



Progress

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Chapter 1

The Microwave

Princess Luna, formally Nightmare Moon, scowled intently at the contraption before her. It sat there, made of pure plastic and metal and gleaming in the private kitchen Celestia had granted her. Dealing with the public had never been one of Luna's strengths, and being trapped in the moon for a thousand years hadn't helped this at all.

Not wishing to feel useless, Luna had dived headfirst into study, trying to assimilate the major changes in Equestria and the rest of the world before moving onto the smaller, more numerous changes.

The legal aspects of this society she understood quite well. The basics of policy law and governance had been practically invented by her. Stars, planets, moons--They moved according to natural laws and it was through these laws Luna had derived the concepts of government, striving for balance between the strong and the weak, the large and the little.

Celestia, however, was always the better of the two at... How did she put it?

"Making the sale," she quoted, a smile coming to her face. Yes. That was it. Making the sale. It was Celestia who convinced ponies of the need for balance in the distribution of power, and Luna who put it together. Behind the scenes. Balance.

The rise of the aristocracy had been natural, but it was offset by executive, legislative and legal powers. While those of landed gentry descent might be stuffy elites, their arrogance was due mostly by tradition and not by actual authority. Celestia, while a great authority in her own right by virtue of being (in all senses of the word) a goddess, she had strove to maintain the balance. The upset of it too far in either way was the difference between despotism and anarchy, and given her own experience with the corrupting influence of power...

No, no, she could look at that objectively now. She need not feel guilt, her older sister had told her and Luna logically knew it wouldn't help. Still, it took a lot more will than she thought to move on.

... Given her own experience with the corrupting influence of power, Luna found herself happy that Celestia had paid heed to her warnings and her thoughts. That she had made a difference besides... Well...

... Being Nightmare Moon. She closed her eyes, sighed, and moved past that thought to her immediate problem.

She could handle the law. She could handle politics, in theory. She could handle economics, mathematics, the sciences...

Therefore, it was only logical she could figure out this... This... This...

"Your majesty?"

Luna looked over at one of the servant fillies, her white coat and yellow mane adding more cheer to the interior of the brightly decorated kitchen. Luna coughed.

"Yes?"

"Do you require any assistance?" She asked. Luna shook her head, and returned her eyes to the contraption on the counter.

"No, thank you," she said quietly. Luna scowled at her reflection in the microwave's surface. The servant filly coughed again. Luna looked back at her. The filly smiled gently.

"If you'd like, I can-"

"No, I'm fine, really," Luna said, her tone a bit harsher than she had intended. The filly frowned and Luna felt guilt.

"I'm sorry... I'd just prefer to figure this out on my own," Luna said. The filly nodded.

“As you wish, your majesty. If you need anything though, don’t hesitate to call,” she said. She turned and trotted off, leaving Luna alone once again. The Moon Princess looked back at the microwave and resumed her scowl. Her horn lit up with magical energies, and she probed the device carefully.

“Hmmm...” It had some sort of apparatus inside it. It seemed... Phased, perhaps? Yes, phased. It emitted radio waves. She had read up on them, seen the technology for herself, and she understood the theory.

Of course, to heat up the food, she reasoned. Excite the water molecules... No different from a heating spell.

She could use a heating spell right now if she wished, a part of her pointed out. Luna snorted, and continued her examination. She lifted a hoof up and tapped it once.

“Feels solid,” she murmured to herself. She tapped it again. Something gave and the device popped open, loudly. Luna squeaked and jumped back, her flanks slamming into the table behind her as her wings puffed out in fright. Slowly, she reopened her eyes, and stared at the microwave.

“Stupid,” she muttered to herself. It was just the door. She trotted back up to the counter, folding her wings away. She peered inside the pristine white interior of the microwave carefully, and sniffed.

“Okay... This is probably where the food goes,” she reasoned aloud, feeling much calmer. She then turned and trotted up to one of the cabinets. Opening it with her telekinesis, she scanned through the various packages, before she found one in particular. She lifted it and brought it down, and examined it.

“Pop Corn,” she read aloud. Right, Celestia had mentioned that it was good to eat. She nodded and trotted back, placing the container in the microwave. Carefully she shut the door, then looked at what she had reasoned to be the interface. She hummed and studied it.

“How long would it take to heat it up...?” She thought aloud. Luna tapped her hooves upon the floor, before she smiled. “Of course! Ah... Excuse me!” She called out.

“Yes, Princess Luna?” The same blonde filly answered, poking her head into the kitchen with a smile. Luna felt a little annoyed that the servant filly had been hanging around, but let it go easily enough. Now she felt like she was somewhere familiar.

“I need an abacus,” she said. “Please, tell me where I could find one.”

The filly stared, her smile growing confused.

“Um... I’m sorry, your majesty, but what is an abacus?” She asked. Luna scowled, but softened her expression when the filly cringed.

Don’t take it out on the servants, it’s not their fault you’ve been locked in the moon for a thousand years, she thought to herself.

“It’s a mathematics tool,” she explained. “It has... Has beads on wires in a wooden frame.”

The filly still looked blank. Luna was about to call for another servant, perhaps one with some idea of what she was talking about, before the blonde’s eyes lit up in understanding.

“Ohhh! Like a calculator!”

Luna slowly nodded. “Yes... That.” Whatever that was.

“Wouldn’t you prefer to use a calculator?” The filly asked. Luna restrained a sigh.

“No.”

“All right,” the filly replied. She galloped off. Luna waited, but felt herself growing impatient.

I could just conjure one, she thought. *It wouldn’t be that hard...*

Still, if it got the filly to stop hanging around for a little while it was worth it. She had the sneaking suspicion Celestia had the servants paying extra attention to her. It wasn’t as though she was going to go on a rampage! It was so annoying how overprotective she could be...

It was twenty minutes before the filly returned, baring a very old, dusty abacus in her mouth. Luna smiled and took hold of it with her telekinesis.

"You wouldn't believe where I found it! The curator of the palace museum said it was one they use for display purposes," the filly explained. Luna nodded, setting the device down on the table. The old motions came to her hooves, and she swiftly calculated the weight of the popcorn container, the energy output of the microwave, and a few other relevant variables. Her smile grew a bit as she felt, at last, in familiar territory.

"There we go," she said after checking her solutions twice. She turned to the microwave and pressed several buttons. "Twenty-seven minutes at full power... All right!" She hit the start button, and her smile grew at the pleasant humming the machine made. She looked over at the filly, who looked uncertain. "... Is something wrong?"

"Er... Well... Twenty-seven minutes seems a bit long, don't you think?" She asked. Luna shook her head.

"No, I checked. It's just the right amount of time," she said. The filly nodded slowly.

"Er... If you say so, your majesty."

"So, what do I call you?" Luna asked, the tension dropping off considerably now that she'd figured out how to work the stupid thing. The filly smiled.

"Sundance, your majesty!"

Luna smiled and nodded. "Well, why don't you tell me a little about yourself?" She asked politely. "At the table."

Sundance shyly, but gradually with greater enthusiasm, related her back story. Luna nodded in the appropriate parts but really, she was feeling very pleased that she'd gotten someone to speak to her almost normally. In fact, it was just about the best feeling she had ever-

POP! POPOPOPOPOPOPOPOPO!

“EEP!” Luna cried, and a wave of telekinesis left her before she could think. It smashed the microwave, and a cloud of billowing smoke emerged from the burning interior.

“Oh no oh no oh no oh no!” Sundance chanted. “Quick! Extinguish it before-!”

A loud alarm went off and water began spraying from the ceilings, dousing the entire kitchen in it as the smoke continued to fill the room. Sundance coughed and got down as low to the floor as possible. She was surprised to see Princess Luna underneath the table, shaking.

“Y-Your Majesty? Princess Luna? Are you all right?”

“... No,” Luna sighed miserably, clutching at her now soaking wet abacus. “No I’m not.”

- - - - -

“Luna, really,” Celestia said as she magically directed the towel to scrub Luna’s hair more forcefully. “It’s not that bad.”

Luna knew she was sulking, but frankly she didn’t care. She held the sad little abacus in her hooves as her sister fussed over her in front of the fireplace. She looked down at it and sighed.

“The fire department was called.”

“A minor overreaction,” Celestia soothed.

“There were instructions on the container I ignored.”

“Mistakes happen,” her older sister said. Luna huffed.

“You *laughed*.”

“I laughed because I saw that my darling little sister was safe,” Celestia said, removing the towel to affectionately nuzzle Luna’s mane. She smiled. “And you looked rather cute, hiding under the table.”

Luna scowled. Celestia laughed, the sound like ringing bells.

“Luna, you shouldn’t be so hard on yourself. It’s been a *thousand years*. You can’t expect to catch up right away. These things happen.” She laughed again. “You should have seen how badly I handled the first aircraft. I asked why the wings didn’t move and why there weren’t any feathers.”

Luna tried very hard not to laugh, and succeeded in keeping it down to a snicker. She looked up at her sister, who smiled more gently.

“At the very least, you acted appropriately when Sundance tried to take responsibility for it.”

“It wasn’t her fault,” Luna said stubbornly. Celestia nodded.

“So now she knows she can trust you not to blame her for your mistakes. I’d say that’s the first step towards friendship.” She glanced at Twilight Sparkle’s latest letter, and she smiled in fond remembrance of her faithful student. “I think I might get to send her a letter this time. So...” She kissed the top of Luna’s head. “Thank you, Little Sister.”

Luna blushed, and nodded back. “It... It was nothing.”

“Now... You have the night to look after,” Celestia said, gently bumping her head against Luna’s. “Go on.”

“All right,” Luna said. She rose, and looked over the abacus. It was worn and worse for wear, no thanks to her, but still...

“May I hold onto this, Sister? For... For a little while, at least?” Luna asked. Celestia smiled and nodded.

“Of course dear. I don’t think it’s outlived it’s usefulness, do you?”

Luna flushed and her smile grew.

“No Sister. I don’t...”

Chapter 2

Baseball

Celestia walked through the halls of the palace with her usual grace and efficiency. Despite having gone through several meetings over the state of Equestria's agriculture and commerce, she was still as outwardly serene as ever.

This changed once she reached the library, and she heaved a great sigh as she looked over the books, rows and tables of the great archives of Equestria.

"Hoo... Luna? Luna?" She called softly. Her horn glowed for a moment, and she smiled as she located her quarry. Flapping her wings briefly, she rose up and came to a hover on the third level. A mass of blue hair and a horn poked out from over a stack of books on a table near the balcony. An abacus clicked away at a quick pace, as the sound of pages turning rapidly accompanied it.

"Enjoying yourself?" Celestia asked. The sounds stopped, and Luna poked her head out from over the stack of journals, textbooks, and articles. A pair of reading glasses decorated her nose. Celestia raised a hoof to her mouth, but was unable to smother her soft laughter entirely.

"I am, actually, and—What? Why are you laughing?" Luna asked. Celestia hovered over the balcony and landed in front of the table. She pointed her hoof at Luna's glasses, and the younger alicorn's mouth made an "o" of understanding.

"Oh! You mean the glasses. Well, um, I saw that the other librarians and others who do a great deal of reading wore them and as they enhance vision I thought it only proper I have the same," Luna explained. Celestia laughed again, and Luna scowled.

"What?"

“Luna, you only wear glasses if you require them,” Celestia said gently. Luna nodded.

“Right. For reading.”

“If your eyes are already bad,” Celestia added. Luna blinked rapidly behind her large frames, then, comprehending, pulled the spectacles off. Celestia’s smile grew.

“On the other hoof, you do look adorable in them,” she teased. Luna flushed again and huffed.

“Yes, yes... Well? Are you going to hug me and give me candy then?”

“Not this time,” Celestia said. Luna frowned and looked back at her papers, and resumed her work, abacus clicking away happily.

“Well, then what? I have a great deal of work to do,” Luna said. “I’ve nearly finished with the trading history of Manehattan, then I am moving onto Phillydelphia, Baltimore-“

“You’re making work for yourself,” Celestia said with gentle admonishment. Luna flushed.

“I am not! ‘A wise princess is a learned princess’.”

“Yes, and you have learned much,” Celestia said. “Your notes helped me a great deal in today’s meetings.” She raised a hoof and rested it on Luna’s, stopping her page turning. Luna looked up with a frown as Celestia smiled at her.

“But did they not also say ‘A time for work, a time for play’?” She asked.

“Yes.”

“They wrote that about you,” Celestia teased. Luna huffed.

“They did not!”

“My dear little sister, they did,” Celestia said. “And now it’s time for some play.”

“All right... What sort of play?” Luna asked flatly. Celestia’s smile grew.

“Today is the first full day of spring, and you know what that means,” she said.

“... It’s the vernal equinox? Isn’t that your department?” Luna asked.

“Try again. Think socially,” Celestia suggested. Luna hummed, and thought it over.

“The... Equinox... Celebration... Ritual... Thing?” She asked with what Celestia thought was both the worst and most adorable bluff face she’d ever seen. She hugged her little sister, who pouted.

“In a manner of speaking, yes,” Celestia said. “It’s the first game of the Equestria Baseball Season. I am going to throw the opening pitch. And I would like you to come.”

“Me? Come?” Luna asked. “But-But I know nothing of sports!”

Celestia smiled. “Why, you are right! You don’t know anything about it! This is why I have arranged for the Apple family to accompany you to the game.”

“Apple Family?” Luna asked, screwing up her eyes in thought. They then widened. “Oh... You mean the... One of the—”

“Yes. Her,” Celestia said. “They have graciously offered to let you come with them. Incognito, if you wish.”

“Oh... Oh! Of course,” Luna said, smiling as she understood. She could slip in and out among the crowds, just another pony. It would allow her to relax while her big sister once more took the spotlight. Really, was there no end to her sister’s generosity?

“Well! This should be simple enough...” Luna pulled off her crown, her grieves and her chestplate, placing them upon the table. She beamed up at her sister. “Nobody will recognize me like this.”

Celestia covered her mouth and laughed again. Luna scowled. “What? I shall look like any other...” She looked back over her wings, and then back up at her horn. “Oh. Yes. Those...”

“I have the perfect solution, dear sister,” Celestia said. Luna blinked.

“Oh. Yes. Magic. I should have thought of that,” Luna said.

“In a sense,” Celestia allowed. Luna’s eyes narrowed.

“In *what* sense?”

- - - - -

“Gosh Miss... Uh... *Selene*, I gotta say you do look mighty fetchin’ in those glasses of yours, if you don’t mind me sayin’ so,” Applejack Apple complimented Luna. The alicorn sighed as the bus bounced and shook over the road to Manehattan, and managed to nod in response.

“Thank you Miss Apple,” Luna replied dully. She took a moment to look over the rest of the occupants of the public bus, primarily focused upon the Apple family. Applejack was sitting next to her on the bus, all smiles. Over her freckled cheeks, she had drawn red marks and in place of the broad-brimmed hat she’d worn when she’d confronted Nightmare Moon she now wore a baseball cap with a bright red *A* on it.

“So, first baseball game huh?” Applejack asked. Luna nodded as she looked behind her. Big Macintosh, Applejack’s big brother, was carrying coolers and bags of supplies as well as a cap like Applejack’s. Next to him was their little sister, Applebloom, who wore a similar hat and carried a big foam hoof with “We’re Number One” emblazoned upon it. And next to her was Granny Smith, the grandmother of the family, who was wearing another cap but with drink containers attached to it and straws leading to her mouth.

"I remember mah first baseball game! The Apple family always comes every year to see the Applanta Mustangs opening game, and mah first time we drove up to watch in our relatives', the Orange family's, box seats. That was also the last time since mah pa got in an argument with mah uncle and well, there ain't no more box seats, I'll tell you what," Applejack recited. She grinned over at Luna. "O' course, it would've helped if mah uncle had just agreed that the call was bad..."

"Consargnit rutting rotten applesalsa," Granny Smith huffed. Applebloom popped up over the back of the seat and smiled at Luna.

"So Miss Selene, you know the Princess, right? Right?" She asked. Luna nodded.

"Yes, yes I do..."

"Do ya think you could put in a good word for me, so I could get my cutie mark faster?" Applebloom asked sweetly. Applejack scowled.

"Now Applebloom! You know that's not how it works!"

"But Applejack! Princess Celestia could do it, right Miss Selene? Pretty please?" Applebloom begged. Luna coughed.

"Well, um I'll see what I can do... Urk!"

Applebloom was hugging her with surprising strength. In fact, Luna was having trouble breathing.

"Oh thank you thank you thank you!"

Everything's... Going... Dark...!

"Applebloom, ah think she's got the point... Applebloom! APPLEBLOOM!"

Too... Tight...!

"She's turnin' blue!"

"How can you tell? Miss Selene? MISS SELENE!"

Is that you Mother...? Tell Celestia to stop taking my toys...

- - - - -

Luna came to later, staring up into several pairs of eyes. She was outside the bus, apparently on a bench of some sort. She sat up and looked around. They were just outside the stadium.

“Uh...?”

Applebloom looked on guiltily. “Um... Sorry Miss Selene, ah didn’t mean ta strangle you...”

“Really sorry Miss Selene, she didn’t mean no harm, honest!” Applejack apologized profusely. Luna groaned and slowly rolled over, standing up on shaking legs.

“I-I’m fine... Really...” She smiled weakly. “Don’t worry... I wouldn’t want to spoil your big day.”

The Apples looked relieved, especially Applebloom. Granny Smith huffed.

“Come on, the game’s starting! Give Miss Selene her tack, Big Mac,” the elder pony said. Big Macintosh nodded.

“Eeyup... Here. Hat,” he said, placing it on her head. Luna smiled as she looked up at it.

“Thank you.”

“Mitt. Hold up your hoof, miss,” he said. Luna did so obligingly and Big Mac slipped on a circular leather shoe that, if she focused, she could flex open or closed.

“Thank you.”

“Flag,” Applebloom said, hoofing it to Luna with a bright smile. Luna took it into her mouth, returning the smile as best she could.

“Thmmph hmph.”

“Flank packs!”

“Program!”

“Sunglasses!”

“Sunscreen!”

“Foam Hoof!”

“Jersey!”

“Autograph book!”

“Sittin’ pillow!”

“Pendant!”

“Foldy chair!”

“Cooler!”

“Peanuts!”

“Mmph!” Luna tried to speak through the flag she was holding in her mouth, her eyes growing wide at the great weight she was now bearing. Granny Smith nodded approvingly, even as Applejack, Big Mac and Applebloom looked concerned.

“Everything ya need... Come on! I’ve got the tickets,” she said, turning and trotting to the gates. Applejack coughed.

“Ah... Need any help there?”

“Mm mmph!” Luna said, shaking her head. *They can handle this, so can I... I’m normal, normal, normal...*

“Are you sure? Me an’ Big Mac can handle it,” Applejack said.

“Eeyup,” Big Mac said. “Wouldn’t be a problem at all.”

“Mmmngh mmph! Hnnph!” Luna protested. Applejack sighed and shook her head.

“All right... If you say so,” she said. She and Big Mac turned and headed for the gate, while Applebloom stayed at Luna’s side. Applebloom poked around in one of her saddle bags, before she smiled.

“Oh! I almost forgot! Here! A ball!” She grinned.

“Mmph? Nnph mmph!” Luna shook her head rapidly. Applebloom apparently missed this as she frowned at the overstuffed bags. She then smiled.

“Here you go!” Applebloom said, setting the game sphere on top of the overstuffed bags. Luna felt herself teetering, back and forth. “You can get it signed at the end of the game!”

“Mmngh! Nnph!”

“I wanna get Grey Marex’s autograph! He’s the best batter there ever was! We can get it together!” Applebloom said cheerfully, hugging her own autograph book with a dreamy sigh. “Ah can’t wait to see him in action!”

“Hmmmmmm!”

Luna fell over, slamming into the pavement. Applebloom blinked and looked over at the sprawled Luna, and bit her lip guiltily.

“Uh... Miss Selene, you okay?”

“Pfft,” Luna spat out the flag and sighed. “Just fine...”

- - - - -

They found their seats easily enough after the tack and supplies had been more equally distributed, and Luna found herself managing to relax. She breathed deep, enjoying the smell of cut grass. She enjoyed the bright

sunshine overhead and the clear blue sky, the murmur of the crowds, the colorful uniforms the teams wore...

"Oh this is going to be great, this is going to be great, this is going to be great!" Applebloom cheered, and Luna had to smile with her. The little filly's enthusiasm was contagious, and the rest of the Apple family was just as eager. Luna smiled and nodded.

"This is gonna to be great. Applanta's starting line up is gonna cream those uppity Mounts," Applejack said with a grin, rubbing her hooves together.

"Eeyup," Big Mac said.

"We're gonna slaughter 'em!" Another fan loudly proclaimed.

"Ah?" Luna blinked.

"YEAH!" The section cheered.

"We're gonna smash em and crush 'em and *destroy them!*" Applebloom cried, standing up on her seat. Luna stared at her in horror.

"YEAH!"

"What?! NO!" Luna spread her wings and flew up in front of the assorted ponies. She glared furiously through her glasses at the surprised fans. "You will do no such thing! I am the former Nightmare Moon, the keeper of peace and balance in the heavens and... And...!"

Applejack was waving her hooves frantically above her head. Luna looked around, and felt her cheeks burn in embarrassment.

"And... You were all speaking figuratively," she said. A number of nods and acknowledgements were thrown at her. "Right... Well... Um... Carry on," she said, flying back to her seat. She pulled her program up over her face and focused intently on the statistics of the players. Luna smiled in relief.

Ah, comforting numbers... I shall add, subtract, divide, multiply, and so many other operations with you my darlings, as soon as I get my abacus.

She rummaged around in her flank bag with a happy smile. *Yes, you should be somewhere in here... Somewhere...*

Luna took the bag off her flank and peered into it. *I know it was in here somewhere... Where is it?!*

“No... No... No...!”

“Whatcha lookin’ for, Miss Selene?” Applebloom asked. Luna looked up.

“My abacus.”

“Aba-what?” Applebloom asked.

“It’s a device for mathematical calculations involving the movement of beads to represent various sums...” She trailed off as the little filly stared at her uncomprehendingly. She sighed.

“It’s a wooden box with beads on wires.”

“Ooh! Don’t worry, ah’ll find it!” Applebloom said cheerfully. She grabbed the bag and turned it upside-down. “The best way to find it is to take everything out!” She grinned at the large pile that resulted and began digging through the various items. “Maybe I can get a ‘findin’ abacuses’ cutie mark!”

“Uh... Yes, sure,” Luna said, her eyes narrowing. She looked down at the VIP box where her sister was currently sitting.

Sister wouldn’t take it... Would she?

- - - - -

“Little sister loves her abacus, does she? Well, why don’t I just... SEND IT TO THE MOON! MWAHAHAHAHAHA!”

“No! Why would you do this Big Sister?” Sobbed Luna.

“Aw, is little baby sister going to cry? Going to cry, Little Luna?” Celestia mocked. “Maybe I’ll send you to the moon too, along with my toaster, my oven and my MICROWAVE!”

“NO! NOT THE MOON AGAIN!”

- - - - -

“Miss Selene? Ah, Miss Selene? The first pitch is about to be thrown,” Applejack spoke. Luna blinked, and looked down at the field. Her big sister was on top of the mound and was holding the ball in her mouth. Luna’s eyes narrowed.

“Right...”

That’s silly, sister wouldn’t take it... Really. Or send it to the moon.

Celestia threw the pitch, and the crowds cheered wildly. Luna joined in, and put the program away. She could just derive enjoyment from the game itself, like everypony else. Yes. Be perfectly normal and not make any more scenes...

The first batter up, one of the Mustangs, swung the bat in his teeth a few times. The pitcher sized him up, before throwing his ball with his tail rather than his mouth as Celestia had done. The batter swung, and connected. Over the roar of the crowd the ball sailed up into the sky and over the foul line, landing in the section directly to the right of theirs. Applebloom’s face fell.

“Aw...”

Another hit came, and it too headed near their section. Once again, Applebloom rose up with her glove, and was disappointed.

“Aw...!”

“Now calm down Applebloom, a ball’s gonna come this way sooner or later,” Applejack soothed. The ball was hit again and it flew right for them. Applebloom grinning and got up on top of her seat.

“Foul ball catchin’ cutie mark, foul ball catchin’ cutie mark...!” She muttered as she reached up. Unfortunately...

“Yee haa! Ah still got it!” Granny Smith said cheerfully as she lowered her shaking hoof and examined the ball she’d snagged. Applebloom pouted. Applejack smiled cheerfully.

“Don’t you worry none... There’s just a another-Ooh! Foul ball, it’s all mine!” She leaped up and held her mitt. She snagged it with a triumphant grin at Big Mac. “Ha! Gotcha!”

“Eeyup, sure did,” Big Mac rumbled, his eyes on the play below. Applebloom settled back in her seat and pouted. Luna frowned, and looked down at the play. She then brightened.

“Hey, Applebloom? Let me see your mitt for a second.”

“Oh? Okay...” She held it up to Luna’s face. Luna closed her eyes and concentrated, her horn glowing.

“Just don’t tell anypony I did this,” she murmured. Applebloom nodded.

“You can trust me!” The mitt glowed brightly for a second and then stopped with her horn. Just in time for another hit. Applebloom’s eyes brightened as she held up her hoof. Luna smiled back at her, and looked back at the incoming ball.

The attractor spell would just ensure that any balls that got close to them would go into Applebloom’s mitt. Very simple. It wouldn’t even alter the play of the game, since a ball would have to be foul to come within range in the first place.

“It’s all mine, all mine...!”

KONK.

“Awww...! Miss Selene, you caught it!” Applebloom pouted. “But you weren’t supposed to catch it with your head.”

- - - - -

“So, how are you enjoying the grub, Miss Selene?” Applejack asked, after they’d bandaged Luna’s head. Luna dug into her apple-based dishes with great relish.

“Mmm... These are wonderful,” she said honestly. She winced a bit as Applebloom poked the bandage.

“I’m sorry you got hit,” Applebloom said. Luna sighed.

“It’s my own fault, so don’t be upset,” Luna said. Applejack raised an eyebrow.

“Your own fault?”

“Oh... Yes... For not holding my mitt up in time,” she said quickly. Applejack slowly nodded.

“Right... Well! We’ve got plenty of snacks but if you’d like to go get some cotton candy, Big Mac is going to be heading that way. Along with nachos and cheese,” she said, giving him a disapproving look. Big Mac shrugged.

“What can ah say? I like cheese.”

“You have a problem with cuttin’ it,” Applejack accused. Big Mac looked away in some mild embarrassment.

“S-Sure,” Luna said, rising up. She trotted carefully to the aisle, followed by Big Mac. She stopped and smiled. “Please, lead the way.”

“This way,” Big Mac said, trotting to the entrance to the interior of the stadium. Following the big horse, Luna trotted carefully.

“I’m awful sorry about Applebloom,” Big Mac said. “She’s a bit overly excitable.”

“I-I don’t mind,” Luna said with a wince. “Ow...”

“Well, here we are,” Big Mac said as they reached the snack stand. He smiled at her. “You want anything?”

“Oh no, I-I couldn’t,” Luna said quickly. Big Mac shook his head and looked to the cashier.

“One cotton candy for her, please,” he asked. Luna sighed as Big Mac paid for it and the rest of the food he obtained, but nodded gratefully all the same.

“Thank you...” She studied the cotton candy carefully as Big Mac smiled wryly at her. Noticing this, she flushed.

“What?”

“You’re staring at it like you’ve never had it before,” Big Mac laughed softly. “It’s kind of cute, if you don’t mind me sayin’ so Miss Selene.” Luna huffed in order to cover up her blush.

“Well... I’m just studying it...” She poked it with her hoof and sniffed it. She then took a bite. She chewed and swallowed it.

“So, how is it?” Big Mac asked.

Luna finished it off in a few bites, gulping it down with speed a certain pink pony might envy. She licked the paper cone clean and looked intently at Big Mac, whose eyes had gotten wide.

“Uh... Like it?”

Luna nodded. She trotted to the stand. “How much cotton candy do you have?”

“Uh...” The cashier pointed to the rack. Luna smiled.

“I’ll take *all* of it.”

- - - - -

“Oh wow that play was amazing! Doubleplay doubleplay doubleplay! Woohoo! Go go go go go!” Luna cried happily as she waved her hooves in

the air. Applebloom was about the same, though she hadn't had nearly as much cotton candy as Luna had.

"That was great yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!" Applebloom cheered next to her, jumping up and down on her seat.

"Big Mac," Applejack said, glaring at her big brother. He shrugged.

"It was with her own money."

"Yes, but hoowhee... That hangover's gonna be mighty bad come the seventh inning," Applejack said.

- - - - -

"Ugh... Energy... Drop..." Luna groaned. Applebloom groaned next to her, rubbing her belly.

"Ah feel awful, Applejack," Applebloom moaned. Applejack chuckled.

"Well, it serves you right for gobbling up all that candy. Who do you think you are, Pinkie Pie? Though, ah'm a mite confused as to why you're feelin' so bad, Miss Selene," Applejack said. Luna moaned.

"Metabolism is still weird since I got back from... Um... Somewhere else," she said with a little wink. Applejack nodded.

"Right, right... Where do you work anyway?"

Luna blinked and stared at Applejack. Applejack stared back.

"Ooh my! Seventh Inning stretch! Everypony up, up, up!" Granny Smith cried. All of them dutifully got up, and sang along with the song.

"Take me out to the ball game, take me out to the crowd, buy me some peanuts and crackerjacks, I don't care if I never get back so let's root, root root for the home team! If they don't win it's a shame. For it's one, two, three strikes you're out at the old, ball, game!"

Much cheering ensued, and Luna's headache and upset stomach seemed to fade away. She smiled brightly and clopped her hooves together.

"And now, to commemorate today's game, please accept these autographed baseballs, to be hit into the stands by today's starting batter, Mino Caballo!"

"Ooh! Baseballs! Autographed baseballs! They're all mine!" Applebloom said, throwing off her upset stomach with both hooves up. Luna's eyes widened.

"Baseballs?"

No, must undo the spell, must undo the spell-!

KONK.

- - - - -

"Lands' sake, Miss Selene! You have got the worst luck of any pony I have ever met, cept maybe fer Twilight," Applejack said, as she yet again bandaged poor Luna's head. She winced. The crowd had gotten rowdier, angrier, and most distressingly, louder as the game entered the bottom of the ninth.

"Oh-Oh?"

"Five baseballs, all slamming right into your noggin! However do you do it?" Applejack asked with a chuckle. Luna moaned.

"I have a knack for making bad decisions..."

"Lucky thing your glasses weren't smashed," Applejack said. Applebloom held up the six baseballs she'd managed to obtain with a bright smile.

"Thank you Miss Selene! Ah couldn't've gotten all these balls without them hittin' you!" She hugged Luna tightly, which the dazed Luna returned.

"N-No problem..."

“OI! GO BACK TO LLAMAVILLE YOU PUNK PONY!” Granny Smith bellowed. “YOU COULDN’T HIT THE BROADSIDE OF MAH BARN!”

“Eesh! Granny Smith, quiet down! Miss Selene’s been hit in the head so many times--“ Applejack tried, but Granny interrupted.

“But that Mount pitcher down there just beaned his fourth batter!” Granny protested. “He’s doing it on purpose!”

“Um... If he hit his fourth batter, doesn’t that mean we scored?” Luna asked. Applejack growled.

“Yeah! But it also means that further down in the season we’ll have more injured! YOU CHEATIN’ NO GOOD CUD MUNCHER!” Applejack bellowed. More booing followed, and Luna dazedly got up to see.

Indeed, the Mount pitcher had just nailed another pony, as the first runner staggered his way to home.

“COME ON UMP! THROW ‘EM OUT!” Applejack shouted. When the umpire simply called for a resume of play, the booing got louder.

“BOO! BOO! YOU ROTTEN NO GOOD UMPIRE!” Applebloom shouted. She grinned at Luna. “Come on Miss Selene! Shout with us!”

“Ohh...” Luna groaned. She focused her eyes on the field, and took a deep breath.

“Um... YOU! YOU PITCHER! NUMBER SEVENTY! YOU ARE... Uh... VERY POOR AT SPORTSMANSHIP! YES! YOUR MANAGER SHOULD ADMONISH YOU! SEVERELY! MAYBE EVEN DOCK YOUR WAGES!”

The booing got quieter. Luna smiled and felt much better about shouting. She focused on the umpire next.

“AND YOU! UMPIRE! YOU ARE VERY POOR AT MAKING DECISIONS! You... YOU ARE VERY UNFAIRLY BIASED AND NOT ACTING AT ALL IN THE MANNER YOUR PROFESSION REQUIRES! YOU LACK HONOR AND DECORUM AS AN ARBITER OF EVENTS!”

The booing in their section had almost completely stopped, and Luna was acutely aware of many eyes on her. She coughed and smiled weakly.

“And uh... Uh... You should be fired?” She offered to the fans in a squeak. Big Mac coughed. Applejack cleared her throat.

“Uh, yeah! YEAH! FIRE HIM!” The holder of the Element of Honesty yelled.

“FIRE HIM!” Big Mac bellowed.

“ADMONISH SEVERELY! ARBITER OF EVENTS!” Applebloom cried.

“**YEAH! FIRE HIM!**” Their fellow spectators shouted.

Luna sighed in relief. Below, the next batter took his position, smirking confidently at the pitcher over the bat. Applebloom gasped and hugged Luna tightly.

“What, what?” Luna asked.

“It’s Gray Marex! It’s him it’s him it’s him!” Applebloom chanted. “Ooh, he’ll finish off that rotten pitcher once and for all!”

The pitcher threw the ball, hard, but the batter easily moved out of the way. A ball was called. The umpire gave the pitcher a hard glare, and the pitcher snorted. He caught the ball and eyed Gray seriously. Gray smirked. The pitcher threw hard, a screaming fast ball right through the strike zone. Gray didn’t swing, choosing instead to ignore it. A strike was called.

“No! Come on Gray, swing! What are you doin’?” Applebloom cried. Applejack patted Applebloom on the head.

“Now don’t you worry none, Applebloom. He’s just makin’ sure this pitcher knows he won’t take any of his guff.”

The pitcher threw a curve ball. Gray let it go past, even yawning at the smoke left behind by the pitch. He shot the crowds a wink at the call of “strike 2”, before he narrowed his eyes.

“Lookit his face! It’s grown stern and and cold! And his muscles are strained!” Applebloom sighed. “He won’t let that ball go by again!”

Gray pounded with cruel violence upon the plate, and swung it in fierce challenge. The pitcher reared back on his haunches and dropped down, the ball leaving his tail and shooting forth like a rocket. The sound of air shattering filled the stadium as Gray swung.

CRACK!

The ball was sent screaming for the fences. The crowds cheered loudly as the home run ball sailed out of the park, and Luna got caught up in it as well, bouncing and cheering loudly in turn.

“YEAH! YEAH! YEAH! TAKE THAT, MOUNTS! HAHAAHAHAHA!”

Applebloom laughed, hugging Luna tightly as the great stallion rounded the bases. Luna smiled and laughed with the filly, feeling wonderful despite her many bumps, bruises and her tummy ache.

“In honor of Gray Marex’s triumph, the Applanta Mustangs are pleased to send out another batch of autographed balls to the audience, via the automatic pitching cannon!” The announcer cried. Luna felt tears well up in her eyes.

“Not again...”

- - - - -

Outside the stadium, the happy crowds went their way to taxis, buses, trains or just by hoofing it. Applebloom bounced in an orbit around Applejack, Big Mac, Granny Smith, and the limping Luna, holding all of her balls in her hooves as happy as could be.

“Oh! Oh! Oh! This is so wonderful! Best first day ever!” She grinned happily at Applejack and Luna. “Can we go next week? Please? Pretty please?”

“Now now Applebloom, ah think Miss Selene’s had more than enough baseball for one day,” Applejack said. Luna wobbled, but managed a smile.

“N-No... I’m okay... This was a lot of fun...”

Applebloom looked down at the huge batch of baseballs she held, and then up at Luna. She frowned.

“Aw... Miss Selene... Are you sure you won’t take just one ball? Ah mean, it’s thanks to you I got so many!”

“I... Well... Um...” Luna tried very hard not to look at Applebloom’s wide, watery eyes, but she failed and with a sigh and pain-filled grin nodded. “Sure. I’d love one.”

“Okay! Catch!” Applebloom said cheerfully, tossing it to Luna.

“Applebloom, no-!” Big Mac tried, but the ball impacted Luna right in the glasses. It fell from them, leaving shattered plastic in their wake. Luna weakly smiled.

“Hahaha... Finally... Got the glasses... Huh...?” She asked. Applejack reached up and took them off, as Big Mac and Granny Smith both looked Luna over intently.

“Are you okay?”

“Did any get in your eyes?”

“Oh I’m so sorry sorry sorry!” Applebloom cried again, hugging Luna’s leg. “I’m so sorry I-!”

“Luna? Are you all right?”

The Apple family froze. Almost as one they looked over at Princess Celestia, who was standing by her chariot with a concerned look. With that same synchronization they looked back at Luna. Applejack looked down at the shattered glasses, and up at Luna, who had managed to cast a healing spell that got her eyes to look in the same direction.

“You mean... Miss Selene... Is *Princess Luna?*!” Applejack gasped. “Ah... Ah... I didn’t suspect it at all!”

Luna blinked several times, staring at Applejack in disbelief. "What?! But... I thought you were just playing along!" Angry now she got up in Applejack's face. "How could you be *fooled* by a pair of *glasses*?!"

"... Well, in mah defense, I didn't get a good look at you the last time we met," Applejack pointed out. "And Big Mac, Granny Smith, an' Applebloom ain't never seen you before."

"Oh. Right," Luna said, backing away. "Um, sorry..."

"Think nothin' of it!" Applejack said pleasantly.

"Uh, your Majesty," Big Mac said with a bow. "About that cute comment-"

"It's just fine, really," Luna said. "I-I took it as a compliment, thank you." She turned her attention to the entire Apple family now with a smile. "Thank you very much, all of you, for such a wonderful outing. I-I would love to do it again."

"Well, we'd love to have you!" Applejack said with a smile.

"Yes! Whoever you are, it was wonderful," Granny Smith said.

Big Mac smiled and nodded, as Luna blushed again. She looked over at the youngest Apple, feeling a bit concerned.

Applebloom was staring with big eyes at Luna, silent as a mouse. Luna gave her a little smile.

"Uh, and you too Applebloom. You were wonderful, thank you," she said gratefully. Applebloom's lower lip wobbled, and she jumped up to squeal happily.

"I MET PRINCESS LUNA! PRINCESS LUNA THINKS I'M WONDERFUL! THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU!" She hugged Luna again, knocking the wind out of her. The alicorn nevertheless hugged her back.

"Okay, okay now! Ah think she gets the point now, Applebloom," Applejack said, before yanking Applebloom back by her tail. Celestia smiled and nodded.

“Well... Until next time, everypony. Thank you again so much. I’ll see you all later, and so will Luna,” she said.

“You’re welcome, your majesty!” Applejack said. “Hey, Princess Luna? Don’t forget this.” She hoofed the baseball to Luna, who took it gratefully.

“Thank you...”

“And these,” Applebloom said, handing her her busted pair of glasses with another guilty look. Luna smiled and nuzzled Applebloom comfortingly.

“Thank you...”

“And the rest of your tack will also be required!” Granny Smith declared. Luna coughed.

“Uh...”

“Ah think we can get that to her later,” Big Mac pointed out. “After all, there ain’t no room for it on the chariot.”

“Ah, of course,” Granny said. Luna shot Big Mac a grateful look.

Before the curious crowds could close on them, Celestia ushered Luna to the chariot and the pegasi pulling it took off, carrying them into the sky above. Luna sighed, holding the baseball with a smile. She looked up at her sister.

“So... You didn’t tell them who I was so they wouldn’t treat me any differently,” she said. Celestia smiled.

“It was the least I could do.”

“... Thank you,” Luna said.

“Think nothing of it,” Celestia said cheerfully. She then lowered her face close to Luna’s, and her smile became sly.

“So... He thought you were cute, huh?”

“Oh... Shut up,” Luna muttered, pulling the baseball cap off her bandaged head, and stuffing it into Celestia’s face. Her older sister just laughed as the chariot flew on.

Chapter 3

Lodging

Hmmm... To launch the required payload... Three ponies, air, food and water for twelve days would require... Luna's abacus clicked loudly in the silence of the mid-day library. She scribbled down her calculations rapidly onto the journal she was writing in. Specific impulse... Fuel recommendations are good but could be better, otherwise this rocket will be as large as a skyscraper... We could do it that way but given the funding... Luna tapped the side of her cheek in a frown.

Well we have that proposal but I don't see how we could convince the tax payers we require a moonshot... Oh, why couldn't any of the other nations be working towards space to give us some competition? She tapped her chin. *Well, kind of hard to manage competition when you've got two goddesses to work against but still... They could at least try.*

She scribbled a few more possibilities down. Luna then became aware of breathing very, very close to her ear. Slowly, she looked to her side.

"Sister..."

"Sister," Celestia returned, smiling. Luna looked away for a few moments, closed her eyes, reopened them and looked back. Celestia was still there, almost uncomfortably close. Luna looked back at the stacks of books in front of her.

"Can I... Do something for you?" Luna asked, sounding resigned.

"You're already doing much for me, Luna," Celestia said with a wry smile. "Thanks to your hard work, I can have a few nights off a week."

Luna nodded. "Well... It's only fair that you get to take breaks given now I'm back and can handle the moon."

"Yes, it is. However, there is something very unfair going on," Celestia said. Luna blinked.

“What? What is going on?”

“When I give you days off, what do you do with them?” Celestia asked patiently. Luna looked up at the ceiling innocently.

“I go have fun.”

“You do *work*,” Celestia said. Luna scowled.

“Work *is* fun.”

“No, work is work,” Celestia said. “I don’t mind you reading or researching for fun, but this is *work*.” She tapped Luna’s stack of papers, nearly knocking them over. Luna grabbed them between her hooves and carefully reorganized them into a neat stack with a scowl at her older sister.

“It-It’s fun!” Luna said.

“Luna, you’re doing accounting for the space program,” Celestia said patiently. “Before that you completely reorganized the irrigation system for an entire province, established a whole new system of emergency response and management for the entire kingdom, and *made sense of the tax code*.” Celestia shook her head in some disbelief at that last one. Luna huffed.

“The Parasprite problem requires better organization and communication between civil services, I know the moon better than anyone alive, and the tax code wasn’t *that* big a mess. I just needed to streamline the whole process a little,” Luna said defensively.

“All of which is great *work*, but it isn’t *fun*,” Celestia insisted. “It requires you to be alone... Didn’t I promise that you’d never be alone again?” The Sun Goddess frowned. Luna looked down at her hooves.

“I just... I want to be useful,” she said quietly. “I have a lot to make up for.”

“No, *Nightmare Moon* had a lot to make up for, and she did. She’s gone,” Celestia said firmly. “As far as I’m concerned, Princess Luna did *nothing wrong*.”

Luna winced. Celestia sighed. She nuzzled Luna's head.

"It's been weeks since you went out with the Apples... I'm just a little concerned."

"The Apples have a lot of work to do, I can't impose upon them," Luna said. She shuffled her papers neatly and smiled. "I can't imagine how rough it must be for them." She scowled at her sister. "Which is why I must do as much work to make things easier for them when it comes to bureaucracy and policy, as well as every other Earth pony!"

"Hmmm..." Celestia smiled. Luna looked over at her.

"Sister... Why are you smiling?" The Moon Princess asked suspiciously.

"Luna, I have a task for you," Celestia said. Luna's eyes narrowed.

"What sort of task?"

"You're quite right, it is difficult for us to understand the problems of the Earth ponies," Celestia said. "We are so concerned with the running of things, we don't stop to appreciate the *things* themselves. The cogs in the machine, if you will. I think that the two of us should try to live like normal ponies for a while, at least part-time."

"Oh no," Luna groaned. "You can't be serious!"

"This is a very important task, Luna," Celestia said solemnly. "It will keep us from becoming too disconnected from our subjects, like so many rulers before."

"But-But I have no frame of reference for how to be... Normal!" Luna said.

"Why don't you ask Sundance for help? She's an Earth Pony, and she lives outside the palace," Celestia suggested. Her eyes sparkled. "In fact, I think she posted an ad for a roommate very recently."

"I-I couldn't impose-"

“We can pay her extra, on top of the rent,” Celestia said. She winked. “And to avoid embarrassing her or ourselves, we can pose as normal ponies.”

“Oh... Ergh...” Luna sighed. “Fine...” She clutched her abacus. “But I get to take Abacus with me!”

“You’re calling it by name now?” Celestia asked with raised brows. Luna flushed.

“... Yes! So?”

“Nothing~,” Celestia said in a sing-song voice. She winked as she trotted off. “I’m just wondering if I should tell Big Mac he has competition.”

“HEY!”

- - - - -

Sundance was relaxing on her couch in her flat, stretched out luxuriously. She had been taking quite a lot of work on in order to keep up, especially with the Grand Galloping Gala coming up in a matter of months. She sighed as she looked up at the ceiling.

“Oh... I’d love to go,” she said. She smiled as she imagined all of the dancing, the food, the high class... *And now introducing Princess Sundance, the queen of the day... Except a princess so... Princess of the Day! With her hunky escort...*

She would ask Princess Luna if she could get her tickets, but she didn’t want to look like she was taking advantage of their relationship for her own benefit. Princess Luna had been so kind already--Other aristocrats would have (and had) fired her for less. Besides, Princess Luna worked long hours and was very serious outside of the microwave incident. She didn’t think galas were her thing.

DING DONG.

“Hm? I wonder who that could be,” Sundance murmured. She got up and trotted through the house to the front door, and opened it. She blinked a few times.

“Um... Hello,” said Princess Luna, standing there with a pair of glasses perched on her nose and a frilly bow around her neck. Her wings and horn had vanished, but there was really no doubt it was her. “I’m Selene. I’m here about the room.” She pulled out a bag of bits from a pair of saddlebags she wore, and hoofed it over to Sundance. “Here, have some rent!”

“Uh...” Sundance looked into the bag. Her eyes bugged out as about a thousand golden bits shined out of it. She looked back at Princess Luna, who was also peering into the bag.

“That’s quite a lot isn’t it... Isn’t it? I’m not entirely sure... I’m Selene by the way, a perfectly normal Earth Pony. With glasses, because normal ponies wear glasses,” Luna said quickly.

“Uh...” Sundance’s lips twitched. She didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry out, but she figured it would be better to do it inside.

“I’m here about the room. I want to be your roommate,” Luna said. “I know the ad asked for a ‘young professional’, which I am... Sort of... I am very professional, I don’t know about the young part. But I assure you I am absolutely wonderful as a roomie. Which I want to be. Yours I mean.” Luna smiled brightly.

“... Okay... Why don’t we go inside and discuss this, *Selene*,” Sundance said, backing out of the way. Luna smiled.

“Thank you!” She trotted inside and looked around. “Oh, this is very nice...”

“Well, um, thank you... Princess Luna,” Sundance said after closing the door. Luna turned and looked back over her shoulder innocently.

“Princess Luna? You must have me confused for some other pony.”

Sundance stared. Luna stared back. Luna sighed and removed the glasses.

“Not that convincing, huh?”

“Well, maybe to somepony who’d never met you before, Your Majesty,” Sundance pointed out. “Um, may I ask what you’re doing here?”

“My sister wants me to learn how normal Earth ponies live,” Luna said, curiously examining one of the knickknacks Sundance had lying around the house. She turned and smiled at Sundance. “And since you are a normal Earth pony, with a room opening up, I thought you would be perfect.”

“Well... Um...” Sundance tried. Luna frowned.

“If it’s an inconvenience, I can leave. You can keep the rent.”

“What? Oh, no! Nonono, it’s no inconvenience at all,” Sundance said rapidly, waving her hooves and smiling. “I guess I just feel like this isn’t the proper kind of place for a Princess to stay.”

“Nonsense, it’s perfect. You’re an Earth pony, you live here,” Luna said. “And that’s the idea. To be perfectly normal.” She smiled brightly. Sundance smiled back.

“Well... There’s the cooking issue and-”

“Oh! Yes! Don’t worry, I know my way around a kitchen,” Luna said, trotting off. She looked around and spied it before trotting to it. Looking about, she spied the refrigerator and opened it, rummaging around. Sundance followed, looking nervous.

“No, no, I mean you don’t have to do that Your Majesty! I mean, I can cook-”

“Nonsense, I am here to learn what it is like to be an Earth pony, so therefore I will act like an Earth pony,” Luna said as she started up the oven. She smiled brightly and winked. “Don’t worry, I’ll stay away from the microwave.”

Sundance nodded and chuckled a bit. She sat down and kept an eye on Luna as she worked. Fortunately, nothing blew up or burst into flames. Soon enough, they were sharing a dish of eggs, vegetables, and rice. It was an unusual mix of foods, but quite palatable and Sundance sighed with a smile as she laid on her couch.

“That was great, your majesty! Where did you learn that?”

“Studying cookbooks... And some practice,” the princess said modestly. “I didn’t set anything on fire this time.”

“Nope!”

“So... Can I stay?” Luna asked. Sundance nodded and smiled.

“Sure! Not a problem.” Sundance got up and procured some keys. “Here you go... Front door key, back door key, and your room key.”

“My room? Oh! Right! My room, I forgot all about that,” Luna said. “Where is it?”

“Right this way,” Sundance said. She trotted over to the hallway and up the stairs. She unlocked the door at the top, and opened it. Luna trotted in and smiled.

“I’m sorry if it’s not very roomy,” Sundance said, but Luna shook her head.

“No, no, it’s perfectly... Perfect,” she said.

“Good... When will your things get here?” Sundance asked. “Or is that all you have?”

“I’ll bring the rest when I’m done with my work tonight,” Luna said. She turned and smiled cheerfully. “Thank you very much.”

“Oh, um, you’re welcome,” Sundance said brightly. Luna went into her room and shut it behind her. Sundance went downstairs to her room to grab a nap before her shift began.

All in all, as she thought about it, this wasn’t that bad a thing. Princess Luna was very neat, very clean, and very organized. She wasn’t likely to have coltfriends in at all hours of the night. And she had given her a very generous amount of money to stay.

Really... What was the worst that could happen?

- - - - -
BRINNNGGGG!

Sundance awoke to the sound of an alarm clock. A very, very loud alarm clock. Even through several floors it was annoyingly loud. Her old roommate had gotten it because she was a very heavy sleeper and it was the only way to get her up. Her old roommate...

“EEEP!”

BOOM!

The house shuddered as an explosion went off. Sundance scrambled out of bed, but only succeeded in slamming snout-first into the wooden floor.

“OW!” She untangled herself from her sheets and galloped out of her room upstairs. She stopped short at the hole now in the door to Luna’s room. She looked behind herself, and grimaced-Yes, there was a hole in the outside wall too. She slowly opened the door and peeked in.

“Uh... Princess Luna?”

The Princess had apparently been staring at the hole left by the alarm clock. She guiltily looked back at where it had been sitting on the side table by the bed, then back at Sundance.

“Er... Um... Hello,” she said. “Sorry but I was... Ahem... Surprised by the alarm going off.”

“Oh... Um... No, it’s just fine Your Majesty,” Sundance said, raising a hoof.

“No, no! It’s my fault. You see, I was... Well... Curious,” she admitted. Sundance blinked.

“Curious?”

“Well, I’ve never woken up with one before,” Luna said. “Usually I awaken due to the natural shift in the world as the sun rises and sets. But uh... An alarm clock seemed...”

“Normal?” Sundance guessed, feeling a bit resigned. Luna nodded sheepishly. Sundance sighed.

“Well... Good thing you gave me so much rent, huh?” Sundance joked.

“I can fix it. I will fix it, it should be very easy with my magic,” Luna said quickly with a smile. “You don’t have to worry about a thing!”

Sundance nodded slowly, but the first hints of doubt regarding the whole arrangement were creeping into her mind.

“Now... Do you think I’ll need nails? Maybe marble? I don’t think those two go together but I’m willing to experiment...”

- - - - -

To keep Luna from constantly apologizing, Sundance suggested that the Princess buy them dinner before they had to go up to the palace to work. Luna found this fair, and so they headed off to a restaurant of Sundance’s choice nearby the palace that a fair number of employees of the Royal Family used before and after their shifts ended.

Hence it’s name: White Castle Royale.

Luna had already raised the moon, so they trotted in and took a table. Luna almost immediately pulled out some books and a journal from her saddlebags and began reviewing them, her trusty abacus clicking away as she wrote down notes. Sundance looked from her off to the other ponies at some of the other tables who were engaged in similar work and couldn’t help a smile.

“Mm? What is it Sundance?” Luna asked, glancing up over her glasses. Sundance shook her head and chuckled.

“Nothing, it’s just that you look... Well...”

“Yes? Yes? How do I look? Is something wrong?” Luna asked, suddenly worried.

“No! No, it’s just, well... You look *normal*, Prin-Er, I mean, Miss Selene,” Sundance said. Luna stared for a few moments and Sundance saw her career going down the drain.

“Guards, have this rascalion flogged and thrown into the dungeon! Then banished! Then thrown into another dungeon where I banished her to!” Princess Luna declared, for some reason waving herself with an ornate fan.

“No! Please! I--My cutie-mark says I must to be free to bring sunshine into other’s lives!” Sundance pleaded. Luna smirked coldly.

“You forgot, my dear--I am of the MOON. Mwahahahahahaha!”

“That... Is wonderful,” Luna said with a large, genuine smile. Sundance smiled back, feeling far more relieved than she thought she would.

Come on, Princess Luna isn’t like that...

“Sundance!” Called a male voice. Sundance turned and smiled as her coltfriend entered the restaurant.

“Hoyden! Hello!” He trotted up to her, and they rubbed noses together. Luna coughed and looked at her notes, which drew Hoyden’s attention. He smiled brightly.

“So, who is this?” He asked.

“Oh, this is Selene, my new roommate,” Sundance replied. Luna nodded back.

“Hello.”

“It’s nice to meet you! Sundance has told me... Exactly *nothing* about you,” Hoyden said with a teasing wink to his marefriend. Sundance opened her mouth to speak, but Luna beat her to it.

“Well, I just moved in today. This morning I mean, I moved in this morning, late morning actually. Now I’m just here as I’m getting ready to go to work with Sundance, at this restaurant, which is perfectly normal,” Luna said quickly.

Hoyden blinked. Sundance resisted the urge to facehoof.

“You’re her coltfriend that must be nice! You look nice!” Luna said quickly. Hoyden blinked. He looked her up and down with a serious expression, from her books to her cutie mark. Sundance had a premonition of sudden doom.

Oh no... He’s going to blurt out her identity and everyone will know and she’ll freak out and alarm clock and-!

“Librarian?” Hoyden guessed. “For Princess Luna?”

“For? Yes! For! For Princess Luna, a librarian! Who’s a librarian?” Luna asked quickly. Hoyden nodded sagely and looked over at Sundance.

“Librarians for the Royal Palace always look like her. The younger ones.” He winked at her. “And the pretty ones too.”

“Wh-What?!” Luna gasped. Sundance nodded quickly and moved forward, setting a hoof over Luna’s.

“Yes! Yes, she is a librarian. She’s under a lot of stress but *Princess Luna* isn’t a bad boss to have,” Sundance said quickly. “So really, Selene is just a *little* stressed.”

“Yes, I’m just a little stressed, that’s all,” Luna said quickly. “I need to read, it’ll make me less stressed.” She frowned. “What’s that ticking noise...?”

“Uh...” Hoyden gestured down with his nose. Luna looked down and saw that she’d begun clacking the beads of her abacus rapidly out of nerves. She stopped, and gave both Earth ponies a sheepish grin. Sundance coughed.

“Well! Uh, Hoyden, we need to talk about that thing, somewhere else,” she said quickly.

"That thing? Oh yes! *That* thing," Hoyden said, his memory "helped" by Sundance's kick to his leg. He smiled at Luna. "Pleasure to meet you, Selene."

"Thank you," Selene said, lifting a book up to cover her embarrassed face. Sundance led Hoyden outside the restaurant. Leading him to a window where she could keep an eye on the princess, she looked at her coltfriend with a sigh.

"I'm really sorry Hoyden, but Selene's... Er... New to Canterlot. Very new."

"I gathered," Hoyden said dryly. He winced. "You didn't have to kick me."

"Well I didn't want her to feel any worse than she already does!" Sundance said defensively. Hoyden nodded vigorously.

"All right, all right... So... Where is she from?" Hoyden asked. Sundance sighed.

"From the moon," she said flatly. Hoyden snickered.

"She does act like it, the poor mare. Seriously, let me guess... Bookish type, not a friend in the world..." He looked through the window at Luna, who was carefully checking over her abacus like a little filly might her teddy bear. "Except maybe that box thing."

"Abacus," Sundance corrected.

"Aba-what?" Hoyden asked. Sundance shook her head.

"Nevermind. Look, the point is she's going to be staying with me for a while to get used to Canterlot and... Everything."

"Well, not to worry... I know just what will fix her up!" Hoyden said happily. Sundance gave her coltfriend a withering look.

"*Not* Thistle."

“Oh come on! He’s mokey and depressed all the time now, it’s just awful,” Hoyden said. “He needs a marefriend, *bad*.”

“And you would inflict him on her?” Sundance asked in disbelief. Hoyden rolled his neck in the equis version of a shrug.

“Well... Maybe she’d cheer him up?”

“Life is just one bad thing after another, nobody stopping by longer than they need to,” Luna sighed, sitting outside of a little tent built out of sticks. Thistle sat next to her and nodded.

“Yup.”

“No!” Sundance said sharply. “Not Thistle!”

“Well, what about Traveller?” Hoyden suggested. “He’s a nice, reliable, salt of the earth kind of colt.”

“He’s... Into *younger* mares, isn’t he?” Sundance asked.

“Not *that* much younger, I mean, everypony’s younger than him,” Hoyden said with a laugh.

“No.”

“Well, how about-?”

“No! Dating is not something that will help Selene out! At all!” Sundance said. Hoyden shrugged.

“But Honey... She needs somepony else in her life. It would give her some stability.” He nuzzled her. “I know the happiest moment in my life was meeting you.”

“Oh, stop it,” Sundance giggled. “Just because it was doesn’t mean you need to brag about it.”

“Yeah, but I just think that... Well, why not help her out? After all, you’re letting her stay with you.” He smiled at her through his bangs. “You never do that for anypony you don’t want to help.”

Sundance looked up at the sky, and the moon that had so recently held the Dark Mare. Staring up at it, she found her smile fading.

“Yes... I do want to help her, I suppose,” Sundance said quietly. “But... I don’t think that can help. Not her.”

“Come on... What pony hasn’t ever felt alone before?” Hoyden asked. Sundance sighed, and nuzzled Hoyden. Her coltfriend nuzzled her back after a moment, a bit confused.

“I think she might be a little out of my league,” Sundance admitted. Hoyden looked her in the eyes with a bright smile.

“There isn’t a pony I know you can’t get a smile out of,” Hoyden said. “Just like you said to me: All it takes is one smile at a time.”

“I suppose,” Sundance sighed. Sundance looked in the window.

“Hoyden,” she said in a very calm voice.

“Yes?”

“She’s gone,” Sundance said, eyes widening.

“Well... She couldn’t have gone far, right?” Hoyden smiled. “I’m sure she can take care of herself.”

- - - - -

“I’m sorry, I don’t quite understand,” Luna said to the two colts now on either side of her. One smiled a large grin that was full of teeth.

“I said, you’re very hot.”

"I think it's quite temperate, actually," Luna said politely, focusing back on her books. The other colt rested his hoof upon her book. She looked up at him over her glasses.

"Yeah, temperate... Listen, can I buy you a drink?" The colt asked.

"Or can we buy you a drink?"

"I really love the kinky librarian look, by the way. Really wicked," the other colt said. Luna blinked, and used a hoof to pull a lock of her mane in front of her eyes.

"Kinky?" She asked.

"Ah, look... Can we buy you a drink?" The second colt asked. Luna smiled.

"Well of course you can, if you want. That... That is normal right?"

"Er... Yes, yes, that is," the first colt said. Luna smiled cheerfully.

"By all means, do so kind sirs!"

"But uh, not here," the second colt said. "Little place across the street."

"Well... As long as I'm back soon," Luna said. She packed away all her books and notes and her abacus into her saddlebags and smiled. "Lead on!"

- - - - -

"No, no, you don't understand, she is gone, just like that, she's too meticulous to just run off!" Sundance said.

"What are you so worried about? She probably just headed to the bathroom or something," Hoyden said.

"With all of her stuff?" Sundance demanded.

"... Well, sometimes I get extra work done-"

“She’s *not you!*”

- - - - -

“Oh my, this is very... Uh... Rustic,” Luna said, looking around the bar curiously. The first colt nodded and looked to the bartender, a beefy looking colt with a cutie mark in the shape of a bottle, and a tattoo of a skull on the inside of his neck.

“What’ll it be?” He asked, as Luna sat up at the bar and the colts took seats on either side of her.

“The usual for all three of us,” the first colt said with a grin. The bartender harrumphed, then set down three shots. He poured from a clear liquid into each one. Luna blinked, and lowered her nose to sniff the glass. She made a face.

“There seems to be a great deal of ethanol in this beverage,” she observed. The colts threw it back. “I don’t think it’s safe to ingest.”

“Heheh... Lighten up, Sugar Cube,” said one of the colts. “You get used to it!”

“Yes, used to it real fast,” the other colt said. Luna blinked curiously, then shrugged.

“Very well...” She turned it up and gulped it down... She then spat it back out in a plume of fire.

“EEUGH! Yech! My tongue is burning!” She groaned. The colts stared. One laughed.

“Oh, don’t worry about it babe. There’s lots of things you can do with your tongue.”

He smacked her bottom with his tail. Luna’s eyes widened, and then narrowed.

- - - - -

“Sundance, you’re really freaking out, what’s wrong?” Hoyden asked.
“You’re acting as though she’s a-”

KABOOM!

Sundance’s eyes widened. She galloped off and around the restaurant to the adjacent street. A bar that stayed open and dive-like despite the development around it was now on fire. Numerous ponies were out and looking and the fire department bells were already ringing. Sundance shook her head and ran through the stampede of ponies out of the bar.

“SUNDANCE! SUNDANCE!” Hoyden yelled as he ran after her. After pushing through numerous other ponies, he finally made it into the bar proper. He came to a stop next to Sundance, and after seeing if she was okay, he looked at the bar itself.

“... A walking bomb,” he mumbled as he stared at the two colts cowering in a ball before Selene--Or rather, Princess Luna. Her wings were spread, her horn was sparking with energy, and her eyes were glowing pure white. Behind her, shelves of liquor were on fire and said fire was shooting straight up and all around and above the Princess.

“No pony who had any sense of manners would act in such a disgraceful fashion you... You... RUFFIANS!” Luna snarled, her voice booming in a place deep inside Sundance that reacted in the same way it did to thunder. The twin colts whimpered. Hoyden coughed.

“Yes, that’s Castor and Pollux all right,” he muttered to Sundance.

“You’re taking my roommate being the moon goddess very well,” Sundance said.

“I might freak out later alone, or put the energy into other uses, I think I’m in shock right now,” Hoyden said.

“Good...” Sundance trotted forward, very, very slowly placing herself in between the colts and the angry Luna. “Ah... Your Majesty... Miss Luna? It’s me, Sundance.”

“Hello Sundance. I know who you are,” Luna boomed. ***“I’m very sorry I went off, these... These...!”***

“Yes, them, they took you to this bar, right? What did they do?” Sundance asked with far more calm than she felt.

“... It’s embarrassing,” Luna stated, making the glasses on the tables that weren’t overturn break. Sundance smiled and trotted up closer to the moon goddess.

“It’s okay... Just tell me...”

“Well, they... They bought me a very unpleasant drink and then they-!”

“Uh... First, can you... Bring it down a little?” Sundance asked. Luna blinked, and abruptly the light show faded. She was back to her normal alicorn self with an embarrassed flush.

“Sorry... Yes, well, they... One smacked me on the... the *rump*,” she whispered.

“Right... Well... I’d say they’ve learned their lesson, haven’t you colts?” Sundance asked the two terrified twins. They nodded vigorously.

“And neither of you will be saying anything about this, right? Just that the bar caught on fire?” Hoyden asked. They nodded. One twin squeaked when Luna looked at him.

“Good... Uh, Princess? Your disguise,” Sundance said. Luna’s horn glowed, and a moment later she was back to being Selene. “Good... Now, let’s get out of the way so that the nice fireponies can put this out, shall we?”

They left the bar, just as several bright red fire engines were pulled to the scene. Hoyden followed at a short distance, just trying to look casual as they doubled back and started on the way towards the palace.

“I’m very sorry,” Luna said. “I didn’t mean to... To...”

“Freak out?” Hoyden asked. Sundance glared at him. He coughed. “I’m trying to help!”

“Yes, well... I did um... ‘Freak out’,” Luna said. Her ears drooped. “We’re also late...”

“It’s all right Your Majesty,” Sundance said.

“I suppose you don’t want to have me as your flatmate any more?” Luna asked miserably. Sundance laughed.

“As long as I don’t hit you on the rump, I think I’ll be fine. Right?”

“Ah... Right...” Luna said with a smile. Sundance smiled back. Hoyden trotted up next to Luna and Sundance and shot a bright grin at his marefriend. She returned it gratefully.

“Well... Um... If you’ll excuse me,” Hoyden said. He trotted off to behind a grove of trees. Luna and Sundance watched.

“Where is he going?” Luna asked. Sundance sighed.

“He prefers to do his freakouts in private.”

“Ah... So he is a true gentlecolt,” Luna nodded. Sundance chuckled.

“Oh yes... Yes he is.”

- - - - -

“Okay... Okay...” Hoyden sighed and closed his eyes tightly. “Phew... Okay... Most important thing. Never, ever, ever suggest a threesome. No matter how hot it might be. Okay? Okay.” He nodded and smiled. “Okay.”

- - - - -

“So, ready for work tonight?” Sundance asked. Luna nodded and looked back at her saddlebags.

“Yes, I should have it all... Right here...” She turned one saddlebag upside down and dumped it’s contents all over the ground. She did the same to the other, and frantically searched through the small piles. Sundance blinked.

“Ah, Your Majesty? What is it?”

Luna looked up at her, lip trembling. “My... My abacus... Where is it?”

Sundance felt a headache coming on. *Oh crap...*

- - - - -

Hoyden trotted into the apartment, whistling cheerfully to himself. He looked into the kitchen/living area and smiled as he spotted his marefriend sitting and staring morosely at her hooves on the couch. He crept up behind her, and took a deep breath.

“If you’re going to scare me, do it a little less loudly next time,” Sundance said, depressed. Hoyden released his breath in a sigh, and nuzzled Sundance.

“Things aren’t any better, huh?”

“No,” Sundance sighed. “She’s even worse. She only goes out to raise the moon, work, and lower the moon. It’s driving me nuts.”

“Well, what have you tried to get her to come out?” Hoyden asked. Sundance threw up her hooves with a groan.

“Everything! I even sprang for tickets for the baseball game!”

- - - - -

“Princess Luna, come out, look what I’ve got!”

Luna poked her head out. “What is it SundaaaaAAAHHHHH!”

SLAM!

Sundance blinked and looked at her attire. Baseball cap, ballball bat, and baseball in her hoof. She looked back at Luna's door.

"... Something I said?"

- - - - -

"She has a phobia of *baseballs*?" Hoyden asked incredulously. "You'd think flying round things would be her bread and butter."

Sundance sighed miserably. "I don't know what I'm going to do, Hoyden. I mean, if Princess Celestia isn't able to do anything, what can I do?"

"What makes you say she's not able to do anything?" Hoyden asked. He brushed her mane with her brush. Sundance murmured, enjoying the sensation.

"Well... Wouldn't she have done something by now?" Sundance asked quickly, looking up at the room above. Hoyden shrugged.

"Maybe she is doing something right now, relying on us to help Princess Luna. Who knows?" He smiled lovingly. "Either way... You haven't failed yet to bring a smile to anypony's face."

"Until now," she groaned. "And stop brushing me, you're making me feel better! I *want* to be depressed."

"Aw come on, I've got just the news to cheer you up!" Hoyden said. "Brushie brushie~..."

"What? And stop it already!" Sundance laughed.

"I've got a blind date set up tonight," Hoyden said. "For Luna."

"What?! A blind date?" Sundance groaned. "That's not going to help. I swear, if it's any of your bone head friends-"

"It's not, really. This is a stand up colt, I swear. Brushie brushie," Hoyden sang, adding a tickle to his ministrations. Sundance laughed.

"H-Hey! Stop it, I mean it!"

"Brushie brushie, brush your cares away, haha!"

"Th-This won't make me agree, heheheh!" Sundance laughed.

"Brushie brushie! It so can~!"

Sundance rolled onto her back and kicked her hooves in the air playfully to try and get Hoyden away. He responded by climbing on top of her and kissing her happily. She returned it eagerly.

"Mmmm~..."

"Sundance, I was thinking *liiieeep!*"

Both ponies looked up just in time to see a Luna-shaped and colored blur race up the stairs into her room with a slam of her door. Sundance glared at her coltfriend, who smiled back at her sheepishly.

"... That doesn't make my idea any less valid," Hoyden pointed out. Sundance grumbled.

"I hate it when you're right," she groaned.

"Because it's so often?" Hoyden asked smugly. Sundance smirked.

"No, because it's so rare."

"Ow," Hoyden said, holding a hoof over his heart theatrically. He then looked up at the ceiling. "You know, we don't necessarily need another colt for tonight's date..."

"What's *that* supposed to imply?" Sundance asked dangerously. Hoyden gulped.

"Nothing!"

- - - - -

Sundance trotted up the stairs to the door, and knocked on it with her hoof. Slowly, very slowly, Luna opened it, blushing brightly.

“Er... Hello Sundance,” she said, looking up at the ceiling.

“Hello Princess Luna,” Sundance said. “Um... Look, I’m sorry for-”

“No! No, I’m sorry. I intruded,” Luna said quickly. “That was my fault, I apologize. I am... Well, I am unused to the openness with which ponies express their affection now,” she admitted with a sigh. “It was very different back in my day.”

She looked down at the floor. Sundance took the opportunity to pull the door open fully, keeping Luna from hiding behind it. Even without the magical enchantments that hid her true form, she looked small and vulnerable.

“Not that I did such things in my day,” Luna corrected quickly. Sundance nodded.

“Uh huh,” Sundance said, nodding her head. Dealing with Luna at this stage was like dealing with a frightened bird. A frightened, super powered, prudish and insecure bird who could destroy the world, but a frightened bird nonetheless.

“I mean, I was very chaste, very... Well... I preferred the sciences, the arts of politics and economies, the forces of history,” Luna went on.

“Uh huh.”

“Celestia was always more social than I was. Far more social...” She blushed. “Almost scandalously so, at least back then. Now I doubt it causes any shock how social she can be, especially with that student of hers.” Luna’s eyes narrowed just little. “Her special, beloved student who is currently researching friendship...” Her expression became one of sorrow. “Who defeated and freed me and writes back and forth with Sister...”

“Uh, Princess Luna...?” Sundance tried.

“They touched their *horns* together. Back in my day they had to have been sisters, or-or the closest... I mean...” Luna pawed at the floor with a severe blush. “Well! Close! You know! Very close! So very close, it was outrageous I couldn’t-!”

“Princess Luna,” Sundance said a bit more firmly. Luna looked at her. Sundance found herself resting her hoof on the Moon Princess’s shoulder with a smile.

“Believe it or not, when I was growing up I was really socially awkward too,” Sundance said. “I hid behind my parents, I hid behind furniture, I tried to be alone whenever possible because I didn’t know how to interact with anypony.”

Luna frowned. “How did you overcome that?”

“Simple. With science,” Sundance said, seizing upon sudden inspiration with a smile. “I investigated, I went out and experienced socializing. I learned how to act and how to relate to other ponies.”

Luna nodded, smiling at this perfectly logical conclusion. “Of course!”

“That’s the only way you’re going to learn too,” Sundance said. She bit her lip. *Now comes the hard part.* “So... I have arranged for you to learn about socializing.”

“How so?” Luna asked.

Sundance took a deep breath. “By taking you off on a double date with a friend of Hoyden’s.”

Luna’s eyes widened.

“Oh no, I-I couldn’t! I don’t know the colt!”

“Well yes, that’s the *point*,” Sundance said with a smile. “It’s a blind date. He doesn’t know you, you don’t know him-”

“But-But I’m, well...” She indicated her horn and wings. Sundance smiled.

“You’re not going to *marry* him, Princess Luna. It’s just a date. You’re going to learn about him, he’ll learn about you... Well, a little bit about you,” Sundance amended. “You have fun!” She smiled. “I’ll be there the whole time, don’t worry!”

Luna frowned. “Well...”

“Trust me, Princess Luna. Nothing will go wrong, promise,” Sundance said. “Well... Not disastrously,” she admitted.

Luna very slowly nodded. “Very well. As long as you are with me.”

“Of course, Princess Luna,” Sundance said brightly. She quickly nuzzled Luna. She then blushed, as her princess did. “Um, I’m sorry.”

“N-No... I need to get used to this kind of thing, right?” Luna asked. She moved forward and kissed Sundance briefly on the nose. Sundance’s eyes widened in shock. Luna blushed herself.

“... Too much?” The moon princess tentatively asked.

“Well yes, but I...” Sundance sighed and closed her eyes. “Hoyden. Were you watching?”

An embarrassed cough came from the foot of the stairs. “... No.”

Sundance looked down and glared. “You had better *not* have been.”

Hoyden stared. His marefriend glared back. He sighed.

“Yes, yes I was.”

“*Eep!*”

Luna’s door slammed shut. Sundance brought her hoof to her face with a groan.

“*You idiot!*”

“Hey! She was *kissing you!* This is *not* my fault!” The colt protested.

“Well now how am I supposed to get her back out here?” Sundance glared death at him when he cleared his throat. “And you had better not say ‘kiss her again’, *got it?!’*”

“Never even crossed my mind,” Hoyden spoke quickly. He then turned and looked at the front door, muttering to himself. Sundance wasn’t able to pick up all of what he was saying, but at least two of the words she made out were “never” and “ever”.

- - - - -

It took a fair amount of coaxing, but Luna finally acquiesced. After all, she still had to raise the moon. After she had disguised herself and put on her bow from the day she’d first moved in, she trotted out the door with Sundance and Hoyden at her sides. Sundance felt a bit like her royal escort.

The Princess and her hoofmaiden, with her royal bodyguard, trot the streets of the capital...

They reached a rather nice restaurant, Buckeye’s, which had started out as a wagon restaurant but had subsequently become a fairly successful chain. The restaurant still kept reminders of it’s past though-In particular, the building itself had real working wheels. Sundance shot Hoyden a look, who shrugged back.

“This is about as casual as I could make it,” he murmured to her. Sundance sighed and looked at Princess Luna, who was eyeing the restaurant with some reservation.

“Miss Selene? We can eat somewhere else, if you’d like,” Sundance suggested.

“Hm? No, it’s fine...” The Moon Princess nodded. “Shall we?”

They trotted up the steps to the inside of the restaurant. Hoyden gave their names to the head waiter, and he took them to a table. An already occupied table, by a familiar big red stallion chewing on a stalk of hay.

“Hey Big Mac!” Hoyden said cheerfully. “Been a while, buddy!”

“Eeyup,” Big Mac said with a smile. His eyes caught sight of Luna, and widened. “Huh?”

“What?” Luna gasped. Sundance looked back and forth between them, a nasty suspicion entering her mind.

“You two know each other?” She asked.

“No, no,” Luna said quickly. “This is a blind date, therefore we have never seen each other before!”

“Eeyup,” Big Mac confirmed, resuming his former stoic expression. “Never.”

Sundance looked back and forth a few more times, eyes narrowed. Hoyden blinked and shrugged.

“Well! I don’t know about you but I’m starving. Let’s order something, huh?” Hoyden said quickly. He took a seat and smiled cheerfully. Luna returned a rather nervous smile as she sat down next to Big Mac. Sundance took her own seat, eyes narrowed.

“What can I get for you all to start?” The waiter asked.

A truth potion would be nice, Sundance thought as Big Mac and Luna determinedly didn’t look at each other.

- - - - -

Oh dear oh dear oh dear, Luna thought to herself. *It’s him, it’s him... This is so awkward! What am I supposed to do now?* She glanced at Big Mac. He glanced back. She looked away and she imagined he did the same.

Oh... I need to just get through this. Big Macintosh is an honorable pony, after all. He doesn’t talk much, he is inoffensive... She glanced at him again. *He is attractive... Wait no, stop that! Really, you are far too old for him anyway.*

You're far too old for anypony, her mind pointed out. How many ponies around here are pushing a thousand save for Celestia?

Somewhere, a brown pony with an hourglass cutiemark sneezed. Finding the sensation enjoyable, he and his companion headed off to procure some pepper.

So really, you might as well enjoy the night, right? Luna thought to herself. *Nothing will happen...* She tapped her hooves on the table and smiled nervously at Big Mac. Big Mac returned it. Luna blushed.

But what if it does?

"Oh Big Mac, I can no longer contain my crazed lusts for your handsome, broad body!" Luna cried dramatically, falling back as she held a hoof to her forehead. Big Mac caught her, his face extremely stoic.

"Eeyup. Same here. Come away with me, my alicorn angel. We will away in my pony shaped fighter plane," Big Mac said, rolling his head in the direction of said craft. Luna gasped.

"Oh my! I didn't know you had a pony-shaped fighter plane!"

"You never asked. Now I have to head off and fight in some war, cause that's what I do," Big Mac said. Luna was suddenly standing in a wedding dress and crying.

"You'll come back, won't you?" Luna sobbed.

"I might, might not. You'll wait for me, right?" Big Mac asked. Luna nodded.

"Of course!"

Big Mac slipped on some sunglasses and trotted off to the plane.

"Ballin'."

"You'll never see him again! Just as you'll never see me again!" Abacus yelled.

“Miss Selene?” Big Mac asked.

“No! No I don’t want you to go!” Luna said quickly. Big Mac stared, as did Hoyden and Sundance. As did a lot of other patrons. Luna’s face burned in embarrassment as Big Mac cleared his throat.

“Ah... Ah’m just going to the bathroom-”

“Oh! Of course, go ahead! Ahahaha, no problem, go right ahead!” Luna said. She covered her head with her hooves, fighting the urge to just hide under the table. In fact, that seemed very appealing right now.

No! No, you are the Moon Princess, Luna of Equestria, the Arbiter of the Heavens! You will not hide under the table... Again, she mentally amended.

“Ah, we’re going to the bathroom as well,” Sundance said. She took hold of Luna’s hoof and pulled her along. “Order for us won’t you Hoyden?”

“Of course,” Hoyden said as he downed his drink with a grin.

Once in the little mare’s room, Sundance looked Luna right in the eyes.

“Okay Princess, what’s going on? Do you know Big Mac?” Sundance asked. Luna nodded.

“Yes. We um... We went to a few baseball games together. He is the older brother of a friend of Twilight Sparkle’s, who is of course Princess Celestia’s student.”

“Oh,” Sundance said. She nodded and chuckled. “That’s really nothing to get nervous about... Not unless you two made out in the bathrooms or something during the seventh inning stretch.”

“N-No! That would be-I-The very idea!” Luna huffed, bright red. Sundance raised her hooves appeasingly.

“All right, all right... I was only joking! Just relax, Princess Luna. It’s not that big a deal. Everything still applies, okay?” She rested a hoof on Luna’s shoulder. “So you don’t have to freak out, okay?”

"I... I was not freaking out," Luna mumbled, averting her eyes. Sundance sighed.

"Yes, you were," she said. "But it's all right. Just... Just ask him about his day. What brings him here. Listen to him. Ponies like it when you listen to them, you know that right?"

Luna nodded. "Of course I do. I sometimes listen in on wishes made upon stars."

"You do?" Sundance asked, interested. Luna nodded.

"Yes... I find it... Pleasant, that so many people ask for guidance and help from the night sky," Luna admitted. Sundance smiled.

"Well then, there you go," Sundance said. "Have you ever heard some of Big Mac's wishes on stars?"

"Er... A few," Luna admitted. Sundance smiled.

"Well then, start from there! You'll be fine!"

"You really think so?" Luna asked.

"I know so!" Sundance said with a smile. Luna finally smiled back.

"All right..."

- - - - -

When they returned from the bathroom, their orders had come. Hoyden had dug in right away, while Big Mac had waited. When the two mares took their seats, only then did he begin eating. Luna flushed at this show of chivalry, while Sundance glared at Hoyden.

"Couldn't you have waited?" Sundance asked. Hoyden shrugged.

"I was hungry. Long day, wasn't it a long day Big Mac?" Hoyden asked. Big Mac nodded.

“Eeyup.”

“So, what brings you to Canterlot Big Mac?” Luna asked. Big Mac blinked and smiled.

“Ah was pullin’ some apples into market. We supply a lot of local grocers, so ah was cartin’ them all up here.”

Luna nodded. “That’s good... Don’t you wish you could fly? Wouldn’t that make everything so much easier?”

Big Mac chuckled. “Ah reckon it would.”

“Like, on big feathery wings that are brightly colored, like that cape you made when you were five,” Luna said. Big Mac blinked.

“What?”

“What?” Sundance asked.

“Mmph?” Hoyden asked through a mouthful of spicy oats. Luna coughed.

“Ah, I mean... I assume that you... Did so... Because so many young colts do that don’t they? Wear capes, run around trying to fly? Because that’s very cute for-for young colts to do?” Luna asked with a bright red blush. Big Mac very slowly nodded.

“Like that, yup,” he said. Hoyden grinned.

“Oh bro, I did that too. It was awesome. I broke my legs once jumping off a roof because I wanted to fly when there was a meteor shower!”

“Our first date,” Sundance said dryly. Hoyden chuckled.

“Yeah.”

“Yes! Remember how you wished he’d grow up and stop drinking the milk right out of the carton,” Luna asked. “And worried he was looking at the flanks of that cute waitress at the local cafe?”

Hoyden's jaw dropped. Sundance winced, and waved her hooves in a subtle way to try and keep Luna from continuing. However, she was still going strong.

"And he was, did you know that? But he likes your flanks much better," Luna said. Hoyden went bright red and covered his face as Sundance's waving became as desperate as though she was trying to signal a pegasus for help from atop a burning house.

"So Sundance doesn't have to wish any more for better flanks, because she's got them," Luna continued cheerfully. "She doesn't have to worry about it, and not her diet. She can stop eating chocolates and nuts to get bigger flanks."

"*Selene!*" Sundance hissed. Luna looked over at her.

"What?" She looked at Hoyden who had looked up at last. "Also Hoyden, what is a 'threesome'? Why would you wish to have it with us? Is it some kind of social ritual?"

Hoyden hid his face under the table as Sundance shot him a glare of pure rage. Luna smiled at Big Mac, looking confused. Big Mac's jaw had dropped and his hay stalk had fallen to the floor.

"... I said something wrong again, didn't I?" Luna asked in a very quiet voice.

- - - - -

The double date moved out to the local park, where numerous other couples were trotting together happily and contentedly. Not so for Sundance and Hoyden.

"Sundance! Honey! Wait, wait!" Hoyden called as Sundance galloped off.

"Leave me alone!"

Luna and Big Mac were left alone. They looked at each other, and then away. Luna rubbed her front leg awkwardly.

"I... I am very sorry... This is embarrassing," Luna admitted.

"Hm... Eeyup," Big Mac said. He looked at her. "Wanna sit down?"

Luna nodded. They trotted over to a bench and sat there in silence. Luna looked up. She looked out over the frolicking couples and the nightlights of the city and sighed.

"This... I couldn't imagine this. *Any* of this. A thousand years ago ponies were afraid of the night, or slept through it, or... Or regarded it as some kind of inconvenience." She narrowed her eyes as she focused on the bright lights.

"They made those lights just so they wouldn't have to deal with the darkness... Their own little suns..."

Celestia, sister... You were always the more popular one, the nicer one, the more social one...

She looked down at the ground as familiar feelings of anger arose in her. She'd spoiled the date, made her two friends angry at each other... Nothing but trouble since she'd decided to try life as an Earth pony.

"This was a mistake," Luna growled. "I did what Sundance said, tried to use my gifts to interact with others! To be me... But being me isn't what anyone wants. I'm not Celestia! I lost my abacus and I made everyone unhappy and now, and now...!" She kicked a rock in frustration.

"I-I should have just stayed in the moon!"

Big Mac was silent for a long time, watching her. Luna felt angry tears come to her eyes, but she tried to blink them away. The big stallion then cleared his throat. Luna looked over at him.

"What?"

"Have you flown up over the city, since you were back?" He asked quietly. Luna frowned.

"What do you mean? Of course I have."

“At night,” Big Mac specified. Luna blinked.

“What difference would that make?” She asked softly. Big Mac just smiled.

“Just give it a try,” he said. Luna frowned, but nodded. Making sure nopony was watching, she unfurled her camouflaged wings and took off, flying up high. She stayed above Big Mac’s position and soared up higher and higher. As she watched his form fade into the darkness, she began to notice something.

All the lights of the city below were the things that shone through the darkness the most. The higher she went, the more prominent they became until finally, when she reached where the air was cold, she stopped and looked down.

She then really looked, her jaw dropping. She looked up at the nighttime sky, her beloved work of art, and back down again.

Slowly, reluctantly, she flew back down to the park bench where Big Mac was waiting. She landed, and wiped her eyes.

“... It... They look the same,” she whispered. Big Mac smiled.

“Eeyup,” he said.

“... I...” She pawed the ground awkwardly. “How could you have seen it?”

“Pictures from pegasi,” Big Mac said. “Sometimes ah like to look at ‘em.”

“Oh,” Luna said softly. Big Mac leaned forward.

“Now, can ah ask you a question?”

Luna flushed as she sat back down on the bench. “Sure... Can’t be more embarrassing than my questions.”

“The North Star... You put that up, didn’t you?” Big Mac asked. Luna looked at Big Mac with a frown.

“Well, yes... Sort of. It’s a little more complicated than that but yes.”

“Why is it always pointing north?” Big Mac asked. He trotted over to a bench and rested on it. Luna followed and sat down with a sigh. She looked up at said star and thought back to long ago.

“It’s because of how the world is tilted. It was Celestia’s idea, I think. Give the world seasons,” she said. “Due to the spin of the planet, that star moves the least right above the north polar area, and so it’s used for navigation.”

“Did you intend that?” Big Mac asked.

“No... No, but I’m glad that’s how it turned out,” Luna said. Big Mac smiled.

“Ah learned to navigate by it at night, when ah travel around,” he said. “It’s never steered me wrong. So... Ah guess I wanna thank you for it.”

“Oh... Well... You’re welcome,” Luna said, blushing furiously.

“Can you tell me more?” He asked.

“I’d like to, but... But what about Sundance and Hoyden?” Luna asked. Big Mac smiled.

“Ah think they’ll work it out themselves... Sometimes, you can’t do nothin’ to help. You gotta let things go as they will.”

Luna slowly nodded. "Mm... So um..." She looked at him shyly through her bangs. "What do you want to know about first?"

"How about meteor showers?" Big Mac asked. Luna's smiled grew.

"Sure..."

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“Sundance! SUNDANCE!”

Sundance had made it to a hill near the center of the park. Panting for breath, she finally turned to glare at her coltfriend.

"I cannot *believe* you! *Wishing* for it?! ON A STAR?!" She demanded. Hoyden bowed his head.

"I didn't think she'd *hear* it!"

"So you're *not* sorry you made the wish, huh? Huh?!" Sundance demanded, rearing up on her hind hooves and kicking out her front hooves. Hoyden was knocked in his jaw, and he went down hard. Sundance stopped immediately and her eyes went wide.

"Hoyden? HOYDEN! Are you all right? Oh, I'm so sorry I'm *sorry!*" She cried. Hoyden groaned.

"No... No... I'm fine," he said. He worked his jaw as he stared up at her. "You've got quite the right hoof."

"Oh... I'm sorry, it's just that..." She sighed. "You made me so mad."

"Because I wished to have Luna too?" Hoyden asked. "I... I'm sorry Sundance, I really am. I say and do a lot of stupid stuff, but..." He got up and nuzzled her. "But that's why I love you so much. You tell me when I'm being stupid, so I can stop it."

Sundance sighed and looked aside. She then slowly looked back at Hoyden.

"I just... I guess even with how much of a spazz she is, I feel kind of... Jealous of her," Sundance said. "And that's the worst thing I can feel, but I do anyway."

"Well... Yeah, it kind of is," Hoyden said. At Sundance's angry glare he coughed and backed up. "Sorry, sorry!"

"You really suck at cheering me up!" Sundance growled.

"But... But me wishing for threesomes... It isn't so different, is it?" Hoyden asked quickly. "It's really, really stupid."

Sundance stared at him in silence for a while, before she sighed. "Yeah... Yeah, I guess," she mumbled. "Sorry."

"I'm sorry," Hoyden said again. "It was a really stupid fantasy... Totally not ever going to happen."

"No," Sundance said. Hoyden smiled at her.

"But... Why would I ever want it to?" He asked. Sundance laughed.

"Charmer."

"It's why you love me," he said. Bright lights flashed overhead, and the two looked up. Falling stars lit up the night sky in a brilliant display. Hoyden watched in awe.

"Wow... Would you look at that," Sundance murmured. She moved closer to her coltfriend and the two watched in silence. She looked at the moon, and smiled.

Thanks Luna... I wish you could see what you've done for us...

Sundance blinked. She could swear the meteors formed a *smile* for just one moment... And then she smiled back.

Of course...

- - - - -

Luna sighed happily. She looked over at Big Mac.

"I... I feel a lot better now," she said. "Thank you."

"Eeyup... Don't mention it," Big Mac said.

Luna sighed.

"What's wrong?" Big Mac asked. Luna pouted.

"I just wish I knew what happened to my abacus," she said. "It just... It's made me so stressed out this week, I feel like I was about to burst and..."

Abruptly two ponies galloped up. One was a brown colt in a pinstripe suit with a wild mane of hair, and the other was a gray pegasus with a blonde mane and walleyes. The latter had a mail satchel.

"Huh?" Luna asked. The pegasus rummaged in her satchel and handed over a familiar looking brown box. Luna's eyes widened.

"M-My abacus!" She cried out happily, grabbing it and holding it tightly. She looked up at the colt and the pegasus. "How did you-Where did you-?"

"Sorry, can't say anything. Thank you for letting me borrow it," the colt said. "Well! Not borrow, borrow without asking, I need to stop doing that *anyway!* Your sister sends her apologies that she let me borrow it without asking you after the fact... It's complicated and right now five things and a lizard are all happening at once so really we must be off. Hello! Goodbye!" The colt ran off. The pegasus smiled and kissed Luna's cheek.

"Aren't you sweet?" She said, before flying after the colt. Luna stared after her, and then at Big Mac, who had no more answers than she did. She looked down at her beloved little abacus, and then up at the castle. In a single moment, it all snapped together... And she smiled.

"You evil mastermind," she muttered.

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High above in Canterlot, Celestia smiled indulgently as she saw that her package had been delivered. She then tapped her hooves together with a warm and happy smile.

"Just as planned," she chuckled.

Chapter 4

Communications

The early morning was cool and beautiful, as Celestia's sun slowly rose up over Equestria. Luna, having just finished setting the moon, was at the kitchen table in Sundance's apartment and had buried the surface in books and manuscripts. Wearing her glasses she scribbled her way through several journals, her abacus clicking away happily. With another sip of tea, Luna felt herself at total and complete peace.

Sundance came into the kitchen, not so much trotting as dragging herself to the table. She blinked at the books and journals and looked up slowly at Luna through a matted mane.

"I'm starting to wonder if I ever had a table," She mumbled.

"I could bring in a new desk if you wanted," Luna said. Sundance shook her head.

"Nah... I don't have that much room," Sundance said. She dragged herself over to the refrigerator and opened it, rummaging around. She closed her eyes and took the milk in hoof. She then turned it up and drank it.

"Gmmph?! PFFWAH!" She spat it out. "Wha-What's with..." She looked over at Luna. "Weren't you supposed to get new milk... Princess Luna?" She added in a more polite tone.

Luna winced. "Oh... Um... Sorry, I must have lost track of time."

What was it this time? Her mind asked tiredly. Out loud, and in a far more polite tone: "You did?"

Luna coughed. "Well, um..."

"Yes? What?" Sundance asked intently, trotting up to her side. Luna flushed, and gingerly held up one of her books.

“...’Zoning Regulations?’” Sundance asked in disbelief. Luna flushed.

“Well, there’s some considerable dispute currently in Fillydelphia over reconstruction following the Parasprite plague, so I was trying to understand the roots of the council’s problems... And then I needed to look at the local history, the local politics, the construction histories...”

“... So you’re telling me this entire mess is just a single issue?” Sundance asked. Luna sighed. “Not that that’s a big problem,” Sundance immediately said.

“I got a bit carried away...” Luna smiled. “But it’s so interesting! I mean, all these rules, all these fascinating overlapping laws with laws with compromises...” Luna sighed happily. “It’s like archaeology through books...”

Sundance spotted a letter in the pile marked *Sweet Apple Farms*, right on top of a book on truth potions. She eyed it and smirked a bit, but at Luna’s look she resumed her placid expression.

“From Big Macintosh?” She guessed. “I mean, it’s none of my business but...”

“We have exchanged letters,” Luna explained. “He is suffering from an injury and his sister must see to the farm for the time being. Their harvest is coming up soon.”

That’s not all that’s coming up soon, Sundance thought, the image of the elegant Grand Galloping Gala already playing out in her mind. Luna had been so strange over the past few weeks she hadn’t been able to bring the subject up.

She had wished about it but... Uh oh.

“Um... Have you been listening in to any wishes lately? Just... Just out of curiosity,” Sundance asked.

“Well, since that night I’ve tried to avoid listening in on you two,” Luna admitted. “I-I don’t want to embarrass you...”

“You didn’t-” Sundance began automatically, but at Luna’s look she said instead, “yes, yes you did.”

“I am sorry about that,” Luna said. “As well as embarrassing Hoyden.” Sundance snorted.

“He does that himself,” she muttered. Luna cocked her head. Sundance flushed. “Ah, sorry. I mean that in a different way... Actually, it’s kind of his job.”

“His job?” Luna asked. “I have not inquired into what he does for a living. I will admit, his cutie mark is very strange... A skull and a pair of crutches? Does it aid in his vocation?”

“Well...”

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“Ready Hoyden?” Asked his boss. Hoyden grinned and pulled his goggles down.

“Ready Boss!”

“All right... LET ‘ER RIP!” Shouted the boss pony. “PULL!”

The trebuchet was released and Hoyden went flying as the massive ballistic launcher threw him into the air. “YEE HAAAAAAAAA!”

“Boss, I gotta ask,” his assistant began. “Why do you insist on testing all these things on Earth ponies? Why not pegasi?”

“Why?” The boss asked. Hoyden pulled the ripcord on his parachute and descended rapidly. He landed in the nearby lake with a terrific splash.

“Because that would take all the fun out of testing the safety gear,” he said with a grin. “HOYDEN! YOU STILL ALIVE?!”

“Pfft!” Hoyden said as he surfaced. He waved his hooves in acknowledgement. The boss grinned. The assistant checked “ALIVE” on his clipboard.

“GOOD! Let’s move onto the rocket car!”

“Awesome!”

- - - - -

“... Yes. Yes it does,” Sundance grumbles. *Helps him to get himself killed...* She saw Luna looking and smiled. “But you know, from now on it’s okay to talk about star wishes... Just not in public, all right?”

Luna nodded. “All right... Then I would like to ask a question.”

“Well, certainly Princess Luna,” Sundance said.

“You complain about him a great deal, yet you continue to date and wish for his well being,” Luna mused. “You also struggle for dominance actively while he is more passive about it. It’s very fascinating to observe.”

“Um, yes, very,” Sundance mumbled, wondering where Luna was going with this. At Luna’s look, she smiled back. Luna frowned.

“Is something wrong?”

“No! No, nothing at all,” Sundance said.

“Are you sure? Because if there’s anything I can do to make things easier, you just have to ask,” Luna said. Sundance shook her head.

“No! No, everything’s fine.”

Luna frowned. “I see... Well, just so you know, I’m going to do something that will hopefully make things easier on both of us.”

“Easier in what way?” Sundance asked. Luna smiled.

“Easier for us both to be honest with each other...”

“Your Majesty?” Sundance asked. Luna shook her head.

"It will be fine... I think it's time we both try to be more genuine with each other. And there are many ways to make sure we have honest reactions... Right?" She asked with a smile.

"Um... Sure," Sundance smiled back, but her eyes drifted to the hallway where the recently repaired holes left by the alarm clock were. The differently colored plaster stood out in the early morning light.

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"I'm telling you Hoyden, she's been acting really weird ever since that night," Sundance said with a sigh, staring at her daisy sandwich on the cafe table before her. Hoyden was eating his spicy oats on the other side, chewing thoughtfully before answering.

"Well, with her it's kind of hard to tell," he pointed out. He held up his hooves defensively as Sundance shot him a look. "I'm just saying!"

Sundance dropped the glare, and adopted an expression of resignation. "Yeah... I just thought that with the meteor shower and Big Mac we'd kind of, maybe, hit it off somewhat. Then she goes back to hiding behind her books and treating her abacus like her baby."

"Oh come on, I'm sure it's not *that*-"

"She got it a little hat and it's own little bed, and I saw her tucking it in with a bedtime story," Sundance said flatly. Hoyden's jaw dropped. He covered his mouth with his hooves to contain his laughter.

"Mmph... Hnhnhnhn...!"

"It's not *that* funny," Sundance mumbled. She sighed and bit into her sandwich. "I don't know Hoyden... It's just that, I thought we were making progress since that night but for the past few weeks she's just..."

"Well, she *was* in the moon for a thousand years," Hoyden pointed out. "And lived that way for a long, *long* time before." He added more hot sauce to his oats, and held the bottle above the table so that in the mid-day sun would cast no shadow. "I had enough trouble breaking the habit of drinking the milk from the bottle."

"You haven't broken the habit," Sundance said with a smile. Hoyden nodded.

"Well, um, there you go," he said. "I'm more interested in this 'being more honest' thing though. What do you think she's going to do?"

"I don't know," Sundance said. "I mean... I don't think she'll do anything particularly big. Right? She's been doing a lot of potions and research in the last week..."

"Yeah, but you know her Sundance," Hoyden emphasized, leaning over the table and looking into her eyes. "What if she reads a... A filly mag and decides to hang out with the wrong crowd?"

"Princess Luna I-Huh?" Sundance stopped at the door to the kitchen. Luna looked up with a huff, wearing tight black leather and heavy makeup. Around the table were several other oddly-dressed ponies.

"It's Selly, thank you," she sniffed. "Selly the Barbarian Queen! My motorcycle sword will destroy the evil Hippies with a single blow!" With that pronouncement, she held up a pair of dice and threw them onto the table.

"I don't believe it! Perfect twenty!" A pony wearing a cloak and a bone-like mask gasped behind a large book and a series of notes. "This is unreal!" Luna smirked.

"Now now Dungeon Master, you are working with greatness, after all..."

Sundance covered her mouth with her hoof to stifle a giggle. "I-I think we're okay on that end... It is *Luna*, after all. Do you really think she'd hang out with anyone really... Offensive?"

"We are talking about the former Nightmare Moon," Hoyden pointed out. "That evil dominatrix look didn't come from thin air. And we *know* she's got some issues."

"Evil dom-What?" Sundance asked. Hoyden nodded.

“Oh yeah, Big Mac knows a guy who got a snapshot of her when she was in her full evil glory.” He pulled out a picture from his saddlebag and hoofed it over to her. Sundance stared in disbelief.

“Geez... You’re right...”

“I can totally see it now,” Hoyden said as he held his hooves up to frame the imaginary scene...

“Lick my hooves, worm!” Luna commanded, wearing tight, silvery leather as she cracked a whip over the back of Sundance.

“N-No, please Mistress Luna, spare me!” She begged. “AH!”

“This is your just punishment, slave,” purred Luna. “Beg properly!” CRACK!

“AH! M-My Goddess, please, have mercy! I love youuu!” Sundance cried. Luna smirked and took hold of her chin with her hoof, raising her lips.

“Show me that love,” she crooned. “Worship your goddess~...”

“Hoyden... Hoooyden... HOYDEN!”

“Huh? What? What?” Hoyden asked quickly, shaken out of his reverie. Sundance scowled at him.

“You’re *drooling*,” she said suspiciously. With a very guilty look, Hoyden coughed and looked down at his food.

“This food is just... So good?” He offered weakly. Sundance sighed.

“You were thinking about something naughty, weren’t you?”

“Well... Yes, I was,” Hoyden said. “But it is *possible* she’d try something of that nature to get you to really respond.”

“Yeah, but given how she acts around Big Mac I don’t think she’d jump right to... To...” Sundance searched for the right mental image, and looked carefully at Hoyden as he took a drink of sarsaparilla. “Tight leather and a *whip*.”

“PFFT!” Hoyden spat out his drink, eyes wide. Sundance smirked.

Gotcha...

“Y-Yeah... You’re probably right,” Hoyden coughed with a blush. Sundance looked back down at her sandwich with a thoughtful hum.

“I think the worst we have to worry about is her taking something a little too far,” Sundance said. “More out of ignorance of the world than anything else. Like maybe she just decides to... To get a wardrobe change or something.” She glared at Hoyden. “That doesn’t involve *leather*.”

“I didn’t say anything!” Hoyden said quickly. “And yeah, I guess that is more likely. A little change in her image...”

“Yee haw! Ride ‘em, me!” A Luna decked out in cowhorse paraphernalia greeted, kicking her hooves up with a bright smile.

“Yeah... Nothing big,” Sundance said.

“Unless she decides to just defy our expectations and go postal on her greatest nemesis,” Hoyden said.

“Her greatest nemesis?” Sundance asked.

“Now the world shall never know the terror of baseball again! MWAHAHAHAHAHA!” Luna cackled as she stood atop a burning Manehattan Field, baseballs turning to ash at her feet.

“That’s stupid!” Sundance huffed. Hoyden shrugged.

“You asked...”

“Oh, this isn’t getting us anywhere,” Sundance sighed.

“Maybe you should just relax. I mean, come on. She likes you a lot,” Hoyden said. He shrugged. “Of course, if you get out of line she might... punish you a little...”

“Hoyden, your eyes are glazing,” Sundance said flatly.

“Damn hot sauce...”

“Riiight...” Sundance sighed.

“You know, she might be planning on dosing you with a potion,” Hoyden suggested. Sundance started.

“Wh-What?”

“Well yeah,” Hoyden said. “You said she had a book on truth potions out, right?”

“Yes, but... But I can’t believe she’d do something like that,” Sundance said.

“You can’t,” Hoyden said, “but I’ve done some research into her time. Using potions for casual conversation was common!”

“Really?” Sundance asked. “Wait, you’ve been doing research?”

“Well... Just to try and help out,” Hoyden said. He shook his head. “She might just think that potion use is the way to go at this point and she’s been looking for the right one.”

“Oh come on, she couldn’t, really,” Sundance said. “That’s not like her!”

“She did blow up a bar for a smack on the rump,” Hoyden said. Sundance frowned.

“Well...”

“And she keeps freaking out at things,” Hoyden went on. He held up his hooves. “I’m just saying that it’s weird she had that book out when she had stacks of stuff on zoning, that’s all.”

“No, no... She couldn’t,” Sundance muttered.

Could she?

The weeks of odd behavior and her inability to get Luna to lighten up were wearing on Sundance. Her cutie-mark was that of a smiley face sun, it was her gift to make others happy. If Luna wasn't happy though... What would she do?

- - - - -

Luna looked about, rearing back on her hind legs. Her foes surrounded her on all sides, their black eyes staring at her without an ounce of pity. They seemed to close in without even moving, their mighty bulk making her feel small and powerless. Luna shot them all a defiant glare. She was the Princess of the Moon, a living, breathing goddess! She would not be stopped!

She leaped forward and struck her nearest foe with a mighty strike of her hooves.

Squeak.

Luna sighed as the stuffed pink dragon barely moved from her "attack", and looked up at her sister.

"Sister, must I really do this?" She asked. Celestia nodded with a smile.

"Oh yes... It's very good practice for the real thing."

"The real thing consisted of a half-dozen Crimson Dragons," Luna said flatly. Celestia smiled.

"Yes, it did... We're starting small. Come now, give it another try."

"Fine," Luna sighed as she struck the dragon plushie again. *Squeak.*

"Ah, adorable," Celestia sighed.

"Sister!" Luna groaned. Celestia chuckled as Luna flew up to the balcony, looking very unhappy.

“Can I be blamed for wanting to see my sister do something cute?” Celestia asked. She gave her a mischievous look. Luna sighed.

“Besides, it’s good for stress relief,” Celestia added. “You seem a bit stressed.”

“It’s Sundance,” Luna explained. “She’s been acting very... Guarded around me. I don’t like it.”

“Oh?” Celestia asked. Luna nodded.

“Yes... So I want to make her reactions more honest. I don’t want to be treated like a princess.”

“I have much the same problem,” Celestia said. “Everyone is always so skittish around me regardless of how I act. It’s the price of power, I’m afraid.”

Luna nodded. “Yes... But we were acting so familiar before...”

“Relationships are not always constant... As you well know,” Celestia said, leaning forward to nuzzle her sister’s cheek. Luna flushed and nodded.

“Yes... I know... But there’s no darkness here. Just... Awkwardness.”

“Well then,” Celestia said, “do you have a plan to deal with it?”

Luna thought about it, and nodded. “Yes, I do.”

“Oh good,” Celestia said with a smile. “Do you need any help with it?”

“No, I don’t think so,” Luna said. “It’s perfectly scientific. I am very confident in it’s success.”

“Are you sure? I’m not too bad with plans myself,” Celestia said with a wink. Luna huffed.

“You don’t have to show off,” she groused slightly. Celestia giggled and kissed Luna on the cheek.

“It’s not showing off if it works, my dear sister,” Celestia told her.

- - - - -

Sundance and Hoyden arrived at her apartment some time later. Sundance looked around carefully, trying to discern if Luna was about to leap out at them.

“You’re acting like she’s a dragon lying in wait,” Hoyden joked. Sundance scowled back at him.

“She’s a *goddess*. It pays to be cautious when she might cause something big.”

“Yeah, but you’re just going to talk, right?” Hoyden asked. Sundance nodded.

“Yes... We are... I’m just not sure how to break the ice though.”

“Well, we could always do something to pass the time,” Hoyden said, coming up beside her to nuzzle her. Sundance giggled and shook her head.

“Come on, knock it off.”

“I just want a kiss,” Hoyden said, looking hurt. Sundance sighed and then smiled.

“Well...” Their lips drew closer together, and just before contact...

“Hello!” Luna cried.

“ACK!”

“Oh, I’m terribly sorry,” Luna said.

“Hello Princess Luna... Don’t think of it,” Sundance said. “Actually I wanted to talk to you.”

“Well, can it wait? I’m making dinner,” Luna said. She trotted back into the kitchen, adjusting her apron that clovered her forelimbs. On top of the stove, she had several pots bubbling as their contents were cooked. Sundance blinked. Her eyes went over a series of cookbooks on the counters.

“Er, Princess, isn’t it a little early?” She asked. Luna shook her head.

“I don’t think so... The books said it was going to take a while, so I started early!” She smiled cheerfully as she used her magic to set the spoons in the pots stirring. “Just sit back and relax, all right?”

Luna’s tail bumped the table, and a book fell off. Sundance caught it with her mouth, and placed it back on the table. Her eyes caught the title:

101 Truth Potions: Truly and Honestly.

She felt a chill go down her spine and she slowly looked up at the smiling Luna.

“Something wrong?”

“Ah... No,” Sundance said. She turned to Hoyden. “Hoyden and I have something to discuss in my room. We’ll be right out.”

“Sure... Take your time!” Luna said, reading through the cookbook. Sundance pulled Hoyden into her room and kicked the door shut behind them. Hoyden blinked.

“Er... Am I missing something? Isn’t this a good thing? She’s just cooking dinner.”

“Yes. Just. Cooking. Dinner,” Sundance said. “With a *truth potion book out?*”

“Well, maybe she just forgot to put it away,” Hoyden suggested. Sundance shook her head.

“No, no, she’s been acting so weird lately... She wants me to be more honest... Maybe she’s just going to use magic to fix her problems instead of talking about them!”

“Uh huh?” Hoyden asked. “That sounds a little paranoid-”

“Well what am I supposed to think?! Luna hasn’t cooked at all for weeks, or done anything... Oh Celestia, there have been so many books out...” Sundance rubbed the top of her head worriedly. “I haven’t gotten anything right, she’s going to ensure I do it this way!”

“Or maybe she’s just cooking dinner,” Hoyden suggested. Sundance shook her head, looking a bit paranoid.

“No, no! She’s been mopey and weird for weeks and now she wants me to be more assertive and honest and now she’s all smiles? No, she’s got this planned out! Why?”

“Mares are crazy,” Hoyden said. Sundance hit him. “OW! What?”

“No... It just feels wrong,” Sundance said.

“So why not confront her?” Hoyden suggested.

“With *what*? ‘Hey Princess Luna, are you going to dose me with an honesty potion?’” Sundance asked flatly.

Hoyden slowly looked over at the baseball pennant for the Canterlot Knights Sundance had posted up in her room. Sundance looked with him. She then shook her head.

“Oh no... No! That’ll be sure to blow up the house.”

“Not if you were a little subtle about it,” Hoyden suggested. “The baseball just out of sight, slowly revealed to get what you want... It works in police books!”

“I don’t know,” Sundance mumbled. Hoyden shook his head.

“Look, you’re the one who was scared about what she’s up to... It’s up to you.”

Sundance looked guiltily over at the dresser drawer where she kept her lucky baseball. She bit her lower lip.

- - - - -

Right, now add the chives... And the roots, after cutting, Luna thought to herself. She was very pleased with herself for learning how to cook. In the end it wasn’t much different from simple chemistry or potions making.

A wonderful, subtle art that... She thought to herself.

The door to Sundance’s room opened up quietly. Luna didn’t notice as she continued reading the book.

Boil for just ten minutes...

Silently, Sundance and Hoyden crept towards Luna. Hoyden was holding the baseball in his mouth, ready to give it to Sundance at the right moment.

“Hmm... Now, with the rate of heat expansion, times the relative temperature...” Luna mused. She frowned and turned around. “I need my-”

Hoyden tried to move to cover at the same time Sundance did. They slammed into each other and the jolt knocked the baseball from Hoyden’s mouth. It flew up to the nearby cabinet and bounced off it, just in time for Luna to turn around at the sudden noise and see it heading right for her face. Her eyes widened and her horn glowed.

“EEP!”

A blast of energy left her horn and sent it shooting off into a random direction while breaking the sound barrier. Unfortunately, said direction was right into the oven, smashing the gas lines and letting the heat take over from there.

FWOOM!

“ACK!” Luna cried as the entire stove went up in flames. Sundance, seeing this, grabbed the mop bucket and began filling it up with water. Luna was far more practical-She ripped the plumbing of the sink right out with telekinesis and directed the water over the fire.

The flames now doused, Luna looked mournfully at the destroyed kitchen, and over at Sundance. Sundance had dropped the bucket out of shock, and she found herself gaping in disbelief at Luna.

“You-I-Why?! Why did you do that?! You didn’t have to rip everything out! It’s just a baseball! I didn’t mean to-You-I mean-!”

The fire alarm went off, and very late, the sprinklers in the apartment came on and doused them all. Sundance looked up, looked back at Luna, and sighed.

“Are... Are you all right?” Luna asked timidly. Sundance shook her soaking wet mane as she looked down at the floor.

“No... No I’m not.”

- - - - -

Maybe I should just move next to the fire department, Luna thought miserably as she, Sundance and Hoyden sat outside as the fire department gave the kitchen a look over. Sundance in particular looked unhappy, staring down at the ground.

“... Sundance? Whatever I did to make you upset, I am very sorry,” Luna said.

“No... No, I’m sorry,” Sundance said with a sigh. “I was the one who had the baseball...”

“Why though?” Luna asked. Sundance looked away, ashamed.

“You had been acting so weird over the last few weeks that I... I thought you might have been planning to dose me with a truth potion,” Sundance mumbled. Luna’s eyes widened in shock.

“Wh-What? No! I would never-I just forgot to put that book away, really!” She reached over and rested a hoof on Sundance’s shoulder. “I thought you were unhappy with my presence, but whenever I asked you about anything you said you were fine. I didn’t listen in on your wishes because I didn’t want to embarrass you... Again.”

“So if we’d just talked about this... None of this would have happened,” Sundance sighed. “I’m really sorry Your Majesty.”

“I’m sorry too,” Luna said. Both ponies looked at Hoyden, who blinked.

“What?”

“Hoyden...”

“Okay okay,” Hoyden sighed. “I’m sorry for suggesting we use the baseball to get the truth out of you, Princess Luna... And the casual potion use thing.”

“It’s all right,” Luna said quickly. “I mean, I can pay for all this damage.”

“Why don’t we just split it?” Sundance suggested with a smile. “Since we both contributed...”

“But Sundance-” Luna tried but her roommate interrupted.

“No! We’re both paying for it and that-that’s final!” Sundance said. She shrunk back a little at Luna’s shocked look, but recovered when she smiled.

“All right... It’s final,” she said. Sundance smiled back.

“Good...”

“So, now that you’ve made up,” Hoyden said, raising a hoof. “One question: Where are you going to live while the house is repaired?”

“Well... We could just share my room,” Luna suggested. Sundance smiled.

“Oh no, I couldn’t-”

“Yes you can, and yes you will,” Luna said. “It’s the least I can do.”

“Well... All right,” Sundance said with a nod.

“Yeah,” Hoyden said. “What’s the worst that could happen? OW!”

Chapter 5-1

Ponyville TV

Celestia did not often sigh in frustration. She found more positive ways to deal with negative emotions, such as channeling them into productive pursuits. Or causing solar flares.

True, the latter happened more often than she liked but she had long ago learned how to keep it under control. For the most part.

That airplane had been just fine though.

“Luna... Luna...” Celestia called out in the center of the library. Receiving no answer, Celestia hummed and flew up. She cast a tracer spell, but found it picked up multiple returns for Luna's location. The Princess of the Sun hummed thoughtfully, then smiled.

- - - - -

Luna had sequestered herself in the basement of the library, where numerous ancient records and volumes resided. Indeed, many of the records in this section were at least as old as Nightmare Moon. It was dark and dusty, thousands of bookcases arranged in a labyrinth the librarians had devised when bored.

Luna had gotten through it in just under an hour, and now sat at the lone desk in the exact center of the maze. She was reviewing some ancient documents, abacus clicking under her nervous hoof.

A flash of light filled the dark library, and Luna looked over her shoulder to scowl at Celestia.

“You’re not supposed to teleport in here!” Luna protested.

"It is the simplest way to get through a maze, isn't it?" Celestia asked with a smile. Luna's scowl deepened.

"That's cheating!"

"I prefer to think of it as 'creative problem solving'," Celestia chuckled. She looked at the tomes Luna had out, trotting next to the desk. "Hmm... Aristallion's *Rhetoric* and *Ethics*?"

"I did not get to see his finished works before Nightmare Moon," Luna said. "They-They are very good!"

"Hmm... Yes, they are... But there are copies of his work in the library above," Celestia said. She nuzzled Luna affectionately. "My dear little sister, whatever is wrong?"

"... It's... Sundance, Sister," Luna admitted. Celestia blinked.

"Whatever did she do?"

"Nothing!" Luna said quickly. She pulled out a copy of Platony's *Republic* and covered her face. Celestia leaned in closer to her, still smirking. Luna peeked at her over her book.

"Nothing?" Celestia asked.

"Yes! Nothing!"

"Must have been quite the nothing," Celestia observed. "Come now Luna... Was it really *that* embarrassing?"

Luna slowly peeked over her book, letting Celestia spy red spots on her cheeks.

- - - - -

Luna flew in through her bedroom window, baring groceries in her mouth.

"Oh Sundance..."

"Oh Hoyden...!"

"OH MY!"

The milk smashed as Luna turned tail and flew for it, leaving a pair of very embarrassed ponies.

"... Well, at least I know this isn't a dream."

"HOYDEN!"

"What?!"

- - - - -

"... N-No, not embarrassing," Luna mumbled as she covered her face up with her book.

"Oh. I see," Celestia said with a nod. She leaned in really close, to the point Luna could feel her breath on her ear.

"You saw them together, didn't you?" Celestia smirked. Luna eeped and fell out of her chair to the floor.

"S-SISTER!"

"Ah, adorable," Celestia sighed. Luna got back up and scowled at her sister.

"That-That isn't funny! I have disgraced them and myself for viewing them in such... Such... Viewing them!" Luna sighed. "I do not think I can face either of them."

"Well, probably not right away," Celestia said. "However, hiding in the library basement won't help."

"I'm willing to try," Luna mumbled, returning to her books. Celestia sighed again. Twice in one day.

"I have another reason for finding you," Celestia said smoothly. "I need you to go down to Ponyville for me."

"Ah? Ponyville?" Luna asked, peeking over her book once more. Celestia nodded.

"Yes. The town has been through many stressful situations in the past few months and I want to see how everything is doing." She smiled. "It will also give you the chance to meet with some of the ponies who aided you."

Luna shook her head. "I... That doesn't seem-"

"Miss Applejack certainly held no grudge," Celestia said gently. "I doubt that any of the others will."

"But I have-"

"Nothing else to do today, because you are so very studious," Celestia said with a gentle smile. Luna huffed.

"I could just defy you," Luna said. Celestia nodded.

"Yes. You could."

The two sisters stared at each other for a long moment. Luna fidgeted. Celestia remained serene. Luna finally heaved a sigh.

"Fine."

"Wonderful," Celestia said cheerfully.

"May I at least go in disguise?" Luna pleaded. Celestia nodded.

"Of course my dear little sister. Your entrance will be quite subtle. I will make *all* the arrangements."

Luna stared for a moment.

Trumpets blared, pegasi in the air corps flew in formation overhead, and fireworks went off as Celestia stepped out of her chariot with a smile.

"Mares and gentlecolts, allow me to introduce to you... Miss Selene. A perfectly normal, average pony." Celestia looked over at Luna, who was covering her head with her hooves as everypony stared. "Say hello, Selene!"

"I think I know the way," Luna said quickly. "Don't worry about me."

Celestia just smiled. "Of course..."

- - - - -

Ponyville looked quite pleasant and quiet as Luna approached it, trotting at an easy pace from where she had landed. As she entered it, she appreciated the old fashioned architecture, the bright colors of it's painted buildings, and the numerous ponies going about their lives. She smiled a bit nervously whenever a pony smiled back as she continued on her journey towards the center of the town.

Luna was unsure of where to start with the town, much less the ponies within. How could she even start? In the central square (which was a circle), she stopped by a barrel and looked around carefully, considering where to go.

I suppose I could find one of the six... It's not like they'd recognize me.

"Hello Princess Luna!"

"EEP! Who?" Luna jumped, looking over at the source of the voice. A bright pink pony with poofy hair grinned at her from out of the barrel.

"Welcome to Ponyville! Have you been here long? How long are you staying and-MMPH!"

Luna covered the obviously insane pink mare's mouth with her hoof and gave a nervous grin to anypony around. Most seemed oblivious to what had happened, for which Luna was very grateful.

"Eheheheh..." She turned and whispered in the pink pony's ear. "Please, don't say anything please please *please?*"

The pink pony nodded as Luna withdrew her hoof.

“Ohhh! I get it! You’re here incognito!” Pinky Pie said loudly.

“Shh!” Luna hissed. Pinky Pie’s eyes widened, and she nodded.

“Oh! Right! Sorry... What is your name, new pony I have never met before and is not in any way Princess Luna?” Pinky Pie asked Luna. Very, very loudly, to the point multiple eyes were on them both.

I wonder if I could just crush my own head with my magic right now, she thought to herself as she slowly looked up, bringing her eyes to chest level at the very least.

“Um... Selene,” she said. Pinky Pie laughed and jumped out of the barrel, hugging and tackling Luna in the same moment. “OOF!”

“Welcome to Ponyville Selene! This is going to be great!” Pinky Pie said loudly. “I’m Pinky Pie, pleased to meet you!”

“Um... Yes... You too,” Luna said as Pinky Pie gave Luna the biggest, most obvious wink in the universe. The pink pony got up and off Luna, allowing the Moon Princess to get to her hooves as well. Not a moment before doing so, however, and Pinky Pie already had a hoof on her shoulder and was dragging her off.

“Come on! I have to throw you a big welcome to Ponyville Party!”

“I-I’m not going to be staying that long,” Luna protested. “I-I don’t need a party!”

Pinky Pie stopped, and turned her head very slowly to stare at Luna. Luna could swear her hair became a little less poofy.

“You don’t?” She asked. Luna coughed, feeling very uncomfortable.

“Ah... Well... Not right away, perhaps you could simply show me around the town, perhaps your home?” Luna quickly suggested. Pinky Pie’s hair returned to full poofiness and she smiled cheerfully.

"Works for me! Come on!" Pinky Pie said, cheerfully bouncing along. Luna followed at a slower pace.

What have I got myself into?

- - - - -

"Well! What do you think?" Pinky Pie asked cheerfully as she grinned in the center of her home. Luna looked around, noting just how... *Pink* the place was.

She could blend in and attack like a pink cobra, she thought to herself.

"You have a lovely home," Luna said with a smile. Pinky Pie laughed and bounced over to the kitchen.

"Sit down! I'll make us some cupcakes!" She said cheerfully. Luna sat down on a couch, and looked around. Before the couch sat a contraption that Luna first mistook for a microwave, but a moment's thought reminded her of the proper term.

A television set, she thought. *It uses an electron gun to project images onto a florescent screen*. She trotted up to it, and examined it. Sundance did not own a television set. She watched it with Hoyden when she was over at his home, but hadn't gotten one for herself. Luna hadn't asked why. She was busy coming to grips with everything else she was being confronted with.

This must be the on switch, she thought, and pressed the button. The screen came to life with a high pitched hummed, and soon images and sound came forth. Luna sat back on the couch, and began to watch as an older colt walked into a home to a song played on a piano. He smiled at the camera as he went to the closet and changed out of his suit.

*"It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood,
A beautiful day for a neighbor.
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?..."*

He sang the song cheerfully and Luna became enthralled.

"Yes, I would like to be your neighbor," she said softly.

"Hello Neighbor. How are you doing today?" The colt asked.

"Good," Luna said. Something about the colt was very trustworthy, despite only seeing him on a screen.

"I'm glad. It was very rainy today outside, so my suit got wet. When it's raining, it can be very frightening. All that thunder and lightning," the colt said. *"A friend of mine once showed me a scary movie with the lights off and a storm going on outside. That was really scary."*

So hypnotic... Why can't I look away...? Luna thought. *I just so want to be this colt's neighbor...*

"It's all right to be scared though. Sometimes it can even be fun, a sharp little bit of excitement. Kind of like a roller coaster," the colt continued.

"Other times though, the scaring can go a bit too far... As Lady Elaine Fairchilde will learn in the Neighborhood of Make Believe. Would you like to go see it?"

"Oh yes, I would," Luna said.

"Here comes the Trolley to..."

The sound fell and soon the TV was mute. Luna blinked and looked around.

"Huh? Why did that happen?" She asked aloud. She wiggled her bottom, before feeling some plastic. "Hm?"

Luna moved off the couch and looked down down at a black plastic rectangle buried between the cushions. She pulled it out and studied the buttons.

This is some kind of control mechanism... I must have made the sound drop, she thought. She scowled as she looked at the remote--The only buttons with labels had numbers. She sat back on the couch and shrugged.

The heart of science is in experimentation, she reminded herself, and hit a random button.

“COME ON DOWN!” Bellowed a voice, and Luna eeped and fell off the couch. *“To honest Carlyle’s Used Wagon Emporium! We’ve got carriages, we’ve got wagons, we’ve got cabs, coaches, phaetons, troikas, drays, chariots, and after-market used CIDOMOS!”* An image of a brightly painted cart appeared, where a pony was strapped in with a smile. This smile turned into fear as the wheels on the cart popped off and fell back, taking him with it. The loud announcer leaped into frame and spread his hooves to try and hide the disaster behind him.

“Yes! Cidomos! Extra cheap with low mileage! Your family will love them!” He said quickly. Luna made a face. She hit the button again.

“AHA! Gentlecolts! You will always remember this as the day you almost caught Captain Sethisto-!”

Luna hit the button again. *Come on, where was it...?*

“Here on the summit of Mount. De Laurentiis, the young Lavan spawn crawl out of the lava to take their first breaths...”

Fascinating, but not right, Luna thought. She hit the remote control again, trying to determine the precise input to use. *Hm... Perhaps I should just keep hitting this one. It seems to increase the number on the channel indicator. I’ll reach the right channel eventually.*

And so Luna did, scanning through the channels. She lingered for a few moments on various programs that seemed interesting, but the simple joy and kindness of the colt in the jacket and tie compelled her to continue.

By everything I hold dear, she has a lot of channels! Luna thought. She hit the button again, but nothing happened. “Huh?” She hit more buttons. The channel refused to change.

“Hmph,” Luna grunted, and set the remote down. She looked up at the program. Apparently she had just come to the start of it, which had the title of “Cupcakes”.

“Hm... Well, how bad could this be?” Luna shrugged, and settled in to watch.

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“All right! These are going to be great cupcakes!” Pinky Pie said aloud as she put the finishing touches on the cake. She then hummed and rubbed her chin.

“I feel like I’m forgetting something though...” She grinned and, in defiance of the laws of science, snapped her hoof. “Of course! The Princess! I forgot to ask her what kind of cupcakes she likes!” She took a cupcake pan in one hoof, and the knife in the other. “Maybe she’d like to help!”

After all, the poor Princess looked like she was incredibly stressed. No need to add to it with a *surprise* party. Just a nice introductory party, a Pinky Pie classic.

She entered the living room and saw Luna watching TV. She grinned.

Well, maybe just a little surprise, she decided.

- - - - -

Luna’s hoof was pressed to her mouth, though whether it was to keep her from screaming or throwing up she didn’t know.

Who made this?! What sick, twisted monster would do such a thing?! She had tried to summon the will to turn off the television set but like a trainwreck Luna found herself unable to turn away from the gruesome atrocity taking place before her eyes.

It... it’s not even a good plot, her mind fiercely argued. *A pink pony invites her friend over for a party... Just so she can gut her, dismember her and turn her into cupcakes? That’s ridiculous!*

“Hey, Princess! I forgot something I need from you!” Pinky Pie called.

“Oh? What?”

Luna slowly turned her head.

Pinkie Pie stood back on her hind legs. Her bushy hair blocked out the light from the window nearby, casting Luna in shadow. Her wide eyes and wide grin suggested mischief and madness tied together in one bright pink package. Her front hooves slowly rose like the blade of a guillotine, and in the sunlight they shined. In one hoof, glinting like her smile, a long cruel knife ascended, ready to plunge down into Luna's wildly beating heart.

And in the other was a well used cupcake pan, with red splotches all over it.

"Who's ready to make dessert?"

Chapter 5-2

Ponyville Romance Novels

Applejack trotted up to a tree absolutely laden with apples. With a confident smile, she turned around, lifted her rear up, and snapped her legs into the trunk as hard as she could. She then set herself down on all four hooves to catch the resulting rain of fruit.

“AH!”

“What the-?!”

THUD!

Applejack groaned and looked over her shoulder. She blinked in disbelief.

“Uh... Princess Luna?”

Luna groaned and rubbed the back of her head. She looked over at Applejack with a flush to her cheeks.

“Ah... Hello Miss Applejack,” she said. Applejack narrowed her eyes.

“Princess... What are ya’ll doin’ in my apple tree?”

“Sorry... I wasn’t aware it was yours,” Luna said. “I was just... Ah...” She coughed. “Resting.”

“I can see why... You look exhausted!” Applejack said. “Ah, ya mind gettin’ off me?”

“Oh! Oh yes, sorry,” Luna said as she got off Applejack and onto her hooves. Applejack got back up as well and blew some mussed hair out of her eyes.

“Well, come on now, I’ll take you to the farmhouse,” Applejack said. Luna looked at the scattered apples around them and smiled.

“Ah... Why don’t I help you with all these?”

“Now Your Majesty, there ain’t no need for that,” Applejack said as she began to pick apples up and toss them into her baskets. “Ah’m perfectly capable of handling this little job on my own.”

“Er, but I knocked you down,” Luna said. “So it’s my responsibility.”

Applejack sighed. “Oh... All right Your Majesty. Two sets of hooves are better than...” Applejack blinked and looked down at her sides. All the apples were now securely in her baskets. She looked over at Luna, who was floating the ones that didn’t fit on either side of her flanks with telekinesis. She smiled and gave an equine shrug.

“When in Rome?”

“Right,” Applejack said. She gave her a little smile and turned to head for the silo. Luna followed.

Luna found herself enjoying the smell of the apple grove and the vast fields. She imagined what it would look like at night with swarms of fireflies dancing through the branches, and smiled as this thought further restored her sense of peace.

On the bright side, she hadn’t hidden under a desk... Pretty much only because the only desk she’d seen in Pinkie Pie’s home was probably on it’s way to Low Earth Orbit by now. Along with large portions of the wall and the TV. Pinkie Pie was all right though, she could sense it.

I will have to apologize and make things right... Luna thought. She started at a flash of something pink, but found her heart rate lowering when it oinked.

As soon as I stop feeling terrified of anything pink...

- - - - -

After depositing their burdens into the storehouse, they trotted off to the barn where Applejack began to hitch herself up to a wagon.

“Ah’ve got a few more trees to take care of,” Applejack said. “The wagon’ll make it go faster. You can have some apple juice in the kitchen in the house.”

“Are you sure you don’t require any help?” Luna asked. Applejack rose her head to say something, but stopped when she saw Luna’s sincere expression. She looked to the side.

“Well... Ah suppose you can help me a little... If ah really need it.” She turned to her and smiled. “Just have a drink ready for me when ah get back, all right?”

“Not a problem!” Luna said with a smile. Applejack smiled back, and trotted off back to the orchard. Luna was about to head off to the farmhouse, when she saw a splash of color out of the corner of her eye. She turned to look at it, and noticed it seemed to be the corner of a book stashed underneath a chest of tools.

That’s odd, Luna thought to herself. What is a book doing in a barn? She used her telekinesis to gently lift the chest up. She then summoned the book to her and caught it with her hoof. She lowered the chest back down and looked at the cover.

“*Twinkle?*” She read the title aloud. The novel cover seemed to indicate it involved a romance of some sort, with a mare and a colt together in a dramatic pose with an apple held between them. Curiosity fully awakened, Luna opened the novel and began to read.

“Oh my beloved Sunny Muffins, our love can never be!” Shining Sparkle Mane said as the golden sun made his perfectly perfect skin shine in the warm loving sun. A warmth I felt just as strong in my hooves and between my flanks, though as I was the virginal filly I couldn’t bear to let him know.

“But Shining Sparkle Mane, I love you! You are so beautiful!” I gushed over his long flowing locks, his piercing gorgeous and fantastic eyes, his sinewy muscles, his perfectly carved flanks... I forced my eyes upward.

“What you see before you... What you call beautiful... is the skin of a monster!” Shining Sparkle Mane sobbed, manly teared rushing down his shining cheeks in rivulets I desperately wanted to lick up. My plain legs covered in their plain, ordinary skin fidgeted under the gaze of my ordinary green-brown eyes. The wind began to blow and make my regular brown hair wave in the breeze. Shining Sparkle Mane’s beautiful ebon locks waved, far more beautifully than mine ever could.

In that moment I realized three things.

One, Shining Sparkle Mane was a vampire.

Two, he wanted to kill me.

And three, I was hopelessly, madly, completely, unbelievably in love with him.

... Four, I wanted him to mount me and ride me like a long, hard trail of marshmallows.

And there was one thing with an apple I’d always wanted to try...

- - - - -

Applejack sighed and wiped her brow with her hoof after dumping the large load of apples into her cellar. She smiled and stretched.

“Mmhmm! Time for a break...” She took one apple off the cart and trotted towards the farmhouse. When she passed the barn, however, she caught sight of Luna.

“Princess?”

“Ah!” Luna spun around, her cheeks bright red. “H-Hello Applejack.”

Applejack frowned. “Somethin’ wrong?”

“Uh... No! No, nothing’s wrong, nothing’s amiss... How are you?” Luna asked. Applejack narrowed her eyes.

“Fine... What are ya doin’ in the barn?” Applejack asked.

“Nothing... Just... Admiring your... Toolbox,” she said. Applejack stared. Luna stared back. Applejack sighed and shrugged.

“Ah well... I’m just going to have a little snack,” she said. “You want one?”

“Ah, n-no! No, not right now, I’m fine! Just fine!” Luna said quickly. Applejack shrugged.

“Suit yerself...”

Applejack licked her lips and raised her apple to her mouth. She rubbed it against her chest and brought it up to her mouth. She noticed there was a significant amount of moisture clinging to this apple, and smiled as she licked the water off.

“Mmm...” She then bit into it, the explosion of flavor rushing over her tongue in the most exquisite fashion imaginable. She chewed it, once, twice, three times, before slowly swallowing it. The simple joy of eating something she had grown with her own hooves went down her throat to warm her insides, and she licked up the apple juice that had dribbled onto her chin.

“Oh... My...” There was a thud. Applejack looked up to see Luna crumpled on the floor of the barn in a dead faint. Applejack gaped.

“Landsake! Princess Luna! PRINCESS LUNA! You all right?!” She held Luna’s head up and fanned her hoof in her face. She then noticed something underneath the unconscious moon goddess.

“Huh?” Applejack picked up the object... And paled when she saw the title of the book.

“Applejack? What’s wrong, ah heard--Princess Luna?” Big Mac’s voice boomed behind her. Applejack’s freckled cheeks turned bright red as Big Mac cantered over. “What happened?”

“Ah... Ah don’t rightly know,” Applejack said, guiltily hiding the book behind her. “Let’s get her in the house and some water!”

“Right!” Big Mac said. He picked Luna up, slung her over his back, and trotted off. Applejack took the book back out, and cringed.

“Lousy Rarity, pushin’ this stuff on me...” She then scowled. “Ah wondered why those colts were actin’ so funny at lunch yesterday...”

Chapter 5-3

Ponyville Hospital

“Oh... Ooh... Where am I?” Luna moaned as she opened her eyes. She stood up on all fours and looked around in confusion. “A forest?”

Indeed, she seemed to be in a lush, tranquil forest. A pair of butterflies flew by. Luna smiled and watched them as they settled on the sparkling mane of...

Big Mac.

“Luna,” Big Mac said as his skin sparkled brilliantly in the sunlight. “Ah’m afraid ah’ve got the skin of a monster.”

“Uh... No, no it isn’t,” Luna said.

“That would be *my* skin,” cackled Nightmare Moon as she emerged, her blue mane flowing like magical fire. She smirked at Big Mac as Luna looked between them in confusion. “You know what that means.”

“Eeyup,” Big Mac nodded.

“What? What does it mean?” Luna asked quickly. Her eyes widened as Big Mac and Nightmare Moon held up apples, the latter with a perverted grin.

“NO! NOOOOOOO!”

She turned and galloped for her life, right up into a door standing in midair.

“OOF!” She opened it, and slammed the door shut behind her. She held her body against it, panting for breath as she tried to catch it. She looked around. She was apparently in a dark bedroom. A dark, familiar bed room.

“Mmmm... Oh my...”

“Huh?!” Luna gasped. She looked over at the bed. The lights switched on. In the bed was a relaxed looking Celestia and...

“Abacus! How could you?!” Luna cried. Her abacus was dressed in a red smoking jacket and had a cigarette stuck between two beads.

“Let’s face it Luna, you were gone sooo long,” Celestia said with a smile as she hugged Abacus. “But we’ll invite you to the wedding. We intend to do a lot of multiplication anyway~.” Celestia then smiled at her.

“Now you’re a Parasprite.”

“Prrip?” Luna asked as she buzzed around.

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

“Luna! Hey, Luna? LUNA!”

She was being shaken, and from this Luna opened her eyes. Big Mac and Applejack were both standing over her, looking concerned.

“Nice toolchest,” she mumbled as she regained her bearings. Big Mac stared in confusion while Applejack blushed.

“What is she talking about?”

“Nothin’! Nothing! Anyway, hope you don’t mind we brought ya to the clinic,” Applejack said. Luna blinked and sat up, looking around. It was a simple but clean and well stocked clinic. A nurse pony trotted up to them, with a clipboard held in her hoof. She looked over at them with a smile.

“Miss Selene, you check out just fine,” the nurse pony said. Applejack nodded.

“All right, that’s good, what about Pinkie Pie?” Applejack asked.

“Pinkie Pie?” Luna asked. The nurse trotted over to a bed surrounded by curtains. Applejack, Big Mac and Luna followed, the last feeling incredible trepidation.

Oh no... No, she was just fine when I left...! I was sure of it!

Sure, she'd fled at supersonic speeds but Pinkie Pie hadn't been caught up in anything... Had she?

The curtain was drawn aside, and Pinkie Pie lied in the bed covered in bandages and cast, her once life filled eyes now dull.

"She doesn't have long, I'm so sorry," the nurse said.

"No! Nooo! She was so young and pink!" Sobbed Applejack.

"There there Applejack," Big Mac said, patting his sister on the shoulder. "She's lived a fulfilling life."

Twilight Sparkle blew her nose loudly as that purple-maned pony sobbed.

"Oh why, oh whyyy?" Rarity (right, that was her name) cried out. Twilight sniffled.

"I'm so sorry Pinkie Pie... I'll never forget you!"

"Nooooo!" Rainbow Dash, the greatest flyer in Equestria, wrapped her hooves around Pinkie Pie and shook her. "Nooo! You can't leave me alone! What about..." She sobbed dramatically but wiped her eyes, "what about our future?! Our dreams and hopes?! Our... Our child!"

"Wait, you have a child?" Twilight asked.

"We were going to adopt, you got a problem with that?!" Rainbow Dash snarled. Twilight raised her hooves.

"N-No! No! No problem!"

"We're not gay if that's what you're thinking! I'M NOT GAY! I'LL DO EVERY COLT IN EQUESTRIA IF I HAVE TO PROVE IT!"

"Rainbow Dash, sugah, yer makin' her die faster," Applejack pointed out.

"Ah, Miss Selene? Miss Selene?" The nurse inquired.

“Don’t mind her none, she does this a lot,” Applejack said.

“Eeyup,” Big Mac contributed.

“Ah! Uh... Yes? Is Pinkie Pie all right?” Luna asked, shaken out of her daydream. The nurse pony pulled the curtain aside, revealing a Pinkie Pie who was rapidly eating through a pie. She grinned a great big cherry red smile at them.

“Just fine! Thanks for asking Selene!” She wiped her face off... With her tongue.

“So, just what in tarnation happened Pinkie Pie? Yer house looks like a twister hit it!” Applejack said. Pinkie glanced at Luna. Luna glanced back. Pinkie Pie smiled.

“I put too much baking soda into my cup cakes. And they exploded.”

“Baking soda, huh?” Applejack asked flatly. Pinkie Pie nodded.

“Yep! Baking soda.”

“Ah, actually-” Luna began, but Pinkie Pie interrupted.

“Baking. *Soda*,” Pinkie Pie insisted. At the looks from Applejack and Big Mac, Luna slowly nodded.

“Right...”

“Anyway, if I’m all right can I do please? I have so much party preparation to do!” Pinkie Pie insisted happily. The nurse pony sighed and nodded.

“Sure... Just please try not to use that much baking soda again, will you?”

“Of course!” Pinkie Pie said happily. “Hey Applejack, I could really use your help baking today, since my house kind of blew up.”

Applejack looked suspiciously between Pinkie Pie and Luna, but slowly nodded. “Sure...”

“Great! I’ll see you there!” Pinkie Pie said. “Better get a headstart!”

Applejack nodded. She looked over at Luna. “Ah’ll see ya around, Miss Selene,” she said. Luna nodded.

“Of course... Goodbye.”

Applejack and her brother trotted off. Big Mac wore a little smile that he shared with Luna, who blushed furiously. Once they were gone, and the nurse pony had headed off, Pinkie Pie jumped out of the bed.

“Well, I need to go!” Pinkie Pie said cheerfully.

“Ah, wait Pinkie Pie!” Luna said. “I just wanted to say I’m very, *very* sorry about what happened.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it,” Pinkie Pie said cheerfully. “Mr. and Mrs. Cake are insured against acts of goddesses, and they’ve wanted to expand their shop anyway, so it all works out right?”

Luna nodded. “R-Right...”

“Besides, everypony’s seen that stupid movie and been acting a little weird around me,” Pinkie Pie said dismissively, a little too quickly. “It’s nothing new.”

Luna smiled and nuzzled Pinkie Pie’s cheek. The pink pony started a bit, a little surprised.

“I know what it is to be regarded... Differently after something out of your control happens,” Luna said. Pinkie Pie blinked a few times, then cocked her head in thought. Luna blinked back.

“... You know... When I was Nightmare Moon?” Luna pressed.

“Ohhh! Oh! Right!” Pinkie Pie nodded. Luna stared in no small amount of incredulity.

“You forgot that?”

“No, I just didn’t think about it,” Pinkie Pie said. “But you know, if you’re still hung up over it-”

“Wha? I’m not hung up over it! I’m not! I’m not thinking about it or worried over it and she doesn’t appear in my dreams!” Luna said quickly.

It was Pinkie Pie’s turn to stare. Luna sighed and kicked her hooves against the ground.

“Okay... Maybe I still need some closure,” she admitted.

“Oh! Okay! In that case, why don’t you go talk to Rainbow Dash now?” Pinkie Pie suggested. “She should be home at this time, you can go see her and talk or whatever else you need to do!”

Luna smiled at her. “Thank you Pinkie Pie. Can you tell me where I could find her?”

“Simple! That cloud house up there,” Pinkie Pie said, pointing her hoof at the structure above. Luna frowned.

“Um...”

“What’s the matter?” Pinkie Pie asked.

“I’m try to keep my identity secret,” Luna murmured, “remember?”

“Oh... Well then, I have just the thing to get you up there!” Pinkie Pie said cheerfully.

“Oh? What?” Luna asked.

- - - - -

A few minutes later, a brightly colored contraption, now powered by two ponies, ascended into the sky and flew on for the cloud house above.

“WHEEEE!” Pinkie Pie laughed as she pedalled furiously. “This is even better with two ponies!”

Smiling brightly, Luna had to agree. “Yes!”

Chapter 5-4

Ponyville Couldball

The cloud castle of Rainbow Dash was well designed, Luna noted, as she and Pinkie Pie approached on the latter's pedal copter. Perfectly suited for stability in high winds and just enough magic to sustain it by directing the cloud formation around it.

"Okay, here we go!" Pinkie Pie said with a grin.

Luna observed their course towards the castle and frowned.

"Ah, Pinkie Pie, I do not believe that's the best place for a landing," she pointed out. "Or that this is a good speed for a landing either."

"Landing?" Pinkie Pie asked. Luna blinked.

"Yes, returning safely to a solid surface."

"Oh! Right! Um... I've never actually managed one of those." Pinkie Pie grinned. "First time for everything, right?"

- - - - -

Rainbow Dash was working at her desk, frowning thoughtfully at the stack of magically treated paperwork that sat on the sculpted cloud.

"Geez..." Dash huffed and leaned forward. She scowled at the stack, wishing it to vanish before her. "I can't believe this... How could I have gotten so behind?"

A loud crash echoed through her home, and vibrations shook through the entire structure. Rainbow Dash was startled for a moment before she sighed with a wry smile on her face.

“Pinkie Pie,” she said dryly. She flew down and saw her pink friend struggling to get out of a cloud she’d become stuck in, headfirst, up to her belly. A midnight blue pony in glasses was trying to yank her out. “Huh? Who are you?”

“Mmph?” The pony asked, just as she got Pinkie Pie unstuck. “Ah...”

“Oh! Thank you Princess Lu-MMPH!” The midnight blue pony covered Pinkie Pie’s mouth with her hoof and gave Rainbow Dash a nervous smile.

“She meant Selene! Miss Selene! I’m very pleased to meet you and-Eep!” She withdrew her hoof quickly with a shocked expression as Pinkie Pie licked her lips thoughtfully.

“Oh! Yes! Miss Selene! That’s what I meant, not Princess Luna because I got confused between mythologies or something! Anyway, she’s here to-”

“You’re standing on the clouds,” Rainbow Dash said. “Did you get Twilight to cast that spell on you again?”

“... Yes! Yes she did!” Pinkie Pie said cheerfully. “Both of us!”

“... So why does a pegasus need that spell?” Rainbow Dash asked with a scowl. Selene blinked and looked over her shoulders while Pinkie Pie’s smile grew a tad strained.

- - - - -

Oh no... How did this happen? Luna thought frantically. My illusion spell breaking down, this is ridiculous! It can only be disabled by hard... Impacts... She shot a brief glare at Pinkie Pie, who shrugged apologetically. Luna mentally sighed.

Well, at least the whole thing wasn’t disabled, otherwise this might become awkward, she thought.

“Well she wanted to take a break and maybe act like an Earth pony who happens to require such a spell but doesn’t because *maybe* the spell would make her walk on ceilings made of clouds and that would be sooo cool I’d do it all the time-!”

"Pinkie Pie merely misspoke!" Luna said quickly. "So! Um... Rainbow Dash, I am very pleased to meet you." Luna offered a formal, polite bow to Rainbow Dash.

"Because of course you two have never met before in your lives!" Pinkie Pie said cheerfully. Luna gained a grin that seemed more like a grimace.

"Not. Helping," she muttered through her teeth. Pinkie Pie emulated her.

"Sorry."

Rainbow Dash watched all of this in confusion, before sighing and giving up with a smile.

"Pinkie Pie, you and your friend are just so *random!*" The pegasus shook her head in some disbelief. "So, you wanna come up for some snacks?"

"Sure!" Pinkie Pie said cheerfully. "Don't we Miss Selene?"

Luna slowly nodded, giving up. "Of course..."

Up they went to the upper levels of Rainbow Dash's castle. It was not as disorganized as the wild maned pegasus's appearance let on and Luna found herself approving of Dash's sense of order. All three were soon perched on cloud pillows, and Pinkie Pie eagerly began to stuff her face with snacks from Dash's fridge. Rainbow Dash therefore was able to focus entirely upon Luna, an experience the moon princess found a bit anxiety causing.

"So Selene... Where are you from?" Rainbow asked.

"Ah... Canterlot," Luna replied. "I work for Princess Luna in the library."

"The library huh?" Rainbow Dash asked with raised brows. "What kind of work do you do there?"

"Uh... Library work," Luna said. Her eyes wandered as Dash's probing gaze became more intense. She spotted a desk, and a stack of familiar forms.

"Oh...! Weather Control reports! You're a weather pony," Luna surmised.

Rainbow Dash lit up happily. "Oh yeah! I'm the Weather Officer for Ponyville!" Pride was evident in her voice and Luna smiled in some relief.

"You seem to have a lot of those forms," Luna indicated.

"Yeah well, with all the craziness of the last few weeks I've fallen behind," Rainbow Dash said. Luna got up, flew over to the desk, and began to sort through them. "Hey! What are you doing?" She asked, flying over next to her.

Luna read through all the forms and accompanying weather logs, did some math, and quickly filled them all out.

Really, this is all so inefficient... I need to do something about the filing system for these when I get back to the palace, Luna thought. Bureaucracy, bah. Too many self-interested ponies trying to get more money from more forms...

"There," Luna said cheerfully. "It's all done."

"No way," Rainbow Dash said with wide eyes. She flipped through the forms herself and blinked several times. She looked back at Luna, impressed.

"That's amazing..."

"I do a lot of work for Princess Luna," Luna said modestly. She found it odd how easily it was to refer to herself in that way, as though speaking about someone else.

"You seem to know an awful lot about paperwork, what do you do for Princess Luna in the library?" Rainbow Dash asked again. Luna nervously tapped her hooves together.

"Filing," she said. Rainbow Dash, satisfied for the moment, smiled and the tension between them dropped.

"So, Selene... What do you do for fun?" She asked with a provocative raise of her brows. Luna blinked and thought about it.

“... I have an abacus?” She offered.

Pinkie Pie snorted in laughter, but covered it up by eating a large cake Dash had stashed away in the fridge. Rainbow Dash stared for several moments, before she shook her head.

“All right... We NEED to take you to a party.”

“YIPPEE!” Pinkie Pie said. “I’ve got one planned already!”

“Good! In the meantime though, I think I can get her a little loosened up before the big bash,” Rainbow Dash said slyly. Luna gulped at the unfamiliar look in the blue pegasus’s eyes.

“Wh-What do you mean?” Luna asked.

“Aw, but Dash, I wanna loosen her up!” Pinkie Pie said with a pout.

“It can’t be all at once, we need to build up to it,” Dash said. She smirked almost wickedly, and Luna felt like running away again. “And I know just the way...”

- - - - -

Rainbow Dash took Pinkie Pie and Luna off to a nearby cloud formation. Several other pegasi were congregated around it, and Luna was able to see them kicking and bouncing a small white ball around.

“Ooh! What’s this, what’s this?” Pinkie Pie asked eagerly as she was deposited down on the edge of the cloud by Luna and Dash. The rainbow-maned pegasus smirked as she looked over at Luna.

“Cloudball... All pegasi play it. It’s a good way to develop your reflexes for quick maneuvers.” Rainbow grinned. “And it’s fun!”

“Um...”

“You have played it, right?” Rainbow Dash asked. Luna gulped and nodded.

“S-Sure! I’m good at it... I think,” she said.

“Great!” Rainbow looked over at one of the other pegasi. “Hey! Firefly! I got us a new player!”

The turquoise pegasus flew over to them with a smile. “Oh, that’s great! Twister’s still down with a busted wing.”

“This is Selene,” Rainbow said. Luna smiled nervously.

“H-Hello.”

“Hello Selene. So, where are you strongest?” Firefly asked.

“Uh...” Luna looked behind the two pegasi. Pinkie Pie rubbed her chin thoughtfully, then made a series of hoof gestures.

“My wings? No! My... Uh...” Luna tilted her head as Rainbow and Firefly stared. “Brain? Maybe my hooves... My... Trampoline?”

Pinkie Pie facehoofed as Rainbow Dash and Firefly looked even more confused. Luna grinned weakly.

“I’m fine wherever!” She said.

“Well good,” Firefly said. “We’re up against a tough team and we’ll need you to be a good forward, all right?”

“Forward?” Rainbow Dash squawked. Firefly smiled and raised a hoof consolingly.

“It’s just for the first round, give her a try. She looks like a strong flyer. Besides, you keep saying you want more practice in your reflexes-Defense is good for that!”

“I suppose,” Rainbow Dash said. She looked over at Luna with a smile. “But you’d better pull your weight!”

“I-I will, really!” Luna said.

“Yay! Go Dashie, go Selene!” Pinkie Pie cheered.

“Now, you take your position forward over there, and get ready,” Firefly said. Luna nodded and flew over to the area Firefly indicated with her hoof. She saw the other players taking positions several meters above the cloud, and on either side of the cloud were formations in the shape of posts. The cloud ball was a perfect sphere, held together with magic. Luna frowned and quickly tried to analyze the game.

Okay... There's a ball, goals, several players... Aha! It's hoofball, in three dimensions. Luna nodded to herself. *This should be easy...*

A pony in referee paraphernalia blew a whistle, and kicked the ball out into the air between Luna and the opposing team's forward. The forward moved like lightning, snapping up the ball with a blow from his head. Luna, shocked, turned and gave chase as the pegasus colt flew with his teammates flying in a protective wedge around him.

Hmmm... How to prevent him from scoring...? Seeing some of the other pegasi jostling each other as they maneuvered around to block the shot, Luna smiled. *Of course! A simple intercept maneuver...*

Luna bent her wings back and gained speed, closing with the pegasus. He weaved back and forth, trying to shake her. He swung himself around as his teammates provided an opening for a shot, and pulled his legs back.

And... Now!

BOOM!

Luna shot forward with a burst of magical power, breaking the sound barrier and snatching the ball away. She looped back up and shot for the opposing team's goal, but the loud whistle of the referee made her come to a hover. The referee pony flew up to her, his eyes wide and open above his whistle.

“Er... Is there a problem, sir?” Luna asked politely. The referee pointed back behind her. Luna looked over her shoulders.

The ponies that had been around her while she had gone supersonic were all lying on the cloud field below in varying states of shock, consciousness, and pain. Rainbow Dash herself was hanging upside down from a goalpost by her tail, staring at Luna with a wide open mouth.

“Yay! Woo hoo! Go Selene, yeah!” Pinkie Pie cheered.

Luna bowed her head. *Oh dear...*

- - - - -

“What the hay was that?”

“Well, um....”

“What the *hay* was that?”

“You see, I er-”

“*What* the *hay* was *that*?” Rainbow Dash repeated a third time, but with far more emphasis. Luna looked down at the cloud as the rest of the players observed from a distance just far away enough to be polite, but not so far they couldn’t hear.

“I... Um... Overdid it. Just a bit,” Luna admitted. Rainbow Dash scowled.

“How the hay did you *do* that?! What kind of pegasus could do that... Sort of...” Rainbow Dash blinked and stared intently at Luna. Luna fidgeted, felt the urge to panic... Saw Pinkie Pie waving nearby. With a sigh, she lifted her glasses up and dropped them very quickly, and at such an angle that the other ponies watching wouldn’t see her do it.

Rainbow Dash gasped and held up a hoof to her mouth.

“Y-You’re-!”

“Yes,” Luna said dully.

“And you’re-”

“Uh huh,” Luna said, again dully.

“So you’re really-?”

“Yes,” Luna sighed. “I can leave if you want me to-”

“*Leave?!?*” Rainbow Dash asked in complete and utter disbelief. Luna stared back with no small amount of it in her expression.

“W-Well, um, yes... I’ll have to leave, won’t I? I mean, it wouldn’t be fair-”

“Princess, look-” Rainbow Dash tried, but Luna waved her hooves and hissed.

“Selene! *Selene!*”

“Right, Selene,” Rainbow Dash said apologetically. “I just think, you know, since you like to play this game you could stay.” The rainbow pegasus grinned. “You know? Hang out... Because I still think you need to loosen up.”

“Loosen up?” Luna asked. Dash nodded. Luna frowned. “How much?”

“... Um... Maybe just a little?” Dash asked. “Like... Do you have a pet?”

“... I have Abacus,” Luna said. Dash stared again and sighed.

“Uh... Your... Selene,” Dash amended as Luna glared. “Do you want the truth?”

“Yes,” Luna said.

“Sure?”

“Absolutely.”

“Posi-?”

“Rainbow Dash, *tell me the truth please,*” Luna said through gritted teeth.

Dash coughed.

“... You’re wound up tighter than a spring under a hydra.”

“... Oh,” Luna said quietly. She shook her head. “I still can’t play. Not without serious handicaps.”

“I think you could do something else for us,” Rainbow Dash said, licking her lips. Luna blinked.

“Ah?”

- - - - -

The game had started with the arrival of the opposing team and numerous spectators. On various clouds surrounding the field, they watched and cheered as the two teams clashed in fantastic aerial battle for the ball.

But they also spared attention to the sidelines.

Specifically, the cheerleaders.

“RAH RAH SIS BOOM BAH! SHOOT THE BALL THROUGH THE GOALS AND SCORE ANOTHER... HOORAH!” Pinkie Pie cried, dancing wildly with a broad grin on her face.

“Ah... GO TEAM!” Luna cheered along with her. “PERFORM WELL! WATCH YOUR DEFENSE! CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN YOUR ABOVE AVERAGE SCORING PERCENTAGE!”

Chapter 5-5

Ponyville Animals

The cloudball game ended in a fantastic victory for the home team, and Rainbow Dash was carried up and away by numerous pegasi. Pinkie Pie hitched a ride with them, and waved to Luna as they headed down with this parting announcement:

“Don’t worry! The party will be ready soon and we’ll find you when it’s time so go have fun for a while!”

“Certainly!” Luna said with a smile, waving her hoof back. Already she felt significantly better about the visit to Ponyville. The Cloudball game had raised her spirits as she had proven both useful and had recovered after a grievous faux pas.

So perhaps things are finally turning around, she thought to herself happily. She turned on the surface of the cloud court to fly down herself, and descended rapidly. She wasn’t sure where to go next but she was quite certain that now she had some confidence about her, she could handle anything that might happen to cross her path.

BONK.

“OOF!” Luna cried.

“Ow!” Cried a soft voice. Luna shook her head free of stars and zeroed in on the pony she had run into. It was a pale yellow pegasus with a long pink mane, who even now had wide eyes.

“Oh, I’m terribly sorry-” they both began, then stopped.

“No, it was my fault-” they said in unison.

"I should have been looking where I was-" they tried again. Luna stared at the yellow pegasus, and the yellow pegasus stared back. The pink mane one laughed softly, then covered her mouth in horror.

"Oh dear, I'm so sorry, I wasn't laughing at running into you."

"No, no, I completely understand!" Luna said, waving her hooves around. "It's quite all right! I should be apologizing, really."

"No, I-" the pegasus tried, but unwilling to get into another disagreement Luna quickly changed the subject with what was left of her flagging confidence.

"What is your name?" The pegasus looked extremely familiar but Luna was unsure how.

"Um... Er... Fl-Fluttershy," Fluttershy admitted.

Luna very nearly stopped hovering in mid-air at that, but recovered very quickly.

"Are you all right?" Fluttershy asked gently.

"Oh yes, perfectly fine," Luna said. *How do I keep running into them?* She thought to herself. Granted, Ponyville was a small town but it almost seemed as though a higher power were directing her movements.

Luna was too much the scientist to say that powers greater than herself or her sister could not exist, but felt that the execution of their wills would be far more subtle. It's what she would do if she had the power.

She looked at Fluttershy's face, and for a moment had a flash of memory: A dark night in a large room filled with ponies, and a maniacal laugh echoing off the walls. Her mane reaching out to brush against the face of this very pegasus, a perversion of an affectionate touch...

I had the power...

"Excuse me... Um... Miss Selene?" Fluttershy asked. Luna shook her head rapidly and looked over at Fluttershy.

“Ahem... Ah... Yes? Wait... How do you know my name?” She asked. Fluttershy looked down bashfully.

“Um, I was at the game, I heard Pinkie Pie call your name a few times,” she admitted softly.

“I didn’t see you,” Luna said.

“Ah... Um... I’m usually not very... Vocal,” Fluttershy said in a very soft voice. Luna couldn’t help a small smile at that.

“Um... Neither am I, usually,” Luna admitted.

The two ponies looked off at each other’s shoulders for a time. Luna then cleared her throat.

“Ah...”

“Well,” Fluttershy said. “Um... I-I feel terrible about running into you, so... So would you like to come down for lunch? If you feel like it, that is.”

Luna noted the height of the sun overhead and felt a very mortal hunger in her stomach. She smiled and nodded gratefully.

“Yes, I would love to. Thank you very much.”

- - - - -

Fluttershy’s cottage was large, a bit larger than Luna had been expecting. Given it’s location near the Everfree Forest, Luna imagined it had been quite the bargain. Even now she could sense the chaotic and unpredictable currents of life within it, and she stood a moment outside the door of the home to take it all in.

It’s truly fascinating, she thought to herself. *Through my senses it feels like a great wibbly wobbly... Timey Wimey... Bubble of... Stuff.* Luna grimaced. *Note to self, find a better metaphor.*

“Oh... Um... You like the forest too?” Fluttershy asked, her voice calling from the kitchen of the cottage. Luna looked over at the yellow pegasus as she worked on their lunch and smiled.

“Yes, I do. It’s... Interesting. In a good way,” Luna clarified. She came into the cottage and looked around. “Your home is very lovely, by the way,” she complimented.

“Oh! Thank you very much,” Fluttershy said with a mild blush on her cheeks. “I’m very fond of it myself...”

Luna looked around carefully. Bird perches, mouse holes, and numerous smaller beds were all over the house. Given her rapport with the monster in the Everfree Forest that night, it wasn’t hard to guess her cutie mark talent had to do with animals.

One animal in particular was resting in a bed, munching on a carrot. It was a white rabbit, who stared at Luna with beady black eyes, with the same expression a king might wear at a filthy peasant entering his throne room.

“Oh, I hope you don’t mind rabbits. That’s Angel, my companion,” Fluttershy said as she prepared some tea. Luna shook her head and smiled.

“I don’t mind at all. He’s adorable,” Luna said. Angel stood up on his hindlegs and held his arms up, as though flexing his muscles for approval. Luna giggled softly as the rabbit struck a number of other amusing poses like a stallion showing off.

“Aren’t you the clever one?” Luna asked. She bent her head down for a closer look. Angel in turn looked back at her, his eyes narrowing. He tapped his foot a few times... Before his eyes shot open wide and he zipped off over to Fluttershy who was setting up the teapot. “Ah?!”

“Oh? What is it Angel?” Fluttershy asked with a smile. The rabbit pantomined something, while wildly gesticulating towards Luna. “Hm? Something to do with Miss Selene?”

Luna broke out into a cold sweat, and carefully readjusted her glasses. While Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash had been accepting of the reveal of

her true identity, she didn't know how Fluttershy might react. She seemed so delicate and deferential...

"Oh no! Princess Luna, your royal majesty, I have dishonored you by treating you like anypony!" Fluttershy cried, now dressed in a white chiton. She held up a chalice of hemlock.

"There is only one means of making up for such disrespect--I must die!" Fluttershy declared dramatically. She drank it all down in one big gulp.

"Nonono! No! You need not go to such lengths, Fluttershy! It's what I wanted! Really!" Luna cried desperately. Fluttershy coughed.

"Oh... Um... Sorry about that..."

She burped, quite loudly, and covered her mouth with a blush.

"And that... Oh dear."

THUD.

Luna shook herself free from her daydream, and telekinetically grabbed Angel. She yanked the rabbit back and shoved him under a table behind her. At Fluttershy's surprised look, Luna thought quickly.

"Oh my! How fast he moves!" Luna said in a high pitched voice.

"He was also glowing," Fluttershy said in some confusion. "He's never done that before."

"Well isn't that wonderful, why don't we have lunch so we can discuss things that are not remotely about such wonderful things!" Luna said, ushering Fluttershy over to the table.

"Well certainly, if you want..." Fluttershy said as she set the table. Luna turned around, trotting to the table she'd shoved Angel under. She retrieved him and held him up to her face. The rabbit looked absolutely furious as he struggled in mid-air, shooting glares of death at her.

“Please, please, I assure you I mean you and your mistress no harm *please* don’t tell her *please*,” Luna begged in a whisper. Angel stopped struggling, scratched his chin, and very slowly nodded. Luna sighed in relief and set him down.

“Thank you so *much*,” Luna said gratefully. She turned and trotted over to help Fluttershy finish setting the table. Angel watched her go, then ran to the window where a few bird friends of Fluttershy were currently nesting. He got their attention by beating a stick on the sill, and pantomimed the situation within. The birds nodded, and flew off as one.

Angel, for his part, stuck his carrot back into his mouth like a cigar and grinned.

- - - - -

Luna laughed. “Ahahaha! Oh... Oh you poor dear, you *kept* one?”

“Well, um, in my defense they were really, really cute,” Fluttershy said with a blush and a glance to the side.

“Cute, yes, that’s what everypony said. Oh, the damage reports,” Luna said shaking her head. “Still, it did show just how ill prepared the disaster response is in Equestria.”

“Yes, I agree,” Fluttershy said seriously. “Why, if it hadn’t been for Pinkie Pie Ponyville would have been completely eaten. I’m very glad Princess Luna organized those reforms.”

“Well, it wasn’t all... Um... Her,” Luna said with a blush. Fluttershy nodded.

“Yes, but she’s been very active behind the scenes ever since she was cured from being Nightmare Moon. I think she’s done a lot of good things.”

Luna smiled brightly, and sipped some tea. Fluttershy hummed thoughtfully.

“However, her support efforts at centralization might lead to excessive bureaucracy and less freedom for ponies overall, while her efforts to make

the provinces more independent might divide our efforts when it comes to foreign policy.”

“Urk!” Luna choked on her tea. Fluttershy started.

“Oh dear... Are you all right?”

“Oh! Oh, I’m fine! Fine!” Luna said quickly. Fluttershy flushed.

“I’m terribly sorry if my political opinions upset you. It can be a sore point with some ponies.”

“No! No, that’s fine! Have whatever opinion you like, really,” Luna said. Fluttershy frowned.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes! Very sure, really,” Luna said. “I mean, um, I would love to hear your criticisms of Princess Luna’s policies.”

“Oh... You would?” Fluttershy asked. Luna nodded.

“Yes, really.”

“Sure?”

Luna felt herself growing a bit annoyed. “Yes! Of course!”

“Well...” Fluttershy took a deep breath. “She seems to favor the executive branch to an almost imperialistic level when it comes to provincial governors and would rather they be in complete control when it comes to crises, her proposals for labor reform are not well thought out, she sees nothing wrong with reintroducing the study of combat weather education to public schools while not addressing long standing problems with the system, she wishes to end cutie mark affirmative action and her foreign policy recommendations are all far too isolationist.”

Fluttershy took a deep breath.

“And... Um... You disagree with all that?” Luna asked tentatively, while wondering how the hay so much policy had been linked to her. *Celestia, you’re the public one! Why is MY name the one coming up so much?!*

“Well... Um... Yes... Some of it,” Fluttershy mumbled into her tea.

“Oh.”

“I’m so sorry, I should have given you the change to respond. If you have differing opinions, I am happy to discuss them if you wish,” Fluttershy said.

Fortunately at that moment, a walnut slammed into the side of Luna’s head.

“Urk!” Luna grunted. Fluttershy gasped and looked up at the roof.

“Angel!” She said. The white rabbit darted to another position and threw another walnut, beaming Luna in the head again.

“Ow!” The incognito moon princess ducked behind the couch as more missiles flew her way coming from multiple animals. “Ow ow ow ouch!”

“No, please, stop!” Fluttershy said. Fluttershy ducked behind the couch as the hail of projectiles continued. She looked at Luna apologetically. “I’m so sorry, I’ve never seen them act this way, really!”

“It’s all right, really! It’s not your fault,” Luna said quickly. She peeked out from behind the couch. There was a veritable army of cute, cuddly creatures, all armed to the teeth with projectiles and all looking determined. “I’m the one they’re after, I can just slip out.”

“No!” Fluttershy said firmly. She looked over the couch. “Now please, everyone, why are you doing this? What possible reason is there to harm our guest? I-I’m very disappointed in all of you!”

All of the animals stared, then as one they all looked down at the floor. Some even started crying. Fluttershy waved her hooves with a smile.

“Now now, you shouldn’t feel so bad... I’m sure it’s all just a little misunderstanding and..” Fluttershy frowned. “Where is Angel?”

SMASH! The door to the cottage came down as a large contraption barreled through. Luna stared in some disbelief. It appeared to be a cobble together monstrosity, but the main part was something that resembled an automated chariot that ran on large gears, propelling the craft via flexible metallic treads. Mounted atop it was something that resembled a turtle's shell made of steel, ringed by a kind of railing. In the center of the machine's shell was a large spinning barrel made of metal that had been tilted to face forward. Extending from the nose of the machine was a large battering ram shaped almost like the hammer of Sliepner in the ancient Northern Pony tales. Angel rode the battering ram itself, wearing a round green helmet with a carrot between his grinning teeth.

In one paw, he held up a book: *Basic Mechanics for Those with Fingers*.

In the other... A baseball.

"Oh no... No...!" Luna felt panic start to ride up in her chest. A panic that only increased as numerous birds appeared, all armed with baseballs. The machine started up and the inner part began to spin rapidly.

And as one, they all threw their baseballs into the contraption and sent them flying at Luna.

"EEEEEEEEEP!"

Chapter 5-6

Ponyville Shock Therapy

They were all around her, covering her, pressing in on her from all sides. Luna felt like she couldn't breathe.

"Miss Selene? Miss Selene?!"

Those horrible, pain causing spheres... She was drowning in them...

"Miss Selene! Please, wake up!"

She found herself going back to a very small part of her mind. Her increased awareness, what might be called a side effect of her divine nature, shrank down, down, down to a tiny point, filled with the objects that tormented her so.

Baseballs... Why did it have to be Baseballs...?

- - - - -

Fluttershy felt extremely divided between the course of action she should take. On one hoof, her guest was apparently going into some sort of catatonic shock.

On the other, her companion Angel was loading his tank up with more baseballs.

"Angel!" She cried. "You need to stop this right now. Miss Selene is already horribly traumatized, can't you see that?"

Angel shot Fluttershy a glare she knew quite well, and translated as, "Of COURSE I can see that, that was the point, make me a sandwich mare."

“You haven’t explained *why* you did this terrible thing... And until you do, there will be... Be no sandwiches!” Fluttershy said, stomping her hoof in an expression of her outrage. Angel rolled his black beady eyes, before turning to the rest of the animal army and issuing orders in his high pitched rabbit speech. The assorted critters quickly moved, arranging their weapons into words on the floor of the cottage. Fluttershy frowned as she read the words formed by spoons, sticks, nuts, and knives.

“Selene is actually...”

“HEY FLUTTERSHYYYYYY!” Bellowed a familiar, high pitched voice. The animal army fled in fear out the windows, doors, holes and gaps in the cottage. Angel stared in disbelief, before bringing his paw to his face.

Applebloom stuck her head in through a window, looking concerned.

“Hey Fluttershy! You’ll never believe what happened! A whole flock a’ critters came and stole mah baseballs and some... Machinery...” Applebloom blinked.

“Ah, yes...” Fluttershy said, looking around at the catatonic Selene in a pile of baseballs, and Angel glaring death on top of his tank. “It’s... Um... A bit hard to explain...”

“Princess Luna!” Applebloom blurted out. She looked back and forth and her young eyes widened. “OH MAH STARS! Your rabbit killed Princess Luna *with mah baseballs!*”

“Wh-What?! Princess Luna?!” Fluttershy gasped. Applebloom jumped through the window and sped over to Luna, taking her hoof into her own.

“Speak to me, Princess! Are you okay?! Speak to me!”

“Oh my goodness, oh my goodness, I’m so sorry Princess Luna!” Fluttershy said, taking Luna’s other hoof and patting it. “Please, say something!”

“... B... B... B...”

“Yes? What is it?” Fluttershy asked.

“... B... B... B-Baseball...” Luna whispered, trembling. Fluttershy looked around at the baseballs surrounding her, and blinked in realization.

“Oh dear... She’s so traumatized by these baseballs she’s gone into a form of shock.” She glared at Angel. “How could you?”

Angel once again shot her a look she could read: “I was trying to save you, stupid mare, now make me a sandwich.”

“Princess Luna would never hurt nopony you... You crazy, vindictive varmint!” Applebloom growled. Angel bit his carrot cigar and scowled, unrepentant.

“You’ve been very... Very... Naughty, Angel!” Fluttershy managed. “Now you will go straight to your hutch and stay there until I-I say so! ... If it wouldn’t be too much trouble?” Fluttershy added at the end in a whisper.

Angel pointed to the kitchen. Fluttershy sighed.

“All right... *One* sandwich...”

Angel hopped over to Fluttershy as she trotted into the kitchen, ignoring Applebloom’s glare.

“Just please no-” Fluttershy began, but Angel hopped up and smacked her rump. “Eep!” Fluttershy sighed again and went to work on a carrot and peanut butter sandwich, while Angel marched to his tank and sat, imperious as a conqueror.

“Ya know what Princess Luna? Ah think there’s something downright peculiar about this here relationship,” Applebloom muttered to Luna.

“B-Baseballs...”

- - - - -

Once Angel had retired with his tank and sandwich, Fluttershy and Applebloom had gathered up the baseballs into a bag and moved them just out of sight. Fluttershy then gave Luna some tea, which she drank with shaky hooves.

“Oh... Th-Thank you,” Luna managed as she sipped the tea.

“I’m so terribly sorry, Princess Luna, your Majesty. I had no idea it was you,” Fluttershy said. She paused. “Though in hindsight it was really very obvious... Sorry...”

“It’s all right,” Luna said with a forced smile, “I-I am somewhat surprised it has worked so well as a disguise...”

“Ah’m sorry too! Those are mah baseballs,” Applebloom said, oblivious to Luna’s flinch.

“I’m very sorry to ask, but why would you have so many?” Fluttershy asked. Applebloom smiled brightly.

“Princess Luna caught ‘em fer me at the baseball games we went to! Every single one of ‘em!”

“Well, it seems a little... If you’ll forgive me, your majesty, strange that you’re so scared of baseballs,” Fluttershy said. Luna kept twitching.

“Y-Yes... It is... “ She sighed. “I-I-I don’t even know how that... Weakness,” she said with extreme distaste, “could have come to be known to your rabbit.”

“It may have been my fault, Your Majesty, I do try to keep up with a lot of things... And Angel is extremely intelligent,” Fluttershy said.

“Ah’ll say! That tank o’ his was neat!” Applebloom gushed. “How’d it look when it was shootin’ baseballs?”

“Ah... Er... If you could...” Luna tried.

“Was it like a big ol’ avalanche of baseballs? Was it a storm of baseballs? Were the baseballs just heaved out like you was hocking a loogie?”

“Um, Applebloom,” Fluttershy coughed. At Applebloom’s confusion, Fluttershy pointed at Luna. the princess was beginning to look like she might slip into catatonic shock again.

“Oh... Oops... Sorry, yer Majesty,” Applebloom apologized.

“No... It’s fine... It’s just...” Luna sighed. “It’s humiliating... If I’m not messing things up, I’m reduced to a... A whimpering *foal* by... By...!”

“Baseballs?” Applebloom asked. Luna nodded.

“Y-Yes...”

“Well, um, if you’d like, perhaps we could try to help you,” Fluttershy suggested. “I’ve had to calm ponies and animals before with therapy... Maybe I could do something for you? If that would be all right with you.”

“Well... I know only a little about psychology,” Luna admitted. “But I suppose-”

“That’s a *great* idea!” Applebloom cried. She smiled up at the two older ponies. “When do we start? Ah wanna help!”

“Well, of course you can help Applebloom,” Fluttershy said with a smile. “I’m sure we’ll be able to help you in no time, Princess.”

“Thank you,” Luna said gratefully, as Applebloom began to chant about a “Royal Psychologist” cutie mark.

- - - - -

“Now, let us begin with your foalhood,” Fluttershy said, sitting in her comfy chair next to her couch. Luna was lying on it, looking up at the ceiling while Applebloom stood anxiously next to Fluttershy’s chair. The filly had a book of psychology out in front of her which Fluttershy possessed.

“My foalhood?” Luna asked.

“Yes,” Fluttershy said. “Most problems of psychology have their roots in foalhood.”

“Well... Um... My sister and I were born from the emergence of the universe, we were raised by our parents but then lost them when they went away,” Luna said.

“Went away?” Fluttershy asked.

“Ooh, abandonment issues!” Applebloom said, flipping to the appropriate page. She nodded. “Awright, continue!”

“Well... Celestia did much of my raising, as the older sister,” Luna said. “However, we began to drift apart as we took on the responsibilities of princesses and goddesses. Forming the orientation of the stars, managing the sun, the different tasks we took on were very... Different,” Luna said. Fluttershy nodded as Applebloom flipped through the pages.

“I see. Were there bad differences, or good differences?”

“Maybe it’s all a case o’ multiple personalities!” Applebloom suggested. Fluttershy and Luna both looked over at her.

“What?” Luna asked.

“Well, maybe it’s like, two personalities and how they clash!” Applebloom said.

“Um, Applebloom, that’s a problem when it’s within the same pony,” Fluttershy said gently. Applebloom pouted.

“Oh.”

“Please continue, Princess Luna,” Fluttershy said. Luna sighed and looked back up at the ceiling.

“Well, when the ponies slept during the night, I felt... Underappreciated. During the day was when all the work and play and praise was done... There was almost nothing done at night.”

“What did you do?” Fluttershy asked as Applebloom continued to skim the book.

“Well, I tried to be productive in other ways. I buried myself in understanding the universe we managed and passing that knowledge onto the ponies. I used the movements of the planets and other worlds in the heavens as inspiration for government, law, even philosophy,” Luna said. “Order and discipline and education were the things I pushed, to perhaps be appreciated even during the day.”

“So, maybe it’s this big schizophrenic thing,” Applebloom said.

“A what?” Fluttershy and Luna asked.

“Well, order and strange patterns are associated with it,” Applebloom said. “You ever hear voices that weren’t there?”

“... Yes,” Luna admitted, “but I-”

“AHA! Maybe your problems are acute schizophrenia, with a side o’ depression!” Applebloom said triumphantly. “Now, how much medication does that require?”

“Applebloom, I *hear* the wishes ponies make on *stars*,” Luna said flatly. “They are not *there* with me, but they are *real*.”

““Patient may defend his or her delusions due to persecution complex,”” Applebloom read.

“I don’t feel persecuted!” Luna said.

“Um, Applebloom, if you would,” Fluttershy tried.

““And may be linked to feelings of im-po-tence in interpersonal relationships, includin’ sexual,”” Applebloom read. She looked up. “What does that mean anyway?”

Luna and Fluttershy both blushed. The book glowed and then flew off back to the bookshelf.

“M-Maybe diagnosis from the book can wait until we’re done talking with her?” Fluttershy suggested. Applebloom pouted.

“Awww... All right.”

- - - - -

Some time later, Luna, Fluttershy and Applebloom were sitting on a comfortable rug in a circle. Fluttershy smiled.

“Now, we’re going to try a little role play,” Fluttershy said. “I will be a baseball, and I will-”

“What do ah get t’ be?” Applebloom asked eagerly. Fluttershy blinked.

“Um, well-”

“Can ah be Princess Celestia? Can I can I can I?” Applebloom asked. Fluttershy worried her lower lip.

“Well, um, I’m not sure...”

“She is... Um... Well, an issue,” Luna admitted uncomfortably. Fluttershy nodded.

“All right... Applebloom, you can be Princess Celestia.”

“Yay!” Applebloom cheered. She ran into the closet, rummaged about, and came back out with a plastic crown upon her head, fake wings, and a carrot serving as a horn. “Ready! How do ah look?”

Luna covered her mouth with her hoof as she laughed. “The spitting image of a Royal Goddess!”

“Hee! Ah am Princess Celestia, Mistress o’ the Dawn!” Applebloom strutted about proudly. “Worship me ‘n despair!”

Luna looked over at Fluttershy. “Ah, Fluttershy, if I may ask-”

“J-Just some leftovers from my modeling career,” Fluttershy said quickly. She cleared her throat. “Now then... I am a baseball, and-”

“But you don’t look like a baseball,” Applebloom protested. “Ah dressed up for this! You should too!”

“But... Well... I’m not sure how useful it would be,” Fluttershy said, “Considering how you reacted before.”

“Ah... er... Well, since it is just Fluttershy in a costume,” Luna said carefully, “maybe it wouldn’t hurt?”

“There, see?” Applebloom said. “Now go on!”

Fluttershy nodded, went into the closet, and soon came out in a sheet of white cloth with red stitches going over and through it. She smiled weakly.

“Th-This work?” She asked. Luna felt very perturbed by the outfit, but managed a nod.

“Y-Yes...”

“Aw right! Let’s begin!” Applebloom cheered. “Ahem... Princess Luna-”

“She would call me Luna. Just Luna,” Luna said. Applebloom nodded.

“Aw right. Luna, mah dear sister! Let us go raise the sun and moon and make ‘n eclipse or somethin! Wouldn’t that be great?” Applebloom asked.

Imagining Celestia talking in such a rustic manner made Luna and Fluttershy giggle. Applebloom then looked over at Fluttershy and gasped.

“Oh no! It is a baseball!” Applebloom gasped.

“Don’t worry Princess Luna, I-I will not harm you,” Fluttershy said.

“But ya did harm her anyway,” Applebloom said. “Ah should banish you and that rabbit to the moon!”

“It... Isn’t that a bit extreme? I’m just a baseball... Who is talking, even though baseballs cannot talk or move or... Um...” Fluttershy mumbled.

Luna found herself laughing harder. Applebloom smiled cheerfully.

“Hey! Ah think it’s working!”

“Are you feeling better, Princess Luna?” Fluttershy asked.

“Oh... Oh yes... Heeheehee...” Luna laughed, wiping her eyes. “Sorry...”

“Nothing to be sorry for,” Fluttershy said with a smile. “Laughter is the best medicine, is it not?”

“So, is she cured?” Applebloom asked.

At that moment, a baseball came flying right at Luna’s head. It smacked into her forehead and sent her down, her glasses snapped in twain. Applebloom and Fluttershy looked over at Angel, smirking with a carrot in his mouth and his helmet on his head.

“Angel!” Fluttershy gasped.

“You consarnit good for nothing-!” Applebloom began, but abruptly stopped when the sunlight stopped coming through the windows. Both she and Fluttershy slowly turned to look at the only remaining source of light in the cottage-The aura of the enraged Princess Luna.

The furniture began to float and spin around the cottage, anything not nailed down joining the storm. Luna’s eyes glowed like pure white fire, and her wings and horn spread her aura around her, causing an Aurora Borealis effect.

“You...”

Lightning crackled around her every hoof step as she advanced on Angel. To the rabbit’s credit, he stood his ground, calmly reaching into his sack and producing another baseball.

“YOU...”

A baseball that quite suddenly burst into flames and flew out through the window.

“YOUUUUUU...”

Angel slowly looked at the hole in the window glass, then back to the approaching, wrath filled goddess.

“YOU. BROKE. MY. GLASSES,” Luna snarled as the windows around them shattered.

- - - - -

“Oh my goodness... I’m so sorry,” Luna said for about the fifth time as she found another one of Fluttershy’s personal items in the mess.

“N-No, it’s quite all right Your Majesty,” Fluttershy said, also for about the fifth time. “I-I understand that, well... We all lose our tempers sometimes, don’t we?”

“Yes. Yes we do,” Luna murmured.

Applebloom was looking back and forth between the two with awe, with anxious glances back at her flanks to see if anything had changed. Once again she was disappointed with seeing her unmarked flank, and returned to staring at Luna and Fluttershy in amazement.

“That... Was incredible...” Applebloom said. “When ah grow up, can ah work fer you, Princess Luna?”

“Certainly Applebloom, if you wish,” Luna said with a smile.

“YIPPEE!” Applebloom cheered. Luna smiled indulgently, the young filly’s good spirit almost dangerous contagious. She looked at Fluttershy.

“I do apologize for all of this, again... But I wonder if I could trouble you for some lunch?”

“Oh, not at all, I was just about to do the same thing,” Fluttershy said. She made to move to the kitchen, but stopped.

“Ah? Angel?”

The little rabbit, carrot cigar forgotten, was furiously working at the oven with lightning speed to prepare a meal of vegetable stew, bread, and salad. Fluttershy blinked, then smiled.

“Oh... Thank you very much Angel, this is very kind of you,” Fluttershy said. “But I really must-”

“Now Fluttershy, relax,” Luna said calmly. “You already made him lunch, it’s only fair he returns the favor.” She eyed the white rabbit. “Isn’t it?”

Angel spared the Princess a single, frantic nod, before returning to his duties.

Chapter 5-7

Ponyville

Cutie Mark Crusaders

“HEY APPLEBLOOM! HEEYYYYYY!”

The cry of a young pony’s voice caused Applebloom to brighten up. She slammed her hooves down around her empty lunch plate and grinned.

“Scootaloo! Sweetie Belle! AH’M IN HERE!” Applebloom shouted. “COME ON IN!”

Luna looked over at Fluttershy. Fluttershy looked back over at Luna.

“Er... How many ponies know you’re here?” Fluttershy asked.

“Seven... Hopefully,” Luna said as she summoned the broken pieces of her glasses and quickly repaired them with a spell. She placed them back over her eyes as an orange pegasus filly and a light purple unicorn filly entered the cottage. Applebloom grinned as the two fillies grinned back.

“Hey Fluttershy! Hey Applebloom! You didn’t forget our quest today did you?” Sweetie Belle asked.

“Yeah! We need to get to it and... Oh! Hello!” Scootaloo said cheerfully to Luna. “Who are you?”

“Girls, this is... Ah... Miss Selene,” Applebloom said, after seeing Luna had her glasses back on.

“She’s a dear friend of mine who is visiting Ponyville from Canterlot,” Fluttershy supplied.

“Wow! You’re friends with Fluttershy?” Scootaloo said.

“Have you been friends long?” Sweetie Belle asked eagerly.

"Has she always been so cool?" Scootaloo pressed.

"Ah... Yes. Yes she has," Luna said with a smile. Fluttershy blushed demurely. "We met ah... At the library."

"Yes. Canterlot Library," Fluttershy confirmed. "This is not at all an elaborate deception to conceal anything."

"... No! No, of course not!" Luna said quickly. Both Fluttershy and Luna laughed nervously. Showing more discernment than many might give a young filly credit for, Applebloom cleared her throat.

"Let's tell 'em what we're gonna do today!" Applebloom said as she pranced over to stand with her friends.

"What are you going to do today?" Luna asked curiously.

"We're gonna see if we can get..." Scootaloo paused for dramatic effect, which gave Sweetie Belle and Applebloom time to take deep breaths. Luna noticed Fluttershy and Angel both covering their ears out of the corners of her eyes.

Wha-?

"*ARCHAEOLOGIST CUTIE MARKS!*" All three fillies bellowed. Luna fell over onto the floor.

"Eep!"

"So we're gonna go exploring and dig up buried treasure or somethin'!" Applebloom said.

"Before Pinkie Pie's party tonight!" Scootaloo added.

"Can you come with us, Fluttershy? Please?" Sweetie Pie begged.

"Oh my... Why would you want me to come? I-I'm not really into archaeology," Fluttershy admitted.

“Yeah, but we heard from Rainbow Dash that there’s this big huge ancient palace in the Everfree Woods and we wanna go see it please please *please* can you take us?” Pleaded Scootaloo.

Luna blinked. “The Palace... The Dios?”

“Is that what it’s called?” Scootaloo asked.

Luna closed her eyes. She could see it in her mind’s eye, the sprawling palace that had once been the center of court for all of Equestria. The summer and autumn celebrations, the libraries, the grounds...

“Yes... Yes, that is what it is called,” Luna said.

Fluttershy looked over at Luna, and the Moon Princess glanced back. For a moment, Luna felt incredibly vulnerable under the light yellow pegasus’s gaze, and found it hard to look away. It was as though her blue eyes were able to discern everything about her in a moment.

She shivered slightly.

Fluttershy turned to the Cutie Mark Crusaders and smiled.

“I think Miss Selene would be a better choice. I um... I need to take care of things, maybe party related things,” Fluttershy said.

“What? But you can stare down anything in the forest!” Scootaloo protested. She snorted at Selene. “What’s a librarian gonna do? Read monsters away?”

“Hey! Miss Selene can handle herself just fine!” Applebloom said. She then smiled happily at Luna. “Besides... She knows the way, doesn’t she?”

“... Yes, yes I do,” Luna replied softly. She smiled at Fluttershy, a bit anxiously, before she turned and headed for the door. “If you’d like, I can show you.”

“Ohhh... All right,” Scootaloo pouted. She looked to her fellow Cutie Mark Crusaders. “Cutie Mark Crusaders, AWAY!” They charged through the

door, laughing and giggling. Luna watched them go through, before look back over at Fluttershy.

“Thank you,” she said.

“Don’t mention it,” Fluttershy replied. “Er um, I mean, if you want to that is. I’m not going to stop you from talking about it if I’m not around and I...”

Luna trotted back over to Fluttershy and nuzzled her cheek. “I understand. Thank you,” Luna said gratefully. She turned and headed back out the door, leaving a smiling Fluttershy in her wake.

As well as a heavily relieved Angel.

“There. Now you see I’m not so bad, right?” Fluttershy asked her rabbit. Angel nodded furiously, and wiped his brow. Fluttershy beamed.

“Maybe now you’ll listen to me?” She added. Once again, Angel nodded, but gave her a look that said “I was just looking out for you.”

“I understand completely, but you pushed it a bit too far,” Fluttershy said. “Besides... Just because rabbits smack each other's bottoms doesn’t mean you get to smack mine.”

Angel made several pantomiming gestures. Fluttershy blushed.

“Um... Well, that’s flattering, but not as flattering to a doe rabbit...”

- - - - -

“When you’re, a younger pony, and your flank is very barrre, it feels like the sun will never commme! When your cutie mark’s not therre! So the three of us fight the FIGHT! There is nothing that we FEAR!”

The singing... The singing... By the Stars and Moon and other worlds why won’t they stop SINGING?! Luna thought to herself, her ears and eyes twitching rapidly.

“So we’ll figure out what to do next... Until our cutie marks are herrre!” The three of them belted out cheerfully as they trotted just behind Luna. The

moon goddess was beginning to feel the temptation to just cast a silencing spell around her ears and save herself a headache.

They're so small but they're so LOUD, how do they manage it?! Luna continued to wail silently as the path led into a rocky gully. The sound bounced off the stone walls and Luna's agony increased.

"WE ARE THE CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS! ON A QUEST TO FIND OUT WHO WE ARE!" They happily continued to screech. Luna saw birds and various other critters fleeing ahead of them and she frankly couldn't find it in her heart to blame them.

"AND WE WILL NEVER STOP THE JOURNEYYY! NOT UNTIL WE HAVE OUR CUTIE MARKSSS!" They finished the chorus. Applebloom smiled brightly at the back of Luna's head. "Hey, Miss Selene, ya wanna join in for the next chorus?"

"Ah, no thank you, I'm fine," Luna said with a strained smile. *Oh my ears...*

A low rumble began to fill the forest, and Luna froze. She narrowed her eyes. It felt... Familiar.

"Everyone says we have to wai-"

"Shh!" Luna said. "Quiet!"

"Hey, if you don't like the singing you could just *tell* us-" Scootaloo tried, but Luna shot a sharp look at her.

"Shh!" Luna emphasized. She looked around, then back to the fillies. "Stay here."

"But, but Miss Selene," Applebloom tried.

"Stay. Here," Luna said firmly. She turned and galloped into the trees. Scootaloo scowled after her and looked back at Applebloom.

"She sure is bossy, isn't she?"

“Nothing like Fluttershy,” Sweetie Belle said. “She just stands off and doesn’t say anything!”

“She’s just shy. Once ya get to know her, she’s really nice!” Applebloom protested.

“Maybe... But what’s the idea of her just running off on us?” Sweetie Bell complained.

“She’s probably just checkin’ somethin’ out,” Applebloom said.

- - - - -

Luna trotted deeper into the forest, and looked around carefully. Her eyes narrowed.

I know you’re here... Somewhere...

Something was moving through the trees--Like a gigantic tiger. Luna’s focused sharpened.

No, not a tiger... Two legs only... Something big...

The ground rumbled beneath her hooves in a steady pattern. Boom... Boom... Boom...

Through the trees, the great monster came into view under the shadows of the forest canopy. It’s massive head was long and angular, and filled with teeth like steak knives. It stood on two powerful legs with three clawed toes each. It’s body was black and covered in hard scales, even it’s small clawed forearms.

It’s a Rex... Luna thought to herself. What species? It’s been so long since I perused the castle library on large saurians... Never had any reason to do so before-!

The Rex paused, and sniffed.

“Could have sworn I heard that awful singing... Hope that whatever it is tastes better than it sounds,” it muttered to himself.

Luna grimaced.

Focus Luna.... She cast a spell and neutralized her own scent. She also subtly altered her appearance to blend in better with the trees. The Rex looked in her direction, but did nothing else. It sniffed a few times again before moving on, the ground shaking under it's steps.

Luna sighed in relief in her mind... Before the calling began.

"SELENE! HEY, SELEEEEEENE!" Scootaloo shouted. The Rex stopped, then turned it's head back towards the sound. Luna cringed.

"MISS SELEEEEEENE! WHERE ARE YOU?!" Applebloom yelled.

"ARE YOU OKAYYYYYYYY?!" Sweetie Belle cried.

The Rex began moving towards them. Luna groaned, then spread her wings and flew up in front of the Rex. It stopped and growled.

"Hey! Hey hey hey, over here, over here!" Luna cried. The Rex growled.

"You! Tasty pegasus, COME HERE!"

The beast lunged with it's jaws open to try and catch her. Luna deftly avoided the snapping jaws and flew back around behind the beast. It turned and growled again, it's massive jaws snapping at her like a steel trap the size of a well.

"Grawr!" It bellowed, *"Get back here!"* Luna came to a stop a few meters away from it in front of the gorge wall. She turned and glared at the monster.

Come on, come on....!

"GOT YOU!"

The Rex lunged, massive jaws wide open. Luna waited until the last possible second, and teleported out of the way. She appeared several

meters above the monster as it slammed into the wall hard, it's gin-trap like mouth finding only rocks.

It roared in pain and Luna took the opportunity to fly back to the path, negating her scent through magic the whole way. Coming through the trees, she pranced to a stop where her charges waited.

All three were in the process of taking deep breaths to shout again, and in a fit of panic Luna covered Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo's mouths.

"Applebloom!" She said quickly.

"Mmph!" Responded the other two fillies.

"Miss Selene! Are ya all right?" Applebloom asked.

"Pfft! Where'd you go? What was it?" Scootaloo asked flatly. "And why'd you shut us up?"

"Yeah! You didn't have to do that!" Sweetie Belle protested.

"I had to... Deal with a porcupine," Luna said at last, deciding she didn't want to panic the fillies.

Much staring ensued. Luna coughed.

"It was a very emotionally disturbed porcupine, and I had to counsel him about his trauma regarding ponies. We really should leave so he can adjust to it without further trouble, come along come along!" She pushed the fillies ahead of herself, and let them get a bit of a head start before she followed, scanning behind her for any sign of the Rex.

It was not far enough, however, for her to be deaf to the resulting conversation.

"A *porcupine*? Really?" Scootaloo huffed.

"She is friends with Fluttershy," Sweetie Belle said. "But Fluttershy could've done that in a lot less time!"

“Ah’m sure she did her best... Must have been a really, *really* stubborn porcupine! Maybe we could get porcupine counselor cutie marks!” Applebloom suggested.

“Later, Cutie Mark Crusaders! We’ve got more important things to do!” Scootaloo commanded, and off they went with a nervous Luna following.

- - - - -

The bridge across the chasm to the palace was just as rickety and hazardous as Luna remembered.

“Hold on,” Luna called to the CMCs as Scootaloo tapped a board of the bridge. “I’ll go across first. If I don’t fall, it will be fine for the rest of you.”

“Be careful, Miss Selene!” Applebloom said.

“She’s got wings, I think she’ll be fine,” Scootaloo grumped.

Cautiously, Luna stepped out onto the bridge. She winced a bit at the creaking sound it made, but she continued on. When she at last made it to the other side, she turned around and smile.

“You can all-” She froze when she saw that the Cutie Mark Crusaders were right behind her. They smiled broadly at her. She scowled. “Hang on, I told you to wait-”

“Yeah, but now we’re on the other side just fine!” Scootaloo said cheerfully. “You know what that means!”

“CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS! GO!” They shouted, and charged around Luna to the ruins of the old palace. Luna sighed and looked back at the rickety old bridge. She then looked back at the palace. She took a few steps before a gigantic black, furry hand reached up and wrapped it’s fingers around her.

“Huh?!” Luna cried as she was dragged down into the chasm. She stopped her descent when she came eye level with some... Well, eyes. Very large brown ones, in a large, black furry face. Luna looked down and back up,

and her efficient brain identified the creature: A giant ape, better known as a Kong.

“Ah, hello,” Luna said politely. “Can I help you?”

“You’re not as colorful as the other ones, but you’ll do,” the Kong spoke in a gruff voice. The ape snorted, and leaped to the other side of the chasm. It then slid down to a large outcropping far below covered in grass, and sat down. It set Luna down in front of it, and sat back as though expecting something. Luna scowled.

“Excuse me, but could you kindly please tell me what-OOF!” The ape flicked Luna with one of its fingers, causing her to fall over. The ape then chortled as Luna got back up.

“Heheheheheh...!”

“Now see here, I am-OOF!” Luna was flicked over again, and the ape laughed even harder. Luna got back up and scowled.

“Hahahahahahaha!”

“Stop that you overgrown-ACK!” Luna fell over again, and the ape continued in his hysterics. The monster primate reached out to knock her over again, when she reached out with her hoof and stopped him. The ape stared, surprised that the small pony could have such strength.

“What the...?”

“Now... You will stop this at once or I *will* be upset, understand?” Luna demanded. The ape stared, before glowering and roaring at her.

“GRAWRRRR!” It bellowed. “You can tell me to do anything! I’m a KONG! I RULE this forest, I AM this forest! You’re just a PONY! I WANT SOME FUN!”

Luna made a face and covered her nose.

“Oh dear...! Ugh! Brush your teeth sometime, won’t you?” Luna asked. The ape glared. “Er... If it would be all right with you?”

“You cheeky little-!” The Kong reached out to grab her in both hands. She leaped up to evade him, and flapped her wings to escape. She sighed as the ape beat his chest and shook his fists at her, but decided she would be better tasked looking over the Cutie Mark Crusaders.

“YOU ROTTEN LITTLE PONY! I’LL GET YOU!”

Ignoring the beast’s increasingly distant cries, Luna landed outside the front door of the palace. She found the wagon of supplies just outside. She entered the palace, and looked around for her charges.

It was long, given that the fillies had apparently gone all the way to the other side of the east wing, but it was easy to locate them.

“WOO HOO!” Scootaloo cried as she used her wings to send the chandelier above into a death spiral. “This is awesome! I want one!”

Nearby, Sweetie Belle was trotting around ancient coats of armor, brushing them and examining them with a magnifying glass.

“This armor must be... A bazillion years old,” she recorded diligently in her notepad. She looked over at Luna. “Oh, hey Miss Selene!”

“... Um, where is Applebloom?” Luna asked.

“OKAY SCOOTALOO!” Applebloom bellowed in the next room. “LET ER GO!”

“YEAH!” Scootaloo cried, and with her hooves she used a crystalline knife to slice through the carefully woven, centuries old rope holding the chandelier when it was swung furthest towards the door. The chandelier was let loose, but to Luna’s growing horror it was not being directed at the door--It was directed at the stained glass window above it depicting the passover of Comet Shadowfax thirteen centuries ago.

CRASH!

Or rather, *through* a stained glass window depicting the passover of Comet Shadowfax thirteen centuries ago.

Applebloom came through the door, looking unharmed, dirty, and cheerful. The cheerful part dropped and was replaced with a nervous smile when she saw the horrified look on Luna's face.

"Ah, hey Miss Selene! Sorry about the window, but we needed to bust through the floor tiling!" Applebloom explained. Scootaloo landed, using her wings to brake, with a grin.

"Yeah! There was this big x on the floor and since 'X' usually marks the spot of some treasure, we decided to bust through!"

"The X... The x in the center of the floor... Surrounded by pillars?" Luna asked in a choked voice.

"That's right!" Scootaloo said proudly.

"With a view up through the observatory mirror system?" Luna asked again, sounding like she was trying to keep from crying. Scootaloo frowned.

"Mirrors? Oh yeah, there are mirrors!"

Through the destroyed window, numerous mirrors fell as though raining from the sky, the sounds of them breaking like a small thunderstorm. Luna's jaw dropped as she watched this. Applebloom winced with every smash. Scootaloo winced too.

"Oops... Um... Well... Archaeology, ya gotta break a few eggs to make an omelet, right?"

"You should have let me write all of that stuff down!" Sweetie Belle complained as she came out from the long line of suits of armor. "Now I have to put it all together again!"

"Don't worry, ah brought glue! Ah left it on the wagon!" Applebloom said.

"Oh?" Sweetie Belle asked, turning around. She bumped the suit of armor, which wobbled precariously before it fell. The one next to it fell too, as did the next, and the next, until finally every single suit was reduced to a pile of

brightly painted metal on the floor. Sweetie Belle coughed at the dust this stirred up and looked over at the trembling Luna.

“Um... Oops... Guess we’ll need more glue.”

“Don’t worry none, Miss Selene! We’ll fix all this up, promise!” Applebloom said, placing a comforting hoof on Luna’s forelimb. She heaved a great breath, trying to calm herself.

Calm... Calm... Don’t get angry... It was all an accident... You can fix it all... They didn’t know what they were doing.

“Why are you gettin’ so worked up? Are you all right?” Scootaloo asked, showing some concern. “I mean... If you wanted to do some exploring too, you can!”

... You can’t send them to the sun for this. It’s all fixable. Luna nodded and took some calming breaths.

“No, it’s just that... Archaeology is easier to do if you don’t wreck what you’re trying to study,” she explained calmly.

“It is? But that’s how it always happens in the movies!” Scootaloo protested.

“This isn’t a movie, dummy!” Sweetie Belle said harshly.

“I’m not a dummy, you’re a dummy! You knocked over the suits!”

“You smashed the chandelier, the window and the mirrors!”

“Calm down! Please!” Luna called, as much to herself as to the fillies. “All right? Listen. To. Me.”

The three fillies treated her with undivided attention. Luna smiled and nodded, despite still feeling stressed.

“You need to understand the context of everything to understand if one thing was important or not. For instance...” She looked around, and felt relief when she saw a mural on the wall that had escaped any damage. It

was an old one, and a bit embarrassing for her seeing how it depicted her driving off several Rexes and other monsters from her palace grounds with a lightning storm around her head and fire coming from her wings.

Sure, that's how it happened but it had always struck Luna as egotistical to have such a mural up. Celestia though had insisted she allow it up, and grudgingly Luna had done so.

She pointed her hoof up at it. "For instance, this mural looks like it was held with great importance given how high it was on the wall. The pony who commissioned it didn't want it to be damaged, they wanted it to be in a high place where everypony would look up at it."

"Ooooh," the Cutie Mark Crusaders said.

"And," Luna continued, "thanks to the mirror system in the... That was in the observatory, you could project sun or moonlight through the window to project onto the mural, getting different color effects."

"Wow... You could tell all that just by looking at it?" Sweetie Belle asked.

"Neat!" Scootaloo said.

"That's cool!" Applebloom added.

Luna smiled and nodded. "Yes. And thanks to the fact that you didn't bust it up, you can see it, and appreciate it for what it is and how much effort the ponies who made it put into it."

She turned to look back over at the young fillies. "History is the only way the ponies who made these wonderful things will be remembered. *That* is the core of archaeology..." Luna's eyes dipped to their blank flanks. "And if it is your secret talent, it will be a wonderful one."

Three pairs of shiny eyes looked back at Luna in wonder. Applebloom was the first to break it.

"Aw right! Let's go get our gear!" She turned and galloped off for the front doors, her sister Cutie Mark Crusaders in hot pursuit. Luna smiled as she watched them go, and looked back at the mural.

The wall then *exploded* outward, as a huge roaring monster smashed through it. The Rex that had been stalking them snarled in triumph as it beheld Luna, and made to snap her up into it's jaw.

CRASH!

With a massive crash the great ape Luna had escaped entered the palace as well. It landed on the floor of the palace hall, and bellowed in challenge to the Rex, drumming it's fists over it's chest. The Rex charged the great ape, and the ape grabbed it's jaws. Flexing it's powerful body, the Rex rolled over and sent the ape flying into another wall, smashing a fountain. Unshaken, the ape grabbed a statue off the wall and threw it at the Rex, smacking it in the head.

Luna very, *very* slowly brought her hoof to her glasses. She removed them, and set them down on the floor in a relatively safe place. She then trotted with purpose to the two warring monsters. She cleared her throat.

"Excuse me."

They ignored her, the great ape punching the huge saurian in the chest. The Rex retaliated by trying to bite the primate's hand off, but the primate pulled back just in time.

"Excuse me..."

The ape leaped backward to grab onto the roof with both of his feet hands, and punched the saurian again as it charged.

"EXCUSE ME."

Both combatants ceased their combat, and looked over at Luna, whose eyes were glowing. She trotted up between them both and looked back and forth.

"Now... I have two questions for you two," Luna said in a calm tone. "Just two." She looked up with a glare. "Why are you two fighting?"

The two monsters looked at each other, then back to Luna. The saurian cleared it's throat and spoke first.

"Um, well... I was hungry..."

"He was trying to eat you," the ape replied in a cross tone. "Ponies are fun to play with!"

"All right... Second question: Whose palace did you just smash into?" Luna asked.

The saurian blinked. "The palace of... Ponies?"

The ape scratched his head. "I think it was the Moon Palace... In the old times."

"Yes... And whose palace would that make this?" Luna asked.

"The old Moon princess," the ape answered, smiling as though enjoying the game but impatient to get back to clobbering the Rex. The Rex growled, getting more irritated.

"What is the point of all this? I can just eat you with one bite! And your young!" The Rex snarled.

"You can't do that! I want to play with them!" The ape growled.

"Ahem," Luna cleared her throat. "One last question, for both of you. To ask yourselves." She treated them both to a stern glare, and subtly gestured with her head towards the part of the mural that hadn't been destroyed.

The part with herself as an enraged, avenging goddess.

"What happened to anyone in the ancient days who dared attack the Moon Princess, those under her protection, or the palace itself?" Luna asked.

Both monsters looked over at the mural. They looked back at Luna.

Summoning her magic, she set forth flames from around her wings, lightning to shoot around her head, and her eyes to glow. The two monsters gaped in disbelief as Luna spoke again

“Take your time...”

They still continued to stare, neither of them saying anything. Luna’s scowl deepened.

“... Well?”

“... Um... Princess Celestia?” Asked the Rex.

The entire palace darkened, the only source of light Luna’s enraged form.

“Try again.”

“Um, the Great and Powerful Trixie?” The Kong tried.

“Pinkamania?”

“Primus?”

“Lauren Faust?”

Both tyrannosaur and megaprimate were treated to the rare sight of a deity in wrath beating her head against the wall.

- - - - -

All of the loud banging and crashing and roaring didn’t escape the notice of the Cute Mark Crusaders, outside the palace they may have been. However, it took several minutes for them to gallop back. They burst through the double doors that had marked the entrance to the sanctuary they’d been exploring.

“YAH!”

“HAH!”

“HIYAH!”

Applebloom posed with a trowel, Scootaloo with a shovel, and Sweetie Pie with a flashlight. All three dropped their tools when they saw the state of the grand hall.

“Oh... Oh my... Miss Selene! Miss Selene, are you all right?!” Sweetie Belle cried, galloping over to Luna. She was adjusting her glasses in the middle of the devastation.

“What happened?!” Scootaloo asked.

“You aw right?” Applebloom added.

Luna smiled. “I’m fine... A Rex and a Kong smashed through, fighting in the palace.”

“Seriously?!” All three Cutie Mark Crusaders asked eagerly.

“Weren’t you scared?” Sweetie Belle asked.

“A bit, yes,” Luna said. “I just hid and waited until they left. I’m just glad the three of you weren’t here when they were fighting.”

“I’m not!” Scootaloo pouted. “Seeing a Rex and a Kong fightin’ like that!”

“And now the palace is destroyed! How are we going to do any archaeology now?” Sweetie Belle asked.

“Well,” Luna said carefully. “You can’t just give up after one try, right?”

“No,” Applebloom said. “But if we’d had a camera... We could’ve gotten ‘Nature documentary Cutie Marks!’”

“Maybe we can still get them!” Scootaloo said. “Let’s go check and see if there’s a camera in the wagon!”

Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo took off, but Applebloom lingered. She looked back at Luna.

“... Princess Luna, did a Rex and a Kong really break in here fighting?” She asked.

Luna nodded.

“Yes... I just didn’t want to scare you girls when I saw them before...” She sighed. “But it seems I was worrying over nothing.”

“Nah, it’s okay Princess Luna,” Applebloom said with a bright smile. “Ah know you were just lookin’ out for us.” She looked around curiously. “So... Where are they now?”

Luna just smiled.

- - - - -

“This is all your fault!”

“MY fault?! You’re the one who guessed wrong!”

“YOU GUESSED WRONG TOO!”

Kong and Rex heard something rustling in the grass nearby, and stopped their bickering. A massive white, furry face with black eyes and sharp teeth peered through.

“MEOWWWWW...”

“RUN AWAY!” Both now diminutive monsters yelled, as they fled from the house cat now about three times their size.

A house cat that was caught by a bit of unicorn magic, and pulled away.

“Now Opalescence, you *know* better than to torment poor, small creatures! You’ll muss your coat,” Rarity sniffed. “Come on, it’s time for lunch.”

The two monsters watched the unicorn take the giant cat into her shop, and breathed a sigh of relief.

“How long did she say this would last?” The Kong asked.

“Until we get back to the Everfree Forest,” the Rex said glumly.

“Well then... Looks like it’s up to me to save the day,” the Kong said, punching his fist into his hand.

“Or we could find the kind yellow skinned pony,” the Rex suggested.

“... Or... That, yes,” the Kong grunted.

“Which of us was supposed to be the smart one?”

“Which of us has a jaw I can snap by pulling it in two directions *really hard?*”

The Rex wisely kept his mouth shut.

Chapter 5-8

Ponyville

The Spa

Luna escorted the Cutie Mark Crusaders back to Ponyville, Applebloom to her farm and Scootaloo to Rainbow Dash's cloud castle (which struck Luna as a bit odd but she thought nothing more of it), which left Sweetie Belle. The pale filly was all smiles and her mouth kept flapping the entire way to her home.

"Ooh Mommy's always going on about how I keep ending up in the basement and the room with the water heater and the trash can-I don't really know myself, I guess I just get distracted-OOF!" Sweetie Belle ran into a fence post and rubbed her nose. "Owww..."

"Are you all right?" Luna asked automatically, as at this point the poor filly had run into several obstacles. Sweetie Belle smiled cheerfully.

"I'm fine!"

"Good," Luna said.

"So anyway, Big Sister keeps telling me to not eat butterflies because they're bad for my health but they taste sooo yummy! I don't know why, they just do and..."

"Sweetie Belle! SWEETIE BELLE!" Called a smooth female voice that Luna recognized. She looked over at a nearby fashion shop, where the elegant looking proprietress waved from the door. She had an expertly coiffed mane and tail, both of deep purple, with well kept white fur and warm blue eyes. Sweetie Belle brightened.

"Hi Rarity!" She galloped over to her apparent sister and nuzzled her, an action the pony returned. She looked up at Luna who stood there a bit awkwardly and offered a dazzling smile.

"This is my big sister, Rarity!" Sweetie Belle introduced.

"Hello! Welcome to Ponyville, Miss... Selene was it?"

"Ah, yes. Yes, that's me, how did you know?" Luna asked, self consciously adjusting her glasses.

"Pinky Pie has invited everypony, simply *everypony* to the celebrations and-Oh my goodness, *look!*"

"What? Where?" Luna looked behind herself. Seeing nothing alarming, she turned her gaze back-And very nearly bumped heads with Rarity. "Eep!"

"You're absolutely filthy! Your hair is a mess, your fur hasn't been combed-My dear, you look like a complete and total *wreck!*" Rarity shook her head. "Well, there's nothing for it. You cannot go to the party looking like that!"

"But I-"

"No no, this will not do! Go on Sweetie Belle, mother is expecting you. I must tend to Miss Selene!" Rarity took hold of Luna's hoof and began dragging her off. Luna, alarmed, began flapping her wings but the white furred pony seemed possessed of a far greater strength than her slender form would suggest.

"N-Now hang on a moment! There's really no need-!"

"There is *every* need! And I am more than happy to fulfill it!"

"Goodbye Miss Selene! See you later!" Sweetie Belle said cheerfully.

"Run right home to mother Sweetie Belle, and no eating butterflies!"

"But Sissss...!"

"No buts!" Rarity said sternly as she dragged the helpless Luna away.

"No! Wait! Sweetie Belle! Help!"

- - - - -

“Now then,” Rarity said pleasantly as she dragged Luna into a tall wooden building with some aesthetics of the Orient incorporated into it’s architecture. “This will have to be a short session, but I believe a mare like you won’t need that long.”

“Uh, well, here’s the thing, I’ve never really-” Luna tried, but Rarity interrupted with that same easy grace and authority.

“Nonsense! You don’t have to worry about a thing dear,” Rarity said. “Come along!”

Feeling trapped, Luna sighed and trotted after Rarity into a wide open office that seemed designed to make one feel relaxed with it’s warm temperature, wooden floors, and sky blue and cloud white walls. The white mare signed them in at the front desk, and trotted over to two attractive twin mares-One blue, the other pink. Both of them bowed, and dressed Rarity in a white bathrobe. Rarity batted her eyes at Luna with a warm smile.

“Come along! I assure you, it will be simply marvelous!”

“Well,” Luna looked between the attendants, then found herself shrugging. “All right...”

The attendants moved as one and slipped Luna into a bathrobe with holes for her wings. An approving look from Rarity calmed her down somewhat and the two ponies were escorted into the baths. Luna moved towards the nearest pool, but Rarity waved her hoof.

“No no no, we start with a nice, relaxing table shower!”

“Table shower?” Luna asked with a raised brow.

- - - - -

“AUGH! IT’S COLD! IT’S COLD!”

“Oops! Sorry, it takes a bit to warm up.”

“EEP! Why are you scrubbing *there?!?*”

“Now darling, just relax! They must get *everywhere...*”

“I-I suppose-EEP! HEY!”

“Now now, don’t get so defensive, we are professionals.”

“Well I suppose but-EEEEEP! N-Now just one moment!”

“She’s being very uncooperative, Lotus.”

“I know Aloe. Whatever shall we do?”

“I know... The *Auto-Brush.*”

“... Auto-Brush?”

BZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ!

“AIEE!”

- - - - -

Rarity chuckled as she gracefully trotted out of the shower area. “Come along dear, it wasn’t *that* bad.”

Luna trotted after, wincing and swaying. “Ergh...”

“Now admittedly, it does tug a bit hard the first time... My dear, since when did you last brush your fur anyway?”

“Um...” Luna tried to think.

“No matter! It’s brushed now so you can move to the next part of relaxation!” Rarity said cheerfully. She got onto a low lying table and waved her tail to the one next to her. “Come along!”

“What’s the next part?” Luna asked as she laid down. Aloe was almost immediately by her, and began drumming her hooves over Luna’s back. “Hee?!”

“A relaxing massage! Oh thank you Lotus, mmm... That is just *lovely*,” Rarity practically purred as Lotus’s hooves went over her back. Luna winced as Aloe’s hooves went all over her back and atop her flanks.

“My Miss Selene, you *are* tense,” Aloe observed in a soothing voice.

“Er, well...” *I’m not comfortable with being touched and so I’m magically reinforcing my body*, she thought to herself in a rather sarcastic tone.

“That’s all right,” Aloe said with a smile. “I know just what to use on you.”

“Um... What?” Luna asked. Lotus tossed Aloe a pair of cucumber shaped devices, which she twirled around like a nin-pony might a pair of swords. She smirked and flicked on both devices, which began to vibrate.

“*These* will help you relax,” Aloe said with an almost fiendish glee.

“ACK!” Luna rolled off the table to avoid the back massagers, and jumped up. “I’m getting out of this mad house!”

“No pony can escape our relaxing hooves!” Lotus contributed, hopping up onto her back hooves with another pair of back massagers buzzing away in her forehooves. Rarity blinked and looked between the grinning attendants.

“Ah... Darlings? Aren’t you coming on just a *bit* too strong?”

“HIYAH!”

“YAH!”

“EEP!” Luna jumped up and flapped her wings, deftly avoiding the two attendants. “You ponies are *mad!*”

Lotus jumped over to Aloe, who caught her in her forehooves and thrust up to throw her into the air. Lotus curled into a ball and somersaulted to kick

off the ceiling, back massagers plunging down like knives. Luna dodged with a triumphant smile.

“AHA! You will not find me so easy a foe to-”

BZZ!

She had, unfortunately, forgotten Aloe below.

“HEE! AHAHAHAHA! N-NO, STOP IT, STOP IT AHAHAHAHA!” Luna cackled as she was tickled furiously by first Aloe, and then Lotus. She fell to the table and laughed hysterically under the dual assault.

“HOLD IT!” Rarity said loudly, holding her hooves up high. She glared at Aloe and Lotus, who ceased their attack on the giggling princess. “Clearly, she is rather uncomfortable with the situation. Why don’t you let me handle things from this point, girls?”

“Ah, but Miss Rarity,” Lotus protested, “we are here to pamper you!”

“Be that as it may, Miss Selene is in need of more pampering,” Rarity said gently. “You can attend to me later, allow me to handle her.”

The twins looked disappointed, and a bit resentful, but they obeyed their mistress and departed through the doors. Luna caught her breath on the table and tried to get up.

“Ah... Thank you, I need to-Oof!” Rarity pushed her down with a smile. “Ah, Rarity?”

“Now now, let Mistress Rarity take care of all your problems,” Rarity cooed as she began to massage the bases of her wings. Luna trembled and found her muscles all turning to jelly.

“Oh-Ohhh...” She moaned.

“Oh my, you *do* have a lot of tension here! When was the last time you got a massage?”

“A-A thousand yearssss...!”

“Feels like it!”

- - - - -

Some time later, Luna was walking on air (almost literally) with Rarity to the baths. Aloe and Lotus were now out of sight. Luna kept scanning carefully, keeping her magical senses locked onto them.

“You know Selene, you really are quite the fighter,” Rarity observed. “Far more... Aggressive than I thought.” She raised a graceful eyebrow. Luna flushed and looked aside.

“Ah... Sorry... I’m not very comfortable being... Touched, I suppose.”

“Oh? Why is that?” Rarity asked as she sank into the warm water. She sighed happily and rolled her head on her neck. Luna sank in nearby, trying to keep her distance without looking like she was keeping her distance.

“Um... I suppose I’m not... Good with other ponies socially,” Luna said with a heavy blush. “I don’t um... Do well.” She sighed. “I’m here because I’m not good socially.”

“Oh? What happened?” Rarity asked. Luna sighed.

“I um... I accidentally walked in on my... Uh... Roommate and her...”

“Oh... *Oh!* Oh dear,” Rarity said. She laid a comforting hoof on Luna’s shoulder. “I *completely* understand. That can be very awkward.”

“I don’t know how to go back and face them... And here I feel like I’ve caused so many problems. I mean, I’ve been forgiven for them but...” Luna sighed.

“You feel like you don’t deserve it?” Rarity asked. Luna shrugged.

“... Maybe a little.”

“Dear, you need to realize that forgiveness is a two way street. It involves trust on both sides,” Rarity said. “I’m sure your friend will realize you didn’t

mean to walk in on her, and I'm sure you will realize you didn't cause anything too harmful." Rarity smiled and nuzzled Luna's cheek. "You shouldn't be so hard on yourself."

"You've been in the same situation?" Luna asked.

"Certainly... More times than I would like," Rarity sighed. She smiled. "It didn't always turn out badly though..."

Luna stared at Rarity expectantly. Rarity stared into space, the smile still on her face and a slight blush on her cheeks. Her forelegs came around the moon princess.

"Ah... Rarity?"

"Hm? Yes?" Rarity asked. "Something wrong?"

"You're... Er... Hugging me," Luna said.

"Do you mind?" Rarity asked softly.

"Er... I suppose not?" Luna said, looking to the side.

"Good..." Rarity purred.

Chapter 5-9

Ponyville

Magic of Friendship

Emerging from the spa, Rarity and Luna trotted down the road, both turning more than a few heads as they passed. Luna, being her usual shy self, kept her head low. All this attention made her feel uncomfortable.

She was no stranger to remarks about her beauty-A thousand years ago she had been the subject of a great deal of artwork, just the same as Celestia. Admired, spoken of, even poetry addressed to her in the years before she became Nightmare Moon. It hadn't matched the output directed to Celestia though. The daytime was always the time for art, the time for play, the time for work. Dreams were the domain of the night, which had inspired many a pony in all these areas...

But the work done was during the day. The creative process was the domain of the day...

"Miss Selene, we're almost there," Rarity said with a gentle smile. Luna glanced over at Rarity, and around at her surroundings. In the distance stood a house made out of a tree, with a sign hanging above the door with a candlestick carved into it.

"There?"

"Yes... I'm sure you would like to see Twilight Sparkle. After all," and here Rarity's smile resembled Celestia's after a successful prank,"it *is* why you came here, is it not?"

Luna blinked once, before sighing. She had a smile on her face as well though. "How long?"

"Since I met you," Rarity said. "But as you can see, I have the sense required to not bleat it all over the town. As much as I love dear Pinkie Pie, she is not the most... Subtle of ponies," the white mare explained.

"You weren't exactly subtle yourself," Luna said flatly. Rarity blinked.

"Why whatever do you mean, Miss Selene?" Rarity asked, suddenly the picture of innocence. Luna found herself thinking the shop proprietor missed her calling to be an actress. However, for all her lack of social graces she knew a prankster, and there was a bit of that in Rarity.

"You know very well what I'm talking about," Luna said flatly. Rarity smiled and shrugged.

"What are we talking about, my dear?" She asked, adding a low sensuous tone to her voice. It seemed at just the right modulation to make Luna's cheeks burn bright red, and she resolved to study the phenomena when she wasn't so embarrassed.

"Nevermind," Luna mumbled. Rarity chuckled.

"My apologies, Miss Selene. Please understand I have nothing but the utmost respect for you," she said. "But I saw how desperately you were trying to blend in, and you were doing a somewhat poor job of it. Loosening you up just a bit was my remedy... After all, it did Twilight Sparkle herself a world of good."

"Oh..." Luna smiled. "Of course... You know, you would get along perfectly with my sister."

"Oh really? Have I met her?" Rarity asked with a laugh. Luna laughed a bit herself.

"Oh yes, you have."

"I think I might remember her," Rarity mused. Luna stopped laughing.

"... My dear, is something the matter?" Rarity asked. Luna smiled a bit awkwardly.

"No, nothing at all..."

“Come now dear, you’re acting as though I should know your sister! For the life of me, I can’t figure it out,” Rarity said. She laughed. “Unless of course your sister was Princess Celestia.”

“Ahahahahahahaha! Hahahahah! H-How ridiculous!” Luna laughed, quite loudly and unnaturally. Rarity stared at Luna. Luna stared back.

“Rarity! Rarity, hello!”

Both ponies looked over and saw a familiar purple unicorn trotting up to them with a smile on her face. Luna looked back at Rarity and nervously adjusted her glasses. Rarity’s hair was curling fantastically as her eyes widened, the light of realization shining out.

“Oh... Oh yes... Um... Hello Twilight, this is Miss Selene. She’s a librarian from Canterlot, visiting,” Rarity got out in a high pitched voice.

“Y-Yes! A perfectly normal librarian who is not in any way, shape or form Princess Luna so nopony needs to feel embarrassed for any behavior they may have committed!” Luna babbled rapidly. Twilight blinked a few times and raised an eyebrow.

“Ooo... Kay...?”

Rarity, her hair curling, managed to maintain her dignity with a deep breath.

“Y-Yes, quite... Ah, I should go work on the preparations for the party, right now, and uh, calm myself you can see I’m a royal-*wreck*, yes, a royal wreck! And I simply must get you something decent to wear before the party goodbye!” Rarity turned and galloped off hard, leaving a dust cloud in her wake. Twilight blinked a few more times. Luna shook her head and turned a smile to Twilight.

“So... Would you care for some news from Canterlot, Miss Sparkle? In return, you can make me some tea... If that would be all right with you? A fair trade.”

“Ah... Y-Yes! Yes of course Prin... I mean, *Miss Selene*,” Twilight stuttered.

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Within the treehouse, an oppressive silence reigned over the princess and the librarian. The tea kettle bubbled and boiled happily on the stove, while the two sat on furniture and stared at anything other than each other.

"... Very... Very nice weather," Twilight got out.

"Yes... Yes, it sure is," Luna replied, just as quietly.

Uncomfortable silence... My old friend, Luna thought angrily. Back with Fluttershy, Applebloom and Angel had broken the awkwardness. It was for this reason her wrath had been painless to the small rabbit. Well, physical.

Besides, she liked rabbits.

Come now... If a rabbit can challenge a goddess, then surely you can break the ice on your own this time... Luna took a deep breath.

The tea kettle whistled.

"Oh! The tea is ready!" Twilight said. She got up and trotted over to lift it off the stove with her telekinesis, at a distance well within range of her abilities. She took a while to add sugar. "Do you want anything?"

Luna took a deep breath, and let it out as a sigh.

"Milk and sugar please," She asked. Twilight nodded.

"It's... It's a bit um... I've never heard of anyone putting milk in their tea, Your Majesty."

"It's a bit odd, I know, but I enjoy it," Luna said quietly.

"Oh... Sorry," Twilight said. She brought the tea cups over and moved a pile of books off to the side. "Sorry, I-I don't entertain often, you understand. Last time was a slumber party-My first one, you understand?"

"Yes, I do," Luna said softly. She was finding herself getting angrier with Twilight's behavior.

Fluttershy was more understandable. She had been meek from the first time Luna had met her. But this mare?

“Princess Luna?

“Hm? Oh... Thank you,” Luna said as she accepted her tea. Twilight sat across from her, trembling a bit as she lifted her tea cup to her lips.

“I mean, I had never done it before... I didn’t do a lot of socializing in Canterlot, you understand,” Twilight babbled on. “I was mainly studying under Princess Celestia. Equestrian Magic and Law, History, all sorts of subjects...” Twilight smiled shyly at Luna. “I-I guess you could say I um...”

“... Lived in the library?” Luna asked.

Twilight nodded. “Yes... yes I did.”

“Why don’t you tell me about your studies? What you have learned?” Luna asked. “You do tell my sister all that you have learned, but I would like to learn it from you, first-hoof.”

She gave her a smile, that was far more genuine than she thought it would be. For Twilight Sparkle returned it.

“Well... I’ve learned twenty five different kinds of magic so far. The hardest to learn was transformative magic, having to maintain the mind link is very taxing...”

“Yes it is. I’m afraid the only means to get better at that is constant practice, though I’ve found meditation helps,” Luna explained. “Finding your center is paramount to maintaining control of your magic, as your emotions can very easily affect it.”

“Yes, though I usually unwind with a good book or a bath,” Twilight said. Luna smiled.

“No no, it’s all right. Anything that calms you down is good for magic. The better you get at it, the less time you will need between intense magical usage.” The moon princess had a very good idea then. “Would you like me to teach you some magic I make use of regularly?”

Twilight lit up, any lingering traces of nervousness vanishing. “I-I would love to, Your Majesty! I mean, Miss Selene!”

“All right, let’s go then,” Luna said with a growing smile of her own.

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The two trotted out to a nearby field which was within sight of a number of buildings. Luna looked around and nodded in satisfaction.

“... Well, this'll do for now, I suppose. All right.” She turned to Twilight. “You can teleport, which is a good skill to have. Celestia is quite good at it when pressed, however, she reserves it only for emergencies. I believe you’ve already discovered how taxing it can be on your stamina?”

Twilight nodded in acknowledgement. “Yes.”

“The most likely reason for that is that you are quite simply too powerful for your own good,” Luna assessed. Twilight blinked.

“I’m too powerful?”

“Well, that’s not a bad thing at all,” Luna soothed. “It just means you require more training in direct control. It also means you can master a type of technique myself and my sister employ, as do a number of other talented unicorns.”

“Oh? What is that?” Twilight asked.

“It’s a relatively simple technique,” Luna explained, “wherein you boost your speed for short bursts using magical enhancement. The advantages of this are considerable: You don’t need to cast an incantation, you just need to train yourself to use it like you would your telekinesis. With a little willpower, you can increase your speed in a short burst by magically enhancing your entire body.”

“Can you demonstrate it for me?” Twilight asked with a smile. Luna nodded.

“Certainly. Pay careful attention.” Luna focused her magical energies throughout her body, doing it in a deliberately slow manner to allow Twilight to get as much information on the technique as possible. She turned towards the forest, and released the magical energy as she broke into a gallop.

The burst sent her screaming forth at incredible speed, and she came to a carefully controlled stop. She looked over her shoulder and saw Twilight was a distant purple shape, and that she was in the trees. Luna turned back and repeated the maneuver, and in a moment she was standing in front of the slack jawed Twilight. Leaves and various other light debris blew past them on a wind kicked up by her movement.

“... Oh wow! That was incredible!” Twilight gasped. She frowned thoughtfully. “I’m gathering that the magical enhancement also enhances your durability? The intense acceleration would require that.”

“Yes, it does,” Luna said, feeling pleased. “The technique is useful for combat that way. However, it has its limits. Unless you know how to combine an Invulnerability spell with the Acceleration, you’re better off using it for positioning, escape, or diversions.”

“So it’s a combat spell?” Twilight asked with a thoughtful frown.

“That was its original use, yes,” Luna said with a nod. “It can also be used in the air, and if you get very good at it, you can change direction while at that speed. The basic version requires you stop between every change in direction.” The moon princess smiled at Twilight. “Would you like to give it a shot?”

“Yes!” Twilight cried eagerly. She pointed herself towards the forest, took deep breaths, and powered up. Her aura flared and the wind picked up around her. Her eyes glowed and she tensed.

“Twilight, wai-!” Luna tried, but it was far too late.

BOOM! Luna closed her eyes against the backdraft caused by the incredible force of Twilight’s acceleration. Glass shattered seemingly everywhere around, and some kind of alarm went off in the distance. Luna opened her eyes, just enough for a wince, before she took off after Twilight.

She found the purple mare a mile away in the forest, dazedly getting to her hooves. Her hair had frizzed out into an afro, and she wobbled a bit. Luna landed.

“Are you all right?” Luna asked.

“Y-Yeah... I’m all right...” Twilight looked around the forest, and blinked. “Uh oh... Um...”

“You over did it just a bit,” Luna said with a wince. She smiled. “Though you did break the sound barrier... I didn’t do that until after several attempts.”

“Wow... Thank you!” Twilight said. She frowned. “What is that siren?”

“You... Broke some glass,” Luna said. “Because of the sonic boom.”

“Oh dear! We should go back right now-!”

“Ah, ahahaha, not just yet,” Luna said. “I think we should go learn some more, elsewhere. Until everything dies down?”

“Well, all right Your Maj-Um, Miss Selene,” Twilight said.

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They moved to a rocky, relatively barren area on the outside of town. The distant mountain peaks were haloed with clouds and cast into stark relief as the sun approached it’s setting. Luna found herself smiling. It was a beautiful sight, she had to admit. The transition from day to night. There was a certain art to it that Celestia had never gotten quite right, but hopefully Luna would be able to help her more.

Below in the quarry, there was a small homestead with a lone windmill. Luna turned back to Twilight.

“Okay... Let's try something simpler. Strength enhancement,” Luna said. “It will not involve any real movement, just a bit of focus.”

“Another combat spell?” Twilight asked. Luna nodded.

“Yes. Every magic user should have a few spells they can use for battle. Now, it uses a similar principle as the speed enhancement technique, but is more focused.” She held up her front hoof and focused her power. She pulled her hoof back and thrust it forward.

“Ya!”

The boulder shattered under the force of the blow. Twilight watched with wide eyes.

“Oh, w-wow...!”

“Focus your magic through your body... Feel it flow,” Luna advised. “Let it move with you, and move with your movements.”

Twilight once again powered up, and she moved to another boulder. She took a few deep breaths.

“Focus and calm yourself... Don’t use too much power, just as much as you need,” Luna warned. Twilight nodded.

“Right...” She pulled back her hoof, and punched out. “YAH!”

The boulder, rather than shattered... Went flying down the hill into the quarry below with a crash. Luna let out a sigh of relief.

“Good! Very good. Now, let’s try a basic combo,” Luna said.

“A combo?” Twilight asked, tilting her head curiously. Luna nodded.

“Yes. Combined strikes and movements for battle. Here is a very simple one,” She reared up on her back hooves in front of a new boulder, and charged up. She unleashed two hoof strikes, then spun around to kick the boulder. It was smashed into rubble, and Luna spun around with a smile at her student.

“Now you try,” Luna said. Twilight nodded.

“All right...” She trotted up to yet another boulder, and charged up. She reared up and struck the boulder twice, before spinning around and kicking it. Like the first boulder, it flew off. Unlike the first boulder, it flew very, very high... And smashed through the roof of the farmhouse below.

“Oh dear!” Luna and Twilight cried. Together, they charged down the hillside to the house.

On the farmhouse porch, a dark yellow stallion with a beard and black hat, and a grey mare with her mane up in a bun were sitting in rocking chairs.

“.. Ma, ah do believe those damn dragons is throwin’ rocks at us again,” the stallion said. The mare nodded, got off her rocking chair and hit a secret control lever on the side of the door.

“We must enact the Tenant of our simple faith and crush the Xenos that dare threaten our livelihoods!” She said in a spirited but matter of fact way as two saddles with machine guns and chainsaws attached to them emerged from a hidden trapdoor in the porch. The old stallion nodded, girded on his weapon, and helped his wife do the same before tugging on the start cords on his weapons, firing them up.

“DEATH TO THE UNBELIEVERS!”

“FOR THE GLORY OF GODDESS QUEEN CELESTIA!”

The two older ponies charged, and opened up their guns on Luna and Twilight.

“What the-? NO WAIT! WAIT! HOLD YOUR FIRE!” Luna shouted as she formed a shield.

“DEATH TO THE DRAGON FILTH!” Roared the mare.

“NO! NO! HANG ON! THIS IS PRINCESS LUNA!” Twilight cried, holding her hooves up.

Both ponies ceased fire and stared.

“Princess who?” The stallion asked.

“You know, Princess Luna? The Moon Goddess?” Luna suggested. “It has been a while but-”

“She came back as Nightmare Moon?” Twilight tried. The two ponies started.

“Nightmare Moon?”

“DEVIL IN THE MOON!”

“DEATH TO THE PROFANE USURPER!”

“EEEP!” Luna and Twilight both cried, as they ran for the hills, dodging bullets and the occasional thrown chainsaw.

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It took a while, but they were able to lose the farmers in the woods. They trotted back towards Ponyville, Twilight’s head held low.

“Haa... Your Majesty... I am so, so sorry,” she said. “I’m really sorry, I didn’t mean to... To do any of that. I just, I lost control, I’m so sorry...”

Luna closed her eyes tightly, angrily. She’d had to endure Twilight’s apologies the whole trip here, and they had not made her feel any better. In fact, a quiet anger had been brewing in her.

You stood up to Nightmare Moon without so much as a flinch, and here you serve me tea with a stutter, and apologize constantly for your great power! What is wrong with you?!

She seemed so different from the brave pony she’d met on the night of her return...

“You think you can destroy The Elements of Harmony just like that? Well, you’re wrong, because the spirits of The Elements of Harmony are right here.” Twilight said, with a growing confidence in her voice.

"You still don't have the sixth Element! The spark didn't work!" Nightmare Moon shouted in defiance, arrogance... But above all else, fear was beginning to take root in her mind.

"But it did!" She cried in her defiance, a reckless powerful hope lighting up her eyes as all of her friends joined with her. "A different kind of spark." She turned to her friends, her smile growing as did the magic around them all.

"I felt it the very moment I realized how happy I was to hear you, to see you, how much I cared about you. The spark ignited inside me when I realized that you all -- are my friends. You see, Nightmare Moon, when those Elements are ignited by the... the spark, that resides in the heart of us all, it creates the sixth element: the element of... MAGIC!"

Power, bright and brilliant and powerful emerged from all six of the gems, surrounding the ponies. And as one, their powers combined and came down on her in the form of a rainbow and with the speed of a lightning bolt from heaven.

"NO! NOOOOOO!"

"Your-Your Majesty?"

"Stop calling me that!" Luna said angrily, whirling around on the young unicorn.

"Y-Yes, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I just lost control, I'm really not any good at this all-!"

"And stop apologizing!" Luna growled. "You... You..." She stopped and stared at the young Twilight, who was staring back in shock and disbelief so familiar it made Luna's heart catch in her throat.

"... I'm the one who should be sorry," Luna said, in a far calmer tone. "I underestimated how powerful and talented you were. It's my responsibility. You're still learning..." She smiled. "But your power and talent... You should never apologize for that."

Twilight stared back, and slowly nodded with a small smile. "I... Thank you, Prin... Miss Selene-"

“Just forget about that too, all right?” Luna said. She looked out at the sun- It was almost totally set. She was going to be late if she didn’t get a move on in raising the moon and...

Luna stared at Twilight for a very, very long time. She then laughed softly to herself, and shook her head.

“Twilight... If you feel up to it, I have one more thing for you to try.”

“Well... I’m a little tired, Princess...” Twilight steeled her resolve. “But if you want me to, I will.”

“All right, come with me.”

Luna led Twilight to a tall hill. It gave them a beautiful view of Ponyville below, and the sun setting behind the mountains. Luna turned to Twilight and smiled.

“I’m going to link my magic with yours,” she said, and her aura flared to life. It joined with Twilight’s own, and both ponies’ eyes and horns began to glow.

“Oh... Okay... What are we going to do?” Twilight asked.

“We’re going to raise the moon together,” Luna said. Twilight’s eyes widened.

“What?! But-But the moon-!”

“Don’t worry, stay calm,” Luna soothed. “I will be linked with you the whole time. I will provide most of the push... But you are going to guide it. You know where it should be thanks to your studies, right?”

“Well, yes, I do but-”

“But nothing. You can do this, Twilight. Trust me... And trust yourself,” Luna said. “Don’t worry... I’m here.”

Twilight closed her eyes, and gritted her teeth. Luna closed her eyes and focused as well, the familiar movements coming to her. She didn't need her eyes to do this-The moon was hers, and even though it had been a thousand years, the old movements came as naturally as words from an old friend.

Twilight's magical presence was impossible to miss-She burned like a star herself. Her magical influence reached out, merging with Luna's, throwing it off a bit but quickly refocusing and adjusting itself to move naturally with hers.

"That's right... Don't fight it. She knows the way, you just need to remind her of the steps," Luna advised.

"Hnnngh...!" Twilight concentrated. Luna spread her wings and focused more deeply. In her mind's eye, she could see the moon rising-A waning crescent, a tiny sliver of light peeking out like a winking eye. The stars emerged, free of the glare of the sun they sparkled and twinkled like diamonds high in the sky. These too Luna guided along their paths, setting the pace for Twilight to follow.

Like any beginner, she overcompensated severely, but under Luna's guidance the young unicorn kept the moon on course. At last, the connection broke, and Twilight collapsed to her knees gasping for breath.

"Haa... Haa... Haa..." She looked up... And saw the moon winking down upon them from a sea of stars. Her exhausted face gained a smile, and she looked over at Luna to see a similar one on the moon goddess.

"Very well done, little sister," she said softly. Twilight's eyelids grew heavy.

"Huh...?"

"Nothing Twilight. Nothing at all," Luna said, stroking the top of her head affectionately. She looked to Ponyville, and saw a great multitude of ponies congregating at Twilight's library. Among them were Pinkie Pie, Applejack, Big Mac, Rarity, Rainbow Dash, and Fluttershy.

"Come on Twilight... We have a party to get to," she said, lifting Twilight up carefully with her telekinesis and flying towards the town.

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Some time later, Pinkie Pie's party was in full swing. Seemingly everypony was at the library, including many Luna had never formally met. She even met the strange gray pegasus who returned her abacus. The pegasus had no idea who she was.

She and many other ponies joined Pinkie Pie's growing conga line, and Luna didn't worry about it, choosing instead to watch the rest of the partygoers. Rarity was conversing with Applejack about a certain book series in low tones, Fluttershy was shyly eating cake with the proprietors of Sugar Corner, Mr. and Mrs. Cake, and a recovered Twilight Sparkle was attempting to dance with an embarrassed looking Big Macintosh. She flushed a bit at how close they were getting, but turned away to see Spike watching.

"Enjoying the party?" Spike asked with a little grin. Luna smiled and nodded.

"Yes, actually..."

"Ya know, I'm amazed anyone was fooled by those glasses... If you don't mind me saying so, your Majesty," Spike said with a little grin and a sotto voice. Luna looked over at Spike, then back at the crowd.

"None of them will say anything, you know that," Spike said. Luna shook her head and chuckled.

"That's not it."

"Then what?" Spike asked, interested.

"Just how much trouble they caused me," she said with a sigh. She adjusted them.

"Not that much trouble though, huh?" Spike asked.

“... No. No, I suppose not,” Luna said, her smile lighting up her face once more. She looked over at Spike. “I presume my sister wishes me to write her about my experiences?”

Spike started and stared at the goddess. “How-?”

“You smell of a recent blast of flame,” Luna deduced. “And you came right to me.” She raised an eyebrow. “I’m not completely clueless, you know.”

“I-I know! I know!” Spike said quickly. “I didn’t imply it, really...!”

“I know,” Luna giggled. “Relax. Let me find some paper and a quill...”

- - - - -

Dear Sister,

I must thank you for sending me to Ponyville to meet your student. Meeting the ponies she befriended to defeat Nightmare Moon, and Twilight herself made me realize just what you saw in her... And what you see in me. They have their ups and downs, all of them, but so do I. And despite everything that happened, I believe it has been an experience for the best. If these ponies can forgive me for what I did as Nightmare Moon, then I know my friends can forgive me for... Peeking in.

Love, Luna

PS: I will require a few funds to help pay for the damage inflicted. Also, kindly look into the creator of this “Cupcakes” film, I wish to... Speak with him.

PPS: Remind Sundance to clean Abacus off with a dry cloth and read him “Mr. Ed Does Annuities” to help him sleep. And tell them all, I’ll be home soon.

Chapter 6

The Facts of Life

"Say, Luna?" Celestia spoke, trotting up to Luna's usual table in the library. Luna's head was bent over a lengthy tome and her trusty abacus was out.

"Mm, yes sister?" The beads of the device clicked loudly in the still air of the library. "Income taxes need to be lowered in this province..." Luna murmured, making a note.

"What do you think of Windshear?" Celestia asked in a soft tone. Luna paused, recalled the name and face, and then resumed work as she responded.

"Windshear? The newest member of your royal guard? He does his job well, I've certainly seen nothing to indicate he's slacking off. Why?" Luna raised a cup of tea to her mouth. Celestia's lips twitched.

"I think I want him to mate me."

"PFFFFT!" Luna spat out her drink in a great plume, splattering the ledgers and financial records before her. She looked at her sister with wide eyes. "WHAT?!"

"Well, it's not like it'd be the first time," Celestia said, offering her younger sister a shrug.

"I-it-WHAT?! First time?! When was that?!" Luna demanded.

"Shortly after I imprisoned you in the moon I think," Celestia said, looking up at the ceiling thoughtfully. She then smiled at the recall of the proper memory.

"Yes, there was going to be a big surprise party held by the Pie Clan in your honor. I went to it afterwards, needed cheering up and... Mmm... So many colts looking to cheer me up~..." She sighed lustily, and Luna felt a shudder run up her spine.

"... As if I wasn't traumatized enough," Luna mumbled, before replying in a louder voice: "But... So what? So he's attractive! He's your *guard*! It would be quite improper!"

"Ah Luna, always so virginal, so noble, so controlled..." Celestia sighed. She shook her head and clicked her tongue sympathetically. "Such a horrible *prude*."

"I AM NOT A PRUDE! It's just-just not *proper*!"

"Well, since I've been doing it for a thousand years now, I'd say it's proper by now, right?" Celestia asked cheerfully. "Given the forces of history and all?"

"You... *What?!*" Luna sputtered.

"Oh yes! Mmm... Sometimes I just see a colt and I think to myself, 'Oh, if only I was an immortal, beautiful, sexy goddess that all would love to mate until I couldn't stand up.' And then I think 'Oh wait! I totally am!' And then-!"

"STOP STOP STOP! I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE!" Luna cried, covering her ears. "Honestly Tia, we're supposed to be pure, *virginal* goddess-queens!"

"Maybe *you* are," Celestia sniffed. "I haven't been for a thousand years. Besides, if you hadn't gone Nightmare Moon I wouldn't have felt so *lonely*."

"I. Was. Sealed. Into. The Moon. Kind of hard to socialize!" Luna growled. Celestia lifted up a hoof and stroked Luna's back. The moon goddess calmed down a bit, and took a few deep breaths to center herself.

"I am sorry. That wasn't your fault," Celestia said. She nuzzled her sister.

"It's all right," Luna said softly. "I just... I never want to be alone again and you talking about how lonely you were... I'm sorry."

"There's no need for apologies, my little sister. I'm so terribly sorry you feel this way." Celestia brightened. "I have the perfect solution!"

"Ah... What, my dear sister?" Luna asked.

"I've quite forgotten. You've got plenty of family to socialize with now," Celestia soothed. Luna stiffened up again.

"... What."

"Oh yes! I'm afraid that nopony had invented birth control yet, so I gave birth to little Starchild a few months later after that party..." Celestia sighed happily. "Then there was Shadowfax, Arion, Hengroen, Epona, Widow Maker..."

"You... How many...?" Luna asked.

"I've quite lost count. But you and abacus could surely work out just how much family we really have, right? Wouldn't that be fun?" Celestia got a devious glint in her eyes and a smirk on her face.

"Or maybe I can help you start making some fillies of your own-"

"Ohlookatthetimelhave somethingstodoelsewhereBYE!"

Luna promptly fled, gathering her soaked papers and documents with telekinesis as she flew right out the nearest window. Celestia watched her go, and chuckled.

"Ah... She's so adorable when she's embarrassed..."

Chapter 7

The Heat

"Urggghhh..."

Sundance was feeling a lot of quite irrational resentment at the sun. Not Princess Celestia, of course--Who could resent such a kind, giving monarch? But that gigantic ball of hydrogen and helium burning brightly overhead was stirring up all sorts of hatred in the normally kind hearted pony's... Heart.

Her apartment was sweltering, even with all of the windows open and the fans running. She was on her couch, feebly fanning herself with one hoof while the other held a glass of lemonade.

"It's like an oven," she moaned.

"You know, if you got closer to the floor, it should be cooler," came Luna's voice overhead. Sundance opened her eyes and looked up to see her roommate, Princess Luna, looking down upon her.

In an unusual series of events, Sundance, hoofmaiden to the recently returned Princess Luna, had found same diety/monarch as her roommate as ordered by Luna's sister Princess Celestia. It was an effort for Luna to learn how normal ponies lived after her thousand year absence.

Not that Sundance resented it--On the contrary, she considered the Princess a friend. But seeing the deity above her apparently not suffering was just a tiny bit irritating.

"Urgh..." She rolled off the couch, careful to not spill her drink, and pressed her chin into the wooden floor. Luna smiled at her.

"Well?"

"... It's not much better," Sundance decided. Luna smiled.

"Heat rises, so it's only logical that the cooler air gathers at the bottom of the house," she said. "Do we have a basement?"

"Yes, but it's icky and gross," Sundance said. She wiped her forehead off and some of the sweat slicked hair sticking to it with a grimace. "Though at this rate..." She looked up at her monarch curiously. "Aren't you bothered by the heat?"

"Not really," Luna said. "I am a goddess, after all."

"Lucky thing for you," Sundance grumbled. At Luna's dismayed look, Sundance waved a hoof.

"No, no, I'm sorry Princess. It's just very hard on me. Hoyden said he'd be here with something to cool the house down hours ago but..."

Luna nodded thoughtfully, and hummed. She then summoned her abacus to her telekinetic ally from her room upstairs. Rapidly, she made some calculations on it, and smiled when she came to a conclusion.

Her horn glowed, and the glow enveloped her body. A few moments later, the glow receded, and Luna staggered. Sundance, alarmed, managed to push up to her hooves and rested a hoof on the side of her princess's shoulder.

"You all right?"

"Yes... I'm fine... I just altered my temperature sensitivity to match yours," Luna said, panting a bit. "Goodness... It is hot..."

"You could have just adjusted my temperature sensitivity to yours," Sundance pointed out. "Er, your Highness."

"Yes, but if I want to know how normal ponies do things, I must do them the same way as... As normal ponies," Luna said firmly. "Now... According to my knowledge of physics, in order to cool off we require a heat sink. So! Let us devise one." She turned and trotted into the hallway... And into the door.

"Oof!"

Sundance winced. "Are you all right?"

"Just fine!"

Despite the Princess's reassurances, Sundance's wince remained.

- - - - -

Outside on the lawn of Sundance's home, Luna took hold of her garden hose and yanked it out. Sundance, now wearing sunglasses, waited on the lawn for her princess to tug it to her position.

"Mmph..." Luna released the hose from her mouth and smiled. "Now. Water is a perfect heat sink for our purposes... Though if I could turn it into helium it would be even better..."

"How would you turn it into helium?" Sundance asked.

"Well, first I'd induce electrolysis to separate out the hydrogen and oxygen, then I'd fuse the hydrogen into helium," Luna said.

"... Through fusion," Sundance said.

Luna nodded. "That's right."

"As in nuclear fusion?" Sundance asked.

Luna blinked. She glanced up at the sun, then down at the hose.

"... Water should work just fine for our purposes," she decided.

"Good," Sundance said. "I'm not in the mood for a second sun, your Majesty."

"Not at all," Luna said. "Now, we will need a sufficiently large vessel to hold the water in." She once again turned to her trusty abacus and did calculations, clicking merrily away.

"Heehee... Oh this is fun... Click click click, I never appreciated how much fun that is!" Luna giggled. Sundance blinked behind her shades.

"Uh, your Majesty?"

"Fun fun fun... Ooh..." Luna trembled. "Ooh... Not good click..." She shook her head out.

"Are you all right?"

"Just fine," Luna said immediately. "Now, we need... Garbage bags, and duct tape, and rope and a frame of some sort. Shall we?"

"Works for me," Sundance said.

It took several minutes for them to get all the needed equipment out of Sundance's house, but soon Luna was tying the rope from the fenceposts surrounding the yard to the porch, and Sundance was taping several garbage bags together to form their "heat sink". When it was finished, Luna stood on the porch, and hefted up the hose.

"Now, we just fill it with water," she said. With a flick of telekinesis, the garden hose turned on and began pouring cool water down the improvised slide. It gathered at the bottom of the construct, and began to fill up.

Sundance watched and found a smile coming to her face.

"A garbage bag swimming pool," she said. She nodded. "I like it!"

"Thank you," Luna said. "I think it will work..."

The hose continued to stream water, but the water level in the bottom was not very high yet.

"Maybe we should go inside and wait until it's full?" Sundance suggested.

"Good idea," Luna said. She laid the hose down, and trotted back indoors with Sundance. "What do we do until it's done?"

"We can stick our heads in the freezer," Sundance suggested dryly.

- - - - -

Hoyden trotted down the street towards his marefriend's house, grunting under the weight of the air conditioning unit strapped to his back. It was heavy and uncomfortable and even with his water bottles he was feeling dehydrated lugging the stupid thing. A pony-pulled bus passed by and kicked up dirt and dust into his face, making him cough.

But it would all be worth it... Yes, it would all be worth it in the end, his imagination said.

"Oh Hoyden! Thank you for saving us from the intense heat!" His beautiful and sexy marefriend crooned, as the air conditioner did it's magic. She then wrapped her forelimbs around herself and shivered.

"Oh dear, now I'm too cold!" She sighed. Princess Luna sidled up next to Sundance and nuzzled her, before provocatively licking up the length of her neck.

"Mmmm... Don't worry Sundance, your goddess will keep you warm," Luna sighed as Sundance moaned. She looked over at Hoyden with a coy look. "Would you like to watch, Hoyden?"

"Oh yes, yes, YES I'd like to!" Hoyden announced.

"... Uh, thanks," said a filly's voice nearby. Hoyden looked for the source and saw a Pony Scout troop with a wagon full of cookies. All three stared at him weirdly. He coughed.

"Uh... Nevermind." He cantered a bit faster, leaving the scouts to watch him.

"Weirdo," one muttered, loud enough for him to hear. Hoyden snorted.

Little punks, can't even let a colt have an imaginary spot to himself... He finally arrived at his girlfriend's home and smiled.

"Finally... Hm?" He blinked. Some bizarre black tarp had been set up between the fence and the porch with a lot of rope and duct tape. Water was filling up inside it. He smiled as he figured it out.

"So, they built themselves a pool, huh?" He thought aloud. Already, thoughts of his two favorite mares in all the world being wet and splashing in the water and... And...

No! No, focus... Focus Hoyden. Arrive as the hero now, fantasy come true later, he thought to himself. He cleared his throat.

The door burst open, and Luna trotted out onto the porch happily, Abacus held in one hoof and wearing plastic wrap. She looked a bit glassy eyed and frazzled.

"Abacus says it's time to go in!" She announced cheerfully. A smiling (but slightly anxious) Sundance came out alongside her.

"Looks that way Princess," she confirmed. She looked out and waved at Hoyden. "Hey Hoyden!"

"Hey Sundance, hey Princess!" Hoyden returned the wave. "Nice looking pool!"

"Thanks! We just threw it up in a few minutes. Looks like it's done! Ready Princess?" Sundance asked.

"Ready Sundance," Luna said cheerfully. She wrapped her forelimb around Sundance's shoulders, and trotted them both forward.

"Wait a second Princess, what are you-?"

"WHEEE!" Luna cried, as she jumped into the improvised pool. However, with Sundance along it turned into more of a tumble, and given the angle the pool was at both slid down fast into the water up against the fence hard.

"OOF!"

"OW!"

The splash of water hit Hoyden in the face, but he found it refreshing. He couldn't bite back a laugh at how waterlogged his marefriend and her roommate looked when they poked their heads out of the water.

"Heheheheheh! Oh, that's adorable," he snickered.

"Pfft!" Sundance huffed. "Laugh it up, stunt dummy!" She splashed him playfully with some water, and Luna followed suit.

"H-Hey! Hey! Take it easy you two!" He laughed. He lowered his hoof from the protection of his face. "Mind if I join you?"

"Not at all! There's plenty of room!" Sundance said. Hoyden set down the AC unit in front of the fence, and galloped around the fence up to the porch. Luna blinked, then pulled out Abacus and did some calculations. Her eyes widened.

"Wait Hoyden don't-!"

"CANNONBALL!" He cried as he jumped down and slid into the pool. The duct tape seams between the garbage bags burst, and water spilled out everywhere as though escaping from a balloon.

The AC Unit was knocked over by the wave through the holes in the fence, and into the street.

"Wh... What happened?" Hoyden asked.

Luna cringed. "I only did the calculations required for... Two ponies, not three."

"So strictly though? You didn't leave any margin for error?" Sundance asked.

At Luna's wince, Sundance sighed. "Of course..."

"Hey! I didn't mean to! I didn't know Hoyden would want to go into the pool too!" Luna said defensively.

"Well maybe you should have thought ahead! You know? That thing you do every other time?!" Sundance snapped back.

"Don't you yell at me!" Luna hissed.

"I'll yell at you all I like!" Sundance growled.

A bus passed by, and there was a loud crunch. Hoyden looked over at the street and winced when he saw the destroyed AC unit.

Oh crap...

He then looked back at the fight, which had escalated to mane pulling.

I can tell them later, Hoyden decided.

- - - - -

Some time later, all three of them were sitting in the living room. All three wore expressions of embarrassment, which weren't diluted at all behind the large glasses of water they gulped down.

"Ah... I'm sorry Sundance... I suppose I was more sensitive to the heat than I thought I would be," Luna said.

"Maybe if you'd been locked in the sun instead of the moon, you'd have been all right," Sundance suggested. Sundance winced when she said it, and began to apologize but Luna's smile stopped her.

"Probably," the moon goddess admitted with a chuckle. Sundance found her smile again and laughed.

"Yeah... Or turned it down just a little... Heheh... I'm sorry too."

Both mares looked over at Hoyden, who was munching some spicy oats. He gulped and looked between them.

"Hoyden?" Sundance prompted.

"Well, you know, technically I didn't do anything wrong," he said.

"Hoyden," Sundance growled. Hoyden sighed.

"I'm sorry I was too... Er... Distracted by you two fighting to save the air conditioning," he said. Sundance smiled and nodded.

"Accepted."

"I can fix that in a moment, you know," Luna said. "Just requires a bit of magic."

"That's wonderful!" Sundance cheered. "Come on, let's go!"

Out the door they went to the street to recover the smashed ruin of the air conditioner... But when they got there, nothing remained.

"Huh?" Hoyden asked intelligently. "Where... Where did it go?"

"Oh no, no, NO!" Sundance cried. "Not now! Not here!"

Luna looked around and sighed. "I guess somepony else got to it first..."

"So what now?" Hoyden asked.

Sundance looked to Luna. "You can clear up the basement with some magic, right?"

"Well, um, yes but-"

"Basement it is!" Sundance declared, dragging the shocked goddess by her horn into the house. Hoyden watched them go, then looked back at the street.

"But who would have stolen a broken air conditioner?" He wondered aloud.

- - - - -

"More lemonade, Your Majesty?"

Princess Celestia, Mistress of the Dawn, Goddess of the Sun and Monarch of Equestria sighed as she raised her head enough to take the end of a straw into her mouth. She sucked the sugary drink down and hummed approvingly.

"Thank you," she said, settling back down on her sun chair on the wide balcony of the palace.

"If I may ask, your Majesty...?" The butler began. Celestia took her sunglasses off and raised an eyebrow.

"Yes Pennyworth?" She inquired of the butler pony.

"This new AC unit..." He indicated the device as it happily hummed away with a wave of his head, "it seems a bit odd to procure one from your sister's home, if you don't mind me saying so."

Celestia smiled.

"Let's just say, Pennyworth, that I thought she needed to..."

She put her sunglasses back on.

"Cool off."

Pennyworth sighed. "Of course, Your Majesty."

Chapter 8

Storytelling

"Yes, come down to the grand opening of Grey Marex's new carriage dealership! You can own your very own for a no-interest lease starting at-"

Click.

"The Dun Jones Equestrian gained five hundred fifty points today to close at a record breaking 30 million points. Investors credit recent extensive tax reforms and cuts-"

Click.

Luna looked from the television set over to Sundance with a raised eyebrow. "I was watching that," she said.

"Princess, you drew up the legislation yourself and looked at the results," Sundance replied, smiling a bit. "I mean, sure, it's great news but watching the financial segments of the news aren't how I like to unwind."

"Oh? Then how do you unwind? I mean, aside from... Er..." Luna tried.

"With Hoyden?" Sundance asked with a wicked little smile. Luna blushed furiously.

"Sundance!"

She really is cute when she blushes, Sundance thought, and squelched it when her cheeks burned red too. She returned her attention to the television. "Oh, well, this way."

Click.

"You show me a good piggy-backer and I'll show you a real pony. Now you take Abraham Lincoln for instance. A natural born piggy-backer. Where do you get all of that stuffed-shirts family of yours?"

*"My father was a great piggy-backer!" *SMACK!* "Eep!"*

"Oh my," Luna said, tilting her head. "It's in black and white..."

"Yeah, all the old movies were. Some films are still in black and white, usually for artistic reasons. They think it makes them classy," Sundance shook her head and sighed happily. "I love these old films... They weren't all about explosions."

"Oh, hey!" Hoyden called from the kitchen. "I'll have you know, explosions are fantastic!"

"Dear, if I want to get entertainment out of them, I'll go watch you at work," Sundance tutted her coltfriend. "I don't want my romance filled with them."

Hoyden trotted up to the back of the couch, and groaned when he saw the film. "This one again? It's so boring..."

"It is not boring!" Sundance said flatly. "It's a classic! It's preserved in the Central Archives of Equestria's Sacred Library!"

"Just goes to show you that taste is relative," Hoyden said. He looked over at Luna. "I prefer westerns, myself, or gangster movies. Real shoot 'em ups, with carriage chases and air duels and-"

"Explosions?" Sundance asked sourly. Hoyden grinned and shrugged.

"They can be used to great effect, you know," he said with a wink. Sundance chuckled.

"Yeah, in dumbing down the viewer... He took me to this film on one of our first dates-"

"Fallout: Equestria," Hoyden said with a grin. "And you liked it!"

"Well... A little, but only a little!" Sundance said defensively. She shook her head. "He had already seen it fifty times before-"

"Twenty times," Hoyden corrected. Sundance rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, twenty times, so he spoke along with the dialogue in the movie."

"And she joined in," Hoyden said smugly. Sundance shook her head.

"Yeah yeah... I did... A little."

"But it was still fun, right? Even after the ushers threw us out for talking?" Hoyden asked. Sundance laughed.

"Oh yeah... But I think that had more to do with your popcorn landing in the film booth and somehow igniting the film reel."

"Oh. Yeah. That was probably it," Hoyden sighed. "That poor movie..."

Luna had nodded, listening to their story with a fascinated look on her face... Yet with an equally familiar look of distance. Sundance saw it, and a sudden idea hit her.

"You know Princess... Um... You haven't really spoken much about... You know..." She shrugged. Luna blinked.

"My past?" She asked. Sundance nodded.

"I mean... Um..." She winced. "If you wanted to... You don't have to of course, I guess I just thought-"

"That you'd like to share some stories about your life, so that we could know more about you," Hoyden interjected. "You know, ex-coltfriends from a thousand years ago, adventures-"

"Hoyden!" Sundance hissed. Luna shook her head.

"No, no, it's all right." She smiled. "To be honest... It is a bit of a tough subject... "

"Because of Nightmare Moon?" Hoyden asked. Sundance shot him another angry look, but Luna nodded.

"Yes... Being her... My memories from before and after my imprisonment are a bit fuzzy. I remember a great deal of magic, facts, a few incidents but..." Luna frowned. "A lot of it is just hard to sort through."

"Well... Is there anything you can tell us?" Sundance asked with an encouraging smile. "Anything you'd like to tell us?"

"Well..." Luna looked at the television, the old movie still playing. The stallion with a mustache was driving hard to get to the city to ask the rich father of the runaway mare he'd paired up with for her hoof in marriage. Risking everything...

She closed her eyes. "There was a warrior... A long time ago, who was one of the few ponies who was at home in the night. I don't remember his name, but he was skilled, and brave, and very... Very stubborn." Luna smiled a little, and Sundance and Hoyden couldn't help but notice the change of tone. Her voice, while quiet, was that of a young filly discovering the world around her with a bright pitch. Now her voice was deeper, silkier... Older.

"This young warrior would hunt monsters that threatened ponies. He used traps, he used cunning, and when those failed he used his weapons and his bare hooves. He was... Magnificent," Luna said. She opened her eyes and looked out at the setting sun.

"This Earth pony had grown up largely without parents, so he knew nothing of social norms or courtly etiquette... He had heard of my sister and I, of course, but one night he saw me as he was hunting a Rex in what is now called the Everfree Forest. I was going for a walk to listen and adjust the music of the night when I came across him." She smiled a little.

"He was dark in color, and very wild looking. His mane was unkempt, his hooves blunt and his tail was short. He stared at me in amazement for the longest time. I asked him if there was anything wrong, if I could help him." Luna shook her head, her mane falling more neatly on her head.

"He said I was the most beautiful pony in the entire world, and he asked if I was married," she said with a chuckle. Sundance's jaw dropped.

"He didn't!"

"He did," Luna said.

"Geez... Colt had balls," Hoyden commented.

"I was a little confused, but he clarified. He wanted me to be his wife," Luna said with a blush.

"What did you do?" Sundance asked. Luna smiled a little.

"I told him that I could not be his wife. I... I was a goddess, after all. I couldn't love just one pony above all others. It would be unfair for a princess to have any other in her heart beside her subjects..." Luna sighed.

"How'd he respond to that?" Hoyden asked. Luna chuckled again, a very sad sound.

"He said that there wasn't a thing alive he couldn't trap, and he'd capture the heart of a princess just as easily as a Rex or a Hydra. I told him that nobody could catch the moon... And he said he was willing to do just that."

"Wait... He said he'd capture the moon?" Hoyden asked. Sundance shook her head and giggled.

"He sounds crazy..."

"Oh, I thought he was," Luna said. "So I told him that if he captured the moon, he could have me as his wife." She smiled. "Most ponies weren't aware of the true nature of the solar system at that time, that we keep the moon and sun in motion around Equestria at an average distance of 238,857 miles. It was impossible."

"But he managed to do it anyway, right?" Hoyden asked. "I mean, come on, this guy is Kamarena level stubborn and awesome."

"Kamarena?" Luna asked, confused. Sundance shook her head.

"Modern Japony cultural reference. Keep going. What happened?"

"Well... He would erect large traps around the palace for several weeks afterward," Luna said. "I gave him food and drink when he needed it, some supplies. He would take no charity, he worked for his meals no matter what I tried to get him to do. He tried so many things... Hoops, nets, even a great basket... They all failed, of course, but he never gave up." She looked down at her hooves.

"I talked to him every day, trying to dissuade him. I tried everything I could think of-Setting him up with other ponies, trying to counsel him, I even tried to restrain him when he fell from a tree and nearly died." Luna smiled again

down at her hooves. "I finally told him that I wasn't worth it. I may have been beautiful, and wise, and a goddess, but that... That shouldn't be all he wanted from me."

Luna looked back at the movie. The lead had learned from his own error that the mare he loved was going to get married to another colt. The look on his face... She took a deep breath.

"He told me that the fact I kept telling him not to do it, that I cared enough to come out every day to stop him, proved the exact opposite... That I was truly the only mare in the entire world worth all this struggle." She closed her eyes. "Because despite him being thought of as crazy, or crude, or violent by my own court, by everypony... All I saw was someone to care for."

Sundance and Hoyden were silent for a long time. Luna watched the movie. The male lead had gone to the father of the mare, and had asked to be reimbursed only for the items he'd lost on the road getting her home when he could have had a much bigger reward. She sighed softly.

"He finally told me he'd caught the moon, one night. I asked him to show me. He held up a bucket of water, and showed me its reflection." Luna said softly. Hoyden stared for a moment, and couldn't help a laugh.

"So what did you say?"

Luna smiled. "What could I say? He'd done it... He had me, fair and square."

"Sounds like he caught you a lot sooner than that," Sundance teased. Luna laughed again.

"You're probably right..."

There was another silent moment following the moon princess's laugh. That sad feeling still remained in the air... But Hoyden couldn't help his curiosity. Not after hearing this much.

"... So... What happened to him?" Hoyden asked.

"... Have you ever heard of the legend of the Smooze?" Luna asked. Sundance frowned thoughtfully, and nodded.

"Right... It was some kind of goofy slime monster released by some dopey witches, a thousand years ago."

"That's the storybook version," Luna said calmly. "The real thing was... Was horrific. It tried to consume and destroy everything in Equestria. It absorbed the essences of anything it killed, making their memory part of it." Luna stared down at the floor. Sundance felt her throat constrict, and her eyes water as the realization hit her.

"Celestia's flanks..." Hoyden cursed under his breath.

"Oh... Oh Luna..." Sundance said.

"... It could have been a lot worse," Luna said in a whisper. "Everypony might have died before we figured out a way to stop it... He bought us time." She looked back at the movie screen-The mare galloped away from the altar, to the surprise of everypony but her father. She was galloping with a smile on her face as she went out to find the stallion she loved. To reunite with him.

"... I'm sorry," Luna said, her eyes shifting around. Her body language became very awkward. "I'm sorry, I-I'm not good at telling stories."

"No Luna, no... You're good at it," Sundance said with a sniffle. She leaned forward and nuzzled the moon princess affectionately. "You're really good."

"Yeah," Hoyden said with a smile. He neck-hugged Luna from the other side. Luna kept her eyes shut, breathing softly between her two friends.

After a while, they released her, though Sundance was glad to feel not the slightest bit awkward about it. Luna smiled back at her two friends, before frowning at the sky.

"It's late... We need to get going," Luna said. She rose off the couch and headed for the door, carefully affixing her glasses. She looked back at them. "Coming Sundance?"

"Coming, your majesty," Sundance said with a warm smile. She pulled on her uniform and was soon following her princess out the door. "Goodnight Hoyden! See you in the morning! Love you!"

"Love you too!" Hoyden called back. He trotted up to the window and sat down to wait. He didn't have to wait too long-The sun slipped behind the mountains, before the moon and stars appeared, shining in the deep, dark night. Hoyden frowned for a long while, before a smile came onto his face. He trotted to the fridge, and pulled out some of the Sweet Apple Acres cider Luna bought religiously once a week. He poured himself a cup, and carried it over to the window. Holding it carefully, he maneuvered it until he had the reflection just right. He smiled up at the moon.

"Here's to you... Whoever you were, you've still got her," he said as he took a long drink.

Chapter 9

The Grand Galloping Gala

The Grand Galloping Gala... His sister had related her excitement in going to it over and over again, all the time he was helping her construct her cart. He begrudged her nothing: His sister's dreams were very important to him and she had been right. It would bring in more money.

So why wasn't he out there, helping her sell? Where was his family duty and honor?

A series of gasps pulled his thoughts back to reality, and he looked around. The elegantly dressed ponies surrounding him were all looking up the stairs. His eyes joined theirs and his jaw dropped low, almost to the end of his silk tie.

Descending down the steps in a beautiful white gown that evoked the moon's ethereal beauty, Princess Luna trotted. The moment his eyes met hers, they stayed together, as though they were already embracing. His green eyes were locked onto hers, and hers to his, so finely he felt like the only pony in the world.

The crowds parted as she stepped out onto the dance floor, and trotted slowly up to him with a warm smile. She looked up at him almost shyly.

"Hello," she said.

"Uh... Ah... Howdy," he said. Luna took a step forward, and touched her horn to Big Mac's cheek. The intimate action brought a blush to his cheeks and sent the crowds stirring in gossip at the scandal. Luna didn't care one wit, and blushed demurely.

"Would you care to dance?" Big Macintosh asked in a sotto voice.

"Oh... I would love to," Luna replied softly. Luna turned her head to the quartet on the stage, and gave them a nod. They began to play, the love theme from a ballet if Bic Macintosh was not mistaken. The two began to dance together, their movements perfectly matched, trotting around the

dance floor like they were made for each other. Big Macintosh saw the scandalized looks on many of the more aristocratic ponies' faces, and could only smile in return.

What did he care? He had the love and favor of a goddess. All the money in the world couldn't make up for-

"HOLD!"

The orchestra's song abruptly dipped a chord, and signalled a dramatic entrance. This was answered by a lone figure in a cape and jaunty hat, swinging from a rope to the floor.

"AHA!" The brave figure cried, brandishing a sword. "You knave and cur! How dare you impugn the honor of my love!"

The orchestra contributed a dramatic note.

"What? No!" Luna cried.

"I ain't done no such thing, you raving loony," Big Mac returned, with all the dignity of a country knight. "Her love is freely offered! And ah took it!"

"Fiend! Wretch!" The intruder cried. "You shall receive no quarter from me! Defend yourself!"

"No, please, don't!" Luna cried. "Don't! Not for me!"

"Ah will!" Big Mac replied readily. "Mah honor will not be impugned! Give me a sword!"

A weapon was provided, and Big Mac brandished it in his teeth. The assailant laughed and waved his weapon.

"En garde!"

The piano took the lead in the music, his dramatic chords following the fight perfectly. Luna watched, her hooves held to her mouth in fright. Big Mac and his foe clashed, their steel flashing and sparking with every impact. Bets were taken and a pony in a bowler hat and mustache slammed his

cane into the floor. A lady pony of Daffodil Heights fainted away when Big Mac's foe drew first blood.

"No!" Luna cried. Big Mac spared her only a glance, before resuming the deadly duel. The pianist was practically slamming on the keys as the battle grew more perilous. The combatants fought, up the stairs, down the stairs, up the stairs, down the stairs, swinging across ropes and into the fountain.

"Seriously, what the hay?" Rainbow Dash cried as she evaded the combatants.

"Watch out!" Twilight Sparkle cried.

Eventually, the two climbed up onto a chandelier, their swords still flashing like lightning until Big Mac disarmed his enemy with a triumphant grin.

"Aha! Surrender! Victory is mine, ya no-good number cruncher!" Big Mac shouted.

"Never! If I cannot have her, neither shall you!" Cried the hapless fellow. He drew a knife from his cloak, and slashed through the rope holding the chandelier up. Down they both fell, to the screams of numerous ponies. There was a terrific crash, and Luna uncovered her eyes just long enough to see the costly resolution.

"Oh no!" She cried, galloping over to the two battered foes. She cradled Big Mac in one foreleg, and his foe in the other. "No! Why? Why fight over me? Why?"

"Aw guess... This is mah last harvest... Ah love you, mah moon," Big Mac coughed.

"Why?" Coughed Big Mac's foe, as beads fell off his wires. "For love... My lady... We made such beautiful... Equations together..."

"But this is insane! You didn't have to... WOULD YOU STOP THAT?" Luna screamed. The bassist sheepishly stopped her sad music.

"Aw, I liked the music!" Pinkie Pie pouted.

"Shush, Pinkie! This is very dramatic!" Rarity informed her.

"Aw...!"

"Oh... Oh my..." Fluttershy sniffled in the background. "Poor Mac..."

Ignoring the background chatter, Luna turned back to the two dying fighters in her arms. "You didn't have to...! I can love you both equally!"

"Alas... It is too late... I go to calculate in the Great Unknown, with the epicycles," the foe coughed.

"No! No! NOOOO! BIG MAC! ABACUS!" Luna sobbed.

"Luna? Princess Luna...?"

"EEP!"

Luna fell out of the warm soft bed into a mass of sheets and blankets. With a burst of magic, she freed herself and stood up. She looked over and saw Sundance standing in the doorway.

"Princess? Are you all right?" She asked.

"... Yes! Yes, I'm fine," Luna said quickly. She took hold of her abacus with telekinesis, lifting it out of bed. She carefully examined it for any damage, before nodding and putting it away in her pack.

"Just fine... Just a dream," she said.

"Okay," Sundance said, with a raised eyebrow. She left the princess alone, and looked at Hoyden standing at the bottom of the stairs. She shook her head.

"Don't ask."

"Wasn't going to," Hoyden said.

Back in Ponyville...

"Oh man... That was weird," Rainbow Dash said, rubbing her forehead. She looked at Twilight. "Seriously? That's what she dreams about?"

"Poking around in the Princess's head is probably not a good idea, Twilight," Applejack added. She made a face. "Especially if Princess Luna is havin' Harlequine dreams about mah brother and her addin' machine..."

"I wonder where she got the inspiration from?" Rarity asked, looking a bit smug. Applejack blushed deeply and looked back and forth shiftily.

"I loved it! Especially with the slashing and clashing and the cotton candy clouds outside!" Pinkie Pie said cheerfully. "They tasted like fireworks!"

"Um... Excuse me Twilight Sparkle, but maybe you shouldn't, um, sneak into her dreams like that?" Fluttershy suggested.

"But wasn't it fun? Really fun?" Pinkie Pie said cheerfully.

"It was at that," Rarity said. "I say, I think this spell is wonderful..."

"Well, it wasn't supposed to do that," Twilight said with a sigh, looking through her book. "It was supposed to be a simple memory transfer spell... I think I mixed up the mnemosyne components..."

"Still, you should keep at it!" Rarity said with a smile. "Who knows when that might come in handy?"

"Aw, memory transfer? Sounds like more trouble than it's worth," Dash huffed.

"Maybe, maybe not," Twilight said with a smile. "I guess we'll just have to wait and see..."

Chapter 10

Ponies! In Spaaace! Part 1

All right... If K and c are non-zero integers, and $\beta_1 \dots \beta_m$ are the roots of a polynomial with integer coefficients... Luna went through the proof's final steps and... Aha! I've got it!

"EUREKA!" She cried, holding up the proof as lightning flashed and thunder crashed outside the window. "I AM THE GODDESS OF MATH ONCE AGAIN! MWAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

"Having fun?" whispered a familiar voice in her ear.

"EEP!" Luna cried, jumping right up onto the table. She stared, mortified, at her sister. Celestia covered her mouth with her hoof, concealing the sight of her laughter but not the sound.

"Sister!"

"Now now, Luna... You really cannot blame me for this," she said. "I didn't even have to sneak up on you, with all the racket you were making. What warranted this little outbreak?"

"Ah... Well... I came up with a new theorem," Luna explained. She held up her calculations. "See? It allows us to establish the transcendence of numbers! Specifically, it lets us prove that π is both irrational and transcendental! If the complex number z is algebraic (the root of an integral polynomial) then $e^z + 1$ cannot be zero! This result can be generalised to the following-

"... Luna... While I'm sure it's quite a breakthrough for mathematics, I have something more important for you to work on," Celestia said. Luna blinked.

"But... But my theorem...!"

"I'll post it to the University first thing tomorrow," Celestia said smoothly, taking the sheaves of paper away in a telekinetic grip. "Come along."

Luna frowned, but followed her sister obediently. Out of the library they went, trotting down the steps of the stairs to the central hallway. It ran the length of the palace, from the front door to the back door and branched out into every room. It was an efficient design for trapping invaders, through it was a bit inefficient for daily traffic.

They stopped by Luna's unofficial office, where Sundance was doing some filing. Or rather, she was supposed to be doing some filing. She was instead making a different kind of deposit in a bucket.

"Blargh!" She groaned, and looked up with a pale expression. "Oh! OH! Oh you... Your Majesties!"

"Are you all right, Sundance?" Luna asked, immediately concerned. Sundance nodded.

"I'm fine... Um... Just something I ate..." She wiped her mouth and took a few breaths. She stood up. "I'm ready for work, whatever you need!"

"Good," Celestia said cheerfully. "What I need from you both is to get out."

Luna and Sundance both blinked. Luna raised an eyebrow.

"Sister, your sense of humor is problematic at the best of times but I really-"

"No no, what I mean is that I have a task for you that requires the both of you to move somewhere else for a few months," Celestia said.

Luna frowned, and thought about it. "Governor of the Province of Epona?"

"Nothing so provincial," Celestia said. "Besides, you're a Goddess-Why would I have you directly acting as a governor? You haven't even been elected."

"Good point," Luna mumbled. "I'm just not sure what task it is you'll have for me."

"The space program, from Cape Connemara," Celestia said cheerfully. "Your accounting work got it back on schedule, and I think you'd be ideal to run as an administrator."

"Me?" Luna asked.

"Yes. You," Celestia said. "It's target is to land a pony on the moon within the next year. Given it is your celestial body, who better?"

"Ah... But I'm not very good at... I have little..." Luna sputtered, despite her considerable blush.

"Your primary duties will be related to personnel," Celestia said smoothly. "You will find suitable candidates for the program, interviewing and testing them at first. If you succeed in this task, you will receive others. My hope is that you will be in charge when the first mission to the moon is launched." Celestia smiled warmly.

"Call it a bit of catharsis..."

"I... Well..."

"And Sundance, of course, will be well paid as your assistant," Celestia said. "It would give you something of a vacation."

"I suppose," Luna said softly.

"And think... Just *think*... Of *all* the science you could do!" Celestia added.

Luna's eyes widened, and Sundance saw a strange gleam enter those green orbs.

"Sc-Science?" Luna asked.

"Science?" Sundance asked.

"All the science you could ever want to do, just like those ancient experiments you did. All the math you could do, all the chemistry, physics... All with the benefit of friendship!"

"Science," Luna said again, in an almost child-like way. "Yes... Science sounds good."

"With dear Abacus, of course," Celestia said.

"Of course," she said. Luna nodded. "I'd love to!"

"Good! Leave as soon as you're able," Celestia said. "Thank you my dear sister, I really appreciate this."

"Thank you! Thank you!" Luna said. She turned to Sundance with a wide smile. "Sundance! Let's get going, right away!"

"Ah, of course Your Majesty," Sundance said, giving her sovereigns a raised eyebrow. Luna practically skipped out the door. Sundance watched her leave, then looked at Celestia. Celestia smiled at her.

"Well...?"

"Ah... Of course Your Majesty," she said. Sundance headed out, though she could not help thinking the Princess of the Sun was smiling madly.

"Hmhmhm, hmhmhm," Luna hummed cheerfully as she gathered her books and files. All of them went into several boxes, organized alphabetically. Sundance looked in carefully.

"Ah... Princess Luna?"

"Mm? Oh, hello Sundance!" Luna said happily. "You're just going to love Cape Connemara! It's a lovely desert right by the ocean! In my day, it was a great center of trade and learning, the Jewel of Southern Equestria! And now, we shall go to the moon from it! Not with magic, but with wonderful, *glorious* Science!"

"Ah, Princess-"

"You see, it's a misconception that my sister and myself are half pegasus and half unicorn-We are Earth Pony, Unicorn and Pegasus all at the same time! And the Earth ponies, they seek and strive to understand the world far more deeply than the Unicorns or Pegasi! Science is their servant, their superpower!" Luna said happily. She held Abacus to her chest, the picture of a squee. "It's wonderful!"

"Yes, but..." Sundance tried once more, reminding herself to be patient.

"Mm? Is something wrong?" Luna asked. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, it's just a bit sudden, that's all," Sundance said.

"Well, she sprang it on us both," Luna said. "Still... It's only a few months."

"Yes, but what about Hoyden?" Sundance asked. "I mean, I can't just tell him 'I'm going off to Cape Connemara' for a few months, can I?"

"Hmmm..." Luna rubbed her chin thoughtfully. She smiled. "Talk to him about it! Convince him to come! I'll go on ahead, and make some preparations. I'll get him a job! Don't worry about anything!"

"Well... All right," Sundance said.

Luna kissed Sundance's cheek, and trotted off happily out the door. Sundance watched her go, feeling a bit of niggling dread. Still, after everything she and Luna had been through... This couldn't be that bad, right?

Just rocket science...

"Honey, you know I'd like to go, I'd really love to, but I have a big job right now," Hoyden said.

Sundance sighed. "Hoyden, it's a great chance! We'll get paid more, we'll get away from the city for a while, it'll be great for us both!"

"Well... The space program is neat, but come on. With my resume, what could I do there?"

"There's probably plenty of things you could do!" Sundance said cheerfully. "Come on, you're adaptable!"

"Yeah, I'm adaptable, but I'm not..."

"Come on honey! Please?" Sundance asked plaintively. She rested her hooves on his face tenderly. "Please?"

"Well..." Hoyden said thoughtfully.

"I swear, if you don't like it we can head home right away," Sundance says. "But I'm a little worried about Luna."

"Why? She sounds like she's gung-ho about it," Hoyden said.

"That's what worries me," Sundance sighed. "Pretty please?"

"Well..."

"Hey hey hey! What's the hold up?" Hoyden's boss asked, stomping over. "What's going on, Hoyden?"

"Well, my marefriend wants me to go work at the space program at Cape Connemara-"

"And what's the problem?" The boss asked.

Hoyden and Sundance blinked. "What?"

"Well, come on! They're going to be building rockets to send ponies to the moon!" The boss said. He pointed to the large rocket Hoyden was currently strapped to in a safety harness and a helmet. "This! This is a firecracker next to that! Go on!" The boss held his hoof up, a shine in his eyes. "GO! Go for Sundance, go for yourself, but most importantly, go for ME!"

Hoyden stared with watery eyes. "I... I will boss!"

"Perfect!" The Boss said. "I... Oh." He trotted over to Sundance and led her away quickly.

"What's wrong? Why are you-?" Sundance asked, but she was interrupted by a massive blast. She turned around to see the rocket flying off into the distance.

"Hmmm... Now we'll see if the parachute functions," the Boss said.

"What if it doesn't?" Sundance asked.

"Well, there's still the pile of pillows to land in," the Boss said. Sundance smiled.

"You've made some improvements!"

"Well, after that *last* lawsuit, I kind of had to," the Boss grumped. "How that little blue mare in the glasses outfoxed me I haven't a clue."

"Let's just say she has a lot of experience," Sundance said with a smile.

Several days later...

"Sign here... And here... Here here... And here," Luna said to Sundance and Hoyden, as the latter filled out the forms at the front desk office of the launch complex.

"Man, that's a lot of signatures," Hoyden said. "I didn't need that many for my last job."

"I didn't need this many for *my* job," Sundance commented dryly. "There."

"Well, you know regulators, they need paper to stamp to feel important," Luna said. "Fortunately! My reforms will get it down to..." She did some calculations on her abacus. "Two forms... Maybe two point five... Anyway! Come with me! I want to show you something right off the bat for the tour."

"Show us what?" Hoyden asked.

"You'll see..."

Luna led Hoyden and Sundance out of the small control building and down the steps to the massive, outside launching area. Paved roads criss-crossed the desert floor, almost right up to the shore of the glittering ocean in the distance. Large buildings dotted the area, the largest of all resembling a giant's metal wardrobe.

Silhouetted against the ocean stood the launch pad-There was nothing else it could be. Hoyden had seen similar platforms and been launched off them repeatedly in the past, but this one dwarfed them all by at least a hundred times.

A pony pulling a sleek buggy ran up and came to a stop. Luna got in, as did Hoyden and Sundance.

"To the Main Assembly Hanger, please!" Luna said.

"Yes Your Majesty," the pony confirmed, and he towed them quickly across the complex to the gigantic wardrobe-shaped building. It took longer than Sundance thought it would-The hanger was that massive.

"Thank you Hauler," Luna said gratefully as they stopped just outside a pony sized door next to the gigantic hanger doors. "Say hello to your new foals for me!"

"I will your Majesty!" Hauler said cheerfully, as he ran off again. Luna trotted to the door, and opened it with a bit of telekinesis. Hoyden and Sundance followed, and they entered into a smaller room with mirrored glass on one side.

"Just hold still," Luna said.

"For what-Woah!" Hoyden cried, as beams of magical energy flashed over them. "They're tingly!"

"Eep!" Sundance gasped. "HEY! There's nothing THERE!"

"Sorry about that," Luna apologized. "it's the only way to make sure we don't bring anything in."

"Like what?" Hoyden asked, as the doors opened. Luna trotted ahead and her friends followed.

"Oh, pies, bubblegum, booze, sticky glue, lemons," Luna rattled off. She pointed a hoof to a large sign. "The full list is available in the manual and in posters!"

"Kind of strict," Sundance commented.

"Well, who wants bubblegum getting into a rocket?" Hoyden asked. Sundance frowned and nodded.

"Good point..."

"Besides, all that stuff is available at the cafeterias," Luna sniffed. They got into an elevator, and the doors closed automatically. Slowly the car ascended through the shaft.

"Has anyone been caught bringing this in?" Sundance asked.

"Just some of the tourists," Luna remarked. She scowled. "One in particular was pretty bad..."

"How bad?" Hoyden asked.

"It took *three hours* to find all the candy she'd hidden on herself," Luna grumbled. "Chocolate bars, caramel bars, fruit pops, candied apples, cotton candy, gummy bears, jelly babies, gum drops, peanut butter chocolate cups, hot chocolate, cherry twists, lemon snaps, pressed sugar glass, a butterfly knife-"

"Wait, wait... Butterfly knife?" Hoyden asked.

"Don't ask..." Luna sighed.

Somewhere, a certain pink party pony sneezed hard enough to poof out her hair. Since she'd just gotten out of the shower, she didn't have to use her hair dryer. She immediately resolved to get some pepper from the store, and then hold a party to celebrate her discovery.

The elevator soon emerged from the enclosed shaft and was now riding on rails, ascending to the waist of the massive hanger. Luna smiled as Hoyden and Sundance turned around.

"There it is," she said with a smile, as Hoyden and Sundance's jaws dropped.

It was obvious now why the hanger had to be so huge-The great moon rocket took up most of the room even while being assembled. Ponies worked all over-Earth ponies handling machinery, pegasi lifting massive components up to add to the stack, and unicorns putting all the intricate pieces together with their telekinesis.

"Say hello to Aponyo 1," Luna said as she trotted out onto the catwalk that ran across the center of the massive hanger. Sundance and Hoyden trotted after, soon catching up. All three stopped and looked up at it.

"It's incredible! It'll really reach the moon?" Sundance asked.

"Eeyup! It'll take us to the moon, to the sun, and maybe to the other planets in the system too," Luna said cheerfully.

"But you can't land on the sun," Hoyden pointed out.

"No, but you can fly around it, maybe study it," Luna said. "Even Celestia and I do not know *every* aspect of the heavens..."

"So, what crazy ponies are you going to get to fly in this... Thing..." Sundance looked over at Luna, then at Hoyden. She made the connection almost at the same time as Hoyden. Though in the case of the latter, his reaction was a grin where Sundance's was a dropped jaw.

"Um... Surprise?" Luna said.

"... You said this was a *tour*," Sundance growled.

"And it is! For you!" Luna said.

"The moon?" Hoyden asked.

"And when were you going to *tell me*?" Sundance asked flatly. She laughed and hugged Hoyden. "This is wonderful!"

Hoyden visibly relaxed. Luna did too. Sundance smiled broadly.

"First Earth Pony on the moon... I have to admit, it has a nice ring to it," Sundance teased.

"You're not upset about it?" Hoyden asked.

"Why would I be upset? Luna's in charge, not that crazy pony who was your boss," Sundance said. "This *can't* be any less safe, right?"

"Of course it's safe! It's just sending a few ponies up to the moon on the largest, most complicated thing ever created! What could go wrong?" Luna said.

She then automatically winced, and looked around. Sundance sighed.

"Princess, for a goddess you sure are superstitious. Here, watch. Ahem... 'Nothing could possibly go-'"

A rocket shot through the hanger door behind and below them, interrupting Sundance and sending several ponies scattering while screaming. It missed the rocket entirely and shot through the other door, leaving large, gaping, fiery holes.

A few scientists poked their heads through the first hole.

"Did anypony see our... Oh, right... Nevermind!" One with very large glasses called.

Sundance very slowly looked over at Luna, while her hug on Hoyden tightened. Luna offered her a comforting smile.

"... Wro-"

"Finish that sentence and *you're* getting shot to the moon, Your Majesty. And I'll do it *without magic*."

"Um, threatening the Princess with bodily harm is a crime Sundance-"

"Shut it Hoyden."

"Yes dear."

"So Prince Blueblood was originally in charge of the program?" Sundance asked as she and Luna trotted down one of the hallways of the Astronaut Training Center. Luna nodded, adjusting her glasses slightly. While she didn't really need the disguise, she'd taken to wearing them to make herself seem more like just another pony rather than the workers' sovereign.

"Well, not specifically the program as a whole. Just the PR department."

Sundance frowned as they turned a corner. She hadn't heard a single thing about the space program until she'd heard it from Luna. That didn't bode well...

"How'd he get that? I thought he was just a Prince of a charity foundation?"

"Normally yes, but apparently his father suggested that since his son had done such a good job with said foundation, that he might be well suited to running the space program."

Sundance blinked, her frown deepened. "Charity work equals... Running a space program?"

"Well, on the pony side of things it's not too different from any other large scale operation," Luna said thoughtfully. "You have to manage money, resources, ponies, same as any other. Though of course, you have to be technically inclined as well."

"Like you?" Sundance guessed. Luna smiled and nodded.

"Yes, like me!"

"But what about the rocket-"

"That was just a little testing error! I miscalculated how much kerosene and liquid oxygen was flowing into the reaction chamber at one time... And one of the scientists on the team didn't secure it correctly... They fixed it though, so there shouldn't be any more problems!" Luna said cheerfully.

Sundance cringed and looked around. Seeing no imminent disaster, the young mare sighed in relief and continued with Luna to the waiting room. Within, several ponies waited, filling out forms.

"So, why mention Prince Blue... Blood?" Sundance asked, blinking. Within the waiting room, given a wide berth by the rest of the ponies, said prince sat on a golden pillow. He was being fed grapes by one servant, and fanned with a palm tree frond by another.

"That is the reason," Luna said. "He insists on being put through the necessary training to go on the rocket."

"I... see," Sundance said. "So... You want him to become an astronaut?"

Luna gave her a smile. "Well sure, if he can pass the training! And I want him to go through the training. Like everypony else. Is there a problem?"

"Well, he is a prince," Sundance said, carefully. "He's used to managing finances..."

"And we have the duty to test him and see if he can handle it," Luna said. "Shall we?"

Sundance sighed. "Yes your majesty..."

They entered the waiting room. Luna nodded kindly to anypony who met her eyes, before stopping in front of Blueblood.

"Prince Blueblood?" She inquired.

"Mm? Oh! Yes, hello Princess Luna!" Blueblood said with a smile, rising up off the pillow. "How absolutely delightful, you're here! We can get on with the interview!"

"Yes we can," Luna said.

"As quickly as possible, if you please," Blueblood sniffed haughtily. "I had to improve this waiting room on my own initiative! The accommodations really are appalling, don't you agree?" His eyes went over the other ponies. A few shot him glares, while the others ignored him.

Luna looked around the room, and scanned it magically. The temperature was nominal, there were no offensive odors, the asbestos level was non-harmful...

"I'm afraid I don't, what exactly is appalling?" Luna asked.

Blueblood looked at her as though she were simple. Sundance felt her blood boil. Sure, Luna wasn't always the most perceptive of ponies but she wasn't an idiot!

"Your Majesty, we are on a bit of a time table," Sundance emphasized gently. Luna nodded and smiled at Blueblood.

"Shall we proceed with the interview then?"

"Of course, of course," Blueblood said. He looked over at his servants. "Wait here, I will return momentarily. And don't talk to anypony."

The serving ponies all nodded, lips zipped up tight. Luna and Sundance turned and trotted off, Blueblood in tow.

The interview room was warm and cheerful. Sundance typed away at the typewriter, acting as the recorder for the interview while Luna sat nearby her. Across from them both sat Blueblood, who was apparently staring intently at the mirror behind the two.

"So, Prince Blueblood, what qualifications do you bring to this program that you think would make you a good astronaut?" Luna inquired politely.

Blueblood threw back his head and let his mane flare out. He shot them a winning grin. "Well Princess Luna, I am absolutely dashing. I mean, just look at me!"

"...Uh..." Was Luna's eloquent response.

"Would I not look magnificent trodding on soil no pony has ever trodden before? And the cameras, yes! Everypony on this planet would get a good look at me! Well, there's never been a bad look at me, am I right Hoofmaiden?"

"Ex-Excuse me?" Sundance asked, her cheeks flushing in fury.

"Well, you look familiar. Have we met before?"

"Yes. Once," Sundance said, her taps to the keys of the typewriter much harder.

"It's so hard to keep track of the mares in my life, but you I would certainly remember," he said, with what he thought was a roguish smile. Sundance twitched.

Luna cleared her throat significantly, trying to get back on track.

"Let me be more specific: What skills do you have that would contribute to the space program?"

Blueblood opened his mouth.

"Aside from your 'magnificence'," Sundance interjected flatly.

"I like your spirit," Blueblood said, quite seriously. "You have a very ja no say na cross about you."

"Je ne sais quoi. Le cerveau il etait en option chez toi," Sundance returned in French. Blueblood smiled and nodded.

"Ah! You too know the language of love! We could spend many an hour discussing it's beauty, and yours!"

"Le réalité et toi, vous ne vous entendez pas, n'est-ce pas?" Sundance returned sweetly. Luna cleared her throat again.

"As she said, aside from your... Magnificence."

"I did manage the PR firm for the Space Program," he said with a haughty smile. "As you know, as a Prince I was appointed by royal decree to manage the same foundation my father was Prince of in his day. I did such a good job that I was entrusted with numerous other tasks, each one more exotic than the last! I have managed a wildlife preserve, a commoner without work shelter, a diplomatic mission to the Pony's Republic of Aduuna, a supermarket chain..."

"Yes, yes," Luna said, looking over his files. "It says here you managed each an average of one week."

"I am a fast learner," he said, his smile made of smug. "Votree chapew tortilla jelly de sables?" He asked Sundance.

"Tu es complètement debile," Sundance replied flatly. *"On t'a bercé trop près du mur?"*

"Yes, I would love some rice pudding," Blueblood said. "Perhaps we could dine on it together. I know, being alone with me will be quite overwhelming but I'm sure I could go easy on you..."

"Ta mere suce des ours dans la foret," Sundance growled.

"Okay, and do you have any physical impediments that might make you unfit for this program?" Luna asked.

"I'm sure I could demonstrate my... Healthiness... To the young mare next to you," Blueblood said with a wink.

"Look you...!"

"Ahem," Luna said.

"... Your *Majesty*, I have a coltfriend."

"That need not be a hindrance," Blueblood said with a grin.

Luna tactfully used her telekinesis to keep Sundance from throwing her typewriter into Blueblood's face.

"Well, thank you, this concludes the interview," Luna said quickly. "We'll go on to the physical tests next, to see you demonstrate these claims."

"But of course," Blueblood said. He trotted out, a wink directed to Sundance and a flick of his tail directed to her flanks. She jumped, and turned to pound the prince with her hooves but once again, Luna's power prevented her.

"Oooh! That... That... That...!" Sundance snarled.

"I take it you've met before?" Luna asked dryly.

"You could say that," Sundance grumbled. "Are you really going to let him into the physical testing?"

"Yes," Luna said, in a very, *very* calm voice. Sundance blinked.

"But-But Your Majesty!"

"Now now Sundance, we must see if he has what it takes to be in this program, as does everypony else," Luna said calmly. "I have not made an exception for Hoyden-He may be my friend but I cannot just hoof over a billion bit spacecraft to somepony for that."

"It doesn't mean you should let somepony like him in!" Sundance argued.

"Sundance, I always listen to your advice but I do not always have to take it," Luna said. She put her papers back into her folder. "Now, let us go test the Prince, as per our jobs." She gave her a little smile.

"... Yes Princess," Sundance said, respectfully.

The Astronaut Training Facility kept the majority of it's testing equipment in the center of the building, a large central room covered in white tiles and filled with various equipment. It hummed with the sounds of motors, fans, and was brightly lit with warm natural sunlight let in through overhead windows.

Luna, Sundance, and Blueblood entered the testing center, the last of their number literally strutting ahead of them. Sundance fumed, while Luna was serene.

"All right, what shall be the first test?" Blueblood asked, bored.

"I will leave that to your fellow trainee, Hoyden, to introduce," Luna said, waving a hoof over at a track that ran through the training center out two doors on either side of the large room. Blueblood frowned.

"Hoyden?"

The roar of a rocket filled the tunnel to the right, and a cart with said rocket attached to the back flew through the room and out the other door. Sundance lowered the hoof she had raised to cover her eyes... And noticed Blueblood was now missing.

"Huh? Where'd he go?" Sundance asked.

"Wh-Wh-What was that?" Squeaked a high pitched voice from behind a nearby control console. Luna raised an eyebrow as Blueblood lifted his head up from behind, his wide eyes darting back and forth in a bit of a panic.

"That was Hoyden. He'll be back in a few moments," Luna said. "Three... Two..."

The rocket cart came back around, the rocket's fuel expended. It slowly coasted to a stop, and the pony strapped into it stayed still for a few moments.

"Hoyden? Hoyden, honey, are you all right?" Sundance asked, resting a hoof on his forearm. Hoyden coughed, and shook his head. He pulled off his goggles and wheezed.

"W-Wow...! What a rush...!"

"That was incredible!" Shouted a voice from behind a blast shield. The source of the voice was a red maned unicorn in a labcoat and glasses, who trotted around the shield.

"Exactly as we predicted," said another unicorn, this one in a beret and labcoat with a magnificent mustache. "How was it, Hoyden?"

"Oh... I think I topped out at nine gees," Hoyden said. "What force do we get to that makes my eyeballs move back?"

"Eight, definitely eight," The beret-wearing scientist said. They performed a few health checks with magic and their equipment before slapping the charcoal-colored pony on the back.

"Everything went according to plan, Majesty!" The glasses-wearing unicorn declared. "I didn't lose my eyebrows this time!"

"I didn't know you *had* eyebrows," the beret-wearing unicorn said.

"Well I don't *now*!"

"Wh-What are you actually-What is this thing?" Blueblood gasped.

"It's a rocket cart," Hoyden said, matter-of-factly. "See? It's a cart with a rocket on the end. Rocket-cart."

"And what in the name of Discord were you doing on it?" Blueblood demanded.

Hoyden shrugged. "Testing. We might pull several gees on the rocket, so I'm testing it out."

"Well Prince Blueblood... You wished to prove yourself physically," Luna said calmly. She gave him a compassionate smile. "If you cannot handle this simple test-"

"N-Nonsense! I'm sure I can handle this just fine!" Blueblood sniffed. He trotted over to the rocket cart, and grimaced. "As soon as it has been cleaned. I cannot touch anything a... *Common* pony has touched for so long."

Hoyden blinked. "*Common* pony? Where'd you get this guy, the Shakespony Festival?"

"What? Was that an insult?" Blueblood demanded. Hoyden looked to the side with a little smile.

"Well, if you couldn't tell if it was, I guess not."

"Why you...!" Blueblood sniffed. "I wish for this pony to be removed! He has insulted me!"

"He did not!" Sundance growled.

"Now Prince Blueblood," Luna said calmly, "there is no need for such outrage. You want to be an astronaut, correct?"

"Yes... But my station-"

"Your station is what got you into this position! Have pride in it, and go forth in the same spirit as your noble ancestors," Luna said encouragingly. "After all, you're sure you can handle it... Correct?"

Blueblood gulped, and nodded. "Of... Of course..." Nevertheless, he pulled out a handkerchief and wiped off the seat and restrained harness thoroughly. He sat in it, and allowed himself to be strapped in, cringing a bit. He pulled on the goggles.

"It's very uncomfortable," he commented. "I believe improvements are necessary!"

"Like whose in the seat," Sundance muttered. Hoyden and Sundance stood behind the blast shield, as the two scientists and Luna set up the device.

"Hmm... Your majesty, what shall we start at?" Asked the first pony.

"Ten percent burn, then increase slowly," Luna ordered.

"What? Ten percent?" Blueblood demanded.

"Well, that's what all trainees start out on," the beret-wearing pony said.

"Hmph! I insist it be made to start at one hundred percent!" Blueblood shouted.

"One hundred percent? But your Majesty, that would surely-!" Tried the glasses-wearing pony, but Blueblood was not deterred.

"One hundred percent! I order you!" He stated. The scientists looked to Luna, who shrugged.

"Give him one hundred percent," she said.

"Ah, Princess?" Hoyden intervened.

"Maybe you shouldn't let him do that?" Sundance tried. She may have thought the prince was a jerk, but that didn't translate to wanting him to *die*. Luna nevertheless held up a hoof.

"No, no, if he wants one hundred percent, he will get one *hundred* percent," Luna said firmly.

"Very well, your Highness. Set! Charged up!" Announced the glasses-wearing pony.

"Ready to go!" The beret-wearing one said.

"Prince Blueblood, are you completely sure-?" Luna tried once more, but Blueblood shook his head contemptuously.

"FIRE!" He cried. Luna shrugged, and slammed down the big red button. The rocket roared to life, and off Blueblood went... Screaming all the way.

"You know... You could have started him off on the centrifuge," Hoyden said. Luna shrugged.

"Maybe, but I think this will provide much more useful data... Oh my! Look how high his heart rate is! Fascinating!" She looked intently at the readouts on the various machines. "Is it supposed to go that high?"

"Not usually, Your Highness," the glasses-wearing pony said.

"He should be fine though," the beret-wearing one said. "At this high a level, the rocket can only run for a minute or two."

Luna nodded. "Good!"

"Is this how you usually do testing?" Sundance asked.

"No... But it could be worse," Luna said. "You should see some of the intelligence reports on the Diamond Dogs' space program."

"They've got a space program too?" Hoyden asked.

"Well... Sort of..."

"All right Claw, light the rocket!" Shouted the test pilot, who was tied by rope to a gigantic red firework. The head of the Wolfenstein Space Program nodded to the match dog, who struck the great match on a rock. The fire lit, the dog ran to the rocket, lit the fuse, and quickly ran back.

"Ah, Space Head, are you sure rocket will get pilot into space?" The assistant asked.

"Of course me am! Look! Fishbowl on pilot's head, and parachute's on his back!" The Space Head said. "Nothing can go wrong!"

"I am sorry to question your wisdom, Space Head!" The assistant said reverently. "That make perfect sense!"

"Of course it does! I am scientist!" The Space Head declared.

FWOOSH! The massive rocket flew off, higher, higher... Until it exploded.

"... Blast! Rocket exploded like all the others!" The Space Head cursed, as the poor test pilot landed on his head. His parachute opened seconds later.

"What we do now?" The assistant asked.

The great Space Head rubbed his chin, before snapping his clawed fingers.

"Get me a *bigger* rocket!"

"Why exactly were we afraid of these guys again?" Hoyden asked.

Luna shrugged. "Well, in my day they had a God-Alpha who could turn anything he touched to stone and created Dire Wolves the size of bears out of diamonds and granite. They've gone... A *tiny* bit downhill since then..."

At last the rocket cart came around, and came to a stop. Luna gently undid Blueblood's restraints, and the prince didn't so much fall off the cart as *melt*.

"Ohhh..." Blueblood moaned. Luna trotted over to Blueblood and smiled congenially as she scanned him.

"He's fine," she assured the scientists. "He's actually quite resilient. Why, with the proper training I'm sure he could-"

"NO!" Blueblood managed to gasp. "No! Nononono! No! I-I am... I have an appointment to make! SERVANTS! SERVANTS!"

"Are you sure?" Luna asked kindly. "I mean, there's still the centrifuge, the underwater training lab, the parachute training, the vacuum chamber-"

"No! No, I cannot stay-Have to be going-Much too important-!" He managed to babble all the way to the exit, carried by his long-suffering servants. Luna watched him go, and turned to look back at Hoyden and Sundance.

"I suppose not everypony is cut out for this job," she said with a shrug. "Oh well! Look at me standing here! I've experiments to run, there is research to be done!" She smiled. "We're going to need more unicorns!"

Luna trotted off happily, as Hoyden and Sundance looked at each other.

"I think Luna's been hanging around her sister too much," Sundance said.

"Why?"

"Because it's getting harder to tell when she's serious. All I know is, never get her *angry*," she concluded.

"I don't think you'll have much chance of that," Hoyden said with a smile. "I'm the one she's putting into a rocket, after all..."

"I'm not sure I completely understand," Luna said, wearing a frown as she trotted to the entrance of the Space Flight Center with her escort, Sundance. "I am to be guiding a tour?"

"Yes your Majesty," Sundance said with a smile. "You've been doing a lot of work and the administrators thought you could use a break."

"I sometimes think these 'breaks' are to simply get me out of their manes," Luna grumbled. "I haven't been biting their ears that hard."

Sundance cringed, very slightly.

"... And in this way we can launch our fusion driven starship with the linear launch rail from the equator, using either the moon or the sun as a slingshot to send it flying to fight space monkeys. We can power it by manufacturing anti-hydrogen from the regolith by processing the helium-3 in the soil of the moon and-"

"Ah, I'm sorry your Majesty, space monkeys?"

"That or space tigers. Big space tigers with gravity drives. But we can teach them a lesson with our fusion drives, blasting them in half with concentrated nuclear fire! Mwahahahahahaha!"

"... Princess, this meeting is for choosing a *contractor* for the new *cafeteria*."

"... Well if you're interested I do have a plan for a fusion-powered... *Oven*... That I am *not* making up on the spot in a vain attempt to cover up my mistake."

"..."

"... I said that out loud, didn't I?"

"Of course not, Your Majesty," Sundance said. "Though you have to admit it is a bit of a concern when you kind of interfere with your own organizational rules."

Luna frowned thoughtfully. "I haven't been that bad, have I?"

"Well... There were the tests with the hover boards," Sundance said flatly.

"Hoyden *loved* those tests!" Luna said defensively.

"Oh yes, so did I... Until he came flying through the *window*," Sundance said.

"He was fine! Really! I healed him myself!"

"Yes, but I can't help feeling more concerned about him... And since he's going out into space, that's a *lot* of concern already," Sundance said.

"I understand," Luna said sympathetically. She nuzzled her hoofmaiden.
"Trust me Sundance. Nothing will happen to him, you have my word."

"You gave that before," Sundance said quietly. Luna looked to the side, pawing at the floor.

"I just... I don't want you to forget it," Luna said.

Sundance chuckled and nuzzled Luna back. "Relax, I won't. Every so often I'll act like it but I don't really." The blonde pony smiled warmly. "Now go on out there and make some tourists' day!"

Luna smiled back cheerfully. "Okay!"

"Oh! And don't forget that the Moonscape Lab is set for Scenario 18!" Sundance said. But as she said that, Luna had already trotted out of earshot. The blonde pony went about her business, pushing any worries out of her mind.

It was a tour group. What could go wrong?

... I only thought it, it doesn't count, she thought to herself.

Luna trotted out to the waiting area, a bright smile on her face... And glasses on her nose.

Why mess with what worked?

"Hello, Welcome to the Space Center! I am-"

"Miss Selene! Miss Selene! Miss Selene!" Cried several familiar voices. Luna blinked as she recognized the three fillies out of a crowd of a number of other school-aged foals. Their teacher, a dark pink mare, smiled at her.

"Hello, I am Cherilee. These are my students from Ponyville. It's very nice to meet you, Miss Selene," she said. "I didn't know you knew anyone in the Moon program, girls!"

"We do!" Applebloom said cheerfully. "She's a... A librarian! From Canterlot!"

"Yes. Librarian," Luna said calmly. "And I am very happy to serve as your tour guide." She smiled brightly at the assembled students. "Shall we be off?"

"Yes! Come along everypony, follow Ms. Selene," Cherilee said.

"I'd follow her... All day," whispered one of the unicorn colts in the class to his friend. His friend snickered. Luna was a bit puzzled at the wording. It almost sounded... But no! He was too young for such talk. That was for sailors or soldiers, not young, eager minds!

Their first stop was the visitor's center. Here, Luna had gone all out in an effort to promote the space program, using several suggestions by Sundance and a few from Hoyden to improve the dismal effort that had been Blueblood's "contribution". The class oohed and ahed at the great, magically floating model of the Equestria system that slowly orbited above

them, a few three-dimensional projections of light highlighting the path of the rockets and other points of interest. Luna intended to make the roof black with the stars from Equestria's night-time sky but she hadn't found the time yet.

But given the expressions of wonder on the faces of every foal, it seemed to be a good start. Luna cleared her throat, and had their attention again. Taking a moment to focus against such intense scrutiny, Luna began her speech.

"Now, above us is a model of the Equestrian triple world," Luna began. "Can anypony tell me what a triple-world is?"

A hoof went up-Scootaloo. "Yes Scootaloo?"

"It's worlds that don't trip over eachother!" The orange pegasus said proudly. Her classmates snickered and Luna, seeing how Cherlilee smiled indulgently, emulated the expression.

"Well, it is true that the system does not trip over itself," Luna said, "but that's not quite what I meant. Anypony else?"

The unicorn colt who had commented on enjoying following her around spoke up: "It's three worlds!"

"Very good!" Luna said with a smile. "Your name?"

"Snails, ma'am," the colt said with a shy smile.

"Good to know," Luna said. She pointed up at the three worlds moving lazily overhead-Equestria itself in the center, with her moon and Celestia's sun orbiting around it. "The sun and the moon are roughly the same mass, about one sixth that of Equestria, and have a slightly elliptical orbit rather than a purely circular one. You can see that the sun orbits almost twice the distance of the moon from Equestria. Does anypony know what this causes?"

Applebloom's hoof shot up. "Eclipses!" She said proudly.

"Very good," Luna said with a smile, and Applebloom blushed. "But this does result in a bit of a problem," the moon princess continued. "If the sun is further away than the moon, then why do they look the same size?"

"Uh... Magic?" Sweetie Belle asked.

"Magic's not the answer stupid!" Scootaloo said flatly. "I bet it's like this big optical illusion!"

"I'm not stupid, *you're* stupid!" Sweetie Belle growled back.

"Now girls, calm down," Cherilee said. "Can anypony think of the answer?"

A gray filly in glasses raised her hoof, almost imperiously. Luna nodded.

"Yes?"

"It's obvious to anypony with a brain," she sniffed, eliciting angry glares from the Cutie Mark Crusaders, "that it's a matter of density. The sun is made of hydrogen and helium and thus is like a big balloon-It's bigger even though it's the same mass."

"Yes, that's correct, ah, miss...?" Luna asked. The gray filly snorted.

"Silverspoon, of the Ponyville Spoons. We take learning seriously," she said with a grin directed at the Crusaders. All three glared pure hatred at the smirking filly, and Luna found herself a bit annoyed by the filly's attitude.

"Never heard of you," Luna said neutrally. Silverspoon's face fell and the Cutie Mark Crusaders beamed. However, keen to avoid any show of favoritism, Luna quickly added: "But it is good to know your family values education."

That seemed to heal Silverspoon's pride slightly, and Luna quickly launched into the rest of the session, asking questions and providing answers, all the while using the great model of the system as her display. She found it an unexpected joy to see the children learning and grasping what she spoke of, and reflected that it was probably how she looked when she learned something new about the world.

Well, when it wasn't exploding of course.

"So, any other questions before we move on?" Luna asked. Scootaloo raised her hoof again. "Yes Scootaloo?"

"So, can any pony become an astronaut?" She asked eagerly. Luna smiled good naturedly at her... And had an idea.

"Well, why don't we find out? The simulator room is not too far away. Why don't you learn how this will actually work?"

"Oh, could we?" Sweetie Belle asked excitedly.

"Of course you can. You all can," Luna said cheerfully.

"HOORAY! CUTIE MARK CRUSADER ASTRO-PONIES!" The three of them cheered, and took off for a door. Luna raised her hoof.

"Wait, hold on! That's the-!"

CRASH!

Luna slowly lowered her hoof with a sigh. "Janitor's closet..."

The simulator room was relatively simple in concept, and per the current state of Equestrian magic and technology almost entirely analog or treated with very simple spells-Just like the actual spacecraft. There were two mockups-One of the command module, which was shaped like a cone with a docking port on the nose and a hatch on the side, and the other was the landing module which was rather like a truncated octahedron mounted on a box with legs.

Facing the two mock-ups was a command and observation room behind thick glass. From this room the foals oohed and ahed again at what they were seeing.

"Now, we'll select three of you at a time to go into one of the modules, and pilot it. Everything is clearly labeled so we'll see how you do in a sim," Luna said. "So, for the first-"

"US! US! WE WANNA GO, WE WANNA GO!" Shouted all three Cutie Mark Crusaders. Luna rubbed her ears with a wince, before nodding.

"All right, all right! You three are up first, go ahead," she said. Cherilee gave Luna a sympathetic look, and Luna couldn't help returning it. While Applebloom was dear to her heart, when combined with the other Crusaders she couldn't help but feel a wince come on.

"Okay... All of you strapped in?" Luna asked as she got into one of the seats for the control station. She started it up herself, making sure each system was online.

"YES MISS SELENE!" Cried the Cutie Mark Crusaders. Luna managed to turn down the gain on the radio with another wince.

"Right then... First job, something simple," she said. She keyed in the program, and the cameras on the simulator activated to give the Cutie Mark Crusaders the view of a model of the lander. By manipulating the controls in the command module mockup, they could move the camera around to simulate piloting the ship.

"You are going to try and mate the command module with the lander in space," Luna called through the microphone. "Use the joysticks to guide the ship."

"Roger that!" Scootaloo called. Luna hummed thoughtfully-She had assumed the pilot's seat? Applebloom had given her the impression of being the leader of the little gang, but maybe the pegasus was more confident when it came to flight?

Another video camera showed the progress of the models. The camera was mounted on a robotic arm and enclosed in a case that resembled the command module. It began to move forward, slowly towards the lander model.

"No, no, you've got to go to the right!" Called Applebloom.

"No, pull up!" Called Sweetie Belle. The camera began to go around wildly.

"Is it *supposed* to do that?" Snails asked.

"Ah... No, not really," Luna said, as the camera approached the lander at too high a speed. She winced as the camera smacked into the lander, and the simulation ended.

"What? What happened?" Scootaloo cried. "... Why does this screen say 'Tilt'?"

"You failed the simulation," Luna said calmly. "You crashed the command module into the lander."

"Congratulations, you're both dead," mocked a magenta pony with a tiara. She and Silverspoon shared a hoof-bump, as Scootaloo growled over the radio.

"She went at it a little *too* enthusiastically," Snails' friend, a bluish-gray colt, murmured to him. They both laughed.

"My turn, my turn, *my turn!*" Shouted Sweetie Belle. There was a sound of a struggle, but as the simulator reset, Sweetie Belle spoke confidently into the radio. "Commander Sweetie Belle, ready for launch!"

"Commander?" Muttered the other two fillies in the background. Luna smiled and nodded.

"All right, Commander Sweetie Belle. Go for it. Think of yourself as thread going through a needle," she advised.

"Oh, I can do that!" Sweetie Belle said cheerfully. "My big sister does it all the time!"

The camera moved forward again... And soon went into a spin as Sweetie obviously fired the thrusters too hard.

"Ahhh! Hey! Where the heck are we going?" Demanded Applebloom.

"It's okay! It's okay! I am the thread going through the needle!" Sweetie Belle said, as the camera began to do numerous crazy maneuvers... Nowhere near the lander.

"What does that *mean?*" Applebloom demanded.

Luna winced.

"Ah, girls... You might want to pay attention to your fuel gauge? Girls?"

"Hey, what's this button do?" Sweetie Belle asked. The robotic arm revved up, and shot forth even faster all over the model chamber. The module mockup began to shake in response, simulating the jarring response to the maneuver. "Uwaaahhhh!"

The cameras would transmit, via magical means, the images that would result from various maneuvers. Judging from the way the module was spinning...

"You lit up the main engine," Luna said. "That was kind of bad..." The module slammed into the model, and the simulator went offline. "And you just smashed the ship... Again."

"I guess she likes it a little too rough," muttered Snails to his friend. They snickered, though once again Luna was unsure as to why.

"Some threading of the needle!" Applebloom scoffed. "Lemme show you how it's done!"

The simulator reset, to the sound of the laughter of the CMC's classmates. Luna shrugged, and set it back online.

"Okay... Ready... Go!"

This time, the camera module proceeded a bit more slowly and steadily. Applebloom was using a measured touch, trying to get in properly.

"Much better," Luna complimented. "Just ease it on in there..."

The two unicorn colts began to snicker.

"Y-Yeah... Don't press too hard," Snails said with a twitching face.

Luna nodded with a smile. "Yes, that is very good advice."

"Just make sure you ease it in... Nice and gently... It's a tight fit, but you can make it in if you keep at it," the bluish-gray one got out between snickers.

"Even better advice!" Luna said cheerfully.

"M-Maybe you should apply some lubricant, just in case," a redheaded filly with glasses suggested through her braces. The colts nearly howled with laughter.

"That would just boil away into space," Luna patiently explained.

"Too... Too hot huh?" The bluish colt gasped.

"Well, more like it's just far too dry, without any pressure," Luna said.

Silence. Snails and his friend looked at each other, and then back at Luna, and then at the floor. The redheaded filly's jaw dropped, and Silver Spoon and her friend looked mortified.

"Did I say something wrong?" Luna asked, after the silence had dominated for a good minute and a half.

"No, you didn't," Cherilee said with a glare at her students. Even more confused, Luna returned her attention to the simulation. Applebloom was almost in. "Very good... Yes... Yes..."

"Ah can feel it!" Applebloom said, and the simulator shook a bit to simulate meeting the lander. "Almost in... Yes... Yes...!"

A grinding and clicking sound was sent through the speakers as the model module locked in with the lander model. "Yes! Ah did it!"

"Yes! Very good Applebloom!" Luna complimented her.

"Was it good for you too, Miss Selene?" Snails asked. Cherilee, in response, glared death at him. Luna was, once again, mystified, but she nodded with a smile.

"Of course! So, who wants to go next?"

After doing the simulators for the modules for a time, Luna took the students and their teacher to the simulated moonscape lab. Within an

enclosed space the size of a football field, a gray, rocky surface sat under walls painted black.

"This room is for training once the astronauts actually reach the moon," Luna said with a smile. "It can be vacuum pumped to simulate the airless environment, and as you can see there are enchanted spacesuits for simulating how much lighter a pony will be on it's surface due to the lower gravity."

"Oooh," all of the students said, in unison. It was rather endearing to Luna. She grinned at them.

"So... Would you like to go in?"

"YEAH!" All of the young ones shouted.

"Very well," Luna said cheerfully. "Let's begin our simulated moon mission!"

After explaining how all the gear worked, and making sure they were all properly outfitted, Luna let the numerous ponies into the Moonscape Lab. Almost immediately, they all bounded off in different directions, laughing as they bounced around in the simulated lower gravity.

"It's kind of beautiful, in a desolate sort of way," Cherilee said to Luna from her spacesuit. She and the teacher bounded along. "So, how come all these spacesuits can fit them?"

"They're just training suits," Luna explained. "They can fit any pony, and are strong enough to provide air and heat and pressure for an emergency. However, they're not the suits we'll be using on the moon."

"Wow... Is the whole moon completely dry?" Scootaloo asked, kicking some dust that settled back down in a thin cloud.

"Yes. No water can exist on it in liquid form-It'd just boil away," Luna said. "Like the water in your body."

"Eep!" Sweetie Belle cried. Scootaloo laughed and looked at her fellow ponies.

"First one to that hill over there is boiled!"

"Hey, wait for me!" Applebloom called as she pursued the bounding pegasus. Sweetie Belle bounded after them, trying to catch up as they shot over rocks and craters.

"Hey guys! Wait up!" Sweetie Belle called over her suit radio. "Hang on! I'm not-OOH!" She fell into a deep, dark crater the other Crusaders had avoided. Scootaloo and Applebloom stopped short, and trotted back.

"Sweetie Belle!" They called. "Sweetie Belle!"

"You all right?" Applebloom asked.

Presently, they heard her calling back.

"Hang on... I'm going to turn on my flashlight," she called. It flashed briefly, then went back off. And the radio was filled with her screaming.

"AAAAHHHH! AAAAHHHH!"

"Sweetie Belle!" Applebloom and Scootaloo shouted. They jumped down and slid into the crater. "Use your flashlight!" Applebloom ordered. Scootaloo complied, and a brief flash showed... Nothing.

"MISS SELENE!" Applebloom screamed. "MISS CHERILEE!"

Luna galloped across the moonscape, skidding to a halt on the lip of the crater. Cherilee plodded along after, unsure of how to maneuver with lowered gravity.

"What is it?" Luna called.

"Sweetie Bell is gone!" The two ponies wailed as they clambered out of the crater. "She's gone! She's gone!"

"Where did she go?" Cherilee asked, as Luna scanned the crater. The Moonscape Lab was as close to the moon as they could make it-Packed gray dust, a few rocks, craters and other materials that went down almost fifty meters. It wasn't supposed to be dangerous unless your suit tore, and that was next to impossible in here.

So what had gotten Sweetie Belle?

"Miss Selene! Miss Selene!" Silverspoon and Snails rushed over, both in a similar panic. "Diamond Tiara, Twist, Snips, they were-!"

"They went into a crater and they just-We didn't see where they went, they're gone!" Snails shouted. "*How* could they *disappear*?"

"Everypony, *calm down*!" Luna said sharply. "Calm down..." Luna looked around. The entire Moonscape lab was closed off save for a monitoring station up above, and the hatch they'd taken to enter it. "Now, Miss Cherilee will take you four outside. I'll try to find them. They have forty minutes of air left, and they couldn't have gone far."

"But-But you can't stay in here alone Miss Selene!" Snails insisted. "We need to get help!"

"And you will, but I will stay behind to see what I can find," Luna said firmly.

"Miss Selene, be reasonable! We can't do anything properly if we split up!" Cherilee said.

"There's nopony monitoring this area at this time of day, you need to go get help *right now*," Luna said. She glared at Cherilee through the faceplate. "**Now!** *Get going!*"

"You heard her, Miss Cherilee! Let's go!" Applebloom cried. She bounded towards the hatch, and reluctantly the rest of the ponies followed save for Luna. She looked around carefully, and began to scan with her magic.

Strange... I can't pick her up... Any of them up, she thought. But she was picking up life, a lot of life. Why? What could be in here? What was Sundance trying to tell me before I went to pick up the tour group?

"Uh, Miss Selene?" Called Applebloom. Luna looked across the suddenly vast expanse of gray dirt and dust to the ponies gathered around the airlock.

"What is it?" Luna called.

"The hatch *won't open*!" Called Snails, sounding frightened.

Luna looked across, and saw that the wheel to turn the airlock hatch's internal mechanisms was missing.

"We're doomed! We're doomed we're doomed we're *doomed doomed doomed!*" Silverspoon cried. She began running in a panick, galloping over the mock-lunar surface. As she bounded over a crater, however, something reached up and grabbed her, yanking her down into the darkness.
"HEEEEEEE!"

"AHHHHH!" Screamed the students and Miss Cherilee. They began pounding on the hatch to the airlock.

"*LET US OUT! LET US OUT! WE'RE GOING TO BOIL TO DEATH IN HERE!*" Scootaloo shouted.

Luna blinked and thought, both rapidly. She then laughed.

"Aha! Hahahaha!"

"MISS SELENE?" Scootaloo screeched. "WHAT ARE YOU LAUGHING ABOUT?"

"HAVE YOU GONE *CRAZY?*" Screamed Silver Spoon.

"I *finally* remembered what Sundance was telling me!" Luna said. She smiled across at them. "Don't worry, it's nothing to be worried about." She tweaked the settings on her suit radio. "Hello? Hello, calling Coconut? Hello?"

There was no answer. Luna frowned.

"Oh, right. The soil blocks radio signals... Aha! Everypony, please stand close together. Applebloom? Get them together, close."

"What are you talking about? We've gotta get out of here!" Scootaloo shouted. But Applebloom, while frightened, managed to push the frightened ponies together. "*APPLEBLOOM!*"

"Just hold on!" Applebloom said. She turned and smiled at Luna. "Ready when you are, Princess!"

"All right," Luna said. Before the other ponies could process the "Princess", they were surrounded in a blue field of magical energy and lifted up. Luna ascended herself, her eyes and horn glowing. Her wings manifested outside her spacesuit as she and her charges floated high above the moonscape. Luna looked down, and narrowed her eyes.

The changes started subtly-A faint glow spreading out over the surface-but they accelerated as in the wake of Luna's magic the dirt and dust was transformed into water. Water that then began to boil into clouds that filled the roof of the large room. More and more of the dust was transmuted in this way, until at the bottom the water became a simple liquid.

And in that water were the shapes of their classmates... And other things.

"Ew... They look like crabs!" Cherilee cried. "Gross gross *gross*!"

Luna descended, slowly bringing her charges down onto a large boulder. She stood on the surface of the water as the weird, crab-like creatures swam up to her. They popped their heads out, revealing they were clothed in miniature spacesuits.

"Your Highness!" They chorused on the radio.

"What's with the transmutation? Not that we mind," one of the crabs said, splashing a claw in the water, "but it's kind of weird."

"I forgot that you were going to be in here for Situation 18," Luna said apologetically. "I am sorry but you scared the tour group I was leading around."

The crabs looked at each other, and back at the princess. "Oh! Sorry about that," the leader said apologetically. "We figured it was a simulation for when colonies are set up on the moon!"

"No, no, we'll have to reschedule the whole thing," Luna said. "Take the rest of the day off."

"No problem, Your Majesty!" The crabs called. They looked back over at the four waterlogged ponies they had dragged down. "Sorry to scare you!"

"Wh-What are those?" Cherilee asked.

"These are the Carcini! I had them flown in all the way from Froggy Bottom Bog!" Luna said cheerfully.

"Pleased to meet you all!" The Carcini responded, clicking their claws through their space suits.

"I've never heard of the Carcini," Snails said dubiously. The lead crab shot him a scowl.

"Well that is so mammalian. If you haven't heard of them they don't even exist! We give you ponies 90% of your plankton!"

"Okay, okay, sorry!" Snails said, holding up his hooves in an appeasing way. The lead crab huffed, before turning back to Luna.

"Still, demonstration of Situation 18 went off without a hitch!" He said.

"Wh...Wh... What's Situation 18?" Sweetie Belle managed while shaking a bit in her suit. Snips was now staring at the crabs and Luna in almost equal awe, while Twist, Diamond Tiara and Silverspoon clung to each other fearfully.

"Why, if there are evil crab-like aliens living in the soil of the moon, of course," Luna said matter-of-factly. "We train our astronauts thoroughly!"

"Wh-What would the response be to this situation?" Snails asked.

The leader of the crabs smirked at the pony. "Magical laser guns. Powered by magic."

"... Cooooool!" Shouted all of the students. Even Silver Spoon and Diamond Tiara, now recovered from their fear.

"Can we test with those next?" Applebloom asked eagerly. Luna smiled.

"Ooh! Well, if you're up for more testing-"

"NO."

Luna sighed and looked up. There she was, eyes narrowed at them through the glass of the control room. "But Sundance! Think of all the science they could do!"

"I am. That's why I said NO," Sundance stated flatly. Luna sighed.

"Oh... All right," she said, almost pouting. But she managed a little grin and wink at the students, to which they returned the gesture.

Sundance couldn't keep her eyes on Luna *a//* the time...

Interlude

The Dreamlands

In the northern window of the room, Luna could see the faint light of the North Star shining in the night. She trotted up to the sill and stared out at it, retracing the star patterns as she remembered them. They blinked into existence, twinkling beautifully in formations that were highlighted by countless more distant orbs. Luna arranged them, a river system in the sky coming to life as the water of starlight flowed through them.

Luna frowned and wrinkled her nose. The magnetic fields of the Earth were extended, shifted just enough... And following the trails of stars in the sky came the aurora, shifting and pulsing in the night like rainbows appearing in the cracks between storm clouds. All of this lit up the dark, flat plateau below, no longer dark and formless but the perfect contrast for the color above.

Luna smiled and let out a little laugh, before she turned to the rest of the chamber.

"Hmm..." She moved to the western window, which had been shut tight with ugly rusty nails and bars. With an extension of her willpower the bars and nails came out, the wood creaking loudly in protest. Wooden boards fell, and Luna beheld twin shutters, colored pink and blue. She reached forth with her hooves this time, gripped them both and pulled them open.

The sunlight shown in. Luna winced for a moment, but her eyes adjusted. She looked out at the land outside this window, and grimaced.

It was a desert wasteland, stretching as far as her eyes could see. Dunes were piled up high as the wind sluggishly moved them. The sun peeked out over the dunes, painting them all blood red.

"I like this," she decided, "but it needs more." She tweaked the magnetic fields again, adjusting the filtration of the sunlight. The dull red gave way to a multitude of deep, sensuous colors, moving from blood red to night blue to a silky indigo. Luna cleared out the sand next, a wave of her hoof and her horn sending the desert back into more manageable paths. Out of the

dunes, some of which had towered hundreds of feet high, came forth stone monoliths.

Geometry was one of the simplest kinds of mathematics, but in that simplicity came a kind of natural beauty. Great domes towered over the sand that once buried it, as pillars holding up great stone roofs composed of triangles, rectangles, circles and arches grew out from them. Obelisks sprouted like grass, reaching up towards the heavens and casting long shadows.

In a desert where the mountains were buried under the sands, this city was their voice above the shifting ground. Smoothed to perfection, the city of Dreams stood shining in the sun as a beacon to travelers. The warm sandstone and smooth marble and rough granite was combined in such a way that, despite the great monuments and buildings, it was clear this was a home for ponies. They were not to be cowed by the great structures, but to feel welcome and part of something greater.

Luna nodded. That was enough work for the moment on that part. She moved to the southern window, which had been blocked up by a cave-in. A flash of her power annihilated the rocks, sending out a boom that was almost deafening in the small room but Luna endured it. She trotted forward into the sudden darkness, and frowned.

Here she looked upon a forest. A dark, dangerous forest, overgrown with thorny vines and deadly trap flowers. They were enticing, dark as midnight and smooth as silk... But she knew all too well that to sniff of one of them would lead to bad choices... Wrong decisions... So many mistakes...

The sun shone through the western door, and Luna started. She almost had her nose in one of the flowers. She recoiled, and took a few deep breaths.

"Get out," she said flatly. The flowers withered and died, the thorns fell away. With another thought the moon shone brightly through the treetops, and paths once barred or made difficult were now clear. The shadows no longer spoke of menace, and the sounds of the creatures in the forest were not ominous. Luna had to tap her hoof to get the rhythm correct, rewriting the songs of the night, but they came together for just the right mood.

She smiled as she looked at the revived forest. The shadows held only the fear of mystery, and the thrill that came with that. The paths were winding, some more challenging than others, but none more arduous than what you perceived. And as a final touch, Luna brought forth fireflies to dance in the dark forest, always moving and mirroring the stars above.

"No thorns aside from what you bring in yourself," Luna declared. She turned to the eastern door, and frowned when she saw it was unlocked. Curious, she reached forth and opened it.

She was surrounded by water in an instant, and flailed around instinctively as panic took hold of her. Her eyes burned from salt water and there was no light to be found.

No, no! Where am I? What happened? I-!

Realization struck her, and she shot up as fast as she could. The water above her vaporized from the force of her passage, a bubble of water vapor appeared around her as she went faster and faster-

The bubble burst, and her ears were filled with the roar of the ocean and the thunderclap of storms. She was blown this way and that above the perilous sea, and below her saw the form of great waves beneath the water. She stiffened in fear when she saw that they resembled a long, flowing mane of stars.

"E-Enough... Enough... **ENOUGH!**" She roared, sending out a blast of power that radiated in a rainbow across sea and sky alike. Her eyes had closed from the exertion of that power, and slowly opened.

The seas were placid, and she heard the waves crash upon a distant shore. The sky held clouds, but they moved with a lazy grace and not the anger of a typhoon. The sun peeked out, no longer hidden but not dominant-It warmed the sea and set the clouds in motion, ever supportive.

Luna hovered for a long, long time, allowing the scents of the ocean to fill her nostrils, the feel of the wind to rippled through her fur and feathers. She smiled and turned around, flying entirely by feeling until her hooves struck sand. She opened her eyes when the *scrish* sounds of her steps were replaced with clops, and the city surrounded her. She walked past the great tower in the center, through the gardens which were slowly coming back to

life, and down the grand boulevard. She stopped for a moment in front of a familiar statue, and frowned.

This stone Earth pony sculpture was cracked and weathered, his eyes worn sightless by the sand and wind. He looked up at the sky, but whether it was out of fear or out of defiance Luna could not tell. In between his front hooves was a stone pail, long since empty of water. Shakily, she pressed her snout to the statue's, and nuzzled him.

"I'm sorry," she said softly. "I'm sorry I was gone for so long..." She sat back on her haunches and sighed. "You... I had the thought of a mighty statue for you, when everything was gone, when everypony was under my hooves..." Luna laughed sadly. "I was such a foal back then..." She raised her eyes to the silent statue.

"I think... I think I know why I avoided this place, for so long," she confessed. "Every time I came here, and saw you here... I was tempted to bring you to life. To make you as I remembered you, alive, speaking..." Luna licked her lips. "Even before I... I made the final transformation, here I was, ready to do it."

She sighed. "I couldn't... I still can't. I think, somehow... I knew it wouldn't be you. It would just be me... Me dragging along a doll I stitched together out of grief and memory."

Luna slowly, so slowly, lifted her hoof up and rested it on the colt statue's shoulder.

"You deserve so *much* more," she said softly, "than to be somepony's security blanket... Even mine."

Luna leaned forward and kissed the statue chastely, before pulling back. She sniffled, and a single tear rolled down her cheek.

"Goodbye, my hero," she whispered. "Thank you..."

She looked down at the stone pail... And couldn't help a whimper. It was full of water now, and reflected in the still water was her moon against a pure black night. She looked up and smiled, tears still rolling off her cheeks.

"Thank you..."

"Luna? Luna... Luna?"

Luna started, and sat up in her bed. She looked over at Sundance, who was stroking her mane comfortingly.

"Are you all right?" She asked softly. Luna sniffled again, and looked out the window. She smiled at the sight of the setting sun, and for a moment she could see the city and the sea standing beneath them.

"I'm all right," she said softly. "I just had to do some... Spring cleaning..."

That night, every pony in Equestria had good dreams, whether in a dark forest or a sunlit city or vast plains underneath a brilliant sky. And Celestia herself, snoozing away, smiled as a friendly moon guided her way through her own dreams.

It had taken Luna a thousand years to remember that night was the domain of dreams. But she decided, in the end, it was worth it.

She was her sister, was she not?

Across a wide, endless plain Discord trudged. His mismatched limbs provided him with sufficient locomotion to go across the tightly packed sand, and his eyes scanned the horizon in all directions.

The sky was blue, clouds rolling lazily overhead. The sun shone, never quite through those same clouds but enough to softly illuminate the desert landscape.

"This *bites*," Discord muttered to himself, for the umpteenth time. For the fifth sixtieth time (or eightieth fourth time-Discord didn't bother to keep track of what order things went in unless he had to) he lifted an arm, summoned up a bit of chaos...

Nothing. He lowered his arm and didn't bother stopping the pout on his face.

Over the flat plain he continued, muttering to himself but never bothering to remember what it was about, or why he should care. The answer always

came back, like a particularly annoying boomerang. Or a particularly annoying purple unicorn.

"Can't believe it... Here I am, lost in the desert without even a horse to name," he grumbled. "Well... I suppose it could be worse. It could be raining..." He looked up. The clouds remained pure, fluffy and white. "Well, wherever this place is, it at least lacks dramatic irony."

He lowered his eyes... And froze in his tracks. "Of course, I could be wrong," he said dryly, as he took in the figure standing before him.

She was an alicorn, with sleek soft blue fur and short, lighter blue hair. Her green eyes stared at him, and her lips were turned upwards in a soft smile.

"Hello Discord," greeted Luna.

"Hello Luna, so nice of you to drop by wherever I am now," Discord said dryly. "Been a long time, you seem to have shrunk since the last time I saw you."

"Oh, I lost some power when I was freed of the influence of Nightmare Moon," the alicorn explained. "I've since regained it, but this form allows me to better associate with others without being quite so intimidating."

"Aw, isn't that sweet? Little Luna afraid of *intimidating* others!" Discord mocked. "Making herself look so adorable just for her little subjects! Isn't that *pwecious*?" He lowered his gripped hands and frowned as Luna just kept smiling. "Well? Are you here for something or are you just going to stand there and mock me?"

Luna remained silent. Discord's furry brows twitched, but he stayed on the offensive.

"Because there's so much I can mock about you. How about the fact it wasn't you and your sister who defeated me this time? No, no, she outsourced the help to her *neurotic little* apprentice and her crazy friends! She didn't care about you enough to reestablish how everything was a thousand years ago! Bet that *had* to rankle you?" He moved to her side and lowered an arm around her shoulders.

"Bet it rankled you enough to come here, *wherever here is*, to spring me. So, here's the deal: You and me, equal partners in *total chaos*! We get out there, we throw Celestia off, we have some revenge time with those six brats-The purple one's mine, and so is Fluttershy and the pink one but the rest are yours-and we just have a gay ol' time for the rest of eternity!" Discord grinned at her and tried to exert his power over her. "What do ya say, eh?"

Luna shrugged nonchalantly. "Whatever."

"*Whatever*? This is the chance of a lifetime, to be on the winning side! I'm not done for yet-Just get me back to Equestria and I'm sure my powers would be back up to full snuff!"

Luna's shoulders shook, and for a moment Discord thought he might have her-She might be cracking or falling apart or something.

Instead, she was... Laughing?

"What? What's so funny? What are you *laughing* at?" Discord demanded.

Luna continued to chuckle, before wiping her eyes. She took a sip of a dark, smooth liquid contained in an elegant glass, and looked across the table at him. "You, my dear Discord. You haven't changed a bit."

"You say that like it's a *bad thing*! I'm the same lovable ball of chaos I *always* was! *Chaos incarnate*! It is my nature, I'm unable to help being so fantastically*discombobulated*!" Discord retorted with a grin, gulping down a glass mug and then tossing it back at the bar they were sitting in. It was warm but shadowy, with indistinct voices drifting through smoke clouds. "Sure we've had our differences but I'm certain we can work them out. I have power, you have power... Not as much as me, of course, but all the same..."

"I'm afraid you miss my point, Discord," Luna said calmly. Too calmly. She rested her hooves on the table and leaned forward a bit. "Things aren't what they seem."

"What do you *mean* they aren't what they seem? Of course they're how they seem-They need a bit of chaos, the spice of life, to be turned inside out and upside down and-"

"I mean where we are," Luna explained, as she left cute hoof prints in the sand. Discord blinked and shook his head. He looked around at the picturesque beach.

"We're... On a beach... We were... Were we somewhere else, a moment ago?"

Luna laughed again, and gave him an almost pitying look. "Poor, poor Discord... We're finally somewhere chaos could reign, and you're four steps behind."

"Where are we? *Tell me!*" Discord snarled.

Luna shrugged, and turned around to sniff a shell. The Lord of Chaos snarled.

"Don't turn your back to me! I'll break you, twist you, turn you into my little toy for all eternity and make you *love it!* Make you love destroying *everything* you hold dear!"

"Go ahead," Luna said, examining the shell without paying Discord any mind at all. "I won't stop you."

Discord lunged forward and smacked Luna across the rump, hard. The blue alicorn, still the same color as before, looked back over her shoulder with a saucy smile.

"Do you want to try it a little harder? Maybe *that* will get a reaction out of me."

"Where are we? What's all this, what's *going on?*" Discord snarled, stomping his feet. They called back with wooden thumps and Discord looked around with wide eyes. They were standing in an expansive wooden room, overlooking a vibrant forest. Luna was sitting on a couch and sipping a cup of tea.

"We're still in Equestria," Luna said after taking a sip. "You're a statue. Twilight Sparkle and her friends turned you back into stone."

"That's ridiculous," Discord snorted. "This isn't what it was like when I was stone last time."

"No, it isn't," Luna agreed. "And there's a reason for that. Twilight managed to really put you to sleep, rather than just in stasis as my sister and I did."

"That's nonsense! I can't sleep! I'm a *Chaos God*, what do I need sleep for?" Discord snarled.

Luna finished her tea, and looked at him over the edge of the cup.

"Exactly. You don't."

They were standing in the middle of a vast desert once more, and Discord looked around.

"Wha-Why do you keep moving us around?"

"I've been moving us down, actually," Luna explained calmly. "Deeper and deeper into the Dreamlands. Given it's my domain, I can take us as far down as I like. And each time I do so, time passes faster than it does in the level above."

"How *much* faster?" Discord asked.

"Mm... Ten to twenty times faster each level down," Luna said with a shrug. "Right now time is passing thousands of times faster in your dream than it is outside."

"And you're doing this why? To give yourself enough time to *rehabilitate* me?" Discord asked with a mocking grin. "I remember you tried-tried-to reason with me before! You were so *cute* then. Doing this for Big Sister then? I knew you still-"

"You know nothing," Luna said. It wasn't angry, it wasn't cold, it was simply a statement of fact. "You know nothing of what I went through in the last thousand years, or in the last year for that matter."

"Sensitive about it, are we?" Discord smirked. "Getting defensive! You're *getting* defensive!"

"And you're scared," Luna said calmly. Discord's jaw dropped, before he fairly exploded in rage.

"Scared? *SCARED?* HA! What do I have to fear from some pitiful second rate Celestia, huh? Some two bit, soft blue has been! You move the moon around, you move the stars and yet nopony loves you! None of them will pay you the due they do Celestia! None of them care for you! None of them will ever care for you! You're just one big miserable joke to all of Equestria AND THEY ALL KNOW IT! *AND SO DO YOU!*"

Discord found himself panting for breath after his outburst. It was a new experience for him. Luna took his rant without any reaction, just staring at him.

"... You know Discord, a thousand years ago I started my war with Celestia with Nightmare Night," Luna said thoughtfully. "I gave every pony the worst possible nightmares I could imagine. Countless horrors were visited upon them, to the point a whole generation of ponies were scared to go to sleep afterwards."

Slowly, she raised her head and locked gazes with Discord. The Lord of Chaos felt another new sensation-A chill running down his convoluted spine.

"They eventually recovered, when they realized that they would all wake up again when they went to sleep," Luna said in a soft, flat tone. Her eyes narrowed, and a feeling Discord had only experienced twice before gripped his insides like an ice-cold fist.

"Say it," Luna whispered.

"... I-I don't... I don't know what you mean," Discord stammered.

"Say what you can't do... That *they can*," Luna ordered, in the same harsh whisper.

"... I can't wake up...?" Discord asked in a strained voice.

Luna nodded, that small smile she'd worn when she first appeared to him back on her face. The chill was getting worse, flowing up his feet. He looked down and his eyes widened in horror as he saw he was transforming into stone once more.

"Now-Now Luna! Luna, let's talk about this! S-Surely I can be redeemed! Isn't that what all you ponies believe, second chances? I-I'm really regretting this, haha! The-The guilt is just *eating* me alive, you wouldn't *believe* how sorry I am!"

"You are the embodiment of chaos. You can't help what you do, it is your nature, your very reason for being. You said so yourself," Luna replied. "By definition, you can't be redeemed, and even if you could... You don't deserve it." Her green eyes seemed to glow as everything below his waist became stone. Discord struggled furiously.

"It wasn't *personal*! It was just my *nature*! You can't punish a storm cloud for being a *storm cloud*!" Discord cried, as everything below his chest transmuted into rock.

"And when a storm cloud approaches, it is contained. This is no different."

"D-Don't you realize you're just as bad a monster as I am? Doing this to a *thinking being*?" Discord shouted.

"That's the difference between us, Discord. I stopped being a monster. You can't, and you never will," Luna retorted, as Discord's arms were frozen in stone. He lifted his head up, as though trying to escape a rising tide by sucking in the last few breaths he could.

"I'm begging you, have some mercy! MERCY! *MERCY!*"

To this, Luna said nothing. She only watched as Discord's head was encased in stone, completing his transformation and silencing his cries. She then lifted her right hoof, and the sands around them began to change.

The desert floor became white-The purest, plainest white any being could imagine. It spread out underneath her, and grew up into walls surrounding them both. A roof flowed into existence above, completing the sterile, colorless room. Luna gave Discord a long, hard look. She trotted up to his face, and looked him right in his terrified eyes. For an endless moment they just stood there, vengeful goddess and frozen statue.

At last, Luna gave Discord a small, vicious smile.

"Sweet dreams," she whispered, before she vanished.

Discord sat there in the pure white room's center.

Silent.

Luna woke up once again in her room. She stared up at the ceiling for several minutes, the quiet ticking of her alarm clock the only sound she could hear. She slowly slid out of bed, and after a quick check on Abacus in his bed, she trotted downstairs.

In the kitchen stood Sundance, cooking some breakfast. Her free hoof was on her stomach, pressing into the slight bulge. The blonde pony's breathing became deeper when she did so, and a tremble went through her spine.

Hoyden nearby was pacing around the table, his eyes always on his marefriend. He winced with every stroke she made of her stomach, and his muscles tensed up.

Luna took a deep breath and trotted into the kitchen proper. Sundance and Hoyden both looked up at her, anxious. Luna gave them both a small, tight smile.

"It's okay... He'll never hurt anypony ever again," she said quietly.

Her two best friends in all the world stared for a moment, before they moved to either side of Luna and embraced her in hugs. Luna wrapped her forearms around them both too, and all three stayed that way for a good, long time.

"So... What are you going to call it?" Luna asked quietly.

Sundance smiled at her. "We... We were thinking-"

"*Not* Luna," the moon princess said quickly. "Please? Besides, I didn't save you... Twilight Sparkle and her friends did."

"All right then," Hoyden said jovially. "We'll name it Twilight Sparkle."

"Yeah, us and every other pregnant mare," Sundance huffed. She gave her coltfriend and her princess a sly smile. "We could always name it Selene."

"Assuming it's a filly," Hoyden returned. "Hoyden's always a good name!"

"We'll talk about it more later," Sundance said quickly. "For now, we should finish up breakfast. I don't know about you but I'm starved."

"Same here!" Hoyden cheered.

"Me too," Luna said with a smile. "Me too..."

Chapter 11

Ponies! In Spaaace! Part 2

"Phew," Hoyden said, wiping off his forehead as upon exiting the train he was hit with the familiar heat of Cape Connemara's climate. Clipped to his saddlebags an umbrella stood above him and Sundance, who was looking a bit green. "You all right dear?"

"Ugh... I'm all right, it's her who's not happy with travelling," Sundance moaned, rubbing her belly. Hoyden smiled and wrapped his forearm around her shoulders as other ponies walked around them, streaming through the train station to the space center nearby.

"He takes after his mom that way, weak stomach," he teased. Sundance giggled.

"All that bouncing around..." She looked at the distant but still massive launch complex and sighed. "Do you think Luna missed us while we were gone?"

"It was just a few weeks," Hoyden said. "I'm sure she got on just fine-"

"HOYDEN! SUNDANCE!" A blue shaped blur zoomed through the crowd, several ponies "mysteriously" tossed aside as though by telekinetic force. The two ponies were wrapped up in a tight hug, and looked over a shaking blue mane at each other with a shared, fond smile.

"Hello Luna," Sundance said. She nuzzled the princess affectionately, as Hoyden pulled both mares into his embrace.

"I'm so, so glad you're both back, I really am...!" Luna coughed and, upon noticing the looks they were getting, backed off, adjusted her glasses and cleared her throat. "Sorry..."

"No, no! That's fine!" Sundance said.

"Yeah. The group hug was just a little early, that's all," Hoyden grinned.

"Well! Now that you're here, we can get down to business," Luna said, once they were in her office. Sundance approved of the choice-It had a nice large window overlooking the launch complex, but was small enough to not be intimidating to ponies who came in to chat.

"Ah. All right, what kind of business? New training sims, launch update...?" Hoyden asked.

"Actually, I wanted to hear about you two," Luna said. "In particular... You know..." She seemed a bit awkward. "About your baby? How is it?"

"He's fine," Hoyden said, at the same time Sundance said "She's fine." They looked at each other with wry looks. Luna blinked.

"It's... Both?" Luna asked, tilting her head. "I've heard of such ponies in the past but they were never-"

"No no no!" Sundance said, waving her hooves frantically. "It's nothing like that! We just decided to be surprised by the gender when she comes."

"Or *he* comes," Hoyden said with a grin, enduring his mate's playful scowl.

"So, the foal is fine? Healthy?" Luna asked. The two parents-to-be looked at each other again, a suddenly bit of awkwardness now in the air.

"Yes... We made *very* sure..."

"Doctor... I'm only going to ask for a *fifth* time," Sundance growled, holding the poor Doctor Hippocrat against the wall. "You are absolutely, positively, *one hundred percent* sure my baby is *fine*?"

"Y-Yes! Yes I am!" The physician cried.

"By which you mean she's not made of stone, cotton candy, or about to jump out and become a puppet on the whim of a mad god, right?" Sundance pushed, practically shaking the good doctor. "ABSOLUTELY NOTHING LIKE THAT, RIGHT? RI-iiiighhh...?"

Hoyden had resorted to his one ace in the hole-Massage. Quickly and efficiently, he released the tension in his mate's shoulders and flanks and used her distraction to pull her off the doctor. He smiled apologetically as he kept his marefriend tightly against him.

"Sorry Doc, but after what we've been through..."

"No, no, it's quite all right!" Hippocrat said, getting up and adjusting his glasses with his horn. "Believe me, it's the same story for every pony I've met today. It's quite understandable." He smiled broadly. "I'm happy to inform you your foal is perfectly healthy and quite normal... Though he or she may experience some..."

"Some...?" Sundance asked.

"Side effects," the doctor mumbled. It was only Hoyden's quick massage that kept Sundance from pouncing on the poor health professional.

"Si-Side effectsssss...? Oh, ohhh... What kind of side effectsss... Ah, I'm going to be soooo angry with you when you stop thissss..." Sundance moaned.

"Doctor?" Hoyden asked. "Side effects?"

"Oh! Oh, nothing dangerous, just... Ah... Unusual," Hippocrat said. A hoofball flew through the window, and landed on the exam table. Hippocrat groaned and trotted to the hole in the window.

"Ladies! If you would *kindly* keep your children under control?" He called down.

"He hasn't even been born yet! What am I supposed to do, send him to his *room*?" Called an irritated mare back.

"Ah," Luna said with a nod. Sundance held a hoof to her face as she blushed, and Hoyden rubbed the back of his head with a grin. "Well... On that happy note, I also have good news!"

"You're also pregnant?" Hoyden quipped. Luna's entire face turned red.

"What? Me? No no no, I haven't-I mean-I've considered, yes, there is one stallion in particular I might consider if-That is, if he was willing-But then there's another who isn't fully grown yet but is so darling I could just-Not that I would do anything now, that's highly inappropriate and quite immoral and-Ah... No, no I'm not," Luna finished, as Sundance giggled. The blonde pony smiled broadly across the table.

"We're very glad you have good news, Luna. So, why don't you tell us what it is?"

"Oh! Of course, the good news!" Luna said cheerfully. "Well actually it's in two parts, two separate kinds of good news, if you will. The first is that, due to your simulator performance Hoyden, I have bumped you to the first test flight of the Aponyo capsule."

"YES! YES! AWESOME! YES!" Hoyden cheered, unable to help laughing and hugging his mate tightly. Sundance laughed in joy as well, and smiled at Luna.

"That's great! So, what's the other good news?"

"All the ponies we hired to tow the rocket platforms have quit!" Luna said cheerfully.

Sundance and Hoyden stopped their celebrations and treated the monarch to some confused blinking.

"Well not quit, they were laid off or transferred to other outfits because frankly we didn't need them all..."

"But without the towing ponies how are we supposed to move the rockets around the launch complex?" Sundance asked. "We're not going to...To *teleport* them, are we?"

"What? No! No, not after what happened with the cat!" Luna said, aghast. "Actually the good news is that I created the means to allow us to move the rockets much more efficiently and without risking all those poor towing ponies throwing out their backs," Luna said. She shrugged. "Sorry, the last week has made me a bit discombobulated."

"So, what is the means?" Hoyden asked.

Luna beamed cheerfully. "I'm glad you asked! I'll show you!"

"I dunno about you Sundance, but I think Luna might have gone a bit... Loopy. I mean, she was alone for a few weeks on the base," Hoyden confided to Sundance, in the back of the coach they were being pulled in. Sundance shook her head with a long suffering sigh.

"Hoyden, I'm sure she's just being Luna. And besides, can you blame her? We are her closest friends and we left almost right after... After Discord. I was close to freaking out myself." At Hoyden's look, Sundance scowled. "And I wasn't the only one."

"I was just making sure Abacus would have a nice clean bed to come home to," Hoyden mumbled.

"Nine times?" Sundance asked dryly. Hoyden sighed, and nuzzled his marefriend.

"All right, all right... You got me."

The carriage came to a stop, and both ponies looked up to see that they were at one of the auxiliary hangers on the base.

"Thank you Hauler! That will be all," Luna said cheerfully. "I hope you weren't too inconvenienced."

"Not at all, Your Majesty," the large stallion said. He tipped his hat and trotted off with his now empty carriage. Sundance and Hoyden looked over at Luna, who trotted to the nearest hanger with a spring in her step. Her companions followed, at a slightly less brisk pace.

It was probably better Luna went first whenever science was involved-She was a goddess, they weren't.

"So, can we have a hint to what this solution is?" Hoyden asked.

"Well... It's actually based off of something I began work on a thousand years ago," Luna explained. She stood next to the massive doors of the hanger, and flashed her horn three times. Three horns flashed in response, and the doors (with loud creaking sounds) slowly began to open. As the

great doors parted, Sundance and Hoyden felt the familiar sensation of their jaws dropping.

Standing in the middle of the hanger, with tiny technician ponies scattered all over it from its massive metallic hooves to its deadly sharp steel horn, was a gigantic mechanical pony. A giant mechanical alicorn, to be more exact, given the wings and horn. In overall shape it reminded Sundance strongly of Nightmare Moon, but in coloring it was plain whites and grays all over the panelling. Its eyes were the only things that stood out-Great green tinted orbs that made the robot look like it was wearing oval-shaped sunglasses.

"Lady and gentlecolt, behold: Mechapony 1!" Luna presented with a great sweeping motion of her forearm and wings. "I realized that, given the enormous expense involved in housing, feeding, and healing thousands of ponies to tow the rockets to the launch pad, it would be *much* easier to build a gigantic robot to handle all of that!"

"Right. Easier. Of course," Sundance mumbled, quite stunned.

"Makes sense to me," Hoyden said.

"Oooh! Giant robot!" Cried an unfamiliar voice behind the three of them. Three sets of eyes turned... And Sundance gaped in astonishment.

"T-The Holders of the Elements!" She gasped. The pinkie one, holder of Laughter (Pinkie Pie, that was her name) bounced right up to Sundance from the carriage that had carried them and smiled happily.

"Hi! I'm Pinkamania Diane Pie but you can call me Pinkie Pie!" She bounced around Sundance and examined her from every angle. She then grinned in her face.

"Ooh... Either you like candy as much as I do or you're pregnant! Congratulations if it's the second one, and double congratulations if it's the first!"

Sundance stared, and her cheeks began to turn red. Her brows twitched.

"... Dear, you can't murder one of the saviors of the world," Hoyden said, immediately massaging Sundance's shoulders.

"O-Ohhh... You can't do that, haa, every time I get angryyy...!" Sundance moaned.

"I can certainly try," Hoyden said, as Pinkie Pie hopped around cheerfully.

"So! What are we doing, aside from checking out that huge, awesome giant robot?" Rainbow Dash said, leaping out of the carriage right after.

"Aw would expect that to be more than enough fer you, Dash," Applejack winked as she too hopped onto the tarmac. Dash huffed.

"No, I'd also like to fly it too!"

"But you can already fly," Twilight Sparkle pointed out as she used the steps in the carriage to exit it.

"Yes, but I'm not a giant robot when I fly," Dash emphasized. "That's the biggest part!"

"Literally," Rarity said. She adjusted her hat as she gracefully stepped out of the carriage, and peered up at the great mecha. "While the lines and form are wonderful, your Majesty, the coloring needs some serious revision. I can see why you called us all here."

"It-It's nice to see you again, Princess Luna," Fluttershy greeted shyly, the last to exit.

"Welcome to Cape Connemara, everypony," Luna said with a warm smile. "It's wonderful to see you all again."

"It's very good to meet you again, Princess Luna," Twilight said with a smile. "And your giant robot, but I am curious as to why we're here."

"Ah... To explain that, we'll need... A meeting table!" Luna said dramatically. "In a meeting room as well!"

"Here? We must meet here?" Rarity asked, after Luna had opened up the door to the first meeting room. Sundance blinked.

"What's wrong with it?" She asked. Rarity sniffed and pawed at the carpet.

"This carpet is positively atrocious, the walls are so sterile, the table itself has absolutely no character...! How can anypony discuss things rationally when there's such clashing and disorder? I can barely hear myself think!" She turned to Luna. "Princess Luna, if you'd allow me?"

"By all means!" Luna said cheerfully. "But quickly, I'd like to get down to business as soon as possible."

Some extensive redecorating later...

"I feel like I'm in one of those Arabian Knights tales," Sundance commented dryly. Twilight smiled at the blonde pony across the warm brown, low table Rarity had replaced the previous plastic table with. Warm red and blue sheets were draped all around the walls, lending the meeting room an intimate feeling. Luna sat at the head of the table, organized some papers, and smiled at all assembled.

"I brought you all here because of Mechapony-1," Luna explained. "And given the vital nature of the work, I thought it only fair to have our greatest heroes involved. Besides, after the Discord incident you all deserve some time off doing something different."

"So, we're here for a vacation?" Asked Twilight, tilting her head curiously.

"Ooh! Vacation! How wonderful! I'm so glad I packed my swimsuit," Rarity said with a smile.

"Ah, but Rarity, we don't wear clothes normally," Applejack pointed out.

"Yes, but when you go swimming to draw attention you must look your best, darling," Rarity explained patiently.

"Oh no, it's much more important than that!" Luna said. "For that though, I need to explain a few things."

"Will it involve a flashback?" Pinkie Pie asked.

"Probably," Luna admitted.

"Yay!" Pinkie Pie cheered.

Luna passed out sheets of paper, with a variety of designs on them. What was most notable about these designs were that they appeared to be extremely ancient given the archaic pony language used in the notes, and the subject of the designs.

"Wait... This looks like Mechapony 1," Twilight said. She looked up at Luna. "You mean, you designed this robot over a thousand years ago?"

"If that's the case then why aren't there more giant robots running around?" Rainbow Dash asked. At Twilight's look Dash shrugged. "What? It's a giant robot, who couldn't get excited about that?"

"In all honesty, I built this mecha for the express purpose of killing my sister," Luna admitted. At the awkward silence that followed, Luna looked down at the table. A pat on her hoof by Twilight helped her regain her focus. "But I was never able to complete it."

"Oh? Why not?" Applejack asked.

"Well..."

Over a thousand years ago, in Nightmare Moon's Palace...

"I'm sorry, *why* can't I take my mighty giant super robot, slay my sister, and rule the world again?" Nightmare Moon asked of her head technician/mage in a flat, angry voice. The technician gulped.

"Well... Frankly, we don't have the power necessary to start it up. We've tried everything, from directing a lightning strike into it to having your army of war hamsters run on treadmills."

"Wait wait wait, *war hamsters*?" Applejack asked incredulously.

Luna sighed. "Not all of my evil plans were foalproof, all right?"

"Nor all your good ones," Sundance commented wryly.

"Sundance!"

"I'm just saying!"

"Not enough power? This is ridiculous!" Nightmare Moon growled. She looked over her gigantic robot, brimming with magitech and a thousand horrible pointy and explodey implements of death. "Curses! I've been foiled before I even began!"

"'Curses'? You *really* said that?" Dash asked in disbelief.

"Rainbow Dash!" Twilight scolded. "Don't interrupt the story!"

"But curses? Really? Bad guys really said that back then? It's so... *Retro!*"

"I said it a thousand years ago, my dear Rainbow Dash. Rethink your definition of 'retro'," Luna said dryly.

"There's only one power source that might bring your mighty war machine to life, my Dark Queen," the technician said.

"Oh? And what would that be?" Nightmare Moon asked.

"The Elements of Harmony!" The technician said dramatically, as lightning flashed and thunder crashed outside the dark palace.

"The Elements of Harmony?" Nightmare Moon asked, and once again, lightning flashed and thunder crashed. She shot an annoyed look outside a window. "Would you *kindly* stop that?"

A few Shadowbolts, who had been playing with thunderclouds, sheepishly flew off. Nightmare Moon looked back at her technician with a sigh.

"Is there any alternative?"

"You want to slay a goddess, your Majesty-Nothing short of the Elements can do that," the technician said gravely.

"Ah well... I suppose I'll just have to steal them from her," Nightmare Moon said with a shrug. "What's she going to do? Use them *against* me?"

"Irony!" Pinkie Pie said with a giggle.

"Yes, irony," Luna agreed with a sigh.

"So, that's why you summoned us here?" Twilight asked. "So that you can power up your giant robot?"

"Ohhh, wait wait wait! I've got it!" Rainbow Dash said with a big smile. "Twilight and the others would charge up the Elements, while I ascended high overhead. Then, whoosh, fwoosh! I'd dive right for them, building up speed until I unleashed my Sonic Rainboom! That would supercharge the Elements and allow Mechapony 1 to come to life!"

Sundance, Luna and Hoyden stared. The first looked terrified, the third looked thrilled... The second looked contemplative. The Holders of the Elements looked equal parts amazed and shocked.

"That... Would be the coolest. Thing. *Ever*," Hoyden said. He looked to Luna. "Can we do that? Please, *tell me* we can do that!"

"It sounds dangerous though," Sundance said. She looked over the plans. "I mean, that kind of supercharge... Who knows what it could do to the robot! Or anypony inside it, for that matter."

"Indeed, it could have caused the robot to explode," Luna said.

"Hindsight!" Pinkie Pie cried.

"Indeed," Luna agreed with a nod.

"I agree," Twilight said. "If I had to guess, the resulting energy release would send this old robot flying at Mach 10! I don't even want to imagine what it might do to Mechapony 1!"

"Oh, it'd go flying," Luna said. "It has thrusters."

"Thrust... Wait, thrusters? Why?" Twilight asked. "I thought it was just for pushing things around!"

"Well, they were an integral part of the entire robot," Luna said. "So it was hard to redesign it to not include them."

"I can understand that, but..." Twilight looked more intently at the plans. "Princess Luna... Did the '*deadly eye lasers*' get included in the current design too?"

"Of course they did!" Luna said cheerfully.

"What? What does a giant robot *need* with eye lasers?" Twilight sputtered. Luna stared at her and blinked.

"... I'm not sure I understand you," Luna said. She looked over at Sundance. "Why *shouldn't* the giant robot have eye lasers?"

"I think Twilight is concerned about what use they would be on a giant robot that's going to be used for pulling and pushing things around the launch site," Sundance supplied. "Frankly, I'm a little weirded out too. What *does* it need with eye lasers?"

"It's a giant robot, with eye lasers?" Rainbow Dash said in a gleeful whisper, shaking in anticipation. "And it can go *Mach 10*?"

"It's a giant robot. Therefore, it needs eye lasers," Pinkie Pie answered. She huffed. "I mean, *duh*! What's a giant robot without eye lasers? It's not a very good giant robot, that's what!"

"But... You... Huh?" Twilight asked in disbelief. She looked around at her other companions. "Is *any* of this making sense to you?"

"Makes perfect sense to me," Applejack said with a little grin. "Why not have eye lasers? Aw reckon ah'd get a lotta use outta them."

"I think the robot could use a splash of red, myself," Rarity sniffed. "Red makes robots three times faster, on average. Or was that salmon pink? I can't recall..."

"Fluttershy?" Twilight asked, almost desperate. The quiet butter yellow pegasus nodded thoughtfully.

"I do have an issue with the eye lasers," Fluttershy said. Twilight breathed a sigh of relief. "They don't seem to offer enough protection against underwater enemies."

And that sigh turned into a choke.

Luna rubbed her chin thoughtfully. "Well, I never really intended to use it against Celestia underwater, and since I'm not going to be using it against her anyway... It might be a good thing to consider!"

"But-You-It's just for *pushing and pulling rockets around!*" Twilight cried. "What does it need with eye lasers or thrusters or Mach 10 or *missile launchers?*"

"Well the missile launchers aren't going to be installed until next week," Luna said, "but it might be something to consider."

"I think we got a mite off topic," Applejack interjected, looking rather amused as Twilight drove her face into the table. Sundance nodded, and patted Twilight's shoulder consolingly.

"Indeed. If you didn't bring the Elements of Harmony in to power up the giant robot, why did you bring them?"

"For a much more important job," Luna said with a big, wide smile. "To test pilot it! It is powered by magic, so why not see how it will respond when under the control of the holders of the most powerful magical artifacts in Equestria?" She raised her eyebrows. "And really... What could be more fun and more relaxing than test piloting a giant robot?"

"Can't think of a thing, your Highness!" Pinkie Pie said cheerfully.

"So awesome," Dash said, trembling in excitement.

"Well, ah expect ah'll find it entertainin' enough," Applejack grinned.

"Well, why not? It could use my delicate touch," Rarity said with a little smile.

"I... I wouldn't mind, if you don't mind, that is," Fluttershy said softly.

"... Well, I pretty much have to, right? Can't let these ponies run wild with a giant robot," Twilight said, looking resigned but not too unhappy about it.

Sundance looked at Hoyden, who was grinning widely. She looked at Luna, who was looking extraordinarily happy. She looked at the ceiling and sighed, a wry smile on her face.

"Good to be home," she murmured.

Chapter 12

Vigilantism

"HAHAHAHAHAHA!" The villainous Jackass cackled. "You've got to face it, Caped Crusader! We're reflections of each other, in a world gone mad!"

"You don't know anything about me, Jackass," growled the masked figure from above, as the Jackass held a pie up to the head of a poor citizen pony. In the dark warehouse, the Malevolent Mountebank was unable to see where the vigilante was, but his mad eyes went all over the place.

"Of course I do! You complete me, Darling!" The Jackass laughed. "Aren't we both the product of one bad day? Just one bad day? Your costume, your tactics-You seek to strike fear into the hearts of criminals, to be larger than life." The Jackass spun around and threw the pie, but missed as the costumed adventurer leaped over it and slammed his hooves into Jackass's chest. "Oof!"

The Jackass struggled with his opponent and laughed. "HAHAHAHA! It's all over your face, fool! You're trying to make sense of a world that destroyed you, whereas I-I don't even bother! The world is pure chaos and an empty, hollow lie!"

"You're wrong, Jackass," the Caped Crusader replied. "Every crime you commit, every action you take is just for attention. To justify your own nihilism!"

The Jackass grabbed his foe and threw them both out the window of the warehouse, plummeting for the water below. From his amazing Utility Saddlebags, however, the Caped Crusader produced a grappling hook, and fired it from his teeth. Holding onto the Jackass, he swung them both to the safety of the dock below, the Jackass smashing into a few barrels. The magic clown groaned and looked up at his foe, who stood up on all four hooves as the wind blew his cape dramatically.

"No... Everything I've done, everyone I've spluttered... You still save me?" The Jackass asked. "Hahahahaha... You truly are incorruptible! The yin to my yang! The Luna to my Celestia! We complete one another!"

The Jackass got a kick to the face for that, as the vigilante stood over him.

"No Jackass... I'm not your twisted reflection. We made our choices. And my choice is to stop you, and beat you. And I will." He loomed over his opponent, larger than life and the clown looked afraid.

"Who are you?" The Jackass whispered.

"I'm Bat-"

"Uh, hello?" The hostage back up in the warehouse called. "Batpony? Would you please untie me? I kind of have a doctor's appointment..."

Batpony grimaced. The Jackass laughed.

"Hahahahaha-URK!"

"Shut up! It's not funny!"

"Luna? Luna?"

"Eep," Luna cried, quickly pushing the comic book (or graphic novel, as they were also known) underneath Abacus. Sundance entered the moon princess's room with a smile. She slowly made her way over to the bed and rested on it. She gave the comic book under the counting tool a wry look before her eyes went to Luna as though she hadn't seen a thing.

The princess blushing was reward enough. She'd save the teasing for later.

"Hoo," Sundance sighed. "I feel like a beached whale..."

"No no, there are many beached whales far bigger than you," Luna consoled her. Sundance laughed.

"Not that many..." She sighed and rubbed her belly. She looked back up at her Princess. "I was just concerned. You've been up here all day."

"Oh, well..." Luna coughed and summoned some paperwork, eyes avoiding the comic book. "After the whole... Being fired from the Space Program... Thing, I've been working to catch up on other matters of state."

"They didn't fire you," Sundance said consolingly. "I mean, you did everything you were asked! Got the program back on schedule, got public interest in it again, recruited fantastic ponies to work on it, improved the training-"

"And built a giant robot with remaining funds that went amok," Luna sighed.

"Well, how were you supposed to know that Twilight Sparkle had such... Issues?" Sundance asked carefully. "No pony was seriously hurt, and look on the bright side! The Equestrian military got quite the training exercise."

"I still haven't been able to put together my own report on the incident," Luna sighed.

"Oh? Why not?" Sundance asked.

"Call it writer's block," Luna said dryly. "Besides, I think it's better for *everypony* if I stay out of the spotlight for a while. Maybe hide in the library..."

"Which your sister isn't letting you do, if you're here," Sundance pointed out, more than a little smugly. Luna scowled at her.

"You're taking after her more than is healthy for you."

"At least I'll be able to make my foals' life interesting," Sundance replied. "Still Luna... You really should try to do something to get yourself out of the house. This isn't as bad as the Nightmare Moon incident-"

"No, but a giant rampaging robot is not good for anypony's image, especially not mine," Luna huffed. Sundance nuzzled her princess kindly.

"Most young ponies in the kingdom thought it was incredible."

"Yes, because they're *young*," Luna sighed. Sundance sighed back.

"You'll get it back, Luna. You will. You got public approval once... This is just one mistake. You'll find a way to improve things! I mean, there are plenty of charities to manage after all... Ooh! Maybe an exhibition boxing match for charity!"

"Maybe," Luna considered aloud.

"Or you could throw out the first pitch for the base-" At Luna's widened eyes, Sundance quickly backtracked. "Okay, never mind... *That*."

"I'll figure *something* out. In the mean time, I am content to hide. Miss Selene doesn't build giant robots or cause mass destruction," Luna huffed. "She is a mild mannered, respectable citizen."

Sundance sighed again.

"All right... By the way, here. The newspaper." The blonde pony moved it to Luna with her mouth. Luna gratefully took it with her telekinesis, and raised an eyebrow at the front page.

"*Mysterious Mare-Do-Well Appears in Ponyville*," Luna read aloud. Sundance chuckled.

"Yeah, isn't it a riot? A masked superpony saving the day. She's becoming really popular... Even though it was some kind of lesson to teach Miss Dash some humility."

"Hum? That's not in the paper," Luna said, her reading glasses on her nose as she looked up at her hoof maiden. "Have journalistic standards slipped so much?" Sundance laughed.

"No, no, but I listened in as Princess Celestia read Miss Twilight's latest Friendship Report to herself."

"Eavesdropping on the princess?" Luna asked. Sundance grinned.

"Who would suspect the innocent, pregnant hoofmaiden?" She asked with a proverbial halo over her head. Luna chuckled. She knew her sister wouldn't mind too much.

"Well, what is the secret of the Mysterious Mare-Do-Well?"

"Apparently Miss Applejack, Miss Pie, Miss Twilight Sparkle and Miss Fluttershy all posed as the Mysterious Mare-Do-Well and saved Ponyville from the many disasters that befall it daily," Sundance reported. "And Miss Rarity manufactured the costumes."

"I see," Luna said thoughtfully. "So... They have ceased their charade?"

"Probably. Mission accomplished and all." Sundance sighed. "How can such a small town suffer so many disasters?"

"Eldritch Abomination sleeping under it," Luna replied matter-of-factly. Sundance stared.

"You're joking right?"

Luna shrugged.

"I think so," Luna said, studying the image carefully. "Been a while... Hmmm..."

She looked back up at Sundance with a smile.

"You know, the Mysterious Mare-Do-Well has become quite popular... It would be a shame to let a new symbol of hope and heroism go to waste."

"Yes, it would," Sundance nodded. She then blinked. "Wait... You're not thinking of doing what I think you're doing, are you?"

"You mean, find somepony to be the new Mysterious Mare-Do-Well?" Luna asked. She scoffed. "Nonsense."

"Oh, good," Sundance sighed. She'd had a horrible mental image of herself, pregnant as she was, waddling after criminals in the Mare-Do-Well costume. Purple may have been her color but black and blue definitely *wasn't*.

Luna smirked. "I'm going to do it myself."

"Wait, what?"

Sundance had been with Luna for over a year now, through thick and thin and giant robots. She had saved her from Discord taking her... Something she tried not to have nightmares about. She'd married her and Hoyden... Late at night and then kissed the two of them...

Point was, she was loyal to Luna and loved her dearly as a friend. But honestly, she was kind of crazy.

"Oh my, Rarity does make such wonderful clothing," Luna said, examining herself in the mirror. She turned around and looked back over her shoulder. She looked over at Sundance with a smile. "I like how she made it darker!"

"Your Majesty, please," Sundance tried to not sound exasperated. "You can't go around fighting crime! Haven't you ever heard of due process?"

"Oh come now. My main focus will be on aiding ponies and others in distress. Of course, when it comes to criminals my priority will be to stop them. I shall leave the legal process to the proper authorities. It's like a citizen's arrest!"

"You're not just a citizen, you're one of the *two freaking god princesses of our world!*" Sundance said, not bothering to hide her exasperation. Luna nodded.

"Yes, but really, thanks to my reforms the bureaucratic process has become far easier. I have far fewer meetings to attend. Delegation is fantastic," Luna said cheerfully. "Besides! Think about it. When my secret identity is revealed, I shall have gained a great deal of positive publicity to make up for the giant robot fiasco!"

"And if it turns into *another* fiasco?" Sundance asked wearily.

"Well, the secret identity part helps with that," Luna admitted. "See? I'm learning from my mistakes!"

"And making whole new ones," Sundance grumbled.

"Oh come now Sundance, it will be fun! I even got you a costume!" Luna held it up with a smile. Sundance's eyes narrowed.

"Luna, I'm not going off to fight crime and evil while I'm *pregnant!*"

"Who said anything about you fighting crime? Don't you and Hoyden enjoy dressing up for your-"

"Ookaythankyouverymuch!" Sundance said quickly, snatching the costume away. She sighed. "Where do you get these ideas, anyway?"

"Hey everypony! Guess who's back from... Uh, woah," Hoyden said as he entered the house. He raised an eyebrow. "It's all ready my birthday?"

Sundance blushed and huffed. "No! ... Though that's a better idea than my original idea, remember that," she said with a sensual purr at the end of her sentence. Hoyden grinned. This marriage thing was looking better all the time.

"Actually, Hoyden, I'm going to give being a superhero a shot," Luna said. Hoyden blinked.

"So... Moon Goddess decides to become a superhero."

"Yep!" Luna said cheerfully. Hoyden's eyes narrowed.

"Wait right there." He galloped down the stairs into the basement. Luna and Sundance shared a look, before returning their gazes to Hoyden who came up with a very large box. He set it down and grinned at them, before opening the box up.

"You're going to need *these*!" Hoyden said, revealing that the box was full of comic books. Luna gasped.

"Oh! More comic books!" She lifted the whole thing up with her telekinesis. "Excuse me, I need to do research! Wonderful research!" She flew up to her room, and the door shut tight behind her. Sundance sighed.

"Great. You've doomed us all."

"Oh, come on. If Luna wants to become a superhero, she'll need to understand what that means. She's already created a giant super robot and been an evil goddess-What's the worse she could do?"

Sundance smacked him over the head with her hat.

"Ow! Hey!"

"That tempting fate thing? Stop it," Sundance said. "Or no more Sexy Breakfast time!"

"I'll be good," Hoyden tried, in as manly a tone as he could. Unfortunately, even he had to admit it came off as a whimper.

But hey... It was Sexy Breakfast Time.

"Okay! I'm ready!"

Sundance and Hoyden looked over from the couch to see Luna descend from her room, dressed in her costume. Hoyden hummed appreciatively.

"I've gotta say Princess, you do make the costume look good."

"Not 'Princess', *Mysterious Mare-Do-Well*. Or Mare-Do-Well for short," Luna hissed. "Secret identity, remember?"

"It's not going to be a secret for long if you go out our *front door*," Sundance pointed out, raising a hoof and pointing the door that led out. Luna blinked.

"Oh! Of course!" She summoned a notepad and pencil to herself, and scribbled out a list. She sent it over to Sundance, who caught it in her mouth. "Sundance, I'm going for a test gallop in my costume for reconnaissance purposes. Please see if you can find me a means of obtaining all of this."

"Yes your highness," Sundance said.

"Well, I'm off! Have a nice night off on me!" Luna said cheerfully. She galloped over to the window in the television room, and hopped out it. She galloped off into the night as Sundance and Hoyden stared after her.

"Oh yeah... That's so much better," Sundance grumbled.

"Now now, give her a chance," Hoyden said. "Let's look the list over."

They did so, and this is what it said:

To Do List Re: Superheroing

1: *Secret identity (Double check)*

2: *Secret lair (Palace too obvious... or is it so obvious as to be dismissed?)*

3: *Sidekick (Check)*

4: *Interesting supporting cast (Check)*

5: *Animal sidekick (Bats? Dogs?)*

6: *Love interest (Maybe reporter)*

7: *Arch nemesis (perhaps bald)*

8: *Origin story (Perhaps best left vague, or multiple choice)*

9: *Cool vehicle (Not necessary but cool)*

10: *Wonderful toys (Ditto)*

"I think she's covered most of the bases," Hoyden said with a nod. Sundance scowled.

"You're kidding right? We're *not* helping her with all this! She's a Princess for Her sake! She shouldn't go around playing superhero!"

"Come on Sundance, just think of it as a weird hobby," Hoyden consoled. "Besides, the crime rate in Equestria is incredibly low. She'll probably just run around for a while, get bored and give the whole thing up!"

"I hope you're right," Sundance sighed, nuzzling her husband.

"Of course I'm right. I'm the male, I'm always right except when I'm not," Hoyden chuckled. Sundance snorted.

"You're cute when you're delusional..."

"Who is this masked mare, who flies between rooftops?" Luna narrated aloud as she jumped over the streets, her cape flaring dramatically behind her. "What drives this mysterious... Mare-do-well to haunt the night?"

She slid to a stop on top of a McDonner's, a franchise restaurant identified by it's twin golden antler logo, and hummed thoughtfully.

"Am I actually flying? I don't think so... Technically I'm jumping, at best gliding," she reasoned to herself. Luna nodded. "Right! Gliding through the night on a cape like wings! ... Well one wing, it's an airfoil..."

"Oh NO! This is absolutely terrible! Somepony, *HELP!*" Cried a mare in the restaurant below. Luna gasped.

"Oh no! Somepony in distress! This looks like a job for-***The MYSTERIOUS MARE-DO-WELL!***" She bellowed, in the Royal Canterlot voice. The windows below shattered from the force of her yell as she swung down, cape flaring dramatically. Many ponies screamed and fainted as she entered, and Luna looked around.

It was a cheerful and warm restaurant with pictures of reindeer in festive clothing decorating the wallpaper, with a center buffet that was more of a garden. Ponies could obtain warm food from up front at the counter, or fresh cool food from the bar.

"What seems to be the trouble, good citizen?" Luna asked, narrowing her eyes at the trembling ponies in front of her.

"Th-Th-Th-Th-!"

"Clearly whatever nefarious force has you so frightened has rendered you unable to speak!" Luna deduced. She rested a hoof on one mare's shoulder. "Fight it, good citizen, and tell me of your peril!"

"She didn't get a toy with her Smiley Meal!" Cried the reindeer behind the cash register, only his antlers visible. "Please don't hurt us!"

"... Oh. The Mysterious Mare-Do-Well apologizes for this intrusion," Luna said. She hopped down to the floor, and her horn glowed. In an instant, the glass windows of the restaurant were all restored. "Have a good night, citizens, and do no hesitate to call in the event of a real emergency!"

Luna turned and trotted out the door.

"With that, the Mysterious Mare-Do-Well left the restaurant, feeling humiliated at her first failed attempt at aiding her fellow citizens! At best, she merely cleaned up her own mess." Luna rubbed her chin as she trotted down the street, passing several gawking ponies on her way. "Indeed! This city seems scared of me... I can smell it."

She frowned and stood firm.

"Well then! Someday, the citizens of this city will not have their toys delivered with their meals, and will instead look up to me with a cry of 'Help us!' and I shall reply, 'No! Petition the manager instead!'"

Luna nodded to herself, and leaped up to the rooftops again.

"Thus reassured of her noble purpose, the Mysterious Mare-Do-Well took to the night to resume her crusade of justice!" Luna cried, and flew off into the night.

Some hours later, as her moon shone down upon her, Luna sat on a rooftop in a pout. She looked down over her city with a deep frown.

"I can't believe this... A thousand years and there's barely any crime! No arson, no murders, no grand larceny..." She scowled deeply at a warehouse nearby. "Even *the Mafia* are well behaved!"

The warehouse, some hours ago...

In the center of the warehouse, surrounded by crates, stood a large round table. Around this large table sat several ponies, all in classy duds that would not look out of place around Manehattan. The largest pony, a large dark green stallion in a pinstripe suit and hat, sat with his back against a fake wall his goons had happily set up for him. On the wall were the caricature drawings of several ponies, all smiling nervously in the artwork.

"All right, youse punks," said Big Caesar, the Don of the Canterlot Andraemon Mafia, looked around the table at his goons, henchmen and made-stallions. "Our operations are returning excellent results. Thanks to

our gambling practices, our newest scheme will finally get underway. Stirrups, you will address the colts on the details of the scheme we will be undertaking post-haste."

"Of course, Big Caesar," Stirrups said. He cleared his throat and sat up on the table. "Our scheme involving the Hearth Day Operation is nearly complete and will require all youse mugs to pull yourse weights, got it?"

"We've got all the harnesses we'll need, Big Caesar," one pony spoke out of turn. All eyes turned to him, and he gulped.

"You talkin' to me?" Big Caesar asked imperiously. "You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me?"

"Er... Yes sir, Mister Big Caesar... Sir!" The pony squeaked.

"Well speak up next time and tell me your full name. It's only polite. Also, sit up straight when you talk," Big Caesar admonished. "Or you go sit in the corner."

"Yes sir! Yes sir!" The pony said in terror.

"Now then... Let us finally reveal our final operation so that all might know what the hay we're actually talking about," Big Caesar spoke. "As well as the one component we are missing, due to not actually having it."

"What is that, Big Caesar?" Asked the pony from before. Big Caesar opened his mouth.

A skylight shattered from above, and a dark figure flew down to land atop the table with a loud thump. All of the ponies gasped in shock as the dark figure's eyes, visible in the dark, narrowed ominously.

"Wh-Who are you? What do you want? What are you?" Big Caesar cried. Stirrup held up his hoof gun threateningly, a contraption that fed rounds into a launcher that wrapped around the hoof like one of the Princess's grieves.

"I am the terror that flaps in the night! I am the guilt nagging at you for forgetting to pick up the milk for your wife!" The figure boomed threateningly, making all of the ponies save for the Don cower. "I am... The Mysterious Mare-Do-Well!"

The Don stared at her for a while, before slapping his hoof on the table. "That's it! That's what we're missing! The Mysterious Mare-Do-Well! Our operation cannot operate without you!"

"HA! You expect a Crusader for Justice to aid criminal scum like yourself?" The Mare-Do-Well scoffed. Big Caesar blinked.

"Criminal scum? What the *hay* are you talkin' about?" His horn lit up and one of the crates flew over. It opened up with another application of telekinetic force, and it turned over. Spilling out of it came numerous toys and games for foals.

"We led a successful toy drive for orphan foals across Equestria, and we think you might help us get volunteers for delivery," the Don said. "Look! There are even action figures o' you in this mess."

Mare-Do-Well blinked rapidly. She scanned the various crates with her magic, revealing that all of them were filled with toys and candy.

"Perhaps you have a signal we could light up so that we might commiserate on the possibility of youse helping us help others help themselves?" The Don asked, not unkindly. "You seem to be having a night of it. First night in Canterlot?"

"You... Could say that," Mare-Do-Well said.

"He didn't have to be so polite about it," Luna grumbled as she chewed on a candy cane the Mafia had given her. "Hmph!"

She looked up at the stars and sighed. "In the old days, I'd have fought bandits, beaten their leaders in one on one combat, and ruled over them as my personal army. He..." Luna sighed and looked back down at her hooves. "He liked it when I did that... Called me the warrior queen." She sighed and held up her sidekick.

"Oh Abacus... What should I do?" She inquired of the mathematical tool, who, appropriately enough, was garbed in a mask and cape. Luna didn't really think it would serve as an effective disguise, but a disguised abacus

would make it harder for people to associate her with the Mysterious Mare-Do-Well.

After all, only a crazy pony would have an abacus for a sidekick, and she certainly *wasn't* crazy!

Luna did some calculations on Abacus, calmed by the reassuring clicks and clacks his beads made. She tapped her chin... And smiled.

"Of course! I need an arch villain, it's right on my list! And if I have an arch villain, then I have something to do and a way to inspire ponies to do more good, just like the Mafia!" She hugged her beloved Abacus. "I knew I could count on you!"

She winced. "No pun intended..."

The abacus seemingly allowed this, and Luna smiled into the night once more.

"All right then! I shall find another pony to aid me in my crusade by providing a purpose for my crusade! Come, Mathematical Wonder! Awayyy!"