



The Sweetie Chronicles Fragments

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Prologue

It was a gorgeous summer afternoon in Ponyville.

The sun shone in the clear sky, the birds sang and flew cheerfully, the leaves on the trees swayed in the gentle breeze, and ponies chatted, worked, baked, and played merrily in the streets.

I wish I was out there, a young thought filly as she gazed out of the library window. *But no, I'm stuck here, studying.* She turned to glare at the open tome in front of her.

"Sweetie Belle?" a voice called from the kitchen, snapping her out of her reverie "Do you like sugar in your tea?"

"Uh, yeah, Twilight! Just one cube!"

"Okay, one cube it is!" came the cheerful reply.

The young unicorn grimaced, partly in guilt at her current thoughts and partly because she knew Twilight would turn drinking tea into practice.

"Here you go." The purple unicorn said with a smile as she set a cup next to the tome. She levitated her own cup a bit longer before she sat at the table, across from Sweetie Belle. "Did you finish the chapter?"

"Uh..." the filly looked down guiltily.

The purple unicorn gave her a gentle smile. "Don't worry. Now, do you remember the spell we've been working on?"

The filly nodded. She had been right. Practice time. "Yes... Pres... pres - ti - digi - tation?"

Twilight chuckled. "It's a long name, I know. Prestidigitation." She looked to the younger unicorn expectantly.

“Presti-digitation,” the filly repeated, earning a slight nod that was Twilight’s way of wordlessly coaxing her on “It’s... a very simple spell... I mean, an ele-men-tary spell... that has limited effects,” Sweetie repeated from what she could remember of Twilight’s rather exhaustive lecture on it, “It doesn’t do much, but it allows the unicorn casting it to create ghostly sounds, move small objects, paint things temporarily...” she trailed off, struggling to remember more.

“And,” the purple unicorn said, “it also allows for a bit of temperature manipulation.”

Sweetie Belle blinked. “Temporal what now?”

“*Temperature* manipulation,” Twilight repeated, she looked at Sweetie’s slightly blank expression and sighed. “In other words, you can cool things down a bit with it, or warm them up.”

“Oooh... I get it!” Sweetie Belle grinned.

“Good, because you are going to use that to cool down your tea a bit so you can drink it.”

Sweetie Belle looked a bit dubious, but nevertheless turned her attention to the cup. Wisps of steam emanated from her tea, a silent statement of how hot it still was. Closing her eyes, she concentrated on the cup, feeling her magic circulate through her body until it concentrated on her horn.

However, her mind was clearly not on the task at hand as she noticed when she opened her eyes and found that her tea was now boiling hot. She watched the bubbles despondently until her mentor slowly cooled it down.

Twilight sighed and looked out the window. “It’s okay, Sweetie,” she said after a moment, trying to maintain her cheery attitude. “I know you would rather be doing something else than sitting here with me reading these dusty old books.”

The younger unicorn almost flinched at the badly disguised undertone of sadness in Twilight’s voice. “It’s not that, Twilight, I promise!” She lied.

The purple unicorn glanced at her.

"It's just that... I mean, you're a great teacher and I enjoy learning with you... but... well, I miss Scootaloo and Apple Bloom."

Twilight nodded. "I know." she said, sipping a bit of her tea. "But they're also taking lessons, Sweetie. Applejack took Apple Bloom to Appleloosa to learn about their apple farming techniques, and from there she's taking her all over to Manehattan, and Hoofington to visit family. It's..." Twilight shrugged. "A family tradition."

The filly nodded. "I know... and Scootaloo is being coached by Rainbow Dash for the freestyle competition..." she sighed. "Last summer it was easier..."

Twilight smiled. "Well, it's a sign that you're growing up," she said simply, "We all need to learn more to be able to be productive ponies of Equestria. I'm still studying under the Princess."

Sweetie Belle nodded. "Yeah..."

"And I sent her a message just this morning about taking you as an apprentice," Twilight stated proudly.

"You told the Princess I'm your apprentice?!" The filly smiled broadly. "Yay! That means I'm officially your student!" she blinked. "But... we've been studying together for a week now. Why did you only just tell her today?"

Twilight blushed and looked away. "Honestly? I thought you would walk away after the second day," she confessed after a short silence, "I thought that... that you would get tired of my lessons, or find them boring, or that I would talk too much and you would get annoyed and skip meeting me and go play..."

Sweetie Belle smiled carefully and decided not to confess she would have done any of those things instead of coming over were it not for her sister making her Pinkie Swear she would attend each class while she was off in Fillydelphia- or else.

Regardless of her silence, it must have shown in her face, because Twilight's proud smile slowly faded away until it was completely gone. The

purple unicorn's shoulders sagged a bit and she looked at the softly steaming cup of tea held in her magic grasp for a few seconds. She stirred the tea morosely. "Oh."

Sweetie Belle gulped. "I'm sorry, Twilight..." she said after a moment. "I really do want to go out and play..." she cringed when she saw the unicorn's shoulders sag a bit more. "But... I- I am enjoying studying with you," she said a bit reluctantly. She knew it wasn't fair to make Twilight feel bad. The studious unicorn was only trying to help her.

Twilight dared a small smile. "I sometimes forget that not everypony loves studying as much as I do." She chuckled. "And Cheerilee keeps reminding me that taking a break is a good idea." She smiled as she looked up at the surprised filly. "I'm glad you told me the truth... and that you like my classes, Sweetie. Why don't we close the tomes, finish our tea and I'll treat you to some ice cream?"

The younger unicorn's eyes lit up. "Really?"

Twilight smiled. "Why, yes! You've been very good, Sweetie, you've been studying for 5 hours straight!"

The filly blinked. Had it really been that long?

Maybe... maybe I'm enjoying this more than I thought...

It wasn't long before the two unicorns were ready to go.

"Spike! We're going out for a bit; could you watch the library for me, my number one assistant?"

"Sure thing, Twilight!" the dragon called back from the upper level, where he was shelving books.

"Good." The purple unicorn smiled. "Ready, Sweetie?"

"Ready!"

o.o.o

The sky was starting to darken by the time that Twilight and Sweetie Belle decided that they had taken enough of a break.

“Twilight?”

“Yes, Sweetie?”

The pair was laying down on the grass, listening to Lyra strum her lyre nearby in the dying light of the afternoon.

“I'm sorry I made you feel I didn't like your lessons.”

They had finished their ice cream, which had been a momentous occasion since Sweetie Belle had managed to hold it with her magic from beginning to end... something she had never done before.

The purple unicorn smiled and nuzzled the crusader. “It's okay, Sweetie. I could see that you were studying hard. And today you managed to levitate your Ice-cream from the moment we bought it until you finished it! I don't think yesterday you could've done it! That's a huge leap!”

Sweetie Belle smiled, pleased with the praise she was receiving. The pair stood up and strolled through the park on their way to the Library.

“I think I know what to teach you tomorrow.” Twilight mused on the way.

“Really?”

“Yes. It's a bit more complicated but... I can start teaching you the basis for the spell.”

“What is it?”

Twilight smiled. “Well, given how you and the other crusaders get into so much trouble... how does a shield spell sound?”

The little filly's eyes widened. “You really think I can do it?!”

“Only one way to find out!”

o.O.o

As they approached the town proper and were just a few blocks away from the Library, they heard several shouts. Turning to look at the source of the commotion, both unicorns stepped back as two very angry-looking wolves in chains and metal muzzles pulled a wagon into the plaza.

Sweetie Belle blinked in confusion, but Twilight immediately groaned. "Oh, Celestia, why her?"

"Who?" the filly asked, confused.

"Watch in awe!" a voice demanded as the wagon stopped in the middle of the plaza. Blue smoke rolled over the ground and into the air as fireworks lit up the sky, drawing everypony to gather around the wagon as it unfolded into a stage, but still keeping a healthy distance from the wolves. An explosion in the stage made them look up as a mare in a cape and magician's hat reared on her hind legs and addressed the crowd. "As the Grrreat and Powerful Trixie performs the most amazing feats of magic and ingenuity!"

"Oooh!" Sweetie Belle clapped her hooves together excitedly. "A showpony! Let's go watch!"

Twilight shook her head and sighed as she followed the excited Sweetie Belle into the crowd.

In an instant, Trixie's eyes had found the purple unicorn. "I see." she said with scorn. "Twilight Sparkle is here again, to challenge Trixie!"

Twilight groaned and glared at the showmare. "Trixie, I don't care about challenging you. You said you were here to perform; go ahead, I won't interrupt you."

The blue unicorn laughed. "Trixie sees that you have learned your rightful place." she looked down at the crowd. "Very well, if you are not here to interrupt, The Great and Powerful Trixie shall amaze you all!"

With a wave of her hoof, the two snarling wolves were levitated to stand on the stage on either side of her. ""Since her departure from this town over a

year ago, The Great and Powerful Trixie has undertaken a glorious quest. A quest of legendary proportions. She has toured the great marvels of not only Equestria, but of the world beyond its borders. And... recently, the most magnificent Trixie captured not one, but two of the most feared and infamous creatures in all Equestria!"

"Wow!" Sweetie said, "That's amazing!"

"..." Twilight seemed to be about to say something, her eyes were fixed on the wolves, brow wrinkled in concentration. "Those wolves..."

"Behold!" Trixie shouted, pointing with one hoof at the wolf on her left. "Romulus!"

Twilight's eyes became pinpricks.

Trixie's other hoof slowly swept to point at the wolf on her right. "And Remus!"

"Amazing!" Sweetie Belle jumped up and down amongst the gasps of awe and amazement escaping the multitude of ponies around them.

"TRIXIE!"

Everypony stopped to look at Twilight.

The showmare growled. "What is it, Twilight Sparkle? The Great and Powerful Trixie has a show to perform, if you don't recall."

"Are you insane?! You caught Romulus and Remus and chained them *in iron*!?" Twilight's eye twitched.

Trixie snorted. "The Great and Powerful Trixie is not a moron! Nor is she an incompetent fool. She did not use simple iron."

Twilight sighed and a trembling smile crept into her face. "Of- Of course, Trixie. I'm sorry, I forget you have traveled all over Equestria..."

Trixie smiled and nodded. "The Great and Powerful Trixie has!"

“... so you know a lot of the legends and myths of the world...”

“Yes, yes Trixie knows many legends.” the showmare said.

“... so you would have of course used at least silver thread along magically engraved and enhanced iron shackles with the appropriate runes etched in silver or even platinum...”

“The Great... what?” Trixie had begun to nod again, but stopped as her mind worked out what Twilight was saying.

“And...” Celestia's apprentice sat down, relieved. “You would have accounted for the fact that tonight is a full moon, so you would have included a moon-energy absorption spell.”

“Trixie... wait...” The blue unicorn was starting to get nervous as the oblivious purple unicorn continued.

Sweetie Belle was starting to get a bad feeling as her mentor kept talking, Trixie kept stammering and ponies all around them started shuffling away from the stage. “Um... Twi?”

“I'm really sorry, Trixie, I don't know why I would have doubted that a professional showmare would know to take the appropriate precautions when dealing with legendary were-creatures.”

The crowd looked expectantly at Trixie, who took two steps back. “Were... creatures?” she managed to ask weakly.

“Why yes,” the purple unicorn, still oblivious to the growing panic, carried on. “Like, were-weasels, were-chickens, and other variations of the lycanthropic effect...” Sweetie Belle gulped when she saw Twilight Sparkle's expression change to one of horror as Trixie's cringing finally dawned on her. “You... didn't know?!” the purple unicorn gaped.

A hush fell over the crowd and even the wolves fell silent. Twilight looked to the horizon in horror as the sun finally set and the moon began its ascension, the celestial orb casting its silvery light over the town of Ponyville.

The growling of the wolves stopped. Sweetie Belle turned to look at them, a chill running down her spine. They were... growing. The wolves had already been large -about the size of Big Mac- and while they had looked feral and dangerous, the chains and muzzles on them had given the citizens of Ponyville a sense of safety.

But now, as the wolves grew, their chains snapped one after another with an almost musical cadence and the illusion of safety was shattered. Their forelegs bulged along with their paws, which extended into clawed hands, the fur on their shoulders and back became darker and thicker. They stood on their hind legs which also became solid masses of muscle, easily keeping their bodies upright. Their lips curled back in a snarling smile, yellow fangs almost seeming to glow in contrast with their black coats. The iron muzzles burst as their heads grew and now the werewolves were easily three times the size of Big Macintosh... and apparently hungry.

Sweetie Belle screamed, the sound snapping the paralyzed ponies into action as everypony ran for their lives. In front of them, the two werewolves turned their attention to Trixie with malevolent smiles on their faces.

The showmare took a look at them and immediately her horn blazed into life. Chains magically wrapped themselves around the two creatures as Trixie took a step back, her eyes narrowing in concentration.

For a moment, Sweetie held hope that it would be enough to stop them, but Trixie's next actions burst that small bubble of hope.

"Catch!" the showmare shouted, her magic levitating both creatures into the air as they started breaking the chains with little effort and threw them into the crowd, straight towards Twilight and Sweetie Belle.

Twilight's magic flared in response to the threat. For a moment, she caught both creatures in the air, but their continuous struggle made it really difficult for her to keep them in place.

Trixie immediately cast another illusion spell, creating blue mist around her and her wagon. When it dissipated, they were gone.

As the ponies around them ran about in a crazed frenzy, the younger unicorn pressed close to her mentor. "Twilight? What do we do?"

“Just stay close, Sweetie...” Twilight ordered through clenched teeth. unexpectedly, one of the panicking ponies crashed into the purple unicorn, and sent her sprawling to the ground, disrupting her concentration.

The werereatures landed right in front of them. Sweetie screamed and jumped back as a clawed hand tore the ground where she had been seconds ago.

“Sweetie! Run!” Twilight shouted, jumping between her and the werewolves, horn glowing bright, but a backhanded swipe to the face knocked her to the ground. The young unicorn ran, her eyes wide in panic as she searched quickly for a place to hide. Behind her she heard the werewolves howl and the excited yips of a predator on the hunt drawing closer. She ran around the corner of a building, and dove behind several trash cans, hoping that the smell of rotting food would throw the wolf off her trail as she cowered in fear.

She couldn’t see it, but she could still hear the creature as it slowed down and growled. The pads on its feet silenced its steps, but the creature’s deep, rumbling breaths threatened to make her scream and reveal her location as it slowly approached her hiding place.

Sweetie Belle cringed as she searched her mind for any possible way out of this situation. There was no Twilight right next to her, or even Fluttershy to use her Stare and scare the monster away, her sister would have at least been able to use her magic to fight it off.

It was getting closer now. From between the trash cans, the filly could see other stacks of boxes and trash in the small alley. She was in between Sugar Cube Corner and Ponyville’s four-star restaurant, The Clover, so there was a lot of trash around. An idea began to form in her mind, as she remembered Twilight’s earlier lesson.

Hoping that the trashcans around her disguised her and her horn's light well enough from the werewolf, Sweetie concentrated on conjuring up the simplest spell she knew.

Something shifted in a trash pile further up the alley from where she was hiding, clattering to the ground. The sniffing stopped and the world was

silent but for the distant shouts outside the alley. She could hear the creature's breathing, it was calmer now. She could almost sense it looking intently at the pile on the other end of the alley.

Fighting to keep quiet and afraid to even breathe, she tried again. But this time, she varied the spell.

From the pile of trash a came a soft, whimpering noise. With a scratch of claws scraping the ground, the werewolf bounded forward to land, with a howl, on top of the pile. Its claws tore into the bags, ripping through wood and bags full of trash as they sought their prey.

Sweetie Belle carefully slid out from behind the trashcans, and, without taking her eyes of the werewolf, slowly backed out of the alley. Her heart was beating wildly inside her chest, and she feared that it would give her away to the wolf.

As she stepped back as slowly and silently as she possibly could, she backed into a trash can. The metal lid slid off, scraping its way to the edge of the trashcan before it clanged onto the ground beside her.

The werewolf whipped its head around, eyes ablaze with anger at having been tricked. Sweetie Belle turned and galloped away, desperately trying to find help or another place to hide. But despite her best efforts there was nowhere to hide, and being in the middle of the plaza, she could only weave through discarded carts and spilled goods in trying to put off her seemingly inevitable fate.

A paw came down hard on her, knocking the filly off her hooves. The world spun crazily around her and she found herself on her back, gasping for breath as the wolf's muzzle hovered over her face. There was a vicious gleam in his eyes and Sweetie Belle knew this was it.

"I..." she gasped and closed her eyes tightly. *Goodbye sis...*

There was a shout and suddenly the weight of the werewolf was gone. Sweetie Belle opened her eyes to see Big Macintosh standing protectively over her, glaring at the werewolf now sprawled out on its side. Slowly, the beast stood up, growling fiercely at the draft pony.

“Good job, Big Mac!” Twilight shouted as she slammed the growling werewolf with his packmate, sending both to the ground in a daze. The purple unicorn galloped to their side and took a quick look at her apprentice. “Are you okay, Sweetie?!”

The filly was barely able to nod, her body was shaking so much.

Twilight trained a fierce look on the werewolves. “No pony, no creature, no *monster* threatens *my* student!” she growled, as her magic enveloped her body.

A blast of magic shot into the air and storm clouds formed high above them, slowly obscuring the moon. The werewolves howled in anger as gleaming chains broke through the windows of a nearby forge, wrapping tightly around them, reinforced by magic. The ends of the chains then buried themselves into the floor of the plaza, pinning them to the ground.

Metal bars followed, slamming down one after the other around the werecreatures, until they were completely surrounded. A large piece of metal landed roughly atop the makeshift cage, sealing them inside.

“Big Mac! Did you get it?!” Twilight shouted, her magic pulsating as she struggled restrain the creatures, chains and all.

“Eeyup!” the stallion quickly moved to the side and brought a cart filled with silver: plates, cutlery and even a vase or two. “This enough, Twilight?”

The purple unicorn’s answer was to levitate the entirety of the carts contents and, in an amazing feat of magical strength, crunch them around the bars and metal top of the cage. It was crude, but soon the bars all had silver cutlery covering them. With another pulse of magic, two more long chains crossed on top of the metal slab that was keeping the wolves inside and buried themselves on the floor of the plaza.

Twilight then released her magic and collapsed, exhausted, right next to a now complete in awe Sweetie Belle.

The wolves broke the first set of chains now that there was no magic to reinforce them, but each time one of the creatures lept at the bars, they

would howl in pain and growl. The cage was makeshift, but they would be contained.

"Twilight, that was incredible!" Sweetie gushed, grinning ear to ear at the collapsed unicorn.

"I'm just glad you're okay, Sweetie," Twilight whispered, chest heaving from exertion but smiling. She nuzzled the younger unicorn as other ponies began to venture back into the plaza.

o.O.o

"That Trixie should be arrested!" a pony shouted as a contingent of unicorns from Canterlot slowly transferred the wolves into a more secure cage the next day.

To say the citizens of Ponyville were not happy with the showmare would be a gross understatement. They were livid. Furious even. Although the Ursa Minor had ravaged the town, destroying many buildings, it was the fact that one so young had nearly died that enflamed the hearts of Ponyville's citizens.

Buildings they could replace. Sweetie Belle, nopony could.

"Find her and throw her into a dungeon!" Aloe added, stomping a hoof, her eyes ablaze with righteous anger.

"Strip her of her magic!" a pegasus shouted, more than one unicorn wincing at the suggestion, although none of them looked inclined to disagree with the punishment.

Twilight and Sweetie Belle stood side by side, silently watching the proceedings as the crowds began to shout more and more for the showmare's head... or at least her arrest. The Canterlot unicorns were hard pressed to keep a professional look as the town almost rioted right then and there.

"Twilight?" the young filly looked up at the purple unicorn.

"Yes, Sweetie?"

"I really want to learn magic," the crusader said, looking at the snarling wolves. "I never want to be so scared again."

Twilight smiled and nuzzled the younger unicorn. "I'll do my best."

o.O.o

"Morning, Sweetie," Twilight said brightly as the filly made her way down the stairs of the library.

The white unicorn yawned and waved a hoof. "Morning, Twi. Morning, Spike." It had been a week since the incident with the werewolves, and she was still having trouble sleeping.

"Hi, Sweetie!" Spike's head poked out of the kitchen. "Guess what I made? Pancakes!"

The filly smiled as she made her way to the table, where she joined Twilight. "What's the plan for today, Twi?"

"I should be receiving a few things from Canterlot," the purple unicorn said, "I requested some books and devices to help your training along with some items for my own studies."

The little unicorn sighed as she looked at the gorgeous day outside. *I know I asked her to teach me as much as she could but... we haven't have a break in days!*

Twilight caught the filly looking outside and smiled gently. "But don't worry too much about it, Sweetie. Why don't you take a break? I have to unpack a lot of sensitive equipment and it's a lovely day outside! You could visit Pinkie Pie or Fluttershy while I do that."

"Really!?" the white unicorn bounced up and down. "Yay!" she hugged Twilight. "You're the best, Twilight!"

The purple unicorn chuckled and wondered if this was how Celestia felt when Twilight became excited. "You deserve it Sweetie, but breakfast first, and you have to feed Opalescence before anything else, okay?"

“Okay!”

It was late afternoon when Sweetie Belle came back. She had kept her promise and fed Opalescence, and had spent most of the morning walking around town or cleaning up the Cutie Mark Crusaders HQ.

“Twilight!” she called as she walked into the library. “I’m back!” There was no answer. “Twilight? Are you home?”

She walked towards the kitchen until she heard a noise. Walking towards it, she found the door to the basement slightly ajar. Inside, she could see a veritable kaleidoscope of shifting colors inside casting strange shadows on the wall.

“Are you down there, Twilight?” she called. There was no reply, but for a moment she thought she heard her mentor’s voice downstairs.

Opening the door and carefully making her way downstairs, she was able to hear more clearly.

“Okay, Spike, you have to do three turns only!”

“Gotcha, Twi!” There was cranking sound. “Gosh, this thing is labor intensive!” Spike added, sounding somewhat grumpy.

“I know, but I want to finish this before Sweetie comes back.”

Sweetie stopped.

“Why?” Spike asked, unknowingly echoing the filly’s thoughts, “Do you think she’d get in the way or something?”

Is that how she thinks of me? Sweetie Belle thought, tearing up a bit, *Even after all that effort...*

“Don’t be silly, Spike,” Twilight replied, still out of sight, “Sweetie is a really smart filly; I’m sure if she were around to help we would be fine.”

“Then why...”

"It's because I want to concentrate on *her* studies Spike," Twilight confessed, "She has a lot to learn and magic like this might confuse her. She needs to learn the basics first and she is very curious, so I know she would try and understand this..." the purple unicorn sighed. "It's like my old professor used to say: You have to build a solid foundation."

"What *is* this, anyway?"

Sweetie Belle finally reached the end of the steps and looked into the lab. In the middle of the basement was a huge crystal orb floating over some sort of machine. Spike was patiently watching and switching some levers while every few moments Twilight would cast a spell into the orb."

"Well, Spike, this sphere allows me to cast spells that affect time and space itself; it is an ancient artifact that I am making the subject of my thesis," Twilight explained, as she cast another spell into it, "Princess Celestia was very generous to let me use it."

"You already have a thesis planned?" Spike asked, impressed. "That's amazing Twilight!"

"Well... I... okay, I really just wanted to study it, I haven't really thought much about the paper itself..."

Spike chuckled. "Well, you at least know what you're trying to do right now?"

Twilight shot the dragon a dirty look. "Of course I know, Spike!"

"Right." the dragon rolled his eyes, clearly not convinced as he glanced to the stairs and spotted the filly. "Hey, Sweetie Belle!"

Twilight stopped and looked over her shoulder with a small smile. "Hi, Sweetie! Don't be shy, come in, I'm just about finished."

The filly stepped carefully into the room, doing her best to avoid touching the machines or getting too close to the crystal orb.

“Um, hi Twilight,” she said once she was safely in one of the corners of the room. “So, is this what Princess Celestia sent you?”

“That’s right!” Twilight smiled. “But that’s not the only thing!” she pointed at a nearby table with a lot of other devices on it. “Those are for you to practice! Go on, take a look!”

“I think I’ll stay here until you finish, if you’re almost done.” Sweetie Belle said.

Twilight smiled at her and nodded.

The filly watched the purple unicorn for a moment, but other than concentrating magic while Spike adjusted knobs and wrote down numbers, Twilight didn’t seem to be doing much.

Sweetie Belle sighed. *I should have just gone to the table.* She glanced at it, trying to make out the different objects on top of it. There was a strange cube and several smaller ball-like items lying there, just outside her sight.

Sweetie Belle stole a glance at Twilight and then at Spike. Both seemed completely fixated on their project, Twilight had even closed her eyes in concentration. Biting her lower lip, she looked back at the table. *I wish this thing didn’t take up most of the space in the basement!* her eyes followed the contours of cables and machine. *I think if I levitate them, they won’t touch the machine and they should just float past the orb...* she smiled to herself. *Okay... here we go, just like in practice...*

Her horn started glowing with a soft white aura and slowly several objects started to float. Sweetie Belle’s eyes narrowed as she commanded her magic to bring them to her. *Twilight will be so proud of me!*

The young unicorn’s magic carried the objects past the table and over the machines. It was when they were passing the Crystal Orb that things went wrong.

Twilight’s eyes snapped open as she tried to cut her spell short, but she couldn’t! She looked in horror as the white magic aura around the magical items was suddenly sucked into the crystal. The magic items floated there as their magic was forcefully stripped from them.

“S-Spike!” Twilight shouted, “Go to the other room and cut the energy source!”

Spike turned around at her shout and his eyes widened in horror as he saw the items starting to shake and smoke started to pour out of them.

“I’m going!” he shouted as he hopped over the machines and ran into another room. There was a short pause and then... “I can’t! I turned it off an’ on, but it won’t stop!”

Sweetie Belle for her part couldn’t concentrate much on what was happening. She looked around as things seemed to slow down. She saw Twilight turn to look at her with a horror. The purple unicorn was shouting something, but she couldn’t hear her.

It was then that one of the small ball-like items exploded. To Sweetie’s eyes it seemed as if it broke into pieces with fire slowly making its way out, only for it to very slowly spiral into the crystal, which started to turn orange.

The next one followed the same fate, only slower if possible. She saw, with a horrifying slowness, how the magic exploded into Twilight Sparkle. The purple unicorn was completely engulfed in magical flames, but her worried eyes never wavered from Sweetie Belle.

There was a bright flash of light and when she could see again, she only saw a crystal figure of a unicorn where her mentor used to stand. Another item exploded, got syphoned into the crystal sphere and then it was her that was covered in magic.

As the world bent and shifted around her, she saw, in a dreadful moment of clarity, Twilight shatter into pieces that were caught in the magical maelstrom. They floated in the air and flashing out of sight before Sweetie could even lift a hoof in protest.

The world shook around her. The sphere cracked. Suddenly everything was moving much faster and there was an earsplitting cry as Sweetie Belle screamed.

o.O.o

“AAAAaaah!” she jerked violently violently, finding herself struggling against something warm and stifling before she rolled to the side and fell. “Oof!”

Sweetie Belle shook her head and groaned. “Uhh... wh-what?” She detangled herself from the comforter and looked around, blinking.

She was in her room. She shook her head. *What am I doing here?*

Her eyes snapped wide open.

The crystal orb.

The magical items.

The explosion.

“Twilight!”

In a panic, she slammed the door open with her magic and quickly ran down the stairs.

“Sweetie Belle!” A voice called just as she was about to open the door and run out.

“Huh?!” the filly unicorn did a double take. “Sis?! When did you get back- Wait... if you’re here... how long have I been out?”

Rarity looked at her younger sister with a bit of trepidation. “I... believe you went to sleep early last night, Sweetie.”

“I... I did?” Sweetie Belle sat down. “Wow. I must have been really tired... and that dream!”

“What dream?”

“I dreamt that Twilight had a horrible accident and... and...”

“It’s okay, Sweetie,” Rarity said, comforting the smaller unicorn, “Twilight is fine, I promise. I just saw her last night before-”

“Wait!” Sweetie Belle interrupted. “What time is it?!”

“About 8:30... why?”

“Oh no! I’m late!” Sweetie panicked.

“For what? It’s your vacation.”

“But I’ve been studying really hard with Twilight, I can’t miss a class! I’m getting really good!”

“You... you have?” Rarity blinked. “Good at what?”

Sweetie Belle’s horn glowed for a second as her saddle-bags floated up to her and settled on her back.

Rarity’s mouth fell open.

“Anyway, I can’t stay! Sorry, sis, I’ve got a shield spell to learn!” The filly shouted in excitement as she ran out the door and closed it behind her.

Rarity stared at the door for a second before clamping her mouth shut with an audible snap.

o.o.o

“I’m late, I’m late!” Sweetie Belle groaned as she galloped towards the library. She thought she heard somepony shouting her name, but she ignored them as she reached the Library.

Surprisingly the door was locked. Sweetie Belle frowned. “Oh, she must still be working with those items Princess Celestia sent her!” she said, brightening. “But as her apprentice, I know the spell to open it!”

A few seconds later, she had closed and locked the door behind her. The library was quiet as usual, save for the sound of somepony humming to herself from the bathroom.

Sweetie Belle walked towards the bathroom door, but stopped when she heard whoever was behind it approaching.

The door swung open, and Sweetie Belle smiled.

“Sorry about being late... Twi... ligh...” She blinked.

Staring down at her, toothbrush frozen mid-stroke, wrapped in Twilight’s favorite towel, bubbles of toothpaste all around her mouth and eyes wide in surprise, Trixie stood, gaping at the filly.

Chapter 1

Of Mares and Magic

Applejack looked down at Apple Bloom as the young filly walked up to her, head down and frowning in disappointment only to sit down next to the apple cart. "What happened, sugarcube? Ah thought you'd seen Sweetie Belle?"

"Ah did!" the filly said, looking up at her sister. "But she didn't hear me callin'! She ran straight into the library."

The orange-maned mare nodded at a unicorn as he left a few bits and levitated an apple, trotting away happily. The apple farmer then turned to look at her younger sister. "Into the library?" she asked with a small frown. "She shouldn't be able to. Should be closed at this time in the morning."

"Ah, know! And when Ah got to the door, it was locked!"

"Now, that's odd." Applejack pushed her hat back, bewildered. "As far as Ah know, only two unicorns know the spell to open it without a key."

The Library door suddenly slammed open and a towel-wrapped, still-wet-from-the-shower Trixie rolled out of the building, followed by her toothbrush.

Applejack and Apple Bloom stared as a piece of rope enveloped in a white magic aura floated out of the library and began to wrap itself around Trixie's hooves.

"Stay still!" Sweetie Belle whined, her horn aglow, "I can't tie you up if you keep squirming!"

"But I don't want you to tie me up, Sweetie!" Trixie shouted, eyes wide in shock at the sudden attack.

"Hey! What in tarnation are you doin'?!" Applejack asked as she and Apple Bloom galloped up to the pair.

"I caught Trixie in Twilight's Library!" Sweetie informed them as she concentrated, trying to loop the rope around the azure unicorn, while Trixie fended her off, slowly getting up..

"And?" the elder of the two sisters asked.

"Call the guards! I almost have her!"

Trixie had gotten up to her hooves and, once her heart had stopped pounding from the sudden attack from the formerly gentle and unable-to-perform-magic filly unicorn, began carefully batting away the rope with short, concentrated bursts of magic.

"Hey! Quit it!" Sweetie groaned.

The showmare leveled a look at her. "No."

Sweetie Belle gritted her teeth. Her brow furrowed and her horn flashed.

Trixie kept a wary eye on the surprising filly. "What was that?"

"None of your business."

"Now, look here, Sweetie..." Trixie said as she began taking a step towards the little unicorn, but just as she planted her hoof down, it slid on a suddenly very slippery surface sending the showmare to the ground, accompanied by a painful-sounding "Oof!"

"Ha! Never underestimate *Twilight's* prized apprentice!"

Trixie growled and stood up, careful to avoid the slippery area around her. "Okay, Sweetie, you asked for it!" her horn flashed and the rope was torn from the filly's grip. Before she could blink, the unicorn filly was upside down and hogtied.

"Hey, lemme go!" Sweetie Belle shouted, struggling against her bonds. She thrashed from side to side, horn glowing as she tried to use her magic to break the rope, but it held.

“Sweetie Belle?” Apple Bloom asked, walking towards her friend carefully. “Why’re you attacking Trixie? And...when’d you learn magic?”

The young unicorn blinked. “Apple Bloom? You’re back!” she smiled in relief. “Quick! Untie me! Maybe we can get a Wanted Felon-Catcher Cutie Mark!”

Applejack and Trixie shared worried looks.

“Sweetie Belle?” Applejack ventured, stepping closer to the tied unicorn. “Whatchu mean by Wanted Felon-Catcher Cutie Marks? There any dangerous sorts around?”

“Oh, I hope not!” Rarity broke in, having overheard Applejack as she approached the group. “The last thing Ponyville needs is ponies of dubious nature!” she stopped and looked down at her sister. “Sweetie, why are you tied up?”

“Trixie tied me up!”

Rarity followed Sweetie’s glare to the showmare who shrugged and released the spell holding the rope. “Well, I wouldn’t have if you hadn’t attacked me!” she glared at Sweetie Belle.

“What did you do with Twilight?!” the young unicorn asked angrily as she shook free of the rope.

“Yes, dear, whatever happened to Twilight?” Rarity asked. “Your challenge ended last night. I thought she would be around for the aftermath so we might avoid certain... unpleasanties.”

Trixie winced. “So anypony can challenge me today?” she sighed. “Twilight left meet with Princess Celestia last night...”

“Ha! A likely story!” Sweetie Belle bellowed as she jumped to her feet.

Trixie ignored her. “And I haven’t heard from her since. She might write later today, I think. I checked on Spike and there were no messages next to his bed.”

“Ah’ve seen a few new unicorns around town today, sugarcube,” Applejack added, “Ah don’t think you have much time before the first challenger comes up and...”

Sweetie Belle had grown more and more frustrated as she was ignored by the older group. “Wait!” she shouted, drawing their attention.

“Sweetie! What have I told you about screaming like that?” Rarity scolded.

“Sorry!” Sweetie looked down. But her eyes went back to Trixie, a frown set on her face. “So, any pony can challenge you?”

Trixie smiled, glad that Sweetie Belle seemed to have calmed down. “Any unicorn capable of performing magic who feels his or her magic is strong enough to earn them the title of ‘Great and Powerful’, yes.”

The filly smiled. “Then I challenge you! What’s it gonna be? Checkers? A race?”

The group of mares looked at her, wide-eyed. Then Trixie frowned and graced the filly with a calculating look. “That’s... possible...”

“What? No.” Rarity shook her head. “You can’t challenge Trixie, Sweetie. Not only are you too young, but you hardly know any magic!”

“I know lots of magic!” Sweetie argued. “I’m Twilight’s student!”

The group exchanged confused looks.

“Uh, Sweetie Belle,” Apple Bloom smiled, a bit unsure, “Don’t you mean Cheerilee’s student?”

“Nope! Twilight made me her apprentice!” Sweetie said proudly. “You’d know, but you went...” she blinked. “Wait, when did you come back from Appleloosa?”

“Appleloosa?” the earth pony filly blinked. “I didn’t go nowhere! We played together yesterday and the day before! Remember? Scootaloo tried doing her double-spin ultra-deluxe upside down back-flip to impress Rainbow Dash.”

Sweetie Belle's eyes were wide. "Did she succeed?"

"Not exactly..." Apple Bloom looked a bit worried. "She lost control on the second spin and ended up dragging the cage-full of weasels and chickens with her onto the catapult... you really don't remember?"

Sweetie shook her head.

"... the cake?"

Another shake.

"Hogtyin' that manticore? Blowin' up that haystack? ... Setting fire to the edge of the Everfree?"

Sweetie stared slack-jawed at Apple Bloom. "You did all that while I was studying? Aww... stupid theory of reverse flow."

"So." Applejack's voice was hard. "If Ah'm hearing this right, y'all responsible fer all that chaos yesterday?"

Apple Bloom looked panicked. "Ah... Ah, uh..."

"No." the filly unicorn stated simply, seemingly oblivious of her friend's panic. "I was studying with Twilight."

"No, you wasn't!" Apple Bloom turned to look at her. "Y'all was there with me and Scootaloo!"

"I was studying!"

"Was not!"

"Was to!"

Was *not*!"

“Enough!” Rarity was also glaring down at the pair. They both stopped and looked at her. “Sweetie, you are in enough trouble as it is. Don’t lie to cover it up.”

The filly’s eyes were brimming with tears. “But sis! You know I’m Twilight’s student! I even Pinkie Swore to do study! If she was here she would tell you I was studying with her!”

“Sweetie...” Rarity almost growled. “I don’t know anything about Twilight taking you on as her apprentice. And you have never cared about magic enough to spend time studying rather than playing.”

Sweetie’s lip trembled. She looked at Apple Bloom, but the other filly wouldn’t even look at her for not admitting to have been playing with them.

“Now, hold on, everypony.” Trixie said. “Sweetie Belle seems to know quite a bit more magic than I would have expected, and she was rather skilled when she attacked me...”

Rarity glared at her sister.

“I thought she did something to Twilight!” Sweetie Belle replied.

“... anyway.” Trixie shot an odd look at the unicorn filly. “Her style certainly had some elements of Twilight’s influence...” she frowned, tapping a hoof thoughtfully on the ground before turning to the little unicorn. “Sweetie Belle, what are the three basic laws of elemental magic?”

“Correspondence, Control and Constitution,” the filly responded immediately.

Rarity blinked, her glare replaced by a look of awe.

“Aleister’s correction to the statute of limitations proposed that the primordial approach for understanding transmutation was flawed because...”

“... Prestidigitation itself allowed for too many changes with a single spell formula,” Sweetie Belle replied from memory, “Whew, you have no idea how many times Twilight made me repeat *that!*”

"I can imagine." Trixie smiled, then turned to look at the others. "I think Sweetie is telling the truth, somehow Twilight has been teaching her behind our backs, unless she somehow managed to sneak into Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns." she frowned. "I don't understand why she would do that, but..."

"Wait... you sayin' that Apple Bloom's lyin'?" Applejack looked to her sister in confusion and hurt. Honesty was a very important part of their upbringing. Come what may, lying was something the Apple Family could never condone.

"S-Sweetie..." Apple Bloom pleaded big eyes begging. "Please, Ah don't know how you know so much about magic, but don't make me inta a liar."

"B-but..." the filly unicorn stepped back. "Apple Bloom... I was studying..."

"No, you wasn't!" Apple Bloom snapped, eyes tearing up as the betrayal sank in.

"Enough, Apple Bloom." Applejack said after a moment, her eyes hard. "Ah don't want to hear from y'all no more. Yer gonna go right back ta the acres an' right to yer room, Ah clear?"

"Yes, ma'am." Apple Bloom walked slowly and with her head down until she passed next to the unicorn filly. The earth pony glared at her friend. "Ah hate you." she spat.

Sweetie looked like she had taken a hoof to the face. "I'm... but I was studying! Honest!" she called after her friend, who didn't bother looking back. "It was all about ki- kinetic forces! I was learning a shield spell for when we go crusading!" she insisted miserably, scratching the floor with her hoof in frustration.

"Don't worry, Sweetie." Rarity nuzzled the depressed filly. "Things will go back to normal once we figure out why she lied."

"Now wait just an apple-pickin' minute." Applejack said, turning to look at Rarity. "Ah never said she were lyin'. She's grounded for burnin' down the edge of the Everfree Forest and causin' such a ruckus that the weather

patrol had to work right through the night. Ah swear, they could've burnt the town!"

"But, darling, you can't possibly believe that Sweetie here is lying." Rarity said, raising her eyebrow. "You heard her answer Trixie's questions. I certainly didn't teach her any of that!"

"Ah jus' don't think that Apple Bloom is lying, s'all."

Rarity frowned. "So you're saying that my sister is lying?"

"No... Ah'm not s--"

"Excuse me." a male unicorn stepped up to Trixie, interrupting the work pony. "Are you The Great and Powerful Trixie?"

Trixie blinked. She had completely forgotten about the challenges. "Uh, yes, it is I, Trixie." she said quickly, turning to face him.

"I am here to challenge you for the title!" the unicorn said. "My name is--"

"I shall accept your challenge on the hills just north of Ponyville, in..." Trixie interrupted, turning to look at Rarity, "fifteen minutes?"

The designer shrugged. "That is as good time as any, I suppose."

The male unicorn grinned and trotted away.

The showmare turned to look at the others. "Well, I'd best prepare. This shall be a long month." she sighed as she walked back towards the Library.

"We'll talk later, Applejack." Rarity said, ushering Sweetie Belle away towards her boutique.

"Yeah..." the apple farmer shook her head as she returned to her cart.

o.O.o

"Why do you look so down, Sweetie?" Rarity asked, as the pair walked towards the hills.

“Apple Bloom hates me,” the filly answered, “I’m not lying, sis!; I haven’t seen them since I started learning under Twilight!”

Rarity turned to look at the hills a small frown on her face. “I don’t know what to tell you, Sweetie.” the older unicorn said.

“What do you mean?”

“I saw you, three playing together just a few of days ago and...” she stopped talking and walking when she noticed that she was alone.

Turning around, she looked back to her sister, several steps behind, staring in horror.

“Sweetie?” Rarity asked, taking a step towards the filly, but stopping when her sister took a matching away from her.

“I...”

She saw, with horrifying slowness, how the magic pierced through Twilight Sparkle, the purple unicorn was completely engulfed in magical flames, but her worried eyes never wavered away from Sweetie Belle.

“Are you okay?” Rarity tried again, seeing her sister’s horrified gaze.

As the world bent and shifted around her, she saw, in a dreadful moment of clarity, Twilight shatter into pieces that were caught in the magical maelstrom.

Sweetie gasped, almost collapsing into the grass, eyes wide and breathing ragged. She could feel her heart going a hundred miles an hour.

“I...” she shook her head, looking around.

Everything’s okay. I’m in Ponyville, the Library is fine. Trixie said that Twilight left last night...

She frowned. “...but that... that doesn’t make any sense.”

“Sweetie? What doesn’t make sense?” Rarity asked, giving her sister a concerned look.

“Sis, I have been studying with Twilight every day for the past two weeks!” Sweetie exclaimed. “How could I have been playing with them when they weren’t even here?”

“Sweetie, are you feeling okay?” Rarity asked, pressing her hoof to her sister’s forehead. “You don’t seem to have a fever.” she muttered. “Scootaloo and Apple Bloom haven’t left Ponyville in months!”

“*This* doesn’t make any sense!” Sweetie shook her head. She looked up at her sister. “And... why is everypony treating Trixie like she’s one of us?” the filly demanded. “She almost killed me just last week!”

Rarity stood straight. “What?!” her eyes blazed in anger. “What did Trixie do?”

Sweetie cringed beneath her sister’s enraged glare. “She... threw two werewolves at me and Twilight...”

“What?” Rarity shook her head and her anger seemed to focus on her sister. “Sweetie. I’ve had enough of these lies. You are *grounded*, young lady.”

“But...”

“No ‘buts’. I can believe that you were not involved in Apple Bloom’s and Scootaloo’s chaos, but accusing Trixie of willingly putting you and Twilight in such danger is simply preposterous! I’m disappointed that you’d think I would believe such a hollow lie?”

“But... sis... I...”

“Go home.” Rarity said coldly. “We shall have to have a talk after I witness Trixie’s duel. Just because Twilight taught you a couple of things yesterday doesn’t mean that you can use that same excuse to convince me of something so ridiculous! Trixie would never hurt Twilight, especially after everything that happened last year.”

“What happened last year?”

“I said go!” Rarity snapped. “And I’d better not catch you outside your room!”

Sweetie Belle opened her mouth to object, but snapped it shut as she found herself facing the full force of her sister's angry glare. Lowering her head and turning around, Sweetie walked slowly towards Carousel Boutique. She could feel Rarity’s eyes on her as she trotted away down the street.

What’s going on? she thought, furious. *How could everypony forget about the werewolves?*

She shook her head as she passed the first few houses. *Just... what’s happening here?* She thought as she kept her eyes on the ground. *Just yesterday I was with Twilight at the lab... how come she is fine and with the Princess if that spell exploded on her?* Her eyes narrowed. *And how come everypony thinks Trixie is our friend? Just like that? How come nopony remembers the werewolves?*

She stopped and stomped at the ground with her hoof. “Come on, Sweetie, you know how to solve a problem: Twilight drilled it into your head!” she growled to herself.

Okay, let’s examine the facts... Sweetie’s thoughts went back to her earlier memories. *I got blasted by the spell, Twilight was...* she shuddered, pushing the thought to the back of her mind *I wake up, Applejack and Apple Bloom are suddenly back from Appleloosa, Rarity’s back from Fillydelphia and everypony thinks I’m just playing around... and even remember me doing exactly that... there can only be one conclusion!* Sweetie stomped her hoof on the ground. “I didn't kill Twilight, Trixie must have come into the library and done something!” Her eyes widened. “Trixie somehow brainwashed everypony with a spell!”

She blinked. “Wait... does that mean that... I murdered Twilight!?” she gulped as a sudden shiver ran up her spine. “No... nonono... I... no...”

A buzzing sound grabbed her attention and she looked up to see one of her best friends propelling herself towards her on top of her scooter.

“Scootaloo!” she smiled, gratefully pushing the horrible thoughts to the back of her mind as the copper-colored pegasus stopped abruptly in front of the unicorn.

“There you are!” she said angrily, jumping off of her scooter and stomping up to Sweetie Belle.

“Listen, there’s something going on-” Sweetie started to say, but she was interrupted by Scootaloo pressing her forehead and snout right up against hers.

“The hay is your problem, Sweetie?!” the pegasus asked, fuming. “I just saw Apple Bloom on her way to Sweet Apple Acres and she was crying! And guess what she told me when I asked her why! Go on, guess!”

Sweetie fell back onto the floor, eyes wide and staring at her friend.

“She told me that you had lied to cover your own sorry flank and let her take all the blame for *our* crusading!”

“But I-”

“So what is it?” Scootaloo asked venomously, walking from side to side in front of the unicorn. “Did you just not want to get into trouble? I guess being a Crusader doesn’t mean you have to be loyal!”

Sweetie cringed. “Scootaloo, I swear I didn’t lie! I was studying with Twilight and-”

“But you were not studying!” Scootaloo shouted, drawing the attention of several passers-by. “You were with us!”

Sweetie shrank back. “But Scootaloo... you have to believe me...”

“I don’t even know why I’m bothering to talk to you, traitor.” the pegasus said. “You lied, and you hurt Apple Bloom...” she looked away. “And me.”

“Bu- but I didn’t...” Sweetie’s lower lip trembled. “Why doesn’t anypony believe me?!” she turned around and ran as fast as she could into town.

“Sweetie! Wait! We’re not done here!” Behind her, Scootaloo’s voice faded as the unicorn ran away. She went into alleys and side-streets. Ponyville wasn’t a big place, but she wanted to put as much distance between Scootaloo and herself as she could.”

She slowed down and sighed, looking up to see where she was.

The Library stood proudly in front of her, the warm wooden interior and the smell of books something she found she needed now.

Funny that I would end up back here...she thought. Now I’m craving a book.

She entered the library, closing the door and locking it behind her.

“Trixie?” a voice called from the kitchen. “Is that you? Where is... oh, hey, Sweetie Belle!” Spike blinked as he walked into the main room. “What are you doing here?” he looked around suspiciously. “Are Apple Bloom and Scootaloo hiding somewhere? You aren’t trying to get a Dragon Slayer cutie mark again, are you?” Spike cringed.

Sweetie Belle couldn’t help herself and started crying at the mention of her friends. She ran up to him and hugged the little dragon close as she bawled her eyes out.

“Uh...” Spike froze for a second, the little dragon flailed about with his arms at the sudden invasion of his personal space, but eventually he managed to return the hug and pat her back, even as he looked around in a panic.

“Uh... there there, Sweetie.” he said once he realized he was on his own. “Please calm down?”

The filly cried for a bit longer, but she nodded against his shoulder and slowly stepped back.

“Why don’t I make you some tea? Chamomile okay?”

Sweetie sniffed. “Would it be okay to have some of your special spicy tea, Spike?” Spike tensed. “I... know it’s usually for special occasions but... I really like it.” she smiled a little, and sniffled.

That did it. The dragon couldn't deny her. "Okay..." he acquiesced. "But just this once!"

Sweetie nodded, still sniffling and went to look at the books as the baby dragon walked into the kitchen. Her horn flared as a tome slid out and floated to a table. Her magic opened the large book on top of the table. She skimmed through the pages until she reached the page number where she had last read the book.

"That's weird..." she muttered, "I already read this page." she flipped a couple of pages until she found the correct spot. "Must've forgotten where I was..."

She read in silence until Spike came out with her tea. Absentmindedly, she levitated the cup from the astonished dragon's grasp and set it down carefully where it would not spill on the book. She took a pause from her reading to sip the tea, eyes closed blissfully. "Thank you, Spike... that was really nice," Sweetie said, giving the flustered dragon a quick peck on the cheek.

"Y-you're welcome, Sweetie." the baby dragon stammered.

She smiled and turned back to her reading, falling into the routine she had cultivated over the last two weeks, and the dragon, after raising an eyebrow at her choice of literature, let her be. He knew from experience not to interrupt an obvious bibliophile.

o.O.o

It was much later that the door to the library clicked open as the lock was released. Spike perked up as the door swung open to admit a pair of unicorn mares into the room.

"I'm really worried, Trixie!" Rarity said, her eyes reflecting her assertion. "Sweetie was not at home when I arrived! I've looked all over Ponyville for her! I went as far as Sweet Apple Acres and their club house but..."

"I think we've found her." Trixie spoke softly, motioning with a hoof for silence. The designer blinked and followed Trixie's gaze towards the center

table of the library. Sweetie Belle was sleeping, her head resting on the pages of an enormous tome and snoring softly.

“She came here a while ago.” Spike said quietly. “She was crying... I didn’t really know what to do. I made her some tea... then she just sat there drinking it and reading that book.”

The two mares stared at the little filly as they made their way to the table. Despite how long it had been since she had arrived, Sweetie still sniffled a bit in her sleep.

“*Kinetic Fields: From the Simple to the Prismatic*,” Trixie read aloud. “She’s certainly trying her best to learn that shield spell. Too bad Twilight is so insistent on theory; it might benefit her to have a bit of hooves-on experience.”

“Are you saying you believe her about Twilight teach-”

“Just look at her,” Trixie interrupted. “She’s almost certainly Twilight’s apprentice. No other unicorn would force such an innocent filly to sit down and read *that!*”

Rarity looked at her sister, sorrow flooding into her eyes. “Oh, Sweetie...”

The younger unicorn shifted. “Just a bit more sleep, Twi... I promise I’ll do those equations later...” she mumbled as she cuddled up to the book.

Rarity blinked. “Sweetie... it’s time to go to bed.”

“Oooh... alright Twilight...” Sweetie Belle, yawning and bleary eyed, ignored the lot of them as she made her way upstairs towards the guest room.

“Sweetie, wait-” the white unicorn spoke up, raising a hoof to stop her sister, but an azure hoof on her own stopped her. She turned to look at the blue unicorn in surprise.

“Let her stay over,” Trixie said, looking at the filly as she walked into the room and shut the door behind her, “It seems that she’s rather familiar with the library.”

"A bit too familiar perhaps," Rarity said, slightly perturbed, "She didn't even have to open her eyes! She just knew where to go..."

"And which step to skip to avoid the creaking," Trixie observed.

"Ju- Just how many times has she been here studying?" Rarity wondered.

"Just once... meaning today." Spike muttered, "As far as I know."

"Yet another mystery..." Trixie smirked. "But we should all rest. It's been a long day. I'll take care of Sweetie."

Rarity hesitated, remembering the filly's words from earlier. "Trixie... do you think something's could be wrong with Sweetie? She's not acting like herself."

"I don't know... yet." the blue unicorn said, stealing a glance at Spike, "You say she's only been here studying today?"

Spike gave her a look. "Trixie, you know as well as I do that today's the first day she's willingly stepped into the library by herself and studied." he looked thoughtful for a minute. "But... I had no idea she could do magic already. Like, she levitated the teacup out of my hands! And she knew about my special blend of-"

"Special blend?" Trixie raised an eyebrow.

"Uh..." the dragon sighed. "I have a special tea that Zecora made for me a while ago. Most ponies don't like how spicy it is, but even less know about it. Until now, I thought that only Zecora, Twilight and I knew!"

"Zebrican tea? That's an acquired flavor. At least for ponies." Trixie smiled, recalling her travels. "Did you know that when hoof-gathering the leaves, they actually separate the leaves by freshness? They have two versions, you see-"

"Can we talk about tea later?" Rarity interrupted, "I hate to be so short with you, I'm sure it would be an enlightening conversation under better circumstances, but I am worried about my little sister."

Trixie smiled weakly. "Apologies. In any case, I will talk to her when she wakes up. It's it does seem rather strange how she believes herself to have lived the past few week so differently-" she stopped, eyes widening.

"Trixie?" the fashionista looked at her worried. "What's happening to Sweetie Belle?"

"I..." the showmare shook her head, briefly considering not telling Rarity anything. However, she knew the white unicorn was very good at picking up on little details and would know if Trixie was lying. The showmare sighed. "I think... I might know what's happening; it's unlikely but..."

"What is it? Is it dangerous? Is she losing her mind?" Rarity asked, starting to panic eyes widening with each imagined horror.

"No, no..." Trixie patted the fashionista's shoulders with her hoof. "I am uncertain if it indeed is what I'm thinking; it's not a bad thing or particularly dangerous, and as far as I know, it only happens to rhinos." she raised her hoof to forestall further questions. "So, I may simply be jumping to conclusions, Rarity. Let me speak with her when she wakes up and I'll find out for sure; it is nothing bad and it is very unlikely that it is, okay?"

"So why can't you tell me?"

"Because you would worry unnecessarily and begin looking for facts to fit into the theory rather than seeing if the theory fits the facts."

Rarity still looked dubious, but finally nodded her assent, casting a worried glance towards the guest room. "I see... I... I suppose I can see why you would say that... please, take care of her."

Trixie smiled warmly. "Of course, The Great and Powerful Trixie can handle a single filly. You needn't worry at all."

o.O.o

It was still nighttime when Sweetie Belle awoke. She rubbed her blurry eyes and looked around. She was in her- in the guest room at Twilight's Library.

She took in a deep breath her thoughts running through her recent experiences. "I guess it was all a dream." she shivered. "Or a nightmare, more like!" She looked out of the window. The moon wasn't that high in the sky, so it was still relatively early... for her mentor at least. She would either be stargazing or reading in her room.

Sweetie shivered again and looked at the room for a second time. *There's... something weird going on... but what?* She slid out of bed and sighed as she walked towards the door. *Maybe talking to Twilight would help.*

As expected, the light seeping from underneath Twilight's bedroom indicated that the mare was awake. She could hear the soft, rumbling snores of a baby dragon coming from within the room.

Sweetie took a deep breath and knocked twice on the door before entering. "Twilight, I'm sorry to be up so late but I had... the strangest... dream?"

Lying on Twilight's bed, comfortably reading a book as if she owned the place, was Trixie. The unicorn looked up at Sweetie and raised an eyebrow.

"Wha- the hay?!" Sweetie stepped back, eyes wide as the showmare slowly stepped down from the bed.

"Are you feeling better, Sweetie?" she asked, tilting her head to the side as she examined the little filly.

"What are *you* doing here?!" Sweetie Belle began fearfully before the questions began to spill forth rapidly. "What's happening here? What'd you do with Twilight? You erased everypony's memories so they wouldn't know you killed her, didn't you?!"

The showmare's eyes widened a bit but then she smiled and chuckled. "Well, I am not called The Great and Powerful Trixie for nothing... but I dare say brainwashing everypony is still a bit outside my current abilities. Not to mention that killing Twilight is the last thing I would ever want to do."

"But- but what are you doing here?" Sweetie asked.

“Hush,” Trixie said, pointing at the snoring dragon, “Let’s go downstairs so we don’t wake Spike.”

Barely able to contain her questions, the filly followed the older unicorn down the stairs. She watched silently as Trixie levitated a teapot onto the stove and began to brew a mix of herbs she pulled from a container that she didn’t recall ever seeing in the library before.

“Wha- what is that?” the filly asked.

“My own special Zebrican tea blend.” Trixie smiled. “What, you thought Spike had the only secret stash?”

Once tea was ready, the showmare sat down, placing both cups on the table.

“Now, Sweetie, this might come as a shock to you, but I live here with Twilight. We’ve been living together in the Library for almost a year now.”

“What? But...” the filly shook her head. “That’s can’t be right! I’ve been staying with Twilight for the last two weeks and... and the last time I saw you you almost killed me! And Twilight certainly wasn’t happy to see you!”

A flash of hurt crossed Trixie’s eyes. “Those are words I’d rather never have to hear.”

“Huh?”

“Exactly.” Trixie smiled as she slowly stirred her tea. “Tell me, Sweetie, how do you feel?”

“Confused... really, really confused...” the filly confessed, staring morosely at the cup. The inviting scents emanating from the tea were making her mouth water, but she had to wait, lest she burn her tongue and lips before recalling Twilight’s spell and cooling down the tea a bit.

“That’s good. If you know you are confused, then you know something is not right.” the showmare looked at the library. “Think about how things were and how things are. Tell me... what’s different? Start with the small things.”

“Well...” the filly frowned as she thought. “My stuff wasn’t in my room upstairs.” she said, feeling a bit dumb for not realizing it earlier. “And... the book I was reading had fewer pages...”

“So, even if somepony had managed to brainwash all of us, do you think they would go into enough detail to change that?”

Sweetie looked down. “No...”

“What else is different?”

“Well, Apple Bloom and Scootaloo weren’t in town, and neither was Rarity the last two weeks.”

“I can tell you for certain that all three of them have been here all that time,” Trixie said, motioning for Sweetie to drink some of her tea.

Slowly, the filly levitated the cup just like Trixie was doing and took a sip. She looked at the tea in the cup in surprise. “This is really good!”

The showmare smirked. “I figured, since you liked the spicy tea, you would like this one too. I got it during my travels with the Zebras.”

Sweetie drank more tea before putting down her cup. “So... are you going to tell me you’re not a wanted felon?”

She had to dodge to the side to avoid being sprayed with tea as Trixie spit what she was drinking.

“I... What?!”

“You released two werewolves in the middle of Ponyville!” Sweetie said, glaring at her. “I almost got killed!”

“But... I would nev-” Trixie took a deep breath. “Okay, now I’m fairly certain I know what the problem is.”

Sweetie blinked.

“While I was travelling with the Rhinos-”

"What's a Rhino?" Sweetie interrupted.

Trixie arched an eyebrow. "Great lumbering beasts with poor eyesight, but with grand magical traditions that go back thousands of years. Almost as long as the Zebras'."

"Oh..."

"Anyway, they have a ritual which allowed them to see beyond this world and into others." Trixie continued. "I never experienced it firsthand, because only they seemed to be able, but it would allow them to find themselves in other dimensions, across time and space itself, and see and experience those other worlds through the actions of their counterparts."

Sweetie Belle stared at her, silent.

"..." Trixie blinked. "Did... you understand any of that?"

"Nope!" Sweetie said. "But some of it sounded familiar. I think..." she closed her eyes and tried to remember. "I think the experiment where-" she choked.

"Go on, Sweetie, what experiment?"

"... the one where..." she couldn't bring herself to say the words. An overwhelming feeling of guilt settled on her as she looked at Trixie's worried gaze. "It was... last night... and Twilight... she..." Sweetie closed her eyes. "I think I killed Twilight!" she confessed as she collapsed on the floor. "I didn't know!"

Trixie dropped her cup, the sound of it shattering lost in Sweetie's sobs.

"You what?!"

"I'm sorry!" she bawled. "I'm so sorry! I was just trying to get something while she worked!"

Trixie looked at the filly, mind racing. "I-it's okay, Sweetie. Just calm down and tell me what happened."

Slowly, between sobs and suddenly finding herself in the surprisingly comforting forelegs of Trixie, Sweetie Belle explained what she had done and what she had seen. "... and- and then she... bro-broke into pieces..." the filly sniffed. "I saw a flash and... and I woke up in my room... I thought it was all a bad dream..." she started shaking.

Trixie felt cold, having imagined that happening to *her* Twilight. "And you said that the thing she was experimenting on affected Time and Space?"

Sweetie nodded morosely, not even looking up at her.

The showmare slowly stroked the filly's mane. "It was an accident, Sweetie... and... I don't want to give you false hope, but when things like that happen, you cannot simply trust your eyes..."

"What do you mean?" Sweetie asked, her eyes red from crying and rubbing at them.

"There is a chance that Twilight, *your Twilight*, is still alive." Trixie said carefully. "Your perceptions of what happened could have been affected by the magic... I believe that's how you were sent to this dimension. Maybe the same happened to her."

"So... this isn't my real home?" the filly sniffled.

"I'm afraid not. That's why everything you remember is so different."

"But then... Apple Bloom wasn't lying! And she got punished worse because of me!"

Trixie nodded. "There's not much we can do about that right now, but we'll sort it out tomorrow. For now we should sleep. I'll ask Spike to send a letter to Twilight; she may know how to get you home."

Sweetie yawned and nodded. "Thanks... Trixie." she stood up and went upstairs, leaving Trixie alone.

With a sigh, the unicorn conjured up a blank scroll and a quill. Soon, the only noise in the Library was the scratching of quill on parchment.

o.O.o

The next morning, Trixie trotted down the stairs slowly to a pair of youthful voices.

“So, then you add the bananas now...” Spike’s voice drifted from the kitchen.

“Like this?” Came Sweetie’s voice a second later.

“Yep, nicely done! Now, press them down a little bit so that the batter goes all around it. Yeah, like that.” Spike instructed.

“What’s going on here?” Trixie asked, walking into the kitchen with a sleepy grin.

“Morning, Trixie!” Spike called, smiling at her.

Sweetie Belle smiled brightly and waved a hoof excitedly at the showmare. “Spike is teaching me how to make the princess’s favorite pancakes!”

“Ok! Concentrate!” Spike interrupted, shifting the little unicorn's attention back to the task before them. “You see how the batter is starting to bubble? That means that they’re almost ready to be turned over; lift up the side of the pancake a bit: once that looks a bit more solid, use your magic to flip them.”

Sweetie concentrated and three of the pancakes glowing as they flipped under her control, while Spike expertly flipped five others with a spatula. They waited a little bit before placing the pancakes onto a platter which went straight into a preheated oven. “To keep them warm.” Spike explained, when Sweetie asked why.

Trixie watched in bemusement as the pair of youngsters produced batch after batch of pancakes. It wasn’t long before they had run out of room in the oven, and the group sat down to eat.

"I think I will take over your training for today, Sweetie," Trixie declared after a pause in the meal, "Twilight is not due back until late afternoon, I would think. And honestly, that mare puts far too much emphasis on theory and not enough on execution, I think you need a bit more hooves-on practice to get that shield working."

Sweetie looked at the older unicorn in surprise. "Really? You'll help?"

Trixie nodded. "Why, of course. The Great and Powerful Trixie could not simply leave her beloved's apprentice unattended to stagnate in her education! Twilight would have my hide for such an offense! So, get ready, we'll stop by Carousel Boutique to tell Rarity you'll be with me today."

Sweetie could only nod dumbly as Trixie walked out of the kitchen. "Did she just call Twilight her 'beloved'?" she squeaked, wide-eyed as she turned to look at Spike for confirmation.

"Yeah," the little dragon nodded, munching happily a somewhat burnt pancake. "I thought everypony knew, what with the duel and the competition in Canterlot..."

"But... what about Big Mac?" Sweetie asked.

Spike blinked. "What about him?"

"I always thought he had a thing for Twilight! I even saw them--" Sweetie stammered out before stopping herself short.

Stupid, Sweetie! I forgot this isn't my home...

"Even saw them what?" Spike asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Uh... nothing." Sweetie smiled. "I should get my mane ready, you know..." she trailed off at his expression. "Because of my sister... Who dislikes... messy... manes. I go now!"

Spike watched as she ran out of the kitchen before shrugging. "Well, better get this cleaned up if I want to go with them to see... Rarity." Spike sighed as he absentmindedly began to wash the dishes.

o.O.o

The walk towards Carousel Boutique was quiet. There were a lot of things that Sweetie wanted to ask Trixie, specifically what to tell Rarity, but Spike's presence made her feel uncomfortable talking about something that felt so personal.

She really wasn't looking forward to this.

What am I going to tell Sis? Is she really my sis? Should I talk to her at all? She grew more even nervous as the boutique came into view. *What should I do? What should I do?!* She looked, wild-eyed to Trixie, who looked back calmly.

"Don't worry, I'm sure your sister will understand if you need a day to sort things out. And you'll be with me, so she needn't worry."

Sweetie Belle exhaled and felt herself relax a bit at Trixie's words. *I guess if she's my sister back home, she's still my sister here...* she smiled. *I'm sure we're as close here as we are there... like apple pie.*

As soon as they reached the boutique, the door opened and Rarity was looking at Sweetie with a worried expression. "Good morning, Sweetie..." the fashionista trailed off, unsure of what to say next.

Sweetie looked down and scratched at the floor with a hoof. "Morning, sis."

The two looked very uncomfortable, just standing there, avoiding one another's gaze before Trixie finally cleared her throat. "Good morning, Rarity. I have talked to Sweetie and she wishes to practice magic with me today, and hopefully to clear her mind. We came here to see if that was okay."

"We did?" Spike asked, cringing as he received glares from everypony present. "Uh... I guess we did."

"I..." Rarity glanced over her shoulder at the tea set and muffins she had procured for a quiet talk with Sweetie. "I- if that is what you want, Sweetie..." she said, looking back to the pair of unicorns in front of her.

"I do, sis..." the filly said after a moment. "But I also wanted to talk to you... and Scootaloo and Apple Bloom... but I... I need some time."

Rarity sighed. "It's okay, Sweetie. I'm... I'm sorry I made you feel so bad and that I accused you of lying." she was suddenly being crushed by a hug from the unicorn filly.

"I'm sorry I'm making you worry, sis!" Sweetie cried. "I just... have a lot to think about. I promise I'll tell you everything."

Rarity smiled, nuzzling the filly affectionately. "I can work with that." she reassured her sister.

"Well, we should get going." Trixie said, casting suspicious glances around. "I'd rather be out of here before I get challenged again."

"Good luck then!" Rarity said as the trio turned around and started walking away.

"Thanks, sis! See you soon!" Sweetie called over her shoulder.

Spike waved half-heartedly as he rode on Trixie's back, watching his beloved Rarity walk into the boutique.

Trixie led them out of town and towards the edge of the Everfree Forest, stopping just shy of entering Everfree proper.

"I think we're far enough..." she turned around to face Sweetie Belle. "Okay, now, we'll start with you trying the spell while I throw something at you. If your spell works, the shield should stop it."

Sweetie blinked. "Uh... Twilight always told me that I should understand everything about the spell before-"

Trixie waved a hoof. "Twilight worries too much. Trust me. I didn't spend several months tied in a high-magic competition with her without knowing what I was doing."

"But..."

"It's okay. I won't throw anything too dangerous at you." Trixie encouraged.
"This is how the Zebras train their young warriors."

"But I'm not a Zebra!"

"Well... you like the spicy tea so you could be." Spike said after a moment.
"I mean, you'd need stripes but..."

Trixie rolled her eyes and levitated a small dirt clod. "Ready?"

"No!"

"Well, here it goes!"

"But I—" Sweetie's eyes widened as they followed the patch of dirt. She jumped out of the way. "Hey! I said I wasn't ready!"

"You cheated!" Trixie called back, grinning. "You're not supposed to dodge! You're supposed to cast the shield spell!"

Spike didn't look amused. "You're enjoying this, aren't you?" he asked the azure unicorn.

"Yes." Trixie admitted, keeping her eyes and her grin trained on the little filly.

Sweetie kept a wary eye on the showmare. "I knew I shouldn't trust her." She muttered, only to watch in horrified fascination as Trixie levitated many, many pieces of dirt and positioned them right over the pair. When the sky was veritably blotted out by small balls of dirt, Sweetie decided that it was best to be someplace else...

... and promptly found that she couldn't move.

Too late did she notice the faint blue aura surrounding her hooves. She looked up at Trixie in despair. The showmare smirked at her. The dirt balls above her shot down in Sweetie's direction.

Spike, watching from a safe distance away, closed both his eyes for a split second, but soon enough opened one to take a peek.

With a huge SPLAT made out of smaller splats, Sweetie Belle was buried under hundreds of dirtballs.

“Why?!” Sweetie asked after a moment. “That’s not fair!” She shook off some of the dirt, but most of her coat was completely covered in it.

Trixie chuckled, looking proudly at the filly. “But Sweetie, you cast the spell!”

Sweetie blinked and looked at her coat. She had been almost completely covered in dirt. “No I didn’t!”

The showmare shook her head, smile still in place. “Look at your mane, you silly filly.”

Sweetie looked up as much as she could.

“One moment.” Trixie transmuted a small rock into a mirror before levitating it before the young unicorn. “Here.”

Sweetie stared at her reflection. Just like the showmare had said, there was not a speck of dust or dirt on her mane.

“I did it?” she asked in wonder. “I did it! Yay!” out of habit she turned to look at her flank.

Was... was there something there? Even for just for a second?

“Are you ready for another try?” Trixie called as she watched the filly spin around trying to see if she had a cutie mark.

“Yes!”

o.O.o

They spent most of the morning practicing. Once Sweetie had figured out how to make a shield big enough to cover her completely from falling dirt, Trixie had changed tactics, hurling clods from all directions. Some were

stopped by the shield, but most of the time, Sweetie was unable to cast the spell quickly enough to avoid getting hit.

Trixie had then alternated between practicing the shield spell to practicing Prestidigitation, and finally having Sweetie levitate three balls which they would toss back and forth between them. As they did, the showmare began to describe the competition she had had with Twilight Sparkle, both of them throwing hundreds of balls at each other.

To say the little filly was impressed would be an understatement.

I'm pretty sure the Trixie from my world would never be able to do that! she had thought to herself on more than one occasion, but she was nevertheless thrilled that Twilight, or this world's version had proven herself so powerful and resourceful as well.

"I think that is enough for now," Trixie said, looking down at the now brown-coated filly covered in darker patches of dirt panting in front of her. "Rarity is going to kill me. I know it."

"I think most of it'll come out in a bath." Sweetie looked down at herself, taking several deep breaths before closing her eyes and shaking herself, sending cascades of dirt falling to the ground. She opened her eyes to find that, despite the ring of dirt around her, her normally white coat was still a light brown.

"Maybe." Trixie smirked. "We should have something to eat." the showmare gave Spike a meaningful look. The dragon, having watched the training with a great deal of amusement, rolled his eyes.

"Fine, fine." Spike muttered half-heartedly. "I'll make you some daisy sandwiches." he sighed as he stood up and walked back towards town.

Thankful for the rest, Sweetie collapsed on the grass. She didn't think about anything at all, content to watch the clouds pass overhead. However, a passing pegasus in the distance brought more painful memories.

"Scootaloo and Apple Bloom hate me." she said finally. "Apple Bloom thinks I lied to avoid getting punished, and Scootaloo thinks that I don't care about them at all."

“They think that you’re their Sweetie Belle. To them, you were here a couple of days ago playing around,” Trixie said, sitting next to her. “We’ll have to clear it up before we send you on your way to find your Twilight, otherwise our Sweetie is going to find herself in a rather unexplainable situation.”

“Oh...” Sweetie murmured, “I just wish I hadn’t hurt them,” she added miserably.

Trixie sighed. “It’ll be okay, Sweetie. You had no intention of hurting them. You were simply confused. I am sure your friends will understand.”

The little filly nodded tiredly before she looked lazily towards Ponyville, blinking in confusion as she saw Spike running back to them. “Well, that was fast.”

Trixie looked towards the approaching dragon and frowned. “Too fast. He couldn’t have even gone halfway to the library yet.”

The pair watched as Spike jogged up to them, out of breath. “I... *gasp* I got this... *cough* from the Princess...” he said, shakily holding a scroll up in his claw as he bent over, wheezing, “Whew... I gotta lay off the agate.”

Blinking, Trixie levitated the scroll up and opened it. As her eyes scanned the page, she started looking ill.

“Trixie?” Spike asked. “Is something wrong?”

“It’s Twilight,” the showmare said worriedly. “She was supposed to have arrived last night!”

“But what happened? Wasn’t she with the Princess?” Sweetie asked.

“The Princess says that Twilight decided to go home on her own after stopping at a village to investigate a some legend.” the blue unicorn said, rereading the scroll. “She’s worried since Twilight was only supposed to be there for a couple of hours before heading back here.”

Trixie smacked a hoof to her forehead before letting it slide down her face, a frustrated groan escaping her. "She'd better not be in trouble!"

"What town is it? Maybe we can go get her?"

Trixie looked down at the filly. "Marethage. But what do you mean by 'we'?"

"I'm not staying here while my teacher is in danger!" Sweetie declared without hesitation. "Even if she wasn't teaching me, Twilight's still my friend"

"Since when have you been so close to Twilight?" Spike asked Sweetie, but she ignored him, concentrating on the showmare instead.

Trixie sighed, wilting beneath the little filly's stare. "Listen, Sweetie, you are indeed very talented in magic and you would make Twilight proud with how fast you are advancing. But, you are still very young. It would be completely irresponsible of me to take you with me."

"But..." Sweetie looked down at the floor angrily.

Why is it always like this? Sis treat me like that all the time! The only ones that never do are Apple Bloom, Scootaloo and Twilight! She blinked back tears.

"Listen Sweetie, you have to stay with your sister. It's too dangerous. We don't know what happened to Twilight." The showmare said kindly.

"No." Sweetie looked up at the other unicorn. "I can't! Don't you see? I can't go back home... I don't even know when I will! I have to learn to be stronger and I have to help Twilight! Please! Don't... don't leave me behind! I can't let anything happen to her *again*... not again..."

Trixie looked unsure. For a moment, she had forgotten who she was dealing with. This might be Sweetie Belle, but it wasn't their Sweetie Belle. And it was true: there were no guarantees that Sweetie would return home once they figured out how to send her on her way. And if she got into trouble... would she be able to defend herself? A Shield spell was useful, but other than Levitation and Prestidigitation, there was little else the filly had at her disposal danger in some other universe. Was it better to leave

her behind, safe in Ponyville? Or would it be better to take her along and try to instill some of the world knowledge she had?

The showmare sighed. This was not what she imagined she was going to spend this month like. Dodging challengers? Yes. Suddenly finding out that the little sister of one of her friends was in reality a dimensional-hopping filly unicorn? No. Embarking on a sudden quest to find her lover? Well... perhaps, considering her lover and friend's habitual attraction to adventure, but a sudden quest and a dimension-hopping filly at the same time? Certainly not.

And now here was Sweetie was staring at her with those big, green, puppy dog eyes of hers. Trixie knew Twilight was probably just caught up in her studies, but still she had an uneasy feeling about the entire situation.

"I'll be good!" Sweetie promised. "It's just that... If anything happens to Twilight and I'm not there to help..." she looked down. "I don't know what I would do. I... I have to make it up to her, Trixie... please let me make it up to her..."

"Hold on!" Spike said, stepping between the two. "Since when does Sweetie Belle hang around Twilight enough to be her student and friend? And how come I never noticed? What is going on here?"

"I-" Sweetie started to say, but was interrupted by Trixie.

"We will tell you and the others when we return." the showmare promised.

"We?" the filly asked, looking up at the older unicorn in surprise, "Are you saying-"

"Yes." Trixie nodded. "I will take you with me. You are not prepared enough for your situation. Be grateful that Twilight managed to teach you the value of study and diligence... it will probably save your life in the future." the blue-coated mare turned to look at the baby dragon. "Spike, please trust me, I will go find Twilight; we should be back soon. We have to talk to Rarity first though..."

"That won't be necessary." a voice said, startling them and making them turn around. Rarity stepped nervously into view. "I... arrived here a few

moments ago... I heard you talking." Rarity walked towards them before stopping a few feet from her sister. "Sweetie...I know yesterday wasn't exactly a perfect day, but I want you to know that I love you, and that I am ashamed of having doubted you. I don't know how you know what you do, I don't understand how Twilight had the time to even teach you while you played... there's quite a lot I don't understand about all this..." she sighed.

"How long were you listening, sis?"

"Only since Spike arrived... I had just been to the library to check on you, but you weren't there... then I saw him running this way, so I followed him."

"Oh..."

"Sweetie... you are my sister and I trust you. Even when everything I thought I knew told me otherwise... I saw you fall asleep studying last night, I saw you use magic and I heard you when you answered Trixie's questions. I know that there is something going on here... something you know that I do not... But... must you go with Trixie?"

"Sis..." Sweetie hugged Rarity tightly. "I... I'll explain everything to you and Apple Bloom and Scootaloo and Spike... but, it has to wait; it's a long story and Twilight needs us. Please let me do this, sis. I have to do it... for Twilight." she begged, eyes pained.

Rarity's eyes met Trixie's. "You will take care of her? You will make sure she's not in danger?" she asked, staring at the showmare.

"I promise," the showmare replied before shrinking back suddenly.

Despite knowing that she was more powerful than the white unicorn, Trixie still found herself intimidated by a sudden death glare from Rarity. "Trixie, if something does happen to my Sweetie Belle, I *will* kill you."

Gulping, the showmare nodded. "I will protect her with my life."

"Good," the fashionista's glare faded as she turned to nuzzle Sweetie Belle, "Take care of yourself, Sweetie Belle."

“I will!” the filly said, sniffing as she pulled away from her older sister to go stand next to Trixie.

“Let’s go, Sweetie.” the showmare said, turning around. “The sooner we find Twilight, the sooner we’ll be back.”

Spike went to stand next to Rarity as the pair watched the blue unicorn and the filly walk away. They stood on the hill until they had lost sight of the travelers, and then Rarity looked down at Spike. “Come now, Spike. I need to take my mind off things, and I could use some company while I find some new gems.”

Spike nodded happily and walked beside the unicorn. “Are you going to be making a new dress, Rarity?”

“No,” she said with a smile. “I just have an idea.

o.O.o

The journey began quietly. Both unicorns were deep in thought as they walked along the road to Marethage.

Finally, Sweetie spoke up. “Thank you for bringing me with you, Trixie.”

The showmare shook her head when she heard the filly. “It’s okay, Sweetie.” she looked towards the younger unicorn. “You really do feel guilty about what happened to your Twilight, don’t you?”

The little unicorn nodded miserably. “It was my fault. If I hadn’t messed up her experiment, none of this would’ve happened.”

Trixie was silent for a moment, thinking on how best to express her thoughts. “I think our worlds are similar enough that the um... incident... with the Ursa Minor happened in your Ponyville too, am I right?”

Sweetie Belle nodded. “I didn’t really know about it until after you, I mean, my Trixie threw the werewolves at me. Twilight told me about it afterwards.”

Trixie nodded. “Well, although I wasn’t the one that brought the Ursa Minor to Ponyville, I was still indirectly responsible for it getting there. If I had kept

an eye on Snips and Snails, I would have noticed that they were too easily impressed with my feats, that they couldn't really distinguish showbiz from reality." she coughed. "Sometimes we do things without thinking about consequences, Sweetie. I inflated my achievements to the point of fantasy to inspire and amaze my audience, but I never thought that it might be too much for... impressionable minds."

"But at least nothing happened." Sweetie argued, her voice threatening to break. "I blew up the Library!"

"Just because the Ursa was contained doesn't mean something much worse wouldn't have happened." Trixie pointed out. "I was lucky that Twilight was there to save my and Ponyville's collective hide." she looked sadly at the filly. "But you weren't so lucky. It's random chance sometimes, how our lack of foresight plays out. I've learned a great deal since then, Sweetie, but you're just a filly, and what you're dealing with is more than anypony should at this time in your life. Accept that it was an accident... but as you struggle to make up for it, also accept that certain things are beyond your control."

Sweetie Belle said nothing, her mind replaying the incident over and over... the way the out of control magic had coursed through and enveloped Twilight... the way her mentor had turned to crystal and shattered...

There's no way I can ever forgive myself. She thought bitterly. How can I ever make up for it? I killed Twilight. There's no bringing her back.

The pair continued in silence a little longer before Trixie spoke up once more. "I don't know where you will go next," Trixie said, looking straight ahead. "But perhaps... would you like to learn some illusion spells?"

Sweetie looked at the mare in surprise. "Will you teach me?"

"Well, why not? I was helping train you with the Shield spell already." Trixie said. "Besides, I can't let my love's apprentice go into the unknown without sharing my amazing magical repertoire."

Sweetie smiled, pushing thoughts of her original world to the back of her mind.

You'll have to deal with it sooner or later... a tiny voice in her mind said, but she told it to shut up. She didn't want to think about it.

"Okay, we can practice a bit on the way," the showmare said. "This is a little like the Prestidigitation spell, but it is more advanced, so don't be too worried if you cannot do it yet, okay? Just keep practicing whenever you have the chance."

o.O.o

The town of Marethage was slightly bigger than Ponyville, but not by much. It had a small library, a couple of restaurants, and other amenities just like their town.

However, unlike Ponyville, Marethage was surrounded by a tall wall made out of thick tree thick, sharpened logs plunged into the earth. The outside fields were even protected by a lower wall, but strangely there were no barns or dwellings of any sort outside of the town itself.

"Look at this," Trixie said, stopping a moment to admire the plants. "I have never seen cornstalks this size! And look at those pumpkins! And those tomatoes! No wonder Canterlot has been buying almost exclusively from Marethage these last couple of years."

Sweetie Belle looked at the plants for a moment. Thinking about harvests and farms just made her think about Apple Bloom and she didn't want to do that.

Taking her silence in stride, Trixie guided her charge along the main road towards the town.

It was starting to get a little dark by the time they arrived. A pony up in an observation tower noticed them and waved with a lantern. "Who goes there?"

"The Great and Powerful Trixie and her assistant and apprentice, Sweetie Belle!" the showmare announced with practiced flourish.

"Apprentice?" Sweetie asked, looking at the older unicorn with an arched eyebrow.

“Well, yes!” Trixie said. “It isn’t as though Twilight has exclusive rights to you! Besides, I *have* been tutoring you for close to a day now.”

The gates swung open to admit them, Sweetie Belle smiling as she followed the blue-coated mare into the town. Inside the walls, the town looked to be pretty much the same size as Ponyville. At its center stood a decorative fountain from which a jagged rock in the shape of a crescent moon glittered in the light of the street lamps. The houses were less stylized than their hometown, having a more uniform look with its structures. All in all, however, it seemed to be a hospitable, if a bit too orderly, place.

“You were lucky to make it here before sundown!” the earth pony guard said, as he trotted up to meet them. He had a brown coat and an honest smile. His cutie mark was a lit candle. “Lantern Case, at your service, ma’ams,” he said with a curt bow of his forelegs. “Welcome to Marethage; no doubt you are on your way to Viscolt, correct?”

“Actually, this is where we were headed, good sir.” Trixie said. “We’ve come seeking a unicorn by the name of Twilight Sparkle.”

“Oh.” Lantern looked suddenly nervous. “I’m afraid that Miss Sparkle is not with us anymore...”

Trixie’s eyes narrowed. “What do you mean, by ‘not with us’?”

“Well, you see...”

“She didn’t listen when we told her she had to be in town by nightfall.” another guard, older looking and with a grey coat and a lock for a cutie mark, growled, as he trotted up to them. “She said she needed to be out there to find something. We warned her to be careful and to come back here. By the time we had locked the gates, she hadn’t come back.”

“What?!” Sweetie Belle squeaked out.

“And you didn’t organize a search party?!” Trixie demanded, her eyes hard.

“Miss, we can’t just organize a search for everypony foolish enough not to listen to those of us that know better. I’m afraid that, having been gone this long,” the guard said. “It’s unlikely she’s even still alive.”

A burst of energy nearly knocked both guards down as Trixie’s magic manifested in a visible blue aura around her. Her eyes almost glowed with power. “Do you *foals* even know who she is?!” she almost screamed, drawing the attention of other ponies in the area, who slowly walked up to the guards as they struggled to get up.

“Just Some uppity unicorn from Canterlot,” the gray one snorted.

“She is Princess Celestia’s PERSONAL STUDENT!” Trixie growled, anger emanating from every pore of her being, wisps of magical energy curling off from her aura. “She’s gone missing and you didn’t even *attempt* to find her!” Trixie gritted her teeth in anger as another wave of energy radiated from her. The main gate beginning to protest as her magic slowly pressed on it.

The guard’s eyes widened. “Stop! Stop! What are you doing, you crazy mare!? Do you want to get us all killed?”

“I’m going to do your job and go find her, you useless slob!” Trixie retorted.

“Miss! Please calm down!” an elder unicorn asked, stepping out from the terrified crowd. “There is a reason why we didn’t go after her! Please! Calm down and let me explain.”

Trixie was about to ignore him when she felt a tap on her leg. Looking down, eyes still glowing with power, she noticed Sweetie Belle looking up at her. “Please, Trixie, calm down. We can go find her, but Twilight wouldn’t like it if you destroyed the town.” The showmare took a deep breath and visibly restrained herself, the blue aura slowly dying away.

“Fine,” she spoke through gritted teeth, “You will tell us what happened. And there better be a good reason.”

The unicorn nodded, sighing in relief at the calmed mare. He turned an annoyed look towards the gray-coated guard. “Lip Lock, when are you

going to learn some tact? There's other ways of breaking the news to a pony."

The guard looked away angrily. "Whatever."

The elder unicorn shook his head sadly. "Please, come with me. I am the Scroll Shelf, Mayor of Marethage."

"Shelf?" Sweetie asked with a soft giggle before she could stop herself. "Sorry."

The Mayor chuckled. "I had cruel parents," he said with a fond smile. "They were very good at name guessing though, since that is about 80 percent of my work."

"Mister Shelf, as much as I would like to chat, I want more to know what happened to my- to Twilight." Trixie demanded.

If the elder unicorn caught her slip, he gave no indication of it. "We're almost there," he said, pointing to a small building with a sign that read 'Council Hall.'

They entered the building and after finding a place to sit down, they did so. The mayor coughed before looking out the window. "Miss Sparkle was here, as you already know, conducting a bit of research," he said. "She asked me if there were any ruins in the area and I said no," he looked back at them, "I lied."

"Why would you do that?" Trixie growled. "Knowing Twilight she headed straight for the nearest library and found out that there were."

The mayor nodded. "That is indeed what happened. Miss Sparkle left the town by herself when she couldn't get anypony to talk to her about the ruins..."

"But why wouldn't you tell her anything?" Sweetie asked.

The Mayor sighed. "A few years ago, something happened," he said. "Out of the ruins came two enormous wolves. The beasts would attack at night, and drag one of our own with them to the ruins. We tried fighting, but they

were far too strong. And when the moon would be full, they would transform..." the mayor shuddered. "We searched the old records for mention of the ruins, and found that the two monsters had been trapped in there in ancient times. They had been turned to stone by some sort of magic. But now... it seems they have broken free."

"But why did you not warn Twilight?" Trixie asked. "She could have-"

"Wait..." Sweetie Belle interrupted, looking up at the mayor with a frown. "These wolves... are they Romulus and Remus?"

The mayor blinked in surprise. "Well... yes but... how..."

"You know of them?" Trixie asked, surprised, then her eyes narrowed. "Were those..."

Sweetie nodded nervously. "Yeah... but..." she looked at the mayor. "How did they get out of the ruins? I studied their story and the legends. The only way they could leave is if somepony took them out of their cave, or if the spell keeping them inside is broken."

Trixie looked at the mayor, who shuffled nervously. "We- we don't know who did it, it just happened!"

"The legend also says that if they capture a mare near the Full Moon, they will try to turn her into one of them." Sweetie Belle continued. "They were stopped a long ago when they were bent on creating a kingdom of wolves."

"Who stopped them, Sweetie? And how?" Trixie asked as she tried to calculate when the next Full Moon was.

"I'm not sure, it could have been the Princesses." the filly replied uncertainly. "But I'm sure we could find out if we researched it en-"

"We don't have time." Trixie said pacing around the room. "The Full Moon is tonight! Twilight will become one of them if we don't act now."

Sweetie frowned and looked outside, worry evident in her eyes. "They will try to do it soon after the moon is out... it's a bit cloudy and they'll want it to be as clear as possible."

“Good, that works in our favor.” Trixie muttered, turning her glare towards the Mayor. “You will give us directions to the ruins.”

“I can’t let you go kill yourselves!” The Mayor said. “You have no idea-”

“We know exactly what we’re doing,” Trixie interrupted, “And I will have you know that the Princess already knows that Twilight was last seen here, and that we both came looking for her on the Princesses’ behalf. If you do not help us, I will personally make sure that she finds out!”

The old stallion cringed. “Fine. But be warned that if you go, you will almost certainly die.”

“We’ll see about that.” the showmare replied.

o.O.o

“So, Sweetie,” Trixie began as the trees rose above them, hiding the stars from view, “What do you know about these werewolves? How did you stop them last time?”

Sweetie Belle looked around at the darkened woods nervously. “Well, they’re immortal... the story says that one cannot die while the other lives.”

The showmare frowned. “That doesn’t make much sense... sounds like some sort of riddle.”

“I didn’t get it either.” Sweetie confessed. “I also know that silver burns them... that’s how Twilight caught them; she made a cage and wrapped silver all over it.”

Trixie groaned. “We don’t have any silver. Is there any other way to stop them? What about that spell that kept them in the ruins?”

Sweetie shrugged. “I just know that there was some sort of spell keeping them there so only somepony willing would be able to release them.”

Trixie hummed to herself, eyes narrowing. “Somepony must have moved it...” she thought for a moment. “You said that they wanted to create a

kingdom of wolves? Why are they sticking to this small area then? If they moved away they would be able to catch more ponies than those in Marethage.”

Sweetie looked down. “I don’t know, Trixie... sorry.”

The blue unicorn chuckled. “I didn’t expect you to know, Sweetie, I was just thinking aloud, that’s all.” her smile faded. “I think the Mayor knew more than he told us.”

Sweetie didn’t answer, she was more worried about the forest around them and the possibility of a werewolf attack.

“But why... they haven’t even reported the werewolves were free to Canterlot!” Trixie growled. “Sweetie, tell me more about this legend.”

“Well... the book Twilight gave me said that Remus and Romulus were two brother wolves that wanted to make their kingdom, but because they were the only ones left, they couldn’t have any subjects, so they each went their own way to find a way to create more wolves.” Sweetie paused, trying to remember more of the story. “They eventually found a magic item to help them with that, it had something to do with... uh... fert.. ability?”

“Fertility.” Trixie corrected.

“Yeah! Fertability,” the filly repeated. “They were somehow tied forever to the item, but the problem was that it would only give its power to one of them.”

“I can see where that would be a problem.” the showmare quipped.

“So they fought over it until Romulus almost killed his brother...”

“But didn’t you say that they were immortal?” Trixie asked.

“Hey! I didn’t write the story! Some silly pony did like a thousand years ago!”

“Sorry, Sweetie. Please. Continue.”

“Well, the book didn’t say how, but a group of heroes sealed them in the ruins with the magic item... and they were supposed to stay there forever.”

Trixie nodded, deep in thought.

The pair walked in silence until the forest started to clear around them. Soon, they were standing outside a circle of stones, with a path at one end of the circle going deep underground.

“I guess this is it...” Trixie sighed.

“Do we know what we’ll do?” Sweetie asked.

The showmare grimaced. “I should have asked you about those wolves earlier, had we been in town I think I could have done something...”

Sweetie looked at the path nervously. “Trixie... what if-”

“Don’t think about it,” the showmare whispered, “We have to get her out. Now, come, The Great and Powerful Trixie has a plan.”

The two unicorns slowly made their way into the ruins. At first, the underground passage was little but rocks around them, but the tunnel eventually emerged into a large cavern, where they stopped and stared in awe at the remnants of an ancient city. From time to time a small tremor would shake the cavern and bits of rock and dirt would rain from the ceiling.

“It looks like this place is about ready to collapse,” Trixie muttered.

“Wait!” Sweetie hissed. “I think I heard something...”

It took a moment, but eventually they heard a faint voice in the distance. Looking at each other, they slowly began to move forward.

“... you don’t have to do this, I’m sure there’s plenty of other ways for you to, uh, procreate than turning me into a werewolf!”

“It’s Twilight!” Sweetie whispered excitedly. Trixie smiled and nodded, raising a hoof to indicate to the filly that she needed to be quiet.

The pair snuck into a half-collapsed house and carefully peeked through the cracks in the wall.

Twilight stood inside a small cage, fearfully pleading with her captors as they stood in before of a massive ancient column that reached all the way up to the apex of the cave and seemed to be the only thing keeping it up. Next to her, a familiar looking stone structure stood amongst the remains of buildings and several rocks that had landed around it. It was a bit of jagged rock that looked almost like a crescent moon... or that's what Sweetie had thought when she had seen it in Marethage. Now, it reminded her more of a wickedly curved fang, albeit a bit duller looking than its counterpart.

"Why isn't she using her magic?" Sweetie whispered.

Trixie looked down and shook her head, pointing towards her horn.

What about her horn? Sweetie wondered, looking at the showmare blankly. When it was obvious the filly wasn't getting it, Trixie rolled her eyes and pointed at her own horn, then shook her head. *Not her horn?* Then the showmare pointed at Twilight, then at her own horn. *Twilight's horn?* Sweetie looked back at her mentor and noticed the small object around her horn, some sort of metal clasp wrapped around the purple unicorn's horn. *Oooh... that must stop her magic!*

Seeing the light of comprehension dawn on the filly's face, Trixie sighed. *Finally.* She turned to look back at the wolves.

"Ready, little mare?" one of the wolves, slightly bigger than the other grinned wickedly as his paw reached past the bars to carefully trace a claw gently down the side of Twilight's face. "You're cute right now; I think you will make an even lovelier wolf."

"Um, thank you, but I'd much rather not... no offense, but I have friends and a very special pony waiting for me back home... Maybe there's some other way I can help you. Maybe a--"

"Don't you ever get tired of begging?" the other wolf barked, annoyed. "You're going to be a wolf, not a dog!"

"I'm just offering a more mutually agreeable solution to--"

“No,” the bigger wolf growled with finality, “I don’t care who you are with right now, and neither will you in a few moments.”

The three looked up, the two unicorns in hiding also following their eyes. Where the ceiling had caved in, the group could make out the stars in the sky above. The weather had cleared and the Full Moon had risen.

“It is time,” the bigger stated as the pair of wolves approached the fang. The pair howled into the air, their lupine shapes blurring as they transformed into their larger, bipedal forms.

Both werewolves, now standing up on their hind legs placed their hands on the jagged rock, lowering their heads in what seemed like prayer.

“Moon!” the larger howled. “It is I, Romulus! He who has proven beyond doubt to be the strongest!”

Sweetie and Trixie noticed Remus shooting his brother a spiteful glare before lowering his head again.

“Bestow unto me your blessing so that I might populate the world with our kin!” Romulus finished.

The rock pulsed with white light. Slowly intensifying until it began to illuminate the area around them.

Twilight stared, fears forgotten at the revelation of what had to be something a pony would only witness once in a life-time.

Sweetie, for her part, was staring at Trixie, the showmare’s horn shining softly with magic and eyes closed in concentration.

The moonlight slowly permeated the smaller of the werewolves, who glowed for a few seconds, smiling fiercely at the look his brother gave him.

“It seems the moon has chosen me after all, brother,” Remus laughed, “Don’t worry, I will make our kingdom strong.” He turned to grin at Twilight, who audibly meeped and backed into the opposite corner of her prison.

"No, no! I don't want to be a wolf!" she shouted, smacking her encased horn against the bars, trying to forcibly remove the clasp that prevented her from using her magic.

"It is too late, pony," Remus growled as he stepped closer, but it was then that Romulus' clawed hand grasped his shoulder.

"This is not going to happen," the larger werewolf said, a threatening growl emerging. "I am the Alpha here! I shall be the one to turn her and we will begin the kingdom of the wolf anew."

Remus stepped away, shrugging his brother's paw off. "You *were* the Alpha," he growled. "The Moon Fang has spoken! I am to be the progenitor of-"

He never finished as, with a vicious snarl, the taller werewolf was on him, ripping and tearing at flesh with tooth and fang. Remus replied in kind and soon both werewolves were in an all out battle. Soon, Remus was sent rolling on the floor. Standing up in shaky feet, he lowered his head and tucked his tail as he took on a submissive posture.

"B-brother... I... I yield to you... spare me..."

Romulus paused and was about to speak when the moonlight shone again on Remus, his fur glistening once more with the white light of the Moon Fang's blessing. "No! The only way to create my kingdom is by killing you! You still have the blessing!"

Eyes widening in terror, Remus turned and bolted, followed closely by his brother, the sounds of their chase fading away slowly.

After a few moments of silence, Twilight started struggling, trying to remove the clasp again, keeping an eye out for the brother's return.

"Need a hoof with that?"

Twilight jumped and hit her head on the top of her cage. Rubbing her head with a hoof, she turned around and stared as Trixie walked out from a ruined house with accompanied by none other than... *Sweetie Belle?*

"T-Trixie!" Twilight choked out as tears of happiness flooded her eyes and flowed freely down her cheeks. Both mares pressed against each side of the cage's gate, nuzzling each other. A lightly blushing Sweetie Belle looked away, her eyes falling on the Moon Fang as something caught her eye.

As Trixie magicked the clasp from Twilight's horn and unlocked the door, Sweetie made her way to the statue. Something had caught the moonlight, she thought, or maybe she had seen a faint, purple glow from amongst the rocks piled around it.

"Sweetie, we need to go before the Remus or Romulus return," Trixie said.

"Wait..." Sweetie shook her head. "I... there's something here..." her horn lit the rocks with a white aura, and she heard Twilight gasp in surprise as she slowly levitated a few of the stones out of the way to reveal a small crystal shard. "That's-" her eyes teared up. She would recognize this anywhere... it was a piece of Twilight. *Her* Twilight. The crystal almost seemed to pulsate with the familiar feel of the purple unicorn's magic.

Trixie and Twilight stepped up to her, admiring the purple crystal as it spun and pulsed with magic.

"What is that?" Twilight asked softly, sensing that the filly was about to break up crying.

Trixie studied the crystal, eyes widening as she looked from it to Twilight and back to the crystal. "It's..." her throat felt dry. "Is that... what I think it is, Sweetie?"

The filly nodded, letting it fall into her hoof before clutching it tight to her chest. "It's my Twilight."

"*Your* Twilight?" the purple unicorn asked, confused, "What do you mean, Sweetie? And... what are the two of you doing here in the first place?"

"There's no time for that," Trixie said. "We'll tell you once we're safe. We need to get out of here before-"

“Too late for that, little ponies.” Romulus said, walking into their sight. He dropped the carcass of his dead brother and smiled, his muzzle dripping blood. “My brother is no more. I will capture the three of you and receive the blessing of the Moon Fang... I will turn you all and together we shall lead our new kingdom to glory.”

The werewolf pounced, but before he made it even halfway through his jump, he was frozen in place by a mix of blue and purple auras.

Horns flaring and anger shining in their eyes, Trixie and Twilight held the wolf aloft for a moment before hurling him across the cavern.

Twilight’s horn took on a brighter shade as the Moon Fang was levitated into the air and thrown on top of the wolf.

“Do you think you can teleport us out?” Trixie asked Twilight.

“I think so!”

“Good!” The showmare turned her attention to the distant cave entrance. With a blast of magic, she collapsed part of the cave wall there before levitating pieces of destroyed building and piling them on top of each other until the whole entrance was covered. “Quick! Before he comes back!”

Twilight nodded and, after placing her forelegs around Sweetie and Trixie, closed her eyes in concentration, horn flaring into life. Sweetie let out an audible gasp as Romulus emerged from the shadows, leaping at them with all his strength and speed, snarling and with bloodlust in his eyes. The massive werewolf smashed against the ancient center column, the force of the impact sending cracks splintering up and down its length.

The werewolf looked up in fear and confusion as the support column split in half and the whole cavern began to groan and shake.

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Reappearing outside of the entrance to the ruins with a burst of purple magic, the three unicorns turned to watch in morbid fascination as the cavern collapsed in on itself, burying its contents under tons of rock and earth.

For a few seconds, the mares thought they could hear enraged howls coming from within, but, as the dust settled, all was silent.

Trixie and Twilight looked at each other for a moment before the purple unicorn grabbed her lover by the neck and shared a very passionate kiss with her. After almost a minute, she let go of the dazed blue unicorn, who had to sit down.

“Now,” Twilight said, “I believe you two have some explaining to do.”

“How about you tell us what you were looking for here?” Trixie said, levelling a look at Twilight. “You might want us to explain, but we are the ones that had to come over here to save you.”

Twilight blushed, looking anywhere but at Trixie. “I...” she coughed. “Well... what do you know of the Moon Fang?”

Trixie raised an eyebrow. “Sweetie here told me that it was a symbol of fertility” her eyes widened. “Are you suggesting that-”

“I came here to see if we could... maybe... use it... someday...” Twilight lowered her head as she spoke until she looked almost as small as Sweetie. “You know, to... have a foal?”

Trixie opened her mouth to say something, but found that she didn’t have the words to describe the sudden warmth within her.

o.O.o

“... and although they had used the Moon Fang to increase the growth of their produce, they did so fully knowing that removing the magical statue from the ruins would allow Remus and Romulus to escape and attack innocent ponies. The wall around Marethage is a clear sign of their premeditation. They knew full well what they were getting into.”

Twilight paused for a moment before continuing her dictation.

“However, since both werewolves perished, the statue has lost all its power and is nothing more than a decoration now. Thankfully no pony was hurt.

“The Mayor of Marethage needs to be made responsible for his decision to endanger so many innocent ponies.

“Your faithful student,
“Twilight Sparkle.”

Twilight took a long breath and released it. “Okay Spike, send it.”

The baby dragon rolled up the scroll, and, in a breath of green fire, it was gone. “Well, it sounds like that was some adventure you three had!”

Twilight nodded. “I agree. But I still need an explanation as to why Sweetie was there. And who taught her magic?” the purple unicorn groaned in frustration. “If Sweetie hadn’t been so adamant on getting to Ponyville first...”

Spike blinked. “But, Twilight... she’s your apprentice. You taught her magic.”

The purple unicorn’s eyes widened. “No I didn’t!” they both turned to look at the filly.

Sweetie Belle, standing next to Trixie, cringed. “I guess I need to explain a couple of things now, don’t I?”

“It’s just about time, Sweetie Belle.” The showmare nodded with an encouraging smile.

“Well...” the filly unicorn hesitated. “I- I’d like Scootaloo, Apple Bloom and Rarity to be here too, if you don’t mind, Twilight?”

The unicorn blinked and nodded. “Spike?”

“On it, Twilight!” he said, running out of the library.

It wasn’t long before Rarity walked in followed by the remaining members of the Cutie Mark Crusaders, both of whom refused to look at Sweetie Belle.

Rarity sighed, but gave her sister an encouraging smile as the group sat down around the filly.

"I- I don't know where to start..." Sweetie said, turning to look at the blue unicorn.

"Then perhaps I should." Trixie offered, looking at each pony in the room in turn before she began. "Last year, while I was travelling through the lands of the Rhinos..."

As Trixie began to tell her captivated audience about the dream-like state that allowed the Rhinos to visit other dimensions, Sweetie sighed and looked down at the purple crystal she held in her hoof. It glittered with so many memories... she felt suddenly nostalgic, and very alone, despite being with friends and family, or rather, versions of them.

Soon she noticed that Trixie was looking expectantly to her. Apple Bloom and Scootaloo were now also looking her way, confused as to what Trixie's story had to do with anything, while Twilight and Rarity had slightly distant looks in their eyes as they looked at her as they connected the dots.

The filly sighed. "I..." she took a deep breath and looked at each pony in the eye. "For the last few weeks I have been learning magic as Twilight's apprentice-"

"But-" Apple Bloom started, only to be shushed by Twilight, who was looking at the small unicorn intently.

"... at first I just wanted to play with Apple Bloom and Scootaloo, all summer, but then Scootaloo went with Dash to a competition and Apple Bloom went with Applejack to Appleloosa."

The group became very quiet as Sweetie described to them what it had been like living with Twilight while Rarity was away on a business trip; about how she had slowly warmed up to the purple unicorn and started really learning magic. How she had levitated her first stone. How she had accidentally turned Twilight's mane pink while learning Prestidigitation. She told them about Trixie dragging Romulus and Remus to Ponyville, how she'd almost been killed and of Twilight's decision to teach her the Shield spell. In halting sentences, she talked about the day that the library had

received the packages from Canterlot, how she had come to the library and...

“... i-if... she paused a moment to wipe away the tears. “If I hadn’t tried to levitate those past the experiment, none of this would have happened!” she sobbed. “I’m so sorry!”

She was suddenly held by somepony. She opened her eyes to see Rarity hugging her. She felt Scootaloo and Apple Bloom do so too, and soon enough Twilight had joined the group.

“Oh, Sweetie...” Rarity said. “You’ve gone through so much...”

“I’m sorry...” Sweetie Belle said, burying her face in her sister’s mane, “I didn’t want to make Apple Bloom a liar, or Scootaloo angry...”

“It’s not your fault,” Scootaloo said, “I’m sorry I acted that way.”

Twilight stepped back after a moment. “So... that piece of crystal you found, is that...”

Sweetie nodded, levitating the crystal so they could all see it. “It is a piece of Twilight... *my* Twilight.”

“May I?” Twilight asked, voice little more than a whisper, staring at the crystal.

Sweetie nodded, and allowed Twilight to take hold of it with her magic. The purple unicorn closed her eyes and concentrated, feeling out the magic within the fragment. It seemed to shimmer for a second, before the purple unicorn suddenly gasped. “I- I heard my own voice coming from it!”

“What? How?” Sweetie asked, a sudden excitement coursing through her.

“I- I don’t know... I just tried sensing the magic in it and... I heard my voice... I couldn’t make out what I said, though...”

Sweetie took the crystal and concentrated, just as Twilight had taught her. Soon everything around her faded and her only focus was the crystal.

“Sweetie,” Twilight’s voice echoed around her, “It’s okay Sweetie, we can make it back home... Both of us. Draw my magic from the crystal; it will get you on your way... I hope to see you soon, my student.”

“Twilight! I’m so sorry!” Sweetie said, gasping as she opened her eyes and found herself surrounded by the others.

“What happened?!” Apple Bloom asked, look of worry etched on the farm filly’s face.

“I think... I think I know how to go home.” Sweetie said after a moment.

“Oh...” Rarity sighed. “I had made this for you, Sweetie...” she pulled out a small notebook, decorated with gems in the silhouette of a unicorn mare in a regal pose. “As a gift for you to take notes in while you studied...” she explained, letting Sweetie take it. “I guess you won’t be able to take it with you after all... and I don’t know if my Sweetie here would ever use it.”

Sweetie’s eyes watered a bit. “Thank you, sis.”

“Wait.” Twilight said after a moment, her hoof to her chin as she thought. “I think there might be a way.”

Sweetie’s eyes were wide. “You really mean that?”

Twilight chuckled. “Of course. What kind of unicorn would I be if I didn’t make sure my interdimensional-counterpart’s student had at least a notebook to write down her lessons?”

“But... you... er,” Sweetie looked at her mentor in confusion, “My Twilight always said that scrolls were better and-”

“That’s... not important,” the purple unicorn interrupted, glaring at the others they snickered. “What is important is that between Rarity, Trixie, and us, we can enchant the notebook to be part of your magic... a summons of sorts.”

Trixie smiled. “I see what you mean. If we both provide the power, Rarity the finesse to enchant the gems and Sweetie ties her magic with them she could theoretically pull it out wherever she is.”

“Well, let us get to work then!” Rarity declared excitedly.

o.o.o

It was a much more tired group of unicorn mares that sat around the library watching as Sweetie Belle concentrated her magic, making her notebook disappear and reappear again on command.

“Well, hopefully that should work,” Twilight said.

“Are you ready to go?” Trixie asked Sweetie Belle, who nodded before embracing the blue unicorn.

“Thank you for trusting me, teaching me and helping.”

“It was great, Sweetie. If you ever stop by again, don’t forget to visit.” Trixie said, returning the hug happily.

“Sis... thank you. And I’m sorry I made you worry.”

“Never mind that, Sweetie.” Rarity said with a dismissive wave of her hoof. “Water under the bridge. I love you, little sister, here and in any other world,” the white unicorn said with a fond nuzzle.

“Thank you for saving me, Sweetie,” Twilight said with a smile, “I’m sorry I wasn’t around to teach you more about the Shield Spell.”

Sweetie chuckled. “It’s okay, Twilight.” the filly said, smiling. “Trixie helped me a lot, and I won’t disappoint my Twilight... I’ll keep studying!”

The little unicorn then turned to look at Spike, Apple Bloom and Scootaloo, who had fallen asleep while the unicorns enchanted the notebook. “Tell them I’ll miss them, please...”

Turning her back on everypony so that she wouldn’t hesitate, the filly concentrated on the crystal, slowly drawing its magic into herself.

A bright, lavender light flooded her vision and then she was gone.

o.o.o

Rarity gasped and ran towards Sweetie Belle as the filly collapsed.
“Sweetie? Sweetie, are you alright? I don’t think it worked...”

“Uhh...” the filly groaned, opening her eyes. “Sis?” she looked around.
“Wha-what are we doing in the Library?”

The mares stepped back and stared.

Sweetie stared right back, face contorting in confusion. “Why are you all staring at me like that?-Did my horn fall off or something?” she crossed her eyes as she tried to look up at her forehead. She gasped as a new possibility occurred to her. “Oh! Did my cutie mark appear?!” she snapped her head around to stare excitedly at her flank.

Still blank.

“Aww...”

o.O.o

When Sweetie Belle opened her eyes and blinked, she sighed as she looked at the bookshelves in the library. “I guess that didn’t work.”

“Uuuggh...”

The filly blinked as she slowly turned around. The library was a mess. There were upturned couches, boardgames were strewn around, and Rainbow Dash was passed out on top of the table.

Sweetie could hear Pinkie Pie snoring noisily, but the filly could only see the pink earth pony’s flank sticking out of the kitchen door.

Fluttershy was giggling in her sleep, kicking out her legs sporadically as she dreamed, hooves barely missing the unknown filly alicorn sleeping beside her.

Applejack and Rarity were lying on the couch, also completely passed out. She could barely make out Spike’s body beneath the lamp cover he had on his head.

The strangest thing, however, was the swirling magical portal placed where one of the book-shelves was supposed to be.

The sound of hoofsteps coming from upstairs made the filly look up in time to see Twilight emerge from her room. The two unicorns, filly and mare, stared at each other.

“Twilight...” Sweetie stared. “Why are you wearing that belly dancer get-up?”

“I...” the purple unicorn fell silent for a few seconds, blinking as if she were imagining things. “Uh... do I know you?”

“I’m...”

“Twiiiiiiight!” a sultry voice called out, making both unicorns look towards the magical portal.

Sweetie couldn't decide whether to scream or run away, the filly's body freezing up as Nightmare Moon stepped halfway out of it. “You're late for work, my assistant!”

“Sorry!” Twilight replied nervously, visibly daunted by the dark alicorn.

Sweetie settled on screaming.

Chapter 2

Nightmares Don't Last Forever

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!" Sweetie Belle kept screaming in panic, unable to move as Nightmare Moon herself entered the library. Never before had she been so scared. Not even being almost eaten by a werewolf invoked the deep-rooted fear that the alicorn before her inspired. She was suddenly reminded of the manic laughter of the Nightmare as she had somehow taken Celestia away during the Summer Sun Celebration.

"Well, you do seem to know how to impress ponies," Twilight stated as she came all the way down the stairs to stand in front of the Nightmare.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"Well, I do have quite the presence," the alicorn chuckled. "You look good, Twilight. I thought you hated wearing that."

"I do," Twilight growled. "Hate it, I mean," she added when she saw Nightmare Moon begin to smile. "I'm only wearing it because it's your birthday and you begged me to wear it."

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

The alicorn chuckled and punched the unicorn on the shoulder playfully. "Oh, Twilight, you say the kindest things."

Twilight glared at the alicorn. "It's not your birthday, is it?"

Nightmare Moon raised her eyebrows in fake surprise. "Whatever gave you that idea?"

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Both ponies looked at Sweetie as she continued screaming.

"So, what's her problem?" Nightmare Moon finally asked.

“Apparently she’s scared of you,” Twilight replied.

“But... really? That much screaming? Isn’t it... too much?”

“Aaaaaa-oof!”

The alicorn and purple unicorn blinked as a pony-sized cushion knocked the filly over, interrupting her scream.

“Sweetie Belle!” Rarity groaned as her horn stopped glowing. “What do you think you’re doing?! Haven’t I told you not to scream like that?”

“Ugh... mah head...” Applejack groaned, blinking heavily as she slowly raised her head from Rarity’s mane.

Fluttershy twitched, and slowly opened her eyes, wincing under the light. “Oh... oh my...” She blushed. “I think I drank too much... again.”

The white pegasus next to her blinked and opened her eyes, yawning cutely. “Sis!” She happily jumped to her hooves and trotted up to Nightmare Moon.

Pinkie groaned and dragged the rest of her body into the kitchen. Spike, for his part, kept snoring as Rainbow Dash turned over and fell off the table with a dull thump.

Sweetie pushed the cushion off of her and stared as the group groggily got up and proceeded to discuss the last night as if Nightmare Moon was not there... unless...

“Is this a Nightmare Night prank, Princess Luna?” she asked the alicorn, whose eyes widened.

“Sweetie Belle!” Rarity gasped then frowned, “What are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be at home?”

“Oh, so this is your sister!” Twilight said with a smile. “I was wondering who she was and why she was here,” she said, looking down at

the filly. "Hi! My name is Twilight Sparkle!" she continued, then frowned. "Although you already seemed to know that."

"Twilight..." Sweetie said without taking her eyes off the alicorn, who was watching her intently. "Why is Princess Lun-"

"Ahem," the alicorn interrupted. "I'm afraid you have it wrong, my little pony. I am Nightmare Moon... ruler of Equestria!"

"Oh." Sweetie considered her options. The pillow that Rarity had thrown at her slowly levitated off the floor and then smashed into Nightmare Moon's face. "Quick, everypony! Run! I'll protect you!" Sweetie shouted, horn glowing again as a couple more pillows were pulled into the air.

The pillow slid down from Nightmare Moon's face as she gave an amused look at the filly. The look turned into a frown when another pillow smacked her in the face.

"What are you waiting for?" Sweetie called. "Sis, run! Twilight, if we cast the shield spell we can hold her back!"

"Shield spell?" Twilight blinked as she turned to look at the flabbergasted Rarity. "Your little sister knows how to cast the Shield spell? Why isn't she in Canterlot studying magic?"

"Now, Sweetie, hold on just a second..." Nightmare Moon said before another pillow found its place embedded on her horn.

"I-" Rarity blinked. "I have no idea how she's doing it!"

"Why are you still here?!" Sweetie asked, turning to look at the group as her control of the pillows faltered.

"If we're done with that-" Nightmare Moon started to say, only to be interrupted by another pillow to the face. The alicorn turned to glare at Pinkie Pie, who gave her a wide smile from within a pillow fort she had somehow constructed while they were distracted. "Oh... It. Is. On!"

Rarity dodged the flying pillows as she made her way to her sister. "Sweetie, let's get going."

“Sunny!” Nightmare Moon roared as several pillows around her floated threateningly. “How dare you join Pinkie Pie’s side! Once I win this fight you will be grounded and spend the next thousand years in your room at the castle, you hear me?”

“But...” Sweetie Belle’s horn glowed as she sent another pillow flying. “Nightmare Moon! We have to stop her!”

The older unicorn just sighed and ushered her sister out. “They’ll be fine.” Once they were outside, Rarity looked up with a frown. “I just hope they finish their pillow fight soon so that Nightmare Moon can raise the sun.”

Sweetie blinked. “Huh? Buh- but, come on, sis! This is serious!” She looked at her sister doubtfully. “Isn’t it?”

“Okay, that’s enough, Sweetie, you’re starting to sound like Twilight,” Rarity chided. Then, when she saw the small frown in the filly’s face, clarified, “The purple unicorn.”

“I know who Twilight is!”

Rarity sighed. “Of course dear, I just... I’m still tired. Now, let’s take you home.”

The two walked in silence for a few minutes until...

“Sweetie, I may be... a bit under the weather, but... did you just levitate and throw pillows around?”

o.o.o

As they walked away from the library, Sweetie’s eyes were glued to the ground.

So I didn’t make it home... back there Nightmare Moon was stopped by sis and the others... even in that strange world where Trixie and Twilight were together, Nightmare Moon was gone! What am I going to do? Why isn’t everypony more worried about this?

To Sweetie Belle's surprise, the sun eventually made its way up into the sky. "I thought Nightmare Moon wanted eternal night?"

Why?

Rarity glanced tiredly at her. "No, I think the only thing she really wants is Twilight..." She sighed. "Ever since we tried to use the Elements of Harmony on Nightmare Moon and failed, everything has been such a rush... with Twilight suddenly becoming Nightmare Moon's slave and Celestia being..." Rarity stopped, looking around, "... indisposed... everything is very confusing. It might be easier if Nightmare Moon had been a tyrant- but no, we get a prankster..."

That made the filly stop. "What?"

*What does Nightmare Moon want with Twilight? It can't be good! Oooh, I should find the piece of Twilight in this world, but can I just do it and not help her defeat Nightmare Moon? What would **my** Twilight want me to do?*

The older unicorn yawned as she herded her sister into the boutique, and looked longingly at the stairs that led to her room. "I know you just met Twilight, Sweetie, so you don't know... she's Nightmare Moon's personal slave..."

"Slave?!"

Rarity held her hoof against her head. "Could you please not yell? Listen, Sweetie, why don't you go play around town; maybe find that pegasus friend of yours, just don't get into trouble, okay?"

"But-"

"Go on, Sweetie. Big sis needs some more sleep."

As she was ushered out the door, Sweetie rolled her eyes. "Fine."

The cool morning air welcomed her into its embrace once more as she pondered what to do.

Nightmare Moon has turned Twilight into her slave! She makes her dress like a belly dancer! Does that mean that she defeated Princess Celestia? What am I going to do? Should I tell them about... the accident? But, how will they treat me if I do? Will sis still think I am her sister? Or maybe she will be scared of me! I don't have Trixie here to explain... I'm... alone... She sighed, but her thoughts were interrupted by a familiar filly walking past Carousel Boutique.

"Apple Bloom!" she called, running up to meet her friend. *Well, maybe not completely alone.*

The earth pony stopped and looked at her, confused. "Sweetie Belle, right? Rarity's sister?"

What? But... oh... right. I'm the other world thing. Sweetie face-hoofed, then looked at her would-be-friend. "Uh... right! And you're Applejack's sister, right?"

"That's me!" Apple Bloom said with a proud nod. "Ah'm lookin' for her right now; she's s'posed ta be back on the farm buckin' apples you see..."

A plan started to form in Sweetie's mind. "Hey, I know where Applejack is right now... want to hang out after we get her?"

Apple Bloom blinked. "Uh, sure."

"Great!" Sweetie grinned as she motioned for the earth pony to follow her. "I'll introduce you to another friend, and then..."

"... and then?"

"We'll rescue Twilight!"

"Who?"

o.o.o

"So, let me get this straight," Scootaloo said, looking at Sweetie Belle as if the unicorn had grown another horn. "You want the three of us," her

hoof went around encompassing them, "To take on *The Nightmare Moon* in order to free this Twilight Sparkle, who you just met this morning."

Sweetie nodded excitedly.

"Ah met her a couple of days ago!" Apple Bloom supplied.

"Right..." Scootaloo gave the earth pony an odd look. "So you really want to do this, even after Nightmare Moon defeated Princess Celestia," the pegasus pressed.

"Eeyup!" Sweetie smiled, ignoring the odd look Apple Bloom gave her in turn.

"Sweetie, I hate to break it to you, but we can't do this!" Scootaloo rolled her eyes. "This is nuts! Besides," she glared at the unicorn, "Since when do you want to go on crazy adventures? You're usually the one telling me to not do this sort of stuff!"

The unicorn's smile faded. "But... but," she stammered. "Think about our cutie-marks!"

Apple Bloom blinked and looked at her flank. "We don't have cutie-marks."

"Exactly!" Sweetie said, nodding sagely. "Maybe we can get them by defeating Nightmare Moon!"

"That's completely-" Scoot paused, eyes narrowing as she scratched her chin with her hoof. "You think that might work?"

"That would be really cool," Apple Bloom added, eyes wide.

"So, what do you say? Cutie Mark Crusader Nightmare Vanquishers!"

"Yay!" the other two fillies joined, jumping up in excitement for a second before Scootaloo and Apple Bloom stopped.

"Cutie Mark Crusaders?" the earth pony asked.

Sweetie coughed. "Uh... ye-yeah! We're trying to get our cutie marks, right?"

"You know..." the pegasus said thoughtfully. "It's weird to say this, but... it sounds natural."

The three looked at each other for a moment before wide grins were shared. "Cutie Mark Crusader Nightmare Vanquishers! Yay!"

The three ran in circles, cheering, until Scootaloo suddenly stopped, which ended in the other two piling on top of her.

"Ouch! Get off! Get off!" she shouted.

"Why'd you stop?" Sweetie asked, as she rolled off to the side, making Apple Bloom slide over.

"Well, I was thinking... we need to plan this out," Scootaloo said. "And we need a base!"

Sweetie blinked. "Well..." Her eyes widened. "There's this filly pegasus called Sunny who lives at the castle, I think. Maybe she can help us find a hiding place there?"

"But... how can we get to the castle?" Apple Bloom asked.

"I saw Nightmare Moon come out of a magic door," Sweetie provided, looking from one pony to the next. "I bet we can also use it to get to the castle!"

The three exchanged glances.

"We can do it!" Sweetie Belle insisted.

Finally Apple Bloom and Scootaloo both nodded. "Let's go!"

o.O.o

Spike groaned as he dragged himself to the library door as the persistent knocks continued. "Hold your horses, I'm coming!" When the

door opened, he was greeted by three grinning fillies. "Uh... can I help you?"

"Spike!" Sweetie said with a bright smile. "We need to get to the castle! Can you help us?"

The baby dragon looked at her, confused. "Buh- what? Castle?"

"Yeah... uh..." Apple Bloom, pointed towards the distance in direction of Canterlot. "Ya know, where Nightmare Moon is?"

"But... why in the name of Celestia's mane would you want to go there?" the dragon asked.

"W-well.... I..." Sweetie hated to lie to Spike, but if they were going to save Twilight... "Twilight told me that I should apply to Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns?"

Spike gave her an unamused look, arching an eyebrow. "She did, huh? Do you know any magic?"

"Y-yes!" Sweetie nodded. "I know Levitation and Prestidigitation and Shield, and I was learning some illusion magic and..."

"Fine! Fine!" Spike sighed. "I can tell a bookworm when I see one, especially after living with Twilight," he muttered before peering around Sweetie at the other two fillies. "But what about you two?"

"Uh..." Scootaloo shifted nervously. "Moral... support?"

Apple Bloom nodded quickly.

Spike rolled his eyes as he stepped back, opening the door all the way, "Come on in."

The three fillies made their way into the library. Apple Bloom and Scootaloo looked almost horrified at the sheer amount of books in there. "This reminds me of school..." she whispered.

“Spike? Could we also talk to Sunny?” Sweetie asked. “She knows the castle and where we have to go...”

Spike blinked, “Sure. I’ll go get her. You three stay here in the meantime, okay?”

The three fillies nodded as the dragon went up the stairs. Once he was out of sight they all released a deep breath.

“It... it worked!” Apple Bloom said in awe.

“I can’t believe you convinced him you knew magic!” Scootaloo added, turning to look at Sweetie with a huge grin. “That was awesome! Levitation and Presti-whatever! Ha! Classic!”

“But-” Sweetie raised a hoof.

“You mean you don’t really know magic?” Apple Bloom blinked. “Ah believed you when you said all them fancy words! You should be an actress, Sweetie.”

“But-” the unicorn filly tried again, only to be interrupted this time by Spike as he jumped down the stairs.

“Aha! I knew it!” the little dragon said walking towards them, brows furrowed. “You almost got me, but there’s no way Twilight would tell you that without telling me about it! Besides we arrived a few days ago and-”

“I do know magic!” Sweetie interrupted. “Look!” she levitated a couple of books off the shelf and then floated them up to the table. “See? I can do magic!”

“How the hay did you do that?!” Scootaloo asked, surprised. “I’ve never seen you do anything like that!”

Spike glanced at Sweetie with a raised eyebrow. “Moral support, huh?”

The unicorn filly cringed.

“Well?” Scootaloo pressed her face against the unicorn’s. “When *did* you learn to do that?”

“I...”

“Spike, are they the ones looking for me?” A voice interrupted them. They all looked up towards the upstairs room as a white pegasus with a sun cutie-mark and a gem on her forehead asked walked down the stairs, stifling a yawn.

“Prin- I mean, Sunny!” Spike smiled nervously. “Yes, that’s them.”

“Oh... hi!” Sweetie smiled nervously as she walked around Scootaloo, who frowned at her but held her tongue.

“I recognize you,” Sunny said after looking at the unicorn filly for a few seconds. “You’re Rarity’s sister... Sweetie Belle, right?”

“Rarity is your sister?” Spike gasped as he grew dreamy-eyed. “No wonder you know magic... with a sister so perfect-”

“Yeah, well...” Apple Bloom looked at Sunny. “We was wonderin’ if you could give us a tour of the Castle?”

Sunny smiled. “Huzzah! At last! New friends!” she exclaimed giddily. “Sis will be so proud!”

The three fillies looked at each other. “Um, sure!” Sweetie hastily reassured the pegasus. “We’d be happy to be your friends!”

“Well! Let’s get going!” Sunny giggled, a spring in her step as she trotted towards the now-hidden portal. “I’m sure sis would love to meet you!”

o.o.o

“So, she lives in the Castle,” Scootaloo said in a sing-song voice that vaguely resembled Sweetie Belle’s. “She can help us get a place to hide and plan there! Why, she’s the best pony that we could ask for help! She

looks really nice!" She hissed at Sweetie, who winced. "Oh, and she's also freaking Nightmare Moon's sister!"

The unicorn filly winced as she and Apple Bloom watched apprehensively as the white pegasus nuzzled the dark Queen of Equestria. Next to the queen, Twilight Sparkle stood, this time without her belly-dancer costume, looking at them with confusion and something akin to panic.

"Ah'm not sure comin' here was a good idea..." Apple Bloom noted.

"Sis! I made new friends!" Sunny said excitedly. "This is Apple Bloom, Scootaloo and Sweetie Belle."

"Welcome to Canterlot, my little-" Nightmare Moon's eyes narrowed as she looked at Sweetie. "You."

The unicorn filly gulped, but then took a deep breath, "Nightmare Moon!" she challenged, "I am here to save Twilight Sparkle!"

Twilight started coughing, looking at the filly in disbelief.

The Nightmare's eyes widened as she suddenly grabbed the purple unicorn with a foreleg and cuddled up to her. "No! You cannot take her! She's mine!"

"She is not!"

"Is too!"

"Is not!"

"Is too!"

"Is not!"

"Is not!"

"Is too!" Sweetie blinked when she saw Nightmare Moon smile. "Heeeey!"

The trio of fillies watched as the Nightmare nuzzled Twilight affectionately, a hoof tracing its way up and down the purple unicorn's horn. "She's mine, and she likes it..." She grinned at the flushing purple unicorn. "Don't you, slave?"

"I... I-" Twilight trembled, her blush deepening as her embarrassment grew.

"Don't surrender, Twilight!" Sweetie shouted. "I'll save you!"

"Ni- Niiii- Nightmare Moon!" Twilight gasped as she pushed back the queen. "They're just fillies! They shouldn't be seeing this!"

The queen pouted. "But Twilight, you know you like it..."

"Sis, is it okay if they stay here for a little while?" Sunny asked, blissfully unaware of the teasing and embarrassment. "They really wanted to see the castle..."

Nightmare Moon stopped trying to catch Twilight and looked down at the three fillies. "So you would condemn your lives to the misery of living in these empty halls, alone, save for each other, my sister Sunny, and the occasional visit from your family?"

Apple Bloom opened her mouth to inform the black alicorn that she was, in fact, not interested in doing that at all... but found that she could not speak at all. She blinked, starting to panic.

The Nightmare smiled. "Excellent! You will then stay at the Castle!"

"But-" Apple Bloom blinked. "Hey, I can speak again!"

"Oh, and I heard Sweetie Belle say that she wanted to study at my school for gifted unicorns!" Sunny provided helpfully.

Both the alicorn and Twilight turned to look at her with raised eyebrows. "Reeeeeeally?" Nightmare Moon grinned.

"Um... I..." Sweetie stammered, looking around worriedly.

“Why, yes!” The white pegasus beamed down at the unicorn, “She even said that Twilight suggested she try out!”

“I did?” Twilight blinked. “I must’ve been drunk...”

“Hey, I’m pretty good!” Sweetie complained.

“I remember you attacking me with a pillow this morning...” Nightmare Moon remarked. “That means that you do have some magical skills, but enough for the School for Gifted Unicorns?”

“I was trained by the best!” Sweetie stomped the floor with her hoof. Apple Bloom and Scootaloo suddenly grabbed her and shoved an apple into her mouth.

“If you’ll excuse us fer jus’ a moment, yer highness...” the apple farmer filly quickly said as the pair dragged Sweetie to a corner of the room.

“Are you crazy?!” Scootaloo asked, glaring at the unicorn. “What the hay are you thinking?!”

“You’re provo- pro- gettin’ into a fight with Nightmare Moon!” Apple Bloom said. “This ain’t part of the plan!”

Sweetie cringed. “But...”

“No ‘buts,’ Sweetie!” The pegasus said, “I don’t know what’s gotten into you, but you can’t just come to the castle and start a fight with Nightmare Moon!”

“You mean she’s not usually like this?” Nightmare Moon asked.

“No!” Scootaloo said, annoyed. “All of a sudden she wants to be the stallion in shining armor that wants to save... the captured... unicorn....” Her words slowly died as she looked to her right... And into the slitted eyes of Nightmare Moon herself.

“AAAAAAaah!” The pegasus jumped onto Apple Bloom’s forehooves, who stumbled, screaming in fright, and jumped, still carrying Scootaloo, on top of Sweetie Belle.

As the trio collapsed, Nightmare Moon laughed. “Priceless! I almost didn’t do it; I mean, I could hear you all the way to the throne, but I thought ‘Will they notice me? Oh, of course they would,’ but then I came over here and you didn’t!” She pounded her hoof on the floor, trying to quell her mirth. “The looks on your faces!”

“Why, you...” Scootaloo glared at the Nightmare. “Now it’s personal!”

“Good,” Nightmare Moon said. “Since you’ll be staying here, I expect you to provide enough entertainment-”

“Wait, wait!” Twilight interrupted. “We can’t simply keep them here!” She looked straight at Nightmare Moon. “As much... entertaining... as they might be, their families will miss them!”

“But Twilight,” Nightmare Moon whined. “I’m the Evil Queen of Equestria! Can I keep one of them? Pleeeeeease?”

“No!”

“Pretty please? With me on top? And sugar? And honey? And anything else sweet that you might like?”

“No!” Twilight repeated firmly. “They cannot stay and that’s final.”

Nightmare Moon sighed and looked at Sunny. “Sorry, Sunny, I guess you won’t be able to have that sleep-over you wanted. Twilight doesn’t want you to have friends over.”

“What? But-”

“Twilight stopped, feeling cold sweat run down her side when she heard the whimper. Slowly, she turned to look at the white pegasus, who was slumped on the floor next to the throne, looking at her in misery, tears welling up in her innocent eyes... Twilight knew that it was her fault, that Sunny’s unhappiness was a direct result of her lack of compassion and-”

“Stop that,” Twilight growled, putting a hoof over Nightmare Moon’s mouth and ceasing the alicorn’s alarmingly accurate narration of her thoughts.

“Can they stay one night, Twilight? Please?” Sunny pleaded. “I promise we’ll be good!”

“Yeah,” Scootaloo said, glaring at the smirking Nightmare. “I wouldn’t mind staying a night at the castle.”

Apple Bloom shook her head as she also gave an evil look at the black alicorn. “Ah don’t mind stayin’ either, as long as mah sister is okay with it.”

They all looked at Twilight, who sighed, lowering her head in defeat. “Fine. I’ll go ask your sisters.”

“Yay!” Four voices echoed in the throne room, with a less enthusiastic Apple Bloom smiling uncomfortably.

When they settled down, Nightmare Moon turned to her sister. “Sunny, show your friends around the castle in the meantime. I have to arrange Sweetie’s test.”

“You’re really doing it?” Twilight gasped.

The alicorn just smiled.

o.O.o

“Twilight, Ah know that the- that Nightmare Moon and you have a... special... kind of relationship, but Ah can’t believe you’re askin’ me to let Apple Bloom stay the night over with her!”

“I have to agree, dear,” Rarity said with a grimace. “Sweetie was acting strange enough today, and I fear that-”

“That’s not all...” Twilight closed her eyes. “She... Sweetie Belle is...”

“What? What is it?” Rarity asked, walking closer to the purple unicorn, worry evident in her eyes.

“Um... Sweetie is taking the test for Celestia’s School for Gifted Unicorns... today,” Twilight said.

“Oh no! That’s horrible! I-” Rarity stopped. “Are you serious?”

“Do I look like I’m joking?”

Rarity stared at Twilight, whose eyes shone with an unspeakable stress. Her mane was disheveled with little hairs sticking out in random directions, the strands around her horn seemed to be matted down, as if she had been rubbing a pillow on them or...

The fashionista coughed into her hoof. “Uh, no dear, you look like you were having... fun... and it was interrupted.”

“WHAT?!”

“Not that there’s anything wrong with that, Twilight, but I hope that my sister didn’t-”

“Nothing happened!” Twilight growled as her coat started smoldering and turning white.

“We believe you, sugarcube,” Applejack hastily interjected, giving Rarity a look. “Now, what was this about a test?”

Twilight took a deep, shuddering breath and let it out slowly. “Sweetie convinced Nightmare Moon that she was ready for to try out for Celestia’s School for Gifted Unicorns and-”

“But, darling... Sweetie cannot cast a single spell,” Rarity pointed out.

“Well, this morning she was levitating and flinging pillows like a pro,” Twilight said. “And she claims to know at least two other spells and some illusion magic.”

“But, I haven’t taught her anything, and the Ponyville school doesn’t teach magic to young unicorns!” Rarity insisted.

Twilight shrugged. “Well, that’s what’s happening. She’ll be taking her test in a couple of hours. We could go watch her if you want.”

“But of course!” Rarity said. “What kind of sister... wait, we would go to Canterlot!”

“Well, yes, the School is in-”

“Oh, Celestia! What am I doing here? Two hours you said? Well, I should get ready! And maybe make something for Sweetie! She needs to look good for her test, in front of all those noble ponies!” Her eyes glittered with a sudden memory. “Do you think that Prince Blueblood will be there?”

Twilight frowned thoughtfully. “Blueblood usually stays away from any form of education or source of knowledge. So, I sincerely doubt it.”

Rarity looked downcast for the barest of seconds. “Oh well, I still need to get ready. See you at the library then!” With that, she cantered away.

The purple unicorn sighed. “Well, time to find Scootaloo’s parents.”

o.o.o

“Do you understand what I am asking of you?” Nightmare Moon’s eyes glowed with inner power as she looked down upon the cowering forms of the board of trustees at Celestia’s School for Gifted Unicorns.

“Bu-but... your- your Highness...” a grey unicorn stammered. “What you’re asking for... it... it doesn’t exist!”

“Aaand?” Nightmare Moon leaned closer, her long mane waving like a malevolent aura all around them.

“Aaaaand... we’ll get it done!” the unicorn squeaked.

“Good!” the alicorn said, leaning back. “Have it ready in two hours.”

“T-t-t... two hours?” the unicorn coughed, unable to fully express his shock. The wide eyes of the others was enough to bring a smile to Nightmare Moon.

“If you don’t have it ready... there will be consequences.” With a megalomaniacal laugh, Nightmare Moon turned into mist and flew out of the window.

The unicorns looked at each other in shock.

“How are we going to do this?” an elder, yellow coated unicorn asked the others. “This is...”

“We have to,” a blue male unicorn said with a sigh, “We have no choice. If we fail... the school would have nopony to repair whatever damage that monster might attempt against our students.”

“I...” A cream coated mare coughed. “I might have an idea...”

o.O.o

Rarity and Applejack followed Twilight through the halls of Canterlot Castle and out into the gardens. Celestia’s School for Gifted Unicorns was right next to the castle, since Celestia herself would sometimes teach and monitor promising students, as well as mentor a select few unicorns besides her faithful student.

“Well, this place here sure is pretty,” Applejack said, looking around the grounds. “Pretty empty, that is! Where is everypony?”

“Well, since Nightmare Moon came back, most of the nobles left the castle,” Twilight explained.

“How awful!” Rarity sighed.

“Well, to be fair, we have managed to do more work for the good of ponykind since they went away than ever before-” Twilight elaborated.

“There she is!” Rarity beamed as she spotted her sister walking with Sunny, Apple Bloom and Scootaloo. “Sweetie Belle!” She waved with a hoof to get her sister’s attention.

“Sis!” Apple Bloom called as she ran up to Applejack. “Sunny just showed us the kitchens! They’re huge! Granny Smith would love ‘em!”

“Yeah!” Scootaloo grinned, “The kitchen was great, and I *can’t* wait for dinner tonight!”

“You should have seen Scootaloo’s face, Twilight!” Sunny declared. “Her eyes went really big and she started running around and grabbing stuff and-”

The purple unicorn chuckled. “As long as nothing was broken, it’s fine. I’m glad you four are having such a good time.”

Rarity stepped forth to hug Sweetie. “I am so proud of you!” She gushed, “I can’t believe you’ve learned magic so early! You must tell me who taught you.”

Twilight caught the filly sneaking a glance at her for just a second. But Sweetie’s attention was back to her sister as a blue and white cape slowly draped around the filly’s form. “Sis... what-”

“You must look good for your test, Sweetie! Remember, It’s the first impression that...”

“... will either open the door or close it.” Sweetie finished.

“Exactly!” Rarity smiled, stepping back to take a look at the filly and carefully arranging the cape until it was perfect. “So, you were saying, darlin’?”

“Um, her name was Trixie,” Sweetie said with a twinge of guilt. *Well it’s not really lying...* “She’s a showmare who has travelled all over Equestria.”

“Oh...” Rarity blinked. “I don’t believe I’ve ever heard of her.”

“Don’t worry,” Sweetie said absently, looking towards the school nervously. “You will.”

“Are you ready for your test, Sweetie?” Twilight asked.

“Um... no?”

“Well...” the unicorn coughed. “I can’t guarantee that you’ll pass, but if you remember smile and look confident, I guarantee you’ll make a good first impression,” the purple mare advised with a wise nod of her head.

“Will they make me hatch an egg?” Sweetie asked.

Twilight blinked. “How did you...” She looked at Sunny hopefully. “Did you tell her, Sunny?”

The pegasus looked surprised. “No... I didn’t know what the test was...”

“Oh...” Twilight sighed, but her mind was working furiously. *How did she know?*

“Well, it’s time!” Nightmare Moon said, inserting her head between Rarity and Twilight.

“Yes indeed-WahaHAha?!” Rarity jumped, her dress fluttering in the wind until she landed on top of Applejack who gave her a half-amused, half-annoyed glance, while everypony else worriedly stepped back from the queen’s sudden appearance.

“You keep landin’ on top of me Rarity, and Ah might think yer lookin’ for something else!”

“Th-that’s nonsense!” Rarity stammered as she turned to glare at the black alicorn. “Don’t do that!”

“I’m the Queen. I do what I like,” Nightmare Moon said. “Now, let’s go, Sweetie!”

o.O.o

The room was a dull gray with the biggest chalkboard Sweetie had ever seen on the wall behind her. She faced the rest of the study hall, idly wondering if Miss Cheerilee felt so nervous in front of classroom. Of course, Sweetie was only facing a class of four unicorns, but it didn't help matters that all four were older and staring at her rather intently.

She looked nervously towards Twilight and Rarity, both of whom smiled widely and pointed at their mouths.

The filly struggled to bring a small smile out, and was rewarded by the board immediately taking notes.

A brown stallion walked into the room dragging a cart, in the middle of which a large egg of the utmost black rested.

"Well, Miss Belle," one of the unicorns spoke, although she couldn't know which one it was, since her eyes were glued to the egg. "It says here you are the student of... Trixie." There was a pause. "Are we talking about the 'Great and Powerful' Trixie by any chance?"

Sweetie looked at them. "Uh, yes. That's her."

Fast scribbling.

"The Great and Powerful Trixie?" Twilight wondered aloud. "Never heard of her, but she sounds like an interesting unicorn based on the title alone..."

"Miss Belle, to be admitted into the school you need to hatch the egg in front of you using magic you know. Please, go ahead. Whenever you are ready."

Sweetie gulped. *I have no idea how to do this! What am I going to do?!* She started hyperventilating. *We never covered this in Twilight's class! I don't have a sonic rainboom to help me!* A quick look at her mentor's counterpart helped calm her down a bit. *Well... if I don't try, I won't know...*

How should I start? Maybe try to levitate half of it? Her horn blazed and the egg's top part started glowing. Carefully pulling, she started the process of what would hopefully hatch the egg and-

"Why is the egg stretching like that?" Rarity whispered to Twilight, who was looking at the black egg in complete befuddlement.

"... I- that- why..." the purple unicorn stammered, her eyes widening as the lower half of the egg remained in place, but the upper part slowly stretched farther as if the egg was made of bubblegum.

Nightmare Moon turned her head away and shook silently, drawing Twilight's attention to her. The purple unicorn raised an eyebrow, but chose to remain quiet.

Sweetie opened her eyes and gasped, releasing her control of the egg, which immediately reformed into its original shape. "Wha- what!?" She squeaked out before glancing at the board of instructors as they wrote more notes.

Calm down Sweetie! You can do it! She focused on the egg once more and slowly a visible aura formed around the egg as she concentrated even more.

The silence in the room stretched for a couple of minutes until a cough from one of the unicorns broke it.

"Miss Belle, while a continuous use of Prestidigitation as a warming spell would indeed hatch an egg eventually, we don't have months to wait nor you the stamina to sustain it that long... however, I have to commend you, since you are the first unicorn ever to think of anything remotely similar to natural hatching... But I am afraid that still doesn't mean you pass."

"Oh..." Sweetie pouted.

Next to Twilight, Nightmare Moon could barely contain her laughter, drawing the attention of Celestia's student.

“You... you had something to do with this!” She said, raising her voice and calling everypony’s attention to the Nightmare. “You’re-” Twilight’s eyes flashed in anger. “You’re cheating!”

Nightmare Moon smirked. “Now, dear Twilight, I just thought that such a smart filly would need a better challenge than a boring old dragon egg.”

“What did you do?”

“Well, I asked them to give her an ink-dragon egg,” Nightmare Moon smiled.

“You... what... I can’t... no...” Twilight started to smoke as her anger increased.

“Wow!” Sweetie Belle looked at the egg in awe. “An ink-dragon! I’ve never even heard of one of those before!”

“Now, Sweetie, that’s because-”

“Miss Sparkle,” one of the unicorns coughed. “If you’re quite done, Miss Belle has one more try, and we all have work to do.”

Think, Sweetie, think! The unicorn filly looked around for inspiration. *Ink... ink...*

“Ink!” she shouted suddenly, her eyes filling with hope.

That’s it! It’s just like that time that I dropped the ink bottle in Miss Cheerilee’s class! I had to use some paper towels! But... where can I get some paper towels... or even just some paper?

“Um...” Sweetie looked at the unicorns sheepishly. “Could I have some paper please?”

“I don’t know what you have in mind, Miss Belle, but the test can only be completed with skills and spells you possess and can do by yourself. The only paper in this room is in our notebooks and we are using them.”

Sweetie sighed, frowning as she pawed the ground, thinking. "Well, there goes that idea..."

What else can I do? She thought. *Levitation doesn't work, Prestidigitation takes months, Shield wouldn't help, and that spell Trixie taught me won't work unless I can talk it into hatching...* She sighed. *I should really review it, maybe take some notes later on that notebook Rarity gave me in the other world... I really hope the summoning spell works here.*

The unicorn filly sat down and stared despondently at the egg. "I- I give-"

Everypony held their breaths.

"I- notebook!" Sweetie screeched, making the surrounding ponies jump in surprise.

"Yes, the notebooks are the only sources of paper here, so-"

"Not yours! Mine!" Sweetie said with a big smile as her horn shone with magic again. Slowly, to the surprised eyes of the gathered ponies, the space in the air just in front of Sweetie seemed to open, and an object slowly floated out.

"An Inter-dimensional Pocket? A filly her age?! Impossible!" one of the unicorns shouted in surprise, dropping his own notebook and pen as the pocket closed up.

Ignoring everypony's gaping stares, Sweetie opened her notebook and approached the egg. "Okay... all I have to do is get the top off the egg..." she slowly started pressing the open notebook on top of the egg. Everypony watched in awe as the top was slowly absorbed into the paper.

"That's-" Nightmare Moon's eyes were wide. "That's cheating!"

"So is having the board create an egg for a dragon that doesn't exist!" Twilight growled.

Still concentrating, Sweetie slowly lowered the notebook until-

“ACHOOO!”

“Ah!” Sweetie jumped back in surprise, losing her concentration on the notebook. The gem-studded booklet fell straight down, splashing the ink in all directions, splattering her face and her cape.

“No!” Sweetie yelled, running up to the egg while the unicorns exchanged worried glances.

“Why did you do that?!” Twilight rounded up on Nightmare Moon.

The alicorn rubbed her nose with her hoof. “I’m sorry! I really didn’t mean to.”

“Right.”

“Uh... this exam is concluded,” one of the unicorns said shakily.

The group watched the unicorns get up and slowly walk out of the door, casting uneasy glances at the ink in the floor.

Sweetie sniffed. With a flash of magic her notebook was gone. “... I failed.”

“It’s okay, Sweetie,” Rarity said, carefully stepping around the ink. “I think I can still remove the ink from it...” She sighed, then gave her sister an encouraging smile. “You did your best, and I have to say, I am very, very proud of you!”

The filly looked at her sister with big wet eyes. “Really?”

The fashionista nodded, “Really! I never thought you knew so much magic! I’m so proud!”

“It was impressive,” Twilight added. “And don’t worry, you really impressed them. I’m sure next time you take the test you’ll get in; you’re still very young... and although I never heard of anypony breaking the egg, it was nothing more than a fake egg .”

Sweetie slowly smiled, "Thanks, sis! Thanks, Twilight..."

She was suddenly hugged by two other fillies. "That was super awesome, Sweetie!" Scootaloo said. "You have to tell me when you learned all that!"

"Ah never seen anythin' like it!" Apple Bloom nodded.

A loud growl made them all cringe. The group turned to look at Nightmare Moon, who had the decency to blush. "What? All of this made me hungry! We should eat!" she said, starting towards the door.

Sweetie nodded and followed the group, but not before looking back at the ink spots on the floor. "I'm sorry... even if you weren't a real egg."

o.O.o

"Oh, my!" Rarity gasped as they entered a large hall. It was tastefully decorated with banners depicting Nightmare Moon in various poses of unquestionable power. "This is amazing! Definitely what you would expect of Canterlot Castle!"

Nightmare Moon chuckled, "This is one of the smaller dining halls."

Applejack's eyes widened. "This is one of the smaller ones? Just look at that table!"

The wooden dinner table was set by the time the group arrived. It could easily accommodate twice the amount of ponies, yet somehow all of it was covered with different dishes.

"Ah don't rightly know if Ah can eat that much!"

"Don't worry sis," Apple Bloom patted her foreleg comfortingly. "No pony expects you to; we're supposed to only eat what we want."

"Ah-" Applejack blushed as Rarity and Twilight chuckled. "Ah know that, Apple Bloom. Ah'm just sayin' it's a lot of food."

"Oh, okay!" The filly smiled brightly. "Let's eat!"

“Ah don’t see that many apples, though...” Applejack muttered, looking around the table.

“Applejack, darling,” Rarity shook her head. “There’s more to food than just apples!”

“Ah’m just sayin’, just sayin’...” the apple farmer shook her head, looking around the dainty decorations, the three different types of forks and spoons and knives and pincers and... she shuddered. It was like being back with the Oranges.

The four fillies, three mares and incarnation of-all-that-was-evil-in-ponydom sat down for dinner, with the black alicorn at the head of the table.

“Oh! Good! They made clover soup! That’s my favourite!” Nightmare Moon grinned.

“We were asked by Miss Scootaloo to prepare everypony’s favorite dish,” a pony in a chef’s coat and a toque said, walking towards the table. “For Miss Twilight, we made a daisy salad with dried tart cherries and greens, with a hint of smoked almonds. I remember well the first time she ate it,” the chef chuckled as Twilight blushed. “For Miss Rarity, under Miss Belle’s advice, we have a wide selection of deli mushroom dishes, hoofpicked by myself and my assistant. Not too much of each, but all of them carefully prepared.” The fashionista blinked as her stomach growled.

“Oh... I am so sorry,” she looked around the table, distressed. “It’s been so long since I ate mushrooms and...”

“It’s okay, sugarcube.” Applejack said. “We understand.”

If anything, the chef looked pleased. He coughed, “For Miss Belle we have a daisy and clover sandwich with a side of fried potatoes.”

“Oh, I love daisy and clover sandwiches too!” Twilight said, smiling at the unicorn filly. “I have them all the time at the library!”

“Really?” Sweetie chuckled nervously, causing the purple unicorn to raise an eyebrow.

“Next, we have a hay milkshake and a carefully glazed portobello mushroom, with lettuce, dandelion and tomato sandwich with a single slice of bleu cheese made with multi-grain bread, toasted just to crispiness, along with a salad of greens, red-onion, chili, bleu crumbles, and nuts, tossed in the vinaigrette she personally made herself for Miss Scootaloo.”

Everypony at the table gaped at the furiously blushing pegasus.

“So that’s what you were doing when you strayed from us!” Sunny gasped. “My! That sound delicious!”

“It is!” the chef said. “I wrote down the recipe, with Miss Scootaloo’s permission, of course.”

The pegasus seemed to shrink as everypony showered her in praise. “Just don’t tell Rainbow Dash! Cooking is not cool!”

“We have buttered spaghetti with fresh basil for Miss Sunny...” the chef continued, although he seemed amused at Scootaloo’s denials of cooking skills. “A plate of waffles with honey for Miss Bloom-”

“Apple Bloom!” Applejack turned to look at her sister. “What kind of lunch is that?”

The filly blushed. “But I love waffles!”

“... and finally, under Miss Bloom’s recommendation, we have an apple-pecan stuffed cabbage with a cold pasta & apple salad as a side, and an apple variation of the crepe suzette for dessert, courtesy of Miss Scootaloo...”

The pegasus hid under the table, her face darker than her mane.

Applejack stared at all the apple dishes in front of her she had not seen as she walked to the table. Her mouth started watering, but she remembered her manners. “Why, this looks simply delightful, chef! My compliments to you, your assistant and of course, our little darlin’, Miss

Scotaloo,” she immediately complimented, her eyes widening at the words pouring out of her mouth.

The table became very quiet. Applejack looked around nervously. “What? Ah said it looked delicious!”

“Buh-” Rarity stammered, her jaw hanging in a very unlady like expression. “Buh- but... you said...”

“Ah said it looked DELICIOUS!” The farm pony repeated, her tone slightly hysterical.

The others slowly turned to look at their plates.

“Well? What are we waiting for?” Nightmare Moon demanded. “Let’s eat!”

The chef pony bowed and retired, leaving them to their meal.

“Yeah!” Scotaloo seconded, her grin widening as the alicorn dug into her soup with gusto. “Enjoy, everypony!”

Following the example of both the pegasus and the alicorn, the rest of the group started eating. It was a few minutes before conversation started again.

“So, Sweetie, that test was very impressive,” Twilight complimented. “I can’t be sure, but if it had been a normal Dragon egg, you might have been able to hatch it!”

Sweetie looked down at her plate sheepishly. “Thanks, but I tried all my spells...”

“Well, it was a very nice try, regardless.” Rarity said. “Sweetie, this Trixie that taught you should be very proud to have you as a student.”

Sweetie’s eyes sneaked a peek at Twilight, but when she saw the unicorn looking at her, she quickly returned her focus to the plate in front of her. “Ye- yeah...”

“To think my little sister might get into Celestia’s School for Gifted Unicorns!” Rarity gushed. “That is amazing! I really hope she passes!” She caught herself, adding, “I mean, whatever happens Sweetie, you’ll always make me proud.”

“Ah’m very impressed too!” Applejack said after a few more bites of her salad. “Now, if I could get Apple Bloom to dedicate herself to school like you do...”

“Hey! Ah study all the time!” Apple Bloom complained.

“Sure you do, sugarcube,” Applejack smirked. “That’s why Ah had that long talk with Cheerilee about your homework.”

“That was just once! And she told you in a bar! It wasn’t even official!”

A screech on the floor made everypony in the table tear their eyes away from the bickering sisters and settle on Nightmare Moon, who had suddenly stood up.

“I have to go. Now.” the alicorn said, turning around and galloping out of the dining hall.

“How rude!” Rarity said, looking at the door as it slammed behind the dark queen.

“I wonder what happened?” Twilight pondered as she stood up slowly. “All of you, please go ahead, I’ll be back shortly.”

The group remained silent until the purple unicorn had left the room. Then Scootaloo started laughing. When she saw that Twilight had left Nightmare Moon’s schedule for the day at the table, her laughter died as she took hold of it.

o.O.o

Twilight winced when the sudden scream tore through the halls of the castle. She hurried after the sound, knowing that whatever it was that could upset Nightmare Moon herself that much could not be good... or should that be *bad*? She got so confused lately.

She followed the angry mutters until she arrived to the... Royal Restrooms. Twilight blinked. "Uh... Nightmare Moon?"

"I can't believe this!" The alicorn shouted from within. "WHO put cling wrap between the toilet seat and the bowl!? HEADS WILL ROLL!"

Twilight stood outside, paralyzed as she mouthed the words she had just heard. "... cling wrap..."

There was a blast of magic from within the restroom then some scrambling then... Twilight walked away slightly so she didn't have to hear more. After a few minutes waiting, Nightmare Moon made her way out on shaky legs. She was sweating. "Somepony is going to pay for this..."

Twilight noticed that the dark queen was dragging a long piece of toilet paper on her left hoof, but chose to remain silent. "Who could have done it?" Twilight wondered. "I doubt the head chef would-" her eyes widened.

The alicorn's eyes narrowed. "Oh, this means war..." she took a couple of steps towards the dining hall, but then her eyes widened and she grimaced. "Slave. Make sure those three fillies stay the night with Sunny." She then turned around and ran into the restrooms again.

o.O.o

Twilight walked back into the dining hall where everypony still sat and ate. All of them turned their attention to her with oddly quivering lips.

"Now, Scootaloo, that was a very mean thing to do-"

Twilight was interrupted by the whole table bursting into laughter. Even Rarity, as hard as she tried to cover her mouth and keep some composure, was madly giggling.

The purple unicorn shook her head at the juvenile humor of her friends. Then as she thought about it, she also started giggling.

It was then that the door opened again, admitting a young pegasus guard into the hall. "Um, I am here for a Scootaloo?" He questioned, looking around the room.

"Uh..." the filly in question raised a hoof. "That's me?"

The guard blinked. "Oh, okay. I was asked on behalf of somepony named Rainbow Dash to escort you to get some flight training, but I don't know if that's-

"YES!" Scootaloo shouted, jumping to the floor. "Yes! YES! I can do it! I want to! If Rainbow Dash thinks it will help, I'm sure it will!"

"Well..." the guard still looked uncertain. "I do *have* to take you there, but-

"Let's go!" the pegasus filly shouted in excitement. "I wanna do this! I wanna fly with Dash!"

"Oookay..." the guard said as the filly bounced up to him. "This way, please."

The other ponies in the room watched silently as the pair of pegasi left.

"Did Dash know we were coming here?" Applejack asked, "Or even that Scootaloo was in the Castle?"

Everypony looked down at the remains of their food.

"... what happened?" Sweetie asked. "I don't get it."

"A lesson." Nightmare Moon said, as her gaseous form slowly materialized in the room, eyes narrowed. "We'll see how she likes it!"

o.o.o

"So, are *you* going to teach me to fly?"

"Uh... no."

“Oh.” Scootaloo blinked, “Well, then, who is?”

“We call him Sergeant Smoking Crater.”

“His name is so cool!” The filly stopped. “Wait, why do you call him that?”

“Yeah, about that... welp, here we are kid-” the guard looked around as he stopped in front of a door. “Are you *sure* you want to do this?”

“Hey, if Rainbow Dash thinks this will help, I can’t miss it!”

“Okay kid,” the pegasus knocked on the door. “Sir! I’ve brought the trainee! I’m sending her in!”

The pegasus opened the door and pushed the filly in.

Scootaloo looked around the room: it had old guard helmets, spears, armor, a chart with different flight formations, a large poster of Princess Celestia pointing her hoof at the viewer which read “Equestria needs YOU!” in big white letters... and in the middle stood a pegasus taller and with more muscle than Big Mac. His chest was covered in scars, his mane was cut short and was already turning white with a few strands of red remaining. His coat was gray, and his cutie mark a log being broken in two by some sort of giant hammer. His steel-blue eyes squinted at the filly as a look of utter contempt and disgust crossed his face.

“This is what they send me?!” He smashed his hoof into the stone floor, sending chips of granite flying. “A waste of my time!” He pointed his hoof at Scootaloo. “You. You are not FIT to be here. You are not WORTHY of being here. YOU ARE NOTHING! WHY ARE YOU HERE?!”

The pegasus guard quickly closed the door behind him and tried to ignore the shouts.

“STAND STRAIGHT, MAGGOT!”

“Good luck, kid,” the guard sighed as he walked away, the whole area resonating with the potent voice of the Royal Pegasi Unit’s Drill Sergeant.

“YOU WERE SENT HERE TO LEARN! SO MAKE SURE YOU DON’T WASTE MY TIME! WHAT THE HAY ARE THOSE? YOU CALL THOSE WINGS?! I CALL THEM DUSTERS! BECAUSE THAT’S ALL THOSE FEATHERS ARE GOOD FOR SINCE YOU CAN’T EVEN HOVER! JUMP! I SAID JUMP!”

“... you’re going to need it.”

“THAT’S ‘YES DRILL SERGEANT’ TO YOU, MAGGOT! AND YOU CALL THAT A JUMP? I’VE SEEN DEAD LIZARDS JUMP HIGHER!”

o.O.o

Twilight, Applejack, Sunny and Apple Bloom watched as Rarity and Sweetie finished their goodbyes.

“And be sure to brush your teeth, okay Sweetie?” Rarity said as she gave her sister a hug.

“Su-sure, sis. You really don’t want to stay? You and Applejack could-” the fashionista’s hoof softly pressed against her muzzle.

“Sorry, Sweetie, but we both have to work,” the unicorn sighed. “I’m sure you’ll be fine; if you need anything, just talk to Twilight.”

“You too, Apple Bloom!” Applejack said, patting her sister in the head. “Ah don’t want to come by tomorrow and find out you misbehaved; you do the Apple family proud and behave, you hear?”

“Yes, sis.”

“We already talked to Scootaloo’s parents, and they were okay with her staying the night,” Twilight told the fillies.

“Yay! It’s going to be my very first sleepover!” Sunny bounced around the group.

The group of mares watched in amusement as the fillies all got excited and jumped around, celebrating with Sunny.

Applejack noticed that Twilight's smile was a bit sad. "What's wrong, sugarcube?"

The purple unicorn blinked. "Oh... nothing, I just... well, I never had a sleep over before either."

"Aw, don't worry Twilight!" Sweetie said, stopping her bouncing to pat her mentor's interdimensional counterpart's foreleg. "I'm sure you, Applejack and Rarity will someday have one! And it'll be raining, and you'll use that book about sleepovers and try to follow it exactly, and sis and Applejack will get into a fight, but a tree branch will fall in and you'll all be friends again!"

"That's..." Applejack blinked.

"... very specific." Rarity finished.

Twilight just looked at the filly, confused. "Okay?"

The sound of a flushing toilet announced the imminent return of Nightmare Moon.

"Well, we should go. Ah'll see you tomorrow, Apple Bloom."

"Enjoy your stay at the castle, darling!"

"Bye girls!" Twilight smiled as the group watched the pair cross the portal. "I'll see you later."

"Ugh," Nightmare Moon walked up to them. "What's going on, slave?"

Twilight sighed. "It's time to work. I think I have the list of petitioners for today..."

Nightmare Moon grimaced. "Do we have to?"

Twilight glared at the Queen. "Yes."

The alicorn sighed. "Fine."

The two mares walked away, leaving the fillies behind.

“We have to save Twilight!” Sweetie said, turning to look at the other two fillies. “Nightmare Moon must be stopped!”

“Oooh! I love playing ‘rescue the princess’!” Sunny clapped her hoofs happily. “How are we doing it?”

“I don’t know...” Sweetie said, slumping a bit.

“Ah have an idea...”

When Apple Bloom saw she had their attention, she smiled. “We set a trap!”

“Yay!” Sunny cried, jumping up and down. “I love setting up traps! I think...” she tapped her chin with her hoof. “Something about it sounds familiar...”

Apple Bloom smiled. “Well, Ah’ll need some paper and a pencil to show you...”

“Follow me!” Sunny cried, leading the other two away from the portal. “I have a bunch of paper and lots of pens!”

“What about Scootaloo?” Sweetie asked as she and Belle followed the disguised alicorn.

“She’ll be okay!” Sunny said. “I’ll tell the guards to take her to my room once she’s finished playing!”

o.O.o

Having gone over the list of things she would have to cover when she held court, Nightmare Moon and Twilight Sparkle made their way to the throne room.

Everything was in order, two guards stood at attention at the base of the stairs that led to the throne, and they could hear the ponies waiting outside the main doors.

“Okay,” Nightmare Moon growled. “Let’s make this quick.” She motioned for the guards to allow the first pony in and sat down in her throne.

Ppppppppppthhhhhhhhhhhhhrrrrrrrrrrppppppppp-p-p!

The sound of the fart echoed in the court room just as a monocled stallion took his first step in. Everypony looked at Nightmare Moon in horror.

The monocle clattered to the floor, breaking in half as the stallion’s jaw almost hit the floor. The guards visibly forced themselves to look away and forward as was their duty. Twilight Sparkle looked horrified and embarrassed.

Three distorted voices echoed around the the room, coming from everywhere and nowhere, making the guards stand ready and the stallion to shiver. “This is just the beginning, Nightmare Moon, unless you release Twilight Sparkle! If you don’t, you will suffer the consequences! You cannot stop us. You cannot see us. We are Crusaders. We are legion.”

The ponies in the throne room stared around in awe. Who would be brave enough to challenge-

Suddenly they could hear giggles as something rustled behind the curtains where one of the not-so-secret-anymore entrances to the throne room was.

“Oh, wait, Ah can still hear it!”

“Shh! The spell’s still on?”

“Turn it off, turn it off!”

Silence.

With a flash of blue energy the doors slammed shut behind the petitioner and Nightmare Moon rose, followed by a slurping wet sound as something inside the throne struggled to suck back air.

From the throne, floating in a blue aura of magic, emerged a whoopee cushion. The black alicorn glared at everypony in the room. "NOPONY will hear of this. Am I clear? I will hunt down whoever disobeys this order and banish them into the Sun!"

She glared around. "Am I clear!?"

"Yes, your majesty!" everypony but Twilight shouted immediately.

"Good," Nightmare's eyes narrowed as she looked at the shaking stallion. "Now, your request. And make it fast... I have business to attend to."

o.O.o

The three fillies ran away from the court, laughing.

"Did y'all see her face? It was amazin'!"

"Yeah!" Sweetie said, looking at Sunny. "How did you know about that secret entrance?"

"Well, I'm not sure..." the pegasus said. "I just remembered it was there..."

Sweetie stared at the pegasus, then her mind flashed back to much earlier that morning. "*Sis!*" *The white pegasus happily jumped to her feet and trotted up to Nightmare Moon.* Sweetie looked at the sun cutie mark. "*She's also freaking Nightmare Moon's sister!*" The unicorn filly blinked. Could it be... "*Sis! I made new friends!*" but... it couldn't... be... "Sunny?"

"Yes?"

Sweetie shifted nervously. "I'm sorry to ask, but..."

"It's okay, I don't mind you asking any questions at all!" The pegasus said with a big smile.

"Um... did you know you're... adopted?" Sweetie asked with an encouraging smile.

Sunny blinked. "I- I don't think so..."

"But," Apple Bloom interrupted, "You're not an alicorn!"

"Oh, I am... this gem just hides it." Sunny said, but then frowned. "But don't tell anypony; it's supposed to be a secret!"

Then, like a hammer, Nightmare Moon's words hit Sweetie. *"So you would condemn your lives to the misery of living in these empty halls, alone, save for each other, my sister Sunny, and the occasional visit from your family?"* Nightmare Moon was really Princess Luna... *my sister Sunny* and Princess Luna only had one sister... *my sister Sunny...* "Oh sweet Celestia!" Sweetie's eyes widened in panic as she pointed at Sunny with a hoof. *My sister Sunny...* "You're Celestia!"

Apple Bloom stared at Sunny then at Sweetie. "But... how do you know?"

"Princess Luna is Celestia's sister!"

"Who is Luna?" The earth pony asked.

"Nightmare Moon!" The unicorn filly explained, "Princess Luna was jealous of Princess Celestia a thousand years ago and transformed into Nightmare Moon."

"Oooh," the yellow coated filly said. "I get it!"

"I'm Sunny now," the pegasus said. "And I don't mind..."

The conversation trailed off as the three fillies heard a tingling melody.

"Is that..?" Sweetie started.

“The candy mare?” Apple Bloom finished.

The three followed the music to just outside the halls, where a small garden was niched. In the the middle stood a small cart with all sorts of treats. An earth pony mare with two crossed candy bars as a cutie mark smiled at them. “Hello! Would you three like some candy?”

o.o.o

Darkness.

Sweetie slowly opened her eyes, taking in the room around her. She blinked. It... did not make sense.

For starters, the sofa was on the ceiling. *Wait. What?*

More awake now, she noticed that both Apple Bloom and Sunny were standing next to her, but they were still asleep. *When did I fall asleep? Why are they standing if they are asleep?*

She started noticing other things as well. Besides the sofa, Sunny’s bed was also on the ceiling. And her chairs, and papers.

It was when Scootaloo walked in on the ceiling and looked around before turning her head down to look at her that she understood. *Wait! She’s not on the ceiling! I am!* “Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

o.o.o

The hall was quiet. A single, ephemeral blue tendril poked around the corner, probing around uncertainly until it slowly pulled back. Nightmare Moon followed, smirking. *A full hour without pranks!* “Victory is mine!”

As Nightmare Moon walked, cackling down the hall towards the archives, she still kept her eyes open. Those Crusaders could be anywhere, but for now it seemed that they had retreated, no doubt to lick their wounds. Sweetie’s scream when she had found herself glued to the ceiling by the hooves... priceless!

She looked around once more as she approached her office. Everything was quiet. A little too quiet.

Clop. Clop. Clop. Her hoofsteps echoed in the unnaturally silent hall, and she could feel her pulse rise.

By the time she stood in front of her office, she was expecting the Crusaders to jump out of the shadows. She turned her eyes to the door. They were behind it. She knew it. They were probably hiding, ready to scare her.

She smiled deviously. Well, she would surprise them!

Taking a deep breath and rearing back, she kicked the door open and jumped in, roaring a challenge- which was cut short when her whole face met with cellophane paper and glue. She sputtered and flailed, knocking down papers and a vase before she thought to use her magic to rip it off her face, leaving her fur matted in glue. "Crusaders!" she shouted in anger as she threw the ball of cellophane to the floor. She stomped forward in anger, not noticing until too late the tripwire. She blinked as she saw the wire flash upwards by her side and looked up... in time to see the bucket of chicken feathers come cascading on top of her.

o.O.o

Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom watched as Scootaloo and Sunny ran after each other in an impromptu game of tag. So far the copper colored pegasus hadn't thought to go chase after them, so Sweetie had a break of sorts to think.

She sighed and put down the book she had been half-reading. She had found some interesting spells, but her understanding was too basic to learn them without help, even if she was doing a lot better compared to a few weeks ago. That, and they didn't seem any closer to being able to free Twilight from Nightmare Moon's grasp.

"You okay, Sweetie?" Apple Bloom asked, hearing the sigh.

"Not really," the unicorn filly shook her head. "I feel like I haven't been able to do much since I arrived."

“Well, maybe if our next trap gets Nightmare Moon...”

Sweetie was about to respond when she felt something. *What was that? Magic? But why?*

“Hey!” Scootaloo and Sunny came running towards them. “Come on, you have to play too!”

“CRUSADERS!” A voice boomed, and a black alicorn covered in white chicken feathers suddenly materialized in front of them. “I will have my revenge!”

“Aaaaah!” Four voices echoed in horror as the fillies turned around in a panic and ran away blindly... only to fall into a pit full of tar the moment they passed the flower beds.

They all gasped and struggled to get out, but a blue aura levitated them out of the tar until the whole dripping group was floating in front of a feather-covered Nightmare Moon, who smiled viciously as another levitation spell brought up a giant batch of chicken feathers.

o.O.o

“And furthermore, no more glue or gooey pranks, from any of you, am I clear?!” Twilight growled at the feathered group in front of her. “Now, you’re all going to take a bath...”

“But-”

“No buts, Sweetie!”

“Ha!”

“I don’t want to hear anything from you either, Nightmare Moon.” Twilight sighed, looking at the alicorn. “You are all taking a bath now. I asked the hoofmaids to prepare it, so in you all go.”

“What? Together?” Scootaloo asked, looking at the black alicorn in horror.

“Yes, together,” Twilight growled.

“Huzzah,” Nightmare Moon growled sarcastically as she stomped to the bath. “The fun has been doubled.”

Once inside, she reluctantly joined Sweetie Belle, Apple Bloom and Sunny inside the huge bathtub, while Nightmare Moon slowly lowered herself into the water with them.

“Now, the hoofmaids are going to-” Twilight began to say when suddenly she was enveloped in a blue aura of magic and dunked into the water, eliciting giggles from the fillies. The purple unicorn spluttered out of the water, eyes wide and turned to glare at the black alicorn. “What- why?”

Nightmare Moon grinned as she nuzzled the unicorn with a feathery snout. “Why, Twilight, you don’t think I would take a bath without you, do you? It takes all the fun out of... personal... cleaning.”

When Twilight started blushing, one of the hoofmaids coughed uncomfortably. “Uh, Lady Twilight, if this is a bad moment... perhaps we could take the fillies to another bath?”

“No!” Twilight shouted, slightly hysterical. “It’s fine! We’ll all take a normal, uninteresting, bath together, where the only thing that is going to happen is that we’re getting clean!”

“But Twiiiligiht...” Nightmare Moon whined.

“No!”

“Fine. Do I get to cuddle you tonight if I behave in the bath?” The queen asked.

“Only if you behave! If you want cuddles from me you have to earn-” Twilight stopped and face-hoofed as Nightmare Moon happily nodded at the hoofmares to start cleaning all of them. “Why... why me?”

“Don’t worry Twilight...” Sweetie whispered to her, “I’ll save you!”

The purple unicorn looked down and sighed. "Somehow, that doesn't make me feel much better."

The bath started with a simple scrubbing. Nightmare Moon watched in glee as the fillies were scrubbed harder and harder, trying to get the tar out of their fur.

"This... this is not working at all." One of the hoofmares panted after a particularly vicious attempt at cleaning Apple Bloom, who looked at them in dread.

"I think... we might need to shave some areas..." another hoofmaid suggested.

"But... mah hair and coat!" Apple Bloom whined.

"It's okay dear," the hoofmare said. "It's not much... and you won't have to stay in the bath for two hours like Nightmare Moon, Sunny and Miss Scootaloo..."

"What?!" Both the alicorn and the pegasus gasped, then looked at each other in horror.

"Well, we cannot cut the feathers," the hoofmaid explained, making Sunny, Nightmare Moon and Scootaloo all wince at the thought. "So you two have to soak in water for a while to get the glue and tar out..."

"This is your fault!" The Nightmare growled at the pegasus, who cowered for a second before a frown replaced her fearful face. Scootaloo splashed the black alicorn in the face.

"It's not! You started it!" The pegasus retorted.

"I'm the Queen! I do what I want without fear of repercussions!"

"Well, I have plenty of cushions here for you!" The pegasus filly replied, getting in the Nightmare's face.

“And with that... we take our leave...” Twilight said, stepping out of the bath. “Come on Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle. Let’s give you a trim and go do something more productive.”

“Ah... Ah think I’ll soak a bit longer, if ya don’t mind, Twilight...” Apple Bloom said. “Ah don’t want to have to cut mah mane...”

Sweetie Belle shrugged and stepped out, following Twilight out of the bathroom.

o.o.o

The pair of unicorns walked into the room, closing the door behind them. Twilight turned to look at Sweetie and her horn glowed. Slowly the tar peeled away, taking a few strands of mane and pulling a bit hard on her coat, but it was soon completely off of her.

“But... why didn’t you do that earlier?” Sweetie asked, looking herself over.

“Well, Nightmare Moon deserves it,” the purple unicorn said. “And I want to talk to you without distractions.”

“Oh...” Sweetie nervously looked around. “What about?”

Twilight sat down and looked at the filly sternly. “The truth. You’ve been lying about a lot of things, Sweetie Belle... And I want to know why. Why do you look at me immediately when a question about magic comes up? You treat me like you expect me to know the answer; you trust me... but you barely know me. You told Spike that I had recommended you take the test, but I didn’t even know you until early today. We had never talked before, so I couldn’t have done that. Did this mysterious Trixie really teach you magic? Why are you so desperate to save me?”

Sweetie cringed with every question. *How can I answer... should I lie? Will she know? What will she think?* The filly’s eyes began watering as her frustration grew. “I-” she gulped and closed her eyes shut. “I’m not the Sweetie Belle from this world!” she said quickly, trying to say as much as she could before the purple unicorn could get angry at her. “I was really your student, and I really liked it! You’re an awesome teacher, I just... it was

an accident, I promise! I wanted to study the stuff you got for me and-" she sniffed. "When you exploded and disappeared- I'm so sorry Twilight! I'm trying to find you; I'm trying to go home! I miss my friends! I miss my sister! I even miss Princess Luna and her Nightmare Night pranks!" The filly looked up at the flabbergasted purple unicorn for a second before shutting her eyes again quickly, not able to handle the guilt. "I went to this other world and Trixie helped me find you... she told me that I was jumping to different worlds... I have to find a piece of you in this one but... Nightmare Moon captured you and I couldn't-" she paused shivering and breathing hard. "I couldn't let her do that to you..."

Twilight stood up and walked around the room, looking at Sweetie as if she were some sort of strange creature.

"So, let me get this straight. You're from another world," she repeated slowly. "And you caused an accident that basically destroyed the 'me' from your universe and catapulted you into another world."

The filly nodded nervously.

Twilight continued pacing. "This doesn't make much sense, Sweetie. How does the magic that is sending you all over operate? Why is it that you 'take over' the Sweetie Belle from the world you visit?" Books floated out of the shelf and hovered in front of the unicorn as she quickly looked at one index after the other. "This is not it. Not it." She threw a couple of books out of the way. "And Trixie told you she had seen something similar?"

"Yes... she said that the Rhinos used a spell like it..."

"Rhinos?" Twilight blinked. "They've been extinct for a hundred years."

"Well, not in that other world."

"This is very hard to believe, Sweetie." Twilight sighed.

The filly felt her eyes moisten as tears threatened to come out. "But..."

Twilight, who was not looking at her shook her head. "If it wasn't because nopony even believed you could do magic, much less cast those spells, I would say you're lying."

"I'm not lying!" Sweetie protested as tears started running down her cheeks.

"And how does the spell know where to send you? What is to say that there is a fragment of this other 'me' in this world?" The purple unicorn continued frowning as she looked out of the window, deep in thought. "What happens if you're sent to a world without a fragment? Will you stay there forever? What happens to the local Sweetie Belle then? And if you're only sent to worlds that have a fragment, are there clues as to how to find them?"

The unicorn sighed as her mind raced through Sweetie's words. "If that's the case... could it be related to me? She found the fragment where the other world's 'me' was with this Trixie..." she hummed, trying not to imagine herself with another mare. "If the fragments... hmm. She found it next to Twilight in a moment that would create a big change... but, has anything like that happened here?" She tapped her hoof against her chin. "If Nightmare Moon was defeated in her world... That's the main difference with this one... We didn't beat her, the elements broke in the Sister's Castle in the Everfree... could the fragment be there?" She stopped when she heard somepony sobbing.

Sweetie cried by herself as her mentor's double pondered aloud. *I shouldn't be here. I'm not wanted. I should just go-* her thoughts stopped when she felt a hoof on her shoulder. Then another hoof on the other... and she was pulled into a hug. *I always cry. I'm useless.* She buried her face in Twilight's mane, unable to control her shaking body.

"It's okay, don't cry... I forgive you." Twilight said, her hoof carefully stroking the crying filly's hair. "You lied, and that's not right... but I forgive you. You have to learn to tell the truth; it'll save you a lot of trouble. I don't know what exactly happened, but if your Twilight is anything like I am... she would forgive her student for a mistake, regardless of how bad it was."

Even if I killed you? "Thanks Twilight..." Sweetie said hoarsely, pushing her thoughts away into the back of her mind, along with the hurt

and fear as she sniffed. "As soon as we stop Nightmare Moon, I'll be on my way..."

Twilight smiled and shook her head. "You don't need to save me, Sweetie."

"What? But... she... you... slave-"

"I know what you're thinking, but-" Twilight hesitated. "Nightmare Moon is not the monster you think she is... or at least not here... or at least I don't think she is..." The unicorn sighed, "I haven't figured her out, but I know she's not all bad... and I think she needs me."

But then... what have I been doing here all this time? Sweetie firmly pushed the stray thoughts to the back of her mind once more. "So, I just... I'm useless here?"

"No." Twilight said firmly, drawing the filly's attention to her. "Everything we do is a learning experience. Maybe you could have gone away, but you would have never tested your current skills to see how well you would have done in a magic test of the level required to enter Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns." The mare stood up. "It was impressive, Sweetie. Much better than I did until I had a stroke of luck..." She smiled fondly at the memory. "If I had been the Twilight teaching you, I would have been incredibly proud of you. And also, if you hadn't stayed and tried to help me, you wouldn't learn a new spell from me."

Sweetie's eyes widened. *Does she mean...* "Are you saying... you'll teach me a new spell?"

Twilight smiled. "How do you feel about a spell to make everything dark? I think it would help you if you're ever in real trouble."

Sweetie grinned. "Let's pull out the books!"

The purple unicorn chuckled as her horn's magic levitated a tome out of its place in the bookshelf. "You're definitely my student." She shook her head in amusement, but looked at Sweetie seriously. "I also want you to think about telling the truth to Scootaloo and Apple Bloom. They are your best friends in your world, and would likely be the same to the local

Sweetie Belle. It would not be right for them to think she was lying, and more importantly, if you cannot trust your friends, who can you trust?"

Sweetie sighed, "I'll think about it."

"Good. Now, how about this..."

o.O.o

When Nightmare Moon and the fillies marched out of the bathroom, they found Twilight and Sweetie going over several books and writing on the younger unicorn's notebook.

The black alicorn sashayed up to them and looked over their shoulders. "Globe of Darkness?" She asked aloud, looking at the diagrams and theories in the book. "Whatever could Sweetie Belle need that for?" Her eyes narrowed as she looked from unicorn to unicorn. "Are you helping her plan a prank, Twilight dear?"

"Not at all," the purple unicorn replied amiably. "I am just teaching her a new spell she wanted to learn."

Nightmare Moon raised an eyebrow. "Why would anypony want to plunge everything into darkness?"

There was an awkward pause.

"Besides you, you mean," Scootaloo clarified helpfully.

"I... I just think it might be useful?" Sweetie smiled nervously.

Nightmare Moon's eyes roamed from one unicorn to the other before settling on Twilight. "You do know that she won't be able to see anything at all when she casts it, right?"

"..." Twilight slowly returned her eyes to the books.

The alicorn laughed, "I guess not." Her horn shimmered with light and another book floated out of the bookcase. She let it drop in front of Sweetie. "Darkvision. Copy the spell into your note book."

Sweetie looked from the book to the alicorn in surprise. Finally, a question that had been nagging her from the beginning erupted. "Um, Nightmare Moon?"

The alicorn, who had been halfway to the door by then, stopped and looked over her shoulder. "Yes? I'm afraid I cannot tell you what Twilight tastes like; she wouldn't approve."

"Oh..." Sweetie looked at Twilight, who turned beet red. "Okay, that wasn't my question..."

"What is it then?"

"Why did you help me?"

Nightmare Moon shrugged. "I like a challenge." That said, the alicorn simply walked out of the room, leaving a confused group of ponies behind.

"Well..." Twilight coughed. "Let's copy that spell, Sweetie... as for the Globe of Darkness... I think you understood the theory, better get some practice..." she hesitated. "But see if you can get the Darkvision down first, okay?"

"Yes, Twilight!" Sweetie nodded, smiling brightly.

"Okay," the purple unicorn got up. "It's about time for dinner. I'll see you fillies in the dining hall in half an hour, okay? Try to behave."

After the unicorn was gone, Scootaloo turned to look at Sweetie Belle intently. "Alright, Sweetie, you've had fun, but mind telling me why you are suddenly so good at magic?"

"I..." *Should I tell them? No... she would think I betrayed them and lied to her and... I did...* "I... have been studying at night, after my sister went to sleep. I uh... I met with Zecora and..."

"With who?" Apple Bloom asked. "I don't know anypony named Zecora in Ponyville."

Sweetie Belle looked from her to the frowning Scootaloo in a mild panic. "Uh... she- she's a zebra, and she lives in the Everfree..."

Pleasebelivemepleasebelivemepleasebelivemepleasebeliveme...

"Y'all don't mean the witch?!" The filly asked in horror. "Ah've heard from mah sister that she curses ponies!"

"You met her? How?" Scootaloo asked, more impressed than dubious.

"Uh... we... I- she came to town and I talked to her... She's really nice," Sweetie gulped. "Um, she... she introduced me to Trixie and... well, Trixie taught me how to... study..."

"Wow! You're very brave!" Sunny said, impressed.

"Yeah!" Apple Bloom agreed.

Sweetie sighed in relief, not noticing the slightly hurt look Scootaloo sent her way. The pegasus quickly moved to the books and started turning pages. A particular one caught her eye. "Hey, Sweetie... take a look at this; do you think you can do it?"

The filly looked over the page. "Well... maybe... it's very easy..." her eyes went wide as she turned to look at the pegasus. "Are you thinking..."

"Yes. Yes I am." Scootaloo's crafty smile said it all.

Half an hour later found the whole group together, sitting at the table in the dining hall in uncomfortable silence.

A fork enveloped in magic energy dug into the salad and carefully lifted greens and a tomato out. Twilight Sparkle took a bite and hummed appreciatively as she chewed. "This is good."

Next to her, Sunny chugged noisily into her own salad, relishing in the flavors and crispiness of the fresh veggies.

The others, however, stared at their food nervously. Nightmare Moon's fork poked a piece of tomato as the alicorn pondered if that morsel was the one that might be 'spiced up' by the crusaders.

The fillies, for their part, looked at the food dreading a possible revenge from the queen.

Apple Bloom whimpered as she looked at the food, her head leaning forward tentatively to take a bite.

"No!" Scootaloo whispered harshly, "We don't know what she might have done to it!"

"But..." an angry growled emanated from the filly's stomach, followed shortly by one from Nightmare Moon's. Scootaloo and Sweetie looked at each other painfully. They were so hungry!

"Come on everypony, don't be silly." Twilight looked at each pony in the eye. "You're all just being paranoid. There's nothing wrong with the food."

There was a chorus of unsure laughter and slowly the ponies started eating, watching each other warily.

Twilight sighed and carried on eating, her thoughts and eyes straying to the only other unicorn at the table. She then noticed that a certain pegasus kept shooting Sweetie Belle looks and shook her head slightly.

When Sweetie's eyes crossed with hers, Twilight nodded slightly towards the pegasus. Sweetie sighed and looked at her plate.

It's all up to you now, Sweetie. Twilight thought as she contemplated on what she had learned that day.

o.O.o

Dinner ended in a slightly better note than the stress it began with. Nightmare Moon looked at Twilight as she stood up. "Well, Slave, it's about time to lower the Sun."

The fillies watched the pair walk out of the room in silence. "Well, I want to see their expression when they walk into that room!" Scootaloo said, jumping to her hooves excitedly.

Sweetie hesitated. "Wait, Scoots..."

The pegasus stopped. "What is it, Sweetie?"

"I- I want to... talk with you."

The pegasus lifted her eyebrow. "But... the room..."

"I'm... not your Sweetie Belle," the unicorn filly said, looking down at the floor in shame.

The silence in the room lasted for a whole minute.

"Explain," Scootaloo said, as she, Sunny and Apple Bloom walked up to the unicorn.

Sweetie took a deep breath. *No going back now.* "I'm really from another world... I came here to find a piece of my Twilight Sparkle..."

"Stop." Scootaloo angrily stomped on the ground. "If you want to lie about how you learned all that magic, you don't have to treat me like an idiot!"

The pegasus turned around and walked towards the door, but bumped against an invisible wall of some sort. "What-" she poked it with her hoof, feeling something stopping her. She turned and glared at Sweetie Belle, whose horn was glowing. "Sweetie, let me out."

"Not until you believe me!" The unicorn replied, "I'm sorry I lied earlier but... I didn't want you to hate me because I'm not the Sweetie you knew!"

"Does that mean yer not really our friend?" Apple Bloom asked, looking hurt.

“No!” Sweetie turned to look at the earth pony. “I mean, I am your friend! I didn’t want to hurt you... I got you into trouble once in another world...”

“Why did you come to me and Apple Bloom then?” the pegasus filly demanded.

“Because...” Sweetie looked at Scootaloo pleadingly. “Back home, you two are my best friends! I- I needed your help... being with you two... it reminds me of home and the adventures we had.”

“What did you do to the real Sweetie?” the pegasus snapped at her. “Did you hurt her?”

“N-no!” The unicorn filly said. “Trixie told me that I was just borrowing her body... she’ll be back once I’m gone... I don’t think she’ll know how to do anything I know... and she will not really know Apple Bloom or Sunny...”

“So Trixie does exist?” Apple Bloom asked confused. “Ah thought you made the whole thing up.”

“So, what you’re saying is that you took over my friend Sweetie Belle and man- manip- *used* us.” Scootaloo growled, “Some friend you are.”

“I-I’m sor-”

“Don’t bother,” Scootaloo turned away. “Just... let us out.”

Sweetie’s shoulders slumped as her horn stopped glowing. Scootaloo immediately ran out of the room, while Apple Bloom and Sunny slowly followed, giving Sweetie side-long glances. They closed the door behind them, leaving the unicorn alone in the dining hall.

The unicorn filly took a deep breath and turned around, walking in the opposite direction.

o.O.o

Nightmare Moon looked at Twilight askance as both of them walked towards her chambers. “What’s on your mind, slave?”

Twilight shot her an annoyed look. "Nothing."

"Sure," the alicorn snorted. "Should I be feeling jealous of Sweetie?" she teased, a smirk playing in her lips. "Am I going to be replaced? I feel so sad Twilight, that you would just leave me and..."

"Oh, stop!" Twilight growled, looking straight at the alicorn. "It's nothing like that!"

"So I don't need to feel jealous?"

"No, you don't need to feel jealous." Twilight deadpanned.

"So you won't leave me?"

"I won't leave you."

"You're mine to cuddle and play with?"

"Yes, I'm yours to cuddle and- what?" Twilight glared at the alicorn. "Hey!"

"If you were paying attention it wouldn't have happened." Nightmare Moon chuckled. "But, since you so kindly offer, I will take full advantage of you tonight."

"I- what. No," Twilight shook her head as the door to Nightmare Moon's chambers opened with a bit of magical help. "We have to lower the sun."

"Oh, Twilight, you're no fun-" the alicorn stopped in shock as she looked around her room. "Wha- buh- how..."

The purple unicorn looked around, impressed. "My, Nightmare Moon, I would have never guessed..."

"But..." the alicorn quickly stepped out to confirm that they hadn't taken a wrong turn. "My- my room!" She looked at the unicorn with pleading, horrified eyes. "It's all pink! This must be a nightmare!"

“Don’t know,” Twilight muttered, poking a pink piece of armor. “Feels pretty real to me!”

The black alicorn gritted her teeth. “They will pay...” she looked around. Her bed. It was pink. Her books. Pink. Her desk. Pink. She started shaking. The bookcase, the curtains, the carpet... pink!
“CRUSAAAAADEEEEEERS!”

o.O.o

The sun was wrenched out of the sky with far less effort than ever before, and a very tired Nightmare Moon stomped angrily around the castle in search of the crusaders.

“Of all the things those little...” the alicorn sputtered indignantly. “Pink! Pink! Can you believe it?! How did they do that?! It’s... argh.”

Twilight was following the queen as fast as she could. “It was just a prank, Nightmare Moon; don’t do anything harsh!”

“I’ll show them a prank!” the alicorn vowed as she opened another door and saw Scootaloo, Apple Bloom and Sunny walking towards her. “There you are!” She glared at the group, “You have crossed the line!”

“Yeah, whatever.” Scootaloo growled as she passed by. “I don’t care. You win.”

“And if you think you can get away with this and challenge me again, I-” the alicorn coughed and looked down. “Beg pardon?”

“I don’t care anymore,” Scootaloo said, not looking at the two adults. “I want to go home.”

“But...” the alicorn frowned. “Is this another prank? Because I’m pretty sure it’s my turn-”

“I said, ‘I don’t care!’” the pegasus filly retorted. “Just... just let me go.”

For a moment, Twilight worried that the alicorn was about to antagonize the obviously upset pegasus further, but Nightmare Moon kept quiet and nodded. She looked at Apple Bloom. "What about you?"

The earth pony filly scratched the floor, obviously torn. She sighed. "Ah think Ah should go too."

"Very well." Nightmare Moon walked past them. "Follow me."

o.O.o

Spike was about to run out of the library when he heard the noise coming from the portal. He turned around and looked at the group of ponies that stepped out of it.

"Hey everypony! You just missed Sweetie Belle; she came here and-"

"I don't care," Scootaloo snapped.

"Okay there, hold on," Twilight stepped in front of the pegasus. "I think I know what happened. Sweetie Belle told you the truth."

The purple eyed pegasus nodded. "You knew?"

"I... just found out earlier. Sweetie..."

"She lied to us! And she said she was our friend!"

"Girls!" Spike waved his hands at them.

"Listen, Scootaloo, I know it's strange, and she shouldn't have lied, but you have to understand that-"

"Girls!" Spike shouted, then stopped as he felt something rumbling in his stomach. With a loud, flaming burp a scroll appeared in the air, which he caught in his claws. "Hey, I wonder where this came from?"

The fire had interrupted the argument, and Twilight had opened the scroll with a flash of magic. Nightmare Moon and Sunny looked over her shoulder, both of them curious.

“That’s...” the alicorn blinked in surprise. “I never expected that.”

“Wow...” Sunny smiled.

“What is it?” Despite herself, Scootaloo crowded the group as Spike and Apple Bloom shared a look and joined them.

“Well ah’ll be,” the earth pony smiled, while the dragon whistled.

Scootaloo said nothing, choosing to frown. “Yeah, whatever, let’s give it to her and be done with it.”

“That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you!” Spike said, drawing their attention. “Sweetie came through the portal earlier and she said something about having to go away. When I asked her what she meant, she said she was going to the Everfree.”

“What?” Nightmare Moon looked surprised. “That’s dangerous!”

“Why would she think of going there?” Apple Bloom asked. “She should know better!”

“Oh, my...” Twilight gasped. “She must have heard me when I thought the fragment would be in the place where we fought Nightmare Moon with the Elements of Harmony!”

“Fragments?” Nightmare Moon asked, then frowned. “I think, Twilight dear, you should tell me what’s happening.”

“I will,” Twilight nodded. “But as we go... right now we must catch up to her; it’s too dangerous for her to go alone.”

“Who cares if something happens to her?” Scootaloo snapped. “She’s not even really-”

“Scootaloo!” Twilight interrupted her, her eyes ablaze with anger. “I know you’re hurt and angry, but do you really want something to happen to her?”

The pegasus looked away, shuffling nervously. "Well no, but..."

"You have to remember, where she comes from, there's another Scootaloo and another Apple Bloom that are her best friends," Twilight said. "And she doesn't know when she'll see them again... you two are the closest she can get to them. Right now she's in the Everfree forest alone because she thinks you hate her."

Scootaloo looked down at her hoofs. "She shouldn't have lied."

"No, she shouldn't." Twilight smiled, "But she's our friend, right? And friends forgive."

Apple Bloom put her hoof on Scootaloo's shoulder. "Ah know we only really just met this mornin', but ah think we were meant to be friends all along. Let's go help this Sweetie... and then y'all can introduce me to the one you know."

With a glance at the earth pony, Scootaloo nodded.

o.O.o

The Everfree Forest...

It was there where Zecora lived, the place that Apple Bloom frequently visited to spend some time with her Zebra friend.

It was there that they had been attacked by the Cockatrice and found out the power of Fluttershy's stare.

It was there that The Elements of Harmony had fought and defeated Nightmare Moon... or at least they had in two other worlds. And it was here that the Castle of the Alicorn Sisters was located.

Sweetie didn't know how to get to it, as her excursions into the forest had never gone too deep. But she remembered hearing from her sister and the others as they talked about it... the way wasn't that difficult to follow, but it was a long trip, and the forest was dangerous.

But she didn't care. Slowly making her way through the path, Sweetie paid no heed to the noises of the forest until she heard somepony moan in pain.

She stopped and looked around. *Where did that come from? And who could be so silly as to come here at night?*

There it was again. She turned to her left, where several thick bushes blocked the view past a few feet. Taking a deep breath, Sweetie gathered her courage as she stepped into the bushes. The branches scratched her fur, and her mane got tangled more than once, but she persevered. The noise was coming from just up ahead.

She finally broke through the growth and onto a small clear area of the forest, where she could hear the sounds. She carefully stepped around it until, behind a log, she found a pit, and lying at the bottom of it was...

"Zecora!" Sweetie gasped as she recognized the Zebra. "Are you okay?"

"I've surely hit my head or ear, for is it my name that I hear?" the Zebra asked weakly, looking up at the filly in confusion. Their eyes crossed and the Zebra gasped. "Child, this world is not where you belong, your presence here feels rather wrong..."

"You... you know? You can tell?" Sweetie gasped.

"Many things I have observed, but I'll talk later if my life is to be preserved," the Zebra answered. "A hearty meal we'll both become, if the wrong creature were to come. I must ask you with all due haste, to pull me out, there's no time to waste!"

Sweetie looked around. *I'm not strong enough to levitate her...* Her eyes settled on a hanging vine. "I think that will work!"

Her horn aglow, she lifted the vine from the tree branch it rested on and lowered it to the Zebra. Then she tied the other end around a tree. "Try to come up now!"

With the aid of the vine and Sweetie Belle pulling, the Zebra managed to scramble out of the pit.

“Thank you, I was afraid I would have to spend the night there! It’s not a fate for which I’d much care.”

“It’s okay, Zecora, you would have done the same.”

The zebra looked amused. “You know my name and unless I forget, you have me at a disadvantage since we haven’t met.”

“Oh,” the unicorn filly smiled. “Sorry, my name is Sweetie Belle.”

“Well met, young Sweetie Belle, now maybe you can tell,” the Zebra nodded. “What are you doing here, in this forest most ponies fear?”

“I... I’m trying to get to the Alicorn Sister’s Castle. I was following the old road when I heard you.”

“If it’s the castle you want to reach, a better way I shall teach,” the Zebra said.

“Come with me, and you shall see.”

They walked in silence for the most part. Zecora seemed to be concentrating on the ground around her, no doubt wanting to avoid another fall. It was a few minutes before the filly remembered.

“Hey, Zecora, you said earlier this wasn’t my world.”

The Zebra smiled as she continued guiding her. “Indeed I did, for the truth may be... the soul I see is not that of the body before me.”

Sweetie sighed. “Yeah, I’m travelling from world to world... I have to find pieces of crystal to carry on, and I think the one for this world is in the castle.”

“A simple explanation for something I sense, much more convoluted was when it did commence,” Zecora said with a sidelong glance.

The filly shook her head. "It's my fault this is happening. My teacher was doing an experiment and I messed up."

"Accidents happen as I know well, think of that hole in which I fell," the striped equine replied, her deep voice carrying a trace of humor and understanding.

Sweetie looked at her guide. "Zecora, I think I killed Twilight... my teacher... she was turned into crystal and then broken into little pieces!"

The Zebra stopped and looked back at Sweetie, a serious expression in her face. "Magic works in mysterious ways, to Zebra and unicorn it turns into a haze. If it's Twilight's fragments that you seek, perhaps to the magic you will speak. Whatever you do, even if you feel torn, mistakes and sorrow you must not scorn. As good or bad as things can get, misery and self-pity bring only regret."

"Why should I be happy? I killed my teacher!"

"That you don't know I can tell, so give yourself a chance for a spell."

"Easier said than done," Sweetie muttered.

The Zebra smiled back at the filly. "Indeed it is so, but the trick I have found, is for the best to expect, even if the worst is bound." She winked at the unicorn as Sweetie groaned but smirked.

"What kind of advice is that?"

"Advice," the Zebra noted, "is a form of nostalgia. Dispensing it is a way of fishing the past from the disposal, wiping it off, painting over the ugly parts and recycling it for more than it's worth."

"Wow," the unicorn shook her head as she mulled over the words. "That's kind of depressing," she frowned. "And it doesn't rhyme."

The Zebra laughed. "A far wiser pony than I once told that to me. To say it wrong a disservice it would be."

"I'll try and remember that," Sweetie said, smiling despite herself. Then she sighed, "Zecora? What should I do if I lied and hurt a friend?"

The zebra didn't even look over her shoulder. "Ponies lie to protect their feelings, often ignoring the damage they cause in their dealings."

"But, I already hurt her... even if I don't lie again..."

"Sweetie, I can see your regret, and your friend I'm sure will on that reflect. She might forgive you, or she might not, but lies should not be where you throw your lot."

They reached a river and Zecora slowly stepped through. The water felt cool but good to Sweetie's hooves, and she sighed in relief as it seemed to wash away her worries.

She sighed bitterly. *I wish everything could be just carried away by the current...*

"We should hurry now, Sweetie Belle," Zecora called from the shore. "The castle's there as you can tell."

Sweetie blinked and nodded, following the Zebra out of the river and once more into the forest.

They walked in silence most of the way. At one point Zecora made quieting motions with her hooves and moved to the side into the undergrowth.

They watched in silence as a large creature walked past them. The body of a lion with bat wings and a scorpion tail. *That's the manticore sis and the others faced!* Sweetie thought in awe at the size and ferocious look of the creature.

Once it was gone Zecora waited a bit longer before guiding her back into the trail. "Some creatures with nasty tempers we should evade, lest their anger and hunger make our chances fade."

Eventually they reached the old bridge. "Thank you, Zecora," Sweetie said, giving the surprised Zebra a hug. "You're always so helpful!"

The striped horse chuckled. "I wish other ponies would see it that way; it's hard to imagine their opinion will sway."

Sweetie shook her head. "It will happen... when we see each other again, I might not remember you... but I would like to be your friend."

The Zebra blinked at this, but her smile was warm as she nodded. "Friendship is special and something to treasure; to have one with you, dear child, would be my pleasure."

The filly nodded as she cantered over the bridge and onto the other side, where the castle walls had crumbled in most areas. *All I need to do is find the fragment in there...* She turned around to wave at Zecora, but the Zebra was gone.

o.O.o

The castle had been huge once upon a time, but now the battlements were nothing but a pile of rocks, the walls little more than a memory. The castle itself was mostly intact, or at least recognizable. Sweetie's eyes roamed the area in search of a clue. She knew the elements had been broken apart in a tower, but which one?

"Why couldn't sis' story be more specific?!" Sweetie Belle huffed. She trotted around the castle, trying to connect the buildings with the descriptions her sister had given her. Eventually she found her way to the court room, where she could see the stained glass windows her sister and the others had described.

And there before her was the broken throne and the place where, in her world at least, Twilight and her friends had defeated Nightmare Moon.

She looked carefully around, her eyes scanning cracks in the wall, torn curtains, even the broken stained glass window.

"So, you would just leave without even saying goodbye?"

Sweetie was so concentrated on her search she hadn't heard the group that came into the room with her.

“Twi-” she sputtered, “Twilight!”

The purple unicorn looked at her sadly as Nightmare Moon, Sunny, Apple Bloom and Scootaloo stood next to her.

“I heard about your fight, Sweetie, but are you sure running away is the best thing to do?”

The unicorn filly looked away. “I just don’t want anypony to hate me... I need help... I don’t want to do all of this alone.”

“So you really are from another world,” Nightmare Moon said, walking up to her and looking at the unicorn in the eye. “That’s how you knew...” she trailed off, but Sweetie saw her eyes shift to her moon emblem.

“Yeah...” the filly sighed.

The alicorn smirked, but left it at that.

“Sweetie, regardless of the circumstances, you shouldn’t have come here.” Twilight said after a moment, “What would you have done if something happened to you? How do you think we would feel?”

“I don’t know,” Sweetie said, looking at the group angrily. “Who cares anyway? I’ll just find the fragment and get out of your mane. Maybe I’ll even get to return home!”

Twilight sighed. She was about to speak when Scootaloo stepped forth.

“Sweetie... I’m sorry I got so angry with you... it just really hurt to find out you were lying to me.”

The unicorn filly stubbornly scratched the floor, tiny tears on the edge of her eyes betraying her emotions. She was about to reply when she was suddenly being hugged by Apple Bloom.

“Ah know you got to go, Sweetie, and ah know we really just got to know each other today... or at least Ah did, but Ah’m gonna miss you,” the earth pony said.

Scotaloo was also suddenly hugging her. “Don’t be stubborn, Sweetie!” She said, burying her face in the unicorn’s mane. “Let’s not... let’s not say goodbye like this... I don’t want you to go away with us being angry with each other!”

Sunny soon joined the hug. “That’s right! You’re all my friends now, and I don’t want to see you angry!”

“I’m sorry I lied,” came Sweetie’s muffled reply, and it seemed as if the whole group relaxed with just those words.

Nightmare Moon walked up to Twilight as both adults watched the group hug in mild amusement. Sweetie looked at them and smiled; it was then that she noticed it. A slight purple glow near the lower corner of the stained glass window.

Slowly she disentangled herself from the group and made her way there. Her magic levitated the crystal as everypony gathered around it.

“Is... is that a piece... of me?” Twilight asked, staring at the crystal as it spun slowly inside Sweetie’s levitation spell.

Sweetie nodded. “My Twilight,” she smiled warmly.

“So, this is really goodbye,” Scotaloo said, scratching the back of her head with her hoof. She looked down. “I’ll miss you.”

Sweetie shook her head. “You’ll still have your own Sweetie.”

“Yeah, but I will miss the one I got to know now.” The pegasus smirked, “You both are crazy, but she’s less stubborn than you are.”

Sweetie laughed as she gave the pegasus a short hug. “She’s not, just give her time.”

Apple Bloom suddenly looked nervous. "Ah don't want to lose a friend Ah just made."

"We'll always be friends," Sweetie replied hugging the earth pony for a few seconds. "We became best friends in my world, so I'm sure this will happen again."

Sunny stepped up to the unicorn filly and gave her a quick hug. "It was really fun! If you visit again we should start another prank war!"

Sweetie nodded as her eyes turned to the adults.

Twilight nodded at her, but then her eyes opened wide. "Oh, my, I completely forgot about this!"

She levitated the scroll that Spike had produced early and gave it to Sweetie. "It's for you."

The filly blinked and opened the scroll. She started reading, and as the words sank in, her eyes grew wider and wider. "I... I passed?!"

"That's what it says!" Twilight nodded with a bright smile. "I'm sure they will be disappointed when you cannot make it but... be sure to show that to my other self when you see her again, okay?"

Sweetie nodded happily as she started jumping around Twilight. "I passed! I passed! Yes! Yesyesyesyesyesyesyesyesyes! I did it!"

Nightmare Moon chuckled and the filly stopped, looking around her, completely embarrassed. "Um, I think I should go."

Her horn lit up as her notebook materialized. She opened it and smoothed out the acceptance letter until it was flat, then fitted it between the pages. When she dismissed it, the scroll disappeared too. "I hope this works!" She said worriedly as she made the notebook reappear. The scroll was safely tucked between the pages.

Sweetie let out a sigh as she sent it away again.

“Well, this is it... Goodbye everypony...” she looked at the gathered group as her horn started glowing. When she was about to absorb the energy from the fragment she paused. “Nightmare Moon?”

The alicorn blinked. “What is it Sweetie?”

“What *does* Twilight taste like?”

The queen ignored the sputtering purple unicorn to her right as she smiled. “Blueberries. Tangy.”

“Oh. Good to know.”

“Wait, Sweetie!” Twilight raised a hoof, but it was too late. The fragment shone with a bright purple light that enveloped the filly as it slowly faded away. The light remained for a few seconds and then it was gone.

Sweetie Belle slumped to the floor, confused and dazed. “What? Where am I?”

She looked up and noticed Nightmare Moon and a unicorn she didn’t know staring at her.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAaaaaahhh!”

“I have one big concern over all of this,” the purple unicorn confessed to the group of ponies as she watched the unicorn filly scream.

“What?” Scootaloo asked.

“How am I going to explain all of this to Rarity?”

“AAAAAAAAAAAAaaaaahhh!”

o.O.o

Inside a stage wagon in a small town in the middle of Equestria, a certain showmare stared at the scroll that had just popped out in front of her. She had a little dragon-fire contraption she used to keep in contact with a few ponies, but she hadn’t written anypony recently, and she had no

idea why Celestia's Nightmare Moon's School for Gifted Unicorns would send her a letter.

Shrugging, she levitated the scroll and opened it, reading the contents aloud out of habit. "Dear Great and Powerful Trixie, as head supervisor of admissions, it is my pleasure to inform you that your apprentice, Sweetie Belle, has been accepted to study at our prestigious institution should she choose to do so. Although we are aware you are not in Ponyville anymore, and that your training of the young unicorn is over, we felt you would like to be one of the first to know of her success. Yours truly, ~Passing Grade"

Trixie stared at the scroll, re-reading it silently a couple of times. Finally, with a confused blink she let it rest on her desk. Only one thing crossed her mind. *What. The. Hay?*

o.o.o

Somewhere, far beyond the worlds and universes, in the deep darkness an eye opened, radiating an inner light. It looked around the vastness around it until it seemed to spot something. Its will concentrated as a voice old as a star rumbled. "*Sinistra in me aeterno ardes et in obscuritas captatus est...*"

o.o.o

Wherever it was she had arrived, it was dark.

Sweetie tried to make sense of where she was, and illuminated the area around her with her horn as her magic coursed through it. She finally recognized the place as her room in the Carousel Boutique. With a twist of magic, she lit up her lamp to see better, but things seemed odd... they appeared to have shrunk.

She looked around. Her bed was smaller, her desk... what were those posters doing there? And that tea set? It was all too small. She passed in front of her dresser, again, too small, giving it little thought and carried on to the door.

Then she stopped. She ran back to the dresser and looked in the mirror. Her eyes widened and her jaw fell slack.

The door to her room was suddenly kicked in as Rarity came in, wielding a poker in her magical grasp. "How dare you break into my-" she blinked and dropped the poker, staring at Sweetie Belle. "Buh-" she choked. "Sweetie... you... but you're dead!"