**A ROYAL PROBLEM**

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Prologue

(*Opening shot: fade in to an extreme close-up of a hovering image of Starlight Glimmer’s cutie mark. The camera zooms out to show that it is parked above Canterlot on the magical map spread across the central table in the throne room of the Castle of Friendship. Watching the display are Twilight Sparkle and Spike, the former so completely dumbfounded that she can only manage strangled little squeaks; the latter closes her slack jaw as an ecstatic Starlight trots in.*)

**Starlight:** I know! I can’t believe it either! The map has never called *me* before! (*Squeaky grin.*)

**Spike:** I’m sure that’s not why she looks…like that. (*Twilight shakes her head clear.*)

**Twilight:** Actually, it is. (*to Starlight*) Well, it’s that, and the fact that you’re being called to the Royal Palace! I mean, what in Equestria could be going on there? (*eagerly, pointing*) Do you want me to come with you? (*backing off*) No, I shouldn’t. The map just called you for a reason, right? (*Chuckle; turn to Spike.*) Though maybe it’s a mistake. (*to Starlight*) Not because of you, because it’s never called just one of us before.

(*Her fearful grimace turns to a weak chuckle in the unicorn’s general direction.*)

**Starlight:** I also wasn’t nervous before, but now…

**Twilight:** Don’t worry. (*Profile of the two.*) For all we know, it’s something small. Like, maybe the cooks are fighting over who has the best butternut squash soup. (*Starlight smiles.*) Or the royal hairdressers are fighting over a comb. (*Zoom out to frame Spike on the next line.*)

**Spike:** Or, you know, maybe the Royal Sisters aren’t seeing eye to eye on something.

(*The boss rounds frantically on him.*)

**Twilight:** No! That’s just crazy! Luna and Celestia would never fight.

(*She puts on a self-reassured smile, but it only lasts a second or two before apprehension wipes it away.*)

**Twilight:** Again.

(*All three faces turn toward the miniature mark circling above the mountain capital. Zoom in on it and dissolve to a close-up of Princess Celestia in the throne room of Canterlot Castle.*)

**Celestia:** So the map sent *you* to solve a friendship problem?

(*Longer shot. She stands on her throne, Princess Luna one step down to one side and looking a bit put out. Starlight bows to them at floor level, saddlebags on back and escorted by two unicorn guards.*)

**Starlight:** Yes, Princess.

**Celestia:** Well, there’s nothing wrong here. (*chuckling*) Right, sister?

**Luna:** (*sourly*) No. Everything’s perfect as usual, sister.

(*She cuts her eyes away from the white sovereign, who just beams—but the whole display leaves Starlight very much ill at ease. Zoom in slowly on her and fade to black.*)

OPENING THEME

Act One

(*Opening shot: fade in to a bedroom within Canterlot Castle. The door is opened by a guard outside, and Starlight enters. A desk stands near the windows, bearing a lamp and a music box topped with the figurine of a ballerina mare poised to pirouette, and a stool is drawn up nearby. After the guard closes the door, Starlight flops face-up onto the bed with a loud groan, having shed her bags. The sky beyond the panes shows the hues of sunset.*)

**Voice of Twilight:** Psst!

(*Cut to frame the entire room; she sits up and casts her eyes around, but cannot locate the source.*)

**Voice of Twilight:** Psst!

(*The music box starts to play a quiet melody, the figurine turning in time until it is fully exposed as a tiny copy of…*)

**Starlight:** (*incredulously*) Twilight? (*She leans toward the desk; the tune stops.*) Is that you? How are you here?

**Twilight:** I’m not. I’m still home. It’s an easy spell. I’ll show you later. (*rapid fire*) Anyway, enough about me. I had to check on you, not in a meddling kind of way, in a friendly “how’s it going” kind of way. So, how’s it going? (*Grin.*)

**Starlight:** (*sighing*) Not great. I think the problem might be between Celestia and Luna.

**Twilight:** Oh, no, that’s terrible! (*She catches herself and grins.*) I mean, what makes you say that?

**Starlight:** You know how some ponies say nothing’s wrong, but you can tell something’s definitely wrong?

**Twilight:** (*trying to sound casual*) Noooooo…? (*She cuts her eyes away with a grin.*)

**Starlight:** That’s basically what the Princesses did when I said there was a friendship problem, only they did it more…well, regally.

**Twilight:** (*sighing, sagging on her mount*) I wish I could help you, but I can’t, both for map reasons and because I have no idea. This is big! Like, really big!

(*She claps both front hooves over her mouth to cut off any further outbursts, but this one has already shaken Starlight enough.*)

**Twilight:** (*smiling*) But I’m here if you ever need to talk, or listen to music. (*The box plays again; she rotates with a chuckle.*) Comforting, right?

(*Perhaps not, based on Starlight’s reaction of levitating the pillow off her bed, throwing herself face-first onto the mattress, and clapping it down over her head with a moan.*)

(*Dissolve to a close-up of a plate stacked with pancakes being levitated into place on a table. It is decorated with a smiling face made from berries and whipped cream, and a few more fruits form an arc around the plate’s edge. Zoom out to show Starlight regarding it, then cut to a head-on view of her sitting at a dining room table.*)

**Starlight:** Thank you so much for breakfast, Princess.

(*Longer shot: a smiling Celestia stands alongside this end. Through the nearest window, the following morning’s sky can be seen.*)

**Starlight:** I can’t believe you cook it yourself!

**Celestia:** (*moving to other end*) Of course, Starlight.

(*Starlight magically forks/eats a bite, and the solar pony’s aura pulls her own chair out from the far end. Another plate is set up here, and a bowl of fruit stands halfway between them.*)

**Celestia:** I really enjoy doing it. (*Sit.*) It’s a small way to say I care.

(*One of the double doors is thrown open by Luna’s magic, surprising her, and here comes one very grumpy Princess of the Night. The heavy bags under the blue-green eyes speak to her fatigue; cut to a close-up as she reaches the bowl.*)

**Celestia:** (*from o.s.*) Good morning, sister! (*Scowl; cut to frame both. Celestia levitates a third plate of pancakes.*) Join us?

**Luna:** Too tired.

(*She floats up a whole pineapple, takes a bite—rind and all—and walks off with it.*)

**Luna:** Please excuse me.

(*Celestia sets the extra plate down, grips her own knife and fork in her aura, and prepares to tuck in. Her previous good mood has given way to visible worry.*)

**Starlight:** (*from o.s.*) Wow. (*Long shot of the table, framing her and Celestia.*) Last night must’ve been really hard on her.

**Celestia:** Uh, perhaps, but— (*Close-up; she brings up her fork.*) —she is like this every morning.

(*The contents of the third plate are dumped into a waiting bucket, and both the plate and the knife she has used to scrape it are floated back onto the table. Celestia walks away, leaving Starlight to ponder this strange development. Dissolve to the bedroom, the hour having advanced to sunset; Starlight sits on the stool at the desk, addressing the music box. Zoom in slowly.*)

**Starlight:** So I think Luna may be hurting her sister’s feelings— (*Close-up.*) —without even realizing it.

**Twilight:** Poor Celestia. That’s so sweet that she makes her sister pancakes every morning.

**Starlight:** (*dryly*) She’s your mentor. I think you might be biased.

**Twilight:** Fair enough. So what are you gonna do?

**Starlight:** (*pushing back from desk*) Nothing yet. I have to get all the facts. I asked Luna if I could spend some time with her this evening.

(*A knock at the door is almost instantly followed by the entrance of a guard, giving her almost no time to get her eyes off the figurine Princess.*)

**Guard:** Princess Luna’s waiting for you, miss.

(*Starlight glances at the music box, then to him, and heads out with a shaky laugh; he turns to escort her away.*)

**Twilight:** (*calling after her*) Good luck, Starlight!

(*The stallion wheels back with a most surprised neigh, eyes popping wide. Seeing and hearing nothing out of the ordinary, he exits again and shuts the door; the purple eyes flick toward him in silent relief after he has gone.*)

(*Wipe to an overhead close-up of a planter filled with hanging flowers and mounted on a wall column in one corridor. Luna’s magic wraps itself around the foliage, pulls it down, and replaces it with a fresh batch. On the start of the next line, zoom out to frame her and Starlight out here, as well as a supply cart with old and new blooms stacked on bottom and top shelves, respectively. The starry night sky is visible through the windows, and Luna is properly rested and in good spirits. She is partway through the job of changing out the flowers that line these walls.*)

**Starlight:** Wow, Princess Luna. You do this every night?

**Luna:** (*levitating some new ones*) Lavender’s calming scent is known to aid dreamers in achieving a restorative sleep. (*Starlight breathes deeply of them; Luna puts them back.*)

**Starlight:** That’s so thoughtful! (*Long shot of them, panning slowly across.*)

**Luna:** I try my best to make sure the ponies in this castle sleep peacefully.

(*The doors at the far end open to admit Celestia along with three visitors. One voice speaks up from among them, a posh older mare.*)

**Mare:** And so then I said—

(*Close-up of the group. The speaker is a crystal pony mare whose coloration indicates “mid-level” good spirits; the others are an earth pony stallion and a unicorn mare.*)

**Mare:** “Touring? More like boring!” (*She laughs loudly; Celestia titters.*)

**Celestia:** (*as they pass*) Oh, you really are a card.

**Luna:** (*to Starlight, sighing bitterly*) But as always, my sister is too busy having fun with dignitary ponies to acknowledge anything I do. Hmph!

(*She extends her aura around the cart and stalks off, pushing it along; Starlight stares after her, then up at the planters, and begins to ruminate. Wipe to a close-up of her pacing before the desk in her bedroom.*)

**Starlight:** So, both Princesses are hurting each other without realizing it. And instead of talking about it, they’re just getting colder and more distant.

**Twilight:** And they’re Celestia and Luna, so it’s not like you can just confront them.

**Starlight:** Actually, that’s exactly what I was gonna do.

**Twilight:** *What?!? Are you crazy?!?*

(*She is so taken aback that the entire music box threatens to tip over the edge. However, she gets herself under some degree of control and puts on a placating smile.*)

**Twilight:** I mean— (*Chuckle.*) —you do whatever you think is best. This is your mission.

**Starlight:** (*sourly*) Gee. Thanks for believing in me, Twilight.

**Twilight:** I do! But the last time the Princesses fought, Luna turned into Nightmare Moon, and Princess Celestia had to banish her for a thousand years. That *can’t* happen again.

**Starlight:** Well, I can’t do nothing. The Princesses aren’t the best at communicating with each other.

(*The little Princess recoils with a disbelieving gasp, but reins herself in before she can upset the music box.*)

**Twilight:** Sorry. It’s just…you said “Princesses” and “aren’t the best” in the same sentence. And it’s making me nervous!

(*The unicorn bangs her head on the desk in frustration, jarring the box.*)

**Twilight:** I’m not much help, am I?

**Starlight:** No!

(*Dissolve to a new plate of fruit-decorated pancakes—peaches and pineapple with whipped cream, in this case—being levitated to Starlight’s place at the dining room table, and zoom out to frame her.*)

**Starlight:** Wow! I almost feel bad eating this. It’s adorable!

(*Longer shot. It is now the next morning, and Celestia stands alongside her as before.*)

**Celestia:** Like I said— (*Laugh; walk to her end.*) —I enjoy this part.

(*As the visiting unicorn uses her field to ply knife and fork, one of the double doors opens under Luna’s influence and she enters. One banana is unceremoniously lifted from the bowl and stripped of its peel, and in close-up, the tired-eyed ruler proceeds to swallow the peel whole and let the fruit splat to the floor. She stalks off as Celestia sits at her own end of the table, sipping from a teacup with a stack of flapjacks before her.*)

**Luna:** Hi.

**Starlight:** (*from o.s.*) Uh, Princess Luna! (*She hurries into view.*) Wait!

(*The dark-hued face trains a squint-eyed scowl toward her, bringing her up short in a hurry and prompting Celestia to drop her cup back onto the table. A deep breath, and Starlight pushes ahead.*)

**Starlight:** As you both know, the map sent me here for a reason— (*smiling tentatively*) —and I think I’ve found out what it is. (*Celestia steps closer, smiling.*)

**Celestia:** Really? Oh, that is wonderful, Starlight! (*Laugh.*) What is it?

**Starlight:** (*fearfully*) You two.

(*Both regal heads shoot upright; the next two lines overlap.*)

**Celestia:** Excuse me?

**Luna:** I beg your pardon?

**Starlight:** I-I think you’re accidentally hurting each other’s feelings without realizing it.

(*There follows a long, tense silence.*)

**Starlight:** (*approaching Celestia*) Princess Celestia, does it bother you that Luna never notices the wonderful breakfast that you prepare for her?

**Celestia:** (*reluctantly*) Uh…yes…it does.

**Starlight:** (*approaching Luna*) Princess Luna, tell Celestia how you feel about the fact that she never acknowledges the work you put into lining the hallway with lavender every night.

**Luna:** (*sputtering*) I…well…i-it’s not the best feeling.

(*She narrows her eyes at her older sister.*)

**Luna:** (*snarky, pushing Starlight aside, stepping closer*) I’m sorry I never noticed that you make fruit faces on pancakes, but nights are long for me. You might be a morning pony, but I am half asleep.

**Celestia:** (*needled*) You think I don’t get tired? I’m exhausted! (*snarky*) Oh, I apologize for not noticing flowers in a wall sconce, but by the time I get to retire for the night, I can barely see straight! (*prodding Luna’s chest*) Even so, I still make an effort to smile. (*Big grin.*)

**Luna:** (*chuckling sarcastically*) Like smiling is so hard.

(*Starlight inserts herself between the siblings.*)

**Starlight:** I-I-I’m sure that’s not what Princess Luna meant to say. (*Both of them ignore her.*)

**Luna:** Is that what exhausts you? Smiling and being adored by everypony?

**Celestia:** And you have it so much worse, do you? (*nasty-sweet tone*) You’ve spent your evenings flitting around giving ponies lovely dreams! (*angrily*) Oh, it sounds just awful!

(*Starlight inserts herself between them again with her best attempt at a light chuckle.*)

**Starlight:** Okay! I feel like we should step back, take a deep breath—

(*She gets no farther before the Princess of the Night telekinetically slides her out of the way, with all the grace and artistry of a bouncer tossing an unruly customer out of a bar.*)

**Luna:** Don’t presume to know what it is like to govern the dream realm!

**Celestia:** (*prodding Luna’s chest*) And yet you know exactly what it’s like to be me?

(*Cut to Starlight, now a terrified little huddle on the carpet.*)

**Celestia:** (*from o.s.*) Oh, puh-lease!

(*The visiting mare has finally had all she can take of the squabble.*)

**Starlight:** *Enough!*

(*She stands up with horn aglow as the camera zooms out quickly to frame all three, and she cuts loose with a spell that slings both Celestia and Luna into the air as if they weighed nothing at all. The screen fills with its glow, and the view immediately fades in to an extreme close-up of Celestia’s haunch. Its golden sun disappears and is replaced by the black splotch and white crescent moon of Luna’s cutie mark, and the reverse process plays out on that sister’s haunch. Both settle back onto their hooves before a horrified Starlight, who has collapsed onto her belly, but she stands up with a hopeful smile as they inspect their swapped marks with no small degree of bewilderment.*)

**Starlight:** There! Now you’ll know exactly what it’s like to…be each other!

(*She swallows hard and stretches her face in a very big, very scared grin before the view fades to black.*)

Act Two

(*Opening shot: fade in to a close-up of Celestia and Luna and zoom out as they continue to goggle at their reversed marks. The older sister is first to find her tongue, pulling in a sharp gasp.*)

**Celestia:** What have you done?!

**Starlight:** I…went with my gut? (*Luna leans into her face.*)

**Luna:** (*prodding her chest*) Switch our cutie marks back this instant! (*Starlight bows.*)

**Starlight:** My apologies, Your Majesties, but I can’t, even if I wanted to. This spell lasts twenty-four hours. I-It may have been extreme, but, uh… (*grinning weakly*) …I think it’s still a good idea?

**Celestia:** (*icily*) What?

**Starlight:** Uh, you said it yourselves. Neither of you believes your sister knows how hard it is to be you. So, this is your chance to prove it. (*Grin.*)

**Luna:** (*disdainfully*) Well, I could use an easy day followed by a good night’s sleep.

**Celestia:** You can try. I haven’t had an easy day in, well, ever! (*sweetly*) But now I get to sleep, and tonight will be a breeze. (*Luna scowls to herself.*) All right, Starlight Glimmer, we will do this.

**Starlight:** Good choice! Not that you had one.

(*Her airy laugh is met by a double glower and annoyed huff that serve to annihilate all trace of levity.*)

**Starlight:** (*small voice*) I’m gonna stop talking now. (*Fearful little grin.*)

(*Wipe to a close-up of a freaked-out, hyperventilating Twilight, then cut to a longer shot of Starlight’s bedroom. The unicorn using it is lying morosely on the bed and staring up at the ceiling.*)

**Twilight:** You switched their cutie marks?!? *The actual Princesses’ cutie marks?!?*

(*Starlight groans, claps hooves to eyes, and sits up.*)

**Starlight:** I thought we moved past this. It was the right call! (*timidly*) I hope.

(*Twilight’s high-strung nerves kick her lungs back into overdrive just before a knock is heard at the door.*)

**Guard:** (*from outside, through door*) Are you okay in there?

**Starlight:** (*loudly, addressing door*) I’m good! Just, uh, reading an exciting book! (*Laugh; she lowers her voice and turns to Twilight.*) He’s gonna think I’m nuts! (*Flop back onto the bed.*)

**Twilight:** He’s not the only one.

(*Without another word, Starlight puts her horn in gear to open one dresser drawer, float the music box in, and close it. Wipe to the throne room, where Luna—now properly rested since breakfast— stands in the seat of power and Starlight a step down to one side. A row of guards and servants stands before them.*)

**Luna:** As you can see, Celestia and I are switching places today.

(*Confused murmurs among the audience; after some seconds, the Princess holds up a hoof for attention.*)

**Luna:** I assure you, I am more than capable of handling all of Celestia’s… (*Disdainful little chuckle.*) …duties. Dismissed.

(*They begin to disperse, the sotto-voce conversations resuming. Cut to just outside the room’s closed double doors, which open to let them out.*)

**Luna:** (*to Starlight*) So, what is first on my dear sister’s to-do list?

(*Back to her and Starlight, the latter producing and opening a scroll that proves to have a considerable bit of length to it.*)

**Starlight:** It says you have a few public appearances. (*pointing out items*) Store openings, judging the Royal Rose Contest, you know, that sort of thing. (*Close-up of Luna.*)

**Luna:** (*chuckling contemptuously*) Oh, I knew today would be easy, but I didn’t think it would be *that* easy.

(*Dissolve to a close-up of her waving and smiling in an extremely forced manner as the Canterlot streets roll by in the background. The sound of wheels suggests that she is riding in a vehicle, and a longer shot confirms this—a chariot drawn by four pegasus guards, with Starlight trotting behind to keep pace. The few ponies on this block stare after the royal procession with visible puzzlement.*)

(*A giant image of Celestia’s cutie mark drifts across the screen .Behind it, the view wipes to a close-up of a large pair of scissors poised in a magic glow to cut through a length of ribbon. The aura has the golden tint of Celestia’s field, and it brings the blades together to snip—but the ribbon refuses to part. After a second failed attempt, the camera cuts to a longer shot of the scene: the grand opening of an establishment that might be a jeweler’s shop, based on the large gem mounted above the entrance. The fact that Luna’s horn is glowing gold instead of its usual deep blue suggests that Starlight’s spell switched the sisters’ magic powers in addition to their cutie marks. Starlight and a knot of spectators watch as she continues to do battle with the offending ribbon, grinning fixedly all the while; finally she floats the scissors away and batters it down with a hoof to sever it. The crowd stomps its applause.*)

(*Another giant sun drifts across; behind it, wipe to Luna stepping up to a table behind which three mares stand with assorted roses in vases and pots—the Royal Rose Contest judging. She carries a blue ribbon in her aura, and she keeps that plastic grin in place while sniffing each floral offering. She makes to give the prize to the third mare, but a hoof waves frantically into view to interrupt her. A camera shift reveals it to be attached to one of six more entrants at additional tables, all eagerly awaiting her opinion. Luna’s face falls in shock, but she quickly gets her grin back in place and moves toward them, followed by an extremely uneasy Starlight.*)

(*Here comes a third sun, behind which the view wipes to the exterior of Celestia’s School for Gifted Unicorns and zooms in slowly. Luna and several of the younger students are gathered on the front steps to have their picture taken, while Starlight watches from a distance back. The photographer signals with a hoof and puts an eye to his camera…Luna, to one side, steps toward center…the photographer motions her back as Starlight grins, a reminder to smile nice and big…Luna shows a few more teeth and resumes her original position…she starts to shake with the effort of holding the pose…the photographer adjusts his zoom lens…every muscle in the blue-violet face trembles under the strain…and her whole expression crumbles into a scowl, just before the flash goes off. The view clears to show the moment caught in full color on a newspaper page, and a slow zoom out on the start of the next line reveals the publication as the Foal Free Press, floating in her magic as she stands at the dining room table of Canterlot Castle. The filly directly next to her in the picture is cringing fearfully away.*)

**Luna:** (*reading*) “Princess Luna Unhappy with Student Fundraiser”? But I wasn’t unhappy! (*She sends it to Starlight at the other end.*)

**Starlight:** Um…you *are* scowling.

**Luna:** I-I didn’t mean to! I’ve been smiling all day. My cheeks hurt! I stopped for one second, and that’s when he took the picture. (*Starlight sets the paper down.*)

**Starlight:** Guess smiling all day isn’t as easy as you thought?

(*She offers a hesitant grin as the copy is yanked back in Luna’s magic; the winged unicorn scrutinizes it in close-up.*)

**Luna:** It says here that because of me, the school didn’t raise enough funds to go on their field trip! (*It drops to the table.*) I-I didn’t mean for that to happen! (*Face thuds down on the newsprint.*)

**Starlight:** (*from o.s., gently*) I know. (*Long shot, framing both.*) But you can’t dwell on that now. (*floating/unfurling scroll*) According to the list, some delegates are about to arrive for a luncheon.

(*It is so long that the bottom end bounces along the full length of the table and drapes itself over Luna’s starry mane. Close-up of the Princess.*)

**Starlight:** (*from o.s.*) You need to dispel rumors of timber wolves in the Whitetail Woods.

(*On the end of this, one blue-green eye peeks glumly out from beneath the length of parchment. She then sits up, levitating the scroll off herself, and looks it over.*)

**Starlight:** (*crossing to her*) The nearby towns have been in a state of panic for weeks.

**Luna:** (*rolling up scroll*) B-B-But I have to fix this! (*Cut to her, trotting toward the doors.*)

**Starlight:** (*from o.s.*) You can’t! (*Stop; she approaches.*) You need to put on a brave face and help *these* ponies. It’s what Celestia would do.

(*The sound of the great doors opening cuts off any further pep talk; pan to them. Two unicorn guards stand watch as three earth ponies enter: a gray-green-maned stallion, a gray-braided mare, and a considerably older mare whose mane has gone white. Cut to just behind them as Luna draws in a long breath to steady herself. She waits to speak until the sound of the doors’ closing has reached her, then addresses them in the booming Royal Canterlot Voice with wings spread.*)

**Luna:** HELLO! GREAT NEWS! THERE ARE NO TIMBER WOLVES!

(*She folds in her wings, displaying a smile of supreme self-confidence. Cut to just outside the doors, which burst open so the trio can gallop out in an uncontrollable panic. A dismayed Luna and Starlight step to the threshold and watch them flee; Luna returns to normal speaking volume on her next line.*)

**Delegates:** There are definitely timber wolves!

**Luna:** (*to Starlight*) I’m sorry, but I couldn’t stop thinking about those poor students. (*pacing a corridor; close-up*) Normally I have all the time and solitude I need to work through my problems at my own pace. (*Zoom out on the next line to frame Starlight keeping up.*)

**Starlight:** Well, your sister doesn’t get that luxury.

(*Both stop short at the sound of a muffled, heated argument, which proves to be coming from the other side of the double doors they are approaching.*)

**Starlight:** Ready for the town hall?

*(Luna just sighs heavily and fires up her horn to open the doors so she and Starlight can pass through to the throne room. The quarrelers are a pair of stallions farther down its length. The doors close again, and a dissolve turns the daytime sky past the windows to evening and fades the color from the lavender flowers hanging on the wall, after which the doors reopen. Out come the two stallions, both earth ponies—one gray and in a dark gray tailcoat with bow tie and white dress shirt, the other light blue and clad in a dark gray jacket, white T-shirt, medallion around neck, and fedora. They are now talking quite amiably, and Luna and Starlight walk a few paces behind, the former looking quite drained.)*

**Tailcoat:** Glad that’s settled.

**Jacket:** (*laughing*) And it only took three hours.

**Tailcoat:** That got heated, didn’t it?

**Jacket:** Still on for golf?

**Tailcoat:** Oh, absolutely.

(*Jacket’s chuckle fades into the distance as Starlight floats up the scroll with the to-do list and smiles.*)

**Starlight:** (*rolling it up*) You made it to the end of the day. Yay?

**Luna:** (*drowsily*) Hm? (*waking up a bit*) Oh, yes, uh…

(*A burst of her magic brings out a second scroll, this one on a darker-tinted parchment, and transfers it to Starlight’s hold—a nocturnal counterpart to Celestia’s list, no doubt.*)

**Luna:** (*yawning*) …I’m just going to turn in, then. (*She starts off along the corridor.*) Good light, Starnight.

(*Cut to one very worried unicorn, then zoom out on the next line to frame one very perky Celestia walking up behind her.*)

**Celestia:** Oh, hello, Starlight. I don’t know about you, but I feel very well rested. (*looking around*) Where’s Luna?

**Starlight:** Um, uh, she already turned in for the night.

**Celestia:** Did she now? (*Chuckle.*) It seems my duties were harder than my sister expected.

(*She walks off. Dissolve to the moon rising slowly in the night sky over Canterlot and zoom out to frame her accomplishing this feat while standing on a castle balcony. Her horn has taken on the blue glow usually associated with Luna’s magic, confirming the reversal of the sisters’ powers. Once the moon is nearly clear of the hills, it pops up to its final position with a sudden jerk and she cuts the spell.*)

**Celestia:** Moon raised. It’s even easier than raising the sun. (*Chuckle; she looks back toward the doors.*) What’s next?

(*No answer is immediately forthcoming, as a cut to the threshold reveals that Starlight has conked out and is snoring heartily, the nighttime agenda scroll lying nearby. Zoom out slightly; Celestia regards her with a slightly deflated expression.*)

**Celestia:** Of course.

(*Cut to Starlight’s bed; she is levitated gently onto it, cradling the scroll, and a blanket is pulled up over her.*)

**Celestia:** (*from o.s.*) Everypony’s asleep at night. (*Chuckle; cut to frame her standing over the bed.*) Luna works alone. Oh, but it’s nothing I can’t handle. (*floating opened scroll up*) All I have to do is watch over Equestria, visit the dream realm, and protect ponies in their nightmares.

(*With a quiet chuckle, she lets her field ball up the document and pitch it away, then begins walking toward the exit.*)

**Celestia:** My list was three times as long!

(*Cut to the moon hanging low over the city as lights in windows blink out.*)

**Celestia:** (*from o.s.*) All right. (*To her at the balcony rail.*) Everypony’s asleep. (*She catches herself.*) You’re talking to yourself, Celestia. (*suddenly frantic*) But there’s nopony else to talk to! (*Chuckle; she calms down.*) Yet, I can talk to ponies in their dreams!

(*She fires up her horn using Luna’s borrowed magic, and total blackness washes over the scene, starting with the background and closing in on her and the balcony last. An instant after the screen has gone complexly dark, she winks back into view, floating amid an expanse of cosmic nowhere as large, faintly glowing spheres drift gently down around her. Some of them pass close enough to the camera to reveal assorted ponies enjoying themselves in various highly implausible ways—encapsulated dreams playing out—and she smiles at the sight.*)

**Celestia:** Now, to save some ponies from their nightmares—which aren’t real, so it shouldn’t be too hard, right? Right. Good call, Celestia! (*catching herself*) And I’m talking to myself again.

(*Her musings are cut short by a shrill scream from Starlight, whose dream flashes as it floats past her. Within the bubble, the unicorn is in a limb-flailing free fall; cut to her as several fruit-decorated pancake stacks crowd in around her.*)

**Pancakes:** (*Celestia’s voice, reverberating*) I care…I care…I care…I care…

(*The smiley faces turn to frowns on this last repetition, and Starlight cries out and covers her face just before plunging through a mass of lavender blossoms to leave them behind. Once these fill the screen, the view rotates 180 degrees and she emerges upward from the bottom—now top—edge and flops face-first onto them, gravity having reversed itself. A strong gust of wind stirs up the blooms so that they fill the screen again; when they clear, she is now the ballerina figure mounted on the music box in her bedroom. The newly minted dancing unicorn has just enough time for one terrified glance around herself before the mechanism begins to rotate her.*)

**Starlight:** No!

(*Zoom out. A giant-size Twilight glares down at her.*)

**Twilight:** (*echoing*) This is big! Like, really big!

(*A blink, and one eye socket is filled with Celestia’s sun in a bright blue sky while the other shows Luna’s crescent moon and a starry night backdrop.*)

**Starlight:** (*jumping clear*) Whoa!

(*She lands on the carpet in the castle corridor, no longer in her ballet togs. As she sits up to her haunches, zoom out slightly to put Celestia in front of her, standing and framed from the neck down.*)

**Celestia:** Starlight…

(*Cut to frame both of them fully, as well as the distinct lack of key architectural features around them. Windows float unanchored in sparkly night sky; columns stand tall and proud but support nothing.*)

**Celestia:** (*lifting Starlight’s chin*) …I’m here now. Tell me what’s wrong.

**Starlight:** (*short of breath*) Going with my gut was the wrong call! I was supposed to bring you two closer together, but I’ve only driven you apart! If you two can’t see why you need each other, then—

**Nightmare Moon:** (*from o.s.*)Then I am back!

(*Both heads turn toward the sound of that most unwelcome voice, the camera cutting to frame still more of this area. The corridor carpet forms a path that winds through and over thick clouds, and banners float free among the windows and superfluous columns. Nightmare’s blue-black horn punches through the panorama from behind as if it were a sheet of construction paper, and the rip stretches to allow the rest of her form to emerge. Eventually the entire scene in her vicinity is torn away, leaving only night sky as her backdrop, and she cackles dementedly while standing tall and proud. Celestia puts out a wing to hold Starlight back as the surreal path shrinks away around them.*)

**Celestia:** Don’t worry, Starlight.

(*She conjures up a force field around the unicorn and herself, then hardens her expression.*)

**Celestia:** I know how to handle Nightmare Moon.

(*The next word—delivered in her voice, but with a much more aggressive, imperious tone—catches her totally by surprise.*)

**Voice:** Yes…

(*She turns toward the source, a tall winged unicorn visible only as a silhouette. Her shield has dropped by this point.*)

**Silhouette:** …but can you handle…

(*Close-up, from the shoulders forward. The new arrival’s mane flares up as a billowing curtain of yellow/orange flame, issuing from beneath an armored helmet in fiery shades of orange and red-orange. The wings are edged with matching reinforcements, and a blood-red gem in the same shape as the ones in Celestia’s crown and necklace is set on the helmet’s forehead. The coat is bone-white, the eyes bright yellow with jaggedly slitted, red pupils, red lashes and scleras tinted so deeply red as to be almost black, and small fangs protrude among the upper teeth in the crazed mouth. This is Daybreaker.*)

**Daybreaker:** (*menacingly*) …me?

(*The pupils fade to black as the camera zooms out and she laughs exultantly. Her eyes are shadowed in red, she wears an armored chest plate with her old sun cutie mark front and center, and red-orange shoes cover all four hooves. The mark on her haunch consists of that same sun, but ringed by a corona of savage orange flames, and the tail behind it streams unholy fire just as her mane does. Celestia and Starlight recoil in fear at the sight. Snap to black.*)

Act Three

(*Opening shot: fade in to Celestia and Starlight and zoom out slowly to the sound of Daybreaker’s mad laughter, then cut to frame the entire group. These two, still standing on a patch of “normal” corridor carpeting, find themselves hemmed in by both souped-up siblings.*)

**Celestia:** This can’t be!

**Daybreaker:** If Luna can turn into Nightmare Moon— (*raising Celestia’s chin*) —you can absolutely turn into me… (*rearing up*) …Daybreaker! The better, prettier, and more powerful version of you!

(*Back to Celestia and Starlight on the end of this, one armored hoof being thrust into the ruler’s face.*)

**Celestia:** No. I’ll never turn into you!

**Daybreaker:** Deep inside, you know how powerful you are. You don’t need Luna. (*Nightmare takes offense to this.*)

**Celestia:** That’s not true! Even when we were apart, I knew I needed her!

**Daybreaker:** (*laughing*) Oh, please! You don’t need anypony! You can do whatever you want, and all you have to do is get rid of anypony who stands in your way!

(*Her horn flares lurid red, and she fires off a broad red/yellow beam that Celestia and Starlight duck with no time to spare. It connects solidly with Nightmare, driving her backwards several hundred yards; now Daybreaker addresses her over the heads of the fear-stricken onlookers.*)

**Daybreaker:** I never should have banished you to the moon. I should have destroyed you!

(*She launches herself into a headlong charge, Celestia and Starlight taking cover.*)

**Starlight:** No! You can’t do that! Day, night, sun, moon—Equestria needs both of you! (*A blast of Nightmare’s magic rips across.*) Without balance, there’s no harmony!

(*Cut to Daybreaker on the end of this; she darts in and lays a flying tackle on the night tyrant, driving her back until she lets her own powers flare up in defense with a snarl. Daybreaker is propelled away, but quickly regroups.*)

**Daybreaker:** Who needs balance when you can have it all?

(*She laughs and claps at her own perceptiveness until Nightmare lets her have it with a beam to the kisser.*)

**Nightmare:** You can’t get rid of me so easily, sister—unless you plan on smiling me to smithereens!

(*She barrels ahead with a feral grin, ready to meet Daybreaker’s identical charge, but Celestia teleports onto their collision course and pushes them both back.*)

**Celestia:** Enough!  
**Daybreaker:** (*laughing, to Nightmare*) I told you I was more powerful than you!

(*The target of this jibe responds by conjuring an arc of black energy in front of herself.*)

**Daybreaker:** Ugh, so much black. We get it. You’re sad. You could really use some SUN!!

(*Which she is only too happy to provide, in the form of a gout of flame issuing from her mouth. Celestia bugs out to avoid being roasted, and Nightmare finishes creating a spherical shield in the nick of time. Daybreaker’s fire pushes it back, a few loose embers tumbling away to ignite the carpeting patch on which Starlight stands. She gasps in fright as the flames close in, but Celestia swoops in to pull her clear just before they totally consume it. The winged unicorn creates a shield around them both, and they watch in utter disbelief as Daybreaker channels enough power into her horn to bathe the whole area in sick yellow sunlight. Flames lick over the surface of the magic barrier, yelps of pain issuing from within, and Starlight covers her eyes in close-up.*)

**Starlight:** This is all my fault! I never should have gone on this mission! Now Equestria is doomed!

(*Tilt up to Celestia, who regards her moon cutie mark thoughtfully and throws her horn into gear. A dream bubble rises before her, showing Luna’s concerned face, and the camera zooms in on it. From here, dissolve to a close-up of the Princess of the Night, reflected in a mirror within Canterlot Castle. She leans closer to the glass, trying for a grin that does not look forced, as a disapproving unicorn filly’s image leans into view behind hers. She is one of the students who was at the botched school photo shoot, and a second one crowds in on the next line.*)

**Fillies:** (*singsong*) That smile’s too wide, it’s obviously not real.

(*She turns away from the glass, the camera cutting to a longer shot as the words echo faintly. Finding herself alone in a darkened alcove, she hustles behind the mirror to see if any unwanted visitors are camped out there. No dice, so she cautiously circles around to the front—and finds the two fillies from the mirror staring her in the face, along with a third.*)

**Filly:** (*tearing up*) Why don’t you want us to go on our field trip?

**Luna:** I don’t—

(*She is greatly shocked to find her teeth falling out on these two words, and she claps a hoof to her mouth to cut herself off. Within seconds, the three fillies have added one to their number and duplicated themselves many times over to ring Luna in with the mirror.*)

**Luna:** (*lisping, losing more teeth*) I mean, I do!

**Fillies:** (*singsong, slowly closing in, falling out of sync*) That smile’s too wide, it’s obviously not real.

(*The soft taunts continue as Celestia’s head emerges from the polished surface.*)

**Luna:** (*lisping, hugging her*) Celestia! I’m so glad you’re—

(*Older sister yanks her bodily back through the frame. Cut to an extreme close-up of one unfurled white wing, which folds up to expose both their faces, then zoom out. They are floating in a patch of light blue infinity, with a front-row seat to the ongoing aerial duel between Daybreaker and Nightmare. The latter’s blast sends them bailing out in opposite directions. Caught in the crossfire, Starlight huddles miserably within the shield Celestia conjured up to protect them both before she ducked out to visit Luna’s dream. When Luna speaks, her voice is back to its normal quality, indicating that all her teeth are back where they belong.*)

**Luna:** I’ve seen a lot, but I haven’t seen this before.

**Celestia:** It’s Starlight Glimmer’s. She’s afraid this is what would happen if we continue to fight.

**Starlight:** (*sobbing*) What was I thinking? I’m never going with my gut again!

**Luna:** (*to Celestia*) If you don’t fix this soon, it could have a grave consequence on Starlight’s psyche.

**Celestia:** But my magic isn’t powerful enough! I thought if we worked together—

**Luna:** (*showing “her” mark*) I have *your* magic, remember? It doesn’t work in the dream realm! It has to be you!

**Celestia:** Oh, Luna, I can’t do this! (*tearing up*) I was wrong. (*covering face*) Your job is so incredibly hard.

(*Cut to Luna and zoom in slowly, the full import of the next words gradually sinking in and curving her mouth up into a smile.*)

**Celestia:** (*from o.s.*) You have to battle nightmares and work in the darkness and do it all alone! It takes such a brave, strong pony to do what you do! (*Both again.*)

**Luna:** (*touching Celestia’s chest*) And that pony is you. I walked today in your shoes. I thought all you had to do was smile and be adored all the time— (*taking Celestia’s hooves in hers*) —but I was wrong. (*Both smile.*) There is so much more to it than that.

(*She wipes a few tears away from one great, deep pink eye—but the emotional moment is shredded by Daybreaker’s flaming, cackling charge across the screen behind them. The crazed equine forms a snake of flame around herself, enough to stop Nightmare’s beam cold and generate a counterattack that bulldozes it right back into the blue-armored noggin. Nightmare screams in agony as the fires envelop her, and she slams down hard to the “ground.” Zoom out slightly as the throne room forms around the tableau, putting her on the floor; Daybreaker’s wild laughter rings out to mark her descent onto the royal seat. The flower baskets to either side ignite to become infernal beacons, and pillars of fire erupt from the floor to line either side of the red carpet. Starlight stands up within her shield.*)

**Starlight:** Don’t do this to each other! (*Daybreaker descends toward the prone Nightmare.*)

**Luna:** (*to Celestia, touching her gently*) In order to defeat Daybreaker, you need only to trust in your strength—as I do.

(*Celestia smiles gratefully, a single tear having beaded up at the corner of her eye. Daybreaker grins savagely and cranks up her horn, while Nightmare raises her head and does the same. Two beams roar toward each other, but just as before, Celestia teleports into view between them. This time, however, she has both wings raised to take the brunt of their attacks.*)

**Daybreaker:** You can’t destroy me! I’m everything *you* want to be!

**Celestia:** No, you’re not! (*Cut to Daybreaker; she continues o.s.*) You are not real— (*Back to her.*) —and you will never exist again!

(*On this last word, she spreads her wings wide to throw the beams off. Nightmare takes one hit and vanishes instantly, while Daybreaker holds out just a moment longer with a rising growl of mingled anguish and strain as the onslaught bears down on her. Her eyes pop open at the last moment, the rest of the body simply winking out a fraction of a second before they do. Nothing is left of her except a rain of rapidly fading sparks, and Celestia tumbles insensate to the carpet. In close-up, she opens her eyes to find one overjoyed sister hunkering down to her level.*)

**Luna:** You did it!

**Celestia:** Only because you were here. I don’t know how you do this alone.

**Luna:** (*knowingly*) So, um, did you talk to yourself?

**Celestia:** (*sheepishly*) Um, a little. (*Both laugh.*)

**Starlight:** (*from o.s.*) Is this really happening—

(*The sound of her approaching hooves is heard under these words; cut to her. The shield around her has now been dispelled, and she is cautiously making her way toward the pair.*)

**Starlight:** —or is this still a dream?

(*She rubs one foreleg apprehensively against the other. In response, Celestia kindles her horn and generates a spot of blinding white light at its tip, which grows to fill the screen. From here, zoom out to frame a profile close-up of her with eyes closed and heavily bagged with fatigue, on the castle balcony at sunrise. She opens her eyes as a very perky Luna leans into view behind her.*)

**Luna:** Welcome back, sister! I know you had a long night, so…

(*A quick burst of telekinesis brings a plate of sloppily made, haphazardly decorated pancakes up for inspection.*)

**Luna:** …I made you some pancakes. (*Close-up of them.*)

**Celestia:** (*from o.s.*) Oh! (*Chuckle; cut to frame both.*) How…uh, nice.

(*The fatigue is now gone from her face. Clearing her throat, she floats up a bite and chews experimentally. Eyes bug out and jaws clench, telling all too clearly the judgment of her taste buds, but she accomplishes the supreme effort of swallowing and forces a smile onto her face.*)

**Celestia:** They’re, uh…delicious! (*Chuckle.*) Thank you.

**Luna:** (*laughing heartily*) I know that face! They’re not. I know you have to be perfect for everypony else, and you do an amazing job, but you don’t have to do it for me.

**Celestia:** In that case… (*pitching plate aside*) …they are *terrible!* (*Both laugh.*)

**Luna:** I know!

(*After they settle down, Celestia rests one gold-shod hoof on the blue-violet chest.*)

**Celestia:** But it means a lot that you tried. I love you, sister.

**Luna:** I love you too. (*They embrace.*)

**Starlight:** (*from behind them*) So…

(*The sisters pull apart to expose the unicorn standing at the doorway ad rubbing her eyes.*)

**Starlight:** …this *was* real! (*Yawn.*) Or was it not real? And this just happened now, and…and not in my dream? (*scratching head*) I’m so confused!

(*Celestia laughs gently and runs a hoof down the side of Starlight’s head to smooth her mane and calm her down.*)

**Celestia:** It’s all real. (*Luna crosses to them.*) It was the right call, going with your gut.

**Luna:** The map was wise to send you, Starlight. Nopony else would have been so bold as to do what you did.

**Starlight:** That’s a nice way of saying I came dangerously close to messing everything up.

**Celestia:** It was just what we needed. The experience has made us closer than ever.

(*As she and Luna lean their heads gently together, a flare of magic surprises them. Extreme close-up of Luna’s haunch, the sun fading from it and the moon and black background reappearing.*)

**Starlight:** (*from o.s.*) Wait. (*The reverse occurs for Celestia.*) I’m not doing this.

(*Cut to the unicorn, who glances back to her own haunch and finds it sounding off in the same matter as those of her friends back in Ponyville have done.*)

**Celestia:** I believe that one means your mission is complete.

**Starlight:** (*excitedly*) Wow! I can’t wait to tell Twilight!

(*Who proceeds to teleport right on the balcony, back to full size and no longer done up as the music box ballerina.*)

**Twilight:** I already know! I mean, I don’t know everything. I just got here to bring you your toothbrush!

(*It poofs into existence between them, sporting an undulating, snakelike contour and marked to match Spike’s coloration—even down to little green spines that run up the handle. The user is left considerably perplexed as to how exactly Twilight knew of its whereabouts, and/or whether it is even hers. The newly arrived Princess zips over to her two counterparts.*)

**Twilight:** (*rapid fire*) So this is just a friendly visit, not interfering because I was worried. I wasn’t! (*Cut to Starlight; she continues o.s.*) I knew you could do it— (*hugging her*) —and I’m so, so, so, so, so proud of you! *Tell me everything!* (*floating up a quill and scroll*) Start from after I hyperventilated and don’t leave out anything else!

(*Her fit of nerves passes as quickly as it came, and she trots back into the castle, dragging both the implements and a disgruntled Starlight along in her magic. Celestia and Luna are left alone on the balcony.*)

**Luna:** (*casually*) Oh, uh, by the way, there’s a field trip you need to make happen, and a— (*Clear throat.*) —timber wolf issue you need to address.

**Celestia:** (*dumbfounded*) What?

**Luna:** Oh! Look, there’s the sun! Time for me to turn in.

(*She lifts off, leaving one properly annoyed sister behind as the camera zooms out to a long overhead shot of the balcony. Fade to black.*)