

Irreplaceable  
Chapter 13 - Revelation

Twilight paced the floor of the hut, her mind churning. Despite the seriousness of the situation, the atmosphere in the hut was air was upbeat, almost triumphant. Twilight Sparkle, the prize pupil of Princess Celestia, was back on her game. She could figure this out. She **WOULD** figure this out. If anyone could, it would be her. Back and forth she paced, searching every fiber of her magical experience and knowledge for an answer. True, there was so much information out there, so much old and forgotten lore, that it would be almost impossible for her to have already absorbed the information, no matter how much she'd read. Somehow, though, she knew she could work it out. She had a feeling. Almost a nagging little voice in the back of her mind. A niggly little brain tremor. It was there, all right, just hiding. Always a step away. The harder she searched for it, the harder it became to find. If only she could remember exactly **WHY** she knew it. She knew this, she **HAD** to know it. She ground her teeth, upgrading her assault on her memory to a full blown war. If it wanted to hide, so be it. She'd do whatever it took to- *Wait- War!* "THAT'S IT!" The small group looked to her, a slow smile spreading across her face. "That's it! War! I've got it! I know what's wrong with him!" Turning to the assembled, Twilight took a deep breath and began to speak.

"A while back, before I met all of you and still lived in Canterlot, I began research on a spell that would cause Spike to grow. Not too big, mind you, just a couple decades' worth. He was having a bit of a macho crisis, if you know what I mean. He didn't think that anyone could take him seriously, just because of his size and age."

"Well, he **IS** awfully cute... Um, right, sorry. Go on, Twilight." Fluttershy blushed.

Twilight continued. "I decided I'd do what I could to help him out, basically just give him one day of being big. I started to look through the archives and such, different sorts of magic, all the old draconian records and the like, both pre and post Celestial, although why they wouldn't shelve the two together is anyone's guess, what with both being-" Rarity coughed.

"Um, Twilight, darling? You had a point to make, if I'm not mistaken?"

"Right, right. Sorry, I just get somewhat absorbed when I start discussing the finer points of the filing systems and the-" Another cough, this one slightly exaggerated. "Gah! Okay, sorry. Anyways, the issue ended up getting resolved without magic. I **DID**, however, find the spell I was looking for. It's old magic. Dragon magic."

Twilight paused to take a breath. Her previous energy and jubilation began to evaporate, her excitement drops of water flicked onto a hot plate as she became serious. "I did find the spell. Ancient Draconian magic. Incredibly powerful. I may have found the spell, but I never cast it. Even if I *could've* pulled it off, there is just absolutely no way I would, not in a million years. It wasn't just difficult, it was..." Twilight paused, shuddering. "It was *evil*. Thousands of years ago, the dragons used to be in a constant state of war and conflict. Hundreds of clans, thousands of grievances and enmities, the entire species was just involved in a constant war, every clan for itself. The spell... It was designed to cause a young dragon to age and grow, creating a new, powerful warrior from an infant. Basically, nigh disposable shock troops". In the momentary

silence that followed this grim pronouncement, Applejack spoke up.

"I can see that th' spell does have some mighty disturbin' origins, but why'd that stop ya?"

Shaking her head, Twilight began to elaborate.

"You see, the thing about this spell, what made it just so... *wrong*... It corrupts them. It takes what they are and just twists it horribly. How could an infant have the will to fight a war? The dragon warlocks needed to fix that if the spell was to be effective; otherwise, the clans would end up with hundreds of fully grown warriors with absolutely no will to fight. One thing they couldn't do, though, was to control their free will. Even if they could've used magic powerful enough to rob a dragon of its free will, it would be almost impossible to maintain for long, and it would be absolutely impossible to field an entire ARMY of them. So the warlocks basically found a loophole. Instead of controlling their will, they..." Twilight stopped suddenly, the last vestiges of her scholarly fervor vanishing as she realized the implications of what she was saying, what it meant for Spike. What it meant for her.

"I-in order to get around the problem, the spell... it... *it breaks their mind*. They go insane. Absolutely, unequivocally insane. Then they'd just let them loose on the enemy". Twilight paused again, allowing her friends time to digest the information and giving herself more time to steel her nerves against the facts she relayed. It was Rarity who spoke first.

"But... I don't understand. Why would they use a spell like that? Desperate or not, an army composed entirely of mindless berserkers would be incredibly easy to defeat, in a tactical sense? They'd be nearly useless if they just blundered around, completely uncontrollable."

"This is very true. However, that's why they *weren't*, in fact, entirely uncontrollable. In order to control them, the warlock who cast the spell would establish a mental link with them, a powerful magical bond. In their madness, nothing anyone could say to them would be even remotely understandable, except for the warlock. The one who cast the spell would be their commander, their voice of reason, their GOD, for all intents and purposes."

"So... what you're saying, in essence, is that Spike has gone absolutely and completely mad and that we have absolutely no hope of being able to save him because even if we DID manage to speak to him, he is entirely incapable of understanding a word we say?" Everyone looked to Rarity as she spoke, their hope, newly rekindled by Twilight's return to herself, beginning to burn away.

"Um... but-" Suddenly the center of attention, Fluttershy quailed slightly. Even among her group of friends, she was still rather uncomfortable speaking aloud. "... I don't think that's quite right. Spike didn't attack me when he saw me. I talked to him, and he understood me." Twilight sighed.

"I know that it may have looked like he understood you, but it just sounded like gibberish to him. He probably didn't attack you because he didn't see you as any sort of a threat."

"But he talked back-" Instantly, she had Twilight's full attention.

"What."

"He talked to me. That's how I was absolutely sure it was still him inside somewhere."

"But... That can't be! How could he..." Twilight started pacing again, lost in thought as she

muttered to herself. How could this be? There was no way he could understand what she was saying, much less actually reply! This just didn't make sense...

"Unless..." Abruptly stopping, Twilight turned to face her friends. "I think I know. I'm not 100% sure about this, but I believe it has something to do with the... *uniqueness* of our situation. It's different from the situation the warlocks used the spell for."

"But, why would it work differently? Didn't the warguys use the spell the same way?"

"That's not exactly true, Dash. The WARLOCKS had a completely different reason for the spell, and completely different dragons to cast it on." Dash kept quiet, knowing Twilight was in full scholar mode now.

"As I said previously, basically breaks their mind, it makes them go insane. There are many ways for a pony (or a dragon, as the case may be), to go insane, but a spell isn't one of them."

"What the hay, Tw? You JUST SAID the spell makes them go whacko!" Twilight rolled her eyes, exasperated, as she warmed to the subject, beginning to sound almost as if she were reciting from a textbook.

"Could you calm down for *just* a second, Dash, and let me finish? As I said, there are many ways for a creature to go insane, but the most common would be the brain's inability to deal with certain situations, emotions and/or memories. For the most part, everyone has certain mental barriers. Their brains do it, instinctively. What the spell does is to break those barriers. Without them, trauma, pain, anguish, whatever would already be in the mind would swell up and drive them absolutely, irredeemably insane. When the warlocks would cast the spell, it would be on infants, barely old enough to walk. Because of their age, they had almost no worldly experience. The..." Twilight's cracked slightly. "The babies were flown over the battlefields to witness the carnage. That way, when the spell was cast, the pure horror of what they'd seen would entirely consume them. Being babies, the only barrier against such things is ignorance. An easy barrier to break, magic would barely even be needed. This is different though."

"How so?"

"First off, Spike is not as young as they would have been. He's... He's *lived*. He's spent time in the world, time to build up different barriers to keep his mind safe. He has had a chance to live, make friends, see the good in the world. He's had bad moments in his life, and has learned to get past them. These are the sort of things that helps your mind evolve, to create barriers. The second, and probably most important part, is what, exactly, Spike's preoccupied with. He's not wrapped up in the horrors of death and violence, he's obsessed with his loneliness and how he feels he was abandoned. When someone feels as lonely as Spike does, all they want is just to be accepted, to be happy, to feel like they belong somewhere. More than anything, they want things to go back to normal. I know what I'm talking about here, trust me." Twilight gathered her thoughts one final time, confirming to herself that she knew how to phrase it right. "My guess is that when the spell on Spike was cast, that feeling, that deep down feeling of... of wanting things to be the way they used to be basically put a hole in the spell, so to speak. It lost some of its bite. Couple that with the fact that the spell couldn't properly cope with Spike's mental barriers,

and you've got a pretty weak spell. Now, if Fluttershy is right, and I can honesty say there's absolutely no doubt in my mind that she is," She paused, glancing first to Pinkie, then to Fluttershy. "Then we can still reach him. We can fix his mind, because past the hurt and the loneliness and the revenge lies a part of him we know. The part who was the best little assistant and friend there ever was. The part of him that we're trying to get back. The part that's, well, irreplaceable. All we need to do is just make him see that we still love him, and that we're willing to do anything to get him back".

\*\*\*\*\*

Spike soared through the sky, each beat of his powerful wings pushing him farther and farther away from... from what? Spike was fleeing from something, of that he was sure. Having slipped back towards the demented pit of his own madness, the only clear objective he had was the last bit of sane thought he had managed to grasp. *MOVE! Go now, go fast. Go as far and as fast as you can. It doesn't matter where, anywhere but here. GO!* The red fog clouding his thoughts mystified him. What was he running from? Why should he run? He was a dragon, what could possibly threaten him? The harder he tried to concentrate, the harder he looked for the answer, the further it would run, leaving his thoughts even more distorted. He could pick up snippets of thoughts, emotions. He remembered feelings, worry, relief. Why would he feel this? Regardless, in his state of constant rage, they were welcome additions to his emotional wavelength. He wasn't sure why but for the first time in a while rage didn't seem to be enough. He needed something else, he needed *more*. And so, despite the dizziness, despite the haze descending upon him, he thought, and thought hard, delving deeper into his shrouded mind, searching for the memories that would trigger these other, almost alien emotions. Each time, however, something pushed back, darkness pressing in on the edges of his vision. He made a curious sight: A purple dragon soaring across the sky, occasionally seeming to lose control and plummet to the ground, only to catch himself and resume his flight path.

After several attempts (and near misses), his brain began to itch. At first, it was a barely noticeable sensation, a slight prickle, but the longer he ignored it, the stronger it got, until, reaching a fever pitch, his mind buzzing, affecting his centre of balance, pushing him in a certain direction. Pausing to hover, Spike turned towards the east, the direction he was seemingly being pulled, and looked out, trying to find the source of the pull. He didn't particularly WANT to go, but at this point, it felt as though he had no choice in the matter. Unable to make a decision as to whether or not he should follow the itch or ignore it, Spike simply hovered there. Eventually, he entirely forgot why he was hovering. Thoughts turned to mist, to water, running away, droplets running down the windowpane of his mind. He simply floated in the air, his eyes locked onto the forest spread before him, not due to any appreciation of the scene, but because he quite simply couldn't think of anything else to do. He couldn't even think of a reason to think of something. Even that itch in the back of his mind, attempting to pull him along, could not spur him from his stupor. Even when the itch grew, from an itch to a burn. He simply hovered there,

thoughtlessly, for several hours, until a booming voice echoed through his head.

***SPIKE! You have lazed about long enough; it is time you held up your part of the bargain. Return to the cave at once!*** Finally snapping out of his daze, Spike wheeled about and soared straight for the dragon's cave.

A short time later, Spike landed at the mouth of the cave. It was strange, he thought, not remembering much of his journey there. He couldn't quite remember any of the events that took place before his decision to listen to Delicraw and return to the cave, either. Not that he could even recall making any decision. All he could recall was Delicraw, telling him to return, and then he was landing in front of the cave. Spike made his way into his master's lair. Not that he could ever recall thinking of him as his master before. Inside, Delicraw lounged atop a pile of gems and gold.

***"Ah, you have arrived. Good, we must speak of important matters. I have to ....."*** Delicraw's voice faded to a low buzz as Spike caught sight of a small pile of turquoise gems. Suddenly, all he could think about was devouring all those gems and then having a nice long nap before he had to reorganise the Library. Spike started to lick his lips, but paused, becoming confused. He started looking around the cave. While big, there wasn't any other tunnels or paths to follow, and there was most definitely not a Library.

***"SPIKE!"*** BAM! Spike staggered as a giant, scaly hand slammed into the back of his head. ***"We have important matters to discuss. KEEP YOU MIND LOLY SQUID SOFA BURN CAT!"*** It was the most curious thing. Delicraw's speech began to drift, shifting into unintelligible babble. Spike couldn't understand a word he said. Another strike landed, snapping him back to reality.

***"Did you burn Ponyville to the ground, yes or no?"*** Spike thought about it. He could recall screaming, and fire, and a pain in his chest. What was it, though? He hadn't been injured, had he? He could remember a tree, and more fire and claws and screams and... Spike nodded. Yes. He wasn't sure if he had actually achieved the razing of Ponyville, but saying yes felt right.

***"And the mare? The purple one?"*** Spike gave Delicraw a confused look. ***"Twilight, I believe her name was. Did you make her pay? Did you devour her body? Did you crush her bones? Did you savour her blood and her suffering?"*** Again Spike tried to remember. He could recall blood. Lots of blood. He recalled the feeling of flesh being rent, and bone crunched, he recalled the sight of a purple mare, unmoving on a cliff side. More blood, anger and rage, but also worry and happiness. Again, Spike nodded. Yes. Again, he felt that it was the right thing to do. Delicraw smiled, clapping Spike on the back. ***"Excellent work, my boy. Now that your revenge is taken care of its time you helped me with what we talked about before. Do you recall?"*** Spike shook his head. He didn't recall. He really didn't recall much of anything. ***"No matter, we only briefly touched on it and you've been though a lot basically rubber chicken hose dogs green flame apple soup man rare, harping giant portal glue stick manifest home land goose net."*** Spike tried in vain to make sense of his master's words, but while some things were clear, the rest was simply an endless stream of nonsensical babble. It reminded him of Ditzzy Doo, except that if you took the time to listen what she said, it mostly made sense. Spike laughed, thinking about the wall-eyed Mail Mare.

***"What is so funny, Spike?"***

***"Oh, I was just thinking about the time Ditzzy Doo Crashed into the cave and spilled your***

tea all over your copy of *Levitation and Levity: A Study in Antigravity*.” Spike chuckled again while Delicraw gave him a rather concerned look.

**“Not only do I not recall that particular incident, I do not own such a book, I have NEVER drank tea in all 1356 years of my life and I have never met anyone by the name of Ditzzy Doo.”**

“Ditzzy who?”

**“The pony you were just talking about. I do not know her.”**

“I don’t recall talking about anyone named *Derpy Hooves*.” Delicraw’s colossal brow furrowed into a look of confusion, shifting into one of concern, just now noting Spike’s sorry physical appearance.

**“My boy. What exactly happened to you?”** Spike craned his neck and took his body in. He smiled. THIS he remembered. He was rather proud of it, as a matter of fact, and he was sure his master would be, too.

“I had a fight with a hydra. I won.”

**“Hydra?”**

“Yes. It’s a multi headed creature averaging on 20 to 25 feet tall. A peculiar evolutionary trait unique to the species is that when a head is cut off, two heads will immediately replace it, creating an exponential increase against the number of heads severed. The Hydra was first discovered 400 years ago by Silver Dollar, a botanist looking for rare plants in the EverFree Forest. 100 years after the discovery by Silver Dollar, a farmer by the name of Hay Stack is noted as being the first to discover the creature’s ability to replicate heads. He witnessed the creature get into a fight with an *Ursa Minor*, during which the *Ursa* caused considerable damage to a head, thus causing the hydra to cleave it off itself, resulting in the growth of two new heads. Hay Stacks’ account goes on to say the hydra then killed the *Ursa*, but only after the *Ursa* bit off two other heads, resulting in the growth of 4 additional heads, giving the creature a total of 12, which was too many for the *Ursa* to handle, resulting in its defeat.”

Delicraw just stared. He was being given a history lesson. Him, getting a history lesson? Ridiculous. He WAS history. He himself had been aware of the existence of hydras for well over a thousand years. When Spike was done, Delicraw gave his head a shake. It seemed his run in with the hydra had left him a mite scrambled. Hopefully, he would still be able to serve his purpose before he completely lost it.

**“Thank you for that... informative lesson, Spike. Now, why don’t you go get some sleep? We need to be well rested for the twilight hours.”** Delicraw turned away and, with a monstrous yawn, snuggled down onto a bed of riches. Spike stood where he was, intently thinking upon what Delicraw had just said. It was that word, twilight. Something about it. He could vaguely recall fleeing from twilight. He snorted a laugh at that thought. Now that was ridiculous. The very thought of him fleeing from twilight, it was ridiculous, Twilight would never hurt him.

~To Be Continued~