

**Twilight Sky Over Canterlot**  
**By Foxy**

Ugh~~~ morning.

I woke up with my muzzle pressed tight against the rough cast of a blue plastered wall, and for a moment, I was sure I was still dreaming.

“Ugh... Spike?”

Nopony. Just the blue wall and me.

Yes, I remembered, that’s right, I’m not dreaming, as my eyes adjusted and the features of my old dorm room at Canterlot U slowly slid back into place. I’m not dreaming, I’m back here again. I shuffled around in the bed. I’d kicked the sheets off in the night and they lay in a heap on the floor right where Spike’s little basket used to sit. He used to hate when I’d do that! Hehe.

My attention shifted to the very foot of the bed, where I contemplated the unfamiliar sight of my old window. I gently moved some books off the sill and unlatched the window with my mouth.

BLECH.

“Genius, Twilight, next time you come back here, clean before you go to sleep!”

I apologized to myself, and used a forehoof to inch it open, the neglected hinges protesting loudly.

As the window nosed open, clean fresh Equestria winds glided over the valley and up the mountain and ruffled my mane. All my flowers had died and been blown away, but the wrought iron flowerbox still stretched the width of the window, reassuringly. I nested down on the stone sill and looked out over Equestria. The sun was still rising, peeking over the high hills, casting long, deep blue shadows, little pockets of night reluctant to slink away so quickly. Morning light. I love morning light, orange, hesitant, and not yet quite so hot.

Funny, it had never mattered to me before that I could see Ponyville quite clearly from here. Sun was starting to creep across Applejack’s orchards, glinting off her beautiful pink barn, set high on the hill to Ponyville’s south side. I imagined I could even see Applejack and Macintosh gathering up their baskets and plough for the day’s work, even if my mind told me that I was just as likely to mistake some extra cider barrels for them at this distance.

Out beyond the gently rolling orchards a ways, the very tip of Rarity’s Carousel Boutique poked out of Ponyville’s gently gabled thatch roofs and rough-plastered walls. I could see the top of the Town Hall, the peak of Sugar Cube Corner, and I wondered if Pinkie was up making cupcakes at daybreak again. The timbers in that shop seemed to have absorbed so much sweetened air that they very well may be wafers now, and inside the smell is always thick with sugar, almost to the point where your head begins to pound.

My library wasn’t visible amidst the trees, and although Rainbow’s house was easy enough to see, I’m guessing Weather Pony Dash was still sound asleep on the balance of evidence of a sky dotted with cottonball clouds.

It seemed suddenly strange and sad to me that I had sat here for years overlooking Ponyville, with my books, and never bothered to give it a second glance, this town that'd become my home. I traced the route from Rarity's Boutique to Sugar Cube Corner, streets I knew so well now, passing Filly Fashion, Sunbeam's Smoothies, Daisy's Flower Shoppe, Mr. Breezy's Fan Emporium.

From high above I lingered in that arched alleyway right off the center of town where I had often played games with Apple Bloom in the cool late afternoon shade.

Although it was hidden from my view by the sagging peak of Carrot Cake's house, I thought of the Ponyville fountain, and secretly splashing in its cold well water once upon several moons ago. All the memories, the sights and sounds of Ponyville stretched out before me, but miles away now, hazy, indistinct, easy to forget with a glance and a shrug and the turn of another page in my workbook.

My enthusiasm, frankly, for Canterlot was waning.

And so it could wait.

I pushed the window closed, materialized a shade over it, curled up back into my bed, and dreamt of the heavy oak smell of the Ponyville Library. Home.

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My hooves clopped quietly along the sloping marble hall, and years of experience told me that the extra clipclop I was hearing was the echo, not a lost phantom pony, but my own steady trot. I looked up into the dimly vaulted ceiling and contemplated the graceful arabesque arches which held it aloft. This was the sort of place to breed such stories, though. Way back in the prehistory of Canterlot those founding ponies whose names time has now erased saw fit to dig subcellar after subcellar beneath the royal city, and many of these have probably not yet been accounted for.

Princess Celestia told me once over rose tea that she thought some of these cellars were used to hold weapons during the great Equestria Wars of two centuries ago, or to contain the dead and dying. After years of being shunned by the residents of the city - who would often report seeing glowing shadows of long dead warriors burnt into the walls - the Royal Canterlot Government took them over. Eventually some disused slabs of marble were hauled into the largest topmost chamber and many of these slabs were hollowed out into tubs. The hot water flows right out of the mountain.

Canterlot Public Works has done a lot with this hall since I was here last. The number of fairy-lights has nearly doubled and just today flower petals have been scattered all the way down the long sloping hall.

Finally the great terraced window looking down into the tubbing chamber came into view, foggy and wet and very warm. I turned o the right, descended a final slope into the great hall, plumes of steam rising up around me, and an attendant came scurrying up.

"Miss Twilight Sparkle, good morning, good morning! Right this way, please!"

Ugh. One great thing about Ponyville is that not everypony's seen me with Princess Celestia so I don't have to see this act every day. I dislike extra special treatment.

I was escorted to the tub and slipped off my sidepacks while noting, silently, how my tub was placed at a significant remove and a higher tier than the others, more of that Celestia touch. I felt in no mood for an argument however and set about arranging my workspace. My bags popped open and books flew out, and I stacked them neatly.

Gently, one book atop the other.

Slipping happily into the steaming mountain spring I levitated item after item out of my bag, forehooves crossed casually on the curved rim of the tub. If the Canterlot Public Baths were going to display me for everypony to see, they were going to get an eyeload of Twilight Sparkle, nerd first class! And teacher's pet!

I leaned my writing tablet there against the other two, at just that careful angle to make reading possible. Yes, almost right.

But just then I became distracted by my pen.

Horsefeathers. It wasn't in my bag. I was certain of it.

It must be tucked in one of these books.

It was my favorite pen, Princess Celestia gave it to me at the end of my first year of study!

I can't have seriously left it back in Ponyville...

I suddenly became aware of my name being called very insistently somewhere close by.

"Miss Twilight!!"

"OH." The bubble popped. I looked up at the bathing attendant and blushed deeply. "I'm.. I'm sorry... I get distracted.."

"That's okay, Miss Twilight, I was wondering if you wanted some salt and some flowers in your bath today."

"Oh, that would be very nice! Thank you!" I smiled at the attendant, perhaps overcompensating. Princess Celestia told me once if I act extra nice it'll get me out of half the situations I get myself into.

I'm getting better about this sort of thing.

I watched the cascade of minerals fall into the water around me and lotus after lotus blossom was floated atop the surface, the heady scent of jasmine drifting from my tub-plateau across the tubbing room as those pearly white flowers fell around me too, very relaxing.

I sank into the hot water up to my mouth and smiled. Phase two of my bath began as suddenly the room seemed to crackle with anticipation! The day planner was now OUT!

I'm not sure Rainbow knew what she was doing when she bought me this last month from the book shop for Gifting Day. I wonder if she had even been in there before...

I used to doodle in every square of my day planner in secondary school, each day I'd finished all my homework I'd draw a little picture in that square and felt extra accomplished. Eventually they began to bleed together to fill the whole page with nonsense drawings. Now I write all my secret crushes in the front page where it's absurdly easy for anypony to find. You've got to live dangerously.

A neatly folded note was tucked inside, near the spine.

"Dear Twilight Sparkle, my faithful student,

Due to your sudden relocation to Ponyville, it seems that several dozen of your books have been accidentally circulating at the University of Canterlot School of Magical Abilities Library, where you abandoned them. I have gathered up many of them, including other items left in the various labs. Please come immediately to Canterlot to collect them! Yours Truly,

Princess Celestia.”

Abandoned? Preposterous! I was using them!

“How can you be so organized about some things and so messy about others?!”

“It’s not a mess, Spike, it’s my workspace! Look, there’s the pile for magical elixirs and potions. There’s the pile for the history of Ponyville. And that over there is for theory and meaning of magical abilities...”

“But the room is a mess... it’s getting difficult to walk in here!”

“...I’ve got them sorted according to size and color...”

“Twilight, please, can we just pick up the room? Even a little?”

I had straightened up and hit Spike with the one thing he hated. The words were each stressed with monumental, thundering importance.

“A functional mess is better than an idle tidiness!”

Spike had gagged and made a face. I giggled then and I giggled at the thought of it again now.

I couldn’t blame him. I hated hearing my mother say it too.

The hewn thatch and rough cast about the walls of Ponyville had seemed charming to me before I settled into the comfortable complacency of life’s slow steady rhythm there. In Ponyville life is metrically attuned to the steady clomping of Big Macintosh ploughing the fields and the gentle turning of her many windmills slowly grinding rough wheat into flour. Entire weeks can go by without anything especially exciting happening. This drives ponies like Rainbow crazy, but for me and my studies the pleasant quietude was shockingly ideal.

Ponyville.

I thought of Rarity, lost in her work already this morning, curlers in her tail, cuddled up in her cozy pink bathrobe, sipping tea while ribbons and bows flew around her. Now, Rarity - Rarity could work in Canterlot. There’s always some fancy fillies strutting around in the newest pack and saddle. Rarity’s nervous energy and her showpony ethic works with this town. In her mind, I’m sure, the busy throughfares and wagonpaths of Canterlot are always just outside her door.

Compared to the slouching, retiring form of Ponyville’s houses, Canterlot shoots up confident, wound tight, engineered, polished, filigreed railing and smooth plaster walls. Ponyville’s simple weathervanes and climbing ivy can’t compare to the decorative scrollwork and domed tops of any Canterlot house, or the splashing fountains and arched bridges. Unicorns are a nervous kind of pony and the restless energy of my ancestors twines ‘round each balustrade and promenade in swirls, flutes and fleurs. In Canterlot, no road can merley proceed directly from point A to point B without winding over a dozen bridges and turning corners for extra dramatic emphasis and a pillow cannot simply be a pillow, it must be an extravagant settee with tassles and ribbons and bows which reclines

back on thickly carved and burnished legs in a fashion which had seemed suspiciously decadent to me for years.

Ponies stomp their hooves in arches and doors, recline in cafes, gallop through the streets, stand right behind your back. They neigh and buck and disparage the wretched nobodies living their unsophisticated lives in Hoofington or Saddlesbury. Canterlot is, in short, much like any major pony city anywhere – a population of rabid self aggrandizers and progress always moves ever on.

On this corner, for example, there used to be a little paper stand where I would often stop by to read the morning scroll. Eventually the entire area was bought out and now it's a trendy café called Stable Scene. I looked at the sign now, trendy gold gilt and polished nickel sparkling in the sun.

Peh. Stable Scene.

I trotted right up the plate glass window and pushed my lavender nose against it with a squeak. Through narrowed eyes fighting the morning sun I could see a long counter, hanging lamps of all sorts, tables, pillows, and all manner of suspended glass pieces and billowy floor-length fabrics. It looked absolutely dreadful! I thought to the poor old mare who ran the scroll stand here just three years ago with the bad hip and thick glasses, who used to misremember my name as Skylight Glitter...

I strained to see through the glass, peering through my own backlit silhouette like a Twilight Sparkle shaped peephole, when something shiney caught my attention at the corner of my eye. I tried to ignore it, focusing all of my disdain through that shop window but it glittered again, and again, and seemed to be resolving out of nothingness from a gleaming brass knob surmounting one of Stable Scene's many decorative embellishments. And suddenly, I looked to my right and a pony was inside the shop, looking out at me!

She tossed her mane in casual annoyance and sipped from a cup. I decided she wasn't really looking at me, and as my eyes focused on her I realized she was not in the café at all, she was right behind me, reflected in the glass, but then she was gone, and I turned just in time to see Trixie finish her drink and toss the cup on the sidewalk, and it rolled sideways and stopped at my hoof.

Trixie?

I blinked and shook my head, a million thoughts suddenly trying to compete in my brain space, with Skylight Glitter and Stable Scene and littering all crashing into each other but oh goodness was that really... Trixie?

I glanced back at the window, nearly expecting to see the phantom pony again, but she was retreating, and I did an about face just in time to see Trixie's silvery tail vanishing into the crowd with a flick and a flash and then she was gone.

I stood there, for a time, thinking about this. There must be *other* blue ponies with silver manes in Canterlot, of course. And I didn't see her cutie mark, it was hidden under her skirt, but her eyes.. those piercing, purple eyes that once seemed so menacing to me just seemed.. lonely. And her sequined saddle and that glittering gem... No, no mistaking it.

I felt a tinge of guilt and began to trot after her, but in just another moment I was

lost in the headstrong traffic pushing this way and that, and as I dodged carts and wagons and galloping ponies on a vendetta ride to somewhere I called her name and it was instantly swallowed up in the crowd. I was about to give up when suddenly an all too familiar voice cut through the crowd like a crack of thunder and all heads momentarily turned in one direction as I saw Trixie up on her hind legs, hooves extended, her glittering saddle catching the light.

“Come and witness the amazing magic of The Great and Powerful Trixie!”

I trotted over to her small audience. Trixie was standing on an overturned crate, gesturing wildly to the Gods. Her wizard robes were nowhere to be seen but she sported a midnight blue rhinestone studded saddle with a hazy transparent skirt which lay limply over her rump, midnight blue flowers in her hair and a blue gemstone necklace draped across her chest. She moved with her familiar ferocious grace, but I couldn't help but notice slump and apparent heavy weight in her shoulders and back, her head held not quite so high, and a nervous tapping in her left rear foot which was a new feature.

Trixie reared up and bolted from left to right, doing her best to work the tiny crowd into a lather. On her fruit crate stuffed in some obscure corner of Canterlot she seemed very far indeed from the showpony I had known for just a few hours in Ponyville. “Watch in awe as Trixie performs feats of magic seldom witnessed by pony eyes!”

Funny, when she was performing in Ponyville these same words hadn't struck me as being a rehearsed patter, consistently performed in goodness knows how many burgs and hamlets across Equestria, but her barely hidden exhaustion seemed to bring out the sawdust and tinsel in her act, and I could sense the memory of a long discarded, grass stained canvas drop that long ago saw Trixie become what she is now.

She stood up on her hind quarters, voice booming out over our heads. “Witness with astonishment as Trixie, the all-powerful, creates beauty out of THIN AIR!” I watched her horn alight, as she concentrated her effort. Five points of glowing light emerged from her horn and formed into the bud of a pink rose, which slowly curled and opened into a blossom, and she tucked this behind her ear and flashed a smile at the audience.

There was some polite applause.

Already as I watched her act I was feeling a cold tightness in the pit of my stomach. In Ponyville she had strutted confidently across a stage which was her own and her unicorn magic was still a novelty for some earth ponies fresh off the farm. But in Canterlot, ninety-percent unicorn, boredom seemed to be the response to the same act and already ponies were wandering away in disinterest. I watched her rear hoof tap out her frustration and her eyes moved slightly to watch each leave, a pony telegraph, but she came back twice as hard.

“Are you not awed by Trixie's magic prowess?”

“No.” A filly barked from the back near me. I slinked down low, trying to avoid being seen.

“Do something cool!” somepony elsewhere chimed in, but Trixie tossed her mane and shot back her very best bored gaze past lowered eyelids.

“Trixie does not do... cool. Trixie does spectacular!” This time she created three

flowers, and they formed out of network of glowing spheres and stars, which was pretty impressive even if I thought some ponies in the audience would rather have missed the finesse. For the truly studious, magic can be like dance, with shapes and beams and colors crafted very delicately, but not all ponies can appreciate that. Trixie floated her three roses over to an admiring boy pony, who blushed a red almost as bright as his mane, and I thought of Trixie's beauty and obvious skill if only her ego could be kept in check...

I continued to inch forward, trying to keep my telltale mane and horn out of sight, but I watched Trixie intently, her soft blue coat, her sad purple eyes.

What was she hiding behind those wet lavender pools? She bucked and trotted and tossed and pranced for the crowd, but more were wandering off and now at this close range I began to feel her growing frustration. Just now she was trying to summon an entire garland of flowers for two fillies in the front row. I closed my eyes and felt out her power in the atmosphere around me, not always easy in a crowd of unicorns, but she outshone them all, and I felt care and precision in her magical field as slowly she worked to make flowers and link them together and watch her crowd taper off helplessly through the corner of her eye.

I felt her rising frustration.

And almost on instinct, my own horn alit. I tried to help her.

I inched my way forward, first picking up the slack bit by bit where she was having trouble with certain petals or blooms, and her furrowed brow and stern grimace slowly softened into a happy confidence, and in her aura I felt her pony heart beating faster, pleased, assured.

The flowers were forming and stringing easily now, and the ponies began to applaud and coo and awe appreciatively, and she fed off them and I felt her excitement too as she closed her eyes in a show of casual flair. I pushed to the very front of the crowd and through her magic I could feel her quite strongly now, her hooves on the ground, the texture of the fruit crate, the skirt draped over her silvery tail...

...and she felt me and Trixie's eyes snapped open and found mine instantly.

I smiled back bravely but her shock of recognition was too great and the magic began to waver unsteadily. Her voice dripped with steel-cold ice, hoarse and low.

**“Twilight Sparkle!”**

Trixie's magic simply stopped as she mentally derailed, her carefully crafted garland exploded, suddenly, breaking apart into dozens of petals, and she screamed in disgust at me and the crowd.

The crowd began to roar with laughter approvingly, pounding the cobbled ground with their hooves and Trixie tried to gallop off in defeat, but with the crowd hemmed in on two sides and those Canterlot stone walls on the other, she simply turned in place one, two, three times, and began to try to curl up under her saddle and disappear.

I rushed up to her and through the cloud of rapidly descending petals, pink flowers catching in my tail and my mane as Trixie seemed to shrink away almost into nothingness.

The next moment I found myself blocking their view of her with my body but I knew she heard them all too well.

“Please, leave her alone. Move along! Please!” I didn't look back at Trixie. She

shook a few times, almost from a chill, very close to me, and seemed to grow smaller and smaller there on the street corner.

The ponies began to move along but they laughed and cantered and trotted away merrily and in the expanding circle of pink petals Trixie and I seemed lonely there alongside a busy Canterlot street, the remnants of a party we had missed. And finally we both felt alone.

I turned to her. She looked up at me with her big purple eyes and something in me broke. I couldn't be indignant anymore, I just couldn't. I began to nudge her towards Stable Scene. "Come on, let's get you comfortable.." I found myself saying. But it didn't feel like me at all saying those words. I didn't really care much about Trixie until she withered up like a flower in front of me. I wondered if she had any friends to go home for and to cry with.

I nudged her along and noticed for the first time her little tin that she had scrawled a bit sign on the side of. It was empty.

I nudged her inside the cafe, her legs moving slowly, like she was wading through a snow storm. "Come on," I said gently, "It seems like you need a friend."

The light streaming in through Stable Scene's pebble glass windows changed and so the traffic outside changed, too. From our table in the earthtone idle of the café I could see the flow of street traffic move from the brisk steady rush of morning to the slight lull of early afternoon. Tea-fueled ponies rushed and clanged by, cups and sidepicks and scrolls all a-flutter. The menus inside the café were all erased and rewritten on the back wall near where a tall polished brass contraption stood. It was a coffee machine. You can't get coffee in Ponyville, the trade paths don't wind that way.

In this modern streamline-deco mélange I kept putting food into Trixie and maintaining my peace policy of keeping quiet. She ate in silence and seemed to agree. I had nothing much to say to her despite my understanding of a deep unspoken sadness in her manner and in her eyes.

But the first half hour was not without our shared moments. We had both smirked at the breakfast sandwich that came out of the kitchen – hardly larger than a hen's egg and it was a perfect cube drowned in a thick yellow sauce. Rarity would have been delighted with its geometric perfection. Another time Trixie looked in my eyes appreciatively when a plate of tea sandwiches was produced, and I was caught in the glance and looked away, not quite ready for that yet. But I kept the flow of food and drinks coming and noted with some amusement that Trixie's taste for hayfries could not apparently be sated. After some time Trixie's will to talk returned, too, complete with adorably uncontrolled lapses into third-person monologue. I let her ramble on. She seemed unguarded by food and company and at last began to speak, hardly above a whisper.

I learned that after the Ursa crushed her home, she had crashed in a friend's apartment in Canterlot and tensions were heating up. She had had a few encouragements to pay up or move out, but her mother was sending her money through Post just to keep her fed. I tried my best to offer a solution.

"Well couldn't you get a job at a restaurant or a theater or something?"



“Hrmp. Trixie will never work under contract..” she spit out the word “contract” like a spoilt apple.

“Well you’re going to have to start over anyway if you’re going to work your way back to being on the road. At least you’ll have food to eat. How did you survive out there anyway?”

She raised a blue hoof dramatically, gesturing mesmerically at the ceiling.

“...Normally, ponies would be so dazzled by *my* abilities that they would offer *all* to The Great and Powerful Trixie.”

I tried not to smirk but I don’t think I succeeded.

“Well you can’t have been very happy living hoof-to-mouth like that anyway...”

Trixie stiffened and posed, statuesque. “Trixie did not have to answer to anypony! She was her own boss!”

But her proud posture collapsed once that statement left her lips. She had sounded so confident, but now her nose drooped all the way down to touch the table. I tried my best to sound chipper.

“Have you been working on any new tricks??”

“A disappearing pony trick.” Now she hardly sounded like herself. I pressed on.

“Oh? And how does that work?”

“My entire life disappears *in one night*.” She rolled her head to lay it on the table and I knew she was hiding her face from me so I wouldn’t see her tearing up.

I remembered that the University of Canterlot always needed more ponies with extra-magical abilities, but I somehow doubted that Trixie had the... discipline for that sort of thing.

“Trixie... you have an amazing gift for magic. There’s no reason you have to use it to be a show pony.”

“What good is it? It’s all I’ve ever known!” she managed between sharp breaths.

I thought about that.

What if I suddenly couldn’t work any magic? I was convinced that when the Poison Joke made my horn floppy and useless that my life as it was, was over. All those years of work and study... all dried up in a night. Thinking about it still made me sweat.

This wasn’t working, regroup, regroup.

Change tactics.

“Well... neither of us have lost our abilities.”

“Huh?”

“I mean... Well you can still work your magic, what’s holding you back is that you can’t buy a new cart, right?”

“Yes...”

“Well then Trixie, your life *hasn’t* disappeared. Every magician knows that trick too well to be fooled. All you need is a new cart – that’s all that’s stopping you, isn’t it?”

“Just a house of wheels. *Please*.” It sounded like she meant the *please* to stop the thought from even occurring, but it seemed to misfire badly and she rationalized aloud, very quiet, as if she could prevent herself from hearing it. “Who’s going to build it for me? I haven’t got a gold bit to my name.”

“Well probably nopony here in Canterlot... but with all the places in Equestria you’ve been, you have to have met somepony who will remember you! Then you could

go on the road with a new show? Maybe one that isn't based around embarrassing other ponies?"

She moaned and moved her head. I suddenly and irrationally let her have it, pounding my hoof on the table for extra emphasis.

"Trixie, think of the shame and embarrassment of being publicly humiliated. Well you were doing *that* to ponies everywhere across Equestria every day you performed your show! You don't have to believe in karma to see that your lie finally caught up to you and bit you in the haunch! But all that is irrelevant because I know you can get yourself out of this slump if you stop sulking around feeling bad for yourself and show us a little of that Trixie resourcefulness! And pride."

"I guess... I guess I did get a little carried away."

*A LITTLE?*

I was afraid that thought had slipped right out of my mouth and into reality, but a quick glance at Trixie showed it hadn't. Her face was turned towards me now, her huge purple eyes quivering at mine. Such kind eyes. Her boastful pride had become a world of hurt in the past few weeks. But I suspected that had always been there.

I looked back at her and smiled. And she smiled back at me.

I looked around the inside of Stable Scene, so warm awash in inviting earth tones and hammered copper and trendy little hanging fairy-lights. Maybe this place wasn't so bad after all. Maybe I didn't resent loss of the little stand on the corner run by the little old mare who never remembered my name.

Maybe Canterlot offered something for me after all.

I nodded my head to nobody as I adjusted to this idea. Yes. Maybe it wasn't so bad after all.

I should take Rarity here.

With the terrific swinging home of a heavy oak door, the official component of my trip to Canterlot had begun.

The royal palace wasn't always so gloomy, and in fact on the night of the Grand Galloping Gala it had been so filled with tapers and fairy lights and magic bulbs that these old stone walls had nearly glowed. But this cold old den was built many thousands of generations ago in less enlightened times. Any window was a liability, and that any light comes in at all is more a feat than a feature.

I thought back to some of the old mare's tales I'd read about the place. Oral tradition has bequeathed us the "Mad Prince's Walk" on the southeast rampart, the hidden subcellars walled up centuries ago to keep their secrets obscure, and the tower no pony can locate from inside the castle even with candles lit in every window to help guide us to it from the outside.

I giggled. I'd told that story many times on class trips. But such surroundings invariably immediately put one in a dire mindset. I sure could use some of Pinkie Pie's giggling right now to lighten my spirits.

Waiting. I hated this part. I imagine that Princess Celestia has royal duties to attend to and all that, but waiting outside her chamber really is the worst. Only the

occasional pacing of the palace guards, echoing off the dark stone from some obscure corridor down that way towards the darkness assured me that the entire palace hadn't been evacuated.

I pulled a nice heavy book out of my sidepack and settled down with it in one of those obscenely floofy Canterot pillows. Enough time passed that the ray of sunlight streaking in through a high window migrated sufficiently to require me to change positions, balancing the heavy book on my purple belly. Purple. I always thought of my coat as being lavender, but everypony says it's purple. I wonder if Pinkie thinks she's more fuchsia than pink... Eventually, at long last, the door to Princess Celestia's reception room creaked open and an officious voice issued forth. "The Princess will receive you now!"

I snuffed and closed the book. I guess I'll find out how Horseluck Sholmes will solve the mystery later.

I stepped inside, and a handsome stallion stepped forward out of his curtained arch to announce "Miss Twilight Sparkle of Canterlot!"

I shot him a dirty glance. "PONYVILLE." But I was ignored.

Suddenly Celestia was there, just as quickly as light breaking through a glass, and I bowed deeply. It sometimes seems a strange thing to do. The Princess and I have been so casual for so many years. Formalities. "Protocol is important!", I heard my mother chime helpfully in my ear. Yes, Mom.

"Twilight! Please come sit down!"

Celestia's reception room is always dusky dark, and with a great roaring fire in one corner. I long ago had stopped trying to reason out why our Sun Princess spent all her personal time in a room dark as night. The room is, I must admit, criminally relaxing, and the air perpetually scented heavily with incense and flower petals. Being with Celestia is ennobling instead of oppressive, like the corridor outside.

Celestia nodded in the direction of her tea table and I found it ready as always. I floated a craftwork bundle of leaves, tied at one end, into her beautiful blown glass tea pot and the copper vial of water was nearby, resting on some burning coals and still simmering rapidly. I poured the water over the pellet and moved back across to Celestia while we chatted idly, politely.

I settled easily into a seatee near her and we quietly waited for a pot of tea to brew. As the hot water infuses with the tea leaves they slowly moisten and uncurl, transforming from an unattractive pellet into a silky "flower" suspended in the glass pot. It is the defacto royal beverage, although it goes back far before our time. We watched this change take place like the hundreds of times before until eventually the stallion attendant discreetly stepped away and we both moved forward with an uncustomary abruptness. Celestia nuzzled my face gently and I giggled.

She didn't seem much in the mood for official reports and talk of my studies, but then she had stopped really asking about those years before. I made sure to make a minor show of moving a variety of objects around as I poured our royal tea, including a few I wasn't looking directly at, if for no other reason than to demonstrate that I wasn't sliding in that department, either. My own quiet pride wouldn't allow it any other way, but we both understood with an unspoken agreement that I was just showing off. Good friends are tolerant of your eccentricities. We sat and chatted in the warm glowing dark, just

above a whisper, the smell of warm rose tea in our noses.

I don't think I've ever felt more at ease with anyone than Celestia, and often my accumulated feelings rush out haphazardly if we haven't spoken in some time. This was such an occasion, and I fell into my all too familiar kind of trance when emoting, with thoughts occurring in spontaneous order and rushing off my tongue like scattering birds. It's so easy when it's written, why is it so darn hard when you have to say these things?

Celestia simply nods quietly, as always, which makes it all seem tolerable to me.

We chatted about my day, and I told her what I thought of Ponyville from high up in my tower window. I told her about the café and my thoughts of my friends, but I glossed over Trixie, because I still hadn't yet decided how I felt about the whole thing.

Then I got into a groove thinking back to my aerial tour of my town and I told her about my life in Ponyville, and especially I told her about my five wonderful friends.

My mind had often been returning to Sweet Apple Acres since seeing it radiating light in the morning dew, and it returned there now, as I told Celestia all about Applejack, her quiet wisdom, and her strength. I thought of her generations-old potbellied iron stove from which all manner of delicious apple treats emerged, and my memories of a wonderful afternoon with her were mingled indistinguishably with the cinnamon succulence of a hot apple crumble. I doubt a purer or more perfect confection has ever existed.

Then I told of Fluttershy in her dug out burrow, just like her animal friends, a yard overflowing with warrens and dens and nests and birdhouses. Fluttershy... she knows more than she lets on, whereas I often can't stop reciting what I know, and often find myself practicing one of my lectures in my quiet time or while I'm alone in the bathtub. But Fluttershy has her priorities straight and only speaks when she needs to. I could learn a lot from her composure. But I guess I'm just not that kind of pony.

I told Celestia about Rarity, and I thought of her often now, since our sleepover. When she slips her silken garments round my body, I feel at ease, pampered, happy. I feel something else for Rarity, for her heart on her sleeve, and her sense of being at ease with herself. At ease with me... how I'd like to... well.

At this point I opened my eyes and saw that in my reverie I had been, without even knowing it, levitating almost everything in the room, including myself. I glanced up to see the sparkly purple aura radiating out of my horn bigger and brighter than I think I've ever seen it, although Rainbow once told me that it had bordered on fireworks when I put the Ursa Minor to sleep. Celestia smiled at me softly and sipped her Twilight-Sparkle-floated tea, and several scrolls were marching around me in a slow circle. I blushed, but I felt good at the same time, like this was how it was meant to be.

"Twilight, are you dating now?"

My face flushed instinctively and several scrolls and quills around me clattered to the floor. I stood up in midair to keep myself from falling as my whole train of thought derailed from under me. I hate when she asks questions like this. *OH GODS*. Did I say that bit about Rarity aloud? Had she known?

"Princess, I..." I choked. Stay collected.

"...Well.. no."

"But aren't you interested in having a relationship, Twilight?"

I formed my thoughts carefully. Celestia waited for me to speak with her massive,

dewy... forgiving eyes.

I thought of how I'd long dreamt of curling up with somepony, for some warmth and maybe something else on many of my loneliest nights. Sometimes the thought was so strong I could nearly feel their hooves around me. As happy as my books and my studies make me, I admit that they're lousy company on cold wintery nights, and bundled up under my blanket in my hollowed tree, my always churning brain would begin to torture me with doubts of my fitness to be a fillyfriend to anypony. But...

Such things are really just me pushing myself out beyond my comfort zone.

After a long pause I answered. "Princess, you know I'm not the type to pursue relationships. If I find somepony out there, I'll know it. But it's just... well.. it's just not my style."

Celestia nodded sagely at that. I smiled. That wasn't so bad. Even I had convinced myself to feel better about the whole thing. Given the abruptness of the previous question I nearly expected her to continue on and ask me about my preferences but suddenly the discussion turned to my dorm at Canterlot U, which of course was kept for me in the event of situations such as this. No, I didn't mind it, and yes, I slept perfectly well, even if right now all I wanted, I felt, was to be at Sugar Cube Corner listening to Pinkie ramble on and watch her make milkshakes.

Celestia must have sensed my restlessness.

"Twilight Sparkle, I called you here today so you could gather up some of your books."

"Ah, yes Princess! I'd be happy to bring them back to Ponyville with me! Where are they?"

"Over here, Twilight." Celestia moved with unnatural equine grace over to a curtained arch and with the ever so slightest, nearly imperceptible twinkle from her horn – I watched that with a touch of envy – the curtain moved aside, revealing...

My heart dropped into my hooves.

There, quite nearly crouching in the half light, was a pile of books so monstrous I doubted they were actually mine. They must have been twenty-hand tall. I stepped forward and paged through one quickly. "Princess, I don't think these are actually all..."

Right there, on the last page, pressed firmly up into the corner with symmetrical precision, was my cutie mark stamp. I blushed. What was this book anyway? I slammed it shut. "A HISTORIE OF MAGICKLE CREATURES". Oh – right. I remembered this class now. But seriously. These can't all be mine.

My heart sank even lower as my scanned pile after pile. "BASIC POTIONS LEVEL ONE" – third year, afternoon class. "PREDICTIONS AND PROPHECIES, ANNO 4777" – I hated that one, and almost failed the test. I wish I had had Pinkie around to tell me I couldn't always be a super smart smarty-pants then.

More titles. "DRAGON FOLK OF THE EASTERN LANDS". "CANTERLOT: A CASE STUDY". "URBAN DESIGN IN MAGICAL..."

"What's wrong, Twilight? Aren't these all yours?"

Sigh. I almost didn't want them now. There's "THE BOOK OF EQUILID", which Spike had to read aloud to me while I pasted together cardboard stars for my second year earth science class. Crabapples. I remember "THE GREAT PONY KINGS", too, which I read in my dorm while Moondancer and Sun Beam went to the party without me. My

poor, poor Canterlot friends... I guess I wasn't a very good friend to them.

All this was causing a quiet gnawing feeling in the pit of my stomach. While all this rolled around inside me, I remembered Celestia, who had been waiting with royal patience through one of my all too familiar "intellect attacks". I put on a brave face, and smiled optimistically at Celestia.

"How... many books are there, Princess?"

Her answer came with authoritative royal precision.

"Two hundred and seventy-three."

I bit my lip.

Eventually I had to go out into the garden and ask one of the landscape ponies to let me borrow his wagon. He let me have it and I had to slowly levitate it back up the dozens of steps to Celestia's reception area, where the books were carefully loaded, in groups of five at a time, into the wagon. Five was just about what I could manage on my own without losing concentration. While I moved the books, Celestia and I talked cheerfully about Spike and giggled often.

Oh, Spike. When Celestia first introduced me to Spike he seemed a little too... obsequious. As the months went by however I would peek over my book while muttering things about magical properties and find him rolling his eyes when he thought I wasn't looking. I thought it was kind of cute, in a boy way. Another time he couldn't suppress his giggles while I tramped around shouting about Star Spangles not holding up her end of our Literature assignment. Then the tipping point came almost four months after we had been living together. I was mixing a potion and it blew up in my face, causing a flower to sprout from my horn. I was terrified but fascinated, but Spike simply rolled around laughing and called me a nerd.

That was the moment. I must have looked pretty ridiculous, jumping up and down in front of the mirror in terror babbling about this and that magical reaction. At least Spike's laughter saved me from falling into another social disgrace because I almost galloped right over to Celestia to show her what I'd done.

Hehe. I wanted to feel Spike riding on my back right now, tugging gently at my mane. After all, he's family.

Wow, are all the books loaded already? Or was I moving more than I suspected?

I looked up at Celestia, who simply smiled down on me with her usual expression of approval and bemusement. I always blush when I see her and realize I'd temporarily lost all sense of where I was. She'd never say so, but I know Spike's real job is to keep me focused on what's important.

We both used our magic to levitate the cart, and we marched it down all those stone steps to the castle's courtyard, much to the amazement of the castle guards. I felt good walking beside her on the other side of the cart. When ponies use their magic to work cooperatively, there's a certain special feeling to it, a tingly... almost intimate... feeling of harmony.

From the courtyard, I said my goodbyes to Celestia, and much to my surprise she moved forward to embrace me in a neck-hug and whispered gently in my ear.

"You're learning much, my dear student. I'm proud of you."

I looked up at her through welling tears. I felt an urge to speak but I knew she

read everything in my face. With some effort I got the wagon wheels to start turning slowly, and wheeled it out the castle walls.

Certain old traditions persist in Canterlot, and this brings out much of the town's charm.

Antiquated lamps run on a sort of natural gas were discovered way down in one of the city's storehouses several hundred years ago. Their design and construction, I learned in one of my many books on Canterlot, is probably from a place called "Persia" - the ponies there perfected many scientific discoveries many centuries before other civilizations - as unicorns and magic are almost never found in desert climates. It's possible they circulated into the holdings of Canterlot thousands of years ago during the pony wars and may have been prized for their brass and copper fittings.

But they stand, quiet reminders of a less peaceful and humane time, lining the broad streets of Canterlot, nearly ten-score of them, all about eight hands in height. Each and every night ponies come around with torches and light the gas jets, which burn bright and beautiful...

...and pink. Perhaps those Persian ponies knew more about magic than we suspect.

I pulled my cart through the usual throng of nighttime shoppers and diners, the rough cobblestones clicking underhoof. I hope Spike's doing okay without me. Hopefully Fluttershy or Applejack have given him something to do.

Actually, he's probably sleeping.

I felt him hug me suddenly, when I returned from Nightmare Castle, he burst out of the crowd and hugged me.

I stood under one of those lamps and watched the flame dance. Pink, like Pinkie Pie. Like Rarity's dress. Like Applejack's barn. Like...

Suddenly a bell rung and pulled me out of my trance. I saw two ponies, chatting happily, making their way out of a nearby store, laden heavily with books. I remembered the chime, suddenly, a memory rushing out to greet me. And the heavy carved door, covered with squares and beautiful little Arabesques. I remembered the door! I was standing in front of *the* shop without even realizing it!

I looked back at my cart for a moment. Well... I doubt that anypony is going to steal three hundred books. Not in Time-Crush Canterlot.

Eagerly I nosed open the heavy carved door. Immediately, the colors and sounds and smells came back to me. Low ceilings with heavy crossbeams in the style of the older Canterlot houses and rooms where the age has seemed to rub off the walls and now hangs in the air. Heavy rustic beams which began their life as rough timbers but time and age has burnished and smoothed into rich grained posts. The wonderful mustiness of old paper, of leather, of gilt letters, time-soiled ribbons, fragile onionskin pages. A dim flickering light, gas jets, musty red domes coloring the flames, just right, just perfect! The old-fashioned cash register in the corner, pressed tin, the paint having long flaked off most of it.

I smiled broadly. In all the shops I'd frequented in Canterlot, this had been my favorite, and it was like coming home.

I remembered the loft where many old dusty tomes had been sequestered and bound up the steps two at a time to that still-intimate space, three walls of books bordering a large heavy carved oak table, a fairylight providing modest illumination. Yes! Books on... **Magical Studies!**

Time changes her rules when I am with books, I've found, and the fairy-light had begun to dim considerably by the time I pulled from that musty shelf a certain old thick book. Opening it, I recognized the jagged, abrupt lines of the old language, not quite so different from modern Equish but still foreign enough to require extra concentration. I had taken three years of this at University, but my skill was rusty. I read the title aloud, and looked with interest at the author's mark, two spheres orbiting each other. We still use our cutie marks or derivations of them to sign our work, but often the name is spelled out now too, which means this book is several centuries old....

At just that moment a jingling bell just on the corners of my consciousness told me that the shop would be closing soon, and the labored clicking of the shop-keeper's stiff, arthritic hooves on the gently sloped wood floor downstairs confirmed this, but I squinted at the book in the failing light and was able to just read a chapter title in the contents that I knew would be worthwhile.

Out came my pen and ink! Fanfare!

I read the old book aloud to myself, while my pen jotted down a rough approximation in modern Equish, and my concentration was staining from the task. A second jingle and my entire train of thought was gone, and I peeked downstairs at the old colt running the shop with an embarrassed smile. He mustered as much charm as he could, green eyes peering up through thick glasses at me.

"Okay, closing time, darling, please bring your books down!"

"Oh, thank you sir! I'll be right down!"

I began to pack up my sidepicks and lifted a few of my book selections, and glanced disappointed at the orbiting spheres book, which I almost put away because of my difficulty with it. But then I peered at the notes I'd written with interest, using my horn to create a little light in the increasingly black old loft.

Now, throughout history ponies have ventured forth many theories about how magic works.

But nopony has yet to fully explain it, however, even if most unicorns have a feeling inside them about what makes it tick that's quite impossible to place into words. I know I have my own ideas. I was therefore no stranger to reading farfetched theories and ideas, and settled into the rhythm of the text comfortably.

The few lines I'd scribbled down read:

*"One hast verily to concede in the face of all Pony learning that, firstly, tis the particular interactions of one unicorne wit another unicorne will bringst out the use of magicale abilities; and secondly that the bond thensforth shall borne fruit as one magicale ability or another; wherest good friends shall breed in them stronger magick, weaker magick..."*

My translation trailed off into scribbles. I processed this nugget, however, and it all seemed too familiar.

Suddenly the Magical Studies loft was gone and the darkness had become the warm, flowery scented darkness of Celestia's palace. I was an awkward teenager again



and I heard Celestia saying one of the first things she ever told me that stuck. I had not been talking for fear of saying the wrong thing until she gently draped a wing over me and whispered: “You have trouble talking to other ponies, I know. But if you treat everyone extra nice, you’ll find you can get out of any situation you find yourself in.”

I stacked the book quietly atop the others. Why is it that all these blindingly obvious statements about life and magic and friendship seem trivial when you’re young but profound when you’re older?

The entire trip downstairs, to the register, and out into the cool night air melted together into the murky purple-blue darkness of my mind, as I rolled this notion around in my head, turning it over and over like a new toy. And outside under the night sky as I loaded my new books into my carts amongst my old books, the flickering light cast through the old shop’s red pebble glass window was blown out.

The moon hung clear and bright and the stars were out, and they gave me power. Only a few stragglers left behind on Canterot’s busy streets now. As the night draws on and the social ponies withdraw back into their houses and apartments, the night belongs to ponies like me. With my haul of books and my thoughts and the space and silence for both, I let out a whoop of pleasure. This is my time to really live.

I nestled down in the damp cold grass and watched the stars blink happily overhead. Each constellation, each a source of comfort and power, called my name as the whole celestial symphony of light blinked and twinkled and moved and danced across the heavens. I’d often dreamt of dancing and leaping and playing up there too, sliding down moonbeams, nudging each point of light playfully with my nose, and swimming in the milky pool of white of the moon until I faded and just the glittering star on my hindquarters shone down over Equestria.

I used to envy the Pegasus ponies because I dreamed if I had wings I could fly upwards and keep on flying until the lavender night sky embraced me...

The moonlight glinted bright and beautiful off the pitched roofs and high terraces of Canterlot, and I giggled again and rolled through the wonderful soft grass, smelling the tang of the Canterlot Musk Blue variety, so prized for its’ sweet crunch and complex palate. I ate some, just because I knew I could. Being a creature of night meant you had certain obligations to withhold when all the other ponies weren’t around to tell you no. I rolled right into the hedge and smelled it’s musky pine, so savory and delicious stuffed into grape leaves or boiled down into syrup...

I smiled and grew sedate again watching the moon creep slowly across the sky. Such a beautiful thing. You can’t look directly at the sun to really admire it, but the moon is not shy to anypony who bothers to really see her. I grew contemplative watching her slow, graceful arc.

I had wandered into the city’s royal gardens, replete with rare plants and trees and hedges. There’s been a maze here for at least a century and a half, one of the first in Equestria, and it’s reported that topiaries were invented here, maybe just where I’m sitting now.

Just where I’m sitting now.

I sat up. I came here because of just where I'm sitting now... it's where I first used magic.

Every unicorn remembers that, of course, it's a huge moment in her life and there's always the irrational fear that she'll never learn how to work her horn, her birthright.

For me... I warped. About two feet. From right here to the other side of that hedge. I was trying to hide from...

Just then my ears filled with a subtle rustling as the wind changed directions and with it came a new sound, just barely on the edge of perceptibility, lost in the gusting breeze and tittering trees and swaying hedges, but it was sweet, and low, and I heard it all too clearly... and it was gone.

*"Eeeugh..."*

I sat up and the gardens seemed quiet in a way I had not known in my entire life. And in that stillness I heard it again, a voice, very soft and gentle, whispering just on the edge of perceptibility. I could hear it just under my pounding heart.

But it was so soft and beautiful, I knew this was no ghost pony whispering in the leaves. I began to slowly and quietly make my way through that moon-splashed midnight garden, and each step I took, the voice became clearer, if still impossible to understand.

*"C'réenáh... loo'eigh... ág ínaugh..."*

My ears strained. Each plant and hedge I passed, the words seemed to become clearer while still faint and mysterious, something I couldn't quite resolve into coherence.

*"Beáúhen ís náugh aughínléigh.."*

Now it was singing,

I was quite sure of it,

in a low but beautiful tone,

slipping gently

but mysteriously over hedge and bush.

Suddenly I stopped because I realized I was hearing something I'd never heard in my life. This was Old Equish, spoken! - or rather sung - and nopony in Equestria has heard that for at least four-hundred years.

*"Auld ín 'Oovén, deeaus áuldméntag..."*

I moved forward and although I could not understand the words to this song, the low tone of the singer's voice and slow, steady rhythm were starting to affect me.

Tears welled and streamed down my cheeks in the moonlight and I was certain

I was hearing the most beautiful music I had ever heard in my life.

In some old manuscripts I'd found in the Occult section of Canterlot's library I'd read the folktales of the "Celestial Symphony..."

*"Augh léigh seígdéigh, eígh 'hvénsa-áuld.."*

...Which was a phenomena reported in the eighth century, when mysterious music coming from the sky echoed through Pony farms and villages. Everypony swore it to be the most beautiful music they'd ever heard in their lives.

*"Mo gháud thoo'd, mén áu Ruín..."*

It was quite close now.

And every pony who had ever heard the Celestial Symphony had died, sometimes running off cliffs or into bogs trying to chase after it to hear it one more time. Beautiful,

fatal music echoing from who knows where, elusively slipping through the trees in the wind.

Was I about to die?

I was unafraid and pushed my way through the last hedge.

And there she was, standing silhouetted against the moon, midnight blue.

*“Eín áus c’reenah, loo’eigh Ruin ág ináugh.”*

I saw the tears in her eyes as mine rolled down my cheeks. I choked back my emotions and bowed deeply.

“My Princess.”

Luna gasped, turning her face towards me away from the moon, seeing me in my bow, and she suddenly became very quiet and still, unsure what to do. I held my bow and let her collect herself, watching my tears drip off my nose into the stiff royal blue grass. My nose pressed to the ground, I heard her cough, and snuffle, and suddenly I knew she was very close to me, unsure, even scared.

“Twilight... Twilight Sparkle.”

I looked up at her and her eyes seemed radiant in the night.

My night.

Her night, actually.

I could sense her apprehension almost palpably and a sickly realization in my stomach told me that it was the same social terror I often feel myself. I looked into her eyes and saw what *she* was thinking.

“Princess Luna, I...”

No, I know something better.

“...***We all*** forgive you.”

She smiled now and I blurted out what *I* was thinking.

“You’re so beautiful.” It ended in a squeak almost like Fluttershy’s.

She took a step back in surprise but she felt so... familiar to me, like Celestia, eternally patient and loving and kind. I smiled at her, and I could look her right in her deep beautiful eyes. “That song... was so beautiful, too...”

Luna looked down, and I felt her attention drift towards the moon.

“It’s a sort of lullaby..”

We both understood that she meant to say “lament”.

She sighed a bit heavily. I took a step towards her and found that she even smelled like Celestia.

“What is it called?”

“Ruin ag Inaugh Leigh.”

“What does that mean?”

She didn’t want to say, so I sat down near her and used my horn to light a comforting blue light for us both.

“You don’t need to be sad, Princess Luna.”

She sighed and moved away. I felt she wanted me to follow and I did, and together we pushed through a hedge and found ourselves on a stepped terrace at the very edge of Canterlot. Creeping vines and hanging flowers nearly obscured the rich carved

stone pillars of nearly a century ago and in the cool clear night breeze, the thick scent of jasmine and bergamont drifted through the air. A sharp cliff face fell away just behind a proudly carved balustrade, and far out beyond it, glimmering in the night, was Ponyville, dark and quiet and calm. My heart swelled just seeing it!

“I often come here to watch over my... subjects..” I nodded softly.

“It’s just a simple farm village, but it means a lot to me. Every night there’s just one house... sometimes just one window... alit, and when I see that window I know that there is a kindred soul for me out there in the dark... a pony who loves my night.”

“It looks like everypony’s asleep, Princess Luna.”

“Tonight of all nights that window is out. I was looking forward to seeing it so strongly... it’s been a cold winter in my soul. And I feel so alone.”

Luna grew very quiet then and suddenly I felt afraid to look at her so I occupied myself scanning Ponyville. I looked for the one window. Funny, I’ve never noticed another..

I looked at Luna, who gazed whistfully out over the town just as I had done not a half day ago. Just this morning.

“But Luna, I’m here.”

“No, you don’t understand..”

“No, Luna, I do understand. I’m right here. I’m the pony out there in the dark.”

She started at me uncomprehendingly, and I watched her eyes widen. I smiled back softly in the blue moonlight. “I’m the pony you see... I love your night, Princess! You never told me, all those nights I’d come out on the balcony and gaze into your heavens... you must have known...”

I couldn’t finish because Luna pulled me into a hug. Wrapping her wings tight around me, just like Rainbow did, once. I giggled and felt tears roll down my cheeks, absorbed in her beautiful blue coat, feeling very warm and close suddenly. I smiled at her but she beamed back, as pure and radiant as her moon crossing the heavens behind her head.

Luna and I clopped along the smooth brick pavers that led through the center of Canterlot University. Her room had been small and very very red, but she told me that Celestia kept it clean and dusted for the whole Millenium she was away. I smiled smugly to myself at this.

We had decided it would be better to hide her wings under a skirt-and-saddle and simply leave the shoes, crown and royal cloak at home instead of trying some complex transformation spell. I assured her nopony would think twice about her supersize horn so long as we dressed her up right. I remember cursing Rarity for not being here while we tampered with a straightening iron hastily obtained by a palace guard, and I could hardly fault Luna for having no idea what to do with the damn thing. We managed to style her mane just differently enough to distract, although I have no doubt Rarity would have had a fainting spell over it.

I had been pleased to see Luna’s piles of books, her art scrolls, and her colored ink wells scattering the place. She had discovered stickers and stuck them on about every flat surface, giving the stately royal bedchamber the appearance of having been temporarily

repurposed as a Fillygarden classroom. But the stickers told me that she was like me.

It felt good to see Luna's hobbies scattering her tiny room. Celestia, for all the years I've known her, I've never figured out what she does besides rule in a general sense and read my letters. Luna paints. She draws. She reads. She likes stickers. She does things ponies do at night. I felt even closer to her in the dark red finery of her chamber.

We'd wound our way together through the Canterlot Market, those carnival lights on strings strung from booth to booth, back and forth across the central path, a poor replacement for the real night sky but Luna had cantered and hopped playfully under each one regardless. Luna looked almost like Pinkie under the rose-hued glow of those old Persian lamps, and she had oohed impressively at the gates to Canterlot U, where some enterprising old groundskeeper a generation ago had outlined the school mascot in the signature paving tiles of the forecourt, and made them glow a pure, almost heavenly bright blue. I had smiled. Sometimes I take the charms of the magical city for granted, sure, having grown up with those stones underhoof for as long as I could remember.

"Princess, do you like your room in the palace?"

"Oh I do! It's... nice. And cozy!"

"Do you have much time for your art?" I longed to see her fine graceful linework again, so delicate, but only glimpsed in passing, as the palace guard awkwardly presented the iron.

She giggled. "Well I'm not always shown around by a beautiful young unicorn."

I blushed deeply at that comment and pulled open a heavy door for her in a gesture which was merely abrupt. "Here we are."

She stepped towards the flickering darkness, readily, darkness her element.

"Where are we going?"

"Well.. this leads down into one of the University's old grain storehouses under the gymnasium."

We had to carefully click our hooves down the narrow sloping passage, torches every so often lighting our way, the uneven brick walls jutting forward regularly and embracing in the center into a slender decorative arch. Unicorns... not even a chute to a grain silo can be without decoration.

"Whatever for?"

I noticed that in this darkness, Luna's very coat seemed to shine dully of moonlight and mercury. She cast a steady but subtle comforting blue light on the walls. "Well the storehouse hadn't been used for years, so it was converted into... well, see for yourself, Princess."

We emerged into the underground refuge, and there they were, Canterlot's finest, the student unicorns lounging on benches or reading in corners and each of the old silo's many side vaults had long since been built into storefronts and cafes, a magical cloud nestled tight in the ceiling showing the night sky outside though we were forty-hand underground. I had spent many a long night curled up here in the courtyard or one of the cafes, listening o the trickling old fountains, sipping coffee and marking up my textbooks in preparation for one class or another.

Luna and I moved confidently past the ever-popular rowdy bar, and Luna looked inside with detached interest. "We're not going to a place like that, are we?"

"Oh goodness no." I glanced inside and saw the unkempt unicorns and a group of

boy fliers mooning about the entrance, laying on the benches, trying to work off their buzz. “The place we’re going to is more...”

My mother’s voice in my ear again. “...Bohemian.”

Mom!

“Our daughter is hanging out in a... café... with the barehoofed Bohemian ponies!”

Goodness.

“...it’s more... nice and quiet.”

Luna trotted alongside me, bright and chipper as her moon, eyes darting this way and that at all the ponies finding their own way to enjoy the restful solace of another beautiful Canterlot night. We reached the sunken stone steps into my old haunt and in a fit of whimsy I pulled open the door for Luna and said through my teeth, clenched tight round the handle: “After you, Majesty!”

Some time had passed in that dim old barrel of a room, almost a dugout, with little side alcoves along the walls stuffed with mismatched old castoffs of furniture where ponies talked or wrote or sipped in silence, before the tea cups Luna and I had long emptied were traded in for vessels holding stronger stuff. I sat on a particularly comfortable pile of hay with my jaw on the table, enjoying feeling the room turn around me slowly like a universe and me as its sun. Luna stretched out on a seatee, posed like the grand lady she is. As we talked my eyes slowly circumnavigated the room. There was a pony with her quill posed in midair while she thought of just the right word, the debris on her table evidence of a caffeine-fueled imagination. Two fillies necked in a quiet corner, something I had missed seeing in Ponyville. Nearby, a group of colts were gathered around their game table, pushing little figures at one another and whispering with particular insistence. But there was no smoke, no rowdiness, nothing but the thundering quietude of a thousand minds racing at a million miles an hour in a dark hole deep under Equestria.

I lolled about happily in my reverie. “Princess Luna, what is the moon like?”

“Sorry?”

“I want to know what the moon is like. When I was a filly I thought it was like a... milky puddle, that you could swim in.”

Luna giggled at me, her mane starting to crimp back slightly to its natural wave. “You can swim in it.”

“I can?”

“Oh, yes dear... the moon is whatever you wish it to be. It can be a speck... a ball of dust... a rock, a planet, a world, a glittery fleck, a puddle of light... it can be whatever you believe. That’s what makes ponyfolk different from the woodland creatures.”

“It is?”

“Of course.” Luna sipped from her goblet, her voice racing far ahead of mine, fueled on the honey sweetness of her wine. “No pony can offer an explanation of magic but we know it’s true, but maybe that’s because no pony is willing to admit that it’s true because we will it to be so. So you can swim in the moon, if that’s what you want.”

I processed all this dully. Luna looked at me with her beautiful emerald eyes

inquisitively, and I felt distinctly as though I were being tested. I sensed some tense impatience in her tone too, but my whole world was swirling into the slow rotation of a turning galaxy, the star on my rump joining a thousand other stars and we'd all link together and sail off through the universe.

“But Princess, you lived in the moon. For a thousand years...”

“Yes, Twilight, but my moon was a dark void of resentment. I... Nightmare Moon... *we* made it that way, and we hoped we'd beam darkness down across Equestria instead of moonlight. But for you, my moon was a pool of milk. Who's to say who was right?”

I began to feel somewhat indignant, but it dissolved away when I looked up at Luna, who had only calm understanding in her eyes. Those beautiful eyes. Even Nightmare Moon couldn't hide her deep, dark sadness in those pools of green...

My own moon. It can be that way as long as I believe it to be so.

Luna sipped her meade again. Meade.

How she seemed to me to be a beautiful anachronism lying there, ancient nobility, spread idly on a cushion just two feet away from me, a queen who knew and spoke a language dead for hundreds of years, casually sipping her honeywine. Meade. Meade may be the very earliest alcoholic beverage ever. The invention of meade probably predates soil cultivation in pony culture, something so old that even ponies cannot fully account for it. But it is thick and sweet and pure, honey and water, left out to ferment in the sun, undiluted by time and culture, the very seed of an idea that food can be prepared instead of just found.

The sickly sweet wine powered Luna on, and her silky smooth voice flushed with description after description of the moon, just for me, in countless iterations. It was white paint one could roll in, or fine chalk powder held together with a thin surface of spider's webbing, or hard rock with craggy mountains and valleys. As each description dripped from her lips, honeyed quicksilver, she stared into my eyes and each emphasized word and pause told me that she knew that each new iteration of her moon was both true and somehow *never enough*.

Maybe the moon was just Luna, there, in the whites of her eyes or the flash of beautiful white teeth behind her soft midnight blue lips.

The moon. I began to submerge into those green eyes, inviting, forgiving, ready to give me a moon to call my own to slip into, a galactic bath.

“Princess... can you take me there sometime?”

Luna giggled again. I smiled at her and in her ageless grace and perfect midnight blue symmetry seemed to fade seamlessly into the ancient tapestry hung on the uneven stone wall behind her, the edges between the two vanishing in a blur. Such a beautiful thing. I wanted to hug her, but I changed the subject instead.

“Princess... I'm worried about... my friend.”

“Who?”

“Trixie.” The word could barely escape my mouth because saying it made it true, and it escaped in an exhalation as I turned my head on its side and looked out into the dimly lit subcellar.

“Trixie?”

“I think she wants to be my friend but... she doesn't know how. She thinks I'm

better than she is... so she won't let me help her..." Images drifted through my mind of Trixie, stuffed into her tiny sleeping quarters, trying to convince herself to doze off to sleep between bouts of fuming.. and tears. My goodness, what was she even eating? I'd probably today given her more food than she'd had in months...

"Why does she think you're better than she is?"

"Because I can do more magic than she can."

"So she's jealous." I was quiet. Leaning forward, I sipped some of the tawny brown ale sitting between Luna and I on the table. It was thick and sweet and made of pine saplings. I didn't want to embarrass Trixie... I didn't want anything to do with it... Twilight why are you bringing it up now??

"She probably thinks that you'll never actually want to help her. So not wanting to accept your help is a way of ensuring she'll never be disappointed."

"I really shouldn't feel bad, she was an awful filly to me, but she seems so... so... vulnerable."

"Most ponies take for granted that they can find a place and a home in this world. That's what makes ponyfolk what we are. But some ponies, they need to be shown. They need to see for the first time what forgiveness looks like."

I searched Luna's eyes. Just like in a dream, I could ask a question without asking it and every time find my answer there in her eyes, sensitive, soft, and hurt. Princess, have you seen forgiveness for the first time? Yes I have. Where? All around us, Twilight. In the air and the water and the land and the brick and mortar and even in all the spaces between.

I knew in those emerald green eyes that I could spare a little for Trixie. Most ponies take for granted that they can find a place and a home in the world. Trixie lost her way home in the dark a long long time ago.

*Moondancer stood shining bright and radiant in the fresh fallen snowflakes.*

*They piled up around her hooves and she smiled at me: Twilight, I'm so glad you could join us!*

*The Canterlot Market was hung heavy with boughs of spruce and pine, delicate cherries and raspberries, coated with ice and glistening amid the silently falling snow, each ice crystal and fleck and white speck twinkling and sparkling in the bright white winter light. I blushed and rubbed my forelegs together, hooves quietly tapping out my nervousness on the old uneven cobblestones. I-I was happy to come, Moondancer! It's been so long since I saw the beautiful winter solstice decorations, ...*

*Moondancer giggled and reared and kicked her forelegs in joy in the moonlight. Creature of the night, like me. My saddle's thick fur lining now rubbed alongside other ponies', all of us dressed in muff or scarves or liners or boots*

*And the snow was silently falling and falling silently across the moon*

*We each moved forward to place our solstice gift at Moondancer's hooves*

*And I felt distinctly awful*

*And despite her giggling and dancing she'd stop inviting me to her Solstice Shopping excursions*

*The very next year*



*I moved forward slowly to embrace her and looked up at Moondancer  
Silhouetted against the Canterliot Market's twinkling fairy-lights  
Moondancer-you're my best friend-I love you  
I tried to hug her but she  
Was gone  
And those hanging lights suddenly weren't lights at all but had become one with the  
starry sky beyond  
And the snowflakes transmuted silently into stardust and comets, burning brightly  
through the heavens  
And there was Moondancer, giggling and dancing in the crescent hoofprint of the moon  
Her white coat and bright blue mane glittering with  
Pure  
Beauty  
I moved, sort of swam, to Moondancer; in that bright blue moon  
But suddenly her coat seemed to change and  
Wings tore loose from her sides and  
Luna held me tight under her wing  
I giggled and leaned forward to kiss her midnight blue lips, to taste those glittering white  
teeth  
But found myself sinking rapidly into the creamy cool delicious softness of the moon  
I struggled but the cool sexy sensation was too much and I was sucked under  
And found myself swimming through its milky center easily  
Twilight-fish  
Twilight-whale!  
Then there was the library, my home, and I swam even faster to rush up to meet it  
Applejack laughed and pulled her apple cobbler from the oven  
Rarity held her tape measure firm in her mouth and fluttered her eyelashes  
Pinkie waved her tail in the air and batted playfully at Moondancer's nose  
And there they all were, Rainbow and Fluttershy and Spike I love you and Luna and  
Celestia I love you I love you and I swam faster and faster through the milky white of the  
moon to reach them  
I fell into a dozen-score hooves then and they lifted me and I felt the snowflakes falling on  
my face and the beautiful cold night air, I saw the frozen berries and the boughs of pine  
such a wonderful drink  
And I felt my friends snuggle me so tight and gently lower me into a bed of books  
Almost twenty hand tall  
And I felt them holding me so tight as tears rolled down my face  
And books began gently falling over all of us, blotting out the dancing fairy-lights  
Until we all lay silently, lovingly, in the dark  
And I gently heard Luna whispering in my ear in the deep blue darkness  
Singing in her silvery delicious voice  
So gently and softly just in my ear  
**"Éigh aúldén béin looéigh aúgh mother...**  
**...Éigh aúldén béin grishelm o éigh.."**  
I blinked awake, guely, still drifting somewhere off near dreaming. Luna's voice did*

not stop even as my eyes adjusted to see my nose pressed tight against the blue plaster wall.

*“Eigh aúlden béin looéigh aúgh mother...*

*...Traugh rúin’ aúgh... rooin léin éigh...”*

I felt her hot breath in my mane as I plunged back into a senseless sleep, feeling the sensation of swimming through the moon once more, and the very real tears on my cheeks. I knew that Luna had been there with me, sharing my dream, as I floated off slowly again on boughs of pine and spruce, a delicious, warm, boozy sleep.

--

The sun broke high over the Equestrian hills once again, illuminating the subtle haze still lingering over the green green grass. Another early morning, and none too pleasant either as my poor lavender body was still recovering from the previous night that seemed to run right into the waking hours without stop. I just want to get home to my beloved library and curl up in my very own bed...

And so, with Luna’s honeyed, whispering voice still in my ears, I trudged down the dormitory hall, towel over my shoulder, and joined the line of giggling fillies as we slowly wound our way towards the showers. I used to hate this, but there was no way I was going to brave the icy morning mists to get all the way across the commons to the Canterlot Tubs. I whispered Luna’s lullaby, misremembered, and leaned against the wall to keep myself upright. In the shower rooms, light streamed in through high windows, tickling across fillies flanks and manes embraced by rising clouds of steam. There was just one window in that wet, high room that light shone in through, the other two long since filled with cut-glass portraits of grim faced saints.

The sunbeams touched my face through a glittering cascade of water. Good morning, Celestia.

And so by and by I found myself outside in the early morning mist not yet warmed by the sun, with a cart load of several hundred dusty old books and a tethered balloon between us.

Sigh.

I’ll be glad when this weekend is over and I can curl up again in my warm wooden tree and read my books and see my friends and not have to move three-hundred-something books from a cart to a balloon by myself. Imagine, I could be sleeping very important sleeps right now.

I tried to keep the feeling of resting my head on my pillow, of dreaming unicorn dreams, the gentle softness of my bedcovers out of the forefront of my mind as I steadily floated each group of books from one spot to another, singing one of Pinkie’s songs to keep myself occupied, until gradually I became aware

of the feeling of being watched.

I looked up. Celestia’s sun was inching higher in the sky now and the dew clung only to that grass which fell in the blue shadows of the outskirts of Canterlot.

“Luna?”

I knew I was being too optimistic. Luna is long in bed now, dreaming of stickers and moonlight.

“Princess Celestia?”

Again, silence, and I turned back to my work, not especially caring if I was being watched or not - that is until I heard a branch snap underhoof behind me somewhere off a ways and my heart began beating fast in my ears. *This was not okay.*

I took a few tentative steps in the direction I thought the sound came from, and after eliminating the low-slung wall and the overturned barrel as possible pony hiding locations I began walking slowly towards a large hedge.

“Who’s there?” I called out, but no pony responded, instead there was another snap of a branch underhoof. Annoyed, I trotted towards the hedge and went scrambling through its green leafiness with my hoof. “Who’s there? This isn’t funny, you know...”

I heard a musical clank as my hoof found something hard. A gentle gasp emerged from the hedge, a voice I had been hearing all too much in the back of my mind.

“Trixie, you don’t need to hide from me.”

The blue unicorn slowly extracted herself from the tangle of branches and stood before me, one hoof pounding the ground expectantly, trying to tap up enough courage to speak. Her mane was in a messy tangle and matted to one side as though she had slept on it wrong. The sequined saddle I remembered from Canterlot had been replaced with her somewhat threadbare robe and hat in royal purple and stars, held together by that beautiful gem my hoof had bumped. The dark circles under her eyes did very little for her haughty attitude.

I scanned Trixie slowly and she watched me do this expectantly, until I decided there was no place to start but the obvious.

“Things didn’t work out with your friend, did they?” I asked the question as delicately as possible but Trixie’s hoof stamping the ground become faster and more frenetic and I saw that icy glare return.

“Trixie does not need them. Trixie has her own plans and stupid.. petty ponies have no part in it.” She said those words in hardly a hoarse whisper, but when her purple eyes met mine she stamped the ground forcefully and her voice rose almost to the fever pitch of her magic act. “You have delayed me long enough, bookworm! Trixie doesn’t need any of you! Her talent and charms will show her the way!”

I narrowed my eyes and returned to levitating books, trying to mask my terror with casual cool. She wasn’t spying, she had been leaving, probably until she had spotted me at the crossroads. Well, if she’s leaving anyway, then...

“Trixie, you can stay at my place if you want.”

Her bluster stopped dead and her eyes widened, but she shut them forcefully and began to march past me down the path towards Stalliongrad. “The Great and Powerful Trixie has no use for your stupid dusty library! She can sleep where she pleases!”

I summoned all of the love and tolerance my tiny aching purple body could manage. “Trixie, I would be happy to have you. There’s a spare room on the ground floor, hardly anypony uses the library and no pony would have to know you’re there...”

Trixie stopped her forward march again and seemed stiff and upright as a pike. “Why are you being nice to me? You’ve no reason to be nice to Trixie...”

I paused and thought for a moment. “You’re right.”

Her eyes sprung open in surprise.

“...but I’ve determined to be a better friend than that.”

Trixie hardly moved but I felt her determination waver to continue along that path until she finally turned around and slowly clopped over nearer to me. But I kept my concentration on moving my books and let the moment play for a bit.

“Not going to Stalliongrad?”

“...No.” her voice was flat and dead sounding.

“Would you like to help me with my books?”

I felt her eyes silently tracing the path as my books floated towards the balloon and back, judging my magic, but when she spoke, even she seemed surprised by her response.

“Actually, I... would.”

I looked back over my shoulder and smiled at her, and she smiled at me, and we stood there together and shared a moment for a long time, cooperating in harmony, until all the books were moved. My poor balloon, now overloaded with ballast, seemed unshapely squat and fat, the basket bulging with literature. I hopped up into the basket, feeling the uneven leathery binding of “Life in the Equestrian Middle Ages Volume Six” underhoof. It was an unsure perch, but with my rump flush against the bulk of the collection, it felt strangely reassuring.

Trixie looked at me expectantly.

“Are you sure you don’t want to come to Ponyville with me, Trixie?”

“Maybe not.. just now.”

“Then where are you off to? Because I’m going in just a moment.”

“Stalliongrad... Tinker Taylor will probably be able to fix up a wagon for me..”

“What kind of a wagon?”

“Ah-heh. Something small and comfortable... just for Trixie... with a little bed and a little stage.”

“Just a little stage?”

“..Okay, a big stage... Yes! A stage worthy of The Great and Powerful Trixie!”

I smiled and watched Trixie the Magician begin to pace and stomp her little blue feet to punctuate each little detail of her wagon, with a pitched roof and just the correct size of the stage and how the stage folded up into the wagon like a celestial map inside a book. I saw that all of her little heart’s hopes was pegged on this wagon and I knew what I should do for Trixie.

“Trixie, I have an idea.”

She seemed annoyed by my interruption, but I tried not to let my essential unease with her bluster show. I continued “...but I don’t know if it will work.”

“Well, The Great and Powerful Trixie would be amused to see.”

“Okay, go stand over there by that gardener’s wagon.”

She did so, and confidently struck a pose, leaning into the wind and her star-flecked cape billowed in it with studied drama.

“No, please, look over here, at me. Don’t take your eyes off me.”

She looked at me, somewhat lazily, head tilted upwards a bit too much.

Okay, here goes nothing.

“Okay, now I want you to think of that wagon you want... just your ideal wagon.”

She did, and seemed to smile slightly from the effort, and it was a real smile, not a smirk of bemusement. I concentrated and closed my eyes and began the painful process. I

leaned hard into the books and stamped my hoof and bit my lip and concentrated all my energy into making this work.

The magical energy radiating off my alit horn felt warm, hot even, and as I concentrated on the subject of my effort a million distractions inevitably came flooding in. Suddenly I found myself recalling where I had read this trick, the first pony to attempt it, what book and classroom and even the color of the binding and the texture of the paper strained just at the edges of my consciousness and suddenly as my magic began to grasp that old gardener's wagon I felt something of Celestia inside me, whose magic had touched it so many hours ago but so strong and pure was her willpower that she lingered on it still.

***Twilight Sparkle, my most faithful student, don't think so much of how it's done and let your power express itself... in the act itself...***

Yes, Princess...

Trixie must have felt it too, herself no normal unicorn, and seemed to inhale sharply and began to murmur something on the edge of her breath. I felt her purple eyes boring into me with a sharp tunnel vision, and we all shared something tactile there, Trixie, Celestia, and I, at the crossroads that morning. The feeling filled my heart and I strained even more, now feeling Trixie's magical aura which was all feminine and gentility and fresh springtime flowers and grace. I knew her secret then, how long she'd kept that locked away inside her.

But I shouldn't pry.

Trixie was mumbling, just under her breath, but in my heightened state I could hear every word that slipped off her tongue unmodulated, and the bond strengthened, all my willpower gathered there in my horn, and Trixie spoke about that wagon she needed so badly to get her life back in order and it fueled me on, and Celestia's divine grace, and all of us linked in some sort of indescribable feeling until I felt Celestia's wings around me and she spoke quite close to my ear now, her voice full of approval.

***You did well, Twilight, look and see.***

Did I do it, Princess?

The fog of concentration suddenly lifted as Celestia's spirit seemed to slip away from me off into someplace ethereal. The sun seemed warm and real again and I came to.

I slipped suddenly out of my trance as Trixie opined: "Really, Twilight Sparkle, I'd rather be a wizard than a Princess."

"Trixie, look, it worked!"

Trixie turned and saw that the gardener's wagon had become a home. It was big with a pitched roof and a stage and four wheels and a sign and everything Trixie longed for. It wasn't quite natural wood anymore; now it looked silvery and blue and sparkled with magic just a bit still, and the wheels had mercury-bright bearings and axels and stars...

and it looked just like her.

It was her home.

For the second time I saw Trixie without words. She simply stood and stared and scrambled over to it with uncustomary abandon and laid her head down on it sobbing and I looked away respectfully.

Okay, I've done my part.

I began to fire up the balloon burner and checked my ballast and the balance of the cargo and studiously avoided looking directly at that glittering blue magician's wagon glistening there in the sun, because I knew that Trixie, that most irrepressibly visible of ponies, needed a moment alone. I looked at my hooves and tried to sort out my emotions until I felt her very close to me in a silent moment. I looked up and saw her wet eyes and broadly smiling muzzle resting girlishly right on the rim of the passenger basket, and I smiled and her and she smiled at me and she giggled at the absurdity of it.

I knew she didn't have anything worth saying so I ventured: "Try not to scare them too much, Trixie."

She sniffed loudly and nodded and stared at me with something like reverence. I felt a twinge of social panic for a moment but pushed on.

"See you in Ponyville?"

"See you in Ponyville..." she whispered. Suddenly I felt very near tears and looked up at my burner with a forced jerk of my head. "Safe travels!"

My horn alit and I lifted gently off, and watched Trixie shrink as myself and all my stupid books took off into the sky. Trixie looked no bigger than a letter on a page when I heard her shout up at me.

"TWILIGHT SPARKLE!"

"TRIXIE?"

"YOU'RE THE GREATEST UNICORN IN ALL OF EQUESTRIA!!!"

I blushed and tried to think of something to say, but she beat me to it.

"...BUT DON'T WORRY, I WON'T TELL ANYPONY!"

I giggled and I knew somehow that she heard me and I looked off across the sky towards Ponyville as my balloon pushed up through a fluffy cloud and all the sounds of the ground seemed muffled and distant in the heavenly quietude. I felt good. Really good. I felt better than I had in a long time, actually.

Trixie probably wouldn't believe it but I wasn't the greatest pony in Equestria. I could hardly even lift ten books at once, never mind three hundred, myself, and my silly balloon. No. I was flying because helping Trixie filled my heart with love and gave me the power to lift off and touch the sky.

I looked back at Canterlot and missed it suddenly, with a warm resolve that it could be okay to feel that way. I had letters to write back at home in my safe tree that smelled of fresh-cut oak. Letters to Moondancer and Luna and Celestia.

I smiled and thought of that book, the one with the two moons orbiting each other. I had no way to prove who the author was but I had a good idea. Celestia and Luna had been right all along. It was pure kindness that made all things possible.

My balloon ascended higher and higher and I sung Luna's song to myself and thought of Rainbow Dash dancing across the Ponyville sky to greet me.