

Elements of Friendship

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Chapter 1

The sun was shining, the birds were singing and the flowers were in bloom. All things considered, it was a beautiful day. At least Princess Celestia, who was enjoying a peaceful walk in the gardens of her School for Gifted Unicorns, thought so. She was here on a mission of sorts, but felt no urgency in reaching her destination; if she felt anything it was a sense of apprehension. She had come to meet one of the applicants to her school, a young filly named Twilight Sparkle. The simple fact that shared her name with one of her old best friends was what brought her here today. She looked down at her necklace and touched the gem that was embedded in it. The fabled return of her sister was drawing ever nearer and the Elements of Friendship would need to rise again.

Princess Celestia was shaken from her thoughts as she heard an explosion that seemed to come from the direction of Cloudsdale. She quickly looked up, worry etched onto her face. The worry melted away and was replaced by a smile as she gazed at the colours crossing the sky; she hadn't seen a Sonic Rainboom in a long time but she recognised it immediately. It brought her back to simpler days of watching famous pegasi flying and doing tricks.

Her thoughts were interrupted yet again when a dragon's head burst through the roof of a nearby tower. Celestia looked at it with agitation, there was powerful and dangerous magic going on in that room; on the same day that the new applicants had their entrance exams. This was unacceptable. Princess Celestia wasted no time in trotting into the magic filled tower and finding the culprit. To her surprise, the culprit was not a professor, whose display to a class had gotten out of hand; or a couple of older students, who were preparing a project for extra credit; but one of the applicants. Not any old applicant either, but Twilight Sparkle herself. She was surrounded by a purple haze of magic as Princess Celestia remained in the doorway slightly shocked. It was, without a doubt, the same filly she had befriended over a thousand years ago. The memory of that day came, unbidden, to her mind.

It was a rather overcast day as Celestia rose the sun for the first time, something she was sure her mother had organised so nopony would notice; should anything wrong happen on her first try. She was standing in the Royal Gardens while the birds sang, the bees buzzed and the trees stood silent and stoic. The little filly took no notice of any of this as her concentration was completely on the task at hand. The sun seemed to be reluctant to get up and start the day but Celestia wouldn't give up. She was sweating profusely by the time the sun was in its proper place. Her pink mane and white fur was damp in several places and she felt like she was going to collapse. When she was finished she quickly perked up, smiled happily at the completed task and looked in anticipation at her flank. The smile quickly faded and she let out a sigh. She was still a blank flank.

"Don't look too happy, you only just raised the sun for the first time," came the angelic voice of her mother from behind her. Celestia turned and looked at her. Her mother, Queen Sol, also had white fur, however her mane was a fiery red, a noticeable difference when compared to her own.

Celestia fixed her with a stare and said, in an accusatory tone, "I thought you said I'd get my Cutie Mark when I learnt to raise the sun." She empathised this statement with a stamp of her hoof. Sol chuckled, trotted over to her daughter and nuzzled her gently.

"I did say that, but you still haven't learnt how to raise the sun by yourself. Don't forget that I was helping you the entire time. Someday you will have the complete power over the sun and, by then, you'll have your Cutie Mark."

"But I want my Cutie Mark now!" Another stamp of her hoof followed this statement.

Sol chuckled again and said, "You know, when I was your age, I was just the same. But, one day, after I had risen the sun, I realised how pretty and almost perfect it looked shining through the clouds. The cloud cover was just right and the sun was shining just so that anypony could look at it and not burn their eyes. It was then that I realised that that was my special talent; making the sun shine in a way that made it possible for somepony

look at it through cloud cover. That's when I got this." She pointed with her snout at her flank; on which rested a Cutie Mark that showed a cloud with a bright circle in the middle of it.

Celestia just groaned, rolled her eyes and stated, with a slightly strained voice, "Mom, you've told me that story a hundred times."

"Doesn't make it any less true or inspiring. Now go, play and enjoy yourself for a while, there isn't anything else you need to do or practice for a while and I need to feed Luna. Have fun!" As she finished speaking, Sol hugged Celestia and trotted back toward the castle.

Celestia looked around the gardens and pondered on what to do for the rest of the day. She considered lying on the grass and watching the clouds pass, but then she looked up and saw that there was a blanket of cloud in the sky and decided that it would be too boring to watch. She considered prancing through the flower gardens but decided against it as she was given out to the last time she did that. She even considered breaking the fourth wall before realising she didn't know what a fourth wall was. She eventually decided on going to the entrance of the garden, as she often did, to watch some normal ponies going about their daily tasks. Having decided on a plan, Celestia happily trotted off in the direction of the entrance from the city.

As she neared the gate, Celestia heard a commotion. There was a young filly arguing with the guards stationed either side of the gate. She was small, at least in comparison to the big Earth Pony guards; if Celestia was to stand beside her they would probably be the same size. She had a light purple coat and her mane was deep blue with a purple and pink streak through it and she was currently in a heated argument with one of the guards.

"Look, it's right there! I could run in, grab it and run back out and nopony would be the wiser!" The pony pointed to a Frisbee that was close to Celestia's hooves.

"No," came the unsympathetic reply

"I'd be really quick; you wouldn't even know I was in there!"

“No.”

“Fine, don’t let me in. It’s not like I really needed your permission anyway,” saying that, the purple filly took a step back and bent over in concentration. As her horn lit up the guards stood up straighter. They weren’t afraid, their armour would protect them from anything this little filly could do, but their training overruled what they thought. Just as they were preparing to jump forward there was a flash of light. Nothing seemed to have happened, the purple filly just stood in the middle of the road with a confused look on her face.

“Wha-? I should be in there. What happened?” One of the guards couldn’t help himself and began to chuckle. The other guard shot him a dirty look and said, in a much kinder tone,

“The Royal Gardens are magically protected, it doesn’t let any magic in.”

The purple filly’s expression changed to one of concentration again as she said, “Wait, you said that it doesn’t let any magic in.”

“Correct.”

“So, let’s say I was inside the gate, would I be able to use my magic to get my Frisbee back?”

“Yes, but you’re not getting in anytime soon.”

“All right then,” she said before locking eyes with Celestia, who suddenly knew what the filly wanted her to do. Celestia bent over and picked up the Frisbee and began to concentrate on being outside, just like she was taught to when she wanted to teleport. One bright flash of light later and she was standing in the middle of the road beside an astonished filly, facing two startled guards. Celestia placed the Frisbee at the filly’s hooves and gave her a smile.

No pony moved for what felt like an eternity, then, as they realised that there was a member of the Royal Family outside when they shouldn’t be, the guards began to march towards the pair. As the large guards bore down on the two, the purple filly quickly whispered “Thank you,” bent down, picked up her Frisbee and galloped off as fast as she could. Celestia

looked up into the slightly angry faces of the two guards and, after letting out a small “Eeep”, followed the filly as quickly as she could.

Celestia galloped after the filly for what felt like hours, winding through the legs of numerous ponies and eventually ending up in a narrow alleyway between two tall buildings. There was a light coating of litter on the ground. The walls either side of Celestia were made of brick, some grime coating parts of it. The purple filly stood in front of with her back to Celestia breathing heavily. The coveted Frisbee lay at hooves, blending into the litter that surrounded it.

“Phew, that was a close one,” the filly stated after catching her breath.

“I know, I thought they were going to catch us,” Celestia replied happily.

The purple filly spun around and said so loud that it was almost a shout, “What are you doing here!”

Celestia recoiled slightly and replied in a meek voice, “I...I followed you”.

The filly stared at her for a moment and, once she had gotten over the initial shock, said in a much calmer tone, “I figured that much out, I was wondering why you followed me.”

“Well, if the guards caught me, I’d probably get into trouble for leaving the Gardens.” Celestia replied after a moment thought and then, after a moment, added, “I’m not meant to, you see.”

The purple filly stared at Celestia. Celestia stared back. The filly cocked her head to the side slightly and said, “You live there, right?”

“Right.”

“So...You’ll have to go back there eventually.” Celestia’s eyes widened as the realisation set in. The purple filly brought a hoof to her face and groaned.

“Can you at least tell me why you left the garden in the first place?”

"I thought you wanted me to. To give you the Frisbee."

"I wanted you to throw it to me or, at the very most, levitate it out with magic. I didn't even know any other ponies my age could teleport."

"Well I'm going to be the raiser of the sun when I'm older, so I need to know a lot of magic."

The filly narrowed her eyes at this and asked, "Aren't the raisers of the sun and moon always a mixture of all three pony races? You seem to be missing the wings." As she said this, she pointed to Celestia's back, which was defiantly wingless.

Celestia couldn't help but blush as she replied, "That's because I've only raised the sun once and, even then, I didn't do it by myself. I'll only get my wings once I accept full responsibility over the sun." After Celestia had finished explaining, there came an awkward silence.

A few minutes passed before the filly spoke up, "I think it might be time to bring you back to the cas-"

"NO!" Celestia shouted, "I don't want to go back yet. I've never really been out of the castle before and I want to explore before going back." Celestia thought for a second before continuing, "I'll get into trouble either way, so there's no harm in staying out for a while."

The purple filly looked sceptical but seemed to realise that there was no point in arguing. "Very well," she said, in a suddenly formal tone, "It is now my royal duty to stay with you until you come to your senses and return to the castle. I shall carry out my duty with relish, Princess."

Celestia briefly wondered why she would need a condiment to stay with her before saying, "Please, call me Celestia."

"Only if you call me Twilight Sparkle," Twilight Sparkle replied.

"Deal," Celestia said as she offered her hoof. Twilight grasped it with her own and shook it vigorously before saying, "I guess that makes us friends"

“Yes, yes it does,” Celestia replied with a large smile on her face.

Princess Celestia was dragged back to the present as a bolt of magical energy flashed past her ear. She knew that this needed to end quickly, lest somepony get hurt. She approached the filly with purpose in her stride, but she felt apprehension in her heart. The filly looked so much like the one she had befriended so long ago that it was unbelievable. Celestia briefly wondered if she would remember anything of her past life and, if she did, would she be able to shed light on whether the Elements were returning.

Celestia stopped walking; she was standing in front of the filly now. She placed a hoof on the filly’s shoulder and she looked into her eyes. The filly’s eyes, which had been pure white with magical power, slowly returned to normal. As the filly broke out of her trance, everything else returned to normal; the examiners that had been floating fell to the ground, the oversized dragon returned to baby size and a pair of house plants that were on the other side of the room changed back into ponies.

“Twilight Sparkle” began Celestia, hoping to get some response. Twilight cowered before her and Celestia knew instantly that this wasn’t the Twilight Sparkle that she had known, she would never have cowered. Luckily, Celestia had prepared for this.

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean-” Twilight began, but Celestia cut her off. “You have a very special gift. I don’t think I’ve ever come across a unicorn with your raw abilities. But you need to learn to tame these abilities through focused study. Twilight Sparkle, I’d like to make you my own personal protégé here at the school.”

Twilight seemed to have been stricken dumb by all this good news. She looked over to the ponies who were, Celestia presumed, her parents. Both ponies gave her a hearty nod and she let out a whoop of joy. Celestia then saw, as Twilight leaped for joy, a Cutie Mark had appeared on her flank. She cut Twilight’s cheer short to point this out. The filly’s smile

somehow grew even larger as she started to leap around the room in joy, yelling 'Yes' repeatedly. *This should be interesting*, Celestia thought.

Chapter 2

Princess Celestia stood on her balcony as she raised the moon. She stood there struggling for a number of minutes until the moon was in its rightful place. She always felt that the reason she found it so hard to raise the moon was because Luna was struggling against her. Celestia knew this wasn't true but the thought always came to her mind when she looked upon the face of her sister etched on the moon. She knelt down exhausted and took a few deep breaths.

"I met Twilight Sparkle again today," Celestia said, looking up at her sister's face, "I had my first lesson with her. She's very adept at magic, but she's not the same Twilight you knew. She likes studying for one thing." Celestia chuckled at her own joke before continuing, "She also seems to be shy. She's had a month to settle in to the school but she hasn't made a single friend yet."

Celestia looked down at her hooves for a moment before looking back up towards the moon, "Did I ever tell you about the first day I spent with Twilight?"

Celestia trotted down the main street following Twilight, or was at least trying to follow but the crowd of ponies was so thick that she only occasionally saw her purple hide which bore the six pointed star cutie mark. Celestia was thankful when the crowd began to thin and she could see Twilight turn onto a side road. Twilight stopped walking for a moment and checked that Celestia was still following her. A terrible idea popped into Celestia's head and she trotted up to Twilight to share it.

"Hey, I uh...I probably should have asked this earlier but, what if somepony recognises me?"

"Oaim nosh wobied abou bat"

“What?”

Twilight spat out the Frisbee that was in her mouth and said, “I said, ‘I’m not worried about that’. I didn’t know you, remember?”

“Yeah but you’re just one pony, what about everypony else?”

Twilight looked her up and down and put a hoof to her chin. After a moment of thinking she replied, “Weeeeell, pink manes and white fur aren’t that rare and you don’t have any other uh...defining features, so I think you’ll be ok”

Celestia looked back at her flank and was happy, possibly for the first time, that she didn’t have her Cutie Mark yet. Twilight, seeing that Celestia’s fears were assured, used her magic to pick up the Frisbee and continued walking.

“Man, I hate carrying that thing in my mouth but I couldn’t risk bumping it into everypony if I used magic. I have no idea how Earth Ponies can deal with tasting everything they carry about.”

“Neither do I.”

“I’ll just ask Dragon or Violet next time I see them.”

Celestia stopped in her tracks and exclaimed, “You’re going to ask a Dragon?”

Twilight stopped as well and looked over her shoulder and replied, “What? No, Dragonfruit. He’s one of our friends.”

“Our friends?”

Twilight smiled and said, “Yeah, our friends. He’s my friend, you’re my friend therefore you’re friends. You know, a friend of my friend is my friend, or something like that.” Satisfied that she had explained it enough, Twilight turned back and continued trotting along, Celestia following along with a smile on her face.

As Celestia looked around she noticed that the buildings were a lot smaller than they were nearer the castle. As she thought about it, Celestia realised she didn't know where they were going.

"Hey Twilight, where are we going?"

"Didn't I tell you? We're going to the clubhouse of the world famous-" Twilight took a moment to strike a pose, "Cutastically Fantastics"

"Who?"

"Oh, it's a group me and my friends set up when we were younger and really wanted cutie marks. We'd go around trying lots of things to try and get them. Most of us have our Cutie Marks but we still call ourselves Cutastically Fantastics. It has a ring to it."

"Wow. Where's the clubhouse?"

"In the forest."

Celestia stopped in her tracks and almost shouted, "The forest?" Then, dropping her voice, she continued, "Isn't that d-dangerous?"

Twilight stopped as well and looked back with a playful smile. "Not if you have me to protect you," then, as she saw how worried Celestia looked, she continued by saying, "The forest isn't scary or dangerous or anything. The scariest thing you'll find is an annoyed squirrel, maybe a grumpy badger if you're unlucky. Though we really should hurry up; we'll take all day just to get to the clubhouse at this rate." At this Twilight turned again and started trotting again. Celestia quickened her pace to catch up.

As the pair neared the forest, Celestia realised that Twilight wasn't entirely truthful when she said that the clubhouse was in the forest. It was certainly beside the forest and a good bit away from the nearest house but, as the tree the clubhouse was in was at least ten meters away from the forest proper, it wasn't in it.

"I thought you said it was in-"

“Everypony’s a critic. I show you an awesome clubhouse on the edge of an evil, dangerous and unexplored forest and what do you do? You complain it isn’t *in* the forest.”

“But you said the forest-“

“Well, ok, it isn’t that evil...or dangerous...or unexplored but it is a forest!” Twilight paused as she heard a few notes of music floating towards them then, as her eyes grew wider, she exclaimed, “Violet’s playing my favourite song! Come on Celestia, I have to introduce you to everypony.” With the sudden change of subject, Twilight escaped from Celestia’s questioning and raced towards the door of the clubhouse. Celestia galloped after her, not wanting to be left alone in an area she didn’t know very well.

Twilight burst through the door and Celestia followed closely behind. The first thing she noticed, once she was inside the clubhouse, was a violet Earth pony with an impeccably styled pink mane sitting in a chair with a violin in her hooves. Then she noticed three other ponies; a brown Earth pony, who had a long blue mane, was kneeling on the ground near the violet pony; a green Pegasus, who had a blonde mane, knelt near him with a book open at her hooves and a white Pegasus, who had a light blue mane, was hovering in the middle of the room. The next thing Celestia noticed was that they were staring at her and Twilight. Celestia made a mental note that bursting into a room at full gallop tends to get everypony’s attention and makes for an awkward situation.

The brown Earth pony was the first to speak up, “Hey Twi, is that my Frisbee?”

Twilight looked at the Frisbee she brought with her and used her magic to throw it to him. The Earth pony reared up on his hind legs, caught it, then promptly fell on his back. Twilight and the light blue Pegasus immediately burst out laughing, the violet Earth pony rolled her eyes as if this was a regular occurrence and Celestia couldn’t help but giggle at the poor Earth pony’s expense. The green Pegasus, on the other hand, just stared at Celestia, her mouth slightly agape.

A few minutes later, after she had finally stopped laughing, Twilight said, “Ok gang, it’s introduction time, this is our newest member, Celestia.

Celestia, these ponies are the other members of the Cutastically Fantastics.”

The violet pony spoke up then in a slightly haughty tone, “Twilight, how many times must I tell you that we are not calling ourselves the Cutastically Fantastics anymore? That name is simply ridiculous and most of us have our Cutie Marks already.” When the violet pony said it, Celestia noticed that it was true; the violet Earth pony had a violin for a Cutie Mark, the light blue Pegasus had a cloud, the green Pegasus had two open books and Twilight had a six pointed star surrounded by five other, smaller, stars. In fact, the only pony without a Cutie Mark, besides Celestia, was the brown Earth pony.

Twilight let out a snort and said to Celestia, while pointing to the violet pony, “That stuck up filly who can’t appreciate a good name is Violet.”

Violet inclined her head and said, “A pleasure making your acquaintance.”

Twilight then pointed to the brown Earth pony, who was still on the ground with his hooves over his face, and said, “That’s Dragonfruit. Say hello Dragon.” Dragonfruit, instead of saying hello, whimpered softly.

“Is he ok?” Celestia asked.

The white Pegasus spoke up and said, “Don’t mind him, he’s just embarrassed because he fell over in front of a filly he thinks is cute.”

Upon hearing this, Dragonfruit got up and shouted, “No I don’t!” He looked over at Celestia before continuing in a slightly panicked voice, “Not that I don’t think you’re cute, but I wasn’t looking at you like that, I only looked at you for a second or two, I mean now that I’ve had a good look at you I could say you’re pretty cute but I’m not really looking at you like that so you know I guess you’re...”

As Dragonfruit’s voice dropped to a whisper, Celestia couldn’t help but start giggling again. Twilight cocked her head and asked Dragonfruit if he was finished. When he merely whimpered as a response, Twilight pointed at the white Pegasus and said, “That delightful Pegasus is called Rainburst.”

Rainburst landed on the ground stuck out a hoof and said, "Pleased to meet ya." Celestia took it and the Pegasus began shaking it in earnest.

Twilight then walked over to the green Pegasus, who was still staring at Celestia with her mouth open, and said, "And this wide mouthed filly is Flora."

Flora looked at Twilight and said, "Twi? Did you really just bring *Princess Celestia* to our clubhouse?"

All eyes focused on Twilight as she groaned and said, "Of course *you'd* know who she was."

After she said this, several things happened at once; Rainburst took a step back from Celestia and looked at her curiously, Violet leapt from her chair and dropped into a bow, Flora got to her feet and bowed as well, Dragonfruit swooned and passed out and Twilight Sparkle brought her hoof to her face and groaned. Celestia could do nothing but stand there awkwardly and wish she could go back a few minutes to when she was only embarrassed for bursting into a room full of strangers

Princess Celestia stifled a yawn as she talked about her first encounter with the Cutastically Fantastics. She tried to keep talking but had to stifle another yawn. She sighed, stared up at the moon and said, "I'm sorry sister, but I must go to bed now, perhaps I could finish this story tomorrow night?"

Not waiting for the answer she knew wouldn't come, Celestia stood and, whilst feeling the same deep sense of guilt she felt every night, went to bed.

Chapter 3

It was a cold and stormy night as Princess Celestia stared at the skies. Nights like these were the ones where Celestia felt the worst; her sister Luna couldn't even look down on her subjects and see them enjoying the night. Not that many were enjoying this particular night; many were inside and were enjoying the sounds of the storm outside.

Deep down Celestia knew that seeing ponies enjoying a night that wasn't brought about by herself would likely enrage Luna rather than comfort her. Even deeper down she knew that Luna could never see down to Equestria or even hear her as she talked. Celestia often paid these thoughts no heed when she stood on her balcony and spoke to her sister.

"Today marks a month of Twilight Sparkle being at this school and her magic is coming along in leaps and bounds. I suspect that she will become as powerful as the Twilight from our time, if not more so. Although, I'm still worried about her reluctance to make friends; I have heard that she has spent entire days inside just studying magic."

Celestia paused for a moment and searched the sky longingly for a break in the clouds. She sighed and then said, "You've probably gotten sick of hearing about Twilight at this stage, I have been talking about her almost every night." Celestia thought for a moment before continuing, "You know, I never did finish telling you about my first day with the 'Cutastically Fantastics'."

It took a lot of convincing to get Violet and Flora to stop bowing and to relax. Even after being told that it was ok to rise from her bow, and that Celestia didn't want any special treatment, Flora was still fretting.

"But 'The Royal Family and You: Royal Etiquette Edition'," Celestia looked over to Twilight Sparkle but she merely shrugged, "said that it was considered an offence to treat royalty with anything but the top-most

respect and we haven't been treating you with the proper respect." Flora then turned to Celestia and said, "I'm terribly sorry, Your Highness, for anything this silly pony," she indicated Twilight, "might have done to disrespect you."

Celestia was about to speak up to tell Flora that she didn't feel disrespected in the slightest but was interrupted by Violet, "I simply must agree with Flora, you are Royalty and should be treated as such. Perhaps it would be for the best if you went back to the castle."

As the words left Violet's mouth Celestia's hopes of having an enjoyable day outside the castle dropped like a stone. She was about to turn and leave when Rainburst spoke up, "Now that just doesn't make any sense; you're being rude to her and turnin' her away just because you're afraid of insultin' her. I say she should stay."

Twilight joined in and said, "I agree with Rainburst, she should stay if she wants."

Flora looked thoughtful for a moment and announced, "We should have a vote."

Twilight nodded and said, "That's a great idea. I vote that she should stay and so does Rainburst and Celestia. There, we beat you three to two."

Flora shook her head and said, "No, that's not how it works," before running over to a wall that had been converted into a small library of sorts. She began to search through the books that were stored there whilst muttering things like "No, that's not it" and "Where did I put it?". After a few minutes of searching, Flora let out a whoop of triumphant joy and came trotting back with a book, which she dropped at Twilight's hooves. It read 'Cutastically Fantastics: Club Rules'.

"Page 11, line 13: 'Official club votes can only be voted on by official members'," Flora chirped, evidently happy for herself.

Twilight flipped to the page in question and groaned. "Flo, you know we don't have to do *everything* by the book, right? We can let loose once in a while and have fun."

Flora looked at Twilight in pure confusion as she said, "But Twilight, if we don't do it by the book, it won't be official and if it isn't official then it can't be officially fun."

It was Twilight's turn to look confused as she opened and closed her mouth, trying to cope with that logic. She looked as if she was about to retort when Rainburst stepped between her and Flora and said, "There's no use arguin' with her Twi, we'll just have to wait until Dragon wakes up. We all know that he'll say yeah to anypony with a pretty face." Celestia blushed furiously when she realised that he was talking about her but Rainburst wasn't finished, "Well, he's never said no to anypony now that I think about it. I *think* I heard him say no to a wall before but I can't be sure."

After Rainburst said this, a silence fell for a few moments. Celestia, deciding that this was her chance to prove that she could be a part of the group, decided to get conversation moving again by asking Flora what she was reading.

"Hey Flora," all eyes in the room snapped to Celestia as if they had forgotten she was there. Celestia lost any courage she might have had as she stammered out, "I was just, um, wondering what you were, ah, reading earlier."

Flora glanced down at the book she left on the floor and back to Celestia, seemingly torn between wanting to adhere to royal etiquette and wanting to talk about her book. The book seemed to win as Flora began to speak with a gleam in her eye, "Oh, it's this really interesting book on the Elements of Friendship and what each Element can do. For example the element of-"

Flora probably would have continued talking about the Elements, what they could do and how they influenced modern pop culture but she was interrupted by Twilight, "The Elements of Friendship? That's just an old pony's tale. Everypony knows that they don't have any real power."

Flora's face seemed to contort between surprise at being interrupted and confusion at what Twilight was saying. "But Twilight," she said while

flipping through her book, “it says right here that they were used to destroy the Nightmare one hundred years ago.”

“No, it says that six ponies *claimed* that they used the Elements to defeat the Nightmare but they were never able to use them again. If they really did use the Elements, why weren’t they able to use them again?”

“Because they weren’t the true spirits of Friendship, it’s said that the true spirits will only reveal themselves when Ponykind needs them the most. I think the legend puts it best.” Flora took a breath and then started to rhyme,

*“When the land of Equestria is in greatest need
And the forces of Evil won’t concede,
The Spirits of Friendship shall rise
Then converge where each Element lies.
A spark will unite the two factions
And break the Evil into fractions.
It shall be a victory in the truest sense,
It will force the Evil to repent.”*

Celestia was impressed by this filly’s ability to recall such a poem just from memory.

Twilight, on the other hoof, wasn’t so impressed. She sighed and said, “Well that’s a great poem but it just raises another question; how did they use the Elements in the first place if they weren’t the *true* spirits of Friendship? On top of that, why did the Elements need to be involved if the Nightmare wasn’t this ‘Evil’ that you’re talking about?”

“Well obviously the Elements defend Equestria from lesser evils as well. And the ponies didn’t really use the Elements, the Elements used *them*.”

Twilight retorted with was surely an amazing argument but Celestia stopped paying attention when Rainburst and Violet sat down either side her.

“Don’t mind those two, they’re always arguin’ over something like this. It’s pretty funny to watch once they really get into it,” Rainburst said with a grin. Celestia looked back at Twilight and Flora and saw that any evidence of rational debate had disappeared as they were gesturing wildly with their

hooves and speaking in loud voices. Celestia sat in silence as she listened to the two ponies 'debating' and was surprised when they started to argue over some poet named Boland.

She continued to sit there captivated until Violet tapped her on her shoulder and announced, "Well, I would just like to say that, while I feel you would be better off going back to the castle and staying there, you're welcome to join our small group," Violet said.

"But Dragonfruit hasn't woken up yet, you don't know for certain that he'll say yes," replied Celestia.

Violet gave her a soft smile and said, "Rainburst was not joking when he said that Dragonfruit finds it difficult to refuse other ponies, however, on the off chance that he does indeed say no, I shall change my vote."

Celestia tilted her head and asked, "Why would you do that? I thought you wanted me to go back to the castle."

Violet looked sheepish as she replied, "Weeeeell...yes, however I only said you should go because I thought you would be better off in the castle. When I saw how scared you were in front of us I knew that you have to spend some more time with ponies your own age so naturally I-

Celestia didn't hear the rest of Violet's explanation as Rainburst reached across Celestia, smacked Violet in the back of the head and said, "Stop that."

Violet gripped her head in her hooves and yelped, "OWWW, why did you do that?"

"Cause you're talkin' like an old mare again," Rainburst accused, "your actin' as if your givin' some sort of ancient wisdom when you're probably not even a year older then her, not to mention your annoying habit of not usin' convicts."

Violet stopped clutching her head to stare at Rainburst for a moment before saying, "What do I not use?"

“Convicts; like don’t or would’ve or should’ve or can’t or I’m. Those things.”

“Those are contractions, you silly pony.”

“Well the fact still remains that you don’t use them and you act way too mature for your age”

“Oh, you want me to act immature?” Violet said with a scowl, “I’ll show you immature.” Saying this, Violet launched herself at Rainburst, knocking Celestia over as she did. Rainburst, although she was being hit by Violet’s hooves, could only laugh and shout, “I made you use a contract” to which Violet shouted back, “They are contractions, CONTRACTIONS!”

Celestia could only look on in utter confusion as the room around her was filled with chaos. Flora and Twilight were still arguing with each other, apparently having broached the topic of proper prancing techniques; Violet was on top of Rainburst punching him repeatedly, Rainburst just laughing all the while.

“Hey, what’s going on?” Celestia nearly jumped out of her skin when she heard Dragonfruit speak up.

“DRAGONFRUIT,” Celestia shouted, “YOU’RE AWAKE!”

“YES, YES I AM,” Dragonfruit shouted back, “WHY ARE WE SHOUTING?”

“Um...I was sorta hoping that everypony would notice and stop fighting,” Celestia looked around after saying this and saw that it had worked; all the ponies in the room were looking at her, except for Rainburst who was still on the ground laughing uncontrollably.

“Ah, Dragonfruit,” Twilight said, suddenly calm again, “we were waiting for you to wake up. Do you want Celestia to stay or go?”

“Um...I’d like it if Celestia stayed, but I think the ponies outside want her too,” replied Dragonfruit pointing to the window. Twilight narrowed her eyes and trotted over to it. When she reached it, her eyes widened and her mouth opened slightly. Curious as to what could have shocked Twilight

into silence all the other ponies, bar Dragonfruit, crowded around the window to see.

Outside there were a dozen guard ponies knocking on the doors of the nearby houses and questioning the occupants. This wasn't what stunned Twilight; what stunned her was the fact that there were two guard ponies, an Earth- and a Pegasus pony, approaching the clubhouse. The two guards paused as they saw the collection of young ponies in the window. Their eyes grew wide as they recognised Celestia and they began to gallop towards the clubhouse, but not before alerting the rest of the guards to her presence. The ponies all backed away from the window as one, bumping into Dragonfruit.

"See?" Dragon fruit said, "They're looking for her and they might think to check the clubhouse next."

At that moment, a loud voice from outside yelled, "STAND BACK, WE'RE COMING IN!" and the door was slammed open. The Pegasus guard flew in, pointed at the group and yelled, "GET AWAY FROM HER!"

Celestia could feel the ponies around her shivering in fear but they didn't move, if anything they moved closer to her. Dragonfruit was the first to move as he took a step towards the guard and said, "D-don't th-threaten m-my f-friends."

"He wasn't threatening your friends, were you Quickfeather?" said a voice from the doorway. It was the other guard, his black coat a stark contrast to the Pegasus' white. His coat wasn't the only difference between the two; his helmet had a plumage on it while Quickfeather's had none. He took a few steps into the room and spoke to Celestia, "I hope you're happy, you've given your parents a right scare. Now you're coming with us back to the castle." As if on command, the other guard ponies arrived outside the clubhouse and the Earth pony began to give orders.

"Alright we've located the princess," he pointed at a grey unicorn, "Grayback, I want you to contact the other teams and inform them of the good news." He then pointed to the Pegasus who was still hovering in midair and said, "Quickfeather, because you were so quick to yell at these ponies you get the honour of getting the royal carriage, the covered one preferably." He waited until Quickfeather left before continuing, "Ok, the

rest of you need to set up a perimeter, one meter out. Thunderbolt, you have point. I'll stay here and make sure the princess doesn't get into anymore trouble." With that said the rest of the guards left and stood in a circle around the clubhouse. The Earth pony sat down in front of the young ponies and said, "Now, one of you, preferably you Princess, needs to tell me what happened." All eyes fell on Celestia as she sighed and began to explain what happened."

About forty minutes later, after Celestia, with some help from the others, revealed the whole story to the guard, a carriage pulled up outside the clubhouse. It was a royal carriage being pulled by the white Pegasus from earlier.

"Alright," said the Earth Pony standing up, "you'll have to come with me now Princess; I reckon your parents will want to have a stern talk with you. The rest of you are free to go."

"No," said five sets of voices together.

"I refuse to let a friend of mine be punished for something that was simply not her fault, I shall come as well," said Violet.

"I agree with Violet, it was my fault she left the castle in the first place. I'll come too to explain that to the king and queen," said Twilight.

"If I didn't pass out, she would've gone home so, um...I guess I'll come and explain that to the king and queen as well," said Dragonfruit.

"It says in my copy of 'Friendship for Eggheads' that you should never leave your friends in trouble if you can help it, so I'm coming too," said Flora.

"Well, I just want to see the castle from the inside," said Rainburst with a grin. All the other ponies looked at him, with the exception of Violet, who was glaring angrily at him. He rolled his eyes and said, "I'm jokin', Celestia's my friend and I don't want her to get into trouble either, jeez."

"Well, that's settled then, we're all going to the castle," announced Twilight, to which the guard shook his head.

“Nope, no can do, my orders are to bring the princess back to the castle, not her entire fan club,” he said.

Celestia suddenly felt a pair of hooves around her neck as Twilight grabbed a hold of her and said, “Well, I’m not letting go of her, so I guess you’ll have to take me with you or leave her behind. It’s your choice.” Celestia then felt four more pairs of hooves as the other ponies followed Twilight’s lead.

The guard began shaking his head again but this time there was a wry grin on his face. “Pesky kids,” he murmured before saying, in a louder voice, “Ok, ok, I give in, all of you can come, but we have to leave, now.” Still shaking his head, he went through the door and began to give orders again.

“Ok men, our orders have changed slightly; we’re now taking all six foals to the castle, so there’s going to be some extra weight. Quickfeather, you look like you’re going to drop, unhitch yourself and take point on the rear team with Thunderbolt, Aerial and Leo. Rafter and Anglesey, you have carriage duty. Greyback, you’ve point on the forward team with Putney, Wilde, Toulouse and Vera,” he announced.

All the guard ponies began to follow the black Earth pony’s orders while he trotted over to the carriage, held open the door and said, “After you.” After the six young ponies got on board, the black guard followed. The plume on top of his helmet was too tall for the ceiling of the carriage so he took it off. Four ponies looked on in amazement as the guard’s coat changed from black to a light brown.

“How did you do that?” Twilight asked, her eyes wide.

The guard opened his mouth to answer but was beaten to the punch by Flora, “Don’t you ever read Twilight? It’s a spell that’s placed on the helmets of all members of the Royal guard. You didn’t really think they only hired Earth ponies with black coats did you?”

The guard chuckled and said, “Your friend’s right, we all have the same spell placed on our helmets. They’re pretty darn useful, though it can get annoying when you mix your helmet up with a Pegasus’ one and spend the day white instead of black.”

The rest of the trip to the castle was spent in silence, the only break in which was when the ponies learnt that the guard's name was Lance. As the carriage passed the gates into the royal garden, Celestia could feel the atmosphere in the carriage change slightly. Flora began to mutter under her breath, apparently repeating passages from her book on royal etiquette. Violet was muttering to herself as well, but it was in a much more worried tone as she was worried about her violin, which was still in the clubhouse. Rainburst was running his hooves through his mane and wearing a grin on his face though Celestia that, when he thought nopony was looking, a worried expression would cross his face. Dragonfruit was staring straight ahead, his eyes wide open. Twilight was also staring straight ahead, but her face bore a mark of grim determination instead of Dragonfruit's fear. Celestia knew that she felt nervous and a little scared herself. She was worried that her new friends might get into trouble because of her, but she also knew that it was too late to do anything about it.

The carriage came to a stop in front of the large double doors of the castle. Lance opened the door, got out and put his helmet back on, his coat changing back to black. Celestia and her friends followed him out. He told the other guards that they were dismissed then led the six foals into the castle.

The first room they entered was the entrance hall, where the Elements of Friendship were stored. The Elements were spherical in shape and had various shapes on them. They were resting on a statue. It was a pillar from which five arms extended to house the Elements and on which a large blank spherical ball rested. Five young ponies stopped and stared in reverence at the five spheres representing the most powerful magic known to ponydom. Celestia and Lance had reached the other side of the hall before noticing the lack of other ponies. Celestia couldn't understand their fascination with something that she saw every day.

After a moment, Twilight cocked her head and asked, "I can only count five, where's the sixth element meant to be?"

Flora rolled her eyes and said, in a, exasperated voice, "Isn't it obvious? The sixth element is-" Flora didn't get to finish her sentence as Lance started to herd them through a maze of corridors.

At last they came to another set of double doors which, Celestia knew, led to the throne room. Lance stopped the group and told them that they were about to meet the king and queen. Celestia's stomach began to contract and she felt a sinking feeling that she knew was mirrored in her friends, if the looks on their faces were anything to go by. Only Twilight looked as if she wasn't about to throw up; she had the same look of grim determination that she wore back in the carriage. Lance stepped forward and opened the doors.

The throne room was an impressive sight. There were thick pillars with intricate designs and beautiful tapestries hanging from them. The sun streamed through large stained glass windows, each one depicting a different legend. The floor was covered in a thick red carpet with swirling designs of black and blue interlaced. None of this caught the ponies' attention, however. They were all looking towards the thrones themselves, which seated a very angry looking king and queen.

Celestia had never seen her parents so angry before. She had gotten into trouble before for various things like prancing through the flower gardens or messing up her room just after the maids had cleaned it, but the looks that graced her parents' faces were more terrible than she had ever seen before. Her mother's face was contorted into a strange mixture of rage and relief while her father's face, which normally had a smile of some sort etched into it, bore a look of such disappointment that Celestia almost burst into tears just looking at him. Both of Celestia's parents stared at her, seemingly unaware of the other ponies in their presence.

Celestia couldn't bear to keep looking at her parents and, instead, looked back at her new friends. They looked as if they were just as terrified as Celestia, if not more so. Violet, Flora and Rainburst stood stock still, looking straight ahead with terror etched onto their faces while Dragonfruit looked as if he could pass out but was too afraid to do so. Only Twilight lacked a look of pure terror on her face, but even she looked shaken upon seeing the king and queen.

When Celestia looked back, her mother seemed to realise that Celestia wasn't brought in alone. In a voice of almost unrestrained fury, she said, "Capitan Lance, when your team reported that they had found my daughter they mentioned nothing about bringing every foal they could find"

Lance bowed his head and said, "I'm sorry Your Majesty, they insisted that they come along. They were quite persuasive."

Queen Sol took a deep breath and closed her eyes for a moment before continuing, "I'm sure they were, but I would like some time with my daughter, so leave and take those foals with you."

Lance turned and started to herd everypony except Celestia out of the throne room. Dragonfruit, Violet, Rainburst and Flora complied and began to leave, their heads hung low. However Twilight, looking scared for the first time since Celestia had met her, took a step towards the king and queen.

"N-no I-I'm no-not leaving until yo-you hear th-the full s-story," she stammered and, her voice growing stronger as she went on, she continued, "Th-the princess only le-left the g-gardens to give me my Frisbee ba-ack. Then she g-got scared by the guards that were chasing me off and followed me as I ran off. When we got away, she wanted to go straight back but I convinced her to come out and meet my friends. She shouldn't be punished for something I convinced her to do."

Celestia's parents seemed to be completely taken aback at this confession. Celestia's father looked at her and asked if it was true.

Celestia had been staring at Twilight, dumbfounded, as she lied to Celestia's parents. She didn't hesitate at all before shaking her head and saying, "No. Well the start of it's true, but I didn't want to come back. Twilight tried to convince me to come back, but I insisted that I wouldn't."

Celestia's father narrowed his eyes, looked at Twilight and asked, "Do you realise that you almost got yourself into a lot more trouble?" Twilight merely nodded so he asked her why she did it.

"Because you never let a friend get into trouble if it's your fault in the first place and Celestia wouldn't have left if I hadn't thrown my Frisbee into the gardens," Twilight replied.

Celestia's parents looked at each other for a moment and then looked back to Twilight.

“Are you implying that you’re friends with my daughter,” Sol asked, all fury gone from her voice.

“I’m not implying it, I’m saying it. I’m Celestia’s friend,” replied Twilight

“So am I,” Violet spoke up.

“And me too,” added Rainburst.

“Um, don’t forget about me,” said Flora.

“Eeeeeep,” squeaked Dragonfruit.

Celestia’s parents were even more taken aback after hearing all of this. The terrible looks that were on their faces had been wiped away and replaced by looks of confusion. “Capitan Lance,” ordered Sol, “take everypony and wait outside in the corridor. I wish to speak to my husband alone.” Lance, who had been standing off to the side, unsure what to do with himself, immediately began herding the ponies back outside.

Once they were in the corridor again, everypony began to nervously scuff their hooves and look around unsure of what to say. Everypony, that is, besides Dragonfruit who immediately ran to the nearest potted plant and threw up in it.

“Well, no matter what happens, at least I can say I didn’t do that,” said Rainburst with a grin.

“And you know what happened next. Mother and Father decided to allow me to continue visiting my friends, but only if I wore a disguise,” continued Celestia. “They commissioned that magic flower that worked like the Royal Guards’ helmets. Of course, after I couldn’t use it anymore you inherited it, so I don’t really need to tell you how it worked.

“I still remember the punishment I received, not being allowed to leave the castle for two weeks. Oh how those two weeks tormented me but they were a small price to pay for all the fun I had afterwards.”

Celestia smiled up at the cloudy sky and felt good that she had managed to finish her story that night. She stood up, feeling tired after having spoken for so long and said, “Perhaps I could tell you some of our adventures some other time.”

The clouds parted for a moment and Celestia caught a glimpse of the moon. Feeling even happier now that she managed to see her sister’s face, Celestia went to bed.