

"Twilight?"

The purple unicorn rolled onto her side. Something was wrong, but she couldn't place it. Last thing she remembered was the ruins...

"Dawn!" She rolled onto her hooves and moved into a defensive stance. Her eyes widened in fear.

Books lined the walls of the room she was in, ever reaching into the sky, with no end in sight. But the shelves were covered in dust and it appeared as though many of the books had been scattered all over the floor.

She tried to lift a few with her magic, but they didn't budge; more specifically, her magic didn't work.

"Hello?" she called out. Her voice echoed in the room, traveling upwards into the sky. No response.

Hesitantly, she walked over to one of the shelves. She jumped back when the wood wilted and peeled away, like the flaps of a tent. Behind it, was a replica of her bedroom at the library, with a new view of the ocean.

My first trip to the beach, she thought.

As she walked over to the window she could see herself and her brother playing in the sand, while her mother and father basked in the sun. Hundreds of other ponies played on the beach or in the water, seemingly ignorant to the happy family.

"Twily! Heads up!" her brother shouted.

The young colt passed a beach ball to her, which she ducked underneath and passed back. As he launched it back over, her filly-self disappeared from the memory. The three ponies looked around frantically for her, as Twilight finally pounded on the window.

"I'm up here!"

The ponies in the memory started to cry, holding one another for comfort. They were older now - at her funeral. She could see her brother in his decorations as a soldier. Her parents were sobbing uncontrollably.

Twilight screamed over and over, slamming her hooves into the glass. She was crying now. Not from watching her own funeral, but from the fact that it already happened. How could she explain her sudden appearance? Would they welcome her back? Would they talk to her?

She turned around and bucked the window as hard as she could. The glass shattered under the weight of the blow, but so did the floor, the room and her surroundings. Everything was black and she was falling - falling into nothing.

She never even saw the ground when she finally slammed into it. A barely audible cry was all she could manage - the pain was overwhelming. The little weight she put on her hooves, wasn't enough to lift her from the ground.

In the dark, Twilight could hear hoof steps closing in on her position.

"Hello?" she cried weakly.

"I'm here for you my love," the voice responded.

Out of the inky blackness, Luna slowly came into view. With her magic, she lifted Twilight to her hooves and moved in to help her stand. Twilight put her weight on Luna's side leaning into her for balance. "Luna... Where am I?"

Luna began to summon her magic once more. "The place where all dreams intersect: The Void, as some have carelessly called it. Its true name is unknown to us, but it has special properties."

As soon as the spell dissipated, the void slowly warped around them, morphing into a small white room with a single door. Luna pushed it open, letting fresh sunlight pour into the room. Twilight hesitated, but eventually went through the door.

She found herself in a field of flowers with the light scent of lavender carried on the summer breeze. The forest swayed back and forth; the trees sighed as their branches bent under the added strain. They were on a field overlooking the city of the alicorns... and it was alive.

"Time and place are meaningless here, Twilight. This is what the land truly is - the spirits of those who have passed continue to embody their elements. Their children - the three types of ponies - each have a piece of their element. They too go here when they die."

Twilight's blood ran cold. "Am I...?"

Luna realized her mistake immediately. "No, no, no. Of course not. You are here as my guest. In the real world, you slumber to recover from your injuries."

"Oh, good," Twilight sighed in relief.

Luna frowned. "Twilight... I, um..." The princess shuffled her hooves back and forth. "I wish to confess something."

Twilight raised an eyebrow.

"I brought you here so that you could visit me... as I won't be able to see you again."

Twilight's mouth went dry. "But you said I wasn't dead? Oh, no. Am I not going to wake up? What about Dawn?!"

Luna pressed a hoof to Twilight's lips. "I have been forced into the Eversleep."

"Wha- what?" Twilight gasped.

"Cunning suffocated my body by sealing it in stone and leaving it without sufficient air. Thus I am forced to sleep until I am free."

Twilight fell into a sitting position. Her mind was racing at high speeds, jumping from problem to problem. The twins, Celestia, Equestria, them.

Twilight stopped herself short. What were they? She had never quite stopped to think much on it. They were parents, albeit from necessity.

"Twilight."

She looked back up at Luna, running right into her waiting lips. The kiss knocked any verbal response right out of her brain. The goddess of the moon broke away, tenderly nuzzling her mane. "I know I can't ask you to wait for me... but at least during the evenings while you sleep, we can be together."

Luna put a hoof to her chest and pushed her gently into the air. Twilight flailed, trying to get back to the ground.

"Please, come back to me!" Luna cried, as Twilight was pulled back into the dark.

Twilight slowly opened her eyes. Her head was pounding so hard she thought it would burst. Consequently, she could barely make out the fact that a huge purple dragon was resting its head on her makeshift bed. It opened one eye, making her freeze in place.

Does it see me? She thought.

"Twilight!" the dragon boomed. "You're awake!"

Before she had enough time to react, the dragon picked her up into his arms, squeezing the air from her. Her mind was swimming from the combination of headache and lack of air.

"I'm so happy to see you again. I knew Princess Celestia would figure it out!"

She looked confusedly at the purple scales coming into sharper focus, before she was placed back onto her hooves. Her body swayed back and forth until she found the edge of the bed. A small gasp escaped her lips. "Spike?"

He smiled. She tried to form words, but she was speechless. Instead she started to cry as she rushed into his waiting embrace. They said nothing for a long time, simply enjoying the touch, the feel of one another. It was enough for them.

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Redcrest had been sitting at his desk for hours. Since the complete dissolution of the senate due to the attack, he had to return to his own district to assume a leadership position. That meant sitting at that very desk, listening to every possible problem to come his way.

The one main problem was the return to small states - one of the most pressing problems he had to deal with. Several attempts to recreate a senate fell short. Some, fearing they had witnessed the beginning of the end times, had declared themselves sovereign to avoid becoming involved. Several others who were survivors of the battle and had witnessed the unicorn fall dead, allied themselves among two factions. His own - which understood the warning, but were wary of the actions of the princess - especially as they seemed out of character since the attack. The other was adamant of allying or even becoming part of Equestria. They felt the Princess was their only safe haven since the emperor was dead. Some states of opposing thoughts had already begun small border clashes. His reports on the Princess' most recent announcement did not help his cause.

He looked out the window, watching the first snowflakes begin to fall on his northern state. Gryffons were quickly clearing the street to put up large tents for the market.

Is it already morning? He thought, rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand. He had hoped the amount of diplomatic mail he needed to sort through would leave him with more time for sleep. That was not going to be the case, however, because of the most recent speech from Princess Celestia. Equestria had postured itself so it was ready to take down the world. The scary part was not

that they could, but that they probably would.

Redcrest leaned back in his chair, hoping that sleep would take him from his work. He didn't want to continuously explain to the Equestrian diplomats that they were allies, just not on friendly terms with the other side of the issue. In his opinion, the princess needed to stay out of their affairs as she had always promised to do - as she still promised to do, regardless of those states trying to become part of her country.

For now all he had to worry about were his own allies and his smaller version of the senate - a simple council of ten composed of himself and the other generals who still took his side. They still flew the flag of the empire and followed its rules, but still had no steward for the supposed empress Emerus mentioned with his dying breath.

"Gilda Razortalon," he whispered.

A soft knock on the door stopped his thoughts from wandering further. "Come in," he called.

The door swung open allowing one of the interns to shuffle into the room. A small mail bag hung around her neck, as did a pair of high altitude goggles. She had snow white feathers and a light gray fur coat - a northerner. Her height was a dead giveaway that she was perhaps in her first year learning how to be a good politician.

"Stuck with mail duty, eh?"

The intern nodded.

"Bring it over here."

She produced several scrolls from the pouch and placed them neatly on his desk. He opened the first one, scanning through the document.

"All but the last one are from the state. The other one is from Equestria, since the diplomats went back home a few days ago," she said, pointing at the scroll.

He eyed her carefully, before nodding curtly. "Thank you. Please let the day staff know that I am delaying any hearings until this afternoon."

The intern nodded again and left the room. After a moment or two, he rose from his desk and pulled the curtains shut. He slid through the only other door in the room, entering his bedroom. With much relief, he locked the door and slid into the bed, getting some much needed sleep.

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Rainbow hadn't cooled off from her outburst yesterday. She had disappeared for hours into the thermals, exploring every cave, home, garden and outcropping they were linked to. Anger blinded her so badly that she was only just realizing something notable about the place - it was almost completely abandoned.

Out of the dragons she had seen in the building, she could count them all on her primary feathers with a few to spare. Five dragons in a city that could probably accommodate thousands - it didn't sit very well with her. Every bit of it seemed like a trap, but they were safe. Dawn was resting

from the King's life-saving magic, Spike was watching over Twilight-

She kicked her back hoof into the nearest rock, chipping a few pieces of it. Her breath came in loud snorts. "That... that..." she let out an exasperated growl. The words were barely forming in her head before her mouth rattled them off into the open air. Finally, she shook her head and dove headfirst into the lake.

The cool refreshing water shocked her system immediately forcing her to shiver from the rapid change in temperature. Her anger had been replaced by a familiar sense of panic that she was running out of air, but as she broke the surface it faded to the back of her mind. Now, there was silence - peace, even in her troubled mind. The problems seemed to slide from her coat like the weeks of dirt she'd cleaned the night before. All she needed now was a nice preening and she'd be in heaven.

It seemed like hours passed by as she relaxed in the cool water, or on the warm grass, basking in the sun. Her thoughts drifted with the gentle breeze. *What happened to the dragons?* she wondered. *It seems so strange... if only Twilight was awake, I'd...*

She sighed. *No. If I want to talk to that egghead, I'm going to give her a piece of my mind. Almost killing herself? AGAIN? It was bad enough that she died once - saving our flanks - but she would do it again?* "Why would she leave me alone?"

"Why would who do what?"

Rainbow looked up from her spot on the shore. Applejack was completely soaked and half submerged in the lake. Her long mane and tail were undone and floating in the water, glistening in the sunlight.

"Nothing," Rainbow said. She closed her eyes, laying her head back on the grass.

"Sure don't sound like nothin'." Applejack slogged her way out of the lake, picking up her mane-ties and stetson in her teeth. She slowly trotted over to the pegasus and lay down next to her.

After a while, Rainbow opened an eye to the hard stare Applejack was giving her. She had already tossed the stetson and mane-ties aside. "What?"

"Why don't you talk to me? I've been here for you through this whole mess a whole lot longer than when Twi' came back," she said. "You look as torn up as a field after a good weedin'. Actually, I ain't seen you like this in a long time."

Rainbow looked away from the orange mare.

"Talk to me, sugar cube. What's goin' on?"

Silence.

"Please, Rainbow?"

"I'm so angry with Twilight right now. I mean she comes back and we go on this crazy adventure and while everything is falling apart around us, she tries to fix something and almost sends herself back under that statue!" Rainbow rose to her hooves, pacing along the grass. "She has everything back - her friends, her fillies, Luna..." She nearly choked on the word. Her insides tightened at the thought of their coming reunion. "I just don't know if I'll ever get the chance to tell her."

Applejack closed her eyes and leaned back against the grass.. “You could go talk to her. I heard Gilda sayin’ she was already awake before I came down here.” A rush of air forced Applejack to rise. She squinted in the light only to notice that Rainbow was gone.