

The small stone cell was a pegasus' worst nightmare. It was a small cramped space with no view of the open sky. Worst of all, the guards made sure there was only just enough light so they could see a prison break. It was the perfect place to crush a pegasus' will.

Not only was Thunder Cloud still trapped in this nightmare, he was the **only** prisoner in the dungeon. If not for significant training, he'd be a babbling, screaming mental case - the exact opposite of what the Princess wanted. She wanted information - specifically, false accounts of his 'working' with Discord.

Thunder Cloud snored lightly, turning over on the cold stone floor. At least, that's what he expected to feel. Instead, he was on his hooves in an instant, backing into the corner defensively. But his immediate fears were fruitless. He had rolled over the remains of the cell door and almost into a small saddlebag sitting right on top.

He blinked a few times, still unsure of whether or not he was still dreaming. Surely he would have heard the door clattering to the ground. But just as he was certain of the dream, cold reality was there to reassure him.

A loud snap sent him diving to the ground, as the thunderous roar of collapsing stone blasted the dungeon with sound. It echoed over and over, as if it was trying to smash the walls like a wine glass. Thunder Cloud desperately tried to block out the noise as the grinding of stone and metal sent chills down his spine.

He wasn't sure how long he stayed in that position - huddled on the ground, covering his ears with his hooves - when he finally, carefully, removed one of his hooves from his ear. Nothing. No guards, no destruction - there was nothing at all. The dull tap of his hooves on stone sent his adrenaline pumping through his body. The silence was unnatural.

As he poked his head out of his room. The wide swath of destruction was impossible to miss. It appeared as though the castle barracks had collapsed through the tons of rock above, easily crushing the other prison cells. He swallowed hard. The only way up had been blocked off in the collapse. He darted across the narrow hallway to the only remaining torch, pulling it out of its holster. As he did so, he noticed the small opening at the bottom of the rubble pile.

His heart leapt into his throat and he bounced into his cell. With a quick motion he threw on the saddlebags and floated down to the hole. Holding the torch between his teeth, he stuck his head through and dropped it.

The sheer amount of gemstones lining the cavern had him floored. The simple torch easily turned the whole cavern into a wild light show. Every color of the rainbow bounced off one another until it disappeared deeper into the mountain. It wasn't until he floated down onto the cave floor that it really sunk in.

Many of the crystals were the size of horse-drawn carts or carriages, with flat mirrored surfaces. But the few that really kept him in awe were those that were as big as train cars, or even the size of houses. Their surfaces lay unblemished and unaffected by time. He dragged a hoof along one

of the crystals, feeling the faint hum of magic beneath.

“What is this place?” He whispered.

Picking up the torch once more, he caught a glimpse of the letter sticking out of his bags in the mirror-like surface of the walls. He carefully placed the torch into the dirt floor and placed the letter on the ground.

In this bag you'll find enough rations for three days. Make your way to Ponyville via Luna's last order. Trust nopony. We are alone. Burn this after reading.

Thunder Cloud touched the paper with the torch, engulfing it in flames almost immediately. He had no idea what he was missing, but something horrible had happened. The frequent telepathic spell with the princess had become the saving grace for his sanity. Before he went to sleep, he **felt** her vanish. It kept him awake for a while, eating up the true silence of the dungeon. The guards scrambled up the steps shortly afterwards, but he huddled in the corner, desperate to survive the night by any means necessary from whatever the calamity was. He only fell asleep when he could no longer hear the screaming.

Thunder Cloud walked for hours through the caves. The main cave was well marked by old mine shafts, abandoned hundreds of years ago as evidence from the remains of old mining carts. The tracks were crude, suggesting this was an early implementation of modern mining.

He rolled his eyes. *Finally, something Granite said comes in handy*, he thought. Granite loved telling stories passed down from his grandfather - a cave explorer and owner of several mines outside Manehattan. The ownership passed down to his sister, who moved to Ponyville on those royalties after selling the mines. He knew Granite was still irate that it took so long to get his share of the bits - not like it was the running topic during their off-duty time.

His hoof caught on one of the old tracks and he stumbled a bit. “Stupid tracks.”

He stopped short, however, saving him from a rather nasty drop. The cave opened out over a wide chasm, where the remains of the bridge had long since been destroyed. With a few pumps of his wings, he was airborne, soaring over the chasm below. The rock here was almost solid crystal and much to his horror, he could see something - rather, many shadows, swirling beneath the surface. They were practically swimming towards the fading light of his torch. As he settled on the other side, he backed away from the edge as the shadowy creatures started to phase through the crystal.

He bolted deeper into the caves, his hooves clicking loudly on the crystal floor. The screech of the creatures behind him sounded alien - a deep burst of sound that made him wet the floors beneath him as he ran for his life. One of the creatures slid into reality in front of him and he rolled underneath it. An apple flew out of his bag and passed through the creature. It aged, rotted, and turned to dust in the blink of an eye.

This time he launched himself into full flight, clipping his wings in the narrow corridor on the walls and ceiling. All thought had left his mind and his animalistic tendencies took over. Flight was the only response to their horrible wails, as his vision swam from the sudden feeling of

claustrophobia pressing onto his subconsciousness.

Turn. Turn! TURN! His mind was screaming for him to avoid the sudden wall before him. He spun to the left and stumbled over a sudden change in elevation. He tried as best as he could to keep upright, but eventually he ended up slamming face first into the crystal floors. The momentum from his sprint caused him to become airborne for a few moments before the second impact knocked him out cold.

There was no way to tell how long he'd been out for, but when he came to, he felt a surge of relief flooding through him - he wasn't dead. But the very notion of being alive began to confuse him. Pain wracked every inch of his body. He smelled unpleasant at best and he desperately wanted a bath, or at least a hose. These were trivial concerns, of that he was aware, but they consumed his mind, trying to block out the sight before him.

There sealed in crystal before him, was Princess Luna.

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"Do I look alright?" Discord asked. He was still the same relative size of his former self. But getting a hoof-stitched order to fit was proving to be an issue. Many times, she had altered his clothing before a public event.

"Well, if you were still gray all over, I wouldn't be able to tell," Celestia giggled.

The two ponies stood side by side in her room - soon to be theirs. After the announcement of their engagement, her father had started wild preparations for the event. Of course, Luna would be the best mare, and Cunning would be right up there as the stallion of honor.

She gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, before straightening his buttons.

"I thought you were saving that until afterwards, Celeste."

She whipped her head around to the door, only to smile wide with anticipation. "And you know not to be in here while royalty is getting ready, Cunning."

The plain brown coated stallion closed the door behind him, crossing the room towards the armoire. He ran his hoof along the dark surface, eyeing the bed covers haphazardly tossed on the floor, "Couldn't sleep?"

Her smile dropped as she shook her head. Discord ran a paw through her beautiful pink mane, digging in his claws along her neck. She gasped and put a hoof to her mouth.

"Awake now?" He said with a smirk.

She hit him playfully with a hoof, sauntering over to his brother. "Maybe I should marry your brother instead and have you on the side."

The three of them laughed, albeit a little nervously. They all knew what they were getting themselves into. Her father was a force to be reckoned with. If they were caught, one or both of them might end up dead. But... she didn't want to live without either of them.

She kissed Cunning deeply, nuzzling his neck before returning to her future husband. Another short kiss was shared between the "couple" before she eyed the door.

"It will work. One day, the three of us will be together. I promised you both."

"As we promised you," Discord said.

"Neither of us can live without you," Cunning added.

"Nor I without you." Celestia nuzzled against both of her friends - her lovers. They would be together forever.

The sound of the heavy stone door pulled her back from her dreams. Her memories were nothing like the harsh reality they created. As the room began to glow brighter, she stared hard at someone she thought she loved.

No, she corrected. That Cunning doesn't exist anymore.

"Ah! My love, you're awake." Cunning seemed to have a skip in his step as he crossed the room to the table. "We have much to discuss this morning."

He levitated a few loaves of bread to the table, as well as some fruit and a teapot with cups. She watched him from behind the prison bars, as if he was lost in his own world. Cunning pushed an apple towards the end of the table pressed up against the bars of her cell. She eyed it hungrily.

"It appears that the attackers were completely wiped out in last night's defense. One where I took the lead in defending your subjects." He took a big bite of the apple, savoring the light sweetness lingering in its juices.

She continued to stare at him, but the hunger continued to pull on her focus. Lean meals for a week had proved to be a much poorer choice than she intended.

"Of course, if my brother was any easier to fool, I'd have walked through the front door."

The anger that was bubbling under the surface of her composure began to boil over. "What do you want?" she hissed through gritted teeth.

Cunning raised an eyebrow, "I just want to spend time with you. Like we promised."

Celestia tightened her features. "I haven't forgotten how you manipulated your brother."

He put down the remainder of his apple. "Just as I haven't forgotten how you went back on your word." Cunning's eyes slowly drained of the red color. A light silver glow permeated his irises. The candle flickered and grew dim. "Your father didn't have sway on you any longer."

"You changed for the worst."

"I changed to secure our future!" The sudden jump in volume caused Celestia to cringe. "Once wasn't enough to prove myself to you! I worked and changed who I was to ensure the three of us could live comfortably!"

Celestia bowed her head and backed away.

"I came back during a war, which I helped you win! We nearly had control over the entire world, but it still wasn't enough."

"My Cuning left for the north, but he never came back. Instead I got you. Someone who connives and plots for things he desires. The stallion I waited for used his wit to help all ponies. Just like his father did," Celestia shot back.

"I AM TEN TIMES THE PONY MY FATHER WAS!" The room shook with his outburst. He launched the table across the room, which shattered upon hitting the far wall. His eye twitched, his barely contained rage momentarily sated. "I had truly hoped I would have convinced you of my genuine intent. But it appears as though the only thing you understand is violence." He smashed one

of the bottles against the wall, forcing the liquid to spin into a thin disc.

The surface shimmered for a moment before revealing a softly lit cave made of crystal. In the center was a small pillar, with Princess Luna sealed within. "Let her go!"

"No. You will stay here while she sleeps for the next thousand years. Perhaps a millennia in a cage will teach you to respect your promises."

She kicked at the cage, but the metal bars didn't budge. Her magic came to her quickly and painfully, but the cage immediately responded with electricity. She screamed in pain, losing the spell to the cage.

Cunning laughed and re-lit the candle, carving a small rune into the wax. It glowed for a moment before returning to normal.

Celestia began to cry softly as the door sealed her and the candle into the room, to stand the test of time.