

## The Eversleep

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“Get up.”

Twilight could feel the blunt end of something being jabbed hard into her side. She forced her eyelids to move apart and look at her surroundings.

The first thing she saw was the cold stone floor of the dungeon that she was thrown into. The only light came from the guards torch, which cast deep shadows within her cell. There was no seat in the room, and the walls appeared to be nothing more than a natural cave with bars hammered into the stone. An easy place to escape with magic.

But that was the problem: she didn't have any. Starfall had made sure that her magic was locked away from her. The magical clamp around her horn stifled even the smallest use of magic on it. The only way to get it off was with a key. Unfortunately for Twilight, the guard didn't have that key. That would be too easy.

As she rose, she was able to take in more of the dungeons. The stone was almost all natural, save for the worked floors and the staircase leading up into the chambers above. Her guard carried a spear in his teeth, and was accompanied by another who held a sword at his side.

“Move.” He said more forcefully, jabbing her again in the side.

Twilight winced but moved out of the cage. The other guard posted outside the door, moved in front of her. He produced a muzzle and placed it around her snout, pulling tight on the straps to secure it. The guard moved to her other side and they prodded her to walk up the stairs.

When they neared the top, she could vaguely hear the sounds of a large crowd outside, and one voice booming above it. The guard to her right pushed open the door, while the other shoved her through it.

“... a traitor who once learned under our beloved Celestia, has turned to destroying all that she had created!” somepony was saying. She recognized it immediately as Starfall's voice. The crowd went wild, jeering and shouting at his statement.

She was brought to a set of double doors. Her guards stood behind her waiting for something.

“Perhaps, we should show her what it means to be a traitor!” Starfall shouted.

The doors swung open, the sunlight blinding her momentarily. She tried to lift her hoof to block the light, but it was chained to the others. Her sense of balance went awry and she fell face forward into the light. The guards pulled her up by her stomach and pushed her forward.

Crowds for as far as she could see were all focused on her, screaming at her. Some of the ponies threw things at her as she passed, or spit in her direction.

“TRAITOR!” They screamed sporadically, jeering at her.

Twilight hung her head low, as she was lead onto the main part of the stage, where she was chained up to a wall. Her eyes welled with tears when she saw who else was in the same predicament. Beside her were all of her friends. Everyone that she had tried to protect. Even Rainbow Dash had been taken, still fighting in her restraints. That foal must have gone after her in the middle of the night.

Pinkie Pie was crying, and her mane no longer had a poof in it. Rarity was horrified, trying to get loose. Fluttershy, was silent, staring down at the floor. Applejack - who was beside her - looked confused and worried. She had good reason to.

In front of the stage were at least thirty different guards, all faced away from them. In their hooves

were crossbows, fully loaded, waiting for a command to fire.

“May I present to you the Elements of Harmony. Those who locked Nightmare Moon deep into Luna’s heart. Waiting for the perfect time to let her come back. But, we won’t give them that chance.”

The crowd went wild, calling for their blood, itching to see them pay for Starfall’s clever lies. A tear fell from Twilight’s eyes.

She had failed. Starfall had won.

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“Celly, you need to wake up now!”

Celestia moved slowly, taking in the place she had been sleeping. The stone walls were only lit by the sunlight that poured into the room. But it felt cold, and full of despair. Something terrible had happened.

Luna stood above her, desperately trying to lift Celestia from her coffin to her hooves. She wobbled a bit.

“Oh Luna, I’ve missed you so much. I’m so sorry that I left you for so long.”

“Celly, your spell worked! It’s only been a month, but something terrible has happened.”

Celestia looked at her quizzically. “A month?”

“Yes! Twilight and I found your notes, and woke you up but, now she’s been taken by Starfall!”

Celestia steadied her footing, feeling all of her muscles responding to her, slowly recovering from her sleep, “Luna, I have no idea what you’re talking about. Starfall shouldn’t be bringing her onto the council yet. She’s too-”

“Celestia!” Luna grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her, “He’s going to execute her and all of the elements of harmony if you don’t come right now and stop them!”

The words hit her like a slap in the face. Her adrenaline kicked in, shooting her mind into overdrive. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Starfall? Her former student, and Twilight’s former headmaster, was going to execute six ponies?

“What? That doesn’t make any sense-”

“He even tried to kill me! Come on, we’re running out of time!” Luna was frantic at this point. Tears were flowing freely from her face. *I can’t lose her*, Luna thought, *I can’t*. Celestia had her doubts, but she followed her sister out through the upper windows and into the air above.

The first thing she heard was the crowd, long before she ever saw it. Ponies were screaming as one pony addressed the crowds below. Luna flew up to the roof of the castle and landed on top of it. It was empty save for one guard who turned on her with his weapon. Celestia came up behind her landing softly on the stones. The guard dropped his weapon in fear, his wings locking tightly to his sides. Luna swiftly reared back and kicked him in the head. His body slumped to the ground, but Celestia said nothing. No pony had ever raised a weapon to her sister except when she was Nightmare Moon.

Her worst fears were confirmed when she looked over the opposite ledge at the proceedings below her.

“As my last act, I would like to pronounce that I have found a wonderful addition to the council. She is a strong hearted mare, one who is both well versed in the ways of magic, and is very dear to my heart. Before you all, I want to pledge, as was tradition in the times before, an oath to express my solidarity with her in friendship, and in love. To she who captivates my heart, I beseech thee my pledge of bonding. In heart I will not waver.”

The crowd cheered, but Celestia knew exactly what was happening. She nodded to Luna and bolted down to the crowd below, trying to stop Starfall before he finished.

“In soul, I will forever hold your name...”

The crowd started to cheer, but gasped when their beloved Princess soared above.

“STOP!” She screamed.

Starfall looked up, his eye twitching and mouth hanging open.

“You...” His voice echoed across the crowd.

Celestia stared at the stage. All six of the elements were chained to the stage.

“Luna, take them down from there.” Luna nodded and flew onto the stage. Celestia stared at Starfall, “How dare you violate the trust I placed in the council? You have gone and done something unthinkable in my presence, merely because I disappeared for a short time. Citizens of Canterlot,” she addressed the crowd, “Do you actually approve of this act? What have these six done, but liberate my sister from a terrible entity?”

“How dare you demand to know what you yourself orchestrated! You used these six to hide Nightmare Moon for a time of your choosing, yet you lie about it to your loyal subjects?” Murmurs filled the crowd, slowly turning into hesitant agreement. “By trying to place her in your stead, you allowed her the chance to rule over Equestria unrestricted! You left us divided so that your appointed council had to ask many ponies to sacrifice their lives just to reunite without you. Only to find that you weren’t even dead!”

Angry shouts consumed the crowd, egged on by his words. His eyes gleamed in satisfaction, turning slightly so he could check on Luna. She was preoccupied with undoing some of the binds on Twilight’s legs.

He ripped a crossbow out of a nearby guard’s hooves and hefted it skyward. The guard responded in kind lifting them in the air. Celestia’s horn glowed with magic, as a shield formed around her body.

“Celestia, princess of all ponies, daughter of Sol, and eldest of the royal line. I hereby accuse you of betraying your duties to the ponies of Equestria and being the cause of many innocent deaths.”

Celestia was taken aback. No pony besides her sister had any knowledge of the old kingdom. There wasn’t even a written record of their family line available to anypony in the world.

“I judge that the proper punishment,” he turned and aimed the crossbow at Luna’s back, who was slowly turning around to stare directly at the crossbow’s deadly load, “Is death.”

The guard fired at Luna, who had no time to respond, closed her eyes desperately summoning the magic to shield herself. But it was too late. The arrows struck flesh and bone, making many dull thuds as they stopped suddenly.

Even so, Luna was unharmed.

“TWILIGHT!” Celestia screamed.

Luna opened her eyes, to see Twilight’s body slump to the ground in front of her.

Starfall raised his own weapon to his head saying the words loud and clear, “In body, I serve until death take me. This I pledge.” He pulled the trigger.

Black fire burned his body and the stage he stood on as Celestia took up a position in front of her sister, who was weeping over Twilight’s body. Muffled screams came from the other ponies, who rattled their chains, desperately trying to get free.

The flames subsided, and in Starfall’s place stood another alicorn. Her fluid black mane dulled the sunlight around her, choking any warmth that it brought to the ponies around her. She spread her wings over the stage, and flared her magic into the sky. Blackened clouds formed overhead, blotting out the sun, leaving only light from the dying torches left over from the night watch. Laughter ripped the air to shreds, frightening some of the ponies watching the terrifying event unfold.

**“Hello Celestia. My precious, *little*, sister.”**

Celestia went pale, and her magic increased, “You’re nothing but a mistake. A *younger* half-sister that should never have been.”

**“Perhaps. But here I am, more mature, and far more... sophisticated than you ever were.”**

She walked along the stage, pacing towards Celestia. The princess took a step back, **“What? Don’t you want to greet me with open hooves? Or was banishing both of your sisters too much to handle?”**

“Silence, Nightmare. You controlled her. You *made* her feel neglected.”

**“Of course. You were too busy getting ready to take over to let her have any attention. That’s why I was allowed in the castle, so she would have a friend.”**

“So you could use her to take the throne!” Celestia roared.

**“Semantics.”** Nightmare stared her down, summoning her own magic around her. It spread into the crowd, touching Starfall’s eager followers with her mind. The color of their eyes turned a light red and their irises changed to those of a dragon, **“If a thousand years ago I had known how much more willing Starfall would be, I would have waited. He massacred far more ponies than you did. An excellent step up the ladder, I would say.”** She clapped her hooves together slowly, looking behind her, **“Although, if you want, I can take our little sister’s body too.”**

Celestia began to summon more magic to her, “I call upon the great Elements of Harmony to heed my call.”

**“Magic’s host is dead. She won’t come to you now.”** Black lightning arced over her head into Celestia’s shield, bouncing out into the crowd behind her.

“Alicorns of greatest stature, my need is great. Equestria needs your presence.” She winced again, as another bolt of lightning arced off of her shield once more. The castle wall behind her exploded with its touch. Celestia ignored her crazed sister’s laughter, “I Celestia, eldest daughter of the royal line, order your presence be forthcoming.”

The last bolt of lightning stopped in front of Celestia, dying immediately. Nightmare stepped back.

Light glowed from each of the remaining ponies behind her, breaking their chains as they changed. Their glowing forms walked forward, taking their place by Celestia’s side. Luna too stood and joined them, a luminescence coming from her, starting from her midsection, slowly encompassing her. Celestia stared wide eyed at her sister’s new form, brimming with raw energy.

**“No. NO. That’s impossible! A wielder can only pass down their element to family!”**

Nightmare gawked, comprehension turning her frustration to horror.

*“Princess Celestia, your need is indeed dire.”* The voice seemed to giggle as it left one of the glowing figures.

*“It comes to you once more to decide how to handle this decision. We will trust your judgement, as you see our warnings were sound those many years ago.”*

Celestia swallowed, “By the power vested within the line of Time himself, I banish you, Nightmare to never claim your eternal purpose. You shall spend eternity in nothingness, you poor foal. May your eternal damnation be your eternal nightmare. Those you have corrupted will be saved by death. But you will never have the chance.”

The six ponies nodded and glowed brighter, *“The right decisions are never the easy ones. Your father taught you well.”*

The elements stepped back and began to glow brighter. Color began to usher from their being, flowing out to the sides covering the ground, stretching as far as the eye could see.

**“You cannot do this to me! I AM ROYALTY BY BIRTH!”**

The glow overpowered Nightmare, forcing her to her knees. She covered her eyes with her hooves, shaking in pain from the light.

*“Not anymore.”*

Nightmare screeched as the six ponies shot across the stage, engulfing her and the entire crowd with light. Celestia was forced to listen to the screams of those who had fallen for Starfall's lies, those who had willingly followed and stayed blind to her words. But she knew the truth.

Death was their only escape.

Celestia walked over to Twilight's prone form, and laid her head on her student's neck. The clouds parted, and bathed the ground in warmth and light, but the presence of sorrow and pain persisted. There were no sounds, save her cries of anguish – cries for everything that had been lost, for everything that had been destroyed. There was no bright future for Celestia's star pupil to look forward to, no chance for her to see the fruits of her courage. Celestia cried for Twilight, for while the violet pony had helped usher in a new age for all of Equestria, she had died in the darkness before the light could shine again.

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*Time's Cliff*

*1000 Years Ago*

The sun was only briefly involved in lighting the ground while clouds were left unattended. Even the rainclouds among them looked withered and dry, struggling to cling to the last bit of existence they had.

There, in a once beautiful capital, the princess of the day, Princess Celestia, walked along the cobblestone streets. She did her best to avoid the debris, and tried to muster the strength to see what her sister had cost her. She watched as a few survivors scoured the homes, looking for any signs of the plague. Almost everypony she saw was crying. It took everything she had to not do the same.

Two Pegasus guards slowly made their way to her and her royal guard. They looked bedraggled with most of their armor damaged or even broken clean off.

“Princess Celestia, your use of the Elements of Harmony appears to have worked. There is no sign of your sister, or her victims.

“I see... Thank you, Captain. I would like you and your partner to search for survivors, and begin evacuating them through the forest. I will meet you in Canterlot.”

The captain saluted, and took to the air with his companion following in suit. Celestia watched them for a few moments before walking to the main hall of the palace.

The stones here were intact, but littered with scraps of tapestries once loved and admired. She smiled, thankful that this place was as intact as she hoped it would be. Her magic came to her, hovering a few books from her saddlebags, knowing perfectly well that they would be needed in the future. A pen and scroll accompanied the books, hovering in the air in front of her. She wrote a very short letter, signing and sealing it, before packing it into her bag.

Then, using her magic once more, she flooded the floor below her with magic. The tiles floated up into the air, and her magic pressed down a small area in the stone floor below it. The books nestled themselves into place, and she spoke into the spell.

“Use this well, Luna.” Her voice was slowly brought into the spell, as she settled the tiles once more in their places.

She took flight then, aiming herself for the entrance to the city. The Everfree Forest was beautiful this time of year, teeming with flowers and apple trees bearing their first harvest. One of her guards stood by the ramp, moving aside so she would have enough room to land.

The pegasus bowed, "Everyone has left, Celestia."

"Thank you, Clear Sky. Can you stay with me?"

"Of course little one." He rubbed his wing on her head.

She frowned, but nuzzled into his side, "Thank you. I'm so sorry for--"

"Don't apologize," he interrupted. His eyes were solemn, but he smiled down at her, "You made a hard decision that few would be able to make. But it was for the best. Now," the aged pegasus took a step back, "Do what you must."

"I, Princess Celestia, last of the alicorns, call upon the founding makers of Equestria: Earth, Sky, Water, and Fire. Ones who have transcended the cycle of the great sleep, you have pledged your loyalty to the Kingdom of Equestria and its citizens. I call on you to hide the destruction that has befallen us. Until the time when you are called upon once more by royal blood, shall you change this place forever.

A voice responded, airy and light, *"It comes at a price. This land must be set free."*

She swallowed hard, "If that is what must be done, so be it."

The voice hesitated. After a moment it chimed back, *"Then it shall be done. No longer shall this place remain seen, and no longer shall ponies need tend to this forest. Until we speak again, Princess."*

The cliff road sank into the ground below, a thick fog rolling in to obscure its fall into the city below. The fog spilled over the cliffs into the forest, slowly creeping into the trees.

"Let's go, Sky."

Clear Sky chuckled, "You have to learn to be more formal, Princess."

She pouted, "But I don't have to be now."

He smiled, "I know. You have plenty of time to learn. Then when your sister comes back, you can save her from herself." The pegasus walked along the path towards Canterlot, taking flight.

Celestia stayed for a moment. No one would know of what truly happened here. She made sure of that. But she would pay for it when her time to sleep came.

It would destroy Equestria.

"Are you coming?" Clear Sky called.

Celestia took one look back and took to the sky. She would worry about it one day. But for now, she had time to live and prosper in what was left behind. Her goal was clear.

She would make Equestria shine as bright as the sun.