

EVIL RISING

Part Seven of the [Geoverse](#)

by

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PART ONE

Ever since our unexpected promotions to Prince and Princess, Twilight and I had both been wondering what our purpose was. We had spent many a night talking about what our duties would be, aside from Twilight learning how to do 'Princess things' – such as smile and wave – and me bashing out trade agreements.

In public, we performed our duties as expected; behind closed doors, however, we felt like the most useless royals ever to have existed – which is saying a lot considering that Blueblood somehow became a Prince, and he doesn't even do *anything*.

But then Tirek came along, and began stealing the magic of everypony in Equestria. That bastard Discord was quick to turn traitor and begin helping him, and now Tirek was after alicorn magic. I stood and watched as Celestia, Luna and Cadence imbued Twilight with their combined powers, citing the fact that Tirek was unaware of the existence of a fourth Princess.

In that moment, it became apparent that Twilight was destined to defeat Tirek and send him back to Tartarus where he belonged. But as I watched her trying to get to grips with her new powers, I began to realise... what the hell was *I* supposed to do?

As Twilight teleported around, trying to control the awesome power she now wielded, I stood around like a spare part, wondering just what part in this saga I was meant to play. As a human, I cannot use magic, so I couldn't help my wife by sharing her burden.

All I could do was... smile and wave.

Twilight eventually got the hang of it and teleported next to me. She saw the solemn look on my face, her own showing concern.

"Geo?" she asked. "What's wrong?"

"It's nothing, Twi," I replied. "Really."

Twilight narrowed her eyes at me. "Don't lie to me, Mister," she said. "You're worried about something, now what is it?"

I sighed. "I'm just... I don't know what I'm supposed to do. You've got all that magic now, meaning you can easily take care of Tirek, whereas all *I've* got is this." I stuck both my thumbs up and gave her a half-arsed smile. "I want to help you, Twilight, but I want to do more than just stand on the touchlines and cheer."

Twilight's eyes softened and she gave me a kiss on the cheek. "Just having you around is all the help I need, Geo," she said. "You, the kids, my friends... having all of you near me will give me a reason to see this through to the end. You, Azure and Evening are the lights of my life, my reasons for living, and what I will be thinking of while I look for the monster who seeks to end us all."

I smiled, genuinely this time, and gave her a hug. "You and the kids mean the world to me, Twi, and I will do anything to protect you. We've faced a lot of crap together, you and I, and we've always come out on top... but I guess this time, I'll have to sit it out and know that you will prevail, just like you always do."

Twilight shook her head. "No," she replied, following it up with a quick kiss on the lips. "We will prevail, just like we always do." She pulled away from me and unfurled her wings, hovering above my head. "Get back to the house and keep the kids entertained while I look for Tirek; he's the size of a house now, so it won't take long."

I nodded and turned around, Twilight's departure kicking up dust around me. Satisfied that all would be well, I began walking home.

Back in Ponyville, I instructed the rest of my friends to get the townspies to take shelter. I wanted to stick around, but John was quick to tell me to 'get my Princely arse back to the library.'

So, I did; keeping my children safe was my top priority, and I knew that my friends would keep the townspoonies safe.

"Dad?"

I turned to the source of the voice; Azure and Evening were sitting on the couch, looking just as concerned as I was. I tore myself away from the window and walked over, sitting between the two of them so that I could bring them in for a hug.

"Is mum going to be okay?" Azure asked. "Do you think she will beat up Tirek and save everypony?"

"Of course she will, you big dummy!" Evening replied. "She's as tough as Dad's cooking – no, wait, she's *twice as tough* – so she'll definitely win!" She glanced at me. "Right, dad?"

I gave her a half-smile in return; I didn't know what to say, but at the same time I didn't want to upset either of them.

"Honestly, sweetheart?" I sighed. "I don't know what will happen. Tirek is a much stronger enemy than your mum has faced, and he has the power he's stolen from everypony in Equestria. I know Twi has all the magic from the Princesses, but I fear even that might not be enough. To tell you the truth... I'm scared."

Azure and Evening both squeezed me as tightly as they could, wincing at the sound of Tirek shouting in the distance. Whatever happened, I could only hope that Twilight would come out on top.

"There's no sense in sitting here worrying," I said. "We need to have hope, and faith in your mum to kick Tirek's sorry butt. What do you think she would say if she was here right now?"

Azure and Evening thought for a moment.

"She'd tell us not to be afraid," Evening replied. "And that harmony would always find a way to triumph over evil."

Azure nodded. "She would also tell us not to worry about her, that she loved us, and that she would come back."

I chuckled. "She'd also tell me to stop fretting so much and make myself useful keeping you two entertained. So, how about I fetch the Monopoly board and we can play a game to take our minds off the epic magical battle that will soon be raging outside?"

"Aww, not Monopoly," Azure grumbled. "The last time we played that, you got mad that mum bought Canterlot Lane before you."

"I wasn't *that* upset, son," I said.

Evening rolled her eyes. "You threw the board across the room," she muttered. "And then you went off in a huff."

I muttered angrily under my breath. "All right, fine; we won't play Monopoly. What do you want to play instead?"

"Snakes and Ladders!" Azure and Evening said in unison.

I groaned at this but, since I had been outvoted by two to one, I had no choice but to go and fetch the box.

"One, two, three, four... yes, a ladder!" Azure moved his piece with a large grin on his face. "I'm in the lead now!"

"Not for long, little brother." Evening picked up the dice, shook them, blew on them for good measure, and rolled. "Really, a one?!"

"Serves you right." Azure realised what his sister had said. "And we're still twins, Evening; you were just born a minute before me."

"Exactly." Evening stuck her tongue out at him. "I'm still older."

"All right, you two, knock it off." I took the dice from Evening. "It's my turn now, so watch how a professional does it." I threw the dice, landing a six... which led to a snake. "When I said 'a professional,' I meant 'a professional snake slider.'"

Azure picked up the dice, but delayed throwing them so he could look at the window. "I hope mum is okay," he said. "I can't hear what's going on out there; has she found him yet?"

"PRINCESS TWILIGHT!" a loud booming voice cut through the air, startling all of us. "You have something that belongs to me!"

I gulped. "I think it's safe to say that *he* found *her*," I replied.

There was a period of silence before I heard Tirek speaking again.

"You're going to give me what I want."

A few seconds later, I heard a *pop* as Twilight appeared on the outside balcony where she keeps her telescope.

I went to the foot of the stairs. "Twilight?" I shouted. "What the hell is going on out there? Are you all right?!"

Suddenly, Twilight gasped. "GET THE KIDS!" she screamed, grabbing Owlowiscious. "GET OUT OF THE HOUSE! NOW!"

She flew off the balcony, holding Owlowiscious; I ran back into the living room to do what she had asked of me, where I saw the kids packing up the snakes and ladders.

But before I could do anything, I saw a streak of magic heading towards the library. There was no time to get out of the house so, without even thinking, I threw myself over my children.

Soon after, there was an explosion, and everything turned black.

I woke up to a clear blue sky overhead, with birds singing from trees thick with the greenest of leaves. I groaned and shook my head, then looked beneath me to make sure the kids were safe.

I let out a cry of shock upon noticing that they weren't with me.

"Azure?!" I shouted. "Evening?! Where are you?!"

"It's okay, Prince Geo," a voice said. "Your children are perfectly safe." I turned to find myself looking at a human whom I did not recognise. "You, however, did not fare so well."

"I don't understand," I replied. "Who are you? Where am I?"

"My name is Anthony." the other human placed a hand on my shoulder. "And the place you find yourself in... is Paradise."

"Paradise?" I shook my head. "No, because that would mean—"

"I'm afraid it's the horrid truth, Your Highness." Anthony nodded solemnly. "This is the afterlife — and you, my friend..."

"Are dead."

PART TWO

"I... I'm dead?" I started shaking. "Oh, God... the kids! Are they all right? How can you know they're all right?!"

Anthony held out his hands. "If they had perished, then they would have arrived with you," he replied. "Your act of parental love was a noble gesture; you saved their lives, albeit at the cost of your own."

"What about Tirek?" I asked. "Is he still around?"

Anthony shook his head. "Your guess is as good as mine," he said. "I only have two sources of information when it comes to news from the living world: Celestia and Luna. However, I have not seen either of them for quite some time now."

"They've both been captured by Tirek and sent to Tartarus, along with Cadence," I replied. "They transferred all of their power to Twilight in the hope that she could use it to defeat him."

Anthony's face fell. "Oh, no... I hope they're all right," he said glumly. "I can't bear the thought of losing Celestia, not again."

"I'm sure they'll be fine," I replied. "Anyway, changing the subject, what happens now? I've got so many questions, such as..." I took a deep breath. "How will Twilight cope on her own? I've been away from her before, yet that was only for a few months; this... this is for eternity. How will the kids cope with the trauma of losing me like that? Where will they live, seeing as that bastard Tirek destroyed the library? Did the kids get out of the ruined house okay, or are they still buried under the rubble?"

Anthony patted me on the back. "Your questions will all be answered in time, Prince Geo," he said. "For now, though, we need to get you situated into your new home here in Paradise." He began walking away, beckoning me to follow. "Come, let me introduce you to some of the folk who call this place home."

"All right," I replied. "But could I ask that you stop referring to me as 'Prince?' I can't be a Prince if I'm dead, you know."

Anthony shrugged. "If that is what you want, Geo, then I shall address you by your name instead," he said. "Our camp is this way, in the same place we always built it; the same place where humans and ponies first encountered each other, hundreds of years ago."

"I can only imagine how that went down." I laughed. "It must have been one hell of a surprise, for both you and the ponies."

Anthony stopped walking and turned to face me. "Why imagine it?" he asked. "If you want, I can *show* you what happened."

"You can?" I scratched my head. "How?"

Anthony grinned. "This is the afterlife, Geo; here, we can relive any memories we have of our time in the mortal realm. Observe."

He held his arms out and closed his eyes. After a moment, the area around us began to distort and warp. Suddenly, it changed entirely, to show a group of stunned looking humans and a group of surprised ponies staring at each other. The campsite was nowhere to be seen, and Ponyville was now lacking many of the buildings that I was familiar with; Sugarcube Corner and the Carousel Boutique being the two that were immediately apparent. I could make out Anthony at the front of the crowd of humans; Celestia and Luna were standing at the front of the pony group.

"What is this?" I asked.

Anthony opened his eyes and returned his arms to his sides. "You are looking at my memory of that day," he replied. "As the leader of our group, it was up to me to make sure that nothing went wrong."

"Um... hello there!" Past Anthony said. "Please do not be afraid, for we are not here to harm you. We only wish to stay here for a day or so to gather food, lumber and water; we have travelled far, and wish to rest before we move on."

"A good day to thee as well!" Luna bellowed. **"Thou art most welcome to encamp thineselves here, for this land is one of plenty; it is rich in enough resources for us to share."**

"Holy crap," I muttered. "I forgot Luna used to talk like that."

Anthony smiled. "It wasn't just her..."

"Mine sister is correct," Celestia yelled. **"Verily, we welcome this opportunity to make new acquaintances. Tell us, who amongst thee is thine leader?"**

At once, all of the humans pointed at Anthony, who raised a hand.

"I am," he replied. "My name is Anthony."

"'Tis a pleasure to meet thee, Anthony." Celestia stepped forward and shook his hand. **"I am Celestia, and this is Luna. We art the leaders of this village, and of these ponies."**

"The pleasure is all mine." Past Anthony coughed nervously. "Um, if you don't mind me asking... why are you shouting at us?"

"It is required that we use the Royal Voice when addressing our subjects and guests," Luna said. **"Thou art guests, so we are addressing thee according to Royal protocols."**

"Oh..." Past Anthony cast a glance back to the other humans, most of whom shrugged. "Well, I would not take offence if you were to *not* use the Voice to address us." He offered a small smile. "Besides, wouldn't you relish the chance to give your throats a rest? All of that volume really can't be good for you."

Celestia and Luna looked at each other, and then to Past Anthony; his smile only increased wider, and his eyes began to dart from side to side as he contemplated whether or not he'd made a mistake.

"Thou makest a good point," Celestia said, at normal volume. "Very well, Anthony, we shalt address thee normally, as thou requests."

"Great!" Past Anthony clapped his hands together, at which the other humans starting walking past him to an empty area of land. "Tell you what: we'll get our camp set up, and then we can get to know each other a bit better, maybe over tea. What do you say?"

"We'd like that a lot," Luna replied. "*Friend.*"

With that, Anthony snapped his fingers; the memory faded away, and we were brought back to the the present.

"And that was it," he said. "Ponies and humans got along famously; so much so, in fact, they soon offered us a permanent place to build a town of our own, only a stone's throw from Ponyville."

"Really?" I asked. "I lived in Ponyville for a long time, and I can't say that I ever saw any of your structures."

Anthony sighed. "The Everfree Forest took over our buildings in the years after we died out," he said. "Nothing was spared."

"Oh, right." I coughed. "Sorry."

"It's all right." Anthony started walking again. "Come, the camp is this way; exactly where we built it all those years go."

I followed him, looking around at my surroundings as we went. I could see ponies of all kinds, talking and laughing together as though they had never died in the first place. Foals – presumably those who had died during the famine Celestia told me about – ran around in the sunshine, playing games of tag and hide and seek. The whole place seemed to be peaceful; even the Everfree Forest seemed to be a lot smaller – and further away from town – than it was in the present day. It goes without saying that the land of Paradise was indeed living up to its name.

We reached the camp, at which point the other humans stood up. They seemed to be in awe of me, the first one of their kind to set foot in the afterlife for over a millennium. The fact that I wasn't even one of them didn't seem to phase them in the slightest.

"Friends, gather round." Anthony beckoned everyone over to him; the whole camp was soon standing in a semi-circle around us. "This is Geo, a human from another world, who has spent the last few years living in Equestria. Sadly, though, the land we once called home is under attack from an old foe." He placed an arm around my shoulders. "Geo here was one of the victims of this enemy, giving his life to defend those who mattered to him the most."

A young woman stepped forward and took my hand in hers. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Geo," she said. "My name is Sandra, and we have been awaiting your arrival here eagerly." Her expression changed to one of concern. "Except, we only wish it hadn't been under such harrowing circumstances." She bowed. "May your children never forget you, and your sacrifice be remembered."

"Thank you for your kind words," I replied. "I did what any parent would do in order to protect their children, and I would do it again if I had to. I can only hope that bastard Tirek is defeated once and for all, lest my sacrifice be in vain."

"From what Celestia and Luna have told us, your wife is one of the six ponies in Equestria who wield the Elements of Harmony," Sandra said. "We have witnessed first hand how powerful they are, when Celestia used them against Luna, so Tirek will not succeed."

"Yeah, I have every faith that Twilight and the girls will kick Tirek's arse all the way back to Tartarus." I smiled. "What I don't know is how she'll cope without me; the last time we were separated for any period of time, she didn't handle it very well."

"She will be able to visit you here, that much is certain," Anthony replied. "I'm pretty sure Luna won't mind her accompanying Applejack when she comes to visit her parents."

"It won't be the same, though." I sighed. "I'm gonna miss sitting with Twilight under the stars, listening intently as she eagerly explains all the constellations she can see through her telescope. I'm gonna miss watching Azure and Evening squirting each other with whipped cream and maple syrup every morning."

I started pacing back and forth; Anthony and the others watched me with sympathetic looks on their faces.

"I'm going to miss sitting with my friends under a tree in the sunshine, enjoying their company with a nice, cool cider. I'm going to miss the feeling of my wife's warmth when I wake up holding her each morning. I'm going to miss... everything and everyone."

I stopped pacing and let my shoulders slump, wiping away tears from the corners of my eyes. Anthony came over and patted me on the back, but there was a moment of silence before he spoke, as though he was searching for the right words to use.

"I know it's hard," he said. "Goodness knows it was hard for me when I first got here. You already know that I was the last Equestrian human to pass on, but what you probably *don't* know is that I was the last one of us alive for *twenty years*."

I was shocked. "Really?" I asked.

Anthony nodded. "Yes, really." he pointed at one of the other men nearby. "Graham there was the second-to-last one of us to go, at the age of fifty; I was seventy-four when I finally died."

"That... I can't imagine how that must have felt," I replied. "Being the last one of your kind must have felt like a huge burden."

"It did, and for a while it was," Anthony said. "I felt as though it was somehow *my* fault that everyone else had died; it wasn't, of course, but I still felt like it was. Thankfully, Celestia and Luna were able to console me, like the wonderful individuals they are. They told me that I still had a chance to live a full life, and that I should do so in honour of the friends I had lost." He chuckled. "Needless to say, I did exactly that; when Death finally came for me, I welcomed him with open arms and a smile on my face." He sighed. "Sadly, my death came a few days after Luna's descent into darkness. Celestia was crushed that she was losing two of her dearest friends in such a short period of time, but we both knew there was nothing that could be done to prevent the inevitable."

He looked at me. "The point I am trying to make, Geo, is this: you have accomplished much during your time in Equestria, and you will be remembered for all that you have done. Your wife and children are in safe hands, for they have at their side some of the most magnificent ponies in Equestria. You lived a full life, just as I did, and those you have left behind – especially your children – will live their own lives to the fullest in your memory."

"You're right." I nodded and straightened my shoulders. "I should be proud of who I am and what I have done, and should not worry about my family; they've got all the help they need." I looked at him gratefully. "Thank you, Anthony. Celestia was right when she told me that you have a way with words."

I reached out to put a hand on his shoulder; a collective gasp arose from everyone present when my hand passed right through him.

Anthony looked perplexed for a moment, but soon raised his eyebrows knowingly. "It would appear as though the mortal world isn't quite ready to relinquish its hold on you, Geo," he said. "Remember what I have told you: live a good life, and be very careful indeed; I highly doubt that Fate is going to give you any more opportunities to cheat death again."

Suddenly, I felt myself being dragged sharply backwards, as though someone had tied a rope around my waist and was pulling on it as hard as they could. Anthony and the others faded away, only to be replaced with the library as I saw it on that day...

Complete with Tirek's magic once more heading in my direction.

PART THREE

I stood rooted to the spot as I once more watched Tirek's magical attack heading towards me; my life flashed before my eyes again, and time seemed to slow down to a mere crawl. I steeled myself, threw myself over Azure and Evening, and got ready to meet my end, all the while wondering why I was back.

It took me a while to realise that I wasn't merely *imagining* that time had slowed down, and that it *had* slowed down.

Seconds before the blast hit the library, the kids and I were all blinded by a flash of purple light; a loud explosion was soon followed by the sound of debris falling to the ground. Unfortunately, Fate decided to mess with me one more time, by way of ensuring that a piece of wood the size of Big Macintosh hit me on the back of the head, rendering me unconscious.

"Geo?"

"Huh, wha—?" I opened my eyes and sat up, holding a hand to my head where the wood had hit me. Looking around, I saw that I was in the hospital; Twilight was sitting on a chair next to the bed, while Azure and Evening were both on the bed itself, on either side of my body so as not to disturb me while I was in the Land of Nod. Both of them were also fast asleep, which was nothing new.

"This is a good day indeed." Twilight got off the chair and kissed me. "Tirek has been defeated, and you are finally awake."

"I am so glad to see you, Twi," I replied. "You will not believe the crazy dream I've had. I dreamt I died and went to the afterlife."

"That wasn't a dream." Twilight shook her head. "You *did* die and go to Paradise, Geo; everything you saw was real."

My eyes widened. "What?!" Now it was my turn to shake my head. "No way, Twilight, that's impossible; it was a dream, it had to be! How could I have died if I am lying on this bed in front of you?!"

Twilight held up a forehoof. "Calm down, and I'll tell you." I rolled my eyes and sighed, then crossed my arms and nodded. "You died, and while I was elated that you had saved the kids, I was devastated to learn that none of you made it out of the library before it exploded. Hearing the cries of our children as they were pulled from the rubble afterwards was the most heart-wrenching thing I have ever had to experience. When we pulled you out, I thought you were unconscious; when Doctor Haywick confirmed the worst, I screamed with the power of the Royal Canterlot Voice." She looked right at me. "Everypony in *Canterlot* reported hearing me."

"Your funeral was one befitting royalty, and your friends from all over Equestria gave a eulogy. Even Chancellor Bronzebeak broke down while speaking of how you much of a difference you had made in his life, and gryphons very rarely show emotion as it is."

I brushed away a tear. "But how did you go back?" I asked.

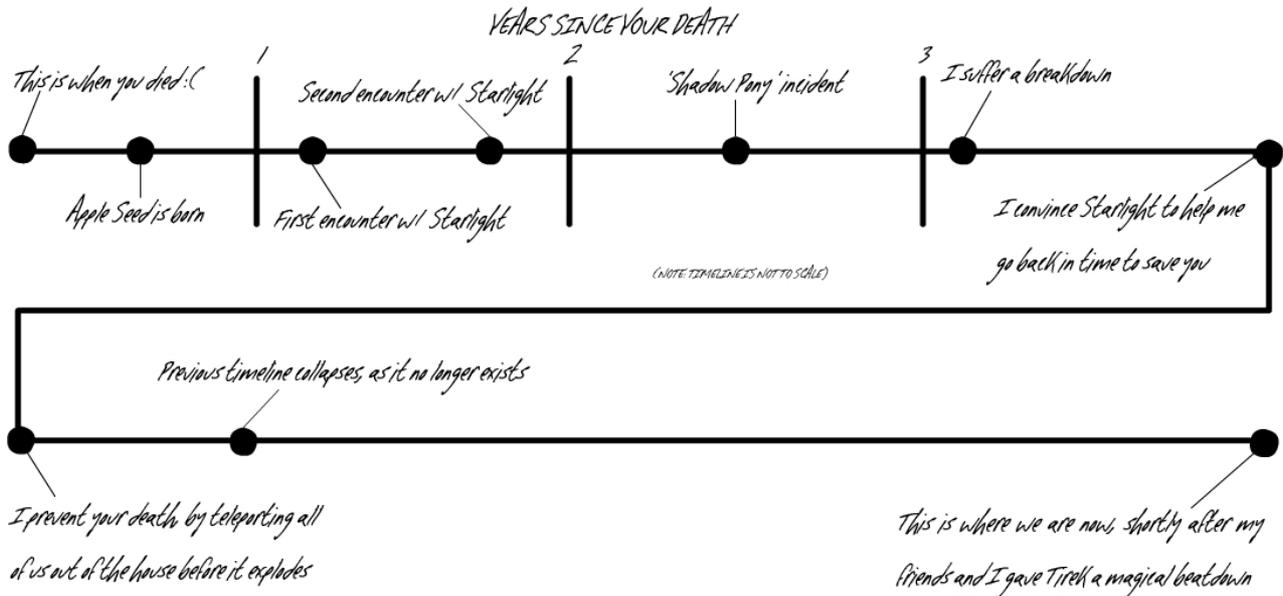
Twilight waved a forehoof at me. "I'm getting to that," she replied. "A few months later, the girls and I found ourselves in a village populated by ponies who all had the same cutie mark. To cut a long story short, the village was being run by a mare named Starlight Glimmer, a unicorn who believed cutie marks to be the cause of many problems. She felt that everypony should be equal, without any special talents to get in their way. In the end, she took the cutie marks of my friends and I; we managed to get them back, but Starlight escaped. A few months later, she showed up in Ponyville, with a scroll she used to send her, myself and Spike back in time to when Rainbow Dash performed the Sonic Rainboom that earned us all our own marks. She succeeded in preventing it from happening, and changed Equestrian history forever. After a lot of back and forth through alternate timelines, I finally managed to convince Starlight to give friendship another try. She accepted, and became my student in the field; she soon went on to save Equestria herself, when Chrysalis and the Changelings returned."

"Two years after your death, we faced a villain called the 'Shadow Pony' after I accidentally brought some of Equestria's greatest heroes back from the past. But you'll soon know all about that; a year later, after the third anniversary, the grief I had been living with finally got to me, and I had a breakdown because I couldn't bear the thought of not having you in my life any more. I hated being alone, but I *especially* hated all of the 'suitors' who fancied themselves as my next husband, thinking that I would ever want to replace you. So, I got Starlight to cast her time travel spell on me again... only this time, I asked her to make sure that it would be a one-way trip. This way, I could simply 'meld' with my past self; I would still keep all of the memories I had of the years that had passed, however, but I would be able to alter the past without fear of causing a paradox. Starlight wasn't sure at first, but I managed to convince her by explaining that my life wasn't worth living if I didn't have you there to complete it."

Upon hearing this, I made no attempt to wipe tears from my eyes.

"And so, I returned to the past, to that fateful day when Tirek attacked the library," Twilight continued. "Only this time, I used my excess magical power to teleport all of us out of the library: you, me, Owlowiscious and the kids. The Golden Oaks was still destroyed, but I don't care about that; all that matters to me is the fact that you, Azure and Evening are safe." She smiled. "I hope that explains everything; I've made a diagram if you want more details."

She levitated a piece of paper into my hands; sure enough, she had indeed created a small diagram explaining everything.



Napony must ever find out about what I did, I will get into a lot of trouble, especially with Celestia and Luna, for misusing the time travel spell. However, that is a small price to pay compared to spending eternity without you. The events I have seen - Starlight and the Shadow Pony - will happen again, as they are part of our future, the only difference this time is that I will have the love of my life by my side, due to the timeline being somewhat different than it was before.

- All my love, Twilight < 3

(A more readable version of this image can be found on Page 30.)

I put the paper aside and looked at my wife with tears running down my face. "Jeez, Twilight, I... I don't know what to say," I said. "What you've done for me... it's the most wonderful thing anyone has ever done for me." I reached over and pulled her onto the bed, making sure not to disturb Azure and Evening, and brought her in for the most intense kiss I think I have ever delivered in my life; we finally separated after a minute. "I hope that went some way to *showing you* just how grateful I am, Twi, because I don't think for a minute I will ever be able to find the right words to *tell you*."

"Just promise me one thing, though," Twilight said.

"Anything."

"Don't you ever die on me again."

"I promise." I gave her a quick kiss on the cheek, just as Azure woke up. He looked at his mother with a raised eyebrow, but then he finally saw that I was awake and squealed with glee.

"Daddy!" he clambered over Twilight and wrapped himself around my neck. "You're awake! I'm so happy!" He looked over at his sister, who was still asleep. "Evening, you dope, wake up!"

Evening woke up at once, wondering what the noise was all about; within seconds, she too had latched onto my neck and was squeezing me as hard as she possibly could.

"I missed you so much!" she said. "The doctors were all saying that you were really badly hurt; they thought you'd be 'out of it' for a good while longer, but you sure showed them, huh?"

I ruffled their manes. "I sure did, kids, I sure did." I looked at Twilight. "What happens now?" I asked. "Since the library has been demolished, we're gonna need to find somewhere to live."

"No we won't!" Evening chirped. "We've—"

"Yeah!" Azure interrupted. "We've got a castle now!"

"Aww, no fair!" Evening pouted. "I was gonna tell him!"

"A castle?!" I parroted. "How?"

"Well, you know that box we found when we gave up the Elements of Harmony all those months ago?" Twilight asked, to which I nodded. "Well, as you know, our friends have all faced challenges which tested their element; each of them was given a special item as a result. It turns out those items were the keys we needed, so we used them to open the box, which granted us the power to defeat Tirek. Once he was sent back to Tartarus, the box sank into the ground and grew into a castle... *our* castle."

"Wow, that's really—" I trailed off. "Hang on a second, you said you needed six keys, but I don't recall you facing a challenge."

"My challenge came during the struggle," Twilight replied. "Tirek inevitably turned on Discord and took his chaos magic; he'd given him a necklace which – he said – belonged to someone close. The necklace belonged to his brother, and actually meant nothing to him; Discord then went on to give it to me, as a way of saying that *our* friendship actually meant something. The necklace was the last key we needed to open up a can of rainbow power whoop-ass on that magic-stealing, tree crushing, home demolishing sack of—"

"Okay!" I clapped my hands together. "I get it, Twi, thanks."

Twilight blushed. "Oh, right." she giggled. "Sorry. Um, anyway, I'll let Doctor Haywick and the others know you're awake." She levitated Azure and Evening onto her back. "Come on, you two, let's give Daddy some breathing room and get something to eat."

The two of them nodded, waving until they had left the room and were out of sight. I waved back, then threw myself back on the pillows and sighed contentedly.

It's good to be home, I thought. But I think I'd better tone down on the adventure for a while; I've got a promise to keep, after all.

I heard voices outside my door and turned my attention towards it; Doctor Haywick was the first to enter, closely followed by John and the rest of my friends. Their faces lit up upon seeing me, and they crowded around the bed eagerly.

John looked me up and down, then grinned. "How many times have you died?" he asked. "I'm actually getting impressed."

I rolled my eyes, then looked over at Applejack. "That's one thing I didn't miss when I was in Paradise," I said. "Your crap jokes."

John snorted. "Paradise?" he replied? "Geo, mate, you *do* realise that somepony can only visit Paradise if one, Princess Luna takes them there, or two, they die and end up there anyway?"

"Well I *did* die, John, so there." I stuck my tongue out at him. "It's actually a rather interesting story if you want to hear it." Everyone nodded. "Right. Well, it all started when I died, of course; I ended up in Paradise, and met that Anthony guy Celestia told us about. Anyway, we had a bit of a chat about stuff, but then I—"

"Then you woke up here in the hospital, having had a really weird dream." Twilight said as she walked in, with the kids still on her back. "Remember, Geo? None of that stuff happened." She narrowed her eyes at me to get her point across.

I rubbed the back of my head sheepishly. "Oh, right," I said. "Sorry, folks, I guess I forgot about it being a dream."

"Wow, Geo, you're right; that *was* really interesting," Rainbow Dash said sarcastically. "Hey, tell us again about the part where you got knocked the eff out by a big ol' piece of wood."

"Rainbow Dash!" Twilight hissed. "Not in front of the kids!"

"Sorry," Dash replied. "Anyway, big guy, we just came by to see that you were all right, and drop off a bunch of 'Get Well Soon' cards and gifts that the townsponies have been asking us to bring. We'll leave you, Twi and the kids in peace." She punched my shoulder gently. "But just you wait until you see your new digs, though, man; you are gonna *love* them."

"I'm sure I will, Dash." I waved them out. "Anyway, thanks for stopping by, everypony; I really appreciate it."

"No worries, mate," John replied. "See you later!"

They all waved as they left; as soon as the last one – Applejack, who dipped her hat – was out the door, Twilight locked it.

"You cannot tell them about what I did," she said. "The future I saw is still going to happen, but no pony else can know about it; the fact that you and I both know is already bad enough."

"How can you be so sure that the future you saw is still set?" I asked. "Things might be different now that I'm around."

Twilight shook her head. "I merged with my past self, remember? So it stands to reason that I am going to live the same three years all over again, meaning the same things will happen; the only difference this time is that you are alive to see them with me. Using that spell the way I did – to alter the past – is frowned upon – if anyone finds out what I did, then the consequences could be dire."

I made a zipping motion over my mouth. "My lips are sealed."

Twilight smiled. "Thank you so much, Geo, your support means a lot." she leaned in and kissed me. "I love you."

"I love you too, Twilight." I kissed her back. "I love you—"

I was cut off by a sudden commotion coming from the hospital lobby. Twilight and I both looked at each other with concern; just as she was about to investigate, Dash burst into the room.

"It's AJ!" she shouted. "She's gone into labour! Come on!"

With that, she shot off again. Twilight and I exchanged a smile with each other, followed by another kiss, and then she helped me get out of bed so that we could both be there for our friend.

While I hobbled along the corridor, I had time to reflect on the fact that I now knew what the future held in store for me. At the same time, though, I also knew if it wasn't for Twilight...

I wouldn't have a future to look forward to in the first place.

BONUS: ORIGINAL PROLOGUE

Every morning when I wake up, I thank every deity I can think of for what I've got. I have amazing friends, a caring family, a mentor whom I can look up to, a wonderful job as a Princess, two beautiful children, and the best husband a mare could ask for.

Speaking of the latter, I noticed that he was trying his best to get out of bed without waking me up, although he had failed miserably. I rolled over and coughed, startling him as he was trying to put his trousers on, then giggled as he fell to the floor in a heap.

"Good morning, Geo," I said sweetly. "Did you have a nice trip?"

"You're hilarious, you know that?" Geo replied dryly, his voice muffled by the fact he was talking into the floor. He rolled over and stood up, getting his trousers on in the process. "I was going to go and make you breakfast in bed as a surprise — but after that, I might not bother now." He stuck his tongue out at me.

"Breakfast in bed?" I parroted, to which he nodded. "Aww, you're so sweet... but we both know you haven't got the heart to not do something for me, once you've told yourself that you will."

Geo sighed. "Curse my loving nature," he replied. "I guess I'll make you breakfast in bed." He chuckled. "Besides, I think it's safe to say that you're going to need all the energy you can get."

"Oh?" I looked at him with half-lidded eyes. "Our anniversary isn't for another six months... but if that's what you want, then—"

"I wasn't talking about *that*," Geo interrupted. "What I was *actually* referring to is the fact that our friends are coming over today to spend some time with us — as well as watch Rainbow Dash give a certain alicorn some flying lessons."

"Oh." I giggled sheepishly and blushed. "I forgot about that." I sighed. "Do you really think I'm ready for flying lessons?"

Geo sat down next to me and pulled me in for a hug. "Of course I do," he said. "There hasn't been anything that you weren't ready for, Twi. Chrysalis, Sombra, becoming a Princess... or becoming a mother." He looked over at the door and raised his voice slightly. "You two seem to be forgetting that just because the glass on the door is frosted, that doesn't mean you can't be seen."

There was a moment of silence before the door opened, revealing Azure and Evening. The two of them entered the room and walked over, clambering onto the bed between Geo and I.

"Morning, Mum!" they said in unison. "Morning, Dad!"

Geo ruffled their manes. "Morning, kids," he said. "Now, care to tell your old man why you were eavesdropping on us?"

The two of them shuffled nervously. "We heard mummy asking you if you think she is ready for flying lessons," Evening replied. "She sounded as though she was a bit scared."

"I'm not scared, sweetheart," I replied. "I'm just... worried."

Azure hugged me. "Don't be worried, mum," he said. "Me, dad and Evening will be there cheering you on!" He paused for a moment. "Oh, and so will Uncle John, Auntie Applejack, Uncle Ace, Auntie Pinkie, little Chocolate, Uncle Haywick, Auntie Fluttershy, Uncle Spark, Auntie Rainbow, Uncle Spike and Auntie Rarity!"

I smiled. "You're right, dear," I said. "I feel a lot better now."

"Good to know," Geo interjected. "Because Dash and the others will be here soon." He stood up, holding Evening, and began walking out of the room. "Time to get showered, fed and watered!"

I giggled, then picked up Azure and followed him.

"And where do you think *you're* going?" Geo asked. "I'm pretty sure I told you I was making you breakfast in bed."

"Maybe some other time," I replied. "Besides, the last batch of pancakes you made for me tasted suspiciously like the ones Pinkie and the Cakes make over at Sugarcube Corner."

Geo chuckled sheepishly. "Did they?" he murmured. "Well, I guess where I get my pancake making skills from is a mystery that we shall never manage to solve, in this life or—"

"But, Daddy," Evening interrupted. "You burned the first load of pancakes you made for mum. That's why you went—"

"How would you like ice cream on your pancakes, sweetheart?" Geo gave Evening a kiss on the cheek. "Oh, wait a minute, only quiet little fillies get ice cream. Can you be quiet for your dear old dad?"

Evening made a zipping motion with her forehoof and nodded. Geo looked at me one more time — then grinned like a madman, beating a hasty retreat out of our bedroom and down the hall with our daughter holding on to him for dear life.

"Husbands."

"Sisters."

Azure and I both spoke in unison, rolling our eyes. Realising this, we both giggled and shared a nuzzle, then quickly followed Geo and Evening out of the room and towards the kitchen.

Because Celestia forbid that Geo blows something up... again.

Four showers, six fires, eight tubs of pancake mix, a bin full of burnt disasters and a creative variety of – magically muted – swear words from Geo later, we finally tucked into our breakfast.

"So, Twilight," Geo said, swallowing a mouthful of pancakes. "How do you think you're going to do today?"

"I don't know." I shrugged. "It might turn out to be the greatest lesson ever, or somepony – probably me – might get hurt."

Azure looked up from his plate. "Why do you need flying lessons anyway, Mum?" he asked. "You flew fine that day you became a Princess, all the way around Canterlot with Dad on your back."

"That was just dumb luck," I replied. "Dumb luck and maybe a little bit of magic to help me get off the ground."

"But you can't use magic all the time," Evening suggested. "That's why Auntie Dash is coming over to teach you."

Geo nodded. "That, and using magic was cheating." he shook his head. "Always remember, kids, cheating is wrong."

"But you cheated with the pancakes, Dad." Azure frowned.

Geo's mouth turned into a thin line and he looked around the room for a moment. "You're allowed to cheat at cooking," he said defensively. "But not at other things, like tests or flying."

Azure seemed unconvinced. "But asking the castle staff to make something for you doesn't exactly count as doing it you—"

He was cut off by the sound of the door opening, followed by several steps on the carpet as our friends walked in. Geo quickly shot to his feet and rushed over to greet them.

"Morning, folks!" he said eagerly. "I was wondering when you'd get here!" He turned to John and Applejack. "And you, AJ, how are you getting on now that you know you're pregnant?"

After Geo and I were coronated, John and Applejack took us – as well as the rest of our friends – aside, whereupon they dropped the bombshell that she was pregnant. It took us all by surprise, but at least we were happy that they were finally joining the Parent Club.

"I'm fine, sugarcube, thanks fer askin'," Applejack replied. "An' Junior here is doin' even better."

"That is correct." Doctor Haywick sidled up next to her. "Her last check-up was yesterday, and both she and the foal are well."

Applejack nodded at him, a gesture Haywick returned before he made his own way inside and began talking to Azure and Evening.

"That's good to hear, Applejack. But the real question is..." Geo turned to look at Ace, who was standing nearby. "Are *you* okay?"

Ace thought for a moment, then gave him a thumbs up. "I'm feeling a lot better now that Pinkie and I have had a chance to make things right," he said. "All that time I spent alone in my lab made me realise that I was putting my love for science above my love for my family." He shuddered. "Call me what you want, but I could have sworn I heard a voice in my head during my time down there, telling me to do horrible things to ponies everywhere. But, thankfully, Pinkie's re-appearance at the lab silenced it." He chuckled meekly. "Then again, I was probably going stir crazy due to the fact I only had my robots for company."

"And now you'll never be alone again, Acey." Pinkie nuzzled him, then looked at Geo and I. "Thanks again to you and the others for talking me around. I can't imagine what might have been had I stayed angry at him for the rest of my life."

"Best not to think about it," I said. "Come on in and get something to eat — we're in for a hard day."

"What's this 'we' stuff?" Rainbow Dash grinned as she walked past me and sat down. "You mean that *you're* in for a hard day, seeing how the Summer Sun Celebration is coming up."

"I probably am, Rainbow Dash," I replied. "But *you're* the one who is going to have to deal with my constant failures until I manage to get a hang of this whole 'flying' thing." I returned her grin with one of my own. "Do you think you've got the patience?"

That was enough to wipe the look off her face, turning it into a sheepish smile as she turned around to join the conversation that was now taking place at the breakfast table.

"Don't worry, Twilight," Spark Plug reassured me. "Rainbow Dash means well, and I think we can both agree that she won't tell you you do anything if it means putting you in danger."

"You're right, Spark," I replied. "I have every faith in her abilities as a teacher — it's my own ability as a student I doubt." Spark Plug nodded in understanding and joined Dash at the table. I felt a hand on my shoulder and looked at my husband. "What do you think, Geo? Am I getting worried over nothing?"

"There are two things that I am thinking right now," he said. "First of all, I think that you are indeed worrying over nothing. Sure, learning to fly will be hard, but you'll have your friends and family there to support you every step of the way."

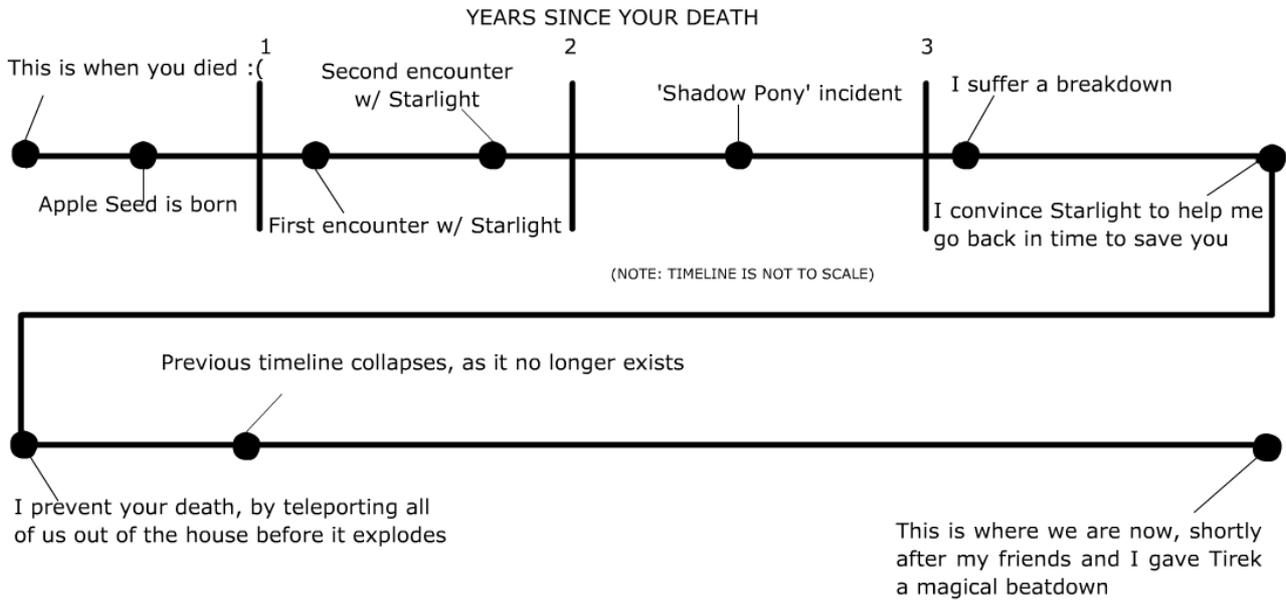
I let out a sigh of relief and gave him a kiss on the cheek. "Thank you," I replied. "Now, what is the second thing you're thinking?"

Geo looked at me, and then at the table. "I'm thinking I need to go and order more pancakes." he winked at me.

There was a pause, and then we both laughed heartily before going to join our friends at the table. I was still worried about what lay ahead, but I knew that Geo was right.

With my friends and family supporting me, I was confident that I would be flying in next to no time at all.

ALTERNATE VERSION OF TWILIGHT'S TIME DIAGRAM



No pony must ever find out about what I did; I will get into a lot of trouble, especially with Celestia and Luna, for misusing the time travel spell. However, that is a small price to pay compared to spending eternity without you. The events I have seen - Starlight and the Shadow Pony - will happen again, as they are part of our future; the only difference this time is that I will have the love of my life by my side, due to the timeline being somewhat different than it was before.

- All my love, Twilight <3