

The room was still dark when Twilight awoke, huddled neatly beneath a blanket. To either side of her were Rainbow Dash and Applejack and her daughter Dawn rested peacefully in her hooves. During the night they moved into one of the empty rooms towards the center of the train. Her invisibility illusion managed to ward off any suspicion that they were on the train.

But it made Applejack nervous. Twilight frowned at the thought, looking over at the farm pony.

Applejack had never been comfortable with her wild displays of magic before - the incident during winter wrap up, the aftermath of the parasprite infestation, and - although she never voiced it - Twilight suspected her timely removal of the Ursa Minor made her friend a little uneasy.

But this time, it was more apparent than ever. The suspicion was well founded, of course - coming back from the dead doesn't usually happen. Being paired off with frequent attacks and plots by loyal followers of Starfall didn't help, nor did blowing up a hospital room. In general, **any** magical outburst or use of magic made Applejack nervous.

Last night she lost some of her well trained control because of a very unexpected stowaway.

Almost as if on cue, Dawn shifted in her sleep, nestling against her coat. The purple unicorn sighed, a nervous frown forming on her features.

A rare occurrence in her life, Twilight had absolutely no clue what to do. Her first approach at the topic of being a mother was through books. Most of the ones she had taken out of the library were pretty basic - there were no deep explanations on what parenting would really be like. Just a bunch of rough guidelines meant for somepony who was ready. Well, more ready than her, at least.

The later volumes included far more in depth looks at parents in separated situations. It was the closest thing she could really find to her own problem. Its not everyday a pony dies and comes back a few years later like nothing had even happened. Needless to say, these books were almost as useless as the first.

Her second approach was to reflect on her parents during her own childhood. Looking back, she was a relatively tame and studious child. Her parents were always supportive of her and as every parent does, gave her a high level of care and attention.

The purple mare rolled her eyes. *Those are the obvious expectations*, she thought. *Still...* Her eyes drifted back down to the filly in her hooves.

Dawn slept soundly, her breathing steady and quiet. She was as close as she could possibly get to Twilight without becoming permanently attached. It gave her peace of mind to see Dawn safe and sound.

She blushed. Was this part of that feeling of being a mom?

A loud snore broke her thoughts, as Rainbow turned over on her side, now facing Twilight. She couldn't help but giggle a little at her friend. Dash's snoring would rival Spike's any day of the week.

Spike... she thought solemnly. Princess Celestia had been rather brief about how Spike had moved on, or rather, if he moved on at all. In all respects, he was like her little brother. She couldn't imagine how badly her death had hurt him. With so much distance still between them, every time she thought about him stung her even more.

Twilight shifted a little to get more comfortable. All she knew is that she desperately needed more sleep. She let herself slip back into her dreams.

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The fireplace crackled in the moonlight in the ancient city. Luna had her wing neatly wrapped around Twilight's body, shielding her from the cold behind her. It was the night before they ended this war. Twilight slid closer into Luna's embrace.

There were a lot of things on her mind. Would their plan work? How would the rest of Equestria accept a Princess with another mare? What about her foals - their foals?

Luna must have caught wind of her nervousness because she pulled tighter with her open wing. She placed her head on Twilight's, "Everything will turn out fine, Twilight."

Before she could stop herself, Twilight blurted out, "But what if it doesn't? I don't know if I can even last against guards, let alone other Unicorns."

Luna closed her eyes, "I believe in you. I know you can do it. You know we don't have any other choice."

"How can you be so- Oh," Twilight's mind flicked back to their Sharing. Her cheeks flushed and she shied away a little, "Right."

A small silence passed between them. Both ponies watched the fire burn, shifting in a gentle breeze.

"You have questions," Luna said.

Twilight nodded.

"My sister re-wrote history for a reason, Twilight. I know far less of the story than I feel comfortable with even now, but I trust her judgement. I'm sure she will tell you. But I have nothing else I can add. You've seen it."

Twilight gave a weak smile. She had seen it, but they came in her sleep - nightmares from an age long forgotten. She hoped she would get more sleep tonight, but she doubted it.

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The storm picked up in its ferocity as they continued onwards. They had been walking for hours away from the wreck. Originally they had intended to walk back to a spot further up the tracks, but the low visibility had them completely lost.

"Twilight, isn't there some spell you can use to get us out of the storm?" Rainbow asked. She had already tried to knock it down a couple of notches, but it seemed that the weather was left to be natural in Celestia's absence. Her attempts were obviously less than successful in subduing the storm.

"I can barely use my magic, Rainbow. I could probably do it if we had a chance to rest first. But-" Twilight looked around. Through the white of the storm, she couldn't even make out any landscapes. It was just an endless set of white.

Rainbow frowned. Twilight was pushing herself really hard just to keep them safe. Her cheeks flushed red and she shied her head away. There was no reason her expectations should be so high. But Twilight always had a magical answer to everything. That's part of why she liked the unicorn.

Dash shoved that thought as deep into the back of her head as possible. This was not the time or place to be thinking about things like that. It completely undermined any alertness she needed to display. She needed to watch out for anything that could just pop out of the snowstorm without warning. Her eyes scanned the horizon, but it did no good. It was like staring at blank paper no matter where she looked.

"Is it just me, or does it seem to be getting worse?" Rainbow asked.

Applejack nodded, "Sure does seem that way. Hold up, girls." She rummaged through her bags, producing a rope. She looped it around Rainbow's waist, giving it a good yank to make sure it

was tight, “Now, in case we can’t see each other, this here rope will connect us all together. Got it?”

The others nodded. Applejack tightened the knots around herself and the other ponies, before nodding. Twilight smiled sheepishly, before continuing on through the storm.

It didn’t take long until they couldn’t see a thing in front of them. The snow shrouded everything to five feet in front, then three, then eventually none. At its worst, they couldn’t see the tips of their noses.

But that wasn’t Rainbow’s biggest concern. She was shivering from the cold - the snow had completely soaked through her jacket and into her coat. It was pretty much useless in this kind of weather.

They pushed on for what seemed like hours. Every step that they took the storm howled against them. Wind whipped at their faces as they marched, while snow piled so quickly they would get stuck if they stopped moving.

Rainbow Dash was starting to lose consciousness. She stumbled forward as she trudged on through the storm, occasionally swaying to the side. Once, she almost fell to the ground. The only thing stopping her was pure will. There was no way that she would simply lay down and die because of a storm. What would her friends do without her? What would Twilight do? What about the twins?

She felt the snow and wind stop quite suddenly. Through her blurred vision, she noticed a small cottage sitting in the snow before her. Muffled noise filled her ears, accompanied by a large purple blur that entered her vision from the side. She assumed it was Twilight. All she really cared about was how tired she was. Sleep gently dragged her away from the world of ice, bringing her to a sunny ocean shore.

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Cunning leaned back in Bright Light’s office chair. His features reflected a sense of deep concentration. Though he paid little attention to the scrying bowl on the desk, his mind was focused on its most recent discovery.

His ace in the hole for throwing off and elongating the young Twilight Sparkle’s journey was a bit more paranoid than he expected. Cunning had planned for his attempts at secrecy - wrangling a storm using his unicorn magic and using a magnet spell to draw the unsuspecting travelers in - but he had not planned for a complex spell that blocked any attempts to scry on anypony within a certain area. His new little pawn, Stormbreaker, must have been in more trouble than he thought.

Trouble was always exploitable.

While he was well researched in current events in Equestria, outer provinces had been difficult to get to. Leaving to go to a former state would have been suspicious in his new ponysona. Even with gaining Celestia’s trust in the last several years, it wouldn’t be enough to warrant a leave of absence. Getting researchers and insiders was even harder. Most of them were already dead.

The thing he did know was that the political situation tended to change frequently, usually ending in the violent and suspiciously unquestioned deaths of the former leaders. This seemed like the best reasoning for the unicorn’s solitude. Since Stormbreaker was a war hero, the government couldn’t just kill him - thus his cottage in exile.

Cunning relaxed a bit in the chair. Forcing them out of pony lands would be quite simple. Assuming that his pawn had been long out of politics from the war, the general public had forgotten his existence. Thus any attempt on his life would now go unnoticed.

He began to gather his magic, focusing on the bowl. But he didn't get far. There was a knock on the door.

With expert precision, he changed the course of his spell, transforming himself back into the Headmaster. A pair of glasses floated onto the bridge of his snout, as he adjusted a few papers with his hooves. He continued, removing the sound proofing spell from the walls and the door.

"Come in," he called. The doors opened. Two of Celestia's personal guards entered the room, one of which was carrying a scroll under his wing. Bright Light gingerly rose from his desk, "How may I be of service, Sirs?"

The guard pulled the scroll from the crook of his wing. Despite his feigned innocence, Bright Light knew exactly why they were here. It ensured that the guards still had a job to do, other than fly around aimlessly.

"Princess Celestia requests your presence this afternoon on a matter most important. She would like you to arrive promptly at 3:00 in the Throne Room," the guard spoke. He rolled the scroll back up and walked forward to Bright Light's desk, "Included is a message for your eyes only, Headmaster."

Bright Light raised an eyebrow. It was quite unusual for the Princess to send private letters, though certainly not unheard of in certain instances of history. Cunning restrained from smiling in his disguise, floating the letter onto his desk for later. History was being written today. Something big was going to happen.

"Thank you, sirs. You may tell the Princess that I graciously accept her invitation. I am looking forward to it."

Especially the part where I write history.

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The throne room doors opened as Bright Light was led into the room. Celestia was sitting in her chair speaking quietly to Quick Wit and Desert Wind. Quick Wit was hastily writing on her scroll, occasionally scratching out whole sections of her work. The look of frustration on her face was clouded by the stress she was clearly under.

Desert Wind seemed to be discussing something with the Princess - quite informally. Bright Light raised an eyebrow, masking the slightest bit of concern Cunning had for that interaction. Still, it was nothing to be worried about.

Celestia noticed Bright Light as he ended his approach to the throne. He bowed deeply, which Celestia returned with a smile.

"Thank you gentlecolts. You may leave," Celestia said. The guards bowed before they walked out of the room and shut the door. "There's no need for formalities today Bright Light. We can't afford them. There is a much bigger problem at hoof."

Bright Light was a little taken aback at the worried, even paranoid, look on her face. Her voice wavered from some kind of stress she was under. He almost let out a knowing smile, but instead hovered a small glass vial of thick blue liquid onto the ground in front of him.

"Does that have to do with why you requested a fresh brew of scrying liquid from me?" Bright Light asked. He also removed his own personal scrying bowl, placing it beside the vial.

"Quite," Desert Wind nodded. "We have both tried finding the locale of the Princess' student, as well as the location of her daughter, but have been so far unsuccessful. It seems that the serum was sabotaged. When I went back to get some of my own, I found my home to be ransacked

and the city on high alert.”

Well done, Vengeance, Cunning thought. He knew that Celestia would immediately try to find her niece. When he was dragged out of bed in the early hours of the morning to assist the Princess, she forced him to scry her location. Of course it was Dawn in a burlap bag, but when Celestia insisted on widening the search, he pushed in Discord’s image before poisoning the liquid’s potency.

Instead of going to him for more, she asked Desert Wind. At first, he was concerned he would have to intervene and subdue her once more, as his control was far from complete. But to his surprise, she sent guards to **protect** him, concerned Discord was trying to kill him to weaken her. He played his role expertly - accepting the gracious concern but emphasizing he wasn’t in any danger. She insisted rather forcefully, so he played the part of the submissive Headmaster and backed off. In the meantime, he had sent Vengeance far south before she made her way back to cause havoc on the Equestrian borders.

“Is the city safe?” Bright Light asked.

“For now,” Desert Wind sighed, frowning his brow. “Discord’s ability to be everywhere at once through Starfall’s followers is making it rather difficult.”

“I understand,” Bright Light interrupted. “However, you are underestimating the problem. Starfall has long been dead. His followers are now Discord’s minions. In not recognizing that, you are still stuck to tried and true ways to fight a completely different monster.”

Desert Wind tried to return his sharp assessment, but Bright Light held up a hoof.

“I meant no offense, Desert Wind. We can discuss how to solve that another time. But for now, we have a more important task.”

The elder unicorn nodded, “Later, then. Princess?”

Celestia still hovered the vial in front of her, thoroughly inspecting it with her magic. Her eyes opened and she let out a sigh of relief. With a curt nod, Bright Light and Desert Wind took up positions on opposite sides of the room.

“Quick Wit,” Celestia said. The unicorn nearly jumped out of her skin, but managed to regain her composure enough to listen. “Stand by the doors. You will need to lend some of your magic to them,” Celestia’s face hardened, solidifying a look of angry determination. “I will not be hindered again.”

Bright Light and Desert Wind winced a little. The steel in the Princess’ voice was... unsettling. Desert shuffled his hooves uncomfortably. Bright Light shied away from her gaze. Cunning was smiling as wide as he could manage in his mind. Paranoia and determination made a great combination.

Fortunately, neither of them were in Quick Wit’s horseshoes. She half walked, half ran to the doors, desperate to get away from Celestia’s potential wrath. Her eyes stayed fixed on the floor.

“You may begin.”

The floor rumbled and peeled away at the slightest touch of Celestia’s magic. Tiles slid underneath one another, packing neatly away under each new layer. A golden bowl rose to meet the new opening sliding tightly into place. It was completely empty, leaving it to shine in the brightly lit room.

At the same time, the three unicorns poured their magic around them, shaping it to cover themselves and the princess. It grew, slowly taking shape as one great dome. Quick Wit was already feeling the strain from the initial shaping. Sweat beaded on her forehead and she could feel her muscles strain against the invisible weight the enormous spell had created. When it solidified, she felt the weight lessen as the two others shared the weight.

Celestia poured the liquid over the bowl. As the liquid reached the height of the rim, it spread out as though the tiled floor was still present. It swirled around into a tight disc, hovering just above its new container.

“O’ clear skies, with Gryphon’s sight, reveal to me the one I seek,” Celestia spoke. Her voice was sweet but determined. The sound reverberated from the pool, sending ripples out from the center. “Show me Dawn, Daughter of Luna, Princess of Equestria.”

The water changed color to become a solid white. The unicorns looked on, waiting for the Princess’ reaction.

Celestia’s eyebrow twitched, showing the only break in her questionable composure, “Discord seems to have better planning this time. Scrying will do nothing now for Dawn.”

Cunning could see the look of frantic confusion in her eyes. While on the outside she was still just as strong, she was mentally beating herself up for some hurt her former love had caused. Bright Light’s lips moved into the slightest of frowns. Anger was welling up behind his own facade.

She couldn’t possibly... he thought.

“What about your former student?” Desert Wind asked, trying to break the growing silence.

Celestia seemed to move back to a state of calm. She took a deep breath before responding, “She still is my student. Returning from death doesn’t stop me from picking up where I left off. But that isn’t the answer you are looking for.”

Desert Wind swallowed hard, “No-”

Cunning sensed his opportunity and pounced on it. While the elder unicorn was stumbling with his words, Bright Light cleared his throat, “If I may?” Desert Wind nodded and stayed silent. “Thunder Cloud accompanied the elements of Honesty, Loyalty, and Magic on their journey. Considering the current circumstances and the concerns you originally had, I believe I speak for us both when we express some concern in their well being. It is highly likely that Discord will have discovered their trip from his new minions that resurrected her.”

Celestia’s face scrunched up in confusion for a few moments, before her features fell flat. Color drained from her face as realization sunk in.

She sent two of the Elements of Harmony into Discord’s playing field.

“Show me the unicorn Twilight Sparkle, student of Princess Celestia.” The water rippled once more, but its surface stayed a stark white, “Show me Applejack, Element of Honesty. Show me Rainbow Dash Element of Loyalty! SHOW ME THUNDER CLOUD!!”

The last command sent the white surface awash with dull colors. The scene was rather mundane - the center street of some small border town. It moved with one particular pony, trying very hard not to be seen, or rather, not to draw unusual attention to himself. He slipped down an alleyway, moving as silently as he could.

The four of them continued to watch as he made his way a little way out of town before hopping onto a passing train.

“Desert Wind? Are those the colors of the North-South Equestria Grand Line?” Bright Light asked. He knew the answer, long before the elder unicorn responded.

“No,” Desert Wind replied.

“I’m assuming he has no intention of coming back.”

“Unlikely.”

Celestia stared at the three other unicorns, before focusing her gaze on Desert Wind. “Bring Thunder Cloud to me. Alive.”