

Tabluna Rasa

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Prologue

As was her custom of late, Princess Luna sat on the balcony staring at her sky. It was a new moon, and freed from its light, the stars fought for attention, each trying to outshine the others. As they squabbled for attention, Luna sighed. It had been almost a year since she was part of that sky, locked inside the moon. She could remember the arguments of the heavens, although not clearly, each star and celestial body wanting to be paid attention, appreciated. It was a reflection of her, always wanting attention and praise, but never getting it. She remembered becoming Nightmare Moon, trying to make the night last forever, just so ponies would see her artwork.

But before that, she remembered nothing. No memory of what she was like before she was twisted by the jealousy in her heart. For a thousand years, that jealousy had kept her alive, consuming her, becoming her. And then a year ago, it was all stripped away by the Elements of Harmony. With her jealousy gone, Luna was forgiven by her sister and allowed to move back to Canterlot. She was even allowed to resume her duties over the night sky. Inside however, she was confused. Who was she now? No longer the attention-seeking Mare in the Moon, what was left of her?

She hid behind her work using the hours she kept as a way of avoiding contact with anypony. Celestia was the only one she saw regularly, though not for lack of effort on Celestia's part. She'd even arranged the Grand Galloping Gala start later in an effort to get her younger sister to attend, but she'd had no luck. Luna spent most of her waking moments simply staring at the sky, thinking. Sometime her inner turmoil would be reflected in the sky, with meteor showers swirling and falling, bringing wonder only to the few who saw them. To Luna, they were reminders of her doubts.

"Who am I now?" she asked of the sky. She received no reply of course, not that she expected to. The sky was too far away to hear her, but it was a question she had been asking for a while now, so at this point it was purely habitual. But tonight, for the first time, Luna had a new thought.

Why am I asking the sky? It's others I need to ask, ponies who can actually answer. Maybe, just maybe, if she found out how others thought of her, she could get a better picture of the sort of pony she was. Of course, there was a flaw in this plan. *But who can I actually ask?*

Celestia was the obvious choice, but Luna dismissed the idea quickly. She didn't want her sister to worry about her, and besides, Celestia would remember Luna as she was before she became Nightmare Moon. And if Luna was certain of one thing, it was that she didn't want a repeat of those events. But no-one else had really seen Luna in the time she had been back, so it seemed this idea was a dead end. Unless....

"Of course! The Elements of Harmony!" They were the only other ponies who had really met Luna, even if mostly when she was Nightmare Moon. And there had been that party afterwards, where she had given a quick apology to them. Sure it wasn't much, but Luna never doubted the ability of ponies to deduce a great many things even in the space of about a minute. They must have some ideas about who she was, even if it was all guesswork.

"Right then, it's settled! I'll ask the Elements of Harmony who they think I am!" Luna beamed at the sky, but a frown shortly found its way to her face. "Oh... but that's not exactly a question you can ask of people is it? 'Hello, I'm Princess Luna, do you know who I am?' 'Yes, I know who you are.' 'Oh great, will you tell me?' 'You're Princess Luna.' No, that's no good at all..."

So then, how to approach this problem. A disguise maybe? Luna decided against this. Disguises were prone to being seen through, especially since Luna was taller than almost all other ponies. A truth potion maybe? This too was rejected, on the basis that truth potions had been banned for use outside of law enforcement, and even then they were rarely used due to the unfortunate side effects that sometimes happened. Truth spells were out for the same reason. But spells... that definitely sounded like the right approach.

Luna headed back inside, and returned a short while later, levitating a spell book in front of her. She flicked through the pages, skim reading to find something that would be helpful. She was hoping to find something she

could do from here. If she went out during the day, Celestia would insist on either coming with her, or assigning her personal guards, and Luna didn't want to intimidate anypony. But then, if she snuck out during the night, everypony would be asleep, and that would be equally unhelpful. Just when she was about to give up hope, she found the spell she needed.

"Oh! Of course, why didn't I think of this sooner?" Luna read the page a few times, to make sure she understood everything involved with the spell. It was perfect! She didn't even have to leave the palace. Luna closed her eyes to focus better, and her horn began to gather magic. As she concentrated, the glow around her horn became steadily brighter, until finally she unleashed the spell. The night sky briefly glowed the colour of Luna's magic, and then it faded.

Luna smiled, tired, but confident in the knowledge that her first spell had worked. Now all the ponies in Ponyville would be dreaming of her. That was maybe the hardest part of the plan done, and it would have been impossible for anyone without an alicorn's natural proficiency for magic. The second part would be easier, but still impossible for a lesser unicorn. Luna glanced up at her sky once more.

"Well then, wish me luck!"

And with that her horn started to glow again. She felt herself become lighter, so light that gravity seemed to lose interest in her, and she began to drift upwards. Luna looked down, and saw her body was still there, lying down as if asleep. It had worked! She permitted herself another smile.

"Now then, who do I visit first?"

Chapter 1

Dreams of Adventure: Rainbow Dash

Luna flew above the slumbering town of Ponyville. Well, not her as much as her dream-projection. It was old magic, and it came naturally to Luna as part of her domain over the night. As she was now, she would be able to enter the dreams of other ponies. Her real body was safe back at Canterlot. And thanks to the other spell she cast, every pony in Ponyville was dreaming about her, or rather, who they thought she was. But there were only six ponies Luna was interested in.

But where did they live? All she knew for sure was that her sister's protégé lived in the town's library, but Luna didn't really want to start there. Going from the stories Celestia had told her, this Twilight Sparkle was a powerful magician. Possibly on the level of an Alicorn. With that much magic, there was a chance that she might counter Luna's spells before the night had really begun. No, Twilight would be left for last.

"What even were their names?" Luna pondered as she began another circuit of the town. Celestia had tried many times to get Luna to take an interest in them, so she really should have remembered. "Oh bother, why can't I remember?"

Lost in her thoughts, Luna didn't notice the cloud wall until she had already flown through it. "Whoops. Guess I should really pay attention to where I'm going." Luna looked around. It wasn't a natural cloud, that was for sure. Natural clouds didn't have rainbow-falls. Furthermore, they didn't have furniture.

Such a grand cloud castle! I wonder who lives here? Her quest forgotten, at least for now, Luna floated to the next level. She found a cyan-coated pegasus here, with a mane the colours of the rainbow. Luna suddenly realised who it was.

"Rainbow Dash!" *Yes, she's one of the Elements of Harmony isn't she? Loyalty wasn't it? Guess I'll start here then.* Closing her eyes, Luna tried to focus on the dreams of the sleeping mare. In her mind she saw blue

skies and green fields. That must be it. Now, what did the Element of Loyalty think of her?

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Once again, it was another AWESOME day for flying. Even better, it was Rainbow Dash's day off from the weather squad. For the pegasus, this meant only one thing.

"Sonic Rainboom time! Oh yeah!"

Dash zoomed off the cloud she had been resting on towards the ground, hooves extended. She felt the air around her stretch, as if she had run into an elastic sheet. She kept pushing though, and the sheet became tighter, and tighter, until finally it burst, and the familiar explosion of noise and colour echoed throughout the land. Trailing her familiar rainbow, Dash did a few loops and corkscrews before coming to rest on another cloud. She was exhausted, but happy.

"So. AWESOME!"

After resting for a while Rainbow decided she'd head back home for a nap. She hopped off the cloud and began her descent downwards, gliding rather than flapping, to try and conserve what little energy she had left. About a minute later she had arrived home. She went inside headed up to her room. Before she could settle into bed though, there was a knock at her door. Groaning inwardly at the interruption, Dash head down to see who it was. The door opened to reveal Fluttershy.

"Oh, hey Fluttershy? What brings you here?"

"Oh, Rainbow Dash, it's just awful it's... oh, I'm sorry, am I interrupting something?"

"What? No, don't be ridiculous. I've always got time for my friends." Rainbow Dash knew that Fluttershy rarely came to visit her, being a bit too high up for the yellow pegasus' liking. It was worth hearing her out.

"Oh... that's a relief... but no, there isn't time. I'm sorry Rainbow Dash, but Twilight needs your help."

"My help?" Dash was genuinely surprised. "Why would an egghead like her need my help? Did I forget to help clean up after the last time I crashed into the library again?"

Fluttershy looked more nervous than usual. "No, it's not that. It's... oh, I can't even say it... Please, Twilight asked me to fetch you specifically. She can explain better than I can."

Dash gave a shrug. "Okay then. Lead the way!" And without waiting, Dash was winging her way towards the library.

Fluttershy watched her leave. "Um... I'll see you there then?" She walked to the edge of the cloud, and made the mistake of looking down. "Eep! In.. In just a bit..."

Meanwhile Dash had already crashed through the library's window for the umpteenth time. Twilight seemed to be waiting for her.

"One day Rainbow Dash, I'll show you where the door to this place is."

"Hehe... sorry Twilight..."

"Anyway, I'm glad you managed to make it here so quickly. We have a problem." Twilight ushered Dash to the main foyer.

"A problem? Well, I'll do what I can, but what sort of problem are we talking about? OH MY GOSH IT'S THE WONDERBOLTS!"

It was indeed. The famous flying fleet was in the library's foyer.

"OHMYGOSHOHMYGOSHOHMYGOSHOHMYGOSHOHMY..."
Dash finally managed to regain control of her voice. "I mean... uh.... hey. What's up?" *Play it cool Dash, play it cool...*

Tactfully, Twilight ignored Dash's outburst. "Just before, I received word from Canterlot. Princess Celestia... has been ponynapped!"

"WHAT?" Dash forgot her earlier reminder to stay cool. "But how could something like that happen? She's the Princess! Who could possibly ponynap the Princess?"

"The answer isn't one I wanted to hear," Twilight admitted, "but all evidence points towards it being Princess Luna."

"That's awful! I knew she hadn't really changed! But I still don't see how I can help."

Twilight nodded at Spitfire, who took over the filling in. "We've discovered that in the time she was stuck on the moon, Princess Luna somehow managed to construct a moon base. We suspect that's where she's keeping Princess Celestia."

"But there's a problem," Twilight resumed exposition. "No pony's ever been able to fly to the moon. But it's been theorised that if there was a pony who could pull off a Sonic Rainboom, then she might manage to get there safely."

Everything fell into place for Dash. "Wait, you're saying you want me to fly to the moon and get Princess Celestia back? But why me? Why can't the Wonderbolts do it instead?"

"None of us have ever managed to pull off a Sonic Rainboom," Spitfire explained. "As far as we know, you're the only pegasus in Equestria who can do this."

Dash was shocked. She was honestly the only one in Equestria who could pull off a Sonic Rainboom? "Okay, but even so, it's not like it's easy to pull off a Sonic Rainboom even with gravity to help accelerate. How will I manage to pull it off going AGAINST gravity? It's never going to work."

Twilight gave a grin. "Oh don't worry, we've thought of that."

"This is never going to work." Dash was standing on the end of the seesaw she used sometimes in her tricks.

"Of course it is." Twilight was effortlessly levitating a huge bolder above the other end. Dash was still skeptical. Twilight sighed. "I'll explain it again. Spitfire, Soaren and.... the other one.... are hovering up there at set intervals. We drop the boulder on the end of the seesaw, launching you straight up. As you pass each of the Wonderbolts, they'll give you a hoof-up, launching you to greater heights at greater speeds!"

"Uh huh. Hey Twi, I don't exactly know much about science, but are you sure this will work? It seems kinda... wrong."

"Oh don't worry, I read about it in a book."

"And what book was that?"

"Umm..." Twilight couldn't look Rainbow Dash in the eyes. "I think it was called.... Filly Fantasy..."

"Wait, what?"

Before she could voice any more reservations about the plan, Twilight dropped the boulder, launching Rainbow Dash high into the sky. Within seconds she was passing by Spitfire, who grabbed her, and tossed her up again even higher, keeping the speed going.

"Thanks Spitfire!" Dash was rocketing upwards still, and next up encountered Soaren, who provided the same boost. "Thanks Soaren!" Only one more to go. It wasn't long until she was boosted by the third Wonderbolt. "Thanks the other one!"

"I have a name too you know!"

This was it. The Critical moment. Rainbow pushed as hard as she could, surprised that gravity was less of an obstacle here than she thought. *Come on... just a little more...*

Back on the ground, Twilight was peering up at the sky anxiously, when a rainbow disc appeared before her eyes. "Alright! she made it!"

It was only a short while after that that Rainbow Dash touched down on the moon. "Alright Luna, come out with your hooves up! And release Princess Celestia!"

"Hah! You foal! You think you can demand things of me?" Dash spun around, and there she was. Princess Luna.

"You! You'd better give up, or you're in for it!"

"Oh I think not my dear. I've come too far now to give up!"

Oh no, Dash thought. Please tell me she's not...

"You see, I've been planning this day for a long while now!"

Yup. She is. She's monologuing. Why do ponies do this?

"Of course, I had to play my part well. Everyone had to believe that I was truly repentant. A bit of sniveling here, and a bit of crying there, and soon everyone had fallen for it! My sister was the easiest to fool, always looking for the best in ponies. Of course she'd trust me. And it was exactly that trust I needed."

"So you betrayed her. You betrayed all of Equestria. AGAIN." Dash knew she should do something, but she couldn't. The monologue was almost hypnotic in it's elegance.

"Betrayed? Oh no, that implies I had some sort of allegiance to it in the first place. But I've known it for a long time now. The moon is my true home! Those who don't want to suffer shall bow to me!"

"And what of your sister?"

"Oh, she'll have to be imprisoned of course. I think a thousand years in the sun should be enough don't you? Yes, send her to the sun! MWAHAHAHAHAHA!"

"Okay, that's it!" Rainbow Dash had finally had enough. "TASTE THE RAINBOW!" She sprang towards Luna and--

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Luna emerged back into the real world. She shook her head a few time to get the image of how Rainbow Dash saw her out of her head. *A monster. An evil stuck up princess who dreams only of power. Is that who I am?* Luna shook her head a few more times. "No, that can't be me. Thank you Rainbow Dash, but I'm afraid you can't help me. But one day I'll show you I'm not somepony to hate." She spread her wings once more, and took off towards the sky.

"Darn, now I want a moon base..."

Chapter 2

Dreams of Love: Fluttershy

Luna left Rainbow Dash's castle behind, and began a sweep of Ponyville again. That was one done, even if it was a rather negative experience on the whole. Still, she was sure that not everypony would think of her like that. At least, she hoped she wouldn't.

Now, who would she find next? Luna tried to remember another name. There was..... hmm.... who was that one Celly had told her about? The one who had tried to help her pet phoenix? Oh well, the name would come to her eventually. She knew enough to go on. If she was the sort of pony who loved and cared for animals, then she'd most likely be found on the edge of town.

It was about five minutes before Luna found the most likely house. *Well, more like a cottage. But then a cottage is a type of house, right?* There was evidence of a lot of wild animals frequenting the area, most noticeably rabbits and chickens. "This is likely the right place then." Luna commented as she entered through the wall. Inside the cottage there were numerous bird houses, and little beds clearly designed for the smaller creatures to sleep in when the nights were too cold.

Upstairs lay the pink-haired pegasus. She lay mostly peaceful, but she tossed every now and then, and let out a murmur.

"Well I'm glad to know that however she sees me, it at least isn't anything too upsetting." Luna closed her eyes once more, and concentrated on entering Fluttershy's dream.

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No pony could remember a time when it had rained so hard. At least, Fluttershy certainly couldn't. She galloped as fast as her legs would carry her. How could she lose track of time like that? She knew the weather ponies had planned this storm for a while now, she'd even reminded herself not to stay out too long today so she'd be home before the storm begun.

The only reason she was even out was to make sure she had enough food to provide for her woodland friends, who she knew would be frightened of all the rain and lightning.

A bright flash illuminated the path. Fluttershy tried to shrink into the ground as it was followed by a loud boom. "Eek! Oh my, why are storms always so loud and scary?" Of course, her woodland friends weren't the only ones frightened.

She continued her way down the path, hoping to get the shelter of her home before she got any more drenched. She turned the corner, and finally she caught sight of her house. Fluttershy picked up the pace as she ran towards it, glad to be almost out of the rain. She made it just as another bolt of lightning flashed, and she dived under her rug as the thunder followed it. "Meep!" Peeking out, she saw her woodland friends cowering in similar fashions.

Oh no, I can't let this lightning scare me. I've got to let my friends know there's nothing to be afraid of. Slowly she emerged from beneath the rug. "It's okay little critters. There's nothing to be afraid of. We're all safe inside this house." The lightning chose that moment to come back, and Fluttershy found herself under the rug again before she knew it.

"Noo!" It was another minute before she tried emerging again. "I've got to be brave, for the sake of my friends," she said. "After all, I've faced down a dragon before. How much worse can a storm possibly be?"

BANG! Under the rug again. When Fluttershy peeked out this time, she couldn't see very much. One of the windows had clattered open from the wind, and the wind had blown out the lamps, leaving the room in total darkness. All the animals decided that this was the final straw, and they erupted into cacophony. This was too much for Fluttershy, and she snapped.

"QUIIIIEETTT!!!" The noise died down. "There is NOTHING to be frightened of! We're safe in here!" Lightning struck again, but Fluttershy stood her ground. "Now everyone just be quiet and let me try and restore some order!"

The animals were all frozen. It was safest not to move when Fluttershy got like this, lest she use the stare on you. Fluttershy closed the window and secured it more firmly. That problem solved, she began to calm down a bit. She turned around and saw through the dimness that her friends were all still afraid to move.

"Oh my. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to raise my voice like that. It's alright now, see? Nothing to be scared of..."

Desperate to prove her wrong, there was another flash of lightning. Fluttershy didn't hide, but in that brief flash of light she saw something. A set of muddy hoofprints leading upstairs. "But I haven't been upstairs yet..." A horrible realisation crept across Fluttershy's mind. "Oh no! What if a burglar is using the storm as cover? What if he tries to... demand certain things of me? No! I'm too young, this can't be happening to me!"

A second thought finally managed to make its way through. "But if there's a burglar, he'll have already heard me from my shouting before. But since he hasn't come down yet, maybe he's asleep. Maybe I've got this completely wrong, and it's just one of my friends come to check on me during the storm. But then why haven't they come down to see me yet?"

Finally Fluttershy made up her mind. "Ok, I'll just have a peek upstairs, and see who it is... there's no harm in that is there?" she said "Oh Celestia give me strength..."

Mustering her courage, Fluttershy climbed the stairs to her room slowly and as quietly as she could. She climbed just high enough to see her bed, and tried to see if there was anyone in her bed. Unfortunately, it was just too dark to see. The pegasus decided to try a different tactic.

"He-he-hello? Is there someone there?" The question was answered by a pair of green eyes flashing in the darkness. "Eep! I'm sorry, I'll leave you alone now. I'm sorry for waking you..." Fluttershy turned tail and prepared to flee.

"Wait, please wait!" A hesitant voice issued through the darkness. "I didn't realise there was anyone here, I just needed shelter from the storm."

Fluttershy was given pause by the gentleness in the voice. "Oh. Um.. well, I- I'm happy to have you here..." she said, trying to get a better view of her mysterious guest. "I'm sorry I woke you then."

"You didn't wake me. To be honest, I've always been afraid of storms, ever since I was a filly," the voice said.

"Me too!" Fluttershy proclaimed, glad there was someone else here to commiserate with. "To be honest, I think a lot of ponies are. There's nothing wrong with it."

There was a soft laugh. "Maybe not, but most ponies aren't half the royal family..."

"Half the royal...." Fluttershy gasped. "Oh my! You mean you-you-you're Princess Luna?" As her eyes adjusted, Fluttershy could tell this was the case. "I'm so sorry I didn't recognise you your highness!" Belatedly remembering her manners, Fluttershy managed a bow as best she could.

Luna shook her head. "No, it's okay. I did drop in unannounced after all." She shifted on the bed, then seemed to realise something. "Oh my! This is your bed then. I'm so sorry, I'll get off it right away! You must have come up here expecting a nap, and found me hogging your bed! I'm so sorry, I just need somewhere to lie down for a bit, I'm sorry, I'll get out of your way now..."

"Oh no Princess! I'm honoured that you would deem my bed worthy to lie down in. I'll just go down stairs and sleep on the sofa."

"I couldn't let you do that. I'm the guest here, so I should be the one on the sofa."

"No as, my guest, not to mention royalty, you should have my bed!"

The thunder decided it had been quiet for too long, and decided to contribute to the discussion with a loud rumble.

"MEEP!"

Both ponies look at each other, both having just made the same noise. Finally Luna spoke up. "Well, I suppose this bed is big enough for two ponies... maybe we could share it?"

Fluttershy looked slightly shocked by the suggestion. "Share? Oh my, no, I couldn't do that, I wouldn't want to make you uncomfortable..."

The sound of thunder. "Ohalrightifyouinsisthideme!" Fluttershy made a dive for the covers. Both ponies were silent for a while, waiting for the other to break the awkward silence that was forming over top the noise of the storm. It was Luna who finally broke it.

"Umm... so Fluttershy wasn't it? You have a nice house."

"Umm... tha-thank you Princess. I'm sure it's nothing compared to your palace though.."

"My palace is beautiful, yes, but at the same time it's so... lonely..."

Another silence. Fluttershy broke first this time. "So um... Princess? Why were you out in the storm anyway.?"

No response. Fluttershy rolled over to see Luna's usual blue complexion turn purple. "Umm, well, this might sound odd, but I was.... I was.... stalking you."

"I'm sorry princess. I didn't quite catch that."

"I said I was.... stalking you."

"I'm sorry, one more time?"

"I was... oh you know what? Actions speak louder than words don't they?" And before Fluttershy knew it, princess Luna had her enclosed within an embrace, and was nuzzling her mane.

"Ahh.... Princess, wh-what are you doing?" Fluttershy was struggling to form coherent sentences, being distracted by Luna attentions.

"I was stalking you Fluttershy. You caught my eye when you and your friends freed me from being Nightmare Moon, and well... I fell in love with you. I've been watching you every moment ever since, wanting so much to just talk to you, but I was always afraid..." Luna's ministrations gradually became more intimate.

"P-p-princess, I, I...." Fluttershy let out a moan of ecstasy. "Oh Princess, I- I- I think I love you too, but this... isn't th-this a bit much?"

Luna pulled Fluttershy closer. "We're in love, nothing else can be too much."

"O-ok, but please be gentle..." Fluttershy blushed, almost luminescent in the dark. "It's my first time..."

"Mine too." Luna locked eyes with Fluttershy and...

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Fluttershy woke with a start. "Oh my. Another one of those dreams? That's the third one this week... Maybe I should ask Twilight about what it means...."

Outside, Princess Luna pulled her head out of the lake she had plunged it into. "Wha-what was THAT?" Luna was certain of one thing coming out of that dream: that wasn't her. She might not know who she was, but she knew she was no filly-fooler. That Fluttershy on the other hand.... *Wait, three times this week? But it's only Monday!* The images from the dream returned, and Luna once more plunged her head into the lake.

Chapter 3

Dreams of Repentance: Applejack

After successfully repressing the memories of Fluttershy's dream, Luna was once more on her way. She stuck to the outskirts though, because she was sure there was at least one more of the Elements of Harmony living out here. But which one? *Oh, if I only I remembered their names. Come on brain, I know you were paying attention SOMEWHERE in there when Celly talked about them...*

Luna tried to marshal her thoughts. There had been Twilight Sparkle, Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy... who else? Magic, Loyalty, Kindness.... What was the Element of Honesty's name? That would probably be her best bet if she wanted to find somepony with a good impression of her. If she could just remember her name... Something Jack, wasn't it? Luna tried a few.

"Umm... High Jack, Captain Jack, Sparrow Jack, Black Jack, Jack Russell... no, those are colt's names. I'm sure all the Elements of Harmony were fillies." As Luna continued her flight, she noticed that she was headed into farmland. She was sure she vaguely remembered something about the Element of Honesty being a farmer. That seemed promising.

Eventually Luna came to a farm house. She could sense four sleeping ponies inside. The sign above the gate read "Apple". *One day I need to remember to ask Celestia why we started using pictures for signs instead of writing.* But the picture sparked Luna's memory. Applejack! That was the name. She knew there was a Jack in there somewhere.

Entering the house, Luna managed to find the right pony after only four tries. She slept in a rather bare room, containing not much more than a bed and hat-stand. And on that bed was the orange work-horse, not so much under the covers as lying amongst them. Clearly a restless sleeper. Hoping she wasn't the source of Applejack's restlessness, Luna entered the dream.

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It was another fine summer's day, with light cloud providing some shelter from the sweltering sun. Applejack was glad for this small mercy, as she had a long day of applebucking ahead of her. Big Macintosh was off in Appleloosa for a week, helping with the applebucking there, as the settlement had had a recent outbreak of the flu, limiting workers for the orchards. Applejack had assured him it was fine, and she'd make sure to get help BEFORE she was in over her head this time. But she didn't see the harm in working alone for one day. Applebloom was still too little to help, and was out with her friends shenaniganing anyway. And while Granny Smith had the spirit of a younger mare, she didn't have the body of one anymore.

No, one day of working alone would be fine. She'd get help from Twilight and the others tomorrow. She'd start with the western orchard today, and would work her way eastward as the day went on. As Applejack approached the orchard, she noticed that there were some trees that were bare.

"Huh. Ah coulda sworn that they were ready for harvestin'." Upon closer inspection, Applejack found a trail of apple cores leading into one of the bushes. "Aha! Looks like Ah've found me an apple poacher." She followed the trail, slightly impressed at how many the thief had managed to eat. Of course, it could always be more than one thief. The cores eventually lead to one of the trees. Faint snoring could be heard from the branches.

Aha. There's the varmint. Well, whoever it is, they're about to get a rude awakenin'. Applejack gave the tree a powerful kick, cause the tree to shake violently. "Ah know you're up there! Come out with your hooves up!"

This was a small shriek, followed by a thud. Applejack headed round the tree to truss up the offender. "Okay then, Ah hope you've got a good reason to be robbin' mah family and me of our livelihood."

"Oww... I forgot falling hurts more here...." The poacher staggered to her feet. Applejack let out a gasp.

"Princess Luna?" Applejack was too flabbergasted to bow. "Wh- what the hay were you doin' in mah apple tree?"

Luna dusted herself off with her wings. "Oh, were those your apple trees? Oh, I'm sorry, I thought they were wild." She gave a sheepish grin. "I guess I shouldn't have eaten all those apples then..."

"Yeah, you shouldn't." Applejack quickly remembered who she was talking to. "Ah mean, uh... it's no problem. You're a royal, not like Ah can do much about what you choose to do. Your highness."

"Well, no I suppose not. But I feel terrible after eating those apples."

"What? Are you tryin' to say there were some bad apples in mah orchard? And uh... if you're gonna throw up, can you face the other direction please?"

Luna was confused, until she realised the farmer had misunderstood. "Oh! Oh no, I didn't mean terrible sick, I mean terribly guilty. I simply must make it up to you for this."

Applejack shook her head. "That's mighty generous of you, your majesty, but if you'll pardon me, Ah'm not sure there much to do around her suitable for royalty."

"Oh no, but I insist! I don't mind really, and it'll be interesting to see the kind of work ponies do in this age." Applejack still didn't look convinced, so Luna continued. "I mean, I can at least help pull your barrows for you, right?"

"Well..." Applejack couldn't think of a reason to turn the princess away. "Oh, alright then your majesty. You've twisted mah leg, so to speak. But if you've got other things to do, Ah understand if you need leave."

Luna was already busy magicking the barrow pull over herself. "Oh no, don't worry. My sister has everything taken care of today. My only job is to raise the moon really, and that's not until the evening." She started heading off. "Shall we?"

"Uh, Princess Luna? The orchard's this way..."

"Oh, right. Sorry."

It wasn't much further before they reached the western-most orchard. Luna maneuvered the barrows into position under the trees, and Applejack kicking them so the apples fell off. The workhorse kept a running commentary while she worked.

"So Princess, how'd you find yourself in this neck of the woods anyways? Ah woulda thought you'd be in Canterlot, livin' the easy life."

Luna looked a bit uncomfortable. "Well yes. Most of the court really still hasn't come to terms with the idea that I've reformed yet, so most of the time I'm in my room anyway."

"Oh. Well, that still don't explain why you're out here instead of there."

"That's easy enough to answer. After I raise the moon, I usually fly for a bit, to stretch my wings. Last night I'd been too busy reading to get dinner, so when I saw the orchard below, I thought, What the hay. I didn't know it was anypony's. Anyway, I guess I fell asleep after my snack. And then you found me, so I guess that explains it."

"Ah reckon it does." Applejack gave the tree she was at another solid kick. Apples rained down into the barrow. "Okay, let's try the trees over there. They usually produce a good crop."

"Um.. do you think I could have a try at getting the apples this time?" Luna almost looked embarrassed. "It looks like fun..."

Applejack thought for a bit. "Well... okay. Ah mean, if you want to do it, it's not like Ah can really say no."

"Oh thank you!" Luna removed the harness and headed over to the first tree.

"So, are you gonna magic the apples down?" Applejack remembered the efficiency Twilight's magic brought to the last harvest. Luna shook her head.

"Oh no. I mean, I could, but when in Roam, right?" Luna looked over her back, taking careful aim at the tree. She focused, and she lashed at out the tree with her hind legs.

"Okay. That wasn't so hard. How'd I do? She turned to look at Applejack, who was just standing there with a look of shock on her face. "What? Did I do something wrong?" Applejack still didn't speak, and raised a hoof, pointing behind Luna. Luna turned around just in time to see the tree fly beyond the horizon. "Oh. Um... whoops?"

Meanwhile, in Ponyville central, a pink pony was busy going about her daily deliveries when she had a funny feeling. Her tail was twitching. She dropped her basket and galloped as fast as she could towards the library. "TWILIGHT! TWILIGHT! Twitchy tail! Twitchy tail! Something's gonna fall on the library!"

Twilight stuck her head out the window. "Oh come on Pinkie. How could something fall ON the library? Don't you mean-" The rest of the sentence was lost to time, as out of nowhere, an apple tree crashed into the library. The impact knocked Twilight off her feet, and half the books fell off their shelves.

"TWILIGHT!"

Twilight managed to stand up and look out the window again. "Yes Pinkie?"

"That was it!"

Back at Sweet Apple Acres, Luna was once more pulling the barrows, and still apologising. "I'm so, so sorry about that! I guess I don't know my own strength. I'll do better on the next one, I promise!"

"Uh, no that's okay Princess." Applejack was back to bucking. "Ah think maybe you should just stick with pulling the barrows for now, okay?"

"But I know I can do better, please give me another chance? Please? I won't send anymore trees into orbit."

Applejack considered. Applebucking was hard work after all, and she could do with a break. "Tell you what. How about you use your magic to get them apples? Ah'm sure that way will be quicker, and less risk of flying trees as well."

Luna perked up at the idea. "Ooh yes! I can do that, I'm good at magic."

"Great! You do that for a while then, and Ah'll go get us some cool apple juice from the house."

"Thank you! I'll make up for that tree, I promise!" To demonstrate, Luna magicked the apples off the next tree all at once, and levitated them safely into the barrows.

Applejack nodded, and headed back to the house. She returned about ten minutes later with two ice-cold apple juices. "Okay Princess Luna, Ah've got us some- WHAT THE HAY HAPPENED HERE?"

Luna was standing in the middle of the orchard, or what was left of it. Half the trees were on a distinct lean, and the other half were somehow upside down. "Oh, um, hi Applejack!" Luna followed her stare to the orchard. "Um... would you believe a really strong wind? No?"

"Wha-what happened to mah orchard?"

"Umm..." Luna pawed the ground. "Well, I was using my magic, and it was going fine, but I thought, if I increase the range of the spell, I can get all of the trees harvested much quicker. And so I did, but... um... it sort of interpreted the planted apple seeds as apples as well, and ripped the trees out..." Luna couldn't look Applejack in the eyes. "But I replanted them all, see? And I only got about half of them upside down..."

Applejack could feel her eye twitching. *Now, don't be mad Applejack. It was just a mistake, and besides, she's a Princess... no, just stay calm...* "That's okay Princess..." Applejack managed through clenched teeth. "But what happened to all the apples?"

"The apples? Oh... um... I sort of panicked, and accidentally flung them all into the lake.... hehe.... sorry?"

Deep breaths AJ, deep breaths.

"Oh, but I can make it up to you! Here, I'll just cast a multiplication spell on the apples we already harvested!"

"Nononono, no more magic please!" But it was too late, Luna's horn was already glowing, and so were the apples. With a *POP*, there were suddenly twice as many apples.

"See? No problem at all." *POP* Luna turned to find the source of the noise. The apples had doubled again. *POP* And again. "Uh oh...."

POP POP POP POP POP The apples were now the height of a mountain, and swaying. It didn't take long for gravity to realise it had a job to do, and there was a sudden cascade of apples headed straight for the two ponies.

"APPLELANCHE! RUN!" Applejack was already sprinting as fast as she could, but the tide of apples washed over her. For about thirty seconds all she could see were apples, then the flow stopped. Applejack poked her head out of the ocean of apples to see Luna flying just above.

"Oops... I'm really, really sorry about that Applejack! I can make it up to you I promise, let me just-"

"No, no NO!" Applejack snapped. "Everytime you've tried to help today it's been a DISASTER! First you kick one of mah prize trees townward, THEN you uproot over half of an orchard, AND NOW THIS!" Applejack gestured to the sea of apples she was in. "Ah don't need your help! Just leave me alone!"

Tears welled up in Luna's eyes, and she flew away, sobbing. Applejack just sat there, huffing and puffing after yelling at Luna. Yelling at Luna. Yelling... at.... Princess.... "Oh horseapples, what have Ah done?"

It took Applejack about ten minutes to finally get out of the all the apples, during which her mind had already gone through all the worst possible scenarios. What if Luna told Princess Celestia? Or maybe she was even allowed to make judgments herself Applejack could see it all too clearly.

"Oh please your majesty, Ah'm sorry!"

"I'm afraid sorry is not good enough. Straight to the moon with you!"

"Ah've got to find her and apologise!"

It took Applejack another half hour before she heard a gentle sobbing coming from one of the apple trees. "Uh, Princess Luna? Is that you?" No response, but the sobbing seemed to get quieter. "Uh, listen... Ah'm sorry that Ah yelled at you before... Ah was wrong to do that, you were only tryin' to help." The sobbing had completely stopped now. Luna poked her head out of the tree. "So uh... can you please forgive me? And can you please not tell your sister and have her banish me and then throw me in prison where Ah was banished to?"

Luna flew down from the tree branches, keeping her head low. "No, you had every right to be angry with me. I'm the one who should be sorry. It's just... I've spent so long not being able to help anypony, I wanted a chance to be able to make up for all the years of lost time..."

Applejack lay a comforting hoof on Luna's shoulder. "Aw shewt, it ain't your fault. Ah mean, if you can forgive me for the way Ah acted, Ah can forgive you for your... over-enthusiasm."

Luna gave a sniff. "You mean it?"

"Ah do. And Ah'd be honoured if you helped me with the rest of today's harvest too."

Luna smiled. "Oh yes, I'd be happy to help! And I have the perfect spell to clean up that applelanche..."

"NO! Uh.. Ah mean, no thank you, your majesty. Ah think we should avoid anymore spells today, okay?"

"Okay..."

§§§§

Luna slipped out of the dream unnoticed. Applejack's dream had given her a lot to think about. Was she the kind of pony who would try her

best to help? She wasn't sure still, but at least it wasn't something she was sure she wasn't. That was progress.

"Well, that's half of them done." Before she headed off to the next place, Luna made a quick visit to the apple orchards nearby. Satisfied that there hadn't been an applelanche, she magicked some apples of the tress and arranged them in words on the ground before she flew off.

The apples read: "Sorry about your dream."

Chapter 4

Dreams of Fabulosity: Rarity

Luna hovered through the centre of town. She could feel the presence of the last elements, but where they were, she still didn't know. Time to try fishing for another name. What about the other unicorn, what was her name? Or her element? Cutie mark? Job? Just about any clue would have been nice.

"Well, if nothing else, I've learnt I need to pay more attention to Celly." Luna let out a sigh. If she couldn't remember the last elements, maybe she should just start trying random houses. That way she had a what, one in fifty chance of finding the right house? *Hmm, perhaps not.* Oh, if only there was some other clue!

And suddenly inspiration struck: maybe there were fewer houses to check after all. After all, the other Elements all had grand and spectacular houses; it stood to reason that the others would as well. So, all Luna had to do was find a house that was over the top. And as luck would have it, there was one right behind her.

Luna entered the house to find it cluttered with dresses and fabric. A fashion store maybe? The second floor was even more cluttered, half completed dresses lay here and there, there was at least two different streams of ribbons unrolled upon the ground. Luna found the unicorn amongst the mess, asleep at her sewing machine. It must have been a late night. For the fourth time that night, Luna peered into the slumbering unicorn's dreams.

§§§§

"What do you mean you can only let me have ten percent?" Rarity was in Canterlot, negotiating with an outlet. Deciding it was time she get her name spread further than Ponyville, she went seeking out the most well-known fashion shop in Equestria: Bridle Wear. The owner had liked Rarity's designs well enough, and agreed to stock her designs. Now they were just arguing about how much of the profit Rarity would receive.

"Darling, it hurts me to do this, really, but it's simply not feasible to give you much more than that. You're still not exactly a household name here, if we're going to turn a profit here, we'll need the lions share." The manager was stretching the truth a bit, but then, that was her job. She was surprised how often it worked. Not this time though.

"Do you WANT to ruin me? Ten percent simply isn't worth my time!" In truth, Rarity knew she probably wouldn't end up with much more than that, but there were things expected of a designer. "No, I won't settle for anything less than, say, thirty percent."

"Thirty percent? Darling, are you trying to ruin us? Now look, I can go maybe to fifteen percent, but frankly, you need us more than we need you."

"That may be so, but are you going to begrudge me my hard work? I'll accept twenty-five percent. Yes, that should do quite nicely I think."

"Twenty-one percent. That's my final offer. Take it or find some other shop."

It was certainly better than Rarity had expected. "Very well then. I suppose I can stoop to such a low share as twenty-one percent."

"Perfect! I'll get my people to draw up the contracts and send them over to you as soon as we can."

The conversation was interrupted by the sound of the door opening.

"Oh for crying out - We're closed for lunch!" The manager was frustrated, she still hadn't had her lunch break.

"Oh of course. I should have realised that when I saw the sign. Clearly I must be a simpleton to miss such an obvious hint."

The voice made the manager turn around, ready to give the visitor a piece of her mind, but the words vanished when she saw who it was. "P-princess Luna! I am so sorry, I wasn't expecting a visit from royalty today!"

"Really. It hardly shows at all. Now then, I require a new dress, my sister is throwing another ball for me."

Rarity wisely kept back. The princess seemed to be unhappy with the service on offer, and she had no plans to be associated with any royal dissatisfaction. The manager, meanwhile, was having a panic attack.

"I- I beg your pardon Princess, but our seamstress has the day off. Perhaps if you could come back tomorrow we could..."

"Ah, a pity." Luna cut her off. "It seems I'll have to find somewhere else to accept my patronage. Farewell."

"No, wait!" The words were out before the manager could stop them. "A-ha. It just so happens that we have a top designer here today, and I'm sure she'll be happy to take your request."

"Very well then. But this had better not be a waste of my time." The Princess headed into the backroom to await her fitting. The manager quickly rounded on Rarity.

"Oh please oh please oh please, you have to do this for me!"

Rarity allowed herself a smile. "And if I don't, what do I have to lose?"

The manager blinked. "Your contract with us! Yes, that's right, we won't stock your designs!" A disconcerting grin spread across her face. Rarity recognised it as the kind one might have while having a breakdown.

"Ah yes, but here's the thing, would I really WANT my designs to be associated with somewhere that was shunned by one of the royal Princesses?" Rarity pressed her advantage. "I suppose I could help... if my share of the profits is increased to forty percent."

"What?!" The manager was shocked. "That's unheard of! Forty percent?"

"Oh, well if it's too much I suppose I can just leave. Good luck with your reputation though, I know how difficult they are to fix." Rarity turned as if to leave. She counted in her head as she walked. One, two three, four...

"Wait." Rarity turned, carefully keeping her expression blank. The manager struggled with the words. "For-forty percent? And you'll make this dress for the Princess?" She swallowed. "Okay. You have a deal. Now please, get in there before she decides to leave!"

"Oh very well then. I suppose you've twisted my leg enough." Rarity could barely keep the glee of her face. Forty percent of the profit, AND she got to make a dress for the Princess! Granted it was the less popular Princess of the two, but royalty was royalty. As she walked towards the backroom though, she had no trouble not smiling. She was too busy fretting. What if the Princess hated her dress? What if she still held a grudge for the whole Nightmare Moon thing? A hundred scenarios ran through her mind as she passed through the door.

"Well then. I take it you're the replacement. You seem very familiar..."

Rarity tried not to shudder at the condescension in Luna's voice. "Yes your majesty. My name is Rarity, I was one of the ponies who helped with... um... Nightmare Moon last year."

"Oh yes. I knew I recognised you from somewhere." Luna turned her head away from Rarity and sighed. "If it helps you be more at ease, I bear you no ill-will for what you did."

"Oh really? The thought hadn't even crossed my mind," Rarity lied. "Right then, did you have any particular design in mind for your dress?"

"No, not really. Do what you think looks best, and pray I like it."

Rarity narrowly avoided gulping. "O-of course! Let me just get your measurements first..."

As Rarity took measurements, she tried to engage Luna in conversation. "So, a ball? How wonderful! You must be so excited!"

"Not really. I don't know what happened in the thousand years I was absent, but somehow balls have become even *duller* than before."

"Dull your majesty?" Rarity was now levitating various fabric colours in front of Luna. "But I've heard that a Canterlot ball is not one to be missed! The glamour, the sophistication, the elegance..."

"The dullness, the sycophancy, the silent judging... no thank you. But my sister insists that I make appearances like this so that the public start to accept I'm back for good."

Rarity levitated a sketchpad and pencil over from the bench and started working on designs. "Oh I'm sure it can't be all that bad..."

"Oh? You would contradict a Princess?"

Rarity dropped the pencil and sketchbook at the sound of Princess Luna's voice. She'd overstepped her place! This was the end for her. All her dreams of fame and fortune, lost!

Luna's stern look was replaced by a smirk. "Very bold. There need to be more like you willing to speak their mind. I'll see to it that you receive an invitation to the ball as well."

"Oh please please please don't punish me for.... what?" Rarity paused in the middle of her eloquently and well thought out defense, shocked by the Princess' decision. "Me? You're inviting me to the ball?"

"Of course. I'm a Princess, I may invite whomever I please. Besides which, this is the fastest way to convince you that these balls are boring. The ball is in a week's time, I'll see you get an invitation before then. I also expect my dress to be ready by either tomorrow or the day after, send a message by way of dragon to my sister, she'll be sure to pass the message along. Now, if I'm no longer required?" The princess tilted her head towards the door. Rarity snapped out of her shock.

"What? Oh, yes of course. I'll be sure to have it done by then."

"Good. I look forward to seeing your craftsmaanship then."

Rarity barely acknowledged her as she left. She, Rarity, was going to a royal ball!

The following week Rarity felt like she was in a dream. She finished the Princess' dress in almost record time, and sent a message to her via Spike to let her know it was done. Not even a day later she'd received a visit from some VERY dashing royal guards, but unfortunately they were only there to pick up the dress. And then Rarity began to feel nervous again. What if the princess didn't like the dress? Would she still give Rarity the invitation to the ball? What if she wasn't serious about inviting her in the first place? Rarity was such a bundle of nerves that she almost couldn't focus on making her own gown.

Finally, it was the day before the ball, and the invitation still hadn't arrived. Rarity was ready to give up hope, when Spike burst into the room.

"Spike! How many times do I have to tell you, you should always KNOCK before entering a room, especially the room of a lady! Go out and try again."

"But Rarity-"

"Ah-ah-ah! No buts Spike! For one from Canterlot, one would think your manners would be better."

Spike sighed and closed the door. A few seconds later there was a knock.

"Just a moment, I'm getting changed!"

"But you... you're.... oh forget it."

Rarity magicked on her ball gown, and opened the door. "Why Spike, how lovely to see you today. What brings you here? Do you like my new gown? I think it's simply GORGEOUS, oh I'm sure to be the envy of the ball. If I'm still going that is. It's been almost a week and Princess Luna still hasn't sent me an invitation. I'm beginning to think she never was going to invite me after all? I bet it's because she didn't like my dress, oh what am I going to do? This was my one shot at the high life and I blew it! I... I think I need to be alone now..."

She began to close the door when spike stuck his foot in the way.
"Rarity, will you let me get a word in edgeways?" He pulled out a scroll.
"This came for you just before. It's sealed with Princess Luna's insignia."

"What? Spike, I thought I told you to let me know the VERY SECOND the Princess sent me something. How could you just leave me in suspense like that?"

"Well if you'd let me actually speak-"

"No excuses Spike! This simply isn't good enough. Now then, the letter?"

Still grumbling slightly, Spike offered Rarity the letter. She unrolled it with glee and began to read it.

"Well Rarity, what's it say? Good news?"

Rarity read the letter again. And then again. A fourth time, just to be sure. She let it drop to the ground. "Princess Luna wants to talk to me about becoming her own personal dressmaker! Oh Spike, do you know what this means? It means I'm destined for the high life! Goodbye Ponyville, hello Canterlot!"

"But won't that mean leaving all your friends here in Ponyville behind? Like me?"

"Oh well yes, but that doesn't mean I won't keep in touch. Now shoo Spike, I need to pack a bag in case I'm asked to stay."

Rarity arrived at the palace about an hour before the ball was to start, as per Princess Luna's request. She was escorted to the Princess' Royal chamber by the guards. Timidly, Rarity knocked.

"Enter."

It was one of the biggest room's Rarity had ever laid eyes on. The floor was covered by an off white carpet, and the walls were painted in a

mix of deep blues and purples, with patches of silver here and there. It felt like Rarity had suddenly been transported to the moon.

"Ah, Miss Rarity, so glad you could make it." The Princess was in the middle of the room, lying on a four-poster bed. Rarity was shocked to see she wasn't dressed yet.

"Princess Luna, so good to see you again..." Rarity bowed deeply. "You mentioned in your letter that you had a job offer for me?"

"Yes that's correct. Please, you don't need to bow. Now then, about the position. I've found your work on my dress to be... more than adequate. In fact, it is one of the finest dresses I have laid eyes upon. As such, I would like to you to consider the position of Royal Dressmaker. Should you take the job, you will be accommodated here in the palace, and you're duties would primarily include making me stunning gowns when I need them, as well as to accompany me to any social functions I may attend."

Rarity was ready to say yes then and there, but managed to keep her composure. "Well your majesty, first let me say that this is very generous, and I-"

Luna cut her off. "Please just wait. I don't want to hear your answer yet. I'll let you attend your first regal ball, and if you manage to find it less tedious than I, you are welcome to the job. If not, I wouldn't want to be forcing you into unfavorable circumstances."

"Oh Princess, I'm sure it can't be that bad..."

"Nevertheless, I want you to know what you'd be getting yourself into before you accept. Now, we have some time before the ball starts, and anyway, I'd sooner be fashionably late. What shall we talk about?"

Rarity was shocked. "You mean, you're not going to start getting ready?"

Luna looked puzzled. "Get ready now? It's a dress, it's not like it'll take me more than 5 minutes to put on."

"Oh but there's so much more to preparing for a ball than to just put on a dress! I simply insist that you let me help you get ready."

Luna stood up, bringing her full height to bear. "And you think you can order around a member of the royal family?" Rarity shrank into the ground, waiting for the yelling, but instead the princess chuckled. "Oh, don't worry. I'm just teasing. If I am going to make you Royal Dressmaker, I suppose I should expect to be told how to wear your creations as well."

Luna exited into the adjacent room, leaving Rarity alone. Rarity took several breaths to try and calm her nerves. Here she was in the presence of Royalty, and she was ARGUING? Was she trying to get banished? Once she'd calmed down a bit more, she took another look at the room. It really was stunning. Rarity had never been one for astronomy, but if this was even close to what one could see through a telescope, she could certainly see the appeal. But why would Princess Luna have her room like this? Hadn't she spent a thousand years on the moon?

"In case you were wondering, yes this is what it was like for me on the moon. Except it was colder, and I didn't have any furniture." Rarity turned around to see Luna standing there in her dress. She had to suppress a gasp. The dress had turned out even better than she had thought, the colours contrasted perfectly with Luna's natural complexion, and the silver trim around the bottom made it look as if she was walking on a moonbeam. Rarity's heart fluttered a little just to look at her.

Wait, that can't be right. My heart can't be fluttering for Princess Luna. She's a mare, like me! Trying to cover the emotion, Rarity asked "But why would you decorate your room to remind you of the moon? Surely you've seen enough of it to last a lifetime?"

Luna was blissfully unaware of her guest's flustered nature. "While that may be true, there is a certain serenity to be found on the moon that I attempted to capture here. It wasn't so much where I was banished to that was so bad, but rather the fact that I WAS banished." Luna paused briefly, and sighed. "But all that is in the past now. So, what else am I supposed to do to get ready?"

Rarity managed a smile, glad to be back to familiar topics. "Why, make up, of course!"

The princess was confused. "Make-up? Why would I need make-up? I've been told on a number of occasions that my beauty was second only to my sister's. Of course, they were trying to butter me up, but still...."

"Ah, yes your majesty. But WITH make-up you could be - dare I say it - MORE beautiful than your sister!"

Luna's ears perked up. "Oh really? well, not that it matters but..." She grinned. "Ok then. Oh, but I don't have any make-up here."

"Not to worry! A lady always brings some make-up with her to every occasion. Oh, not to say that you aren't a lady your majesty..."

Luna gave an exasperated sigh. "Lady Rarity, please feel free to relax. I invited you here, I'm not going to banish you." She smiled. "Now please, allow me to find out what all this fuss about make-up is about."

It was about forty minutes afterwards that Rarity and Princess Luna finally headed off to the ball. The doorguard announced them. "Princess Luna of Equestria, and her guest, Lady Rarity of Ponyville." All eyes were on them instantly. Well, mostly they were on Luna, but a few slid off and found their way to Rarity. She felt like she was going to faint. Her first Canterlot ball! Not counting the absolute disaster that was the Grand Galloping Gala, of course.

It wasn't long before a small herd of ponies had surrounded Luna and Rarity. Rarity felt smaller than she had ever felt before. *This must be what Fluttershy feels like all the time!* Luna noticed her guest's distress.

"Go on. Mingle with the crowd; you don't have to stay with me. Besides, I'm sure you'll have more fun wandering the hall then here with me, trying to manage all these ponies and their requests."

Rarity didn't need to be told twice, and managed to squeeze her way out of the herd. Freed from the stress of so many ponies around her, she managed to calm down. Here she was at last, in the heart of sophistication and class. Time to shamelessly self-promote!

Hours later Rarity was still enjoying herself. She had got a number of compliments about her gown, and on the occasion that the topic turned to Princess Luna, Rarity managed to slip in the fact that it was her design as well. Oh yes, business was going to be booming. Soon the whole world would know the name of the most fashionable unicorn in all Equestria, Rarity!

Entranced by the scenes of fame that played before her, Rarity forgot to pay attention to where she was walking, and stumbled into one of the other guests.

"Oh, I'm so dreadfully sorry, I was.... YOU!"

"You!" replied Prince Blueblood. "You're that unicorn with the horrid manners from the Grand Galloping Gala! How did you manage to get in here? Guards, guards!"

Before she could react, Rarity found herself being restrained by two guards. "Unhand me you ruffians! Why the nerve! I'm an invited guest!"

"Oh? I don't remember seeing your name on the list," sneered Blueblood.

"That's because she was a late addition by me." Blueblood turned to find Princess Luna bearing down upon him. "Is there a problem, oh esteemed nephew?"

The prince gulped, but managed to speak without a hint of fear in his voice. "Oh, aunt Luna..."

"Don't you call me aunt! It's Princess Luna to you."

This time Blueblood couldn't hide the tremble in his voice. "P- Princess Luna, this unicorn simple has no manners. Why, at the Grand Galloping Gala, she got cake all over my perfectly groomed mane, and showed absolutely no respect for my position."

"As I understand it Blueblood, your position as prince is only justified because your mother married into the royal family. After you were born. And I don't think she'd been married before that either. Now, if you're done questioning my choice of companions, I think we'll take our leave."

Rarity found herself released, and she hurried to the Princess' side. "Oh thank you so much for helping me out Princess!" She felt a stirring in her chest again, and once more tried to push it down.

"It was no problem. And please, just call me Luna." The princess turned to the disgraced Blueblood. "Oh, and I had meant to mention, a wonderful outfit you're wearing. It must take you and five servants at least half an hour to get into it."

The prince's chest swelled with pride. "Forty five minutes actually," as if an outfit was better the longer it took to put on.

"Ah I see. But from what I hear it only takes one filly 10 seconds to get you out. Come along Rarity, we're leaving."

They left the unicorn stallion fuming. "Well, I think I've had enough of this for one night. Shall we retire for the night?"

Rarity nodded. "Once again, thank you for saving me there your majes... Luna. I'm sorry to have caused any trouble for you."

"Trouble? Oh not at all. That was the most fun I've ever had at one of these balls. Besides, he had it coming, strutting around like he was important."

They made their way back to Luna's chambers, Rarity barely stifling a yawn. "Oh my, I'm more tired than I thought. Those balls really do take a lot out of you."

"Tired? Oh, well in that case we should leave the discussion about if you want to take the job or not until tomorrow. Do you have anywhere to stay tonight?" Rarity shook her head. "Right then. You may stay here for tonight then. The bathroom's through there if you need to take your makeup off."

"I thank you for the offer your.... Luna, but to be honest, I think I just need to get some rest. So, where am I to sleep?"

Luna motioned towards the bed. "Well, you have one option if you want a bed."

"Oh no, I couldn't possibly, that's your bed! Where will you sleep?"

"Well for one thing, it's big enough that we could both sleep in it together, but that won't be a problem either because I don't need to sleep. One of the benefits to being an immortal goddess. Oh, are you feeling okay? You look slightly off-colour..."

Rarity couldn't hide the blush that had spread over her face when the princess mentioned sleeping together. *No, she didn't mean it like that! Really Rarity, what has come over you?* "I'm fine Luna, really. I'm just tired." *Besides, she's an immortal princess, it would never work out. Oh what am I thinking, even entertaining the idea of a crush on another mare...*

"Well, if you insist. Have a good sleep, I'll see you in the morning then." Luna walked out to the balcony, magicking her dress off as she went. Upon reaching the edge, she spread her wings and flew away.

Rarity watched in awe. *Oh it's no use. I DO have a crush on her. She climbed onto the bed and lay down. I'll worry about this in the morning. Right now I just need to sleep.... no, I must at least change out of this gown.... after I've lain down for a few seconds....*

Rarity opened her blurry eyes. Rubbing them a few times, she eventually managed a clear view. The second thing she noticed was that she was no longer in her dress. The first thing she noticed though, was she was in bed, and snuggled against Princess Luna. This took a few seconds to properly process, and when it did, Rarity had to clasp her hooves over her mouth to prevent herself from screaming.

Calm down Rarity. I'm sure there's a good explanation for this...

Her musings were cut off as Luna rolled over and opened her eyes. "Ah, you're awake. I don't usually say this, but good morning." She climbed out of bed and stretched. "I hope you don't mind, but I took the liberty of undressing you and tucking you in last night. By the time I came back from my flight you were already out, and just lying on the covers instead of under them. You must have been tired."

Well, that answered one question. "But why were you in bed as well?" Rarity was trying her best not to blush just thinking about it. "I thought you didn't need sleep?"

"Oh, I don't. But that doesn't mean I can't. After all, why else would I have a bed at all if I couldn't sleep? I find a quick nap every couple of days is usually sufficient." There was a knock on the door. "Ah, that'll be breakfast. Punctual as always. It's good to know at least that hasn't changed in the years I've been away."

As Luna and Rarity sat down to breakfast, Rarity tried to order her thoughts. She knew she had a crush on Luna, but how to tell her? Should she even tell her? Luna noticed her guest's puzzled expression.

"Something on your mind dear?"

"What? Oh no, it's fine, it's just..."

"Ah, it's about the job isn't it. Have you come to a decision then?"

Rarity nodded. "Yes. I would be very honoured to be your personal dressmaker." She swallowed. May as well get it over with. "And there's another matter."

"Oh?" It was Luna's turn to look puzzled.

Another swallow. "I think... I think I'm in love with you Luna."

There was a silence. Nervous, Rarity tried to fill it. "I mean, I don't normally feel this way about other mares, but for some reason when I look at you I just feel all..."

"Rarity." Luna cut her off with a word. "I'm afraid I can't let you be my dressmaker any more."

"What?" The words shattered Rarity. She felt tears welling up in her eyes, and tried to hold them back.

"Please, try to understand. If you took the job as you are now, you'd be chasing after something you won't ever be able to get. I simply can't reciprocate your feelings. Not now, not ever."

"Is it just because I'm a mare as well?" Rarity managed to spit out through the tears, flowing freely now.

"No, that's not it at all. My answer would be the same if you were a stallion."

"Then why? Why can't you love me?"

"My dear, I do love you, just not in the way you're thinking. I just can't form a deep relationship with anypony. Please, understand. I'm immortal, or at least very long-lived. If I was to enter into a relationship with any pony, I would be entering into it knowing that at the end, I would have to bid them a teary farewell as they passed on. If I allow myself to feel that sort of attachment, I would end up being torn apart."

Luna got up from her side of the table and went round to Rarity. She embraced the weeping unicorn. "So I'm sorry, but I have to let you go. There's somepony else out there for you, be they filly or colt. But not me."

It was a week later. Rarity was back in Ponyville, mostly recovered from the ball. There was still an ache in her heart, but with everyday the pain grew less. Soon it would only be a dull memory.

There was a knock at the door. Rarity answered it, and had a packaged thrust upon her. "Special muffin!" The mailmare saluted, and then flew on her way.

Odd, Rarity wasn't expecting any packages. She inspected it, but was unable to find any return address. It was addressed to her though. Curious as what it could be, Rarity ripped open the package with her teeth. Upon getting to the interior Rarity let out a gasp. It was a roll of fabric, but it was unlike any fabric Rarity had seen in her life. It seemed to shimmer with the colour of the night sky itself. There was a note attached. Rarity had a feeling she knew who it was from, but she read it anyway.

"Dear Rarity. I once again apologise for having to crush your feelings the way I did. You deserve better. While I can't provide love for you, I can provide this. I wove this fabric myself from the night sky. The fabric is one of a kind, so use it well. Make yourself something that will be the envy of everypony in Equestria. With love, Luna."

Rarity finished reading the note, and smiled. "Thank you."

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Luna was back in the real world again. She didn't spare a glance for the sleeping unicorn, and flew out into the streets again.

"Aloof. Distant, yet caring. That's certainly how I've been acting recently, but is that how I want to continue?" With more to think about, Luna continued on her way.

Chapter 5

Dreams of Parties: Pinkie Pie

Once more Luna was drifting through Ponyville. *So, the Element of Laughter next, right? Now what was her job? Um... butcher? No, I don't think that was it... Baker? Candlestick maker? No, I'm pretty sure it was baker, we'll stick with that. So a baker would live...*

Luna halted in her tracks as she looked up at the building before her. It looked like a gingerbread house had had an affair with a cupcake. *Is that place even waterproof? And what about the rats, wouldn't they just eat it?* Trying not to think about it too hard, Luna entered the bakery. The ground level was your standard bakery, front room with display cases and a large open space for events, and a kitchen out the back. Also on the ground floor Luna could sense two sleeping ponies. Presumably the owners of the house. There was also someone on the upper floor. Investigating, Luna found a pink earth pony laying asleep. This was the Element of Laughter alright, although Luna was confused as to why the mare had gone to sleep cuddling a... was that a sack of flour?

Ah yes. Luna remember a bit more about the pony before her. This was the one who was... how had Celly put it? A few cupcakes short of a batch? This would be interesting. Bracing herself, Luna peered into the dreamscape.

§§§§

Pinkie bounded downstairs at the sound of the first knock. "Oh this is so exciting! What will we do tonight? Ooh, maybe we can go to Cloudsdale again!" She reached the bottom of the stairs in just two bounds, a new best! She flung open the door and began talking at once. "Hi Dashie! It's so nice to see you today, what can I... wait a minute, you're not Rainbow Dash!"

Standing at the door was Princess Luna! The twist left Pinkie momentarily speechless. Luna spoke up "Hi, I hope I'm not interrupting anything. Did you have something planned for today?"

Pinkie got her voice back. "Oh no, not really. I mean, I was expecting Rainbow Dash, but that's only because it's Monday and Monday is the day I always hang out with her! Fluttershy I see on Tuesdays, Applejack gets Wednesdays, Thursdays go to Rarity, then it's Friday, Friday can be anyone depending on what happened that day, and that leaves Twilight for Saturdays!"

"Then what about Sundays?"

"Oh, Sundays. That's reserved for things that don't make any sense. Anyway, since it's you at the door and not Dashie I guess I get to hang out with you today! So, what's on your mind? Any reason for this unexpected but still super awesome visit?"

"Oh, well yes actually! I need your help with something."

"Help? Well that's silly, most ponies would go to Twilight for help. Unless they need help with a party, and even then for some reason they try to stop me finding out about it. Jeeze, you spike the punch one time.... Ooh, is that why you're here? Do you need my help with a party?"

"Well, it's like this. Since returning from my vacation as it were, I've discovered I don't really know any pony other than my sister."

"You know what would fix that right up? A party! Oh, sorry, am I going on about that too much? Rarity keeps trying to tell me that I'm a one track pony or something like that, but I think that's silly because Dashie's the racing pony around here, not me, so why would I be on a track unless I was cheering for Dash?"

"Are you sure you're not thinking of one trick pony?"

"No, I know tons of tricks as well. Ooh, if you'd like I can show you some of my best pranks! Oh, but we were talking about a party weren't we? No wait, that's just me skipping ahead. How can I help you Luna?"

"Well since I'm talking to Equestria's top party planner, there must be only one thing I'm after. Fashion advice. Should I try wearing socks?" Luna's tone was deadpan, but after a few seconds her face betrayed her.

Stifling a giggle, she resumed. "No, actually, I do need your help planning a party. It needs to be big!"

"Ooh, I can totally do that! I'm the best at parties, all the ponies do agree. Well, not counting those grumps at the Grand Galloping Gala. They wouldn't know a party if it jumped out of a cake wearing nothing but another cake yelling 'PARTY!' Wait, am I getting ahead of myself again? Did we do the part where you ask for my help with a party?"

"Yes." Luna was doing her best to follow the party pony's ramblings, a good way to get a headache. "A 'Get to know Luna' sort of party."

"That's a great idea! I wish I'd thought of that!" Pinkie grinned and jumped out the door, snaring Luna in her bushy tail. "Come on then, we're heading to Twilight's!"

The pair was about halfway across Ponyville before Luna managed to untangle herself from Pinkie's tail. "Wait, so why are we going to the library? Do we need Twilight's help after all?"

"What? No, don't be silly! But we do need a super awesome place to host the party, and library is the second best place for parties!"

"What's the best place then?"

"Sugar Cube Corner of course!"

"So why are we going to the library?"

"The payoff of course!"

As the two ponies approached the tree that served as Ponyville's library and Twilight's residence they noticed it was strangely busy. There were several pegasi hovering around the upper window, all tugging on what appeared to be an apple tree lodged in the side of the library.

"How on Equestria does an apple tree wind up in another tree?" Luna asked.

"I dunno, you tell me."

They entered the library where they found Twilight in conversation with Applejack. "Well shewt Twilight, That's one of my apple trees alright, but how they hay did it get up there?"

"I'm not really sure, it was just there when I got up this morning." Twilight spotted Pinkie and Luna across the room. "Oh hey Pinkie Pie. And Princess Luna, what brings you here?"

Both ponies answered as one. "A party!"

Pinkie took over the explaining. "See Luna here wants to get to know the ponies around her better. So what better way to do that than a party!"

"And all the ones in Canterlot are so boring, so I came here to have a proper one!"

"And we'd like you to come if you're not busy!"

Twilight was busy looking between Pinkie and Luna, waiting to see if either of them would start speaking again. "Well, I am a bit behind in my studies, so I don't know..."

"Oh please Twilight!" Luna implored. "You're one of the few ponies around here who I almost know!"

"Yeah," Pinkie joined in. "And we were kinda hoping to have it here as well."

"Well...." Twilight gave in. "Oh sure, why not. My studies can wait one more day. It's not like it's every night I get a visit from royalty."

"Yes!" Pinkie pumped her hoof into the air in celebration. She then turned to Applejack. "What about you AJ? You in?"

The farmer gave a nod. "For a Pinkie Pie party? You know I am. When will it be?"

"Tonight, duh! It's Luna's party, and she practically is the night, so we can't have it in the day!"

"Besides, we'd have no time to decorate if we held it any sooner."

Applejack smiled. "Heh, I guess that makes sense. Anything I can help with?"

"Actually, can I count on you to do the catering? You're totally the best cook in all of Equestria!" Pinkie gave Applejack her best smile.

"Gotcha, I'll go do that right now."

"Great!" Pinkie next turned to Twilight. "Twilight, can you send Spike to tell Rarity that she's in charge of decoration, and then find Rainbow Dash to spread the word?"

"Well sure, I can do that. What are you going to be doing then Pinkie?"

"Luna and I have to get some supplies for tonight! So we'll leave you to it! Assume everypony's invited!" Pinkie turned to Luna. "Come on Luna, let's go!" She was out of the library before anyone had a chance to respond. Luna smiled at Twilight before following suit.

"So Pinkie, what sort of supplies are we getting? Cupcakes? Pin the tail on the Pony? That game's still played right?"

"Of course it's still played! It's my favourite party game! But no we're getting a different kind of supplies." Pinkie lead Luna to a shop that looked more like a circus tent than a building. "Come on, let's see what they've got."

As they entered the shop Luna looked around. Pinkie smiled as she saw recognition dawn on the Alicorn's face.

"This is a prank shop!"

"Yup! What kind of a party would it be if there weren't any pranks? Not one I'd want to be at!"

The shop's owner, a unicorn with a jester hat for a cutie mark, emerged from the back room. "Why hello there Pinkie! Planning another party?"

Pinkie giggled. "You know me too well Bozo! Let's see... I'll take my usual order number one, and whatever else my friend Princess Luna picks out!"

Luna had wandered away and was looking at some of the merchandise on display. There was a wide variety of course, fake blood, sneezing powder, invisible ink, the usual prankster's repertoire. There was also other, less common things like smoke bombs, hollow cakes, explosive candles and a piñata filled with slime instead of candy.

Pinkie looked at Luna. "Well Luna, anything that looks like it could be fun? You need only ask and we can get it!"

Luna smiled. "Actually, I think I've got a good idea for a prank. I'll need the fake blood and smoke bombs for it though."

"Okie dokie loki!" Pinkie turned to the owner and nodded. "We'll take some fake blood and smoke bombs as well. Put it on my tab!"

"Right-o Pinkie. I'll go grab the stuff for you now then." Bozo headed into the back room to get Pinkie's things.

"So then Luna, what's this prank idea? Can I get in on it?"

Luna gave a mischievous grin. "Oh, I was planning on it. Here's the plan..."

The party was going swimmingly. They'd had to start a bit sooner so that the fillies and colts could attend for a while. The slime piñata had entertained them all right, and Pinkie had already had to apologise to Twilight for the ensuing slime fight. It was beginning to get late now, and the foals and their parents and siblings had headed home. It was getting to

be that way for the rest of the ponies as well, most of them still not used to being awake at late hours.

Pinkie was glad to see Luna was enjoying herself, and more of the Ponyvillians had worked up the courage to talk to her. But they still hadn't enacted Luna's prank, waiting for the perfect moment. Pinkie made her way over to Luna, who was momentarily without somepony talking to her.

"Luna, can you come to the kitchen with me? There's a batch of cupcakes in there that need to go on the table." This was of course a coded hint that it was time for the finalé.

"Hmm? Oh! Yes, right. Of course."

The two went into the kitchen. Luna closed the door, checking to see that there were no eavesdroppers. "Okay, coast clear. Ooh, this is going to be good!"

"I know! I wish I'd thought of this prank! They're going to love it, I'm sure!"

"Well, that depends. It could go horribly wrong of course. Anyway, you know your part?"

"Well it's not like there's much I have to do for it. You get to have all the real fun Luna."

Luna smiled. "Yes, but it wouldn't be possible without you." she paused and wiped the smile from her face. "Okay, let's begin."

It had been about half an hour since anypony had last seen Pinkie Pie. Most ponies took that as a sign that the party was over, and were on their way to the door. Before anypony could leave however, the door slammed shut and issued a click. It was locked! And if that wasn't enough, the lights chose that moment to go out. Panic began to set in, but it was just beginning. Smoke began to flood the room, creeping up the walls and across the floor. But this wasn't normal smoke. It glimmered with a dark blue sheen to it, almost like the night sky mirror in the floor. The last time

any smoke like that had been seen had been last summer sun celebration! But did that mean...

"Mwahahahahaha! You little foals! You've fallen right into my trap!" As one, the ponies turned to find the source of that voice. It was as they'd feared, the queen of darkness, Nightmare Moon had returned!

"Did you really think I'd reformed? Bah! I was just biding my time, waiting, plotting, scheming... and now my plans of come to fruition! The night will last forever!"

"Big deal!" Rainbow Dash was already in the air. "We've stopped you before, we can stop you again so long as we still have the Elements of Harmony!"

"Oh? But it was my understanding you needed all the elements to stop me, and that just isn't possible! Behold!"

The lights flickered just a bit, and formed a spotlight of sorts. And what they lit up caused a shriek of horror from the assembled crowd. Lying there in a pool of red was Pinkie Pie, still as a stone.

"This foalish girl though she could stop me, but see now what has become of her! The same fate awaits each of you unless you bow to me and accept me as your Queen! MWAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! MWAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

It was too much. There wasn't a single pony that wasn't screaming now. The noise mingled with the booming laugh of Nightmare Moon, filling the library.

"AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! HAHAAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!" But as the laughter continued, her voice started to boom less, becoming... softer? Gentler? "Hahahahahahaha!" That voice was now nothing like Nightmare Moon's. Most of the ponies had stopped running now, and looked at Nightmare Moon in confusion. Before their very eyes, her form began to waver as the illusion spell dropped, and now there was only Princess Luna standing there laughing.

The corpse of Pinkie Pie beside her started to giggle as well, and before long broke out into full laughter, betraying her attempts at playing possum.

"Hahahaha, oh wow, you were so right Luna! That was awesome!" The party pony was rolling around in the pool of fake blood, busy laughing.

"Hahahahaha! Oh, you guys should have seen the look on your faces! Priceless!" Luna wiped away a tear from her eye and looked up at the assembled ponies. Over the last few minutes their faces had undergone a change, from terror, to confusion, until finally, anger. "Uh.. you guys aren't mad about that prank thing are you?"

As one, all the unicorns at the party lit up their horns. "Uh oh," Pinkie gulped, nervous for once. "Lynch mob. Run. Run!"

Both of the pranksters were out the door in a flash. There was a delay of a few seconds before the mob could follow. A few of the faster Unicorns were already casting stun bolts at the fleeing pair. Despite the situation, Luna was still laughing. "Hehehe, well at least we had fun with that!"

Pinkie was giggling as well. "Yup! Luna, you'd better fly away! No need to be stuck here with me."

"You sure? It seems wrong to abandon you like that."

Pinkie smiled. " Oh no, I have my ways of escaping. No one can capture Pinkie Pie!"

Luna hesitated, then eventually flew up. The pegasi in the mob followed her, leaving only the earth ponies and unicorns following Pinkie. She smiled. This was going to be a piece of cake. She jumped behind some crates in an alleyway, and emerged on the other side of town. She looked around, satisfied that there was no-one following her. "Well, that was easy. Now, where will I next meet up with Luna? Ooh, I know! The stargazing hill!"

A few seconds later Pinkie was at the top of the hill, waiting for Luna to show up. And another few second later, she did. "Pinkie! I'm glad I found you again? How'd you manage to escape?"

"Oh, I have my ways." Pinkie gave Luna a wink. "Anyway, wasn't that party fantastic? Oh, they'll be talking about that one for years! Oh, at least they would be if..." Pinkie shook her head. "Nonono, that's not important right now! Anyway Luna I think it's probably time we say goodbye. It's been super-amazing having you here, and I hope you can visit some other time as well!"

"Of course I'll visit again! This has been the most fun I've had for like, millenia! Of course, the last party I tried to host was on the moon, and the moon rocks were dreadful company."

Pinkie gave Luna a hug. "You take care of yourself! Come back whenever you like! I'd be happy to throw you another party."

Luna nodded. "Oh, and I hope you don't mind, but I took the liberty of taking some of your pranking supplies for myself. Is that okay?"

"Of course it's okay silly! You go prank your sister for me! Now bye!"

Luna spread her wings and took off. As she flew away though, something strange could be seen happening to the landscape. The sky, as if snagged on her wings, was pulled along with her, leaving a white void where the sky was meant to be. The ground beneath Pinkie faded away as well, until all that could be seen was white in all directions. Pinkie spoke up again.

"Real Luna? I know you're watching. I just wanted to let you know, I meant it when I said I'd be happy to throw you another party. A real one this time, with real cake and real friends! I won't even pull any pranks if you don't want. Now, I hate to do this to you, but I still have the better part of a night left, and I'm sure Dashie will be so disappointed if I don't have a dream of her tonight, and I can't have you seeing that, so bye bye! See you soon!"

Everything faded to black.

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Luna was flung backwards through the wall. She shook her head a few times. "She could really sense me? She can control her dreams? She's one to watch, that Pinkie Pie." She hovered in though for a while. "But her version of me, what was that like? Fun-loving on the whole I'd say, and she seemed to indicate that I should be happy.... maybe that's who I should be?"

Luna let out a sigh as she flew towards the library. "Well, one last stop for tonight then. Let's find out what my sister's prized pupil thinks of me."

Chapter 6

Dreams of Bonds: Twilight Sparkle

In contrast to her previous hunts, Luna knew exactly where she was going this time. Ponyville's library, home to Twilight Sparkle, Celestia's protégé and bearer of the Element of Magic. But this time, Luna dawdled. She felt a certain apprehension about looking into Twilight's dreams. Yes, originally she had been left until last because she might counteract Luna's dreamwalking spell, but there was another reason as well. Magical feedback.

It was an well documented fact in the etheric sciences that if the magic of two different unicorns came into direct contact with each other, the results could range from anywhere to a minor headache to a magical explosion roughly the size of Stalliongrad. Of course the last one had only happened once, and that was right before Luna had been banished to the moon. It seemed that the more powerful the magicks that collided were, the greater the repercussions. And Luna's magic had grown since then, and scientists had estimated that if she were to go head to head with any other unicorn with her level of magic, or even just very close, the worst that could happen would be all life stopping instantaneously and every molecule in existence exploding at the speed of light. Personally Luna suspected that the team's intern had proposed that one, and everyone else had just gone along with it because it sounded cool. But the point still stood, the results could be very bad.

Luna looked at the tree looming before her. After a quick inspection of the sides, just to confirm a lack of embedded apple trees, she made her way inside, cautiously. Knowing that Twilight had a habit of keeping late hours, Luna first checking the writing desk on the second floor of the library. It was entirely possible that the unicorn had been making some late night notes when Luna's spell had been cast. Possible, but not the case. There was, however, an owl keeping watch over the room. Its head followed Luna as she floated through the room, owls possessing the ability to see things hidden to others.

Luna next checked the bedroom, but the bed too was empty. She finally found Twilight outside on the balcony, curled up beside a telescope, wrapped in a blanket. The find made Luna smile. If she was out here she must have been stargazing. It gave Luna a good feeling to discover any pony enjoying her night.

After a minute of watching the sleeping mare, the moon princess steeled herself. "Well, here's hoping no explosions occur then." With that, she began gazing into Twilight's dream.

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"Spike! Hurry up, we don't have much more time before the Princess arrives!" Twilight was in her usual pre-royalty worry mode. She was dusting the library for about the third time that day, and had already cleaned the kitchen twice. Spike meanwhile had the job of putting all the books that were scattered around the place away. Again.

"Just put the last one away," said Spike, coming down the stairs. "Although I don't know why you had me clean the upper study as well. It's not like she's going to go up there."

"You never know with princesses Spike, they like to surprise you." Twilight remembered her last trip home to Canterlot, where a bucket of icy water greeted her as she entered her old room in the palace. "In more ways than one. Now, let's see what else we need to do." She levitated a clipboard and quill over and started going through the items. "Okay, make beds, check. Make checklist, check. Put away study material, check. Put away recreational reading, check. Dust the house-

"Three times no less."

"Hush Spike. Check." Twilight gave her list another quick scan, making sure she hadn't missed anything. "Oh no, I forgot to pick up the treats from Sugar Cube Corner! The princess could be here any minute! Spike could you-"

"Already on it Twi. But I expect overtime pay for this."

"Don't worry, I'll make sure to get a nice emerald for my number one assistant." With Spike off to collect the snacks, Twilight ticked that item off her list. "Right, that's everything then."

"Oh? I think you missed out 'Welcome Princess Luna as she arrives.'"

Twilight gave her list a puzzled scan. "But that one isn't on my..." Realisation dawned. She turned around to find that Princess Luna had indeed already arrived. "Princess! How lovely to see you! Uh... have you been here long?"

"Long enough to confirm my sister's fears. You really do get engrossed in your work far too easily don't you?" Luna gave a light chuckle at the unicorn's expression. "Oh, don't worry. I'm the same way. Give me a good constellation and I can be up for hours trying to get the stars just so. But listen to me ramble, and I'm still only at the front door. May I come in?"

"Yes of course princess!" Twilight was already flustered by this visit, not a good sign. She tried to calm herself. "Can I get you a drink princess? Or maybe a snack. No, wait Spike's just gone out to get those, never mind that. So, A drink?"

"A coffee would be wonderful thank you. All these late mornings and early evenings are starting to get to me."

Twilight had to pause to figure out that last statement. *Right. Princess Luna is usually asleep in the day and awake during the night.* She headed into the kitchen to get Luna her coffee. She poured a cup for Luna, and made tea for herself. As she returned she tried to pick up the conversation again. "So, you've been having to keep a diurnal sleep pattern? Why?" Just seconds after asking Twilight realised that the question might be a bit personal. "Oh, I'm sorry princess, I hope you're not offended by my asking."

Luna gave a light laugh. "You really are just like my sister said. Relax Twilight Sparkle, I'm no more offended than my sister would be. If it helps put you at ease, just try to think of me as my sister. We're more than a little alike after all."

Twilight smiled. "Okay, I guess I can do that..."

"No. No, no, no, no. I've seen many things this night, many possibilities, but this is where I draw the line. I am NOT my sister."

Twilight looked around confused. That was definitely Princess Luna's voice, but she was looking just as confused as to the source of the voice. "Who's there? Is there someone spying on us? I warn you, I have magic and I'm not afraid to use it!"

"No, please no magic! It could lead to catastrophic... it would be very bad!" The voice seemed to echo, yet at the same time had a quietness to it, almost like a whisper.

Twilight was still looking around the room, trying to figure out where the voice was emanating from. "Well then show yourself, or I can't be responsible for what happens!"

A sigh. "And I was hoping to avoid this... very well. Just give me a second, I'm not sure I quite remember how I get this to work..." A ball of indigo light began to shimmer in the centre of the library. Twilight looked on with curiosity as the ball became bigger. Suddenly spears of light shot out from the sphere, piercing the library's walls. A bright flash momentarily blinded Twilight, and when she got her sight back, there in the centre of the library was...

"Princess Luna?" Twilight was astounded she was able to articulate, feeling like her jaw must have fallen on the floor. She looked behind her, and saw princess Luna sitting at her table, sipping coffee like nothing was wrong. And then she looked back and saw princess Luna standing in the middle of the floor, albeit a bit shakily. Twilight rubbed her eyes and looked at her drink. "Did I brew the cactus juice tea by accident again?"

The Princess Luna in the middle of the floor shook her head a few times. "Okay, right. Note to self, next time try and do that with a bit more finesse." She looked around the room. "Oops. Um, sorry about your wall. Don't worry, it should be back to normal soonish."

Twilight looked to see what she was talking about. Where the beams of light had touched the walls, they had indeed gone right through, leaving holes scattered through out the library. Almost as soon as she noticed this, some of the holes seemed to close up, as if there was never any hole in the

first place. "But- how...? Okay, now I know I've brewed the wrong tea. First twin princesses, now self fixing walls?"

"I know it may be hard to realise from in here, but this isn't because of any ill-brewed tea. This is your dream Twilight Sparkle, and I'm trespassing."

"My dream? How is something like that even possible? And why would you come into my dreams in the first place."

"It's a long story, and I don't want to trouble you with the details. As to how, dreams are part of my domain as the Moon Princess, so I have the ability to view or enter other's dreams."

"So you've been spying on my dreams? Why would you do that?"

"It's not just you, I've been spying on lots of ponies..." Luna trailed off. "This isn't helping my case here is it?"

"Not really, no."

Luna sighed. "Well, I'm not asking you to forgive me, I had no right to view or enter your dreams. It's just that, well, when I saw that you thought of me like THAT," Luna gestured to the other Luna, still sitting at the table, seemingly oblivious to the goings on around her. "I am not like my sister. If I had been, maybe I wouldn't have become Nightmare Moon in the first place..." Luna gave a faint smile. "Ah, I'm rambling a bit. I apologise. I'll leave you alone now, and let you get back to your own dreams." She spread her wings and ignited her horn, ready to depart.

"No, wait, you don't have to leave." Twilight was still confused by the scenario, but she didn't think Luna had done anything wrong. "I'm not angry with you or anything. I'm just confused as to why you were doing this in the first place."

"I already said, I don't want to burden you with it."

"It wouldn't be a burden. This is the sort of things friends are for, right?"

Luna paused. "You... you think of me as a friend?" Twilight could hear the emotion barely contained in her voice. "But we've scarcely spoken two words to each other. And you know hardly anything about me!"

"Well..." Twilight started sheepishly. "That's not exactly true. In our correspondence, Princess Celestia has been telling me a bit about you, as I'm sure she's been mentioning me to you. I think she was planning on setting up a meeting of sorts between us."

"She's been...?" Luna could imagine her sister's face all too well, curved into that gentle smile she had whenever she was planning something. "That meddling..." Luna couldn't help smiling as she said this though, despite her frustration. "When will she learn I'm not a filly anymore? I can take care of myself."

"I think she knows that," Twilight said. "I'm sure she's just trying to help. And I'd like to be able to help you as well. So please, tell me why you're going into dreams?"

"Well..." Luna considered. "Okay, if you insist. But first, can we get rid of her?" She pointed a wing at Twilight's dream version of her. "She's beginning to creep me out..."

"Oh, right. Sorry." Twilight concentrated, and the doppelganger faded away. The real Luna took her spot at the table.

"Okay, well I guess I'll start at the beginning. Or, as far back as I can remember. Which admittedly, is only about as far back as last year's Summer Sun celebration. You know, the one where I..." Luna paused, unable to say it. "Anyway. I can remember that time, the time I spent as Nightmare Moon, but I can't remember anything before then. I can't remember the time before my banishment at all, not a thing. And so, I haven't been able to remember what I was like before then, I mean, the kind of pony I was. Was I kind, was I aloof, regal? Did I have the makings of a tyrant, a trickster, a hard worker? I just don't know.

"So I decided to see how other ponies saw me, and the easiest way was to find out how their subconscious viewed me. And of all ponies alive right now, you and your friends would have the best ideas about who I might be, seeing as you stopped me."

"But how did you know we'd be dreaming about you."

"Magic, specifically a spell to force you to dream about me. Once again, I apologise for the violation of privacy."

"Well I wouldn't have noticed if you didn't mention it, so I guess it's okay. Did any of my friends dreams' help?"

Luna considered this. "They haven't answered my question, but they've helped a bit I guess. Rainbow Dash saw me as a villain, bidding my time to overthrow my sister. Fluttershy saw me as a..." Twilight could have sworn she saw Luna's cheeks flush slightly at this point. "She saw me as a shy, mostly well-mannered individual. Applejack saw me as eager, if slightly clumsy, and wanting to do right by the citizens of Equestria. Rarity saw me as an aloof and regal, but caring individual, and Pinkie Pie saw me as a fun loving prankster of sorts. But that might not be how she actually sees me, it was hard to tell by the end."

"And I was think of you as basically another version of your sister." Twilight smiled. "And I'm sorry if that offended you."

"If you can forgive me for my crimes, then how can I not forgive you of yours?"

"Right. So, none of those were helpful?"

"Well, I suppose I could have been like any of them, but at the same time, I just don't know if any of them are who I want to be, or who I will end up being!"

"Hmmm." Twilight mulled the problem over before responding. "Well princess, it seems to me that you shouldn't have to feel constrained to be like any of them. You should be able to be who you want to be, and I'm sure you will be. If anyone else has preconceived ideas about who you are, they're going to have to accept that they'll end up disappointed."

"So, you're saying that I should just be who I want to be?"

"Something like that, yes. None of us can actually pin down who you are, I mean, we just proved that I can't get you right, so what's to say others can? They might come close, some might even be spot on. But it's not because of them that you should be who you are."

Luna smiled. "That is probably the most helpful advice I've heard all night. Of course, I haven't exactly been asking for advice... still, thank you Twilight Sparkle."

"Oh, it was my pleasure to be of assistance princess. I mean, I would have been happy to help even before you decided to enter my dreams."

"And I still can't apologise enough for that. I'll leave you to your dreams now then." Luna spread her wings again, and began to channel her magic through her horn.

"Oh, just before you go, there's one more thing that might help you. It's a quote from a famous philosopher-where'd I put that book?" Twilight walked over to a shelf and pulled down a book. "Ah, here it is. Didn't think I'd be able to find it the first try."

"Well, this is a dream. Your subconscious is reacting to your wishes."

"Oh right." Twilight flicked through the pages, talking as she looked. "It's a quote from one of the less well known philosophers, a pony named Sebastian, and he-"

"That's an odd name for a pony."

"Well, yes it is a bit. But he was an odd pony. His special talent was making noodles of all things, but he managed a bit of philosophy on the side it seems. Ah, here we go. He often remarked to those who had lost their way, or were looking for a purpose in life that 'The future is a clean slate, and you're the chalk.'" Twilight looked from the book. "Of course, this is a translation, and some think that it would be better translated as blank slate, but the point stands. Whatever the future may hold for you, it's your choice."

"Thank you for all you've done Twilight. I shall bear your words in mind. And..." Luna hesitated for a moment. "Do you think that we could meet up some time this week? In the real world that is, not in your dreams."

"Of course we can," Twilight giggled. "I'll be happy to see you. Just send word to me by way of Spike, I'll even see if I can't get Pinkie Pie to throw you a party."

"I doubt that'll be a challenge, she's already told me she expects me to come visit for a real party." Luna saw the look of confusion on Twilight's face and suppressed a laugh. "I'll explain some other time. Well then, goodbye." And for the third time, her horn began to glow, and this time after a short while, she was enveloped in its light, fading out from Twilight's dream, and into the real world.

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Twilight had given Luna a lot to think about, and she was beginning to feel the drain on her energy that maintaining the dreamwalk required, on top of what other magic she had performed that night. She began her flight back to Canterlot, where her body awaited her. The night was nearly over, so soon she would need to lower the moon shortly. Hopefully she had enough magic left in her to do that before she went to bed. If not she'd have to ask Celestia to help her with it, and Luna hated having to do that.

Luna arrived back at her balcony with about an hour before moonset. Her body was where she'd left it, always a good sign. She didn't remember having a blanket draped over her when she started though. Especially since her bed didn't have blankets. It wasn't hard to figure out where they'd come from though. As she settled back into her body, she could sense a presence behind her. She headed back into her room. As she suspected, Celestia was there, lying asleep on the bed. At some point she must have come to check on Luna, and finding her lying outside, pulled a blanket over her to keep her warm. Part of Luna found herself irritated at being treated like a little filly, unable to look after herself, but at the same time she appreciated her sister's act. She nuzzled Celestia awake.

"Wake up big sister. The night's almost over, and the servants will be expecting you to be in your chambers, not mine."

Celestia rolled over and yawned, blinking sleepily as her eyes adjusted to the dark. She smiled at Luna. "Welcome back little sister. I trust you had a good evening of dream walking?"

"Yes, I did." Luna motioned to the blanket still draped over her. "You didn't have to do this for me. I survived a thousand years on the moon with less, I can survive one night back here much more easily."

"I know you could, but I worry about you Luna. You've been distant ever since you've returned, and you never tell me what's on your mind. I know adjusting to a thousand year's of changes is hard, and I just want to help you. But how can I if you don't talk to me? This is quite literally the least I can do for you."

A pang of guilt shot through Luna. It was true, she had been neglecting her sister. She had been so concerned with trying not to worry her that she hadn't considered that her sister might be concerned anyway. "Oh... I'm sorry Celly, I hadn't thought of that."

"It's okay. It would be nice if you could open up a bit more for me though? I feel like I scarcely know you anymore."

"You're not alone in that." A pause. "Celly? How do you think of me?"

The bluntness of the question caught Celestia off guard. "How do I think of you? Well, you're my little sister, my only and most beloved family member. There's nothing I wouldn't do for your happiness. Why do you ask?"

Luna gave her sister a hug. "Because I can't remember what I was like before Nightmare Moon." Luna proceeded to tell her sister about her trip, about how she was searching for herself.

"Oh Luna... I had no idea you were feeling this way. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't want to worry you. I see now that it was a needless concern. You worry about me anyway."

Celestia smiled. "Always have and always will. Still, did you find an answer?"

"I think I did. It was your student who gave me the answer I was looking for. I may not know who or what I'm going to be like, but that isn't what matters. What matters is, the future is a blank slate. And I'm the chalk."

~~The End~~