

Common Sky

And

Fragments

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Common Sky

Chapter 1

“Ah'm tellin' you, you're makin' it way too pretty. It's all form and no function.”

“Oh, please darling. If she's going to be out there all ALONE, then the LEAST I can do is make sure she looks fabulous! What if she were to meet some nice fellow along the way, hmm? She'd look dreadful without proper fashionable winter attire.”

“Ah don't think it's that kinda trip, sugarcube. She's goin' up in'ta the mountains, not lookin' to chat up some sophisticated pony in the big city. She's gonna need lots of pouches te' carry all 'er things, you've got no pouches or even a small pocket on that thing. Where's she gonna fit her telescope or her food?”

“Why, in those one-of-a-kind-designer-saddle-bags I made for her over there, of course.”

It was the dead of winter, the dark starry sky overhead gleamed and sparkled above. It was only early evening, but had just past the winter solstice, and with the season came less and less sunlight. Now was the time of year which brought darkened coldness to the entire land of Equestria most of the time. Twilight Sparkle was walking along the path to Rarity's boutique, looking up at the stars, as she began to overhear the conversation between her friends.

“Ah see then. ... Gosh Rarity, yeh even colour-coded the inner linin'. Is this thing gonna hold up alright?”

“Are you doubting my skills, Applejack, darling? I'll have you know that ALL of my fashionable items and accessories come complete guarantee towards their durability, thank you very much.”

“Geez, ah didn't mean ta' imply--”

“Well alright then! ... It does look alright, doesn't it?”

“Look's fine tah me... ah suppose...”

Twilight giggled to herself just outside the door. Those two always seemed to rub each other the wrong way, but these days it was almost as though they bickered like an old married couple. She quickly composed herself. “Hey guys, it's Twilight!”

The door quickly opened, and Twilight was greeted by Applejack, who warmly greeted her. “Well hello there Twilight. Glad yeh made it. Rarity here's just finishin' up.”

"Hello there Twilight, I'll be just a moment. I just have to finish this... one... section..." Rarity continued to concentrate on the jacket she was making, making the final stitches to the bottom corner with her magic. She then placed her tools in a small tray to the side and finally turned around to face Twilight, beaming brightly and looking accomplished. "There! Done! Now tell me, Twilight, is this suitably gorgeous? Functionally fashionable? This IS what you wanted, right...?", she said, with a slight tinge of fearful expectation. Twilight was usually so picky about these sorts of things, even more so than she was.

Twilight examined the dark violet jacket, lined with a wool-like material. It had black buttons close together running down one side, crossing over to the middle to provide more insulation to the chest. It was a large jacket, covering the neck and fore-hooves, as well as having a hoodie which could be pulled over top her ears and head. Immediately her mind started scrutinizing it, and she wondered if the lining being exposed over the sides would make it wear improperly, or if it would absorb more moisture (which was a bad thing), or...

"Hmm, well... it looks good... but--" She looked over to Rarity, who had a nervous grin on her face, and her big, gleaming eyes of expectation that only Rarity (and maybe Pinkie Pie) could pull off. Looking back at the jacket, Twilight figured that just this once, she wouldn't look the gift-pony in the mouth. She didn't want to put her friend, already doing her a huge favour, through more stress on her account.

"It's... it's perfect! Thank you so much, Rarity!" Twilight let out a nervous laugh, and then quickly noticed the saddle-bags sitting behind Rarity. "Oh, those must be the bags, right?"

Rarity let the tension melt away with contented sigh, "Yes, they are, darling. And I made sure to mix both form AND function into their design." She glared a little at Applejack, who just laughed a bit to herself embarrassingly and scratched the back of her head. "... Oh my, maybe I should even start up a brand new line of outdoors adventure wear for the fashion-conscious customer? Oh, it's already half way into the season... far, far too late to start designing. Perhaps this fall..."

Twilight examined the bags. They looked rugged enough, and had a slightly off-violet colour to their sides, with black trim running down the corners and edges. Everything Rarity had made complimented Twilight's "natural complexion" and themselves, of course. Applejack interrupted as Rarity trailed off into her own little world of fashion and economics.

"Well, ah reckon this'll get yeh where yeh need te' go. It's better then anythin' ah used to use when ah was doin' outdoors stuff in mah younger days. But are ya sure yeh can't just see another meteor shower in the summer, when ya don't have te' worry 'bout freezin' te' death?"

"It'll be okay AJ, I promise. Besides, this meteor shower only happens once every THOUSAND years. This WILL be the first AND last time I ever see it!"

"But, how is this meteor shower any different from any other meteor shower? Say, like the one we all saw during the summer? At least then you wouldn't have a good chance freezin' te' death."

Twilight sighed. She figured Applejack probably wouldn't understand. She was always so worldly and pragmatic. "Don't worry, I'm not going to freeze to death, I promise. It's just a very important meteorological event, and I just want to go see it, just once, you know? These are supposed to be the brightest shooting stars out of them all, even than the ones we saw during the summer. The night is darkest during the winter, too."

"Ah well, maybe ah just don't get it. You just be safe, ya hear?"

"Applejack's right. You'd better be safe out there, darling. We couldn't STAND to have anything happen to you."

"Hehe... it's alright. You made me this awesome stuff, and I'm sure it'll keep me warm the entire time I'm up there. Thank you so much, both of you."

Twilight Sparkle had been looking forward to this meteor shower ever since she learned about it during the summer, when the first meteor shower had occurred. Both of these meteor showers occurred in the same twelve-month span of time, which was amazing news to amateur astronomers around Equestria. She had thought about it quite a bit, but figured it would be too cold to even attempt. She would need to travel two days out of town, all the way into the mountains, both ways. The tree-line was too shallow to see it properly in Ponyville, and the rest was obscured by the mountain range, since the shower took place closer to the horizon than the previous one. She'd need to stay at least two or three nights to make it worth it, as well, which practically made it a week. Despite her reservations, the compulsion to see this once-in-a-lifetime meteorological event drove her to inevitably plead Rarity to help her make the things she'd need - a mere week before she was supposed to leave, of course. Rarity managed to finish it, with Applejack's expertise, in record time, even with the custom fabric she needed to order.

Twilight walked slowly home, looking up at the shimmering sky. She questioned doing this on her own, but none of her friends could be talked into going. Rarity and Applejack obviously had their own reservations. Fluttershy couldn't be separated from tending to the sick animals that couldn't survive the winter, even if she did like the idea. Rainbow Dash of course said she'd feel too bored just looking at stars all the time. Even Spike said he'd much rather tend to Twilight's house while she was gone, being content with "not being cold and wet all the time." The only one left was Pinkie Pie, and, well... Twilight figured that star-gazing and just enjoying simple, calm tranquillity and the serenity of the view itself wouldn't be her 'thing.' All of them had immensely enjoyed the meteor shower over the summer, of course. This, however, was just too 'extreme' for them to agree to go. It wasn't too extreme for Twilight, of course.

Twilight finally made it home. It was dark inside, and none of the lights were on. Spike was taking a nap, since he tended to get tired when it got dark. She smiled and walked up to him, tucking the baby dragon in, as he shuffled around a little and murmured to himself. She decided she'd better write Celestia to tell her what she was planning. She moved over to her desk, lighting the post-lamp nearby with her magic. She took out a blank piece of parchment, and her quill and ink jar from the side table.

Dear Princess Celestia,

I hope you're doing well! Everything is quiet here in Ponyville. This isn't a regular update, per-se... it's mostly to inform you that I'll be travelling out west to watch the meteor showers that should be occurring during the next few days. Thus, I may not be able to make my regular update. I hope you'll be understanding about this.

Another thing is... none of my friends want to go with me. I understand their reasoning, though. After all, it will be very cold the entire time. Plus, not many of them know the first thing about astronomy, so going out of their way and dropping all of their chores for five days, over something like this, probably wouldn't really be their thing, even if they DO enjoy it. But I suppose have to learn to understand their feelings, and that doing some things on your own sometimes is okay.

That's a good lesson to take away from this, right?

*Your Faithful Student,
Twilight Sparkle*

Twilight sighed to herself, as she began to draw a small map on the bottom of the letter, so Celestia would know where she was in case of an emergency. She was going to be terribly lonely out there, and she knew it. She also knew it was totally worth it go. She loved meteor showers, especially ones as big as this, and she had only seen a few in her life. But even then, the excitement was partially muffled, knowing she wouldn't be able to share one of her biggest passions with her friends.

She let the ink dry for a moment, before rolling the letter up, and placing it beside Spike's bed quietly as not to wake him. She figured he'd send it once he woke up, as he usually did if she decided to write a letter during the middle of the night. She then walked over to a side-window, looking out at the stars and the moon hanging overhead in the sky. The moon was waxing into a crescent moon, and the stars sparkled with beautiful radiance. The snow, which caressed every crevice of every object outside, reflected the moon and star-light perfectly, creating a soft, bright blue, almost-twilight glow to everything that the light touched. She loved nights like this, where the crisp,

clean air of the winter made everything look just a little sharper. The spring and summer skies always had that little bit of humidity in the air, which would obscure some of the finer detail, but in the winter, there was none. On nights like these, she could almost feel the stars and the moon reflect off of her eyes. They always instilled a kind of calmness in her heart, just staring up at the black sky with little points of light, spanning the entire horizon. She could walk alone on nights like this and never feel scared. Just seeing this view gave her extra resolve to go on this journey, and she couldn't imagine what it would look like out there, if it looked so good here already.

"Yo, Twilight!" Rainbow Dash's voice boomed from overhead, as she swooped down and quickly landed beside Twilight. "I got it!"

It was the next day, and Twilight was walking up to Rarity's shop to get suited up for the trip. There wasn't much needed in terms of 'equipment,' especially since she wouldn't really be using a telescope for most of the trip. "Oh, thank you Rainbow Dash."

Rainbow Dash handed Twilight a sheet of especially strong-stock paper. "Don't sweat it! Just make sure you watch it out there. That one day near the end is going to be a totally killer storm, and you'll be dead meat if you're outside!"

It was, of course, the 'seven day schedule' from the Weather Service in Cloudsdale, showing weather for the area she'd be going to. All of the days looked bright and clear, although a major storm was being scheduled for later in the week. "Thanks," said Twilight appreciatively, "this is a major help. Now I'll know when it's safe to come home."

"So, you're sure you wanna go do this? This is really dangerous, you know, for an egghead like you. And not in the good way."

"Yes, I'm sure I want to go," Twilight said, rolling her eyes. She was getting tired of answering that particular question every single time. The only one who didn't was Pinkie Pie, who just bounced up and down and promised to bake her tons of stuff. Twilight was half certain that Pinkie would just load her up with sweets on her way out of town – to "always be prepared" – and she'd have to subsist on candy for those five or six days she'd be gone.

"Alright alright, I'm sure I'm not going to change your mind. Anyways, I they were gonna have another storm in the middle there, but I had them move it back. They owed me a favour anyways," said Rainbow Dash, smiling triumphantly with her arms folded. Rainbow Dash always seemed to like impressing her for some reason.

"Thanks, Dash. Now, come inside and help, okay?," Twilight said, giggling at her bravado. The pair of them entered Rarity's shop.

It was only an hour or so later that Twilight was able to leave, completely suited up in Rarity's coat and bags. She was already outside, since the jacket was way too warm to stand being inside anywhere for very long. Everypony was waiting for her to set down the main road out of town, admiring the fine handiwork of her jacket and bags.

"Oh darling, it looks amazing on you! I'm DEFINITELY going to expand my business to include kind of attire for 'adventurers' such as yourself. When you get back, you MUST model for me. You will, wont you? Pretty please?," Rarity asked, pleadingly with her hooves together.

"Um... let me think about it when I get back, okay? That isn't a 'no,' of course. After all, I do owe you one for all this."

"Oh of course. Silly me, you're all worried about this trip," Rarity said in a kind of chiding voice.

"Yeah, you take care of yerself, y'hear?," warned Applejack.

"Oh, um... Twilight will be okay though, right...?," said a flustered Fluttershy, almost hiding behind Applejack.

"Now don't ye' worry Fluttershy, Ah'm sure Twilight'll be alright. She's a big filly, she can take care of herself. She's just gotta be extra careful to not get hurt."

"Oh, but... what if she *does* gets hurt out there, wont she be *all alone*?" Fluttershy seemed to get even more worried, starting feeling guilty about turning down Twilight's offer to go with her and be there.

"I'm... not that worried, guys. Seriously," Twilight replied, shaking her head in mild defeat. "You all know where I'm going, and Princess Celestia knows, too."

"Yeah, guys," said Rainbow Dash, "It'll be good weather most of the time she's gone. She's got that big jacket and everything! It's not THAT dangerous." Rainbow Dash finished, rolling her eyes and sighing.

Twilight then felt a huge weight suddenly and randomly press into her back, nearly making her legs buckle. "What the...?!" She then turned her head and saw Pinkie Pie bouncing up and down. There were the sweets, on cue. Pinkie had loaded her down with a huge, ginormous pink bag full of candy and individually-wrapped cupcakes.

"Pinkie... Pie, I can't carry... all of this!"

"Sure ya can! If you don't, you wont have enough candy to throw an amazing party without me around with the first random pony you meet! How can you have a party without candy?!," Pinkie Pie said, continuing to bounce up and down.

"Pinkie Pie! Please, this is very generous... but can you please... just put some in my bags? This is really too much," Twilight pleaded.

"Oh, okay! I wasn't actually going to make you carry all that candy though, that'd just be silly! You thought I was being for real? Silly Twilight," Pinkie Pie said, still bouncing, having not taken the gargantuan bag of candy off of her.

"Pinkie--"

"Oh, right!" She finally took the weight off of Twilight, who sighed in relief.

"You can fill up the spare space in my bags, okay?," said Twilight, smiling nervously.

"Okie-dokie!" Pinkie then quickly shoved a hoof-ful of candy into both sides, and zipped them up tightly. "Remember, this is ONLY enough candy for a party of TWO. If

it's a party of THREE, give ol' Pinkie Pie a call. Oh, wait, that would make it a party of four, wouldn't it? Then you'd need even MORE candy!"

Applejack sighed, and finally interjected. "Pinkie Pie... ah think Twilight oughta get goin'. Don't ya think so?"

"Right!," said Pinkie, bouncing her away to be alongside the other ponies. "Have a super-duper awesome time, Twilight!"

Twilight smiled at all of them. Even though they weren't coming with her, she could still tell all of them cared about her very much. That alone was enough to alleviate some of her regret. "Thank you, all of you. I'll be back in about six days. If I don't return, then I just want you to know, that I've enjoyed all the time I've spent with all of you, and that I've left my will in an envelope under my mattress."

All of them gasped in disbelief, moving towards her quickly. Twilight waved her hoof and giggled. "I'm kidding, guys. KIDDING. You're all more wound up than I am. Just make sure Spike does his chores around the house for me, okay?" She then turned and started walking, waving in their direction. "See you all in a week!"

Everypony said their goodbyes and so-longs to her, and Twilight turned and started to head up the main road. The weather was good – not too chilly. The tension inside of her finally started to build up. She couldn't believe she was actually doing it, but she was, and that fact alone was making her more excited than anything else in the world.

The path was snow-covered, and the sky overcast. It was a bleak kind of grey that populated most of the winter. The Pegasus ponies tended to let these overcast conditions happen more often during the cold season, since it wasn't really necessary to keep clouds in a particular formation for crop growth, before Winter Wrap Up. After that, they'd have to keep moving the clouds every day, so this was a vacation for them. The weather schedule that Rainbow Dash had given her said they would clear it up the next day, around the same time Twilight would arrive at her destination. Perfect timing.

Twilight continued on her travel towards the mountain range. It had been quite a few hours since she had left Ponyville. Snow covered the ground where grass had once grown, and the empty branches of trees contrasted themselves against the pale grey sky. Aside from the occasional sign-post along the path, it seemed that life itself had gone into hibernation. It was so calm and quiet, unlike the summer, and she couldn't hear a single animal in the bushes or a single draft of wind moving a branch. She was approaching the point where she would need to turn in for the night, since the sun set very early. She had set out kind of late to begin with, but only to make sure she'd be able to get there without straining herself and being too exhausted to see the stars.

Twilight's thoughts roamed to various subjects, as it usually did when she was alone and didn't have a book in front of her. She thought of her destination, as to whether or not it'd be suitable despite Rainbow Dash's insistence that it would be. She

thought about Celestia, about her one and only encounter with Luna, and her friends. None of them had wanted to come with her. She'd repeat the rationalization of why they didn't come in her head, and keep going. Now she was thinking of some random spells she had read in one of her obscure books, and after that, remembering how a random colt had embarrassed himself at the last "Pinkie-Party." Then she remembered some of the parties in Canterlot she had been forced into going to by Celestia – as a futile attempt to get her to make friends. Twilight probably figured it was because she refused to make friends that she got shipped off to Ponyville by Celestia herself. Now her mind was on a cafe in Canterlot she missed going to. Through all this, Twilight knew that if somepony could read her thoughts, they'd swear she was more disorganized and random than Pinkie Pie, and that was saying something. She spent so much time re-organizing her library simply to keep herself sane, but it was basically a front for how disorganized the rest of her was. Twilight's brain could never slow down or stop thinking, even for a second. It either had to be accumulating, processing, or outputting information. The only thing that really calmed her down was star-gazing – especially if it was the kind of astronomy that didn't involve fiddling around with a telescopes too much.

"There," Twilight said aloud, stopping for a moment. The path weaving up the mountain range came into view, and she decided that she would set up camp beside the tree-line on the side of the road. She sighed and tried to clear her head a bit. "I'm right on schedule. I'll be able to finish this tomorrow." The familiar fields of Ponyville had been replaced with an unintimidating forest that surrounded and arched over the main road. She veered off the path, and sat down on a patch of relatively flat, snow-covered terrain, looking around herself to make sure it'd work well enough for her tent.

Night descended, and the overcast clouds brought a very light snowfall with them, covering the ground with a light white powder. Twilight was in her tent on the side of the road, reading a book, naturally. It was a large tent, way bigger than was necessary for just one pony. She munched on some dried apple slices that Applejack had given to her, flipping the pages idly. Nothing really caught her eye, even after flipping through random pages – usually something caught her eye then. Bored with it, she flipped onto her back, sighing, sensing some kind of discontentment within her. For a few moments, she said nothing, and attempted to think nothing, which was a futile endeavour, to be sure. The lamp beside her filled the tent with light which flickered and danced on the ceiling. There wasn't a sound to be heard. What was this feeling? She felt almost agitated, but not angrily so.

'Ah-ha,' Twilight thought to herself. 'Being alone. I've been so enthralled with my friends, being dragged on their crazy adventures, that I've barely had a moment to think by myself.' There always seemed to be fires to put out in Ponyville, so unlike her time in the library in Canterlot, where she was free to study almost entirely on her own – with

the occasional help of her "Research Assistant" Spike, of course. Now that she was alone, doing something on her own again, she didn't really know how to feel. She felt alone, for sure, but not... lonely. She knew she'd be back putting out those fires with her friends in no time. Even though a tinge of disappointment in not being able to share this awesome event with her friends. Ugh, there was that regret again.

"None of them would find it interesting... sometime you have to do things on your own, right?," Twilight said, speaking to the air in the tent and the darkness of the night outside.

And, of course, that rationalization. She sighed and turned onto her side. She was determined to enjoy this to the fullest extent possible. Maybe Celestia could appreciate it more than her friends, and she could talk about it with her afterwards? Another sigh - she really did want to share it with somepony. Before she knew it, her mind started bouncing around again.

Twilight turned back over onto her other side, and then magically pulled the blanket over her. "I better get some sleep... that usually fixes things when I'm like this." She then swiftly placed the book back in her saddle-bags, and turned off the lamp. She couldn't sleep that easily, of course. It took a little while before she was finally taken into her dreams.

The path to the lookout spot was serene and covered in fresh powder snow from the night before. Stone walls jutted up from both sides of her, stretching to the sky, weaving back and forth through the mountain range itself. It had only taken Twilight three hours to cross through the mountain path, and she had kept up a decent speed. She had finally reached the exit of the path, which led out to a truly spectacular view. There was a very dense, stretching pine forest which spanned out below the cliff face she was now standing at the top of, spreading out a far and wide, then opening into a field in the far distance. The drop off the cliff was fenced off by what looked like a very old, unmaintained fence, and the cliff itself must have cleared the tree line by at least fifty feet. To her left was a path downwards, continuing to lead onwards into Equestria. To her right, up the side of the cliff, was a straight, wide, sloped path, that looked even less maintained than the fence. She pulled out the map from her bag to double-check, and sure enough, it was up the right path she needed to go. She took in the view, Celestia's sun hanging lower in the sky, with a kind of simple, elegant brightness in the winter air which was unseen during the spring and summer months. It looked almost reserved and demure in contrast to the light blue sky which enclosed the rest of the sky.

She began walking up the path to the lookout. The winds were being kind to her, as they had remarkably been since she left that time yesterday. It was just a very calm day, even though the cold air bit into Twilight's lungs quite hard. The air was as sharp as it looked. 'Only half an hour around this bend before I'll be at the most desirable spot,' she thought to herself. She increased her pace, excited with anticipation. "This is gonna

be so, freaking, cool!," she then said aloud to herself again, grinning widely. She almost felt glad nobody was around to hear her obsessing over it the entire time.

It wasn't very long before the path led to a bare area, up against a sheer side of a cliff-wall which blocked the way forward. It almost looked perfectly chiseled out of the side of the mountain, like somepony had been trying to make a mountain pass but then decided to stop right then and there for some reason. By her calculations, it still gave her the optimal viewing angle for the meteor shower. It looked out onto the forest and the flat-lands, giving a perfect view which stretched all the way to the horizon.

Twilight sat down, and shuffled the bags off of her back. "Right then," she said, closing her eyes and focusing her attention. Her horn began to glow with a familiar violet light, and gear began moving out of her bag, unfolding, and expanding itself around her. Her tent puffed out into a more tent-like shape, the support spokes assembling and propping the structure up, while her blanket and all of her smaller things flew inside of it all at once. She continued to concentrate more of her magic into assembling her things, and placing them in the correct places. Pegs then stuck into the ground, holding the tethers of the tent firmly down. After only a few seconds, Twilight's camp was set up. She looked around finally, pleased with herself, and decided to crawl into the tent and get a bit warmer. It was going to be only a couple of hours before the main event started. She decided she would read her book on non-telescopic astronomy in preparation.

Twilight anxiously awaited the coming of the night. Celestia's sun began to drop below the horizon slowly but surely, and like clockwork, the night and Luna's moon began to rise into the sky, creating a twilight above her. The stars began to sparkle and shimmer in the sky, and Twilight could almost make out the tiny streaks of light beginning to show up on the changing horizon. She giggled with glee and hunched forward slightly, as if to get closer. It was so, so early in the evening and she could already see them!

In a short while, Twilight began to see the full meteor shower in effect, as Celestia's sun finally bid farewell for another day entirely. There were multitudes of meteors entering the atmosphere, entirely at random, almost lighting up the night sky with their brilliant displays of incandescence. The largest ones fought the moon for attention in terms of brightness, but would always die out in a few seconds. It was like tears from the sky falling down to earth, creating a beautiful fireworks show on their way down to the ground. The moon hovered, unwavering, to the right of the shower, thankfully not so bright as to drown out any of the meteorites or stars. The air was of course clean, clear and crisp, almost seeming to magnify the entire scene before Twilight eyes. The symphony of fire dazzled and amazed her as she looked up in awe at the night sky, taking it all in. She had never seen a more beautiful and enchanting night such as this. It had really been worth the wait and the long trip out here.

Twilight lowered her head and rested it on her hooves, breathing gently. She felt so calm. It felt like this was the perfect time and place for her. She couldn't imagine why she ever questioned coming out here. Well, except for her fri--

Suddenly, Twilight heard an audible, although muted thump outside her tent. At first she thought it had been a snow shelf that had fallen from above, but then heard the familiar sound of crunching snow, as if somepony was out there. She said nothing at first, as a dark silhouette came into view, and began to look out into the forest and night sky, imposing themselves against the view of the horizon. The figure stood out there – obviously another pony – for a few moments, before Twilight spoke up.

“Um... hello?,” Twilight said, cautiously, at the dark figure.

Two gleaming, teal-blue eyes peered through the darkness and seemed to light up. A particularly bright meteor began to be set ablaze in the atmosphere, and the bright fireball illuminated the other very pony subtly, showing off the dark blue hair flowing from their mane. The moon and the stars almost seemed to glow brighter in their presence, reflecting off of the other pony's mane and highlighting them perfectly. The light dimmed then suddenly, but Twilight could easily make out who it was. It was Princess Luna.

“O-oh! Princess Luna!” Twilight immediately got up too quickly, getting her face stuck on the tent momentarily. “H-how nice to see you here!,” she continued after untangling herself.

“Oh...” Luna said, looking down at the ground. “I'm terribly sorry. I didn't realize this spot was taken. I'm sorry to disturb you...” Luna almost immediately took off, apparently feeling herself unwanted by default, but Twilight called out to her before she could get very far.

“Wait, Princess! It's me, Twilight Sparkle.”

Luna wasn't very far off the ground before she stopped, and landed again. “Oh... Twilight Sparkle. My sister speaks so highly and frequently of you.” Twilight blushed a bit, even though Luna couldn't see it. “I... was looking to enjoy the meteor shower tonight. I can understand if this spot is already claimed.” Luna seemed uneasy and almost afraid, which threw Twilight off quite a bit. She had only really known Luna as the hubris-prone, confident-to-a-fault Nightmare Moon.

“O-oh, no, not at all! There's more than enough space up here for us to share. I promise!” Twilight eyes then popped open, realizing that she hadn't even properly curtsied, and she bowed her head. “I'm very terribly sorry, Princess. I never paid my proper respects.”

Luna seemed visibly flustered, waving her hoof frantically. “No, no, it's okay. I never wished to be a bother. I can go elsewhere if need be...”

“There's no need, your highness. I promise.”

“Are you absolutely sure?”

"Absolutely." Twilight stepped outside of her tent, and aside. "I would be absolutely honoured if you'd join me in star-gazing tonight, Princess Luna. I promise you're not unwelcome at all."

Luna smiled very slightly, feeling touched by Twilight's kindness, even after everything that had happened between them, and slowly moved towards the tent.

It had been an hour after Luna had arrived. The two mares were beside each other in Twilight's tent, legs folded underneath them and looking out into the brilliant night. The meteor shower had only intensified as the night continued. The bright fireballs continued to shoot down through the sky like falling stars. Twilight felt a little flustered being so physically close to a living immortal alicorn goddess at first, but the display above them was enough to calm her down a little bit.

"Thank you for sharing your space with me, Twilight Sparkle. You're very hospitable," said Luna, suddenly and quietly.

"O-oh, it's no problem at all! The honour is all mine!" Twilight replied, grinning wider than she should, and nervously giggling out of the suddenness of Luna's praise. Luna's breath filled the air with steam around her, the coldness eating up and crystallizing the humidity. "I made sure to get a large tent, to make sure I store all my things inside during the night. It'd be really inconvenient if something blew off the side of the cliff during the night, right? Plus if anypony wanted to come with me, I'd have enough space for them, too! Or if I found anything really interesting on the way here I wanted to take back with me! That kind of thing!" Twilight looked to the side, grimacing a bit. The little voice in the back of her head told her she was talking too much for her own good.

"I understand," Luna said plainly, continuing to look out into her night.

Twilight said nothing for a few moments, thinking of what to say or do next. "Oh! Would you, um, like some apple slices? My friend Applejack gave me some." She magically moved the bag over to Luna, offering. "'Best apples in Equestria,' as she always says!"

"Why yes, thank you. It was quite a journey here," Luna said happily, taking one with her hoof. "Applejack... that would be the farmer-labourer pony that you're with often, yes?"

"Yes, that's right. She's very dependable, you know, once you get past her must-do-everything attitude."

"I see. My sister told me about her."

"And this coat I'm wearing was made by Rarity. She's the fashion diva, with gemstones as her cutie mark."

"I see. It looks like it would keep you very warm."

"Y-yeah, it does."

Twilight continued to think of things to say, feeling even more awkward with the pace of the conversation. Luna wasn't wearing anything, and had only brought a small bag with her, crested with Luna's royal emblem and lined with golden fabric. Wasn't she cold? The night continued to light up randomly, casting ethereal shadows upon the pair of them. Twilight looked around her, when noticed the small telescope beside her. "Oh! And this was a gift from my parents, for being accepted into the Royal Academy. I've kept it with me ever since."

"Oh? A telescope?," Luna said, visibly interested.

"Yeah! I've been an amateur astronomer ever since I was a young filly. Aside from learning about magic – and I suppose studying friendship, now – astronomy has always been one of my favourite things to do."

"Amateur... astronomer?"

"Yeah. Whenever it's late and I'm tired of reading books or learning spells, I usually just go upstairs onto my balcony and look out at the stars. I find it fun and relaxing," replied Twilight, smiling brightly. Finally, a subject Luna might like!

"People look up at the night sky for fun, now?," said Luna, inquisitively interested

"Oh, yes, lots of ponies do. Amateur astronomy is a pretty big hobby for lots of ponies out there these days. It's even taught in some schools growing up. Books have been written about the night sky by famous authors... the moon is even a symbol of romance in some fiction novels. "

"I-I see... so... some ponies out there look at the night, for personal enjoyment?" Luna lowered her head a bit, looking over at Twilight out of the corner of her eye.

"Of course they do," Twilight said happily, getting too caught up in her own descriptions, completely oblivious to Luna's reactions. "A lot of ponies love stargazing. A lot of them stay up sometimes just to do it. It's a fairly big hobby. People learn about it in school these days, too."

"I see. And you're out here because you're one of these 'amateur astronomers,' too?"

"Well... yeah. I came all the way out here just to get the perfect view for this amazing meteor shower," Twilight said, still grinning to herself, gazing over the hail of light bringing her endless entertainment. "Once in a thousand years? Of course I couldn't resist. The night sky just... makes me feel so calm. It's like nothing else. Lots of ponies feel that way too."

"I'm glad," replied Luna, after a few moments. She sounded happy, but in an almost sad way as well. A small gust of wind came by and blew her mane away from the side of her face for a moment, sparkling in the wind like it was the sky itself.

Twilight looked more closely at Luna, who had her head lowered, with a quivering smile on her face. Twilight wasn't sure if she had offended her, or done something to displease her. She wasn't thinking terribly straight, what with all the anxiety rushing through her brain. Even in all her years under Celestia's tutelage, she had never been

so close as to spend this kind of intimate time with her, just talking. With a nervous grin and a soft voice, Twilight prodded a little. "I-I didn't say anything to offend you, did I, your highness?"

"Oh, no. You didn't offend me in the slightest," Luna replied, almost frantically. She composed herself and smiled at Twilight, which gave Twilight a feeling of relief. It was, of course, followed by an awkward pause, which Twilight attempted to break as fast as possible.

"W-would, um, you like some food? It must have been a long trip, right?," stuttered out Twilight. Oh, how she wished she could stop being so afraid. All she could really think about was the last time they had seen each other, and how her and the others had essentially ripped Luna apart with the Elements of Harmony. She couldn't help but feel that there was some kind of bad blood remaining between them, even if Luna seemed just as anxious as her.

"It is quite alright, you've offered me food already. I have enough packed for myself, I promise."

"Ah. Right. Haha." Twilight looked off to the side, grimacing a bit. Now she was just making herself look like an idiot.

"But... if... if you're okay with it, I would not mind having another one of those apple slices. I don't get to taste such... simplified forms of food in the castle."

"Oh! Of course, go right ahead!"

Luna magically raised another one into the air. "I must ask, however... you seemed very over-packed for just one pony. Were you expecting someone else?"

"In case anyone decided at the last minute to come with me, yeah." Twilight looked down for a moment, lost in thought, but then snapped back to attention and smiled. "Sorry. I was hoping to share this with my friends, but none wanted to brave the cold to come out here. I'm just glad you're here to share this with. This is one of the best things that's ever happened for me. I was convinced I wouldn't be able to share this with anypony, but then you arrived." Twilight smiled sweetly at Luna. "And I'm having great time with you, Princess."

Luna was on the verge of tears, and a single one rolled down her cheek, although Twilight couldn't see through the moonlit darkness. Luna had never heard such sweet words about her night, the thing she put so much of her heart and soul into every time the sun set. She was so shocked that she couldn't say a thing, and she just turned her head the other way. What was this feeling in her chest? Sadness? Relief? Happiness? She couldn't tell. A torrent of emotion was about to burst out of her, and she could feel it.

"...Princess, are you okay?" She could hear Twilight talk to her. She responded quickly, attempting to save face.

"I'm fine... really," replied Luna, shaking her head. "I promise you. And... thank you, for having me here. I'm... I'm... having fun." The word 'fun' left her lips before she could process them. She didn't know whether or not she was having fun. She didn't know what that word really meant anymore. It was at that moment a very large fireball entered the sky and shot across it, from over their heads all the way to the horizon, and a thought occurred to Luna. "Somepony... appreciates my night..." Luna started thinking to herself. At first it was small, but slowly, a great sense of joy overcame Luna, replacing all other emotions, as the brightness of the meteorite intensified in the sky, illuminating both of them for what seemed like an eternity. 'Somepony... loves my night...!' Her heart began to flutter a little, and she started to smile, tears forming on the edges of her eyes.

"I'm glad you are. I am too," responded Twilight, seemingly oblivious to Luna's emotional state. Luna wasn't sure if she was hiding it well or if Twilight wasn't picking up on it at all. But then Twilight just sweetly smiled again, causing Luna to melt just a little. One thousand years of waiting and she finally found someone who appreciated her night. She didn't know how to process all of the feelings she was experiencing. She decided just to enjoy it.

"Thank you, Twilight Sparkle. And please... you can call me Luna."

She smiled brightly back at Twilight, feeling that fleeting sense of happiness overtake her. She realized, finally, that she had found somepony with some common ground – or in this case, a common sky. Maybe now, she could make her very first friend.

Chapter 2

"Luna, Luna, Luna," a voice said through the darkness.

Luna walked down a long, brick-laden hallway, lit up only by the phosphorescent-like properties of her mane and the light emitted from her horn. She had no idea how she had gotten here, or what this place was. She could only feel the bone-cold dampness of the ground on her hooves and throughout the hair on her body. It felt like a cellar or a dungeon.

"This world isn't a place for ponies like us. You know that. Didn't you learn anything from our little 'vacation'? We are one and the same, and yet, you've learned nothing, NOTHING from me. You really think this happiness and joy will last? Pah. You're just as weak now as you were then."

Luna saw a big oval mirror in front of her, bolted against the wall of what appeared to be an abrupt dead-end to the corridor. She had seen this scene more times that she could remember, and she knew who was speaking to her so menacingly. She'd heard that voice torture her for over a thousand years. It was Nightmare Moon. Looking into the mirror, Luna could see the typical, forever-unchanging reflection of her doppelganger staring back at her, with a smirk on her face like a malevolent tyrant displaying the most exquisite schadenfreude.

"Nightmare..." Luna started, looking down and sighing, stamping her hoof down, "Things have changed. The Elements of Harmony suppressed you, and as soon as you went away, everything improved. Once I was allowed to come back home, I was happier. I don't have to listen to you anymore. I'm even trying to make friends now."

Nightmare Moon rolled her eyes and laughed. "Oh you silly little filly, still holding onto those dreams you've caressed and kept alive for so many centuries. You will always be alone. No mere mortal can compare to the power we hold. In the end, we are RULERS."

"RULERS don't have to be EVIL."

"Tell that to our sister. Oh, you've forgotten, haven't you? How she mercilessly suppressed us because we wanted equal say over the affairs of the world – equal rule over the subjects of Equestria."

"With you threatening destruction, how did you expect her to react? She even apologized to us."

"Is that how you rationalize it now?," replied Nightmare Moon, laughing to herself. "You pulled the trigger, and you could have easily ended it. Oh yes, it's so easy to blame the big-bad Nightmare Moon for everything, since everyone always just

ASSUMES that sweet little Luna could NEVER do something as EVIL as that. Oh,” Nightmare continued, bringing a hoof to her mouth in a faux-attempt to hide her amusement, “I wonder how your 'friend' Twilight would feel if she knew that you, and not I, were the one who wanted to plunge everypony in Equestria into eternal darkness. How you didn't care if they DIED?”

Luna's hoof instinctively raised up and smashed the mirror in anger, distorting and fracturing the face of Nightmare Moon. Luna's face contorted in pain and she began to sob, as a small trickle of blood ran down her fore-hoof and dripped onto the floor. Fighting Nightmare Moon always just hurt her in the end. You can't fight yourself.

“We'll see how long it takes before you come running back to me. You always do, in the end. Always looking for me to punish whoever has hurt you. I'd be GLAD to do it again.” she said, giggling her menacing way.

Luna just pounded on the broken mirror as glass fell frantically to the floor, crying out in pain, the blood dripping and mixing with the tiny shards of glass. It wasn't her fault, it wasn't her fault, she just... she just... wanted...

Luna awoke with a start, her eyes popping wide open, with the unfamiliar surroundings around her snapping back into place in her mind. She was shivering ever so slightly, despite being perfectly warm. She was still in Twilight Sparkle's tent on the edge of the cliff, and she could see her sister's sun shine through its fabric. She was actually glad it was daytime for once, since feeling her sister's presence always made her feel safer. She refocused her eyes on her surroundings, noticing that Twilight wasn't in the tent with her. After looking around, images of the dream popped into her mind, and she quickly looked at her hoof – there were no injuries, of course. She continued to breathe deeply, and slumped down into the large sleeping bag the two of them had shared. It was a dream. It was always just a dream.

It had been a long time since she had reacted so violently to one. After returning to Equestria, the Elements of Harmony had suppressed the villain, thus silencing the dream-invasions of Nightmare Moon for quite a while. But as Luna's desires for companionship and friendship began to come back, so had she. Nightmare Moon fed on her fears, broken hopes and dreams. Luna had been so hopeful for change since returning, yet she still remained practically anonymous wherever she went. People only acknowledged her existence insofar that she was an alicorn, which was wonder in itself and confused many of them. They knew of Nightmare Moon, but had all heard that she had been 'defeated and banished.' Her sister, Celestia, attempted to correct people whenever possible, but ultimately, the word never spread. The only ones who knew the truth were the ones who were there when it happened, and the denizens of Ponyville who had all heard the story from Twilight and her friends.

Luna got up slowly, shaking her head. Nightmare Moon had told her lies for a thousand years, why start believing her now? She shrugged off the sleeping bag, and stretched her wings out as wide as possible in the relatively-cramped space. She magically gripped the zipper on the door, opened it slowly, and stepped outside, her hooves impacting on the crunchy snow. She looked around, her eyes adjusting to the bright light, peering around the tent. She couldn't see Twilight anywhere. "Twilight Sparkle?"

"I'm over here, your hig-- uh, Luna!," called Twilight from the side of the tent. Luna stepped outside and looked around the corner of the tent. Twilight was moving all sorts of stuff around with her magic, cooking what appeared to be powdered eggs over a small, dual-burner gas stove, concentrating very intensely on the precise measurements for making a perfect meal. "Good morning! I'm just cooking us breakfast. I'll be with you in a moment."

"Oh... thank you, Miss Sparkle."

"It's no problem at all! I brought extras after all," said Twilight as she turned and smiled at Luna. She quickly then snapped back to her cooking as something nearly tipped over due to her distraction.

"I... I see. Thank you so much." Luna said as she smiled back, walking closer to Twilight. The sun shone bright in the sky, spreading her sister's love and warmth over the sleeping, natural landscape, with a bright, baby-blue tone caressing it on it's journey across the sky. It must have been mid-day by now as the gentle winds of the mountain passed behind them. "However, I did... bring my own food. You don't have to go through such expense and effort for me."

"Of course I don't *have* to, I just *want* to! It's not very often I get to cook for others. I just hope it tastes alright, yo-- Luna," replied Twilight, catching herself again.

Luna sat down beside Twilight and watched her continue to mix and stir things. She had no idea what she was cooking. She had never actually seen food prepared in front of her before – it was very fascinating to her. "May I ask what you're making, and how?"

"I'm making scrambled eggs and rye toast. It's actually more like an omelet at this point, really. I mix powdered eggs, some dried vegetables. I then use the snow from around here for water to rehydrate the eggs. After I cook them, I put some rye bread on the pan to lightly toast them. Does that sound okay to you?," explained Twilight, as she continued to concentrate.

"I've... I've never had them before, I don't believe."

"Oh! Well, there's first time for everything, right?," replied Twilight, visibly nervous now.

"B-But, I'm perfectly willing to try them!," said Luna frantically.

"O-Okay then!"

The pair of them just sat there, not speaking for a moment, as the sizzling of the eggs filled the air with the delicious smell of green onions. The awkwardness of the night before had returned. Neither of them seemed to be able to get over their fear for each other, and Luna started to feel like she was being a burden, or overstaying her welcome, or something like that.

"T-Twilight Sparkle?"

"Yes, Luna?," she replied, still a bit nervous.

"If you'd like the time to yourself, I can leave after breakfast. I understand if you do." Luna looked to the side, feeling the sadness in her heart slowly creep up.

"N-No, of course not!," Twilight said, as she split the omelet with a spatula and served it onto two plates. She then quickly placed the frying pan back down and put two pieces of toast on. Twilight, essentially done with cooking, turned to Luna. "If you'd like to stay, then you're more than welcome to! To be honest, if you weren't here, I'd be getting really lonely right about now. I mean, unless you have some royal duties to attend to."

"I don't... but are you sure?"

"Definitely. I just hope I'm not being too annoying, talking all the time about random things. I do that a lot. If I'm talking to much, please tell me, so I can stop talking too much, okay? Haha." Twilight looked to the side, hiding her face. Luna noticed she did that a lot.

"O-okay, I can do that. I'm not making you uncomfortable, am I?"

"No... no. I just need to relax a bit, I guess," replied Twilight, laughing to herself.

"I need to do that as well, I think. I can't help... but think I'm doing something wrong, or imposing upon you. I'm very sorry." said Luna, lowering her eyes. Twilight was being so hospitable to her, out of pure kindness. Why did she always assume the worst from everypony? A brief vision of her dream flashed before her eyes, and then she remembered, as she always did whenever she reached out to anypony. She was still fighting off Nightmare Moon's emotional poison. Would she have to live in her shadow forever?

She raised her eyes again to find Twilight Sparkle staring at her. Their eyes met, and they looked into each other for what seemed like a small eternity. In that moment there was a kind of understanding between them, a small connection. Although they didn't realize what they understood, precisely, they knew what each other was feeling. Both of them knew that they feared each other to the same extent. Much of the tension finally broke for both of them, as they understood a simple but unspoken rule between each other: they didn't have to be afraid.

Twilight smelled something burning and quickly snapped back into reality, frantically flipping the toast on the pan. Thankfully, they were just well toasted and not burnt. She sighed happily. "Well, breakfast is served, I suppose!" She moved the toast

onto the plates, turned off the burners, and then placed one of the plates in front of Luna.

“Thank you very much, Twilight Sparkle.”

“No problem at all, your h-- I mean, Luna. And please, just call me 'Twilight,' if I'm allowed to be so informal with you,” replied Twilight. Luna didn't know what she was feeling, but her respect for the purple unicorn had grown again. The pair of them just smiled at each other and laughed. For a moment, Luna could swear that she even felt a little bit safer in Twilight's presence. From what, she didn't know.

Twilight flipped through a few pages of a book on “Ancient Astronomy,” nestled under the sleeping bag, with a cup of hot chocolate beside her. The temperature was rapidly dropping, but Twilight hadn't been able to take her jacket off since she got there regardless. She read a passage on the meteor shower she had travelled all this way to see, and the scant amount of details it held. Being a once-in-a-thousand-years occurrence, very few details could be recorded about it. Most of it contained speculation on the event, when it had originally started, and so on. She knew all of this already, of course – she just liked re-reading over things to solidify them in her mind.

Twilight closed the book and looked curiously over at Luna. She was starting to get used to having the alicorn so close to her, which allowed her to relax quite a bit. At least she knew now that Luna was just as scared as her, but wasn't terribly sure how she had picked up on that. She questioned whether or not something entirely different had happened – she was rubbish at reading body language. She also knew she always second-guessed herself like that, and decided to ignore it, just this once.

Luna was reading her own book as well. It was a smaller, gold-encrusted book, that seemed to be very old. Twilight curiously looked at the cover, which had a title in a type-set she couldn't decipher – it looked Equestrian, but not entirely. “Hey, Luna, what are you reading?”

“Oh,” she raised her head, and turned the book on its side, “it's a very old book of poems. It's written in Ancient Equestrian. Not many ponies can read that anymore.”

“Ah,” Twilight said, trying very hard to decipher what it meant. As far as she could tell, the book's title was 'Plenty Rose-Water,' which made no sense. “Gah, I have such a hard time remembering how to spell things in plain-old modern Equestrian. What's the title?”

“‘A Rose-Filled Ocean.’ Kind of a, how do they say... ‘cheesy’ title, I know, but it's quite good.”

“Oh, okay. Sounds interesting,” said Twilight. She had never really read many works of fiction, or poetry. It was always scientific or magical research, since she didn't know how she could take anything away from a work of fiction that she couldn't just take away from life experience or, of course, studious research.

“What book are you reading, Twilight?”

"Oh, this? This is a book on ancient meteorological events. I used it to calculate the best possible viewing location – as long as it wasn't too far away from Ponyville, of course."

"I see," replied Luna, eyeing the book carefully. She seemed to be very intrigued by it, although Twilight didn't understand why. Wasn't she the one who made the night itself? "W-would you mind if I... took a look through it, with you?"

"Of course I wouldn't mind," replied Twilight, slightly perplexed. Luna closed her own book and put it aside, and the two moved closer together, almost nuzzled up against each other. Twilight placed the book between the two of them, and turned the page to the main index in the front. "What would you like to see?"

Luna looked over all of the subjects in the book. Recorded meteor showers and meteor impacts was the top category. There was also listing of Summer and Winter constellations and their categories, as well sections on both the sun and the moon. The last one, of course, caught her eye.

"People have written about the moon?"

"Well, yes. It's the brightest object in the night sky, so tons of ponies have written all about it," said Twilight, as she began to flip the book to that section almost automatically. On the page itself, there was a beautifully illustrated picture of the moon on the heading page, featuring all of its physical imperfections. It then began to list all of its properties, such as its luminosity, its waning/waxing cycles, and so on. Luna seemed to be taken aback by all the information, for some reason.

"O-oh wow, this is all so overwhelming," said Luna, reading the pages over closely. Twilight just grinned, thinking that maybe she had piqued Luna's interests finally. "I didn't think ponies out there took it so seriously. I didn't even know many of these things... this, for instance," she continued, pointing at a sentence with her hoof. "'A symbol for romance'? What's meant by that?"

"Well, as far as I can remember, a moon-lit evening has always been considered one of the most romantic things in the world. Ponies romanticize and write books with moonlit romance scenes all the time."

"I-I never knew..." said Luna, smiling softly to herself.

"You never knew what the moon symbolizes to most ponies?," she said, almost aghast at how little Luna knew of her own creation. "But, don't other ponies tell you about these things? There's no way I can be the only one."

"You have to understand, Twilight," replied Luna, "not many ponies talk to me about such things. They're always so afraid to do anything except bow before me and try to please me. They don't ask about my night, and if I ask them, they just give me a belittling response of, 'oh yes, it's simply marvellous.'"

"...really? Why won't anypony be honest with you?"

"I suppose that they're scared of me," replied Luna, the smile from her face fading.

Twilight noticed she had hit a sore spot. If there was anything she disliked more, it was hearing about another pony being belittled and forgotten about. She immediately sat upright, puffing out her chest as if to show her courage. "Well, I-I'm not scared of you at all, and I promise that I will never lie to you like that. I will always be honest and truthful to you, Luna. I'll even Pinkie-swear over it," she said, in the most serious voice she could muster.

"... Pinkie-swear?"

"... Nevermind," said Twilight, sighing to herself, waving her hoof. How had Pinkie-swearing entered her vocabulary like that? "... but the point still stands." Twilight looked at Luna, and the pair's eyes locked again, for one of those little-eternity moments. Luna was just smiling, her eyes beginning to glisten with tears. Twilight was sure she had completely wrecked something at this point, yet she couldn't look away. A part of her, at least, knew that she had actually made Luna happy. In her, a tension began to build as her logic and her emotions clashed, freezing her up entirely. Her mind just kept drawing blanks, until Luna finally spoke. What was causing her to feel this way every time their eyes met?

"Twilight...?"

Twilight took a few seconds to snap out of it, but then quickly turned the pages to the section on meteor showers. "R-right! Sorry, I got carried away." Her heart was starting to pound. Why did she feel this way over just complimenting somepony?

The pair of them continued to read Twilight's book as the day drew on to a close. They talked and even laughed a little bit, as Celestia's sun began to dip into the low horizon.

Luna felt happy. She actually felt a lot of different things, and didn't quite know how to process them all, but the word 'happy' seemed to fit her in that particular moment. She could barely contain her smiles as the evening approached, and she continued to talk with the purple unicorn who had dispelled the one thing that had made her so miserable, so withdrawn and so lonely for her entire existence. Luna knew now, that somepony out there appreciated her night, that they would come so far just to see and enjoy it. She just wanted to hug Twilight, but didn't, being too shy to display such a form of affection to someone she didn't fully know first. Luna just enjoyed the sensation, the feeling of being happy and appreciated by somepony. She didn't question it, nor did she want to. A question in the back of her mind continued to gnaw at her, however. Did Twilight Sparkle want to be her friend? That, she couldn't tell. She'd have to try as hard as she could to become Twilight's friend, she thought to herself.

"Thank you so much for your hospitality, Twilight. You've been so generous with me imposing upon you," said Luna, as the pair of them sat together inside the tent.

"Please, y-- Luna, I promise you're not imposing. You've thanked me more than enough."

"I know. I just felt like saying 'thank you' again."

"Well, you're very welcome, then," said Twilight, smiling happily.

Luna loved that smile of hers. It was so genuine and sweet. Unlike the other ponies back in the castle, she could tell that when Twilight smiled, it was honest. It wasn't one of those fake smiles the ponies of the royal court would put on to please her, even though it wasn't expected (or wanted) of them. The two of them had finally begun to get comfortable in each-others presence, after all the awkwardness that had transpired. Luna didn't know why, but she craved the informality that existed between them. Perhaps it was how it made her feel equal, in a certain sense, and that equality made her feel accepted instead of feared. She needed to be accepted for who she was. But whether or not Twilight would be her friend, despite her best efforts, eluded her. On that thought, another question came to mind.

"Twilight, may I ask you something?"

"Of course!"

"What do you and your companions do in Ponyville?"

"What do we do? Well, Applejack, helps run her family's apple farm just on the outside of town, of course. Pinkie Pie works with Mr and Ms Cake at Sugarcube Corner as their 'Party Director,' setting up parties for anypony who makes a request. Fluttershy-

"Sorry, I don't mean to cut you off," interjected Luna, "I meant, specifically... what do you all do together? As... friends?"

"Oh! Well, that's... hard to explain. We do all sorts of things. If we're not putting out fires or preventing Ponyville from being destroyed, of course," said Twilight, laughing to herself and sighing. "But, for instance, two of my friends, Fluttershy and Rarity, usually go to the spa together, just to talk and hang out. Pinkie Pie usually hosts parties for us, and we all get together to just dance, eat sickeningly-sweet food, and have fun. Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie hang out sometimes too, pulling crazy pranks on everypony. Just a whole lot of random stuff, really."

"So all of you get together to... 'hang out,' as they say? Just to enjoy each others company?" Luna listened intensely, finding all of this fascinating.

"Yeah! There's really no rhyme or rhythm to it."

The thought of just 'hanging out' intrigued and confused Luna. The only ones who spent any significant amount of time in her presence were the royal guards or her sister, Celestia. She didn't understand what other ponies did in those situations, even though at most royal events, she could see ponies who were obviously familiar to each other talking amongst themselves. She had always assumed those conversations were business-like or somehow necessary – the concept of 'pleasant conversation' escaped her. Luna raised her head and said, suddenly and forcefully, "And, how would one go about arranging such a time as to 'hang out' with other ponies? Is scheduling required?"

"N-not usually," replied Twilight, taken aback by her directness. "Most of the time somepony just shows up, and if you're free, then you do something together. If not, then you simply say, 'some other time!,' and move on."

"And if they're free, they do something together? As friends?"

"Y-yes. That's usually how it goes."

"I see. I would li--" Luna caught herself and the words became a giant lump in her throat, like an entire apple had been caught there. She coughed and lowered her head, a wave of anxiety crashing into her out of nowhere, completely breaking the small tide of confidence she had. 'I would like to 'hang out' with you sometime, Twilight.' She tried as hard as she could to make the words escape her lips, but she couldn't do it, no matter how much she strained. She was too afraid. "I-I wo--"

"You would...?," said Twilight, visibly worried.

"... nevermind. It's alright," said Luna, trying to hide her face. "I'm... going to go for a walk. To stretch my wings." She could feel tears coming on, and she didn't want Twilight to see herself in such a state. Why was she such a coward? Why couldn't she do what was necessary? Why was she so STU-- no, she wouldn't think like that. She wouldn't. She couldn't.

"Luna."

"I'll be back... before dark, I promise."

"Luna."

"I-I'm sorry--"

"LUNA!"

Luna turned her head to Twilight, who was standing up and had an exasperated look on her face. She had never heard anyone raise their voice to her like that, and so she just stared at Twilight, the tears not moving from the rims of her eyes. Twilight's expression lightened a bit, and she sighed, sitting back down. "I'm sorry for raising my voice at you, Luna, but it's okay. You don't have to be afraid. I might be a bit oblivious to somepony's feelings most of the time, but I'm not completely blind. I could tell what you were going to say. If... you'd like to come to Ponyville, and visit me sometimes, that would be perfectly fine. We can even do some star-gazing on my deck upstairs." Luna couldn't say anything. She just stood there, her head down, unable to believe what she was hearing. Twilight continued, in a warm voice. "You don't have to be afraid, you know. I'm just a simple unicorn pony. I've just been so worried that I haven't been doing what you've wanted, but I understand now that both of us are afraid of each other, for different reasons. Aren't we?"

After a few moments, Luna finally replied, her lips finally responding to her commands. "I... I... suppose so."

"So let's both relax, okay? After all, the meteor shower is about to start. I'd be so disappointed if I missed seeing the beginning of the night with you. How about I make us both some hot chocolate, while there's still some light outside?"

Luna slumped back down finally, trying to calm herself down. "Is... is it really alright if I visit you? If we... 'hang out' together?"

"Yes," answered Twilight, simply and directly. Luna couldn't tell where Twilight's burst of enthusiasm had come from, but her words had completely silenced the anxious thoughts in her mind. Now, her mind was filled with the most wonderful notion she could imagine.

"I'm going to go make that hot chocolate. If there's anything else you want heated up, just tell me, okay?"

"O-Okay," Luna said softly and quietly. She watched the purple unicorn open the door to the tent, step outside and close it back up behind her. Luna slid herself under the sleeping bag again. She just breathed deeply, calming herself down. A spark inside of her had removed a huge weight from her soul, and she could feel it. She looked up at the ceiling of the tent, and saw the sun's light slowly fade from the outside world. She couldn't even cry at that moment. The happiness in her heart had grown too immense for even tears of joy, and she realized that she had done it, that she had finally proven Nightmare wrong. She had a friend. She couldn't believe it. Somepony actually wanted to be around her. She didn't have to be alone anymore. It almost felt like waiting a thousand years had been worth it. She didn't have to feel lonely anymore.

Twilight was beaming as she set up her portable stove again. She couldn't believe it! She had an astronomy partner now, and it was none other than Princess Luna herself! Twilight giggled as quietly as she could, heating up the milk in a small, tall pot. She had two insulated mugs laid out to the side, with "Pinkie Pie's Super-Deluxe-Ultimate Hot Chocolate Mix (Marshmallow Edition)" in them. Twilight stirred the milk, and continued to think of all the fun times she could have with Luna back home in Ponyville star-gazing.

It still seemed very odd how Luna knew next to nothing about her very own creation. Or perhaps, it hadn't been that straight-forward. Perhaps Luna had never designed her night in a scientific manner, and she was more of an artist – like a painter, or a sculptor. Twilight figured that made the most logical sense. When she had read of Nightmare Moon in the books, at the beginning of her adventures in Ponyville, the legends specified that Nightmare Moon had become so twisted because nobody appreciated the night. Had Luna really never heard of amateur astronomy in all the time she had come back? Hadn't she noticed the telescopes around the royal castle itself? Twilight mused upon this, until she could see the milk start to steam.

Twilight poured the milk into the hot chocolate mix. The marshmallows added a pink hue to the surface of the drink itself, a Pinkie Pie trademark. She stirred the drinks, and moved over to the tent's entrance as they hovered in the air. "Luna, could you open the door for me? My... horn's a bit full at the moment," she said, giggling at her own pun.

"Oh, certainly." The door fell open instantaneously, and Twilight set the mugs down beside Luna.

"Just a sec, I'm going to go and put everything else away for the night." Twilight then packed up the stove and her supplies, and magically hovered them into the back of the tent, setting them down out of the way. She then walked in and sat down, snuggling under the sleeping bag. She turned off the lantern inside the tent, and smiled over at Luna. "There, now we can relax."

The night finally arrived, and with it, a display which challenged the moon itself directly with a display of bright brilliance. The hail of light had returned, and it looked like a silent firestorm had descended upon the night sky. It was unlike anything Twilight had ever seen. She could almost feel pure bliss overtake her thoughts as the clearest images of fireballs streaking against the dark-blue sky burned themselves into her retina. It was somehow more intense than the night before. She took in the entire display, as if the sky was a giant rolling wave. As the meteorites began to hit their peak, suddenly something caught Twilight's eye just right of the cliff face, like a soft change in hue upon the pallet of the night sky.

"N-no way!," she said, dashing outside of the tent. She ran close to the cliffs edge, but safe enough away from it. Her head craned to the north, and her hopes were confirmed. It was the start of an Aurora Borealis forming on the horizon, skimming across the night sky, growing bigger and bigger until it swept across half of the sky. Not a single sound could be heard, except for the soft, subtle noise of an arctic breeze blowing through Twilight's ears. Twilight was firmly stuck into a trance, staring up into the heavens.

She could feel her cheek become damp and hot, as the intensity rolled over her. She broke out of her trance-like state, and brought a hoof to her face, to feel if she actually was crying. She was. The feeling that a clear winter night always brought her had been amplified to a point where she was unable to do anything except take all of the feelings in. This was, by far, the best thing she had ever seen. She was gazing upon the perfect night.

"Twilight?" Twilight turned to Luna, who was walking towards her, eyeing her curiously only a few steps away. "Are you doing okay?"

"Oh... oh, I'm fine," she said, smiling and looking back up at the sky, almost losing herself once more. "I'm just... overwhelmed. It's so beautiful."

Luna looked across her creation, her eyes reflecting the sky itself. "Yes... I suppose it is."

Twilight noticed herself shivering. The temperature had plummeted way below what it had been last night. Her jacket insulated most of her body, but the cold air still found ways to her unprotected skin. "I'm actually really cold, c-come to think of it." Twilight sat down, folding her arms together and pulling her hooves inside the sleeves. It was the warmest jacket she had ever worn, yet the night was still sending a chill

through her body. The warm glow of fire and the waves of soft light dancing across the sky took her mind off of it almost entirely. That is, until she felt a warm weight press against her side. Twilight looked down and to the side. Luna had pressed herself up against her. Twilight pushed back into her, trying to conserve heat. Luna then magically grabbed a blanket from the tent, unfolded it and placed it over the pair of them in swift, precise motions. "T-thanks Luna, this should keep me w-warmer," said Twilight, shivering.

"It was no problem...," replied Luna, simply.

"I can't b-believe you made all of t-this, Luna," continued Twilight, her teeth chattering. "I-It's so beautiful. I can't believe my eyes. You're the most a-amazing a-artist in all of Equestria."

Luna nuzzled against Twilight's neck, closing her eyes. "I came here to see this by myself. I didn't think anypony knew or cared about this. I made it for myself, so long ago, as an outlet for my emotions... almost like a journal of my feelings. I always wanted to show somepony this night. I've... always dreamt of it. I--I put everything I had, everything I am, into this," said Luna, lowering her head, "and just to share it with somepony... even just one other..."

"Thank you for sharing it with me, Luna. I am truly, eternally grateful. I absolutely mean that," replied Twilight, oblivious.

Luna said nothing for a few short moments. Then, she raised her head, and nuzzled her neck against Twilight's, wrapping the blanket tighter around them. Twilight could feel Luna's warm breath against her muzzle, smelling the sweetness of her hair. Twilight instantly stopped shivering, and she felt her heart skip a beat.

"You're... so wonderful, Twilight. You're just... wonderful."

With those words, like a tiny explosion in her mind, Twilight finally Got It, and everything finally snapped into place all at once.

Luna had never known that even a single pony in Equestria liked her night. The feelings of being unloved and unwanted by the whole of the Equestria itself were the feelings that had twisted her into the being known as Nightmare Moon. Nightmare Moon's rebellion against Princess Celestia is what caused her to be banished in the first place for a thousand years. She was banished, in effect, for feeling unwanted and disliked. Twilight had been showering Luna with praise about her night practically ever since she had arrived. In a flash of empathy, Twilight finally took in the full effect of the things she had been telling Luna all this time. How would she feel if she had been imprisoned for a thousand years because she felt not a single person liked her? A kind of disturbed, muted grin came across her face, as all the scenes that had transpired between them in the last couple of days finally fell into place and made complete sense. Luna was so afraid of scaring Twilight off, because Twilight had been the only pony in

the world to tell Luna that her heart and her soul – her night – were beautiful beyond her wildest dreams.

Luna was falling in love with her. Luna was falling in love with her *hard*. Twilight thought all of this as Luna nuzzled in closer to her, the pair of them looking up at the night sky as a small silhouette against the cliff-side. 'Oh Celestia,' she thought to herself, 'L-Luna... I-loves...' She turned her head, looking at the contented alicorn beside her. Luna looked back, staring into Twilight eyes intensely. Twilight saw the stars perfectly reflect off of Luna's eyes, her mane refracting and amplifying the light of the meteors, the moon at the aurora borealis itself. She truly was the Queen of the Night. Twilight stared at the goddess, speechless. Luna was the night itself, everything it was and had ever been. Twilight couldn't feel anxious anymore. At least, not with the night – the one thing that had always calmed her - sitting right beside her, staring into her soul.

Chapter 3

The breeze blew past Luna's ears as she enjoyed Twilight's warmth against her. Her eyes were closed, focusing intently on this feeling of closeness that was so new and terrifying to her. She didn't know if she was being too affectionate, too forward, or whether or not what she was doing was right. She just wanted this one moment, and Luna knew that it was too good to be true. She had dreamt about it for so long, and couldn't pass up the opportunity, no matter if wrecked everything else. This was the only dream she had left. From what Twilight had told her, maybe Twilight wanted to share this with somepony too. Luna didn't know what being somepony's 'friend' was like. She didn't know how she was supposed to act. All she could think of was the photo her sister had shown her of Twilight and her group of friends all huddled together. She could only hope Twilight wanted her as a friend like that. But for now, she was content with just this.

Under the sea of stars, with streaks of fire and waves of light challenging the daytime in pure brilliance, Luna was finally at peace. Her dream had come true. Nightmare Moon was wrong.

"Ahem," spoke a familiar, dark voice. Luna's eyes shot wide open and she stepped back, looking around. She was in that familiar, damp, dark corridor again, with that same oval mirror in front of her – another dream. "Welcome back, my dear Luna." Nightmare Moon stood over her in the reflection, with an disappointed look on her face and something in her eyes that looked almost afraid. "Having fun with your new 'friend'?"

"Stay away from me, Nightmare Moon. I did it. I proved you wrong, *completely* wrong. Twilight wants to be my friend. Twilight wants to spend time with me. She loves my night," said Luna, defensively. "I don't need to be afraid anymore. I don't need to be alone anymore. Go away."

"Luna," said Nightmare Moon, in a deadpan tone. Luna looked up into Nightmare Moon's ice-blue eyes, which shot directly into her soul. "Do you know what the pain of having your heart broken in half feels like?"

Luna was taken aback by the question. She had never experienced heartbreak. The only emotions she had felt for most of her existence were things like loneliness and being unwanted.

"Oh, it's quite alright. Neither do I. Do you want to find out? I've heard it's the most exquisite pain there is," said Nightmare, craning her neck downwards to look at

Luna in the eye. "It would be a wonderful, *painful* new emotion to add to our repertoire, don't you think? You could do *so much* with it."

Luna looked at the ground, shaking her head. How had she made somepony so evil? "Nightmare... I'm going to be Twilight's friend. She won't hurt me, I know she won't. She'll never betray me like that. Big sister told me she never betrays her friends."

Nightmare Moon looked indignant, scoffing at the smaller mare. "So you're really willing to play roulette, willing to give our heart to the first random pony – another mare, no less – that you meet. You're certainly braver than I am. Or perhaps you're just stupid."

"Our' heart?," replied Luna. "I thought you didn't want any part of that 'mushy stuff.' I thought that wasn't your 'thing.'"

"You know *very well* what I mean, you foal. Don't play stupid with me. If you are hurt, *I* am hurt. No power in all of Equestria could stop the destruction if you were to get your heart broken by your first love. The world itself would shatter under your hoof."

Luna audibly gasped. 'First love'? What did she mean by that? "I'm not like that anymore. I won't do those horrible things. I never will. I'll never hurt Twilight, even if she ends up hurting me. I never will. I'd never forgive myself for hurting somepony so wonderful. I won't. I just won't."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes."

"Do you *REALLY MEAN THAT?!,*" yelled Nightmare Moon, forcibly, filling the entire corridor with her booming voice.

"*YES!!,*" screamed Luna back, with all the force she could muster, countering Nightmare's voice with echoing reverberation that could have moved the walls themselves given half a chance.

"You can never trust somepony completely. *Never.* If-- no, *when* you get hurt, I will NOT be there to pick up the pieces of your heart! I will only be there to ensure that you can do what you've always wanted to, which is to rule Equestria and its subjects. It's always been your one, true desire!"

"That's not what I want anymore! I don't want to rule anything or anypony!," said Luna, looking her demon straight in the eye. She got into an aggressive stance, her fear for Nightmare melting away in an instant. The fear of Nightmare had crippled her for so long. She wouldn't be afraid of her anymore. No more fear, ever again. "You've corrupted me, told me lies, and made me afraid of ever reaching out to anypony ever since I came back! You were hoping to *USE ME, AGAIN,* hoping I'd snap and give in to your evilness! Never again!" Luna moved towards the mirror, Nightmare Moon looking visibly shocked and stepping away from the determined mare. "I'm going to be Twilight Sparkle's friend! That's my dream! That's what *I* want! And you'll never take her away from me!"

Luna awoke, and she felt so very cold. The howling wind chilled her to the very bone, and she found it hard to bear. She raised herself off the ground, trying to look around, seeing nothing but a white haze in front of her. A blast of frigid air assaulted her flanks, nearly pushing her over, forcing her legs to dig into the snow for support. The giant storm, the one that had been scheduled had started early, and not a speck of the proud, beautiful vista they had shared the night before could be seen. The only visible thing was the snow, being whipped up, around and into everything. Luna was freezing, but she had been desensitized to it during her imprisonment on the moon, where it was always this cold. She looked back at the tent, her ears and mane flapping in the violently. The door was open and snow was pouring in, the wind nearly tearing its supports from the ground. The pair of them had fallen asleep outside from the night before, entirely forgetting to close the tent.

Luna finally came to her senses, her eyes widening. 'Twilight?,' she thought. She looked beside her, and could see the purple unicorn, shivering and covered in a thin layer of snow, the violet colour of her jacket barely visible through the white powder. How could she sleep through something like this? Luna lowered her head and nudged Twilight with her muzzle. She didn't move. She was only shivering, with her eyes half-open.

"Twilight?!", yelled Luna, trying to make sure Twilight could hear her through the intense background noise. "Are you okay?!" Twilight just kept shivering, trying to mouth something to her, but being unable to produce enough sound to counter the storm around them. "Can you move?!", yelled Luna again. Twilight slowly shook her head, and tried mouthing something to her, as if it was the hardest thing in the world to do. Luna realized, at that moment, that Twilight was freezing to death. Luna knew what hypothermia could do to a young mare, and if that she didn't act at that moment, Twilight would die.

Without waiting another moment, Luna lowered her body and nuzzled her head underneath Twilight. She kept pushing, the cold, damp snow covering her face. Eventually she wiggled her away underneath, balancing Twilight's body on her neck, and then her back, spreading her wings as wide as she could to support the mare. She turned towards the entrance of the tent and began walking slowly, every step towards the tent was a chore, and the thick snow seemed to suck in her hooves further the closer she got. Eventually, she made it, stepping inside of the partially-filled tent. She placed Twilight down on top of the sleeping bag, the cold air tearing into the tent as if it were a wind-trap. With great effort, she closed the tent door, the elements still pounding against it like a ravenous beast trying to get in. Luna looked around frantically, wondering exactly what she was supposed to do.

"L-I-I...", sputtered out Twilight, who was still shivering.

"Twilight?!", exclaimed Luna, lowering her ear to Twilight's mouth. "Please, tell me what to do Twilight. Please tell me how to help you. I'll do anything."

Twilight's teeth continued to chatter, her body stone-cold and the snow still stuck to every part of her. She attempted, as hard as she could, to give instructions to the anxious alicorn standing over her. "H-h-h... hot... b-bottles... i-i-in b-bag."

"Hot bottles? Hot water bottles?," replied Luna, reflecting what Twilight was saying to make sure she understood. Twilight nodded her head. Luna magically pulled Twilight's saddlebags over towards her. She opened them, and rummaged through them as quickly as she could, throwing things to the floor, eventually finding two hot water bottles near the very bottom of the bag. She pulled them out, showing Twilight. "These? What do I use for water?" Twilight nodded again. Twilight started mouthing something again, her breathing getting more laboured. "U-u-... use... s-snow..."

"Use... snow? But... snow is-- heat up the snow!," exclaimed Luna, the adrenaline beginning to pump through her. She knew how to heat up water with her magic alone, and snow was no different. She unscrewed the cap on the water bottle, and grabbed a lump of snow that had accumulated in on the tent floor, magically heating up the crystallized water and pouring it into the bottle. She focused intensely on the task at hoof, repeating this process as quickly as she could until the bottle was completely full. She then tightened the cap, and undid the top buttons of Twilight's jacket, placing it on her chest and closing up the jacket again. Luna repeated this process with the other one. Once she was done, she looked around her. It must have been a half a foot of snow covering the tent floor.

"I'm going to get rid of all this snow, okay, Twilight? I'll need to open the door for just a second, but I'm going to expel all of it so I can warm you up, okay?," said Luna comfortingly, bending down to talk into Twilight's ear. Twilight nodded and closed her eyes, still shivering.

Luna sat down and concentrated, her horn growing brighter and brighter. One by one, all the particles of water, snow and debris collect into the air as a large mass, hovering silently around her head. Luna then quickly opened the door, and just as the wind was about to rush in from the outside, Luna created a counter-wind which expelled all of the snow in a giant wave. Her mane flapped in front of her face and the feathers of her wing were blown out of shape. After she was sure it was all gone, she closed the tent again quickly, and sighed deeply. She looked at Twilight again, who was laying on her side, her eyes still half-open and her hooves out in front of her listlessly.

"I-Is there anything I can do now, Twilight?"

Twilight only nodded very slowly, and sputtered out, "C-cov-vers..."

Luna silently understood, and nudging the other mare over, opening the sleeping bag with her mouth and then nudging her back under it. She tucked Twilight in, bringing the fabric right to her neck and covering all of her body, and then pulled the jacket's hood over her head and ears. She stood beside Twilight, her ear near Twilight's mouth again, waiting for her next order. "Is there anything else at all? Anything I can do?"

"P-p... p-please... hold m-me..." She forced out those words with whatever she had left in her, her breathing obviously very laboured, although her shivering began to subside. Luna immediately slid herself between the covers of the sleeping bag, and pulled in Twilight with her hooves as close as was possible. Luna was shocked to feel how cold Twilight had gotten, her hooves and every other bit of exposed flesh chilled to the bone. Twilight tried as hard as she could to stutter something else out, but then trailed off into mumbling, before she fell unconscious.

The fierceness of the wind seemed to intensify against the side of the tent. Luna had done what she could, but she still had to do everything on her own from now on. She was terrified that she was too late to save Twilight. She held Twilight as tightly as she could, feeling just how cold the mare had gotten sleeping outside. Tears formed in Luna's eyes, as she pulled a thick, wool blanket out from her own bags behind her, and placing it gently over their heads, trying to keep every single ounce of heat inside. It didn't take very long before Luna was outright crying. It hadn't even been her fault, but she felt responsible for it. She felt like she had hurt her one and only friend. If it hadn't been for her, she wouldn't have fallen asleep outside, and be half-dead as she was now. If it hadn't been for her, Twilight would have never gotten hurt. If she hadn't been so selfish. If she--

"T-thank y-you, L-L-Lun-...", said Twilight, her eyes still closed and her voice barely audible, as she trailed off again.

Luna just kept holding her, whispering into her ear. "Save your energy, Twilight. Please. Don't thank me until you're better again, and until everything is okay."

Twilight wouldn't fight it. She had no energy to. She just nodded. The mares embraced each other for survival, with the strongest blizzard Equestria had ever seen roaring overhead, slamming against the cliff-side they were now trapped on.

Night had fallen once again. The wind remained strong, but not to the gale-force level it had been earlier. Twilight was sitting up now, after hours of being unable to move, huddled with a blanket over her. Luna was sitting beside her, focusing intently on a spell. Suddenly, a small ball of energy emerged in front of the pair of them, growing rapidly until it began emitting a soft, pure-white glow which seemed to warm the air around it.

"There," said Luna. "This should help. It's a spell I learned a long time ago. It's pure magical energy, unlike your stove, which would probably burn the tent down. Here," she took Twilight's hooves and raised them to the small ball of energy, which hovered off the ground near their chests. "It won't burn you. You can even put your hooves directly into it."

"It's warm," said Twilight, in a subtly amazed voice, running her hooves through the wisp in front of her.

"I... I've used it to help me stay warm in the past, whenever I've been cold," replied Luna, nervously laughing.

Twilight couldn't think terribly well. She held her hooves in the ball of light in front of her. Luna was doing something off to the side, but she was too exhausted to pay much attention to it. She breathed deeply, staring at the light. She had nearly died, doing something so unbelievably absent minded. How had she fallen asleep outside? Why hadn't the strong winds woken her up before she was nearly freezing to death? Oh Celestia, Applejack would never let her hear the end of this.

"Here you go, Twilight," said Luna, suddenly. Twilight snapped out of her trance, looking up at the alicorn, who had a mug hovering in front of her. "I prepared that hot chocolate mix you had. Please, drink this. You haven't eaten or had anything to drink since last night. It'll warm you up."

Twilight tried to pick up the mug with her magic, but couldn't, no matter how hard she tried. She squinted, but was unable to produce even a spark. "Twilight, please don't strain yourself," said Luna, concerned. Twilight then just reached out with her hooves, taking it into her hooves.

"T-thank you," replied Twilight, dreadingly. "H-how did you get the water? Didn't you put all the snow outside?"

"Oh... I teleported some in, from outside, and heated it up. Didn't you notice?"

Twilight just shook her head. She was more out of it than she thought. Hadn't only a few seconds passed? "N-no, not really. Thank you, though."

"It's alright. You already thanked me," said Luna, smiling softly. Luna had completely saved her life. Twilight couldn't help but thank her constantly. "Can I do anything else?"

"No... I don't think there's anything else. We just need to wait out the storm for now, I think."

"Okay," replied Luna. She sat down beside Twilight, and looked at the warm glow of the wisp in front of them. Nothing was said for a few moments, as a slightly jittery Twilight continued to sip on the drink Luna had made for her. It made her feel immediately better, and reminded her of Pinkie Pie. Oh, how she missed Ponyville right now.

Twilight couldn't think of anything else at the moment. For the first time in a while, her mind was completely clear, even with Luna sitting beside her. For quite a while, she just admired the handiwork of the warm ball of energy in front of her. Waves of energy rippled across it as if it were both a liquid and a gas at the same time, and it was very warm to the touch. It was similar to other spells she had seen, but this one was... different, almost organic in a way. Twilight tried to strike up a conversation, to get her mind going again and to try to think about something other than her near-death experience.

"What's this spell, Luna? I've never seen anything like it before. It's very nice, and warm," said Twilight, suddenly.

"This spell... is one I came up with a long, long time ago," replied Luna, gently prodding it with her hoof. "I made it to keep me warm, when--" She paused for a second, lowering her head. "--when I... was imprisoned... on the moon."

Twilight looked at it with a kind of fascination, almost feeling the higher-functioning of her brain return piece by piece. It was warm, but it couldn't have kept her very warm on the moon of all places. "But... isn't it even colder than this there? How did you survive?" Twilight then frantically waved her hoof, realizing how oblivious the question had been. "S-sorry, you don't have to answer that. That was very insensitive of me." Open mouth, insert hoof.

"N-no. No. It's... it's alright. I promise," replied Luna, laying down and folding her legs underneath her. "You get used to it. The cold, that is. Eventually you just stop feeling it. A normal pony in those circumstances would have died, of course, but... I'm not a normal pony. I conjured this up, not because I would have died without it. I just wanted to feel some warmth... when I was up there."

Twilight nodded, still feeling like she was going way past Luna's comfort zone. She attempted to break up the tone of the conversation. "T-that explains why you don't need a jacket, I guess." Oh Celestia, just tape my mouth shut, *please*.

"Yeah, that's right," Luna said smiling sweetly up at Twilight, as if it was nothing. "I know you probably think it's a difficult subject for me, but don't worry. I... I don't get to share things like this with anypony." Twilight just nodded, trying not to embarrass herself again. "... this might not be the right time, but I just wanted to say, thank you for last night. It meant a lot to me, more than you can imagine."

Twilight could imagine a lot. She sipped her hot chocolate again, the warmth spreading throughout her body. She felt more and more normal as time went on, which was comforting. "It's okay, Luna. I saw one of those most beautiful things I had ever seen in my life last night. Maybe even *the most* beautiful thing. I honestly believe that everything that happened today was a small price to pay, really," Twilight said, smiling. "Thank you for making something so beautiful."

Luna blushed and looked away, smiling and giggling. "You know that... I did nearly kill you, yes?," she said in a playful tone.

"Labour of love, I suppose," said Twilight. She instantly regretted dropping the 'L'-word in there.

"I suppose that makes two of us," replied Luna, happily.

Twilight blushed and her eyes went wide. "N-no, I didn't mean it like that!"

"L-like what, Twilight?," said Luna, with a wide-eyed expression on her face, just as startled as Twilight. What exact did Twilight mean?

"O-oh, nothing. I'm just being weird. Must be the cold getting to my brain, haha." Twilight just sighed at herself. There was no helping her.

Now a new thought had entered Twilight's mind. Why was she being so defensive? Aside from one or two things, Luna hadn't done much of anything to suggest that romantic love existed. She just as friendly and anxious as Twilight herself the entire time. Why was she getting so afraid? Was it because of the connection they now shared? Why was she afraid of getting close to somepony?

She looked over at Luna, who was still eyeing her curiously. She hadn't stopped looking at her since that outburst. She remembered how beautiful Luna had looked last night, with the sky itself reflected in every fibre of her being, how calm she had been staring into her eyes. Like she was sitting beside the sky itself. Like she didn't need to be afraid.

"Twilight...?"

"Oh, sorry. I was just lost in thought." Twilight was more caught off guard than anything. That familiar sense of calmness had taken her just by looking at the other mare. She knew she should have been feeling anxious around Luna at this point, especially with the notion of her loving her bouncing around in her head, but she didn't. Maybe it had been that she had nearly died, so everything else seemed like a walk in the park. The awkwardness between the two of them had gotten to the point where Twilight was honestly worried she was hurting Luna, and there was nothing she'd hate more. Acknowledging everything that happened between them, Twilight felt compelled to speak.

"Luna, what do you feel about me?"

Luna looked at her curiously, taking a few moments to think on it. "I-It's embarrassing to say, and, I don't know if you feel the same way, so it's okay. I'd rather give it time."

Twilight could feel the anticipation start to build up in her mind and her heart. Was she feeling... hopeful, almost? "It'd mean a lot to me, Luna. I promise I won't judge you. I-I just don't know how you think of me."

Luna blushed and looked to the side, away from Twilight. "I-I don't know if I can say."

"Please, I promise I won't be upset."

"I-I can't."

"Please?"

Luna breathed deeply, her lip quivering. "I think that you're a very wonderful pony, who I feel connected with, and, well..." Twilight could feel her own heart beat through her chest, getting faster and harder with every passing second. "Twilight, I want to be your friend. I want to hang out with you." Luna sat back up, looking into Twilight's eyes as she spoke. "I want to spend time with you, and see things with you, and go on adventures with you, just like you do with any of your friends in Ponyville. I want--" Luna lowered her voice, folding her ears back. "... nevermind. I'm sorry."

Twilight's mouth stood slightly agape for a few seconds, before coming to her senses. "N-no, there's nothing to be sorry about at all!," she replied hastily. "You want to be my friend?"

Luna nodded, looking away.

It didn't make sense to Twilight at all. Why would Luna be so affectionate to her, if she just viewed her as a friend? Why was she so open and trusting? It boggled Twilight's mind, but it didn't take her very long before she answered that question on her own, images of the night before entering her mind again. That connection was more real and deep than she had ever felt. It's why she felt so calm just looking at Luna, just knowing that somepony understood her--

And with that, Twilight finally understood. She sighed and smiled, looking at Luna. She remembered how she had read the passages in the book which spoke of Nightmare Moon, how nobody had appreciated her, or her night. She had been so stupid, so oblivious, like she had always been. "Luna," she began. "I over-think things sometimes. Well, okay, I over-think pretty much everything all the time. But I think I understand you, now."

Luna just looked at her, confused. "Y-you do?"

"I spent so much of my life avoiding friendship with anypony, because I thought it was a drag and that they'd get in the way of doing what I wanted to do. I eventually learned what having friends was like, and I knew then that I'd never trade them for the anything in the world."

Luna just nodded again, listening silently.

"You told me that you want to be my friend. I understand now how much that means to you. You've always wanted friendship, but never had it. I always had ponies coming up to me and asking to hang out, but never did anything with them. Friendship means everything to you. It means the world to you," continued Twilight. "And Luna, I'd love to be your friend. I'd love to spend time with you, if you can put up with how absent-minded I am most of the time."

Luna's eyes grew wide, and it looked like her eyes were beginning to glisten with tears. "Really?," she said, with so much hope in her voice.

"Really," replied Twilight, smiling wider. Luna instantly tackled her, and wrapped her legs around Twilight's neck, her wings unfurling, hugging her as tight as she could and giggling happily. "Oh, thank you Twilight! Thank you so much! Thank you!" Luna was crying in happiness, the tears falling from her face and onto Twilight's jacket.

Twilight hugged the other mare back, smiling. She felt just as excited as Luna, although she didn't really know why – and didn't much care for a reason, either. They had found a connection between them, the likes of which Twilight had never felt before. She didn't know what it was or what it meant. At that moment, she was simply content with knowing she'd be able to be friends with somepony who appreciated the night as much as she did, and that the feeling was completely mutual.

"Twilight?! Sister?! Where are you two?!", said a voice, bellowing from outside. Dawn had broken and light flooded the walls of the tent. Luna and Twilight both awoke with a start, the pair of them embracing each other closely under the cover of the sleeping bag. Both of them instantly knew whose voice that was. It was Princess Celestia herself. Luna instantly got up, shook off the sleeping bag and opened the tent door. A small bit of snow poured in from the two-foot high swell that had formed at the entrance. The storm had passed, and the sun shone brightly, low on the horizon. "Big sister?!", Luna yelled out into the blinding light.

"Oh thank heavens, are you alright? Is Twilight Sparkle with you?"

"W-we're both okay! She's with me!," replied Luna. Her eyes tried to focus on what was outside. Her eyes always took a bit longer adjusting to the brightness of the day. Eventually she could see Celestia standing on the cliff side, her mane waving in the wind as it usually did, with her regular two royal guards at her side and a round, gold carriage parked precariously on the cliff edge itself. Twilight slowly got up, feeling exceptionally sore this morning, as Luna galloped out to meet her sister, the snow providing no hindrance to her. Upon reaching her, she nuzzled her sister's neck affectionately. "I'm so glad to see you, big sister."

Celestia bent her head down and nuzzled her sister back in a loving embrace. "And I am as well. I'm so glad you're alright. The Pegasi weather crew informed me last night that the storm had ended up getting much bigger than they had initially planned, and was nearly beyond their control. I would have come sooner, but the winds prevented the us from coming all the way out here. Are you two okay?"

A groggy Twilight emerged from the tent, stepping out into the crisp morning air which burned her eyes. It was, thankfully, nowhere near as cold as the night before, with the warm rays of the sun hitting her. "We're okay, your highness."

Celestia's eyes widened as she looked at Twilight. "Dear heavens Twilight, you look like a mess! What happened?"

Twilight's hair was completely messy and unkempt, she had giant black rings under her eyes, and she was hunched over in pain. "O-oh, do I really look that bad?," said Twilight, laughing pitifully at herself.

"Well, let's get you two home safe and sound," said Celestia, her guards departing from her sides.

Twilight sighed happily, walking towards her wonderful mentor and Luna. "O-okay. If you could drop me off at home, that'd be gre--"

Luna stepped in front of Celestia, abruptly cutting Twilight off before she could finish. With a determined look on her face, Luna began speaking very sternly. "Sister, I want Twilight taken to the castle, and looked at by the royal physician *immediately*. She was seriously hurt and I want to make sure there's absolutely nothing wrong."

Celestia was taken aback for a moment, before speaking to Twilight. "Is this true, Twilight? Were you really hurt?"

"Well... I did kinda almost, uhm, freeze to death," she replied, grinning nervously.

"It's settled then. Twilight, you'll accompany us to the castle and be looked at by the royal attending physician. You won't be allowed to leave their care until they say so."

"Bu--"

"No 'buts'," replied Celestia, in an authoritative, caring tone.

Twilight lowered her head a bit, her nervous grin widening. "O-okay, your highness. But we still need to get all my thing's pa--" Twilight looked behind her, and noticed that the royal guards had somehow managed to pack up the entire campsite, only finishing on rolling up the tent. How had they packed up things so fast?

"We're done here, my lady," spoke one of the stallions, briskly.

"Let's get going, Twilight," said Luna, smiling brightly as she stood beside her taller sister. Twilight could feel her muscles become more sore as all of the stress finally released. They were safe now. Everything was going to be okay.

"Y-yeah, let's get out of here."

"Luna really is an artist, isn't she?"

Twilight and Princess Celestia were walking down a hallway of the royal castle. Only a couple of days had passed since they had left the cliff-side vista. Twilight had fully recovered with good nights sleep, and the doctor gave her a bill of good health. The sunlight peered in through the windows, illuminating the beautifully crafted stone walls. These hallways were familiar to Twilight. It had been so long since she had last been here, when before it had practically been her home.

"Yeah, she really is. I've never seen something so beautiful in my life. N-not to say your sun isn't very beautiful, of course!"

Celestia smiled. "No, no, I completely understand, Twilight. My artistic skills are nothing compared to that of my sister. I felt the same way the first time I saw Luna's creations fill the night sky. She's only gotten better and better over time, like a painter perfecting their technique. There's really nothing quite like her night."

"Y-yeah, definitely!," replied Twilight, smiling.

"I'm glad you two had fun together out there, even if it did get very dangerous. Did you learn anything on your trip?"

"Oh yes. I learned something very important about friendship, of course. I learned that even when you have your heart set on something, that if your friends are really worried about you, maybe you should listen to them more closely, even if you think they just sound like worry-warts."

Celestia smiled warmly. "Very good, Twilight Sparkle. Don't ever forget that your friends are always looking out for you. That's what having friends is all about, after all."

Twilight smiled to herself, remembering how everypony back home in Ponyville was so worried about her, and how she should have listened. She felt so stupid now, having brushed off all of their concerns all at once, just so she could go without feeling guilty. She also remembered Luna, and how she had been there for her when she needed it most, saving her life and nursing her back to health. That reminded her of something important. "Oh, Princess..."

"Yes, Twilight Sparkle?"

"Is it alright, if Luna came to visit me in Ponyville? Regularly, that is."

Celestia's eyes lit up, as if she was intensely excited at the prospect herself. "Why certainly! It is, of course, up to my sister, but I would have no problems with her regularly visiting Ponyville at all."

Twilight smiled, "That's good. Her and I talked a lot about doing astronomy together when we got back. I promise that I'll try my best not to get her into any more dangerous situations, okay?"

"I'm certain you wont," replied Celestia, smiling. She then quickly lowered her head to face Twilight, as if to talk a little more privately. "She's very sweet and kind. She's as loyal as can be, as long as you treat her with kindness and love. She's very a very... 'passionate' mare, as you can probably tell – maybe even a little intense at times – but she's so very wonderful and caring."

Twilight was a little confused at why Celestia was telling her this, and just nodded. "... I understand."

"I'm just so worried about her. She hasn't made a single friend since she came back to Equestria. I just want her to be happy, after so, so long," said Celestia, with obvious concern for her little sister written across her face and demeanour. "I have complete faith in you, Twilight. She's just so fragile. Please tell me how it goes with her?"

Twilight nodded solemnly. She had never seen Celestia so worried about something or somepony. "I'll be sure to take good care of her, Princess."

"Then I hope you two have many wonderful times together," replied Celestia. The pair of them continued walking, discussing various subjects and catching up on all the little things that couldn't be fit into their letters to each other.

"Are you sure they'll like me?"

"I'm positively sure. They're very friendly. You'll see."

"I'm just so scared. I don't want to upset anypony."

"You wont upset anypony, Luna. I promise. Everything will be okay."

"O-okay, Twilight. I trust you."

"Ere she comes now!," exclaimed Applejack, who pointed up at the sky with her hoof. The golden carriage began to descend from the sky over the main road, where it

usually landed. Everypony was anxiously waiting for Twilight to return after Celestia had written them, telling them what had happened on the mountain. The carriage finally landed and the royal pegasi guards came to a halt, the snowfall crunching under their hooves. The door swung open and Twilight stepped out outside, smiling. "Hey girls, did you miss me?"

The entire group of her friends huddled around her, all of them voicing their intense concern. She felt overwhelmed and embarrassed. What an idiot she had been.

"Twi', when ah told ya te' stay home because ah was worried about ya freezin' te' death, ah didn't mean that te' be taken as a challenge."

"I know, AJ. I'm really sorry. I should have listened."

"Ah heck, all's well that end's well, right? Ah'm just glad yer back home."

"Yeah, you egghead! Don't scare us like that again!"

"We were so *worried* about you, Twilight. I feel *just awful* not going with you..."

"I feel just dreadful that my jacket didn't keep you warm enough. I really ought to have made something much warmer for you, darling. Can you ever forgive me?"

"Did ya get to see the stars? Did ya did ya did ya? Huh huh huh?"

"G-girls, please," said Twilight, exasperated but happy to see everypony again. "It's okay. I'm perfectly fine. We'll all talk about what happened when I get a chance to settle in, okay?" The five other mares just nodded and smiled. It was good to be home. "However, I must to introduce somepony first. Luna, you can come out now," said Twilight. Luna appeared from the carriage, stepping down and smiling meekly, looking at the ground.

"H-Hello, everypony. It's nice to meet you, under better circumstances this time." The five of them all stood there with their mouths agape for a moment, before all bowing to Luna in succession. Luna waved her hoof. "N-no, it's okay, you don't have to do that. I promise. Y-you don't have to be so formal."

One by one, they all got up and approached Luna, still somewhat weary of the royal alicorn. It didn't take long, however, until they were all giving their formal introductions. Luna smiled, shaking hooves with everyone in the group.

"Come by Sweet Apple Acres whenever you'd like, your highness."

"Yeah! You should visit Sugarcube Corner, too! I'll throw an awesome party for you, Luna!"

"If you'd prefer more... refined tastes, you can just come by my boutique at your leisure, my lady. We could chat and have tea, and it'd be wonderful!"

"Or if you want a tour of Cloudsdale or any of the other Pegasus cities, just come find me. I'm usually around."

"Or if you'd like to come by and see the animal hospital I run-- I mean, if that's okay... if you'd like to..."

Luna looked confused, taking in their hospitality and friendliness. She couldn't believe how open they were all being with her. "I-I can try to visit you all, although it might take me some time."

"Weeeee! Awesome! I'm definitely throwing a party for you, then!," exclaimed Pinkie, bouncing up and down in glee.

"A-a party?"

"Yeah! How else are we gonna celebrate Princess Luna visiting Ponyville! It'll be so super-awesome-amazing that everypony will want to come to it just to meet you!"

Luna smiled nervously, finding it difficult to take it all in. She looked to Twilight in an oddly confused but happy way. Twilight decided that she'd better give Luna a bit of reprieve from everyone's prodding, so she could get used to it.

"Let's all get going, girls. I'd love to get home and see what Spike has been up to," she said, smiling. Luna was going to love it in Ponyville, if this was any indication.

"Oh, him? He didn't even bother to show up to meet you here because he let Sweetie Bell and her friends make a complete mess of your library, AGAIN," replied Rarity, sighing heavily.

"Oh geez, I better go rescue him then," laughed Twilight.

Everypony began walking back to town, as the royal guards took off with the carriage up into the sky. Luna was beaming as they walked into town, walking beside Twilight as the others continued on a few paces ahead.

"D-do you think they like me?," asked Luna softly.

"I think they like you. That's my honest answer," replied Twilight.

Luna just kept on smiling. She leaned her head against Twilight's neck and nuzzled softly as they walked together, which made Twilight blush. Twilight didn't mind. She didn't feel scared around her at all anymore. Every time she looked at Luna, that beautiful vista of dusk entered her mind. She could only hope that Luna enjoyed Ponyville, and that they could be the best of friends as time went on. She couldn't wait to show Luna the intricacies of the night sky she had so lovingly created.

Luna was overjoyed and terrified. Her long, immortal life had taken a sharp turn in a direction she didn't understand. Half of her was convinced that it was too good to be true, the other half uncaring and willing to throw caution to the wind. She could only hope that Twilight and her friends accepted her, and learned to forgive her for all the things she had done to them as Nightmare Moon.

Despite these fears and reservations, the pair of them knew something for certain. That bond they felt between them would only get stronger. There was something intrinsic and wonderful about it. They were brought together by a common sky, together forever in that simple, lonely darkness of the brilliant night that they had shared.

Epilogue

"O-oh my."

"It's very beautiful, isn't it?"

"Y-yes it is... I never imagined..."

Twilight and Luna were standing on the deck of the Ponyville Library. It was the middle of spring, and Winter Wrap Up had long past. The grass was growing and the flowers were blooming, adding a beautiful green hue to the world as Luna's moon shone brightly overhead in the dead of night. The temperature was warm and the air was muggy, but the sky remained crystal clear. The pair of them were looking through Twilight's largest telescope, which she had just set up the night before, now that the winter was over.

"Things are so much clearer with a bigger lens, don't you think?"

"Definitely," replied Luna, her eye glued to the eyepiece, the telescope pointed low on the horizon. "What's this star called?"

"It's called Antares. It's a part of the constellation called Scorpio."

Luna took her face away from the eyepiece, looking up at the sky itself. She stared in the direction of red star, the brightest one in the constellation, that continued to flicker different shades of red visible even to the naked eye.

"Does it always do that? I mean, how it shifts in colour constantly."

"As far as I know, it always has, since the very beginning. It's how most astronomers find Scorpio in the sky."

Luna continued to stare at intensely and curiously. She had never noticed it before, even in all of her time changing and perfecting the night sky so long ago. In the relatively short amount of time she had began doing astronomy with Twilight, she had started realizing that there was so much she didn't know about her night.

"Oh! There's something really interesting I want to show you, before you go tonight." Twilight began moving the telescope's orientation, pointing it higher into the horizon. She fiddled with the viewfinder on the side, attempting to point it at a precise location. She then looked through the eyepiece, and then adjusted the telescope again. "A-ha, found it!" she exclaimed. "Although, it might be a little too dark to see on this particular telescope."

"Oh, let me see," replied Luna, trading places with Twilight. She looked through it again, squinting, trying to figure out what exactly she was seeing. "It's... it's very fuzzy."

"Yeah... I'm sorry, I wanted to show you something I remember seeing back in the big observatory in Canterlot. Unfortunately this telescope just isn't big enough to see it clearly."

"What is it, exactly?," said Luna, curiously.

"Well... nopony really knows. There's a few theories floating around, but as far as anypony can tell, it's sort of like a giant cluster of stars, far, far away. They call it Andromeda."

"Andromeda..." Luna looked out into the night sky, trying to see if she could spot it with her naked eye. She could only see the same fuzzy outline out of the corner of her eye that she had seen in the telescope. How she wished she could see it.

"T-Twilight."

"Yes, Luna?"

"If I... if I made it brighter, could we see it with this telescope?"

"W-well," replied Twilight, taken aback by Luna's question. She had never imagined Luna could do something like that. On second thought, it made complete sense, of course. "Well yes, you could make it brighter, and then we'd be able to see it from here. Are you sure you can do that, though?"

"I haven't done it in a very long time, but... I made all of this, right? I can't imagine it'd be too difficult."

Twilight smiled. "I can't wait to see what happens. Give it a try, if you'd like."

Luna returned the unicorn's smile, then turning back to the night sky. She focused on where she had seen Andromeda, and then closed her eyes, picturing it in her mind's eye. Her horn began to glow with an odd type of brightness, as if it were moonlight itself. She didn't know how it looked, but she didn't need to. She only needed to command it to be brighter, and it would accommodate the mistress of the night's desires. There was a large flash of energy from her horn, and it shot into the sky directly at Andromeda. It lit up the entire sky like a phosphorescent lake, rippling with waves of brilliant, pure light. Luna opened her eyes, and looked up at the sky. The sight she saw nearly knocked her to the floor.

A large, white disk, visible to the naked eye, appeared in the sky. They sparkled and filled the vista of the night, as if it was a cloud of an innumerable number of stars, hovering in the abyss. It was so bright, so beautiful, and dwarfed everything else, short of the moon itself.

Twilight said nothing, only gasping and covering her mouth with her hoof. Luna did the same, the image of Andromeda burning itself into her retina. Had she really made this? All on her own? How many stars were there? Twilight walked beside Luna and sat beside her. The two mares stared in awe at the galaxy, trying to take in everything they were seeing.

"... a hundred billion stars," said Luna suddenly.

"W-what?"

A tear ran down Luna's cheek. She had never imagined that her night held such wonders. It was beyond her wildest dreams. "There's a hundred billion stars in there. I can see them all, all gleaming and shining. I... I made all of that...?"

Twilight wasn't sure what to say. She looked at Luna, who was simply staring at her creation in a kind of wonder that Twilight had never seen in anypony before. Her mane glowed with the same soft light as the stars above them, her eyes reflecting and absorbing the light of Andromeda. Twilight couldn't help but think how beautiful Luna looked like this. She was honoured to even see her like this again.

"I made... all of that?"

"You're the creator of the night, Luna. All of this is you," said Twilight, smiling. Luna couldn't respond. "It was seeing things like this as a young filly that made me fall in love with your night. I couldn't imagine anything else so beautiful."

Luna responded by resting her head against Twilight's, continuing to look up at the beautiful galaxy whose light displaced the entirety of the sky. Twilight leaned back against her in kind.

"Thank you, Twilight."

"There's no need to thank me. I just showed you what was already there."

"You've shown me who I am."

Twilight blushed. "I just showed you what was already there," she said, repeating herself.

Luna smiled, nuzzling Twilight's neck with her muzzle, enjoying the warmth and Twilight's scent. It was one of her most favourite things to do in the world. There was nowhere else she felt this safe. "I would have never known myself if it weren't for you."

"I'm only telling you the truth. I promised I'd never lie to you about something like that."

"And that's why you're wonderful, Twilight." Luna broke from the loving embrace, looking at Twilight, smiling and giggling to herself. Luna looked almost euphoric. Twilight loved seeing her so happy and calm. "I need to go home now, before it gets too late. Celestia and I are doing something tomorrow. She even booked the whole evening off for me."

"I completely understand. I hope you two have great fun."

"We will," said Luna, smiling sweetly again. She embraced the unicorn in a hug, and held her for as long as possible. Twilight returned it, smiling just as brightly. Luna then took a step back, a blush forming on her cheeks. "I had a wonderful time tonight, Twilight."

"I did to. The last few months have been wonderful. Would you like to do this again in a few days from now, on Thursday? Weather permitting, of course," replied Twilight.

"I'd love to! Oh, and Twilight...?"

Twilight was cut off before she could even utter a single syllable in response, as Luna leaned in closer to the other mare. Twilight blushed bright red as she felt Luna's lips lay a soft, gentle, slow kiss directly on her cheek.

"Goodnight," Luna said softly, as she pulled back. Luna extended her wings, stretching them as wide as she could, and began flapping them, ascending off the viewing deck of the Ponyville Library. She looked tenderly at Twilight for a few moments, before launching herself high into the sky in the direction of Canterlot, blending in and disappearing into the bright, starry night sky. Twilight could only sit there, stunned for a few moments, before coming back to her senses. Her heart was nearly leaping through her chest, her heartbeat pounding through her ears. It took only one look back up at the night sky they had just shared again, like so many times before, before Twilight felt calm again. She sighed, and could feel that sense of elation that she only felt when she was with Luna. Luna was the night itself. Twilight spoke softly into the sky, as if it were a private conversation between only her and the night itself. And it was.

"I love you too, Luna."

--THE END--

Fragments

Prologue

"How *dare* you claim we are equals when not a single pony in all of Equestria so much as glances upon my night! How can you possibly claim that I'm being too '*demanding*' when I receive *NOTHING* for all of my work and effort in this Queendom! I want my night to be as equally represented as your sun, starting now!" yelled a tall, dark-maned alicorn mare. The walls reverberated with her voice, hurting the ears of the other pony in the chamber with her.

"The Ponies of Equestria are not nocturnal, sister!" replied a pink-maned alicorn of equal size, opposite her sibling. "They work during the day and sleep during the night! What do you expect me to do?!"

"If they're not nocturnal, then why not make at least *SOME* of them nocturnal?!"

"You honestly expect I have the power to do that? That isn't a reasonable demand and you know it!"

"Together, with our powers combined, we could!" hissed the dark-maned mare, her eyes narrowing. "Or is that too much hard work for a high-society socialite such as yourself?!"

"Oh, don't you start going on about that! *ONE* of us has to be responsible enough to rule this Queendom! All you do is run off into your night '*perfecting*' your '*art*,' whatever that means," replied the pink-maned one, sarcastically. "You're completely irresponsible, yet you demand attention! What a foal!"

The dark-maned mare grit her teeth, growling. "How do you expect me to learn anything when you act like a dictator? You can never keep your hooves off of the world's affairs for even half a second before you start meddling in everything again!"

"It's not my fault you can't be trusted."

"Can't be trusted...?!"

"Yes, what with your... mental condition," scoffed the pink-maned mare, sticking her nose up at her.

“Celestia, don’t you dare hold that against me!” yelled the other mare, getting into an aggressive stance. “Don’t you dare!”

“Or what, dear sister Luna? You’ll become the ‘Nightmare’ again and need to be held down before you *murder* somepony? Then my point will be justly proven,” replied Celestia, nonchalantly, turning away from her sister and back to the piece of parchment she was reading just before. The pair of them were fighting in Celestia’s study, and the argument had been going on for quite some time at that point. Luna paced back and forth, her discontentment more than visible in her demeanour. “Just be glad that you’ve kept control over your night! I’m sure there’s at least one or two ponies out there who admire it, so don’t be so bitter.”

“Do you have no respect for me? None at all?” asked Luna, with a tinge of sadness behind her voice.

“Yes, of course I do, as long as you stay out of the way and don’t make any trouble, like you tended to before you got these silly thoughts in your head,” retorted Celestia. Luna grimaced and looked at the ground, gritting her teeth even harder. A tear fell from her eye, rolled down her cheek, and splashed down to the ground. She hated how mean her sister was sometimes. She couldn’t help who she was. How did she have any right to say such hurtful things?! “The Transition is in two hours. I suggest you go clean yourself up and prepare, unless you don’t mind looking like a *starving* artist tonight,” quipped Celestia, chuckling to herself.

Luna felt a surge of rage begin to shoot through her mind. Normally, she would fight it, but this time, she embraced it, and let it flow through her. She had a right to be angry! Her night was beautiful! She deserved equal respect, and Celestia had no right to chide her like this! She felt her horn grow warmer, the familiar sensations of anger and darkness flow over her mind and heart, filling her with power.

(My turn.)

Celestia heard the clattering of hoof-falls coming towards her, and turned to look. Before she could even see what was happening, a tremendous force knocked her off her feet, sending her sliding along the floor, the metal fixtures of her large sun-emblazoned pendant scraping

across the stone finish. The force had winded her, and as she tried to stand again, she glanced up to see her sister - only, it wasn't her sister's eyes that met hers. An even darker alicorn appeared before her, looking down at her with narrowed, slitted, menacing eyes and a completely emotionless look drawn on her face. Armour protected her head, neck and hooves, and she stood even taller than Luna had.

"N-Nightmare..." sputtered out Celestia, trying desperately to rise to her feet and catch her breath.

"How can you insult and belittle Luna, your own sister, in such a way?!" replied Nightmare Moon, standing over Celestia. "And how *DARE* you accuse *me* of being a *murderer*! Would you like to repeat those words to me directly to my face, or have you lost your nerve?"

"You're dangerous! Y-you just attacked me!"

"After you wounded Luna so deeply with your hateful, narcissistic words! You'll recover in a few *minutes*, while she'll be feeling that pain *all night*. Have you no care for her feelings?!" bellowed Nightmare.

"What would *you* know about *feelings*?!" retorted Celestia, brushing herself off and straightening her mane and crown. "You're just some vile monster she created to hurt me! Be gone with you!"

"Your insults mean nothing to me! Give her what she wants!" demanded Nightmare.

"I REFUSE! I'll never let a sick mare such as yourself rule even a fraction of Equestria!"

"Ugh! So be it!" yelled Nightmare Moon, rearing herself back and stamping her hooves down on the ground. Her horn lit up brightly with a darkish light, as she lowered herself and pointed her horn directly at Celestia. Celestia grimaced and made the same motions, her own horn set ablaze with a pinkish light. The pair charged up their spells, the ground beginning to rumble. Nightmare held onto her spell for as long as possible, waiting for Celestia to make the first move, as she usually did. As Nightmare predicted, Celestia shot first, sending her spell forward with a giant shock-wave. Nightmare quickly sidestepped, the spell ripping past Nightmare, annihilating a cabinet on the wall behind her into a thousand little splinters, and reared her head, sending her own spell arcing towards her sister. Celestia, still recovering from using such an intense amount of

magic, widened her eyes as she saw the ball of energy heading in her direction, and attempted to dodge out of the way. Nightmare's spell, however, clipped one of Celestia's wings, sending her flying towards the wall, pinning her against it as if it were a restraint, holding her wing firmly against the surface with a thick blue ring of energy. Celestia struggled and cried out in pain as her wing twisted in the wrong direction, frantically attempting to stand so it wouldn't hurt so intensely.

Nightmare Moon smirked, walking triumphantly towards her restrained sister. Too easy. "I did not wish to hurt you, yet you were the one who sent an injuring spell towards me. See how much... *restraint* I can have when necessary, compared to you?" Nightmare Moon chuckled at her own pun, and lifted her sister up with her head to prevent unneeded pain. Celestia just grimaced, avoiding eye-contact with Nightmare, breathing deeply and sweating. "Am I not deserving of your respect?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Just go to hay," replied Celestia, angrily glaring up at her.

Nightmare Moon wrinkled her nose and tutted at her sister. "Tch. Such unbecoming language for a Princess. But as you wish. I really should be on my way. Luna has a night to prepare for," she said turning from Celestia and walking away. "Don't worry, that holding spell will expire in a few minutes. Be sure to rest that wing of yours." As Nightmare Moon approached the exit of Celestia's study, she felt the hair on the back of her neck begin to tingle. She knew what that sensation meant, and quickly turned around, just in time to see Celestia casting another spell. Before Nightmare could react, the spell shot through the air, and hit her directly in the face. A intense ringing entered Nightmare's ears as she fell to the ground, unable to focus on what was happening around her. She could vaguely see the outline of her sister standing over her, flexing her wing in pain and moving her soft, pink mane from her forehead, with a look of pure malevolence in her eyes. The world seemed to reverberate around Nightmare, causing a sickening migraine headache to pierce through her skull. Nightmare began feeling fear creep into her mind, as she found herself unable to get herself upright or think properly.

“GUARDS!” Celestia yelled, rearing her head. It was then that two unicorns with gold-encrusted clothing entered the room, quickly surrounding Nightmare.

“Yes, m’lady?” one of them said.

“Take Princess Luna to her room, and seal the door for three nights. She isn’t to be allowed out until then without my express permission.”

The guards looked aghast, glancing down at the strangely familiar alicorn below them, who was wincing in pain. It was definitely Princess Luna, but she looked so different at that moment that it was hard for them to recognize her. “B-but, m’lady...”

“NOW!!” yelled Celestia authoritatively. The two guards snapped to attention, and magically restrained the grumbling Nightmare, levitating her up into the air and moving her safely out of the room through the large doorway.

“S-sister...” sputtered out Nightmare, as she began to cry. She felt her rage, her anger and her power slip from her, as her body shifted and changed once more. She became so very afraid.

“SISTER! PLEASE!” cried out Princess Luna. She struggled against the restraints, unable to muster up enough energy to break free from the two unicorn’s binding. Luna reached a hoof out towards Celestia, calling out again, as she began to cry. “I’M SORRY! PLEASE FORGIVE ME, SISTER! *SISTER!!*” Celestia said nothing, only glaring at her, before slamming her door shut, as Luna got carried off into the dark depths of the royal castle, wailing and crying.

~

Luna awoke with a start, her eyes wide and her entire body shaking. She immediately felt like she was going to be sick, trying to force air into her lungs with some success. She was back in the Ponyville Library, and it was nearly dawn, the light of the sun beginning to creep up on the frozen winter horizon. Luna just began crying silently, clinging to the blanket, shaking as pictures from the dream flashed through her vision. These days, it was no longer Nightmare Moon torturing her in her dreams, but her own

bitter memories of years long past. She didn't know which was worse anymore.

"L-Luna?" asked a voice from behind her, as they touched her shoulder. "Are you okay, dear? You cried out in pain..."

Luna just shivered more, closing her eyes. "T-t-twilight..." she replied weakly.

"Oh dear... did you have a nightmare?" asked Twilight tenderly, wrapping her hoof around Luna's body and pulling her in close. Luna just nodded, clinging to the blanket as tightly as she could. "It's okay. You're awake now, Luna. That was just a nightmare. It's okay... you can cry if you need to..."

Luna just shrunk down into Twilight's arms, crying silently and shaking. She felt safe with Twilight. Safe from harm, safe from pain, safe from fear, and more importantly, safe from herself. She just focused on the other mare's scent and warmth, trying desperately to stop choking up and breathe normally. "T-thank y-you, T-T-Tw..."

"It's okay. It's okay. Just relax. You can thank me later," whispered Twilight. Luna just nodded again, letting the other mare hold her closely and firmly. It didn't take very long for her heart to stop pounding, and for the feelings of fear to pass, as she looked around the familiar objects around her. Eventually the tears and fear dissipated, and Luna felt a little more at peace, although quite a bit drained. Twilight Sparkle shuffled her way out of bed walking around the bed frame to come face-to-face with her partner. Twilight sat down in front of her and extended her hooves, taking one of Luna's and holding it close to her chest. "Feeling any better?" asked Twilight, with a deeply concerned look on her face.

Luna just nodded. "It was just... a bad memory... of a long time ago," she replied quietly. "It... it doesn't mean anything now... it's just a bad memory."

"That's right. Everything is better now. Always remember that, okay?" replied Twilight, smiling softly. Luna smiled back shyly, as she felt Twilight's heartbeat with her hoof. Twilight was always there for her and knew exactly how to calm her down in times like this, and Luna's trust and love had only grown over time. Luna was eternally grateful to have her in her life. She felt like the luckiest mare in all of Equestria.

"I... don't know if I can sleep again tonight, Twilight... I apologize," said Luna, looking into Twilight's eyes timidly.

"That's okay," replied Twilight. "How about I make you some soothing tea to calm you down? Does that sound good?" Luna nodded happily, beginning to sit up. Twilight grinned and walked over to the ladder, quickly scaling down it and heading towards the kettle she had on her main desk. Luna looked out of the side window, seeing her sister's sun begin to press up into the night sky, slowly overtaking it as it had thousands of times before. She smiled. The relationship between her and her sister had never been better, and they had been able to work out most of their differences. But if so, why did these dreams keep coming back? Luna chalked it up to anxiety and nerves. In a few days, she was going to attend the first Winter Moon Celebration ever, and usher in her night for the first time in a thousand years. She didn't know if she was capable of it anymore, and the thought of having any kind of power or responsibility again scared her. She sighed and slumped back into the bed, looking up at the wood-grained ceiling of the library, hearing the movements of her partner off to the side. The next few days were going to be difficult. She knew she'd be able to handle them, though, with her sister and Twilight Sparkle at her side. With those two, she was invincible.

At least, she hoped so...

Chapter 1

Twilight Sparkle felt her mind and body reverberate and become overstimulated. Her mind went blank as she tried desperately to hold onto consciousness, the world around her warping and changing rapidly. Energy crackled and surged over her skin, her fur standing up on end, while her mane blew around in an intense wind. In front of her, all she could see was a blinding white light, as she got sucked forward by some kind of gravitational energy. She instinctively dug her hooves into the ground. The sensation began to feel like falling, as if gravity had suddenly reversed on her, pulling her effortlessly into the blinding light. She fell for only a short while, before she felt herself impact quite harshly against a hard floor.

“Ow...” she said aloud, wincing as she lifted herself off of a pale blue carpet. She tried to catch her breath and make herself steady, attempting in vain to focus on the floor underneath her as it shuddered and rippled before her eyes. She shook her head, an intense ringing filling her ears to near-deafening levels. It felt like the horrible, mind-crushing feedback she’d get if she messed up a particularly large spell, but somehow much worse. As she raised her head, her eyes finally finding a bit of focus, she began to gaze on her alien surroundings. Old-fashioned lanterns hanging from chains lined the stone walls, and a fine, patterned blue carpet spanned out in front of Twilight seemingly into infinity before her and behind her, with no end to be seen in either direction. Twilight noticed the distinct symbol of Princess Luna’s cutie mark strewn through the carpet, which instantly made Twilight think of her partner.

“Luna...?” she said aloud. “Luna?! Where are you?! Are you okay?!” The moment the words left her mouth, Twilight tried to remember why exactly she was afraid for Luna in the first place. Her memory seemed to be disjointed and disorganized. The last thing she remembered was waking up with Luna beside her in the morning. She tried harder to pull the memories back into her head, as she continued to gaze around her plain but orderly surroundings. “What is this place...?” Twilight to herself softly, looking around in the dim light.

~

Twilight's heart jumped when she heard an incessant knock on her door, almost as if it were going to be busted down at any second.

"TWILIGHT?!" she heard a voice yell, as the pounding intensified.

"Y-yes?! I'm coming!" replied Twilight, turning away from her book "The History of Tea" and cautiously approaching the door. She reached her hoof forward and unlocked it, and suddenly, an energetic, pink pony burst through, with an extremely concerned look on her face.

"TWILIGHTYOUGOTTACOMERIGHTNOWLUNASHURT!!" yelled Pinkie Pie at Twilight, point-blank.

"Huh...? Slow down and lower your voice, Pinkie Pie," replied Twilight, taken aback.

"You gotta come right now! Luna's hurt!" repeated Pinkie, breathing hard.

"Wait, what? What's wrong with Luna?!" inquired Twilight, her heart rate immediately starting to spike.

"No time to explain! We gotta go right now!" said Pinkie, more scared that Twilight had ever seen her.

"O-okay!" replied Twilight, with conviction in her voice. "Spike, clean up after me, please!"

"... huh? What now...?" replied Spike, lifting his head up from his bed and blinking tiredly.

"Twilight, come on!" insisted Pinkie Pie, nudging her with a hoof.

"Right! Let's go!"

~

Twilight sat down and held her chest, her heart beating extremely quickly. She had suddenly remembered what had happened in the morning, but it felt more like she had been stripped from reality and *re-lived* it. She continued to breathe deeply, the sudden change in scenery she had just experienced disorienting her. 'W-what was that...?' she asked herself again, the questions beginning to mount up. She shook her head again.

Where WAS she? “Hello?!” Twilight called out into the darkness in front of her, which garnered her no reply. Twilight sighed. “Of course I’d be completely alone in a situation like this,” she quipped to herself. Twilight turned her head to look behind her, only to be greeted with a stone wall that shot up all the way to the ceiling. Faced with only one direction to go in, Twilight decided that she should start walking, and began down the long, dimly lit corridor ahead of her.

After walking quite some distance, the repetition of the fixtures on the walls began to unseat Twilight and made her wonder if she wasn’t somehow walking around in circles. As she continued walking, something out in the distance caught her eye. Before long, Twilight could make out three doorways directly in front of her, becoming clearer and clearer as she approached. After a minute or two, she arrived directly in front of them. Above the doorways hung three emblems, and all of them reminded Twilight of Luna’s cutie mark. She cocked an eyebrow as she examined the large symbols. The first, on the left, was very worn, like it was intensely old and ill-maintained, with the colour faded and the shapes beginning to crack and wear away. The second, in the middle, had a distinct teal-blue hue to its moon, surrounded by a dark, violet, star-emblazoned shadow, seemingly the largest of the three. The third and final emblem on the right doorway was much like the first, but new and pristine, with sharp edges defining every point and curve along its surface. Twilight could only guess at what the symbols meant.

“Three different versions of Luna’s cutie mark? What does this mean...?”

~

“You don’t think I’m... a freak...?”

“Of course not! Why would I think such a thing?” replied Twilight.

“J-just... if Nightmare is still inside of me, and still a part of me... I might hurt you--”

Twilight placed a hoof over Luna’s lips, silencing her partner before she could finish. “That was before, okay? I forgave you for what happened back then, and I meant it, too. I’m sure that being around here with ponies

who appreciate you will make sure you won't become Nightmare Moon ever again."

"... y-yeah... you're right, Twilight. Everything has been so wonderful recently. I... shouldn't question the good things in life, right?" replied Luna, smiling meekly. "T-Thank you... for accepting me." Luna closed her eyes and leaned in, planting a kiss on Twilight's lips...

~

"WAH!" said Twilight loudly, as she snapped out of yet another hyper-realistic flashback. She held a hoof to her face and grimaced; it wasn't so much that the memory wasn't a good one, but the overwhelming sensations that had hit her so intensely. "What the hay?! Stop doing that, brain!" continued Twilight. She sighed and looked back up at the three doorways. Now she was extremely confused. She still wasn't even sure what this place was, and why it was having such a dramatic effect on her. Twilight began pacing back and forth slowly, unsure of what to do. Naturally, she wondered why exactly she had remembered that conversation and what its significance was. Looking at the middle symbol, with its teal-blue hue, Twilight couldn't help but be reminded of Nightmare Moon.

"Wait! That's it! That symbol must represent Nightmare Moon! And then that one," she said, pointing her hoof to the one on the far right, "must represent Luna!" Twilight furled her brow, moving her foreleg and pointing her hoof to the one on the far left. "But then... what's that one? I don't get it..." She sighed. More questions! She began moving for the right-most door, with the newer symbol above it. Perhaps, she hypothesized, Luna would be in there waiting for her. There was no evidence to suggest that'd be the case, but it wasn't like she had much to go on, and there was no direction other than forward. She stopped directly in front of it, looking it up and down, as if she could glean more information if she stared at it hard enough. "I don't know what else to do, so this is the only choice I have," she said into the dead air around her, gathering her courage, and slowly pushing the door forward. As the door swung outwards slowly but surely

with a loud, ancient creak, Twilight found that there was next to no light in the room ahead.

“L-Luna?” Twilight called out into the darkness, focusing her magic and illuminating her horn. There was no response, and even with her illumination, nothing clearly visible could be seen in front of her. “Is anypony out there...?” As she stepped into the room, a chill came over her body, making every hair on her body tingle once more. She couldn’t tell if it was how eerily calm and quiet everything had been so far unsettling her, or if it was actually cold. Twilight turned around, and focused her magic on the door itself. “Stay!” she commanded, as the door illuminated with a violet hue, holding it firmly ajar. Twilight had read enough horror novels to know to never let her only exit out of a creepy situation slam shut behind her.

Proceeding into the chamber, Twilight could make out the dim reflections of what appeared to be a very well-decorated and furnished room, although she could only see them out of the corner of her eye. The air was crisp and clean. As Twilight examined her surroundings, she could roughly make a faint blue shadow hovering in the darkness ahead of her. Curiously, she began walking towards it, eventually being able to make out what appeared to be a bed frame pressed against the wall. It wasn’t very much longer before she was able to see a pattern of small white lights within the shadow, as if they were stars. Twilight knew exactly what she had found.

“Luna!!” she exclaimed, running towards the bed frame. The outline of Luna’s body became clearly visible as she screeched to a halt at the side of the bed. Luna was curled up into a ball, her hair covering her face and her breathing laboured. Twilight put her front hooves onto the soft satin sheets of the large, queen-sized bed, pulling herself closer, listening closely to the other mare.

“Luna... are you okay? Please be okay,” said Twilight, waiting for a response. She pursed her lips and grumbled at the lack of response, jumping onto the bed beside her. As she got closer, Twilight could hear sobs coming from her partner, which caused her to stop for a second to observe the other mare carefully. “I’m here now,” she said softly, moving closer and illuminating her horn a little bit brighter. Twilight frowned and wrapped her fore-hooves around Luna, pulling her in close to her body.

~

“Luna, darling, we *really* must discuss our arrangements for your Moon Raising Ceremony. I know you’ve been terribly busy preparing with Twilight, but this *really* must be taken care of,” said Rarity, leading Luna into the Carousel Boutique.

“I-I’m not sure what there is to arrange, Miss Rarity,” replied Luna, walking behind the fashionista pony.

“Are you silly, darling? I haven’t even gotten the measurements for your dress yet!”

“D-dress?” replied Luna.

“Well yes, darling! Oh my goodness, you didn’t think your good friend Rarity would let you go to your *big day* without being adorned in the BEST dress anypony has ever seen, now did you?”

“Erm... Miss Rarity...” began Luna, as she stepped into Rarity’s boutique. Luna instantly noticed the lineup of half-finished dresses along the side, some more high-class than others, in various stages of completion. One in particular stood out among the others. It was created with what looked like small chains and frilly streamers crossing over from side to side. It was cut off very short, with a black denim skirt. It was flashy, gaudy, but still managed to retain a hint of pure elegance that was distinct in all of Rarity’s designs. To the side of it hung a commemorative poster from DJ PON-3’s Equestria-wide tour that had stopped in Ponyville over that summer. “... I really must insist that you not go to such lengths for me,” continued Luna. “Us alicorns have never ‘dressed up’ for events such as this.”

“Oh pish-posh... I think it’s about time we broke that habit, don’t you think?” said Rarity coyly, as she smiled and pranced elegantly towards the side table on the far side of the room. “It’s proper form for a lady of your stature to present herself in a refined and dignified way. Surely you must understand!”

“I do, Miss Rarity, but my sister and I have always preferred to be a little more toned-down in our presentation,” replied Luna, smiling as she sat on one of the pillows in front of Rarity’s coffee table.

“Oh! Well, I *completely* understand where you’re coming from then, darling. A little light makeup, perhaps? A properly gorgeous hairstyle? You’re all about the raw, purified beauty, aren’t you? Now - black, green or oolong?”

“Oh, um... black, please,” replied Luna, responding to Rarity’s abrupt request. “You have to understand that I’ve never actually... worn makeup before, Miss Rarity.”

Rarity froze in place, turning her head around slowly to look at the other mare with a kind of incredulous horror in her eyes. “N-never?!”

“Never,” replied Luna, blushing ever slightly.

“*NEVER?!?*”

“Y-yes.”

“Oh... oh my goodness! I simply *must* correct this oversight! Will you allow me to--”

“I’m sorry, Miss Rarity, I don’t mean to interrupt,” interjected Luna. “It’s just that alicorns tend to, um, do things *au naturel*, if you understand.”

Rarity looked off to the side, pursing her lips as she thought upon this foreign, alien concept. “Hmm... so perhaps you’re more like Fluttershy in that respect. Oh well, I suppose everypony has their own standards of beauty,” replied Rarity, turning back to her tea set as the water began to simmer in the kettle.

“Y-you’re not too upset, I hope?”

“Upset? Heavens no, darling! I was just thinking that we’ll need to get you a proper spa treatment instead! Does that sound agreeable?” replied Rarity, smiling wide. “The spa in Ponyville has an *all natural* approach to beauty and skincare, which is why I go there myself!”

“Yes, that would be lovely,” replied Luna, smiling enthusiastically. The kettle began to whistle as the water started boiling. In quick, deft motions, Rarity filled the tea pot with tea leaves and then poured water directly on top, covering the pot with its lid. She then assembled the tea set itself, putting all of the accessories onto a sterling silver tray, and magically levitated it into the air, swinging around to face Luna with a smile across her face. Within one step, however, there was a loud, piercing screech from below Rarity, as she accidentally stepped on Opalescence’s tail. Rarity jumped back as the tray tumbled down to earth, shattering on the floor and

sending shards of porcelain scattered across the wood finish. Luna tensed up as the sound of the shattering tea cups reached her ears. She clenched her jaw as a harsh, cold chill ripped down her spine.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry, my dear Princess. It seems in my old age, my unicorn powers have grown weak and feeble. Oh ho ho. No matter, I'll clean it up myself later," said an old, gray-maned colt, chuckling and coughing as he removed the largest chunks of porcelain from the ground, placing them into a dustbin at the side of the table. He walked gingerly towards his desk on the adjacent wall, his large coat dragging along the ground and picking up some of the hot liquid that remained on the floor. It was mid-day, and Celestia's sun shone through curtained windows to the left of his desk, creating a cosy, warm feeling to the mahogany-trimmed study, filled with old books and relics of the past. The old colt hooved the remaining teacup to Princess Luna. "Here you are. Now, as we were discussing..."

"I'm not going to disclose a single thing to you. I'm aware that my sister put you up to this, and that you do not have my best intentions at heart," replied Princess Luna, folding her and looking away, disgusted, as she placed the teacup on the small table beside her. She was laying down on a large sofa, which was placed a few feet away from the old colt's desk.

"Now, my dear..."

"Address me by my title," snapped Luna, refusing to make eye contact.

"Y-yes, my apologies, your highness," replied the old colt as he bowed towards the regal alicorn in proper form. "It was foolish of me to be so informal with you. But I must insist that I am here for your benefit, and not that of your sister."

"And who, exactly, is paying you?" retorted Luna, becoming increasingly agitated.

"No pony. This is strictly pro-bono, your highness, for the well-being of the Queendom and the royal sisters," replied the old colt, smiling warmly.

"Hmpf," Luna retorted, sticking her nose in the air.

"Now, Princess Luna, your highness... can you tell me what is causing you such agitation and distress?" he continued, sitting in his old,

wooden chair, magically placing his notepad to the side, as to give the Princess his full, undivided attention.

"Is it not all over the tabloids by now?" scoffed the Princess.

"I don't listen to conjecture from third parties regarding these matters," he replied.

*"Well, it's true. The fights, the quarrels, all of it. My sister **refuses** to allow me to have even one ounce of control in this Queendom, yet I am expected to perform all of the regal functions, like attending her extravagant galas and celebrations. Do you think that's fair?"*

"Well, we are not here to discuss politics... but perhaps not," replied the mature pony.

"Perhaps'? I want an answer, not speculation."

"Depending on your point of view--"

"Weasel-words!" quipped Luna, turning her head and looking him directly in the eye. "Give me a direct answer!"

The old colt took off his reading glasses, folding them and putting them to the side slowly. He sighed quietly, considering his words carefully, before continuing. "Your highness... if I am to give my opinion to you, do you promise me to pardon me of any and all treasonous claims against me by your sister, her highness Princess Celestia?"

Luna's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

"There are rumours - purely more conjecture, of course - that Princess Celestia, her highness, does not take kindly to... how should I say... things that could be construed as slander."

"You have my assurances," replied Luna, plainly. It sounded all too possible of her sister at this point.

"Then, if what you say is correct, I agree that you should receive proper dues for your great effort in the Queendom, your highness," he replied, smiling warmly again, although with a slight tinge of nervousness echoing in his voice.

"Thank you."

"But as I said, we are not here to discuss politics. We are here to discuss you. Now that I have answered your question, it is only fair that you answer mine, yes? Oh, and please do drink that tea, it's quite refreshing."

"It is only fair," replied Luna, mirroring his words. "And I'm not particularly thirst at the moment, thank you."

"Right then," replied the colt, placing his hooves under his chin. "So... who is Nightmare Moon?"

Luna narrowed her eyes as a shot of adrenaline violently ripped through her body, as she turned and looked at the therapist with ferocious eyes. "How do you know that name?" she said with a deadpan expression and tone, attempting to hide her fear.

"Rumours and gossip - again, conjecture, but you did say that 'all of it' was true. I promise you it was not from Princess Celestia, her highness, however."

Luna wrinkled her nose in disdain. If he were able to hear about such a closely guarded secret from anywhere else except Celestia, he must have been very connected. "You're not just some bumbling old colt, now are you?"

"Hardly, your highness."

"... Nightmare Moon is my friend," responded Luna nonchalantly.

"Your friend?"

"Yes. She is my friend, and she encourages me to stand up for myself by not allowing Celestia to push me to the side so hastily."

"And how does Nightmare Moon do that, your highness?"

"She gives me power, strength, ability, confidence, and stands up for me when I am unable to."

"So, a doppelganger? A different part of yourself?"

"My friend," insisted Luna, with a pointed tone of voice.

"Yes, as you said, a friend," replied the old colt. "But none the less, it is not you performing these acts, correct?"

"It is... well... perhaps it is," replied Luna, hesitantly, as she second guessed herself.

"'Perhaps.' I need a yes or no answer, your highness, as you requested of me," he replied, with his genuine warm smile that was beginning to grate on Luna. "And please, do drink your tea."

"She is me, and she isn't me. She is my friend but she is also within my spirit. Do you expect me to explain such a concept to you? Us alicorns are beyond your true comprehension!" Luna retorted, her voice becoming

distinctly agitated. She looked down at her drink, which looked rather unappealing at the moment with this new, stressful situation.

"Oh, no, I understand. She is, in a matter of speaking, an imaginary friend, yes?"

"No. She is real."

"But there is only one Princess Luna, correct?"

Luna grit her teeth. This was the exact same argument Celestia had used against her. "Yes. That is correct."

"Then this 'Nightmare Moon' character is an illusion of the mind, someone who only exists in your mind," said the therapist, sitting back in his chair.

"She is not an illusion."

"Then what is she?"

*"She is my friend!" snapped Luna, raising her voice at the old colt. "I will **NOT** repeat myself once more!" The colt retained his composure.*

"A friend, then. But as far as I can see, she is fragment of who you are," he replied calmly. "Are you aware that there is a way to bring you two back together, as a singular whole?"

"I'd rather not do that, thank you," replied Luna, her tone now immediately reverted to its original, calm nature. She looked off to the side once more, her nose in the air. "She speaks sense and, as you agreed earlier, my complaints against my sister are justified and sound."

"I must insist on this course of action, your highness. It's for your own good. Left unchecked, this can do intense damage to your psyche."

"And being alone, forgotten and scorned by my sister doesn't?" retorted Luna.

"Yes, that would be hurtful as well. However, we must focus on you before your relationship with her can be restored. I must insist that dealing with this fragmentation would be the best way possible."

"No. Insist one more time and I will tell Celestia of your treasonous words against her. Do we have an understanding?" Luna's rage was nearly beyond containment at this point. "I don't want help! I want to be treated fairly by my sister, I want to not be isolated from the world's happenings, I want to be fulfilled in my life and I want to be loved! What is so wrong about that, you foal?!"

"Nothing," he said, solemnly. "Nothing at all." He sat back in his chair, sighing, as if severely disappointed with himself.

*"I'm **so** glad you understand now," replied Luna, thick sarcasm and agitation present in her voice. "It should be my sister and not I who is attending this session. She is the one who cannot respect my well-founded desires."*

"My dear Luna... I cannot, at this point, continue," replied the colt, looking down at his desk with his front hooves together. He almost looked defeated, which confused Luna.

"And why not?"

"I must confess that I have not been completely honest with you." As the words left his lips, Luna could feel something like a sixth sense begin to tingle, and it wasn't a good feeling. Something bad was about to happen. "Princess Celestia, your sister, did have a hoof in this meeting. She told me you were psychotic and beyond reason."

"WHAT?!" yelled Luna, her eyes growing wide in horror.

("Get out of there. Now.")

*"Yes... she had me drug that tea of yours. I'm glad you didn't drink it. I was to take you away to the clinic and have you 'fixed' - her word choice, of course, as I do not consider patients to be some **thing** that can be 'fixed'. But I cannot, at this point, commit treason against once Princess to sate another, when there is clearly nothing corrupt or villainous in your intentions."*

"YOU WERE WILLING TO SELL ME OUT TO MY OWN SISTER!" said Luna, quickly rising to her hooves.

"She threatened me. I had no recourse."

"THAT IS STILL TREASON!" yelled Luna, in full-fledged rage. She had been betrayed, again, by her treacherous sister. Her horn lit up bright, and gripped the unicorn, pulling him out of his chair and slamming him into the bookcase behind his desk. Luna quickly jumped to the desk, standing on top of it as she brought her face as close as she could to his. "HOW DARE YOU!!"

The door behind her swung open with a loud clang. Luna gasped and looked behind her, just in time to see Princess Celestia walk through the door. "Unhoof him at once, Luna!" exclaimed Princess Celestia, her pink mane flowing behind her back.

"You betrayed me, sister! You would have me drugged and 'fixed' by these so-called 'doctors'! How dare you?!" she retorted.

"It's for the good of the Queendom!" replied Celestia, trotting slowly into the room with her guards following closely behind her.

"And what of **my** well-being?!" replied Luna, tears coming to her eyes.

"GUARDS!" exclaimed Celestia, blatantly ignoring Luna's question. Luna felt energy begin to wrap itself around her hooves and neck, as if they were restraints beginning to bind to her flesh. Luna knew what this feeling was, but thankfully, she was aware enough to produce a counter spell, shattering the oncoming restraints immediately and throwing the unicorn guards out of the room, slamming the door and sealing it behind them. She had no time to waste. Celestia gasped, as she saw the full transformation take place before her. Luna's hooves grew and the armour snapped into place around them, her mane became a dark violet shadow, and her eyes gleamed with teal-blue ferocity, strong plate metal surrounding her horn and cheeks. Within seconds, Luna was gone, and Nightmare Moon stood before Celestia once more, majestic and powerful.

"I simply cannot believe you, Celestia. You've gone beyond the pale this time. There will be retribution for this. Oh yes," said Nightmare Moon in a devious, malicious voice, standing atop the old desk with her nose in the air incredulously. "There will be retribution!"

"Nightmare Moon! Luna! You must understand. You're sick! You need help!" said Celestia, pleading.

"**WE** need help? **WE** aren't the ones who tried to drug and manipulate our own sister into submission!" retorted Nightmare. "HAH! Good day to you, '**sister**'!" Nightmare Moon's horn lit up, and with a loud crackle of energy and a dark violet light, Nightmare Moon disappeared from the room in an instant as a gentle gust whipped around the room in her wake. The old colt, who had still been pinned against the bookcase, fell to the ground with a loud thud, sweating profusely and laboured in his breathingbreathing.

Celestia sighed angrily, walking over to the desk briskly. She lifted the old colt to his chair with her magic, and spun him around to face her.

"You have failed Us."

"Y-yes, your majesty. I have failed you," he said plainly, his reserved demeanour holding strong even against an enraged goddess.

"Hmpf. Useless. However, We will not punish you for this. Our sister is far too intelligent and cunning to be outwitted by an old foal such as yourself. We will not be in contact again," she said with eyes that could cut through glass. She turned around quickly, and trotted towards the door, violently ripping Luna's seal apart with a loud snapping sound. She opened the door, assaulted with the moaning of her injured guards. "Good day," she spoke finally, closing the door quickly behind her.

The old colt breathed in slowly and deeply, as he tried to take in the entire situation. He had just been threatened by both Princess Celestia and Princess Luna in a single day, and the excitement and nervousness was too much for him to handle. Being in the middle of a quarrel between two goddesses had clearly taken its toll on him. "Oh, my dear Princess Luna... I am eternally sorry for what I have done. I am a poor, old foal. Please, forgive me, my dear Princess Luna..."

"Luna? Luna dear? Are you there? Are you doing alright?" asked Rarity, waving her hoof in front of Luna's face. "Oh dear... I hope I didn't break her..."

Luna snapped back to attention, her eyes nearly pinholes as she felt that surge of adrenaline continue to course through her veins. She looked up at Rarity, trying to get her bearings once more. It had never been so intense. What had just happened to her?

"P-Princess Luna... I-I apologize if I've done anything to upset you," said Rarity, abject fear overtaking her expression as she quickly bowed her entire body before her as humbly as possible.

"W-what...?" said Luna softly. She realized her eyes were fierce and her jaw was tight-set. She looked as if she was about to tear into somepony at a moments notice. Her expression softened and she blinked, the fight-or-flight response beginning to diminish. "I-I-I'm so sorry, Miss Rarity. P-please

don't bow before me, I-I was just a little frightened is all! You did nothing wrong!"

"...are you sure, your highness?" replied Rarity, raising herself slowly, still very timid.

"O-of course, Miss Rarity. Of course. I-I think I need a walk, to clear my head... I'm sorry. Please don't read into me too much, I don't feel like myself today." Luna stood up, and with her head lowered, quickly trotted out of Rarity's boutique, closing the door gently behind her. Rarity could only look on, frowning and completely confused as to what had just happened, as Opalescence peered out from behind her, just as afraid...

~

Twilight fell backwards, dizzy and disoriented, a fog coming over her vision. She felt like she had just been punched in the stomach and winded, as she stumbled off of the bed and landed on the floor with a soft thud. For a few moments she did nothing but try to make the spinning of the world around her stop, or at the very least slow down. Disoriented, she struggled to bring herself to her hooves and stand. Her vision slowly cleared, and Twilight looked over at Luna, who by now was sitting up and staring directly at Twilight with a look of complete and total fright.

"T-T-T-Twilight?!" exclaimed Luna, taken aback. "What are you *doing* here?!"

"Luna! You're okay!" replied Twilight, a huge smile coming across her face. She reached forward and hugged Luna tightly pulling her close to the edge of the bed. "I'm so glad I found you!"

Luna just tensed up in horror, as she felt the other mare squeeze her close. She pried the violet mare off of her and looked at her once more, her eyes getting wider and wider. "Oh, no... no, no, no, no, no!"

"W-what's wrong, Luna?" asked Twilight.

Luna's horn lit up as she pushed Twilight away from her. Before Twilight could react, she could feel herself begin to feel lighter and lighter, and her hooves begin to be restrained in place as she tumbled off of the bed again. "H-hey! What's going on?!"

“Whatever you did, whatever spell you cast to get here, just undo it and go back! You shouldn’t be here!” scowled Luna, quickly jumping off of the bed and trotting to the exit with a tightly restrained Twilight flying ahead of her.

“B-but Luna! What’s going on?! I don’t even know how I got here or what this place is! Please, *tell me!*” replied Twilight, frantically trying to break out of the spell she was locked in. Luna only grimaced and levitated Twilight through the door, dropping her with a soft thud against the carpet. “Luna!” she called out again.

“This isn’t your place! This is nopony’s place except mine! Go away!!”

“D-don’t push me away! Tell me what’s wrong!” pleaded Twilight, feeling herself on the verge of tears as Luna’s agitation and hostility became more and more visible. Luna said nothing, and gripped the door with her magic, trying to pull it closed. It resisted her, snapping back into place each time due to Twilight’s holding spell. Twilight quickly stood up and galloped towards Luna. Luna’s eyes grew wide as she saw the other mare leap forward towards her and lightly tackle her to the ground.

~

“Please... get to safety...” said Nightmare Moon, weakly, her resistance slipping piece by piece.

“Or what?!” retorted Twilight angrily, standing her ground.

“Or... you’ll be responsible for more than you can... possibly imagine...” replied Nightmare, with a grim grin and a chuckle, as she fell to the ground wincing in pain.

~

Twilight shook her head as the ringing pierced her ears once more, causing her to bite down hard. She had no time to react, however, before she felt herself thrown backwards, kicked off of Luna and sent flying through the door once more. Twilight tumbled and rolled, before landing on her side, feeling sore across her entire body. She looked up just in time to see Luna’s angry face, seething with rage, staring at her from the entrance,

as she gripped the door and slammed it shut, sending a shock wave of sound echoing through the hallway and startling Twilight with its ferocity.

“L-Luna?! Come out! Please!” she said, scrambling to her hooves and walking over to the now magically-sealed doorway. “You know I’d never hurt you!” she called against the door, tears beginning to stream down her face. She pressed her ear against the door, attempting to hear anything inside, but, of course, was met with complete silence. She rested herself against the door, sitting down and crying to herself. Never had she been so violently pushed away, even in all of the things they had shared together. Seeing Luna like that frightened her to no end, and Twilight knew now that she couldn’t help her with how she was acting. After a good long while, Twilight finally collected herself and her thoughts, and sat back upright. She looked up at the tall doorway, frowning, as she spoke softly, hoping Luna could still hear her plea. “Luna, I’m going to figure out what’s going on, and then I’m going to get us out of this horrible place, okay?” No response, naturally.

Twilight recalled what she had seen when she had touched Luna, which caused a minor headache in and of itself. It seemed to be a memory of Luna’s, although... a memory within a memory? Why had she suddenly found herself a thousand years in the past, and why had everything been so vivid, so clear, as if she was right there in the moment? The emotions of rage and defiance washed over her just like they had washed over Luna and Nightmare Moon, which made her shake her head in disbelief. Celestia had been so vicious, so vile, that Twilight couldn’t help but think that something was severely wrong with the entire situation she’d seen unfold. That wasn’t the Luna she had known. Even with all of the history books portraying Nightmare Moon as being violent and destructive, it just didn’t seem right. That wasn’t the Celestia she’d known either, and nowhere in history had Celestia ever been portrayed as so contemptuous and tyrannical in all of her years as the Ruler of the Day. It went against everything she had ever known or studied about the history of the royal princesses, even in the books which had critiqued and argued against their rule through *Divine Right*. It felt so out of character that it had to have been a trick, an illusion, a false memory, or something along those lines. It just had to be.

“... and I have a good idea of who’s responsible for this,” said Twilight, looking over at the door to her left. Wasting no time, Twilight walked over to the middle door - the one with Nightmare Moon’s symbol above it - with determination in her eyes. She swung the entrance open with a loud crack as it snapped against its hinges. She trotted quickly into the room, and bellowed out into the darkness, “Nightmare Moon, show yourself! What have you done to Princess Luna?!” Within a few short steps into the room, she immediately felt a small, cool draft behind her, as if a magical spell was being used. She whipped her head around just in time to see the door slam shut behind her, sending a deafening noise that reverberated against the walls of the dark room. Twilight felt dread fill her heart almost immediately, knowing that she had just fallen into an obvious trap.

“Ahem,” said a voice through the darkness. Twilight very, very slowly turned her head forwards. She was met with a pair of shining teal blue orbs with a dark, violet blanket of dimly-lit stars flowing and rippling behind them through the darkness. Twilight could feel a cool breath on her face, which chilled her to the bone and nearly made her heart stop right in its place, and she could only reel back in horror, her confidence and anger completely disarmed and cast aside. She recognized that voice. She knew exactly who it was, and needed no introduction...

Chapter 2

“And just what are *you* doing here, hmm?” asked Nightmare Moon, her eyes piercing directly into Twilight Sparkle’s. Twilight couldn’t seem to avert her eyes, and slowly began backing away, even with the knowledge that the door was firmly sealed behind her. “Answer me, foal.”

“I-I-I... I...”

“Has the cat got your tongue? You were so *reckless* just a moment ago,” continued Nightmare, her voice vaguely amused and her grin etching itself into the pitch-black darkness. “Spit it out.”

Twilight felt her flank brush against the door behind her. Nightmare kept in pace, her unblinking, unwavering gaze continue to drill into Twilight’s soul. Twilight tried to remember why, exactly, she had decided to run into danger without any forethought. She immediately recalled how Luna had so forcefully ejected her from her room, causing a tinge of pain in her heart. She stood her ground, and looked back into Nightmare’s eyes with determination. “I don’t know what I’m doing here, but whatever this is, it must be *your* doing! What did you do to Luna?!” exclaimed Twilight.

“What did *I* do to Luna?” asked Nightmare, incredulously.

“Yes! I just saw her, Nightmare, and she wasn’t anything like herself! She pushed me away and threw me out of... out of... her ‘room,’ or somewhere like that, after I saw a bunch of really horrible stuff after I touched her, or... or... I don’t know!! Where in the hay am I?!” Twilight’s thoughts began to become a bit erratic, the fear and confidence becoming a muddy melange which took away from her usual composure.

Nightmare Moon blinked and said nothing. After a pause, presumably so she could process the information she was given, she sighed with an uncharacteristic melancholy and turned her head. Twilight just waited for the other mare’s reaction with bated breath. “What did you see?” Nightmare asked finally, betraying nothing.

“W-what?”

“What did you see?!” insisted Nightmare, raising her voice, causing Twilight to recoil slightly.

"I-I saw Luna in Rarity's shop and they were talking about the Moon Raising Ceremony, and then something happened and suddenly I was in some old study with a doctor who talked with Luna for a bit, a-about y-you, and Princess Celestia--..."

"And Celestia *what?*"

Twilight lowered her head. She wouldn't say it. In the entire time Luna and Twilight had been together, Celestia would always ask Twilight whether or not Luna was fitting in or if she was happy in Ponyville. Celestia was overjoyed to hear about Luna wanting to take on more responsibility in Equestrian affairs. The Princess Celestia she had seen in that vision was clearly a trick, and Twilight pushed it from her mind. "No," said Twilight finally.

"No?"

"No," repeated Twilight.

"Hmpf," retorted Nightmare Moon, turning away from Twilight and walking slowly into the darkness. Twilight could distinctly see Nightmare Moon's horn light up, and the room suddenly became illuminated, causing Twilight to wince and gasp in pain as she hid her sensitive eyes from the bright light. "You've told me enough," finished Nightmare.

Twilight began to be able to focus on her surroundings slowly but surely, and was met with what appeared to be the most elegant facade which challenged even the castle in Canterlot. Royal decorations lined the walls, and a large mural etched into the ceiling portrayed the 'Twin Sisters of the Night and Day' arranged in a yin-yang pattern. A crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling, causing light to refract and scatter through what appeared to be the lobby of the castle. Nightmare Moon was visible before her unarmoured, her helmet and hoof-guards stacked neatly on a small table directly under the chandelier, the sight of which made Twilight do a double-take of the large alicorn. Nightmare Moon's face was thin and sleek, and her neck and chest almost unnaturally bare without her royal pendant in place. Nightmare Moon concentrated her magic, and the armour began floating up into the air, swirling around her. Her hoof-guards snapped into place, her helmet fit snugly onto her head, and her royal pendant fastened around her neck, recreating the facade of the Nightmare Moon that Twilight had known from her memories.

"W-what are you going to do to me?" asked Twilight cautiously.

"Nothing."

"N-nothing? You're not... going to hurt me? Or... or kill me?"

"Do you think I murder for sport? Ugh. What kind of pony do you think I am?"

"A-a monster! You wanted to bring eternal night!"

Nightmare Moon just laughed quietly to herself. Twilight cocked an eyebrow at her reaction. What was so funny? "Walk with me, Twilight Sparkle," replied Nightmare.

"No! Not until you tell me what's going on!"

"Isn't it obvious?" replied Nightmare Moon, snickering. "You are in the mind of Princess Luna, Queen of the Night. Your *partner*." Twilight looked around at her surroundings once more, at a loss for words. "And do you honestly think Luna would ever permit me to harm even a single little hair on your head?"

"Permit you...? But..." Twilight thought to the conversation she'd heard between Luna and the therapist...

~

"She is my friend."

~

Nightmare turned and began walking towards a long flight of stairs, which ascended into the darkness above until there was nothing to be seen. Twilight scowled and grumbled, before trotting towards Nightmare as slowly and cautiously as possible.

"What's going on, Nightmare? Why did Luna reject me like that?" asked Twilight.

"Your presence here is a mystery even to myself," began Nightmare Moon, as she placed her hoof on the first step. "And I do not know why Luna has rejected you. If what you say is true, her behaviour is quite uncharacteristic, considering how deeply in love she is." Twilight blushed slightly. "I, too, cannot contact her."

"Then... why are you letting me in, when Luna wont?" asked Twilight, ascending the stairs in kind. "It feels like a trap."

“A trap as obvious as this? My dear Twilight, if I had any intention of harming you, I would have done so already. You are defenseless without the other Elements of Harmony. You could be crushed in an instant, even as powerful as you are,” replied Nightmare, in a nonchalant tone that unnerved Twilight.

“You didn’t answer my question, Nightmare,” retorted Twilight, reasserting herself. Twilight stopped on the stairs, looking up at the large, dark alicorn.

“In due time.”

“No!” demanded Twilight, stamping her hoof down on the hard, stone staircase. “Luna is in danger! She’s sad, alone, and she needs help! If I’m going to believe that you’re her *‘friend’* and that you actually care about her like I saw in that vision, you need to be honest and tell me everything you know!”

Nightmare Moon stopped a few feet ahead of her, turning her head and peering at her through her mane. “Just *shut up* and follow my lead,” replied Nightmare Moon, becoming increasingly impatient and dismissive. Twilight gulped, lowered her head and began to meekly follow in tow.

The staircase seemed to twist and turn endlessly. Endless rows of doorways in the stretched out corridors could be seen spanning out into the darkness from side to side as the steps weaved up into further reaches of the castle. It was as confusing, if not moreso, to the unenlightened wanderer than the castle in Canterlot. The fixtures were far more decadent - things were trimmed with gold and silver, and what seemed to be portraits of ponies from ages long past could be seen lining the walls. None of the faces were recognizable, save for a few, but even they only appeared in history books.

At the top of the staircase, Nightmare Moon veered off to the left and around the corner. Twilight Sparkle followed closely behind, breathing heavily. The workout, too, reminded her of her stay in Canterlot, walking its endless stairwells and hallways during her time there. Twilight followed Nightmare Moon through a high-walled corridor which opened up into a large, all-encompassing room, with two thrones elevated on a tall, stone-stepped hill. Two symbols were distinctly etched onto either one - a blazing

sun and a crescent moon, adorned with gold and silver like everything else in the castle.

“This must be...” began Twilight.

“Yes,” interjected Nightmare Moon, as Twilight came alongside her. “This is the old Castle of the Twin Sisters, a thousand years ruined.”

“Unbelievable...” replied Twilight, taken aback by the sight before her, staring up at the thrones. She had only ever seen vague drawings in history textbooks, and now she was right in front of them, like she was actually *inside* the textbook.

“Believe it,” continued Nightmare, veering off to the side, approaching what appeared to be a balcony attached to the right wall. Twilight admired the two thrones for a moment more, before following Nightmare Moon off to the side and onto the balcony. Nightmare Moon stopped and looked up at the sky. It was, apparently, night time, and the crickets could be heard croaking and chirping below in the summer heat. Twilight felt the humidity hit her face, as she came alongside Nightmare once more and looked up into the crystal-clear sky above her. She gasped in amazement, the stars in the heavens twinkling and gleaming brighter than she had ever seen them. The Milky Way spanned from horizon to as far upwards as was visible, and the moon hung in the middle of the sky, full and radiant, imposing itself on its own canvas.

“Oh my gosh,” said Twilight softly. “It’s so beautiful...” She sighed happily, able to pick out some of the all-too familiar constellations and patterns. She sat down and tried to collect herself, feeling the tension in her neck and shoulders releasing slightly. At last, she had found a familiar sight in this place, and even in all of the commotion the night sky still managed to calm her down.

Nightmare Moon chuckled. “Do you always become like this when you gaze upon Luna’s creation?” she said, distinctly amused.

Twilight Sparkle just blushed and looked down, her ears folding back. “W-well yes, I like astronomy, a-and I think the night sky is very beautiful...”

Nightmare Moon just laughed as she looked over at Twilight, who was put back a little on edge. “Wonderful. Simply wonderful,” she said in an almost uncharacteristically cheery tone. Nightmare Moon looked up at the

sky once more, before giggling and turning away, walking back into the main chamber.

“N-Nightmare? D-Did I say something funny?” asked Twilight cautiously. She really couldn’t understand what was so funny.

“Nothing at all. I simply wanted to see your reaction for myself, to see if Luna hadn’t been feeding me rose-coloured memories all this time,” she replied, smiling. Twilight cocked an eyebrow and stared blankly at Nightmare. First, Luna throws Twilight out of her ‘room’, and now Nightmare Moon is happy that Twilight likes the stars? Twilight sighed. This was getting her nowhere.

“Nightmare... please tell me what you know. Luna is suffering,” said Twilight calmly.

Nightmare Moon stopped and turned around slowly. “Fine,” she began. “You’re in our own private little world, built on things we remember, things we’ve cherished. Halfway between dreams and reality.”

“So... this isn’t *really* real?”

“It’s as real as anything else you can touch or see, isn’t it?” replied Nightmare.

Twilight looked up at the two thrones and pursed her lips. “Then why is Celestia’s throne still there? If this is your world, why didn’t you make yourself the ruler?”

“All I ever wanted was to be treated as equals,” replied Nightmare, indignantly. “If you want to talk to a *true* dictator, perhaps you should ask your dear mentor Celestia, hmm?”

Twilight started to get annoyed with Nightmare’s tone. “I’m not buying it, Nightmare! I know Celestia! She’s been so worried about Luna ever since she came back--”

“Oh yes, ever since she *came back*.” Nightmare scowled, stamping her hoof down. “Yes, yes, *now* she’s all touchy-feely, empathic and righteous after she *tortured* us for centuries. So good of her to have a change of heart after it’s all said and done. That hypocritical *jackmare*.”

Twilight felt a flare of rage rush up her spine. Choking back insults was becoming difficult, but she managed none the less. “*Okay, okay*, I get it, you hate Princess Celestia. Sheesh, I knew that already,” said Twilight, sighing again. Twilight decided to change the subject. “I had a couple of...

weird 'visions' when I first arrived here. You were in one of them, and we were talking. You told me to get away from you, like you were afraid I'd get hurt or something."

Nightmare Moon's scowl was quickly replaced with a look of confusion. "Oh really? What specifically did I tell you?"

"You don't remember?"

"No. Please, enlighten me," replied Nightmare.

"You told me to get away from you, or that I'd *'be responsible for more than I could possibly imagine,'*" said Twilight, walking closer to Nightmare. "You look injured, maybe even a little afraid... but that's all I saw."

Nightmare Moon's eyes narrowed, a concerned expression coming across her armour-clad face. "Really? That's all?"

"Yes."

Nightmare Moon sharply sighed. "Why did I have to be so *uselessly* vague?" At that moment, a loud clamouring could be heard from down the main corridor. The pair of them whipped their heads around and gasped in shock. Nightmare Moon's wings extended in fright, and she growled like a beast at the sudden disturbance. All that could be heard was the clanging of metal and a lot of commotion. "*What. Is. That?*" demanded Nightmare Moon to nopony in particular. Twilight's heart began to race, seeing Nightmare so startled herself.

"W-what's going on?" asked Twilight.

"This isn't possible!"

"What isn't possible?" asked Twilight again, nervousness creeping up into her voice. Nightmare Moon didn't reply, and instead immediately broke out into a full gallop towards the noise. Twilight followed, quickly outpaced by the taller, leaner mare, down the corridor to the very end. Nightmare Moon stopped outside a large, wooden door at the far end of the hall, as Twilight tried desperately to catch up to the larger alicorn. "What... what's going on, Nightmare? Please tell me? I've had enough surpri--"

"Shhhh," hissed Nightmare, holding her hoof to Twilight's mouth. Nightmare stared intently at the door. "Somepony is in there. It isn't Luna."

"W-what--" Twilight couldn't even finish her question, before the door swung open and cracked against the adjacent wall. A dark green unicorn

pony with a red mane stood before them, holding a silver tray in the air with his magic. He began walking out of what appeared to be a very well-stocked kitchen, with several other unicorn staff all moving their own trays in tandem.

“Outta the way, missy!” said the unicorn chef in a brisk, surly tone, looking straight at Twilight. Twilight blinked, before moving quickly aside, taken aback by the fact that she could actually be seen.

“O-oh, right. Sorry,” she said from the side, as six or seven other unicorn ponies quickly filed out of the noisy, smelly kitchen, holding up silver platters of hors d'oeuvres and various other vegetable and fruit delicacies that were to make up the courses of the evening. They marched down the hallway single-file and into the throne room, as lights and sound began to fill it piece by piece, as if the entire scene were materializing right before them. Ponies popped and faded silently into view, as Twilight and Nightmare Moon followed the procession of chefs and servants entering the main throne room. Twilight looked up at the decorated walls, the chandelier hanging from the high, oval ceiling, and the absolutely perfect, immaculately-dressed ponies which adorned the floor of the hall. It was unlike anything Twilight had ever seen. The pure decadence felt almost uncanny to Twilight, even having been to the Grand Galloping Gala.

As Twilight and Nightmare entered the main hall, loud, ceremonial trumpets played from side to side. The crowd went dead silent, and two alicorns ascended the long staircase to the twin thrones. It was obvious who they were, but Twilight had a hard time recognizing Celestia, and had been ever since the first vision. Why was her mane purely pink, and not the colours of the *aurora borealis* that she remembered? Not only that, but she looked much, much smaller. Twilight looked behind her, noticing that Nightmare Moon had mysteriously disappeared. However, Twilight knew she didn't have time to think on it very long or to search for her, and silently skirted the crowd, trying to get to a better vantage point to see the royal princesses. She headed off to the far right of the room, avoiding bumping into anypony as much as she could.

“Our wonderful guests!” began Princess Celestia suddenly, extending her hoof to the crowd in front of her. The high-socialite ponies all bowed their heads in respect. Celestia smiled, although from Twilight's angle, it

looked a little more like a smirk. “Thank you *all* for attending Our Grand Galloping Gala. We are so happy to have you all here.”

“By the way,” began Nightmare, startling Twilight slightly as she whispered into her ear. Where the hay had she gone? “That’s the *Royal We*, in case you were wondering.”

“Wait... she actually did that?” asked Twilight quietly.

“You really don’t know her, do you?” replied a giggling Nightmare Moon, her presence fading back out behind her.

“It is with great pleasure that We welcome you into Our castle to join Us. Please, do make yourselves comfortable,” finished Celestia, magically raising a glass of wine in front of her, as the other ponies in the crowd did the same in kind. They all waited for the Princess’s cue, as Celestia gazed around the room, with a distinctly pleased look adorning her grinning face. She then sipped slowly, as all of the other ponies, including Luna, did the same. Not a moment after, the well-dressed orchestral set at the side of the room began playing formal, gentle background music, as the other ponies immediately began talking amongst themselves. Twilight squinted up at the thrones. She could see Luna have a distinctly defeated look on her face, gazing down at the floor below her throne, as Celestia beamed happily out into the crowd. Luna began speaking to Celestia, but what about, Twilight couldn’t make out.

“Darn, I wish I could hear what they were saying,” said Twilight idly. A second later, she remembered a directional-hearing spell she had picked up from needing to study the phenomenon of the ‘Pinkie-Sense’ from afar. She cast it on herself, focusing intently on the general area of the thrones, and gasped softly as the amplified, unfiltered noise of the party hit her ears. She focused a little more intently, finally picking up the familiar voices of her mentor and her partner, and listened in.

“... why not, sister?” asked Luna.

“Listen, it’s hard enough having to navigate this social scene without me having to watch over your shoulder for your inevitable mis-steps. Please, don’t interfere with tonight, and just do as I say.”

“But I--”

“This is my final decision.”

“... alright... I’ll keep to myself...” Luna glanced off to the side, before stepping off of her throne, Celestia eyeing her cautiously. Luna descended the large staircase down from the thrones, and made her way through the noisy, well-dressed crowd. It was at this point that Twilight realized that Luna was coming straight for her. Her heart fluttered, hoping to catch a glimpse of her partner up-close again, when a thought occurred to her. She remembered that the chef ponies she had seen before had stared directly at her and seen her before, which caused Twilight to tense up. She remembered Luna’s initial reaction to her in her ‘room’ before, and quickly dashed onto the balcony, galloping across it and whipping around to its other entrance on the far side, trying to escape from the open as quickly as possible. She breathed heavily as she slowed down, pressing her back into the wall behind her.

Nightmare Moon appeared in front of her in a puff of dark smoke. She giggled. “You didn’t cast an invisibility spell the second you realized that you could be seen?” asked Nightmare, in a condescending tone. “Oh heavens, are you always this absent minded?”

“Hey, I’m under a lot of stress, okay?!” whispered Twilight indignantly, looking up at the tall alicorn.

“... I... I just don’t want to upset her,” said a voice from around the corner. Twilight turned and peered around the corner, seeing Luna on the other end of the balcony. “This is her big day. It’s the only time of the year when she treats me with any kind of respect in public,” said Luna, lowering her head. Luna was magically levitating a small hoof-mirror in front of her, talking into it. The reflection in the mirror scoffed and snorted at her.

“Oh? And do YOU have any ‘big days’? Do YOU have anything to look forward to, aside from your sister barking orders?” said the doppelganger. “Instructing you to ‘keep your mouth shut’? Is that *really* the way a sister treats her own?”

“S-she’s under a lot of stress...”

“And *you* aren’t?!”

Luna just began crying silently. The sight immediately made Twilight lurch forward, but Nightmare Moon spread her hoof outwards, stopping Twilight in her tracks. “No,” said Nightmare plainly. “You cannot interfere.”

“Why not?” quietly demanded Twilight.

"Because I said so," replied Nightmare, simply.

"Stand up for yourself!" shouted the figure in the mirror, interrupting Luna's quiet sobs. "You have every right to feel upset! You have every right to want better! Even if you don't want the attention, the very least she could do is give you some small semblance of respect! Am I wrong?"

"W-well--" replied Luna, quietly.

"Am I?!"

"I--"

"Answer!"

"NO!" shouted Luna, snapping back intensely. "You're NOT wrong! You're right! This is unacceptable!" Luna stamped her hoof against the ground.

"You're the queen of the night!" replied the doppelganger. "You should be allowed to speak to whom you wish at whatever time you'd like."

"Yes!" replied Luna, her energy rising into her voice. "I'm going to go there right now and demand it! I'm going to... I'm..."

"Going to...?" mirrored the figure.

"I... I..." said Luna softly, whimpering. "I can't... do this alone," continued Luna, looking into the mirror pleadingly. "Y-you'll... you'll be there to help me, right? You'll be beside me, ready to come to my aid, should anything go wrong, right?"

The face in the mirror just smiled warmly back at Luna. "Of course. If that is what you need, then I will be there for you. Call on me should the need arise."

"Thank you," said Luna gently and happily. "Alright. I'll do it. I'll do it right now." The mirror disappeared with a spark and a small crackle, and Luna turned to exit the balcony, an extremely determined look in her eyes. Twilight cautiously approached out from behind the other exit, carefully walking towards the entrance to the party, with Nightmare Moon following behind in her wispy, smoky form. Twilight peered out from behind the decorative curtains, trying to see where Luna had gone. It wasn't too hard, however, to spot her moving into the crowd and near the steps to the throne. Twilight tuned in with her hearing magic once more.

"Sister," said Luna, finally beside Celestia. Celestia happened to be talking to some wealthy business ponies, and didn't respond. Luna got

closer, and said it again, more insistently. "Sister, we have to talk," she said, insistently. Celestia continued to not respond, talking to the other high society ponies in front of her, who agreed with every single one of her statements. Luna moved closer and prodded Celestia with her hoof.

"Yes, Luna, what?" snapped Celestia, looking severely displeased as she turned away from her guests. Luna lurched back slightly, as did the other guests Celestia had been speaking to, as if slightly scared of their Princess's reaction.

"I want to talk to the other ponies at this party."

"And why would you want to do that, hmm?" quipped Celestia, quietly muttering to Luna so the guests couldn't hear.

"I'm not an idiot, sister. I can talk to the other ponies without you having to worry about me."

Celestia just scoffed. "No."

"Why not?"

"I don't have time for this," she said, returning to her guests once more, their faces betraying their fear.

"So be it," replied Luna through gritted teeth, her rage almost becoming beyond control. Luna stormed up the large staircase to the twin thrones, and at the top, she turned around to face the crowd, with the most determined look Twilight had ever seen adorning her face. "Everypony! Thank you so much for attending!" she began, extending her hoof out to the crowd. Celestia tensed up and slowly turned around, eyeballing her sister incredulously. "I'm very sorry, but you all must leave at once. Please, do not ask for an explanation. Just make your way home."

Celestia's face took on a look of complete and utter shock, as she began to visibly panic. "O-oh! Ha ha ha! My sister, everypony, is *quite* the comedian, isn't she?" laughed Celestia, trying desperately to save face. She turned anxiously to look at the other ponies, who by now had easily picked up on the obvious disagreement between the two royal sisters. "Please! Do continue amongst yourselves--"

"EVERYPONY! LEAVE! NOW! I WILL NOT ASK NICELY AGAIN!" yelled Luna at the top of her lungs, stamping her hooves down against the hard stone surface with a furious noise. Not a single pony in the room needed to be reminded again, and quickly began filing through the main

corridor, practically galloping as they did. Celestia's face only got angrier and angrier as the shuffle of the ponies leaving the hall became a dull roar. As the last of the guests left, and the two sisters looked at each other in disdain. Celestia said nothing, and only quickly climbed the stairs, approaching Luna. "Sister, you were unreasonable and I will not stand for such things anymore! I am a royal sister, and I want to participate in the culture of the royal court just as much--"

Celestia raised her hoof and smacked it across Luna's face. Luna cried out, bringing a hoof to her own face to caress her cheek. "What *is* your problem, Luna?! How DARE you break up my party! This is the ONLY time I'm allowed to actually ENJOY myself, and it only happens once every FIVE YEARS!" Luna said nothing, and only hid her face beneath her mane. Off to the side, behind the curtains, Twilight was using all of her strength not to intervene. This had to be some cruel imposter. It just couldn't be Princess Celestia. "Go to your room! We will discuss this later!" finished Celestia, snorting and walking down the flight of steps. Luna hid her eyes behind her mane, tears falling to the ground.

It was at this point that Twilight lurched forward again, only to be magically restrained by Nightmare Moon. "Hey!" whispered Twilight. "Let me go! Let me help her!"

"There's nothing you can do," said Nightmare Moon, her expression vacant and blank as she looked on into the scene unfolding in front of them. "Nothing at all."

Dark light silently surrounded Luna, illuminating her body. It caressed her, turning her mane to a tone of dark blue. It was only a few moments later when a much darker coloured Luna appeared near the thrones, the tears gone from her eyes. There was no armour, much to Twilight's surprise. Luna flapped her wings, silently gliding over Celestia, and landed with a loud thud in front of her. Celestia stopped in her tracks, narrowing her eyes. "Out of my way," she briskly demanded, failing to notice Luna's change. Luna said nothing, and instead charged her horn, quickly sending a bolt of dark energy at Celestia, striking her in the face. Celestia cried out, although she recovered quickly, and didn't look injured. Except for her pride, of course.

“There. An eye for an eye,” spoke Luna in a soft voice. “You prevented me from participating in the party, and I prevented you from participating as well. You smacked me, and now I’ve smacked you.”

Celestia’s eyes shot wide open at the change in Luna’s demeanour. “Y-you’ve never talked back to me... **YOU’VE NEVER TALKED BACK TO ME!**” yelled Celestia, pure, unbridled rage creeping into her voice.

Luna grinned and stuck her nose up in the air, looking down at Celestia. “Oh, right, and about those other times...” Luna charged up another spell, immediately striking Celestia again directly on the muzzle, causing her to cry out softly and step back. “That was for canceling MY party!” Another strike. “And that was for chasing off that colt who liked me!” Another, and another. “And for insulting me for cheap laughs!” She charged up another powerful spell, as Celestia cowered, lowering herself to the ground. “**AND THIS IS FOR MAKING THE LAST FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF MY LIFE COMPLETELY MISERABLE!**” Luna sent the final spell hurling towards Celestia. Celestia quickly side-stepped, dodging the large stream of energy as it hurled past her up the stairs. She recomposed herself as quickly as possible, but the energy whipped around and homed in on Celestia. Celestia gasped as she felt it strike her, sending her violently flying through the chamber. Twilight noticed very quickly that Celestia was hurling directly for her, but before Twilight could react, she felt the alicorn smash into her, intense pain shooting down her side.

Twilight could see a picture of herself as a young filly flash before her eyes for only an instant, but it burned into her skull like any other vision, however short it was. It caused her to squint and close her eyes from confusion and overstimulation, making her mind reel once more. Luna walked closer as Celestia attempted to get to her hooves. As Celestia made herself upright once more, she looked beside her to see what or who she had inadvertently hit. Celestia gasped in horror, stepping back as soon as her eyes laid themselves on Twilight.

“T-Twilight Sparkle!” stuttered Celestia. “*What are you doing here?!*”

“P-Princess Celestia...?” asked Twilight weakly, failing to get up as the intense pain around her body made her completely debilitated. Now, she had one of those weird, fuzzy mind things going on, *and* she felt like she’d just been hit by a train. “... y-you recognize me?” she asked weakly.

Celestia just continued to look on in fright, stepping backwards, accidentally backing into Luna, who just glared at the pair of them viciously.

“Y-you put her up to this, didn’t you?!” yelled Celestia, pointing a hoof at Luna in anger. “I expected cruel behaviour, but this goes too far!”

“Do you think I’d bring her into a place like this?” asked Luna, shouting at Celestia. Celestia didn’t reply, and quickly cast a teleportation spell, disappearing into a hoof-ful of sparks and a cloud of dust.

“W-wait! Princess Celestia!” pleaded Twilight as the pink-maned alicorn disappeared into thin air.

“Hmpf,” said Luna. Luna turned to Twilight, staring directly into her eyes. Twilight frowned, her ears folding back. Given Luna’s reaction before, she could only expect what would happen now, given how angry she seemed to be.

“I-I’m sorry, Luna... I-I can’t get out of here. I know I-I’m probably invading your privacy--”

“Stop,” said Luna simply. Now that Twilight could get a good look at her, Twilight noticed that she looked almost like she was half way between the Luna she’d always known and Nightmare Moon. The body was rigid with power and ability, but her eyes were calm and caring. The juxtaposition was jarring. “I know you can’t leave, but please do not interfere any longer. Wander if you must, but stay out of our way.”

“B-but Luna...” pleaded Twilight, falling to her side as she attempted to bring herself to her hooves again. She winced as the pain intensified with every movement. Twilight panicked, wondering if she had actually managed to get a couple of broken ribs. Luna stepped over her, looking down at her injured partner with sadness in her eyes, and began charging up a spell. Twilight immediately felt herself become warm, as if pure energy was caressing every fibre of her body. Within an instant, she felt the intense pain lift and dissipate, her strength returning to her muscles slowly but surely. Twilight opened her eyes dreadingly, feeling refreshed yet still a bit tired. She was met with the darkness of the unlit throne chamber, looking as if everything had been reset to the way it had originally been. None of the ornaments or fixtures of the party she had just witnessed were visible. It was as if it had never happened at all. Luna, of course, was nowhere in sight.

“Interesting,” said a voice behind Twilight. Twilight jumped, quickly turning around to see Nightmare Moon standing over her, observing the throne chamber.

“Oh, it’s just you,” said Twilight, sighing. She was still on-edge from what had just happened. Half of her even considered that without Luna’s healing spell, she may have actually suffered serious internal damage, causing her to shudder a little. “Why did you disappear like that, huh? And how did they recognize me? Isn’t this supposed to be a memory?”

Nightmare Moon’s expression betrayed nothing, as it usually did. “No idea,” she said, a slight grin coming across her face. “Twilight, I have a plan,” she continued, changing the subject.

“A plan? Please, I’m all ears. Things just somehow got even *MORE* confusing.”

“Every vision you see brings you to your knees, yes?”

“W-well, yeah, kinda... it’s intense, like all my senses are being overstimulated all at once, like I’m getting ripped from my body. It gets... really hard to think about anything afterwards, like I’m waking up in the morning after a night of really awful sleep.”

Nightmare thought to herself, her eyes rolling to the side as she went over whatever plan she’d be thinking of. “I can cause those ‘side-effects’ to cease. I can also allow you to have more strength so you’re not caught off guard again. Then, we can begin searching for Luna, even if she doesn’t want to be found. I have a feeling she’ll be more willing to listen to you over me.”

“What’s the catch?” asked Twilight instinctively. If there was anyone she didn’t expect any favours from, it was Nightmare Moon. “And why wouldn’t she listen to you? I saw her doing exactly what you said just now, didn’t I?”

Nightmare Moon frowned. “Our relationship has changed over the years. She trusts me as I was then, not as I am before you. There is no catch. You just have to give me your complete and *total* trust. I promise you that no harm will come to either you or Luna.”

“And Princess Celestia?” asked Twilight, averting her eyes. Nightmare scoffed and grumbled, but inevitably complied.

"I cannot speak for Luna, but I, personally, will not harm Celestia," continued Nightmare begrudgingly.

"... I don't have much of a choice, do I? I just nearly got killed because I wasn't able to move fast enough," replied Twilight bitterly.

"You always have a choice," said Nightmare.

Twilight thought over it. It was clear now that Princess Celestia being mean wasn't just some trick or illusion put on by Nightmare Moon. It didn't make any sense, but what Twilight did know was that both Luna and Celestia were here in the flesh. Whether or not these were still 'just memories,' Twilight couldn't tell. Twilight muttered under her breath. The situation was becoming so complex that she wasn't even sure where to proceed next. Nightmare Moon's offer seemed almost desirable in comparison to the confusion she was feeling. "Fine," spat out Twilight, looking up at Nightmare. "You said Luna wouldn't let you harm me, and Luna said that you're her friend. If you hurt me, you'll mess everything up, and Luna will be trapped forever, so just this once, I'm going to believe you. Don't mess it up."

"Of course not, *your highness*," quipped Nightmare sarcastically. Nightmare grinned and disappeared into a cloud of dark gas and energy, hovering over Twilight. Nightmare Moon's shadowy form descended upon Twilight Sparkle's body. Twilight felt an intense sensation hit the back of her head, and a huge surge of energy ripped through her mind. Her legs buckled and she fell to the floor, completely overwhelmed. She could feel sensations and emotions she had never felt begin to invade her thoughts. The intensity started to become unbearable, and she cried out.

"Nightmare, stop! This is too much! Get out of my head!" she pleaded, squinting her eyes. Nightmare Moon didn't respond. Little flashes of pictures went through her mind's eye: a green field in the moonlight, a room set up for a party, and a damp, dark, stone-walled corridor. It was all foreign and terrifying. She could feel the reverberation take over senses, knowing that she'd soon be sucked into another vision.

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“Luna?” called Twilight. She stepped into the basement of Sugar Cube Corner, as Pinkie Pie and Applejack waited at the top of the stairs with deep concern for their friends. Twilight could hear gasps of pain, which caused her to hasten her descent. “L-Luna? Is everything okay? Where are you?” Twilight searched around, illuminating her horn as she gazed across the far walls. Her eyes eventually zeroed in on the body of a larger pony, cowering in the corner and shuddering. Twilight moved closer, speaking softly. “Hey... what’s wrong, Luna? Do you want to talk?”

“N-no... leave me alone...” replied Luna softly.

“You’re obviously hurt... can I do anything? Do you want me to get Fluttershy?” asked Twilight. She thought perhaps Fluttershy, who had become one of Luna’s best friends in Ponyville, might cheer her up a bit.

“No... just go... go before I hurt you...”

“You’re not going to hurt me, Luna. Let’s just--”

“NO!” Luna yelled, raising her head to stare at Twilight intensely. Twilight stepped back cautiously, her eyes wide. “If you don’t go right now, I’m going to hurt you! Do you understand?!”

“I-I don’t... I’m sorry, Luna...”

“I... I can’t take this anymore... I can’t...” Luna lowered her head and held it between her hooves. She cried softly, sobbing against the floor, as a black shroud covered her body. It began to illuminate, and within seconds, the vague outline of a taller pony could be seen. Her mane was jet black with a few scattered stars, and armour covered her body. Twilight immediately knew who it was, but her initial reaction of horror was stifled when Twilight saw the state she was in after the shroud dissipated. Nightmare Moon looked terrified and weak.

“Nightmare... Nightmare Moon...? What’s going on? Why are you hurt?”

Nightmare choked, gasping as her legs shook. She tried to raise herself to her hooves, before an intense magical light began to illuminate from Nightmare’s horn. Twilight immediately cast a ‘shield’ spell, one she had picked up from a book about unicorn knights. “T-Twilight S-Sparkle... run... just run...”

“What?” said Twilight, through her shield.

“Please... get to safety...” said Nightmare Moon, weakly, her resistance slipping piece by piece.

“Or what?!” retorted Twilight angrily, standing her ground.

“Or... you’ll be responsible for more than you can... possibly imagine...” replied Nightmare, with a grim grin and a chuckle, as she fell to the ground wincing in pain. The magic from her horn began to crackle, an electrical surge consuming Nightmare Moon’s body. Nightmare Moon cried out in pain, as the light became so intense it blinded Twilight, causing her to shield her face.

“TWILIGHT!” yelled Applejack and Pinkie Pie in unison from the top of the stairs. Suddenly, everything went black.

~

Twilight stood up slowly, opening her eyes. She felt perfectly fine. She felt *better* than just ‘fine,’ actually. The normal mind-numbing fog that clouded her thoughts after being sucked into a memory simply wasn’t there, and for that, she was thankful. As she looked around the hallway, she noticed that everything looked a little bit brighter and clearer. In the corner of her eye, she caught a glimpse of the side of her mane. It looked darker than usual, and she reached up to feel it. Her mane had a slightly different texture, and she could distinctly see the outline of a dark blue stripe in her hair as she ran it through her hooves. She gasped and galloped towards one of the large mirrors in the hallway, skidding to a halt in front of it. Twilight was speechless at what she saw. Her mane had turned a darker shade of violet, her hair seemed more naturally-kempt, and she could see the dark streaks of blue fade throughout her hair. Her eyes themselves had changed themselves halfway between deep blue and deep violet.

Twilight couldn’t help but think that she now bore an uncanny resemblance to Nightmare Moon.