

Never Truly Forgotten

Prologue: The Summons

Majestic. That was the only way to describe it, really. The way the windows let in the light at all times of the day, letting it fall just right so that the path forward appeared to be flanked on both sides by walls of amber, the expertly carved white marble and sheets of gold reflecting it just so, causing the architecture to convey the majesty of the Sun.

Growing up, Twilight Sparkle had been to the throne room several times before, most often to meet with her teacher and guardian, but sometimes just to admire its beauty. Even so, to this day she couldn't help but be awed at its majesty. In fact, she simply stood just inside the ever-open throne room doors, just to soak it all in. After all, she had just spent the last half hour in the comparatively dull-looking antechamber just outside those doors.

This time, however, things were different. Just a few things, really, but they caused this visit to take on its own, disparate tone. The first thing was, she no longer lived here, in the capital city of Canterlot. While she had lived in the city most of her life, and near the castle for much of that time, nearly a year ago she had been sent to the town of Ponyville, where she had made friends, and faced such threats as dragons, manticores, cockatrices, Nightmare Moon, and parasprites. She shuddered a bit at that last thought. All in all, an eventful year, and one she would probably never forget.

The second thing was, this was the primary throne room, where matters of state and other important things took place. She had been here before, several times, but whenever she met her teacher, it was typically in the secondary throne room, which was designed to be more accessible to the general populace.

The third thing was, this was decidedly not a casual visit.

Just yesterday morning, she had been reading a book by Tycho Brayhe, *Stars, Planets and You*, when Spike, her dragon assistant, had come out of the kitchen door. He was holding his prized possession, a large ruby, a gift from Rarity.

"You know, if you keep washing it like that, it'll eventually just wear away," she teased.

"Ha ha ha," he said sarcastically. "I'm just making sure that it looks as good as the day I got it."

"What? You mean covered in dirt?"

"No! I mean when Rarity gave it to me. I remember I could see my face in it, like a mirror! No, clearer than any mirror I've ever seen. Yep, not a speck of dirt to be..."

Twilight knew he was exaggerating, and just rolled her eyes, laughing to herself a little. She turned back to her book. If she knew Spike, and she did, he would continue on his own embellished version of that moment until something interrupted him.

Which came soon enough. "...sparkling in the sunlight, and not a flaw -" He then belched up a short column of green flame, which solidified into a sealed scroll, and landed next to Twilight. Had she not noticed the official-looking seal on the letter, she would have giggled a bit at how Spike's prized gem was singed, a layer of soot covering the exact place he had been staring longingly. She would have also put aside the letter for a moment, to help her assistant wash away the scorch marks. He probably could have used the help, because she noticed that he didn't come out for quite a while. Magical burns must be hard to wash off or something. She'd have to look into it later.

No, she was focused on the letter, which bore the seal of the Royal Family, a picture of two alicorns chasing the sun and moon, making a circle. She regularly sent and received letters from her teacher, but they were always fairly informal, and this was the first time she had seen the seal on one of her letters. This meant that whatever this letter was about, her teacher was contacting her in the capacity of Princess, not as her guardian.

Curious, but with some feeling of dread, she broke the seal and unfurled the letter with her magic. It read,

Miss Twilight Sparkle,

By order of the Princess, your presence is requested in the Royal Throne Room of Canterlot Castle. A chariot will be provided for you tomorrow morning. After you arrive in Canterlot, you may not leave the city, though you are free to go anywhere within its limits. You are to report to me in the Antechamber of the Throne Room by 7:00 tomorrow evening. If you do not arrive by then, we may be forced to rely on the Royal Guard to find you and bring you in.

Have a pleasant day,

Sundance, Secretary for the Royal Family

Ever since then, she had been worrying herself sick. There were very few reasons to use

such a formal summons, and most of them were bad. Her mind ran from one thought to another, wondering whether she did something to warrant punishment, or whether something bad had happened to someone she knew, or whether she would be forced from her home in Ponyville and be given an assignment somewhere else.

Yes, she knew she was probably overreacting, but her rationality just could not win against this sense of foreboding.

The chariot came the next morning, as scheduled, pulled by two white pegasi of the Royal Guard. Normally, the journey from Ponyville to Canterlot would have taken several hours, but flying there cut the time to a mere half hour. Not having to walk, however, just gave her more time to worry.

Upon arrival in Canterlot, it was late morning, approaching noon. Seeing she had plenty of time, Twilight attempted to use her day in Canterlot to relax. She went shopping for books, and ended up with a copy of *Transmutations and Conjurations*. She bought it because of a certain incident with Fluttershy last month, where she screwed up a casting of Eagle's Splendor so badly that she accidentally cast Plane Shift, of all things, and wished to avoid repeating the mistake. But then, she also once messed up a casting of Teleport, and had cast...Plane Shift. On second thought, perhaps she should look into why she kept casting Plane Shift when she didn't want to. So, she turned right back around, and when she came out again fifteen minutes later, she was carrying another book, *Mordecolt's Missive of Many Magical Mistakes and Mishaps*.

After that, she met with some old acquaintances, and even went to see her mother and father, who she hadn't spent all that much time with since moving. After eating dinner at her favorite donut shop, she made her way to the castle, the distractions of the day helping her forget why she was worrying.

Well, standing in the throne room, she remembered again.

"Please move forward, Twilight Sparkle," said a voice behind her. It was Sundance, who seemed more than a little annoyed that the purple unicorn was just standing there. After all, Twilight was the last visitor of the day, and she would be able to leave once Twilight walked into the room.

Twilight flinched a bit, and began slowly walking forward. Sundance, satisfied, packed her things and made her way out a side exit.

There, at the end of the red carpet, sat the Sun Throne, and on it sat the Regent of Equestria, the Avatar of the Day itself, Princess Celestia in all her radiance.

The Throne, being the centerpiece of the room, was just as majestic as the rest of it.

Made, again, of white marble, it had golden fringes that flared outward, and was framed by the light that lined the carpet leading to it, giving the impression that one was looking into the face of the Sun itself. Which, if they were here on official business, they usually were.

Perhaps the first thing Twilight noticed, was the fact that Celestia had a small smile on her face.

"Welcome, my faithful student. I trust your trip went well?"

Twilight shuffled her front hooves a bit before answering.

"Well, ever since I got your letter, I've been a bit worried. After all, you usually write to me directly, so getting a sealed letter from your secretary made me wonder what was going on..."

"Oh, I apologize, Twilight. I had to go through official channels to free up the time to see you, and Sundance always feels the need to be so formal with these matters."

Twilight felt a bit better knowing that, but then she realized something. "In that case, Princess, why did you want to talk to me? And why couldn't you write me a letter instead of having Sundance do it?"

"Because, Twilight, I'm not the one who called you here."

The antechamber door opened, which, being a very large door, made a very large sound. Twilight, startled, turned around to see who had entered.

Though hard to see at first, due to the vastness of the two rooms, by the time the visitor had entered the throne room proper, Twilight could tell who it was. In walked another pony, a mare with a coat as blue as the night sky, a mane the color of starlight and a crescent moon on her flank. More importantly, though, was the fact that she was an alicorn, much like Princess Celestia, and even more importantly than that, was the fact that Twilight had seen this particular alicorn before, nearly one year ago.

"She did," said Celestia.

Twilight eventually remembered how to speak. "...Princess Luna?" she asked.

With another very large sound, the antechamber door closed behind the alicorn. She stood inside the throne room, still some distance away from the teacher and student. A moment passed, and she slowly made her way towards them.

As Luna approached, Celestia rose from her throne to stand beside her student. Luna paused, and looked at her sister, as if for reassurance. Celestia gave a small nod, and Luna, with renewed confidence, walked toward the purple unicorn.

Once she was about ten hooves from the two, she stopped.

There she was, the second Regent of Equestria, the Avatar of the Night. In her royal regalia, she certainly looked the part. Even so, she visibly had to work up the courage to speak to Twilight.

"I'd like to thank you."

Another moment passed, and when no explanation seemed forthcoming, Twilight asked, "...What for?"

Luna lowered her gaze to the ground in front of her. "For saving me...from myself."

It took her a moment, but soon Twilight understood what she meant. "You mean when me and my friends defeated Nightmare Moon, during the last Summer Sun Celebration." She smiled at the younger sister. "There's no need to thank us; we're just happy to help. Though, if I may ask, why now? We all saw you during the parade, but we never actually met, or even talked with you. You could have thanked us then."

The Princess lifted her head back up. "After being freed of Nightmare Moon, my sister forgave me for everything I've done. I was more happy than I could ever describe. I certainly noticed the parade, and everything else that happened that day, but it didn't matter to me. After so many years, I was home again. Nothing but that and my sister's forgiveness even registered."

As she said this, Luna turned toward her sister and gave her a small smile, before turning back to Twilight. "In addition, when I came back, I had lost much of my magic due to my...absence. I could hardly control enough magic to do even the simplest telekinesis. I've been slowly recovering over the past year, but even now I'm significantly less powerful than I used to be."

As she spoke, she began studying Twilight, which the unicorn thought was just slightly disturbing. While Twilight's nerves had calmed a bit already, they had not gone away, so she couldn't help but have those nerves begin building again as Luna looked her up and down. Luna's fascination, however, was more looking at her as if she had just noticed something strange, but couldn't quite put her hoof on why it was.

"It's weird. Usually I'm very reluctant to speak to anypony I don't know very well, but you seem familiar for some reason. It's almost like I've known you for a very long -" She suddenly stopped speaking, and Twilight noticed she was staring directly at her cutie mark. Luna looked almost as if she had seen a ghost. Which, Twilight decided, was definitely *very* creepy.

Backing away slightly, she asked, "...Is something wrong, Princess?" She tried not to

betray just how uneasy she was, but she never really was able to hide those types of feelings very well. Or too many others, really.

"I'm sorry, Twilight, but..." said Luna, but she trailed off. She began to squint her eyes to study her mark. "It's exactly the same. But, how? That's impossible..." she said to herself. "Sister? Have you-?"

"Yes, I have," interrupted the elder sister, "and I'm glad I'm not the only one who has. At first I thought it might just be wishful thinking, but both your recognition and the events of the past year have proven otherwise. Besides the color of her coat and mane, she is the very spitting image of her."

"What?" said Twilight. "Spitting image of who?" She paused, then registered what else her teacher had said. "And what do you mean, 'the events of the past year'?"

"The spitting image of a pony we both cared for very much. She was, quite possibly, the first true friend either of us ever had. And as for what it has to do with you and your adventures, well, she lived over one thousand years ago."

It took Twilight just a moment to make the connection, but Luna was faster, and became very nervous.

"But Celly," she asked, momentarily forgetting to speak formally around their guest, "what could she possibly have to do with what happened back then?"

Celestia looked at her sister for a moment. She lowered her horn. The telltale aura of the alicorn's magic surrounded her, and extended into the carpet beneath their hooves. As they stood there, the carpet bulged slightly, and transformed into three red cushions. There were two medium-sized ones for Twilight and Luna, and one larger one for Celestia.

As she sat down, Celestia spoke. "I suspected I would have to tell this story. That's part of why I scheduled Twilight to be my last visit for today." She turned to face her student. "Please get comfortable, Twilight; this story may take some time to tell." Then she turned towards her sister. "And Luna, there are parts of this story you do not know, so you may want to listen as well."

The two followed her advice, and Twilight found that while the cushion made of the same substance as the carpet, it was very comfortable. It was also very large for her, since it was the same size as the one Luna currently sat on.

Luna, however, gave her sister a quizzical look, before she realized what she had meant. Her questioning look suddenly turned into one of surprise and shock.

"Don't tell me she has something to do-"

"Yes, I'm afraid she does," Celestia interrupted.

Twilight wasn't quite sure what that was about, so she decided to ignore it as she asked her own question.

"Part' of why you scheduled this? What was the other part?"

"The other part was this," replied her teacher.

Again, Celestia lowered her horn. Her magical aura surrounded the large, ever-open doors that lead into the throne room. While something so heavy would have caused even the magically-inclined Twilight to grunt and sweat under the strain, Celestia's face remained calm as the doors moved. With a third very large sound, they closed themselves tight. As Celestia ceased focusing her telekinesis, the doors began glowing with a faint golden aura.

"As you might know, Twilight, those doors are enchanted with very powerful wards. They were meant to be closed only during emergencies, but the charms on them not only ensure absolute safety; they also ensure absolute privacy.

The story I'm about to tell you is known to very few, and only I know all of the details to it. I also wish to have it stay known to very few. I trust you to keep what you hear a secret, known only to the three of us. Can you do this for me?"

Twilight planted a small, fake smile on her face. The last time she had been trusted with keeping secrets, it hadn't ended too well.

"Even from my friends? I don't know if I can keep secrets from them."

Celestia thought for a moment before replying.

"If you believe they can keep a secret, then yes, you can tell Spike and the other Elements. I suspect there may be things I don't know, that tie this story to them as well."

Twilight gave a somewhat more sincere smile this time.

"Then yes, I will try, Princess."

Visibly relieved, Celestia said, "Then let me ask you another question. What do you know about cutie marks?"

Twilight thought, remembering her studies on the subject, and replied, "Well, a pony gets their cutie mark when they find their calling in life. No pony knows what causes them to appear, or what causes magic to be entirely unable to make one appear. Whatever it is, it must be very

powerful, ancient magic, possibly as old as Equestria itself."

"Then tell me, Twilight: is it possible for two ponies to have the exact same cutie mark?"

"No, or at least it shouldn't be. While some ponies with similar skills can have *similar* cutie marks, something always differentiates them from the rest. They're like a unicorn's magic: it acts as a signature for that pony, and that pony alone, throughout history. Two ponies having the same cutie mark would mean that they would have to be the same pony."

Realization dawned on Twilight as she explained all of this. "Wait, are you saying that this friend of yours, from over a thousand years ago, had the same cutie mark as I do?"

Celestia nodded.

"Right down to the colors."

Twilight's curiosity was stoked. "Then, who exactly was this friend of yours?"

Celestia looked between the two members of her audience as she began her story.

"To get a true understanding of who this friend was to me, as well as what exactly it has to do with today, I will need to start at the beginning. Let me tell you about the first time I met her, a young unicorn filly named Dawn Star."