

For the past five Springs Canterlot Castle had been placed on high alert during the night of March 31st. and security would not have been stepped down until the dawn of April 2nd. But this year was different; instead of eagle eyed guards being posted at each entrance and three-pony patrols sweeping the grounds, there was an air of calm and tranquillity. This year they didn't have to worry about The Purple Menace, He-Who-Chews-The-Valuables; or, as he was more affectionately known by some of the castle staff, That *Damn* Dragon. They didn't even set any Spike-traps. Because, this year, Twilight's assistant was far away from the castle, contained within the rural town of Ponyville.

“May Celestia have mercy on them all,” said a grizzled watchpony, as he looked over the battlements towards the aforementioned town; a mere speck in the distance. He stamped his hooves to ward off the night air. His veteran's intuition caused him to glance skywards and he was rather startled by the sight of a wicker container, flying away from the castle. He briefly courted with the idea of telling somepony about it but he didn't want to be known as a basket case for the rest of his days. The watchpony decided it would be best to forget the incident.

Aside from a skeleton crew of fairly bored guards, the castle was sleeping peacefully. There was, however, one notable exception. Princess Celestia was pacing her bedchamber, worried about the day ahead. She had never intended for her meeting with the dragon ambassador to take place on the first of April, but both of their previous appointments had been cancelled and it simply would have been rude to postpone another month; or so her Foreign Affairs advisor had told her. Celestia still didn't like it. Even with Spike away from the castle, holding such an event on this day was asking for trouble. To make matters worse her sister was missing.

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The Purple Menace awoke from his dream of chasing dancing rubies and groggily became aware that he was moving. Looking around, he saw that his familiar basket had been placed inside a larger open-topped container that featured a sturdy central handle. Looking up, he saw the 'pegasus pony' that was carrying the basket's handle in her mouth. He was vaguely aware that her purple coat seemed to blend into the night sky before the realisation of his situation caught up with him.

“Help! Help! Somebody help me! I've been kidnapped!” Spike risked a look over the side and saw the ground far below. “I need an adult!”

“I *am* an adult!” Luna said automatically. “Oh dear.”

Having recovered the plummeting basket and its panicking cargo, Luna set them both down on a cloud, a quick spell preventing them from falling through.

“Sorry about dropping you like that; I shouldn't have tried to talk with my mouth full.”

“Th... That's okay,” said Spike, his annoyance at being dropped having been completely overshadowed by his curiosity towards the one who dropped him. “But Princess, why are you out here? Why am *I* out here?”

Luna knelt down to reach eye-level with the young dragon. “I need your help, Spike.”

“What?!?”

“Tomor—” Luna glanced up at the position of the moon. “Today is my first April Fools day for a thousand years. I'm *really* out of practice and I need *your* help to make up for all the pranks I've

missed.”

“So... you're taking me to the castle, to help you with April Foals day pranks?”

“Yes. If you agree.”

Spike grinned. He had been disappointed that he wouldn't get to prank the castle this year.

“Definitely.”

“Great! Now that you're awake you can ride the rest of the way on my back.”

“Okay,” said Spike, as he clambered onto the Princess. “You know, you could have just asked me back in Ponyville, I'd have agreed anyway.”

“I felt guilty enough about disturbing your sleep when I did. And besides,” she said, adopting the involuntary tone of voice that appears when you talk to a young baby, “you just looked so adorable, all curled up in your little basket—”

“Okay I get it.”

“—and sucking your thumb.”

“Sheesh! You're as bad as Twilight! Wait... I forgot about Twilight! She'll worry when she wakes up and finds I'm gone.”

Luna's face lit up with a mischievous smile. “Twilight'll be fine; I left her a note.”

Twilight Sparkle awoke to find her assistant missing and a note where his basket should be. Reading the note, she was so surprised that she spoke out loud.

“What does Princess Luna need Spike for?!?” She read the message again, her cheeks growing red. “And why has she left me kisses!”

We return to the Princess and her dragon passenger, flying through the darkness of the very early morning. Luna had asked Spike about what he had done for his first April Foals day at the castle.

“Well, I had only learned about April Foals day when Twilight told me the evening before, so I didn't really have time to plan anything,” said Spike.

“So what *did* you do?”

“I stole everyone's left shoe.”

“Hah!” chuckled Luna. “The castle must have been in chaos! They're obsessed with their uniforms.”

“Yep,” said Spike. “They even had to pass a new law which forced shoemakers to sell just left, or

just right shoes. I didn't come up with that one myself though," he added, "pretty sure I got the idea from something I read."

"Even so, I'm impressed that you pulled it off." Luna thought for a moment. "So what did you do with all those shoes?"

"I waited about a week for them to get replacements, then I returned the shoes to their rightful owners."

Luna had to stifle her laughter as they flew over the castle walls and landed on her balcony, having waited for a gap in the patrols before doing so. They hid the baskets beneath the Princess's bed and began to discuss where they should go first.

"There's an ambassador arriving today, so Celestia's bound to show off the new display-thing in the grand reception hall," said Luna.

"Hmm... That sounds like as good a place to start as any. It'll be easier to come up with an idea with the thing in front of us."

Luna nodded. "Let's sneak down then. There shouldn't be many guards about."

The pair carefully made their way towards the reception hall, scurrying between cover and keeping to the shadows. Spike asked Luna about the ambassador, but all she knew was that it was a *he* and *he* was arriving today.

They finished the journey without incident. Spike looked around and marvelled at the high ceiling, and the enormous main doors that could have accommodated creatures many times larger than a pony. He hadn't seen this room before. The 'display-thing' that Luna had mentioned sat pride-of-place on a raised stand in the centre of the floor. It was a fairly large, scale-model of the castle made out of some kind of white stone. Spike thought it looked very accurate and the display itself was about as tall as he was.

"Canterlot!" he said.

"It's only a model."

"Shh! Someone's coming... Hide!"

"Where?!?" said the Princess.

"You get behind those curtains, I'll squeeze behind the grandfather clock next to them."

"Okay."

"Hurry!"

"*Okay!*"

As quickly as they could, the Princess and the dragon concealed themselves in their respective hiding places. Spike stuck his head out to see what was going on.

A trio of mares trotted into the hall. They were each wearing a wide hat (that featured several feathers), and blue uniforms. Spike grinned.

“It's 'The Three Maresketeers!'” he whispered towards the bulge in the curtain beside him.

“Who?”

“They're the worst guards in Canterlot.”

“Well even if they are the worst,” said the curtain, “we can't do anything while they're still here!”

“Relax, I know how to get rid of them.”

Spike fished around on the floor behind the grandfather clock, and was rewarded with a small stone. The castle servants must still prefer to shove mess behind things instead of removing it properly. After testing its weight in his hand, Spike threw the stone out into the room.

The sound of its impact echoed around the hall. Its effect on the Maresketeers was instant. They became so alert that Spike could have sworn he had seen exclamation marks above their heads.

“Huh? What was that noise?”

“Over there! Bring the light.”

“It's a rock!”

“Just a rock?”

“But it moved!”

“I think this rock is getting ideas above its station.”

“This could set a dangerous precedent.”

“What do you mean?”

“Think about it; today this rock moves, tomorrow a boulder might think its a good idea to fall on somepony's head.”

“And the day after the whole castle might go for a stroll!”

“We need to escort this rock from the premises before it spreads.”

“Agreed.”

Luna watched in amazement as the Maresketeers removed the stone (under heavy guard), and marched it off through the castle. Having been left alone, she and Spike left their hiding places and approached the model once again.

“Well, what should we do?” said the dragon.

“We could fill it with spiders.”

“Why spiders?”

“They scare my sister.”

“I didn't know that.”

“Not many do,” said Luna.

“Hmm,” pondered Spike, “I know the castle gardens like the back of my hand. You get me some jars, and I'll get you some spiders.”

“Deal!”

It took several hours, and many stealthy trips into the gardens, but their labours were rewarded. The model of Canterlot Castle was covered in spiders. They crawled along the walls, around the battlements, over the spires, and across the courtyards. The spiders themselves seemed fairly content, several had already begun to spin webs between the towers, and a particularly large hairy one had taken up residence in ‘Celestia's bedroom’.

“Right, that's that done,” said the Princess, as she delicately extracted an eight-legged hitch hiker from her hair. “Where next?”

“How about the library?” said Spike. “I'd hate for ol' Contents Cover to have an uneventful April 1st.”

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Contents Cover had risen early, as he usually did, and the earth pony was quite looking forwards to an uneventful April 1st. He arrived at the castle library as dawn began to creep over the outer walls and started to make it ready for the day ahead. Part-way through his preparations, Contents noticed a book in the return box. That was strange; he was sure that he had dealt with all the returns the night before.

“Must be getting old,” he muttered, as he picked up the book and trotted towards the self it lived on. Contents stopped short; there was *another* book where this one should have been. And it belonged to a completely different section!

“This is highly irregular!” Contents put the first book back in its place and took the interloper with him. He had made it half way down the classic fiction aisle when his front leg snagged on something. It was a length of string running across the passageway. A sound came from above, and he looked up in horror as the books on the higher shelves began falling towards him.

It was a good fifteen seconds before he realised that the books hadn't hit him and he risked opening his eyes. Suspended, just above his head, was a hardback edition of 'The Colt of Monte Cristo'. Dozens of other volumes were similarly hanging around him, just above pony head height, tied up with string. From Contents's perspective, the ceiling had gotten a lot lower and contained a significantly higher amount of printed text. He could also hear laughter from somewhere nearby.

“You won't get away with this!” The laughter stopped. “I don't care who you are, I'll get you if it's the last thing I do!” He heard a *'Twang!'* and the books fell the rest of the way.

Luna flew out of the library via a high, open window and took up position in the corridor behind a large pot plant to wait for Spike. He was taking longer than she had expected. Luna started thinking about going back in to fetch the dragon, when she heard the librarian shout from inside: “Got you!”

Luna panicked. “Spike are you okay?!? Spike? SPI-I-IKE!?!?”

“What's wrong Princess?” said Spike, casually walking through the library doors.

“I thought you'd been caught!”

“Nah, that was a library assistant. Contents jumped him when he came to help. I stayed to watch the show.”

Luna still looked miffed. “Well don't do that again!”

“Yeah yeah.” From up the corridor came the sound of running horseshoes. “Someone must have heard you! Quick, round the corner!”

The pair escaped round the corner and heard voices coming from where they had been.

“It was definitely a shout wasn't it?”

“Oh yes, definitely.”

“First it was moving rocks, and now shouting plants.”

“Where will it end!”

“Now now, there's no need to get hysterical.”

“But this could be the start of an uprising!”

“Hmm... that's a good point. We had best take this plant in for questioning.”

“Agreed.”

“We have ways of making you talk!”

Spike yawned, even listening to those three was tiring. “I think all that missed sleep is catching up with me...”

“Okay, let's go back to my room and you can have a nap. It'll be too busy to sneak around soon anyway. I can wake you up when the castle's preparing dinner and we can try something then.”

The young dragon nodded, his basket sounded very inviting after a hard morning's work. They made their way back up to the Princess's bedroom, careful to avoid Spike getting seen by anypony. They had just gotten through the door, when Spike suddenly gave a loud belch of green fire. A message scroll formed in front of him. He groaned.

“I was afraid of this,” he said, reading through the scroll.

“What's the matter?”

“Princess Celestia sent this to check up on me, to make sure I'm behaving. It says I have to give it to Twilight and that she expects a response post-haste!”

“So? Just make up a response and send it,” said Luna.

“I can't! It has to be in Twilight's hornwriting or Celestia won't accept it.”

Luna floated a quill, an ink pot and a spare scroll over to them. “I'll write one then; I've seen enough of Twilight's hornwriting to be able to duplicate it.” She began to do so.

“That's neat,” said Spike, “but where have you seen Twilight's writing?”

“Half the spell books in the library have her notes in the margins. And the back covers.”

“Oh yeah, Contents Cover was always yelling at Twilight for that.”

“Aaand done!” said Luna, passing the scroll to Spike.

With a deep breath, the dragon engulfed the new message in flame and it flew out of the window.

“What did it say?”

“I wrote that you definitely aren't causing trouble to anypony in Ponyville.”

And that Twilight thinks Celestia's hair is nice and she would like to go out to dinner sometime.

Luna thought to herself.

“Great!” said Spike, dragging his basket from under Luna's bed. “Erm... you haven't got any food up here have you?”

Luna opened a draw and threw several purple gems towards the dragon. “You can have these.”

“Thanks!” Spike said, munching happily. When he had finished, he looked up guiltily. “Were they expensive?”

“Don't worry about that. Ponies give me purple gems all the time. Frankly, I'm running out of places to keep them. Just get some sleep, I'll wake you before dinner.”

“Okay,” said Spike, curling up in his basket.

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“Spike. Spike, it's time to wake up now.”

The voice floated into his dream, gently coaxing him back towards consciousness. It whispered of gentle streams glittering under moonlight. It spoke of evenings sat around an open fire. It sang of the warmth given by family. Spike opened his eyes.

“Twilight?” Spike said, sleepily. “Your hair's different.”

“I'm not Twilight. I'm Luna. You've been helping me with April Fools day, remember?”

“Wait? Luna?” Spike blinked, the days events gradually came back to him. “Oh yeah.”

Several purple jewels had been placed in a pile next to him and Spike chewed one thoughtfully. “So what's the plan then?”

“When you've finished eating, I thought we could sneak into the kitchens and see if an opportunity presents itself there.”

“Sounds good to me.”

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The Princess and the dragon had managed to hide themselves behind a table in a dark corner of the smaller of the two royal kitchens, the larger kitchen being too busy for them to get inside without being caught. This kitchen was currently empty, but the pots, pans, and jars left around suggested that it was going to be used soon. They didn't have to wait long.

An earth pony, in an apron with a large red spot in the middle, burst into the room and began to busy himself with the oven directly opposite to Luna and Spike's hiding place.

“Hey, that's '*King of Heartburn*' Roasted Cashew!” said the dragon.

“Who?”

“All the cooking magazines have been raving about him!” Spike continued, turning to Luna, who looked back at him questioningly.

“Hold on, I'll double check.” Spike crept out of their hiding place for a better view.

“Black mane, a red bandanna, and a cutie mark of cashew nuts set against a heart-shaped fire; it's definitely him.”

“Why is he so famous then?”

“The magazines say he's amazing with spicy foods.”

“Oh! He must have made the curry dishes that my sister and I have had recently,” said Luna. “They were very nice, but much too mild for my tastes.”

“Why would you get Roasted Cashew to cook for you and then only ask for mild dishes? That just seems like such a waste!”

“It must be for my sister, she can't stand spicy food.”

“Funny, I would have thought it was the other way around, what with the sun being hot and all.”

“Yeah,” said Luna. “So this Cashew-guy can make really spicy stuff?”

Spike nodded. “He's got this signature super spicy sauce that the critics described as '*Godly*'.”

“I'd love to try that...” Luna said, as a plan formed in her mind. She stuck her head out of cover, and looked around. She spied what she was after on the table behind the occupied chef. Luna carefully levitated the scroll containing the instructions for tonight's first course towards their hiding place.

“What are you going to do?” said Spike.

“I'm attaching a note that says Celestia has made a last minute change and wants the chef to use his signature spicy sauce on the royal meal tonight.”

The young dragon raised an eyebrow. “That should be interesting.”

When she had finished, Luna placed the scroll back where she had found it, with her note sticking out from underneath. She ruffled the papers slightly to attract Cashew's attention.

The sound behind him caused Roasted Cashew to turn around.

“Hold on, a note? I must have missed it earlier.” The chef began to read and a wide, toothy grin spread across his face.

“Finally, a meal worthy of the undefeated of the east cooking style!”

While they watched Cashew gather his ingredients, Spike turned to Luna.

“He's supposed to be a bit eccentric.”

“How so?”

“He talks to the food as he cooks it.”

As if on cue, the *King of Heartburn* began:

“THIS PAN OF MINE IS BURNING RED!”

With quick, precise motions, Cashew picked up the jars of spices and containers of liquids that he had arranged around the oven and began pouring them in.

“ITS LOUD ROAR TELLS ME TO GRASP SEASONING!”

A satisfying hiss escaped from the saucepan as more ingredients were thrown into the mix.

“ERUPTING...”

The chef was now stirring his concoction energetically.

“GOD...”

Luna didn't know if this 'style' of cooking worked, but it was great fun to watch.

“SAUCE!”

With a flourish, Cashew reached down for the hob's temperature dial.

“HEAT END.”

A quick twist turned the dial to its lowest setting. Roasted Cashew slowly sank onto the floor, seemingly exhausted from his work.

The two onlookers watched the chef sprawl out on the ground and waited until they were sure he was asleep (or at least until he stopped moving). As they emerged from their hiding place, Spike looked up at the clock.

“You should get going, they'll be expecting you for dinner soon.”

“But what are *you* going to do?” asked Luna.

Spike winked. “Don't worry, I'll see you at dinner.”

Princess Celestia was frazzled. She kept looking out the windows expecting to see giant spiders crawling all over the walls. She shuddered. It had just seemed far too real, the model was too perfect. It was just so easy to imagine those eight legged beasts were actually invading— No! She wasn't going to think about that again. But she was sure that the one living in the model of her bedroom had winked at her. The Princess tried to put the experience out of mind. Just this dinner to get through, and everything would be fine.

She realised that the enormous red dragon sitting across the table had been speaking, and that she hadn't been listening. Celestia breathed a sigh of relief when her sister answered their guest. This was going to be harder than she thought.

At last! The first course was being brought out. Mr Cashew's delicate spices should steady her nerves and take her mind off of those spiders.

Luna was enjoying herself. She hadn't known the ambassador was going to be a dragon. He was much more interesting to talk to than the diplomats she had met in the past. This dragon had been reciting a tale in which the son of a friend of his had recently been told off by a group of ponies, and now suffered from nightmares of a giant, pink-haired, yellow pegasus being cross with him. The ambassador had just started to explain how this son of a friend would begin to whimper at the merest glimpse of a rainbow, when the first course arrived.

Luna had been looking forward to this, and speared a baby carrot that was swimming in the curry sauce. She popped it into her mouth. It was delicious! Full of flavour and *so* spicy! Luna bit down on the carrot, its crunchiness and sweetness telling her that it hadn't been boiled. It took the edge off perfectly. She looked over to her sister, who was having a slightly different reaction.

Princess Celestia's hair had turned bright red and was standing on-end, as if trying to get as far away from her mouth as possible. She levitated several water jugs around her head and drained each in turn. After several minutes, Celestia was able to think about something other than finding a lake and becoming one with it. She noticed the red dragon was talking to her.

“You must give my compliments to the chef!” he said in a deep, rumbling voice.

Celestia just nodded.

There was a commotion at the door, and Celestia's majordomo rushed to her side (along with his impressive moustache).

“Your Majesty!”

Celestia was still struggling to speak. “Yes, Basil?”

“Your Majesty, there have been several reports of things happening in the castle.”

“Things often happen in castles.”

“Begging your pardon, your Majesty, but I mean *strange* things.”

“What strange things?” Celestia wondered if she could get Basil to bring her more water.

“We found the jars that we believe were used to transport those spiders.”

“Spiders from Jars?”

“Yes, your Majesty,” said Basil, “and the librarian, Contents Cover, was buried by an avalanche of classic fiction.”

“Oh my.”

“Quite so, your Majesty. And to make matters worse, those... 'Maresketeers' have been escorting various inanimate objects out of the castle all day.”

“And you believe these events are linked?”

Basil leaned closer. “I believe that we have a reptile in the punch bowl.”

“I'm sorry?”

Basil tapped his nose. “The castle is a lot more *prickly* than it ought to be.”

“I'm still not following you.”

“It's Spike! I know we're not supposed to mention him, but he's bloody here, I bloody know it!”

The main course had arrived, and was placed in the centre of the table, covered by a large silver cloche.

“You're worrying over nothing,” said Celestia, shooing Basil away. “I received a message from Twilight saying that he was being well behaved in Ponyville; so it's impossible for him to be at the castle.” She noticed that her hair had finally returned to normal; *it does look nice*, she thought to herself.

The cloche was lifted.

Celestia gaped at it.

Luna burst out laughing.
The ambassador cocked his head.

With its cover removed, the main course had been revealed to be Spike, eyes closed, hog-tied and with an apple in his mouth.

The enormous red dragon opened his mighty jaws. Celestia closed her eyes. This was it, hundreds of years of dragon-pony peace were about to be shattered...

“Spike mah boy!” the ambassador bellowed.

Surprised, the main course opened his eyes and spat out the apple. “Uncle Gold Tooth?!?”

“I haven't seen you in years, lad. Come over here and give your uncle a hug.”

Spike released his hold on the rope around his legs, which fell away unsupported. He got up and scampered over to the older dragon. “I didn't know *you* were the ambassador!”

“Well I very nearly wasn't. Previous ambassador said visiting the ponies was dull so I had tried to find an excuse not to come. But I actually found it very entertaining!”

“You did?” said Celestia, who was still shocked that the red dragon hadn't gone on a rampage at the sight of an infant of his species on the dinner table.

“Of course. I thought that building a miniature castle for those spiders to live in showed a wonderful love for nature, perhaps a little much but its better to go too far, eh! And just when I was starting to get bored of all that politics talk, those three jesters arrived!”

“Jesters?” asked the Princess of Day.

“Those mares in the silly hats, shouted at that pot-plant. Jolly spiffing I thought.”

“Oh yes, *them*.”

“Then you serve me a top notch meal and to cap it all off, you've brought my nephew to see me and even let him play a cracking-good joke!”

“I'm so glad you've enjoyed it,” Celestia managed.

The rest of dinner continued without additional incident, once Celestia had stopped Basil from summoning the guards of course. The two dragons and the Princess of Night chatted amicably, and Celestia contented herself with listening to their stories, occasionally wondering when her sense of taste would grow brave enough to return. She had been particularly interested in the tale of what those two had been up to today. Celestia sighed, it had been a long April 1st and she still had to work out what she was going to do with *both* of The Purple Menaces. It would probably involve snakes.