



# Child of Two Worlds

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# Chapter 1

## Luna's Prison

Luna sat in her room, staring up at the moon, her moon, her home, wishing for a chance to go back. As she stared, tears rolled down her cheek along an already damp path down her face. Her sister hadn't known it, but in a way, bringing her back to Equestria had been the cruelest thing she could have done. She had been happy up there.

Of course there was no way Celestia could have known what she had taken away. How could she, when Luna had spent centuries carefully concealing it. Now her own wards wouldn't recognise her, not in this younger body, and certainly not as a regular alicorn. Only a nightmare could see through the wards. Without that, her own magic would ensure she never found it. Element Stones notwithstanding, that particular transformation was normally one-way, and somewhat less than popular with the locals.

When Celestia had sent her away, she had overlooked sealing her magic. Instead she simply prevented it from reaching the world below. Perhaps on purpose to give her something to do, maybe as another of her silly jokes or she could have simply been too drained from their fight to do a proper job of the seal. Whatever the reason, Luna had been free to go about her life up there as she chose. So she had made something up there, something amazing, something beautiful, something she knew only as "home".

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Almost two hundred years she had toiled in vain to give the night a beauty that would make the people stay up and appreciate her work as much as they did the day. Arranging the stars into the complex patterns her few followers called constellations. Meteors and comets that shoot across the sky leaving glowing trails like delicate brush strokes along an immense black canvas. The dancing many colored ribbons of light of the aurora, brighter and more brilliant than any rainbow. Yet nothing worked. Although a select few showed an interest in her work, they were mostly her lunar knights, sworn to her just as the solar knights were to Celestia. The people

still ignored her. Celestia raised but a single star and all of Equestria loved her for it, while Luna worked and worked all night long for the benefit of a mere handful of followers. It wasn't fair.

Then one of her most loyal followers, a black-coated unicorn named Shadowmane, came to her with an idea; an eclipse. Unlike the royal sisters, the three races all needed to sleep, so most had never even considered staying up long enough to see her creations at all. Since she could control the moon, perhaps she could keep it in front of the sun during the day, and darken the sky enough to show her works while everyone was awake. Then they would see the beauty of all she had created. Luna's ego being what it was, and the desperation she felt to have her work acknowledged, she immediately agreed with him without even questioning the gaps in his logic.

Had she known it would spark the 'Lunar War' and cost her everything she had spent so long making, she never would have listened to his idea. Looking back, all she could see of that day was the pained expression of her one true friend as he lay cradled by her forelegs, crimson staining his once perfectly groomed black coat, silently whispering "I'm sorry." before he stopped moving completely. Even with all her magic she couldn't save him. All she had wanted was to give the ponies a chance to see something amazing, instead they had taken it as a sign of aggression against the elder princess they so loved.

Her thoughts already clouded by jealousy for her sister and the bitterness over nopony seeming to appreciate her work, only twisted her sorrow at the loss of her friend into an unyielding blind rage, taking root in her heart as the ponies ran, screaming and panicking under the dim light of the eclipsed sun. In that moment her coat and attire seemed to lose their hue, leaving a vengeful blackened beast of a figure where a princess had stood seconds ago, her new visage made all the more eerie by the fact that other than transmuting her crown and amulet into armor, her form had not changed.

In the blink of an eye, the entire Everfree Citadel erupted with a thunderous rumble, the land shaking as the dark mare strode through the the crowds of terror stricken ponies. Looking at them with not but contempt and malice as they were engulfed by the rapidly growing vines or swallowed up as yawning chasms opened and closed beneath their hooves, and the entire city collapsed around them.

With the fall of the last spire the cursed forest forced it's way into existence up through their foundations, it's rapid growth fueled by Luna's rage. She simply looked at the ruined city with disinterest. Her eyes

searched the fleeing masses until she spotted one pony, the one who had drawn his blade to try and stop her from creating her eclipse. The one who had killed her best friend. More than any other, this pony would suffer.

That was how it began, and on those same ruins it would also end. Luna watched as the five element stones lit up. Were Celestia's heart and mind not too clouded by sorrow to feel any joy or laughter, she would have used all six and it would have ended there. It didn't matter though, as she was too drained from their battle to block them without at least one of her own. She expected she would die, and all history would remember of her was the vengeful tyrant. For the first time since her change, she felt something she had almost forgotten, regret. In some buried corner of her mind, there was a part of her that wanted more than simple hatred to be her legacy.

Then Luna felt an otherworldly tug on every fiber of her being, and in an instant found herself standing amongst a pale gray landscape, stars shone everywhere and both her sister's sun and Equestria hung in the sky above. Instantly she knew where she was, and was outraged by the fate her sister had chosen for her. The moon, *her moon* had become her prison. Despite the space between her and the world that silently taunted her, Nightmare Moon could still hear her sister speak, no doubt crying as she did.

"I'm sorry Luna. I'm so sorry. I'll find a way to fix this, I swear. Even if it takes me a thousand years, I'll find a way." She could hear Celestia saying, the tears evident in her shaking voice. While the old Luna probably would have reciprocated, Nightmare Moon simply glared down at the world below, those ignorant foalish ponies. Her mind was clouded by thoughts of revenge, revenge against her sister, revenge against her so-called followers. All they had to do was steal one of the element stones, just one. But no, they had managed to even bungle that. So on the eve of her hard won victory, it all came crashing down around her.

As Celestia's barrier went up, Luna could feel a strange sensation. Her blackened visage suddenly shifted back to its usual blue, her power diminished sharply, and the swirling dark thoughts seemed to vanish, as if they had never truly been hers to begin with. Immediately Luna knew their source.

*Discord... I should have sensed your influence, how have you done this?* Luna mentally growled. Now fully aware of the link in the back of her mind, and the powers that had made her other form possible.

*Moi? Oh dear me have I done something to upset you, Princess?* Another voice among her thoughts taunted with mock sincerity and a sadistic chuckle. *No no no, I didn't do much of anything. I simply made a suggestion, and I must say, that eclipse was spectacular. Pity it didn't break the seal like I wanted. But beggars can't be choosers, and your little war was quite the entertaining consolation prize.*

As the mental echo of the chimera-like freak chuckled, Luna simply listened in horror. *Shadowmane... my guard captain... my friend... he was... was...*

*MEEEE! Oh you should see the look on your face! Hah! This is PRICELESS!* The taunting voice echoed in her mind with that maddening laugh.

*HOW?! YOU WERE SEALED!*

*I'll get out eventually, I'm just using my powers from then.*

*...that's both stupid and impossible. Time doesn't work like that.*

*Bah, it's always rules rules rules with you. Can't I just step out and stretch my legs once in a while? That statue is so cramped.*

*The last time you got out you killed billions, completely destroyed the natural order, and ended civilisation as we knew it.*

*I know! Wasn't it so much fun? All our little games and contests. Well, except that stick-in-the mud Harmony. So boring. Had to get rid of her.*

*Don't you DARE speak of her, worm. You were lucky Celestia is stronger than I am, I would have killed you.*

*Ooh, struck a nerve did I? Didn't think you were the type to follow other mares, Luna.*

*HARMONY WAS MY SISTER YOU HALFWITTED CREEP. You know what, when I get back, I'm having a 'special' sledgehammer made, just for you.*

*Oops, last barrier's going up. Time to go.*

And so the years began to pass, the first dozen wasted on trying to find a way back on her own, to warn her sister that Discord's seals were weak. Not even an immortal demi-goddes is immune to the effects of isolation though, and in time her mind began to drift to other things. Lately she had taken to making a unicorn shaped set of craters appear and disappear on the surface, out of boredom more than anything.

Then, on a whim, she made a pony statue from the lunar regolith carefully shifting and shaping the fine powder, bonding it together into the shape of a proud unicorn in the armor of a lunar knight. Examining her work, she nearly broke down crying. It looked just like him. Just like the

friend who had taken the blade for her, just like Shadowmane. No matter what Discord had said, she refused to believe the loyal, honest knight had been him. And yet, those eyes... for some reason she had crafted the statue with *his* eyes. She didn't know how she had gotten them so lifelike, but in spite of their appearance they seemed to comfort her, seemed to reassure her. More than that, they inspired her to make more.

Each day she would craft a new one, and each one she would imagine as one of the followers she had lost in that stupid war. The war that had had a meaning once... could she even remember what it was? Did it even matter anymore? Or had that too just been more of *his* manipulation?

But she wasn't lonely anymore. All she had to do was look around to see the comforting faces of her friends. All of those who had appreciated her work. Who had stood up for her in her darkest hour, who had protected her and fought for her to the last stallion. They had all deserved a better end than her hopeless, stupid war. It was only when she finished the last one and realized how many hundreds there were that it dawned on her how much of a waste it had all been. She had had so much but she ruined it all over... something she couldn't even remember anymore... If she had only seen how much she had had, perhaps he wouldn't have been able to manipulate her, she thought bitterly, looking at her first statue. The one who's gaze had gone from comfort to torment the more she saw it.

It was that moment when she finally broke down and cried, cried for her lost friends, her lost home, her own foolish behavior, and for the sister she never got to say good bye to. She didn't know how long she sat there. Hours? Days? Months? Time kind of blurred together without any seasons or solar cycle to help track it. At some point she had gone from crying, to shouting at the stars, to just talking to herself. It felt good to tell the story of the last two hundred fifty years, even if there was no one there to hear it. Sometimes if she closed her eyes, she could almost hear the stamp of trotting hooves, the rustling of feathers and manes, and the hum of a unicorn charging a spell. As if her statues were real, and her lost friends really were with her.

All but one, one that kept staring at her with mocking eyes... *Those* eyes... somewhere during that time she had shattered it in a failed attempt to make it stop, but it wasn't the statue watching her, it was *him*. Always just out of reach, waiting for a chance to finish what he started.

After what seemed like an eternity, Luna woke up to a surprise. Somehow while she slept, all her statues had been placed in a circle around her, and more than that, all of them were in a kneeling pose. Not only was Luna certain they should be scattered, facing random directions,

but she was sure she hadn't made any of them in that pose. Then before her astonished eyes, they all rose their heads as one, and all looked at her. Their pleading expressions asking something, a request never voiced, but one Luna seemed to already know.

They wanted to be real.

Jolting awake Luna was almost surprised to see all of her statues in their usual spaces, save one. Her usually bright valley eclipsed by the world and sun above in perfect alignment. Luna chuckled, eclipses had come to mark turning points in her life. The dream had felt real, and for an instant she wondered if she still was dreaming. Her thoughts quickly turned back to the challenge before her, however. Mortal ponies needed air, and creating immortals was beyond her abilities, so how could she make something that could survive up here? For that matter, how would they speak? What would they eat? As a demi-goddes she could bend nature's rules easily enough, but they wouldn't have that luxury. As she began to plan idea after idea drifted through her mind.

A year, perhaps two passed as she worked, as she poured everything she had into building her 'new world', and even more into shrouding it from her sister's sight. To the world below the moon would look as it always had. None of them would know of her creation. It wasn't for them.

Finally her work was done, and the real magic was ready to begin. Stretched across a large part of the moon's surface, a great dome sat. It's concealed and warded outer surface looking like not but a pile of more dust in the endless sea of gray nothing. Inside, the only green the moon's surface held. Luna chuckled, at the irony. She had tried to create eternal night, now out of the necessity of simple things like food and air, she had had to place her garden where it would forever be mid day. But for now her garden would be shrouded in black as the world and sun above moved into alignment.

"Time to wake up, my Nightmares." She whispered in a soothing tone, like a mother trying to coax her foal out of bed. As she spoke blue-white lines snaked across the ground wriggling and jumping until they touched the base of a statue and made it glow, before spreading from it to others. The statues began to crack, a paper thin layer of stone crumbled away revealing the astonished ponies seemingly inside them. At first glance they seemed not too different from regular ponies, until you looked closer; the Nightmares all had the same magical mane, every strand seeming to flow by itself in a nonexistent wind, and the iridescent colors of



each strand giving the illusion that their manes were made of fire, arcing with lightning, shining with the aurora, or a dozen other effects, depending on which pony you looked at. They were thinner and lighter than their counterparts, not needing the heavier bone structure regular gravity demanded. Every horn was long and narrow. Every wing strong and broad, much larger than that of a normal pegasus, with the trailing edge looking less like individual feathers and more like a single curved blade, storm gray or midnight black regardless of how the rest of the wing was colored. Those without either seemed to have marks like wisps of energy surrounding their hooves not unlike the colors of their manes.

If Celestia saw her now, she probably would not have recognised her, as Luna had altered her own appearance to match that of her subjects. She was her sister's size, and the same mane, horn, and blade like wings her subjects possessed graced her form. All in her usual royal and navy blues, with subtle hints of cyan and green in her mane and innumerable twinkling white specs in the blue mass creating the illusion that she carried all the majesty of the stars with her. Though hidden behind the shoes of her amethyst colored regalia, matching hoof marks were present also.

Luna knew full well the term 'Nightmare' had a negative connotation on the world below, but that didn't matter to her. To her, it meant the majestic new race of ponies she had made. She was one of them now, and they knew her instinctively as their mother and their sovereign.

As the stunned silence of her new subjects was gradually replaced by the low rumble of a hundred conversations at once, one voice in the back caught her attention. Apparently at least one of her creations was a party pony by the sounds of it, and was insisting this was cause for celebration. That day became the first lunar festival, a celebration of the dawn of a new people.

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Luna sat in her box at the Colosseum as the flight team finished their performance by soaring one last circuit over the capitol, their uniforms making them seem purple and black blurs with only their brightly colored manes and wings to tell them apart. The minute all seven were on the ground, the structure erupted with the thunderous hoofbeats of tens of thousands, cheering and applauding.

Luna couldn't help but smile. "Thank you, sister. This wouldn't have been possible without you." She whispered, staring no longer at her people, but up at the "forbidden world" as it had come to be called. She had no idea

if Celestia could actually hear her, but she made a point to say that each year at the festival. Next to her, her apprentice, Starfall quietly asked;

“Is it time?”

“Yes, it is time.” Luna whispered. As she spoke, her student and guards all turned their gaze skyward, as did any who saw them, and any who saw them.

The Colosseum grew quiet for a few moments, all eyes looking to the sky and waiting, as the sun and the forbidden world inched closer together. As their edges seemed to touch, from the crowd a slow chant began, the Nightmares as one counting down the seconds until the alignment. Gradually the rhythmic chant grew louder until the sun was in it's totality, and all was bathed in pure black and total silence.

This part always brought back memories of the first time, the silence in the dark, every form as still as a statue, then the chorus of voices as the light touched them and each began to move again. Banners unfurling from every arch and the celebration beginning in earnest.

“Sovereign, may I be excused to join the others?” Luna heard her student ask, drawing her attention back to the present. Starfall was staring up at her, crimson eyes calm yet silently pleading as she pointed a hoof at a group of other mares waiting just below.

“Go, join your friends.” Luna said with a smile, watching as her student happily hopped down and trotted off.

The banners showed that this was the three hundredth celebration, and by her people's calendar each eclipse marked the end of the year, but Luna knew they were further apart than that. They probably didn't even correspond to an even number of years. The moon's orbit had been skewed ever since she had made that first Eclipse and Celestia had never bothered to correct it. Maybe she didn't notice the moon's periodic disappearance? Maybe she let it happen on purpose, as a reminder to herself? One could only guess.

*How long has it been for you, sister? Five hundred years? Seven hundred? A thousand?* She silently thought. As a faint memory drifted to the surface of her mind, and her gaze drifted to the horizon.

“New stars?” She mumbled confused, as she recognised what had drawn her attention. Directly in front of her the white light twinkled, hovering to the north east. A glance to her sides, and behind her revealing three more, evenly spaced on the horizon. Something was wrong, Celestia NEVER made new stars. A worried frown crossing her face, she looked to her captain.

"Prism, Gather the Academy's best diviners and have them brought to the palace." She ordered, her voice cold and sharp as a steel blade. Her captain just looked at her in shock, mouth moving as if she wished to speak yet not a sound came. She merely stammered in silence for a moment.

"Captain, you have your orders, I expect you to carry them out." The statement was practically growled.

"Sovereign... in the middle of the festival... wh-"

"Stars do not simply appear. Something is coming, and it's no coincidence they emerged during the eclipse." Luna stated, cutting the confused officer off before getting up and returning to the palace. Something about those stars filled her with dread. She would likely have one chance, and one chance only to prevent whatever was happening.

It hadn't taken long to find the stars purpose. Reading the tome her diviners had uncovered through her scrying pool, Luna was torn. The fact that the tome was penned by 'Sunny Days' a name the Celestia loved to pretend was hers during her little 'vacations' from being an Alicorn, meant it was likely a piece in one of her sister's convoluted schemes. That or an absurd coincidence. It spoke of a prophecy of Nightmare Moon's return, and based on the calendar of the world below it was a scant twenty years away. Celestia had said she would find a way to bring her home, and now centuries later she obviously had.

But did Luna even want to go back? Was Equestria even her home anymore? Looking out the window of her palace at the glistening black spires of the city below, part of her longed to see her sister's smiling face once more, but just as much of her didn't want to go... her prison had long since become home to her, her kingdom just as Equestria was her sisters, it's fellow occupants her friends and family. She had a purpose now, and ponies who needed her. Her sister's punishment had in a strange way, given her everything she had ever wanted...

More than that, the barriers meant to trap her were her sole shield against Discord's influence. She might be able to hold him off a while now that she was aware of him, keep some part of herself long enough to warn Celestia, but he would eventually corrupt her just as he had so many others during the Age of Chaos. Even sealed, he had shown he already had that kind of hold over her.

Gazing into her mirror she could easily picture her reflection shifting; her coat turning black, the nebulous patterns of her mane fading into a comparatively bland blue-gray star field, her amethyst regalia, twisted into dull silver armor. But it wasn't the change in appearance that frightened

her, it was knowing how her mind would change with it... the alter ego Discord had given her, Nightmare Moon, would return. How many thousands had died at her hooves the last time? How many more would this time? Worst of all, if Celestia failed, the corruption kill her. Not all at once, and not quickly to be sure. The 'Grays' were only the first stage... Just thinking of it made her shudder.

She would need to outmaneuver him, lest history repeat itself. The obvious solution would be to "play the villain" and get herself banished again, before Discord could use her to further damage the seal. The barriers at least protected her from this side, she was safe here. Her big sister was no foal, she would have something ready for the possibility that she hadn't changed, and that would at least end things quickly. That option would be a last resort though, as there was no telling how much damage she would do in the process, and there were so many variables to keep track of, not to mention the possibility of Discord himself having a contingency. No, despite the pain it would cause her sister, her best option would be to sabotage her efforts.

Nodding to one of her guards, she calmly stated "Have Starfall brought here immediately." The guard quickly bowed then turned to the door.

"Yes Sovereign. It will be done."

"Sovereign, you wished to see me?" The nightmare asked as the doors of the palace inner sanctum closed behind her. It had been many years since her mentor had summoned her to the palace, and to do so when she had so recently been given leave to spend the festival with her friends, something must be very wrong.

"I'm afraid I'm going to need you to put your studies at the academy on hold for a while, Star. I have an important mission I can trust to no one else." Luna explained, the fear in her voice carefully masked, but still noticeable to one who knew her well. She stood at the far end of the room, eyes locked on the barely visible orb hanging in the sky above.

"Anything, Luna."

"I believe I've developed a spell that can breach the barriers separating us from the world below, but you are the only one I know who's magic is strong enough to make it down alive." She explained, turning to face her. In the air in front of her floated two scrolls, one a spell scroll, the other a letter with an interlocked sun and moon on the wax seal. Starfall recognised the mark immediately as the symbol of the sovereign of the world below.

The forbidden world. No one went there by Luna's own decree, and the six barriers separating the two domains had killed the last pony who tried. *What could be so important that Luna would ask her to knowingly break their society's oldest law?* She wondered.

"This task will not be easy, the barrier will not allow me to assist you in any way, but the fate of many depends on this scroll reaching my sister. She must be warned." Luna finished, her expression grave. *What did she mean the barriers wouldn't allow her? Didn't she control them? Were they not there to protect us from the beast of chaos?* So many questions swam through Starfall's mind, but now was not the time for that. Her sovereign was counting on her, her people were counting on her. She had a mission to complete.

"By your command, Sovereign."

As her student activated the spell, Luna was careful to track her progress across the heavens. At first the modified teleport spell seemed to be working, skipping between the barriers one by one, but on the last one, instead of teleporting her across the barrier, the energy dissipated the minute she disappeared. Luna just stared at the sky in stunned silence, as her only hope of stopping this before it began died silently in the night sky.

"No..." She just silently whispered, willing her senses to somehow be wrong.

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On open land at the edge of somewhere unfamiliar to her called Ponyville, a bored cobalt blue coated filly stared out the window of her father's caravan, her snow white mane hanging down in a messy clump over her horn.

There was nothing to do. She was still too small for even basic magic, and as an only child there was no one to talk to or keep her company while her parents performed. Behind her, across the curtain that divided the caravan in half, The Great Crescent and his assistant Star Sparkle, her parents, were half way through their act on the collapsible stage that made up half of their home. The stage that her father had insisted would one day be hers.

All six years of her life had been spent in this cart, and she had seen this act plenty of times before. Knowing how the illusions, cantrips, and slight of hoof tricks worked, even if she couldn't do them herself yet, kind of took the 'magic' away, so she gazed lazily out the window. Spotting the shooting star, she closed her eyes and made a wish.

*I've always wanted a little sister, I wish I had one...*

# Chapter 2

## The Last Day

Starfall drifted, at rest among the stars, trying to mitigate the strain on her aching body. Those last five jumps had weakened her considerably more than any spell she had previously attempted, and each jump seemed more fatiguing than the one prior. So she floated, trying to conserve what strength she could, only the fact of her heritage preventing the vacuum of space from suffocating her as she drew on the remainder of her magic reserves.

This was it, the last jump. As power built in her horn, everything felt right. Everything was ready. Then just as the spell activated she saw it.

A meteor flying right towards her exit point. She tried to divert the magic flow but it was too late. The spell flashed and everything was pain. Her momentum knocking the rock, which what was left of her was now fused to, off it's course.

*So this is what it feels like to fail... I'm sorry Sovereign, I wasn't good enough.*

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*Goodbye, whatever your name is. I'm gonna miss you... you had such potential... But then again, all good things must- Oh wait, no, that was somepony else. Nevermind.*

*Alright, no messenger to warn Celestia, now I just need to find out who the element bearers will be. Ugh, all this planning is making me sick. So orderly, so boring. I just want to do something random, ANYTHING! This chess game is driving me sane! But then Celestia might sense me...*

*Oh the hay with it, there. You're a magic ball thingy. Hopefully it gets used up for something stupid.*

*Better lay low before 'big sister' notices...*

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As the filly opened her eyes, she noticed that the shooting star had changed direction, and was now coming towards the caravan. Some part of her knew she should be terrified by this, but instead, she was just curious. The shouts from behind her told her quite clearly though, that her parents and their audience did not share her enthusiasm. Hopping out the window and heading towards the approaching object, she simply looked up at it in wonder as she faintly heard stamping hooves and voices behind her.

"Trixie! Get out of there!" Crescent shouted as the object came closer and closer, unable to get to her due to the panicked stampeding crowd. By the time they had cleared out enough for him to get through it was almost on top of her. But instead of hitting her, it stopped, floating in front of her. If Trixie concentrated, she could almost hear a voice coming from it.

"Help.... me..." The pained voice seemed to whisper. The object was a sphere of white and orange, almost completely blotted out by waves of crimson sweeping across its surface. It was quickly shrinking, and the voice, already faint, was getting weaker. Somehow Trixie could sense that whatever it was, it was dying. It was strange but Trixie felt compelled to touch the thing. She didn't know why, or what it was, only that it needed her help, and this somehow felt like the right thing to do.

The minute her hoof brushed the sphere, a new blue stripe mixed into the swirling colors, and Trixie found she couldn't let go. Panic gripped her as she tried to pull her hoof away to no avail. The colors of the sphere seemed to swirl faster, mixing and changing into a myriad of purple hues, before bursting to reveal a shaking unicorn filly, half Trixie's size, floating in front of her. As gravity seemed to slowly but steadily assert itself and the tiny form was softly lowered down. Star and Crescent, their audience long gone, trotted over, as Trixie stared down in amazement.

"It's ok, Twilight." Trixie softly whispered, calmly, lowering herself down to eye level, "Your big sister Trixie's here." She didn't know where she had thought of that name, but it just kind of... fit. Not remembering anything before her "sister's" words, Twilight just shuffled over, latching onto Trixie's foreleg.

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*Well phooey. That wasn't entertaining at all, and now I need to kill her, again. Maybe this will give me something to do.*

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Trixie sprinted across the park giggling and shouting “CHN’T CHTH MRH!” over her shoulder, despite the textbook gripped between her teeth. She would have carried it by magic if she wasn’t already using that to boost her speed. Her home-made cape billowing in the wind behind her. Further back a purple filly galloped at top speed trying to catch up to her.

“No... fair... sis! Give it... back!” The younger of the two howled in frustration, trailing by a good twenty hooflengths and breathing heavily as she did. Twilight was nowhere near as fast as her sister thanks to the haste spell, and was quickly wearing out from trying to keep up with her. Her big sister just smirked and kept running. Ever since last year’s summer sun celebration, Twilight had spent every moment in every town they passed through in one library or another. For the life of her Trixie couldn’t see the point of it; the best tricks were learned by practice, not dumb books. You can’t dazzle a crowd by making a flower grow faster or making animals fall asleep. Now that they were in Canterlot, their parents had said something about an ‘important meeting’ and gone off to some school or another, and Trixie wasn’t about to let her sister waste this beautiful day with another silly book.

Coming up on a fence, Trixie skidded to a halt. The huffing and hoofsteps behind her quickly catching up. Turning to look back, she froze, her jaw hitting the ground and the book landing heavily on her front right hoof and then making it’s way to the cobblestone with a thud.

“Finally... caught... you...” The pony behind her huffed. It certainly sounded like Twilight, albeit older, but it couldn’t possibly be her. The pony Trixie was looking at was a full grown mare with a black six point star mark, not a pint sized blank flanked filly, more than that her coat was white with subtle yellow highlights and her mane was somehow on fire, yet not actually burning her or making any smoke. All the while, the strange unicorn cast off an orange glow that Trixie could feel was a magical aura.

Trixie simply stared in shock, immobilized by her fear, for a few seconds before a wave of purple light replaced the orange and swept across the strange mare. Instantly she was gone, in her place, a much more familiar yet slightly singed looking small purple filly. Trixie’s mind simply ground to a halt as she recognised Twilight.

*When had she learned an illusion like that?! And more importantly, how had she cast it when she could barely levitate most books?* There was silence between the two sisters for almost a minute, as Twilight finally caught her breath.

“That... Twilight that was amazing!” Trixie barely managed to squeak out, as her sister looked at her, confused. “How did you do that?”

"How did I do what?" Twilight asked, still confused, part of her wondering why Trixie had looked small a moment ago. That had been strange.

"What do you mean 'Do what'? The illusion you were just using!"

"I cast an illusion?! REALLY?" Twilight babbled, a mixture of excitement and confusion in her voice, looking behind herself then back forward with a disappointed expression. It wasn't hard to guess what she was looking for. She had been making that same check after every new thing she tried ever since Trixie had gotten her cloak and wand.

*If illusions were easy enough for her to cast by accident, they must have something to do with her talent, so why hadn't her mark appeared? Unless that wasn't an illusion? No, an aptitude for transmutation would have given her a mark too though.* Trixie silently wondered, unconsciously scrunching her face up into an expression of heavy concentration. *Just how strong would a caster have to be for that to not be their talent but still be that easy?*

There were so many questions Trixie wanted to ask, but a glance up told her it was almost three. Father would be returning to the library to get them soon. Grabbing the book with her magic, she grinned devilishly.

"I think that's enough of a rest" she said before dashing off back the way they came, Twilight immediately on her heels.

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*Awww... I was hoping she would explode a second time... only, not with magic... stupid Celestia getting in the- she's looking straight at me... DAMN! Forget disposing of the pest. Gotta hide. Fast.*

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*One minute what I can do is amazing, the next she hates me for it...* Twilight thought bitterly. Laying on the bed, staring up at the ceiling of her new room in the school's dormitory. Her parents had been so happy for her, even Trixie had at first... But the minute anyone mentions her staying at the school and her big sister decides she's selfishness incarnate.

*Who needs her anyway. If I have to pick between friends and magic, then I pick magic. I can do this myself, I don't need friends. I don't need anypony.* She mentally grumbled, trying to ignore the small voice in the back of her mind telling her she was wrong. Flopping onto her side and staring across the room at the small ball of purple scales lying in his basket,

a flicker of a smile crept onto her face momentarily. His soft gurgling sounds as he unconsciously chewed on the tip of his tail in his sleep lightening her mood.

"I suppose I could use an assistant though... And you're going to need a name." She whispered. Glancing over at the window it was almost sunset, but she wasn't really tired. Instead the lavender filly pulled one of her books down from the small shelf in her room, entitled 'Equestria, A History of the Fourth Age' and began reading.

She had already read it twice, but so much of it was still beyond her, maybe if she read it again it would make more sense. It was a pity none of the history of the previous three ages had survived the 'Age of Chaos' that separated the Third and Fourth. Those books would probably have helped. Maybe she should read something else? There was her books on magic, that book on what different cutie marks meant, and she had been meaning to start on that book about astom-... asturonim-... astromnom-... stars and stuff. Hmm, she'd need a dictionary too. So many of her books used big words. So many books to read, so little daylight left... maybe she could find a book on speed-reading in the library?

As she flipped through the tomes though, she couldn't shake the feeling there was something she was supposed to be doing. The nagging feeling had been there ever since Celestia had given her the scroll with the map of the school two days ago, as if something about that moment had flipped a switch in her mind.

Pulling a small stuffed doll out of her bag, she looked at it for guidance.

"What do you think, Smartypants?" The logical part of her mind knew it wouldn't answer. Couldn't answer. Yet unconsciously her magic brought it's hoof up to it's chin, as if thinking hard. then something she never would have thought possible happened.

"I lost the scroll." It said. It sounded disappointed, sad. As if it had failed someone or something completely. Twilight's only reaction to the doll was fear, the idea of failure had always terrified her, as long as she could remember, even over the smallest things. Yet there was curiosity there too. Twilight was no longer controlling the doll consciously, yet she could feel it was her magic animating it, and could hear her voice coming from it. How was it doing that?

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"Spike! Spike? Oh... where did he run off to this time?" Twilight grumbled to herself, searching the library and periodically stopping to call out the little dragon's name. He'd wandered off while she had been reading, again. She wasn't sure why she was shouting, he wasn't likely to respond, he couldn't even speak yet, but she tried anyway. It was kind of frustrating actually, four years old and he was still more like a pet dog than a sentient being. Galloping through the children's section for the third time, she happened to glance out the window, spotting a familiar purple form outside.

"Oh no, how did you get out there?" she groaned, heading for the nearest door. He was playing next to a salt water pool that had been set up for one of Canterlot Academy's exchange students, and while Coral supposedly didn't mind guests Twilight wasn't entirely sure how well Spike could swim. Actually, considering he liked to eat shiny rocks, he would probably sink like a stone. It only took a few seconds for her to get down to the pool, but by the time she had, Spike had already disappeared again.

Worried the baby dragon might have fallen in, she dived into the water before remembering she couldn't swim either, though she was apparently very good at sinking. Her mind was rapidly slipping into full blown panic mode as she struggled to try and swim back up, only to sink further. Soon enough she could feel a burning sensation in her lungs, and couldn't hold her breath any longer, her body forcing her to expel the air she had and suck in a lungful of... more air? How was that possible?

As her hooves touched the bottom of the pool, Twilight was perplexed. She certainly didn't know any water-breathing spells, yet here she was, under water breathing as normally as if it were air. Maybe someone else was using the spell on her? A safeguard the school set up? Whatever it was it was convenient. Now she just had to find a way out of the pool. Looking around she noticed a bubble coming towards her, but strangely, not rising. Soon enough she noticed the scaly body and tail sticking out of said bubble, swishing side to side as it moved with little difficulty.

"Spike!" She shouted, not even questioning how her voice was still intelligible. She had all but forgotten about looking for him, in her panic over nearly drowning. "What are you doing down here? I've been looking everywhere for you." She scolded. The little dragon just let out a growl and wiggled like a playful puppy before latching onto her mane.

"I think a better question is how you're down here without a bubble spell or an air mask." A familiar voice said from behind her, causing Twilight to spin around... and then just kind of flailed randomly when the water

decided to remind her her hooves had no traction down here. Laughing, the sea blue Angler grabbed hold of twilight with her magic and stopped her, turning her the right direction, so they were face to face.

"Um... Magic?" came Twilight's rather pathetic excuse for an explanation, eliciting another laugh, as she addressed who she assumed to be her classmate Azure Coral. Coral had always used her magic to take on the form of a unicorn when she left her pool to attend classes, so this was her first time seeing the real pony. ...well, merpony in this case. She wasn't actually that different, aside from her coat being scale rather than fur it was the same blue, And the same silver mirror adorned the sides of her tail. Her mane was still aqua, matching the fin on her back, and her bright green eyes and 'normal' forelegs were exactly the same. The biggest differences were the massive tail that took up the space where her hind legs should be, and the bobbing little light on the end of a tendril where her horn would go.

"Here. let me help, before you hurt yourself." Coral stated with a chuckle, her lure lighting up again as Twilight felt a strange sensation flow over her. Her tail, back legs and horn all felt strangely warm. As suddenly as it started it seemed to disappear, though Twilight's back legs still felt funny. A glance back told her why.

"That's your talent, isn't it?" Twilight asked, both shocked and fascinated by what she was seeing. Remembering how she'd seen Spike swim, she gave her tail an experimental swing, and immediately started moving, albeit unsteadily.

"That's right. It's only temporary though. It'll wear off if you leave the water." Coral explained as Twilight swam around, getting used to the new tail and way of moving. Watching her for a few minutes, Coral was surprised at how quickly she was adjusting. The spell was supposed to help, but it had taken her hours to get used to walking, she had expected the same to be true in reverse. Smiling, she spoke up. "Wow Twilight, I knew you were a quick learner, but not this quick."

"It's not that different from being in orbit, only that time it was my magic doing the... work... wait. When was that?" She commented, suddenly drifting to a halt and frowning in concentration. Lost in her thoughts she didn't notice Coral's expression. The merpony wasn't sure whether to believe her ears or not. Before she could snap out of her thoughts though, Coral's appearance returned to it's normal state.

"What about you, what's your specialty? Water breathing doesn't really fit any of the classes I see you go to." She questioned, deciding to change the subject, a bright smile on her face. Her guest though just seemed to freeze up.

“Oh... um, well... it’s nothing special just... uh... all of it, magic I mean... I think that’s it anyway. I mean, I’ve yet to find a type of spell I can’t use...” Twilight commented quietly, part of her wishing Coral had given her time to think up a convincing lie. Talking about her magic wasn’t exactly a topic she liked, it made her stand out too much. Drawing the envy of more than a few of her classmates. “...Please don’t hate me...”

“Why would I do that?” Coral questioned, shock clearly audible in her voice. For a full minute the two were silent before she spoke up again, sounding faintly frightened, “You’re... the only pony who has come down here.”

Having long ago resigned herself to the idea that she would probably never have real friends, having always moved around too much to really get to know anypony besides her sister, Twilight was surprised to find Coral in the same position and didn’t really know how to react. So, rather than come up with a response, she just stated the first excuse to derail the topic that came to mind.

“I should probably get back to the library, Mrs. Reader gets a bit cranky if I’m gone too long...” As soon as she said it, Twilight regretted the words. While it was true the librarian didn’t like the student volunteers disappearing on her, this was probably the worst time to mention going anywhere.

“Why don’t you come with me? It’s usually just me, Mrs. R. and Spike up there anyway.” She added quickly, trying to salvage her error. Fortunately, Coral had paid more attention to the invitation than the initial comment.

At first, she just liked the company. Later, having somepony to bounce ideas off of that could keep up with her, made studying go faster and led to ideas she would have missed. Then there were her attempts to copy Coral’s signature ‘mirror form’ spell, which didn’t exactly work, as Coral was terrible at explaining the spells mechanics. It wasn’t clear when Twilight had stopped seeing Coral as her classmate, and started seeing her as her bestfriend, but it had definitely happened. Not six weeks had gone past since they met and it was time for first semester exams.

Canterlot Academy was different than what Twilight had gotten used to at Celestia’s School, with just as many classes tailored to non-magical studies as magical, and even a flight track for the Pegasi attending the school. In spite of that it still had the same upper-class private school feel.

“Hey, Twilight. How did you do on the exams?” Coral called as she flew into the library, currently mimicking the form of a pegasus. Once

inside, she flopped down on a padded bench next to the reference section, giving her 'borrowed' wings a shake before closing them. A foal-sized purple form came running up to her and shouting "Heyoo!" in half-learned Equish. Grinning she playfully rubbed a hoof against the spines on his head, knocking half of them crooked. The dragon just grinned and hugged her neck.

"Hi, Spike."

"Top marks in every class." Came a voice from behind them, exhausted yet filled with pride, as she trotted up before collapsing on the floor next to the bench. "Twelve for twelve."

As she lay there grinning, Coral just stared at her.

"Twelve? You're only supposed to be scheduled for six classes..." She commented, confused.

"Can't afford private school. In exchange for paying my way, Celestia picked my schedule. She thinks I can handle night classes too, so I'm not going to let her down." Twilight explained, pulling a Sherlock Hooves novel from her saddlebags and opening it to the marked page. Typical Twilight, always with her nose in a book, even on her down time.

"No wonder all you do is read. Between that, your own studies, and taking care of Spike, that must be exhausting. How do you find time for hanging out with friends?" Coral questioned, impressed by her dedication, even if she considered it a bit excessive. Then again, Twilight was top of her classes for that very reason.

"I don't... Besides you and Spike, I don't really need anyone else anyway. When we were on the road it was just me, my parents, and Trixie, so I'm used to it." She commented casually, as if having only one or two other ponies to hang out with was perfectly normal, when to any other pony, because of the 'herd' mentality they all shared, having such a small circle of friends was virtually unheard of. Even for an outsider like Coral it seemed a strange sentiment, back home it was a common sight to see schools of merponies together, spending free time, working, or collaborating on some project. She couldn't get her head around the idea of Twilight not minding the solitude, being alone in an otherwise empty pool those first few months had driven her nuts.

"Twilight, that's just crazy. You can't just go through life without friends. I'm only going to be here another semester, the exchange program is only a year. Promise me you'll make some friends before I go." Coral insisted, glaring at her friend.

"But..." Twilight started to protest, but got cut off.

“Promise. It won't be easy, nothing worth having ever is. But try anyway.”

“I... Okay. I Promise.”

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“...make some friends!” Spike finished reading the scroll as Twilight leaned over the side of the carriage, groaning her disapproval of the ludicrous instructions from the Princess. For someone who was technically a teenager, he certainly still acted like a baby.

*Just send her a quick letter before heading out, it's not like she'll reply before I get back from Lyra's. Besides I'm sure there's somepony in her personal guard just for situations like this. Brilliant move Twilight. Not only did the princess not take the warning seriously, she's giving me busy-work because she thinks I have too much time on my hooves.*

“Make some friends...” She grumbled, annoyed. Venting her frustration at Spike, “What the hay are Lyra, Cloudkicker and Moondancer, lawn ornaments?!”

“Don't Lyra and Cloudkicker live here? I'm sure they could introduce you to a few ponies. Besides, the princess is sending us to stay in a library, doesn't that make you happy?” Spike offered, trying to cheer her up. Looking over at him, Twilight felt a smile creeping onto her face.

“Yes. Yes it does, you know why? Because I'm right! I'll check on the preparations as fast as I can, then get to the library to find some proof of Nightmare Moon's return.” She stated confidently, her gloomy disposition disappearing in a flash.

“But... when are you going to make friends like the princess said?”

“There's nothing wrong with the ones I have, why do I need more? Besides, my priorities here need to be my royal duties and averting a catastrophe. New friends can wait.” Twilight rolled her eyes at the last part of her reply.

Dismounting and offering a quick ‘Thank you, sirs.’ to the chariot drivers, she picked Spike up and sat him on her back before making a beeline for the nearest of her friends' houses. Her checklist would go faster with somepony who knew the town helping. She didn't even notice a frizzy maned pink pony do a double-take as she cantered past. Frozen in place and staring at her in confusion, mouth agape, as Twilight started checking the names on mailboxes before seeing “L. Heartstrings” on a box a few houses down, and trotting off towards it.



“That’s not how it’s supposed to go... You were supposed to say ‘Hello?’ so I could be all surprised... and... and...” The pink pony quietly protested to the oblivious Twilight’s retreating form, seeming to deflate and discolor. The now distant unicorn giving no indication she had even heard her.