

CPast Sins

By Pen Stroke

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Chapter 9

Revealing Truths

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Twilight walked back to the library with Nyx as the sun began to set near the western horizon while Rainbow Dash and a few others stayed behind to clean up Learn and Play Day. It was a moment she was thankful that she hadn't been asked to stay and help with the clean up. The last thing she wanted to do at the moment was linger around the school with Nyx.

Nyx, however, was oblivious to Twilight's concerns and was happy as she could be. She bounced alongside Twilight, proudly wearing her first place ribbon from the tug of war competition and her Cutie Mark Crusader cape. She used a kazoo, her chosen prize, to play a triumphant fanfare that only she knew the notes to. It was a sight that let Twilight relax a little.

She was happy that Nyx had enjoyed herself and that it had all ended well. The silence from the crowd after the last round of tug of war had been deafening, and Twilight could only imagine how bad Nyx would have felt if nopony had cheered for her. Thankfully, Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo broke the silence, cheering and running up to their friend, letting Nyx laugh and enjoy her victory.

It was, however, only a small drop of happiness in the sea of fear and anxiety. While Nyx was unaware of what had happened, Twilight had been in the crowd watching when she began to use her magic to win that last round of tug of war. She was using her magic, a lot of it... and that was when things began to happen.

Nyx's mane started shimmering at first, something that could have easily been a trick of the light. Yet, as Nyx began to use more and more magic, her mane and tail began to change more, revealing the energy flowing through her body.

Her mane and tail began to get lighter, and began to float and wave in the air as if Nyx were floating deep underwater. The shimmering of her mane and tail also started to focus into a few dots.

It was one of the worst things Twilight could imagine happening. Nyx's mane and tail had started to change into the night-blue mane and tail that Nightmare Moon was known for, infamous for, and the change started to happen with everypony at Learn and Play Day watching.

Nyx's mane and tail, however, never changed completely. They remained comprised of hair, similar to Celestia's. In contrast, Nightmare Moon's mane and tail were clouds of energy, which was why she was able to use and manipulate them like extra appendages.

It all brought several unwanted thoughts to Twilight's mind. For the first time since that evening Nyx had called her "mom", Twilight doubted herself. Could Nyx really be Nightmare Moon? She had always argued that Nyx just *looked* like the infamous Mare in the Moon, but with those memories coming back, and Nyx's level of magic, was it possible she really was Nightmare Moon?

Part of Twilight's mind snapped at these, cracking a mental whip like an animal tamer driving a beast back into its cage. No, Nyx was *not* Nightmare Moon! The filly was too sweet, too well behaved, too... *sensitive* to ever be Nightmare Moon! She had friends and was happy. Nightmare Moon laughed at times, but her laughter was a maddening laughter that was born of scorn and thoughts of domination, not true happiness.

Twilight was starting to wonder if she'd have to deal with the fact that Nyx seemed to possess an alicorn's power and immortality. The filly she was taking care of, was raising... There was a chance she would be alive for thousands of years with the power to do things like move the sun and moon. She couldn't help but wonder: Was she really up to that kind of responsibility, to shape the life of a filly that could live for the rest of time?

Nyx, noticing how silent Twilight had been, stopped her happy kazoo playing and looked up at Twilight with a hint of concern. "Twilight," she asked, "are you okay?"

"Huh, what?" said Twilight, turning down to face Nyx. She put on a forced smile. "Oh, I, uh... Yes, I'm fine. Just tired, that's all. We've had a busy day. Now, why don't you run in and show Spike your ribbon? I'm just going to stay outside for a little while longer."

Nyx nodded, returning the kazoo to her mouth and blowing on it loudly as she ran inside, accidentally scaring Spike. Twilight smiled at this, a smile that faded quickly as the situation weighed down on her.

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"Dear, you really should drink your tea before it gets cold," Rarity said before taking a sip from her own cup. She looked across the table at her guest, though she might as well have been having a conversation with a statue. Twilight had hardly said a word since her arrival, choosing to instead just stare at her cup of tea like it held all the answers in the world.

"Twilight? Twilight!" Rarity snapped, bringing her out of her thoughts.

"What? Oh! Oh, sorry, Rarity. I... I was just thinking about something."

"That's all you've been doing since you got here, Twilight." Rarity pointed out with a frown. "All you've said to me is that you wanted to talk, but you haven't said a single word since then. What is wrong?"

Twilight sighed, lifting the cup of tea magically. She drank it all down in a single gulp, which made Rarity squirm in her chair at the sight of improper manners.

"I'm sorry, Rarity. I'm just worried about Nyx."

"What for, Dear? Don't tell me she's gone missing again."

"No, she's at school."

Rarity refilled Twilight's cup of tea. "Then why are you worried?"

"I'm worried because I think... I know..." Twilight groaned, dropping her head down on the table.

Rarity leaned in a bit, touching Twilight's shoulder with a hoof. "Twilight, if something is wrong, you know you can tell me. I'm here for you."

Her generous offer seemed to give Twilight some courage. She sat up and took a deep breath. "Rarity... I think Nyx is Nightmare Moon."

Rarity raised an eyebrow, giving Twilight an unsure look. "You think she is?"

Twilight nodded then hung her head. "I've been trying to deny it, but after what happened at Learn and Play Day, I can't ignore it anymore. She doesn't just look like Nightmare Moon. She has Nightmare Moon's power; she has some of Nightmare Moon's memories. She was made by a spell meant to bring back Nightmare Moon. It's just too much to ignore."

"And have you told Princess Celestia?" Rarity asked cautiously.

"No," Twilight groaned. She covered her face with her hooves. "And I know what I said. I promised that if I realized Nyx was was Nightmare Moon, I would. But Rarity, I just can't bring myself to tell Princess Celestia. What if she sends Nyx to the moon? I'd never see her again."

Twilight looked at Rarity in desperation. "But what if she *is* Nightmare Moon? What will happen when she grows up or remembers more about her past? This might be our only chance to stop her. If I don't tell the princess now, then Nyx might someday make the night last forever. I... I just don't know what to do."

A silence fell upon the two mares. Twilight stared at her tea while Rarity looked on with her eyes

reflecting the thoughts occurring inside her head. For several minutes, the silence persisted before Rarity lifted her tea, took a sip, and set down the cup.

Rarity began speaking slowly and chose her words carefully. "Twilight, perhaps you need to think less about who Nyx was, and more about who she is."

Twilight looked up with confusion in her eyes. "What do you mean?"

"You're right, it would be foolish of us to deny the facts in front of us, but you are putting too much focus on who Nyx was," Rarity's argued. Her voice grew stronger as she gained confidence in her argument. "You need to see her as who she is, and realize that the two are not one and the same."

"But Rarity-" Twilight began, only for Rarity to lift a hoof.

"Twilight, do you know what happened last week? The Cutie Mark Crusaders, Nyx included, came stumbling into my shop covered in honey, leaving icky, sticky hoofprints all across my front room. I was, of course, furious, but before I began scolding them for making a mess of my boutique, do you know what they were doing?"

"No," Twilight answered flatly.

A smile spread onto Rarity's lips. "They were laughing. Laughing together at their latest escapade, and Nyx was laughing just as loudly as the others. Twilight, I can understand your fears. They are ones I shared when you first brought Nyx into my shop.

"But," Rarity continued, ensuring that Twilight did not interrupt, "there is a difference between *was* and *is*, Twilight, and what matters now is who Nyx *is*, not who she *was*. Nyx is a curious little filly with four good friends, three of which ensure she gets into an appropriate amount of trouble for a pony her age.

"And above all," Rarity said, giving Twilight a true, honest smile, "she is a filly you obviously care about and want to protect."

Rarity's kind words soothed Twilight, who finally managed a weak smile. "Thanks, Rarity. That makes me feel better, but I'm still worried."

"And that's perfectly normal," Rarity assured her. "Heaven knows I worry about Sweetie Belle every time she goes off with her friends to do her 'Crusading'. Those three fillies have gotten into more danger than I ever did growing up. I'm always afraid that somepony will come running into my shop telling me Sweetie Belle got hurt, or worse. Despite this, I can't keep Sweetie Belle from enjoying her childhood. She should be out there with her friends, having fun and even getting into trouble... not too much trouble mind you, but some."

Twilight frowned, unconvinced. "Sweetie Belle is just a normal little unicorn, Rarity. Nyx is-"

"Nyx is just as normal," Rarity interrupted firmly. "Twilight, do not misunderstand me. I am fully aware of why you are worried. I am not ignoring Nyx's past or the strong possibility she was, at one time, Nightmare Moon. You are also right, there is a chance that Nyx could become the Nightmare Moon that threatened Equestria last year. You, however, are failing to see something, Twilight."

"What's that?"

"That Nyx has a chance to be something else, and you have a chance to help her change."

Rarity's words rung through Twilight's head and left her in a mild stupor. The thought of ponies changing wasn't new to Twilight. In Canterlot, she was a hermit of the library that preferred the company of a good book to any other pony. Since her arrival in Ponyville, however, she had gained five really great friends and actually spent entire days away from her library and its books. But could Nightmare Moon change? Could a pony known for being utterly devoted to Princess Celestia's fall and the eternal night, change?

Twilight wasn't sure, but at the same time the tension and worry that had been plaguing her was being washed away by hope: the hope that Nightmare Moon could be a different mare. Despite all she had seen, despite the near conclusive evidence Nyx was Nightmare Moon, there was a chance she wouldn't be the same Nightmare Moon.

The past didn't matter. What mattered was who Nyx was now, and right now she was just an innocent, happy filly..

Twilight leaned in and gave Rarity a grateful hug. "Thank you, Rarity. That makes me feel much better."

"I'm happy to help, Twilight," Rarity said, returning the hug. When Twilight pulled away Rarity flashed a smile and lifted her cup of tea. "We mares have to stick together, after all."

Twilight chuckled. "How did you get so smart, Rarity?"

"Learning from experience," Rarity offered softly, staring into her own cup of tea. "Taking care of Sweetie Bell the past several years and running my boutique without any help, it's forced me to learn many things the hard way... at least since mother and father..." Rarity trailed off, the end of the sentence dying in her throat.

"You want to talk about it?" Twilight asked quietly.

"Maybe another time, Twilight," she replied. "I tend to get misty-eyed when I think about it too much, and I've got ponies coming into get fitted for some dresses in an hour. I need to look presentable. Still... I will definitely tell you about it sometime."

"Of course, Rarity," Twilight offered with a smile. "Whenever you are ready."

Rarity smiled appreciatively for a moment before tossing her head, brightening up, and changing the subject. "Now, in light of all this, I *do* hope you're going to let Nyx go to the Cutie Mark Crusader sleep over Apple Bloom is having at Sweet Apple Acres. I can only imagine that she's just as excited about it as Sweetie Belle is."

"Probably *more* excited, considering it's her first sleep over." Twilight gave Rarity a nod. "And yes, I think I will let her go."

Rarity paused to take a sip of her tea. "That's good. Not only will it make Nyx happy, but it may help dispel some of the rumors that are undoubtedly floating around. If ponies see you and Nyx walking to Sweet Apple Acres, it may help them believe that what happened at Learn and Play Day wasn't out of the ordinary. After all, if something was wrong, most ponies would expect you to hide Nyx away."

"Which is something I seriously considered," Twilight admitted before taking a sip of tea, "but, if our friends are any indication, they all just think Nyx is really good at magic, like me. So, for the moment, I can just say that strong magic runs in our family. After all, I did turn my parents into potted plants when I was taking my entry exam for Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns, and I was a filly back then too."

"You mean the day you got your Cutie Mark? Yes, I heard it was quite the impressive display, at least from what Sweetie Belle told of the story."

"Yeah, it was pretty crazy," Twilight said.

Rarity leaned in, curious grin on her face. "Mind sharing?"

Twilight shook her head and took a second sip of her tea before going into the story.

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"Well, I don't think our Cutie Marks have anything to do with bein' rodeo ponies," Apple Bloom said dejectedly. She pushed open the door to her bedroom, and walked inside with Sweetie Belle, Scootaloo, and Nyx following close behind. Their sleeping bags were rolled out on the floor in the bedroom.

"It was kind of fun seeing Big Macintosh tied up like that," Scootaloo said with a chuckle. "He

didn't even know what hit him."

"Tell that to my sister," Apple Bloom replied as she jumped onto her bed, "'cause if she had found it funny, we wouldn't have been sent to bed already."

Sweetie Belle laid down on her sleeping bag. "Yeah, but that isn't so bad. I'm pretty tired."

"Aw, don't tell me you want to go to sleep already?" Scootaloo whined. "Sure, we had to go to bed, but there is still a lot of fun things we could do."

"Like what?"

Scootaloo grabbed a flashlight and held it under her chin, causing spooky shadows to fall on her face. "We could tell ghost stories!"

"No offense, Scootaloo, but your ghost stories aren't that scary," Apple Bloom said. "Even Nyx isn't afraid of them."

"Hey!" Nyx whined.

Scootaloo lowered the flashlight from her face. "Okay, then what do you think we should do?"

"We could play a board game," Sweetie Belle suggested.

Apple Bloom and Nyx perked up at the idea of a board game, but Scootaloo shook her head. "No, that's too boring."

"Well shoot," Apple Bloom grumbled, "what are we goin' to do then?"

"Um... well, Twilight did give me a book she said really helped with her first slumber party," Nyx said. She levitated a book from her saddlebags, which were stacked with the rest by the bedroom door.

"Are slumber parties the same as sleepovers?" Sweetie Belle asked as Nyx cracked open the book.

"Well, you spend the night with friends, so I guess they're the same," Scootaloo said before scrunching up her nose. "But I don't want to do any sort of makeup stuff."

Nyx flipped through a few pages of the book in her search for ideas. "Me neither. We... could... have a pillow fight."

"We only got four pillows, and my bedroom is too small," Apple Bloom said, shooting down the

idea.

"We could make smores."

"We don't have marshmallows. Or chocolate. Or graham-crackers. Or even a fire to roast the marshmallows on," Sweetie Belle pointed out.

"Well, ghost stories are in here too," Nyx said with a slight quiver. She shook her head before the thoughts of scary stories could sink in and continued reading. "But I think we've already decided not to do that."

"Bet you're glad about that, huh?" Scootaloo teased.

Nyx glared at Scootaloo for a moment before turning back to the book. "Here's another game: Truth or Dare."

"That could be fun," Sweetie Belle offered with a smile. "Let's give it a try."

"How do you play?" Apple Bloom asked.

Nyx held a hoof on the page in the book, reading the instructions out loud. "Somepony starts by asking if another pony wants to tell the truth or take a dare. If the pony chooses truth, they have to answer one question truthfully. If they take the dare, they have to do whatever dare the first pony gives them. Once the question is answered or the dare is complete, the next pony in the circle takes their turn. Play continues for as long as desired."

Scootaloo turned over on her sleeping bag, looking at the rest of her friends from her now upside-down perspective. "That sounds kind of boring. I mean, the truth part sounds all right, but what could we dare each other to do?"

"Oh, I know!" Apple Bloom perked up. "Let's make it Truth or Challenge."

"What's the difference?" asked Scootaloo.

"Challenges are a lot harder than dares, because you actually have to do something... well, challenging. Something that might be hard to do. If ya don't want to answer a question, then ya have to complete a challenge. If you can't, then ya have to answer a question."

"Oh, that sounds way better," Sweetie Belle agreed. "Let's do it."

Nyx looked up anxiously from the book, obviously a little worried about the idea. Still, her three friends were very eager to get the game started, so she just put the sleepover guide book back into her bags and forced some enthusiasm. "Okay, so who wants to go first?"

Scotaloo shifted, sitting up right on her sleeping bag and putting one of her hooves into the air. "Oh, me! Me! Apple Bloom, truth or challenge?"

Apple Bloom paused to think. "Um... I'll go with... the challenge."

"I challenge you to stand on your head for ten seconds."

"Ha, is that all?" Apple Bloom replied confidently. Within moments, the yellow filly was balancing on her head, legs waving around as her friends counted down.

"10... 9... 8... 7... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... 0!"

Apple Bloom got back on her hooves, smiling triumphantly before wavering. She shook her head to try and clear it. "Whoa, that makes my head all swimmy."

"Really, let me try," Sweetie Belle said before flipping onto her head. Soon, the other three Cutie Mark Crusaders were on their heads, laughing and giggling as the blood rushed from their brains..

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"Okay, Nyx... truth or challenge?" Apple Bloom asked about an hour later. The game had turned into a good way to end the sleepover. The four friends had done a lot of strange and silly challenges, from seeing how long they could hold their breath to having hoof wrestling contests. It was all in good fun, and Nyx was ready for more. She bit her lower lip, and focused on Apple Bloom as she tried to decide what she would do.

"Truth," Nyx finally answered.

Apple Bloom leaned in, lowering her voice. "Tell us something you've never told any other pony."

Nyx blinked in confusion and tilted her head to one side. "Like what?"

Apple Bloom shrugged. "Anything."

"Yeah, just make it something cool," Scotaloo added.

"Well, I can't really think of anything to tell you, but..." Nyx fell silent and glanced back at her vest. "There... is something I can show you."

"Really, what is it?" Sweetie Belle asked.

"I think it's better if you just see it, but you got to promise not to tell any other pony. Twilight and Rarity know, but they told me I couldn't show what I'm about to show you to anypony."

"Oh boy, this has to be *good* if Twilight told you to keep it a secret," Scootaloo grinned. "But yeah, we promise not to tell anypony."

Nyx turned to look at Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle, ensuring that the two other fillies also promised to keep her secret. Despite their nods, Nyx had one more condition. "And you have to promise me you won't hate me and we'll still be friends after I show you."

"Well, that's a silly thing to promise," Apple Bloom said as Sweetie Belle nodded her head in agreement. "We're the Cutie Mark Crusaders. We're going to be best friends for life."

"No matter what," Scootaloo stated firmly, with a strong, confident smile on her lips.

Nyx nervously smiled, looking at her three friends. Decision made, she got up from her sleeping bag and walked across the room into Apple Bloom's closet. She shut the door once she was inside, and for a moment there was only the thing that came out of the closet was the sound of rustling. Apple Bloom, Scootaloo, and Sweetie Belle all craned their necks, watching anxiously until the door opened.

Nyx nervously walked out, carrying her vest in her teeth. Once she was a few steps out of the closet, she spread her wings out and stretched them for a few moments before letting them fold to her sides.

Sweetie Belle, Scootaloo, and Apple Bloom all stared with eyes wide and jaws hanging open. Nyx set down her vest and waited for her friends to say something, but there was only unnerving silence. She started to frown, and looked away from her friends anxiously. Tears started to pull at her eyes, and she began to retreat back into the closet.

Yet, before Nyx could hide in Apple Bloom's closet, her three friends surrounded her.

"Why didn't you tell us sooner you had wings?" Apple Bloom asked.

"Well, Rarity told me that if ponies knew I had both a horn and wings, that they would get jealous of me. I didn't ask for them, I just have them, and-"

Sweetie Belle nodded her head. "Oh, yeah! You could so make Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon jealous."

"But aren't you jealous? Rarity said everypony would be, and I don't want to make anypony feel like that."

"Naw, why would we be jealous?" Apple Bloom asked. "It's just part of who you are. It'd be as silly as me being jealous of how well Sweetie Belle sings."

"Or me being jealous of how well Scootaloo rides her scooter," Sweetie Belle chimed in.

Scootaloo motioned to herself with a hoof. "Or me being jealous of how good Apple Bloom is at fixing up things like our clubhouse."

"Yeah, it's like my big sister Applejack says, 'There ain't no point in bein' jealous, because it doesn't change how things are.'"

"Still, why *do* you have wings and a horn?" Sweetie Belle asked, unable to contain the curious thought. "The only ponies I know that have both are Princess Celestia and Princess Luna."

"Well, isn't it obvious?" Apple Bloom asked, looking at her friends who only answered her with silent, blank stares. "Well, okay, maybe not so obvious."

"Just spit it out, Apple Bloom," said Scootaloo.

"I bet that one of Nyx's parents is a unicorn and the other is a pegasus."

Sweetie Belle cocked an eyebrow. "Does it really work like that? I mean, isn't there somepony in our class that has a mom that's a unicorn and a dad that's a pegasus?"

"Maybe it doesn't happen all the time," Scootaloo guessed. "I mean, isn't there also a pony in our class who has a pair of unicorns as parents but doesn't have a horn of her own?"

Apple Bloom nodded as she turned to jump back up onto her bed. "Yeah, there is, and I think Scootaloo is right. It must only happen some of the time. Still, Nyx, it's your turn now."

Nyx, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo returned to their sleeping bags. She couldn't deny it was nice not having to wear her vest. Her wings always felt kind of scrunched up beneath the fabric. She allowed her wings to flutter a little as she laid down on her sleeping bag. She then turned her attention back to the game. "Okay, Sweetie Belle, truth or challenge?"

"Truth!" Sweetie Belle answered without a moments' hesitation.

"What's the funniest story you have of your big sister Rarity?"

Sweetie Belle snorted and started giggling. "Oh, you're going to like this."

It didn't take long for Sweetie Belle to tell the story, and by the end all four fillies were giggling loudly until a pounding came at the bedroom door.

“Apple Bloom, you and yer friends get to sleep right this minute or I’m goin’ come in there and hogtie all of you in your sleepin’ bags!” Applejack threatened, clearly irritated by the late-night noise. “I got applebuckin’ to do in the mornin’, and I won’t have you four keepin’ me up all night.”

The four fillies chimed back a “We’re sorry”, and with their game over, decided to call it a night. Apple Bloom blew out the candles in her room, and the four friends lay down to go to sleep.

Still, before anypony could fall asleep, Nyx broke the silence. “Um... girls, thank you for still being my friends, even after I showed you my wings.”

“Aww, of course we would still be your friends!” Sweetie Belle replied from her own sleeping bag on the verge of going to sleep. “We’re the Cutie Mark Crusaders; that’s like being friends for life with a cool theme song.”

Sweetie Belle gently cleared her throat and began to sing. “We are the Cutie Mark Crusaders, on a quest to find out who we are. And we will never stop the journey, not until we have our cutie marks.”

While Sweetie Belle had been the one to start singing, the other three soon joined in. It wasn’t the intense, arguably painful, rock ballad that had been performed at the talent show. Instead, the three sang it softly, softly enough that even Scootaloo’s voice was bearable.

To the sound of their own theme song, the four drifted off to sleep, none resting as well as Nyx. She had been able to reveal a truth about herself to her friends, and they accepted her all the same.

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Nexus stared at the moon with turquoise eyes through his study window, floating a glass of orange juice nearby. He swirled the contents gently while intently reading from a scroll. It was one of the reports he had received from the spy, and while some parts of the information were welcoming, other pieces were troubling.

His plan had gone off without a hitch, for the most part. Through his connections at Celestia’s School for Gifted Unicorns, he had sent out flyers to every school in Equestria pitching the idea of a “Learn and Play Day”. He also had some members of the Children of Nightmare in Ponyville approach Cheerilee and convince her of the idea’s merit.

In the end, Cheerilee held her own Learn and Play Day, and during the event, the spy had been able to accomplish his goal. He observed and spoke with Nyx while Twilight Sparkle was preoccupied elsewhere.

Despite the interruption by Pinkie Pie, the spy had been able to learn a great deal. He witnessed and reported the two feats of magic Nyx performed: turning a pony into a tree and her performance in the game of tug of war. It was a kind of magic that only few ponies could control at such a young age. There was no denying that the magical potential was there, but potential was not enough.

Nyx did not act like Nightmare Moon. She did not speak condescendingly to the country bumpkins of Ponyville. The spy described her as nervous and timid, having few friends. All things that Nexus wouldn't have believed would be attributed to Equestria's true queen, at least when dealing with the common pony.

But the potential was there, and that would be enough to *make* her Nightmare Moon. Making a second attempt at the resurrection spell without the lingering shreds would be impossible. But Nyx could be used as a seed. She could be used to draw in the traces of Nightmare Moon's magic which was dispersed by Princess Celestia's interruption. That magic would bear with it the echoes of Nightmare Moon. The memories, the emotions, the essence of the great dark empress would fill Nyx, and she would become the queen Equestria deserved.

But completing the spell would be difficult. He would need time to prepare, resources, and above all, power. The spell would need to be obscenely powerful. That was the only way to be sure the ritual would complete before Celestia could interfere a second time.

A powerful spell, however, could not be set up secretly. One precluded the other, and thus Spell Nexus found himself thinking in circles as he sipped at his orange juice. There was a need to act quickly, before something happened, but he could not act overtly. The spell had to be powerful, but had to be done secretly. If he could not strike a perfect balance, he risked another failure or revealing his true intention to Celestia. What he needed was-

"Sir?"

"Yes, Proper Etiquette?" Nexus asked. He glanced over his shoulder at his butler, who was standing in the study's doorway.

"Princess Celestia is at the front door and wishes to have a word with you. Shall I see her in?"

"Yes, please," Nexus replied, closing his turquoise-colored eyes. When he reopened them, they had reverted to their original slate gray color. He then finished the rest of the orange juice in his glass, winced a little from the resulting brain freeze, and then walked across the room. He sat in his favorite chair and picked up a book, all an effort to make Celestia believe that the only thing she had interrupted was a quiet evening reading.

The timing was near-perfect. Nexus had just settled into one of his chairs with a book when the doors opened and Princess Celestia strolled in. Her guards remained in the hallway.

“Thank you for allowing me into your lovely home at such a late hour, Nexus,” Princess Celestia said as she strode across the room. “I do hope I wasn’t interrupting anything.”

Nexus set his book down on a nearby end table. “A good book and nothing more. Still, I find it surprising you are out and about at such an hour. You are usually in bed by this time.”

The princess came to a stop beside Nexus. “If I may be honest with you, I have been having trouble sleeping.”

“Then please,” Nexus began. He motioned to a large cushion that was kept in his study specifically as a seat for royal, alicorn guests. “Make yourself comfortable, and tell me what troubles you.”

Princess Celestia took Nexus’s offer, sitting down on the cushion as she began to speak. She told Spell Nexus about the spell in the forest, about the research his co-worker Bastion was doing on the spell, and of many other things Celestia had learned about the Children of Nightmare. It was all information Nexus knew, but he feigned interest. He listened and offered appropriate levels of shock and disbelief.

“To think, ponies trying to resurrect Nightmare Moon. It is hard to believe some would be so foalish,” Nexus mused when Princess Celestia finished. He poured a fresh glass of orange juice for himself and offered some to her. She replied with a smile and a shake of her head.

“But you stopped them,” Nexus pointed out. He lifted his glass in a casual toast. “And Equestria continues to thrive in your protective embrace. So why have you not been sleeping well?”

Princess Celestia was silent for a moment before looking at Nexus with a grave expression painted across her features. “I’ve come to believe that the spell, while interrupted, may not have been completely unsuccessful.”

“What makes you say that?” Nexus asked with a concerned frown.

“Do you know my student, Twilight Sparkle?”

A chuckle escaped Nexus’s lips. “The most magically gifted unicorn I’ve ever had the pleasure of getting to know? Of course I know your student. I would bet that everypony at your school knows of her, both staff and students. Why do you ask?”

“At the Spring Festival in Ponyville, I discovered Twilight was taking care of a young filly by the name of Nyx, who she said was her half-cousin,” Celestia explained. “A filly that, if my sources are to be believed, started living with her shortly after the incident in the forest. A filly who, in recent days, performed two very profound feats of magic at a school weekend event.”

Nexus took a sip of his glass, not finding the information at all troubling. "I can only imagine powerful magic runs in her family."

"Yes, I would believe that as well if Nyx was related to Twilight," Princess Celestia said. "Yet, I have checked the family's records. There is no listing of Twilight having a half-cousin named Nyx. In fact, there is no listing of a Nyx being born in Equestria in the past several decades. It is as if she appeared out of thin air."

Nexus, who had been taking another sip from his orange juice glass, froze up for a single moment. He eyed Celestia over the rim of his glass, and then resumed drinking before the princess could take notice.

"Appeared out of thin air?" Nexus echoed after clearing his throat. "Your highness, do you believe that Nyx didn't exist until a few months ago, that she literally appeared out of thin air?"

"I don't think she just appeared, but I do believe Nyx's origins are far different from a common pony's. Based on the research done by Bastion Yorsets and his team, I've come to know for certain that the ritual I interrupted was designed to bring back Nightmare Moon.

"Then, within days of the spell's failure, Nyx appeared in Ponyville. There are no records of her existing before she was registered for school. No pony in Ponyville knows anything more about Nyx's history than what Twilight herself has told me. As I have said, it seems like she appeared out of thin air... like she is the product of a spell."

Nexus nodded his head. "I see. You believe Nightmare Moon and Nyx are one and the same, which is a very unsettling thought." Nexus took in a deep breath. "I do believe I understand why you've been losing sleep."

"No, Spell Nexus, you don't," Celestia replied. She stood up and walked across the room. "For it is not as simple as you make it sound."

"What's there to make it complex?" he asked. He sipped at his orange juice, trying to quell a tremor of fear that had slipped into his voice.

"The fact that Nyx doesn't act anything like the mare I once knew," Princess Celestia replied as she reached the study's window. She looked at the moon while memories of the past overwhelmed her. "Nightmare Moon, the real Nightmare Moon, was a vindictive, deceptive, hateful pony. She desired to plunge Equestria into eternal night, not just so ponies would appreciate the beauty of the stars and moon, but so they would also be deprived of the sun they loved so dearly.

"She was a threat to all Equestria... and I watched it happen. I watched as Luna, my dear sister,

became that monstrous mare, bent on vengeance. It was my duty as a big sister to protect her, and I failed. I failed so horribly that I had to banish her to the moon and wait a thousand years for six ponies to do what I could not.

“And now,” Celestia continued, lowering her head. Her regal composure was failing, and a tired expression took its place on her face. “The past few nights, my dreams have been haunted. I see Nyx growing to become the monster I once knew. She laughs and plunges Equestria into eternal night. She takes away my sister as well as Twilight. I scream out in the dream to try and help them, only to find myself sitting up in my own bed in an icy sweat.

“I fear this filly, Nexus,” Celestia concluded with a heavy sigh, “but at the same time I feel guilty for fearing her.”

“Why would you feel guilty?” Nexus asked.

Celestia turned her back on the window. “Because Nyx has done nothing to warrant such fear. I have met Nyx personally, over a short dinner, and she acted nothing like the Nightmare Moon I knew. At first, she was scared of me and my sister. She shied away, and only after some encouragement from Twilight was Nyx even able to say hello to us.

“It was Luna who was able to finally draw Nyx out of her shell, and, after that, Nyx laughed and spoke excitedly on many topics. She spoke of friends, spoke of school, spoke of all the things a normal filly her age would want to talk about: all things Nightmare Moon would never care about.

“And thus I am torn,” Princess Celestia explained. “I worry about what Nyx might become, but at the same time I believe that she is not the same as Nightmare Moon. She is the product of that spell, and yet she acts like any normal filly as she lives, laughs, and has friends. That, Spell Nexus, is what is troubling me.”

“It is something that would trouble anypony,” Nexus said, faking his concern. “I am honored you would come to speak with me about this, but I must ask... what does Luna think of her? Certainly she, who was once Nightmare Moon, would be able to judge Nyx’s true nature.”

“I... I must confess, I have been doing everything in my power to keep this a secret from Luna,” Princess Celestia said, heavy guilt in her voice. “It has not been easy. She was able to sense the same surge of magic I felt rise up from the Everfree Forest some time ago. By some stroke of luck I’ve been able to convince her it was nothing to worry about, and have kept the rest of what I’ve told you hidden.”

Nexus frowned. “I find it strange you would want to keep this a secret from Luna. Do you not trust her with this matter?”

"No, I do trust her, but... I choose to keep this a secret to protect her," The princess admitted. "Call me a foal if you wish, Nexus, but I'm Luna's big sister. I lost her once to Nightmare Moon, and I don't want her getting anywhere near this."

"This is why I've come to you, Nexus," Princess Celestia continued as she moved away from the window, retaking her seat next to him. "Because, while I cannot turn to Luna in this, I need somepony to talk to. I need somepony to give me an honest opinion. Am I wrong to fear Nyx? Am I wrong to doubt in my student's ability to judge character? Assuming Twilight has noticed the similarities between Nyx and Nightmare Moon, would she not have come to me if she felt Nyx was a danger?"

"And even if Nyx grows to be the same in body and power, could she not be her own mare? Or... do my dreams tell me the simple truth? In time, will Nyx become the only mare in the world I truly fear?"

Silence fell upon the study at this as Nexus slowly took his gaze off of the princess. He closed his eyes and swirled the orange juice in his glass. He tried to make it look like he was pondering the question, but in truth he was considering the situation as a whole.

Princess Celestia saw there was a chance the filly was a threat to Equestria, but did not act because of her feelings. An alicorn of her power and stature, hesitating because of her bleeding, tender heart. He'd pity the princess if her weakness wasn't so pathetic. Above that, the thought of Nightmare Moon's return scared her. She feared having to face Equestria's true queen, and for good reason. Nightmare Moon would no longer be held back by Princess Luna and her feeble feelings.

Indecision, compassion, and fear... all weaknesses that only proved to Nexus that Princess Celestia wasn't fit to rule Equestria. In his mind, only the cold wisdom of Nightmare Moon would ensure the kingdom's future. Yet, these weaknesses were not without their purpose. Nexus took a sip from his glass of orange juice, using it to hide the smile that was trying to creep onto his lips. Only once he was able to force the smile away did he lower the glass and begin to speak.

"You are not wrong to fear Nyx. It is your job as a ruler of this kingdom to try and foresee anything that would arise to threaten Equestria. Right now, Nyx is a credible threat. Nightmare Moon is among the worst things to happen to Equestria in recorded history, and, if there is even a small chance Nyx could become her, then she is a threat you should take seriously."

"But I cannot condemn Nyx for what she might do, just as I cannot punish a normal pony for a crime they have not yet committed," Celestia argued. "Not only would that go against Equestrian law, Twilight would never forgive me."

"Your concern for your student is heartwarming, Princess Celestia, but I shouldn't need to remind you that you have a whole kingdom to worry about. Is it not better to save everypony in

Equestria from the danger that is Nightmare Moon, even if it means one particular unicorn doesn't like you anymore?"

"It is better, Nexus," the princess admitted reluctantly, "and perhaps, if I were a stronger mare, I could do what is best for the kingdom without batting an eye. I, however, cannot and will not act against Nyx unless more evidence becomes available, even if it means I must endure sleepless nights."

"Then maybe I can offer that evidence," Nexus replied, smiling gently.

"And how would you do that?"

Nexus turned his head, looking across the many books tucked away on the study's shelves. "If I recall correctly, there is a magical ritual from the zebra homelands that may just be the answer to this predicament." With a delicate touch, he levitated a book from the shelves and cracked it open. He flicked through the pages, not truly reading the words but doing it more for appearances. He continued to turn pages for several moments before finally settling on a spot deep within the tome.

"Hmm, yes. It would take time to study it, even longer to prepare, but if the spell works, you will be able to take a glimpse inside Nyx's mind and even her soul. From that glimpse, you should be able to see whether or not the filly is somepony you need to fear."

Celestia smiled as the weights of fear and doubt began to lift off her chest. "Spell Nexus, do you honestly believe you can prepare this spell? Can you promise that this spell will do as you say?"

"I don't know if I can outright promise, but I am very certain," he replied with a confident grin.

"Then please, coordinate your efforts on the spell with the palace. I will make arrangements so that anything and everything you will need to perform this spell is provided," Princess Celestia said as she crossed the room and approached him. "Do whatever it takes to get this spell prepared as quickly as possible."

Nexus bowed respectfully. "It would be my pleasure to do so, Princess, but I should warn you of something. If my memory about the spell is correct, then Nyx will need to be present. This isn't something that can be done unless she's at least in the same room. Nyx would need to be brought to the spell, taken from Twilight."

The smile that had only just made its way onto Princess Celestia's face vanished, replaced by a frown. For a moment, the sun princess sat in silence, contemplating the one catch to her and Nexus' newly hatched plan. "Nyx would need to be taken from Twilight Sparkle?" The princess asked, as if hoping she had misheard.

"Yes," Nexus stated coldly.

"But couldn't Twilight accompany her?" Princess Celestia asked. "Would they truly need to be separated?"

"I believe so," Nexus answered, a heavy tone of regret in his voice. "I think it would be unwise to have such a magically talented unicorn present for the test. While you easily outclass Twilight with your power, she could do something regrettable before you could stop her, if she feels we're harming Nyx. That and having to be there when Nyx is tested, be there when worse could be revealed, would be very difficult for Twilight."

Nexus heaved a sigh and scratched his forehead. "To put it simply, princess, do you really want to put Twilight through something like that? Do you want to have her there, to watch the test, knowing what it could reveal? Personally, I feel Twilight's presence at the spell would only cause more trouble for us and more heartache for her, especially if she is as attached to Nyx as you say she is. I must strongly advise that Twilight remains in Ponyville."

"Then that shall be my part in this," Princess Celestia said in defeat, her heart once again heavy in her chest. "Spell Nexus, I would ask you to simply focus on preparing the spell. I... I will handle the task of fetching Nyx personally."

"Are you sure?"

The princess nodded. "Twilight deserves as much."

Nexus snapped the book shut and placed it on his desk before smiling reassuringly to Princess Celestia. "Very well. I will begin preparations in the morning. I will need time to study the spell, and then I will need time to gather the materials and prepare. Once the spell is ready, however, I will inform you so that you can perform your part. After that, it will take but a few minutes to know whether or not Nyx poses a threat to Equestria."

"Thank you, Nexus," The princess said, managing a weak, half-hearted smile. "You have been of greater service this evening than I could have hoped for."

Nexus offered a short bow as a playful smile pulled at his lips. "Do give me some credit, Princess. My special talent is, after all, creating and understanding complex spells."

"Oh, I haven't forgotten. After all, it wasn't so long ago that you were one of my faithful students," Princess Celestia teased with her usual, playful tone. "Now, I believe I've taken up enough of your evening. I shall return to the castle to get some rest, but please send word to me when you are ready to begin preparing the spell. Also, please do not share our conversation here with more ponies than necessary. I do not want to burden Luna with this, and I do not want to cause a public panic about Nightmare Moon's return."

"Of course, Princess," Nexus replied. He got out of his chair and walked with the princess to the door of his study. "I will keep what we discussed here a secret to all but those who need to know about it. Now, I hope you have a pleasant evening."

"Good night to you too, Spell Nexus," Princess Celestia said.

Nexus returned the farewell with a wave of his hoof as the princess slipped out the study doors. He then waited until the princess rounded a corner further down the hall before he pulled the doors shut and moved to the far side of his study. He looked out the window, and wore a gentle, happy smile on his lips until the princess had entered the courtyard, boarded her chariot, and departed.

It was only when Princess Celestia was out of sight that Nexus allowed his slate gray eyes to return to the turquoise color that marked him as a member of the Children of Nightmare. His gentle grin turned menacing, and he had to fight the urge to laugh out loud.

Horn glowing, Nexus began pulling books off his study shelves. Yes, he would need time to prepare, but now he had all the time he would need. He had no fear of the princess acting, for she was waiting for him to help her act. He had even convinced her to keep Twilight in Ponyville, which would make things much easier for him.

A second opportunity: he had been given a second chance to complete the spell, and it had been laid in his hooves by none other than the sun tyrant herself. Fate and destiny were on his side. The world itself worked to help him bring back Equestria's true queen.

"Celestia, you have become a contributing architect in your own demise," Nexus whispered before diving into the work that lay ahead of him.

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Questions, Comments, Concerns?
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