

# Never Truly Forgotten

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# Prologue

## The Summons

Majestic. That was the only way to describe it, really. The way the windows let in the light at all times of the day, letting it fall just right so that the path forward appeared to be flanked on both sides by walls of amber, the expertly carved white marble and sheets of gold reflecting it just so, causing the architecture to convey the majesty of the Sun.

Growing up, Twilight Sparkle had been to the throne room several times before, most often to meet with her teacher and guardian, but sometimes just to admire its beauty. Even so, to this day she couldn't help but be awed at its majesty. In fact, that she simply stood just inside the ever-open throne room doors, just to soak it all in. After all, she had just spent the last half hour in the comparatively dull-looking antechamber just outside those doors.

This time, however, things were different. Just a few things, really, but they caused this visit to take on its own, disparate tone. The first thing was, she no longer lived here, in the capital city of Canterlot. While she had lived in the city most of her life, and near the castle for much of that time, nearly a year ago she had been sent to the town of Ponyville, where she had made friends, and faced such threats as dragons, manticores, cockatrices, Nightmare Moon, and parasprites. She shuddered a bit at that last thought. All in all, an eventful year, and one she would probably never forget.

The second thing was, this was the primary throne room, where matters of state and other important things took place. She had been here before, several times, but whenever she met her teacher, it was typically in the secondary throne room, which was designed to be more accessible to the general populace.

The third thing was, this was decidedly not a casual visit.

Just yesterday morning, she had been reading a book by Tycho Brayhe, *Stars, Planets and You*, when Spike, her dragon assistant, had come out of the kitchen door. He was holding his prized possession, a large ruby, a gift from Rarity.

"You know, if you keep washing it like that, it'll eventually just wear away," she teased.

"Ha ha ha," he said sarcastically. "I'm just making sure that it looks as good as the day I got it."

"What? You mean covered in dirt?"

"No! I mean when Rarity gave it to me. I remember I could see my face in it, like a mirror! No, clearer than any mirror I've ever seen. Yep, not a speck of dirt to be..."

Twilight knew he was exaggerating, and just rolled her eyes, laughing to herself a little. She turned back to her book. If she knew Spike, and she did, he would continue on his own embellished version of that moment until something interrupted him.

Which came soon enough. "...sparkling in the sunlight, and not a flaw -" He then belched up a short column of green flame, which solidified into a sealed scroll, and landed next to Twilight. Had she not noticed the official-looking seal on the letter, she would have giggled a bit at how Spike's prized gem was singed, a layer of soot covering the exact place he had been staring longingly. She would have also put aside the letter for a moment, to help her assistant wash away the scorch marks. He probably could have used the help, because she noticed that he didn't come out for quite a while. Magical burns must be hard to wash off or something. She'd have to look into it later.

No, she was focused on the letter, which bore the seal of the Royal Family, a picture of two alicorns chasing the sun and moon, making a circle. She regularly sent and received letters from her teacher, but they were always fairly informal, and this was the first time she had seen the seal on one of her letters. This meant that whatever this letter was about, her teacher was contacting her in the capacity of Princess, not as her guardian.

Curious, but with some feeling of dread, she broke the seal and unfurled the letter with her magic. It read,

*Miss Twilight Sparkle,*

*By order of the Princess, your presence is requested in the Royal Throne Room of Canterlot Castle. A chariot will be provided for you tomorrow morning. After you arrive in Canterlot, you may not leave the city, though you are free to go anywhere within its limits. You are to report to me in the Antechamber of the Throne Room by 7:00 tomorrow evening. If you do not arrive by then, we may be forced to rely on the Royal Guard to find you and bring you in.*

*Have a pleasant day,*

*Sundance, Secretary for the Royal Family*

Ever since then, she had been worrying herself sick. There were very few reasons to use such a formal summons, and most of them were bad. Her mind ran from one thought to another, wondering whether she did something to warrant punishment, or whether something bad had happened to someone she knew, or whether she would be forced from her home in Ponyville and be given an assignment somewhere else.

Yes, she knew she was probably overreacting, but her rationality just could not win against this sense of foreboding.

The chariot came the next morning, as scheduled, pulled by two white pegasi of the Royal Guard. Normally, the journey from Ponyville to Canterlot would have taken several hours, but flying there cut the time to a mere half hour. Not having to walk, however, just gave her more time to worry.

Upon arrival in Canterlot, it was late morning, approaching noon. Seeing she had plenty of time, Twilight attempted to use her day in Canterlot to relax. She went shopping for books, and ended up with a copy of *Transmutations and Conjurations*. She bought it because of a certain incident with Fluttershy last month, where she screwed up a casting of Eagle's Splendor so badly that she accidentally cast Plane Shift, of all things, and wished to avoid repeating the mistake. But then, she also once messed up a casting of Teleport, and had cast...Plane Shift. On second thought, perhaps she should look into why she kept casting Plane Shift

when she didn't want to. So, she turned right back around, and when she came out again fifteen minutes later, she was carrying another book, *Mordecolt's Missive of Many Magical Mistakes and Mishaps*.

After that, she met with some old acquaintances, and even went to see her mother and father, who she hadn't spent all that much time with since moving. After eating dinner at her favorite donut shop, she made her way to the castle, the distractions of the day helping her forget why she was worrying.

Well, standing in the throne room, she remembered again.

"Please move forward, Twilight Sparkle," said a voice behind her. It was Sundance, who seemed more than a little annoyed that the purple unicorn was just standing there. After all, Twilight was the last visitor of the day, and she would be able to leave once Twilight walked into the room.

Twilight flinched a bit, and began slowly walking forward. Sundance, satisfied, packed her things and made her way out a side exit.

There, at the end of the red carpet, sat the Sun Throne, and on it sat the Regent of Equestria, the Avatar of the Day itself, Princess Celestia in all her radiance.

The Throne, being the centerpiece of the room, was just as majestic as the rest of it. Made, again, of white marble, it had golden fringes that flared outward, and was framed by the light that lined the carpet leading to it, giving the impression that one was looking into the face of the Sun itself. Which, if they were here on official business, they usually were.

Perhaps the first thing Twilight noticed, was the fact that Celestia had a small smile on her face.

"Welcome, my faithful student. I trust your trip went well?"

Twilight shuffled her front hooves a bit before answering.

"Well, ever since I got your letter, I've been a bit worried. After all, you usually write to me directly, so getting a sealed letter from your secretary made me wonder what was going on..."

"Oh, I apologize, Twilight. I had to go through official channels to free up the time to see you, and Sundance always feels the need to be so formal with these matters."

Twilight felt a bit better knowing that, but then she realized something. "In that case, Princess, why did you want to talk to me? And why couldn't you write me a letter instead of having Sundance do it?"

"Because, Twilight, I'm not the one who called you here."

The antechamber door opened, which, being a very large door, made a very large sound. Twilight, startled, turned around to see who had entered.

Though hard to see at first, due to the vastness of the two rooms, by the time the visitor had entered the throne room proper, Twilight could tell who it was. In walked another pony, a mare with a coat as blue as the night sky, a mane the color of starlight and a crescent moon on her flank. More importantly, though, was the fact that she was an alicorn, much like Princess Celestia, and even more importantly than that, was the fact that Twilight had seen this particular alicorn before, nearly one year ago.

"She did," said Celestia.

Twilight eventually remembered how to speak. "...Princess Luna?" she asked.

With another very large sound, the antechamber door closed behind the alicorn. She stood inside the throne room, still some distance away from the teacher and student. A moment passed, and she slowly made her way towards them.

As Luna approached, Celestia rose from her throne to stand beside her student. Luna paused, and looked at her sister, as if for reassurance. Celestia gave a small nod, and Luna, with renewed confidence, walked toward the purple unicorn.

Once she was about ten hooves from the two, she stopped.

There she was, the second Regent of Equestria, the Avatar of the Night. In her royal regalia, she certainly looked the part. Even so, she visibly had to work up the courage to speak to Twilight.

"I'd like to thank you."

Another moment passed, and when no explanation seemed forthcoming, Twilight asked, "...What for?"

Luna lowered her gaze to the ground in front of her. "For saving me...from myself."

It took her a moment, but soon Twilight understood what she meant. "You mean when me and my friends defeated Nightmare Moon, during the last Summer Sun Celebration." She smiled at the younger sister. "There's no need to thank us; we're just happy to help. Though, if I may ask, why now? We all saw you during the parade, but we never actually met, or even talked with you. You could have thanked us then."

The Princess lifted her head back up. "After being freed of Nightmare Moon, my sister forgave me for everything I've done. I was more happy than I could ever describe. I certainly noticed the parade, and everything else that happened that day, but it didn't matter to me. After so many years, I was home again. Nothing but that and my sister's forgiveness even registered."

As she said this, Luna turned toward her sister and gave her a small smile, before turning back to Twilight. "In addition, when I came back, I had lost much of my magic due to my...absence. I could hardly control enough magic to do even the simplest telekinesis. I've been slowly recovering over the past year, but even now I'm significantly less powerful than I used to be."

As she spoke, she began studying Twilight, which the unicorn thought was just slightly disturbing. While Twilight's nerves had calmed a bit already, they had not gone away, so she couldn't help but have those nerves begin building again as Luna looked her up and down. Luna's fascination, however, was more looking at her as if she had just noticed something strange, but couldn't quite put her hoof on why it was.

"It's weird, usually I'm very reluctant to speak to anypony I don't know very well, but you seem familiar for some reason. It's almost like I've known you for a very long -" She suddenly stopped speaking, and Twilight noticed she was staring directly at her cutie mark. Luna looked almost as if she had seen a ghost. Which, Twilight decided, was definitely very creepy.



Backing away slightly, she asked, "...Is something wrong, Princess?" She tried not to betray just how uneasy she was, but she never really was able to hide those types of feelings very well.

"I'm sorry, Twilight, but..." said Luna, but she trailed off. She began to squint her eyes to study her mark. "It's exactly the same. But, how? That's impossible..." she said to herself. "Sister? Have you-?"

"Yes, I have," interrupted the elder sister, "and I'm glad I'm not the only one who has. At first I thought it might just be wishful thinking, but both your recognition and the events of the past year have proven otherwise. Besides the color of her coat and mane, she is the very spitting image of her."

"What?" said Twilight. "Spitting image of who?" She paused, then registered what else her teacher had said. "And what do you mean, 'the events of the past year'?"

"The spitting image of a pony we both cared for very much. She was, quite possibly, the first true friend either of us ever had. And as for what it has to do with you and your adventures, she lived one thousand and one years ago."

It took Twilight just a moment to make the connection, but Luna was faster, and became very nervous.

"But Celly," she asked, momentarily forgetting to speak formally around their guest, "what could she possibly have to do with what happened back then?"

Celestia looked at her sister for a moment. She lowered her horn. The telltale aura of the alicorn's magic surrounded her, and extended into the carpet beneath their hooves. As they stood there, the carpet bulged slightly, and transformed into three red cushions. There were two medium-sized ones for Twilight and Luna, and one larger one for Celestia.

As she sat down, Celestia spoke. "I suspected I would have to tell this story. That's part of why I scheduled Twilight to be my last visit for today." She turned to face her student. "Please get comfortable, Twilight; this story may take some time to tell." Then she turned towards her sister. "And Luna, there are parts of this story you do not know, so you may want to listen as well."

The two followed her advice, and Twilight found that while the cushion made of the same substance as the carpet, it was very comfortable. It was also very large for her, since it was the same size as the one Luna currently sat on.

Luna, however, gave her sister a quizzical look, before she realized what she had meant. Her questioning look suddenly turned into one of surprise and shock.

"Don't tell me she has something to do-"

"Yes, I'm afraid she does," Celestia interrupted.

Twilight wasn't quite sure what that was about, so she decided to ignore it as she asked her own question.

"'Part' of why you scheduled this? What was the other part?"

"The other part was this," replied her teacher.

Again, Celestia lowered her horn. Her magical aura surrounded the large, ever-open doors that lead into the throne room. While something so heavy would have caused even the magically-inclined Twilight to grunt and sweat under the strain, Celestia's face remained calm as the doors moved. With a third very large sound, they closed themselves tight. As Celestia ceased focusing her telekinesis, the doors began glowing with a faint golden aura.

"As you might know, Twilight, those doors are enchanted with very powerful wards. They were meant to be closed only during emergencies, but the charms on them not only ensure absolute safety; they also ensure absolute privacy.

The story I'm about to tell you is known to very few, and only I know all of the details to it. I also wish to have it stay known to very few. I trust you to keep what you hear a secret, known only to the three of us. Can you do this for me?"

Twilight planted a small, fake smile on her face. The last time she had been trusted with keeping secrets, it hadn't ended too well.

"Even from my friends? I don't know if I can keep secrets from them."

Celestia thought for a moment before replying.

"If you believe they can keep a secret, then yes, you can tell Spike and the other Elements. I suspect there may be things I don't know, that tie this story to them as well."

Twilight gave a somewhat more sincere smile this time.

"Then yes, I will try, Princess."

Visibly relieved, Celestia said, "Then let me ask you another question. What do you know about cutie marks?"

Twilight thought, remembering her studies on the subject, and replied, "Well, a pony gets their cutie mark when they find their calling in life. No pony knows what causes them to appear, or what causes magic to be entirely unable to make one appear. Whatever it is, it must be very powerful, ancient magic, possibly as old as Equestria itself."

"Then tell me, Twilight: is it possible for two ponies to have the exact same cutie mark?"

"No, or at least it shouldn't be. While some ponies with similar skills can have *similar* cutie marks, something always differentiates them from the rest. They're like a unicorn's magic: it acts as a signature for that pony, and that pony alone, throughout history. Two ponies having the same cutie mark would mean that they would have to be the same pony."

Realization dawned on Twilight as she explained all of this. "Wait, are you saying that this friend of yours, from over a thousand years ago, had the same cutie mark as I do?"

Celestia nodded.

"Right down to the colors."

Twilight's curiosity was stoked. "Then, who exactly was this friend of yours?"

Celestia looked between the two members of her audience as she began her story.

"To get a true understanding of who this friend was to me, as well as what exactly it has to do with today, I will need to start at the beginning. Let me tell you about the first time I met her, a young unicorn filly named Dawn Star."

# Chapter 1

## The Child

"As I said, Dawn was the first friend either of us had ever had. She was quite unique that way, because there were two specific things separating us from the common pony, the first of which was our age.

"I'm old, Twilight. You already know this, but you might not be able to imagine just *how* old. After all, our titles as the Avatars of Day and Night aren't just pretty names. We've been around as long as the Sun and Moon, and we will survive until they're gone. We were there when our Mother and Father created Equestria, and we have ruled for as long as ponykind has existed. *That* is how old we are.

"The second was our power, both as rulers, and as alicorns. Maybe most ponies can only be close with those they perceive as equal to themselves, and who could be equal to us? Maybe they feared being the friend of a goddess would put them into the spotlight, make them a target. Or maybe they believed that power brings happiness, and so we had no need for anypony else. We never knew, and frankly, we don't want to.

"As you can tell, Twilight, we were very lonely. Our Parents have been gone for a long time now, since long before there was a kingdom to rule, and even when They were here with us, They were distant. While our subjects adored us, and some even worshiped us, nopony wished to be our friend.

"So for the longest time, Luna and I could only find comfort in each other. And even that's not the same as being a friend. You're an only child, Twilight, so you might not know this, but the love of a sister is very different from the love of a friend. While you can care for your sister, she will always be your sister first.

"Not that we didn't try. That's why both of us are so much more informal than any other royalty. We try to get everypony to treat us as one of them, to not be so awed and scared by our very presence, but that hasn't worked. We would take in students, apprentices, protégés, but they couldn't be our friends either. To them, we were their teachers, their rulers.

Their superiors. They loved us with all of their heart, but they treated us as teachers, or in some cases as parents. But try as we might, we could never find anypony that would treat us as equals, as ponies they could be friends with.

“That is, until we met Dawn Star.

“One day about one thousand and thirty years ago, give or take, after I had risen the Sun into the sky, I left the castle. I had made sure to clear out my schedule, so that I could have a day off. In fact, Luna had volunteered to take over my duties, to give me some time to relax.

“Now, back then we still lived in our old castle, in what is now the Everfree Forest. You've been there yourself, though most of it and the surrounding city had long since been overtaken by the Everfree, or simply crumbled away. It was located on the very edge of the city, with the *Evergreen* Forest, as it was called back then, directly behind it. If I remember correctly, you found the Elements within the central structure of the castle, and faced Nightmare Moon in Luna's Tower. My tower was on the opposite side, but it's been gone since we abandoned the castle.

“Anyway, the forest wasn't nearly as thick or as dangerous back then, and the city thrived there. Our castle had a large garden in the back, walled off from both the city and the forest, where nopony but the two of us were allowed unless invited. We even took care of the garden ourselves, and it became our own little hideaway.

“In the center of the garden was a large willow tree, surrounded on all sides by a field of flowers. While I am tied directly to the Sun, even I can find its heat overbearing, though I always make it so for a reason. I forget why, specifically, I made it so warm that day, other than that it was not long until the beginning of summer, but the branches and leaves of our tree made it the perfect place to lay your head to take a nap.

“As I sat down in the shade, I heard a rustling sound to my left. I mentioned that only Luna and I were allowed in the garden, and I knew it wasn't Luna, and there weren't any animals able to get into the garden that were large enough to make a noise like that. I had little to fear from a pony invading my privacy, so I stood up and began to investigate. I walked towards where I heard the noise, and that's where I found her.

“Sleeping among the daffodils, the tulips and the sunflowers was a unicorn filly, still wet with the morning dew. She was young, even younger than you were, Twilight, when I first met you. Her coat was the deep red of the early morning, and her mane was the soft orange and pink of the golden hour, the first hour of sunlight. I suspect that was why her parents named her Dawn Star, because simply looking at her was like watching a beautiful sunrise.

“I gently nudged her, and soon she was awake. I wasn't able to get a good look at her face before that, but when she turned to face me, I could see she had cried herself to sleep, and still had tears in her eyes.

“ 'What's wrong, my little pony?' I asked. 'Where are your parents?'

“She sniffled, and tried to rub her tears away before replying. 'I don't know where they are, Miss Princess. My mommy was carrying me, and my mommy and daddy were running from somepony. I don't know who we were running from, but some mean pony wanted to hurt us. Mommy ran next to a big wall and set me down next to a small tunnel and told me to run and hide. Then she ran away. When I crawled through the tunnel, I got here. I was so tired, I just fell asleep in all these flowers. I wish I knew where they were or if they're okay, but they ran into the forest, and I don't know if they're coming back.'

“The poor thing could hardly keep herself from crying the whole time she spoke, and when she finished, she just broke down. I had to comfort her, somehow.

“I said, 'Please don't cry, you're safe here. I promise you, I'll do everything I can to help find your parents, but until I do, you're welcome to stay.'

“She stopped crying for a moment and looked at me. 'Really?' she asked.

“I gave her a smile and said, 'On my honor as a Princess.'

“I noticed that she was covered in scratches and bruises. 'But first, you're hurt. If you hold still for a minute, I can heal you.'

“I may be powerful, but healing requires a certain finesse that I lack. Luna was always better at healing magic than I ever was, which may be

because of the artist in her. Luckily, her injuries were minor, and she was well-behaved enough that, with just a bit of concentration, I was able to heal the worst it.

“She was feeling much better after I was finished, and it showed. She was practically glowing with happiness as she bounced around.

“ 'Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you, Miss Princess!' she said.

“ 'Please,' I said, 'you can call me Celestia.'

“ 'Thank you, Miss Celestia!' she said.

“After she had calmed down a bit, I said to her, 'Now, I can't go around calling you "little unicorn", and you never told me your name.'

“ 'My name's Dawn Star, Miss Celestia, but you can call me Dawn!'

“ 'Well then, Dawn, why don't we go get some breakfast? I'd rather not have you eat through my garden, and you must be starving.'

“She looked at me and said, 'What can we have?'

“ 'I *am* a Princess, so you can have whatever you want.'

“She liked that idea, so we made our way out of the garden, and back into the castle.

“I later had the storm drain of the garden looked at. It was broken off its hinges, obviously where she had entered. I also made sure to introduce Luna and everypony else in the castle to Dawn, so that she could feel more at home.

“I wasn't thinking of any of that as we were walking into the castle, though. The only thoughts I had on my mind were finding the filly's parents, and finding out what they were running from.

“Little did I know that this child, this young and innocent filly I had just met, was destined to change the course of history.”



# Chapter 2

## The Friend

“The course of history?” asked Twilight. “What? What did she do?”

Celestia shook her head. “We haven’t reached that point of the story just yet, Twilight. There’s still more to tell before then.”

Twilight wasn’t quite satisfied with that explanation, but she realized she had another question. “Well, in that case, did you ever find her parents? Or even what was chasing them?”

Again, Celestia shook her head. “We never did find out where they went, or even what they were running from. All we knew was what Dawn had told us. According to her, her father was a red and white unicorn stallion named Crimson Wall, and her mother was a gold and brown earth pony mare named Featherstep. These two fled into the Evergreen Forest after leaving her, to keep her safe from whatever, or whoever, was chasing them.

You may believe that Equestria is peaceful today, Twilight, but our kingdom was very nearly a paradise back then. You've probably read many history books, and so I'm sure you know of the destruction of Old Canterlot and the construction of this castle. Before then, the Elements were alive and well within all ponies, but the old capital's destruction also caused them to become much weaker, allowing more destructive thoughts in.

So the idea of two ponies, running for their lives from something that wished them harm, was almost unheard of.

Furthermore, we searched all we could, but nopony had ever heard of them. We even checked the royal archives, where we kept the census information, but we had no record they existed.”

“Then, where did they come from?” Twilight said. “If they didn't show up in the census, then doesn't that mean they came from somewhere outside Equestria?”

“Back then, Twilight, we were the only nation with pony citizens, and other countries were almost completely isolated from us. Not like today, where ponykind has spread across the globe. We did have friendly nations check their records as well, but we never found anything.”

Twilight thought this over for a bit. “Then...does that mean they were wanderers? That they traveled from place to place, never settling down?”

“That was the conclusion we came to, as well. But the simple fact was, we never knew who they were, and Dawn was too young to remember much of her time with them.

We didn't stop searching, though. We held out hope for a very long time, but Dawn was an old mare when she asked me to stop. Even then, we had never found anything.”

“So,” Twilight said, “did you raise her?”

“In a way,” Celestia responded. “Luna and I, being Princesses, knew we would likely be far too busy to raise up this filly ourselves. Dawn was quite different from the students we had mentored before, because she had no family to go back too. So, the only place she had to live was the castle.

When it became obvious that we wouldn't find her parents anytime soon, we decided to find somepony to raise her. So one evening, after Dawn was asleep, we held a meeting with the servants of the castle. Our two personal attendants, a pegasus stallion named Cloudburst and an earth pony mare named Moonbeam, volunteered. From that day on, they were her parents in all but blood.

And so the years passed. Her adoptive parents lived in the castle, and so she was raised almost exclusively on the castle grounds. We kept searching for her parents, and we would interact with her on a daily basis. Before long, she was one of a very exclusive group of ponies given access to our royal quarters.

One day, not long before she obtained her cutie mark, I found her rummaging through my things, her head buried deep in my dresser. She hadn't noticed me come into the room, so I snuck up behind her. I carefully stretched out my foreleg.

I touched her back and said, ‘Gotcha,’.

She nearly shot straight out of that dresser, and managed to stop herself before going through the mirror on the other side of the room. She had apparently found my tiara, as she was wearing it like a necklace.

When she saw it was me, she relaxed, and said, 'Don't scare me like that, Celestia.'

'I just couldn't help myself,' I said. 'Now, what exactly were you looking for?'

She paused and said, 'You see, Celestia, I've been wondering. What's the sky was like? What's it made of? And why do the sun, moon and stars just float in it?'

'And what does this have to do with you searching my drawers?'

'Well, I thought that, since you and Luna are the only ponies able to manipulate the sky, there must be some sort of magic item or some notes in here that would help me know what the sky is.'

I suppose I could have explained it to her, that the sky was really just quite a lot of air, but I don't think she was old enough to understand. So, I had an idea. 'Would you like to see for yourself?' I said.

She just stood there a moment, trying to understand if I said what she thought I said. While she stood there, I levitated my tiara off of her, and placed it back on my head.

Finally, she gave me an answer. 'Yes! Yes, I'd love to, Celestia! Please, show me!'

I lowered myself and said, 'Then climb on.'

She climbed onto my back, and I walked to the balcony of my room. I cast a spell to ensure that she wouldn't fall, and to make sure she would have enough air. Then, I took off.

You've been to Cloudsdale, so you know just how high some pegasi are capable of flying. I flew much, much higher than that. I'm capable of flying higher than any pegasus that ever lived, and I flew up and up, until we reached the edge of the sky.

The sky doesn't have an end, really, but when you fly that high, the light blue of the sky gets darker and darker, and the air gets thinner and thinner, until it's dark enough to see the stars. The clouds were far below us, and the highest mountains seemed very, very small. The horizon looked like an endless sky that turned the color of the deep blue sea as you looked up.

I looked to my back and saw that Dawn was taking this all in with her eyes wider than I'd ever seen them, and her jaw hanging open.

'You see, Dawn,' I said, 'the sky isn't some dome that covers us. It's the air itself, that changes color when the sunlight strikes it. The Sun, Moon and stars aren't floating in the sky, but far above it, moving along the inside of a great sphere many, many miles above us.'

She closed her jaw, and said, 'What's that made of, then? What is it?'

'Even I am unable to fly that high, Dawn,' I said. 'I couldn't tell you what it is. It was there since long before I was born. But I touch it, each and every day. I can feel it with my magic every time I move the Sun.'

We flew for some time, and I allowed Dawn to see the sky, and the entire land of Equestria below us. Eventually, I started turning around, and flew back towards Old Canterlot. I decided to land just outside the forest, on some rolling hills that gave us a great view of the sky above.

I dispelled the magic I had cast on Dawn, and I asked her, 'Does that answer your questions?'

Now, after such a display of my abilities, my knowledge and age, most ponies would see not me, but their Princess. Not Dawn. She just looked at me for a moment, before she stood up on my back. 'It does,' she said. 'That was amazing, Celestia. But, I have one more question.'

'What do you want to know, Dawn?'

'Does your tiara help you at all? I thought that was why you always wore it, that it has something to do with moving the sun.'

I looked at the tiara on my head and said, 'This? Oh, no, it's just a pretty little crown somepony made for me.'

'Oh, okay,' she said. Then she took the crown in her teeth and jumped off of my back. She turned back to me and gave me a mischievous little smile.

'Dawn, why did you take my tiara?' I asked. I wasn't angry at all, just a little surprised, not to mention amused.

'If this crown doesn't do anything, you won't mind if I take it, right?' she said. She ran off, still holding the crown in her teeth.

'Oh, yes, I do!' I laughed, and began chasing her.

So there I was, a Princess of Equestria, the embodiment of the Sun itself, and I was playing 'Tag' with a young filly. It must have been quite the sight, but I didn't care. We chased each other well into the afternoon, running around and around in circles. At one point, she tackled me as she tried to snatch the crown out of my teeth, and we both ended up rolling down a hill.

When we reached the bottom, we couldn't help but laugh. We laughed and laughed for several minutes, and once we calmed down, we just laid there on our backs, watching the clouds go by.

After a while, she said to me, 'Celestia, today was the best day ever! This was so much fun!'

I couldn't help but agree with her. 'It was, wasn't it?' I said. 'I can't remember the last time I had this much fun with somepony else.'

It was getting late, and I knew that if I wasn't back soon, the Royal Guard would be sent to find out where I went. So I had Dawn climb back on, and we flew to my balcony.

When we landed in my room, she climbed down, and I said, 'Moonbeam will probably be wondering where you went.'

I opened the door for her, but before she walked out, she wrapped her hooves around my left foreleg.

'I'm so glad that you're my friend, Celestia,' she said.

In that moment, I realized that she was just what I was missing. That there was a reason I took her in, and why I had been feeling strangely

content ever since I met her. I realized that she was what nopony else ever was to me.

I lowered my head, and nuzzled her gently. 'And I'm glad you're my friend, Dawn,' I said.

The next time I saw her, she had gotten her cutie mark. I can't help but wonder what gave it to her."

At this, Luna lowered her head slightly, and said, "Um...Celly?"

Celestia, a bit surprised to hear her sister speak up, said, "Yes, Luna? What is it?"

Luna rose her head just enough to look at her sister, and said, "Actually, I was there when she got it. I promised I wouldn't tell anypony, though I think she won't mind now."

Both Celestia and Twilight were very surprised to hear this. Finally, Celestia spoke. "Then, how did she get her cutie mark, Luna?"

Luna took a deep breath, and told her side of the story.

# Chapter 3

## The Night

"The night after she flew around with you," Luna began, "I was in the courtyard, having just finished raising the moon. I was looking at the sky, trying to plan my newest addition to it, when Dawn came up to me.

'Hi, Luna!'

'Hello, Dawn,' I said. 'I heard you had fun yesterday.' You had told me what you saw in her that day, how you saw she's your friend. I felt the same way, and decided to try seeing Dawn in a new light.

'I did, Luna! Celestia flew me through the clouds, and I learned what the sky is like. Then after that, I took her crown and we chased each other until it was time to go home.'

She paused a bit, and realized that there was something she wanted to ask me.

'What are stars like, Luna? And how do you make them appear?'

'Well, Dawn,' I said, 'I was just preparing to add some stars to the sky. Would you like to see?'

She began nodding her head so fast, I was afraid it would fly off.

'Okay, okay. Calm down, Dawn. I'll show you...'

Her eyes widened, and a very large grin began to creep across her face.

'...tomorrow.'

And suddenly she looked like the very picture of disappointment.

'Awwww, but why *tomorrow*, Luna?'

'You really shouldn't be up this late, young as you are. I'd like you to get Moonbeam's permission first, because creating and adding stars can take some time,' I said. 'After all, my sky's like a half-finished mural. I've

been adding to it, piece by piece, for a very long time, and it's still nowhere near complete.

In addition, a full Moon is scheduled tomorrow night. That way, there will be plenty of light for you to see by.'

Dawn agreed to this idea, and we decided to meet on my balcony. Once she got permission, of course.

The next day, I was in my quarters, preparing the materials I needed. The Sun was nearly finished setting, but I hadn't brought up the Moon yet, leaving Equestria in the bright blue of the early evening. Dawn knocked at the door, and I let her in, after she gave me a note from Moonbeam, allowing her to spend the night under my watch.

As we walked out onto my balcony, Dawn saw the materials I had for my spell, but was mainly looking at one set in particular. Sitting on the balcony was a pile of gemstones, twice my height and easily twice again as wide.

'That's a lot of gems, Luna,' she said. 'Are you going to use all of them?'

'No,' I said. 'The gems are the focus of the spell, really. But only the finest will do, and I wanted to get enough that I was sure to have something from this batch.'

I began levitating each gemstone, and one by one, I cast a spell on them.

Dawn watched me, obviously wondering what I was doing, but she was kind enough to wait until I was finished. Considering the sheer number of gems I had to work with, she was waiting for much longer I expected her to. By the time I was finished, the Sun had set completely, leaving only a few more minutes of light.

'So, what was that spell, Luna?'

'Wait a moment, Dawn,' I said. I focused my magic on the darkening sky, and I brought up the full Moon. Once I did, the gems began glistening with magic, fascinating Dawn.



'The spell I cast a moment ago was to help me determine what gems are fit to become stars. The spell absorbs the moonlight, and the gems that can become stars will begin to glow.'

Dawn immediately began darting around the pile to see if she could see any glowing, which I couldn't help but giggle at a bit.

'But first, Dawn, they have to *absorb* the moonlight. This could take some time, which is why I had to make sure you were able to stay here this late.'

Dawn looked at me. 'Then, what do we do while we wait?'

I smiled at her and said, 'Whatever we want, I guess.'

So, we passed the time. We talked, we shared stories, we even played a few short games of '20 Questions' and 'I Spy'. Finally, after about two hours had passed, we went back out to the balcony. Looking at the pile, you wouldn't be able to tell anything had changed.

'It doesn't look like any of them are glowing, Luna,' said Dawn.

'There should be at least a few,' I said. And so I began using my magic to sift through the pile. After some thorough searching by the both of us, we finally found something. At the bottom of the pile was one small ruby, giving off maybe a candle's worth of red light.

'See? There's a gem here that'll work,' I said.

'But there must have been hundreds of gems in that pile! How come we only have one star?'

'Like I said, Dawn, the gems must be of the finest quality. Such a gem is very, very rare, and it takes me years to find enough to add something new to the night.

Now, watch this.'

I decided to put on a little show of my next spell, to impress the little filly. I hunched over as if in intense concentration, and began casting. While the spell itself is fairly complex, I've done it enough that such concentration wasn't necessary, but I didn't care. I wanted to entertain my friend.

I weaved my magic into the ruby, and it began to glow brighter and brighter. Then, before it became too bright to look at, I stopped. The ruby was now giving off a very strong red light, strong enough to see from far away.

Without moving from where I was, I levitated a small box I kept in my room, and brought it out to me. I opened it, and inside were three other baby stars: a sapphire, an amethyst, and a diamond, each giving of a colored glow to rival that of the ruby.

I levitated the gems out of the box, and I said, 'Now, these stars are ready to be set into the sky. One more spell, and they'll go to their assigned place.'

I floated the ruby next to the other gems, and began charging them with a different spell. Instead of using the energy of the spell to become even brighter, this time they began to vibrate. After a few seconds, they were vibrating with so much magic, they began shooting sparks of magical lightning between them.

I paused the spell, and they stopped vibrating, though they crackled with energy. I pointed my horn into the sky, and with one more spark of magic, they shot away. Have you ever seen one of my shooting stars, Twilight, or maybe one of my meteor showers? It was almost like that, except they flew up into the sky instead of down to earth.

They disappeared from our sight, and a moment later, four new stars were born, encircling the Moon.

'This is a very special night, Dawn,' I said, 'because it took me nearly fifty years to gather that many stars.'

She stared at me, not quite believing me. 'Does it normally take you that long?'

'No. It normally takes much longer. I'm lucky that we have such skilled rock farmers nowadays.'

She turned her gaze towards the leftover gems. 'What happens to all of these, then?'

I looked over the gemstones that completely covered the balcony. 'Well, some of them, we keep in our treasury. Some others, we use to feed

the dragons of Equestria. Most of them, we give back to the ponies who so generously donated them to us.'

I looked at her and had an idea. I levitated a large purple gem that laid on the edge of the pile. With one more spell, white lines appeared on its surface, carving it into the shape of a six-pointed star.

'But one, I think, goes to you, Dawn.'

She took the star in her hooves, and a smile spread across her face. 'Thanks, Luna,' she said, stifling a yawn.

I checked the Moon, and it was easily past midnight. 'It's late,' I said. 'I have some business to attend to, not to mention some cleaning up to do. You go ahead and sleep in my bed. I'll wake you up in the morning.'

She nodded, still fighting off sleep, and made her way back into my quarters.

The next night, I was wandering the halls of the castle. It was probably just an hour or two past midnight, so I had finished what little work I had, and was just enjoying the peace and quiet.

Suddenly, I felt some sort of magical presence within the castle. I focused on it, and I could feel that, somewhere in the castle, a fair amount of magic was being used. The amount of power would have been nothing for any of us, and would have been only marginally strenuous for a skilled unicorn, so I would have paid it no mind. However, I noticed one thing that caused me to fixate on it: though less powerful, this was the same spell I had cast last night.

I immediately began trying to find the source of the magic, and it led me outside. I found the spell caster underneath the tree in our royal garden, focusing their magic on something before them. It wasn't until I got much closer that I realized it was Dawn.

I started to panic. Not only because I knew Dawn didn't know the spell she was casting from just observing me once, but also because the amount of magic she was using was dangerous for an untrained unicorn, much less a filly.

Before I could open my mouth to stop her, the spell exploded. Dawn, unable to keep the spell going, was flung back, and the wild magic set fire to some of the flowers and leaves of the tree.

I caught Dawn in my forelegs before she struck the ground, and cast a simple rain spell, which quickly put out the fires that had sprung up. The tree was virtually unscathed, but some of the flowers surrounding it had been burned away.

'Dawn, what were you doing!?' I said, worried for her. 'You could have been hurt!'

She looked at me with tears in her eyes. 'I'm sorry, Luna! I'm so sorry! After seeing how those gems glowed so brightly before you put them in the sky, I thought that I could enchant a gem for Celestia, and give it to her as a gift. I didn't know it was so dangerous.'

I was about to tell her only certain gems could be enchanted in the first place, when I noticed what the focus of her spell was. Lying under the tree, unmoved and undamaged, was my sister's crown, the gem in its center still glowing slightly.

'So, you took my sister's tiara, and wanted to make its crystal glow?'

She nodded. I set her down on the ground.

'That's nice of you, Dawn, but the spell wouldn't work on that gem,' I said. Even as I spoke, the light in the crystal was fading. 'Not only is it not the quality of gem needed, but there are wards on it to keep it from being enchanted. I'm surprised you managed to make it glow at all.'

I nuzzled her to get her to cheer up. 'And if you want, I can help you find a better gift for her.'

Her tears faded, and she looked up at me. 'Thanks, Luna,' she said. 'I'll go put her crown back now.'

'Oh, don't worry. I can take care of that for you,' I said. I focused my magic on the crown, and made sure to include the spell key for bypassing its protections. The crown teleported away, and presumably landed where my sister had left it.

Dawn was beginning to fall asleep again, when she said, 'Luna, please don't tell anypony about this? I don't want Celestia to get mad at me.'

I assured her that, while I've never seen my sister get mad at anypony, I would keep this night a secret. On hearing that, she fell asleep,

and I noticed a flash of light on her flank. Her cutie mark had appeared, a purple star like the one I gave her last night, surrounded by several smaller stars.

I suppose there are different ways to interpret her mark. It could have meant she was gifted in magic itself, or something to do with the night sky. In light of your adventures, Twilight, and how you proved that friendship is a certain special kind of magic, I think I might finally know what her mark meant."

As Luna finished her story, Celestia nodded her head. "I see," she said. "I wouldn't have been mad at her, not at all. However, I may have been a little disappointed in her if I ever found out she took my crown. I guess that's why she didn't want me to know what happened."

"Wait," Twilight said, "so her cutie mark *wasn't* for magic, yet it's still the same as mine?"

Luna turned to her. "I'm not entirely sure. It's possible hers meant magic, but in a different way than yours does. It's also possible that neither of your cutie marks mean precisely what we think it means. After all, there isn't really any meaning to a cutie mark beyond what we assign to it."

Twilight nodded and said, "I think I'm beginning to see how we might be connected, but how exactly does she affect me?" She turned towards Celestia. "And you said she changed the course of history. What do you mean by that?"

Celestia turned towards her student.

"She's actually directly related to the events that led to both Luna's imprisonment and your rescue of her. Twilight, she was the one who helped me create the Elements of Harmony."

# Chapter 4

## The Vices

"Wait..." said Twilight. "You...*created*...the Elements of Harmony...a mere thousand years ago?"

She paused, trying to make sense of this latest revelation. She couldn't.

"But...they're the building blocks of magic *itself*. To create the Elements, you would have to create magic! And you already mentioned situations where somepony used magic, so how's that possible?" She suddenly remembered something else Celestia had said. "In fact, you said that the Elements were more active than ever back then! How could you have created something that already *existed*?!"

Celestia simply sat there patiently while her student ranted.

"Sorry, Twilight, allow me to rephrase what I said. It's true that to create the Elements of Harmony is to create magic, one of the fundamental forces of our world. To create magic, one would have to create the universe itself. What I meant was, she helped me create the vessels that currently act as a direct link to the power of the Elements. The vessels I currently keep in a secure vault here in the castle."

Twilight calmed a bit on hearing this new information, and began turning it over in her mind, trying to find what this meant.

"So, the necklaces and tiara we used one year ago...In that case, how did you do it? I would have thought the creation of such powerful artifacts would be beyond the ability of even the greatest magicians...no offense. And why? Why would you feel the need to create something that powerful?"

"Well, Twilight, it wasn't our power that created the Elements; we were simply the ones to shape it. And why? Because, we were facing a threat that only such a power could defeat. Equestria was under attack.

I already mentioned that I should have taken the disappearance of Dawn's parents as a sign of things to come. But I am not omniscient, nor

am I unable to make mistakes. I sometimes wish I was, because if I was either, then perhaps I could have prevented the destruction of my home.

Where we stand now, there used to be a great mountain. What Canterlot is built on was simply a small piece of it. It was taller than any other mountain in the world. But perhaps the strangest thing about it was that it was in the middle of an open plain, with not another peak anywhere near it.

Everypony was afraid of the mountain. Its edges were wild and jagged, its weather was dangerous and uncontrollable, and it was completely barren. Nothing grew there, nothing lived there, and nopony who ventured up the side of the mountain ever returned. In a way, it was *our* Everfree Forest. We called it the Empty Mountain.

We didn't know what was there, and we didn't want to. That all changed one day, about one thousand and five years ago, give or take.

Dawn had grown into a full-grown, independent mare. She lived in the city, though nopony outside the castle knew of her connection to us. Not that we actively sought to keep it a secret, she was just too humble to comfortably receive that level of attention, so we respected her wishes.

She had taken both to astronomy and magical theory, and spent her time studying both. She truly had an almost insatiable love of learning, as she soon read every book that could be found on either subject. In addition, though she couldn't quite match your ability, Twilight, she was an accomplished magician. She still visited us from time to time, but with her living in the city, the castle was notably more quiet.

And finally, she had effectively taken over the search for her parents. She would gather information, or what little she could find, and organize searches into uncharted areas of the forest in attempts to find them. That day, she and Luna had embarked alone on one such expedition.

So, I was left on my own. I had to cover for Luna, so my schedule was completely full. I had meetings to attend, appearances to make and ponies to meet. Such is the life of a Princess.

Early that afternoon, I was at a lunch meeting with many of the most important ponies from around the kingdom. I forget what exactly we were discussing, possibly tax codes or trade regulations or something equally dull. I'm certainly the more social of the two of us, but I tended to get bored

easily, and Luna was always more capable at dealing with the minutia of ruling. My mind drifted elsewhere before they even began speaking.

However, the meeting was soon interrupted by something nopony could explain. While a brown earth pony was in the middle of some impassioned speech on who-knows-what, the castle shook violently. Plates shattered, chandeliers fell, and ponies began panicking. Just as I and the Royal Guard began getting everypony outdoors, the *air* shook with the loudest sound any of us had ever heard. I finally made it outside, and I looked toward where the sound originated. I couldn't believe my eyes.

The Empty Mountain had *exploded*.

It didn't erupt, like a volcano; half of it was simply *gone*, smoke billowing from the wounded earth. It looked almost like a great bomb had been planted in its center, powerful enough to tear through the mountain like paper.

As I watched, I noticed bits of it flying in all directions. I breathed a sigh of relief that none were heading towards the city, but as I did, several of those bits *changed course*, and began heading this way!

I took off, flying straight towards these mysterious meteors. As I did, I began casting a disintegration spell that would dissolve these things to dust before they landed. As soon as they were within range, I released the spell, bathing them in magic.

But nothing happened. That spell was powerful enough to destroy even the toughest diamonds, but it had no effect on the meteors.

They changed course once again, and began to slow down. By this point, I noticed several things about them. First, these weren't meteors, nor were they even made of stone. What they *were* made of, I can't say, but if I had to guess, they appeared to be constructed from pure magical energy. Second, there were six of them, each burning with a different colored aura.

And finally, they were in the shape of living beings.

I quickly prepared a spell and held it in my horn, in case they ended up being hostile. As they approached, they began to spread out, surrounding me. Soon, I was finally able to get a good look at them.

The largest, positioned to my right, burned a deep red. It was in the shape of a bull, easily three times my size or more, and it was covered in



all manner of scars, injuries and burns that didn't seem to bother it in the slightest.

The next one, going clockwise, was a very dark orange, almost dark enough to be brown. Its shape was a griffon, not quite my size, but still taller than any griffon I've ever seen. Its body, however, seemed to be wasting away, as if by starvation. It was a wonder its wings held it aloft.

Directly behind me was the smallest of them, which had a light yellow aura, and its shape was the most confusing. It appeared to be a weasel of some sort, but its body was scaled like a snake's. It also wore a blank white mask, which covered its face completely, with only a single slit for its mouth.

The next two were about the same size as the griffon. The first was blue, deep as the ocean floor, and the next was green as an emerald. The blue one was a dragon, apparently fattened to the point of bursting. The green one was a wolf, with bare skin showing through the patches of fur that had fallen off.

And directly in front of me, positioned between the wolf and the bull, was an alicorn. It was as large as me, and its aura burnt a dark, unnatural black, so black that at points it seemed to simply be a pony-shaped hole in space.

The orange one spoke first. 'What have we here?' it said. 'It seems that the Princess herself has come to welcome us!' Its voice was small and squeaky, but nevertheless held a certain amount of malice.

'And welcome us, she should. With open wings, if she knows what's good for her,' said the griffon.

'Who are you?' I demanded, trying to keep my eyes on all of them. 'And what do you want?'

The blue dragon gave a low, guttural laugh. 'Oh, you wound my pride, Princess,' it said. 'You mean to say that after ruling our land for so long, you don't know who it really belongs to?'

'This land is Equestria,' I responded. 'And it *belongs* to nopony, but is *ruled* by the Royal Family.'

'Then I believe you have not read up on your history, Celestia,' said the wolf. 'But I guess that ruling this pathetic excuse for a kingdom doesn't mean much time for studying, now, does it?'

'I have been ruler here for as long as there was a land to rule,' I said. 'There is no *history* that I don't know.'

'Oh, but there is, Celestia,' said the alicorn. It shook its head in mock disappointment. 'To think, the Avatar of the Day herself doesn't know of the greatest threat to her kingdom.'

It lifted its head again, looking directly at me. 'We have been trapped under that mountain for eons, Daughter of Lutia. When we were here last, there *wasn't* a land to rule.'

I was stunned. 'How do you know my Mother's name?' I demanded. 'There isn't anypony alive other than me and my sister who knows that name.'

'Why, because it was she who sealed us away!' said the weasel.

'Indeed. She and that infernal Astor defeated us long ago, robbing us of our rightful property,' said the griffon.

I looked at them, then at the alicorn again. 'You still haven't answered my first question,' I said. 'Who are you?'

'Ah, yes, where are my manners?' it said. 'Why don't we introduce ourselves?'

It gave a signal with its hoof, and the bull began to speak for the first time. 'I AM THE FIRE THAT BURNS ALL TO CINDERS. MY FLAME DESTROYS ALL, SPREADS QUICKLY, AND NEVER DIES. I AM **WRATH.**' To prove his point, it stomped the nonexistent ground and let out a burst of fire from its nostrils.

The alicorn gave another signal and the griffon yawned, showing many more teeth than a griffon ought to have, before speaking. 'I am the force that leads ponies to ignorance, blinding them to make them content, before stealing everything they've accomplished. I am the voice that causes ponies to ignore the world, making them think their interference won't solve anything. I am Apathy.'

Next was the weasel. 'I am the voice that speaks to the coward in everypony. I embellish, modify, do what I can to hide the truth. I sow the seeds of discord and break the bonds of trust.' It flitted its tongue at me, which gleamed a bright silver. 'I am Deceit.'

The leader gave another signal, and the dragon spoke. 'I am the hunger that never ends. I prey on the fear of loss, making those I influence take what they can. Whenever somepony sees something they don't have with desire in their heart, they see me instead. I am Greed.'

The wolf growled, trying to intimidate me, before introducing itself. 'I mock the souls I feed upon, and make them hate what they cannot be. I make them destroy what they desire, so that others won't have it, and my touch lasts longer than any of my brethren. I am Envy.'

And finally, the alicorn spoke. 'I am the voice that invites my brethren in. I am the antithesis of all you hold dear. I pave the road I walk upon with the good intentions of mortals. I am Corruption.'

And together, we are the Six Vices.'

They began to move, floating clockwise around the circle. I began to discreetly strengthen the spell I held. Envy spoke first. 'And as for what we want, *Princess*, well, nothing could be simpler.'

'We just want everything there is to have here,' said Greed.

'Though, *truthfully*,' said Deceit, 'there isn't much here to *have*.'

'So,' said Apathy, 'we'll just have to build something of it, after we clear out what's in the way.'

'WE SHALL DESTROY THE KINGDOM OF LUTIA,' yelled Wrath. 'AND THE LEGACY OF ASTOR WILL **BURN**.'

After they made a complete revolution, Corruption was once again in front of me. 'So you see, Celestia,' he said, 'what we desire is a kingdom of our own, and yours simply will not do. It will have to be replaced.'

My spell just about complete, I responded. 'And if I refuse to simply let you usurp my throne and destroy my kingdom?'

'Well,' said Corruption, 'then I'm afraid that you would have to be...removed from the equation.'

My gaze hardened, fixed into a glare. 'You overestimate yourself,' I said. 'I am Celestia, daughter of Astor and Lutia, Regent of Equestria, Avatar of the Day and Bringer of the Morning. If you threaten me, I will send you back wherever you came from. But if you threaten my kingdom or my subjects, I will unleash the fury of the Sun itself upon you.'

I released my spell, holding nothing back. I had slowly been forging a bond of magic with the Sun during our conversation, and when I released my spell, the bond came racing back towards me like a whip, dragging with it fire hotter than any in the world. A column of flame burst from the Sun, barreling straight towards Corruption. It was upon him in an instant, leaving no time for him to dodge.

The alicorn was engulfed in flame so hot and bright, it would have set fire to anything a rock's throw away. Even I had to avert my eyes, and I had known it was coming. The fire persisted for half a minute before vanishing, and I looked toward his remains.

Except that he was still floating there, unfazed. In fact, from what I could tell, he made no attempt to evade or protect himself, taking the full brunt of the heat. And yet, he wasn't even singed.

'Impressive, Celestia,' he said, 'very impressive. Either you were capable of casting a spell of that magnitude in the blink of an eye, or you were able to cast it without any of us knowing. Most impressive indeed.'

He suddenly became very serious. 'Ineffective though your attempt to kill me was, you did try to kill me. I'll have to make a new law for when we take over.'

He looked around at the other Vices and said, 'First law of our new Empire: Any and all acts of treason are illegal. As obvious as that should be, we'll need remind our subjects what the first law is anytime somepony is found to be a traitor.'

He then turned to me. 'Celestia, you are hereby found guilty of attempted assassination, a crime of treason. Acts of treason are punishable by death.' Looking toward the bull, he said, 'Wrath, take care of her. I know how much you were looking forward to it.'

The bull roared, and began to charge at me. I quickly threw up a shield, which absorbed some of the blow, but I was still hit hard enough to be thrown halfway back to the city.

I recovered, and saw that Wrath was still charging towards me, the other Vices content to simply watch the show. I shot a bolt of arcane lightning towards Wrath. The spell struck him between the eyes, but he slowed down only slightly.

I shot another bolt, but he was prepared this time. He breathed red flame from his nostrils. Lightning and fire collided, exploding with enough force to knock me back even further. Before I could cast again, a bolt of red energy hit me. I was paralyzed in waves of agony, and I felt my power slipping away. When the pain wore off, I tried to catch my breath, recover enough to move out of the way.

I wasn't able to recover in time. The bull caught up with me, ramming me in the side. The force of the blow sent me flying towards the ground.

I couldn't slow down. I landed on my back, and felt the ground shake as Wrath landed, too. He took his time walking to where I lay, where I was trying to get up. I looked up, and saw that despite the injuries I had given him, he didn't seem hurt at all. In fact, he had a smile on his face, looking like he would intensely enjoy what came next.

'GOOD *NIGHT*, PRINCESS!'

He reared up for the final blow, and I braced myself as best I could. But the blow never came.

A beam of blue magic appeared from behind me, hitting Wrath square in the chest. Wrath was knocked into the air, and slammed into the ground a fair distance away.

'You will *not* harm my *SISTER*!'

I recognized Luna's voice. But I was beaten and injured, too weak to keep my head up. My head hit the ground, and as I felt reality slipping away, I feared that I was dying.

I heard Luna land next to me. 'Celly! Are you okay?'

'Luna...' I said, struggling to speak. 'We can't...fight them...Please...teleport us...back to the castle...activate the defenses and...evacuate the citizens...'

She wasted no time. Wrath was beginning to get back up, and the other Vices were on their way. After that, all I saw was another flash of blue light, and I lost consciousness."