I don’t own My Little Pony, Hasbro does, etc. Enjoy.

The Longest Journey

Chapter 1 - An Epoch’s Finale

[Chapter 1]
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4 (coming soon!)

1001 A.E. (After Exile)

With a snort, a gray stallion walked at an unhurried pace through the thinning Everfree Forest. His armor of steel plates that shrouded his sizable muscular form clanked and jingled from the movement. The armor was scratched and scathed; a large portion around his left eye had been torn out. On the earth pony’s face a scar aligned with the twisted metal.

An emerald eye scanned the openings of the less-than-dense thicket. Plains and hills and valleys greeted him, and in the distance an immense orchard of apple trees. His stomach roiled as he took in the sight of the red fruit.

The stallion’s steady walk turned into a lively trot as he made a bee line for the distant buildings beyond the apple orchard. He thought his eyes would glaze over as he took in the juicy apples that hung low from the branches, shinning crimson in the sunlight filtering through the leaves above. *Maybe I could take just one, there’s no pony around afterall…*

A heavily accented female voice inquired from behind him, “Pardon me sir, might I ask what’re ya doin’ in the middle of mah orchard?”.

He paused in mid-reach with the apple mere inches from his hoof. The stallion rotated his head towards the source, not expecting somepony nearby. The orange mare looked at him with a raised brow.

“Ah… yes, my apologies ma’am, I’ve been traveling for quite some time and I’ve run low on food. I figured one apple missing wouldn’t harm anypony.” He locked eyes with her, slowly bringing his raised hoof back to the earth. He pulled his lips into smile as he turned the rest of his body to face her.

She gave him a stony look for several seconds but her face softened as she began to speak, “Ah well, ah s’pose one apple wouldn’ hurt no pony, go ahead.” She said with a sympathetic smile.

The grin on his face grew wide as he reached for the same apple. The armored stallion knocked it off the branch with a hoof catching it in his mouth by the stem. He took a large chunk out of the fruit with a satisfying crunch.

“Thank you ma’am. Is there a town nearby where I might find a place to spend the night?” he asked after he swallowed the last bite of the red fruit.

“Yessir, Ponyville is a short walk east from here, on the road near the farmhouse, mister…?” Her eyebrow rose as she looked over to the other pony.

“Warden. My name is Warden, if you could perhaps show me the way there, miss…?” He matched her look, minus an eye.

“Applejack. Come along, ah’ll show ya the road.”

Applejack took the lead and they made their way through the orchard. The walk was silent and Warden was pensive as he followed her on the path.

---

21 B.E. (Before Exile)

“Warden Ironwall, step forward.”

The younger gray colt approached the aging unicorn stallion with steady legs. The elder pony looked down on him with yellow eyes and thin smile. “I would like to congratulate you, for you have passed all our basic and advanced training programs. It is my honor as granted princess Celestia and princess Luna, our leaders, our rulers, and our goddesses, that I present to you your helm.”

The white-coated guard captain levitated a helmet off of the shelf behind him and held it in front of Warden. “Raise your hoof.”

Upon complying, the helmet was released landing bottom up on his outstretched hoof.

“This helmet is an emblem of your duty, not just a practical form of protection for your skull. You are to wear it at all times when you are on duty. All must know what you are when they see you. Go now Warden Ironwall, your shift is posted on the chalkboard in the barracks.”

As he donned the final piece to his set of armor the stone room filled with the noise of clapping hooves. Old friends punched him in the shoulder and cheered at him as he walked the aisle towards the door. The door shut behind him as the cool noon breeze ran over his ear-to-ear grin.

---

3 B.E.

The alabaster moon shown bright through the window in the hall of the night princess. Princess Luna sat on her throne preparing herself for those who would be seeing her this evening. Her attendant, a gold-coated mare with icy blue eyes, approached her bearing a parchment scroll in her mouth.

“This is the list for tonight, yes?” the princess asked as she levitated the scroll out of her servant’s mouth.

The attendant nodded while furrowing her brow. “Yes your Highness, the one named Hod has a group with him. The exterior guards removed several weapons from them though they claimed they were only for personal protection.”

Luna pursed her lips. “Bring an attachment of guards in.”

“Of course your Majesty.” As the mare turned to fetch more defenders, Warden entered the very door she sought.

“Princess Luna! I have heard that you are in need of some of my stallions?”

She jumped in her chair, staring at the guard captain with wide eyes. She took a deep breath and said, “Praetor Warden, how in the name of the heavens did you hear that?”

He chuckled, “Well my Liege, you have not the softest of voices, if you do not mind me saying so.”

“Very amusing Praetor. Now that you are here, however, could you join me for this session? My assistant here has informed me that a group of ponies have had weapons confiscated at the door.”

“I would be delighted to watch over your court my princess.” He turned to the ponies accompanying him, replacing his smile with a grim look, “Stallions, assume posts by the doors. I want two to an entrance and four by my side.”

They wasted no time in obeying his commands. The grand entrance now had a

total of six armored unicorns divided equally on either side. The handful of side entrances behind the throne were occupied by a pair of soldiers, while the throne itself was flanked by Praetor Warden and four of his elite guards.

The princess eyed all the soldiers as she hummed to herself. “This should be plenty, I am sure. It is not likely I will need you Praetor, I could handle most threats that can come through that door on my own,” she swiveled her eyes towards him with a small smile, “but you know how much of a virtue caution is.”

“Shall we begin your Majesty?” piped up the golden mare.

“We shall Dayglow.” Luna glanced down at the list. “Bring in the one named Meadowmist.”

Two of the unicorns at the front exited the throne room, returning moments later with a meek looking lime-green earth pony in tow.

“You are the one named Meadowmist?” Luna’s voice echoed in the vast hall.

“Y-yes your M-majesty.” The lanky stallion said shakily.

“What brings you to my court this evening?”

The pony glanced around the room, shivering where he stood. “I-I was wondering w-when the weather p-ponies were going to make a-a rain storm for the f-fields south of S-Stalliongrad, your M-majesty.”

The princess sighed, causing the nervous farmer to shrink back. “The weather schedules are not directly under my control, you will have to consult Princess Celestia during the day, she has the influence you are asking for. I am puzzled as to why you are bringing this to me to begin with.”

“I-I apologize your Majesty, thank y-you for seeing me.” The green pony’s shaking quelled as he was escorted out of the hall by the guards.

Warden had the list now; there were only two more to be seen tonight. “Bring in this Hod fellow. Leave any others out in the lobby.”

The guards nodded in response, and this time fetched a bulky stallion with an earthy coat. A dusty and tattered cloak with a hood concealed his flank and face.

“You are the one named Hod?” recited Luna.

The stallion bowed and spoke in a steady voice, “Yes my princess. I come on a

mission.”

“What is this mission?” inquired the midnight ruler. Warden did not allow his eyes to wander from the claimant.

“My retinue and I are seeking your leadership. We wish to serve you, my liege.”

She quickly glanced at Warden, only to find his face unreadable. “What is the nature of you and your... retinue?”

“We are specialists in many fields. Espionage and combat are our primary talents however.”

“And why do you seek me?”

“Because you are the princess of the night your Majesty! It is only fitting that our tasks be overseen and commanded by you.”

Spies would be enormously useful...

The praetor stepped up the dais to Luna’s throne. He brought his face close to her ear and whispered, “Perhaps these ponies could be of use? Our covert department is more than lacking.”

The princess stared at the cloaked pony, yet he did not wither under her gaze. “How do I know I can trust you? How can I be sure you will not betray me?”

“What purpose would that serve us? We would not have the funding or honor we could gain if you were set on killing us!”

The princess leaned her head on a hoof. “I will consider your request. You are dismissed.”

“I am gracious for your time spent. Thank you my liege.”

Warden redirected his focus back to the list as the pony exited the room. “Bring forth the one named Serendipity.”

---

3 B.E.

“...So what do you think the wisest course of action would be, Praetor?”

Warden grunted as he swallowed his mouthful of potato. “Princess Luna please,

we are sharing a meal! Call me Warden."

Celestia smirked behind her cup of tea as the two fumbled around formalities.

"Alright... Warden, what do you propose we do about these 'Northmen', as the professor put it?"

The stallion raised an eyebrow at the midnight princess. "You believe Glitterstone? The old stallion is senile at best. Upright, two legged, hairless apes wandering the northern wastes? Apes that can talk for that matter? I would sooner believe that a pegasus or earth pony had magical talent."

"Well there was that theory proposed by Magister Hrothgar about 3 years ago. He postulated that every living thing has some magical capability, and that it was necessary for life itself."

He sighed, eyeing another chocolate filled pastry, "Regardless, I do believe there is nothing to fear or consider in the case of these... Northmen. He did not happen to see any with wings, did he?"

"He did not mention wings, no."

"Then if an army decides to show up on our doorstep, we will have little trouble holding the walls and picking at them from above."

An assortment of servants hovered around the table as the three ate. The Sun had recently been risen, so the princesses decided they would share a meal before one took over the other's duties. Luna had requested Warden's presence as a way to thank him for putting up with the monotony of the court.

One unicorn with a white coat and fiery red eyes brought in a tray bearing small bowls of fruit . She hovered the bowls off the tray and placing them in front of the royalty. Celestia pecked at the berries with a fork, while Luna eyed her bowl skeptically. She gave it a sniff, wrinkling her nose.

"Is something wrong sister?" the larger alicorn asked between bites.

"My fruit smells odd."

"Well, maybe if you ate more fruit like you are supposed to, it would not smell so strange." She teased.

Hm...

“May I see the bowl princess?”

“Luna.” the azure mare corrected as she levitated the bowl over to him. He sniffed the colorful berries as she had, and carefully picked out a raspberry to sample. He chewed, and with a snort spit it out into a napkin.

“These have been poisoned.”

Celestia’s jaw ceased as both the princess’s eyes widened at him. The guards stationed around the room tensed, as if ready to leap at command.

“Stallions! Shut down the kitchen, no pony is to enter or leave this room or there. Find and bring to me all kitchen staff. GO! And you two, stay with the princesses!” Warden roared as the guards rushed into action.

The room was bustling with the rushing bodies of guards, and the frozen, shaking forms of the servants still in the room. The praetor rose from his seat, planting his front hooves firmly on the table. He swung his head towards the group of servants as a snarl grew in his throat. “You four! Line up here in front of me!”

Several slow steps later, the serving ponies stood looking up into the contorted face of the gray stallion. “Alright, do any of you know the name of that mare who brought out the fruit?”

His gaze swept back and fourth, and with each passing, the servant who fell under his stare twitched. The pegasus on the far left piped up, “Y-yes Praetor sir, her name was-”

Warden felt a sharp pain in the base of his neck. The pegasus’ hoof removed itself from his throat, along with the short blade strapped around it. Her hoofcap lay on the floor nearby. He stumbled, his vision going awry as the pegasus made a move to escape. A crack reverberated up his right foreleg as he impacted the stone floor. The last signals from his eyes to his struggling brain were the two princesses backing toward a doorway on the other side of the room, while the assassin plummeted from the air with two guards on top of her.

---

3 B.E.

The stallion’s body decided it was time to awaken. Warden’s eyes opened slowly, rebelling at the bright sunlight with pains slithering back into his skull. The white linens of the infirmary cot were soft on his coat, but the pain in his knee quickly distracted him

from the luxury. He twisted his head to look at his now splinted foreleg, only to find a stinging sensation arc across his neck. The gauze wrapped around his throat did not make the mechanical act of moving his head too easy either.

Warden decided it was best to let his head lay where it was. He let a groan escape his lips as he muttered a variety of colorful words to himself. The light clopping of hooves reached his ears as the nurse entered the infirmary room.

“Oh goodness, you are awake. You took quite the fall out there! How are you feeling?” the elderly nurse asked.

“Well Hilda, I was stabbed and it appears that my foreleg is fractured. The joint broke, right? I can tell by how you have set it. Otherwise I am quite fine, although not being able to walk is going to erode my sanity,” he groaned as the old mare gave him a big grin.

“Oh Warden, you were always such a silly colt. I have seen you in this bed or another a dozen times! And yet you still toss witty remarks at me like seed at a bird! Here, Let me fetch you something to eat, you have been out for a few hours, and you never even finished breakfast!” Hilda beamed at the stallion and turned to go get his food from the kitchens.

All Warden could do between now and his little meal was stare at the ceiling. *Well, at least they put me in the infirmary, no damned servants to hover around me in here.*

He scowled. *Damn servants.*

After several moments, the stallion had catalogued every crack and bump in the plaster ceiling of the infirmary. He was alone in the room. The empty beds around him told that none of his men had been harmed in the attack or had been seriously injured enough to be bedridden.

“Praetor Warden?”

He was pulled from his thoughts by the voice of the midnight alicorn standing in the door. The stallion hadn’t heard her come in.

“Princess Luna,” he tried turning his head, resulting in a fiery knife of pain being forced across his throat. “What can I do for you?” he asked through gritted teeth.

“I wanted to tell you that my sister and I are appreciative of your sacrifice today.”

He huffed, “Sacrifice? What have I given up for your lives?”

“Your leg and your throat. Your stallions captured the assailant without killing her. Considering the violence of the incident, that is quite a feat.”

“Well, I suppose *maybe* I did something of importance there.” He grinned.

Luna smiled back at him while stepping closer to the bed and seating herself on a cushion she had pulled from nearby. “Thank you Warden. You have done us and your nation an honor.” She paused, chewing her lip as the praetor watched her from the corner of his eye. “You have served me and my sister faithfully for many a year, and yet I know so little of who you really are. Would you mind if I stayed and talked with you?”

“Not at all, princess, what is it you would like to know?

“Tell me about your home, where you came from.”

Warden swallowed, closing his eyes, “Home. My home was far north on the edge of the Griffon Kingdom.” He was then silent.

The princess felt her brow furrow into a look of sympathy. “Do you not wish to tell me about your past?”

He rotated his head as far as his throat allowed, snorting at her, “You asked me if I would like to tell you, and I did not say no. I apologize if I’m... bristly.”

“Your past was not kind, was it?”

“It was alright. My childhood was as good as any colt’s could be. My father was a farmer. He grew pumpkins, huge ones! You could fit the largest workpony you could find in them with room for their wife to spare!” the smile on Warden’s face quickly melted into a frown. “A blight hit us when was sixteen. Our crop was destroyed, and my brother died a year later from dysentery.”

The princess put a hoof to her mouth, “You had a brother?”

“Aye, his name was Ranger. The little fellow loved to explore. He was four years my junior, far too young to die like that.” The praetor felt himself choke up. He took deep breathes to break down the lump in his throat as the princess watched, her own eyes becoming shiny with tears.

“My mother and father decided it was time we made a journey to Stalliongrad and rebuild our lives. My mother did not make it there. She drowned in a stream because my father was not able to save her in time. I even told her not to go near it, the waters were

too fast and I knew she was not a strong swimmer. After we buried her, we chose to head to the Palace of the Sisters, for it was closer and we had few supplies to run on."

Luna could only sit in silence looking at the stallion lying before her. He looked her in the eye and huffed with a smile, "Your eyes are just like hers were; big and turquoise like the oceans in all those paintings out in the halls. Almost liquid themselves with a glorious intelligence swimming beneath the surface."

"Warden! You are going to make me cry!" she almost giggled at him. When she had recomposed herself, she urged him to go on.

He smiled at her, yet it was ineffective at hiding all of his sorrow. "My father and I reached the palace soon after. We begged on the streets, no one would hire him or I. He starved right in front of me. I woke up one gray morning to find my father dead on the ground. I was defeated, I did not bother asking for money anymore. I just sat on the corner against a building, a blue-bricked one, I remember that. Always the same building. I sat and I watched the world pass me by as my stomach devoured itself. On the cusp of death, the praetor at the time found me nearing the edge, and he brought me in and put me into training. Steamhoof was his name. He was a great stallion, treating me as good as if I were his son. He never coddled me though, always worked me like a dog, and I was fine with that. I had found a reason to live again, so here I am now. I have since replaced the old bastard, and still I have seen the face of death too many times in service of you two."

Luna watched his lips cease moving as his tale came to an end, stunned by his history. "Twelve years in service to us, and we never even knew."

"Amazing, is it not? I suppose I owe you princesses something. Without you, there would have been no praetor to save me."

"You owe us nothing. Steamhoof was a good stallion, it is a shame he had to die so abruptly."

"I agree, I never took the chance to thank him for all he had done for me."

They both sat in silence, during which Hilda returned with his meal. He thanked the old nurse with a big smile as he began on his food.

"You know Luna, when I retire, I think I will start a pumpkin farm. I will grow them bigger than any that papa ever grew. Heh heh, he will be rolling in his grave!" Warden chuckled between bites of his bread.

Her smile was weak from imagining the dread he must feel. "If I may ask, why

were you put up in the infirmary and not your quarters?”

He swallowed, nodding his head in response, “Ah yes, I told my men and the nurses long before hand that during the event of my injuries, I be sent here so I may spend time with my stallions should they also be injured. I hate being in my quarters when I do not have to be.”

“How noble of you.” The princess rose to her feet, stretching her wings out. “Well Warden, I must be off to sleep, my sister took over my duties hours ago. Rest well now, and listen to the nurse, I have heard you tend to be rebellious when you are in the injury ward.”

“Oh I will be fine, thank you for stopping by my liege.” He smiled warmly up at her.

“Luna.” She said, flashing him a grin as she left the room.

1001 A.E.

Warden shook his head, bringing himself back to reality. A dull ache pulsed in his knee. “Looks like we’re gonna have a storm soon.”

Applejack’s pace slowed as she craned her neck to look at him, “Oh yeah? Ah think ah see clear blue skies up there.”

“My knee aches. I broke it when I was younger, got in a little scuffle you see. Turns out that it’s useful for predicting the weather.” He grunted.

“Musta’ been a change in the weather schedule I reckon.”

---

0 B.E.

An aging Warden hobbled down the corridor as the echoes of his plated hooves bounced around the walls. At its end were the double doors to Princess Luna’s private rooms. The doors themselves are ornately carved with a heavenly vista of suns and star bursts surrounding an intricately detailed crescent moon. Two of his finest unicorns kept vigil over the hall, seemingly monolithic in comparison to their surroundings.

“Good evening Lord Praetor.” Said the guard on the left.

“Evening soldiers, all is well I hope?”

“Yes, Lord Praetor. Not a soul has walked this hall, except for servants of course. We inspected each that entered.”

“And what did you find?”

“Two cleaning mares tonight, sheets, pillows and such. Nothing harmful, though the old hags seemed taken aback by the search.” The guard grinned.

Warden grinned, “Excellent, carry on then, and get something to eat when your shifts end, the cooks received a shipment of apples from the western front, those big crispy ones that Celestia loves.”

In unison the guards responded, “Yes Praetor, sir!”

Lord Praetor Warden pushed one of the doors open, admitting himself to Luna’s antechamber. Her attendant occupied the desk which was stacked high with scrolls and parchments. Her ears flicked at the sound of hooves and she looked up, giving the stallion a baggy-eyed smile.

“Hello Praetor, are you here to see the princess?”

“As a matter of fact I am, how is she?”

“She is sulking.” She looked at the doors leading to the private rooms as her smile dipped. “Is that why you are here?”

“Indeed it is. She is still awake I hope?

“I believe so, go look for yourself.” As he began to step towards the door, Dayglow’s voice halted him, “Praetor, could you please cheer her up? From what little I have seen of her social life, you seem to be her closest friend.”

A small smile formed on his lips, “I will try.”

The door creaked as he pushed it slowly. He peeked in her room, spotting her cosmic form on the immense bed. Stepping in, he took his time eyeing the room’s incredible detail. Plaster molds of an inspiring night sky decorated the ceiling, painted in golds, silvers, and deep hues of blue and purple. The round room had a balcony with glass doors off to the right, and a circular, low lying bed opposite the door. Midnight blue carpet was applied tastefully where hoof traffic would be at its highest and mountainous bookcases lined the western wall, stuffed with volumes innumerable. The princess herself was curled into a ball of stars and ocean shades, taking up little space on a bed

that could fit ten ponies larger than himself.

Luna stirred as she heard him walk towards her, his uneven clop on the floors giving away his identity. “Warden, what do you want?” she groaned as she lifted her head towards him.

“Ah, I suppose you do not want me here now, I apologize your Majesty. I will be off then.”

Wait for it....

“Warden, please!”

Predictable.

“Hmm?” A triumphant smile tugged at the corner of his mouth.

“I am sorry, please come sit with me.”

He obeyed, planting his rump on the edge of the bed. “I heard you had an... episode in court this evening.”

Her eyes were downcast as she spoke, “That I did.”

“Would you mind telling me why you became so livid, as the guard put it?”

The princess held her head high, pouting her lips, “This arrogant unicorn thought he could speak to me in such a distasteful manner! He called my night frightening! Cold! Does he not realize how necessary it is that it be dark!”

Warden arched an eyebrow at her. “This is why you were upset? Come now Luna, you need to act more mature at court.”

“I shall act however I please! I am the princess of the night! You are subordinate to me, you cannot tell me how to act!”

Noting the fire in her eyes, the condescending anger welling up in his own mind quickly fizzled. “My apologies, my princess, I spoke out of turn.”

Gritting her teeth, Luna rose from her tangled nest of sheets. She stepped gracefully over to the balcony doors, gazing up at the sky. The light of dawn was barely bleeding up over the horizon as the sun approached is waking hour. She laughed.

“You have always had an odd sense of humor my princess.”

She looked back at him, her face shadowed by the growing morning light, “Oh

Warden, I apologize for yelling at you. I am acting like a foal."

"I understand. I would feel the same way if somepony spoke to me in such a manner."

"Oh I know you would, you have a temper that rivals even my own."

The stallion returned his princess's smile, "Feeling better?"

Luna's smile shrank barely enough to escape notice, " I suppose. I only yearn for appreciation like my sister has from our ponies."

"Understandable, we all want to be loved, right?"

The princess closed her eyes, "Indeed. Warden, I would like you to look up somepony to replace you as Praetor."

"What? Are you retiring me?" His eyes narrowed at her, confusion splattering across his mind.

"From that position yes. I am reassigning you. You have spent the past twenty one years protecting and serving both me and my sister with a professionalism and care that either of us had been given by previous praetors. The incident with the poison three years ago awoke us to that realization. Because of this, with my sister's agreement, I am requesting that you give up the title of Lord Praetor in exchange for Royal Cohort of the Moon. You are to be my personal guard and companion. What say you?"

The stallion's mouth worked, but no words came out.

"I never thought I could leave you speechless, Warden." Luna said with a smile.

"I... this is an honor, my princess-"

"You can call me Luna at all times you know, you seem to do it sparingly. There is no reason to hold back now."

"Yes... Luna, I will gladly accept this title. I will serve you until my time has come."

Her mouth stretched into an excited grin, "I name you Warden, Cohort of the Night. Serve me well cohort."

"It is an honor, my ruler and master, Princess Luna. I now beg of you to answer this question for me," he said with as serious a face as he could hold. "Would you honor me with a game of stones this evening?"

She gave him an equally business-like stare, “That is a tall request for anypony to make. Give me a moment to consider.”

Warden’s snort caused the princess to break her false composure and giggle like a filly. She levitated a the board off of one of her many shelves over to the bed, placing it in front of him. She sat as the the bag of polished river stones hovered over to them, dumping its contents on the board. Twenty black and twenty white smooth, flat stones were separated deftly by the princess.

“Black I assume?” the stallion asked.

“Mhm.”

They arranged their pieces out on the black and white checkered board, one stone per square, with two rows of squared filled on each player’s side.

“You may go first my liege.”

---

0 B.E

Half an hour of intense strategy and a less than polite comment or two later, Warden slumped on the edge of the bed.

“Oh heavens above, I am afraid I have taught you too much about strategy.” He groaned as Luna’s teeth practically gleamed in her smile.

“You did good my cohort. Maybe you will win next time?” she teased.

“Yeah yeah yeah. Well princess, I must be heading off to bed, I have never before felt such a drain from being overwhelmingly defeated in my own territory, and the sun is starting to rise. I believe I have become nocturnal, like you.” He said with an amused look.

Luna rose off the bed, walking with him to the doors, “Thank you for stopping by Warden. It means far more to me than you can ever know.” The smile she gave him was vast with emotion.

“It is my job to see to it that you are happy and well my princess.” He bent himself down on one knee and kissed her hoof.

Luna felt her face warm as she pulled her hoof back, “Please Warden, call me Luna. You know better.”

He smiled warmly at her, “Alright, are you going to be okay for now?”

“I think so. I just need to think about many things.”

He raised a disbelieving eyebrow, “Are you sure?”

“Yes, go to bed Warden. You need sleep more than I.”

“Good night, Luna.”

“Good night, my cohort.” She felt the joy his presence had brought her drain away, replaced again by the memories of her hateful subjects.

1001 A.E

“And here we are mister Warden. Take that road there and you’ll be on your way to Ponyville.” Applejack said with a big smile.

“Thank you ma’am, I appreciate the help.”

“Hey, if’n ya don’t mind my askin’, what’s with all the metal? Are ya some kinda soldier er somethin’?”

He was silent a moment, then responded, “I am Princess Luna’s personal guard. She’s… given me a vacation, so I spent my time travelling Equestria and beyond. I’ve probably seen every sight there is twice.”

“Oh wow, a worldly stallion, are ya?”

Warden gave her a small smile, “I suppose you could say that.”

“Well it’s been a pleasure meetin’ ya, mister Warden. Have a nice day now!” She smiled, turning back to the farmhouse.

Pleasent fella, isn’t he? A little cold though.

---

0 B.E.

“Well Celestia, morning comes.” Warden reminded the alabaster alicorn as she sat on the balcony, watching the moon dive for the horizon.

“Indeed it does Warden. How about you fetch my sister for me, the moon needs

to rest.” She said, unable to keep her voice perfectly stable.

“Something troubles you, what is it?”

“Oh, I am worried about her. She has been in such a mood these past few days. You could not even cheer her up!” she sighed at the view of the landscape below.

“Do not worry princess, I believe she will be alright in time.”

“I do hope you are right, Warden. ”

Making his way to Luna’s rooms, he found the same two guards standing watch. He greeted them and her assistant as he pushed through both sets of doors into Luna’s private quarters.

“Luna, your sister told me to come get you. It is time to lower the moon.”

She was silent for a moment, and she turned her head slightly. “No.” she replied in a firm whisper.

Warden froze. “Luna, come now. The moon needs to set so the sun can rise.”

She sniffed, tears threatening to fall. “N-no.” He could see her lip quivering in the moonlight.

“Luna-“

“NO!” She turned fully now, facing him. The mare’s face was warped by her snarls and wild eyes.

“Luna, stop this madness! You have a duty!” Warden shook at his core. *This cannot be happening*!

“SILENCE WARDEN, I DID NOT GIVE YOU PERMISSION TO SPEAK.” Her royal Canterlot voice bellowed across the room, pushing him back slightly.

That wretch! “How dare you talk to me like that!” Warden roared at her.

“YOU WILL BE SIL-”

“NO, I WILL NOT! I will not allow you to act like this! GUARDS! CELESTIA! SOMEPONY!”

The doors burst open at his command as the pair of guards he had spoken to earlier galloped in, only to be met by an eye-widening sight.

“What is the problem sire?” one of the unicorns asked in a less than steady voice.

“Restrain the princess, she is out of control!”

Both the soldier’s jaws hung slack as Luna turned to them, her body enamored with black wisps of eldritch magic.

“I DARE YOU, MORTALS.” She spoke in her booming voice, a wicked grin growing on her lips.

The guards were frozen in place, caught between the horror that roared in front of them and the furious snarls of their old commander on their left.

“GO GET CELESTIA THEN, IF YOU TWO PILES OF DUNG ARE JUST GOING TO STAND TH-!” he screamed, but was cut off by a pressure wave knocking him and the two soldiers back. The guards smashed through the doors forcing the wood to splinter under the force of their impact. Warden’s face connected with her vertical mirror, causing a large fragment of glass to cut into his left eye, slicing the orb.

He grunted, hauling himself to his knee as blood mixed with the white vitreous fluid that flowed from his eye.

“Luna… Stop this…” the stallion groaned as his voice was snuffed out by the whirling maelstrom and the pain burning through his body. His stomach churned and a lump expanded in his throat.

The room seethed with ebon magics, permeating the walls and floors with darkness and celestial might. The cohort’s skin tingled as his vision began to fail him.

The moon’s path reversed, travelling slowly back up towards the zenith. The very thing he had thought could never happen was playing out right before his dying eyes. The room was darkening, his last good eye was succumbing to the pain.

“Luna… I love...” he could barely manage to utter before his body began to shut down. He could not bring himself to try and stand once more; he was done and he knew it. He went limp as the darkness overtook his consciousness. The incapacitated stallion’s body writhed and flailed with astral energies that inundated the space around Luna. Then he was still.

1001 A.E.

Moisture collected in the curves of his eyes as he recollected the bitter memory. A resentful Warden sniffed and looked ahead at the hill he was approaching. Over that hill should be Ponyville, as Applejack had told him. Warden sped his walk to a cantering jog, then to as swift run as his knee would let him. He made it to the hill in a manner of minutes and was greeted by a shallow valley inhabited by a couple hundred wooden homes. He could hear the bustle of ponies and the cries of playing fillies and colts even from this distance. Far away and shrouded in the atmosphere, the knight could barely make out Canterlot, his ultimate destination. *Pace yourself Warden*, he thought. The view of the little town gave him reason to pause. It was so peaceful, so sheltered and far from the raging hellscape that were the lands outside of Equestria's boundaries. *And just beyond it, my goal. I'm coming Luna.*

The stallion walked down the dirty path into town with food and sleep on his mind. It was midday, but fatigue held the earth pony and he had not had a substantial meal in two days. He quickly found his way to the Hoofprint Inn, greeting the innkeeper politely and purchasing a room for a single night. After being given the room key, Warden climbed the stairs up to the rooms and found his door. The exhausted warrior entered and set bags down, beginning the laborious but familiar task of removing his armor and piling it neatly next to the bed. His stomach then roared at him, demanding food. Knowing sleep could never come on an empty stomach, he retrieved his bags while leaving the room and descended the stairs. Exiting the inn, he scanned the area in search of an eatery. A short walk lead him to a small café with half of the outdoor tables filled by patrons. Warden sat himself at an empty table, and was almost immediately greeted by a waiter.

"Good afternoon, sir. What may I get for you today?" the waiter asked.

Thinking a moment, Warden responded, "A grass burger, and some hay fries please."

"Alright, your food will be here in a minute sir."

Nodding at the waiter, he took the time to observe the ponies around him. The table nearest him was occupied by a couple of mares, one of which was talking loudly with a fanciful accent. She had a white coat with a curled violet mane, while the other had light golden fur with a pink mane and turquoise eyes.

Like Luna's…

Shaking his head, Warden looked up to see the waiter coming with his food. He set it down at Warden's table as the gray stallion rubbed his hooves together. Taking a bite of his burger and chewing slowly, he listened to the loud white pony at the table

nearby.

“Oh Fluttershy! I *need* to attend the Galloping Gala! Last time was a crushing failure, yes, but there’s always a second chance! There could be other ravishing young noble stallions!” a squeal of excitement left the white mare’s lips.

“But what if the same thing happens again, Rarity?” Fluttershy asked.

“Then… I don’t know! But darling, I must go! I need my prince charming right this instant!” With a dramatic sigh, Rarity took a sip of her drink, while Fluttershy shook her head.

The gala, perfect! Luna will probably be there, being a princess and all. He continued his meal, imagining what the meeting would be like. He had waited ten lifetimes for it.

---

0 A.E.

His aching eyes opened. *This is not Luna’s room...*

“Luna!”

Warden tried to get up, looking around the room hastily. A sharp pain made his skull feel like it was shattering. He fell back onto the bed, grunting as the spike of agony twisted in his eye socket.

“Relax there, you cannot be floundering about like that!” An older Hilda said.

His head was throbbing, “What happened? Where’s Luna? Why does my head hurt?” Alarm rushed through his mind, “My eye… What happened to my eye?! Why can I not see?”

“Relax Warden, your eye was cut by a shard of glass,” She inhaled, glancing at the floor, “You are blind in your left eye now, I am sorry. Princess Celestia will explain the rest when she returns to check on you.” She brought the tray she was carrying over to the table next to his bed. On it was a glass of water and an assortment of breads and cheeses.

“I am blind?!”

“Unless you call not being able to see with your eye something else, then yes, you are blind.” His curling lips alerted her to his temper. “I know this is one of your worse injuries Warden, but think about it, when you decide to get married, you can impress

your wife with the tale of how you battled one of the princesses!”

Even with the fog of anger rolling in his head, he couldn’t help but chuckle at the her.

“Eat, you need your strength. Whatever Princess Luna did really sucked the life out of you!”

“A-alright, thank you. May I be alone please?”

“Of course, I will be outside. Ring that bell if you need me.” Hilda said as she pointed at small brass bell with a handle lying on the nightstand next to the bed.

Warden’s body relaxed as he let the tension flow out of his muscles. He looked around with his good eye, each movement causing a sharp pain in his head. He was in his quarters, a stone’s throw from Luna’s. *Damn it, why did they not put me in the infirmary!*

He dredged through his memories, trying to remember what happened. He remembered fear, fear and pain. He remembered yelling her name, telling her to stop... *What was she doing?*

The moon!

She was trying to keep the moon from setting! Oh no, did she succeed? A quick glance at the window showed sunlight peering through.

Guess not. Oh Luna, he thought, *I tried to make you see, I am so sorry, I am so sorry I failed you. I lied, I told you I would keep you safe, I told you I could protect you…*

A knock on the door followed by a request for entering made him aware Celestia had returned. He beckoned her in and her white head poked in the doorway. Spotting him, she smiled weakly and entered, walking to his bedside.

“Oh Warden…” She cooed, looking him up and down.

His upper half wasn’t covered by the white sheet, plainly displaying his wounds. His left eye was bandaged and his mouth hung slack, his rage having cooled to defeat and hopelessness that oozed from his face.

“I am sorry Celestia… I failed your sister, I failed you.” He said feebly.

“No Warden, it was not your fault she felt that way. I believe there was nothing you or I could do about it.” Celestia sighed, and closed her eyes.

“You know that is a lie, I could have done something. I needed to try harder to make her feel appreciated.” He exhaled. “Where is she now?”

Celestia was silent for a minute, then spoke softly. “I sent her to the moon, using the elements of harmony. She’s a monster now. Something… happened to her. Her magic changed her I think, she is not the Luna you and I remember. But she is gone now.” Celestia shut her eyes, taking a deep breath. “I am sorry Warden, I had to do it. I did not want to, but she left me no choice.” She managed to say, failing to keep her voice steady.

“The moon? well, It had to be done, you could not keep her here.”

They sat silently for several minutes trading looks. Finally he spoke, “I know what it is like to lose a sibling. When I was young, my brother died of disease. You will move on in good time. It will never stop hurting, but you will learn to override it.”

She gave him a tired smile that lasted only a moment on her face. “I think you should retire, Warden.” She said, looking him in his good eye.

His eyes widened, “But princess! I-I do not know what I would do with myself! I was born to serve here!”

Celestia clenched her eyes shut. “Warden, please, I do not need you to make this any harder for me than it already is. Please, retire. Go start a family, go explore the world, I do not know! I think you and I both need to occupy ourselves.”

Warden was silent with his gaze fixed on a painted scene of mountains hanging across the room. “Alright. If and when Luna returns, however, I will return.”

Celestia gave him a solemn look. “You and I both know that will be too long from now.”

The princess stood up from her cushion, and left the room.

1001 A.E.

Finishing up his meal, Warden pulled a small sack of bits from his saddle bags and left it on the table with the empty basket that had held his burger. The stallion rose from his seat and proceeded back towards the inn.

It was late afternoon according to the sun lowering in the sky. Entering the inn, Warden greeted the jovial innkeeper as he climbed the stairs to the rooms. Turning the

corner led him to his room where the stallion closed the door behind him and sat on the bed with a sigh. He undid his saddle bags and placed them on the floor next to the bundle of armor.

Warden was motionless on the bed with his hooves in his lap and a one-eyed gaze focused on the open window. He inhaled and exhaled noisily.

It's been one thousand years, he thought.

Warden had pondered his longevity a couple times while he walked the face of Equestria.

Perhaps Luna's magic did something to me. It doesn't seem very likely that I'm alive just because I want to be.

He looked up at the descending sun. He decided that he would follow it into the realm of dreams. The weary warrior pulled back the covers of his bed and slipped into place, sheathing himself in fresh linens. Sleep came easily soon after.

---

0 A.E.

Celestia returned to Warden's quarters three days later. The alicorn had planned on seeing him off since he had recovered fairly swiftly. She knocked, but there was no answer. Entering the room she found it empty, devoid of his personal positions and sterile of any personality.

A piece of parchment was left on his dresser, rolled up and sealed with his cutie mark; a knight's shield bearing a blue tower. Walking to the dresser, she levitated the note with her magic and unraveled it.

Dearest Princess Celestia,

As you can see, I have left. I have taken with me all that I need, anything left over is yours to keep. I suppose it is a form of payment for allowing me to serve you and your sister the majority of my short life. It has been beyond an honor, something divine in my eyes even, to have served you two. I would have never chosen another path in my life than what I have walked with you, and I thank you, oh by the heavens above do I thank you. Should she ever return, you will surely see me walk in ready to resume my duty. Enjoy the remainder of your life, I will try to myself.

With love and sincerity,

Warden Ironwall

P.S. Look in the top middle drawer of my dresser. That is yours to keep.

Furrowing her brow, she opened the aforementioned drawer. Lying inside was a small painting. Levitating it up, it was a portrait of Luna leaning on her balcony rail, looking up at the stars and the moon. She had no crown of royal accessories, and her mane was ruffled up. She flipped the canvas over, and scrawled in messy ink on the wood frame was a little note.

You are just like the rest, just as beautiful, just as loving. And yet you are like no other.

Her face split apart with a sad smile as she left to bring the painting and the note back to her quarters.

The End of Chapter 1

[Chapter 1]
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4 (coming soon!)