

“Mail Call!”

Twilight Sparkle looked up from her daisy salad and shared a puzzled glance with Spike. He thumped his chest, coughed experimentally, and shrugged. “Don’t ask me.” Since nearly all her mail was sent by dragon, she had no idea what it could be.

“Coming!” She called back, trotting down one flight and to the front door of the library. Her horn flickered momentarily as she pulled it open, and the gray Pegasus beyond beamed at her. “Package for you!”

“I don’t-” she started as Spike came trotting up behind, but she didn’t get to finish her sentence before the Pegasus pulled the box off her back, nearly toppling over as it thudded heavily to the ground. “Whew. Later!”

She took off at Twilight called, uselessly after her. “Wait! Ditzzy!” The deliverymare vanished into the sky and Twilight shook her head. “Well, let’s see who it’s from. Spike?”

“On it!” The dragon bent to pick up the box, grunting and straining for a moment. The package moved perhaps half an inch before he collapsed on top of it. “A little help?”

Twilight rolled her eyes, her horn starting to glow. “Oh Spike, it’s not – oh.” While not as heavy as, say, an Ursa Minor, the plain box was weighty enough that Spike certainly couldn’t carry it. By now her curiosity was thoroughly piqued, and she floated the box over to the table. It was the work of a moment to unfold the flaps, and inside was – books.

There were two books and a sheaf of papers, and on top a small envelope with her name in a style she certainly recognized. But what books did Princess Celestia need to send her, and why were they so heavy? The envelope floated out of the box, and Twilight unfolded the letter inside.

*My faithful student Twilight Sparkle,*

*I’m sure you’re wondering what I’ve sent you and why. To answer the second question first, in a few months I’m expecting Princess Luna to make an unofficial visit to Ponyville. While I don’t think you or any of your friends cherish much animosity toward my sister, I thought now would be a good time for some history.*

*The books I have enclosed are very old, and I have included some of my own marginalia and commentary. These are the only extant copies, and I had significant trouble finding them, so the information within is not widely known. I will leave it to your discretion how much to share and with whom.*

*As always,*

*Princess Celestia.*

“Oooh.” The sound escaped her unbidden. Books were one of Twilight’s many academic loves, and a *rare, old* book was pure intellectual candy. Spike, however, was less impressed.

“Do you really need more books? You *live* in a *library*.”

“Now, Spike,” Twilight chided him. “One can never have too many books. Well, as long as they’re different books.” The last was added with a rueful smile. “Well, let’s see what’s inside.”

The papers proved to be Celestia’s notes, annotated by book and page number. That was straightforward enough, but when she lifted out the books themselves, Twilight saw why the package was so heavy. Instead of paper and cloth, the books were solid metal.

The pages were extraordinarily thick, and Twilight opened the cover and flipped through experimentally. They were bound to the cover with wire, and the pages were golden. Not solid gold, she thought, recalling some metallurgy texts. That would have been even heavier. But probably rolled copper, plated with gold. She ran a hoof over one of the pages, looking at the words that had been etched, not written, into the metal fundament.

Now Spike was impressed. “Wooooow,” he breathed, his eyes large and full of avarice. It was not far from Twilight’s own thoughts, but her initial reaction was already being replaced by analysis.

Such as, why would someone go to the trouble to make a book like this?

“Spike...” Twilight said slowly. “I think when the Princess said these books were old, she meant it. It’s nearly indestructible to anything short of a volcano or a grown-up dragon’s fire.” She closed the book again and looked at the cover this time. “Six Elements: The Dawn of Our Age,” by one Lettered Scrolls. The other, of similar construction, was titled, “The Dusk of the Goddesses,” by The Honorable Inkblot.

“I don’t remember reading anything of theirs before. Do you, Spike?” The dragon shook his head in response.

“Well, let’s go see what they say.” The books and accompanying papers floated around her as she trotted up to the balcony, which was really her preferred place for reading. And with these books, she didn’t even have to worry about rain – not that there was any scheduled, but you never knew.

The Princess’ notes suggested starting with ‘Six Elements’ and then immediately delved into footnoting. Twilight nodded to herself, putting a paperweight down on top of the notes to protect them from errant breezes or pegasus flybys. The first book went onto her reading stand and she opened the cover.

Celestia is the sun. Luna is the moon. We give these phrases lipservice, we know that Princess Celestia raises the sun, and Princess Luna raises the moon every day. But it is not a figure of speech. The fire in the heavens that gives us life is the same being as the Princess Celestia that inhabits the castle of the Goddesses. The silver orb at night is the same being as the Princess Luna that is her sister.

Only three generations have passed, and already we are forgetting this. We are also forgetting the corollary: *the sun and the moon can be angry*. Fortunately the goddesses were created with harmony in mind; the Elements of Harmony are embodied in them. But today we buried Stormshadow, and the grief on Princess Luna’s face was plain to see. It behooves us to remember that the sun and moon are both goddesses and people, and it falls to us to respect both sides. They are not mortal ponies, but neither are they perfect, unmovable beings.

The end of the entry was marked with a small piece of paper, directing her to Celestia’s notes, and Twilight blinked, pulling herself from the dusty depths of the past. Lettered Scrolls may not have been the most talented author, but she certainly was sincere. The unicorn caressed the cover again. Old was an understatement, this book had been written a basketful of years after creation itself. “Wow.”

Spike had vanished somewhere while she was reading, probably to feed his insatiable appetite, so she simply turned to the papers Celestia had provided.

*Stormshadow was the last of Luna’s first set of friends. The difference in our ages is...significant. I was born while the world was young, my friends were comets and planets, asteroids and gods passing in the dark. I had grown significantly by the time Luna was born, and she was still young when our parents left. Luna grew up – to the extent that she has grown- during the time of mortal ponies. She had found a set of friends not too unlike yours, and she was not prepared to see them age and die as she stayed perennially young.*

*Nor was I, I must admit, but comets have long lives, and they know their lifespan the moment they awaken. My introduction was different and, as I said, I was older. Once Stormshadow died, she had no one but me, and I was day, and she was night. We did not always have time together.*

Twilight winced. As old as these books were, what happened was a foregone conclusion. But, the point of history was to learn from the past. Maybe –

“Look out below!” The voice and the warning were familiar enough, and Twilight ducked, putting her hooves over her head. Sure enough, there was a resounding *thud* and the wood of the balcony shivered. The following wash of air stirred the papers, but the weight did its job.

“Rainbow Dash,” Twilight said, half-amused, half-exasperated. “That’s the sixth time this week you’ve crashed into the library.”

The Pegasus grinned unrepentantly at the unicorn, hanging upside-down from a limb of the tree. “Can’t learn anything new without taking a few risks, Twi.”

“I think I’ve heard that before, too.” Twilight shook her head. “Are you okay? Nothing worse than bruises and scrapes?”

“I’m fine.” Dash wriggled out of the foliage, hovering over the balcony. “Heeey, that’s a pretty spiffy book.” The gleaming gold seemed to have impressed the normally literature-indifferent Dash, and Twilight smiled.

“Yes,” she said, putting her hoof on the cover with possessive pride. “It certainly is. It was sent to me by Princess Celestia herself. It’s...thousands of years old!”

“Yeah? What did they have to say thousands of years ago?”

“Well...I haven’t gotten very far. But the author was talking about how Princess Celestia *is* the sun. As in, that’s her.” Twilight pointed at the sun, riding high in the sky. “Her actual being, as well as the pony who lives in Canterlot.”

Dash looked askance at her for a moment, glanced skyward, and then back down. “That’s...kinda creepy.”

“Well...I suppose.” Twilight frowned for a moment, then shook her head. “She also was talking about Princess Luna *before* she became Nightmare Moon.”

“Well, that’s pretty cool, I guess.” Dash was rapidly losing interest. No matter how glittery gold the book was, it really wasn’t her thing.

Twilight laughed. “Go ahead and practice. I’ll tell you if anything really awesome happens.”

“Sounds good. Later Twi!” Dash zoomed off with another riffling of papers. Twilight watched her go, thinking of how much her life was centered about her friends. To lose all that...Twilight shivered. She couldn’t even imagine how Luna must have felt.

“Well Twilight,” she said to herself. “Enough being maudlin. Back to reading.”

It falls to us because in us, too, are embodied the Elements of Harmony. As the Goddesses balance each other, Day and Night, so do we balance them, mortal and god. In some the Elements are greater, in some they are lesser, but we all have the capacity.

Princess Celestia holds the Element of Magic, and Princess Luna holds the Element of Kindness. Of course that does not mean they are the sole ponies capable of demonstrating those qualities. It would be a dark day indeed if only one pony in all of Equestria was kind.

No pony need hold the other Elements unless their magic is needed. Indeed, Magic is the odd Element out. It is both the result of the remainder of the Elements, and that which binds them together. And it is because of this that the one who holds the Element of Magic is responsible for bringing them together.

Beware thinking that means the Element of Magic rules the others, however. These are Elements of *Harmony*, and it takes the bonds of trust and friendship to use them. Fear and coercion, lies and blandishments will only bring ruin.

Twilight found herself nodding. She’d figured *that* much out herself, when she’d faced Nightmare Moon. It had been the most profound revelation of her life, a searing burst of understanding

that had awakened something deep within her. It was that thing that had connected her with the Element of Magic. And still could, according to the Princess.

Her friends still carried the Elements of Harmony, as did she. That was why they had been tasked with shooing away the dragon, for example. But the Elements could only be used when they *were* the only answer, and the fact that all the Elements were represented among them meant that they were the most likely to find a solution without resorting to force.

The book was not as long as it might have looked; the thick metal sheaves of the pages reduced it from the length of a tome to the length of a treatise at best. Most of the rest of the text was taken with describing each Element and how it was best embodied. That much could be found in *The Elements of Harmony: A Reference Guide*, but the closing segment could not.

While it is a fallacy to suggest that there is no pony capable of petty jealousy, cruelty, or selfishness, if a holder of one of the Elements of Harmony were to completely turn away from her own being, there is no telling what would happen. Would it simply pass to another, or become unclaimed? Would it be destroyed forever? Or would it become a terrible force in its own right, corrupted by its bearer?

It may not seem that an individual could affect the Elements of Harmony in that way, but they are entrusted to us, and they are our responsibility. The Elements are not an esoteric gift from the gods, they are the result of all the choices all of us make every day. Like the turning of the seasons, they are a result of our existence.

There was another slip of paper for Princess Celestia's notes. Twilight blinked and shook her head slightly. It was far from the most technical book she'd, but the matters it discussed were almost as weighty as what it was written on. The unicorn took a breath and turned to the notes.

*You can guess how much of Lettered Scrolls advice was actually followed. I admit, even if I had read it at the time, I don't think I would have taken it seriously. Back then we were all young and foolish, even I.*

*The next book takes place much, much later, so I will fill in some time. After Stormshadow's death, Luna was understandably distant. For myself, after what Luna went through, I had no real desire to make friends either. That was even ignoring the issues of cutting through the distance afforded by my rank.*

*As Luna withdrew from the public eye, I had to spend more time on matters of state. That meant I had less time to spend with Luna, or socialize myself. It was not long before we only met at dawn and dusk, when I brought up the sun and she brought up the moon.*

*I can make no excuses. What is obvious now should have been obvious then. As Luna withdrew into her own element of the night, she faded from the public view. Ponies did not know her, only of her. This is not to say she simply became a hermit. We still met, talked, laughed. But these moments became fewer and farther between.*

Twilight found it hard to believe. Surely Princess Celestia, of all people, would know better. But then she remembered how she had felt before coming to Ponyville. Maybe in some long-ago past the Princess was like her.

The unicorn stood and stretched, poking her head into the library to check the time. She hadn't been at the reading as long as she thought. She cocked an ear at a noise from downstairs, and rolled her eyes as she realized what it was.

“Spike!” She called. “Remember we’re going out with the girls to eat tonight. Don’t ruin your appetite!”

The dragon appeared at the bottom of the stairs with a half-eaten muffin. “Have I ever-” He took a moment to take another enormous bite of the muffin. “-*not* had an appetite?”

“Fine, but don’t say I didn’t warn you.” Twilight shook her head at him. “While you’re finishing your muffin, see if you can find any reference to either of those authors in the history books. Oh, and someone called Stormshadow. I’d like to get some verification on what these books are saying, if possible.”

“Just someone? Great, how am I ever going to find that?” Spike made a show of his exasperation, throwing his paws in the air and waving them around, and Twilight couldn’t help but giggle. “Start with the oldest ones, Spike. Anything more recent than a thousand years isn’t old enough.”

“Oh. Right.” The dragon looked mortified for perhaps half a second, then shrugged and tossed the last of his muffin into his mouth. “Mrfln flshn rnn.” He mumbled with his mouth full, turning to head over to the ladder. Twilight giggled again and stepped back outside to start on the second book.

The sun did not rise. Even the most mundane of ponies could sense the wrongness as it brought them from their beds. All of Equestria was out of balance, as if falling from a great height. We could only brace ourselves for the impact.

I was there in the Palace of the Royal Sisters. The voices of the goddesses raised in anger split the air and caused the very earth to tremble. Cracks appeared in the ground, masonry crumbled.

We fled. What else could we do? Magics blazed throughout the palace, searing light and enveloping black. As the battle raged, I caught a glimpse of what the Princess Luna had become. A nightmare, an all-devouring darkness, her hatred a physical force.

Princess Celestia burned too bright to look at, and where their powers met a storm roiled and flashed. As they struggled the very fabric of the world twisted and tore around them. The storm chased us as we scattered, tearing at the palace grounds. Lightning scoured chasms deep into the earth, and any still inside those storms was certainly lost.

For hours we watched from the edges as dark and light swept through the clouds, and the moon hung overhead like a raised hammer. Throughout the long night, we could do nothing but wait, and hope. But it was not until our clocks told us it was time for the third sunrise that there was relief.

A coruscating rainbow of light shone forth from the Palace, sweeping away all the storm clouds at once. The moon flared, then dimmed again, leaving the outline of a unicorn’s head. And then, the sun rose.

Here again was a footnote. Twilight took a slow breath as she lifted her head from the book. This painted a far messier picture of the conflict than most histories. Also, a more frightening one, to imagine the moon hanging unchanging in the sky. After a momentary glance skyward, she turned to Celestia’s notes.

*I was as taken by surprise as everyone else. To have your own sister, who you have known for hundreds of years, turn against you? But I didn’t know then, and still don’t know now, how much of Luna was in Nightmare Moon. The Element of Kindness within her had been twisted and curdled, changed into something dark and terrible.*

*I begged, I pleaded, I commanded. I fought with her, yes, with all my skill and power. But we*

*were equal, she and I. We were meant to be that way, for we were meant to be in harmony, in balance. And so we were evenly matched. The night was her element, and I could not budge it.*

*If we continued to fight, all of Equestria would be ripped asunder and cast back into the void from which it was created. Under eternal night, the world would stifle, wither and die. But if I were to – unthinkable – vanquish my sister, eternal day would bake Equestria into a barren wasteland.*

*The only answer was to break through the shield she had erected in the guise of Nightmare Moon, and reach the Princess within. That required the Elements of Harmony. It would have been a perfect solution, but there was only one holder of any of the Elements. Me.*

*The Elements are not meant to be used by a single pony, but I had no choice. As I gathered the remaining four elements I realized that, no, I did not have friends. I did not have any I could call upon to aid me. I was, by my choices, alone. And because of that, I could not bring my sister back. Not without genuine friendship.*

*I tried, oh how I tried. But in the end I could only seal her earthly incarnation back into her greater essence. I am thankful indeed that it was temporary. That I was never faced with the choice to make it permanent.*

*The stars you saw the night she returned were the four Elements I used to seal her. As for her element, and mine, we forfeited our right to them on the night we fought. Neither of us had lived up to what true harmony required.*

Twilight paused a moment to blink away tears. The anguish was clear in her mentor's writing, even if it was kept factual. She had seen how the sisters had acted when they were reunited, of course, but she hadn't considered what it would have been like at the time.

"Uhh...are you okay?" It was Spike, who had appeared on the balcony with a small stack of books. Twilight gave him a smile. A small one, but still a smile. "I'm fine, Spike. It's just the books. What did you find?"

"Not much. One mention each in these books for your two authors, but none for anyone named Stormshadow that far back." The dragon looked disgruntled; he *hated* not being able to find something she asked him for.

"Thank you, Spike." Twilight's horn glimmered briefly as she took the books and stacked them off the side. "I'll take a look at them as soon as I'm finished this."

"Anything else, Twilight?"

"No thank you, Spike. I'll call you when I need you. I'll probably need to write a *long* letter to Princess Celestia when I finish reading this."

"Righty-o!" Spike gave her a half-salute, half-wave and disappeared back inside.

When the Princess Celestia emerged from the torn wasteland around the ruins of the Palace, she was as grim and drawn as I had ever seen. She told us we could not rebuilt the palace – the land surrounding it was irrevocably altered by the conflict there.

Instead she pointed at a mountain, and told us to build there. And so now we are building Canterlot, to replace the capital we have lost. But what of the Princess we have lost?

I asked the Princess what happened to Princess Luna, and what we will do without her. My only reply was that Luna would be back, but until then, she would handle the sun and the moon every day. While I deeply respect our Princess, how can a single pony handle both?

Our world was built on harmony, and we have lost both the Elements of Harmony, shattered when sister turned against sister, and the harmony of the Royal

Sisters themselves. There is now only one arbiter of power in the world, and that is Princess Celestia. With the natural order so disturbed, how long can we truly last?

*It was a valid question, the notes read. One that I took it upon myself to address. True, I was handicapped by my station, but that was no excuse for not extending friendship. And if I truly understood what Luna was going through, perhaps I would have been a more caring sister.*

*Luna and I will always lose our mortal companions, but she and I will be sisters until the stars burn out and we return once again to our parents. So we should be friends, and be there for each other in grief as well as happiness. And so I began to make my own friends. I began trying to find those who could wield the Elements of Magic when the time came for Luna's return.*

*It was hard. Not just to make friends, but to lose them. I have watched fifty generations come and go, burning bright like meteors before finally going out. Several times I wanted to simply withdraw from the world as I had before, but I learned, eventually, that the joy of friendship outweighs the sadness of a friend's passing. I have lived a thousand years without slumbering, until you finally restored the Elements of Harmony and brought back my sister.*

*And now I will try to be friends with her. I want to, but so much has passed between us. We no longer hold the Elements, we are not who we started out being. It remains to be seen whether we can still be harmonious.*

"Twilight! You're going to be late!"

It was Spike again. Time had passed without her really noticing as she'd read, and it was heading on toward evening.

"Coming!" Twilight quickly gathered up all the materials, dumping them onto a table inside as she rushed down the stairs. Spike hopped up onto her back as she headed out into Ponyville. She was almost late, the last one into the restaurant as she sat down with her friends.

As she ate, what she'd read weighed on her mind, and it wasn't long until somebody noticed. "Twi? You okay there, sugarcube? You've been quiet tonight."

"Oh, sorry Applejack. I just got these books today -"

"They're gold!" Rainbow Dash interjected. "So they're pretty awesome looking."

There were various noises of curiosity, especially from Rarity, whose eyes gleamed. Twilight chuckled. "Yes, but they're also very old books, from Princess Celestia. I read through them today, along with her notes and...well...it sounds like she's lonely."

"But she's a *Princess*, Twilight." Rarity said. "She's expected to be above the rest of us."

"That doesn't mean she isn't lonely." Twilight said. "If you read it, you'll see what I'm talking about."

"We should throw her a PARTY!" That was Pinkie Pie, of course, sounding as cheerful as always.

"I - I don't know..." Fluttershy drew down into her seat, but Twilight cocked her head at Pinkie. "Actually, Pinkie..."

Rarity looked horrified. "You can't be serious! You don't just simply *invite* a Princess to your own party."

"Princesses. And I think we should. She said she needed to make friends; why not us?"

"WHEE! Party!" Pinkie bounced out of her seat, and Twilight hastily added. "Just for us six, Pinkie, and the Princesses. I don't want this to end up like her last 'casual stop' here."

"You think they'd really come, Twilight?" Applejack looked doubtful.

"It can't hurt to ask. The worst they can do is say no, and we can still have a party with us six."

"Yeah. And if they come, maybe I could get one of them to get me a letter of recommendation to the Wonderbolts!"

Everyone looked at Dash. “What?” The pegasus grinned at them.

Twilight rolled her eyes at Rainbow Dash and looked around the table. “Well...like I said, it can't hurt to ask.”

“Spike, a letter to Princess Celestia.” She was back at home, and the dragon took out one of the message scrolls and a pen with ink.

“Dear Princess Celestia.

After reading through the materials you've sent me, I think I've learned something about what it means when you *don't* partake in friendship. In that vein, I would like to invite you and Princess Luna to a small party with my friends...”