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Warning: These stories are incredibly grimdark and reference and feature murder, torture, mutilation, and death. Reader discretion is advised.

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Silent Ponyville 1

Chapter 1

Pinkie Pie's eyes shot open. Her face was buried in her wet pillow, stained from her tears. She quivered as she very gently tried to lift herself up from the bed. She was afraid of seeing her bed soaked, covered in blood, evidence of a horrific deed she had committed... but her bed was dry, save for her tears.

She gently placed a hoof to her face, feeling the still fresh tears on her cheek. She shivered as her hair moved to cover her eyes, still in shock at the sights she had seen.

"How... how could I..." the vivid images of the nightmare she had just slept through came back in her mind. Horrific cries rang vividly in her ears, her coat soaked with blood, the feel of slicing open another living being... it felt so real. Pinkie Pie shook her head viciously, trying to remove these thoughts from her head.

"Why am I having these dreams!?" She rammed her hooves into her head, trying to stop the images that were assaulting her. For the past two weeks she'd been having restless nights of sleep. She was having nightmares every night, the severity of what they showed were getting worse and worse with each one.

The first dream hadn't been too scary...she was just attacked by a monster, she had shrugged it off easily, and it wasn't too different from a normal day really. From there the monsters changed, one night she was attacked by the Pony of Death who wanted her soul for damnation, another night it was a faceless slender pony whose presence quaked her very being, then the next night she suffered from a disease and starvation as her body had begun to rot but was denied death from the pain...

She could handle those dreams. They weren't real after all; a good party with her friends made all those scary thoughts go away. She'd tried changing her diet for a day to see if the bad dreams would go away, and it worked for a night, but only for a night. The next night she had dreamt of being a monster, one with sharp teeth and claws. She was the monster and she had attacked and eaten herself. She still remembered the gagging taste the dream had left in her mouth.

The next dream had her terrorizing ponies throughout Ponyville; she'd wrecked homes, crops, products and lives. Then the next night she attacked each of her friends, she could feel the berserk rage of the monster as it had slashed and tore them apart indiscriminately, but at least it was a quick death, her friends didn't suffer in that dream.

But the dream last night was different...it was personal. She was a monster again last night...but it was different. She was just herself, no fangs, no claws, no berserk rage, but a monster. In the dream she had captured her friend, her dearest friend Rainbow Dash. She had taken sharp objects and...

Pinkie dashed into her bathroom, before emptying the contents of her stomach into the toilet, as the vivid images of what she'd done in her dream flashed before her once more. She felt wretched, how could her mind even come anywhere close to thinking of such horrible, horrific things!? She loved her friends! She loved them more than the sun, then her sweets, then her parties, then life itself! Especially Rainbow Dash! Rainbow Dash was the coolest, most awesome fun-loving Pony she'd ever met! If she wanted to just hang out and have fun or pull some pranks or share some sweets or help throw a great party it was Rainbow Dash who was there for her.

She wiped her mouth as she groggily looked at herself in the mirror. Her mane was straight, her eyes were bloodshot with bags under her eyes, her coat was dull with a sickly look, and she was breathing quite heavily. She looked terrible.

She ran some cold water and repeatedly splashed her face with it. She really, really, REALLY wanted to go see Rainbow Dash...she had to know she was okay but...at the same time she couldn't do it until the memories of that dream had faded some more...and she had to get out of

Sugar Cube corner for the day...she wouldn't be able to hold back anymore of her stomach if she even smelled a cupcake.

Pinkie tried to stay in the shadows of the buildings as she quietly walked through Ponyville. The fresh air and warm sun weren't any comfort today. She didn't want to look at anypony either, worried their faces would trigger another flash of the awful images in her mind. She had nowhere in mind to go, she just had to wander, had to get away from Sugar Cube corner, from her room, from anything that would remind her...

She looked up and around, she had lost track of how much time had passed since she started her little trek, thankful no one had stopped to ask her why she was acting so differently today. She knew the other ponies had started to notice dips in her cheeriness, ever since the dreams she'd been throwing more parties than ever before, but more and more they weren't enough. Twilight had even asked her if something was the matter and she'd done her best to reassure her friend...

Wait! Twilight!

Twilight was a great magical pony! If anypony could figure out a way to stop these dreams she did! She winced at the idea of having to tell Twilight all about the horrific things her mind had imagined about her and her friends...but maybe she wouldn't have to, Twilight might find a solution without having to know what the dreams were of.

She picked up her pace, running straight for the library. It didn't take her long, she figured her body must've been taking her here by instinct; it did have a funny way of working that way. She ran to the door and knocked a little frantically. It didn't take long for the door to creak open.

"Oh, hey Pinkie Pie." Twilight said surprised but happy to see her friend, "Is this an invitation to a party agai-" Twilight stopped as she blinked, noticing the distressed look of her friend, "...Are you alright Pinkie? You don't look so good."

"No...No I'm not good Twilight...Can I come in?" Pinkie said, minding her manners for once.

“Of course Pinkie, please, make yourself at home.” Twilight said quickly offering her friend hospitality.

“Thank you...” Pinkie said as she quietly trotted into the house. She quickly headed for the table in the center of the room and sitting on one of the red velvet pillows before it. She rested her head on the table, closing her eyes as she took a soft sigh to try and relax, remembering her friend’s favorite hot beverage.

“Can I get you something to drink? Perhaps some hot chocolate?” Twilight said

“No sweets please...if you have some coffee that’d be great...no cream or sugar...” Pinkie softly groaned.

“No sweets?” Twilight said in shock, “Oh my...this really IS serious!” She said as she quickly prepared her friend the hot drink she requested. She levitated it before Pinkie, who groggily took it and began to drink. She grimaced at the bitter taste.

“Pinkie, what’s the matter? You can tell me.” Twilight said sitting down next to her downcast friend. Twilight could see the signs, her mane was straight, her coat was dull, her eyes bloodshot with bags under them and most noticeable of all...she wasn’t radiating the energetic aura of Pinkie Pie.

“Oh Twilight...Its awful!” Pinkie put her hooves over her head, “It’s the most awful thing that’s ever happened to me! I can’t even believe what’s happened to me it’s so awful! I can’t sleep, I can’t rest, even parties aren’t helping! I need relief, I need to stop this but everything I’ve tried only seems to make it worse!” Pinkie said her voice was quivering; Twilight couldn’t help but be surprised at how terrified her friend sounded.

“Pinkie...tell me, what exactly is this ‘awful’ thing that has happened.” Twilight tried to reassure Pinkie that everything would be alright. Pinkie took a big breath, steeling her nerves.

“I’ve been having nightmares Twilight.” Pinkie finally said, “Awful, horrible, relentless nightmares. I was throwing more parties to forget them, but they kept coming. I tried changing my diet, I tried relaxing before bed, I

even tried falling asleep in a handstand with a lemon in my mouth while in the shower. Nothing works...and last night's nightmare was the worse of them all."

"Nightmares?" Twilight said tapping her chin for a moment, "One second." She said as she got up and quickly ran over to a bookshelf. She began to pull out books checking them out, scanning them one by one, "No...no, no, no, not you, you're not right either..." It took about ten minutes before Twilight finally pulled a book and looked at it satisfied, "Ah-hah!" She said as she trotted back to the table and opening the book, flipping through the pages quickly.

"Nightmares," Twilight began after having stopped on a specific page, "A dream of strong negative emotions; a common occurrence that most ponies will experience. However, if the nightmares should persist or become more terrifying with each episode it could be several reasons: external forces such as medication or diet, which we've already ruled out," Twilight added an addendum, "External stress from recent physical or mental events or caused by a psychological event from anytime during the pony's life that has left a deep impact. There are several ways to determine what kind of nightmare is being experienced and what the best manner of treating them are." Twilight said before silently reading the next part.

"So, that book can help me stop the nightmares?" Pinkie asked, hope rising in her heart.

"Looks that way, of course it can't stop you from having nightmares for the rest of your life though, they're a normal part of sleep, but it can help you with your constant nightmare issue." She said still reading. "There's a spell in here that'll let me look into your mind and see the memories of your dreams, that way I can see what you've been dreaming about and apply the proper spell to try and help."

The hope that had risen inside of Pinkie fell into her gut like a boulder into a lake.

"No! No no no no no no Twilight!" Pinkie said shaking her head furiously, "You CAN'T see my dreams! They're...they're!" Pinkie covered her face with her hooves, "They're too horrible Twilight! I...I don't want

anypony to see what I've seen!" Her voice was trembling; tears were threatening to leave her eyes once more.

She looked up when she felt Twilight's hoof placed against her shoulder, the look of concern on her face.

"I can't imagine what kind of dreams you've been having Pinkie, but I can see the pain on your face. It's affecting who you are and I can't just let this go. You came to me for help and I'm going to help you. Please, you have to let me see what you've seen, so that I can help." Twilight pleaded to her friend. Pinkie lowered her head as she held back the tears burning at her eyes with all her might, swallowing hard as she knew her friend wanted to make everything better and might have the power to do so...

"Twilight..." Pinkie muttered in hushed breath, holding back a sob.

"Yes? What is it Pinkie?" Twilight asked, in a similar hushed voiced.

"Please...you have to promise me...that what you're about to see...w-won't change your opinion of me." Pinkie sniffed deeply.

"I swear Pinkie, I won't think of you as anything but the dear friend I know and love." Twilight said, Pinkie saw her smile, it was so reassuring, so comforting...

"P-Pinkie Pie swear?" Pinkie asked one last time. Twilight just seemed to smile a little amused.

"Cross my heart, hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye." Twilight did the motions of the Pinkie Pie swear, mimicking sticking the pastry into her face. Pinkie took a moment to let it sink in, then squeezed her eyes shut and lowered her head a little.

"A-Alright...I t-trust you Twilight." Pinkie Pie softly muttered, as she did her best to prepare for whatever was going to happen next.

Twilight nodded softly, as she remembered the spell from the book, her horn glowing with light as she concentrated on it. She gently swept hair covering Pinkie's forehead behind her ear to hold it, then gently tapped the tip of her horn against Pinkie's skull.

"LEAVE ME ALONE!" The Slender Pony approached regardless, the static screeched at her as it drew closer. Pain shocked her body from one side to the other as blood seemed to splatter and cloud her vision turning the world red. She fell to her knees trying to grasp reality, before the pain and sound became too much to bear.

There was a hole in her body. She could feel the worms wriggling in it, crawling up into her torso. They were eating her, eating her alive. The pain clawed into her very soul, but yet death would not come. Her body laid there, unflinching as the insects had their way, feeling every wriggle and slime of their bodies as they slid under her skin.

Bones crunched in her teeth as blood dripped down her chin. The fresh taste of gooey flesh slid down her throat. Sharp teeth bore down again into the side of an earth pony's neck as the pony's head fell from her body, giving her a good chunk of flesh to chew. The taste was revolting, but she craved it. She HAD to have it. She had to have more! Her teeth dug into the pony's skull, crushing the skull as the inner organs began to dribble into her mouth. She had to have more; this one would never be enough.

The screams had died down for now, but that wouldn't last for long.

"Why? Why are you doing this?" It was the pained and frantic cry of Rainbow Dash. She could see her tied down to a table, wings already sawn off, sawn off by her own hooves.

"Oh Rainbow Dash...everypony dies sometime." Her voice betrayed her as she pulled out a scalpel, "It's a simple concept really. You just have to think, 'Did my life meaning anything? Did I die with a purpose? Will my memory be left when I'm gone?' All are important questions you see." She walked towards Rainbow Dash; she could feel the murderous intent grasping at every fiber of her being.

“But...” Rainbow Dash hiccuped through the pain and tears, “I won’t have died for a good purpose... if you kill me.” Rainbow sobbed. “How could you do this to me?”

She raised her hoof and petted Rainbow Dash’s face. She leaned in close to her, there was an attraction she could never describe as having felt before. Her breath was hot and her body betrayed her mind, “Oh Rainbow Dash...If you don’t know the reason by now, you’ll never understand. This is just how things have to be.” She stepped back from her prisoner.

Rainbow only looked confused, but she would rectify that look. She gripped her scalpel and placed it at the base of Rainbow’s hip, and sliced down her leg. Pain overtook Rainbow’s face and voice as she began her delicate slicing operation. After all, she had to prepare the ingredients to be just right.

Twilight stumbled back. Her head kicked back instinctively, wanting to escape from the horrors inside of Pinkie’s mind. Twilight crashed into a book case, causing a cascade of books to fall onto her. She was breathing heavily, frantic and panicked. The spell had only taken a few seconds to complete, but the rush of all the dream memories flooded her all at once.

Those dreams were horrific...and so real...she had felt everything in those dreams, even though dreams should not normally contain such vivid feelings. The monster that attacked her...the feel of bugs crawling all throughout her skin and organs...the gagging taste of flesh in her throat...the torture...the acts she had committed...she wanted to vomit.

“Twilight?” Came a scared, timid, almost hushed voice.

Twilight snapped from her thoughts and looked up at her pink friend. She was trembling, trembling with fear as tears streamed down her eyes. That was right...these were the dreams Pinkie was having...the dreams that were terrifying her, the dreams that she had come to her for help with...

“Pinkie...” Twilight finally muttered, swallowing back her own emotions and stomach contents, “I...I had no idea...” she said shakily

getting to her feet and slowly walking back to her friend. She had to be strong right now.

“Twilight...” Pinkie sniffed through her sobs, “I’m sorry...I’m so sorry you saw them...” she closed her eyes, gasping for air through her sobs. Twilight quickly moved next to Pinkie, taking her into an embrace to hold her tight. Pinkie cried desperately into Twilight’s shoulder. Twilight held her dear friend, making sure she knew she had all of her support. The images may have had made her stomach twist, but her friend was more important than that.

“It’s okay Pinkie...” Twilight said once Pinkie’s sobs had started to calm down, “I can see how much these dreams have been eating at you...the Pinkie in those dreams is not you. So we just have to figure out why you’re having them.” Twilight said, letting her friend dearly know that she had in fact kept her promise. The Pinkie in her arms was nothing like the Pinkie that appeared in the dreams. Pinkie slowly nodded her head in agreement, before finally being able to stop her tears and let go of Twilight. Twilight turned to her book and flipped a few pages.

“Since we know it’s not your diet, we need to determine if it’s because of recent events or if it’s something much deeper in your psyche...so let’s start there. When did the dreams start happening?”

“Well...” Pinkie rubbed her face, trying to dry it some, “The dreams started about a few days after the Grand Galloping Gala...and they’ve been happening about every night for the last two weeks. They didn’t happen one night after I did change my diet, but then they just came back the next day...” Pinkie said trying to recall how often she’d have them.

“Hmmm...Well, the Gala was a pretty big incident. You certainly seemed fine at the Donut Shop...but what about after that? I know you said you had some business to attend to before you headed back to Ponyville, so we didn’t see you again till we were heading to the chariot.” Twilight wondered.

“...Well...after I’d spent time with you guys, I went and met with my sister Octavia. She was the one playing the Cello on stage during the gala. She was the main reason I was able to get away with my music antics while there. I wanted to go thank her for helping me try to liven things up.” Pinkie

said recalling the night, "She was a little mad at me at first for the mess I'd caused, but she forgave me and we ended up having a very fun chat about what we'd both been up to since we'd left the farm. After a little while it was time for me to go so we promised we'd keep better in touch."

Twilight pondered this, "Do you think it was that meeting with your sister that could've started the dreams?" Twilight asked curiously.

"I wouldn't understand that if she did," Pinkie said putting a hoof to her chin in thought, "We had fun that night...there wasn't anything that she said that was negative."

"Have you gotten a letter from her yet?"

"I did get one, but it was just letting me know that she was going to be performing a concert in Fillydelphia. She said that her band was touring around so that if I wanted to send her letters I'd have to address them to her band since the mail carriers know where they'll be." Pinkie said tilting her head in thought, "Again, there was nothing negative though..."

"Well, what about the last two weeks then? You seemed mostly fine, other than a few instances where you weren't as chipper." Twilight said remembering Pinkie Pie was a little less hyper then usual the last few days. She certainly could understand why now though.

"No...nothing significant. I've been throwing more parties because of the dreams, but it's just been life as usual in Ponyville..." Pinkie said shaking her head slowly.

"I see." Twilight went back to consulting her books, scanning the pages of the book, flipping through some more looking for what would be best to handle this.

"Here we are...it's another spell. This one is a bit more of a mind delve; its intention is to find the source of your problems though. It'll let us find out why you're having these dreams, be it a minor or major reason." Twilight said confidently, "So don't worry Pinkie, I'm going to make sure you'll be all better in no time." She gave her friend a confident smile.

"Thank you Twilight..." Pinkie said giving a soft smile back.

“Alright, the book says the spell can be a little disorientating at first, but that you’ll get used to it. You ready?” Twilight asked. Pinkie gave her a nod. “Then here goes nothing.” Twilight said taking a deep breath as she concentrated once more, her horn flaring up with light. She lowered it towards Pinkie’s forehead once more and gently touched her.

Pinkie’s mind did a flip and felt like it fell into a hazy fog. She lost track of her surroundings as it felt like she was falling from a very far height. The world was spinning around her as she felt like wind was rushing past her. Her stomach was rolling inside of her as she was inside of this intense feeling. She wondered just how long she was going to feel this way, when she finally felt the world stabilizing with a thud that knocked the wind out of her.

She gasped for breath, coughing a bit before feeling the sensation of a ground beneath her. She lifted her head up and shook it lightly, before slowly opening her eyes. She was still in the library...that was for sure. But Twilight was missing, why would she have left her alone in the library?

“Twilight?” She called out, but the only thing that came back was a hollow echo. This was bizarre; the library seemed eerily quiet, even more so than usual when Twilight wasn’t around. She looked onto table noticing two things on it, a bag and a note. She carefully read the words on the note:

You must cross the darkness to see the light.

Pinkie looked at the piece of paper a little confused. Did Twilight write this? If she did...what did it mean? Was she supposed to take this bag with her? Twilight must know what she’s doing after all; she wouldn’t just abandon her here without a good reason...

Pinkie opened the bag, looking to see if there was anything inside of it.

There were two things inside. The first one was obvious what it was, it was a lantern. Inside was oil with a wick. There was a knob on the side; she assumed it would turn the lantern on. If she was going to use it, she’d

have to make sure not to use up all the oil. She gently placed the lantern back into the bag.

“What’s this?” She asked as she pulled out a rectangular device. It had a dial on it and an antenna, but it wasn’t an object she was familiar with. It had a face like a picture on it, with a circle on it that had holes. In her mind it kind of looked like a miniature Phonograph, but how would this tiny thing play music?

In her hoof it began to spring to life, playing a soft static sound. Pinkie dropped it surprised by the sudden sound. She stared at it as it buzzed; the sound seemed like a bunch of bees being mixed through a DJ table. She poked the device with her hoof. After a few moments the buzzing stopped. Pinkie looked confused, but had the gut instinct that it must be something important. She placed it back in the bag.

“I guess Twilight believed I needed this bag...I’ll keep to her advice then.” Pinkie muttered to herself as she carefully strapped the bag to her back. She then looked around. The library seemed to hold no more clues for the moment, so she decided to step outside. She felt more comfortable now that she had visited Twilight, so maybe she could go visit Rainbow Dash now...

“Huh?” Pinkie said stopping short of a few feet out the door. A thick fog had fallen all around Ponyville. It was so thick she couldn’t even see the buildings next to the library. She’d have to get close to a building if she wanted to see one. Then she started to shiver as a wind blew by, the temperature had fallen a significant amount.

“What’s going on? I’ve never seen this kind of weather in Ponyville before...” Pinkie said confused. “Did Rainbow Dash do this? Why would she?” Pinkie knew she had to find Rainbow and talk to her now. She quickly began to run off in the direction she knew Rainbow’s house to be. She was in full gallop, when she suddenly realized she had to come to a full stop. She skidded along the ground and stopped along an edge, a few pebbles getting kicked loose and falling in front of her.

There was a gigantic chasm that had never been in Ponyville right before her. It cut right down the road to Rainbow’s House...in fact it cut off the entire way outside of Ponyville if you didn’t have wings.

“What’s going on?” She asked as she stared into what seemed to be a bottomless pit.

Chapter 2

"There it is." Pinkie Pie said as she pulled out a map of Ponyville. She'd gone back to the library to find it; luckily she had an uncanny ability to find things she needed very quickly. She took a red marker in her mouth and drew a circle with an X through it at the road with the chasm on it. She then placed smaller X's on several houses she'd tried to gain access to in trying to find anypony. The town appeared to be empty, abandoned.

"What happened here?" She asked herself looking at the map of X's. She'd only investigated a small portion of Ponyville, but there were always ponies either at home or wandering around. On bad weather days they'd be in their homes or there'd at least be a notice of some kind if a lot of the ponies would be leaving. Plus why was there that bottomless pit at the edge of town?

"I need to get to Sugar Cube corner. If I can make it there I can get my hot air balloon and try and see if there's any pegasi in the sky, they might have an explanation for the fog." Pinkie Pie said confirming her plan of action in her head. She also admitted to being worried about Gummy, she hoped he would be alright. She quickly checked her route on the map before packing the map and the pen into her bag. She'd mark anymore unusual occurrences she encountered in Ponyville on the map for her to remember.

She stepped back out into the chilly day when something cold and wet landed on the end of her nose.

"Huh?" Pinkie said trying to see the end of her nose. She shook her head a little, then looked up into the sky. Small specks of snow began to appear as they slowly fell to the ground.

"Snow? But...But its summer..." Pinkie said in shock staring at the white spectacle. She could see her breath but she hadn't realized it was cold enough for snow out. The pegasi controlled the weather, so they must be up there right now! Pinkie headed out in a gallop towards Sugar Cube Corner.

Suddenly Pinkie heard a static sound coming from her bag. Was that miniature Phonograph making noise again? It certainly picked random times to do so.

Pinkie was knocked out of her thoughts when she saw the outline of a figure in the fog.

“Oh! Somepony is here!” She said her hope rising. She quickly ran faster to the figure. As she got closer though, she couldn’t help but get the strong feeling that something wasn’t right, as the phonograph grew louder...

“Hey, what’s going on here?” She instantly asked before even assessing who it was. She stopped shortly though when she got a good look at the pony...and she let out a high pitched scream.

“Ruuuaaaaa...ghhuuurrrrrggghhh...” The pony was barely a pony anymore. Its coat and mane was gone, replaced with the look of rotting flesh that was trying to live. One of its front legs was missing, there was a missing chunk of flesh from its back, its eyes looked like they had been gouged out, several teeth looked like they had been knocked out with the holes bleeding, and several lacerations covered its body.

“A-Are you alright!?” Pinkie said taking a step back from the pony. Her initial reaction was to figure out if it was in pain, but her gut told her to stay away, that this thing didn’t want her help. The phonograph in her bag started ringing off the hook.

“Gruuuuuh” The fleshy mass lunged at Pinkie, its teeth bearing to strike down. Pinkie cried out and jumped away, as the creature fell where she was standing, its teeth sinking into the dirt. Pinkie took a few more steps away from the creature as it brought its head back up, a mouthful of dirt in its teeth. It growled as the dirt dribbled out of its mouth, soaking the dirt with its blood. It began to slowly lumber towards Pinkie again, growling as it seemed to smell her out.

“S-Stay back! Stay back!” Pinkie cried out trying to back pedal away from the terrifying creature. It growled and moaned, dripping a trail of blood as it was intent on tracking her. The creature terrified Pinkie, it looked like it

was on the verge of death, yet it wouldn't die. Instead it was intent on attacking her. Every fiber in her being told her to run away, run as fast and far as you can from this creature.

"Stay away from me!" She cried before her legs finally took action and ran around the creature, quickly galloping away. The creature went to lunge again, its teeth implanting on the dirt once more as Pinkie ran past. As she got farther and farther away the phonograph in her bag began to settle down, before going silent once more.

She collapsed into a sitting position as she breathed heavily; her heart was beating a mile a minute in her throat. What was that thing? Why had it attacked her? Why did it look like a pony? Why had she not seen any pony else but that...thing?

"Sugar...cube...corner..." Pinkie panted trying to calm her nerves. She bit down on her arm, pinching herself to remind herself she wasn't dreaming. She was in control of herself...she could run away from what she saw...this was not a dream. She shook her head and got back to her hooves and began to run again.

The door to her room in Sugar Cube Corner creaked open slowly as Pinkie pushed it. The inside of her room was pitch black. She couldn't see anything past the frame of her door. She carefully dug into her bag and pulled out the lantern, holding it in her mouth as she turned the knob. The wick came to life, the flame shining. She stepped into her room, the light of the lantern illuminating what she couldn't see before.

She looked at shock at the state of her room. It looked like it hadn't been used for years. The wallpaper was rotted and peeling, the wooden floor was splintering and falling apart, the curtains were riddled with holes, dust was thick and the air was stagnant. Pinkie looked around confused, before placing the lamp down gently onto a table so she could see the whole room.

"Was I...gone for a long time?" Pinkie asked as she stepped through the room, hearing the floor creak and groan as it adjusted to her weight. "Twilight wouldn't have used a spell to send me into the future if she was going to help me...would she?" Pinkie said not sure what to think. "The

spell did say it would be disorientating...I guess this could just all be part of that side effect."

The Phonograph began to let off a soft static. Pinkie stopped in her tracks as she listened to it. The last time it went off she met that creature and it had gotten louder as she got closer to it. She looked around the room hastily but she didn't see anything that looked like a monster...

"Calm down Pinkie Pie...there's...nothing too serious to worry about. Let's just check and see if Gummy is here...grab the balloon...and head for the sky...you can put this creepiness behind you then." Pinkie said as she grabbed the lantern in her teeth and quickly pushed her bathroom door open.

"Gummy?" She called out despite the lantern in her teeth. She looked into the bathroom and nearly dropped the lantern.

The walls were smeared with blood, bloody hoof prints and hastily scribbled words. The curtains were torn to shreds, the remains barely hanging onto the poles that used to hold them. Caked blood covered the outside of the tub; the whole room looked like a massacre.

"G-Gummy? A-Are you in here?" Her words were muffled, but she had to check, she had to look. Her mind screamed leave but she had to find out if he was in here or not. She took steps into the bathroom, her hooves echoing loudly as she stepped onto the tile. The only relief she was given was that the Phonograph grew quieter as she stepped in further.

She placed the lantern down on the sink and gulped as best she could. The room stank of mold and blood; it made her want to gag. She carefully checked around the tub and the curtains, only seeing more blood. She turned to look at the walls, getting a chance to read what was written in the hastily scribbled blood:

Help me

Pain

He hungers

The words sent chills down her back. What did they mean? ‘He hungers?’ the words echoed in her head. Was that...referring to Gummy? But Gummy had no teeth; the only thing he could swallow was the mushy gator food she bought for him. What had happened in her bathroom? Why would this have happened here? Her mind was reeling with questions; she desperately needed the comfort of one of her friends right now.

She stepped away from the wall, there was only one place left she had to check and that was the tub itself. She very carefully leaned her head over the edge of the tub, looking down into it.

In the tub laid half of the rotted remains of a tiny green gator.

Pinkie threw her hooves over her mouth as the tears began to stream out of her eyes. It was unmistakable...that was Gummy. He looked like he had been there for a long time. Pinkie’s stomach was moving into her throat as she stared. ‘Why was this happening?’ was the question bouncing around her head again and again and again. She needed answers.

It was then that she noticed a bright red ribbon. It was tied immaculately into a bow around something that was sticking out of Gummy’s mouth. Pinkie swallowed as she stared at the item, not sure what it meant. The item was clean...it was free of blood and it looked like...it looked like Gummy was trying to give it to her.

Pinkie gingerly lowered her hoof and took the item from Gummy’s mouth, the item slipping out with a bit of ease. She was able to look at it clearly now, realizing it was a key. The key had a symbol of a star on it. She didn’t quite know what it meant, but Gummy had given it to her in his last days. She had to keep it. She gently placed the key into her bag, remembering just then that the phonograph was still giving off a quiet buzz.

She carefully grabbed her lantern and stepped out of the bathroom, closing the door behind her. She placed the lantern down on the ground as she wiped her face again, hiccuping.

“Gummy...I’m so sorry...” She cried into her hoof as she desperately tried to calm down, “I promise...I’ll give you the proper burial you deserve one day...” she held back another sob, “Please forgive me for not being there for you...” She said as her shoulders shook. Her attempts at calming

down were failing. The tears were pouring out stronger now. She just wanted to sit there and cry...

Her mind snapped aware when she heard the buzzing grow louder, turning into the high pitched ringing. Whatever was setting it off was getting closer. That meant she didn't have the time she needed to sit there and cry her heart out, she had to move or the fate that befell Gummy was going to befall her too.

She hastily grabbed the lantern and ran across her room to the closet where she kept the balloon. The ringing grew louder. Her heart was racing a mile a minute. She grabbed the closet doors and ripped them out.

A high pitched scream erupted as a white blur latched onto Pinkie's face. Pinkie whirled her head around frantically as pain struck all around her face. She scrambled her hooves and rammed her head against the wall, erupting another screech from the blur. She whirled her head and flung it across the room. Pinkie breathed heavily as she felt blood trickling down the side of her face. She turned to look at her attacker, her eyes opening in shock.

"Shkyyyaaaaaaaaaaa..." Writhing on the floor was what looked like the upper half of a hairless young filly, its white skin beginning to rot on its bone, its two front hooves grasping for land as it flailed on its back, its eyes covered by a white bandanna as its black mouth opened, a long tongue flickering out as it let out its wailing cry. The screech of the thing struck her ears harder than the loud ringing of her phonograph.

Pinkie Pie was speechless upon seeing this creature. That thing resembled a filly...her stomach did a flip, a full grown pony was one thing...

The creature found its way right-side up, its wailing screeches quieted down as it seemed to be tasting the air, its tongue flicking about. Pinkie winced as she tried to take a step back, only to find a wall there. The creature's head snapped to look straight at Pinkie Pie. It let out another wail as with shocking speed it began to crawl straight at her. In a blind rush she quickly jumped to the side, the creature slamming its head straight into the wall. It let out a wailing cry as it flailed its head in pain.

Pinkie's heart pounded in her throat as she watched the creature. Its wailing cry made it sound so pitiful. It had left a sizeable bloodstain on the wall and its head was bleeding profusely. It flailed its head back and forth. Pinkie wanted to reach out and help it, she wanted to stop its pain and let it know everything is alright...

The creature let out a blood curdling scream and rushed at her again, its mouth clamped down hard on her leg. Pinkie cried out she flailed her leg trying to get the creature off, but it held on with a tight grip. She began to run around trying to shake the creature, but its grip seemed to get tighter. She couldn't hear anything beyond her screams and the beating of her heart.

She stopped next to a wall and slammed the creature hard against the wall. The creature was still there, she slammed it hard again. She slammed it again and again and again. Warm blood splattered against the wall and onto her coat. She slammed it with all of her might against the wall.

The creature slid off as life escaped its body, collapsing onto the floor with a thud. Pinkie's breath filled her lungs with fire as her body shook with adrenaline. She looked down at her bleeding leg and then at the creature she'd just finished off...

"Oh no...oh no oh no oh no..." Pinkie said in a shaky breath as she stepped backwards from the creature. She hadn't meant to kill it, did it deserve death? It had attacked her but was it the right thing to do? She sat on the ground panting, her body shaking, her mind reeling. She looked down at her body and saw the soft splatter of its blood against her coat. Her stomach flipped again and again, her contents about to come up.

"What have I done..." she gasped trying to cool her burning lungs, "Why did it have to come to this?" She shook her head violently. She didn't want any of this but it was happening...this was no dream that she could wake up from and it'd all go away...this was here and it was real.

She took a deep breath as she tried to stand on her shaking legs.

"Rainbow
Dash...Rarity...Fluttershy...Applejack...Twilight...anypony...I need you

right now..." she said shakily walking towards her closet. She grabbed the lantern and looked into the darkness. The Balloon was there, the basket holding the deflated balloon. Hope rose in her heart as she placed the lantern down and began to pull out the cloth from the basket...

Large holes riddled the balloon. It wasn't use-able for flight.

Pinkie broke out in sobbing tears, crying into the hole-ridden cloth.

The phonograph had finally stopped ringing.

Chapter 3

Pinkie Pie tenderly finished cleaning and wrapping her wounds. Her leg still throbbed from the bite wound, but at least now it would start to heal properly. She tested her weight on it; there was a small bit of pain but nothing she couldn't handle. She could keep moving; she could run away if she had to.

She looked at the note she had placed on her bed once more; it had been resting at the bottom of the balloon's basket, as if it had been waiting for her to find it.

*Laughter and smiles of youth,
Together as they find out truth.
Dreams of the future are held,
As fears of the past are expelled.*

She had been dwelling on this note since she'd found it. She knew it was a riddle...she wasn't very good with riddles. But her mind had finally calmed down enough now to start thinking more coherently. Her brain was finally not reeling from horror long enough to take deciphering these words seriously.

"...Well...I guess the first line means foals...foals finding truth? Like...learning?" That word sparked it for her, "Oh! This riddle is about a school." She said rereading the riddle in context of a school and all the lines fit, "So...does that mean I should head for the school?" She asked herself.

She looked around at the dilapidated room, the balloon that was torn apart, the body of half a filly...

"...No reason to stay here." She sighed as she packed the note into her bag before grabbing the lantern and heading outside. She shivered as she hit the cold, snowy air once more. She hadn't realized how warm it was being inside of the buildings...

She turned the lantern off and placed it back in the bag. She then began her gallop towards the school.

She watched carefully from behind a tree as the lumbering form of the monster paced away from the entrance to the school. It looked just like the first monster she had encountered, the three legged groaner. 'If there's more than one of those things, maybe Groaner is a good thing to call them...' she thought to herself.

She had hoped the buzzing of her phonograph wouldn't give her position away, but it didn't seem to notice any sounds unless she made them. It soon began to lumber away into the fog, turning into a dark silhouette of itself. She figured now was the perfect time to move.

She quickly made it to the front door of the school and pulled on the handle, trying to get inside quickly. The door jammed from the sound of it being locked.

"W-What? It's locked?" She said bewildered. She hadn't expected it to be locked, not after that riddle had told her to come to the school. 'Did I get the answer wrong?' she asked herself as she looked at the door again. It was then that she noticed just above the handle was the lock, with the symbol of a star on it.

It felt like a switch was flipped on in her head. She quickly reached into her bag and pulled out the key Gummy had left for her, being careful not to undo the ribbon. She placed the key into the keyhole, it fitting perfectly. The door unlocked with a satisfying 'click' that made her smile softly. She went to grab the key to hold onto it again.

The key turned into ash, the tiny pieces quickly falling to the ground.

She stared in shock at the gift Gummy had given her. The only part that hadn't turned to ash was the ribbon that floated down gently, landing on her outstretched hoof.

"No...Gummy's gift..." She said, her lip quivering as tears threatened to fall once more. She shook her head quickly, taking a deep breath of cold air as she calmed herself again. She'd already cried a lot...if she kept

crying she wasn't going to get out of this situation anytime soon. Besides, she still had the ribbon from the key...

She very carefully tied the bow to the end of her mane. It still didn't have its frizz to it, but tying it at the end helped make her feel like it was a little poofy again. The ribbon gave her comfort, she felt as if Gummy was right beside her while wearing it.

She opened the school door and headed inside. To her surprise the area was fairly well lit, she had been expecting to need her lantern like at her house. The school seemed to have fared better than her house did, it had a thick layer of dust but the structure wasn't nearly in as much disrepair. Lockers lined the walls as the hallways lead to classrooms, before her an opening to the main auditorium. Signs hung on the wall pointing out the direction to the gym, nurse's office, Principal's office and the numbers of the classrooms.

"Huh?" She said as her ear twitched upon hearing a sound. It sounded like the laughter of young foals. She turned her head in the direction of the sound, simply amazed at the sight. She could see the ghostly apparitions of two young foals playing in the hallway. They laughed and pranced around each other before running down the hallway in the direction of a classroom.

Pinkie watched as they faded through the door to the classroom. She quickly turned her head to her bag and listened for the static of her phonograph...but it was silent.

"...Well...maybe those ghosts aren't monsters like the others..." she said quietly to herself. Perhaps if they weren't monsters, they were a sign. She quickly followed after the foals, opening the door to classroom 104.

The classroom was as quiet as the halls of the school, stagnant air mixed with a layer of dust. But the room gave Pinkie a sense of nostalgia; it was the classroom she had gone to when she had moved to Ponyville.

Memories began to flood her mind.

“Well Ms. Pinkamena Diane Pie, we recognize that you have been home schooled for most of your life, but upon testing you on the Ponyville Standardized Test your score was not high enough to acknowledge a graduate level pony. So we are requiring you to take at least one year of public school here in Ponyville.” The mayor explained to her.

“W-What? I have to go to school?” Pinkie said pouting in her seat opposite the mayor’s desk. “But learning was so boring!” She stomped her hooves a little in her chair.

“Now, now sis,” Octavia said reaching over and placing a hoof on her sister’s shoulder, “it won’t be that bad. Just think of all the new friends you’ll be able to make. You’ll have a lot more ponies to invite to your parties.” She said comfortingly.

“But...but...” Pinkie said looking at her sister with pleading eyes. She already knew that she wanted to spread smiles as much and as far as she could, but this was her first time finding other ponies to be friends with to host a party for. She was rather intimidated by the thought that they wouldn’t like her parties.

“Tell you what,” Octavia said with a comforting smile, “if it’s alright with the mayor, I’ll go to school with you. How does that sound?”

“I don’t see why not.” The Mayor said nodding with a smile.

“Really!? Oh my gosh you’re the best big sister ever!” Pinkie said hugging her dear sister with all her might, a big smile on her face. Octavia smiled in return as she petted her young filly sister.

Pinkie smiled at the warm memory. It was one she hadn’t thought about in a long time. When Pinkie had decided to leave the farm Octavia was the one who had been the one willing to help her adjust to life outside of it. Her parents seemed to understand and stayed behind to let their kids experience the world.

Octavia had been the biggest help to her while they were at school. She gave her the confidence boost to meet the new ponies and she made

so many friends. She was also the reason she'd met Mr. and Mrs. Cakes and ended up staying with them.

It was after that year of school that Octavia decided to leave on her own adventures, having discovered her love of the contrabass and classical music. She'd been sad to see her sister go, but understood she had to go live her own life. Besides, she'd left her in the care of some very wonderful friends.

Pinkie walked down the rows of desk with a soft but warm smile on her face. The room certainly gave her plenty of happy memories to remember. She stopped before her old desk in remembrance, but noticed a piece of paper lying on top of it.

"What's this?" she asked before taking a quick breathe and blowing the dust off of the paper. Sitting on her desk was a little foals drawing. On it was the picture of a family smiling on a rock farm. She gently placed a hoof against it; it was one of her old drawings. She smiled as she remembered the fondness she had for doodling during class. She could see their old house in the background, her moth and father standing behind their kids in the foreground. She smiled at the cute scribbling of her and Octavia.

"...Wait..." she said suddenly realizing something. She took her hoof away from the picture and stared at it. Something was wrong with this picture. She couldn't put her hoof on it though...

"It's my family...what would give me the impression somethings wrong?" she stared at the happy family of four. She couldn't fight the strong urge that there was something wrong with the picture. But no matter how she racked her brain, nothing seemed to come to mind. She scrutinized the picture carefully.

"...I'm sure if Octavia was here she would know what the problem was." Pinkie shook her head softly, "She always was the smartest of us. If we were ever in trouble she would always bail us ou-" Her words stopped dead.

"Alright fine, I'll play with you, but only because you're so insistent."

Her eyes shot back to the paper as she scanned it and counted the number of people in her family once more.

“One, two, three, four...five?” She counted out loud as she pointed to an empty spot that should’ve contained her other sister. “Where’s Bellamina? Where’s my younger sister?” She scoured the picture for any sign of her. She wouldn’t have drawn a picture of her family without her...would she?

“...Wait...come to think of it...when was the last time I thought about Bellamina?” she asked herself quietly. She remembered thinking about Octavia several times over the years, but she’d never thought about Bellamina...”Oh my gosh...I must be the worst sister in the world!” She said feeling so rotten for having forgotten about her other sister.

She tried to recall memories of her sister desperately, but the only thing that came to mind was the story of how she got her cutie mark...but beyond that...

She shook her head furiously trying to jog loose any memory, but she didn’t remember anything else. She looked down somberly before slamming a hoof against the ground.

“I’m so so SO sorry Bellamina! I promise you; once I get out of here I’ll keep you in my thoughts!” Pinkie said determined now. She had to escape the horrors that had befallen Ponyville. She looked around the classroom, her eyes being drawn to the desk next to hers; the one Octavia had sat in during school. On the desk was a red circle with an X through it written with a red marker. She carefully grabbed the edge of the desk and opened the top of it, looking inside.

Inside of the desk was a blue jewel carved into the shape of a contrabass.

“...Wow...it’s beautiful...” Pinkie gasped examining the item. She wasn’t sure what it was doing there, but she had the strong feeling that it was something she was meant to keep. She picked it up carefully before placing it gently into her bag. She closed Octavia’s desk, before realizing she should check her desk as well. She was careful not to disturb the

picture and opened hers as well. Inside was a red jewel in the shape of a balloon. She quickly placed it inside of her bag as well.

She closed the desk and looked around. None of the other desks appeared to have anything of significance on them. She headed to the front of the class and checked the teacher's desk. There was a note written on the desk:

At the eve of the switch from night to morning, the red moon will shine.

"Another riddle?" Pinkie asked aloud to no one. This one certainly made less sense than the last riddle she tried to solve. Off the top of her head she couldn't figure out what this riddle was trying to tell her...

She twirled her head towards the door when she heard the laughter of the foals coming from the hallway once more. She quickly exited the room and looked around the hallway for them. She saw them further down, playing with each other. She slowly approached them, trying to get a better look at the two little foals. However, once she got close enough they began to run down the hallway, she gave chase.

The little foals didn't run too far, they quickly made a turn into another room. Pinkie stopped in front of the door and read 'Janitor's Closet' on the front. She heard a click come from the door, as if it had just been unlocked. She reached for the handle and opened it, walking into the closet.

The room didn't look anything like a Janitor's Closet should, rather than shelves of items for cleaning it was a mostly empty room. At the end opposite the door stood a small knee-high pedestal, then behind it was what looked like a door with a clock and symbols around it, in-between two portraits of the princesses.

"Oh! Is that lantern oil?" she said as she walked up to the small pedestal, noticing a small bottle of yellow liquid. She sniffed it real quick to confirm what it was before picking it up and placing it in her bag, "Good, that should keep me stocked for a while."

She then walked forward to take a closer look at the door. To the left of the door was a picture of Princess Luna, gracefully drawn with her body in a circle, surrounding a small hole in the wall. Princess Celestia was drawn much the same way, also surrounding a small hole in the wall.

“Wait...this hole...I know this shape.” She said having noticed something about the hole Celestia was surrounding. She quickly reached into her bag and pulled out the red balloon jewel and fit it gently into the hole. It snapped into place with a satisfying click.

“Then that means the other jewel must go here.” She said placing the blue contrabass underneath Luna’s picture. When the second jewel clicked into place, the clock moved forward out of the door a little, followed by the symbols placed in a circle around it. She looked carefully at the symbols; there were six pictures, three of suns, one red, one yellow, one blue and three moons, one white, one green and one red.

“Wait...a clock and a moon...” The words from the teacher’s desk came to mind. “The eve of the switch from night to morning...night is pm; morning is am...they switch at twelve...and the red moon will glow at that time.” She placed her hand against the dial of symbols and turned it, placing the red moon so that it was directly above the number twelve on the clock. Then she moved the two hands of the clock to point at the number as well.

The clock chimed twelve times as it and the dial moved back into the door, before the door moved up and rose into the ceiling opening the path. Pinkie quickly walked into the next room.

“Huh?” She said as her ear twitched. She heard a very quiet sound, like it was a sound coming from Ponyville itself. She recognized it as a siren, a siren was blaring in the distance. She wasn’t sure what it meant, but she had the gut instinct it didn’t mean anything good.

She focused on the room before her. She regretted it instantly.

The room itself gave off the stench of it rotting, the ceiling was brown with missing tiles, the walls were a mess of peeling rotted walls, and the floor was covered in dirt, mold and grime. Holes littered the room, revealing

a mesh of iron grating behind them, apparently the foundation holding the room together.

Two dead ponies hung from the corners of the room, their bodies wrapped in some kind of cloth, but their blood splattered the wall and floors next to them. They hung by chains and metal that kept them suspended. On the wall between them was a single word written in their blood.

Run

She didn't need to be told twice as she ran out of the room. She ran out of the janitor's closet and back into the hallway.

"W-Wait...what happened to the light?" She asked as the hallway she entered was pitch black. She quickly reached into her bag and pulled out her lantern. The flame came to life illuminating the hallway. She gasped as the hallway was no longer that of the calm and quiet schools, but instead was made of the same dilapidated materials as the room she'd just escaped.

Everything was rotting, held together by a metal grating. The grime covered the floor in splotches and blood caked the walls. Hanging bodies of ponies were visible at various intervals down the hall. The smell of so much rotting gagged Pinkie; if not for the lantern in her mouth she would've lost her stomach.

The sound of static hit her ears next. Her heart started pounding as she next heard footsteps echoing down the hall. She turned to the direction of footsteps, listening to the hiss of static grow louder as the footsteps grew closer. Her brain was screaming at her to run, listen to the wall and put every force of power into her hooves...

But she seemed stuck, almost glued to the spot. This feeling wasn't like the other monsters. This sensation was piercing down right into her very soul. This feeling was biting into her and was forcing her feet to stay.

The edge of the light hit the creature. It walked further into the edge of her light and she felt her heart stop for just a brief moment.

It was one of the monsters of her nightmare.

It was a tall, slender pony that towered over her. It had no face; its skin clung to its face and body as if they were attached directly to its bones. It was pale, deathly pale, accentuated by the black suit and red tie it wore on its torso. It continued to take slow careful steps toward her; every hoof step echoed in her brain like it was trying to grate her mind.

The Phonograph erupted into its loud high pitched ringing as she felt a pain strike her mind. She finally felt herself no longer glued to the spot and with every ounce of strength she turned around and ran.

Her heart jumped to her throat and beat away a mile a minute as her hoofs connected loudly with every single step she took. She didn't care about the grime or the bodies she passed, she had to get away. Her mind grated with the feeling of a haze that the creature seemed to bring with its presence. The loud ringing of the phonograph seemed to be the only thing that kept her in any state of mind to run as fast as she could.

She rounded a corner with lightning speed. She was putting everything into this; she knew she could run fast, she could keep up with, if not out-run Rainbow Dash at times. She had to be losing the Slender Pony, she had to be escaping. She dared to look over her shoulder.

It was keeping up with her. It seemed to only be walking, somehow the slow paced canter it strutted kept up, and his whole being seemed to slide towards her, as if there was no escaping.

Her mind reeled and she whipped her head forward trying to go faster. She had to turn another corner. Her hoof caught under one of her legs and she nearly fell. She scrambled her legs and took off again.

"SHKYAAAAAA" A blood curdling scream bellowed out before her as she saw half of a white filly start to crawl straight for her. She jumped over it, its tongue passing over one of her hooves as it tried to bite her. The screams of the filly were cut short as she heard the sound of it being crushed by the monster chasing her. Her stomach hit her heart inside of her throat as her lungs burned. Her mind was reeling and the haze was growing.

'I can't escape I can't escape I can't escape I can't escape / *CAN'T ESCAPE*' the words yelled and flung themselves to the very corners of her mind. She felt it: She was about to die. This monster was about to kill her and there was nothing she could do about it...

Her eyes flung open as she saw at the end of the hallway an open door.

'An exit!?' Her mind screamed as she continued to book it. She raced as fast as she could, trying to ignore the constant looming presence of the threat behind her. She had to get to that door! She was almost there! Just a little closer! Just a little closer! She was going to make it!

She jumped, passing straight through the open door and skidding to a halt inside of the room. Her heart instantly sank as she looked around. The room was a square with one entrance, no exit. She had jumped straight into a dead end with that monster behind her.

She looked around frantically; the room was adorned with party decorations: multi colored streamers, balloons caked with blood, vile looking snacks, poorly wrapped and rotting gifts, hanging ponies at every corner, a seal of blood drawn out on the floor.

She instantly turned around, watching as the Slender Pony gradually walked into the room. The only opening to the room sealed shut with an iron gate behind it. There was no escaping it now. She was trapped in the same room as this monster.

She dropped the lantern from her mouth, no longer able to hold onto it as she panted frantically. The lantern rolled to the center of the room, turning itself up right and in the center of the blood drawn seal. The seal lit up with a red glow filling the whole room with light. She could see the red hued Slender Pony as it walked towards her.

"STAY BACK." She yelled as she ran to the gifts. She began grabbing them one by one and throwing them at the Pony. The gifts struck the pony and seemed to stun him for a moment. But as the gifts hit him, they fell to the ground and burst into a pile of ash. They slowed his walk down for a moment, but soon they didn't even phase him.

She grabbed the last gift and tossed it with all her might, straight at his head. It struck him before blowing up into a pile of ash.

Pinkie cried out in pain as she felt like her forehead was splitting open as her vision hazed into oblivion.

She stomped her hooves down and ran blindly in a direction away from the pony. Her vision returned as she felt blood trickling down between her eyes, dripping off of her nose. He'd opened up a fresh wound on her head.

She grabbed the table holding the vile snacks on top of it and tossed it to the ground. She raised her hind legs up and with all her might she kicked the table straight at the Slender Pony. The whole table struck him and pushed him back. He hit the wall as the table seemed to hold him in place for a moment.

Pinkie panted as she stared at the creature. He got up. He pushed the table gently and the table fell apart as a pile of ash.

Pinkie's legs gave way under her as she fell to her knees. Tears fell from her eyes as she sobbed in pain and exhaustion. She couldn't fight this monster. It was too much. Her mind reeled and wanted to accept her death. Her body couldn't take it, her mind couldn't take it.

She felt her mind begin to hurt worse, the Slender Pony was drawing closer. She couldn't look at him, she sobbed with her eyes closed shut just wanting the horror to end once and for all.

The pain stopped. The hoof steps of the Pony had stopped getting closer. The ringing of the Phonograph was dying down.

Pinkie dared to open her eyes and looked up. He was still there, but he had stopped its assault on her. He looked like he was looking away from her, at some something she couldn't see...

That's when she heard it. The siren. The siren was going off again in the distance. The Slender Pony put one of its lifted hooves to the ground and turned to look at Pinkie. She braced for whatever he was going to do,

but he just stood there. Then, slowly, he lowered his head into his suit and pulled out a small brown box. He placed it on the ground before turning around and walking away from her.

The light in the room dimmed until it was pitch black.

Light from her lantern began to bring a gentle glow to the room.

Pinkie hiccuped, taking in a huge breath of air that burned her lungs again. She could feel her heart still racing at top speed as she began to get her bearings. The room wasn't the one she had just been in. It looked like a normal basement. It had pipes and fixtures that controlled water and heating throughout the building. Her lantern lay on its side in the middle of the room, glowing with its gentle flame.

The brown box was still where the Slender Pony had left it.

Words failed Pinkie. She didn't have the strength to get up at the moment. She lowered her head and let herself sob again.

Chapter 4

The world was quiet. Her hair floated around her face; she didn't feel the sting of her wounds here. Everything felt the same like this. It seemed almost as if all her cares were a mile away...

The last of her oxygen left her mouth and flew past her face. Her lungs began to burn. She wanted to hold it for a little longer, but her body defied her.

Pinkie gasped, taking in a huge breath of air as she surfaced from the bucket of water. She panted heavily as she tried to relax and calm her beating heart. She had just survived staring death in its face. That thing...that monster...that...Slender Pony...she knew just getting close to it was a death wish. When it had gotten close her mind had fallen into a haze unlike she'd ever experienced before...then there was the head-splitting pain...

She gingerly touched her re-wrapped head wounds. The cuts from the attack in her room had started to heal, but the slender pony had left a deep gash down the middle of her forehead. But she'd survive, the cut only stung a little now and that would fade soon. The bandages on her leg had also needed to be changed. All that running had reopened the bite wound and her leg was currently throbbing as it recovered.

She shook her head and mane, casting the water off of her head. That soak had relaxed her some, but she was still inside of that school. The school where she had been chased inside of that...that...the only word that came to her mind that could describe it was as an 'Otherworld', one that was separate yet almost the same...

She lowered her head and started gulping down the bucket of water. She hadn't realized how thirsty she was at first, but she remembered how much crying and running she'd been doing and suddenly her throat felt as dry as a desert. She very quickly emptied the bucket of its contents.

Her tongue lapped at the bottom of the bucket expectantly, but there was no more water to be had. She softly sighed as she pulled her head back up and looked around at the empty cafeteria she was in.

She was able to imagine back when it was in pristine condition, all the little foals that would gather around, eating lunch as they took a break from their day of learning. Friends would share gossip stories, adventures in the games they were playing at home, some would doodle, some would spend time by themselves, but lunchtime and recess were always the foals' favorite part of school.

"Those days are long gone in this place, aren't they?" Pinkie sighed as she stared at the empty, dust covered room. The tables had been empty and abandoned for a long time now and no foals visited these halls. Even the brief glimpse at the playful ghost foals had gone away and left the empty silence.

She took a soft breath and picked up the red ribbon, she had taken it off to soak her head. She gently tied it into a bow at the end of her mane once more. She was growing very fond of this ribbon, not only being a gift from Gummy; it seemed to give her a sense of normalcy during these calm moments, when she just had time to herself. It seemed to put her mind at a bit of ease just knowing it was there.

"I guess..." she said taking a deep breath and turning her head, "All that's left to do now is...open this box..." She said looking at the brown box that sat next to the bucket. She hadn't looked inside of it; in fact she had wanted to leave it there. Even more she wanted to smash it; she wanted to destroy the box. Anything that Slender Pony had to offer just made her stomach twist in anger. But forces beyond her understanding compelled her to bring it with her. She had put it down to get some water and now that she had finished it, it sat there mocking her.

"...Maybe I can smash it after I find out what's inside." She reasoned with herself, giving herself enough confidence to finally open it. She carefully lifted open the brown lid, half expecting it to burst into fire upon her touching it. The lid slid off easily as she looked inside it.

"...W-why is this in here?" She said as she stared in shock at what sat inside the box. It was the key to Sugar Cube Corner. "Why would he

have this? Why would he give it to me?" The questions racked Pinkie's mind, but no answers came. She had just come from that area, after all her home was right above Sugar Cube corner.

"I-I can't believe I forgot to check on the store itself!" Pinkie kicked herself mentally. She looked at the key again, then remembered what she had seen in her room and sighed, "No...I can believe I didn't check it. Not after that filly attacked me...I did want to get out of there as quickly as I could."

She carefully picked up the key and placed it in her bag. She had to go back and find out what had happened to Sugar Cube Corner now. She then carefully replaced the lid on the brown box, before picking it up and dropping it on the ground.

She lifted her good leg and smashed the box under hoof. It let off a satisfying crunch as she crushed it.

The snow had started to pile up thickly at her hooves. The town looked like it had a white blanket covering it. Every part of the town had snow on it, the streets, the roofs and the trees...Pinkie had never seen the town covered in the snow this way before. There had always been ponies that made sure the town was still useable during the winter, clearing the streets and making sure the snow didn't pile up too thickly...

Each step gave a crunch in the snow, as the cold ground sank underneath her. She shivered even more now, wishing she had brought some winter clothes to keep warm. Normally she did well in the cold, but the snow kept wetting her coat. She could feel ice starting to form at the base of her legs.

Sugar Cube Corner finally came into view. She sighed in relief; she had seen groaners in the distant fog but none had come close to her, she had managed to make it here only suffering from the cold.

She went up to the door of her favorite bakery and gently tried to open it. The door was locked, as she had expected. So even if she had tried to check on it earlier she would have just had to move on.

She carefully pulled the key to store out of her bag and placed it into the lock, the door unlocking. Pinkie watched as the key turned to ash, just as the school key had before it. She just let out a soft sigh as she pushed open the door, stepping inside.

As she expected, Sugar Cube Corner was dark, just like her room had been. Scant amount of light entered the room as she looked around. She quickly reached into her bag, pulling out the lantern. She was thankful she had refilled it with the oil back at the cafeteria as she set the flame alight.

To her surprise, Sugar Cube Corner looked fine. There were no pastries on the shelves or counters, but there was a lack of dust and decay. In fact, the place was even decorated. There were ribbons and banners and balloons set up all around the shop. There was a table set up for holding snacks and punch, several games placed in various locations as well as a pile of presents on another table.

There was a banner tied from one pole to the other above it all that read, 'Welcome Pinkie Pie'.

"Are these decorations for me?" Pinkie asked placing her lantern down on a table so it could illuminate the room.

"Oh! Do we have a guest? I love guests!" Came a voice that sounded all too familiar. Pinkie stopped as she looked around, she hadn't heard ANY ponies voice since she'd entered this horrible place and she was suddenly filled with hope.

"Yes! You do have a guest! It's me! Pinkie Pie!" Pinkie Pie quickly called out excitedly, wanting to meet the other pony right now. "Where are you? Come on out! I promise I'm not like those monsters outside!"

"Oh, really?" The voice chuckled, "It's just so hard to tell these days who is and isn't." The voice said cheerfully.

"Please, will you come out? I'd really like to see your face." Pinkie said, she didn't care that the voice seemed to sound familiar; she just wanted to see the pony.

“Okie-dokie-loki! Since you asked so nicely!” A blob of darkness in the corner of the room began to move, it seemed to manifest into the form of a pony before Pinkie’s eyes. The shadows surrounding the pony faded as light soon gave her a form. Pinkie gasped in shock, covering her mouth with a hoof.

“What’s the matter? You seem surprised to see me! You said your name was Pinkie Pie right? What a coincidence! My name’s Pinkie Pie too!” There was no doubt about it, the bright pink coat, the frizzed up curly mane and tail, the blue and yellow balloons for a cutie mark, the bouncing bubbly attitude...it was Pinkie Pie. “But that’s going to get confusing if we BOTH start calling each other Pinkie Pie!” She explained as she stopped bouncing for a moment, thinking about, “We should give you a nickname!”

“W-What...but I’m...” Pinkie couldn’t think of anything to say. Why was there two of her? And this Pinkie didn’t seem to be suffering at all from any sadness or despair, she wasn’t covered in any bandages and she didn’t look hurt. This Pinkie looked exactly like she did before the nightmares had started to affect her, and this town wasn’t helping her.

“Oh! I see your hair is down, does that mean you’re sad? You must be! The only time my hair goes down is when I’m sad! We can call you Saddle Pie!” The happy version of Pinkie bounced again, “Why are you sad Saddle Pie? Did someone steal your sweets? You can always make more you know!” She giggled merrily, “Oh! I know what’ll turn that frown upside-down! Let’s have some cupcakes!”

“C-cupcakes?” Pinkie asked a little hesitantly, “But...I want to get out of this town...”

“Awww, you want to go?” Happy Pinkie Pie said, tilting her head, “But you only just got here! Come on! There’s so much fun for us to have!” She bounced over to a door on the side of Sugar Cube Corner, one that led to the basement. She opened the door then turned back around, “Come on and follow me! We’ll have lots of fun! Then we’ll make those Cupcakes!” The happy Pinkie Pie bounced into the darkness of the stairs, disappearing from sight.

Pinkie just stared in disbelief as the second Pinkie disappeared from sight. She couldn’t believe her own eyes. Surely she was the only Pinkie

Pie...right? She had to find out why there was a second Pinkie Pie. She grabbed the lantern and slowly began to follow down the stairs to the basement. She could hear the constant giggling of herself far down in the darkness. For some reason, she might have preferred the silence...

She hit the bottom of the stairs and looked up, expecting to see the basement. Instead there was a long hallway before her, with a series of four wooden doors along it with a final wooden door at the end.

"Come on come on! Let's play already!" The chipper voice echoed throughout the hallway. Pinkie couldn't tell which direction it had come from. She slowly walked up to the first door and opened it, entering slowly. Inside the room she got a shock, as she saw the familiar look the living room from the farm.

"Here...you should eat something." The ghostly image of her father had placed a bowl of soup before a ghostly image of her younger self, wrapped up in a blanket.

"...I'm not hungry..." her younger self had softly muttered in response. She bundled herself up tighter into the blanket.

"You haven't eaten anything since you got back...please, you have to eat." Her father sat down on the couch next to his daughter.

"...I don't ever want to eat again..." Young Pinkie said, her voice quivering with fear. Her father placed his head around his shaking daughter, holding her close to his body.

The images faded away. The room was quiet as Pinkie stared at the images she had just seen. 'Was that...a memory?' she asked herself. It wasn't a memory she could remember. The words her father had spoken felt ominous, but she couldn't think of why they would seem that way.

She saw something out of the corner of her eye, looking down on the table where the soup had been placed. On top of it was a green tile with the image of a cat on it. She wasn't sure what it meant, but she felt it was something important. She made sure to quickly grab it and place it inside of her bag.

She then exited the room, closing the door behind her.

"You do want to have fun, don't you?" Came the cheerful voice that echoed through the hallway once again. Pinkie ignored it for the moment, opening the door across from the first one. Inside the door she saw an interrogation room, one she would've seen at the local authorities when she was little.

"Can't you see she's been through a lot?" The ghostly image of her mother told a ghostly police colt, as she hugged her pink daughter, "Your questions are upsetting her!" The pink filly was shaking in her mother's arms.

"I apologize profusely...we're not trying to scare her, but we need to know what happened." The colt said reassuringly.

"You need to give my daughter time," her father said adamantly, "This has been a tough time...for all of us."

"We understand, and you have our condolences, but if we need to know the details. Once we do, we can bring this whole affair to an end quickly." The colt returned.

The images faded from the room once more, leaving behind a pink tile on the interrogation table. It was another scene that didn't exist in her memories. This one confused her more than the last one, not knowing what reason she would have to be in an interrogation room like that...

She examined the tile, seeing that it had the picture of a bird on it. She quickly placed it inside of her bag before exiting this room as well.

"Ooooh, you're going to make me wait, aren't you?" The chipper Pinkie Pie voice echoed in the hallway, sounding dissapointed. Pinkie softly shook her head. The voice of that other Pinkie was unsettling to her. Hearing herself talk without it being her just felt...unnatural.

She carefully walked to the next door, opening it and stepping inside. This time she saw her bedroom from the farm. Three beds filled the room, one for each of them as their parents had slept in a different room.

“Come on sis...you need to get some sleep...it’s getting late.” The ghostly image of her older sister Octavia was trying to comfort the young pink filly. They were sleeping in the same bed as her sister hugged her tightly, “I know you’re having a hard time...but I’m here...you know I won’t let anything happen to you.”

The young pink filly began to sob into Octavia’s coat. The two of them embraced as the images faded once more. On the bed sat a red tile with the picture of a snake on it.

Pinkie wiped away a tear that had begun to form at the edge of her eye. She didn’t know why these emotions were welling up inside of her, the images were too real to not be true...but why couldn’t she remember them?

She carefully placed the red tile in her bag before exiting the room.

“Come oooooon...I’ve prepared a party for you and everything!” She still sounded happy, but like she was getting impatient.

Pinkie shook her head softly; she had to see what was in this other door now. That other Pinkie could wait.

She opened the final door on the sides of the hallway, stepping into a room that had its walls painted like the sky, the ground was covered in sand and rocks. It looked like the outside of the rock farm.

“So...you’re sure this is what you want?” Her ghostly father asked once again.

“Yea...it is. I just...I don’t think I should stay here anymore.” Her younger self responded slowly.

“I understand.” Her mother commented, standing next to her father, “Just please be careful out there. I know you’ll have Octavia with you.”

“Are you sure you guys don’t want to come? I don’t know if I’ll be coming back either.” Octavia said looking from her younger sister to her parents.

"I was left this farm by my father; I can't just leave it now." Their father shook his head slowly, "This farm is my whole life now, good and bad memories alike. So I hope you can forgive us for not coming with you. Just please be safe."

"Don't worry father, I'll guarantee that nothing shall happen." Octavia smiled.

"We trust you Octavia." Her mother nodded, tears in her eyes. The images faded away, a blue tile with a fish on it sat in the middle of the room.

'That was when we left the farm, wasn't it?' Pinkie thought remembering having left the farm with her parent's approval...but she hadn't remembered that conversation before they had left. Yet...she was sure it had happened. All of these images were experiences she'd had when she was younger...yet she had forgotten them.

'Why would I have forgotten these memories?' She asked herself as she walked over to the blue tile, before placing it in her bag. 'There must be a good reason for why I have forgotten...maybe...maybe that other Pinkie Pie knows...' She thought to herself as she exited the room.

The other Pinkie Pie voice huffed softly, "You're not very fun Saddle Pie! If I was told I was being thrown a party I would just go straight to it!" The voice sounded like her patience was wearing thin.

Pinkie walked down the rest of the length of the hallway, reaching the door at the end of it. She pushed the door open, walking inside.

"Oh! There you are! I was afraid you'd gotten lost somehow! Which would be weird, how do you get lost in a straight hallway? I mean I'm sure there's a way but you sure have delayed the party!" The other Pinkie stood in the middle of the room, illuminated by a lantern that hung from the ceiling. The rest of the room was pitch black except for the circle of light that showed where she was.

Pinkie carefully turned off her lantern, before storing it back in her bag and then turning to face herself.

“Tell me...you know what those images were about, don't you?” She asked as seriously as she could.

The other pinkie frowned, “What? You made me wait for that? That's not very nice.” She said giving a huff, “But I'll forgive you! After all now that you're here we can have fun together!” She bounced happily.

“Please! I want to have fun as much as you do...but I can't enjoy myself until I find some answers.” Pinkie shook her head, “What happened to Ponyville? Why are there monsters? Why am I seeing the images I'm seeing? I want nothing more than to go back to throwing parties and hanging out with my friends...” she lowered her head a little, “But I can't...not so long as all these questions are eating me up inside.”

The other Pinkie stopped bouncing and just seemed to frown.

“Fine, I see how it is.” The other Pinkie turned around, “I guess I'll just have to remove that sadness from you Saddle Pie.”

Pinkie blinked in confusion. She had no idea what the other Pinkie meant, but she hadn't answered any of her burning questions...

Her thoughts were stopped as her heart sunk. Her ears could hear the siren going off. The light in the room was dimming, turning it pitch black slowly.

‘Oh no...oh no no no no no no no!’ She thought beginning to panic as the light faded completely. She tried to brace herself for anything, the world was changing; she could feel it shifting under her hooves. As the siren began to die out, the lantern began to flicker back to life, re-illuminating the spot the other Pinkie was standing.

The ground around them had turned into the rotting, grime-covered floor that had appeared the first time she had heard the siren. The other Pinkie Pie was still standing where she had been; the only difference now was that she was wearing a strange dress with wings...

As the other Pinkie began to turn around, the phonograph began to come to life with static.

“You know...” the other Pinkie spoke up, “playing with myself really might be the most fun I’ll ever have.” She let out a soft chuckle, turning around fully to give Pinkie a full view of the outfit, “I’ll have to make it last...but all things do come to an end.”

Pinkie stared at the outfit, beginning to notice details about it she wish she hadn’t. The wings on the back, 6 in total, were each a different color and were crudely stitched on. Around her neck was a necklace with multiple unicorn horns dangling from it. The cloth her dress was made out of looked like a patchwork quilt made of leather, each square of the dress had a different cutie mark on it.

“Oh, do you like my dress?” The other Pinkie noticed her gaping stare. The other Pinkie angled her body to show it off better, “I’m so glad you like it, I worked very hard to make it. It wasn’t easy getting everything to be so intact. Ponies really like to squirm you know.” She laughed as she gently played with one of her wings, “I’m quite proud of how it came out too. But I must admit, I see something I can add to it that would make it even better!”

The lantern grew brighter, illuminating more of the room, revealing a table that had been hiding in the darkness. The other Pinkie turned and walked towards the table, reaching into a medical bag that was placed on the table.

From the bag she pulled out a large, sharp butcher’s knife.

“Now be a good pony and hold still will you? I don’t want to mess up that beautiful Cutie Mark of yours.” The other Pinkie said as if it was a natural thing, before putting the butcher’s knife in her mouth. The phonograph began to let out its wailing rings.

Pinkie’s heart felt like it had stopped. She couldn’t even comprehend everything that this other Pinkie was saying. But it was very clear that the other Pinkie wasn’t going to give her a chance, as the other Pinkie began to charge full gallop at her. The other Pinkie appeared to be aiming for her legs.

She jumped out of the way, as the knife came close to cutting deep into her. She tried to back up away from the other Pinkie, into the darkness

when she hit something hard. She looked behind her, and as if following her eyes the lantern hanging from the ceiling glowed brighter, revealing the entire room to her.

She had run into the dried remains of a pony hanging from the ceiling by a butchers hook. She jumped away, not wanting to even touch it as her eyes quickly began to see the decorations of the room. She felt her stomach reach her throat.

Pony bodies hung from several parts of the room, their bodies dried and caked pools of blood lay underneath them. Skulls decorated the walls, while the furniture was made up of bones and skin, balloons floated that were dyed with blood, streamers and ribbons had been given the same treatment, piles of body parts and organs lay stacked in the corners of the room. On the table with the medical bag, appearing from the darkness that had hid it before was a plate adorned with four foals surrounded it, with a pile of cupcakes in the center of the plate.

Her ears twitched as she heard the galloping of hooves and jumped into the air, as the sound of a blade being swung struck the body she had run into. Pinkie ran away from the twisted version of herself, panting heavily as she galloped to the other side of the room. She turned around, watching as the other her pulled the knife out of the body.

“Saddie Pie, this isn’t any fun if you just keep running!” The other Pinkie said cheerfully, pulling the knife out of the body, “I admire you though; you have the will to fight! I like that in a pony.” She chuckled happily as she placed the knife back into her mouth.

The other Pinkie said everything in that same, happy voice. It terrified her, thinking that such things could be said with such a happy tone. That Pinkie had every intention of killing her, and not quickly; it was obvious she wanted to make it a slow, painful process.

The other Pinkie was charging again. She could dodge it from this distance though; she jumped out of the way, avoiding Pinkie.

“GAH” She cried out as a searing pain sailed across her right leg. She stumbled away as she looked at the other Pinkie, who was giggling, blood dripping from the end of the butcher’s knife. The other Pinkie had

tilted her head and changed her direction when she had dodged. The knife had cut deeply into her leg; she could feel the blood trickling down her leg.

With a playful hoof stomp, the other Pinkie broke into another charge straight for her. She mustered all her strength to jump away again.

“GAAAAH” she let out another painful cry as a gash cut down on her back leg, causing her to trip and collapse on the ground. Her leg twitched in pain as the gash reached diagonally down half her leg. She was severely bleeding now; the other Pinkie was able to maneuver too well for her to dodge. The attacks had all but immobilized her movement now.

“I give you an A for the effort, but a C for the execution. That gives you a good round B!” The other Pinkie cheered happily for her. “I do hope you won’t completely give up once you lose your legs though! I know it’ll be tough, but keep on fighting!” The twisted words sounded so cheerful it sickened Pinkie.

She turned her head to watch the other Pinkie put the knife back in her mouth. She had come up to her from behind and was raising her head now. She was going to bring the knife down, bring down right into her leg.

With all of her might she pulled her back leg in, as the other Pinkie began to throw her head down with all her might to chop the leg off, Pinkie bucked the leg with all of her might into the other Pinkie’s jaw.

A loud crack sounded through the room as Pinkie felt the body of the other Pinkie fly backwards, away from her. She heard a loud thud, followed by the clanging of the knife hitting the hard ground. She panted in pain, trying not to focus too much on her bleeding legs. She turned her head weakly to look in the direction the other Pinkie had flown.

The other Pinkie groaned, having landed on her back. She rolled over, lying on the ground as her head wobbled. Her mouth was bleeding severely. She coughed and hacked, bits of teeth and chunks of blood flying out. She panted as best she could through the blood oozing out of her mouth, turning to look at the Pinkie she had attacked.

“Nicbth...truhth...” The other Pinkie tried to speak, but she just sputtered out what sounded like nonsense. She looked in pain as she tried to speak, but she slowly got to her wobbly hooves.

Pinkie slowly got to her hooves as well. Putting weight on her injured legs made her body cry out in pain for relief, but she did her best to silence the cries.

“Ahlbth...finthith...yoobth...” The other Pinkie sputtered out more blood, as she gripped the butcher’s knife as best she could with her hoof, dragging it along the ground as she began to walk towards Pinkie. Pinkie took in sharp breaths of air as she concentrated on the vile Pink mare before her.

The other Pinkie began to pick up the pace, before going out into a full on run straight for Pinkie. She seemed groggy, but determined, to bring that knife down into Pinkie’s flesh. Pinkie had aimed the uninjured half of her body at the other Pinkie, bringing her hind hoof up once more.

The butcher’s knife was raised into the air, sparks flying as it had scrapped along the ground. The frantic rush of the other Pinkie was closing in, ready to strike down. For a moment, everything seemed to hold still, right on the edge of death, two forces that never should’ve met collided.

The butcher’s knife flew through the air, impaling itself into the ground. A loud crunching sound broke through the air.

Pinkie’s hind leg had struck, landing with all its might straight into its victim’s throat. The other Pinkie’s eyes shrunk as her wind pipe was crushed, her forward energy being matched by the stopping force of the kick. Her body betrayed itself and swung itself free of the ground, her whole being shifting out from under the power of the kick and hitting the ground with a hard thud.

That Pinkie jerked and twitched on the ground, as it tried with all its might to get air from its broken wind pipe, only to be filled with blood that poured freely from the neck. She jerked and squirmed, as her eyes rolled into the back of her head. It seemed to last for an eternity, but the body finally stopped squirming as life escaped it.

The only thing that could be heard was the loud panting of Pinkie Pie, her phonograph had gone silent. She stared at the corpse that lay before her. She saw herself dead, killed by her own hoof.

She seemed to be numb to the pain that was trying to coarse through her body, her mind beginning to fall into a haze from the amount of blood she was losing down her legs. It seemed...insignificant at the moment. All she could do was stare numbly at the lifeless body before her. Nothing else seemed to even exist in the world.

However, her mind finally began to receive the signals her body was sending. She needed medical attention. Her legs became shaky as she finally began to take her first step. She limped, putting as little pressure on her injured legs as possible, over to the medical bag. She carefully pried it open, looking inside. There were many sharp instruments, scalpels, syringes filled with a strange liquid, even a saw for cutting bones.

However, she saw a roll of gauze bandages. She carefully grabbed it, pulling it out of the bag. She unrolled the length of it, before carefully, but tightly, wrapping it around her wounds. She wrapped slowly, but surely, wrapping up the large cut on her hind leg, then the smaller cut on her front leg.

The bandages quickly soaked with blood, but they would seal her wounds for the time being. She placed the remaining gauze inside of her bag and then turned towards the exit. She slowly limped her way back into the grimy hallway, walking past the steel doors. She carefully began to climb up the stairs, her wounds slipping once or twice due to the grime that had grown all over them. The climb was slow, her body ached with pain and exhaustion, but she made it to the top.

She slowly walked across the rotting floor of Sugar Cube Corner, heading straight to one of the grime covered counters. In a dry spot on the counter sat a brown bottle, the label of it called it a 'Health Drink'.

Pinkie's dulled mind pulled the cap of it off with her mouth, before taking it and drinking the whole thing. The drink tasted like a mix of bitter herbs and strawberries for flavor, it was a lot like drinking medicine. But her body was grateful to have the liquid inside of her. She placed the empty

bottle back down on the counter and slowly trudged to the middle of Sugar Cube Corner.

She laid down, panting heavily, as the haze of her mind finally came to a stop as she went into an uncomfortable sleep.

Chapter 5

A groan escaped Pinkie's lips. That had not been a restful sleep by any stretch of the imagination. She rubbed her throbbing head as she began to stand up.

Her body was wracked with aches the moment she tried. She laid back down and took several deep breaths, her senses being hit with the overwhelming stench of decay. She pulled her head away from the ground coughing as the stench tried to gag her. Her eyes shot open as she tried to look around; however, it was far too dark for her to be able to see anything.

She fumbled around in her backpack reaching for her lantern before pulling it out and turning it on.

The floor she sat on was a mess of rotting wood and grime, the normal pristine floors of Sugar Cube Corner had become one with the otherworld now. She lifted her head up to look around, seeing the walls and furniture were also rotting away, bodies of ponies hung from the corners of the room, bad confectionaries were placed on various counters on the shop.

Pinkie quickly turned her head away, closing her eyes from the images. She had seen so much of it already, yet it still wasn't any easier to see any of this. She had kind of wished that waking up would've made this whole place go away, as if it were just some bad dream.

"At least I wasn't attacked by a monster..." she groaned as she began to stand up onto her wobbly feet. She looked down at the blood soaked bandages that covered her legs.

Images of herself attacking her assaulted her mind, as the events replayed in her mind. She remembered each cut, then of her own hoof ending the life of herself.

A pang of guilt coursed through her. She hadn't wanted to kill her, but in her state of self-defense she hadn't been given any other option. If only

this town hadn't warped everything, if only things went back to the way they always were...

"Wait!" Pinkie said as a thought reached her mind. She looked around Sugar Cube Corner once more, before looking down at her feet, viewing the grime-riddled floor. "Sugar Cube Corner didn't look this way when I came in..." she said aloud as she began to realize what was happening around her, "Which means...oh no...that siren didn't go off again! I'm still in this...otherworld!" Pinkie began to panic as the realization hit.

"No...no no no, calm down Pinkie!" Pinkie said sitting herself down taking in deep breaths, "If you panic then nothing good will happen!" She shook her head, before gently tapping it with her hooves, "Stay calm...stay calm and just...just think."

Her heartbeat began to slow down as she managed to rationalize with herself.

"Okay...okay first things first..." she said as she looked at her legs, "I need to change these bandages..." she reached into her bag and grabbed the bandages she'd put in there from before. She quickly unwrapped her wounds, inspecting each of them to make sure they were healing properly before reapplying fresh bandages. She used up the last of her gauze, but she felt satisfied with the fresh wrappings.

"It'd probably be better if I had some disinfectant...but I gotta work with what I have." She sighed softly. "So now what?" She asked herself as she reached into her backpack and pulled out her map. She unfurled it to try and see where she should go.

She gasped in shock. The map was blank now. The entire map only consisted of one word,

Nowhere

"Nowhere? I'm not anywhere?" She asked herself confused. She pressed against the map looking for any clue as to what happened to the

old one, but there were no clues to be had. Letting out a defeated sigh, she placed the map bag into her bag.

“I...guess I should get a look at my surroundings...before I decide where to go next.” She softly gulped down a bit of anxiety. She wasn’t sure what to expect outside now that the siren hadn’t turned the world back to normal.

“Alright...you’ve been through a lot already Pinkie...you can handle this...” she softly motivated herself as she gripped the lantern in her mouth, standing up. She headed for the door and softly pushed it open, expecting a blast of cold air.

Walking out of the store, she found that all of Ponyville had succumbed to the otherworld. The entire street was paved with the rotting floor, littered with holes that showed the metal framing that held it together above a dark bottomless pit. The houses had mutated into decrepit, rust-colored shacks that were falling apart at the seams. The fog still only illuminated part of the town, but was now as black as the sky. The only light that penetrated the area was that which came from her lantern.

She carefully looked around, before stepping down from the front steps of the shop. She didn’t have any idea of where she should head first. The other version of herself hadn’t dropped any clues, and if she had she didn’t want to go back to find it.

Suddenly, a loud thud hit her ears as the ground shook slightly. She looked at the ground carefully, as another tremor passed through, a few pebbles shaking at her hooves. Pinkie’s heart began to race, she had no idea what this meant but it couldn’t be anything good. She looked around her, trying to find a source for the rumbling.

“Ghhuuurrrrgghhh...” Came the groan of a monster Pinkie had become familiar with. She quickly turned her head in that direction as her phonograph began to pick up with the sound of static. Coming slowly out of the darkness was a Groaner, hobbling its way slowly towards her.

‘...There’s no way he’s the source...’ the thoughts ran through Pinkie’s head for a moment, when suddenly she was deafened by a loud roar that cut through the foggy air. The rumbling picked up its speed, as if

the source was now running. Pinkie took a few steps away from the Groaner, not sure what she should do.

“Ruuuaaaaaa...” The Groaner groaned as it tried to move faster. Pinkie couldn’t help but notice that it looked as if it was trying to escape, but escape from what?

“Ruuu-GHRA” The Groaner let out a final cry of pain as from the darkness a massive mouth appeared, biting into the creature, taking it in one bite. It swiveled its head back up before chomping the Groaner in a single bite. Pinkie stared in shock at the giant monster before her.

It was a single body, a large mouth at its front, with no eyes, its skin was curved and pink running straight back, large muscular legs that held its entire frame up. It was as if someone had taken off a pony’s head and neck and put a giant mouth at its body. It stood as tall as a dragon.

It let out another roar that knocked Pinkie back to her senses. It had finished its meal and it was looking for its next one.

Pinkie turned on her heels and ran with all her might. The creature let out a roar as it began to chase, every stomp of its legs shook the ground under her hooves.

Her heart was pounding as she tried her best to run, she constantly felt her hooves about to slip from the shaking ground and she panted like crazy, rushing air to her lungs.

She felt and heard a massive thud behind her. She looked over her shoulder and saw the creature had tried to bite down on her, its head crashing into the floor. It quickly pulled its head back out, letting out a pained roar as it began running again.

She watched it run, its loud thudding feet doing its best to keep up with her. However, it was slower than her and she knew it, this thing wasn’t nearly as fast as the last thing that chased her before. Confidence built up inside of her, she turned to face the road ahead of her.

She made a quick turn, noticing the path ended before her. She ran quickly, looking behind her as she saw the creature run straight into the buildings, letting out another pained roar.

'I can do this...I can out run this thing.' She thought to herself as she felt her confidence skyrocket. She didn't know what it was, but she could outrun it...

She looked ahead of her and saw the rotting town pass her by with every hoof step.

'But where do I outrun it to?' She asked herself, not sure of that answer.

She heard it let out another roar as the tremors under her legs began once again. It was coming after her again, but it didn't seem too bright. It was a thing to be feared, it could eat her if she wasn't careful, but she could get away from it...

She quickly made the turn around another bend, increasing her distance from the creature.

Her attention was caught by what she saw in the distance. It looked as if a giant gate of metal bars had been erected in the middle of the world, cutting off one half of the world from the other. As she ran towards it she could tell it stretched up into the sky but couldn't see where it ended.

She looked behind her; the pink monster was slowly starting to catch up as it meshed its jaw and roared for her blood.

She looked back at the gate, seeing a normal sized door open in it for her to fit through. She kicked herself into high gear and charged straight for the door.

She slipped through with ease and quickly slammed it shut behind her. She stared through the metal bars at the creature running straight for the gate. She panted as she watched it charge with all of its might straight forward.

It crashed loudly against the gate, letting out a wild roar as it came to an abrupt stop. The gate was strong enough to hold it back. It let out another roar as it stepped backwards, rushing straight into the gate again. The bars bent slightly, but held strong. Pinkie stood there amazed, watching the creature fight with all its strength to break through the bars, roaring and hollering as it slammed its head repeatedly against the bars.

A loud cracking sound echoed through the area as the creature stopped its thrashing. It let out grunts as it tried to figure out what the sound meant, before it crashed its head once more against the gate.

The loud crack sounded again and the large creature found its hind leg through the floor. It began to let out frantic roars as it thrashed around, trying to get its foot free. The ground below it cracked and gave way, the creature roaring as it clawed at the metal gate for support. Its giant form soon fell through the ground, its loud roars disappearing into the dark sky as it fell into the bottomless pit.

Pinkie slowly walked towards the area he had crashed into the gate, peaking her head down towards the bottomless pit. The creature had fallen, it was nowhere to be seen or heard anymore. The ground it had stood on continued to crumble away, spread out towards the town. The whole town was slowly falling into the bottomless pit as well, as if the only place left in the whole town was this area behind the metal gate.

Pinkie stared at the crumbling town, in shock that it truly was crumbling away yet...it almost made her a little happy. The place that had caused her so much torment was slowly vanishing before her eyes. It had left her stranded there, but it was going away.

She turned her back from the crumbling town, to get a look at where she currently was before letting out another surprised gasp. She hadn't noticed what was actually behind the gate since she had been too focused on running.

The dirt before her was littered with rocks of all sizes, spread as far as the eye could see. In the center of all the rocks was a wooden house, small but quaint with a moderate windmill. It was the farm, the place she had lived and grown when she was a foal.

'The farm? It's not supposed to be this close to Ponyville!' She thought as she began to run towards it. Its familiarity and comfort was calling for her.

The image of a ghost-like filly appeared before the front door as she ran closer to the house. The little filly ran forward, going through the door to the house. Pinkie had to follow it.

She quickly reached the front door opening it and going inside.

Inside, in the living room, was the ghostly image of her younger sister, Bellamina stood there looking at her.

"B-Bellamina!" She called out, dropping the lantern from her mouth. It hit the ground with a clang, rolling over to the young ghost filly, who stopped it with her hoof.

"I'm...surprised you made it all the way here Pinkamena." Bellamina sat the lantern right-side up, "I guess I was wrong, I guess you can handle the truth."

"Bellamina! Y-You're..." Pinkie started, but stopped herself as she looked at her sister. "You're...not really here, are you?" she said, her cheerfulness dipping as she could see through the ghostly image of her sister.

"You'll see the truth here." Bellamina turned and pointed, directing Pinkie to the stairs to the upper floor, "This house is your last safe haven though. After this, there is no turning back." Her younger sister said ominously.

"...What do you mean?"

"Goodbye sis." Bellamina's last words echoed as her image faded from the living room.

Pinkie could only stare at where her sister had stood, not sure what to make of what she saw. She felt a pang of sadness and yet...a bit of comfort as well. It was short, it was brief, and it didn't last as long as she had wished it could've, but...

She had talked with her sister.

She walked over to the lantern and picked it up once more with her mouth. She couldn't stop here, not now. Her sister's last words gave her a boost of strength, a boost that she could use to see this through. She looked at the stairs her sister had pointed to; they lead to the bedrooms on the second floor.

'The truth...I guess it's time to find out what that means.' She thought to herself as she took the careful steps up to her destiny.

At the top of the stairs she was met by a wooden door. She carefully pushed it open, revealing a hallway. On the sides of the hallway were four square holes with writing below them. At the end of the hallway was another wooden door. She stepped into the hallway, when suddenly the wooden door snapped closed behind her. She quickly looked at the door, trying the handle, only to find it locked.

She let out a soft sigh as she turned back to the hallway, before almost jumping out of her skin again. The Slender Pony stood at the end of the hallway, right outside the door on the other side. Her heart started beating in her throat as she stepped back against the door that had locked closed behind her.

However, the Slender Pony turned around and seemed to phase through the last door, as if telling her he was waiting for her on the other side.

She took a deep breath as she tried to calm her beating heart. The very sight of the creature was instilling fear into her...

She shook her head as she calmed down.

'My sister said that the truth was here...I have to have faith in her.' Pinkie carefully got back on her hooves, stepping forward slowly, 'She said I was ready for it. I've managed to come through this far through hell and back, I can handle this.' She took a deep breath as she turned to the first hole in the wall, reading the words written under it:

*Eyes gleamed over,
It stalks before striking,
Its tail wags in anticipation.*

Pinkie thought it over in her head. The square shaped hole was just the right size for her to place in one of the tiles she had gotten from Sugar Cube Corner. She assumed the riddle meant that she had to put one of them in the slot.

She carefully looked inside of her bag and went over the selection she had: a bird, a snake, a cat and a fish.

‘This riddle refers to the Cat tile, doesn’t it?’ she asked herself thinking the clue over. She carefully grabbed the tile and gently placed it into the hole in the wall.

The tile began to glow white, spreading out from the hole it was in. Pinkie took a step back as she watched the plate spread out into an area the size of a door before her. The light soon faded away, revealing a door in its place.

She carefully opened the door, looking inside. It was a single room, almost like a closet. Four solid walls with no description to them, yet she felt compelled to go inside. She walked into the dark room, closing the door behind her.

Suddenly, the flame on her lantern went out on its own. As she reached out to try and relight it, the room was filled with light. Projected on the walls were images. Pinkie instantly recognized them as memories.

“I dunno Pinkamena...are you sure this is a good idea?” Bellamina asked as she walked with her bouncing older sister towards the edge of the rock farm.

“Of course it is!” Pinkie said happily as she lead her younger sister, “It’s a super special party! I tried to invite Mother, Father and Octavia, but they were all too busy. So that means you get to enjoy the fun with me!”

"Well...I do love your parties." Bellamina smiled, it was true that she did. The two of them reached the edge of the forest.

"We're here!" Pinkamena called out happily.

"Who are you talking to?" Bellamina asked confused.

"Why the Party Host of course!" She giggled happily. Bellamina looked confused, but the confusion didn't last for long. From the forest walked a tall colt, his coat was pale and dull grey, his mane was unkempt and was curled into a mess of brown, he didn't look like he'd had a good bath in at least a week, and most odd of all was that his cutie mark was that of three dark red balloons.

"Hello Pinkamena, I see you brought a friend." The old colt said with a smile. His voice sent shivers down Bellamina's back.

"See? He's the party host! He's going to throw us a super-duper-wonderfully-fantastic party!" Pinkie bounced over to his side and pointed at his cutie mark, "And see? We both have a similar cutie mark! That means he's going to throw us the best party!" Pinkamena was very excited.

"Oh of course, I always throw the best parties." The colt let out a soft deep chuckle.

"R-Really?" Bellamina asked a little unsure, but if her sister believed in this guy, then he must be alright. Besides, they were going to a party, and parties were always fun.

"Come, the party is this way." The colt smiled as he turned and walked back into the forest.

"Yea! Party time!" Pinkie bounced happily after the colt. Bellamina followed slowly after the two.

The flame of the lantern flickered back to life as the images faded from the walls. Pinkie stared at the walls that had shown the images she had long since forced herself to forget about. She didn't like where this was

going. Back then she was too ignorant to realize that the colt gave off a bad vibe, she was too focused on parties.

She gulped heavily as she opened the door back up and reentered the hallway. She looked at the hole before her, with the text written under it:

*Sleek and smooth,
Striking at its prey,
Its tail lets it move.*

The image of a snake came to her mind. A bad feeling ran through her as she carefully pulled out the tile with the snake on it, placing it carefully into the slot. The light turned the area into a door just as the previous one had.

She hesitantly walked into the room, trying to prepare herself for whatever it was she was about to witness. The light of her lantern faded away.

“W-What are you doing to my sister!?” the young Pinkamena cried from behind the bars of a steel cage. The colt had locked her inside under the guise that they’d be playing Pin the Tail on the Pony.

“Don’t look so sad little filly,” The colt said with a dazed over smile. Pinkamena looked into his eyes and saw nothing; it was as if the colt truly had no soul to him, “I’m just about to play one of the most wonderful games with your sister.”

“She doesn’t look like she’s having fun!” Pinkamena cried out, looking at her sister who was strapped down to a table. She was frantic, trying to pry herself free from her bonds. The straps were too tight; she could do little more than twitch various parts of her body. He knew what he was doing.

“Oh, she may not look like it now, but I’ve played this game with lots of ponies before. Just look around you, I’ve had many friends over the years.” A wry smile came to his face before he turned his back to her.

Pinkamena looked around the room; it was the first time she'd paid any attention to it. Suddenly, the horrifying stench of the room was obvious; it was coming from the various states of decay from the ponies that adorned the room. Most were of young fillies, with little more than their heads remaining as decorations. The colt had dressed the room up for a party using the bones and skin of the ponies he had killed.

"NO! STOP! PLEASE!" Came the hysterical cries from her sister. Pinkamena's attention instantly snapped back to what was happening before her.

"That's right, make the noise. It's what I long for." The colt laughed as Pinkamena watched as he carefully placed a scalpel against her skin. With precision he began to cut away at her.

The scream of her younger sister echoed around the room as the image faded. The flame came to life, illuminating the dark room once more.

Tears streamed down Pinkie's face like they'd never fell before.

'Bellamina...' She sobbed to herself as she remembered the horrific images of her sister being dissected alive by the colt. She had tossed the memory aside a long time ago, a memory that had been too horrific for her to want to remember. Her precious sister had become nothing more than a plaything for that colt.

She hiccupped as she gasped for breath between her sobs. She still had two tiles left to go; she had more memories to remember. She had to remember everything that had happened, for the sake of her sister.

It took her a long time to leave that room, very quietly closing the door behind her. She had to see everything first, see it all before she could say anything. She very quietly walked to the next section of the wall and read the text bellow the square hole:

*Soft to the touch,
It soars over its fears,*

Its tail stabilizes.

Pinkie quickly took the tile with the bird on it and placed it into the hole. The door appeared just as it had with the others. She walked inside, staring at the walls as the light once again faded from her lantern.

"Come now, you must eat. There's no point in letting yourself go hungry." The colt chuckled to himself, his cold, harsh, cutting laugh. Pinkamena had curled up in the back of the cage, having cried her heart out. All that remained of her sister now was the lifeless upper-half that still was strapped to the table. She hadn't seen what he'd done with the rest of her after he'd finished.

"Here, I even made you this special treat." He said opening a small hole in the cage, pushing a plate with a cupcake on it. Pinkamena didn't want his treat; nothing made by this cruel colt could truly be worth eating.

Her stomach let out a growl; she hadn't eaten since breakfast and had been hoping to stuff her face with a feast from the party.

"See? You're hungry. You should eat." The colt smiled.

Pinkamena's body defied her mind, as it slowly got up and walked over to the cupcake. She sniffed the cupcake carefully, but it was hard to smell anything past the stench of decay in the room. She then, very carefully, licked at the frosting that lay on top of the cupcake. The sweet sugary taste hit her tongue, almost as if in defiance of what her mind was telling her. Her mind screamed that something was wrong.

She very carefully opened her mouth and took a bite out of the cupcake.

"Good, I'm so glad you're eating. It would be a shame if your sister went to waste." The colt chuckled ominously.

The flavor of the cupcake hit Pinkamena's senses like a brick. This wasn't a sweet and sugary cupcake; it was salty and chewy, almost as if the main ingredient had been...

The colt laughed as he watched the expression on the young fillies face distort. Pinkamena vomited, rushing back to the back of the cage where she coughed and sputtered, trying to get the vile from her mouth. The imposing laugh of the colt hit her ears, causing her tears to return.

A loud crash was heard from the top of the staircase leading to this basement. The colt looked up surprised, his eyes widening. He suddenly tried to open the cage like a mad beast, as if he absolutely had to reach Pinkamena. He managed to open it as he began to reach a hoof inside, when he was suddenly tackled by another large figure.

There was loud yelling, as if there was a fight going on. Another large figure appeared before the cage, reaching to try and grab Pinkamena.

"No! No!" Pinkamena cried out as she tried to resist the figure pulling her out of the cage.

"It's okay! Don't be afraid, that evil colt can't hurt you anymore." The voice that came from the figure was comforting, reassuring. It was nothing like that of the colt's.

Pinkamena looked up fearfully at the figure as it pulled her out of the cage, holding her in one of his legs. The colt had a white coat with striking red hair; he wore a blue uniform adorned with a blue hat.

"It's okay, we're the good guys. We've come to take you home." He said with a smile as he moved quickly to get her out of the basement.

'I was rescued...' she said remembering as the light came back, 'But it had been too late...they didn't make it in time to save my sister.' Pinkie shook her head, 'and that...that vile treat...' even the thought of the cupcake was making her stomach turn. 'It's...it's hard to believe anypony could be that cruel.'

She walked back into the hallway as the thoughts continued to bounce through her head. 'Those words I spoke in another memory make sense now though...after having eaten that; I really didn't feel like ever eating again...'

She looked up at the last hole in the wall, the words underneath it read:

*A slick texture,
Its sustenance for most,
Its tail propels it forward.*

Pinkie carefully pulled out the last tile, the picture of a fish on it, and placed it in the hole. She carefully wiped away a few tears forming in her eyes as the door appeared. She carefully walked through, seeing what the last of her hidden memories had to offer.

Pinkamena sobbed into Octavia's coat. The older sister had been doing her best to comfort her younger sister, but no matter what she tried she couldn't get the filly to sleep.

Pinkamena had barely eaten, she refused to sleep and she constantly was sobbing. Octavia had no idea what it was that her sister had seen; all she knew was the Bellamina was dead. That fact alone seemed to have Pinkamena jumping at the shadows.

"Oh my, I hear crying." Came a very soft, soothing voice.

"Grammy Pie." Octavia said, surprised, looking up to see their grandmother walking into the dark room carrying a lantern.

"Grammy..." Pinkamena sniffed as she saw her grandmother.

"It's me child." She smiled warmly as she walked closer, placing the lantern on the night stand, then nuzzling the crying filly, "What troubles you?" The sound of her gentle voice seemed to sooth something deep in the filly's soul. Pinkamena's sobs slowly turned to sniffles as she composed herself enough to speak before her grandmother.

"B-B-Bell...Bellamina's...dead grammy..." Pinkamena choked a little.

"Yes...I know dear. It's a fact we all must deal with now." Grammy said solemnly. "We all have done our share of mourning, and we shall forever mourn her loss. But your tears seem to hide something more my child. They seem to hide more than just your loss."

Pinkamena rubbed her eyes as she sniffed, looking away from her grandmother, burying her head into Octavia's coat.

"I'm...never throwing another party as long as I live." She sobbed.

"Oh child, why would you say such a thing? You know we love your parties, and you love to throw them." Grammy Pie said, surprised at the sudden words from her granddaughter.

"M-M-My partying...got Bellamina killed." She sobbed the words out into Octavia's coat. Octavia did her best to try and comfort the filly. Their grandmother looked a little sad, but closed her eyes as she seemed to understand.

"My dear Pinkamena...if nothing else, you should continue to throw your parties." She spoke softly but truly.

"Huh?" Pinkamena and Octavia said in unison as they both turned to look at their grandmother.

"You see dear Pinkamena; your sister loved your parties. She truly had fun at them; sometimes all she could talk about with me was how much fun she had had at your last party." Grammy Pie chuckled softly to herself as she remembered, "Which is why I'm telling you; continue to throw your parties child, in honor and memory of your sister. Your sister would not want you to live the rest of your life being afraid and crying. She'd want to see you smiling for the rest of your days." Grammy Pie's smile was warm as the words she spoke were the truth.

"B-But..." Pinkamena sniffed as she tried to comprehend her Grandmother's words, being only a filly as she was. "But...the world is so scary Grammy. How...How can I have a smile in it?"

"Simple my child," she chuckled softly to herself, "You have to laugh your fears away."

“Laugh?” Pinkamena asked curiously.

It was a lesson she remembered often from her childhood. Her grandmother would often visit her and teach her how to laugh at her fears, stand up to the shadows and the idea of monsters and to laugh her fears away. She could face anything the world had to throw at her so long as she had the inner strength to laugh when the day was over.

She had forgotten why her grandmother had repeated the lesson so often to her, in her memories before she had just thought it was because she had been afraid of the dark as a filly. She knew now that it was because of something much deeper.

A small smile crept onto her face as she remembered all of the memories she had forgotten now. The good memories, the bad memories, the ugly ones, the beautiful ones. She had locked them all away to keep herself happy, to try and keep Bellamina's wishes true. She hadn't been ready to accept the memories into her heart as fact...

She carefully left the last of the rooms that contained her memories. She could feel the slow, rhythmic beats of her heart that resonated loudly through her. A smile was on her face as she remembered her sister fondly.

'So...there's just one last thing to do then.' She said as she looked to the door at the end of the hallway. She slowly walked towards it, her resolution holding firm in her heart. She knew what she had to do now.

She opened the door, stepping out.

Outside the door she saw four torches lit around an open arena. A pathway was lit for her leading to it. A fence was placed along the path and arena so she couldn't go anywhere else.

She gently put her lantern away as she walked towards the center of the arena. She could feel small tremors shaking through the world as she walked.

As she reached one side of the arena, from the ground on the opposite side the Slender Pony emerged from ground. He stood tall over her, his presence still bearing down.

But...she wasn't afraid this time.

"I finally understand now." Pinkie said softly, shaking her head slowly before looking at the Slender Pony with a smile, "My fear of your presence, your stature over me, your very existence...you're the colt aren't you." The Slender Pony just stood there, unchanging from Pinkie's words. "Well...you're not him exactly...but you're my image of him." She closed her eyes and smiled, "which means...I'm not afraid of you anymore."

The Slender Pony began to walk towards her, every step seeming to echo across the arena. Pinkie opened her eyes as she watched the pony walk towards her. Her mouth began to quiver as she saw him getting closer. She felt the haze beginning to hit her mind, the phonograph letting out its static.

She stood firm where she was, remembering fondly the words of her grandmother, the memories of her younger sister, of her friends back in Ponyville, of the fun she's had throughout her life thanks to the help everyone she's ever known gave her. All of them helped her live a life she could say she was proud of.

The Slender Pony stood a few feet from her, but the haze he brought to her mind began to fade. Her quivering mouth puckered up for a moment, before a soft sound came from it.

"Heh..."

It started off low, as it gained its footing inside of Pinkie.

"Heh, heh, heh..."

The confidence grew in her with each sound that came out of her, the haze lifting, the static of the phonograph becoming more quiet.

"Hahahahaha"

She was laughing. She was laughing at the fear that this Pony...no, that this whole town had brought upon her, just so that she could become strong enough to face her fears.

“Ahahahahahaha!”

She laughed, she giggled, she snorted, she chuckled. It felt like it'd been a lifetime since she had last let out a laugh, she'd let out so many tears that had been pent up for years, so many pains and torments she had kept inside. For the first time in a long, long while, she laughed with all of her heart.

A bright light shone from her neck, as a golden necklace with a blue balloon gem appeared. Her laughter continued as the light from the necklace made the Slender Pony jump back, letting out a shrilling cry as it seemed to hurt him.

The entire arena began to shake with a gigantic tremor as it began to fall apart. All of the scenery around her began to fall into the bottomless pit that lay beneath them. The entire world was crumbling and shattering around them.

The Slender Pony let out another painful roar as he dissolved back into the ground, disappearing from Pinkie's sight.

She calmed her laughing, enough so that she could speak.

“I won't forget you Mr. Colt. And I don't think I can ever truly forgive you for what you did, but I can move on now.” She closed her eyes as she smiled brightly. The golden necklace around her neck shined brightly as it shot a beam of light forward, hitting the air before forming into a door of light. The necklace then vanished, to wait for the next time it would be needed.

“It's time for me to head home. For real this time.” Pinkie smiled happily as she walked through the door of light, the last of the world crumbling away behind her.

Ending – The Truth

Unlock Condition:

Clear the game and see every hidden Truth

Twilight pulled her head back, rubbing her forehead as she groaned. The spell was taxing, not to mention she had held it for minutes already. She shook her head before looking at her pink friend. Pinkie still had her eyes closed.

“Pinkie? You alright?” Twilight asked, not sure if she had been released from the effects of the spell yet.

It took a moment, but soon Pinkie’s eyes slowly opened.

“You okay? It wasn’t too much was it?” Twilight asked a little worried about her friend.

Pinkie simply blinked, before smiling and lowering her head closing her eyes. Twilight blinked a little confused at this behavior.

“Thank you Twilight.” Were the first words to leave Pinkie’s mouth.

“Oh, did it work?” Twilight asked, softly smiling.

“It did. And I thank you so much for helping me.” Pinkie said lifting her head, letting Twilight see the smile on Pinkie’s face. “If you hadn’t helped me...who knows what would have happened. I mean, I probably would’ve been driven insane.” She twirled her eyes in example, then chuckling at herself. “But I won’t now and it’s all thanks to you.”

“Oh well I, you know, I was doing it to help a friend in need.” Twilight said smiling, accepting the compliments in her usual manner.

“This has been a pretty crazy experience.” Pinkie chuckled.

“So...I hope I'm not prying, but you know what was causing those nightmares now?” Twilight asked curiously.

“I do.” Pinkie said, but shifted her head a little, “But I'll tell you about it later, I promise. Right now,” she stood up, “I have a few things I need to take care. I hope you don't mind.”

“Oh, but of course. I'm just happy I was able to help.” Twilight smiled. Pinkie smiled back as she headed towards Twilight's door to help. A thought struck her and she stopped.

“Oh hey, Twilight, before I go I need two favors.” Pinkie said happily.

“Sure, what do you need?” Twilight asked curiously.

“Well, first I'll need you to cast the cloud walking spell for me. And second, do you have any red ribbon on you?” Pinkie asked curiously

Rainbow Dash was getting in a good afternoon nap in her home when she was awoken by several knocks on her door.

“Mmm...wha...” She said as she stirred from her sleep. Her ears wiggled as she heard the door being knocked on. “Yea yea, hold your horse shoes, I'm coming.” She yawned, stretching as she woke up. She walked over to the door, opening it up.

Almost instantly she was assaulted by a pink blur that proceeded to hug her, knocking her over onto her back.

“G-Guh! What the-“ She said in surprise, before realizing her assaulter was Pinkie Pie. “Oh, Pinkie Pie?” Rainbow Dash said sitting up slowly, “What's the idea? You know it's my nap time.” Rainbow shook her head as Pinkie slowly let go.

“I know and I'm sorry for waking you,” Pinkie smiled, “A lots happened to me and I really just had to see you.”

“Well, that’s alright then. I certainly can’t abandon a friend in need.” Rainbow Dash said brushing her hair with her hoof, “What’s on your mind Pinkie?”

“It’s...a really long story Dash. A long and...well a rather sad one.” Pinkie said with a hint of melancholy in her voice, “And I’m more than willing to tell you, but I hope you don’t mind if I keep you waiting a little while to hear the story.” Pinkie ran a hoof through her hair, “I still have some things to deal with before I’m really ready to tell other ponies about it.”

“...A sad story? That’s not like you Pinkie Pie, you’re always about being upbeat, fun and having a good time. What could be so sad about something recently happening to you?” Rainbow asked a little curiously about her friend.

Pinkie giggled a little, smiling at Dash, “You’ll know when you hear it. Just trust me for the moment. After all, I came here to hang out with you for a little while, if you don’t mind.”

“Of course not, a visit from my gal-pal is always welcome.” Rainbow smiled as she flew over to another part of her house, “Would you like a snack? I got some fresh apples from Applejack, they’re really good.”

“That sounds delightful.” Pinkie said walking further into Rainbow’s house.

Rainbow returned with the apples, the two ponies sharing the snack together. They talked, they laughed, they reminisced about some of the adventures they’d been on since Twilight had arrived in town. Rainbow thought it a little weird that Pinkie was being so sentimental, but figured she must have a good reason. They spent a few good hours just hanging out in her home.

“So Pinkie,” Rainbow said after they had just finished a conversation about possible pranks they could pull in the future, “what’s with the red ribbon in your hair?” Rainbow asked curiously.

Pinkie turned her head to look at the red ribbon she had tied into a bow on her mane. She smiled softly, before looking at Rainbow Dash,

“Well...let’s just say it’s helping me remember what dear friends I really have.” She chuckled.

“I didn’t know you needed a ribbon for that, after all we’re all right here.” Rainbow Dash smiled, putting a hoof to her chest.

“I know,” Pinkie laughed, “But I did need the reminder.” She gently nuzzled her hair with the ribbon attached to it. She then smiled softly, before looking up at Rainbow Dash.

“Dash...I’m going away for a while.” Pinkie announced to her.

“Huh?” Rainbow said almost spitting out the apple juice she had been sipping on. “Going away? But why?”

“I’ve got something I need to take care of.” Pinkie said, looking away from Rainbow Dash, though still smiling, “I’m going out to go see my sister Octavia.”

“Well...we could go with you, you know. You don’t have to go alone.” Rainbow explained.

“I know, but this is really something I have to do myself,” she chuckled as she gently batted her straight hair with her hoof, “Especially if I want this to be poofy again.”

“...So you’re sure this is what you need?” Rainbow Dash asked once again.

“It is.” Pinkie smiled, looking at Rainbow Dash.

Dash looked conflicted, she certainly didn’t want Pinkie to go away, but she also had to support her friend.

“...Hey, you gotta do what you gotta do right?” Rainbow said putting on a strong face and gently hitting Pinkie’s shoulder, “Besides, you’ll be coming back right?”

“Oh of course I will. I could never abandon you and the other girls here in Ponyville! You’re my bestest friends ever! I can’t think of what life would be like without you all!” Pinkie explained happily.

“Then go ahead. We’ll see you off, of course. Though things will be mighty quiet without you around.” Rainbow said smiling.

“I know, I bring so many smiles here, which is why I could never stay away for long.” Pinkie chuckled again.

Classical music filled the halls, the small group of ponies played on the stage to a large crowd. Their instruments were finely tuned, they never missed a beat or a cord as they all played in perfect harmony. The very soul of their music resonated through the hall and the hearts of all the ponies attending.

The final chords were played and the auditorium was filled with applause as they took their bows. The curtains came to a close on the stage as the band members began to pack up their instruments.

“That was probably our best performance yet.” Beauty Brass said as she put her sousaphone away in its case.

“I don’t know, I still feel like we could do better.” Frederic said as his piano was pushed off to the side.

“I still say we should add in some of Beethooven’s earlier work, his later work is magnificent but it doesn’t compare to the wonderment his early work provided.” Harpo said as his harp was also carted off.

“We sounded fantastic guys; don’t worry about it too much.” Octavia chuckled at her fellow band mates. “It was a great performance, so we’ve got a well-deserved night of rest.” Octavia smiled as she placed her contrabass into its container. She pulled the strap over her shoulders, placing the instrument on her back. She always refused help with putting her beloved instrument away.

“Hey, you’re not supposed to be back here!” The band heard a security guard say loudly. They turned their heads to see who he was yelling at.

“I know, but my sister is in the band and I really need to talk to her.” Pinkie’s begged at the security guard.

“We didn’t hear anything about any of the band members getting a family visit today.” The security guard said grabbing Pinkie by the leg.

“H-Hey! I’m not lying!” Pinkie said trying to get the security guard to let go.

“It’s okay sir.” Octavia said walking up to the guard, “She’s my sister. Though she did come by rather unannounced.” Octavia said looking at Pinkie curiously, before noticing that her hair was straight, something she hadn’t seen in a long time now.

“Well, alright, if the band says you’re okay, then you are. Just don’t come in unannounced next time.” The security guard huffed before walking off.

“Hey, do you need some time to yourself?” Beauty asked as she walked up to Octavia.

“Yea, sorry guys, go ahead and do your own things, I’ll see you back at the hotel later.” Octavia smiled. Beauty Brass understood and walked off to the rest of the band.

“Sorry sis, I probably should’ve given you more warning. Then again even I didn’t really know I was going to be setting off till I basically did. Still, I could’ve written.” Pinkie chuckled.

“Yea, would’ve been nice.” Octavia chuckled back, “At least you didn’t interrupt my performance this time.” Pinkie blushed while smiling, still remembering the Gala. “Come on, let’s go have some dinner and we can talk.”

Pinkie dined on a fresh daisy salad, while Octavia enjoyed a French Daffodil Soup.

“So, Pinkie,” Octavia started as she finished taking a sip of her soup, “Why the sudden visit? I assume it has to do with something that’s bugging you.”

“Heh...I can’t hide anything from you, can I sis?” Pinkie smiled as she took another bite of her salad.

“Not really. You’re hair doesn’t go down unless your upset about something.” Octavia said as her eyes wandered down to the red ribbon in Pinkie’s hair, “The ribbon is new though.”

“Heh...well the two topics are related.” Pinkie said, before giving a soft sigh as she smiled. “I know I’m about to ask a lot from you Octavia...what with you on tour and all...and it’s been a long time since either of us brought this up...”

Octavia ate another spoonful of soup as she watched her sister curiously, not really sure what to expect.

“But...I’d like the two of us to go visit Bellamina’s grave.”

Octavia nearly dropped the spoon from her mouth. She quickly swallowed the contents of her mouth.

“This is...rather sudden Pinkie.” Octavia said surprised her sister would bring it up, “If that’s what you really want...our next concert isn’t till next week in Hoofington, so if we left now we could make it to the farm with enough time for me to get back.”

“Oh, thank you sis!” Pinkie said happily, “You really are the best sister in the world.” She chuckled happily.

“Sure, I’ll do this so long as you tell me what’s going on.” Octavia smiled.

“Deal.” Pinkie smiled back.

The wind blew san across the rocky field, as the two sister's stood before their younger sister's grave. It was a hand-carved rock marker, carefully crafted to look like their younger sister sitting with a smile. She sat on top of a slab that read 'Here lays Bellamina Marie Pie, a beloved daughter, a wonderful sister, and an angel in filly form.'

"That's...really quite a story Pinkie." Octavia said looking at Pinkie, then back to her sister's grave, "But...it's good to hear that you've forgiven yourself for what happened." Octavia smiled.

"Yea, I'm glad I did too. But I couldn't say it was official till I at least came here again." Pinkie said as she gently placed the roses she had picked up on her sister's grave. "I'd forgotten about her because I didn't want to remember. And that's a terrible thing for an older sister to do. So from now on, I promise to visit her once a year." Pinkie smiled happily.

"You know what...if you're going to do that, then I'll join you." Octavia smiled, "I've been too focused on my work lately. I haven't given our sister the proper time of day either."

"Thank you." Pinkie said, nuzzling against Octavia.

"You're my sister; I've always been here for you if you need me sis." Octavia nuzzled her sister back, smiling happily. The sister's shared their happy embrace.

"Octavia, Pinkamena, dinner's ready." Their mother called from the farm house.

"Coming!" Octavia called out, "Come on, let's go get some dinner sis."

"I'll be right there." Pinkie smiled to Octavia. Octavia nodded and headed towards the farm.

"Hey...Bellamina..." Pinkie said softly, getting closer to her sister, "You were a wonderful sister. Thank you so much for being my sister. I love you." She kissed the forehead of her sister's statue. She then turned around and began to walk back to the farm.

Her hair poofed out and curled, returning to her usual, bubbly self.

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*The End of  
Silent Ponyville 1*

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You can find five alternate endings to story 1 here:

<http://www.equestriadaily.com/2011/06/story-silent-ponyville.html>

Silent Ponyville 2

Chapter 1

“How does it make that sound?” A young filly stared hypnotized by the gentle music caressing her ears. The small box before her let out a harmony that reminded her of angels. The warm body next to her grew closer, nuzzling up against her.

“I don’t know the details myself,” an older mare’s soothing voice swept through her ears as if the voice itself was trying to hug her. Her voice was soft yet delicate, “But it’s just like an instrument. Every piece is finely tuned, so that when a cord is struck it plays a gentle note.”

“But it only plays one song...” The young filly mused as she continued to stare, comforted by the warmth of the other with her. “And...it seems a little sad...” she leaned her head against the bigger body, resting against it.

“Yes, I suppose it does sound a little sad.” The older mare smiled warmly, her long mane falling in the filly’s face. The little filly giggled a little as the hair tickled her face, before moving it out of the way to smile at the music box, “But this music box is...very special to me.” The older mare sighed happily.

“...I like it.” The filly smiled happily, closing her eyes as she listened, the melody softly flowing through her ears. She couldn’t help but think it was beautiful.

“Please never forget...that I love you...” The older mare’s voice grew quiet with those words.

"I know mother...I love you too." The filly nuzzled against her mother happily. The older mare grew quiet as the filly nuzzled against her mother. There was a silence that filled the air, only being filled by the gentle and calming music from the box.

"...Mother?" The young filly broke the silence, but it soon returned. The chimes of the music seemed to slow down, drawing out each individual note. "...Mother..." she called again, lifting her head up to try and look at her mother. The older mare had suddenly grown quiet.

"Mother...say something..." The filly pleaded, pushing against her mother with her hooves, trying to get her attention. The mare's body felt like it was growing colder, wobbling a bit before falling over. The older mare lay on the floor, her hair looking like cobwebs on the ground, her coat growing dull, her unmoving form framed against the darkness of the ground.

"Mother!" The young filly cried pushing her hooves against her mother as the music box continued to slow down, each note ringing in her head that something was wrong. The filly moved her hands away from her mother and stared at her hooves, her blood covered hooves. The body of the mare was withering away, blood escaping from underneath her body.

"Mother...Mother...MOTHER!" The filly cried as tears began to stream down her eyes, shaking her mother's body to wake her, to tell her everything was alright. The music from the box died.

The body of the filly's mother turned to dust, as it vanished in the wind, leaving nothing but the blood that had been spilled.

The filly shook and cried, tears drenching her cheeks. She touched the blood stain on the floor, trying to feel any remaining heat that told her that her mother was still there.

The blood was cold, no sign of life to it.

The music box started to play music once more, but it no longer played the sad but beautiful song. The music box hissed a horrifying sound, as if bees suddenly filled the box. The filly looked up into the darkness, terror filling her core.

Red eyes gleamed as a presence made itself known. It towered over the filly as it drew closer, its body cloaked in darkness. The darkness itself flickered and flowed off of its body, its mouth opening revealing a gaping hole of white filled with jagged black. The presence of the creature crushed the filly, she couldn't move, she couldn't breathe, she was paralyzed by the very thing that stood before her. With a single swift movement, the creature closed the distance.

Its teeth sunk into the filly's neck, lifting her up and holding her as if a prize. Tears continued to stream down the filly's face, as the blood slipped down her body. The creature growled, before dropping the filly on top of the dust of her mother. The filly could do nothing but stare into the darkness of the world.

Even that darkness was soon fading, fading into a separate darkness.

The filly's vision was filled with the beast. Its jagged white mouth turned into a grin, as it once more, drew its teeth at the filly's face.

Fluttershy awoke with a scream. She panted heavily as she sat, staring at her pillow in the darkness, the covers hanging on her shoulders, her body soaked in sweat. The cool night air filled her burning, aching lungs. She put a hoof to her face, feeling the fresh tears that had been streaming from her face. She hiccuped softly as she tried to rub them away, still feeling fresh ones wanting freedom as well.

Something rustled under the covers next to her as she froze, turning as she heard the moan of something waking up.

"Another one?" Rainbow Dash groaned, sitting up from her spot on the bed, rubbing her eyes. "How many is that now? At least ten..." she let out a yawn, obviously still not used to being woken up in the middle of the night constantly.

"I-I...I'm....I'm sorry..." Fluttershy hiccuped, squeezing her eyes shut as she desperately tried to hold back her tears, her body shaking. "I-I...k-keep waking y-you up...I-I shouldn't...h-have asked you to t-try and comfort

m-me..." Fluttershy stuttered her words, lumps forming in her throat as tears escaped her shut eye lids.

"Ugh." Rainbow put a hoof to her face. She shifted on the bed, before wrapping a hoof comfortingly around her marefriend's shoulders. Fluttershy leaned into Rainbow's chest and sobbed softly into her. "Come on Fluttershy, you should know by now that me sleeping isn't as important as you feeling better." Rainbow said quietly, lowering her head closer to Fluttershy's. Fluttershy didn't reply, only continuing with her soft sobs. "So me spending the last few nights here hasn't helped your nightmares, that's no big deal. It just shows us how serious this is." Rainbow said trying her best to offer comforting words, something she wasn't too used to.

Fluttershy could only let out a whimper in response. The nightmare's terrified her, she was barely able to fall asleep anymore knowing they were waiting for her inside of her own mind. She didn't want to sleep anymore, she wanted to stay up and be rid of the dreams, but her body was exhausted, it demanded sleep, but her mind screamed to stay awake. The conflict inside her only brought out more tears.

Rainbow looked out into the darkness of Fluttershy's room as she tried desperately to think of something to do or say. 'If only I was a smarter...' Rainbow Dash thought to herself.

It was as if a light bulb had been turned on in Rainbow's mind.

"Fluttershy, in the morning lets go see Twilight. I'm sure she can help with these nightmares, I mean she's got all kinds of books, I'm sure she'll have something that can help with this." Rainbow spoke eagerly but softly, making sure Fluttershy heard her.

"..Do...do you really think...she can help?" Fluttershy asked, managing to wipe her face as her sobs softened.

"Yea, of course she can." Rainbow said confidently, nuzzling up against Fluttershy, "She's Twilight, even if she can't find an answer, she can ask Celestia! We'll get rid of these nightmares before you know it."

"...Thank you..." Fluttershy smiled softly, the tears finally stopping.

“Hey, what’s a marefriend for?” Rainbow grinned, kissing Fluttershy’s forehead.

“...I still don’t feel like sleeping though...” Fluttershy said, staring at the pillow of her bed. It was still deep in the middle of the night.

“...Hmm...” Rainbow said in thought. She wasn’t sure what to say for that. She looked up at the ceiling as she thought about it. She then let off a small shrug unintentionally as a thought rolled through her mind, ‘I guess it’s now or never then.’

“H-Huh?” Fluttershy said confused as she felt herself being pushed down onto the bed. She looked up at Rainbow Dash as she lay on her back, Rainbow climbing on top of Fluttershy before kissing Fluttershy deeply.

“Don’t worry; I’ll take your mind off of those nightmares so you can finish resting.” Rainbow grinned, blushing deeply. Fluttershy blushed in return, surprised, but accepting as she closed her eyes, their lips meeting once more.

“Shouldn’t you clear the clouds?” Fluttershy asked, yawning as her and Rainbow walked through the town, the warm sun only slightly obscured by a few clouds lingering around the sky.

“This is more important.” Rainbow said rubbing Fluttershy’s head lightly, “I can clear the clouds in a snap. Let’s get you feeling better first.” Rainbow grinned.

“I suppose.” Fluttershy rubbed her eyes, still trying to rid them of sleepiness. She had started to develop bags under her eyes from the lack of sleep, but nothing severe.

“Suppose nothing! It is more important.” Rainbow said trying once more to build Fluttershy’s confidence, “Just focus on getting better. Everything else can wait till then.”

“Getting better? Is Fluttershy sick?” Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy stopped as they looked behind them, seeing Pinkie Pie standing behind them with a basket in hoof filled with letters.

“Oh, hey Pinkie Pie.” Rainbow said turning to smile at their pink friend, “And no, she’s not really sick. She’s just been having some really bad nightmares lately, so we we’re going to see Twilight if she can help.”

The silence was almost deafening despite its brevity. The basket in Pinkie’s hoof fell, hitting the ground with what seemed like a loud thud, the letters spilling out before it.

“N-N-N-N-Nightm-mares?” Pinkie stuttered, a look of shock on her face.

“Uh Pinkie, you dropped your basket.” Rainbow said pointing to it.

“No time for that!” Pinkie said quickly rushing to Fluttershy’s side. She looked Fluttershy over, causing the yellow pegasus to flinch a little, before Pinkie look into her face, “How bad are these nightmares? How long have you been having them?”

“T-They’re...awful...” Fluttershy squeaked, answering though intimidated by Pinkie’s actions, “I’ve been waking up crying for the last week and a half now...I thought Rainbow Dash could help make them go away, but they still haven’t stopped...so Rainbow suggested we go see Twilight.”

Pinkie stared, mouth agape at Fluttershy. Fluttershy began to sweat a little, not understand what was going through the pink pony’s head. Pinkie Pie then looked serious for a moment, before turning her head from Fluttershy, as if she was in serious mental contemplation.

“...I see...going to see Twilight is the natural assumption to make.” Pinkie mumbled to herself.

“...Pinkie Pie, what’s going on? You’re acting even stranger than you normally do.” Rainbow looked at Pinkie Pie confused by her actions.

“...It’s nothing.” Pinkie lied stepping back from Fluttershy, “But I’m going to Twilight’s with you.” It sounded more like a demand than an offer.

“O-Oh, no, i-it’s okay Pink-”

“I’m. Going. With. You.” Pinkie interrupted Fluttershy, not backing down.

“...O-Okay...” Fluttershy meekly agreed as Pinkie then nodded, taking the lead in heading to Twilight’s house.

Rainbow Dash looked at one of the scattered letters on the ground, picking it up and looking at the pink envelope curiously.

“What’s gotten into Pinkie Pie?” Fluttershy asked looking at Rainbow Dash confused about what just happened.

“I don’t know...but she just put off inviting us to a party for it.” Rainbow showed the envelope to her.

“...Wow...this IS serious.” Fluttershy said in a bit of shock.

“Hey! Come on, we need to get to Twilight’s house, like right now!” Pinkie Pie called out to the two mares after realizing they hadn’t immediately followed.

“...I think it’s best if we do what she says for now.” Rainbow said not wanting to chance thinking what else a serious Pinkie Pie might do.

“Right.” Fluttershy agreed as the two of them quickly followed after Pinkie.

“Oh, hey Pinkie P-“

“Twilight, we’ve got a serious problem.” Pinkie barged into Twilight’s house without giving the purple unicorn a chance to pose a greeting, “And I mean a problem as big as the *last* time I visited you with a problem.”

“...Huh? Do you mean the nightmares are back?” Twilight asked a little confused, looking Pinkie over, “But your mane is fine...”

“Oh, no, the problem isn’t with me this time.” Pinkie said pointing out the door she had just so casually walked through. Twilight turned her head to see a Rainbow Dash quickly walking in as well.

“Geeze Pinkie, was running here really important?” Rainbow huffed as she moved past Twilight, “This is a big deal, sure, but Fluttershy’s not good at high-speed pursuits.”

“Oh but there WAS a need to rush Dashie! Trust me on this one; we need to fix this ASAP!” Pinkie tried to get Rainbow to understand.

“...Is Dash having the problem?” Twilight asked, looking curiously at her rainbow-haired friend.

“No, it’s not her.” Pinkie said pointing to the door once more. Twilight turned once more, to see Fluttershy slowly making her way in as well.

“Sorry for the interruption Twilight, I hope we aren’t disturbing you from anything important.” Fluttershy apologized.

“No, it’s no trouble Fluttershy. I was just catching up on some studying.” Twilight smiled comfortingly, “But is something troubling you Fluttershy?”

“Oh...well, yes actually, that’s why we came to see you.” Fluttershy said, scrapping her foot against the ground, “I’ve been...having trouble sleeping...a-and was hoping you could help.”

“Trouble sleeping nothing.” Rainbow said moving to stand next to Fluttershy, “Fluttershy’s been having some nasty nightmares that’ve been keeping her up. She’s unable to sleep and she dreads having to go to bed. We we’re hoping you could help out Twilight.” Dash explained in more detail.

“Heh...well, I do happen to have one spell I know of that works won-mmph” Twilight’s words became muffled as a pink hoof was jammed into her mouth.

“No no, we’re not using *that* spell.” Pinkie explained.

“Bleh. Why not?” Twilight asked after removing the hoof from her mouth.

“Cause we’re not.” Pinkie said closing her eyes, as if not wanting to budge, “We have to find some other way to help Fluttershy.”

“But...the spell worked so well last time, why shouldn’t I use it now?” Twilight was very confused. Pinkie Pie had explained to her that the spell had let her come to terms with the tragedy of her sister’s passing, but she hadn’t explained what exactly happened during the spell that led to the revelation. All Twilight had seen during the delve was what appeared to be a warped picture sitting amidst a foggy backdrop. As she had tried to study the picture, it kept changing before her, till the mind delve disconnected itself in a flash of light.

“Trust me Twilight, using it on Fluttershy will end badly. So we’re going to help her without it.” Pinkie explained.

“But it’d be so much easier to just use the spell, it only takes a few minutes and I’ll have helped her with the nightmares. Doesn’t that make sense?” Twilight tried to battle Pinkie with her logic, an already losing battle.

“Even if it does, it’s still not happening.” Pinkie retorted back.

Fluttershy and Rainbow looked at each other very confused as Pinkie and Twilight went back and forth. They had no idea what their friends were talking about.

“So uhhh...what exactly ARE we doing to help Fluttershy then?” Rainbow finally asked, interrupting the back and forth between the two bickering ponies.

“Ugh...fine, I’ll go get my copy of ‘Dreams: a Psychological Understanding’.” Twilight said walking away from the pink mare who sat there looking victorious.

“Thank you Twilight, I assure you this will be the best for everyone.” Pinkie then bounced over to Fluttershy, putting her hoof around her shoulders while offering a comforting smile, “Don’t worry Fluttershy, I promise we’ll make your bad dreams go away.”

“...Y-You really think this will work?” Fluttershy looked at Pinkie for hope.

“If anypony can help make things better it’s Twilight. I’m sure of it.” Pinkie smiled happily.

“Alright,” Twilight said returning with a floating copy of the book, opening it up and flipping through several places, “The first thing I should do is see what kind of dreams you’re having. Since we won’t be jumping straight to the Mind Delve spell, there’s other solutions listed here that might work depending on the severity of your dreams.” Twilight explained before placing the book down on the table in the center of her house.

“O-Oh...how will you know that?” Fluttershy asked curiously.

“There’s a spell in this book that will let me see the dreams you’ve been having. I’ll be able to judge for myself how severe they are.” Twilight said walking over to Fluttershy.

“...B-But...” Fluttershy began to protest.

“Don’t worry Fluttershy; Twilight knows what she’s doing, right?” Rainbow asked while trying to comfort the worried pegasus.

“Of course, now this will only take a moment.” Twilight smiled, not waiting for Fluttershy to give another response before gently sweeping hair away from her forehead and tapping her glowing horn against the Fluttershy’s forehead.

‘IDON’TWANTTOFLY IDON’TWANTTOFLY IDON’TWANTTOFLY’
The words screamed again and again, bouncing in her skull, driving her mad. Her wings were beating as fast and as strong as they could, despite every ounce of her being telling her to stop them. Her whole body was

crying out for relief, pain filling her back and legs. Her wings were bent, horribly misshapen, not even looking like they should lift her, but they carried her through the sky. Tears swept across her face as every flap sent pain shooting through her back, scratching away at her mind, eroding her sanity.

A loud roar pierced her ears and shook her whole being. Her head painfully but slowly turned to look behind her, as a giant figure appeared from behind the clouds, billowing smoke as it soared at high speeds straight for her. Her legs flailed, feeling as if every movement snapped a bone and tore her muscles.

The large beast opens its jaws, before its gigantic teeth sunk straight down into her flesh.

She wanted to scream but no voice came to her. She wanted to close her eyes but her body would not obey her. She wanted to shut down and die but her body did not comply. The swirls of tortured screams filled every inch of her. Twisted faces and horrified cries screamed out to her. One word repeated itself endlessly in her mind.

Pain.

*Pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain
pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain
pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain
pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain.*

There was nothing to decipher, only the red horror that swirled around her. It bellowed and cried, it screeched and it hollered, but its suffering would not end. Neither would hers. Everything assaulted her mind; she felt the pain as every fiber of her being was destroyed by the horror before her.

Her knife came down. It struck its target. She brought the knife back up. She swung it down, her target hit again. Her actions repeated again

and again. One fluid motion after the other, her knife struck the body before her. She was coated already, coated in the warm liquid she had caused to splatter all over. Each fresh strike sent another burst of the warm liquid against her body.

A smile was on her face, one that had been there a long time as she had started. She made fresh holes and fresh liquid with each strike, plunging the knife in and out of the pony before her seemed to bring satisfaction.

They deserved this, she deserved to be the one to do this to them. This is how it was supposed to be.

She plunged the knife down one last time, panting as she looked excitedly at her work. The punctured body didn't move or twitch, it just laid before her. The body would never move again.

She tossed the knife to the side and leaned forward, nuzzling the body as she smiled.

This was love.

Twilight stepped back as the memories of the dreams filled her mind. She grimaced as her stomach did a flip, a knot forming in her throat. They were horrific dreams, dreams filled with pain, suffering, insanity and loss. These weren't just simple nightmares, no, she had seen dreams like this before...

"...Are...Are you okay Twilight?" Fluttershy asked nervously, not sure what to expect Twilight's reaction to be.

"...Y-Yea...I'm fine..." Twilight finally managed to say after swallowing the knot in her throat.

"You're awfully pale for being okay." Rainbow said, looking at Twilight worriedly. She didn't think the nightmares would've been so bad as to make Twilight lose a shade of color.

“Well, you didn’t go stumbling back into the bookcase this time; were they not as bad?” Pinkie asked, tilting her head curiously.

“...Oh, they’re...very bad.” Twilight rubbed her head a little, “But...they’re bad in a different way. I don’t think I could make an accurate comparison...at the very least, they felt the same in intensity.”

“S-So...w-what do I do?” Fluttershy asked meekly.

“Hold on, I need to consult the book.” Twilight said shaking her head lightly, before levitating it over to herself, flipping through some pages and reading a few passages.

“...There’s a lot of spells in here for more minor nightmares, soothing remedies, relaxation methods, normal and magical psychological evaluations...but...” Twilight sighed looking at Pinkie, “With what I just saw, there’s only one spell in here strong enough to find out what’s happening in Fluttershy’s mind.”

“...Are you absolutely sure? There’s NO other spell in that book?” Pinkie asked, desperate to not have to turn to that answer.

“I’m sure Pinkie. The mind delve spell is going to be our best solution.”

“Why are you so against using that spell Pinkie?” Rainbow asked looking strangely at her earth pony friend, “You said it helped you before, why shouldn’t we use it on Fluttershy?”

Pinkie was silent. She thought about it for a moment, before looking seriously at Twilight.

“Twilight, read to me the spell’s description.”

Twilight flipped back to the exact page of the spell, and began to read:

“The Mind Delve spell is used in cases where the nightmare or psychological problems are not so easily discernable. This often means

that the problem is rooted deep within the patient's subconscious and cannot be obtained through normal psychological methods without spending a very long time treating the patient. This spell allows the user to shorten the necessary time needed in order to bring the patient to a full recovery. Each patient the spell is used under experiences different results, as the subconscious is molded by the patient who owns it. No two patients will likely experience the same recovery under the use of the spell."

Pinkie thought about those words carefully. Something seemed to spinning the wheels in her head.

"...Okay..." Pinkie finally said, breaking from thought, "We can use the Mind Delve spell on Fluttershy...under one condition though."

"What?" Twilight asked blinking a little confused.

"You have to find a way to put me into Fluttershy's mind when you do it."

"Y-You want to...go into my mind?" Fluttershy asked very surprised.

"Yes. I won't let you go through this alone Fluttershy. I'm going to be there with you to help you with your problem." Pinkie said, turning her head slightly, shifting her mane so Fluttershy could see it better, "I wear this red ribbon as a testament that my friends are dear to me. That means if they're in trouble then I'm going to help them. And I'm going to see you through this Fluttershy, so that you can not only feel better, but so that you don't have to be alone while doing it." Pinkie smiled.

"Well, then I'm going in too." Rainbow said stepping closer to Fluttershy, "I can't just let my marefriend do something like this without me. I'm going to be there for her till the very end." Rainbow grinned, nuzzling against Fluttershy.

Fluttershy blushed as she smiled softly, "T-Thank you...both of you..."

"...Ugh..." Twilight put a hoof to her face, "I don't even know HOW to do that." Twilight said as she walked off towards the bookshelf, "You guys are going to have to give me a moment, there's nothing in 'Dreams: a

Psychological Understanding' that explains how to link minds together." She said as she began to levitate books off of the shelf, checking each title before pushing them off to the side. There was a distinct sound of her mumbling something about how she shouldn't have sent Spike on a shopping trip that day.

"This could take a while." Rainbow said looking at the other two mares.

"Let's play some games to pass the time!" Pinkie chimed in happily.

"That sounds fun." Fluttershy smiled.

"King me!" Pinkie grinned happily, having victoriously jumped several of Dash's pieces before arriving at the opposite end of the checkers board.

"Man Pinkie, how're you so good at this?" Rainbow furrowed her brow as she looked at the board. She was clearly losing, for the fifth time now. Pinkie had just obtained her third king.

"Years of practice Dashie." Pinkie chuckled as she awaited her opponent's next move.

"I think you've both been doing very well." Fluttershy smiled, having enjoyed watching the matches.

"OKAY!" Twilight suddenly declared very loudly putting the book she had been studying vigorously down. "I think I've got something. By using a mixture of various spells I SHOULD be able to get all of you to share in Fluttershy's mind delve. I don't know how well it'll work, at the moment, it's all theory. But I've made theories work before! I can do it again." Twilight nodded, walking towards her friends.

"Oh good, I was getting tired of this game anyway." Rainbow said standing up, waving a hoof at the board.

"Only cause you were losing." Pinkie chuckled before hopping up as well, before turning to Twilight and looking a little serious, "Are you absolutely sure you can get this to work Twilight?"

“Absolutely. When have you ever known me to mess up a spell once I was confident in how it worked?” Twilight asked curiously.

Pinkie put a hoof to her chin as she looked off to the side before mumbling under her breath, “Well...not in continuity...”

“What was that?” Twilight asked not having heard her well.

“Nothing.” Pinkie smiled before turning to look at Fluttershy, “Are you ready for this Fluttershy?”

“I-I guess I’m as ready as I’ll ever be.” She said, walking next to Pinkie.

“We’ll have you feeling better in no time, just you wait.” Rainbow Dash smiled, standing next to Fluttershy as well, smiling her confident smile.

“Alright then, here goes.” Twilight’s horn lit up, glowing brightly as she concentrated. She walked up to her three friends who stood before her, before gently tapping her horn against each of their foreheads. A thin blue line attached to her horn that stretched from their foreheads with each tap. The light surrounding her horn grew brighter as she stepped forward, before tapping her horn against Fluttershy’s forehead.

In that instant the world felt like it slipped from under Fluttershy’s hooves. Everything felt hazy as her body almost felt numb. She couldn’t keep track of her surrounding, thought she felt like she was falling. The only indication she felt like she was moving was a sensation of wind rolling around her. She tumbled and fell through a hazy fog in her mind, unable to comprehend anything.

She let out a sharp gasp as air finally returned to her lung. She panted for a moment, before her eyes fluttered open. She got her bearings slowly, as the world began to come into view before her. She was still inside of Twilight’s house; however it was now missing that particular purple unicorn.

“Ugh...Twilight, what’s the big idea? That spell-...” It was Rainbow’s voice she heard next. She turned her head and saw her marefriend already standing up, looking around for Twilight, “Wait, where’d she go?”

“Ugh, I don’t think I could ever get used to that.” It was Pinkie’s turn to speak up, Rainbow and Fluttershy look behind them to see her groggily standing up, “But I’m glad to see she got it to work.” She smiled seeing her two friends.

“What’s going on Pinkie? Where’s Twilight?” Rainbow asked looking around, confused at their missing unicorn friend.

“That’s normal, she’s not going to be here with us.” Pinkie said, looking around quickly. She got up and ran to a nearby window looking out of it. She grew quiet as she stared out the window.

“...Pinkie Pie?” Fluttershy asked looking at her friend oddly.

“Is this what you went through when Twilight helped you?” Rainbow asked curiously.

There was silence for a moment. Rainbow and Fluttershy looked at each other a little confused, before Pinkie finally spoke back up.

“Yes.” She turned away from the window, looking at her two friends with a serious look, “It’s almost exactly the same as what I went through, and is exactly the reason why I said I had to come.” Pinkie said galloping across the library to a shelf, before pulling a map out from it.

“What do you mean?” Fluttershy asked as Pinkie brought the map over to the table, Fluttershy and Rainbow walking up to look at it.

“We’re going to need this to keep track of where we are.” Pinkie explained, pointing to the map of Ponyville that she unfurled before them. Pinkie looked up from the map, seeing that a bag lay on the table as well. “Fluttershy, you should be the one to take that bag.” Pinkie explained pointing to it.

“W-Why?” Fluttershy asked confused grabbing the bag and pulling it closer, opening it.

“Trust me; we’re going to need it. Is there some kind of instrument inside of it?” Pinkie asked, seeing Fluttershy look inside.

Almost as if an answer to Pinkie’s words, a soft, almost haunting melody began to slowly play from the bag. Fluttershy carefully reached in, pulling out an old music box that was playing the soft tune.

“T-This...” Fluttershy stared at the music box in shock, “This...is the music box my mother owned...”

“What’s it doing here?” Rainbow asked looking at it curiously.

“I...I don’t know...I lost it a long time ago. How did it get here?” Fluttershy wondered quietly.

The music slowly faded to a stop as she continued to stare at the music box. Pinkie Pie rolled up the map of Ponyville before placing it in the bag.

“Come on, let’s head out.” Pinkie said smiling at Fluttershy before heading for the front door.

“Head out? Where are we going?” Rainbow looked confused at her pink friend.

“We’re going to Fluttershy’s cottage. If we’re going to find any answers I think that’s the first place we need to check.” Pinkie explained as she opened the door.

“Answers? To the nightmares?” Rainbow thought in confusion, “What does this strange place have to do with them? Why are we even here?”

Fluttershy gently put the music box back in the bag as she listened to Rainbow Dash’s questions. She closed the bag, which had a clasp of a blue and pink butterfly. She gently lifted the bag up and placed it on her back to carry with her.

“I...I can’t say for sure what this place is. I think we’re inside Fluttershy’s mind, but at the same time...it feels too solid to just be our

imaginations.” Pinkie scuffed the floor softly as she explained, “The only thing I know for sure...is that we need to be ready for anything.” Pinkie opened the front door, stepping outside.

“Let’s follow her,” Fluttershy said smiling at Rainbow, “She seems to know what she’s talking about, so we should follow her till we get our bearings.”

“Oh alright, I suppose that makes sense.” Rainbow said before following after Pinkie Pie. Fluttershy followed the same, stepping out the front door of Twilight’s house.

“H-Hey! What’s with this weather!?” Rainbow cried in confusion. Fluttershy stood in shock.

Ponyville had fallen into a thick fog. No building could be seen past a few feet in front of their eyes.

Chapter 2

Rainbow desperately waved her hoof, but no matter what she did she couldn't seem to grab hold of the fog. She reared up her hind legs and kicked as hard as she could, but her legs only hit air.

"Ugh! What is wrong with this fog!? I can't touch it!" Rainbow huffed, stomping a hoof on the ground.

"I'm not sure; it was like this for me too." Pinkie said looking up at the sky, "I originally tried to escape from here by using my balloon fly out, but it had too many holes in it. I don't know what's beyond the fog bank."

"Well I'm about to find out! If nothing else I should be able to be rid of this fog!" Rainbow said spreading her wings before racing up into the sky, disappearing from sight quickly.

"...Do you think it's safe?" Fluttershy asked looking at Pinkie curiously.

"Well, if anyone can handle herself its Rainbow Dash. I'm sure she'll manage to have this place cleared up in ten seconds fla-"

Pinkie's words were interrupted by a ear shattering roar that bounced and echoed through the town. It felt like the very earth itself was shaking at the roar. Fluttershy and Pinkie instantly looked up into the sky at the direction of the roar, as Rainbow came barreling through the fog at them. The music box in Fluttershy's bag began to hiss with a sound similar to bees being stuck in the box.

"HIDE NOW!" She yelled loudly before swooping down to grab the hooves of her friends before giving them a chance to register her words. She half-dragged them behind the library when they all heard a tremendous thud shake the ground, as if something gigantic had just landed quickly.

“What’s goi-” Pinkie tried to ask only to have Rainbow quickly shove her hooves into her mouth, giving a loud ‘SHHHH’.

“Look around the corner, carefully.” Rainbow whispered harshly before looking around the tree herself. Pinkie and Fluttershy carefully looked around the corner themselves. Fluttershy’s eyes widened as she felt as if her heart could stop at the sight before them.

A gigantic black dragon had landed in front of Twilight’s house. It growled softly as black smoke billowed from its nose. It gave a snort, shooting out a large part of the smoke into the air, as it swiveled its head around, looking for the pony that had just escaped from its sight. It stepped forward carefully examined the building and areas on the street.

It gave another snort of frustration, as its wings opened up, giving them a good flap lifting its body into the sky and causing everything to rattle and shake with the force of the wind. With a few more quick flaps it flew up into the fog filled sky, disappearing from sight. The buzzing of the music box faded away with the dragon.

The three mares stood frozen, waiting until they could no longer hear the beating of its wings, before letting out a long collective sigh.

“What’s a dragon doing here?” Pinkie asked, stepping out from behind the tree, looking up at where it had flown off.

“I don’t know, but it seemed to know exactly where I was the moment I started flying.” Rainbow said looking at her wings, “I can’t go up into the sky and clear this weather away if it knows where we are when I fly...” Rainbow groaned, “Meaning I can’t fly AT ALL and that we’re going to have to deal with this fog.”

“It’s alright,” Pinkie smiled reassuringly, “the fog’s not so bad, once we get inside we’ll be able to see just fine.”

“If you say so. Alright, let’s go Flutters-” Rainbow said turning to look at the ball of pink that was curled up, shivering on the floor. “Fluttershy?” She asked worriedly, quickly running over to her marefriend.

“A-a-a-a....d-dragon t-that...c-chases you...w-when you fly...” Fluttershy stuttered in fear, whimpering and shivering curled up in a ball behind the tree. She was scared out of her wits.

“Hey, hey, come on, it’s alright, he’s gone now.” Rainbow said leaning down nuzzling Fluttershy gently, “He’s gone and he won’t hurt you, I promise.”

Fluttershy began to calm down, feeling the comfort of Rainbow Dash. She stopped shivering, leaning up and nuzzling Rainbow Dash back.

“It’s just one dragon, we’ll get to your house, find out what’s causing these nightmares and we’ll be out of here in no time, okay?” Rainbow said reassuringly to her marefriend.

“Well...” Pinkie said, looking conflicted, “I...don’t want to lie to you two...but...that might not be all we face.”

“What? You mean there’s more?” Rainbow said looking up surprised at Pinkie.

“Well...when this happened to me before...I...I encountered...many monsters.” Pinkie hung her head solemnly, not wanting to have to say this, “It’s...why I didn’t want Fluttershy coming in here alone. I was afraid she’d have to face monsters like I did...and I couldn’t stand the idea of her having to face them alone.”

Fluttershy shrunk back into her ball at Pinkie’s words.

“And you didn’t think to TELL us this when we were discussing the spells!?” Rainbow almost yelled, but holding herself back.

“Hey! I TRIED to get a different spell to be used! I did everything I could to make sure we didn’t have to resort to this! And when we did I refused to let her do this alone!” Pinkie protested to Dash’s accusations.

“You STILL could have told us there’d be monsters!” Rainbow felt her hair standing on end, “We COULD have been more prepared! We could have prepared for facing them or running away! We could’ve brought our

elements!" Rainbow growled in frustration, closing her eyes, "We could have done SOMETHING so as to not put our LIVES in danger!"

Rainbow panted heavily. She was angry, she couldn't remember being so angry before.

"...I'm...I'm sorry..." Pinkie lowered her head, her ears folding back. Rainbow opened her eyes and looked at Pinkie. Pinkie looked like she was on the verge of tears. Rainbow opened her mouth to say something, but closed it again. She was still mad, but she couldn't stay mad at her friend this way. Rainbow turned her head to look at Fluttershy who had covered her head with her hooves, shaking.

Rainbow was sure she could hear Fluttershy's soft sobs.

Rainbow sighed softly, walking up to Fluttershy, lying down on the ground before her, lowering her head and nuzzling her marefriend gently. Fluttershy hiccupped softly, trying to breathe, her mind still reeling from everything.

"Fluttershy...listen to me please." Rainbow said closing her eyes, speaking to her from her heart, "This isn't the best situation we could find ourselves in. But I need you to know, that no matter what happens or what we face, you're going to be okay."

Fluttershy began to calm down again, sniffing as she took a deep breath, feeling the comfort of her marefriend. She slowly uncurled from her ball, moving closer to Rainbow, wrapping her head around Rainbow's neck, as Rainbow nuzzled against Fluttershy's neck.

"I need you to be strong right now, alright?"

Fluttershy looked up into Rainbow's eyes, seeing the comfort and warmth they offered. She heard her words as they echoed in her mind. She gulped down the nervous tensions that had built in her throat, before nodding slowly.

"That's my girl." Rainbow kissed her forehead. She helped Fluttershy on to her hooves, "Now give me a smile alright?"

It took a moment, but Fluttershy managed to bring her courage forward and put a smile on her face. Rainbow smiled back, before turning to face Pinkie Pie, who was still had the apologetic look on her face.

“Uh...hey, look, it's alright Pinkie Pie.” Rainbow put a smile on her face for her friend, “I know you meant well...you wouldn't put us in danger on purpose. But since we're already here, we might as well just deal with it.”

“...You're still right Dash...” Pinkie turned her head away from Dash, still with the look of hurt on her face, “I really was a stupid mcstupid pants...” Pinkie let out a soft sigh, before putting a smile on her face, “But I'll do my best to make up for this and get us out of here as quickly as possible. So let's head for Fluttershy's house.”

“Right.” Rainbow nodded smiling, the three mares walking off into the fog.

It seemed like a long walk to reach the outskirts of Fluttershy's cottage. The town had been deathly quiet. There was a moment or two where they had frozen, thinking they had heard the wing beats of the dragon, but it faded as quickly as it came.

Ponyville had become a ghost town. The only three inhabitants seemed to be the three of them as they made their way out of town, following the path along the park, past the trees, quickly approaching the house where Fluttershy lived.

The air had felt thick between them. None of them had spoken since they had started walking. The only sounds they heard were their hoofsteps and the occasional breeze that seemed to blow through the town.

“Here we are.” Pinkie said as they approached the bridge before Fluttershy's house, the three of them just barely managing to make out the shape of her house in the fog.

“Do...Do you think my animals are okay?” Fluttershy asked as she looked around, trying to spot any critters.

“I don’t think there’s any around.” Rainbow said looking around herself before crossing the bridge.

“I’m not really sure what determines what you do and don’t find in this world. Honestly I figured we should come to Fluttershy’s house first because ‘home’ was the first place I went. So since this is Fluttershy’s mind it made sense to me. When I was in my mind the path to Fluttershy’s house was blocked off.” Pinkie explained as she walked up to the front door of the cottage, checking for any locks that might be on the door.

“I see...well, I’m actually glad my animals aren’t here then.” Fluttershy smiled walking up to Pinkie, “I’d hate for them to be put in danger.”

Pinkie opened the front door and the three of them entered Fluttershy’s house. To Pinkie’s surprise, the house was intact. Everything that should be there was, nothing was run down or broken, there wasn’t even any dust as if the house had been sitting in time.

“What’s the matter Pinkie? You look surprised.” Rainbow chuckled as she walked further into the house.

“I...guess I am a little.” Pinkie chuckled a little awkwardly as she closed the door behind them.

“So, what exactly are we looking for?” Rainbow asked looking around at the house.

“I’m not sure...I guess anything that seems odd or out of place, something you wouldn’t expect or just a clue as to what exactly is going on.” Pinkie explained as she began to look around at various shelves in Fluttershy’s home.

“Oh...well, I guess I would know best then...” Fluttershy said tapping a hoof to her chin as she carefully glanced around the room.

As Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash carefully looked around the living room, Fluttershy couldn’t help but feel a connection to the kitchen. She stepped out of the living room, soon entering the familiar space of her kitchen. She looked around carefully, trying to spot what was giving her the feeling something was in there.

It was then that her eyes fell on the fridge. Attached by a small butterfly magnet was a piece of paper, marked with what looked like a crayon. Fluttershy blinked, not having seen the paper before. She slowly walked up to it, getting a better look at it. It looked like a child's drawing, drawn with several colors of crayon; it was of a simple house with a sun, outside the house was a happy pony attending to a garden. Below the picture there were words written in a red crayon:

*When I grow up I will hav a house and lots of pets. I ~~luv~~ love helpin
aminals.
I keep a ~~key~~ key to let me know I will have a house.*

There was a small bulge under the paper, as if the paper was hiding something. Fluttershy carefully lifted the paper and looked at the back of it, seeing a key taped to the back of it. She carefully peeled the key away looking at it; the key was also in the shape of a butterfly.

"Hey, how come this door is locked?" Fluttershy's ear perked up as she quickly walked back into the living room. She saw Rainbow Dash struggling to try and open the door to her closet, which was locked tight.

"Does it have a lock on it?" Pinkie Pie asked turning from her side of the room to look at the door.

"Yea it does." Rainbow said looking at the door, "It's got the shape of a butterfly over a keyhole."

"Oh, well, I just found a key with a butterfly on it." Fluttershy said holding up the key.

"Then it probably opens that door." Pinkie said thinking about it, "Though...maybe I should open the door."

"Why's that?" Fluttershy asked a little confused.

“Well...I just don’t want anything popping out and hurting you.” Pinkie thought, before looking at Fluttershy’s saddle bag, “But...I guess you’re music box isn’t letting out any noise...so I think it should be safe.”

“My music box?” Fluttershy blinked, turning her head to look at the saddlebag.

“Yea, do you remember when the music box started making noise when the dragon attacked? The music box will let you know when something that is trying to hurt you gets close. So just be careful alright?” Pinkie explained, choosing her words carefully.

“I see...alright, I’ll be careful.” Fluttershy nodded walking up to the door. Rainbow backed up a little from the door, watching as Fluttershy unlocked the door. She slowly opened the door to her closet, looking inside the lightly lit room. She stepped inside slowly, noticing that the things she would normally have placed inside were missing, and in their place was a grandfather clock, with words written on the side of the wall.

*My hands are frozen, but they weren’t always this way.
I used to reach for the sky and wave over the crowd,
While my friend to my right offered me his snack.*

“What’s in there?” Fluttershy heard Rainbow ask from behind her.

“I think it’s a puzzle.” Fluttershy said thinking about the words and looking at the clock. “I think I know the answer though...” She said carefully lifting up her hoof to the face of the clock. She turned the long hand up to face midnight, while moving the small hand to face three.

Fluttershy heard a loud click, as if something was unlatched by her actions. She looked at the clock, waiting to see what it would do, when it suddenly began to rush up and out of her vision.

Fluttershy let out a cry as she lost her bearings, falling into the giant hole that opened up beneath her

“FLUTTERSHY!” Rainbow Dash yelled, before the hatch that had opened closed.

Wind rushed past her ears, falling in the darkness. She screamed and cried, she had to open her wings and stop her fall, but they were stuck, glued to her sides. Her hooves flailed as she tried to grab something, anything. She descended into the bottomless darkness.

Fluttershy let out a groan as she slowly lifted herself up off the ground. She rubbed her head as her eyes opened. It was too dark, she couldn't see a thing.

“Rainbow Dash? Pinkie Pie?” Fluttershy called out, trying to reach around for something. Only silence returned her call. She felt her saddle bag in her hoof and remembered something she'd seen inside of it. She carefully opened it up before reaching in. She moved the music box slightly to the side before grabbing hold of a lantern in her teeth, pulling it out and turning on the light.

She was in a blank room, the walls seemed to be made of cement worn away by age, the sound of water dripping echoed off of the walls. She looked up at the ceiling; a metal grate was sitting in the way of her trying to fly back up the long shaft she had fallen through.

‘How...did I get through the grate?’ She asked herself, not sure exactly what just happened, ‘And...why am I not hurt if I fell from such a great distance?’ she looked at her body, not seeing any damage or feeling any pain. It was as if landing on the hard cement after falling a great height hadn't hurt her.

‘I...I need to get out of here. I need to meet back up with Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie!’ Fluttershy thought to herself, quickly looking around for an exit. She saw a metal door along the wall behind her.

‘Okay, I just need to get my bearings, find where I am and...’ Fluttershy opened the metal door, revealing to a long hallway, water covering the floor after a small dip in the ground. The walls looks like they were molding over, the channel seemed to stretch and turn.

‘...I have no idea where I am.’ She had never seen this place before. ‘Why is it flooded with water?’ she asked as she slowly began to step into it. It wasn’t very deep, it only came up to about her ankles, but it was enough that the tips of her hair would drag in it. The cool water sent a few shivers up her spine, but she headed forward.

The only sound she could hear was the splashing of her steps as she went down the long hall. The quiet hallways seemed to echo her splashing loudly. The darkness of the hallways being lit only by the light of her lantern sent a chill up her spine. She really hoped she could get out of this hallway soon.

She rounded a corner along the hallway and found herself facing an intersection. The paths branched out to her left and right.

‘...NOW which way am I supposed to go?’ Fluttershy furrowed her brow in frustration and fear. She didn’t want to get lost, not here, not with the idea that monsters could be anywhere.

Her music box began to hiss, letting out the sound of bees buzzing. She grimaced at herself for having jinxed it. The next sound she heard was the slow splashing of steps being taken in the water, each step seemed to slosh around as it got closer. She looked down both paths, she couldn’t tell which way the sound was coming from, and running back would only lead back to the dead end.

Her attention snapped to the left route, when her eyes caught the creature emerging in the light. Her eyes widened as she stared at what was treading through the water.

It was a mannequin, a moving mannequin with no head. Its body looked like it was made of cloth, rotted with age and wear, it had several large seams sewn along it as if it had been put together and torn apart many times, it had several pale, sickly colors and looked like it had trouble walking.

Fluttershy took a step back from the creature; the buzzing of the music box grew louder as it came closer. It reared its front legs up and smashed them down into the water, growing closer to Fluttershy.

Her legs acted on their own, her galloping fast down the right path, getting as far away from the monster as she could. The water kicked up and sprayed across her body as she ran as fast as she could through the hallway. The water was slowing her down, but she could outrun that creature.

She looked behind her as the buzzing of her box grew to a quiet stop. The mannequin couldn't keep up with her, she was in the clear. She slowed down a little, breathing softly as she turned to look in front of her, stopping just short of running into a wall. She had come to another split in the road. She looked down the right path, not seeing anything unusual.

Suddenly her music roared with its buzzing, as her head snapped to the left, right before her body was hit by two hind legs, sending her flying down the right path. She hit the water with a huge splash as she skidded along the ground. She winced in pain as her skin burned and her chest ached. The lantern had landed just next to her head with a splash in the water, cutting the light from the area.

She groaned in pain, feeling a welt beginning to form on her chest, as she groggily reached out for her light. She managed to grab the handle, lifting the lantern from the water. She could hear the steps of what had attacked her shifting through the water, getting closer slowly. She frantically moved to turn the lantern back on. It gave a few clicks without turning on, making Fluttershy grimace to each click. She desperately turned the knob again and again, praying for it to light up.

The flame came to life illuminating the mannequin whose front hooves now stood raised over her. The legs came down, striking her body.

Fluttershy wanted to let out a scream, but the handle of the lantern in her mouth just caused her to bite down. The hooves of the mannequin scratched against her skin as it dragged its hooves. Pain soared through Fluttershy's mind as she winced her eyes shut, biting down onto the lantern so hard she began to bleed a little, tears rolling down her eyes as she couldn't stop her attacker.

"I need you to be strong right now, alright?"

Her eyes shot open as she whipped her head around to look back at the mannequin, it raising its hooves once more to come down hard on her. With all of her strength Fluttershy swirled her body around before kicking the mannequin with her hind legs.

The mannequin stumbled a tiny bit, forcing itself to put its hooves back on the ground.

Fluttershy internally cursed herself for being so weak, but was able to get back to her hooves. She turned and began to run again, escaping from the tormenting creature. She felt like her lungs were burning, each hoofstep seemed to only intensify the pain in her chest, but she had to keep going.

She rounded another corner, seeing another split before her. The buzz of the music box returning. She swiftly moved her head back and forth, seeing the mannequin trying to head for her, trying to attack her. She wouldn't let it this time. She turned down the left path and ran away from it, galloping with all of her might.

She looked up ahead of her and saw an opening. She rushed forward, putting all of her might for this one point of escape. She jumped out of the water, landing on dry land as she reached out for the door and opened it, escaping behind it before shutting it.

Fluttershy panted heavily, leaning against the cool steel door. She felt like her chest was on fire, burning from behind tossed around and slammed. She could feel blood trickling down the side of her from where the creature had cut into her, as she felt where she had been hit slowly starting to swell.

She could only let out gasping groans and pants of pain as she tried to breath, her lungs feeling like they might burst with each breathe of air.

There were monsters, just as Pinkie Pie had said there were. Her music box had warned her of the danger of the creatures too. But when she had been struck, she couldn't find the strength to stand up, she had been willing to lay there and take it. She would've let that mannequin do whatever it had intended to do to her...

But a voice struck out in her mind. It was Rainbow's voice.

She had told her to be strong.

Fluttershy put the lantern down for a moment, wiping the blood from her mouth with her wet hoof. She was soaked; the water had drenched her completely. She needed to dry off and she needed to put something on her wounds. She looked at the room she had just entered.

It was a room similar to one she had fallen into, only this time there was a ladder in the middle of it, leading up into a hole above with a faint light shining down from it.

Fluttershy adjusted her aching jaw, gently spitting out some blood that had been pooling in it. She then gingerly picked up the lantern and turned it off, placing it back in the bag. She rubbed her jaw gently.

'I...need a better way to get light...' She thought to herself for a moment, she couldn't keep holding the lantern with her mouth if she was going to keep biting down on it.

Fluttershy slowly walked over to the ladder, beginning to climb up it one hoof at a time.

The ladder seemed to stretch far into the hole. Fluttershy could barely see the top of the ladder, though she could still see it. A faint light was shining down the hole illuminating her path. The water in her mane and coat felt like it was holding her down, but it was slowly dripping off of her body.

With a few final grunts she managed to pull herself to the top of the ladder, pulling herself to the wooden floor and let herself lay on it, panting as she breathed. Her eyes felt a little heavy, but she couldn't let herself lose consciousness yet, not till she at least tended to her wounds.

She was in a house, she couldn't tell whose house it was, but it must've been a house in Ponyville. It was small but it was cozy. She grunted as she slowly got to her feet, moving to where she could see a bathroom in the house.

She pulled two towels that were hanging on the wall and placed them against her body. She winced as the cotton landed on the scratches on her back, but bore the pain for the moment. She rubbed the towels against her hair and coat, getting as much water as she could off of her.

Once she felt she was dry enough she looked at her wounds in the mirror. The scratches on her back were deeper than she had thought, but weren't too serious. What worried her more was the deep blue marks that had appeared on the side of her chest from where she had been kicked. Her teeth were a little red as well, but it only seemed to be minor bleeding, it'd stop on its own.

She looked through the bathroom drawers and found a bottle of antiseptic and a few bandages. With very careful hooves she cleaned her wounds, grimacing and gritting her teeth as the alcohol burned. Once it was cleaned she carefully placed the bandages against the wounds, and wrapped it a few times around her body. A few tears escaped her eyes as she grimaced in pain, but she had to make sure the bandages were on securely.

She panted once the whole procedure was over. She wobbly stood on her hooves and inspected the bandages. They'd do for now, but she needed a serious medical evaluation once she could find a doctor.

Her eyes grew heavy as she slowly wandered out of the bathroom. She couldn't go outside like this. If she was attacked she wouldn't have the strength to run away.

Fluttershy wandered to the nearby couch and gently slid her bag off, placing it next to the couch, before getting on top of it and curling up.

'Rainbow Dash...Pinkie Pie...where are you two...' Fluttershy thought as she began to close her eyes, a few more tears escaping, 'Please...I need you two with me...'

"I need you to be strong right now, alright?"

"...A-Alright...I...I promise I will be..." Fluttershy said, holding back her lonely sobs. She had to be strong, she told Dash that she would be.

Fluttershy slowly, but surely, fell asleep.

Chapter 3

Fluttershy snapped awake when a loud explosion rocked the house. A vase that had been placed next to the couch came crashing to the ground, shattering into pieces.

“What was that?!” She asked, moving quickly to get off of the couch.

She instantly regretted the fast movement, twisting her body in a way it didn’t approve as her chest roared at her in pain. She collapsed on the floor, panting as her chest throbbed. For the moment she had forgotten about her injuries. She groaned as she carefully sat up, making sure not to offend her wound. She inspected her dressing carefully.

Her injuries hadn’t bled any more than expected during her sleep and the recovery was about where she would’ve expected it for a bit of sleep. She carefully got to her hooves and took a few steps. She then stretched her wings before wincing slightly and shutting them back closed. She could move, she could walk, she could fly with a bit of pain, but she still wasn’t about to go flying around.

“...How long was I asleep?” Fluttershy asked aloud. She hadn’t meant to fall asleep; her body had done it almost on its own, as if on instinct. “I...I got separated from Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie...I should’ve been looking for them, not sleeping.” Fluttershy felt awful for having left her friends alone, even though it was against her will. They were probably worried about her; they must’ve gone to look for her...

“Oh, I hope you two are alright.” Fluttershy tried to not let her worries hold her back, before moving to the front door of the house she was in. The door was locked; she stared at the door in shock. The door was locked from the inside. Above the handle to the door there was a doll shaped symbol hovering over the lock.

“...W-Why is the door locked?” Fluttershy frowned, staring at the door. She had to get back outside and see what was going on. She turned back around to look at the house in closer detail.

It was a small, quaint little house, but it didn't look like a house that would normally be built in Ponyville. She hadn't noticed till just now, but the building material was the kind you would find in a cloud city, material that was made specifically for sitting on clouds.

"Huh? This is...a cloud house?" Fluttershy looked around baffled, "But...the only cloud house in Ponyville is Rainbow Dash's house..." Fluttershy was confused. She didn't know whose house this was, as it certainly wasn't Rainbow Dash's.

She looked at the vase that lay broken on the floor, noticing something unusual about one of the broken pieces. Getting closer, she could see that it wasn't really a piece of the vase at all, but something that must've been inside of the vase when it broke. She carefully picked it up examining the item.

It was a white coin with the shape of a cloud on it, with tiny writing engraved on the edges that read 'The Floating Cloud'.

She had never been one to take things from other ponies, but something told her that she was supposed to take this with her. Maybe it was Pinkie's words about what was going on in this place, maybe it was a gut instinct, or maybe it was just something about the coin looking valuable. She carefully placed the coin in her bag before looking back up at the house.

Her eyes drew to movement she hadn't noticed before. Outside of a door in a hallway in the house there were several moths flying outside the door. This seemed odd to her, the moths seemed to have no reason to be gathering by the door, unless perhaps there was some kind of food behind the door they couldn't reach. She walked up to the door and carefully pushed it open.

The door gave way, opening up to what appeared to be someone's study. The moths didn't seem to move still, confusing her, but she slowly entered the study regardless. The walls were lined with books on various subjects; she could recognize several different topics. Most of them were about cloud building, some were poetry books while others looked like

business books. They all shared the same markings though, they were books from Cloudsdale.

Fluttershy slowly walked up to the desk that sat at the end of the room. There was a book open on the desk. Curiosity got the best of her, and she read what was on the open page;

...patient has shown symptoms of a weakened immune system. The case continues to grow more baffling as this now discredits all prior diagnoses of what was wrong. Every step forward causes two steps back. I have to start going through new tests to determine what the cause of her illness is.

I don't have much time though. Her heart is growing weaker, the muscles are growing thinner the more time passes. I fear it'll rupture before too long.

I'll have to start her on another set of medication. She won't like being on any more drugs, but we have to prolong this for as long as we can.

*June 23, 983
Medical Case #1156 –Entry 14-
Dr. R. K. Mandeus*

It was a book recording medical cases through the years. The book was open to one of the last entries in the book, recording the case of an unknown disease that had sprouted up before the turn of the millennium. It seemed the book went on to explain more about it in other entries.

"Huh?" Fluttershy looked at one of the pages; it was indented as if something was lying underneath the page. She lifted the page up to look, seeing a small brown coin with the shape of a house on it. Written in tiny text on the coin were the words 'The Old Home'.

She carefully picked the coin up, placing it in her bag.

She was curious though, as to why the book was open to that particular page. Or why the coin had been hiding just underneath it. She

had always seen a lot of medical books around the house and she'd read a lot of them, it's how she'd become so good at tending to the sick and injured.

Next to the book she noticed something that looked like a long piece of thick string. It was curled up on the desk in a coil, as if waiting for someone to use it.

'...Oh! Hey, I think I can use this.' Fluttershy thought as a light bulb felt like it had turned on in her head. She carefully reached into her bag and pulled out the lantern. Her jaw still ached a little from biting down on it, but it certainly didn't hurt as badly now. She placed the lantern down on the desk, before taking the string and looping it through the handle.

She carefully tied the string into a knot; with it now looping onto itself she had a makeshift necklace. She carefully placed the necklace around her neck, testing the string. It seemed to be supporting the weight of the lantern just fine, the lantern hung just in front of her chest comfortably.

She carefully turned the switch to test out how hot the lantern would get, the flame coming to life. She let it sit on her chest for a moment, then walked around slowly, then jumped around as best she could without making her injuries scream at her.

The flame danced to her movement, but never made the lantern too hot. It felt warm against her coat. The lantern hanging before her gave her good lighting in front of her, though she'd have to turn around if she wanted to see something that was behind her.

"Oh Fluttershy, you're so smart." She chuckled softly at her own ingenious. She turned the lantern off for the moment, since the house had plenty of light for her to see, but now she could still have light and not hurt her jaw anymore then she had to.

Nothing else seemed out of the ordinary though. It was just an average study. She turned around and headed out of the room, leaving the rest of it as it was.

She looked up at the moths that still circled outside the study. She was still confused at their flight pattern. Her study of moths showed that

they usually preferred to travel following some source of light or near sources of nectar. These particular moths just seemed fascinated with circling around the air before the door.

She pushed the thoughts out of her mind for the moment, seeing that in front of her was now an open doorway into the kitchen. She curiously stepped into it, looking at the small but quaint kitchen. She could smell something sweet, turning her head to look at the table, seeing a pie simply sitting on it.

“Who left a pie here?” Fluttershy asked curiously, walking up and looking at the pie. It smelled like an apple pie, though there was a particular extra scent to it, as if a special ingredient had been added to its making. The scent reminded her...of her mother...

There was someone she hadn't thought about in a long time. Besides the dreams, she hadn't thought about her mother in a long time. She felt guilty about that. Her mother had died of a disease when she was young, leaving her and her father to fend for themselves.

“Mother...” Fluttershy quietly murmured, trying to remember her mother fondly. Images of the pink-haired mare flashed through her mind briefly, though for some reason they all felt hazy. As if she couldn't focus in on the very memories she had of her mother. If she tried to concentrate harder on a memory she remembered liking, it seemed to just haze out even more.

Fluttershy rubbed her head in confusion. She'd never had trouble thinking about her mother before, what was different now? Was it because she was in this strange place? Was it a side effect of Twilight's spell? It was the only thing that made sense to her...

She looked at the pie longingly, but though it smelled good she couldn't bring herself to try it. Something just didn't seem right to her about it being there. She saw something glint next to it though, drawing her attention. Next to the pie was a gold coin with what looked like a young mare on it. In tiny writing the words 'The Trapped Mare' was written.

She instinctually added it to her bag alongside the others. She still wasn't sure what possessed her to collect them. She turned from the table

and walked out of the kitchen. The house seemed small; she was already outside the last door she hadn't checked yet. She carefully pushed the door open peering inside.

It was a bedroom, though she could only tell that from there being a bed pressed up against the wall. The only other furniture in the room was a drawer with a glass case on it, and on the front of it appeared to be indentations.

Fluttershy carefully walked up to the desk, getting a better look at it. The indentations were in the shape of coins, with five holes. On the glass case she could see a note that had been taped down:

Only three of five exist in this world,

*In the morning, noon and night the quiet wind blows
Through the world, giving the world its shape.*

*When the sun beats down it brings its heat,
Cold and water disappear into the sky.*

*Awaiting for those to arrive so that a home can be built
The world awaits, sitting quietly and empty.*

*It doesn't take long, they arrive and they build,
What was once empty is now filled.*

*But though it is filled, it is not filled with joy or fun,
Instead there is a quiet unspoken misery.*

Fluttershy read the note twice, thinking about what the note was saying. The drawer had five spots to fill with coins and she had brought three with her. Her instincts had yielded results, but now she just had to figure out what this meant.

She reached into her bag and pulled out the three coins, looking at each and its shape carefully.

‘Okay...when water is evaporated by the heat of the sun it becomes vapor, which the vapor then turns into clouds...’ Fluttershy surmised as she carefully put ‘The Floating Cloud’ in the second spot, figuring the first slot must be empty, similar to the effect of wind.

‘Next...they build a home in the empty quiet...’ Fluttershy thought leaving the spot next to ‘The Floating Cloud’ empty and placing ‘The Old Home’ in the slot. ‘Then that just leaves this coin in this slot.’ She placed ‘The Trapped Mare’ in the final slot.

The desk let out a loud click, confirming that she had done everything correctly. The glass case on the drawer swung open slowly, revealing a small lever inside of it. Curious, Fluttershy carefully placed her hoof on the switch and flipped it.

Her ears perked up as she heard the sound of something moving. She turned her head and saw that a door-shaped hole had opened in the wall that wasn’t there before. Inside was a dimmed staircase that led down into what looked like a basement.

Fluttershy looked cautiously down the staircase, it was dark. She couldn’t see past a few feet down them. Her music box was still silent, so she assumed there was no trouble just yet. She turned the light on her lantern on and began to make her way down.

The walls seemed to be damp as she walked further down into the darkness. There was the faint smell of wet mildew that emanated from the darkness, but she continued to walk further down. She wasn’t sure what would be waiting for her, but the area had been hidden so her instincts told her something was waiting at the bottom.

The stairs flattened out, before opening up into a wide open basement. Fluttershy looked around, taking in the sight of the gray moldy walls. Her eyes wandered the room before noticing something in the corner.

It was a small pony doll. Worn and torn from years gone by, covered in stitches and rotted with age. Fluttershy felt a pang of nostalgia looking at the doll; it was a very similar doll to one she had as a child. However, the one she owned wasn’t so riddled with stitches or aged so badly. It was

sitting in a storage box in her house, waiting for the day she'd pass it down to a little filly or colt of her own one day...

Next to the doll was an opened and messy sewing box, spools of thread and needles were scattered around it, as if someone had dropped the case in a hurry and left it there. She figured it must've been the case used to help sew the doll back together.

She turned from the doll and kit looking around further, before noticing something glint on the ground. She carefully walked over to it, noticing a key on the ground. She leaned in closer, noticing that the key had the shape of a doll on the end of it.

"Oh, this must be the key to that door." Fluttershy smiled before picking it up and placing it in her bag, now she could hopefully leave this house and start looking for her friends.

Her ears perked up as she heard a strange noise far off in the distance. It sounded as if a siren was going off, warning the town about something. The sound sent a chill up her back, but she couldn't explain why. Something was off putting about the sound of the siren, she felt like she had to get out of the basement right away. She turned herself around and began to quickly walk back up the stairs she had just come down from.

But something seemed off, she couldn't tell what it was right away, but something about the stairs seemed...different from when she had just walked down them.

The smell of mildew was stronger, the steps seemed more slick than they had when she was coming down; she started to hear the sound of water dripping, it almost felt like water was coming from everywhere.

Her ears perked up again at what sounded like rushing water. She turned to light up the stairs behind her, hearing the sound from bellow her. Her eyes widened as suddenly water was rapidly filling up the stair well. It was rising fast, bubbling and swelling as it swirled to fill the stairs.

Fluttershy turned on her hooves and began to run, running as fast as she could up the stairs. Her hooves were almost slipping on the steps as she ran from the water. She could hear it quickly filling up behind her,

drawing closer as she ran. If she didn't get back to the top of the stairs, she was going to drown.

Her front hoof slipped, sending her face into the stairs. She yelped in pain, but quickly stood back up trying to shrug the pain off. Her back hoof touched the swelling water and she burst into full panic, her legs stretching out as quickly as they could to get her to climb up the stairs faster.

'I should be out of here by now! The stairs weren't this long! I should be back in the room by now!' Her mind screamed as she ran. Her chest was yelling at her, screaming that it was being put under too much strain; her face ached with a dull thud. She pushed all that to the side, trying to make it an afterthought, she couldn't die here, not drowning in some staircase when she needed to find her friends.

The water began to splash against her back hooves, drawing closer still. She panted heavily as her body was struggling to stay away.

The stairwell suddenly made a sharp turn into a large opening, the stone steps being replaced with a metal fire escape, circling around a large open shaft that reached into the sky. Fluttershy couldn't see where it opened up at, but she couldn't stop there. She began to run up the metal stairwell, having to turn every few feet to go up the square-spiraled staircase.

The water was swelling up even faster now, her hooves were doing their best but she could tell that she wasn't going to be fast enough. Her heart leapt out of her chest and into her throat as breathing became hard from her forced exertion.

The water swelled, the back of her hooves falling into the water. Fluttershy cried and did her best to run, but the resistance and churning of the water instantly slowed her down. The water level rose up her legs, over her body.

Fluttershy took in one last final gasp of breath before the water rushed passed her head, finally submerging her.

She flailed her hooves in the water, trying to reach the surface. She was panicking, the water current was pushing her body and she was

having difficulty orientating herself to follow the direction of the rising water. She swam with all her might upwards, but her body was feeling the strain. Her light had gone out when submerged in the water and she was quickly getting disorientated, unable to tell which direction was the right one.

The water swirled around her; it clawed at her body and mind. She could barely think, the world was quickly being lost to her.

Her burning lungs forced her mouth open, the air escaping from her lungs, wanting to be replaced with fresh oxygen, but only water was awaiting her. She was fading and she could feel it.

She wouldn't be in this world for much longer...

"Come on in, the water's fine." Fluttershy smiled happily as she gently floated around the quiet lake, looking at Rainbow Dash who seemed to be hesitant about entering the water.

"Uh...sure, I'll be right there." Rainbow forced a smile to her face as she slowly began to put a hoof into the water. She slowly began to walk into the water, though she didn't tread too far. She kept herself about half a legs length above the water.

"Do you not feel like swimming? Because we could do something else, if that's what you want to do..." Fluttershy said, slowly swimming next to Rainbow Dash, looking a little worried.

"It's not that, it's just..." Rainbow looked away, as if embarrassed, "I can swim...but I'm not very good at it."

"Oh, is that all? Well I can teach you how to swim better." Fluttershy said smiling comfortably as she swam up next to Rainbow Dash before standing up in the shallows.

"Well...I've never really been much on practicing my swimming. After all, I've always been a fast flyer by nature. Water just seems slower in comparison, it's too heavy to get a good momentum going." Rainbow furrowed her brow as she kicked the water.

Fluttershy thought about this for a moment, before smiling.

“Well, I can teach you how to use your wings underwater so that its similar to flying. You can actually get going pretty fast if you do the technique right.”

“Really? There’s a way to do that?” Rainbow said rather surprised.

“Of course, though it takes a lot of practice to get right. There are a lot of subtle movements and you’ve got to position your body correctly so the water will drag less as you swim, but it’s possible.” Fluttershy smiled proudly, feeling good about knowing something Dash was interested in that she didn’t know about yet.

“You HAVE to show me! I could incorporate swimming into my tricks if what you say is true!” Rainbow grinned eagerly.

“Of course I’ll show you.” Fluttershy giggled softly before moving back into the deeper waters, “Now watch carefully.” She spread her wings in the water, as she prepared to show off to Dash for the first time.

Fluttershy’s eyes shot open in the dark waters as she spread her wings out. Her hooves flailed around for a moment, before catching the railing on the metal staircase. She put her hind legs on the rail as her wings adjusted, battered by the current, but she could do this.

She kicked off with her back legs and she moved her hooves forward, flattening her body as she began to move rapidly in the water. Her wings bent and moved as they very carefully moved with the rushing water, moving the water around her wings to give her forward movement. She could feel the water rushing all around her, trying to drag her back down.

She began to flap her wings precisely, scooping the water and pushing against it, thrusting herself forward as she slipped gracefully though the water.

Her mind and body reeled and ached and screamed and tried to tear her apart looking for relief from her pain, from the inferno in her chest, from the wounds telling her she had to stop. Nothing could make her stop though.

She gritted her teeth, she narrowed her eyes, she flapped her wings with every last ounce of strength she could muster as she swam up through the dark abyss, looking, no, needing an exit. A dim light filled the edge of her vision and she spread her wings far, grabbing as much water as she could and powering them down to thrust her to the edge of the light.

The loud gasp echoed amongst the sound of splashing water as her head surfaced from the water. She coughed and gasped, hacking and wheezing as she scrambled for an edge to the water, grabbing hold of a floor. She threw both hoofs on the ground holding her up as her lungs accepted the sweet, sweet relief of air.

Her head was throbbing like mad, her body felt like it had been torn apart and every muscle in her body was telling her she was lucky to be alive.

She coughed up water that had entered her lungs. She grimaced unpleasantly as the pain became more and more apparent to her. Her echoing pants bounced back into her ears, making her realize just how lucky she truly was. For a moment she had accepted death as an inevitability, that she would've had no choice but to die in that cold watery hell.

...The water was cold. She hadn't noticed in her panic, but she could feel herself shivering as she floated in the now calm water. She groaned as she pulled herself up, using any strength left to escape the water.

She managed to drag her legs out of the water, before slowly pulling her tail out as well. She lay on the floor panting, drenched in the cold water, breathing heavily as everything ached. She felt her eyelids slowly closing, wanting to drift off into sleep to calm down.

'...No!' Her mind snapped at her, forcing her eyes back open, 'Fluttershy, you just almost drowned! Not to mention you're drenched in freezing water. If you go to sleep without anyone around you may never

wake up again, the oxygen deprivation may put you into a coma and sleeping in this cold could result in hypothermia. You *can NOT* go to sleep right now!’

She panted as she could feel the onset of her panic returning. Her medical training was coming back to her now, it was fine before when it was just some lacerations and bruising, but this was much more serious. She couldn’t go to sleep, she had just saved her life and she couldn’t let it slip away from her so easily.

She tried to stand up, get back on her hooves. Her legs shook tremendously; she could barely put any weight on them before they slipped from under hoof. She felt her heart rate accelerating, ‘good...stay awake...panic might just be my friend right now...’ she grunted as she did her best to stand. She had to get up, she had to start walking.

With the last of her strength she found her legs and was standing. Her legs were shaking like mad, but she was standing. She very carefully began to shake her whole body, harder than her body’s natural shaking. The water on her coat scattered as best as she could muster, there was no way she could get it all with her being so tired though.

She tried to look around for something to support her, but the light was too dim to see anything. She looked back at the lantern that was still pressed smartly against her chest. She needed the warmth of the flame right now. She clicked at the lantern, flipping the switch several times. She prayed that despite the water logging that it would still work for her.

By some miracle, the flame appeared once more. Somehow the oil and the wick were still useable.

Her head was groggy, shaky as the world seemed to spin around her, but she did her best to get a look at the world. She was in a small square room with a doorway opened to what seemed to be a lobby outside. A large square hole was in the middle of her current room, filled with the water she had just escaped from.

She carefully began to walk out of the room with the cold water into the lobby. Every step made her body shudder and cry, putting her on the verge of collapsing with each step. She needed towels to dry off, she

needed to wrap up in something warm, she needed to put some food and drink in her.

She carefully walked towards a desk she saw in front of her. There were three things on top of it that she instantly took notice of. The first was a map of where she was, it read 'Cloudsdale Hospital' in bold letters before showing the layout of the two story building.

"...C-Cloudsdale...Hospital?" She stammered out loud unintentionally. She could hear the frailty in her voice, but she had spoken anyway. This hospital was where her father had worked, the best doctor in all of Cloudsdale. He had saved more lives than most other doctors had combined. It was thanks to him that she had learned all the medical knowledge that she had for taking care of animals and other sick ponies.

If she was in a hospital, she was sure she could find all the supplies she'd need to take care of herself...

Fluttershy quickly took note of where the patient rooms were. She'd have to come back to pick up the map, her bag would soak the map and ruin its use for her at the moment.

The next thing she saw on the desk was a bottle labeled 'Health Drink'. She remembered them from her visits to the hospital, they were a special type of medicine that helped relax and heal the body. She needed that right now.

She carefully unscrewed the top off of the drink, before pouring the contents into her mouth. She chugged the whole bottle hungrily, the mixture tasting a bit like bitter strawberries but felt soothing going down her throat. She finished the drink and gave it a moment to sink in.

Almost instantly, she felt some of her exhaustion begin to wane, the pain that had been screaming at her began to fade, growing numb. Her eye sight straightened more and her mind lost some of the foggy haze that had been floating around in it. She could tell the drink had a pain killer like effect to it, she wasn't truly feeling better just yet, but it was alleviating the pain so that she could feel better.

It was now, with her head feeling clearer, that she was able to get a look at the lobby for the first time.

The floor was made of rustic steel that was growing some kind of mold; the walls were falling apart from age, mold and being soaked with water. The roof was caving in in many places, the waiting chairs and tables were falling apart, in pieces and torn into shreds. There were overturned wheel chairs and gurneys, some spots on the floor had blood stains on them. The whole room seemed to scream that it was nothing but a vile place.

Fluttershy turned her attention away. She didn't want to focus on the state of the room; she had to attend to her body's needs first.

But before she left she read the last thing of notice on the lobby's desk, a note that looked like it was written hastily in a red pen:

*I locked it away
It can't hurt us anymore
The staring oh, oh Luna the staring
They erected it but it won't go away,
It's judging us,
It knows
But it can't hurt us without it
I locked it away
But should I need it I have this code*

H I D E

The note didn't make any sense to her at the moment but she felt it must be important. She'd come back for it as well.

She stepped away from the counter, taking in her new vigor to move past it and through the double doors behind it. She appeared in a hallway, one she was familiar with from her childhood. Though the place had aged into despair, she still recognized it.

She quickly made it over to the first room she could find and pushed it open. Inside was an examination room, though the cabinets were falling apart and the table looked like it had fallen to disuse, it was still an examination room.

Fluttershy carefully removed her saddle bag from her back and placed it on the table before moving to the broken counters. She found various supplies, fresh bandages, a few more Health Drinks, towels and gauze pads, everything she'd need to get herself feeling back to her top form.

As she began to work delicately on drying herself and applying fresh bandages, she didn't notice the soft hissing that began to emanate from the music box in her bag.

Chapter 4

Fluttershy let out a soft sigh as she lay on the floor of the examination room. A towel was draped over her head as she breathed slowly, trying to calm herself down and feel better. She had redressed her wounds; her cuts had reopened in the water and were slowly healing again. Her muscles still ached though the Health Drinks had helped a lot. Her shivering had gone away as well, a sign her body temperature was returning to normal.

She had made a makeshift fire with some of the leftover gauze and bandages using a small bit of the lantern oil to help it burn. The fire had provided her with a gentle comfort, warming her body and calming her mind as the flames danced before her. It wouldn't last for long, but it was serving its purpose.

She had hung her bag to help it dry quicker, as well as getting all the water out of the music box. She was surprised she hadn't lost the Doll Key in the watery mess, though the map of Ponyville hadn't fared as well. It was drying as well, though it wouldn't ever quite be the same.

"...I wonder what Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie are doing right now..." Fluttershy asked herself staring into the flames. She was feeling lonely without her friends, and she was starting to worry about their safety. This place wasn't welcoming, already she had brushed with death twice...and both times she had been saved thanks to Rainbow Dash.

"...Rainbow Dash..." she muttered quietly, closing her eyes to think about her marefriend.

"THIS IS IT! THIS IS MY CHANCE!" Rainbow dash squealed happily, as she held up a poster to Fluttershy, "The Wonderbolts will be having OPEN AUDITIONS in THREE MONTHS! This is the first time they've EVER done this! Apparently they've been so amazed at the talent of upcoming fliers that they want to see and personally invite the best of the

best to join them!” Rainbow Dash let out another squeal as she was practically dancing for joy.

“That’s wonderful Rainbow Dash!” Fluttershy cheered happily for her, “You’ll finally be able to make your dream come true!”

“I know! Oh, I’m going to have to pick up my practice sessions! This is going to have to call for some new tricks too, tricks nopony has ever thought of! The most death-defying and out-of-this-world tricks any pony has ever SEEN!” Rainbow Dash instantly contemplated anything and everything she could do.

“You shouldn’t forget about using the Sonic Rainboom either, you’re the only pony in all of Equestria who can perform it! They’d let you in for sure after they see that.” Fluttershy happily said.

Rainbow stopped her musing when Fluttershy said that, lowering a hoof she’d had raised eagerly to the ground.

“...The Sonic Rainboom huh...” Rainbow scuffed her hoof against the ground looking a little anxious.

“What’s the matter?” Fluttershy asked, noticing the instant change in behavior.

“Well...to be honest...I haven’t been able to perform the Sonic Rainboom since the best young fliers competition.” Rainbow Dash seemed to grimace at her mentioning failing to do a move.

“Really? Do you not remember how you performed it?”

“It’s not that I forgot how I did it...just for some reason things seem to get too real just as I’m about to perform it. The ground gets too close or I start to panic about not controlling my speed or I think that it must be something to perform only on critical occasions or-“

Rainbow Dash’s frantic rant was interrupted when Fluttershy’s lips found their way to Rainbow’s. Rainbow’s face lit up in a blush at this.

"I know you can do it Rainbow Dash, I believe in you." Fluttershy smiled warmly at her marefriend.

"Well...I suppose I can always give it another try." Dash said grinning as she blushed heavily. She spread her wings and shot into the sky at a mighty speed. Fluttershy smiled as she watched her, always loving the way Rainbow flew.

Rainbow perched herself high-up on a cloud, looking over the world. With a quick breath she sprang up into the air once more, flying around as she began to pick up momentum. Fluttershy watched her fly around, realizing Dash was getting a feel for the air first, before Dash stopped high up in the air, almost invisible against the sun.

Then she saw the descent. Rainbow was racing straight for the ground at a tremendous speed. Fluttershy watched in anticipation, as she could see Rainbow begin to form the cone of air around her body. Fluttershy almost held her breath.

For a moment it seemed Rainbow hesitated, Fluttershy could see the change in her flight, she put a hoof to her mouth out of hesitation that she might go flying backwards as she had so many times before...

But at that last moment it seemed a last ditch determination fired in her eyes and her body stretched forward and suddenly-

BOOM

A huge explosion ripped through the sky, a circle of color spreading out as a rainbow shot towards the ground, turning right before it would impact with the ground and rocketing into the sky, spreading a giant rainbow across the sky.

Fluttershy cheered, jumping up and down at the amazing sight.

"...Wait a Moment...an explosion..." Fluttershy's head popped up from where she had been laying it on her hooves. "The one that woke me up earlier...that sounded a lot like the Sonic Rainboom!"

Now she was worried. What reason could Dash have for doing the Sonic Rainboom here? Unless...

"Oh no...was Dash being chased by the Dragon again?" Fluttershy's heart started pounding, "She could be hurt, or trapped, or...or worse!" Her heart lodged in her throat as she stood up quickly, shaking her head trying to clear her mind as her towel fell to the floor.

"No, I can't think that way! Rainbow Dash is okay...and I'm sure Pinkie Pie is too. I just have to find them..." Fluttershy looked at what remained of the fire before her, it was flickering with its last embers, and it would die out very soon.

"Okay, I should be dry enough and my things should be dry enough as well, it's time for me to find a way out of here. I have to find my friends." Fluttershy quickly placed her things back into the slightly damp bag. She made sure to pack some of the extra gauze, bandages and health drinks as well, making sure she'd have more medical supplies with her should anything happen along the way.

This would have to do for now as she closed it up and placed it back on her back. She then returned the lantern to around her neck and turned it on, making sure it still worked, before walking out into the hallway.

Instantly the music box began to hiss and wail with the sound of buzzing bees, as the air seemed to become thick. Fluttershy instantly had to struggle for breath as it felt like the air itself was pressing down hard against her body, trying to strangle the life out of her. Her body felt almost frozen as the pressure felt like it was trying to crush her body. Her head slowly turned, looking down the hallway from where it felt like the pressure was emanating.

Her eyes grew wide and her pupils shrunk as she could see two piercing red eyes staring back at her. It was a tall pony-like creature, one that easily overpowered her. Its body was covered in darkness that seemed to flow and crawl all around it, almost like dancing flames. As it stared at her its mouth began to open revealing a white mouth in stark contrast to its black body, its jagged sharp teeth bared for her to see. It was grinning at her.

It began to walk towards her, each step echoing with a loud thud through the hallway. As it drew closer the air grew thicker and its presence seemed to crush her further, the very air pressing down on her, making her legs shake and her breathing stop as her heart pounded heavily in her chest.

As it grew closer, a word began to echo through Fluttershy's mind.

Pain.

This creature would bring her pain.

She had to run from it, she had to get away, but her hooves felt glued in place.

Pain. Pain. Pain pain pain pain pain pain pain pain PAIN PAIN PAIN PAIN PAIN.

Why couldn't she run? She had to run. She was going to die if she didn't run but she was paralyzed by fear. Fear of what? The wrath of this creature? That's what she had to run away from!

"I need you to be strong right now, alright?"

Fluttershy's mind snapped back to reality, instantly turning on her hooves and running as fast as she could.

She was finally able to get air into her lungs as she quickly ran past the doors around her. The hallway was quickly coming to an end though and before her she could see the staircase to the second floor. She couldn't stop now, she had to run.

Her hooves hit heavily against each step as she ran up the stairs with all her might. She seemed to be getting farther away from the creature, the air was breathable and she wasn't feeling the soul crushing presence, the music box was slowly growing more quiet.

She reached the top of the stairs, panting as she took in the stale air. The world still smelled of mildew and rotting materials, but it was better than being in that creature's presence.

She quickly began to walk down the hallway of the second floor, when her music box suddenly began to hiss again. She stopped in tracks, expecting that black creature to appear before her, but slowly coming into the view of her lantern wasn't the black creature...it looked like a nurse...

It was wearing the standard Cloudsdale Hospital nurse uniform, a pink hat with a red cross and a pink coat that fit well around the body but ended just short of the flank so that the cutie mark could be seen, with white stockings on the hind legs and special-made hoof-sandals to keep their steps quiet for patients.

However, that's where the similarities ended, for the face of the nurse was covered in bandages, hiding its eyes and face, but around its mouth was a metal muzzle with holes for air, but looked like it had been placed to keep the creature quiet. It's uniform was covered in spots of blood as if it had attacked something, while its white tail seemed spotless.

But most striking of all, was that around its neck it wore what looked like a black necklace of living flames, as if it had come from the body of the creature from before.

Her music began to hiss louder as the creature grew closer. Her head looked back and forth, looking for a way out that didn't involve going back the way she came.

Her eyes fell upon double doors just in front of her to her right. She jumped at the doors and pressed on them, praying they were open. The door swung open and she ran inside, closing the doors behind her.

The hissing of her music box died down as she could still tell the creature was nearby outside the door. She hoped it wouldn't come breaking the door down, but she now realized she had just set herself up in a trapped room.

She had jumped into what looked like a supplies closet. However, most of the supplies had fallen to this world's rotten disrepair. Moths flew

around the ceiling of the room, as she could smell blood in the air but couldn't see any. She looked around, seeing if there was anything that could possibly hide her or keep the creature behind the door away from her.

Something glinted against the glare of her lantern on one of the shelves.

"Huh?" She slowly walked over to the glint of light.

It was an orange gem stone in the shape of an eye. It was the only thing in the entire room that hadn't fallen into a state of rotting; in fact it looked pristine, as if it had been taken care of while everything else fell apart. Something about the gem drew Fluttershy to it, as if it was hypnotizing. The jewel itself seemed to be watching her.

She gulped down her beating heart and placed the gem carefully in her bag. She'd hold onto it, she felt it was important.

She slowly walked back over to the door and placed her ear against it, trying to hear anything. The hissing of her music box had gone silent and she didn't hear anything past the door.

She opened the door carefully, peeking outside and looking around. The nurse had left, it didn't seem like it had tried to chase after her and break the door down. Fluttershy let out a soft sigh in relief realizing this.

She exited the supply room and continued down the hallway from the direction the nurse had come, she felt very strongly about not returning the way she had just come from, moving forward was her only option now.

Fluttershy looked around carefully at the doors in the hallway. Many had been boarded up with wooden planks nailed to the frames, making sure no one could enter or exit the rooms. Many looked like they had been sealed with some kind of building material, while others just looked like the locks and handles had been broken for ages and wouldn't open.

The hallway ended abruptly with a turn, Fluttershy turning with it to continue down the hall. Something immediately struck her eyes as she

walked down the hall. She drew closer to it, to get a better look at it, when she stopped and stared in surprise.

On the wall opposite the doors was a giant mural of Princess Celestia. She was facing the pony looking at the mural, with a hoof raised and her wings spread out with an imposing look about her. Above the mural, in large letters looked like a quote she had said once,

“Life is the right of every Pony, may we all bask in the light together.”

Fluttershy blinked in awe at the mural. She had never seen it before, not in all the years that she had been to the hospital at least. Not to mention, something struck her as being odd about the mural, as if something was missing...

Her eyes! Her eyes were missing. In their place were indentations in the wall, looking as if something was supposed to be placed inside of them.

Fluttershy carefully pulled out the orange stone she had found in the supply closet and carefully fit it into the right eye socket. The stone fit in with a click and stayed in place. Now Celestia was only missing one eye. It was likely that the other eye was somewhere in the hospital.

Suddenly, the note from the front desk made sense to her. They had locked away the other eye somewhere because Celestia's staring was judging them, as if the mural itself could see something that they didn't want it to see.

Fluttershy put a hoof to her chin in thought, 'So I have to find where they locked the gem away, and the only hint I have is the word Hide'.

Fluttershy looked around the dark hallway once more, before quickly setting back down the way she was heading. She looked even closer at the doors now, looking for any door that might have some sort of keypad or be open for her to check and see if it would reveal some kind of locked item.

Even after another turn in the hallway, none of the doors revealed any answers, before opening up to another staircase heading back down to the first floor.

She treaded carefully, expecting another creature to start heading for her if she wasn't careful.

The world remained quiet though, as she came upon a hallway that she recognized from when she was a filly. It was the testing wing of the hospital, one she remembered frequenting with her mother as she was getting help.

In a quiet nostalgia, she began to check some of the doors in the hallway. One door opened for her, as she walked inside.

"Mother!" Came the voice of a little filly. Fluttershy stepped back in shock as she looked at what was happening before her. A ghostly version of her mother was lying on the bed in the room, as a filly version of herself ran up happily next to her bedside.

"Fluttershy, you came to visit again." Her mother chuckled happily, leaning down to pick up the little filly, hugging her close as she lay in the bed.

"Of course mother, you know I'll always visit you." Fluttershy chuckled happily as her mother's hair tickled her. "When are you coming home mother? I miss you..."

"As soon as the doctor's finish there testing today." Her mother smiled happily.

"Really!?" Fluttershy's face lit up happily.

"Really." Her mother chuckled happily at her daughter's enthusiasm, "They said unless it's serious, I can head home today since I'll have your father at home to take care of me. We're so lucky to have him." She smiled.

"Dad's the best doctor in the whole world! He'll make you all better in no time." Fluttershy smiled happily.

“Indeed he will.” Fluttershy’s mother smiled happily, before turning her head and coughing into a hoof, away from her daughter.

“You really should be resting.” Came a deeper voice. The two girls turned to see an older Pegasus with a doctor’s coat walk into the room.

“Daddy!” Fluttershy smiled happily.

“Hello dear.” Her mother smiled happily.

“Hello you two.” He smiled and walked closer, “How’re you feeling today?”

“Better, my stay here helped, but I’m eager to get home and be with my little one.” Mother smiled, rubbing Fluttershy’s head happily.

“You’ll be resting there too you know, you may feel better but you’re not cured yet. But we’ll find the cure, don’t you worry.” Her father smiled. He looked tired, like he hadn’t gotten a good night’s sleep in a long while.

“I know you will dear. We’ll be a happy family again before too long.” Her mother said happily, before the images faded away.

Fluttershy didn’t know what to make of the images. After they had gone the room had returned to the state of decay as the rest of the hospital was in, the furniture and cloth was destroyed and old, with the smell of mildew hitting her nose.

“Mother...” Fluttershy said quietly. She remembered that memory now, though when she had tried to remember it before it was hazy, but now it was coming in clear as could be. She wondered why, what reason her memories would have for hiding her mother till they showed up like this.

She took a closer look at the room, but nothing else seemed to pop out to her. She frowned a little, hoping she’d find a little more to remember, but it didn’t seem she’d be offered any. She slowly turned back to the door and walked out back into the hallway.

She let out a soft sigh as she tried to gather her thoughts and try to calm down. She walked further down the hall, before her eyes caught the sight of a sign that was lit up above double doors. The sign read 'ER'.

She hesitated for a moment, she hadn't been in the ER section of the hospital before and she was worried about what she would find. However, she gulped down her fears and quickly entered the double doors.

She looked around, not seeing any creatures, but the scent of blood caught her nose. She looked down on the ground and saw a trail of blood leading down the ER's hallway, as if something had dragged a pony's body down it. Her gut told her that following the trail was the right way to go, but she dreaded what she would find. She didn't want to see a bleeding corpse.

With another gulp, she began to follow the trail of blood. The trail lead under a door at the end of the hallway, a door that looked like it was used for surgery. She carefully pushed the door open, walking into the room.

It was indeed a room for surgery, torn apart privacy curtains hung from rusted metal rails, a window for observation was broken on one side of the room, a tray filled with rusted medical items lay near a broken table, various machines and devices lay in various pieces around the room, the disinfecting sink was coated with a layer of blood.

The blood trailed ended in the middle of the room, leading to a large pool of blood that lay just underneath the surgical table. On top of the table was a wooden bloodstained box with a padlock on it. The padlock had a dial on it for turning numbers to open it.

Fluttershy carefully walked up to the box and examined it, before noticing a bit of extra blood on the table that had been formed into words.

Turn, turn, turn, the letters into nhmblyrs

The last word was smudged, but it had all been written in blood, she was surprised it wasn't all more smudged.

She carefully placed a hoof against the padlock and looked at the four dials on it. Each dial went from one to nine, creating a four digit number code to unlock the box.

“Hmmm...the note said that the code was the word hide...and the words here say something about ‘turning the letters’...” Fluttershy thought quietly for a moment, trying to tell her brain what it meant.

Suddenly it seemed to come to her, as she placed her other hoof against the dial and began to turn the numbers.

“Eight...Nine...Four...Five...” She said out loud as she turned all the numbers to what she thought must be the right combination. The padlock clicked, releasing its iron grip on the wooden box. Fluttershy smiled happily at her own ingenious, before carefully moving the padlock aside to open the box.

Inside she saw what she expected, the other gem that was Celestia’s eye, though this one was a dark shade of blue instead of the orange that her other eye was. Fluttershy carefully put the jewel inside of her bag, ready to leave this surgical room.

She turned and exited the room, only to be met with the loud hissing of her music box once more.

Her head instantly looked down the hallway, seeing the same kind of nurse heading towards her, blocking off the path of the hallway. Fluttershy looked around, not sure what to do, not wanting to get attacked but having nowhere to run. She did the only thing she could think of and pressed herself up against the wall. With that she very slowly began to walk towards the nurse, hoping the nurse would ignore her and let her slip by.

The nurse’s head turned to snap and look at Fluttershy as she got almost side by side by it. Fluttershy stopped in her tracks as the nurse stopped as well.

The nurse seemed to be staring at Fluttershy through its bandaged face. Fluttershy couldn’t see the eyes, but she knew they were staring deeply at her. Fluttershy stared back in return, as she could feel a cold sweat beginning to form on her forehead.

The two of them were in a standoff and Fluttershy didn't want to be the first pony to make a move. The tension was thick, only cut by the hissing of the music box telling Fluttershy that she was in danger.

The nurse finally, but slowly, turned its head away from Fluttershy, before walking past her, heading for the surgical room Fluttershy had just left from.

Fluttershy let out a soft sigh from the air she had been holding in from the tension.

The nurse turned around instantly, as it suddenly let out a wailing, ear-piercing cry. Fluttershy jumped, running out of the ER hallway as fast as she could. She turned down the testing hallway, running straight for the stairs to the second floor, when her music box hissed even louder as she hit a wall of thick air that squeezed down on her as if trying to suffocate her.

She skidded to a stop as her whole body felt terror. The dark creature was standing before her once more. It roared at her as its white mouth opened, the jagged teeth coming down swiftly.

Fluttershy's instinct reacted as she raised a hoof to defend herself. The jagged teeth bore down into her leg and Fluttershy let out a scream in agony as it felt like her flesh was on fire. The dark creature twisted its head before quickly snapping it back, picking up and tossing Fluttershy by her leg. Fluttershy slammed into a wall, the air escaping her lungs as pain soared through her.

She coughed and gagged on the thick air as the dark creature began to walk closer to her, wanting to strike out once more.

Fluttershy scrambled to her legs, her injured leg slipping causing her to crash face first into the floor, eliciting another yelp as her bruised face was struck. She managed to turn her head to look at the creature through blurry, tear-filled eyes. It was drawing too close, she had to escape, she had to get up and run.

Instinct struck again as her wings spread out and she flapped them desperately, trying to pick up her body and get away, get away quickly, she had to get to the mural of Celestia.

Jagged teeth bore down into her wing. Fluttershy screamed even louder than she had before, her sensitive wing being punctured in several places. The dark creature twisted its head again, though this time a loud crack was heard as the bone in her wing snapped.

Fluttershy's body flailed once more as her screams echoed through the hallway. The dark creature let go of the maimed wing, seeming to grin happily at its accomplishment.

As tears streamed down her face, her legs finally found traction. Fluttershy pushed with all her might against the floor and just barely managed to put distance between her and the dark creature. She could barely see, her vision blurred by the pain and the tears.

She smacked into the end of the hallway, crying as pain shot through her body from the force of the impact. She shakily looked down the hallway, seeing the blurry outline of the dark creature heading straight for her, continuing its slow pace.

She reached her good hoof out in front of her and found a door before her. With haste she opened it, stumbling out. She quickly blinked, whirling her head around. She was on the other side of the lobby, she knew where she was, she could go through the other door, make it up the stairs, and then she could get to the mural.

Her music box had yet to cease its hissing, as a figure came into her blurry vision. Fluttershy turned and ran, only looking back to see the blurry outline of a nurse that had been walking towards her.

She tripped against the receptionist's chair that lay scattered behind the desk. She didn't have time to let the pain settle in, she had to get up. She scrambled back to her feet and reached the other door.

The moment she entered the hallway to the patients' rooms, another ear-piercing wail cried out. Fluttershy turned just barely in time to see a

nurse raised up on her hind legs, as the front legs came rushing straight for her.

Fluttershy felt the hooves strike her face as she was sent tumbling back into the wall. She panted as she got back up and tried to look around. She could no longer see out of one eye, only half the world came to her vision.

She made out the image of the nurse walking towards her, barely even giving her time to realize she'd been hit. Fluttershy pushed off against the wall and ran past the nurse, the nurse wailing at her as she ran by.

She could barely see, her hoof hit the staircase with a thud sending her face into the stairs once more. Her head was throbbing so much she wasn't even sure what was happening to her body anymore. She only knew she had to get up and keep running, she had to get to the mural, it was her way out, it had to be her way out.

She climbed the stairs to the second floor. She wasn't even sure how she did it, but she had managed it. She kept running, she wasn't even sure how she was keeping up pace with her body, but her legs were running. She made the turn down the second floor hallway, and the blurry image of the mural was in her sight. She ran straight for it, skidding to a stop right before it.

The music box let out a loud hiss as the air began to feel thick. Fluttershy reached into her bag and pulled out the blue eye.

The air began to feel like it was pressing down on her, going to crush her body. She fumbled with the eye, fumbling to put it into the right slot. It nearly fell from her hooves, she shifted it hastily into place.

She couldn't breathe, the air and pressure was too strong. She swore she could feel breath on the back of her neck as the blue gem clicked into place.

The two gems let out a bright light as a loud cry came from her side. The mural began to move, disappearing into the wall. In its place was another dark hallway. Fluttershy ran for it, she ran through the hallway, ran away from the pressure and the thick air.

It was chasing her, the creature was following her down the long hallway. Her chest was once more on fire but she couldn't stop.

An office opened up at the end of the hallway. A simple office, a desk, a filing cabinet, chairs, office space. Fluttershy crashed into the desk, throwing her hooves over it as she panted in desperation. Her vision was impaired so much now, she could only make out the outline of the furniture in the office.

The air grew thick once more, she turned her head in fear, watching as the dark creature was drawing closer. It's blood-covered white smile and jagged teeth shone underneath its red glaring eyes. She couldn't see anything but its face. Her breath sounded loud, her panting was as loud as the beating of her heart in her ears.

There was no escaping it this time. The mural had led her to a dead end, there was no escape now. Her vision was filled with the dark creature, it was going to kill her, she would die here and her friends would never know what happened to her.

She muttered an apology under her breath as her face continued to be drenched with her tears. The creature was upon her and her breath stopped. The pressure of the creature's presence was enough to feel like it would stop her heart.

It opened its mouth as it was going to bore its fangs down on her one last time.

It stopped. The creature had stopped moving. Something had forced the creature to not kill her. Fluttershy meekly stared at the creature, not understanding what was happening. It had the opportunity to kill her, why wasn't it taking it?

Her ears twitched as she heard the reason. Somewhere in the distance a siren was going off.

The dark creature before her began to disappear, as if the siren had called it forth, then summoned it back. The darkness that surrounded the creature's body seemed to burn up, the entire creature went up in a black

fire before her, disappearing before it could finish her. The music box ceased its hissing as the creature vanished, leaving her in the office by herself.

A loud click could be heard, before the sound of something crashing to the ground.

Fluttershy's mind was hazed over, she could barely see, she couldn't understand what was going on, but she dragged herself over to where she had heard the sound. Her body moved on its own now, without her guidance.

Her body stepped on top of a platform; one she was sure hadn't been there when she entered the room. She felt her body collapse on top of it, laying herself down as she panted.

The platform began to move, she wasn't sure how or why, but she didn't care. It was moving up, it was taking her away from the hospital. The platform was moving into the ceiling, through a dark path that she couldn't see what was around her, but she knew she wasn't around danger anymore.

The pain was becoming real to her now. Her face came to her attention first, she could feel the swelling around her eye, she was probably also bleeding a lot from her face, but it was hard to tell.

Her leg was no longer useful. Using it so heavily in her panicked state while it was injured, it had gone completely numb to her. She had probably done irreversible harm to it; it probably would never work the same way again. She could barely make out the blood pouring from it.

Her wing...the creature had snapped her wing, broken it. She couldn't help but remark at that, Pegasus wings were strong and sturdy, one could not normally break it with a twist of the head. They weren't like bird wings that were fragile, they were strong enough to lift the entire body of a pony, but hers was now broken. She wasn't sure how if it could be fixed or not, the one thing she knew about broken wings, was that they could break two ways, a way that they could be used again, or a way that they'd never be useable again. There was very little in leeway.

Her thoughts were distracted when the platform came to a stop. It had reached its destination.

She panted heavily. Her body wanted to stay collapsed, absorb the pain...the pain that was trying to drive her mad. The only thing that was keeping her sane was the thoughts of what damage had been done to her and what she could do to fix it.

But she knew she had to at least get up. If she didn't get up she couldn't start fixing her wounds.

She tried to stand up, she put energy to her legs, but they refused to stand her up. She carefully blinked her one useable eye, trying to open it more than it was, but it refused against her actions. She tried to flap her good wing, but it was pressed hard against the platform by her body.

She panted, but she was too tired to panic anymore. She was yelling at herself at get up, but her body was refusing now.

"Hahaha, oh man, that was a good one!" Pinkie giggled happily.

Fluttershy's eye closed tightly, wanting to escape the pain with sleep, but she forced it open.

"Hahaaaah, man you pull the BEST pranks Pinkie Pie!" Rainbow Dash laughed alongside the pink pony.

Her good front leg lifted weakly off of her body, as she very carefully placed the hoof against the ground.

"...Heehee, that was pretty funny." Fluttershy giggled, covering her mouth with her hooves.

Her leg started to lift the front of her body up. Her body jerked in refusal, but she held herself up. Her back legs began to weakly move now.

"I told you you'd enjoy yourself!" Rainbow said grinning, putting a hoof over Fluttershy's shoulder.

Her back legs slowly moved, placing their hooves against the ground. She lifted herself up, she was standing again, she could feel herself dripping. She was losing blood.

"It's all in good fun after all!" Pinkie laughed, bouncing up to Fluttershy, "After all, who DOESN'T love to share a good laugh?" She grinned brightly.

On three legs she slowly began to walk. She didn't know where she was going yet, but she could feel the need to go forward.

"You're right, I'm still not sure that I'm that good at them, but I love doing them with you two." Fluttershy smiled happily. She loved being around her friends, they gave her such strength. She didn't know what she'd do without her friends.

Fluttershy stopped before a mirror. She could see herself now. She could see the bruised half of her face swelling around her eye, the maimed wing, the bleeding leg. She was a mess. With very careful precision, she dropped her saddlebag onto the ground. Using her good hoof, she opened the bag and pulled out a health drink.

She very carefully swallowed its bitter contents before placing it down. She then grabbed the bandages in her bag, and very carefully began to wrap the wound on her leg.

"I think that's enough for one day, but we should totally do this again!" Rainbow Dash grinned at Fluttershy.

"Oh yes, I'd love to. Doing this again would make me happy!" Fluttershy grinned happily. She could ask for nothing more...

Than to spend another day in the loving care of her friends.

Chapter 5

With all of her weight Fluttershy managed to snap the end off of the mop handle. It was just the right size she needed. She gripped it tightly in her mouth, breathing heavily through her nose. Her mind was reeling, her body was fighting her decision, but it was one she'd already chosen to make.

She carefully looked back in the mirror; her body was starting to shake. She carefully raised a hoof up, her body screaming out as it touched the tender spot. She bit down harder on the stick, her breathing was stirring into a panicked breath, the Health Drink had numbed some of the pain, but it couldn't numb this.

She had one shot to do this right and she had to watch to make sure she did it right, she couldn't close her eye. Her heart throbbed in her throat; she could hear every fast and deep breath she took, her hoof positioning itself just correctly. She readied herself as best she could, and then in a swift motion moved her hoof.

CRACK

Fluttershy screamed into the broom handle like she'd never screamed before, the pain was instant and intense, like red-hot knives piercing the back of her mind. Her body collapsed once more as fresh tears poured out of her eye. She panted heavily, laying there as she tried to recover from the pain.

She lay there, twitching as her wing throbbed constantly now, in more pain than it had been before. She forced herself to stand up, to look at it in the mirror; she had to make sure she had snapped it back into place correctly.

Through one eye she looked at the wing carefully. Despite it being covered in blood, hurting like she'd never felt pain before, she could see that the wing was in the correct shape it should be. She'd managed to snap

it back correctly. She prayed that would be enough to keep it useable once it finished healing.

She laid down onto her back and held her injured wing straight as best she could. Only having one hoof to mend her wound was a pain, but she could work around it. She carefully placed the stick on the wing to keep it straight, hoping it would also help in making sure her wing healed. She carefully grabbed the bandages, and proceeded to wrap her wing with the stick.

It was excruciating, but once her wing was wrapped, she'd finished taking care of her wounds.

She panted heavily as she carefully picked herself up, looking back into the mirror to see everything that she had done.

Her face was half covered now, wrapped in bandages so only her good eye was visible. Her hoof was bandaged and now raised in a sling that had been carefully tied around her neck, just below her lantern so that both could fit around her neck. Her body had been rewrapped for the third time as well to make sure the first wounds she had received were healing well. And finally her wing was wrapped in a makeshift cast that she had managed to get to lay flat against her body.

She sighed at the state her body was in. She had a hard time believing that this was real, yet there would no doubting the pain she felt.

"...If...If Rainbow Dash or Pinkie Pie are hurt...could...could they take care of their wounds?" Fluttershy frowned, looking at herself, "Rainbow Dash is reckless...but she's also strong...she might be alright, she could fight back against the monsters here...but Pinkie Pie..." She shook her head, "No...Pinkie Pie's done this before...a-as hard as that is to believe...she...she'll be fine too."

"Both of my friends are fine." She smiled to herself in the mirror, trying to force herself to be reassured, but it wasn't working well. She frowned again, before looking away from herself, "I...I hope they are..."

She turned and looked at her surroundings. She had wound up in a bathroom after the lift ride, though it seemed the effects of the drenched,

rotting world had been left behind for the moment. The bathroom looked like it had fallen to disuse, but nowhere near the levels the hospital had. She had found a mop in the corner of the room, though it hadn't looked like it'd been used in ages.

It was time for her to leave though; she had to go find her friends.

She carefully slipped the saddle bag back onto her back, and very carefully coordinating her three hooves, walked out of the bathroom.

She walked out into a cool breeze, wincing a little as the cold air bit against her freshly bandaged wounds. She looked out as best she could to see where she was, but it seemed that night had fallen, shrouding the world in a veil of darkness.

'H-Has it really been half a day?' Fluttershy asked herself in shock. She hadn't felt that much time pass, but maybe because of her condition she was having difficulty with being a good judge of time.

She carefully turned her lantern on and it illuminated the path before her. There was a dirt road before her, open wide at first, before narrowing into a forest. She looked around, noticing the building she had walked out of. She knew where she was.

It was the boat-house that sat on the edge of Crystal Lake just outside of Ponyville. That meant she was only a short walk away from Ponyville, she could be there in just a minute or two.

"Hold on Rainbow Dash...Pinkie Pie...I'm coming to find you." Fluttershy said determined, before moving as quickly as she could down the path to Ponyville.

She was having trouble coordinating three hooves correctly, especially with trying to trot into town. She was wobbly on her legs, most likely a side-effect of not having rested enough, but she kept going forward. Her determination to see her friends was the strongest factor driving her mind right now.

Twigs in the forest snapped, strange noises crept through the leaves, she swore she could hear soft wails in the distant trees. But she forced her mind off of the sounds. She had to move past them, move into Ponyville.

The path began to open up before her, the dirt path quickly being replaced by the stone streets of Ponyville, the trees spreading apart as she saw the first signs of the homes in Ponyville. She smiled to herself as she returned, happy to be back in a place that seemed more normal than where she had been for the last half a day.

Her music box began to hiss, stopping her in her tracks.

'Oh no...they're here too...' Fluttershy gulped as she looked into the night, trying to see what was causing her music box to hiss.

Sliding into view around the ground before her came a creature. It was in the basic shape of a pony; however this creature seemed to be no older than a filly reaching marehood. It's body was completely hairless, the skin of the creature looking as if it had been deeply bruised all over, many parts of the skin dead or dying with other parts seemed fresh and healthy in comparison. It's ears were folded down, melded with it's face in such a way that it's eyes were covered. It's long legs pushed its body against the ground, its front hooves seemed to be strapped down on its back, as if tied down with its own skin, melding it with its body.

As the creature crawled around, it let out a strange, screeching cry, not unlike that of rusted metal grinding, unpleasant to the ears, but yet a sad wailing cry...

Fluttershy gulped as the creature seemed to push itself all over the place, unable to move in a straight line. Her instinct was to feel sympathy for the creature, her gut told her it was a creature to be pitied, that it needed her help...

Then an image of the dark creature appeared in her mind.

She carefully stepped around, slowly getting away from the creature, before running deeper into town. She slipped away from the creature, her music box finally going back to silence. She panted softly, looking over her shoulder to the direction she had left the creature.

It didn't seem to be able to follow her, which didn't surprise her considering it didn't seem capable of moving in a straight line. She let out a soft sigh, grateful that she could avoid the creature, she really only had enough bandages left to wrap one more wound at best and she didn't know when she would need it.

She carefully began to look around, trying to focus on the buildings around her. She blinked her eyes to gain more focus, if she knew where she was in Ponyville, she could navigate her way around.

She carefully moved her head around to look, careful not to harm her injuries, as a blur moved across her vision.

"Huh?" She said, quickly turning her head back to the blur. In the distance, as if glowing white like an angel, was the image of a young filly.

Fluttershy stared at the filly, not sure what to say or if to speak up. She wasn't even sure if it was real or not, but it was a filly just standing in the middle of nowhere.

The little filly let out a giggle before turning around and running away from Fluttershy.

"H-Hey! Wait! It's dangerous out here!" Fluttershy cried out, her instincts acting to quickly chase after the filly. "Come back! You shouldn't be alone!"

If the filly could hear Fluttershy, she didn't seem to be listening. She just continued to run, turning down a street. Fluttershy followed as quickly as she could, but she was slow and stumbling now, she cursed at herself for having let herself get so injured when she needed to help an innocent foal right now.

Her music box hissed as from the darkness crawled out another one of the monsters that pushed itself along the ground. Fluttershy ran past it, making sure to avoid even touching the creature. Her whole body was telling her she had to catch up to this filly.

The filly turned down another street and Fluttershy followed as best she could, nearly toppling over as she slowed herself down with her three hooves. She quickly paced down the street, when two of the monsters burst forth from the darkness causing her music box to wail.

These two seemed to be heading straight for her, with no time for her to move out of the way. She gulped before quickly jumping. The two creatures wriggled their way past her as she landed behind them.

She thanked Celestia for having avoided them, before returning her sight to the filly. The filly made one last turn, not down a street, but into a house. Fluttershy felt grateful that the filly had gone inside, but she still had to make sure the little filly would be alright.

Fluttershy quickly drew closer to the house, looking it over before gasping.

The house was in terrible condition, it didn't look like it had been used in years. The windows were boarded, the walls were black, holes littered its frame, the gentle breeze caused it to groan very slightly.

Fluttershy gulped, getting a bad feeling from the house. However, the filly had gone inside of the house, she couldn't leave the poor thing alone.

She very carefully walked up to the door and pushed it open, her lantern illuminating the insides.

The door opened up to a decrepit living room, the furniture had long ago been eaten by insects, the table lay in pieces on the ground, most of the doors were sealed off with wooden planks the floor was covered in a thick layer of dust.

Fluttershy slowly walked into the house, her every footstep made the house creak and groan, as if struggling to hold up her weight.

She looked around the living room, every doorway on the floor she was on was completely sealed, there would be no way for her to get through any of them. On top of that, she couldn't see a single sign that the filly had entered the house.

She turned her attention to the stairs, the only path that hadn't been barred off by wooden planks. If the filly had gone anywhere, she must've gone upstairs.

Fluttershy slowly made her way to the staircase, looking up its length. She very carefully began to climb it, testing each step to make sure it'd hold her, as she then worked on climbing the stairs with just three hooves. She found herself doing surprisingly well.

Despite the creaking, the moaning and the constant threat of collapse, she made it to the top of the stairs.

She looked around, to her left was a door that was blocked off by more wooden panels, to her right was...

Fluttershy blinked in confusion. The imagery before her seemed to clash with the rest of the house.

The section of the floor right before a door had turned into a red, rusted metal, the door made of the same material. The wall seemed to be stretch out in a circle around the door, making the walls rotting and falling apart while just behind the holes in the wall was a chain-link fence, as if they were holding the walls together.

The area gave her the sense that it was supposed to be like a cage...

Fluttershy gulped before walking up slowly to the door. She didn't know what was behind the door, but something told her she had to look inside, that she had to find out what was in this room. She carefully put her hoof up to the door, took a deep breath for courage, and pushed open the door.

The first sound that came to her ears was panting. Loud, exasperated panting. Her eye focused on the image before her, her sight recognizing two different hues of pink in the shape of a pony. It had to be...

"P-Pinkie Pie?" Fluttershy called out to her friend. The panting stopped as the pink form seemed to freeze right in front of her. It slowly turned; as Pinkie's wide blue eyes came into view, looking to stare at Fluttershy.

Fluttershy let out an audible gasp as she instinctively took a step back. Pinkie Pie was covered in blood. Her mane was straight and her cheeks were wet with tears she'd been crying. Fluttershy's eyes immediately tried to spot or identify a wound...but she didn't see one. The blood on Pinkie hadn't come from her, it had come from...

Fluttershy's eyes moved down to the ground. Laying on the ground, in a pool of her own blood...was Pinkie Pie. Though this Pinkie was different...the hair was curly like Pinkie's normally is, but it was wearing a multi-colored leather dress with varying wings on the back...

"Flu...Flu...F-Flutter...shy?" The standing Pinkie seemed to gasp, as if finding difficulty breathing.

"Pinkie Pie...what...what happened?" Fluttershy asked in shocked disbelief. She could barely make out the scene before her. Why were there two Pinkie Pies...and why was one dead?

"F-Fluttershy..." Pinkie hiccupped as fresh tears began to spill down her cheeks, "Is...Is that...r-really you?"

"...O-Of course it is...Pinkie Pie...why...why are you..." Fluttershy couldn't finish her sentence. The words were refusing to come out, she couldn't think of how to speak what she needed to say properly.

"Fluttershy...why...why are YOU..." Pinkie choked on her words, as she desperately rubbed her face of her tears, "Why are you...why are you so hurt!?" Pinkie twisted her head, as if saying those words struck pain into her.

"W-What?" Fluttershy asked confused, before looking down at her hoof in the sling. She was hurt...but at the moment she didn't care about that, she cared about what was happening with her friend...

"I'm fine Pinkie Pie, but please, tell me-"

"You're NOT fine!" Pinkie interrupted her with a yell. Fluttershy took another step back in shock; she'd NEVER heard Pinkie yell like that before, "Fluttershy..." Pinkie visibly shook as more tears came from the pink pony,

as her blue eyes looked at her once more, "Your face is swollen and covered in bandages, your hoof is in a sling, your body is wrapped up and...a-and your WING IS IN A CAST!" Pinkie then snapped her head away from looking at Fluttershy as she sobbed hard.

Fluttershy was speechless. It was true; she was in very bad condition at the moment.

But...

But seeing her pink, party loving, fun having friend sob and cry while covered in blood didn't feel right to her. She wanted to help Pinkie Pie more than she wanted to help herself.

"...Pinkie Pie..." Fluttershy mumbled softly, as if trying to find the right words to comfort her friend.

"This...This is all my fault..." Pinkie visibly shook as she cried, "I shouldn't have let this happen. I should've protected you; I should've been there..." Pinkie hiccupped and gasped for breath, "I should've known better than to let Twilight do this..."

"Pinkie...you...you couldn't have possibly known things would happen this way..." Fluttershy offered her words to Pinkie.

Pinkie seemed to stop shaking for a moment, before she began to shake again, though this time it was different. Pinkie...Pinkie was laughing. Fluttershy grimaced a little, this wasn't a fun loving laugh, this was...this was the laugh of a mare whose mind was breaking.

"Oh...Oh that's to laugh." Pinkie tried to smile, but her mouth wobbled as she rubbed her face, "I've been through this before...I've done this once before and I...I know how horrible this place really is." Pinkie shook her head, "But despite that...despite knowing everything I do, I let us get brought here anyway!" Pinkie let out a single laugh, before the smile she was trying to have vanished from her face as she hung her head.

"...Rainbow dash was right..." Pinkie mumbled quietly, "...If I...If I had really cared...I wouldn't have said nothing...I would've told you everything that happens when you come here...I wouldn't have tried to hide

the truth for the sake of protecting you all from what I experienced...no...I didn't speak up because I was selfish, because I only cared about myself...and so I let this hell fall upon you Fluttershy..."

Fluttershy's mouth fell open as she tried to speak. She didn't honestly believe any of Pinkie's words. But she couldn't say anything that would make her friend not believe them. Her mouth closed as she frowned, she felt so helpless...

Pinkie's head slowly turned to look at the corpse of herself that still lay on the ground. Something about that body seemed to spark something inside of Pinkie Pie.

"But...But that doesn't mean I'm going to just let my friends die!" She stood up, almost as if she was yelling at the dead Pinkie, "I REFUSE to be the reason they die! So long as I have strength in my body I will NOT let any of my friends fall victim to this world any longer! So long as I have a single breath of air in my body, I will fight this world with all my strength so that they can live!"

Pinkie was angry. She was panting heavily as she yelled at the corpse. In this one moment she had never seen Pinkie go through so many emotions, emotions that gave Pinkie's words truth behind everything she said. The words were all personal, words that she had to speak from her heart.

Pinkie slowly turned away from the corpse, looking at Fluttershy with a glare. Fluttershy flinched. Pinkie's stare softened when she saw the fear she was putting into her friend. Pinkie rubbed her face one more time as she tried to put on a soft but sad smile.

"Come on Fluttershy...let's...let's get out of here." Pinkie said slowly walking towards Fluttershy.

Fluttershy could only just softly nod, as she turned around and opened the door back up, walking out back into the abandon house's hallway, slowly followed by Pinkie Pie.

"So...what brings you here?" Pinkie asked quietly, not looking directly at Fluttershy, but at the hallway before them.

“W-Well...” Fluttershy tried not to stumble over her own words, “I found my way back to Ponyville after getting separated...a-and then I saw a filly run into this house...I-I was looking for that filly when I found you...” Fluttershy explained quickly.

“So you saw a filly run in here?” Pinkie asked making sure she understood. Fluttershy nodded her head, “...Did you find her yet?” Fluttershy shook her head, “...Then we should try and find her. If there’s one thing I’ve come to realize...things don’t just happen without a reason here.” Pinkie said as she began to walk further down the hallway of the second floor.

Fluttershy slowly followed after Pinkie Pie. There was silence between the two mares. Fluttershy wanted to speak up, she wanted to say something, but the words only got caught in her throat. She felt like Pinkie Pie was portraying herself as a monster...

But she knew Pinkie Pie wasn’t a monster...she was a caring friend, who more than anything, loved her friends...

Pinkie checked a door, only to find it locked. She seemed to scrunch her face at the door, before letting it go and continuing on, leading the way.

Fluttershy watched Pinkie Pie as she moved. She seemed to scrutinize small details, looking at her surroundings with intensity. She looked like she didn’t want to miss a single detail of anything in the house. She seemed determined, focused, like nothing was going to stop her from the mission she had set herself out to accomplish.

Fluttershy’s ear perked up as her heart suddenly dropped. She could hear it...

She could hear the siren blaring in the distance.

“P-Pinkie Pie...do you hear that?” Fluttershy asked, terrified of the sound.

“Hear what?” Pinkie asked, instantly putting her focus on Fluttershy.

“...You don't hear it?” Fluttershy asked surprised, “T-Then maybe it's my imagi-“

“Fluttershy, don't ever assume anything here is your imagination!” Pinkie said, emphasizing the word ever, “Tell me what you're hearing!”

“I...I hear...a s-siren...” Fluttershy mumbled quietly.

Pinkie's pupils shrunk, as if in instinct.

“Fluttershy...stay very close to me. Don't leave my side, alright?” Pinkie said very seriously. Fluttershy nodded her head softly, as Pinkie turned back around before continuing down the hallway.

At the end of the hallway they came to another door. Pinkie put a hoof up to it and the door swung open.

Inside the room was a surprise. The shape of it was well taken care of; there was a new beige carpet with white walls all around the room, the room being lit fairly well. On one side of the room was a giant mirror that seemed to encompass the whole wall.

Pinkie entered the room first, scrutinizing it carefully. She didn't see anything out of the ordinary in the room, there was a small bed in the corner and desk with drawers. On one of the walls next to the window was another door, looking similar to a closet.

Pinkie walked over to the desk and examined it, seeming to be looking for something, opening each of the drawers for a clue or answer.

Fluttershy slowly walked into the room as she turned off her lantern. She had been expecting scenery similar to the kind she had seen at the hospital, everything drenched with water, rotting and falling apart...but the room was remarkably serene. Something about it gave her a sense of calm...

“Nothing...” Pinkie Pie muttered staring at the desk confused. She then turned her attention to the closet door and walked over to it. She opened the door and saw a small, walk-in closet that was lined with some clothes and boxes. She stepped inside to investigate for clues.

Fluttershy sat down, looking at herself in the mirror. She really did look a mess. She'd managed to avoid getting most of her hair in the bandages, so it was helping to hide the bandaged side of her face, but she still couldn't believe just how much damage she had taken from her encounter at the hospital.

"...You'll be okay..." Fluttershy said to herself, raising a hoof up to touch the mirror.

The mirror began to become translucent, as Fluttershy let out a shocked gasp. On the other side of the mirror, in a room similar to the one she was in, sat Rainbow Dash, staring at the mirror.

"Rainbow Dash!" Fluttershy cried out, pressing her hoof harder against the mirror.

"Rainbow Dash!?" Pinkie cried out from inside the closet. She instantly moved to exit the closet, when the door slammed shut on her face. She stared in shock at the door, as she tried to force it open, but it was locked tight.

"NO! NO YOU LET ME OUT RIGHT NOW!" Pinkie yelled as she banged on the door with all her might.

Fluttershy couldn't believe that Rainbow Dash was on the other side of the mirror. She tried to bang her hoof against the mirror, but Rainbow Dash didn't seem to hear her. Rainbow Dash was just staring blankly back at her from the other room opposite the mirror.

"Rainbow Dash! Rainbow Dash! RAINBOW DASH!" Fluttershy cried out with all of her might as she tried desperately to bang on the mirror as hard as she could, trying to get her marefriend's attention. But Rainbow Dash just sat there, looking confused at the mirror before her.

Suddenly, the lights dimmed. Fluttershy gasped as the light grew dimmer, her hoof quickly moving to her lantern to turn it on. The bright light blinded her as it reflected off the mirror, as she was no longer able to see through it or Rainbow Dash with the light on. She quickly turned the light back off, looking back into Rainbow's room.

The door at the back of Rainbow's room opened, though Rainbow still didn't move. Darkness was creeping into the room from the open door, washing in as if it was mist.

Fluttershy's heart sank. From the doorway flared a pair of familiar red eyes.

Fluttershy banged on the mirror again and again, crying out as loud as she could, "RAINBOW DASH! BEHIND YOU!"

The dark creature opened its mouth, revealing its wretched white mouth as it slowly walked closer to the sitting Rainbow Dash. But Rainbow Dash didn't move. She only seemed to tilt her head in confusion looking at the mirror still.

"NO! STOP! PLEASE! DON'T HURT RAINBOW DASH!" Fluttershy begged as tears began to stream down her face, her hoof starting to hurt from how hard she was banging on the window.

The dark creature stood right behind Rainbow Dash, its white mouth grinning at her as her heart stopped beating, Fluttershy looking right up into its face.

The dark creature opened its mouth in a bigger grin. Fluttershy's heart sunk further into her gut. The dark creature raised its mouth higher.

Then, it brought its mouth down hard on top of Rainbow Dash.

The mirror turned bright, forcing Fluttershy to shield her eyes from the sudden change. She adjusted her eyes as best she could, as she looked up at the mirror.

A soft, sad, music box lullaby began to play as images started to dance across the mirror.

"D-Don't worry...A-Ashley...I-I'll...f-fix you up..." the image was a crying, very young, filly Fluttershy. Her pony doll had been torn to pieces, the stuffing spread all around her. The filly was very carefully pushing the

stuffing back inside of the torn up doll, before taking a threaded needle and starting to very slowly, very shakily, sew the torn pieces back together.

A splatter of blood struck the window, making the image turn red, before the image changed.

“Mother...” Filly Fluttershy called out softly to her mother who was lying in her bed. The older mare’s head seemed to almost snap, as if looking in anger at the child. Fluttershy shook at the sight, never having seen her mother look so angry at her before. But the look of the older mare soon softened, as she looked at her child. She was tired.

“What is it my child?” She asked, though exhaustion was apparent in her voice.

“Dad...wanted me to see if you wanted anything to eat...” Fluttershy whimpered softly.

“Hah...food to eat.” Her mother said with sarcastic bitterness, turning her head to look out the window of her room, “What’s the point of eating. It burns my throat and makes me sick.”

“B-But...you n-need to eat mother...” Fluttershy whimpered.

“Oh, I DO, do I?” The older mare glared angrily at her daughter.

Another splatter of blood struck the window, causing the image to turn red once more, before the images changed once more.

A smack rang out loud, as Filly Fluttershy tumbled from her sitting position on the table. Tears sprang to the edges of her eyes as she looked up at what had just struck her; the nurse pony was glaring at her.

“Now tell me again...how did you break your wing?” She snapped at the little filly who was crying.

“I...I...” Fluttershy gulped as she tried to breath, “I...f-fell while...t-trying to fly...”

“That’s right.” The nurse said then walking over to Fluttershy and picking her up, sitting her back down, “You broke it trying to fly. You silly filly,” The nurse said as if trying to be patronizing to her, “You need to be much more careful when you try flying. It can be very dangerous to fly.” The nurse nodded her head slowly, “Now let’s freshen that cast.”

Fluttershy could only cry more, the cast on her wing seemed to be digging into her skin.

A third splatter of blood struck the window. The images turned dark, the mirror seeming to turn into a fire of darkness. The mirror burned up completely, disappearing without a trace.

Fluttershy sat in the dark, tears streaming from her eye. She was sitting in the pitch black room now, unable to see anything.

She carefully moved her hoof up to her lantern, before hesitantly turning it on.

The light lit up the room before her. Blood stained the carpet and the walls, but there was no sign of Rainbow Dash or the dark creature. The smell of blood and mildew struck her next, as she could hear the dripping of water all around her. The room was now rotting, drenched, she had returned to that world, the world separate from Ponyville.

She had returned to the Otherworld.

She very slowly stood up, lifting her hooves over the wall where the mirror used to exist. She carefully walked around the bloodstain that was all over the floor. She couldn’t see a single remnant that told her Rainbow Dash had been here, only the blood stains that scoured the room.

She hiccuped before gulping, praying that Rainbow Dash hadn’t just been killed before her eyes. But without a body there, she prayed that she could still be alive.

Fluttershy walked up to the door in Rainbow’s room, and saw something written on blood on the door,

*Deep within there are secrets laid to rest
But we cannot hide forever from the sins of our past
What once was lost will now be found
Blood-stained hooves will rise once more*

Fluttershy couldn't help but realize, the words were meant for her. That the images she had just seen were only the beginning. Once she stepped through that door, she was going to learn...

Learn exactly what those images meant.

With a deep breath, and gulping down the heart beating in her throat, she opened the doors and walked inside.

Chapter 6

The hallway was dark and long, it was old, it was covered with mold as it rotted at its core, water fell down the sides of the wall in small streams, the floor had a small pool of water lying all about.

The hair on the back of Fluttershy's neck stood on end, but she walked forward into the darkness.

Every step echoed off the walls, her hooves splashing against the water on the floor each time she passed a puddle. She didn't know where she was or where the path was going. She didn't know what happened to Pinkie Pie, she didn't know what happened to Rainbow Dash.

She only knew that she had to go forward right now.

The hallway turned, Fluttershy followed it. It turned again, she turned as well.

The water was growing deeper, soon each hoof was splashing through water with every step she took. She stumbled for a moment, adjusting herself to walking through water with only three hooves, but she managed to catch herself.

The hallway turned once more, Fluttershy went along, the long winding corridor seemed to be leading her, guiding her to where it wanted to take her. She almost had no choice in the matter, even if she wanted to she could feel that there was no going back now that she had come this far.

Once she had crossed that doorway, there was no turning back.

Just before her the path opened up and split. A path to her left, a path to her right, and in the middle stood a door right before her.

The door was different though, it wasn't made of the same rotting material as the other doors she'd seen, or of rustic metal or anything that would fit in with the drenched world she found herself in.

The door looked exactly like the door to her house back in Ponyville, in great condition despite the environment.

She carefully walked up to the door, pushing it open as she walked into the room it led to.

“Well, this is the best place I can think of.” Rainbow Dash said while flying with Fluttershy to the outskirts of Ponyville to a small empty cottage stood close to the edge of the Everfree Forest, an old ‘For Sale’ sign stood before the property. “No one wants to live here since it’s so close to the Everfree Forest, but with your love of animals that might work out for you.”

“Wow...its looks great.” Fluttershy smiled quietly, walking up to the house.

Fluttershy opened the door and looked inside. The house was dusty from disuse, but everything appeared to be in good condition still. It even came with furniture wrapped in cloth, waiting for someone to unwrap them for use once more. Fluttershy wandered the home as Rainbow Dash entered the house after her.

She could see everything she could do with the home, she could make spots for animals to live, she could set up the closet to hold her supplies, she could set up several soft chairs for resting and tables for eating, the kitchen seemed to have everything she’d need to cook the perfect meals and water was still running in the bathroom.

“Oh Rainbow Dash...it’s perfect.” Fluttershy smiled happily returning to the living room.

“You like it huh? Alright, then I’ll buy it for you.” Rainbow grinned. Fluttershy looked at her speechless.

“Oh, no, I could never ask you to do that! It’s so much money...I-I can work to pay for it myself.” Fluttershy fumbled her words.

“Don’t worry about it. This house is like, dirt cheap right now and I make plenty of money from my job here. Heck, there’s even talk of promoting me!” Rainbow waved her hoof at Fluttershy, trying to dismiss her worries.

“B-But...s-still, I couldn’t ask you to do that for me.” Fluttershy frowned, not wanting to take so much of Rainbow’s charity, it was a huge investment just for her, she didn’t feel worthy of it.

“Hey, just think of it as my apology for running out on you at school.” Rainbow weakly smiled, “So in return, you make this house your perfect home, alright? I know you had one in mind, you used to speak about it all the time when I last saw you.” Rainbow chuckled.

Fluttershy stared at the mare before her, still stupefied. She slowly looked around at the house once more.

‘The perfect home...’ she thought to herself, ‘Something I never had as a filly...but...I have the ability to make come true now.’ She smiled softly as she felt tears begin to form gently at the edges of her eyes.

“...I will...” Fluttershy wiped her eyes gently, turning to face Rainbow Dash, “I’ll make this...my perfect home.”

The room dimmed from the bright light that had filled her vision. The memories had flooded her vision before she had a chance to prepare for them. But now that the memories had faded, she could see the room for what it was. The room was laid out similarly to her living room, though it looked like it had when she moved in, covered in dust with cloth covering all the furniture.

Fluttershy was silent. She wasn’t sure what to make of the images she had just seen. It was her memory of moving into Ponyville after she had come to find Rainbow Dash. They had an amazing reunion and when she told Dash she was going to move to Ponyville, Dash helped her so much in finding a place to live.

“...That memory...I don't...I don't remember...thinking that...I didn't have a perfect home before...” Fluttershy speaks softly, surprised by her own thoughts. She didn't doubt that she felt that way, but she couldn't remember why she would feel that way about her home.

A glint of light caught her eye as she turned to look at the back wall of the room; something was hanging from the wall.

She quickly walked up to the item, seeing that it was a key with the mark of a butterfly on it. Not sure what to make of it, she carefully picked it up and placed it in her bag.

She exited the room, stepping her hooves back into the few inches deep waters of the hallway. She now had a choice, go down the hallway to her left, or the one to her right.

Taking a guess, she began to walk slowly down the left path, listening to the sloshing over her hooves as she walked. She didn't walk to far before she stopped, staring at what was standing perfectly still in the path, blocking her movement.

A mannequin seemed to be frozen in place on the path. It was just sitting there, her music box wasn't making a sound and it didn't seem to have a desire to attack her, but it just seemed to be waiting for her, blocking her path forward.

She carefully stepped backwards away from the creature, it soon disappearing from her sights once more. She turned herself around and began to head down the right path, wanting to stay away from any path that led to monsters if she could avoid it.

The right path wasn't that long though, as it came to a rather abrupt end not too far away from the fork. However, at the end was another door, though this one was different. It wasn't like the door to her cottage, this time the door reminded her of the ones she would see back at flight school.

She took in a deep breath and slowly pushed the door open, heading inside.

“Now you listen to me.” Her father said gruffly as the two of them stood outside of the Flight School in Cloudsdale, “It’s required for you to go to school so you’ll go everyday they have it. You’ll do everything your teachers tell you, and you’ll come straight home unless you ask permission to do otherwise. And if you’re good, I’ll likely allow your request.” He sounded very stern, “But every other rule from home still applies. You don’t talk unless spoken to; you don’t tell anyone anything unnecessary; you obey everything the adults say unless I overrule them. Do you understand?”

“Y-Yes sir...” Filly Fluttershy squeaked her response, never looking her father in the eye, keeping her head low.

“If you understand then I’ll see you at home later tonight.” He said turning away from her, spreading his wings out and flying off. For the first time, Fluttershy lifted her head to look at her father flying away. Even from there she could see the scalpel that adorned his flank as he flew off.

She let out a soft sigh, thankful he had left. She looked up at the school before her. There were lots of young and old pegasi flying into the building, many were hugging and saying goodbye to their parents, many were meeting up with their friends, and many looked reluctant to head into the school.

It was the first day of school. Fluttershy was happy that she’d finally have a reason to be somewhere else other than home or the hospital. But the faces of so many pegasi she hadn’t met before intimidated her. She was scared of them.

She gulped down the lump in her throat and slowly began to walk into the school. It seemed almost every other pegasus was flying inside, she felt like she stood out like a sore hoof walking into the building.

But there was a spark of hope in her heart that hadn’t been there before.

Light faded from the room as the memory came to an end. The room she was left in looked like an abandoned school hallway, though cut off

short by a suddenly erected wall. Rusted lockers lined the walls as a broken clock hung over them; the entire area was covered with dust from disuse.

‘...Was my father...always that stern?’ Fluttershy wondered to herself, not having realized her father had talked down to her like that, ‘...and...I was afraid of him...but...why was I...afraid of my father?’ she asked herself unable to find the answer within her memories.

Then she realized what was going on.

“Deep within there are secrets laid to rest...” Fluttershy murmured, remembering the puzzle on the door, “This...This place is showing me...memories I forgot...or...or more accurately...memories I suppressed...” Fluttershy felt a lump form in her throat.

‘If I forgot about these memories...I must’ve forgotten about them for a reason...’ Fluttershy did her best to gulp the lump that had formed in her throat. She walked carefully to the back of the room, noticing that the key was sitting there. She carefully picked it up, examining it. The key had the shape of a cloud on it. She carefully placed the key in her bag, before exiting the room.

Her hooves returned to the water-filled hallway once more. She hesitated for a moment, but she headed down the hallway to where the mannequin had been standing before. It was the next place she had to check, she couldn’t go back now.

She rounded the bend in the hallway, swallowing to keep her nerves as she drew closer to where the mannequin had been standing.

But it was gone now. As if it had been standing guard, waiting for her to see the second memory, it had vanished from its position.

Fluttershy counted her blessings at this; she couldn’t handle any more injuries to her body. She imagined that with the state her body was in, any more damage would possibly cause more serious internal injuries, one’s she couldn’t fix herself. If she got an internal injury now, she’d just die a slow, painful death.

Every step she was taking was draining her stamina, both physically and mentally. She never imagined walking everywhere on three hooves would be so taxing, but it was.

As she continued to follow the curving path of the hallway the water began to become shallower as the pathway drew slowly upward. She was now walking on dry ground as the hallway began to open up. She reached the end of the hallway, the path opening up into a large lobby.

Her music box began to hiss softly, Fluttershy turning her light to look at the room better.

Just at the edge of her light she saw a nurse pacing. It walked on the other side of a table in the middle of the room, before turning and walking back into the darkness. Fluttershy watched the darkness carefully, when the Nurse then reappeared in the edge of her light. It walked the same path it had when she first saw it, before it turned and walked back into the darkness.

The nurse seemed to be walking in a pattern, as if waiting for something to disturb it or ruin its routine. Fluttershy very carefully drew closer to the table, but the nurse didn't seem to notice her.

Fluttershy's eye turned to the table the nurse kept walking by, seeing something shine on it. It was another key. She paused carefully, waiting for the nurse to walk by and head away from the table, her music box hissing as it stepped closer to Fluttershy, before growing quieter when the nurse stepped away from her. Once the coast was clear she quickly walked up to the table and grabbed the key, before backing up before the nurse got close once more.

She examined the key carefully, seeing there was the symbol of a red cross on it. She placed the key in her bag and looked around the room.

Other than the circling nurse, there was the usual scenery of broken chairs and rotted walls. To one side she could see an extended wall with a door on it and a bookshelf along the wall past it. Then just past the circling nurse looked to be a small hallway, though what was beyond it was too dark to see at the moment.

She carefully walked around the table making her way to the door she could see. She pushed the door open, heading inside. Her music box became quiet as the familiar light flashed before her eye.

"Augh." Filly Fluttershy whimpered as the nurse applied the alcohol to her cuts.

"Oh don't be such a crybaby." The nurse rolled her eyes a little before pulling away the cotton ball and placing a Band-Aid on the wound. "You really should be used to this by now; you're always coming in here with some problem. Honestly, I don't know why your father doesn't just take care of you at home." The nurse said begrudgingly as she walked away from the table Fluttershy sat on to the counter.

"That's... That's because..." Fluttershy whimpered softly.

The nurse snapped her head to glare at Fluttershy, Fluttershy instantly shut her mouth. She shrunk back into the table, trying to avoid the glare of the nurse. The nurse, once satisfied that the filly wouldn't say anything, turned back to the counter organizing her items.

The door to the room clicked open, as Fluttershy sat up straight, her whole body turning stiff as her father strolled into the room, before closing the door.

"Is everything fine with my daughter?" Was the first thing he asked. The nurse pony instantly turned to him, her whole face lighting up, as if his mere presence brought her joy.

"O-Of course sir. You know I ALWAYS do the finest work I can when you're asking me to." The nurse said, batting her eyelashes flirtatious at the doctor, smiling with all her might. Fluttershy's father didn't look impressed by the flirtation and turned to look at his daughter. His daughter sat up straight, shivering as she sat on the table, afraid of what her father might do or say.

"Have you recovered from your 'accident'?" Her father asked with the stern, overbearing tone, as if he didn't actually care that she had recovered.

“Y-Y-Yes sir.” Fluttershy stuttered and squeaked, her whole body shaking as she stared straight ahead, not making eye contact with him.

“If you are then leave. You can do as you wish, just be in the lobby by 9 and I’ll take you home.” Her father almost growled.

“Yes sir!” Fluttershy instantly jumped off the table and practically bolted out of the room. Closing it behind her. She panted a little outside the door as her heart beat inside of her chest.

“Oooh... Doctor~” Fluttershy heard the nurse almost moan from inside the room. She didn’t stick around to hear more, she ran away from the room. She’d be in the lobby when her father told her to be there, but she’d be as far away from him as she could be till then.

The light faded away, revealing a room similar to the one she had just seen in the vision, only much like the rest of the world, falling apart, broken into pieces, covered in dust.

A chill ran down Fluttershy’s back as she recovered from the returning memories.

She was scared of her father. She was scared of him...but she didn’t remember what he did to make her scared of him.

But she had an idea.

“Did...my father...abuse me?” She muttered the words to herself. She didn’t want to believe that he did, but everything was falling into place that he did. Maybe she was jumping to conclusions, maybe she was blowing it out of proportion, or maybe he’d just punished her too severely once by accident and hadn’t made amends yet...

“...or maybe I’m trying to make excuses for my father.” She sighed out loud as she lowered her head a little.

“I...I have to know the full story...” Fluttershy said lifting her head up, “If I don’t find out now...I’ll...I’ll regret it for the rest of my life.” Fluttershy gulped once more. She walked carefully to the end of the room, where on the table she spotted a similar key to the others she had gathered. This one seemed to have the symbol of a needle. She carefully placed it alongside her other keys.

She exited the room, the hissing of her music box returned as the pacing nurse returned to her sight. Fluttershy carefully moved her lantern to get a better view of the room, seeing if she was forgetting anything.

A similar glint caught her eye in the corner of the room, the glint coming from the worn down bookcase that lay against the wall, just outside of the nurse’s pacing range.

She waited for the nurse to cycle through the path once more, then quickly rushed over to the bookcase. Making sure the nurse didn’t turn its attention to her, she looked at the bookcase. It seemed to be filled with rotting medical books, ones she saw a lot as a foal, but they were all illegible now.

Hanging loosely on one of the rotted rows was another key, this one with the symbol of a book on it. She carefully placed it in her bag, before turning to watch the nurse once more.

The only place she had left to go now was the hallway the nurse seemed to be pacing just in front of.

Fluttershy watched the nurse carefully, it seemed she’d just have a few seconds at best to run past the nurse and get to the hallway with her being the farthest away from it as she could. She remembered the last time she got too close to a nurse, it screamed and it had summoned...

A cold shiver ran down her back again. She couldn’t face that creature again. If she faced it, it would no doubt be able to kill her this time.

She took a deep breath and waited. She counted the number of times the nurse walked in a circle before her. She didn’t want to screw up the timing even by a second.

Ten times...fifteen times...twenty times...

She didn't want to move but she knew she had to. She steeled her nerves, stretched her three hooves, and crouched down as she aimed for the door...

She ran as fast as her hooves would take her past the nurse, stay as far away from it as possible. The hallway came up on her blind side, but she knew where it was. She turned as soon as she needed to and moved down the hallway away from the nurse.

She skidded to a halt as the hallway came to an end abruptly. She had almost run straight into a heavily chained metal door. It took her eye a moment to focus in on the door, but once it did she could see everything.

There were five padlocks holding the chains to the metal door behind it, that seemed to have something written on it but was blocked by the chains. She recognized each of the symbols on the lock instantly; they matched the keys that she had just gathered from around the area.

Being careful but swift, she pulled out each key one by one and placed them in their corresponding lock. Each lock and key fell to the ground, seeming to shatter against the ground. When the final lock fell, the chains fell with it, the chains seeming to shatter into pieces across the ground. The door was now free, and she could see what was written on the door.

Strains of the Heart
Chained up Memories
Will things be the same?
You know what is true
You are not what you think you are
But feelings are strong
They can change everything
Or they can change nothing.
Experience the sins of another
Then perhaps the threads of destiny
Will make their feelings known.

Fluttershy looked at the poem and read it carefully. She read it at least three times, not fully understanding what it meant. A shiver ran down her spine as she read it though, she got this feeling in the gut of her stomach...

It was the feeling that it was trying to warn her about her future, telling her that she had something important to do once she crossed this door.

"...I...I can't be scared off now." She said out loud to herself quietly, before reaching a hoof up and pushing the door open.

Fluttershy almost felt blown back. A wave of heat struck her as the door opened. She shielded her eye from the heat. It felt like an inferno was burning on the other side of the door. She slowly moved her eye from where the fire was coming.

The room just before her was undoubtedly covered in flames. Fluttershy's jaw dropped a little staring into the flames. Fluttershy slowly walked into the room, looking around. She could feel the heat all around her and she was having difficulty discerning the appearance of the room.

The door shut behind her as her vision began to clear.

She was inside what looked like the abandoned house she had entered in Ponyville, only covered in fire. She looked around, the fire was everywhere, it seemed that the house should have burnt down to the ground already, yet it somehow was managing to stay upright despite the flames.

But something stood out in the flames. Her eye turned to focus on the figure that stood in the flames, looking at a picture that hung from a wall.

It was a blue Pegasus with a rainbow mane.

"Rainbow Dash!" Fluttershy called out, surprised but happy to see her marefriend alive and okay. She tried to draw closer, but a wave of fire seemed to stand between her and Rainbow Dash. Rainbow Dash continued to stand in the same place, staring at the picture as if she hadn't even heard Fluttershy call out.

“...Rainbow Dash?” Fluttershy called out once more.

“...It’s all the same, you know.” Rainbow Dash muttered quietly, not looking away from the picture.

“Huh?” Fluttershy responded, confused by her words.

“...I can’t believe I didn’t see it before...but it really has always been like this.” Rainbow Dash closed her eyes for a moment, before opening them again, “Always running away, always getting away when I don’t care anymore.”

“...R-Rainbow Dash...what...are you talking about?”

Rainbow Dash just seemed to pause for a moment, before a small laugh came from her.

“Haha...heh...I’m the Element of Loyalty...what a load of crud that is.” Rainbow closed her eyes as a small smile faded from her face, “All I ever do is abandon. I’ve never cared about my friends or loved ones, I’ve only ever cared about myself. ‘There’s a better life for me out there!’, ‘I don’t want to be held down by your rules!’, ‘I don’t care about clearing the sky for you!’, ‘I don’t care for you as a friend anymore!’, ‘I’m going to abandon you for my own desires!’.” Dash seemed to be imitating herself.

“But...Rainbow Dash...y-you don’t abandon your friends...” Fluttershy offered a meek protest.

“Hah! Are you blind?” Rainbow Dash half laughed, half cried, “After you got separated from us, I abandoned Pinkie Pie to go find you. I yelled at her, I blamed her for getting us into this mess, I said...I said that if you died this would be all her fault.” Rainbow Dash shook her head softly.

“And I’ve hurt you the worst with my abandonment and you still want to say I don’t? I abandoned you at flight school when you needed me, all because I didn’t care to be held down.” Rainbow lowered her head, a sad grin on her face as she seemed to be accepting the truth just as much as she was telling it.

“B-But...t-that was a long time ago...things have chan-” Fluttershy started up, but she was interrupted by Dash.

“You know Fluttershy...when you join the Wonderbolts...there's a minimum one year mandatory private training you have to go through, to learn all their techniques and flight patterns, to fly with the Wonderbolts successfully. They perform shows year round, all over Equestria.” It almost seemed like Dash didn't want to say this, “When I make my dream come true...I'm leaving Ponyville. I'm leaving behind my friends...I'm leaving you behind...I'll be abandoning you once again.”

Fluttershy's mouth was agape, unable to comprehend Dash's words. No...more accurately she didn't want to comprehend her words. They felt like needles trying to jab into her heart.

“But...hey, why should that change now?” Dash lifted her head up and looked at the picture before her, “I ran away from home, I quit flight school, I give up friends just because we don't see eye to eye anymore, and I'll get rid of all my friends just for some silly dream.” The sad grin returned to Dash's face, “I burn all the bridges I've made in my life, so that I can never look back at what I've done.”

“...Dash...” Fluttershy muttered weakly.

“I'm...sorry you fell in love with somepony like me Fluttershy.” Rainbow's voice cracked, as if she was holding back tears, “I'm not one who deserves it.” Dash turned away from the picture, putting her back to Fluttershy, “You should forget about me.”

Dash began to slowly walk away, walking towards a doorway Fluttershy couldn't reach through the burning flames.

“Rainbow Dash....Wait!” Fluttershy cried out.

Rainbow Dash stopped in her tracks for a moment, as if she didn't want to, but she had to hear what Fluttershy needed to say.

“Rainbow Dash...” Fluttershy whimpered a little, feeling tears burning at the edge of her eye. She gulped the lump in her throat and lifted her head, saying with all of her heart,

“I need you to be strong right now...alright?”

Dash didn't react or move right away. She stood there as if the words seemed to sink in slowly. But, after a time, she finally spoke up.

“...Alright...” Was the only word that escaped from Rainbow, before she disappeared into the doorway before her, being shrouded by the fire that filled the house. For a moment, Fluttershy thought she had seen tears fall from Dash's face.

Fluttershy lowered her head as tears began to fall from her eye, rolling down her cheek and down her chin. She didn't care how hot she felt, or that the fires were still burning so close to her.

She just had to cry right now.

Chapter 7

The heat finally got to her. Once she had cried what felt like all she could cry, she moved slowly out of the burning room.

Her only path was to exit out of the door she had come in through. She pushed open the surprisingly cool door and walked through, the door closing shut behind her.

The cool air struck her coat, causing her whole body to feel a bit of relaxation as her temperature cooled. She wiped her face, sniffing as she continued to try and regain her composure. Dash's words still had a strong grip on her heart.

"I...I can't stop now..." Fluttershy gulped back more tears from spilling. "I have to move forward."

She looked into the room at the end of the hallway, expecting to see the pacing nurse. However, the room wasn't the same one she had just come from. The room before her was a small, square room, with a staircase going up before her.

Fluttershy blinked at the sight, but the twisting, warping rooms had become something she was accustomed to by now. She stepped across the room, quickly reaching the staircase. She slowly began her climb upwards, feeling a sense of déjà vu upon the climb.

Her hooves nearly slipped on the slick steps as the stench of mildew hit her nose once more. Water dripped down the walls and she felt a sense of dread.

Suddenly, as she reached the top of the stairwell, she knew where she was.

She was back in the cloud home she had entered when she was first separated from her friends...only it wasn't a random cloud house anymore.

It was her home from when she was a filly. The room she had just entered...was her mother's room from when she was young.

The same bed sat next to the window so she could look out it, the bookshelf that contained the books she'd read in her bed, the bedside table that held her personal belongings, a desk and a chair, the bathroom just a short walk away, everything she'd need for living in her room while sick.

Fluttershy was drawn towards the bed; a force felt like it was guiding her, telling her to go near it.

Her mind felt like a haze flew past it, as she stepped back. She saw blood flash before her eyes on the bed and on the carpet, as if her mind was trying to reject the images; but there would be no stopping them.

Her head began to ache with pain but she couldn't stop the memories.

Her attention was drawn to the bed, as the memories that she had lost came back in full force, making her remember what happened in the room so long ago...

"Mother?" Filly Fluttershy called out, walking into her mother's room.

Her mother sat on the bed, a knife in her hoof as if she was playing with it. Her hair was messy, unkempt and uncared for. Bags were under her bloodshot eyes and she seemed to be glaring at the knife, as if unhappy with it.

"...M-Mother..." Fluttershy whimpered, walking further into the room, "W-What would y-you like to eat tod-"

"Hahahahahaha!" Her mother suddenly burst out laughing. Fluttershy halted her movements forward, looking up at her mother in shock. The older mare just seemed to have found some funny.

“Oh...yes...that’ll do nicely...” The older mare smiled once she’d finished laughing, turning her head to grin at her daughter. Fluttershy couldn’t move, afraid of what her mother was about to do.

“Come closer my daughter.” Her mother said, twisting her body closer to the edge of her bed. Fluttershy began to hesitantly move closer to the bed.

“I SAID CLOSE-” Fluttershy’s mom began to yell, but suddenly fell from the bed, hitting the ground with a thud.

“Mother!” Fluttershy cried out as she ran to her mother’s side, trying to ensure she was okay.

Her mother groaned, but slowly rolled over onto her other side so that she was facing her daughter. Once she could see her face, a wicked smile crawled onto her face.

“My dearest daughter...oh you came just at the right time...you see...I finally figured it out...I figured out how to cure myself.” Her mother gave another short laugh.

“R-Really!? O-Oh mother, t-that’s good news! I-I have to tell fathe-”

“No, you can’t tell your father yet.” Her mother hissed.

“W-Why not?” Fluttershy asked confused.

“Because...only you...can administer the treatment right now.” Her mother laughed, carefully holding the knife up to Fluttershy, “And you’ll need this to cure me.”

Fluttershy gingerly took the knife in her hooves, staring at it confused.

“I’d do it myself...but I’m far too weak to administer the treatment properly...but you...oh, you can do it just fine.” Her mother laughed, “And you want me to be cured right? Cured...and happy?”

“...O-Of course I do...b-but...w-what do I...” Fluttershy began to ask in confusion, but her mother seemed ready to answer.

"That's simple my dear child... You take the knife...and you strike me with it." Her mother smiled.

Fluttershy froze. That didn't sound right at all. She knew that something as sharp as a knife hurt when you grazed its edge, why would striking her mother cure her illness?

"B-but...mother...that..."

"Are you questioning me?" Her mother glared at her. Fluttershy's skin jumped at the glare.

"N-No b-but-"

"That SOUNDS like your questioning me!" Her mother growled. If she could move with any decent strength she'd have smacked her daughter, "I need you to do this for me! Only you can do it right now! You do love me right?"

That pulled on Fluttershy's heart.

"O-Of course I do mother..."

"Then strike me!" Her mother demanded.

Fluttershy took a gulp as she shakily raised the knife up over her head. She didn't want to bring it down; her mind was telling her that doing this was wrong; the knife hovered in the air, unable to strike it down.

"Fluttershy..." Her mother spoke quietly, coldly.

"Y-Yes?" Fluttershy whimpered still holding the knife up.

"You said you loved me...but you haven't struck me with the knife yet...so you lied to me..." Her mother said bitterly.

"N-No, I-I do-"

“Then strike me!” Her mother yelled at her, making Fluttershy almost jump, “Strike me! Love me! You’re going to LOVE ME!” Her mother’s head snapped up off the ground, her mouth open as if to bite down on Fluttershy.

The knife sailed through the air, imbedding itself into her mother’s side.

Her mother’s eyes went wide for a moment, before the wicked grin returned.

“Yes! YES YES! DO IT AGAIN!” She demanded with a yell.

Fluttershy pulled the knife out and slammed it back down into her mother.

“DON’T STOP.” Were the last words Fluttershy heard from her mother.

The knife rose and sank down into the body before her, again and again. Each strike sent blood flying, her fur was being coated, and her mane was drenched.

Each strike sounded deafening, yet it was one of the quietest sounds in the world. It was as if the very knife was screaming at her, but only she could hear the screams of the blade.

She plunged the knife in one last time. She panted, she cried, she shook. Her mother wasn’t moving anymore, she wasn’t speaking, she wasn’t breathing, and she wasn’t warm anymore.

Fluttershy didn’t know what this meant, had she cured her mother like she had asked? Hadn’t she put her through a lot of pain? Was she going to be alright?

“Fluttershy, haven’t you gotten that answer from your mother ye-” Her father walked into the room.

Fluttershy slowly turned, tears streaming down her face, still holding onto the knife, covered in her mother’s blood, sitting before the corpse of her mother.

The air was silent.

Then, her father drew closer.

“F-Father...I...” Fluttershy hiccupped, trying to say something, anything to explain the sight before her father.

However, she was silenced. Her father’s hoof struck her, hard. Her small body was sent sailing across the room and smashed into the wall. She let out a yelp of pain before hitting the ground.

Her father picked up her mother’s head in his hoof as he began to cry.

Tears streamed down her face.

“I...I killed my mother...” Fluttershy whimpered, “I...I killed...” She cried. She couldn’t believe she had done it, but she had done it, all because her mother had yelled at her, because she had been too weak to disobey her mother.

Fluttershy felt her stomach twist, she felt like she was going to be sick. She turned and ran into the bathroom, wanting to escape the room for even a moment.

However, her brain assaulted her once more, a vision of memories forgotten appearing before her once more.

There was silence as her father scrubbed away at her coat, washing away the blood that had begun to cake onto her fur. The hot water was managing to get most of it away, but some of it was being stubborn.

He was being hard with the brush, harder than he had ever been before. Fluttershy didn’t speak up though, she couldn’t speak up against it, her heart felt like it was in a million pieces.

“...Do you know what you’ve done?” Her father finally asked.

Fluttershy whimpered her response, she couldn’t say any words.

“... You took your mother from us.” Her father said, as if he was breathing was becoming more ragged, the brush stopping its cleaning. “You took...the most wonderful mare I’d ever known...out of this world...” Her gripped the brush harder, he started to speak through gritted teeth, “You did it so quickly too, I sent you in to help her...and you killed her.”

Fluttershy’s eyes burned with tears. Her father’s words made her heart sting worse.

“...You’re a monster.” He growled.

Without warning he pushed her head down under the water.

Fluttershy scrambled at the unexpected movement, her mouth and nose filling with water as air escaped her lungs. Her hooves flailed as she tried to push herself up out of the water, but the hoof holding her down was too strong.

The air escaped her quickly and her lungs began to burn. She reached for air but it wouldn’t come.

Suddenly, she was lifted up into the air. Instinctively, she took in a big gasp of air, only for her head to be shoved back under the water. She lost her air almost instantly again, her whole body beginning to feel like it was burning from the movements.

This repeated several times, getting a short breath of air only to have it painfully taken away by the water once more. Her struggling had lessened and now she was too weak to push against the water, too tired to try and get air.

The hoof was holding her under the water for good now. Her eyes began to roll into the back of her head as her limbs stopped moving. She couldn’t stay awake any longer.

She was pulled out of the water. Her body gasped and took in the fresh air, before coughing up water that had filled her lungs. She puked slightly as her body tried to reject the water that had attacked her body.

“...No...no just killing you would be too easy.” Her father growled, watching her sputter and gasp for breath, “You need to understand the misery you’ve caused with your love.” Her father let go of her mane, Fluttershy instinctively catching herself on the edge of the bathtub, still recovering as her father walked out.

Fluttershy shook as she stared at the bathroom. Her father had tried to kill her. He could have killed her, but he didn’t.

Though, she felt like she deserved it at the moment. She had killed her mother in cold blood, death sounded exactly like what she deserved.

She backed out of the bathroom slowly. She didn’t want to be in that room anymore. She turned to the door to the hallway and quickly exited.

She panted heavily outside her mother’s bedroom as her tears refused to stop. She slowly hobbled forward, having difficulty even seeing where she was going. She reached a hoof up, touching what felt like a door. Without thinking she pushed it open, stepping inside.

“So, you sewed it back together huh.” Her father said, looking at the sloppy sewing job her daughter had done with her favorite doll.

“Y-Yes sir...” Fluttershy replied meekly, lowering her head as her father held it.

He wasn’t impressed at all. All the stitches were visible, the stuffing was still hanging out of spots not sewn close enough, and the fibers easily would come loose if tugged on.

“Unacceptable.” He said before grabbing the doll and tearing it apart. Fluttershy snapped her head up in shock as she watched; he tore apart all

the seams and stitches. She had worked so hard making the doll one piece again after he'd torn it up the first time.

Soon the doll lay in pieces of cloth and stuffing before her again.

"If you love it, I shall destroy it." He said sternly, "Then it will be your job to put it back together. And if you can't do it perfectly, then you don't deserve it at all." He said as he walked over to his book shelf.

Fluttershy whimpered as she began to pick up the pieces of her favorite, most beloved doll, her doll Ashley.

A book slammed itself before her, making Fluttershy almost jump. But she read the title carefully, 'The Mastery of Sewing'.

"If you don't want to see your doll destroyed, you will make it look perfect." Her father said before returning to his desk, going back to his work.

Once she had all the pieces of her doll, Fluttershy carefully picked the book up with her mouth, careful not to stain it with her tears, as she quickly left her father's study.

Fluttershy whimpered. She was in her father's study, she had wandered in there by accident, but now she had seen more of what she had forgotten.

She swallowed back more tears, as she began to calm herself down. Her mind began to put things together.

'I...I wanted to see this...' She breathed heavily, reminding herself that she had chosen to come here, that she had told herself that there was no turning back now. 'I...I have to see every memory...for my sake...' she took a deep breath as she wiped her face of tears, before pushing back on the door to her father's study, exiting it.

She stumbled out of the study a little, finding the kitchen that lay just on the opposite side of it. She steadied herself, before walking into the kitchen. The haze returned as another memory surfaced.

“WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING!?” Her father yelled loudly.

Fluttershy dropped the box of cereal she had picked up from the top shelf of the counter, her wings snapping shut to her sides as she fell a few feet before landing on the ground with a thud.

Her father was furious, as he stormed up to her, Fluttershy trying to back away out of fear. Her grabbed her hoof and forced her to eye-level with him.

“What have I TOLD you about FLYING without permission!? You’re NOT allowed to do it even in the house!” He yelled at her, gripping her hoof hard.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry!” She cried out as tears streamed from her eyes, her hoof hurt like crazy as he gripped it hard.

“I’ve told you before! Bad filly’s who DON’T listen to what their told get eaten by Dragons! Do you WANT to get eaten by a dragon!?”

“No! No!” Fluttershy cried out, struggling against his grip.

“Well you’re ATTRACTING a Dragon by flying as a Bad Filly! You MUST want to be eaten by a Dragon! Why else would you be flying without permission!?” His screams made her ears feel like they wanted to burst.

“No! I don’t want to be eaten by a dragon! I’m sorry!” She cried harder.

“Well, you know what? I think I can HEAR a dragon! He’s already pretty close because you’ve flown! Maybe I should just throw you outside so he can eat you right now!” He hissed and growled.

"NO! NO DADDY PLEASE! I DON'T WANT TO BE EATEN!"
Fluttershy wailed, afraid for her life.

"Well, if you don't want to be eaten, then there's only one thing I can do." He said tossing his daughter to the ground. The wind escaped her body as she tried to scramble to her feet, only to have her father's hoof step on her holding her down.

His mouth reached down, gripping down hard on her wing, forcibly extending it despite all of her efforts to shut it.

"NO! NO DADDY PLEASE! STOP!" She cried out as pain shot through her back. But it was too late, he wasn't going to stop.

CRACK

Fluttershy cried louder than she ever had before as her father snapped her wing.

"There, now you won't be flying for a while, and you won't attract any dragons." He simply said stepping off of his wailing daughter, "I snapped it carefully; you'll be able to fly once it's healed, but we'll have to get you to the hospital to put a cast on it." He said though a grin formed on his face, "Though, only once the Dragon has left."

Fluttershy barely heard her father's words past her own screams of agony from the burning pain that echoed from her wing.

Fluttershy gulped down more tears, trying to hold herself back from crying. She slowly backed out of the kitchen.

'My father...he was...cruel...' She whimpered softly to herself. 'I...I can believe that I made myself forget all this...it's...it's all painful to remember.' She shut her eyes, another tear escaping despite trying to force herself not to cry.

She struggled with her hooves, to make herself continue forward. Past the kitchen was the living room. She could see the front door from

there, she knew that was where she needed to head; her instincts told her so.

However, the living room held one more memory that she had to see. The haze returned, as the memory came to her once more.

“...Where did you get that?” Her father asked as filly Fluttershy walked through the door, carrying a candy bar in her mouth.

“Oh...a colt at school gave it to me.” She said quietly, “He said he liked me and wanted me to have it.” She said gently chewing on the end of the bar, savoring the sweet taste.

“Oh...he did, did he?” Her father said walking up to Fluttershy. Fluttershy looked up at her father, taking a step back from him getting so close.

Fluttershy fell to the ground as her father’s hoof hit her hard across the face. The candy bar slid across the room.

“Let me tell you something about boys loving you.” He growled, grabbing Fluttershy by the mane and picking her up, eliciting yelps of pain from the filly, “Colts will only hurt you. They only think of themselves and they want nothing more than to see you suffer.” He grinned wickedly, “After all, look at me. I love you and here I am hurting you.” He said before tossing his daughter across the room, her landing hard against the floor.

Fluttershy cried as she tried to curl up into a ball, not wanting to be hurt anymore.

“But I suppose you must really like being hurt, if you’re going to let a colt like you.” Her father grinned walking up to his daughter, kicking her in the back, causing her to cry out in pain, “Any colt that gets close to you will do nothing but hurt you. So I hope you enjoy this for the rest of your life. I’m sure you’ll find a colt who loves you even more than I do.” Her father laughed before walking off to his study.

Fluttershy whimpered and cried where she curled up, remembering the colt from school who had given her the candy bar.

Suddenly, her mind filled with anger, hate for the colt who had given her the candy bar. All he wanted to do was hurt her, he wanted to get close to her so that he could make her cry and suffer, just like her father did.

"I...I hate colts..." Fluttershy whimpered out loud. She vowed to herself that she would never like a colt, or let a colt like her, for as long as she lived.

Another lump came to Fluttershy's throat.

'...My father...he...he made me...hate colts...' She thought to herself. '...But I...I don't...hate them...' she knew better now. Not all colts were like her father, not all of them would hurt her just because she got close to them. But...she still had never had interest in being with a colt, the only pony she had fallen in love with...

Was Rainbow Dash...

'Do I...Do I love Rainbow Dash...for her...or because...she was the only pony who got close to me...that didn't hurt me...' Fluttershy found herself confused by her own feelings now. Everything she had believed had turned upside down in a single moment. It felt like she had just been lying to herself all this time and that everything she had done might have been a mistake.

"...No..." She suddenly said firmly to herself, "Because of Rainbow Dash...I came to Ponyville...I escaped from my father...I...I met the best friends I've ever had...friends who...who care about me more than anything else...I...I fell in love and...had a wonderful relationship." She said looking up at the ceiling, as thoughts of her friends came to mind.

She remembered so many wonderful moments together with her friends. Picking flowers, going to parties, playing games, sleep overs, tea parties, hanging out, adventuring...

She'd done so much with her life now, even though she had forgotten about her foalhood because it was painful, it hadn't stopped her from moving on in her life, from experiencing all the wonders life had to offer. If anything...because her father pushed her away, she found her way into the embrace of the ponies that truly loved her.

She took a deep breath as she calmed down. A small smile formed on her face.

"Yes...even though all this happened...I still have my friends." She said, a warmth sparking inside of her heart.

It gave her legs strength. She walked through the living room up to the front door of the house. She could see the lock on the door, the lock with the symbol of a doll on it. She carefully reached into her bag and pulled out the key with the doll symbol on it, the key she had picked up a while ago and still had. She carefully placed the key into the lock, the door letting out a click to let her know it had worked.

She carefully pushed the door open and walked through the door.

On the otherside was a large open room, almost like a small gymnasium. She walked forward to the middle of the room, when she stopped.

A black fire was burning on the opposite side of the court. The fire slowly grew, rising up into the shape of a pony, before red eyes appeared on its face, a white mouth opening. It was the dark creature.

Fluttershy stared at the creature. She didn't feel a heavy, overbearing presence this time. The creature was still drawing fear from her heart, but it wasn't overwhelming her now. She could stand before this creature now.

The creature slowly turned itself around, showing its back to Fluttershy. Fluttershy looked at the creature curiously, not sure as to what it was doing.

Then, as it turned around, she could see that hanging from its mouth, was the body of Rainbow Dash.

Fluttershy let out a gasp, as the creature flicked its head, tossing the body towards Fluttershy. It landed right before her, hitting the ground with a thud.

Fluttershy reached a hoof out and gently nudged the body. It was cold. Rainbow Dash was dead, killed by the creature before her. Fluttershy stared at the body for a long while, the creature watching her, grinning as it waited.

Fluttershy moved her hoof away from the body, a sad look appearing on her face. She turned her head upwards, to look at the dark creature.

“...Father...” she spoke softly, “I...understand now.” She made sure she spoke clearly, “I’ve done a horrible thing...and...it’s likely that I can never be forgiven for what I’ve done. I can’t bring the dead back to life...and the blood of my mother is on my hooves.” Fluttershy closed her eye for a moment, taking a deep breath, before she continued.

“I probably deserved all the punishments I received. No foal should ever do what I did. Though it may have been tough living with what I did and receiving the punishments for my deed...I lived with everything.” She smiled softly, “And...I’ve grown up to have a wonderful life now. I’ve...left behind all the things that made me sad, that hurt me, that made me miserable living at home.

“I have wonderful friends, animals that depend on me, a home I take care of myself...I found love that didn’t hurt me.” She smiled softly.

Fluttershy carefully stepped over the body before her, walking up closer to the dark creature. The smile of the creature faded as it looked down her, as if not amused. Fluttershy came to stand just inches before him, looking up at him smiling.

“You...brought a lot of pain to me...but...I forgive you.” She leaned in and nuzzled the chest of the dark creature. The creature let out a roar. “I forgive you for everything...and I thank you. Thank you for letting me find a wonderful life.”

An orb of bright white light appeared in the air above the two, floating down towards Fluttershy. The dark creature roared out in pain as the light

gently floated past him, reaching Fluttershy's chest. The light engulfed her body, filling her with a pleasant warmth. The bandages that covered her body began to unfurl. Each bandage was pulled away from her body, pooling around her as her body recovered.

Her wings extended out, she stood on all her legs, she opened both her eyes to look up at the roaring dark creature, which seemed to be fading away as the light shined. The very existence of the creature seemed to be fading away, burning up in the bright light that surrounded her.

The last bits of the darkness that made up the creature disappeared, as the light began to slowly fade. Fluttershy smiled softly as she looked down, seeing on her chest, in place of the lantern, was now a golden necklace with a pink butterfly shaped jewel.

For a moment her necklace glowed once more, a beam of light shot out, creating a doorway of light before her. Fluttershy looked at the doorway of light, knowing what it was.

"So...this is my way home now..." She said looking at the door. Once she passed through that archway of light, she would leave this world. She'd go back to Ponyville, she'd be able to take everything she had learned and live a better life than she had before...

"I can't leave just yet." She smiled at the doorway, before turning around and running away from the light. "I have two friends who are lost and need my help."

Pinkie Pie lay on the ground, panting in pain and exhaustion.

"Haha...you've been running away oh-so-well...you're very good at it." The Other Pinkie smiled walking towards Pinkie, "You've killed me three times...and yet here I am again. You must really want to be a part of my parties." The other Pinkie laughed.

Pinkie Pie could only sob. This other Pinkie wanted to kill...and she couldn't stop her. What was the point of trying to stop her? She let Fluttershy go get separated twice now, she was probably dead with how injured she had been. And Rainbow Dash hated her, what was the point of

trying to stop her other self from killing...when she was just as guilty of it herself.

"I'm sorry Bellamina..." Pinkie sobbed, closing her eyes.

"Oh well, guess I'll just have to take my time playing with you." The other Pinkie smiled, picking up her Butcher's knife as she drew closer.

"Now just hold it right there for one minute!" Came a motherly demand.

Pinkie and the Other Pinkie snapped their heads to the doorway to the room they were in. There stood a yellow Pegasus pony with long pink hair, wearing a golden necklace.

"Hasn't your mother ever told you it's not nice to hurt other ponies?" Fluttershy stomped across the room towards the other Pinkie Pie. The normal Pinkie Pie was just staring with her mouth agape.

"Well, yea, but I'm not really hurting them, I'm playing with them!" The other Pinkie laughed, putting down her butcher's knife to talk to Fluttershy.

"That's NOT how you play nice with other Ponies!" Fluttershy stood right up to the other Pinkie, looking her straight in the eye, "You were going to seriously hurt my friend! You don't use knives or sharp objects when you play, you play nice games! Like pin the tail on the pony or bobbing for apples! You should know better than this!"

"But-" The other Pinkie began to protest.

"No buts! You should be ashamed of yourself. I have half a mind to tell your mother the kind of games you've been playing with other ponies!" The other Pinkie seemed to be shrinking back under the scolding of Fluttershy, "Now you're going to take your little things, and get rid of them, and I never want to catch you doing this again, you got that?"

The other Pinkie could only nervously nod her head rapidly, before picking up her butcher's knife and turning, running away from Fluttershy.

“That’s a good...second Pinkie Pie.” Fluttershy smiled happily seeing the other Pinkie run off, before turning to the Pinkie who was staring in shock at Fluttershy. “How was that? I was so assertive.” Fluttershy softly chuckled as she felt a happy shiver go down her back.

Pinkie Pie stared. It took a long time for her to even register what was going on. But once it dawned on her that Fluttershy had just scared her other self away...a smile formed on her face. It quickly began to grow, before a sound escaped her lips.

“Pffft...pffft...aha...ahahah...AHAHAHAHAHA” Pinkie Pie began to laugh. She laughed hard, rolling over onto her back as her hooves flailed in the air. Fluttershy had scared away the very thing that scared her to her core. And she’d done it by just being Fluttershy. Pinkie couldn’t help but laugh as her hair poofed out into its usual curls. It was one of the funniest things she’d ever seen.

“Thank you.” Fluttershy said smiling, giving a small bow to Pinkie Pie, accepting the laughing as a compliment.

“Ahahahaha...Oh...Oh Fluttershy!” Pinkie laughed, finally rolling back onto her hooves and rushing up, hugging her friend dearly, “You’re all better! And you saved me!” Pinkie laughed joyously.

“Hey, what’re friends for?” Fluttershy grinned, returning the hug.

“Oh! Speaking of friends, have you seen Rainbow Dash?” Pinkie said, looking at Fluttershy with concern again.

“Don’t worry, I found you first, but we’re not leaving till we find her.” Fluttershy smiled.

“Right! Operation Locate Dashie is go!” Pinkie Pie smiled happily, saluting Fluttershy.

“It really is for the best.” A cold voice said.

“Yea...it’s what I’ve always wanted after all.” Rainbow Dash tilted her head, closing her eyes as she agreed.

"I'm glad to see you've been able to follow your true heart then." The voice laughed. Rainbow Dash opened her eyes to look at the pony that stood before her. She looked just like one of the Shadow Bolts, the flying team she had seen in the Everfree Forest the day they had taken down Nightmare Moon.

"It's what I've always done...no point in changing that now." Rainbow said slowing looking around. The two of them were sitting in the middle of a burning building, the fire staying just far enough away to not burn them.

"Good, then just take my hoof, and everything will be made clear." The Shadow Bolt said, holding out her hoof to Rainbow Dash.

Rainbow Dash looked at the hoof hesitantly. It didn't feel good, it didn't feel like the right thing to do, but she felt it was the only thing she could do anymore. She slowly raised her hoof, reaching out to carefully take the Shadow Bolt's hoof.

"DASHIE!" Came an insanely cheerful voice as suddenly Rainbow Dash was suddenly tackled from behind, flattening her against the ground. The Shadow Bolt gasped loudly.

"What the-Hey! Pinkie Pie!" Rainbow shouted annoyed, still being embraced by the pink mare.

"Oh my gosh I thought I'd lost you! After you'd ran off I was so worried that I tried to find you and Fluttershy, only I started running into the monsters I ran into before. Man, I was so depressed because of what you said that I couldn't help but start to relive the nightmare here, but that's all okay now cause I forgive you! And now I've found you again!" Pinkie cried out happily all at once.

"Yea, that's great Pinkie Pie, but your crushing me!" Rainbow groaned as she tried to sit up, Pinkie finally sliding off of her.

"Oopsie, sorry about that." Pinkie laughed.

"And what're you doing here anyway!? I told you we were supposed to find Fluttersh-" Rainbow Dash stopped herself as her eyes went wide,

“Fluttershy! Oh my gosh, I TOTALLY FORGOT!” Rainbow Said looking around rapidly, “What am I doing here!? I have to find Fluttershy!”

“It’s okay Dash, I’m already here.” Fluttershy smiled happily, walking into the burning room from the hallway Pinkie had just ran through at blinding speed.

“Fluttershy! You’re okay!” Rainbow said galloping over and hugging Fluttershy, “What was I thinking!? You were right in front of me not too long ago and I completely forgot I had to protect you!”

Fluttershy laughed, hugging Rainbow Dash back, “It’s okay Dash, this place does weird things to a Pony.”

“Hey!” The Shadow Bolt yelled, standing up, glaring at the three mares before her. All three turned their heads to look at the Shadow Bolt, “What about your dreams!? You won’t accomplish them if you don’t come with me!” she growled.

Rainbow Dash looked at Fluttershy, Fluttershy smiled back at her, before Rainbow Dash grinned and turned to look at the Shadow Bolt, “Tell ya what, keep it for now. I’ll find a way to achieve my dream on my own.”

The Shadow Bolt yelled, before turning into a puff of black smoke and disappearing into the burning building.

“And don’t come back!” Pinkie yelled happily, waving at the puff of black smoke.

“Fluttershy...I’m so sorry.” Rainbow said again, “I shouldn’t have let this place get to my head and forget about protecting you...” Dash then turned to Pinkie Pie, who was smiling at Dash, “And Pinkie...I’m...I’m sorry I yelled at you. That wasn’t right of me when you were only trying to help.”

“That’s okay Dashie, I forgive you!” Pinkie said giving Rainbow another hug. “Let’s just focus on getting out of here!”

“I can handle that.” Fluttershy smiled happily. She turned herself towards the hallway and stood proudly. Her golden necklace began to softly glow, before releasing a beam of light that shot out before them. A

doorway of light formed, their exit home. The necklace around Fluttershy's neck, having served its purpose, turned back into an orb of light, floating up into the air before disappearing.

"Alright! Let's go home!" Pinkie smiled happily.

"Yea, I'm kind of tired of this place." Dash grinned.

"All of us are." Fluttershy smiled.

The three mares walked through the doorway of light together.

Ending – Face Your Fears

Unlock condition: View all the memories and encounter Pinkie and Rainbow Dash in the Otherworld.

Twilight was doing her best to understand what the three pictures before her meant. Each picture was a distorted mess of color and shapes. At times she thought she had been able to make out the vague shape of a pony or some other shape that she could identify as an object, but it quickly moved back into being a distorted blob.

“I can’t make heads or tails of this.” Twilight was groaning as she looked back and forth, “How exactly does this spell work? This is my second time doing it and I’m STILL confused.” The book didn’t explain any further than how to perform the spell and its purpose. Was it supposed to be easy to figure out? Should something have been obvious to her? There were no instructions on how to interpret the pictures, or what she could do to help!

It really seemed like she was purposely being kept out, as if she wasn’t allowed to see what each of her friends were experiencing.

“If I had something to write with I could maybe take better notes...but I have nothing to compare this to! I only have the other two pictures! Ugh! I can’t learn like this!” Twilight groaned sitting down as she stared a little frustrated at the pictures. She wanted nothing more than to figure this out and learn so she could help her friends better, but without a frame of reference it seemed pointless.

Just as she was getting frustrated, each of the pictures began to radiate with a bright white light. Twilight tried to look at this development, but the light became too much for her to bear. She covered her eyes just as she felt the familiar tug of the spell ending.

She was dragged backwards, out of the spiraling darkness that carried the three paintings, before finding herself thrust back to reality.

“Uuuggghh...” Twilight groaned as she rubbed her forehead, it was an unsettling feeling to be pulled about like that. “Everypony okay?” She asked, opening her eyes to look at her three friends.

“Yay! It worked! We’re back!” Pinkie said excitedly jumping up, smiling happily as she looked around.

“Haha! Take that you creepy world you!” Rainbow Dash grinned.

“That was...really eye opening.” Fluttershy smiled softly, putting a hoof to her chin in thought.

“So...the spell worked? You were able to figure out why you were having nightmares Fluttershy?” Twilight asked looking at her friend curiously.

Fluttershy felt herself become the center of attention as every mare looked at her in anticipation. She blushed softly.

“Uhm...yes...I found out the reason.” Fluttershy admitted slowly.

“Well, don’t leave us in suspense, what was it?” Rainbow asked eager to figure it out.

“Whoa, hold on Dashie!” Pinkie said stepping closer, “If it’s anything like me finding out I lost my sister, we shouldn’t force her to say it if she isn’t ready...though I admit, I am really curious as to what it was...it’s probably something hug worthy.”

“Oh...uhm...” Fluttershy rubbed her leg awkwardly with her hoof, “Well...I...” Fluttershy stumbled in thought, “T-Tell you what...there’s...something I need to do...something I need to take care of...then I can tell all of you...I hope...” she said the last part quietly.

“And that’s completely understandable.” Pinkie said embracing Fluttershy into a big hug, “Just know that whatever it is, we’re always here for you.”

“Yea, sorry, I didn’t mean to sound pushy. Tell us when you’re ready.” Rainbow smiled supportively.

“...Thank you...all of you.” Fluttershy said smiling, with tears at the edge of her eyes. “I don’t know what I’d do without you girls.” She embraced Pinkie Pie back.

“Well...I’m glad I could help.” Twilight smiled.

“...Yea...about that...” Pinkie said letting go of Fluttershy and looking at the other two.

“...I think we’re in agreement here Pinkie Pie.” Rainbow said nodding at Pinkie.

“Yes, I do think we are.” Fluttershy nodded as well.

“Twilight...” Pinkie started.

“Huh?” Twilight asked confused. The three mares before her each took a deep breath, before in one big cry, they unanimously shouted,

“DON’T EVER USE THAT SPELL AGAIN!”

“So...why are we going to Cloudsdale?” Rainbow Dash asked curiously looking at Fluttershy as the two of them were flying towards the city in the clouds.

“Well...I guess I can tell you.” Fluttershy said before letting out a soft sigh and smiling, “I’m going to see my father.”

“Your father?” Rainbow asked curiously, “I don’t think I’ve ever met him...heck, you haven’t told me much about your family. You always avoided the subject when I asked.”

“That makes sense.” Fluttershy said softly.

“...Does...this have something to do with that freaky nightmare-version of Ponyville?” Rainbow asked hesitantly, the gears turning in her head as she thought.

“...It does.” Fluttershy said softly, trying not to alarm Dash. She wasn’t ready to say too much about what she saw, not until she’d at least confronted her father. Rainbow looked at Fluttershy as they flew quietly; waiting for her to say more though she realized it wasn’t coming. Rainbow let out a soft sigh.

“You ARE going to explain things right? Pinkie didn’t explain anything more than she lost her sister to some serial killer...she didn’t mention the monsters in that town. I...I really want to know what happened to you Fluttershy. After you got separated from us, I was so worried...” Rainbow said, still feeling guilty about having yelled at Pinkie Pie.

“...I...I promise Dash...I’ll tell you everything...” Fluttershy looked down sadly, “Just...promise me you won’t...you won’t think I’m a monster...”

Rainbow looked shocked, as if she was almost offended at the idea.

“How could I ever think THAT!? You’re the nicest, kindest, most gentle pony in all of Ponyville! Heck, maybe in all of Equestria! How could I think you’re a monster?” Rainbow shook her head confused.

“...Thank you Dash.” Fluttershy held back a tear from spilling, “We’re almost there...” Fluttershy said as they were now flying close to the cloud city.

Cloudsdale was busy with its normal buzz of pegasi ponies all around. Some were working on new construction, some were delivering packages, other were simply out enjoying the weather while others seemed to be in a hurry. It was a normal day for Cloudsdale.

Fluttershy looked at the school house in the distance as they flew past it. She could hear the familiar bell ringing from there as the school house suddenly poured out with excited young foals that were eager to be out of school for the day and go off to play. It brought smile to Fluttershy, seeing all the happy faces of youth seemed to lift her spirits.

“There it is, the place my father works, Cloudsdale General.” Fluttershy said after a few more minutes of flying, pointing to the large white building with the large red cross on it. It had several pegasi flying in

and out of the building, some healthy, some sick, some with bandages on their limbs. There was an emergency vehicle that sat parked next to it that would be pulled by a team of pegasi should an emergency call be made.

“Is your father a doctor?” Rainbow Dash asked as they set down just outside the front doors before walking inside.

“...You could say that.” Fluttershy said smiling softly. The lobby was large, very large. There was a huge open space above their heads for pegasi to fly around, a large fountain in the middle that seemed to have a few bits floating at its depths, a receptionist desk that had lots of ponies checking in, a waiting area for ponies to fill out paperwork and wait for them to head where they were needed, and the most noticeable part of the room was a very large picture over the receptionist desk of a light amber Pegasus with a dark red mane in a white lab coat with imposing blue eyes. Underneath the picture was a plaque, though it was difficult to read from afar.

“Well that’s a large photo.” Rainbow said chuckling at the size of it, “They must really like that Doctor.”

“Well, he has saved hundreds of pony lives. He’s the best doctor in the whole hospital.” Fluttershy stopped where she was walking, making Dash stop and look back at her curiously. “His name is Lance...Lance Strongshy...and he’s my father.”

Rainbow’s mouth hung agape, before looking quickly at the large picture, then back at Fluttershy, doing this several times in disbelief.

“You...You mean your father is THE Lance Strongshy!? I...Oh my gosh...he’s the most famous doctor in ALL of Cloudsdale! Even I’VE heard of him! It was said that when a terrible lightning storm broke loose from the Weather Center and injured at least thirty ponies, that Lance was able to save ALL of them, when all the other doctor’s couldn’t have saved them!”

“Yes...I’m familiar with that day.” Fluttershy said nodding slowly, all of her memories from her foalhood had returned now. She could remember almost everything about it.

“He’s always been one of the best Doctor’s! I heard he only got even better when he poured his passion into studying medicine after his wife died of a disea-“ Rainbow Dash stopped in her tracks as realization hit her like a ton of bricks. She was speaking about Fluttershy’s mom.

“O-Oh...Fluttershy...I...I had no idea...I’m...” Rainbow started to apologize.

“It’s okay Dash.” Fluttershy said with a sad smile as she walked past Dash, heading for the counter, “There’s...a lot I have to tell you...you’ll understand soon.”

“Hello, welcome to Cloudsdale General, how can I hel-“ The nurse behind the desk began to say, having been nose deep in paperwork before looking up to shock, seeing Fluttershy standing there.

“...Hello Nurse Soft Cure, covering for the receptionist today?” Fluttershy offered as genuine a smile as she could looking at the white coated Pegasus with a blonde mane, after all, it was the first time she’d seen her personal foalhood nurse since she’d last visited the hospital so many years ago.

Nurse Soft Cure narrowed her eyes immediately, giving Fluttershy a rather nasty glare.

“...What are YOU doing here?” The nurse almost hissed. Rainbow Dash raised an eyebrow at the nurse’s behavior. This seemed very rude, considering she was talking to the daughter of the best doctor in the hospital.

“I’ve come to see my father today...if he’s not busy, that is.” Fluttershy explained simply.

The nurse’s hooves banged hard against the desk. Almost everypony turned their heads to look at this, not having expected a loud bang in the middle of a hospital. Nurse Soft Cure looked around quickly before offering a weak smile and a soft laugh, as if it had been an accident. The other pegasi just seemed to shrug before continuing with their own duties. Once she was sure nopony was paying full attention to them, she went back to glaring at Fluttershy.

“...So what...after all these years you just come waltzing in here, not only expecting an audience, but expecting me to believe that’s all you’re here for!?” Soft Cure was trying to yell, but her voice came out in a harsh whisper.

“Hey! Who do you think you’re talking to!?” Rainbow Dash said, feeling her fur start to stand on end, but was stopped by a hoof put out by Fluttershy.

“I swear to you Ms. Cure...I’m only here to talk with my father.” Fluttershy smiled in the face of the hate that was coming from the nurse.

“Oh, yea, like I believe that.” Soft Cure growled, “You’re just here to smear Lance’s good name aren’t you? Try to interfere with his life-saving work because of some bitter vengeance you want.”

Again, Rainbow Dash went to speak up but was stopped by Fluttershy.

“You can accompany me if you want...I really want nothing more than a chance to talk to my father. I won’t say a word to anypony else, I promise.” Fluttershy explained calmly.

Nurse Soft Cure just glared at Fluttershy, but seemed to be thinking the situation over in her head. Her eyes wandered over to Rainbow Dash, who seemed to be giving her glaring daggers back. It took a while, but the nurse finally responded.

“...Fine...I’ll escort you to his office.” The nurse got up from her sitting position behind the desk before spreading her wings. She began to fly down one of the hallways, towards the air paths to fly to upper levels.

“Yeesh, what’s HER problem!?” Dash growled as the two of them followed after the nurse.

“It’s...a long story I’ll tell you later.” Fluttershy smiled softly. Rainbow Dash didn’t seem pleased, but listened to Fluttershy as they flew. The nurse directed them up several stories, before stopping at the ninth. She

flew down a long hallway that barely had a soul in it, they only passed a single other pegasi as they drew closer.

“Here. His office.” Soft Cure stopped outside one of the doors, turning to face the two mares, “I’ll let him know you’re here to see him.” She explained, before turning to knock on the door.

“Come in.” came a gruff voice. Nurse Soft Cure opened the door and walked in before closing the door behind her.

“...I don’t like the feel of this Fluttershy...” Rainbow whispered his displeasure with the situation, “Something doesn’t feel right...”

“I understand Dash...I promise, this’ll be over soon. Just...let me talk to my father in private for now please...if I need you, you’ll know.” Fluttershy said nuzzling against Rainbow Dash for support.

“...I’d rather go in there with you...but...if you say so.” Rainbow said softly nuzzling her back.

The door opened once more, nurse Soft Cure coming out.

“He’ll see you now.” She said standing next to the door, glaring at the two of them.

“Thank you.” Fluttershy smiled softly, before walking up to the door. She took in a deep breath to draw strength, before carefully opening the door and walking inside.

The office wasn’t too different from the last time she’d seen it. There was still the desk, with books lining the walls, many of the books stacked on top of each other around the office as if recently read. One book lay open on the desk as it was currently in the middle of being read.

There behind the desk, looking up at her with tired eyes was the familiar amber coat and dark red mane of her father. He looked up at her, almost as if in disbelief that she was actually there, standing before him after all these years.

“Hello...Father. It’s me...Fluttershy.” Fluttershy said as nicely as she could.

“...So...so you’re here.” Lance let out a soft sigh, moving out from behind his desk and walking around to get a better look at her, “You’ve...certainly grown a lot since I last saw you.” He looked her up and down, scanning her, “You resemble your mother so much now...”

Her father turned his head away from her, closing his eyes, “...Why are you here?”

“I...I came to talk.” Fluttershy spoke softly, “About...what happened between us.”

“...What’s there to say? You killed your mother...and I hurt you because of it.” He said the words coldly, as if he didn’t care to say them, let alone think them. “You remember all that don’t you? So what’s there to say.”

“...I guess...I came to apologize.” Fluttershy smiled a soft, sad smile.

“...Apologize?” Her father said looking almost confused as he turned to his daughter.

“I’m...I’m sorry I killed mom...” Fluttershy lowered her head softly, “I can never take back what I’ve done, and no amount of apologies will bring her back...but I...I did kill her...and so...I’m sorry.”

There was silence in the room. Fluttershy could feel the cold stare of her father as he looked at her, as if trying to figure out what was going on.

“...Are you trying to seek redemption now?” He finally spoke up in his cold voice, “Trying to make up for what you did so long ago? After all these years...you came back for this?” Anger was starting to rise in the back of his voice.

“...I guess...that’s not all...” Fluttershy admitted, lifting her head up and smiling, “I also came...to let you know that...I forgive you as well.”

This seemed to stop the older stallion where he stood.

“You punished me for what I did to mother...and I still feel...that it was a worthy punishment. I did a terrible thing, so it only is befitting that I had a fitting punishment...and I don’t hold any anger for what you did to me. In fact...I was able to find a wonderful life thanks to what you did. I have so many friends who love me so much now...I take care of the animals in Ponyville you know, I put the knowledge I learned from your medical books to use.” Fluttershy smiled happily as she thought back to her life in Ponyville.

“I...was even able to find love in Ponyville. I don’t know where it’s going to head, but it’s a journey I’m going to enjoy all the way...and I wouldn’t have met my love if you hadn’t done what you did. I owe everything in my life to you Father...and...I want to thank you.” Fluttershy gave a small bow.

“Thank you for everything.”

Lance just stared at his daughter. He could still remember the night his wife was taken from him, the monster that had ended his wife’s life. He remembered how much pain and suffering he had inflicted on that monster, how after that he had put so much work into studying medicine and practicing his craft so that he could save anypony, regardless of their condition or disease...

But now that monster was bowing before him, thanking him for everything that happened in her life, apologizing for taking the mare that had brought him the greatest amount of happiness he’d ever known.

He grit his teeth as he felt anger swelling inside of him. He stared at her with maddening intent. He saw her slowly lift her head to look at him with a smile. That smile...it felt like it was digging into his very soul.

He took a step forward, as he took a deep breathe out of his nose, raising his hoof into the air. He wanted to strike her, he wanted to make her hurt more, and he wanted her to know that what happened still tore at his soul as he looked into the face of every patient he ever had saved...

Fluttershy smiled softly, looking at her father. She closed her eyes, ready to be struck. She would take any punishment he seemed befitting for

her as she always had, it was the only thing she could do to make amends for their past, for having taken her mother out of this world.

She waited for the blow, expecting it to come.

But the strike never came.

Instead, what Fluttershy felt next surprised her.

Her father gently placed his hoof down on her back, drawing her in close to embrace her, wrapping his hooves around her. She blinked in surprise, when she felt him start to shake. She wasn't sure how to react, when she suddenly felt something cool and wet hit her back.

He was crying. Her father was crying as he embraced her.

Fluttershy couldn't help herself, she moved her hooves up around her father and hugged him back, closing her eyes as she let him cry into her as he needed.

The two of them stood there in that embrace for what seemed like an eternity, when her father finally broke away from it, rubbing his face as he turned away from his daughter.

"...Fluttershy..." He finally said after clearing his throat.

"Yes?" She asked curiously.

"...I think...it's best if we never see each other again..." He muttered quietly, "Please...don't ever come visit me again."

"...Alright...I understand..." Fluttershy slowly nodded her head, "Just know that...I love you Dad..."

"...I...I love you too..." He choked out, "Now...get out of my office."

Fluttershy didn't need to be told twice. She gave one last bow before moving to his door and opening it, heading out.

“...Well that was a quick visit.” Soft Cure said looking at Fluttershy curiously. Fluttershy’s emergence was the only thing that had stopped the constant glare battle between Soft Cure and Rainbow Dash.

“Yes...but don’t worry Ms. Cure, you won’t ever be seeing my again.” Fluttershy smiled to her nurse.

“...What? Really? You’re not going to smear his name?” The nurse said surprised.

“Ms. Cure...I understand now...you did what you did because you didn’t want anything bad to happen to my father. If something had happened, he couldn’t save all the lives he’s saved over the last few years.” Fluttershy smiled, but Soft Cure just turned her head, almost as if she was being stabbed by Fluttershy’s words. “I don’t blame you...he’s saved so many lives, the one he hurt seems insignificant in comparison.” Fluttershy chuckled softly.

“...Get on with it.” Soft Cure growled.

“I’m sorry, I just needed to say it.” Fluttershy smiled, “Please, have a wonderful life...and look after my father.” Fluttershy gave a bow, before walking off.

“...Fluttershy...” Rainbow Dash spoke up after a while, “What the HAY was that all about?”

“...I guess I can explain to you now Dash.” Fluttershy smiled happily, “But...let’s go somewhere more private first.”

Rainbow and Fluttershy landed at the top of a hill in the middle of a large field that expanded far out into the horizon. One could see the mountains in the distance and the flowers blooming in the field bellow, it was a beautiful sight, one that was tranquil, without another pony around to be seen.

“This seems like a good place.” Fluttershy smiled as she laid herself down, turning to look over at the nearby forest, “You know...over there is

where I fell from Cloudsdale and learned my special talent of taking care of animals.” She gave a soft chuckle.

“Huh...it is, isn’t it?” Rainbow Dash sat down next to Fluttershy looking at the forest. The sight did bring back fond memories, but that’s not what she was concerned about at the moment.

“Okay Fluttershy, will you tell me now that we’re alone? That nurse was glaring daggers at you and I didn’t like it one bit. Also, what did you see in that other Ponyville that warranted a trip to Cloudsdale?” Rainbow Dash quickly asked, wanting answers.

Fluttershy could only offer a sad smile as she felt the wind blow through her mane. She closed her eyes as she began to speak.

“I suppose you know that my mother died of a disease, right?” Fluttershy asked, just wanting to double-check what Rainbow knew.

“Y...Yea...I was too young to remember it but it was big news one day. And of course everytime I heard ponies talking about him, they almost always mentioned how he tragically lost his wife and it made him want to become an even better doctor.” Rainbow explained slowly.

“Well...then here’s the truth Rainbow Dash. My mother didn’t die of a disease.” Rainbow looked at her curiously, “It’s true that she was sick with a disease to which we had no cure, and it likely would’ve killed her eventually. But that’s not what killed her. For, you see...I killed her. I killed my own mother Rainbow dash.”

Rainbow Dash’s mouth fell open once more as she stared at Fluttershy. Fluttershy wasn’t even looking at her, she was just staring out into the field with the soft, sad smile. Any question of doubt that ran through her head was hit by that sad look. She wasn’t lying, Fluttershy had actually done what she said...

“...But...But...why? Why would you...” Rainbow stuttered trying to process it, “What...what would drive you, the kindest pony EVER to...to kill your mother?”

“...She asked me to.” Fluttershy replied slowly.

“Whu...” Rainbow said in shock once more, “You mean...your mother asked her young daughter to KILL her!?” Fluttershy just slowly nodded her head.

“Fluttershy...that doesn’t make YOU the killer here!” Rainbow stomped her hoof, “You were too young to know the difference! If she made you kill her then you had no ability to stop yourself! You didn’t kill your mother! She kill-“

“But I did kill her Rainbow Dash.” Fluttershy closed her eyes slowly, “Even if she told me to and as a child I had to listen to her, I still had enough sense in me to know that what I was doing was wrong, that it didn’t feel right...but I choose to not want to disappoint my mother. I took the knife she gave me and I stabbed her repeatedly.

“No matter how you look at it, the motives or the reasons, my mother died because I stabbed her multiple times. If I hadn’t had the knife, if I hadn’t moved my legs in the stabbing motion, if I hadn’t listened to her, then she’d still be alive today.” Fluttershy’s smile stayed on her face, that sad smile that said she was forcing herself to be okay with everything she said.

“I’m simply a monster, Rainbow Dash.”

“NO!” Rainbow shouted stomping the ground before grabbing Fluttershy by the shoulders, much to her surprise, and turned the sad looking Pegasus to face her, “You’re not a monster! You’re mother forced you to do that Fluttershy! As the most gentle pony in all of Equestria you’re not capable of murder unless you didn’t know what you were doing! You’re not a monster!” Rainbow breathed heavily as she ranted.

Fluttershy looked in shock for a moment, before smiling gently. She was so happy that Rainbow cared for her so deeply, despite having admitted her monstrous truth to her. She could feel tears burning at the edges of her eyes, but she held them back as she closed her eyes.

“Well...my father told me I was.” This seemed to shut Rainbow Dash up again as she stared at Fluttershy in shock, “He didn’t just tell me I was a monster...he punished me as the monster I was. After all...you don’t argue

with the best doctor in all of Cloudsdale...he knows what's best for you. I don't have any scars because he knew what he was doing, but I visited the hospital so often because of his punishments." Fluttershy let out a small laugh; she apparently found that statement to be funny.

"That's where nurse Soft Cure comes in...she was my father's head nurse. Whenever I came in for one of my 'accidents' she was the one who helped me. However, she was loyal to my father...if I tried to tell her that my father was the one who had been doing all this to me, she only hurt me in return, forcing me never to speak the words that said my father was a horrible person.

"And I understand why now...she was protecting the people my father was caring for. I remember passing by the rooms of his patients one day...at the time he was attending to a cancer patient who all the other doctors said they had no chance of healing her, but my father said he wasn't going to give up on her till the very end. Another patient needed a complicated organ replacement that other surgeons were too afraid to perform because one wrong move would kill her, but my father took it upon himself and saved her life."

Tears were beginning to flow down Fluttershy's cheeks as she spoke of the deeds her father had accomplished,

"There was a little filly with a weakened immune system...she had given up on life and was dying when my father gave her a hope she hadn't had before...she made a full recovery. There was even a time when he was able to help a mother who was going to kill her baby in labor, but because he was there and knew what to do the baby came out healthy as could be..."

Rainbow could say nothing; she was staring at the crying mare before her as she poured her heart out about her father.

"These were all patients I saw with my own eyes Rainbow Dash...I saw him smile and laugh and help them all. Even after I had killed my mother he never once showed that sign of sorrow to them...so what else can I be but a monster Rainbow Dash? I deserved everything that happened to me. I did the unforgiveable and killed my mother." Fluttershy

closed her eyes, giving a small laugh as tears continued to stream down her face.

“...no...no...no, no, no, NO, NO, NO!” Rainbow Dash began to scream as she lowered her head. Fluttershy looked at her in surprise. Rainbow Dash began to shake as she felt the tears burning at the edges of her eyes.

“Fluttershy...YOU'RE NOT A MONSTER!” Rainbow Dash looked straight into Fluttershy's water-filled cyan eyes, “Even if it's true...even if you DID kill your mother, that doesn't make you a monster! You could never hurt a fly unless you were given no other choice, no other option! Unless your back was to the wall you'd never do anything to harm another living being!

“So...so stop saying you are...” the tears ran down Rainbow Dash's cheeks unhindered now, “Stop...speaking like your some...horrible pony that deserves to be punished...when you're not...when you're the nicest, gentlest, kindest pony whose ever lived.” Rainbow's shoulder shook as she spoke.

“...Rainbow Dash...” Fluttershy muttered quietly, looking at her through sorrowful eyes. The two sat on the grassy hill, looking into each other's eyes as they sat there crying. There were no words to be had at that moment, just the bond that was between the two mares set up.

As the sun began to set in the horizon, between two breathless mares, they shared a deep kiss on that hill. Each mare could feel the passion that radiated from the other through the kiss; it wasn't just a kiss out of longing or lust, or of a simple understanding or care...

It was a kiss out of deep love, a love that was rooted in their hearts.

The night sky began to become visible when the two finally broke apart their kiss, Fluttershy nestling herself into Rainbow's coat.

“...Thank you Rainbow Dash...” Fluttershy said quietly. Rainbow Dash just smiled at her marefriend, petting her coat softly. The two stayed that way for a short while. It was Fluttershy that broke the silence between them.

“...We’re not done yet though...” She said softly.

“Huh?” Rainbow asked curiously as Fluttershy sat up.

“This time...we need to talk about you.” Fluttershy wiped her face as she smiled, “About...your dream to be a Wonderbolt.”

“Oh...” Rainbow Dash grimaced, not wanting to have brought the topic up just yet. She looked up at Fluttershy, who was smiling at her, then up to the sky, then down to the ground and gritted her teeth as she closed her eyes before letting out a soft sky.

“I’m...not going to-“

“I want you to tryout for the Wonderbolts.” Fluttershy smiled happily.

“Huh?” Rainbow Dash blinked in confusion, “But...but I told you before...if I join the Wonderbolts...I’ll be abandoning my friends, the ponies I care about...” Rainbow Dash felt like she was shrinking as she spoke, “That I’d be abandoning you...”

“I’ve been thinking it over despite my own thoughts.” Fluttershy smiled, “And...there’s a one year training program right? Well...as far as I know, they’re not allowed to keep you away forever. By law, they must give you opportunities to rest, breaks from working. You get sick days, vacation days, rest days, holidays...and even once you’re part of the main flight team; they don’t do shows during the winter. And not every team member flies during every show. All that down time you’ll have, you can use to spend with us.”

Rainbow Dash blinked.

“How...How do you know all this?” Rainbow said, flabbergasted at Fluttershy’s level of knowledge about the Wonderbolts. Fluttershy could only laugh.

“I’ve been listening to you rant about them since we were fillies Rainbow Dash, I’ve remembered most of what you said about them. I just took important details from each rant and brought them together.” Fluttershy nodded slowly, “Just because you’ll be gone for a while at a time

doesn't mean you'll be abandoning your home or your friends. And you especially won't be abandoning me."

"...I...I hadn't thought about it like that..." Rainbow said thinking it all over in her head now. In that other Ponyville, it had been presented to her in such a black and white way that she couldn't help but feel what she was shown was true...but here was Fluttershy mixing that black and white line, causing it all to be an ambiguous gray blur.

"...You're right Fluttershy...you're absolutely right!" Rainbow Dash said as her enthusiastic grin came back to her face, "YES!" She cried out, jumping into the air, doing a flip and pumping her hooves into the air, "The dream is alive! I'm going to be a Wonderbolt!" Rainbow cheered.

"That's wonderful Dash!" Fluttershy laughed happily watching Dash, "I've come up with my own dream too...one I want to make come true very soon."

"Oh? What's your dream Fluttershy?" Rainbow Dash flew down to Fluttershy, smiling happily.

"I've decided...that I'm going to be a mother." Fluttershy explained.

Rainbow Dash's wings stopped moving as she fell to the ground before Fluttershy.

"B-But...what...I...I can't' give you a child!" Rainbow Dash cried out in a panic. Fluttershy couldn't help but laugh.

"I meant, I'd like to adopt a little filly or colt of my own." Fluttershy explained more clearly.

"...Oh." Rainbow Dash sat up, understanding now. "I don't know Fluttershy...a foal is a LOT of work...a lot more than trying to be a Wonderbolt is...plus with me being your marefriend you know I'd have to help take care of it..." Rainbow rubbed the back of her head in thought, "I don't know if I'm ready for that kind of responsibility..."

"It's okay Dash, I wouldn't ask you to do anything you're not comfortable with." Fluttershy smiled happily.

“...Ugh...you have a way of twisting my heart.” Rainbow put a hoof to her face, before smiling, “but if a foal is what you want...then I can’t do anything but say to go for it...just uh...let’s consider our options first.”

“Options?” Fluttershy blinked, tilting her head a little.

“You know...ah...we could...” Rainbow Dash thought about what she was going say, “...Well I WOULD say we could ask Twilight about...you know...pregnancy spells between two mares...but I think I want to avoid Twilight’s spells for a little while.” Rainbow grimaced. Fluttershy couldn’t help but laugh at this as well.

“It’s alright. Whether its from you or from someone else, all I know is...I want to give some little filly or colt a wonderful foalhood, one I didn’t have growing up.” Fluttershy nuzzled up against Rainbow Dash.

“...I know.” Rainbow let out a soft chuckle as she embraced her marefriend, “Hey, it’s getting late, we should probably head back to Ponyville.” Rainbow said, as a cool breeze blew through her mane, reminding her of the time.

“Alright, let’s go.” Fluttershy smiled up at Rainbow.

The two of them soon took off from the hill, flying back to Ponyville together.

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## The End of Silent Ponyville 2

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You can find five alternate endings to story 2 here:

<http://www.equestriadaily.com/2011/06/story-silent-ponyville.html>

# Study of the Mind Delve

## Chapter 1

### Comprehension

Twilight threw her hooves up in frustration.

“WHY IS THIS SO COMPLICATED!?” Twilight groaned as she put the latest book she had been browsing through down. It too had yielded her no answers; she was squarely back where she had begun once again.

“You seem stressed Twilight, is this really that important?” Spike asked as he approached her quickly, placing a cup of her favorite tea down next to her.

“Thank you Spike.” Twilight sighed softly levitating the cup up to her lips and taking a sip, starting to settle down again, “And it is. This spell is baffling me now. There’s no indication in the book it comes from that suggests the spell is bad. Yet I have three separate testimonies that the spell shouldn’t EVER be used again.” Twilight rubbed her forehead carefully.

“Have you asked them why?” Spike asked curiously.

“Of course I have Spike. But...” She took another sip of the tea as she thought about her friends reasons carefully, “Pinkie found out about her sister through the spell but refused to explain how beyond that she had to go through some fog filled version of Ponyville. And apparently when Fluttershy went into the spell with her and Rainbow Dash the same thing happened, only it wasn’t the same. Of course they didn’t explain how.” Twilight groaned softly.

“Poor Pinkie...It’s sad that she lost her sister when she was younger.” Spike frowned thinking about it.

“Yea...I know how you feel Spike.” Twilight said calming down a little, that reminder sobering her emotions, “And chances are Fluttershy had something similar happen to her, but she hasn’t told anypony but Rainbow Dash...and from what I can tell it wouldn’t be a good idea to pressure her into telling us.” She sighed softly. “That’s why I’ve been doing this research, to try and figure it out on my own.”

“Have you figured anything out yet?” Spike asked curiously, looking at Twilight’s notes.

“Nada. Nothing. Zilch. Zero!” Twilight groaned frustrated putting her head against the table, “I’ve gotten nowhere Spike. I’ve looked at every detail, every loophole, anything that would tell me exactly how this spell works or why it does what it does.” She lifted her head and levitated her copy of ‘Dreams: A Psychological Understanding’ over to her. The book once more flipped open to the offending spell in question.

“What’s so difficult about that spell? I mean, your Twilight Sparkle, you can figure out any spell you put your mind to.” Spike said praising Twilight.

“Heh...Thanks Spike.” Twilight said lifting her head, “But the problem is just the lack of information.” She put her hoof against the page in the book, “This book has a description of the spell and how to cast it...and that’s it. Every other spell has details on it. Possible side effects, proper handling and use, just basic info every spell should have. And I didn’t notice any of this till I started studying it.” Twilight closed the book, not wanting to look at the page anymore.

“So I went searching for answers in the rest of the library but...I turned up nothing.” Twilight said turning to the massive amount of books and papers that were stacked around the library, a usual scene after her intense studying, “Every book on dreams, psychology, understanding the mind...ANYWHERE the Mind Delve or a similar spell might appear there was nothing. The mind delve spell appears in THIS book and this book alone.” Twilight gave ‘Dreams: A Psychological Understanding’ a soft glare.

“How is that possible?” Spike asked confused, “No spell appears in just one single book, it has to be somewhere.”

“Well, apparently this one doesn’t show up anywhere else in the library.” Twilight sighed again, taking a sip from her tea before her frustrations started to get to her nerves again, “I even tried to check other books by this author, but this is the only book I have of his. So I checked the creators of the original spells. Even in his book, every spell is referenced to having an original creator and I can find out more about them. But not this spell.” Twilight’s hoof ran across the page as she scowled at the spell, “This one. Specific. Spell. Has no extra information. It’s just there. Mocking me.”

“...Huh. Do you think the answer would be in the Canterlot archives?” Spike asked curiously.

“Most likely Spike, but I can’t just waltz over to the Canterlot archives whenever I want. I’ve still got things to do in Ponyville. I’ve got to help Applejack with the farm, then help Pinkie Pie try and figure out her new recipe, Rarity wants to spend time at the spa as well, and then Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash want to talk to me about some personal spell they need. My schedule is booked solid.” Twilight sighed.

“...Uh...Twilight, how’re you going to find time to go to Canterlot then?” Spike asked curiously.

“That’s exactly what I’m saying Spike, I can’t go to Canterlot right now. As much as I’d like to.” Twilight sighed again carefully sipping on her tea once more.

“No, I mean, you have to find time to go to Canterlot Twilight. Your evaluation is next week, don’t you remember?”

Twilight nearly gagged on her tea, it spewing out back into her cup and splashing onto her face.

“MY EVALUATION!” Twilight cried out in a panic, not even flinching about the tea, “I COMPLETELY FORGOT!” Her horn lit up as her books and notes quickly moved to the side and her list of things to do flew over. At the top of the list was in fact, underlined in red, was the date of her



evaluation, one week from now. "Spike, why didn't you remind me sooner!?" She said jumping from her seat and rushing around quickly putting books back on the shelf haphazardly as she panicked.

"I've never had to remind you before Twilight. Besides, it's not like you to forget something so important...How DID you forget about it?" Spike asked scratching his head a little confused.

"I...just...the last few days have been stressful, alright Spike?" Twilight said shaking her head. She didn't want to admit to Spike that the combination of Pinkie and Fluttershy's dreams had been getting to her, as much as she'd like to forget them. On top of that she was still worried about the mental health of her friends; even though they said they were alright she worried. Pinkie lost her sister and Fluttershy likely suffered something similar, there was no way she could believe they were handling it as well as they showed it to others. Then on top of that she'd been researching the mind delve spell.

"That's not like you Twilight. You've never forgotten about your evaluation before." Spike said rather surprised, "Even when you've been busy you remember it...are you alright?" Spike seemed worried now.

"I'm fine Spike...I just..." Twilight thought about her words carefully, "I guess things have been bothering me alright? But...I have no choice now. I can't fail the evaluation, so I have no choice. I have to put all my other plans on hold and go to Canterlot." Twilight said gathering the books scattered amongst the library more calmly now, placing them away gently.

"Your friends will understand Twilight, besides you could use a short break from all this, study up on your magic for the test and all. I'm sure you'll be feeling better in no time." Spike said moving to help Twilight pick up the mess of a library.

'I hope you're right Spike.' Twilight thought, still feeling a bit of a grip on her heart. If her friends were troubled, then so was she.

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"Again, I'm really sorry about all this." Twilight turning to her friends, as she placed her small suitcase on the chariot.

“Don’t you worry two bits over it Twi’, nothin’ a little extra hard work can’t handle.” Applejack said adjusting her hat before crossing her legs, “Sides, this here’s like yer final exam of the year right? Well we wouldn’t want ya to fail that.”

“Undoubtedly. You can come with me to the spa anytime, and after your exam I most certainly must take you. You’ll need a good relaxation and grooming after that.” Rarity explained, her voice as elegant as ever.

“Don’t worry Twilight, when you get back I’ll have figured out my new super-duper amazing recipe! We’ll throw you a super-awesome Congratulations party with cakes and sodas and balloons and streamers and everypony in Ponyville will be there!” Pinkie spouted happily prancing in place, already excited for the party.

“It’s okay Twilight, really, this is very important for you. Don’t worry about our small problems if they’ll interrupt your big one.” Fluttershy offered up with a smile.

“Yea, we can wait for you to get back. You have a good trip.” Rainbow nodded in agreement.

“Thanks. Still, I really feel like I should apologize for not remembering.” Twilight smiled softly, looking at Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy, “but, I suppose with all the craziness the last week what else I was supposed to do?” Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash each gave a soft laugh rubbing the back of their heads.

“We’re all set to go.” One of the royal guards pulling the chariot said turning to Twilight.

“Thank you sirs.” She nodded politely to them before turning back, “Alright, I guess I’ll be off then...ugh, you WILL be okay taking care of the library by yourself, right Spike?” Twilight asked cautiously.

“For the millionth time, of course I will.” Spike said rolling his eyes having heard the question far more often than he’d like, “Owlowiscious will be there too if I need any help. You’ve got nothing to worry about Twilight, I promise.”

“Well...then I’m off everyone. I’ll see you all in a week.” Twilight said finally satisfied with her goodbyes. The royal guards gave a quick nodded and proceeded to take off into the sky. Twilight waved to her friends who waved back as they soon disappeared into the distance of Ponyville.

Twilight let out a soft sigh as she settled into the chariot ride. She looked at her suitcase, opening it carefully with her magic and pulling out her copy of ‘Dreams: A Psychological Understanding’. She scrutinized the cover once more, her eyes landing on the name of the author.

“Magus V. Darkarts.” Twilight read out loud for what seemed like the hundredth time to her. “I will find out about your little ‘Mind Delve’ spell if it’s the last thing I do.”

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“It’s wonderful to see you again Twilight.” Celestia said sipping her tea gracefully, “I do hope your trip here was pleasant.”

“But of course Princess.” Twilight smiled remembering her manners.

Since she would be staying in Canterlot for the week the Princess had taken the opportunity to have tea with her star pupil before she became a studying recluse.

“How have your studies in magic been going?” Celestia smiled interested.

“Oh, unbelievably!” Twilight said excitedly, “I’ve learned a lot while in Ponyville, not just about friendship but about new magic in general.” Twilight said excitedly.

She quickly began a rant to the Princess, not even knowing where it was coming from, about all the new things she had learned in Ponyville. She explained about the new spells she taught herself during their crazy misadventures, such as growing facial hair, turning objects into clothes, making music from reeds, finally getting the hang of teleportation, levitating large objects and even how to turn simple mice into carriage pulling horses.

Celestia listened eagerly to her student’s tales, laughing where appropriate and happy to hear her student was having fun with her friends

while learning about magic. It did her heart good to know she was growing up so well. She was already an adult but she did have a lot left to learn. She was on the right track though and Celestia was thankful for it.

“Spike was sneezing for a few days after that. We had to keep him outside to keep from burning the place down.” Twilight laughed, Celestia chuckling softly in return, “But we eventually got it settled and he was very grateful. The day after that I sent him out on a shopping trip to replace the things he’d accidentally scorched during his sneezing fit, though we were lucky he didn’t burn up any of the books.” Twilight nodded taking a sip of the tea before her thinking about what happened next.

“And then after that Pinkie...” Twilight stopped as she realized where she was in her story. She stopped abruptly, lowering her tea cup to the table as she stared down at it with a melancholy look.

“What’s the matter Twilight?” Celestia asked curious about this sudden shift in mood and behavior. Twilight softly contorted her face in thought, debating with herself about what she should tell the Princess next. A thought came to her mind first though.

“Princess, can I ask you a question?”

“Of course my faithful student, what is it?” Celestia asked genuinely smiling, not sure what to expect.

“Do you know of a spell called ‘Mind Delve’?” Celestia pondered this question for a moment, not really having expected it.

“Well...what kind of a Mind Delve my student? There have been many spells that focus on the mind throughout the years, be it for a memory problem, a medical problem, finding out if somepony is telling the truth or not, and various psychological studies.” Celestia answered with her normal regal tone, thinking over the types of spells she’d seen during her years.

“Well...this spell is simply called ‘Mind Delve’.” Twilight said looking to her side and seeing her suitcase. Her horn lit up as she reached inside of it and pulled out the book once more, flipping open to the page in question before showing it the Princess, “It appears in this book called ‘Dreams: A

Psychological Understanding', but there's no extra information about it. I was wondering if you knew anything about this spell."

Celestia looked over the spell curiously, reading the description and the intricate details of how to cast such a spell. A slight worry came across her face that sent a small bit of panic through her body, but the Princess simply closed her eyes in thought before moving the book down onto the table.

"I'm not sure what to make of the spell Twilight." Celestia finally spoke, Twilight letting out a breath she hadn't realized she was holding in. "It's a spell that lets one find out about problems that are hidden deep within the subconscious." Celestia tilted her head, looking up at the ceiling in thought, "However, that seems like an awfully dangerous idea..."

"...Princess?" Twilight asked, not sure what was going through the Princess's head.

"The mind is a delicate thing Twilight. Even with magic its very easy to harm it if you're not careful. This spell says that it's supposed to draw out the problem its patient is suffering from to shorten the time they need to recover...however, its more than that." Celestia explained placing a hoof against the page, Twilight listening with earnest.

"This spell, the way it's written, described and displayed is in fact a cure for nightmares. However, even without casting it I can tell that it's more complex than that." Her hoof passed over the section explaining how to cast the spell, studying it intently, "This is a very complex dive into the mind. The potential for abuse is high for somepony that could figure out the details of this spell. With some modifications it can very easily be turned into something that attacks the mind instead of helping it."

"R-Really?" Twilight's eyes widened in shock, not having expected any of this from the princess. She was good at learning a spell and how to cast it, but she was still just a beginner in how to deconstruct a spell and learn it's inner workings. Celestia on the other hand had thousands of years of experience in this, deconstructing a spell would be almost second nature to her.

"I'm...almost amazed at this spell." Celestia said, turning the pages to check on a few of the other spells in the book before returning to the page with the Mind Delve. "This spell...I would say this spell is at least a Rank A."

"Huh!? But...but I've seen Rank A spells before and they were much harder to cast than that spell." Twilight said in shock.

Spells went in rank of difficulty casting and the ability that went along it. The lowest a spell could be was Rank D and was often associated with every day spells Unicorns needed, such as levitation of objects. The highest a spell could reach in Rank was S, and spells of that nature could move the very Sun and Moon itself. Not to mention the Elements of Harmony broke the scale itself, being a power beyond anything seen before.

"That's what worries me my student. While not just anypony could cast this spell, it's easy enough for unicorns studying magic to cast. Despite how complex it is, it's designed to be simple to cast." Celestia then mumbled softly, "It took a great genius to devise a spell this way..." Celestia closed the book and looked at the cover, her eyes falling to the author. "Where did you find this book my student?"

"It...it was in the library." Twilight explained, "I found it because my friends were having troubles with nightmares...and they were some serious nightmares. That spell was the only option we felt we had left and so I used it on them...they came out better and saying they were thankful for having found out what was causing their nightmares, but it concerned me."

"And what was the cause of them?" Celestia asked curiously.

"...W-Well...Pinkie came to me first with the Nightmares..." Twilight began. She quickly explained to Celestia about finding the spell and using it on Pinkie. How after the spell ended Pinkie had left for a while before returning to Ponyville and explaining to her that the spell had showed her the death of her sister Bellamina at the hooves of a serial killer.

"A...A serial killer?" Celestia stopped Twilight short.

“Y-Yea...is something wrong Princess?” Twilight looked up at the Princess curiously.

“Twilight... in the last 100 years of my reign there has only been one known and captured serial killer. He’s currently locked away in Foalsom Prison for Deranged Ponies.” Celestia spoke slowly and clearly, “I haven’t been informed on everything about the case with him, it’s been left up mostly to my security staff...I had no idea that one of the wielders of the Elements of Harmony had almost been a victim to him...” Celestia looked away from Twilight, as if gears were turning in her head as her eyes narrowed.

“W-Well...Princess, Pinkie may have been a victim to his evil but she’s alright now.” Celestia looked at her student curiously, “Well...I-I mean I assume she is...she keeps telling me she is and she certainly doesn’t seem to do anything to contradict that...so I think she took the lesson and used it to strengthen her resolve in life, rather than let it keep her down.”

“...I see.” Celestia said still in thought. “Well...go ahead and continue Twilight, you said Pinkie was the first?” Celestia seemed even more attentive now than she had been before.

“Y-Yes...about two months after Pinkie had suffered from her Nightmares, Fluttershy started having them too. So I ended up using the spell on her as well...she came out better for it as well, though she hasn’t told me what happened to her.” Twilight grew quiet as she finished explaining.

“I see...” Celestia pondered quietly. “What did you experience during the spell?”

“That’s just it Princess...I don’t know.” Twilight said, looking away, “Both times I used the spell I found myself in a dark foggy void staring at a floating picture that morphed and changed. I couldn’t make sense of what I saw. It only lasted a short while too. The spell ended on its own both times, I had no control over when it ended. However it seemed to end just as my friends found resolution within the spell.”

“The spell ends on its own?” Celestia looked at the contents of the book once more. She didn’t see anywhere in the intricate castings of the spell of it ending on its own. “And that’s all you know of the spell?”

“Yes...see, my friends...whatever it is they saw or went through...they refuse to tell me. In fact...they made me promise to never use the spell again.” Twilight looked down at the book feeling defeated, even though part of the reason she had come to Canterlot was to find out more about the spell.

“Well, then I have a proposal for you Twilight.” Celestia said turning to her student, Twilight looking up in surprise, “I’d like to see what this spell does for myself. Would you grant me permission to cast it upon you?”

Twilight perked up in curiosity. On one hoof that made sense, if she couldn’t cast the spell again her teacher certainly could. On the other, she was suddenly afraid of what she might find inside of her, this spell was enough to have Pinkie Pie, Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash all make her promise that she shouldn’t use the spell again. She found herself second guessing this idea.

“Twilight?” Celestia’s voice kicked Twilight back to her senses, “I asked if it was alright for me to cast the spell on you.”

“...Of course Princess.” Twilight put a smile on her face, “You’re here with me, what could go wrong?” She really hoped she hadn’t just tempted fate right then and there.

Celestia just gave a smile and her horn lit up as she cast the spell that was written down in the book before her. Twilight gave a silent gulp and tilted her head forward for the princess. With careful precision she tapped her horn against Twilight’s forehead.

Twilight felt herself float up into space. She was confused at this new sensation, as she opened her eyes to try and figure out what was going on. She blinked, trying to confirm that she had opened her eyes.

Everything was pitch black around her. There wasn’t anything to be seen anywhere. She raised a hoof up to her face. She could see it clearly. She looked at more of herself, able to see herself completely despite the



lack of a visible light source. She looked down at where she thought she would see a ground, but only saw darkness. Her hooves weren't standing on anything discernable, she was just floating in a random black void.

Suddenly she felt as if somehow the world was moving around her quickly, a rush of wind moving past her body though she could see nothing. She squinted her eyes at the rush of wind, trying to gain control of the situation. Her hooves flailed as she tried to gain ground. The whirlwind was deafening though she couldn't explain how anything was there to be loud.

Then it all stopped. All at once Twilight blinked her eyes open and found herself in a completely new location. Her hooves set down on a dirt road with a small grass patch on either side that ended shortly before a black pit. The sky was still dark, but was randomly littered with floating trees and buildings she recognized from Canterlot. Not too far from her she could spot her home in Canterlot and looking behind her she could see the castle.

"I must say, this is very unique. I've never quite experienced anything like this." A voice called out much to Twilight's surprise. She quickly looked up, seeing the white form of Celestia slowly fly down and land before her.

"P-Princess! How did we get here!?" Twilight asked confused about her surroundings.

"It appears we're inside a projection of your mind." Celestia explained looking around.

"We...we are?" Twilight asked surprised.

"We are. I must say, I'm surprised to see a version of Canterlot here. I was expecting a representation of Ponyville if anything." Celestia pondered looking around.

"Well...I spent most of my life in Canterlot...b-but that's not the point." Twilight shook her head, "How're you here? Whenever I used the spell I didn't interact with my friends. I saw nothing and this..." She looked around at the floating scenery, "This is strange but...it's not terrifying. My friends were terrified of what they saw here."

“I see. Then the only solution is to look further into what is happening with this spell. Shall we?” Celestia smiled at her student.

“Of course Princess, I couldn’t pass up an opportunity like this to learn more about the spell.” Twilight smiled.

“I’m glad my faithful student.” Celestia said happily, the two of them walking down the dirt road to the house that looked like Twilight’s.

# Chapter 2

## Reasoning

“Twilight? What are you doing?” Her mother asked looking down at the little filly who seemed to be nestled on a pillow surrounded by a fort made out of books.

“The munsters can’t get me while I read now!” Filly Twilight spoke up in her young cheerful voice before sticking her nose back into the book and happily read away at her latest adventure.

Celestia stifled a giggle as the more adult Twilight who stood next to her blushed.

“I forgot how adorable you had been.” Celestia commented.

“Ahaha...yea...” Twilight said trying to laugh her blush away. The ghostly image of that memory seemed to fade away and was replaced with another, this one a scene of Twilight’s mother reading a book to filly Twilight.

This had been the scene since they had entered the building that looked just like her old home in Canterlot. Various images of memories past blinked in and out of existence, all of them Twilight’s. Most in this house were just of her as a little filly, interacting with her parents, having birthday parties and of course lots of studying. Most of her active memories of her youth involved her nose deep in some kind of book.

Celestia looked around the house curiously, watching each memory come and fade before her eyes fell on a chest that seemed to somehow stand out from the rest of the scenery objects. Twilight looked at her curiously as her mentor began to walk forward, before looking at what her eyes were drawn to, her heart almost stopping.

“Oh, hey Princess, w-what’re you looking at?” Twilight asked quickly zipping in front of the Princess, standing between her and the chest.

“This chest seems to stand out as something different from the rest of the room. I was just going to check what was inside it.” Celestia explained with a smile.

“Oh, what, this chest?” Twilight said awkwardly placing her body against the chest as if protecting it, “Oh there’s nothing inside of here, haha, don’t be silly, it’s just an ordinary chest! It’s not like anything would be kept inside of here.” She laughed trying to grin away the Princess’s curiosity. Celestia opened her mouth to question this, when suddenly a voice interrupted them both as if answering her question.

“What’re you writing Twilight?” The supportive voice of her father came, looking over the filly sitting at a desk who was happily writing away.

“Oh, I just finished reading The Adventures of Captain Roger! I was sad to see the story end, so I’m writing what happened next!” Filly Twilight giggled happily.

“And what happens in your story?” Her father asked curiously.

“So far Captain Roger has fallen in love with the pretty mare Midnight Sparkle! They’re currently seeking to find a cure to the curse placed on Midnight to restore her broken heart!” Filly Twilight giggled as she went back to writing.

“My, a romance story? How bold.” Her father chuckled.

“It’s the bestest story ever!” Filly Twilight gave a wide grin.

Celestia did everything she could to keep herself from falling over with laughter, as Twilight’s face became a deep red as she clutched the chest harder.

“It’s not funny!” Twilight said trying to bury her face against the trunk now.

“Oh...oh my faithful student...I had no idea you were such...such a *romantic*.” Celestia let out another set of giggles, covering her mouth with her hoof as she was failing, miserably, to not laugh at this revelation.

“Ooooh...curse my mind...this is so embarrassing.” Twilight groaned at Celestia’s laughing.

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Twilight and Celestia walked down the dirt road heading for the depiction of the castle. Twilight’s ears were folded back as she walked, still trying to get over the embarrassment of having been caught writing her silly fanfiction as a foal.

“Come now Twilight, you should relax. I’m not going to tell anyone about your daring adventures as a child.” Celestia chuckled softly walking beside her student.

“It’s STILL embarrassing.” Twilight grumbled softly, “I haven’t told anyone I used to write those...things when I was younger. They’re so poorly written!” Twilight said letting loose her inner critic, “The established characters were all acting out of character, everything was focused around my original character, a poorly written one I might add, who was the admiration and affection of every other character. Captain Roger was a swinging bachelor, he would never settle down with a single mare so easily! Not to mention the physics of their adventures, oh they broke physics so often just because I wanted to.” Twilight rubbed her forehead as they walked.

“But that sounds like such fun.” Celestia laughed, “Everypony has written something like that at least once in their life. It’s fun to write silly things for the sake of it. Even I’ve written some in my days.” Celestia smiled.

“W-what? Really?” Twilight asked surprised having heard the Princess had written fanfiction in the past.

“Of course. Though it has been many years since I wrote anything that wasn’t a letter or a political paper.” Celestia mused with herself, “I’ve been so very busy with all my work as of late. Perhaps when I get a break I’ll write something new.” She smiled softly.

“Would...would it be okay if I could read it?” Twilight asked now very curious as to the kind of literature the Princess would write. Surely anything

that she graced would be filled with an exhilarating prose, one that would keep her enthralled for quite some time.

“Only if I can read some of your old work.” Celestia gave a sly smile to her student. Twilight felt her ears go back again as she groaned looking up at the sky, eliciting another chuckle from the Princess.

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Inside the castle Celestia and Twilight were greeted with a very similar scene as they had upon entering Twilight’s house. Only now the scenes were of an older Twilight, learning and studying magic.

“I don’t get it Princess...” Twilight said watching the ghostly images of her younger self struggling to learn spells. “It seems that everything here is just showing us my memories. It’s helping me remember these events more clearly...but how is this terrifying?” Twilight looked up at Celestia looking for an answer.

Celestia didn’t answer straight away. She had to ponder that question herself.

“Well...let me ask you Twilight, you haven’t been having nightmares correct?” Celestia watched with a bit of amusement as a filly Twilight was bouncing around in a circle cheerfully at having succeeded in casting a spell.

“No, I haven’t...and I don’t think I have memories I’ve suppressed from my childhood...I just wasn’t very social as a child. I read books and studied primarily but...that was always of my own choice, not because I was afraid of friends.” Twilight spoke softly, remembering back to her focus on studying and bettering herself over getting to know anyone she knew.

“Tell me Twilight, do you think that it would make a difference?” Celestia asked in a curious manner.

“I...it’s the only thing I can think of that would...” Twilight murmured slowly to herself.

“Well, now that I have seen this spell for myself I can give you a proper analysis of what I think of it.” Celestia said closing her eyes, her

horn flaring up with magic. Twilight looked at her teacher curious, wondering what exactly it was she was doing when she suddenly felt the world begin to crumble away around her.

The wind returned as everything crumbled away. She closed her eyes trying to orientate herself quickly before she felt solid ground underneath her once again. The warm touch of her teacher's horn pulled away from her forehead as she blinked open her eyes, realizing she was sitting at the table once more, looking at Celestia.

"Wait...did you...you ended the spell on purpose?" Twilight said astonished rubbing her forehead.

"I did. It's in the casting instructions." Celestia explained with a soft smile.

"Well...I knew that but..." Twilight was just kind of at a loss for words. She was used to the spell ending on its own...she scoffed at herself for thinking it was possible to get 'used' to that spell.

"This has certainly been an interesting discovery." Celestia said closing the book and levitating it back over to Twilight, who carefully took it in her hooves, "It's a spell I believe I'll have use for in the future. However I'm still worried that it was released in a book available to the public."

"I...I can understand your worries Princess..." Twilight said looking at the book.

"Regardless though, here are my thoughts on what I saw." Celestia said taking a quick breath to gather her thoughts, "The spell does exactly what it says it does. It lets the caster delve into the patients mind so that they can view memories better. I'm sure if we had dug deeper we would've found more...embarrassing things that you'd rather keep secret." Twilight could only blush, knowing it was true, there were somethings she did on quiet days while alone that she didn't exactly want the Princess to see.

"However, your experience seems to differ. We used the spell as intended and it reacted exactly how it's supposed to as it's written down. The spell allows me access to your mind and together we unravel what might be ailing you. That's why it's so effective as a cure for Nightmares. It

takes you directly to the problem of the Nightmares and makes you deal with them.” Celestia pondered again, “However...you should still have been with your friends the entire time. There’s no explanation for you to have been separated as you said you were.”

“Do...do you think I screwed up in casting the spell?” Twilight asked a little worried.

“No, I don’t think you did.” Celestia pondered, “I think there’s more going on than meets the eye.” She grew quiet after that, the gears in her mind turning. Twilight opened her mouth to speak up; however Celestia was the next to speak.

“Well, this is as good a place as any to end our time for the day.” Celestia smiled, “I have business to attend to and I’m sure you would like to get started on studying for your evaluation.”

“Y-Yea, I guess I do need to start studying.” Twilight said thinking to herself, there was only a few days left till she would be evaluated; though now that she had talked with the Princess she was feeling better about it all. “Would it be alright if I had access to the Canterlot Archives for my studies Princess?”

“But of course Twilight. I’ll see you again soon.” Celestia bowed softly to Twilight, Twilight bowing back before the two of them went their separate ways.

‘Okay, I’m only more confused now...’ Twilight thought taking several mental notes of everything she saw during her experience with the Princess, ‘I have to find out more though.’ She thought while looking at the book she was levitating by her side before placing it back into the suitcase as she made her way to the archives, ‘For the sake of my friends I have to learn more about this spell...’

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The Canterlot archives were a vast network of book shelves that seemed to stretch as far as the eye could see. It was the single place in all of Equestria where all known knowledge was stored. Every book that was published had a copy placed inside its lengths, every finished research



paper, every official document, anything written that was deemed important for Equestria.

The archives were a well-guarded resource. Only those who had direct permission from the Princesses were allowed access to them. At any time there could be found at least two or three researchers browsing the archives for information, however the size of the archives often meant you'd find solitude more often than running into another soul.

This wasn't Twilight's first time stepping into the hallowed chambers. She'd been there several times, the first few with the Princess teaching her how to access the resources available, then how to study details on new spells she was studying, then she'd been there on several personal trips looking for books that were not available in the normal Canterlot Library.

Twilight found herself now staring at the many long pathways before her, books filled from one end to the other. It was one of her dreams to have all the time she could ever want to just simply browse through the literature here, learn everything that was possible to learn from the hidden depths of this amazing collection of knowledge.

However, she was here for a very specific purpose and she didn't have the luxury of idling for too long.

Along the wall next to the door she had just entered were several pendants that hung loosely by strings on the wall. She levitated one over to herself and looked at it. The pendant was a simple point cut crystal wrapped with a decorative silver frame. The pendants were simple yet shined with a complex beauty. Twilight was sure Rarity would love to get her hands on one.

"I'm looking for the works of Magus V. Darkarts." Twilight said concentrating her magic on the pendant. The pendant lit up with a soft white glow and Twilight let go of the pendant as it now floated before her on its own. The pendant then began to move, creating a path through the massive lengths of archives for Twilight to follow.

The pendant was like a small star leading her through the dimly lit hallways of the archives. She had once asked why the lights were kept dimmed and the answer she had received was that it helped preserve the

documents. It was an answer that made sense to her, but it made looking for what you wanted a little more difficult.

She turned and wove through several archives following the light as it guided her through the maze of knowledge. It was always hard to tell just how far you would have to travel, for all she knew his section could have been at the very back of the archives.

However the pendant made one final turn down a length of the archives and came to a stop, illuminating the area.

“Ah-hah, so here’s the section.” Twilight said aloud to herself smiling as she drew closer, when she noticed movement. She quickly shifted her eyes in the direction and saw a dark colored pony that seemed to be just slightly taller than her, “Oh, I didn’t expect to meet someone else here.” Twilight said surprised, trying to adjust her eyes to see who it was.

“O-Oh...I didn’t either...my apologies, I-I’ll just go somewhere else.” The voice of a quiet mare replied to her as the pony turned and began to walk off, her own pendant following her.

“There’s nothing to apologize for.” Twilight explained causing the mare to stop, “I don’t mind having someone else around while I study. My name’s Twilight Sparkle, what’s yours?” Twilight smiled giving her guest a friendly greeting.

The other mare was quiet for a moment before turning around and walked closer before her pendant raised up and glowed brighter, giving Twilight a proper look at the mare before her. She had grayish purple coat with light blue hair that seemed to frame her face just right. Her teal eyes seemed to pierce strongly through the dim light as Twilight could now make out the large size of her horn accentuated by a small dark crown. Her body was adorned with small pieces of royal regalia the same color as her crown and hair. Her chest and flank bore the shape of the crescent moon.

“I-It’s me Twilight...Princess Luna...” Luna said quietly not wanting to look Twilight in the eyes.

“Oh, I’m sorry Princess; I didn’t mean to intrude upon your studies.” Twilight said giving her a quick bow before smiling, “I must admit I wasn’t expecting to see you here of all places.”

“W-Well...I-I’ve been spending...a lot of time studying here...much to Tia’s dismay. She keeps saying I should go out and be social...” Luna turned her head away from Twilight, “But...I...I just want to study right now.”

“Well...we haven’t seen you since...well...” Twilight said not wanting to bring up bad memories, “Since Pinkie threw you that party. Is this where you’ve been the whole time?” Twilight asked surprised, eliciting a nod from Luna. “Well, Princess...if I may...I think you should make some time for friends.”

“...But...I have no friends...” Luna mumbled quietly lowering her head, “Not...after what I did...”

“Oh come now, everypony already forgave you.” Twilight smiled, “No one holds it against you, and you just need to work up the courage to make some friends.” Twilight felt weird giving this advice to Princess Luna. Not just a year ago she wouldn’t have said a word of it; surprising what can change in such a short amount of time.

“...Are you sure?” Luna asked looking at Twilight with a curious look, not sure whether she was being told the truth or not, “You...you were one of the ones that freed me from my evil intentions...you don’t hold any ill will against me?”

“Of course not, don’t be silly.” Twilight chuckled, “What were you currently studying anyway?”

“...I...I was studying dreams at the moment.” Luna looked towards the book shelves, “It was always a topic of fascination to me since ponies dream while they sleep through my night...so...I was wondering what kind of things they’d been dreaming about for the last thousand years...”

“What a coincidence, I’m here studying dreams too.” Twilight grinned, walking up to the shelves her pendant point to indicating the section that was labeled as the works of Magus V. Darkarts. Twilight scanned through

the selection and frowned a little. There were only four books released by this author which disappointed her. She grabbed all four of them with her magic and levitated them to her side before levitating one of the books over to Luna. "I think you'll find this one particularly interesting."

"Dreams: A Psychological Understanding?" Luna said curiously reading the cover of the book.

"Why don't we study together Luna? If we compare notes I'm sure we can learn a lot more about this subject than either of us could alone." Twilight grinned happily.

"...You'd like me as your study partner?" Luna perked up, a smile forming on her face at Twilight's proposal.

"Of course! Plus I'm sort of on a time limit, so having the help would be greatly appreciated." Twilight beamed happily before looking around and finding one of the nearby study tables, "Lets study!" She exclaimed walking over to the table and placing the three books down onto it.

"Alright...lets." Luna said happily walking over to the table with her book and sat down across from Twilight, looking curiously at the book before her. Luna wondered what kind of knowledge would be gained from this book that delved into the psychology of dreams.

# Chapter 3

## Understanding

Dreams: A Psychological Understanding

Sea Ponies: Fact or Fiction?

Long Distance Communication Theories and Ideas

A Modern History of Thumbtacks

Twilight felt her face hit the table hard, prompting Luna to look up quickly from her reading. The paper next to Twilight was filled with many crossed out scribbles that once had been notes on what she had THOUGHT were important aspects of each book in an effort to learn more about the author. But no, each note taken was very easily contradicted in the next book which had some other bit of info that would then be destroyed by the next.

There were only four books he had written and each one told the story of a completely different author.

“Are you alright Twilight?” Luna asked blinking curiously.

“I’m just frustrated is all.” Twilight said lifting her head and flipping through the next page of ‘Sea Ponies: Fact or Fiction?’ “These books are almost like they were written by a completely different author. However, I know they weren’t because despite the contexts being different, the writing style is almost exactly the same. Quick, to the point yet nonsensical dialogue. Listen to this for instance.” Twilight said clearing her throat and putting a hoof to the page as she read.

“Early research said that the possible existence of ‘Sea Ponies’ would be a biological impossibility even amongst the fields that studied the biology of the dubbed ‘mythical’ class creatures. However, the recent discovery of a new species of fish with an elongated body with similar structure to that of a pony has given way to the possibility of life developing

in such a way under the sea. The fish known as 'Sardina Equus' has come in various sizes and has shown a level of increased intelligence in comparison to other fish in the same genus."

"He then goes on to talk about the various research trials the fish have undergone and how this relates to intelligent life developing under the sea." Twilight said rubbing her forehead in discomfort, "This whole book is just one big nonsense rant. An equine fish would NEVER be classified under the 'sardine' family."

"I...thought you were researching dreams not...Sea Ponies?" Luna asked a little confused.

"Well...I am and I'm not." Twilight said pointing to the book Luna was reading, "See, in that book your reading there's a spell that's different from all the others called The Mind Delve." Luna looked at her book carefully, she hadn't gotten there yet but she flipped through the pages quickly till it fell onto the page Twilight mentioned. "The author who created the spell also wrote these books...yet these books haven't been useful at all." Twilight sighed closing the book that dared try to say that if Sea Ponies were real that they'd be classified as 'sardines'.

Luna was still reading over the mind delve spell carefully, much the same way Celestia had. Her brow furrowed as she seemed to suddenly become concerned about the spell.

"Well, I guess this lead was a bust." Twilight side move the three books over to the side, "I don't know what I was expecting from 'A Modern History of Thumbtacks' that would tell me more about the Mind Delve." She sighed, "Guess I'll just have to go find some books on psychology and the mind and see if I can't get any answers from here."

"Hold on Twilight." Luna said stopping the purple mare who was just about to head out, "This spell...it seems familiar."

"What? Really?" Twilight asked a little shocked, turning to look at the princess curiously.

"Well...it's not the same by any means but...it seems to have taken its roots from a spell I had read just recently and...well I know how THAT

spell came into creation.” Luna said putting the book down and turning to look at her pendant her horn glowing, “I require Spirits and Deities of Ages Past.” Luna spoke clearly.

The pendant gave a quickly glow of confirmation before streaking off into the depths of the archives. Luna waited a moment or two, before the pendant came streaking back, this time carrying a book wrapped in the strings that hung loosely from it. The pendant stopped before Luna and laid the book down on the table before her.

“Spirits and Deities of Ages Past?” Twilight asked curiously walking up to the table and looking at the book. Luna nodded before opening the book, flipping through several of the pages.

“It’s a book that speaks a lot about the old myths and legends of Equestria’s past. Legends even older than either my sister and I...it even has some myths from before Equestria was made.” Twilight looked up at Luna curiously, “A lot of these myths and legends even I’m not too sure are real. Honestly a lot of it sounds like a bunch of nonsense a foal dreamed up. Yet other sections of it are filled with truth I’ve seen with my own eyes.” Luna didn’t dwell too long on any particular old myth or legend, before stopping on the page she was looking for.

“Here it is. In the section where it talks about myths with the deities of dreams it brings up a spell that allows the caster to grant restful sleep in the restless.” Luna said pushing the book over to Twilight, her looking it over and reading out loud.

“For the restless and the weary, the chance to probe into dreams is a very real possibility, allowing rest and relaxation from that which ails you. With the blessing of the Ruler of Dreams this spell shall clean the mind of worries and doubts and grant peaceful sleep once more. Caution is to be had, as the mind of others can be a vexing and daunting place to behold. The mind is tied to the soul and the soul will protect itself from what it deems an attacker. Ensure safety of both involved before casting this spell.”

“This...this sounds a lot like the Mind Delve.” Twilight said surprised, reading how to cast the spell. It was similar no doubt, but the instructions on how to cast the spell...they were much harder to follow than the Mind

Delve's instructions. The flow of the spell was all over the place, not to mention even she could tell that the spell wasn't intended to do the exact same thing.

"Exactly." Luna said bringing the other book back over to her looking upon the Mind Delve spell's page once more, "I think whoever wrote this spell found this spell during their research and manipulated it until it fit their needs. And really...they must be a genius. They wove this spell so well...even I would take long time taking that spell and weaving it into this..."

Twilight chuckled softly, making Luna look up curiously, "Oh, sorry." Twilight apologized quickly with a smile, "It's just Princess Celestia said something very similar." This brought a small smile to Luna's face.

"Well, alright, as I was saying." Luna said clearing her throat quickly, "That book, Spirits and Deities of Ages Past, is a very old book. This is a newer copy and I doubt we'd find too many copies of it floating around Equestria anymore, considering the book is at least a thousand years old."

"A thousand years?" Twilight said in mild surprise. No doubt that books that old had to be reprinted or else their content would be lost to the ages. The book was written in an older style but she hadn't suspected it to be a thousand years old. But as she thought about it more other legends had to be at least that old, after all the Legend of the Mare in the Moon must've been at least a thousand years old in order to know what happened back then...

"Yes. I remember meeting the author who wrote that book, who was doing his research." Luna explained, causing Twilight to close the book and read the cover again, "A wise old Unicorn who was known for his powerful magic abilities and his sense of prophecy. He was simply known as-"

"Merlin." Twilight said blinking at the front of the book. Now that was an old name of legend she knew. He was one of the original studiers of magic in ponies. Sure there had been researchers before him, but he went beyond what other ponies had thought of in spells before. Most of the modern day spells were built off of the research he originally made. He even tried, from what she had heard, to do research into the Elements of Harmony though the results of that research was never published.



Not only was his research known as legend, but there were legends about him. It was once said he gained control of the most powerful dragon Equestria ever knew, the dragon of Apocalypse. It was once said that he commanded the stars themselves to fall to save Equestria from an invasion of mythical creatures. It was once said that he created the most powerful sword ever known, a sword made out of pure light, from the very essence of magic itself.

“Yes. Merlin was quite an eccentric unicorn...sad I never knew what became of him. But he came to me while doing his research into the deities of dreams. As the ruler of the night he had many questions for me. I never did get to see this book get published though...” Luna sighed softly looking at the book. “This was one of the first books I found while researching dreams...I was planning to look into more of Merlin’s later works after my study into dreams.”

Twilight felt a small pang of guilt rise in her chest. She felt guilty knowing more about Merlin than Luna did, even though she had known him personally in the past. She looked at the book before her, then at the book before Luna and a thought popped up in her head.

“Hey Luna, I think a better idea would be for us to start researching Merlin’s works.” Twilight suggested.

“Huh?” Luna blinked confused, “How come? Isn’t this research on dreams?”

“Well, it is...but in a different way now.” Twilight smiled, “Whoever this Magus v. Darkarts is, he obviously took his inspiration from Merlin here; meaning that he must’ve studied Merlin’s work in order to figure out to manipulate his spells. If we follow his method I’m sure that we’ll not only figure out how to make a safer version of the Mind Delve, but we’ll also get my studying done for the evaluation!” Twilight explained, proud of herself.

“You’re trying to make a safe version of the mind delve?” Luna asked curiously, this being the first time she’s heard of this.

“O-Oh...” Twilight said having forgot, “Sorry, I guess I should’ve mentioned it...see...” Twilight quickly retold the story she had told Celestia,

about her friends experiences with the Mind Delve spell. Luna listened intently, not speaking up till Twilight was finished.

“...And they made me promise never to use the spell again because of their experiences.” Twilight sighed softly, “So, in case something like this happens again I wanted to create a safe version of the spell. However, since I don’t know a Magus V. Darkarts or how he came up with the spell, I’ve basically had to do research from scratch.” Twilight said before looking at the spell in Spirits and Deities of Ages Past. “However, now that I have a starting and ending point, finding out the steps in the middle will be much easier!”

Luna tapped her chin in thought.

“Alright Twilight, I understand. I’ll help you with your research.” Luna smiled.

“Oh thanks you! This’ll make life so much easier.” Twilight sighed happily before turning to her pendant, “We need the works of Merlin.” Twilight smiled as her horn glowed, the pendant lighting up to lead the way.

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The next week seemed to go by in an instance. Twilight could honestly admit to it being one of the hardest sessions of studying she’d ever taken part in. The spells of Merlin were vast and seemed to affect every part of Pony society. His legends stretched far and wide, Luna was amazed to learn of everything the unicorn had accomplished since her time trapped away.

The research didn’t only reveal more clues about the Mind Delve spell, it also was teaching Twilight new spells she hadn’t thought to try and learn before. She made sure to make time for learning new spells for her evaluation as well as making sure the spells she already knew were mastered to every detail.

By the day of her evaluation Twilight wasn’t that much closer to figuring out a new spell to use for her friends should they have a problem like they did before.

“Ugh...Magus you really are a genius.” Twilight grumbled softly walking down the halls of Canterlot, heading for the testing room where her evaluation would take place. “Even WITH Luna’s help we didn’t get that far in cracking your spell.” She sighed softly.

It didn’t take long to reach the big double doors that would lead to the evaluation room. She took a deep breath and calmed her mind.

“Alright Twilight, Luna promised to continue helping you from Canterlot, you can’t ask for much more right now. Focus on passing the evaluation.” She said putting a smile to her face and pushing the doors open.

The large class room opened before her, set up specifically for her evaluation. A small box of a stage was set up with various materials she could use for her spells. In front of the stage was a long wooden desk, behind of which sat several of the head teachers from Celestia’s School for Gifted Unicorns, two of the unicorn royal guards and Celestia herself.

Celestia gave a smile looking at her faithful student walk in and take her place on the stage, Twilight looking back and smiling as well, before a throat clearing cough caught her attention and she looked towards them.

“Alright Ms. Sparkle, welcome to your Evaluation.” The stuffy teacher with a bright yellow cut and curly light purple hair spoke up, Twilight recognized her as Lonsdaleite, one of her old homeroom teachers. “You’ve been through this before so you know the drill. You also know that just because Princess Celestia choose you as her personal student doesn’t mean you can simply neglect our grading standards...however we also cannot expel you due to this either.” Lonsdaleite adjusted her glasses, “So present to us the spells you have learned over the last year.”

“Certainly.” Twilight said smiling confidently. She used to be nervous over these evaluations, but she’d long since gotten over that fear. She turned to face the table before her, placed on top of it were things like rocks, cloth, a hat, an apple and some string. Twilight smiled in amusement thinking about the various things she could do with all of it.

With ease she began to show off her abilities. The rocks were soon turned into rather fashionable clothes, the apple was turned into a rather

sizeable chariot able to fit up to six, the strings formed together creating a complex diagram with ease, the cloth rubbed and wove together as it began to play a rather soothing song from the folds somehow.

The teachers were quickly scribbling down notes as they watched, Twilight continuing to sneak smirks at Celestia who happily smiled back, happy to see her student performing so well. Despite the time spent in Ponyville she was happy to see her student's talents growing with her own eyes.

Twilight looked at the hat on the table for a moment, pondering what to do with it. However, an idea popped into her head as she smiled, floating the hat over to her.

"And here's a more recent one I learned." Twilight said floating the hat up and presenting it, "Now you see it..." then the hat just simply disappeared into thin air, "Now you don't." She grinned. "But where did it go?" Twilight tapped her chin while pondering. "Oh, I know!" She said lowering her head, the hat suddenly appearing on her head, "It was on my head the whole time!" She laughed.

The teachers murmured amongst themselves. Twilight had a hard time knowing if that meant they were impressed or not, but it often mean they were wanted to know more about what she'd done.

"It's a rather interesting yet simple spell I found." She made the hat disappear from her head and then summoned it before her, "By creating a pocket inside of my magic I can create a space in which I can put a limited amount of small items." She put the hat back down on the table, "Of course it's more practical for short travel and hiding private things quickly than it is for long travel, as it can be exhausting to hide the items for too long. But it does allow for quick surprises."

"Very impressive Ms. Sparkle." Lonsdaleite said writing something down, "It seems you have been learning a lot and you've learned it exceptionally."

"That's my student for you." Celestia smiled proudly.

“Before we finish the Evaluation, is there anything else you’d like to show us?” Lonsdaleite asked curiously.

Twilight suddenly hesitated. She did in-fact have a spell she hadn’t shown off yet, one she had spent the last week studying...would it be right for her to use it here? Celestia already proved the spell was fine...but she still had a promise to keep to her friends...what should she do?

“Well Ms. Sparkle?” Lonsdaleite asked again. Twilight stood at attention.

“Ugh...w-well I do have another spell...but I need a volunteer for it.” Twilight spoke hesitantly, causing Celestia to raise an eyebrow in surprise.

“Very well.” Lonsdaleite commented putting down her clipboard and walking onto the stage quickly. Twilight hesitated looking at the teacher before her, before quickly glancing a look at Celestia who seemed curious as to what Twilight was going to do. Twilight let down a quick gulp and smiled awkwardly. She then concentrated as her horn glowed. Lonsdaleite looked curiously at what was happening.

Lonsdaleite felt a little weird as Twilight worked her magic. She wriggled her nose for a moment before suddenly she felt something appear on her upper lip.

“Tada~ Mustache magic!” Twilight laughed a little awkwardly. The teachers looked at her a little awkwardly as Celestia put a hoof up to her chin quietly chuckling.

“...Yes...well.” Lonsdaleite wriggled her nose before her horn lit up and the mustache disappeared, “Thank you Ms. Sparkle, we’ve seen everything we need to for your evaluation.” She said simply going back to her Clipboard, “You are free to do as you like until we have completed assessing your progress.”

“Thank you.” Twilight said giving a short bow before walking out of the room. Once the door was closed behind her she let out a soft sigh. “Well...not my best evaluation...I mean, normally I have a lot more to show off than that but...” she thought it over, “Well...I did spend most of my study time on that ridiculous spell...well, it was worth it, I’ve found a whole slew of

new spells to learn from Merlin.” She grinned to herself, walking away from the evaluation room.

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“A B+ huh?” Twilight chuckled as she placed her suitcase onto the chariot, before turning to face Celestia, “Well it certainly could’ve been worse.”

“I’m surprised you held back on using the Mind Delve spell my student.” Celestia smiled, “That probably would’ve earned you a perfect score.”

“Well...I did promise my friends Princess.” Twilight smiled, “And losing a friends trust is the fastest way to lose a friend forever.”

Somehow, someway, through the miles between Canterlot and Ponyville, despite the difference in height and no way for that sentence to have been heard, an echo of Pinkie’s voice was heard clearly across Canterlot.

“FOOORRREEEEVVVEEEEEEEEEER.”

Twilight put a hoof to her face as Celestia thought the oddity curious.

“Anyway Princess, don’t worry, thanks to my time down in the archives I’ve found a whole new set of spells I can start learning.” Twilight smiled, “Princess Luna said she would help me borrow copies of Merlin’s books for me to learn from. He had a lot of interesting spells I’d like to learn.”

“So you’re going to study Merlin’s work?” Celestia said surprised, “Well I know you’ll learn a great deal from him. I would dare say he was one of the greatest Unicorn’s I’ve ever seen during my days.” Twilight smiled, “It was an honor to know him.”

“I can imagine Princess.” Twilight smiled, “Though I suppose I should be heading back to Ponyville now. I can’t wait for the next time I get to see you Princess.”

“Likewise Twilight. Have a safe trip.” Celestia gave Twilight a quick nuzzle, Twilight returning it happily.

As the chariot took off towards Ponyville, Twilight felt elated at her trip. Though she hadn’t learned enough about the Mind Delve to satisfy her interest, she had come out richer for the trip. Luna promised she’d continue the research and keep her informed as well as supply her with good books from Merlin.

And though she didn’t know it now, the spells she would learn would prove useful in her coming future...

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The End Of
Study of the Mind Delve
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# Silent Ponyville 3

## Prologue

A soft chill blew through the brisk winter's day. A blanket of snow covered the ground far below, as Celestia's chariot soared through the sky.

*'What a beautiful day for a wedding.'* Celestia thought with a smile sprawled across her face. It had been far too long since she had last been able to attend a wedding, her royal duties always coming first. However, with Luna back she could afford to take time off on such short notice. Plus no one would blame her for going to a wedding where the two being wed each wielded one of the Elements of Harmony.

As Celestia's chariot grew closer to the quaint town of Ponyville, her regal eyes scanned the snow banked town, easily catching sight of the pacing lavender unicorn that stood out from the white backdrop around her. Celestia let out a soft chuckle to herself, knowing exactly how her student fussed and worried over every little detail, and now doubt a wedding between her friends was going to have her nerves on end even more than usual.

The unicorn quickly looked into the sky as a smile formed on her face, the chariot quickly came to a landing and the unicorn was upon the chariot in an instant.

"Princess! Oh thank goodness you're here! And only ten minutes and forty-two seconds late, BUT THAT'S OKAY!" Twilight laughed a hair seeming to split out of place, "We can make up for lost time! If we just move the flower girl ceremony to here-" the unicorn hastily made scribbles on a clipboard, "And move the buffet preparations to here and-"



“Twilight.” Celestia spoke clearly, interrupting her star pupil who looked up quickly, “You must calm down. If you’re too high strung the whole affair will be ruined.” Celestia laughed at the look of horror that appeared on Twilight’s face, “Besides, ten minutes won’t harm the wedding. In fact, it might make it better. Just think about it, the anticipation in the air, everypony waiting eagerly for the event to take place, the slow reveal for the audience of everything happening.” Celestia winked at her student.

“...With the music and the atmosphere the tension will be high,” Twilight spoke as the spark went off in her mind, her hair returning to normal as she smiled, “with bated breath they’ll wait on the edges of their seat, anticipating the arrival of the bride. Every moment longer they must wait drives them further to the edge until those regal doors open revealing the heavenly body behind them.”

“Now you’re thinking like a writer.” Celestia grinned happily, as Twilight chuckled herself, the joke shared silently between the two of them. “Well, I promise I won’t keep the ceremony waiting any long-” The moment Celestia’s hoof touched the ground she instantly pulled it back, stopping her thoughts and staring at the ground with her mouth agape.

“...What’s the matter Princess?” Twilight asked, confused at the Princess’s sudden behavior.

“...Twilight... you don’t...” Celestia blinked confused looking at her student standing as if nothing was wrong. Twilight just seemed to return the confused glance, before Celestia looked back the earth she had just touched. Carefully, the princess lowered her hoof back to the ground. Then almost as immediately she pulled it back, as if the ground was trying to bite her hoof.

“...Celestia, what’s going on?” Twilight asked, confused, not sure if she should be worried or not now.

Celestia didn’t speak a word now, but simply narrowed her eyes. Through her years of hardship as ruler of the land she steeled her nerves tightly and planted her hoof down upon the earth of Ponyville. A bolt of electricity ran down her spine as she felt the hair on the back of her neck stand on end. This wasn’t a natural sensation, it was unlike anything she’d felt before.

The ground had a pulse. A slow, gradual pulse that felt like something was trying to break free of the ground. The ground didn't move, it didn't show any sign that something was wrong with it. To the normal observer Ponyville was the same as it was every day. But the pulsations of the earth sent shivers down her spine; they felt menacing and vile, like they wanted her as far away from the town as possible.

"You don't feel that Twilight?" Celestia asked curiously, looking over at her student.

"Am I supposed to be feeling something?" Twilight looked down at her hooves, picking it up to look at the bottom of it, before a wind blew through sending a chill down her spine, "Well I feel a little cold if that's what you mean."

Celestia just looked at her star pupil for a few moments, before turning her attention back to the ground. The pulse was steady and even, she could count about four seconds between each wave of the feeling. But if her student wasn't feel anything, perhaps whatever was causing it could wait till after the wedding.

"Well... don't worry about it for now Twilight. Let's focus on the wedding." Celestia nodded.

"Oh... well alright Princess, if you say so." Twilight said quickly looking back to her clipboard with her checklist on it, "Alright, let's get things rolling before we delay things even more!" Twilight then quickly turned back to town hall and raced over to it, wanting to keep things on track.

"I'll have a chat with her after the wedding." Celestia spoke softly, following after her student.

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The wedding ceremony had went off without a hitch, much to Twilight's relief. Celestia had watched each moment and guest carefully, smiling the whole time. It really did seem that all of Ponyville could not feel the strange pulsations like Celestia could. That was not a sign that boded well inside the regal princess's heart. If she was the only one that could feel it, that must mean it was something involving powerful magic and that gave her cause for concern.

At the reception she watched the ponies dance and eat to their hearts content, happy over the celebration of the newest happy couple in their town. She was happy for the ponies of the town as well, even with the strange sensation constantly pulsing at her hooves, giving her an uneasy feeling. Next to her stood her faithful student, the only one who had seen her even flinch at the sensation of the town.

Celestia looked at her student from the corner of her eyes, watching her looking around amazed at everything happening. This was likely the first wedding Twilight had ever attended, Celestia could see the curious look in her eye, taking notes of the whole affair.

"They truly do make a lovely couple." Celestia spoke up to her student before chuckling softly, "Though I must admit my surprise. I had no idea two of the bearers of the Elements of Harmony would take their lives together a step further like this."

"Yeah, I didn't see it coming either." Twilight smiled, watching them. "Honestly... I don't know much about love, but even I can see that they truly love each other."

"Have you learned anything from all this?" Celestia asked, curious and amused at her student's involvement with the wedding. It was likely Twilight had learned an important lesson through it all and she was curious to hear about it.

"...I think I have Princess." Twilight smiled, Celestia listened carefully, "I've learned that love is truly a beautiful thing. It brings out the most joyful times in a pony's life and can let them have some truly amazing journeys in their future. Both of them are going to help each other to achieve their dreams because of their love."

Celestia couldn't help but smile at her student's words. It warmed her heart to know her student was learning so much since her stay in Ponyville. A curious thought crossed her mind that she just had to ask.

"Does this mean I'm going to see my student with a new colt or marefriend?" Celestia laughed softly, causing Twilight to break out in a blush.

"Ugh... I-If you need me to for my advanced studies C-Celestia... b-but that's awfully embarrassing." Twilight looked around unsettled, suddenly very nervous at the idea that she'd be forced to go on dates. Celestia couldn't help but find this behavior both cute and hilarious. She always found it curious how serious Twilight took her studies. It was a constant delight and a slight frustration on her part, but today she found it amusing.

"No worries my student, I would never force you to find love." Twilight let out a sigh of relief, "Love is something you should find on your own to make you happy. Never forget that."

"I won't princess." Twilight smiled happily now, going back to watching her friends dance. "It's a shame Princess Luna couldn't come."

"Well, she had to remain behind to continue royal duties in my absence." Celestia nodded slowly. It was true that Luna had to stay behind, and for the moment she wished she had come along. A second opinion on the pulsations would be very helpful right now.

Celestia's face grew serious as she felt the pulsing waves continue to strike at her feet. They hadn't stopped for even a moment during the entire wedding. Something was wrong with the town, and now seemed as good a time as any to let Twilight know about it.

"Twilight, there is a serious matter that I need to discuss with you." Celestia spoke slowly.

"What is it princess?" Twilight looked up at her teacher, blinking a little confused at the shift of tone.

"Well, the truth is... is that since my arrival, something has felt off.

Like something is wrong with Ponyville." Celestia spoke quietly and gravely. She could see a small shiver go down her student's back.

"What is it?" Twilight asked cautiously.

"I'm not sure... and honestly, that is what scares me right now." Celestia's words were heavy. "However, whatever is wrong with Ponyville it seems that only I can feel it."

"What... what are you feeling princess?" Twilight asked confused. Celestia thought it over, wondering just how much she should tell Twilight. She looked down at her hooves, feeling another wave pulse through, the constant sensation of the town having a heartbeat.

An idea sparked in Celestia's head.

"It's too hard to explain at the moment Twilight. But I need you to trust me that something is wrong with Ponyville and tonight I'm going to try and fix it." Celestia turned to look at the dancing ponies, "I wanted you to know so that if you see anything strange, you'll be prepared."

"But, what should I prepare for Princess?" Twilight asked still worried.

"I'm... not sure." Celestia spoke truthfully, "But I have a feeling that when I do fix this, it'll be noticeable. Right now I don't want to panic the citizens of Ponyville, but if something does happen I want you to be ready to keep them calm, alright?"

"Well... alright Princess, I'll do my best." Twilight nodded with enthusiasm.

"I knew I could count on you." Celestia smiled to her faithful student, "Now why don't you have some cake? I'm not going to do anything till nightfall anyway."

"Alright, I think I will." Twilight smiled, though Celestia could still see the worry etched onto her face. She quickly trotted over to the refreshments table to get some cake.

“I think I know what’s going on...” Celestia murmured to herself quietly, “I should be able to fix this.” She looked down at the floor as it pulsed once more.

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Celestia’s warm breath washed past her face as she walked through Ponyville. Night had fallen and the moon was glowing brilliantly overhead. Most of the town was sleeping peacefully in their homes now, many were hung over, a few just tired from the partying, the rest just eager to get to work in the morning. To their knowledge the regal Princess had left after the wedding to return to Canterlot.

However, she currently found herself walking to the center of Ponyville, just a few yards away from Ponyville town square. Each stepped seemed to echo loudly in her mind, though she knew very well she wasn’t walking as loudly as it sounded. A cold breeze blew through the town sending a small shiver down her spine.

The pulsing hadn’t stopped, not for a moment. In fact, now that night had fallen it felt like the pulsing had intensified. It was as if the sleeping ponies gave the strange sensation strength, a fact that disturbed her. She came to a stop at what she knew to be the center of Ponyville and looked at the ground, her wings spreading regally into the night air. Her body was surrounded by the moon’s glow as she straightened her stance.

“Alright, I’m not sure what’s going on, but I’m going to put an end to it.” Celestia spoke to no one in particular. Her horn began to glow a vibrant yellow as she began to weave her magic, picturing the images of the spells in her head and readying their execution. Waves of magic began to gently flow from her body and into the ground of Ponyville. The spell wove into the ground, reaching for the source of the pulsations, trying to discern its identity.

Suddenly, it was as if the town silently roared up at the intrusion of magic, pushing the magic out of the ground and sending a new, terrifying wave of energy into the streets of Ponyville.

Celestia gagged at the overwhelming sensation of this invisible fog that seemed to be choking her senses. Her horn quickly lit up once more and a bubble of energy quickly surrounded her, pushing out the seemingly toxic energy away from her body. Celestia took several deep breaths, looking at the strange air surrounding her. The air itself seemed to be deforming, changing and shifting the look of the town as the pulsation no longer felt like a pulse, but a constant wave of unreal feelings.

"I don't know what you are, but you're not welcome in Ponyville. Leave immediately." Celestia's eyes began to glow white as her horn began to glow brighter, more vividly. The crushing air seemed to hesitate and back up as the Princess began to weave her magic.

Celestia unleashed a wave of magic out from her body, bathing the strange energy in her raw unhindered magic. The air seemed to scream and wail as it was assaulted by her power, unable to stand up to it.

As Celestia's attack ended she looked around her surroundings, it seemed that the air had returned to normal and the ground had stopped its assault.

"No, that was too easy." She murmured to herself, her horn glowing once more. She reached her magic back into the ground, weaving through the dirt. It had to still be there, trying to hide from her reach. But she would drag it out and force it to stop.

Celestia gasped as something seemed to grab hold of her magic and yank on it, breaking the connection to her horn. The remaining magic dissipated into the air as she grit her teeth, a new wave of powerful energy bursting up from the ground around her. Her shield struggled against the massive onslaught of energy attacking her. She lit her horn to strengthen it, but it seemed to be too late. Large cracks formed in the shield, stretching over the entire surface before it finally broke.

Unrestrained by the shield, the energy hit Celestia like a bag of bricks, knocking her away from the center of Ponyville and sending her several meters back. She grunted and groaned as she quickly got to her feet, ready to strike back and take down this strange force. However, once she stood, she found herself unable to move.

She forced commands down to her legs but they wouldn't lift. She instinctually lit her horn to surround herself in magic to yank her free from the spot, but to no avail. Baffled she forced as much magical energy she could to surround her head. With all of her force concentrated she was able to move her head to look down at what was trapping her in place.

Celestia's eyes dilated, as she stared in horror.

A blood red seal had appeared below her. It was made of up of two large circles filled with cryptic and ancient runic lettering. Inside these two large circles were three smaller circles, also surrounded by ancient runic lettering. Celestia tried to cry out, to scream, to retaliate with her magic against the force binding her, but the force did not budge.

The energy of the symbol began to wrap itself around her, surrounding her very being. Her magic sparked and flared from her horn, but no form came to it. Her mind screamed and rebelled against the force attacking her, but she could not fight back or resist. The strange energy was reaching into her mind, grating at her sanity. Her eyes began to flash in and out of their magical state, as the probing energy distorted her perceptions and reality.

With her very last ounce of ability, she concentrated the last of her magic into a single point to save her sanity. With a soft grunt the last of her magic burst, erupting into an explosion in the middle of Ponyville. For a moment fire billowed up into the sky, but was silenced just as quickly as it came.

The town was quiet once more. The struggle between Celestia and the invisible force was over. It seemed the town hadn't wakened from the sound of a struggle, deaf to what had just occurred.

Ponyville fell deathly silent that night, the residents unaware of the battle for their lives that had occurred. For after the fight, there was only one clue left over from what occurred.

A thick fog had rolled through the town of Ponyville.



# Chapter 1

Twilight stirred in her bed, feeling the end of a fitful sleep ending. She rubbed her head as she sat up in her bed, groggily yawning. She blinked several times trying to get an eyeful at her room to determine the time. However, things simply remained dark.

“...It’s too early to be waking up.” She grumbled at herself before sinking back into the soft covers of her bed and closing her eyes to rest. She tossed around in her bed getting comfortable once more. She would spend a few minutes in one position, before tossing into a new one trying to return to slumber.

This pattern continued until she finally grew frustrated with her own inability to go back to sleep. She sat up once more and rubbed at her eyes, trying to clear the sleep and drowsiness from them. As she blinked to try and examine her room again, she found herself blind. She raised a hoof to her face and waved it, trying to determine how dark it was. The hoof touched her forehead and yet it was still so dark that she could not see it.

“What the...” Twilight whispered confused, turning her head to the direction of where she knew her window to be. On any normal night there would be the moon and natural lights of Ponyville shining through, allowing her to at least see the faint details of her room in the darkened night. However, the window seemed just as muted as the rest of her room. This darkness that was surrounding her wasn’t natural.

“Okay, what’s going on?” She grunted to herself as she concentrated, her horn flaring up with the simple light spell that illuminated the room for her. The familiar room appeared before her groggy eyes before she turned to look at the window and letting out a short gasp.

On the outside of the window a piece of plywood had been hammered against it, blotting the sun or moon from piercing through.

“Oh, of all the no good pranks...” Twilight sighed turning her head to the lanterns that hung around her room. With a swift flick of her magic the

lanterns burned brightly filling the room with light once more. She dimmed her horn as she heard her young dragon assistant groaning at the sudden intrusion of light.

“Is it morning already?” Spike groaned, sitting up with a yawn and rubbing his eyes.

“Most likely Spike.” Twilight said getting up from her bed, “It seems somepony put up plywood to block the morning sunlight. It was probably Rainbow Dash getting in one last prank before she leaves for her honeymoon.” Twilight motioned with her hoof to the window.

“Oh...” Spike said scratching his head a little confused, “Weird prank then.” He stretched from his little cot hopping out and heading for the door downstairs, “I guess I’ll go ahead and get breakfast started then.”

“That’s very thoughtful of you Spike.” Twilight smiled as she watched her assistant head off.

“What’s a number one assistant for anyway?” Spike grinned as he made his way down the stairs. Twilight smiled happily at his energy after having just woken up and walked over to her bedroom mirror. She levitated the resting comb up and began to brush her hair. It certainly wasn’t a disheveled mess, but it needed a good combing. She was quickly going over the events of yesterday in her mind, over how she worried about organizing the wedding and being glad everything came through, over how beautiful the ceremony itself had been, how Celestia had confided to her some strange secret.

“Oh... that’s right.” Twilight turned her head to look at the barricaded window, “I wonder if she was successful at what she wanted to do?” Twilight pondered this thought for a moment before simply smiling, “Oh of course she did. She’s the Princess, when she sets her mind to fixing a problem she always succeeds.” Relieved with her own revelation she gently levitated the brush back down onto the nightstand.

“...Huh, what’s this?” Twilight asked confused, looking at something that hadn’t been on her nightstand before. A small, thin brown box sat there, on top of it was a sliding puzzle consisting of fifteen pieces that

formed a scrambled image, one she couldn't decipher by simply looking at it.

Twilight levitated the strange box, so she could see it better. The box had a hinge on the side and seemed to open down the middle of it. Twilight shook the box gently, hearing something rattle inside of it. She tried to pry open the box to see what it contained, only to find it locked soundly. She stared puzzled at it for a moment, when a thought clicked through her head.

"Oh, I see, the picture must be the locking mechanism. If I solve it the box will open." She smiled as she began to move the tiles on the box, each sliding motion giving a satisfying 'click' as she worked.

"TWILIGHT!" Spike suddenly shouted rushing back into the room interrupting Twilight's puzzle solving.

"What is it Spike?" Twilight asked confused at the sudden urgency of the baby dragon.

"It's not just the bedroom window! It's the whole house!" Spike pointed down the stairs with urgency.

"The whole house?" Twilight said dumbstruck by this. She quickly followed Spike out of her room and down into the lower floors of the library. Sure enough, as she looked around every single window she could spot was boarded up tight with the same plywood blocking any light from entering. Spike had already lit as many lanterns around the house as he could, illuminating the interior of the library for them.

"Okay, what the hay?" Twilight demanded walking to the front door. Her horn lit up and grabbed hold of the borders and pushed at it to open as she was going to get to the bottom of this elaborate prank.

Twilight ran face first straight into the door. She stepped back a few paces and shook her head, rubbing her snout. The door remained firmly locked before her. She glared at the door and lit it up with magic once more, pushing and pulling on it to force it open. The door refused to budge an inch however, no matter how much force Twilight applied.

"Why is this door locked? Why can't I open it?" Twilight growled with frustration, "Okay, this prank has gone far enough. How am I supposed to see Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy off to their honeymoon if I can't leave my house?" She groaned walking up to the door with a hoof and trying to use the handle. It was then that she noticed something new was on the door that hadn't been there before. A new lock had been installed into the center of the door. It seemed that the lock was holding the door in place.

"...Spike, get me the book that has the lock picking spell in it." Twilight spoke calmly.

"Right away!" Spike saluted before dashing across the library to grab the ladder. He wheeled it over to section 2, before climbing up to shelf G. He quickly pulled a brown book from the shelf and waved it, "Here it is, A Guide to Locks and Mechanisms!" Spike grinned happily as the book was suddenly engulfed in light, "Whoa!" Spike cried out as Twilight's magic dragged him and the book over, causing him to smash into the floor.

"Oh, sorry Spike." Twilight said quickly helping him up and dusting him off, "I'm just a little frustrated. I don't want this to hinder us from our plans today."

"Yeah, yeah, I understand." Spike sighed softly, "While you figure this out I'm going to go ahead and make breakfast." The young purple dragon quickly headed for the kitchen to start preparing them meals.

"Alright, lock picking, lock picking..." Twilight quickly flipped through the pages looking for just the right spell. "Aha!" She spoke aloud acquiring the knowledge she sought. With a quick scan of the page she memorized the spell and closed the book, her horn igniting with more magic, "Let's get this lock out of the way." She pointed her horn at the door, a stream of magic firing forth and straight into the lock. She heard the tumblers moving and grinding inside of the lock before she heard a loud 'click' telling her the spell had worked.

"Finally, now let's go find out what's going on-" The door gave a jarring 'click' as Twilight tried to open it, telling her the lock was still firmly secured. "Hey!" Twilight glared at the door before igniting her magic and casting the spell once more. The lock whirred and grinded once more as

the spell danced inside of the lock before finishing with another loud 'click'. Twilight pushed on the door once more, the door resisting with another click.

"ARGH!" Twilight growled in frustration and cast the spell once more. As the spell worked on the lock Twilight grabbed the handle with both hooves and frustratingly shook the door trying to pry it open. Even as the spell finished with its usual 'click' it refused to open. Twilight sat back on her haunches and rubbed her head frustrated. For some reason the lock-picking spell was working and yet it wasn't.

"Maybe there's an anti-magic enchantment on the lock." Spike said walking into living room, with him two plates containing their breakfasts. A daisy sandwich for Twilight and a small pile of common turquoise he'd been given after the reception.

"Well, if any other unicorn enchanted it, it would be Rarity, but she isn't the type to prank ponies. Especially not like this." Twilight grumbled walking over to the table Spike had placed her breakfast onto. She took a bite trying to figure this out in her head.

"Maybe Celestia enchanted it?" Spike asked curiously, stuffing a gem into his own mouth.

"Don't be silly Spike, the Princess wouldn't go so far with something as important as seeing my friends off planned out." Twilight rolled her eyes, "Though... perhaps we can use her to get us out of here." Twilight smiled. "Spike, quickly, grab a quill and parchment."

"Can do." Spike said stuffing a few more gems into his mouth before rushing off and returning shortly with the quill and paper.

"Alright. Dear Princess Celestia," Twilight began, Spike quickly writing away, "I'm writing to you because it appears that some prankster has boarded up my house and made it impossible for me to leave. The door has been sealed with a magic resistant lock and I can't seem to open it. Since I assume you're still in town, I was hoping you could stop by and help me out so I can continue with my day. Your Faithful Student, Twilight Sparkle."

“Done and done.” Spike said punctuating the letter with finality before rolling the scroll up. With a quick inhale he held the scroll up and exhaled the brilliant emerald flame upon the message.

The paper alight from the green flame quickly succumbed to the heat and fell as a pile of ashes onto the floor.

“...Spike! I told you to SEND the letter, not burn it!” Twilight sighed exasperated with her assistance’s work.

“But, but that’s how I always send the letters.” Spike said baffled. He quickly pulled out a spare sheet of scroll paper and quickly rewrote Twilight’s letter. He rolled it up once more and held it up, “Okay, this how I’ve sent every letter in the past.” He spoke quickly, remembering his lessons on how to send things properly with his green fire. He inhaled expertly before spewing out another emerald flame onto the paper.

Once more the message was burnt to ashes and joined the other pile on the floor.

“Wait... so... we CAN’T send letters to the Princess either!?” Twilight asked, shocked at this revelation.

“...I guess so.” Spike said just as confused as Twilight.

“...I’m starting to think this isn’t just some prank then.” Twilight said turning to look back at the door, “This is too elaborate to be some joke. Who could have done this?”

“I don’t know. No pony in Ponyville is capable of preventing me from sending lette-“ Spike stopped mid sentences as suddenly his eyes bulged and he closed his mouth, his cheeks bulging as he put his hands over his stomach. Twilight quickly turned to look at her dragon assistance as suddenly he let out a loud belch, smoke and fire spewing out and circling above his head before forming in a burst of magic into a scroll.

“Huh? Maybe she got our letter anyway...” Twilight said confused quickly levitating the scroll over to her and opened it.

If this was a letter from Celestia it was the weirdest letter Twilight had ever received from the Princess. The scroll was marked with random designs and scribbled all over, done mostly in black but with some sections in red. She concentrated hard on the scroll and thought she could see something written underneath the scribbled madness. It seemed the sections in red contained the actual message that had been scribbled over by the sections in black.

“What’s it say?” Spike asked, unable to see the mess of a document.

“I’m not sure. I’m going to find out though.” Twilight said pushing her sandwich aside before laying the scroll down on the table flat. As she pushed the plate aside it bumped into something, knocking it off the table. This caught Spike’s attention and walked around the table to pick it up.

Twilight concentrated her magic and quickly scanned the scroll with it, before pulling the black ink straight off of the page. Another blank scroll was levitated over to her side and she cleanly placed the black ink onto that scroll, creating two separate documents. She glanced upon the scroll that now contained the words written in the red ink and read carefully.

for whaT Has happEned there is no apologY  
twisted be the revAlation undeR the guise of rElief  
halloWed foAl, hurT and shoCked, tHeir slght fiNdS no liGht  
no remorse no regret no apology  
no return

The letter was almost incomprehensible. If this had been intended for her to read, the message had been hidden underneath scratched up nonsense, then to top it all off the letter had strange capitalization, as if the writer had no concept of where words needed to be punctuated.

“Hey Twilight, have we always had this?” Spike asked confused, causing Twilight’s attention to rise from the note. In Spike’s hands look like some kind of small box made of what looked like mahogany.

“Let me see that.” Twilight asked, Spike handing it over as Twilight quickly inspected the box. The box had a seem near the top and small hinges indicating it was meant to be open. On the side she could see a

small hole that lead into the device. When Twilight tried to open it she found that it was locked, obviously needing something in the hole to open it.

It was then that Twilight looked up at Spike, thoughts beginning to form into each other.

“Spike, there’s no way this is a prank any longer.” Twilight put the box down and stood up from her spot, “I need you to quickly search around this floor of the library for anything and everything that wasn’t here before we went to sleep. I’m going to go search upstairs for the same things.”

“I understand.” Spike said quickly returning to his plate to scarf down the rest of his gems before searching. Twilight quickly made her way back to the upper floor, swiftly returning to her bedroom. On the nightstand she could see the strange puzzle device that she had been inspecting earlier. She quickly gathered it with her magic and looked around her room carefully. There were the usual strewn books, Spike’s small cluttered mess he called a bed, various decorations and reminders of her stay in Ponyville for the last year. Not seeing anything out of the ordinary, she made her way to the bathroom.

Lighting up the bathroom with its lantern, it seemed the same at first glance. Towels where they should be, the bathtub empty, the mirror above the sink reflected her image as always. However, on the sink, alongside the usual sundries was a newer brown bottle. The label read ‘Health Drink’ on it. Twilight levitated the drink as well and quickly headed back downstairs certain she hadn’t missed anything else obvious.

She saw Spike was still searching quickly around the library, trying to not leave any space unturned. Twilight quickly walked over to the table and placed down her two items and quickly re-examined what they had already. It only took Spike another minute before he returned to the table carrying another note.

“This was the only other thing I could find.” Spike said looking the note over, “It says, ‘When all is lost, when the darkness is its strongest, when all is cold and bleak, you’ll find the light.’ What do you think it means?” Spike asked, placing it next to the rest of the strange items.



"I'm not sure Spike... I don't even know what these things are doing here. But I plan to find out." Twilight said quickly scanning through the various items on the table. There were three notes, two of which were part of the one she had split in half, two boxes, one with a sliding puzzle on top and the strange Health Drink bottle. "But I'm going to figure this out."

Twilight quickly grabbed the quill Spike had used to write his letters and brought it over to the first letter she had read. Something about the way it was written was bothering her and she couldn't just leave it as it was. She reread the note once more, before putting the quill to the bottom of the note. She quickly wrote down each of the capitalized letters in order as they appeared.

"...They are watching?" Twilight looked up and around her house. There was no one there except for her and Spike. How would it be possible for anyone to be watching them?

"That was in the letter from the Princess?" Spike asked scratching his head, "This just doesn't seem like a letter from Celestia."

"That's what worries me about all this." Twilight said, the concern in her voice was apparent, "Hopefully opening these boxes will yield some answer. And since I don't see a way to open this box yet," Twilight said moving the mahogany box to the side, "I'll try and open this one first." She levitated the sliding puzzle box into her sight and began clicking away at the puzzle.

"What's it a picture of?" Spike asked curiously, watching Twilight work away.

"I'm not sure. I'm trying to figure that out right now, so that I can solve this thing easier." She concentrated on getting separate pieces to match up so that she could figure it out sooner. Spike watched carefully, adding in his input, much to Twilight's discontent. It took several minutes before she started seeing a pattern forming in the image. As she clicked pieces together and started seeing the full image, she simply grew more confused.

"It's some kind of circle pattern?" Spike asked confused.

"It's not one I've ever seen." Twilight said just as confused, still clicking the pieces away. She could make out the general shape of the

picture now. She could see where each piece was able to go and was able to complete the puzzle much more efficiently. It took her just a moment to complete the picture.

The completed picture was a red symbol consisting of two large circle filled with strange, cryptic runic writing, while inside those two circles were three smaller circles also surrounded by the strange writing.

When Twilight completed the puzzle the box let out one final satisfying 'click', telling Twilight she had solved the puzzle correctly. Happy with her work she opened the box, its contents revealing nothing more than a music box key. Twilight carefully lifted it up, examining the piece. She then looked over at the second box on the table, noticing that the small hole in the side was the same size as the end of the music box key.

"Really?" Twilight groaned, "I opened up one box to get the key to another?" She sighed before lifting up the second box now and slipping the key into the hole. It fit snugly inside the small opening and seemed to stick. She slowly turned the key, hearing the gears grind inside of the device with each turn. Spike watched her carefully, grabbing hold of the table as Twilight cranked the key. With one final turn, the small box clicked.

Twilight reached to open the box, when the lid suddenly flipped open on its own accord.

Something suddenly burst out of the box, rising into the air. Twilight nearly dropped the box surprised by the action, as whatever it was hit her ceiling and exploded into a bright burst of light. Spike and Twilight shielded their eyes from the blast, waiting for the light to dim. Once it did, they blinked and looked up into the air, seeing a small shower of sparkling lights falling to the floor.

"What's all this about?" Spike asked, unsettled by the strange display that had erupted from the box.

"Have you finished the preparations?" A familiar regal voice said from behind them. Twilight and Spike instantly snapped their heads around, seeing a translucent figure of Princess Celestia standing there. "This is an important night after all."

Twilight opened her mouth to speak to the image of the Princess, only for her to be interrupted by a second, familiar regal voice.

“We have ensured the preparations for the festivities. Thou need not worry, thy subjects shall be safe with us.” The dumbfounded unicorn and dragon turned their heads back around, seeing a similar translucent image of the dark blue alicorn with a dark magical mane, Princess Luna, walking towards Celestia. “Now thou should go, so that thou is not late. Thou should not keep thy friends waiting.”

“Very well, thank you for everything Luna.” Celestia bowed her thanks before turning around and quickly heading out.

“Tis nothing dear sister, we shall always be willing to help thee.” Luna smiled.

The falling sparks of light faded from the world leaving the two in a state of awestruck dismay. They could not find the will to believe that had just happened.

“What the hay was that all about?” Spike finally broke the silence, throwing his hands into the air, “Images of the Princesses? I’ve never seen magic like that before! What’s going on here Twilight?”

“Spike...” Twilight spoke softly, uneasily, “I don’t know. I really wish I did know. I’m getting a very bad feeling about all of this. Right now I need to find somepony, preferably Princess Celestia, but if I can find my friends they can help us out too. After all, we can do anything as long as we’re together.” Twilight smiled reassuringly before looking inside of the box she had just opened.

“Hey, what’s this doing in here?” Twilight levitated a thin stringed pendant with a point cut crystal with a decorative silver frame.

“Hey, isn’t that the pendant used to search for books in the Canterlot archives?” Spike asked curious about the device.

“It is Spike. But what is it doing in this box?” Twilight looked at it curiously, twirling it around with her magic. She then concentrated and

poured some of her magic into the device, it lighting up brightly. "Well, it seems to be functioning alright." She commented before gently wrapping the pendant around her neck for safe keeping, "I'll hold on to it till we can return it to Celestia." With that said Twilight checked inside the box once more to see if anything else was left inside.

"Hey, a key!" Twilight said surprised at her discovery. She pulled the thin skeleton key out of the box and examined it.

"Do you think it's the key to the front door?" Spike asked looking over at the locked door.

"Only one way to find out." Twilight said turning to the door and walking over to it. She guided the long key into the door and heard the tumblers click into place. With a quick turn of the key she heard the door let out another 'click' telling her it should be unlocked, though after having heard that sound several times she admittedly had her doubts. She raised a hoof to the door and pressed against it to see if her actions had worked.

The door swung noisily open, as if the hinges hadn't be used in years and were rusted over, a fact that seemed strange to Twilight. However, once she opened the door all thoughts of the creaky hinges left her mind.

A thick sheet of fog sat just outside her door frame, shrouding all of Ponyville within the confines of its embrace. Twilight couldn't even see the houses across the street. The fog only allowed a few feet of visibility.

"Holy guacamole, I've never SEEN weather like this in Ponyville before!" Spike said shocked, looking at the fog himself. He stepped outside the door frame and waved his hand through it quickly, some of the fog moving to his actions, but quickly being replaced by more fog.

Twilight continued to stare in disbelief at the sight before her. Rainbow Dash wouldn't have let fog like this cover Ponyville, never in any of the weather forecasts in Ponyville had it called for the town to be shrouded in fog. Were weather ponies trying to desperately clean it away? How was it even possible to have such a freak fog covering just suddenly appear over night? This much fog would take a while to build up, not to mention there would be warnings over it being placed over the town. Everything about this was unnatural.

*"I wanted you to know so that if you see anything strange, you'll be prepared."*

Celestia's words suddenly came back to Twilight, awaking her from her stupor like a splash of cold water to her face. Twilight quickly turned back around and ran back to the table.

"Twilight?" Spike asked, turning to see the strange actions of his unicorn mentor.

Twilight quickly levitated each of the remaining items on the table, accounting for the three notes and the health drink. She closed her eyes and concentrated, creating a pocket inside of her magic reservoir, the four items disappearing from the world and finding a home inside of the pocket. She then turned around, looking at Spike seriously.

"Twilight, why do you look so serious?" Spike said, unnerved more by the serious looking Twilight than anything else that had happened that morning.

"Spike, I'm heading out into Ponyville. I need you to stay here and make sure nothing hap-" Twilight stopped suddenly as her eyes widened, her mouth dropping and her pupils dilating.

Spike lay on the ground before her, his body dismembered and the separate pieces scattered around the floor. His hot blood was splattered everywhere, including on her coat. Scratched claw marks trailing blood were along the wall where the tiny dragon had tried to escape from its attacker. The blood burned against her coat, telling her it was all her fault.

She wanted to scream, to cry, but her voice caught in her throat and choked her.

"Twilight?" Spike called out, causing Twilight's head to snap back, her eyes looking at her dragon assistant standing by the doorway. She quickly scanned the room, trying to find traces of the horrific scene she had just witnessed. "Twilight, you're scaring me. What is it you want me to do?"

Twilight couldn't speak for a moment. She felt completely shaken by the vision she had suddenly seen, one which she couldn't understand. She only knew one thing that the vision told her.

If she left Spike in the library, something horrible was going to happen to him.

"Change of plans Spike..." Twilight spoke, swallowing the fear that had lodged itself into her throat, "You're coming with me. We're going out to find Princess Celestia."

"Oh... well okay." Spike said, before looking out the door at the fog then back to Twilight. "Hold on, let me get something." Spike said before quickly heading over to one of the shelves. Twilight watched him with a bit of curiosity, before the dragon return carrying a large rolled up paper. "We should bring a map of Ponyville since we won't be able to see clearly in the fog." He grinned happily.

Twilight blinked oddly at the dragon, before smiling at him. The dragon's sentiments seemed to affect her even more at that very moment.

"Good thinking Spike, this is why you're my number one assistant." Twilight gave her praise to the dragon, who took it with his usual ego. Twilight didn't leave him much time to speak however, wrapping him gently with her magic before lifting him up and placing him on her back. "Let's go figure out what's wrong with the town." Twilight said confidently turning to the door.

As long as Spike was with her, she knew she could handle anything this strange fog was going to throw at her.

The two of them wandered quickly into the strangely silent Ponyville.

# Chapter 2

Twilight walked carefully through the fog, taking note of the unusual surroundings. There was no longer snow on the ground. Everywhere she could see was conspicuously missing the distinct feel of winter. In fact, the very air itself seemed to have warmed as well; the wind no longer contained the biting winter chill. In its place was a warm wind that pushed the fog slowly across town, though it never cleared the unusual weather.

“Alright, first thing we should do is find Pinkie Pie. If we find her, we’ll be able to find the Princess in no time!” Spike smiled looking over the map, “And if we keep heading down this road, we’ll make it to Sugar Cube Corner before we know it!” Spike with a grin, creating a separate atmosphere from the fog around them.

“Thanks Spike, even in the face of a crisis you’re still my number one assistant.” Twilight smiled, grateful to have him with her at the moment, hearing his voice right now was comforting. She had hesitated about taking him with her, feeling that it would have been safer to leave him in the library where he could lock himself away from any danger. At least until she’d had that vision. Whatever was going on in town, she knew Spike wasn’t safe back at the library. She wondered if there was any place in town at the moment that would guarantee his safety.

Twilight’s eyes scanned the building they were walking past, as she came to a slow stop before one.

“Huh? What’s the matter Twilight?” Spike asked wondering why the pony had stopped suddenly.

“Spike, every single house we’re passing seems to have been boarded up just like the library was.” Twilight explained, taking a short detour from their route and walking up to the front door. The entrance to the building was closed but all around she could see wooden planks had boarded up the windows blocking light from entering the building. She reached her hoof up to push against the door and heard it jam. She

fumbled with it for a bit, hearing the constant jarring of the door as if the locks were broken.

“Why do you think that is?” Spike asked, watching Twilight fumbling with the door.

“...I couldn't say.” She paused shortly to contemplate the strange door, “This phenomenon seems to have affected the whole town. Which means everypony is likely trapped inside of their homes like we were.” Twilight put a hoof up to her chin in contemplation, “Which might mean we won't be able to get Pinkie's help in finding Celestia.”

“Well, you never know until you try right?” Spike said thinking it over himself, “Besides, if I know Pinkie Pie I'm sure she's already figured out the puzzle and getting the store ready for some bad weather parties.”

“Always the optimist Spike.” Twilight chuckled, turning from the house and walking back down the road towards Sugar Cube Corner.

“Hey, someone has to be.” Spike grinned, before suddenly shifting on Twilight's back and pointing ahead, “Twilight! Look! Someone got out of their house!”

Twilight quickly looked in the direction, seeing a pony shaped figure in the fog.

“You're right Spike! Hey!” Twilight called out, quickly racing towards it, “Hey, did you escape your house too?” The figure in the fog seemed to turn its attention to Twilight, noticing her approaching. Drawing closer the two of them could discern that the figure was wearing a black cloak around its body, its face hidden beneath the hood of its cloak.

“Zecora? Is that you?” Twilight asked, finally slowing as she approached, grateful to see her friend, “Oh Zecora, thank goodness you're here. Something's happened to Ponyville and I don't know what! You know more about strange stuff like this, do you know what's happening?”

The cloaked figure just stood there, continuing to stare straight at Twilight. Twilight suddenly felt a little uneasy at the staring, having expected to hear the familiar voice of the rhyming zebra.



“Uhhh... hello?” Twilight tried to communicate once more, “Anypony there?”

“You have a kind look in your eyes that seem surprised.” A deep feminine voice escaped from the cloak, the voice seeming to send chills down Twilight’s spine as she took a step back out of instinct, “I fear soon your life will be compromised.”

“M-My life?” Twilight stammered thrown off balance mentally at the sudden sharpness of the voice before her, “H-Hey! You’re not Zecora! Who are you?” She asked trying to steady herself. She felt vibrations starting to come from her back, Twilight quickly realizing that Spike was shaking.

“Time shall weave and pass through you, and you shall be lost to the whims of the night. Shadows prowl and seek your flesh, which shall tear you apart with loud delight.” The cloaked mare began walking slowly backwards into the fog.

“Hey! Get back here! You haven’t answered any of my questions!” Twilight yelled, trying to run back to the cloaked figure. With a powerful gust of wind the figure was covered by fog before seeming to disappear into the thin air. Twilight stared dumbfounded at where the mare had been, looking around for her. There had been no sound of the pony running away, no flash of magic indicating they’d teleported. It was as if they hadn’t existed in the first place.

“I-Is she gone?” Spike asked, managing to stop shaking long enough to look over the top of Twilight’s head at where the mare had once stood.

“Yeah... she is Spike... but I have no idea where she went.” Twilight was baffled at this. It wasn’t an illusion; both of them had heard the mare talk. Something about her had scared Spike and she herself had felt a sense of unease and dread hearing the mare’s voice. “We... we should keep moving. Sugar Cube Corner isn’t much farther.” Twilight said to Spike, gulping down the anxiety building up in her throat.

“Right... We should just need to continue forward...” Spike said hesitantly, looking into the fog for the bakery. Suddenly, the strange fog seemed a lot more menacing than it had moments ago.

“Right.” Twilight nodded her head before slowly continuing with her walking. Her hoof steps seemed unusually loud now, each step seeming to echo against the cobblestone street. She hadn’t been paying attention before, but the echoing steps truly told her the town was apparently empty.

“T-Twilight... do you hear that?” Spike said, panic starting in his voice. Twilight stopped walking, as she heard a distinct sound of metal scrapping against the cobblestone. She perked her ear to hone in on the sound, hearing it several times in short succession.

Klank, klank, klank, klank.

The rhythm of the scraping metal was in tune to somepony walking. But there was more to it than that. She narrowed her eyes in the direction before her, the direction the sound was coming from. She tried to focus on what was making the sound, beginning to see another faint figure in the fog slowly heading towards them. It was then that another metal sound was heard. It was the sound of metal being dragged along the ground.

“Who’s there?” Twilight called out to the figure. The figure began to grow more definition as it slowly grew closer to her. It didn’t respond.

“T-Twilight... there’s more!” Spike said quickly turning the unicorn’s head to look elsewhere in the fog. Twilight’s eyes widened, catching sight of more figures beginning to appear in the haze of the fog. Each figure brought with it that scrapping metal of their hoof steps, as well as dragging something metal along the ground.

This unnerved Twilight. She could feel the hairs standing up on the back of her neck. There was something very wrong with what was happening around her. She slowly began to walk backwards, away from the creatures as they approached.

“Hey! Stop freaking us out! Just tell us who you are!” Twilight cried out, trying to get answers. But all of her questioning was in vain, the figures just continuing to approach. She swept her gaze back and forth rapidly between the approaching enigmas in the fog, trying to determine why they were cornering her and Spike. She counted at least five now, in a half circle around them. They were trying to stop her from continuing forward, as if they didn’t want her to go to Sugar Cube Corner.

Twilight turned her attention to the first one she'd spotted. For a moment she froze in horror, staring at the creature that had appeared from the fog. Though it looked to be in the shape of a pony, there was no way Twilight could discern it as being one.

The creature was wearing armor, though it was different from the royal guards she'd seen in Canterlot. The armor was thicker and covered much more of its body, reaching under their bellies and down their flanks. The armor was rusted away with age, covered in battle scars from what must've been many battles. The shape and design of the armor was unlike anything Twilight had seen before, the armor seemed like a much more ancient design.

But it wasn't the armor that sent fear into her spine. It was a simple look at the face of the creature. It had no eyes. Its skin was barely holding onto its face, rotted and diseased, if the creature had an identity it was long ago. The rest of the skin that was exposed through the armor shared the same fate. Twilight couldn't comprehend how the creature was standing, let alone walking towards her.

In its mouth it was dragging a hefty double-edged sword along the ground. It seemed to have difficulty holding it, yet was unhindered with its advance.

"Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-ZOMBIE PONY." Spike yelled, suddenly scared out of his mind.

"SPIKE! Calm down! There's no such thing as zombie ponies!" Twilight cried back at the terrified dragon, doing everything she could to keep herself calm too. Though she was berating him now, he had snapped her back to reality. She turned her head back to the deformed creature and forced a smile onto her face, despite the sweat beginning to fall down her face, "E-Excuse me, y-you seem to be hurt, please, let me help-"

The air was punctuated with a loud metallic clang that reverberated through the air. Twilight stood like a ghost, staring before her where the blade of the creature's sword had imbedded into the ground, just mere inches away from her. She had just narrowly escaped no longer having a head.

Twilight stood there, paralyzed by the sudden situation, as the soldier-like creature slowly pulled the blade out from the ground. Adjusting it in his mouth for a better grip, he began to lift it up for another strike at the terrified unicorn.

“TWILIGHT! TWILIGHT RUN!” Spike shouted straight into her ear. The petrified pony felt her heart skip and life return to her veins, her mind finally getting the message to her legs. Her body jumped back, instinctively moving out of the way of danger, as the sword came striking down once more, cleaving through the cobblestone with ease.

Twilight turned on her hooves to run, noticing the approach of the other creatures. Five of these things were walking towards her, some dragging swords, some dragging spears and one of them was dragging an axe. Adrenaline coursed through her and her hooves began to pound the ground with force, careening her body forward with barely any idea of where she was headed. She just ran from these abominations of nature knowing they intended to kill her and her number one assistant.

She'd never forgive herself if harm came to the baby dragon.

The sound of scrapping metal suddenly increased. She dared a glance behind her, seeing the armored creatures chasing after her. They had slowly shambled towards her, but now were in full pursuit behind her. Her mind was in full panic, turning to look in front of her once more.

She was running straight for a house, one she recognized as the house for sale near Sugar Cube Corner. The sides were boarded up just like the rest of the town, Twilight instantly realizing it must be a dead end. She looked to her sides, the creatures were preparing their weapons, to strike her down if she drew close as they chased at her. If she didn't head straight for the house she wouldn't be a whole unicorn for very long.

She gulped down panic that had lodged in her throat and put her efforts into one last ditch effort. She had to get through the door, no matter what. Her horn lit up, surrounding the door with magic. She instantly tried the lock, on the off chance it would open, before thinking she'd ram into it to break through and-

The door opened. By some miracle, as if knowing she was in peril, the door gave way to her magic. By Celestia she counted her thanks and slipped straight through the open door, slamming it closed behind her.

Without a moment of rest she whipped her head around, looking for something, anything to barricade the door with. When her eyes fell upon the couch inside the dark, musty room she instantly surrounded it with her magic and slammed the furniture against the door, firmly holding it in place.

Seconds passed, as Twilight braced the couch against the door, slowly backing away from it. She could feel the sweat pouring down her face like bullets, nervous and anxiety building up as she didn't know what was going to happen. The brief time felt like agonizing minutes, not knowing what was going to happen next.

Wood splintered and broke, the shrapnel flying across the room as Twilight shrieked, a sword slashing through the thick wooden walls. The sword got caught in the fixtures of the wall for a brief moment, before sliding back out. Spike cried out in terror, gripping hard against Twilight's neck, practically choking her. Twilight couldn't speak up in protest, only stare in horror as the next weapon broke through the wood and foundations. It was the head of a spear.

A sword slashed through next, followed by an axe right next to it. Her heart beat in her throat as she panicked, shallow breaths echoed in her ears, struggling to get air to her lungs.

The weapons wailed on the wall, creating several holes and lacerations into the door and walls. They were desperately trying to break their way in. Twilight didn't know if they would be able to break through, but she was terrified that they would.

The axe bore its way through the door once more, pausing as it sat stuck in the door frame. Twilight stared at it, waiting for the continued destruction of the weapons. The axe slowly withdrew from the door, and for the brief moments Twilight could hear the scrapping metal footsteps growing quiet.

The creatures were leaving them alone. For whatever reason, they'd stopped their assault.

"A-Are they gone?" Spike asked, not daring to look at the door the creatures had so anxiously been striking at. It was then that word finally got to her brain that Spike was strangling her.

"S-Spike... can't... breath." The words barely escaped her lips.

"Oh! Twilight! I'm so sorry!" Spike apologized and instantly let go of her neck, letting Twilight inhale a much needed breath of air. She gasped and panted for a moment, letting the musty air fill her lungs, before coughing it back out, crashing down into a laying position on her belly.

"I've been better Spike." Twilight finally managed to mutter, starting to feel the rush wear off. With her body calming down her mind could finally start to process what exactly it was that had just happened to them.

"Twilight, what WERE those things?! They looked like zombies! Zombies wielding swords and spears and axes!" Spike grabbed his head, the baby dragon starting to freak out, "They tried to attack us! We almost lost our heads! I thought zombie ponies weren't supposed to be real!" Spike was now in full panic mode.

"Spike..." Twilight gasped for air, standing up slowly, looking at the rambling, frantic dragon, "Spike, calm down." She spoke calmly, the baby dragon looking up at her, his mind still racing.

"Calm down? CALM DOWN!? Did you SEE what almost happened to us!?" He cried desperately, waving his hands at the splintered wall and door.

"...I did Spike. But... panicking about our situation isn't going to help it." Twilight said taking a deep breath, "We know we're in a bad situation. But if you panic, you'll only make a bad situation worse."

"...Are... you lecturing me?" Spike asked almost shocked, "Now? Of all times?"

Twilight blinked a bit confused, before smiling softly at the baby dragon, amused by his statement. It was true; she was giving him a bit of her usual lecture. But seeing the young dragon she cared for so much

being frantic seemed to spark some instinct inside of her that told her she needed to keep him calm. The same instinct that hold told her to bring him with her, was now telling her she needed to make sure he was going to be alright. That his wellbeing was more important than her own. The feeling told her that she couldn't let what just transpired get to her for Spike's sake.

"Maybe a little. But listen, if we panic we're going to make bad decisions, and if we make bad decisions, we're going to run into those things again."

"Zombies." Spike interrupted.

"Spike, do you really believe we were chased down by zombies?" Twilight asked unsure of the answer.

"Well... they LOOKED like zombies, SOUNDED like zombies, and ATTACKED us like zombies... I'm going to go with zombies." Spike listed the reasons off on his fingers.

"Fine, so zombies are apparently real." Twilight did not find comfort in that statement, "The better question is, what are they doing in Ponyville and why?" She looked over at the splintered wall once more, "There has to be some reason, some explanation that'll tell us what's going on here."

"This is bad Twilight! What if they're turning the whole town into a zombie horde as we speak!" Spike shivered at the thought of being attacked by a massive army of the creatures.

"...I don't think that's likely Spike." Twilight put a hoof to her chin as she thought about how the creatures looked, "Though you're right that their skin and manner of moving was similar to the stories about zombies, they were still different from those stories. For one thing they all were wearing armor; if they were ponies from this town why would they be wearing such regal looking armor?" Twilight began to pace as she thought, "Second of all they attacked us with weapons. The zombies from any story we've heard about attack by biting and spread infection that way. If they were trying to amass an army, they would want us infected and in one piece."

“Well... maybe they’re really CONFUSED zombies! You know they lose control of their thoughts when they turn.” Spike said trying to give favor to his argument.

“Let’s focus Spike.” Twilight shook her head, “The biggest problem here is that those ‘zombies’ are roaming around town! They’re likely attacking innocent ponies! We have to find Celestia and put a stop to this.”

“How’re we going to do that? We can’t go out the front door; those things are probably waiting for us!” Spike motioned once more to the broken front door. Twilight had to admit; even she was unwilling to go out that door now.

“I guess we’re just going to have to find another way out.” Twilight looked around the room, getting a good look at it now that she wasn’t distracted by fear of her life or Spike’s rambling about the zombie ponies. They were in the house’s living room, the couch that had been in the middle of it was now pressed against the splintered door. The center of the room had a broken table, split down the middle and laying in pieces. There were several doorways scattered about the living room, one leading to the kitchen, one to what looked like a closet, one to what seemed to be a basement that was boarded up and one that lead to a bathroom that was also boarded up. Then there were the stairs to the upper room, a balcony could be seen from the first floor that showed doors on the second floor.

“Alright, I have no idea whose house we’re in right now, though it doesn’t look like anyone’s lived here in quite some time.” Twilight turned towards the opening to the kitchen and walked towards it. As she entered she finally began to notice just how dark it was inside of the house. She could barely see anything within the kitchen. Her instinct was to start casting the light spell, when a thought occurred to her.

If she was using the light spell and had to switch to a different spell, the light would cut out and she’d be stuck in the dark. If there was a monster in hiding waiting to attack her, she wouldn’t be able to see where she needed to defend herself.

This was a problem. Twilight took a moment to think about it, knowing full well she still needed a light. As she lifted a hoof up to her chin to think, the material of her pendant brushed against it. Surprised, she looked down



to remind herself that she still was wearing the pendant from the Canterlot Archives.

“Oh, of course.” She smiled to herself, being reminded of it. She pressed her hoof against it and the crystal came to life, illuminating the world before her. The part of the pendant that was used to read books was now serving her as a lantern. Now that she was able to see, she quickly gave the kitchen a glance over.

The kitchen hadn't fared much better than the living room, many of the counters were a broken mess, worn away with age and rotting. Many of the doors to the cupboards were loosely hanging on the hinges that were left over with rust and age. Cracks covered the floor and there brown and red stains littered throughout the kitchen.

However, Twilight's eyes fell upon what she was looking for, a backdoor that was neatly placed at the end of the kitchen. It must've been a patio door, and if they could get to the backyard they could get around those creatures out front.

Twilight's hoof reached the door and tried the knob, hearing the distinct sound of it being locked.

“Of course it is.” Twilight sighed, looking down at the handle, seeing a keyhole similar to the one that had been inside of her house. She realized it must be similar to the situation from her own home. Somewhere within the house was the key to this door, probably hidden within some dumb box within some dumb box puzzle that she needed to figure out.

Twilight quickly returned to the living room, illuminating Spike with her pendant causing him to be blinded momentarily.

“Augh, hey, watch where you point that thing.” Spike said covering his eyes.

“Oh, sorry Spike.” Twilight chuckled softly before walking up to him keeping the light directly out of his eyes, “There's a door in the kitchen that looks like a way out, however its locked by a similar lock that was on our front door. I'm going upstairs to see if I can't find the key.”

“Oh, well alright, then I can search downstairs for anything.” Spike smiled ready to help.

“Actually Spike, I was hoping you’d just stay down here and not go exploring. I don’t know what could be waiting for us in this house, or if those things are going to attack again. If you stay here, I can hear you shout for me and I can come to you quickly.” Twilight explained as best she could to her assistant.

“But... but...!” Spike began to protest.

“No buts Spike. I can take care of myself, but I have to be able to take care of you too. It’s safe here for the moment, so please wait for me to look upstairs. I won’t be longer than a minute or two and if you need me, I’m a single shout away, okay?” Twilight pleaded to the baby dragon, hoping he’d understand. Spike hesitated for a moment, fiddling with his fingers, looking unsure of what he should do.

“A-Alright Twilight... but if YOU need me, call me right away, okay!” Spike said, giving her a look of determination in return.

“Thank you Spike.” Twilight said quickly nuzzling against him.

“Yeah, yeah, just, go find the key and... be safe alright?” Normally Spike would protest against the show of affection, but considering their circumstances, it seemed appropriate.

“I will Spike. I’m not about to leave you alone.” Twilight nodded, giving him one last reassuring smile before turning and proceeding up to the second floor. Each step on the stairwell gave a loud groaning creak to each of her hoof steps. She worried that with the age of the structure that one wrong step she would find herself with a leg stuck in broken, splintered wood.

However, the stairwell seemed to hold up and she was soon on the balcony of the second floor. She looked down to the living room of the second floor, seeing Spike looking back up at her. Anywhere from the balcony she’d have a good view of the first floor, so she could easily jump to Spike’s aid at any time. She turned her head to look at the doors on the

second floor. She counted six in total, though two of the doors were boarded up with wooden panels.

Twilight turned to the closest unbarred door; it was the only door just to the left of the stairwell.

Twilight pushed the door open, it creaking on its hinges as it moved. Twilight swept the light slowly across the room, checking to see if anything was amiss.

The room looked to be some old library or perhaps a study room. There were bookshelves that were now deprived of books, gathering dust and cobwebs with time. A few blank papers were scattered the floor near an old rotting desk. On the other side of the room she spotted something unusual. Sitting on top of a chair was a safe that looked much too heavy for the chair to be holding, yet somehow it did. On the front of the safe was a piece of paper that appeared to have some messy writing on it.

Twilight quickly walked over to the safe, examining it carefully. It just seemed to be a normal, cast iron dial safe that was unlocked with a number combination. Her horn lit with magic as she grabbed hold of the paper on the safe and lifted it up to her face to read it.

***Part of the key is locked away here. I locked it away so that it won't hurt us again. If you want the key, you must answer the riddles three, for only the combined answers will unlock the key.***

*-If you find nothing then you're not there yet, but if you find more than me then you've gone too far.*

*-At sunrise the foals came out to play. They played all day as the sun began to set and the moon rose above their heads. They continued to play despite the night, never tiring or growing weary. They did not stop till they saw the sunrise once more, and then went tired back to their homes.*

*-In my collection I have but four ponies. Though sadly two befell to an accident and lost a leg each. It's unfortunate to say, but the legs will still suffice, just need to make a small change.*

Twilight thought the note odd for a moment. After all, it just seemed like a random set of riddles set up just for her to answer.

She looked at the safe, then back at the note and pondered what the words meant in her head.

*'I suppose the answer is the combination to this safe. Which means the answer to all of these riddles must be numbers.'* Twilight looked back at the riddles and read them again carefully, looking for the answer to this puzzle.

She racked her brain for a few minutes, going over possible solutions in her head. However, she finally came to a set of numbers that made sense to her.

"Alright... one... twenty-four... fourteen..." She spoke aloud as she turned the dial back and forth. As the dial landed on the final number it let out a satisfying 'click', informing her that she had solved the puzzle. She opened the safe door and peered inside, hoping to find the key to the door downstairs.

There were two things inside of the safe, none of which were a key. She sighed, a little disappointed, though somehow not surprised, before inspecting the items there.

The first thing her eyes came upon was an iron helmet. It seemed strange to her that the item would randomly be in the safe. She picked it up with her magic and inspected it. It looked almost brand new. It shined in the light of her pendant. She pondered about just leaving it there, but something in her gut told her it'd be useful. She wasn't sure exactly how a random iron helmet would be useful, but at the same time she remembered back to the items she had obtained after solving the puzzles in her own home.

The iron helm soon vanished, being stored safely within her magic.

The other item in the safe was a strange ancient coin with weird markings on it. She levitated it closer, inspecting it. At first she couldn't tell what it was, but as she looked it over memories of books she'd read back in Canterlot came to mind. The strange designs on the coin were of ancient

Equestrian, the circle had a metallic extension on the back for imbedding it on clothing or armor and as her magic surrounded it, she could feel a soft pulse emanating from it.

“This is... an enchanted medallion. They’re used to imbue magical properties to items without them...” Twilight was fascinated at having discovered it in the safe, “Judging by the age, it must be at least a thousand years old. But despite its age it still holds a magical charge... Equestrian magic is truly amazing.” She smiled in wonder at the device.

“TWI-ZZZZZ-...”

Twilight dropped the medallion as she nearly jumped out of her skin. Instinct made her jump away from the medallion, as it began to make distorted, garbled sounds. She stared at it in shock, not sure what to make of the noises. She thought she could hear a voice playing through the strange noise.

“ZZZZZZZ-BZZZZZZ-CA-VVVVRRRRRRSSSHHHH-ED HEL-SSHRRRRUUUUUU-LONE HER-SSSSSSSHHHHHHHH-UN AWAY-KSSSSSSSSHHH”

Twilight could do nothing but stare in horror until the medallion finally grew quiet. She had no idea what had just happened with it. She’d never known medallions to store voice or sounds before. Sure, it was the basis for some of the musical equipment that was developed recently, but it was technology beyond what ponies would’ve had a thousand years ago.

She slowly approached the medallion and tapped it with her hoof. It didn’t seem to be doing anything now. She wondered if the sound had been triggered because she had poured magic into the device, as there were many items that required a regular recharge with unicorn magic.

Twilight levitated the medallion once more and gently poured some of her magic into the device, expecting to hear the sound start up once more.

She was baffled at the silence it produced. She twirled the medallion around, inspecting it from every angle she could, but nothing came from it. It was almost as if the whole thing had just been her imagination. Her brow furrowed in frustration at the piece of metal in front of her. She resigned

herself to just putting it away into her magic repository and forgetting about it for the moment. She made space in her magic reservoir for it and attempted to place it inside.

However, the coin refused to budge. Though she could lift it, for some reason it refused to go into her holding space.

“Hey, what gives?” Twilight glared at the coin, trying several times to get it to vanish from her sight and find a place inside of her magic, but it simply refused. She let out a huff in frustration at the medallion. “Maybe it’s enchanted not to work with this kind of spell. Which is stupid, why would it be enchanted against being carried inside a magic vessel?” She groaned before thinking about what to do with it.

She examined the metal extension on the back, noticing it was thin and strong, able to clamp down hard to either cloth or metal, depending on what it was going to enchant. She looked down at the string of her pendant.

The medallions metal extension slipped onto the string and snapped closed, now firmly attached to her pendant.

“There, now I’ll be able to keep hold of it.” She wasn’t sure what she was going to need it for, but the note said that these items would lead her to the key to unlocking the back door, so she needed to take them with her.

With nothing else notably interesting in the room, Twilight turned and exited the room. She looked over the railing down to see that Spike seemed to have found a candle and lit with his fire. He was staring at some pictures that were hanging on the walls around the living room.

“You okay Spike?” Twilight called down to him, causing the baby dragon to look up.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I was just looking at some stuff down here.” He replied.

“Alright, just be careful. I don’t want you getting hurt.” She was still worried about what might happen to him if she was gone for too long.

"I know, don't worry so much, I'll be fine down here." Spike nodded his head before looking back at the pictures. Twilight smiled softly at the young dragon. It wasn't very often that he knew to take a situation seriously, but it seemed he was able to this time. She was grateful for that calm rationality was going to keep them from getting hurt.

Twilight turned her head back towards the doors, examining the next open one. The door closest to where she had just left was boarded up, leaving the next door down the hallway open. The creaking floor punctuated her every footstep as she approached the door.

Twilight's ear twitched as she approached the door. She could hear something faint from behind the door, something that sounded like another pony.

She quickly pressed her hoof against the door and pushed it open, walking into a large open room. The walls were decorated with ornamental armors and weapons of varying shapes and sizes, all ones Twilight was able to recognize as made only to be displayed, not used. Banners decorated with the symbol of Equestria hung in the corners and the floor was covered with a red velvet carpet. At the opposite end of the room looked to be a statue of a pony standing on its hind legs made of bronze, holding in its hooves a worn down, rusted old sword with words written on the wall above it. In the center of the ceiling appeared to be a fresh blood stain that was slowly dripping blood into a pool.

The most striking thing about the room however, was that Twilight could hear the soft sobs of a mare crying. She looked around the room, but couldn't see a single pony from where the sound would originate.

"Hello?" Twilight called out walking further into the room. She stopped for a moment when she heard the medallion on her pendant began to hiss quietly with its static sound. She stared at for a moment, wondering if it would go quiet. When it didn't, she decided to ignore it for the moment and continue trying to contact the pony in distress.

"Hello?" She called again, though there was no response, just the continued sad sobbing. "Hello? Is anypony here?" Twilight tried desperately to call out to the pony that seemed to be in distress. She called out to her several more times, but all she got was silence in return.

"I don't get it... I can hear them, can't they hear me?" She wondered aloud to herself. She slowly walked over to the statue of the pony and examined it. It seemed to be a soldier, dressed and ready for battle, though he seemed to be missing his helmet. Twilight glanced up and looked at the wall with the writing.

*Equestria, our Nation, shall be defended in honor. For the peace of every citizen who wishes only freedom and love, we raise our shields and swords for them. We must be ready for battle should our ideals ever come to harm.*

Twilight pulled out the helm from her magic pool. She wasn't sure how this was going to get her a key to leave the house, but she knew what the riddle was telling her to do. She levitated the helm down onto the statue's head, it fitting with a snug 'click'.

The statue suddenly moved, causing Twilight to step back in surprise. The forelegs of the statue that were tightly holding onto the rusted old sword in its hooves lifted up slowly, before separating, letting go of its grip on the blade. The blade fell to the ground and landed with a small clatter. Twilight looked at the chipped blade curiously.

The blade had a purple jewel just below the white-bandaged wrapped handle, presumably to give it a better and less-painful grip when held in the mouth. The guard looked like it was made out of a dark bone. She clearly saw the massive amount of chips in the steel blade, as if it had been through many a battle and left unrepaired for years, rusting away in this spot now.

She levitated the blade up carefully, to get a better look at it. As she did, the medallion around her neck began to cry out with a loud distorted buzz.

The room suddenly shook as the gentle sobbing turned into a loud, heart-wrenching scream. Twilight felt her skin jump as she quickly turned around. The room shook once more as a loud thud struck the room. She looked back and forth, trying to find the origin of the loud noise.



Another thud shook the room and she heard a loud crack reverberate through it. She turned her head up to the ceiling, seeing specks of debris falling down as something slammed into it. She bolted her attention to the door and tried to make a run for it, to escape the room.

Another ear-piercing scream shrieked through the room, as one last thud shook the room, the ceiling bursting from the weight of the strike and knocking Twilight back as debris and rubble hit the floor.

Twilight coughed and gagged on the dust that was billowing from the floor, turning her attention to look at what had just crashed through the ceiling.

A gigantic figure was hanging from some abyss above the ceiling. Its legs disappeared into the abyss, showing just a large torso and head below. Its body was long and its skin was rotted, marred with scars and wrapped in tightly bound chains. It was missing one of its forelegs, the other was bound, broken and misshapen under the chains. The head of the creature brought horror to Twilight, as this creature was also missing its eyes. But more than that, the ears looked like they'd been put through a shredder and were barely hanging on, teeth were missing from its mouth and it was profusely bleeding from the skull, likely where it had repeatedly struck the ceiling to be free.

The creature let out a distinctive mare-like screech that felt like it would pop Twilight's ears. She folded her ears down and backed away from the creature, her back hitting a wall. Adrenaline instantly began to shoot through her veins as she stared down the creature.

It writhed in agony at its bindings. It began to thrash back and forth in the room, screeching and wailing in horrific pain. Twilight could only stare, feeling her heart thundering against her chest at the sight. She didn't know what it was, she didn't know what happened to it and the last time she'd encountered a creature it had tried to kill her.

The creature stopped its thrashing for a moment, breathing heavily. Its head seemed to focus on Twilight, Twilight freezing in fear. It was as if the creature had noticed her thoughts and turned its attention to her.

With another screech its head lunged straight at Twilight, mouth wide open intent on biting down on her.

Twilight barely managed to jump out of the way in time, as the creature crashed into the wall Twilight had been standing next to her. Twilight's hooves slipped for a moment, but she got to her feet, instinctually levitating the sword in front of her defensively. She'd never wielded a sword before, not even back during her days in Canterlot. The Princess had asked her if she would be interested in any weapon training, but she had always focused on studying magic.

Right now she wished she had done some training.

The shrieking creature pulled its body back and shook with pain and anguish, crying out constantly.

"Please! Stop!" Twilight yelled at the creature, watching it spasm under the chains, "I don't want to hurt you! If you'll just calm down I can help you!" She pleaded at the creature, trying to get it to listen to reason.

The creature refused the offer, swinging its body straight for Twilight. She jumped out of the way once more, the creature smashing into the wall.

Twilight tried to keep her balance, but the creature wasn't wasting its time this time. It pulled back quickly and thrust itself forward once more at Twilight.

Twilight gasped in shock and tried to dodge out of the way again, holding the sword up to try and soften the blow. The creature's face grazed the side of the sword as it wailed in pain, before striking the side of Twilight's body. She felt her body get knocked to the side as it smashed into the wall once more.

She groaned, feeling the impact on her sides. She knew, however, that she didn't have time to wait and adjust to her new bruises. She scrambled to her feet as the creature began to pull back once more. That constant, horrific yell was piercing straight into her, the cry of pain and agony that permeated the soul.

“STOP! PLEASE! I DON’T WANT TO HURT YOU!” Twilight cried out desperately to the creature, trying to get it to stop its assault.

The creature roared out, its jaw crashing onto her body. She let out a horrified gasp in surprise as suddenly the room seemed to flip upside down. She could feel the powerful jaw of the creature beginning to dig into her flesh. She shrieked, crying out in agony as the teeth began to dig deeper, trying to devour her alive.

The sword swung through the air, stabbing straight into the creature's throat.

The creature's jaw opened wide in agony, Twilight tumbling out as it began to flail across the room, crashing and smashing into walls all over the room.

Twilight gasped and panted for air, a hoof rubbing her neck as she stood up. The creature's wails filled her mind as she was able to spot the sword she'd been wielding imbedded in its throat. Her horn quickly lit up and her magic grabbed the handle of it, ripping the sword quickly out of its throat.

Its head slammed into the floor, shaking the whole room. Twilight's legs shook with it, trying to keep herself standing and stable, aiming the sword towards the creature once more.

The creature didn't wait for another opportunity. It bellowed its wrenching cry and rushed straight for Twilight, its mouth wide open to take her down.

Twilight didn't wait for it to get close. With a swift thrust the blade soared through the air and stabbed the creature in the mouth.

This didn't seem to falter the creature, as it still aimed to take Twilight down.

Twilight dodged out of the way, its jaws reaching where she had been standing and snapping shut on top of her blade. Her horn lit up, pouring a huge amount of her magic into the hold of the blade and forced the blade out of its mouth, dragging blood and teeth with it as it soared out.

The creature's head rammed into the ground once more, as if trying to silence the pain as its blood began to spill and drench the room with its constant movements. Twilight held the sword up over her, every nerve in her body firing at once to react, to attack, to not let this thing take her out of this world.

The creature cried out, its jaws mashing, wanting to devour Twilight. Twilight levitated the sword up, her eyes flashing white as she grit her teeth, her nostrils flaring as a turbulent wind picked up in the room. Debris began to be picked up, the splinters of the decorative weapons and armor beginning to circle with the cyclone of air. Twilight glared at the creature, the sword being the focus of her magical rage.

The creature lunged for her, mouth open and screaming.

Twilight cried out in return, forcing all the air out of her lungs as she yelled like she had never yelled before.

The sword dove through the air, guided by the magical force. The blade struck the creature, striking the bottom of its jaw and straight through its skull, embedding itself into the floor of the room.

The creature writhed and shook, its body going into uncontrolled spasms. Twilight panted heavily as she watched, the creature's agony spilling out before her. She waited, as the creature began to shake less and less.

Finally, the creature grew quiet and still. Her medallion became silent as well.

Twilight panted as her magic began to calm. Her eyes stopped blazing white and she could feel the effects of the adrenaline coursing through her veins beginning to fade as the situation was no longer one of life and death.

Her legs began to shake, no longer able to support her weight. She collapsed to her knees as her mind began to reel, her breath not slowing as the horror of what she just did began to crash in at full force.

“TWILIGHT! TWILIGHT ARE YOU OK-“ Spike cried out, finally able to get the door to open and came rushing into the room only to stop.

He could see everything. The dead creature impaled through the head on the floor, the blood that was splattered throughout the room, the horrible mess and destruction that had come from it crashing through the ceiling and destroying the walls and decorations.

But most of all, he could see Twilight, staring at him, shaking in place with wide eyes as she was beginning to deal with what just happened. Her body was splattered with blood, some of it being her own.

“T-Twilight...” Spike gasped, having difficulty taking the sight in for himself. He was rendered speechless.

“S... Spike...” Twilight’s voice quivered, shook as much as her body did. Her eyes began to shutter as much as her breath, “I... I... I killed... a living creature...” The fear was evident in her voice, the pain and grief of what she done was striking her. Spike could see the tears that were quickly beginning to flow down Twilight’s cheeks.

“I... I killed it...” She hiccupped and gasped, as her face contorted. She was trying to hold back her sobs, trying to hold back her pain and anguish. But there was no stopping it and Spike could see it. He rushed over to Twilight and threw his arms around her neck.

Twilight broke out into loud, painful sobs into the small dragon’s shoulder, her hooves holding him as close as she could.

# Chapter 3

“Here Twilight, I found some tea bags in the kitchen.” Spike said holding up the warm cup of tea for the lavender unicorn.

“...Thanks Spike.” Twilight mumbled quietly. She levitated the cup up to her mouth and slowly sipped on the tea.

It had taken a while to get the strength back in her legs, but once they had recovered, Spike led her down to the living room. Somehow he’d managed to find a blanket and wrapped it around her. In this moment of need, he was proving to her that he really was her number one assistant.

“I’m sorry Spike.” Twilight sighed softly, looking into the murky waters of her tea, “I should be the strong one right now, not y-”

“Twilight, how’re your wounds?” Spike interrupted her, looking at her seriously.

“My...” Twilight blinked a little confused before looking down at her body. She shifted the blanket a little to get a better look at the damage that had been done.

Her chest was swelling, though she was actually surprised at how small it was. She’d expected bigger bruises from the way it had felt, but she seemed surprisingly well off there. They were also the worst of her injuries. The cuts she’d received from the creature’s mouth had already stopped bleeding.

“My wounds are fine Spike. But why is that-”

“You just got hurt Twilight. I’m fine. You rest for the moment and we’ll continue when you’re ready.” Spike interrupted her again with a soft smile. Twilight blinked in confusion at him, before returning the smile.

“Sometimes I wonder if you’re really a baby dragon anymore.” Twilight chuckled softly, closing her eyes to sip her tea.

“Yeah, I’m growing up pretty fast.” Spike nodded happily. There was a comfortable silence shared between the two of them, leaving Twilight to her thoughts as she drank the warm liquid. Spike smiled as he watched Twilight relax, before softly scratching the back of his head, “Hey Twilight, I know it’s a little soon but,” Twilight looked up at her dragon assistant from the rim of her cup, “When we were in the room I saw a key on the floor next to that thing. I think that might be the key for the door. I didn’t grab it cause I was helping you, but...”

“Say no more Spike.” Twilight softly nodded her head, putting the cup of tea down and standing up, the blanket falling from her shoulders, “I’ll go grab the key.”

“Wait, are you sure? Maybe you should just-“ Spike tried to stop her from acting hastily, but Twilight just held out her hoof to silence him.

“Thanks for the concern Spike, but I’m okay now. Besides, I can handle retrieving a key from a room. I can’t let you do everything.” She took a deep breath, “I’m supposed to be taking care of you. Not the other way around.” She smiled softly at him.

“It’s okay to need help Twilight.” Spike furrowed his brow, looking worried for her.

“I know, and if I need it I’ll ask.” Twilight rubbed his head gently, “I’ll be okay, just wait for me and I’ll be right back.”

“Alright Twilight... I trust you.” Spike still looked at the lavender unicorn with worry, but did as she asked.

“Thank you Spike.” She nodded before turning to the stairs. She looked up the flight towards the walkway that lead to the room they’d escaped from, swallowed a lump that had formed in her throat, and then slowly began her ascent back up.

‘Come on Twilight. If Spike can handle this, you can too. He’s just a baby dragon, you’re an adult unicorn AND Celestia’s personal student. You can face what you did.’ She mentally reassured herself several times. She could feel her face flushing with anxiety, her heart beating more heavily

with each hoof step. She was trying to force herself to stay calm, taking deep breaths while repeating to herself that everything would be okay.

At the top of the steps she hesitantly looked into the half open doorway leading to the destroyed room. Even as she approached she could glimpse some of the rubble and destruction within, most prominently the spatters of blood that had come from the thrashing-

“You okay Twilight?” Spike’s voice carried from the first floor.

“Yeah. I’m fine Spike.” She quickly flashed him an assuring smile before walking to the door and stepping inside.

A hoof went straight to her mouth as she observed the remains of the room. The creature’s corpse was still there in the center, lying limp in a pool of its own blood. She couldn't look away, only barely able to discern the destroyed decorations everywhere, the wrecked walls and ceilings, the room of utter chaos laid out around her.

But something was also amiss. Something about the room didn’t seem right. As if some important detail that she had left there was no longer where it should be...

“The sword! Why isn’t it still...” Twilight stared in shock at the head of the creature. The sword that should have been impaled through it wasn’t there. Instead, looking just in front of the creature, she saw it lying on the ground, not a speck of blood on it. Right next to it on the floor she saw a small glint of light reflecting off of a small key.

Had the sword fallen out of its head? Had it not actually been dead and managed to pull the sword out before it died? Had something else come along and pulled it out? Had she or Spike pulled it out without either of them realizing? Were they still not alone?

Twilight gulped down another lump of nervousness that had formed in her throat. Not daring to take another step into the room, she felt fortunate that her desired items were already within her line of sight. She quickly lit her horn up and wrapped the sword and the key with a magical aura. The two items quickly disappeared into their waiting storage inside her pool of magic and the room grew dim once more. She hadn’t planned on bringing



the sword with her, but if more things were going to go wrong then she might need to defend herself again.

Not waiting to see what surprises might pop out at her, Twilight quickly turned around and headed back down the stairs.

“Okay Spike, I grabbed the key. Let’s go ahead and get out of this place.” Twilight said trying to hide her desire to leave from Spike as she hurriedly walked past him.

“Oh, uh, sure Twilight. Once we head out we should continue looking for your friends or the Princess.” Spike suggested, making a mental note of the task at hand while following after the lavender unicorn.

Twilight wasted no time turning her pendant on and illuminating the kitchen. She summoned the key once more and approached the locked door, fitting the key into the lock. With a turn the key opened the lock. With a push of the hoof the door opened, revealing the fog laden world just beyond it.

It lead to the backyard of the house that was surrounded by a small fence cornering it off from the streets of Ponyville. It seemed a small garden used to be raised there, but the small patch of vegetables had fallen to a state of rotten disuse. The grass was dying and the air suddenly felt thick.

“Whoa, look Twilight, it’s snowing again!” Spike said eagerly running out into the backyard without a care.

“Spike wait! We don’t know if it’s safe yet!” Twilight cried out, chasing after the baby dragon.

Spike didn’t seem to care though, just looking up into the fog filled sky as specks of white floated down around him. He briefly spun in place before opening his mouth and sticking his tongue out, letting one of the flakes of snow land on his tongue.

Instantly he retched and started spitting, wiping his mouth of the vile snowflake.

“Ugh! That wasn’t snow at all!” Spike groaned as Twilight walked up next to him.

“Not snow? What do you mean it’s not snow?” Twilight wondered, looking up at the flakes. She held out a hoof as a speck landed on it. She expected it to be cold and to melt, instead it seemed to smear onto her coat. Perplexed, she drew her nose closer to it but didn’t notice any smell aside from the thick smell that seemed to hang in the air. Curious about what Spike had tasted she licked the speck that had landed on her hoof.

“...This isn’t snow...” Twilight whispered to herself, suddenly realizing what was falling from the sky, “Its ash...” Suddenly the thick smell in the air made sense and brought a horrible realization to her mind. Either something in Ponyville was burning, or these were the remains of something having been burnt and scattered through the sky.

“...Uhhh... Twilight...” Spike said suddenly scared of something. Twilight looked down at the baby dragon, before looking to where his eyes had followed. She regretted what she saw.

It must’ve been the owner of the house, or at least what was left of her. It was a mare she vaguely memorized, one of the newest ponies to move to Ponyville. She had a strikingly white coat and silver mane. Her body was covered with lacerations, as if she had been severely whipped all over staining her white coat with blood. But worst of all was that she had been mounted to a large wooden cross with giant nails piercing each of her hooves and holding her in place. The mare to which this had happened was named Winter Withers.

Winter had been crucified.

“Oh... Oh Celestia... we have to get her down!” Twilight said racing over to the crucified pony. She wrapped the mare in her magic, gripping hard against the nails before pulling them out carefully. The body went limp in Twilight’s magical embrace as she carefully lowered the pony to the ground. As the white mare lay there Twilight put a hoof to her neck, desperate for any sign of life.

“Is... is she...” Spike stuttered, walking up slowly.

Twilight was quiet for a few minutes, hoping for a conclusion that wasn't what Spike was thinking. She checked several spots where she knew she would be able to feel a heartbeat. She put her ear next to her mouth to try and hear breathing. Finally, her horn lit up and she placed a small blanket of magic on her chest to try and detect a heartbeat.

Twilight's face grew dim as the magic of her horn faded, closing her eyes and softly shaking her head.

"Oh no... why is this happening Twilight?" Spike asked, now truly scared. It had been one thing for Spike when he had seen a monster dead. It was another to see a pony mutilated and hung up for display.

"I... I don't know Spike." Twilight spoke softly, looking down at the mare's face. Winter was a face she rarely saw in the streets of Ponyville, someone who had recently moved there to get away from her city life and enjoy a peaceful one there. They'd only talked on two occasions, and with it being a small town she was having a hard time adjusting to everypony knowing everypony else.

Twilight stood up, her horn lighting up once more. With her magic she quickly formed a shovel and began to dig up the dirt of the back yard. Spike watched silently as Twilight dug the hole. The two of them could only hear the stifled sound of the shovel digging into the dirt as she dug deeper. It took a long time for the hole to be deep enough to satisfy Twilight, yet not a word was shared between the two of them.

Twilight carefully wrapped the white mare's body with her magic and placed it down at the bottom of the hole. Picking up the excavated dirt with her magic she gingerly placed it back in, covering the mare and filling the hole. She made sure the dirt was meticulously flat before forming a block of wood into the shape of a head stone and placing it at the front of the grave. She carefully etched onto it, 'Here lays Winter Withers, may she find a peaceful rest.'

Twilight sat at the foot of the freshly dug grave, looking solemnly at the ground. Spike walked up and sat next to her, putting a claw against her back.

"Maybe we should say a few words?" Spike mentioned solemnly.

"You're right... but... I barely knew anything about her. I met her briefly Spike, enough to know her name and why she moved but... she was just a passing friend." Twilight sighed softly, not sure what to make of this. Just knowing everypony in Ponyville wasn't enough to call them true friends. If she only had one conversation she could maybe call them a friend, but she didn't truly know a pony in that case. It took a while to truly earn great friends like the ones she had.

"Winter..." Twilight spoke up softly, "I'm sorry I never got to know you that well. You seemed like an interesting pony and... I know you were starting to enjoy life here in Ponyville. You were starting to make friends and who knows; maybe you could've become a great member of the community..." Twilight paused for a moment, turning her head away from the grave feeling guilt hit her stomach, "And I'm sorry you had to die this way. You didn't deserve this... nopony deserves this." She took a deep breath and looked back at the grave, "And I promise... your death won't have been in vain. We may not have been the closest of friends, but you were still one of mine. I'll put a stop to whatever is going on here Winter, you have my word."

Twilight stood, feeling the weight of her words in her heart. Spike looked up at the unicorn, not sure how to feel anymore. In the span of a few minutes, the two of them had been through more emotions than they ever thought they'd go through in a lifetime.

The young dragon's body was surrounded with magic as Twilight lifted him up on to her back.

"Alright Spike, we have to find the others now. We can't leave things like this, not if innocent ponies are going to get hurt." Twilight spoke with near vengeance in her voice.

"But... But Twilight, what if... what if they..." Spike hesitated, looking back at the bloody crucifix that stood impaled in the ground before them. Twilight looked at the device, glaring at it. Twilight was reminded of when she had read about the horrible devices, where she had learned what being killed this way was called, in the biography of Merlin the Great.

*Upon hilltops of Saint Clydesrow was where I saw the ghastly sights of our fellow blood, nailed to wood in the shape of a cross to serve two purposes; one of execution, the other of warning. Their bodies spoke of the atrocities the nation would commit. If you broke their laws, invaded their land or offended their nobles, the fate of death was brought to you. You would be seen by those you knew and loved, by your enemies and by your Goddess, that you were an example of their power. They called this execution the 'crucifixion'.*

Twilight grit her teeth as her horn flared once more. The bloody cross was gripped in her magic and let out a loud groan as the wood began to bend. With a loud and powerful snap, the cross fell over, slamming into the ground in two pieces. Twilight stared with satisfaction at her work and walked towards the edge of the small picket fence that surrounded Winter's yard.

"Our friends are going to be okay Spike; they wouldn't let this town get to them so easily. Now hold on." Twilight told the baby dragon. Taking her advice he gripped tightly to her neck as she took a few steps back and galloped at full speed. She cleared the fence in a single jump, landing once more into the cobble stone streets of Ponyville.

"Spike, do you know where we are in town at the moment?" Twilight asked pulling the map out of her pool of magic and handing it to Spike. Spike fumbled with it for a moment before opening it properly. He swallowed down nervousness that had been building up and cleared his throat, examining the map.

"I'd... guess we're on Pen Street." Spike followed the roads, noting the buildings that they had been around before being chased into the mansion, then the location of the mansion itself. "So, Sugar Cube Corner should still be the nearest place, we just have to head to the right and down the road." Spike explained.

Just as he finished though, the medallion on Twilight's neck began to let out a buzz.

"What's that!?" Spike said jumping into the air and landing on Twilight's back. Twilight grunted at the sign and sighed softly.

"It's something I found in that house that seemed important." Twilight lifted the necklace of her pendant up to show Spike the medallion that was attached to it, "It was doing this back at the house too. It was acting right before-"

Twilight was interrupted by the sound of metal scrapping against the cobblestone. Spike and Twilight instantly turned their attention to the direction of the fog, seeing a silhouette of a pony once more.

"Oh no, not more of them." Twilight growled, reaching into her magic and swiftly pulling out the ancient, rusted sword. She inspected the condition of it, noting that it was still holding together well despite her recent encounter. She feared that it was on the verge of breaking, many of the chips digging into the blade. However, it was something to defend her and the young one she had to protect. So help Celestia, if anything came to harm Spike-

"Twilight, come on, let's get out of here!" Spike said tugging on her mane, "We shouldn't fight it, it might draw more!"

"We're not surrounded already?" Twilight quickly glanced around, seeing that the only silhouette around them was in fact the one slowly approaching them. Looking back at the figure in the fog she began to slowly walk backwards away from it. The figure didn't pick up any speed, just continuing to saunter slowly towards them, dragging whatever weapon it carried along the ground.

"We're not going to get any closer to our friends if we keep running away... but I understand, we shouldn't fight if we don't have to." Twilight returned the sword to her magic, then quickly turned and ran from the creature. It didn't chase after them and the silhouette fell out of view. As it did, the buzzing of the medallion grew silent.

"Hey, that sound went away." Spike said taking note of the silence returning as Twilight moved into a quick jog over a full sprint.

"Hey, you're right Spike." She said slowing to a walk as she examined the runic symbols of the metal, "It seems to make noise whenever a creature draws close... I think its warning of us danger when it draws near."

Twilight was amazed at this deduction, that something she'd found was so useful.

"Well that's convenient." Spike said reaching around and poking the medallion softly, "If it makes a noise whenever danger is near, all we have to do is avoid dangerous areas."

"I... don't know if that'll be as easy as it sounds Spike." Twilight said thinking back to the mansion, "We only got the key to leave BECAUSE I... because I killed that thing. It dropped the key when it died and the medallion was buzzing before I encountered it." Twilight sighed as she thought about it, putting the pieces together in her head, "Whatever is going on in this town it seems to be following some strange rule set. You have to follow the rules or else you won't get out."

"Are you sure Twilight? That makes it seem like something is trying to play a game with us." Spike scratched his head at the words.

"Maybe Spike. But think about it, when we were locked inside the library, we couldn't escape until we solved the puzzles on those boxes. Then when we finally got outside we we're rounded up into that mansion. Then the only way out of the mansion safely was through that creature." Twilight listed the events for them to analyze logically.

"So... you're saying that the only way out of this mess... is to obey whatever rules are presented to us?" Spike felt a chill run down his back as he spoke.

"I'm afraid so Spike. And it seems the consequences of disobeying are dire." Twilight spoke gravely.

"Do... you think that's what happened to Winter?"

Twilight stopped walking, head instantly lowering to stare at the ground.

"I... sorry, I just..." Spike began to mumble.

"I don't know Spike." Twilight sighed lifting her head up, "But Winter... she was crucified. And when you crucify a pony, it isn't just to kill them. It's

to send a message.” Twilight narrowed her eyes again, “And I think the message was intended for us. I don’t know what it meant, but I plan on finding out.”

Spike didn’t say anything after that. He just sat on Twilight’s back as she began to walk once more. The only sound the two of them heard was the loud click of her hooves hitting the cobblestone road. The road she was heading down would eventually lead to a fork, where she could either turn to head for the school house or down further into Ponyville.

Twilight came to a dead stop at the end of the road, her mouth slowly falling open as she stared at the building that had appeared before them in the fog.

“Whoa, I don’t remember THAT building being in Ponyville.” Spike said looking at it in confusion.

“That’s because it doesn’t belong to Ponyville.” Twilight explained, looking at the building once more. Where more houses should have been was instead a large brick building. A small flight of stairs stood before double doors that lead into the building. Above them was a weathered sign, seemingly battered by the elements that read ‘Stalliongrad Library.’

“Well... if it doesn’t belong in Ponyville, what’s it DOING here?” Spike asked perplexed, not accustomed to buildings suddenly shifting entire locations like this.

“I’m not sure Spike, but I’m certain we’re supposed to find out.” Twilight said stepping closer to the building.

“Are you sure this is a good idea Twilight?” Spike asked hesitantly as she began to climb the stairs.

“Good idea? Probably not. But, if this really is Stalliongrad Library there might still be other ponies inside. One of our friends might have taken refuge in here.” Twilight slowly pushed open the front door, finding a dark abyss inside waiting for her. “Or we might find out more clues as to what happened here.”



Her horn lit up and magic surrounded the pendant around her neck, causing the crystal to light up the area before her. The door opened up to a hallway, the red carpet floor looked like it had seen better days. The color was worn with age and a layer of dust seemed to cover it. The cream colored wallpaper was peeling and seemed to be covered in scratches. She could see the reception desk from the entrance.

“Whoa, what happened to this place.” Spike wondered aloud as Twilight walked over to the desk.

“I’m not sure Spike, but we should probably keep our voices to a whisper.” Twilight whispered back to the dragon on her back as she approached the rotting wooden front desk. Her eyes began to scan what lay on top of it.

“Why to a whisper?” Spike asked quietly, “If there are other ponies wouldn’t we want them to know we’re here?”

“We could also attract more of those zombie things from outside if they’re in here.” Twilight replied, “The medallion is quiet so far, but I don’t want to chance having to fight something... at least not with you in harm’s way.”

“Twilight...” Spike spoke softly, but was interrupted as Twilight’s horn lit up once more. She picked up a map from off the reception desk and quickly examined it.

“Alright, the layout of the library is pretty simple. We should be able to find any pony who is here quickly.” She rolled the map up and let it vanish into her pool of magic, “And with any luck we might find some information too.”

Twilight then levitated the note that had been lying next to the map. It was a sloppily written note, as if whoever had wrote it had been in a hurry. But it was just clear enough for her to be able to read what was there.

*Oh no I lost them I can't believe I lost them  
Those things are going to guard them now I know it  
I can't hide in the backroom without them  
I'm done for, I won't survive  
Oh Celestia, why did it have to be a puzzle?*

"What's it say Twilight?" Spike looked at the note curiously, not able to get a good look of it past Twilight's head.

"I think its saying that in order to get into the backroom of the library we need to find items that are... being guarded around the library." Twilight gulped softly, vanishing the note into her magic.

"So... you're going to have to fight again?" Spike wrapped his arms around Twilight's neck a little tighter, as if hugging her.

"Most likely Spike, if we want to find out what's back there." It wasn't a conclusion Twilight was happy to make, nor was it one she wanted to face. But she'd already killed one creature that had been out to kill her; if she kept it to self-defense she might be able to stay sane.

Her eyes wandered to the small dragon on her back, who looked back at her with a hint of fear in his eyes.

Besides, she had to protect Spike no matter the cost. She wasn't about to let anything happen to her young assistant.

Twilight turned from the reception desk and walked a few paces down the hallway when she saw the first door to her right. A sign next to the door labeled it as the 'Reference' section.

"Well, I guess this is as good a place as any to start searching." Twilight said with a bit of hesitation in her voice. Spike gripped her neck softly as Twilight carefully opened the door.

Her light going into the room was able to pick out several bookshelves, all containing several different books lined up on them. Most of the books appeared to be worn with age, dust collecting on the shelves and bindings. She stepped quietly into the room looking back and forth with

her light. At the entrance way she could see large piles of books had been dropped at the end of the bookshelves, blocking a pony's path from going around. The only path they could take was to go forward between the openings of the shelves.

Twilight took a few steps further into the reference section, slowly closing the door behind her, when her ears perked up. Her medallion began to softly hiss.

Spike gripped Twilight's neck a little harder and she instinctively pulled the sword out from her magic, gripping it tight within her magic. She stood in place waiting for whatever creature was causing the hissing to step forth. However, despite standing in place for what felt like an eternity, no creature walked out in front of them. They could only hear the soft hissing of the medallion.

Softly swallowing her anxiety, Twilight began to take slow, careful steps forward. The hissing remained quiet for her first few steps until she was standing at the opening between the next two shelves of books. The medallion slowly began to buzz louder, but now it was accompanied by the sound of something chewing. She looked to her left, seeing another large pile of books blocking the end of the path. She then slowly turned to look to her right.

At first she thought she was seeing a pony hunched before a small pile of books. But something was clearly wrong with that. She focused more and details began to fit into her vision.

What she thought was the pony's back seemed to be made of a rotting brown leather that was moving and bulging, as if giant worms lived under the skin. Several areas looked as if they had been sewn together, like the skin was a suit made out of rotted pony hide. Extending out of an opening in the skin on its back were two purple and red muscle-like tentacles that sharpened to a point at the end. Its head lifted up, revealing two flaps of what looked like a pony head falling to the side, revealing a skin-stripped and eyeless head that was chewing hungrily on a book.

Twilight almost gagged. She could hardly describe the horror of the creature before her. Its head shredded the book in its mouth easily, swallowing whole the cover and the pages. The tentacles on its back

suddenly reached out to the bookshelf next to it and stabbed a book straight through its binding. It picked the book up and laid it down next to the small pile the monster had gathered, its head digging back down to grab hold of another book.

Twilight slowly moved, continuing across the gap in the bookshelves away from the monster. It didn't seem to notice her as the monster disappeared from sight past the bookshelf once more. The medallion's loud buzzing dulled to a soft buzz as she let out a soft sigh.

"Twilight. What IS that thing." Spike hissed into her ear, gripping hard against her neck, though being careful not to choke her.

"I don't know Spike." Twilight hissed back, lowering her sword as she continued to slowly back away, "But I'd rather avoid it if possible."

Twilight felt her back bump into a large pile of discarded books. She turned her head to see that the path ended because of the obstruction. She glared at it softly and lit her horn a little brighter, trying to grab hold of the books and move them out of her way.

However, the books refused to budge, as if wedged tightly into place. She glared softly and tried teleporting the obstruction out of her way. However, despite the spell casting the books didn't move. It was as if they were just like the locked doors, immune to magic.

"What is with this place and its magic immunity." Twilight growled softly, checking her location in the short maze of bookshelves. She could see the end of the room, counting off six book shelves within the room in total. The large piles of books seemed to be positioned in such a perfect way as to direct her straight towards that creature. She quickly pulled the map of the library back out and checked its contents.

It seemed that there were three rooms just at the other end that were used for studying. However, with her path blocked by the large piles of books, the only route that seemed like it would reach them would be to go through that creature that was devouring the books.

"Spike..." Twilight spoke softly, yet seriously, "I need you to get off of my back for a minute."

“T-Twilight?” Spike asked hesitantly, “What’re you going to do?”

Twilight took a deep breath, closing her eyes and steeling her nerves. She pictured the scene back from the library of Spike torn to pieces. She pictured the creature from that mansion that had tried to kill her. She pictured the zombie soldiers, each carrying their weapon and attempting to cut them down with their weapons.

These creatures were cold and harsh; they didn’t care for the sanctity of life. They blinded sought to kill and harm. And though she desired to leave them alone, she knew that she couldn’t avoid this fate for long now. Though they were living creatures, she had to see them as obstacles. No more than puzzles standing between her and getting out of this miserable situation. To save her friends, to find Celestia, to let no more harm come to any pony.

“Spike... I’m going to take out that creature.” She raised the chipped and damaged sword in front of her, looking it over with her eyes, “And if you’re on my back you may get hurt. And no matter what, I can’t let you get hurt Spike.”

“Twilight no! You shouldn’t fight it unless there’s no other choice!” Spike tugged on her mane, trying to persuade her not to be foolish. “What if it hurts you Twilight!?” his voice began to rise, Twilight eyeing him carefully, “If something happens to you, what am I supposed to do!? What do I tell the others if I find them and you’re... if you’re...” Spike shut his eyes as tears burned at them, a lump forming in his throat.

Twilight eyed the hallway of the booshelves carefully. She could still hear the creature devouring away at the books. Its distraction seemed deep.

Spike felt himself being shrouded in magic and forcefully lifted up and off of Twilight.

“Twilight! No! I-“ Spike began to shout, but found himself muffled when suddenly embraced deeply into Twilight’s chest. His eyes widened as he tried to look up at the lavender unicorn that held him close to her with one hoof in a hug.

“Spike, I know all that.” Twilight spoke softly, trying to calm the young dragon. Spike wrapped his arms around her neck and hugged her tightly. “I can’t promise I won’t get hurt, but I’m not about to die and leave you behind Spike. I’m also not about to let these things hurt you either. So if I can stop one before it has the chance to strike, I’m going to take the chance.” Twilight’s voice seemed different to the young dragon ears, in a way he very rarely heard Twilight speak. It was as if the voice of a mother was coming from the lavender unicorn now.

“But... but!” Spike tried to interject, but Twilight just gently shushed him, rubbing his head softly.

“Please Spike, I promise, everything will be alright.” She spoke to calm the young dragon down and it seemed to be working, “Just wait for me right here. This will only take me a moment.”

Spike was quiet for a moment, holding onto Twilight tightly. He didn’t want her to have to fight, but the more Twilight’s words sunk in and the more he thought about the situation, he began to realize it truly was an inevitable outcome.

“O-Okay... just... be careful...” Spike spoke softly shifting away from Twilight. Twilight nodded her head and took another deep breath. She could hear her footsteps echo loudly now as she rounded the corner, holding the sword out before her. The creature came into view once more under the shine of her pendant. The creature tore out a large section of paper from its recent book, chewing upon the leaflets of paper before swallowing them messily.

Twilight stepped forward towards the creature, the creature stopping to turn its head.

The buzzing of Twilight’s medallion began to grow. It grew feverish with noise, crying out to her that danger was right in front of her.

The tentacles on the creatures back flicked back and forth, the spiked ends seeming to cut the air they sailed through. The creature let out a snarl as its skin moved underneath the flesh it wore, as if more tentacles were waiting to burst out.

Twilight narrowed her eyes, keeping her sword even before her, ready for the slight shift of movement from the monster. Though it had no eyes she could feel it watching her, waiting for her to make her move. It seemed to want to ambush her, attack her when she wasn't ready for it, but she wouldn't give it the chance.

She could feel a small sweat forming on her brow. The creature wasn't going to budge and if she showed her back it was going to strike. She would have to make the first move.

Her hoof took another step closer.

The creature let out a loud wail as the serpent like tentacles struck out at her. They sailed through the air intent on getting her blood.

Without a moment of hesitation her sword swung broadly, striking both of the offending appendages. They flew to the side as she drew closer once more. The creature turned now to face the unicorn challenging it, letting out another screech at its foe.

The foul odor of its breath hit Twilight's nose. She grit her teeth and raised the sword to swing down at its head.

One of the tentacles came striking down towards her. Her sword quickly sailed through the air, striking the limb and stopping it just short of slashing her. She poured her magic into the sword and slashed it furiously against the limb.

The creature cried out as the spiked end of the tentacle flew off, carrying a trail of blood with it.

Blinded by the pain the creature charged Twilight, opening its mouth wide intent on biting down on her.

The sword moved swiftly down towards her, her magic holding it tightly. With a thrust the sword struck the creature, burying itself deep inside of its open mouth.

Twilight dodged out of the way as the creature crashed into the bookshelf, writhing in pain and smashing its head against the bookcase to

remove the horrible item that had lodged itself down its throat. Her horn lit up and engulfed the sword inside of the creature, swiftly pulling out of the creature.

The creature gagged and roared as blood spilled from its mouth, lifting what it would dare to call hooves to its throat, grabbing for some relief. The single sharpened tentacle that remained thrashed around haphazardly, striking books and the shelves in an attempt to defend its own.

Twilight wasted no time and aimed the sword. With a loud cry she thrust the sword forward, impaling the creature through the side of its head. The sword imbedded into the bookshelf behind it, nailing the creature to the surface.

The creature writhed a moment longer, trying desperately to cling to what remained of its life, before finally falling limp, the tentacle crashing the hardest from its position in the air.

Twilight breathed heavily, letting the shock of the moment sink in. She had been focused, she had been calculating, she had carefully seen through the creature's movements and had struck it down when it was its most vulnerable.

*"I don't get it Princess..." A young Twilight spoke as she walked through the training grounds with her teacher, "How come your soldiers train so hard to fight when no one fights in Equestria?" She admired the several stallions, each wielding swords in a different manner as they struck wooden mannequins. Some wielded weighted wooden practice swords as they sparred with each other, ensuring they're in top shape.*

*"Well..." Celestia thought her words carefully, "It's true that peace has reigned during my rule for a very long time now, it wasn't always that way. There are still times when ponies or other creatures would rather settle things with hooves than with words." She spoke solemnly, "But it's not just for those moments. We live in a world filled with creatures that wish to do us harm, there many creatures who would enjoy feasting upon ponies as a snack."*



*“W-What? R-Really?” Filly Twilight looked up at her teacher with big sorrowful eyes, scared at the idea that something in the world might come to eat her. Celestia looked down at the sight and softly chuckled.*

*“Never fear Twilight. I work every day to ensure peace remains in Equestria.” The Princess smiled sincerely, “ And if you’re so worried about your safety, you can always partake in practicing your swordsmanship between down time of your studies.”*

*“R-Really?” Twilight spoke curiously, looking back at the guards. One of the white Pegasus guards, having overheard the conversation slowly walked over to the small filly, smiling as he looked down at her.*

*“Hello there.” He spoke proudly, but sincerely. Twilight backed up a little, almost frightened, “I heard you’d be interested in some sword training. How’d you like to try?” He asked holding out the wooden sword he’d been practicing with.*

*Twilight looked at the sword hesitantly, before moving a hoof over to touch it. The Pegasus guard moved it approvingly towards her. She grabbed the sword with both hooves as he let go of it, Twilight dropping to the ground with the weight of the equipment. She got on her hooves and lifted as hard as her little legs could to lift the sword, only managing to lift it a little ways off the ground. She panted heavily as she gave up trying to lift it. This elicited a chuckle from both the guard and the Princess.*

*“Here, I’ll go get you a lighter training sword, the ones we use when young foals like yourself want to practice their swordsmanship.” The guard smiled, picking up the wooden sword with his teeth and turning back to the training grounds, heading for the equipment shed.*

*“Hmph. Why are those things so heavy?” Twilight grumbled, folding her hooves as she sat on the ground defeated.*

*“It’s because the material of a real sword, to make them strong and reliable, also makes them heavy. So the training swords are weighted.” Celestia smiled explaining, “Have you taken an interest in training with a sword?”*

*“A little.” Twilight thought it over in her head before standing up on her hooves and smiling, “I want to become a great unicorn magician! And if I practice sword fighting with magic it’ll help my studies over all!” She seemed eagerly excited, “Besides, if I learn magic how often will I need to fight with a sword?”*

*Twilight and Celestia shared a small laugh.*

“Is... is it safe?” Spike asked cautiously, peeking his head around the corner. Twilight looked over at the baby dragon, seeing his eyes filled with fear.

“Yeah...” Twilight spoke softly, looking down at her medallion, the buzzing having come to a stop. “It’s safe now.”

Twilight vanished the sword back into her magic as the body of the creature slumped to the ground. She stared at it solemnly as the baby dragon slowly walked over to her. The scene truly was sinking in. She had killed yet another living creature and this time she’d done it on purpose.

But this was also different. As she felt the young dragon wrap its arm around her front leg, she was reminded of why she had done it. Right now, she had to protect Spike. She was the adult here; she had to be the one there to comfort him. She had to remember she wasn’t a little filly anymore. Once all of this was over, she could morn over the lives she cut short. But until then she had to focus, her only focus had to be the safety of Spike and returning Ponyville back to the way it had been.

Twilight carefully lifted Spike up onto her back and finally walked past the creature. Rounding the corner of the bookshelf her light fell upon the back of the reference section. She could see a broken down door that would’ve lead to one of the study rooms in the back. She walked over to it and pressed her hoof against the door, finding the door broken and lodged in place. There would be no getting into that room.

With a soft sigh she turned her head to the left and saw the second door from the back, though this door looked to still be intact. The third door appeared to be buried behind a pile of discarded books and desks.

Twilight approached the middle door carefully and placed her hoof against it. Her medallion wasn't buzzing yet which put some confidence into her hooves. She pushed the door open, not certain of what she would see next.

The study room was surprisingly well lit, a lantern hanging from the center of the room. Unlike the rest of the library the room didn't appear to be falling apart. The walls were painted with a simple cream coat with a simple wooden pattern on the bottom. A table sat in the middle of the room, set up for anypony to come in and start studying. On the table were only two items that sat right next to each other, a few sheets of paper and what looked like a large jigsaw puzzle piece.

"What is that?" Spike asked looking at the large puzzle piece that lay on the table. It had several lines on it, seeming to be part of a bigger picture. Twilight couldn't quite decipher what was on the puzzle piece. It looked like it might've been a picture of a mural.

"Hmm..." Twilight hummed softly looking at the puzzle piece, before pulling out the sheet from the lobby desk and reading part of it out loud. "I lost them I can't believe I lost them, those things are going to guard them now I know it... why did it have to be a puzzle." She looked from the note down to the puzzle piece before making the paper disappear. "Spike, I think this is what the note was talking about. Pieces of a puzzle that when gathered together will unlock the door to the backroom." Twilight levitated the puzzle piece up before placing it in her magic.

"I guess that makes sense. How many pieces do you think there are?" Spike asked aloud, "And are they all going to be guarded by one of those... things?" A shiver rolled down his spine.

"I don't know. It's a pretty big piece so I would assume there's not that many of them." Twilight pondered, "And they might each be guarded..." she put a hoof to her chin in thought, thinking about their current predicament. "If only there was a way to know where the other pieces would be..."

"How about a locator spell?" Spike suggested quickly.

“A locator spell...” Twilight blinked before a light bulb seemed to go off in her head, “Spike, you’re a genius!” She smiled as she pulled out the map and the puzzle piece.

“Well, you know, I try.” Spike chuckled accepting the compliment with his usual graciousness.

Twilight flattened the map out onto the table and floated the puzzle piece above it.

“Alright, this puzzle is part of a whole. I should be able to use the spell to locate the missing pieces of it and show us where they’re located.” Twilight concentrated her magic on the piece. The piece began to glow brightly as invisible strings of ether shot out into the library, connecting the separated pieces of puzzle. The piece then shot down three separate beams of light down onto the map, marking the separate locations of which the pieces were located.

Once the spell was complete she vanished the piece back into her magic and looked over the map, observing their locations.

“Alright, it seems there’s only three more pieces to the puzzle.” Twilight scanned carefully, checking each of the locations that had been marked. “Two appear to be in the main section of the library, and the third is in another study room. If we can head straight for them we’ll get into the backroom quickly.” Twilight smiled placing her hoof against the backroom section of the map.

“I don’t know Twilight; it’s likely that the main section of the library became a maze just like the reference section did.” Spike looked over the map a little worried.

“Well... perhaps, but I guess we’ll find out.” Twilight said putting the map away once more. Her eyes fell upon the papers that lay on the table next, reading a large title that read ‘The Cat Who Married a Mouse’. She blinked confused before beginning to read out of curiosity.

*Once upon a time there was a cat who made acquaintance with a mouse. They knew each other so well that they grew to be friends and*

*gained love. So they decided to wed. The married couple lived their lives in peace.*

*One day in the summer they realized their need to store food for the winter. Together they found a beautiful piece of meat covered in fat and sealed it in a jar. To keep it safe they hid the jar in an abandoned field so that others could not find it.*

*However, the cat began to long for the meat and dreamt up a lie to tell the mouse. When the mouse believed his lie he went to the meat and ate a small portion. He returned to the mouse with his appetite satisfied and a belly full.*

*However, the cat soon began to long for the meat once more. So he dreamt up another lie to the mouse. The mouse being trustworthy believed the cat, and the cat went back to the jar and feasted once more upon the stored meat.*

*Even after two feasts upon the meat, the day came when the cat was still not satisfied with his prior feasts, and once more dreamt up a lie to the mouse. The mouse grew suspicious of the cat, but let him leave once more. The cat returned to the meat and ate the rest of the spoils, leaving none in the jar.*

*When the cat returned the mouse questioned the cat. The cat tried to lie, but the mouse caught wise. As the mouse began to accuse the cat of eating their food, the cat grew of the questions. So the cat snapped the mouse up in one fell swoop and swallowed the mouse whole, filling the cat's belly once more.*

*Twilight looked at the story with a confused awe. The moral seemed confusing, the message seemed unclear. Though the story had a beginning, middle and end, she could not tell for what purpose the story was written or the relevance it had to being near the puzzle piece.*

*Deciding not to ponder on it for much longer at the moment, she surrounded the paper and combined it with the other papers she was storing inside of her magic.*

“Alright, let’s find the other puzzle pieces Spike.” Twilight said, confirming their plan of action. Spike nodded in agreement and they quickly left the study room. They wandered back through the small maze made from the reference section, Twilight eyeing the body of the creature once more as she passed it before quickly returning to the main hallway.

“Alright, according to the map the next piece is actually fairly close. There’s about twelve books shelves in the main room and it should be in the walkway between rows three and four...” Twilight spoke optimistically as she walked into the main room of the library. She could see the bookshelves coming into view now. She scanned her light across the shelves, seeing them in the same state of disrepair as the ones in the reference section. Dust was covering several of the books and she could see grime starting to climb up the sides of the bookshelf.

She moved the light to look down the center isle of all the bookshelves, hoping to spot the puzzle piece between the second and third shelves. Instead, her pendant fell upon a pile of books that was blocking her path. She let out a soft sigh, scanning her light upwards. The pile of books seemed unnaturally neat and stopped at the top of the bookshelf.

“Of course... this area is going to be a maze too.” Twilight sighed softly. She turned to the left and walked down the aisle of shelves one and two, trying to find a way around to the puzzle piece.

“How many more monsters do you think are in here?” Spike asked nervously, trying to keep an eye on the darkness around him, though it was difficult to see anything not illuminated by the pendant.

“I don’t know Spike. I’m trying not to think about it right now.” Twilight said trying to shake the thought from her mind.

At the end of the row she could see the line of study rooms that lined the walls just beyond the bookshelves. To her left she could see the public bathrooms and to the right were more shelves and study rooms. Each of the doors to the study rooms seemed to have fallen to the same disrepair as the first study room door she had seen.

“Well...” Twilight began to think, pulling the map out once more, “I assume we’ll be able to reach each piece, but the library has been turned

into a maze against us. So all we have to do is figure out which sections are blocked, which ones aren't and find our way around." She viewed the map carefully before sighing, "I wish I had grabbed some quills and ink before we'd left."

"Here you go." Spike said suddenly producing a red quill and a small bottle of ink. "I figured you'd want them eventually."

"Wow. I suppose you are my number one assistant for a reason." Twilight smiled grabbing the items in her magic and dipping the quill into the ink. She then began to mark the map with the where she had seen the piles of books. With that in mind she began to walk towards the back of the library, following along the wall.

She marked off a pile of books that blocked her way between shelves two and three, but saw that the path through shelves three and four was open. Hoping she'd get closer to the puzzle piece she began to walk down it, though she didn't get far before she saw that the end was also blocked by a pile of books.

She softly sighed and marked it off on the map. Then as she was turning to head back she saw a particularly noticeable red book sticking out from the shelves. Curious, she levitated the book off the shelf. The cover read 'The Old Widow'. Twilight opened the book up and read what was inside.

*In a certain large town there once lived a Poor Widow, who sat every evening thinking of everyone she had lost; her husband, her son, all her relations and friends so that she was quite alone in the world. Her heart grew sorrowful with her thoughts; but the loss of her son troubled her the most, and she wept very bitterly.*

*One day she sat quite still, lost in her thoughts, when she began to hear bells ringing from the town hall. She wondered how she had spent all of the night sorrowing; but lighting her lantern she went to the hall. As she entered she saw it already lit up: but not with the usual tapers, but glimmering light shone through the whole building.*

*It was already filled with ponies who stood, seemingly to await their deeds for the day. When the widow walked to her normal spot, she found*

*that it was already filled. As she looked round at the ponies, she perceived that they were her deceased relations, who sat there in their old every-day dresses; but with pale countenances. They neither spoke nor sung, but a gentle whisper and hum floated through the hall.*

*Presently an Aunt of the Poor Widow got up and said to her, "Look towards the steps, and you will see your son."*

*She looked and saw her son, hanging from the gallows.*

*"See," continued the Aunt, "thus would it have happened to your son, had life been given to him, instead they were mercifully taken when they were but an innocent."*

*With trembling steps the Old Widow went home, and thanks the heavens for their mercy. Then on the third day after she laid down on her bed and died.*

"What's that Twilight?" Spike asked just as Twilight finished reading the story.

"I'm not sure Spike." Twilight furrowed her brow in confusion, closing the little red book. "It was sticking out of the bookshelf, and unlike the rest of the books here it's practically immaculate."

"Imacawhat?" Spike asked confused.

"Ugh, it's pristine, un-damaged, it hasn't fallen to disrepair like the other books have." Twilight sighed, vanishing the book into her magic.

"Oh, well why didn't you say so?" Spike asked confused, causing Twilight to softly roll her eyes before exiting the aisle.

She continued along the wall slowly, marking off the blocked path between rows shelf four and five before coming to a stop between five and six.

The medallion had started to buzz once more.



Twilight glanced the light slowly down the aisle between five and six. The aisle was empty, but the medallion continued to buzz. Spike grew silent as the unicorn began to slowly step through the aisle. She quickly put the map away and pulled the sword out from her magic, holding it ready for anything that might happen.

She stopped as the sound of munching suddenly hit her ears. She quickly looked around for the source, hearing it nearby. Then she stopped as she realized where it was.

“Spike... it’s behind the bookcase...” Twilight whispered looking to the shelf to her left.

A spiked tentacle suddenly broke through the shelves, causing Twilight to jump back and raise her sword over her head. The spike wriggled just a foot away from her, having nearly impaled one of them. It seemed to be searching around for something, before coming back to settle against the books.

The spike stabbed straight through the cover of one of the nearby books before dragging it through to the creature. The sound of munching rang loud as the creature seemed to engulf another book into its mandibles.

Twilight nervously raised her hoof to her lips, turning to look at Spike and giving the quietest ‘shhh’ she possible could. Twilight then aimed the sword to face the bookshelf in case the tentacle returned and began to slowly tip-hoof across the aisle as quietly as she could.

She froze for a moment when the creature seemed to give a grunt and stop eating. She didn’t move again until she heard it going back to munching away at its find.

Twilight soon reached the end of the aisle, the buzzing of the medallion finally growing quiet. Together her and Spike let out a collective sigh of relief.

“That was too close.” Spike said, wiping the sweat off of his forehead.  
“Yeah...” Twilight agreed putting the sword away and pulling the map back out. “But, there should be another puzzle piece right over there.”

Twilight pointed just past the sixth bookshelf to the wall. Spike looked in the direction she was pointing, seeing the familiar looking puzzle piece sticking out between two books on the bookshelf. Twilight quickly covered the piece with her magic and carefully pulling it out of the shelf.

Twilight then looked to the left of the bookshelf and spotted the door that lead to the backroom. On the door was a square space that looked like it was slotted to fit four separate pieces of a puzzle.

“See? I told you that the puzzle pieces opened this door.” Twilight smiled as she summoned the second piece from her magic. She aligned the corners of the pieces to where they would fit appropriately in the slot. The pieces fit into place with a ‘click’ each, forming half of the picture.

“So we just need to get those other two pieces and the door will unlock.” Spike said smiling.

“It’d be nice if getting the pieces was easier.” Twilight sighed softly turning around. She began to walk down the center aisle of all the bookshelves when she stopped, hearing the medallion start buzzing again.

“Oh no, not another one.” Twilight softly cursed under her breath and drawing the sword once more. She looked around herself; the door was behind her and two empty aisles to her sides. She snapped her head back to the center aisle and saw the creature beginning to walk slowly into her field of vision.

The two tentacles on its back were slowly moving back and forth, as if scanning the air around it. The creatures seemingly skinned head was wobbling slowly back and forth, as if trying to taste or feel things around it. The two halves of skin that used to be a head flapped to its sides as it walked.

Twilight looked around once more in a panic. The creature was going to be upon her quickly and Spike was still on her back. She could feel the young dragon gripping onto her tightly once more. She couldn’t stand there and fight, not with Spike possibly being put in danger.

She had to find a safe spot for him if she was going to fight again.

She turned to her left and quickly ran down the aisle. At the wall she looked around, trying to find a study room with a working door. The first door was a mangled mess of splintered wood, boarded up to prevent entry. The second however, had a door that looked perfect.

Running quickly to the door she pressed her hooves against it and flung it open. The room was brightly lit like the last study room she entered, consisting of a simple table once more. She quickly moved inside and shut the door behind her, the loud buzzing of her medallion turning into a very soft hiss, but never quite going silent.

“Okay... I think we’re safe in here for the moment.” Twilight commented quietly backing away from the door, “We’ll just wait a moment or two and see if the creature passes.” It seemed like a logical idea in her mind, after all it didn’t seem to be in any hurry and if she could avoid fighting when possible, she’d prefer to. Even then she could feel the worry building inside of herself that she would become too accustomed to killing living creatures.

“Hey, Twilight, look there, on the table!” Spike said suddenly pointing to something that lay on the table, Twilight looking towards it, “Isn’t that like one of the boxes we found in the library?”

“...It is Spike.” Twilight said surprised. There was a small mahogany box lying on top of the table. Twilight covered it with her magic and levitated it over to herself. “If it’s here, then that must mean there is something inside of it.” She gripped the top half of the box with her magic, expecting the box to be locked and she’d have to go find some miniscule key hidden inside of a box half way across the library.

However, the box opened easily.

In the next instance something shot out of the box quickly, rising straight up and exploded against the ceiling. Twilight bumped into the back of the room out of surprise as the bright dust began to fall all around the room.

“Hey, this is the same as back at the library!” Spike said standing up on her back and pointing to the dust. “Right afterwards the Princesses showed up!”

Twilight was going to say something, but the room itself seemed to begin to visibly warp and deform. She could barely keep track of the configuration when everything changed, turning into what seemed to be a castle, though not the same castle as the one in Canterlot.

*“Hast thou heard? That unicorn is coming to the palace. The stories of his talents have spread fast across our lands.” The regal voice of Princess Luna was heard, walking with her sister down a hallway in the castle, “He returns to us from his journey. It is said he has bested the Dragon of Apocalypse.”*

*“We have heard the stories and if his words be true than we have many reasons to be grateful to this powerful stallion.” The eldest regal sister, Princess Celestia, spoke in turn of her sister. “For he has done what we could not. The Dragon of Apocalypse is a mighty foe, one that would only otherwise have been bested by our combined unity under the Elements of Harmony.”*

*“That is exactly what we speak of sister!” Luna put her hoof down with more force, stopping in place. Celestia softly turned to look at her younger sibling, “What force can best the Elements of Harmony? Tis impossible I say! There is no such force that can outshine them! I sense treachery and deceit dear sister.”*

*Celestia was quiet for a moment, considering her sister’s anger and her words. She looked towards the ground, before looking back up at her sister.*

*“The feats of heroism are astonishing indeed, but I dare not rule out the possibility that his words are true. Perhaps it was not a force greater than the elements, but something much more deceptive. Perhaps he did not best the dragon with power, but with wit.” Celestia smiled to try and comfort her sister.*

*“We shall resource our judgment. Until we see this stallion with our own two eyes, his presence shall be one of suspicion and disbelief.” Luna raised her head as she walked past her sister. Celestia could only smile and softly shake her head as she followed the younger alicorn.*

*They approached two large, majestic doors that with a single grace of their magic opened wide, revealing the spacious throne room. Guards stood at attention near the throne room chairs as the two sisters took their seats. Their presence was regal and imposing, befitting the rulers of the land.*

*“Guard, fetch for us the unicorn that has come to see us today.” Luna decreed to one of the nearby guards. The soldier saluted before spreading its wings and flying to the opposite end of the throne room. While the regal sisters had come in from their back room, the guard opened the doors to the front where any awaiting guest to speak to the royal sisters would wait.*

*Upon the doors opening, a pony began to make its way forward. Around its body it wore a dark blue cloak, with a hood that stretched to cover its face. Around his neck was a golden necklace, the center of which sat a blue octagon gemstone. The pony approached the throne, stopping just short and bowing before the Princesses.*

*“We welcome thee brave stallion.” Celestia spoke first, setting the regal tone, “Thou may stand and speak with us.”*

*“And let us see thy face, so that we may know thee better.” Luna added, prompting a look from her sister.*

*“But of course your majesty.” The stallion spoke clearly, his voice deep. He stood from his bow and raised a hoof up, pulling the hood of his cloak back to reveal himself.*

*The unicorn had a blonde light blue coat with a long mane of gold, a beard began to form just under his chin and his face looked just freshly turned stallion. He did not look strong, as though he had had the body of a youth. Yet his eyes pierced fiercely with an ice blue stare, as if in his short life he had seen and learned much.*

*“My name is Merlin, Merlin Ambrosius. I have come to the castle of the Royal Sisters so that I may speak with thee. It is an honor to meet you both.” He bowed once more.*

*"The feeling is returned, for a pony whose name is heard across the land we are honored to have met thee." Celestia smiled as Merlin came back up from his bow.*

*"Yes, thy feats have amazed us all. Tell us, are thy tales true? Has a pony such as thee vanquished the Dragon of Apocalypse all by themselves?" Luna cut straight to the chase, not wanting to delay the question any longer.*

*"It is true my lady. Acnologia shall no longer be a threat to our lands." Merlin spoke clearly, without a moment of hesitation in his voice. The quickness of his reply seemed to astonish Luna.*

*"Acnologia? Who, pray tell, is Acnologia?" Luna narrowed her eyes at the suspicious unicorn.*

*"Oh, pardon my manners." Merlin swept some of the hair out of his face so that he direct his conversation to her more clearly, "Acnologia was the name of the dragon, I discovered it when I came to confront the creature."*

*"And how did thou take down such a creature?" Celestia asked as curious as her sister.*

*"Yes, this is a tale we would like to hear." Luna added, wanting to hear more of Merlin's words.*

*"It is one that I shall share, nor will it take much time. The Dragon of Apocalypse as thou know was destroying our lands, leaving destruction in his wake. No pony could stop him and all diplomacy was for not. He knew to hide and escape from you, the royal sisters, but he feared not the common pony. When he destroyed the village I had visited, I tracked him to his newest home and saw him face to face." Merlin began his tale.*

*"And he did not swallow thee or burn thy flesh?" Luna puzzled at him, ever skeptical of his tale.*

*"He did not, for his curiosity had peaked. He asked what a foolish pony thought he could do and wanted to hear my words before I died. So I spoke to him plain and true. I was there to stop his fiendish deeds, to save our fair ponies and world alike."*

*"And he did not strike thee where thy stood?" Luna winced more.*

*"Nay your majesty, instead he bellowed with laughter." He raised his hoof and closed his eyes, giving the impression of an aristocrat, "He thought it hilarious that a common pony by himself could defeat one such as he." Merlin put his hoof back down and looked back up at the princesses, "So I told him that I would offer him a challenge. Interested he asked what it was. I told him that if I could present to him an item he could not destroy that he would lose his power and be forced to live the rest of his life as but a fair earth pony. Should he break my item, I would give him all the powers and strengths of a Unicorn."*

*"WHAT!?" Luna roared loudly across the chamber halls, "If the Dragon of Apocalypse acquired the power of unicorns the world would end in but an instance!"*

*"Dear sister, calm thyself." Celestia spoke clearly, Luna realizing she'd acted brash, "Let our guest finish his tale."*

*"Very well." Luna calmed herself sitting back down, "Tell us the rest of the tale."*

*"But of course your majesty." Merlin adjusted the hair out of his face once more and continued to speak, "The dragon was confident, knowing his power could shatter anything within the land. He agreed to my game and I cast the pact forming spell, to make ensure that whoever won our game would give up their bet. This is where I learned the name of the dragon, for one must speak thy true name for the pact to work. He then asked me to present his item and from my cloak I drew this." Merlin reached into his cloak and pulled out a large black scale.*

*"What, pray tell, is that item?" Luna asked, not recognizing it.*

*"It is the very thing that cannot break. For Acnologia who has the magical power within him to break anything, can break not but one thing, the armor of his own hide." Merlin held the scale a little higher to behold, "This is a scale from his back. During my travels I witnessed the dragon several times, studying his true nature. During one of those times this scale fell from his back. I know not why it fell or how it did so from the*

*impenetrable shell of the best. But with it in my possession I challenged him to my game.” Merlin put the scale away back in his cloak. “So try as he might, with crushing fists, gnarling jaws and fire hot as magma he could not break the scale.”*

*“Then what became of the Dragon?” Luna asked, demanding to know more.*

*“True to the pact he could not best his own scale. The spell activated and his power was stripped from him and his body changed to that of an earth pony. With no way to change back I left him in his cave to wallow in his new form.” Merlin smiled, “And thus ends the terror of Acnologia, the Dragon of Apocalypse.”*

*“If thy words are true then there is much to celebrate.” Celestia smiled, amazed at the tale, “Once we have confirmed the end of this nightmare upon our land, we must hold a feast in your honor.”*

*“I would be most honored to be hosted a banquet by you, your majesty.” Merlin bowed once more, “But I am afraid there is something else of grave importance I came to speak of thee with.”*

*“Speak away my subject, you have earned thy words in this room.” Celestia spoke once more.*

*“Very well, I shall speak a message first then tell you of why I came.” Merlin cleared his throat quickly, before turning his head, as if not looking at either of the royal sisters, but at somepony that wasn’t there yet, as though they would be there for him to look at one day.*

*“Twilight.” Merlin spoke clearly, “Thou must find the rest. Memory is the key.”*

The world suddenly twisted and shifted, molding itself back into the simple study room that it once had been. The glowing dust that had fallen from the ceiling faded, leaving no trace that it had ever been there.

Twilight and Spike stared in absolute shock at the sight they had just witnessed. At the last words that had been spoken.



“Twilight... was... was he talking to you?” Spike asked confused, not sure of what it was he just saw.

“I... I think so but... how is that possible? That wasn’t happening right now, that had to happened a long time ago, well before I was even CLOSE to being born.” Twilight’s mind was reeling, her eyes moving around frantically as she tried to gather her thoughts into one place. “Was this a magical documentation of events that had occurred? Is it possible to record events like this? And if so who had placed this specific event in this box? Why would it be made for me to find it in this crazy mess?” Twilight spoke quickly and bewildered.

“I don’t think it was any of those things... maybe it was a memory of the past? That Merlin guy did say that memory was the key.” Spike said trying to think about it.

“A memory...” Twilight thought to herself, “But then... whose memory was it Spike?”

“Uhm... I guess it’d be Celestia’s memory... or maybe Luna’s... they were both present for that event.” Spike thought scratching his head.

“Well... he said I had to find the rest. I guess that means there must be more memories hiding like this one was.” Twilight examined the box, finding the contents now quite empty. With no need for an empty box she placed it back down on the table.

“Hey, your medallion isn’t making noise anymore.” Spike noticed, trying to listen for any sound.

“Oh, you’re right Spike.” Twilight lifted the medallion with her hoof to look at it, confirming it had gone silent, “It must be okay to wander outside again, since it was still buzzing when we got in here.” Twilight walked over to the door and put her hoof against it. “Let’s hurry up and find those last two puzzle pieces Spike and get into the backroom. I have a feeling something very important is back there.”

“How can you tell?” Spike asked curiously.

“Like I said Spike, whatever is going on is following its own rules. This includes the puzzles, the monsters and things like the memory we just found. Something important is locked inside the backroom, or else it wouldn’t be locked.” Twilight nodded, taking a deep breath and opening the study door once more.

The dark library came into view once more and she realized her pendant had turned itself off in the study room. With a quick tap of her hoof light returned and she could see into the dark library. She scanned the area around the door quickly, finding no monsters waiting for them in ambush. It seemed that the creature had simply walked by and left them alone. Twilight quickly pulled the map back out and examined it.

“Okay, the last two pieces are actually nearby. They’re that way.” Twilight said looking to her left, before quietly closing the study room door behind her and following along the wall. She scanned with her light down the aisles of the book shelves she passed, stopping when she saw a light blue book sticking out of one of the nearby shelves.

Without moving from the wall she grasped the book within her magic and levitated it over to herself. The title of the book read ‘Heaven’s Food’. She did a quick glance around to make sure no monster was near and listened carefully to her medallion, before she opened the book to read what it contained.

*Once there were two sisters, one of whom had no children and was rich, and the other had five and was a widow, and so poor that she no longer had food enough to satisfy herself and her children.*

*In her need, therefore, she went to her sister, and said, “My children and I are suffering the greatest hunger; thou art rich, give me a mouthful of bread.”*

*The very rich sister was as hard as a stone, and said, “I myself have nothing in the house,” and drove away the poor creature with harsh words.*

*After some time the husband of the rich sister came home, and was just going to cut himself a piece of bread, but when he made the first cut into the loaf, out flowed red blood. When the woman saw that she was*

*terrified and told him what had occurred. He hurried away to help the widow and her children, but when he entered her room, he found her bowed.*

*She had her two youngest children in her hooves, and the three eldest were lying dead. He offered her food, but she answered, "For earthly food have we no longer any desire. Heaven has already satisfied the hunger of three of us, and it will hearken to our supplications likewise."*

*Scarcely had she uttered these words than the two little ones drew their last breath, whereupon her heart broke, and she sank down dead.*

"Can reading wait till later Twilight? I'd like to finish our business here as quickly as possible." Spike asked, trying to get Twilight's nose out of another book.

"Oh, right, sorry Spike." Twilight vanished the book into her magic and continued following the wall.

Each study door she passed continued to be broken and boarded off. The map showed that the last two pieces of the puzzle was in one of the study rooms and in the middle of the maze of bookshelves. Twilight's light scanned down the aisles looking for anything that might jump out at her. The pathway ended when she was stopped by a large pile of books, but lead down into another aisle of the bookshelves. She examined the map and looked at the study door that was next to her. The door wasn't broken or boarded up, looking perfectly good for use. One of the puzzle pieces was contained inside that room.

Not wanting to waste any more time she placed her hoof against the door and pushed it open slightly.

Her medallion suddenly began to buzz loudly as the sound of chewing struck her ears.

She quickly closed the door shut and the buzzing silenced itself.

"Oh no..." Twilight took a deep breath, realizing she might have to fight another one of those creatures and opened the door slightly once more.

The medallion began to buzz as she looked in through the crack of the door. The room was brightly lit like the others, she could spot the creature and its tentacles easily. It was devouring a pile of books in the corner of the room, the table pushed to the opposite wall for it to have room. She saw the tentacles floating around its back, looking for some prey to stab into.

Her eyes moved over to the table, spotting the puzzle piece lying on top of it. She thought about her actions for a moment, before having a brilliant deduction. She lit her horn with magic and the puzzle piece covered the distance with her magic.

The creature feasting stopped for a moment, as if noticing her use of magic. Twilight softly gulped and vanished the piece into her magic, before closing the door.

The medallion continued to buzz for a moment or two after the door closed, causing Twilight to softly sweat at the idea of having been discovered.

However, the buzzing grew quiet and she let out a soft sigh, realizing she'd gotten away with it.

*'Thank you Merlin, your spell has worked miracles today.'* Twilight thought to herself. She turned around and walked away from the door, heading for the center of the library now. According to the map, the puzzle piece should be right under her nose.

At the end of the aisle she saw it, sitting on the floor comfortably, surrounded by three separate piles of large books that blocked off any other way to the puzzle piece. It was a dead end in the maze, but a dead end that hid the final piece.

With a smile she whisked the puzzle piece up with her magic and vanished it into her magic.

"Alright, we have all the pieces we need Spike. Let's go open that door." Twilight smiled confidently, ready to go into the backroom and away from all these monsters. She turned around and made her way back to the

wall, planning on following it back to the locked puzzle door and putting the pieces into place.

As she began to follow along the wall, she was stopped in her tracks when her medallion suddenly began to buzz once more. She quickly looked down the aisle that was next to her, hearing the sound of groaning coming down it.

From the shadows appeared another one of those creatures, only it seemed different. Its tentacles were at attention; point straight forward, its head wasn't wobbling back and forth but instead heading straight forward. It wasn't searching; it knew where its prey was now.

The creature let out a screeching wail, charging forward straight at the unprepared unicorn.

Twilight leaped forward as the two tentacles came crashing down, breaking into the wall where she had just been standing. She couldn't stand around right now; she couldn't stop and fight the thing. With Spike on her back and nowhere safe to quickly put him, she had to just run.

She felt like she ran faster than she ever had before, but the world itself had grown in size. It was all in her mind, she knew, but it felt like the aisle would end. She could hear the creature screeching as it pulled the tentacles out of the wall; it was going to head for her once more.

Twilight made a sharp turn at the end the wall. She could hear her breath as her heart began to pound in her ears. One thing was constantly shouting out in her head.

Spike was in danger.

She could feel the baby dragon clinging to her head tightly, looking back at the creature chasing them. She could feel his panicked breath, his terrified claws, his racing heart. Everything about him wanted to be out of danger quickly and she was the one who had to protect him. She had to get him out of danger.

The door came into view, the puzzle pieces still locked into place where she had placed them before. She could hear the crashing of books

and the splintering of wood behind her as the creature thrashed its tentacles out, it attempting to drive them straight into her body.

“TWILIGHT! HURRY!” Spike shouted gripping hold of her mane. Twilight winced in pain but held back her words, summoning the two pieces of the puzzle out from her magic. With speed and precision she placed the remaining pieces into the door, hearing it ‘click’ with the sound of the puzzle being completed.

Her magic gripped the door and forced it open, Twilight sprinting straight for it. The creature wailed as its tentacles missed her by inches, slicing through the air. Twilight turned in the opened hallway, seeing the creature flail for the door, its skin flapping around as its mandibles mashed around.

With her horn lighting up, she swung her head and slammed the door shut hard, the echo of the slam being heard through the library.

The medallion didn’t let up its buzzing and Twilight stepped back from the door, still hearing the creature wail behind it. The sound died down for a moment, causing an unnatural calm. Twilight gulped softly, not liking the quiet.

The door cracked visibly as something hard was struck against it. Twilight’s eyes widened as she realized the door could be damaged by the creature.

Another strike hit the door, loudly splitting the wood it was made out of.

A tentacle burst through the door, heading straight for Twilight. She jumped back and let out a startled scream as it stopped a few feet away from her.

The tentacle suddenly began to wither and writhe, a loud high-pitched screaming sound coming from it as if it was suddenly being attacked. Steam started to rise from the entire appendage as it began to wrinkle and shrink.

The creature tried to pull the tentacle back out the door, only for it to fall off mid-pull. The tentacle landed on the ground curling up, before vanishing completely in the steam of smoke that it had produced.

Twilight stared in confusion at where the tentacle had been, then up at the door, hearing the creature wail and moan behind it. It wailed and seemed to scratch at the door for a minute or two, before giving up and walking away. The buzz on the medallion began to fade as it walked away, before finally going silent.

“What just happened Twilight?” Spike asked confused, though still riding from the terror of having survived a close encounter.

“I... I don’t know Spike.” Twilight gulped softly, looking down at the ground. Her light illuminated the spot where the tentacle had been, then she lifted it up to look down the hallway to see what might have caused the tentacle to suddenly fall apart.

“Hey, what’s that?” Twilight asked walking closer to the door, spotting a strange marking on the ground. She carefully stopped right before it, illuminating the symbol with her light.

“Hey, isn’t that the same symbol as the one from the box in the library?” Spike asked curiously looking at the design.

“It is Spike...” Twilight spoke softly looking over the strange circle design. It was indeed the circle within circles design with the cryptic runic writing. However, it was different. Instead of being a red symbol, this one was blue. “Do you think this thing being here is what hurt that monster?”

“Maybe. It’s the only thing that makes sense right?” Spike commented, tapping his chin in thought.

“Then who put it here...” Twilight pondered as well. The two of them sat there for about a minute in thought, before Twilight looked back up at the door with a hole in it leading back to the library. “We can contemplate about it more later Spike. Let’s head into the backroom and see what we can find.” Twilight spoke firmly, turning around and heading down the narrow hallway.

Twilight was a little surprised that the backroom was at the end of this long, narrow hallway. It seemed unusual for a library to have a useless hallway like this within its borders anyway. But her light fell upon the door at the end of the hallway, the words 'Backroom' written onto it. Quickly approaching it, she put her hoof against the door, braced for what might be behind it, and pushed it open.

The door let out a loud creak as she pushed it open. She winced at the sound, realizing it would likely attract anything that was inside of the room. Though when she looked, she found it to be surprisingly well lit. A few candles were lit around the room and there appeared to be several tables in the center of the room with a few bookshelves along the back walls.

"Oh, hello there." A voice suddenly came out, causing Twilight to nearly jump out of her skin, "I wasn't expecting to meet another pony here."

Suddenly, a unicorn walked into her view from across the room, one she hadn't seen before.

His coat was a light brown, while his mane was a striking blonde with darker blonde highlights going through it evenly. On his face was a pair of glasses that showed off his dark blue eyes, while he had a scruffy goatee growing in around his mouth and nose. On his body was a lighter brown sweater with dark brown edges to it and a white collar that popped up out from the sweater. But most striking of all was that his cutie mark appeared to be a red magic circle with a simple cross square pattern, with a large question mark in the middle of it.

He closed a book he had been reading and levitated it gently down onto one of the tables.

"I was here doing research on my latest book, when things suddenly started going weird. So I thought I might poke my nose into some other research." The stallion smiled oddly. Twilight wasn't sure how to read his reaction, but she was grateful to see another pony.

"O-Oh... well I wasn't expecting to see another pony too." Twilight spoke hesitantly, walking into the room and closing the door behind her. "Are you from Stalliongrad? This is the library there after all..."



“No, I was born in Canterlot actually.” The stallion said walking closer, “But I was in Stalliongrad doing research. Tell me; based on your question this library is no longer in Stalliongrad. So where am I?”

“You’re... in Ponyville.” Twilight mentioned, the two stopping a few feet short of each other. Spike was gripping onto Twilight’s head, eyeing the new pony with suspicion. “My name’s Twilight Sparkle, and I’ve been trying to figure out what’s going on here.”

The stallions face seemed to light up upon hearing her name, before smiling his odd smile. Twilight couldn’t help but think he seemed a little off.

“Twilight Sparkle? The one and only? The student of Princess Celestia and the current wielder of the Element of Magic?” He asked simply fascinated by this information. Twilight went to open her mouth to respond, when Spike did it for her.

“She’s the one and only alright, but who are you?” Spike asked pointing a finger accusingly.

“Spike? What are you doing?” Twilight glared softly at the baby dragon’s rudeness.

“Now, now, it’s alright.” The stallion smiled, adjusting his glasses, “I’m certainly not as famous as you would be Ms. Sparkle, but I have started to gain a name for myself. You see, I’ve published a few books recently in my ever growing hunger to know more about the world. I love nothing more than finding answers to the questions that the world brings up.” He chuckled softly to himself, before making sure to look straight into her eyes. “My name is Magus. Magus Vince Darkarts. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

Spike practically fell off of Twilight’s back. Twilight’s jaw felt like it could have hit the ground. There was a moment of stunned shock as Twilight took all of that information in. Magus just seemed to chuckle softly at her reaction.

“Oh my, I take it you’ve heard of me?” He asked amused.

“Heard of you!?” Twilight could barely contain her voice, “You’re the guy who... you practically caused this mess!” Her mind jumped straight to conclusions.

“Huh?” Magus asked confused, raising an eyebrow, “What do you mean? I certainly would have nothing to do with what’s been going on with this library. I’ve simply been doing research.”

“Well... no you haven’t done anything directly.” Twilight said trying to reign in her emotions, “But your spell has caused a lot of indirect problems... and it’s helped some good ponies too...” Twilight bit her lip as she began to realize what she was saying and how she was reacting.

“Start from the beginning Ms. Sparkle, what are you talking about?” Magus asked a little more confused than he likes to be.

“Okay, well, see, I have these friends who had been having nightmares. So I looked up a book on dreams and found yours. I used the spell you created called the Mind Delve on them to find out what was wrong.” Twilight quickly explained.

“Ah yes. Dreams: A Psychological Understanding. I remember writing that.” Magus mused rubbing his chin. “And the Mind Delve is one of my personal favorites. Oh a lot of work went into weaving that spell. I assume it brought your friends problems to the front and they were able to confront them?”

“Well... yes and no.” Twilight explained, causing Magus to be a little confused again. “See, I never saw what their problems were. I saw a floating picture and then the spell ended on its own. But when it was over my friends said they had come to understand their problems and were better for it.”

“...You don’t say.” Magus thought once more. “That is certainly odd. The spell was never intended to do either of those things.”

“Exactly. So if you’re here now... can you tell me, why did the spell do that? And what reason would my friends have for not telling me what they experienced while under the Mind Delve?” Twilight wanted answers.

Magus grew quiet as he thought in silence. It seemed to take a minute or two before he finally responded.

"I couldn't tell you Ms. Sparkle." Was his answer, "I didn't intend for the spell to have those effects. And you should've seen what their problem was when you cast the spell." He smiled, looking off into the distance. "But this intrigues me now. I'd like to find an answer to this question myself."

"Is this guy right in the head?" Spike asked a little confused about Magus's words.

"Spike, no need to be insulting." Twilight huffed a little before turning back. "Sorry about asking such questions with the situation we're in. I just... I never expected to run into you of all ponies here."

"It's alright Ms. Sparkle." Magus nodded slowly, "All things must happen for a reason. With the recent phenomenon going on in this library, I've been busying myself with research on it."

"How can you research something noponies ever experienced before?" Spike asked confused.

"By finding clues and hints left behind of course." Magus chuckled softly, "Like for instance, did you know that the monsters that have appeared hate something? It brings them pain and suffering to simply even be in the vicinity of it."

"...The blue circle." Twilight gasped in realization.

"Oh excellent, you saw that on your way in." Magus smiled, adjusting his glasses again, "That's exactly right. I found that symbol adorned in red while I was here researching. Then the monsters suddenly started showing up. I knew it couldn't have been a coincidence, so using my knowledge of runic symbols, I figured out quickly that changing the color turned the symbol from a positive effect for the creatures, to a negative one." He chuckled softly, "Of course, the symbol has its limitations."

"Huh? What do you mean?" Twilight asked confused.

“You see, Ms. Sparkle, the symbol runs on a strange system. The monsters hate the symbol in blue, but only in small numbers. The more you create, the weaker the effect becomes. I discovered this when I tried to create a wall to stop their movements, but they were simply able to walk through it.” Magus turned to walk back over to the table where his book now lay, “But if I put a single one in a hallway, then the creature feels its maximum effect. So in short...” Magus’s horn lit up as he pulled out several different books from the shelves around him and piled them neatly into a small structure in front of him, “You can create a safe room that the monsters won’t be able to get inside.”

“I see... that’s amazing. You were able to find this all out with a short time researching?” Twilight asked astonished, amazed at his work.

“Indeed I have.” Magus smiled, walking back towards Twilight, “And I still have a lot more research to do. So I’m going to be remaining her in this safe room until I’ve finished it.”

“I see...” Twilight softly murmured to herself, thinking things through in her head. She had just found a safe room, a room that would prevent from any kind of monster attack. She couldn’t stay there for long, her friends needed her and she needed to find the Princess.

However, there was something that the safe room could do for her.

“Magus.” Twilight spoke suddenly, causing the stallion to tilt his head curiously, “I’m going back outside to look for my friends and for Princess Celestia. Are you going to be staying here and studying?”

“But of course.” Magus smiled adjusting his glasses once more, giving that strange grin of his, “I love finding answers. I’ll be here for a while at it.”

“Good. Then can I please ask you to watch my assistant Spike for me?” Twilight pointed to the baby dragon with her hoof.

“What!?” Spike said shocked at the sudden proposal, “Twilight, what are doing? You need me with you!”

“Spike, please.” She looked at her assistant before looking at Magus, “Would you be willing to do that for me?”

“But of course.” Magus smiled his creepy smile, “Anything for the wonderful Ms. Sparkle.”

“Twilight no! I want to go with you!” Spike cried out, clinging to Twilight’s leg. Twilight sighed softly and sat down on the ground, holding Spike close to her. She pressed his head up against her chest so that he could hear her heart beat. Spike looked up at her worriedly as she smiled down at him.

“Listen Spike... it’s dangerous out there. Those creatures don’t show any mercy. They’ll rip you to shreds if they get the chance.” Twilight spoke gravely, yet comfortingly.

“I know that! And if you’re going out there that means they’re going to come after you too! I have to be there to protect you!” Spike cried out, clinging harder to Twilight. Twilight lifted a hoof and wrapped it around the baby dragon’s body, closing her eyes as she hugged him.

“Spike, listen. I can protect myself. You’ve seen me do it. I can avoid the monsters and save my life much easier if I don’t have to constantly protect you.” Twilight opened her eyes and lifted her head, Spike looking up into her eyes as water started to form at the edge of his, “I won’t be putting myself into any intentional harm and I’ll stop anything that plans to hurt me. I won’t let those things get to me Spike, but I do have to go out and find the others.” Twilight put both her hooves on his shoulders and lowered her head to look him level in the eyes.

“Do you trust me to keep my word Spike?” Twilight asked solemnly.

“I... I...” Spike hesitated, not wanting to be separated from the lavender unicorn. But her words spoke true, if he continued to stay with her, he’d be a liability more than he would be an aid. “I... I do Twilight.” Spike wrapped his arms around Twilight’s neck, “I do trust you. And you better come back for me! I won’t forgive you if you die on me!”

“I won’t Spike. I promise you.” Twilight hugged the baby dragon close to her. They sat there for a while, just enjoying each other’s embrace.

“Well,” Magus spoke up finally, causing the two to slowly break out of their hug, “If you’re going back out there then maybe this will help you.” His horn lit up and from a pocket in his sweater he pulled out a strange key. Her levitated it over to Twilight who held out her hoof, the key gently falling into it. “I found that back here but have no use for it since I’ll be researching. Perhaps you’ll find a use for it out there.”

“Thank you Magus.” Twilight nodded her head, vanishing the key into her magic, “Thank you for everything.”

“Don’t mention it.” Magus flashed his creepy smile, before turning to head back for his books. Twilight stood up and headed back for the door to the library.

“You’re going to come back for me. You got that?” Spike said, giving Twilight a soft glare, out of fear and worry.

“I do.” Twilight smiled back at the baby dragon. The two looked at each other for a long period of time, before Twilight opened the door to the backroom and exited, leaving her number one assistant behind.

# Chapter 4

The warm foggy air hit like a wave in comparison to the cooled interior of the library. Twilight shook her mane as the breeze blew past her.

She carefully walked down the front steps that lead to the building, looking back up to the sky as she watched the flakes of ash still falling slowly. A thin layer was beginning to form on the ground. She could see the footsteps she was leaving behind as her hooves stepped on the ground.

She turned and looked back at the building. It didn't belong in Ponyville, its look and architecture didn't belong standing next to the simple designs of the other buildings. Ponyville was a relatively small, though growing and rather robust village.

Twilight let out a soft sigh, turning to look at the building fully. Though she had managed to sneak her way outside, the building still held things inside of it. There were still those strange, book eating monsters inside of its walls. There were broken doors and piles of books. What seemed most strange was the simple look of its disuse despite knowing that it had to be a facility that was often used.

But the most important thing of all was that it contained a pony that was watching over a dragon. Her number one assistant who she knew had to be kept safe and protected. Though Magus didn't give her the best of first impressions, leaving Spike with a pony seemed to lift a burden that she hadn't realized she was carrying since she left the library. Even if she wasn't completely sure she could trust Magus, she knew that he had written his books in order to benefit Equestria and make it a better place. If nothing else gave her confidence, it was the thought that Magus wanted what was best for everypony, even if it didn't show on his face.

Twilight's horn lit up as she reached into her magical pool once more, gripping the key that magus had given her and pulling it out into the world. She'd just tucked it into her magic for the moment because she was ensuring Spike was going to be safe, but now that she was alone in the quiet air of Ponyville she had a chance to examine it.

“Hey, wait a minute.” Twilight said looking at the end of the key. She wasn’t sure how she hadn’t recognized it right away at first, but now that it was in plain light she could easily identify the key now.

It was a long skeleton key with the three blue diamonds on the end of it. Shaped and placed the exact same way as Rarity’s cutie mark.

“Rarity!” Twilight said suddenly feeling a sense of urgency for finding her unicorn friend. She quickly swapped the key for her map and checked her location in Ponyville. From the buildings around her and the direction she had run from Sugar Cube Corner, she had to be on the intersection of Pen Street and Kat Street. If she wanted to make it to Carousel Boutique, she’d have to go down the street and cut across the town square.

“Town Square...” Twilight murmured to herself scanning the area with her hoof. “It’s wide open and going to be covered in fog. I could easily get surrounded or ambushed...” Twilight gulped at the idea of being surrounded and chased down by those creatures again. She didn’t have Spike with her this time, she could fight one off if she had to but she knew she couldn’t handle more than that.

Twilight considered her options. She knew heading back towards Sugar Cube Corner lead to more of those creatures, the only other directions she had was to head back home or to head through the plaza. As much as she didn’t like the idea she was quickly beginning to realize that heading through the plaza was going to be her only route.

She put the map away and stared down the fog filled road. With a soft gulp, knowing she was all alone and that she couldn’t rely on being backed up by anypony, she began to walk down the street.

Each of her hoof steps that had once echoed loudly now only created dull echoes. The ash was muffling each of her steps and she was beginning to grow thankful for it. She didn’t like the idea of being covered in the ash, but it was something she’d have to deal with until she could be inside once more.

The eerily looming buildings of the town seemed to tower over her, as if glaring at her for even being outside. The thick smell of the air seemed to



clog her senses, unable to smell anything but the ash that hung in the air. The warm muggy air was beginning to give her a soft sweat allowing the ash to stick even more easily to her coat. She could hear every step of her hooves, every groan of the town as the houses shift, of the wind blowing through holes and openings in the buildings.

A shiver ran down her back. She didn't like being alone like this. She hadn't realized how comforting having that weight on her back was, knowing that even during the silence she could at any time turn to someone and just talk. She could distract herself from the situation she was in just long enough to not be afraid anymore.

Though he was safe she no longer had that buffer of comfort to help her. She was on her own now. She would have to be the one that was strong.

But it was hard. She'd come to Ponyville and she'd learned what it meant to have true friends. Before them she would've preferred to be alone, enjoyed not being held back by the thought of others or being inconvenienced that she had to go and save ponies who should be able to help themselves.

That was exactly why she was going to Carousel Boutique now. The key was to Rarity's house, or at least she assumed it was, and to have gotten a key to her house only meant one thing to Twilight. Rarity must be in danger.

If Rarity was in danger she would go to help her friend. The only wish she had was for Rarity to be okay. She hoped her gut instinct was wrong and that when Twilight opened the door she'd find her friend obsessively cleaning the mess that had become of her house because of this fog.

She could picture it now.

Rarity would be moving about quickly as she unlocked the door and pushed it open. Rarity would be carrying her duster and cleaning every dusty spot that had emerged into her store.

*"Oh this filthy grime! Where did it come from? I'm always so clean, so meticulous! This is unbecoming of a fine ladies shop!"* Rarity would grumble

and moan before turning her head to see Twilight standing there, covered in sweat and ash, her mane and tail a mess.

*“Oh my stars DARLING!”* Rarity would drop everything and rush over to her messy friend, *“Twilight what happened!? Oh you poor dear! Oh this simply cannot do! You come with me right now and we’ll get you cleaned up!”* And although Twilight would struggle against her friend, telling her there were more important things to take care of, she’d be effortlessly whisked away to Rarity’s bathroom where the prim and proper unicorn would take care to groom all the dirty grime off of her body.

“A wandering mind will make one blind.” A deep female voice suddenly said.

Twilight instantly jumped back and whipped the sword out from her magic pool, pointing it in the direction the voice had come from. She could feel her heart beating fast, having been lost in her thoughts and not realizing she had wandered distracted.

Only about a foot away, the figure of a pony in a black cloak that covered her face stood there once more.

“The end is meant to be a surprise; but some foolish ponies will seek their demise. Do you seek the end Twilight, or do you seek the new dawn’s light?” The strange pony asked Twilight.

“I... I don’t know!” Twilight replied in her hasty confusion. “Who are you?! How do you know who I am?”

“From beginning to end I shall watch all depart, all journeys find me at their start.” A cold breeze suddenly blew through the town and Twilight shivered at the stark contrast in temperature. “Time seems long and vast in this open world, yet its brevity is shown to all unfurled. You have the chance to make all things right, but fate is not kind and it will fight.”

A second breeze blew through the town, shifting the fog to once more cover the cloaked pony.

“No! Wait! Come back!” Twilight cried, rushing forward to where the pony had been standing. Just a few feet away and the figure had disappeared, devoured once more by the fog of the world.

Twilight looked around and swung the blade trying to clear the fog, but no matter how harder she swung the blade, the fog refused to clear. Twilight softly huffed, annoyed, before putting her sword away.

“I don’t know what’s going on... she couldn’t have been a hallucination, Spike saw her too.” Twilight shook her head. That mare wasn’t Zecora, they didn’t even sound similar, but she spoke just like the zebra. Figuring out who she was came to her mind, but was pushed aside when she paid attention to her surroundings. Ahead of her was town square, a wide open area where ponies would normally be gathered to check out several of the market carts or to meet up with friends or even to head for town hall.

This was where Twilight had feared to be. She couldn’t see the nearest buildings, but she knew that if she could get across the open field that she would make it to Carousel Boutique. She had to go help Rarity.

Twilight drew her sword, swallowed her fear and began to walk forward.

She knew how long the town square was. She walked it quite frequently, be it to see her friends or hang out with the mayor. But with it so devoid of life, Twilight knew that the only thing that was waiting for her in the fog were monsters.

Each hoof step felt like they inched her along. She was traveling miles in what should only be yards.

The sight of the buildings behind her faded into the fog, she kept moving forward determined to see the other end of the square. A breeze blew through that brushed her mane, coating it with another layer of ash. She snorted softly, getting the ash out of her nose. She tried to control her breathing; she had to make it across before anything found her, before anything bad could happen to her. She had a promise to keep to Spike.

Her medallion began to buzz and Twilight stopped in place. She knew it had been coming, but the sound of the buzz instantly struck her heart with fear.

She spun her head around in the fog. She instantly caught sight of the shadow in the fog that was beginning to approach her. As soon as she recognized the figure she could hear the clacking of the metal shoes and the dragging of the metal along the ground. It was still away from her, she could run from it.

She turned back to the direction she was headed and began to run. She wanted to get away from that creature with the weapon.

Her hooves skidded to a halt however; several figures appeared in the fog before her now. The sound of clicking metal against cobblestone was intensifying. Twilight's heart leapt into her throat as she instantly recognized this pattern. She turned to her right and started to run, when she saw the figures in the fog there too.

Her head darted back and forth, spotting figures all around her. It was exactly what she had feared.

She was surrounded.

She backed up a few feet, her sword shaking as her magic became unstable. She couldn't believe she'd fallen straight into this trap. She knew it had been coming and yet she had foolishly walked straight into it.

The creatures soon made their way through the fog. She could discern them again, several pony-like creatures, all wearing that same ancient armor. Each carried a different weapon that they dragged along the ground. Swords, axes, spears, all seemed to be sharp as they cut into the ground as they dragged.

Twilight twirled herself, feeling sweat drip down her forehead as she began to panic. She couldn't take them all on. She counted; there were at least twenty of them surrounding her. They seemed to form a perfect circle around her, slowing to a stop as they made their formation.

She was backed into a corner. They were all hunters and she was their prey.

‘Spike... forgive me.’ Twilight silently pleaded to herself, already realizing the reality of her situation. She couldn’t escape now. The only way she could was possibly making a break through the line, but that would never work. She would be skewered and chopped before she would manage an escape.

The creatures were drawing closer, her medallion was buzzing louder. Her sword shook more as her body joined it. She couldn’t handle this. She was going to die. She was going to die and she knew it.

All she could do was try and brace herself. Their weapons would start swinging and if she was lucky it would only hurt for a little while. She glanced around, trying to discern how much closer they would get.

It was that moment that she blinked, a hint of confusion crossed her mind. They weren’t advancing anymore. Instead they all had craned their heads up, as if looking at something she couldn’t see.

She slowly turned herself around, looking at each of them, but they seemed to have stopped advancing towards her. Instead, they all were looking up into the sky. They weren’t paying attention to her movements anymore. A thought struck her mind.

‘Perhaps this is my chance to escape!’ Twilight looked around quickly, trying to discern which of the soldiers were far enough apart to attempt a break through the line. ‘If I put everything I have into breaking through the biggest opening between them, I might have a chance of getting out of here alive-’

A huge rush of wind suddenly blew through the town, tossing her mane across her face. She coughed at the sudden ash that had been flung into her face, but froze as her ears perked up. The wind had come from a creature. A creature with gigantic wings that was flying right above them. Her heart sank at the realization of what was going on.

They were distracted because something much worse was right above them.

A loud roar punctuated the air and Twilight clasped her hooves against her ears. The very ground she stood on shook, tossing her to the ground as she tried to stop the deafening sound from destroying her ears. She winced at the impact before opening her eyes to try and figure out what was going on.

The creatures that had once surrounded her were no longer in their formation. They were now running for their lives. Twilight lifted her head up as the creatures ran past her, dragging their weapons along with them. She watched them in awe, the creatures that very easily had the chance of slaying her, the chance of drawing her blood like they wanted, were running in fear. They feared for their lives more than taking hers.

Another deafening roar broke through the air causing the earth beneath the unicorn to shake with tremors once more. Her hooves instinctively clasped back to her ears from the pain. She knew she was defenseless lying on the ground protecting her ears, she couldn't continue to lay there. Letting go of her head she scrambled to a standing position, just as another earthquake struck the ground attempting to knock her over once more. This time the quake had been caused by something large landing.

Twilight's eyes slowly lifted up, the gigantic creature coming into her view. She had to crane her neck to get all of the creature within her vision. She wished she hadn't.

Its skin was black and rotting. At several locations on its body it had worms digging into its flesh and wrapping around to cover holes in its muscles. Its two wings were leathery and riddled with holes, as if they wouldn't hold it in flight. It had several razor sharp spines running down the length of its back. Its head was large, falling apart in several places. She could see rows of razor sharp teeth jutting from its mouth. Its eyes were pure black, bleeding from the sockets. It let out a growl and smoke billowed from its nose.

Though it looked like it shouldn't be alive, the shape of the creature meant it could only be one creature. It was a dragon. It was unlike any dragon the unicorn had ever seen before.

Twilight shakily tried to stand up. Her senses felt dulled. She'd come face to face with a full grown dragon before. Every day she dealt with a baby dragon as her assistant. But the presence this creature gave off sent fear straight down her spine. She was only barely able to make it to her hooves, her legs shaking fiercely as they tried to support her weight.

The dragon moved its head, its entire neck letting out audibly snaps as it jerked with its movements, as though its spine was misaligned. Twilight froze hearing the sound, chills running through her as the dragon lowered its head to ground level with the lavender unicorn.

Twilight stared into its black, oozing eyes as the dragon stared at her. The sword she had been wielding that whole time fell, her magic no longer stable enough to grab hold of it. It clattered loudly onto the ground.

She could feel her entire self trembling, the monstrosity before her was staring her down. Its hot, disgusting breath washed over her as it breathed through its nose. Her mouth quivered to yell, to scream, to shout, to do anything, but nothing could form within her throat. The hot breath rolled over her body once more as she could hear a low growl come from the back of the dragon's throat. Her eyes darted to the edges of its mouth, certain she'd spot them moving into a devil's grin.

The rotted, gaping mouth of the dragon opened. Twilight stared straight into the gaping jaw, the near-searing breath instantly choking her. The foul odor only punctuated the site. The rows of jagged, uneven fangs were hanging on by oozing and rotted gums. The mandibles were held together by the wriggling, writhing of maggots that formed at the back of its throat, acting as though they were muscles for the jowls. Seething red fire grew in the back of its throat, as if being summoned from the pits of hell itself.

Twilight couldn't move. Her mind no longer understood what it meant to move. She had to move, she had to run, she had to get away from its mouth or else she would die. The hell fire in the dragon's throat began to grow. The blaze roared loudly shooting straight up from the throat. Twilight stared straight into the flames as they flew straight towards her. They felt slow, as though the world itself had slowed down just for her to behold the flames that were heading straight for her. There was almost a serene grace to the sight. She couldn't feel the heat or the panic anymore, she could only

stare into the flames heading for her, as if a moment given to her by fate so that she might relive her life a last time.

*"We'll name her Twilight."* The sound of a loving parent.

*"She's so smart, always reading."* The praise of a loving parent.

*"Twilight, we've enrolled you into Celestia's Academy for Gifted Unicorns!"* the encouragement of a loving parent.

*"Twilight Sparkle, I'd like to make you my own personal protege here at the school."* The moment that changed everything.

*"You're improving with incredible speed. Here, lets try a harder spell."* The encouragement of a mentor.

*"You know that I trust you completely, my faithful student."* The trust of a mentor.

*"And I have an even more essential task for you to complete. Make some friends."* The first words that lead her to her friends.

*"She must continue to study the magic of friendship. She must report to me her findings, from her new home in Ponyville."* The life altering words of her mentor.

*"I've been having nightmares Twilight. Awful, horrible, relentless nightmares."* A friend that spoke out in need.

*"Fluttershy's been having some nasty nightmares that've been keeping her up. She's unable to sleep and she dreads having to go to bed."* The second time a plight was presented to her.

*"Thank you for seeing me in any case miss Sparkle. Your rather...unpleasant blue friend out there tells me you might have a spell to treat my problem?"* The third time she had encountered the same problem.

*"I didn't intend for the spell to have those effects. And you should've seen what their problem was when you cast the spell."* The words of the only unicorn who might have known what the horrors meant.



*"I do trust you. And you better come back for me! I won't forgive you if you die on me!"*

Twilight felt something in the back of her mind smack her back to reality. The roaring flame was bearing down on her with increasing speed.

The inferno flooded the town square, flames spreading quickly across the ash-laden ground. The cobblestone itself appeared to melt under the heat. The fires of hell had been unleashed upon Ponyville with a single breath.

The lavender unicorn rolled against the hard stone ground. As she came to a stop she could feel the weight of her breath with every breath. She stood back up on her trembling hooves, having narrowly escaped her brush with death. Her blurred vision slowly cleared as she made out the view of what looked like lava burning in Ponyville. The cobblestone was heating up rapidly, glowing red like coal stones. The dark red flames ate away at everything they touched.

The dragon's head twisted, the distinct sound of bone bopping echoed above the roar of the flames. Its neck and head turned quickly, coming to face in her direction once more. The black, soulless eyes stared directly at her. The blood oozed thickly from its sockets as it stared. Twilight could feel it staring at her, as if somehow its very gaze was a weapon it had.

She broke her gaze away from its eyes not wanting to stare into the empty voids any longer. She eyes shot down to where she had been standing moments ago before the dragon. Just outside the edge of the blazing fire she could spot the rusted and jagged blade of her sword. It hadn't been caught in the fire.

Twilight looked back up at the dragon's head. The creature stepped towards her, smoke billowing from its nose as she heard the low, piercing growl echo from it. She didn't have much time to stop and think. She had to act and she had to act now.

Fire began to spill from the edges of the dragon's mouth. It was ready to unleash hell once more upon the lavender unicorn. Twilight's horn

quickly burned with magic as the dragon reared its head back. The sword was instantly surrounded with a lavender aura as the creature thrust its head forward.

In that instant the sword seemed to gleam as it sailed through the air. It struck its mark true, slicing straight through the dragon's jaw.

The effect was immediate as the dragon's head went skyward, its mouth opening and spewing its stream of hell fire straight into the air. The dragon roared in pain, shaking the ground once more with its deafening cry. Twilight's ears flattened against her head as she pulled the sword out of its jaw.

The blade dripped with blood as she quickly pulled it back to her side. The dragon's neck popped and cracked as its head wobbled from the pain of its new gaping wound. The dragon shifted its head to once more look at the lavender unicorn that had dared to strike it. Twilight posed the sword before her. She felt a confidence rising inside of her now. She had struck the creature and hurt it, she could do it again, she could kill the dragon.

The dragon saw her stance, realizing it as a challenge. His mouth opened once more, the ear shattering howl erupting from the dragon once more. Twilight stabilized herself, lowering her stance as the ground quaked below her. She huffed loudly, glaring at the dragon. Sweat poured down her forehead from the blaze surrounding her and the dragon, but she could not be swayed from her stance.

Fire brewed within the dragon's mouth once more. Twilight knew it was going to unleash its hell fire once more. She scraped a hoof against the ground and grit her teeth. She had to make her blows count, she had to bring the creature down before it could do the same to her. The sword shifted in her magical grip, ready for her to deliver her strike.

Twilight's hooves struck forward, running straight for the dragon. The dragon thrust its head forward, the inferno in its mouth being unleashed once more upon the world.

The fire struck the cobblestone, wrapping the square in the blazing heat. Twilight's eyes widened in shock as she saw the flames heading straight for her. There was no way she could move in time to avoid the

flames. The flames rushed upon her and instantly overwhelmed her. She was engulfed in the flames, burning alive. Searing heat lapping at her skin and flesh. The fire washed over her, covering her in the fires of hell. Within the flames she turned to ash.

The world came rushing back, Twilight gasping for air as though she had been submerged underwater. She was disorientated, certain she'd just been roasted alive by the dragon.

The dragon pulled its head back, the fires licking at the edges of its mouth as it prepared to spew forth its destructive blaze.

Twilight's eyes widened watching the dragon's movements. She had no time to think anymore, whatever just happened she didn't have the luxury to worry about it now.

The fire raged forth, the heat being felt immediately. Twilight no longer wasted a moment, raising her body and forcing herself to move. The confidence she had to strike the dragon vanished from her body just as quickly as it had come as her hooves struck the cobblestone. The intense heat struck behind her as she felt the end of her tail singe. She cried out in pain, the intense heat lapping at her skin, slowly beginning to burn her flesh.

Her hooves struck hard and carried her body. She began to make her escape from the heat as she felt cooler air wrapping her body.

She looked over her shoulder the silhouette of the dragon and the burning flames in Ponyville disappearing into the fog. She watched the dragon's figure raise its head into the air of Ponyville and unleash one of its earth-shaking roars.

The unicorn didn't stop running for a moment. She ran as fast as her hooves could carry her. As far away from the dragon as she could go.

The blaze of the fire died into the distance, the dragon's roars seeming to grow fainter, the buzz of her medallion began growing quiet. Soon she could hear the strikes of her hooves against the cobblestones, her heavy panting as air rushed to fill the need in her lungs, feeling the air return to its cooler, muggy self.

She skidded to a stop, as the cobblestone gave way to dirt. Before her was the small river that flowed straight through Ponyville. The medallion had grown to a very faint buzz and she could no longer see the flames of the town square. The only thing she could hear was the distance roars of the dragon, as if it had lost its prey.

She knew she had to keep moving. To stand still outside only meant death. Be it from those strange soldier creatures or the dragon catching up to where she had run off.

Looking into the river's stream reminded her that she was still on a mission. She had to get to Rarity's house and make sure she was okay. If she was near the river, that meant that she would be near the home as well. It could also mean that it might provide shelter, a place to hide from the dragon out to roast her alive.

Without hesitation she summoned her map once more and reviewed it quickly. The river at the edge of town square would lead her straight to Carousel Boutique. She didn't need to be told twice. Putting the map and her sword back into her magic she began to run once more alongside the river.

As she ran further from the town square her medallion became silent. Just as she was thankful for the silence the familiar bridge to cross the river to Rarity's boutique could be seen. Twilight wasted no time crossing it, the wood creaking with every quick step she took.

The familiar round building appeared through the fog. Twilight stopped for a moment to stare in shock at the state that had become of the building. If not for knowing the building so well she might have not recognized it.

Several of the decorations had fallen from the store and lay scattered in the yard. The familiar plywood was nailed to cover the windows, though several sections of the wall were busted open, as if something had been striking against it. Mold and grime climbed the sides of the building and made it look unused for years.

She didn't waste a moment longer and quickly ran up to the door, knowing full well the silent peace could be disturbed at any moment. She pressed her hoof against the handle and tried to push the door open. The door jammed with a 'click', telling her it was locked from the inside. She scanned the handle and saw an opening to place a key inside to unlock the door.

Without even hesitating she pulled out the key that had Rarity's cutie mark on it and placed it inside of the lock. With a quick turn the door let out a 'click' and began to creak open. Twilight pushed the door open and slammed it closed behind her.

Finally, inside of the familiar building, not being attacked by monsters or dragons, her medallion silent, Twilight let herself collapse. She closed her eyes and rested on the cold floor of Rarity's boutique, just panting.

The realization of what she saw began to slowly sink in.

"I... was going to die..." Twilight whispered softly to herself. She had seen it. If she had attacked the dragon like she had planned, if she had rushed it and sent the sword into its body once more, the dragon would've hit her with its fire. The fire would've taken her life in a matter of seconds.

But she had avoided death. She had avoided it by the no more than the skin of her teeth. That vision...

"That vision..." Twilight's eyes opened slowly as she began to realize it. "That vision was just like... just like the vision I had with Spike..."

Her body shifted, sitting up slowly from the laying position on the ground.

"No... no they were different..." Twilight spoke aloud to herself, wanting to hear the comfort of a voice right now, even if it was her own voice. "The vision of my death happened seconds before it was going to happen... with the vision about Spike... it wasn't an imminent threat... but if she had left him there it would've been the last chance she had to save him."

Twilight closed her eyes and she gripped her head in her hooves. "What's happening... None of this... none of this makes any sense." She shook her head as shivers ran up her body. She could feel tears trying to form at the edges of her eyes.

In the span of a day she had brushed with death more times than she ever had in her life. She had never felt so terrified for her own safety as she did right then, the gravity of her situation fully sinking in for the first time. Before now she'd had Spike with her, before she had to protect him, before she wasn't alone.

But she had left Spike behind. She had left him behind where it was... where it was safe.

"I... I have to find my friends..." Twilight rubbed her face, shuddering as she tried to hold back her sobs. "I... have to find Celestia... it's my... my responsibility." She forced herself to believe it. "I wield the Element of Magic... I bring harmony together." She took a deep breath, calming her heart.

"...Rarity?" Twilight called out quietly, lifting her head to look into the boutique. It was only then that she realized that she couldn't see, the building was too dark to see anything.

She lifted her hoof up to her pendant and pressed against it. The familiar white light lit up and for the first time she was able to see the insides of Carousel Boutique.

Everything looked like it had been destroyed. Many of the mirrors were cracked and shattered, mannequins were torn to shreds, dresses and curtains lay ragged across the floor. The once beautiful boutique now sat in utter ruins.

"Rarity!" Twilight called out louder this time, looking back and forth across the large show room. The building creaked softly as it settled into place. It didn't even look like the white unicorn had seen the state her home and business had become. No doubt one look at the mess and Rarity would've been frantic to clean it.

Twilight got up from her sitting position back onto her hooves. Just as quickly as she did she found herself falling to the ground. She grunted in pain as her chest struck the ground before the rest of her body followed.

She hesitantly raised her front hooves and lifted her body, turning her head to look at her back legs. She could see the hint of red running down the length of them. Though she hadn't felt it at first, she was able to realize it now.

The heat of the fire had burned her legs.

It wasn't a severe burn. She could move her hind legs and if she was careful she could walk on them.

She stood up once more, being cautious about the amount of weight she placed on her back legs. She winced as the pain shot through her legs, but they held her weight. She gingerly walked further into the boutique, trying to adjust to the pain.

The debris crunched under her hooves as she walked. She didn't know what she might be looking for, but she wanted any clues that might tell her what happened to the boutique.

When she had awoken at her home, everything was perfectly fine except for being boarded up and locked inside of the building. However, it seemed that something serious had happened at the boutique. Twilight didn't see any cuts or scratches that would indicate weapons like the creatures outside used. She wondered if something else had come into the store and attacked Rarity.

"Please be okay Rarity..." Twilight spoke quietly to herself.

She swept her light back and forth, trying to get a better look at everything in the room. Her light hit the three mirrors used to show off the dresses that the ponies in her shop would try on. Surprisingly, of all the mirrors in the shop, those three seemed to have suffered the least damage, only have a few minor cracks running through them.

"Oh, hey, there's something there." Twilight spoke, continuing to keep her voice hushed, as she walked over to the mirrors. As she reached the

platform, she spotted what looked like a piece of paper attached to the mirror with some tape. She grabbed the paper with her magic and floated it in front of her to read.

*It was still the eve of that cold winter's night. It was now just the two of us alone in the cabin, trapped in the woods while the blizzard raged outside. I kept thinking back to the events that had lead up to this moment, only to still be baffled as to how it had come to this.*

*"Here, drink this, it'll warm you." Daniel's sultry voice washed over me once more sending a chill down my spine. I looked up to see the warm cup of cocoa he had brewed for me floating from his magic. I raised my hooves to grasp the cup and he let it go.*

*"Thank you." I cooed, though not meaning to. A soft blush formed on my face as I tried to sip my cocoa. It was as though I was once more a young school filly with a crush.*

*"It was no problem at all." That voice sent me into chills. The hunk of a stallion then sat next to me and I felt my face flush harder. His flanks were so close I could feel them rubbing against mine. I wanted to resist him, but the fires in my body yearned for his embrace.*

*With just the two of us alone in that cabin I didn't know what to think. The only thoughts that ran through my head was about the ways he could make me his on that night, each scenario steamier than the last. My face felt like it could glow in that darkly lit cabin.*

*"You look like you're cold, here let me warm you." Daniel spoke softly as his magic touched a blanket and brought it towards us. I soon found myself wrapped tightly within the bundle, right next to the stallion that sent my heart beating. "I couldn't live with myself if I let a young mare go cold."*

*Oh Princess, his words were electric.*

This had to be a page from one of Rarity's romance novels. She always enjoyed the rather ridiculous storylines, the corny dialogue and hammed-in plot that worked around the fact of two ponies that barely had



anything in common falling in love; always with some strange plot twist towards the middle and, more often than Rarity liked, one of the main characters dying at the end.

Twilight wondered what the page was doing taped to Rarity's mirror. Whatever the reason may be Twilight vanished the page into her magic. She turned to look back at the mirror.

The medallion began to blare its buzzing as Twilight screamed, scrambling away from the mirror. A large shadowy figure of a pony had appeared in the mirror, a red eye gleaming from it.

Her back legs struck a fallen table causing her to trip. She fell backwards and struck her head hard against the ground. She yelped in pain, quickly reaching up and grabbing hold of the sore spot that had struck. However, the blaring of the medallion snapped her back to her senses and she scrambled to her legs to look back at the mirror.

The figure was gone just as quickly as it came. Twilight panted as she felt her heart beating in her chest. Whatever that figure was it had been bigger than a normal pony. It was almost as if the pony had been as tall as the Princess.

Twilight's ears perked as she still heard the buzzing of her medallion. She looked around quickly, not seeing a creature of any sort that would trigger the buzzing of the medallion.

Wood snapped loudly behind Twilight, causing her to jump once more. She twirled around and faced the front door, spotting an axe head that had just struck its ways through the door.

"Oh no! One of those things knows I'm here!" She cursed loudly to herself, backing away from the door. Her horn lit up as her sword was pulled forth from her magic.

The axe head pulled itself from the door, causing a large gash to appear from the force. The axe struck through the door once more, splintering wood struck the ground and scattered. The axe was forced through the door once more, the hole growing larger.

Twilight grit her teeth hard, preparing herself for the creature to break through.

A shattering crunch of wood echoed through the boutique as the axe destroyed the door. Twilight covered her face as dust and wood flew past her. She coughed as she stepped back further, turning to look at where the front door used to be.

The metal clicking of armored hoof steps walked into the boutique. Twilight could view the creature now, illuminated by the light of her pendant. The chunks of rotting flesh with bone showing through, the thick and ancient armor over its body, the hefty double-headed axe it dragged with its mouth. It was definitely one of the creatures that seemed to litter the town now.

Every step drew the creature closer to Twilight. There was no way around the creature and it was clearly on a mission. It was out for her blood.

The creature lifted the large axe with its mouth, raising it to strike down on Twilight. Twilight jumped to the side swiftly, getting out of range of the creature. The axe came striking down right where she had been standing. She skidded to a fast stop at the creature's side and concentrated her magic. She commanded the sword to swing with a mighty blow down at the creature. The sword flew swiftly through the air, straight at the creature.

A sound of metal clashing echoed through the boutique. Twilight cursed at herself, she'd struck the armor of the creature. The armor didn't even have a dent from her strike.

The creature pulled the axe out of the ground and began to turn towards Twilight, readying to strike once more.

Twilight looked the creature over quickly, trying to find openings in the armor. The armor was packed tightly around the creature. The biggest openings seemed to be around the face. The helmet covered the entire head and the bridge of the nose, but the eyes and the mouth were wide open. Twilight cursed her luck at having such a small opening and one directly within the line of fire.

The axe came swinging down and Twilight jumped back. She felt the force of air blow past her quickly from the force of the swing, the axe embedding itself into the ground. Twilight raised her sword and put a hoof down on the handle of the axe. As the creature tried to force the axe out of the ground Twilight pushed against it, keeping it there.

The creature let go of the blade and lifted its head. It opened its mouth wide, a growl piercing from its throat. It lunged forward, the jaws looking to sink into her flesh.

The sword was plunged straight into the creature's mouth. Twilight didn't let up on the force for a moment, the sword driving straight through bone and muscle as it became buried handle deep inside the creature.

A piercing wail of pain cried out as Twilight jumped back. The creature tried to thrash about, digging the sword around its insides deeper. Blood began to ooze from its mouth and through the openings in its armor. Twilight grimaced at the awful sight occurring before her, putting a hoof up to her mouth. The piercing wail felt like it struck at her soul, realizing she had purposely brought this upon the creature.

With a final shriek the creature collapsed onto its side. Blood pooled quickly under the creature as it oozed from every open spot it could.

"Forgive me..." Twilight closed her eyes and whispered her apology. She swallowed her nausea and carefully walked up to the creature. She still needed that sword, but now it was lodged inside of yet another creature that she had killed.

Twilight's ear perked up. Something was happening. She could hear something, but it wasn't her medallion buzzing. No, this was something coming from the town itself. A sound she recognized.

It was the siren.

The siren was going off in Ponyville. Twilight looked out the broken front door, the world was being devoured by darkness. The darkness spread through the open door and began to devour the inside of the boutique as the siren seemed to blare even louder.

“W-What!?” Twilight cried out, stepping back from the darkness that was encroaching upon the home. Twilight’s pendant began to flicker, growing dim.

“No! NO NO NO NO NOT NOW!” Twilight tapped against the pendant. The light of the pendant went out and suddenly she was in pitch darkness. She wanted to scream, but the sound couldn’t escape her throat.

The world was shifting all around her, she could feel it, she could hear it. Fear ran straight down her spine as she heard the crawl of something all around her.

She was all alone in the darkness. Even the sound of civilization had left, the siren’s blaring growing dimmer before growing silent.

Her world was deathly quiet.