

She awoke on the grass. Soft grass, like those of Canterlot Garden, tickling her snout and making her sneeze ever so slightly. She giggled at the scent. Like honey: sweet and delicious. There was no dirt. There was no muck. Just splendid, glorious grass, ripe for the eating or perfect for a nice roll. But for now, she rested. The sun would be rising soon, spreading its warmth across the land. Vibrant colors of orange and red would flame across the skies, as ponies across her sweet Kingdom would awake for the day ahead.

The cool night breeze shifted the heavily leafed branches to and fro. The wind added to the invisible force that blew the Princess' mane around. No lights from Canterlot polluted the sky at the moment. No cities or towns or villages or huts could be seen. She was alone. Like she liked to be. She looked up at her sky. No doubt Celestia would be asleep still. Although the Princess had constantly begged her sister to stay up for one night, Celestia just couldn't. She was adapted to sleeping through her nights, and therefore could not experience them like the Princess could. Celestia had tried to persuade her sister countless times to switch over and sleep during the night. It had been hard to decline. Sleeping in the night would mean more time with Celestia. But it would also mean missing what she created. And right now, her creation looked a little dull. The stars weren't shining as bright as usual, and some weren't even visible, despite the cloudless sky. The constellations looked sloppy, with many stars shifted to the side of their lines.

As she rested in her night, she allowed herself to decorate the sky a little more before she was forced to lower it. *'Maybe somepony will be awake to see this,'* she thought to herself. The mistress of the night closed her eyes and breathed in deep. She held her exhaling breath and puffed out her cheeks. A great pressure started building in her, and was boiling below her crest and dock. It felt like a raging fire inside her cool body, but she held it in. Her mane and tail swayed rapidly and thrashed about in their invisible wind from the strain, but the princess was not done yet. She felt herself about to burst, and with one last push, her mane and tail exploded upwards in a fury of relief. They licked the sky and tickled the stars in their fire of stars and darkness. However, they did not fall back to her. They stayed up in the dark heavens, masterpiecing the canvas above her. "Ahh," sighed Luna as she crossed her forelegs and laid her head to rest on them. Her magical energy filled mane and tail continued to dance in the sky high above her, but she was now at peace. The sun would be rising very soon. She would need to bring back her hair and lower her spectacular night.

"I don't wanna go!" moaned Luna as she flopped on her back. She spit out a few clumps of her magical energy hair, which reacted in floating upwards to the sky and adding a new star. "Oooh. Pretty," giggled Luna. She tore off another clump of mane and let it fly, and that night two new stars appeared in the sky. She knew the astronomers would march into court with their tails in a twist about the spontaneous addition, but she didn't care. It was kind of ironic though. The few ponies who fully appreciated her nights were the astronomers, yet her favorite activity was pushing their buttons. The princess giggled to herself yet again. "Oh well," she whispered to herself quietly, "They'll get over it."

An internal alarm went off in the princess' head, and she rolled onto all fours. She stepped up and held her head high, and a magical blue aura surrounded her royal horn. The aura spread across the moon in front of her, and she proceeded to tug it down below the horizon to make way for her sister's day. The moon fought her, but eventually it and the stars

faded away into the horizon. Luna squinted her eyes, for something was wrong. Was the moon, coming back up? *'I must not have pushed it all the way down,'* she thought with a shrug. Her magic lit up once again and enveloped her horn and the celestial object. She pushed the moon down once again, but for the first time, something was... fighting her.

Luna grunted at the unexpected force she was required to apply, but the moon would not go down. A back and forth struggle played out between the Mistress of the Night and the unknown force that was toying with her. "What is this?" said Luna. This force was one she hadn't felt in a long time, but she couldn't put a hoof on it. The force propelled the moon upwards, breaking Luna's bond with it. A white light burst outwards from the space rock, sending Luna flying backward into the soft grass. The energy pulsed from the rising moon. But there were no screams. No ponies crying out for their sun. The world was dead silent. The wind stopped. Luna licked her hoof and felt around for any breeze: nothing. It just stopped. Yet her hair still blew freely.

Luna stood flummoxed in the field, not knowing what to make of this situation. She mustered up her strength yet again, and made one final attempt to shove the moon down to begin her sister's day. She gritted her teeth and poured her magic into her task. She summoned all her energy, sucking the magic out of her mane and tail, leaving it as light blue regular pony hair. Her hooves dug into the ground, digging up the soft terrain. She maintained her footing and fought against her moon, her purpose. *'Why is it fighting me? I was made to control it, so why can I not?'* thought Luna desperately. She couldn't take it anymore, and a magical backlash whipped out at her, sending her flying back once again. She couldn't take it anymore. No matter her pride nor stubbornness, she had to do what she dreaded most. Swallowing her pride, she screamed. "Tia! Tia! Help! Celestia! Help me please! Tia!" Her body ached as she cried out for aid. She didn't want to be perceived and treated as a foal more so than she already was, but she needed help.

A wicked laugh echoed in the silent darkness. Luna's ears perked up, and a bead of sweat formed on the side of her cheek. "How foalish, dear Luna. I thought you had grown in a thousand years." Luna bit back tears.

"Show yourself!" she screamed into the darkness. Unfolding her wings to look larger, Luna searched the blackness of her night.

"As you wish," chuckled the voice. The wind picked up yet again. Not the soft wind that had previously cooled Luna, but a vicious hurricane of air that threatened to tear the skin off her flank. It blew ferociously, and Luna had to duck her head against it to not get blown away. It whirled around, but through it Luna could hear something she hadn't expected. Shattering. Like glass. But there was nothing to be broken. Grass did not crack. Not even trees swayed with that sound. A crack rained out directly in front of her, sending her jumping back in surprise. A hole in the ground appeared where the sound had emitted. A soft glow emanated from inside. Its white light spilled over the sides as it flickered wildly in the ground. Curious, Luna took a few cautious steps towards it. Peering over into the hole, she gasped. A beautiful little star was burning in the hole. "T-that's not possible," stammered a terrified pony. It flickered and burned out, leaving nothing but a dirty hole in her perfect grass. More shattering could be heard. Luna looked everywhere she heard the sound only to see her stars falling from her sky. "Tia!" she screamed again, hoping it was a joke. The lights swirled as they fell, and a large clump were picked up in

the wind before they hit the ground. They zipped past her face, each leaving tiny burn marks as their heat singed her fur. Flying past, they settled an area twenty feet from Luna's hooves. They stayed in the air, but refused to move. They twinkled as if they were still in the sky, but were completely stationary and near the ground. Suddenly, they swirled again creating a dark purple tornado of magical energy swirled rapidly towards the dark blue alicorn. The tornado spun at powerful speeds as a second wicked laugh rang out. Luna looked all over for the source, only to be caught off guard and thrown back by the intense wind that was still fighting her. The moon was still stuck above the horizon, and looked to be making its way up into the sky yet again.

"Ah!" yelled Luna as the tornado approached her and decelerated. As it approached closer, the beautiful green grass beneath her hooves started to wilt and die, turning to an ugly yellow crisp as the tornado continued forward. Everything the magical storm passed died behind it, and its deathly energy leaked out further ahead of it. The trees and reeds started to wilt, and the lush green leaves turned to brown brittle bits that blew into Luna's face. Debris from the fallen and dead nature around her blew into her mane, snagging and pulling. The tornado opened up with a wicked laugh and-

Luna sat up in bed, breathing heavily. "Tia! Tia!" Luna screamed out into her bedroom chambers. The light of day leaked through her heavy curtains, and Luna could tell by the shadows that it was about eleven o'clock. She screamed and cried for her sister, thrashing about under her covers trying to free herself from their constrictions on her body. "Tia!" she sobbed. A pair of unicorn guards busted into her darkly painted room, magical daggers created by their magic to fight off the possible attacker that was causing their Princess to cry out in ear shattering shrills. Instead, they saw Princess Luna, Mistress of the Night, thrashing about in a crying fit under her thick royal purple blankets.

"Princess Luna, are you harmed??" asked one of the white-coated unicorn guards.

"Tia!" she screamed. She covered her eyes with her hooves, hiding her tear stained face from her subjects. The guards stood dumbfounded at the situation, not being trained on how to comfort a sobbing ruler of their kingdom. One attempted to comfort her in some way. As he approached, Luna's head popped out from behind the covers. She locked on to him, and her horn was wrapped in its blue aura. Her eyes glowed slightly as the aura grew stronger and she continued her hysteria.

"Ah!" screamed the guard close to her. His body was enveloped in the Princess' magic. He flailed his limbs as he was slowly lifted off the ground.

"Get away from me!" screamed Luna in a voice that sounded demonic. She flung the guard into the wall, causing a large hole where he impacted. He did not move, stunned in fear and pain from the attack.

"Uh, I-I shall fetch Princess Celestia," stammered the other terrified unicorn guard as he backed out of the room with his heads bowed, not wanting to be another victim. A magical white light flashed at the corner of the room, sending out sparks of lightning. Luna had returned under her covers and was shaking rapidly. The guard who had been assaulted quickly scrambled to his hooves. The guards stood back in slight fear, but held firm expressions that were ready for

battle, even if their loyalty to their Princess was faltering at the moment. The light faded, and Princess Celestia stood in its place. She quickly locked on to her sobbing princess sister, and galloped over to comfort her. She climbed onto the bed and draped a wing around the heaving pony.

“Guards, you are dismissed for the moment,” she said in a calm yet tense voice, that was an indirect way of saying ‘*Get out.*’

“Yes your highness,” they said with a bow, and quickly trotted out of the Night Princess’ bedroom chambers. The huge dark wooden doors clamped shut, and glowed with the lock spell only palace guards knew of to keep intruders out.

With a wing still draped over the younger alicorn, Celestia started to use her motherly ways to soothe her. “There there, Luna. Whats wrong?”

Luna attempted to choke something out through her tears, but did not succeed. She sobbed into her elder sister’s crystal white wing as Celestia tried to get a response from her terrified sister. “Luna, what happened? Did somepony try to hurt you?”

Luna shook her head no without looking up from Celestia’s wing. Did you hurt yourself?” Once again Luna shook her head no. Celestia breathed out heavily and rolled her eyes. “Was it a nightmare?” she asked.

Looking up from her comfort spot, Luna “Mhm”ed and Celestia put on a faux caring smile.

“There, there Luna darling. Its okay. It was only a bad dream. I’m here.” Celestia stroked Luna’s back with her hoof until the crying subsided.

“I am embarrassed for you to see me like this, dear sister,” admitted Luna sheepishly. She sniffed and wiped her nose with a hoof, before repositioning her head buried in Celestia’s wing. Mumbling through the feathers, she continued. “I dreamed of... her.” The stewardess of the night’s voice faltered and died, and the room was filled with a dark silence. Nothing moved. The only sound was that of the two alicorns breathing. Several tears ran down the young one’s cheek, disappearing into the warm mass of feathers of which she refused to lift her face from. Celestia softly nuzzled her sister’s neck, hoping to soothe her.

“Dear sister, you are not to blame for the horrors that haunt your dreams. She may plague your sleep, but you must remember: she is no longer real, nor will she ever be. And in your dreams, you can contort her into any pony you like. Then, you wont be afraid of her.” Luna raised her head with an arched eyebrow.

“Sister, not even we can control our subconscious. No pony can. Unicorn magic has failed to unravel the mysteries of a pony’s mind. I don’t believe I could do it either, nor could you.’

“Believing is not only seeing young one. Faith must be present, and you shall succeed.’ Celestia began to rise with her last words of advice, but Luna’s hooves pulled her back down. Celestia’s eyes dilated in surprise, but returned to their soft nature when seeing the blue princess blush.

“Do you think you could stay here... until I fall asleep? Just to be safe?” asked Luna, nestling into Celestia’s motherly body.

“Of course,” sighed Celestia. Her horn glowed, and a magical message was sent to her assistant, Sunny Charm, informing her that court would have to be postponed for the time being.

Celestia draped her neck over Luna's body as both their breathing slowed until they plunged into a deep sleep.

She awoke on the grass. Soft grass, like those of Canterlot garden. They tickled her snout and made her sneeze ever so slightly. She giggled at the scent. Like honey. Sweet and delicious. There was no dirt. There was no muck. Just splendid, glorious grass. Ripe for the eating or perfect for a nice roll. But for now, she rested. The sun would be rising soon; spreading its warmth across the land. Vibrant colors of orange and red would flame across the skies, as ponies across her sweet Kingdom would awake for the day ahead.

She decided to paint the sky a little more, so mustering up her strength, she enchanted her mane and tail so that they flooded from her body into the heavens above, painting her personal canvas. An alarm in her head reminded her of her duty, and she got up to end her night. *Not like anypony cared.* She shook the thought away, not wanting to regress to the crazy Nightmare Moon.

"This is... familiar," said Luna. She shrugged off the feeling, and began to lower the moon. But, it fought her. She pushed harder against her, but she persisted. With a blasting strength of a million Star Swirled the Beardeds, the moon shot right back into the sky to midnight position. "Impossible. What kind of sorcery be this..." ranted Luna as she racked her brain for answers. Suddenly, the wind blew at ferocious speeds, lifting charred leaves and dead grass flying through the air. The grass started to die in front of her, and slowly crawled under hooves. Luna hurriedly crawled backwards to avoid the unknown evil from reaching her. She looked to the stars for aid, but something odd happened. The stars which moments ago had appeared from her mane and tail, were swirling back down towards the ground wildly, twisting and twirling into a mega tornado of stars and energy. From inside the tornado came a wicked laugh that sent Luna falling on her flank. "No," she whispered, remembering where the déjà vu feeling had aroused from.

The eerie voice erupted from the tornado as it died down. "Yes," it whispered. The tornado halted, and the stars fell to the ground, shattering like glass. In the center stood a jet black alicorn. She was taller than Luna, maybe taller than Celestia herself. Her mane flew as Luna's did, but her eyes were enchanted as dragons', and they pulsated with loathing and evil. Her body was adorned with original armor, armor that represented the night. Not even Luna had been granted the gift of personal armor, but this mare was flaunting her power through it.

Luna couldn't tear her eyes away from the mare who stood before her. "Y-You're n-not real," said Luna, remembering Celestia's advice. A terrified tear spilled down her cheek. The black mare lowered her head and laughed a maniacal, wicked cackle.

"Oh, but I am all *too* real!" she laughed, and flashing her razor sharp teeth, galloped towards Luna.

"Tia!" screamed Luna as she jitted awake from the nightmare. Luna panted in a nervous sweat, "Tia!"

“Luna I’m here. I’ve been here.” Her sister’s voice echoed in the walls. Luna felt her sister’s warm breath on her back, and looked up to see she was still in the spot she had left her in. But she did not look like she had when Luna had last seen her. The usually regal looking mare looked sick and tired. Her mane was frizzed and her coat was ruffled and dry. The sheen and softness that once possessed it was nowhere to be found. Celestia had bags under her eyes and looked more bored than Luna usually was in night court.

“Sister, why are thou- I mean *you* so fatigued? Tis your day. You are not missing any rest periods?” questioned Luna as her eldest sister stifled a yawn.

“Was it the dream again?” asked Celestia.

“That does not pertain to my question, but yes it was. Answer me Celestia,” prodded Luna quizzically.

“Horseapples...” muttered Celestia under her breath. Luna’s ears perked up at the whispered tone, and she arched an eyebrow.

“Tia, what is wrong?”

Celestia huffed in defeat, and rested her head on her forelegs. “I was trying to purge your dreams of her. It was surprisingly difficult and strenuous. I believe it did not work either. Whatever is bothering your subconscious dear Luna, it is very deep.”

‘What is deep? What does she mean? Can I be fixed? Why am I cursed with these nightmares?’ Luna’s thoughts frantically raced through her mind. “You need not help me Celestia. I am a grown mare. I can take care of myself.” Luna looked up at her sister with a mature look. “Don’t tire yourself on my behalf.”

“I will always do whatever it takes to help you, little sister.” Celestia smiled. Luna smiled back as well. Celestia’s eyes drifted behind Luna’s face for a second, then shot open in alarm.

Thump! Luna’s head clashed down onto her velvet cushion when Celestia suddenly jumped up from her downward position. “Oh dear Luna! I’m going to miss lowering the sun! Maybe I can still make it,” Celestia muttered the last part. She galloped to Luna’s balcony, and spread her wings, preparing for take off. Luna leaped off the bed and ran up to her sister, trying to fit in a few more words before she was left alone for the night.

“Wait Tia! Will you stay with me tomorrow too?” pleaded Luna, terrified of what the next day’s dreams may bring.

“I will try my best, but I cannot guarantee. I must go now. I’m sorry, but I love you. Have a wonderful night.” And with that Celestia spread her mighty white wings and soared off of Luna’s balcony to pull the sun down to begin the night. She dropped at a steady pace at first, but the wind caught her wings like a parachute, and she was thrust upward on the wind. Every so often she would pump her wings to gain altitude to reach her destination of one of the palace’s highest towers. Luna watched until Celestia rounded the corner of a tower and could no longer be seen.

“Hmmm,” sighed Luna with a snort of her nostrils. She was rested for the most part, and had a few minutes to spare before she had to bring out her glorious night. Maybe tonight she would add that constellation she was drawing out. Luna trotted over to her desk and levitated a quill. Sifting through the piles of budgets that she had been putting off, she found what she was searching for. On a plain sheet of paper were the etched out beginnings of her new constellation. If she worked efficiently, it could be up in the sky by tomorrow night. The

constellation was a very personal one to her, in fact. Though many ponies would not know nor care enough to look into detail of the constellation's picture, it brought an emotional peace to Princess Luna. The pattern of stars depicted herself fighting Nightmare Moon. Their two horns were clashed together. But while Luna wore a face of triumph, Nightmare Moon for once wore a face of fear. Although the event never took place, it was a little homecoming gift to herself. She would tell the astronomers it was something about Equestria so they wouldn't think she was vain to put a constellation of herself in the nighttime sky. Maybe two unicorns creating a spell. Yes, that would work.

The last of Celestia's light faded from the horizon, and Luna once again brought out her moon. Flying up with it, she pushed the constellations out of her horn and pushed them up into the heavens with each beat of her wings. Pony warriors and spirits alike now graced the skies through stars. Luna looked over her work once again. The North Star was a bit crooked. With a huff of breath, Luna blew the star straight, and satisfied with her work, continued to drawing out her latest addition.

A soft rapping echoed on the large wooden doors of Luna's chambers. Through the open windows a cool breeze wafted into the dormitory, bringing along the sounds of chirping crickets and snoring ponies. There was no scent like there was during the day, but rather a peaceful tone that induced relaxation and serenity. "Enter," yelled Luna in her Royal Canterlot Voice.

A young unicorn mare slowly peeked through the doors, and bowed to the ground as soon as she met Luna's eyes. "Excuse me Your Highness, but court is about to begin," said the unknown pony. Her cutiemark was that of a checkmark, for whatever that meant.

"Who are thou?" questioned Luna towards the white mare with the jet black mane.

"Forgive me, Your Highness. I am Moon Shine."

"And pray tell, what business do you have of informing us of our schedule?"

"I-I'm your new assistant, Your Highness." The poor pony never looked up from the ground.

Luna studied the mare for a minute, but nodded and walked towards her door. Using her telekinesis, she shoved her drawing into a drawer, and re-scattered the overdue budget accounts across her desk. That way if Tia came to check up on her work, it would look as if some progress was being made in the national bit crisis.

Moon Shine held open the large doors with her own magic and the Princess sauntered through them, as a Princess should. The two ponies waded through the halls. In the silence of the night, each hoof step sounded like a falling bomb that radiated throughout the palace. Few servants were up at this hour, mainly because 90% of them waited on Celestia, not Luna. Although Luna often wished to be equal to her sister, she understood that most had families that they could not afford to be away from all night long. Luna could practically feel the sweat pouring off her worried new assistant. She had seen it too often with every replacement. But it wasn't nerves. It was genuine fear. "So Ms. Shine. What happened to Ms. Beam? She was present yesterday." Luna decided she should break the tension. Gathering what she learned from Twilight and her friends about meeting new ponies, she decided it was best to start the

conversation.

“Oh, um I think she took personal leave,” answered Moon Shine in a shaky voice. She levitated her clipboard from her back and scrolled her eyes along it.

“Very well. We suppose we can’t execute her for that,” said Luna with a joking smile. Hoping it did the trick to ease her assistance, Luna was more than disappointed to see even greater fear in the mare’s eyes as she hurriedly flipped through her checklist. Clearing her throat, Luna tried again at the conversation. “For whom are we making an appearance?” asked the Princess.

With a few more nervous flips of the never ending checklist, Moon Shine answered. “Tonight you are meeting with Pegasi in charge of the weather for your meteor shower next week and a few common ponies with extreme time zone differences. The astronomers are expressing concerns over the stars and there is a pony guilty of threatening the crown.”

“Time zone differences? Why does that concern us?” huffed Luna. Night court was always slow, but some requests were just too stupid to get by to Celestia’s court, so they got shoved into Luna’s.

“W-well you see Your Grace, these ponies come from far away, so when they are able to come for a meeting, it is night when it is day at their homes. So they can only attend night court.”

“Hmm, we see. Well, onwards we suppose.” Luna and Moon Shine walked through the tall hallways of Canterlot Castle. Tapestries decorated the walls depicting major fight scenes between Celestia and mythical creatures (most of which were fabricated to make her seem like a hero.) A large painting of the Royal Sisters stood alone between two doors. From the painting, Celestia’s eyes seemed to follow Luna as she walked. A small bead of sweat formed on Luna’s brow and she quickly trotted away to avoid confrontation of a painting. She knew it was naïve of her to be threatened by paint, but something about it wasn’t natural, like it was watching her. Navigating perfectly through the endless series of hallways in the castle, Luna and her assistant were upon the throne room in which Night Court was held. The looming doors swung open with the magic of the unicorn guards with squeaks of a thousand years. Celestia and Luna’s thrones stood together in the center of the room. Celestia’s throne shone off a brilliant gold luster, complete with hoof rests and pink cushion. Luna’s throne had a metallic silver color and bore a plush blue cushion that much resembled the darkness of the night. All though she had once been jealous of Celestia’s reign over the day, Luna had now embraced how much she loved the night and its deep colors.

Luna unfolded her wings and flew up to her high throne while Moon Shine sat on the cold tiles below. Moon Shine’s soft voice suddenly became very assertive and harsh as she screamed out “Pony #1, we are ready for you!”

A pegasus pony sauntered into the room with his head held high. Luna rolled her eyes at his cockiness, but quickly snapped to attention as he cleared his hoarse throat. Splotches of his light blue coat were still visible among the dark blue stains of a rain storm. His blonde mane was knotted, yet he still strode up to the throne with the same attitude of Prince Blueblood himself. “General Stormcloud, Captain of the Weather Patrol Your Majesty,” he said as he bowed.

“Charmed,” stated Luna as she was expected. Night Court had only resumed two weeks ago.

Knowing that a princess' time was valuable, he immediately stated his business. "You requested my presence to discuss the weather schedule for your meteor shower next week."

"Yes, what are the arrangements?"

"Well your Highness, a thunder storm was previously scheduled for that day, but if we push them towards Baltimore the night before, they shouldn't reach Canterlot until your shower has concluded."

"Excellent General." The Pegasus pony bowed and flew out of the room. With a loud close of the door, Luna rolled her eyes dramatically and blew a raspberry. She looked down to Moon Shine who was busily scribbling down notes. She cleared her throat loudly, and Moon Shine looked up to her with scared eyes. "I don't see why they have to come talk to me if they already know the answers to their questions or just want to talk for talking sake. Couldn't he just send us a scroll that said 'the weather will be good'?"

Luna had never seen such a large amount of sweat filter off a single pony as Moon Shine stammered for words. "Uh-uh, uh I-I didn't know-" as she flipped through her clipboard with crazed eyes.

Not knowing what to do, Luna tried to pull a Pinkie Pie. "Woah, looks like somepony is weathered from this situation," she said with a large smile. Her face was strained from the masked grin, something her face didn't experience much anymore.

Looking at the oddly smiling Moon Princess, Moon Shine broke into tears and hid her face in a curled up ball that was now her body. "Don't h-hurt me!" she whispered. Luna blew yet another raspberry. *'Every assistant. Why cant they realize I'm a different mare?'* she thought to herself. Luna felt a few frustrated tears sprout herself, but lifted her chin and pushed them down.

"Pony #2, you may enter," said Luna herself, something she knew Celestia would have her flank for. A black stallion pranced in with his head held high and an oomph in his step. His cutie mark of a moon somewhat pleased Luna, for she always enjoyed seeing ponies that enjoyed and studied her night. His facial expression, however, looked a tad testy. Behind him levitated maps and stands and a projector wrapped in a lime green aura. He bowed at the foot of the throne, and Luna nodded. He stood and conducted himself in a manner only an astronomer would attempt towards the Night Princess. "Your Highness. It is lovely to see you again. Are you well?"

Luna was not much for personal chatter with ponies, nor did she want to stay in court for any longer than was necessary. "I am not your next stall neighbor Shadow. Do not address me as I am," said Luna, biting back a snarl at the informality that this pony was addressing her with.

"M-my apologies, Your majesty."

"What business do you bring?" said Luna.

The black stallion cleared his throat and set up a display on the projector in front of the Princess. "Yes, you see Princess, the astronomers and I noticed an unscheduled addition to the stars last night. We were wondering what the occasion was?"

Luna raised an eyebrow. "We did no such thing," she said dumbfounded.

The pony pointed to two stars on the projector's screen. "Well, y-you see Your grace, that there are in fact two additions. Here," he pointed, "and here." Luna squinted her eyes to see what the pony was yammering about. Her eyes shot open with recognition.

"Impossible..." she whispered.

“Excuse me, Your Majesty?”

“We don’t remember making those,” lied Luna.

“Perhaps they are a mistake,” also lied the pony as he collected his things. But he knew what would happen if he upset her. He bowed a farewell and trotted out of the room. With a loud thunk of the door, the room was once again silent. Luna couldn’t believe what she had just saw. She remembered creating those. She remembered it all too well. She made them with her loose hair. In her dream. *‘This isn’t possible. That’s not possible! The dream and reality worlds cannot coexist. How is this possible?’* fretted Luna in a panic. But they had been there. As clear as night. They were there.

A large creak snapped Luna out of her madness. Sometime in her frenzy Moon Shine had called for the next appointment, and two pegasi guards were escorting an Earth Pony in shackles towards the throne. His coat was a light yellow but had blood splattering on it. The guards most likely beat him. They threw him down in front of Luna and he coughed in agony. One of the guard spoke. “We bring thee a pony who has been accused with threatening the royal crown!” bellowed the pony.

Luna eyed the accused pony. “And why does thou threaten my princesship?” she said as she looked up to the royal crown she had atop her head.

The pony tried to rise to his feet, but the guards pushed him down so that he remained in a bow. “I never threatened you, princess. Nor did I the crown. I am the royal crown polisher,” he said. Luna raised an eyebrow and eyed his cutie mark of a sparkle. “When I was cleaning your crown the other day, I found an ink stain. I was scrubbing it, and when it wouldn’t come out, I said ‘I hate this stupid thing’. I didn’t mean I hated you or the crown itself. Just the stain.” He started sobbing. “Just the stain!” he cried into his hooves.

“You idiots,” she yelled to the pegasi guards who were now looking sheepish. “Set him free at once!” The guards bowed and unhinged the pony’s chains.

Without so much as a thank you, the accused pony galloped out of the room. The pegasi guards remained bowing before Luna. Not wanting to scare them further, she decided the best thing to do would be to let them go. “Go. Get out.” The pegasi rose from their positions and flew out of the throne room. Luna looked to Moon Shine who had dried her tears and was writing down the notes yet again. *‘Why do they even bother?’* thought Luna. *‘Its not like I read the notes anyways.’*

Through a door on the opposite side of the room, poked the head of a brown Earth Pony. His eyes widened at the sight of the expressionless princess, but he quickly scurried to the center of the room and bowed respectfully. “M-M-My name is Rusty, Miss Luna.”

“Good evening. What business do you have in the royal court,” stated Luna.

“I come from a farming village outside of Trottingham, Our corn and hay are coming in late so my village sent me on behalf of asking how l-l-long we have until eternal n-night. So w-w-we can prepare our crops?” Luna’s eyes shot open, and she couldn’t catch her breath.

“W-what has thou said?” she stammered. She couldn’t believe her ears. Did he say she was bringing eternal night? A tear ran down her face, and unable to stop her emotions, she let a few more spill. She shook her head rapidly, trying to push what the ignorant colt had just asked down, knowing she shouldn’t let even the touchiest of subjects break her composure. But she couldn’t. Her horn glowed, and a bright white light erupted from her eyes. A set of storm clouds

formed on the ceiling, crackling with lightning and roaring with ominous thunder that caused Moon Shine to continue sobbing from the terrifying princess. An intense rage built up inside her. *'I guess they're not scared of Celestia anymore. She warned them not to do this. Why would they do this? The audacity, the nerve, the criminal!'*

"Its just that we need more time to harvest Ms. Nightmare and-"

"What has thou said?!" screamed Luna in her Royal Canterlot voice, forgetting the lessons Twilight Sparkle had taught her. "WE BRING THEE BEAUTIFUL NIGHTTIMES AND HAVE BEEN NOTHING BUT LOYAL TO EQUESTRIA. AND THOU HAVEST THE AUDACITY TO OUTRIGHT ACCUSE US OF STILL BEING THAT MONSTER?"

"I-I was just sent. I didn't mean to-"

"WE ARE NOT HER!" shrieked Luna so sharply that her voice broke, going up a few octaves. The stained glass murals that surrounded the room shattered, sprinkling glass down like the tiny stars in her dream. With that, she teleported out of the room, dismissing court for the night to mull things over.

With a large flash of white that eliminated the darkness from her chambers, Luna appeared. A thousand years of pent up emotion blew out of her. She paced around sobbing. Using her telekinesis, she levitated her crown from her magical blue hair. Bringing it in front of her face, she examined it. The fine blue etchings on its black surface, the shine and care put into making it. But in it, she also saw a creeping darkness that made her grit her teeth. She threw it against the wall of the room with a loud thud, and continued to pace. The clattering of the metal ceased as it bounced under the bed, and Luna's horseshoes also found themselves hurled to the same fate. "Agh! Tia's going to kill me for flipping out them!" Luna peered into her mirror, and with a scowl lit up her horn. Her reflection distorted and twisted, until a beam of light filled the mirror. In its place stood Celestia's reflection. Not Celestia herself, but a copy Luna had formed when she needed to practice how to break news to her sister. Never would the white alicorn know of the conversations Luna was having with the copy.

"So, Tia, please don't be mad. But I went crazy on one of my subjects during Night Court tonight."

"You what!?" yelled the imaginary sister.

"I'm sorry! But he called me Nightmare Moon!"

"Luna! As a princess with a country to uphold, you cannot allow your emotions to get the best of you. These ponies will never take to you again if every time you get angry you summon dangerous weather and use your Canterlot Voice. They need patience and nurturing, not cruel punishment for believing what has been fed to them since they were foals."

The not-Celestia's voice always cooled Luna down in her fits of rage. Celestia never got angry like Luna did. She puts on a calm face and saves her anger until she is in private. *'Why do I always have to go insane?'* thought Luna ho-humly.

"I know that. God damnit don't you think I know that!?" screamed Luna.

"See, right there. You cannot lash out like that. And I don't want to hear any cursing in this palace either." Not in the mood for being lectured, Luna gruffed and the image evaporated. Even the copy she controlled tried to constantly improve her.

Luna flapped her wings and hovered around her dark room in thought. Tapestries that depicted her raising the glorious moon hung in the quarters. Every article of furniture was a

dark, rich purple that only accented how dark and dreary her room was. Celestia's room had some dark cushions and such, but in the day it shone with the brightness of the sun with beautiful pastels and bright yellows that burned Luna's eyes. The only time she was up during the day was for special outings (which were very rare for mostly they wanted Celestia) and if she had a nightmare and had to wander through the blinding light to her sister's room for comfort.

Luna pulled out her journal from a pile of papers she had discarded on the floor in response to one of her previous fits of rage. Pieces of loose leaf flew off of it, and she brought it close to her. She didn't know what to write, and usually didn't write much. She stared at the leather binding, seeing the ink splot of a crescent moon that acted as a cover photo. Luna grabbed a quill, and began writing what had happened.

They can't forget can't they? Why can't they forgive me? I'm so sorry for what I've done, but with how I've been treated since I return I'm starting to not be sorry. Like they deserve it. No, I take that back. I really do. I just want them to love me like they love Tia. I don't want them to think I'm that monster Nightmare- Luna stopped her entry, not being able to bring herself to write the cursed name.

She dropped onto her bed and smothered her face with a pillow. She couldn't take it anymore. Nothing good had come to her in the time she had returned home from the moon. Everypony she met was terrified her, and she had to admit that Celestia was her best friend. And only friend except Twilight and the occasional guard that Celestia had bribed.

A cool breeze tickled Luna's flanks, and she uncovered her face to see the source; an open window. Luna rolled off her back and on to her glared out into her darkness. She stretched her wings and flapped them, gazing at their dark blue tint and beautiful plumage. "Well, I haven't had a fly in weeks..." said Luna aloud to nopony as she smiled to herself. She stood and bounced off the bed, fluttered her wings, and soared out the window. Celestia would be enraged when she found out Luna was out alone; especially with all the death threats she had been receiving. Luna didn't like to dwell on the hurtful threats she had been receiving since she returned. Some times some school fillies would send her pictures of her in a heart. Most of those came from Pip and his friends from Ponyville, but many others were amateur drawings of Nightmare Moon eating young fillies and colts. And those always cut the deepest. That even her youngest subjects were raised to believe she was a monster. Nonetheless, she need not dwell on the matter while she soared through her sky. It was dark, but the sky was illuminated at the same time by the millions of stars she had painted into the heavens tonight. She dropped down from her window in a perfect nose dive. The wind attacked against her favor, begging her to pull up soon. But what's the fun in that? Luna continued down in a spiral, cutting through the air like a sharp knife. A stone patio was closely approaching, but she didn't care. Beneath it was another half of the castle, and she couldn't miss out on the fun. Lighting her horn, she masked her body in blue. Her bones and muscles tingled like a thousand chills, but it only made Luna giggle. She was a foot from the stone patio. Then she was a foot underneath it. Luna laughed out loud. "Walk through walls. Never fails!" she chuckled genuinely for the first time in a while. Gaining more speed than ponily possible, Luna continued her descent alongside the castle. Before she reached the earth, she spread her majestic wings high and pulled up, missing the ground by mere inches. Her wings took the weight of her body easily, and she soon left Canterlot Castle far

behind her. Canterlot city was spread beneath her, but didn't even bother looking down. She knew what she would find. Dark houses and closing bars that made her sick. No pony enjoying the night. The cool mist of the nighttime clouds licked her face as she breezed right through them. She thought about resting on one, but decided she had the rest of her life to rest, but might not get the chance to fly unsupervised for some time. She barrel rolled and looped and zigzagged until she couldn't see straight anymore. It was such a rush It was so great. If only Celestia was here. 'No,' thought Luna. '*I can do things on my own.*' Her stars twinkled above as she flew over her amazing country at speeds that would make the Wonderbolts envious. Celestia and Luna didn't want to brag, but they possessed the ability to fly as fast as light, but sometimes it was just fine to slowly soar. After a while of uneventful flight, Luna even tried to attempt one of those sonic rainbooms that the Element of Loyalty had performed at Princess Cadence's wedding, but she failed as the force didn't break, but instead forced her back like a boomerang. After tumbling back wards in the air a few times and rubbing her head, Luna was fine yet again but decided not to attempt again.

Princess Cadence. Many ponies had expressed concerns about the princess' origins, and Celestia had always answered. But Luna still didn't know. She had never been present. She had only met Cadence once. She was a nice mare. Nothing special. But apparently she was family. So she must be treated as so.

Town after town flew beneath the rogue princess as she continued her rebellious flight. The moon princess spotted Ponyville beneath her, but decided against visiting Celestia's star pupil at this time at night. However, she was fond of Ponyville's scenery, and decided it would be a nice break area. Carousel Boutique almost scratched her legs as she descended into the sleeping village. '*Wow, I remember when I was there. It took a lot of magic to was off the pink dye Miss Rarity put into my coat,*' reminisced Luna with a joyful chuckle.

She landed as silently as possible in the quiet town. Collective snores could be heard from open windows, and every house had a welcome mat on the doorstep. Flowers bloomed even in the dark of Luna's night with colors that could be faintly made out at this hour. She strolled through the town, not sure of what to engage in now that everypony was asleep. Hearing the audible effect of her hooves on the cobblestone streets of the main town square, she decided to use her wings a little more to be as silent as possible and not give herself away. Its not like she would be mobbed by fans anyway like Celestia would. Well, maybe by a mob with pitchforks and such. She passed the Town Hall and thought of the dusky mayor that refused to welcome the royal sister to their celebration. Hanging her head in sadness, she continued her flight/stroll and came across Ponyville Park. Multiple bridges came in and out of the public area. A cute fountain adorned the center while flowers bloomed everywhere. Tulips and petunias and roses and daisies. Seeing a particularly beautiful daisy, Luna plucked it with her magic and plopped it in her mouth. A savory and sweet sensation flooded on her tongue as the delicious aroma matched the wonderful taste that overwhelmed her mouth. Luna rarely got to experience a simple flower, for every single meal in the castle was as extravagant as Celestia's mane was rainbow. She looked at the Ponyville Bell Tower, and saw that it was 4:00 a.m. "Okay, I have a few hours or so." Luna decided to practice a little singing, for this was the only time she would get to be alone and away from Celestia's put-downs about her pitchiness. The only time she got to sing was when she sound proofed her room with a spell, and even then Celestia would still

send her notes that would say *'Shut up. You're hurting my ears,'* like any sister would. Remembering the lullaby her father used to sing, she put a soundproof bubble around herself to not wake the residents.

"Can you see the night? Burning stars oh so bright. Bringing peace and happiness. Nothing more that perfect bliss. Can you see the day? In the sun's warmth we lay. Bringing joy and light to all. Beauty like a waterfall." Forgetting the rest of the words to the old folk song, Luna just hummed the melody over and over again. And then, she looked to the moon. And it stared back at her. The imprint. Left to forever haunt her of her errors. When Nightmare Moon had initially escaped, the silhouette had vanished from the moon's surface. However, to further convince the ponies that Luna was no longer a monster, Celestia painted an identical silhouette on the surface so ponies would think the monster was still trapped. It was fairly faint, but it was still there. It didn't work well enough. For now it just served as a reminder to Luna of the monster she had become.

Looking away from the painful memory bringer, she found a wooden bench next to a dimly lit lamppost. A few moths buzzed stupidly towards the light, only to get knocked back by the glass each time. She blew a raspberry and used her magic to open the glass so they might succeed at one thing in her life. With the glass opened and the light finally in range, the moths buzzed to it, only to be burned to death in a flame by the light's intense heat. Luna's eyes went beady as she quickly shut the glass and walked away whistling.

Luna looked around the park. North. South. East. West. There was no pony in sight. A shiver assaulted her spine as the wind crept through her body. It was cold. Not cool. But shiver inducing. Yearning for a warm blanket, Luna realized that for the first time she sort of missed being waited on hoof and hoof by her terrified servants. Luna wished that she could control the weather as well, for her night always seemed to bring coldness. She knew the sun brought warmth, but why did her night have to bring coldness? Her ears picked up the sound of clopping hooves. Luna sat straighter on the bench, trying to hear more. They were a steady beat, a trot. They were approaching. Closer and closer. Heavy and light. Light and heavy. Ever changing. Two ponies? Three? One? Luna could not tell from the changing sound of the clopping hooves as they approached her from the street. Luna slid off the bench and straightened her breastplate, trying to look as imperial as possible without her famed shoes and crown. She licked a hoof and smoothed her horn. The sound of the hooves was now almost deafening, approaching closer and closer. There they were. She couldn't see them, but she could hear them. The pony's hooves were directly in front of her. Or at least from what she heard. And then there was silence. Shifting uncomfortably in the sudden taciturnity, Luna cleared her throat loudly. "Wh-who goes there?" she commanded. No response. Just eerie quiet. The wind howled and whistled as the mosquitos buzzed, but the hooves were gone.

Feeling somewhat scared and uncomfortable in the lonely night, Luna decided to fly back to Canterlot Castle before Celestia and her guards realized she was missing. She sat back on her haunches and took off, right into a branch...

The tornado unraveled yet again. And yet again stepped out the mare that haunted Luna since she broke free of her. Nightmare Moon. "Oh my dear Luna. Its been so long. Have you missed

me?” chuckled the black alicorn manically.

“I cannot miss what I have never cared for,” gritted out Luna.

“But I missed you. That’s why I visited you tonight,” pouted the evil witch.

“Y-you? That was you? But how?” Luna stumbled over her words.

“I cannot divulge my secrets...” teased Nightmare Moon.

Luna turned to run. “Get away from me! I hate you! You witch!”

“But we are one dear Luna. You are me. And I am you,” said the vicious and evil black mare who ruined Luna’s life as her hair flung out and grabbed Luna’s back legs. It snagged tight, and Luna fell violently on her face. Nightmare dragged Luna back towards her. As Luna stopped struggling against the unknown force that enchanted her and her alter-ego’s manes, it released its grip, and she was able to get to her hooves.

“You may be me, but *I* am not *you*,” said Luna, trying to hold her ground.

Nightmare Moon laughed a laugh that made Luna shrink back. “You foal. I am as close as anypony who will ever understand you. Who will know what you have gone through?”

“That is because you cause everything that made me feared!” screamed Luna in retaliation to the evil pony’s lies.

“Me? As I recall, I am you, so you ruined your own life,” teased Nightmare. “Celestia doesn’t care for you. No pony in the castle cares for you. Your subjects are terrified of you, and they always were.”

“You’re wrong,” chocked Luna. “I have friends, and Celestia loves me.” Nightmare laughed, and stepped from where her tornado of dark magic had unraveled, starting to circle Luna. With every step, Luna tensed up until Nightmare Moon was right next to her.

Ignoring Luna’s last comment, Nightmare continued. “My my. Look how much you’ve grown. You’re going to look just like me pretty soon.”

“I am *nothing* like you!” sad Luna as she flared her horn in anger.

“Uh uh uh,” tsked Nightmare as her own horn also began to glow. A seeping magic spread from the larger alicorn and took hold of Luna’s horn, blocking off its magic. Luna struggled, but decided staying still would be the easiest way to stay alive at the moment. *‘If she can halt my magic flow, what else can she do?’* thought Luna. “Do you know how we are similar, Luna? We both had the same hopes. The same dreams. We loved our nights, but no pony else seemed to. And we both wanted the night to last forever, don’t you recall. You cannot place the blame solely on my withers, now can you? Remember when you embraced me and let us become one? You wanted that, but now you stand as scared as a child in front of a ghoul. Why has Celestia poisoned your mind with lies about me? About you. Lest you not forget that, Luna. If you fear me, you are fearing yourself.”

“You took over my mind. Got out of control. I admit I wanted eternal night, but that was only after you poisoned my mind and thoughts and convinced me to steal that magic. I was loved before you. They did not fear me. I was equal to Celestia, but you made me feel as if I was not equal to Celestia. But she thought of me as so. That’s all that matters. You turned me against my own sister you witch! Had you not been present, I could have never what I did...” finished Luna as she lowered to her stomach, hiding her face in her forelegs from the circling mare.

“Oh but you made me present, and you gave me that power. I can not help it if I simply took a little bit of advantage of that, now can I?”

"You're a monster," gritted out Luna.

"Then you are too," sneered back Nightmare Moon. Her mane swirled around her in a fit of magical energy, and before she was whisked away, she whispered something in Luna's ear. "I like your mane." And then she vanished.

Luna rolled into a fetal position and gently rocked herself from the horror that she just experienced. A tear dribbled its way down her cheek and splashed on the ground with a 'plop'. It was audible. Too audible for a single tear. "Luna..." echoed a voice. Her ears perked up. '*Was she back?*' Luna thought to herself. Just the idea of that sent chills up her spine, and she hugged her back legs tighter. "Luna..." the voice echoed again.

"Leave me alone!" she cried out as she sobbed to herself. "Tia! Where are you?" she yelled into the darkness that surrounded her. She looked to the stars for comfort, but the only thing that admitted was another wave of helpless tears. The sky was blank. No stars to be seen. Her beautiful creations burned out all at once by Nightmare Moon. The only thing that remained was a magnified moon that took up most of the sky. And the silhouette.

The voice rang out again. "Tia? Its me, Twilight." It echoed.

Luna's eyes shot open to a bright light. A white mare with soft pink hair was holding a flashlight over her eyes. Luna blinked and fidgeted away from the brightness, but could not escape it in the highly lit, sterile room. The intense light that was the equivalent of a thousand suns stung at her darkness adapted eyes, and she rolled onto her stomach and held the pillow over her head to block it out as much as possible. "Princess, you have to stay still," rang out Twilight's voice as a soft hoof slightly restrained her squirming. The sounds echoed and bounced off of every wall in Luna's shocked eardrums, so she couldn't pinpoint the speaking pony.

When the hoof rolled her onto her back once again, a smiling lavender unicorn greeted her.

"Princess, are you okay?" it questioned. The two ponies slowly faded into one smiling Twilight Sparkle.

"Mhmm," muttered the sleepy princess. It had to be nine a.m. She looked to her left and noticed an IV tube in her left foreleg and with her right foreleg felt her head. There was a bandage.

"What happened?" she asked, too weak to use her Royal Canterlot Voice.

"I was walking home from stargazing and I saw you passed out in Ponyville Park in the early morning. What were you doing here" questioned Twilight to the aching princess of the night.

"Really?" groaned the Princess. Her eyes shot open and she grabbed Twilight by her shoulders. The sun was up. "Does Celestia know!?" she suddenly panicked.

"Princess, I don't think you should be getting up-"

"Does she know!?" rasped the princess. Her gaze shot over to the window. The sun was up.

"She does know..." said the defeated alicorn as she flopped back onto the bed, resulting in a major headache.

"Um, excuse me Luna, but how do you know?" gently asked Twilight as she tucked a blanket over the dark princess of the night.

"The moon is down. She lowered it for me." Luna smiled at the fact that Celestia would do that for her, but then became panicked once again. "She has guards looking for me. They'll find me

and I'll be in so much trouble!" Luna groaned and moved to her side and covered her ears with the pillow once again.

"PRINCESS LUNA!" roared a mighty voice from the doorway of the hospital room. Luna uncovered her face and saw a bright white and bowing hospital ponies. 'Oh no,' she thought. 'Tia, I can exp-

Luna's words were cut off by a white alicorn embracing her in a bear hug. "I was so worried," whispered the older sister.

"You're not mad?" asked Luna. Celestia broke away from the hug and stood tall and regal.

"I would like to have a moment alone with my sister," she announced to nopony in particular, but everypony cleared out of the room just the same. When the door clicked closed, Celestia huffed.

"Luna, why would you do that? You know you are not allowed to leave the castle unsupervised. I'm sorry, but that was very naïve of you. You have a duty to uphold control of Equestria's moon, which means you cannot go off flying without giving notice and without guards."

"But this was my own fault," reasoned Luna, "No pony tried to hurt me."

"This time," corrected Celestia, "You know how these ponies have been acting towards your return. What if you did get hurt? What would I do? I just got you back and then I would lose you," sighed Celestia, wiping her eyes with one of her wings.

"I'm sorry, Tia. I didn't mean to scare you. But how did you find me?" asked Luna.

"Well, I noticed you were gone when the moon was a few minutes late of going down. And we traced your magic traces to here. Actually quite simple." Celestia smiled and nuzzled Luna, "You'll have to try harder next time."

Luna and Celestia giggled together, but the weight of the secret Luna was carrying made her laugh forced. "Tia. May I ask you something?"

"Anything little sister."

"I think Nightmare Moon is in our world."

Celestia chortled at the words. "That's impossible Luna. She's not real anymore. It was just a dream. Come, we must return to Canterlot." Celestia offered her wing to bring Luna home, but Luna shook her head. She knew she was right. And if Celestia didn't believe her, somepony had to.

"Sister, may I stay the day. And talk to Twilight Sparkle?"

"What for?" questioned Celestia.

"She was going to teach me some pony skills, so I fit in better. And you will be in court and busy so..." Luna looked up at her big sister with large pleading eyes.

"I suppose-

"Oh thank you thank you thank you! I won't be long. I'll be back in Canterlot to raise the night."

"Very well sister. I shall see you soon." And with that Celestia teleported back to the castle while Luna stood alone in the hospital room.

"Thank you for meeting with me, Ms. Sparkle," said Luna as she sipped her tea.

"Of course princess," shakily replied Twilight as she poured more tea into Luna's cup.

"Although I was a bit surprised when you called me back in earlier. Do you need to borrow my Star Swirled the Beared costume?" said Twilight excitedly.

Luna had to suppress a laugh at Celestia's student's serious question. "N-no. I am fine,

thank you," Luna snorted into her cup of tea.

"Oh, well. Anything you need ask." Twilight Sparkle's cup was shaking a tad. Luna knew Twilight did not fear her; she was one of the few ponies who respected her.

"Twilight, you need not be nervous. This is an informal visit."

"I-I know Princess... Spike! This place is a mess!" Luna giggled at the student's nerves. "How are you adjusting?"

Luna's teacup slipped out of her telekinetic grip with the thought. "Oh, I'm sorry Princess. Spike! No there's another mess! Spike!" she called.

Pushing away her eye twitch, Luna cast a spell from her infinite stores of knowledge. In a blink the mess was cleaned and the tea and cup were in place on the coffee table between them.

"Oh Princess, you didn't have to—"

"It is all right Twilight Sparkle," said Luna with a wave of her horseshoe-less hoof.

"Please, call me Twilight."

"If you insist. But then you must call *me* Luna," said Luna with a warm smile.

"Of course Pri- Luna. So, um, if you don't mind me asking, what brings you to Ponyville at such an hour?" asked Twilight settling her own cup on the table.

Not wanting to admit it was because of a temper tantrum, Luna racked her brain for a lie. "Oh, you know. Stuff?"

'*Smooth*' she thought with a sarcastic tone.

"Oh, ok," said Twilight skeptically.

"And how do you fare, Twilight," asked Luna in small talk.

"Just wonderful. I'm opening a new fantasy section of the library. It's going to include everything about ghosts and zombies and this new hilarious thing that I personally think should be in the comedy section. They're called humans. They're like monkeys but they can talk. Can you imagine talking monkeys?" laughed Twilight.

"Ha ha, yeah..." said Luna uncomfortably. '*Ghosts.*' She needed to know more. "I would love to see this collection Ms. Sparkle." Twilight gave her a faux death glare. "I mean, Twilight." A smile lit up the purple unicorn's face once again.

"Right this way," she said with an exaggerated bow. Twilight led Luna through a small hallway out of the common room. They passed a small door with a wood slate that showed a stallion and mare that could only lead to the bathroom. A few clattering pots and pans echoed from further beyond the walkway, but Luna continued to follow behind the librarian. Rounding a corner, a bright light came from an arched opening. "Spike! What are you doing?" shrieked Twilight. Hearing the horror in her voice, Luna peeked her head around and had to hold back a laugh. Twilight's dragon assistant was perched on dozens of stacked pots and pans, desperately reaching for something on top of the counter.

"Woah! Woah!!!" he screamed as the pots and pans twisted and turned under him, losing balance. With a final wiggle, the pots gave way, sending a terrified baby dragon falling to the tiled floor.

"Spike!" screamed out Twilight as her friend fell.

"Ahh! Oh, wow. Okay." Twilight peeked her eyes out from behind her hoof to see Spike being carefully lowered to safety in the magic grip of Princess Luna.

“Spike! What were you thinking? You could have hurt the princess!” yelled Twilight at the clumsy dragon.

“Yeah, hurt Luna. I’m alright too, thanks for asking,” sarcastically remarked Spike before his mouth was magically sealed closed with a zipper.

“I’m so sorry Luna.” Twilight’s horn shined as magic spun out of it, fixing up Spike’s mess in the kitchen. With the close of one last drawer, the room was picture perfect yet again.

“It is quite alright Twilight. I have made many a mess in my time,” smiled Luna.

“Yeah! You go sister!” declared Spike as he playfully punched Luna’s chest. Looking down in horror and confusion as a subject physically contacted with her, Luna hoisted her chin high into the air and backed away from his touch, causing the baby dragon to recoil his arm in embarrassment.

“As I was saying... I would like to continue on to your new addition if you would be so kind.”

“Oh, yes, of course!” exclaimed Twilight before turning to Spike with a glare. “And you’re going to march your little dragon butt upstairs and think about what you have done!” reprimanded Twilight.

“March my butt upstairs? How old do you think I am, geez.” Spike huffed out of the room with many grumbles. His clawed feet paddled up the stairs until the princess and Twilight could hear him crawl into his bed located on the floor directly above their heads.

“I’m so sorry Princess. You know how foals are...” tried to apologize Twilight.

Without looking at Celestia’s student, Luna decided to start escorting herself through the hallway. “I cannot say I do,” said Luna before she started off. Twilight quickly cantered up to the royal mare and took the lead.

The hallways opened into the main library area where the front entrance was located. Hundreds of books stood dusted on the mahogany shelves covered in a deep orange polish. Labels for each genre graced the wood on faux gold plaques that shined in the light through the window. Each book was meticulously arranged in alphabetical order by author, lined up neater than stacked plates. Colorful books with detailed binding stood proud, while some duller and more worn books shrank below their counterparts. Luna immediately spotted the gold plaque she was searching for. *Fantasy*.

Far fewer books than Luna had hoped graced the shelves, but a laundry cart filled to the brim held the rest of the bounty. Luna stepped to examine the cart, but as she reached a hoof in to browse, the cart was whisked away by a purple energy. “Sorry Luna. These are preordered.”

“As a princess, I believe I have the right to browse. Who in Equestria anyways preorders that many books?” said Luna in disbelief that she was being denied something.

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to offend you. Its just that these are the books on humans, and they have been put on hold for a... Miss Lyra Heatstrings,” said Twilight, checking the name on the cart that had been scribbled on by Spike. She would have to reprimand him later for writing in marker on a reusable cart.

“O-oh, of course,” Luna scanned the list of available titles that lined the shelves. *Attack of the Zombies, Humans Invade, Ghosts, the Paranormal, and the Unexplainable; perfect!*

Luna brushed her bangs out of her eyes and cleared her throat, causing Twilight to whip round and face her in anticipation. “Ghosts sure are odd, aren’t they quite silly don’t you think?” said

Luna with a half hearted smile, trying to get Twilight talking.

"Oh no. They are very serious," said Twilight, not getting overly excited like Luna had expected.

"Serious? Pray tell, what do you mean, fare Twilight?"

"They have powers that even unicorns cannot understand. At least, not from what I've read."

"And what do they say of ghosts powers?" asked Luna inquisitively.

"Why you sure are interested in ghosts. I would think that you and Celestia would know all about these," said Twilight.

Luna looked away sadly. "Celestia won't allow fantasy books in the library. She says they distract ponies from proper studies."

Twilight walked over to the sad princess. "Oh, I'm sorry Princess. You can borrow this one if you want," said Twilight as she floated *Ghosts, the Paranormal, and the Unexplainable* over to the dark blue alicorn.

"Twilight, I certainly cannot ask you to give me a book from your business. That is not right of a princess to take from her subjects." Twilight only waved a hoof.

"Please. Its not like any other pony would want it. But if you don't mind me asking, why are you so interested?" Twilight asked.

Luna shifted uncomfortably on her hooves at the question. "Its okay Princess," reassured Twilight politely, "If it's a personal matter you do not have to tell me."

Although that statement should have allowed Luna to relax her tense body and carry on with her life, it only made it worse. "No, Twilight. I have to tell somepony."

Twilight suddenly looked scared. "Luna, really, you don't have to. I'm sure Celestia or one of your other friends-" Twilight cut herself off when she saw a tear slip from the eye of the ruler of Equestria. "Oh Luna," she comforted, putting a hoof over the princess in an embrace. For once, Luna did not shy away from the contact.

"I do, Twilight. I have to get this off my chest." Twilight broke from the hug and led Luna by a hoof over to some cushions that Luna could only contemplate was for reading.

Twilight levitated some tea over which Luna politely declined. "I think I've had enough tea since I returned to last my entire life." Seeing the princess was not partaking in the drink, Twilight put her own cup back on the table.

"Where do we begin?" asked twilight, using her magic to tie her mane in a bun, much like a therapist. "What is troubling you?"

"Its not so much ghosts, as is my dreams." Luna laid on her back across her cushion.

"Dreams? About what?"

"It's a bit embarrassing..." said Luna uncomfortably.

"I'm sure its perfectly fine," assured Twilight.

"They're all about... her," finally splurged out the Princess of the Night.

"Oh Princess. I know Pinkie Pie can be a little creepy, but I didn't think she could plague a pony's dreams!"

"No!" shouted out Luna in shock. "It's about... Nightmare Moon." whispered Luna.

"What was that?" asked Twilight, leaning in.

"It's about... Nightmare Moon," repeated Luna.

"Didn't quite catch that," prodded Twilight.

Luna hung her head in shame and defeat, knowing the truth would have to come out. She blew

a raspberry and continued. "I've been dreaming of Nightmare Moon every night lately."

Twilight looked at her quizzically. "Luna, you didn't have to be embarrassed by that. It's natural to have nightmares about traumatic experiences.

"I know, I know," admitted Luna, "But they're so real. She talks as if she's right in front of me," finished Luna with a shudder.

"Well, you and your sister—"

"Celestia," said Luna, cutting off Twilight. She didn't want any pony calling her her sister. That was a family title.

"Um, okay... You and Celestia both have magic beyond belief. So it is no wonder that your dreams would be more powerful and lifelike than regular ponies as well, don't you think?" said Twilight with a hopeful smile.

"I-I suppose so. But that isn't all Twilight. It seems my dream realm has somehow crossed over into reality." Luna bit her lip back, afraid that Twilight would burst out laughing. To her dismay, Twilight tried to stifle a giggle.

"Princess, I'm sorry, * giggles *, but that sounds impossible. Even for you."

Luna could not contain her temper. Her sister's student was laughing at her. "How dare you not disrespect me!" raged Luna as she raised her voice.

Twilight's eyes shot open, and her laugh evaporated immediately. She tried to put an apologetic hoof on Luna's, but the princess moved her bare hoof away. "Princess, I am so sorry. I just have trouble believing things I cannot see."

This brought Luna's attention back and her rage down to cooling temperature. "But I have proof!" she said excitedly.

Twilight cocked her head, causing Luna to roll her eyes. "I can't show you until the night, and judging by the events that transfolded last night, Tia won't be allowing me to make any more unscheduled visits. I shall return tomorrow night at nine p.m. Do not be tardy." And with that, Luna teleported out of the library.

"What am I supposed to be looking at exactly?" asked Twilight, one eye burrowed into the lens of the telescope aimed at the starry night sky. A palace guard stood firmly in his spot behind the two ponies, eyes trained on the field below the hill they rested atop. Princess Luna sat her flank upon a cushion Spike had been forced to carry out to the largest hill in Pontville, and Twilight was studying the sky.

"There," said Luna, pointing a hoof to the sky. "That star right there!"

"There are billions of stars! How can I tell which one you're pointing at?" said an exasperated purple unicorn.

Luna face hoofed. "Give me the telescope," she said, losing her patience. "She immediately found the two stars she Twilight had wasted thirty minutes searching for. "There."

Luna moved her face from the telescope, allowing Twilight to replace her eye to the lens. "Ohhhhh! I see!" said Twilight finally. Luna was able to finally let out a breath of relief.

"Now compare those stars to the ones on the map," said Luna, feeling like she was giving more of a lesson than showing proof. Twilight backed away from the machine and studied a map strewn across the grass. Stars dotted every corner of the plot, covering every inch. If

Twilight wasn't so bright, it would be pretty much impossible for any other pony to read it.

"T-that's not possible. They aren't here!" exclaimed Twilight in shock.

"I know Twilight."

"How did they get there? I didn't get the notice. I check my mail every day!"

"I know Twilight."

"It's Discord! He's back. He's behind this!"

"I kn- Wait, what? No, it was me!" said Luna, becoming very confused by Twilight's nonsense.

"Y-you, Luna? Why? There's no organization, no order, no-" Twilight started to hyperventilate by the unannounced addition that did not fit into a schedule.

"That's what I don't understand!" screamed Luna into the dead nighttime air, startling Twilight a few feet back.

"What do you mean? You don't remember making them?" asked the inquisitive pony.

"No Twilight. I remember. That's the problem!" shouted back Luna, losing her short temper at the poor unicorn. "It was in the dream," she said, hanging her head so that her horn scaped the grass. "Before she came. I made them. And now they're here," admitted Luna, sinking onto her hooves and laying in the grass. Soft grass. Like those of Canterlot Gardens. "That is what brought about my suspicions."

"I've never heard of anything like that. Are you sure?" asked Twilight.

Luna gestured to the stars in the sky. "Of course I'm sure! I made them in my dream, and now they're there! It's connected somehow. That's why I need your help, Twilight Sparkle," said Luna, getting to her hooves.

"You know what we need? To study!" Luna blew a raspberry, and rolled her eyes, not being a fan of studying. That was more of Celestia's thing.

"Um, okay, if that's what it takes," said Luna getting to her hooves. Packing up her equipment in a burst of magic, Twilight hoisted her supplies in her magic and trotted towards her library. Luna followed obediently behind while the Royal Guard kept a fair distance behind.

Unlocking the door to the library quietly, Luna and Twilight stepped in with careful hoofsteps to not wake Spike as the guard stood outside. Twilight settled herself on one of the cushions yet again, as did Luna. "So, what happened?"

Luna was getting tired of the constant questions, but obliged. "I was painting the sky, and I took off some of my hair, and it floated up into the sky creating a star. Then I did it again. And when I went to night court that night, some astronomers complained about the new stars."

"That seems very off," mumbled Twilight. She rose from her seat and pondered through the library, pulling out countless books and then tossing them on the floor in frustration. This continued for a few minutes until she finally wore a triumphant smile.

"Oh my, I think I know exactly what happened!" squeaked Twilight as she grabbed a book with her magic. It floated over and flipped to a page. "*An alicorn's power is unlike any others. When in dren sleep, they have the power to open a portal from their mind, realizing what they are visualizing into the real world,*" read Twilight from the random book.

Puzzled and amazed that the answer was so simple, Luna stood to bid the unicorn adieu.

"T-thank you so much, Twilight. Really. That was very helpful. I'll be more careful next time," promised the Princess of the Night.

"No problem Princess, I was happy to help," smiled back Twilight, stifling a yawn.

“Oh I’m sorry Twilight. You have been up quite a while helping me. I thank you for your time and effort, and bid you a good night.” Luna smiled warmly at the pony and teleported away, back to the safety and reassurance of her own quarters back in the castle.

The Pegasus guard that accompanied her unhitched the chariot from his back. Luna, however, was already off. As soon as she reached Canterlot Castle, she bolted from the supervision of the minion and straight to the Canterlot Gardens. Looking around dazed and confused from the changes in altitude, the guard started to quiver. *‘Oh no. Celestia is going to banish me if I lose Princess Luna!’* He immediately broke into a gallop to search the grounds.

Luna walked through the gardens as she so often did. She passed the sleeping hummingbirds and the dozing squirrels as she explored. She always yearned for their to be more fuzzy and cute nocturnal animals, but she supposed that bats would have to do for the moment.

The garden was mapped out through a series of secret paths that either led in circles, or brought a pony into the damning labyrinth. But if one knew them from years of wandering, especially one dark blue alicorn, they could find themselves in a hidden oasis, surrounded by waterfalls and daisies and critters. Sure, there were flowers and animals everywhere else. But this place was special to Luna. The frogs croaked even late into her night. A few birds tweeted through the darkness. The air was still and cool, yet comfy and warm at the same time. Multiple waterfalls splayed into a crystal pool. Luna was sure that if it was day out, she would have seen a rainbow sparkling in front of each individual fall. Truth be told, Luna saw few rainbows in her everlasting lifetime. Maybe one or two, tops. Rainbows don’t shine through the night. A lot of things didn’t shine through the night. A filly’s smile was never apparent. The colors of a flower did not radiate as nicely. Although Luna hated to admit, even to herself, she was envious of Celestia. Not because of the whole *everypony likes her better and her sun and day*; but more because she got to experience things in the light. In the pitch-black sterile darkness that surrounded Luna, she couldn’t even identify a tulip from a rose. Everything was black. Eerie. *Peaceful. Mine. Perfect.* It was what she created, and Luna was more than happy to bask in it. She breathed a heavy breath, pulling in the cool night air that stung her nostrils with every breath. The scents of flowers and water and trees flooded in like a tsunami. If she couldn’t see them, at least she could smell them. In a faraway tree, a monkey screeched loudly, followed by the calls of many more. Branches broke and vines were swinging, and overhead passed many an ape moving to a new sleeping spot. Probably having been scared by one of the panthers. When the gardens had first been installed, Celestia had insisted that only cute, furry, and harmless creatures occupy its land. But Luna had protested and asserted that predators were needed to keep balance. She was correct and won that argument, but that was only an excuse to be able to have the carnivores.

The champions of the night. They stalk their prey, using the cover of her glorious darkness to feast and thrive and feed their families. Without her night, they may not survive. She was helping something. It wasn’t ponies, but it was something.

A swarm of bats rushed past her muzzle, their wings tickling her snout. Most ponies would stumble back in fear, but Luna only embraced the animals as they circled around her. Getting really close to the ground, they spiraled around her in a flurry of wings and gloom that brought

her a sense of comfort that screamed she belonged. Their wings created a ferocious breeze that sent a shiver from her dock to her forelock. Harnessing a simple spell, she vacuumed the bats towards her. At first they fight the light of magic and the restraint, but then they embrace their princess, swarming towards her and engulfing her body. Their bodies morphed together for the time being in a magical bind, and as the last bat fell into place, Luna wore a dark shroud, the hood pulled to her horn. Beneath her cloak she was truly alone. The night was hers. No supervision. No guards. No Celestia.

A tap on her barrel. Luna spun around at a break neck speed, turning to face the culprit who had not only stalked her, but now knew of her only hideaway. The shock startled the cloak of bats away, sending Luna into an angry mood already. Shuddering from the new cold chill, she stared down at a white Pegasus guard kneeled before her, forelegs crossed over his head for protection from the oncoming Princess' wrath. "How dare thou disturb thy Princess in her own personal time!" raged Luna at the terrified pony.

"I-I'm sorry Princess," stammered the still kneeling pony, "But Celestia said I cannot let you out of my sight," he whispered.

Growing more infuriated, Luna turned away from the white pony. "And why does she think I need a foal sitter!? I have been alive forever. I know how to handle myself on my own grounds!" "I'm sorry Princess. I know you can. I was just following orders," he said. He reached one of his hooves to a grove in his helmet and peeled it off, placing it behind Luna. As he took it off, rushes of blue crept down his body, sinking down into his hooves and engulfing him in a new body. Hearing the clatter of the metal behind her, Luna turned to face the new stallion. The transformation took several seconds, so she was still able to witness it as he took off his armor. With his helmet off came his natural coat and mane. Dark blue fur, though not nearly as dark as hers, now made up his body, and a short mane of navy blue blew in the wind around him. Ripping off the breastplate that adorned his chest, he shrunk a tad, losing the molded build of all other guards. He was slimmer and smaller, but not by much. His chin was chiseled and his eyes were bright and large.

"I shall resign immediately Your Majesty." Luna was taken aback by his comment, and realized where he was placing his armor: at her feet.

She kicked it back towards him. "There will be no need for that-" she blanked, not knowing his name.

"Notte, Your Majesty." The pony stumbled through his words, not believing what he had just heard. His job was safe?

"Notte," repeated Luna, the name rolling off her tongue. It was so familiar, but she couldn't place a hoof on it. "I say, does thou name contain a hidden meaning?" asked the perplexed Princess.

"Um yes Your Royal Majesty. It means night. " The pony never stood.

"Please, Notte, stand." The pony did as told and raised to his hooves, but his gaze was glued to the ground. "Thou parents were fans of the nights I comprehend?" Luna knew she wasn't supposed to associate with the help, but if a pony enjoyed her nights, she couldn't help but try and fish out complements.

"Sadly not Your Majesty. It is an adopted name." He looked up at her, hoping she would not take offense to him trading his name.

"And your original name?" she asked with an emotionless face.

'I'm dead. She's going to make me change my name, then banish me. Then make me change my name again, bring me back to see if she like it, then banish me again,' he fretted to himself. With an embarrassed sigh, he spoke. "Sunny," he said.

Luna could barely hold back a laugh. *'What a wildly inappropriate name for his color.'* But, nonetheless, she was joyous that a pony had enjoyed her nights so much that he would legally change something about himself to be closer to it.

Unable to control herself, Luna let out a giggle/snort. "I must say, I like Notte better."

He smiled at the princess for the first time. "Thank you princess."

An awkward silence surrounded them, and he pawed a hoof at the ground and folded his wings. Luna was plagued with a thought that wasn't wildly unreasonable, but might cause a few problems either way. "Say, Sir Notte, do thou work in Celestia's realm?"

"Yes, Your Grace."

"Yes. But to no insult to you Princess! When I applied, you weren't... um... you know—"

"Back." Luna finished, looking away full of sorrow.

"Yes, Princess. But as soon as you were back to doing the nights, I applied to work as your guard. But, I was declined."

"You don't say." Luna's mind started reeling. This pony was amusing her. She had to admit she appreciated the compliments. And, he wasn't crying yet. That's was good. Her decision was made.

"If you wish, I could put in a request to transfer you to my personal guard." The blue pegasus' jaw hit the ground. "I-I-I-I." He couldn't get a word out as he stammered through his thoughts. "YES!" he screamed, louder than Luna could muster in her Royal Canterlot Voice, forcing her to take a step back from the force.

"Oh, my Majesty, I am so sorry," he said, reverting back into his bow.

Luna chuckled in a way that reminded of her of seeing Celestia and Twilight Sparkle together. But she would not allow herself to be any less professional as a princess as Celestia so often did. Embarrassing the crown with her foolish ways of caring for everything personally. Sometimes it was better to not give a clop. "Thou are welcome. But, thou must learn to control thyself if thou wishes to serve us- I mean me." Luna mentally slapped herself for reverting back to the royal we. Although she was still speaking in the language of a thousand years ago, so technically she deserved two slaps. "Thou must compose thyself with grace and humility, with professionalism and enthusiasm. Can I trust that thou can handle he task?" asked the Princess of the Night, her mane billowing with its myriad of stars.

The dark blue Pegasus pony nodded his head furiously, a large smile wrapped around his face. "Thankyouthnakyouthankyou- I mean, thank you your Highness. I shan't disappoint," he said bowing for the zillionth time.

Luna blew her bangs out of her face and started off away from the pony before stopping and looking back. "Thou shall meet in the throne room tomorrow night at one a.m."

"That seems mighty late, Your Majesty—"

"I suggest you sleep during the day to prepare your body. The only light you will see from now on will be that of my moon. If you are to serve with me, you must be awake with me," she concluded, and walked away, leaving an eager and somewhat nervous pony behind her.

"Phew. I'm glad that's taken care of," Luna whispered quietly to herself, more than

pleased that she gained more ponies for the nighttime shift. And one that wanted it nonetheless. She looked to the sky with a yawn. “Ahhhhh,” she yawned, “How long have I been gone?” She bid adieu to her oasis for the moment and summoned a teleportation spell, bringing her to her chambers once again.

She glanced at the large grandpony clock that stood proud and tall. A crescent moon hung from the ticker, and when Luna was a filly she remembered watching it swing back and forth, back and forth. Mesmerizing. Hypnotizing.

She shook her head, freeing her mind from its sorcery. Two hours until the moon rose. Not enough time for a nap. Not enough time to do anything in particular. Maybe read. *Boring*. Her eyes drifted to her desk, and she couldn’t resist. She scattered the papers and documents, surfacing her drawing. It was perfect. Not much more to be added. Nightmare Moon was falling like the wicked pony she was, and Luna was succeeding at something for once. It was glorious.

Seeing there wasn’t much to do, as always, Luna sifted through the friendship reports Twilight Sparkle sent Princess Celestia. Celestia was always giving them to Luna after she read them in hopes that Luna would learn a thing or two about being more friendly and social. All it had done was teach Luna things she was bad at recreating. ‘*Daring Do?*’ she read. *Rainbow Dash? Well, if Rainbow Dash likes it, it has to be good.* Luna reached some of her magic through the castle to the library. Being bored all night did have its benefits, and now Luna was able to stretch her magic out all over the castle. She reached around the shelves, her eyes closed to visualize where her magic was.

Danky Dungeons, Dares and Truths, Daring Do! She grabbed the book and teleported it to her feet. Cracking it open, the stench of rotten wood and abandonment flooded her nostrils. *Seem Canterlot ponies don’t have time for fiction.*

Wincing at the thought of reading, she forced her eyes to clamp down and analyze the words. And she was hooked.

“Come on Daring! You gotta get out of there!” Luna couldn’t tear her eyes away. Was Alezodo going to keep the sapphire stone? Would Daring be able to escape her bounds and get her treasure? Would- *Ring Ring Ring*.

Her internal alarm buzzed in her head, alerting her that the time had come to lower the moon and give way for Celestia’s day.

She stepped onto her balcony and yawned, having been awake for quite a while. She had barely gotten any sleep the day before, trying to save herself from another nightmare. She had succeeded, but not before sending herself into sleep deprivation. With another large yawn and sip from the coffee cup that had been placed on her nightstand from earlier in the evening, she vacuumed the stars back into her being, feeling her mane absorb their energy and rejuvenate itself, which, before, was starting to go limp and light blue like common pony hair. Probably from the lack of sleep. One by one, the stars swirled back into her soul, rejuvenating her body, but not taking away the heaviness in her eyes. She couldn’t ignore it anymore. She had to sleep.

"My, my back so soon?" questioned the black mare.

"Get away from me," Luna hissed through clenched teeth as the black alicorn circled her once again.

Nightmare only laughed at the hostility. "You'll have to try harder than that, Luna. Wouldn't want Celestia to come help you would you?" Luna looked confused at the mare, which only exchanged a maniacal grin. Her face contorted and twisted, contracting and stretching. A light seemed to come from beneath her fur, and her horn began to shrink. Her eyes glowed and rolled into her skull. It was disgusting. Luna looked away from the horrifying feat, only to have her head snap back to where the other mare once stood at the voice that was all too familiar. "Tia! Tia!" called Luna's voice. On top of Nightmare Moon's pitch black frame was Luna's face and her voice, crying out for her sister. Luna smiled an evil smile back at the real Luna, before resorting back to Nightmare Moon's face.

"You monster!" yelled Luna as she lurched forward to pierce Nightmare's heart. With a quick dash, Nightmare Moon was behind Luna laughing. Luna fell into the vacant space and stumbled forward before regaining her footing. Luna spun around so fast it almost gave her whiplash, and she tried to strike again. This time, her navy blue horn clashed with a steel black one, both struggling at the force of the other. While Luna's face was contorted in pain from the pressure, Nightmare Moon looked bored at the physical quarrel. Mustering the rest of her possible strength, Luna lit the tip of her horn. Little sparks emulated, and suddenly a blast erupted that threw Nightmare moon skidding on her backside ten feet away. Defeated for the moment, Luna teleported to stand over her tormentor of a thousand years. Nightmare just cackled under her, although it could easily be her certain death. Through her snarled laughter, Nightmare levitated her helmet off. Her piercing dragon eyes struck through Luna, freezing her momentarily. Luna shook off the paralyzed feeling and pinned Nightmare Moon's forelegs with her own.

Luna lowered her horn onto Nightmare's heart, but hesitated for a reason she could not understand. The sinful black alicorn only cackled more. "What's the matter Woonna? Can't you kill me?" Before Luna could drive her horn into the foul being, Nightmare's sword like unicorn horn emulated the same spark from before, sending Luna flying ten feet back. She appeared on top of the young blue alicorn. "Because I could kill you in a second," whispered Nightmare into the now pinned victim's ear.

"Please don't," whispered Luna as she held back tears.

"Please," chuckled Nightmare. Luna was sure she would be another murdered victim at the hooves of the malicious mare, but what slipped from Nightmare Moon's lips she couldn't believe. "I could never."

"W-what?" scoffed Luna, but immediately regretted her response for fear that it may change Nightmare moon's mind.

"I can't kill you. I am you," Nightmare Moon lowered her head and stepped off of Princess Luna. "If I killed you here, I could easily take over your body once again and bring eternal night. If purged by the Elements, I would die, and Princess Luna and Nightmare Moon would be gone forever. And if I banished Celestia and ruled, nopony would love me. I would spend the rest of my life watching ponies cower at the sight of me and crying when I addressed

them. They would never accept me,” Nightmare Moon said. She sat on her haunches and pulled off the rest of her armor. Luna could help but notice that she was actually quite lovely like Celestia. Her coat was shiny and clean and her mane flew with the magical wind of Luna’s. It was more lavender than Luna’s, and not as transparent. Though she hated herself for it, Luna actually felt some sympathy for the vile horse. “So what’s the point?”

Celestia had taught her better than to laugh in the face of an ailing pony. Even if this pony had ruined her life and gotten her banished to her to the moon for 1000 years. Luna cautiously made her way to the alicorn’s side. Seeing that the mare would not harm her, Luna approached a little closer. When she reached her side, she saw that the wicked mare of darkness was crying. Nightmare Moon, crying. Seeing how the past events had an emotional toll on the mare, Luna had to admit that she felt the same way. “Tell me about it,” said Luna as she plopped down next to her dark alter ego. “That’s how it’s been since I returned. Everypony is scared of me. They hate me. In court, they accused me of being you.”

Nightmare Moon’s eyes turned to Luna, seething with anger that was not present moments ago. Luna scuttled backwards to escape the fury as the dark mare’s eyes burned a bright red. “What is so bad about me?”

“N-Nothing. I mean, you have been associated with being-“

“Evil,” finished Nightmare Moon, losing the sudden outburst of anger. “I have never done anything evil. I had a passion, a need. And I acted. I never harmed anypony. I had a way figured out of how to keep plants healthy through the night. I knew how to make the ponies thrive. I never planned to kill them or make them unhappy.” A few tears spilled down the black mare’s cheek as she continued. “I just wanted to be loved. We deserved it.”

“I know Nightmare Moon. They were my dreams too. I was the one who wanted those things, but you were more powerful. I must admit I don’t know much about the events that trans folded after you took over. I know from what Celestia has told me. I’m sorry for what happened. I know now that we were wrong. It was selfish of us to try and take away the day.”

“Please, call me Moon. It makes me seem less... vile. I just wanted to help you. I know how much you wanted them to appreciate you. And then I wanted that too. And I got out of control, and I apologize,” said a very out of character ‘Moon’.

“You’re not evil,” said Luna. “We have just been taught to believe you are so. This is the first time I have associated with you. When you took over me, I was buried so deep beneath you that I pretty much didn’t exist anymore. So I never really knew you’re actions.” Concluded Luna.

“I admit, I didn’t paint a very good picture of us. I did some things... I regret.” Nightmare Moon sighed heavily, and stared off into the night.

“We mustn’t dwell on the past right now. And you don’t seem like a bad pony to me,” comforted Luna to Nightmare Moon.

“Thank you Luna.”

“But I don’t understand this very much. How can you be me? I am here, and so are you? So there are two of me?” asked Luna.

“Its confusing. See when I started influencing your mind, the amount of magic you stole was supposed to give you the power to stand up to Celestia. But instead we took too much and I gained control of your motor functions, and I may have made a few... personal touches to your body.” Nightmare Moon looked at the grass that she had killed with the touch of her hooves. “I

never wanted to be a monster. And my name wasn't supposed to be Nightmare Moon. It was supposed to be Night Mare Moon. As in Mare of the Night. But I guess Equestria decided it would be a nice pun or something because I was scary." Nightmare Moon hung her armor free head in personal defeat.

"So, you're like my alter ego, but you've separated from my brain entirely?" questioned a skeptical Luna.

Nightmare Moon nodded solemnly. "Some what. Yes, the elements of harmony eliminated my magic from you're body, but that just trapped me inside you. So my thoughts and part of my magic are trapped in your subconscious. I'm... I'm sorry Luna. You made a monster." Nightmare wiped a tear with her jet black wing.

Luna struggled for words. She wasn't actually purged of the monster she once was? "But... you don't seem like a monster," admitted Luna to the weeping villain.

The mare chuckled good-heartedly. "Thank you."

"So... what do you do in here? I still can't believe I literally have a pony living in my head," chuckled Luna forcedly at the confusing situation.

"I apologize, it is a lot to take in. Well I see through your eyes. I live your life without words. I just watch. Like a play or something."

"That's awful!" said Luna. She thought of what Twilight would do. Read. Ick. Then she thought of Pinkie Pie. She would want to have some fun. "Would you like to play a game?" suggested to the mare that took over her and tried to banish her sister.

"A... what?" stammered the distraught mare.

"A game," repeated Luna at the mare's ignorance.

"We did not have 'games' in my time. We have been gone for a thousand years. We are not sure we understand." said Nightmare Moon in old Equestrian.

Luna chuckled. "Yes we did. You just weren't there for the good times," said Luna, pawing the ground at the thought of what she had endured.

"We play a game where we throw a circular disk, and then we shoot it with our magic. Tia- I mean Celestia and I used to play it in the gardens before she got so busy." Luna immediately regretted bringing up Celestia, for she noticed a sudden twinge in the black alicorn that no longer looked like the fiendish monster Luna once was.

"Sounds rather trivial for a princess," gruffed Nightmare.

"We- I mean / admit it is far outdated for a pony of my age and stature, but it might get you back on your hooves?" said Luna, starting to sound more like the encouraging Celestia than the uptight Luna.

"Why are you doing this?" asked Nightmare Moon. "I've seen how you interact with other ponies. Very professional and uptight might I add."

"I am not uptight!" retorted Luna. "You're starting to sound like Ms. Sparkle."

Nightmare's ears perked up, and she looked at Luna. "Twilight Sparkle? Element of Magic?"

"Indeed. She was not very fond of my pony skills either. But she helped me realize how my dreams and reality are related, so I owe her."

"You must tell me of that one time," pleaded Nightmare Moon.

Luna's horn glowed, and two disks materialized out of thin air. They were flat yet circular,

and shined with a great silver sparkle. Luna hoisted her's up, and watched it spin and cut through the air. When it reached a good height, she created a laser beam from her horn and shot it down, breaking it into a million fine pieces.

The glass sprinkled down in a flurry of crystals lighting up in front of their eyes. Nightmare's eyes widened and she oohed at the sight.

Luna looked back at her evil counter part. "Care to give it a go?"

Nightmare Moon looked uneasy and unwilling for a brief moment, but shook her head and got to her hooves. "I'm not sure I know how," quivered the black queen.

She took a plate in her mac and flung it extremely high in the air. Firing a purple beam, she overshot and missed the target by a hundred feet. Her blood boiled as she screamed, "This game is rigged!"

Luna was taken back by the ferocity in the pony and backed up a few steps. "Its okay Moon. You just need practice. Here, watch." Luna created another disk and flung it in the air, shooting it down promptly.

Nightmare Moon sat on her haunches with her jaw agape. Shaking the thoughts of envy away, she tried again with a newly formed disk, and only missed by a small margin. By the fourth try, she was jumping like a little school filly. "I did it!" she yipped.

A loud ringer sounded. Nightmare and Luna looked around curiously at the sound, and after a few seconds, their faces both wore a look of recognition. "Night fall," they said at the same time.

They both chuckled a little. Luna liked that one pony actually understood her responsibility as nighttime ruler, and that there was actually a lot of effort that went into every night. She liked that somepony actually understood how she felt, instead of pretending like she did.

Nightmare nodded at Luna. "I'm glad we had this time," said Luna to the once feared mare.

"Thank you for trusting me," said Nightmare Moon with a warm smile. "I will see you soon, Princess of the Night."

"Likewise," smiled back Luna, leaving her friend for the night.

The stars did not dance that night. Thick, grey clouds blocked most of them out. None could be seen, even by her keen eye. '*What's the point of painting them in on nights like this?*' thought Luna angrily. It was such a hassle to not even have them seen.

Thinking back, she distinctly remembered why she still put them in. It had been before her banishment. It had been a rainy night after Luna raised the moon.

"Is the moon up?" asked Celestia, he pink mane tied in a pony tail as she laid on Luna's bed, supervising her.

"Gosh! Yes Tia. Its like, my only job!" yelled Luna, growing gradually more frustrated for some reason in the past few weeks.

"And the stars?"

"Um, no," said Luna in with a snarky voice.

"Luna! Don't use that tone!" reprimanded the older sister. "Why didn't you put the stars in? That is also part of your duty."

Luna fluttered over to her bed, closing the balcony doors from the rain with her magic. She flopped on her back next to Celestia. "Because it's raining. The clouds are covering it." Luna gestured a hoof towards the storm outside. Celestia, however, wore a face of extreme anger and disappointment.

"Luna! I am very disappointed in you! This is your duty, and seen or not, you must complete it. You can not afford to be lazy, dear sister," lectured Celestia.

"But-," tried to reason Luna.

"And the storm is only over Canterlot. What if somepony adventuring somewhere looked to your stars for guidance but was greeted with a blank sky!? They would die because of your foolishness."

Luna felt tears bubble in her eyes at her sister's words. "I'm sorry Tia... I'll fix it, I promise."

Celestia rose to her hooves and spread her swan like wings. She floated off the rich purple sheets of Luna's bed and on to the ornate rug. Reaching the door, she looked back over her withers. "Good," she said, and sauntered out of the room, leaving Luna sobbing on the ground as swirls of cosmos and stars flooded from her stubby horn and out an open window.

Snapping out of her memory, Luna felt something she had been feeling a lot lately. Lonely. Her eyes searched through her deserted room. She did not own a pet to keep her company as Celestia did with Philomena. Not that she would want one of those damned birds. Many a time had that foul fowl pranked her or scared the bejeezus out of her. And any prank Luna tried in retaliation was met with a harsh lecture from Celestia who refused to believe that the vile bird was pure evil.

A good night's sleep for once had done her weary eyes well, and Luna floated her attire to her body. Her horseshoes squeezed on to her hooves and sparkled with the shine of all the stars. They were custom fitted to her hooves, and were designed to grant comfort as Luna paced down the marble hallways as she so often did in the emptiness of the night. She levitated her crown onto her head. Its cool embrace on her poll was like a foal's teddy bear to her, reminding her of her purpose and her duty. She used a hoof to pull her bangs out from under the crown, her bangs being the only pony hair on her head not filled with magic.

Before returning her hoof to its natural place on the ground, she balanced on her three legs and examined it for a second. She rarely used her hooves anymore. Magic was way easier; she could do anything she wanted with ease. *'How do Earth ponies and pegasi even survive?'* thought Luna. She flapped her wings and examined them as her hoof reconnected with the floor. Magic and the gift of flight. It was good to be her. Or was it?

Luna moved to her desk by the balcony. The moon shined through the thick cloud layer, but the stars were obscured. As she suspected. But she had a duty to uphold and she was going to do it. She immediately found the drawing she had slaved over. Her masterpiece. Her closure. Her lie.

After her conversation with- herself, she couldn't help but feel wrong for what she had done. She knew in her mind she shouldn't feel sympathy for the mare who had caused so much chaos. But her heart told her that she was a different mare than she had been made out to be.

Luna couldn't hate herself, right? Luna knew that she was not a bad pony herself, so that could only mean that Nightmare Moon was not a bad pony either. If they were the same, which they were, then Luna always had some control, right? And Luna loved her little ponies. She would never hurt them. And from what she had learned the previous day, Nightmare Moon wouldn't hurt them either. She was a nice pony, dare Luna say it.

She wasn't putting up a fight when they had talked. She seemed, changed. And if nopony was going to see that, maybe Luna would make them. But right now, all Luna could think about was that a pony was trapped watching the world through another pony's eyes. Everything anypony said to Luna, anything Luna said to anypony in response, Nightmare would have to watch. If she disagreed or had advice or just needed somepony to talk to, she was trapped watching, with no way to communicate. Except through Luna's dreams. Her one escape.

Or maybe there was another way. Luna crossed to her mirror. She studied her reflection. Her sleek, trimmed figure. Her glorious wings that made flamingos jealous. Shiny long horn that held secrets to the entire world. And a flicker of green crossed her eyes. A... catlike reflection took over for a split second, and had Luna not been closely watching herself, she wouldn't have noticed. But that flicker was there. She was there. And Luna wasn't scared. For once she wasn't scared.

Her horn lit up like a tree on Hearth's Warming Eve. Her reflection swirled and contorted. A dark ink flooded the glass, splotting the mirror surface. When the ink started to sink back into the corners, a black unicorn head with dragon eyes of green stared back at her, instead of Celestia's usual copy. But this was a far more complicated spell than usual. Instead of a copy, Luna had reached into her brain and pulled out part of Nightmare Moon's being, placing it in the mirror momentarily. She was trapped there for now, and she was bound to be weaker in the real world. But she was here. Free to speak out loud and see what she could through her own eyes. Though she was trapped behind the wall of glass, she was temporarily free, and Luna felt safe.

Terrified, the black alicorn mare looked around viciously, feeling hooves up to the glass that contained her. Her armor was back on now, her horseshoes clinking against the glass loudly. "W-where am I?" she stuttered, not being able to catch her breath.

"You're outside!" Luna responded gleefully. "Well, not outside outside, but pretty close."

Nightmare Moon did not look pleasant. She looked as if she was seething with anger.

"What is this? Let me out!" she moved her head back and forth from behind, trying to escape.

"Woah, woah. I'm sorry. You can go back in my mind if you want," Luna suggested.

Nightmare's face drained of blood. "N-no, I am quite happy here. Just a bit, claustrophobic, that's all." She repositioned her helmet on her head. "How do you fare Luna?"

"I fare well Moon. But this is for you." Luna beamed happily at the skeptical mare.

"What do thy mean?" she questioned cautiously, looking around her glass prison.

"Well, I thought you could stay here sometimes. And go back in my mind when I walk around, so you won't miss anything. This way, you can talk and stuff." Luna could barely contain her excitement as she revealed the good news. The black mare behind the glass put on a forced smile. It fooled Luna.

"Perfect! That is so great, thank you Princess Luna," she faltered.

Luna's smile evaporated, and a look of concern shrouded her once shining smile.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s just, I am weak here.” Nightmare looked away from Luna’s sad gaze.

“O-Oh,” she stuttered, forcing a smile back on. “Well, that’s ok. Its only for a few minutes.”

Nightmare Moon smiled at the filly. “Splendid. Is there anything you wish to converse on?” the mare said with an inquisitive smile.

“U-um...” Luna thought of showing her the new constellation. But then she realized something. This was not a mare she wanted to fight. She wanted to change this mare. She was not the pony she believed she was when she had been told the stories of what she had become. She was not the wicked mare that had tried to kill everypony. She was a good-hearted mare who just wanted to be loved. Just like Luna. Luna peered over her withers over to her desk. She focused her magic on the picture and floated it over to her. Examining it in front of her, she threw it to the trash bin, not being able to bare the sight that she had drawn something so stereotypical about herself.

“Was that your new constellation?” asked the mare with a solemn and slightly insulted look.

Luna face hoofed at remembering that Nightmare had seen everything Luna had done since she returned. *“You dodo! She saw you draw that!”*

But Luna was able to smile again. “Not anymore.” Luna galloped over to her desk, enchanting her hooves so that they didn’t make a sound as her metal shoes collided with the floor. Grabbing a quill and paper in her teeth, she galloped back over to the vanity. Laying the paper in front of her, she floated the quill and started her work. Dots covered the pictures, and lines swirled in patterns unimaginable. They twisted and turned and looped and created. Nightmare tried to catch a peek, but was blocked by Luna’s head bent over the paper in determination. After several minutes of focused drawing, Luna raised her head with a large smile.

“What? What is it?” questioned the mare with the speckled mane.

“It’s us,” she said gleefully. Raising the image to the mirror, a smile so big graced the black alicorn’s lips that Luna couldn’t help but laugh. She had never seen a pony smile so wide. “Its beautiful. Thank you so much Luna.”

“It’s nothing, It’s just accurate.”

Dots and swirls depicted a constellation different in everyway from the previous insult of a picture. Two mares, one small, and one large, where galloping. Their gorgeous manes smudged and gradually faded into the rest of the stars, painting the skies as they galloped. Side by side, they smiled and laughed, their horns pointed to the sky, shooting out magic to shoot down tiny plates. It was trivial and didn’t pertain in the least bit of the rest of Equestria, but it was Luna’s gift to herself. Some closure.

“I cannot thank the enough beautiful Luna,” warmly smiled Nightmare Moon. No teeth of razors and steel glared at Luna. Pearly whites of grace and royalty beamed, and her eyes were soft and caring, not piercing and cold. She was not the mare she was made out to be, and Luna could not help but feel sorry for the reputation she had gained in her short reign.

“It is no proble-“

‘Knock Knock Knock.’ Luna’s body froze, as did Nightmare Moon, and thinking quickly,

Luna cast the reverse spell and swiftly sucked Nightmare out of the mirror, transporting her back into her mind.

The door creaked open, and a white head with a jet-black forelock peeked into the room. "Excuse me Your Highness, b-but court has assembled for the night."

Moonbeam. The mare was less terrified today as she was before. Probably from the day off between Luna's meltdown and now. But nonetheless, she carried herself taller and presented what she needed done, and the mare earned a slight bit of respect from Equestria's princess.

"Excellent." Luna strutted over to the door and joined her assistant who sadly still flinched at the sight of Luna's horn glowing, even just to close the door.

The hours ticked by. Every case was so menial. Crops this. Weather that. Stars everything! Luna was about to hoof her eyes out.

But as the clock struck nine, she was finally able to straighten her ailing back and let a small smile creep onto her face. The tail of the last pony for the moment disappeared behind the door, and Moonbeam finished scribbling the notes for the case. And then the door creaked open as it so often did. And the frightened face of a pony peeked into the room, as it so often did. But this one was special. Luna had been waiting for this pony in particular.

He quickly scurried into the room and fell in front of her in a bow, which she dismissed with a nod of her regal head. "Your Majesty. It's an honor," said the pony of the hour.

"Before I may induct you, Notte, I must conduct a background check." Luan snickered to herself. Her 'background' usually consisted of trying to fish out compliments.

"Anything, Princess."

"Why do thou want to work under my realm?" she questioned, shooting Moonbeam a look to see if she was taking notes. Like always, she was.

Stumbling for an answer that wouldn't get him banished, Notte finally spoke up, blowing his dark blue mane out of his eyes. "I have appreciated your nights since I was little." Luna's heart swooned a little. "I would study the stars and your meteor showers and be awestruck. So, I decided that if you ever returned in my lifetime, I would devote my time to serving you."

"Thank you," she said, trying to hide her blush. She still couldn't get over the fact that a pony had *wanted* to work for her. Every other pony who worked under her was picked at random out of those who applied to serve Celestia.

"Under any circumstances, would thy protect and honor thy Princess of the Night?"

He looked at her. Through her. Into her ageless soul. And into her heart. "I would do anything," he said surely and calmly.

"Congratulations, Notte. I hereby dub you part of my personal nighttime realm guard. You are to be my personal guard on excursions and garden voyages, when, and only when, I ask for your company. Do thou agree?" Luna held back the smile on her lips as the pony shook his head yes faster than she had ever seen a pony shake their head.

"Thank you so much Princess Luna! I will not let you down!" He bowed and turned to leave.

He was halted by a strong feminine voice. "Wait, you will need this."

Just as she materialized the disks, Luna spun her magic into an array of metal that peeled out of the sky. From where, even she didn't know. Unicorn magic was very complicated, and she often found herself bored to death when forced by Celestia to study their history. Like she didn't know it already.

The sheets of metal spun and colored and twisted and broke. They reconnected, sucked color off of tapestries, and curled together in a feature presentation of alicorn magic in front of a guard.

A purple helmet emerged first from the flurry of sparkles. A fin of bat wing adorned the crest, a richer and darker color than the helmet itself. It wrapped down along a pony's neck, laced with diamonds all the way down. Four horseshoes appeared as well, shining with the luster of Luna's moon. A breastplate of steel materialized, built to wrap around the soldier's chest, all the way to his withers, adorned with a piercing serpent's eye situated in the center. Formal garments covered that were meant to cover the back flashed out. Luna smiled as Notte smirked at the fru-fruiness of said apparel for his flank, but she figured she should have some sort of conversation started with all her new guards. All though usually it just made them dislike her more. Luna smirked the thought away and levitated Notte's uniform before him before softly placing it on the ground. She winced at the thought of what would now happen.

And she did. Notte threw on the armor as fast and unprofessionally as he could, and in an instance, his body was being engulfed in a mud brown fur. His ears became tattered and disfigured, and his once noble wings morphed into hideous bat appendages. His tail became short and awfully styled, and his once soft eyes, were replaced with piercing yellow dragon eyes.

Luna hated the form of her lunar guards. Celestia had donned them as punishment for her crimes as Nightmare Moon. Luna had protested, but Celestia had reminded her of hat she had done, and that even a small fee had to be paid for her actions. Luna had begrudgingly agreed, but now she regretted it more than ever. Such a handsome stallion, transformed into... this... this... monster.

Monster. The word bit at her brain. It stung deep into her heart and flooded chilling memories that she had not ever seen. The last thing she heard, was a familiar shriek of *No*.

"Who are thou?" spoke a terrified, blurry figure. Watching the memory form what seemed like third pony, Luna couldn't make out a soul through the blurry cloud that shrouded her memory.

"Why, I am your new princess, dear foal. Where is your mother?" Luna recognized the voice instantly. Nightmare Moon.

A new pony galloped into vision. "Get away from my foal, you... you monster!" The image backed up a bit, as if stepping back in insult.

"How dare thy speak of me like that, thou ungrateful whelp!" The image reared up, coming crashing down, followed by a blood-curdling scream.

A flash of white. Some odd smells. Some very odd smells. They were so close. So pungent. Too close. Too close! Luna's eyes shot open in surprise, darting around the room for any clue of what she had just experienced. Several guards along with a hyperventilating Moonbeam crowded around her.

"Princess Luna! Are you okay!?" A familiar voice rang out. Pushing through the several

guards emerged a new pony. He looked identical to the other guards ,but his voice was all the same.

“N-Notte?” she whispered. She immediately bit her lip and recoiled her words. *Had she just asked for a guard? By name? That was unheard of!* Luna shook her head, trying to get the thoughts to flee.

“I-I mean, what happened?” she looked around. She was on the marble floors. The banners of the throne room had been switched from those of the sun to those of the moon for Luna’s night court. All was normal. Just a distinct height difference.

His voice sang out again. “You collapsed. I think you hit your head fairly hard,” he aid, reaching a hoof out to examine her wounds.

The good hearted stallion was stopped harshly by an equally mud brown hoof. “Thou shalt not lay a hoof on thy Princess!” it barked, in the same traditional language Luna sometimes reverted to. Captain Foscor. The only member of her lunar guards who tried to copy her language. Kiss flank.

Her nose caught a whiff of something rank, and she immediately pushed the smelling salts out of her muzzle. “Get those damn salts off of me! And Captain, I am to decide who can and cannot touch me on my own, thank you.” She smiled up at Notte. For some reason, she was starting to favor him to everypony else.

“And if you do not mind, I believe that I should be able to dismiss court for the night as well.”

“But Your Majesty, that’s the third night in a row-“ tried to explain Captain Foscor.

“I can dismiss court whenever I damn please.” Luna spread her regal wings and flew over to where Notte had entered. Opening the huge doors with a strong hoof, she peered around the corner. With a look of satisfaction on her face, she appeared in a flash of unicorn magic with her forehead pressed against the Captain’s angrily. “Its not like there’s ever anypony here.”

“But-“

“And I feel like I need to stretch my wings,” she cut off, “And I would like Notte to supervise me.”

Without another word of explanation, the free willed Princess spread her mighty wings and flew up to one of the many windows, peering out at her night. Her horn lit up in its blue aura, encasing the window in a greasy film. “Come,” she beckoned.

Notte looked around in a confuzzled state, trying to receive the approval of the Captain to go. Only seeing a look of hate and sternness upon the commanding pony’s face, he backed down a little. Luna rolled her eyes. “Are thou going to resist an order form the co-ruler of Equestria?” she yelled.

“OH, no sorry, I’ll... um come, yeah,” he stumbled, flapping his bat wings. He wobbled a little in the air, trying to get used to the lack of feathers but eventually made it to the princess’ side. With a mighty flap of their wings in sync, they took off into the deafening silence, soaring through the crisp clouds of the night.

They soared. Luna closed her eyes and breathed in her night. Cool and crisp. The sterile freeze of each cloud stung her nose like a thousand bees, yet it was refreshing. Looking to her side, Notte was no doubt shifting his eyes nervously, scanning for attackers, or any hint as to

why they were flying so high up and away from the castle. The wind whipped the bat fin back on his helmet. Sadly, Luna couldn't stand the sight of it anymore and turned away. That is, until he addressed her.

"Your Majesty, where are we going?" he asked innocently. He reminded her of a foal. So afraid of getting in trouble or doing wrong; so wary of everything. His nervous eyes scanned about, causing Luna to roll her own.

"We are merely going to have fun," she said with a playful smile, one she hadn't worn since she herself was a foal.

"F-fun?" questioned Notte, having missed the briefing on personal fun time with royalty.

"Yes fun. I just learned about it last Nightmare Night." This time, Notte got to roll his eyes, getting him an angry glare from the princess. Before he could break down into very *manly* tears and plead for her forgiveness, a smile had already taken hold on her face. She closed her wings. Just shut them tight, falling from her escort's side in a nosedive.

"Princess!" he screamed in terror, petrified that the ruler of Equestria's nights had fainted yet again and was now plummeting to her death. He flapped his wings, trying to reach the princess before it was too late. *Celestia would have my flank mounted on her hearth for this!*

He barreled towards her, her tail and mane whipping upwards rapidly. With several mighty flaps, he reached beneath her, and caught the fallen princess in his hooves. Her eyes shot open, as did her wings.

"What are thou doing?" she commanded, furious.

"Saving you! You were about to splat on the ground," he argued.

"I am older than this country. I know how to fly!" she retorted with an audible snort.

"I-I..." his voice faltered, not knowing what to say. He had just ruined her fun.

"Well, now you owe me," she said in faux anger that brought a smile of relief to his face.

"Race ya," she winked, and blasted off back towards the castle.

"Oh no you don't!" he yelled out playfully, and zoomed after his Princess.

They sat atop the roof that night. Just watching as the moon ticked through the sky. Luna had not shared a moment like that in decades. She had had a colt friend once. He had been older than she, before ruling Equestria became so time consuming. His name was Clip. He would always try to cut her hair before she had gained so much power that it was no longer pony hair. Lets just say, three out of four times, she ended up half bald because he would try to "even it out."

Luna and Notte sat upon the palace roof. She pointed out constellations to him after they caught their breath. She kicked his flank in that race. Not that he'd ever admit it. They joked about their families and their lives.

"And before my mom ever found out, I stuffed it into a box I found. Little did I know that box was going to my grandmare's..." Luna and Notte rolled on their backs in a fit of giggles.

"I must admit, that was quite the enjoyable tale. And I also must confess that I must not be so causal with a member of my staff-" she was interrupted by another fit of giggles as he tickled her behind her foreleg, a place only he had dared to find. She liked him. He didn't fear

him. Maybe that was why for once she was so willing to be causal and not so uptight as she always was. "Notte-

He looked over at her with his big green eyes. Luna cleared her throat and rolled onto her stomach, her legs neatly tucked under her. "I haven't had this much fun in... well, ever. You must know that this is not how a Princess should act, and that you cannot breath a word of this night to anypony."

He was disappointed. She could tell immediately. She decided to change the subject back to something they could both be happy about. "I can't believe you sent your playcolt magazine to your grandmother," she said, another wave of giggles washing over her. The two shared in another hearty laugh, watching as the stars twinkled above the two dark ponies. Notte stood and walked over to the Princess of Equestria.

"Princess-

"Please, you may call me Luna in this setting."

"Luna... Why do you always talk so professional? Even now?" The question startled her, but also peeked her interest. Truth be told, she had never thought about her way of speech. Of course she had worked on the volume and the Royal We, but she did have to admit that she was far more articulate than other ponies.

"Well... I have head thousand of years to learn more vocabulary, and it just kind of rolls off the tongue."

"But you can be lazy in your speaking with me," reassured her new friend. To seal the deal, he let out a large belch. Had they not spent the past four hours together, and had Luna not been becoming increasingly lonely lately, he would have been in the dungeon in the blink of an eye. But she was fond of this Pegasus pony. Even if he looked like a bat at the moment.

"Take off your helmet Notte," she said.

"What? But Princess, I have to wear-

"Please, take off the armor." She looked at him with puppy dog eyes, her ethereal mane billowing in the none present wind.

Trying to avoid the subject, Notte stuck a hoof through her mane, getting it stuck in the middle of the thick magic. "Oooo," he said, feeling around the stars.

"Stop it!" she reprimanded, hoofing his hoof away. He put on a pouty face. She stuck her tongue out like a foal. He laughed. She laughed. It was bliss.

Luna scooted over to the bat guard, and with two hooves, removed his armor, piece by piece. His natural color flooded back to him, and he visibly shrank in size from his guard like glory. When the color was all back to its usual scheme, his wings started to plump out with real feathers, instead o the Celestia awful bat wing membrane.

"Much better," said Luna, eyeing the stallion subtly.

Notte smiled at her and she smiled back. Staring for a bit too long, Notte shook his head and returned his gaze to the sky. "What's that one?" he said, pointing a hoof at the sky. Their friendship had originally blossomed with his unquenchable thirst for knowledge about the night. The night had started off professional, but with the all too frequent mistakes he made, it was extremely difficult to keep themselves from falling over in uncontrollable laughter form his ignorance sometimes. Luna admired him for that quality. That he could laugh at himself. Prince Blueblood, her nephew from who knows where, wouldn't know a joke if it hit him in the face.

Which form what Luna heard, had actually happened at the Gala when a cake flew across the ballroom thanks to Pinkie Pie's wild party antics.

Luna playfully shoved him, something she rarely did since she was a foal, save for the rare servant she dubbed as playmate or bonded with. "I think I've literally told you this four times. "That's the Ursa Major."

"No, no, I'm pretty sure *that's* the Ursa Major," he said, pointing a hoof in a completely different direction in the sky. Luna face hoofed.

"That's Orion's breast plate you feather brain," she teased.

"Ooohh, ok. I knew that," he said, pretending to brush off his shoulder like a cool guy. That only out Luna back into a rage of giggling.

"How do you make and name all these constellations?" he asked. Luna was not one or teaching. To be honest, she had a shorted temper than Twilight did social skills. But something about the foal like curiosity of Notte drew her in. He was so eager to learn. So full of spunk and life and willingness. It brought a cool feeling to her heart. This must be what Celestia felt like when she would mentor Twilight Sparkle or any of her past students. Sadly, being the younger pony, Celestia would never even offer Luna the chance to mentor a pony. Luna was okay with that for the most part. She wasn't very interested in teaching schoolwork and stuff. But if she could just mentor one pony who cared for a night on all the constellations, without them getting bored or whining or falling asleep, it would be a dream come true.

And right now she was living that dream. She smiled at her semi student/friend. "That is a secret as old as time itself my friend." Notte put on a coy smile, raising his lips up above his teeth.

"I'm your friend?" he said with a massive number of overly seductive winks. Luna threw her head back and laughed a deep throated laugh, shoving her new star gazing buddy.

"Sure. Whatever," she said passive aggressively, making Notte playfully shove her back this time. "Just kidding!"

"Ok. But seriously. Can't you tell me?" he pleaded.

"Sadly no. Over the years, interviews and gossipers and spies throughout the castle have given away every one of my secrets that I have ever culminated in my entire life span. But this. This is my one secret that no pony will ever know. Its my little secret, and it makes me happy to know that no matter how hard those stuck up snobs of astronomers say they understand my sky, they really don't." Luna sighed heavily and happily to herself as she examined her work, hundreds of years in the making. Notte returned the deep chested sigh, taking in the glorious sight. Next to a glorious pony.

"Its beautiful," he whispered, not wanting his voice to interrupt the moment of respect for Luna's hard work and creation that should be admired. And then it slipped. "You're beautiful."

Luna whipped her head around at her new friend. "W-what?" she had never been called beautiful before. She swooned, and her heart meted into her blood. But at the same time she froze. That was wildly inappropriate for one of her subordinates to say to the ruler of all of Equestria.

And what he did next was even more wild. He leaned over to her, and nuzzled her neck softly. Rubbing his muzzle against her neck and cheek as she sat next to him. And for once, Luna did not shy away. She allowed herself to embrace the affection of the stallion she was

spending time with. And it was glorious.

“Oh Moon, it was amazing!” she said as she sat with the mare in her dreams. Her stomach was still fluttering with butterflies from the time she had spent with Notte.

“You really like him, huh?” said Nightmare Moon with a warm smile, sitting across from Luna on the dead grass. Luna had now gotten used to the itchy sensation of the dead grass Nightmare Moon brought along with her.

“Oh, Moon. I really do. I haven’t felt like this in five thousand years! He likes me! And he likes my nights. And he’s not afraid of me. A pony that’s not afraid of me!”

Nightmare Moon smiled at the pony’s giddiness over a colt. “I know,” she said with an over the top eye roll. “I was there, remember?”

Luna giggled sheepishly. “Oh yeah. I forgot. But I’m just so excited.”

“Luna, I don’t want to be a Captain Foscors, but you must heed this warning with your feelings. You are immortal. He is not. If you chose to love him, it will only result in heartbreak when he passes on, and you are left mourning your entire life without the pony you latched onto. It’s a dangerous path,” cautioned the wise black alicorn, her mane swirling upwards in seriousness.

She didn’t show it, but her stomach dropped. She hadn’t thought of that. She pushed down her doubts and put on a smile. “B-but, its better to have loved and lost, than to never have loved at all, right?” she offered.

“Is it, Luna?” Nightmare raised an accusing eyebrow. Luna didn’t know what to think. She definitely didn’t love Notte. She had just met him. She couldn’t fall in love with everypony that complimented her, right?

“I suppose not,” she said, trying to humor Nightmare Moon, even if it wasn’t her real thoughts.

“I just don’t want you getting hurt.” Luna crossed over to the black mare and hugged her. At first the mare tensed up incredibly, extremely resistant against the contact with another pony. But as Luna rubbed her back lovingly, Nightmare wrapped her forelegs around Luna as well, embracing her alter self. “I-I, just know how it feels to not be loved.” She tried to hold back tears, but failed, sending a steady stream down Luna’s neck.

Luna rubbed and comforted the mare. “I’ll love you, Moon,” said Luna. Nightmare looked up unbelievably.

“Really?” she sniffed.

“Really,” assured Luna. Nightmare broke down into another round of tears, but this time, they were tears of happiness, blinding her with love for the mare that was willing to see past the monster that everypony had made her out to be.

“I wish I could be with you out there Luna,” she cried. “To be able to be like a sister to you. Give you advice. Help you with colt troubles. Just be there for you. We could rule the night together, and everypony would see how glorious we are together. And we would always have somepony to talk to. And I would never be trapped in here, lonely and scared. I miss you when you wake up Luna. I love you.”

Now a few tears graced Luna's eyes. "Thank you." Her eyes brightened as she was struck with brilliance. "I have an idea!" she exclaimed joyously. "Why don't I try and get you out of my mind? And you can be with me outside?" Luna hopped up and down like a filly getting her cutie mark.

Nightmare Moon's dragon eyes widened with excitement. "You can do that?" she squealed.

"Well, I would need a lot of power. Like maybe the elements of harmony power. But, yeah. I think it could definitely be done." Luna's smile never left her face, and neither did Nightmare's.

"I see you interact outside, and you always are so articulate. But to me, you speak like a filly?" pointed out Nightmare Moon to Luna.

Luna shrugged. "I just feel the most comfortable around you that it rolls off the tongue like this. Nothing more, nothing less.

Nightmare shrugged too, deciding to accept it rather than argue. She was so giddy and excited that she might finally get to be a mare again. That is, until she realized a flaw in the plan.

Her grin faded away and was replaced with a mopey frown. "But, everypony still thinks I'm a monster. They'll never agree to release me," she said solemnly.

Luna recalled this as well. The Bearers of the Elements of Harmony, the residents in Ponyville, had purged Luna of the evil power of Nightmare Moon. But they didn't know the real pony Nightmare Moon was. She had it.

"I've got it!" exclaimed Luna loudly, spreading her dark wings in excitement. Nightmare's ears perked up in interest as she removed her uncomfortable helmet.

"What is it, Luna?" she said sweetly.

"I'll tell them that you're still in my mind, and that I need them to purge me once more. But then I'll give them the spell to bring you out, and you can show them how nice you are. Then, they'll be happy they set you free!" Luna patted herself on the back with a hood for the brilliant idea.

Nightmare swept Luna up in a bear hug. "Luna! That is a fantastic idea!" Luna giggled in her alter ego's embrace, glad to feel the warmth of another pony. Sure she would engage in idle chit chat with Celestia during shared meals, but otherwise she was alone most of the time. But soon that would all change. She would have her new friend Notte, and she would have her beautiful and wise friend Nightmare Moon. They would share together in the beauty of the night, pointing out constellations and meteors and when they got bored with that, run around the palace pulling pranks on uptight nobles and stressed cleaning ponies.

But Luna now broke away from the hug. "Moon, I had a vision today. When I fell off the throne, I was seeing something. I was in the palace, talking to a filly, and her mother came and yelled at me. She called me a-

"Monster." Luna looked back at Nightmare Moon.

"How did you-"

"Know? That was me. Somehow you triggered one of my memories. I'm not sure how you did it," Nightmare pressed up close into Luna's face. "Just don't do it again," she growled through her teeth.

Her once sweet face was now filled with malice and seething anger. And in a blink, it was there. Her motherly expression had returned as quickly as it had left, leaving her eyes now soft and

controlled, like nothing had ever happened.

Luna took a step back away from the mare in her face. "Luna..." echoed a voice throughout the dream world. Nightmare and Luna's ears both pricked up, searching the world for the speaker. "Luna..." it echoed again, a sweet tone against her ears.

"Celestia? What are thou doing? It is still my sleep time." Luna rubbed her eyes with her hooves, trying to wake up. Celestia parted the curtains with her magic, letting the light of a thousand suns beat down on the poor alicorn's tender eyes.

"Ah!" she shrieked, pulling the covers over her eyes.

"Luna," chuckled Celestia, "You cannot hide from my sun forever."

Luna squirmed under her covers, trying to get back into sleeping position. "I can hide from it for five more minutes."

Celestia crossed back over to the gigantic bed, taking the sheets in her mouth. With an unprincess-like jerk of her neck, she yanked the heavy blankets off her royal sister.

"Tia!" she whinnied.

"Really Luna, I thought you might want to spend some time together." Luna looked up at her sister.

"Really?" she said dumbstruck.

"Really," said Celestia, putting on a silly face, mocking Luna. Luna levitated a pillow and tossed it on her sister's face.

"Shut up," she laughed.

Celestia grabbed something off of Luna's discarded snack cart that she hadn't gotten around to ravaging yet. Plucking a glass, she spit into it. She dipped her horn into the glass and created a thick golden syrup. She swished it around, then floated it over to Luna.

"Drink this."

"Are you crazy!? That's repulsive!" protested the disgusted blue alicorn. Celestia rolled her eyes with a smile.

"It will wake you up, I promise." Luna eyes her sister skeptically.

"Uh, fine!" she said, ripping the cup out of the magic with a hoof. Holding it in front of her muzzle, the repugnant smells berated her nostrils, causing her to internally gag.

"Tia..." she whined.

"Come on," prodded Celestia, ruler of the sun and thousand year ruler of all of Equestria. She had to be trustworthy, right?

Luna raised the confounded concoction to her lips, and inhaling deeply, forced it down her throat. When she saw Celestia rolling on her back laughing hysterically, she threw it up over her balcony. "Bleh! Tia! How could you!?" she said, racing over to tackle her awful sister.

Wiping a tear from her eye, Celestia hugged Luna on top of her. "T-that was so rich! I haven't had this much fun in eons!"

"What? A silly little prank?" Luna was certainly awake now. With a long felt fury eating away inside her, Luna cast a spell on her sister that would destroy her forever. Not knowing where the spell had come from, or why she felt how she did, she had no regrets as her sister stared at

her with terrified eyes. Luna rose above Celestia.

“Thou have embarrassed us for thous own amusement. Prepare to feel our wrath!” she spoke. Igniting her horn, she shot down on Celestia, and only when she heard crying did she look at her sister again.

Her once flowing mane had been replaced with a rainbow clown wig. Tears did not flow form her cries of pain, but her cries of laughter. Luna joined in, flopping on her back. She proudly looked at her prank. The once regal Celestia had fallen, and now looked like a hopony shrieking about the end of the world.

“I must admit, Lulu. You have not grown a bit,” chuckled Celestia at her sister’s childish prank.

“We can say the same for thou, Celestia.” The two wiped the fit of tears from their eyes, and helped each other up from the floor.

“What have thou planned for this day of... fun?” said Luna, seeing if she was using the word correctly.

“A walk.” Luna’s ears drooped to her neck.

“A walk?” she repeated flatly.

“Indeed.”

“Like, what we do all around the castle, every night?”

“Precisely.”

“And where do thou plan to host this walk?” asked Luna in a dead tone.

“The Everfree Forest.” Now Luna’s ears perked up and the smile returned to her face.

“*The* Everfree Forest? Like forbidden forest of Equestria? Full of monsters and dragons and hydras?”

“The same,” nodded Celestia. Luna started jumping with giddiness. Although her flight to Ponyville had been the biggest adventure she had set out on in over three thousand years, this just tickled her pink. *A real adventure*. With her sister! She squealed in excitement, which only led Celestia to smile warmly at her yet again. *Don’t condescend me Celestia*.

“Shall we go?” asked Celestia.

“Like right now?” questioned Luna, raising an eyebrow. “Have the palace staff been informed?”

“Yes. But they think we’re on a conference in Fillydelphia,” winked Celestia.

“Tia? Are you being... sneaky?”

“Maybe I am. Maybe I’m not. Do you want to go or not?” Luna jumped towards the window.

“You coming?” she yelled behind her as she leapt off the balcony.

“Hurry up Tia! You don’t want to get eaten by a manticore do you?” teased Luna. Celestia was still trying to wrangle her way through loose vines, that Luna may or may not have magically enchanted to trip her up.

Still trotting thirty paces ahead, Luna could hear cutting and ripping, and soon Celestia reached her side, covered in little nicks in her prestigious white fur. “Ha ha, little sister. Very funny. Fix me up.” Luna rolled her eyes, but was extremely relieved that Celestia was able to take such a harsh joke.

“Fine fine.” Luna ignited her horn, and a colorless wave washed over Celestia, engulfing her

body in a pale light. With the fading of the light came the revelation of healed cuts that may have never existed.

"I still hate you for cresting those foul beasts. I should have never challenged you to do that," gruffed Celestia, preening her now in tact feathers.

"Hey, my manticore was way better than your stupid Cockatrice!" argued Luna.

"Ok, I'll give you that one. That was one of my... less fortunate creations."

"It sucked," corrected Luna.

"Ok, yeah, it sucked," agreed Celestia. This sent Luna into triumphant round of hollering and laughing. "See, that's why your so good at the constellations. Can you image what my *constellations* would look like?" shuddered Celestia.

"Probably a parasprite," giggled Luna, "cause' that's the only thing you can draw."

Celestia stuck a tongue out at Luna and Luna graciously returned the gesture.

"Shall we explore, Daring Do?" asked Celestia, poking Luna in the ribs.

Her blue face turned completely red. "Y-you know that I read that?" said a dry throated Luna.

Celestia threw back her head in laughter. "Of course I know. I nearly tripped over one of your copies floating into your chambers."

Luna wiped the sweat from her brow, and forced a chuckle. "Yeah, well you know... It's pretty good."

"Come now Lulu, I am only teasing. Let us enjoy our scarce time together," said Celestia, offering a wing of apology, which her sister graciously accepted, climbing into the warmth.

Together they walked through the forbidden forest, free of any guards and any royal responsibilities. Free of ponies flanking either side of them, dusting the ground before them on which they were about to step. They didn't have to watch what they said or how they talked or watch their matters.

"Its nice, being away from it all, isn't it Tia?" said Luna with a large breath, inhaling the untamed scent of these mysterious woods.

Celestia snorted through her large nostrils, tossing her head to the side. But her wing still stayed draped over her sister. "It is wonderful. Though you know it must better than I."

Luna chuckled uncomfortably, daring not to look at her sister's disappointed gaze. "I have already apologized for my ignorance Celestia. You need not raise the guilt from where we left it," growled the younger sister. She hated when Celestia resurfaced old wounds. Luna knew she was just playing around, or was trying to get closure, but it only put Luna into awkward and uncomfortable situations.

Celestia shook her head at the young one's misinterpretation. "I am not trying to open wounds healed, my sister. Rather I am expressing that you have more freedom than I." Celestia's sweet, melodic voice did not mask what she had just said, and the look on her face of utter regret registered instantly. Luna stopped walking, allowing herself to dislodge from under the protective wing of her older sister.

"More freedom than thou? In what way?" growled Luna threw clenched teeth.

"Luna, I'm sorry, that's not what I meant-" tried Celestia.

"In what way?" repeated Luna, growing more agitated.

"Luna, please. Let's keep going. There's a wonderful little place I'd love to show you-"

"You dammit Celestia! You will explain yourself this instance!" roared Luna, her Royal Canterlot

Voice peeking out threw her otherwise controlled vocal manner.

Celestia sighed. "I just meant, you have less responsibility than I. You are young. You are free. Thou are able to cancel duties to pursue personal matters. I am not so fortunate," reasoned Celestia.

Luna had not felt such a heat of anger in a thousand years. *'How dare she insult your rule. Your power. You are as important as her. As powerful. Strike her down, Luna. Strike her down.'*

Luna shook her head free of the whispers. She could not pinpoint where they were coming from in her memory, but she recognized them. Remembering them being in her head in the beginning. She could not revert to those awful ways again. She wiped her mind clear, and tried to think a little more sensibly. She secretly wanted to not forgive Celestia, but to instead punish her. She wasn't sure why, or where the urge was coming from, but it was present. But a greater urge compelled her. The urge to forgive and forget, and not let one argument ruin their relationship as it had one thousand years ago.

"I understand that thee are extremely busy with thou's responsibilities as ruler over Equestria's days. And I now understand that my nights are being enjoyed through the peacefulness of sleep. And I know I do not receive nearly as much work as thee. And you know what? I am glad. For once, sister, I am happy to be free of those bounds. I can dismiss court on a whim, not disappointing nearly as many ponies as if I ruled the day court. I can go off for a fly in the middle of the night, when no pony comes to check on my slumber. Thou are not so fortunate, as your guards check periodically. And I am happy that I can finally understand," said Luna, being able to look up at her motherly figure with a warm smile.

Proud tears ran down Celestia's furry cheek. She wrapped Luna in a hug with her forelegs before enveloping them in her massive wingspan. "Oh Luna. I am so sorry. I did not mean what I said. But I am proud of you And I love you."

Luna sniffed back a few tears herself, not wanting to lose Celestia's respect. "And I love thee, dear sister."

The two royal sisters broke their embrace, and continued their adventure through the hot and buggy woods. After a thousand complaints from Luna in the span of five minutes, Celestia created a bug force field, and the two were able to walk in peace without being made a meal of. Happily chewing on some grass she had found in a meadow they had frolicked through, Luna was stopped by a gleaming white hoof.

The hoof attached to her loyal sister, stopping Luna from walking right into a ravaging river with ice cold water. And to top it all off, a hysterical sea serpent thrashed around downstream, blocking the only shallow water safe to wade through. His shining purple scales were magnificent. His moustache was as unique as Luna's mane, one side a golden blonde, while the other a royal purple curl. However, his wondrous mullet had been sliced off the top. "Luna stay back!" said Celestia, restricting Luna and trying to figure out a way to sneak by without being noticed.

But Luna pushed through her sister's hoof, much to Celestia's panic. Before she could grab the younger one back out her embrace of safety, Luna was gone in a flash of dark blue sparkles. In the distance she could hear Celestia yelling for her, but now was not the time to turn away and give in to authority. She approached the wailing monster, offering up a gentle smile. The poor serpent held his clawed hands over his eyes, trying to contain the bountiful tears that

streaked his smooth face.

“Good sir, what is the matter?” asked the Princess of Equestria’s night. The serpent uncovered one of his eyes and immediately took a double take at the princess that stood before him. He lifted his sulking head from the shore and bowed beneath her multiple times, shattering and shaking the ground with each bow of contact to the earth. Had Luna been a lesser pony, she would have been bounced to the moon.

“Oh! OH! Princess Luna!” he remarked in a rather marish voice for a creature his size.

“Dear sir, thou do not needest to kiss our hooves. We are here to see what it is that puts you into such disarray.” Luna said with sympathy. She didn’t know what could have troubled such a monster. She thought they were impenetrable.

“Fair princess. My mane. Its ruined!” he cried, reverting back to his helpless tears. Princess Luna had to repress an eye roll. She had heard many complaints in her day. Many unsolvable or even downright stupid requests. But this one was probably near the top of the list. Nonetheless, this creature was one of her subjects, and it was her duty as a princess to aid him.

“Oh my,” she said, stroking his tearful face. “How did this happen?”

“A herd of mantikor flew by, and their tails cut it clean off!” He sniffed, and she prayed that he wouldn’t engulf her in fire with a sneeze. *‘That’s dragons. Not sea serpents,’* corrected a voice in her head. A familiar voice.

‘Moon?’ thought Luna for a second.

‘The one and only my friend,’ replied the soft, caring voice.

‘How are you talking to me?’ questioned Luna happily that her friend was not bound only to her dreams and her mirror.

‘I’ve been here all along. You’ve heard me. You just haven’t made the connection until now I suppose,’ she said, and Luna was positive that in her head, the mare was shaking her head in disbelief.

Her mind drawing a blank on handle this *dire* situation, Luna decided to cheat a bit. *‘How do you suggest I handle this Moon?’*

‘I do not know. You know I did not have time to test out my compassion when I was able.’

‘I suppose,’ thought Luna. And then she had it. It was perfect. ISmple, easy, and it should work.

“Good serpent, I have a solution to your troubles!” she proclaimed happily as Celestia stalked closer.

“Y-You do?” he sniffed.

“Indeed.” Using her magic, she stretched out her flowing mane.

“OH no! Princess no!” he yelled, trying to stop her.

With a quick cut of a magical dagger, a lock of soft, blue pony hair fell into her magical grasp. It was long and luscious, soft and silky. It was her baby hair, enchanted away as her powers increased. But when separated form the source by a dagger, its true form would show. Floating it up to the wailing creature, she entwined it into his mullet, creating a blue poof where the original hair was sliced off. Looking up at his new do, her patted it with a clawed palm. “Oh woe is me! Its gorgeous!” giddily shrieked the purple serpent. “Thank you Princess! Oh thank you thank you!” he cried, kissing her hooves.

Patting his snout, she smiled warmly t her subject. “That is quite unnecessary. It is my job to see my subjects happy. That is my reward enough.”

Celestia slammed into Luna's side, sending them both crashing to the ground. Opening her eyes in horror, Luna felt the warm hug tighten every second. "That was very impressive, Lulu," wept Celestia. "Just don't scare me like that again."

Luna rolled her eyes for the thousandth time that day, hugging her sister back. Her mane whirled and hissed, and in a matter of seconds, had returned to its formal glory, breezing around at full length.

The two alicorns got to their hooves, and holding hooves, soared over the now calm river, leaving the happily waving serpent behind them as they continued through the area. Touching ground in a floral clearing, they regained their breath. Well, Celestia did.

"What's wrong Tia? Can't take a little flight?" teased Luna.

"Very *pant* funny *pant*," stumbled Celestia, tugging a snicker out of Luna.

They looked around where they were. Flowers bloomed along the edge of the field, save for the opening where the path continued on through the darkness. They blossomed in every color, and zap apples covered a few trees to the west. Little rabbits unowned by anything but the wild scampered away from the foreign ponies in the deep woods, and in the light of day, the dew sparkled and glistened.

"It's beautiful, isn't it Lulu?" spoke Celestia as they wandered aimlessly through the enchanted woods.

"That it is, dear sister," said Luna, breathing in the air of freedom. The rare air of no responsibility. The rare air of nothing to worry about, no ponies to attend to, no fights to settle. The rare air, of nostalgia.

But that wasn't all that Luna felt. And she was absolutely sure that that wasn't all her wise sister was feeling either in this enraptured forest. The mood was thick, a long forgotten topic that was willed not to resurface in either of their lifetimes. Although it tied into both of them as much as their manes waved freely, it was no longer something that they worried themselves with. It was air long forgotten, an air not breathed anymore. It was frayed, it was old, it was abandoned.

They wished not revisit such air, leaving it in their memories to rot and dust over.

But here they felt it, and they yearned for it. And they were pulled towards it; but they dare not admit it. They were drawn with baited breath, and both knew it.

And when they arrived by following that forgotten path, both breathed a sigh of relief and anger. They were there, though they wished they weren't. It had to be faced sooner or later, so that they may forgive and forget.

They were home.

Across the rickety rope bridge stood, or fell, the ruins of an ancient castle. The ruins of a castle where two alicorns had been raised. Where two alicorns had been deemed princesses, and where Princess Celestia had banished her dear sister to the far away moon. Although they had vowed never to revisit the cursed place, it beckoned through their souls, and with a nod of understanding to each other, they crossed the unstable bridge. Halfway through, an unnerving creak was let out from the wooden planks.

"Tia..."

"What Luna?" said Celestia, looking back at her sister.

"What if the bridge gives out?" asked a wary Luna.

"Umm... duh?" said Celestia with a mighty flap of her swan like wings.

“Oh, yeah.” Luna chuckled with embarrassment.

Safely reaching the other side as they had so many times when they were fillies, they stared at the looming structure. It was a place of love, anger, betrayal, and redemption of late.

“Are you sure, Tia.” Luna physically shook on her hooves, and not even a draped wing by Celestia could soothe her.

“It must be done,” answered her serene voice.

Luna gulped down all her fears. Her guilt of becoming Nightmare Moon, her embarrassment of being saved from something she never meant to be, and the anger at still not being accepted. But she pushed on. The doors were unhinged at the top, allowing Luna and Celestia to squeeze between them with some effort. There was barely a roof, the light burning into what used to be their mighty throne room.

Luna shielded her eyes to achieve a better look of her old home. Two regal thrones crumbled on the far side of the room. One could have been gold, though it was mostly a pile of rubble now. And the other, though also barely standing, smashed her heart with a wave of nostalgia. She crossed over to it.

‘Luna was here.’ She traced her hoof over the ancient inscription of her foal-hood at the base of the throne. A bit of silver luster shone through the debris and dirt that now plagued her favorite part of the castle.

Refusing to punish her mind anymore with melancholy, she turned to face a large pedestal. Celestia, still eyeing her own collapsed throne, did not notice as Luna approached the old structure.

It was the resting place of the Elements of Harmony before they were rediscovered. It was naked right now, but Luna smiled. A new home for the elements, so they could continue helping ponies.

“Do you feel that?” rang out Celestia’s voice.

Luna looked around, and now that she thought about it, she *did* feel something. It was a great power. Unlike one she had felt in a long, long time.

“Don’t cry Lulu.,” soothed Celestia, nuzzling her younger sister as she sobbed into her chest.

“They’re still here. Can’t you feel them?”

Luna nodded through her tears.

The day wore on, and as they explored their old home, new relics turned up, each of which they teleported back to their respective chambers back in Canterlot.

Old foal books. Forgotten toys. Ancient scrolls. All of which brought closure to the home they abandoned after Discord’s defeat. Luna stumbled through the collapsed walls that led to rooms she had never even seen as a foal. She found an abandoned kitchen that she had never seen, since the family was always confined to the dining hall. No rats were left to infest it, and the pantries still remained intact on their hinges. The countertops were dusty and dirty, but still sturdy. Luna wished she had been old enough to have been able to appreciate her home in its prime, when she could see everything bustling about and getting done. She would have loved to help. She tried to help a little now and then back in Canterlot, but she had far less time.

‘Those were the days,’ she thought, reminiscing about the carefree life of a foal, where time was

plentiful and responsibilities a few.

Luna crossed up the stairs of one of the many staircases she had discovered after she split off from Celestia. But what she found caused her jaw to crack the ground. At the far side of a barren room, lay shiny objects.

As she cautiously approached them, a power seethed into her. It was strong. They were strong. Even stronger than the power she had felt in the throne room.

'Yes!' screamed Moon. Luna closed her eyes, trying to rejoin the dark alicorn.

'What do you mean?' thought Luna, seeing nothing but darkness.

'The time is upon us Luna! The time to bring me to you! We can finally be together!' screamed Nightmare Moon inside her head happily, unable to contain her excitement.

'But I thought we needed the Elements of Harmony?'

'No no no. Not anymore. We can do it. It's all here. Just like I remember.'

'What's here?' she questioned frantically, not knowing what the midnight mare was getting at in her hysteria of excitement.

'The armor! The armor! It holds my powers. Go to my shards. Free me Luna!'

They were gathered around her as Nightmare had instructed. Each shard positioned as close as they could be to the laying Luna.

The energy was strong. That was undeniable. Just a spark of magic could set them off in the right way. Or the wrong way. Much concentration was needed, her ethereal mane flapping wildly as she summoned more energy than she had in a while. Her horn ignited a brilliant blue, the energy erupting within her.

Nightmare's voice chanted spells in her head, transporting the words and orders to Luna's horn as it casted each spell perfectly.

The shrapnel of the once proud alicorn shook intensely as the magic infused itself deep within the artifacts. They gleamed and burned as the ancient magic enchanted their being, summoning their wearer and mistress that forged them centuries ago. They pulsated as the blue light exploded from Luna's mouth and eyes. There was no turning back now. She couldn't stop the magical flow. Nightmare Moon's chants increased in volume to a deafening state in Luna's eardrums.

The heat building in her was horrifying, burning her inner being as the magic sucked out of her and into the broken armor.

They now shook uncontrollably, rattling against the cracked stone floor. 'Yes! Yes!' screamed Nightmare Moon from inside Luna's head as the magic continued pulsating out of the poor young alicorn. She stretched her wings in balance, only to feel sharp, petrifying pain at any movement.

All to help a friend. It was unbearable. Luna had never experienced such burning pain inside her body, that if her mouth wasn't pouring magic, she would be screaming in pure, uncontrollable agony. Not even Celestia herself could withstand such throbbing for such a long time.

'Just a little longer, my friend. You're doing great,' reassured Nightmare Moon, comforting Luna slightly.

It felt like part of her soul, her being was being sucked- no not sucked... ripped. Torn. Shredded. Every painful word imaginable could not describe the hell Princess Luna was in right now as her alter ego, part of her mind, was split from her body. She felt weak. On the verge of passing out. The final spell. It spilled out of Nightmare's lips with uncontrollable laughter, as she recited it over and over again. Luna started to feel scared, but also trusted that the mare would keep her safe. She chanted the words without fail, each time sending Luna into a deeper and deeper agony. She felt her body get light. Very light. Like she was flying on a clear spring day through the wispy clouds.

Through her eyes and mouth erupted a hazy purple smoke, washing over the broken armor in a cloud of purple and stars. The armor swirled and shined, Luna finally free of her everlasting agony to witness such a feat. Inside the tornado of cloud she could here the familiar sound of clinking metal to fur, one she heard every day when she adorned herself with her royal regalia. Luna's hair fell over her face as the tornado whirled, surrounded by rushing winds and magical auras. Seeing soft shades of blue on her face, Luna suddenly realized how much power that had taken out of her. Her magically enchanted mane had disappeared, gone with her magic for the moment. These spells had taken everything out of her, but it was worth it. She would be with her idol. Her friend. They would rule the night together, making constellations and studying the moon and the cosmos. They would prank Philomena and the palace staff, and Nightmare would be Luna's best friend.

The tornado slowly decelerated, a scene Luna had learned not to fear. With a mighty flap of her wings, a gorgeous black alicorn mare stood before Luna. She flapped and examined her feathered wings. "Yes," she spoke in a deep voice. Luna smiled at finally being able to see her friend free from her mind, able to act on her own as she had always dreamed.

The black alicorn stood tall and regal as she examined herself. She was jet black, blacker than the nighttime sky. Her mane shimmered with the same stars and invisible wind that Luna's had before her magic shortage. Her horn was long and perfect, each symmetrical knot building up into heart piercing tip. Her regalia curved around her chest in a shield type fashion, much different than the gradually sloping shape of Luna's and Celestia's. Adorning her hooves were four identical horseshoes, much larger and longer than Luna's. They poked up at the top, creeping up all the ways to her knees. The same ahining armor helmet she wore in her dreams still adorned her feminine face, curving down her crest and covering her face from sight, save her eyes and muzzle. Shining with the brilliant blue of the regalia as well, they clashed with her coat, but gave off a sense of power at the same time.

Nightmare Moon rubbed her muzzle to her wings, feeling the soft plumage she now possessed.

"Yes..." she repeated in a whisper, gazing at her rich purple splotched cutie mark, carrying the identical crescent moon as Luna's. "It's all happening. I'm free..." she whispered to herself.

Luna stood and approached the reborn pony. "I know! Now we can do everythin-" Luna was struck back by a powerful magic, flinging her into the rear wall so forcefully, that a visible crack ran through the stone structure. Luna stared up at the approaching mare in disbelief.

"Don't touch me you foal," hissed the mare. Her eyes, once filled with kindness and sympathy, now stung through the young alicorn's soul like a thousand bees. They were cold and dead, save for one emotion. Hatred. They were the eyes of the evil mare depicted in all the legends. All the fairy tales. All the stories. She couldn't believe it. She wouldn't believe it.

“Moon? What are you doing,” softly whimpered Luna at her friend. The black mare shoved her face into Luna’s, her tone harsh and loathing.

“Do not call me by that awful name. You can only address me as Empress Night Mare, ruler of all Equestria!”

“W-what? I t-thought we were friends,” cried Luna, trying to get to her hooves after that crushing blow.

Nightmare Moon scoffed at the injured pony. “Wow. You *are* gullible! You were even easier to trick than you were a thousand years ago!” said Nightmare with an ear curdling laugh, wicked and maniacal. She flared her horn, a dreadful smile curving her lips.

The sun vanished. Black shrouded the sky, stars twinkling in all. A purple miasma surrounded the corrupted mare. “The night, will last, forever!”

‘No.’ Luna panicked. She had been tricked. Used. And now she had just unleashed the most evil and destructive villain known to Equestria.

Trying to redeem the pony, Luna thought of the only thing she could in her frazzled state. “B-but, I thought you changed.”

“You ignorant foal, you thought wrong!” and with an malignant cackle,, she vaporized away, her cloud slipping out the window and into the new night.

Celestia came thundering up the stairs a moment too late. “Luna! What the hell are you doing!? Lower the moon this instance. This is not funny!”

“Nightmare Moon.”

“Luna, if this is some kind of cruel prank, knock it off,” warned Celestia.

“Nightmare Moon,” repeated the stunned co-ruler.

“Luna! Listen to me!” Luna galloped into Celestia, staring right into her eyes.

“She’s back. Nightmare Moon is back. We have to go now. She’s in Canterlot.” Luna took off to the window, followed by a pale faced Celestia.

“How do you know?” asked the terrified pony.

“I can feel it,” and with that, she leapt out, sonic booming her way out towards Canterlot at break neck speeds.

“How did this happen!?” yelled Celestia over the roaring winds as they rocketed home.

Luna refused to return her gaze. “I thought she had changed! She tricked me. In the dreams!” yelled back Luna over the wind.

“What? What do you mean?” screamed back the white alicorn.

“I trusted her Tia! I didn’t think she’d turn on me! We were going to rule together. We were friends!”

“You’re not making sense!” yelled back Celestia, straining to hear over the deafening wind.

“I set her free!”

“You what!?” shrieked Celestia.

“She tricked me. I thought that what I had been told about her were lies. But they weren’t. They were true. They were all true!” she cried, trying to fly even faster.

For once in her eternal life, Celestia did not have a response. Not a word of comfort. Nothing.

The wind sliced against their faces as they raced rapidly to save Equestria from certain destruction.

Their hooves clicked as they landed heavily on the tiled balcony of Luna's chambers, panting for air. "Luna, you're mane! What happened!?" cried Celestia, noticing her sister's lack of magical mane, holding the limp blue pony hair in her hooves. Luna pulled it away from her sister, staring at it herself.

"She took it," Luna panted. "She drained me. All of it. At least for now," Luna realized as she spoke, breaking down sobbing.

"I can't believe this," whispered Celestia, falling to her haunches. Luna sucked back her tears, knowing her job. She offered a hoof to Celestia, wet from her eyes.

"There is no time to rest sister!" screamed Luna. Celestia nodded.

"We have to find her!" shouted Celestia, getting up and trying yet again to raise the sun past Nightmare's cursed night, but to no avail.

Luna's eyes darted around Canterlot and the palace, searching for any sign of the foe as Celestia repeatedly attempted to raise the sun, despite the moon's solid position.

"I found her..." trailed of the blue alicorn as she looked at her sister with fearful eyes. Shrieks and cries came from the opposite side of the castle, where shocks of lightning was breaking through the meticulous stained windows.

Celestia teleported the pair into the throne room to face the monster that had been released. Poofing into the throne room by an exhausted Celestia, neither could believe what they saw. Servant ponies laid hog-tied and on their backs, screaming with gags in their hooves, or razor sharp unicorn horns pointed at their throats. And Luna's guards. All of them. They gathered in rows of ten, bowing at the throne.

The servant ponies cried and squirmed in their bows, some pleading for assistance, others warning the princesses to escape. One was able to spit the sock out of its mouth to shriek "Run! Save yourselves! Save us all!" before her throat was slit by one of the guards on stand. A thick blood gushed out, her limp body rolling over as her terrified eyes glassed over whilst the life flowed from her body.

Luna shrieked in terror, only to have Celestia shove a wing of feathers into her mouth to muffle her horrified cries, She ached to go aid the pony, or be able to look away at the least, but she couldn't bring herself to do either of those.

The army bowed to the mistress atop the throne. She sat regally, as if she was Celestia herself. Her nighttime wings spread to their full span, stretching far off the throne, and even exceeding the size of Celestia's. She sat, eyeing the army that knelt before her. Looking down at them from the tall throne, she wore a cocky smile, feeling good to be in charge again. Although she had never gotten the chance the first time, now was certainly all she needed to realize this was all she had ever yearned for. And that she wasn't going to give it up anytime soon.

Luna wanted to flog every one of her personal guards. Betraying her for the same pony who had also betrayed her. Here they knelt before her in utter respect, not daring or willing to move from their positions, as if they weren't done paying their respects to their mighty leader who had been

in power for all of twenty minutes so far.

Their bat like wings were spread at their sides, all noses touching the shined floors frozen.

Eating up the love and adoration of the ponies before her, she had not noticed the two intruding ponies. "Well well. Seems you've come to see me take the throne," chuckled the ghastly mare.

Celestia stepped forward. "You won't win. We defeated you once. We can do it again."

Nightmare Moon just cackled, her laugh shattering the remaining windows. "Hmmm, I don't think so. I've been trapped for far too long, and I ponily don't feel like returning to that hellish prison. Seize them, they're attacking your ruler!" she chortled. With a flick of magic from her horn, the guards stood straight.

Slowly rotating on their haunches, they swiveled towards the true leaders of Equestria. Their eyes were cold and dead, steaming a red mist from their dilated pupils. Their piranha teeth were bared and sharp, saliva dripping hungrily from each tooth, creating mass puddles of liquids on the floors.

With each step they took towards them, dripping teeth of hunger and eyes of rage were ever so present.

"Well go on then," said Nightmare, leaning on the edge of her throne for the day she got to see Celestia *and* Luna destroyed. IF only she had some of that popped corn that the young ones were so fond of. With feral snarls, the guards approached closer, enchanted under Nightmare Moon's dark magic. Closer and closer. Luna and her faithful sister backed into the corner of the palace as the animal guards closed in, biting and snarling at them as they pressed the two sisters prepared for battle. Celestia ignited her horn, summoning the battle spells her ancestors were urging her to use in the back of her head. Luna tried repeatedly to illuminate her magic, but with her power drained for the moment, it was no use. It would be hours before she was back to half her strength. Locking eyes with Nightmare before the first pony pounced with knife teeth, Luna huffed. "I thought you were good."

The snarling was gone. Everything was gone. Celestia no longer stood by her side. The guards were not viciously closing in on her anymore, but instead she stood in front of an empty hallway. To her left, a black alicorn. Luna tried to move to strike the wicked mare of darkness, but her hooves were plastered to the ground. She struggled ferociously against the enchantment, trying anything she could without her magic to escape. Even with the strongest flaps of her wings, she was still glued.

"Don't even try it." Luna looked up at the pony who refused to look back.

"Why are you doing this?" sobbed Luna, tears streaking her face. "You told me you were good! That it was a misunderstanding! How could you betray me? What have you done!" shouted Luna at the top of her pony lungs.

"Like this," she said with a wide smirk. The hall went grey and silent. Luna couldn't place where she was standing, but she saw Nightmare Moon.

"Who are thou?" spoke a terrified, little foal. Watching the memory from what seemed like third pony, Luna could make out the ponies now that the blurry cloud of a flashbaack wasn't blinding her.

"Why, I am your new princess, dear foal. Where is your mother?" Luna recognized the voice instantly. Nightmare Moon.

A new pony galloped into vision. "Get away from my foal, you... you monster!" The

image backed up a bit, as if stepping back in insult.

"How dare thy speak of me like that, thou ungrateful whelp!" The image reared up, coming crashing down, followed by a blood-curdling scream.

Nightmare's hooves came thundering down on the face of the mother pony, striking her dead in one, quick blow at her hooves. Her skull broke and the pony's face bore in the horrified expression she had worn seconds ago. The mare's body fell to the side, the foal running up to her mother, sobbing into the crushed in face of her mother.

"Momma? Momma wake up!" cried the foal, stroking her mother's mane and curling into her limp body for comfort.

"Oh, shut up," groaned Nightmare, as she recreated the same fate for the innocent little foal.

The color returned, but not to Luna's face. Still glued to the ground, all she could do was scream and shout. "How could you!? You are a monster! I can't believe I trusted you!" This only set Nightmare Moon into a fit of giggles.

"Because you are an ignorant, stupid foal who is not fit to rule the night!" she boomed through her laughter.

Luna was at a loss for words. Or she didn't want the same fate as the poor foal and mare that she had just witnessed the murdering of.

"Thou are a monster."

Nightmare Moon whipped around at her. "What?" she seethed.

"Thou are a monster. A tyrant! Thou are unfit to rule!" growled Luna, still trying to struggle against her bonds.

"You know nothing! You are just as oblivious as Celestia!" roared the Nightmare.

With a flash of teleportation, they were in the garden, the scene bathed in grey. Celestia lay upon the ground covered in cuts and bruises, her cheeks sliced and two legs broken. Her mane was fallen upon her face in a pink pony hair.

"How weak. Spineless. Thou aren't even putting up a fight," said Nightmare, spitting on Luna's dear sister. Luna tried to look away, but upon seeing this, Nightmare enchanted her eyes so they could not close for more than a blink.

"I don't want to fight you Luna," struggled Celestia, as she tried to get to her hooves, only to be pushed down by the crazed mare.

"Don't call us that! We are not thy Luna! We are not thy little sister anymore! We are more powerful than thou now. Surrender Equestria!" snarled the black mare, her armor shining in the unmoving moonlight glow.

"Never. I know you're in there Lulu," snarled Celestia through what teeth hadn't been kicked out of her mouth.

"We are not her!" said Nightmare, stomping down on Celestia's barrel.

Coughing up sputters of blood, Celestia finally got to her hooves, her eyes seething with anger.

Nightmare Moon, shot her down with another burst of painful magic, striking deep down into all of her limbs, freezing them up until she seized to the dirty earth once again. With a stomp of her mighty black hoof, all the foliage in the garden died, wilting and turning to ash, sprinkling around them in the wind. The smell of death and fire was potent.

"What happened to you?" she cried through her anger.

"They do not respect us! They do not love us, or our nights. They will learn to. I'll make them!"

screamed the mare, laughing crazily to herself.

"You killed so many ponies," sobbed Celestia for her sister.

"They deserved it!"

"The whole hospital wing. Did those foals' crying not strike your blackened heart?" pleaded Celestia.

"They were ungrateful! They feared us!" argued Nightmare.

Celestia rose to her hooves once again, refusing to strike her sister. "And they were right to! And now," she let one more tear slide down her filthy face. "They will not die in vain."

Celestia's horn ignited, and in front of her appeared six stone orbs. Summoning the greatest alicorn magic, the orbs spun around Nightmare. "What are you doing?" she screeched.

"Thou are a menace. You must be stopped," said Celestia, through tears for her tainted little sister, whom she had once loved so much.

"By the power of sun, and all that is good. Help my sister, bring back the one I knew. Cleanse her soul, free her mind, send her away, until the right time-" chanted Celestia, her eyes glazed over towards the moon.

"What are you doing," screamed Nightmare. "Fight me you coward!"

"Guide her heart, through the years. Make her see, don't make her fear. Help her now, if I cannot. Be my savior, and save her heart!" Celestia's eyes exploded with the most powerful unicorn magic known to pony magic. A magic summoned by every ancestor existed wrapped itself around the corrupted ruler of Equestria.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she writhed from the binds of her sister's magic. With steady tears flowing down her face, Celestia spoke for the last time.

"Goodbye my sister. I'll see you again. One day."

"NOOOooo." And then she was gone. The mare in black disappeared, and a silhouette of a unicorn took over half the moon. Celestia sank to all four knees, weeping every night for the next thousand years.

Luna blinked. That was what had happened. A spark flickered in her mind, and she let a tear slip for the inevitable.

They erupted back into throne room, the scene of the mutt/guards closing in on Celestia frozen in time. "She did not respect me. She did not believe my power," hissed Nightmare Moon, pointing an accusing hoof at the terrified statue of Celestia.

Luna openly let the tears fall as she knew her fate, as well as Celestia's in the coming moments. Nightmare Moon side glanced at the weeping alter ego.

"But I am feeling generous..." she said with a half smile.

Luna's eyes shot up to Nightmare's full of hope and happiness. "Oh thank you! I knew you were good!" cried Luna going to hug Nightmare, seeing the good was still present.

Before she could reach her though, Nightmare held a hoof up. "An eternity in the dungeons."

Her devious grin erupted and she burst out into her signature laugh, her mane and tail swarming in a tornado of lightning and stars above her. Luna's stars.

"What!?" cried out Luna, as the beam of magic hit her, sending her body flying away into the

depths of Canterlot Castle.

She rubbed the blue spot with a hoof. It was still tender, bruised harshly from smacking against the cobble stone of Canterlot's deepest dungeons, meant only for awful criminals. How long she's been out, she could not tell. Minutes? Hours? Maybe not even at all. Nothing gave any hint to her predicament, making her weave in place nervously.

She looked around. The cell was bare. A pile of straw covered in mold inhabited a minuscule corner of the den, uninhabitable and unedible for sane ponies. The room was as black as could be, save for the faint glow of the moon, shimmering through the lone window on the far wall. She knew why she was here. Not in the dungeon, but into this cell in particular. It was one of the few that contained a window. It was for those who claimed to be framed. So Luna had devised a way to make them confess the truth. Every day and night, they would see the freedom they could have, but it was so far. They would sit and yearn and go insane, just wishing they could fit one hoof between the bars. Soon enough they would confess, if only it meant being sent to a prison with outdoor privileges. Or they would rot away in front of the window, their eyes dried out from lack of sleep as they stared aimlessly for what they could not have.

But to Luna it was meant for one purpose, and one purpose only. To see that there was no hope. That there never would be. The moon would never move. The stars would never be obscured by the light of the sun. She would know what she could not see. That no pony had beaten Nightmare, and they never would. She too would rot away, staring at the moon, hoping that for once the sun would bring its day and wash away every minuscule trace that the night was ever present.

Luna had suffered a pretty good whack on the head by a jutting stone when she was teleported by force into the prison. The room was small, but space was ample enough that she could pace in her worries.

Folding and unfolding her wings, flapping them nervously then folding them again, Luna paced around the cell. Celestia had chastised her many a time for the annoying habit that usually resulted in things being knocked off of tables, or winds soaring through palace hallways. Celestia claimed it was just as equivalent as hoof biting, and was unprofessional for a princess; a pony everypony idolized and modeled themselves after, to have any vices. So Luna had pushed the habit down into the depths of her being, forgetting about it for hundreds of years. But now, it dared rear its ugly head yet again. And it won. Pacing and flapping. Pacing and flapping. That was all she could do. What else could she do? She was weak mentally, and was not certain how much magic she possessed at the moment. A single fire lit lamp resided in the hallway outside of the prison, illuminating the myriad of spiders and mold that clouded the wall behind it. Luna approached the cell door, trying to find any instruments that could aid in her escape.

"OWwww!" screamed a voice. Startled more so than she had ever been on her life, a beam of magic shot out of her horn in terror.

'Well, at least one good thing came out of this.'

Luna found herself heaving in terror, her back pressed up against the slimy wall near the straw. A figure, light illuminated behind it slowly rose from the opposite side of the cave. It stretched its jaws, moaning and howling as it did so. IT growled, heaving itself up onto its legs.

'One, two,' counted Luna, 'three, four.' The creature stood, bathed in the blackness of the dimly lit prison cell. In the dull light she could see the flick of hair. A tail? Quite possibly.

It opened its mouth once more, and with it, Luna opened hers.

"Ow, that really hurt," it said, stroking the tail. "Who knew it hurt to have your tail stepped on so much, it said glumly.

Luna sprinted into the creature, knocking it to the ground, her lips pressed against its firmly.

"Notte! Thank Faust!" she squealed in delight. She could not have been blessed more than to be with a pony she knew and trusted.

"Princess!" he said, pulling his forelegs across her barrel and up to her withers, wrapping her in a safe hug. She breathed in his scent, blocking out the mold and grime that he laid upon.

"What's happening up there?"

"I should ask the same thing," she said, her tear plopping on his cheek.

His ears flattened in the light of the torch. "It was awful," he exclaimed. "It was like lightning. It was there, and then it wasn't. She appeared, and we charged her, ready for battle and to interrogate her on what she'd done with you and Celestia.." his voice trailed off, and his head slouched to the side a bit, refusing to meet Luna's hungry gaze.

"What aren't you telling me, Notte?" she fished, crawling off the stallion to resume her regal composure with muzzle high and legs tall.

"She just blinked. That was all it took. Just one flutter of her eyes. All the guards stood still, and this red ooze started watering from their eyes. It was awful. They looked possessed," he said nervously.

Luna resumed her pacing, trying to make sense of the information she had just received. No longer did she have time to panic. If Nightmare Moon could corrupt her entire army in the blink of an eye, she could make all of Equestria her slave with a flap of her wings. She knew what she had to do, but refused to admit it to herself aloud. Or to anypony else for that matter.

And when another thought struck her, she did not have an answer. She spun towards her friend.

"Wait. Why are thou not possessed by Nightmare's powers?"

"I-I um, I..." he stammered, shifting on his hooves uncomfortably.

Luna put her horn to his forehead. "Thou will tell us the truth, and nothing less," she seethed in anger from the stress at the pony.

"I slept in!" he confessed. "I was at a barn late last day, and I slept in!" he collapsed, hiding his face in his forelegs.

Luna reacted in the only way she could. An over the top eye roll, hidden by the dark. These ponies sure did take their job seriously. But it touched her heart to see his loyalty.

"But how are thou not influenced? Surely her powers reached every lunar guard," she questioned, eyeing the pony.

"I overslept, remember?" he repeated, a little ignorant.

"I know that!" she snapped, but after calming her self with a short temple rub, she recollected herself. "What does that have to do with it?"

"I didn't have my armor on."

Click. She got it. Nightmare was warping the magic that Luna had enchanted the armor with that changed the soldiers' appearances, and made it warp their minds, instead of body. It all made sense.

She told Notte her theory. "Ohh, that makes sense," he said.

Luna examined the bars of the rusty cage. "How can we escape?" she contemplated.

Notte stood and examined the lock. "Its locked by a spell. Only unicorn magic can open it," he concluded. He turned to Luna, smiling in the moonlight. "That's simple enough, Just blast it open."

Luna shook her head, and his smile fell. "I'm afraid not. She has drained my powers for the moment," she said with a sigh, realizing that when she was able to escape, Nightmare would already be too powerful to stop, and who knows what would have become of Celestia by then. "But, you had magic a minute ago. It blasted up at the ceiling," he said pointing a hoof up. Luna followed his point, and sure enough, a aping hole resided in the stone.

"That's only because you scared-" She grabbed Notte's muzzle with her hooves and kissed both his cheeks. "That's it!" she cheered, spinning the poor pony around in circles by his face.

"What?" he tried to say between squished cheeks, gazing upon the gay face of the alicorn swinging him around like a ragdoll.

She stopped spinning and smield into his face, her horn nearly poking his eye out. "Thou hasest to scare me!" she exclaimed.

"Ummm," she dropped him form her grasp. Rubbing his head from the fall, he staggered to his hooves again.

"What?" she demanded, trying to see what faults he saw in her brilliant plan.

"I can't just scare you. The first time was an accident. And any ways. Now you're expecting it. You won't be scared." Luna pondered his logic, but ultimately came up with an even better plan.

"Fine. Than thou will stay here until thou scarest me," she proclaimed. Notte huffed into the air as the grueling process began.

"Boo!" screamed the exhausted pony in Princess Luna's face. He was met by a bored expression.

"That didn't work either, huh?" he figured. Luna shook her head. Notte collapsed in exhaustion from their feeble attempts. They had tried everything from scary stories (Most of which just aroused a laugh from Luna at their poor quality) to scary faces. Nothing had worked, and they were losing valuable time.

He bruashed his midnight blue tail in hopes for comfort, a habit he had picked up as a foal.

"It appears not," she summarized. "What shall we try next?" she said, not one to give up.

Notte got to his hooves with a solemn expression. He walked to the door and hung his head low.

"There's nothing more to try Princess."

Princess Luna rose from her makeshift bed of repulsive straw. "We musn't think like that Notte. There is still more to be done," she said wrapping a hoof around the pony.

"Rah!" he screamed into her face whipping his head around from his glumness with ease.

"Ahh!" screamed Luna, stumbling back an incredible flash of light leaving her horn and creating an alicorn sized hole in the bars.

“Perfect!” he yipped, galloping to freedom. Luna rubbed her head from the unsummoned magic. “Thou tricked us!”

“It was the only way to surprise you,” he said with a nonchalant shrug.

‘*Ok, this informality is starting to get old,*’ she thought, seeing as her subordinate would trick her. But, he had saved them both for the moment, so only respect could be bestowed upon him.

“Fine. Let’s make haste. We do not know what could have happened in her absence.

The two emerged in the slimy walled hallway. Further down, several torches dimly lighted the pathway. “This has to be the way out,” said Luna, gesturing to the stone spiral staircase at the end of the hall. Spiders scurried with every fallen hoof step as the pair galloped cautiously through the dank, forgotten dungeons. Emerging from the stairway, they were met with a congruent hallway, barely lit and leading to yet another stairway.

“it must be like this all the way up,” stated Notte as the two continued their quest for the throne room. With every hallway they emerged into, the moon grew brighter and brighter through the windows.

Slam. Notte ran into Luna’s hoof that she outstretched to contain him. A bright light shone from up the next set of stairs. He looked at Luna in surprise that she wasn’t already charging upward at her foe, but her face was solemn and with drawn. Yet she maintained her gaze with him, deep in thought.

“What’s wrong?” h asked, eager to help his princess fight her nemesis.

“I don’t know what will happen,” she said sadly. “And I’m scared,” she admitted, casting her gaze upon the moon through a barred window.

“It’ll be okay. You can beat her,” consoled her friend, draping a hoof around her. She shook it off.

“But what if I can’t?” she snapped. She inhaled deeply, her withers rising as she sucked in the massive calming breath. When she released, her gaze softened. “I just want to say thank you.” Notte stared at her, puzzled. “For what? I haven’t done anything.”

She smiled, the dark concealing the tear. “Just thanks for being our friend. And not fearing us.”

Notte returned a goofy smile. “Well, your welcome! Who wouldn’t want to be friends with the beautiful princess who brings the beautiful night- woah!” he yelped, as Luna pulled him into a tight kiss.

Not a second later, she was trotting up the stairs, leaving star struck pony a few paces behind her.

The light blinded her, assaulting her eyes as she emerged from the darkness. The fluorescent light beamed down hard, yet there was no pony occupying the room.

Notte appeared next to her, looking around. “Where are we?”

“The hospital wing,” replied Luna.

“You built a dungeon under a hospital!” shrieked Notte, not believing the information he had just received. Luna shrugged.

“We were short on space when we first built the castle. Come on, we have to move,” she said walking cautiously out from the hidden door, visualizing any means of escape if they were to be cornered.

They crept through the hospital, vacant of any patients. Their hooves click-click'ed heavily on the tiles, making the ponies wince at every step, their noise being a dead give away to their position. Sneaking through the wide double doors, they slinked out of the hospital and towards the throne room.

The tapestries were in awful condition. "She's been here," whispered Luna. Every tapestry's pictures were crossed out in ink, smudging Luna and Celestia's images beyond reprieve. Not one failed to be blacked out.

Crunch. Luna cowered back at the unsuspected sound. Seeing that the article responsible was not alive, she put her muzzle to it and opened her eyes. It was burnt.

Sniff. Unicorn flames. *Sniff.* Dark magic. Notte trotted to her side, and lifted the charred item to his face for further examination. "Luna..."

She snatched it from him, holding it close to her face.

Only a small section remained unblackened. Two muzzles. She instantly recognized it.

Luna rolled onto her side, sobbing and heaving. "Luna What's wrong!" She shook her head no. She couldn't speak. "Luna! Please! Answer me!" She laid still, clutching her tail and rocking, the tears flowing like the waterfalls falling off of Canterlot. She only shook her head no, refusing to answer.

She touched the item with her hoof, part of it crumbling at her touch into a small pile of ash. She sniffed loudly, and tried to compose herself to carry on with the mission.

She shakily rose to her four hooves, Notte helping her up and offering his body as balance.

Luna shook against him, shivering from the invisible cold that shrouded her. She tried to hold in her cries, but all that resulted was an awful hiccup sound emulating from her throat, chocking her with her own sobs. She kept herself from crumbling.

"Please Luna. We have to go," he tried, not ever being good at comforting. She nodded, her face bunched up in fear and excruciating sadness.

She walked, much slower than before. But although her motor functions were temporarily shot, a new fire burned within her. Pure hate. The same hate that led to Nightmare Moon's creation. Unconditional loathing for the monster that was hell bent on destroying every pony's life for her own selfish desires. And then Luna realized, that she had tried to do so as well. And that the hate had to be split in two, for she was half to blame for her ignorance.

She trotted away from the last remaining portrait of her parents.

Luna continued with her head cast own, Notte leading. "Oh my gosh! Are you okay?" he exclaimed, followed by an audible murmur and mumbling.

Luna raised her head and went to his side, to see a bounded servant pony. She was white, with a dark grey mane, a cutie mark of a feather duster.

"Dusty, are you okay?" he said, nuzzling the mare as he untied her gag and bound legs.

She spit a few times, followed by a lot of coughing and hacking from the lack of air. "I-I" cough, "fine."

"What happened!" exclaimed Notte in Luna's place, for the princess was unable to speak still.

"She She came! She swept through! Everywhere she went, it was black! Everywhere!" cried the mare, visibly shaking. Notte draped a comforting wing over what Luna presumed was his friend/co-worker.

It was then Luna noticed the inky substance splotted on her body. And the floors, and ceiling and

walls. It was everywhere. Like the pony was made of oil.

Click.

“Where is she now?” asked Luna, straightening up and regaining her voice. Notte looked at her with a proud smile, but she was focused on the mare.

“T-throne room...” she stammered. Notte nodded at Luna, and nuzzled the mare.

“Get away from here,” she told the unfortunate Earth pony. “There is a secret passage leading out of the castle behind the breads in the kitchen pantries. Warn everypony. Tell whoever you find to stay inside and spread the word.” The mare nodded.

“Go my little pony,” said Luna, knighting the mare with a tip of the horn on each side of the withers.

The pony bowed and scampered off towards the kitchen. Luna and Notte watched in relief as she ran off to freedom, and prayed to Faust that she would find other servants on her way and warn them as well.

The pair pressed on through the winding palace hallways, each one coming to an intersection that Luna easily breezed through. Endless, lonely nights of wandering the great halls had one her well, it seemed.

“The throne room!” exclaimed Notte, galloping up to the wooden doors, depicting carvings of two ponies, a sun and moon over them respectively. He reared up on his hooves, and laid them on the gigantic doors, preparing to swing them open and engage in the battle of the century. Or, the second battle of the century, after Discord’s defeat earlier.

“No!” yelled/whispered Luna, tears still in the brim of her eyes, no matter how hard she tried to fight them.

“What do you mean?” he hissed back, beginning to get frustrated with her moodiness.

“I have to get something,” she said, continuing down the hallway, but breaking into a frantic gallop. Notte flew in front of her, causing her to screech to a halt. He spread his massive wings, forbidding her from passing on either side of him.

“What are you doing?” she said, looking around to see if Nightmare’s minions were lurking anywhere.

“We can’t keep stalling Princess!” he demanded.

“I have to get something! It’s really important!” she insisted, spreading her own wings and leaping over her guard. She flew down the hallway. “Keep a lookout!” she yelled behind her before he could catch up.

She flew quickly down the twisting hallways, soaring up stairwells to the highest level of the castle. She stood before two magnificent doors, with a crescent moon in the shape of her cutie mark carved on it. To the sides were two paintings of Luna that she had originally protested against, but Celestia thought tour groups should get to know where she dwelled, even though Luna felt it was an invasion of privacy. Apparently, nothing was sacred anymore since she returned. Before she had been sent to the moon, tour groups weren’t allowed near the Princess chambers. If she remembered correctly, they weren’t allowed in the castle at all.

Luna pushed into her dormitory. Nothing had been touched, yet. She was fairly positive that Nightmare would have her and Celestia’s rooms torched at the first chance she got.

She ran straight to the vanity. Opening every drawer, she scoured for what she searched for. But when her eyes lay upon a certain revised drawing, her horn lit up in anger. With a fresh sheet

and the blink of an eye, the original picture was redrawn and tacked to the wooded vanity, bringing Luna a brief smile.

She voted against flopping on her bed for possibly the last time as she so often did as a filly. She took in the surroundings of her room. So many memories. Not all good. Most boring. She spotted the Daring Do book she had been forced to put down. She desperately wanted to finish it, but that would have to wait until peace was restored. She saw the multitude of maps and drawing she had collected and drawn over the years. The lists of new constellations she had added. Photos and portraits of her and Celestia, happily hugging each other like two sisters were expected to. She found a piece of paper and scribbled something very quickly onto it. Opening the last drawer, she breathed a breath of utter relaxation. A silver amulet hanging from a golden chain. She didn't need to open it; she already knew what was inside. But what else was stored what hold the fate of Equestria.

She quickly stashed in inside her breast regalia, and cantered out of the room, back to the throne room to regroup with Notte.

"Are you ready?" asked Notte. Luna gulped, but nodded. She had to do what she had to do.

"Ok, let's do this," he said.

"Wait!" she said, holding him back.

Notte looked at her quizzically. She lent down to him. He prepared himself for a peck of good luck. "Ow!" he screamed/whispered, rubbing his wing.

Luna held between her teeth a dark feather, with a tiny spot of blood on the tip from where it left the skin. He rubbed the spot incessantly, not seeing Luna tuck the feather into her chest plate along with the locket.

"Now we can go," she said, sucking up her chest to look bigger. A little sparkle had started to return to her hair, as a bit of magic started to return to her. She breathed her last breath of safety, and entered.

The room was dark. The light was as dim as the moonlight, but Luna's eyes were adjusted to her that she was able to see clearly, as was Notte from his time as a nighttime guard.

"Well well well. Looks like I wasn't able to hold you for long," chuckled Nightmare Moon from atop Celestia's throne which had now been bathed in a midnight black marble, while Luna's had been melted into a pile of liquid ruble.

"Luna!" cried out Celestia from an unidentified area. Luna searched the large room, placing the voice to an awful area. Dangling from the ceiling, was a magical chained Celestia, her mane dripping on to the floor below her. Where her ethereal mane dripped from her head, a pool of fire licked up towards her. If she tried to escape, which she probably could, she would fall into the heat of the sun that poured out of her body, something even the Goddess Celestia couldn't withstand. Her wings were bound with the same magical chains as her legs. "Luna! Get out of her-mmm," her mouth was covered with a levitated gag, blocking out her sentence.

"Shut up!" commanded Nightmare perched on her haunches on her regal seat. The guards crowded around Luna and Notte, their mouths dripping with saliva, and some of them,

blood. The servants from earlier were no where in sight, but Nightmare was surrounded by several pony skulls. Not being able to hold herself anymore, Luna gagged and vomited on the floor from the sight, heaving at the sight and even thought of the lost ponies. She could only find relief in the fact that Dusty had probably survived.

The guards closed in, squeezing Notte and Luna's rumps against the warm wood of the doors. Luna spread her wings and launched into the air. Several guard pegasi followed, licking at her heels with their piranha teeth. A sharp pain inflicted her hoof, only to be knocked off suddenly, but not before pulling a large chunk of fetlock with it. She looked behind her to see both Notte and the feral guard spiraling to the ground, growling and attacking each other as they crashed into the ground. Before she looked away, she saw him pull off the guard's helmet, the pony turning a bright yellow with a fluorescent orange mane. He blink-blinked, the viciousness fading from his eyes. Within seconds, he was attacking other guards along with Notte.

Notte and Sunlight fought back to back, smashing the wild ponies into the walls. Luckily, the unicorn guards had not retained enough control over their bodies in their untamed state to control their unicorn magic, so luckily there wouldn't be any magical guns being fired at them.

Hissing and biting at their faces, the guards attacked their comrades in their frenzied states. One Pegasus guards flew above them, head butting Notte repeatedly, crushing him into the floor with his skull. Pounding incessantly, he drove the dark Pegasus to the ground, sitting on him and stabbing him with the razor sharp bat fin that adorned his helmet. Sunlight torpedoed into the body of the ravenous pony, beating him to the floor with massive pounds of his strong wings. While Notte attempted to stop the bleeding from his open wounds, Sunlight slammed the base of his hooves into the helmet of the pony until the purple guard cracked along the side, giving way so that he could easily pull it off.

The color returning to his coat, the guard blink-blinked, shaking his mossy green mane out of his eyes. "Good to have you back, Leaf."

"What happened?" he said, rubbing a hoof to his face. Before Sunlight could respond, he was body slammed to the ground by yet another pony. Several ponies had already attached themselves to the legs and back of the green maned unicorn guard, who was trying to summon his power to blast them off, but to no avail. They gnawed on his legs, reaching the bone. Blood gushed from his body, staining the white marble floors until he limped over dead, the feral creatures devouring him.

"No!" shouted Sunlight, sprinting to the fallen guard. Filled with fury, he bucked the demon ponies off of his fallen friend and into the fire pit created by Celestia's mystical mane. The ponies screamed in demonic, other worldly voices that echoed through the room, melting away in the intense heat of the sun.

Sunlight didn't allow himself to look, as he was positive that as the cursed armor would melt off of his comrades, he would see their original faces, crying out for aid from the burning heat eating away at their bodies until they painfully drifted off to another world.

Notte wiped away the sweat from his brow, emulating from the fire pit in the far side of the room that burned brightly. He had several teeth marks embedded in his fur, but luckily none of them

were deep enough to constrict his movements too much. His muzzle was bleeding profusely though, A guard hissed behind him, and with a swift, easy buck, it too was sent flying into the inferno. The heat of the room was increasing rapidly, making him feel woozy and faint. Finding a unicorn that had been freed by Sunlight, he galloped to him. "You need to get the armor off of all these guards," he ordered. The unicorn looked disoriented, obviously just becoming free minded again. But he sloppily nodded his head, and brought about his magic. A magical blast filled the room, and armor shattered to the ground like glass. Everypony staggered around in a drunk like haze, trying to make sense of what had happened. Seeing everypony was safe, Notte went to fly up to aid Luna, only to be yanked down by his tail. "What gives? We have to help our Princess!" he shouted at Sunlight. Sunlight spit his tail out of his mouth. "We have to get everypony to safety," insisted Sunlight. "Luna can take care of herself, I promise. You need to let her do her thing." Notte's gaze shifted nervously between his princess and the guards, but ultimately gave in and aided in escorting the guards out to the gardens. Meanwhile...

She hovered in front of the throne, where Nightmare stared holes through her. Her dragon eyes burned, but still maintained an icy glare. "I have had enough of you and your little ponies," she declared, rising from her seat. Spreading her inky black wings, a few drops fell from them. Luna eyes them quizzically.

Click.

The mare flapped them, spraying the substance as she went, and soon was hovering in front of Luna. The room was deathly silent. The wind howled eerily through the broken windows sending a cool tingle up Luna's spine. This night was not graceful or beautiful. It was dark and scary. And it was meant to be. Nightmare flashed her knife like teeth, dripping with what looked to be liquid silver. She licked her lips, narrowing her eyes with a coy smile, the slit of a pupil growing even thinner than it already was naturally.

Luna lunged at the pony in blue armor. They circled each under the high ceiling of the throne room. Going for the throat, she aimed her horn precisely. Speeding towards her target, she became very disoriented when her target disappeared, and appeared behind her.

Luna's back cracked at a sickening volume as Nightmare lunged her hooves into it, rocketing Luna towards the ground. Nightmare laughed wickedly and crazily, as she plummeted her front hooves further into Luna's spine, pushing her down faster and faster. Unable to turn and attack back, Luna's face crashed into the marble floors, creating a pony head sized crater in the rock. The impact was excruciating. She was extremely dizzy, unable to stand with the incredible headache that followed. Her muzzle bled horribly, but she merely wiped it with a hoof. Turning, she tried yet again to attack. Aiming her sharp unicorn horn for Nightmare's eye, she stumbled to her hooves and flapped her majestic wings, sending herself flying at the other alicorn. But she was met with no gain. Nightmare was well adapted to fighting techniques, dodging every move that Luna attempted. She was too strong.

Celestia cried and shrieked from behind her gag, trying to get Luna to stand. To give her hope that her sister was still alive. Luna did not move for many seconds. Her body was exhausted

from all she'd gone through in the past day/night. She laid on the freezing floor, helpless and weak. But she still knew she wasn't done, and she had to finish what she had started.

Ignoring the pain, Luna staggered to her hooves, not able to muster any magic yet that would do anything more than take a few hairs off of Nightmare's backside. So she fled, deciding to try and tire the evil empress out until she was more vulnerable. "Go Luna! Save yourself!" cried out Celestia, pitting out the gag, seeing Luna fly out of the broken glass windows. Little did she know, that her little sister was far from safe.

Luna did not let herself cry. She stayed strong and pumped her wings, soaring out of the castle. The flap of wings behind her chimed Luna into that Nightmare was not far behind. She pricked her ears back hearing sparks behind her. Luna barrel rolled, closely avoiding the deadly blast coming from the black mare's horn.

"Fight me!" screamed Nightmare as she raced towards Luna, razor sharp feather strung out crazily. Her dragon eyes were burning into the back of Luna's head, thirsty for vengeance and power. Luna loop-de-looped, spun, and flipped away from every magical blast Nightmare flew at her.

Her body was exhausted, and she could feel her wings about to give out. They rocketed over the gardens, and Luna could hear something she hadn't heard in decades. Was that, cheering? She circled back, looking down to see her troops cheering her on, rooting that their princess would emerge victorious from the raging battle. She smiled, and regaining her strength, boomed forward at Wonderbolt speed, sending Nightmare toppling back on the back wind of Luna's jolt. Nightmare, shaking her head from the whiplash, lurched back in the air, and sent herself zooming off towards Luna, easily following her through the trails of stars trailing behind her as she reached super sonic speeds.

She couldn't shake her. She tried everything she could to free herself from Nightmare's grasp. Shot after shot was fired at her, and although she avoided most of them with ease, the ponies were equal in the air. "Ah!" cried Luna, as a beam of fire grazed her left shoulder. The impressive wind pressure blowing on it did not aid in pain relief, and Luna felt that at any moment she was going to fall from the sky right into the city of Canterlot. She didn't know if anypony was watching. She hoped no pony was watching. She didn't even know if Dusty had made it out safely. Nightmare was quick, and never got left behind. Luna could dodge all of her attacks in the air. It was a stalemate. Both ponies were exhausted, their wings barely flapping anymore, and their nostrils flaring wildly for breaths of air as they zoomed over Canterlot in malicious battle.

Luna knew what she had to do. What she had to do to end it, once and for all.

She lurched to the side, making a complete U-turn, Nightmare Moon following in sync. She crashed through the last remaining glass of a window, spiraling into the throne room yet again, but careful to avoid the fire bit of Celestia's mane. She had a few second before Nightmare followed suit, so she sparked what little magic she had to free Celestia off her chains, lowering her down gently so she wouldn't fall into her own portal of fire. Celestia hugged her sister close, weeping on her shoulder.

"I love you so so much Celestia. I don't blame you for anything you've done, and I don't want you to blame yourself. You're a great, strong pony, the ruler of Equestria. I love you so much big sister," whispered Luna. Celestia continued sobbing.

Nightmare erupted into the room. "Enough!" she cried out into the night. Luna stood tall. Celestia spread her mighty wings and hunched back to attack, but Luna stopped her with a hoof and a shake of her head. "This is my battle sister." Celestia backed down as Nightmare chuckled.

"Oh, how touching," she cooed, before dive bombing down towards the dark alicorn. Nightmare blasted Luna in the chest with a dark magic that only she possessed. The blast heated Luna's inside, making her feel like her pure insides were melting at the blast zone. She fell over on her side, clutching her chest with a hoof. It had missed the chest plate by mere centimeters, luckily.

Enveloping Luna in her magic, she lifted her up, and slammed her into the far wall. The banners fell, wrapping Luna in their grasp. Her side hurt horribly, and she was sure a few ribs were broken. Nightmare lifted her back up into the air, repeatedly slamming her into the wall until she was sobbing and coughing up blood. When Nightmare got bored with that, she picked Luna up for something new.

Luna was flung to the ground, head held over the fire pit by Nightmare's hoof. She struggled intensely, but Nightmare weighed too much. "No!" screamed Celestia as she galloped over to help her younger sister. Within seconds, Notte appeared as well, doing whatever he could to aid Celestia and Luna.

"**GET BACK!**" roared Luna in her Royal Canterlot voice. Shocked to hear the volume and severity coming from Luna, the victim, both Celestia and Notte backed up in instinct and surprise. Luna pawed into her breastplate, taking out the locket with one hoof. With the other hoof, she stuck onto Nightmare's chest. "What are you doing?" hissed Nightmare.

Luna smiled at her foe. Nightmare went to smack the mare's hoof off of her chest, but it wouldn't budge. It was glued onto the evil mare, morphing into the blackness until the two were connected by skin and blood. The hoof transmuted into the chest, until it wasn't identifiable anymore as a separate hoof, but rather looked as if Luna was growing out of Nightmare. "What is happening!?" screamed Nightmare, trying to rear up. But Luna stuck her back legs up, attaching them to Nightmare's barrel, her back hooves also connecting in the same suit until Luna was holding her down with her weight. Nightmare struggled and squirmed, but the two were joined together in inky goo.

"Luna!" cried out Celestia and Notte rushing to help her yet again. Both had tears in their eyes, rushing down their faces as they screamed out for their friend. Notte flapped his wing wildly, trying to gain speed, while Celestia illuminated her horn, reading a spell that she hoped would help.

"I love you," she said to both of them, a loving tear falling down the side of her cheek. They rushed towards her to help, but with her one free hoof, Luna opened the locket. A photo of her and Celestia resided inside, one of when they were fillies. Luna used to look at the locket after their parents left, and smile, knowing that no matter what, she always had Celestia to be by her side. To stand by her. But with the opening of the picture, something far greater erupted. A blinding light of white flooded the throne room, instantly melting the dark marble throne Nightmare had constructed. Everypony had to shield their eyes with a wing from the insufferable light, followed by a gigantic rainbow that shot upwards, then dived down on the two mares. It swirled around them, maliciously, squishing them together and ripping them apart at the same

time.

“NOOOO!” screamed Nightmare Moon as the rainbow surrounded her yet again. Luna had harvested the lingering magic of the elements once she had been freed, saving it for use when the time was right. The time was right.

Luna did not scream. She was sure that Notte and Celestia were screaming and crying. She did not want them to. She absorbed the warm embrace of the rainbow, proud of herself for finally doing the right thing for once. It was cool, yet comforting at the same time as it engulfed her body. She felt herself being lifted, ever so slowly.

She felt Nightmare struggle greatly in their conjoined body. She had known ever since Dusty. Nightmare wasn't complete. She hadn't gotten every drop out of Luna like she had thought, so she wasn't whole. Instead, she was stuck as an inky blob in the shape of a pony, not fully formed yet, and still a part of Luna. Touching, she had started to morph back into Luna slightly, causing them to connect.

She didn't want anypony to cry. She wanted them to be happy, to be proud. She wanted her little ponies to be safe, for she loved them all dearly. She thought of the Elements of Harmony, how they had the friendship she hadn't been able to experience. But instead of being envious, she was so happy for them. So incredibly happy she felt like crying. That they had found each other and wouldn't waste their lives as loners as Luna had.

She clutched her breastplate for the last time as the rainbow's powers increased. She couldn't hear anything except the billowing wind. She could feel Nightmare's thrashing, but tried to ignore it. Instead, she clutched the feather of blue from her only friend, and secret love and the locket of silver that held her dear sister's memory. The two, she would never, ever forget.

Her hooves were far off the ground, and she felt light as a feather. She smiled. And she laughed. She laughed and laughed, glad that this was being done. She wished one day to return. She knew Celestia would try whatever she could, but she had to face the fact that if Luna was there, so would Nightmare Moon be. She could not have just one, no matter how hard she tried. Maybe one day. Luna hoped that day would never come, if it meant keeping Equestria safe. She knew it was a great shame, and she knew she would be missed. She loved them all, and she loved Celestia so much. But she wouldn't cry. She needed to be strong. For the both of them.

She didn't want to go, but she was glad to. She knew she had to, and she wished there was another way, but in the end, she had to leave her little ponies. She had to leave Notte She had to leave Celestia. She knew it would kill Celestia inside, losing her sister again, but she knew she wouldn't be as sad this time, because it was what Luna wanted, and what equestrian needed.

They rocketed off. She couldn't see it. But she felt it. A final scream deafened the tornado of color, and then Luna felt warm and safe. She felt the coolness of the night sky upon her, but she felt the comfort that her life was complete: fulfilled.

And that night, two silhouettes graced the beautiful moon's surface.

Celestia closed the book, and the teachers present stomped their hooves, tears brimming their eyes. Everypony was enticed by the famous story that their own Princess of Equestria had read

to them.

“What happened next, Miss Celestia?” called out a little filly with a raised hoof.

“Why did Luna go away?” called out another. Multitudes of confused questions filled the air.

Celestia silenced them with a wave of her hoof.

“My sister did what she knew was right for Equestria. She righted the wrong she had done, for the greater good.” Celestia had repeated that line hundreds of times. She had taken up telling Luna’s story every time she visited a school, which was surprisingly often. Although it had been almost fifty years, she still had to brush away tears at the end. She knew how much Luna had enjoyed foal, so she had decided, what better way to let her memory live on than to pass it through the younger generations?

This time, she had promised herself, Luna’s memory would not die out like it had 1501 years ago, when she had first become Nightmare Moon. Now, she was a hero. She had thousands of statues scattered around Equestria depicting her bravery to all. She was a hero to pony kind. Within hours of the incident, word had gotten out to Equestria of what had happened. They all cherished her from then on forth, and Celestia knew her sister would have been ecstatic to know that.

Luna’s lunar guards remained in duty as a testament to their princess, patrolling cities at night to reduce crime rates, which they had beyond succeeded in doing. Celestia found Luna’s drawing of her constellations, and just a few weeks ago, had finally gotten the nerve to put it into the sky, right next to the moon so Luna could always see it. Notte was present. He never married. He said he would save himself for Luna forever. He would never love again.

Nightmare Night was discussed on court of whether or not it should be cancelled. The court voted for the deterioration of the holiday, and most ponies agreed it wouldn’t be right without the Princess. But Celestia had overthrown the vote and insisted it stay, knowing Luna was honored to see young ones having fun in her name.

However, a new holiday were added to the Equestrian calendar. Dies lunaris, or lunar day, would be a full twenty-four hours of night, filled with shooting stars and swirling cosmos. There would be no clouds, and the sun would never rise. Everypony would see the night, and see Luna, and be able to thank her. Foals would write letters to the princess and throw them into a bonfire, told that the smoke would carry the message up to the moon for their princess. Some would even burn flowers and other goodies, hoping foolishly that those would reach her too. Celestia was one of them.

Children would send letters to Nightmare Moon too, so that she would hear every year that what she did was wrong, in hopes that she would see the error of her ways and become good, and one day allow Princess Luna to be free. They missed her. He little ponies missed her so much. They would weep for her, wrecked that they previously took her for granted. But they were glad to celebrate her too.

The Elements of Harmony took the news hard, especially Twilight Sparkle. Her and Luna had been closer than other ponies, and Luna hadn’t been able to thank her for all she had done, or say one last goodbye, which ravaged Twilight Sparkle. But Celestia had assured the student countless times that Luna had meant to, but hadn’t had the time.

Twilight’s children had heard the tale many times. Two of the four had gone into astronomy in Luna’s honor, trying to figure out a way to save her. Thousands of ponies had. Celestia knew in

her heart it was a fruitless effort, but still demanded to be constantly updated on their progress. It was good to keep hoping.

A foal's question snapped Celestia back to the present.

"Wasn't she sad to leave?" asked an inquisitive colt.

Celestia smiled. She reached into her saddlebags and pulled out a crinkled, old piece of parchment. "I'm going to share something that I've never shared with anypony else, but you have to promise not to tell," she whispered, leaning in close towards the children.

They all got super excited, anxious to hear such a secret from the ruler of their country. Celestia was trolling a bit, for she did this with every visit, but it was a good excuse to get to read the letter to herself as well.

"Ok. This is the letter Princess Luna left me the night she left." Clearing her throat, Celestia levitated the note to her face. For twenty five years, she would cry herself to sleep reading Luna's note. But today she was proud of her sister's sacrifice.

"My dearest Celestia," she read, "when you find this, I will no doubt be gone. Don't get me wrong; I did this for you my dear sister. I cry as I write this, for I will miss you very much. But what must be done must be done. This is my fault, and I am going to take action against my mistake. I love you so much, never forget that. Tell Notte I love him very much as well, and to continue with his studies of the stars. You don't realize how hard it is for me to have to leave you a second time, and it is killing me inside to have to abandon you sister, this time for much longer. Don't cry for me Tia. Don't fret over a way to fix this either. I will be happy, I'm sure of it. I will watch over you every night as you raise me and my moon. Nightmare will never be a problem again, and I know you will keep Equestria safe from whatever other horror rears its head. I love you so much sister. I hope to see you one day again. Don't forget me, and please try to move on. Diligite noctem. Quod colimus, cui semper adest, scio.

*With so much love my sister,
Princess Luna (Lulu)*

Celestia re-wrapped the scroll and placed it in her saddlebag. A little paint colt tugged on Celestia's ethereal tail. "Will Princess Luna ever come back?" he said with quivering lip. Celestia looked to the sky with a single tear. "I hope so."