

TO LOVE IS HUMAN

The second story in the [Geoverse](#)

by

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With assistance from

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Welcome, friends and readers, to the rewrite of *To Love Is Human!*

When I made the decision to edit all of my stories, I knew that it would be one hell of a challenge. But I also knew that I could count on your support, which in turn helped me out a lot.

And your feedback has also aided me in making sure that this rewrite is just as good as the one for *To Friend Is Human* was.

This rewrite has (hopefully) fixed all known grammar issues, as well as a few plot holes. I have also changed the story to refer to Doctor Sorou as 'Ace,' rather than 'Sorou.' Unless you're in the military, referring to someone by their last name is rude.

Anyway, I'll let you get on to the story now.

Enjoy!

--

Christopher "GeodesicDragon" Urquhart

Author

1. HOPE IS REKINDLED

I sat with my back against the wall, my knees up to my chest, as I stared blankly at the pendant in my hand. John, who had been watching me, slowly came over to sit by my side.

"Geo, you're scaring me," he said. "You've been looking at that thing for hours now. What's so special about it?"

I looked him in the eyes, my own eyes puffy and red from the copious amounts of crying I had been doing. "Remember that story I told you?" I said quietly. "The one about the ponies?" John nodded slightly, turning away from my gaze. "And remember how I said I fell in love with one of them?"

"Yeah, I do," John replied. "But what does that have to do—"

"She gave me a pendant exactly like this one," I said blankly. John turned around, a shocked expression on his face, and prepared to speak when I cut him off. "I don't know how I could possibly have this pendant." I continued. "You're the only person I've told about it, and even then I missed out the exact details of what it looked like. So that means... this isn't a prank." I stood up, clutching the pendant in my fist. "What I saw in Equestria was no dream. I was really there." My voice cracked with emotion.

John stood up and put a hand on my shoulder reassuringly. "So what are you going to do now?" he asked.

"I'm going back," I said forcefully. "I don't care what I have to do to get there, but I am. Now that I know it wasn't a dream, you bet your arse that I will do whatever it takes to see Twilight again."

John gasped. "Mate, you can't be serious!"

"I have never been more serious of anything in my entire life!" I shouted, causing him to flinch. "One way or another, I am going to see my beloved mare again."

"If that's what it takes for you to be happy, then I'll help you," John said, to which I smiled. "And who knows?" He chuckled, as a mile-wide grin appeared on his face. "Maybe I'll go to Equestria with you and find myself a good-looking mare to settle down with."

"You sly bastard," I said as I punched him on the arm.

We exchanged a few glancing blows as the smile on my face grew wider, but eventually John put his arms up. "Now that I think about it..." he mused. "Do you have any idea how to get back?"

My face fell. "No, I don't," I groaned. I threw myself on the couch and buried my head in my hands. Through the gaps in my fingers, I could see John standing in front of me with his arms folded.

"That doesn't mean you can give up," he said sternly, holding out his hand. I took it and he pulled me off the couch into a hug. "I'm with you, mate." He said. "Let's get you home."

"But I don't know where to begin," I said softly.

"Then let's start with where it all began," John replied, looking into my eyes. "You know where I'm thinking of..."

I gasped as realisation hit me. "The crossing where I was shot..."

It was another day in Ponyville, and the town square was busy with ponies buying and selling their wares at the market stalls. All the shops were busy, and the general atmosphere was a happy one.

The Ponyville Library, meanwhile, stood eerily quiet — leaving many of the townsponies worried. Despite their concerns, though, most of them were too afraid to approach the structure. But one group of mares was not afraid to walk up to the door and knock, the sounds of sobbing coming from the other side indicating signs of life.

"Twilight?" Applejack said, her voice full of concern. "C'mon, sugarcube, open up and let us in."

There was no reply.

"Let me try," Rarity said, gently nudging Applejack aside. "Twilight, darling, it's your friends. Won't you please let us in?"

Her plea fell on deaf ears.

"T-Twilight? I-it's Fluttershy," the timid pegasus said. "We're very worried about you, and we just want to come in and see if you're OK... if that's all right with you."

There was a pause before Twilight finally replied. "You're not going to leave until I let you in, are you?" her voice was broken, and carried a twinge of remorse.

"You're our friend, Twilight!" Rainbow Dash said proudly. "You bet your flank we're not gonna leave you like this!"

"Yeah!" Pinkie Pie exclaimed. "We love you, Twilight, and we just hate seeing you all sad and mopey like this!"

There was a series of clicking noises as the door was unlocked. It opened wide enough to let all five mares in, then slammed shut with a resounding echo.

"Uh, Twilight?" Applejack asked nervously. "It's a bit dark in here, sugarcube, can ya turn the light on?"

Another soft click sounded and the room lit up — only for the mares to gasp when they saw the figure in the middle of it.

Twilight was lying on the sofa, her eyes red and puffy. She was wrapped up in several articles of clothing and was sniffing heavily. Her mane was unkempt, her fur was matted and the normally tidy library was a mess of books and empty food containers.

"Oh, Twilight." Rarity cautiously approached the broken unicorn, wrapping a hoof around her and bringing her in for a hug. "You don't have to suffer alone."

Twilight began crying much louder than before, and as the tears poured down her face her friends joined Rarity, wrapping the distraught mare in a group hug. "I can't bear it!" Twilight choked out between sobs. "I miss him, I miss him so much!"

"We know ya do, sugarcube," Applejack said gently. "But you gotta move on — Geo wouldn't want you ta live your life grievin' for him."

"I can't move on!" Twilight screamed. "I just can't!"

"As your friends, we'll help you get through this, Twilight," Pinkie Pie said solemnly. "We'll do whatever it takes!"

Twilight sighed and pulled away from the hug, a small smile on her face. "I know you will, girls." she sniffed. "I know."

The six of them sat in silence for a while before Rarity noticed something and spoke. "Twilight, darling?" she asked gently. "Where's Spike? Why isn't he here to comfort you?"

"I sent him back to Canterlot," Twilight replied.

"Because you didn't want him to see you like this?" Rarity queried.

"No, for research," Twilight said.

"Research?" Applejack raised an eyebrow. "Research on what?"

"Remember when I went back in time to try and warn myself about the disaster that wasn't really a disaster?" Twilight asked, blushing at the memory, to which the others nodded. "Well, while I was in the Starswirl the Bearded wing, I found a scroll on how to talk to spirits." As she spoke, her smile grew.

"Spirits?" Rainbow Dash checked. "As in, speaking to the dead?"

"Exactly." Twilight nodded. "If Spike can find it again, then I can use the spell to talk to Geo in the afterlife... and finally get some closure." She sighed. "But it requires six of us to cast."

She looked pleadingly at the others, who looked at each other. Eventually, though, they all looked at Twilight and smiled.

"If that's what it'll take for you to be happy and start smiling again, then so be it," Pinkie Pie said. "I'll stand by you."

"Me too." Rarity added.

"And me." Applejack smiled.

"You can count on me as well, Twilight!" Rainbow Dash said, punching the air with a hoof.

Fluttershy simply nodded.

"Thank you, girls!" Twilight squealed, grabbing her friends in a group hug. "One way or another, I am going to see Geo again!"

And thus, amidst the mess of the library, the unicorn found herself filled with a renewed sense of purpose.

2. HOPE IS EXTINGUISHED

As I stood at the pedestrian crossing, the events of that particular night began flashing before my eyes.

Crossing the road.

Almost getting run over.

Yelling at the driver.

The car turning around and coming back.

The driver getting out and punching me.

The beating.

The gun...

I closed my eyes, trying to block out the memories as John put a hand on my shoulder.

"I'm here, mate," he said reassuringly. "Let's look for clues."

I nodded and we both began scouring the area, looking for anything that could help me in my mission to return to Equestria.

"Oh come on, where is it?" Spike groaned as he looked through a mountain of books and scrolls. His eyes were bloodshot, showing signs that he had not slept for a while, but they also burned with the determination to help his friend. "Darn. It's not here either!" He yelled, slamming the book he was reading. A dull thud echoed through the area. Putting the book in a pile with the others he'd been looking through, Spike buried his head in his hands.

"Spike?" the voice calling his name was full of warm concern.

The young dragon looked up to see both Celestia and Luna in front of him. He leapt off his chair and bowed deeply. "Princesses!" he said quickly. "What brings you here?"

"One of the guards told us he had let you in here, but he hadn't seen you come out," Celestia replied. "We were worried, so we thought we'd come and check up on you."

Spike smiled. "I'm fine," he said reassuringly. "I'm just trying to find something for Twilight."

Luna lowered her head and looked at the ground. "How is Twilight?" she asked softly. "Has she been coping?"

There was a pause as Spike tried to find the right words. Eventually, he sighed. "She's not been coping well at all," he said glumly. "She sent me up here to find a scroll which details how to talk to the dead." He let out a deep sigh. "But I can't find it anywhere. I'm beginning to think it doesn't even exist."

Luna nodded and trotted over to the shelves. Her horn lit up, and a scroll floated down into Spike's hands. He read it carefully, his face lighting up as he did so.

"But how did you...?" he spluttered.

A small smile appeared on Luna's face. "It was filed under 'S,' for 'Spirits.'" She chuckled. "This *is* a library, after all."

Spike slapped his forehead, dragging his hand down his face and muttering to himself. "It was so obvious..." he put the scroll in his bag. "Thank you, Princesses." He offered another bow.

"It was our pleasure, Spike," Celestia replied. "If this is what Twilight needs in order to get closure and move on, then who are we to get in the way of that?" Spike nodded and prepared to leave before she put a hoof on his shoulder. "Give Twilight our regards, Spike, and tell her that we will come to see her soon."

"I will, Princess," he replied as he left, both Princesses watching him leave. Once he was out of sight, Luna looked at her sister.

"Do you think the spell will work, Tia?" she asked. "Or will poor Twilight's heart be broken yet again?"

"I don't know, Lulu," Celestia replied. "But all we have is hope." She sighed and looked to the ceiling. "If you're out there, Geo, then please come back — because Twilight needs you."

"Dammit, there's nothing here!" I shouted.

"I couldn't find anything either." John shook his head. "I'm sorry, mate — but perhaps there's something else we can do?"

I sighed. "It's not your fault, John," I replied. "And I guess the only way to get back is to nearly die again — but you can fuck that for a game of marbles." I laughed weakly.

"Let's go back to my place." John laid a reassuring hand on my shoulder. "We can get drunk and you can tell me all about Equestria, because it sounds like a great place."

I smiled and nodded, and the two of us started walking. "I guess I'll concentrate on getting another job then," I grumbled. "I quit my job at the warehouse because one, it was boring as fuck and two, it brought back memories of that night..."

John smiled sympathetically before something caught his eye. He walked over to a telegraph pole, stapled to which was an advert.

I am a local scientist who is looking to hire people to assist me with manual labour in my laboratory. If you think you can handle working in a fast-paced and often chaotic environment, then you might just be the person I am looking for. Please contact Dr. Ace Sorou on the number below.

"There you go, Geo," John said, giving me a nudge. "Since you've done warehouse work, this should be right up your street."

I read the notice and nodded. "A job's a job." I shrugged, making a note of the contact details. "You want to get in on this?" I asked. "After all, you said your job at the courthouse was only temporary."

John hesitated for a moment before he nodded. "Yeah, why not?" he said. "We'll call Doctor Sorou when we get back to my place."

As we walked up the street, I had a smile on my face — but on the inside, I was tearing myself apart with grief, thinking that I would never see Equestria – or Twilight Sparkle – ever again.

As Spike burst into the library triumphantly, holding the scroll above his head like a sword, his heart was warmed by the sight which greeted him — Twilight and her friends, still locked in their group hug, all fast asleep on the floor of the library.

Spike smiled and gently closed the door before crossing the library to join them — only to step on a squeaky floorboard. He froze in place as he saw Twilight's eyes flutter open.

"Spike?" she asked wearily. "Is that you?"

Spike chuckled nervously. "Uh, yeah," he said sheepishly. "It's me. I got that scroll you wanted, and Princess Celestia says to tell you she and Luna will try and visit at some point."

"That's nice," Twilight replied, still half-asleep. She closed her eyes and settled down again. Suddenly, her eyes shot open and she sat bolt upright. "YOU HAVE THE SCROLL?!" She shouted. The sudden outburst forced the other five mares wide awake.

"What the hay?" Applejack groaned. "What's goin' on? What time is it?" she looked around and saw Spike.

"Spike has that scroll I wanted!" Twilight squealed with delight. "I can finally talk to my lost love!"

"What, now?" Spike stifled a yawn. "Can't it wait until tomorrow, Twilight? I'm really tired after the trip back from Canterlot."

Twilight opened her mouth to speak, but she closed it upon seeing Spike's bloodshot eyes and the pleading look on his face.

"Okay, Spike," she relented, lying back down. "We'll do it tomorrow. Leave the scroll on the table and get some sleep."

Spike did as he was asked and climbed upstairs to bed.

As soon as the sun hit her face the next morning, Twilight leapt off the couch excitedly — waking up the others in the process. As they stretched, and in Dash's case groaned a lot, she levitated the scroll over to her and read it quietly to herself.

"It seems simple enough," she said as she looked up from the scroll. "You can probably imagine how keen I am to try it."

Her friends nodded.

"So let's do it already!" Rainbow Dash shouted, clopping her forehooves together fiercely. "Just tell us what to do, Twi."

Twilight smiled and looked at the scroll again. "According to this, we need to stand in a circle." as she spoke, she glanced around the untidy library and winced. "And we will, once I've tidied up."

Twilight's horn glowed as she cast a spell, a flash of light enveloping the library and causing the others to shield their eyes. Opening them, they gasped upon seeing that the library was back to its usual level of tidiness. Twilight admired her work with a smile.

"Just a little spell I found," she said nonchalantly, laughing at her friends open-mouthed stares. "Now, everypony form a circle!" The six mares stood around the table in the middle of the room, linking hooves on Twilight's instruction. "Okay." Twilight checked the scroll again. "Here goes nothing." Her horn illuminated once more, covering the room with a dull purple cloud. "Spirits of Equestria, I beseech you," Twilight said. "I seek the spirit of the human named Geo, my lost love. Please bring him before me, so that I might communicate with him and get the closure I so desperately seek."

She opened one eye and looked around expectantly.

"Twilight, are you sure this is gonna work?" Applejack whispered.

"It has to," Twilight whispered back. "Otherwise I'm all out of ideas." She raised her voice. "Please, spirits of Equestria, I must talk with my love. I need to hear his voice once more." Twilight's eyes filled with tears. "Only once I hear it can I attempt to move on." Silence greeted her. "I beg you, Geo, please speak to me!" Twilight yelled. "I need this. I need... you."

Suddenly, the cloud floating around the room descended to eye level, taking on the form of a human as it did so. But, to Twilight's dismay, it was not the human she was expecting to speak to.

"You're not Geo," she said mournfully. "Where is he?"

"It is true that I am not the one you seek," the spirit replied, offering a small bow. "My name is Anthony — although a thousand years ago, I was also the last remaining human in Equestria."

"Wait..." Twilight's eyes widened. "*You're Anthony?*" She asked, to which he nodded. "Princess Celestia has told us a lot about you." She returned his bow. "It's a pleasure to meet you... although I can't help but wish that it was under better circumstances than this." She sighed. "Anyway, what can you tell us?"

Anthony rubbed the back of his head nervously. "I can tell you that no new human spirits have arrived in the afterlife of late," he said hesitantly. "It pains me to say this, Twilight Sparkle, but... your lover is not with us." He paused. "In fact, I can safely say that no trace of him exists in Equestria at all."

"What?" six voices spoke in unison.

"How?" Twilight asked. "How is that even possible?"

Anthony opened his mouth to speak, only to grunt as he was forcibly pushed aside to reveal a second spirit.

"Ooh, let *me* answer this one!" the newcomer said gleefully, as he looked at the six mares. "Hello, girls, it's nice to see you again."

Twilight narrowed her eyes and snorted.

"Discord..."

3. AS LONG AS IT TAKES

The six friends stood in silence as a grin began to spread across Discord's face. Anthony reappeared as well, standing next to the Lord of Chaos and giving him a filthy look. After a while, Twilight rolled her eyes and groaned.

"Well?" she demanded. "I'm waiting."

"Really?" Discord held out his claw. "Hello, Waiting, I'm Discord." Twilight snarled at him and he withdrew the appendage. "Oh, my, somepony is certainly touchy today. Are you like this because it's been a while since you were last touched?" He grinned and wiggled his eyebrows. "If you know what I mean."

"You know damn well what I meant!" Twilight shouted. "Just tell me what you know about Geo, or so help me I will go to your statue in Canterlot and break it into a million little pieces!"

"Yeah!" Applejack added. "An' I'll help her!"

"Me too!" Rainbow Dash proclaimed.

"Me three!" Pinkie said. "No, wait, I actually meant 'me four.' Since, y'know, I was the fourth one to talk."

Discord sighed. "Very well," he said. "I'll tell you. As you know, my speciality is chaos — meaning I don't really know, or care much, about science. But I do know that your human friend's spirit has somehow managed to return to where it originated from. Which, in Geo's case, would be the wonderful planet Earth."

The six friends gasped.

"No... NO!" Twilight cried. "He can't have!"

Discord chuckled. "I'm sorry, but he has." he said flatly. "Think about it, Twilight — if your little spell managed to summon Anthony and I's spirits, then *surely* it would have worked on Geo's?"

Twilight pondered for a moment before lowering her head. "As much as I hate to say it, you make a good point," she muttered.

"So, basically..." Rainbow Dash mused. "This whole thing has been a waste of time, and there's no way for Twilight to talk to Geo?"

Discord applauded. "Finally!" he beamed. "Somepony who gets it!"

"All right, you've had your fun," Anthony said, pushing Discord aside. "Now piss off and go bother someone else."

"Ugh," Discord groaned. "You humans are so dull. Whatever happened to the grievously savage child-race you used to be?"

"We grew up." Anthony pushed him once more and Discord vanished from sight, a series of loud clattering noises heralding his departure. "I was going to tell you that myself, Twilight — and in a more eloquent way — but he beat me to it. Are you all right?"

All eyes were on Twilight as she looked at the floor, sniffing as tears ran down her cheeks, staining the floor beneath her hooves. She nodded meekly, but gave no reply.

"I'm sorry, Twilight." Fluttershy nuzzled her sympathetically.

"Me too, sugarcube," Applejack added.

"Blech." Discord's face suddenly appeared in front of Anthony's. "There is far too much affection for my liking. Now, if you're quite finished, you can let go of each other to end the spell."

"I thought I told you to piss off?!" Anthony shouted. "Can't you see that you've made the poor mare suffer enough?"

Discord chuckled. "You're forgetting, my dear Anthony." he snapped his fingers and disappeared in a flash of light, leaving behind a glass of chocolate milk. "Making ponies unhappy is what I do best!" He continued speaking. "I hope to talk to you again soon, my little ponies! I must say I've enjoyed our little catch-up. After all, being trapped in stone can be quite detrimental to one's social life."

The ensuing silence was enough to tell the others that he was gone, or that he was keeping quiet. In either case, Anthony spoke.

"I'm very sorry that I was unable to assist you," he said. "All I can really say is that I hope you get the closure you seek. But, if your lover has indeed returned to his own world, who's to say he won't be trying to find a way back to you?"

Twilight smiled. "You're right, Anthony," she replied. "Knowing Geo as well as I do, that is exactly what he'll be trying to do." She wiped her eyes. "Thank you for your time, we'll leave you in peace." She paused. "Oh, and good luck dealing with Discord."

Anthony rolled his eyes and chuckled – then ducked as the chocolate milk exploded violently – while Twilight let go of Fluttershy and Applejack's hooves. In an instant the cloud was gone, and so was his spirit.

Pinkie Pie walked over to Twilight and hugged her tightly. "Anthony's right, Twilight," she said. "Who says that Geo is not trying to find a way back here? He loves you, so you bet your booty that he's going to do all he can to get home!"

Twilight pulled her head back and looked at Pinkie. The mare's eyes were bright and full of hope, her face showing its usual warm smile.

"You're right, Pinkie," she said, sighing contentedly. "Geo is going to come back to us... back to me."

Pinkie smiled. "That's the spirit, Twilight!" she beamed. "He'll be back soon, and then I can throw a 'Welcome Back To Equestria And Congratulations On Your Engagement' party!"

Twilight's face fell. "I forgot he was going to propose to me." she sighed, levitating a small box over to her and opening it. Inside lay a golden band, adorned with rubies, sapphires and diamonds.

"Don't worry, darling," Rarity said reassuringly. "I'm sure he'll soon be here to give it to you."

"And once he's done that, he'll propose." Rainbow Dash grinned, only to get stern looks in return. "What?" Twilight raised an eyebrow at her, and Dash threw her forehooves into the air. "Are you kidding me? So it's all right for *Discord* to make a joke like that, but when *I* do it..." she trailed off, grumbling angrily.

Twilight rolled her eyes, stifling a giggle, and put the band back in the box before placing it gently on the table and turning back to look at the faces of her friends.

"I know for sure that Geo is trying to come back to us. To me," she said, the determination in her voice evident. "And with Celestia and Luna as my witness, I will wait for his return — and I don't care how long it takes." She looked up at the ceiling and raised her voice. "Do you hear me, Discord?!" She yelled. "We will be together again, no matter what you might think!"

The other five ponies cheered wildly.

"That's the spirit, Twi!" Rainbow Dash said, her earlier grumpiness having seemingly been forgotten.

"Come on, girls." Twilight walked over to the library door. "I think it's about time I showed myself around town. Everypony is probably worried sick about me." The others nodded, and she opened the door. "Let's get some lunch, my treat." Her friends trotted out the library, allowing Twilight to lock up. Turning away from the door, she looked up at the afternoon sun.

"I want pancakes!" Pinkie squealed excitedly.

"Fer lunch?" Applejack chuckled. "Sounds like a mighty fine idea, but I've got me a hankerin' for some apple fritters!"

"A salad will do me the world of good," Rarity said. "After all, a lady must not let herself go."

Rainbow Dash scoffed. "Puh-leeze, Rares," she said. "Even ladies like to treat themselves to a great big pile of freshly made pancakes or fritters every now and again."

The five of them soon descended into a heated discussion about suitable lunchtime meals, while Twilight looked up at the sky dreamily. "I know you're out there, Geo," she said softly. "And I know we'll be together again soon."

With another contented sigh, she quickly trotted after her friends.

"OK, Doctor, we'll see you tomorrow. Bye!"

John put the phone down and let out a humph.

"Well?" I asked. "What did he say?"

"He said he wants us to meet him at his laboratory tomorrow at ten for an interview." John replied.

"Okay, sounds great." I picked up a beer and held it up. "Well, here's to a brand new start." As I drained the contents of the can in one go, I saw John watching me with a look of concern on his face. I crushed the can and put it into the recycling bin next to the couch. "What's with the look?" I queried.

"Nothing. It's just that..." John hesitated.

"Spit it out, mate," I replied, raising an eyebrow.

"Well... I can't believe you're giving up so easily," John said bluntly.

"I *have* to give up!" I snarled. "There's no way back to Equestria, so I'm going to have to accept that I'll never see Twilight again."

"Bullshit!" John yelled. "You saw Derek's court case through to the end, and that was hard enough after what happened."

I sighed. "That was different," I said. "That was actually real."

"And so was your time in Equestria!" John pointed at the pendant around my neck. "That thing proves it!"

I gently ran my fingers along the pendant, remembering the moment Twilight gave it to me. Suddenly, a thought came to me, and I snapped my fingers.

"Maybe the pendant is the key to getting back!" I took it off and looked at it, the gemstones reflecting the light hypnotically.

John shrugged. "Maybe it is," he replied. "But how?"

"I don't know." I shrugged. "But I intend to find out. This pendant holds the key to me getting back to Equestria. And with Celestia and Luna as my witnesses, I will find a way."

John chuckled. "There's the Geo I know!" he said, patting me on the back. "We'll figure something out, mate, don't you worry."

"Thanks." I patted his back. "Say, when you were talking to Doctor Sorou, did he tell you what it was he was working on?"

"He did mention something about 'seeing it to believe it.'" John put a hand on his chin. "But other than that, I don't know exactly what it is that he's studying."

"I guess we'll find out tomorrow," I said. "Hell, part of me is tempted to tell him my story and ask him if he can help me find my way back to Equestria."

"And what if he thinks you're crazy?" John asked.

I laughed. "I already am crazy," I replied. "Crazy about Twilight Sparkle, that is." I sighed. "I hope she's all right..."

John smiled and put a hand on my shoulder.

"I'm with you every step of the way, mate," he said reassuringly.

I patted his hand. "So help me, I will find a way back to Equestria. I will return to the land where I belong, with the mare I love." I looked up at the ceiling. "No matter how long it takes," I said flatly, "I will hold Twilight Sparkle in my arms again."

I grabbed another beer, and John joined me in an impromptu celebration of my upcoming return home.

4. THE GOOD DOCTOR SOROU

John and I stood in front of the warehouse. It was a large building with boards over several windows, and several solar panels and wind turbines on the roof.

"Are you sure this is the right place?" I asked, looking around with a feeling of unease.

"Yeah, this is the address Doctor Sorou gave me." John nodded.

I took a deep breath and started walking towards the door. "Best not keep him waiting then," I said.

The door opened with a high pitched squealing noise, revealing a set of stairs which we began descending. We came to another door, made of solid iron, with a buzzer on the wall nearby. John hesitated for a moment before pressing it.

"Who's there?" a voice demanded.

"Uh, Doctor Sorou?" John asked. "My name is John Adams. We spoke on the phone yesterday?"

There was a series of clattering noises, followed by rustling.

"Adams, Adams... ah, yes, I remember now. You and your friend are here about my job offer. Come on in!"

The door unlocked with a loud click and John pushed it open. We entered the laboratory, our eyes widening at the many pieces of equipment which lay scattered around.

Doctor Sorou was standing at a table nearby. He was wearing a long white lab coat over top some casual clothes, a shirt bearing the logo for Halo, and a pair of blue jeans. His doctorate in mechanical engineering hung in a frame on the wall behind him.

He was paying close attention to a device he was constructing using an adjustable wrench and what appeared to be a spoon. His brown curly hair was parted down the centre by a rubber strap that held his goggles to his head, and he had a wide grin on his face.

Upon seeing us, he put down the wrench and spoon and held out his hand. John and I each shook it firmly.

"Hi there," I said. "I'm Geo, and this is John."

"I'm Ace Sorou, and it's a pleasure to meet you both." Doctor Sorou chuckled. "You have *no* idea how hard it is to find victims who are so eager to help me." John and I looked at each other nervously as he clapped a hand to his forehead. "I'm sorry, did I say 'victims?' I meant 'assistants.' I'm always getting those two mixed up."

John and I laughed half-heartedly and looked away. An awkward silence descended upon the room, but it was quickly broken when Ace clapped his hands together.

"Right then, now that the pleasantries are out of the way, perhaps you would like to know what the job involves?" he asked, to which John and I nodded. "I just need a couple of pairs of extra hands, that's all. I will pay you handsomely for your help."

"How much?" I asked. "If you don't mind me asking, that is."

"I may not look it, but I am very wealthy," Ace replied. "I'll pay each of you seventeen pounds an hour for helping me out."

John and I did a double-take.

"Seventeen quid an hour?!" John gasped. "Count me in!"

"Me too!" I said happily. "For that kind of money, I'll do anything!" I hesitated for a moment before I quickly added, "Within reason."

Ace laughed and grasped John and I by the shoulders. "Welcome aboard, then," he said. "You know something, guys? I think this could be the start of a wonderful friendship."

"If you don't mind me asking, Ace, what are you working on here?" I asked hesitantly. "Is it anything dangerous?"

Ace looked around the laboratory, as if he was expecting someone to be listening in, then pulled John and I closer.

"What are we working on?" he said. "Well, you wouldn't believe me if I told you, but... what the hell, I'll tell ya anyway!"

"Okay..." the worry on John's face was all too obvious.

"What if I told you that there are other worlds?" Ace said, his eyes full of wonder. "Other universes, aside from the one we live in, where creatures – other than humans – have evolved to the point of sentience, and are the planet's dominant species?"

John and I looked at each other with raised eyebrows.

"As it happens," Ace continued. "I have found one such universe, and, get this, it's inhabited by ponies!"

John and I spluttered, which made Ace glare at us.

"Yeah, yeah," he said bitterly. "Laugh all you want, but I'm serious! These ponies can fly, they build their own equipment and structures, they control their weather.. and they can even talk! In fact, they speak the same language we're speaking right now!"

I rubbed the back of my head with my hand. "That's really freaky, Ace." I looked him in the eyes. "Because I believe you."

Ace gasped. "You do?" he said, before narrowing his eyes. "Wait, you're not pulling my leg, are you?"

"No, I'm not." I shook my head. "I believe you because..." I trailed off, my hesitation lasting for a few moments — until Ace sighed and threw his hands into the air exasperatedly.

"Spit it out, Geo!" he shouted.

"I have been to the universe you've just described, Ace," I said at last. "Furthermore, I have seen the ponies you speak of."

Ace began spluttering, unable to string a complete sentence together, then walked over to his desk and started raking through a vast pile of paper. Grabbing a few pieces, he came back to me and thrust what he had gathered into my hands.

"You've seen *these* ponies?" he said, jabbing the paper with a finger. "These ponies right here?"

I looked down at the pile of paper and gasped, realising that what I was looking at were drawings and photos of various ponies.

"How did you get these?" I asked, unable to contain my glee.

"I've been working on a device which creates a gateway to other worlds. A portal, if you will," Ace said.

"That's plausible," I replied. "But, Doc, these photos and drawings are... well, they're perfect!"

"I've managed to get a few successful portals up and running, but they only last for a few seconds at a time," he explained. "So I send in these flying, robotic cameras to collect data, and they report back to me once their memory banks are full." He pointed to a nearby workbench, upon which sat one of the cameras he was referring to. It looked like a bird, but with a camera instead of a beak. "I've gotta disguise them so I don't freak out the natives."

I continued looking through the photos and drawings. I recognised several of the ponies depicted in them. I saw Big Macintosh, Lyra, Derpy Hooves, Ivory Scroll, Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, Rarity, Applejack, Fluttershy, Doctor Haywick, the Cutie Mark Crusaders, as well as several others whom I had met at my welcome party.

As I got to the last picture in the pile and looked at it, I gasped and covered my hand with my mouth.

"What is it?" John asked.

I showed him the picture, doing my best to fight the tears forming in my eyes. The picture showed Twilight, but not as I knew her. She was downtrodden, walking along the street looking nothing like the cheerful mare I had fallen in love with. All around her, ponies played and laughed — but Twilight kept her gaze fixed firmly to the ground. Looking closer, I could also make out tears in her eyes.

"It's a picture of Twilight." the emotion suddenly became too much to handle as I dropped to my knees and began sobbing, clutching the photo to my chest. "I miss her, I miss her so much!"

John took the picture from me and looked at it. "It looks to me like she misses you too, mate."

"I've never seen her so miserable, John," I replied. "I have to get back to her... back to Equestria!"

"Equestria?" Ace mused. "Is that what this place is called?" He chuckled. "A fitting name, I guess, but that doesn't explain what the heck is going on here." He took the picture from John and studied it. "Who is she, and why does she mean so much to you?"

I composed myself and stood up. "Take a seat, Ace." I chuckled. "Because this is going to be one hell of a story."

5. PREPARATION

I eventually managed to regain my composure, and told Ace everything about my trip to Equestria. I was expecting him to raise his eyebrows when I got to the part about Twilight, but he listened to the whole story with a smile on his face.

Once I'd finished, he nodded excitedly. "That was a fantastic story!" he said loudly. "I can see why you are so keen to get back; you make her sound like the most fantastic pony there."

I nodded. "Yeah," I replied. "She is."

"The question is, though, can you get him there?" John asked.

"Of course I can!" Ace replied. "I just need to finish building this stabiliser, and then I can try to open a new portal."

"A stabiliser?" I asked.

Ace sighed. "My first portals weren't so great," he said. "I couldn't keep 'em in one place, and they went all wibbly-wobbly — which is dangerous, because you'd be sucked into the edges if you touched them, and then turned to mush. That's why I need a stabiliser."

I raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean, you couldn't keep them in one place?" I asked, a trace of annoyance in my voice.

"Exactly that," Ace said flatly. "The portals opened in random places around town, but only for a few seconds." He thought for a moment, then suddenly snapped his fingers and crossed over to his desk, which was still littered with various pieces of paper that he began rifling through. "Where did you say you were shot again?"

"James Street," I said, wondering what he could be getting at.

Ace threw random pieces of paper on the floor as he continued to sort the pile. Eventually, he picked up a piece and read it, crossing back over to me as he did so. "Ah, yes. My records show that one of my portals did appear in James Street on the same night you were shot," he said, waving the paper in my face. "It would appear you ended up falling into it when the bullet struck you."

My jaw dropped. "So you... I mean it..." I was unable to speak, the shock was too much to bear.

"So... it was your experiment that sent Geo to Equestria in the first place?" John said, grasping my shoulder.

Ace nodded. "It would appear so," he said. "Although I can't explain how he was able to come back." He scratched his chin for a moment before exclaiming suddenly.

"What?" John eyed him curiously.

"I've just realised that I'm not the first person to visit another universe!" Ace cried. "Dangit, I worked my butt off for this!" John and I rolled our eyes, and he chuckled. "Oh well, Geo seems like a good guy. And if I can at least be the first *scientist* to visit another universe, chances are he'll let me take the credit anyway."

He and John both turned to look at me, the shock on my face still apparent. John snapped his fingers in front of my face, which brought me back to reality. I blushed slightly before turning to Ace.

"If we help you build this stabiliser, will you help me return to Equestria?" I asked him. "You have to believe me when I say that I would be willing to do anything to get back."

Ace grinned. "Of course I will," he replied. "I'm very keen to see this world for myself, so I hope you'll let me tag along."

"It's your machine." I nodded. "Of *course* you can come."

Ace's grin got wider as he clapped his hands together. "Excellent!" he said gleefully. "But, before we begin, it goes without saying that both of you need to sign a little something for me."

He handed John and I a copy of what looked like a contract, with print that was difficult to read without the aid of a magnifying glass. Taking a copy of the form for himself, he began to read it at a rate of speed that reminded me of Pinkie Pie.

"I, your name, understand that, by entering the laboratory of Dr. Ace Sorou, I forfeit the right and/or privilege to take legal action against Dr. Sorou in the event of bodily harm, lost limbs, transformation, change in mental health, or any combination of the above as a result of drinking chemicals and/or being shot by plasma energy, light energy, particle energy, atomic energy, gravitational anomalies, or any combination of the above. I further note that I will not press charges if I somehow turn in to a goat, pony, chicken, lion, tree, minotaur, dictionary, or any other vegetable, mineral, or animal that I am not meant to be."

John and I glanced at each other as he continued speaking, not even pausing to draw breath. *Yep, definitely reminds me of Pinkie.*

"I sign this legally binding contract and/or enter Dr. Ace Sorou's laboratory under my own volition without any outside influence affecting my judgement, be it coercion, blackmail, drugs, alcohol, or other. By entering Dr. Ace Sorou's laboratory, I will keep all activities within the laboratory a closely guarded secret, and will not tell anyone who has not signed a similar contract with Dr. Sorou about anything going on in the laboratory. My signature below is my agreement that I have read and understood all of the above."

He looked at the two of us and held out a pair of pens, his grin now threatening to consume his face. "So, if you'll just sign at the dotted line, we can finally get started."

John and I looked each other and shrugged, signing the contracts with an air of nonchalance about us. Ace took the contracts and put them on his desk with the other pieces of paper. "OK, gentlemen, let's go." he said, rubbing his hands together.

John and I cracked our knuckles and stretched ourselves.

"Let's do this," I said, looking Ace in the eyes. He nodded, and motioned for us to follow him. As I passed his desk, I glanced at the photo of Twilight on the table and picked it up so I could kiss it. "Soon, Twilight." I whispered. "I'll be home soon."

I put the photo down as I followed John and Ace, a look of determination etched firmly on my face.

"So what's the plan, Twilight?" Rainbow Dash asked.

"You heard what Pinkie said," Twilight replied. "Geo is trying to come back to Equestria, so I might as well be there to welcome him when he eventually shows up."

Rainbow Dash and the other five exchanged worried looks.

"But, Twilight," Applejack said. "Ya don't know how long it'll be before he comes back, sugarcube; it could be days, months or years before ya see him." She lowered her head, and her voice. "He might not even come back at all."

Twilight stopped dead in her tracks and turned round, her eyes narrowed. She glared at Applejack, who flinched.

"Don't say that!" she shouted. "He *will* come back to me, damn it, I just know he will! How *dare you* doubt him, Applejack!"

Applejack lowered her head even further. "I'm sorry, Twi," she whispered. "I don't mean ta upset ya, but at the same time... you have to accept that I might be right."

Twilight sighed. "I know." she hugged her friend. "I'm sorry for shouting at you, Applejack, it's just... I'm finding it hard to cope."

Applejack returned the hug. "No, sugarcube," she replied. "I should be sorry. Yer right, I shouldn't be doubtin' Geo like that. He's a good man, an' I know he's tryin' his hardest ta get back ta ya."

Twilight smiled.

"But, Twilight!" Pinkie Pie said. "When he does finally come back to you, who's to say he'll even arrive in Ponyville?"

Twilight broke away from Applejack and scratched her chin.

"I was wondering that myself, Pinkie," she replied. "But I have a feeling he'll arrive at the same place he did the last time."

"You mean that forest clearing?" Pinkie asked.

"Exactly." Twilight nodded. "It's the only possible place."

"Pinkie's right, Twilight." Rainbow Dash looked amazed as she said those words. "What if he *does* arrive in another part of Equestria?"

"Then he'll do his best to find me," Twilight said flatly. "Nothing will keep us apart, Rainbow Dash. *Nothing.*"

Rarity coughed gently, attracting Twilight's attention. "So, darling, let me see if I've got this right. You mean to tell us that you are going to camp in that clearing until he comes back and you are in his arms?" she asked, unable to keep the concern out of her voice. Twilight nodded, eliciting a gasp from Rarity. "But what if Applejack is right, and you're waiting there for a long time?"

Twilight furrowed her brow. "I don't care how long I am waiting for," she said through gritted teeth. "As long as I am there when he gets back, I would gladly wait until the end of time if I could."

Rarity opened her mouth to reply, but the glare she was getting from Twilight made her think otherwise.

Rainbow Dash puffed her chest out and flew up to Twilight, hovering just a few inches away from her face.

"If you think I'm just gonna let you do this—" she began.

"R-Rainbow Dash is right, Twilight," Fluttershy said timidly. "It's far too dangerous out here. M-maybe we should go back to—"

Rainbow Dash waved her hoof in the air. "I wasn't finished!" she said gruffly, at which Fluttershy let out a small squeak and blushed. "I was going to say that if you think I'm gonna let you do this waiting thing all by yourself, Twilight, then you've got another thing coming." She lowered herself to the ground.

"You'd wait with me?" Twilight asked.

"Heck yeah, I would!" Dash replied proudly. "You're one of my best friends, and I *am* the Element of Loyalty."

Pinkie Pie stepped forward. "I'll wait with you as well, Twilight!" she beamed. "We'll have the world's longest camping trip!"

"But what about the Cakes?" Twilight asked. "Won't they need your help over at Sugarcube Corner?"

"Oh." Pinkie thought for a moment. "Ooh, I know! I'll do my work at the bakery like normal, but I'll come here every night to spend time with you! It'll be like having lots of sleepovers!"

Applejack sighed. "I'd love ta stay with ya Twi, I really would." she drew a hoof into the dirt. "But I can't just leave the farm." Twilight nodded, and Applejack grinned. "Havin' said that, I sure as hay ain't gonna let y'all starve. I'll come by every day with food for ya."

"And I can't leave the Boutique, darling," Rarity said glumly. "But I *will* make all three of you the most gorgeous tent you've ever seen in your lives! Oh, and sleeping bags!"

"Thanks, Rarity." Twilight nodded, then looked at Fluttershy.

"I can't leave my animals," she said. "But I *can* see to it that the ones in the Everfree leave you all alone."

Twilight smiled. "Thank you, girls," she said, tears beginning to form. "I really appreciate this. You're the best friends ever."

"You deserve happiness, Twi." Applejack gave her a hug. "And we'll do whatever it takes ta see ya that way."

The other four ponies joined the hug, squeezing Twilight tight. They stood in silence as they appreciated each others company.

And in the eerie stillness of the Everfree Forest, the only sounds that could be heard were the quiet sobs of a desperate unicorn.

6. OF SCIENCE AND FRIENDSHIP

Several weeks passed by in a heartbeat, as John and I diligently assisted Ace with the construction of his stabiliser; the shocking news that he was responsible for sending me to Equestria in the first place making me all the more determined to help him.

"That's good." Ace watched as John and I lowered a piece of metal into position. "Right, guys, hold it there for just a second..."

He flicked a switch and started welding the piece into place, the mask on his face shielding his eyes from the bright blue flames.

"How does this work anyway, Doc?" I asked carefully, bearing in mind the fact he was busy. "I mean, portals to other universes?"

Ace stopped welding, removed the mask, and looked at me. "It's quite simple, Geo," he replied, as if he was talking to an idiot. "The going theory of the cause of the Big Bang is that two universes collided with one another, and are now constantly reforming into one universe. The collision itself was the Big Bang, and the vast, ever expanding universe is really two universes collapsing into each other. Are you with me so far?"

"Uh, I think so." I glanced over at John, who shrugged. "But what does that have to do with all of this?"

"Well, I have a theory that black holes are the key to bridging two universes together," Ace explained. "They're gravitational anomalies which are so dense, they warp time and space around them; not even light can escape the singularity. I've based my theories on trans-universal travel on the results of the Large Hadron Collider over in Geneva." He sighed. "I wish I had toys like that..."

He took a deep breath before continuing. "So far, the results have been promising. My theory is that black holes are dense enough that they should be able to pull two universes together, and that the Big Bang was caused by a super-massive black hole."

"Are you seriously saying that I fell through a *black hole* to get to Equestria?" I asked, raising an eyebrow sceptically.

"A small one," Ace replied, using his fingers to indicate something the size of a postage stamp. "But, yeah, pretty much."

"Wait a second," John interjected. "Aren't black holes supposed to, like, rip you apart or something?"

"I've been doing some research into the relationship between gravitational and magnetic fields," Ace replied. "It's all very complicated, so I'll try to simplify it as best I can. I use magnets to flatten the black hole, and that pulls it apart enough that a solid object can pass through without being torn apart."

As he talked, he made squashing motions with his hands.

"How does that work, anyway?" John scratched his head. "Wouldn't someone getting sucked into a black hole just be squished into the hole? It's not supposed to be a portal, is it?"

"According to some theories, black holes are actually the entrance to interstellar wormholes, and quasars are the exit," Ace said, as if talking to a couple of bored schoolboys. "That is what my current theory relies on. Black holes are supposed to be one way tickets to another part of the universe – our universe – but I can make them go to another universe, which is entirely unlike ours."

"Why do you call it 'another universe,' anyway?" I asked. "Wouldn't it be best to call it another dimension?"

"Another dimension implies that we would be existing in a state other than length, width, depth, or time." Ace folded his arms.

"What about 'another world?'" John asked, somewhat smugly.

"That implies that the other world exists in our universe."

"Another plane of existence?" I suggested.

"That implies we're going to Hell."

"So... another universe?" John checked.

"A place where different laws of nature and physics apply, yes."

When John and I didn't reply, Ace looked pleased that we finally understood what he was saying. He put his face mask back on and continued welding, as John and I went to fetch more metal.

"Twiiiiiiiiillight!" Rarity called in her sing-song voice.

Twilight's head poked out from the flap of the tent, which was half the size of the Ponyville library and elaborately patterned.

"Good morning, Rarity," she said sleepily. "Is it morning already?"

"Indeed it is, darling," Rarity replied, holding up a bag with her magic. "I've brought you some supplies." Twilight took the bag and opened it, revealing a small pile of food and water.

"Thanks, Rarity." Twilight pulled Rarity in for a hug, which the other mare returned eagerly, before she broke off and looked around.

"Where are the others?" she asked.

"Rainbow Dash is away getting firewood, and Pinkie Pie is... well, being Pinkie Pie." Twilight replied with a chuckle.

"Have you had any trouble from the wildlife?" Rarity said, looking into the tree-line. "I shudder to think at what might be out there."

"Not a peep," Twilight said with a smile. "I don't know what Fluttershy said or done, but it's helped a lot."

Rarity returned the smile before hugging Twilight one more time. "I'm sorry to cut this visit short, darling, but I have to return to the Boutique as soon as possible," she said. "If I leave Sweetie Belle unattended for too long, things tend to explode."

"They'll explode even more now that Spike is with her," Twilight replied. "Thanks again for letting him stay with you, by the way."

Rarity giggled. "It's no problem at all, Twilight," she said. "Although I'd rather not think about things exploding." She began to walk away. "Anyway, must dash. Ta-ta, my dear friend, take care!"

Twilight waved to her friend and went back into the tent, the floor of which was covered in rolls of parchment adorned with tally marks. Twilight sighed and kicked out at them, scattering them every which way, before she flopped onto her bed.

"Three weeks we've been here," she muttered. "And nothing."

She sighed as she looked at the ceiling and allowed fond memories of moments past to invade her mind. The fond memories soon gave way to sorrow, and Twilight had to stop herself from crying. Composing herself, she sat up and levitated a quill and parchment over. After thinking for a moment, she began writing.

Dear Princesses Celestia and Luna

You've both probably heard by now that I have been camping out in the Everfree Forest for the last three weeks now. If so, you'll know - and hopefully understand - why I am doing this.

If you don't know, then it's all in the name of love. While trying to contact Geo using that spell Luna helped Spike to find (thank you!), my friends and I spoke to the spirit of Anthony.

He's much nicer in person than you led me to believe, Celestia, but I digress. Anthony told us that Geo's spirit wasn't in Equestria, because he was back in his own universe; a fact that was confirmed when the spirit of Discord made himself known.

At first, I was crestfallen, for I thought that all was lost. But then my friends made me realise that Geo wouldn't exactly be the sort of man to give up. They convinced me that he's trying his utmost to return to Equestria — and to me. There are parts of my mind which tell me he is gone forever, but I refuse to believe them.

And that leads me to where I am now: in the Everfree Forest. I'm camping out at the exact spot where we first met him. When he comes back, I know that he'll arrive here. Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie are both with me, so I'm not alone. Fluttershy has asked the local wildlife to give us peace, Rarity has made a lovely – and enormous – tent for us to sleep in, and Applejack is providing us with the refreshments we need.

I am so happy to have these five as my friends, for they are doing everything they can to see me happy once more. They are the greatest ponies I have ever had the privilege of meeting, and I hope someday to repay the favours they have bestowed upon me.

I'm running out of parchment, so I will finish this letter off by sharing with you what I've learned.

Never give up on the one you love — and I don't intend to. Even if it takes ten years or a hundred years, I will see Geo again.

Also, your friends can help you get through what seems like the darkest of times. They are always there with a comforting word, a shoulder to cry on or — like mine — support for your madcap ideas.

It's because of my friends that I managed to drag myself out of the pit of despair and onto the path to hopefulness. I couldn't be more thankful to have them by my side.

Do not worry about me, Princesses, for I'll be fine. But if you'd like to come and visit me, look out for the giant tent in the middle of the forest. As I said, Rarity went a bit overboard with it.

Your lovestruck (but still faithful) student and friend

Twilight Sparkle

Twilight wrapped the letter up and sent it off using her own magic, a feeling of happiness welling up inside her. Lying on her back again, she closed her eyes and let the fond memories invade her mind once more; the sorrow having been replaced with joy.

I frantically pressed buttons as John shouted at me, the two of us looking around frantically. We were being stalked, and we had to defend ourselves, but our adversary was a clever one indeed.

"He's there!" John yelled suddenly, pointing wildly in front of him.

"Where?!" I asked fearfully. "Where the hell is—"

BLAM

"FOR FUCK SAKE!" I shouted, throwing the controller down. To our left, Ace cackled madly with his arms raised in triumph.

"I win again!" he said gleefully. "You guys suck."

"Nuts to this," I said. "I'm more of a PS3 guy, anyway." I picked up the controller again. "Never did get the hang of this Xbox one."

Ace laughed. "OK, I get it," he said. "You're a sore loser, and you're making excuses. It's no big deal."

I glared at him and decided to change the subject. "Is the stabiliser complete yet?" I asked, still seething from the drubbing I'd got.

"Yes," Ace replied. "But—"

"It is?!" I interrupted, punching the air in celebration. "Well, what the hell are we sitting around gaming for? Let's get going!"

I made a break for the gateway, but Ace grabbed my shirt as I ran past, forcing me to an abrupt halt.

"It needs to charge first," he said flatly. "And even then, there's no guarantee that you'll actually end up in Equestria."

I sighed. "How long will it take to charge?"

"Three days," Ace replied.

I slapped my forehead and groaned. "OK, fine, three days," I said through gritted teeth. "Guess I can't do much about that."

Ace patted my shoulder gently.

"Hey, Ace," John said. "Geo's already set on staying in Equestria, but how are you and I gonna get back should the need arise?"

"See that big guy over there?" Ace pointed at a large, robotic vehicle which was sitting behind a table with various bits of machinery and hardware attached to it. "That's called a Tread-bot. I made it to be a beastly powerhouse that can haul anything. It has a five hundred horsepower engine that runs off algae, it can reach speeds in excess of thirty miles an hour, and it's even powerful enough to tear down a small building." He smiled. "I call him Tiny." He continued, as he turned to the robot. "Tiny! Here, boy!"

The large metal machine activated with a deep series of beeps, then began moving out from behind the table. It rolled on two treads out to the floor, and looked like a tank that was the size of a Volkswagen Beetle, with a battering ram on the top. It rolled close to us, causing John and I to fall backwards. It came to a stop just before running in to Ace, whose smile increased in size as he began rubbing the machine, as if he was petting it.

"Aww, that's a good boy, Tiny!" he said, displaying more affection towards a machine than was humanly sane. "You came as soon as daddy called, didn't you? Didn't you? Aww, Good boy!"

John and I looked at each other, dumbstruck.

"So... is Tiny coming with us?" I asked hesitantly.

"Of course he is!" Ace continued to pet the robot. "You're gonna be carrying the equipment and materials for me to build a new lab in the other universe, aren't ya, boy? Aww, dat's a good boy!"

The robot made a series of noises which indicated that it was responding to the affection in a positive way.

"Well, you two are more than welcome to come back," I said, as I dragged myself off the floor again. "Because, as John as already stated, I'm gonna stay put and get with my mare again."

"But you'll come back if it's the wrong universe?" Ace asked.

"Yes, of course." I replied, wondering why he asked me such a thing. "I don't give a fuck how many universes I have to travel through; all that matters to me is getting back to Equestria."

I slammed my fist down on the nearby table.

"These next three days had better fucking *fly by*."

7. THE WAITING GAME - PART ONE

"And THAT is how you play a first person shooter!" I shouted gleefully, as John and I jumped to our feet to perform a victory dance — although it ended up being more of a victory shuffle.

Ace chuckled. "Only because we're using a PS3, and I'm more of an Xbox man," he said. "But no matter, you finally beat me at something." He thought for a moment. "Mind you, that's *one* victory to *seventy-three* defeats, so you've got a long way to go."

I smiled and turned my head towards the stabiliser. The only noise I could hear was a gentle hum as the giant batteries charged. But as I looked at the display, my smile vanished. "Fucking hell," I said sharply. "It's only twenty percent charged!"

Ace sighed. "Well, it *is* a big machine," he said flatly. "So, naturally, it would need a lot of power. That, and I'm charging it using solar energy. Have you *seen* how much sun we've had recently?"

Now it was my turn to sigh. "What about the wind turbines?" I asked. "Because we're getting a shit ton of wind."

As if on cue, the wind blew into the room, ruffling papers and hair.

"Those turbines power the rest of my lab," Ace said, with a trace of hesitation. "As I said, the stabiliser uses a lot of energy, so I needed something else to provide power for it."

"And you chose solar panels?" John asked.

"Yes," Ace replied.

"In the UK?"

"Yes."

John looked at him with a raised eyebrow, the corners of his mouth slowly turning into a shit-eating grin.

"Oh, right," Ace said, realising what John was getting at. "I realise now that solar panels weren't exactly the best choice." John laughed, and Ace pointed at him. "But *you* try getting planning permission for a nuclear reactor, buddy! It's not easy!"

This only seemed to make John laugh harder.

"Well," I said glumly. "I can only hope that the weather cuts us some slack and gives us some sunlight." I chuckled. "How ironic is it that I hate sunlight, yet here I am wishing for it more than anything else in the world?" I thought for a moment. "After my beloved Twilight Sparkle, of course."

There was a pause before all three of us broke into hearty laughter. After a while, we managed to regain our composure, at which point I picked up the PS3 controllers.

"OK, boys," I said with a grin. "Who's ready to get schooled?"

Twilight, and Rainbow Dash were lying outside the tent gazing intently at Pinkie Pie, who had a look of pure concentration on her face. She looked around before pointing at something.

"Ooh, fire!" she exclaimed with a gasp.

Twilight nodded and smiled. "You win, Pinkie," she said.

Pinkie cheered. "I *told* you I was good at Eye Spy!" she said, a faint trace of smugness present in her voice.

"And we never doubted you for a moment," Twilight replied. "Isn't that right, Rainbow Dash?"

Dash nodded. "Not at all," she said. "Now, let's do something else!"

"What do you have in mind?" Twilight asked.

Before Rainbow Dash could answer, a brilliant flash of light lit up the area, causing the three mares to shield their eyes.

"Oh!" a voice said. "Sorry, girls, we thought you'd be inside."

Twilight, Pinkie and Dash uncovered their eyes to see that Celestia and Luna were standing in the middle of the clearing. "Celestia, Luna!" she gasped, as Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash stood up and bowed. "What are you doing here?"

"Your letter said to come for a visit, Twilight Sparkle," Celestia replied with a smile. "So, here we are."

"Indeed," Luna said. "Greetings, friends."

"Hi, Princesses!" Pinkie said. "We were just playing 'Eye Spy!' Wanna join us? I gotta warn you, though, I'm *really* good!"

"Perhaps later, Pinkie Pie," Luna replied. "In fact, we are here to speak with Twilight... in private, if at all possible."

"Sure thing, Princess." Dash grabbed Pinkie's tail. "Come on, Pinks, I think we should, er, get something to eat."

"Okie-dokie-lokie!" Pinkie waved. "Bye, Twilight! Bye, Princesses!"

Celestia giggled. "Goodbye, Pinkie," she said. "Please, Twilight, could we possibly have this conversation in the tent?"

Twilight opened the flap and all three of them trotted inside and sat down. The Princesses looked around at the surprisingly spacious interior, their eyes wide with wonder.

"So, what do you want to talk to me about?" Twilight asked.

"Well, for starters..." Luna began. "How are you doing?"

"I'm doing well," Twilight replied. "My friends are supporting me, and I live each day knowing that Geo will be coming back to me soon. And when he does, Pinkie has said she is going to throw him a 'super-duper, ultra-huge mega-party.'"

Both princesses smiled.

"I'm sure he'll appreciate that," Celestia said.

A period of silence ensued, during which Luna's attention was drawn to the pile of tally-marked paper on the floor.

"Has it really been three weeks since you came here?" she asked.

Twilight nodded. "And I'll wait even longer if I have to," she said, the determination in her voice all too obvious.

"That is why we're here, Twilight." Celestia sighed. "Luna and I both believe that it would be in your best interests if you went home."

Twilight gasped. "No, I... I can't!" she said, unable to comprehend what she had just heard. "I need to be here for him!"

Celestia laid a comforting hoof on Twilight's shoulder. "I know you do, my dear student," she said softly. "But how can you be certain that he will re-enter Equestria at this spot?"

"I *know* he'll reappear here," Twilight sniffled. "I can feel it!"

"Your feelings can often betray you, Twilight," Luna said. "And believe me, I know what that's like."

The two princesses exchanged an awkward glance.

"Why are you saying all of this?" Twilight asked, her anger rising.

"We just want to make sure you understand everything," Celestia replied. "What if something happened to him in his own world?"

Twilight's mouth hung open, but no sound came out.

"We're sorry to have to be so blunt, Twilight," Luna said softly. "But you have to be ready for any eventuality."

Celestia nodded. "My sister is right, Twilight," she said quietly. "And, as much as it pains me to say this... what will you do if Geo doesn't come back to Equestria at all?"

Twilight's eyes filled with tears. "I... I never thought of it like that." she said. "I just assumed that because he loved me, he'd come back to me. I never realised that something could have happened to him. Maybe he doesn't even remember me."

Suddenly, Pinkie and Dash entered the tent, the former pulling Twilight in for a hug. "Don't say that, Twilight!" she said. "Geo *does* remember you, and he *is* coming back! You'll see!"

"That's the thing, Pinkie Pie," Celestia said. "She's been waiting long enough. And what if she's right? What if he doesn't remember his time here? What if he thought it was all a dream?"

Twilight burst out crying and fell to the floor in the foetal position.

"We're so sorry for hurting your feelings like this, my dear friend," Luna said. "But we felt you needed to face up to the worst."

"I understand, Princesses." Twilight stood up and wiped the tears from her eyes. "I will return to my duties in Ponyville." She sighed. "I won't forget Geo, but I have to accept that he's probably forgotten all about me." She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Pinkie Pie? Rainbow Dash?"

Both mares looked at her.

"Let's go home."

8. THE WAITING GAME - PART TWO

As I looked up at the grey dawn sky, I thought about what the weather was like in Ponyville; no doubt Rainbow Dash had cleared all the clouds, leaving behind a brilliant blue sky.

I was standing outside the laboratory, enjoying what fresh air I could. Although it wasn't as fresh as the Equestrian air, I still took the time to savour it. It was certainly a hell of a lot better than being stuck in the stuffy lab all day.

It was day two of our three day wait, and I was bored. To John and I's dismay, Ace had mastered the PS3 within hours, and kicked our asses at everything we played, leading to me smashing the console in a fit of rage. He was right: I *am* a sore loser.

Having grown sick of the Xbox, there wasn't much else for me to do but watch the sky, and think about various things.

I did the latter a lot.

I thought about what I was going to do when I got back to Equestria, I thought about how John would cope with the sudden change of scenery, and I thought about what Ace would get up to. But it goes without saying that most of my thoughts were about how I was going to spend the rest of my life with Twilight.

I cursed myself for somehow losing the golden band I was going to give her when I proposed. It meant a lot to me, as it was the very embodiment of how I felt.

That, and it cost me a fortune.

The door to the laboratory opened with a creak as John stepped out into the cool morning air, followed closely by Ace.

Ace took a deep breath and smiled. "It's been a while since I've been out here," he said. "I get so caught up in my work, I don't usually find the time to take a break."

John laughed. "It's just good to be out of the lab," he replied. "Doc, you really gotta fix the air conditioning down there."

Ace opened his mouth to fire off a retort, but I spoke first. "So, what's the charge level at now?" I asked.

"Fifty-eight percent." Ace turned to face me. "It turned out the air conditioning was leeching a *lot* of power, so I turned it off. As a result, I was able to speed up the charging of the stabiliser... albeit at the cost of our personal comfort."

John narrowed his eyes, but said nothing.

"So we can hopefully go to Equestria tomorrow?" I said hopefully.

Ace nodded. "Provided the charge keeps up at its current rate, then I see no reason why not," he said, before snapping his fingers. "That reminds me, I need to go make sure Tiny has everything he needs. I don't want the widdle guy to go unprepared."

John and I looked at each other and shrugged as Ace ran back into the lab, the door slamming shut behind him. John took a seat next to me and coughed, joining me in gazing at the sky.

"So," he eventually said. "Are you excited about going back?"

"What do you think?" I grinned. "Fancy asking me that."

John chuckled. "All right, I get it, it was a stupid question." he paused for a moment. "So... um, what's Equestria like?"

"Equestria..." I sighed contentedly. "Equestria is, without a doubt, the most amazing place I have ever been to in my life."

"You haven't really told me much about it, to be fair," John said. "All you've told me is the story of how you got there. After all, I kind of want to know about the place I'll be moving to."

I smiled sheepishly. "Yeah, I did leave out some details, didn't I?" I ran a hand through my hair. "What do you want to know?"

"Well, I guess I should know more about Twilight and her friends, for a start." John said with a smile.

I nodded. "Get comfortable, then," I said. "There's a lot to tell." John put one leg over the other and leaned backwards expectantly, making a pyramid with his fingers. I rolled my eyes and cleared my throat. "Twilight Sparkle is the librarian in Ponyville, the town where she lives. She's a unicorn, meaning she can do magic; she's damn good at it, too. She studied magic under Princess Celestia, one of the two rulers of Equestria, but she cared more for studying than spending time with her fellow students."

John nodded, and I continued.

"One day, Twilight became convinced that an ancient enemy of Equestria was due to make a return. But when she told Celestia about it, the Princess instead sent her to Ponyville."

A puzzled look appeared on John's face. "Really?" he asked. "You'd have thought that the Princess would do something about the fact an old enemy was going to be coming back."

"I'm getting to that," I replied. "Anyway, Twilight's job in Ponyville was to oversee the final preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration. While doing so, she met five other mares: Rarity, Rainbow Dash, Applejack, Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie."

"However, when the Celebration came around, Celestia was nowhere to be found. It was at this time when Nightmare Moon, the enemy I mentioned, made her appearance. She declared eternal night across Equestria and retreated to her old castle, while Twilight ran to the library in town to find a way to defeat her. It soon became apparent that the key to defeating Nightmare was by finding the Elements of Harmony."

"Elements of Harmony?" John laughed. "How cute."

"The Elements of Harmony are the most powerful weapon in Equestria," I replied. "They are capable of defeating foes with the power of friendship. The six elements are Kindness, Generosity, Loyalty, Laughter, Honesty and Magic. Twilight, as you can probably guess, represents the element of Magic."

"What about the other five elements?" John asked.

"Well, to cut a long story short, Twilight and the other five tracked Nightmare Moon to the castle. Along the way, they encountered many challenges which were a reflection of each element. For example, Fluttershy calming a manecore by removing a thorn from its paw proved that she was the embodiment of Kindness."

"Applejack is Honesty, Rarity is Generosity, Rainbow Dash is Loyalty and Pinkie Pie is Laughter. Together, they tracked Nightmare Moon down and defeated her. It turned out that Nightmare Moon was actually Princess Luna: Celestia's sister, and the other ruler of Equestria. She became the Nightmare after becoming jealous of ponies enjoying the day and sleeping through the night. Celestia raises and lowers the sun, and she raises and lowers the moon."

"Twilight realised that these five mares were indeed her friends, which is something that Celestia wanted her to discover," I said. "It turned out that Celestia knew about Nightmare's return, and knew that Twilight would be key to defeating her. But first..."

"She had to make some friends," John offered. "Right?"

I nodded. "Exactly. This all happened a couple of years ago, and they've been best friends ever since."

"I see," John replied, his hand on his chin. "Can you tell me about the other five now? Starting with... uh, Applejack."

"Applejack, like Pinkie Pie, is an ordinary 'Earth' pony. Earth ponies can't do magic or fly like pegasi can, but they make up for this with increased strength. Applejack runs her own farm, Sweet Apple Acres, which grows apples for consumption... and cider."

John's eyes lit up at the mention of 'cider,' and he licked his lips.

"Applejack's family consists of her grandmother Granny Smith, her brother Big Macintosh and her little sister Apple Bloom. Their parents – Temple Orange and Ariane Apple – passed away some years ago, and it's a subject which still pains her to talk about."

"I'll need to make sure I'm introduced to her first," John replied. "I could do with getting my hands on some cider. Continue, please."

"Rarity is a unicorn like Twilight. She's a fashion designer and runs her own shop, the Carousel Boutique. She is a very generous pony, and will often put her friends needs before those of her customers. She has a little sister named Sweetie Belle, who gets into all sorts of mischief with Apple Bloom and a pegasus filly named Scootaloo."

"Rainbow Dash is a pegasus. Pegasi are born to fly, and Dash is no exception. She is capable of flying at speeds so intense, she can produce a sonic rainboom; think of it as a sonic boom, but more colourful. She is fiercely loyal to her friends, and will do anything to help them... even if it means getting her hooves dirty."

John's eyes widened when I mentioned the Sonic Rainboom. "Holy crap," he muttered. "Now *that* is something I *have* to see."

"I'm sure she'll show you eventually," I replied. "Anyway, moving on, Fluttershy is also a pegasus. True to her name, she is rather timid, but she's the sweetest pony you could ever hope to meet. Unlike other pegasi, though, she doesn't care much for flying."

"She is extremely kind, especially to animals. She takes care of a lot of sick and injured creatures and cannot tolerate anyone hurting them. If the situation calls for it, she can shed her timid nature and become a force to be reckoned with. Hell, Twilight told me she stood up to a dragon once. A fucking *dragon!*"

John nodded slightly, a look of respect on his face.

"Finally, there's Pinkie Pie. She's the most... random... of Twilight's friends, but she's great nonetheless. She's a great laugh, and her parties are to die for. In fact, it was after one of her parties that Twilight and I first kissed." I smiled at the memory. "Pinkie is a bit erratic, but she's still a good friend; always there with a smile and a sympathetic ear. She doesn't let anything get her down, and if it does... well, she's very good at hiding it."

"They sound like a terrific bunch," he said. "I hope they'll eventually grow to accept Ace and I as friends."

"They will." I stood up and patted him on the shoulder. "After all, you're my friend. And if I trust you, so will they."

John stood up and smiled at me. "That's all I needed to hear." he stretched his arms, groaning as his joints popped. "Come on, let's go and see how Ace is getting on with the repairs to his PS3."

"Oh, fuck off," I grumbled, and walked into the laboratory.

Twilight kicked open the library door and threw herself onto the couch, starting at the ceiling and sighing wistfully.

"Maybe the Princesses are right," she muttered. "Maybe he *isn't* coming back, and that I *should* stop hoping." She thought for a moment, then slapped herself. "No, you stupid mare, don't say that! He *is* coming back... it'll just take a while. In the meantime, though, I guess I just *pretend* that I'm going to move on."

A smirk spread across her face as she contemplated her plan, but her face soon fell as other thoughts came to mind.

"Hmm, but what if the others try to set me up with somepony in the future?" she tapped her forehooves together. "No, I don't think so; they probably won't try that for a few months, as it would be rather insensitive of them to do it so soon."

A small sigh of relief escaped her lips.

"Right, so that's what I'll do." she giggled. "I'll put on the 'broken and forlorn mare' act in front of my friends, but behind closed doors... I'll be more hopeful than I've ever been."

In the darkness of the library, her giggles soon turned into laughter.

As John and I helped Ace load Tiny with various pieces of equipment, my attention was drawn to the robotic camera in the corner of the room. It was this camera that helped the doctor to explore Equestria while he was working on his stabiliser, and had taken all of the photos I was looking at earlier.

I thought back to the picture of Twilight, and sighed. She had been walking through Ponyville's market, oblivious to the strange device overhead; the fact the camera was disguised as a bird probably having something to do with that.

"So, Ace." I asked. "I've been wondering about those cameras of yours. What do you call them?"

"Oh, those little guys?" Ace strapped a box of construction materials to Tiny. "I call them BIRDS."

"Hmm, that makes sense," I replied. "Since they look like birds."

"I didn't call them 'birds,'" Ace replied, giving me a deadpan stare.

"But you just said they *were* birds." John shot back, a confused look etched on his face.

"No, I didn't call them birds," Ace said huffily.

"Well, if they're not birds, what the hell are they?" I asked gruffly.

"They're BIRDS," Ace said proudly, and maybe a little smugly. "It's an acronym; stands for 'Bionic Investigative Robot Devices.'"

"So..." John said sheepishly. "They *are* birds?"

"No, they're BIRDS," Ace replied, narrowing his eyes.

"That's what we said!" I snapped.

"No, you called them 'birds,'" Ace replied, sighing heavily. "When in fact they're *supposed* to be called 'BIRDS.'"

"I don't see the difference!" John yelled.

"Of course not!" Ace replied. "Your eyes are photo-receptors with natural lenses, designed to bend light into an image your brain can comprehend. You don't hear with your eyes, that'd just be silly."

We stood in silence for a while as we stared each other down, but eventually John and I gave up. We knew better than to get into an argument with a guy who probably knew several ways to kill us and not leave any evidence. And who had a giant robot tank as a pet.

"What's the charge level at?" I asked, trying to break the tension.

Ace glanced at the control panel. "Eighty-six percent," he said with a smile, before turning his head to look at John. "I *knew* that turning off the air conditioning would help!"

John stuck his tongue out at him while using a hand to fan his face in a sarcastic manner. Ace ignored him and looked back at me.

"So... tomorrow then?" I said. "We can try tomorrow?"

Ace nodded. "Hopefully," he said. "Although without any way of knowing exactly which universe we're going to, your chances are getting back to Equestria on the first attempt are miniscule."

"What about your notes?" I asked. "Since it was one of your portals which sent me to Equestria in the first place, surely you would have something lying around here somewhere?"

Ace shook his head. "My notes only recalled where the renegade portals opened," he replied. "In order to open a portal to Equestria, I would need something from that universe."

"Wait..." I thought for a moment, then reached around my neck and pulled out my pendant. "What about this, Ace? Twilight gave it to me before I ended up back here."

"Let me see that." Ace walked over with his hand held out, and I took the pendant off so he could hold it. "Incredible... this could be exactly what we are looking for! I'll need to run some tests on it to ascertain the energy readings, of course, but it should work."

"If it helps us, then go for it," I replied. "Just... be careful with it, please. That thing means more to me than you might think."

Ace nodded. "You have my word," he said, then walked over to one of his many machines. "All right, let's see what we've got here..."

He began muttering to himself about various scientific things, all of which flew right over my head, so I sat down next to John.

"Well then," I said. "I hope that Lady Luck is in a good mood tomorrow, because if I have to wait three more days I'm probably going to kill myself and see if that works."

John looked at me blankly and sighed. "It'll work, Geo," he said reassuringly. "It has to work."

"Why?" I asked, looking at him with a blank stare of my own.

"Because you want it to work. You want it to work more than anything else in the entire. Fucking. World." he prodded me in the chest with each of the last three words.

"Yeah, mate, you're right," I replied. "Why the fuck am I being so pessimistic about this? It's going to work."

"Atta boy." John nodded. "Now, you keep telling yourself that."

"It'll work," I said, looking up at the ceiling and raising both arms above my head. "It'll work, because I say that it'll work!" I shouted. "*Nothing* will stop me from getting back to Equestria."

I slammed my fists down against my sides.

"NOTHING."

"There's that optimism!" John said cheerfully.

I looked at the control panel, which was saying ninety percent, and a smile spread across my face.

"I guess you could say that tomorrow is the day of reckoning," I said. "And I *reckon* that by the end of it..."

I looked towards John and then to Ace, who was watching one of his computers analysing my pendant.

"... I'll be snogging Twilight's face off."

9. THE WAITING GAME - PART THREE

Celestia's sun slowly crept into the library as Twilight lay on the couch, groaning as she rolled onto her side. A knock on the door roused her from her gloomy reverie, and she slowly got to her hooves. Opening the door slightly, she peeked through the crack to see five smiling faces peering back at her.

"Good morning, Twilight," Rarity said. "Did you sleep well?"

Twilight made a neutral sound in her throat.

"We just came by to make sure ya were settlin' in OK," Applejack said. "Y' know, after spendin' three weeks in the forest."

"I'm fine, thank you," Twilight replied. "I appreciate you coming over, girls, but I'm really not in the mood right now."

The smiles on her friend's faces vanished, replaced with looks of concern and raised eyebrows.

"Why not, Twilight?" asked Rainbow Dash. "Are you still upset about what Princesses Celestia and Luna told you?"

"Whatever could they say that would get her worked up like this?" Rarity asked, looking at Dash quizzically.

"Just that she needs to pull herself together and face the possibility that Geo might never come back," Dash said matter-of-factly.

Rarity, Fluttershy and Applejack gasped.

"They didn't!" Rarity said, the shock in her voice obvious.

"Well, they *did*," Twilight snapped. "And as much as I hate to admit it... they're right." Her voice dropped to a whisper as she spoke.

"Come on, Twilight!" Pinkie said. "We've been through this already, remember? He *is* going to come back to you!"

Twilight sighed. "I know, Pinkie," she replied. "I suppose you'd better come in, girls. I don't want to discuss this on my doorstep."

She opened the door and all five mares trooped inside, the door closing behind them with a small click.

"So... um, what are you going to do now, Twilight?" Fluttershy asked timidly. "If you don't mind telling us, that is."

The Princesses told me that I need to accept the fact he might have forgotten about me," Twilight said. "So that's what I'll do."

The other five looked at her with stunned expressions on their faces. They shifted uncomfortably, unsure of what to say. Eventually, Pinkie Pie spoke up.

"Looks like Twilight's getting back into the dating scene!" she said excitedly. "Ooh! I'll throw you a 'Blind Date' party, and I'll in—!"

Twilight stuffed a hoof into the party pony's mouth. "I'm not ready for that," she said. "It'll be a while before I'm ready to date again."

Pinkie's face fell.

"But just because he's probably *forgotten us*, that doesn't mean we can't *remember him*," Twilight continued, offering a smile.

Pinkie's face split into a wide grin.

"So I can hold a 'Remembering Geo' party after all!" she squealed happily. "Just like I was going to do when he was kill— no, wait!"

Twilight patted her friend on the back. "It's okay, Pinkie," she said softly. "He's not dead; he's back home, where he belongs."

"But his home is *here*, darling," Rarity offered. "With you."

"I know that," Twilight replied. "But I need to face up to the fact that that might not be the case any more. Pinkie, do what you need to do for this party you're planning."

Pinkie nodded. "On it!" She saluted, then suddenly disappeared in a puff of confetti, balloons and streamers.

Twilight blinked for a moment before turning her attention to the four ponies who remained. "We can still remember the good times we had with him, so we should focus on those."

The others nodded.

"What about that gift he was gonna give ya, Twilight?" Applejack asked, pointing at a small box on the desk nearby.

Twilight looked at the box, then to her friend. "It wasn't just a *gift*, Applejack," she replied. "It was meant to be a symbol of our... engagement. But since you asked, I'll keep it; he went to all that effort to have it made, so it would be rude of me to simply throw it away. I'll keep it as a reminder of our time together."

Applejack smiled. "Well, if we're gonna be havin' a party, I guess I've got some pies and cider to make. I'll see y'all later."

Twilight waved as Applejack left the library.

"I have to admit, darling, that I'm not really keen on this whole idea of you giving up hope of Geo's return," Rarity said, putting a hoof around Twilight's neck in a tight hug. "But, as your friends, I will still support you in any way that I can." Twilight smiled and returned the hug. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to make sure that Sweetie Belle hasn't destroyed my shop... again." Rarity walked towards the door. "Ta-ta for now, everypony!"

"Bye, Rarity." chorused the three who remained.

"I've gotta bust some clouds," Rainbow Dash said as she stretched her wings. "I'll see you later, Twilight. You take care, ya hear?"

Twilight dipped her head slightly and Rainbow took off, leaving her and Fluttershy standing in the library.

Fluttershy nuzzled Twilight gently, a small smile on her face. "I have to get back to the animals," she said quietly. "But if you ever want to talk, you know where I am."

Twilight returned the nuzzle. "Thanks, Fluttershy," she said. "It's good to know I have friends as great as you girls."

Fluttershy blushed and left, closing the door behind her.

As the sound of hoofsteps receded, Twilight sighed heavily. "Oh, girls," she said. "If you only knew how I *really* felt..."

"*They* don't," another voice said. "But *I* do."

"Spike?!" Twilight looked to the stairs, where the dragon stood. "I thought you were still at Rarity's?"

"I was," Spike replied. "But once I heard that you had been convinced to return home, I came back as well."

Twilight sighed. "I'm sorry I didn't let you stay with me in the forest, Spike, but you have to understand—"

"Don't worry, Twilight," Spike interrupted. "I know you didn't want me to be there just in case something went wrong with any of the creatures that live in the forest, and they attacked us." He paused. "I heard what you said, and... well... I'm with you."

Twilight perked up. "You believe he's coming back as well?"

Spike nodded. "Of course I do," he said. "Geo is one of the only guy friends I have around here, so I'm not about to give up on him."

Twilight's horn glowed, and Spike found himself being levitated into a hug. "Thank you, Spike," Twilight whispered. "For believing."

Spike didn't reply, and so the two of them sat in silence.

I was lying on a makeshift bed in the laboratory with a gaming magazine across my face, caught in the embrace of sleep, when a loud beeping noise suddenly jolted me awake.

I shook my head and looked around, trying to find the source of the noise, my eyes soon falling on the stabiliser control panel. I yawned and heaved myself off the bed before I walked over to it.

I looked at the display in front of me — and then I rubbed my eyes again for good measure, unable to believe the words I could see.

-- CHARGE COMPLETED --

"GUYS, GET IN HERE NOW!" I yelled. "IT'S FINISHED!"

The laboratory doors flew open and Ace rushed in, followed by John. The latter put both hands on the panel as he read it, then slowly turned to face John and I.

"Well, Geo." he smiled. "It looks as though your day of reckoning has arrived at last. I hope you're ready."

I looked at Ace, then at John, and then at the control panel.

Then I looked at the ceiling.

And then I screamed with joy.

10. WHERE I BELONG - PART ONE

I tapped my foot impatiently as Ace stood at the control panel, pressing buttons while occasionally looking at his notes. John stood next to me, twiddling his thumbs and whistling tunelessly.

"You were right about that necklace of yours, Geo," Ace said. "It does indeed contain traces of energy not native to this planet. So, by doing some scientific things that I won't bore you with, I was able to correlate these readings with the few notes I had on that renegade portal which opened the night you were shot."

"I thought you said you didn't have any notes?" I asked.

Ace raised an eyebrow. "I'm sorry, but you seem to be mistaking me for someone who actually files his paperwork," he replied. "It took a while, but I did find some notes I made."

I rolled my eyes and tutted while Ace turned his attention back to the machine. He pressed a few more buttons and flipped some switches before stepping back and laughing triumphantly.

"It's done!" he said. "The co-ordinates are in, and we're ready to go. But before we do, let me just say that it's been an absolute pleasure working with the two of you." He held out a hand and we both shook it. "Okay." He took a deep breath. "Here goes nothing."

He hesitantly reached out and pulled a lever on the side of the control panel. Almost immediately, the room was plunged into darkness as a deep rumbling shook the ground beneath our feet.

I looked around, panicking. "No, no!" I yelled. "Don't do this now!"

"It has to," Ace replied calmly. "It won't start up otherwise."

"But the powers gone out!" I snapped.

"Relax, would you?" Ace was still calm. "The machine is drawing power from the batteries, so it's knocked everything else offline."

I grunted. "All right," I said. "Sorry, it's just that I'm a bit paranoid about everything going wrong after we all worked so hard."

The rumbling stopped and was replaced by a humming noise. It started off quiet, like a bee, but soon escalated to the point where it seemed as though there was a Formula One car in the room.

The lights came back on and Ace pointed at the stabiliser.

"This is it!" he yelled excitedly. "Come on, baby!"

The humming soon gave way to a loud bang as the portal opened.

And then, there was silence.

Applejack, Rarity, Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie were sitting in Sugarcube Corner, each of them enjoying one of the many treats on offer. They ate in contented silence, which was ultimately broken by Applejack coughing.

"Is it mah imagination, or is Twilight actin' weird?" she asked.

"Now that you mention it, there *is* something a bit off about her," Rarity replied. "But I can't put my hoof on what."

Rainbow Dash scratched her chin. "Yeah, she's acting really calm over this whole Geo thing," she said. "To be honest, girls, I was kinda expecting her to have made a model of him by now."

"You all have to remember that Twilight has ever been in this situation before," Fluttershy said. "After all, Geo was the first special somepony she's had."

The others nodded.

"I know, but the way she's been actin' lately just ain't healthy," Applejack said, the concern in her voice obvious. "As her friends, we need to do somethin' to help her get outta this rut she's in."

"Silly AJ!" said Pinkie Pie. "We're throwing her a party to help her *remember* Geo. Why would we want her to forget him?"

"I didn't mean it that way, Pinkie Pie, and fine you know it!" Applejack snapped. "Of course she can remember him; she needs to get over the fact he ain't comin' back. Bottlin' up them feelings o' hers ain't gonna do her any good."

"But, AJ, she told us earlier that she's all right," Rainbow Dash replied. "Why can't we just leave it at that?"

"I'm the Element of Honesty, Dash." Applejack sighed. "I know when somepony is lyin' — and that mare is lyin' through her teeth."

"So let's just tell her that, and get her to open up," Dash suggested. "Only then can we actually do something to help her."

"But it's just not that easy," Fluttershy interjected. "Everypony needs time to unbottle their own feelings; you can't force somepony to talk if they don't want to."

Rainbow Dash sighed and laid her head on the table. "Well, I'm out of ideas then," she grumbled.

"Come on, y'all," Applejack said. "The five of us know Twilight better'n anypony. If anypony can help her, it's us."

The others nodded and put their hooves on their chins.

Soon, they were all deep in thought.

"It's... it's beautiful!" Ace yelled. "And it's stable! AND it's here, in front of me, not in some random place across town!"

I smiled. "Well, what are we waiting for?" I asked. "Let's check it out." I gestured at the portal. "You first, Doc."

Ace wiped a small tear from his cheek and whistled. "Tiny!" he called. "Here, boy!" The robot trundled over and beeped affectionately. "Go through the portal and see if it's safe." He said, patting the robot on the head. "That's a good boy." Tiny beeped affirmatively and slowly trundled through the portal. A few moments passed by before he reappeared. "Well?"

Tiny's chest cavity opened up to reveal a monitor, which was showing pictures he'd taken during his time in the other universe.

"Geo." Ace pulled me over to him. "Take a look at the pictures and tell me if anything you see looks familiar to you."

I looked at the pictures... and I saw trees.

Lots of trees.

I kept shaking my head at each tree picture until, eventually, I saw the outline of a building shaped like a cupcake.

I gasped. "It's Ponyville," I muttered. "That's the town I was in!"

Ace laughed. "Looks like Lady Luck was on our side after all, albeit with a little help from good old fashioned science," he said. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a new world to discover!"

He walked up to the portal and jumped inside while I approached it with John, who looked nervous.

"Don't worry, mate," I said to him reassuringly. "Stick with me, and you'll be fine. Twilight in particular will be happy to meet you."

John smiled, and we stepped through the portal together.

Twilight walked into Sugarcube Corner, her stomach grumbling loudly, and walked up to the counter. "Hi there, Mrs Cake," she said, trying to sound happy. "A stack of pancakes, please."

"Of course, dearie," Mrs Cake replied. "Your friends are over there, in the corner. Go see them, and I'll bring your order over."

Twilight turned around to see her friends. They hadn't noticed her presence, and appeared to be thinking.

"Thank you, Mrs Cake." Twilight approached the table. She stood and watched her friends for a moment before coughing, which caused them to sit upright with a startled gasp and Twilight to giggle. "Sorry, girls, didn't mean to startle you."

"No worries, Twi," Applejack replied. "What brings ya here?" Twilight's stomach grumbled, and Applejack chuckled. "I guess that answers mah question." She moved over and created a space in the booth. "Come on, sugarcube. Sit with us."

Twilight sat down with her friends, just as Mrs Cake placed a plate of pancakes on the table. "Dig in, Twilight," she said in a motherly tone. "You look like you need these."

Twilight smiled and began eating. As she did so, she noticed her friends looking at her concernedly. "What is it?" she asked. "Is there syrup on my face again?" The other five shook their heads, at which Twilight sighed. "I've already told you that I'm fine." She said wearily. "You don't need to keep checking up on me."

Rarity opened her mouth to speak, but was interrupted by a flash of blue and white light. In an instant, Celestia and Luna both stood in the middle of the room. The customers in the room gasped and bowed at the sudden appearance of their Princesses.

"We're glad we caught you, girls, and we're glad you're all together," Celestia said gravely. "We have a problem."

"What is it, Princesses?" asked Twilight. She spoke calmly, but her mind was full of the many things she wanted to say to them.

What gave you the right to tell me those things? I thought you were supposed to be my friends, not two ponies who would so willingly crush my dreams as if they were nothing?

"We detected a strange surge of energy coming from near Ponyville," Luna said quietly, aware they were in public. "We don't know what it was, but we've never felt anything like it before."

"What are you trying to say, Princess Luna?" Rarity asked.

Celestia paused for a moment before sighing. "The last time we felt energy like this..." She took a deep breath. "Discord was released."

11. WHERE I BELONG - PART TWO

I was standing in the very clearing where I first met Twilight and the others, something I gathered from the fact my blood was still staining the grass. A single tear rolled down my cheek as I took in my surroundings with a ridiculously wide grin on my face.

John took a walk around, and came across something in the grass. He looked at it and his eyes widened. "Hey, Geo, check this out!"

I went over to him and he pointed at the ground, where the remains of a fire smouldered in a small pit.

"Hmm," I said, surveying the area around the fire pit. "Looks to me like somepony was camping here." I could see grass which was slightly singed, leftover wood... and streamers. Upon seeing them, I smiled. "She was waiting for me." I said.

"Who, Twilight?" John asked, looking up from the fire pit. I nodded, and he chuckled. "Well then, if she's not here, then she'll probably be in town." He turned to face Ace, who was standing in the middle of the clearing, taking in the beauty of his new surroundings.

I went over to him and tapped him on the shoulder. "Ace?" I said.

"This is such a wonderful place," he replied. "I'm so pleased I'm getting the chance to study it properly, rather than use my BIRDS."

"You mean 'birds,'" I said mockingly.

Ace groaned. "Let's not start that again." He turned to face me. "Now, I assume that you are eager to get into town?"

I nodded so fast, I thought my head was going to fall off.

"Does caesium explode when you add it to water?" I asked.

Ace chuckled. "Oh, good, you *have* been learning." He patted Tiny. "Very well, then. Climb aboard, and Tiny shall take us where we need to go — namely, to your lover's embrace."

I climbed onto Tiny's treads and sat down. John followed suit, taking a position across from me. Ace went into his pockets and pulled out a cassette tape. He tossed it from hand to hand as he spoke to us. "Are you up for a little music as we ride?" he asked.

"Not at all." I grinned. "Hell, anything to avoid talking to you two."

Ace smiled and climbed onto Tiny. He pressed a button and a set of speakers rose out of each of the robot's shoulders. With a chuckle, he put the tape in the player before looking at me. "Let's go," he said. "Just point the way into town, and Tiny will do the rest."

"That way!" I said, pointing down a dirt track. At those words, Tiny set off down the track, gears grinding and treads rumbling.

Nobody spoke, but I personally didn't see a reason to do so. The huge grin on my face, and the tears streaming from my eyes, were all the expression I needed.

The atmosphere in Sugarcube Corner was as thick as treacle. Twilight and her friends stared in disbelief at Celestia and Luna.

"Discord?" Rainbow Dash asked, still shocked. "Are you sure?"

"Discord's statue is still in the palace gardens, so he hasn't been released," Luna replied. "However, this could be the work of one of his followers, trying to free him."

Rainbow Dash puffed out her chest. "Well, let's go find them and kick their flanks!" she said fiercely.

The others voiced their approval at Rainbow's plan and Celestia smiled. "I'm glad you think that way," she said, levitating a small box in front of her and opening it. "The Elements of Harmony are in here. Put them on, and we'll go."

Each Bearer took her respective Element.

"Let's get going, friends," Luna said. "Every moment we wait means another opportunity for Discord to be free once more."

Throwing some bits on the table, Twilight and the others hurriedly followed the Princesses out of the shop and into the town square.

The townsponies gasped and bowed on seeing the two alicorns, who smiled at them before leading the way out of town, along the path past Fluttershy's house, and into the Everfree Forest.

"Be on your guard, everypony," Celestia said quietly. "We don't know what manner of evil could be lurking out here."

Silence fell as the group trudged along the road.

As Tiny rolled along the dirt track, I could see the familiar skyline of Ponyville in the distance. I tapped Ace on the shoulder.

"We'll be in Ponyville in ten minutes," I said to him. "So you and John had better get ready to introduce yourselves." I looked down at my ride. "And I hope you're ready to answer a *lot* of questions."

Ace chuckled. "Yes," he said. "And most of them will probably be about Tiny." Tiny let out a small beep. "Don't worry, Tiny!" He said, patting him gently. "Daddy will make sure nobody says anything mean about you. Yes he will, yes he will!"

I turned to face John. "Are you sure you want to do this?" I asked. "You have a life back on Earth, so why share mine?"

John snorted. "A life?" he said glumly. "That wasn't a life, what I had. The only real friend I had was you, and I couldn't hold a job." I looked at him sympathetically, and he continued. "You said a lot of great things about this place, and the ponies who live here, so I felt that it would be the idea location to start my new life."

I nodded. "It *is* a great place," I said. "The ponies are great, and they'll accept you with open hooves." John smiled. "Though I'm, not quite sure how they'll react to *him*, though." I said, pointing at Ace. "Hey, Doc?" Sorou turned to face me. "We'll be there in five minutes, and you haven't even played that cassette yet."

Sorou laughed. "I guess now would be a good time," he said, reaching over to the cassette player and pressing a button.

As the music blared out of the speakers on Tiny's shoulders, I realise what it was and laughed out loud.

There's no way Twilight will miss this entrance, I thought.

The eight ponies trotted silently along the twisting path, their eyes constantly checking their surroundings.

"I don't like this, Lulu," Celestia whispered.

"Me neither, Tia," Luna replied. "It's too quiet."

"Do y'all reckon they know we're comin'?" Applejack asked.

"It's a possibility," Celestia replied. "Stay alert, everypony."

They continued walking, their hearts beating in their throats and their ears tuned for the smallest of noises.

Suddenly, Celestia stopped walking and stood still. She looked around for a moment before a puzzled look appeared on her face.

"Sister?" Luna said quizzically. "Are you all—"

"Listen," Celestia said quietly. "Can anypony hear that?"

The others strained their ears and listened intently as a sound, rather like music, filled their ears. It seemed far away, but it was getting closer with each second that ticked by.

"What in tarnation is that *racket*?" Applejack said.

The eight of them stood rooted to the spot as the music was soon accompanied by a deep rumbling which causing leaves to fall from the trees, and animals to hide in fear.

"Whatever it is, it's coming right for us." Twilight gulped.

"Then we shall stand our ground here," Celestia replied, narrowing her eyes towards the noise. "Get ready, girls."

With that, they took up defensive stances and waited.

As the noise got closer, the eight ponies heard voices alongside the music, which made them scrunch their faces up in confusion.

Cause I'm back

Yes, I'm back

Well, I'm back

Yes, I'm back

Well, I'm back, back

(Well) I'm back in black

Yes, I'm back in black

Rarity covered her ears.

"Make it stop!" she squealed. "It's horrifying!"

"Stay strong, everypony!" Luna yelled above the noise.

Her staunch demeanour soon faded when she saw what was approaching, and was replaced with a look of panic.

It was a metal behemoth which rolled along the ground, groaning and creaking as it went. It was much taller than even Celestia was, and was covered with various bits of machinery.

The girls looked closer to see, standing on the machine, two figures; one was doing gestures imitating playing a guitar, and the other was flailing their head back and forth.

Celestia and Luna gasped.

"Humans?" they shouted in unison.

At the sound of the voice, the two figures on the metal beast stopped what they were doing and looked ahead of them.

A series of grinding noises followed as the tracked monster ground to a shuddering halt, just feet away from the eight ponies. The music and noise stopped abruptly as the two humans jumped off.

"This is incredible!" one of them said. He was wearing a pair of goggles and a white coat. "All of my work has finally paid off!"

"Holy crap," the other one added. "This is... I mean, I can hardly..." He seemed unable to finish his sentence.

Celestia's eyes narrowed. "Identify yourselves!" she yelled. "Who are you, and why have you come to Equestria?"

The human wearing the white coat put his arms out in front of him reassuringly. "Please," he said. "We mean you no harm."

Twilight stepped forward and pointed at the hunk of metal the two had been sitting on. "Is that so?" she replied. "If that is true, then what is this thing? It looks dangerous."

The white coated human looked at the machine. "What, Tiny?" he asked with a shocked gasp. "He wouldn't hurt a fly!"

"You actually gave that thing a *name*?" Rainbow Dash said with disdain, giving the human a fierce glare.

The other human stepped forward. "Please," he said. "You misunderstand our intentions; we are not here to cause trouble. My name is John Adams, and this is Doctor Ace Sorou. We've spent a long time trying to find a way here."

"Why?" Twilight snapped. "What reason could you have for coming to our world? Only one of your kind has ever been here before—"

"That's true," a third voice said. "And now I've come back."

Twilight's face fell. "What is this?!" she shouted. "Show yourself!"

Eight pairs of eyes suddenly turned to the third human, who stepped out from behind the machine.

"With pleasure," he said, watching as Twilight's expression went from one of anger to one of joy. "Hello, Twilight. I'm home."

A burst of purple filled my vision as Twilight leapt on me. She prodded me sharply in the chest, as if to check that I was real, only for her smile to widen even further when I grunted.

"It's... it's really you!" she squealed. "I knew you'd come back! I just knew it! I've missed you so much!"

Before I could reply, she was kissing me. I returned the favour eagerly, as we both released weeks of pent-up longing.

"Well, I'll be damned," Applejack said. "And to think we doubted that he would ever make it back."

The others, including Celestia and Luna but except for Pinkie Pie, all nodded and murmured in agreement, while I eventually tore myself away from Twilight and stood up.

"I told you both that I would do anything to see her smile, come hell or high water," I said to Celestia and Luna. "And, while I was back on Earth, I told myself I needed to keep that promise."

Celestia and Luna smiled — then another burst of colour filled my vision as the other five enveloped me in a group hug.

"I knew you'd come back!" Pinkie Pie said excitedly. "The others had their doubts, but I knew otherwise! Now I can throw a huge, super-duper, wonderfully magnificent, splendiferous 'Welcome Back To Equestria' party for you and Twilight!"

Rainbow Dash punched me on the shoulder. "Welcome back, Geo." she said with a smile. "I'm sorry I doubted you."

"I'm sorry fer doubtin' yer return as well, sugarcube." Applejack added. "But do you have any idea how much work you've missed?" I looked at her and she fell over laughing. "I'm only teasin' ya, Geo." She said. "Welcome home."

"It's nice to see you again." Fluttershy said. "I'm... um, I'm also sorry for thinking you'd never come back." Her bottom lip quivered. "Oh, can you ever forgive me for being so callous?"

"Yes, darling, I'm sorry too," Rarity said. "But I think I speak for all of us when I say that we're glad you're back where you belong."

I was about to reply when a cough distracted me. "Now that you've got your welcomes, and your snog, d'you think you can help us out here?" John asked, giving me a deadpan stare.

I laughed weakly. "Yeah, sorry." I turned to Celestia and Luna. "This is John, a friend I made after I arrived back in my own world."

"Just like you promised me you would." Twilight nuzzled me.

"And this is Doctor Ace Sorou." I indicated the eccentric doctor, who smiled and waved. "It was his machine that brought me back here, so I consider him a friend too. Without his help, I don't know what I would have done to get back here."

Celestia and Luna trotted over to Ace and looked at Tiny, who was brimming with scientific instruments.

"Thank you, Doctor," Luna said. "As friends of Geo's, you and John are welcome to stay here. Furthermore, please accept our humble apologies for our earlier behaviour."

"That's OK," Ace said, patting Tiny. "I assure you, Your Highnesses, that I only want to study this world."

Celestia smiled. "Then study away," she said. "I see that... 'Tiny' is loaded with construction materials. Would it be right to assume that you wish to build a laboratory somewhere?"

Ace nodded. "With your permission, of course."

"I'm sure we can find somewhere for you," Luna replied as she turned to face me. "Come, Geo, let us return to Ponyville. I am keen on hearing how you found a way back to Equestria."

I chuckled. "I hope you've got a spare few hours."

The eleven of us, followed by Tiny, set out along the path to Ponyville. As we walked, I sighed contentedly.

"What's wrong?" asked Twilight, concern in her voice.

I picked her up and kissed her deeply. "Nothing," I said. "Not a single god-damn thing."

I hoisted her onto my shoulders when Ponyville came into view, tears running down my cheeks as I beamed from ear to ear.

I was home.

12. EPILOGUE

"That was quite a story, Geo," Celestia said.

The eleven of us were squeezed into the living room in the library, sitting on various items of furniture. Outside, Tiny was attracting a curious crowd; every sound caused them to back away in fear.

Luna conjured a map of the town, a section of which was circled, and handed it to Ace. "There is land there that we have no need for," she said. "You may build your laboratory there. It's out of the way of town, so you don't need to worry about your experiments causing any problems for the townsponies."

Ace smiled and took the map. "Thank you, Princesses, I'll get started right away," he said. "Thank you again for your hospitality." Celestia and Luna both returned the smile as he stood up. "John, Geo, it's been a pleasure. I hope to see you all again soon." He extended a hand, and we both shook it.

"Likewise," I said. "And thank you for everything you've done for me... for us. Without you, I wouldn't be here now."

Twilight nuzzled my chest as I spoke, a smile still plastered firmly on her face. "Yes," she said. "Thank you, Doctor."

"Call me 'Ace,'" he replied. "Anyway, I'll let you know when my new laboratory is completed." He went towards the door. "Perhaps you'd like to help me with my experiments?"

I nodded while John made a neutral noise in his throat.

Ace opened the door and stepped outside. "Now, now, everypony," he said to the crowd. "You don't need to be afraid of my little friend here." He closed the door behind him as he began explaining to the townsponies why Tiny was so great.

John stood up. "He's got his lab, and you've got this place," he said. "But what about me? Where the heck am I going to stay?"

"Ya can stay with me if ya want, John," Applejack said. "I've got plenty of room, and ya can help me around the farm."

"Thanks, Applejack." John replied. "I'd be happy to help."

"All right then." Applejack nodded. "Come with me and I'll get ya settled in fer the night. G'night, everypony."

She opened the door and stepped out, followed by John. Ace's voice could still be heard as the door closed, trying to explain why Tiny was named 'Tiny,' when he was anything but.

The rest of us sat in silence for a while, occasionally smiling at each other. I was glad no pony was saying anything, as it gave me more time to enjoy being around them all again. Twilight was on my lap, nuzzling me gently while I stroked her mane.

Eventually, Celestia broke the silence. "If you'll excuse us," she said. "Luna and I must return to our duties in Canterlot." We all nodded and bowed. "It's wonderful to see you again, Geo." She smiled slyly. "Take care of yourself this time."

"You can count on it, Your Majesties," I said, squeezing Twilight softly. She let out a small squeak and giggled.

They both vanished in a blaze of light, leaving behind Rarity, Fluttershy, Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash.

"I must go as well, darling," Rarity said. "You know what that sister of mine can get up to in my absence."

I chuckled. "I'll need to catch up with the Crusaders at some point," I replied. "It'll be great to see how they've been doing."

"Come by tomorrow, then," Rarity offered. "Chances are they'll be at the Boutique after they finish school."

"Will do, Rarity. See you then."

With a wave goodbye, she left, leaving the door open.

"I'll go as well," Fluttershy said timidly. "I need to feed my animals, and I don't like leaving Angel by himself for too long."

I nodded. "OK, Fluttershy," I said gently. "See you soon."

She left the library, followed by Rainbow Dash.

"I'm gonna go get some shut-eye, since I'm on the weather patrol tomorrow," she said. "But we've gotta hang out soon, 'kay?"

"Hell yeah we do," I replied. "All of us."

"That's why I'm throwing you a party, silly!" Pinkie Pie said. "I've got it all figured out. You're gonna love it, trust me!"

I held out my hand in a futile attempt to calm the bouncing pink ball of energy. "I know it'll be great, Pinkie," I said. "You don't need to tell me; I know that you always throw a great party."

Pinkie smiled. "I'll go and put the finishing touches to it now! Bye!"

Before anyone could reply, she was gone. Rainbow Dash waved goodbye and followed suit, closing the door behind her.

Now that it was just the two of us, Twilight sighed contentedly and locked the door using her magic. "Would you like a drink?" she asked. "We need to celebrate you being back."

I nodded while she went into the kitchen and stood up so I could look around the library, fond memories flooding my brain.

As I walked, my eyes fell on Twilight's desk — and the plain black box which was sitting on top of it.

I gasped and rushed over. Opening the box, I found the golden band I'd asked Diamond Dust to make.

"I thought I lost this!" I said to myself.

"Lost what?" asked Twilight. I turned around and saw that she had a tray of drinks in front of her. I showed her the box and her smile faded slightly. "I found it on your... body... after you were shot." she said. "I already know what's inside. I hope that's all right."

I nodded. "Did you like it?" I asked.

"Like it?" Twilight replied. "No, I didn't *like* it." I lowered my head, and she grinned. "I *loved* it."

I grinned back and walked over to her, keeping my eyes on hers while she levitated the tray over to the table and put it down.

As I dropped to one knee, she suppressed a squeal. I took one of her hooves in my hand and looked deep into her eyes.

"Twilight," I said softly. "You are my life, my love, and my everything — but I want you to be much more than that."

The corners of Twilight's eyes filled with tears as she nodded.

"Throughout my time in Equestria, you have been by my side. You have helped me get through thick and thin." I said, my own eyes filling with tears. "You have listened to my problems, and shared your own. You became my friend, and then you became my lover."

Twilight's lower lip began trembling as I continued. "I know now that I want nothing more than to spend the rest of my life with you. No other person has loved me the way you do." I opened the box, showed her the band, and took a deep breath. "Twilight..." I gulped. "Will you make me the happiest man alive, and marry me?"

Twilight began sobbing loudly. "I have waited *so long* to hear you ask me that!" she said between snuffles. "Of *course* I'll marry you!"

I grinned and wiped my tears away as I slipped the band over one of her forelegs. She wiped her own eyes and admired her new piece of jewellery, as it glowed in the moonlight which was now streaming in through the window. *Perfect timing, Luna.*

"Now we can celebrate." I reached for a drink, only for my hand to be slapped away from the tray by an invisible force. I looked up to see a purple aura around Twilight's horn.

"Forget the drinks," she said. "I know another way we can celebrate." I looked at her blankly and she glanced upstairs with a sultry grin on her lips.

I realised what she was getting and quickly returned her grin with one of my own. "I guess we could celebrate that way," I replied. "After all, we have a lot of *catching up* to do."

And with those words, I scooped her into my arms, kissed her passionately, and carried her upstairs.

***** THE END *****