

Luna's Day Out

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Chapter 1

"But Celly, you promised!"

"I promised I'd try my best, Luna. It simply isn't going to happen; it's out of my hooves."

"Bah, I should've known." The princess of the moon sulked, staring at her teacup. Across the table from her, her older sister sighed and sipped her tea before continuing. These mornings didn't give them a lot of time to bond, and she felt all the worse when they spent that time fighting. At least alone as they were in Celestia's study Luna could be convinced to speak candidly.

"It's not that I don't want to spend more time with you, you know that." Celestia said gently. Her little sister was having none of it, and she looked up from her tea with a glare.

"It's just that you've got more important things to get to than your own sister." her words were sharp, but Celestia didn't cringe.

"Now Luna, that isn't fair. I think you're overreacting."

"Oh yes, we wouldn't want that to happen." Luna replied, rolling her eyes.

Celestia kept her expression calm. On the inside however, she was marvelling at how the only thing worse than an effectively teenaged immortal throwing a fit and being given a time out was the sulk they would throw once they got back. Alicorn growth was a funny thing, a mix of age, power and mental maturity, and her younger sister wasn't quite there yet. Still, she knew what Luna was going through, at least a little. Everything had sped ahead of her when she was gone, even her own sister, and she wanted to catch up with everything at once. Celestia also saw that Luna, though she'd never admit it, still felt guilt for the entire incident and was probably taking Celestia's busy schedule as her fault for being indisposed.

"I have an idea then." Celestia told her sister, trying to salvage the

situation. "I shall have another take my place on our outing tomorrow. It would do you good to know another pony besides myself in any matter."

"What?" Luna nearly jumped. "But Celly, I don't want anypony else, I want..." she huffed and looked away. It touched Celestia, it really did, how much Luna cared to rekindle their friendship.

"Not even Twilight Sparkle?" Celestia asked carefully, hiding the smirk she felt creeping on to her face. "After how often you've asked after her, I would've thought..." she saw her sister blush, and could tell the idea was winning her over.

"I'll ask it of her as a favor." Celestia continued, pushing while Luna was still susceptible to the idea "She's a very friendly young mare, I'm sure you'll get along. Do you know she has a degree in astronomy?"

"She does? Really?"

"Yes." Celestia said with a nod, not mentioning Twilight's other degrees in magical theory, ancient history, archaeology, agriculture, literature, chemistry, botany, applied mathematics, meteorology, or library science. Celestia had been grateful to ship her off to Ponyville, if only because she was running out of things to teach the insatiable student.

"We will still reschedule, I promise." Celestia wrapped up, "But for the time being, I'd rather you have some fun than spend another day cooped up in your room. The guards... have heard you muttering, Luna."

Luna looked away. "I wasn't... I'm not crazy."

"You were talking to it again, weren't you?"

"Abacus is a him, thank you very much." Luna quipped before catching herself. She looked away, and Celestia waited.

"Fine" Luna said reluctantly.

"You'll have a delightful time, I assure you." Celestia said. Luna nodded, but she clearly didn't believe her sister. Celestia decided she could work with that.

"I'll send her a letter, and you can go early tomorrow."

"Well, fine then. I'll set my alarm for three."

"Luna..."

"...well, if I go straight to sleep I can manage noon I suppose."

Celestia sighed. "You know what schedules ponies keep."

"What?" Luna asked. "Celly, I can't get up earlier than noon!"

Celestia marvelled at her sister, slightly jealous she had retained her youth for an extra thousand years, whatever the price. "You know there are hours earlier than noon."

"I'm pretty sure there aren't." Luna retorted.

"Oh?"

"I've never seen them. Scientifically, their existence is unconfirmed until I observe them."

"Luna, everypony else has seen them, or... experienced them."

"Yes, but you're not scientists. It's anecdotal evidence."

"Luna." Celestia wasn't sure whether to laugh or roll her eyes. Still, both responses were ones she didn't give often, and that was encouraging. She and her sister were playing - not like before, but it was still heart-warming.

"We'll call tomorrow an experiment then, in more ways than one." she decided to say. "Now, get some rest. You're going to need it for tomorrow." her sister nodded, and reluctantly left the table.

"I hate you."

"I know you don't mean it."

"I hate you and your stupid sun. Put it out."

"You'll feel better after some coffee."

Luna fumbled as Celestia guided a mug into her hooves. Her little sister had been dragged out of bed, washed up, and put into a carriage without once opening her eyes. All in all, Celestia had to admit it was quite a feat. The night-tinted alicorn brought the mug to her lips and sipped carefully. She stopped and wrinkled her nose.

"This isn't tea."

"No dear. It's coffee, like I said."

"Oh."

"It'll wake you right up, I promise."

"What will?"

"...The coffee, Lulu, the coffee."

"What coffee?"

"...Drink your tea dear." Celestia replied. Luna nodded and sipped her mug again. She drank for a minute as the carriage took flight and lifted them beyond Canterlot. Luna lowered the mug and turned to Celestia, eyes still scrunched close.

"This tea tastes-"

"I know dear."

Luckily, by the time Ponyville was on the horizon Luna had opened her eyes, though she still rubbed one occasionally and was blinking often. She watched the scenery for some time, saying nothing as the land sped by below. Finally, still looking away from her sister, Luna spoke.

"I hate mornings."

Luna paused out front of the Ponyville library. She gave a glance back to her older sister, who gave a small nod, her gaze as serene and knowing as ever. Luna hid her scowl this time, unsure of when her sister had become so motherly. Well, she knew it was probably during the last thousand years or so, but still. It hurt to realize how far ahead everything had moved in the last thousand years. Everything she had looked forward to coming home to was either dust or in a museum. Even her sister was gone, or might as well have been given how much she had changed. And when Luna got over all this being her fault, and had worked up the courage to go out and discover this new world that had replaced hers, her sister had responded with "we'll see" and now here they stood. It was infuriating, yet she didn't dare speak out too much.

Still, she knew Celestia had to leave soon, so she put aside her troubles and approached the library. She knew she didn't have anything to fear, really, but that wasn't going to stop her from doing so anyway. She took a breath and knocked rapidly on the door. Both princesses waited for a moment before the door cracked open. They heard a surprised squeak, but no pony emerged to greet them. Luna turned to her sister, who for once didn't seem to know what was going on. The door moved again, prompting Luna to turn back towards it.

"Oh, um, hello Princesses." a timid yellow pegasus bowed before them. Celestia stepped forward, her confusion showing for only a split second before that all-knowing gaze returned.

"Good day Fluttershy. May we speak to Twilight?"

"Oh, um, I'm sorry." Fluttershy stepped backwards into the library. It was probably an act of shyness, but Celestia took it as an invite into the building.

"She, there was an emergency this morning." Fluttershy explained, looking to the floor. "She and Rainbow Dash went off to Cloudsdale to help fix the weather factories."

"Twilight Sparkle?" Luna spoke up. "Why would a unicorn from Ponyville be enlisted to fix a cloud factory?"

"Her friend Rainbow Dash is in charge of the weather for this sector." Celestia explained before Fluttershy could. "The factories do use some unicorn magic for support, so she probably came to Twilight when she heard the problem. Twilight's more than strong enough to make Cloudsdale hospitable for herself."

Luna nodded, but the situation hit her. "Ahh... What rotten luck."

"You are watching her home for her then?" Celestia continued. Luna frowned, wondering why her sister was even bothering to ask.

"Oh, yes, and Spike. Um, my friend Rarity is coming by to help too."

"That's very kind of you both." Celestia said with a nod. Fluttershy smiled, but still looked slightly afraid of them. At least she looked afraid of both of them equally, Luna thought. A selfish thing to be glad about, she knew, but she couldn't help herself. She gave a loud sigh.

"Is it wrong for a goddess to believe in fate? What shall go wrong next, I wonder? Perhaps next Manehattan will catch fire just to draw you away." she lamented to Celestia. Her sister actually frowned.

"Oh, um, I'm sorry. Did you need Twilight? Can, can I help?" Fluttershy asked, crouching in such a way that made it ambiguous if she was bowing or simply afraid they'd bite.

"It was noth-" Luna began before her sister cut in.

"Twilight was going to help Luna find her way about Canterlot today. She wanted to see what's become of our little town since she came back."

Luna shot Celestia a glare, thoroughly embarrassed about how Celestia was talking about her to this stranger.

"Oh that sounds lovely." Fluttershy smiled. "Rarity and I both love to spend a day in town, in, in Ponyville that is. Rarity's so much fun to shop with." she looked to finally be losing some of her fear of the goddess sisters.

"Really now?" Celestia smiled, turning to Luna. Luna stumbled verbally as she realized it was up to her to keep the conversation up. She had no idea what to say.

"Er, yes. I had hoped to take her to Canterlot, I believe she's familiar with the area, and I can't very well go wandering aimlessly."

Fluttershy nodded. "Rarity always talks about spending a day there. It must be... beautiful."

"Well... so you can imagine my curiosity." Luna replied.

"Luna just didn't want to go off on her own." Celestia offered, infuriating her little sister with her motherly tone. She tried to glare at Celestia, but of course it had no impact.

"So you were going to..." Fluttershy realized the situation with wide eyes. "Oh, and now Twilight's busy."

"Yes, you see the conundrum. And she was so looking forward to it as well. She's usually quite cooped up you know."

Fluttershy nodded. Luna stamped her hoof.

"I'm right here you-"

"And she barely knows anypony at that!" Celestia continued, ignoring Luna. Fluttershy nodded again. "There are so few ponies she can go to for a simple day out. Imagine if Rarity had to cancel plans with you."

"Oh yes, I'd be..." Fluttershy looked down at her hooves "Disappointed."

"You're not-" Luna hissed to Celestia.

"Oh, if only there was some way to salvage the day." Celestia said with a sad shake of her head. "But I'm not sure who else we could turn to."

"Well...is, is there nopony else?"

"Who? She only barely knows the six of you, and I don't think she could impose on anypony else."

"But..." Fluttershy drew back, hiding behind her mane. "I mean, I'm sure you could ask."

"Oh no, we could never put anypony through such trouble."

"I, I don't think it'd be trouble. I know I'd love to..." she stopped and bit her lip. Celestia smiled. Luna just stared on, amazed at her sister's control of the situation. It was like watching a cat bat around a mouse, only slightly more benevolent.

"Fluttershy, you said Rarity would be coming by to help watch everything, did you not? I don't suppose you're saying you'd like to explore Canterlot with Luna today?"

"Oh, well, I couldn't..."

"Oh? Pity, I just thought you said..."

"I mean, I, I'd love to..." Fluttershy stammered. "But I don't really know the city..."

"And neither does Luna! What luck, you'll both have an adventure now."

"But-" Luna and Fluttershy said in unison.

"I'm so glad she won't have her day wasted after all. Good luck sister, I must be off. I'm sure Rarity will understand, send her my regards." Celestia turned around, and left before anypony could react, leaving two slightly-stunned ponies sitting in the library. Luna turned to Fluttershy.

"Um... Hello."

"Hello." Fluttershy squeaked, falling back into a sitting position. There was silence for a moment after that as Luna looked around, collecting her thoughts. Fluttershy was peeking up at her through her mane like a turtle out of its shell.

"You don't have to. Celestia's always been a bit pushy." Luna finally said.

"Hmm? Oh, but... I mean, if you'll have me...."

Luna nodded. "Truthfully, I just didn't want to go out alone, guide or no. Most ponies don't know me, but I fear what they do know wouldn't be... positive. A friendly face would be appreciated."

"It's, they just don't know it wasn't you." Fluttershy offered.

"Right." Luna agreed. "So, shall we head to Canterlot?"

"I, I suppose. Let me go wake up Spike and tell him. I mean, if that's okay."

"Spike?"

"Twilight's assistant."

"Go right ahead." Luna told her with a nod. The pegasus hurried towards the stairs. Luna looked around the library. She was a little disappointed with it, if she was going to be honest with herself. It wasn't even as grand as her personal collection and half the books looked rather hurriedly shelved. How a scholar like Twilight made do was anypony's guess. She'd have to wait for another time to find out, Luna figured, though she was thankful that at least somepony had time for her. Still, Luna barely knew who Fluttershy was; in truth she was glad Celestia had referred to the pegasus by name. Her anxiety, if anything, had only increased with the prospect of dealing with Canterlot and this stranger at once.

Fluttershy returned quickly, a sweet smile on her face. "Spike was oh-so nice. He says he has no problem with being alone with Rarity. He wanted us to leave right away, isn't that nice?"

"Hmm... yes, sounds rather selfless of him. What kind of pony is named Spike though?" Strange thoughts entered Luna's head about Twilight living with another pony, but her sister had never given mention of anything.

Fluttershy giggled, but caught herself and looked embarrassed, a little afraid of Luna. "He's, he's a dragon actually."

"Oh. Oh!" Luna's eyes widened. "Yes, yes, of course, he's... Celestia did tell me Twilight had a dragon assistant, I forgot that was... yes. I should've...well, never mind. Shall we then?" she was just about ready to die from embarrassment. Luckily, the other pony didn't even giggle at her, just nodded simply.

"Do, do we go by carriage, or, um...?"

Luna shook her head and began to grin. "Celestia says the chariot gives ponies warning where she goes, but we don't need that. Hold still."

Fluttershy's eyes widened, lip quivering as she fought to hold back some question. Luna ignored it and focused. The world around them began to dim, as if the shades had been drawn. Fluttershy squeaked and looked around as everything except the two ponies faded into blackness; first the edges of the room faded from view, then what was around them, then even the floor beneath their hooves. Yet as dark as it got, Fluttershy could make out Luna clearly, as if by the light of day. They spent an instant in pitch darkness, and then Fluttershy's ear twitched as sounds came to her. The bustle of walking and talking ponies, the click of hooves on stone, the creak of wagons and carriages. The darkness began to let up and revealed an entirely different scene than before. Fluttershy looked down to find cobblestone beneath her, ponies began to pass them by, and in another moment they were sitting in the middle of the road somewhere in Canterlot. Fluttershy stared at Luna, mouth agape. Luna looked up and surveyed their surroundings.

"Haha! Great success! Um, are you okay?"

"Oh, um, I'm sorry. I wasn't expecting so much, um... darkness." the pegasus shuddered. Luna frowned.

"Sorry. I do that." Luna looked around. "I wanted to know what ponies are interested in these days, so we should be somewhere near the commercial center of Canterlot."

"Oh! Oh, I should have gotten my bits..." Fluttershy lamented quietly. Luna blinked.

"Oh, well, Celestia keeps saying we share the kingdom again. I can dip into

the royal treasury if need be. I doubt we'll need it, we're here to observe."

"I think we are being observed..." Fluttershy responded, lowering her head as she looked around. She was right, Luna realized. They weren't creating any huge stir, but everypony was rubbernecking as they passed, no doubt wondering at the sudden appearance of a princess. Luna sighed.

"Well... at least you're noticed." Fluttershy offered. Luna glanced back to her and tried to smile.

"I hadn't thought of it like that. Though Celestia can't go anywhere without fanfare..."

"Oh." Fluttershy didn't seem to know what to say. "Um...shall we?" she gestured to a wide road with only pedestrian traffic, a multitude of signs hanging from both sides of the building fronts. Luna nodded.

"For maximum efficiency, we'll keep to the right with the majority of hoof traffic, we do each route back and forth once and-"

"Bunnies!" Fluttershy trotted off down the road, too distracted to hear Luna. Luna groaned and chased after her. The pegasus had her nose pressed lightly against the glass pane of a pet shop where a half dozen small white rabbits hopped about a small enclosure. One of them looked out the window and twitched its nose at the two ponies.

"Aren't they precious?" Fluttershy cooed. "I hope they get enough room to play in. Do you think that's fresh hay?"

"Cute." Luna said coolly, keeping herself detached, observant. "But we really should..." out of the corner of her eye she caught something else looking at them. In its own enclosure was a kitten, black as a starless sky. It had big green eyes and was tiny enough it could have fit in a tea cup.

"Why...why is it staring at me?" Luna whispered. The cat's eyes widened, full as the moon.

"It's...what's it doing?" Luna asked, stepping in closer. The cat's eyes widened even more, giant shimmering pupils, and its mouth moved with a mew that Luna couldn't hear. It flashed a tiny pink mouth.

"I want it." Luna said, pressing her nose against the glass. The kitten raised a paw as if to reach out to her. The alicorn's lip quivered.

"Um, Princess Luna?" Fluttershy asked. Luna was pushing against the glass, eyes wide and focused on the kitten. "Princess Luna, do, do you like cats?" she got no response, and so timidly reached out to the other pony. That contact set Luna off.

"His name is Nova and he is the best kitty and he'll have a little silver collar with a bell on it and he'll come to my tea parties and he'll have tons of toys but we'll play with bits of colored string and I'll get him a little blue pillow so he can sleep on my bed and I'll never ever be alone again." she gasped for breath, and finally leaned back away from the glass. She turned to Fluttershy, slightly dazed.

"What just happened?"

Fluttershy giggled. "Would you like to go inside?"

Luna hesitated, knowing she was deviating from her plan, but then made the mistake of looking back to the window. The kitten was cleaning itself, rubbing a tiny paw with a tiny pink pad over a tiny ear. She didn't even have a chance, and entered the store with Fluttershy in tow.

Chapter 2

Several minutes later, Fluttershy and Luna exited the pet store. Luna had vanished midway through their purchase and returned with saddlebags to carry their items, along with more than enough bits to make their purchase. The princess glanced up at her head, where a certain black kitten was nested in her mane, currently gnawing lightly at her horn.

"This is a mistake. Why am I doing this?" Luna asked.

"I think he'd look good with a ribbon, don't you?"

"Oh yes he should have a blue ribbon, but sky blue, it'll go with his silver darn it stop making me do that." Luna glared at Fluttershy. Instead of smiling like she would've expected her sister to do, Fluttershy looked hurt.

"It's fine." Luna said quickly. She felt the kitten shift, settling down. She felt slightly ridiculous, but oddly enough didn't care.

"I could help you with animal care, I mean, if you want..."

"We'll... see. I think we bought enough pet supplies for at least a couple years."

Fluttershy smiled. "I'm sure you'll take great care of him."

"I've never owned a pet before." Luna admitted, her mind turning to contemplation of her spur-of-the-moment purchase. "It's silly, but maybe if I had... even if an animal can't understand how hard I worked..."

"They can appreciate you." Fluttershy finished for her. Luna began to nod before remembering the kitten on her. She looked back to the street.

"Let's continue on before I buy Nova a sister."

Fluttershy giggled again, but when Luna turned to her she clammed up.

"S-sorry Princess Luna." she mumbled. Luna blinked.

"Are... are you worried about... what, insulting me?"

Fluttershy nodded with a squeak. Luna frowned.

"Is it because you fear me?" She tried to keep the edge out of her voice.

"Well, um, I'm s-scared of insulting Princess Celestia too. I don't want to hurt anypony."

"I see, alright. Um... thank you." Luna turned back to the task at hoof. She and Fluttershy window shopped a little more after that, Luna forgetting her intended rigor in the thrill of discovery. That thrill didn't stop her from giving a yawn as they looked at a store specializing in ottomans and paint brushes. She saw Fluttershy glance at, but say nothing to, her.

"I was barely asleep when Celestia insisted we get up. I know I wanted as much time as possible to study Canterlot, but I'll see nothing if I'm half asleep." she explained. "And precisely how do these markets cross in the slightest?"

"Um, I guess you come in for a paintbrush and realize you don't own an ottoman? We, we can take a break if-"

"No, no, I'm fine. Now, what's next?" Luna moved on to the adjacent shop. "Ah, now this is what I'm after."

"W-would you like a new dress, princess?" Fluttershy asked, seeing the clothing shop in front of Luna.

"No no. You see, fashion has changed more than almost anything else, and it's something I've found disappointingly little mention of in the library. Let's take a closer look." Luna entered the store, Fluttershy just behind.

The store was fairly empty, and Luna and Fluttershy were immediately set upon by a dapper brown earth pony with an ascot.

"H-Hello Princess Luna! It is an honor." the earth pony went into a shallow bow. Luna smiled. He hardly looked afraid of her at all.

"Good day to you." she said cordially. "I hope you don't mind, I was hoping to take a look around."

"Here? Oh, I mean, of course, you honor my humble store. Go right ahead, go right ahead." he stammered. Luna's smile faded a little, but she nodded and turned away. She ran her eyes across the racks, noting patterns, hemlines, the selection of dresses versus saddles and other garments, and so on.

"Oh, Rarity would love this." Fluttershy cooed over wide brimmed hat. Luna took a closer look.

"I've never liked hats." she said. "No pony ever accounts for my horn." she glanced up as if to see the offending cranial protrusion.

"Well, um..." Fluttershy kicked at the ground. "I-It is a very large horn. I don't think I've ever seen one like it."

"It...It's not intimidating, is it?"

"Well, a little."

Luna sighed. Then, with a smirk, "You should see my sister's."

Fluttershy held a hoof to her mouth as she suppressed a giggle. Luna brightened at the sight of it. She had made another pony laugh! And not like Fluttershy's nervous giggles of before, which Luna had taken as confirmation of her foalishness. Perhaps things would be more successful than she had hoped. With this thought in mind, Luna returned to her study of the store, something quickly catching her eye.

"Oh Earth and Sky what do we have here?" she turned to a wall of hooks from which hung packaged socks, all in sets of four of course. She was soon standing before a very pink pair with her sister's visage embroidered on them.

"Feel free to try on absolutely anything." the earth pony said from elsewhere in the store. Luna had already levitated the packaged set off their hook for a better look, and upon hearing the storekeeper's offer she

began to open it up. Fluttershy watched on, silent, as Luna carefully fit two of the socks over her forelegs.

"Yes." Luna said with a giddy smile, the socks making it just above her knees. "Celly would die if she saw me in these." she laughed, stomping her hooves. When she heard Fluttershy laugh she came back to earth. A pink blush spread across the princess's face.

"Ahem, I mean... please don't mention this to her. Any of this." she lowered her head. "And please pretend I didn't call her Celly right now."

Fluttershy's face fell into a look of near panic. "W-why?" she squeaked. "I-I mean, yes, sorry Princess." she bowed. Luna swallowed. Minutes ago she had managed to make this other pony light up at her words, and yet fear still lurked under Fluttershy's bright smile. A part of Luna admonished herself, however; it was no fault of Fluttershy's - Luna had caused that. And if she wanted to hear Fluttershy's laugh again - and she did, she realized - it was up to her.

"Please, don't fear me. I didn't mean that." she lowered her voice, though currently the shopkeep was doing his best to attend to a couple other customers, and at the same time doing a fair job at occupying those who would likely otherwise be gawking even more than they were now. "Just because I'm a few hundred years her junior, Celestia thinks I'm a child. And now I'm prancing around in socks... I really would rather this stay between you and I. Please?" she tried to pick her words with care, like her sister always had, but Luna's strengths and flaws alike came from her emotionality. It could lead her to violent rage in some cases, or in this case, it could make what was meant to come across as a simple, if personal explanation sound instead like a desperate plea. Yet it made Fluttershy get up, and even glance towards Luna.

"...They're very nice socks." she eventually mumbled. Luna realized she was blushing. It wasn't even a compliment directed at her! That was what she told herself, but those words carried weight beyond what the princess felt they should have.

"I guess so..." Luna replied. She cleared her throat, trying to remember her place and her goals. "I suppose I will have to rely on first-hoof experience if I'm to get any accurate results, so a bit of testing is in order, don't you

think? I wonder if they come in purple..." she turned back to the rack. She found set after set she just had to try on, usually only trying on the ones for her forelegs. Fluttershy was convinced more and more to offer her opinions, and Luna was delighted to find the mare quite fashionable, perfect for what she wanted to achieve. At one point Luna considered moving on to other pieces of clothing - maybe she should avoid hats for the sake of the sleeping kitten on her head, she figured, but there were plenty of options. She looked over to ask Fluttershy's opinion, and caught the pegasus staring up at the wall of socks. She followed the pegasus's gaze up towards a set of green knee-socks with a leaf print over them. Luna felt guilt wash over her. It was a familiar feeling, nearly ever-present since her return, but this current emotion added something new. An acknowledgement of what should have been done, rather than a simple sadness over what had happened.

"Would you like to try on any?" Luna asked tentatively "I didn't mean to make a one-pony show of it." Her words made Fluttershy jump, pause, and bow her head.

"Oh, I don't know, I mean, it's fine, and I wouldn't want to be any trouble..."

"No trouble, come on. You are my research assistant after all." Luna insisted, bringing down the pack of socks. She brought them in front of Fluttershy, who paused, letting her mane fall in front of her face.

"Please?" Luna asked, wanting to prove her consideration of the other pony. Fluttershy still hesitated, but then took the socks from the princess. Luna tried to hide her elation. A moment later and Fluttershy sat down awkwardly, four green socks around her hooves. Luna looked her over, and Fluttershy began to relax, obviously enjoying the sight of her socks, and Luna had to admit that after spending almost her entire life bare of any clothing, the snug fabric was unlike anything else, quite different even from the occasional dress or saddle she had put on. It was quite enjoyable, reminding her of wrapping herself up in a blanket as a filly after a long night. This feeling was at least partially mutual, that much was clear. Only one thing came to mind in light of all of this.

"Scientifically, I'm relatively certain socks make everything better." Luna said with a grin. She now had one a striped purple-and-white set that reached to her shoulders and thighs respectively. She held up a hoof at

Fluttershy, who responded with a small smile. This one was different, and Luna realized it was because for the first time, Fluttershy was making eye contact. Luna hadn't realized what large, open eyes her research assistant had.

"I don't normally wear much..." Fluttershy told her. "I guess I can't wear them over my horseshoes, but I spend so much time in the forest..."

"Shoes?" Luna blinked, realizing she had been staring. "Hmm, no, I have an idea. Come, let's actually make a purchase or two..." she took her socks off, and waited for Fluttershy to do the same. She slipped everything back into their packages and approached the register, several sets in tow. The shop keep was almost apologetic of the price, but took Luna's bits all the same.

"I can't interest you in a dress, my lady? A scarf?" he asked as he rung them up.

"I shall be sure to visit you in the future." Luna brushed him off politely. She allowed him to place her purchases in a bag, and when she levitated the bag her horn let off a small purple flash. She turned to Fluttershy with a look of self-satisfaction.

"Stain repellent, water repellent, tear-proof... stronger than an iron shoe. Perfect for any occasion." she said. Fluttershy's eyes went wide.

"You can do that?" she asked quietly. Luna held her head high.

"Of course." she said, heading for the door.

"Thank you." Fluttershy replied. Luna realized the guilt from before had more than just left; it had been replaced by a warm comfort that extended beyond any mere sock.

"A-aren't you going to put them on?" Fluttershy asked from behind, making Luna stop.

"What?"

"I just thought the point was... I'm sorry."

"Well, I mean, it'd be silly; a single pony going around in nothing but socks."

"I, I could... with you..." Fluttershy mumbled. Luna paused. A strange offer, yet...

"Really?" she asked. Fluttershy nodded, so with a small grin, Luna opened the bag.

Moments later, a certain two mares turned heads as they trotted down the street. They had smiles on their faces, one had a cat asleep on her head, and they both wore nothing but socks. The yellow pegasus had spring green socks up to her knees, and the blue alicorn had purple high socks with a little silver moon over each hoof. It was probably the alicorn princess who drew the most attention, not the socks, but she seemed to ignore it, her head held high and looking almost unaware of the world around her.

"Socks make everything better." Luna asserted once more, looking over Fluttershy. The pegasus nodded enthusiastically. Luna finally noticed the eyes on them.

"Hmm. Funny, I was determined to win back their respect. Well, win it at all really. I don't think this is helping."

"I, I respect you..."

"You... you're saying what I want to hear, but thank you for trying."

"But... I do."

Luna hesitated, and wouldn't look at Fluttershy. "You do?" she finally asked quietly, glancing at the pegasus out of the corner of her eye. Fluttershy's gaze wasn't one of fear, she realized. It was a subtle difference, but Luna realized that the other pony was very worried. From the looks of things, she was worried about Luna.

"I don't think I could ever go shopping with Princess Celestia. She's so nice, but... ummm...." Fluttershy stared at the ground in front of them. Luna

nodded, but in truth she was more confused than ever, her mind trying to fill in the rest of Fluttershy's sentence. But what? Celestia was the perfect one, the all-loved ruler with her fears and woes in check.

A high pitched yawn interrupted Luna's morose musings. On her head she felt Nova stir, and the kitten mewled a moment later.

"I think he's hungry." Fluttershy said. "He's been very peaceful."

"I have that effect on creatures. It is most ponies' lunch time, is it not?"

"A-about." Fluttershy agreed. Luna looked around and found a grouping of tables set up on a small patio. She headed straight towards it, or more accurately towards the establishment the patio was part of. Her entrance widened the eyes of the host waiting at his podium, a pale gray unicorn with a slicked black mane.

"P-princess?! Ahem, Princess Luna!" the host quickly bowed at their entrance. His startled shout served to alert the rest of the sparsely populated cafe. Luna wished the eyes on her weren't all so full of fear, and her wish was granted as several were overcome with confusion. Realizing its source, Luna hid a small smile.

"We, we are hardly prepared for a royal visit, I apologize profusely-

"At ease, at ease. I wouldn't have expected you to be, now would I? I need just a simple meal for my friend and I."

"Y-yes, of course princess, right this way princess." The host turned, grabbing a couple of menus as he did. That was when Nova decided to mewl again. The host did a double take.

"Yes?" Luna asked, very carefully trying to keep a straight face. She could feel Nova gnawing on her horn again.

"N-nothing, princess." he turned slightly and led them out to the patio.

"M-may I start you out with something to drink?"

"An iced tea, if you have it. Oh, and a teacup of milk." Luna said, daring the

waiter to say something. He played the game well, and just nodded.

"Very well, right away." he turned to Fluttershy, who had opened her menu already.

"Oh, eep, um, iced tea sounds lovely thank you." she said. The host nodded and walked off. Luna began to snicker.

"Oh, I am so glad I bought Nova after all. Celestia would kill me if she saw me pulling rank like that!" she lowered this kitten on to the table telekinetically. He stayed quite still as Luna stroked him. She turned her grin to Fluttershy, but the pegasus was staring at the table, an unusual expression on her face. It was like she was far away, only cursory attention given to the world around her. She probably wasn't even aware of the table in front of her.

"Fluttershy?" Luna could see she wasn't all gone at least, as the sound of her own name woke the pegasus up.

"Oh, I'm sorry. W-what were you saying?"

Luna frowned. "Is something wrong? It was just a small joke, really. Besides, Nova's too interested in my horn to cause trouble. I wonder if he's teething."

"I... it's not that. Princess Luna, am I, am I your friend?"

"Huh? Oh." Luna realized she had referred to Fluttershy as such just moments ago. "I meant it casually, really..." she saw Fluttershy's wings tighten against her sides, "But!" she rushed to say, "But, I've never had a day quite like this. I would gladly call you my friend. If, if you would let me, that is."

"I'd be happy to call you my friend." Fluttershy said with a smile, for once not stumbling over her words at all. Luna smiled back at her. Those words alleviated some burden she hadn't even realized she was carrying. It felt easier to hold herself upright, and her wings loosened from their own tight folds against her sides, where they had remained plastered almost since her return. The moment was interrupted by a swipe at her forehead.

"Ow! Nova... alright, I suppose you've been a good kitty. Just a little more." she brought the kitten down off her head and onto the table, giving him a slight nudge, to which Nova responded by gnawing on Luna's sock.

"There's a good kitty. Did you see the waiter's face, Fluttershy?" she grinned, but Fluttershy's smile back wasn't enthusiastic, and she shifted where she sat. Luna stopped grinning and rubbed her nose briefly with her free hoof.

"I suppose he's only doing his job." she admitted, the whole thing suddenly not seeming as funny as she had thought.

"I'm sorry, I'm not very good at, um, 'pranks'. You should talk to Rainbow Dash." Fluttershy apologized.

"Well it wasn't really.... hmm? Rainbow Dash? She'd be that rainbow-maned pegasus, wouldn't she? Ahh, literalism..."

Fluttershy blinked at her, but after a moment gave a nod, never breaking eye contact. Luna appreciated it. "She loves that kind of thing. I think you'd get along well with her."

"Really?" Luna's eagerness betrayed her. "And what of the others? Say, oh....Twilight or somepony."

"Well, Twilight's very serious and-"

"I can be serious!" Luna spoke too quickly. Fluttershy jumped a little, and Luna felt her cheeks redden.

"I mean...I'm a scientist." she stared at her hooves, having almost forgotten she still wore her socks. She gave a weak smile at the sight of them. "I am." she insisted quietly.

"I believe you." Fluttershy said quietly. Luna glanced up at the table. Nova had spotted some mote of dust in the light and was batting at it. He leaned too far and tumbled forward. Luna couldn't help but guffaw as the kitten fell on his face, though she immediately felt bad for the poor thing. Fluttershy chuckled and helped the kitten right itself, giving the cat a good petting while she was at it.

"Today has been a day for new friends all around, I suppose." Luna replied. "And all I had to do was go out during my sister's day instead of during my hard worked nights..." The bitterness in her voice made her cringe inwardly. She saw Fluttershy flinch as well.

"I-"

"Forget I said anything." Luna replied, reaching up to pet Nova. There was barely fur for two hooves, and Fluttershy accidentally brushed Luna's. Sock against sock, and Luna found herself wondering whose would be softer. It was interesting how Luna's socks matched her before the idea could get any further, a different pony from before came by with their drinks, and with a start Luna realized she hadn't even touched her menu.

Chapter 3

Lunch went smoothly, and Luna's praise that she'd have to recommend this place to others had left the host with a nervous happiness. She gave a long yawn, and Nova matched it from his nest on Luna's head. Fluttershy had started back towards the shops, but paused for the princess.

"My apologies, again." Luna said, in all sincerity. "I'll be pulling an all-dayer at this rate, with my night ahead of me!"

"We could-"

"No, no, if I go back to the palace before the sun has set I know my sister will find time to ask me what's wrong, why didn't I enjoy myself... she tries so hard, but I wish she wouldn't sound so much like mother used to." Luna ended with a huff. "Though to be honest I've spent more time amongst ponies today than... well, for significantly more than a thousand years, I'll tell you. I wasn't expecting this bustle, it's enough to wear on one's patience."

"But, what if we went back to Ponyville? It's so much quieter there, and, couldn't you explore there?" Fluttershy offered. Luna paused, and pawed idly at the ground as she considered this.

"I suppose that would be an interesting excursion all of its own." she admitted. "But... I wouldn't want to cut your day short Fluttershy."

"It's, it's no problem..."

"You're too kind you know." Luna replied, quieting herself to Fluttershy's level. "Besides, I don't mean to imply I haven't been enjoying myself."

"W-well... what if we just explored Ponyville? I mean, I could be a guide like..." she ended in a mumble. Luna mulled this over, and gave a nod.

"It certainly can't hurt, now can it? Besides, I'd say today has been a success." she looked around, a smile spreading across her face. She had

been in stores, she had interacted with ponies in a way that hadn't involved terror and threats! She owned a kitten and several fashionable socks, but even all that couldn't explain the giddiness she felt thinking over the day.

"Do you mind if I transport us again?" Luna said as she tried to clear her head. "It'll just take a moment."

Fluttershy nodded and shuffled close to her, very close. It gave Luna pause, but she pushed her concerns aside and began to focus. Fluttershy swallowed and stayed calm as the world around them faded. They reappeared in front of Ponyville's library without trouble.

"Ah!"

"Woah!"

Luna blinked her eyes open, not expecting anypony to be around. Twilight Sparkle and Rainbow Dash were staring at the alicorn princess, who had along with Fluttershy apparently appeared between them and the tree. Twilight had her saddlebags on.

"Oh, p-pardon me Twilight Sparkle." Luna said quickly, trying to still her nerves.

"Princess Luna." Twilight gave a deep nod, not even a bow. She blinked.

"Nice socks."

"Huh - oh!" Luna shuffled as if she could hide her hooves. She saw Rainbow Dash put a hoof to her mouth. Luna definitely didn't feel like royalty with those eyes on her.

"I, your friend Fluttershy aided with me with a trip to Canterlot, you see, and-"

"Fluttershy?" Twilight asked. Dash had walked around and was poking at Fluttershy's hooves, making the yellow pegasus draw back.

"Didn't I ask Fluttershy to-"

"Oh, yes, that's my fault. I came looking to see if you'd be willing to help me find my way around Canterlot, you see-"

"Oh, yes. Princess Celestia's favor." Twilight responded. Luna tried not to frown at Twilight's wording.

"So... rather than reschedule, you... took my house sitter instead, Princess?" Twilight asked, sounding slightly too formal. She looked up. "And bought a cat."

"Well... I..." Luna's tongue felt dry and stiff. Twilight sighed.

"Well, unless you have any other requests?" Twilight asked. Luna shook her head stiffly.

"Good day then." Twilight walked around her and into the library. Dash kept chortling and followed Twilight away. Luna sat down right there in the road.

"Princess?" Fluttershy asked. Luna was staring at her socked hooves.

"She doesn't like me." Luna said, her voice cracking.

"I think she's just tired. She seemed tired."

"I should've known better. I'm an intrusion. I was a foal to ever think she would..." Luna bit her lip.

"Princess? Princess Luna? Do, do you want to talk about it?"

"I think I want to go home." Luna replied, her tight throat making her voice higher-pitched.

"Would, would you be willing to go to my home instead?" Fluttershy offered. Luna nodded, wiping her eye. Fluttershy guided her out of town, and Luna didn't really care for any of the looks she got. Her head swam; all Twilight had done was think logically, point out a distinct lack of sense in the situation. Luna began to curse herself on the inside. She had insisted time and time again that she was the logic-minded sister; that emotion did not get the better of her any more often than it did anypony else. Yet time and time again.... she wouldn't get along with Twilight, the superior scientist.

That much was clear to her now.

"P-princess? Are you okay?" Fluttershy led her to a nice, spacious cottage surrounded by simply cultivated gardens. Birds flew to and fro out of open windows, and a rabbit watched them approach. Luna hadn't even paid attention to the last few minutes of their journey. There Fluttershy went again, looking so worried over Luna. Yet Luna couldn't place her in the same category as Celly. Fluttershy's worry wasn't about Luna. It was for her. That revelation allowed Luna to begin to collect herself out of her misery.

"I'll be fine. This is your house?" Luna asked. Fluttershy nodded.

"I take care of all the critters in the forests around here. They come and go as they please." she said as Luna followed her inside. The rabbit that had been watching them hopped off the windowsill, but Luna was surprised that instead of a warm welcome, the bunny seemed intent on glaring at them both. He made a gesture suspiciously like pointing at a watch.

"Angel, please, not now." Fluttershy said. Luna blinked, and felt Nova stir. The bunny made the gesture again and tapped his foot.

"Angel please..." Fluttershy said earnestly. That was when Nova let out a surprisingly loud yowl for such a small kitten. He hopped from Luna's head onto her back and, from her back to the ground. Angel's eyes widened, and despite being bigger than the kitten, he quivered, turned around, and ran for it.

"Nova, no!" Luna tried to stop her kitten. Fluttershy held out a hoof gently to her shoulder.

"Angel will be fine, see?" she pointed, and Luna saw that the rabbit had hopped up out of reach on an end table. He glared at Nova, who was leaping playfully up at him. He then glared at the two ponies before springing from the end table towards the banister of a staircase, and then up out of view. Luna gave a sigh of relief. Nova gave up on the rabbit, and Fluttershy approached him carefully. She had gotten a small ball of fluff from somewhere while Luna had been watching him. As soon as she dropped it in front of the kitten he was off, pouncing on it and batting it away. Fluttershy gave Luna a gentle smile that Luna found herself returning

before she even thought about it.

"Would you like any tea?" Fluttershy offered

"No thank you, we did just have lunch."

"Oh...right..."

"Thank you all the same, Fluttershy. You really are a good friend." Luna sat down, removing her saddlebags and placing them by the door. She gave a sigh and traced one hoof around the ground "I suppose I should tell you why I was sniffing like a little filly back there, shouldn't I?"

"It's okay, I think I understand."

"You do?"

"Mmm-hmm." Fluttershy nodded.

"I... I guess it's pretty obvious. I mean, you don't blame me, do you?"

"No, not at all."

"Thanks. I think Celly - erm, I think Celestia knows, but naturally I can't very well talk to her about it?"

"Oh, of course."

"I don't know what she thinks of it either. You think she'd have more interest when her little sister has a crush on her only student!" she heard Fluttershy squeak, and when she looked up, the pegasus's eyes were filling her head.

"I-I don't think I understood after all."

"O-oh." the blood drained from Luna's face. She worked her lips for a moment, trying to find enough saliva to speak.

"I-I have a crush on Twilight Sparkle. Just a little."

"You do?"

"Well..." Luna pawed at the ground briefly. "It's just... she saved me! Even Celestia couldn't manage to get through to me. When you all purged me of... that thing..." Luna paused involuntarily as she shivered. "I felt each one of you, felt some part of your souls. Each one was beautiful in its own right, but what I remember the most was her open heart, welcoming me, telling me even I had a place..."

Fluttershy nodded. "Even that first day, I already felt like I was Twilight's friend."

"But that's all she was offering me, wasn't it? Friendship. And I've probably screwed that up too..." Luna's whole body seemed to slump, making the alicorn appear smaller than she was. Fluttershy slowly drew up beside her and sat down right next to her. She lowered her head until she forced her way into Luna's field of vision. Her teal eyes reminded Luna of stained glass, filtering through them the light of the day, or in Fluttershy's case, some inner light Luna was only now noticing.

"You could... she was just tired."

"She was upset. That I had called on this to begin with. You heard her. She was doing this for Celestia. She only cared about my sister!" Luna closed her eyes. A hoof wiped the tears forming at her eyes, but it wasn't her own. Luna opened her eyes and saw Fluttershy's hoof just in front of her.

"Socks make everything better." she said quietly, bringing Luna's attention to her tear rolling down the smooth green fabric of Fluttershy's sock, refusing to stain the magically enhanced cloth. She kept her hoof still in front of Luna's face, and Luna found herself mindlessly studying the lines of the fabric, the way the leaves were just a darker, thicker fabric, and how snugly the whole thing wrapped around Fluttershy's hoof, tinted slightly by her yellow coat beneath. Luna brought her own hoof up and grabbed hold of Fluttershy's, pressing it against her face to feel the smoothness of fabric, seeing no other way to do so given the socks on her own feet. Fluttershy kept still until Luna finally let go.

"Sorry."

"Don't be." Fluttershy said. "Princess?"

"Hmm?"

"It's... it's not because it's the day."

"What?"

"You said you were only having a good time because you came during the day. It... It wasn't that."

"Then what?"

"You're a lot like her." Fluttershy replied. "You have an open heart. I, I feel like you're my friend already. I could never, with Princess Celestia... I could never feel like I was so important to her."

"Really?" Luna paused, searching for something else to say, something to ask the mare in front of her. But while she searched for her words, Fluttershy filled the silence for her.

"I, I'd be willing to help if you want... with Twilight."

"You mean...?" Luna couldn't believe it, but Fluttershy nodded. Luna didn't even register her body's movement until her arms were around the pegasus, squeezing until her chest was tight against Fluttershy's. The other mare squeaked but stayed still, relaxing after a moment, judging by the feel of her breath against Luna's neck.

"Thank you Fluttershy. You are a true friend." Luna said. That was when Fluttershy finally moved. Luna hadn't even realized her friend was tense, but Fluttershy relaxed in her grip and returned her hug, resting her head on Luna's shoulder. Luna's head seemed to be buzzing, and the emotion that overcame her being was all through her body, from the tingle in her hooves to the swelling in her chest. But aside from all else, Luna felt comfort in Fluttershy's embrace. At that moment she felt that that was all she needed, all she could ask for.

She realized she had held on to Fluttershy for probably a few minutes past comfortable for the other mare, and awkwardly let go of her. She felt the blush spread across her cheeks as she saw Fluttershy's face again. There

wasn't a trace of fear or worry in her gaze, and it was the first pony who Luna felt didn't hold an iota of either. Even her sister was clearly worried about her, even Twilight Sparkle had been apprehensive. What Fluttershy gazed at her with was something entirely novel to the night princess. Luna thought back to Fluttershy's offer, and the idea seemed suddenly off to her.

"Thank you, but no thank you. If I want a relationship with her, it is only fair I try to be her friend, which I haven't been today. Besides, it's, it's just a silly crush. I barely know her. And I really ought to get to know the rest of the elements while I'm at it." Luna realized she was yammering, and stopped herself before she made a complete fool of herself for the umpteenth time.

Fluttershy nodded silently, and then her eyes lit up. "We should see Rarity!"

Luna flinched. "The one I made watch Twilight's home all morning?"

"Oh... it's just, she's so good with clothing, and oh-so fashionable... I thought you would..."

"I'm sure we could see her another time, maybe once this incident isn't so fresh on everypony's mind." Luna said, looking to the ceiling. "Thank you Fluttershy, but I promise, I am happy enough now, I think. Though we should see about getting you some more socks." she looked down and smiled. Fluttershy giggled.

"Well, I do own a few other pieces..."

"Really?"

"Oh yes. Would you like to see?"

"I, I would, thank you." Luna replied. She paused to check on Nova.

"My home is kitten safe." Fluttershy assured her. "And puppy safe, bunny safe, turtle safe..." she smiled, and Luna chuckled, realizing this was as close to a joke as Fluttershy got. It was endearing, somehow. Fluttershy turned around and led her upstairs, into her bedroom. She opened a large wooden wardrobe, and Luna's eyes couldn't help but widen.

"A few things?" she asked dryly, giving Fluttershy a wry smile. Fluttershy

looked away, but had a small grin about her that suggested playfulness. The wardrobe was filled with dresses, scarves and hats.

"A few things. This one is one of my favorites." she pulled down a green dress adorned with blue and white flowers. Little green slippers were tied carefully to the hanger.

"Haha, green really is your color." Luna said brightly. "It matches you perfectly!"

"Rarity made it for me, to wear to the gala."

"Ahh, you must have turned so many heads, hmm?" Luna's quip had its intended effect as Fluttershy's face turned as pink as her mane.

"I, I don't really..." she ended in a mutter too quiet to make out. "It didn't go well." she added, at least loud enough for Luna to understand.

"Well, Celly- I mean... oh, blast it all. Celly-" she saw Fluttershy stifle a giggle and gave her a look. "Celly told me it had been such fun."

"I... I didn't have a good time. Not until the very end at least. Princess?"

"Hmm?"

"Were, were you at the gala?"

Luna cringed. "No... No, I refused to go. Celestia had kept a lot of traditions the same, but I didn't know anypony and I spent the night...erm, well, in my room."

"I see."

"Oh, and she tried so hard to convince me to go." Luna held a hoof to her forehead. "I must have looked like such a child. I need to act my age."

"H-how are you supposed to act when you're a thousand years old?"

"Well over a thousand, thank you. I don't know... regal, proper, benevolent...." as she listed off traits, she was surprised to see Fluttershy

appeared, of all things, troubled.

"Yes?" Luna asked.

"..." whatever Fluttershy said, it was beyond Luna.

"Could you try that again?"

"But... this."

"Fluttershy, please."

"But I like you like this." Fluttershy squeaked, shutting her eyes tight. Luna began to respond, but realized she was drawing a blank.

"I... um... thank you." she settled on eventually. Both of them stared around the room, not looking at one another. Luna's eyes drifted back to the wardrobe.

"Could I, um, could I see some more?"

"Oh! Oh, Of course, here, Rarity didn't like how this turned out but it makes great winter wear..." the tension broken, they got back to rummaging through Fluttershy's things. In addition to numerous dresses, the gentle pegasus had accessories to spare as well, and Luna found herself trying on a giant pair of red-rimmed sunglasses out of curiosity.

"Whatever do you own these for?" she asked with a laugh. Fluttershy's giggles told her she looked as ridiculous as she felt.

"I tried to make a disguise for when I was modelling."

"You? You modelled?"

"Um... a little. I thought it was what Rarity wanted me to do. I had to disguise myself just to get away from everypony."

"Why ever would you want that?" Luna frowned. "You must have had the adoration of hundreds!"

"I guess, I guess so..." Fluttershy flinched. "I just like it better spending time with my friends, and, and I couldn't. I couldn't get any peace, and everypony was so loud..."

Luna nodded solemnly, thinking this over carefully. "I hadn't thought of it like that, but I understand, I think. I think this is the best day I've had in... well, a long while." she laughed and shook her head. "Anyway, these are precious, Fluttershy. I can only imagine how adorable you'd look in them." the words left Luna's mouth before she could catch them and silence them. They hung there in the air, suppressing all further conversation. Luna continued to stare at the clothes, waiting for something to happen.

"Princess?"

"Y-yes?" This was it. She could imagine what Fluttershy was about to say next. Please get out. Please leave, please don't come back.

"They look cuter on you." Fluttershy's voice was quiet and smooth, almost melodic. Luna's cheeks burned bright red, and her wings twitched in temptation.

"Oh, look at the time! I need to feed all the critters." Fluttershy turned to the door, but paused and looked back to Luna. "Would, um, you like to join me, Princess?"

"Oh, well... yes, thank you. That sounds lovely." Luna said, trying to keep some measure of her composure. She followed Fluttershy out of her room and downstairs. They found Nova curled up under the sofa, and Fluttershy assured Luna that they could feed him once everyone else was done. The pegasus stopped by a closet and retrieved a simple set of saddlebags that she filled with different types of feed and a few other supplies. Luna kept her curiosity to herself as she followed Fluttershy outside. The pegasus began to hum to herself as she trotted away from her house, and while Luna couldn't place the melody, it sounded familiar, and it was well sung enough that she didn't want to interrupt Fluttershy to ask. Luna realized that Fluttershy wasn't kidding when she said she took care of the animals around; there were easily a dozen dens visible at a single glance, likely more, along with the multitude of birds and other tree-dwellers. As Fluttershy approached one such den a family of badgers came out, looking positively pleased to see her. Fluttershy got out some seeds and a small

amount of fruit. Luna watched as Fluttershy fed them, finding herself smiling at the display as Fluttershy carefully nudged the fruit into the badgers' paws. An open heart, she thought to herself. That was what she had claimed had drawn her to Twilight. So how had she not noticed the big heart of this sweet pony until now?

As Luna contemplated this, a baby badger trudged up to her, curious about her and clearly not afraid of ponies like most animals would be. Luna found herself stepping back, trying to disinterest the little creature. It continued towards her however, and Luna gave in and allowed it to sniff her. Then it bit lightly at her hoof.

"H-hey!" Luna pulled her leg back, but the badger had found purchase on her sock. She tugged at it, but the thing just growled and tugged back. Before she knew it the sock slipped straight off her hoof. Triumphant, the baby badger rushed towards its den.

"Hey, give that back!" Luna called. Fluttershy looked up and saw Luna sticking her head down the badger hole. She began to back up, and her head emerged with the sock in her teeth. On the other end of the sock was the baby badger, growling and digging in his little paws. Luna was winning ground, but given that the badger was clinging tight to the end of her sock, how much progress she was actually making was unclear.

"Little one, please let go, oh dear." Fluttershy trotted over. After a few moments of coaxing the baby badger was convinced to release his prize. Luna took the sock out of her mouth and looked it over.

"I should have made them stretch proof too. I think it's fine, the saliva is at least running straight off." she held it away from herself telekinetically.

"I'm sorry."

"Hmm? What for?" Luna asked. "It's fine, anyway, see?" the glow of her horn shimmered, and the sock was completely dry. She slipped it back on and stomped her hooves.

"Right as rain!" she said, bringing a smile to Fluttershy's face. "I'll watch out for inquisitive critters from now on, sorry."

Fluttershy nodded, and got back to work. Luna followed carefully as Fluttershy fed several birds, some squirrels, rabbits and even a couple beavers. By the time they were finished, the sun was setting. Fluttershy found Luna gazing at it, directly at it, apparently not at all bothered by the stunning light.

"Celly will be expecting me back soon." she said.

"O-oh. You have to go raise the moon, right?"

"Well, it's not like I have to be in Canterlot specifically for that, but still."

"Could, could you, um... stay for dinner?"

Luna paused. "Heh, it is my usual breakfast time. Thank you, Fluttershy, that'd be wonderful. You're too kind." This time, saying those words earned her a delighted smile, Fluttershy's happiness clear in her eyes. Another pony who wore her emotions openly, for good or ill, Luna realized. A pony who understood her.

Dinner was simple but enjoyable, and while neither of them spoke much, Luna managed to convince Fluttershy to speak a little about herself. How she came to Ponyville (Luna was skeptical about the sonic rainboom, but apparently there had been other witnesses), her job with the town as its pest control (vital for a farming town), and her friends. Luna found herself enraptured by Fluttershy's tales; everything seemed to turn into an adventure when the six of them got involved, and Fluttershy admitted that through all the fear, she was glad for the things that brought them all together and brought out their hidden strengths. The sun fell as they ate, and Luna could feel the onset of her domain.

"I cannot express enough how thankful I am, Fluttershy." Luna said as her host cleared away the remnants of their meal. Nova had been fed and was active again, so the two ponies lay on the floor and helped him play with a couple of stuffed mice.

"I'm so glad, Princess." Fluttershy replied.

Luna smiled and began to gather her things, bringing over her saddlebags and making sure everything was in order. She stood up and grabbed Nova, deciding to put the kitten on her back this time. She paused, and then dove in to hug Fluttershy again, squeezing the pegasus tight for just a hoofful of seconds.

"Good bye then, Fluttershy."

"Come back any time." the pegasus offered. Luna lit up.

"I'll take you up on that." she replied, her tone bright and half-joking as she released Fluttershy. From her perspective, the world around her began to dim. From Fluttershy's perspective the alicorn princess became translucent, her already dark colors turning her into a shade, and then a mere shadow, until all Fluttershy could make out was a slight blue tinge to the couch behind Luna. And then not even that. Fluttershy turned away and began to hum to herself. She began up the stairs, intending to put away the dresses she and Luna had gotten out. She was halfway up when she heard a call.

"Lulu, come back!" the call was accompanied by uproarious laughter. Luna fumed as she headed for her bedroom, socks muffling what should have been angry stomps. She had gone straight for her sister, ready to delight and amaze her with her fast friendship to Fluttershy, along with her day out. Her mind had been positively brimming with things to say. How gentle a soul Fluttershy was, how polite she managed to be without adopting the stiff formality most did around them. How understanding she had been... how eager Luna felt to return to her already...

But no! Her sister had been staring from the moment they met, and since they were alone she had openly allowed herself an ever-widening smirk as Luna had tried to recount her day. Luna hadn't even gotten to the clothing shop before she had to ask her sister what was going on. Celestia must have been trying to hold her laughter back, because when Luna insisted her socks were perfectly fine and regal her sister had broken down. Luna was probably the only pony in at least a thousand years to see the princess of the sun roll around on the floor, clutching her sides.

"Lulu, come now." her sister was suddenly above her, dancing around in the skies. Luna hated when she did that. Celestia landed in front of her,

blocking her path.

"I was just.." Celestia brushed her nose in a bad attempt to hide her smirk. "No, tell me again. Your socks are darling, you look... you look...." she ducked and shook her head. Luna stomped her hooves and turned around.

"We'll have to get you a scarf." Celestia said, in front of Luna again. "How do you feel about hats?"

"You're impossible!" Luna told her, taking to the skies. She bumped into Celestia, who was laying on nothingness above her, ignoring gravity.

"You're adorable." her sister replied. Luna screamed wordlessly in frustration, and winked out of existence. There was only one Celestia again, and she took a deep breath.

"You can't end it like that, you silly pony." she said to nobody, before trotting away, looking as serene and knowing as always.

"Fluttershy?" the pegasus turned around, wide eyed, as Luna was in her living room again.

"Princess?" Fluttershy stared as Luna was blushing so hard it was visible straight through her coat, nearly beaming pink. The alicorn squirmed a few seconds before explaining herself.

"I may have forgotten my socks before approaching Celly." Luna admitted, splaying her legs slightly to emphasize her point. "Benevolent ruler aside, sis can be cruel." she saw a look of shock come across Fluttershy's face as she turned back down the steps.

"No, no." Luna nearly tripped over her tongue to explain. "I just mean she teased. And when Celly teases...ahh. If it's not too much trouble, could I just stay here for a little longer? Hopefully she'll be off to bed soon. I can deal with her later."

"That's fine, Princess."

"Thank you. Right, um... I need to raise the moon. I'll just be outside." Luna said, getting up and heading for the back door. Fluttershy nodded and watched her go. After a moment's pause, the pegasus followed after Luna.

The princess was already in a trance, sitting atop a small rise in the land, not really even a hill, Nova at her side. Fluttershy paused and stared at her. At first she thought it was an effect of the deepening shadow, but on closer inspection she realized that she just couldn't make out where Luna ended and the night sky began. She could still tell there was a pony there, yet trying to follow the outline of Luna always led her astray. She could see parts of the night through Luna, a night not yet in the sky. Twinkling stars were visible through Luna's mane and coat, which mixed deep purple with pure black. Her outline became distinct again only as a silver glow enveloped her, somehow imparting on Fluttershy the feeling that the source of the light was actually very, very far away. She glanced up and realized that the moon was rising, and it was the pale moonlight that she saw enveloping Luna. Once the moon was over the horizon, she saw Luna lower her head and then stumble but catch herself. Fluttershy rushed forward as Luna pulled herself up.

"Don't worry." Luna said before Fluttershy reached her. "I lost a lot of my power when... when Nightmare Moon was defeated. I'm getting it back, however." Fluttershy trotted over and sat down beside Luna, her eyes forward, looking to the rising moon.

"You don't like the darkness, right?" Luna asked. She didn't sound quite the same as before. Her voice seemed to glide across the evening air, wrapping around Fluttershy's head and giving the impression the alicorn was everywhere at once even though she sat right there. Fluttershy kept her eyes on the moon.

"I didn't use to." she said. "Princess?"

"...please. Luna."

Fluttershy swallowed and nodded. "L-Luna?"

"Yes?"

"Would, would you like..." Fluttershy closed her eyes, gathering herself.

When she next spoke, it was both with calmness and confidence. "You don't have to leave... I mean, r-right away."

Luna paused, and glanced over at Fluttershy, who's gentle gaze was still focused on the moon. Luna's mind went back to the touch of Fluttershy's socks against her cheeks.

"There is one thing I have learned since returning." Luna responded quietly. "The day, my sister's day, is opportune for activity and celebration of life and friendship. Perfect for cavorting with friends and exploring the world. But my night?" she saw Fluttershy turn to her. She raised a hoof and brushed gently against Fluttershy's cheek. The pegasus leaned in at Luna's touch, closing her eyes and nuzzling against the soft fabric-coated hoof.

"My nights?" Luna repeated softly. She saw Fluttershy's wings twitch open as the pegasus turned to her. She felt Fluttershy's socks again; briefly up at her shoulders, then around her body. She realized her own hooves had gone around Fluttershy's torso.

"My nights are for something quite different..." she whispered, her breath mixing with Fluttershy's.

Celestia looked out over the balcony, staring up at the moon in the sky. Her normal gentle smile was replaced by one much warmer, more personal.

"And you didn't want to go out." she chuckled at the moon. "The night is yours, sister, enjoy it. When you get back we'll discuss your 'experiments'. And maybe your day out while we're at it." she turned away from her balcony and headed inside, leaving the night and its secrets to the ponies enjoying them.