

The Empty Room

Chapter 3

By Wanderer D

By the time Lyra had gone home and promised to see them the next day, the five ponies had a pretty good idea of the layout of the castle. As they sat down to eat a small lunch in the gardens, courtesy of the Princesses, the guards accompanying them took positions around them, trying not to be too obtrusive to their guests, but still curious about them.

“It was awfully nice of Lyra to show us around.” Applejack said.

“Yes! And did you see those amazing grounds?!” Pinkie Pie giggled. “I bet I could throw the bestest party ever for Princess Celestia! That would really make her happy!”

The guards smiled at each other. Given how stressed they all had been a party sounded nice.

“But it has to be big!” Pinkie Pie continued prancing around. “I have to get cupcakes and streamersanddanglersandcakeanddrinksandhotsauceand...” she stopped when she turned and came nuzzle to nuzzle with Fluttershy.

“But... you would have to make sure that the party didn't disturb the animals.” The Pegaus said. Although they hadn't been as friendly as she had hoped before, she was not going to hold it against them.

“Yeah yeah, parties are good, but I want to explore! Hey! You know what? This place is old!” Rainbow Dash said.

“Yeah, we know.” Applejack deadpanned.

Dash gave her a look. “It has been around from even before Nightmare Moon appeared! That's thousands of years!” she smiled. “I bet there are ghosts here!”

Applejack suddenly grew nervous.

“Oh, Dash, don't be silly.” Rarity laughed. “There are no such things as ghosts! Next thing you'll say is that humans are real.”

“Hey!” Rainbow Dash glared at her. “I never said I believed in humans! I stopped believing in fairy tales like that when I was a little filly!”

“But you believe in ghosts, dear.”

“Hey now, I don't know about humans, but ghosts are as real as this table here.” Applejack broke in, tapping her hoof on the table.

“No they aren't.” Rarity said.

“But humans are.” Pinkie said with a giggle. “I met one just before the story started.”

The other four ponies slowly turned to look at her, while the guards tried valiantly not to stare.

“He was very strange! No hoofs, and they don't have wings!” Pinkie Pie continued, slightly confused. “I always thought they would have wings.”

“Now, Pinkie Pie,” Applejack said after a moment. “Don't go making up stories, okay?”

“But it happened!” Pinkie Pie declared, bouncing around. “When I said ‘hi’ he stared at me, then said something about ‘self insertion was a low he was not going to hit’ and then...”

“And then?” Rainbow Dash asked, leaning in, interested in the story despite herself.

“He imploded!” Pinkie Pie giggled. “Twice!”

Applejack and Rarity smacked their hooves against their faces and groaned, there was a crash behind them and a helm rolled past them... Rainbow Dash smiled.

“Really?! That's awesome! If I implode I want to do it twice! NO! Thrice!” the pegasus declared. “There's no way I'm losing to a human!”

“Um...” Fluttershy drew their attention. “What is 'self-insertion'?”

“Well... I don't know... but it sure sounds painful.” Applejack said, raising an eyebrow.

“Why are we talking about this?” Rarity asked, giving the others a wary look.

“Oh! Because of the ghosts!” Dash jumped and turned to one of the guards. “Are there any ghosts in the castle?”

While the one that had face-hoofed so hard he had knocked his helm off sheepishly made his way past them to pick it up, the other guards exchanged nervous glances. “Uh... there used to be one in the library tower, but it disappeared a year ago.” one of them ventured.

“It's gone? Aww.” Rainbow Dash sighed, but looked up hopefully. “So... what did that ghost do? Was it scary?”

“Well...” the guard shuffled in place when everypony's attention focused on him. “It was usually late at night... when everything was calm, and even after Lady Twilight had gone to sleep... when we did our rounds... we would hear a voice, but whenever we investigated there was no-one there!”

“I remember that the voice was that of a capable general, commanding his troops.” another guard said. “It freaked us out... we thought there really was a battle happening.”

"Hm... that does sounds suspicious." Rainbow Dash said. "I wonder what happened to it?"

o.O.o

Snort! "One does not simply walk into Mordor!" Spike bellowed as he rolled out of Twilight's bag. He whizzed when he hit the floor belly first. He stood up, shaking his head and rubbing the sleep off his eyes. "Uh? What? Where am I?" he looked around, spotting the calendar.

It was the same day as when he and Twilight had gone looking for books about the Elements of Harmony.

"Oh... Celestia... I'm in Twilight's room back in Canterlot... this... this can only mean one thing!" he fell heavily on his rump. "I... must have dreamt the whole thing! We never went to Ponyville!"

He started to despair. "But then... I never met Rainbow Dash! Or Pinkie Pie! Or Fluttershy! Or even Applejack! But most importantly... I never met Rarity!" his little claws made fists as he shook them at the heavens. "Noooooooooooooooo! They were all figments of my imagination!" he sighed. "Although I must say that my imagination gave Rarity very, very, nice flanks."

Then he groaned. "Why does this always happen to me?"

o.O.o

Rarity shuddered. "Is it getting cold?"

"Not really." Applejack said, taking another lick of her apple-caramel ice-cream.

Pinkie Pie giggled.

"What?" Rainbow Dash asked, turning her attention to the pink pony.

“Oh, nothing... I just think 'Mordor' is such a silly name!”

“Uh... right. Anyway, aren't there any more haunted places here? This place is so old there should be at least a couple!”

“Well...” one of the guards ventured, but hesitated when another shook his head violently. “... uh... never mind.”

Applejack and Rainbow Dash shared a glance.

o.O.o

“Hmm...” Twilight Sparkle hummed as her horn shone in different shades. “Interesting.” next to her, a quill quickly took notes as she proceeded to cover the room inch by inch.

She stopped when she reached the bookshelf. She felt tears flooding her eyes as she watched the shelves full of foal books, lovingly chosen by her mentor for her daughter, who never had the chance to lay next to her and listen to the kind alicorn read the wondrous stories within.

She sighed. Before the Princesses left, she had felt anger and horror at what had happened. But now... now all she felt was sadness. She had stopped several times as she moved about the room, when her hoof had hit a toy in the floor, or the mobile made with little effigies of ponies, stars, the sun and the moon had chimed when a breeze had swept through the room. Whenever that happened a deep sorrow filled her, and she had caught herself crying more than once.

She had tried to detach herself from it, a little, at least, to be able to do her job... but there was so much love in this one room... she looked in sorrow at the crib with the two dolls in it, a mental image forming of Princess Celestia's kind smile as she leaned in to wish her filly a

good night. Or the wooden blocks in the corner, where she could almost hear childish laughter and the gentle and warm chuckles of an amused Princess Celestia.

She took a deep breath and concentrated. She was not going to fail her mentor. Especially after the Princess had gone back to her duties after experiencing something that would have kept most ponies... indisposed... for a few days at least. She had to find out what had happened here.

o.O.o

Luna lay in her bed thinking. She should be asleep, especially if she wanted the night to come in time, but... she sighed. So many things had changed since she had arrived. She knew technology would be much different when she finally emerged from the Moon. Faces had changed, obviously, the forests had changed, even the continents had changed a little bit. Islands that had been there when she had controlled the night so many centuries ago were gone now...

Like Celestia, she had had some temples built in her honor by her devoted subjects as a sign of love and appreciation... most of those were gone, except for a few that had mysteriously been kept clean, although she had been unnerved to find an effigy of Nightmare Moon rather than the Moon or Stars that were traditionally used to represent her.

But none of that was as shocking and saddening as what she had found out today. She sighed. "Today" felt like it had been a whole week of stress.

But... she hadn't really felt the loss of so many things as deeply as today, when she had found out that even her sister had changed. The thought of her sister... *her* sister, Princess Celestia, starting a family? A week ago she would have laughed if someone brought it up as a possibility. There had to be a limit to attachment, after all. They were immortal. Whoever they married, whichever fillies or colts they produced would pass away eventually, while they remained. That didn't mean they had to be aloof, or unkind, or even feel superior -hard

lessons that she had to face after the Nightmare Moon debacle- but it meant that if they didn't draw a line, they would be miserable.

But her sister had taken a bold step beyond that line and produced the first filly to be related to them by blood. And then she was taken away, Celestia deprived of even the memory of her filly.

Luna felt bitter tears forming as she considered what it would have been like being an aunt? If she had had more family, someone to keep close and teach about the stars and the moon and those places invisible to normal pony eyes, would she had transformed into a monster? Even as Nightmare Moon, she knew, she would have been touched by the existence of more family. Someone that would not judge her, maybe even love her unconditionally.

Why had this happened? And who had done it?

She sighed and looked out the window at the busy streets, lost in thought.

o.O.o

A filly. She had a filly. She felt so much joy at the thought of that... and then a jolt of pain that she had been taken from her.

And yet, somehow, for some reason she felt that she knew that filly. The sense of loss had been overwhelming, the years and happiness that she had been deprived from sharing with her daughter felt like stab wounds directly in her soul... but when Twilight Sparkle had walked in, she had remembered what it felt to care for a filly like it was her own daughter...

She would find her, and she would apologize for not having been there for her, and more importantly, she would spend every second she could with her, making up for lost time. But for now... she had to hold court.

As the latest petitioner started speaking, Celestia's mind drifted for a second to her faithful student, wondering what she had discovered so far.

o.O.o

A slightly chewed out blue magician's hat rolled down the street, pushed by a breeze that only seemed to affect it until it bumped to a stop next to the wheels of a blue stage wagon.

The Great and Powerful Trixie panted as she stopped. It had taken considerable concentration to get the hat to her stage wagon, and now, proudly she looked up. "Finally! I would like to rest, but the sooner The Great and Powerful Trixie reaches Ponyville, the better."

With another burst of air, her hat fell into the driver's seat as she made her way to the front to slip inside the harness.

Ducking her head in, she slid forward. When she didn't feel the harness resting on her back, she leaned forward even more, until she had to quickly get her hoofs into position to avoid falling face first onto the road.

Growling she looked back, ready to start swearing when she realized that part of the harness was *inside* her body. She looked at it for a few seconds before she remembered. "Ah... I forgot. I'm a ghost." she sighed.

"Okay Trixie, there's no need to panic." she said after a moment. "Deep breaths, deep breaths. Am I even breathing?"

The Great and Powerful Trixie began to walk in circles around her stage wagon. "Okay, what do I know about ghosts?" she thought for a moment. "Well... ghosts are ethereal. That means they... we... cannot really touch normal objects, however, according to Magister Crowley, magical objects can be moved and touched by spirits... that is how fetishes are created. Ohhh... I hate magical theory." Her eyes narrowed. "*She* was always better at it than I was,

even if I could levitate stuff first.” she shook her head. “But now is not the time...” she looked at her stage wagon, considering.

The old one, which she had left in Ponyville, had been enchanted to produce several magical effects on demand, something she hadn't gotten around to casting on this one for some stupid reason... ah, yes, she had needed ingredients and she hadn't been too keen on getting them herself. And her father had only sent enough for buying a new stage wagon. Sure, she had enchanted some items herself, but they were all *inside*.

Sigh.

It was then that she heard the clopping of somepony approaching her stage wagon.

“Now dear, see? This... Great and Powerful Trixie is not in her stage wagon right now. I'm sure we will hear when she starts her show, and I promise you I will bring you over to watch.”

It was two unicorns. A mare and her colt. Trixie grimaced and tried to concentrate on what to do, when...

“But mom, why don't we ask her? She's right there.” the little colt asked, pointing with a hoof at her.

Trixie blinked. “Huh?”

“Now, Six, don't start this again... there's no-pony there. Really.”

“But mooom.”

Six? Who named their colt ‘Six’?

“Look dear, if you promise not to touch anything, you can stay here and look at the stage

wagon. Look. Not touch. I'm sure if the Great and Powerful Trixie were here she wouldn't appreciate some mischievous colt touching her things, right? We have to take advantage of the sunlight, so I will go to the store over there and get the groceries if you are a good colt and wait for me here. How is that?"

The colt looked at Trixie, doubt filling his eyes, but The Great and Powerful Trixie was already on her knees, hoofs clapped together and nodding desperately for him to agree. "I... guess..." he said.

"Good. I'll be right back."

Six's mother went into the store, leaving him with Trixie, who was giving him a thankful smile. "Thank you! Thank you! You see, I really need your help, if you are willing to do something very, very simple for me?"

Six nodded slowly. "Are you really the Great and Powerful Trixie?"

"Yes, yes I am!" Trixie said, striking a pose. "And I guess you are a fan?"

The colt nodded, shyly.

"Well then, The Great and Powerful Trixie will sign you an autograph if you do that small favor I was talking about. Do you know how to perform the basic spell runes?"

The colt nodded and Trixie had to hold herself from shouting in glee. "Well, I need you to scratch one of the magic runes onto my stage wagon..."

"Uh... but my mom said not to touch it..."

"Silly, that's my stage wagon, right?"

The colt nodded.

“And I’m giving you permission to touch it, right?”

The colt nodded.

“Then, its fine if I let you, right?”

“I... guess.” He approached the stage wagon. “Where do you want it?”

“Um... anywhere will be fine.” Trixie said, finally noticing the colt's cutie mark. An eye with a small number 6 in the middle. Huh. How odd.

“So, Six...” she started as he carefully scratched the paint on her stage wagon with his glowing horn, drawing a basic magic rune for speed. “What did your mom mean when she said you shouldn't 'start this again'?”

The colt didn't answer immediately, until he was done. The magic in his horn died, and for a moment nothing seemed to happen, then suddenly the stage wagon seemed to glow for the barest of seconds. Trixie nodded happily.

“Well done, Six!”

Six, for his part looked around, then motioned for Trixie to get closer. Curious, she leaned forward.

“Well... I have a problem, and that's why my mom was saying that thing about not doing it again... it hasn't made me very popular with the other ponies.” he confided.

Trixie blinked. “Well, what is this problem?”

"I see dead ponies." Six said, eyes very wide. "And they don't know they're dead!"

Trixie snorted. "Well, it's not like it feels much different, you know?"

The colt blinked. "You mean you know? But... aren't you going to stick around and see me through a journey of self-discovery and my purpose in life by helping those lost souls in desperate need to find peace and continue to the next world? Only to leave me sad, bitter and alone once you realize you too are dead?"

Trixie laughed. "Oh, silly colt. The Great and Powerful Trixie has better things to do. Here..." her horn shining, she levitated a magic ink pen from within her stage wagon and proceeded to sign a piece of paper, which she then blew towards him with the same wind spell she had used on her hat. "There you go. Go find more dead ponies, now, ok?"

She tried to pat him in the head, but her hoof went through it in a very disturbing way, so she chuckled nervously and jumped on top of her stage wagon. "Bye-bye now!"

With a sudden lurch the stage wagon rolled forward, leaving a thoroughly confused colt behind.

o.O.o

In a dark room with six slightly glowing circles and one column of light in the middle, several ponies had gathered. Obscured by shadows, the only visible detail was that they were all wearing dark cloaks they nickered and shuffled in place, until one stepped into the light. From within the cloak a female voice emerged.

"Brothers and sisters... both the Princesses are acting strange... they are weak."

There was a moment of animated whispering, but the pony in the middle stamped her hoof on

the floor, drawing their attention.

“I have seen signs that the Guardian has awoken. The time to strike approaches swiftly... be vigilant. We will find what makes them weak and we will bring night eternal again to Equestria.”

“The Nightmare in the Moon will live again!” the others chanted.

“Not only her, this time.” the mare said, the light allowing the others to see a small smile in her muzzle. “This time... both the Sun and Moon will forever bring the night.”

o.o End Chapter 3 o.o

Liked the story? Why not add to its Tropes page? <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/FanFic/TheEmptyRoom>