

Natural Order

Princess Celestia sat upon her throne, listening halfheartedly as a representative of the Farmer Pony Union of Equestria presented a petition by its members requesting that the length of the day be increased in the months of August and September. She could understand their argument; Equestria had a growing population and it was becoming increasingly difficult for farmers to meet the demands of such a large population. Hiring additional fieldhoofs only went so far toward solving the problem as well considering that most farmers couldn't afford the salaries for new workers. Still, meddling too much with the day and night was not something she would consider lightly.

She sometimes wondered if the ponies that came to her with these requests really believed she would grant them, or if they simply wanted to be seen by their peers as having tried. It was frustrating to have to say no, knowing that they wouldn't understand the reason why. Being seen as a goddess did have its disadvantages after all, and it was sometimes hard to explain to her subjects that there were some things even she couldn't do, and even some things that she *could* do, but wouldn't.

Being an alicorn did not simply mean being a deity with incredible power, it also entailed bearing the responsibility of the system she was connected to. She could extend the length of the day if she wished, Nightmare Moon had proven that less than a year ago, but the fact remained that there was a reason that the night and day were balanced as they were. A pull in one direction required an equal pull in the other at some point. That was part of the reason Nightmare Moon's goal of eternal night was so dangerous; eventually it would unbalance the cycle of the sun and moon to the point that the whole thing would collapse. She would be surprised if anypony had noticed it, but for the last year the days had been five minutes longer in order to make up for the disturbance on last year's Summer Sun Celebration.

She blinked for a moment, realizing that the earth pony that had been speaking, as well as the dozen or so other ponies present, were all looking at her expectantly. It seemed that while she had been letting her mind wander the farmer mare had finished speaking and was awaiting a response.

Celestia coughed, holding a hoof to her mouth to hide her embarrassment. "Yes, well. Thank you for taking the time to bring your request to my attention, but I'm afraid I cannot grant it. I understand that it is an inconvenience for you but you will simply have to make do. The balance of night and day is delicate and cannot be disturbed lightly. I ask that you trust my judgment on this matter and leave it at that."

The pony, a forest green mare, with a potato cutie mark and chocolate colored mane opened her mouth as though to argue but quickly closed it, bowing deeply before the throne. "Thank you, Your Majesty," she said, sounding disappointed, "I will relay your answer back to the Union. I'm sure everypony will understand."

After she had departed, Celestia let out a sigh. "Please tell me that's the last one for the day Leary," she said, rubbing her temples with her hooves.

Her assistant, Leary Stargazer, gave her an apologetic look, his horn glowing as he flipped through the pages of his itinerary. "Sorry Princess, but it looks like you still have a couple meetings scheduled for this afternoon. More of the same it looks like, a couple requests for government aid in some of the frontier towns, and a request to reduce the taxes in New Hoovesworth."

"Not again," Celestia said, exasperated, "I've told them a thousand times, tax rates are standard for all of Equestria and are managed by the treasury. It's not my place to simply lower their taxes because they ask nicely."

Normally she was eager to hear from her subjects but today her heart simply wasn't in it. It didn't help that every request she had received today had been the equivalent of whining in a dignified manner. Of course, she doubted that even if their problems were serious she would have been able to muster much enthusiasm. Ever since Luna had run away from her in the hallway the week before, she had been trying to find a time to meet with her, but every time she did Luna was either sleeping or busy. She was beginning to suspect Luna was intentionally avoiding her.

"That's because she is, you foal," Nightmare Moon's voice sneered, "You've tried so hard to get her back and now all she wants to do is get away from you. Ha! It's almost too funny."

Celestia narrowed her eyes, trying to ignore the voice. It had been getting worse over the last few days. She was beginning to wonder whether it was really all in her head or not, having gone so far as to check the vaults below the castle where she stored some of the more dangerous magical artifacts she had acquired over the centuries. After Nightmare Moon's defeat, she had had her armor brought there and magically sealed by her best unicorns. She had been careful not to handle them herself. Though not exactly the containers of Nightmare Moon's power, they were nonetheless powerful and dark magical objects that held traces of Nightmare Moon's magic. If she did indeed return, Celestia had little doubt the magic present in her armor would respond, and try to return to its master.

But of course there were no signs of anything of the like when she had checked the armor. There was no sign that anything out of the ordinary was happening at all, except for the voice in her head.

"But what did you expect? I've told you over and over again what the problem is but you have done nothing to change it. Every day Luna's pain grows, and every day you try to soothe her with empty words and emptier actions. I'm honestly surprised it's taken this long for her to start avoiding you. It must be so hard on her, the poor thing. Maybe I should...lend her a hoof?"

Celestia could almost hear the grin in those words, and she couldn't keep the snarl of her face.

"Um...Princess?"

Celestia started, shaking her head to dissipate the cold fog that had clouded her mind. Leary was looking at her, concern written on his face.

"Are...are you alright your Majesty?"

Celestia sighed, standing from her throne. "Yes. Yes I am fine Leary, I apologize for worrying you. I'm afraid I'm not myself today," she said wearily, "I suppose I'm just worried about Luna. She's been avoiding me and I'm afraid I don't know how to approach her without making things worse."

Leary nodded in understanding. "Ah, well I'm sure she'll come around. It's been almost a year but I admit sometimes I forget just how long she was away. It must be hard on her, everything must be so different from what she remembers. But I'm sure she just needs some more time to adjust Princess. Once she does she'll be the little sister you've told me so much about again."

"I hope you're right Leary," Celestia said with a small smile, "I miss her, even though she's right here I miss her. I just wish I could let her know how sorry I am."

"Well I'm sure when she's ready to hear you out, she'll listen," he said, giving Celestia a reassuring smile.

"There are a few more meetings scheduled for the afternoon," he said, rechecking his list, "But it's nothing pressing, as you already noted. Simple bureaucratic nonsense really. If you'd like I could handle these meetings for you. To be totally honest Princess, you don't look well today. I'd recommend getting some rest before evening."

"Yes, I think that sounds like a good idea Leary, and you're right," Celestia said, nodding, "I'm afraid my mind is elsewhere today. I'll leave these matters to you, my trusted assistant." Giving him another smile, she trotted out of the throne room and into the halls of Canterlot castle.

She briefly considered looking for Luna, but thought better of it. She would most likely still be asleep. It was still only mid-afternoon, and Celestia didn't want to wake her. Even if she was awake, she didn't feel confident enough to approach her after her little chat with Nightmare Moon.

'Luna...I'm so sorry my dear sister,' she thought as she made her way to her chambers, 'I only wish I knew how to help you now.'

In the back of her mind, Nightmare Moon laughed.

"I tell ya Snow," Aurora said, wiping sweat from her brow as she took a seat next to the white unicorn, "This forest is really freaky."

Snow Drift nodded in agreement, trying to ignore the distant cries of unidentifiable animals. It had been days since they had left the castle, and initially their travel time had been swift. The sleds they had taken allowed for quick movement over the frozen landscape, even through the dead forest. However, after a couple days of swift travel they had made it to the border of their country, and the landscape began to change.

Little by little the snow had begun to disappear and the air had begun to warm up. The whole company had stopped to gape when they reached the border of the forest they were now travelling through. Snow had never seen anything like it before. The trees were alive, covered in foliage and casting a dark shadow over everything below. There were other plants too, things she couldn't identify, and the breadth of life that flourished was astounding. There were, of course, animals that inhabited the forests back home, but in nowhere near the numbers that seemed to inhabit this place. It was astounding.

A slight buzzing sound and a stinging sensation caused Snow to slap her hoof to her cheek. It certainly wasn't without its annoyances though. She would not be sad to get away from these flying, buzzing, stinging creatures.

Still, despite all of the physical differences between this place and her home, the clearest indication that they were no longer in Equiiria was the temperature. It was hot. Really hot. Snow was grimy and covered in sweat, a condition shared by Aurora and the other members of the Guard. The only one who didn't seem affected was the strange old earth pony that had accompanied them, Dead Leaves.

To ponies that had lived their entire lives in the freezing cold, the temperature difference was taking a great deal of getting used to, and more than the thick brush of the terrain it was this that had caused them to stop early for the night. Pushing forward was becoming too much of a hassle and while Snow would have liked to keep a better pace, she was relieved to be able to rest. If she had to keep going she was afraid her cutie mark would melt right off her flank.

The sun was beginning to dip below the tree line, turning the hazy sky an eerie orange. Snow watched it as it disappeared behind the twisted trees of the Everfree forest. She wondered if, right at this moment, the Princess of the Sun was guiding it. Was she somewhere in this strange new land, guiding the sun across the sky? It was a strange thought.

A shuffling at her side pulled her out of her reverie, and she turned as Aurora spread out

a map on the ground in front of her. The Guard members were setting up camp a short distance away per Aurora's orders. Looking over, she noticed that some of them looked decidedly less than amused at having to take orders from a rookie. But no one ever questioned Lady Winter Chill's orders, even this far from home.

Snow Drift had to admit she had been surprised to find out that this had been the assignment her friend had been so excited about. Shortly after her meeting with Lady Winter Chill she had returned to her room to pack, only to be tackled by the teal pegasus.

"Can you believe it Snow!?" She had practically shouted, her whole body vibrating with excitement. "I was made a Captain! And I have to protect you on a journey into the unknown, it's gonna be just like an adventure story! I can't wait!"

Snow Drift couldn't help but giggle at the memory. Aurora was certainly capable of acting professional when the situation called for it, but when she was excited about something she reverted to her normal foalish demeanor. Not that Snow minded. She thought it was cute. Besides, Aurora had always been a fun-loving pegasus, and Snow would have hated to see her become as stuffy as some of the other members of the Royal Guard.

Leaning over, she looked at what Aurora was doing. She had spread the map out on the ground, tracing their course from Lady Winter's castle in Equiria, across the border into the forest, and towards Ponyville. The farther the map got from the castle the fewer details were available. It appeared that this forest had never really been explored, as no landmarks were indicated aside from the sketches that Aurora had added herself in an attempt to give them a sense of what path they had taken. Snow had been impressed with the level of foresight her friend had put into this assignment. As far as Snow Drift was concerned, she was proving herself to be a fine leader.

"So do you know where we are?" she asked, watching her friend plot different courses through the unmapped forest.

"Well...more or less I guess," Aurora said, a frown of concentration on her face, "I mean, it's not like we have much to go by here. This map isn't really all that useful once you get out of Equiria. I guess not many ponies have come out this way for a while." She shrugged, rolling up the map and putting it away in her saddlebag. "I sent Lieutenant Weatherlight on ahead awhile ago, but she hasn't come back yet and until she does I can't really plot a course through what's up ahead. I can't imagine we're far though. If I've read this map right, and there's a good chance I haven't but if I have, then we should be able to reach the edge of this place sometime tomorrow. It all depends on Weatherlight's report though. I just hope we're not lost, I'd really hate to screw up my first major assignment, especially with you here."

Snow Drift smiled and opened her mouth to say something but was interrupted by the arrival of one of the soldier ponies.

"Captain, we've finished setting up camp. I'll be taking first watch with Firestarter after dinner."

Snow couldn't help but frown at the stallion's words. They were spoken professionally enough, but they lacked the respect she had heard in the voices of the members of the Guard addressing their superiors back at the castle.

Aurora nodded, seeming either to not notice or ignore the other pony's disrespectful tone. "Thank you, Lieutenant Fleethoof," she said, "The sun is setting fast so you and the others get some food in you and then get to bed. We need to be up bright and early tomorrow if we're going to make it to Ponyville on schedule." She looked around, seeming to notice something for the first time. "Hold on...damn it! Where's that creeper Dead Leaves gone off too?"

"As far as I know he was simply going for a walk," Fleethoof said with a shrug, "Said something about wanting to see the trees in the twilight. Didn't seem worth the trouble to say no so we let him wander off. If you ask me the longer he's out there the better. That pony gives me the creeps."

Aurora growled in frustration, stamping a hoof into the ground. "That's exactly why we were supposed to be keeping an eye on him in the first place! Lady Winter Chill doesn't trust him, so we're supposed to make sure he doesn't do anything suspicious. I thought I had made that clear before we left Fleethoof."

Aurora looked at the sky, which had turned from orange to a dark purple, the first stars beginning to poke out. "Well it's too late to send anyone out looking for him now, they'll only get lost in the dark. We'll just have to hope he turns up at some point. If not, well...we still have a job to do and I'm sure he can take care of himself." She threw an angry glare at Fleethoof, who just shrugged in response, and walked back to the fire set up by the camp.

Aurora let out an angry growl, kicking the dirt. Snow Drift bit her lip, watching the other ponies by the fire. She knew that some of them didn't like taking orders from Aurora, but that had been just plain rude.

"They don't respect me," Aurora said with a sigh, "I suppose I can't blame them really, they've all been in the Royal Guard a lot longer than I have, and now they have to do what I say. I guess it's probably a blow to their pride but they don't have to be so rude about it, not to mention unprofessional. They all know we're not supposed to let Dead Leaves out of our sight. They did it on purpose and now I look bad while that creep is off doing who knows what."

"They probably just need time," Snow said, placing a reassuring hoof on her friends shoulder, "I'm sure once they see how great of a leader you can be, they'll fall in line behind you. I know I would."

Aurora smiled, some of the worry leaving her face. "Thanks Snow, you always know how to cheer me up. Now, how about some grub? I'm famished!"

"Sure. I'm starving too; all this walking is doing a number on me. I'm starting to think I should have exercised more back at the castle," Snow said, giggling as Aurora's stomach rumbled.

Their attention was drawn by a rustling in the bushes. After a moment, a pale pink pegasus with a frosty blue-white mane, a wisp of cloud on her flank emerged, looking tired and dirty.

"Lieutenant Weatherlight, reporting back from scouting duty Captain," she said, a tired smile on her face.

Aurora grinned back at her. Weatherlight had joined the Guard only shortly before Aurora had, and as such was the second youngest member of the escort, and the one she got along with the best. She also seemed to be the only one of the group, other than Snow Drift, that had any confidence in Aurora's ability to lead the group.

"Hey Weatherlight, anything interesting out there? I hope we're getting close, I'd hate to think I've been reading this map wrong and leading us around in circles out here."

"Nope! Good news actually," she said, taking a seat next to Snow Drift and Aurora, "I cut through the forest for about ten miles, heading east, until I came to another clearing like this one. I surveyed the area from the sky and it looks like Ponyville is just through this last batch of forest. Looks like there's some kind of farm or something once you get out of the forest, and then just past that is the town. There's nothing too strenuous, although we might have to work through a bog and over a couple ravines. Should be able to get there sometime tomorrow evening though if all goes well."

"Good," Aurora said, letting out a sigh of relief, "Glad to hear we've been heading the right way. I would have hated to have led us all into the middle of this forest with no way out."

"Naw Aurora you wouldn't do that," Weatherlight said with a smile, "I knew you'd get us there lickity split!"

Aurora chuckled. "Thanks for the vote of confidence Weatherlight. I'm glad that at least you two appreciate all my hard work, even if those guys over there don't," she said, jerking her head in the direction of the fire.

"Oh stop being so dramatic," Snow Drift said with a giggle, "I already told you they'll come around eventually. You're a Captain now, you're supposed to be tough and rugged. So

stop being such a big baby about them not liking you and let's go eat dinner."

"Hey now," Aurora said with a grin, "You may be Lady Winter Chill's student, but that doesn't mean I won't lock you up for insubordination!"

Snow Drift rolled her eyes, shaking her head. "You're hopeless you know that? Come on," She said, pushing the pegasus towards the fire, "Food food food!"

The three sat down by the fire, digging into their provisions. As they did, the last rays of the sun died out, leaving the sky black save for the pale glow of the moon and stars.

Snow Drift woke to the sounds of the forest at night. Bugs buzzing, frogs and toads croaking, and the distant cries of other nocturnal creatures. She groaned, rolling over in the tent she shared with Aurora. Her pegasus friend was sprawled out against the opposite end of the tent, her hooves in the air and her mane a mess. The only light in the tent was the pale silver light of the moon.

Initially upon leaving the cold climate of Equiria they had tried sleeping without the tents, they were all so hot and uncomfortable inside them that it seemed better not to use them at all. However, after one night of trying to sleep in the open they had all ended up swarmed by small biting insects. After that, they decided to stick with the tents. Being a little hot was better than being eaten alive while they slept, after all.

She lay there for what felt like ages, watching Aurora twitch and mumble in her sleep, but sleep didn't return to her. She didn't want to admit it, but now that they were almost to Ponyville she was a little nervous. What would the ponies there be like? How did they live? What would a pony society that didn't evolve in a world of snow and ice even look like? Her mind was full of these thoughts as she opened the tent flap and walked out into the night air. It was cooler than during the day, but it was still uncomfortably sticky. Her horn glowed briefly and the moisture in the air condensed on her coat, freezing into tiny ice crystals. Snow Drift let out a contented sigh, her breath visible in the cold air that surrounded her. 'Much better,' she thought.

Snow took a look around the campsite, noticing that the fire was little more than embers and the two ponies on watch had fallen asleep beside it. She shook her head. She'd have to let Aurora know her soldiers were sleeping on the job in the morning. Looking up at the moon, she was seized by a sense of awe similar to what she had felt earlier, when she had watched the sun go down. It was so bizarre to think there was somepony out there guiding it, leading it in its slow path across the night sky. Winter Chill had once told her that it was not only the duty of an alicorn to guide their cycle, but also to give it life, to make it special. Looking up at the vastness of the night sky, the pale moon with its scarred face and the countless stars glimmering in the void, she wondered just how much of it the Princess of the Moon had created herself.

It didn't seem as though Dead Leaves had ever returned from his walk. Of all of them, he was the only one that slept outside. The insects didn't seem to bother him, and honestly Snow Drift didn't blame them for staying away. He gave her chills, which was quite a feat given her affinity for the cold. She had caught him looking at her several times during their trip, always with that same half-smile, the same pale shine in his eyes. There was something so very unsettling about him, something she could never quite put her hoof on but that was just under the surface. Whenever he was nearby she could feel an overwhelming sense of wrongness. That there was something that didn't belong.

She spent a while longer watching the moon. The thin wisps of cloud passing over covering the camp in a halo of silver light. Still, sleep was no nearer than when she had woken up. Just as she was contemplating waking the guards so she'd have somepony to talk to, she heard a rustling in the bushes. She tensed, adrenaline pumping into her veins at the sudden disturbance. Her horn began to glow and she turned towards the forest, watching carefully for whatever might have made the noise.

Another rustle and a figure stepped out of the brush. She could barely make out what it was in the darkness, but as it approached she realized it was a pony.

"Who's there?" she asked, her voice trembling as she tensed up, preparing to act should the need arise.

"Oh my," a raspy voice chuckled, "Such hostility. I hope I didn't frighten you, young frostling."

Snow Drift let out an aggravated sigh. "Oh. It's you," she said, relaxing a bit as Dead Leaves entered the clearing. In her moment of fear she had forgotten he could arrive back at any moment. She was relieved that she hadn't had to face down some sort of monster, but honestly she didn't think the disturbing earth pony was much better. She certainly wouldn't sleep any better with him around. "And just where did you get off to? Aurora was beginning to consider sending someone to look for you. I told her not to bother."

Dead Leaves grinned at that, the moonlight glinting off his yellow teeth. "I suppose I'll take that as meaning you had the utmost confidence in my abilities. I thank you for the compliment," he said, ignoring Snow Drift's aggravated look, "As to your question, I have merely been admiring the forest. This place is quite remarkable really. So much life, and so much death. Every living thing fighting to ensure its own survival. Eat or be eaten, kill or be killed, the natural world at its purest and most unrestrained. Truly beautiful."

Snow Drift shivered. She was certain of it now. There was something very wrong with that pony. She would have to let Winter Chill know just how unstable she suspected Dead Leaves really was. Snow Drift had no idea what his role was supposed to be, but she was sure

that if they weren't careful, he could end up being more of a danger than an asset.

"What a characteristically morbid outlook. I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised," she said, eyeing his saddle bags. They looked quite a bit heavier than they had been when she had seen him wear them earlier in their journey, "And I suppose you brought those along for souvenirs?"

"Oh these old things?" Dead Leaves said, patting one of his saddle bags, "You never know what you'll find in a place like this, especially at night. I wouldn't want to miss the opportunity to collect some rare and valuable specimens. Surely a mare of such academic achievement as yourself can understand my... curiosity."

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't make that comparison," Snow said, her face twisted in disgust, "I don't want to know what would garner the curiosity of a pony like you."

Dead Leaves laughed softly, stepping closer to Snow Drift. "So much like you're teacher aren't you my young unicorn? It seems you've learned more than just magic from our benevolent leader."

Snow Drift wanted to back away, but found she was rooted to the spot. As he approached she nearly gagged, fighting to keep from covering her nose. The sickly sweet smell of decay coming off of the earth pony was almost overwhelming. She briefly wondered how she could have missed it before now. She hadn't spent much time in his company, but there was no way she wouldn't have noticed such an overpowering odor.

"You're both such strong and confident ponies," he said, stopping mere inches in front of her. "She doesn't think much of me either, but she could hardly refuse to let me go on this little trip. Not when her dear sister places such trust in me." He paused, running a hoof through Snow Drift's mane. She cried out in surprise, stumbling back.

Dead Leaves chuckled as Snow Drift backed away. "You share her beauty as well, but you have so much more vitality, the vitality of youth," he whispered, taking another step towards her. Snow Drift's eyes were wide with fear, her mouth open as she tried to find a reply. Finally, her body seemed to become hers again, and she leapt to her hooves, dashing off into the forest.

Dead Leaves watched her flee, an amused twinkle in his eye. It might have been ill-advised, to push her so far, but he couldn't help himself. There was just something so irresistible about a frightened young mare. He retreated to a corner of the campsite and lay down, still chuckling to himself.

Snow Drift panted, leaning heavily against the gnarled trunk of the tree she had crashed

into after running blindly through the forest. She tenderly touched a hoof to the side of her face, wincing as it made contact with a newly formed bruise.

“Ooh, I’m not looking forward to trying to explain this to Aurora,” she groaned, taking a moment to get her bearings before surveying her surroundings. Now that she was away from Dead Leaves she no longer felt the intense sense of panic she had when he had touched her and she felt foolish for having fled in the first place. As unpleasant a pony as he was, that didn’t mean that running off into the forest had been an appropriate reaction, especially in the middle of the night.

Here among the trees, the canopy of leaves was thick enough that trying to find her way by moonlight wasn’t going to be an option. She could barely see her hoof in front of her face. Concentrating, her horn lit up, casting a hollow blue light over her surroundings. Her face fell, and she felt a new kind of panic beginning to well up within her. She was lost, and had no idea which way she had come from.

“Aurora!” she called, her voice sounding tiny to her ears in the inky blackness just beyond her horn’s light, “Can you hear me?! Weatherlight, anypony! I’m lost!”

She waited for what felt like hours, but was only answered by the soft chirping of insects, and her own heartbeat as it pounded in her ears. She could taste the bittersweet taste of fear in the back of her throat, and she began to seriously consider her situation. If she was really lost in the forest, then there was little chance of Aurora or any of the guards finding her. Her only hope was to head east and hope she hit Ponyville.

She began walking, keeping her eyes trained on the sky, looking for a break in the canopy. If she could get a clear view of the sky, then she could figure out which direction to go. However, the trees were not forgiving, and the foliage only seemed to get thicker the further she walked.

After a few hours she was beginning to worry that she was heading deeper into the forest rather than out of it when a faint glow in the distance, not unlike the light cast by a unicorn’s horn, caught her attention.

As she got closer, the light grew until she was almost positive she had stumbled upon another unicorn out in the woods. ‘Thank goodness!’ she thought, relief washing over her like a cool breeze. ‘That must mean Ponyville is nearby!’

“Excuse me!” she called out, struggling to make her way through the thick brush, ignoring the scrapes being left by some of the thornier bushes, “I’m sorry to bother you, but I’m lost! I got separated from my friends, and I can’t find them! Are you from Ponyville? Can you show me how to get there? Please, I don’t know where to go.”

She broke through the bushes and saw the glow moving away through the trees. “Wait!

Please, I need your help!”

Rushing after the light, she crashed through bushes and over streams. Several times she tripped over large tree roots, reaching out of the ground as if to ensnare her. No matter how hard she tried or how long she followed it the light stayed the same distance away, always just far enough away that she couldn’t identify who she was following.

Finally, the light stopped and Snow Drift paused, panting. Her coat was a mess, streaked with mud and sap and blood from her various scrapes and scratches. She was exhausted, and didn’t know if she could follow anymore.

“Please...stop running,” she panted, “I just...need to get out...of this forest.”

She was startled by the soft sound of foalish giggling. *‘Silly pony shouldn’t be running around the forest at night. Now pony is lost!’* a voice seemed to whisper in her ear, causing her to jump in fright. Too late she noticed she was standing on the edge of a ravine. She cried out as the ground beneath her hooves crumbled. Another giggle and the light vanished. Snow scrambled to try to regain her footing but the ground gave out, sending her tumbling with a scream into the ravine.