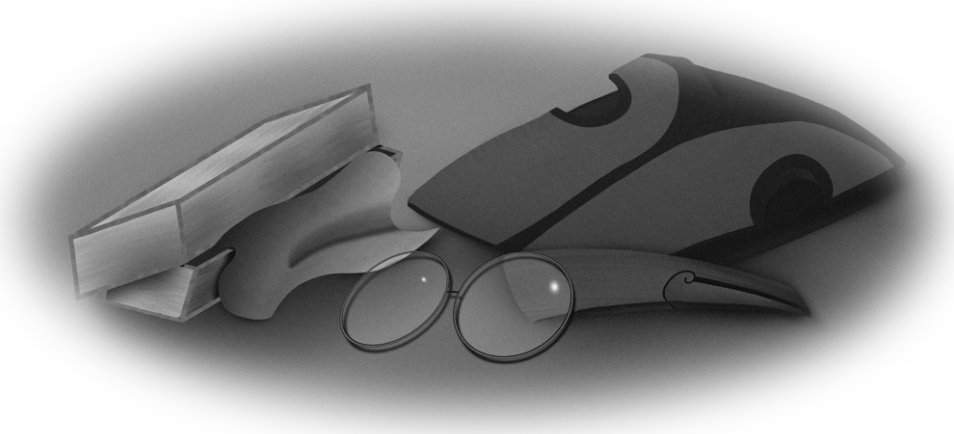
Past Sins

By Pen Stroke
Assisted By Batty Gloom

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Chapter 2
A Secret Between Friends

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<<Chapter 1 - Chapter 3>>

Twilight yawned as she made her way down the steps to the library's main floor. Her mane was freshly brushed, but the unicorn herself still wasn't completely awake. She had been up late the night before, doing research and making some plans, and had not gotten to bed until well past midnight.

Still, as an empty belly can be a powerful motivation to get out of bed, the unicorn stepped into the kitchen.

"Morning, Twilight," Spike greeted, the baby dragon working at the stove.

"Hey Spike," The unicorn replied, before having to yawn again as she made her way to the table. This had been Twilight and Spike's usual morning ever since they had moved to Ponyville, and even for a time before that. One of them would get up early and make breakfast while the other would stumble into the kitchen sometime later. Who made breakfast largely depended on who went to bed first the night before, and the previous evening it had been Spike.

Yet, for the past few days, there had been an addition to the routine: a little black filly alicorn who was currently seated at the table, waiting patiently for breakfast.

Twilight had come to call the filly Nyx, an old name from a storybook Twilight remembered from

her own fillyhood. Nyx, as the stories went, was a pony that basked in Luna's night before the princess became Nightmare Moon; a black coated mare who guarded her home town from the creatures that lingered in the dark.

Nyx had been one of Twilight's favorite storybook characters growing up, her parents reading some of the old stories to her at bedtime. The name just seemed to fit the filly, and it was far better than calling her Nightmare Moon.

And, in truth, the filly had become the focus of Twilight's efforts for the past few days. She had spent all of her free time studying, devoting herself to researching the possibilities of resurrection spells. Unfortunately, none of the library's books had any direct information, and what information she could find was in theoretical magic.

Her library was insufficient, but Twilight knew that the princess had unicorns in Canterlot working on the spell. They had to have more information, and she had asked Celestia if she could possibly read some of the same books or be kept informed on the progress of the research. Princess Celestia, however, refused the request, wishing Twilight to simply forget about the spell.

But Twilight couldn't stop herself. While she couldn't really believe that the scared little filly was Nightmare Moon reborn, the threat and danger of that truth lingered constantly on the fringes of her mind. She needed to be absolutely sure, and the only way to be absolutely sure was to understand the spell and figure out what could have happened if the spell was interrupted.

Progress, however, was slow and Twilight was forced to put her research on hold the previous evening to handle a more pressing concern, one that involved Nyx.

Over the past few days, Nyx had become a little more open, though she was still quite nervous and quiet. She had even started helping Spike with his chores, slowly winning over the skeptical baby dragon. She had also demonstrated an interest in reading, cracking open a number of books in the library. She struggled with the words at times, but she was reading a lot and not just stories either. She began to get into books that fillies her age would read at school; nonfiction books about a wide and almost random spectrum of subjects.

If there was one thing that Nyx did that annoyed Twilight, it was that she asked questions... a *lot* of questions. Most of them were things that Twilight could easily answer off the top of her head, but it was still enough of a distraction to greatly reduce the unicorn's normal study time.

Nyx had also started demonstrating an anxious curiosity of the outside world, Ponyville looking far more inviting than the Everfree Forest. The filly would spend hours at a time just looking out the window, watching ponies pass by. If any happened to look in her direction she would quickly duck out of sight, but she would only hide for a few minutes before returning to the window.

It was something Twilight hadn't concerned herself with until Nyx asked if she could go outside. Twilight, of course, had to refuse the request, and, thankfully, Nyx didn't resist. The filly was willing to accept her confinement in the library, at least for the moment, but Nyx's request had made Twilight realize something.

She couldn't keep Nyx hidden in the library forever. The library wasn't a jail, she wasn't a warden, and Nyx wasn't a prisoner. The filly deserved to be able to go outside and enjoy the sunshine, but if she did so without considerable preparation, it would have been disastrous.

So Twilight spent the previous evening making a plan. Twilight was going to pass off Nyx as a cousin who was going to stay with the unicorn indefinitely to study, much like how Twilight had started living at Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns when she became the princess' private pupil. It might not have been the greatest of plans, but Twilight never really told anypony in Ponyville about her family, so there was a chance they would probably believe it.

Most of all, it was a plan that could buy her the time she needed to be sure whether or not the filly was Nightmare Moon, but it would require a number of things to work, the first of which Twilight was going to try and tackle that very morning.

It was time to call in Rarity's favor.

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It took some precise movements and careful hiding, but Twilight was able to lead Nyx across Ponyville to the Carousel Boutique without anypony getting a good glimpse of them. The front door to the shop was thankfully unlocked. The little bell rang as Twilight opened the door, let Nyx inside, and slipped in herself before being noticed by any passers-by.

While Nyx had been excited to finally go outside, the filly clung close to Twilight the entire trip over and still lingered nearby now that they were in the shop, just as scared of running into another pony as Twilight was, though for different reasons. Yet, her cautiousness was slowly being overridden by curiosity as the filly looked about the room, taking in the shop's beautiful interior and the elegant dresses on display.

"Rarity, are you home?" Twilight called out as she levitated her saddlebags off and set them by the door.

"Yes, Dear, just a moment!" Rarity called back as she came out from the boutique's back room with several spools of thread floating behind her. She had on her red glasses, a sign that Rarity was in the middle of sewing something together. Reading glasses, Rarity once told Twilight, that she only needed to work and, well, read.

"Twilight, *Darling*, I've seen neither hide nor hair of you in days. Where *have* you been hiding?"

“In the library, where else?” Twilight replied teasingly.

“Where else indeed,” Rarity chuckled before setting down the spools of thread she was levitating. “You know, all those dusty old books *can’t* be good for your complexion. You should come with Fluttershy and I on our weekly spa outing. You had *such* fun the last time you joined us that I was actually hoping the three of us could make it a regular thing.”

“I’m sorry, Rarity, really; I would like to, but sometimes I just can’t pull myself away from a book.”

“A fact I am well aware of,” Rarity replied, taking her glasses off and setting them on her workbench. “Still, I guess hearing that you’ve been studying your little head off is a good thing. It means you’ve recovered from your *traumatic* ponynapping as well as anypony could hope. Now, just what brings you by the boutique?”

“Um... I need some casual day-wear.”

“Casual day-wear? Now *that* is a request I don’t get too often. Most ponies are just satisfied strolling about without a thread of fabric on, but personally I feel some ponies would look just *fabulous* with the right vest or day dress.

“Personally though, I think you’re one of those ponies that doesn’t need casual wear,” Rarity assured, though she was already gathering up some pencils and blank pieces of paper. “I however, can’t say for certain until I have a chance to sketch out some designs. So, Twilight, what were you looking for in particular?”

Twilight smiled nervously. “Okay, so... here’s the thing... it really isn’t for me.”

“Well, who is it for then?” Rarity asked.

“It’s for her,” Twilight admitted as she stepped to one side, leaving Nyx standing out in the open. When Nyx realized that she was exposed and in clear view of Rarity, the filly hung her head and stepped back behind Twilight, trying to remain hidden. It took Twilight whispering some reassuring words to the filly to finally coax Nyx back into plain view, though Nyx chose to keep her head lowered and avoid direct eye contact.

“Rarity, I’d like you to meet Nyx.’ Twilight said when she was sure the filly wasn’t going to try and hide behind her a second time. “Nyx, this is my good friend, Rarity. Say hello, Nyx.”

“Um... H-Hello, Miss Rarity,” Nyx mumbled very quietly. It was a good thing Nyx kept her eyes turned down at the floor, for it kept the filly from noticing that Rarity was staring dumbfoundedly at her. The white unicorn was focused on Nyx’s eyes, which were all too familiar... eyes Rarity had gotten a *very* close look at during the last Summer Sun Celebration.

The white unicorn, however, managed to put on a uneasy smile as she turned her attention to Twilight. “Well... of course. I... just need you to... uh... come in back with me and... pick out a fabric. Uh... Nyx, was it? Would you mind staying here? I just need to speak with Twilight for a few moments in private.”

“T-Twilight?” Nyx whimpered, looking at the purple unicorn as if she would never see her again.

“It will be all right, Nyx,” the purple mare reassured. “Just go look at some of the dresses that Rarity has made. We’ll be right back.”

The little black pony slowly nodded before she turned and headed towards one of the mannequins, which was currently displaying the jumpsuit Fluttershy had worn when Rarity was trying to impress Photo Finish.

As soon as the filly’s back was turned, Twilight felt herself wrapped in magic; specifically Rarity’s magic. The white unicorn drug Twilight into the back room of her shop unceremoniously before shutting the door, though she did it gently so she wouldn’t draw unwanted attention. Then, the moment that backroom door was closed her eyes locked on Twilight.

“Twilight. Who. Is. *That*?” Rarity stressed.

“I take it you noticed she looks kind of like-”

“Nightmare Moon!” Rarity loudly whispered, though it was obvious she would have rather been shouting. “*Yes*, I *did* notice! Now, would you care to explain?!”

“Well, do you want the long or short version?” Twilight asked, anxiously scratching at her front right leg. “Or maybe the medium version? I suppose I could-”

“Twilight, just *tell me*!” Rarity pressed.

“Okay, short version. She might, and I mean *might,* be Nightmare Moon reborn. That crazy cult that ponynapped me cast some weird spell, and while Princess Celestia kept the spell from being completed, it still... well... I *think* it created her. I found her in the Everfree Forest, alone and scared, and-”

“And you brought her to Ponyville?!” the fashion designer snapped, struggling to keep herself from shouting.

“Rarity, calm down before she hears you!” Twilight stressed, motioning with her hoof that the white unicorn needed to keep quiet. “Look, she doesn’t remember anything that happened before I found her, and she acts nothing like Nightmare Moon. She’s... just a sweet, if a bit

nervous, little filly. To be honest... I am having trouble believing she could be Nightmare Moon at all."

Despite Twilight's assurances, Rarity was worried and unconvinced. "And did it ever cross your mind what would happen if she really *was* Nightmare Moon? That monster could have attacked you in your sleep!"

"Rarity, she isn't a monster, I promise. She's just-"

"Twilight, I think your ponynapping has rattled your senses! You *have* to tell Princess Celestia about this! If there is even a small chance that filly is Nightmare Moon, the princess needs to know before-"

"But I'm afraid that if the princess finds out, she'll banish Nyx to the moon!" Twilight said, struggling to keep her voice down as the argument grew more heated. "Look, you saw how she acted when she first met you. She's more scared of you than you are of her. She really doesn't know who Nightmare Moon is or anything that happened at the last Summer Sun Celebration."

"And have you ever thought about what might happen if she *did* start to remember?"

"I've thought about it, yes... but-"

Rarity stomped a hoof. "Twilight, listen to yourself! If that filly was produced by a spell and that spell was supposed to bring back Nightmare Moon then-"

"Rarity, *please*! You're the only other pony I've told, and I *need* you to keep this a secret," Twilight pleaded, "If somepony finds out, then the princess will find out. Do you really think a filly that young deserves to be banished to the moon, even if she *was* created by a spell meant to bring back Nightmare Moon?

"Right now, all I want to do is to try pass her off as my cousin, just until I can figure out whether she is Nightmare Moon or just looks like her. But I can't just keep her locked in the library all the time. If I'm going to pass her off as a normal unicorn, she needs to be able to go outside, but... she needs a disguise."

"Twilight, I *really* think you should tell Princess Celestia," Rarity nervously stressed.

"Rarity, I need you to keep this a secret. Consider this the favor you owe me."

Rarity pushed her lips together. "And you want to use your favor like this?"

"Yes," Twilight replied firmly.

“Are you absolutely sure?”

“*Yes*.”

“Are you absolutely, *positively*-”

“Rarity, I’m sure.”

Rarity let out a sigh, touching a hoof to her head for a moment before nodding. “Very well, Twilight. Your secret is safe with me, but that still leaves me wondering just why you’ve brought her to my boutique.”

“I need you to make something, anything, Nyx can wear on a daily basis to hide her wings.”

“Her wings?” Rarity echoed, cocking an eyebrow.

“Didn’t you notice? Nyx is an alicorn.”

“Well of course I noticed,” Rarity assured with a wave of her hoof. “I also understand why you’re apprehensive about her going outside, but, Twilight, wings are *so* in style right now. *All* the best boutiques in Canterlot are using pegasus models this season. Makes me wish I could talk Fluttershy into stepping back onto the stage; that or convince Rainbow Dash to give fashion modeling a try. She could have *such* a beautiful mane if she would just brush it out once in a while and-”

“Rarity, focus!” Twilight interrupted, bringing the fashion designer back to reality. “Even if wings are in style, its whole lot easier to hide a pair of wings than it is to hide a horn, wouldn’t you agree?”

“True, wings are a more readily hidden feature, and... I’ll admit she *does* have such a wonderful black coat; a rare color to say the least. And her mane... it’s not nearly as beautiful as mine, but with a little care... Hmmmm...”

At that, Rarity shut her eyes, gently tapping her chin with her hoof as the gears in her mind turned before a smile sprang onto the unicorn’s lips.

“Oh... iiiiidddddddeeeaaaa~!” Rarity sang, her horn lighting up as she opened the door to the backroom. And with that, the fashion designer was off, calling Nyx over as spools of fabric began to float around the room.

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“I’m almost done, just hold still for a few more seconds,” Rarity said an hour later, having gotten

lost in her work. She had been treating Nyx more like a mannequin and less like a filly, making her stand still almost the entire time, but it had allowed the white unicorn to work quickly and efficiently. It was, however, becoming apparent that Nyx was growing tired of standing in the same place for so long. Still, as Nyx had proved to Twilight, she was naturally well behaved, if timid, and did her best to keep still.

Rarity had worked her usual magic, creating a perfect bit of casual wear for the little filly. A simple purple vest, similar in design to the vests worn by everypony in town during Winter Wrap-Up. Rarity, however, modified the design in a few places so that Nyx's wings could hide comfortably beneath the fabric. Rarity also worked to stylize the vest a little bit, putting some black bits here and there to blend with Nyx's natural coat color.

The final thing Rarity needed to work on was Nyx's hair. The unicorn had tried a number of different styles, including styling the mane up like her own as well as giving it more body like Fluttershy's, but nothing she tried seemed to please Rarity.

"Oh, what to do? What to do?" Rarity pondered, letting Nyx's hair drop. "Most ponies have their mane styled to leave a little something in the front, but I think you'd just look so... *elegant* with your mane pulled back. Yes, I definitely need to keep the pulled back style... but it just *needs* something... "

Rarity's horn glowed, the unicorn levitating a few ribbons and hair bands from her private collection. Her eyes moved over each, tossing some away while others lingered in the air, waiting to be judged by the fashion designer's meticulous eye. Then, Rarity's eyes lit up.

"Of course! Aloe and Lotus," the fashion designer exclaimed.

"Who and what now?" Twilight asked, watching in confusion.

"Aloe and Lotus, the ponies who manage the spa," Rarity answered, using a hoof to pull back on Nyx's hair. "They style their manes back like this and, oh, that style would look absolutely *perfect* on little Nyx here."

With that Rarity was off, running a brush through Nyx's hair until every strand fell perfectly straight. Then, as a final touch, Rarity settled a head band just above Nyx's horn, a turquoise color with some designs on the sides to bring out Nyx's eyes.

"Perfect," Rarity said, approving of her handiwork a few minutes later. "Oh yes, this really is a mane that can pull this off. The hair falls so wonderfully and has such a shine when it's brushed. I dare say it gives off an air of sophistication and class."

"Am I done now?" Nyx whined, not trying to sound bored but even the well-behaved filly was at her wits' end.

Rarity nodded, slipping out of designer mode and gaining some cautious coldness in her voice as she remembered who she had been making the vest for. “Yes Dear, you are done. Here, why don’t you go take a look in the mirror?”

The filly nodded, jumping down from the table she had been standing on while Rarity worked. It wasn’t hard to find a mirror; the front of Rarity’s shop was littered with mirrors of varying sizes. Nyx moved to the nearest one, examining her reflection.

“It’s perfect Rarity,” Twilight beamed as she moved over beside the fashionista. “If I didn’t know better I’d say she was just a normal unicorn.”

“Oh, Twilight, must you *always* think of function over form?” Rarity chided as she began to put her supplies away. “Yes, it hides her wings, but she also looks *fabulous*, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yes, she looks amazing, Rarity.”

The white unicorn batted at a bit of her hair. “Try not to sound *so* surprised. After all, I was the one that made your wonderful Gala dress.”

“Now all Nyx needs are her glasses,” Twilight said with a smile.

“Glasses? Heavens, what would that little filly need glasses for? Her eyesight seems fine.”

“These aren’t correctional glasses. It took a lot of research, but I’ve finally found an illusion spell so that I could enchant the glasses to disguise Nyx’s eyes that will make them look... well... more common.”

Again, Rarity slipped into fashion designer mode, lamenting Twilight’s decision.“Oh, but it will be such a travesty to hide those beautiful orbs! Those slits of pupils give Nyx an air of mystery about her. What other pony can say they have eyes like a dragon?”

“None; that’s the point,” Twilight insisted, whispering so Nyx, who was staring wide-eyed at her own reflection, wouldn’t be able to hear. “There is only one other pony who has ever had dragon-shaped eyes, and that was... you know who.”

Rarity frowned, her fashion desires defeated by Twilight’s logic. “True... and it *was* because of those eyes I was really able to notice the resemblance. *Oooohhh,* but it’s such a shame to hide them! At least tell me you got some fashionable frames.”

“Well, I *thought* they would be fine,” Twilight admitted. Turning her head, the unicorn’s horn began to glow as her saddlebags, which had been left by the door, flipped open. From inside Twilight extracted a pair of glasses, levitating them across the room before presenting them to

Rarity.

“Twilight, *please* tell me this is some kind of cruel joke!” Rarity said as she shied away from the glasses, as if they were an angry snake.

“Why, what’s wrong?”

“Those glasses are in every *way* wrong,” Rarity stressed, treating the glasses as if their ugliness were infectious. “Those thick frames, and that black color! Oh, they utterly clash with Nyx’s entire outfit!”

“But... she has a black coat. How can black frames clash with a black coat?”

“It’s about so much more than just the *color,* Twilight. I mean, look at these glasses!” Rarity said, levitating the frames as she proceeded to point out their flaws. “They’re matte, with no shine whatsoever, while Nyx’s coat has just the slightest, natural sheen. And don’t get me *started* on the thickness.

“No, these just won’t do,” Rarity snipped matter-of-factly.

“But-”

“No buts!” Rarity said, getting behind Twilight and starting to push her towards the door. “I will *not* have you ruin this poor filly’s fashionable attire with some random frames you picked out just because you’d thought they’d ‘be fine’. As you surely remember, Twilight, I’ve seen your definition of fine... and it was embodied in that*... interesting* dress you were going to wear to the Gala. Not only was it old, the red and yellow colors were a *horrible* match for your mane, coat, eyes... It clashed with *everything*.”

“But-” Twilight tried to defend, only to get cut off again.

“Now, I *want* you to gallop down to wherever you purchased these atrocities and get them exchanged. Pick up something midnight purple with a slight, and I mean *slight*, gloss and make sure the frames are also at least half as thin as these... these... things,” Rarity stressed, setting the offending glasses on Twilight’s forehead.

“But what about Nyx?”

“She will be fine here with me until you come back with those new frames. Now, *off* with you,” Rarity ordered, shoving Twilight outside the shop before shutting the front door abruptly behind the purple unicorn.

“Twilight, I swear, sometimes you *try* to be unfashionable on *purpose*,” Rarity huffed, turning and

trotting away from the door. “I do apologize for that outburst, Nyx, but I just couldn’t let Twilight make you wear those awful glasses. They would have just been a travesty against fashion, a simple *travesty*.”

“Were the glasses really that bad?” Nyx asked as she turned towards Rarity.

“Oh, yes, they were. Honestly, I wouldn’t make my worst enemy, somepony I truly hated, wear those glasses. They are, in all honesty, the very *definition* of a fashion *don’t*.”

At that Rarity turned, quickly busying herself as she cleaned up the bits and pieces left behind while she had been making the vest. For a time, the unicorn went about her work happily, humming a melody to herself. Yet, as Rarity worked she began to hear something: a quiet sniffling. Caught a bit off guard by the sound, Rarity turned to look at its source.

Nyx had plopped down in the middle of the shop floor and looked like she was on the verge of sobbing.

It was an awkward moment, but Rarity turned away and tried to ignore the filly. She wasn’t in any way convinced that Nyx wasn’t Nightmare Moon, and still strongly believed that Twilight needed to write a letter to the princess immediately. Yes, she couldn’t deny that Nyx had been well-behaved while she was working on the vest, but that hadn’t dispelled the white unicorn’s fears.

So Rarity continued to clean, putting away her spools of black and purple fabric. Yet, as Rarity tried to keep herself busy, Nyx’s sniffling began to mature, graduating to soft sobs. It was a noise Rarity tried to block out, tried to ignore, but she was finding it more and more difficult with each passing moment.

Finally, it became too much, Rarity turning and approaching Nyx. “What in the world is the matter?” Rarity asked, unable to hide the hint of annoyance in her voice.

“T-Twilight doesn’t like me,” Nyx blubbered with a whine, struggling to not cry outright.

Rarity was a little caught off guard by this, her annoyance being replaced with confusion. “Now just what makes you think that?”

“Y-you said that you wouldn’t m-make anypony wear those glasses, e-even some pony you really hate... b-but Twilight wanted me to wear those glasses, s-so she must hate me and... and...”

“Oh... oh Nyx, no,” Rarity reassured, speaking as if the filly was just being over dramatic as she used a hoof to raise Nyx’s chin. “Twilight does not hate you.”

“But... you said...”

“Allow me to clarify,” Rarity began, gently brushing away a few of Nyx’s tears. “I wouldn’t make anypony wear those glasses, but I also have a better sense of fashion than Twilight Sparkle. She just doesn’t realize how ugly those glasses were; she’s *always* more concerned with function at the expense of aesthetics. Honestly, if she needed to, she’d probably wear those glasses herself, and I know Twilight doesn’t hate herself.”

“Are you sure?” Nyx asked.

“I am absolutely positive,” Rarity said, her voice ringing with authority. “Twilight Sparkle does not hate you in the least.”

“O... okay, Miss Rarity.”

“Please, you may just call me ‘Rarity’,” the white unicorn corrected. She appreciated the fact the filly had enough manners to address her like a lady, unlike those ruffians the Diamond Dogs. However, she never quite liked it when young fillies and colts addressed her as “Miss Rarity”. Coming from them, it made her sound older than she liked.

“Okay, Rarity,” Nyx said again.

Rarity smiled, giving an approving nod before heading towards the stairs that led to the upper level of the shop, where she lived. “Now, I’m done cleaning, so why don’t we go and have ourselves a late morning tea while we wait for Twilight? I also think I have some leftover pieces of cake from one of Pinkie Pie’s many parties. I’d say you deserve to have a slice after behaving so well this morning.”

Nyx perked up at the thought of getting a slice of cake and eagerly followed Rarity to the boutique’s kitchen. With an elegant flick of her horn, Rarity set several things in motion about the kitchen, the fashion designer well-practiced at levitating a number of items around a room at the same time: a shining example of an efficient multi-tasker.

“Go ahead and sit there,” Rarity said, motioning to the small kitchen table. “The tea will be ready in a jiffy.”

Nyx complied as she jumped up into one of the seats, sitting and watching as Rarity poured the tea and served both herself and Nyx a slice of cake. It was going to be a pleasant late morning tea, but Rarity had another purpose for the impromptu gathering. To say the least, the designer was curious about the Nightmare Moon look-a-like, and now had an opportunity to satisfy her curiosity while Twilight was away.

“So, tell me a little about yourself, Nyx.”

Nyx looked up from the cake and tea that had been placed in front of her. “Well, I’ve been staying with Twilight. She’s a really nice unicorn, and Spike is nice too. She also has an owl named-”

“Nyx, you’re telling me about Twilight Sparkle, and I *know* Twilight,” Rarity said as she batted at her mane. “She is, after all, one of my closest friends. That and, if you recall, you and Twilight told me all about what you’ve been doing the past three days while I was working on your vest.”

Rarity levitated her cup of tea, preparing to take a sip. “No, I want to know more about *you*. Oh, and if I were you, I’d drink your tea before it starts getting cold.”

Nyx nodded, looking down at the small cup she had been served. The filly alicorn first leaned in to take a sip, but quickly froze up and cringed when Rarity began to speak.

“Oh, please tell me Twilight has at *least* taught you how to have tea correctly,” Rarity groaned.

“There’s... a proper way to have tea?”

“But of course,” Rarity replied as she gave her head a gentle toss, something she liked to do when making a point, “especially when you have a unicorn horn. The only proper way for a unicorn to have tea is to levitate the cup to your mouth and take a very delicate sip, and, above all, a proper mare shouldn’t spill a drop or slurp.”

As if to give an example, Rarity did just that. She expertly sipped from the cup of tea without making a single noise before levitating it back down onto its coaster.

“You mean... like this?” Nyx replied, her own horn starting to glow. Yet, to both her and Rarity’s surprise, Nyx’s cup of tea shot up into the ceiling, smashing to pieces as drops of tea rained across the room.

Rarity’s mouth hung open ever so slightly, the unicorn gaping at where the tea cup had shattered against the ceiling. “My word...”

“Rarity, I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!” the filly panicked, practically begging. “Please don't be mad, I-I-I didn't mean to do it! It was an accident! Please don't be mad! I'm so sorry, please don’t hate me! I... I..."

“Nyx, Nyx, please! Relax, it was just an accident,” Rarity replied, her own horn glowing as she took a few dish rags and began cleaning up the spilled tea and shattered tea cup. “Though, if I were to venture a guess, that was your first time trying to levitate something.”

The black coated filly replied with a nod.

“Well, I never liked that cup anyway, and no unicorn gets levitation right on the first try. Though, most colts and fillies your age have trouble lifting things, whereas your trouble seems to be that you have a natural ability for magic. You just put a little too much energy into it.

“Now,” Rarity continued, her magic cleaning up the last pieces of the mess while, at the same time, pouring Nyx a fresh cup of tea. “I want you to try again, but be very gentle this time.”

“But... what if I break another cup?”

“Then I’ll just clean it up and we’ll try again until I’m out of cups,” Rarity answered, though she would secretly keep some of her cups hidden away. She was willing to help a filly learn, but she wouldn’t risk her best china being destroyed.

The vote of confidence, however, brought a smile to Nyx’s face as her horn glowed again. This time, Nyx very gently levitated the cup of tea off the saucer. It wobbled around in the air but stayed level enough that it didn’t spill. Nyx then opened her mouth far wider than she probably needed to, bringing the cup close until she could bring her lips together and take a very gentle sip.

She then levitated the cup down, intending to set it gently on the saucer. Nyx, however, released her magic a little too early. The cup clattered down onto the waiting saucer, causing both Nyx and Rarity to wince. Thankfully, the cup neither broke nor spilled.

“There you go, just like that,” Rarity said, though her happiness came mostly from the fact that Nyx hadn’t smashed another tea cup. "Yes, you’ve taken a good first step towards being a proper mare.”

Nyx looked up at Rarity with wide, eager eyes. “So, if I can learn to sip tea right, I’ll be a proper mare!?”

“Oh heavens no,” Rarity replied, stepping away from the table as she began to slowly walk across the room. “A proper mare has to be able to be able to walk with the right posture, to keep up pleasant conversation, oh... and any proper mare must-”

“Can you teach me something else, Rarity?” Nyx asked eagerly. “Please?”

Rarity glanced in Nyx’s direction, finding the request all too enticing. Yes, she was still unsure about the filly. The white unicorn, however, had been presented with an opportunity to spread her knowledge of proper manners and elegance, and it was too tempting to pass up.

“Well... I suppose we have time before Twilight gets back to go over a few things,” Rarity mused with a smile as she walked back over to the table. “First, sit up straight; a proper mare must

never slouch at the table. Now, while maintaining your posture, I'll demonstrate the proper way to eat cake."

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Twilight galloped, grumbling under her breath about the pony at the shop where she had bought the frames. It had taken much longer than it should have to find the right glasses, and it was no fault of Twilight's. The stallion who ran the store understood Rarity's very specific specifications, but what had taken him forever was *finding* those glasses. The stallion had no organization skills, and they ended up looking through half the boxes he had in storage for that one pair of glasses.

Still, Twilight had the glasses in question and was happy to see she was getting close to the Carousel Boutique. She galloped in the door, looking around the front room for Rarity and Nyx. A small surge of panic went through the unicorn seeing the front room empty, but before starting to get worked up in worry, Twilight called out.

"Rarity?"

"Oh! Twilight! You're back," Rarity called. "Come on into the kitchen."

Following her friend's voice, Twilight nosed open the door to the kitchen and was a bit surprised at what she found. Both Nyx and Rarity were standing in the kitchen, the white unicorn balancing a stack of three books on her head while Nyx had a single fairly thin book on hers. The filly was watching the book, squirming a little as she tried to keep it balanced.

"What... are you two doing?" Twilight asked, her expression etched with confusion.

Rarity smiled, turning and strolling towards Twilight as the books remained perfectly balanced on her head. "Why, I'm just giving Nyx a few lessons in being a proper mare."

"Yea, she taught me how to sip tea, how to eat cake, and now she's showing me how to have proper posture," Nyx chirped, all too excited by the prospect of learning... well, anything.

"There's a way to eat cake?" Twilight couldn't help but ask while raising an eyebrow.

"But *of course*, Twilight; at least there is a *proper* way to do it. Still, I assume you have the new glasses?"

"Yep, I've got them right here," Twilight said, levitating the frames off her forehead and over to Rarity. The white unicorn took the glasses into her own levitation magic, turning them around a number of times as she examined them, scrutinizing every detail.

“These are... better,” Rarity admitted with sigh. “Not *ideal*, mind you, but still better than the last pair. Have you already enchanted them?”

“Yes, I did it on my way over here.”

“Well then, Nyx, try them on,” Rarity said, passing the glasses to the little filly. The spell took effect as soon as the glasses were on the bridge of the filly’s nose; Nyx’s dragon-shaped eyes now looking round and normal. Her irises were still turquoise, but, more importantly, the whites of her eyes were actually white.

“While I still say your real eyes are far better, you still look absolutely darling,” Rarity said, tilting her head to one side as she looked at the ensemble with a discerning gaze. The fashionista then began to grin as she gave her head a single decisive nod. “Yes, those midnight purple frames go perfectly with your new vest.”

“Twilight, why do I have to wear a vest and glasses?” Nyx asked, her curiosity about the clothes reaching its limits. Twilight bit her lip for a minute, trying to think of something but failing. Thankfully, Rarity seemed to pick up on Twilight’s nerves.

“Well, Twilight’s just trying to protect you.”

Nyx’s ears drooped and she shrank back a little. “Protect me? From what?”

“Why, from making other ponies jealous. Most ponies either have wings or a horn, if they even have either at all, but you have both. Not only that, but you have such unique eyes, and you wouldn’t want to make anypony jealous, would you?” Rarity finished by gently tapping Nyx on the nose, making the filly giggle a little.

“No, I guess I don’t...”

“Good. Now, why don’t you go finish your cake while I talk with Twilight for a moment?” Rarity suggested as she motioned towards the kitchen table. “Oh, but *do* remember to practice eating it properly.”

“I will, Rarity,” Nyx chirped, moving back to the table while Rarity guided Twilight to the far corner of the room, where they could talk quietly without being overheard.

“So, I take it you two have been getting along,” Twilight offered in a hushed voice.

“I’ll admit Twilight she’s... she’s very well behaved, and I can see why you believe she only *looks* like Nightmare Moon.”

Twilight breathed a sigh of relief. “I’m glad to hear that.”

Rarity lifted a hoof. “Don’t misunderstand me, Twilight. I still think you should tell Princess Celestia about this, but I can better appreciate your reasons for desiring secrecy. I also noticed a couple things that you may want to be aware of.”

“Like what?”

“Firstly, that little filly has a *lot* of magic,” Rarity warned. “As you can see, she’s already able to levitate a tea cup. Well, actually, the first cup she tried to lift flew straight into the ceiling and shattered to bits, like she put too much effort into it.”

“Well, she *is* an alicorn,” Twilight pointed out. “Princess Celestia and Luna are able to move the sun and moon, so moving a cup is probably something that comes quite easily to an alicorn.”

“Secondly,” Rarity continued, not even registering Twilight’s quick comment, “be very, and I do mean *very,* careful what you say around her. I’ve found out the hard way that Nyx is a very sensitive pony and tends to cry at the drop of a hat. I accidentally said something in passing that made her think you hated her, and she was absolutely heartbroken. In fact, I dare say she is actually *worse* than our dear Fluttershy.”

“To be fair, Fluttershy has gotten more sociable recently. I’m sure that Nyx will grow out of it eventually... or at least I hope so.”

“Well, still be careful of what you say,” Rarity stressed “It wouldn’t take much to hurt her feelings.”

“Don’t worry, Rarity,” Twilight replied with a reassuring smile. “I may not know as much about fashion as you do, but I do know that you have to be careful about what you say to some ponies because it just may hurt their feelings.”

Rarity gave a small laugh. “One of your lessons on friendship, I would imagine. So, what *do* you have planned for the rest of the afternoon?”

“I was actually planning to show Nyx around Ponyville and see how well her disguise works. Take her to see the rest of our friends.”

“Very clever of you, Twilight. In case the disguise isn’t enough, you’d only be introducing her to our friends, ponies who we can trust to keep a secret.”

Twilight gave an affirming nod. “Exactly, though... I think for right now I’d like to just keep the truth between you and me.”

“It would be for the best, wouldn’t it?” Rarity agreed. “While Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie may take

well to Nyx, I can only imagine that convincing Applejack and Rainbow Dash that she isn't Nightmare Moon would be *much* more difficult, considering how stubborn those two ponies are."

"That, and the fewer ponies that know the truth, the better, at least until I can figure out if she really *is* Nightmare Moon or just happens to look like her. Still, you promise to keep this just between us?"

"Cross my heart, hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye," Rarity quickly chanted, making the appropriate body movements in tune with the Pinkie Pie promise.

"Thank you, Rarity... and thanks again for helping with Nyx's disguise."

"It was my pleasure, Twilight. It was nice being able to extend my creativity to a casual wear vest," Rarity replied before her tone once again turned serious. "Please promise me one thing, though."

"What's that?"

"Keep an eye on Nyx, Twilight. I know you don't think she's Nightmare Moon, but I would rather you err on the side of caution."

Twilight nodded. "I'll be careful Rarity, I promise."

"Good," Rarity said with an approving nod as she and Twilight began moving back to the table, now that the sensitive part of their conversation was done. Nyx had just finished the last of her cake, setting down her fork like a proper mare before getting down from the seat and smiling up at the two mares.

"All right Nyx, we need to get going," Twilight said, beginning to walk towards the staircase as she glanced back at her white coated friend. "Thanks again, Rarity."

"Yeah, thank you, Rarity," Nyx added. "It was fun learning to be a proper mare."

"Well, I'm glad you enjoyed it," Rarity said with a smile.

"Do you think I could come back and learn some more?"

Rarity tensed, glancing anxiously at Twilight. It was a rare occasion when somepony was actually interested in learning about proper manners, at least in the simple-natured community of Ponyville. Rarity would walk down the street and see ponies slouching or eating with such horrible manners, and the few times she tried to correct ponies she was met with annoyed glares. The only other willing student she had was Sweetie Belle, and that was before her little sister started playing with her friends the Cutie Mark Crusaders on a daily basis.

It was such a tempting request, an opportunity to spread proper manners in a world that was often, in her opinion, lacking such things. That, and Rarity realized something else. Having Nyx over would give her the opportunity to make sure the filly wasn't Nightmare Moon. While Twilight seemed at least somewhat certain, it wouldn't hurt to have another pair of eyes on the filly, just in case she started to show signs of being evil.

"I suppose you could come back from time to time," Rarity finally answered, "though, if I'm busy with a client, I expect you to either come back later or wait patiently. A proper mare doesn't interrupt a lady when she's working."

Nyx nodded her head eagerly, more than willing to accept Rarity's terms. The exchange made Twilight smile a little, happy to see that Rarity was at least somewhat open to the filly.

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Twilight spent the next few hours showing Nyx to her other friends, and, just like her friends, their responses to Nyx were vastly different, the only constant being that none of them could see through the expertly crafted disguise.

Rainbow Dash was actually the very first to run into Twilight... literally. Twilight was no stranger to being a living crash site for her pegasus friend, and was no worse for the wear. Nyx, however, was bawling her eyes out in panic, worried that the first pony to show her any kindness was seriously injured. Thankfully, it was easy enough to get Nyx to calm down once Twilight assured her that she wasn't hurt.

Rainbow Dash, on the other hoof, wasn't too impressed with Twilight's "cousin". In her own words, Dash pointed out that Nyx was kind of a crybaby and that she could stand a lot of toughening up. It was the kind of harsh honesty Dash was known for, though Twilight didn't appreciate it at the time. After those not so gentle words, Nyx hid behind Twilight until Rainbow finally left.

The next pony Twilight introduced Nyx to was Applejack. Still reeling from her encounter with Rainbow Dash, Nyx was frightened of Applejack, and seeing the farm mare bucking trees didn't help. Nyx, however, warmed up to Applejack when she showed the filly some good old fashioned hospitality, offering a smile and apple juice. Soon, Applejack was answering Nyx's almost endless stream of apple and farm related questions, impressing not only Nyx but Twilight with her extensive knowledge of her livelihood.

There was no doubt about it. If apple farming was a field of study, Applejack would have a PhD.

Nyx also got along with Fluttershy fairly well. Thought, if the filly couldn't get along with the Bearer of the Element of Kindness, Twilight would've doubted that Nyx could ever get along with

anypony. Fluttershy was all over her with how adorable she thought Nyx was, quickly pulling Nyx out of her shell. The yellow pegasus then introduced Nyx to as many of her animal friends as she could, happily responding to Nyx's questions about the many cute and cuddly creatures.

After leaving Fluttershy's, Twilight lead Nyx down the streets of Ponyville, their final destination looming closer. The disguise had to undergo one final test before Twilight would feel confident that Nyx's resemblance to Nightmare Moon would remain hidden. One final opponent; an energetic pink earth pony that had a happy outlook on life but, more importantly, a strange sixth sense.

The disguise would have to stand up against Pinkie Pie.

Twilight winced when she heard the little bell above the shop's door ring, announcing her and Nyx's arrival. She knew she could make Pinkie Pie promise to keep the truth a secret if she saw through the disguise, but that didn't ease Twilight's nerves. If anypony was going to see through the disguise, it would be Pinkie Pie. Yet, if the disguise could fool the party pony, then it meant that any regular pony would be fooled.

"Hey, welcome to Sugarcube Corner, where everything is super tasty, super sugary, and just super super. Oh, hey, Twilight!" the pink earth pony said as she bounced out from the kitchen. "Here for an afternoon snack?"

Twilight shook her head. "No, I'm actually here to introduce you to my cousin. She's going to be staying here in Ponyville with me for a while, and-"

Twilight found herself quickly knocked out of the way as Pinkie Pie zipped up, bringing her face within inches of Nyx. The filly responded to this invasion of her personal space by craning her neck and taking a few nervous steps away from the earth pony.

"Yay! I love meeting new ponies! I'm Pinkie Pie. What's your name?"

"I'm... I'm... I'm..." Nyx stammered as Pinkie Pie stared at her with expectant, almost manic blue eyes.

"Oh, I know!" Pinkie Pie chirped, bringing her head back and returning some of Nyx's personal space. " Let me guess! I'm *great* at guessing games. Um... Little Shadow? No... how about Night Shade? Oh, I know! Black Snooty, Black Snooty!"

Pinkie Pie froze up at this, as did Twilight. The unicorn's mind slipped back to the morning of the last Summer Sun Celebration. When Nightmare Moon first appeared, Pinkie had tried to guess the alicorn's name, and one of the names she guessed was Black Snooty. Was that a sign Pinkie Pie saw the resemblance? Was she able to see through Nyx's disguise?

“Oh, I’m sorry, that was mean of me,” Pinkie then finally apologized, ending the silence that had fallen on the room. “I know your coat is black, but I don’t know enough about you to call you snooty, and even if I did, I wouldn’t say it to you like this. That would just make me a rude rudy rude pants.” Pinkie Pie tilted her head to one side, staring at the ceiling as she scratched her head. “I wonder why I thought that would be your name?”

“Well,” Twilight interrupted, not wanting to give Pinkie Pie time to think about it. “In any case, her name is Nyx.”

“Oh, that’s a cool name. Nyx... *Nyx...* **Nyx...** oh yea, that is a *really* cool name. So, Nyxie, how long have you been in Ponyville?”

“Just a few days,” Twilight answered for Nyx, who was now hiding behind the unicorn.

“WHAT?!” Pinkie Pie shouted, the earth pony glaring angrily at Twilight, causing the unicorn to take a few anxious steps back. “She’s been here for *that* long and you didn’t tell me?!”

“Well, I was just giving her a chance to settle in. See, she’s very-”

“Twilight, nothing helps a pony settle in better than a welcome party,” Pinkie Pie lectured, her tone dead serious, “and now I’m late! I’m going to have to make this party extra, super-duper special to make up for it being so late! Oh, I’m going to need streamers, balloons, and you know what else?”

“No... ” Twilight replied, slightly afraid of what the answer would be.

“I’m going to need... a piñata! That’s the only thing that can make up for the fact that I’m this late with Nyx’s ‘Welcome to Ponyville’ party!” Pinkie Pie announced, as if the strange unwritten laws of Pinkie Pie’s parties were common knowledge to anypony. “Now, we’ll have the party at the library tonight, and I’ll invite everypony! Oh, it’ll be so much fun, but I’m going to need help if I’m going to pull it off. Oh, where’s Rainbow Dash?”

With that, Pinkie Pie was off, leaving a very scared and confused Nyx in her wake. Twilight, however, was mostly relieved. Pinkie Pie was acting like Pinkie Pie, which meant she hadn’t recognized Nyx. The unicorn couldn’t help but worry that Pinkie Pie might have subconsciously noticed Nyx resemblance to Nightmare Moon, which could explain why she brought up the name Black Snooty. Still, as long as that recognition stayed in the pink pony’s subconscious, they would be fine.

With Pinkie Pie off to pull together a welcome party, Twilight turned her attention to Nyx. The filly was still stunned, as some ponies were when they first met the very energetic pink earth pony.

“Twilight, i-is she always like that?” Nyx asked as she began to recover from meeting Pinkie Pie,

just barely finding the courage to come out from her hiding place behind Twilight.

“Only when she meets a new pony,” Twilight assured.

Nyx took this answer silently, turning her attention to the door Pinkie Pie had bounced out of a few moments earlier. “And... is she really going to throw me a party?”

“Yep. Pinkie Pie throws a party for every new pony who comes to Ponyville, even ponies who may only be staying here for a few days. She just... really likes throwing parties and making ponies smile.”

“That’s nice, but... please don’t hate me for saying this but... she’s kind of weird.”

Twilight laughed a little. “Yes, that’s Pinkie Pie. She’s on a different wavelength than anypony else. But don’t worry; she’s one of the nicest ponies in Ponyville. Still, if she’s going to throw you a party, I’m going to have to let you know what to expect. I don’t want you to get overloaded like I did at my welcome party.”

“Pinkie Pie threw you a welcome party? What was that like?”

Twilight chuckled anxiously; the welcome party had been on the night just before Nightmare Moon returned, which was treading dangerously closely to information Twilight didn’t want to share with Nyx. After all, the reason she hadn’t attended her own welcome party was she wanted time to look up more information about Nightmare Moon.

Then again, Nyx did just ask what the *party* was like. Twilight didn’t have to mention what happened during the Summer Sun Celebration or why she was so eager to get away from everypony that day. It couldn’t hurt to just tell her about the party.

“Well, it’s sort of like this,” Twilight began as the pair turned to leave Sugarcube Corner. “I had just arrived in Ponyville with Spike, and he told me to try to talk to some of the ponies in town. The first pony we ran into was Pinkie Pie, and..."

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<<Chapter 1 - Chapter 3>>

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- Bonus Art -

Concept Renditions of Filly Nightmare Moon AKA Nyx

Art By Valcron



Undisguised Filly Nightmare Moon *Disguised Filly Nightmare Moon*

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Questions, Comments, Concerns?
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