

# Warmth for the Night

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# Chapter 1

## Frozen

The map hovered in front of the lone unicorn, barely lit by the glow from her horn. By all appearances, she seemed to be lost, even going so far as to reach up and scratch her mane in confusion. The filly had been to other large cities before, of course, but never to Canterlot. Continuing forward down an empty street, the unicorn entered into the light of a street lantern. She looked to be a bright shade of red, while her mane and tail were a darker red and an orange.

*Come on, Heat Wave. The Pull says I should be heading this direction, but all I have to show for it is being lost!* the filly thought to herself, lowering the map to look up the street ahead, and then back, noticing the simple saddlebags and mark upon her flank in the lanternlight. A thermometer with a flame behind it. Nearly losing herself in remembrance of the day she had gotten it, Heat Wave gave a soft snort and turned back to her duty.

Okay, so not duty, but her...Desire? Maybe not. The Pull was still guiding her, so, giving up on the map, Heat Wave moved forth, her hooves clopping loudly in the empty streets in the midst of the night.

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Luna, Princess of the Moon and Night, sat upon the throne she shared with her sister, Celestia. This night was no different from the others she held vigil through for the last several months after her release from Nightmare Moon's hold by Twilight and her friends. A lonely night that few ponies paid attention to, and that few have ever thanked her for. And when somepony did, it brightened Luna's night, but the melancholy that was always within her would swiftly return.

Luna knew her elder sister was worried for her, Celestia continuously begged her to leave the history books behind for a day, and to get out of the castle to socialize. 'And yet, she knows how people look at me, how they fear and loathe me.'

A cackle and a voice, "Then maybe you should take hold of that fear of theirs, build upon it, rule with it! Or better, give me control and I shall do so, and bring about the darkness once again!" The voice was all too familiar. Nightmare Moon. While the Princess was grateful that Twilight had freed her, she didn't dare mention to anyone, even her own sister, that the evil enchantress still lived on as a voice in her mind.

The alicorn despised her talks with Nightmare Moon, but she had to reply, or else her past would haunt her throughout the night once again. "I gave you that chance once before, and what did we get? Things did not turn out better, they turned out worse! Instead of being loved, I was hated, and in trying to banish you from me, instead my sister banished us both to the moon. A THOUSAND YEARS we were there!" Luna was practically screaming in her head, having a conversation she'd gone through a hundred times. A thousand times, a million times before! And though all this were going on in her head, tears sprang to Luna's eyes as she remembered the thousand years of pure loneliness, of boredom, of....Nightmare Moon. And all that she got back from her alter-ego was a laughing. A rich and evil cackling devoid of kindness. "Oh, yes, dear Luna. A thousand years of me. And even at the end, you practically begged for me to fix everything, to make everything right. Oh the delicious trust of a naive foal."

Luna ground her teeth as she fell back within her mind, knowing who Nightmare Moon was placing all the blame upon, and she was right, it was all Luna's fault. Once again, only a laugh greeted her.

Outside of her mind, Luna had curled up around herself upon the throne, sobbing into her shoulder when a small "Excuse me, Princess Luna...?" brought her out of her inner-most thoughts.

Wiping her eyes as best as she could with a hoof, Luna stood and attempted to look her most regal, and tried to talk with her stately voice, yet, instead, it came out in an uncertain voice, “Y-yes, my faithful subject?” There was a crimson unicorn before her throne, bowed as deep as she could be and....Shivering? It can’t be from the cold, it was not quite winter, yet and....Luna blinked, the air around her definitely seemed warmer.

The unicorn showed no notice of seeing Luna’s tentative behavior, and came out of the bow with a question of her own. “I am Heat Wave, majesty, and I wish to know if you are still holding...” Looking around at the empty halls of the throne chamber, Heat Wave finished her question, “...Court?”

Luna was taken aback. Few ponies came to her to solve problems, or to pay mind to her during the hours of the night. In fact, ever since she was freed, a bare hoofful of ponies paid much attention to her anyway. Her mood took a leap of hope and it brightened her night just a bit. “Of course, dear Heat Wave, what is it that you need of me to solve?”

Before Luna could properly react, however, Heat Wave had leaped up the stairs and throne her neck and hooves around Luna’s own neck, giving her the most awkward of hugs. In Luna’s ear, the unicorn whispered, “It is not what I need, but what you need. Sometimes, the flame’s warmth is noticed most during the night.”

Surprised, Luna dropped all pretenses of being royalty and simply leaned into Heat Wave’s hug, a few tears escaping from her eyes to fall upon the red pony’s shoulder. “.....Thank you...”

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“Sister, I heard you had an interesting visitor last night?” Celestia asked, peering at Luna out of the corner of her eye while at their private dining table, eating that morning’s breakfast.

Swallowing the bit of salad she had been chewing, Luna glanced shyly over at her elder sibling and gave a terse nod. "She....Hugged me. For several long moments, and then just ran out of the chambers, as if that was all she came to do. Heat Wave was the unicorn's name. She was nice...I guess."

Celestia simply nodded, taking a silent sip of fresh orange juice. A long silence followed before either of them spoke again. "Do not be afraid to talk to her if she comes around again. In fact, do not be afraid to go out and talk to other ponies, either. I know you're afraid to socialize, dear sister, but do please try."

The Princess of the Moon said nothing, instead finishing her meal and standing to head back to her alcove in the maze of the royal library to catch up more on the history that had gone on while she was imprisoned upon her own moon.

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"Dear Diary,

I finally arrived in Canterlot and the Pull began again. I was lost for a time before it finally led me to not somepony's home, but the Palace of the Sisters itself! Never before had I been so terrified. I did not know if it would try to drag me to some forbidden section of the palace and get me in trouble again! But no, that is not what happened. Instead, it took me to one of the Sisters themselves, Princess Luna! If I was terrified before, I was ready to wet myself now. However, she seemed to be the most lonely pony in all of existence, just the feeling from her making me depressed. I darted ahead and gave her a much needed hug, surprising even myself. I ran out shortly afterward, praying to Celestia that I would not have guards on my hooves to take me to the dungeon. Or to banish me! Or to throw me in a dungeon in the place they banished me to! I can still feel the Pull, directing

me back to Luna. I shall go again tonight. May Celestia protect me if things go wrong.”

Heat Wave closed her journal and rubbed at her temples. She was getting a headache again. This always happened if she did not follow the Pull, even if it was for a break. And was it ever a doozy of a Pull. It took all of the unicorn’s willpower not to go dashing out of the inn room and straight up to the palace.

Looking out the one window in her rented room, Heat could see the shadows growing longer, the street darker. While she could not see the sun, she knew it was setting, and the tiny patch of sky she could see was growing black, stars beginning to twinkle. And like she did every night, she looked up at them and made a wish...

# CHAPTER 2

## COLD

Luna had woken up a short time ago, having brushed her mane into compliance, and eaten a hearty dinner with her dear sister. That pony from the night before was still in her thoughts, and, thank her sister, Nightmare Moon had been silent since then. Setting her crown upon her mane, behind her horn, Luna stepped out from her chambers through the quiet hallways until she noticed her sister upon the balcony they met at every morning and evening.

Standing next to her and watching the setting sun, her horn began to glow violet as Celestia's own did. "The day shall sleep," Celestia whispered to Luna, the sun slipping beneath the horizon.

"And the night awakens," Luna replied, her moon peeking up over the distant horizon, the crescent giving soft light to the landscape as stars began to awaken and twinkle above them. They had done this ritual twice a day, every day, since she had been freed, and it never grew boring for her. Mostly for the fact she and her sister would just take in each others' presence.

Remembering about Heat Wave, Luna softly said "I miss my old friends..." Causing Celestia to turn and look at her with wide eyes. Her younger sister rarely brought up their life before she had been banished, and, in fact, could barely remember it. Much of her memory from before the banishment was gone.

All Celestia could really say had been told many times before, and each time with full sincerity. And so she whispered it again, "I am so sorry, dearest sister. I didn't fully know how to work the Elements...I can't imagine what it was like for you, but I was tortured by my decision, my choice, every



day and night for the entire millennium. I studied up on the Elements, so that when you came back, I would not repeat my mistake...I am so sorry..."

The alabaster alicorn lowered her neck around her younger sister's, a single tear escaping from her eyes and trailing down over Celestia's cheek. A low sobbing came from beneath her, and the Princess of the Sun pulled her sister in against her side with a wing, hoping to comfort her.

Luna's voice managed to eke out from between her sobs, "It was my fault. Entirely my fault! Even the things Nightmare Moon did, I allowed her to do. I was so terrified when I was changed back that you were going to take me to the headmare...I still have nightmares about it all..."

"Luna...My dearest sweetest sister, I love you with all my heart and being. I would never do such a thing. I have things I need to finish up, my dearest sister, before I turn in. Please remember everything I've asked." Hugging her sister once more, Celestia held for for a few moments before releasing her and walking away, peering back with tear filled eyes.

Luna herself had stopped sobbing, however, tears still dripped for her eyes. Looking up to the sky, she watched as a few shooting stars flew across the stars in all their glory, and she smiled to herself. Ponies all across Equestria wished upon falling stars, and Luna herself could hear them, if she were close enough. Looking upon one of the falling stars, she focused, and they came to her.

"Please have mommy and daddy bring me a new sister."

"Tomorrow's the big game for the Canterlot Colts, I will do anything if they beat the Manehattan Mares."

"Please oh please allow me to pass the magics exam tomorrow!"

"Please help break this spell she placed upon me..."

That last one startled Luna out of her trance, causing her to shake her head as she regained her senses. That last voice was...Heat Wave...Who was she talking about? Luna? And what kind of spell?

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Heat Wave packed the rest of her things into her saddlebags, including her pouch of bits, which was starting to look very light. Her traveling life was hard enough, leaving everypony she ever knew behind, without the associated trials that finances held upon her as well.

She hadn't meant to sleep so late, only take a brief nap as she waited for the midnight hours! She didn't rush, though, rushing made mistakes, and the Pull could wait several moments for her to finish up. Using her magic to settle the saddlebags into place upon her back, Heat Wave took one last look into the mirror to make sure her mane was nicely brushed before stepping out of her rooms, then out of the inn.

And in ten seconds flat, or so it felt, she was standing before the throne room of the alicorn sisters, but she could not see Luna upon the throne, even though the Pull told her the Princess was nearby. Walking cautiously past the two pegasi guards at the entrance, her hooves sounded loud hitting the tile of the floor.

"Princess Luna? I-I'm sorry I am late for Court, I had accidentally slept too long-OH!" Heat Wave was saying, trudging slowly up to the throne before Luna's head popped out from a side door, startling the poor unicorn into falling onto her tail with an oof. Of course, Heat Wave quickly turned it into a bow before quickly hopping to her hooves and galloping up to the throne, and the entrance to the side of it.

Luna's eyes widened and she brightened slightly to see the pony who had visited her the night before, and whose wish she had heard. "It is nice to see you again, Heat Wave. Any unexpected hugs from you this time?"

Heat Wave blushed, embarrassed by her action the night before, "Oh, erm, not this time, Princess. I came this time to provide you some company

for the night, if you wish for it.” Then, the pony realized what she said and frantically waved her hooves, “But not in that way, of course!”

Luna raised an eyebrow and shyly approached the unicorn before her, wary of her visitor. “I would certainly hope not in that way. I barely know you, and Celestia would probably throw you in the dungeon. Or banish you. Or throw you in the dungeon to the place you were banished! But...What did you have in mind?”

“Oh...Ummm...” The filly looked around, before spotting her saddlebags way behind where they had slipped off her back. Running back to them, she levitated them back to her haunches and came back up to Luna, “Well, talking, mostly. You seemed to be quite lonely when I last met you, and I felt if somebody could give you company, it would more be a night owl like me. I had always enjoyed the night, and used to even have a telescope when I was a foal. But...Telescopes are heavy and are not a good thing to carry on travels like mine.” Heat Wave’s face saddened, and she shook her head to move her mane out of her eyes.

Immediately, Luna’s face broke out in a smile, ‘Another pony who enjoys my night! Oh, Luna, please do not screw this up!’ However, her smile quickly vanished when she heard the second voice. “Like everything else you have screwed up, little foal? Or have you forgotten why everybody fears you? Whispers about you? HATES YOU!? This pony shall be no different. You will see, and you will come crawling back to me, begging me to take control once again!” That cackle. That ever present evil cackle rang through Luna’s head, causing her ears to fall back.

Noticing the gesture, Heat Wave took an uncertain step back, thinking she had said something wrong. “P-Princess? Is s-something wrong...?”

Snapping back to reality, Luna shook her head and attempted a reassuring smile, “Just some thinking, Heat Wave. Let us go to my private quarters! I have a telescope that, while not as large as the observatory’s, is

still powerful in and of itself. Come, come!” And she turned, skipping away looking, while not happier than before, definitely more content.

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After having stargazed for what seems like hours, with Luna showing Heat Wave the various constellations and other assorted wonders of her night sky, the alicorn finally asked a question.

“Your packs look heavy, Heat. What do you carry within them?” Luna asked, bending down away from the telescope to nuzzle at the saddlebags that had been taken off and set aside, lifting away the flap of one to peer inside and seeing....Books. Untitled books with fanciful designs. Heat Wave, however, in a panic jumped upon the saddlebags and slammed them closed, her eyes as wide as dinner plates. “No! They’re...Uhhh, journals...Diaries, my own private thoughts. Very private!”

Nodding like a bobblehead pony, Heat Wave finally noticed the shocked expression upon Luna’s face and lowered her head with a blush. “Er, sorry, Princess. I travel a lot, and keep diaries. I have no place I call home, so I carry all my past ones with me as well.”

Tilting her head just enough to be noticeable, Luna watched the pony before her before asking, carefully, “Heat Wave, what did you mean by wishing that the spell I had placed upon you would be broken? Are...Are you falling for me?” And while Heat Wave’s pained expression said one thing, her words said another.

“N-No! Never! I mean, no, that isn’t it! How did you know about my wish!?” Heat’s heart was racing like a pegasus across the clouds, as did her thoughts. Her legs felt locked in place, and the sound of a doom bell played in her head.

Luna crept closer to the filly and peered down into her eyes, "Is...That the truth? I can hear the wishes of anybody in Canterlot when they wish upon my stars at night...I heard yours."

A great amount of panic showed upon Heat Wave's face and she scurried back, then eventually sprinted from Luna's quarters. Her eyes wide, Luna didn't do anything for a moment, before she finally gave chase, but she had apparently lost the young unicorn. Yet, Luna knew she would be back. Her saddlebags still lay upon the alicorn's floor.

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It was a couple hours until dawn, and Heat Wave had yet to show back up, and yet her saddlebags remained, causing Luna no amount of confusion, sadness, and over all, curiosity. It did not help in the least that Nightmare Moon had been pestering her the entire time with a haughty 'I told you so' cocky attitude.

Her curiosity getting the best of her, Luna fished out the most worn looking of the books and opened it, skimming through the pages until she reached a point where there was a large span of time between the two entries. The second looked interesting, and so she sat down to read.

"Dear Diary,

I am sorry I have not written in a while....Many things happened, and I do not even trust you enough to keep track of them. I have decided to finally leave home, bidding farewell to my tearful parents. I keep feeling something, like a pull towards some unforeseen destiny, and it has only been getting stronger. But when I started feeling like following it, it lessened, as if satiated. I am scared, to say the least. I have never been far out of town, but...I trust my destiny."

Flipping the page, Luna kept reading, intrigued by the unicorn's writings.

“Dear Diary,

I believe that earlier I found my destiny, or, I think it is. Or he is. A young colt who I befriended. He said he was lonely and had been wishing for a playmate, and then said I had come along. The past couple days have been nothing but fun and adventures for us, and I haven't felt this happy in months.”

“Dear Diary,

That...Pull is back, and it isn't pointing to Overboard anymore. I decided to follow it, leaving my colt friend behind. And while I was sad I was doing so, I was even happier that I had made him happy. Maybe that is my destiny? To make others happy?”

“Dear Diary,

This isn't what I wanted at all! I met two more fillies who were unhappy as well, and I had to leave them behind, too! I have to follow the Pull, or I start getting headaches, some bad enough to make me scream in pain, or even knock me out! I tried resisting once and I woke up later that day with a killing headache. What did Trixie do to me? She said she was Great and Powerful! What did she do to me!?”

Luna set the book down and rubbed her eyes with a hoof, then continued to read. It was the same across all the pages. Heat Wave would follow this....Pull and meet some lonely pony and make them happy, or try to. And when she succeeded or failed, this Pull would take her somewhere else, causing the unicorn to abandon those she became friends with. She saw some parts where it looked as if tears had smudged the ink, and even one entry that was completely unreadable, the entire page looked as if it had been dunked into a bucket of tears. What went on with Heat Wave? And who was this Great and Powerful Trixie that was mentioned multiple times through the journal? Maybe her sister can find out for her.

# CHAPTER 3

## WARM

Dawn had come and gone as Heat Wave had wandered the streets of Canterlot, not really going anywhere important. She had left her room at the inn behind, unable to pay for another day, and all of her possessions were in her saddlebags. The ones Princess Luna currently had in her hooves. The unicorn could not understand how everything had gone wrong so fast, nor could she wonder why the Pull was still there, soft, but not urgent. Heat bumped into a unicorn going the opposite direction and muttered a soft apology, then moved off to the side of the road so that she wouldn't do so to the clutter of other ponies going about their morning business.

*I can't keep doing this...Following the Pull and befriending others, then abandoning them when they're happy. I've seen what happened to a couple, their glares...I will remember their glares. And what will happen when I do so to Princess Luna? Oh, Celestia, what shall I do?* The downtrodden unicorn thought to herself, settling down upon her hindquarters to think.

Heat had so far been unable to find a way to break the spell in any way, it was too deeply ingrained into her psych and could cause her permanent damage if disrupted, she had been told. What she had not told them in return was that just having the spell in her was already doing the same. She wanted a nice home, a nice town to live in, friends she could see daily, who she would never abandon, and she could not go back to the Princess and ask for her help. No, never, not for that. She would have to explain about everything, and if they could do nothing, and the Pull took her, the filly would still have to leave.

Heat Wave could just imagine it all now. "By the Royal Orders of Princesses Celestia and Luna, Goddesses of the Sun and Moon, Ruling

Sisters of Equestria, the unicorn known as Heat Wave is to be imprisoned until her ultimate fate is decided by the injured party, Princess Luna. May Celestia have mercy upon her soul.” The image of the darkest, deepest dungeon came to mind, Heat Wave dressed in dirty beggar's rags with nothing but rats for company, the shadows of a noose being prepared for her neck seen through the bars of her prison, and the hate and disappointment upon Princess Luna's face as the unicorn ascended the gallows. Ohhh, she could not think about this anymore, it was making the filly's mood even worse.

*Wha-What if she's been reading my diaries!? Oh nonononononononoNO! Even if I return now, she'd never trust me! ....Not that I blame her, nobody should trust me, all I'll do is befriend them and then abandon them...* Slowly, the unicorn made her way back up the street, then slipped down into an alley and flumped down against one of the brick walls. The sun's light did not penetrate past the rooftops above her, and the alley was quite chilly, with the occasional gust of wind not helping in the least. One thing brightened Heat Wave's mood by a smidge, though. She was not named such, nor had that cutie mark on her flank for being cold. Her horn glowing yellow, a flame appeared on the ground in front of her, and she felt the air noticeably become warmer.

She had started reminiscing about how she had gotten her mark when a sudden and forceful “Excuse me?” broke her from her thoughts, startling her into causing the flame to vanish.

At the mouth of alley stood not one, but two Royal Guards, causing Heat Wave's heart to immediately sink to her hooves. She could see one of them looking down at the cutie mark on her flank, and then she knew what was going to happen.

“Come with us. The Princess wishes to speak with you.”

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Celestia sat with her sister in Luna's chambers, looking over the journals strewn before them. Luna was talking, "This is what I meant, it is the same thing in every journal. In fact, these journals stretch back to before I was released fr-" She stopped before continuing, "What happened months ago. Heat Wave goes to some new pony, becomes their friend or just spends time with them, and then leaves....Is she going to do that with me?"

The elder sister looked up into Luna's eyes, and the profane sadness within them. It was a moment before she spoke. "Luna, my dearest Luna, I will protect you from anything and anypony I can, including those who would abandon you, and that if anything ever does happen to you, I will be there for you. I will always be here for you." Leaning over, Celestia lovingly nuzzled Luna's mane before pulling away, a smile crossing her face.

A knock came at the door and both Celestia and Luna peered back at it as a colt's head poked in to say, "Majesties? The Captain of the Guard is here, as you requested."

"Thank you, Swifthoof. Send him in," replied Celestia, standing to her hooves as she awaited the Captain.

In walked a gruff looking pegasus with a scar running from his mane down to his left cheek, and an permanent glare in his eyes. His gold armor seemed to be more ornate than the other guards, and he even seemed to walk as if his station was the most important around. However, he bowed before the two Princesses and then stood, asking, "You called for me, Highness? I assume there is a matter of importance that you wish me to take care of? Has one of our neighboring kingdoms done something I have not yet heard about?"

As Luna got to her feet and walked to Celestia's side, the Goddess of the Sun shook her head, "Nothing so drastic, thankfully. No, something of much lesser importance than that, Captain." Her horn began to glow and a sheet of parchment floated over to the guardspony. "This is a matter of

importance to Luna, and as such, to me. I require your guards to find this unicorn for us. And do not worry that you will have to search the entire city. We know the general region she is in.” Next, a map floated out from Heat Wave’s bags and pulled open to show a small circle around the area of the inn the unicorn lodged at. “Use that sketch to find her, and the map. Bring her back to the palace, I will take her in the smallest of the state rooms. And please, do not be rough with her.”

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With her head held low to the ground, Heat Wave followed the guards bracketing her, one fore, one behind, preventing the unicorn from escaping. The slow plodding through the crowds, as well as their glances to her only worried Heat further. Her mind raced, mostly with dark thoughts and half-formed plans on how to get herself out of this mess.

The guard behind stretched his wings and noticed the pony before him practically shivering herself apart. “What do you think she did to get called to the palace by the Princess herself, Fire Rain? Had to have been serious, this filly’s practically scared to death.”

“It ain’t none of my business, and it ain’t none of yours. I would rather not join her for digging too deep into what it was. Let’s leave it alone,” Fire Rain replied to his partner.

“Well, I know it is not our business, but haven’t you been wondering as to what she did?”

“Of course! This be what I think it was,” Fire Rain replied, having his own idea of what Heat Wave had done.

And off the two pegasi went on a conversation going back and forth about what Heat Wave could have done, and the things Princess Celestia would do to her for it. In one thought, Heat imagined that she would probably prefer the dungeon or banishment, or even both to some of ideas

the guards came up with, and in the next thought, she fainted plum away onto the cobblestones of the street at a unexpectedly graphic idea of the pegasi.

“As you started this, Jet Stream, you get to carry her to the palace,” Fire Rain flat out said, unamused by Heat Wave fainting.

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Heat woke to find herself in the plushest pillow she has ever laid in. Raising her head and looking around, she was amazed to find herself not in a dank dungeon, but instead, a small room with piles of cushions strewn about, as well as a low table, and a window on one wall framing the afternoon sun.

“Ahhh, you have awoken. I have several questions that I expect you to answer with complete truthfulness and sincerity,” a motherly voice said to one side of her.

Turning her head to look, Heat’s ears immediately flattened to her head and she cowered back at the sight before her. She had been expecting Luna, yes, but most certainly not Princess Celestia, who she was alone in the room with. And not only that, but Celestia’s usual smile was gone, and her eyes were hard and glaring.

“As much as I was in glee that my sister had a pony visit her and show her some kindness, the fact that we have read your journals has killed that glee. So, my questions.” Celestia moved forth, towering over Heat Wave’s cushion and stared down at her. “Who is Trixie, what was this spell she placed upon you, what exactly does, or did, it do, and why do you continue to do this?”

Heat Wave cowered back further, her eyes wide and her body trembling. It was too much for her to handle, and she nearly felt herself faint dead away again, but she held on, not wanting to know what would happen

if she fainted again. “I-I-I-Please d-don’t be angry!” she managed to get out, her voice high pitched and squeaking in her fear.

The Princess moved away and went to the window, looking out at her sun. Heat Wave could see her draw in a deep breath, then let it slowly out, composing herself. “I am not angry, I am concerned. Concerned for my sister’s well being, now,” Celestia turned to stare at Heat, the intensity in her eyes gone. “Please answer my questions.”

Gulping, Heat drew in several breaths to calm herself, then glanced out the window her Princess was at.

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“Heat Wave! Heat Wave!” shrilled a couple fillies running to her from across her parents’ lawn. The broom she was using with her magic stopped sweeping the path as the unicorn looked up at her closest friends, Sparkle Dancer and Shadow Heart, a purple pegasus and yellow earth pony respectively.

“Whaaat? My mom has me doing chores and I can’t come to play until they’re done!” Heat Wave pouted. Still doing chores at her age, it isn’t fair! But as her mom said “You live under our roof, you live under our rules.”

“A wagon pulled into town, some sort of magic show! A Trixie of some sort or another! Heat Wave, she can do magic! Maybe she can help you with that spell you wanted to try!,” Shadow exclaimed. “And besides, we still have to go get Moon Glow!” Moon Glow was the youngest of the four friends, another dark blue unicorn who looked up to Heat Wave.

Heat’s eyes grew wide and dazzling, and, her broom forgotten, she dashed inside the house. “Sweetie, are you already done with the-” “Not now, mother! There’s a magic show in town! I can finish the chores when I get back!” “Alright, but be back by-” “I know, mother, you’ve drilled the rules into me already! Be back by nightfall!” And out sprinted Heat, a book being placed into the saddlebags upon her flank.

“Let’s hurry and get Moon before all the good spots are taken!” Sparkle giggled, zooming into the air and doing a loop-de-loop before coming over to hover above her friends. “Ooo, maybe we can get autographs, too!”

“I thought you wanted the Wonderbolts’ autographs,” asked Shadow, staring up at the pegasus as they started towards their fourth friend.

“Oh, pffft, you can get the autographs of more than one pony!” Sparkle rebutted. “Besides, who else can say they’ve seen a magic show like this before!?”

As Heat Wave was about to reply, Shadow looked over at her with half-lidded eyes, “That didn’t involve nearly burning down the school. And the treehouse. And the store. And your mom’s shop. And-”

“Okay, okay, I get it!” Heat Wave laughed before going, “Oh! There’s Moon Glow!” The unicorn pointed with a hoof at their other friend, a young unicorn laying beneath the shade of a tree and studying a book. “Knowing her, that isn’t a magic book, but some romance novel. I don’t see what she likes about those things.”

“Hush!” Shadow said to her, before brightening up and running over to Moon Glow. “Moon! Put that away! You have to hurry, there’s a magic show in town and we’re all going to see it!”

Her mouth forming an O of delight, and her book forgotten, Moon Glow leapt up to her hooves and dashed past them, “Then let’s go!” she yelled in giddiness.

The lot of them giggling, Heat and her friends raced to the pavilion in the center of town, a lone pony-pulled cart-home sitting there in wait. Already, a small crowd of ponies were gathered, and the posse of fillies rushed in to take their places behind the crowd as more ponies filtered in

from around them. The wait seemed like an eternity as ponies around them whispered to each other, the excitement in the air palatable.

The wagon began to unfold before their eyes, drawing the gaze of everypony as a voice boomed out, "Fillies and Gentlecolts! Ponies of every kind! Be prepared to go into absolute awe at the mighty magics of the Great and Powerful Trixie!" And upon saying her name, a large cloud puffed up and vanished, revealing a light blue filly in an oversized magician's hat and a cape clasped by a large gem at her neck.

"The Great and Powerful Trixie will show you magics nobody can match! Stories that will amaze and astound you, and, above all, anypony who wishes to challenge the Great and Powerful Trixie may do so, for I am the most talented and magical of all unicorns in Equestria!" And with that, fireworks, flares, spirals, and lights danced upon and around the stage, the entire audience oooing at the beauty and splendor of the show. Nearby, an earth pony snorted and in a stage whisper said to those around him, "I bet she's never even beaten an Ursa."

Heat Wave swore she could see Trixie's eyes light up at the thought, yet said something else, "The Great and Powerful Trixie has no need to defeat the dreaded Ursa Major! They would cower and hide before my greatest magics, never to show their face again! But you, neighsayer, do you wish to challenge the Great and Powerful Trixie!?" Another round of fireworks burst over the crowd, bringing about another round of cheers, while the nearby colt lowered his head and backed away.

"Onwards with the show!" And thus began the most magical moment besides gaining her mark that Heat Wave had ever experienced. Stories were spun, tricks were produced, and challengers soundly, and hilariously, defeated. The stage resonated with the sound of bits thrown upon it, while Trixie bowed for them all before vanishing in a loud puff of smoke, and her stage folded back up into her wagon, dragging the bits and other paraphernalia with it. As the crowd dispersed, Heat Wave could only stare

at the wagon, her eyes like saucers with the magic of the show still glittering within them.

Later that evening, just after sunset, Heat snuck out of her bedroom window and climbed down to the ground, her saddlebag with the magic book within it upon her flank. Quietly, she snuck out of the yard and then galloped to the meeting place, noticing only Shadow Heart and Sparkle Dancer waiting for her.

At the look in her eyes, Sparkle rolled her own, "Moon fell asleep, it seems. Either way, we're here now, let's go!"

And off they went, sprinting for the wagon located at one side of the pavilion. Walking up the steps, Heat and her friends gulped, then knocked upon the door with a hoof, pulling the book out of her saddlebags and hovering it near her. The top half of the door opened, revealing an annoyed Trixie devoid of hat and cape. "What is it? What is so important as to wake the Great and Powerful Trixie?" Then, noticing the book floating nearby and the three fillies' smiles, Trixie shook her head with a snort. "Trixie does NOT do autographs!"

Shadow's and Sparkle's faces fell, but Heat was quick on the pickup. "It's not an autograph book, Trixie!" She heard Sparkle cough under her breath and whisper 'The Great and Powerful Trixie.' Only causing Heat to roll her eyes. "I was wondering if you could do a spell for me?"

"The Great and Powerful Trixie also does not do party favors!" The light blue unicorn turned her nose up and shut her eyes.

Another object floated out of her saddlebag and clinked, causing Trixie to open a single eye. "D-Do you take payment? I can pay."

Shadow Heart's eyes bulged, "Heat! That's what you've been saving from your allowance and job for a-"

“I know! But this is more important right now!” Turning her head to Trixie, she put on her best pouting face, “Pleaaaaaaase!?”

Trixie, interested now, eyed the bag of bits before pulling the book over with her own magic and opened it to the bookmark. After studying and reading it over for several moments, causing Heat’s smile to falter and her hope start to fall, Trixie finally spoke.

“This....Spell is no match for The Great and Powerful Trixie’s magic!”

Heat could have sworn she heard Trixie falter, and saw a look of uncertainty pass across her face, but she was too elated to really care. “Oh, thank you!” she exclaimed, passing the bag of bits to Trixie and wistfully wishing she could have kept them.

Watching Trixie close the door, the filly unicorn wondered if she’d made a mistake, but the door opened once again, fully, showing the blue unicorn before her in the showmare outfit.

“Stand back, and be amazed by the Great and Powerful Trixie’s magic!” The unicorn stood upon her hind hooves with her forehooves in the air, but there were no fireworks or dancing lights to accompany her this time. However, the three ponies did as they were told and stepped back, then watched as Trixie went upon all hooves, her horn glowing.

Heat Wave’s eyes grew wide as she watched Trixie’s horn grow brighter, and a similar glow appear around her own body. ‘It’s working, it’s working!’ But something happened. Something went wrong. What she could see of Trixie was a unicorn that was panting, straining, and then the magic on her horn went out, while the aura around Heat continued on, glowing brighter, blinding her. She still isn’t sure what happened next, she woke up on her stomach, though her friends said the glow went into her body.



Heat stood up, dazed, her friends at her side, but she felt it, the spell had worked. She could tell that in front of her, Trixie was lonely. A weak “Thank you...” escaped from her lips as her friends led her off back to her home, and Sparkle helped Heat back in through her window, whereupon she dropped her saddlebags to the floor, crawled into bed, and immediately fell asleep.

Everything seemed to go right, she could tell whenever another pony was lonely, but then the Pull came. And she left her home town, wandering, her Pull taking her to those who were lonely. And as time went on, the blessing became a curse. The spell that helped her find those who were lonely did not help her stop being such, did not let her stop wandering. Did not let her go back home. And now, it had gotten her into more trouble than she could get out of.

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Heat Wave nestled herself deep into the pillow. Afternoon had turned into evening, and talking about what had happened had left her mouth dry and her mind tired. Princess Celestia had moved throughout the room several times in her telling, and even had water brought to her to quench Heat’s dry mouth. She was not used to talking so much, and it still was not easy to do so while the Princess was watching her.

“What was the spell meant to do?” Celestia asked, quirking an eyebrow while settled upon a pile of pillows.

Leaning over and dipping her muzzle into a bowl of water to drink deeply, Heat tried not to keep the Princess waiting with her answer. “I-It was meant to tell me what others were feeling, in this case, lonely, sad, angry, those things, so I could help comfort. I-I bring warmth to others, that’s my specialty, in more than one way, and I found that spell in a library book, and it sounded perfect for me...”

Celestia thought for a time, causing Heat no end of fidgeting, then whispered, “That sounds like an advanced spell. A spell like that that goes

wrong can cause a lot of trouble if it is done incorrectly, or done by somepony who cannot control or does not have the power for it. I assume that is what happened with you.” Standing, Celestia gracefully walked over to Heat Wave’s pillow and then said, in a harsher tone, “We will find Trixie and have her break the spell for you, since it was she who cast it. Until then, stay within Canterlot, and if you do anything to hurt my sister, including abandonment, a dungeon will be the least of your worries.

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“My Faithful Student Twilight.

I seem to be of need of you right now in the search of a certain pony that goes by the name of ‘Trixie’ or ‘The Great and Powerful Trixie’ a unicorn. I have in my hooves another unicorn who had a spell go wrong from this certain showmare and she is in need of this unicorn to take it off. Please tell me of any of your findings whenever you can.

Your teacher, Princess Celestia.”

Sooner than she thought, a return message came in and materialized before her. Opening it and reading, Celestia allowed a simple sigh to escape her lips. Things were going to be more trouble than they were worth. Standing, she set the scroll with a stack of others she had received in the past from her student. Snuffing out all the lights in the room, the alicorn slipped into her bed and nestled beneath the covers, removing her chestplate and crown to place them aside. The next day was going to be a long day indeed.

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Heat Wave was panicking, hyperventilating. The inn room was too small, and her thoughts too many. “Oh Celestia, I’m doomed! I’m doomed! I can’t help if the Pull takes me! What if it takes me before this spell is removed. Oh Goddess, I am so dead! I can’t do this anymore. Oh why oh

why did I ever get that spell done!? What things could be worse than-No!  
Don't think about it! I don't want to know!"

The unicorn's possessions lay all over the room's floor, showing some of the results of the filly's panic and her general distress.

Against one wall lay her newest diary, and a quill scribbling her exact thoughts on it at a skewed angle, just pages of panic.

# CHAPTER 4

## HOT

It was in the hours before dawn, and Luna was peering up at her beautiful night sky with interest, her large telescope set upon the balcony before her. The night had been quiet, and even Nightmare Moon had barely said a peep within the back of Luna's mind, which was something she was extremely grateful for. The Nightmare seemed to talk more nowadays than she had when she was first pushed back into the alicorn's mind. The Princess paid no attention to why, though, it had been the same thing when they had been imprisoned upon the moon. A tear formed within Luna's eye, the subject, even the thought of it, was still painful. She could not remember much of that time, only the memories that the Nightmare within her had left her, and during their imprisonment, they had slept, only waking occasionally. Those times had been better in some ways, and worse in others. While she was able to escape the namesake nightmares of her counterpart, it brought Luna's own thoughts to the forefront, as well as Nightmare Moon's ever present ranting and raving.

A knock at her door caused Luna's head to snap in that direction, pondering who would bother her at this hour. "Come in," the night goddess announced, blinking as the door swung open and none other than her elder sister slipped in, looking tired.

"Sorry for disturbing you, my thoughts have been roiling with yesterday's events. So I decided to get up early and spend some time with you, dearest sister, as well as get something off my chest," Celestia said, coming in and shutting the large double door behind her. The Princess was bare of her crown, chestplate, and hoof adornments. Celestia was not worried that her subjects would see her, her room was practically across from Luna's.

Looking around, Luna scurried over to a pile of cushions and hastily maneuvered them into a nice bed for the two alicorns. Luna sat on one side while Celestia came over, and with a grateful nod, settled down on the other. The two sisters leaned against one another, flank to flank, sitting in silence for several long moments before Luna gazed up at Celestia, a slight cock of head showing her curiosity.

“Um...So, what did you wish to talk about, sister? I mean- I’d love your company! And I don’t wish for you to feel forced to tell me, but...Well, I can’t help but wonder.”

Celestia locked her loving eyes upon her younger sister, then spoke softly, “I had a talk with our little friend yesterday, and I found out what all this was about. However, I....think I overdid it with her. Luna, I would protect you against anything that would dare ...threaten you, even other ponies, and I grew... well... not angry, per se, but definitely heated enough to use harsher language than necessary with the poor thing.”

Celestia sighed, bowing her head until her neck was against Luna’s, a simple hug for her sister. “I still worry for you, everyday, and it is starting to show. For a thousand years I suffered for what I did to you. And for a thousand years I waited for when you would return. It was the soonest I could unlock the seal upon your prison, dear sister. And now with you taking your duties back, I thought the stress of this whole ordeal would vanish. But instead, it’s worse than before. The life of a ruler is never easy, and the life of a goddess even harder.” Tears began to streak down Celestia’s cheeks, causing Luna to start in silent alarm, her concerned eyes watching over her sister.

“...I’m here now, sister. And I won’t ever leave again, willingly or not. I love you so much....” Luna rubbed her nose against Celestia’s cheek, raising a hoof to wipe away her tears. Usually it was her who needed the comforting, who needed that strong shoulder, but tonight, it was Celestia. Luna did not know all of the hardships her sister faced, but she could guess at them.

“Thank you, dearest sister. I can feel myself get angry at the Legislature sessions, at decisions I alone could make. At everypony demanding things of me. Having to choose between the happiness and well being of my subjects, while still trying to make things work. It just builds up. I’ve been lucky, so far I haven’t had any outbursts where others could see them. I had to deal enough with the ‘Our Tyrant Princess, Celestia’ propaganda that happened after your...vacation, and even now, ponies fear to make mistakes in my presence. I would still like to know where this whole ‘Anger the Princess, and to the moon you go’ nonsense came from, and what exactly it has to do with these toasters.” Her cheeks damp from her tears, Celestia gave a soft chuckle, her down mood beginning to be replaced by mirth, instead. “Though, I do have to say that the tabloids that list me as a Master Trickster amuse me greatly. Though, why they call it trolling is beyond me.”

Luna gave an uncertain giggle as well, having read many of the tabloids Celestia had chosen to give her. She really enjoyed the way she had tricked Mr. and Mrs. Cake into overflowing her teacup. But seriousness came back into the conversation. “Sister, what shall you do with Heat Wave? Do you think she will be fine?”

Sobering up quite quickly, and wiping the tears from her eyes with a hoof, Celestia turned her head to look out the window. “I do not think she will be ‘fine’. I was quite harsh with her, and I worried much more about your safety and how you would feel if she hurt you than I was about her well being. And do you know how hard it is to find a certain pony if they decide they do not wish to remain in Canterlot? I’d like to see that spell upon her broken, but we cannot do so without her and this...Trixie.” Looking over to Luna’s desk, the white alicorn’s horn glowed, her magic hovering a quill, inkpot, and sheet of parchment over to them. “I believe I shall write her a formal apology, and something that should hopefully cheer her up.....Do you know if she has a dragon or something that could make the delivery easier?” Celestia asked, turning towards her sister.

All Luna did was shake her head, resting it down upon her sister's forelegs. She was deep in thought with a certain Nightmare of hers.

"Oh yes, 'dearest' Luna. I would have been there waiting to pick up the pieces when your first 'friend' left you. Oh? Wait. She was not your friend? Oh my...how pathetic!" The voice echoed within Luna's mind.

Meanwhile, Celestia was writing out a heartfelt apology to the unicorn she had so terribly frightened. While the castle did, in fact, have dungeons and such, they had been unused for many years, and she did not see them needing to be used for many many more. She even wrote how the unicorn was not only welcome back at the castle, but encouraged to come back. Feeling that she had finished, Celestia rolled up the parchment and sealed it with her royal mark, before sending it off with a puff of magic and a seeker spell. It would take longer to get to the target, but it was faster than normal Air Mail by a pegasus. Especially if it was that darned wall-eyed pegasus that seemed to have a habit of causing property damage whenever she brought in the mail.

A whimper from Celestia's sister brought her back to the here and now, causing her to look down as she heard Luna cry out, "Shut up...Shut up! SHUT UP!"

Gasping in shock, Celestia nudged her sibling's cheek, concern nearly radiating from her body and eyes. The nudge motivated Luna to spring her eyes open and glance up at Celestia, her eyes wild, yet beginning to focus. Looking terribly guilty, Luna mumbled something under her breath, bringing Celestia to ask, "I'm sorry, what was that, dearest sister?" Another mumble was all she got in return. "Please, Luna, tell me what is bothering you."

A deep breath, and then a flood of words greeted Celestia. "Nightmare Moon never left-- she's still a part of me and couldn't be gotten rid of because to get rid of her would get rid of me and I can *still* hear her- All. The. Time. She *never* leaves me alone and oh, how I wish I could have

just a month go bye without her horrible laughter in my head..." This continued on the same string for the next several minutes, Luna barely taking in breaths for the long tirade, her eyes beginning to overflow with tears as she buried her face into Celestia's chest.

Celestia could only stare down at her sister, her eyes tiny pinpoints while her thoughts attempted to keep up. *Nightmare Moon is still in her head? But....Then.... The Elements of Harmony only managed to restore Luna to her body and not fully banish Nightmare Moon. My poor dearest Luna, things are worse off for you than I first imagined.* Celestia could feel that anger building up again, not at her sister, but at the being who had caused so much trouble for the two alicorns. Keeping it tempered down with self control, she simply placed a hoof against Luna's lips, silencing her. Luna looked upward, fear in her eyes only to see absolute love in her sister's own. "Luna, my dearest sister and closest friend. I told you before, no matter what happens, I will be there for you, thick and thin. Our parents set me the task to take care of you, and while I failed that in the past, I will not fail you again. Remember, Nightmare Moon may still be there, but she has no true hold over you." *I hope.* Celestia unfolded a wing and draped it over her sister, pulling Luna against her body before leaning down to kiss her lovingly upon the forehead, just beneath her horn. "Come, sister. It is nearly dawn, and thus, breakfast. We have much to do today, and I do not feign enjoyment at having to deal with more of these self-entitled nobles at the Legislature meeting later."

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The swirl of magical mist streaked through Canterlot's skies, seeking somepony for the delivery. Minutes passed, then an hour, as the seeker spell triangulated, then pinpointed the recipient of the scroll. Whereupon it darted to a nearby inn and into the open window.

The room it entered into was in shambles. The bed was unmade, books were strewn all over, and an inkpot had been spilled in a large puddle on the floor. Upon the bed lay a pony in what appeared to be a



wholly uncomfortable position, her eyes shut in sleep and her cheeks dampened, as if she had been crying for some time.

None of this mattered to the spell, which paid everything except for the pony absolutely no mind. Coalescing above Heat Wave, a scroll appeared and hung in the air for a moment before dropping. Landing on her body, it bounced off and fell to the floor in the worst conceivable place: right into the puddle of ink.

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Once the morning hustle and bustle began outside of her window, Heat Wave awoke fairly quickly, but instead of getting up, she continued to lie there for another hour before finally slipping out of the bed with a thump upon the floor. She felt a lot calmer now, after her night of panic, but the unicorn could still feel worry worming its way through her mind.

Stretching her legs, Heat's eyes wandered over the mess strewn about her inn room. The books everywhere, her other assorted possessions tossed willy nilly, and even a huge sigh at the ink pool a scroll was sitting in.....It took a moment before it dawned upon her. A scroll!? As quickly as she could manage without splashing ink everywhere, Heat Wave nabbed the scroll from the pool of ink, immediately noticing the Equestrian Royal Seal upon it. Swallowing with trepidation, the filly broke the seal and pulled open the scroll, getting ink all over her hooves and noticing it had even soaked through the parchment. Not much of it was legible. Something about an apology, and being neither welcome and even encouraged not to come to the castle again... At least, that is all she could read or understand from it, but she had gotten the gist of the letter. The Princesses were wanting an apology from Heat Wave, and was telling her not to come to the palace again unless it was for the apology.

Stretching her legs, Heat placed the scroll daintily upon the window sill so that the ink would dry, then as an extra measure, placed the emptied ink pot atop of it before she turned to the task at hand. Cleaning up the room.

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It had taken Heat Wave forever to clean up the room. Most of the time was spent on that ink pool. Of course, she had remembered that the type of ink she uses was flammable for one large reason....Easy cleanup. The scorch mark left behind upon the floor, however, was not so easy to clean. That had taken up a good part of her morning, and during that time, Heat had noticed something: The soft, gentle Pull that had pointed her to the palace and Princess Luna was gone. Instead, a more pressing one had replaced it, pointing elsewhere into the city, which had given Heat no end of relief. It meant that she would not have to leave the city and brave Celestia's order.

Her newly reorganized saddlebags upon her back, Heat made her way out of the room, shutting the door with a hoof before making her way down the stairs and out of the inn. She wanted to explore before she had to confront this new Pull. Maybe a nice breakfast somewhere, and window shopping. *I haven't shopped, much less window shopped, in ages. And Canterlot is the perfect place to do so! And maybe to spend a few bits,* Heat Wave thought to herself. She could just imagine herself in a new dress, maybe one of those designs she had seen while coming here. The ones by...Rarity, she believed? Oh, they had been so delightful to behold, but she could never afford one in a thousand years, not with her meager earnings. Oh, but she could dream.

Exiting the inn and making her way down the street, Heat could see all of the various shops and stalls that were lined up along the sides: bakeries, clothiers, souvenirs stands, and jewelers. All manner of shops. Suppressing a yawn, Heat's gaze drifted back and forth. Her sleep schedule had been disrupted by Luna's Pull, and last night did not help it in the slightest. As she passed a bar, she stopped, causing the pony behind her to run right into her rump. "Hey! Watch it!" She could hear behind her. Heat moved off to the side of the street, peering at the bar. The Pull was pointing her inside of there, and there was a loneliness inside she couldn't

place, yet it felt familiar somehow. *I can check it out later. It knows it has my attention, so the Pull won't hurt my head if I decide to wait until later.*

Heat Wave turned away from the bar, then reached back and settled the saddlebags across her flank into a more comfortable position before pushing onward. So much to see and do before she had to get back to the Pull.

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The bar door lay before her once again, and Heat could barely see through the tinted windows. It was mid-afternoon now, and she had explored Canterlot as best as she could without getting lost. She had even bought a hat! A nice white, wide-brimmed thing with fake flowers decorating the front. It kept the sun's glare from her eyes.

Pushing the door open, Heat peered inside. The tables strewn about seemed to be packed, and there were few spots open at the bar. *Alright, which one are they? I can feel it all around me, there are a few lonely ponies here, but they are not what the Pull is pointing at.* Pushing towards the bar, she managed to quite clearly hear, "Barkeep! Trixie demands another oat shake!." *Of all the ponies it had to be...*

Setting her saddlebags down by a barstool, she quickly hopped up onto it to listen to the conversation. She wasn't beside the certain light blue unicorn, but she could certainly hear what was going on. "Sorry, no more for you. You're over-budget on your tab, and I want to see that paid before you get any more service." Heat could plainly hear a huff come from Trixie, but nothing more. An idea formed in her head, and reaching down, the unicorn liberated a few bits from her dwindling supply, then placed them above the counter.

As the barkeep, a brown earth pony stallion, passed by, she noticed his cutie mark. It was that of a martini shaker, and for some reason it made Heat giggle. He took notice of this, and through her grin, she managed to

ask, "Could I get two oat shakes, please? Oh... and could you pass one to that boisterous unicorn over there?"

Rolling his eyes, the barkeep took the bits and went off to fetch her drinks. While he didn't mind budding romance, or even lust going on in his establishment, he simply could not see what that red unicorn saw in the light blue one. A few moments later, and a shake was placed in front of Heat, whereupon she immediately pounced upon it. The second was dropped in front of Trixie without ceremony, much to her surprise. Looking inquisitively at the barkeep, he pointed to Heat, Trixie's purple eyes meeting the other unicorn's orange.

Floating the oat shake in front of her, Trixie slowly approached Heat, then asked, "Does Trixie know you?"

"I would certainly hope so. You performed at my village one day. I approached you later that night for a spell, which you cast upon me when I paid you for it," Heat replied, taking a deep drink of the shake."

"Well, of course! Trixie is Great and Powerful! She assumes this shake was in clear thanks for a spell well done." Trixie beamed, her ego coming back in full force. Heat felt that it needed to be deflated a bit.

"No, this is in thanks for 'a spell well done.'" Whereupon the hoofslap to Trixie's cheek immediately cut her ego down a bit. And caused a large wave of pain to shoot across Heat's temples, making her nearly tumble off the stool. She had forgotten that the Pull does not forgive trespasses such as a physical hit. Her oat shake, however, was safe. Before the either of them could say another thing, the barkeep coughed loudly, startling the two and pointing to a sign that said "No fighting." Muttering a pained apology, Heat glared down at the shocked Trixie.

"You DARE hit the Great and Powerful Trixie!?" Trixie's horn began to glow, and then suddenly, two large earth ponies grabbed Trixie and Heat

by their manes and dragged them over to the door, tossing them to the street.

“W-Wait! My sadd-” FWOOMP! Her saddlebags smacked right into Heat’s face, the diaries within dazing her.

“Now look what you have done, you stupid foal!” Trixie yelled, glaring over at Heat.

“Stupid foal? Stupid foal!? You ruined my life! You and your ‘Great and Powerful’ magic! The spell went wrong, you idiot! Instead of giving me what I wanted, you cursed me!” Tears began to streak down the crimson filly’s cheeks, more threatening to issue forth.

Trixie sat there staring at Heat, while ponies maneuvered around them, ignoring the filly and mare in their way. As Heat began to sob, all Trixie could do was feel like this was unfair to her. First Twilight, and now this unicorn. It was like she was a filly magnet. Then Trixie did something she had done only a few times since her mother had died. She apologized. “T-Trixie-No...I am sorry.” Of course, it wasn't close to being a sincere apology; she had only given it in order to cease the filly's bawling.

Turning her gaze to Trixie, Heat mumbled, “Please...Help me...”

As Trixie was about to say no, a thought crossed her mind. *If I help her, maybe I can learn something new. Something that I can use to get my revenge on Twilight Sparkle. Oh why did that filly have to catch my eyes!? The only one to defeat the Great and Powerful Trixie...Leaving...me not so Great, nor Powerful.*

Heat had burst into a fresh wave of tears, cementing Trixie’s decision. “Fine. Fine! As long as Trixie does not have to listen to this foal’s waterworks!”

Heat visibly relaxed, her sobs instead being replaced by hiccoughs as she set her saddlebag upon her back. Wiping the tears from her eyes and placing her disarrayed hat firmly upon her head, Heat Wave managed a weak, "Thank you." before she rose to her hooves, and despite the unicorn's protests, began dragging Trixie away by her foreleg.

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Trixie looked utterly indignant, her hooves crossed across her chest while she leaned up against the wall of Heat's room. She had been dragged here partially against her will, and still no explanation had been given on what she was supposed to do. While a small part of her mind said she owed Heat for the shake, the rest was in a huff. "Trixie still does not see what you need her for, much less why she is wasting her valuable time standing here!"

Heat was digging through her saddlebags, tossing books upon the bed. "Uh huh, valuable time spent at a bar being alone, hmmm?"

"Trixie was busy thinking!" she cried. *Of course, thinking of a certain unicorn. Why oh why does Twilight haunt Trixie's thoughts so much!?* A blush spread across Trixie's face, but it went unnoticed by Heat, who finally found what she was looking for.

Pulling out that spellbook from months ago, Heat looked aside, embarrassed, "I, erm, stole this from the library long ago." Setting aside her shame, she straightened up and opened the book to the spell Trixie had cast upon her. "This is the spell you placed upon me, and I need it removed. You're the only one who can remove it, as you're the one who cast it! Please take it off!"

Trixie sighed and rolled her eyes, "Fiiiiine." Dropping to all hooves, she approached the other filly. She then placed her horn near Heat's face, which started to reflect the light cast by Trixie's horn glow. The showmare could definitely feel her spell there, and followed it along all of it's routes

and details, her eyes widening at the full scope of it. *No wonder it got out of my control. This thing involves mental magic, and is incredibly complex! What did Trixie do to this fil-Oh no...* Trixie could see how it wrapped around Heat's mind, its roots deep and complex. It practically controlled the unicorn before her. And not only that, there was something more. Something much more grim than a simple spell. It was killing her, slowly but surely. A few more months of this and the unicorn before her would be dead, her mind an empty shell. *And Trixie does not know if she can reverse it, or remove it! It's beyond Trixie's power...Oh Twilight, why did you have to show Trixie just how weak and powerless she really was!?* Trixie pulled back, trying to hide the look upon her face.

Heat's eyes looked over at Trixie expectantly, hope blooming upon her face. "Can you do it? Can you remove it?" Trixie stayed silent, and Heat understood at that moment what it meant, her smile vanishing, taking her hope along with it.

"Trixie...Cannot...It is beyond her..." She was in a horrible mood now. Her bravado and ego long gone. She had doomed this filly to die...

"But, you're the-"

"Don't! Don't say it, not now!"

Thoughts raced across Heat's mind as she thought of what to do. She knew of only two others who could help her, and they both hated her. The Princesses did not want her to return unless it was with an apology, and even then, who knew if they would welcome her back afterward? Just then, Trixie whispered something that caused Heat Wave's blood to run cold, and she hurriedly began to pack her saddlebags. Maybe it would be a good time for that apology, and to beg Princess Celestia to forgive her enough to help.

---

Heat Wave swallowed hard, standing before the entrance to the castle and the audience chamber just beyond. The throne containing Celestia could be seen in the very back, and throughout the great hall, nobles and diplomats were wandering about, while near the throne itself, a small line of petitioners were awaiting their turns for the chance to speak with the Princess. Glancing aside at the white pegasi guards on either side of the entrance, and Trixie next to her with her haughty expression having returned, Heat moved forth, her head held low as they entered the back of the line.

It seemed to take hours for the line to move forward as ponies trickled one by one out of the audience chambers. Some left with happy expressions, while others left disappointed or angry. And then, it was just the two of them before the Goddess of the Sun, a long line stretching out behind them. Swallowing for what seemed the hundredth time that day, Heat Wave ascended the steps to the throne. Turning back to peer at the other unicorn behind her, Heat heard the princess say in her cheery voice, "Ahhh, Heat Wave, I see you received my letter. What is it that you need of me?"

For a moment, all Heat did was stare up at the ruler of Equestria, before abasing herself to the floor as much as she could, practically begging, "I'm sorry! I'M SORRY! I did not mean for any of this to happen! Please do not throw me in a dungeon! Please do not do anything worse than throw me in a dungeon! Please do not throw me in a dungeon and then do worse things than that to me! PLEASE!! PLEASE!! PLEEEEEEEEEAAAAASE!!!"

Celestia eyes were locked upon Heat in shock, but then she shot a warning look at the other unicorn with her, who had been laughing behind her hoof. Trixie immediately stopped and looked away sheepishly. "You did get my letter, did you not?" Celestia asked, reaching out with a forehoof to lightly poke Heat.



“Yes, Princess! I know it said not to return to the castle, and if I did, it was to only be with an apology, but I had to come! I’m desperate!”

Celestia blinked, then lowered her head to Heat Wave, “Rise, my subject. My letter said none of that, so I do not have any idea of how you have misconstrued it so. The missive was an apology from me to you, and said that I would encourage you to even come back to the castle. And the reason I had asked you not to leave the city was that so I could keep my tabs on you. If this Trixie had shown up and you had not, then our efforts would have been for not.”

Heat opened a single eye and looked up, then opened the other and stood upon her hooves, looking embarrassed. She did not mention the ink spill. “I, uh, thank you, Princess. It helps put my mind to rest....Oh! Also! No need to find Trixie, she is right here!” Heat stepped aside so that the previously silent unicorn could step forth.

“Oh! I see! And did you have any luck removing the spell, Trixie?” Princess Celestia asked expectantly, bobbing her head a fraction.

Trixie bowed to the Princess. Bowed! *Trixie should not have to prostrate herself before any pony, even nobility.* Standing back upon her hooves, she answered, “No, Trixie did not. The spell is too deeply ingrained and too powerful for me to remove. She...” Trixie took a deep breath, she could do this. “....humbly requests your assistance in removing this spell.” Humble indeed, the sentence nearly came out from between her teeth as a hiss.

Smiling warmly, Celestia nodded her head, replying, “Then I shall lend you my help, but not now. I am currently holding Court, as you can see. But in a couple hours, I will be finished with my duties and able to lend you my aid before my next meeting later tonight.” Celestia whistled, and immediately a unicorn with a quill upon her flank was by Celestia’s side. “Take these two to the second ready room and make them comfortable. I have an appointment with them later. Onwards and upwards you go.”

“Yes, Your Majesty. Come with me, please.” The unicorn said to the filly and mare, leading them down the steps and out one of the side doors. Heat and Trixie were silent for the duration of the walk as they were led to a chamber that looked like to the one that Heat had been in the day before. “Please make yourselves comfortable, the Princess should be with you soon. If you need anything, please do not be afraid to call for an attendant.” The unicorn closed the door, leaving Heat Wave and Trixie alone.

Heat quickly flopped into a pile of cushions and lazily relaxed upon them before looking over at Trixie, who seemed to be distracted by the room they were in. “Trixie...What happened to you? You were so boisterous and exuberant, and called yourself Great and Powerful. What caused all that to change? You seem so...Subdued now.”

Trixie snorted and turned her head away to look out a window in the back of the chamber. “Why should Trixie tell you? What makes you think something happened?”

Heat raised her head and cocked it to the side. “Because I would like to know, and so that I can help you cast aside the loneliness that you feel.”

“Trixie is not lonely!” However, Heat had definitely seen her start when she had said that.

“Trixie, the spell you cast on me allows me to see that you are. You cannot lie to me about things like this.”

Trixie rolled her eyes once again and let out a long-suffering sigh. “Fiiiine.” She turned back to Heat, a glare in her eyes. “But only because you will not stop bugging Trixie if she does not tell!” Looking around, she laid herself down upon another cushion, then began. “Trixie had gone to Ponyville for another show a few months ago. It was the same as any other of Trixie’s shows. A bit of magic, a bit of story, and a bit of competition. She had soundly trounced those who took her challenge, and it seemed to be

another fantastic show; however, later that night, two stupid mules went out and brought back an Ursa Maj-Er, Minor from the Everfree Forest. All Trixie could do was inconvenience it after it had smashed her wagon!

But...Twilight Sparkle. Smart, beautiful, *luscious* Twilight Sparkle..." Trixie shook thoughts of the unicorn out of her head. "She was the most powerful pony Trixie had ever seen, sending the Ursa back to the Forest with the utmost of ease. Trixie was...Defeated. She escaped that hillbilly town and came to Canterlot, trying to earn her living here. And only barely managing to do so..."

Heat sat in silence for the longest time, the glare from Trixie growing deeper before finally the azure unicorn yelled, "Well, are you not going to make fun of Trixie!?"

The filly shook her head, then started to say, "No, I will not make fun of you, Trixie, but I thi-"

"No! Stop! Trixie does not want your advice! Trixie will do what she always does, without question!"

The two remained in agonizing silence for the next hour, until finally Princess Celestia opened the door and came in, drawing the attention of the filly and mare. "I believe you have waited long enough." Shutting the door behind her, the Princess approached, and then located herself regally within the center of the room, her rainbow mane and tail billowing out from behind her, despite the absence of even the gentlest zephyr.

Bowing, Heat smiled, "Princess, thank you..."

Nodding, Celestia turned to Trixie, who had her head up and alert. "Trixie, I wish for you to inspect Heat Wave. Make sure you know what you want to do and how to do it. You will tell me when you are ready, and I will lend you my power. It is not for you to keep, and I will take it back when the job is done." She hoped she did not sound too pushy or unforgiving.

“Yes, Princess. Trixie will do such now.” It was almost like Trixie had teleported, moving to Heat’s side swiftly, her horn beginning the to glow with blue light. *Alright, Trixie thinks this would be a good place to start. Then pull that and remove this, fold that back...* The blue unicorn quickly became lost in thought as the minutes ticked by. Heat looked worried, while Celestia seemed impassive to the whole affair. No emotion showed on her face or in her eyes.

Finally, the mare nodded and said, “Trixie is ready, Princ-” her voice was cut off as a a river, no, a flood, NO! An entire ocean of power flowed into her. The unicorn had never felt so much magical energy in the past. Her horn doubled, tripled in intensity from the power of it all, her eyes blazing with a white light at the magical energy coursing through the unicorn’s body.

Heat could feel something. Touches to her mind, caresses, and the occasional tug, as if a nail that had been driven into her mind was removed. Then, tiredness set in, her eyes wanting to close, her legs wanting to buckle. “You must not sleep during this, Heat Wave, else you may not wake up.” Heat looked up through the haze of her tired eyes, having recognized the Princess’ voice and noticing her horn was just as bright as Trixie’s. Yet try as she might, Heat was losing the battle for sleep. Then suddenly, she felt one last great tug upon her mind, and then the oppressive, crushing weight within her head was removed. The pressure gone, the overwhelming need to sleep overtook the unicorn, causing her to topple down upon the cushions.

---

Coming to, Heat Wave stretched, then smacked her lips as opened her eyes....To see a dark blue face practically pressed up to hers. The following scream could be heard halfway to Manehatten.

“Luna!” Heat yelped, scrabbling back against the cushions, her heart going as fast as a hummingbird’s wings. “Er, I mean, hello, Princess Luna.”

The unicorn managed an awkward bow, and an equally awkward smile. "Er, um...How long was I out?" she asked, trying to start a conversation.

Luna pulled back and raised a hoof into the air, "Well, it is currently a couple hours after midnight, sooo...I'm not sure. All I was told was that you're asleep and that I should be here for when you awaken. Celestia is asleep now, and Trixie had left shortly after the procedure was complete, as I was told."

"The procedure! Oh! I forgot about it!" Heat peered inwardly, and felt nothing. No Pull, no headache, and no...Oh no. The part she enjoyed the most was gone, too.. Knowing when others nearby were lonely, or sad. A steep price to pay to be free once again. Then she realized: *I can go home.....Oh Celestia, I CAN GO HOME!* She then noticed that Luna was talking.

"-all better, now you can stay here and become my friend, I hope. You're really the only pony I have talked with at length about anything, I have been so busy with the night and learning the past thousand years of history. Oh, my sister would be proud." Luna looked so happy, a broad smile upon her face.

However, Heat Wave was stuck in her own thoughts. *Oh gosh, I can finally see mother and father again! Moon Glow, Sparkle Dancer, and Shadow Heart! They'll be so excited! We can all be together again! Home! HOME!* She mumbled something to Princess Luna.

"What was that?"

Another mumble.

"One more time, please?"

A louder mumble, but still indecipherable.

“Please, Heat, I’d like to kn-”

“I don’t want to be your friend. I don’t want to be your friend! I JUST WANT TO GO HOME!” The yell echoed within the chamber, and suddenly, Heat Wave realized what she said. The hurt in Luna’s eyes was evident, as she slouched in obvious depression. Heat Wave panicked, letting out a quick, “I’m sorry, Luna...” before dashing to the door, throwing it open, and running as fast and far as she could.

In Luna’s mind, through the veils of self-hate and depression, she cried out, *I want this pain to end!*

And a voice answered with a haughty laugh. A terribly familiar voice. A thousand year old voice. It said one thing. “As you wish.”

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Celestia started from her dreams, her eyes gazing across the darkness of her chambers, trying to find what seemed out of place. She had felt something. “Something just went wrong. Something just went very wrong...”

# CHAPTER 5

## MOLTEN

*Oh Goddess...Oh Celestia...What have I done!? You'd think I would have learned!* Heat Wave galloped across the late night streets, fear in her step and self-loathing in her mind. Her saddlebags lay haphazardly across her back, while her hat lay askew atop her head. *Why did I have to want to go home so much!? It blinded me to what was in front of me! How could I have been so selfish!? Oh Goddess, Princess Celestia is going to kill me!*

It was nearly dawn. Even with the swiftness of her steps, it had taken Heat upwards of an hour to get back to her room at the inn, gather her belongings, check out, and be on her way. The filly did not dare stay within Canterlot now. Even with Celestia's apology, Heat Wave felt she would not be forgiven this trespass. No, no, she had to flee. She dare not stay. She knew Princess Celestia was only trying to protect her sister, but a goddess' wrath was nothing Heat Wave would have wished upon her own head.

Hope flared within Heat as she approached the city gates ahead. Just beyond them was the switchback that led to the town below, and its many roads leading away from Canterlot.

That hope died rather swiftly, as Heat noticed the guards posted just to the side of the gates, their eyes focused upon her. The sudden "HALT!" forced her to all but stop in her tracks, fear gripping her heart.

Heat's ears folded back and her head hung low as she was immediately approached by two pegasi. Not from the Royal Guard, but from the town guard, instead. She could not see their marks beneath their armor, but one was black, and the other a light green.

"All guard stations are on alert. Something has happened up at the castle and we are not permitted to allow anyone out of the city until it is resolved," the black pegasus explained, then blinked as he noticed her half-covered cutie mark. Turning back to the guard post, he said to the other ponies there, "We found her, take our posts while we take her to the castle."

The other guard gave her a smile that did not at all comfort her, and flatly said, "Please, come with us."

---

Celestia studied the empty chamber, attempting to find any clue of what may have transpired within. There had been no struggle, and though some of the cushions were in disarray, that was to be expected from ponies sitting and standing upon them. *Oh sister, what happened? Where did you go? I could hear your cries for me...*

The state room felt...strange: energized, nearly crackling with the static in the air. This gave the Goddess of the Sun an idea... Raising her horn into the air, it began to glow with her pure light, and two paths lit up like clouds at the dawn. To her, they were like wispy trails of smoke. Aural residue. Two distinct trails, flowing out of the room in splitting off in opposite directions, like fog down a river. One seemed to be a deep sunset orange, stretched into a thin wisp and streaking out of the room as if in great haste. The other, however....Celestia gasped. The other had something wrong with it. It was a deep and painfully familiar violet, soft and gentle, but coiled around it as a serpent was another, black as tar.

Following it out of the room, she tracked the twisting trail through the corridors, her eyes watching the violet and black auras wax and wane in power as they struggled against one another.

As the trail went on, however, the inky corruption slowly began to overwhelm the violet aura, and by the time the path ended at a balcony, the blackness had completely consumed it.

Celestia knew. She knew exactly what had happened. Tears began to stream down her cheeks in time with her thoughts.

Celestia knew that Nightmare Moon had returned, and the Nightmare within Luna's mind had taken her dearest sister with it.

---

"As you wish." The Nightmare within eagerly seized the opening Luna had given her and rushed in, filling the alicorn's mind as she rushed from



the hole in her prison. The foal had begged Nightmare Moon twice before to take away the pain, the feelings of loneliness, the hate, the self-loathing. And she had done so again, drilling a hole into the prison the Elements of Harmony had put her within. Now she was free.

Luna started at the invasion, crying, "NO!" Shaking her head in a futile attempt to dislodge the Nightmare.

"Struggle all you wish, *dearest* Luna. You know what will happen. You invited me again, and now your mind will be *MINE!*" The rumbling cackle chilled Luna to her soul. That laugh, that accursed laugh, echoed within Luna's head as she fought her Nightmare. She would not break this time, no, no matter how much she fought, she would. Not. BREAK!

Luna's body barely under her own control, she felt herself walk out of the chambers and into the hallway, hearing within her mind, "Oh, you must be kidding. Please tell me you are joking? 'I won't break! Oh no! I will defeat you myself'" Nightmare Moon mocked Luna, imitating her in the most irritating voice she could use. "You know what happens now, foal. And this time, I think I'll leave you within my dreams, for all of eternity. You see, I *learn* from my past mistakes."

The alicorn bumped into a wall, her will struggling against that of Nightmare Moon's and losing. Her body was refusing her commands, instead taking her to the balcony ahead. Tears ran from the frightened Goddess' eyes. She knew, beyond a doubt, what would happen next. The tortures Nightmare Moon would force upon her.

Upon her thoughts.

Upon her dreams.

The darkness that would shroud the land. The cries, the screams, the *death*. All of it would happen if she did not win this battle for her mind. Her sister was the only one besides her who knew the destruction her counterpart had caused in the War of the Night. The Elements of Harmony had stopped the Mare in the Moon when she escaped from her lunar prison, preventing a second war from occurring. She could hear the Nightmare's plans, and sobs wracked her body.

"Stop the waterworks, foal! Your body is mine now." And upon those words, Luna felt the last trace of control over her body slip away. They were upon the balcony now. "A valiant effort, *dearest* Luna," Nightmare

Moon sneered, her voice dripping with derision, "But now, sleep. Sleep. And let the Nightmares come."

As Luna felt herself being locked within her mind's prison, she grasped at one last hope, and throughout the hallways of their castle, two words rang out. "Celly! CELLYYYYYYYYY!"

---

The Goddess of the Sun appeared disheveled, her normally cheerful mood replaced by one of fear and uncertainty. "Yes, the same unicorn from before. I believe she witnessed what happened to my sister. Please, bring her straight to me. One last thing, nopony is permitted to leave the city until this is resolved. I want air patrols combing the skies, and extra guards stationed at the city entrances, the entirety of Code Seven. Try not to alarm the populace. Make something up if you have to. Dismissed, Captain."

The Captain of the Guard sharply saluted, replying with a bark, "Yes, Princess. Code Seven will be implemented immediately." Turning away from Celestia, the Captain immediately flew out into the night sky towards the Royal Guard's headquarters.

Trying her best to keep calm, all Celestia could do was worry as she peered through the doors at the far end of the audience chamber. It was nearly dawn, and if Nightmare Moon had returned, then the night might continue to go on until she was vanquished once again.

Memories came to Celestia unbidden, remembrances of times long gone. Of the war that had torn her and her sister apart, the land and entire families with it. The Everfree Forest was one such stain upon the earth that remained behind from the past. Wild magics had corrupted it, turning the forest into unsafe territory for any pony.

No, Celestia would not allow that to happen again. Using her telekinesis, she lifted a red scroll, quill, and inkpot from a scribe's desk, and began to write, determination hardening her heart. The ruddy scroll was reserved for only the most dire of situations; she herself could not seal her sister away for another thousand years, could not kill her, could not defeat her. But she knew who could.

“To Twilight Sparkle,

This is a Priority message of the utmost importance. Something has happened to my sister, and I fear that Nightmare Moon has come again. Gather the Elements of Harmony. Chariots will be awaiting to ferry you straight to the castle.

Princess Celestia, Goddess of the Sun.”

---

It was nearly dawn as Twilight Sparkle gazed out her window, having just woken up a short while ago. It had been a crazy night of studying, and she had awoken early to continue. Bringing a brush to her hair, the lavender unicorn began smoothing the bird's nest that had formed out of her mane and tail.

Satisfied with the results, Twilight set her brush back down upon her dresser stand, before working her way over to the pile of books cluttering her desk. Climbing atop the low chair, the pony leaned forward and began looking over the book she had been reading the night before.

Glancing about her bedroom and study area, Twilight could see Spike still asleep within his basket, and Owlowiscious staring quietly at her from his usual perch. *The end to a peaceful night*, Twilight thought to herself before turning back to her book.

She had been researching the possibilities of multiple pony teleportation, and had emptied nearly all of the shelves in her search for sources. As Twilight turned back to continue researching, a belch and the sound of a puff of flame came from behind her. *The Princess sending me a scroll at this time of night? What could be so important as to prompt this?*

Hopping down from the chair, she noticed a crimson scroll lying upon the floor near Spike, who still lay asleep. *Red...? Why red? Did Princess Celestia run out of regular parchment?* Floating the scroll over to her, she broke the seal upon it and unraveled the parchment. *Oh no...Oh nonononono!*

---

"I knew that Luna couldn't be trusted! We should go over and kick her in the flank right now! Send her back to that moon of hers where she belongs!" exclaimed Rainbow Dash, who darted around the air in anger. She had been rudely awakened in the middle of her favorite dream by Twilight's message, and the news of Luna did not help in the least.

"Whoa there, Rainbow," replied Applejack, who reached up and grabbed Rainbow's tail between her teeth, bringing her back down to earth. "We still don't know fer sure tha' this is Luna. Fer all ah know, Nightmare Moon and Luna are two separate ponies!"

"Right, and Celestia is asking for our help to find and stop her. And...Oh! Here come the chariots now!" Twilight looked up into the dark heavens of the night, the waning moon giving just enough light to show the two chariots coming towards the town.

"We should be gentle with her. Who knows how afraid Luna may be right now..." A soft voice came from another pegasus. Fluttershy lay at the back of the pack of ponies, trying to stay out of most of the conversation.

"Gentle? Gentle!? We should be wailing on her as hard as we can, teach her never to show her face again!" Rainbow Dash snorted, crossing her forelegs over her chest, her tail still held by Applejack.

"Maybe we should throw her another party, instead? Nightmare Moon is just a grumpy frowny snooty pants! She needs to turn that frown upside-down! Oooo! I should bring invitations," the physics-defying Pinkie Pie put into the conversation as she hung upside down into their view, and was just about to speed off when a shake from Twilight's head stopped her.

"Oh, this is absolutely dreadful! I certainly hope this does not mean we shall have to run back into the Everfree Forest. I would certainly rather keep my tail this time," Rarity said with a shake of her mane.

Applejack spat Rainbow Dash's tail out, then glared over at Rarity, her mouth opening for a rebuttal before Twilight stepped between the two ponies.

"Girls! Stop arguing! We're not gathered to throw parties or beat up on Nightmare Moon. We're meeting with Princess Celestia to find and stop her," Twilight chastised as the chariots landed. "Now everypony in, we have

no time to spare! Dawn will be here shortly and we must be there to stop whatever plans Nightmare Moon may have!"

---

The trip to the castle was spent in silence, the wind whistling past everypony's face as the guards pulling the chariots put on all speed. As they were approaching the imposing city of Canterlot, in the distance the moon set over the western horizon, drawing the attention of all the ponies. To the east, the sun began to creep into view, painting the sky in bright yellows and deep tangerines. At that moment, the two chariots landed in the castle's courtyard.

"I-I don't get it. If Nightmare Moon is back, then why is Princess Celestia able to raise the sun?" Twilight Sparkle wondered aloud to herself as she and her friends leaped out of the chariots and ran for the cracked doors of the audience chambers.

"Maybe...Maybe she's weak...? Maybe the Elements took her powers...?" Fluttershy ventured as the group of mares burst into the throne room, their hoof falls reverberating heavily off of the marble floor.

Rainbow Dash laughed, her wings taking her straight through the open doors, "That would be everything we'd need. Nightmare Moon won't know what hit her when I get through with her! It'll be 20% cooler than anything else we could do to her!"

"And I would rather you did not rough up my sister." A voice commanded, everypony's heads and eyes swiveling to lock onto Princess Celestia as she walked down from the throne. They could all see that the night had been rough on her. "She is not Nightmare Moon. Not...Completely. It is a part of her that could not be removed when the Elements of Harmony acted upon her. I...I do not know what goes on in her head, but she told me things about herself that she had never said before. I can only hope that she is safe."

"P-Princess. I am sorry about Luna, we are all here to help, as you requested," Twilight softly said, all the ponies bowing before her, and Rainbow Dash somehow managing to do so in midair. Now that was talent.

Standing before the group of friends, Celestia continued, "Thank you, my faithful student. I should say I know that Luna is not Nightmare Moon, for earlier, while in my search to uncover what exactly had occurred, I came across something that astonished me. Luna was fighting her Nightmare, trying to stay in control....but she failed. I tried to find where they had gone, but I could not trace the path well. That they have remained in the city is all I can say, they may even still be in the palace."

Stepping forward, Princess Celestia leaned her head down and peered at the yellow pony standing behind the others. "Fluttershy, if my memory of your name serves me right, you mentioned that my sister's Nightmare may be weakened. I believe that is exactly the case. I think Nightmare Moon may have hidden herself away to leech power from the magic coursing throughout the castle." Celestia steeled herself, holding her head up high and trying to bring her usual majestic temperament into being. "Your duty, my little ponies, is to find and free Luna from Nightmare Moon's grasp, and if—" Celestia faltered. It was harder than she thought to say this. "And if that is not possible, to banish her once again..."

---

Celestia's heart felt heavy as she settled back upon the throne. She had cleared her day of appointments, and even the daily Court had been canceled. She needed this time for her student Twilight and the rest of the Elements of Harmony to find and defeat Nightmare Moon. *Oh, Celestia, things have gotten even worse. I guess it is true what they say, bad things come in threes. Oh Luna, my poor sister, I should have tried something that night, tried to stay and help you be rid of your Nightmare.*

She let out an anguish-filled sigh, sure that nopony would hear it before looking up see, well, three ponies! Two city guards were practically dragging a very obviously terrified filly between them. "What do you wish that we do with her? Take her to the cells? Questioning? Or do you wish to take care of herself, Highness?"

"What? No! This filly has done nothing wrong. I will have nothing of the sort done to her!" Princess Celestia stood at her full height, looking down upon the three ponies before her. "You will release her to me."

“Yes, your Majesty.” The two guards gently lowered Heat Wave to the floor, backing away from her. “Though, if I may suggest, question her yourself. She has been babbling on about how she had sorely messed something up.” The two guards bowed before walking quickly out of the throne room.

Lowering her head to nudge the unicorn before her, she could see that Heat had curled up into a tight, shivering ball. *Why is she so terrified? Did...Did she have something to do with my sister?* “My subject, what has happened? What did you see? Something has happened with my sister and I must know what it was,” Celestia asked, concern showing in her eyes.

Heat Wave glanced up at the Princess with tear-filled eyes. She could barely think, she felt like her mind was gibbering to her. But the filly knew that she must not lie to the Sun Goddess. “I-I-I-” she stammered.

Taking a seat by the trembling unicorn, Celestia leaned in close, trying not to frighten the unicorn further. “Yes...?”

“Oh...Princess! I am so sorry! I did not mean to say what I said! I was just so happy about being able to go home that I wasn’t thinking of anything else! I yelled at Princess Luna! I told her that I did not wish to be her friend! I just wanted to go home!” By this point, the poor filly was bawling her eyes out, nearly screaming, “I just want to go home! I just want to go home! I just. Want. My. *Mother!*”

The stress of the night and all of that morning hit Celestia like a hammer upon the head of a nail. Her horn shimmered, and the large doors to the audience chambers slammed shut, as she stood to her full height and glared down at the filly..

Heat Wave shrieked in fear and curled around herself tighter, her eyes shut as she waited for what she felt she deserved.

However, a voice in Celestia’s head said, *Stop. Look at her.* And the Sun Goddess did. And she remembered a certain sister of hers in the same position. Celestia could not remember what Luna had done, but she was terrified. Terrified of her. Of what her elder sister would do to her. And then she really looked at Heat Wave, and realized just how young she was, still a few years off from becoming a mare. *A filly barely old enough to even be let out of her village...* What she saw cooled her anger. She saw a scared

filly who had gone through a lot in the past several months, separated from her family and friends, forced through countless instances of having to abandon the only ponies she knew. She had been dying a slow, unnatural death, the effect of an insidious spell seeded within her by an unwitting magician. And then, when she was free of it, all she had wanted to do was go home to her family and friends. She was guilty of nothing but feeling an unwavering love for them.

Celestia felt guilty, so terribly guilty, a tear springing to her eyes. The alabaster alicorn settled down beside the young unicorn, and began to nuzzle her like a mother would. "You will get to see your parents again, Heat Wave. I will be sure of it," Celestia swore she would see it done, and swore that after this was all over, she would take a much needed vacation. The stress of ruling was getting to her...

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Elsewhere in Ponyville, a certain teal unicorn had finally made her way into the town and up to the library. Trixie had seen no activity within the building, but was still cautious. No activity did not mean nopony was home. *Trixie will be Great and Powerful once again. The Princess had shown her just what it could be like. But stupid, lovely Twilight has all of Trixie's remaining possessions!*

Trixie's horn began illuminating as she started a spell, studying the tree house before her. Furthermore, she found not a single pony within! She nearly yelled in glee, but held herself in check. No, Trixie would go about this the right way. Get in, get her stuff, get out, be Great and Powerful again. *Why did Trixie suddenly have the idea to put a bunch of question marks into that list, followed by Profit?*

*Okay, Trixie, showtime. Get in, grab your mother's cloak and hat, whatever else may have survived the destruction, then get out,* she thought to herself, creeping toward the front door and pushing it open before closing it behind her. The base floor was empty, giving Trixie free reins to search, and pretty much trash the library. *Where are they? Trixie knows they are he-*



A knock at the door interrupted Trixie's line of thought, and the door opened to let in a grey pony with bubbles upon her flank, and a noteworthy wall-eyed expression. "Twilight, mail's here! Oh! Hello there!"

Trixie froze as yet another voice came from the stairs, "Coming, Ditzzy. I slept in this morning. Twilight had something she had to do." Spike walked right past Trixie, seeming not to see her before taking a bundle of mail and going through it, the derpy-eyed pony leaving and shutting the door behind her.

As the dragon walked back towards the stairs, he looked through the mail.

"Bill, bill, junk, check, junk. Oh! Hello, Trixie! Bill, more junk....Trixie!?" Spike skidded to a halt, then dashed back down the stairs to stand in front of the unicorn, "What did you do to the library!?"

Trixie, however, was made of sterner stuff, and said defiantly, "What did Twilight do with Trixie's possessions!?"

Facepalming, Spike sighed, "I should have believed her when she said you'd come back. They're in the basement, Trixie, past all of that.... equipment Twilight keeps down there. It's on a table. I'd show you, myself, but I have to get started on this mail. And don't worry, Twilight isn't here. She was called away by Princess Celestia on important business involving Princess Luna, apparently." Spike yawned before heading back up the stairs.

"Trixie is not worried!" *Though, how does she know the Princesses? Is she the personal student Trixie has heard about? No, can't be. Not sweet, powerful Twilight,* she thought to herself before charging the basement door, throwing it open, and running down the stairs. Various shelves along the walls held old books, and the equipment that Spike had mentioned was scientific in nature, which disappointed Trixie somewhat.

And there on a table lay in neat piles many of her possessions. Thank Celestia. Her mother's hat and cloak looked relatively undamaged. Next to it was a picture of her and her mother, the glass cover shattered and the wooden frame cracked in places. The picture itself, however, appeared to be untouched. In addition to the more personal effects, there was a raggedy bag of bits, various magic books, and several other odds and ends on the table as well.

Trixie took the hat and cloak, and hastily donned them, feeling comfort in their familiar fabric. A flash of something falling to the the floor caught her eye, and levitating it before her face, the unicorn could see it was a note.

“Trixie, I collected whatever I could salvage from the wagon, which was not much. I looked for you for days afterward, and I could find no trace of your whereabouts, but I knew you would be back. Whatever may have transpired between us, I still wish for us to be friends.”

Trixie crumpled the paper up and ground her teeth. *Oh that insufferable unicorn! Why must she torture Trixie so!? On the other hoof, she wishes to be Trixi-NO! We shall come back to her only when Trixie is Great and Powerful again, to defeat her and show who is the most talented unicorn in all of Equestria!”*

The showmare gathered her things up into a ball and floated them ahead of her as she sprinted out of the library. *Oh, yes, Princess Celestia, you have shown Trixie what true power is. And The Great and Powerful Trixie shall rise again with a new show!”*

---

Celestia had managed to calm Heat Wave down, apologizing profusely to her and giving her comfort. Currently, the filly was ensconced in a guest room, sleeping. She hadn't levied any sort of judgement against the unicorn, but she had made very clear what the alicorn thought of her actions.

However, there would be time later for things other than the current events. Climbing back atop her throne, Celestia raised her horn to the air, whereupon it began to emit a gentle glow. She allowed her magic to search the castle until it finally located what she was searching for. *There are Twilight and the rest of the Elements. I assume they have found Luna.* She could not feel Luna, the Nightmare that had taken her seemed to be masking the two of them from any prying eyes. ...*What are they doing?*

From her magical sight, it appeared that Twilight and her friends seemed to be standing there, perfectly still. Doing absolutely nothing.

---

Luna pushed herself awake, terrified by the dreams her alter-ego had been forcing upon her. She kept her thoughts hidden from Nightmare Moon, deathly afraid of being sent back into her realm. *I've had a thousand years to learn every nook and cranny of her mind. I-I've got to do something! I can't hide from my Nightmare forever. I created her, I can stop her! ....No, I can't...She easily overpowered me. I-I was like a foal to her! I must try, though! For my sister's sake!*

---

"Girls, I think I can feel her down this corridor!" Twilight's horn was aglow as she attempted to follow the magical ley-lines through the palace, searching the halls for the greatest concentration of ambient energy.

"What's down here, Twi? More rooms filled with dusty tomes?" Rainbow Dash asked, fluttering through the air above them.

Twilight shook her head, her mane and tail trailing behind her as the sextet of friends galloped down the castle's lower hallways. "No! It's the storage for magical items. Many of them are too dangerous to be used, so they were sealed away down here. Several of the rooms here are behind magical wards because of that. I just bet this will be where we'll find Nightmare Moon!"

A simple cackle met them as they rounded a corner, Nightmare Moon not more than a few ponylengths away, standing there menacingly as she stared down the group of ponies. "Find me indeed, foals, though there isn't much you and your...'Elements' can do about it," the Nightmare sneered derisively.

"We won't need the Elements to deal with you, Nightmare Moon! I can do just fine myself!" Rainbow Dash countered before dashing ahead of the group down the hallway.

"Rainbow Dash, wait!" Twilight cried out, reaching out with a hoof.

Ignoring her, Rainbow charged on ahead. Right into the protective ward she had failed to see. First came the sound of a crunch as Rainbow collided into it, then came the loud *ZAP* as the ward electrified the pegasus.

Rainbow fell straight to the stone floor in a daze, little wisps of smoke trailing from her mane, all the while Nightmare Moon laughed. "You stupid, foolish foals. Did you think I was not prepared for you to brashly run into the situation!? To think you can best me twice? Oh, no no no. This time, I am quite well prepared for you, and I wish to share my....dreams with you, just like with little Luna," Nightmare Moon glared at the ponies, cruelty dripping from her voice as wisps of black night drifted from her form, connecting with the walls, and then sliding along them towards the group of ponies. Another barrier sprang into life behind Twilight and her friends, cutting them off from any means of escape.

---

*NO! I can't allow them to experience what I have! No pony should go through the horrors I have. I-I need to do something!* Luna thought to herself, imprisoned within her Nightmare's mind.

As frantically as she could without giving herself away to Nightmare Moon, Luna sped through her alter-ego's mind, trying to find something that could help the ponies. *What if I...? No, that would give myself away immediately....Maybe..? No, never that...I don't want to die.... Maybe.... Yes! I hope this does the trick!*

Luna tweaked something within Nightmare Moon's mind, and waited.

---

"Behold the Nightmare within, my little ponies. A Nightmare that you cannot escape from. And soon, yes, soon, you will become under my control. Just like your poor, precious Luna!" screamed Nightmare Moon in what seemed like insanity. Twilight and her friends were pushing their flanks up to the solid barrier behind them, trying to creep back from the encroaching shadows.

However, something happened. Nightmare Moon twitched. A simple twitch, and the shadows receded back into her, the ward and barrier dropping. *Curses! I must have overextended my reach! I am not yet at my full strength, and these foals will ruin everything I work for. Ahhh, but there*

*is more that I can yet do, there are plenty of others within this castle. Plenty of fresh bodies with bountiful lifeforce to feed on, to regain my power, my strength.*

“You fools will still not defeat me again!” With that, just as the group of ponies before her were regaining their senses, Nightmare Moon shifted into purple mist, then vanished into the ceiling above. *I know exactly the foal to start with...*

---

Heat Wave lay within an impossibly plush bed filled with pegasus down, trying to will her body to sleep. It was fitful, however, and just when she'd pass into slumber, the unicorn filly would awaken once more. Further exacerbating her insomnia was the light streaming in through the open windows near her bed, filtering through the heavy curtains.

As a chill passed through the room, Heat shivered and pulled the covers tightly around her body before rolling over, only to start out of the bed, taking the covers with her. There, at one side of the mattress, stood a dark and armored alicorn, easily a few times the filly's size.

The alicorn glared at her with a look of malevolent glee that sent shivers down Heat's spine. “Hello there, *dear* Heat Wave. I must thank you for freeing me. Or, should I say, *emotionally scarring* Luna enough to allow my escape. I require something of you, something I expect you to give willingly and without a fight, or it will become the most excruciating experience you will have ever had...”

---

Princess Celestia watched the sky through the skylights in the ceiling of the audience chambers, lost in thought. *I should be out there, helping my subjects defeat my sister's Nightmare. But, I can't. I can't face her like that again. The war's memories are still too fresh. Too real. Too...hurtful. I can't ever fight her again.*

A scream reverberated through the castle, startling Celestia from her thoughts and putting speed into her legs. She galloped down the halls, her tail and mane stretching out behind her. She knew whose scream that was.

As she approached Heat's room, about a dozen other castle staff were clustered around the door, an intense heat palpable through the thick wood. "Clear the hallways, go back to your duties, I will take care of this!" commanded Celestia, the hallways emptying before her eyes as ponies sprinted back to their stations.

Once the hallway was clear, Celestia's horn shimmered and the doors burst inward, crushed by an invisible force, a wave of searing heat smashing into her body. Within was the perfect image of chaos, flames dancing over every surface. Her sister's Nightmare was to one side of the room, thrashing around, yet staying upon her legs and evading the conflagration. And in the corner, a filly lay curled up, her horn white hot, glowing like molten metal. It was her that was presumably causing the raging fire throughout the bedroom.

Celestia was stunned, but the training she'd undergone, and her centuries of experience quickly took effect, just as Twilight and the rest of her friends came running down the halls. Swiftly wrapping Heat Wave in a bubble, the Princess then snuffed all the flames at once, staring at Nightmare Moon's thrashing the entire time. Something did not seem right. At least, not until her sister's Nightmare spoke.

"GAH! My dreams were too good for you, foal! You will rue ever coming out of that prison! I will *shred* your consciousness beyond all doubt of recovery!"

Then, while Celestia, Twilight and the others watched on, Nightmare Moon froze. Her body flickered, losing focus as the outline of the Moon Princess snapped into being. The two aspects seemed to grapple with each other before the Nightmare recovered, snapping back into focus with a quiver of renewed rage.

Celestia's pupils were nearly pinpricks. *She's...fighting. She's fighting her Nightmare. She....she truly isn't Nightmare Moon.* Bending down to Twilight, her throat clenched as she whispered, "Use them, my student. Use the Elements. End her torture, please. Whatever may happen, know that you will not be blamed."

“Y-Yes, Princess.” Twilight said earnestly and with a bow, peering back to her friends to nod to them, “Let’s do this, girls. The Princess needs us.” Amidst murmured assents and a whoop from Rainbow Dash, the group of friends sprinted into the room and circled Nightmare Moon.

Around their necks, golden necklaces with gems in the shape of their cutie marks appeared. Then, pointing her horn at Luna’s Nightmare, Twilight shut her eyes and called upon the Element of Magic. She expanded her awareness to her friends, feeling their love, their friendship flow into her, activating each of the Elements.

But a thought came to Twilight. *C-Can we really do this to Luna? We saved her once before, but what will happen this time? Can we guarantee her safety? It is obvious Luna is in great pain, fighting Nightmare Moon like that. Can we do this without harming her?*

All at once, the spark failed, leaving Twilight’s friends befuddled.

“What’s wrong, sugarcube...?” Applejack asked, keeping one eye on Nightmare Moon.

“Yeah! We were all ready to get rid of her! What happened!?” Rainbow Dash demanded, stomping a hoof.

“Darlin’, we’re in this together, and we’re better friends than we were at the Everfree Castle,” said Rarity, taking a step towards Twilight.

“I know! But what about Luna? Can we know that she will be safe? I mean, look! She’s having a mental struggle with Nightmare Moon right now! Can we separate them without doing harm to her...?” Twilight asked, her ears folding back as tears appeared at the corners of her eyes.

A noise drew everybody’s attention as Nightmare Moon’s form flickered again. From her mouth came Luna’s voice. “P-Please....Do it...I can’t hold her for much longer. If you must get rid of me to do in her, then do so! For everypony’s sake!”

Princess Celestia came forward, laying a hoof upon Twilight’s shoulder, causing her student to peer up at the alicorn. “Please, Twilight. For mine and her sakes. I would help, but the last time I used the Elements, I banished my own sister to the moon.”

The pain in Celestia’s eyes and voice were evident, and Twilight swallowed, nodding her head as she steeled herself, “Right!”

Opening herself back up again, she accepted the friendship of the other ponies, the Elements connecting within her, raising Rainbow Dash, Applejack, Pinkie Pie, Fluttershy, and Rarity into the air while Twilight's eyes took on the glowing sheen of large amounts of magic passing through her body. From them, twin rainbows flew into the air and surrounded Nightmare Moon, encasing her in the spectrum of light.

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The pain was excruciating, but Luna fought on. She had to fight on, had to keep her Nightmare busy, distracted from everything else. Distracted long enough to allow Celly and Twilight to get rid of Nightmare Moon... and herself, if need be. *The pain will be gone soon. All I have to do is stand it until the Elements come into play...I just have to hold out...*

Luna's mind swam in an ocean of black, an ocean of nightmares and agony, buffeted by storms of misery. Her Nightmare was pulling out all the stops, and yet she fought on, taking control of one part of her mind before letting it go onto the next.

The echoes of ponies talking barely reached her, but she could still hear them. Throwing her will against her Nightmare, gaining inches of ground, just enough to grasp for control a second time.

Luna knew what was going on outside of her mind, she could hear it amongst Nightmare Moon's guttural screams of rage, and her ever present cackle, and so she managed to say in her own voice, "P-Please....Do it...I can't hold her for much longer. If you must get rid of me to do in her, then do so! For everypony's sake!"

Luna was immediately thrown back into the ocean of chaos, a new bout of suffering causing her to scream in torment. She could feel her mind falling apart. Luna was just about to accept her destruction when she felt strength flow through her consciousness. *The Elements...they're...helping me?*

The power of the Elements of Harmony reinforced the Moon Goddess' flagging strength, allowing the alicorn's consciousness to clear away the ocean and storms, replacing them with a lucid tranquility.



“No! You stupid foal! You never knew when to give up and cower at my hooves! Surrender to me now and I’ll end you and your agony for good!” Nightmare Moon’s voice echoed around her, but Luna could detect the uncertainty, the touch of fear.

Luna was about to make a strike, to seal Nightmare Moon in her prison, when the strength of the Elements faltered. *Wha-What? Why would they-* Then it hit her. The Elements of *Harmony*. The Princess realized what she must do as the strength of the Elements flooded back into her stronger than ever. It was the hardest thing for her to say, even to do; but it needed to be done.

“Nightmare Moon. I hereby pass judgement upon you....I forgive you... and the trespasses you have committed upon me and my kin, and I accept, that no matter what happens, I will never be rid of you. You are a part of me, your darkness to my light. In a way, of course. The shadow under the light of the moon.”

“*NO!* You wouldn’t! You couldn’t! You are but a weak foal, useless without your sister! Without *me!* You have not the power to do anything to me!” The fear was audible now, and Nightmare Moon lashed out, using everything she could to bind herself to Luna’s mind. To destroy her. To consume her. And then, having thrown everything she had at the Princess, Nightmare Moon could do nothing but watch in visceral horror as her assault simply evaporated before Luna’s presence.

“Nightmare Moon...I hereby pass my judgement. Come, we shall once again be as one...”

The Elements of Harmony acted, and a blinding light engulfed upon their thoughts.

---

As the magic from the Elements of Harmony vanished, Twilight and the rest of the ponies drooped from exhaustion. Where Nightmare Moon had towered now lay a very weak looking Luna.

Celestia crept forward and knelt down next to her sister, giving her a nuzzle against her neck before looking over at the pony encased within the bubble, releasing her from its temporary aegis.

And in a small, weakened voice, Luna whispered, “Thank you, Celly. Thank you, Twilight, and to all your friends. The Nightmare is over...”

# EPILOGUE

## COOL DOWN

“Dear Princess Celestia,

I learned that everypony has their own inner balance, a precarious equilibrium between the good and the bad, and that everypony must come to terms with who they are. Whether it is through acceptance or the desire to better oneself, there are many ways a pony is able to keep a balance between each of the facets of their personality. I can think of one pony who could use this advice. Spike says she visited the morning I left to regain her possessions. I just hope that someday, she can accept who she is.

Your Faithful Student, Twilight Sparkle.”

Celestia smiled to herself as she finished reading her student’s letter for the third time. The sun was high overhead. The day: excellent; and the sound of the waves crashing upon the beach soothed her frazzled nerves.

Beside Celestia, Luna drowsed in the sun, and the Sun Goddess did not doubt that Luna deserved the break. Shortly after the incident, Celestia had sent Heat Wave off back home, and then had set up her trusted ministers to run the nation while she was gone. Oh, the two alicorns still raised the sun and moon every dawn and dusk, but they needn’t be in Canterlot to do so, and it was certainly nice to be able to lie down upon a nice towel and simply bask in the sun, without a care in the world.

Just Celestia and her sister for the next week, enjoying each other’s company, and being there for each other.

Together.

---

“And now, fillies and gentlecolts, the Great and Powerful Trixie makes her triumphant return! Her magics will astound, her stories will amaze! And

she even has a new act for all you ponies....Your chance to show off your talents to The Great and Powerful Trixie and your peers!" Yes, *show off to Trixie. Show her your tricks so she may incorporate them into her show, and in her plan for revenge against that beautiful, yet insufferable Twilight...*

The stage exploded with smoke, fireworks, and dazzling light shows as the pale-blue unicorn appeared from the cloud. Yes, it was good to be herself again, to feel the power coursing through her veins, the adoration of the crowd.

Trixie would show Twilight Sparkle who was the better mare.

---

Heat Wave did not like to remember the events from those fateful days in Canterlot. Despite being forgiven by both Princesses for not only her words but her actions, the crimson unicorn felt that she had been nothing but trouble. The fact of the matter was, she still only wished to go home. She had been released from the Canterlot Hospital in good health. Her only injuries had been minor burns and smoke inhalation, nothing so severe that it would keep her for more than a few days. The guards had even returned her saddlebags to her, after having confiscated them during her attempt at fleeing the city.

The pony had tried her best to make herself scarce after being released from the hospital, though Princess Celestia still managed to discover where she was hiding and help her on her way back home.

That had been weeks ago, and Heat Wave was currently on the final stretch of her journey home, her saddlebags bouncing as she started to gallop; the familiar, quaint houses of her home town were enticingly close, their window panes glinting in the afternoon sun. Before she knew it, Heat was amongst them, passing by ponies she knew and buildings she fondly remembered.

And there it was, the gate slightly ajar and the yard kept nicely manicured. Heat couldn't take the nostalgia, dashing forward through the gate and up to the door of the house, tears seeping from her eyes as she knocked upon the wooden door.

The seconds that passed felt like the longest of her life. But Heat knew it was all worth it as the door opened, revealing two ponies the unicorn had missed ever so much.

“Mother! Father!”

---

“Spiiiike! I am heading down into the basement! I want to check out more of the books I found on the shelf in the back!” yelled Twilight Sparkle as she swung open the door to the library’s basement, “Could you begin cleaning up the books, please?”

“Yes, Twilight!” The dragon could be heard replying from the living quarters above.

A magical light fluttered above her head as she trotted down the stone steps, the echoes of her hooves on the hard surface bouncing around her. She was continuously uncovering old tomes and books within the depths of the library. Most of the shelves were just filled with stored records from the Mayor’s office, but there were still plenty of shelves holding books the unicorn had yet to discover.

In fact, Twilight had just come across a shelf the night before that contained books that were hundreds of years old! She was nearly salivating at the chance to dig her eyes into their secrets.

After several minutes, Twilight Sparkle arrived at the large shelf of books and began studying the various titles. Pulling ones she felt pertained to her interests off of the shelf, the unicorn set them in a pile next to her. The mare felt satisfied that she had plucked enough for a good long studying session when something on the bottom shelf caught her eye. Hidden behind the other books was a large tome covered in gilt, revealed only by the last book she had added to the pile.

Twilight began the process of freeing it from its prison, pulling other books out and setting them aside until she was able to slip it out from behind them. What surprised her even more was just how heavy the book was when she lifted it with her magic. But once she got a closer look at it, the unicorn noticed something strange. It wasn’t a book, but rather a locked

container that probably contained a tome within. Whatever it was, it had to be important.

Adding it to the top of the pile and returning the displaced books back onto the shelf, she hovered the pile before her in the air as she made her way out of the basement and up to her desk with them. Spike was deep in daydream, staring longingly at a picture of Rarity within a fashion magazine as Twilight passed by him, smiling a little grin.

Shaking her head in amusement, Twilight Sparkle organized the books into a nice arrangement upon her desk before setting the gilded box in front of her. The lock was of a strange design and felt like...

"Of course!" the pony exclaimed, startling Spike from his reverie.

"Of course, what, Twilight?" he asked, crossing his arms as he shot her a funny glance.

"This....Container! It must have something extremely important within it to require not just itself, but a lock! And not only that, but a lock that is magical in nature! Whoever put this away did not want just anypony to get it!"

Lowering her horn and pointing it at the container, Twilight used her magic to find out whatever she could about it, even going so far as to explore the lock. It was incredibly complex, made so that not just anypony could open it. However, she was not just *anypony*, she was the personal student of Princess Celestia herself!

Working, Twilight began to sweat as the difficulty of the lock presented itself, and just as she was about to falter...the lock opened.

Panting, Princess Celestia's student looked upon the container in victory, relishing the moment when she would find whatever happened to be inside.

Opening the container, Twilight lifted out what appeared to be an extremely old tome, the cover even more heavily gilded than the container, with silver filigree covering whatever the gold did not! A sensation of ancient magics emanated from about the tome, and Twilight reverently opened it to the front page.

"The War of the Night, a survivor's personal eye witness account.' The War of the Night? I don't recall Equestria ever having a war..." Twilight

wondered inquisitively, not recognizing the strange seal stamped upon the page below.

Unbeknownst to Twilight, the breaking of the lock sent off a warning to its owner, the author of the tome.

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Celestia blinked and raised her head, staring in the direction of Ponyville. While Luna played in the waves, giggling in a mood that Celestia hadn't seen her in in many a year, she also knew that somepony had found her history. The history of the War of the Night. The history of Celestia's and Luna's fillyhood. Of the events that turned Luna into Nightmare Moon. And the war that nearly destroyed Equestria having followed those events...