

At the base of the far tower, Luna was leading Dusk and Dawn out from the stairwell after having spent the afternoon studying in the observatory. They had returned to Canterlot together after leaving some get well cards with the nurse to give to Rainbow and the stranger. Something important had happened, though the twins didn't really know what.

Dawn frowned. She didn't question what their mother did for them, but she wanted was to know whatever was really going on.

On many occasions she let curiosity get the better of her. Consequently, that caused a certain amount of trouble for her. Rainbow was far more lenient about her adventurous nature than her mother was, for while Rainbow let her have more room to explore, Luna kept her close by her side. That was why she hadn't bothered asking her mom who the mysterious purple unicorn was. She wouldn't get an answer.

"Ah, Princess Luna," a unicorn said in the hallway, bowing deeply.

Dawn examined him for a moment, unable to remember who was speaking to them. After a moment, she recognized him as their former teacher, Bright Light.

"Master Bright Light!" Dusk yelled, running up to him and giving him a big hug.

"My, my, haven't you grown!" He returned the embrace warmly, ruffling her mane with a hoof.

"Headmaster Bright Light. I take it you received my message?" Luna smiled.

He let Dusk go and rose to his hooves, "Of course! I am always pleased to serve the royal house."

Dusk and Dawn looked up at Luna, Dusk far more enthusiastically than her sister.

"Girls, Aunt Rainbow isn't feeling very well after that night in the rain. The nurse says that she'll need some bed rest, which means she won't be able to look after you for a little while. So I asked if Headmaster Bright Light would like to help with your schooling." Luna paused for a breath, "It's only temporary, just until Aunt Rainbow is better."

Dusk squealed in delight, jumping up and down. Dawn rolled her eyes, turning her gaze to the floor. Luna gave her a reassuring nuzzle.

"Bright Light is an excellent teacher. He has many stories from his travels abroad. Don't you remember?"

"No..." Dawn mumbled.

Luna gave the twins a gentle push towards the stallion, while flagging down one of the guards on patrol. The guard trotted up to the princess, stopping in front of her.

"Princess?" The mare stood at attention, barely shaking her armor as she did so. Bright Light looked up, raising an eyebrow at the guard.

"Cloud Skimmer, will you take these three to the practice room? My sister wishes to speak with me shortly."

"Of course." Cloud Skimmer walked around Bright Light, "If you'd follow me."

Luna watched them walk down the hall, ensuring that they disappeared around the corner. She let out a sigh, walking slowly down a different hallway towards the throne room.

--\*--

"Excellent work, Dusk. I see that you have been practicing magic." Bright Light stood between Dawn and Dusk. Each of them was tasked with hovering a small glass ball as high as they could manage without it

wobbling.

To Bright Light's surprise, Dusk was much farther along than he had imagined for her age. Of course, from a future Princess this level of aptitude seemed correct. Her orb was at least three or four feet off of the ground, holding steadily above her.

Her sister was trying hard, but she was only achieving levels reserved for second graders and younger. Bright Light watched the orb stay steady perhaps a few inches off of the ground. It was a tad disappointing. But his expectations were set... differently for her.

"Good, Dawn. Keep focusing. Try thinking that the orb is the moon and that you are helping your mother lift it to the sky," Bright Light added. The little bit of encouragement helped slightly, as the orb rose about a foot off the ground. It held for a moment before wavering and clattering to the floor.

The stallion frowned. Dawn simply didn't have the stamina for drawn out magical exercises. He would have to try a different approach with her.

"I believe that's enough for now. Why don't you go get something to eat for lunch and take a walk in the garden? The leaves are turning such lovely colors this time of year."

Dawn nodded, while Dusk pouted.

"After lunch, I'd like to work on magic with you individually. After all, you have different interests."

The twins bounded out of the room into the hallway. Dusk ran down the hall towards the kitchens, while Dawn slowed down, stopping short at the juncture in the hallway. Seeing no sign of her sister returning, Dawn took off towards the throne room. She still hadn't shaken her curiosity about the lavender unicorn and she was now more determined than ever to find out.

She ducked down a hallway near the throne room. A group of guards walked down the main hall, passing the side hallway without a second glance. The sounds of their armor plates banging together dulled, until it was silent once more. Dawn dug her face into her wing, biting down on a little metal key and drawing it from its hiding place.

She snickered to herself for swiping the key off of the groundskeeper over the summer. Since she hadn't been caught with it yet, Dawn had used it to explore many of the hidden rooms and chambers the castle workers used on a regular basis. Some places were just for storage, mainly filled with books and odd tools she saw them using.

The room she was standing in front of was much cooler. She inserted the key and unlocked the door. She slipped inside, making sure that the door shut without a sound.

Inside hung a set of poles with large, claw-like ends. A few boxes were piled in the back corner, but had long since been emptied. The most interesting part of the room, however, was a steep staircase which led into the crawl space above the throne room's red carpet.

As she trudged along the wide tunnel, she did her best to shield her eyes from the hanging lights. The tunnel was designed for earth ponies to replace those lights, but it also allowed her to listen in on "royal business".

She tucked herself into the end of the crawlspace, which hovered above the carpeted circle, just before the actual throne. Some of the lights here were still broken, making it easier for her to see the floor below.

"Are you sure its alright to let her go?" Dawn recognized that as her mother's voice almost immediately. She was addressing two ponies who were unfortunately obscured by the light fixture. Dawn did her best to get into a better position, but she still couldn't see.

"Of course." That voice belonged to Celestia, "I wouldn't want her to go alone or with a stallion she

doesn't know."

"Relax Luna," a blue pegasus walked into the forefront. Dawn shoved a hoof into her mouth to stop from shouting. Aunt Rainbow was standing in the throne room. She didn't even look sick, as her mother had claimed. "Me and Twilight will be fine. We'll be back before you know it. If you're so worried, we can bring AJ along for the ride. She's already offered to come with us."

Dawn's breathing stopped cold. Wasn't her other mom's name Twilight? She had read plenty about her in books. Even Rainbow's story was as fresh in her mind as the day she heard it. She leaned her head over the edge of the tunnel in a last ditch effort to get a good look at the other pony.

It paid off. The lavender unicorn stepped into Dawn's view, smiling despite the obvious restraint on her horn. "As long as this is on to stop any more of those crazy bursts of magic, I'm sure we'll be fine. Besides, I'd just like to see our fillies."

"I'm afraid you will have to wait a little longer." Celestia's spoke once more. She sounded sad, "I'll have the wagon ready for you by this evening. If Applejack wishes to join you, she'll have to be here by midnight. You'll leave then."

"Thank you, Princess," Twilight said.

"Be safe, my faithful student."

One of Celestia's guards led Twilight and Rainbow Dash from the room. Dawn crawled along the tunnel, trying to get another glimpse of the unicorn before she reached the doors. She was entranced by her new found parent, but conflicted by her mother's lies. Why would her mother lie to her about something so important? More importantly, what else had she lied about?

--\*--

Bright Light entered the practice room for the last time that evening. His session with Dusk had been very fruitful. There were so many questions that she had about magic, he had trouble getting her to agree to learning the basics. She was without a doubt one of the most curious fillies he had ever taught in his career at the School for Gifted Unicorns. It was simply a matter of time before she would be pleading to stay in Canterlot.

Dawn was sitting on the floor, rolling the glass orb back and forth between her hooves. He wasn't sure it was possible to see a struggling student who was less excited about studying magic.

"Dawn? Are you ready to start?"

"Uh-huh..." Dawn muttered absent mindedly. She stopped the orb between her fore-hooves.

"We won't be doing anything with the orb this evening. You can set that aside for now." Bright Light hovered a few books over to one of the tables in the room. He walked over to the table, beckoning her to follow.

Reluctantly, she rose to her hooves and trudged over to the table. Spread out were several different books, each with a different kind of magic outlined in the title. She glanced at each title, rejecting them almost as soon as they registered with her brain.

"These books detail the most important schools of magic: Illusion, Telekinesis, Alteration, and Elemental. Each of them function very differently from one another, yet at the heart of each school, they are connected. That is why everypony has the potential to learn more than one school of magic. Is there one in particular you would like to start with? One that catches your interest perhaps?" Bright Light looked down at his pupil. She was completely removed from whatever he was trying to say.

"None of these interest me," she replied. Her expression stayed flat.

The books flew back to their appropriate place on the shelves, "Then perhaps you would like to tell me what you are interested in. Is something on your mind?"

Dawn nodded.

The magic glow faded from his horn. "Would you like to talk about it?"

She shook her head.

"Why not?"

"I'll get in trouble if mom finds out."

Bright Light looked at her quizzically, "Finds out about what?"

"Things."

Bright Light sat down on the floor next to Dawn. He placed a reassuring hoof on her shoulder, "As your teacher, I have a lot of knowledge that might be able to help you. I won't tell Princess Luna if it makes you feel better."

A moment of silence passed between them. Deep inside the facade of Bright Light, Cunning was itching for a new opportunity to expand his control. He knew that the twins would be the easiest to manipulate. It was simple and best of all, it didn't even require magic.

"... Do you promise?"

"Of course."

She hesitated for a moment before she began, "I saw my mom today."

"Did you have a fight with your mother?"

"No. I mean... I saw Twilight Sparkle, my other mom."

Bright Light looked taken aback, going into deep thought on about this revelation.

"They're sending her far away tonight, but they all sounded so sad about doing it."

"Who sounded sad?"

She leaned to the side, "Mom, Aunt Celestia, and Aunt Rainbow. But what was confusing was that mom said Aunt Rainbow was sick. That's why you're here to teach us."

Bright Light nodded.

"Does mommy not want us to see Twilight? All the books we read say she died. But... I definitely saw her."

Bright Light gazed into the far wall of the room, pretending to run through his thoughts. Deep down, there was only one solution for this opportunity.

"There is a story that I know that may help. Would you like to hear it?"

Dawn nodded.

"Once upon a time, many years before Equestria, there were two fair princesses and their baby sister. They lived in a grand castle with the King and Queen, who ruled their land with a just hoof.

"Now these princesses were friends with the sons of another King. Both of these brothers longed for the eldest sister, but she could not decide which brother she loved more. So the king asked the two of them to do something very special for her."

*"Go to the King of the Dragons, Therenweil, and become his students. Learn all the magic you can before you come of age and when you return, show me what you have learned." Celestia stood in the corridor of her castle, her pink mane blowing in the wind.*

*Before her stood two alicorn stallions each bowing low. They rose simultaneously smiling with pride.*

*"I will not disappoint you, love of my heart," one said.*

*"Nor will I, my sweet," spoke the other.*

*She smiled at both of them, "Just remember that I care for you both, no matter what comes of this challenge. If I had the choice I would have you both. But..."*

*Each of the brothers put a hoof around her neck.*

*"It is not easy for us either. Right, Cunning?"*

*"Not at all, Discord," Cunning replied. "But we would brave any challenge to show our love for you, even if nothing comes of it."*

*"But we are willing to take that chance. We have always won at games of chance." Discord smiled and let go of her shoulder.*

"Each of the brothers went to the King of the Dragons, to learn some magic to win over the princess' heart. The first brother asked for the power to change things around him to whatever he willed. The king told him that it would change the way he looked, but the prince claimed he would do anything to use that power for his love."

*"Celestia will love me no matter what I look like. I will happily trade, King Thereweil." Discord stood regal before the king, bowing in respect for the king's kindness.*

*"So be it." The king boomed.*

"The other brother asked for the power to do anything anyone else could do."

*"Hmm." The King clawed at his neck, scraping along his scales, "I can teach you that power, but... it comes with a higher cost."*

*"Anything is worth it, your majesty." Cunning bowed low.*

*"Indeed? The cost is your cutie mark. You will never be able to earn your special talent."*

*"But in trade? A special talent where I can utilize any power or talent in the world. It is a fair trade in my eyes."*

*"So be it."*

"They spent several years studying for the princess. When the time came they returned to show her their gifts. The first brother used his magic to turn a field of dirt and muck into rolling hills filled with wild flowers and roses.

"The second brother used the power of her father, the king, to fill the sky with clouds, drawing the symbols of his love.

"Of course the princess loved each of their displays equally. But it was not her choice. While the king thought both feats of magic were indeed impressive, he chose the first brother.

"This confused the second brother, who asked why he did not win the challenge with a larger feat of magic. The king replied that rather than study power for himself, the second brother had chosen to study how to become someone else."

Silence passed through the room. Dawn looked up at Bright Light, a little bit of confusion still on her face.

"Did the story not help?" Bright Light asked.

"I'm not sure what the brothers have to do with what I heard."

"Your sister studies hard, Dawn. But she is very willing to be told what to learn and to do what others have done, rather than to create something new.

"You, on the other hoof, explore new things in order to discover the things that make you happy," he poked her playfully on the nose. She giggled a little. "Perhaps all you need to do is explore a little by yourself. Or in the words of the first brother, 'Add a little chaos', Dawn."

She smiled, "Ok."

"Good. Now I'm going to let you go early, but I want to hear what new and exciting things you have done. Ok?"

She didn't nod. Instead she hugged the older stallion, "Thank you, Bright Light." She let go and ran out of the practice room into the hallway.

A wicked smile shot across Bright Light's face. This was going to be interesting.

--\*--

The garden was filled with the sounds of insects singing their songs of autumn. The night sky was filled with clouds, blocking much of the light from the full moon. The light that did manage to escape flowed down from the sky, piercing the night with pillars of pale white. The gardener was whistling into in the cool air as he put away his tools to go home for the night. But while he believed that there was no pony in the gardens, something stirred within the fields of green.

Tonight there was a visitor.

Far from the castle, deep within the labyrinth, a soft popping noise was muffled by the high walls. He spread his wings as the magic subsided from his horn. Cunning had memorized this place: a location covered with vines, complete with four small braziers and a gazebo. Everything he needed for this evening was here. Plus, it was the perfect spot to go unnoticed.

He summoned his magic once more, lifting the braziers over to him. Three of them caught fire, illuminating the dark space, while the other simply settled down before him. From under his wing, he produced a small pouch, filled with a few small strands of blue hair. He dropped them in the unlit brazier.

A quiet guttural hissing ushered from his mouth. It grew to short, unintelligible syllables with far more force and volume than his other persona. The liquid in the last bowl burst into flames, shifting from a normal color into a sickly green.

"O' dragon hunters high with eagle's vision, narrow my sight upon my prey," Cunning growled.

The oil rose from its vessel, spinning wildly in front of the alicorn. As it spun, the liquid spread itself to its limits, becoming almost as thin as a scroll. The green flames siphoned off to the sides to form a circular border around the mirror-like surface. An image flickered to life on the surface.

An image of Dawn, pressed up against a wall came into view.

"And what might you be doing, Dawn?" He whispered to himself.

The blue filly looked around the corner.

She was staring into one of the lower entrances to Canterlot's streets. The archway had one guard on either end of the opening. The room itself was no more than an empty stone chamber that looked very old and probably poorly maintained. Probably.

The only other item of interest was a small carriage, built to hold two or three ponies inside. It had an extension for luggage on the back that was more than large enough to hide in. She looked around again –

there were no other guards.

Her wings unfolded from her sides. She flapped them furiously, lifting herself a few inches off of the ground. Slowly, she pushed herself across the hallway, pulling her hooves up as far from the floor as possible. Sweat began to bead all over her coat. The lessons on flying from Aunt Rainbow were paying off today.

When she touched down behind the carriage, voices began to echo from where she came. Panicking, she opened one of the flaps for luggage and dove inside. The pouch she had chosen was filled with scrolls, which she pulled from beneath her as best she could so she was covered.

"I still don't see why I can't pull this here wagon," Dawn recognized Applejack's voice. She was in deep trouble if she got caught now, "Won't three of us be too much for you ta pull?"

"Not at all, Miss Applejack." Dawn knew the voice, but couldn't place a name to it. He was one of the guards, that much she knew.

"Well, alright. Just holler if you need a hand, sugar cube," Applejack replied.

One by one, she felt three ponies entering the carriage above her. After about a minute or so, the cart lurched forward and drove out into the night.

"How deliciously predictable, Dawn," Cunning laughed. His voice had returned to normal after the spell. The oil mirror faded to nothing and the green flames went out. "It appears that you've done my work for me. As expected, of course."

His horn glowed once more and the other fires went out. He replaced the braziers in their proper locations, before passing through the nearest hedge. The stallion moved like a ghost towards the castle, passing through walls like mist while he mused to himself.

Eventually he arrived outside of the Labyrinth, staring at the line of statues. A smile worked its way across his lips, "Ah the games we play, my dear Celestia. With one hoof you protect your kingdom," he raised his fore-hoof. "But with your horn you crush dissension."

His horn suddenly burst with light, releasing a huge amount of power into the night air. The statues shook imperceptibly at first, then more violently as the magic increased. The earth rumbled and vibrated under the influence of the magic. The light became blinding as Cunning's magic filled the air. It engulfed the entire garden, glowing as bright as the sun.

Then, it was over.

Cunning was gone... and so were the statues.