

Spitfire landed in a forest she didn't know, panting heavily. She had flown at top speed for nearly an hour, something which was far removed from the ten-minute set of tricks she performed as part of the Wonderbolts' routine. She glanced around, trying to get her bearings.

I could just see Ponyville when I flew up to break the pegasus line, she thought, tiredly flapping her wings to get above the treeline. *But they were on to me so damn quickly, I don't even know if I was flying in the right direction.* After rocketing up into the sky, Spitfire knew the pegasi patrolling the skies of Canterlot were right on her tail, but in the panic of her escape, she had barely registered her pursuers as more than blurry shapes.

But then they...stopped, she thought, as she replayed the moment in her head. *They were probably close enough to bite my tail off, but then they just...weren't there.* Spitfire had already seen the Royal Guard annihilate anypony trying to escape, and yet she had survived. She was confused, but decided not to think too much on it - she had gotten out, and there was no point questioning why.

Suddenly, she gasped in pain, bringing her hooves to her stomach. The adrenaline rush from her escape had made her forget about her wound, and it was only now that she had a chance to get a good look at it. It had been deeper than she first thought, a wide slash stretching from her back hooves to her chest. Having flattened her body to increase her flight speed, she had opened the wound a fair bit, and a steady trail of blood was oozing from it.

The pain forced Spitfire into a reality check, as she suddenly realised the gravity of her, and Equestria's, situation. Celestia was at the brink of death, Nightmare Moon had brainwashed the most powerful army of the land, and soon they would begin their march onto Ponyville, with plans to kill everypony there. And who knew where Nightmare Moon would take her army after that? Would Manehattan be next to fall? Phillydelphia?

Her exhaustion overpowered her, and Spitfire slowly sank out of the sky, collapsing onto the floor. *Soarin'...* she thought, tears appearing in her eyes, as the image of her struggling colleague invaded her mind. *He was in trouble. He was in DANGER, and I just left him there! I just ran like a scared little filly! He could be dead, or worse...he could be a new puppet of Nightmare Moon's. And I didn't do anything to stop it...*

Spitfire lay on the grass, the setting sun casting an ethereal glow across the un-named forest. She forgot about her wound, she forgot about warning Ponyville, she forgot about the fact that the sunset in front of her might be the last one she'd ever see. She closed her eyes, and let her emotions take over, her exhausted panting turning into painful sobs, as she cried for the loss of her friend.

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Twilight had finished reading her newly-received letter, but she stayed silent. Her horn still held up the ominous scroll, her eyes darting from left to right, as she read and re-read, not believing the words on the scroll.

Her friends were silent, too. They had all seen the letter before Twilight, but they knew that Twilight would probably need a bit longer to process it. The silence hung heavily in

Twilight's library, as the rays of the setting sun started to grow dim. Everypony in the room could feel the silence consume them, but still they stayed quiet, none of them knowing what to say.

In the end, it was Twilight who broke the stony silence.

"Applejack..." she said, her voice laced with fear, "When did this letter arrive?"

Applejack looked at her hooves. "A few hours ago," he replied. "Spike had just sent off that letter you left and this one came about ten minutes afterward."

"Which means...with such a quick reply...she must've been in Celestia's chambers when the letter arrived there." Twilight's rational thoughts and emotional responses were battling in her head - part of her wanted to break down and cry, while another part was trying to figure out exactly what had happened in Canterlot. For the moment, the rational side was winning.

This can't be right! Twilight thought. Nightmare Moon can't have returned. It's only been three years, and if the stories are anything to go by, she needs the help of the stars to get her power back. And even then, Princess Luna surely wouldn't try to take her form again! She was thankful, grateful for our help freeing her from that evil alicorn's influence. And EVEN then, there's an army of unicorns and pegasi at Canterlot, with Celestia's help they could surely beat her!

"Uh, Twilight?" Applejack's voice broke Twilight's train of thought. "We all know when you've got your thinkin' cap on, sugarcube. If you got a theory on what the hay is goin' on, you mind lettin' us know?"

Twilight looked at her friends, seeing the worry in their eyes. "I'm certainly thinking, AJ," she said, trying to keep her emotions at bay, "But...this doesn't make any sense. I can't think of a way that Luna could turn back into Nightmare Moon without help from the stars...and that's if we assume that Luna would even want that to happen anyway!"

Rainbow Dash was now hovering impatiently, clearly waiting for some sort of action plan. "That's not the bit that caught my eye, Twi'." she said, her face uncharacteristically serious. "It was the, oh, I don't know, MASSIVE ARMY that this mare says she's got. I mean, if Nightmare Moon is back, we can just use the Elements of Harmony again, can't we? But if it's her plus a big fat army, I think our chances drop a bit."

Twilight closed her eyes. "One thing at a time, Dash," she said. "I'm still trying to get my head around this whole thing, let's save the battle plan for when there's an actual battle, yes?"

Rainbow Dash landed, crossing her legs. "Fine." she replied. "But if that letter's anything to go by, there's gonna be a battle pretty darn soon."

Twilight nodded, still processing what she'd read in the letter. Her thoughts turned to the phrase that had worried her the most, the one about Celestia "taking ill", as Nightmare Moon had put it. *I can only think of two ways in which Nightmare Moon could gain control - either Princess Celestia is actually helping her with it, or...*

Twilight didn't want to think of the "or", because she knew it was far more likely than the first idea. It was a thought that she'd been trying to bat away ever since she first read the letter, one carried more by her ever-strengthening emotional side this time - the idea that something terrible had happened to Celestia.

Twilight could feel the stare of her friends, as they waited for her to say more. *They want me to tell them what's going on, but I really don't know, she thought. This is all too much, I need to think, and I can't do it with these guys staring at me.*

"Girls..." she said, her eyes becoming ever so slightly watery. "...Don't go anywhere. I'm just gonna take this letter upstairs, give it another read, see if I can figure out what's going on. I'll be back soon."

Her friends silently nodded, and Twilight trotted slowly to her stairs, trying to hold the tears back.

After she had gone, there was another awful moment of silence before Rarity spoke. "Hmm," she said, "This reminds me of the first time we encountered Nightmare Moon. Remember? We finally get to the Elements of Harmony and Twilight shoos us out of the room, trying to figure out how to use them on her own."

"Cept this time, she shooed herself," Applejack replied, looking at the stairs that Twilight had climbed, a worried expression on her face. "Poor girl just got a heap'a bad news in the space o' ten seconds, I'd probably want some alone time mahself."

"...I hope she's okay." Fluttershy said, her voice barely audible.

The silence came again, but was broken by the sound of Twilight Sparkle's muffled sobs from above them, telling everypony that the purple unicorn was definitely not okay.

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Nightmare Moon walked quickly along the corridors of the palace, her long strides forcing Trixie to walk at a slow canter to keep the pace. She drank in the sights of the regal, marble filled corridor, and the sounds of her hooves echoing through them.

This is all mine, now, she thought, with a small smile. *I turned my makeshift prison into the crowning jewel of my new kingdom.*

"Uh, Queen Nightmare..."

"Please, Trixie, just Nightmare will suffice," Nightmare said, interrupting her new student. "You need to stop thinking of yourself as my underling."

"Yes, of course...Nightmare." Trixie continued, stumbling on the act of addressing a royal without her title. "I...I was just...well, I'm no warpony, but couldn't telling your enemy your plan be considered a bit of a...mistake?" Trixie's attempt to word her enquiry without trying to offend her new mentor hadn't quite worked, but it seemed that Nightmare hadn't noticed.

"Yes, Trixie, that is quite true. And yes, all that letter served to do was tell them of my plan to invade. Not the finer details, perhaps, but enough to maybe force them into some sort of counter-plan."

"So...why did you do it?"

Nightmare smiled. "I'm no warpony either, Trixie, but there's one thing I do know. Destroying your enemy's morale is just as important as destroying their military strength. And since Ponyville has no military strength that I know of, I decided to prioritize the former."

"And...letting that pegasus escape? That was for the same purpose?"

"Indeed. If anything, her arrival in Ponyville would probably harm their morale more than the letter. Think about it...she's a Wonderbolt, a national icon, and she's going to collapse into Ponyville, bloodied and beaten, with exactly the same doom-filled message. When the ponies

see one of their rolemodels has been bested by me, they'll lose any remaining hope of ever defeating me themselves."

Trixie was impressed. From what she'd heard of Nightmare's plan, it was completely unstoppable, but she realised now that her goal was not just to win, but to break the spirits of everypony that crossed her, *as well* as win. She could have easily just steamrolled the town she was planning on attacking, but Trixie knew that Nightmare's plan was far more ambitious than just a simple torch and burn.

The two ponies had reached the end of the grand corridor, approaching the Palace's main entrance. With a flash of her horn, Nightmare Moon opened it, and trotted down the stairs, taking yet another moment to admire her own handiwork.

The courtyard was filled with members of the Royal Guard, sorted, rank and file, just as Nightmare had commanded. Three long columns of ponies stretched before her - unicorns to her left, hovering pegasi to her right, with the earth ponies taking up the middle. The columns were further separated into small troupes, groups of about twenty, each headed by a commanding officer of varying rank, the lieutenants at the back, the ranks ever growing until they reached the generals at the front.

Nightmare Moon smiled, and gave a quick flash of her horn. At her telepathic orders, every member of her army dropped into a bow, causing an almost ocean-like ripple spreading from the front to the back. The Queen cleared her throat, preparing to speak to her new army.

"My loyal troops of Canterlot!" she yelled, using her magic to boost the sound of her voice. "Thank you all for making your way here so promptly. I am Queen Nightmare Moon, the new ruler of Canterlot, and, indeed, all of Equestria! Before I start with my plans for you all, I'd like to personally congratulate the pegasi on a job well done. I imagine nopony will try and escape again any time soon, thanks to your vigilant overwatch of the skies."

The ranks of unicorns and earth ponies roared with appreciation, the sounds of hoof banging ringing through the courtyard. Nightmare's smile grew wider - exactly as planned, the majority of the troops had been far enough away from the telepathic wave to keep some semblance of ponyhood, unlike the guards near the chambers, who were so close that every move they made had to be personally dictated by Nightmare herself. *That's good*, she thought, *Keeping a permanent telepathic link to the entire army would've drained my power quite quickly*. She raised a hoof, and the noise of the ponies quietened.

"The pegasi's ruthless and lethal nature must be mirrored in the task ahead, my subjects." Nightmare continued. "There is a town to the west, a town known as Ponyville. You have all been freed, and have embraced your new leadership, but I know for certain that this town will never be freed. There are ponies there who will always plot to overthrow my plans, and they have already succeeded once! But they will not succeed again. They will be punished for their treasonous acts once and for all."

Her horn flared, as she broadcasted the image of the six ponies that had defeated her into the minds of all of her soldiers.

"These are the ponies of which I speak. Twilight Sparkle, Applejack, Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, Pinkie Pie, and Rarity. Remember the faces. Remember the names. These are the ponies which will *die* by my hoof this night, and you are the ones that will let me carry out this judgement. This new empire will *never* be perfect while these ponies still breathe, and I refuse

to live in an imperfect land. So, listen up, soldiers, and I will tell you all your roles for this night, the night where we will cleanse the imperfections of our new empire!”

The roaring and hoof-banging and started again, this time from everypony in the courtyard. Even Trixie found herself joining in. *Even without her mind tricks*, she thought, awe-stricken, *she could have had this army in the middle of her hoof just with a speech like that!*

Nightmare Moon heard the thoughts of her protegee, and smiled. *Indeed I could, Trixie*, she thought. *You yourself are living proof of that.*

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The combination of Spitfire’s worsening wound and the long trip to Ponyville had taken its toll - no longer having the strength to fly, she had walked for almost thirty minutes before finally seeing the town in front of her. She soldiered on, a noticeable trail of blood being left in her wake.

Rainbow Dash mentioned that Twilight Sparkle lived in a tree, she thought, *so that should be easy to find*. She glanced at her stomach, but quickly turned her head away when she saw her own blood-stained coat. *Ten minutes more to get to the town, five minutes to warn everypony. I think I have enough blood left for that.*

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If any of the six ponies in Twilight’s library had any intention of taking Nightmare Moon’s advice to take one last look at the sun, they had missed their chance. The sun had now set, with only the faint red glow on the horizon keeping the fullness of nighttime at bay.

Of all of the things in Nightmare Moon’s letter, however, this advice was certainly not the highest thing on the young ponies’ minds. In fact, for perhaps the first time since the letter had arrived, their minds were on something else entirely - the sound of Twilight’s sobs had died down, but she had not yet appeared from the higher levels of the library.

Rarity and Pinkie Pie had both wanted to go and comfort their friend, but Applejack had stopped them both. “Just give her a bit o’ time,” she had said, before the stony silence had begun again. “Whatever happened over at Canterlot, the one thing I think we’re all certain of is that somethin’ pretty awful happened to Princess Celestia, and she was all but a second mother to Twilight. Aint nothin’ we can say to make that any better for her. She jus’ needs a bit of processin’ time, is all.”

After that, nopony had spoken. There’d been awkward glances, nervous pacing, but no talking, with the one exception being Fluttershy’s announcement that she was going to make some tea for everyone. This had recieved silent nods from Pinkie Pie and Rarity, but Applejack and Rainbow Dash were lost in their own identical thoughts: *What do we do?*

What do we do? Applejack thought. *I’ve seen those armies, we’ll never stand up to them.*

We need to get everyone out. It'd be mighty hard for Nightmare Moon to kill everyone in Ponyville if there weren't a pony in sight. The walk to Canterlot isn't far, a few days, max...but I imagine Nightmare's got the Royal Guard on high alert lookin' for us. Next closest place is Phillydelphia...I got there on my lonesome but it'd be a darn sight trickier to take the whole town there....

What do we do? Rainbow Dash thought. We gotta get the word out, we gotta tell everypony to get to battle stations, we gotta get our strongest stallions, quickest pegasuses, and most powerful unicorns and defend this town! Nightmare Moon was STUPID to out and out tell us she's coming, who does she think she is? Me? You gotta earn your arrogance, Nightmare, and as far as bringing everlasting night goes, you're 0 for 2. If you've got an army, then we'd better get ourselves one too.

Applejack and Rainbow Dash both nodded to themselves, and both made moves to the front door, pausing when they saw the other move.

"You thinkin' what I'm thinkin', Dash?" Applejack said, raising an eyebrow.

"Think so." Dash replied. "We need to tell everypony what's going on, right?"

"Yep, we sure do. We should go the Mayor, she can get the word out to everypony faster than us."

"Yeah, good idea. Once everyone knows, we gotta get to work."

"Darn right, we got us some difficult times, and we gotta prepare."

"Psh, difficult? Nothing's difficult while I'm around, AJ. I'll get these ponies ready for battle in ten seconds flat, you'll see."

"Ready for...battle?"

"Yeah, for battle! It'd be kinda hard to beat an army without a battle now, wouldn't it? I mean, that's what you meant by difficult times, right? Because of the battle?"

There was a silence, as the earth pony and the pegasus looked at each other, finally realizing that their ideas were not as synchronised as they had first thought.

"You can't be suggestin' we stay here, Dash?" Applejack said, her eyes wide with disbelief. "Were you readin' the same letter I was? This mare's got an *army*, Dash. Didya not see the Royal Guards when we were in Canterlot for the Grand Gallopin' Gala? They're serious business, we aint gonna stand a chance against 'em in a straight fight!"

"We've got a better chance here than anywhere else!" Rainbow Dash replied, returning to her impatient hovering. "Where else could we go? Canterlot isn't safe, Phillydelphia is too far a trip for everypony, only pegasuses can get up to Cloudsdale, and if Nightmare really wants to get us, she'll catch us no problem if we're just wandering in some random direction. Either we make a stand here, or she chases us down like dogs!"

"Well the quicker he get our hinds movin', the better then! We can up and leave before Nightmare even knows we're gone. She can't exactly chase us if she don't know where we went!"

"And we can't exactly run away if we don't know where we went! Er...I mean, where we're gonna be...er, I mean...well it's a STUPID idea!"

"Right, an' assemblin' a group o' applebuckers, dress makers and pie bakers to fight the gosh darned Royal Guard is downright sensible?"

Rainbow Dash landed, and looked straight into Applejack's eyes. "Well, AJ," she said,

with a sigh, "There's clearly only one way to settle this..."

"Dash, if you even say the word 'hoof-wrestle', I'm gonna break your darn neck!"

"Yeah, well, it's only 'cause you know you're gonna loooooose!"

"GIRLS!"

The ponies in the room span around to the stairs, to see Twilight Sparkle at the foot of them. She was clearly trying to give them a stern look, but her puffy, bloodshot eyes and her tear stained face ruined this attempt.

"Now girls, calm down." she said, looking at the two ponies as if they were rowdy school-fillies. "There'll be no hoof-wrestles or neck breaking in here, this is a library after all."

"Uhm, sorry Twi', guess we kinda lost our heads there..." Applejack paused, noticing Twilight's eyes. "Are you okay, sugarcu..."

"I'm fine." Twilight interrupted. "Well, I'm fine now. If anything my biggest problem now is that it's kinda hard to think with two ponies arguing a few feet below me."

"But Twilight, Applejack thinks we should..."

"...get out of Ponyville and find refuge somewhere else, you think we should stay here and fight. Ceiling's pretty thin, Dash." Twilight gave an awkward grin, which was quickly returned - everypony in the room was jumping on any smile they could experience, awkward or not.

"But yes," she continued, starting to pace up and down the library. "Those are the two choices here...run and hide, or stay here and fight. I'll be honest with you, girls, they both kinda suck."

"Everything kinda sucks today." Pinkie Pie said, only a hint of her trademark grin on her face. "Like a big ball of sucky suckiness sucking us all into a sucky situation. Seriously, it sucks."

Twilight nodded. "One thing I do agree with, though," she continued, still pacing. "We need to tell everypony what's happened. But doing it right now would only cause a panic, it'd probably be a lot better if we at least had half a plan before we make a move. I mean, we tell everypony that an army is coming here without some kind of action plan, then ponies might try and make a break for it on their own, and that won't be any good. We've got some time...it's three or four days march from Canterlot and not even the Royal Guards could teleport such a distance without putting themselves out of commission for a while...but yeah, like I said, the last thing we want to do is start a panic..."

Twilight was interrupted by a pegasus crashing through her front door, and landing in a heap in her library. It took her a few seconds to register that, since Rainbow Dash was standing just in front of her, that it couldn't be another one of her crash landings. In the next few seconds, she registered the frenzied eyes of the pegasus on the floor, the Wonderbolt cutie mark on her flank, and the long wound on her stomach, which was already making a small puddle of blood on the floor. The ponies stood, slack-jawed at the sight, as the pegasus looked up at them, her speech punctuated by gasps of pain.

"Nightmare...Moon...is...back.....she's...coming...here.....you...need...to...run..."

Despite Twilight's advice, the ponies started to panic.

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Nightmare Moon's original plan was to go back to Celestia's chambers after her chat with the army. There were still a few things left to sort out before heading to Ponyville - there was an unconscious pegasus to deal with, she needed to make a trip to the dungeons for some last minute enlistments, and she still hadn't given Trixie her reward for already becoming such a faithful student. These things would have to wait, though.

Literally ten minutes after her speech, one of the pegasus captains had reported that pegasi from outside Canterlot were helping some of the townsp ponies escape. It had been found out that they had come from Cloudsdale, which raised a few grievances in Nightmare Moon's head.

I've just publicly thanked the pegasi for being such ruthless skyguards, and then they make two big mistakes, she thought, trotting down the streets of Canterlot, Trixie hot on her heels. They let someone escape and warn the Cloudsdalians of what's going on, then they let pegasi back in to airlift Earth Ponies out? I'm thinking we may have a few dishonorable discharges before the sun rises tomorrow.

The pegasi hadn't been complete failures, however. They'd caught a Cloudsdale pegasus trying to escape carrying two earth ponies at once, clearly something that was outside of his capabilities. Nightmare was happy with one thing, though - the two ponies he was carrying had both fallen to their deaths, which, at the very least, had saved her a job. This was why Nightmare Moon was in the streets of Canterlot now - she'd requested for the pegasus to be left where he lay in the street, so that an example could be made in front (or, at least, within earshot) of the townsp ponies in the houses.

Trixie, she thought, broadcasting her voice into Trixie's mind. These ponies all know me as I am, but they still think of you as just a showpony. Let's fix that. You can strike the final blow here. Don't worry, there won't be a shield stopping you this time.

Trixie didn't respond, but Nightmare saw her nod her head out of the corner of her eye. *Excellent. This should be quite amusing.*

As she turned on to Market Street, she saw the pegasus in question. Three Royal Guard unicorns surrounded him, stood to attention, with a pegasus hovering just above them. There were a few bangs and clatters from the nearby houses and shops - clearly the ponies had been watching the events, but the sight of their new Queen had scared them back from their windows.

Seeing his Queen approach, the taller of the Royal Guards approached her, making a quick bow before he spoke.

"He's been here about half an hour, ma'am. The pegasi roughed him up a bit, but he's still alive. He's not talking, though. We've tried to get information out of him, about who warned them and such, but he's staying silent. We figured you'd be...ah...more convincing."

"Well, I'll try my very best, Captain." Nightmare said, an evil smirk appearing on her face. "You and your colleagues can go, we're marching at dawn, and you need to prepare."

The unicorn nodded. His horn flashed for an instant as he commanded his underlings to head back to the castle, and, with another flash, he and his soldiers had disappeared.

Nightmare Moon now had full view of the rebellious pegasus, and was mildly surprised. Clearly, he was no soldier. His wiry, small frame could almost be mistaken for a female's, his

pure white coat blemished only with the rainbow-shaped cutie mark on his flank, and the spots of blood on his torso.

Rainbow-shaped cutie mark...he's a weather-maker? Nightmare thought. *And he tried to get two ponies out at once? Well, he's ambitious, I'll give him that.*

She walked over to him, giving a quick nod to the pegasus flying above, motioning him down to the ground. She was finally close enough to see the rebel's face - clearly this had been the target of the Royal Guard's attack. His face was bloodied, red stains around his cheeks and eyes, with dark bruises forming on his chin. She could see the fear in the pegasus' green eyes, but once he had seen who was approaching him, the fear changed into defiance.

"What is your name, pegasus?" Nightmare asked. She received no response, save for a glare of disgust from the injured rebel. She smiled.

"I'm very understanding of the fact that you didn't hear my speech a few hours ago, so I'll just say the one thing from it that applies to your situation - the right to remain silent doesn't exist anymore. So, once again, what is your name?"

The pegasus returned the smile, as forcefully as he could. "My name is Screw You." he said, with an air of arrogance. "I've never been a fan of it, to be honest. I couldn't tell you how much abuse I got at school."

Nightmare's Moon suddenly vanished. "Listen, you *termite*," she said, her eyes narrowing and her voice becoming a hoarse whisper. "Regardless of what happens here, in about ten minutes, you will be dead. I have the choice to make that death either quick and painless, or slow and horrible, and I'm *certain* the former will be your preference. Last chance. What is your name?"

"Go to hell."

The Queen's smile was back. "Break one of his legs."

The Royal Guard pegasus moved quickly, dashing to the downed pegasus and quickly pulling him to his feet. He took one second to line up his attack, before bucking the rebel right on the side of his knee, as forcefully as a ram. Nightmare saw the leg give way, hearing the violent crack of breaking bones as the rebel fell to the floor again, a scream of pain exploding from his throat, echoing from the walls of the buildings around him.

Nightmare waited. She was giving the pegasus a chance to experience the pain he was in. She reasoned that no weather-maker had experienced pain so excruciating, but it was just the tip of the iceberg. At least, if he kept up his stonewall attitude.

The screaming stopped, and was replaced by the pegasus' heavy breathing, punctuated by whimpers of pain.

"I won't hesitate to remind you, pegasus," Nightmare said, not bothering to hide her pleased tone of voice. "You have three other legs to break. And if you still feel the need to be cute with me after that, then I'll move onto your wings. Trust me, breaking your legs is nothing compared to the pain of having a wing ripped off. Once again, *what is your name?*"

"...Starlight...Flash..."

"That's more like it. Although I can see why you wouldn't want to tell me, that's a rather...odd name for a male. How did Cloudsdale hear about the events here in Canterlot?"

The pegasus had clearly given up on his silence. "One of...the Wonderbolts..." he said, between grunts of pain. "Tyco...he got out...told us what happened...convinced us to come

help...”

Right, mental note, Nightmare thought, annoyed. The Wonderbolts are far too much hassle than they're worth. When I make the new Shadowbolts, just find new pegasi. Probably far easier.

“He *convinced* you? How? There are no soldiers that I know of in Cloudsdale.”

“Ha...do you...live under...a rock or something? He's a Wonderbolt...famous everywhere...but a god...in a pegasus town...like Cloudsdale...”

“You act so rebellious, yet you followed him like a lamb to the slaughter?”

“He...didn't tell us...how bad it was. We didn't expect...so many...”

“How many of you were “convinced”?”

“Fifty...or so...your guards got...most of them...some of them...took off before we even got here...too scared.”

Good, Nightmare thought. If this is the best Cloudsdale can offer, then it shouldn't be hard to nip this insurgence in the bud.

“It's a shame, Starlight,” Nightmare said, turning and starting to walk away from the pegasus. “Your bravery and arrogance was quite impressive. Had you not broken so easily under torture I might have kept you on. Put you in the army. The potential was there, if only you hadn't screamed like a child from something as small as a broken leg.”

“Are you gonna...keep rambling on...or are you gonna...kill me?” Starlight replied, the arrogance creeping ever so slightly back into his voice.

Nightmare gave Trixie a nod, and she walked past her on the left hand side, not looking back to the downed pegasus. Trixie approached him, her horn sparking in readiness.

“I think I'll go with the second one.” Nightmare said.

There was a loud crack, and the pained breathing of the pegasus turned into silence.

Hey guys, just wanted to take a second to thank you all for the feedback! I've been trying to work on keeping the mane six more in character, I'm sure you'll let me know whether I was successful or not =D Also, sorry for the long wait between chapters, been busy with work and moving house. I've decided to write shorter chapters from now on (chapter three was 21k words...yeah, pretty beefy) so there'll be more frequent updates!