

The Night Will Last Forever

By MrFugums



Table of Contents:

Chapter 1	Creation and Destruction	3
Chapter 2-1	Setting Sun	26
Chapter 2-2	Sunset	53
Chapter 3	Cloak and Dagger	67
Chapter 4	Blue Icarus	83
Chapter 5	Fuel for the Fire	105
Chapter 6	To War A Goddess	128

Chapter 1

Creation and Destruction

"Hello again...." A voice broke the silence, "I know that you have been suffering for quite some time...." A soft but unmoving voice spoke.

"But it's all going to be okay.....I know that you will continue to plead with me, and that you will refuse to let me go, but I must do what I must do...for your sake....." the voice continued, getting no response from her audience.

"Don't worry about me, I'm going to be alright....you all will..."

Only grey, empty silence answered her, no one was there to reassure her and say 'don't go, please, we love you'.

She didn't care.

She had stopped caring years ago.

Not about those that did not respond, she didn't care that they were not there to respond in the first place.

She got up on her hooves from her lonely slump in the grass, her face a mixture of determination and sadness.

No matter how many times she walked through this pitiful landscape, this disgusting, tangled mess of land good for nothing but standing on, she always gave that same sigh.

A sigh of deep sadness, one of turmoil, one of pain. But it lacked something that most ponies would be flooded with.

Hate.

Anger.

Bitterness.

Rage.

Vengeance.

Things that nopony would think twice about feeling. She felt sickened as she recalled the last time she let hate flow through her mind. It had gotten her nowhere, only given her a sickening feeling of regret. She refused to feel these feelings anymore. She felt if love wasn't the answer, then there was no answer.

She started to slowly clop forward, each step crushing the grey, pitiful, useless grass. It couldn't even be used as food anymore, the only thing anypony ate anymore was nuts and berries, a diet that could barely sustain a filly.

The memories of those events made her cringe for what seemed the hundredth time today, but of course there were no days here, not in 1000 years, this could not go on anymore...

...no, it couldn't...nothing could go on anymore...everything was gone...except the two of them.

As she was slowly bringing her way through the grass she saw the entrance to a horrible forest; an epitome of the destruction that was upon everything around her. There was absolutely nothing alive in this place. Even the worn out trees surrounding the forest had leaves with the same depressing grey color as the grass and the sky. One couldn't call it a forest anymore, there needs to be life for a forest to exist. But the withered trees and dried up plants continued to grow, as if their poor existences were prolonged only so that they may suffer longer.

The plants grew, but there was no life in them.

A castle loomed overhead as she made her way through the disgusting forest, a place she knew quite well, she had come here often, she came here when she was looking for something, and she always found it here. Or more specifically, someone.

"Ah! You have finally arrived I see, I knew you would be here sooner or

later, I'm surprised you weren't here sooner." A shrill voice said, smiling to herself.

Her voice struck the Mare's body like ice, or it would have, if she had feared the figure standing in front of her.

"SHUT UP!" she yelled at the top of her lungs.

But she didn't say it out loud, she couldn't, never again.

"Hello." She instead calmly said to the large Black Figure in front of her.

"Hello..." A soft voice came from somewhere within the Black Figure.

"QUIET!" The Black Figure shouted. "YOU ARE NOT TO SPEAK!"

"I can speak whenever I please..." the Soft Voice replied.

The Mare had seen enough of this, this suffering, this pain. She was going to end it all the only way she could. She did not want to, oh how she did not want to, but she knew that it was the only way for the world to be right again. The only way to end everyone's suffering, except for only one.

"Please, do what you are here to do..." The Soft Voice said with determination. "I will be fine, I have made my choice, leave me here..."

The Mare nodded, and then five white orbs floated around her enveloping her in pure magic. Magic unlike anything the Black Figure had ever felt before.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!" She frantically shouted at the glowing mare, now floating several inches in the air.

The mare ignored her, and continued to focus on the spell she was trying desperately to cast. It was the hardest spell she had ever cast, almost as powerful as the magic that had created Equestria and the rest of the known world so long ago. The pain from trying to perform the spell powerful enough to create worlds grew; then she began to feel a different kind of pain.

It was not her own pain; it was the pain of every pony that had lived since the Return.

She could feel the sorrows and misery of every pony from history and as she felt the pains, she took them. She took their pain from them, and as she did, she felt it replaced with pure emotions.

Happiness.

Confidence .

Hope .

Love.

Understanding.

As she took pain and felt it replaced with these wonderful emotions that she so desperately wanted to feel again, all the pain in the universe came together into her body.

She didn't care. She had given herself up to her own choice.

She felt the pain of the Voice that had come from the Black Figure, and tried to take their pain too. She tried harder than she had for anything else in the entire world, just to take their pain from them. But she could not take it.

She could not take the pain she felt from the Soft Voice.

Then she did something she had not done in hundreds of years.

She cried.

Not from physical pain, but from the sheer suffering that had befallen those whose pain she took.

A single tear flowed from her eye, trailing down her flaring body down onto the cold dark stone underneath her.

As she did, she felt another tear through all the unbearable pain: it had come from the Soft Voice; it was not a tear of sadness, but one of solemn understanding.

Her tear hit the floor with a small splash, inside were the reflections of thousands of ponies, all happy and smiling amongst each other. But one pony was visible over them all; a sad dark blue pony looked up at the tortured soul above her.

The Black Figure could only stand shocked at the incredible magic being performed in front of her, she could do nothing to stop what was happening. She tried to shield herself from the bright light using her wing.

The pain was unbearable, the Mare felt as if her horn would split open, along with the rest of her body.

But she knew that this was the last thing she could do to help anyone.

The last thing she could do to help anyone in the world.

The last thing she could ever do with her life.

She put her entire being into the spell, the spell that would shape everything that would ever happen after this moment. Her teeth began to crack as she gritted her jaws against the suffering, she felt as if she would burst from the sheer amount of pain. She felt like she was going to die.

NO! She thought to herself, she couldn't die, everything she had ever done would have gone to waste, and she wasn't about to let 10,000 years be lost to this horrid fate.

Then, suddenly, it was all gone, all replaced with white as far as she could see.

She felt....happy....at peace.... She almost forgot what she was just doing....maybe the spell had worked...maybe it hadn't....maybe she had failed and nothing could be done to save that world...

She opened her eyes, and could see a dark blue figure fading away from her. When she did her thoughts froze as she then knew the answer to her

own question.

The blue figure started floating far away from her, and she reached out to touch its hooves.

But she could not move, only watch and listen as the dark blue pony turned to her and looked her straight in the eyes and opened her mouth to speak.

"Goodbye ----e----a..."

=====

"TWILIGHT!"

A young mare fell out of her bed, flailing around in a mess of blankets on the floor. She quickly managed to untangle herself from the sheets to look at the source of her abrupt waking.

"Man Twilight, I've been trying to get you up for hours!" Came a familiar voice.

Twilight shook her head and looked groggily at her assistant Spike. She grumbled for a few moments, trying to collect her thoughts.

"I thought you'd never get up!" Spike complained, putting his hands on his hips.

"Me neither," the violet-maned pony confessed, "I had that dream again, the one with the big black alicorn."

"I think you just had a bad apple during dinner" Spike replied, skeptical.

"Again? Maybe once or twice, considering the food poisoning that went around a few weeks ago, but now? It doesn't make sense! I shouldn't STILL be having the same dream over and over again!" She stomped her hoof on the ground to emphasis her point.

Spike shrugged his shoulders, if something was truly bothering her, then he wanted to help. It's just that he didn't quite see the importance of a reoccurring dream.

"Really Twilight, you're overreacting! Sounds to me like it's just some kind of filly tale or something." Spike said.

"That's it! Spike you're a genius!" She practically screamed, her eyes widening.

"You bet I am! What would you do without me here to help you with my massive brainpow – wait, I am?" Spike said, confused by what he just heard.

"Yes!" Twilight was practically floating with excitement, "The old mare's tale; The Mare in the Moon! I thought it was just a bunch of ponyfeathers, but it seems so similar to the dream, maybe it has some sort of truth to it!"

"Uh...that's not what I meant Twi..." Spike tried to interrupt, but Twilight was already a flurry of activity, pulling out books from every shelf in her room at Canterlot University.

Spike sighed, he had just arraigned those.

She threw seemingly random books in front of her with her magic, then evidently not liking what she saw, tossed them somewhere random in the room.

Spike began to count down on his fingers.

4.

3.

Twilight frantically rushed around the room, pulling books out of their carefully organized spaces as Spike continued to count down on his fingers

2.

1.

"SPIIIIIKE!" Twilight shouted from across the room.

"Yeeeeees?" He responded in a sarcastic tone, a slight smirk on his face.

"I can't find the book anywhere! Stop standing around and help me look for it!" Twilight commanded with a hint of annoyance.

"But we don't have a copy of it! You're better off with that Predictions and Prophecies hooey." Spike tried to reason with her.

"You're right! About needing to find the book! That might have something related to The Mare in the Moon! I don't remember seeing one here, but I'm sure the royal library has a copy!" Twilight exclaimed as she rushed to the door.

"But-"

"I'll be back soon Spike!" Twilight turned her head as she ran out the door, "And clean up this mess, I can't study about this weird dream with all these books scattered everywhere!"

Spike crossed his arms, turning to look at the mess he had cleaned up just an hour ago.

"Sheesh Twilight, did you have to check every shelf?" He grumbled to himself.

He was just about to get back to his nap too.

=====

Her eyes shot open into a blinding yellow light, she squinted against the intensity of the huge ball of light hanging high into the sky. She couldn't bear to look at it, she spent several minutes trying to adjust her eyes to the place surrounding her.

Finally the light became less intense, as her eyes adjusted to this strange world she found herself in. She looked around this gorgeous landscape for any clues as to where she found herself. A landscape so full and teeming with life, yet there was no one else around her.

She sat for several minutes taking in the sights and sounds of this new world. But how had she gotten here? The last thing she remembered was...

...nothing.

She couldn't remember anything, almost like she just began to exist, like she was simply placed into being. She felt like a newborn foal.

Wait....what was a foal?

She didn't know, in fact she didn't know what she herself was. As she looked around she saw thousands of things around her, but she didn't know what any of them were. She felt a twinge of fear go through her.

What was this green stuff she was standing on?

What were those tall brown columns with large tufts of green on them?

What was the impossibly huge bright object in the sky?

And most importantly, what was she?

She looked down at herself for the first time since her arrival. She studied her form. She saw that she had four long legs with which she had been standing; she saw a pure white coat of short fur covering her body. She reached up and touched her head as she tried to take everything in and to her surprise she felt a long, hard object projecting from her forehead.

It was almost a foot long, it became narrower as it spiraled up to the sharp point at the top. It was glowing with warmth, but began to become slightly cooler over time. She felt a strange energy coming from it, filling her body with warmth and light. As she felt the sensation of the energy flowing through her, she began to feel power welling up in her.

It began to flow through her body until it had reached every fiber of her being. After standing in awe for what seemed like hours, she broke herself out of her reverie and started to slowly trot forward, suddenly eager to try and figure out as much as she could about this world she found herself in...

=====

Twilight walked out of the Canterlot library, her saddlebag now containing a new gold-colored book. Even though the library was supposed to be a quiet place, a group of fillies and young colts had started to excitedly talk about something. She think she overheard them talking about a party that Moondancer was holding at the courtyard in a few hours. She thought that if she stuck around they might want to even ask her to the party.

She didn't have time for things like parties right now! She had to figure out everything she could these weird dreams she was having! Even if it meant studying through her break.

Besides, going to a party was not what she wanted to be doing. Even though she knew Moondancer meant well, she thought a party would just be a waste of time.

She hoped no one would recognize her as she made her way out of the library.

Fortunately, she found that one of the surrounding gardens was mostly devoid of anyone to bother her. Maybe now with some peace and quiet she could get some reading done.

~~~~~

"-and banished her permanently into the moon. The elder sister took on responsibility for both the sun and moon. And harmony has been maintained in Equestria for generations since." Twilight finished reading the last line of the old text in front of her.

She sat underneath a tree with scraggly branches, barely casting any shadow on the book she had just finished reading over.

"Hmmm....the Elements of Harmony," She mused to herself, "I know I've heard of those before, but where?"

She closed the book and got up off the grass that neared the edge of the lake behind her. She began to trot back to her book-filled living quarters. She knew that this was important, it had to be, it just had to!

As she crossed a bridge she saw three of her classmates walking in her direction. They stopped when they noticed her and called out to her.

"There you are Twilight!" The middle filly called out to her, "Moondancer is having a little get together at the West-Castle Courtyard, wanna come?"

All three of the fillies leaned forward with a look of pleading in their smiles. Twilight knew they just wanted Twilight to have a good time by relaxing for once, but she had more important things to do right now! She thought for a moment before answering.

"Ohhh, sorry girls, I got uh, lot of studying to catch up on," she desperately fed them an awkward smile, somehow she thought it didn't work.

Before they could protest she bolted away as fast as she could.

The fillies watched her gallop away before one sighed to herself and said to the others, "Doesn't that pony do anything except study?"

"I think she's more interested in books then friends." Another horned filly answered.

They watched her gallop away as fast as her legs could take her.

Twilight felt a little bad for rejecting their invitation in such a rough manner, but she had to get back to her room and learn more about the Elements of Harmony and hopefully, the weird dream she kept having!

Obviously, she would have to inform Princess Celestia if she found anything, she had to be warned of any possible danger!

~~~~~

"I don't believe this!" A frustrated Twilight stomped angrily around the room, "How could Celestia not take this seriously? Equestria is in peril and she brushes it off like it's no big deal!"

Twilight fumed as she recalled the words her teacher had written to her: ...you know that I value your diligence, and trust you completely, but you

simply must stop reading those dusty old books!

Did the princess think she was crazy? Maybe she did, but deep down Twilight knew there was a reason for Celestia to tell her off in such a manner.

"Look, maybe the princess is right, you have been a little obsessed over a little filly story. The princess knows you mean well, but bringing up nursery rhymes is no way to go about trying to help something." Spike desperately tried to calm Twilight down, he wasn't doing a very good job.

In fact, she seemed to get even more frustrated.

Perhaps the princess didn't take her seriously because she didn't write to her about the dream. She didn't know why she hadn't told Celestia about it, it just didn't feel appropriate telling her.

She couldn't put her hoof on why she felt this way.

Maybe Celestia was too busy preparing for the Summer Sun Celebration; it was only two days away after all.

But that was the problem, it was the 1000th year of the Celebration, the prophecies told that on that year, Nightmare Moon would return from her slumber and bring darkness eternal.

She was annoyed that the princess had brushed off her warning like that, but she was even more annoyed at what the rest of the letter said.

It said that she had to go to the town of Ponyville to check on the preparations for the Celebration, and even worse, Celestia had given her other orders as well:

...make some friends!

She understood her task to supervise the preparations, being that she had become something of a master of organization, but her second duty was downright sickening!

Friends? What on Equestria would she need to do that for?

She sighed to herself as she prepared to leave for the chariot that was outside waiting to take her to Ponyville. The golden helmets of the Royal Guards that drove the chariot shone in the gorgeous morning sun, but she paid no attention, as she had seen the Royal Guard hundreds of times during her stay in Canterlot.

~~~~~

After what seemed like hours, she managed to get some time alone in her new living quarters in Ponyville. Although it could hardly be considered quiet, on account of the massive party Pinkie Pie had decided to throw for her.

She lay awake on her new bed, if she couldn't study about the Elements of Harmony, she could at least get some sleep.

Or TRY to get some sleep...

Twilight sighed and recollected the weird day she had had...

She had meet Pinkie Pie earlier today, but the only thing the pink pony had done was jump into the air and make a sound that sounded like she was gasping for air, she later discovered that she only did that because she had the idea of throwing Twilight the party that was ruining her sleep.

Next she meet Applejack, who seemed nice enough, but all she could remember from the meeting was a flurry of names all with the word 'apple' in them and the massive pile of food thrown in front of her.

Later as she was trying to walk off her now bulging belly, a rainbow-colored blur crashed into her from somewhere in the sky. Rainbow Dash, as she discovered her name to be, seemed to be a bit full of herself. But she was a skilled Pegasus; she cleared the sky of clouds in ten seconds flat right in front of her very eyes!

As Spike was playing with Twilight's now poofy mane, she came across a white-coated unicorn with a deep purple mane masterfully curled into swirls that appeared to defy gravity.

Her name was Rarity, and before Twilight could protest, the unicorn had outfitted her with almost a dozen different saddles and dresses. She managed to sneak out before she had to spend her whole day trapped in that boutique.

A mysterious melody had come within earshot as she left the boutique, she hid in some nearby bushes and peeked out at a yellow Pegasus leading a group of birds to the most beautiful song she had heard in a long while.

The Pegasus was named Fluttershy, and much to her name, barley responded to Twilight's questions. She only spoke up when she saw Spike, and had been chatting with him all the way back to the Library.

They had all seemed different then the ponies she was used to growing up with.

Sure the ponies in Canterlot were nice, but these ponies were showing her more of themselves then anyone at her old school did.

They simply radiated love and affection, she could even feel the positive emotions coming out of the citizens of Ponyville.

Argh! Why did all these ponies want to be her friend so bad?

She didn't come here to make friends, the Summer Sun Celebration was about to begin, and she hadn't learned a thing about the Elements of Harmony.

"This is not going to be good..." Twilight thought herself as she pulled the pillow over her head.

~~~~~

Applejack, Rarity, Pinkie Pie, Fluttershy, Rainbow Dash and Twilight all ran out of the Everfree Forest and crossed the broken old bridge leading to a dark gloomy castle. It looked like it had been abandoned for years.

Possibly even hundreds of years.

Each pony thought back on the events that had rapidly taken place over the

past hour.

Celestia was missing, Nightmare Moon had returned just as the prophecy stated, Pinkie Pie had somehow found the book that told them what the Elements of Harmony were, and now they were on their way to the castle to use them to stop Nightmare Moon before she enveloped the land in terrible darkness for all eternity.

It seemed odd that there were six ponies headed to the castle if the book only spoke of five Elements...

As they had begun their journey to the castle they now were looking up at in wonder they thought they might never make it, but each pony had proven herself indispensable in getting here.

Applejack gave Twilight an Honest answer that helped save her from slipping off the cliff.

Fluttershy had calmed the Manticore by showing it Kindness.

Pinkie Pie had chased away the haunted trees by showing everyone the joy of Laughter.

Rarity expressed Generosity to help the dragon with his problems.

And Rainbow Dash showed Loyalty by not abandoning her friends after being tempted by Nightmare Moon.

But Twilight hadn't done anything to help along their adventure, in fact she had done absolutely nothing to help get past any of the obstacles. She felt slightly ashamed that she had not been able to do anything to help these ponies that had done so much to help her.

The other ponies recognized it in the way she had walked up towards the castle, falling slightly behind the group.

They reached the imposing doors on both sides of the entrance and stepped inside as one large group.

Each felt a sudden strong bond to one another, like they had to be there for

each other no matter what the cost might be.

They felt power in being with each other, in going through something treacherous together, they had already felt an obligation to help the other ponies in need, but now it felt like a conviction.

"Wow..." Applejack awed at the destroyed ceiling one hundred feet above her, "Come on Twilight, isn't this what you've been waitin' for?"

Twilight clopped up to the imposing structure, this was it, all she had to do was use a spark to activate the five stone orbs lying on the floor in front of her.

The spark was all she needed to activate the Elements of Harmony and stop Nightmare Moon.

At Applejack's urging, the rest of the group moved just outside the mossy castle to give Twilight room to focus.

Twilight closed her eyes and began to concentrate, her horn began to softly glow and small bits of magic spilled out of the tip.

She could feel a slight Spark inside of her, she concentrated all her magic on reaching the tiny Spark. No matter how hard she tried however, she could not reach it, she pushed and pushed, but the power she needed to activate the Spark got farther away as she got closer.

As she desperately tried to reach the Spark, her thoughts drifted to her friends.

She thought of how much they had done for her, she felt grateful to have such wonderful ponies around to help her.

As she thought of her friends, the Spark began to get closer, she wasn't even trying to reach it anymore, the only thoughts going through her head was that of the other five ponies standing outside.

"Focus!" She thought to herself, she shook off the thoughts of her friends out of her head and focused all her energy on activating the Spark.

As her thoughts shifted from her friends, the Spark started to fade, Twilight felt it getting farther and farther away.

"NO! I can't let it get away!" Twilight thought, redoubling her efforts to reach the Spark. "I can't let it get away!"

As she thought these words, the spark faded even faster than before, it was only a matter of time before she would lose it.

She began to sweat as she put every bit of magic she had into activating the Spark. But it continued to fade...

And fade...

And fade...

Until it was gone completely.

Twilight didn't feel anything, she couldn't even try to use the Spark now. She let out a heavy sigh as she relaxed her muscles.

Was that it? She contemplated, she couldn't activate the Spark, which means they now had no way of stopping Nightmare Moon. Their mission was over, she had failed. She felt absolutely terrible about the fact that even when everypony else had almost given their lives to save her, she couldn't do single thing.

She grudgingly got up and turned to tell the party the bad news. But as she turned she saw the five ponies outside the castle.

She saw Pinkie Pie playing in the gnarled grass.

She saw Applejack talking to herself worriedly.

She saw Rainbow Dash practicing a low-speed somersault in the air.

She saw Fluttershy nervously brushing the ground with her hoof.

And she saw Rarity trying to fashion her now short tail.

She saw five friends outside, all willing to rush to her aid at a moment's notice, all willing to give Twilight a shoulder to cry on if she needed it, all willing to do anything they could to help her in her time of need.

When she looked at the figures outside the large doors, she didn't see five ponies, she saw five friends...

The word hit her like a crushing boulder.

Friends.

She had friends...

The word kept repeating itself over and over again as she watched those ponies that were now so important to her.

As she did she felt a Spark, a different kind of Spark. One that came from her heart instead of just her horn. She focused her new found energy towards activating the precious Spark.

She did not feel nervous, she felt confident, she kept her thoughts on her friends. Friends. She couldn't believe she did not notice it earlier. The Spark hadn't worked because she tried to do it herself. But now she knew she had friends that would help her. She didn't have to try it alone.

The Spark began to get closer as she felt the new bonds to her friends grow. It got closer and closer as her thoughts about her friends grew.

It was so close now, she was surprised at how easy it was to get it this time.

It was now just out of her grasp, all she had to do was take it. She took one last breathful of air and reached out to activate the Spark.

Almost....almost....almost....

Then with the last bit of energy she had left, she reached as far as she could, and felt a sharp warm sensation rush over her. She had it...

But just as quickly as it happened, it vanished, throwing Twilight back on

her hind hooves. She screamed at the shock of what just happened.

Her friends heard her scream in surprise and rushed back into the ruined castle.

Twilight laid on her back as she recoiled from the blast. And as she looked towards the Elements of Harmony, she saw a violet shadow move through the open windows and made its way to the platform in front of where the Elements had been.

The five ponies rushed up to Twilight, asking her if she was alright.

"Hey! You okay?" Rainbow Dash flew to her side.

"Yeah, I'm fine, but look!" She answered and pointed with her hoof to the wave of shadow that was now manifesting over the Elements that lay on the ground.

The shadow swirled around and around until it was forming into a dark shape. The shadow dissipated, revealing a tall, black alicorn standing in the middle of the Elements.

Nightmare Moon.

"Ahahahaha! Oh you have no idea how long I've been waiting for this moment!" The sinister alicorn threw her head up and laughed. "I have anxiously awaited for this day to come!"

The six ponies stood staring up at her, too shocked by her dark forces to move.

"We aren't scared of you you big meany head!" Pinkie Pie yelled with all the strength she could muster, sticking her tongue out at Nightmare Moon. "You think you're all big and tough, but you're just a big bully!"

"Yeah! We can take you!" Rainbow Dash shouted in her usual brash tone.

"Come on girls, let's show this pony who's in charge 'round here!" Applejack lowered her body, preparing to charge. The other five followed suit, lowering themselves to charge at Nightmare Moon.

"You're kidding, you're kidding right?" Nightmare Moon raised an eyebrow as she looked at them skeptically.

They all charged at once, with Fluttershy and Rainbow Dashed launching in the air to attack from above. They ran down the long hallway as fast as they could.

The Elements around Nightmare Moon began to glow a deep purple color and turn grew as they floated up around her.

Rainbow Dash was the first to meet her, Rainbow Dash turned in midair and prepared her patented Air Kick move. Nightmare Moon simply moved her head to the side at the last minute and summoned a column of stone up from the ground behind her.

Rainbow Dash tried to move as she missed Nightmare Moon, but the column came up underneath her and struck her in the stomach, launching her up in the air.

The others froze at the terrifying blow, watching Rainbow Dash fall down and skid to the wall at the back of the room. The column receded back into the ground next to her now limp body.

"RAINBOW DASH!" They all cried in unison.

"Ya'll pay for what you just did!" Applejack shouted angrily.

"I agree! We shall not simply stand here and let you ruin our perfectly good world with your absolutely garish darkness!" Rarity shouted as well.

"Come on girls, she can't hit us from different angles!" Twilight encouraged them. "Rarity, you charge from the left, Pinkie Pie, you from the right. Applejack, you go straight up the middle! I'll keep her distracted!"

They nodded and ran towards Nightmare Moon from three different spots in the room.

"Fluttershy, you go make sure Rainbow Dash is all right!" She shouted to the yellow Pegasus.

"I...um...ok." She was almost too scared to move.

Twilight focused her magic on a fallen pillar behind them. It started to levitate. With every ounce of magic she had left, she threw it at Nightmare Moon.

She stood there, watching the six-ton rock fly towards her at breakneck speeds. She closed her eyes when the pillar was getting closer.

Rarity and Pinkie Pie were almost to Nightmare Moon when she opened her eyes again.

As she did, a huge crack instantaneously split down the middle horizontally. The pillar split in two as fast as it approached, half flew up to the ceiling and the other half shot into the ground in front of her.

Rarity and Pinkie Pie reached her as the pillar split and each jumped towards her and bucked with all their might.

Without batting an eye, Nightmare Moon spread her wings as far as she could, each one creating a powerful gust of wind that launched Rarity and Pinkie Pie backwards against the walls.

Applejack continued to charge towards Nightmare Moon; her determined eyes not seeing Rarity and Pinkie Pie fly away from her.

The pillar split in front of her, and she instinctively jumped up on the half that had been flung into the ground, using it as a ramp to reach Nightmare Moon's head.

She jumped off of the still falling pillar with every single ounce of strength she could muster, the pillar crushed into thousands of tiny fragments as she jumped off it towards her target with her mighty hind legs, turning to buck Nightmare Moon with her entire being.

Nightmare Moon was still closing her wings as she looked up and saw a crazed orange earth pony kick with the force of one hundred ponies.

The kick landed square on the side of her face, generating a crack in her

armored helm as she recoiled from the blow, stumbling back a few paces.

Applejack slumped to the ground, exhausted from the kick that she put her whole life into.

"AAAGH! FOOLISH PONY! YOU WILL PAY FOR DARING TO STRIKE ME!" Nightmare Moon shouted in a blood-fueled craze. Her eyes shot wide open and a drop of blood flowed down her face.

Twilight managed to regain consciousness from her intense spell to see an infuriated Nightmare Moon standing over the barely awake Applejack.

"A...pple...jack..." Twilight stumbled to her feet, trying to get enough magic for a spell to teleport Applejack out of the castle. She couldn't...

"YOU THINK YOU CAN DEFEAT ME WITH YOUR PATHETIC KICKS?" Nightmare Moon screamed down at Applejack, "I WILL MAKE SURE YOU NEVER MAKE THAT MISTAKE EVER AGAIN!"

Her horn glowed a slight purple, and a chunk of rock tore itself out of the ground. She hovered it over the orange earth pony. Applejack could only look up at the enraged figure above her, and the large boulder hovering next to her.

"Applejack!" Twilight screamed in desperation.

Nightmare Moon smiled and looked down at the writhing figure on the ground. "NEVER AGAIN!"

She brought down the rock with full force onto Applejack's hind legs.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGGHHH!!!!" Applejack screamed as the boulder crushed her legs. She felt every single bone in her legs break at once, she could do nothing but scream at the excruciating pain. She flailed her free limbs in panic.

She was trapped, trapped under the object that was crushing the very life out of her.

Trapped under Nightmare Moon's rage.

After what seemed like hours, the boulder was lifted, and Applejack's ruined legs came into view. Twilight averted her eyes from the gruesome sight, she couldn't bear to watch.

Fluttershy had watched from the back of the room next to the barely alive Rainbow Dash. She couldn't even move, only stare at the wicked horror standing over her suffering friend.

Nightmare Moon threw back her head and laughed, "Do you ponies see now? Do you see what happens when you try to defy ME? I am unstoppable! And now that I have the Elements of Harmony," The five orbs flew over to her, they were now pure black with violet symbols on them, "I can rule all of Equestria! No, all off the WORLD!"

Twilight could do nothing as she and her defeated friends struggled to stay awake, they only stayed conscious because of the massive fear that encased them.

"And the night, will last, FOREVER!"

Chapter 2-1

Setting Sun

Ponyville was in a state of panic. The mayor had called a state of emergency, recruiting every Pegasus pony in town to form search parties to look for Princess Celestia.

The Princess had gone missing, and nobody had seen her since her Royal Guards escorted her to her private living quarters to prepare for her appearance at the Summer Sun Celebration. And since Ponyville was the last place she was seen, some ponies feared that the rest of the throne would blame their town for her disappearance.

Pegasus flew in every direction, unicorns used magic spells to try and locate a trail that might lead them to her, and earth ponies ran to and from the mayor's office carrying out orders that came left and right.

Every pony in Ponyville was either running to find the Princess or running to go hide. Some ponies stopped to wonder what had happened to the party that went out to the Everfree Forest, when they succeed with getting the Elements everything would be back to normal... right?

Little did the town know, they had bigger reason to fear then they thought, completely unaware of the events taking place in the middle of the Everfree Forest...

Events that would shape their lives forever...

A sharp cry pierced the air around a ruined old castle. The sound of crunching bones and horrified wails cut through the black trees making up the Everfree Forest.

Applejack shot her eyes open in pure agony. She could never imagine such torment as this. She lay on the ground as the boulder that had crushed her legs was finally lifted off of her. Nightmare Moon started to speak but Applejack couldn't hear or see anything.

Nightmare Moon smiled a terrible smile and shouted, "And the night, will last, FOREVER!"

At that her horn glowed bright violet and sparkles and streams of magic shot out of the piercing object atop her head. The Elements glowed deep purple and vibrated uncontrollably. The ponies still conscious felt part of themselves being drained from them.

An orb of light came out of each of the Elements of Harmony, each one floated above the now empty black rocks with ancient symbols etched onto them. The five orbs spiraled around Nightmare Moon faster and faster, causing a band of light to form around her.

She closed her eyes in concentration, focusing on the Elements. The useless stone vessels cracked and burst into pieces at the intense magic coming from Nightmare Moon. Her spell sucked in the air inside the old castle, Twilight had to hang on to a nearby vine to avoid being sucked in.

Applejack's screams still sounded through the air.

The orbs suddenly flew towards Nightmare Moon one by one, each one growing her power ten-fold. She smiled to herself as the powerful magic flowed into her.

Fluttershy hid herself behind Rainbow Dash to shield herself from the dark figure standing in the middle of the hallway.

"Now you will all see the true power of the night!" Nightmare Moon yelled, her eyes glowing with darkness, "The night you all so foolishly push aside! The night you treat only as a waiting time for the sun to rise! I have been trapped in that horrible prison for 1000 years! And now you will all face the fate I was given so long ago by your precious princess! Do you hear me?!"

"DO YOU HEAR ME CELESTIA?! I KNOW YOU DO! I KNOW YOU ARE LISTENING! YOU WILL PAY MOST OF ALL FOR YOUR TREACHERY!"

Each time she spoke, the fury in her eyes grew. The fear in Twilight's eyes grew as well.

"THIS LAND WILL BE NOTHING BUT DUST AND RUIN FOR EVER!"
Nightmare Moon's power continued to grow, "JUST AS I WAS
IMPRISONED IN THAT BARREN MOON! THIS LAND WILL NEVER SEE
THE LIGHT OF DAY AGAIN!"

A huge beam of purple magic shot out of the tip of her horn into the night sky. It tore through the sky, breaking through the barriers of sound and space. An incredible earthquake shook the ground, causing Twilight to lose her footing and fall to the ground.

She looked up at the monstrosity casting this earth shattering spell.

The mayor of Ponyville stopped yelling at the ponies running frantically around the town square and looked in the direction of the blast of magic rising from Everfree Forest. Other ponies stopped what they were doing and stared in awe as well. Not even the powerful earthquake could shake them from their fright.

The sky split above Ponyville, revealing a sheet of grey sky that seemed to go on forever. High up above the grey clouds a crescent moon shone dully through the sky. The sky split until it reached the horizon and the entire atmosphere became a shade of dark grey, undulating in swirls and patches of even darker grey.

The sun could faintly be seen just above the horizon line, but it was no longer full of life and warmth, it was empty and dull, matching the depressing sky.

The six defeated ponies lay on the stone floor writhing beneath the world-shaping power that had beaten them. Each one faded from consciousness one by one, Twilight struggled to stay awake, stay alive.

"AFTER ONE THOUSAND YEARS, THE TIME HAS FINALLY COME!"
The icy voice bellowed, "YOU SHALL ALL FACE MY NIGHT WITHOUT
HOPE FOR RELENT!"

At that she increased the strength of her magic and a white light shot out of her and started to envelope the land. For those last few seconds, the earthquake roared through the ground below Twilight, and as she was sent reeling from the shock, she could only form one thought...

"I've failed...I've failed you all..."

"This is all my fault..."

The light soared through the sky, reaching Ponyville and swarming it with its light.

Everypony in the town square stopped running and dropped to the ground, their minds gone.

=====

She clopped through the beautiful world everywhere around her, taking in the sights of a land teeming with life. Her new legs wobbled to keep her up, she still had to adjust to her newfound form.

She stumbled over to one of the tall brown columns with a mess of green on top. She lay under this large object as something entered her head. A simple thought, but one that shook her new mind...

She was alive.

She knew she was alive since she arrived here, but she never truly realized it until now. She didn't just know she was alive, she felt alive, she felt like an actual presence in the world, instead of just an object placed there.

Her mind reeled at this simple thought that brought her to a new understanding of where she was. Somehow, becoming aware of herself opened her mind to understand many new things, she was suddenly aware of her own actions. Before she had just moved without thinking, on instinct, but now she found out she had complete control over her movements.

She realized that she was not trapped within her instinct, she could do whatever she pleased. Her mind still tried to recover from her startling realization.

Her first action was to admire the object she had been sitting under. She looked up the brown column to the tangled green above her flowing mane. Something else simple but powerfully profound entered her head.

Words...she looked up at the object and a word came to her thoughts...

Tree.

She had discovered that she could give things names that could be used to identify the objects she was looking at.

Grass.

Flower.

Leaves.

She looked up at the large ball of heat above her.

Sun.

She spent the next few hours giving as many objects as she could names. Rock, sky, ground, dirt, petal, moss, her list grew and grew.

Then she noticed that some things were bigger or different than others, so she gave names to the differences between the things as well.

Tall, short, wide, hard, soft, narrow, rough, smooth...

She continued to put words to different objects. She wasn't just forming words, she was forming language...

=====

Date: 0001

New Lunar Calendar

-3 hours after The Return-

Rainbow Dash

"Owww...my stomach..." Rainbow Dash woke up grapping her core in pain. "What happened?"

She opened her eyes and surveyed where she was. She was in Ponyville's nursery, she had no idea how she gotten here.

The last thing remembered was flying into the castle in the Everfree Forest, and then...

She remembered now, she and her friends had tried to stop Nightmare Moon from bringing the world into eternal darkness, and she was knocked out as she charged towards her. Did the others manage to succeed? Was the world really wrapped in darkness?

She wasn't going to find out in this hospital bed. She moved to get herself up, but a sharp pain in her side made her give up her efforts.

"Oh! Rainbow dear, please don't try to move!" Nurse Mercy trotted into the room, "You still need some more rest to recover!"

"Rest? No way!" Rainbow Dash boasted, "I don't need any rest, I just need to see if everypony else is ok!"

"Rainbow Dash..." Nurse Mercy was quiet, "...Please stay still. Your friends....are ok..."

Something in her voice told her that everything wasn't ok. Before she had time to think about it, her head grew weary and she slumped back onto the pillow.

-6 hours after The Return-

Rarity

Rarity walked back to her boutique to get more supplies, almost every building in Ponyville was in need of repair, and her crafting skills made her perfect to help. She was an absolute mess, her mane was tangled and drooped over her grave face, her hooves were worn from so much walking, and her tail was limp and was in desperate need of brushing.

It hadn't helped that she woke up inside a bush.

She could only remember one thing after Nightmare Moon had thrown her

against the wall; how horrible that voice had been that yelled out while unleashing its terrible magic.

She looked up at the dreary sky. Grey, just like it had been for the whole day. If there were any days anymore. There was just enough light to see. The stars were visible in the eternal night sky, but they only faintly showed in the dark sky. They were nothing like when Celestia was still raising the sun and moon, beautiful and sparkling.

The landscape was also changed, the grass now hung limply on the ground, and it was normally standing straight up.

Large cracks in the surface of the earth littered the ground, Rarity hopped over one on her way through Ponyville Plaza. Maybe later she could fix them and bring some semblance of order to this ravaged town.

As she slowly made her way to her shop, she saw another earth pony standing looking up at the night sky. She decided to approach her.

"Hello?" She called to the pony, "I was wondering if you have seen Fluttershy anywhere?"

The pony turned towards Rarity, her face etched with sorrow. "No, she is still in her cottage."

Still? Rarity thought, she had been in her cottage all day, she hadn't even tried to help the animals that became frightened since the earthquake. Still, she didn't expect Fluttershy to be outside; the state of the town would probably scare her even more.

She felt the withering grass crunch under her hooves. Even the grass had started to decay; it had turned into thick crunchy blades, their color draining every hour.

She finally got back to her boutique and gathered more materials into her saddlebags. She looked around her shop, seeing the damage the earthquake did to her home. She shuddered at the state of her boutique, her carefully placed decorations had fallen from their places, her stock was a complete mess, and she saw her life work practically falling apart in front of her.

She gathered what she needed and turned to leave, she had heard Twilight was calling them together for a meeting on what to do next. Well, she invited those who could attend.

Hopefully this would shed some answers on what happened to the beautiful land of Ponyville...

Pinkie Pie

Pinkie Pie sat on a cushion in the Ponyville library, her mind in a blank state, her usually happy attitude a sad serious one. She hadn't smiled since she woke up outside of town square. She had tried to laugh, but she found that she couldn't find anything to laugh about.

She normally had a hundred things to laugh about, her friends, the bakery, holding parties for ponies even when they didn't want her to, and knowing that no matter what her friends were always there for her. But she didn't feel any of those things right now.

She only felt emptiness.

She only felt sadness.

Like the whole world had been drained of its happiness.

Twilight rushed to the other side of the room, knocking into Pinkie Pie on her way to another shelf.

"Oh! Sorry Pinkie Pie, I wasn't watching where I was go-" Twilight stopped and looked at her blank friend. "Uh, Pinkie Pie? Are you ok? You aren't your usual self."

Pinkie Pie turned her head, "Huh? Oh, I'm just fine Twilight!" she threw on a nervous smile, "I'm just fine and dandy...dandy...dandy..."

Twilight didn't believe it for a second. Maybe she was just being Pinkie Pie. No one understood that pony after all.

Pinkie Pie stared off into the distance again, her mind wandering to the sad

thoughts she was thinking. Will anything ever be the same? Would she be able to go back to working at the bakery? Would life ever be normal again?

She wanted to be happy, to laugh. But the ponies around town were all so sad, she couldn't stand seeing them all like this.

Rarity opened the door to join the two ponies, Pinkie Pie barely noticed her through her lonely thoughts. She sat down next to Pinkie Pie and saw the look of sadness on her face, she opened her mouth to speak, but closed it.

Twilight turned to the two mares in her living room, "Ok girls, since we are the only ones that saw what happened that were able to attend this meeting, and I feel it's necessary to formulate a plan of action. I have studied more on the Elements of Harmony and I was able to find that according to my research, we were more than qualified to receive the Elements."

Rarity spoke up, "Twilight my dear, we already knew that before we went to the Everfree Forest."

"I know that now, but when we left for the Forest I didn't think we could actually get the Elements in the first place! I didn't think that we could use them..." Twilight hung her head, "Which is why I couldn't get the Spark to work, because I didn't think we could ever succeed in the first place....It's all my fault this happened..."

"Twilight!" Rarity practically yelled, "This is not your fault! This is the fault of Nightmare Moon! And I simply will not let a friend of mine talk about herself that way!"

"No Rarity, it's true, I couldn't activate the Spark because I didn't believe in us. But then I realized that I had friends willing to help, and I trusted you to be able to use the Elements."

"But that's not all..." She continued, "I tried a second time to activate the Spark, and that time it almost worked. I had complete faith in you ponies, but I still couldn't get it. The reason was that I was hiding something from you the whole time..."

Rarity sat in shock, "You...lied to us? You hid something from us?"

But....Twilight....we..."

"I know! I know I lied! And I feel terrible, you have no idea how terrible I feel..."

"But what is it you were hiding? It must be important if it caused you to not be able to use the Spark." Rarity's voice softened, "Twilight, if there's something you are hiding, you can tell us...we won't be mad, right Pinkie?"

Pinkie just shook her head, taking in everything she was hearing.

"Well..." Twilight mumbled, chocking on her words, "I knew about Nightmare Moon's return before I got to Ponyville. I had a reoccurring dream where a dark figure was defeated by a powerful pony, I thought that the Elements would summon the figure to defeat Nightmare Moon. I thought that I didn't need any of you, just that one that I thought would be summoned...I'm sorry I didn't tell you all earlier, and now we are all paying for it..."

"Twilight....I'm....it's ok. Really, I understand. You did what you felt was necessary." Rarity wiped a tear from the violet pony's eye.

"And what's in the past is done, the only thing we can do now is make the best of our situation, no matter how grim. You may have made a mistake, but we don't hate you for it. We're your friends Twilight, you can tell us anything. Ok?"

Twilight mumbled a reply.

"So from now on Twilight, no more secrets. Ever! If you know something important, tell us no matter how bad it is! There is no reason to hide something from your friend!"

"YOU!" Pinkie Pie shot out of her seat and pressed a hoof to Twilight's face, "YOU CAUSED THIS!"

"PINKIE PIE!" Rarity yelled at the enraged pony. "What do you think you're doing?"

"THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT! YOU LIED TO US AND NOW....AND

NOW...." Tears started to stream down her face as she screamed at one of her best friends. "AND NOW EVERYTHING IS RUINED!"

"PINKIE PIE! WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?!"

"SHUT UP RARITY! HOW COULD YOU NOT CARE THAT SHE RUINED OUR LIVES!"

"LISTEN TO YOURSELF PINKIE PIE! THIS ISN'T YOU! Twilight made a mistake and she is already paying for it! You think she doesn't feel awful about all this?"

Pinkie Pie stood in front of Twilight, tears pouring out of both of their eyes, she gritted her teeth as she listened to Rarity's words. She suddenly became aware of what she just said, and she backed away from Twilight, her look changing from anger to one of intense guilt.

"Twi...light...I'm so sorry..." She looked at the pony in front of her, the pony she reduced to a sobbing mess on the floor. She turned towards the door horrified of what she just did. Without taking one look back she galloped out the front door as fast as she could.

What had she done? How could she say those things? She never said mean things to anyone. Even when they made her really mad, she just smiled and brought everyone into a fit of laughter with her jokes.

She ran through the town marketplace surveying the destruction. Most ponies by this point were hiding in their homes, too scared to go out into the dark world. Only a few ponies could be seen in the small town.

She passed the small hospital, it was the only place left in Ponyville with any activity. She stopped in her tracks, watching the scene before her unfold. Ponies were leaving and entering the hospital left and right. Tents had been laid out; nurses and volunteers were running between them.

As a nurse left a tent pushing an empty stretcher, Pinkie Pie saw what was inside the tents. This wasn't a collection of healing tents.

It was a morgue.

The tents lined the field next to the hospital, each one housing those that did not survive the Return of Nightmare Moon. Ponies that could no longer live in their homes, no longer work in their shops, no longer see the one they loved more than life itself.

Ponies who never got to kiss their children good night.

She froze staring at the sight of rows of tents containing those who could not go on. She couldn't move. She couldn't breathe. She couldn't feel anything except the cold fact that these many ponies couldn't celebrate parties anymore.

Her thoughts turned to Rainbow Dash and Applejack. Could they be in those tents?

No way! She thought, Rainbow Dash and Applejack were too tough, nothing could stop them. She left before she had a chance to investigate the tents, galloping back to her home.

Twilight Sparkle

Her pink friend charged out of her front door, tears streaming down her face. She couldn't believe the way that pony was acting. It didn't matter though, she was right. She deserved it, it was all her fault.

Even though Rarity tried to comfort her, she couldn't hear her, she could only hear her thoughts of how she had let them all down. How she had ruined all these ponies lives. How so many ponies had gotten killed since she arrived in Ponyville.

She couldn't believe herself, why didn't she tell them about the dream? Why couldn't she have brought herself to tell them everything? She still didn't know.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the front door busting open again, she turned to it expecting Pinkie Pie to be back to accuse her again. Instead she found a weary Rainbow Dash at her doorstep, wearing a large bandage around her midsection.

"Hey girls." She lazily greeted the two ponies, her voice nowhere near her

usual tone.

"Rainbow Dash! I'm thrilled to see you have awaked!" Rarity's face lit up.

"Yeah, the nurse finally let me out. But she said I can't use my wings for another week." Rainbow Dash hung her head, "Can you believe that? A whole week! What am I supposed to do for a whole week? I don't belong on the ground, I'm the best flyer in Equestria!"

"You should be thankful you can even walk in the first place after that nasty incident you took." Rarity reasoned.

Rainbow Dash thought back to what happened, that pillar that came out of the ground had hit her right on one of the nerves that controlled her wings, almost like Nightmare Moon wanted her to not be able to fly just to smite her.

Twilight remained silent, Rarity's foreleg still wrapped around her neck.

"Have you been able to see Applejack yet?" Rarity asked Rainbow Dash.

"Nah, the doc said no one was allowed to see her yet, but I guess that means she's still...alive." Her voice trailed off. Was she ok? There where an awful lot of tents outside the hospital.

Rarity spoke up after a few moments of silence, "I'm sure she's fine dea-"

"I'm leaving." Twilight had broken out of reverie.

"WHAT!?" Both ponies shouted in alarm.

"I'm going back to Canterlot. I don't belong in Ponyville, I've caused nothing but trouble for all of you and I don't want to be burden for you anymore."

She started packing some of her books into an empty saddlebag. Her friends stared at her, unable to speak.

"I'm going to Canterlot to try and find Celestia, she's the only one who knows how to fix this."

"But...sweetie, no one else has been able to find her either. What makes you think that you can find her when the entire Guard is searching for her and haven't found a thing?" Rarity asked.

"They don't know her like I do. Not the Royal Guard, not her advisers, and not even her nephew know her like I do. She was the first pony I ever considered a friend... She is the only one I ever truly trusted growing up. Even more than my parents." She continued to pack tools and rations into her bag.

"So that's why I'm leaving, to go find my best friend. She's out there somewhere. And even if I don't find her, odds are I will be more useful there than I will here."

"Twilight, you couldn't possibly leave us he-"

"Sorry to interrupt," Rainbow Dash cut into her sentence, "But I don't think it's going to be possible to go to Canterlot."

"Nonsense!" Twilight shot back, unperturbed by Rainbow Dash's statement, "If I couldn't walk there I could always teleport. I've learned how to teleport over long distances during my time at Canterlot University."

"No, it's not that, it's just that...well...Canterlot is gone." Rainbow Dash pointed out the window.

"WHAT?!" Twilight ran to the window and peered outside. Rainbow Dash was right, Canterlot was gone. Not just the city, but the whole mountain range it was built on! The landscape around Ponyville seemed to be the same, but instead of meeting the foot of a mountain, it kept on going as far as they could see.

She ran to another window and saw the same sight. Only rolling hills dotted with trees as far as she could see. She looked out towards the Everfree Forest, but it was gone, replaced with more plains covered with trees and plants. It was as if Ponyville was the only thing around for one hundred miles!

"Twilight, what did Nightmare Moon do?" Rarity pleaded to the panicked pony.

"I, I don't know, but I think when she returned, she did more than bring eternal night. I think she changed the land itself!"

"What?! That's not possible! The prophecies didn't say anything about that!"

"No they didn't Rainbow Dash, but they also didn't say anything about Nightmare Moon taking the Elements of Harmony. Or the fact that I couldn't activate the Spark."

Rainbow Dash stood stunned while Twilight continued. "I think Nightmare Moon actually changed the land, I think she managed to move entire pieces of Equestria. She must have separated all the cities and towns from each other. If they are still there at all."

"By Celestia! Does that mean Ponyville is the only place around for hundreds of miles?" Rarity gasped.

"My guess is that Nightmare Moon isolated all the pony civilizations from each other. Trottingham, Canterlot, Hoofington, Stalliongrad. They're probably all at least three hundred miles away from each other, maybe more."

Rainbow Dash's jaw hung open, "So we're stuck here? By ourselves?"

"Not unless you would like to travel a few hundred miles by yourself." Twilight said flatly.

"Correct, which means we won't be getting help from anywhere else. That means we are on our own for the time being..." Rarity's lip trembled a little, "Oh I hope we can sort this mess out soon, so we can all go back to our normal lives..."

-2 hours after the Return-

Zecora

"Oh my aching head, next time I nap I should use my bed!" Zecora thought, pulling herself off the floor of her hut.

She got up before she realized she hadn't been napping, she had been trying to figure out what those noises coming from the old castle were. She heard crashing and rocks smashing, it sounded like some sort of fight was taking place, and a big one at that.

She had just packed some provisions to go investigate the sounds when she had the scream of a pony in great pain, it sounded like whoever was fighting was losing. She had had experience in fighting off the creatures of Everfree Forest; she used her skill with hunting weapons along with some unique magics she learned from her people long ago.

She galloped out of the hut ready to go help whoever was in need, but suddenly a beam of powerful magic shot into the air, piercing the clouds and shaking the ground. She stumbled over a vine as the ground shook around her, she could barely get back on her feet as the world seemed to tear itself apart.

A large fault crack shot past her and branched off into three separate cracks in three different directions. Whatever was happening here, it was powerful.

As she regained her footing, she saw a bright light come out of the beam of magic and go across the forest. It quickly enveloped her and before she knew it, she was out cold.

That was the last thing she could remember before waking up on her hut floor. She was still alive, so whatever it was that happened hadn't been lethal. Her hut on the other hoof was an absolute mess, brews spilled, books littered the ground, and her cauldron had spilled its contents onto the floor.

Then she thought of the nearby town she went to on occasion for supplies. They were absolutely terrified of her, but she still needed to see if they were alright.

"They may shriek at me with a yelp, but the ponies of Ponyville still need my help!" She thought to herself and grabbed the bag she had prepared earlier.

She galloped as fast as she could in the direction of Ponyville, expertly navigating the Forests tangled growth. It was strange that the earthquake had been so powerful yet the Forest was perfectly fine.

She brushed the thought from her head, she had to get these remedies to the ponies in Ponyville. She couldn't just stand by while somepony was hurt. But then she remembered the scream she heard before the earthquake, whoever it was probably needed help more than those in Ponyville. She was almost out of the Forest already, so she figured she would have time to drop her supplies off at the edge of the town and come back to help whoever had shouted out in pain.

She saw a gap in the forest up ahead, she had almost reached the edge of the forest. She galloped with a new sense of determination.

She burst through the tree line, but what she saw was even more shocking than she could have ever imagined. She skidded to a halt. Outside of the Everfree Forest was...nothing.

The land she was standing on simply stopped, like a cliff. In fact, it was a cliff. The land ended in a sharp ninety degree drop into a layer of clouds below her. As far as she could see there was nothing but grey above her and clouds below her forming a thick floor of swirling wisps.

She peered over the edge, it was at least a hundred foot drop to the cloud layer below her. The rock holding up the land she was standing on grew narrower the farther down it went. It was like an upside down mountain, except it seemed to be floating above the clouds.

It looked as if the Everfree Forest had simply tore itself out of the ground and now floated on top of the clouds. She couldn't believe it, she was not only on a floating chunk of land, but the island was floating above the cloud layer!

Her mind struggled to accept the impossible, there was no way this could be happening. Then she remembered that she still had to help whoever was in peril. She turned around and galloped back into the forest. It would take at least an hour to reach the castle.

She hoped she would not be too late.

=====

Date: 1000
Old Lunar Calendar

-2 hours before the Return-

???

Her mind raced as she tried to calm herself, she had prepared for this. She knew this was going to happen when it was supposed to, and she was not one to object the inevitable. She had prepared, she had trained, she had counted down the days, she had been waiting for this day for a long time. She was going to go through with this.

Nothing was going to stop her from doing what she going to do.

Nothing was going to stop her from completing her task.

Nothing was going to stop Mayor Mare from making the best speech of her life.

She adjusted her glasses against her snout, they were practically falling off of her face with all the sweat. There was no denying it, she had never been so nervous in her life. She looked at herself in the mirror. She was shaking.

"Ok", she thought to herself, "Okokokokokokokokok I can do this..." she tried to regain her composure in the mirror, she wasn't very successful. She always got a bit nervous before speeches but once she was onstage all her nervousness melted away. But this time it was the Princess herself!

That fact only made her even more nervous, if she messed up, she would have to answer to the throne! Oh, they might banish her from Equestria! Or throw her in a dungeon! Or banish her and then throw her in a dungeon in the place they banished her in!

She almost wanted to run to Celestia in her dressing room and beg her not to do these strange things to her if she messed up, but she didn't leave her room.

She knew Celestia said that absolutely no one was to disturb her before the Summer Sun Celebration.

Even if it was life or death.

Celestia

Celestia sat in her dressing room, the one the Mayor had set up for her. She was such a sweet mayor, but she had a tendency to be a nervous wreck sometimes. Celestia used her magic to push all the furniture to the outside of the room and locked the door. She told her not to let anyone disturb her, she didn't want anyone to get pulled into this.

She sat in the middle of the room, her eyes closed in preparation for what was going to happen. She did not want it to be this way, she hadn't wanted it to be this way 1000 years before.

Yet here she was.

As she was collecting her thoughts, a breeze swept through the window. She knew it was time, time for Nightmare Moon to return.

She placed a silence spell on the walls so no one could hear from the outside.

The wind began to manifest itself into a shape, Celestia knew that shape, she remembered it from when she encased it in the middle of the moon 1000 years ago. She was not scared. She trusted the six ponies she had chosen to take the Elements of Harmony.

She smiled to herself.

The wind grew darker and began to form into four legs. A body formed quickly after. Then a pair of great wings spread from the shadow, and soon a head with two dark green eyes. They stared Celestia right in the face.

The black figure dispelled the darkness oozing from her formed body with a flick of her wings. She too had been preparing 1000 years for this day.

Darkness embodied and Light embodied sat in front of each other looking each other in the eyes, neither with any fear.

"So you've come to visit have you?" Celestia was the first to speak, and flashed a small smile.

"Yes and I don't suppose you know why I'm here." The evil figure responded.

"So how long did it take to convince the Stars to help you?"

"About 1000 years, I guess you were right on that part. You just had to put down every little detail in that old mare's tale didn't you?"

"I would like our subjects to either reject the whole truth or a complete lie, but not only part of the story."

"Interesting choice of words. However they are my subjects after all, so you should probably get used to the idea."

"They are either my subjects or both of ours, but they are not yours!"

"You know what? I say we just get **DOWN TO BUSINESS!**" Nightmare Moon flared her deep purple aura of magic.

Celestia didn't bat an eyelid, "If you wish."

Their horns glowed and magic shot out through the room.

A split second later they were gone.

Celestia opened her eyes after the flash of light and saw where they had teleported. She saw grey dust in irregular patterns filled with small craters. She looked up and saw thousands of shining stars in every direction in the darkness around them. There was no doubt about it.

They were on the dark side of the moon.

"So how do you like it?" Nightmare Moon sneered, "You must have, because this is where you forced me to live for 1000 years!"

"You know why I put you here. It was the only place where you could do no harm."

"So do you like what I've done with the place?" Nightmare Moon asked, ignoring Celestia's comment.

She looked around at the extraterrestrial wasteland. There were craters littering the land, obviously places where Luna had practiced her magic spells. Some places were turned to glass.

Nightmare Moon continued, "1000 years of practicing, I've managed to regain all of my powers within the first 600 years you know. I'll bet you were hoping it would have taken longer, what with you using the Elements to strip me of my magic."

Celestia said nothing, only looked around at the lonely wasteland she had trapped Luna for 1000 years. Her eyes moistened as she thought of her sister.

"Awww..." Nightmare Moon sobbed in fake sympathy, "Are you sad you imprisoned me here all this time?"

"NO! I am only sad that I trapped my dear sister here for this long, but not you! I'm here to take Luna back and right this wrong I should have solved 1000 years ago!"

Now it was time for Nightmare Moon to smile, "Very well."

"You want to fight?" Nightmare Moon lowered her head, "Then you shall HAVE IT!"

She shot a quick blast of magic at Celestia, she stopped it without even moving. Her attacker lunged at her, preparing another blast of magic.

Celestia simply lowered her graceful form in preparation. Nightmare Moon shot a purple bolt at Celestia's legs. Celestia simply kicked it away. Nightmare Moon tried to stab her with her horn after Celestia kicked the spell away.

She dodged to the side and turned her horn towards Nightmare Moon and blasted her side with a quick bolt of white magic.

Nightmare Moon flew through the air, slowly falling from the moons weak gravity. A small cloud of moon dust sprang up around her when she hit the ground.

"So I see your own skill has not faltered in my absence." Nightmare Moon got up, "Good, now we can actually get started.

Celestia said nothing.

Both combatants charged towards each other at full speed, wings spread. As they reached each other, they both teleported in a flash. For a few moments, all was silent.

Another flash rang out a mile away above the surface. Celestia and Nightmare Moon clashed against each other, pressing their bodies against the other combatant. Another flash, they disappeared.

They appeared once again as their bodies collided, this time 50 feet above the surface. They disappeared again.

Another flash and another great clashing sound, deepened by the moons weak atmosphere.

Another flash.

Another flash.

And another, and another, and another.

They kept hitting each other at light speed as fast as they could, the two figures glowed black and white as explosions of light came from each impact. They were teleporting faster than sound could process. Flashes of light covered the atmosphere around the moon.

Each combatant teleported away from each other, never breaking eye contact. They charged towards each other at full speed. Twenty foot waves of dust soared upwards behind them as they flew.

They collided with an incredible smash, the shockwave sent a rippling through the ground, followed by a massive crater spontaneously smashing into the ground below them. Large clouds of dust shot up into the air.

They jumped apart from each other. Seeing the other not yet defeated, they lowered their forms and prepared a spell. Nightmare Moon's horn glowed an intense purple, Celestia's glowed a pure white.

They fired a powerful beam of magic at each other. The two spells collided at the midpoint between them. The spells collided with a bright explosion; they blended together, each trying to get past the other. Celestia put all her effort into increasing the strength of the spell, but she could not break it.

Neither could Nightmare Moon.

Finally she sent the last of her spell through the beam as a ball of intense magic. Nightmare Moon did the same.

The two balls of magic travelled through the beams until they crashed into each other causing a giant explosion. Celestia shielded herself from the shockwave. She heaved as the shockwave passed. When the dust settled, she saw her enemy standing tall.

"See Celestia? My power has grown to surpass that of your own! You can't possibly win!"

"Maybe, you may have superior power, but I will show you what true strength is!"

She picked up a boulder out of the moon with her magic and threw it at Nightmare Moon. She charged after the rock.

Nightmare Moon reacted by bringing a pillar of rock from the ground. The boulder collided and shattered both the rocks, turning them to dust. Nightmare Moon looked up from her spell and saw a crazed white form charging towards her, before she could react from her previous defense, the mare reached her and brought a powerful strike to her chest.

She went flying from the impact and fell to the ground and laid there.

Celestia walked up to the fallen form, her body not moving. She heaved a sigh, she wish it didn't have to be like this. Before she could finish her off, Nightmare Moon's horn glowed suddenly. Celestia barely had time to get out of the way as a boulder flew up from underneath her, followed by another.

More boulders came up from the ground and Celestia flew between each one. Nightmare Moon got up and continued her attack, focusing on throwing large chunks of the moon at Celestia. Celestia dodged each one.

The battle raged throughout the dark side of the moon.

Down on the surface of Equestria, a group of ponies were throwing a party in honor of a newcomer to the town of Ponyville, unaware of the battle between the two goddesses.

They continued to fight with all of their strength. Destroying entire chunks of the moon in their rage. The surface of the dark side of the moon was now impossible to navigate, craters covered the entire surface, some hundreds of feet deep.

The two fighters finally stopped and looked at each other. They were both becoming weary, but neither side gave up. Celestia knew this had to end now, before it was too late to do anything more.

She started to gather every bit of magic she had left, she had one last spell to cast to end this conflict. Nightmare Moon started to gather her own magic, she wasn't about to let 1000 years of prison go to waste.

Celestia reached into the deepest part of her being and found the magic for the spell she used to imprison Nightmare Moon so long ago. She sighed at having to use this spell again, but it had to be done.

Before Nightmare Moon finished gathering her magic, Celestia shot out four white magical chains and grabbed Nightmare Moon. Nightmare Moon struggled under her constraints but no matter how hard she tried she could not break them.

Once she had Nightmare Moon in her grasp she concentrated once again,

this spell would require every ounce of magic she had in her entire being. She had on occasion wondered what happens when a unicorn puts their entire being into a spell.

She was about to find out.

She reached out to the stars, each in one of four directions. She pulled as hard as she could, and she broke off a piece of the stars out of their orbit and brought them towards her. Towards Nightmare Moon.

She knew this spell might kill her, but as long as she could defeat Nightmare Moon she didn't care.

Four glimmers from the four points on the horizons glimmered brighter and flashed as a piece of them was broken off. They grew brighter and brighter as they hurled towards the moon, all aimed at Nightmare Moon.

Nightmare Moon fought back with every spell she could think of, but nothing could pierce the shield Celestia put up around herself. She was still trapped in her chains, unable to move.

The stars came closer, they glowed even brighter throughout the night sky. Celestia struggled to keep the star fragments headed towards Nightmare Moon. She started to feel her spell breaking. Nightmare Moon was resisting the chains, she felt them loosen slightly.

As she struggled to keep her spell intact, she felt a presence looking at her.

Using a small bit of magic, she tried to sense who it was. She felt someone looking up at the moon, whoever it was would obviously be able to notice the four glimmering lights converging on the moon. She pushed to find out who it was. It cost her some of her magic, but she was confident finding whoever this pony was was important.

Then she recognized them.

It was her own personal student, Twilight Sparkles. She was lying at her new home with her head on her pillow, she was turned to the window, looking up at the moon.

At that moment Celestia felt a Spark deep inside her. She found new reason to fight, to beat Nightmare Moon. She had to fight for everyone who was living on the face of the planet. She had to fight for her friends, for those she loved more than life itself, for those she couldn't live without.

For Twilight Sparkle, her best friend.

With renewed strength, she increased her hold on Nightmare Moon. Her eyes flared white. The star fragments were almost at the moon's upper atmosphere. Nightmare Moon thrashed against her bonds desperately, unable to escape the fate plunging down to meet her.

In one last effort, Nightmare Moon reached deep into herself and found her hidden power. Without hesitating, she unleashed it.

Five beams of light shot out of Nightmare Moon's horn, they converged on Celestia, trying to break free. Her eyes flared pure black. The fragments caused a loud boom as they reached the atmosphere. With one last final effort, Celestia kept her hold on Nightmare Moon.

The five lights hit Celestia again and again, trying to break her. She resisted for as long as she could before she began to succumb to their blows. The fragments were so close she could feel their heat.

Nightmare Moon gave one final push, and to Celestia's horror the bonds broke. The fragments were now seconds away from hitting the surface of the dark side of the moon. The ground started to violently shake. Celestia screamed in exasperation.

"YOU SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU TRY TO STOP ME?! YOU HAVE FAILED CELESTIA, MY 'DEAR SISTER,' AND NOW YOU WILL DIE WHILE I LIVE ON TO RULE EQUESTRIA!" Nightmare Moon roared over the flaming star fragments searing the surface of the moon.

"SHE IS NOT YOUR SISTER!" A voice yelled from inside Nightmare Moon.

A beam of dark blue shot out of her chest and encased Celestia, and after a quick flash she was gone as the fragments collided where she was previously flying.

"YOU FOAL!" Nightmare Moon shouted. The fragments crashed together only 20 feet from her. The only thing she could see was the huge chunks of flaring molten rock heading towards her.

At the last possible second Nightmare Moon cast a teleportation spell, she felt the stars sear the tip of her horn as she teleported off of the damned moon.

The fragments hit the dark side of the moon with an impossibly huge explosion. The shockwave from the impact caused every piece of moon dust to fly into the air, only to be disintegrated by the explosion.

From the far reaches of space a glimmer of light could be seen flashing brightly, then slowly fading.

The crater grew and grew until the explosion subsided. The surface where the stars hit had unearthed magma from the moons core. The rest of the surface had turned to solid glass.

Down below on the surface of the planet, the town of Ponyville had gathered to see Princess Celestia raise the sun during the Summer Sun Celebration.

Their wishes would not be granted.

Nightmare Moon grinned to herself as she speed across the surface of the Everfree Forest.

She had a speech to make.

And the world would listen.

Chapter 2-2

Sunset

Date: 0001
New Lunar Calendar
-1 hour after the Return-
Celestia

Celestia braced herself at the bolt of magic that was fired at her from Nightmare Moons chest. Before she could react she was enveloped by it and her mind went blank. The next time she woke up she was on the floor of the Everfree Forest. She shook herself off and stood up wearily.

The battle with Nightmare Moon had drained her of all her magic, she could barely stand. But somehow she had just enough magic to heal her wounds. She wondered where this new magic had come from, but before she could finish her thought she knew the answer.

It was Luna's magic.

Her dear sister Luna had broken free of Nightmare Moon's clutches over her body for just long enough to give her all of her magic. She had teleported Celestia off of the moon before the star fragments hit her. Luna had saved her life.

She thought back on the sacrifice her sister had made for her. Without any of her magic, there was no way Luna could break free of Nightmare Moon's powers on her own. She was trapped within Nightmare Moon forever.

NO! Not forever! Celestia had to find a way to break her free from Nightmare Moon's terrible grasp. But there was no way Celestia could beat her on her own.

Fortunately she had selected six ponies to wield the Elements of Harmony. Five to wield the Elements, and one to activate the Spark. She was hesitant to send her personal student as the one who would activate the Spark, but in her time in Ponyville she had learned much about the magic of

friendship, and she was confident that Twilight had learned it enough to use the Spark.

As much as she wanted to believe they had beaten Nightmare Moon, she couldn't help but feel an evil presence looming all around her. She trusted the ponies she chose, but she couldn't rely on her instincts alone.

She had to go to the castle and see if they succeeded for herself.

She started through the Forest, walking over the tangled growth until she reached an old bridge, falling apart from 1000 years of disuse. She flew over the bridge obstructing her passage. A castle loomed above the trees, a castle that predated Ponyville and much of recent history. A castle that predated the Banishment.

She used her magic to check for life signs within the castle before entering, she found nopony inside. She knew that either the ponies had succeeded without her or they had-

Her thoughts froze as she entered the front doors. There was devastation throughout the hallway, columns were knocked over or broken to pieces. There was a column of rock coming out of the ground slightly in front of the statue that held the Elements.

Or that used to hold the Elements. The statue was almost completely decimated, half of it was blown out by some sort of magic blast. She could still feel magic seeping through the walls. In the middle of the room were five piles of fine dust.

They were the Elements. Celestia instantly knew what had happened here.

Hoofsteps sounded behind her, she didn't turn around to face them. She could only stand in shock as the full realization about her situation hit her. The icy voice behind her spoke.

"So now you FINALLY see what happens when you mess with powers far beyond your control." Nightmare Moon walked past Celestia, Celestia felt Nightmare Moon's magic pressing against her as she walked by.

"You may have been strong enough to Banish me in the moon 1000 years

ago, but I have become stronger than you could ever hope to be. Something I think you know realize for yourself. You were a fool to challenge me on the moon, you only proved one thing I knew all along..."

She walked up to Celestia and whispered in her ear, "You are weaker than me...Even with every bit of magic you have, you still cannot defeat me."

Celestia took in all her words, and her eyes moistened at the thoughts of what now befell Equestria. She had failed, if only she could have beaten Nightmare Moon in their battle the world wouldn't have to suffer through this new nightmare.

It was all her fault...

"But...as much as I enjoyed proving my powers to you, you have been a thorn in my side for longer than you know. You have no idea how much I hate you right now, even with my glorious victory, it cannot overshadow how much I have come to hate you over the past one thousand years..."

"Equestria will be ruined forever, but YOU! YOU will face worse than the rest of the world ever will! Just as I was forced to wander the barren moon as I could only watch the world go by, YOU will watch the world go by in eternal night! YOU will never get to see your precious subjects enjoy the light of day, only the darkness they so foolishly ignored!"

Celestia looked up at Nightmare Moon. She was crying, she was not crying for her own fate, but the fate that the ponies she so lovingly raised faced. They would never get to gaze upon her lovely sun anymore, they wouldn't get to have crops grow, or have light brighten their day.

"I am going to make sure you see every last bit of this new place, every last night star, every last pony who wishes for the sun to rise again! I have the Elements, and their power will make my night reign for as long as time itself."

Celestia looked at Nightmare Moon and felt five powers swirling inside of the black alicorn, she felt the Elements intertwined with Nightmare Moon, but they were different. She couldn't put her hoof on it, but they were different than when she used them 1000 years ago.

"Well? Don't you have anything to say?" Nightmare Moon taunted, slightly agitated about Celestia's lack of response. "Anything at all?"

Celestia only turned her head to the black figure, "I....I...." Her voice trailed off.

Nightmare Moon hung her head, "Well, if you really have no intention of speaking I might as well get on with it."

She leaned in closer to Celestia and said in a half whisper, "If you hold still, this will go by quicker..."

She backed away a few steps and gathered some of her magic. Her horn began to glow and small rocks started to float above the ground in response to the magic Nightmare Moon gave off. Celestia only hung her head.

There was nothing she could do anymore, she couldn't stand up to Nightmare Moon now that she had the Elements.

"I think I'm going to miss having someone to fight against, Celestia, but how could I be lonely with all these new subjects?" She chuckled, "I'm going to have the time of my life! And you are going to watch!"

She shot a spell at Celestia, she reacted by cringing her body. She felt herself being drained of life. Her horn stopped giving off that soft glow it always had, her flowing mane slowly drained of color. She felt her magic leaving her, being drawn into Nightmare Moon. She did not try to fight back.

She had already tried, and failed.

She lost consciousness at the end of the spell; it had been so quick, like Nightmare Moon was excited to have Celestia out of the way. She did not know where she would wake up, but it didn't matter, Nightmare Moon had left her teleportation spell intact so she could wander her old kingdom.

It wasn't her kingdom anymore, it was Nightmare Moon's.

-3 hours after the Return-

Zecora

Zecora finally made her way through the floating forest to the source of the screaming. It had taken her an hour to get through the tangled brush to the gap that stood in front of the castle entrance.

The quake had dislodged the bridge yet again, but Zecora was prepared for it. She had recently finished working on a brew using ingredients from her homeland that allowed whoever drank it to be able to run faster than any creature in the Everfree Forest could. She only had a few of them left, but she felt that she had to help this creature that had yelled out a few hours ago.

She reached in her bag and pulled out the concoction. With a sigh she drank a sip, enough to only give her about 20 seconds of the effect, enough to make the jump across the cavern. She backed up as far as she dared, said a silent blessing to herself, and ran. She didn't know if she could make the jump, she wasn't as young as she used to be.

She ran as fast as her newly improved legs could carry her. The edge got closer and closer. She jumped with her hind legs near the end of the short cliff.

She flew through the air, bits of dirt following her through her jump. She kept her focus on the landing on the other side. She could feel her momentum begin to break, she thought she would fall into the foggy abyss below her. The hole she jumped over might even go all the way through the bottom of the island.

Her eyes widened as her momentum broke, even with her powerful jump she didn't have enough momentum to get to the other side. Oh what a fool she was, thinking she could make this wide jump. She closed her eyes.

Just as she was about to miss the ledge, her front hooves found ground beneath them, and her instinct caused her to latch onto the edge of the platform. She opened her eyes, she was dangling from the edge of the gap on the other side. She pulled herself up.

She caught her breath after pulling herself to safety. Strange, she wondered, she didn't have enough distance in her jump to make it, yet

somehow she grabbed on to the other side. It was almost as if the ground reached out and pulled her to the other side.

She shook the thought from her head. That was crazy, there is no way the ground actually moved out to her. But considering she was on a floating island above the clouds, that wouldn't be the strangest thing she saw today. She ignored her curiosity and ran into the old castle.

The imposing doors to the castle were blown open, parts were singed by some kind of explosion. She stopped looking at the old doors and looked into the main entrance proper.

It was empty. Some of the pillars were knocked over or smashed to pieces. A statue at the back of the long room was half disintegrated. She slowly trotted into the hall, looking for anyone who might still be here.

"Hello? There is no need to fear. I've come to help whoever may be here!" Zecora called out to the empty room. There was no one here. At least there wasn't anyone here anymore. She continued searching the room for any signs of life.

"Well what do we have here? Someone snooping around my castle?" Nightmare Moon materialized in front of the destroyed statue. "I do oh so wonder what business you have here on my island."

"I have come to help someone in need, and I've come with quickest speed! But there doesn't seem to be anyone here, I suspect they left when I drew near." Zecora responded. Her eyes searched Nightmare Moon's, and she did not like what she found.

"My my, you have a wonderful way with words. I like your style, maybe you and I could have a little chat, if only to get to know each other." Nightmare Moon sneered through her words. "You see, I happen to find myself in a very large seat of power, and I might have some difficulty keeping in contact with my new subjects."

"I am not interested in whatever you are offering; I only want to help whoever is suffering!" Zecora lowered her form to emphasize her point, "Where are the ones who were before? I heard them all the way through my hut's door!"

Nightmare Moon let out a chuckle, "You mean those six ponies who tried to steal the Elements of Harmony before? I assure you they are perfectly fine now. They certainly don't need your help."

Zecora waited a moment as she recognized who she was talking to.

"You! You are the one spoken of in the legend! The one Celestia banished when the day was threatened!" Zecora backed away slightly. She subtly shifted her bag so she could reach her speed-enhancing potion quickly, she knew what Nightmare Moon had done, and she wanted to get away as fast as possible.

"Oh? So I see Twilight Sparkle wasn't the only one who knew of my return. So did your people believe the legends and signs? Or did you just foolishly toss them aside as mere stories like all those ponies did?"

"I see no need to tell you anything at all, seeing as though you are all the way down that hall!" With that she reached in her bag and quickly drank the potion she had readied. She ran as fast as a Pegasus out of the room, Nightmare Moon reacted and gave chase.

Zecora ran out of the crumbling castle and jumped over the gap on her way back to the hut, as far as she knew, no one knew where she lived. Nightmare Moon turned into a cloud of black dust and slithered out the door. Trees blurred by as she ran through the Forest she had called home, she could barely see she was running so fast.

Zecora saw a blur of black magic out of the corner of her eye, she quickly changed her direction. The magic again moved in front of her, she changed direction again only to be met with the same cloud of blackness.

Nightmare Moon materialized and fired a quick blast at Zecora, capturing her in an orb of magic. Zecora flailed her limbs in vain.

"Well I must say I'm impressed." Nightmare Moon leaned towards her prisoner, "A way with words and knowledge of alchemy? You might be more useful than I thought."

Zecora opened her mouth to protest but Nightmare Moon sent a cloud of

dark magic over Zecora's face. She squirmed trying to stop the cloud from getting into her body, it seeped through her skin as she felt herself slipping from consciousness.

Nightmare Moon kept pouring her magic into Zecora until the zebra stopped moving. She released her grip on Zecora and lowered her to the ground.

"You have proven yourself quite a bit of trouble, but I forgive you of your grievances towards me. Now arise my good and faithful servant." Nightmare Moon looked down at the striped figure in the ground.

The last spirals of the magic dust lifted off of Zecora, and she rose herself off of the ground. She got up and straightened her back, she was now wearing a brown cloak, similar to the one she wore going into Ponyville.

Her eyes were pure yellow.

"My master, please forgive me, I will forever give my allegiance to thee..." Zecora pulled back her cloak hood and bowed before Nightmare Moon.

Nightmare Moon chuckled. "Do not worry, you will prove yourself useful to me in due time. You will have the honor of being my new messenger, I will from time to time need to deliver messages to my new subjects, and you shall do perfectly."

Zecora rose to meet her master's gaze.

"I have given you magic powers beyond anything you could have hoped to achieve with your potions. They will soon learn to fear your very arrival."

Nightmare Moon mused to herself, "Hmm, Zecora the Harbinger of Night, I think I like your new title! You will serve me well, but do not forget one thing. You belong to me, and you will serve only me!"

"Yes my liege." Zecora pressed her nose to the dirt.

Nightmare Moon smiled and turned around to head back to her castle, "The citizens of Trottingham have been refusing to accept my return as fact, perhaps you could deliver them a message to convince them of my rule."

Zecora bowed again and turned into a cloud of magic, the dark cloud swirled to a single point on the ground and vanished.

"A new kingdom full of subjects, a new castle, a new loyal servant and Celestia is forced to watch it all. This has by far been the best night ever!"

Nightmare Moon walked to her throne, a wide smile on her face.

=====

-9 hours after the Return-

Twilight Sparkles

Only two other ponies remained with Twilight in the Ponyville library to discuss their future plans. So far, they had come up with nothing that could help them out of their predicament. More than once Rainbow Dash had suggested that they simply go find the Everfree Forest and take the Elements back. She was always making overly confident suggestions, but she failed to grasp that these ideas would be suicide.

"Rainbow Dash! How many times do we have to tell you, we can't simply take the Elements back!" Rarity had been the one that had to constantly bring Rainbow Dash back into reality. "We don't even know where the Everfree Forest is anymore!"

It was incredibly hard to process, that something you lived next to for years was somewhere else and you didn't even know where it had gone. Canterlot disappearing had been especially hard for Twilight; she thought back all those years she had spent there.

She remembered playing in the Canterlot Nursery.

Her parents tucking her into bed each night.

The first time she performed magic.

She wasn't even listening to Rainbow Dash and Rarity anymore, it had just been Rarity trying to keep Rainbow Dash from running off for the past three

hours. She was glad Spike was at the town hall trying to connect with the Dragon Mail network, she didn't want him to hear this.

"I'm just saying, what if the other places are out there? What if they are still there, just really far apart? I mean, why don't we just get our bags together and go! Why don't we at least try and find out what's out there?" Rainbow Dash was getting more and more frustrated.

Twilight had had enough of this. "WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO? FLY THERE?"

Rainbow Dash looked over at Twilight in shock, she hadn't spoken in half an hour, but evidently she was listening.

"Listen Rainbow Dash! I have had it with your stupid ideas! We don't know what's out there, maybe Canterlot is still out there maybe it isn't! But all we can see is plains for who knows how far! If you want to run out into the unknown and get yourself lost, then fine! But leave us out of it!"

"All of this is getting us nowhere! Face it you two! Nightmare Moon won! You got that? W-O-N!" She emphasized each letter with a stomp of her hoof, "There's nothing we can do about it anymore! She beat us even without the Elements, and now that she has them, she can do whatever she wants! We are wasting our time trying to think that we can reverse everything, so why don't we just STOP TALKING!"

Twilight's face was pure red, she didn't know why she was so angry, she was normally able to handle herself during stress, but not like this. She knew they meant well, but there was no way they could do anything, they were just wasting their time!

The only pony that could do anything was gone, she was gone and Twilight didn't even know where to look for her.

She didn't know where to look for her best friend.

It was a few moments before anypony spoke.

"So that's it then?" Rarity looked at Twilight desperately, "We just lay down and deal with it? That's it? There's absolutely NOTHING we can do?"

"Yes Rarity, that's it. Nightmare Moon won, she beat us. And now we have to live through her eternal night, that's it..." Twilight felt sadness creep into her anger, "And I refuse to have this matter spoken of in my house!"

Twilight opened the door with her magic.

"If you wish to continue with your pointless talk, you may leave my house immediately!"

The two ponies fumed under their breath.

"Fine! If you are just gonna quit, then I don't wanna be here anymore!" Rainbow Dash stormed out the front door.

Twilight had her back to Rarity. "And you?"

"I...I.....You know what Twilight? I thought that after all we did for you, we had all made a new friend." Rarity walked out the door, "But I see we were mistaken!"

She slammed the door behind herself, she couldn't believe Twilight was acting this way.

Twilight was now by herself, facing her writing stand. She was so angry with her friends, but she didn't know why. They had all shown her so much love, and she turned around and spat in their faces. She was sent here to learn more about the magic of friendship and she thought she had learned a lot.

She picked up a new scroll and her writing quill.

Dear Princess Celestia,
This is my first friendship report upon arriving in Ponyville, and I believe I have learned much during my short time here. But above all, the most important thing I learned was tha-

Her quill froze. What was she doing? This wasn't the time for a report, especially not her first one. She must be losing it from all this stress. Besides...

Celestia would never get this letter anyway...

Celestia

Celestia had been walking for what seemed like hours now, she had found herself without magic in the middle of an enormous field. With no knowledge of where she was and no bearing, she started to trot in the only direction that made sense, forward.

The only thing she knew about her surroundings was that it looked like the plains that made up the area between towns. Maybe she would end up going where she wanted to go, the rest of the throne needed her right now. But she didn't want to go to Canterlot, she wanted to go to Ponyville.

She just knew Twilight was hurting right now, and she needed her comfort.

Perhaps Nightmare Moon had placed her facing where she needed to go. Celestia just hoped she had instead pointed her where she wanted to go.

She kept walking.

Rarity

Rarity left the Library in a fit. She didn't want to believe a word Twilight had said about there being nothing they could do. But she had to admit, she had a point, there was no possible way they could get back the Elements. Still, she thought that even with the rough exterior Twilight had put up, she was probably looking through her books for a way to take back the Elements anyway.

She didn't want to think it at all, but she had no idea what to do, if she should do anything at all.

"Rainbow dear, perhaps Twilight is right, there isn't a thing we can do right now." Rarity said in her best reasoning voice, "I think we should just deal with the situation for now and see if the right time arrives to take action."

"What? You mean we're just going to sit here and do nothing? Go about our lives pretending nothing is wrong? No way! You go ahead Rarity, you

and the rest of town go ahead and quit! Not me! When I get my wings back I'm going to go find Celestia, just you wait and see!"

"Rainbow Dash, you know you can't just fl-"

"Look Rarity! I've been through enough scrapes to learn one thing." She leaned towards the white pony.

"It's not over when you lose, it's over when you quit...When I can fly again...I'm going to show everyone that sitting here is going to achieve nothing. Sitting here just to survive is stupid, I don't want to survive, I want to live!"

Rarity was taken aback by Rainbow Dash's sudden seriousness.

"Well Rainbow Dash, if that's the way you feel, then I suppose there is nothing I can do to stop you...Just don't do anything too stupid in the meantime."

Rainbow Dash nodded her head and looked up in the direction of her cloud home. She remembered that without her wings there was no way to get home for the next few weeks.

"Uh...hey Rarity? Do you think that...uh...I...could...you know..." Rainbow Dash mumbled.

"Of course you can stay with me at my place for a while. You may stay as long as you please."

"Thanks Rarity..."

Rarity smiled to herself as they trotted back to the Carousel Boutique. They walked in silence, each feeling uneasy about the exchanges that had taken place throughout the day. Rarity seemed to be the only pony to keep her head during this whole ordeal, normally she was the first to panic in a sticky situation, after Fluttershy of course.

"Hey Rainbow Dash, do you think we should give Fluttershy a visit tomorrow? She has been by herself this whole time and I think she could use the company."

"Yeah...I think that would be...nice..." Rainbow Dash felt her heart warm a little, things might be bad, but she still had ponies she loved deeply. Even if she didn't always show it, she cared for all of her friends.

The sky was starting to dim, they had been able to see just fine earlier, but now they had to struggle to see their own hoofsteps. Rarity guessed that the sky went through light and dark cycles similar to night and day.

A little bell rang as the door to the Carousel Boutique opened and two weary ponies entered.

Chapter 3

Cloak and Dagger

Date: 0001
New Lunar Calendar

-1 day after the Return-

Applejack

“But she’s my big sister! I have to see her!” Applejack heard a faint mumble, it sounded like a voice, everything was swirling around, she couldn’t make head or tails of anything. “Come on Applebloom, leave her alone!”

Applejack struggled to gain consciousness, she couldn’t remember anything, she didn’t know where she was or who was talking, but she heard ponies yelling somewhere through the fog of her mind.

“She’s my big sister! She needs my help! I’m big enough to see her!” “I’m sorry, but we aren’t allowed let anyone in the infirmary yet, she’s still in critical care and she needs more time to rest before she can see anyone!” Words formed inside Applejack’s head, she could hear three ponies arguing outside of the white room she was in.

She shook the fogginess out of her head and looked around at where she was, she found herself in a hospital bed surrounded with various machines and devices scattering the clean room. Her body felt like it had been drained of any energy she had, she could barely move her head.

Her thoughts gradually aligned themselves as her eyes adjusted to the bright lights. She put the pieces together as to why she was here in this bed instead of working at her farm like she was supposed to. Had she sprained her hind legs bucking apples again?

That couldn’t be it, her legs felt fine. Actually, she did feel a slight tingle in her thighs, maybe she did hurt herself again.

“Cut it out Applebloom, the nurse says we have to go!” She heard her big brother sternly yelling at somepony else, “But Big Mac, why can’t we stay? I wanna stay here with mah big sis!”

“If you want to visit her, you may come back tomorrow and we will see how she is feeling, but for now we are very busy, so I must politely ask you two to leave.”

“Thank you kindly ma’am, let’s go lil’ sis.” Applejack heard screaming and the sound of somepony being dragged off by their tail.

“This ain’t fair! I wanna see mah sister! I wanna see Applejack!” Applebloom’s whining faded from earshot as she was dragged out of the door. Nurse Mercy sighed in exhaustion, the small hospital hadn’t had this much activity since, well, ever.

Hoofsteps slowly got louder and the door to Applejack’s room opened, she heard tools and medical equipment being moved around. Nurse Mercy clopped over to the curtain around Applejack’s bed.

Applejack winced her eyes at the sudden influx of light from the curtain being pulled back, she saw a silhouette outlined against the white backdrop.

“Oh! You’re awake! I wasn’t expecting you to be up until later today.” Nurse Mercy leaned towards the dazed earth pony, “I hope that ruckus in the lobby didn’t wake you.”

Applejack only slowly moved her head in response.

“Now I imagine you must be very disoriented, it’s natural when you have been unconscious for 17 hours. But don’t panic, you’re perfectly safe, we moved you into critical care right when you were brought in. Do you remember what happened before you got here? Just move your head up and down if you do...”

Applejack turned her attention to trying to remember the past events that put her in this bed. She could only remember bits and pieces of what had happened. She was running through the Everfree Forest...and...she...met

a purple dragon...and there was an old castle, but she couldn't remember anything else.

Her head slumped to one side.

"Oh dear, Applejack sweetie why don't you just get some rest and we will sort everything out later, ok?" Nurse Mercy comforted her as best she could.

Applejack mumbled something but she couldn't understand what she was saying. Her eyelids grew heavy as she faded back into the blackness of sleep.

Rainbow Dash

"Come on you stupid wings!" Rainbow Dash grunted, "Open! Come oooon!"

Rainbow Dash struggled to open her wings more than a few inches. The nurse had said she could take the bandages off the next morning, but there wasn't much point if she could barely open them. She sighed in exhaustion.

"Rarity, are you almost done in there? You've been in the washroom for half an hour. I need to use it too you know!" Staying with Rarity might take a while to get used to, and certainly didn't want to stay with Twilight right now, but this was the only other place she could stay after she was banned from the Inn.

Maybe practicing her triple-barrel-roll-loop trick inside the hotel room was a bad idea...

"Almost done Rainbow dear, it takes a long time to stay this fabulous every morning you know." Rarity said matter-of-factly.

Rainbow Dash huffed, she just wanted to get ready and go to Fluttershy's cottage, she always enjoyed hanging out with the timid filly. She knew that Fluttershy always supported her, even if she wasn't very vocal about it.

The washroom door burst open in a shower of mist and scents, Rarity dramatically posed in the doorway, she was absolutely glowing with health

and beauty. Rainbow Dash was impressed with how much some time and effort transformed a pony into something more beautiful.

“Wow Rarity...you look awesome!” Rainbow Dash earnestly praised.

Rarity gave an exhausted sigh, “Why thank you Rainbow Dash, even if we must saunter through this garish nighttime that doesn’t mean I can’t be the most gorgeous pony in Ponyville!”

“OK cool, can we go to Fluttershy’s place now?” Rainbow Dash said in a pleading tone.

“Yes yes, I’m ready to go when you are.”

“Awesome!” Rainbow Dash jumped into the air spread her wings...about three inches and crashed back onto the ground. She got up with an embarrassed look on her face.

“Oh yeah, um, how about we just walk there?”

Rarity rolled her eyes and the two trotted out the front door of the boutique.

Twilight Sparkles

Twilight rolled her eyes around her head in a daze, she had stayed up far too late last night trying to read more about the Elements of Harmony in her other books, but so far she had found nothing new.

She had thought of nothing but the Spark since she had kicked her friends from her house, she knew there was something important about it, like it could still be reached even without the Elements. She shook the thought from her head, there was no reason why that would work, Nightmare Moon had the Elements anyway.

Sleep had calmed her down since last night, her anger started to give way to guilt, she kicked herself for forcing her friends to leave, they were just trying to help after all.

She groaned and looked out the window of her hollowed tree. The sky was still that same shade of swirling purple-grey, but where last night she could barely see a thing, she could now see everything almost as light as day.

She theorized that Nightmare Moon set up light and dark cycles, possibly to taunt them with the prospect of waking up to the precious sun each night only to have their hopes yanked out from under them.

Everything was so different now, it was as if grey had seeped into everything around her, drowning everything in a slog of filth.

She needed Celestia to be there to comfort her. For the first time in her life, she felt truly lost, she had no idea what to do.

Her coat was stained with two dark wet lines running down her neck...

Rarity

A white-coated unicorn trotted through the center of Ponyville, taking in all the destruction Nightmare Moon had caused. The streets were mostly empty, she didn't really expect anyone to be outside anyway.

Rainbow Dash trotted behind her a few paces, their pace moving through the town square started to slow down, they took in the state of the town wearily.

As much as Rarity didn't want to, their paths eventually lead them to the town's hospital, still buzzing with activity.

She turned her gaze away from the building and the tents next to it. She heard the side door of the hospital open and the sound of squeaking wheels rolling over the grey grass. She heard the stretcher slowly wheel down the line of tents until she heard the sound of fabric parting.

Another patient had checked out the Ponyville Hospital.

Rainbow Dash felt her gut knot up, she averted her attention from the improvised morgue to the grey sky that had been bearing down on them since the Return. This wasn't the first time she looked at the sky, but this time she concentrated on it more than she normally did.

“Hey Rarity, don’t you think that the sky kind of looks like one big cloud?”

Rarity almost stopped in her tracks at the oddness of the question. “Uh, why yes, I suppose it does, but I think you would know that more than I would.”

“Ya know what? I think it is just one big cloud.” Rainbow Dash got that look in her eye she got when she was about to do something somepony would regret. “So that means that we might be able to smash right through it! Just kick it out of the sky!”

“Rainbow Dash that’s ridiculous. If it was even possible to control a cloud that size I imagine Nightmare Moon used some kind of magic to keep it there. I’m sorry Rainbow, but I’m afraid that’s not really an option.”

“Humph!” Rainbow Dash hung her head and furrowed her brows. “Well you know what? I’ll do it anyway! Something being impossible hasn’t stopped me before! I’m the greatest flyer in all of Equestria!”

Rainbow Dash struck a pose while Rarity rolled her eyes.

“Yeah! That’s what I’ll do! After we help Fluttershy and I can fly again, I’m gonna break right through that cloud and show Nightmare Moon who she’s dealing with!” Rainbow Dash got a determined look on her face.

Rarity shrugged and continued walking, there was no stopping her when she put her mind to something. Besides, Rarity reasoned, some things just don’t work and you need to figure that out for yourself the hard way.

They kept going down the road leading to the town outskirts, the perpetual glow of the town started to fade slightly as they left the town limits. At least when Everfree Forest disappeared Fluttershy’s cottage didn’t go with it.

“Alright Rainbow Dash, when we see her you have to be on your best behavior, I imagine she is extremely shook up from all of this, and if you start getting rough you might scare her further.”

“Oh come on, I know that! Why are you always acting like I’m just gonna barge in and mess everything up without thinking?”

“Force of habit...” Rarity mumbled.

They crossed the little bridge that went over the small river running in front of her abode. There were no animals in sight; usually Fluttershy had all kinds of creatures running around her front yard.

Rarity knocked on the door with her hoof. She and Rainbow Dash waited a minute before knocking again. No response. Rarity turned to Rainbow Dash with a look of curiosity. Rainbow Dash shrugged.

“Fluttershy? Are you in there? We’ve been awfully worried about you, please let us in if you are home!” Rarity gave her best comforting voice.

No response.

“Well it’s not like Fluttershy ever locks her doors anyway.” Rainbow Dash grunted and walked up to the door to push it open.

Rarity said nothing, she knew how much privacy meant to some ponies, but if Fluttershy was really in trouble then they needed to help her. Rainbow Dash nudged the door open with her front hoof and the pair walked inside.

The room was in perfect order, not a thing was out of place. While this was usual for Fluttershy, it seemed like it was extra orderly today, like she was expecting guests. The main room was empty.

“Hey Fluttershy! You home?” Rainbow Dash belted out. Rarity gave Rainbow Dash a nudge and shot her a cold look. “Sorry.” She apologized to the stern looking unicorn.

Suddenly a timid voice came from another room, “Girls? Oh it’s so nice to see you!”

“Fluttershy?” They both took off towards the voice coming from the dining room.

They turned the corner and saw Fluttershy sitting at her table, a contented smile on her face. The table was set for herself and someone else, a spot on the other side of the table had been prepared for a guest.

Fluttershy had a look of deep content, she did not look scared in the slightest. Her eyes were exceptionally calm, like she didn't have a care in the world. She almost gazed right through the two ponies.

Rarity was relieved to see her, "Oh thank Celestia you're alright, you had us so worried!"

"Why would you be worried about me?" Fluttershy responded nonchalantly.

"Well, when we woke up after our scuffle with Nightmare Moon you had ran straight to your cottage in tears, and you hadn't come out since!"

"Oh Rarity, you don't have to worry about me, I'm just fine."

Rainbow Dash was more hesitant to believe her, "Are you sure? I mean, you were pretty shaken up."

"Oh yes, I was pretty scared, but I'm fine now." Fluttershy gave a small grin and turned to pour herself some more tea.

"Hey Rarity," Rainbow Dash whispered in Rarity's ear, "Don't you think something's up with Fluttershy?"

"Why whatever do you mean? She looks perfectly fine."

"Yeah, but she looks kind of...off. In all the years I've known her since Junior Flight Camp she's never been able to get over something this quickly, especially not something like this."

"Perhaps she found some inner courage, she has proven to be quite brave at some points in the past."

"Yeah but...I don't know Rarity...And why do you think she has the table set up like that? Do you think she knew we would visit or something?"

"I suppose it couldn't hurt to ask..."

Rarity turned her attention back to Fluttershy, “Fluttershy, sweetie, might I ask why you have the table set up for a guest? Were you expecting somepony?”

“Oh...Actually I was waiting for them to come back from somewhere, they should be back soon.” Fluttershy said with a look in her eye.

“What?! You mean someponies already been here? You invited somepony else and not us? Why the hay would you do that?” Rainbow Dash felt herself becoming slightly angry.

“Oh, well, you see girls, she came into my cottage a little after I ran here, at first she just scared me, but then she convinced me to come back downstairs. Oh her voice was so wonderful! She said there was nothing to be afraid of and she would help me with my fear.”

“And just who was this pony huh? Obviously they were more important than us!”

Rarity shot Rainbow Dash another cold look.

“Oh no Rainbow Dash, no one could ever replace you girls, she just kept me so calm and peaceful, I didn’t feel the need to leave...Oh! Here she is now!”

Rarity and Rainbow Dash were pushed to side as a cloaked figure walked past them and sat at the table across from Fluttershy. The two ponies stood with their mouths hanging open. The cloaked figure composed herself on the stool, dark purple magic seeped out of her cloak in swirls.

“Girls, I would like you to meet Zecora.”

Zecora turned and smiled at the two shocked ponies, her pupil-less eyes taunting them with a look of victory.

Rarity and Rainbow Dash lowered themselves threateningly. Rainbow Dash yelled at the evil form. “YOU! I know who you are! You’re that creepy Zecora that lives in the Everfree Forest! I knew you were nothing but trouble!”

“Now, now, Rainbow Dash.” Fluttershy poured her terrible guest some tea, “She’s the one who helped me overcome my fear when I was scared. Please treat her like a guest.”

“Fluttershy, sweetie? You do know she is not someone you want to be talking to! She’s just here to cause trouble, and we have enough of that already!”

“Oh Rarity, she’s not bad, she showed me how to overcome my fear of the eternal night time. She’s a nice pony. She said that I didn’t have to be afraid of it, that nothing could hurt me, nothing at all.”

Zecora nodded her head as she listened to Fluttershy’s words, a smile grew across her face.

“Please sit with us, I’m sure there is much we can discuss.” Zecora’s voice cut through the two ponies like a frozen dagger. How could Fluttershy trust her? She was probably here to mess something up.

But Rarity and Rainbow Dash trusted their friend and took a seat at the table.

Fluttershy

Oh this was fantastic! Her friends finally came to see her! Now they could finally meet Zecora and she could tell them how to overcome their fears as well! Fluttershy practically bounced with excitement as she went into the kitchen to get more teacups.

Rarity and Rainbow Dash sat at the round table eyeing Zecora carefully, she kept her eyes closed looking down at her tea, a smile ever present on her face.

“Look Zecora, we’re on to you! We know you’re up to no good!” Rainbow Dash said.

Zecora only chuckled to herself, her body bouncing slightly as she laughed, disturbing the swirls of dark magic coming out of her body.

Fluttershy came back into the room carrying two more teacups, she placed them in front of her friends and sat back down in her seat.

“Isn’t this wonderful? We all get to have a nice quiet get together! Oh, Zecora! You simply have to tell them what you told me! Wait! Actually, I think I would rather tell them...if that’s ok...”

Zecora looked at her, “Go ahead child.”

“Oh, thank you...”

Rarity and Rainbow Dash looked at Fluttershy intensely, not looking forward to what she had to say.

“Ok, well, when I first ran here after, well, you know...I hid under my bed for a long time, I was too afraid to come out. But then Zecora showed up, she started singing in that beautiful language of hers. Oh girls it was so gorgeous I wish you could have heard it! Hey Zecora, do you think you could show them? I mean, if you want to...” Fluttershy spoke a mile a minute, overly excited at what she was saying.

“NO! We don’t want to hear anything you have to sa-uh, I mean, maybe later...” Rarity tried to keep her composure, but she was becoming extremely nervous.

“Oh, well ok then. Anyway, when I heard her, at first I was scared that there was a strange pony in my house, but then I started to listen to what she was singing, and I just felt everything kind of melt away, all my fears and doubts, it was like I was under a trance!”

Fluttershy giggled to herself. “When I went downstairs, I saw Zecora moving all the animals out of my home. I was so frustrated, but I didn’t do anything, she just kept singing. I tried to run away, but I just couldn’t move! Then she walked up to me and said that I didn’t have anything to worry about. And you know what girls?” Fluttershy leaned forward in excitement.

“I believed her! I wasn’t scared at all! Oh it was so wonderful! I felt so free right then! Not having a single fear in the world! I felt like I could take on an Ursa Major! Well, maybe just an Ursa Minor, but it felt great! She started

telling me all these encouraging things. Like that I didn't have to care for the animals because they would be fine on their own!"

"She said that I didn't have to do a thing because everyone else could take care of themselves! I felt SO relieved, sometimes it can be hard to care for all these animals when their sick and try and help other ponies!"

Rarity and Rainbow Dash sat in silence, they couldn't believe the words coming out of Fluttershy's mouth!

"Then she gave me some of her special soup, it's supposed to make you super relaxed, and after all that excitement, it felt so good to get it all off my chest!"

Rainbow Dash lowered her eyebrows, so that's what must be wrong with Fluttershy, she thought, Zecora must have messed with Fluttershy's head!

"So now I can just stay here all I want, I'll be perfectly safe. Zecora even said she will visit me sometimes, it'll be so much fun!"

Rarity tried her hardest to straighten out what she was hearing, Fluttershy was timid for sure, but it seemed like she planned on ignoring everything that was happening! She just wanted to sit in here forever, and only because Zecora told her to?

Fluttershy continued. "I can just stay here now and be happy forever! I don't have to worry about trying to please anyone now, they don't need my help. Oh it's such a relief!"

"I don't believe this!" Rainbow Dash yelled. "You can't just sit in here! There is an entire world out there in trouble, a world that YOU are part of! You can't just ignore the entire world because some creepy pony told you to!"

"Actually Rainbow Dash, she's a zebra, she told me earlier..."

"ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING?! She's a big fat liar! You can't believe anything she says!"

"Hey! Rainbow Dash! Why don't you and Rarity stay here too! We could all be here together forever! And we could bring Pinkie Pie and Twilight and-"

“Fluttershy! You can’t be serious!” Rarity yelled.

“Oh but I am Rarity, it’s so wonderful here, like a perfect little world!”

“YOU!” Rainbow Dash spun towards Zecora, “You told our friend all this nonsense! This is your fault! I’m...I’m...gonna....AAAARGH!”

Rainbow Dash jumped at the striped horror at the table. Zecora only moved her head to look at Rainbow Dash and stopped her in the air with her magic. The blue Pegasus flailed her limbs uselessly. She spread her wings, knocking over the teapot.

“You...can do magic?” Rarity took a step back.

“I can indeed do these things you see, they were gifts from my master to me.” She threw Rainbow Dash across the room, the blue body knocking over a small table.

“WOW!” Fluttershy exclaimed, “Who’s your master? She must be very nice to give you magic! And very powerful too.”

“My master is the night goddess, and she can also bring you eternal happiness!” Zecora turned to Fluttershy.

“Really?!” Fluttershy jumped in the air and flew up to the cloaked figure.

“Yes...”

“Oh that would be so great! Say, um, girls, why don’t you two wait outside? I think me and Zecora would like to have a little privacy...if that’s ok...”

“No that most certainly not ok!” Rarity said, “We demand that you leave with us immediately and leave behind this...this...FOUL creature!”

“What? And leave my chance to not be scared ever again? I’m sorry girls, but I don’t want to go back to being scared again...and...and I don’t want you two keep me from that. Zecora, could you kindly show these two the door?”

Zecora grabbed the two with her magic and moved them towards the front door.

“HEY! Put me down this instant!” Rarity tried to counter the magic to no avail.

“Get off me you stupid thing!” Rainbow Dash flapped her wings, now finding herself in full control over them. “Fluttershy! FLUTTERSHYYYYYYYYYY!”

The two were thrown out the front door of the cottage, and the door slammed shut behind them. A dark purple shield went up around the entire house.

“FLUTTERSHY! Nonononononononono!” Rainbow Dash flew against the barrier as hard as she could, but she only succeeded in wearing herself out.

“Rainbow Dash! Stop it! That won’t do anything! We need to find Twilight, I bet she could get through this!” Rarity yelled.

“Ok fine! I’ll go get Twilight! Rarity, you head for Pinkie Pie’s place, we’ll need everyone we can get! Come on!”

They both took off towards their respective destinations as quickly as Rainbow Dash’s wings and Rarity’s legs could take them.

Laughter could be heard coming out of Fluttershy’s cottage.

Rainbow Dash

This was bad, this was very bad! Zecora was gonna keep Fluttershy trapped in there forever! Even if Twilight could get past the barrier surrounding her house, they still had to convince Fluttershy that hiding away in her house was no way to go about overcoming your fears.

Rainbow Dash checked her wings, somehow she had complete control over them. Maybe the conversation in the dining room had shocked something in her nervous system back into shape.

She didn't know, and she didn't care. All she knew was that she had to get to Twilight's tree house.

Sitting around and watching the world wasn't the answer, you had to do something, even if it doesn't accomplish anything! Sitting and watching the world fall apart is a complete waste of time, she more than anyone knew that.

And then there was Zecora's mention of her master, she just knew that zebra was in cahoots with Nightmare Moon! Maybe she was gonna turn Fluttershy into some kind of zombie pony or something. FOCUS! She shook her head.

A streak of color blurred through the sky.

Twilight was sitting at her reading podium, looking through the same book she had looked through four times already, her eyes were glazed over.

A blue blur smashed through her front door, sending wooden pieces into the room. Twilight jumped at the sudden crash. Rainbow Dash flew over to Twilight and grabbed her hooves.

"Come on Twilight we gotta go right now!"

"WOAH! Rainbow Dash what are you-"

"Listen! Shut up and listen! It's Fluttershy, she's in big trouble! I know you don't want to do anything to help anyone, but this is important!"

"Fluttershy?" Twilight thought to herself, Fluttershy hadn't done anything to Twilight, even if she deserved it. She was so gentle and kind, if anything happened to her she didn't know what she might do.

Rainbow Dash didn't give her a chance to respond, she grabbed Twilight and slung her on her back and took off through the smashed door.

Rarity

Rarity had reached Sugarcube Corner and began pounding on the door. Mr. Cake answered in a panic.

“Woah there Rarity! What’s got your mane a bunch?”

“Where’s Pinkie Pie? I need to see her right away!”

Mr. Cake leaned back in slight fear of the crazed pony, “She’s upstairs in her roo-hey!”

Rarity ran past him and up the stairs of the bakery. She scrambled up the steps to the door leading to where Pinkie Pie lived. She often stayed outside most of the day, so Pinkie Pie only needed a one-room apartment that the Cake’s let her stay in.

She knocked on the door as hard she dared without knocking the door in. She waited for a response, nothing. She didn’t like that, the last time she knocked and didn’t get a response was at Fluttershy’s place.

Her heart beat faster.

She couldn’t wait for Pinkie Pie to open the door, she turned the knob and jumped in the room.

Rarity froze in place. It wasn’t Pinkie Pie that inhabited the dimly light room, it couldn’t be, this pony was far too different from the hyper pink earth pony Rarity had come to know and love, far too empty, far too distant.

Rarity could barely contain her surprise at the dull form that sat in the middle of Pinkie Pie’s room in a catatonic state.

Chapter 4

Blue Icarus

Date: 0001
New Lunar Calendar
-1 day after the Return-

Rainbow Dash

Rainbow Dash flew from Twilight's house, the purple unicorn barely holding on. She hoped that whatever was going to happen to Fluttershy she could at least have an influence in.

"Rainbow Dash! What's going on? What's wrong with Fluttershy?" Twilight could barely speak over the wind rushing past them.

Rainbow Dash explained the entire exchange that happened at Fluttershy's dining room at that round table. Twilight said nothing, she didn't know who Zecora was, but she sounded like someone she didn't want to know.

Rainbow Dash landed in front of Fluttershy's cottage, "Ok Twilight, there's this big magic purple thing we can't past-"

"Uh, Rainbow Dash?"

"-and Fluttershy is inside and-"

"RAINBOW DASH! There's nothing here!"

"Huh?" Rainbow Dash finally took the time to look around and saw that the magic shield was gone.

"Are you sure Fluttershy is in trouble?" Twilight cocked her head at the confused Pegasus.

Was she ok? Had she just imagined the whole thing? No way, something was up. Rainbow Dash flew through the front door calling for Fluttershy.

No response.

She dashed inside and looked through every room in the house. They were all empty.

"Zecora must have taken her somewhere! Come on, we gotta go find her!"

"Rainbow Dash! I really think you shou-" Twilight was cut short by Rainbow Dash forcibly picking her up and rocketing out the door.

Rainbow Dash only thought of the yellow Pegasus as she flew towards the town square, Zecora couldn't have taken Fluttershy too far, and the middle of town seemed like a good place to start looking for her.

She almost dropped Twilight on the ground when they arrived.

"Ok Twilight! You gotta go look for Fluttershy by the south end of town, I'm going to the north end. If you don't find her, come back here in half an hour, got it?"

Rainbow Dash shot into the air in a small shockwave of color. She heard Twilight faintly calling her name but she ignored her, speeding off towards the edge of town.

Even though her thoughts were filled with trying to find Fluttershy, she found herself looking back up at the sky. Up at the grey night cloud covering Equestria. She looked up at it with sudden seriousness.

Soon, she thought, soon she would break through it and show Nightmare Moon and the rest of Ponyville what they were capable of. Yes, very soon...

It had to be, Ponyville's spirits were getting lower every hour.

Pinkie Pie

Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?
Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?
Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?

Why did all this have to be? Why did everypony have to be so sad? Why am I so sad? I can make anypony laugh...What is the point of trying to make everypony happy if I can't even be happy?

I'm always happy...

Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?
Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?
Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?

I just don't understand why any of this is happening.....Why?

A loud knocking came from outside Pinkie Pie's room, she didn't even hear it.

Rarity came bursting into the room a second later, she jumped into the room with a look of desperation on her face. She started to speak but she instantly froze, glued to the spot.

Pinkie Pie didn't turn to greet her new guest, she simply sat in a frozen trance on her floor. Her eyes were not looking at anything at all, she simply sat staring at the far wall, her face one of complete thoughtlessness.

Pinkie Pie's eyes were glazed over, she didn't acknowledge Rarity's entrance, let alone anything else. She only seemed focused on her own thoughts.

Rarity slowly walked over to the vacant pony, trying to think of something to say. She decided that silence would say more than words, that Pinkie Pie only needed someone to be next to her, to silently tell her that she had a friend who cared for her.

Rarity sat down next to Pinkie Pie and placed a hoof around Pinkie Pie's neck. Her eyes felt an urge to relieve themselves of tears, but Rarity kept them at bay for now.

It was all she could do for her empty friend until words would become appropriate.

Twilight Sparkle

Twilight still had some doubt that the blue Pegasus was saying anything that made sense, but she felt that Rainbow Dash was right about Fluttershy being in trouble. After running to her house yesterday, to be missing now didn't add up to anything good.

She started searching through the streets on her way to the north end of town. But suddenly she felt something tugging at her, pulling her towards the east side of Ponyville. She tried her best to ignore it, not wanting to interfere with Rainbow Dash's search plan.

Try as she might, she kept feeling like she was being called to the east side of town. She felt like someone was crying out to her. Before she knew it, she was heading in the direction of the signal.

As she ran, it began to fade out, she picked up her pace as she galloped through the rocky streets.

She called out for her missing friend.

"Fluttershy! Fluttershy where are you?"

No response, only strange looks from some ponies milling about.

"Fluttershy!"

"FLUTTERSHY!"

"Oh! Why hello Twilight." A soft voice cut through Twilight's thoughts.

"Fluttershy?" Twilight turned and looked down a wide street she was crossing. Fluttershy was standing as calm as she was at her cottage, and looking slightly happier. She was standing at the edge of the town.

Twilight's heart leapt, she ran towards her to say how worried for her she was. It wasn't until she had taken a few steps did she realize Fluttershy was not alone, she was joined by a dark striped figure wearing a brown cloak.

Twilight froze in her tracks, she didn't know who this was, but she didn't think she liked them.

"Fluttershy what are you doing? And just who is that?" Twilight's concern was eclipsed by slight nervousness.

"Oh, that's right, you haven't met Zecora yet. She's such a nice pony, well actually she's a zebra, but she's still nice." Fluttershy giggled to herself a little.

Twilight sensed the dark magic coming from the figure. "Well she doesn't look nice to me. And what are you doing out here anyway? It's dangerous outside the town borders! Who knows what could be out there!"

"Oh, but Zecora knows!"

"But the only way she would know was if...was if she worked for Nightmare Moon! Fluttershy you have to ignore everything she tells you! She is lying to you!"

"Twilight you silly, why would she lie to me? She helped me overcome my fears, and now she's going to take me on a trip, we're going to go visit her master so I can overcome my fears for good! It'll be so freeing! I won't have to be scared ever again!"

"WHAT?!" Twilight shouted at the top of her lungs.

Rainbow Dash

Rainbow Dash sped over Ponyville, looking for a distinct yellow pegasus. Suddenly a shout interrupted her concentration.

"WHAT?!"

It was Twilight! She must have found Fluttershy, and by what Rainbow Dash just heard, it was bad. She sped off in the direction of the cry.

The scene she found upon arriving at the edge of town made her blood run cold. There was Fluttershy, with Zecora again at her side, Fluttershy was talking to Twilight with a broad grin across her face.

"What's going on here?" Rainbow Dash landed next to Twilight.

"Hello Rainbow Dash! I was just about to go off to visit Nightmare Moon so she can make me super brave!" Fluttershy seemed happy to tell Rainbow Dash of her actions.

"What? Are you kidding? You can't just leave! You'll get killed out there! What makes you think that what Zecora told you was even true? It's just a pack of lies!"

Zecora took the insult with a knowing smile.

"Oh boy, you two are being so silly! She's a nice, honest zebra who just wants to help."

"No Fluttershy! No she isn't! She is lying to you, Nightmare Moon is the one who caused all this in the first place! How can you just believe her over us? How can you just...just...RUN AWAY! How can you run away from everything? From us?"

Rainbow Dash wanted so much at that moment to just fly at Fluttershy and scream the words into her face, but she held her ground, slightly off-put at what that might cause.

"Come on girls, you're being so mean to Zecora. She has been good to me, and ever since she helped me you girls have been saying all these awful things to her. I...I was hoping my friends would be supportive of my decisions...I thought my friends wanted me to be brave!"

Fluttershy became slightly angry at this, "I thought my friends wanted what was best for me, but obviously you don't want me to be brave! I thought my friends wanted what was best for me...but apparently you aren't my real friends!"

"Fluttershy! Listen to yourself! This is not the pony that had shown me so much love and kindness when I arrived in Ponyville the other day. This is not the pony I became friends with! And we DO want what is best for you! That's why we are trying to keep you away from Zecora, she doesn't want to help you, she doesn't want anything good for you!"

Twilight's eyes moistened as she tried to save her friend.

Zecora's smile never left her unmoving body.

"We're only trying to save our best friend...."

"Well guess what Twilight? Maybe it's best if we just go our separate ways. All of us. You girls don't need me around, and I don't want to be around ponies who try and stop me from doing something I feel is best. So why don't you all just let me go!"

Rainbow Dash broke as her friend rejected the relationships she had worked so hard to make. It had taken Fluttershy a long time to come out of her shell and make friends, and now Zecora was making her throw all those years of work away.

Throw away everything that she had come to love in her life.

"Fluttershy...I don't believe this..." Rainbow Dash was at a loss for words, "All those years we have known each other...I knew that we made you happy, that having friends made your life happier..."

"Don't worry Rainbow Dash, I'll be fine. You all will, as soon as you learn to conquer your fears."

"But this...this isn't how you do it..."

"I'm sorry you two feel that way, but I'm leaving with Zecora to go conquer my fears once and for all, and I'm going with or without your approval."

Zecora raised her gaze to the grieving ponies and gave them another evil smile. That smile, that horrible smile, it said one thing and one thing alone...

I win. I win and you lose.

"Let's go Zecora."

"Of course..." The smile said.

Fluttershy turned to leave, turned to leave behind her life and her friends.

"FLUTTERSHY! Don't do this!" Rainbow Dash cried, her voice unable to hold back her panic.

"I'm sorry girls, but I'm leaving with Zecora and that's final." She started walking away from Ponyville, from her real life.

"FLUTTERSHY! Do. Not. Do this!"

Fluttershy stopped and hung her head.

...

"Fluttershy....please, don't do this to us..." Twilight pleaded.

...

...

.....Goodbye girls

With that Fluttershy walked out of the town's borders into the wasteland outside the relative safety of Ponyville.

"FLUTTERSHYYYYYYY! COME BAAACK!"

Rainbow Dash leapt through the air, not about to let one of her best friends walk out on them to her own demise.

"I WON'T LET YOU TAKE HER!" She yelled at Zecora while flying towards Fluttershy to try and stop her.

Zecora tilted her head and a cloud of purple magic came out of her eyes and trapped Rainbow Dash in a swirling cloud.

"LET ME GO! LET ME GO RIGHT NOW! FLUTTERSHY!"

Twilight concentrated her magic and tried to cast a teleportation spell on

Fluttershy, but Zecora cast another spell, releasing another dark cloud that covered Fluttershy, stopping any magic that tried to touch her.

"I SWEAR BY CELESTIA IF YOU DON'T LET ME GO I'M GONNA.....FLUTTERSHYYYYY!"

Zecora gave a wicked chuckle. "You ponies are unwise to challenge the royal throne, you can do nothing all on your own!"

Rainbow Dash flailed in her magic bonds, desperate to save her friend from walking out into the distance.

A fog rolled up from the ground, obscuring the two ponies vision from seeing where Fluttershy was walking. Fluttershy started to fade from view into the fog she was foolishly walking towards.

"I can finally be truly happy..." Fluttershy said softly to herself.

"NOOOOOO! FLUTTERSHY! PLEASE DON'T DO THIS!" Twilight screamed with all the air in her lungs through her sobs.

"NO! I WON'T LET YOU TAKE HER!" Rainbow Dash strained, trying to free herself and fly straight at the one who was taking their friend.

Fluttershy took one last look back at the life she had made, that she was now throwing away. As she did, a single tear fell from her face. A tear that contained her entire life. One that contained the places she had seen, the things she loved, the memories she held so dear.

And the friends she held even dearer.

She faded from view, obscured by the fog.

"Goodbye, I'll miss you....."

Fluttershy disappeared into the fog, her outline now completely gone. Zecora threw her head back and laughed.

"FLUTTERSH-"

Rainbow Dash was cut off by Zecora throwing her into Twilight, knocking them both onto the ground.

Zecora floated a few inches into the air, laughing the entire time.

"Nightmare Moon sends her regards."

At these words she turned into a puff of dark purple smoke and swirled into a point on the ground, leaving the two ponies in defeat.

"F-Fluttershy...I...come back...please come back..." Twilight got to her hooves, staring at the now vacant spot where her friend was standing not moments before.

Rainbow Dash just stood in place, her mouth open at what had just happened. Her best friend, gone, taken by Nightmare Moon. As much as Rainbow Dash wanted to see her face again, she knew she was not coming back.

Fluttershy was gone.

Rage seared through Rainbow Dash, she could think of nothing but killing Nightmare Moon with her own hooves. She thought of nothing but her friend who was no longer there to be with.

"I. Can. Not. Believe this! She's gone! Just like that!" Rainbow Dash let out a scream of pure hate, crying out at the sky. She had never been this angry in her entire life. Ponyville had never experienced such loss and anger as it did that day, all coming from one blue pony.

"She's gone! She's gone she's gone she's gone!" Rainbow Dash beat the ground, causing small holes to form in the dull dirt. She brought her hooves to her head in pure rage, crushing her temples with her forehooves.

"SHE'S GOOOOOOOONE!"

Rainbow Dash shot into the air with an explosion, creating a streak of colors into the sky and cracks in the ground from the force of her powerful takeoff. She flew with such determination as she didn't even know existed.

"I'm going to show Nightmare Moon who she's messing with! I'm gonna show her just what we "subjects" can do!" She yelled to herself as she bolted straight up towards the cloud layer bearing down at the unfortunate ponies.

"I see now that this is what I've been working for my whole life!" She told herself, "This is what I've been training for! This is what I've been working for! This is the last and greatest thing I can ever do! This is what I was born for!"

"And this, is what I will DIE FOR!"

She broke into the grey cloud barrier at incredible speeds, piercing the oppressive layer with a powerful smash. Small streaks of light purple lightning crackled all around her, some nipping at her body with a snap.

She looked around at the inside of the huge cloud, this was definitely created with magic she noted while seeing the lightning crackling throughout the greyness, each one illuminating the surrounding area for a half-second.

She furrowed her brow as she put her thoughts back on breaking through this cloud. The cloud roared at its new occupant, trying to remove her with powerful winds and loud roars. Rainbow Dash struggled against them, she braced herself as she broke through layers of cloud and lightning.

She looked to her side, bits of the cloud began to darken and form together, eventually taking the form of a large face. The giant head gradually formed together, followed by a sharp horn, and lastly with two green eyes.

Rainbow Dash's eyes widened as she recognized the eyes.

"Oh you stupid pony!" The head of Nightmare Moon spoke, following Rainbow Dash just to her side. "You have outdone yourself this time! Flying straight into the cloud barrier! I mean, come on! You're kidding right?"

Rainbow Dash felt herself become even more enraged.

She felt her front hooves press against an invisible barrier, trying to stop

her from flying any faster. She was flying as hard as she could.

She flew faster.

"I'll have you know that someone else already tried this very same thing before. And I know you would love to know who that was! I believe you know them already?"

The shadowy figure smiled. Rainbow Dash remained focused.

"She was a griffon named Gilda!"

Rainbow Dash took a sharp gasp of air. Gilda, Gilda had tried this very same thing, and she had failed.

"Ha! She didn't even last ten seconds! I didn't even give her the chance to hit the ground! I dragged her limb body through the storm until she was gone. She couldn't do it, what makes you think you can either?"

Her old friend was gone. The one she had known through Flight Camp. They had so many memories, so many moments. She was the only one she called a friend at the camp, and Nightmare Moon had beaten her too.

Rainbow Dash flew with renewed effort, the barrier starting to notice her continued speed by bending slightly. She wasn't going to let her effort go to waste. She would finish what Gilda started.

She pushed harder on the barrier, it responded by bending further. A white circle formed in front of Rainbow Dash, being pushed along by her ferocious wings.

"And another thing, she wasn't the first! Many others have also tried, and they have all failed!"

The barrier bent further.

"Ha! Cloudsdale in particular. They just kept trying and kept failing! The entire flight camp team tried to beat my sky. They ALL lost. Even your instructor!"

Rainbow Dash smirked, "Yeah, well you know what Nightmare Moon? You know the difference between them and me?"

The barrier started to glow multiple colors.

"I'm RAINBOW DASH! And I've made the impossible HAPPEN!"

The barrier exploded and broke into a cone, showering colors onto the cloud surrounding her.

The wind threatened to break her into pieces.

She flew faster.

"What makes you think you can succeed where so many have failed? What makes you think you are stronger?"

"Please! I'm the greatest flyer in Equestria!"

"No you're NOT! You are not the greatest! You're not even close!"

The lightning burnt the tips of her wings and bits of her skin.

She flew faster.

"You know what Nightmare Moon?" Rainbow Dash screamed through the roaring and crashing. "There's nothing you could possibly do to stop me now! So why don't you JUST. SHUT. UP!"

The colored barrier broke again around her body, the very fabric of sound unable to contain her incredible speed and power. Long sparks shot out of the end of the cone around the tip of her hooves.

"There is NOTHING you can do to stop my reign! You cannot hope to achieve anything!"

"Shut up!"

She flew faster.

"You have nothing to look forward to now!"

"I said SHUT UP!"

She flew faster.

"You're just a big, stupid foal!"

"SHUT UP!"

She flew faster.

"Destined for nothing but death, what could you possibly achieve?"

"Shut up shut up shut up SHUT UP!"

She flew faster.

"You're useless!"

"SHUTUPSHUTUPSHUTUPSHUTUPSHUTUP!"

She flew faster. Rainbow Dash put her entire life into breaking the barrier that wanted desperately to stop her from going any faster. The whole sky was roaring.

Tears flowed freely from her face, leaving a trail of shimmers in her wake.

"You and your stupid friends shall have darkness for the rest of your LIVES! And will be able to do NOTHING ABOUT IT!!"

"SHUUUUUUUUUT!! UUUUUUUUUUUUP!!!"

BOOOOOM!

An incredible explosion parted the clouds in a powerful shockwave. Intense colors shot outward from Rainbow Dash's body as she broke the very fabric of sound. Her body rocketed forward with renewed speed, the sonic rainboom having freed her from the limitations of the speed of sound.

Equestria shook under the raw power that was unleashed in the explosion of pure color. On the ground, every pony in Ponyville looked up at a bright flash of light deep in the clouds above them. The flash of light could be seen for miles around.

The incredible shockwave of colors slammed into the oppressive grey like a bombshell, destroying any trace of its existence in its wake. It pushed the cloud apart, forming a ball of emptiness a mile wide within the cloud.

Rainbow Dash closed her eyes and screamed as she traveled at supersonic speeds. She felt like she would be torn apart, but she continued flying, leaving a solid rainbow shooting straight into the sky. She could barely stay awake from all her exertion.

Right as she felt she could no longer fly anymore, she felt an incredible sensation.

Warmth.

She opened her eyes, her speed relented and she felt her body unable to spend any more energy.

The quake from the sonic rainboom rattled the small town below it. Every head turned upwards to see the most incredible sight they had ever seen in their lives.

The wave parted the cloud layer from the middle all the way through from the bottom to the top, and the ponies saw the most beautiful thing they had ever seen in their lives.

Sunlight.

It was bright and filled with warm life. From the column in the clouds, sunlight poured down onto the town, showering it in golden light. There was a wave of color opening the clouds, with a column of shimmering sparkles in the center.

Pinkie Pie was shaken from her state by the sudden influx of real light. She looked up at the sunlight with pure awe, her eyes widening. She looked at the beautiful sight and felt all of her emotions overtake her once more.

She had only experienced joy like that once before in her life, it was unlike anything she ever felt. For those few moments that sunlight blanketed Ponyville with its blessed rays, she felt like she wanted to start dancing through the streets once more.

Rainbow Dash felt the warmth overtake her body, she opened her eyes to see the source of her newfound comfort. She saw nothing but golden brightness all around her. The grey swirling cloud beneath her had been broken through.

She had made the impossible happen, again.

She stopped flapping her wings, the momentum carrying her gently higher in the sky above the terrible grey. Above the layer she had just pierced, there was light. Sweet, pure sunlight. It felt like it had been gone for her whole life and she was just feeling it again.

She smiled a weak smile, and with the last part of her being, she let loose a single drop of glimmering water from her face.

She spread her arms to take in the beautiful feelings and pure warmth of the sun's light. She smiled a smile of deep content. She had become a beacon of hope to the ponies of Ponyville. She had shown them that impossible meant nothing...

She closed her eyes.

Never to open them again...

-2 days later-

Ponyville

No tears were shed. Not a single one on that day. They were already used up, used up by the need to bring sorrow forth from the deepest realms of a pony's heart. Used up by the desire to express emotions no words could show. They had all been dried up in the aftermath of the losses the town

had suffered.

All the tears were used up by it's inhabitants.

The town square was packed with ponies, all grieving for the loss of those who never had a chance to say goodbye. A hundred suffering souls gathered round the Town Hall to attend the funeral service for those who did not survive Nightmare Moon's return.

Mayor Mare hung her head against the wall leading outside. She couldn't believe she was going to say this, she couldn't believe that she would ever have to speak these words to all these souls. She never wanted to do anything like this, but she had to speak, she had to tell Ponyville it had to move on from their hardships and face the next ones with renewed vigor.

She wiped her brow with her hoof, it took all her courage not to run away from this building and never come back. She breathed a deep sigh and nudged the front gates open, as she did, she looked back and saw her notes laying on the table where she left them. She decided to leave them there.

Her speech came from her heart in the first place, she didn't need to try and remember it.

Ponies of all different colors and species watched the light brown mayor make her way to the podium to begin the event.

Mayor Mare stood at the podium for a few moments, letting her sad silence speak more than words could. She let out a breath and brought her mouth up to face the crowd.

"My citizens, neighbors, and friends...I do not want to be here saying these things right now, I do not want to be standing up here telling you that these things have happened, in fact, I want to be at home in my bed right now, laying under the covers like a school filly."

"But here I am...Even though I don't want to have to say these things, to recount these events and losses, I am here because I cannot deny these events. As much as we wish they did not happen, they did. And we are now given a choice, we can either let grief overtake us and turn us into a wreck,

or we can look up. We can rebuild."

A few ponies nodded to themselves amidst the audience.

"We can take our troubles and turn them around. We can take what we have been left and build our homes and lives. We can rebuild our spirits and our hopes. If Nightmare Moon gives us ashes then we will build sandcastles out of it..."

Mayor Mare hung her head a little.

"We are all here today to mourn for the loss of many, but there are two who are on every one of our hearts, two who have touched us all. Though we may mourn for our own kin, we all feel a deeper sadness towards two specific ponies."

A small curtain lifted to reveal a portrait of a yellow pegasus holding a white rabbit close to her chest. Her head was bowed and her cheeks were blushed from having a camera capture her beautiful moment. Her impossibly warm smile drew fresh droplets to the faces of many.

The tears may have been already shed, but their eyes could not stop drops of their souls to flow through. These tears from a deeper sadness filled the cheeks of most of the ponies gathered in the square.

"Fluttershy was a wonderful pony, she gave us all a reason to be kind to each other. She never did anything to hurt anyone, she only cared for others. No matter what happened, she met each pony with a smile and open arms. While she wasn't the most outgoing pony, her small presence had a huge influence on us all. She almost forced us to be kind through her example..."

"She was a beautiful, giving soul, and she will be missed dearly...But do not cry for her, she wouldn't want us to worry about her..."

Mayor Mare smiled a little as she pictured Fluttershy hiding from a group of ponies with a small squeak. She always thought Fluttershy's reactions to attention were a bit humorous.

"There is another reason that we are all here tonight, and I think you are all

thinking about it already..."

A few ponies lowered their eyebrows in thought. Mayor Mare pulled on a string attached to another portrait.

The curtain lifted to reveal a portrait of Rainbow Dash. She was looking directly into the camera with that confident smile on her face. That smile that somehow always seemed to give anyone a sense of strength just by seeing it. Her head was slightly lowered, adding to the picture's sense of power from the figure it showed.

Mayor Mare let the memories of what happened two days ago rush back to her listeners before continuing. "Rainbow Dash...what can be said about this pony that she hasn't already shown us herself?"

Rarity seemed to stick out from the crowd as the only one with a face filled with regret. As often as Rainbow Dash got on her nerves, she always saw the good traits her friend possessed. She knew that as much as she often didn't show it, Rainbow Dash loved her friends more than anything.

She had given her life to show them that.

Rarity was the only one of the six ponies who were at the Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters when Nightmare Moon returned that stood in the crowd. Pinkie Pie had stayed home, Applejack was still at the hospital, and Twilight had left at the start and hadn't come back yet.

Maybe Twilight just couldn't bear to think that her new friends were gone.

"She was an incredible pony, a talented worker who never let anypony down. She represents the kind of skill and hard work we all wish we had...Rainbow Dash gave her life to show us that we had to live ours, that we can't just let our fate push us around, we can live through whatever happens to us."

Mayor Mare let another pause soak up her words.

"She died as she lived, with her head in the clouds and her wings full of air."

A respectful silence fell over the crowd.

"She remained loyal to us all even with her last breath. She didn't know every one of you, but she did it for you all anyway. And we will not let her sacrifice go in vain, we won't give up, just as she did not. Which is why..."

Mayor Mare walked past the two portraits to a bulging tarp about the size of a pony.

"Which is why I hereby award Rainbow Dash the Pegasus the coveted Prized Pony of Ponyville award for her incredible bravery and loyalty to us all!"

She tore off the black tarp from the golden trophy, it glimmered in the dull light, almost as if it was thrilled to have such a deserving bearer. A ribbon was tied around the golden pony that stood atop the trophy, it's rainbow colors flowed in the gentle breeze.

A roar of applause rang out from the crowd, some banged their hooves on the ground while others whistled their agreement at the award.

In this time of sorrow, a crowd of ponies were cheering in honor of one pegasus that gave them, if only for a few moments, hope. They all cheered at the memory of the pony that inspired them to get up that morning and the morning before that.

"Rainbow Dash," Mayor Mare spoke half to herself as the cheering drowned out her words. "I know you can't hear us...but...thank you, for being there..."

"This day shall be remembered! Not as the day where the town of Ponyville cowered in fear, but as the day where we stood in the face of she who opposes us and showed her the true spirit of those she oppresses!"

"We will live on! For those who cannot!"

"For Fluttershy!"

"For Rainbow Dash!"

Another cheer roared through the crowd, each ponies face filled confidence and rage. Rarity looked around at the ponies surrounding her, she didn't know what it was, but she didn't like the look in their eyes. It was filled with so much anger, a desire to right something that has been wronged.

Rarity looked nervously at the ground. This was a good thing, she told herself. Everypony was getting ready, but to do what? The thought bothered her, she worried for her neighbors, she didn't want to do anything dangerous, she just wanted life to return to normal.

"Rainbow Dash has shown us that impossible means nothing!" Mayor Mare went on, her voice getting louder and more serious. "And we will remind Nightmare Moon of that fact! She will not take any more of us away! She will not cause us anymore grief!"

"Ponies, I leave you with these words...do not let anyone try and tell you that you cannot go on, you will not falter in the face of any odds! Just because the sky looms grey does not mean our lives are over, the sun has shown down upon us once, it showed us that it is still there. And just as it still shines, we too shall shine forth with our actions!"

She looked over her audience with a sad smile, she hoped that she inspired them to do the right things, she had done her job here, but her task was not yet complete. It had only started.

She turned solemnly back into the town hall, leaving the cheering crowd to themselves. Rarity saw the look on the mayor's face as she left, her expression didn't ease her nerves, it only made her worry even more for the well-being of the town.

After about fifteen minutes, the crowd had begun to disperse. Many had placed flowers or other gifts in front of the two portraits, while some simply took one last look at them and sighed before leaving.

As Rarity got up to leave, she noticed that a number of pegasus ponies were entering the town square, they all walked with their chests out-thrust slightly, they all had a look of determination about them.

She thought nothing of it at first, but as more and more poured in, she took a look inside the building. She saw a glimpse of a purple unicorn. Twilight?

Twilight Sparkle was inside talking to the mayor, she talked with surprising seriousness, but occasionally a hint of sadness would appear. The two ponies ushered in another pair of pegasus ponies past a large blackboard.

Rarity could only make out two words written along the top of the blackboard, underlined multiple times with white chalk.

PROJECT: ICAR-

Chapter 5

Fuel For The Fire

Date: 0001
New Lunar Calendar

-1 Week after the Funeral-

It was war.

No one had said it, the word was never spoken that day, but it was war.

It was war against the Night Goddess.

=====

BOOOM!

It was chaos, ponies were frantically running or flying around the small town of Ponyville. The sounds of chaos were running rampant throughout the town, many were panicking, but the rest were either pounding their hooves on the ground or staring up at the sky intently.

The sky was black with the shadows of the quick bodies of pegasi and the swirling cloud of grey above.

BOOOM!

Another explosion shocked the ground, and a flash came from within the cloud layer. It parted and let a small column of that impossibly sweet sunlight through. Earth ponies and unicorns looked up at the cloud, it had holes dotting its underside, each letting through another column of sunlight.

Lightning flashed across the town, striking the top of another thatched roof and causing a burst of flame.

Almost every pegasus was in the air by now, desperately trying with their lives to break into the bottom of the cloud layer. Some had succeeded, others did not.

Through the roaring thunder and the whirlwinds created by the sheer number of pegasi flying at once, a single outline could be seen falling from the sky, clearly not in control of their body anymore.

"I see em!" A sea-green unicorn yelled and ran towards the falling outline, her horn glowing as she ran.

A light glowed around the falling pony, they stopped their descent and was gently lowered to the ground. Lyra moved the unconscious figure in front of her.

"Please be alive..." She said to herself as she moved the body to her feet.

They were not moving, and when she went to check their pulse she slammed her hoof on the ground. Another lost. She moved the pegasus onto her back and ran back to the town hall, where the others they lost where held.

BOOOM!

Another shockwave as the sound barrier was pierced yet again.

"Come on! Come on!" Cloudkicker banged her hooves on the ground, desperate to fly into the chaos.

Twilight concentrated for the hundredth time that day, she grunted and a beam of magic shot out of her horn and pierced a tiny hole in the oppressive cloud layer.

"GO! And may Celestia's light guide you should you find it!" Twilight yelled her blessing she gave to all the other pegasi she had helped into the cloud layer.

Into their deaths.

Cloudkicker shot into the air, leaving a light violet streak behind her. Her eyes were only focused on the swirling grey above Ponyville.

Twilight looked with determination and hope up at the pony who was speeding away. When Cloudkicker pierced the clouds Twilight sunk her head. She didn't want it to be like this, she didn't want to waste lives to try and bring back the sun.

BOOOM!

It was too late for that.

=====

-One week earlier-

-After the Funeral-

Rarity

There was a crowd of ponies in the town square, almost the entire town of Ponyville had come to the funeral held for everyone who was lost during Nightmare Moon's return. But it as held for two ponies in particular, a blue pegasus pony and a small yellow pegasus.

One had died with her head in the clouds and another chasing her dream of bravery. Nightmare Moon had taken their lives away, everypony missed them, but they were not coming back. They were dead.

Rarity swallowed, trying to regain her composure, she had seen the look on Twilight's face as she spoke with the mayor. She had also seen the look in the eyes of some of the pegasi, and she hoped they were not going to do what she thought they would do.

She had seen the chalkboard but she could only make out the words "Project: Icar-". Combined with the look on the Mayor's face she didn't like the sound of this "project" one bit.

She stared at the portraits of Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy one last time and turned to go back to her boutique. She had sent Sweetie Belle to bed early before she left, she didn't want her to see that her big sister had been crying.

Rarity didn't want any of this, she didn't want to fight against Nightmare Moon's total dominance, all she wanted to do was put everything back in order.

All she ever wanted was order, but not everyone appreciated it as much as she would like. Some ponies thought she was prissy or haughty, but she was really just trying to get everything straight and in order. She just wanted to make order out of chaos.

It was something some ponies just didn't care about, especially Applejack.

Applejack...

Her steps slowed as she thought about her friend, sure they had their differences, but they were the best of friends. They were just different.

She thought about her friend, she didn't know what she would do if anything happened to her.

Rarity quietly opened her front door, careful not to wake her sleeping sister. She didn't bother to do her normal rituals she did before going to bed, she just flopped her body onto the soft mattress.

Her eyes soon succumbed to the weight of the day and the exhaustion of her worry.

Pinkie Pie

The pink earth pony stared out of her second story window, watching the ponies disperse from the area around Town Hall. She had done nothing but think about what she had felt when Rainbow Dash performed the sonic rainboom.

The explosion of light and color had clicked something inside of her, she felt like she had something to laugh at again, something that had opened

her up to new possibilities for happiness. But she didn't know why.

Pinkie Pie slowly dragged herself across the room to her bed. She flopped her front leg on the floor then recoiled in surprise.

She jumped at the sudden pain in her hoof, she backed up a pace and looked at it. A small red dot was visible on her skin. She had stepped on a discarded quill, and the tip had pricked her, causing a tiny cut.

She stared at the tiny prick on her hoof with a strange sense of awe. A small drop of blood poured out from the injury. It looked so silly, she thought, just flowing slowly out of her body.

The drop fascinated her, she giggled for a moment, thinking about the red dot. Something about the silly little drop of blood made her smile, if only for a moment.

She chuckled one last time and smeared the blood droplet off with her hoof. She slumped into her bed, thinking about the tiny prick. The little jolt she got when she stepped on the quill gave her a tiny little jolt of feeling.

It wasn't pleasant, but it had been something.

Maybe she would find something to laugh about after all...

Twilight Sparkle

Only one thing went through Twilight's head as she climbed the steps up to her bed.

Project: Icarus

The mayor had discussed it with her at length after the funeral, and she had come to one conclusion about her plan, it was suicide!

It could never work, there was no way that the plan she and the leader of the weather pegasi could ever bring anything but more trouble. They had approached her because they needed her help in order for it to work, and for whatever reason, she agreed.

It had taken a bit of convincing, but she finally agreed to help them in their ridiculous idea.

Project: Icarus, a plan devised by the Mayor herself. It was what she believed to be the only way to stop the eternal nighttime. Rainbow Dash had proven that it was at least possible to break through it, if only for a few fleeting moments.

But, what if a dozen ponies did it at once? Or a hundred? No, there was no way that enough ponies could somehow perform a sonic rainboom at the same time to cause the clouds to dissipate. Even if they could, who knows if it will even keep the clouds open permanently?

For all she knew, they would just close up again. She had tried to explain to Mayor Mare how if the clouds were kept together using magic, they could easily be reformed.

She didn't listen, she didn't even look at Twilight when she told the mayor the inherent danger in attacking magical objects with non-magical means.

But, that was where Twilight came into the plan Mayor Mare had said. If they needed magic, then Twilight would use hers to break a small hole in the clouds. A way to help the pegasi fly deeper inside.

Every fiber in Twilight's body told her to walk away from the suicidal plan, but everything in her mind told her to agree, that it was worth fighting for.

In the end, her mind won over her sense of self preservation.

She was on her way to helping dozens of ponies to their deaths.

-The Next Day-

Mayor Mare

This was it, it was time to unveil her plan to the entire town. She had called a special gathering in the town square, and everypony in town was ordered to attend.

She didn't like having to resort to using her position as mayor to force

ponies into something, but they all needed to be here to hear about Project: Icarus. She just hoped she could convince them to go through with it, she needed everypony's help in order to pull this off.

Mayor Mare adjusted her glasses again, they were starting to slid down her face from all of her sweat. She wasn't worried about speaking to the town, she was just worried about what their reaction might be. What if they didn't want to fight? What if they didn't want to risk their lives fighting Nightmare Moon's night?

She would just have to convince them she thought. She hoped she could. Mayor Mare gave herself a wish of good luck and walked confidently out to the podium.

"Filles and Gentlecolts, I'm assuming you are wondering why you were brought here today. Rest assured that it was for a very important reason. As I know you are all aware, we have been without sun for the past 2 days, and if Nightmare Moon's threat is to be taken seriously, then we may never be able to see it again."

A few ponies in the crowd grew visibly nervous.

"However, as I said the other day, that does not mean our lives are over. It means we need to use our lives to our fullest extent...and use them we will."

"All of you want to be able to see the end of this oppression, and this is why I am here before you today. I am here to tell you that you WILL see it's end."

Murmurs ran throughout the audience, many perked up their ears and paid Mayor Mare their full attention.

"You all want the freedom of the sun back? Then we will take it back! Myself and a number of other ponies have come up with a plan to take back what was ours. Citizens of Ponyville, I hereby formally unveil Project: Icarus!"

Mayor Mare tore a sheet off of an object next to the podium, revealing a blackboard with the words Project: Icarus in white chalk, it had been

underlined multiple times, and there were telltale signs that things had been erased on the board.

The murmurs around the crowd increased. Mayor Mare waited until it died down before continuing.

"My fellow citizens, we have devised a way to end this nightmare. We shall fight Nightmare Moon's eternal nighttime and we shall make sure it never comes back. Rainbow Dash proved to all of us that she is not invincible, her magic can be stopped. You all saw how she managed to do it."

"And if she did it, then so can any of you! You all saw what she did to the clouds, she broke a hole right through it, if only for a few fleeting moments. That was one pony, what would happen if five ponies did it at once? Or ten? Or twenty? We would unleash enough power to dissipate the entire cloud at once, leaving no way for it to reform."

A few ponies in the crowd began to grow excited at the idea.

"We will destroy the dark cloud until there is nothing left, we will unleash enough power to reduce it to nothing but air. Nightmare Moon will see us destroy her nighttime and she can do nothing to stop us."

"Fillies and gentlecolts, now is the time for action, we have sat by while she does her evil works, but no more! It is time to fight back! We will show her how strong we truly are, she thinks she can beat us just like that? Well she is wrong!"

"We will defeat her, we will prove that even the humble town of Ponyville can fight harder than she has ever seen. These will be the days that are spoken of in history. These will be the actions that will be taught to our grandchildren and their offspring! The actions that will be read in our history books!"

"Years from now, our kin will look back at us with admiration! You will all be remembered as heroes! As the strongest warriors this land has ever known! The ones who did not stand idly by, but destroyed that which opposed them!"

Some ponies in the crowd began to cheer loudly.

"We will be remembered as the ones who dethroned a GODDESS!"

The crowd lost all semblance of self-control, cheering loudly and stomping their hooves.

"Now I know none of you have ever had a reason to fight anypony else, but now you do! Now you have something to fight for! It will bring out the best in all of you, show Nightmare Moon and yourselves how strong you really are!"

"The time has come for action, and our actions will be noticed. Anyone who does not wish to fight may leave now, you may leave this whole plan behind and ignore it, I won't stop you. I'm not going to force anyone into this, this is entirely your own decisions, but think for a moment that you might be walking away from your one chance at salvation."

The crowd remained perfectly still.

"Those who wish to help are to meet back here in the town square in one hour. Should you attend, your decision is sealed, if you join us and then leave, you will face the full extent of the law."

"I will leave you with that choice, I'm not going to try and convince you anymore. You may go or you may stay to fight, your choice..." Mayor Mare paused for a moment before making one last statement. "For the glory of the Princess and the Sun."

She turned and left the stage, leaving behind a crowd of cheering ponies. Most of those who were there started to talk amongst themselves, debating whether or not to stay and possibly give their lives for the cause.

The hour passed quicker then all would have liked, the town square was not nearly as crowded as it was earlier. Mayor Mare watched outside through the window, watching ponies show up at random intervals, sometimes in groups. Some seemed more reluctant to return then others, but almost everypony came back.

Almost the entire town was gathered yet again in the town square, many cheering loudly and others starting war chants about defeating the

darkness. The town had listened to her speech and took it to heart, they were all ready to fight the desperate battle that was to take place.

"Well," Mayor Mare said to herself, "No going back now."

"You don't have to do this, you can still call it off." Twilight tried to convince the mayor.

"No, I can't, not anymore. I guess we will see how the fate of Ponyville comes to fruition."

Mayor Mare walked downstairs to the front door to begin addressing the ponies outside.

"Oh, and Twilight, one more thing. I know you just arrived here, and you barely know us, but thanks for choosing to help our struggle, that says a lot to us."

Twilight gave her a half-hearted smile, anyone could tell it was forced, but Twilight was not a smiling mood.

Mayor Mare walked back out to the podium to begin discussing Project: Icarus with the town. Twilight could hear the roar of the crowd outside, she let the noise fade from her thoughts and turned her attention to the window.

Twilight saw the crowd in an uproar, but across the street she saw something else. She saw Sugarcube Corner, it's windows all empty except one, Twilight looked into the second story window and saw a pony with curly hair laughing to themselves.

It was Pinkie Pie, Twilight noted. She smiled a bit, she didn't know what it was, but she was glad Pinkie Pie had found a reason to be happy again. She watched Pinkie Pie giggling in her room before heading to the room the Mayor had let her stay in.

She had been up way too late last night, and she needed all the sleep she could get, tomorrow began the preparations for Project: Icarus.

And it was going to be a very busy day.

-The Next Day-

Rarity

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Rarity stood at the front door to the Library, shuffling her hooves nervously. The door opened to reveal a purple pony standing a few feet behind it.

"Oh, hello Rarity, please come in." Twilight stepped aside, letting her guest inside. The library was an absolute mess, books were scattered all over the floor. Rarity cringed at the mess.

"Erm, thank you Twilight..." Rarity was visibly nervous at being here. "Look, I hope you aren't still upset about....you know...what I said the other day..."

"No, it's fine, really. My head wasn't in the right place that day, I guess I was just so angry I didn't think straight."

"So, no hard feelings?"

"Nope."

Rarity smiled a little. "Good." Rarity looked around the library once more, resisting the urge to place every book back where it belonged.

"So, um, how has this project thing been going? Is it...really going through?"

"Yep, everything is finalized already. The pegasi are working on their techniques right now, the earth ponies have started building the gear, and I'm learning everything I can about cloud magic so I can help the pegasi further inside."

"Gear?"

"Yes, we have come up with a design for a specially made set of horseshoes, once we enchant them, it will allow the wearer to fly faster and protect them from lightning. It's a rather fascinating design."

"Oh, so I suppose everything is going according to plan."

"So far."

"Oh...that's...good..."

"Rarity, what was the real reason you came over here? Did you come to help me?"

"What? N-no, it's not that."

"Oh that's right, you weren't at the town square after the mayor gave her speech."

"I just...don't feel like we should be doing this, fighting shouldn't be the answer."

"I don't see any other choice, and neither does anypony else."

"I guess I'm just so opposed to the idea of violence that I can't stand the thought of it."

"Well, if it makes you feel better, we aren't actually fighting anyone, we are just breaking up a really big cloud. So long as Nightmare Moon doesn't make any more of those Shadowbolt guys that is."

"But they didn't actually do anything remember dear? They just tried to convince Dash not to help us across that bridge."

"I know, but I'm afraid they could convince the pegasi to all give up."

"Oh dear, that would be bad. So...um...what exactly are the unicorns doing? Do they have any special tasks?"

"Actually yes, the spells I'm planning on using are pretty complex, most of the ponies here aren't particularly skilled in magic, so it's up to me and a few others who are capable to do the casting. The other unicorns are just going to loan us their magic for the day."

"One can do that?"

"Yep, a unicorn can transfer their magic temporarily to another for one day. Then it returns to them around 24 hours later. It's a technique that the Mayor had kept secret, fearing ponies might use it to cause trouble."

"I had no idea...that's all the unicorns can really do? They loan their magic away? Simple as that?"

"Rarity, you haven't answered my question, and you seem to be awful curious for somepony who said she isn't interested. So why are you really here?"

Twilight gave Rarity a glare, she shrunk inwards, trying to hide herself from her accuser. After a few moments she jumped up and started talking again.

"OOOOOO OK! I want to help! I do! I just wanted to see everything back in it's place and clean up this icky town! I know I didn't say it before but I'll help, honest! No more hiding it, I'll help you."

Twilight smiled warmly. "Thanks Rarity, I'm sure you can contribute a lot to us."

"Well, so, now that that's cleared up, please give me your first instructions."

Rarity thrust her chest out and flexed her foreleg in a fashionably heroic pose.

"Rarity, is ready!"

Applejack

A painful buzzing brought Applejack back to consciousness. Her legs had begun to ache yet again.

Or, at least what remained of her legs.

She begrudgingly pulled herself up on her infirmary bed, ready to start another day of lying still while the world moved on without her. She hated it. She hated being stuck here, unable to help anyone with repairing the town.

She couldn't even help with this "Project: Icarus" thingy. There was finally a chance to do something about Nightmare Moon's nighttime, a chance to take back what was stolen.

Yet here she was, sitting in bed by herself. She felt disgusted by the whole ordeal.

She reached down and touched her thighs, she grunted as her hooves felt what remained of her legs. There was nothing left from the lower thighs down, her hind legs ended in stumps, the result of her recent surgery.

She knew that the doctors had been working on some kind of reconstructive operation, and she trusted that it would work, but she couldn't help but feel that she would be stuck without her hind legs for the rest of her life...

"Applejack? Oh good, you're awake." Nurse Mercy trotted into the room, her attitude a little more positive than usual, "I hope you're comfortable this morning."

"Eyup." Applejack mirrored her big brother in her usual optimistic tone.

"Well, you will be happy to know that your treatment was authorized for next week, and we have plans to begin prepping you for the operation immediately!"

"Well thank Celestia, ah was hopin' I could start soon, ah'm tired of sittin' here doin' nothing!"

"If you're feeling well enough, I would like to hook you up for a moment, just to check your vitals."

"Go right ahead, I'm feelin' just fine."

Nurse Mercy wheeled a small tower with a box on top over to Applejack's table. A green line glowed in the middle of the box, letting off a soft glow each time it flicked on and off.

"Now this might sting a little." Nurse Mercy said.

She stabbed a small needle into Applejack's upper arm. She winced her eyebrows a bit at the sudden wound. The box started to beep at an uneven pace. The beeping slowly paced out, making an even flow of metallic beeping sounds.

BEEP

"All right let's see here. Heart rate, normal, Pulse, normal, Brain activity, normal." Nurse Mercy went down a checklist of standard tests to check for abnormalities.

BEEP

Applejack knew everything was going fine, but she still felt incredibly nervous. She couldn't point out why.

"All right Applejack, so far your vitals are all stabilized, I'm going to administer a sma-Hello Applejack, I hope you're enjoying the beautiful nighttime."

Applejack's eyes shot open, Nurse Mercy's voice suddenly changed to an icy, dark voice. Applejack recognized that voice.

How could she forget it...

BEEP

Nurse Mercy suddenly turned to face her in her bed, the nurse's head turned black and her mane turned into long flowing wisps of dark magic. Applejack found herself staring deep into the glowing blue eyes of Nightmare Moon.

BEEP

The sides of the bed suddenly shot up around her, she felt as if she was falling through the world. Applejack flailed her limbs uselessly, she couldn't see and she couldn't move.

She could only feel herself floating helplessly through the darkness. After a

few moments, her eyes were able to adjust to the darkness and saw herself floating through a dark void, with deep purple swirls all around her.

She could still hear the beeping coming from the machine so far away from her.

BEEP

"I'm so glad to see you remember me this time." The cold voice of Nightmare Moon made Applejack freeze up.

"Not you again! What the hay do you want now?" Applejack found enough courage to raise her voice to the void.

A group of wisps swirled together and formed into the head of Nightmare Moon.

BEEP

"Me? I'm just here to pay a visit to one of my favorite subjects. After our little get together at the castle, I just had to check in on you. So tell me...."

Applejack looked at the enormous face in front of her, she saw a large crack running through the side of the armor on Nightmare Moon's face. The crack that she herself had caused what seemed like so long ago.

"...How have you been? My faithful subject..."

BEEP

"Ah am not your subject!" Applejack yelled at the dark apparition. "And ah will not let you tell me otherwise!"

Nightmare Moon only laughed, filling the void with her loud voice. Applejack shrunk back in fear, she tried to stay strong and at least keep up an air of confidence, but she was not very successful.

BEEP

Applejack gestured towards Nightmare Moon's face, "I see you still haven't

recovered from our last encounter!" She pointed with a hoof to the crack in Nightmare Moon's armor and started to chuckle.

Nightmare Moon grew visibly angry at this, but she soon returned to her sinister smile.

"I see you havn't either."

Applejack looked down at the stumps where her hind legs used to be and cringed.

BEEP

"Well...you still ain't my ruler! I'm not bowin' down to you no matter what you do! So you might as well just run along Miss Nightmare, 'cause ah'm afraid you're wasting yer time!"

"Oh no, I'm not here to try and tell you to worship me, I'm here to remind you why you should! You think your legs are the worst I can do? You are **WRONG!** Dead wrong!"

BEEP

"Y-You just wait until Princess Celestia gets a hold of you! You'll be sorry all right!"

Nightmare Moon threw back her head and laughed again, this time louder than before. "Oh I'm sorry, did you mean **THIS** Princess Celestia?"

She opened a hole in the void and an image of Princess Celestia walking through the plains somewhere in Equestria appeared.

"Princess Celestia!" Applejack shouted.

BEEEP

Celestia was slowly dragging herself through the grey, lifeless grass. Her mane no longer sparkled, her crown was gone, and she no longer gave off the air of perpetual calm she always had.

She looked like she had been walking for days, and her face reflected this fact.

"She-she's alive! What did you do with her?!" Applejack flailed her limbs again, still unable to move from Nightmare Moon's magic.

"Ha! Yes, your precious ex-ruler is alive, but she is useless now, there is nothing she can do to stop my night anymore!"

BEEP

Applejack stopped squirming to look at her princess. She looked so frail and broken, each step more labored and forced than the last. It pained Applejack to look at her beloved princess in such a state.

"I allowed Celestia to live, but only so that she may watch me take her kingdom and indeed her very daytime right out from underneath her. Oh, how it will pain her to watch you all squirm under my rule!"

BEEEP

Applejack looked from the monstrous horror back to her down-trodden princess. She watched helplessly as Celestia slowly traveled to who knows where.

But then something caught her eye, something about Celestia that made her almost inexplicably happy. She almost began to cry when she saw it.

She looked Celestia right in the face and saw it, her look of determination, she looked like she was on her way to do something of vital importance, and that nothing could keep her from it.

BEEEEEP

Applejack started to laugh like she was a little school filly, she laughed like somepony who didn't have a care in the world.

"Ya'll really think you won? HA! You might have beat us, but as long as Celestia is alive, you'll never win! She'll beat you faster than you can buck a bushel full o' apples!"

Applejack laughed even harder at her own joke. Nightmare Moon simply stared at her in disgust.

BEEP

"Ya'll go ahead and do whatever you like to me, I'm just happy knowin' that mah princess is comin' to kick yer hindquarters halfway to the moon and back!" Applejack kept laughing.

Nightmare Moon scowled at Applejack in disgust. "You dare laugh at ME?! Do you really think that your pitiful princess can do anything to stop what's happening? HA!"

Nightmare Moon's scowl turned to laughter as well, "Celestia is weak! She's useless! She can't do a thing about ANYTHING! You really think she has a chance? You foal!"

BEEEEEEEP

Applejack kept laughing from joy at discovering Celestia was alive. She felt that so long as Celestia was alive, there was hope and the night would end.

Nightmare Moon laughed at Applejack's ignorance. "You're serious aren't you? Oh that is just too good. Then laugh little pony, laugh at your fate."

Nightmare Moon's head dissipated into the void, leaving Applejack clutching her sides in a fit of pure laughter.

BEEEEEEEEEEEP

The only sounds left were Applejack's laughter and the slow beeping of the metal box.

"Yo-you really think you can beat the Princess?" Applejack could barely speak she was laughing so hard. "Boy, you certainly have another thing coming, HAHA!"

Suddenly she started coughing in between bits of laughter. She started hacking and wheezing trying to get air into her lungs. She felt like she was

choking but she didn't care what happened to herself anymore.

All that mattered was that Celestia was alive.

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

Her laughter stopped, she could only choke and cough as she felt her life being drained. Her coughing got weaker and weaker until she began losing sight. The world around her began to fade.

She felt light-headed, everything was spinning. This was it, she thought. This was my last chapter.

But Applejack didn't care. What happened to her meant nothing, she couldn't stop Nightmare Moon, but Celestia could. And she was still alive.

That was all that mattered.

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

"Welp..." Applejack said to herself, "Ah guess that's it then..."

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

"Here ah go..."

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

"Shoot, ah always thought I could run Sweet Apple Acres some day."

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

"Big Macintosh..."

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

"Apple Bloom..."

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

"Granny Smith..."

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

"See ya'll later....."

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP

BEEEEEEEEEP

BEEEEEP

"Vitals dropping! Doctor she needs to be stabilized!"

"I know! She's not responding to anything!"

BEEP

"Come on! Breath!"

BEEP

"Why won't you live?!"

BEEP

BEEP

"Doctor...I think..."

"I know Nurse, I know..."

Another patient had checked out of the Ponyville Hospital.

-Two Hours Later-

Twilight Sparkle

A purple unicorn burst through the doors to Mayor Mare's study.

"Mayor, we have a problem!"

"What is it?" The vanilla coloured pony put a book down and stared at her intruder.

"It's Applejack..."

"Wh-what? Is she ok?"

Twilight hung her head, saying nothing.

"Oh..."

"They said she was perfectly normal until suddenly her vitals started dropping. They tried everything but they couldn't figure out why. We can't figure it out, it's like she just suddenly...died."

"I see..."

"But we do have one theory. I'm guessing you know what it is?"

"Nightmare Moon..."

"Right..."

Mayor Mare concentrated on her notes, she had been making adjustments to Project: Icarus. But now the whole plan took on a whole new meaning to her, a more personal meaning.

"Then we have no choice, we have to move faster, before any more

innocent lives are lost."

Twilight nodded, agreeing with her.

"I want that cloud gone by the end of this week."

And thus the wheel was set in motion.

Chapter 6

To War A Goddess

Date: 0001
New Lunar Calendar

-3 Days after the Funeral-

Rarity

"Oh it is so nice to be able to have a decent get together again, my mind needs a rest from all this excitement." Rarity relaxed in her seat in the back of the Hay and Gourmet Restaurant.

"It is rather nice to be out of those crowded offices, even if it is only for a little bit." Twilight took another bite of her daffodil and daisy sandwich.

"I'm glad the three of us could find some time to be together, with all the commotion around town. Wouldn't you agree Pinkie?"

"You betcha!" Pinkie Pie tossed another hay fry into her mouth.

Twilight smiled, it had been awhile since Pinkie Pie had been outside, and she was glad she didn't seem to be taking everything too badly. In fact, she seemed like she didn't have a care in the world.

If only I were so lucky, she thought.

"So, Pinkie," Rarity said, "You said you had some sort of new recipe, something that will, ahem, knock our socks off?"

"I sure do! And you wanna know the secret ingredient?" Pinkie Pie grabbed the other two and pulled them closer. "The secret ingredient to my new cupcake recipe is..."

Pinkie Pie looked over her shoulder suspiciously. "...a dash of rainbow."

"I beg your pardon?" Rarity pleaded.

"Rainbow, I imported some from Cloudsdale! It gives them a nice spicy touch! I think it'll make me enough money to buy out Sugarcube Corner, and then, the WORLD!"

Twilight giggled. "Pinkie Pie, sometimes I just do not understand you!"

The three of them laughed as three friends enjoying a peaceful get together should laugh.

Time passed, and the three of them ate and laughed in spite of the gloomy situation Ponyville found itself in. The restaurant was the only one still open, so plenty of ponies were eating and talking or even just catching up.

A few tables over the waiter was passing by to deliver a plate of rose leaves to a customer. Another pony accidentally got out of their chair at the same time he walked by, knocking the waiter over.

He fell to the ground, clutching his knee. "OW! Agh, that hurt!"

"Oh Celestia! I'm so sorry!" The pony tried to help him. "I-I didn't mean to, I was just-oh I'm so sorry! Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, I think I just sprained it." He grabbed his knee, wincing as he did.

Suddenly Pinkie Pie burst out laughing. She laughed harder than she had all day. She could barely control herself.

"Pinkie! That's completely disrespectful!" Rarity gave Pinkie Pie a stern look.

The waiter tried to get up but his leg gave way underneath him. Pinkie Pie laughed even harder, rolling on the ground grabbing her stomach.

"Pinkie! What are you doing? That pony just hurt himself! you shouldn't be laughing at him!" Twilight scolded Pinkie Pie.

Pinkie Pie managed to get on her hooves again and ran out of the restaurant laughing uncontrollably.

"Well how rude..." Rarity glared at the pink pony running down the street.

"I'm sorry about that sir." Twilight helped the waiter to his hooves. "I hope you aren't hurt too badly."

"I'll be fine. But, why was that pink pony laughing at me?"

"Well, I don't really know." Twilight went back to the table Rarity was sitting at. "I think it's time we got back to work."

"I agree, we shan't waste any more time. I'm just concerned about Pinkie, that wasn't like her."

"I'm sure she's just a little off today, she hasn't been with anyone else for a while. We'd better get going though, we're supposed to meet the captain of the weather patrol today."

Rarity and Twilight left the restaurant, the waiter hobbling back to the kitchen. Something did seem wrong with Pinkie, Rarity thought. She never laughed when other ponies got hurt, she was normally one of the first ones to help them.

Something in Pinkie Pie's eyes bothered her, she didn't like the way she had laughed.

-One Hour Later-

Twilight Sparkle

Twilight and Rarity walked past a group of trees into a clearing. It was populated with dozens of pegasi, some talking to one another, others doing various exercises, and a few doing maneuvers in the air.

"Hello?" Twilight tried to get the attention of a large grizzled pegasus. "Hellooooo?"

"Wha? Huh? Oh, hey there, you must be that Twilight unicorn I've been hearing about."

"That's me, I'm glad to meet you, uh, Captainnnn-?"

"Just call me Captain. And yes, I'm in charge of makin' sure these pegasi are fit and ready to perform sonic rainbooms in their sleep."

"Aren't you bothered by the fact that only one pony has ever performed one?"

"Hehe, that's why I put a hundred bit reward for whoever does it first. I'm smart like that."

"I see."

"It's my job to turn this simple pegasi into the toughest ponies around! Why, when I'm done with em' even Celestia's Royal Guard would be jealous."

"Are you sure you can do that? I mean, Ponyville has never been part of any conflict in history."

"Of course I can! I have to, it's the Mayor's orders, and I understand the importance of listening to orders. I'm not one to let anypony down."

CRASH!

"OW! Watch it!"

"You watch it!"

Two pegasi crashed into each other, knocking each other to the ground. The Captain simply facehoofed.

"Uh, like I said, we aren't quite there yet."

Twilight looked at Rarity who simply shrugged.

"Now go on, GIT! Our meeting is over, you need to go see the Mayor, she called you in again to talk about that spell or somethin'."

"Um, are you sure you have everything handled?" Rarity asked nervously.

"Of course I do! Now go on, go help save the world!"

The Captain pushed Twilight and Rarity back onto the path leading back into town. Rarity simply huffed in annoyance.

"Come on Rarity, let's go help the Mayor."

===

-Three Days Later-

Pinkie Pie

This was going to be so exciting! Pinkie Pie could barely control herself, she was bouncing around in excitement. The Project wasn't even supposed to begin until tomorrow, but she was already excited about it.

Pinkie Pie hadn't been part of the project, but that was fine by her, all she wanted to do was watch anyway.

"Wow, I'm so excited! I've never been so excited! Well, except for that one time...no...wait...I've never been this excited!" Pinkie Pie was hopping around her room happily. "There's going to be so many sonic rainbooms!"

The element of danger involved didn't seem to bother her. The fact that some ponies wouldn't even make it back didn't bother her either. In fact, it seemed to make her more excited.

Pinkie Pie pictured what might happen to a pony when they performed a sonic rainboom. She pictured a pony going faster and faster until they exploded in a flash of color and giggled to herself.

She couldn't care less what happened to the cloud or the ponies trying to break it, she just wanted to see a sonic rainboom again.

Nothing else mattered to her.

Twilight Sparkle

Twilight shook her head, trying to keep herself awake. She had been studying up on the technique for borrowing another unicorn's magic and she

had been awake for the past 48 hours.

Rarity poked her head around the corner of the library's basement.

"Look Twilight, I said I would help you but you can't learn anything if you drool all over your books and smear the pages. You need some sleep!"

"No..I don't...I have to...keep studying..."

"Really Twilight, you need to go to bed! Just look at your mane, it's filthy! You haven't slept in two days, how are you supposed to help the pegasi if you are asleep?"

"But-"

"No buts! You need rest! Everypony else is already prepared for tomorrow, I'll keep studying for you and tell you everything I find ok?"

"I..ok...fine...I'll go to be-zzzzzzzzzzz"

Twilight's head fell on her book, finally succumbing to her weariness.

"Awww, aren't you just adorable when you're asleep?" Rarity grinned and carried Twilight up the stairs to her bed.

"Now you get all the sleep you can, we've got important things to do tomorrow."

Rarity shut off the light and walked downstairs.

"And it's going to be a very busy day..."

-The Next Day-

-Project Day-

Princess Celestia

Princess Celestia walked through the plains of Equestria, not knowing where she was headed. She had awoken in the middle of a field without

any indication of where she was. She didn't recognize anything around her, she had the entire land of Equestria memorized, but she didn't recognize where she was.

She theorized that Nightmare Moon somehow changed the landscape, perhaps pushing the cities and towns away from each other.

Either that, or she had destroyed them outright. But Nightmare Moon didn't want to destroy the world, she wanted to rule it. The thought cheered her up, but only a little. All she wanted to do now was find her friends and rebuild everything Nightmare Moon had undone.

As she walked, she saw a small yellow lump on the grass ahead, she ran towards it. As she approached, she realized it was the shape of a pony.

Fearing the worst, she mentally braced herself for a gruesome sight. Her fears were indeed realized.

A yellow pegasus was lying on the ground, her beautiful pink hair a tangled mess. She lay curled up on the ground, clutching a grey flower. Celestia could only stare at the unparalleled beauty that had once occupied this body.

The pony looked as if she had been walking for days, her hooves showed spots of red from where she had stepped on the odd rock or sharp branch. Her eyes looked worried and were stained with streaks of moisture down her face.

Celestia knelt down next to the pony and pressed her head against their body. She couldn't feel that warm life that everyone gave off, hers had faded away not too long ago. Only a cold shell of what once was remained.

Celestia shed a single tear for the life that was lost. She focused her magic, her horn responded by glowing faintly. The yellow body began to glow softly, not resisting the magic. Celestia whispered a blessing to the lost pony, concentrating what magic she had left on the fragile body.

It began to glow brighter and brighter until it couldn't be seen beneath the veil of light. Sensing she was finished, Celestia stopped her magic. When the light faded, the print in the dirt was all that was left of the body.

Fluttershy could finally have peace.

Celestia looked past where the pegasus used to lay and saw a trail of flower petals going off into the distance. That had to be it. That just had to be the way she had to go, Celestia could feel an urge to go in the direction of the flower petals.

She knew now where she was headed, she was going to go find her most faithful student. Twilight would need her now more than ever, she had to find her.

Celestia pushed herself off of the ground and followed the trail of flower petals. She knew now what she had to do.

Mayor Mare

"Mayor! Mayor Mare get up!"

A voice shook the Mayor out of her sleep.

"Get up! You're going to be late! You're supposed to start the project soon!"

"Oh dear! I over-slept, tell them I'll be right there."

The pony that woke up the Mayor ran outside to tell the crowd of ponies waiting in the town square.

Well, Mayor Mare thought to herself, this was it. Time for all this planning to go into action. Time to fight for our right to have the sun shine down once again. Hopefully it would help the Princess, wherever she was. If she was still alive, maybe we could give her her power back?

Only one way to find out, she thought. She stepped outside to the podium, it was time to give her last speech. A crowd of cheering ponies answered her presence. Ponies of all different species and colors were holding banners and stomping their hooves.

Some of the pegasi were already wearing their new horseshoes, crafted by

the most skilled earth ponies in town.

Mayor Mare scanned the crowd, she found so much courage in these ponies. They were willing to potentially risk their lives for the cause. For the first time in her career, she was speechless.

"Fillies and Gentlecolts, I come before you a very proud pony. I am so very proud of you all, willing to put absolutely everything on the line. It makes me proud to be your leader..."

Mayor Mare hung her head.

"I have said everything I can to you, there is nothing left to do but take action. So let us fight, and win!"

The crowd cheered again, proud to have made her so proud of them.

"For the glory of the Princess and the sun! We strike at midday!"

She turned and left her town cheering behind her, she needed a moment to herself before the big attack.

-One Hour Later-

The Captain

"All right ponies, listen up!"

All the pegasi were lined up in formation in the park which was cleared for this very event.

"I know a lot of you are scared, and I know that no one has been able to perform a sonic rainboom yet, but that doesn't matter! Failure in practice means nothing! You can perform a hundred sonic rainbooms on the ground, but if you can't up there, then what's the point?"

"The only thing that matters is what happens in that cloud, you got that? I've seen a town full of peaceful ponies turn into a mean fightin' machine! You can do it, I know you can."

The ponies in front of him stood as stiff as a board.

"Or so help me I will tie a rock to you and make you do two sonic rainbooms! But enough of my gabberin', you all got your horseshoes, they've all been enchanted, so what are we waiting for?"

The Captain scanned his troops.

"Let's go save the world!"

Twilight Sparkle

"Ok...here we go..." She said to herself, trying to calm herself down.

She was positioned in the middle of the town, in front of a few groups of pegasi.

"You all remember the plan? A, B, and C teams will go in first, start to scramble it up. D and E teams, you go left side, F and G hit right. The rest will go in their formations."

"Yeah yeah, let's go already!"

Twilight inhaled, trying to gather her magic. This was going to be one of the biggest spells she ever cast. Her horn lit up, shooting sparkles outward.

A purple beam of magic shot into the sky, it smashed into the grey cloud and created a purple star where it hit. It broke through the underside and created a large hole.

"GO! And may Celestia's light guide you should you find it!" Twilight yelled her blessing to the groups of pegasi.

"Let's do this!" One of the pegasi shouted.

"Ad maiorem dei gloriam." The Captain whispered under his breath.

WOOOOSH!

Twilight was deafened by the sound of two dozen pegasi taking off with the

force of a dragon. They flew higher and higher, out of the town and into the oppressive cloud. Twilight could only watch and hope they would make it.

The pegasi slammed into the grey cloud, filling it with the colors of their bodies. They began to fly in circles in their formations, disrupting the bottom of the cloud. Two teams of three pegasi in an arrow shape broke in beside them, easily speeding through the discombobulated cloud.

"So far so good." Twilight said. "All right Captain, you're up!"

"Gotcha!" The Captain saluted and flew back to the army of pegasi waiting in the park. "You all know the plan, so let's bring our princess back!"

WOOOOOSH!

The rest of the town's pegasi flew into the air, getting into their formations and awaiting their turn to go.

Twilight cast another beam into the cloud, opening another hole for another pegasus to fly in. They broke in without any trouble. Another broke in, and another, and another.

"I don't like this Captain, this is too easy. Nightmare Moon hasn't done a thing to it. I don't like this one bit." Twilight said.

"I know what you mean, maybe she's just waiting for all of us to get in so she can attack everyone at once."

"Yeah, but with those horseshoes they'll be safe from lightning."

"That's not what I'm worried about..."

Inside the cloud dozens of ponies were flying as fast as they could, desperately trying to perform the fabled sonic rainboom.

Suddenly a loud voice could be heard over sounds of flapping wings and lightning.

"HAHAHA! ARE YOU SERIOUS?! You are honestly ALL trying this now? Oh this is too good! You little foals can't do a thing! Go ahead and try, just

like that one blue pony!"

The clouds began to stir up, the winds getting stronger and stronger. The lightning picked up its ferocity, striking the town below. Some of the ponies began to get scattered, a few formations breaking up.

"Oh no..." Twilight gawked at the swirling cloud.

"It's her isn't it?" The Captain shouted. "Fine! This changes nothing! It wouldn't be a battle if it were easy! Twilight, keep using your magic, we need to get as many of us in there as possible!"

Lightning struck a flower shop, frying the weather pane on the roof. Twilight shot another few holes in the cloud, allowing a few more ponies inside the warzone.

"HELP! SOMEPONY HELP ME!" A pony cried out inside the cloud. There was no one around to help him, a darker cloud swirled over his body, causing him to cry out again. The cloud moved away, letting his limp body fall.

"LOOK!" Somepony shouted, pointing to the body falling out the bottom of the cloud.

"I got him!" Lyra shouted. She grabbed his falling body using her magic. She was one of the few unicorns that had not given Twilight their magic, in case of emergencies.

Not unlike this one.

"Is he ok?" "Is he alive?" "What happened?" Ponies gathered around his body.

He didn't move as Lyra carried him to the town hall.

"Oh no...I don't think they realize what they are up against." Lyra sighed.

Inside the cloud layer, more and more pegasi were either losing their formations or their lives. The dark clouds chasing down the ponies, swirling around them then releasing their limp bodies. Everyone was shouting in

panic.

"Where are you?"

"Where is everyone?"

"It's right behind me!"

"Don't touch the darker clouds!"

"Somepony help!"

"What's going on?"

"Where's the Captain?!"

"Don't let it get me!"

"Look out!"

BOOOOM!

"What was that?" Twilight shouted.

An explosion rocked the clouds, shaking the very air around everyone. On the ground, a hole could be seen in the cloud layer. Someone had done it.

Someone had performed a sonic rainboom.

"I don't believe it! Somepony did it! Captain, get the rest of your team in there now!"

"It's about time I got to show Nightmare Moon what's what myself!" The Captain shouted.

The Captain and his team shot into the sky, Twilight spell flashing beside them. They easily broke through the bottom, the world around them shifting to a mad warzone. Ponies were yelling everywhere.

Lightning struck the town again, lighting another building on fire. The

pegasi who didn't volunteer for the attack grabbed buckets of water to put the fires out.

"This isn't working..." Twilight said to herself. "Come on everypony...just hang in there..."

"CAPTAIN! I can't do this sir!" A pony in the Captain team yelled.

"Yes you can! The only thing stopping you is yourself!"

"But...I can't! I never have!"

"Neither did whoever it was that just did one! What's your name pony?"

"S-Storm sir!"

"Well Storm, you got a family? Someone you care about?"

"Y-Yes sir, another pegasis named Cinnamon!"

"Do you love him?"

"Y-Yes sir!"

"Did you ever tell him?"

"No...I never had the chance."

"Well here's your chance! You do this and then you go find this pony, you go start a family you hear me!?"

Meanwhile in a small house near the edge of town a pegasis lay curled up in terror in their closet. The grey pony kept trying to focus her eyes.

"Mommy?" A small purple unicorn opened the closet to where the cross-eyed pony was hiding.

"Why are you hiding in the closet?"

"L-Little Muffin?" The yellow-haired pegasis pulled the foal closer.

"Mommy, I thought you said to never be 'fraid?" The small unicorn asked her mother.

Another explosion rocked the house. Derpy Hooves whimpered in fear again, tears forming in her eyes.

"You said to always be a super strong and brave pony!" The foal looked deep into her mothers eyes with a look of sadness.

Derpy looked back at her foal, she had fought hard to keep this child, and here she was cowering in the corner. Her crossed eyes fought back tears, but the foal could still tell she was crying.

The cloud had turned into utter chaos, ponies running away from the darker clouds and others trying to go fast enough to break the sound barrier.

"I-I will sir!" Storm stammered back to her Captain. The clouds drowning her words in the chaos.

"You have something to fight for! The only thing keeping you from him is yourself! You have the ability to do a sonic rainboom, I know you do!"

"But Captain, I ca-"

BOOOOOM!

A grey and yellow blur shot past them and created a shockwave bigger then they had ever seen. A large hole formed in the middle of the clouds, almost blinding the ponies with it's light.

"Was that-?"

A hole was torn into the cloud, blasting away any of it caught in the blast.

"See? If she can do it, so can you! Now GO! Go save the world!"

The Captain pushed Storm away from himself, throwing her towards the swirling clouds.

BOOOOOM!

The ground shook from another pony breaking the sound barrier. There were a few small dots along the underside of the cloud where the ponies had performed the sonic rainboom.

"It's working! We might just be able to pull this off after all..." Twilight said.

"WOO HOO!" A pink pony skipped around the town square. "This is so much fun!"

"Pinkie Pie? What are you doing? Run, it's not safe out here!" Twilight yelled at her.

Pinkie Pie giggled, "Oh Twilight, you party pooper! It's like one big party out here! BOOM! Haha!"

Pinkie Pie bounced off, laughing like a little school filly. Twilight shook her head, she didn't believe it, ponies were dying and she treated it like a joke!?

She didn't have time for this, she had to help the other pegasi. It felt like hours had passed, no one was left at peace, everypony in town was frantically trying to put out fires or help those who were wounded.

It was war.

No one had said it, the word was never spoken that day, but it was war.

It was war against the Night Goddess.

BOOOM!

It was chaos, ponies were frantically running or flying around the small town of Ponyville. The sounds of chaos were running rampant throughout the town, many were panicking, but the rest were either pounding their hooves on the ground or staring up at the sky intently.

The sky was black with the shadows of the quick bodies of pegasi and the swirling cloud of grey above.

BOOOM!

Another explosion shocked the ground, and a flash came from within the cloud layer. It parted and let a small column of that impossibly sweet sunlight through. Earth ponies and unicorns looked up at the cloud, it had holes dotting its underside, each letting through another column of sunlight.

Lightning flashed across the town, striking the top of another thatched roof and causing a burst of flame.

Almost every pegasus was in the air by now, desperately trying with their lives to break into the bottom of the cloud layer. Some had succeeded, others did not.

BOOOM!

Another shockwave as the sound barrier was pierced yet again.

"Come on! Come on!" Cloudkicker banged her hooves on the ground, desperate to fly into the chaos.

Twilight concentrated for the hundredth time that day, she grunted and a beam of magic shot out of her horn and pierced a tiny hole in the oppressive cloud layer.

"GO! And may Celestia's light guide you should you find it!" Twilight yelled her blessing she gave to all the other pegasi she had helped into the cloud layer.

Into their deaths.

Cloudkicker shot into the air, leaving a light violet streak behind her. Her eyes were only focused on the swirling grey above Ponyville.

Twilight looked with determination and hope up at the pony who was speeding away. When Cloudkicker pierced the clouds Twilight sunk her head. She didn't want it to be like this, she didn't want to waste lives to try and bring back the sun.

BOOOM!

It was too late for that.

"Oh ponies of such little size..."

BOOOM!

"Why do you fight the night you so despise?"

Twilight froze, her ears hearing an icy voice through the chaos. She recognized that voice.

"You...what are you doing here?" Twilight asked, taking a pose ready to defend herself.

Swirls of dark magic came out of the ground and took the form of a zebra wearing a brown cloak. Her yellow eyes pierced through the crowds and took the air out of Twilight's lungs.

"It matters not what I have to say, I simply remind you you will never see the day." Zecora smiled that sinister smile.

"I guess Nightmare sent you to stir up more trouble? Because we already have enough of that." Twilight wanted nothing to do with the evil figure in front of her. "And I will not let you interfere!"

Zecora simply stood and smiled.

"If you won't go peacefully, then I guess I will have to make you!" Twilight shot a purple stream of magic at Zecora.

Zecora leaped to the side, easily dodging the attack. Twilight shifted nervously, Zecora had easily out done her last time when she had taken Fluttershy, and even with all this new magic she had, Twilight didn't know if she could beat her.

Still, she had to try, she couldn't let anything get in the way of their attempt to bring back the daytime. She had only glimpsed at a few spells that had any sort of offensive use, and that was only so she could find a spell with

enough power to penetrate the clouds.

She never thought she would have to make use of them. Yet here she was.

Zecora shifted the saddlebags she was wearing and pulled out a number of vials. Before Twilight could guess what they were, Zecora threw one at a nearby building. The bottle crashed against the straw and stone and exploded in a ball of fire, engulfing much of the house.

Twilight sat in shock, she watched as the building started to burn to the ground. Zecora threw another bottle at another random building, roasting it as well. Twilight concentrated, trying to find a spell that could quickly extinguish fire, she had to keep as much of the town safe as she could.

Zecora laughed and threw a third fire bottle. Twilight snapped her eyes open and caught the bottle with her magic and threw it back at the zebra. Zecora vanished as fire exploded around where she stood.

Reappearing behind Twilight, Zecora spoke into her ear.

"I see you zealously want back the light, then let the fires illuminate our fight!"

She knocked Twilight back with a swift kick of her hooves. Twilight grunted, slamming hard into the dirt. She would have to think of something fast, she had no idea how to beat Zecora or even how to stop her from destroying anything else.

Twilight shook her head and got to her hooves. She focused her magic, she needed to get rid of her potions as quickly as she could, without them, she would be much less of a threat. Twilight focused her magic on a patch of dirt on the ground. She tossed the dirt up into the air, creating a dust storm that pelted the cloaked figure.

Twilight charged at her, head lowered. Getting as close as she could, she turned to kick the bags containing the vials. Zecora twisted around and returned her kick with another kick of her own, sweeping Twilight off her feet.

Twilight shook the dust of her face again. She would have to work with her

strengths if she was going to win, and that meant staying as far away as she could. She focused her magic again and released it as a bright ball at Zecora.

Zecora brought up a purple shield in front of her body. Just before the sphere made contact with the shield, Twilight yanked her head, shifting the sphere's flight. The magic ball went past the shield and impacted the saddlebags, blowing them all up.

Zecora disappeared in a huge fireball, her fire potions detonating all at once. Twilight heaved, it worked, but it took quite a bit of effort to move the ball of energy that quickly, but after a few tense moments, Zecora was still no where to be found.

"Woah! That was so cool!"

Twilight turned to see a younger pony yelling to her. She grinned sheepishly at the compliment. She hated fighting, but Zecora had to be stopped.

"That was probably the coolest thing I've ever seen! She was like 'WHAM!' and you were all 'ZOOSH!' and she was li-ZZZZZSNAP!"

The pony was cut off mid-sentence by a lighting bolt crashing into their body. The bolt flashed and turned their body to ash in an instant. Twilight turned in the direction of the flash and saw Zecora looking at the ashes with a smile, her eyes glowing yellow.

"You...why did?...How?" Twilight gawked, completely at a loss for words.

Zecora threw her head back and laughed. "You have learned much I certainly admit, but now I must end our little fit." Zecora launched a bolt of dark magic at Twilight, launching her across the street.

BOOOOM!

The sounds of a sonic rainboom could be heard in the skies above. A hole opened up and shined a column of light onto the street they were fighting on. Even if Twilight was losing hope, the rest of the town was still fighting the battle.

Twilight lay on the ground, cringing in pain. Rarity was trying to help transport water from the town's well when she saw the evil figure knock her friend to the ground. She put down the buckets and ran towards the two.

"As much as I enjoy our little fun, your time in this place is done." Zecora stopped smiling, her eyes glowing again. She gathered more magic, getting ready to shoot another magical lightning bolt.

"TWILIGHT!" Rarity came running down the street, trying to save her friend.

Zecora launched the bolt straight at Twilight, Twilight's eyes widened as she watched death approach her at incredible speed. Just as it was about to hit her, a white pony jumped in front of her, holding her arms out wide.

Rarity was slammed by the bolt and was instantly turned to ashes. Twilight's eyes shot open, unable to believe what just happened. Rarity had just given her life to protect her, she lay on the ground, her mouth wide open.

Zecora only smiled that terrible smile once more.

"No...Rarity...you...I can't believe this...no...." Twilight stared at her friend, reduced to nothing but ashes. She closed her eyes, forcing back tears.

This couldn't be happening, there was no way, absolutely no way! NO! This was not happening! Twilight beat the ground, feeling rage flare up inside her. Nightmare Moon had destroyed so much, but this was too far.

She could never let her get away with this. She would destroy this foul beast standing before her.

"You..." Twilight wearily got on her hooves, "You did this...I won't let you get away with this any of this, not anymore..."

She felt magic start to build up inside her, fueled by her pure rage and pain.

"You monster..."

Her horn glowed softly, illuminating her face. She felt power rise up inside

her.

"I am going to destroy you..."

She couldn't even feel the incredibly powerful magic flaring up inside her anymore, all she cared about was killing this horrific monster.

"I AM GOING TO KILL YOU!"

Twilight's eyes shot open, her pupils flared pure white. Her hair flew outward, pushed away by the raw uncontrollable magic. She floated into the air surrounded by pure pulsing magic. Magic unlike anything the town had ever seen came from her body, causing cracks in the ground and shaking the very earth.

In a flash, she charged towards Zecora, bent on nothing less than crushing the life out of the zebra. Zecora jumped out the way faster than any anyone could see, zipping backwards down the streets of Ponyville.

Twilight chased her, flying on a cloud of pure magic. She saw nothing but her target, shooting back and forth throughout the streets. They chased each other through alleyways and parks, flying around corners, buildings and plants becoming a blur.

BOOOOM!

Another shockwave shook the town. Another pony had succeeded in their plight. Ponies flying everywhere saw two figures running through town faster than they had ever seen. One was flashing bright purple, the ponies could feel the raw power coming from the unicorn.

Twilight threw random bolts of magic at her target. Zecora dodged each one as she ran through the town. With every missed shot, she became more and more angry, feeling more and more magic control her body.

She didn't care about her body anymore, she didn't care if beating this enemy meant her death. All she cared about was murdering this creature that had taken away her best friend.

Zecora laughed over her shoulder at her pursuer. Twilight screamed at her

again, another wave of magic pulsing from her body, shaking the ground anew.

Princess Celestia

Celestia walked along the lonely path to wherever she was headed. She still had no idea, but wherever that pony had headed from had to be where she needed to go.

She hoped that she was headed in the direction of her student's last known location, Ponyville.

A powerful earthquake shook Celestia's hooves. She looked up and saw a bright light flash off in the distance.

"Is that-? No, it can't be, not again." Celestia stared as the light slowly dimmed. "It is..." Celestia broke into a gallop, running full speed towards the direction of the light.

"I'm coming my faithful student! Please hold on until I arrive! Do not let yourself lose control!" She ran as fast as she could, determined to reach her student in order to save her life.

And possibly the lives of others.

Twilight Sparkle

"I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!" Twilight yelled as she launched balls of magic at Zecora. Zecora dodged each one, they crashed into houses and buildings, blowing up half of anything they touched.

"That's it little pony!" Zecora taunted, abandoning her rhyming mannerisms. "Kill me! Crush me!"

Twilight grew even angrier, magic continuing to overtake her being. Zecora ran into the middle of town and turned around to face her pursuer. Twilight shot another blast at Zecora, who easily jumped away.

Zecora's eyes glowed and she shot another lightning spell at the town square. The bolt hit the town hall with an enormous explosion. Twilight

stopped and stared at the exploding building for a moment. The town hall was reduced to nothing but blackened debris in only a few moments.

"You...WHAT HAVE YOU DONE!" Twilight screamed. Her eyes lit up once more, this time even stronger than before. All those ponies that were in the building that now lay in ashes.

She would avenge them all.

"WOULD YOU JUST DIE!" Twilight shouted at the top of her lungs.

Then she felt it, she felt magic take complete control of her. She couldn't stop the powerful flow of uncontrollable magic rip its way through her. Her thoughts immediately shifted away from trying to kill Zecora to pure panic.

It was happening again, she had lost control of her magic. It wasn't the first time, but unlike before, she was only a little filly. Now her magic had grown considerably, she didn't know what would happen.

Twilight floated uncontrollably in the air, squirming her limbs in panic, trying to stop herself from causing any more destruction. But she couldn't, she couldn't stop it, not anymore.

The ground shook harder and harder. Ponies stopped running in fear and stopped to look at this new disturbance. The purple haze around Twilight grew with each passing second. If she couldn't find a way to stop it, the whole town might be destroyed.

A lightning bolt shot out from Twilight and blasted a hole in a nearby building. The magic was quickly growing more and more out of control, pulsing with flashes of lightning and sparkles.

Zecora stared at the possessed unicorn and nodded her head.

Her work here was done.

Zecora vanished, leaving Twilight and the town. Another flash, this one obliterating a well. Cracks in the ground formed and slithered away from Twilight. The ponies on the ground were being pushed away from her by the force of the wind.

This was it, Twilight thought. If I can't stop this then everyone is dead because of me.

It's my fault again...

BOOOOOM!

Yet another pony had pierced the sound barrier, creating a beautiful circle of color. The ponies in the cloud were still trying to break up the oppressive grey, completely unaware of the purple pony tearing apart the town they were trying to protect.

"Hey Twilight!" Pinkie Pie hopped happily out into the street, seemingly unhindered by the force of the winds. She didn't have a care in the world. "Is this some party or what!"

"Pinkie..." Twilight managed to grunt out a few words. "Run! You...have to...get...out of here..."

Suddenly another lightning bolt snapped out and vaporized Pinkie Pie, reducing another of Twilight's friends to a pile of ash.

Nonononononononononono this isn't happening! Twilight tried to hold herself back but she couldn't move, a slave to the unstoppable magic coming from her body.

This can't be happening, Twilight thought. Her mind was wracked with guilt and pain and heartache. She had caused yet another one of her friends deaths, and if she couldn't stop this, the rest of the town would follow her into oblivion.

The clouds overhead began to react to the powerful magic happening below. They started to swirl and twist around into a funnel above Twilight. Another wave of dark clouds came out of the funnel and slithered about the clouds.

"What's going on?"

"What is that?"

"SOME PONY HELP ME!"

"Is this the end of the world?"

Pegasi were shouting everywhere, trying to keep away from the new threat. The darkness swirled around and around, growing larger and threatening to envelop the entire sky.

"By the Goddess..." The Captain of the pegasi whispered to himself.

Lightning struck out and vaporized a pony that had flown too close.

"I thought these horseshoes protected us from lightning!" A pony flying with the Captain yelled.

"They do! But this is different, way different!" He yelled back.

A yellow pony flew straight past them and straight into the darkness screaming something incomprehensible.

BOOOOM!

A sonic rainboom ripped through the dark clouds, tearing a hole straight through them. But before anyone could celebrate, it reformed almost immediately, leaving no trace of the mighty rainboom.

"Oh Celestia! Captain what are we gonna do?!" The pony pleaded to her commander.

"We're gonna die! We're gonna die like soldiers!" The Captain yelled back.

He flew straight at the darkness, ready to give everything he had left to do what good he could against the threat.

It wasn't much.

Lightning circulated out of Twilight's body and up into the funnel gathering above her. It started flashing a dozen times a second. Ponies were being

picked out of the air left and right, those stuck on the ground tried to dodge bolts of magic or hide in their homes.

Most were obliterated.

What have I done? Was the only thought going through Twilight's head as she struggled and squirmed.

As the ground quaked and the sky roared, Twilight felt one large push from within her. Something had caused the last bits of magic to release themselves all at once. Twilight screamed as the magic made its way through her to the world.

The lightning and the earthquakes all stopped at once. For a moment, it was all quiet. Before she could think a huge burst of light came from inside her, along with a wall of pure magic.

It exploded outwards, overtaking homes and ponies running from the blast. The explosion of magic engulfed the entire town in a matter of seconds. Anypony caught in the blast simply vanished, not even their ashes remained.

The entire cloud broke into one large mass of darkness. A lightning bolt bigger than anyone had ever seen shot out of Twilight and into the darkness. It spread instantly throughout it, not leaving single inch unsinged.

Every pony in the air and on the ground were gone in only a few seconds. The town was in a state of ruin, and no one was even left alive to see it.

Maybe it was the end of the world.

When the thunderclap had passed and the sky dispersed of electricity, Twilight was still left in the town square, floating above a crater that had dug itself into the earth. Tears streamed down Twilight's face.

What have I done?!

Twilight's mind tore itself apart over what had just happened. She had destroyed the town and everyone in it.

And she still couldn't control it.

But above all the chaos, all the magic coursing through her body, all the struggles of her mind she felt something else.

A presence.

Someone was here.

Princess?!