

Prancing Through Paris
by Pen Pal

The sunlight slowly crept, inching bit by bit towards the bed. Insufferably slow, the shadows of the night fled before the almost inexorable rise of the sun, fleeing into every nook and cranny, abandoning their stewardship over the land of dreams and restful slumber. Over every marble etching and past every piece of ornate furniture, the light chased the shadows away, until at last it fell upon the edge of a bed in the shape of the moon covered with silken sheets and fluffy blankets. A bed currently inhabited by a rather lumpy dark blue mass.

“Ugh” groaned the mass. “Did I forget to close the curtains again?” The mass struggled under the covers, rolling round and round, until finally it appeared to stuff its head under the pillow. A horn poked out from underneath it. Moments later, the horn began to glow and the curtains slid shut, locking out the day and turning the room into a little pocket of the night.

SHHHHHHHH roared the curtains, as they were pulled back, and sunlight flooded into the room. “Luna! Time to get up! It’s a bright and wonderful day today!”

“UGH!” moaned Luna from underneath her pillow. “Celly! You know that I stay up all night!”

“But I’ve got some wonderful news!” said Celestia. “Such wonderful news that it simply can’t wait!” Luna pulled her head out from under the pillow, staring blankly at her sister. Princess Celestia, usually so regal and motherly, was practically prancing about the room.

“What couldn’t possibly wait until at LEAST noon? Actually? You know what? Scratch that. What couldn’t wait until two?”

Celestia snickered. “You have to clean yourself up first silly filly.”

Luna stared at her sister. “What?”

“You have to get up!”

“I am up. And I have every intention of going straight back to bed.”

“No you’re not. You’re not even out of bed.”

Luna shook her mane in anger. “I just stayed up all night to guide the moon through the night-time sky and hold evening court! I deserve to sleep!”

Celestia giggled. “Oh come on! It’s not everyday I wake you up early!”

Luna sighed. “Fine. But you don’t bother me for the next week. I have a lot of work to do and I need to be well-rested for it.”

“Oh, I won’t be tearing you away from your precious work for awhile. This little surprise is just that good.”

“It had better be,” Luna muttered as she clambered out of bed. A light morning breeze swept through the chamber; the cold mountain air whipped through Luna’s coat. “Brrrrr,” she shivered. “I’m up now. I don’t know how you can live up here. I preferred the old castle.”

“Oh, you’ll get used to it. Now do hurry up!”

Luna followed Celestia from the room, levitating her hairbrush and grumbling as she went.

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“I’m DOING WHAT?!” Luna screamed.

“Now now, you don’t need to shout,” Celestia chastised, wincing from her little sister’s outburst.

“Oh no no no NO NO NO! I’m not going anywhere except back to bed! And then I’m

going to wake up and hold evening court, and raise the moon, and watch the night!” Luna turned around and was about to storm off when two members of the royal guard barred her way. “Get out of my way!”

“Luna...” Celestia said quietly.

“What?!” Luna spat, spinning around. “You think you can just make me do anything you want? Go anywhere you want?”

“Now it’s not like that little sister...”

“How isn’t this like that?!” Luna raged. The guards stepped backwards.

Celestia looked away. Luna noticed tears in her sister’s eyes; her stomach began churning.

“I just thought that my little sister deserved a vacation...”

Luna’s anger disappeared completely. Shame ate at her insides as she lowered her head and pawed slowly at the ground and one of the guards behind her muttered “Awk-waaaard...”

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“Ugh...how do I let my sister talk me into these things?” Luna said to herself. She was resting her head on the side of the sky ferry railing. The puffy thing felt so much like her pillow.

“Your Highness? Would you like anything to-“

“For the last time Periwinkle, I don’t want anything,” Luna said to the sky blue mare behind her.

“Yes your Highness,” said Periwinkle. She bowed lightly and then retreated to the door.

Luna looked over the railing at the lower decks of the sky ferry, watching as happily playing foals leapt over the clouds. Earth pony foals looked in wonderment at the ocean passing rapidly beneath them. Some of them stood at the front of the ferry, watching the teams of pegasi pulling the ship along.

“Periwinkle?”

“Yes your Highness?”

“Won’t the pegasi get tired pulling us all the way to France?”

Periwinkle looked surprised. “Oh no your majesty. The pegasi just pull us out of dock. Once we’re far enough, the captain will engage our onboard engines. Earth pony design. Powered by unicorn charged magical batteries. All made in Equestria.”

Luna blinked. “So the cloudwalking spell. There’s not somepony constantly casting it?”

“Nope. Static enchantment maintained by battery. We have backup unicorns just in case, and lifeboats of course.”

“Of course,” nodded Luna. She’d hypothesized the concept of magical batteries a thousand years before. It looked like someone had finally decided to look into her idea. “How long have there been magical batteries?”

“Oh gosh...I don’t know...if I remember correctly from my schooldays...about 900 years?” Periwinkle said.

Luna sighed and put her head back on the railing, sinking into it a little.

“Did I say something wrong Princess?”

“No. You didn’t say anything wrong. I’m just tired, that’s all.” The cawing of seagulls flying in the ferry’s wake did nothing for her mood. The world had changed in the past 1000 years, and Princess Luna had been left behind. The only pony that treated her as someone other than The Goddess of the Moon, Her Highness Princess Luna, was her sister Celestia.

As thoughts of her loneliness drifted through her mind, Princess Luna returned to what

Celestia had said to her earlier.

“I do not work too much,” she muttered. So what if she spent nearly every waking hour in the library with Abby? She had, singlehoofedly, balanced the budget for the entire judicial system! It’d taken her months admittedly, but she’d done it! Celestia hadn’t been able to do it for years! Then there was the tax code, the multiple agricultural subsidies, the various issues that were raised at her nightly court...

Luna paused. Maybe she *did* work too much. It *was* all she did. Did normal ponies spend all their time working out the kinks in the tax code? Then again, she wasn’t a normal pony. But did that really matter? She had time to herself after all, even if her hobbies were a little...odd.

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“You just stare at yourself in the mirror.” Celestia had said.

“No I don’t. I *model*,” Luna had retorted.

“Ok. You model. Socks. I hate socks.”

“What’s wrong with socks?” Luna asked indignantly.

“Because we wear horseshoes?” Celestia stuck her tongue out.

“Oh, you don’t like them just because they don’t look good on you.” Luna responded with her own tongue.

“And you’re just using them to cover up your three thousand year old legs!”

“You’re one to talk! Miss I’m scared of Mr. Buttons!” With that, Luna levitated a little white sock puppet with one yellow button and one green button sewn on for eyes out from under the table. “Bleach! Scary Mr. Buttons is coming to get you Celly!”

Celestia’s eyes had opened wide in mock terror. “Oh no! Not Mr. Buttons!” Afterwards, she immediately leapt behind a large, ornately decorated round table. Several papers detailing even more affairs of state each had scattered about the room.

Luna chased Celestia around the table with Mr. Buttons for several minutes before that busybody Lemon Drop interrupted them, “Princess Celestia? There is some business in the Sun Court that needs tending to. A Mr. Beach Goer is here to see you? He says it’s urgent.”

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“Your Highness?”

“Yes Periwinkle?”

“Would you like to retire to your chambers now?”

“Yes Periwinkle. I’d like that very much.”

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“It is an honor to be in your presence, oh Great Goddess of the Moon,” said Papier de Pousette. Luna regarded the grey mare that bowed before her. Papier looked older, but well-worn; but somehow, Luna felt, she wasn’t likely to be a very interesting pony. It might have had something to do with the cutie mark of a horsecart full of papers. Or maybe the dull, matching grey satchel, stuffed full of even more papers, that hung over her shoulder. “It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to the fine country of France.”

“It is an honor to be here,” Luna said. She stared around the formerly busy airport. Several journalists had started snapping pictures, and multiple ponies in suits stood at the edge of the dock, glaring menacingly at anypony who even dared to come near.

“It’s ok boys, you can relax,” Luna called. The bodyguards didn’t even move. “Seriously boys. At ease.” The bodyguards softened, moved to the edge of the boarding ramp. A journalist tried to slip in, but quailed and fled underneath the gaze of one of the guards.

“We have reserved a room for you at the Hotel Prince de Galles. Would you like to go now?” Papier asked.

“But what about my luggage?” Luna asked worriedly. She’d left Abby all alone for the entire trip, and she was worried about him.

“We have already unloaded them from the sky ferry. They will be waiting for you in your room when you arrive.” Papier said. Luna wondered if Papier ever sounded excited about anything; it seemed more appropriate to believe that Papier would continue to speak in that dull monotone even if the world was ending.

“Is there anything you can tell me about the room?” Luna asked. “I’d very much like to know about the place I’m staying.

“Certainly Princess. The Hotel Prince de Galles is one of the most prestigious centers of hospitality in all of France. Located only a short walk away from the Arc de Triomphe and Champs Elysee, you are guaranteed to be in the heart of Modern France. Describing it as a mere luxury hotel does the Prince de Galles a disservice.” Papier de Pousette sounded like an advert reel, Luna thought. She began debating getting Papier de Pousette to tell a joke. Laughing at a joke was probably out of the question.

“I wouldn’t mind going to the hotel now. I have sleep I’d like to catch up on,” Luna said. She yawned at the end of the request, and though she would have liked to say that she had done it for emphasis, it was actually because the bed on the sky ferry hadn’t been comfortable at all.

“Of course milady. Right this way.”

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“Who paid for this?” Luna asked, her mouth agape.

“Her Royal Highness, Princess Celestia paid for your room at her insistence. We were going to offer it to you for no cost.”

“My sister rented out the PENTHOUSE?!”

“Her Solar Majesty, Princess Celestia actually purchased the penthouse, but if you like you can stay in one of the regular guest rooms,” Papier said.

“No thank you. I just need to give her a good talking to about the appropriate distribution of Equestrian assets,” Luna muttered. It was a VERY nice place. So very elegant, it reminded her of home. Everything from the decor to the furniture was a testament to olden France. Emperor Naponyon? No. It felt like an earlier time...the time of self styled Sun King, Louis XIV. Celestia hadn’t approved of someone claiming to be king of her sun, and she’d said so in very short order. He’d simply laughed and said, “I am only the King of France’s sun; you are Queen of the world’s.”

“I am a princess. The world has no queen,” she had retorted. King Louis just laughed. Despite all his warmongering and multiple political machinations, Luna had liked him. He had a deep, hearty laugh, and he certainly cared about his subjects. More than any other European king had for a long time.

“Milady?” Papier said, shaking Luna out of her reverie.

“Oh? I’m sorry, yes?”

“Milady, if there is nothing further, may I go?” Papier’s face looked like she had a million things to do, and no time for Luna...not that she would want to. Luna didn’t know what to think about Papier’s attitude at this point; she was so cold and distant. Was everypony outside of Equestria going to think about her this way? Admittedly she had tried to bring about eternal night, but she had changed since then! On the other hoof, maybe not everyone was as forgiving

as Equestrians in general. Maybe. Or Maybe Papier just didn't like her for her? Luna wasn't sure which one was worse.

"Milady?" Papier asked again, an edge of tension to her voice.

"Oh! Of course," Luna said. It didn't matter if anypony didn't like her. She couldn't be popular with everyone. Even Celestia was not universally loved, and her older sister had saved the world. From her. "No! No!" Luna thought to herself, "You're on vacation! Think happy thoughts! Happy thoughts!"

"If you have any further need of my services, I have left my card by the telephone. Please feel free to call at any time," Papier said, giving Luna a wan smile. With that the paper pusher turned tour guide, Papier de Pousette, left the room.

Luna was by herself. At last. On vacation. What was she going to do now? She felt like catching up her sleep. Catching up on her sleep sounded like a really good idea. Ponies did that on vacation right? They caught up on their sleep? She yawned loudly, before deciding to try to find a bedroom before she fell asleep on the gold embroidered sofa in the living room.

SHHHHHHHHH went the window curtains on the glass window-doors to the balcony. Luna stared. Then blinked. Then rubbed her eyes. Then stared again.

"*SURPRISE!*" yelled a pink earth pony with party balloons as her cutie mark. A shower of confetti began falling from the ceiling. She had been hiding behind the curtain with five other ponies. Another earth pony, and two each of pegasi and unicorns. Wait. She recognized these ponies. They were...

Moments later, Princess Luna, Goddess of the Night Sky, was hiding behind the sofa.

"Omigosh omigosh omigosh omigosh!" she thought to herself. "Celly!!! Why did you do this to me?!"

"You need to stop reading those dusty old books, relax, and make some friends," Celestia had said to her before she left. It had sounded like a line right out of the fateful letter that Celestia had sent to Twilight Sparkle the day before she had escaped from the moon. The day before the night when she had finally been freed of her hate, her jealousy, and her malice.

She didn't know how to talk to anypony normally. She hadn't realized it before, but she realized it now and it scared her. Furthermore, she owed these six mares everything. They were the ones that had freed her from her self-inflicted prison; and there they were, standing right in front of her, holding a surprise party for her. All that shock concentrated into a single moment was why she was now huddling behind the sofa. At the same time, she noticed that the confetti had coincidentally stopped falling.

"Huh. Normally ponies don't hide behind things when I give them a surprise party! Normally they're all like *gasp* and they're so happy and surprised and thankful and just think that it's so totally amazing!" It sounded like she was taking a *very* deep breath. Luna hadn't been sure if that voice even needed to take a breath, but was a little glad that now she knew. As she heard the breath ending, Luna braced herself. "You think maybe she's scared or something? Oh! I know! Something really scary must have happened during her last birthday party! Maybe it was a diamond dog, or they were playing Pin the Tail on the Pony, and someone pinned the tail on her! Or maybe--"

"...um...girls..." said a gentle voice.

"Pinkie Pie, do be a dear. The princess is frightened enough as it is," said someone else. It sounded like it was the white mare with the purple mane. Luna didn't know why, but something about that voice just stuck in your head. It was the kind of voice you couldn't tell if you were

annoyed with or you liked, because it sounded like it was always looking for an angle. But not in a bad way.

“...she’s right behind that sofa...” said that same gentle voice.

“Hey! I don’t know if I even WANT to give her a chance anymore,” said a strong, tomboyish voice.

“Rainbow Dash! There ain’t no reason to be goin’ on like that. She’s just scared is all; and if’n you don’t recall, Princess Celestia didn’t said anything to her about spendin’ time with anypony else.” said another. This one had a thick cowboyish, countryish twang to it. With a hint of...was that Manehattanite?! “At the very least, ah think we should stop bein’ so rude. She’s right there behind that sofa. You know. THAT one?”

“...that’s what I said...” Luna just wanted to leap out from behind the sofa and give whatever pony was saying that a hug. She didn’t know why. Something about it just felt so...cute?

“Princess Luna?” said a voice. This one was clearly different. It sounded levelheaded.

“Now I know I’m crazy. How does a pony sound levelheaded?” Luna thought to herself.

“Princess Luna? Are you alright? We didn’t scare you did we?”

Luna slowly stepped out from behind the sofa, uncertainty pouring out of every drop of her body language. “Um...I was just startled?”

The pink one gasped and opened her mouth before the orange one in the stetson stuffed her hoof in her mouth. She turned around and gave the princess an awkward smile as Miss Hoof-in-Mouth’s muffled voice still went at a million miles a minute.

“You do remember us right?” asked the lavender one. Luna just felt...safer looking at her. Something about her seemed relatively sane. At least compared to the other ponies standing around her. And that mane! That pink stripe and the lilac stripe just worked so well; she looked so pretty and...Luna shook her head. It was just the City of Love getting to her. Yeah. That was it.

“Oh of course! How could I forget the mares who saved Equestria and the world from...me,” Luna said. She’d started excited, but she just couldn’t be excited about that mistake. Her single biggest mistake. “No! No!” she thought to herself, “I am ON VACATION!” Turning to the six ponies before her, she nodded, confident. “Yes of course! You’re Twilight Sparkle, you’re Applejack, Rainbow Dash, Rarity, Fluttershy, and...Pinkie Pie?” She pointed to each pony in turn.

Pinkie Pie managed to escape Applejack’s hoof. “Blech! I don’t know what it is about hooves but they never taste any good! Maybe if everypony went around wearing horseshoes made of sugar instead of steel they would taste better! Oh but then they wouldn’t be very tasty after somepony had walked on them. Oh! I’m forgetting that Princess Luna remembered all of our names! Do you know what this calls for?”

“A party?” Luna said weakly. She wasn’t sure why she said it, but something felt right about the guess.

“Oh you’re good,” Pinkie Pie said.

Luna looked at each of the six ponies, each standing and looking back at her expectantly. “Well,” she thought, “It’s been a thousand years since my last real party, I’m on vacation, and I don’t think it’s going to be anything like the Grand Galloping Gala...so...why not? It’s not like I know anypony else in this city.” Her thoughts turned briefly to Papier de Pousette. “Anypony who likes me,” she corrected herself. To the ponies before her she said, “Oh why not? Let’s party!”

At that moment, Luna wasn't sure how but had decided that she didn't care how, confetti started falling again. "Tonight," she thought, "is going to be the best night in a very long time."

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Luna groaned. The morning sun had returned to bother her. At least the cold mountain breezes of Canterlot weren't here to bother her. Maybe Celly would let her sleep in today...

"Rise and shine sleepy head! It's a great day here in Paris, and there's a lot to do! So let's get and go go go, because we have got some diem to carpe!" someone shouted excitedly.

"Ugh," groaned Luna. "Five more minutes Celly." She rolled over to the other side of the bed to get away from Celestia...

"Oof," said Luna. That had hurt. Her bed was bigger than this, she thought. She must have been tossing and turning through the night, and had been closer to the edge than she thought. Then again – wait. She'd slept during the night? Wait – did that voice say Paris?

Luna's eyes flew open. That voice was Pinkie Pie!

"I told you she was just going to shrug us off Pinkie Pie," said Rainbow Dash.

"Dears, don't be absurd! She's the Princess of the Night Sky! Of course she doesn't get up during the day! It's because she's up all night!" said Rarity.

"She went to sleep fine last night," argued Rainbow Dash.

"She hasn't slept since Celestia sent her on vacation! The poor dear must be completely exhausted," Rarity replied.

knock knock knock

"Dear?"

"Yes Rarity?"

"Doesn't that hurt?"

"Only the first few times I tried it. But it's really fun!"

"Pinkie Pie?"

"Yes Dashie?"

"You are so random."

knock knock thump

"Don't do it again dear? It can't be good for your head."

"Awww...ok."

knock knock knock

Luna finally got to her hooves. She had to answer the door at some point. She owed them that much. After all, last night had just been...what would Rainbow Dash say? Awesome?

"Awesome..." she said, feeling the modernity of the word across her tongue. "Last night was...awesome." They'd danced and ate and danced some more...it had been utterly unlike any of those stuffy formal affairs, like the Grand Galloping Gala. It was fun! Not only that, but what had Pinkie Pie said?

"And now you have lots and lots of friends!" she had said, with one of those classic Pinkie Pie smiles plastered all over her face.

Friends. Now there were some things she hadn't expected to have anytime soon. Though, she supposed, if it was going to be with anypony it'd be with the Bearers of the Elements of Harmony. Somehow it made sense: the prodigal princess returning to the fold, welcomed back by her pony saviors and becoming friends under her elder sister's wing. They could make a movie out of it. Luna liked movies. They could make Papier de Pousette the villain.

"Let's go girls. I don't think anything will wake her up until she's good and ready," said

Rainbow Dash grumpily.

“Don’t be a Grumpy-Snooty Rainbow Dash!” said Pinkie Pie. “I think I can hear her coming!”

“I’m up girls!” Luna shouted, “I’m on my way!”

“See!” said Pinkie Pie.

“Ah!” said Luna.

Luna had opened the door to Pinkie Pie, right in her face, smiling her big smile.

“What’s wrong Luna?”

“Don’t do that again?”

“Don’t do what?”

Luna stared at her for a moment. “You know what? Never mind. Just come in.”

“So Looney Luna, I was just-“

Luna had frozen. “What did you call me?”

“Looney Luna? Do you not like it, because you liked it last night! We were all dancing and you were dancing really hard and I asked you if I could call you Looney Luna, and you said yes, and I was all like *gasp* because I nicknamed one of the princesses, and I was SO excited, were you excited?”

“Buh...What?!” Luna replied.

“Dear, don’t tax her so. It IS early in the morning, and I deeply doubt she got any beauty sleep on that sofa of hers. Wonderful to look at, but sooo uncomfortable.”

“I’m fine,” Luna said, “I may not be a morning pony, but I did sleep through the night. The sofa is much more comfortable than you think. So where are you girls staying? If you’re staying in separate rooms, you can stay with me if you’d like. You won’t have to spend as much.”

“Oh dear, we couldn’t possibly. Besides, Celestia is paying for us to stay in the Presidential Suite. So, no worries!”

“Yeah, and it’s totally cool! There’s two fold-out futons and everything! And Dashie ran up the bill eating out of the mini-fridge!”

“Pinkie! I was hungry!” said Rainbow Dash, covering her face with her hoof.

“Huh?” thought Princess Luna. “I thought Rainbow Dash didn’t trust me...why does she care what I think about her? Rarity surely knew already.”

“Pinkie Pie! It is quite rude to talk about another’s behavior in that way! Even if it was...rather unladylike,” Rarity said, wrinkling her nose.

“Not helping,” replied Rainbow Dash.

Pinkie Pie started leaping on one of the sofas in the room, nearly knocking over a table, and sending the stray confetti everywhere. Luna cringed. The maids were surely going to have a field day with this. “Dashie you need to try this!”

“Pinkie Pie! It looks kind of-“

“Expensive. Pinkie, would you be a dear and stop that? I wouldn’t want to make Princess Celestia pay for an antique sofa just because somepony was jumping on it.”

A light knock and the sound of a clearing throat made them all jump. Luna spun around to face the source, almost certain that it was Papier de Pousette. After all, clearly Nikola Sarpony would want to keep the Moon Goddess entertained during her stay here.

Papier stood in the doorway, a little smirk on her face. “I had no idea that the Moon Goddess was *such* a party girl.” Luna stood, her mouth agape. She could just hear the printing

presses now. The thought of her name being plastered over as a headline reading “Looney Luna the Party Pony?” or “Moon Goddess: Paris Prancer” tore through her soul like lightning. She froze, not knowing what to do.

“Papier, oh just how woonderful to see you dahling,” said Rarity. She walked in front of Luna, turned to face, winked at them, and said “Let me handle this girls.”

“Miss Rarity, it’s wonderful to see you again too,” said Papier.

“Now my friends and I just had a little soiree with Princess Luna here, that’s all. I realize what this would look like to the common pony on the street; their Princess Luna being incredibly irresponsible and such. But surely you don’t believe that? I *know* I don’t.”

Papier smiled weakly, “No, of course not Miss Rarity.”

“Speaking of, what do you think of those new haute designs coming in this spring?” Rarity asked. “All the designers are talking about them. They’re supposed to be all the rage this season. Haute is back.”

“That’s wonderful to hear Miss Rarity,” said Papier.

“Now you don’t think that anypony in the paparazzi will hear about this would you? Soooo scandalous! The Moon Princess spending the night with six noponies from Ponyville? The press would be *just* awful! Nothing happened here last night, but you know how some ponies are with their imaginations!”

“I don’t think anyone will find out. The security here at the hotel is surprisingly good at keeping the newspopies away from their more...prestigious guests. I’m sure that Princess Luna more than suffices as prestigious,” Papier replied in her thick accent. Rarity’s eye began twitching. Luna noticed that she was visibly struggling to keep from slapping Papier. “I believe my tie needs a few alterations. Could you take care of it Miss Rarity? Surely a designer as talented as you could take care of it? You were, after all, featured in Monsieur Hoity Toity’s store.”

“Of-of course dear. Consider it done. Just leave it in the Presidential Suite downstairs, and I’ll see to it before I return to Equestria.” Papier nodded. When she turned to face Luna, Rarity blanched visibly mouthing “*THAT BOWTIE?!?*”

“Princess Luna? President Nikola Sarpony apologizes for being unable to greet you personally. Instead, she has arranged for a state dinner at the Notre Dame, beneath the Crystal Rose of the Moon. The world famous pastry chef Creme Brulee will be cooking dinner. We would be greatly honored if you would join us.”

Rarity started in immediately, “Oh, I would presume to answer for another pony, especially Princess Luna, but I’m sure she’ll-“

“No,” Luna said.

“I’m sorry?” Papier said, her eyes narrowed.

“I’m not going,” Luna said.

“I’m sorry, but the government of the First Lady of France *insists* that you join us for dinner,” hissed Papier.

“I’m not going,” said Luna forcefully. “I am the Goddess of the Moon, a guest here at the pleasure of your First Lady of France.”

“But Milady,” started Papier.

“She said no,” interrupted Rainbow Dash. “Didn’t you hear the lady the first time? If she doesn’t want to go, she doesn’t want to go.” She flew in between Luna and Papier, shoving her face into Papier’s. “What are you going to do about it?”

“Yeah! What are you going to do about it Pushy Pousette?” said Pinkie Pie, standing even withup next to Rainbow Dash.

Papier stood back, her mouth agape, unable to find the words for this savage insult.

“Girls! Girls! Let’s just take a moment to catch our breaths. Now Miss Pousette, I do believe you have things to be getting to? I am afraid that you *have* overstayed your welcome by a just the teensiest weensiest bit. However, I do believe our earlier bargain stands?”

“Well?” said Rainbow Dash.

“Yeah! We trust you! And you wouldn’t want to lose our trust would you? Because you’d lose our trust FOREVER!” Pinkie Pie said, her eyes taking on a creepy, piercing glare. Luna shivered. She made a mental note to never, ever, ever, break trust with any of the girls. She was sure she’d never hear the end of it.

“Of...of course. Our earlier deal stands,” said Papier, sweat lightly matted her coat.

“Oh good good. Then I do believe that you’ll just have to tell everyone at the Notre Dame that Princess Luna won’t be attending,” Rarity continued.

“Yes. I’ll just be on my way,” Papier said, and with that she left in a huff.

“How rude. I’ve never met anypony who thought that she could simply order around one of our Princesses.”

“Yeah! She’d said no, and as far as I’m concerned, no means no!” said Rainbow Dash.

“But why didn’t you want to go Princess Luna? I mean, it was another party and everything!”

Princess Luna looked at all of them, and pawed quietly at the ground. “First, I’d like to say thank you for what you’ve done. It was absolutely wonderful, the way you stood up for me like that. Normally when Celestia is around, nopony wants to bother me whenever I refuse, and they’re just as happy that Celestia is willing to go along with anything. But when I’m alone, they just don’t quit bugging me. I guess some princess is better than no princess.”

“But that doesn’t explain why you didn’t want to go to such an important meeting,” said Rarity.

“I hate formal functions,” said Luna.

“You hate parties?” asked Pinkie Pie. The confusion on her face was obvious.

Luna smiled at Pinkie Pie, “No Pinkie Pie. Just formal ones. Stuffy ones. You know, like the Grand Galloping Gala.”

“Oh, oh! I have an idea! Since you’re not going to go to the big stuffy party, why don’t we have a party here!”

“Another one so soon?” Luna asked, her voice laden with surprise. “But-“

“You’re on vacation silly! Of course we should have another party!” said Pinkie Pie. She danced around the room, throwing legfuls of confetti everywhere. “And we’ve already got the confetti!”

“Just go along with it,” said Rainbow Dash. “We’ve all learned just to go along with Pinkie Pie whenever she gets in the mood for a party. Which is, like, all the time.”

“Well, it’s not like I have anything else planned,” said Luna.

“Then that settles it! Let’s have a party!” Pinkie Pie shouted, sending confetti flying everywhere. “Speaking of, Twilight wanted to take you to this open air market thing on the Rue de Cler. She said that it was this place where bunches of vendors set up little booths and things and sell a whole bunch of stuff! Oh! You think they’ll have candy there? French candy? Will it be yummy, because I love yummy stuff. Oh! Maybe they have taffy! Or maybe-“

“Pinkie Pie, it is waaaaaaay too early in the morning for this,” said Rainbow Dash. Luna nodded in agreement.

“Oh my goodness!” said Rarity. “We forgot why we came here at all! We were supposed to bring Luna downstairs so we could figure out what we were going to do today! The open air market was definitely on Twilight’s list, though I personally would rather go to the Palais Garnier.”

“The what?”

“The Paris Opera house, my dear Rainbow Dash.”

“Oh? You mean the place with that phantom pony? Are you sure you won’t be scared? Remember Rarity! Keep your hoof at the level of your eyes! OOOOOOOOOoooooo!”

“C’mon! Twilight is waiting for us!” called Luna from the doorway. “Well? What are we waiting for?” She dashed from view, as the others rushed to follow suit.

“Wait!” shouted Rarity. “You don’t know where the Presidential Suite is!”

...

“So Pinkie Pie and Applejack will cook, and Rarity and Fluttershy will clean up and decorate, and Rainbow Dash and I will go shopping at the Rue de Cler market,” said Twilight. Luna had to admit that Twilight’s reputation for organization was well-deserved.

“What can I do?” Luna asked. “I don’t want to be a burden or anything.”

“No it’s ok, it’s your party after all,” said Twilight.

“Well, I really want to help out, and you all are on vacation too,” said Luna.

“Really? But Celestia said our job was to help you find some friends!” protested Twilight.

“Really Celly?” Luna thought to herself. “Am I really that helpless a pony that I can’t find my own friends?”

“Yes Luna,” said a small inner voice that sounded nothing like Celestia, “You needed Rainbow Dash and Rarity to stand up for you to some pushy bureaucrat. Some nopony. You needed two of the Elements of Harmony to do it for you.”

“No Luna,” said Celestia’s voice in her mind. “I just care for my little sister and I know how busy she is. So I decided to give her a little nudge.” She knew it wasn’t actually Celestia, but hearing what she knew her sister would say still made her feel better.

Out loud Luna said, “You’re my friends now, and as far as I’m concerned, as long as I’m on vacation and we’re together, you’re on vacation too.”

“Awesome!” said Rainbow Dash. “I love vacations!”

“That’s just ‘cause you love nappin’ Rainbow,” responded Applejack. Rainbow Dash stuck her tongue out at Applejack. Applejack returned the gesture. Pinkie Pie leapt in between them with her own tongue out.

“Are we playing a game?” she asked, speaking around her tongue.

Twilight rolled her eyes. “C’mon Rainbow. We’re going shopping. Luna, you can come too if you want.”

“Wonderful. Just let me go get ready,” Luna said.

“What do you have to get ready for? We’re just going grocery shopping,” asked Rainbow Dash as Luna made to leave.

Luna turned around and wagged her wings and waved her head around slowly, eyes telling the rest of the story.

“Oh. Right,” said Rainbow Dash, the chagrin written in her body language.

“Ok girls! Here’s my list!” said Pinkie Pie.

“Pinkie...do you really expect us to get all this?”

“Yes! It’s an open air market in Paris! They have everything! Oh! While we’re here we really have to go to this one restaurant! I can’t remember what it’s called, but a rat works as the chef!”

“Ah don’t know if I wanna go anywhere where a rat cooks mah food,” said Applejack.

“Oooookay. Rainbow Dash, we’ll wait in the lobby. Tell Luna to meet us down there, would you Applejack?”

“Will do sugarcube,” said Applejack. “Don’t you worry. We’ll hold down the fort while you’re out. Just watch yourselves out there will you?”

“What do you think will happen?” asked Twilight.

“Just be careful. You never know about these foreign types Twi,” said Applejack.

“Oh Applejack, I’m sure we’ll be fine,” replied Twilight.

“And she’s got me! The fastest flier in all of Equestria!” added Rainbow Dash. “So there’s nothing to worry about!”

...

“Wine! Wonderful whites to try!”

“Just hear that symphony of crackle! Only good bread sound this way! Come! Come one! Come all! Listen to my bread before you try it!”

All around, ponies were everywhere. Tourists and locals mingled in the Rue de Cler market, and Luna had to be careful. If anypony realized who she was, being in the market was going to become a nightmare. Journalists would be popping out of the trash bins, and there was no way that they’d be able to make it back to the Hotel Prince de Galles, let alone continue to stay there, in peace. Luna shivered. She hated the eternally unsatisfied maw of press attention. It always felt like a losing battle.

Still, there was plenty to look at. Several locals were rather unsubtly pointing at and chuckling about two American tourists: one incredibly buff tan-coated stallion and one very anemic tan-coated mare. Several colts were staring at the mare: half at her very taut rump (“I’m almost certain she’s had butox injections,” thought Luna), and the other half at the strange little Chihuahua that sat on the top of her head. Both of their cutie marks were the same: a waving American flag.

At the nearby Cafe Roussillon sat a strong looking brown colt with red, yellow, and black striped mane with what seemed to be his very dainty looking white-coated and red-maned fillyfriend. Both were quietly sitting and stirring their drinks, only occasionally looking up from their drinks to look at each other before blushing and looking away. Neither of them seemed to notice the pair of colts, one red with a white mane, the other red with a blue mane, sneaking up behind the colt. Moments later, they popped up beside the brown colt, seized his legs, and gave him a very slow lick across his face. Luna could only titter as the poor colt began to shiver in shame, and his fillyfriend immediately developed a nosebleed which she desperately tried to cover with her hooves. The American mare immediately stormed up to them and began arguing with the two troublemaking colts; a nearby blue-coated and yellow-maned colt chuckled as he watched them from a nearby table where he’d been toying with his PDA previously.

Luna frowned. Was she that far behind? She was still using an abacus instead of all this newfangled modern technology? On the other hoof, Abby had always been faithful. He had always been there when she needed him, and they always took good care of each other.

“Wax?” Luna shook her head. “Wax, are you alright?” Luna shook her head lightly and turned to look at who was talking to her.

Twilight was looking concerned. “So...you’re not ok? Wax?” Twilight winked.

Luna remembered that that was her fake name: Wax. Luna personally would have preferred Crescent, but Twilight thought that that might have been too obvious. So Twilight had chosen Wax because the moon was currently in its waxing phase. It felt awkward to Luna. It didn’t fit. Neither did this awkward dress of hers. It was an ugly old thing, bright lime green. It clashed entirely with her coat, but it did a wonderful job of hiding both her wings and her cutie mark.

“No, I’m fine Twilight,” Luna said. “Just distracted. Where’s Rainbow Dash?” The rainbow-maned pegasus mare was nowhere to be seen.

Twilight sighed. “She’s off flying. She said that she hadn’t had a reason to use her wings yet today.” Twilight paused and looked at the list Pinkie Pie had gave them. “How are we going to find all these things? What is this then? En-Dives? Endives? Framboise fromage? What is that?”

“Strawberry cheese,” Luna said absentmindedly. The two troublemaker colts were now fleeing from the blue-coated colt, teasing him with his PDA. The blue-coated colt had his stylus in mouth, screaming around it in what sounded like Swedish. Or was it Danish? Norwegian? Luna couldn’t remember.

Twilight stared at Luna. “What?” Luna asked.

“You speak French?” Twilight asked. Her face was a mask of confusion, with a hint of exasperation. Just a hint.

“She looks kind of cute that way,” Luna thought to herself. “Adorable even...” She shook her head again.

“So...no you don’t?” Twilight continued, utterly incredulous now. Somehow, her skepticism made her even cuter...Luna shook her head more vigorously.

“Well...” Luna said out loud, “I know some French, but it’s been a thousand years, and I never really knew it as well as Cel-my older sister did.”

Twilight nodded. “Why don’t you try asking around for these...whatever they are?” However smart she was, Luna decided, cooking probably wasn’t one of Twilight Sparkle’s strong suits.

“Sure,” Luna said. “Shall we keep an eye out for Rainbow Dash?”

“She said she’d meet us back at the hotel if she couldn’t find us in the market,” Twilight said.

Luna thought it wouldn’t be too hard to find them. Twilight Sparkle had a very distinctive streak in her hair, and...“We’re here to shop!” Luna thought to herself.

As Luna went from stall to stall, from shop to shop, they kept redirecting her to other stalls and other places. Eventually, they had made it all the way to the Rue de Grenelle, an extension of the Rue de Cler market. It didn’t help that neither of them knew what they were looking for looked like. Finally, they asked an older gentlecolt who seemed to know what they were looking for, and he pointed at a lonely stall on an offshoot of Rue de Grenelle.

“Merci! Au revoir!” Luna called to the gentlecolt.

“Au revoir! Je vous en prie!” returned the gentlecolt, smiling. He waved his hoof after them, turned and headed back towards the Rue de Cler.

The stall was maintained by a rather strapping stallion, who turned to them and said in

rather accented Equestrian, “Well good morning! What can I help you girls with?”

“Oh! We need some of these...en...en...dives?” Luna asked.

“Oh ho ho! You mean endives!” he said. He seemed to say it *on-deevs*, but there was a smoother, more fluid sound to it. “Of course! Though I am surprised that you made it out all the way to Jacques’ lonely little stall!”

It turned out that Jacques had had everything but the cheeses; and so had every other vegetable stall they had passed on the way. “Apparently,” Luna thought, “my passable French isn’t very passable.” They paid Jacques, and turned to return to the Rue de Cler, when two rather strapping stallions blocked their way.

“Pardon? Est-que vous pouvez nous excuser, s’il vous plaît? Vous êtes bloquant notre passage.” Luna said. The two stallions stood aside politely, but as Luna and Twilight tried to pass, they stepped backwards, and blocked them again.

“What is going on here?” Twilight asked. A little fear passed over her face.

“Um...what do you want?” Luna asked. She frowned internally; she had been unable to keep the quavering out of her voice.

“What we want, little Equestrian, is you and your friend. You will come with us to the Hotel des Invalides and we will all have a good time no?” said the brown earth stallion in a heavy French accent.

“Oh yes, we will have a *very* good time. So good that I do not think we will make it to the des Invalides,” said the black unicorn stallion. “Oh Sweet Celestia...” Luna thought, “He’s almost as big as Applejack’s brother!”

“So you will come with us?”

Twilight and Luna shared a look between them. A look that said that these two weren’t going anywhere with them. Ever.

“What chance do you think two earth ponies have against two unicorns?” Twilight asked.

“Oh chance enough,” the unicorn said. His horn glowed bright for a moment, and the next, two amulets hung from both Twilight’s and Luna’s neck.

“Oh no you don’t!” Twilight said, and she squinted her eyes shut, bracing herself.

Nothing happened.

“Wha-wha?” Twilight said, absolutely stunned by what had just happened.

“Come with us now little fillies, and nopony will have to get hurt,” said the brown stallion menacingly. What he had failed to notice, and what made Luna’s heart leap into her throat in excitement, was the growing shadow behind him. What she had failed to notice was the fact that the black unicorn had noticed as well.

- THUMP went Rainbow Dash. She had crash landed into Jacques’ pile of melons. Jacques himself was nowhere to be seen.

“RAINBOW!” shouted Twilight. Luna just stared at the scene, agape. Moments later, Twilight, biting back her tears, charged directly at the stallions; in short order, she was bucked into a pile of lettuces next to Rainbow Dash.

“Maybe he’s gone to get help,” Luna hoped, noticing Jacques’ disappearance. “Maybe...”

“Ugh...I’m going to feel that tomorrow morning,” Rainbow Dash said to herself. She pulled herself to her hooves, spread her wings, and charged at the two stallions. The unicorn smirked, and his horn began glowing.

“Rainbow, no!” Luna shouted.

Rainbow Dash crashed a second time. This time, it was her chin into the cobblestone.

“Ugh...going to feel that too.” Her legs had been chained together, and her wings tied against her sides. The black stallion was clearly quite good at tying up ponies. It was almost like they’d done this a million times before. In fact, Luna was quite afraid that they had done this a million times before, and her friends were about to become the millionth and first time.

Luna glanced about the alleyways, looking for some form of escape, or for someone to call for help to. Windows were being shut, and several ponies were fleeing the scene or were pretending that they didn’t see anything as they briskly walked away. Luna tensed herself, steeling her resolve for what she was about to do. “I never liked this dress anyways,” Luna said.

“What is she going on about? What about this dress?” The brown stallion asked, keeping an eye on Luna.

“It is nothing! We have the anti-magic amulet on her, what threat is she to us now? She is just a unicorn without her magic! Helpless!” said the unicorn. He followed his partner’s fixated gaze to Luna. “What...on earth?”

Luna had reared back, her horn glowing. Twilight and Rainbow watched in awe as Princess Luna stomped the ground, a literal moving wall of magic sending the two stallions flying. Both anti-magic amulets shattered.

“YOU DO NOT HURT MY FRIENDS! DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?!” she screamed. Ponies still on the street stared at the sheer force of magic flowing out of the alicorn. She had shredded her dress to pieces, and now Princess Luna, Goddess of the Night Sky, She Who Guides the Moon, stood before two lowlife stallions unveiling her full glory in broad daylight.

“We...we...we...we...” stammered the earth stallion.

“We attacked Princess LUNA?!” said the unicorn.

“YES! AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, YOU ATTACKED AND THREATENED MY FRIENDS! PHYSICALLY *AND* OTHERWISE!” Her voice echoed throughout the street, and those ponies present quickly arranged themselves into a reverent bow. The two criminals were the fastest of all the ponies present to prostrate themselves.

“We’re sorry! We won’t do it again!” exclaimed the earth stallion.

“AND WHY WOULD I BE INCLINED TO BELIEVE YOU?” Luna snapped.

At that moment, several ponies in blue uniforms dashed around the corner. “PRÉFET DE POLICE!” they shouted. They paused for a moment to take in the truly awe-inspiring scene before them: a street full of ponies bowing before the Princess of the Moon, whose eyes were glowing and mane waving with the sheer force of her magic. In fact, the police captain swore, she looked like a blue star of a pony. Except with wings and a horn. In front of her, two stallions were cowed and sniveling.

“OFFICERS? TAKE THESE TWO AWAY,” Luna ordered. “ON CHARGES OF ATTEMPTED PONYNAPPING.” When Luna asked Twilight about it later, Twilight would swear that she had never heard anypony that angry before; nor did she ever want to see it again.

“Of course Milady,” said the French police pony. “These two are repeat offenders, and we thank you for apprehending them. They’ve both missed their parole and are on the run. If you and your friends would please come with us so we can take an official statement?”

“No,” said the unicorn. He looked utterly beaten. “I’m guilty. Just...take me away from here.”

“I’m guilty as well,” said the earth stallion. “I...” Both of them looked at each other, before silencing themselves. It was pretty clear what had happened today.

The French police pony smiled at them, “Finally...how do Equestrians say it? Bit off more than you can chew?” Luna nodded. “Ah good. My lessons in Equestrian were money well spent.” Some rapid motions and even more rapid French later, the two were chained and taken away. “Pleasure to be of service Your Highness,” said the police captain, saluting her.

Luna no longer looked like a celestial body descended from heavens. Instead, she simply looked like Luna. She’d seen herself in one of the shop windows, and decided that she didn’t like herself like that. It reminded herself too much of Nightmare Moon; but, if she had to be that way to defend her friends, she would. Sometimes friendship meant sacrifice. It felt good to know that about herself. In fact, it felt wonderful. But she had to check on Twilight and Rainbow now.

“Do your friends need any medical attention?” asked the police captain.

“No, we’ll be fine. I’ve just got a couple bruises,” said Rainbow Dash.

“Same here,” said Twilight.

Luna looked both of them over, amazed. They’d both been sent flying, and they both had gotten out of the encounter with little more than a few surfaces scratches and bruises. Twilight was more hurt than Rainbow, but not by much.

“Is there anything further you need of us?” asked the police captain expectantly. “I expect the newsponies are on their way as we speak. This is front page news after all.”

Luna sighed. Of course they were on their way already. In fact, she was surprised that there weren’t any here right now.

Click and flash. Click and flash. Click and flash and flash.

Never mind. They were here now.

“Captain?” said Luna. “We have a little more shopping to do. Could you please come with us as my personal guard? We need a translator, and I will probably need your help to fight through the reverent throng.”

“Of course Milady,” said the police captain. Already the group of ponies that was bowing around them had quadrupled in size.

“Who can blame them?” Luna asked herself. “One of the symbols of their religion stands in their midst.”

“Yeah. The darker one,” said the little niggling voice in her head. Luna banished it immediately.

“Shall we get going then?” asked the police captain. “These newsponies, they are like buzzards, no?” Motioning them to get behind him, he had his two more officers flank them from behind. They were quite the sight, returning to the Rue de Cler market. Ponies everywhere in the market tried to get closer to Luna, tried to reach out and touch her, or at least one of her friends. Rumors had already started spreading that they were two of the powerful Elements of Harmony. A priest among the crowd actually started holding an impromptu religious gathering.

The captain held true to his world. They sliced their way through the market, finding their way from stall to stall, where the shopkeepers tried desperately to give away their food despite Luna’s insistence that she pay for it all. Camera flashes only kept growing. Finally, laden with groceries and gifts, Luna, Rainbow, and Twilight returned to the Hotel Prince de Galles under escort.

“Thank you Monsieur...”

“Monsieur Passepartout Your Highness,” said the police captain. “Please. The pleasure was all mine. But you will agree no? The paparazzis, as you call them, are like buzzards? Outside the door several journalists were kept back by the line of police ponies.

“Thank you Monsieur Passepartout. Your services will no longer be required however, but remember that you have my thanks for services rendered today,” Luna said. Twilight and Rainbow nodded.

“Milady,” he said. He held a card in his mouth that he had retrieved from one of the pockets on his blue uniform. “Should you need my services at any time, please call. My commissioner has decided to assign me to you as your personal detail. I must ask, however, where your own personal security detail is? I should like to meet them.”

“I sent them home,” Luna said. “I had not intended to be found out, and a security detail seemed more like a giveaway than anything. But now that that has happened, I suppose a security detail will be necessary.”

Passepartout blinked in surprise. “Oh. Of course Milady.”

“If you’d like, I can arrange for rooms here at the Hotel Prince de Galles, paid for by the Equestrian government,” Luna offered.

“Yeah, the rooms are really awesome!” Rainbow Dash said.

“No thank you Milady, but thank you for the generous offer,” Passepartout said. “But please, call me before you decide to leave this building at all. I will leave some ponies here to aid hotel security. But I,” he said, saluting Luna, “must get home to the wife and children.”

“He’s a really nice stallion, isn’t he?” Twilight commented. For some reason, Luna could swear she felt her mane bristling a little.

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“She WHAT?!” Creme Brulee shouted. Papier de Pousette cringed. Creme Brulee angry was never a good sight. Papier couldn’t imagine a worse cook when angry. With the exception of perhaps Gordon Ponay. Then again, he couldn’t possibly be as mean in real life as he was on television could he? That was just television.

“How could Princess Luna decide not to come to a dinner that I cooked? I? The great Creme Brulee! Nopony, I repeat! Nopony refuses a meal from Creme Brulee!” Papier sighed. First she had to deal with the much less popular, former Nightmare Moon of a Princess. That had been a nightmare of paperwork alone; forms filled out in septuplicate. Septuplicate! Who really NEEDED that many copies?!

“Did they say anything about why?” Creme Brulee asked Papier, her face now directly in Papier’s. Truth be told, Papier was getting a little annoyed with it.

“I’d just turn on the television and see,” retorted Papier.

“What?” Creme Brulee asked in consternation.

“Yes. She revealed herself at the Rue de Cler market this morning. It looked like they were grocery shopping.”

“Do you have the list?” Creme Brulee asked intently.

Papier looked at Creme disgustedly. “No! Of course not! Just watch the reports yourself! I have to get going Creme Brulee. I’m a very busy pony you know! I can’t just waste time with you, watching TV just so you can have somepony else’s complete shopping list.”

A half hour later, Creme Brulee was smiling. She trotted cheerfully over to the phone, called her receptionist, and said, “Get me Papier de Pousette. Now.”

...

“Wait, WHAT?!” Luna exclaimed.

“Yep. You’ve been challenged to a baking contest. Papier de Pousette just dropped by and told me about a half hour ago,” said Applejack bluntly.

“But...but...I can’t bake!” Luna stuttered.

“Well, it’s not exactly you sugarcube,” said Applejack. “You see, it’s everyone in this buildin’. There’s a cake making convention goin’ on in Paris right now, and it’s being held right in this hotel.”

Luna blinked. A cake making convention? They had those?

“So I don’t have to enter?” Luna asked hopefully.

“Well...the sponsor’s name is Creme Brulee, and she said that she *insists* on you takin’ part,” Applejack said.

“Well...can’t I just refuse to go again?”

“Ah reckon you could. In mah opinion, I think you should go for it.”

“Wait, what? I just said I can’t bake!”

“Contest rules say you can have a partner, and ah think it’d be fun for you ta try out.”

Luna put her hoof down. “No.”

“Luna, can I be honest with you?” Applejack asked.

“Yes Applejack?” Luna said inquisitively.

“Ah really think you should try this out. After all, in mah experience, life’s regrets come from what you don’t do more’n what you do do.” Applejack paused. “What do ah think ah’m doin’? I’m lecturin’ somepony more than 800 times mah own age!”

“Now that you put it that way, it does sound kind of ridiculous,” Luna giggled. “But it makes sense. If you think I should try it out, I think I will. But I want you as my partner.”

Applejack looked at the floor. “Ah can’t. Ah’m racin’ Rainbow Dash tomorrow in the Tour de Paris run.”

Luna’s heart sank like a stone. “So you can’t be my partner?”

“Pinkie Pie is great baker herself,” Applejack said. “Between the two of you, I think you’ll be fine.”

Pinkie Pie popped out from behind a corner. “Was somepony talking about me? Was it you Applejack? Was it you Luna?”

“Pinkie Pie! You’re just the pony we needed!” Applejack said.

“You two needed me? Oh wow! What do you need me to do! Do you need me to be a spy? Oh! I’ve always wanted to be a spy! You get to jump off of sky ferries, ride in really fast carts, meet really handsome stallions who sweep you off your feet, use kung fu on ponies, play poker, and blow things up! Speaking of blowing things up some French pony told me about this blow up pastry called a souffle! Apparently, if you make it wrong, it collapses! Oh! Pastries! Did you want me to make a cake?” Pinkie Pie looked at them expectantly.

Applejack sighed before nodding. “Yep. Luna here is in tomorrow’s baking competition. Now ah can’t be her partner, but I figure you can. You DO work at Sugarcube corner an’ all”

“Sure Jackie! I can be Luna’s partner! If she doesn’t mind that is. Do you mind?” Pinkie Pie asked, leaning forward into Luna’s personal space. Luna backed up a little, but she didn’t mind too much. Rainbow Dash was right. Pinkie Pie just took getting used to.

“Sure, I’d love you to be my partner. But we need to start practicing for it. Tonight,” Luna said nervously. “So can I help you bake for tonight’s party?”

“Of course silly filly! Just meet your Auntie Pinkie Pie in the kitchen!”

“...she’s a thousand years older than you...”

And then Pinkie Pie was gone.

“Oh hi Fluttershy! What’s going on?” Luna asked.

“Oh...um...not much,” Fluttershy said. The yellow mare was quiet as always. Of all the ponies there, Luna had interacted with Fluttershy the least. She went to the Menagerie du Jardin des Plantes daily to interact with the animals in the famous French zoological park.

“How was the Menagerie today?”

“Um...the animals there weren’t really used to me yet. But there was this one polar bear who came up to me. He let me pet him a few times. I don’t think France is the right climate for him at all. He looked very unhappy. But I know that the zookeepers are doing their best,” Fluttershy said. She looked sad.

Luna nodded. Then hugged Fluttershy. Then released the hug. Applejack stared at them.

“Don’t look at me like that Applejack,” Luna said. “It’s nothing like that.”

“...yeah Applejack,” Fluttershy said, “She was just trying to be a good friend.”

“Well OK then!” Applejack said quickly, “Ah’m sorry Luna. Ah didn’t mean nothin’.”

Luna’s face softened. “It’s ok. I overreacted. I’ve been a little defensive about...things this week.” Her thoughts turned to Twilight Sparkle. To how defensive she’d been about Twilight, and her thoughts about the purple mare...and those attractive pink and red stripes...and...

Luna blushed and shook her head. Again.

“Is there somepony else yah got your eye on?” Applejack asked, winking knowingly. Fluttershy’s eyes widened.

“Can we help?” the yellow mare asked.

“Oh no no no no! I just need to focus on the baking competition tomorrow! Speaking of, Pinkie Pie must be waiting for me!”

Luna rushed to the kitchen where, she hoped, she would prove to be a better baker than Casamara.

...

knock thump thump

“Pinkie Pie, I believe we discussed your mode of knocking...”

“Awww...you’re no fun.”

“Luna? Are you there? It’s almost time for the contest!” called Twilight.

“I can’t do it! I can’t do it I can’t do it I can’t I can’t I can’t I can’t!” shouted Luna. She thrashed around her bed for dramatic effect, not caring that nopony could actually see it.

“Don’t worry! You did great yesterday, and you’ll do great today!” said Pinkie Pie from behind the door.

Luna could see it already. Applejack and Rainbow Dash were going to come back from the Tour de Paris with great big trophies, while she, Luna, would only drag down Pinkie Pie and prevent her from even placing. She’d felt so incredibly awkward and in the way yesterday; even if the pastries had turned out fine. Wonderful even! Luna hadn’t known what to do at all. She’d even tried to use Abby to do some baking calculations before Pinkie Pie took Abby away, set him on a chair, and told her she needed to feel the proper amounts. Also, measuring cups were better than abaci for baking.

“...girls?”

“Yes Fluttershy?”

“Let me handle this,” Fluttershy said. There was a little edge of confidence to the voice that Luna had never heard before. “Luna? Can I come in? Could you please open the door?”

Who could say no to that voice? “No...” Luna apparently.

“Pretty please?”

“...Ok...” Luna’s horn glowed and the door clicked open.

“Just me girls,” Fluttershy said, as she stepped barely into the room.

“What’s wrong Luna? Why don’t you want to take part in the contest anymore?”

“No...I still want to...I’ll just be terrible at it,” Luna sniffled.

Fluttershy was silent.

“Will I be terrible at it?”

Fluttershy remained silent.

“Will I?”

Fluttershy stayed silent.

“Fluttershy?! What do you want to hear?! That I’m scared of myself failing? Ever? The last time I failed, I failed myself most of all! I tried to plunge the world into eternal night! I could have KILLED EVERYPONY and I DIDN’T CARE!” Luna screamed. She continued sobbing for a few minutes before continuing. Fluttershy still hadn’t said anything. “That was not just me failing myself...I was failing everyone...and I couldn’t stand to fail anyone of you...”

“But you won’t if you try,” Fluttershy said.

“And why is that?” Luna asked sarcastically.

“Because we’re your friends and we don’t care if you win or lose. We care if you’re happy, and if you’re happy staying in here and not competing, then we’ll be happy,” Fluttershy replied. “So what do you want to do?”

Applejack’s advice floated through her mind. She would regret not going more than going and losing. She knew it. Applejack knew it. Lance Legstrong was racing today. Applejack and Rainbow Dash would lose to him for sure, but they would lose trying at least.

“I’ll do it,” Luna said, hoping that she sounded more confident than she felt.

...

It had been a hectic day of competition, but somehow, Pinkie Pie and Luna were now in the championship round against none other than Creme Brulee. Pinkie Pie was hopping around the kitchen giving orders, and Luna was using her immense magic to try and keep pace. Pinkie Pie was trying something new...something risky. Luna hoped it would pay off; especially since Pinkie could only succeed with access to Luna’s immense magical powers. She tried to ignore the click of the camera shutters as the newponies caught their headliner photographs.

“Pretty Little Princess Loves Pastries”

“Baked Goods or Baked Bads from Former Nightmare Moon?”

“Goddess of the Moon Over the Moon for Baking”

No. She had to focus. The whisk started turning a little more regularly, and the flow of the milk into the bowl slowed slightly. She had to keep the consistency regular, or there would be clumps in the cake; and the judges hated improperly baked clumps.

“Now pour it into the mold! Wait! Line the mold with confectioner’s sugar!” Pinkie called. Luna struggled to keep up with Pinkie’s constant barrage of directions. Cooking, she decided, was nothing like what happened on Gordon Ponay’s shows. It was more hectic than she ever could have imagined.

“Now into the oven!” Pinkie Pie said, as she set the dials to the appropriate heat and temperature. In the distance, Luna could see Creme Brulee speeding along comfortably. So different to her own experience with Pinkie Pie. Creme Brulee was in her element: the pastry chef’s kitchen.

“And now...we wait,” Pinkie Pie said.

...

The last stretch, with the decorating, had been difficult. The heavy detail work had mostly been on Luna, but Pinkie Pie had helped out by making sure a steady stream of icing was available. How the pink earth pony managed to pump out so much icing so quickly was a mystery to her, but she didn't bother to ask. Pinkie Pie was Pinkie Pie, and it was really good that she was Pinkie Pie right now.

Pinkie Pie had almost panicked when one of the roses fell off the cake.

“Wait Pinkie Pie! I can fix it!” Ten seconds. They had ten seconds. Luna's horn glowed as she picked up the rose, reshaped it, and reattached the sugary bonds between the icing rose and the rest of the cake's tasty covering.

“Contestants! Put down your utensils and present your cakes!”

Luna has fixed it, with no time to spare. That was good, especially when presentation was worth forty full points out of one hundred. Who knew that making food look good was that important?

A few minutes later, they stood before the judges, awaiting their final fate. Who would be the champion of baking here in Paris? The Goddess of the Night Sky and the Element of Laughter? Or Creme Brulee, the World Famous Pastry Chef? It made Fluttershy mad with excitement. She could barely sit still.

“The judges have come to their final decision!”

Everyone waited with bated breath.

“The winner is...Creme Brulee!”

Creme Brulee squealed as they handed her the huge golden trophy she'd commissioned just yesterday. Pinkie Pie immediately hugged Luna.

“I'm sorry Lulu!” said Pinkie Pie.

“For what?” asked Luna.

“We didn't win!”

“That's ok, Pinkie. I had fun doing it. It made me happy, and it made you happy. That's what matters,” Luna said. Applejack was right, Luna thought to herself. She definitely would have regretted not competing. She never would have found out if Pinkie Pie and her could make it as far as they did. The thought warmed her soul. The girls, minus Applejack and Rainbow Dash gathered back in the room while Creme Brulee celebrated her grand victory over the She Who Rules the Night Sky.

“Lulu?”

“Yes Pinkie?”

“Do you like your new nickname?”

“Yes Pinkie. I like my new nickname.”

...

Applejack and Rainbow Dash walked into the room, looking tired, and very much worse for the wear. Everypony stared at them.

“What...what happened?” Twilight asked.

“Somepony knocked loose part of the bunny cage on our way through the Menagerie? Yeah. Accidentally started a bunny stampede. Ah had to drop out to help round 'em up. No pony around here knows how to use a lasso apparently.” Applejack's voice was tired, but not bitter.

“And I need a shower,” Rainbow Dash said. “No pony told me that the race through the

Lourve would include dodging barrels of the ingredients in their art labs' paint!"

"Oh my goodness!" Fluttershy said. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah," Rainbow Dash said. "Turns out that the paint ingredient they used for the race is pine sap. Apparently makes for a great paint base or something."

Everyone looked around at each other, and then started laughing. Then, at the end of it, on the spur of the moment, Luna gave Twilight a peck on the cheek.

Everypony froze, including Luna.

"Didn't see that one comin'" Applejack said quite plainly.

After some time, Rainbow Dash was the first one to speak, "Well, if Luna likes Twilight, I don't mind. So long as Twi likes Luna that is."

Later, Rarity commented, "Oh how wonderfully romaaantic dahling! Falling in love in Paris! The city of lights! The city of love!"

...

Celestia was alone in her study. She always liked to be alone when she read Twilight Sparkle's latest friendship report. The scroll was a little thicker than usual, but that was to be expected. They were, after all, in France.

The report had, unsurprisingly, been sent through regular sky ferry channels. Spike didn't want to go to "frilly frou-frou girly girly Paris" and so had stayed in Canterlot for his vacation. Mostly visiting Pony Joe's. "I will have to visit this fine establishment one day," Celestia thought. "It clearly keeps drawing Spike's attention. I will never understand the pony fascination with fried, and sugar glazed dough though. Or the requirement that it have a hole in the center."

As she read through Twilight's latest scroll, nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Her heart was warmed incredibly by the fact that Twilight had succeeded in her mission of helping Luna find some friends. That those friends consisted of Twilight and the other Bearers of the Elements of Harmony was ever better than she had expected. After a few more minutes she froze mid sip, before doing a rather spectacular, coffee filled, spit-take all over the friendship report.

"Luna and Twilight are *fillyfriends?!?*" Celestia said out loud. "That's quite a bit more than I expected." She couldn't say she was unhappy for Luna and Twilight. She just...It hadn't been expected. A few moments later, after having calmed down from the shock of her little sister's new relationship with her own star pupil, Celestia continued reading.

"P.S. Enjoy the present?" Celestia paused. "What present?" Celestia opened the scroll further and a little envelope popped out. Celestia's horn glowed a gentle white glow, and the envelope opened. Then the envelope was consumed in a burst of fire that made Celestia's eyes grow wide. The fire kept growing, and growing, and then it began to take the shape of a....giant white sock puppet with yellow and green button eyes. Mr. Buttons smiled at Celestia as she stared back in shock before finally leaping behind a nearby column.

"SHE TOLD TWILIGHT ABOUT MR. BUTTONS?!?"