

April the Fifth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

They call this the Age of Shadow, a time of great darkness and foreboding. Sarosians, night guards, and all other ponies of nocturnal blood: they look upon the great white bowers of Luna's home and mourn her divine absence. They wait for her to come out of hiding and reveal to the ponies of the night exactly what it is that she has been meditating on over the past decade. My brothers and sisters know what it means to be pious, and yet—I fear—they forget what it means to be joyous.

The wind in the air is chilling these nights. While many in my family are apt to call it melancholic, I can only find the entire sensation exciting. Perhaps it is due to my mixed blood, but I am overwhelmed by great anticipation. I feel as though we are on the crest of great discovery and enlightenment. I can feel it in my bones; I can feel it in my horn. This world has been nothing but science and mundanity since the end of the Discordant Era. Even Starswirl the Bearded's accomplishments, for all of their practical merits, have only filled Equestrian life with simplicity instead of enchantment.

We deserve more in this life. There is more to existence than dirt and air and blood. There is a truth beyond the base elements of our superficial existence. There is something that can't simply be exposed by Celestia's brilliance, something that must instead be dredged from the shadowed alcoves of Creation. I suspect that our royal Majesty Luna, the ever vigilant Goddess of Shadows, is on the verge of such an endeavor.

Why else would she have summoned me, Whinniepeg University's leading scholar in ancient mysticism, to join her in an unprecedented meeting of secret importance? There is more to this invitation than a royal alicorn wishing to engage in one solitary function. After all, I have been asked to take residence within the Midnight District of Upper Canterlot. What could her Royal Highness desire of me? How could my intellectual gifts be of service to the Princess in her time of solitude and seclusion?

I can only guess the gravity of this situation. What has she discovered that would require my sudden and potentially long-term relocation? I am more than happy to oblige, of course, especially since I was allowed to move to Canterlot in loving company, instead of on my lonesome.

I can't shake the feeling that this world is about to change. Verily, I shall embrace this new chapter in my life as the dawn of a new awakening.

They call this the Age of Shadow, and if that is true then it is a glorious, soul-cleansing shadow. I cannot think of another era that a unicorn would be more blessed to witness. Now more than ever, I rejoice at being alive.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

April the Seventh, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I do sincerely apologize for the poetic ambiguity of my first entry into this journal. I hold degrees in over five areas of magical study; I'm more than capable of succinctly chronicling my experiences. However, I've been summoned by Princess Luna herself. This is not something that happens to everypony, no matter how elite. I suppose that, even at my age, I can let myself get overwhelmed with excitement. To that extent, I believe some explanation is in order.

I was bequeathed this journal by my cousin Crescent Shine, and with it he gave me a message. When one is delivered a message directly by the Captain of the Royal Night Guard—blood relation or not—one pays close attention. As it turns out, Princess Luna has broken her silence for the first time in nearly ten years, and her first public act was to request my services as a scholar and a researcher.

To say the least, I was speechless. Crescent Shine merely mocked my numb reaction to his delivery. For as long as we've known each other, he's taken it upon himself to tease me good-naturedly for the intellectual path that I've taken in life. I know that deep down, he is as proud of me as I am of him, especially now that my time has come to serve the Goddess of the Night as he has so dutifully done all these years. I can only hope to live up to the legacy he has established with the Night Guard, so as to bring Luna the glory and respect that she deserves.

Crescent, it would appear, was the first non-alicorn to speak with Luna face to face in a decade. Naturally, I asked him if he could give me any details of the Moon Goddess' countenance. Was she as everypony suspected: a soul embittered by loneliness and melancholy? Was she full of vigor and excitement, enlivened by an epiphany befitting only an immortal equine? What could have possessed her to ask for the assistance of a unicorn scholar gifted in ancient mysticism and music theory?

Naturally, Crescent was reticent to give me any details. His loyalty to Luna is a holy thing. He keeps her feelings in silent confidence. He did, however, tell me that Luna had acquainted herself with many of the records that I had kept in the past when toiling on previous research projects. The fact that Her Majesty had actually read my humble works both shocked and excited me. Before I could process any of that, Crescent informed me that Her Majesty also wished me to keep record of my current experiences, now that I am about to enter a new field of study.

There was no way I could refuse such a request. To think that these words that I am writing right now could act as a direct commentary to the research Her Majesty and I are now committed to: I am beyond ecstatic. All my life, I have studied history; it never once occurred to me that I might become a part of it. It's one thing to be invited into the esteemed presence of the immortal Princess Luna. It's another thing altogether for her to give me a chance at literary immortality.

And so it is that I write about this new chapter in my life, and of the things I've yet to discover. It's safe to say that I've waited my entire existence to experience something as glorious as this, and I knew exactly what I would do when such a moment came.

I've written several records in the past, and all of them were meticulously dull. For once, I have

a chance to write something with significance that will transcend the ages. I can't think of a better occasion to dedicate something to you, for your preciousness exceeds even this, the apex of my being.

Thus I, Alabaster Comethoof, write these records to you, Penumbra, the love of my life, my constant star, my evening breath. It is you who has made this possible, who has patiently stood by my side for years upon years, who has given this scholar a chance to feel when everything else in his life was mere pretense and study.

I write these records for you, dearest Penny, so that you—more than any other soul in Equestria—will know what has happened in this time, and what this age will mean for the legacy of our kingdom, and how it will pave for us a new and glorious age of enlightenment. I feel that this coming era will enrich us, but it will never redefine us, because the only thing more permanent than an immortal alicorn's will is the fabric of our love.

Read these words, Penny, and know that all of this is because of you, and for you. Let them be food for the mind, and lyrics for the soul.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

April the Twentieth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

It was a six hour ride by air coach from Whinniepeg to Canterlot. Ridden without you, Penumbra, it felt like an eternity.

I arrived at the outer walls of Canterlot three hours ago. I'm almost too exhausted to write this, but I am far too excited to sleep just yet. Canterlot deserves its standing as the capital city of Equestria. It is a magical buttress filled with the most brilliant and creative minds in all the land. Every street is full of music, art, poetry, and color. Torches burn even in the daylight. I know this, for I've seen them with my very own eyes.

Fear not, Penny. I garbed myself well, and the only thing I burned on the way to our new apartment was my bag of bits from asking for too many directions of the street-folk. Thankfully, before I could get entirely lost—or broke—Crescent Shine found me. I did not expect him to be flying around in the daytime. Apparently Canterlot business never sleeps, and the same can be said of the royal sarosian Guard. You yourself have always said that he looks majestic at night, flying about with his elite squadrons. When his shadow armor glints in the sunlight, Crescent is positively intimidating. Several ponies around us cowered at the sight of his glowing amber eyes peering out from under that onyx helmet of his. The two of us had a hearty chuckle, and after a swift embrace he led me to the Midnight District and hoofed me the schedule for my first meeting with Luna.

You will never believe how spacious our new home is, Penny. It positively dwarfs our flat in Whinniepeg. The windows have thick shutters that will keep me safe in the daytime, and yet will open freely for you when I am away. The kitchen possesses a royal girth, and I can already imagine the feasts that you and I can invite our new neighbors to. They are a very social lot, our next-door tenants, and most of them are also sarosian. I've always wanted a chance for you to commune with more of my kind. Believe it or not, a great many of them aren't nocturnal. I love to think that you and I can make many new friends here in Canterlot.

I would write more, if only I had something to write of. I've only barely glimpsed the splendidly decorated alleyways and winding streets of the Midnight District, but this trip has exhausted me greatly. I hope that you arrive here sooner, even if it means abandoning all of our things back at Whinniepeg, though we both know I could never ask you to do that. A week is a terribly long time to wait for my wife. I'm giving Luna's summons a final read. She wishes me to bring the records I wrote when I researched Proto-Equestrian symphonies of Dream Valley. What she desires to pull from that chapter of my scholastic career, I can't even pretend to know. She still hasn't even given me a clue as to what exactly we will be studying. For the time being, I don't have a title to give this tome I'm currently leaving notes in. I don't know whether to feel confused or excited. I think I shall just settle for “tired”

and do something I haven't done in ages, and that's sleep while the sun is down.

I miss you dearly. There's no joy in standing on the crest of discovery when one is alone.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

April the Twenty-Second, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

It's official. Tomorrow, I shall finally go and meet with Her Majesty. I've been so preoccupied with waiting for you that I forgot I was also waiting for Princess Luna as well. Don't take it the wrong way, Penumbra. You are not a distraction to me, but rather a buffer. Just knowing that you will be here soon, joining me in my new home, is a blessing, and it animates my body and mind in such a way that I feel like I'm an alicorn myself, incapable of death or decay.

I've taken it upon myself to scour the Royal Archives in preparation for my studies with Princess Luna. What's more, I felt that I should visit the city library in the daytime. I don't tell you this to alarm you, Penny, but rather to let you know that I am more than capable of adjusting to the lifestyle of Canterlot. Though you and I may be living in the Midnight District, it is not my desire to force you into a nocturnal lifestyle any longer. After all, my love, you have labored all these years to live under the moon on my behalf, and now that we are entering a new chapter in our lives, I couldn't possibly wish more torment on you. I know you'll only say that I'm being unnecessarily humble and melodramatic, but I can't help it. The ponies of Canterlot—the majority of citizens who fill this town with so much life and energy—live by the daylight, as you do... as you were born to do. It is high time that I changed things so that our lives can be convenient for you from now on. You no longer need to make the sacrifice, my love, though I shall always cherish the lengths to which you have gone to help advance my career.

As it turns out, visiting the library in the daytime is not nearly as harrowing as it may sound. My moonsilk cloak is as useful here as it was in Whinniepeg. As a matter of fact, there are many places throughout the location of the Royal Archives that provide a great degree of shade. It would seem that Canterlot has long made its facilities and public places accessible to sarosians. Princess Luna, after all, has been living here along with her sister for the past four thousand years. In a lot of ways, it's like a piece of Whinniepeg has been seeded throughout the remote areas of Equestria's capital.

This doesn't, however, stop several citizens from glancing curiously my way. In every street and building I've visited, citizens have stopped to look at me, and a few to even talk to me. I hardly find it annoying. As a matter of fact, I'm greatly amused by their curiosity. I imagine it's not often they see a sarosian without wings. I don't show them the horn, of course, for fear of suffering burns. I've taken it upon myself to invent a fabrication once or twice about being in service of Crescent Shine's guard, only to have my leather wings chewed off by a manticore. Yes, darling, I know you will frown

upon such childishness. I wish there was a better way to share with you just how happy I am to be in this city full of lively ponies, willing to learn and eager to socialize.

Once I got to the library, I spent several hours there. Despite the full knowledge that I would be in direct conversation with Princess Luna the following day, I managed to concentrate perfectly on my research. I'm in a special place, Penny, a state of extreme lucidity that I haven't had the grace to feel for years. My eyes and ears are wide open, ready to learn what I am here for and what it is that I can provide for her Majesty.

I wonder if this is what you felt like when you were attached to the botany research division at Whinnipeg University the first year that we met. Oh, and speaking of such, I have a surprise for you when you arrive in a few days. Even now, if I had a choice for what I desire to experience the most—hearing Princess Luna's divine voice or seeing your immaculate face—I think I would gladly choose the one I can cuddle up against at night. Do you suppose her Majesty's wings are sharp upon contact?

I joke, Penumbra. Forgive my jocularity, and believe in my sincerity as I long for your arrival, so that I may share with you the glories of tomorrow.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

April the Twenty-Third, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

Well, my darling Penumbra, it has happened. I have met with Princess Luna, and... I don't quite know what to write about.

The meeting was scheduled at night, of course. She had just raised the moon by the time Crescent Shine showed up at our new apartment's balcony along with two guard ponies. Together, they brought me to the threshold of Princess Luna's quarters, which came as a complete surprise. I imagined that I would be conversing with Luna in her throneroom. Apparently this was not the case, and nopony thought it right to warn me. This would be a good time to reemphasize the good humor with which I wrote one particular snide remark in the last entry.

I stood before the doors to Princess Luna's quarters, shaking in my horseshoes. I had imagined an entire night of study and research, and so I brought my moonsilk cloak in anticipation of the coming sunrise. Naturally, the cloak only added to my nervous perspiration.

Finally, the doors to her chamber opened. Without a word from her or any of the guards lining the hallway, I took the bold move of stepping inside. I found her sitting beside the windows, overlooking the starlit rooftops of Canterlot's moon district and beyond. The sight of her filled my soul with a numb sensation. I don't think there is an eloquent enough way to put it into words.

You yourself have met with Princess Celestia, Penumbra. I think I recall you describing it to me as "being born again." That's not quite what it felt like for me upon seeing Luna. Instead, it felt like a part of me was dying. I don't write that to sound grim or melodramatic. I only wish to convey that I felt extremely humble, insignificant, and yet special all at once. I was in the presence of an immortal, and a part of me felt drained from merely looking at her, so that I became aware of how small and precious I am in this world.

I said nothing. I expected her to speak. She did not. Silence filled the room. This awkward

quiet occupied the space of several minutes, and then those minutes became an hour... two hours. I wondered if I was doing something wrong, if I was the reason for such terrible silence. Still, I couldn't summon the courage to say something, for fear that the quiet was something sacred for a reason, even if I didn't know that reason.

My legs were starting to go numb. I didn't know how long I could politely stand in her presence, all the while she merely sat there, staring out into the night sky as if she were a part of the cosmos itself. For fear of fainting, I took a brave seat on the far side of the room. Still, she said nothing. With polite silence, I rummaged through my things and refreshed my memories with the notes I had taken regarding Proto-Equestrian symphonies, in case she might quiz me on my scholastic knowledge. She never did.

My eyes swam about her quarters. I felt like I belonged there—in that the walls were adorned with almost every known instrument in Equestria's long history of music. There were even some objects I had never seen before, and you of all ponies should know that my knowledge is quite extensive, Penny. I saw wind instruments carved out of the wood of extinct trees. I saw drums fashioned out of material as old as Creation. The dust that had collected on several of the string instruments had gathered well over the centuries, so that I felt like a pebble marinating at the bottom of some unfathomably deep well.

Then my attention was drawn to the center of the room. Standing on a pedestal was an object of mystical importance. A glittering effluence of black light hung off the instrument's polished surface and moon-pale strings. I imagine the only reason I hadn't seen it when I first entered the room was because Luna's glorious visage had drowned my attention to any other detail.

It then occurred to me—in a gasping breath of realization—that I was staring at none other than the Nightbringer. What legend tells of its fate is a lie, Penumbra. I've seen the holy instrument with my very own eyes. It was not—as ponies say—destroyed during the war with the dragons three centuries ago. It not only exists, but it is in perfect condition, still imbued with magical energies. What's more, it is in Princess Luna's possession.

Was this why she had summoned me to Canterlot? Was it because she had discovered the Nightbringer, that she had somehow excavated it from the sediment of all Equestria's yesteryears? Or did the alicorn sisters possess it all this time? If so, why would they have kept the truth from us?

Princess Luna never said a thing that night. In a way, she didn't have to. Bringing me there to see the Nightbringer was enough to shake my soul apart. This changes so many things. This means that we modern Equestrians could very well be privy to hearing—with our own mortal ears—the songs that brought forth the chorus of Creation.

I almost broke the silence right there, if only to ask her what it all meant. But that never happened. She turned her head, like a statue coming to life, and tilted her majestic horn towards the chamber entrance. Right at that moment the doors to her quarters opened for the first time in hours. Crescent Shine and his two fellow guards marched in, and without so much as saying a word, they escorted me home.

Right as I was dropped off at the Midnight District, I was given a letter. Apparently, I'm to visit

Luna again tomorrow, just a day before you arrive. What do I have to expect? What is the point of such curious silence? I am extremely confused, and yet I am supremely enraptured. I have witnessed a tool of Creation with my very own eyes, Penumbra. I've stood in the presence of something that was once pure energy, a formless song that had accompanied the dawn of all light when the Cosmic Matriarch herself trotted across this landscape.

I may not have any answers, but I definitely have purpose. I shall fulfill my obligations, if only to be given a chance to witness such glory yet again, no matter how obscured.

Yours faithfully and forever,

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

April the Twenty-Fourth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

Once again, I was summoned to the Princess' chambers. Once again, I had to walk into her quarters on my own accord. And—just like the night previous—Princess Luna sat on the edge of her balcony, gazing out the window, giving me time to study the Nightbringer up close. I stood around it, trotted around it, gazed deeply at it. As terribly tempted as I was, I could not bring myself to touch the dark instrument.

And so it was that she finally spoke to me, and I realized that less than an hour of silence had transpired since I had first arrived there. Hearing the Goddess of Shadows speak in the very same room is like living through a divine explosion. I felt every fiber of my being burning and freezing at once, so that all I could do was stand still and absorb every booming word she had to say. Only an alicorn like Princess Luna can say things in a whisper and yet resonate with thunder. Between each breath, I had no reason to doubt her authority, her righteousness, her connection with all that was complicated, glorious, and eternal.

When she spoke to me, it was not in regards to the Nightbringer. It was not about the topic of mystical research. It didn't even touch the subject of Proto-Equestrian symphonies. She asked me how I had managed to live my entire life as a sarosian unicorn. And, well, of course I answered her, Penumbra.

I explained to her what it meant to grow up as the only non-winged sarosian in my village. I explained to her the rudimentary facts of genetics that led to one in every five thousand unicorns being

born like me. I skipped the details of the ridicule and harassment I received as a child, from foals who lampooned my albino coat and slitted eyes and leafy ears. All of the things that I had become well acquainted with, I explained in moderate detail, as if I had become an amnesiac and somehow had to teach myself just who and what I was in a short period of time. After all, what was there for me to teach her? Surely she knew everything there was to know of sarosians—both pegasi and the seldom few without wings—who had all long sworn their allegiance to the Goddess of the Night and her eternal will.

When my speech was over, Luna neither smiled nor frowned. She stood up and marched beside the Nightbringer, all the while giving a meager but very satisfying explanation. Apparently my first invitation—and the ensuing silence that engulfed our initial meeting—was all a test. She brought me there within the presence of her and the Nightbringer to gauge my reaction. The fact that I didn't speak was apparently something that worked in my favor. She determined that I was not a pony who was outwardly swayed by grandeur. Paraphrasing the Goddess of Night as best as I can, she essentially said that I thought and acted upon scholarly intent, and that I had supreme control over my whims, since I didn't break her silence or attempt to touch the Nightbringer with my own mortal hooves.

I listened to everything she had to say, and I felt it best to exercise the same tactful silence. I bowed when I needed to, responded only when I needed to. In the end, she said something that absolutely floored me. She was **putting together a symphony**. That's right, Penny: our very own Princess Luna, the steward of the moonlit sky, is coming out of ten years of silence to give Equestria a song of her indomitable spirit. And what's even more amazing... she wishes my help in **writing the music**.

I knew better than to faint in the Princess' presence. I relayed to her my enthusiasm in as gentlecoltish a manner as possible. She gave me no information regarding the nature of the symphony, nor the number of movements. Furthermore, she seemed fit to overlook the fact that I was merely a scholar of history and musical theory. Couldn't she have called upon Celestia's royal conductor for such a task? Wouldn't it have been more prudent to enlist the help of Marezart or some other world-famous composer? Alas, she wants *my* help and *my* input on this endeavor. I don't know if there's been a luckier soul in the history of Canterlot, Penny, to be the one pony to process Princess Luna's one and only **artistic endeavor** into a medium through which mortals could preserve and enjoy her glory for the eons to come.

She must have known just how unbearably enthused I was, so she sent me home early—at least much earlier than she had the previous night. The only hint she gave me for when I was expected to return were the words “After you have settled in with your loved one, Penumbra.” She knows your name, Penny, as well as she knows how honored I am to be given this opportunity. That's how I believe that everything I've ever hoped for is coming true. I am in this project for the long-run, and as much as I'm dedicated to writing this information down, I can't wait until I can see you tomorrow and tell you face to face, and hold you, and find out once again what it means to laugh and cry at the same time.

With great joy and enthusiasm,

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

April the Twenty-Fifth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I told you that I would have a surprise for you. It was easy to forget it the moment I saw your face, your shiny gold coat, your pearlescent blue eyes. You leave the scent of jasmine everywhere you go, especially in this new home of ours. And now I know that it is truly our home, for it smells of you.

I can't get over how adorably confused you were as I practically dragged you out onto the balcony. I told you to close your eyes. I measured the increasing length of your smile as your trot seemed to go on forever. Just how large was this balcony? Was I about to lead you over the edge? Surely I didn't grow wings like Crescent Shine overnight.

Then, when I told you to open your eyes, the look on your face was worth every fitful dream that brought me to that moment. I expected gasps of joy; I didn't quite expect the tears that came along with them. I hope you forgive me for nuzzling them immediately away, Penny. I prefer kissing a dry cheek over a wet one any day.

I bet you never thought you'd have your very own greenhouse, instead of having to walk across

town and use one in a university. I meant it when I said that a little bit of Whinniepeg was seeded all over Canterlot, and that's no less true than right here in our home. Our apartment is the only spot in the Midnight District with a balcony touched by the midday sun, and I chose it specifically with you in mind. Now, no matter how long I may be away at research, you'll have a place to water your plants and continue your studies in botany. I can't presume to understand the nature of flora, but I like to think that I'm well acquainted with your smile, and it grew most majestically last night when you arrived and I showed you the "surprise." I hope it blesses you in every facet of your life, as you bless every part of mine.

It's an immeasurable joy having you here: your scent, your eyes, and your laughter. I know I've written this multiple times—to the point that it's almost a complete distraction—but being around you almost makes me forget what's happening here in Canterlot. I wouldn't have even mentioned seeing the Nightbringer with my own eyes had you not asked how the initial meetings went. I know I could very well just let you peruse these records I've been keeping, but what's the point when you're right here with me? What I'm writing here is a chance to preserve us as much as to preserve Luna's legacy. What we do and what we contribute to the glory of the Moon Goddess will mean nothing if we don't preserve ourselves and that which is most precious to us.

There is much unpacking to be done. I'm about to try and convince you to put it off for the night so that I can be with my darling wife yet again. Months or years from now—when you finally read this—maybe you can tell me if I succeeded or not, and I greatly trust that the answer will be "yes."

Indeed. Jasmine. Such an enchanting scent.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

April the Thirtieth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

It is with a heavy heart that I parted ways with you this afternoon. After almost a week of setting up the apartment and getting acquainted with the neighbors, it's only right that I return to Princess Luna to get a start on this epic undertaking that her Majesty has allowed me to take part in. I'm happy to think that you are not entirely alone while I am gone for the next week, Penumbra. You have your plants to decorate the greenhouse with. You have an entire city full of courtyards, gardens, shopping districts, and cafes to explore. What's more, you have my eternal love and respect. I hope the latter is enough to keep you happy during my absence, though I am terribly tempted to suspect it will be the shopping districts.

The flight with the sarosian guards to Princess Luna's Palace was over in a flash. I wonder if I'll ever get used to how insignificant the travel is compared to the destination. This was my first occasion of arriving at Princess Luna's quarters in the daytime. When I arrived, she was more alive than ever.

All of the stillness and solemnity of the previous two visits was gone, replaced by a spring to her trot as she scurried like an overgrown foal from one side of her room to the next. Apparently she had taken the time to extract half of the books on music theory from the Royal Archives and relocate them to her quarters. I had to trot over several piles of books before settling down.

When her Majesty spoke to me, it was in short, curt bursts. I realized that the ritual for introductions and pretense was over. This was the time to study, to process, to make some semblance out of the music in her mind and **put it down on paper**.

I didn't quite know how we were supposed to go about the method of **writing**. This was to be Princess Luna's masterpiece, after all, not mine. I merely expected to serve as her assistant. As the minutes limped into hours, and Princess Luna's dissertations resembled a chorus of confusion and madness, I began to realize that the best thing I could do for her was to exercise patience. Princess Luna was unraveling a tangled string of substance in her head, and she needed a learned soul such as mine to spool it into a finely woven tapestry.

Surely, Penny, you've heard the utterly horrible nicknames that our fellow Equestrians have occasionally given to her Majesty, especially during the last nine years of the Age of Shadows. I shudder to write them, for they feel blasphemous to even think of. Luna has been called "Shadow Brained". She's been referred to as "The Looney Princess." Even in Whinniepeg, ponies joke that she's a "Keeper of Cosmic Dust," and that her heart and mind are not on earth like Equestria, but rather Luna is a veritable "Mare in the Moon." All of these names serve as a great insult to me. It is not simply because of my sarosian heritage. I feel as though the majority of Equestrians do not understand her Majesty, nor the methods behind her superficial madness or this decade-long seclusion.

Seeing her up close, being in the same room with her: I've come to realize that she is more than just the Goddess of Shadows. She is a mirror to us all, to lonely souls in a dark world attempting to shine. In the grand scheme of things, we are all alone, just like her. To eke substance out of the blackness of eternal night is to be the very essence of mad. For thousands upon thousands of years, it has been Princess Luna's selfless task to be the steward of such necessary madness, and now it's come to pass that her latest endeavors involve dragging a song out of the deepest, darkest depths of the universe.

I do not know what purpose this symphony will have, nor do I care. If it helps Princess Luna exorcise the collective shades constricting her divine thoughts, then I am happy to be of service. After all, she is forever our Goddess of the Night: the one shining beacon we have in the darkness. One does not find purpose and meaning in humbling himself to the "Mare in the Moon," for she is anything but that. She is here. She loves Equestria, and she is about to usher us into a new age of beauty.

That age will have to wait for a few more hours. After a full afternoon of work, we only managed to get a few musical notes written down. Right now, she is raising the moon, and I am resting in the guest quarters of the royal palace. I need to meditate on what I've learned, but it's hard to do when all I can think of is you.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the First, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

Dearest Penny, we have created something.

It is a very short piece, harmonic and dissonant at the same time. The introduction is full of diminishing strings, so that a part of me wondered if Princess Luna was merely experimenting with the notes that she had me write down.

Soon enough, though, the piece was complete, and I understood the majestic beauty that it was always meant to possess. I was allowed to borrow a harp from the walls of her quarters, and I performed half of the instrumental on it. I was enraptured by its beauty, and I wanted to worship her Majesty all the more for being able to transform the world with song in the same way she did with moonlight.

And then she decided to perform it. When she did so, she placed a series of dark crystals around the room. I recognized them to be sound stones, fragments of the Harmonic Rock that was once used to build the Equestrian barricades during the ancient war with Discord. Furthermore, Luna chose to use the Nightbringer. I couldn't imagine my good fortune for being in the presence of this divine instrument as it was being played. Every pluck of a string was like a continent being formed along the crest of bells in my ears. I reveled in the sound of life itself.

But then, as the song culminated, I experienced something that I would never have imagined. I've been under enchantment before, Penumbra. You remember when Doctor Halfrot's transmutation spell backfired on the entire science wing of Whinniepeg University. This, however, completely surpassed that experience, both in severity as well as in shock.

I felt as though the walls were closing in on me. At the same time, the tiniest specks of light in the room magnified. The sound stones flickered as if they were blazing flames. I feared for my safety. I felt that the luminescence was going to burn through my pale sarosian flesh. However, I was too overcome by a paralyzing paranoia to so much as gallop across the room and grab my moonsilk cloak. I've never felt so nervous and petrified before in my life. Soon, however, I was being ushered back into a warm world of safe shadows.

It was then that I realized exactly where I was, and just who was beside me, comforting me. Princess Luna herself had given me a motherly embrace. By her divine presence, the ominous magic was driven away from my being. I was so relieved to be freed of such paranoia that I hardly registered the fact that she had stooped so low to make contact with me. I expressed my gratitude, though it was hard to find my voice.

She silenced me, and spoke for the both of us instead. She told me that she had known that the song had magical properties, that all of the songs **we were writing** would. I asked her why, and she said that the symphony serves a grand purpose. **She is writing it** for the safety of this world. It is bound to have side effects, but she must know if they will positively or negatively impact the mortals of this realm.

I'm starting to understand why I'm here. I've had experience with enchantments before. If she had chosen just any musical expert from the art halls of Canterlot, they wouldn't have been nearly as capable of weathering the impact of the first instrumental, nor the ones potentially to follow. I am more than just her assistant in unraveling this music. I am her humble test subject.

You can probably expect what happened next. She asked if I was too distraught from the experience, if I wished to step out of the project altogether. Her Majesty's grace is equal to her strength. I told her that. I also told her that I was dedicated towards helping her all the way through the **creation** of this symphony. I was committed, as she was committed.

She accepted that, and for the first time I saw her smile. That's when she told me exactly what it is that we're working on. She's calling the symphony "*The Nocturne of the Firmaments*," and the first movement shall be named "*Prelude to Shadows*."

I do not know what will transpire next in this process of discovery. But I know one thing. I finally have a name for this tome, and shall title it forthwith.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the Third, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

We've constructed the second movement of the *Nocturne of the Firmaments.* It is a far livelier piece than the *Prelude to Shadows.* Its tempo is upbeat, and I suggested a heavy use of percussion in the orchestral version, to which Luna swiftly agreed. There is a sense of urgency to this project, brought on by her Majesty herself. It's as though she wishes us to write these songs as swiftly as possible. I wouldn't describe her motives as impatient. Rather, there is a righteous determination that is forcing her forward—and me along with her—at a breakneck speed. I find the enthusiasm to be positively infectious, and it feels as though I'm doing everything in my power just to keep up.

This latest instrumental is the very embodiment of such a spirit. I was thinking of coining a name for it myself, but Princess Luna spoke up and immediately called it *Sunset Bolero.* I can't think of a more meaningful name. It embodies that whimsical feeling ponies get when they rush to accomplish innumerable things while the sun melts into the west horizon.

When Luna performed the written song on the Nightbringer, I felt my heart beating faster and faster. You know me to be a fairly reserved, unathletic unicorn, Penny. But hearing this music from the ancient instrument made me want to gallop in circles and do backflips. Such would be unbecoming of a young colt, much less an esteemed scholar such as myself. I couldn't help but chuckle from a deep wave of merriment passing through my body. I don't know if *Sunset Bolero* is a prophetic installment in the grand piece that will become the *Nocturne of the Firmaments,* but one thing is certain: I am more excited than ever to be a part of this project.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the Fourth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I haven't slept in nearly twelve hours. How can I? The rhythm of the “*Sunset Bolero*” is still entrancing my spirit. It's hard to even sit in one place for too long. How will I get the daytime sleep I need before I'm called to help her Majesty with the next instrumental?

No. Sleep will not come to me. Not now. Not during this great moment of discovery and magic. I have to do something to concentrate, to focus my thoughts.

What better a time than to cover the magic of song itself? You know all that there is to know, Penumbra. After all, you've been around me long enough. You've heard every tale of creation told and retold ad nauseam. Still, though, if this is to become an official record regarding the “*Nocturne of the Firmaments*,” then it is important that I put together a necessary dissertation on the power of song, so that I may have a pertinent introduction by the time I process this into a final draft.

They say that the world began with a song. I've always assumed that, and after playing audience to the Nightbringer, I believe it all the more now. It's said that the Cosmic Matriarch came upon a cloud of chaos floating adrift in space. She saw the disruption as a blemish upon the tranquility of the universe. If this nebulous spot in the cosmos was to be unpredictable, then she saw it fit to reshape the leylines of energy to reflect order and purpose. So, she imprinted herself upon the cloud. She did so with a song, giving birth to harmony by the sheer power of her holy voice.

For, after all, what is more harmonic than music itself? Noise is merely disruption across the medium of a fixed space. Only when patterns emerge with a purpose towards order and tonality does that thunder become the ringing of bells. We are shaped by music, empowered by music. In the throats of mortals, music becomes an ode to all that has come to be—in ways that we can record and illustrate all of life's construction. In the lungs of goddesses, music becomes something immanent in the foundation of the world. The earth is solid, for the instrumentation that brought it into being holds true.

The Cosmic Matriarch forged the world from chaos with a song, but that was not enough to preserve Equestria forever. After all, what power does a song have if there stands the chance that it will no longer be sung?

So it was that the Matriarch created the Firmaments. The Firmaments were to become barriers, necessary shields against the chaos and cold of the universe that forever surrounds the bubble of life that is Equestria. The Firmaments could not function by themselves, though. They needed stewards, eternal sentries charged with maintaining the chorus for eternity.

It was then that the Matriarch performed the greatest sacrifice of all. She broke her song into **two** distinct parts. At the same time, she broke herself into **two** distinct parts. Thus she gave birth to Princess Celestia and Princess Luna. Princess Celestia was charged with the Firmament of the Earth: and the sunlight and the seasons that governed its cycles of growth. Princess Luna was charged with the Firmament of the Sky, and the safe protection against the extraterrestrial elements.

Under the spheres of both the Earth and Sky, mortals were born to give beauty and honor to the songs of the Matriarch and her **two** holy daughters. When her labors were complete, the Cosmic

Matriarch returned to the stars, for her work in Equestria was done. The Firmaments had their functions as well as their **two** guardians, and her song's harmony was bound to be protected forevermore.

Since the departure of the Cosmic Matriarch, Celestia and Luna have faithfully stood watch over the fields of Equestria, empowered by the omnipotent song that created them as much as enchanted them. Very rarely did they shatter the seal of their heavenly chorus. After all, the song can be broken up into smaller parts. There is no foreseeable way for the smaller parts to reconstitute a whole, not unless the Cosmic Matriarch was to somehow return and give us more music to reshape the world with.

When the monsters of chaos banded together to ravage the landscape, the alicorn sisters broke the song in order to construct the "*Titanic Ballad*". Together, their new and holy chorus created Tartarus, which became the eternal prison for Equestria's most brutal abominations. When Discord appeared in this dimension and attempted to tear the Firmaments asunder, the sisters once again disassembled their mother's gift, giving birth to the "*Elements of Harmony*". The instrumental was transformed into material pendants, and such spheres of magical importance were used to trap Discord in stone.

With the Matriarch's song becoming something tenuous and threadbare, it became necessary to channel the energy of Creation into something permanent, something capable of being preserved. For if the timeless song broke too many times, even if in the best interests of life, all of Equestria stood the chance of dissolving into the same chaotic miasma that the Matriarch first discovered when she graced this one nebulous spot in the cosmos.

So it was that the **two** alicorn sisters decided to transform the song into an instrument itself. They created a vessel that would forever embody the power of Creation, the razor-sharp edge upon which light and darkness hinged eternally. That vessel would later be called the "Nightbringer," and it is as glorious to look upon as it has ever been awe-inspiring to dream about.

Simplistically speaking, the Nightbringer is a normal-sized string instrument. It resembles a lyre, only larger, with the elegance and beauty of a royal harp. But it is far too holy and pristine to be compared to any ordinary tool of music. When its strings vibrate, one can feel his essence spreading apart and coming back together. To stand in the same room with it is to stand upon the precipice of nonexistence. It may not be as powerful as the Matriarch's original song, but its strength and presence are still overwhelming to a mortal such as myself.

The fact that the Nightbringer is being used to **write** the "*Nocturne of the Firmaments*" into reality fills me with both trepidation and wonder. Surely the Princess is not breaking the song down again. If she was, then Celestia would be a part of this project as well. As it stands, this instrument is merely serving as a way for Luna to transform that which is in her head into something corporeal. Upon contemplating this, I am filled with intense euphoria.

Could it be, for the first time in ages, that a new song is **being created**? Is that even possible for the sentry of the Firmament of the Sky? Has Luna suddenly become more powerful in the last nine and a half years?

Only time will tell. I fear that—for a mortal like me—I may not be told. So I tell you what I know, dearest Penny, so that when all is said and done, you and I can tell all other ponies as well. When the time comes that Equestria hears the *Nocturne*, mortal ponies may bear witness to our words as well, and we will all become one with a heavenly chorus, something spawned out of darkness and given enough harmony to bring new strength to the Firmaments.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the Sixth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

Princess Luna calls it the “*March of Tides*.” I call it one of the strangest instrumentals I've ever had the pleasure of listening to, much less **writing into being**. If one hears it with his ears or even reads the music sheets with his eyes, it feels in both ways like the “*Sunset Bolero*,” only backwards and at a slower tempo. One would think hearing such a strange tune would curse me with the same unease and paranoia that the “*Prelude to Shadow*” brought. But this is not the case. I am filled instead with a great sense of awe and wonder. I feel like I am making a journey, and the “*Nocturne of the Firmaments*” is my path into such a starry expanse of mystery.

All the while, I keep looking upon Princess Luna's holy visage. At some point during this study process, I've felt it was necessary to gauge her progress as well as the symphony's. There is very little change to her expression. The smile that she gave the other day is gone. I wonder just how many details make up the righteously cold facade that she maintains for the sake of swiftly finishing her sacred, musical duty. There's been no word on Celestia, on whether or not she is privy to this project and the role that the Nightbringer plays in **creating** the *Nocturne* from nothingness.

I almost hate myself for thinking too hard on the matter. The **two** royal sisters have lived with one another for millennia, performing their sacred duties to the Firmaments in a binding of absolute trust. Perhaps it was premature of me to think that Luna was **creating** a whole new “holy song” in this endeavor. After all, Celestia has composed her own instrumentals for the royal orchestra to perform. Did she ever request Luna's attention to such personal hobbies?

But every time I hear the mighty strings of the Nightbringer plucked in the air of Luna's quarters, I feel parts of myself burning, as if I am being set aflame from the inside out. Something truly amazing and magical is happening here. I feel blessed beyond imagining to be a part of it. I only wish that Luna's immaculate face would register the same emotions that I feel. It would make me a great deal more at ease to see just what this symphony means in her eyes, instead of the constant, unchanging solemnity that clouds her royal features.

Alas, our studies are over for now. I am being sent home. I relish the thought of seeing you once again, Penny. When I arrive at our apartment, I don't want to think about music for once. I only want to think of your forelimbs engulfing me as I drown myself in your jasmine, your voice, and your perfection.

Of course, you may be too encumbered in tending to your new greenhouse to indulge this stallion's lovesickness. But that would be just fine. You've been patient for me, and I shall be eternally patient for you, my darling wife.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the Eighth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

Today is the best day I've experienced since I came to Canterlot, and that's because I spent it all with you. After a solid week of studying music and putting melody to paper, you have no idea how joyous it is to just be by your side. It didn't matter much to me where we went or what we did, so long as it was something you enjoyed. In the end, you chose to walk through the Canterlot gardens; I couldn't have been happier.

I knew that you would be enchanted at the sight of the many endangered plants that the royal sisters grow in their capital. I specifically suggested we stroll through the gardens in the daytime. I don't care how cumbersome the cloak of moonsilk can be, it's worth wearing just to watch you giggle like a schoolfilly at all of the remarkable, sunlit specimens surrounding you. I chuckled as you asked that I curry favor with Princess Luna in order that she would let you take a sample home to the greenhouse. Unfortunately, my love, my influence with the Princess of the Night begins and ends with the *Nocturne*.

I'm glad that you chose an open marketplace for us to eat at. I don't want you to feel like you must hide me in the shadows. I love knowing that you aren't ashamed to be an earth pony married to a sarosian, that you're willing to let all citizens of Canterlot see us together.

It reminds me of the first few years we spent together at Whinniepeg University. I was the only unicorn of my type in the entire institution. In the daytime, I resembled a mummified pony shuffling through the hallways. At night, students trotted out of my path, for fear that I might grow fangs and pounce upon them suddenly under the moonlight.

You saw past all of that. You saw something in me that enchanted you. At first, I thought that you were attracted to my peculiarities, to my living oddities. You were the first pony not to flinch at my sarosian diet. To this day, I still don't know how you managed to hold your lunch the first time I ate meat in your presence. But then I no longer had to worry about anything, or had to think about anything.

I had become engulfed in your kindly smile, in your melodic laugh, in the way that you loved to play with my ears when nopony was looking. I wanted to know all about you, and I learned an encyclopedia's worth of wonders. You were so fascinated in the science of plants. You taught me how nature grows and sustains itself. It took my poetic ramblings to teach you that there was an underlying magic beneath all of reality. Together, we formed a balance, a harmonic duet that fused pragmatic and

ethereal realities together into an other-worldly chorus. We became the prince and princess of Whinniepeg University, and when all ponies gazed upon us, they understood what true love was. It could form out of complete uncertainty much like the Cosmic Matriarch's first song did.

All of those years, as I ascended the ranks of scholastic mastery, you stood by my side. I was your creature of the night, and you joined that daring darkness with me. You learned to forsake the day, so that we would be awake together under the moon. What other esteemed botanist in the history of all Equestria has made such a sacrifice? I wanted more than anything to make it up to you, and all you ever did was silence my worries with a kiss, letting me hold you closer as the stars spelled out our future.

I love you, my dearest Penny. And I want so much to give you all the world's treasures. But then I realize that all the beautiful things in Equestria are already within reach, for I've been given you. These days in Canterlot are bound to be the best days of my life, because I know that I'll finally have a chance to give back to you all that you've ever sacrificed for me. I only regret that the reason for our coming here distracts me so often. I despise the fact that it forces me to be apart from you, throwing me into the depths of magic rather than the warmth of your loving voice.

One of these days, we'll start a family. We'll have children, and they'll be our song to preserve our love between the Firmaments of Creation. What we are, what we've forged together in our short, bleak, and altogether beautiful lives, is something priceless, and it must never be unsung.

Until then, we both have work to do. And I look forward to the time when all of our duties are behind us, for they will have dissolved just as righteously as our fears did the day that we met.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the Tenth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I'm making an entry right now, though I have no concrete reason to. I've just now arrived at Princess Luna's quarters for another week or two of study. We haven't even begun writing yet. Still, I feel like I should write down an observation before my studies necessarily eliminate it from my mind.

It feels as if the sarosian population of Canterlot has increased dramatically since the time I arrived here. I noticed this on the day that we went out together, Penumbra. There were pegasi of the night in the streets, garbed in moonsilk and shadow armor. This didn't just happen in the Midnight District. Everywhere I looked, there were more and more leather-winged, slit-eyed brothers and sisters. What's more, they seemed just about as new and inexperienced with the alleyways of Canterlot as I was when I first showed up. I'm almost tempted to think that there's been some unofficial pilgrimage of sorts. Did word spread that Princess Luna was coming out of hiding, that the Age of Shadow is coming to an end? What else could explain so many nocturnal ponies having arrived at the threshold to their patron alicorn's dwelling?

I asked Crescent Shine about it. He had no answer, at least not one solid enough. He seemed preoccupied. There was a nervous shuffle to his hooves, and his eyes looked twice as pale. I know that look very well: it's the sign of a sarosian who has seen too much sunlight. How much has Princess Luna been overworking the captain of her Night Guard? Has my cousin gotten any sleep these past few weeks?

Perhaps I'm reading too much into things. Admittedly, my heart is feeling a sense of unease. It's more than the fact that I'm having to part from your presence again. As I walked the hallways of Luna's wing of the Palace, I felt as if something from the shadows was looking out at me. My ears twitched, and for a moment I thought I heard the ghostly sensation of metal rattling against metal.

I don't think Crescent Shine is the only sarosian missing sleep. I need to keep myself together if I'm to be of any proper assistance to her Majesty. I surely hope that the next installment of the *Nocturne* is something promising.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the Eleventh, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I've never felt more frightened in my entire life.

It began with **the writing** of the fourth instrumental, or “elegy,” as Princess Luna suddenly called it. She surprised me when she told me out of the blue that there would be ten movements to the *Nocturne* in total. I daringly asked her if she had always planned to **write** ten elegies. She ignored my question. Her face was as vacant and lifeless as ever as she told me the title to the fourth instrumental. She wished it to be called the “*Darkness Sonata*.”

I wondered what had possessed her to name it before it was **completely written**. But then **we finished creating it**, and she performed it without hesitation on the Nightbringer. That's the moment when I died, or at least I thought I had become dead.

A sarosian, as you well know, Penny, is well acquainted with darkness. This is most evident in the pegasi who possess the night blood. Our innate powers of echolocation have guided us through the thickest of time's shadows. It's what helped us find flying food under the fall of night before Luna gathered us under her wing thousands of years ago and taught us to hone our powers into becoming her elite Night Guard.

The darkness that followed after the performance of the Nightbringer was blacker than black. None of my senses were capable of penetrating it. It was as though the walls and floor of the room had been lifted away and thrown into the void of space. I felt nothing, absolutely nothing. Even the sound had evaded my detection. I quite literally thought I had died.

I floundered about in desperation, calling for the Princess' name. She found me, and held me still like a mare might coax the fear out of her foal. I was beside myself with panic and fright, and I

unashamedly clung to the Princess for the time it took for the light to return, for it would return—or at least that's what her Majesty assured me of.

In spite of my horror, she was as calm as an underground lake. She was distant too. Her voice could have been a million miles away, and yet I could hear every word that dripped out of her. They were strange words, frightening words. The Princess was rambling, speaking of a world between worlds, of a place far darker than even the Sonata's magical strings could evoke. Was she telling me this to educate me? If so, what could I have possibly learned? The truths she had to lend me were her truths alone, seemingly absurd dissertations on the countless shapes of chains she saw swimming all around her. Something had come to her in her sleep, and she needed to shape such a formless monster into song or else her mind would be ripped asunder.

For the first time since darkness enveloped me, I started to fear for her instead of myself. Ponies' incessant insults regarding the “Mare in the Moon” came to mind, and I hated myself for letting my thoughts wander into such desperate fields. As her and the walls of her room came back into focus, I asked her if she had told her sister about her visions. She merely stood up and walked away from me as if I was never even there to begin with. She placed the Nightbringer back on its pedestal and dismissed me, saying that there were six more elegies to the *Nocturne* to learn, and I needed my rest to be of proper assistance to her.

Right now, I'm sitting in my chambers, surrounded by twice as many candles than I had lit the night before. They're so collectively brilliant that I can already feel my pale coat starting to singe, but I don't care. The light is precious to me. It always has been. What are ponies but awkward pebbles rattling around in a dim crucible hung beneath impenetrable darkness? I think of you, of the forbidden sunlight that I can't enjoy, and yet it's there for me every time I gaze into your eyes. This world is fragile and can be snuffed out at any second, but it is ours, Penny. For the first time in my life, I can fathom it disappearing, and it is so unbelievably cold.

What is the meaning of this *Nocturne*? Why is it frightening and exciting all at once? Furthermore, can a single mortal like me withstand the **birth of a new and hauntingly glorious symphony**?

I need strength. I need to be there for my Princess, and I need to be there with you.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the Twelfth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

The “*Waltz of Stars*” is haunting, but at least it has poetic beauty to it. I can listen to it and not feel my soul draining away as with the “*Darkness Sonata*.”

As soon as Luna and I finished writing the fifth elegy, she had to leave for raising the moon. She didn't bother dismissing me. I was alone in her chambers, and I decided to make the best of it.

You may think it dishonorable of me to have snooped around the living quarters of the Goddess of Shadows, Penny. Looking back on it, I feel a horrible pit of shame as well. But if you had been forced to endure the “*Darkness Sonata*” like I had, if you had been there at the birthplace of so many otherworldly songs, you would be no less empowered by an unquenchable thirst for answers yourself.

A key thing to understand is that throughout the entire time I've worked on these elegies with the Princess, her room has been utterly in shambles. You would find this rather surprising for the domain of an immortal alicorn. I myself chose to ignore it, for I felt that the research we were performing in the creation of the *Nocturne* was far too righteous to second-guess. However, with the utter fabric of light drained and restored to my eyes, I saw everything in a brand new texture. There was no way to dance around the description: Princess Luna's chambers bore the signs of a mad pony.

Books were lying in disarray. Tomes were spread wide open, their pale pages flickering under

candlelight. Unrolled scrolls and layers of parchment gathered dust in the corners. What was most alarming was that half of the books were sparsely written in. As a matter of fact, many of the books—the most ancient and antique of the lot—were utterly blank. This didn't feel like some freak happenstance, either. The books were of uniquely different styles of binding. I saw signatures of bookmaking from all corners of Equestria, from as far as Timbucktoo to the stylistic nature of Dream Valley. The only way so many diverse and differently-bound books could be together under one ceiling was because they had been summoned there. Upon that thought, I perused through a series of letters that had accumulated atop Luna's workbench. I found several missives that had ordered members of Crescent Shine's Guard to acquire these books from the most remote libraries of Equestria. What's more, the rarest of these books were the ones that were mostly blank.

It startled me that I hadn't noticed all of these details before. I was so enraptured in the process of writing these elegies that I hadn't taken even a second to step back and look at this composition more objectively. Was it pure genius that was inspiring Luna **to write** this symphony? Or, perhaps, was it something more that was helping her transform that which was incorporeal into the material?

I didn't have too much time to ponder it. Princess Luna returned from the moon raising. She didn't look even the least bit exhausted, nor ready to quit. She ushered me back to her side, and immediately we began working on the sixth elegy. I saw a fire in her eyes, and for the first time I felt that I could register an emotion. It curiously looked a lot like *anger*.

More on this when I have the time to think it over.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof.

May the Fifteenth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

It's been three days since the Princess and I **finished writing** the sixth elegy. Unlike the "*Darkness Sonata*" and "*Waltz of Stars*," she did not give the instrumental a name. However, it struck me as far more important than all of the tunes previous. The very day after it was **written**, I heard it in the hallways. It was being hummed by the guards. At first, I was furious. I felt as though they had eavesdropped on us. Apparently, though, this was not the case, for I found several reprinted sheets documenting the very same elegy that **I had written into being** just the day before.

Now, I hear it when I go to sleep and I hear it when I wake up. The sixth elegy is nameless, but it isn't formless. It's taken residence in the heart of every member of the Night Guard, to the point that it's become a soundtrack to this wing of the Palace. Personally, I rather tire of hearing it, but I dare not say that out loud. I'm filled with a deep sense of nervousness, as if to sing anything else would be a crime. I don't know if Luna meant to spread this song on purpose, but it's already become an infectious anthem. The anthem to what: I have no earthly clue. I can only wander these halls, my ears echoing with the marching beat, waiting for Luna to summon me to her room once again.

Something just doesn't feel right. My services haven't been needed for days. Why can't her

Majesty send me home during the interim? I want to smell your jasmine. I want to hear your voice. My ears need a song that doesn't belong to shadows. I'm overcome with a terrible sense of cold. Maybe I should light some more candles.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the Eightteenth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I got the shock of my life today. I was finally summoned to Princess Luna's quarters, and when I arrived she was not alone. There were four other ponies in her presence, but they weren't just any ponies, Penumbra.

Two of them I recognized instantly: Professor Flat of Blue Valley University and Marerice Ravel. The others I had to be introduced to, and I was amazed to discover that I was in the same room with Marezart and Doctor Hoofstone of Stratopolis. Before me were four living legends of Equestrian music, and they were all sitting down and having tea with Princess Luna as if it was just any other Friday afternoon. The fact that they were there wasn't half as startling as the fact that they weren't elsewhere, for it was my explicit knowledge that each of the four equines lived far from each other, and far from the Palace for that matter.

It would appear, though, that I had arrived at the tail-end of whatever conversation they were

having with Luna. When I asked just how they all showed up there, they gave me a funny look. All of their dialogue ended, as if they had run out of reasons to say anything, their souls stripped of all logic. It was at this point that Princess Luna gazed my way. I wondered if I had said something wrong. Whatever the case, she reached her hoof over and tapped a polished black object. I realized she had the Nightbringer by her side. Under her careful touch, the strings stopped vibrating, and suddenly all four of her guests disappeared.

I was amazed at such magic. I asked Princess Luna where they went. In her usual, curt way she explained to me that she had completed the “*Song of Gathering*.” It took me a while to process what she meant. Then it occurred to me that she must have played the ancient tune on the Nightbringer. I had read old tales of how such a song was used by the Princesses during the griffon/pony war to summon the souls of generals from across Equestria to their strategy room. It was one of the most powerful spells in the alicorns' repertoire. The fact that Luna used it to summon four musicians struck me as strange, and then I realized that she must have done it in order to get a better understanding of the elegies left to unravel. Whatever the *Nocturne* had in store for us, we were headed into territories that required the combined knowledge of Equestria's finest musicians.

I no longer felt as adequate as I did the last session we had together. I felt like asking her if she truly needed me, but her swift actions and blurred gallop across the chambers suggested that she was in no mood for a complicated conversation. We were on a mission of celestial importance, and Luna wasn't about to turn things around.

Dear Penny, what have I become a part of? I came back to my quarters now just to breathe. She's making me **write down** a tune called the “*Threnody of Night*,” and already I feel like something is clawing at me from the shadows. I have less than ten minutes at this point before I must return to her study and resume **transcribing** the symphony, but a part of me is extremely hesitant. I fear that I will not return as the same pony. I can't explain it succinctly enough, but it's as if my ears stopped being mine several days ago. The room is so cold that I can barely summon the magic to lift this pen.

She is requesting my presence. I have to go. I have to perform my duty for her Majesty. Heaven help me, but I must.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the Twenty-Fifth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

How much time has passed? I had to ask the guard outside my door what day it was. Comparing his answer to what I have written in my journal, I judge that an entire week has transpired. It's all a blur. I feel hungry and cold. I have facilities around me. I can use them. I'm quite sure I have used them. Still, this entire place is miserable. I'm miserable. When was the last time I saw her Majesty?

My memory is tenuous at best. I know that we finished **writing** the “*Threnody of Night*.” I played it. I wished I hadn't played it. I felt like I was drowning somewhere, but I hadn't moved a muscle. I sat there, paralyzed, in her room, expecting her to perform the same tune on the Nightbringer.

She didn't touch the ancient instrument. For the first time in days, part of me rejoiced. But when I looked in Luna's eyes, I didn't see an alicorn who was afraid to gallop herself past the final, fragile membrane of magical sanctity. As a matter of fact, I didn't see the Princess that I knew at all. It was as if she had become an empty space, a living doorway for something enormous and lifeless and full of black dust. I looked upon her, and it was like I was treading water upon the event horizon of a churning nightmare.

She spoke of things. I didn't have the strength to listen to her at that point. I had missed sleep. Somepony carried me to my chambers two nights ago. Was it her? It must have been her. The Princess' words are coming to me now. She speaks of voiceless souls, of bodies within the depths of all our forgotten yesteryears. She speaks of a lost entity, **somepony's** beloved. Yes. I know that word. Beloved. She speaks of beloved. She speaks of beloved. **She** speaks of beloved. **She** speaks...

What's come over me? Have I been entranced? What was the last song **we wrote**? Something about twilight. Yes, a requiem. "*Twilight's Requiem.*" I hear the tune going around in my head, swimming circles around me like a predator. Why do I keep thinking about seas and oceans and deep, inescapable fathoms? **She** speaks of **her** beloved. **She** abandons him in the world between worlds, the lost currents of time and space and songs. His love is his anger which is also his menace. When he destroys worlds, he's simply trying to claw his way back to **her**.

Dearest Penny, I wish I could explain to you what this all means. But as soon as I put pen to paper, these things come out. Things that I can't explain. Things that can only echo the fragile remnants of **her**, of **her** world, of a cyclone of frost hungrily undulating beneath all our hooves. They sing **her** chorus and become nothing, and upon the forsaken **her** breath liberates, an ancient song giving birth to the birthless, **her** loyal subjects for eternity and for never. They no longer serve **her** beloved, for the domain of the forever dying has become **hers**, a task equated to the unbirth of everything, the **unwritten** symphony that holds the Firmaments together and separates them all at once.

I have to stop. I have to stop writing. But all I can do is lie here. Outside, ponies are marching. To what, I can't tell anymore. Something terrible is about to unfold, and I just want to see you. I just want to hold you. I just want to stop hearing the music in my head.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the Twenty-Eighth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I think I can write now, now that I see you lying next to me. When did I get home? Yesterday? It's all slowly coming back to me. Crescent Shine dropped me off at the apartment, quite literally. I woke to your shouting voice. You were angry at Crescent. I didn't understand why until I felt half of my face burning. He hadn't taken the time to notice that my cloak had come undone in the sunny afternoon. I don't think he cared. The air echoed with a grunt of indifference, and he was gone.

But you... Your gentle hooves pulled me up off the balcony and led me into the house. You nursed me. I felt the cold kiss of the washcloth against my burnt brow. As soon as I knew it was you, I seized your forelimbs and pulled you to me. Sweet jasmine. I don't know how long I held you, or that you held me. All I know was that I was happy, and you were scared. I didn't want you to be scared, Penny. I never want to frighten you. But I didn't know what else to say at the time. What could I have said?

There was a ninth elegy. I remembered Princess Luna's words. In between rambling about *somepony's* beloved, she dropped the word "Desolation." Was it the "*Song of Desolation?*" "*Desolation's Elegy?*" I don't remember now. All I know is that we incorporated the notes she had taken with the four souls she had teleported to her chambers ten days prior. Furthermore, it took the two of us to perform the ninth elegy. Did she use the Nightbringer?

No. No, I am still here. What does that even mean? Where else could I have gone? Even in my own apartment, I feel chills. You started a fire two hours ago, before you fell asleep. I wished I had an explanation for you, something to convey the fact that the fire won't do anything to help me. I am going someplace, and I just don't know where.

Dearest Penny, all day you stayed by my side. I barely said a word, and yet you clung to me like a second skin. How you're not mad at me, I can't even begin to fathom. There hasn't been a single explanation for why I've been gone this long. I could invent an excuse, but it wouldn't justify things.

I want you to know that I am happy to be married to you, and I am sorry, Penny. I am sorry that something great and dark has consumed your husband's time, energy, and sanity. You've sacrificed so much as it is. I'd hate for you to sacrifice more. This was supposed to be a time of opportunity, a time of joy. I don't know what's in store for me. I don't know what will happen when Luna and I *write* the tenth elegy. This *Nocturne* is bigger than anything, and I fear it will consume me like a whale might dine on shrimp.

Please forgive the awkwardness of this entry, Penny. You might think these blemishes to be tear stains. You might be right.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the Thirtieth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I scared you again. I didn't mean to. It's just that I wanted to see you. And things have been so cold, so confusing, so full of this ringing music in my ears. I stepped out and entered the balcony's greenhouse because I wanted to see the sunshine in your eyes. But the sunshine was everywhere. Only

when you started screaming did I realize what I had done. It was as if I was reduced to a toddler, numb to pain, lacking in common sense.

You rushed me back into the apartment before the daylight could do any permanent damage to me. I hate making you mad, even when your anger is merely a mask to your confusion. I'm confused too, Penny. Like Luna, though, I have no mask. I merely have darkness, and it's clouding me everywhere I look. Why must there be a dichotomy of sunlight and moonlight? The world is so imperfect. If only we could bathe Equestria in solid shadow, then everything would be gorgeous. Everything would be simple. You've lived in darkness before. You're evidence that ponies can survive that way. You will be perfectly fine. I will be there for you. We can have a family of shadows, in the shadows, by Princess Luna's glory, safe from **her** song and **her** beloved...

I can hardly write. I still hear your shouts. You love me, but you hate what's happened to me. You hate the fact that I can't tell you. I hate it too. Every time I try and open my mouth, the tears start flowing. There are horrors that you must not know. I don't want the sunlight to die in your eyes. As perfect a world as this would be in perpetual shadow, I can't let you fade away. Have I been struggling with this conflict all my life? It's like I've discovered a beat that I've been trotting to since the beginning of time. I'm not sure if I want you dancing to that same bone-skin drum. Something precious would be lost. Something precious *has* been lost.

I see your face when you think I'm not looking, and there is something sad there. There is something that wants to tell me a secret both terrible and beautiful all at once. But you can't speak any more than myself. You fear that my ears wouldn't belong to the husband you married, and they don't. We're becoming shades of what we once were. Luna's symphony has stripped me of colors, but you? You're warmer and rosier than ever. Why can't I touch you and feel you like I once did? The love is there, but the life is draining away like moisture on a windowsill.

The sun is setting. Luna hasn't called me. I need to go for a walk. You will understand. At least I hope you will. I have to go somewhere. You love me. You adore me. **She** adored her beloved too, and even **her** beloved had to go. Twilight's Requiem. Desolation and dead notes. A pool of frost, enveloping, like an endless choir of banshees.

I have to go somewhere, dear Penumbra, or else I will die.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

May the Thirty-First, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I have multiple bruises, and each one of them stings. You didn't believe me when I told you how I got them. You thought that I had made the story up. Right now, I can't explain things better. I can't afford to in this time of tribulation. Regardless, I must write the truth down. Maybe you'll understand when time has gone by, when you summon the strength to read these records I've written.

I met with Crescent Shine late this morning. He didn't want to see me. He was too busy. Every member of the Night Guard was busy, and that was precisely why I wanted to see him.

When I was inside Luna's wing of the Palace last week, I could have sworn I heard marching. I didn't have the strength nor sanity at the time to investigate the noise, but I did today. I do not like what I discovered. Something has happened to the multiple sarosians who have flocked here to Canterlot. More than three-fourths of them have joined the Night Guard. All of this rapid induction has transpired in less than a week's time. This is not only unprecedented; it's downright frightening.

I've been even further flabbergasted upon discovering what tune they used to march to. It was the sixth elegy, the one that Princess Luna and I **personally wrote down** just days ago. The song had been transmitted to a record, and it was being broadcast throughout the courtyards of the lunar wing. Every guard pony was marching to it, their leather wings lined up in perfect synchronization. I admire Crescent Shine's authority and command as Captain of the Guard, but not even he has the power to hold sway over so many ponies. No mortal could have taught these new recruits to function as a unit so swiftly.

I know what's happening here. The sixth elegy has taken hold of these ponies. Something dredged from the depths of darkness is controlling them, empowering them, and it's my fault for helping Luna bring it to the surface of this world. These sarosians hear the incessant beat, and it speaks invisible secrets to their hearts. But do they hear the chorus? Do they hear **her** undying voice? Has the cold wriggled its way into their lungs as it has into mine?

I tried to tell Crescent Shine that what was happening here was wrong. He refused to hear my words. He's changed. Something about him is hollow, lacking, like the shell that Luna herself has become. All of my life, I have gotten along with my cousin. Now, it is as though I'm staring into the polished marble of a sepulcher. I tried to reason with him. I tried to get him to see what was happening, but how could I? I only know so much as it is.

Where I'm easily confused, he is easily frustrated, and after my last frenzied attempt to grab his attention, he grabbed me—physically—and threw me to the ground. I was too shocked to register his bucking hooves until a pair of lieutenants rushed over to lift him off my battered body. He shouted something. He called me a “traitor” and a “coward” and threatened to do horrible things to you, Penumbra, which is why I didn't tell you too many details when you gazed with shocked eyes upon my beaten complexion.

You mistook my silence for something else, and you turned a cold shoulder to me, colder than the elegy of *Desolation*. I can't blame you for being mad. I could never blame you. I just want these elegies to be finished. Somehow, I feel... I know... that everything will be alright once the *Nocturne* is finished. The cold and the music and the madness will stop. I will be able to explain things to you then. And if I can't, what will there be left to write about?

This journal: I feel that it means more than I had ever intended it to. I must guard it carefully, for fear that somepony like Crescent Shine—or whatever spirit may be possessing him—might do something terrible to it, and then to us, dear Penny.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

June the First, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I love you so much, Penumbra. I love you more than life itself.

I write this in glorious affirmation, because I fear that saying it out loud no longer holds the same sway over your countenance. Today you crawled up next to me in bed and you held me dearly. You sobbed for over an hour. I tried to dry your tears, but you batted my forelimbs away from your face. You told me that you just wanted me to hold you. If only every moment of my life was so simple, so gorgeous. I complied sincerely, and you nuzzled me, murmuring and whimpering how sorry you were for being angry the past few days. You said that you were simply confused. I already knew that. But more than anything, I knew that I loved you anyway, and shall continue loving you. You've waited for me all these years, and I shall forever wait for you.

You said that you understood that I couldn't explain everything. You were merely scared, for this was the first time in our lives that the scholar you married couldn't put something into digestible words. I tried to solace you by saying that some songs require the sound to carry their meaning far more than the lyrics. I don't think this made you feel any better, so I kissed you and held you even closer. Sweet jasmine.

It was then that you finally told me what had brought you there. We had just been delivered a letter from the Night Guard. Crescent Shine was either too busy or too angry to come see us personally. Whatever the case, I'm to report to Princess Luna as soon as possible. Our time together, however precious, has once again been curtailed.

You didn't want me to go. I didn't want to go either. But we both knew what the Night Guard would do to us if I didn't comply with her Majesty. You were scared. I tried not to look scared. I kissed you, and then I asked you what it was that you wanted to tell me. I knew that something had been troubling you, something that you were too nervous to touch. Then you looked even more scared. The colors in your cheeks burned brighter. I knew you were trying to keep something secret from me, but enough of my senses had woken from the cold to remember the tiniest of your quirks.

You dismissed my inquiry with a smile. You nuzzled me and told me that I would learn the truth by the time I returned. I've never before had a better incentive to face the darkest night of my life. Whatever **writing the last elegy** will entail, I am no longer afraid. I have you to come back to. All of this madness and confusion will end. I promise you this, my dearest Penny. I love you and I promise you: everything will be tranquil once again.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

June the Third, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

There are ponies marching and performing drills outside the Palace. In the lunar wing, nopony would imagine so. Here, it is deathly quiet. All of the guards are gone. They and the servants have been dismissed from these halls. It is quite literally just me and the Princess, alone, surrounded by musical instruments. Every breath and plucked string and murmur between us is louder than the voice that brought about Creation. All the while, the Nightbringer rests in the thick of our **invention**, like a judge from the past who's about to witness **the first newly written song** in millennia.

Princess Luna is in another world. I feel like I'm working alone, for she is merely a hollow outline of an alicorn that floats around me. When she speaks, it's as if I'm listening to a voice from beyond a great, obsidian wall. She says something, and it sounds terribly like the title of a song, the one and only song, the last song.

"Dawn's Advent," she calls it. I am enraptured at the name. Tears are coming to my eyes, and I haven't even **written** a single note. I feel a great darkness coming, but suddenly I'm no longer trembling. I think about the forbidden glow of the morning. I think about the sunlight in your eyes. I'm coming home to you, dear Penumbra. There's one last elegy, and I am coming home to you.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

June the Fourth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I thought that we were done, but Luna's complexion says otherwise. She sits in the middle of her room like a statue, a ghastly gargoyle carved out of the blackest stone. I tell her that our task is finished. I tell her that we've written the last elegy. We are done with the project. The "*Nocturne of the Firmaments*" is complete.

She doesn't look even remotely capable of believing me.

What is there left to do? She stares past me. Her eyes are locked on the Nightbringer.

Dear heavens. She wants to perform it. She wants to play the song on the timeless instrument, the leftover fossil from the Creation of the World. But as long as I stare at her, she refuses to move a muscle. Is she sick? Has a terrible, otherworldly ailment finally consumed my Liege?

Could she be afraid? Could she suspect that there sits before us a horizon too ominous to contemplate crossing? Then why would we have come so far? What was the point of this exercise?

The hallways are empty. There are ponies marching outside to an incessant beat. I hear the rattling of chains in the distance, rising, like a sea of rust and sorrow. **She** misses **her** beloved. I don't want you to miss me too. If something doesn't happen soon, I'll be stuck here, frozen in place like Luna, lodged into a position that affords a mortal no rest, no peace, and no chance to see the mare that he loves ever again.

I write this because I did something brash. I reached over, and I touched the onyx surface of the Nightbringer with my very own hoof. When I did so, I looked over at Luna, and her Majesty was looking at me.

It was then that I understood. She is the audience. She's always been the audience. This symphony was **written** for her. I know why she needed me all this time, and why the four musicians were teleported here and away again with the whimsical spell of the "*Song of Gathering*." She didn't trust them, but she trusts me.

I no longer have the energy to question my place in this. I want this to be over. I want to see you. I want the music to end. For that to happen, the music must also begin.

May you, Penny, and any other pony who reads these records forgive this sarosian mortal for

desecrating the holy Nightbringer. But I must do this. I must lay down the sound stones. I must play the elegies. The *Nocturne* must be heard, for its first time and its last time.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

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It's so cold. It's so very cold. There were voices, muffled and screaming. Chains formed a tunnel that rattled all around me. I was swimming somewhere. Luna was nowhere to be found. I awoke in a puddle on the floor of the palace hallway. I was numb. I couldn't move. I still can't move. I'm in my quarters. How did I get here? There's a fire; I must have built it. It's large and blazing, toasting my skin. I can barely feel my skin. There's something black in the corner. The Nightbringer? Why do I still have it? Can't think. Can hardly breathe. So cold.

-Comethoof

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Still cold. My head hurts. I hear a melody. It is endless. I recognize it. It's the "*Prelude to Shadows*." I performed that, didn't I? I performed many elegies. The *Prelude* and the *Bolero* and the *March* and...

The last thing I remembered playing was the "*Threnody of Night*." Then everything went black. Luna disappeared. The world disappeared. I disappeared.

But I am here now. I'm here with the cold, the dying fire, the music in my ears, and the Nightbringer. Where is everypony?

Something just thundered. The walls are shaking. Is it something outside? I need to go look, but I'm afraid to. So cold. Freezing. Penny, forgive me. Penny, something horrible has happened. I'm so cold, Penny. So cold.

-Alabaster

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Ponies are dying. I have seen their bodies. Blood bathes the walls and floors of the Royal Palace. Luna's nowhere to be seen. I hear screams announcing **her** voice, and they are full of horror and anger. We must be at war. I do not think I can make it out of this Palace alive. Anypony who reads this, search my saddlebag. I have the Nightbringer. Take it and keep it safe from evil.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

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My cousin is a murderer. I saw him slay another guard with my own eyes. What is Crescent Shine doing? He's not alone. The Night Guard are flying with him. They are setting fire to rooftops. They are killing ponies. No, it's more than that. They are killing all non-sarosians. This is a bloodbath. I must get—

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So many fires. So bright. I am freezing. I see my own breath. I am hyperventilating. I've thrown up twice. I've never been to a battlefield. It smells like singed hair and vomit. Canterlot burns. Ponies are dying in the street. Those still alive are wailing out loud. They are all cursing a name, one name: Luna's name. Her Majesty has committed a terrible atrocity. She's turned against Equestrian kind. Why? I was just with her hours ago, performing the *Nocturne*. What has happened to her? Why is she destroying the capital of her kingdom?

So cold. I'm writing this to a holocaustal fire. Night is falling, but I do not feel comfort. I'm scared to show my face, but I must. If I can get the Nightbringer to Celestia, then maybe she can do something about this turn of events. But I do not know how long I will last as soon as I show my sarosian face. My brothers and sisters have shed blood in the name of the night. It's as if they are all possessed, and Princess Luna's madness is leading them.

-Comethoof

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I've found members of the Royal Guard. They aren't sarosian. Upon seeing me, they were briefly startled, but they appear to mean me no harm. I gave them the Nightbringer. We're holed up in what remains of the city library. Just weeks ago, I was studying here in peace. Now everything is cinder and flame. There are bodies covered in sheets behind me. I hear the Captain talking about an evacuation route. I must know if you're okay, Penumbra. I must—

They're looking at me strangely. Their faces.

Something is wrong.

-Alabaster

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My name is Doctor Alabaster Comethoof. I am thirty-seven winters old. I have a degree in historical mysticism and advanced music theory at the Whinnipeg University. I have a wife named Penumbra Comethoof. We both live in the Midnight District. Please, help me. Help her. I beseech whoever reads this.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

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I keep showing the guards the last page. I know I've written the words down. I've seen them. They can't read a single letter. It's like there is no hoofwriting at all. I try to explain who I am to them, and then their faces return to the same blank expression.

What's happening? Why doesn't anypony pay attention to what I'm saying? These are trained guards. These are—

We're being attacked.

-Alabaster

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The battle is on the other side of the city. I'm safe here. It's still deathly cold. There are other ponies huddled here with me. Every ten minutes, they look at me with shocked expressions. It's like I've emerged from the shadows over and over again. I've told them my name at least five times. This can't be a joke. We're at war. It's no time for sick humor. Did Luna cast a spell on the city? Are all sarosians empowered by some sort of magically empowered amnesia? I try showing the ponies my

journal. None of them see a single word I've written, even if I write in large bold letters. There's more here than just a civil war. I have the Nightbringer. I have the elegies stuck in my head. Oh dear heaven, did I do this? Did I start all of this madness? Did I—?

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I am bleeding. I am in pain. I still must write.

Several ponies just finished letting their frustrations out on me. They took one look at my slitted eyes and pale coat and immediately thought I was part of Luna's murderous army. They bucked me across the cobblestone street. They tore my moonsilk cloak into tatters. They called me every horrible name I've ever been teased with since birth, only now with venomous hatred. They promised to kill me, along with "Nightmare Moon." Is that her name now? I look at the flames and smoke that have gathered above Canterlot, and somehow I can believe it.

They stopped beating me up, but not for want of my asking. They gazed at me in the same stupor that had overwhelmed the guards. I felt a chill of invisible frost across my limbs. I tried to get up, and then they took notice of me. Their anger repeated, as if seeing me for the first time. The beating repeated itself, just as violently. Then, when I was bleeding far too much to see, they fell into their amnesiac spell again.

That's when I ran away. I took the Nightbringer with me. It would be no safer in the hooves of those brutes than it would be in Crescent Shine's possession. I limped through the crumbled, war-struck districts of Canterlot. This beautiful city is decaying from the inside out. It's all happening so swiftly.

For fear of my life, I've holed myself up in a half-collapsed infirmary. I've taken advantage of the tools left here to heal myself. Still, it doesn't stop the pain throbbing in my extremities. It hurts even more to write, but I must commit these horrid memories to paper. Something terrible is happening, and I fear I may be the cause of it all. I performed the *Nocturne*. I saw all of the warning signs, and yet in blind reverence and worship of the Goddess of Shadows, I took the Nightbringer into my own hooves and played **a new and altogether dangerous symphony**. I should have known better. I should have thought with my mind and not with my heart. I should...

Oh dearest Penny. Where are you in this madness? Where are you in this dark bloodshed of Nightmare Moon? I must find you. It's so cold, and the city is still collapsing all around me. But I must find you, my love. I must know that you are safe.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

June the Sixth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I only know what day it is from a passing coroner's muttering answer. Two days have passed since I played the *Nocturne*, and half of Canterlot lies in ruins. They are combing the streets, piling bodies into wooden carts. There's a mass grave on the east side of the city gates. I can smell the horrible fires from here. They must prevent plague and infestation at all costs. This is, without a doubt, the worst disaster since the Discordant Era.

I must find you. I found a bundle of blankets in the collapsed infirmary. It's not moonsilk, and I already feel my coat hairs burning from the midday light, but it hardly matters. I must find you, Penumbra. I must get to you.

The attacking forces were sarosian. It's logical to assume that the Midnight District is the one place they didn't ravage. I pray that you're still there. I pray that you're safe in the apartment, that you've locked yourself in the center-most part of the building. You were always resourceful in Whinniepeg. Right now, I have no choice but to believe in your tenacity.

There're explosions in the distance. Luna's forces were driven out of the city hours ago. I fear they might be attempting a return siege. I must be swift. It hurts to move, but I must get to you.

-Alabaster

June the Sixth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

Dear heavens. There are fires in the Midnight District. Citizens of Canterlot have formed a militia, and they are taking their frustrations out on the sarosian neighborhood. This is worse than I thought. I must get in. I must find a way. Stay safe, my love. I'm coming to find you.

-Alabaster

June the Sixth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I am Alabaster. Your Alabaster. Your husband. We were married under a gazebo on the Whinnipeg University Campus grounds. You wore lavenders in your hair, your most beloved flower. You smelled of jasmine, my favorite scent. Please, my love, tell me that you read these words. Please tell me that you remember me.

-Alabaster

June the Sixth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I know you.

I know you and I love you.

Look into these eyes.

Feel these ears.

You always loved to play with my ears.

Dearest Penumbra, it is I.

It is your husband.

Read these words.

Tell me that you know me.

Please.

-Alabaster

June the Seventh, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I am in our apartment, just a room away from you. But you don't know it. You won't expect it. You'll shuffle out of the bedroom to check on the carnage outside. You'll see me. You'll gasp in shock. You'll cry and beg that I not bite you with my sarosian fangs and drink of your blood. You'll tell me to go back to the Mare in the Moon, to rejoin the army of death and destruction. And just as your hysteria reaches a fever point, you'll teeter and collapse, as if overcome with a great dizziness. I'll disappear for the sake of your sanity, and you'll wander back into your room, alone and confused. Then you'll come back out a few moments later. You'll see me, and the whole nightmare will repeat itself.

I know you. You are the pony that I fell in love with, the pony who fell in love with me. You are here. I can smell your sweet jasmine. I can see your golden complexion. And yet, you are not here.

You are not here. Dearest Penny, where has the song taken you? For I now know that it is the song. I know that this is all the song. The *Nocturne* has separated us as far as the east is from the west. I don't dare try and hug my wife, or else you'll think me a sarosian pillager come to defile you.

It is so cold here, colder than in the rubble-strewn streets, colder than the Palace halls where the holocaust began. I sit here, slumped against the wall with the Nightbringer by my side. I gaze out beyond the balcony. Your precious greenhouse is smashed, much like our lives. Smoke rises endlessly from the rooftops of the Midnight District and the neighborhoods beyond. Equestria is sundered. The two alicorn sisters are at war with one another. What has become of us? What has become of our future?

I would write more, but I hear your hoofsteps. A geist painted with the colors of my wife is coming out to shriek at me once more. Maybe things will be different if you see me cry this time. But I know better.

-Alabaster

June the Ninth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

Luna's forces have been driven away by Celestia's Royal Guard. Word on the street is that Nightmare Moon's army—the Lunar Empire—has taken over the northern territories of Equestria. That means Whinniepeg is in the clutches of the Mare in the Moon. I no longer have any home to return to.

It's not like I could. I tried marching out to the outer gates of Canterlot. I found myself incapable of going beyond Twentieth Street. As soon as I reached the furthest edge of the capital, I felt my body overwhelmed by intense cold, as if my very own blood was freezing inside of me. I tried heading towards the opposite edge of town. As soon as I reached the western cliff-faces, I felt the same invisible wall of cold assaulting me.

I'm sensing a pattern. I judge that I have less than two miles in either direction to walk before this freezing sensation I'm constantly feeling intensifies to an unbearable degree. But what is the center? After much exploration and experimentation through the ruined streets of Canterlot, I judge that the Royal Palace is the heart of my new prison. More specifically, the center is Princess Luna's former place of residence. It makes sense. After all, that's where I performed the *Nocturne* with the Nightbringer. There must be some sort of connection.

I do not know what to do now, Penny. I've spent the last twelve hours hovering about our apartment as a ghost. I stopped bothering to interrupt you, for fear that my constant and startling presence would only give you a heart attack. At least ten times now we have “met,” and on each occasion it was as though you had never met me before. I know that this couldn't possibly be an act. There is no more sunshine left in your eyes. Nothing in your spirit recognizes me. I am but a shadow to you, a shadow that loves you no less than he did the day that we said our vows. At least I remember them, and that's all that matters. For it means that I must find a way to undo what's been done. Luna and I ushered a great darkness into this world. Surely, with the Nightbringer, I should be more than capable of restoring what's been lost. Perhaps I will even be able to salvage the Princess from this “Nightmare Moon” that has taken hold of her spirit.

Yes. Yes, it's coming to me now. A possible solution. If everypony in this city forgets me—including my own wife—then it means I'm speaking to the wrong equines. I must meet with an

immortal alicorn. I must speak with Princess Celestia directly. She's been alive since the dawn of time, when the Cosmic Matriarch's voice was powerful enough to alter reality. A piece of that very same magic is in my possession. I hold the Nightbringer. If I hoof it over to Celestia directly, she may be able to undo this horror. She can finish the nightmare, and you and I will be reunited, my beloved Penny.

Rumor is that she's returned to the capital to assess the damage and strategize a counter-attack to the new Lunar Empire. I have no time to waste. Please continue to wait for me a little bit longer, Penumbra. I shall return to you, and together we will experience a new dawn together, refreshed and resurrected unto hope.

-Alabaster

June the Tenth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I am outside the gates to the Palace. It's less cold here. I feel energized. It's now or never. This cursed state I'm in: it should afford me a mystical form of stealth. If I pace myself carefully, I should be able to take advantage of each group of guards and their amnesiac spells. Sneaking my way into Celestia's war room will be akin to skipping across a pond over a series of sporadically placed stones. The only thing I must be cautious of is my tenuous bravery. I've never liked conflict, and this is undoubtedly going to involve coming to blows—or near blows—with many a guard unhappy to see a sarosian in the flesh, winged or not. And if all else fails, I have the Nightbringer with me to win their favor, or at least distract them. Celestia, give me strength. I'm coming to deliver you the key to Equestria's salvation. I only hope I'm not too late.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

June the Twelfth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I'm still recovering from the terrible shock that the explosion caused. My ears ring constantly. I'm lucky I haven't gone deaf.

Sadly, I never got to meet with Princess Celestia. As soon as I arrived at her Palace, a gigantic explosion engulfed the military wing. Apparently Princess Luna had anticipated her transformation to Nightmare Moon, and the lengths to which her older sister would resist her. Already, the Canterlot Guard is describing the bomb as something of sarosian design. The Lunar Empire has stooped to an all-new low. It wasn't enough that Nightmare Moon shed the blood of innocents in the streets of Canterlot. She's now resorted to attempting the outright murder of her sibling.

Yes, I do emphasize “attempting,” for as nefarious as Luna's tactic was, it ultimately failed. Princess Celestia is alive. There's not a single scratch on her. I wish I could say the same about her military cabinet. Several key generals in the Canterlot Defense Initiative are dead. This moment in Equestrian History keeps getting darker and darker.

I've since returned to the apartment, hanging in the shadows of the balcony, encumbered by the stench of death, anchored to your distant and vacant stares. I swear you've seen me at least half-a-dozen times since I've returned, but it's almost as if you no longer register my existence, whether you remember me or not. I don't remember a time when I've seen you so detached, so full of depression and ennui.

How alone you must be, my beloved. Your husband no longer exists, and I'm starting to think he never has as well. Everything I write turns invisible to ponies around me. I've tried spelling my name out in the street, knocking things over, setting rubble on fire in a desperate attempt to get

survivors to notice me. Every physical thing I've done is either ignored or excused as freakish happenstance. There's no denying it: I've been magically robbed of the ability to prove my existence. Ponies remember me for a few minutes or a few hours at most, but then I am once again nothing.

I've tried educating you as well, Penumbra. I've eased your frightened spirit, sat next to you, and stared into your eyes as I told you my life story, *our* life story, again and again. I know that the most you can commit to is a hollow belief, an acceptance of something that could—at best—be the utter fabrication of a desperate, sarosian stranger. I can share with you the knowledge of our legacy, but I can never spark within you the sincerity or the love. Our union has vanished, and I fear that your joy has gone with it. With each subsequent moment I reveal myself to you, you respond with less and less vigor, as if the part of you that recognizes death and decay is the only thing that remembers me.

When we last were together, there was a color to your coat, a rosiness to your cheeks. I knew that you wanted to tell me something, like I wanted to tell you so many dear things. Now, I fear that we may never get that chance. I don't know what's to become of me; I hardly care. I stand here and I look at you in the shadows, and I see you becoming one with the darkness. Could a part of you be searching for your husband, for that soul you once loved in the nights of Whinniepeg, that you are now drifting into bitter blackness in a blind attempt to find that part of you forever missing?

Why don't you leave the apartment? Why don't you abandon the empty bowers of the Midnight District and join the other ponies in the relief effort? There is nothing for you here, Penny. I don't know why you stay. I want to help you. I try to help you. But you barely have the energy to move anywhere. Are you sick? Did the elegies curse you too? Are we so joined, so connected, that a part of me dragged you into the same depths of frost and horror that have consumed me?

I can't stand to see you like this, but I don't know what to do. **My attempt to meet with Princess Celestia has failed.** After a swift ceremony to honor the fallen, she's left Canterlot to make her camp on the new frontline just beyond Blue Valley. Civil War is upon us. Equestria is burning, and I've lost the love of my life. I'd give everything up just to be sure that you don't lose yourself, Penumbra. But I don't know what to do.

Blessed Matriarch, I just don't know what to do.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

June the Eighteenth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

Something doesn't make sense.

In the depths of my new existence, I found myself turning to the Nightbringer for comfort. Plucking the strings of the magical instrument—it would seem—awoke something inside of me. I wonder why I hadn't thought of utilizing the corporeal song of the Cosmic Matriarch before.

Something doesn't make sense about **the explosion that went off in Celestia's Palace**. For one thing, the expressed nature of the bomb doesn't match traditional sarosian design. Furthermore, how could Luna have found the time to set up the explosive? During the time it was said to have been planted, **she was writing the Nocturne with me**.

I don't know why I'm thinking of this all of the sudden. Again, I think it might be due to my possession of the Nightbringer. Carrying it empowers me, in spite of the frozen pariah that I have become. I feel as if there is something I'm overlooking, something that I can and must discover.

I look back and I realize that I never did quite perform the entire *Nocturne*. At least, if I did, I lost memory of the event immediately upon playing the "*Threnody of Night*." Did I perform "*Twilight's Requiem*," the "*Desolation Elegy*," and "*Dawn's Advent*" afterwards? Or did Princess

Luna finish the rest of the symphony in my stead? If so, why is it that I possess the Nightbringer and not her?

If there's anything that you've taught me about science, Penumbra, it's that a true scientist knows the importance of repeating an experiment to achieve results. That is what I must do right now. If I never got as far as performing "*Twilight's Requiem*," then I must make that my immediate goal. However, I can't do that here, not in the midst of this pain and destruction. I must return to the place that the experiment began. I must return to Princess Luna's wing of the Palace, assuming it still stands **after the terrible explosion that the bomb caused.**

I only regret that I must leave you to do this. It's not something that will be easy, nor is waiting around here and watching you suffer. And you are suffering, Penny. There's no denying it, but there's no explaining it either. Your body's growing weak. Your limbs are shuffling slower and slower. I don't know why this is happening to you, and Celestia knows I've done all I can to nurse you back to health. I've appeared to you under the guise of a Canterlot relief worker. Naturally, it's taken a great deal of tact on my behalf to make you look past my sarosian exterior, but I've managed to get you to see sunlight, to eat, even to visit the local infirmary.

Nothing seems to be working. All I've done for the past two days is hover around you, a ghost helpless to bring healing to the mare that he so lovingly haunts.

That's why I know I must take this drastic step. If Celestia can't help me, and if Luna is now a phantom of rampant destruction, then I must take the solution to this curse in my own hooves. If I can unlock the venomous power of the *Nocturne*, through the power of these last unplayed elegies, then maybe—just maybe—I can cleanse the taint that has turned me invisible, and has rendered you an invalid.

Not once will I stop writing. This journal may appear invisible to everypony, but I trust that it won't be that way forever. Equestria must know what has actually transpired here. If I am to take the blame for Princess Luna becoming Nightmare Moon, then so be it. I don't care what happens to me, so long as you are restored to your health, my beloved Penny. I shall bring you back. I shall bring everything back. This, I promise.

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

June the Twenty-First, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

It's taken a great deal of physical and mental effort, but I've arrived once more at the Palace. I employed the same tactics I anticipated using when I first attempted to reach Celestia. I only hope an explosive doesn't go off once again under my nose. Surely fate can't be *that* damnably cruel.

I've snuck my way into the Lunar Wing. Just ten minutes ago, I arrived at Princess Luna's quarters. I'm amazed at how untouched everything is. Things are in the same disarray as when I was last here. The same books are splayed open across the floor and tables. The same scrolls and notes are dangling off of the Princess' workbench. There's even a stain on the floor in the hall outside where I awoke in a mysterious puddle of water eleven days ago.

The details of my surroundings aren't important. What matters is that I've returned. It's remarkably warm here in the center of my accursed prison. I have a fresh set of sound stones laid

two. I brought a hoof to my horn, and shrieked at the scorching contact. It was like my magical leylines were burning a torch at the end of my cranium. I glanced down at my journal, and I saw that I had furiously scribbled two pages worth of words, all repeating the same phrase over and over again. No wonder my horn is nearly burnt out. How quickly did I write those words, and for what purpose? Was I entranced yet again?

It's taken me several minutes of resting and meditating before I could summon the telekinesis to write once again. And yet, I don't know what to write about. I played "*Twilight's Requiem*." That much I know. What happened afterwards is a blur. All I remember is a sudden and irreversible migraine and...

Must stop writing for a moment.

-Comethoof

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This is incredible. The books all around me—the ancient and mysterious tomes that Princess Luna had gathered from all across Equestria—are no longer blank. There are words on them. I don't know why I never saw them before. They shimmer with an otherworldly luminescence. The language predates Basic Equine, and yet I can read them as if I was taught their syntax from my foalhood. They speak of shadows, souls, and songs between the Firmaments. They also speak of a **singer**, as beautiful as she is **dreadful**. **She** guards over the forgotten. **She** mourns for **her** beloved, who is never to return. What's more, when I glance back at the last two pages of my own journal, I find that the repeated phrases I've written glow with the same supernatural quality as the words of Luna's tomes.

Wait. Could it be...?

No time to write. I must read.

-Comethoof

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My head hurts again. I went back over the last few entries I've written. I read the parts where I detailed **the bomb that blew up before I could meet with Princess Celestia**. It was then that something happened. I recognized the words that I had written—or at least thought I had written. But then, I started to see through them, beyond them, as if my vision was being siphoned down a deathly funnel of ice and chains and lightning.

I was unprepared for the flood of memories that assaulted me. I fell to the floor, the room shimmering from the burning glow of my horn as the truth bled back into my leylines. There was no **explosion**. There was no **bomb**. I met with Princess Celestia. I know this. I know this because it happened. I snuck past the guards. I slipped past the Sun Goddess' amnesiac line of defense. I stood before her and her entire military cabinet with the Nightbringer in my hooves. I told her the truth. I told her about the *Nocturne*. What's more—when she asked me what happened—I felt it was necessary to show her. In the end, for whatever reason, I was motivated to perform the symphony once more, in her presence instead of Luna's.

What resulted was the destruction of that particular wing of the Palace. But it wasn't a sarosian **bomb**. Rather, it was Princess Celestia herself. I am writing down the absolute truth here, the truth that I now know as clear as day. Before I had even reached the *Threnody*, something seeded deep in Princess Celestia's spirit responded violently to the *Nocturne*, and pure solar energy burst outward from her being, as if she was attacking everything in sight. I was too shocked by her blatant destruction to even scream. When I came to, I believed that it was all **because of a sarosian bomb**, and that's exactly what I wrote in my journal... or what I thought I wrote.

But obviously I wasn't alone. Everypony inside and outside of Canterlot—including those witnesses who were there to witness Celestia and the military advisers who died around her—believe that it was **a bomb that destroyed** that part of the palace. It wasn't just my memory that was altered, but everypony's memory. History was rewritten, just like the *Nocturne* was brought into being. But something isn't quite right about that either. Why is it that these memories are becoming clear to me? Does it have something to do with all of the glowing letters I now see? Did "*Twilight's Requiem*" bring this about?

There is only one way to find out. I have more reading to do. More specifically, my entry about the first performance of the "*Nocturne of the Firmaments*." Will that also have changed, I wonder?

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

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Every time I try to breathe, I only want to vomit. Can't write. Can't think. Must wait. Must recover. Will write. Just not now. Not now.

Blessed Matriarch, protect me, protect us all.

-Me

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I just woke up. I wish I was asleep. I wish the nightmare wasn't real. But it is real. It's burned into my brain. There is no removing it now. There is no forgetting the truth, not for me at least. I have the ears for the songless, eyes for the unblessed, hooves for the souls enslaved by the eternally forgotten now.

When I wrote that I woke up after the performance of the *Nocturne in a puddle of water*, I only wished that was the only truth. Reality is far darker than all the shadows of time mixed together.

I have been someplace. I have been someplace cold and terrible and without measure.

I was alone there, and yet I wasn't. There were bodies—shells that once housed souls—and they were strung together in clusters of rusted chains stretching onward into infinity. Between the eternal thunder and flashes of lightning, seas of ice-cold water spun like cyclones between platforms of impenetrable metal. There were ponies strapped to these purgatorial machines, and they were too busy singing a haunted chorus to even register the lengths of their torture.

And then *she* was there. *She* has always been there. *She* has always been watching us. *Her* beloved came and went, and yet *she* stayed there—in the limbo between Firmaments—wailing *her* endless song.

For it is *her* song. The “*Nocturne of the Firmaments*” is *her* song. It has always been *her* song. It was written for *her*, to protect *her*, to imprison *her*, and to protect us. And when Princess Luna and I dredged this forsaken symphony up from the forsaken depths, we were not *writing it*. We were discovering it.

Princess Luna... to think that I worshipped her and Celestia as the only *two* precious alicorns this world has ever known. All of that allegiance feels hollow now, stripped of meaning and purpose, which is the very crux of my current despair.

The truth is, there have not always been *two* alicorns. There have been *three*. When the Cosmic Matriarch shattered herself, she became four entities.

There is a *third alicorn*. There is a *second daughter*, a *middle child*. Princess Celestia guards the earth. Princess Luna guards the sky. And *she*...

She guards the *unsung*. *She* is the grand Queen of the Firmaments, between the Firmaments.

She holds the universe together by tearing it all apart. I don't know if Princess Luna ever intended to do it, but in her ten years of seclusion—the Age of Shadows—she meditated too deeply, and chanced upon discovering this magical barrier between worlds. I don't know what empowered her to osmotically absorb the forbidden knowledge of this place. Perhaps it was the same connection she's always shared with the fabric of the Cosmic Matriarch's being. But she reached out to her sibling, and whatever it was that reached back poisoned her.

I was part of that bridge of communication. With the Nightbringer as my key, I unlocked the gates to the world of forgotten anguish. Princess Luna, a soul empowered by magic, could not allow herself to crumble completely under the force of the **unsung** realm. I imagine that must be why she shattered into two. The Goddess of Shadows I once worshipped had become no more. The seeds of her deconstruction had been planted long before she summoned me, but the *“Nocturne of the Firmaments”* is what finally pushed her over the edge. She's become Nightmare Moon, and now she spreads destruction over the land of Equestria. I don't know what the purpose is in this. Perhaps by razing the landscape, she seeks to paint a picture that resembles the landscape of the **unsung**. Perhaps by covering the world in endless night, she intends to turn Equestria into a blank canvas upon which she'll illustrate the forsaken song forevermore.

All I know is that Luna must have gone into this exploration in the good faith of reconnecting with something that was once lost and forgotten. But when Celestia was exposed to even a fraction of the truth—her ears filled with the **unsung** symphony, her reaction was necessarily violent, an instinctual effort to silence the instrumental and keep the barrier between the Firmaments sealed.

And it was then that she did the rest. She sang reality into a different shape to patch up the wound I had made. If the same thing had happened with Luna, then perhaps I wouldn't be here right now, cursed by the same mystical effluence that keeps the **unsung** out of everypony's collective memory. But it's too late. The damage has been done. Luna's been transformed by the same terrible sorrow that should only populate her realm, the land between Firmaments. What it's produced in this world is the terrible Nightmare Moon.

Who knows what other horrors lie lurking in the depths, but I fear that it's not worth exploring any further. I may not be an immortal alicorn, but I possess the Nightbringer. What's more, I contain the forsaken knowledge that was never meant to be unlocked by pony minds. As a result, I am a living doorway, invisible and intangible, a fleeting thought that passes through a random pony's head and then is gone like ash in the wind. The fissure between Firmaments now lies within me, for *“Twilight's Requiem”* has unlocked the truth for my eyes and my eyes alone. And as long as I am the junction for all things that exist and all things that are forgotten, I am but a bodiless spirit, doomed to haunt the permeable Firmaments, forever nameless and **unsung**.

What options do I have? I could perform the *“Threnody of Night”* again. But to what end? It would only launch me once more into her domain. I would be her puppet, just like every other pony chained to the platforms in that world of thunder and chaos. Just where did those shackled equines come from? Were they souls just like me who had been so dreadfully cursed in the past? Did they write all of the myriad of books surrounding me in Luna's study? Am I just another doomed soul in a long line of pariahs, linked together by forsaken thoughts like rusted chains suspending the world above oblivion?

Blessed Matriarch, I can't think. I can't even breathe. I must go someplace, anyplace, just so that I'm away from this room, away from these books, away from these glowing words that shine with her colorless color. I have seen a fate worse than death, and it's slowly biting into me with teeth as cold as ice.

I must go somewhere. I must go. I must...

-Doctor Alabaster Comethoof

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Good heavens. They're everywhere. I can see them now. They started fading at first, but then I took the Nightbringer and performed "*Twilight's Requiem*" again—unabashedly, in the streets—and they once more came into focus.

They were bodies. They were words. They were splashes of blood, names scattered with debris from the carnage. They weren't there before I performed the *Requiem*, but they're there now. They're all around me, all around us. Right now as I'm writing this, there's a pony hanging from a noose right above me. He's shimmering with the same aura as the re-written words in my journal, or the letters splashed across the empty tomes of Luna's study. His body is greatly decayed. I can see his skeleton, and a fine mist is wafting out—cold and vaporous. No pony else can see him. How long has he been here? What's more, how long until she finds him and drags him into the depths where he belongs in chains, under her eternal stewardship?

When will she find me? Will it be after I'm dead, or when I've collapsed and become too weak to outrun her?

I have the Nightbringer. I have my knowledge. I exist, and I must find a way out of this. Maybe it's worth the risk of playing the "*Desolation's Elegy*" and "*Dawn's Advent*." Maybe things will be different if I actually manage to play the entire *Nocturne* straight through. Maybe I can still...

Wait, what day is it?

-Comethoof

June the Twenty-Sixth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

It's been five days. Blessed Matriarch, five days have gone by. How could I have been so foolish to have been entranced that long?

Dearest Penny, I'm coming for you.

-Alabaster

June the Twenty-Sixth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

You're not at home, Penumbra. The apartment is empty. Where could you have gone in my absence? I know that fate demanded I learn what I know now, but nothing excuses my negligence in this matter.

You've been so sick. I'm worried, Penny. I don't know where you are. I must find you. I must...

A guard just flew by. I managed to flag him down. He says the former tenant of this building was taken to a field hospital in downtown two days ago. Praise Celestia. I'm coming, Penny. Please wait for me. Please wait for me, as I have always and shall always wait for you.

-Alabaster.

June the Twenty-Sixth, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

No. It doesn't make sense. None of this makes sense. Magic has rules to it. Magic can't be broken. I don't care if **she** can sing reality into a patchwork mosaic of what it was ever destined to be. This isn't real. All of my years of study and research...

I've screamed. I've screamed louder than those in the realm of the **unsung**. And yet no pony can hear me, and neither can you.

Damn Princess Luna. I don't care if the Cosmic Matriarch strikes me dead. Damn Nightmare Moon. Damn her to burning ash in the pits of Tartarus.

This doesn't make sense. It doesn't. It doesn't. It...

June the Twenty-Seventh, Year 6233 of the Harmonic Era,

I've held your hooves for the last twenty-four hours, and still they haven't moved. Every so often, a nurse strolls by, takes one look, and draws the sheet over your golden features. I've stopped fighting them. There's no point in making a scene. I just wait until she's gone, and I pull the sheet back once again. I love you. I don't ever want to stop looking at you. I don't ever want to stop holding you. I don't...

Two months, the nurses said. Two months with foal. Dearest Penumbra, why didn't you tell me? Was I that blind? Was I that encumbered by the euphoria of my new task here in Canterlot? You had to have conceived before we both set out from Whinniepeg. If I had known at the time, I would have never taken up Luna's request, Princess or not. I would have never...

It all makes sense now. I wish it didn't, but it does. Your constant lethargy. The ennui that poured out of your eyes where there was once sunlight. I had disappeared from your world. You found yourself in a stranger's house. What was more, you carried inside of you a hollow life, the seed of the **unsung**. How it must have poisoned you, torn you from the inside out, frozen you in your sleep and in your thoughts and in your sobs. All that made you whole, all that made us real: it was ripped from you. Why couldn't **her** song heal it up? Why couldn't **she** spare your life? Just because I was gone didn't mean you couldn't be alive, couldn't be a mother, couldn't be happy.

Now I understand. I carry the knowledge of the **unsung**. I am as much a danger to the fabric of reality as Luna was—before becoming Nightmare Moon changed her into a horrible despot, and yet a manageable evil. Everything that I do or say must be forgotten. Every mark I have to leave upon this world is swept away like leaves across a granite path. I must not be allowed to exist, in any fashion whatsoever.

She took our child, Penny. **She** took our child, and then **she** took you. I understand, and yet I don't understand. I can hardly write. I can only hold you and dream that all of this is just a shattered song, something that was meant to be believed in, but never real. Somewhere you are out there, invisible, as lost and as lonesome as I. We are right in front of each other, looking for each other, and all that separates us is a broken symphony.

I can patch it together. Yes, I can bring us back together again. I'm looking at these words while I'm writing them. They haven't yet transformed into the shimmering text. But that means I just need to play the *Requiem* again. It's the "*Desolation's Elegy*" that I can't seem to figure out. I remember so many things, but that instrumental has escaped my mind. Maybe it's because Princess Luna is no longer here. Maybe it's because Nightmare Moon sapped me of the notes. But it doesn't matter. I must keep searching. I have the Nightbringer. I have the *Nocturne* in my head. I can **rewrite** the song of Desolation. I just need to keep playing it over and over again, and I will reach "*Dawn's Advent*."

Then I will find you, dearest Penny. This world is a facade, as fake and full of dust as this miserable corpse lying before me, trying to convince me that it's you. Please wait for me, my beloved. You've always been so patient. I pray that I find you with your forelimbs outstretched for an embrace, instead of your body at the end of a noose. You are somewhere in this city, in this frozen prison. We are not alone. We will be together once again. We will be. We will...

-Your faithful and loving Alabaster

“From there,” I said, lowering the ancient book as I stood across the library from Twilight Sparkle. “The journals become increasingly erratic. Doctor Comethoof begins to ramble. His eloquence gives way to cyclical gibberish. It's a classic descent into madness. I've been able to spot familiar terms in the midst of the garbled mess, such as 'unsung' and 'her beloved.' But most of it is merely textual chaos. Even the diagrams stop making sense. Nowhere does Comethoof bother writing down the actual music notes to the elegies, but judging from his opinion on their mystical function, I seriously doubt he would want to, even if he assumed nopony was capable of reading what he had to write.”

“Well, forgive me for saying so, Miss Heartstrings...” Twilight remarked, her face scrunched in an unending look of confusion. “But I find all of this very hard to believe. Everypony knows from grade school and onwards that the Lunar Civil War started at the end of Shadow's Advent, with a horrible explosion being discharged in Princess Celestia's royal cabinet. What you're suggesting here is a complete re-write of Equestrian history!” A soft, afternoon light wafted through the windows of

her library and illuminated the lines in her furrowed brow. “Furthermore, all I've seen in that book of yours is a bunch of unrelated text about Whinniepeg farming methods written in Old Equine. Are you're telling me that a ‘[Doctor Alabaster Comethoof's](#)’ words somehow *appear* magically over them?”

“Yes. I imagine that long after he died, ponies found the journal in the streets of Canterlot where he was imprisoned. They thought the enchanted manuscript was blank, and so they cycled it through the national libraries for reprinting purposes until it became a Whinniepeg almanac several decades later.”

“But none of that explains how come I can't see [Comethoof's](#) words and yet you can!” Twilight exclaimed. “You seem to suggest that it's all because of some bizarre curse that he could see invisible words. How exactly is any of that related to you?”

“As strange as it may sound, Miss Sparkle, I find this to be an extremely real circumstance. What's more, [Comethoof's](#) words have taught me more about my situation than I could ever have imagined... or have cared to.”

“Situation?”

I sighed. I didn't want to tell her too much. Not now. I just wanted somepony with a penchant for history to hear me out. “Please. Tell me. What do you know about a ‘Penumbra [Comethoof](#)’ who lived in the Midnight District of Canterlot the very month of the Civil War's beginning?”

“Well, I'd gladly tell you, Miss [Heartstrings](#), if only a certain assistant didn't stop dragging his tail with fetching the records I asked for!”

As if on cue, Spike waddled into the room. He muttered something under his breath and handed a dusty old scroll to Twilight. “Here you go. I still don't understand where you get off having surprise study sessions with strangers. Don't we have a dinner party to go to at Sugarcube Corner in an hour?”

“Shhh! Just hand me the scroll, Spike! This is actually rather fascinating...”

“Yeah yeah, if you say so.” Spike glanced at me and did a double-take. “Oh. Hi there. Dig the swell hoodie.”

“Uh huh.” I glanced over at Twilight. “Anything?”

While Spike waddled away, Twilight unscrolled the parchment and read down a list of names. “Well, it *does* mention an earth pony by the name of ‘Penumbra.’”

“Yes?” I leaned forward. “And?”

“Well, that's just it.” Twilight shrugged and glanced at me. “She has no last name, married or maiden. It says here that she was living alone in a lush apartment in the upper heights of the Midnight District when Nightmare Moon's initial attacks took place.”

“Any news on how she died?”

“My Old Equine is a little rusty,” Twilight said, squinting as she read the words before her. “But it lists ‘hemolytic anemia, as a result of malnourishment during early pregnancy...’” Slowly, she glanced up from the manuscript until her eyes met mine. Any sign of deep thought was swiftly washed away by an air of pragmatism. “Ahem. But seriously, Miss **Heartstrings**, this all happened a thousand years ago. That’s a long time for history to be twisted by untrustworthy sources.”

“Don’t you find it strange that there would be a single earth pony mare living alone in a rich apartment of Canterlot, surrounded by nocturnal sarosians, with no family or spouse to provide for her? And on top of that, she dies from a simple complication of pregnancy that could very easily have been prevented by doctors who were around her at the time?”

“It was the start of the Lunar Civil War, Miss **Heartstrings**. Canterlot was burning. Supplies and resources were scarce.”

“I know. I know.” I grumbled, pacing around the library. “Nothing I do will convince you that history as we know it is wrong. Furthermore, you’ll only forget whatever it is I have to say, no matter what evidence I could even provide.”

Twilight squinted hard at that. “Wait. Just what are you meaning to imply?”

“I don’t know, Twilight. I don’t even know what to *think* anymore.” I slid a hoof out from my hoodie’s sleeve and ran it over my aching head. “I just can’t help but feel as if **Comethoof** and I are taking the same hoofsteps. After all, he made it clear that when he went directly to Princess Celestia with the *Nocturne*, not only did the meeting result in a horrific discharge of magical energy, but the entire event was completely forgotten, and instead they blamed it on a sarosian explosive.”

“Uhm...?” Twilight gulped nervously and trotted towards me. “Just what are you getting at?”

“Tell me, Miss Sparkle.” I turned and looked at her. “How many times has Princess Celestia visited Ponyville since the Summer Sun Celebration before last?”

“Uhm... Well, let's see.” Twilight scratched her chin in thought. “There was the return of Princess Luna, the tea party at Sugarcube Corner, and the Annual Running of the Leaves.” She paused briefly, then blurted, “Oh! And then there was that one time when she was scheduled to visit Ponyville, but had to **cancel at the last second on account of a parasprite infestation** several months back.” She tilted her head aside and squinted at me. “Why, Miss **Heartstrings**? You said you've been here in Ponyville for over a year. In all that time, you never once crossed paths with Princess Celestia?”

“That's just it, Twilight.” I gulped and stared into the dusty shadows of the library. “I... can't remember...”

For the longest time, I thought this curse could be ended with a simple symphony.

Now, I'm not sure of anything anymore.

Background Pony

XI - “Unsung”

by [shortskirtsandexplosions](#)

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