

Chapter 7: Return to Unicorn Tower

Twilight tried to focus on something else, something to get her mind off the battle with the assassins. She tried to think about Unicorn Tower, and their books. *Books about wars and battles and death. Tomes with spells to reduce a pony to dust.* She felt ill just from considering such thoughts.

She then turned her thoughts to kindly old Wise Eyes, somepony who could give her counsel. *Counsel like how best to freeze a pony's heart from the inside and shattering it into a million pieces.* Twilight needed something to keep her mind off the killing. Ironically, even a ponyspawn attack would help. Or another Pinkie Pie song.

Night fell over Lake Blackwater, the moon and stars shining in the sky as the party approached the ferry docks. It was a strange contrast with the bright night sky and the murky waters that gave Blackwater its name. The ferry could be seen travelling back towards the docks, where much to Twilight's surprise she could see that several templar were waiting for the small boat to return.

Several scenarios played out as to why there were templar waiting for the ferry. Perhaps it was a changing of the guard, maybe some sort of training exercise. But all the templar were well armed and armoured, and held the same look Twilight had seen so many times. They gave a look hinting at their fear of magic, and their presence indicated the danger they would soon face. There was trouble in Unicorn Tower.

Twilight galloped at full speed, ignoring the calls from her friends. The thought that the only home she had ever known was in danger from either the templar or something within made her heart race faster.

"Excuse me!" she called out toward the templar, "Excuse me! What's going on, what's happening in the Tower?"

A young templar reacted to the sight of Twilight and Rarity by drawing his sword bit. "Apostates!" he called out before being held back by another templar.

"They are with the Grey Wardens," he said, pushing the young templar back and pointing at Twilight's cutie mark, "Their apostates are protected under their banner. For now."

One of the larger templar turned to face the unicorn. His eyes were filled with disgust at the prospect of even exchanging greetings with a pony of magic. "Listen here," he began, "Knight Commander Hornshield sent out missives to Trotterim and other Chantries. His message says that there has been a unicorn uprising and that they are using Dark Arts. Blood magic, demon summoning, the whole works."

An uprising? There had always been mutterings of dissent among the unicorns about throwing out the templar overseers, but Twilight always had thought Wise Eyes kept the tempers in check. What had happened between the time between her leaving the tower, the battle of Ostequus and now this? How could she enlist the aid of the unicorns now that they were fighting a battle with the soldiers of the Chantry?

The others quickly grouped up around her, concerned looks in their eyes. With the exception of Pinkie, who was bouncing up and down excited to be around so many ponies in one place. "Is it a party?" she asked with that bright smile, "I can cook up some tasty treats in a pinch! Or maybe put together some fun grenades!"

Twilight shook her head. "It's not a party Pinkie." She took a deep breath before continuing. "There's some kind of rebellion going on inside the Tower. The templar are fighting against Dark Art sorcerers, who are using Blood Magic and summoning demons from the Fade."

"D-d-demons?" Fluttershy squeaked in surprise, "As in, evil corrupting monsters who take delight in torturing ponies with their sadistic magic, who will also try to possess your body and do the same thing to your very soul?!"

"That's about right," Twilight answered. Fluttershy sunk to the ground, head low and trembling. The lavender unicorn turned back to the tower. "Lesser demons like Shades and creatures of Rage don't need a pony to possess, just enough of a tear in the Veil to sink through. More powerful demons like Sloth and Desire do need a pony, which only adds to the problem."

Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie raised their eyebrows in mutual confusion. "The Veil is the barrier that separates the physical realm from the dreamscape of the Fade," explained Rarity, "Death, violence, very negative thoughts about last summer's fashions are ways to weaken the Veil. Unicorns are sensitive to the Fade already, which makes us excellent targets for demons, but they are known to possess anything they can reach, just to be a part of the physical world."

Twilight was glad there was another unicorn to explain things like the Fade with her. "That's not all," she continued, "A unicorn who is possessed by a demon becomes an abomination, a twisted pony who is hardly recognizable due to all the changes they are under, physical and otherwise. Abominations are dangerous, and will fight to the last for the body they have claimed."

Fluttershy lifted her head from under her hooves. "Is there any way to cure an abomination?"

Her eyes closed, she said but one word: "No." Twilight remembered the first time she had come face to face with a possessed unicorn. He was like the other magic users taking part in the rebellion, angry at the templar for their strict watch over the unicorns, and angry at Wise Eyes for not allowing him to pursue more powerful spells. In the dead of night, a demon of Rage took his body, shifting the form into a hideous and perverse mockery of a pony.

Twilight was awoken during the attack and feared for her life until the templar burst into the dormitory, with Hornshield himself slaying the abomination. After the attack, there were weeks of questioning and months of the templar not allowing any magic to be cast. Until the past week with the Wardens, Twilight had never been so scared in her life.

She had to steel her resolve. Turning to her party, Twilight pointed a hoof towards the Tower. "We are going to save those unicorns," she announced, "And we are going to stop whatever demons incited this uprising."

"Pinkie," Twilight said as she began to organize their efforts, "We are going to need flashing grenades to distract the demons and Dark unicorns from casting spells. Fluttershy, you hang to the rear with myself and Rarity and help us deal with enemies from range. Applejack, Rainbow, you two will be our front line. Hold off any demons and abominations that charge towards us. We'll keep a loose wedge formation to support each other."

"What about me?" Spike sat up on Twilight's back with a salute. Twilight sighed.

"Keep out of trouble, and stay close to us." Ignoring Spike's disgruntled rumblings, Twilight turned to her friends, looking them over. "Everyone ready?" The party stood tall with her, even though Fluttershy could not stop trembling. With a nod, Twilight turned back towards the docks.

The other templar crossed the water while they were talking, but the ferrypony was making his way back across Lake Blackwater. The old earth pony looked up, his expression grim as Twilight and the others approached him.

"I remember you," he said to Twilight, "The unicorn that left with that Grey Warden. You'll wish you never came back, the Tower is in a right mess." The ferrypony was about to tie the ferry up to the dock before the unicorn stepped in front of him.

"I'm sorry, but we have to get across to the Tower. It's urgent we speak to Knight Commander Hornshield." With her magic, Twilight levitated the Grey Warden documents so the ferrypony could see them. With a sigh, the old earth pony removed the rope from the dock post and stepped into the boat.

With their group as large as it was, Twilight decided that she, Rarity and Applejack would go across the lake first, followed by Pinkie and Fluttershy with Rainbow Dash flying over to the Tower. While the ferrypony was busy sailing the boat across the lake, Applejack shook her head as she looked towards the Tower.

"Never thought ah'd come back here again," the blonde earth pony said, "Only been here once, but once was enough. Was just a squire then, but the templar brought me in to watch a Harrowing. Worst thing I ever saw, until Ostequus. The unicorn they brought in..." Applejack

looked down, but Twilight knew what she meant. Not every unicorn survived the Harrowing.

Applejack looked at both Twilight and Rarity. “Ah know we needed the templar powers to beat that ornlock back in the observatory, but it’s stirred up something fierce. Something Ah was hoping to forget. Being a templar and learning all their skills ain’t easy. Especially when they use lyrium to make the magic come out.”

Rarity appeared puzzled by this explanation. “Lyrium? That brings out magic in even the most mundane of ponies. What do the templar do with their recruits that involves lyrium?”

Twilight was also interested in Applejack’s answer. Having lived with templar watchers for so long and not being privy to their secrets, she wanted to know as much as any unicorn about how they were able to nullify magic.

Applejack took a deep breath before continuing. “You ain’t hearing any of this from me,” she said, “But the Chantry gives us lyrium to put into our blood. Then we’re taught how to see the flow of magic and stop it, like a dam in a river. Takes a lot of effort to do that, let me tell you. Also it feels good to have the lyrium inside you. When a templar is done training, they give the pony a much larger amount of the stuff to get them hooked. Since the Chantry controls the legal lyrium trade, they can also control the templar like a barkeep control a drunkard with his cider.”

“Ah was so glad when Duncan came to take me away from that life. I still have the lyrium in me to do the fancy tricks of the templar, but not enough to shrug off, say, a fireball. And now we’re going to the Tower. It feels like I woulda came here no matter what happened in my life.”

As the boat approached the Tower’s dock, Twilight felt sorry for Applejack having to go through all the training of the Chantry, including the dogma. Thankfully, the earth pony did not seem to hold a hatred for unicorns or their magic. Just a cautionary eye around apostates like Rarity, and Dark Arts users like those who were inciting the rebellion inside the Tower now.

Twilight looked up towards the Tower as they waited for the ferry to bring Fluttershy and Pinkie over. When she left with Duncan, the Tower had looked grand in the sunlight, but now it just loomed over her like a haunting shadow. Inside the structure waited demons and Maleficar alike, with the templar fighting a losing battle against the denizens of the Fade. If they were going to get the aid of the Unicorn Circle, the party would have to struggle against nightmares they never thought possible. They were, after all, the greatest weapons in the demons’ arsenal.

After showing the treaties to the templar guards at the front entrance, Twilight and her group made their way to the main foyer before the iron doors that lead into the rest of the Tower. The templar situation was much worse than she imagined. Many of the earth ponies were wounded, lying on blankets as their apothecaries did their best to heal the wounds with salves and poultices. Many of the wounded were covered in burnt flesh, likely caused by Rage demons, while others had gashes and ugly scares caused by abominations and shades.

“By the light of Celestia,” came a familiar voice, “Twilight Sparkle. You’ve returned to a dire situation, young one.” Never had Twilight seen the Knight Commander look so tired and old. With so many templar down, he had likely never seen such a disaster strike his watch over the unicorns.

Hornshield turned towards the iron door, his head low. “The attacks started a few days after you and the Grey Warden left. Hubred and his ilk unleashed their Dark Arts on my templar, unleashing demons and blood magic against us. First Enchanter Wise Eyes tried to reason with Hubred, but he and the rest of the senior enchanter were captured by Hubred and his demons. I fear the worst.”

“I fear Unicorn Tower is lost. There are too many demons and Maleficar for this force of templar alone. I have sent word to the Chantry of Trotterim, requesting for the Right of Annulment, may the Sisters have mercy on my soul.”

Twilight gasped as she heard the Knight Commander mention the Right of Annulment. As her friends gave her questioning eyes, she did not know if she could face them and the dangers of the Tower. If Hornshield had deemed it necessary to call for the Right, then the situation was not just dire, but near hopeless.

“Listen everypony,” Twilight began, “The Right of Annulment is the act of purging the Unicorn Tower completely. Demons, Maleficar, unicorns, anypony the templar find they will put to the torch.”

“If the Chantry agrees, and ah’m right sure they will,” Applejack added.

Hornshield looked away from Twilight, almost ashamed. “Every one hundred years in Equestria has the Right of Annulment been used to purge the Tower. I had hoped during my service I would not have to resort to such measures. If the First Enchanter stood before me and told me the threat was passed, I would call off the Right.”

There it was, the only opportunity to save the Tower and the unicorns. “Knight Commander,” Twilight said, “Let us go into the Tower, rescue Wise Eyes and stop Hubred. Your templar are in no shape to face the demons, but we are. We need the help of the unicorns against the Blight, and I know you don’t want the Right of Annulment brought down on the Tower. Please, Hornshield. We won’t fail.”

The old templar looked at Twilight, respect shining in his battered eyes. “I will allow it,” he said, “We have not had any demons attacking the iron doors for the past day. Perhaps things are finally getting under control. But once you cross the threshold, the doors will remain closed until I am certain the First Enchanter is with you. Is that understood?”

Twilight nodded to the templar commander before she looked to her party. They all stood ready to enter the Tower, though Fluttershy was still shaking and Pinkie was still bouncing around merrily. Still, there was no turning back now. They needed to begin their ascent up the tower to find Hubred and Wise Eyes.

The iron doors opened, revealing a serene and calm scene that was the entrance to the Tower proper. The sight was a contrast to what Hornshield had described. Nothing was out of place and there was no sign of battle. No blood stains from blades or scorch marks from fire.

“Spike, stay with the templar,” Twilight said as she bumped the baby dragon off her back, “It’s too dangerous for you.”

“But Twilight!” Spike complained, but could do nothing as she and the rest of the ponies turned towards the inner tower. Hornshield nodded as he beckoned for Spike to come see an assortment of gemstones.

True to the knight commander’s words, as the last of the party entered the Tower, the heavy doors were closed behind them. “This place is too confined!” Rainbow Dash complained, “How am I supposed to use my amazing acrobatic aerial assaults in a place like this?”

“Ya don’t,” said Applejack, “You stay close just like Twilight said. Where to next sugarcube?”

“We have to begin to climb the tower,” the lavender unicorn pointed a hoof towards the stair case, “The second floor has all the classrooms for the younger unicorns. We’ll be able to get to the dormitories and the libraries after that.”

The party quickly galloped up the stairs, opening the door to the classrooms. Unlike the entrance to the island spire, the classrooms appeared to have been struck by a whirlwind. Books and parchment were strewn about and ruined, with burn marks from spells and demons scarring the ground and walls.

As they continued, Twilight could feel a stinging in her horn. Magic was clashing against magic. She looked to Rarity who was in obvious discomfort, likely feeling the powers of the arcane slamming against each other. The ponies surrounded the door, with Applejack and Rainbow taking the lead. Carefully, Twilight opened the door to the classroom, moving forward to meet the threat.

They were instead met with the surprised look of wounded unicorns and templar. In the archway leading into the classroom, a blue unicorn with a silver mane was struggling to keep up a magical barrier under assault by several Rage demons. Her horn glowed bright, channelling energy into the shield protecting the unicorns behind her.

Twilight was impressed by Trixie’s magical aptitude. Hornshield had said the attacks were

relenting somewhat and after seeing Trixie fight back against the demons, Twilight wondered how much of the “Great and Powerful” title was true and not just bravado. However, keeping up such a barrier was greatly taxing and it would only be a matter of time until she faltered.

“Trixie!” Twilight called as she galloped over to the blue unicorn’s side. Trixie turned her head only slightly, eyes wide in shock.

“Y-you?” she said as the Rage demons continued to claw at her shield, “What are you doing here? The Great and Powerful Trixie did not ask for your return! She can handle these demons herself!”

The magical bulwark shimmered a bit as Trixie cried out in pain. The demons would soon cause its collapse, and their hatred was focused on the pony who had hindered them for so long.

“Trixie, you can’t keep that barrier up forever,” Twilight said. She looked down and saw Trixie’s star headed staff on the ground, snapped in two. “Drop the shield and let us help you! I can see that you are incredibly gifted for magic, but you’ve been fighting demons for days!”

Trixie grimaced as she looked to see her shield begin to falter. “OK!” cried the silver maned unicorn, “Trixie will drop her barrier but you have to defeat the demons. Trixie...I only know a few fire spells, everything else I know is defensive! Impressively defensive, but still no use in banishing demons!”

With a gasp, Trixie fell to her knees and the barrier was gone. The Rage demons surged forward, their flaming maws opened wide as they made a burning path towards Trixie. Twilight and Rarity stepped forward, their horns and staves glowing in sync as they channelled their energy into arcane blasts, forcing the monsters of the Fade to avert their attention to them.

Applejack and Rainbow Dash moved to help them, but stopped as Twilight raised a hoof. The Rage demons were creatures of living fire, and getting close to one was similar to sticking one’s hoof into a forge. Thankfully, with Rarity’s help, their magical barrage did not cease, and the demons were dispelled from the physical world, too weakened to maintain their bodies.

Trixie got back to her hooves, dusting herself off and adjusting her large pointed hat. The starry hat and cape she always wore was now in tatters, the edges were frayed and burnt during the attack. She immediately regained her usual composure as she walked over to Twilight.

“The Great and Powerful Trixie may indeed be grateful for your timely arrival,” she said while looking over her hoof, “Trixie has been holding off the demons for days, protecting her young charges from the madness that was her former mentor Hubred.”

“About that,” Twilight looked past the doorway to where the stairs led to the libraries, wondering what the demon controlled areas of the tower looked like, “What happened? Hubred

was your mentor, but now he's summoning demons and leading Maleficar against the templar."

"The Great and Powerful Trixie would not associate herself with demons and Maleficar." With a huff, she looked at her broken staff sadly. Twilight almost caught a glimpse of a tear as Trixie put the broken pieces on a table. "Trixie made a promise to become Great and Powerful on her own, and she has succeeded at that. When Hubred came to Trixie, she knew that her mentor had made a deal with a demon. Many unicorns were suddenly using Dark Arts, including blood magic. Wise Eyes and the rest of the senior enchanters went to confront Hubred in the Harrowing Chamber."

"What are you doing here?" Trixie looked at Twilight with narrowed eyes, still holding that same rivalry the two had shared as fillies as top priority. Twilight explained her task to save Wise Eyes and stop Hubred before the templar could enact the Right of Annulment. The mention of the Right made the colour in Trixie's face fade.

"They can't!" she called out, "All the young unicorns...I mean, the Great and Powerful Trixie is still in the Tower! Well if YOU are going to go into the Tower, then so will the Great and Powerful Trixie. You should thank Celestia while you're at it."

With her snout in the air, Trixie walked over to the door. Applejack groaned, while Rarity shook her head. The others simply murmured as Twilight sighed before following the braggart up the stairs towards the library.

Things were as bad as Hornshield had said. Unlike the lower floors, the library was a ruined warzone, covered in fleshy pustules on the floor and walls. This was the work of several demons, corrupting what they could to create an ideal habitat. As Pinkie was poking one of the globules with a hoof, Twilight called out to warn her away.

"Stay away from those!" she warned, "Those...those were ponies. Ponies who can't become full abominations become this. As far as anypony is concerned, they can't be saved. We should move on."

The shape of the library was a nightmare to Twilight. How many years had she spent in this hall, reading as many books on magic as she could get her hooves on, taking in all the lessons her elders had to teach? Now all of that was being burnt away by a mad unicorn's hunger for power. Did Hubred not realize what the templar would do in this situation? Or did he even care?

Fluttershy let out a sharp gasp as they turned towards the staircase. A group of abominations surrounded a wooden cabinet, smacking against the drawers with their hooves. At the sound of Fluttershy's cry they turned towards the party, their full grotesque visage in view. If it were not for their four legs and hooves, they would hardly have been considered ponies at all; their bodies covered in twisted flesh and blood filled boils. Their teeth were sharp and jagged, and their eyes a dark crimson.

With a roar the abominations charged, their teeth gnashing for flesh. Applejack and Rainbow pushed forward, delivering sharp blows with their blades. Too confined for her grenades, Pinkie also leaped into the fray, swinging her mace against the twisted creatures. Fluttershy also joined in, firing arrow after arrow into the abominations. Twilight, Rarity and Trixie held back though, not wanting to attract the attention on the abominations with their magic.

Trixie stepped forward however, and began to chant as her horn glowed bright. As the words flowed from her lips, the spell she was casting began to take form, causing the attacking ponies to glow with energy. Twilight watched as her friends began to fight quicker, striking stronger blows with their weapons until the last abomination fell. Each look surprised at how well they did, for not one had suffered a scratch against the abominations.

“Did the Great and Powerful Trixie not say she was a master of defensive spellwork?” Hearing the pride in Trixie’s voice made Twilight consider if Trixie was possessed by a Pride demon, but instead gave a weak smile of agreement as they approached the cabinet. As Twilight neared the cabinet, she overheard two quiet voices.

“Hey Snips, can we get out of here? It smells bad, like old cheese.”

“Not yet, Snails! You don’t want to be a demon’s lunch, do you?”

“Mmm...lunch.” Though the voices were muffled, Twilight recognized them immediately as the two unicorn colts Snips and Snails. They were not the brightest by any stretch, but still did not deserve being trapped in the Tower with demons. With her magic, the lavender unicorn forced the cabinet open, revealing the two scared unicorns shaking and covering their eyes with their hooves.

“Please don’t eat us!” Snips cried out, “We don’t taste very good! We taste like...like...Snails, help me out!”

Snails thought for a moment before looking up. “Taste like green beans and yams!”

“What if they like beans and yams?” Snips retorted before finally seeing who had opened the cabinet. A wide smile of relief formed on the chubby colt’s face. “It’s the Great and Powerful Trixie! She’s come to save us and vanquish the evil Hubred!”

Trixie gave a weak laugh at the praise and expectation from Snips. She looked to Twilight who simply raised an eyebrow and gave a wave of her hoof; her way of saying they’re all yours. “Of course the Great and Powerful Trixie will save the Tower,” she said, “We just need to know what happened since Trixie made a, how can we say, tactical retreat.”

“Bookworm was here digging for something,” Snails said, “A scroll or something. The

Liter...Lida...Lemon..."

As Snails struggled to remember, Twilight looked to Trixie as they both realized what he was trying to say. "The Litany of Dawn!" They shouted in unison, quickly shooting daggers at each other with their eyes. The rest of the ponies offered only puzzled expressions.

"The Litany of Dawn was a chanted spell written by a unicorn named Dawnstride several hundred years ago," Twilight explained, "It's a spell that when chanted allows a unicorn to stop the Dark Arts from being used. It's not effective against demonic possession, but it does work well against mind control."

"If Bookworm had the Litany, then he's likely gone to try to stop Hubred by himself," Trixie began to pace, walking back in forth as she appeared deep in thought. "We have to keep going up the Tower before Bookworm gets to Hubred and loses the Litany!" Without warning Trixie charged up the stairs, leaving the party behind.

"We'll just stay in here," Snips said before closing the cabinet. Twilight let out a noise of exasperation before joining Trixie up the stairs towards the dormitories. As they climbed, the walls were increasingly covered in more flesh and blood, the abominations spreading their filth everywhere they could.

Trixie was waiting by the archway leading into the centre room. She pointed a hoof towards the centre of the room, her eyes wide with fear.

The room looked like a crowd of ponies exploded, leaving their entrails and corrupted flesh on the walls and floors. Only the torn robes of unicorns and the battered armour of templar told who had fought in the room. In the centre of the room was a large abomination, much more twisted and deformed than the others the party had faced.

Twilight looked over to the group, before motioning for the others to take their positions behind her. Before they could enact any plan of attack, a low warbling voice shook in the lavender unicorn's mind.

"I know where you are, little fillies. Come out. I have much to offer, and I don't want to be a bad host."

A cold chill resonated throughout Twilight's body as she recognized the voice. It was the same Sloth demon that had tried to tempt her with promises of restful sleep inside the Fade during her Harrowing. The demon had manifested itself in the physical realm, likely taking the body of a Maleficar.

Twilight stepped towards the Sloth demon, keeping her mind sharp by looking the demon straight in its eyes. The others followed, with Trixie trailing behind the farthest, her veneer of

courage now faded in the presence of a powerful beast from beyond the Veil.

At the demon's hooves was a brown unicorn Twilight could only assume was Bookworm. A scroll, likely the Litany of Dawn, hung outside of the poor scholar's saddlebag. The demon stood still, its eyes unblinking as it watched the ponies surround it.

"Welcome, ponies," the Sloth demon spoke directly into their minds, its low voice oddly soothing, "I was so hoping you would come join me. You have struggled for so long, don't you all deserve a moment of rest? Just rest your eyes, take a nap."

The Sloth demon began to glow, the air becoming hazy and intoxicating. It was worse in the real world than it was in the Fade, as Twilight felt every ounce of energy being sapped. She turned to see Trixie fall to her knees, the hat sliding off her head to the ground.

"The Great and Powerful...Trixie..." the blue unicorn mumbled as her eyes drooped, "Is so tired. Fighting the demons for days, she needs...to sleep."

Trixie fell into swift slumber with the other ponies unable to resist the spell as well. "I'm just so...sleepy..." Fluttershy let out a soft yawn, "I don't want to be trouble...I just can't stay...awake."

"Come on..." Rainbow Dash tried to move forward to attack, but fell like the others, "I have way too much...energy...but I do like a good nap."

Pinkie Pie was trying to do some sort of dance, but even that was slowed by fatigue. "Just dance..." she said, eyelids low, "The pony pokey. You put you right hoof...in, you put...your right hoof out..."

"I can't fall...here..." Rarity squealed, "The ground is icky...it will ruin my...hard work on my mane..."

"Everypony...we gotta hunker down...resist..." Applejack pulled her sword, but let it drop, not having the strength to wield it.

One by one, the ponies fell into a deep sleep by the Sloth demon's spell. Twilight tried to resist as well, but failed as she too let her eyes close, the magical sleep overtaking her as easily as it did the others. The Sloth demon laughed and then yawned as it set itself down on the ground.

"Nighty night, little fillies."

* * *

Twilight awoke with a start, tossing her blanket off as she looked around her treehouse

bedroom. Her head throbbed as the images of a nightmare bounced around in her mind. An oppressive tower filled with cruel earth ponies in cold armour bearing wicked swords. The fearsome visages of indescribable monsters resonated at the periphery of her thoughts as she made her way to a nearby water basin. She submerged her head in the cool waters to clear her troubled mind.

She levitated a towel to dry herself as she looked around her bedroom. Spike was sleeping soundly in his basket as the morning sun shined through the windows of the bedroom. Not wanting to disturb the baby dragon, Twilight made her way to the main floor, each hoofstep echoing in the silent library.

As she walked, Twilight noticed a strange wrongness to the start of her day. She could not recall what she had planned to do, and a studious and well organized unicorn such as herself would not have let her day be decided on a whim.

Twilight then tried to remember what she did yesterday, but only a stinging headache came as an answer. Nothing seemed right, except she had a large collection of books that she could spend months studying.

“There,” Twilight said aloud, as if to reassure herself, “I can study. Nothing in particular, just choose a book and read it.” But the task became more daunting as she found that she did not know what to read at first. Agitation grew as even the desire to read felt wrong. There was something else she was supposed to do.

A knock at the door interrupted her thoughts. Twilight walked over to the door, opening it with a small push from her hoof. Standing before her library was a familiar, brown coated stallion. His cheery smile was more unnerving than anything to the unicorn as he stepped into the library, eagerly looking around at the bookshelves.

“Twilight Sparkle,” he said, “It has been quite some time. I hope you are well? I seem to find myself with quite a bit of free time, so I was wondering if you have any books I would be interested in. Perhaps something about history, or birds?”

Twilight stood agape as she saw the earth pony look over her collection of books. It simply was not possible for him to be here.

“Duncan?”