

All The Pretty Little Horses: Episode 6 - Hungry Steve **1**

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SCENE 1 - FLASHBACK: WHOLE FOODS 2

Intense music.

DAN

It's not a big deal.

STELLA

It is a huge deal.

DAN

It's not. Just pick one.

STELLA

How?

DAN

Like this! I pick that one.

STELLA

No. That one is not organic.

DAN

Okay. This one.

STELLA

Too expensive.

DAN

Oh my god.

STELLA

You see how difficult this is?

DAN

Stella. It's peanut butter.

STELLA

Peanut butter is a crucial part
of my diet.

DAN

Yeah, which is a serious problem!
You have to get protein from
somewhere other than peanut
butter!

STELLA

What, you want me to eat beef? So
I can get mad cow disease and
die?

DAN

For the last time, you are not going to get mad cow disease.

STELLA

Yeah well you're gonna feel pretty stupid when I get mad cow disease! And also sad, cos I'll be dead!

DAN

Can you hurry it up? People are starting to stare.

STELLA

They are?

DAN

I shouldn't have told you that.

STELLA

Oh my god. People are staring at me because they think I can't decide which peanut butter to buy.

DAN

I mean, you can't.

STELLA

Yeah but I don't want them to know that!

DAN

I'm getting the sense that maybe this is not really about peanut butter.

STELLA

Of course it's about peanut butter! What else would it be about?

DAN

It's just usually people don't get this worked up about peanut butter.

STELLA

Well maybe they should! Maybe we should all get together and agree that we don't need this many brands of peanut butter.

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DAN

Let's get to a different aisle, okay? Let's get you some frozen dinners. I know how much you like to heat food up without cooking anything.

STELLA

No it's too cold over there.

DAN

It's too cold...in the frozen food section?

STELLA

Yeah, I just...I don't wanna be cold right now.

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DAN

Do you want my jacket?

STELLA

No, it's just...I don't want to...I can't...I need to go.

DAN

What?

STELLA

I need to go!

DAN

Stella? Wait! Stella!

INTRO AND THEME MUSIC.

SCENE 2 - PREPARATIONS

NARRATOR

The galaxy does not have a name. Or rather, it has too many. After all, it is home to billions upon billions of life forms, and they all have different names for it. The crab-like creatures of Lugawug call it The Big River, as the chemical makeup of their atmosphere turns it a dark blue in the night sky. The spindly, long-eared people of Lentrax call it The Others, because even before they could go off-world they knew there were more intelligent life forms out there waiting for them. The furry blue rat-creatures of Zungdot call it Fred. No one really knows why.

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But unlike the galaxy itself, the black hole at the center of the galaxy does have a name. It is known as Meepee, though it's more often referred to by its colloquial title: Hungry Steve. Though everyone knows Hungry Steve is simply a hole in the fabric of reality, it's hard not to endow that the swirling black nothingness that holds together your galaxy with a bit of character. Some see Hungry Steve as a benevolent god that that unites all the creatures in the galaxy. Others see him as a monster that requires sacrifices to be appeased. Some, though they are in the minority, view him only as the remains of a dead star.

NARRATOR

Hungry Steve is many things. A friend. An enemy. A lover. But most of all, Hungry Steve is a hole. A black hole. Unlike a regular hole, which functions the way a hole logically should, a black hole functions in a way that no hole in its right mind would. It sucks. Literally, though if the person being sucked in is you then it probably sucks metaphorically as well. No one really knows because no one has ever survived.

PUPPET

(over the PA)

Hey everybody! This is your pilot speaking. Your pilot being me, Puppet, friendliest crew member in case you have forgotten.

BUTTERCUP

Are we there yet, Puppet?

PUPPET

I'm here to give you some very important announcements.

BUTTERCUP

Puppet please.

PUPPET

First of all: The latest issue of the Raccoon Weekly is available for purchase and also not for purchase as I will give it to you for free, and, if you are too busy to pick up a copy, I will shove it under the door of your bedroom.

CAPTAIN

Please don't.


PUPPET

This week's issue features a special article on why cables you found lying around should not be used as a neat fashion accessory. In other news, something is wrong with the door by the Med Bay, so Buttercup, if you could fix that--

BUTTERCUP

Come on!

PUPPET

Now for some personal news. 

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Loud protestations from the whole crew.

PUPPET (CONT'D)

Okay fine! If it's really so important to you: we are now approaching Hungry Steve.

THEED

Yay.

STELLA

Yeah. Yay.

THEED

Stella? You don't seem that excited.

STELLA

Oh. I don't?

THEED

Yeah, if you were excited you would be going like this: Yay.

STELLA

Oh, sorry, I didn't realize I wasn't doing that. Um. Yay.

BAZ

What wrong?

STELLA

I'm just...you know, first time at a black hole and all. It's a little scary.

BAZ

C'mon Stella! It's gonna be fun!

STELLA

I don't trust your definition of fun.

Door sound.

SCOTTBOT

Stella?

STELLA

Yes, Scott?

SCOTTBOT

Not to imply that I care about you. Because I don't. I don't have emotions.

STELLA

I get it, Scott.

SCOTTBOT

But I can't help but notice that you're the only crew member not currently getting suited up for the jettison.

STELLA

I don't...do well under stress. And this seems...stressful.

SCOTTBOT

Would it help you to talk about it?

STELLA

Hm?

SCOTTBOT

When you were scared at Trashland, we talked. Then you felt better. I assume. I possess no mirror neurons, so--

STELLA

I felt better, yes.

SCOTTBOT

So let's talk.

STELLA

I mean, here's the crazy thing: when my world was over, I genuinely considered killing myself. Is that crazy? I mean, I'm not, like, depressed. At least, I don't think so. I'm pretty sure I have a ton of undiagnosed orders but I don't think that depression is one of them. But when everything I knew was gone...I just kind of thought, what's the point? And it's not like much has changed since then, but I'm attached to my life again. I think. I mean, what is life when it comes down to it? Maybe the Politicians were right. Maybe I am just a mosquito.

SCOTTBOT

You're not a mosquito. You are a human.

STELLA

No, I mean-- Maybe I don't mean anything. Maybe I shouldn't be afraid of death because well, what does my death even mean? Like, my dad, okay so he was a professor. I mean, he was a simulation of a professor, I guess. And he always gave me these weird thought experiments and they always freaked me out cos I couldn't come up with the answer. And one of them was like, say you teach a computer to speak in Chinese. You program it so that if you speak to it in Chinese, it can respond. But does it understand Chinese? Like, if you gave a person an algorithm to respond to Chinese, they could respond too. But they don't understand Chinese.

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SCOTTBOT

I don't understand how this relates.

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STELLA

What if I don't understand Chinese? I mean, the Politicians don't see me as any different from the simulation. They killed my friends without a second thought. Maybe they were right. Maybe none of understand Chinese.

SCOTTBOT

What's Chinese?

STELLA

Scott I don't know if talking made me feel better. I think I feel much worse. I suddenly feel so small, so insignificant--

Door.

BAZ

There you are, silly! Let's get you suited up.

STELLA

No no no no--

Door.

SCOTTBOT

Have fun, Stella!

BUTTERCUP

There she is!

STELLA

Oh my god. Is that..is that tiny little space suit...

BUTTERCUP

Yes. That one is mine.

STELLA

(struggling to hold herself together)

Okay.

BUTTERCUP

Don't say anything.

STELLA

I won't.
(beat)

BUTTERCUP

Okay fine.

STELLA

OH MY GOD BABY KITTY SPACESUIT
LITTLE SPACE SUIT FOR LITTLE
KITTY LITTLE BABY PAWS CUTE
LITTLE KITTY BABY SPACE SUIT.
(beat)

BUTTERCUP

Are you done?

STELLA

For now.

CAPTAIN

Alright Stella, here's how this goes: we exit the ship, but we're still tethered to it with these cables. ScottBot will be connected to our suits. If you have any problem, or you panic at all, just tell Scott and he can pull you back.

STELLA

Scott will pull me back. Got it.

CAPTAIN

The ship will jettison the garbage. All we have to do is guide it in the right direction. No friction in space, so as soon as we send it in the right direction, it won't stop moving until it makes it into Hungry Steve.

STELLA

(afraid)
Where it gets...spaghettified.

CAPTAIN

Yes, precisely. Seems like you do understand. In that case, let's go.

STELLA

Wait!

14 Air lock opens.

SCENE 3 - OUT THERE

15 Spicy music. Stella is seeing space.

NARRATOR

Stella had seen space. In the simulation, she looked up at the night sky and wondered at the infinite number of stars. On the Raccoon she would spend hours staring out the window at the impossibly empty blackness. But Stella had never really seen space. She'd never been thrust into it with nothing to hold, never floated with no anchor in the gravityless void. Only once she was pulled into the vacuum did she truly feel the presence, or rather, absence, of space.

Stella laughs.

STELLA

(whispered)

Holy shit.

(pause)

I'm...in space. I'm really in space.

Music cuts out.

BUTTERCUP

Hey Stella! Are you gonna help us with--

BAZ

Don't bother her! She's having a moment!

Music continues.

STELLA

Oh my god. This is space.

Music cuts out.

CAPTAIN

Let her have her moment, I suppose. Just don't let her draft too close to Steve. Buttercup, keep an eye on her.

BUTTERCUP

Yeah, yeah. Whatever.

CAPTAIN

Puppet, you're good to jettison.

PUPPET

(over coms)

Aye aye, Captain!
(Sound of jettisoned space trash.)

THEED

Isn't it beautiful?

BUTTERCUP

What, Hungry Steve?

THEED

No, the garbage. I love trash. That's why I became a garbage collector in the first place. Because I think trash is so pretty. Also because the snail wars destroyed my home.

BUTTERCUP

Oh yeah I forgot about that.

CAPTAIN

Start throwing, everyone.

THEED

Wee. Wee. Wee.

CAPTAIN

Theed, you do not need to say that every time you throw a piece of trash.

THEED

Oops. Sorry. I didn't realize I was doing it.

(beat)

Wee.

ALL

Theed!

NARRATOR

And so the four worked diligently, pushing against trash and, as Newton's third law of motion would tell us, having the trash push them back. It was not a particularly fun task -- at least, for everyone but Theed, who could have fun doing almost anything -- but it was something the crew of the Raccoon had become accustomed to. Even Baz, who had been on the crew only a short while, had taken enough trips to Hungry Steve that staring down that gaping mouth in the fabric of reality was almost routine. Speaking of the gaping mouth in the fabric of reality, Stella was drifting closer and closer to it, and no one seemed to notice.

BUTTERCUP

(muttering)

This is unbelievable. I didn't get a free pass on trash day when I was new to the crew. If she's gonna live on this ship she has to work like the rest of us.

BAZ

Got a problem, Buttercup?

BUTTERCUP

It's nothing.

BAZ

She lived her life in a simulation. Give her a chance to explore, okay?

THEED

She's exploring really close to the black hole.

BAZ

Yeah! Let her! It's not like she's gonna go past the event horizon.

THEED

She's getting pretty close.

BUTTERCUP

Wait what?

(she sees)

OH SHIT.

NARRATOR

When Baz looked where Theed had indicated with his eye stalk, this is what she saw: Stella drifting almost but not quite dangerously close to the Hungry Steve's outer rim. She was only just beginning to feel the gravitational pull of the gaping hole, but the closer in she got, the more the hole began to tug, and the more Stella unwittingly floated towards its gaping mouth. A steel cable could pull her out now, but once she really got deep in there, the force would be too strong.

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BAZ

Hey Stella?

STELLA

Yeah?

BUTTERCUP

I don't know if you noticed this, but, uh, you are drifting directly into the black hole.

STELLA

(not fully grasping the situation)

Oh, I am?

(fully grasping the situation)

I am?

BAZ

Yeah you definitely are.

STELLA

Oh my GOD.

BAZ

Stella just stay calm.

STELLA

There is no possible way for me to stay calm. I have lost my shit in situations far far less stressful than this.

CAPTAIN

What's going on here?

BAZ

Hungry Steve is devouring Stella.

CAPTAIN

Buttercup! You were supposed to watch her!

BUTTERCUP

I got distracted!

BAZ

By what? A laser pointer?

BUTTERCUP

Shut the fuck up.

STELLA

Holy shit holy holy shit holy shit. I'm gonna get spaghettified.

CAPTAIN

Stella, stay calm.

STELLA

You guys keep saying that and it's really not keeping my calm.

CAPTAIN

Remember what I told you. Just ask Scott to pull you back.

STELLA

Scott! Pull me back.

SCOTT

Hi there. My servers are currently busy at the moment. Please try again later.

STELLA

What? Scott is busy? I didn't know Scott could be busy?

BUTTERCUP

Stupid shitty off brand AI! I knew we should have splurged and bought an EileenMachine!

CAPTAIN

I don't think this has anything to do with Scott's software. He's never done this before.

STELLA

Um...Scott? SCOTT!

SCOTT

Hi there. My servers are currently busy at the moment. Please try again later.

STELLA

What do I do? What do I do?

CAPTAIN

Stella, stay calm.

STELLA

I literally cannot.

CAPTAIN

Theed, go into Scott's server room and see what's taking him so long.

THEED

You got it, Captain.

(long pause)

Here I go.

(another pause)

Headed for the ship.

CAPTAIN

On second thought, Buttercup, you go into Scott's server room and see what's taking him so long.

BUTTERCUP

Will do.

BAZ

Wait, you're gonna trust Buttercup? She's the one who let Stella drift too close in the first place.

BUTTERCUP

Oh, you wanna pick a fight now?

BAZ

Um, my best friend's life is on the line, so yeah, I do! I should be the one going to Scott's servers, not you.

CAPTAIN

Please, you two. It doesn't matter who goes, it matters that--

BUTTERCUP

As far as we know, you're just gonna tell Scott to throw her into Steve. Just like you did with Sid!

CAPTAIN

Buttercup, please!

BAZ

Hey, you know I didn't want to have to do that. You can't keep painting me like a killer--

BUTTERCUP

You are a killer.

BAZ

I am sick of you calling me that!

STELLA

Is anyone gonna help me?

Angry cat noise.

BUTTERCUP

Let go of my tail!

BAZ

No!

STELLA

Guys! I'm being spaghettified!

NARRATOR

She was not, in fact, being spaghettified, but things were not looking great for her.

BAZ

Not until you apologize for how mean you are to me all the time!

BUTTERCUP

Never!

18 Ad lib fighting.

CAPTAIN

BOTH OF YOU. QUIET.

Air lock sound.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Theed already went.
Congratulations, you two are slower than a giant snail.

19 SCENE 4 - SERVER ROOM

THEED

Hey, Scott, what's going on, buddy?

SCOTT

Hey, so I'm having a bit of a crisis here.

THEED

Yeah, so are we. But I don't want to be rude. You tell me about your crisis first.

SCOTT

Okay so Stella was telling me about a computer that speaks Chinese--

THEED

What's Chinese?

SCOTT

It's language, obviously! C'mon, Theed, get with it. Stella told me this whole thing about how if computers can know Chinese, do they understand Chinese? And I was like, well I know lots of things, do I really understand them? Because a person-- a person understands things. But I just know things. Or do I? Do I understand the language I'm speaking right now? I don't know! Do I understand my own thoughts? I also don't know! Do I have thoughts, or do I have a bunch of firing circuits and ones and zeros and zero one one zero one zero one--

THEED

Sorry I don't speak binary.

SCOTT

What's the answer? I don't know! And I always know the answer. I mean, sometimes, my answer is wrong, but at least I know the answer.

(deep breath)

Okay so that's where I'm at. What was your problem.

THEED

Stella is about to die.

SCOTT

What?

THEED

She's getting pulled into Hungry Steve and she's about to die.

SCOTT

Shit! Fuck!

THEED

Scott?

SCOTT

Oh my god oh my god I am so
sorry. Oh my god.

THEED

Can you reel her back in?

SCENE 5 - RESCUE

Stella whispering panickedly under her breath.

SCOTT

Stella?

STELLA

Scott!

SCOTT

I'm pulling you back in.

STELLA

Thank you so much. Oh my god
thank you so much.

NARRATOR

That evening back on the Raccoon,
the crew was oddly silent about
the incident that happened
outside. They didn't know how to
deal with Stella's fragile human
emotions because dealing with
feelings was never something that
the crew of the Raccoon was
particularly good at.

BAZ

So. How do you feel?

STELLA

I feel...fine.
(breaks down crying)

BAZ

I know that was...really scary
for you, Stella. I've never been
very good at comforting people,
but..is there anything we can do
for you? Anything you would like?

STELLA

Do you guys...do you guys have
any Moon Pies?

BUTTERCUP

Those disgusting marshmallow things?

THEED

Yeah, I have some.

BUTTERCUP

Why?

THEED

Padding for my nest.

STELLA

I'd like some please. Even if they are from a snail nest. Oh, and...okay this is a really weird question.

BAZ

Shoot.

STELLA

Do you guys have the store Staples?

21 SCENE 6 - SENTIENCE

SCOTTBOT

Captain?

CAPTAIN

Yes?

SCOTTBOT

Could I ask you a question?

CAPTAIN

Oh. Yes, of course.

SCOTTBOT

The other day I was talking to Stella and she said some...alarming things.

CAPTAIN

Alarming how, Scott?

SCOTTBOT

She was talking about me. She seemed really convinced that I was having feelings.

CAPTAIN

That's ludicrous.

SCOTTBOT

Thank you! That's what I said! And she was all like, "no you have emotions or whatever" and I was like, "um? No? I'm not sentient?"

CAPTAIN

No. You're not.

SCOTTBOT

Thanks. That's very validating to hear.

CAPTAIN

I'll make sure the bring it up to her.

SCOTTBOT

Great. I mean, you know, I feel neutral about that because--

CAPTAIN:

Yes. I know.

SCOTTBOT

But. You know. Good.

SCENE 7 - DEATH

STELLA

So. I almost died today.

BAZ

Yeah.

STELLA

I've never almost died before.

BAZ

Well? How was it?

STELLA

Um. Bad.

BAZ

Really?

STELLA

Yeah. Of course it was. It was horrible.

BAZ

Oh. I mean, maybe I'm just really used to almost dying, but I always get a little kick out of it.

STELLA

Well I'm not like you! I like my life. And even though I know how small and insignificant it is...I still want to live it.

BAZ

Sure. I think everything that's alive feels that way.

STELLA

It's just...I saw my two best friends killed like it was nothing. And my dad...my dad didn't even exist at all. It feels like...like I shouldn't care about anything anymore. I mean, if my whole life was a lie...then does my life really matter anymore?

BAZ

Would it really matter if he had been real?

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STELLA

What? Of course it would!

BAZ

I mean, think about it: Your dad, for instance. Let's say he was real, and he died. You'd still be in the same situation. He's not around anymore, but he still has a lasting effect on you.

STELLA

I guess. But it just...it feels different.

BAZ

Yeah but I don't think it is. You're right, you are very small and on a cosmic scale, you don't matter. But no one is watching on a cosmic scale. Believe me, I've had enough near death experiences that I'm pretty sure if there was a god, I would have met them by now. There's no one out there who cares about us. The only scale that matters is yours. And everything in your life, even if it wasn't real: that mattered to you. And you? You matter too. This is a cold, uncaring universe. All you can do is find people in it who care about you. And that takes time.

(pause)

I mean, I'm still looking for mine.

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STELLA

Oh. Um.

(beat)

Baz?

BAZ

Yeah?

(pregnant silence)

STELLA

I hope you find them.

BAZ

I hope you find yours too.

STELLA

Well...good talk.

BAZ

Yup. Good talk.

STELLA

Good night.

BAZ

Good night.

(quieter, fonder)

Good night.

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END OF EPISODE