log into the river with SPIKE and TREEBARK on it. The log immediately slips away from them, falling right into the river. TREEBARK manages to snatch onto a root on the river bank. SPIKE is not so lucky and falls into the water.

Cut to TREEBARK looking back toward SPIKE. His pupils shrink to pinpricks as the camera pans to the close end of the river: a waterfall that SPIKE is heading straight toward.

Cut to SPIKE grabbing onto a stone sticking out of the river relatively close to TREEBARK. TREEBARK attempts to reach SPIKE to help him, but they are unable to reach each other.

TREEBARK

HELP!

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS, TREEBARK'S HOUSE, EXTERIOR, SUNSET

MAPLE LEAF and REDWOOD hear the echos of the cry for help. They turn to the noise sharply.

MAPLE LEAF

That sounds like...

REDWOOD gasps, horrified as he realises his son is in danger.

REDWOOD

Treebark!

REDWOOD quickly sprints off towards the noise.

RARITY, APPLEJACK, TWILIGHT, and RAINBOW DASH also hear the call for help.

RAINBOW DASH

Come on!

RAINBOW DASH and APPLEJACK lead the charge as they also head towards SPIKE and TREEBARK.

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS RIVER, EXTERIOR, SUNSET

TREEBARK sees that SPIKE is beginning to slip from the rock and TREEBARK attempts to reach toward SPIKE again. After a moment of failing in his endeavors, TREEBARK's eyes glance upwards at his antlers. TREEBARK grits his teeth and yanks one of the antlers off, holding it out to SPIKE.

TREEBARK

GRAB ON!

SPIKE

But what about...!?

TREEBARK

JUST DO IT!

SPIKE grabs the antler and TREEBARK pulls SPIKE toward the shore. SPIKE manages to grab ahold of the same root that TREEBARK holds. This action causes the mud and the root to shift, making TREEBARK lose his grip, sliding into the water. SPIKE grabs onto TREEBARK's other antler. The adhesive on the antler breaks and TREEBARK floats off.

SPIKE begins to panic, but REDWOOD appears on the scene, scooping SPIKE up away from the river with his antlers and running along the side of the river. REDWOOD lowers his antlers with SPIKE on them, attempting to give TREEBARK something to hold onto, but to no avail. By the time the two get close enough, TREEBARK is tumbling down the waterfall.

A vine in the shape of a lasso shoots off the side of the waterfall, wrapping around TREEBARK's tail, halting his fall. APPLEJACK begins pulling a shivering TREEBARK up the side of the waterfall with audible effort. When TREEBARK gets to the top, APPLEJACK flicks the rope, disengaging it from TREEBARK's tail.

REDWOOD

Treebark!

TREEBARK

Dad!

REDWOOD unceremoniously dumps SPIKE out of his antlers before running over to TREEBARK, elated to see his son is safe and sound.

REDWOOD kneels in and embraces TREEBARK.

REDWOOD

Oh thank goodness you're safe!

Cut to APPLEJACK and SPIKE. APPLEJACK lifts a hoof between her head, nervously scratching at the back of her head.

APPLEJACK

I'm real sorry for what I said—

SPIKE hugs APPLEJACK, interrupting her. APPLEJACK looks confused for a moment before returning the hug with a smile.

SPIKE walks over to TREEBARK, REDWOOD, and MAPLE LEAF. REDWOOD releases the grip on his son so TREEBARK can converse with SPIKE, who has the wooden antlers in his claw.

SPIKE

So uh... Do you want your antlers back?

TREEBARK looks at the antlers that SPIKE holds up. He looks to the ponies, then to his family, before smiling, slowly shaking his head.

TREEBARK

Nah. I don't need them anymore. Even if I am a pony, family is family.

Cut to REDWOOD and MAPLE LEAF standing in front of the ponies. REDWOOD looks somewhat apologetic and nervous, but happy.

REDWOOD

Uh... I can't... Well you see—

MAPLE LEAF

What he means to say, girls, is thank you.

REDWOOD

I... Yes. Thank you, girls.

All of the ponies smile and nod, happy to be of service. REDWOOD walks to TREEBARK, a nervous expression on REDWOOD's face.

REDWOOD

My son... I'm sorry for being dishonest all those years. From now on, I'll try to be open with you, not hiding anything else.

I can't thank you enough, girls. I used to be so afraid he wouldn't accept us if he learned the truth... From now on, I'll be honest with him, not hiding anything more from him.

The ponies all smile and MAPLE LEAF nods, her eyes closed and a grin on her face.

CUT TO: WHITETAIL WOODS CLEARING, EXTERIOR, TWILIGHT

REDWOOD, MAPLE LEAF, and TREEBARK assist the ponies and SPIKE with the sap. Soon enough, it is all packed up and ready to be transported on the ponies' backs. REDWOOD accidentally spills sap in RARITY's hair when REDWOOD is putting sap buckets on her back. He gets an apologetic look on his face as RARITY just sighs. The ponies depart, SPIKE on TWILIGHT SPARKLE's back. SPIKE turns to wave at TREEBARK as they leave.

CUT TO: GOLDEN OAKS LIBRARY, INTERIOR, NIGHT

SPIKE tiredly puts the antlers on his memory desk, alongside photos of his pet phoenix and other memorabilia. TWILIGHT SPARKLE smiles faintly as she watches SPIKE climb into his basket, yawning. She goes down the stairs to the main room of the library, wetting a quill and taking a letter.

TWILIGHT SPARKLE

Dear Princess Celestia, ponies and friends come in all shapes and sizes. While we may not always come from the same place or have the same upbringing, what makes you friends is how you help each other find your true self and not how well you fit in with norms. We all come from a different place, but we can all belong somewhere.

CUE OUTRO

EPILOGUE

CUT TO: FLUTTERSHY'S HOUSE, EXTERIOR, NIGHT

APPLEJACK

Fluttershy? We're done with that... uh, thing we were doin'.

APPLEJACK puts a hoof on the door. It explodes outward before she can open it. GUMMY gallops out, ANGEL riding on his back. When GUMMY is next to APPLEJACK, ANGEL pulls back on some manner of reins. GUMMY rears back, giving ANGEL time to glare at APPLEJACK. After a second or two, ANGEL looks back forward, pointing ahead. GUMMY takes the signal and begins sprinting away from the house. APPLEJACK, wide-eyed, looks inside the house.

CUT TO: FLUTTERSHY'S HOUSE, INTERIOR, NIGHT

FLUTTERSHY is seen frantically trying to get the animals back in control. PINKIE PIE is happily skipping around the main room.

PINKIE PIE

That was the best party EVER!

Cut to APPLEJACK's confused and somewhat horrified expression.

FADE OUT

THE END