**Crusading for a Turnabout Part 3**

# **Scene 1**

**Characters: Athena, Widget, Twilight, Phoenix, Apollo, Trucy, Scootaloo, Turning Page, Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle, Rarity, Applejack, Rainbow Dash, Bailiff**

***February 14, 8:47 AM***

***Ponyville District Court - Defendant Lobby No. 5***

*[Athena is by herself in the defendant lobby waiting for the others and preparing for the trial.]*

ATHENA  
[Nervous] Okay...okay... First trial in Equestria! No big deal. It’ll be just like any other.

WIDGET  
Except with magic… And two kids as defendants… And no help from Phoenix or Apollo…

ATHENA  
[Exasperated] Widget… Can you say something positive for a change?

WIDGET  
[Perky] I am positive that this trial will be anything but a cakewalk!

ATHENA  
[*Sigh*] Why do I keep you on all the time…?

*[Twilight arrives with Phoenix, Trucy, and Apollo.]*

TWILIGHT  
[Relieved] Athena! There you are! Where have you been all morning? We were looking everywhere for you!

ATHENA  
Sorry, Twilight, I got up early to run a few laps around the castle. As soon as I was done, I rushed over here.

TWILIGHT  
But, you were already up late last night! How many hours did you actually sleep?

ATHENA  
[Sheepish] Umm, about three, I’d say?

TWILIGHT  
… [*Sigh*] [Exasperated] Did you at least get something to eat?

ATHENA  
[Cheerful] I had something to drink after my laps! Nothing like some freshly squeezed orange juice after a good workout!

TWILIGHT  
[Mumbles] Just don’t let Applejack hear that.

ATHENA  
What was that?

TWILIGHT  
[Sudden] Nothing!

PHOENIX  
Trust me, Twilight, this is nothing out of the ordinary for Athena.

APOLLO  
[Snarkily] Not exactly a great idea to tire yourself out before the trial even starts, though, is it?

ATHENA  
[Indignant] Hey, at least I’m getting some exercise, Mr. Overnight Instant Noodles and Comics!

APOLLO  
[Indignant and defensive/passionate - emphasis on Manga] It’s called “MANGA,” and it’s art!

TRUCY  
[Interrupting] You two could learn a lot from me! I always make sure I’m well-rested before a performance, just to be safe!

ATHENA  
[*Sigh*][Exasperated] There’s a lot more on the line with this, though, Trucy.

PHOENIX  
[Concerned] You’re still worried about defending both Scootaloo and Turning Page, aren’t you?

ATHENA  
[Nervous] Y-Yeah, just a little bit. But I’m fine! I’m just… a little on edge, y’know?

TWILIGHT  
[Reassuring] Well, don’t worry, Athena. I’m going to be right there with you throughout the trial.

ATHENA  
You’re right. [Appreciative] Thanks again, Twilight, for agreeing to be my aide.

TWILIGHT  
No problem, Athena!

ATHENA  
[Self-deprecating] *(I’m certainly gonna need the help, that’s for sure.)*

APOLLO  
[Curious] Speaking of those kids, where are they? They should’ve been brought here by now.

ATHENA  
Apparently, the prosecutor wanted to have one last conversation with them before the trial started. They should be here any minute.

APOLLO  
Hopefully soon. The trial’s about to start.

PHOENIX  
By the way, Twilight, did you manage to get any info about the prosecutor?

TWILIGHT  
[Disheartened] … No.

ATHENA  
[Shocked] Wait, they didn’t even tell YOU?

TWILIGHT  
[Disheartened] No… They didn’t. [*Pause*] I’m sorry, Athena.

ATHENA  
Huh? For what?

TWILIGHT  
[Upset] For not being able to find out who the prosecutor is. I gave you my word that I would, after all…

ATHENA  
[Comforting] Twilight, it’s ok, really. I mean, it’s not like it would make THAT much of a difference, right?

ATHENA  
The second we walk through those doors, we’re gonna find out exactly who the prosecutor is, anyway.

PHOENIX  
[Encouraging] You did the best you could, Twilight. That’s all anyone could ask for.

TWILIGHT  
…

## *[Scootaloo and Turning Page enter]*

SCOOTALOO  
...

TURNING PAGE  
[Reverent at “Especially...”] Good morning, everypony. Especially to you, Princess Twilight.

*[Turning Page bows to Twilight]*

TWILIGHT  
[Uneasy] Turning, there’s no need to bow to me, really.

TURNING  
What do you mean? Of course there is! You’re taking time out of your busy schedule to help defend Ms. Scootaloo and me! I’m eternally grateful, Princess!

TWILIGHT  
[Surprised] !?

TWILIGHT  
Wait, how did you know I was assisting the defense?

SCOOTALOO  
!

TURNING PAGE  
[Caught off-guard, Stuttering. Neutral tone at “They…”] O-oh. Uhh… well, it was… the prosecutor. They told us to be aware of your presence today.

ATHENA  
[Annoyed] *(Why does it always feel like we’re being left in the dark?)*

ATHENA  
 [Pensive] *(We don’t know anything about the prosecution, but somehow they already know about us? AND they told Turning and Scootaloo?)*

TURNING PAGE  
Ms. Cykes? Princess Twilight?

TWILIGHT  
Yes, Turning?

TURNING PAGE  
[Determined] I… have a request. I want you both to focus on Ms. Scootaloo. I don’t care what happens to me, but… you MUSTdefend Scootaloo no matter what.

TURNING PAGE  
[Emphatic] She’s innocent! I know it! If worse comes to worse, let me take the blame, and just save her!

ATHENA & TWILIGHT  
WHAT!?

SCOOTALOO  
[Upset] Turning! No!

TWILIGHT  
[Shocked] Do you realize what’ll happen if we do that? If you’re found guilty, you’ll be banished from Equestria!

TURNING PAGE  
[Start off a bit unsure, transition to Determined at “But…”] I… I know that… But that’s a price I’m willing to pay, if it means Ms. Scootaloo is saved.

ATHENA  
[Grave] *(He’s… absolutely serious about this.)*

TURNING PAGE  
[Determined] Defend me if you must, but just know that if I think things start to look bad… I won’t hesitate to confess if it means saving her.

SCOOTALOO  
[Desperate and angry] No! You’re innocent, too! You can’t throw your life away just for me, Turning! I won’t let you!

SCOOTALOO  
[Sad] Besides... Think of your mom… She’s just lost your dad, after all. If you end up banished…

TURNING PAGE  
[Slightly caught off-guard] Ungh… She’ll… she’ll be fine. Besides, she’d understand. Sometimes, sacrifices need to be made.

TURNING PAGE  
[Firm] It’s my duty, as a future member of the Royal Guard. If even one life is spared, no matter whose, I’d have no regrets.

SCOOTALOO  
...

TURNING PAGE  
[Determined] Don’t worry, Scootaloo. If what the prosecutor said is true, then we shouldn’t have to worry at all.

TURNING PAGE  
I’m just stating this as a last resort, in case things don’t go according to plan.

SCOOTALOO  
[Worried] R-Right.

ATHENA  
[Annoyed] *(This mystery prosecutor is making secret plans with the defendants as well?!)*

ATHENA  
[Determined] *(… You know what? I’m not gonna just stand here twiddling my thumbs! It’s time for some answers!)*

ATHENA  
Alright, just who exactly IS the prosecutor? And what exactly did they say to you two?

*[Scootaloo and Turning Page look to each other]*

SCOOTALOO  
...

TURNING PAGE  
I’m sorry, Ms. Cykes, but we were told not to tell you anything about the prosecutor’s identity or plan.

ATHENA  
[Exasperated] S-Seriously?!

APOLLO  
[Curious] What’s the deal? Why are they being so secretive?

ATHENA  
[Annoyed] I don’t know, but it’s starting to get on my nerves…

*[Rainbow, Applejack, Rarity, Apple Bloom, and Sweetie Belle enter.]*

APPLE BLOOM  
Scoots! Turning! You guys doin’ alright?

SCOOTALOO  
[Nervous] Y-yeah, I’m fine, Apple Bloom.

TURNING PAGE  
I am, thank you for asking.

RAINBOW DASH  
Heya, squirt! You doing okay?

SCOOTALOO  
[Nervous] Y-yeah. I just can’t believe I’m going on trial…

RAINBOW DASH  
[Reassuring] Yeah, it feels pretty crazy, huh? It’s okay, though! You’ve made it through the worst part.

RAINBOW DASH  
All you gotta do now is sit tight and wait for Athena to prove that you didn’t do it!

ATHENA  
I’m glad you’ve all come out to support Scootaloo and Turning!

RARITY  
[Uncomfortable] Well, most of us, darling. A certain somepony didn’t want to get out of bed today. I practically had to drag her to the courthouse!

*[Rarity drags Sweetie Belle to the front where Scootaloo is]*

SCOOTALOO  
[Awkwardly] Oh… well… that makes sense, I guess. She was feeling sick yesterday, wasn’t she?

SWEETIE BELLE  
…

APPLE BLOOM, TWILIGHT AND PHOENIX  
…

APOLLO  
[Awkwardly] Uh... she doesn’t seem like she’s ill at all-

ATHENA  
[Nervously interrupting. Quieter, through gritted teeth at “Be quiet!”] Apollo! Be quiet!

SCOOTALOO  
[Worried] ...Ms. Cykes? What’s going on?

ATHENA  
[Nervous] W-well, uh, you see-

WIDGET  
[Upset] Sweetie Belle didn’t want to help us investigate the case!

RAINBOW, TRUCY, AND RARITY  
!?

SCOOTALOO  
[Disheartened] What...?

ATHENA  
No! That’s… Argh! Widget!

RARITY  
[Concerned] Sweetie Belle… What’s this about?

SWEETIE BELLE  
[Frantic] Oh, no no no! I-It’s not like that at all! It’s not like I DON’T want to help!

SWEETIE BELLE  
I’m just... so sure that Scootaloo is innocent, and I know that Princess Twilight and Ms. Cykes will be able to prove it without my help!

RARITY  
[Concerned] Sweetie?

SWEETIE BELLE  
[Falters] That’s… how it works, right? In court? The truth will come out no matter what?

SCOOTALOO  
[Upset] … You didn’t even want to try and help, though?

APPLE BLOOM  
[Angry] Sweetie Belle! What’re you talkin’ about? We’re the Cutie Mark Crusaders! We do everything together! That includes helping each other out, no matter what!

APPLE BLOOM  
We’ve had each other’s backs ever since we started looking for our Cutie Marks!

APPLE BLOOM  
That’s the whole reason why we’re friends in the first place! So why aren’t ya helping now!?

SWEETIE BELLE  
[Nervous] Ah… I…

*[Sweetie Belle rubs her foreleg]*

APPLEJACK  
[Stern] Apple Bloom. Sweetie Belle. I know this is a rough time for y'all, but this ain’t the time or place to be havin’ this discussion.

SWEETIE BELLE  
I want to help Scootaloo, I really do… But considering what she did, I… didn’t want to get in the way, and make things worse... [*Under her breath*] like you did...

SWEETIE BELLE  
!!!

TWILIGHT AND ATHENA  
!?

TURNING PAGE  
…

APPLE BLOOM  
[Insulted] What’s that supposed to mean!?

RARITY  
[Shocked] Sweetie Belle! Apologise to Apple Bloom!

SCOOTALOO  
 [Upset, emphasis on I] What are you talking about, Sweetie Belle!? What did I do?

SWEETIE BELLE  
[Agitated, Frantic] You know what you did! You STOLE some fabric from Carousel Boutique the other night!

SWEETIE BELLE  
You went into the forest, and gave it to Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon, didn’t you?! In exchange for your scooter?!

SCOOTALOO  
I… I...

APPLEJACK  
[Firmly] Girls! That’s enough! This ain’t-

PHOENIX  
Wait a minute. Sweetie Belle, how did you know that Scootaloo stole the fabric in the first place?

SWEETIE BELLE  
I… urk!

RAINBOW DASH  
[Realises] Yeah! How did you know about that!?

*[Sweetie Belle realizes the slip up she made, and attempts to run away, only to be stopped by Rainbow Dash]*

RAINBOW DASH  
[Aggressive] What are you hiding from us, Sweetie Belle!?

RARITY  
[Assertive] Rainbow! That is quite enough!

RAINBOW DASH  
[Angry] No! She’s clearly keeping quiet about something, and if it can help Scootaloo, then she needs to tell us!

APPLEJACK  
[Stern] YOU need to calm down, Rainbow. You’re not helping anypony by scarin’ Sweetie Belle!

SWEETIE BELLE  
[Scared] I… I just knew, alright? Something didn’t seem right when Turning showed up in the middle of the night to say hello, so I figured something was up.

SWEETIE BELLE  
 I checked around the boutique after he left, and noticed one roll of golden silk was missing. That’s all!

RARITY  
There you go, Rainbow. See? A perfectly reasonable explanation.

RAINBOW  
[Aggressive at I think] I don’t buy it… Look at her - she’s shaking like a leaf! I think she’s still hiding something! [*Pause*] Now tell us what happened! You followed them there, didn’t you?!

APPLEJACK  
[Demanding] Rainbow! Back off!

SWEETIE BELLE  
[Desperately] I… I… Look, I need to go. I’ll… [*sniffle*] I’ll see you all in there, okay?

*[Sweetie Belle leaves quickly]*

SCOOTALOO AND APPLE BLOOM  
[Upset] Sweetie Belle!

RARITY  
[Stern after But] [*Sigh*] I’ll go after her. But, you and I are going to have a serious talk later, Rainbow Dash!

*[Rarity leaves in a huff]*

APPLEJACK  
[Exasperated] Consarn it, Rainbow…

RAINBOW  
[Annoyed] Rrgh…

TRUCY AND APOLLO  
…

ATHENA  
What a mess…

APOLLO  
[regretful] I shouldn’t have said that. I should NOT have said that.

TRUCY  
[Uncomfortable] I just don’t get it… Why would Sweetie Belle doubt Scootaloo? Aren’t they all good friends?

TWILIGHT  
[Upset] They are, but… I… I don’t know…

PHOENIX  
[Unhappy] Even close friends can still doubt each other… But, not typically without a VERY good reason...

## *[The bailiff arrives, interrupting what is going on.]*

BAILIFF  
If I could have everypony’s attention, the trial is about to begin. Will the defendants and their attorney please make their way into the courtroom?

ATHENA  
*(Ack! Here we go! Deep breaths, Athena!)*

WIDGET  
Palms… sweaty!

APOLLO  
[Reassuring] Don’t worry! You’ve got this! Remember to focus, and you’ll be able to prove your clients’ innocence.

TRUCY  
[Earnest] Just… believe in yourself, okay?

ATHENA  
[Grateful] Thanks, you guys...

PHOENIX  
I know this is a big step for you as a lawyer, but we all start somewhere.

PHOENIX  
It’s time for you to take that next leap forward. I’m confident you’ll succeed. You’ll always have my full support.

ATHENA  
[Close to tears] Boss...

ATHENA  
[*Clears throat*] We got this, right Twilight?

TWILIGHT  
[Initially startled. Determined at Now] O- Of course, Athena! Now, let's go!

# 

# **Scene 2**

**Characters: Athena, Twilight, Princess Luna, Judge, Private Eye, Gallery Pony 1, Gallery Pony 2, Gallery Pony 3**

***February 14, 9:00 AM***

***Ponyville District Court - Courtroom No. 5***

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble….***

JUDGE  
Court is now in session for the trial of Scootaloo and Turning Page. Are the prosecution and defense ready?

*[Prosecution bench is empty]*

ATHENA  
*(That’s weird, the prosecution is missing…)(Wait, why’s the judge still here?)*

*[Athena realizes that the Judge is still presiding in Equestria.]*

JUDGE  
[Demanding] Prosecution! Defense! Are you ready?!

ATHENA  
[Startled] Y-Yes, Your Honor, but… um… you’re still here, then?

JUDGE  
[Cheery] Oh ho ho! You didn’t think I’d go straight back home, did you? I figured I’d just take a short vacation in this wonderful world!

ATHENA  
*(Is it really a vacation if you’re still working…?)*

JUDGE  
[Pleased] I truly do love it here in Equestria! After I’m done with today’s trial, I plan on doing some sightseeing for a few days before I head back home.

*[Camera swaps to Athena]*

JUDGE  
I know I said I wasn’t interested before, but I’m thinking of checking out that race Prince Blueblood mentioned.

JUDGE  
I’ll admit, I don’t have much experience with them, but I suppose it could be fun to watch.

*[Camera swaps to Twilight, surprised pose]*

JUDGE  
Princess Twilight, if you know of any other sights I could catch in Equestria, I’d greatly appreciate being told about them.

TWILIGHT  
[Confused] I’ll… let you know, Your Honor.

ATHENA  
[Curious] So... uh, why are you here exactly, Your Honor? In court, I mean?

JUDGE  
Well, actually, it was Princess Celestia who asked me to preside over this trial.

TWILIGHT  
[Thunderstruck] Wait, PRINCESS CELESTIA asked you? Why?

JUDGE  
I’m sorry, Ms. Sparkle, but I’m afraid I don’t have that answer.

JUDGE  
The letter I received simply asked if I would be willing to preside over the trial, and I agreed.

ATHENA  
[Inquisitive] *(That’s odd… Wasn’t that supposed to be one of Princess Celestia’s responsibilities?)*

ATHENA  
*(The only reason she wasn’t the judge for the previous trial was because Twilight specifically requested it.)*

ATHENA  
[Inquisitive] *(But that doesn’t seem to be the case this time… Just what is going on here?)*

JUDGE  
In any case, we should get started with the trial. Prosecution, I have still yet to hear your answer. Are you ready?

*[Prosecution bench is still empty.]*

ATHENA  
*(Forget hearing their answer. I’d settle for just seeing them!)*

JUDGE  
Hmmm… If the prosecution is not prepared, then it would appear that I will have to postpone the trial until they arrive.

JUDGE  
Very well… Court is--

LUNA  
***HOLD IT!***

ATHENA  
!?

TWILIGHT  
!?

JUDGE  
!?

## *[Luna finally enters the courtroom, before moving to the Prosecutor’s Bench.]*

## 

## LUNA My apologies, Your Honor. The prosecution… is ready.

ATHENA  
*(About time…)* Hmm? *(Wait! She has wings… and a horn… Does that mean...)*

JUDGE  
Oh? [Curious] And who might you be?

LUNA  
I am Princess Luna. A pleasure to meet you, Your Honor.

ATHENA  
[Shocked] A-A princess!?

JUDGE  
Ah, yes, I do recall receiving a message that the original prosecutor for this case chose to allocate their duties to another.

JUDGE  
Regardless, that is no excuse to be late to court, prosecu-- erm, Princess.

LUNA  
Just “Prosecutor” will do, Your Honor, and I understand. My sincerest apologies.

LUNA  
A colleague of mine had something they wished to discuss with me, and so it delayed my arrival. Nevertheless, the prosecution is now prepared.

JUDGE  
Hmm, very well.

ATHENA  
*(Princess Luna, huh? So she IS an alicorn, just like Twilight. I suppose that makes sense, given that she’s a princess and all.)*

ATHENA  
*(That name, though… it sounds familiar… Wait!)*

***[Flashback]***

TWILIGHT  
[Neutral Happy Turned pose] *It was where Equestria’s current rulers - Princesses Celestia and Luna - used to live.*

***[Flashback Ends]***

ATHENA  
[Surprised] *(Oh, that’s right! She’s one of Equestria’s leaders.)*[Frustrated] *(Ugh… just my luck! How am I supposed to keep up with the ruler of an entire country!?)*

ATHENA  
[Calmer, but still slightly caught off-guard]*(*[*Sigh*] *Okay, relax! Just... focus on the case.*[*Pause*] *Still, something about her appearance… Have I seen her somewhere before…?)*

ATHENA  
Hey, Twilight, have--

*Athena looks over to Twilight, mouth agape.*

ATHENA  
Twilight? What’s wrong?

TWILIGHT  
[Shocked] P-Princess Luna!? What are YOU doing here!?

LUNA  
[Kindly] Ah, Twilight Sparkle. I heard that you would be assisting the defense today.

TWILIGHT  
Heard? [Snarkily] I think it’s more likely that you found out during your nightly stroll, am I right?

LUNA  
Heh, I should’ve expected you’d know. You’ve always been the clever one.

TWILIGHT  
...

ATHENA  
[Confused] *(What the heck are they talking about?)*

LUNA  
[Serious] Nevertheless, Ms. Sparkle, the reason I’m here is quite simple: it is my duty to uphold the laws of Equestria. I am simply fulfilling that duty.

LUNA  
Regardless of whom it is I may be prosecuting, be they adult or child, friend or foe, I plan to fulfill my responsibility to the fullest.

LUNA  
But of course, being the clever pony that you are, I’m sure you could’ve guessed that, couldn’t you?

*[Twilight looks down, dejected.]*

TWILIGHT  
...

ATHENA  
[Upset] *(Twilight…)*

LUNA  
As for you, defense.

ATHENA  
Huh? M-me?

LUNA  
I must confess, I WAS hoping that the Blue Phoenix would stand against me.

ATHENA  
 [Taken aback] B-Blue Phoenix?

LUNA  
His efforts during the TS-5 case, and the case from two days ago, were certainly admirable, twice proving there WASno murder in our peaceful country.

LUNA  
So, imagine my surprise when I learned that YOUwould be the lead on this case instead.

LUNA  
You, whom I have only heard of in hearsay and whispers that began spreading after the trial in Manehattan.

LUNA  
I look forward to seeing if you can hold yourself up to the same standards that the Blue Phoenix has set.

ATHENA   
  
[Confident] Hmph. You’ll see. I WILL live up to his example. With Twilight by my side, Scootaloo and Turning Page are as good as free.

LUNA  
Is that so? Well, that’s wonderful to hear.

JUDGE  
And with that, let us resume this trial. Prosecutor Luna, you may make your opening statement.

LUNA  
At once, Your Honor.

ATHENA  
  
[Pumped up] Alright, let’s do this! Ready, Twilight?

TWILIGHT  
…

ATHENA  
[Concerned] Twilight?

TWILIGHT  
Huh? Oh… sorry. Right, let’s get this started.

ATHENA  
…

LUNA  
Today’s proceedings shall center around the murder of Royal Order, who had just returned home from Canterlot the night he was killed.

LUNA  
He was a member of the Royal Guard.

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble…***

GALLERY PONY 1  
What? A guardspony was killed!?

GALLERY PONY 2  
Not just killed! He was murdered!

GALLERY PONY 3  
What does this mean!? Are we still safe!?

LUNA  
[Desk slam] [Firmly] Rest assured, my little ponies, that there is no cause for alarm. We anticipated this would be the public’s reaction to this news.

LUNA  
That is why we withheld this information until we had all the facts.

ATHENA  
*(That’s right. Private Eye mentioned something about keeping the victim’s identity a secret from the public. Looks like that was the right call.)*

LUNA  
Now that we have investigated this matter in full, we are ready to present the truth behind this stallion’s death to the court, and the public.

LUNA  
I will begin by submitting the victim’s autopsy report.

JUDGE  
The court accepts the report as evidence.

**Added to Court Record: Royal Order’s Autopsy Report - Time of death was between 9:30 pm and 10:30 pm. Cause of death was a stab wound to the right temple. Death was instantaneous. Several post-mortem stab wounds were also found at the same location. In addition, the victim suffered a large bruise on the left side of his torso ante-mortem, and was under the effects of poison joke, causing weak knees.**

LUNA  
The time of death is estimated to be on the evening of February 12th, between 9:30pm, when the victim was last seen, and 10:30pm, when the body was discovered.

LUNA  
The coroner was able to confirm this during their examination of the body.

LUNA  
Death came as the result of a single stab wound to the right side of the victim’s head.

JUDGE  
A single lethal strike, then…

LUNA  
It’s not quite that simple, Your Honor. There was only ONE visible wound, but he appears to have been stabbed at least twice.

LUNA  
Whether or not this was caused by a single weapon or multiple weapons is unclear.

LUNA  
What we DO know for certain is that the victim died instantly after just a single stab. All subsequent stabs the victim suffered were post-mortem.

ATHENA  
*(In other words, the only thing we need to be concerned with is figuring out how the victim suffered his initial stab wound - THAT’S what killed him.)*

LUNA  
Additionally, we discovered a large bruise on the left side of the victim’s torso, indicating that he was struck by some sort of object.

LUNA  
However, unlike the subsequent stab wounds, the victim received this bruise BEFORE he died.

JUDGE  
Hmm, I see.

ATHENA  
*(What I’m still wondering is… Why did the killer stab the victim in the head, of all places? That’s way too bizarre to not be important.)*

JUDGE  
There’s still one more point in this autopsy report that confuses me, though.

LUNA  
I assume you are referring to the affliction the victim was suffering?

JUDGE  
That’s correct. This… poison joke. I’ve done my research on Equestria, but I’m afraid my studies didn’t quite cover this topic.

LUNA  
There’s no need to worry, Your Honor. I shall explain. Poison joke is a rare type of flower, native only to the Everfree Forest.

LUNA  
It is relatively harmless, but should one so much as touch this plant, they will be afflicted with a bizarre condition, unique to every individual.

ATHENA  
*(Yeah, this is all stuff that Twilight mentioned yesterday.)*

LUNA  
In the case of Royal Order, the affliction he suffered was weak knees.

LUNA  
Ironic, that a member of the royal guard would be afflicted with a condition that makes it difficult to stand tall.

JUDGE  
Hmm, indeed.

LUNA  
As for the body itself, it was discovered at the foot of the bridge leading to the Castle of the Two Sisters.

LUNA  
As you can see on this diagram, the castle ruins lie at the very end of the path that cuts through the Everfree Forest.

LUNA  
We also have an additional diagram here that gives us a closer look at the crime scene itself.

LUNA  
The “X” we’ve marked on here is representative of where the body was at the time of its discovery.

LUNA  
Lastly, the prosecution wishes to submit this photo of the crime scene to the court.

LUNA  
The victim’s body had already been removed for autopsy by the time it was taken, but we laid out tape to mark its exact positioning.

JUDGE  
Very well. The court accepts the diagrams and photo as evidence.

**[Added to Court Record - Crime Scene Photo: A photo depicting the scene of the crime. The body has already been removed.]**

LUNA  
The ponies accused of committing this wretched crime are Turning Page, the son of the victim, and Scootaloo, a friend of Turning’s.

JUDGE  
It is rather difficult for me to believe that two children would do something like this, though.

JUDGE  
Not to mention the fact that one of the two standing accused is the victim's own son!

LUNA  
It’s certainly a rather tough pill to swallow, but I am certain that, in time, you will come to see that these two were the only ones capable of committing this crime.

JUDGE  
Hmmm... You’d better have some pretty substantial evidence to back up your claims, Prosecutor Luna. These are children’s lives at stake.

LUNA  
Trust me, Your Honor, it brings me no pleasure to prosecute these young souls. However, justice must still be served.

LUNA  
In the eyes of the law, everypony is equal. “Age” is a non-issue. I trust that you, too, know this, and will remain impartial in your judgement?

JUDGE  
Certainly, Prosecutor Luna. That is the duty of a judge, after all.

LUNA  
I am glad to hear that, Your Honor.

JUDGE  
Well then, defense, what is your stance regarding the charges filed against your clients?

ATHENA  
[Confidently] Your Honor, we stand by our plea of “Not Guilty.” The defendants, Turning Page and Scootaloo, are both completely innocent of the charges filed against them!

LUNA  
…

JUDGE  
The court acknowledges the defense’s position. Now then, let’s hear from the prosecution’s first witness.

LUNA  
Your Honor, the prosecution would like to call the detective in charge of this investigation, Private Eye, to the stand.

JUDGE  
Very well.

ATHENA  
*(All right. Private Eye’s up first, then. Hopefully he doesn’t say anything too damaging.)*

## *[Private Eye takes the stand]*

LUNA  
Witness, please state your name and occupation for the record.

PRIVATE EYE  
My name is Private Eye, Princess. Detective. And might I say, good morning to everyone present. Princess Twilight, Ms. Cykes, My Lord.

ATHENA AND TWILIGHT  
[Caught off-guard] Um… good morning.

JUDGE  
Lord, huh? Hmm… I could get used to that.

ATHENA  
*(Aaaand, we’ve already lost him.)*

LUNA  
The prosecution’s first course of action will be to make the actions of the victim clear to the court.

LUNA  
Detective, please testify in regards to this matter.

PRIVATE EYE  
At once, Your Highness.

# **Scene 3**

**Characters: Athena, Twilight, Turning Page, Princess Luna, Zecora, Judge, Private Eye**

***Witness Testimony***

**-- The Victim’s Movements --**

*The victim, Royal Order, was stationed in Canterlot until late afternoon on the day of his murder.*

*After his shift ended, he boarded a train and arrived in Ponyville at around a quarter past nine that night.*

*Upon his return home, he was informed of Turning’s whereabouts, and decided to head into the Everfree Forest to find him.*

*When he arrived at the Castle of the Two Sisters, he was ambushed and murdered.*

LUNA  
Our investigation determined that Turning Page had gone off into the forest with Scootaloo that night for currently unknown reasons.

LUNA  
We believe this is why the victim was in the forest that night: he was trying to save his son.

JUDGE  
I see. You’d certainly need a very good reason to be willing to head that far into the forest.

JUDGE  
If I recall correctly, that place is filled with all kinds of dangerous creatures, isn’t it?

LUNA  
It is indeed, Your Honor. Figuring out why the victim chose to go so far into the forest was one of the key questions we had during our investigation.

LUNA  
It was the statement of one Ms. Devotion that cleared the matter up for us.

JUDGE  
Ms.… Devotion?

PRIVATE EYE  
The victim’s wife, Fair Devotion. She’s a substitute teacher at the local schoolhouse.

PRIVATE EYE  
While her husband was away in Canterlot, Ms. Devotion would take care of her son all by herself.

PRIVATE EYE  
This is on top of her demanding role as a teacher and member of the Ponyville school board, you see.

JUDGE  
Hmm, she certainly sounds like a very kind, hard-working mare.

LUNA  
…

PRIVATE EYE  
She was home when the victim returned, and it was she who told him that Turning Page had gone into the forest that night.

ATHENA  
So, the reason the victim went into the forest was to chase after his son?

PRIVATE EYE  
That is what the evidence and statement currently point to, yes.

ATHENA  
*(It’s hard to argue against that. I guess in that case, I’ll just see what other information I can draw out of Private Eye.)*

JUDGE  
Now, Ms. Cykes, you may begin your cross-examination.

***Cross Examination***

**-- The Victim’s Movements --**

### *The victim, Royal Order, was stationed in Canterlot until late afternoon on the day of his murder.*

ATHENA  
***HOLD IT!*** What was he doing there?

PRIVATE EYE  
He was performing his routine duties as a guard. Nothing out of the ordinary.

ATHENA  
What did those duties entail?

PRIVATE EYE  
Monitoring doors, patrolling hallways, the standard fare.

ATHENA  
So, he was just your average, everyday guard?

PRIVATE EYE  
I suppose you could say that, yes.

ATHENA  
There was nothing special about his rank, his title… anything at all?

PRIVATE EYE  
… Well, as a detective, I can only know so much. What do you think, Princess Luna?

LUNA  
… It’s just as Detective Eye says.

LUNA  
As someone who gave the victim his orders, I can say with certainty that there was nothing that set him apart from the other guards in our entourage.

LUNA  
If you’re looking for a motive, defense, I’m sorry to say that you will not find it here.

ATHENA  
Grh!

PRIVATE EYE  
Well, there you have it. You couldn’t ask for a clearer answer than that.

ATHENA  
*(Shoot. I was really hoping I would get something out of that.)*

ATHENA *(If he was just an ordinary guard, then that eliminates any potential motive that could be tied to his rank.)*

ATHENA  
*(Still, though, the way Private Eye shifted my question to Princess Luna… Something still doesn’t seem right here.)*

JUDGE  
Defense, please stop staring at the witness, and continue your cross-examination!

ATHENA  
Ah! Uh, y-yes! S-Sorry, Your Honor.

ATHENA  
*(I’ll have to look into that later. Gotta continue pressing the detective for information now.)*

### *After his shift ended, he boarded a train and arrived in Ponyville at around a quarter past nine that night.*

ATHENA  
***HOLD IT!*** How long had he stayed in Canterlot?

PRIVATE EYE  
Nearly a month, according to our findings.

ATHENA  
[Shocked] A-A month?!

LUNA  
Royal Order often spent many weeks in Canterlot with little time to himself.

LUNA  
Even when offered extended sabbaticals, he chose to forgo them in service to the crown.

JUDGE  
Hmm, this fellow seemed like quite the workaholic.

ATHENA  
[Snarkily] *(Says the guy working on his “vacation.”)*

LUNA  
He was simply honor-bound to serving Equestria and maintaining harmony amongst its citizens.

LUNA  
Whenever he wasn’t on active duty, he spent all of his time with his family in Ponyville.

PRIVATE EYE  
[Sorrowful] He certainly was the epitome of a royal guardspony. His death will surely echo a great sense of loss for both his country… and those close to him…

ATHENA  
*(Hm?!* *That’s odd… That sounded a lot more sorrowful than anything I would expect from Private Eye.)*

PRIVATE EYE  
The day he was murdered was no different than any of his other off-duty times: he returned to Ponyville to visit his family.

PRIVATE EYE  
According to our investigation into the ticket purchases and train schedules for February 12th, Royal’s train arrived in Ponyville at a quarter past nine.

PRIVATE EYE  
He then headed straight home, arriving about ten minutes later.

JUDGE  
And what did the victim do once he got there?

### *Upon his return home, he was informed of Turning’s whereabouts, and decided to head into the Everfree Forest to find him.*

### 

### ATHENA ***HOLD IT!*** So, it was Fair Devotion who told the victim that Turning Page had gone into the forest?

PRIVATE EYE  
Indeed. We heard this from Ms. Devotion herself.

ATHENA  
And how did she know what her son was doing? I doubt she would’ve allowed Turning to go somewhere that dangerous.

PRIVATE EYE  
During our investigation of the victim’s house, we found a note written in Turning’s horn-writing confessing to his actions that night.

PRIVATE EYE  
Ms. Devotion knew where her son had gone because of this note.

**Added to Court Record - Turning’s Note: A note left by Turning on the night of the murder. Reads: “Went to the Everfree Forest. Be back soon.”**

ATHENA  
“Went to the Everfree Forest. Be back soon.” *(Succinct and straight to the point. Just what I would expect from Turning.)*

ATHENA  
If Ms. Devotion was the one who discovered this note, why didn’t SHE go after him as soon as she found it?

PRIVATE EYE  
As you said yourself, the Everfree Forest is a dangerous place, especially after dark.

PRIVATE EYE  
She knew Royal Order would be coming home soon, so she decided to wait until the more able-bodied pony had arrived before attempting to follow after her son.

PRIVATE EYE  
According to Ms. Devotion, when Royal Order offered to go find him, she insisted on going with her husband, but he told her to stay put.

PRIVATE EYE  
She reluctantly complied, and watched him leave at around half past nine. That was the last time she ever saw him.

JUDGE  
[shudders] Oooh, that sounds rather ominous. Like something right out of a horror movie.

ATHENA  
Did the victim make any stops on his way to the forest?

PRIVATE EYE  
I beg your pardon?

ATHENA  
I’m just wondering if it’s possible that the victim went somewhere else before entering the Everfree Forest.

PRIVATE EYE  
Hmm, I’m afraid we neglected to look into this matter, so I cannot say anything for certain.

LUNA  
The forest entrance is roughly 20 minutes away from the victim’s house.

LUNA  
The crime scene is about 35 minutes away from the entrance. The body was discovered at 10:30pm.

LUNA  
[Slight taunting tone] Do the math, attorney. Do you really think the victim could’ve dawdled before entering the forest?

ATHENA  
Considering there was only five extra minutes to do something else, I highly doubt it…

TWILIGHT  
Well, not so fast, Prosecutor Luna.

ATHENA  
Twilight?

LUNA  
What is it, Ms. Sparkle?

TWILIGHT  
The victim was a unicorn, wasn’t he? Did he, by any chance, know how to teleport?

ATHENA  
!!! *(That’s right. I have to keep in mind that this is a world of magic. Not everything here follows the rules of my own world.)*

LUNA  
… Detective. Do you have the answer to Princess Twilight’s question?

PRIVATE EYE  
I do indeed, Your Highness. Royal Order was an incredibly gifted unicorn. Teleportation was just one of many spells he had long since mastered.

TWILIGHT  
So, if he could teleport, then the time it would’ve taken the victim to travel between locations is irrelevant, wouldn’t you say?

LUNA  
You have a point, but, as I’m sure one as proficient in magic as yourself is aware, one cannot teleport to locations that they’ve never been.

ATHENA  
!!! You mean…

LUNA  
We could not find any indication that the victim had ever been to the Castle of the Two Sisters before this incident.

LUNA  
The best we could uncover were multiple instances of him and his son going to Froggy Bottom Bog, to spar with the monsters that inhabit the area.

ATHENA  
Froggy Bottom Bog, huh… I think I heard about that place yesterday. It’s down the path that leads to the right from the crossroads, isn’t it?

PRIVATE EYE  
Quite so. You can see it here on the map we drew of the forest.

PRIVATE EYE  
 If one were to walk to Froggy Bottom Bog, they would first have to travel to the crossroads to get there.

ATHENA  
So, that means he could at least teleport as far as the crossroads, right? He must have been there before when traveling to his sparring sessions.

ATHENA  
If so, then he may have teleported to the crossroads first, and walked the rest of the way to the castle. This would make his travel time 30 minutes at most.

LUNA  
… I suppose that’s a reasonable assumption to make. Then, are you saying that between 9:30 and 10:00, the victim was off doing something else? Why?

LUNA  
His son had gone off into the Everfree Forest alone at night. Do you really think he’d waste time delaying his entrance into the forest?

LUNA  
If anything, he would’ve used the extra half-hour he had to search elsewhere in the woods. After all, it’s not like he could’ve known exactly where his son was.

ATHENA  
Rgh!

ATHENA *(Yeah… That’s true. It’s kind of hard to believe that Royal Order would’ve risked his son’s safety by taking a detour, given what we’ve heard about him so far.)*

ATHENA  
Twilight, any ideas?

TWILIGHT  
Unfortunately, none. I didn’t think this line of questioning was necessarily going to reveal anything case-breaking, but still…

TWILIGHT  
Knowing that the victim had a half-hour period where he could act freely, without heading to the crime scene…

TWILIGHT  
I think that might be something we’ll want to keep in mind.

ATHENA  
I agree. It might not be relevant, but you never know.

JUDGE  
Ms. Cykes! Ms. Sparkle! If you are done whispering over there, then let’s continue with the testimony!

ATHENA  
Sorry, Your Honor. Private, please continue.

### *When he arrived at the base of the bridge, in front of the Castle of the Two Sisters, he was ambushed and murdered.*

ATHENA  
***HOLD IT!*** He was ambushed?

PRIVATE EYE  
We believe so, yes.

ATHENA  
What led you to that conclusion?

PRIVATE EYE  
It was the bruise on the left side of his body. We believe that the assailant first delivered the blow to his torso, in order to knock the victim to the ground.

PRIVATE EYE  
This was then followed up by at least two stabs to the head, the first of which must have killed the victim.

PRIVATE EYE  
If the victim had been on guard at the time, there isn’t a chance somepony of his caliber would have been knocked down so easily. That is why we believe he was taken by surprise.

ATHENA  
But walking through that dark, dangerous forest in the middle of the night… Wouldn’t the victim have been on guard regardless?

PRIVATE EYE  
Perhaps… But you are forgetting something else, Ms. Cykes: the victim was suffering from the effects of poison joke.

ATHENA  
[Shocked] Ah! Weak knees!

PRIVATE EYE  
Exactly. The poison joke caused the victim’s legs to be weaker than normal.

PRIVATE EYE  
So, when his assailant struck him, even if he was completely on guard, it’s hard to believe he WOULDN’T have been knocked to the ground.

ATHENA  
*[sighs] (I guess that’s true…)*

JUDGE  
That certainly seems to make sense. And what weapon are you proposing was used to knock the victim down?

PRIVATE EYE  
We believe it was the sword of the defendant Turning Page, My Lord.

JUDGE  
[Alarmed] One of the defendants… HAS A SWORD?!

LUNA  
A wooden one, Your Honor, no need to worry. I have it right here.

LUNA  
The defendant has been known to carry this sword everywhere he goes. That night was no different.

LUNA  
According to our witness, when she last saw the defendant, his sword was still in one piece, yet the sword you see now is broken.

LUNA  
Turning Page’s mother has also confirmed that his sword was undamaged earlier that day.

LUNA  
The prosecution contends that the sword broke when it was used to attack the victim.

JUDGE  
I see. That’s definitely a strong possibility.

ATHENA  
***OBJECTION!*** Wait, hold on! That’s NOT how the sword broke!

JUDGE  
Oh?

ATHENA  
Yes, it’s true that the sword is broken right now, but that’s because-

LUNA  
***OBJECTION!*** Before you explain it to us, defense, I would like you to tell us from where you learned this alternate interpretation.

ATHENA  
From… where? Well, uh, I guess it was from Turning Page.

LUNA  
From the defendant himself, in other words? Do you truly believe that story to be reliable, in that case?

ATHENA  
[Annoyed] Urgh!

LUNA  
Unless you have some proof to back up his story, I think you’d do well to keep it to yourself for now.

ATHENA  
??? [Confused] *(For now?)*

LUNA  
In any case, the prosecution recognizes that our own evidence on the matter is circumstantial. More definitive evidence may yet prove our claim to be false.

LUNA  
At the moment, however, this interpretation of the facts surrounding the sword is the most likely scenario.

JUDGE  
The court agrees with the prosecution.

ATHENA  
*(No! I know that’s not how it happened! That sword broke when Turning used it to attack those blackmailing bullies!)*

ATHENA  
*(But unless I can find some proof of that, I’m not going to be able to convince anyone!)*

ATHENA *[Frustrated] (Argh, this sucks! If only I could get those two on the stand! One of them might have a bruise somewhere that I could point out!)*

ATHENA *([Sigh] That’ll have to wait until later, though. I have to finish this testimony first.)*

JUDGE  
So I assume this sword of the defendant’s was also used to stab the victim?

LUNA  
It was not, Your Honor. There wasn’t a single trace of blood on the sword. No forensic spell or potion could reveal even a single drop.

JUDGE  
But then… What WAS used to stab the victim?

ATHENA  
*(Oh boy, here it comes…)*

LUNA  
It was a possession belonging to the other defendant: Ms. Scootaloo. She stabbed him using her scooter.

JUDGE  
A… A scooter?!

***Rubble, Rubble, Rubble, Rubble…***

JUDGE  
How… How is that even possible?! Scooters aren’t sharp… are they?

PRIVATE EYE  
Not normally, My Lord, but in this case, the scooter in question was broken.

JUDGE  
Broken… how?

PRIVATE EYE  
The left handlebar was snapped off, leaving behind a sharp, exposed bolt that could easily puncture a body.

LUNA  
You can see it in the photo I submitted earlier, Your Honor.

LUNA  
The scooter was unquestionably at the scene, and I have it recorded right here that the bolt itself was covered in blood.

LUNA  
When tested, we discovered that the blood was indeed the victim’s.

JUDGE  
WHAT?!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble…***

JUDGE  
*[Gavel slams]* Order! Order, I say! I must admit, as unbelievable as it appeared to be at first, the more I listen, the more it seems like these two kids really DID commit this crime.

PRIVATE EYE  
As regrettable as it is to think so, the evidence certainly points to that conclusion.

PRIVATE EYE  
The victim arrived on the scene, and was ambushed by his son, Turning Page.

PRIVATE EYE  
He used his sword to hit his father’s left side. This attack caused the sword to break.

PRIVATE EYE  
Thanks to the poison joke affliction that the victim was suffering at the time, he couldn’t resist the impact and was knocked to the ground.

PRIVATE EYE  
At that point, the other assailant, Scootaloo, rushed to the victim’s side.

PRIVATE EYE  
She stabbed him in the head multiple times with her scooter before he could even react to what was happening.

JUDGE  
Hmm, yes. That does seem to be what happened, given the evidence so far.

ATHENA  
*(... Wait a second! I… I think there might be a contradiction in that sequence of events!)*

ATHENA  
[Unsure] *(Although… I might be overthinking this… No, I have to be onto something here… Right?)*

TWILIGHT  
Don’t doubt yourself, Athena.

ATHENA  
Twilight?

TWILIGHT  
If you think there’s a contradiction, then go for it. I’ll be right here with you.

ATHENA  
Right. Thanks, Twilight! [Confident] Your Honor, I would like what Private Eye just said to be added to his testimony.

LUNA  
...

JUDGE  
Very well. Detective, if you please.

PRIVATE EYE  
Certainly, My Lord.

### *The victim was knocked to the ground, and then stabbed before he could even react.*

ATHENA  
***OBJECTION!*** Private Eye, there’s a contradiction in your testimony!

PRIVATE EYE  
Oh? Please, do tell.

LUNA  
Yes, enlighten us, defense. What is this supposed contradiction?

ATHENA  
R-Right… Um, it’s… It’s written here in the autopsy report:

ATHENA  
Cause of death was a single stab wound to the right temple that caused immediate death, followed by at least one more postmortem.

JUDGE  
It does say that, yes, but… I fail to see how this contradicts the witness’s testimony.

ATHENA  
Well, Your Honor, it’s simple.

ATHENA  
If the victim was first knocked to the ground by a blow to his left side, as Private Eye claims, then tell me this: Which side of the victim’s head would be facing up?

JUDGE  
Well, that would be… the left side, wouldn’t it? … OH!

ATHENA  
Exactly, Your Honor. The victim would land with the left side of his head facing up… meaning it would be impossible to stab him in the right temple!

PRIVATE EYE  
!?

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble…***

JUDGE  
ORDER! Order! That certainly is a puzzling contradiction! The victim COULDN’Tpossibly have been stabbed in the right temple if he were in that position.

JUDGE  
Prosecutor Luna, any thoughts?

LUNA  
[*Pause*] Hmph. You certainly pose an interesting dilemma, defense.

LUNA  
So, are you implying that the victim was first stabbed in the head, and THENhit in the torso? It would certainly help your case, if you were.

LUNA  
After all, a child would have a much more difficult time trying to stab a fully grown stallion in the head if he were standing up straight, even IFone of them was a unicorn.

ATHENA  
[Hesitant] Umm… *(IS that what I’m implying here? Could the victim have been stabbed before he was struck?)*

TWILIGHT  
That can’t be it, Athena. Think back to the autopsy report one more time.

ATHENA  
!!! Ah! You’re right, Twilight!

JUDGE  
Well, Ms. Cykes? Is what the prosecution said true? Are you claiming that the victim was first stabbed, and then struck?

ATHENA  
I’m not, Your Honor.

JUDGE  
Y-You aren’t?

LUNA  
Intriguing… And why not, defense?

ATHENA  
It says so right here in the autopsy report: The victim suffered a large bruise on the left side of his torso ANTE-MORTEM. He was hit BEFORE he was killed!

ATHENA  
Since the autopsy report notes that the victim was instantly killed by the first stab wound,

ATHENA  
That means that it would’ve been impossible for the victim to have been struck in the torso after he was stabbed!

## ***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble…***

ATHENA  
*(I… I did it… I managed to find a flaw in the prosecution’s case!)*

TWILIGHT  
Way to go, Athena!

ATHENA  
Let’s see how the Princess tries to get out of this one.

JUDGE  
Prosecutor Luna, do you have an explanation for this seemingly unexplainable contradiction!?

LUNA  
… Hmph. Of course I do.

ATHENA  
[Proud] Yeah, that’s what I thou-- [Confused] wait, what…?

JUDGE  
You can explain it? Then please, share your theory with the court!

LUNA  
At once, Your Honor. As the defense has so eagerly demonstrated for us, the victim’s autopsy report creates quite a few perplexing contradictions.

LUNA  
However, there are two explanations that can clear them all up.

ATHENA  
T-Two?

LUNA  
The first is a rather simple one: after the victim was struck, he fell onto something sharp, and it pierced his head, killing him.

ATHENA  
!!!

JUDGE  
The victim… fell onto the murder weapon?

LUNA  
Well, it may not be right to call it a “murder” weapon.

LUNA  
After all, there’s no proof to indicate that the assailant ever intended on killing the victim, should this be the case.

LUNA  
And the crime scene WASa forest, after all. Who knows what could be on the ground? All kinds of dangerous objects, I’m sure.

JUDGE  
Hmm, indeed. This murder could very well have been an accident, in that case!

JUDGE  
But then, wouldn’t the object that took the victim’s life still be at the scene? You would’ve found it there, wouldn’t you?

LUNA  
Not if the culprit took it away in a panic, or in fear.

JUDGE  
And what about the blood on the scooter?

LUNA  
That could’ve been the result of our real culprit wishing to frame Ms. Scootaloo for the crime.

LUNA  
Even if it was an accident, the culprit still wouldn’t want to be caught. They would likely fabricate a weapon to avoid their punishment.

LUNA  
In truth, while the stab wound in question IS quite similar in shape to the exposed bolt on the scooter...

LUNA  
Irregularities WERE discovered during examination, which indicates that it’s POSSIBLE two different items could’ve stabbed the defendant.

JUDGE  
[Thinking] I see…! [Realizes] Which would mean the culprit is… …

LUNA  
Indeed, Your Honor. The evidence, as it stands, suggests that Turning Page was the one who knocked the victim over.

LUNA  
On top of that, out of the two defendants, he’s the only one who would benefit from making a fake weapon out of the scooter.

TURNING PAGE  
!!!

JUDGE  
If that’s the case, then everything would line up, wouldn’t it?

LUNA  
[Goading] What do YOU think, defense? Do you wish to argue that this was all an accident, perpetrated by Turning Page alone?

ATHENA  
[Determined] *(You’re going up against the wrong person if you think you can manipulate me into saying what you want, Princess!)*

ATHENA  
*(That being said, if I did argue that this was what happened, I could get Turning Page’s sentence reduced significantly, and Scootaloo would be off the hook completely.)*

ATHENA  
*(Is that what I should do? Turning DID**say that he’d be willing to take the blame for this… But…)*

TURNING PAGE  
…

ATHENA  
*(Turning’s looking at me. Is he trying to tell me to let him take the fall? But if I do that, then...)*

TWILIGHT  
Athena?

ATHENA  
I’m… not sure what to do here, Twilight. The way things are going, I could very easily get Scootaloo off the hook, and Turning a light prison sentence.

TWILIGHT  
Hmm, that WOULDhave everything turn out just as Turning asked back in the defendant lobby.

ATHENA  
… But, I don’t think I should do that.

TWILIGHT  
...

ATHENA  
If I do… That’ll just mean we’re admitting that Turning killed his own father, even if only by accident, and that will undoubtedly have a severe effect on him.

ATHENA  
His family, his peers… They’d never look at him or treat him the same way again… It’d ruin his life!

TWILIGHT  
Even so, Turning seems to be satisfied with that.

ATHENA  
[Forceful] Well, I’m not! I don’t care if he thinks it’d be a good thing to do, because it isn’t!

ATHENA  
I’m supposed to look out for both his and Scootaloo’s best interests, and him taking the blame isn’t what she wants!

ATHENA  
[Assertive] So if Luna’s got some sort of trap waiting for me, bring it on! I’ll never admit that either of them had anything to do with Royal Order’s death!

TWILIGHT  
… If that’s the path you’re going down, then don’t you worry; I’ve got your back!.

ATHENA  
[Heartfelt] Thank you, Twilight.

JUDGE  
Ms. Cykes! If you are done whispering to your co-counsel, then tell us! Do you intend to argue that this murder was, in fact, an accident?

ATHENA  
No, Your Honor. I do not.

JUDGE  
Y-You don’t!?

ATHENA  
The defense’s stance is simply this: We assert that neither Scootaloo nor Turning Page had any hand, or hoof, rather, in this murder!

TURNING PAGE  
[Annoyed] Hmph...

LUNA  
I thought you might say that. How… ambitious of you, little Golden Pixie.

ATHENA  
[Confused] G-Golden Pixie?

LUNA  
If that’s the case, then you are admitting that the second explanation for our autopsy contradiction is the correct one?

ATHENA  
Y-Yes, of course. *(As soon as I figure out what that is…)*

LUNA  
Hmph. Not so confident, are you? Perhaps once we elucidate the matter, you’ll see the folly of your actions.

LUNA  
Private Eye, if you please.

PRIVATE EYE  
At once, Princess. If the issue is merely in regards to the claim that the victim didn’t have time to react before getting stabbed, then the solution is simple: he DID react.

ATHENA  
Urgh!

PRIVATE EYE  
When he was knocked over, he must have lifted his head to see who hit him.

PRIVATE EYE  
Once he did, his right temple would’ve been exposed, allowing the second assailant a chance to stab him there.

ATHENA  
No!

JUDGE  
You’re right. That does clear up the contradiction quite nicely.

LUNA  
Well then, there you have it. If the defense refuses to argue that this was an accident, then this is the only other possibility that fits the evidence.

ATHENA  
*(This isn’t good. Unless I can poke a hole in this theory, we’re gonna be up a creek with no paddle. There must be something we’re overlooking!)*

LUNA  
… Excuse me, Golden Pixie?

ATHENA  
Um, yeah?

LUNA  
I see you’re straining yourself over there, no doubt desperately clawing for some sort of advantage in this argument.

ATHENA  
Was it that obvious…?

LUNA  
Unfortunately, I'm afraid you’re not going to find one. Just look over the evidence again, and I’m sure you’ll realize you’re “fighting” on the “wrong side” of this debate.

ATHENA  
!!! *(What? I’m “fighting” on the “wrong side?” Why did Luna say that? Was that supposed to be… a hint?)*

ATHENA  
[Stressed] *(C’mon, think Athena, think! Fighting on the wrong side… Fighting on the wrong side… The evidence… shows that I’m fighting on the wrong-)*

ATHENA  
[*Gasps*] I’ve got it!

ATHENA  
***OBJECTION!*** Your Honor! There’s no way the murder could’ve played out the way the prosecution is claiming it did.

LUNA  
…

JUDGE  
Oh? How so, Ms. Cykes?

ATHENA  
Let’s look back at the photo of the crime scene. Here, we can see an outline of the body as it was at the time of its discovery.

ATHENA  
Looking at it, don’t you find it to be a little odd?

JUDGE  
Odd? What do you mean? The victim is on his side, just as the prosecution claimed.

ATHENA  
Yes, but think back to the earlier theory: “The victim was hit on the left side of his torso, and was knocked to the ground.”

ATHENA  
Now, if he was hit on the LEFT side, then his RIGHT side should’ve been what hit the ground, right?

JUDGE  
Yes, I suppose so.

ATHENA  
And yet, in this photo, we can clearly see that the victim… FELL ON HIS LEFT SIDE!!!

JUDGE  
OH! You’re right!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble****…*

JUDGE  
ORDER! ORDER! Prosecutor Luna! Do you have an explanation for this!? This… This completely overturns your entire case!

LUNA  
Quite literally, in fact.

JUDGE  
You… You aren’t fazed by it?!

LUNA  
I’m afraid not, Your Honor. Sorry to disappoint you.

JUDGE  
So then, do you have an explanation for this after all?

LUNA  
Perhaps we should allow the one who brought this to our attention an opportunity to explain it first?

ATHENA  
M-Me?

LUNA  
Who else?

ATHENA  
W-Well, um… *(I don’t know. I just pointed out the contradiction. I hadn’t really thought about what it means yet.)*

TWILIGHT  
… Well, one thing it could mean, Prosecutor Luna, is that the police made a mistake when they were outlining the body.

ATHENA  
!!!

LUNA  
I assure you, no mistakes were made. I saw to the removal of the body myself.

LUNA  
The tape outline was made around the body just before it was removed. Private Eye can confirm this, as he was also there at the time.

PRIVATE EYE  
Yes. The tape was laid down before the body was moved; there’s no chance it was a mistake on our part.

TWILIGHT  
If that’s the case, then this contradiction eliminates the possibility of this being an accidental killing.

TWILIGHT  
The victim couldn’t have fallen on something if he ended up with his stabbed side facing towards the sky.

LUNA  
Indeed. And what else?

TWILIGHT  
Well…

ATHENA  
Oh, I think I’ve got it! It would also mean that the body itself had to have been moved, right?

LUNA  
How so?

ATHENA  
If the side of his body that was hit somehow ended up facing the ground,

ATHENA  
it would mean that whoever killed him must have moved the body from somewhere else, and placed it down incorrectly.

ATHENA  
I don’t know if that was by accident or on purpose, but the body had to have been moved!

LUNA  
And why couldn’t the explanation be as simple as the victim himself having rolled over after being hit?

LUNA  
Or having his feet swept out from under him, causing him to fall on his left side?

TWILIGHT  
Because, if he really did land on his right side after being hit, and then rolled over,

TWILIGHT  
He would’ve ended up facing away from his attacker, regardless of which direction he rolled.

TWILIGHT  
I doubt he would’ve wanted to let them out of his sight.

ATHENA  
As for why the assailant couldn’t have swept out his knees, the autopsy report doesn’t mention anything about the victim’s knees being injured.

ATHENA  
Even if they were weak at the time, some bruise or mark would’ve been left behind if they were hit with enough force to topple him over.

TWILIGHT  
And before you ask, there’s no doubt that the victim must have fallen over when he was hit.

TWILIGHT  
His legs were far too weak to support him after suffering the blow to his side.

ATHENA  
[Confident] So, how’s that for an answer, Prosecutor Luna?

ATHENA  
The victim’s body was moved after he was killed. That’s the only way he could’ve ended up being found with the left side of his body facing the ground.

LUNA  
The ONLY way? Are you sure about that?

ATHENA  
[Exasperated] *(Ay caramba, what now!?)*

LUNA  
I think you are forgetting one last possibility.

JUDGE  
And what would that be, Prosecutor Luna?

LUNA  
First, let’s review what we’ve uncovered so far:

LUNA  
We know that the victim was struck on his left side, which undoubtedly caused him to fall on his right side.

LUNA  
However, when the body was discovered, the victim was found to have fallen on his left side.

LUNA  
This proves conclusively that, between the time the victim fell over and the time the body was discovered, the victim must have moved to account for this change in positioning.

ATHENA  
Exactly! The culprit, after killing the victim, moved the body!

LUNA  
That’s not necessarily the case, Golden Pixie.

ATHENA  
Wh-What do you mean?

LUNA  
Undoubtedly, the victim was knocked over after he was hit, but who’s to say that’s also when he died?

ATHENA  
!!! You mean…!

LUNA  
Yes, I do. The victim was NOT stabbed when he was knocked to the ground. Instead, after he was knocked over, he managed to stand himself back up.

LUNA  
After an unspecified amount of time, he was then stabbed in the RIGHT temple, which caused him to fall over onto his LEFT side!

ATHENA  
ARGH!!!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble****…*

JUDGE  
Order! Order in the court! After hearing both the prosecution and defense’s claims, I believe I must side with the prosecution’s stance.

ATHENA  
What!? But why?

JUDGE  
Your theory of the body being moved, while plausible, simply lacks enough evidence to back it up, and leaves too many questions unanswered.

JUDGE  
If the body was moved, who moved it, why, and from where?

ATHENA  
[Flustered] Umm… Those are all… uhh… really good questions, Your Honor!

JUDGE  
Oh! Why, thank you, Ms. Cykes. I have been doing this for quite some time, you know.

LUNA  
If you wish to pursue the theory of the body having been moved, you’ll need to first disprove that he was killed at the castle ruins.

LUNA  
All of the evidence presented in the trial so far points towards the likelihood of the murder occurring there.

LUNA  
Furthermore, nothing was missing from the crime scene to suggest that the murder may have occurred elsewhere. Right, defense?

ATHENA  
!!!

ATHENA  
*(There it is again! She’s hinting at something! What does she want me to see? Something missing from the crime scene? Everything’s here, isn’t it? The scooter that stabbed the victim, the body itself, the…)*

ATHENA  
*(…)*

ATHENA  
*(Wait a second… the body that was STABBED is there, but, there’s something else that SHOULD be there, but isn’t! This is it!!!)*

ATHENA  
Your Honor, the defense has evidence to counter the prosecution’s claims.

LUNA  
…

JUDGE  
Then please, show it to us, Ms. Cykes.

ATHENA  
Look at this photo one more time. There’s a grave contradiction contained within it.

JUDGE  
A contradiction? Where?

ATHENA  
Right here, Your Honor. ***TAKE THAT!***

ATHENA  
Look at the area near the head of the victim. If we go by the prosecution’s theory, then the victim would have fallen in the place he was stabbed.

ATHENA  
However, if that was the case… then there should be a pool of blood around the victim’s head.

JUDGE  
Yes, there should be…

ATHENA  
But, looking at this picture, what do you see?

JUDGE  
Hmm… [gasps] There’s… There’s no blood at all!!!

ATHENA  
And that’s precisely the significant contradiction in that photo, Your Honor. An area that should be caked in blood… HAS NO TRACE OF IT WHATSOEVER!!!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble***…

ATHENA  
If the crime scene lacks even a drop of blood to speak of, that casts significant doubt over whether or not the victim was stabbed there at all.

JUDGE  
Indeed it does, Ms. Cykes.

ATHENA  
So how could this be the case, you might ask? The answer is obvious. The victim’s body was moved from somewhere else to the castle ruins. That’s the only possibility!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble***…

LUNA  
Interesting claim, Golden Pixie. And you sounded so triumphant while making it, too. It's a shame that it’s completely flawed.

ATHENA  
F-Flawed? How?

LUNA  
True, there doesn’t appear to be any blood on the scene right now, but once I bring my next witness to the stand, that tune of yours will surely change.

ATHENA  
*(This other witness… Time to see if it’s who I think it is.)*

JUDGE  
Very well. Detective, you may leave the stand. Remain in the courtroom, however. We may need your opinion on other matters as they come up.

PRIVATE EYE  
Of course, My Lord.

JUDGE  
Now, let the prosecution’s next witness take the stand!

*Zecora enters the courtroom.*

LUNA  
Witness, please state your name and occupation for the record.

ZECORA  
My name is Zecora, an apothecary. I make my home in the Everfree.

JUDGE  
You live in the Everfree Forest?

ATHENA  
You’re a zebra?

TWILIGHT  
Oh, right. I guess I forgot to mention that, didn’t I?

ATHENA  
You and Apple Bloom both…

JUDGE  
And you say you’re an… apothecary?

ZECORA  
Yes, Your Honor, I am indeed. Crafting potions is my creed. The forest's creatures are bizarre, but their wonders are unmatched, by far.

JUDGE  
Interesting.

ATHENA  
*(…I just noticed that she’s rhyming. Oh, boy. I REALLY hope this doesn’t mean what I think it might.)*

LUNA  
Let’s get back on topic, shall we? Witness, is it true that, on the night of the murder, you were the one who discovered and reported the victim’s body?

ZECORA  
Yes, quite sadly, this is true. It was a scene most gruesome, too.

JUDGE  
Please, give us your testimony in relation to this gruesome discovery.

ZECORA  
Of course, Your Honor, I shall speak. I’m sorry, for this tale is bleak.

# 

# **Scene 4**

**Characters: Athena, Twilight, Turning Page, Princess Luna, Zecora, Judge, Gallery Pony 1, Gallery Pony 2, Gallery Pony 3**

***Witness Testimony***

**-- The Discovery of the Body--**

*That evening, I was tending to the plants near my home.*

*Two little ponies passed, heading towards the castle dome.*

*For a while I waited, but return they did not, so I chose to head home at an agile trot.*

*But soon I heard a strange, far-off sound. I ran to where those ponies were bound.*

*On my way, a small shadow my eyes did track. But it jumped away before I could react.*

*Upon arrival, what met my gaze I’ll not forget for all my days. A pony’s body, still, with blood around his head, turning earth to mud.*

*Once I was sure that he was dead, to tell the police I quickly fled.*

ATHENA  
*(Can life cut me a break already!? It’s hard enough sifting through testimonies without having to decipher them first!)*

JUDGE  
It must’ve been horrifying to see a dead body that night. Hmm… but if the Everfree Forest is as dangerous as you say it is, wouldn’t, well, bodies be a common sight?

ZECORA  
Most creatures are clean with the food they hunt. But a corpse in the open? A surprise, to be blunt.

ATHENA  
And you saw… blood on the ground… around the body?

ZECORA  
Of all the life that he had bled, a ring of red lay around his head.

ATHENA  
***OBJECTION!*** That’s… That’s impossible! We checked the area ourselves! Even this photograph shows there were no traces of blood! Your testimony is completely contradictory!

ZECORA  
[Stern] Do not point your rage at me. I have told you all I've seen.

LUNA  
Perhaps I can shed some light on this matter.

ATHENA  
!!!

JUDGE  
Do you have something that can explain this contradiction, Prosecutor Luna?

LUNA  
Of course, Your Honor. I’d look rather silly if I didn’t.

JUDGE  
Very well. Please explain for us.

LUNA  
As was just stated, this witness was the one who reported the body to the police.

LUNA  
She accompanied them to the crime scene, and they found it in exactly the same state as she just described - the victim lying in a pool of his own blood.

LUNA  
I have here a photograph of that very scene.

JUDGE  
Hmm, you’re right. The victim DOES appear to be lying in a pool of blood.

ATHENA  
But… why was it gone the next day?

LUNA  
That will become clear soon enough.

LUNA  
First, the prosecution would like to submit this evidence to the court, along with this photograph.

JUDGE  
Hm? And what is this?

LUNA  
It’s a cape, Your Honor. The emblem on it denotes it as belonging to the Cutie Mark Crusaders, the group of which the defendant, Scootaloo, is a member.

ATHENA  
*(That must be the third cape that Private Eye said the police had taken for examination.)*

LUNA  
As you can see in this earlier photograph, two more of these capes, as well as the fabric used to line their undersides, laid in this wagon attached to the scooter.

LUNA  
It likely goes without saying, but this wagon also belongs to Scootaloo.

JUDGE  
Great wickering stallions! Just what were the defendants up to in that forest?

LUNA  
We’ll cover that in a moment. For now, I would like to draw further attention to this cape here.

LUNA  
Upon testing it, we found that it was absolutely drenched in the victim’s blood.

ATHENA  
What?!

JUDGE  
The cape… was covered in blood?!

TWILIGHT  
You mean… someone tried to clean up the crime scene?

LUNA  
I can’t imagine that to be the case. Going by where this cape was found, I’d say there’s another, more likely possibility.

JUDGE  
Where was it found?

LUNA  
This cape was discovered underneath the victim’s body. Specifically… under his head.

ATHENA  
… Gnk! You mean… That pool of blood Zecora saw…

LUNA  
It appears as though the little Golden Pixie has figured it out.

LUNA  
When the police went to examine the blood, they discovered that it wasn’t blood at all. It was actually… [Desk slam] this cape right here!

ATHENA  
AAARRRRGGGHHH!!!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble***…

GALLERY PONY 1  
So she was on the wrong track all along, then?

GALLERY PONY 3  
Looks like it, yup.

LUNA  
Now do you understand, defense?

ATHENA  
Uuuggghhh…

LUNA  
When the victim fell to the ground after being stabbed, he must have fallen on top of this cape.

LUNA  
Any blood that seeped from his wound would’ve trailed down his face and been absorbed by the cloth.

LUNA  
When the witness came across it, she mistook the cape for blood due to its red color.

LUNA  
[Desk slam] The fact that there was no blood at the scene is completely irrelevant. After all, it was the police themselves who removed it!

ATHENA  
[Desperate] NO! This… this can’t be right!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble***…

GALLERY PONY 2  
Dragging things out like this for those two children is just cruel, even IF they’re guilty! Why can’t that lawyer see that?

JUDGE  
[gavel slams] Order! Order! My word! It seems as if the defense’s argument has been completely overturned!

LUNA  
Indeed it has, Your Honor. Despite what they claimed, it’s clear that the body was never moved.

LUNA  
The scene of the crime was undoubtedly at the foot of the bridge. The blood on this cape proves it.

LUNA  
And, as luck would have it, I have one more piece of information that will crush the defense’s rebuttal once and for all.

ATHENA  
[At breaking point] *(No… please… no more...)*

LUNA  
Upon examining the area where the cape lay, thanks to forensic spell-testing, we discovered traces of blood UNDERNEATH the area around the victim’s head.

JUDGE  
Really?

LUNA  
It seems as if the cape absorbed more blood than it could handle, and some of it leaked through to the ground below.

LUNA  
 Further testing of this blood revealed that it belonged to the victim.

LUNA  
Your Honor, I submit to you the photo of the victim’s body, as well as the blood-stained cape, as evidence.

JUDGE  
Very well. The court accepts them.

**Crime Scene Photo 2 - A picture of the victim’s body before it was removed for autopsy. Traces of the victim’s blood were detected underneath the cape he was lying on.**

**Bloodstained Cape - A cape belonging to the Cutie Mark Crusaders. It was discovered underneath the victim’s head, soaked in his blood. Zecora mistook this cape for an actual bloodstain.**

JUDGE  
Defense, care to share your thoughts on the matter?

ATHENA  
*(Not if I don’t wanna get held in contempt of court...)*

LUNA  
It seems the Golden Pixie has been rendered speechless in the face of such irrefutable evidence.

ATHENA  
[Pained] *(Ugh. Just… ignore her! Ignore everyone, okay?) [exhales]*

ATHENA  
[Desk slam] *(I’m not gonna lose! Time to get my brain in gear! There HAS to be something off in her theory.)*

ATHENA  
*(Luna’s saying that the body was never moved… The reason there was no blood at the scene is because it was absorbed by the cape…)*

ATHENA  
*(In that case, the victim would’ve stood up after being knocked over by Turning…)*

ATHENA  
*(Afterwards, Scootaloo hit him in the head with the scooter, which knocked him to the ground again… Is there anything wrong with that series of events?)*

ATHENA  
*(… Wait a second… If the victim was standing UP when he was stabbed, then wouldn’t it be impossible for-)*

JUDGE  
MS. CYKES!!!

ATHENA  
Aaah!

JUDGE  
Do you, or do you not, have any objections to the prosecutor’s theory?!

ATHENA  
[Nervous, but smiling] Uhh… you bet I do!

LUNA  
[Unamused] Feigning confidence will get you nowhere, defense.

ATHENA  
… ...***OBJECTION!*** Your Honor, the defense would like to point out a flaw in the prosecution’s theory.

JUDGE  
Then get on with it!

ATHENA  
Y-yes, Your Honor! The issue has to do with the victim’s fatal stab wound being inflicted while the victim was standing upright.

ATHENA  
 I would think stabbing an adult at such a height would be nearly impossible for a child, correct?

LUNA  
***OBJECTION!*** You forget that the owner of that scooter is a pegasus. What’s stopping them from simply flying up and stabbing him that way?

ATHENA  
[Confident] Funny you should mention that. I heard something from the defendant in question yesterday that clears up this matter. Namely, the fact that Ms. Scootaloo… can’t fly.

JUDGE  
Wh- WHHHAAATTT!?

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble***…

JUDGE  
Order! Order! Prosecutor Luna, is this true?

LUNA  
…

JUDGE  
If Ms. Scootaloo can’t fly, then there’s no way she could’ve stabbed a stallion in the head while he was standing!

LUNA  
Of course she couldn’t.

ATHENA  
*(Can I take you by surprise at least ONCE in this trial?)*

LUNA  
What the defense has said is absolutely true. I have the medical report from Scootaloo’s doctor right here.

LUNA  
Contrary to other pegasus fillies her age, her wings haven’t fully developed yet, and thus, she cannot fly.

JUDGE  
But if you knew that, then why were you arguing that she could’ve stabbed somewhere she couldn’t even reach?

LUNA  
Now, when did I ever claim that?

JUDGE  
?!

ATHENA  
?!

LUNA  
All I ever claimed was that SOMEPONY stabbed him whilst he was standing upright.

LUNA  
If it was impossible for Scootaloo to have done so, then that leaves only one option, doesn’t it?

ATHENA  
… !!! Uh-oh…

LUNA  
Turning Page is a talented unicorn for his age, and levitation is a relatively simple spell to learn, even for colts and fillies.

LUNA  
I’m sure he’d have no problem levitating the scooter up to his father’s head, and stabbing him with it.

ATHENA  
RGH!!!

TWILIGHT  
***OBJECTION!*** Princess Luna, if you choose to claim that, then Scootaloo would’ve done nothing wrong, am I right?

ATHENA  
!!!

LUNA  
…

JUDGE  
Princess Twilight! Please, explain what you mean!

TWILIGHT  
It’s simple, Your Honor. If Turning Page was the one who assaulted his father, and then proceeded to stab him in the head with the scooter,

TWILIGHT  
Then Scootaloo would be completely innocent - nothing but a bystander at most. Am I right, Princess Luna?

TURNING PAGE  
…

LUNA  
… Heh. We shall see.

TWILIGHT  
???

LUNA  
First, I think it’s time for the defense’s cross-examination of our witness. We’ve been putting that off for long enough now.

ATHENA  
*(Oh yeah. I kinda forgot that Zecora was even here.)*

JUDGE  
Very well. Let us begin the cross-examination.

***Cross Examination***

**-- The Discovery of the Body--**

*That evening, I was tending to the plants near my home.*

ATHENA  
***HOLD IT!*** You were tending to plants?

ZECORA  
Yes, my plants must grow up strong, lest a potion turn out wrong.

ATHENA  
Including that poison joke in front of your home?

ZECORA  
Yes, they’re blooming but not quite grown, since only recently they were sown.

ATHENA  
Are these plants of yours hard to find?

ZECORA  
Many flowers around my home can’t grow without the forest’s loam. They’re so rare that to meet my needs, I search the forest for their seeds.

ZECORA  
I tend to them both day and night, and harvest them when the time is right.

ZECORA  
But poison joke differs. It’s often seen in a sprawl. But at this time of year, it hardly grows at all.

ATHENA  
So you scour the forest for plants. Did you happen to do that on the day of the murder?

ZECORA  
Indeed, I searched quite long that day. From dawn to dusk, I was away. When I got home with the seeds I’d sought, I tended to my garden plot.

ATHENA  
Did you happen to visit the Castle of the Two Sisters that day?

ZECORA  
Yes, for along that castle’s cliffside, sometimes rare flowers peek and hide. Sadly when my search was done, I left without finding a single one.

ATHENA  
… Uh… Just to confirm… The body didn’t happen to be at the foot of the bridge at that time… did it?

ZECORA  
I understand what you mean to say. But no, the body wasn’t there that day.

LUNA  
We already know when the victim died. It was long after this witness was scouring the area for plants.

LUNA  
Stop wasting our time with these pointless questions, and move on.

ATHENA  
*([Sigh] Well, at least I got SOME information. Not exactly sure how helpful it was, though.)*

**Court Record Updated: Poison Joke - A magical species of flower that grows in the Everfree Forest. It plays ironic jokes on anyone who touches it. Natural growth is limited around this time of the year. The flowers in front of Zecora’s Hut were planted recently.**

LUNA  
Please continue, witness.

*Two little ponies passed, heading towards the castle dome.*

ATHENA  
***HOLD IT!*** Did you happen to see who they were?

ZECORA  
Of the colt I had no clue, but the filly was Miss Scootaloo.

JUDGE  
And so you saw the children walking through the forest that night?

ZECORA  
It surely was a curious sight: two foals traveling solo that night. The forest’s danger is well-known, so I thought, “What are they doing alone?”

ATHENA  
*(They were going to settle the blackmail with Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon, but I can’t bring that up yet, it’ll just be rejected outright.)*

LUNA  
These two ponies… Was there anything about them that caught your eye?

ZECORA  
Scootaloo looked frightened, but that wasn't so strange. The forest scares anypony of any age.

ZECORA  
The colt was holding something thick, not with his hooves, but with magic.

LUNA   
And what was that?

ZECORA  
It was a bolt of fabric, rolled. The moonlight showed that it was gold.

ATHENA  
*(That checks out with what Scootaloo said yesterday. How Turning Page offered to carry it for her, just in case.)*

LUNA  
This matches what we found at the crime scene, as there was a roll of golden silk left behind in the wagon.

JUDGE  
It would seem that way.

ZECORA  
He also carried a weapon, a sword of solid wood. Given where they were going, I thought that this was good.

LUNA  
And I’m assuming this sword was in one piece, am I right?

ZECORA  
Indeed, there wasn’t a single crack. The sword appeared fully intact.

JUDGE  
So the defendant’s sword really was whole while heading to the scene.

LUNA  
And it then broke when he used it to attack the victim.

JUDGE  
Hmm, indeed. That’s seeming more and more likely.

ATHENA  
*(Rrrgh! At some point here, I need to counter with how the sword REALLY broke, but I’m still missing the evidence to support Turning’s version of events…)*

ATHENA *(One way or another, I’m going to have to find it soon.)*

JUDGE  
Witness, please continue your testimony.

*For a while I waited, but return they did not, so I chose to head home at an agile trot.*

ATHENA  
***HOLD IT!*** You just stood on the path and waited?

ZECORA  
It would not have done to stand and wait, for time has an unchanging gait.

ZECORA  
Along the central path nearby some plants were quite nearly bone dry. These I tended by the light of the moon, expecting the foals to come back soon.

ATHENA  
How long were you waiting for them?

ZECORA  
I worked from 9:45 to about 10:10, so a half-hour had nearly passed by then.

ATHENA  
And you just stood there, taking care of plants the whole time? Weren’t you worried about two kids going so far into the forest by themselves?

ZECORA  
Of course I was - who wouldn't be? After all, they were in the Everfree.

ZECORA  
But for all that time there was no sound, nor any sign that they were found. On the path I kept one eye, in case they returned, or another passed by.

ATHENA  
 I guess no one ever came, then?

ZECORA  
No one did, neither pony nor foal. I finished my work without seeing a soul.

ZECORA  
So, I decided to head home and rest, until I heard something that brought dread to my chest.

*But soon I heard a strange, far-off sound. I ran to where those ponies were bound.*

ATHENA  
***HOLD IT!*** A… noise??

ZECORA  
It sounded unlike anything I'd ever heard - not a bear, manticore, wolf, or bird. I could hear it echo around, a strangely loud, metallic sound.

ATHENA  
You mean, like… A clang???

ZECORA  
It was a peculiar tone to hear… though clang does suit well with what reached my ear..

ATHENA  
[Exasperated] *(This again!? First a fabric roll, and now a clang!? Any other similarities to the case from two days ago I should know about!?)*

ATHENADo you… know when you heard this… clang?

ZECORA  
As soon as I heard it, I checked the time. It was 10:15, right on the dime.

ATHENA  
And do you know where it came from?

ZECORA  
No, I know not, much to my shame. I could not tell from where it came. I remembered where the children were headed. The sound coming from there was a thought I dreaded.

ATHENA  
So what did you do then?

ZECORA  
I made up my mind to find the foals. Reaching and protecting them were my goals. That plan was briefly sent awry, when something weird caught my eye.

*On my way, a small shadow my eyes did track. But it jumped away before I could react.*

ATHENA  
***HOLD IT!*** A small shadow?

ZECORA  
I wish I could describe it more than just “weird,” but it left as soon as it had appeared. Still, it was rather odd to me, so I included it with my testimony.

ATHENA  
Do you know when and where you saw this… shadow?

ZECORA  
Five minutes after would be the “when,” so I'd wager it was 10:20 then. "Where" is difficult, I must confess, as Everfree has no address.

LUNA  
Here witness. Point it out on this diagram.

ZECORA  
You have my thanks, Princess Luna. Now let me fill this lacuna. … Ah, yes, it was this spot right here, or, at least, someplace near.

ATHENA  
So just… on the path?

ZECORA  
Yes. I thought we were on the path towards collision, but then it jumped out of my line of vision.

LUNA  
For those unaware, the Everfree Forest is notorious for being absolutely pitch black at night.

LUNA  
The intense tree cover prevents most forms of light from reaching the forest floor.

LUNA  
However, this incident occurred on the night of a full moon, so SOME light was able to illuminate the areas that lacked direct cover from trees.

LUNA  
Unfortunately, the rest of the forest remained as pitch black as one would expect it to be.

ATHENA  
Was there any detail about the shadow you could make out at all? Shape? Size? Anything?

ZECORA  
Even in darkness, there was one distinct feature: at the very least, it seemed like a small creature.

ATHENA  
Small? Like… a child?

ZECORA  
That’s what I thought, after what I’d seen. I looked for them, seeing only the forest’s green.

ZECORA  
I tried calling out, hoping they would return, but if they had responded, I could not discern.

ZECORA  
Perhaps they cared not to heed me well, or perhaps my voice drowned under the howling swell.

ATHENA  
Howling?

ZECORA  
Yes, and quite loudly, for one main reason: tis now the timberwolves' hunting season.

ZECORA  
Whenever they are on the prowl, they raise their canine heads and howl. On that night, they were easily heard, and they kept going, undeterred.

ZECORA  
When they stopped, I do not know. By then I knew it was time to go.

ATHENA  
What do you think made them howl?

ZECORA  
Who is to say? Certainly not me. Into a timberwolf’s mind, I cannot see.

ZECORA  
As I have told you, it's their hunting season. But truthfully, it could be for any reason.

LUNA  
Let’s focus on what we CAN answer then, shall we? Witness, what did you see once you arrived at the scene?

*Upon arrival, what met my gaze I’ll not forget for all my days. A pony’s body, still, with blood around his head, turning earth to mud.*

ATHENA  
***HOLD IT!*** But it wasn’t blood. It was a cape, right?

ZECORA  
I’ll admit my interpretation was flawed, but if you don’t have a problem, don’t needlessly prod.

ATHENA  
You didn’t check to make sure?

ZECORA  
When I came upon the former guard of the law, his stillness shocked me; not a breath did he draw.

ZECORA  
Creeping closer to his still build, I hoped my fears would be dashed by thrills. But my suspicions proved correct, as I realized when I checked his neck.

ZECORA  
No pulse of life-giving blood I found. He was as dead as winter’s ground.

ATHENA  
And… what did you do after that…?

ZECORA  
That gruesome discovery sent me reeling and gave me a terrible, sickening feeling.

ZECORA  
The moment I reclaimed my head, I glanced about, filled with dread. There were still the children I needed to find, and their fates were plaguing my mind.

ZECORA  
Thankfully, as I looked around, no other bodies could be found. Merely a scooter and a wagon lay amidst that frightfully horrid display.

ATHENA  
There was no one nearby?

ZECORA  
Perhaps that shadow of which I’d caught sight was one of the children in mid-flight. The other could have simply hid while farewell to that scene I bid.

ZECORA  
But that’s just one thought in my mind, since no other figures did I find.

ATHENA  
 [Desperate] Y-you sure? There was nobody else there at all? Maybe… uh… hiding in the trees, or something?

LUNA  
***OBJECTION!*** Continuing to press the issue won’t yield a different answer, defense. I suggest you move on before you waste all of our time.

ATHENA  
[Annoyed] *(Well, excuuuuuuuuuse me, Princess! Nothing wrong with double-checking, now is there?)*

LUNA  
Witness. What happened after you found the body?

*Once I was sure that he was dead, to tell the police I quickly fled.*

ATHENA  
***HOLD IT!*** Did you happen to run into anyone on your way there?

ZECORA  
While leaving the forest I saw not a soul. It was, ironically, a more pleasant stroll.

ATHENA  
I see. And how long did it take you to get to the police station?

ZECORA  
I’m not sure. My sense of time dissolved amidst thoughts of the crime.

LUNA  
Let’s puzzle it out, then, shall we? Witness, you claim to have left your house at 10:15. Is that correct?

ZECORA  
Yes, it is exactly as you claim. I left right as the odd noise came.

LUNA  
From there, you headed to the scene of the crime, which we have confirmed was a roughly 15 minute walk. This means you arrived around 10:30.

LUNA  
Next, you examined the scene. How long would you say you stayed there?

ZECORA  
While it doesn’t feel right to make a guess, I’d say five minutes, more or less.

LUNA  
So you left at 10:35. The walk out of the ruins and then back through the forest is approximately 35 minutes.

LUNA  
The police station itself is another 10 minutes away from the forest. This puts the witness arriving there around… 11:20 that night.

JUDGE  
[Impressed] Those are some very nice calculations, Prosecutor Luna!

ATHENA  
[Annoyed] *(Oh, come on! Don’t be THAT impressed!)*

LUNA  
The best is yet to come, Your Honor. I have here a report from that very station.

LUNA  
It confirms that this witness notified the police of a body around that time.

ATHENA  
Ghk!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble…***

JUDGE  
[Gavel slams] Order! Order!

ATHENA  
[Grumpy] *(Great. Instead of casting doubt on her testimony, I just made it even MORE reliable. Come on…)*

ATHENA  
 …

ATHENA  
[Distressed] *(Oh, this is just hopeless! There’s not a single contradiction! What am I supposed to do?!)*

*[Fade to black…]*

# 

# Scene 5

**Characters: Athena, Twilight, Turning Page, Princess Luna, Zecora, Judge, Widget, Gallery Pony 4, Gallery Pony 5,** **Gallery Pony 6**

JUDGE  
[*Gavel slam*] Enough! I believe we have reached the end of this cross-examination.

LUNA  
Agreed, Your Honor. I don’t think our Golden Pixie can take much more. Best we put her out of her misery now.

ATHENA  
...

JUDGE  
What about you, defense? Are you finished with this testimony? As far as the court can see, there were no contradictions contained within it.

JUDGE  
As things stand, we will have to trust in what the witness has told us. If you have a rebuttal, Ms. Cykes, now would be the time to give it.

ATHENA  
Uhhh… [Snarky, and distressed] *(Yeah, sure. I’ll get right on it with the whole lotta NOTHING I can even say!)* Twilight? Do you have any ideas?

TWILIGHT  
[Unsure] Um… Well… Just one, but…

ATHENA  
Great! What is it?

TWILIGHT  
I… I don’t think it’s a good idea, though…

ATHENA  
Well, just tell it to me anyway. We can decide together.

TWILIGHT  
[Still sounding unsure] I don’t think we have the time for that, Athena.

TWILIGHT  
Let’s… let’s just keep following the flow of the trial. Maybe something else will come up later that we can attack.

ATHENA  
No! We can’t just let this slide. This testimony is too damaging. We have to strike now!

TWILIGHT  
I understand that, Athena, I do, but right now, I don’t think there’s anything more we can do...

ATHENA  
But we can’t just give up,Twilight! You said you’d try and help me in any way you could!

ATHENA  
If you have an idea for how to get us out of this mess, even if it’s awful, you HAVE to tell me! Otherwise, we’ll lose!

TWILIGHT  
[Defensive] I-I know that! [Insistent] But I can’t let you do this! I’ve seen it happen before, and it’s not worth it! There… There has to be another way!

ATHENA  
[Frustrated] There IS no other way! We need to do something, right now! We can’t let Scootaloo or Turning Page down!

TWILIGHT  
[also growing more frustrated] I’m not saying we should give up! I’m just saying that--

LUNA  
[Interrupting] Unless you two are interested in sharing with the court what you are squabbling about, I believe it is time we moved on.

ATHENA  
*(No! I can’t let this happen! If I let this testimony stand, I’ll never be able to recover from it!)*

JUDGE  
Very well. Witness, thank you for your time. You may--

ATHENA  
***OBJECTION!*** [Desperately] Wait! Hold on! There’s… There’s something about the witness’s testimony that I find strange.

LUNA  
Oh? Really, now? Please, do tell.

TWILIGHT  
Athena! Stop!

ATHENA  
Sorry, Twilight, but I can’t just sit and wait for an opportunity to show itself. I have to knock this testimony down NOW.

TWILIGHT  
...

JUDGE  
This better not be a bluff, Ms. Cykes.

ATHENA  
O-O-Of course it isn’t, Y-Your Honor!

WIDGET  
It totally is.

ATHENA  
Shut up, Widget!

LUNA  
[Teasing] Talking to yourself, are we?

ATHENA  
Grrr… *(Don’t let them distract you, Athena! If Twilight doesn’t want to help me, then I’ll just have to figure this out by myself!)*

ATHENA  
*(But… there aren’t any contradictions or flaws! What now?)*

ATHENA  
 *(What would Mr. Wright do here? He’d turn his thinking around - think outside of the box!)*

ATHENA  
*(If I can’t cast doubt on the testimony itself, then… What if I just cast doubt on the one testifying? Is there a way to do that…?)*

JUDGE  
Ms. Cykes! I’ve had enough of you wasting this court’s time! Present your rebuttal, or let us move on!

ATHENA  
Y-Yes, Your Honor. *(Here goes nothing…)* So… , a-actually, [*clears throat*] the previous testimony didn’t have any noticeable contradictions in it.

JUDGE  
[Sputtering] Wha- [Angry] Is that not what we’ve been saying this whole time?!

ATHENA  
Y-Yes, but, um… Well, what if we think about this another way?

LUNA  
Another way?

TWILIGHT  
Athena...

ATHENA  
According to the testimony, Zecora saw Scootaloo and Turning Page heading towards the crime scene. She heard a noise, and headed there herself.

ATHENA  
On the way, she came across the two running away from the scene, and shortly afterwards, she arrived on the site.

LUNA  
And right there, she found the dead body of one Royal Order. I see no point in us repeating all of this.

ATHENA  
Well, let’s think about that last point for a minute. As we established earlier, the victim suffered both a blow to the side, and a stab to the head.

ATHENA  
What’s more, we know for a fact that, after the victim was knocked to the ground, he managed to get back up again.

LUNA  
Quite so. Our current theory is that Turning Page was the one who hit him, using his sword. However, if he was killed right at that moment, the stab wound would be on the opposite side of his head.

LUNA  
Therefore, he must have had an opportunity to stand upright before being stabbed, and falling over again.

ATHENA  
Right, but as was pointed out earlier, Scootaloo could not have been the one to inflict the fatal wound.

ATHENA  
She can’t fly, so she wouldn’t have been able to stab Royal Order in the head after he stood up.

LUNA  
Which leads us to the conclusion that it must have been Turning Page.

LUNA  
He used his magic to stab the victim with the scooter. There wasn’t anyone else on the scene who could’ve done it, after all.

ATHENA  
*(... This is it. Now’s my chance! I may not personally believe what I’m about to say, but I don’t have a choice now. My hand’s been forced.)*

ATHENA  
But there WAS someone on the scene, actually.

ATHENA  
After Scootaloo and Turning Page fled, someone else arrived, and had the perfect opportunity to murder the victim.

TWILIGHT  
[Pleading] Athena, please…

JUDGE  
!!! Wait, you aren’t saying…!

LUNA  
[Unimpressed] Defense…

ATHENA  
Let’s assume that Turning Page really did hit his father, and he fell to the ground.

ATHENA  
Now, at that point, who’s to say Scootaloo and Turning didn’t flee right then, without killing him?

JUDGE  
Then that would mean… The one who showed up on the scene after they left would have…

ATHENA  
Exactly. Given this scenario… It’s entirely possible that our witness, Ms. Zecora, is Royal Order’s true killer!

ZECORA  
Wh-WHAT?!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble...***

JUDGE  
[Gavel slams] Order! ORDER IN THE COURT!!! Ms. Cykes! Are you saying that her whole testimony… was one giant lie made to cover up her crime?!

ATHENA  
Not necessarily everything. Just the part where she claimed to have stumbled across the dead body.

ATHENA  
The defense believes that, instead of finding Royal Order dead, Zecora came across him as he was getting up.

ATHENA  
She then took the scooter that was left on the scene, and stabbed him in the head.

ATHENA  
Afterwards, she reported the body to the police, claiming he was already dead when she found him.

ZECORA  
That… That is a RIDICULOUS accusation! What could possibly be my motivation?!

ATHENA  
Turning and Scootaloo don’t have motives either. Is it really that much of a stretch to suspect you, as well?

ZECORA  
…

ATHENA  
Your Honor, I may not have any evidence to back up this claim, but you can’t deny it IS a possibility.

ATHENA  
As such, we shouldn’t take stock in ANY of this witness’s testimony!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble…***

GALLERY PONY 4  
It’s true, the yellow attorney brings up a good point.

GALLERY PONY 5  
Would Zecora really do that, though?

GALLERY PONY 6  
Dunno. But, hey! If she’s right, that means those two kids are innocent!

LUNA  
***BE STILL!***

ATHENA  
?!

TWILIGHT  
?!

JUDGE  
?!

ZECORA  
?!

LUNA  
[Desk slam] [Furious] You naive CHILD!

ATHENA  
Ch-Child?!

JUDGE  
P-Prosecutor Luna, please, there will be no insults in my courtroom—

LUNA  
[Seething] For one who knows not the weight of her words, I can’t think of a better comparison!

ATHENA  
[Insulted] H-Hey! What gives?! I was just--!

LUNA  
***BE STILL!*** [Furious]You intend to cast doubt on the witness in order to save your own clients. Yet, to do so, you accuse her of committing the crime herself.

ATHENA  
[Defensive] Well, what else was I supposed to do?! That testimony-

LUNA  
Was not at all conclusive!

ATHENA  
H-Huh?

LUNA  
The witness never saw who the killer was! She didn’t even clearly see who was running away from the scene!

ATHENA  
B-But… That’s what you, and Your Honor, were assuming...

LUNA  
And it’s your job to point out why that assumption is flawed, and demand further evidence and testimony for the prosecution to support their case!

LUNA  
[Furious] But instead of doing that, you have openly accused this witness! You have dirted not just her name, but, if you’re wrong, yours as well!

ATHENA  
I…

LUNA  
[Accusatory] And you, ponies of the gallery! You who would be so quick to suspect this poor creature on nothing but a baseless theory!

LUNA  
[Mocking and shaming] Shame on you all! Is this the kind of “harmony” Equestria seeks to share with the world?!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble…***

JUDGE  
[Bangs gavel] Order! ORDER! Prosecutor Luna! That’s enough! Make one more disparaging remark towards Ms. Cykes or the gallery, and I’ll have you held in contempt of court!

LUNA  
[Composes herself]… My apologies, Your Honor.

ATHENA  
[Shaken] S-say what you want, Prosecutor Luna, but my theory doesn’t contradict any of the evidence or testimony presented in this trial.

ATHENA  
As long as that remains true, I’m free to continue asserting it.

LUNA  
[*Sigh*] Very well. If that’s the path you choose, so be it. I wonder if your co-counsel feels the same way, though?

TWILIGHT  
…

ATHENA  
*(I’m sorry, Twilight, but it’s too late for me to back down.)*

LUNA  
Nevertheless, you shan’t be relying on that theory for much longer. If I can’t convince you to simply abandon it, then I’ll just force you to go against it.

ATHENA  
[Nervous] Wh-What do you mean? (*Uh-oh! I don’t like the sound of this!*)

LUNA  
You mentioned motive a minute ago, did you not? The motive that Scootaloo and Turning Page lack?

LUNA  
It’s about time we discussed that, don’t you think? So bring out that letter you received yesterday.

ATHENA  
L-Letter?

LUNA  
[Demanding] The blackmail letter! I know you have it. Show it to the court! Now!

ATHENA  
*(Darn it… Why does she know about the blackmail? Did Scootaloo or Turning tell her?)*

JUDGE  
Defense! What’s this about a blackmail letter?

ATHENA  
Y-Your Honor, um… It’s this right here. Scootaloo and her friends - the Cutie Mark Crusaders - received it yesterday afternoon. Their scooter, wagon, and capes were all stolen by somepony.

ATHENA  
To get them back, they’d have to bring the blackmailer a roll of golden silk.

JUDGE  
Hmm… Those items all sound familiar…

LUNA  
They should, Your Honor. All of these items were accounted for at the crime scene.

JUDGE  
!!! You’re right! But, why would that be?

LUNA  
Read the letter yourself, and I’m sure you’ll figure it out.

JUDGE  
Hmm… !!! The… The location of the blackmail…! It’s… the same place where the murder occured!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble…***

LUNA  
[Desk slam] Precisely, Your Honor. Now we finally know why the defendants were in the forest in the first place. They went to settle this deal with their blackmailer.

JUDGE  
I see. And I guess this would mean Turning Page is a member of these “Cutie Mark Crusaders?”

LUNA  
Not exactly, Your Honor. The two had met for the first time earlier that day. They became quick friends over the course of an afternoon.

JUDGE  
But then, why did Mr. Page get involved with the blackmail?

LUNA  
During her interrogation, the defendant, Scootaloo, mentioned that she was backed into a corner when her friends decided against following the orders they were given.

LUNA  
She decided, instead, to ask her newfound friend, Turning Page, to help her retrieve what had been taken.

LUNA  
The two conspired to break into, and steal from, Carousel Boutique in order to acquire the golden silk the blackmailer asked for.

JUDGE  
These two kids… broke into a store?!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble…***

ATHENA  
*(Oh, this doesn’t look good.)*

LUNA  
After acquiring the fabric, they proceeded to enter the forest, and made their way to the scene where the blackmailer was waiting.

JUDGE  
And this blackmailer… Who were they…?

ATHENA  
[Desk slam] I can answer that, Your Honor! The defense believes they were two fillies named Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon!

JUDGE  
Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon?

ATHENA  
An infamous pair of bullies whom the Crusaders are unfortunately well acquainted with.

ATHENA  
They constantly harass the group for not having their Cutie Marks yet - calling them names like “blank flanks.”

JUDGE  
 [Shocked] Bullies?! How awful! [Passionate] Let me speak with them! There’ll be no bullying on my watch!

ATHENA  
[Awkwardly] *(You seem pretty content watching me get insulted, though.)*

ATHENA  
There’s more, Your Honor. You see, yesterday when we spoke to Scootaloo at the detention center,

ATHENA  
We learned that an altercation between the Crusaders and these bullies occurred on the day of the murder.

ATHENA  
During that exchange, Turning Page came to their aid, and chased the bullies off. This was where Scootaloo and Turning Page first met, and later, spent time getting to know each other.

JUDGE  
And I assume this is somehow related to the blackmail letter?

ATHENA  
Precisely, Your Honor. The two fillies were angry that their encounter with the Crusaders ended with them getting told off, so they blackmailed them in retaliation.

ATHENA  
If you look at the top of the letter, you’ll see that it begins with, “Hey there, blank flanks!” The only ponies who would address the Crusaders as such are these bullies.

ATHENA

[Confident] This serves as definitive proof that the ponies who wrote the blackmail letter… are none other than Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon!

LUNA  
***OBJECTION!*** … Unfortunately, defense, that is not a wholly concrete possibility.

ATHENA  
[Shaken] H-Huh? But… the insult—

LUNA  
—Could easily be a red herring by the author of the note. These fillies are not the only ones who are aware of that particular taunt.

LUNA  
After all, if these fillies are as infamous as you say they are, then anypony familiar with them would know that they are fond of the term “blank flank.”

LUNA  
It’s hardly proof, defense. Suppose Your Honor began to refer to you as “Golden Pixie.” Would that make him me?

JUDGE  
Well? Would it, Golden Pixie? I very much would not mind being considered a princess, you know.

ATHENA  
Urk! *(I’d rather not answer that, Your Honor…)*

LUNA  
But now let us turn our attention to the letter itself.

LUNA  
I’m sure everyone can see that this note is written entirely in letters cut out from a magazine.

LUNA  
As a result, it is impossible to perform any sort of writing analysis. However, that doesn’t mean we can’t prove who the author of this note is.

ATHENA  
H-How?

LUNA  
If we could find the magazines that these letters were cut-out from, it’d be a simple matter of matching the cuts on the letters to the holes in the magazines.

ATHENA  
[Incredulous] Yeah, but, we don’t HAVE those magazines!

LUNA  
Are you sure about that? [Luna pulls out two magazines]

ATHENA  
!!! A-Are those…?

LUNA  
I have here two magazines with several letters cut out from many different pages.

LUNA  
If the court would be so kind, I’d like to request some time for the police to analyze the letters on the note, and the empty spaces in the magazines.

LUNA  
If we get a match, then we’ll know for a fact that the blackmail letter was written using these magazines.

JUDGE  
Very well. The court grants the prosecution’s request. Private Eye?

PRIVATE EYE  
Yes, My Lord?

JUDGE  
Please take this letter and these magazines, and have the analysis performed. Try to have it done in 30 minutes, if you can!

PRIVATE EYE  
Certainly, My Lord.

*[Fade to black…]*

# Scene 6

**Characters: Athena, Twilight, Turning Page, Scootaloo, Princess Luna, Zecora, Judge, Gallery Pony 7, Gallery Pony 8,** **Gallery Pony 9**

JUDGE  
Prosecutor Luna. Have the results come in yet?

LUNA  
They were just delivered, Your Honor.

JUDGE  
And what’s the the conclusion?

LUNA  
The letters on the blackmail note… match the shape of the cuts in the magazines.

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble...***

JUDGE  
I see. So it has been proven how the blackmail letter was written. But… I fail to see how this helps us, Prosecutor.

LUNA  
Rest assured, Your Honor. We did not simply pick those magazines up off the street, or find them in a dumpster.

ATHENA  
You must have found them in either Diamond or Silver’s house, right?

LUNA  
… The magazines that were used to write the blackmail letter… were found in the home of Royal Order.

TWILIGHT  
Wh...

ATHENA  
WHHHHAAAAATTTT?!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble…***

JUDGE  
Order in the court! Prosecutor Luna, are you saying that the one behind the blackmail… was the victim himself?!!

LUNA  
At the site of the blackmail, it was HIS body that remained after Scootaloo and Turning Page fled the scene.

LUNA  
Additionally, the magazines used to write the blackmail letter were found in HIS home. It certainly doesn’t look good for him.

**Added to Court Record: Magazines - Two magazines found in the victim’s house. Several letters have been cut-out from the pages. They match the letters used to write the blackmail letter.**

GALLERY PONY 7  
A member of the royal guard… was a blackmailer?!

GALLERY PONY 8  
I can’t believe it… I won’t believe it!

GALLERY PONY 9  
But, if you think about it, it does seem to line up...

TWILIGHT  
***OBJECTION***! Prosecutor Luna, you can’t seriously be suggesting that Royal Order is the blackmailer! It doesn’t make any sense!

JUDGE  
What do you mean by that, Princess Twilight?

TWILIGHT  
Royal Order was in Canterlot on the eve of the murder!

TWILIGHT  
He would not have been able to steal the Crusaders’ belongings, nor send them the blackmail letter. Those events transpired much earlier in the day.

TWILIGHT  
Unless the prosecution can explain how he absconded with the Crusaders’ things while in Canterlot, it’s IMPOSSIBLE for him to be the blackmailer!

JUDGE  
Is that so? Well, then, Prosecutor Luna, what do you say to that?

LUNA  
… The defense is, of course, correct, Your Honor. Given the fact he was in Canterlot when the theft occurred, Royal Order could NOT be the blackmailer.

LUNA  
However, I don’t recall ever asserting that he was.

TWILIGHT  
!!!

LUNA  
Ms. Sparkle merely assumed that would be my argument, and has seemingly overlooked the fatal implication this evidence actually holds.

TWILIGHT  
W-what?

LUNA  
Royal Order was not around to set up this whole blackmailing scheme, yet the fact remains that these magazines were discovered in his home.

LUNA  
This can only mean that the perpetrator of this blackmailing must be somepony else who lives there.

LUNA  
We know for a fact it can’t be Turning, given that he went with Scootaloo into the forest to settle the deal. That leaves us with only one other possibility.

ATHENA  
Y-You don’t mean…

LUNA  
[Desk slam] The perpetrator can only be the victim’s wife… Ms. Fair Devotion!

ATHENA  
WHHAAAATTT?!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble….***

JUDGE  
ORDER! ORDER IN THE COURT! P-Prosecutor Luna! Are you sure? That’s the defendant’s own mother!

LUNA  
I am, Your Honor, as much as it pains me to say. But remember: Turning Page was not the target of the blackmail. The Crusaders, and by extension, Scootaloo, were.

LUNA  
Turning simply accompanied her into the forest. In which case, it’s not so unthinkable that his mother could very well have been behind the whole thing.

ATHENA  
***OBJECTION***! T-this is ridiculous! Why would Ms. Devotion want to blackmail the Crusaders?!

LUNA  
Because she NEEDED to.

ATHENA  
S-she needed to…?

LUNA  
You explained it to us earlier, defense, did you not? Turning Page confronted two bullies earlier that day: Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon.

LUNA  
He intervened whilst they were harassing the Crusaders. However, you left out the most important detail.

ATHENA  
Wh-What detail…?

LUNA  
That Turning’s attack resulted in the fillies’ dresses getting ruined.

ATHENA  
Argh!

LUNA  
Now tell me, Golden Pixie, what do you suppose happened afterwards?

ATHENA  
A-Afterwards?

LUNA  
There’s plenty more to this story than what has been told. Luckily, thanks to our interrogation of Ms. Devotion, we are able to shed light on this matter.

JUDGE  
Please, explain, Prosecutor.

LUNA  
According to Fair Devotion, Diamond Tiara’s mother, Spoiled Rich, met with her later that day, after hearing about the incident from her daughter.

LUNA  
You see, those dresses Turning Page dirtied were custom-made and quite expensive, so of course Mrs. Rich was rather upset to hear about what had happened to them.

LUNA  
Seeing as how the fault lay with her son, Spoiled demanded that Ms. Devotion pay back the money in compensation.

ATHENA  
And… She agreed to that? Why?

LUNA  
Once again, out of necessity. Mrs. Rich happens to be the president of the Ponyville school board.

LUNA  
Ms. Devotion feared that, if she didn’t agree, Mrs. Rich would ensure that she would never work at the school again.

ATHENA  
[Horrified] That’s horrible…

LUNA  
But now I’m sure you can see why Ms. Devotion would need to get her hooves on a great deal of money quickly.

TWILIGHT  
But… The blackmail letter didn’t ask for money… It asked for the fabric…

LUNA  
Indeed it did. Now, why, Ms. Sparkle, would that be the case?

TWILIGHT  
Why? Well, because…

TWILIGHT  
!!!

***\*FLASHBACK\****

*SWEETIE BELLE  
Like I said, it takes a long time to make, and it costs a LOT of money.*

***\*END OF FLASHBACK\****

TWILIGHT  
[Hesitant] The fabric would fetch a pretty high price if sold to the right pony…

LUNA  
Exactly. The value of that golden silk was brought up during the fight between the kids.

LUNA  
Turning must’ve overheard what was said, and recounted the details to his mother when she confronted him.

LUNA  
And that, fillies and gentlecolts, is precisely what gave Ms. Devotion the idea to blackmail the Cutie Mark Crusaders. She did it in order to pay off Spoiled Rich!

ATHENA  
GAH!!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble….***

ATHENA  
*(What… what is even happening right now?! Luna’s somehow opened up the possibility that Fair Devotion wrote the blackmail letter!)*

JUDGE  
[Gavel slam] You’ve presented a very convincing argument, Prosecutor, but there’s still one thing that troubles me.

LUNA  
And what would that be, Your Honor?

JUDGE  
Earlier you said that you think Royal Order is involved in this blackmail somehow.

JUDGE  
But it’s been proven that he wasn’t around to steal the Cutie Mark Crusaders’ effects or send the letter, so how could that be?

LUNA  
There’s no big mystery here, Your Honor. It’s easy to imagine that Ms. Devotion and her husband… were working together.

JUDGE  
W-Working together?! But… But I thought Mr. Order had gone into that forest to look for his son!

LUNA  
So Ms. Devotion claims, but the prosecution sees no reason to trust her word anymore.

LUNA  
The instant these magazines were matched with this blackmail letter, all of her testimony became highly suspect.

JUDGE  
Hmm, you’re quite right. The magazines leave little room for doubt in regards to who the blackmailer was.

LUNA  
Which means they also cast doubt on her explanation for Mr. Order’s movements. Taking that into account, we must seek another explanation for why he went into the forest.

LUNA  
Luckily, there is a rather simple one. Perhaps, as soon as Mr. Order got home, Ms. Devotion explained the whole situation to him.

LUNA  
Armed with the knowledge of the blackmailing and the fabric roll, he would’ve left immediately for the Castle.

LUNA  
That would be the REAL reason why Royal Order went into the forest that night. He intended to act as the recipient for the blackmail!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble...***

LUNA  
[Desk slam] And thus, we arrive at the heart of the matter - the motive for the murder.

ATHENA  
Urgh…

LUNA  
I don’t think we could ever truly know what happened at the foot of the bridge that night.

LUNA  
However, if Mr. Order was the recipient for the exchange, then we can make a few inferences.

LUNA  
It could be as simple as the negotiations going sour. Or, it could be that learning what his father was doing infuriated Turning to the point of attacking him.

LUNA  
Whichever scenario you choose, the basic facts remain the same. Royal Order was present at the scene of the blackmail, and died there - murdered.

LUNA  
The only ones who could have done it are the only two who were at the scene at the time: Scootaloo and Turning Page.

LUNA  
 However, as the defense has previously demonstrated, it’d be rather difficult for Scootaloo to be involved in this crime,

LUNA  
Given her inability to fly, and the fact that the victim was killed whilst standing.

LUNA  
Therefore, the prosecution is willing to cut the defense a deal here.

ATHENA  
Wh-What is it?

LUNA  
[Persuasive] Concede that Turning Page is guilty of murdering his father, and we’ll be willing to let Scootaloo off without a single charge.

ATHENA  
!!!

LUNA  
The choice is yours, Golden Pixie..

ATHENA  
… I--

TURNING PAGE  
***HOLD IT!***

LUNA  
?!

JUDGE  
?!

TWILIGHT  
?!

ATHENA  
?!

TURNING PAGE  
Your Honor…

ATHENA  
[Desperate] *(NO!)*

***\*FLASHBACK\****

*TURNING PAGE  
[Determined] Defend me if you must, but just know that if I think things start to look bad… I won’t hesitate to confess if it means saving her.*

**\*END OF FLASHBACK\***

ATHENA  
*(He’s going to confess! I have to stop him!)*

ATHENA  
***OBJECTION!*** Turning! Don’t do this! We don’t have to give up yet.

TURNING  
[Grateful] Thank you for fighting so hard for us, Ms. Cykes, but… [Sad] This is honestly for the best.

ATHENA  
***OBJECTION!*** No! It’s not! I… I promised you both! I’d save the two of you, together!

TURNING  
But, there’s no way you can do that now, can you? ...And besides, this is--

ATHENA  
Just tell me one thing, Turning!

TURNING  
Hm?

ATHENA  
Who was it that you met at that bridge? Was it really your father?

TURNING  
… No.

ATHENA  
So, I was right, then! It WAS Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon!

TURNING  
W-Well, yes, it was, but that’s--

ATHENA  
Ha! See, Luna? The defendant just disproved your whole theory!

LUNA  
***OBJECTION!*** Yes, congratulations, my dear Golden Pixie. You can now add perjury to the defendant’s list of charges.

ATHENA  
 ***OBJECTION!*** Not if he’s telling the truth, Prosecutor Luna!

LUNA  
In that case, defense, let’s clear this matter up once and for all, shall we?

TURNING  
Wait! But I--

LUNA  
[Comforting] Shh… It’s alright Turning Page.

TURNING  
!!!

LUNA  
Don’t forget what I told you before this all started. You and Scootaloo have nothing to worry about, I promise.

LUNA  
[Comforting - perhaps a bit of warmth] Surely, Ms. Cykes can promise you the same?

ATHENA  
! *(Is she...? Yes! She’s... trying to help them! Of course! That explains all those hints from before! [Ashamed] And why she got so mad when I accused Zecora, too…)*

ATHENA  
(*Ungh… There’s no way I can do this by myself. She wants to help, and I need it. Argh! Accidenti! I’m never gonna get any better if I keep being bailed out like this!)*

ATHENA  
(*...But I need to do SOMETHING! ...[Sigh] Just this once, okay? Just this once…)*

ATHENA  
Y-yes, Prosecutor Luna. [*Clears throat* - assume more confident tone] I can indeed.

LUNA  
Glad to see we’re on the same page, then.

TURNING  
… *[Sigh]* Alright. Go ahead, Ms. Cykes.

ATHENA  
Thank you, Turning.

JUDGE  
Umm… I’m not quite sure I understand what just happened…

LUNA  
Then allow me to summarize for you, Your Honor.

LUNA  
The prosecution claims that the orchestrator of the blackmailing deal was Fair Devotion.

LUNA  
We claim this because of the magazines found in her home. These, as previously proven, were used to create the blackmail letter.

LUNA  
We also claim that Ms. Devotion sent her husband, Royal Order, to the scene for the exchange.

LUNA  
He was subsequently killed by one or both of the ponies who arrived to settle the deal: Scootaloo and Turning Page.

LUNA  
Meanwhile, the defense claims that the orchestrators of the blackmail were two fillies the Cutie Mark Crusaders had encountered earlier in the day: Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon.

LUNA  
Their main evidence is what Turning has just said: that the ponies he and Scootaloo met at the bridge that night were, in fact, Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon.

LUNA  
Defense, I hardly need to explain to you that testimony from the defendant is not entirely reliable, do I?

ATHENA  
Not at all, Prosecutor Luna.

LUNA  
Then, by all means, do prove it to us: prove that the one the defendants met at the crime scene was not Royal Order, but instead, those two fillies!

ATHENA  
*(If I’m right that she’s helping, then I have to believe that the evidence I need has already been shown.)*

ATHENA  
*(Unfortunately, all of the evidence relating to the blackmail seems to point directly at Ms. Devotion.)*

ATHENA  
*(In that case, instead of trying to prove who the blackmailer was, I should focus on figuring out everyone’s movements that night.)*

ATHENA  
*(If I can show that Royal Order’s actions contradict the blackmailer’s, it should be enough to bring those two fillies to the stand!)*

ATHENA  
Prosecutor Luna, I have a question for you. How do you think the victim made it to the scene of the blackmail?

LUNA  
Ah, now we’re asking the real questions. The prosecution is under the assumption that the victim would’ve wanted to get there as quickly as possible.

LUNA  
Thus, he likely would’ve teleported as far as we know he could go - the crossroads - and simply walked the rest of the way. Simple, no?

ATHENA  
***OBJECTION!*** Unfortunately, Prosecutor Luna, that’s not possible.

JUDGE  
Why not, defense?

ATHENA  
Turning! Scootaloo!

TURNING  
[Shocked] Y-Yes, Ms. Cykes?

ATHENA  
Remind me once again at what time the two of you entered the forest.

SCOOTALOO  
Um, it was around 9:25, I’m pretty sure.

ATHENA  
And while you were walking through the forest, did you ever come across anyone?

TURNING  
No.

SCOOTALOO  
I don’t think so.

ATHENA  
[Desk slam] Prosecutor Luna, can you remind the court what time the victim left his house?

LUNA  
As we heard from Detective Eye’s testimony, it was 9:30.

ATHENA  
And do you know how long it takes to reach the crossroads from the forest entrance?

LUNA  
About five minutes.

ATHENA  
Precisely. And that clears it all up then, doesn’t it?

JUDGE  
Uh… I’m afraid I’m not following…

ATHENA  
The prosecution claims that Royal Order teleported himself to the crossroads as soon as he left his house. In other words, at 9:30.

ATHENA  
Additionally, we’ve just confirmed that Turning and Scootaloo entered the forest at 9:25. After a five minute walk, they would’ve reached the crossroads… at 9:30.

JUDGE  
OH!

ATHENA  
In conclusion, the victim COULDN’T have teleported to the crossroads immediately after leaving his house, because if he did, he would’ve appeared right in front of the defendants!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble….***

LUNA  
***OBJECTION!*** Very impressive, Golden Pixie. You’ve proven that Royal Order couldn’t have been walking AHEAD of the defendants, but…

LUNA  
What’s preventing him from having followed behind them? It might mean he was a little late to the meeting, but that alone doesn’t make it an impossibility.

LUNA  
[Coyly] Unless… you have proof to the contrary, defense?

ATHENA  
I… Ack!

JUDGE  
Is something wrong, Ms. Cykes? You look like you’ve come to a terrible realization.

ATHENA  
… (*He’s right… I have…*)

***\*FLASHBACK\****

*ATHENA  
And you just stood there, taking care of plants the whole time? Weren’t you worried about two kids going so far into the forest by themselves?*

*ZECORA  
Of course I was - who wouldn't be? After all, they were in the Everfree.*

*ZECORA  
But for all that time there was no sound, nor any sign that they were found. On the path I kept one eye, in case they returned, or another passed by.*

*ATHENA  
 I guess no one ever came, then?*

*ZECORA  
No one did, neither pony nor foal. I finished my work without seeing a soul.*

**\*END OF FLASHBACK\***

ATHENA  
*(The contradiction is obvious, but unless I retract my earlier accusation, it won’t be credible!)*

JUDGE  
Defense, what have you hit upon?

ATHENA  
 *… (So this is what Luna meant when she said she’d force me to abandon that theory.)*

ATHENA  
*(The only reason I made it was to remove that damaging testimony from the court’s consideration.)*

ATHENA  
[Despondent] *(But now, it’s coming back to bite us… No. To bite ME…)*

ATHENA  
(*This must have been what Twilight wanted to warn me about. She knew this could happen.)*

LUNA  
Well, Golden Pixie? Don’t keep me waiting.

ATHENA  
[Hesitant] *(I… Once again, I don’t think I have much choice. ...NO, that’s not right. Not “again.” This isn’t like before, when I could’ve let it go. This time, I REALLY have no choice. I HAVEto do this, and Luna knows it.)*

LUNA  
...

ATHENA  
*(If she isn’t out for blood, then, letting Zecora’s testimony stand shouldn’t be a problem, regardless of how much it hurts our case.)*

ATHENA  
*(At this point, that’s what I have to believe.)*

ATHENA  
Your Honor…

JUDGE  
Yes, Ms. Cykes?

ATHENA  
[Guilty] … Before the defense makes its next argument, we would like to retract our accusation of Ms. Zecora.

TWILIGHT  
!!!

ZECORA  
!!!

LUNA  
…

JUDGE  
D-defense! D-did I hear that right?! You wish to retract your accusation?!

ATHENA  
… Y-Yes, Your Honor.

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble….***

JUDGE  
[*Gavel slams*] [Sternly] I’ll have you know, Ms. Cykes, that I don’t take kindly to fruitless accusations. I’m afraid I will have to hold you in contempt of court as punishment.

ATHENA  
[Shocked] C-Conteeeeempt…?!

LUNA  
***OBJECTION!*** The prosecution objects to the defense being held in contempt.

JUDGE  
[Surprised] Y-You do?

LUNA  
We can see that our opponent is merely a fledgling attorney, still trying to find her footing.

LUNA  
Such inexperience can easily lead to impulsive decisions.

ATHENA  
[Shocked - trail off] Prosecutor Luna...

JUDGE  
Hmm… Even so, in this line of work, such actions cannot be overlooked, Prosecutor Luna.

JUDGE  
They could easily lead to the destruction of an innocent life. As such, I feel punishment is necessary here.

LUNA  
… I understand, Your Honor. In that case, why don’t we leave that decision up to the one whose life was targeted?

LUNA  
If she wishes for the defense to be punished, then the prosecution will stand down.

ZECORA  
…

JUDGE  
… Very well. Witness, what do you say?

ZECORA  
…

ATHENA  
[Guilty, Upset with self] It’s… alright, Ms. Zecora. You don’t have to say anything.

ZECORA  
!!!

ATHENA  
If you want to see me get punished, I won’t blame you. What I did was rash and dumb.

ATHENA  
I’m just… really new at this. Twilight here tried to stop me, but… I didn’t listen to her.

ATHENA  
As a result, I put you in danger, even though I knew I had no real reason to suspect you of anything.

ATHENA  
Especially when a certain filly made me aware you’d never murder anypony.

ATHENA  
 I can’t expect you to forgive me, but... I just wanted the chance to say… I’m sorry.

*[For a moment, Zecora doesn’t speak. Her face remains drawn in a tight frown. Then, suddenly…]*

*[Zecora smiles.]*

ATHENA  
!!!

ZECORA  
[Kindly] I understand what you meant to do - save both Turning and Scootaloo. While your accusation has hurt my pride, I, for one, will take it in stride.

ZECORA  
You and I desire the same, you see. To see those two young defendants set free. You evidently still have much to learn, but punishment from me you have not earned.

ATHENA  
[Relieved] Oh… Thank you. Thank you, Zecora!

JUDGE  
[Gavel slam] The court acknowledges the witness’s decision. The defense shall not be held in contempt.

JUDGE  
[Stern] However, Ms. Cykes, I better not see any more rash accusations come from you again.

JUDGE  
If I do, you WILL be penalized and held in contempt, regardless of what the prosecution, or witnesses, may say.

ATHENA  
Understood, Your Honor.

LUNA  
I am glad we’ve cleared up that matter. So now let’s return to the topic at hoof.

LUNA  
The prosecution still believes that Royal Order was the recipient for the blackmail exchange. The defense has proven, however, that he could not have arrived at the scene prior to the defendants.

LUNA  
Our amended theory is that he followed behind the children as they made their way through the forest. Defense, do you have any objections to this interpretation?

ATHENA  
I do.

LUNA  
[Inviting] Then by all means, state them here and now.

ATHENA  
It all relies on Zecora’s witness testimony.

ATHENA  
If you recall, she claimed to have kept an eye on the forest path ever since she saw Turning and Scootaloo pass.

ATHENA  
She continued watching until 10:10, when she finally retired for the evening.

ATHENA  
During that entire time, she didn’t see anypony following behind the defendants. That means the victim couldn’t have passed by during that timeframe.

LUNA  
***OBJECTION!*** Need I suggest the obvious? Mr. Order could have easily waited until Zecora had stopped watching the path before continuing onwards.

LUNA  
Or better yet, he could have simply walked off the path and through the woods himself using an illumination spell.

ATHENA  
***OBJECTION!*** But that doesn’t make any sense, either! There’s no way he could’ve known when Zecora would leave.

ATHENA  
Even if, for whatever reason, he DID wait, it takes about 15 minutes to reach the scene from Zecora’s Hut anyway. He’d be arriving at the castle no later than 10:25.

ATHENA  
But, we know Turning and Scootaloo had likely left the castle by that time. Zecora spotted one of them in the form of a small shadow at 10:20.

ATHENA  
 There would’ve been no chance for negotiations to even occur, let alone turn sour.

LUNA  
And the chance of using an illumination spell?

ATHENA  
Highly unlikely. The Everfree Forest is pitch black at night. Under the cover of trees, you’d need a very strong source of light to find your way through.

ATHENA  
A light that strong in a place that dark would no doubt have caught Zecora’s attention, no matter where it came from.

ZECORA  
Indeed. There’s no way I would’ve missed a light, and I did not see one at all that night.

ATHENA  
Which leads us to only one conclusion: Royal Order could not have followed behind the defendants, nor made it to the scene ahead of them.

ATHENA  
[Forceful] Thus, Royal Order… could not have been involved in the blackmail!!!

LUNA  
…

JUDGE  
…

ZECORA  
…

TWILIGHT  
…

COURTROOM  
…

ATHENA  
[Confident and happy] And with that, any motive for murder has completely disappeared.

JUDGE  
Indeed. It would seem as if the prosecution’s proposal no longer holds water. What say you in response, Prosecutor Luna?

LUNA  
[Genuine] Simply this, Your Honor: Bravo, Ms. Cykes. That was a fantastic rebuttal.

ATHENA  
… [Awkwardly] ! Oh, uhh… thanks? *(I could say the same thing to you, given how much you helped.)*

LUNA  
It’s too early for thanks, Golden Pixie.

ATHENA  
[Weary] *(Oh boy, back to the nickname already…)*

LUNA  
Your assertions are solid and well-founded, but unfortunately, they are far from impregnable.

ATHENA  
[Nervous] Wh-What do you mean?

LUNA  
Your claims hold strong only so long as the two assumptions they’re based on are true.

ATHENA  
[Curious, but cautious] What assumptions?

LUNA  
The first is the small shadow Ms. Zecora saw: we can’t know for certain it was related to these kids.

LUNA  
If it’s not, then we have no way of knowing exactly when they left the scene.

LUNA  
In that instance, it would be more than possible for Royal Order to arrive late at the scene, and still meet the defendants there.

ATHENA  
[Annoyed] Rgh! W-Well… Why don’t we ask them now?

LUNA  
***OBJECTION!*** Any testimony they could offer on this matter would be heavily influenced by your own remarks, defense.

LUNA  
They could easily claim to agree with your statements in order to support your story, and that would get us nowhere.

ATHENA  
That may be true, but I’d still like to hear what they have to say, regardless.

SCOOTALOO  
[Hesitant]… We’re… We’re using our right to remain silent here.

TURNING  
[Stuttering] Y-Yeah...

ATHENA  
[Confused and annoyed] What?! Why?!

LUNA  
If they told you, Golden Pixie, would that not defeat the entire purpose of the right?

ATHENA  
[Resignation] [*Deep Sigh*] …You’re right. Fine, then. What’s the second assumption?

LUNA  
Your initial rebuttal was based on the fact that Royal Order left his house at the specified time of 9:30.

LUNA  
However, this information came from Ms. Devotion, whose testimony is questionable. Can we really trust the time she gave for when her husband left home?

ATHENA  
Ugghhh...

LUNA  
And finally, there’s one last problem with your rebuttal.

ATHENA  
There’s still more…?

LUNA  
Even if we grant that those assumptions are true, your arguments utilize several different measurements of time in order to make your points stand.

LUNA  
These measurements are but estimates based on a pony’s gait. Depending on the difference in size, walking speed, and other varying factors,

LUNA  
There’s always going to be a slight difference in how quickly or slowly one can travel from point A to point B.

LUNA  
 So, even though it may seem as though Royal Order would’ve teleported into the crossroads right before the defendants’ eyes,

LUNA  
It’s still entirely possible that he could’ve done so before the two ever reached the area!

ATHENA  
Nooooo!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble….***

LUNA  
[Desk slam] So, what’s your next move going to be defense?

LUNA  
I’ll grant that you managed to cast doubt on Royal Order acting as the blackmail recipient, but it still hasn’t been proven to be false just yet.

LUNA  
As long as we have no reason to doubt that Ms. Devotion was the one behind the blackmail, it’ll be difficult to refute this point.

ATHENA  
[Desperate] But… But she’s NOT the one behind the blackmail! Turning said it himself: the ponies he and Scootaloo met at the castle were Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon!

LUNA  
[Unfazed, and stern] And yet, no evidence has been submitted which would suggest that either Diamond Tiara or Silver Spoon were even AT the scene of the crime!

LUNA  
We only have the defendants’ words, which cannot be fully trusted!

ATHENA  
[Nervous, annoyed in inner monologue] W-well… I… (*Grrr! I know for a fact that Diamond and Silver were the ones who made the blackmail letter! They HAVE to be the ones who were there that night!)*

ATHENA  
[Annoyed, turns to weary after first sentence] *(But how am I supposed to prove that if I can’t even use Scootaloo and Turning’s own words?!*

ATHENA

*If I’m right about Luna, the evidence to prove it must exist! But… I’ve never even SEEN these kids before! How am I supposed to be able to--?!* )

TWILIGHT  
***OBJECTION!***

JUDGE  
!?

ATHENA  
!?

LUNA  
...

ATHENA  
!! T-Twilight?!

TWILIGHT  
You’re right, Prosecutor Luna. Looking through the evidence, there’s nothing that can yet prove our claim.

TWILIGHT  
Which is why [confidently] the defense is prepared to submit NEW evidence!

ATHENA  
Y-you are?

TWILIGHT  
WE are, Athena.

ATHENA  
!!! Twilight…

JUDGE  
[Eager] Then by all means! Please, present this evidence to us, Ms. Sparkle.

TWILIGHT  
Gladly, Your Honor! ***TAKE THAT***!

JUDGE  
Hm? Are those… pieces of glass?

TWILIGHT  
In a sense, Your Honor, but not quite. These glass fragments were found at the scene of the crime.

TWILIGHT  
However, the investigation concluded that they were actually a broken pair of near-sighted glasses.

JUDGE  
Glasses?

TWILIGHT  
Exactly! Now, if you run through the profiles of every single pony involved in this case so far,

TWILIGHT  
You’ll notice that they all share a distinct characteristic: not a single one of them wears glasses!

JUDGE  
What?! Is this true, Prosecutor Luna?

LUNA  
It is, Your Honor.

TWILIGHT  
That would, of course, make these shards of glass seem irrelevant to the case.

TWILIGHT  
However, if we take into account Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon, then the story changes.

TWILIGHT  
[Declarative] For you see, one of them DOES wear glasses on a regular basis: Silver Spoon!

JUDGE  
[Stunned] WH-WHHHAAAAAAT?!

***Rubble, rubble, rubble, rubble….***

LUNA  
***OBJECTION!*** Many ponies wear glasses, Ms. Sparkle, so I’m afraid that alone isn’t enough to substantiate your claim.

LUNA  
Do you have any proof that those shards of glass are from Ms. Spoon’s glasses specifically?

TWILIGHT  
[Hesitant to admit]… Unfortunately, I… don’t. But, it shouldn’t be hard to figure out what the prescribed measurements of her glasses are.

TWILIGHT  
All we need to do is hear from her optometrist, and then we--

LUNA  
***OBJECTION!*** You wish to invade a child’s privacy on nothing but an educated guess? You have no proof that these glasses were even broken on the night of the murder.

LUNA  
For all you know, they could’ve been broken the day before, or the day before that.

LUNA  
[Desk slam] If you want us to collect a statement from the doctor, you’ll first need to show us that those shards are, beyond reasonable doubt, related to the crime in question.

TWILIGHT  
[Serious] … Very well. I’ll do just that. Athena?

*[Twilight turns to Athena. However, Athena doesn’t immediately respond.]*

ATHENA  
 [Glum] *(...So much for no more getting bailed out. Twilight’s doing all the work for us. If I hadn’t jumped the gun with accusing Zecora…)*

TWILIGHT  
Athena?

ATHENA  
Y-yeah?

TWILIGHT  
 [Nervous] We’re going to have to make a gamble here.

ATHENA  
What do you mean?

TWILIGHT  
[Nervous] Apart from hearing from Turning and Scootaloo, there’s only one way we can prove when those glasses were broken.

TWILIGHT  
[Nervous] Seeing how Luna won’t accept either of their words, our only hope is that SHE can recall, in enough detail, what she saw that day.

ATHENA  
[Caught off-guard] She…? !!! You mean…?

TWILIGHT  
Yes, but before I do this, I just want to make sure you’re okay with it.

ATHENA  
[Despondent] … At this point, you seem to know far better than me how to handle this. Go ahead…

TWILIGHT  
...

JUDGE  
[Gavel slam] [Stern] Defense! Present your evidence to the court now. What can prove the connection these glass shards have with this case?

TWILIGHT  
Your Honor, if you recall, we heard testimony from Zecora earlier. She spoke about what she was doing that day, before the crime occurred.

TWILIGHT  
One of those activities was looking for rare flowers… right around the scene of the crime.

***\*FLASHBACK\****

*ZECORA  
Yes, for along that castle’s cliffside, sometimes rare flowers peek and hide. Sadly when my search was done, I left without finding a single one.*

***\*END OF FLASHBACK\****

JUDGE  
Yes, I do remember that, but what significance does that have here?

TWILIGHT  
If Zecora had gone to the scene earlier that day, then she might be able to confirm for us whether or not the shards in question were present at the time.

JUDGE  
Oh! That’s right!

TWILIGHT  
So, Zecora, can you confirm for us? The glass shards in the picture here… were they there when you went to the scene that day?

ZECORA  
How funny you bring this up to me. It just came rushing back, you see.

ZECORA  
That night, at the scene, those shards I did spy. The glint of the moonlight caught my eye.

ZECORA  
And as for their presence earlier that day, I think you’ll like what I have to say. Because, as far as I can recall…

TWILIGHT  
…

ATHENA  
…

JUDGE  
…

LUNA  
…

ZECORA  
… There were no glass shards there at all.

TWILIGHT  
[Appreciative] Thank you, Zecora. You’ve been a great help.

TWILIGHT  
[Confident] So there you have it, Prosecutor Luna. The glasses were undoubtedly broken on the day in question, at some point prior to Zecora coming across the body.

TWILIGHT  
[Confident] And I’m confident that, once you get these shards examined, you’ll find that they match up with the glasses Silver Spoon is prescribed to wear.

TWILIGHT  
[Confident] That, in combination with the defendant’s testimony, will leave very little room for doubt, I’d say.

TWILIGHT  
[Confident] It’ll prove conclusively that both Silver Spoon and Diamond Tiara were at the scene that very night.

JUDGE  
I concur with Princess Twilight. Prosecutor Luna, what are your thoughts?

LUNA  
… The prosecution… concedes that the glasses prove exactly what the defense claims.

TWILIGHT  
!!!

ATHENA  
[Surprised] !!! Y-you do?

LUNA  
There is, however, one final question I must ask.

ATHENA  
[Hesitant] *(Oh, no…*) A-and what would that be?

LUNA  
Does your stance in regards to why these two would’ve been in the forest that night remain unchanged? The evidence speaks for itself: the one who orchestrated this blackmail was Fair Devotion.

LUNA  
It’s possible you may have proven that Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon were at the scene, but do you still claim that they were the blackmailers, even in the face of evidence? ?

JUDGE  
Hmmm! Yes, that’s a very good question! Defense, do you have an answer?

TWILIGHT  
[Sincere] What do you think, Athena?

ATHENA  
[Shocked] W-what? M-me? Twilight, I’m not even sure I should say anything at this point. I’ve already messed up once before, making claims that I couldn’t back up!

TWILIGHT  
[Supportive] … True. But… this is different from then. We have a footing, now. One backed up by our own evidence.

TWILIGHT  
Regardless of how this trial has gone so far for us, I think we’re finally getting somewhere. I think… I think this is our chance to make up for our mistakes.

ATHENA  
[Self-deprecating] *(You mean, MY mistakes…)* But Twilight…

TWILIGHT  
[Desperately] Athena!

ATHENA  
!!!

TWILIGHT  
[Imploringly] I know you feel like you messed up, but that doesn’t matter right now!

TWILIGHT  
I took a huge gamble with objecting earlier. But I did that because I trusted you could back me up if I needed you to.

TWILIGHT  
 Yes, you accused Zecora, but we can’t let that stop us. [Desperately] We’ve got one chance to bring those fillies to the stand. We have to take it!

ATHENA  
(*Twilight… Even after what I did, you still believe in me?)*

ATHENA  
[Realizes] (*... Twilight just paved the way for us to make our comeback. Even if the evidence is stacked against us, we have to take a chance here… together!))*

JUDGE  
[Sudden] Ms. Cykes! Princess Twilight!

TWILIGHT  
[Caught off-guard] G-gah!

ATHENA  
Y-Yes?

JUDGE  
Do you or do you not still assert that Ms. Tiara and Ms. Spoon were the ones behind the blackmailing?

TWILIGHT  
[Nervous] … Ready, Athena?

ATHENA  
[Serious] I hope so.

LUNA  
[Coyly, but not altogether unkind] The Golden Pixie is back from her sulking journey, I see. Let us hear this final answer, then.

ATHENA  
The defense… [Athena looks to Twilight, receiving a reassuring glance] The defense still believes that Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon were the ones who blackmailed the Cutie Mark Crusaders!

LUNA  
[Forceful] ***OBJECTION!*** And how do you expect that claim to hold, Golden Pixie? The evidence has clearly established that Fair Devotion is the only one who could’ve been the blackmailer.

LUNA  
The magazines found in her home are conclusive to this fact.

ATHENA  
[Begrudgingly] Guh… That is true…

TWILIGHT  
However, what if that very fact… is nothing short of the true author’s trap?

ATHENA  
!!!

LUNA  
You’re claiming that us finding the magazines in Ms. Devotion’s household was something that the true blackmailer set up? And where’s your evidence?

ATHENA  
Of course! The glass shards! They prove that Silver Spoon, and presumably, Diamond Tiara, were both at the scene where the blackmail was supposed to occur. That can’t be a coincidence!

ATHENA  
If the magazines say that they CAN’T be the blackmailers, then perhaps that evidence should be called into question!

TWILIGHT  
Exactly. The glass shards found at the scene corroborate the defendants’ testimony. So, if anything’s suspect here, it’s those magazines.

TWILIGHT  
It’s quite possible they could’ve been placed in the victim’s home in an attempt to mislead the investigation.

LUNA  
Yet, you have no definitive proof of your claim. Just speculation and guesswork.

TWILIGHT  
[Desk slam] Then there’s only one way we can settle this. The defense wishes to call Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon to the stand!

ATHENA  
We know they were there. It’s impossible to hide that now. What matters at this point… is what they saw.

TWILIGHT  
Were they the blackmailers, or was it someone else? The only way we can find out for sure… is by hearing what they have to say!

ATHENA  
…

LUNA  
…

JUDGE  
…

COURTROOM  
…

JUDGE  
[Gavel slam] Allow me to give my thoughts on the matter. The prosecution has given us a very convincing case, with only the slightest room for doubt.

JUDGE  
HOWEVER! Given the potential that there were additional witnesses to the crime that we have yet to hear from, I do not feel it is right for me to give a verdict at this time.

JUDGE  
Prosecutor Luna, what say you?

LUNA  
I wholeheartedly agree, Your Honor.

JUDGE  
!!!

LUNA  
The defense has pointed out an interesting conundrum. By all accounts, it should be impossible for Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon to be the perpetrators of this blackmail.

LUNA  
However, it was THEIR effects that were found at the blackmail site, which would lead one to believe that they WERE involved. This contradiction cannot go unresolved.

LUNA  
Therefore, the prosecution concedes to the defense’s request.

JUDGE  
 Very well. This court will now enter a 30 minute recess.

JUDGE  
During that time, I expect the prosecution to obtain the results on those glass shards, and find out if they match the prescription of the filly, Silver Spoon.

JUDGE  
If, by chance, they do, the court demands that she and Diamond Tiara, are summoned here immediately to give testimony.

LUNA  
That last bit will be entirely unnecessary, Your Honor. After all, the two of them are already sitting in the witness lobby, waiting to be summoned to the stand.

ATHENA  
…

JUDGE  
Very well. Court is now adjourned.

**To Be Continued...**