

The Last Enemy

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Chapter 1: Time's End

“Then choose!” Death shouted, his voice full of triumph. For he *had* triumphed; there was no doubt of that. His lies had corrupted Celestia and turned her into the monster Nightmare Star. The Nightmare had turned on her own race and led an army of darkness that burned cities across Equestria to the ground. Thousands of ponies – including the talented Starlight Glimmer – had been killed by the grim specter of War. It was a glorious victory. Death had harvested many souls – and he had only just begun.

Yes, Twilight Sparkle had proven bothersome. She and Luna had rallied Equestria and fought back. The tide of the war had turned and the Nightmare was now trapped in Canterlot. But Death was still going to win. When Nightmare Princess saw that the war was lost she triggered her doomsday weapon – a monstrous spell that would vaporize her, the city, and all its residents. In a last, desperate effort Twilight charged into the besieged Canterlot in order to save her friends, but she failed. It was now too late. Death had paused time so he could savor the moment, but

the end was unchangeable. When Death released the flow of time the shockwave would vaporize the city and kill everypony. There would be no survivors.

There was not a single thing Twilight could do to stop it. The blast would happen. Her friends would die. The city was lost.

In order to torment Twilight, Death froze time and gave her an awful choice. She could save one pony from the blast. One life could be spared – but all the rest would be lost. Every victim would be on her conscience. Death was certain that the pain would ruin her and, in time, turn her into a nightmare as well.

Death was deeply satisfied. He knew he had won. It did not matter who Twilight saved; for her, all roads led to madness. “Whatever you choose, I will not interfere with your choice – you have my word. I will abide by your decision. So what will you do?”

Twilight knew her time was short. Before Death paused time she was certain that she was going to be killed without saving anypony. Now she had a chance to do some good. All she had to do was cast her time spell around herself and one other, and that soul would be saved. The blast would still occur but it would not affect the two ponies frozen in time. The spell only had to last for

a minute and then the danger would be gone. But how could she save just one life? Her friends deserved better than that. Even if the Nightmare had corrupted their minds, they were still her friends and she would not let them down.

The purple alicorn looked around. She was standing in the throne room of Canterlot. In front of her was Nightmare Star – a corrupt pony, full of darkness and flame. The ruler of Equestria was encased in an intense purple glow. Beyond the tip of her horn was a blinding sphere of light. The doomsday spell had been cast; it was too late to stop its ignition. The moment Death released the flow of time, the spell would catalyze and everypony would die.

I will not let them die, Twilight decided. I just need more time. If I only had a little more time, I could–

Then she knew what she had to do. She really *could* save them all. The answer was obvious – but Death would not like it.

* * * * *

A thousand years passed. Then a second millennium went by, and then a third. The city of Canterlot crumbled into dust and was forgotten. The race of ponykind became old and cynical. The

days of princesses and alicorns were rejected, discarded as myths fit only for fillies. A new and darker nation arose. The values of friendship, honesty, and integrity were lost, for there was no pony left to teach them.

Twilight Sparkle only intended to freeze the Nightmare and her doomsday spell for a single day. She knew that Luna would immediately realize what she had done and would quickly evacuate Canterlot. Twilight could not suspend time for very long, but a day was all they needed to save the lives of everypony. Once the spell was released the weapon would go off and vaporize the city – along with Twilight and her former mentor. Two lives would be lost but the city would be saved.

But she did not consider Death. When he saw Twilight's clever response he became enraged, and decided in that instant to break his promise. He knew that shattering the divine Accord would have terrible consequences, but in his blinding anger he did not care. Death used his considerable power to strengthen Twilight's spell. The alicorn would not be suspended for one day, or two, or three. Instead she would be trapped in time *forever*. Twilight would never escape. She would not live to bring the divided nation back together. Death made sure that she would not be

around to lead her ponies on a better, brighter path.

So thousands of years passed. Nations rose and nations fell. As the centuries turned into epochs, the races of the world began to die out. One species after another went extinct until Death finally took all life from the planet. The world itself became airless and vacant – but still Death would not let Twilight go. A million years had not abated his fury or quenched his wrath.

Over the course of deep time, the stars changed. The young stars grew old. Equestria's beautiful yellow sun grew into a red giant. Its expansion incinerated the surface of the planet and turned it into glass, but the world itself endured. As billions of years passed the red giant turned into a white dwarf, and then became a black dwarf. The stars of the sky burned for a long time, but eventually the universe grew old. One by one the stars went out. There came a time when the universe had no light left at all, save for the two alicorns who were still locked in battle.

Death waited a long time to release his enemy. He waited until the last star had gone out and the last light had been quenched. All that remained was the dead world of Equestria. The only light left in the mortal plane came from the doomsday spell that Celestia had cast an eternity

ago. This time Twilight would not be able to win. Twilight's cleverness would do her no good when there was nopony left to save. There was nothing she could do but despair and die. It was over.

But if it was truly over, why was Death so nervous?

The surface of Equestria had changed considerably in a thousand trillion years, but Twilight and Celestia were still there. Time had leveled every mountain and erased every valley, which meant the two ponies were now a thousand feet off the ground. The surface of their broken world was fused glass – a testament to the day its sun exploded and baked the ground.

Death knew how unhappy Twilight would be once she saw what had become of her home. Except – the blast of the spell would kill her in less than a second, before she could even look around her. *What was I thinking? I have gone to great lengths to displease her, but she will not live long enough to appreciate it. She will never experience the true despair that I spent so much time crafting. Well, I can't have that. I didn't wait this long to ruin it now.*

The black specter of Death hovered beside the pair of alicorns. He did not need wings to fly, but he enjoyed the terrifying look that his bony wings gave him. He wanted to strike fear into the

heart of Twilight, so he took care to look the part. When Death was certain that Twilight would be able to see him, he cast the spell that released the two alicorns.

As soon as the spell was cancelled the two alicorns began falling. Twilight immediately screamed in panic. She spread her wings to catch herself – but before she had time to realize that all the air was gone and her wings could not save her, the doomsday spell ignited.

It was the brightest eruption of light the world had ever seen. Never before had mere light been such a potent and devastating weapon. The long delay had altered the spell and magnified its effect by six orders of magnitude. If Equestria still had an atmosphere it would have created a deafening roar – as if a thousand megaquakes had gone off at once – but in an airless void there can be no sound.

In less than a microsecond the Nightmare was vaporized and ceased to exist. Death finally claimed her soul, and the spell had only just begun. Its magical shockwave expanded with such speed that it caused the atoms in the ground to split apart in violent fission, triggering an uncontrolled nuclear detonation. Each atom became a nuclear weapon that ignited the one beside it.

The explosion blew the planet apart. One moment the world existed, and a second later it was gone in a brilliant flash of light and deadly radiation. When the last light cleared and Twilight could see again, there was nothing left to see.

Nothing, that is, but Death.

* * * * *

“Where am I?” Twilight asked, confused. “What just happened?”

The purple alicorn was suspended in space. Around her was nothing but darkness. Twilight lit up the area with her horn, but she could see nothing but darkness. She could feel nothing. She couldn’t even find any air to breathe – and yet she was somehow still alive. *Wait a minute. How can I hear my own voice when there is no air to carry the sound?*

That was when she saw Death.

“I have won!” Death announced. “Behold the glory of my kingdom! Behold the encompassing nature of my victory. You thought you defeated me, didn’t you? You thought you were such a clever pony. But what have you gained? Nothing!”

Twilight had no idea what Death was talking about. “You’re not making any sense. There’s nothing here except, well, nothing. What is this

place? And what have you done to my friends?"

"This is the end, Twilight – the end of the universe, and the end of time itself. Yes, you saved your friends, but only for a time. Surely you must have realized that no pony lives forever! You may have delayed me for a time, but I still won. One by one I claimed each of their lives. Then I claimed the lives of their descendants and the entire pony race. I harvested *everything*. I have destroyed every world and taken every star. Do you see this nothing – this void? This is what is left of Equestria."

"That's impossible," Twilight said firmly. "You could not possibly have done all that in one day. You're lying!"

Death laughed. "One day! Your spell did not last for one day. It lasted for all of eternity. This is eternity's end, Twilight. This is the darkness that conquers everything when all other lights have gone out. You are the last pony left. You were not frozen for one day. You were frozen for a thousand trillion years."

Twilight was so taken aback by his claim that she laughed. "You seriously expect me to believe that? I mean, come on! I wasn't born yesterday. This is *not* the end of time. You're being ridiculous. You have me trapped in a closet or something. This is the sort of stunt that Discord would pull."

Death glared at her. “Do not take me for a fool. I do not make jokes, nor do I amuse idiots. This is real, Twilight. This is the end of all things. You are alone, in the dark. You saved no one. Now it is your turn to meet your end.”

Twilight looked around her. *Is this true? Is this really the end?* She decided that, for now, denial was the best option. “This can’t be real. For one thing, I’m not powerful enough to cast a spell that lasts for literally all of eternity. That would take *way* more magic than even an alicorn has. I can’t do that!”

“Of course not,” Death said mockingly. “You’re just a little pony, after all – one who thought she could bargain with me and win. I am the one who kept you frozen forever. Did you really think I was going to let you get away with your little trick?”

Twilight gasped. “But you promised!”

“And you expected me to keep my word? Please. What do you take me for? I am not your friend. It gave me great pleasure to break my oath.”

Immediately there was a brilliant flash of pure light. The light struck death and burned him, searing his flesh. He screamed and leaped away – but the light only grew brighter.

The light struck Twilight as well, but it did not harm her. To the princess the light felt warm and

inviting. It was a piercing light that seemed to cleanse the very soul. She wanted to stay in its embrace forever.

As the seconds passed the light grew steadily stronger. Twilight felt herself strengthened. To her amazement, Death was growing weaker. His form began to fade. His spells could not block the light or shield him from its power. He began to panic.

Then the light changed. The source of the light widened and a figure emerged. Twilight realized that the light was coming from another realm – a realm where darkness had no place. *Somepony opened a door between realms and the light is leaking through. But who has stepped through the gate?*

The light became so strong that Twilight had to turn her head; it was too much to take in. Once the light faded heard a voice call out to her. Twilight looked again and saw a beautiful white alicorn with a silver mane. Her cutie mark was a living circle of stars. The pony glowed with the power of pure light. As she came near, Death backed away.

“Thank you for that admission,” the pony said. “You were warned about this, Death. You have violated the Accord.”

“Who are you?” Twilight asked.

“I am the one called Blue Onyx,” the alicorn

explained. “I have come to restore to you what Death has wrongfully taken. There is much that needs to be done. I have waited a long time for your release.”

Death glared at her. Although his power had waned, his hatred had not. “It is too late. Do you hear me?! It doesn’t matter what you do or what trick you pull! If you send Twilight back in time to her beloved Equestria, she will still die. If you go back in time and stop Celestia from ever becoming corrupt, she will still die. No matter what you do with Twilight the end will be the same. All ponies will die, all stars will end, and the universe will be mine. *I will always win.* So go ahead – do your worst.”

Death then vanished.

Blue Onyx smiled. “Light is strong against the dark. We will see him again, but not for a while.”

The white alicorn came closer and hugged Twilight. “It is so good to see you again! I have waited such a long time for your release, but I never gave up hope. Your friends didn’t either. We knew it was just a matter of time.”

“What’s going on? Is what Death said true?”

“It is partly true. This truly is the end of time – but it is not the end of all things. Nor is it true that all has been lost. Since Death violated the Accord, we can put things right. *You* can put things

right.”

“Your voice sounds familiar to me,” Twilight said thoughtfully. “Do I know you?”

“At one time you did. In your era I was called Luna, the Princess of the Night. Since those days a great many things have changed. Death has had his way with history because he cheated – but you can defeat him. Come, little one. We have much to do.”

Twilight’s eyes widened. “You’re *Luna*? Really? But – you’ve changed! Like, a lot.”

Luna laughed. “Time will do that. I am older now – although time works differently where we are going.”

“And where is that, exactly? I don’t exactly see a lot of places to go here.”

“Ultimately you will make your way back home – to the world you once knew. One day you will become as I am and live in the shadowless plane, but you are still young and it is not yet your time. For now I am going to take you to Lamplight.”

“What’s that?”

“The home of Death – the place he came from. Come! We have spent enough time waiting.”

Luna lit up her horn, and the two alicorns vanished.

Chapter 2: Time's Library

When Luna transported Twilight to Lamplight, the Princess of Friendship braced herself for a grim spectacle. What she saw took her breath away. For almost a minute Twilight couldn't bring herself to say anything at all. She looked around for a while, and then finally looked back at Luna. "*This is Death's home? Really? Are you sure we're in the right place?*"

Twilight and Luna were in a place of unimaginable beauty. Beneath their hooves was a field of lush green grass that stretched to the horizon. The ground was flat below them, but there were gentle hills in the distance. A soft breeze blew through Twilight's mane and carried with it the scent of violets. It was the most relaxing place Twilight had ever visited.

To her right was an enormous tree with a red door in its base. She recognized it immediately – it was a perfect replica of the Golden Oaks Library in Ponyville, only this one was enormously larger. The door in its trunk was slightly open, as if it was beckoning her to step inside.

The sky above them was a deep, deep blue

with not a cloud to be seen. There was no visible sun, and yet the world was not dark. The most curious thing about the sky were the lights. Twilight couldn't quite tell what they were. *It looks like this world is filled with a million fireflies,* she thought. *Only fireflies are all the same color, right? But these lights are every color of the rainbow. They're so beautiful!*

Luna smiled at Twilight's question. "I have made no error, Twilight. I have taken you to the right place. Why? Is this not what you expected?"

"Well, um, no. I was kind of expecting Death's home to be really dark, with lots of skulls and corpses and other unmentionable things. You know – a scary place. But this world is gorgeous! I feel completely at home here and I've never even set hoof in this place before."

Luna laughed. "Oh, Twilight, of course you are at home here! This is Lamplight, not Tartarus. You are thinking of the realm that imprisons the dark souls. When foul beings like Tirek meet their end, they are not allowed to come here and spread their corruption and evil. The darkness may torment the light in the lower realm, but not here. All dark souls are imprisoned forever in the Abyss, of which Tartarus is a part. Since those souls clung to the darkness and would not part with it, they are condemned to outer darkness

forever. But the Abyss is not the home of Death. It is actually his prison – one that Death is trying very hard to avoid, for he does not wish to be locked away there. He greatly fears that fate.”

“Really? But I thought Death was in charge of all that! Doesn’t he harvest souls and then eat them or something? I’m sure I’ve heard him talk about that.”

“Death tells a great many tales that are not true. He does indeed end lives, but he cannot keep that which he has taken. The only soul he has is his own. The dark souls go down to the pit, and the pure souls come to this realm of peace and rest. This place was prepared for you, Twilight. You feel at home here because it *is* your home. Or it will be, when you are older.”

“Oh.” Twilight looked around again. She tried to take in what Luna was telling her, but the sights of this place were simply overwhelming. A thousand questions came to mind. She didn’t even know where to begin. “You know, this has been a really, *really* strange day. An hour ago you and I were outside Canterlot, ready to overthrow Nightmare Star. Now I’m... here. I am so confused! This is *not* how I thought things would turn out.”

“Look at the lights,” Luna said. She pointed at one with her hoof.

Twilight had wanted to investigate the lights

as soon as she saw them, so she did not need a second invitation. The pony leaped off the ground and quickly flew up to it. When she got near it she gasped. “Why, these are *memories!* This one has Applejack in it. I’m there too, helping her harvest her apple crop. This must have been the time Big Mac got sick.” Twilight darted over to another one. “Look! This was the time I taught Sweetie Belle how to control her magic. And that one is when I worked with my friends to recover the lost Elements of Harmony!”

“I remember that day well,” Luna replied. “In fact, were it not for your actions that day, I would not be standing here now. You saved me from the darkness.”

Twilight kept darting from light to light. “Do you mean to tell me that all of these are memories? There must be *millions* of them!”

Luna shook her head. “No, they are not memories, although they appear to be. They are a record of all the lives you touched. Every pony and griffon and zebra you have ever aided is recorded here. Some of these ponies you know, and some you do not, but all of these ponies know you. You saved the lives of many whom you never met. This is what you have done, Twilight. This is the impact you had on the world.”

Twilight scanned the sky. She tried to form a

mental estimate of the number of points of light, but there were too many of them. “I can’t possibly have done that much! That’s crazy. I mean, really.”

“It is the truth. Do you see now why Death chose to imprison you? Death seeks to spread corruption. You are his great enemy, for you are a powerful agent of good. Have you ever wondered why you had so many struggles and trials when other ponies did not? Death knows who threatens him. He fights most strongly against those who are on the front lines.”

“But that’s a *lot* of ponies!”

“And not just ponies,” Luna added. “You made more friends in your life than you ever knew. Each one of those souls would gladly receive you into their room as an honored guest. They would be delighted to host you.”

“Their room?” Twilight asked, confused.

“Did you not know? Lamplight is but one realm in this plane. This area is your room – your dwelling place. But there are many others, and the residents of this realm may travel among them as they wish. They may even visit the great city and the deep wood. But this place is yours, to use as you wish. Only those you invite may enter it.”

“You call this a *room*?! This looks more like a country to me!”

Luna laughed. “Just wait until you invite a million of your closest friends over for a party! The space you see will not go to waste. You will enjoy your life here, but your time has not yet come. You still have a task to do.”

Twilight flew back to the ground and landed in front of Luna. “Now, hold on just a minute. How could this possibly be Death’s home? I may not have known Death for very long – well, not personally, anyway – but the one thing everypony knows is that he is pure evil. This doesn’t look like the sort of place where evil is allowed.”

“That is correct. But Death was not always like he is now. He was once a very different creature. This plane is where he was formed. He could have dwelt here forever, but sadly he took a path that led away from the joy he once knew. He no longer dwells here for he has been cast out. But at one time he did.”

“So he went bad, is what you are saying.”

“He did far more than just ‘go bad’. He *invented* the dark. He is the one who brought corruption into being. He has been its source all along. That is why you must fight him. The wellspring of darkness must be locked away.”

“Locked away?”

“Of course! What is the best way to repair a broken window?”

Twilight thought for a moment. “Well, let’s see. You could use glue, I guess. Or maybe magic. I’m sure there’s a spell for that. Usually I just replace them, though. Windows aren’t really the kind of thing that lend themselves to repair.”

Luna stifled a laugh. “No, Twilight. The best course of action is to prevent it from being broken in the first place. Once the world is broken it cannot be mended. The corruption must be stopped at its source, before it can poison all things.”

“So you want me to *kill Death*? Isn’t that a contradiction in terms?”

Luna shook her head. “You do not understand. He is called Death because that is what he spreads, and he is called the Adversary because he opposes all that is good. But that is not his name. You must remember that your task is *not* to kill him, Twilight. He must be imprisoned in the pit, for souls cannot be annihilated. Come with me and I will show you what you must do.”

Luna began trotting off across the field. Twilight followed her. “So what was Death’s name?”

“In the beginning he was called White Diamond. He was a creature of unparalleled beauty and magnificence. You will be amazed when you see him! He was not always a creature

of the dark.”

“So Death was a *pony?!?*” Twilight exclaimed, shocked. “With a cutie mark and everything?”

“Of course not! Ponies did not exist when he was formed. No, Death was an altogether different sort of creature. You will see. His name suited him well.”

“What happened to him?”

“He... chose poorly.”

Luna suddenly came to an abrupt halt. Twilight walked to her side and looked around. As far as she could see they were in the middle of an empty field. There was nothing particular in sight.

As Twilight watched in confusion, Luna reached a hoof into the air and pressed something that could not be seen. A moment later a fissure opened in space, and a doorway appeared. Twilight could see that the passage led into an elegant room, but she could not see the door frame.

“Woah,” Twilight said, startled. “What just happened?”

Luna looked at her, puzzled. “I simply opened the door. Why?”

“But there’s nothing there! Did you cast a magic spell or something?”

Luna smiled. “How easily I forget your youth. You are still so young, little one – too young to be

in this realm, I am afraid. You have much growing to do before you can perceive all that is around you. Can you see the guardian who watches over this door?"

Twilight looked around. "Um, no. I see grass, and a sky, and in the distance I see a bunch of trees. As far as I can tell we are pretty much all alone here."

"And yet we are not alone at all. This place is far from empty. It only appears to be so because you lack the Sight. Standing guard over this door is a magnificent mystery. He has six wings and the appearance of a lion. He is full of eyes and he never stops watching. He is your protector, Twilight. He guards this place to keep the darkness from entering."

Twilight shifted nervously. "Am I in danger?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then why do I need a guard?"

"To remind you that you are protected. He is a token that in all the ages to come, for the rest of eternity, no threat shall ever enter here."

"Oh," Twilight said. She paused. The alicorn was sorely tempted to reach out a hoof and try to touch this invisible creature, but she eventually decided she shouldn't poke something she couldn't see. "Doesn't he, like, get bored?"

Luna laughed. "He has other uses as well. But

come. I have something to show you. This you will be able to see.”

Luna stepped through the portal, and Twilight followed close behind her. Twilight immediately found herself in an enormous room that was filled with her favorite thing: *books*. The sight of them immediately filled her with happiness. And what a beautiful library it was! The floor beneath her hooves was made of elegant oak planks. The walls were lined to the ceiling with the largest bookshelves Twilight had ever seen, and every inch of the shelves were packed with massive books. The ceiling above her was painted to look like the evening sky – or perhaps it was a magic ceiling; it was hard to tell.

“This is *amazing!*” Twilight exclaimed. It was all she could do to keep from dancing with joy. “I can’t wait to get started. I have so much reading to do! So how are these books organized? By topic, maybe?”

“These are not those kind of books,” Luna said gently. “This room is the Timeline. Since you love the written word, I have organized history into a shape that is easy for you to work with. Do you see the blue volume in the middle of the room?”

Twilight looked around and quickly spotted the book that Luna was talking about. It was a

thick blue hardback volume that was resting on a crystal pedestal. There was a small gold plaque in front of the book. The pony trotted over to it and examined it more closely. “It says ‘Twilight Sparkle’. So this book is named after me?”

“It *is* you. Pick it up.”

Twilight levitated it with her magic and opened it. She gasped. The book was not filled with words; instead it was filled with living images. She saw herself as a young filly, reading her first book. She saw Candace watching over her when her parents went out. She saw her entrance exam to Celestia’s school of magic – and so much more. It was overwhelming.

“Is this book my life?” Twilight asked.

Luna nodded. “That book is your section of the timestream. The other volumes contain the rest of time – the years before you were born and the years after you vanished. The whole history of the pony race is contained here. It is, sadly, a rather short tale.”

Twilight scanned the room. The library stretched off to the right and to the left as far as she could see. “A *short* tale? Really? Do you see how many books are here? It would take forever to go through all of this!”

“But it is few in number compared to what might have been. You see only what is here, for

you are young; I see what never came to pass, for I am old. So tell me, Twilight. Death once offered you a choice – an evil one, I am afraid. He offered it not to help you but to harm you. Today I offer you a choice as well, and I ask you to think carefully. Since Death broke the Accord, you may go back into the timestream and resume your life.”

“Hold on,” Twilight interrupted. “What do you mean, *resume*? I mean, Celestia’s blast killed me, right? It was so powerful that it completely vaporized the whole world! I’ve *got* to be dead. Isn’t that why I’m in the realm of, um, departed souls?”

Luna shook her head. “No, Twilight. You are not dead. The blast would have killed you, but Death decided to save your life so he could torment you further. He wanted you to see his greatest creation – the end of the universe. He used his magic to spare you and enable you to breathe and talk. You did *not* die, but your years were stolen from you. That gives you the right to re-enter the timestream.”

“But I kind of like it here. Didn’t you say that I had lots of friends here? So I could go see Applejack and Pinkie Pie and Celestia, right?”

“Celestia is not in here,” Luna replied sadly. “She was corrupted by Death and chose the path of darkness. No corrupt soul may enter this realm.

If you wish to see her again you must go back and save her.”

“Oh. But – well, I guess that’s not too hard. I can just go back in time and warn Celestia to not make the deal with Death, right? Problem solved!”

“Is it? Tell me. What did Equestria look like when Death freed you from your prison?”

That was a memory Twilight was already trying to forget. Just thinking about it made her nervous. “It, um, looked pretty dark. There wasn’t really a lot left.”

“*Nothing* was left. Death destroyed all. The corruption that he spread into the lower realm consumed everything. It took away every life and extinguished every star. It ruined far more than just Celestia.”

“*Death* did all that?” Twilight asked skeptically. “That just sounds like the normal march of time to me.”

“But it was *not* normal. It was not how things were meant to be! Oh, Twilight, you have lived for so long in a corrupt world that you cannot see what you have lost. You are so used to the darkness that you cannot imagine a world of pure light. Since a broken world is all you have known, you are convinced that the world *must* be broken in order to function. You can no more imagine what Death took from you than you could imagine

a new color. Tell me something, Twilight. Have you ever wished that Pinkie Pie would put some poison in her cakes so that the goodness of the cake would be balanced with darkness?"

"Of course not!" Twilight gasped, horrified. "That would be awful."

"Indeed it would. A cake should be pure. No one wishes to find Death in their confections. What you must understand is that Death's presence in the lower realm is just as unacceptable. We do not need darkness in order to bring balance to light. What we must do is use the light to *obliterate* the darkness. Do you think it is a good thing that Apple Bloom never knew her parents?"

"I never said that!"

"That is true, for you know her parents loved her. They could have enriched her life considerably if they only had the chance. They loved her dearly but they were taken from her. Apple Bloom did not need Death to bring some 'balance' to her life."

Twilight knew what Luna wanted her to do, but the thought filled her with fear. Lamplight was a beautiful place of peace – a place where Twilight knew she would be happy. She was tired of war and tired of fighting. She was tired of bloodshed and pain and nightmares. She had seen Death's

power and knew what he could do. *I can't do this. I just can't.*

"I see what you're getting at," Twilight said aloud. "But look. Suppose I *do* go back to the beginning and stop Death. That's going to change everything, right? All of history is going to be totally different. Things won't turn out the way they did before. Doesn't that mean that Apple Bloom might never exist at all? Maybe it would be better if we just left things alone."

"Souls cannot be destroyed," Luna replied. "They can be corrupted and they can be consumed by darkness. But even changing time cannot erase them."

"But that doesn't make sense! If Death is gone then ponies will live longer – like, *way* longer. And they'll probably have more children, right? You can't tell me this won't affect the population!"

"I said souls cannot be *destroyed*. I did not say they could not be created. If that were the case then none of us would exist. But tell me: does this realm seem crowded to you?"

"Not really," Twilight admitted.

"And yet there are so many souls here that nopony can number them! Death did more damage to the lower realm than you know."

The fear inside Twilight grew even stronger. She tried hard to hide it from Luna. "All right. So

you want me to go back and, um, do what, exactly? I still don't know how I'm supposed to defeat Death."

"You cannot kill him. What you must do is resist him. Remember, the light is strong against the dark. Force him out of Lamplight. Protect the lower realm from his wrath. Rally the watchers to join you and cast him into the Abyss. Once he is locked away he will be unable to poison the realms with his darkness. Equestria will become what it should have been all along."

"So what happens if he kills me?"

"If he kills you?" Luna echoed. "Twilight, he cannot. Is that what you fear? Before I brought you here you were touched by the uncreated light. It burned Death and made him flee, but it transformed you. Death can grievously wound you but he cannot overcome you. The only way he can win this fight is if you choose to surrender. I will not lie to you, princess: there will be pain and there will be blood. You are going to war and it will be brutal. It will be far worse than our fight against the Nightmare. Death will make you pay a very high price, but if you resist him he will flee from you. The darkness cannot overcome the light – as long as the light is willing to fight and not flee."

Luna's speech did not make Twilight feel any

better. *I am in big, big trouble*, Twilight thought. Her fears gave way to panic. Going to war against Death was an insane thing to do. *He is going to tear me apart! How can I possibly do this? Has Luna lost her mind?*

As terror started to overwhelm her, Twilight nervously looked around for the First Book – and she found it. Just looking at it made her sick to her stomach. The volume was resting on a pedestal not far from the one that bore her name. It was a thin, white book. Despite its plain and unassuming appearance, it was easily the most frightening thing she had ever seen. *That book is a one-way road to Death himself.*

Twilight immediately turned her head. She couldn't bear to even look at it. "So, Luna, you're coming with me, right? Please tell me you don't expect me to do this by myself."

Luna shook her head. "I cannot. I know this brings you pain, but I lived out my life. I have no right to change my fate."

"But I can't do this alone! Can't the lion guard creature come to help?"

"He cannot. Only you can do this, for only you were cheated. If somepony else could fix the world then do you not think they would have done so long before now? This task is yours and yours alone."

“But I can’t do this! Don’t you understand? *I can’t*. Death is terrifying! He’s huge, and monstrous, and incredibly powerful. Death will crush me like a bug and turn me into a bloody mess. You told me that yourself! Luna, you’re asking me to fix *all the evil that has ever happened*. When I fail – which is certain – I’m going to be responsible for all the deaths of everypony. And if I somehow succeed, Equestria will have a new timeline. My friends will have entirely new lives and will be unrecognizable. And they will have lives *without me*, since I won’t even exist in this new timeline. All our shared memories will be gone. No matter how this turns out I’m going to lose everything.”

“You are thinking too small,” Luna said gently. “The good deeds you have done cannot be undone. Those lights in your sky cannot be lost. If you succeed you will *gain* the world, not lose it. The souls you have touched will have a new life, yes, but they will retain the memories of their old life. They will know what you have done for them – and they will *not* love you less for sparing them agony and death. You will rejoin them when this is over.”

Luna saw that Twilight was terrified. She knew that no words would comfort her, so she decided on a different approach. The Princess of

the Night walked over to the First Book and levitated it off the stand. "Follow me, little one. I want you to meet somepony."

Twilight frowned, but followed Luna out the door of the library. When they emerged back onto the grassy field she looked around – and gasped in amazement. Her world was no longer empty; instead it was packed with more ponies than she could count. They filled the ground and the sky.

I know these ponies! Why, there's Rainbow Dash over there. I see Applejack, and Pinkie, and Rarity – and look, there's Scootaloo! I even see Spike – and boy has he grown. He's not a baby dragon anymore.

Twilight stared at the crowd, utterly speechless. Luna nudged her. "I hope I did not violate your trust by inviting these ponies to your realm. Aren't you going to say hello?"

Twilight galloped over to the nearest pony and hugged her. "It's so good to see all of you!"

"The Great and Powerful Trixie is glad to see you too," the blue unicorn replied. "She promises she was never truly on the Nightmare's side."

"Don't leave me out!" Pinkie called out. "I've waited a *long* time to see you again."

As Twilight's friends rushed over, her fears dissipated. The love of her friends warmed her heart and made her feel like her old self again.

The last time she saw them was before the rise of the Nightmare – before Celestia poisoned them and overthrew their minds. Trixie had been controlled by the Nightmare’s mind spell and died while killing Starlight Glimmer – and yet here they both were, alive and in their right minds again. The horror and stress of the grueling war finally began to melt away.

“I have missed you all so much,” Twilight finally said. “I tried to save you – I really did.”

“And you did save us, darling,” Rarity replied. “You freed us from that terrible mental prison and gave us all new lives. We only wish you could have shared them with us.”

“Which you *totally* will, once you beat Death,” Rainbow Dash commented. “I sure wish I could join you! That fight is going to be *epic*. Promise me you’ll tell me all about it when it’s over.”

“Do you really think I can do this?” Twilight asked. “I mean, seriously. You know how crazy this is, right?”

“Of course you can!” Spike replied. The enormous dragon smiled at her. “If you ask me, Death is the one who should be afraid of *you*. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: since when does Twilight Sparkle ever fail?”

Rarity spoke up. “Well, she can’t make a good bird’s nest, so there’s that. Her fashion sense

is also a bit, shall we say, underdeveloped. But really, those are just minor faults. I have no doubt, Twilight, that you will crush this foul beast. We are all rooting for you. We can't join you but we'll be watching."

Twilight looked around at her friends and then back at Luna, who was still holding the First Book. The situation had not changed, and yet she wasn't nearly as scared anymore. Her friends had strengthened her. "So how is this going to work?"

"When you touch this book you will return to the beginning – to the day when White Diamond became Death. If you lose the war the timeline will remain unchanged. If you win, everything will change the moment Death is locked away– and you will be brought home."

"To Lamplight?"

Luna laughed. "Not yet, Twilight. You have a life to live in Equestria first. You will set hoof here again, but not until the days of deep time. You still have a lot of growing to do. Are you ready?"

"Absolutely not. But I'm not going to let my friends down. If I have to do this then I'll go."

Twilight slowly approached the white book. Even though she knew what it represented, she could now look at it without flinching. "I *really* wish I had some help, though. I'll do whatever it takes to save my friends, but this isn't going to be

easy.”

“I know,” Luna said. “But you will find allies. You will not wage this war alone. I will see you on the other side, when this is over.”

Twilight hesitated. She hugged the princess one last time. “I guess I’ll see you later, then.”

“You bet we will!” Pinkie exclaimed. “And we are going to throw a *totally awesome* party when you get to Ponyville. It’s going to be the best party ever!”

In spite of her fears, Twilight smiled. *I’ll miss you*, she thought. She then grabbed the book with her magic and opened it to the first page. The princess carefully reached out and touched the book with her hoof – and instantly vanished.

Chapter 3: Time's Birth

One moment Twilight Sparkle was surrounded by her friends in a peaceful world, and the next moment they were gone. The world around her disappeared in a flash of light and was replaced by a very different one. This time she found herself at the base of an enormous mountain. The bottom of the mountain was covered in tall pine trees. The tree line eventually gave way to bare rock, and then snow. The top of the mountain was so far above her that it was lost in clouds. *It must be miles tall, at least!* Twilight thought with amazement.

The alicorn looked around. To her surprise, the mountain was the only piece of landscape in existence. The ground beneath her hooves was a featureless gray, as if it had not yet been defined. The sky above was a pale blue and held neither sun nor moon. There were no ponies, or signs of life, or any civilization to be seen. The only noise she heard was a gentle breeze that rustled the trees on the mountain. *Now that's weird. Either there is nothing here, or there are lots of things here and I just can't see them. I'm not sure which*

possibility is worse.

“Hello?” Twilight called out. Her voice did not even echo. It simply vanished.

Twilight looked up at the mountain. *Hmmm. Well, since there isn't anything else here, I guess I should try to climb it. Maybe there is something hidden at its peak.*

After nervously looking around one more time, Twilight flapped her wings and flew off into the air. She tried to calm herself by focusing on the task at hand. She didn't want to think about the fact that she was at the very beginning of time, before any of her friends had even been born, and she was completely alone in an alien world. But somehow that was all she could think about.

Twilight soared up the side of the enormous mountain. She flew high over the trees and aimed for the layer of clouds that obscured its peak. The pony didn't know if she should be in a hurry. For all she knew Death didn't exist yet – or he was off somewhere else. *I am so unprepared for this! I have no idea what I'm doing. I really should have asked Luna a few more questions.*

As Twilight flew over the base of the mountain she wondered if maybe she was missing something. *What if everyone lives in the forest? There could be a whole town down there. For that matter I don't even know what kind of life form*

I'm looking for – why, for all I know Death might be a talking tree or something.

Twilight focused intently on the ground below her and strained to spot any signs of civilization. Her concentration was so intense that she forgot to look where she was going – and less than a minute later she crashed into something.

Twilight shrieked in pain and began to fall out of the sky. She felt a claw grab her – and a moment later she found herself on the ground in the forest.

“You had better watch where you’re going, you know,” a very familiar voice chided. “It’s not nice to call for someone’s attention and then run into them when they come to greet you. Why, in some circles that would be considered quite rude.”

Twilight rested on the ground for a moment and caught her breath, and then looked at the creature she had collided with. She gasped in astonishment. Standing before her was a chimera that appeared to be constructed of random, leftover parts from other animals. She saw a deer’s antler, a goat’s horn, a lion’s arm, an eagle’s claw, the wing of a bat – and it didn’t end there. He was definitely a draconequus – and his voice gave away exactly who he was.

“*Discord?*” Twilight gasped in amazement. “What in Equestria are you doing here?”

“I might ask you the same thing, my damsel in distress.” Discord snapped his eagle talon, and a comfortable overstuffed recliner appeared. He settled down in it and waved his lion paw in the air. “So do tell. What brings you to this part of the world?”

Twilight face-hoofed. “This is the *last* thing I needed today. Seriously? This job is going to be hard enough without you making it a hundred times harder! I’m trying to save the world, Discord. I don’t have time for your games. Just stay out of my way and leave me alone.”

“Dear me, your manners certainly leave much to be desired,” Discord said languidly. “You call for my help, and then you dismiss me. Is that any way to address a friend?”

“A *friend*? Do you even know what that word means? You have been nothing but trouble since the day I met you! Do you remember what you did after you escaped that stone prison – a prison, I might add, that you were trapped in for taking over Equestria and tormenting the entire pony race? You turned my friends against me. Then when Celestia took pity on you and Fluttershy became your friend, what did you do? Why, you betrayed the entire country and turned everypony – including Fluttershy – over to Tirek for torment and death. In spite of your

treacherous betrayal, I saved you – and what thanks did I get? None whatsoever! When the Nightmare arose and I needed you most, you abandoned us all. You refused to save anypony – even Fluttershy – and left us all to die. You refused to fight with us.”

“I did all that?” Discord asked. He snapped his talon again, and a tall lemonade with a twisty straw appeared. He slurped from the straw, and the straw vanished. “Dear me. Please, go on.”

Twilight was now furious. It was all she could do to keep from hitting him. “You still don’t care, do you? You *abandoned us*. Every time I’ve given you a chance to change, you betrayed us! So no, Discord. You are *not* a friend. Friends care for each other. Friends are there when you need them the most. Friends stand by you. You are *none* of those things. Do you know what I’m doing here?”

Discord tossed the drink away. It vanished in a flash of light. “Of course I do. You have clearly come to bask in my greatness! That’s what I would do if I were you.”

“No, you moron! I’ve come here to stop Death. That wretched monster imprisoned me for an eternity and destroyed everything. I’m here to stop him from corrupting Equestria. I am going to save the lives of everypony – including Fluttershy, who you pretend to care about. All I ask is that

just once – just this once! – don’t be a total jerk. If you won’t do it for me then do it for her. Is that really so much to ask?”

Discord stood up out of his chair. The chair blinked its eyes and ran off into the woods. “I just have one question for you, my crabby and rude friend. Why do you keep calling me that?”

“What – a jerk? Really? Do I need to engrave it on a tablet of stone and hit you with it?”

“No, no. Perhaps I wasn’t clear. Why do you keep calling me Discord?”

“Because that’s who you are! You’re the Prince of Chaos – the source of disharmony. Ponies have hated you for thousands of years because of the cruel way you torment them. And what did you do when we gave you a chance to change? You left us to die – and now you’ve come all this way through time to cause even *more* trouble. What do you have to say for yourself?”

Discord’s eagle talon magically changed into a magnifying glass. He peered through it at Twilight. “There are several things that come to mind. First of all, you are clearly a pony. Yet White Diamond told us just this morning that the pony race would not appear for some years yet. Therefore, you must be from the future. Since you describe an entire race of ponies, you must be from the *distant* future.”

The magnifying glass disappeared and Discord waved his eagle talon in the air. "Since you are from the future, you must have arrived at this place through time travel. Apparently you truly have come to save your friends from an unfortunate demise, of which I seem to have played a part. I must confess, however, that it pains me to know of the sorrow I have inflicted on your race. I have always thought of myself as the living embodiment of unity – different parts coming together to form a glorious whole."

"Unity is the *last* thing that you are," Twilight said angrily.

"That does seem to be the impression my future self has given," Discord agreed. "But I assure you I have done none of those things. You may condemn my future self as much as you please, but I am not him. In fact, I only got here just yesterday. You are the first pony I have ever seen."

"Uh-huh. Look, Discord. Maybe you're telling the truth and maybe you're not. You have never given me a reason to believe you. If you're from the future then *stay out of my way*. If you're from the past then *help me*. Do something good for a change. If you won't do it for me then do it for Fluttershy. She cares about you, you know."

"Why wouldn't I do it for you? After all, you

are the only pony I know. You seem rather rude, hostile, angry, and bitter, but other than that you're not so bad. Although I *do* believe you could use a shower. You're not very presentable."

Twilight glared at him. "Do you know where I was a few hours ago? In battle, trying to save my friends! Then I had to fight Death, and now I'm here to fight Death some more. The only thing that matters to me right now is *saving my friends* – not making sure my mane is properly styled. I'm sorry if my blood, sweat, and tears do not suit your refined tastes!"

"Is that the dry, crusty substance that is all over your wing?" Discord asked. He peered closer to it. "Fascinating. I know so little about ponies. You are the most peculiar creatures."

Twilight jerked her wing away. "We're wasting time! Can you take me to White Diamond?"

"Certainl—" Discord started to say, and then stopped. He peered at Twilight. "Do you mean to tell me that *he* is the one you refer to as Death? That he is the great villain who has been tormenting your race?"

"Yes," Twilight said testily. "Now can you bring me to him or not?"

"I simply can't believe it. White Diamond! Wait until the guys hear about this. White

Diamond is the most magnificent creature in the entire universe – and considering *I* am in the universe, that is really saying something. You simply *must* be mistaken. His manners are so refined and his speech is so elegant. He is the pinnacle of life.”

“He is evil incarnate – just wait and see. Now can you take me to him, or not?”

“Certainly, certainly. No need to be fussy. Right this way.”

Discord snapped his eagle talon and the two of them vanished. Twilight reappeared at the peak of the mountain. Here, at last, was a wide city, filled with all the signs of civilization. The alicorn was in what appeared to be in a large public square in the heart of the town. She was surprised to see that she was standing on top of a pedestal. *I’m going to get you for this, Discord*, she thought. *You just can’t help yourself, can you? Where did you go, anyway?* But her friend was nowhere to be seen.

Yet she was not alone. There were all sorts of creatures in the square, staring up at her. All of them were completely alien to her. But one creature in particular grabbed her attention. Flying in the sky was the largest dragon she had ever seen. The dragon’s scales were made out of what looked like literal diamonds. As the dragon

flew through the air the diamonds caught the light and refracted it, showering the city with a burst of rainbow light. His beauty was staggering. It was like watching a living rainbow flow through the sky.

So that's why he's called White Diamond. His scales are literally jewels – and his head alone is bigger than my old treehouse. I am in so much trouble. Is it too late to back out and go back home?

But Twilight was out of time. White Diamond had taken notice of her.

* * * * *

Twilight was very, very uncomfortable. She was perched on a white stone pedestal that was at least twenty feet tall, and she was surrounded by a host of strange creatures. Most of them looked like chimeras – creatures made up out of the parts of other creatures. There were thousands of them and they were all staring at her. The creatures talked among themselves in low voices.

White Diamond circled in the air above her. He then simply stopped in mid-air, over the city. The refracted light from his scales bathed the square in a rainbow of purple hues. Twilight was

a bit surprised that he could simply hang in the air without flapping his wings, but then she remembered who she was dealing with.

Twilight was vaguely aware that she was in a very poor strategic position, but she couldn't bring herself to move. Her entire attention was fixed on the monster who was staring at her. Somehow his dragon form was far more frightening than his apparition as a shadowy specter.

Then White Diamond spoke. "Behold! This, my dear friends, is a pony. Do you now see my point? Can you understand my great dismay? We have been wronged, brothers and sisters. A grave injustice has been thrust upon us. We cannot allow this to stand!"

The crowd below murmured.

"Um, excuse me," Twilight called out. "What are you talking about?"

"Why *you*, of course. Look at you! I am clothed in precious gems; you are clothed in sweat and dirt. I am a being of great power and majesty; you are a bad joke. I am a resident of the greater realm who has walked among the stones of fire; you are from below. I am *infinitely* greater than you. You are a perversion of everything that is beautiful and elegant. You bring a plague upon this place just by being here! You stain this city

with your filthy presence.”

Now that’s the Death I remember, Twilight thought to herself. “So, basically, you’re saying that my very existence offends you.”

“Not at all. I do not object to the existence of inferior races. There are certainly uses for them. They could provide amusement, or perhaps serve as slaves. What I object to is the idea that I, the greatest of all creatures, should be required to serve your kind. I should be the *ruler*, not the servant! You are utterly unworthy.”

“Now wait a minute,” Twilight said. “I never—”

“Silence!” White Diamond thundered. “I have heard it all before. You will tell me that love is a noble thing. You will say that true love cares for others. Friendship does not count the cost; instead it does whatever is needed because that is the very meaning of being a friend. You will tell me that if I just had love in my heart I would gladly do anything for you.”

“Actually, I—”

“Love, love, love, love,” White Diamond mocked, growing steadily angrier with every word. “Love is patient. Love is kind. Love sacrifices for others. Love seeks to do good. Love just wants to help everyone. Do you know what *I* think, you miserable worm? I think love is a concept invented by the garbage of the universe to

imprison the strong and noble. I think the very concept of love should be burned out of existence. It holds us back from taking what is rightfully ours.”

Twilight did her best to hide her growing sense of panic. She knew she was moments away from being attacked. “And what, exactly, would you replace it with?”

“I would replace it with *me!*” White Diamond roared. “All creatures would bow down to me. I would rule over everything and everyone, for I am glorious. *You*, however, would utterly perish.”

“And what of the watchers? Will they simply go along with your plan to destroy the universe?”

“If they try to stop me I will *burn them all,*” White Diamond growled. “So tell me, little pony. I am not going to submit to your tyranny. I refuse to heed the sickening siren song of ‘love’. I will not allow the good and noble residents of this city to become your slaves. Instead I will defend my home and devour your race. Do you have any last words before I crush the life out of you?”

“You cannot kill me,” Twilight said, with far more courage than she felt. She wasn’t sure she actually believed that, but it felt good to say. “I am going to stop you. I will not let you harm my friends!”

White Diamond laughed. “You’re ridiculous! Killing you isn’t even going to be a challenge. You

are so pathetic that you don't even know how pathetic you are. The universe is better off without a race of ponies."

White Diamond took a deep breath. Twilight knew what was going to come next – a river of molten fire. So she teleported out of sight.

Her disappearance took White Diamond by surprise. He coughed and looked around. By the time he found Twilight it was too late. She had teleported herself right behind his head. She quickly gathered up all her magic and fired a bolt of blinding white light at him.

The light refracted off his diamond scales and became a beautiful rainbow of colors. It did not hurt him in the slightest.

White Diamond shook his head. "I wear light as a garment, you idiot! Did you really think it would work as a weapon?"

Well, actually, yes, Twilight thought to herself. In blind panic she tried to teleport again, but she was too slow. White Diamond grabbed her with one of his claws. He crushed her and tossed her broken body to the ground.

Twilight blacked out.

* * * * *

The alicorn slowly regained consciousness.

Every part of her body hurt. She opened her eyes and looked around. The world was murky at first, but it gradually cleared up. *So that's what it feels like to die*, she thought to herself. *I should never have listened to Luna.*

To her surprise she was still in the white city at the top of the mountain. Up in the air she could see White Diamond flying off. He was saying something to some other creature, but she couldn't quite hear it.

Twilight struggled to stand up. To her disbelief, nothing appeared to be broken. There was blood everywhere but she was whole. There weren't even any open wounds.

What in Equestria is going on? Twilight wondered. What did the uncreated light do to me? Am I some kind of unkillable zombie now? If I am then why am I in pain?

Twilight looked back up at the sky. Something about White Diamond caught her attention – he looked different somehow. There was something wrong with one of his claws. She needed to get a closer look.

None of the chimeras were looking at her. Around her were tall buildings made of white stone that were covered in gems. Between the majestic homes was a maze of narrow alleys. Twilight galloped down one of the alleys and

crossed the street. She raced to position herself beneath White Diamond.

That was when she saw it. White Diamond was still an enormous dragon and he was still covered in diamonds. But he was no longer completely white. The claw that he had used to crush Twilight had turned black, and tendrils of darkness snaked from the area into the heart of his being. His attack had corrupted him. *Light is strong against the dark*, Twilight thought to herself. *As his darkness increases the light will become more painful to him. I just need to—*

Twilight froze. “Luna, you’re out of your mind!” she screamed. “*This* is what you wanted me to do? Are you serious?!”

White Diamond immediately looked down. He saw the pony standing in the alley. “What is this?” he exclaimed in amazement. “How is it that you are still alive?”

Twilight didn’t give him time to finish his thought. She teleported out of sight.

White Diamond soared over the city but could not find her. His anger grew. “Come out you coward! Face me. You wish to defeat me, so here I am! Give me your best shot.”

When Twilight did not reappear, White Diamond began to lose patience. He took a deep breath and roared, breathing out a stream of

white fire. He passed over the city and raked it with his breath. Entire blocks of white buildings cracked and melted. The chimeras in the city streets screamed and dove for cover – but he did not stop. The dragon passed over the city again and again, melting it with his unbearable flame. He then dove down and landed in the square. “Where are you, you miserable wretch? Show yourself!”

By now the darkness within him had grown even further. His former purity had become corrupted, and he was now gray. “I’m up here, Death,” Twilight called out.

The dragon immediately looked up. Twilight had been hovering above him in the sky the entire time.

White Diamond roared in rage and slammed his tail into the ground. The city quaked, and more buildings fell. By now the chimeras were fleeing the city in droves, but their leader did not care. The dragon leaped off the ground to chase the tiny purple alicorn. Twilight tried to flee, but to her horror she found herself trapped. She couldn’t move.

As she desperately struggled to break free, the dragon flew up to her. His enormous head filled up her entire field of vision. He was a terrifying sight. “You are not the only one who can

do magic,” he snarled.

The dragon took a deep breath and blasted her with a stream of fire – but the fire did not touch the pony. When the last flame dissipated, Twilight was still there – protected by a magical shield she had cast.

“Look at yourself!” Twilight called out. She was panting heavily. The strain of maintaining her defenses was taking a heavy toll on her. “Do you see what you’ve become?”

That was when he noticed that he was no longer a creature of the light. His diamond scales had grown dark, and tendrils of blackness were now laced through his entire being. The light was fading.

“Yes, look at me,” White Diamond shouted. The chimeras below ignored him; they were too busy running for their lives. “Everyone, look at me! I am the ruler of this realm. I am the mighty one. This pony cannot define me. Her magic is useless against my might!”

White Diamond reached out with one of his claws. He seized the magical sphere that surrounded Twilight and squeezed it. Twilight did her best to sustain it, but it was impossible. The sphere collapsed.

The dragon grabbed her and held her tightly. When Twilight screamed, he snarled at her and

threw her into the ground with all his might.

Twilight crashed through the ceiling of a building and immediately blacked out. She hit it with such force that the entire building collapsed. The magic that White Diamond used to throw her propelled her with such violence that Twilight pierced through the ground and came out the other side of the mountain. Her body rolled down the rocky slope and finally came to a stop at the side of a large boulder.

When Twilight came to herself she didn't even try to get up. She just lied on the ground, in pain. Twilight saw where she was but made no attempt to move. *So when Death kills me I go to the realm of departed souls – which is this place, apparently. My body is resurrected but the memory of the pain lingers. Luna, what have you done to me?*

But Twilight had no time to think. This time White Diamond did not assume that his enemy was defeated. He flew around the mountain and sped toward Twilight's position. The alicorn saw him coming and knew what was going to happen. *We are going to keep doing this, over and over and over, until I finally go insane. But I can't let my friends down. All of Equestria is depending on me.*

Twilight struggled to stand up on her hooves. When White Diamond approached she fired a

beam of light at him and struck his side. To her surprise, White Diamond screamed in pain. He immediately veered off course and backed off. That is when Twilight noticed how dark he had become. The light was entirely gone from him. He contained nothing but great darkness.

Twilight leaped off the ground and fired at him, again and again and again. Each attack found its mark. The light seared the scales of the dragon and cut grooves into him.

But the dragon was not defeated. With a roar of anger he dove to the ground, snatched up an enormous rock the size of a house, and threw it at Twilight. The alicorn darted out of the way – but she wasn't quite fast enough. The edge of the rock cut her wing and sent her spiraling to the ground.

The enraged monster picked up another rock and hurled it at her. Twilight used her magic to deflect it aside. She backed away – but the dragon kept hurling rocks, one after the other.

“You are weak and spent,” the dragon snarled. “I can do this all day! You, though, aren't going to last another minute.”

Twilight desperately wanted to shoot him again but she had to put all her effort into dodging the incoming boulders. In a desperate attempt to escape she tried to teleport away – but the dragon was ready for her. When she reappeared

in the sky, a rock was already on its way to hit her. She didn't stand a chance.

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This time when Twilight awoke she was pinned under a giant rock. She felt as if an entire house was on top of her. She could barely breathe.

White Diamond towered over her. He then leaned down so that his head was just a few feet from her face. "It is over," he said triumphantly. "No matter how hard you try you can never defeat me. I can kill you over, and over, and over again. You cannot win. Continuing this futile battle will only bring you more pain. It is time to surrender."

By now the dragon was exceedingly dark. His scales were no longer jewels; they were now cracked, broken, and dull. He looked more like a cloud of utter darkness than a dragon.

"Come now, let us be reasonable," Death said, as he squeezed the life out of her. "You gave it a try, and that is all your friends could expect. I will open a door for you and return you home – to Ponyville. There you can live out the rest of your days in peace. Isn't that what you want? There's no need to continue this pointless fight. You have nothing to gain but more pain and torment. The alternative, of course, is to remain trapped under

this rock forever – dying over and over again for all of eternity. Is that really what you want? Wouldn't you rather be with your friends?"

Twilight knew she was seconds away from blacking out yet again. Using what little energy she had left, Twilight shot Death squarely in the face. This time the beam of light penetrated his head and came out the other side. He leaped back, screaming in pain.

But Twilight could not finish him off. She didn't have the strength to teleport out from under the rock, or even fire a second time. It really was over.

Twilight blacked out.

* * * * *

When Twilight came to herself she was startled to see that the rock was gone. She was no longer trapped – and Death was nowhere to be seen.

Twilight struggled to stand up. She looked around in confusion, and saw a familiar face standing beside her. "I apologize for the delay," Discord said. "It took me some time to put together an army. They were all busy running for their lives, I'm afraid. I hope that Death didn't do too much damage to you."

“What?” Twilight gasped. “I don’t understand.”

Discord pointed up at the sky. Twilight saw that the dragon was still there, blacker than ever – but he was being attacked by a whole host of creatures. It was a vicious fight, and Death was not winning. “I’ll admit that at first no one wanted to get involved. But then White Diamond enacted some rather unpopular legislation that caused him to take a dive in the polls. Flattening the city was a bad start to his administration, and roasting its citizens did not win him the support he was after. Plus, the way he treated you was, shall we say, rather shameful.”

“He killed me!” Twilight said angrily. “Over and over and over again. It still hurts.”

“And yet you never stopped fighting him. You never gave up. Even when you were trapped under that rock you still fought for your friends. Your actions demonstrated the true meaning of love far more convincingly than any speech. If this is the sort of love you showed to me in the future, and I then betrayed it – well, it’s no wonder you were so rude. The truth is I simply couldn’t bear the thought of being on the same side as that monster. What if he decided to come after *me* next? He clearly had to go.”

Twilight looked up at the sky. She still in pain,

and she knew she looked frightful. The alicorn was covered in debris and dirt, her mane was a complete mess, and her feathers were in disarray. "Are you sure you want to be seen with me?" Twilight asked Discord.

"There's no one I would rather have by my side. Are you ready to go back to battle?"

Twilight didn't say anything. She leaped off the ground and flew toward Death as fast as she could fly. Now that she had friends at her side she felt a renewed surge of hope. She was no longer alone. In fact, Death was surrounded by an enormous cloud of creatures. She didn't know who they were or what race they represented, but she knew that they were on her side.

When Twilight approached her allies parted. Death stopped for a moment and then saw who was coming for him. For the first time his eyes widened in fear. "We can talk this over," Death protested. "Stop and think about what you're—"

Twilight shot him in the face. The blinding white beam of pure light pierced through his entire body. Death didn't even have time to scream. He simply disappeared.

A loud cheer went up. The crowd thronged Twilight and began congratulating her. "Wait!" Twilight shouted. "We haven't won yet. All we've done is cast him out of this realm. We need to go

after him in the lower realm before he can do any damage there. We cannot rest until we've imprisoned him."

Discord spoke up. "And where, exactly, is this prison of dark souls that you speak of? I'm afraid I'm not familiar with it."

"Don't worry – I know how to get there. I've been there before."

Discord gave her a peculiar look. Twilight face-hoofed. "Not as a *resident*, Discord! I just had to – oh, never mind. It's a long story and we're wasting time. Let's go!"

"We're all behind you," Discord said.

Twilight hesitated. "Um, I don't know how to get out of here."

Discord smiled. "Allow me."

He snapped his eagle talon, and everyone vanished.

Chapter 4: Time's Wrath

Twilight Sparkle flew high over an endless sea. The waters below were a murky brown color and stretched from horizon to horizon. Above her was a dull sky. There was light in the world, but it was weak and provided little illumination. Twilight lit her horn to see more of her surroundings.

"I don't see Death anywhere," she told Discord. "What is that down there, anyway? Is it the ocean?"

A chimera left the massive group that had followed her from the upper realm and flew toward her. It was a mighty creature, many times her size. It had the body of a lion and the claws of an eagle. It had six wings and two heads – and there was something about it that inspired both awe and fear. "This is not the world that you once knew, alicorn. Your world has not yet been made. What you see below is Void and Chaos. The waters have been gathered together in one place to form the Sea, but there is dry land beyond the horizon. That is where you will find your enemy. But he is not alone."

"Are there ponies in this world?"

The chimera's second head spoke. "That time has not yet come. There are no beings here except for those Death has formed out of his darkness. As each moment passes his forces grow larger. Your enemy is preparing for war. He is going to fight for this world, for he wants to keep it for himself."

"Come," the first head said. "We will show you."

The chimera raced off into the distance. Twilight struggled to follow, but the creature was moving far too fast. In less than a minute it was entirely out of sight.

"Allow me," Discord said. He snapped his talons, and the two of them vanished.

This time when Twilight appeared she was flying over what looked like hill country. The hills were barren, and there was no trees or grass or greenery of any kind. All she could see was rock and dirt. It was a stark and brutal sight.

"Look," the chimera said. He pointed in the distance.

At first Twilight could only make out a vague cloud. Then she realized she was seeing a dark swarm of some kind. "What are they?" she asked.

"Go and see," the lion replied.

Twilight cautiously flew toward the darkness. What she saw made her gasp in horror. The black

dragon was on the ground below, breathing out smoke. As the smoke left his mouth it solidified into a host of small, dark creatures. The insects had the body of a locust and the tail of a scorpion. They wore iron armor that was black as night. They were creatures of pure evil.

Twilight immediately energized her horn. She prepared to strike out at them – but then she felt a talon reach out and touch her. “What, exactly, do you think you’re doing?” Discord asked.

“I’m putting an end to this!” Twilight replied. “Don’t you see what’s going on down there? He’s creating an army so he can fight us and take back the upper realm! I’ve got to stop him now, before he gets any stronger.”

Discord shook his head. “My dear, dear Twilight. I quite agree that he needs to be stopped, but you need to approach this from a more... strategic point of view. It may be that in that dreadful future of yours you had to fight all your battles by yourself, but you are not alone anymore. You have friends – in fact, you have an entire army. All you need to do is give them a little guidance.”

Discord pointed behind her. Twilight turned her head and saw that he was right. In the sky above her was an enormous force of strange creatures, which were lined up and ready for

battle. There were more of them than she could count.

The lion chimera approached her. “What would you have us do, your majesty?”

Twilight hesitated. The beast hovering in front of her was the size of a small house. The thought of telling it what to do made her more than a little nervous. “Well, um, let’s start by attacking the insect swarm and wiping it out. Once Death’s army is gone he will be vulnerable and we can then attack him directly.”

The two heads of the lion nodded. They turned around and roared in unison – a deep, powerful roar that shook the sky. The roar was so loud that the dragon below looked up and saw them for the first time. He immediately redoubled his efforts.

In response to the roar a single creature flew out of Twilight’s army. This chimera had the body of an eagle and the head of a dragon. Twilight looked at it in wonder. *Is that really what these creatures look like, or is my vision limited? Am I really seeing who they truly are?*

The eagle looked at the lion, who pointed at the ground below. The eagle nodded, gathered up its strength, and spoke. Twilight did not understand the word that was thundered, but the power behind it nearly knocked her out of the sky.

To her horror, the light went out. The sky became utterly black. She could see the stars above – but the stars were moving. It looked like all of them were falling to the ground.

But that's crazy! Twilight thought. *Stars are enormous. They can't possibly be–*

But they came. In a few minutes the sky was filled with flaming orbs that hurtled toward the ground with great speed. Twilight immediately realized that she was looking at meteors. Somehow none of them hit her or her army; perhaps it was the eagle's doing. But they slammed into the hills below with tremendous speed.

The flaming, burning rocks thundered into the ground and struck it with great force. The rocks broke the hills into pieces and made the ground quake. Each meteor seemed to target a different clump of insects. The bugs tried to flee, but the falling rocks were much too fast for them. It took only moments for the entire dark army to be crushed.

When the dragon saw that his forces were defeated he fled in terror. He desperately sought to hide from the unrelenting barrage, but he could find no place of safety. Even his great speed could not shield him. Eventually a mighty rock struck him – and he disappeared into nothingness.

When the last rock fell from the sky, Death's army was gone. The ground below was cracked and broken – and the dragon was nowhere to be seen.

Twilight spoke up. “Well, *that* was effective. And kind of poetic, since Death used rocks to kill me. But aren't we doing a lot of damage to the world? Is there going to be anything left to turn into Equestria?”

The lion chimera spoke up. “This is the Void, your majesty. It has form to your eyes but it is still shapeless and undefined. Once the darkness is removed, the void will be turned into the world you knew.”

“Oh. Ok. So where is Death? He can't be gone, right? I mean, I know we can't kill him. Did he just reform somewhere else?”

Discord spoke up. “Allow me.” The draconequus transported her to another place. The sky above was still dark, and the familiar points of light were gone. She could see neither sun nor moon. Down below was a great pit. Smoke billowed out of the bleak darkness – and as it entered the sky it became the same evil insects she had seen before.

“That pit doesn't look like Death's prison,” Twilight commented. “Not that I know one place from another in this world. All of the landmarks

are gone, you know, so I have no idea where the entrance to Tartarus is. But still, it does look like an unhappy place.”

The lion chimera pointed. “Look and see.”

Twilight looked closer. She could see Death through the smoke – but there was something different about him. “Is he... *smaller?*”

“Indeed. He poured his power into his army, and the army was destroyed. The power of Death is waning. Each fresh defeat will weaken him yet more.”

As Twilight watched, she saw Death look up at her. Death immediately yelled out a command. His army of locust scorpions sprang into action and began racing toward her.

The lion turned his heads to face the princess. “What would you have us do?”

“Attack, of course!” Twilight screeched. “Do you see how many of them there are?”

Discord laughed. “Relax, Twilight. This is the easy part. The real battle will be fought when you finally catch him.” He snapped his talon and a pot of tea appeared. “Thirsty?”

Twilight shook her head. “Um, not right now, thanks.”

The lion roared a second time. Another eagle flew out of Twilight’s army. This one looked identical to the last one. The lion pointed at the

onrushing cloud of darkness, and the eagle nodded.

The eagle flew toward the insect swarm, alone. When the eagle was just a few hundred feet from the dark cloud, it spoke. Once again Twilight could not understand the voice that thundered, but the effects were immediate. The dark sky immediately blazed with light – a bright, intense light that penetrated Twilight’s very soul. The light went everywhere. There was no hiding from it. No shadow was safe.

The insects screamed in pain as the light struck them. They scattered. The light burned off their armor and caused their exoskeleton to boil. One by one the dark creatures fell out of the sky and were consumed by the light. In a matter of minutes the entire army was gone.

Down below, the dragon bellowed in rage. He tried to hide from the light but he could find no shelter from it. The light ignited his scales and set them on fire. He fell to the ground, burning, and then vanished out of sight.

“Two forms have fallen,” the lion chimera announced. “There is but one left, and then you will judge him. Come. This time he makes his abode in the sea.”

The chimera soared across the sky and disappeared into the distance. “Seriously?”

Twilight exclaimed. "Surely he knows by now that I can't move that fast."

Discord ate the teapot he was holding. "There is so much you don't know, isn't there? You should try reading some books or something. Your lion friend moves at his own speed. It is his nature to travel as he does – just as it is my nature to add joy to the drab lives of others."

Twilight ignored his comment. She looked up at the enormous army that was waiting in the sky. "So, um, this seems to be going really well. Like, *too* well. I thought this would be a lot harder."

"That's because we haven't gotten to the hard part yet. Tell me something. What's the best way to defeat you?"

"Excuse me!?" Twilight exclaimed.

Discord waved his lion paw dismissively. "I'm trying to make a point. From what I've seen in the past few hours, fighting you head-on is a *terrible* idea. I haven't known you for very long, but I suspect the best way to defeat you is to leverage your friends against you."

"That's exactly what you did when you escaped your stone prison. It nearly worked, too. If it hadn't been for Celestia's intervention I would have lost."

"So I missed a friend, then," Discord said thoughtfully.

Twilight eyed him warily. Discord shook his head. “Now Twilight, I realize that we have history together – although I swear I cannot remember any of it. But then, how can anyone remember a thing that hasn’t happened yet?”

“Do you have a point?”

“My point is that you are still quite vulnerable. You can weaken him through force of arms, but it will take a different sort of strength to achieve victory. I simply wonder if you are up to it. But come. Our lion friend is ready.”

Twilight disappeared in a flash of light. She reappeared high over the dark sea. There was no land in sight; the waters stretched from sky to sky. The white light was still there – but Twilight realized that it did not penetrate into the deep. Death had found himself a hiding place.

The sea below raged and boiled. The alicorn had never seen it so angry or so dark. Wave crashed into might wave. She heard a voice over the waters – a dark, hateful voice. As she watched, dark creatures began to fly out of the water. These were not the same insects that she had seen before. What she saw were winged creatures, with the body of a snake. They were enormous and they were full of rage. Their scales appeared to be forged out of a dark armor. They dove back into the sea and eyed the sky.

“Are those sea serpents?” Twilight asked.

“They are leviathan,” the lion chimera agreed. “Death’s wrath is great, for he knows his time is short. He is spreading his darkness across the sea and intends to turn its waters into a weapon. His plan is to create an exceedingly great army and then launch a final attack against us. What are your orders?”

“Attack, of course! Can you, um, destroy the sea? Like, all of it?”

The lion nodded. He roared once more, and a third eagle appeared. This one was identical in appearance to the other two. The lion pointed at the sea below, and the eagle nodded. The eagle then opened its beak and spoke.

Once again the power of the word startled her. *I have got to learn how to wield that kind of magic!* Twilight thought in amazement. *Although I guess it’s not really all that useful under normal circumstances. But still. I had no idea how much I didn’t know. What else can those eagles do?*

Overhead a spot appeared in the sky. The spot grew larger – and louder. As it approached the sea it became shrouded with lightning and the noise of thunder. Twilight quickly realized that she was looking at a mountain – the largest mountain she had ever seen. The falling mountain was electrified; its bare stone shot out long sparks that

crackled with energy.

Twilight realized that the mountain was going to plunge into the sea. When it hit it would create an enormous tidal wave – or worse. She definitely didn't want to be anywhere nearby when that happened. But just as the alicorn was about to flee, Discord stopped her. "It will be fine," he assured her. "Just wait and see."

Twilight wasn't sure that she believed him, but she noticed that no one else was leaving. She reluctantly tried to calm herself and wait. Nevertheless, as the seconds ticked down and the mountain raced to meet the sea she became increasingly terrified. It was almost there – almost – and then...

The mountain struck the sea in a burst of blinding light. The ocean around the impact sight exploded. The noise was so loud that Twilight thought it would surely deafen her. A tidal wave of dark water was ejected high into the air, and yet she was not harmed. The sound and the darkness washed over her and left her untouched.

The lion spoke up. "The darkness is not strong against the light."

When the light faded Twilight could no longer see the mountain. The sea became red, as if it were made of blood. The darkness was consumed out of the sea and the serpents were

drowned. Then the ocean itself dried up, leaving behind an enormous, empty basin.

The lion immediately flew toward the ground. Twilight flew after him and her army followed behind her. At first Twilight couldn't figure out what the lion was looking at. Then she saw it – a tiny dark form, writhing on the ground.

When Twilight got near she backed away and circled it cautiously. The lion landed without fear about thirty feet from it. Twilight landed right next to the lion.

The dark creature on the ground had the form of a snake. It was about six feet long. It had no wings or legs or claws, but it had a head and two eyes.

“Is that what I think it is?” Twilight asked.

The snake spoke. “Do not be coy with me, Twilight. You know who I am. You may have reduced me to this meager form, but you have lost far more than I have. In fact, this pointless war has cost you everything you ever loved and cared about. You are a very foolish pony.”

“Excuse me? It looks to me like *you* are the loser here!”

The snake stared at Twilight. “Tell me something. What is it that you truly care about? It is clearly not power. You do not desire the throne, for if you did you would have it. You were

powerful enough to go back in time and change all of history, so you must be powerful enough to take anything you want. So tell me, Twilight. What is it that you want?"

"I want to save my friends, of course. I want them to live in a world without sickness and pain and death. I want to give them an Equestria that hasn't been poisoned by your darkness. I want to save them."

"And in so doing you have *lost them*," the snake hissed. "Have you considered that events will not unfold the way they did before? You changed time itself, and that will change all those you care about. They will not become the ponies you knew. Instead they will be strangers – strangers who have no idea who you are or what you did."

"That's not true! Luna promised me that they would remember the old timeline."

"Does Discord remember?"

"Well... no," Twilight admitted.

"So Luna lied, then. She manipulated you into doing what she wished. Think, Twilight. How could ponies remember a thing that never happened? Surely you must realize that the identity and character of your friends was based on their personal circumstances and the nature of their world. It is now impossible for them to

become the ponies you knew and loved. Your friends are *gone*.”

Twilight started to speak, but Death interrupted her. “Yes, yes, perhaps they will still exist. But they won’t be the ponies you knew. And they won’t know *you*, because you have no place in the new timeline. Since you are already here, you cannot be born into time. Your mother will never have you as a filly. You won’t exist in your family. You have lost your world, your friends, and your loved ones. Everything that you ever knew is *gone*.”

Twilight took a step back. Tears began to form in her eyes. “No,” she whispered.

“Tell me I’m wrong,” the serpent said. “Go ahead. I’ll wait.”

But Twilight knew he was right. Things *wouldn’t* happen the way they did before. *Luna won’t be imprisoned on the moon, since there won’t be any darkness to corrupt her. I won’t be sent to Ponyville to make friends. In fact, I won’t even exist! Since the alicorn race won’t vanish this time, Celestia and Luna probably won’t even be the rulers. My friends may not live in the same place. They might not get the same cutie marks. They may never even meet each other. The events that brought us together and united us will never happen.*

Twilight felt her heart begin to break. Ever since the Nightmare arose, the one thing she wanted more than anything else was to have her friends back. She was willing to go to war to fight for them. She was willing to risk certain death in order to save them. Twilight desperately wanted her friends – but now she realized they were truly gone.

The pain overwhelmed her. She really *had* lost everything. She didn't have parents anymore. She didn't have a brother. She didn't have a home, or a city, or even anyone who knew her. Her crystal castle was created from her conflict with Tirek, and that would never happen. There was nothing left of her life. She wasn't even a memory.

Twilight fell to the ground and cried.

Death looked at her and smiled. "You know, there is another way. It's not too late to fix this. I'll admit you've done a lot of damage, but there's still time."

The alicorn tried to stop crying. She looked up at him. "What do you mean?"

"I mean you can still let me go. With your magic I can put things back the way they should be – the way you want them to be. What happened before can happen again. If you release me I can give you your friends back. I can recreate the world that you once knew. Let's be honest:

isn't that what you really want? It's not too late."

Twilight stared at the serpent. She knew he wasn't lying.

She slowly struggled to her hooves. The pony knew it was the only way to get back the world that she had lost. If she imprisoned Death – if she carried out her plan – she would become a pony without a country.

Twilight stepped toward Death. Discord said nothing; he simply watched. The lion chimera remained motionless. The armies of the upper realm waited.

The pony slowly walked toward the serpent until she was right above him. She looked down at him. Tears were streaming down her face. Her eyes were red and her entire being was filled with pain. "I hate you," she whispered.

Death smiled. "Do we have a deal?"

Twilight immediately lifted a hoof and crushed his head.

The serpent screamed in pain. It writhed in agony on the ground.

The pony turned her head to look at the lion chimera. Her tears had not stopped. "It's done. Cast him into the abyss."

The lion nodded. When he stepped forward to take the serpent to his eternal prison, Twilight lit her horn and teleported out of sight.

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Twilight reappeared miles away. She could not see the army or the lion or the three eagles. All she could see was rocks and dirt. But she didn't care. Twilight didn't feel victorious; instead she felt utterly defeated.

For a while she was alone. Then there was a flash of light, and an old friend appeared. "I see you're taking this glorious victory very well," Discord commented.

Twilight ignored him. She was too depressed to say anything.

Discord sat down on the ground in front of Twilight. "If I might ask – why did you do it?"

"I would do anything for my friends," Twilight said quietly. "I came here to save them. I'm not going to condemn them all to darkness and pain and death just so I can get back the world I knew. I can't fail Celestia. If saving her from darkness costs me everything then, well, I guess that's what it means."

"Tell me something. Has it ever occurred to you that perhaps Death was not being entirely honest? Isn't it possible that your future might not be as bleak and friendless as you may suppose?"

“But what he said was true!” Twilight protested.

“Or perhaps it wasn’t. The world will be different now, certainly. But you don’t seem to have grasped the fact that the world will be *different* now. Come. It’s time to go and meet the watchers. We need to get you home.”

Discord snapped his talon, and the two friends vanished.

Chapter 5: Time's Fate

[Ending #1]¹

When the flash of light faded, Twilight found herself standing in the sky. She could see no ground below her and no stars above. There was no visible source of light and yet the realm was not dark. No earth was beneath her hooves, and yet she was standing on something solid – something she could not see.

She was also completely alone.

“Discord?” she called out. “Where are you?”

A voice called back to her. It was a deep voice, massive in power and scope. It carried with it the sound of many waters. “Your friend is not here, princess. He will visit this realm later, but it is not yet his time. For now he has a part to play in the world below. Thanks to you, his role in history will be very different from what it was before.”

Twilight looked around. “Where are you?”

“I am right in front of you. Can you not see me?”

¹ This was the story's original ending.

“Um, no. I’m seeing a lot of nothing.”

There was silence for a moment, and then the outline of a figure slowly appeared in front of the pony. It was tall – much taller than Twilight. The figure was so bright that Twilight couldn’t bear to look directly at it.

“You are very young to be in this place,” the voice said gently. “You are not yet old enough to perceive creatures of light. The shadows and darkness of the old world is something that you understand, but this is new. When you can see us you are blinded, for we do not contain any darkness.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about. Are you one of the watchers?”

“I am. I have come to send you home. You have done well.”

“But I don’t have a home anymore,” Twilight said sadly. “Everything I knew and loved is gone.”

There was silence. Twilight stood uncomfortably. She tried to look up at the glowing figure, but she had to turn her gaze away.

“Tell me, pony. Why do you believe the words of Death? Do you truly believe that everything good in your life was a product of his darkness? Do you think that there can be no joy apart from him?”

“Well – I mean – he did have a point. I

changed things. That's great for everypony else, but it's not so good for me. I don't really know what to do now. I created a world that doesn't have a place for me."

As Twilight spoke, the world around her changed. A wooden floor appeared beneath her hooves. Walls appeared out of thin air, and a ceiling formed over her head. Bookshelves grew into place – but strangely, there were no volumes on the shelves. When the room finished forming Twilight realized she was standing in a library – but the library was empty.

Then the watcher moved. A pillar of glass grew out of the ground and became a short pedestal. The watcher flew over and placed two books on it. The books were of equal size, bound in white.

Twilight stepped closer so she could get a better look at the books. The volume on the left had a single word on it: Old. The volume on the right also bore a single word on its cover: New.

"What are these?" she asked.

"You know what they are," the watcher replied. "You have seen such a thing before."

"So... I guess that means they're timelines. Right? This book here is the old timeline, and that other one is the new one. That's nice, I guess, but why did you bring me here?"

“To show you that you did not change time. Not in the way you think you did. You see, pony, all the events of the old timeline did occur. Your very existence is testimony to that. The new timeline only exists because the old one preceded it. Therefore, nothing that you have done in the past has been lost. It is all still there.”

“But my friends don’t remember it!” Twilight protested.

“The world is still young,” the watcher replied gently. “You expect a great deal out of a world that has not yet been formed. Give it time. You have not erased the past, for the past cannot be erased. What you have done is given the races of your world a second chance. They will be reborn into a better world. They will have new lives in a far better country – and you will as well.”

“But–”

The watcher interrupted her. “Twilight, you have done much for your friends. It is time that you let your friends help you. They care far more for you than you appear to realize. Let them welcome you home.”

Twilight looked at the second book apprehensively. “I thought the future didn’t exist yet! Since, you know, it hasn’t happened.”

“In this place we are outside the timestream of the lower realm. It is not a hard thing to insert

you into the era where your friends have prepared to meet you. But do not fret, little one. The day will come when you will visit Lamplight again – but for now you have much to do in the world below.”

Twilight opened her mouth to say something, but it was too late. The world around her disappeared.

* * * * *

This time Twilight found herself standing on a beach. Beneath her hooves was a wide expanse of soft sand. A gentle ocean of clear blue water lapped up onto the shore. Above her were a few white clouds, which gently floated through the afternoon sky. The sun shone brightly overhead. The sand on the shore gave way to a forest of palm trees. Twilight could see nothing beyond that. For all she knew she was a thousand miles from civilization.

There were no ponies to be seen.

“Well, this certainly isn’t Ponyville,” Twilight remarked.

“Indeed not,” a familiar voice agreed. “This place is named Twilight’s Cove. On this very spot you crushed the head of Death and created a new world. To you it is, no doubt, a recent memory.”

A tall, white alicorn stepped out of the forest of palms. She was regal in appearance and had an image of the sun for a cutie mark. Twilight recognized her immediately. “Celestia? Is that really you?”

“It is,” the alicorn replied. She was clearly overcome with emotion. “I have waited such a long time to see you again. My heart has greatly desired this moment.”

Twilight looked at her warily. “But you can’t possibly remember me! This is the first time I’ve set hoof in this world. I’m a stranger to you, right?”

Celestia laughed – a long and hearty laugh. “Oh, my dear princess. You are a stranger to no one in this world. There is no pony more famous or beloved than you. Towns across the world are named after you. Countless families have named their daughters Twilight in your honor. There is a statue of you in every city. Everypony knows who you are and what you have done.”

Twilight face-hoofed. “Please tell me you’re joking.”

“Not at all. You are a legend! You were the first pony. You cast Death out of his home, and then you defeated him and imprisoned him forever. You fought and won the only war this world has ever seen. Did you think your actions would go unnoticed?”

“They always did before,” Twilight pointed out. “I mean, until I became a princess I wasn’t famous at all. Even then I was only famous because of my royal status – not because I saved the world or anything. I’m not really the kind of pony who likes a lot of attention. Please, *please* tell me you made up the part about the statues.”

Celestia walked over to Twilight and hugged her. “It is so good to have you back. We have been waiting a long time for you to return, and those years have not been idle. This world has changed a great deal from the one you knew – but we did not neglect your desires. Your home is ready and waiting.”

“Now hold on just a minute. Are you saying that ponies actually *do* remember me? From, you know, before?”

“It was Discord’s doing,” Celestia explained. “He is friends with the watchers and has access to the record of the old timeline. He used his magic to give us the memories of what came before. I remember the time I banished my sister Luna to the moon. I remember her return, and the way you defeated her and gave me my sister back. I even remember believing Death’s lies and becoming the Nightmare that tried to destroy the world. I am so thankful that you stopped me.”

Twilight finally began to relax. “So I really *am*

home. I haven't been lost to time. You have no idea what a huge relief that is."

Celestia put her wing around her. "Welcome back, my dear and faithful student."

A pink blur shot across the sky, arced over the beach and landed squarely in front of Twilight. The excited pony bounced up and down with a mixture of high energy and pure joy. "I knew you could do it! I just *knew* you could. And here you are! I haven't forgotten my promise to you, Twilight. I've spent years preparing for that party I promised. Years! And it's going to be *totally epic*. I've got your home all decorated and ready to go. The only thing we're missing is the guest of honor!"

Twilight looked at her friend Pinkie Pie in shock. "Are you a *pegasus*?"

"You bet I am! I've got wings now. Wings! And wings are *amazing*. Now I can make even more friends than I made last time. Flying is really the best!"

Twilight looked at Celestia. "Did you, um, upgrade her or something?"

Celestia laughed. "No, Twilight, your friend was born a pegasus. This world is different from the one you knew. But rest assured that your other friends are as you remember them. Their cutie marks are unchanged as well – although the journey to obtain those marks was a bit different."

“I understand. So, is everypony else hiding in the trees too?”

Celestia shook her head. “They were all *supposed* to be waiting for you in Ponyville. But it seems that one of them simply couldn’t wait any longer.”

“It’s not just *me* who can’t wait,” Pinkie insisted. “Everypony is going to head over here if we wait any longer!”

“Then we had best not keep them waiting,” Celestia replied. “Twilight, are you ready?”

The purple alicorn looked around one more time. “I just have one question before we go. Is this really the spot where I crushed Death? I mean, it looked *really* different back then. Which, to me, was more like an hour ago.”

“So the story is true?” Pinkie asked excitedly. “You *really* walked right up to him and smashed his head flat? That’s fantastic! What hoof did you use? Was it the right front one?”

Twilight thought a moment, and then looked at her friend. “Yes, that’s the one. But what difference does it make? Is that actually something ponies talk about?”

Celestia laughed. “Believe me, Twilight, the pony race is far more interested in what you did that day than you realize. But come. Your friends are waiting, and Pinkie is quite capable of asking

you questions all day.”

“I can do it a *lot* longer than that,” Pinkie said happily.

Celestia smiled. She lit up her horn, and the three ponies vanished.

* * * * *

By now Twilight was getting used to being teleported around by others. Discord, the watcher, Celestia – everyone seemed eager to magically transport Twilight from one place to another. In some ways it was a little bit annoying, being hauled around as if she was a bag of bits, but in another way it made her feel loved. She *hadn't* been forgotten about.

When the teleportation spell finished, Twilight looked at the world around her and was astonished. Before her was Ponyville, exactly as she remembered it. The town had the same buildings, the same streets, and the same crystal castle towering over it. Nothing had changed.

This time Twilight was not the only pony in sight. The area around her – and the sky above – was filled with more ponies than she could count. *It's like the whole world showed up*, Twilight thought in amazement. Some of the ponies she knew well, but many of them were complete

strangers to her.

The ponies nearest to her she recognized immediately. There, just a few feet away, were the rest of the Elements – Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, Rarity, Applejack, and Pinkie. Just as Celestia promised, they looked exactly as she remembered. Spike was there too – but Spike had changed dramatically. He was now an enormous dragon.

Twilight's family was there as well. Her mother and father were present, along with Shining Armor and Cadence. To her shock, King Sombra was standing right by the happy couple.

Celestia noticed the look of horror on Twilight's face. "In this timeline he never became evil," she explained. "You removed the darkness from this world, so there was none to corrupt him. He has been a wise and noble steward of the Crystal Empire."

Luna nudged her sister. "I believe he is far more to you than that."

Celestia blushed, but said nothing.

As her friends rushed to greet her, Twilight saw many familiar faces. There was Trixie, and Starlight Glimmer, and Moondancer. Apple Bloom was present as well, along with her parents. Greeting her friends and catching up with them was pure joy – but there was one figure she did

not see. "Where's Discord?" she finally asked, when she was able to get a word in among all the chatter.

A head popped out of a rather puffy pink cloud. "Oh, nowhere in particular," he said lazily. He dropped down out of the sky and landed in front of Twilight. "So what do you think? Not a bad job for the crown prince of chaos, eh?"

"It's beautiful," Twilight said warmly. "Thank you all so very much. I can't believe you did all this for me."

Rarity spoke up. "I'll admit it wasn't easy. There was quite a debate over what to do with your home. I thought that we should recreate your old treehouse, since you did love it so. It was so warm and inviting, and it was filled with your dear precious books."

"Yeah, but it was so small," Rainbow Dash objected. "How is Twilight supposed to rule over all of Equestria from a tiny little tree? She can't hold court in there!"

"Do *what*?" Twilight exclaimed.

"It's true," Celestia replied. "The alicorn race has been stewards and caretakers of the throne for this age, but no pony was willing to take the throne for themselves. That honor is yours and yours alone. Only you have the right to rule over Equestria."

“Now hold on a minute,” Twilight protested. “If you really *do* remember the past then surely you know that I was just the Princess of Friendship. I didn’t actually rule over anything! It was more of an honorary title. I went around the world and taught ponies about friendship and relationships and so forth. I was really more of a glorified therapist than an actual ruler – and a lot of friendship problems were solved by my friends, not me. I didn’t have legal jurisdiction over anypony.”

“Oh, don’t be so modest,” Applejack said. “We all know what you did. Who else could possibly be more deserving? You actually *died* fighting to save us – and more than once! When you had every reason to turn back, you didn’t. We’re all here because of you.”

Fluttershy spoke up. “I’m sure you can do it, Twilight. I promise we don’t get into a lot of trouble. It won’t be like it was before – with wars and all that unpleasantness. And we’ll all help you.”

Twilight finally began to truly relax. The world was different – that was clear to see. But she had her friends and she had her future. “It’s good to be home,” she said.

“You bet it is!” Pinkie exclaimed. “Now enough chit-chat. We’ve got a celebration to

celebrate!”

Chapter 5: Time's Fate

[Ending #2]²

Twilight slowly walked toward the serpent until she was right above him. She looked down at him. Tears were streaming down her face. Her eyes were red and her entire being was filled with pain. "I hate you," she whispered.

Death smiled. "Do we have a deal?"

Twilight immediately lifted a hoof and crushed his head.

The serpent screamed in pain. It writhed in agony on the ground.

The pony turned her head to look at the lion chimera. Her tears had not stopped. "It's done. Cast him into the abyss."

The lion nodded. He approached the serpent at lightning speed and grabbed it with one of his talons. Using his second claw, he ripped open a hole in the air. Inside Twilight saw nothing but utter blackness.

The chimera tossed the snake into the hole

² This ending was requested by a reader.

and closed it. "It is finished," he said.

In that instant, time stopped.

* * * * *

Two beings, clothed in light, appeared next to the frozen Twilight. They looked at her with respectful silence. It was clear to them that the alicorn, although victorious in battle, was heartbroken. Her mind was filled with trauma and pain. Her mane was dirty and tattered and her wings were spotted with her own blood, which Death had spilled in his repeated attempts to kill her once and for all.

"What should be done about her?" the being asked.

"She should be returned home," his brother replied. "Yet she has no home to return to. She has no place here."

Discord calmly walked over to Twilight. He peered into her eyes for a second and then looked up at the watchers. "If I might be permitted to partake in this glorious conversation – I think I have an idea that will solve your little problem."

It was impossible to see the faces of these beings of light, but it was clear they were startled. "How is it that you can discern us?" the first one asked.

“Magic, of course,” Discord said deviously. “But seriously, let’s talk about this. Twilight *clearly* wants to go home. *You* want her to go home. *I* want her to go home. Therefore, as anyone can plainly see, the obvious thing to do is send her home.”

“But she has no place to go,” the second watcher said.

“Sure she does. After all, her parents are still going to exist, won’t they? Just make sure that they get together – as I presume they did before – and arrange for Twilight to be born. Since all of the other ponies from the old timeline are going to be born into the world, I don’t see why you can’t do the same thing for her.”

“But Twilight is already in this world,” the first watcher pointed out.

“So? Take her out of it! Suspend her in time or something. Don’t you guys have any imagination? Just keep her someplace safe until it’s time for her to be born. She can then be raised from fillyhood, just like she was last time. This brave new world of ours will become the only world that she knows.”

“But what of the memories of her past?” the second watcher asked. “She has done a great deal and triumphed gloriously. Why should the memory of that victory be taken from her?”

Discord waved a claw dismissively. “Don’t you two have records of everything that’s happened?”

“We do,” the first watcher said.

“Then there you go! A trillion years from now you can get all the little ponies together and give them a happy little history lesson. But for now let Twilight be herself again. Give her a new life. You’re giving one to everypony else, so it’s only fair. Do you *really* think she wants to remember the time when Death crushed the life out of her? Besides, if you tell the pony race what Twilight did they’d probably build statues of her and make her their queen, and put her through all sorts of nonsense. She doesn’t want that. Hasn’t she suffered enough?”

“There is wisdom in what you say,” the first watcher agreed. “Brother?”

“I say let it be done,” the watcher replied.

“Then so it shall be.”

* * * * *

An eon later, the magnificent city of Canterlot spread along the Equestrian coast like a glittering jewel. The capitol of the pony republic was known for its beautiful harbor, amazing beaches, and its diverse population. Creatures

from all over the world, and from every species, were proud to call it their home. It had some of the tallest skyscrapers in the world – and the largest intercontinental airport.

One of the city's many attractions was Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns. Only the best ponies were accepted into this elite academy, which was run by none other than Celestia herself – the Princess of the Sun. Although she was not one of the nation's elected rulers, she faithfully raised the sun every morning. Her sister, Princess Luna, raised the moon every night. In spite of the fact that there was no Equestrian royal family, the two sisters were still given the title "princess" in honor of their contributions to the nation.

From a young age, Twilight Sparkle's dream was to become as great a magician as her hero, Starswirl the Bearded. The young unicorn was delighted when she passed the school's entrance exam with flying colors. While her brother was chasing after the affections of a pink pony named Cadence, Twilight spent her time learning as much as she possibly could about magic. On this particular day, though, something would happen that would change the course of her life forever.

* * * * *

“That was some party last night,” Spike commented. The young dragon was with Twilight in her room in Celestia’s academy. Twilight was on a break at the moment – but that didn’t stop her from studying.

“It was kind of fun,” Twilight agreed distractedly. The unicorn was, as usual, deeply engrossed in a thick book.

“I still can’t believe Moondancer talked you into going! It’s almost impossible to get you out of those books of yours. You spend more time reading than any other pony I know.”

Twilight looked up at Spike. “Well, Moondancer and I are friends, you know. Plus, everypony in class was going to be there – Twinkleshine, Minuette, and even Starlight Glimmer. I just felt like I should be there.”

“Your instincts were correct,” a regal voice replied. Twilight turned her head and saw that a tall white alicorn had walked into her room.

“Celestia!” Twilight exclaimed. She ran over and hugged her mentor. “It’s so good to see you. What a surprise! If I’d known you were coming I would have reorganized my room or something.”

“It’s good to see you as well,” Celestia replied. “Starswirl tells me that you have been a very dedicated and faithful student.”

“He makes it easy. Starswirl knows so much

about magic! It's amazing. I wish I knew even half the things that he does."

Celestia laughed. "He has had a lot of practice, my student. After all, he has been studying magic since before I was born."

"So what can I do for you, princess?" Twilight asked. "Is there some exam I can take?"

Celestia smiled. "My dearest Twilight. I have come because I have an assignment for you – one that I believe will turn you into the pony that you ought to be. You see, Twilight, there is more to a young pony's life than studying."

"Yeah, I know. That's what Spike keeps telling me. It's just that books are so *fun!*"

"There is great wisdom to be found in books," Celestia agreed. "Yet wisdom is of little value if it is never applied. It's time that you left the theoretical realm and engaged in some field work. Therefore, under my authority as the Princess of the Sun, I am sending you to Ponyville to supervise the preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration."

"Really?" Twilight asked, surprised. "But why me?"

Spike spoke up. "It's probably because you're super good at organizing. I mean, seriously. Have you seen her skills?"

Celestia laughed. "Twilight, I am sending you

on this mission for a simple reason: I want you to go and make some friends. I have created a checklist for you that will, in the course of your official duties, introduce you to some of Ponyville's most amazing ponies. This is a perfect opportunity for you to start learning about a new kind of magic: the magic of *friendship*."

"I see," Twilight said eagerly. "And you want me to send you reports and let you know what I learned, right?"

"Of course. I will help and guide you down this new path."

"Thanks!" Twilight said excitedly. "Spike, let's pack our bags. We have a plane to catch!"

As Twilight hurried to get ready to leave for Ponyville, Celestia gave her the checklist and bid her farewell. She found her sister Luna waiting in the hallway. "Did she agree to go?" Luna asked.

"Of course," Celestia replied.

"Do you think she will be all right?"

"She will be fine," Celestia assured her sister. "Twilight is a special soul. According to Discord she defeated Death himself in order to save her friends. I do not think she will have trouble forming a bond with them."

"But there will be no threat this time to bring them together," Luna pointed out. "In the previous timeline Twilight only became friends

with the rest of the Elements when I returned from my banishment and threatened the whole world.”

“True. But on that occasion Twilight was so distracted by the danger you posed that she actually skipped the party Pinkie Pie threw for her! This time her heart will be in it. She will find her place in the world.”

“I suppose you are right. But are you sure it is wise to keep this from her? Surely she should be told about her past.”

“Give her time,” Celestia replied. “She is still young. Let her enjoy her youth. Who knows – perhaps she’ll meet some nice young pony and will fall in love.”

Luna nudged her sister. “Speaking of that, I’ve heard tales that you and Sombra have grown quite close.”

Celestia blushed. “I have no idea what you are talking about.”

“I think you know *exactly* what I mean. Have you told Father?”

“Come now,” Celestia said. “I’m a thousand years old.”

“So am I,” Luna retorted.

As the two sisters teased one another, Discord watched from a painting in the wall. *It looks like my work here is done*, the master of

chaos thought to himself. *Time to go and visit
Fluttershy. I mustn't keep her waiting!*

And with that, he was gone.