

A Slightly Cruller Fate Part Four

"OW!" Luna danced around her office, waving frantically at her tongue. "Ow, ow, ow-ow-ow!" As the pain died down, Luna took a look at her tongue in the nearby mirror.

The papercut was surprisingly small, considering that Luna felt as if a flaming hot donut hole had been crammed into her oral cavity. She turned from the mirror, tongue still sticking out, and glared at the half-open envelope on her desk.

"Blathted pen requithithon forms," she spat.

Almost immediately, somepony knocked at the door. "Who ith it?"

"It's Celly. May I come in?"

After a quick effort to put her office in some recognizable semblance of order, Luna sat calmly behind her desk. "Come in," she said, barely remembering to suck her tongue back in.

Celestia entered. "Good morning, sister."

"Good morning, Celly," replied Luna, wincing slightly, "Do you need me for something?"

"Some of our out-of-town guests for the Garden Party have arrived already, and they're expecting a welcome of sorts. Would you mind?"

Luna smiled weakly. "Not at all," she replied, "Just give me a moment."

Celestia nodded, casually exiting the room.

Luna held her posture for a moment, then emitted a high-pitched, muffled scream into the crook of her front leg. "Ow." She took another look at her tongue in the mirror, giving a resigned sigh.

"...It's not like things could get much *worse*," she mused. Very, very stupidly.

North Star cautiously crept behind Snapshot, giving him a soft tap on the shoulder. "Uh, Snapshot?"

"One minute, Northie." Snapshot turned away from his friend and back to the rather comely model he had been flirting with moments ago. "Now, then, like I was saying, photography's a difficult thing to get right, sure...but I definitely can't complain about the subject material," he said with an oddly out-of-character wink.

North Star gave a quick eyeroll before tapping his shoulder again. "Snapshot, I really think you should -"

"Hold on, it'll just be another minute. Anyways, my last job was a pretty dull affair, though. Too many old nobles, not enough good-looking models like yourself," he said with yet another unbearably cheesy wink.

North Star couldn't take it anymore. Tapping him on the shoulder one more time, she said, "I was just letting you know that your doctor called. Your T.R.O.T.S. test came back positive."

Snapshot entered into a stunned silence, only recovering after the mare he'd been talking to was long gone. Craning his neck slightly towards North Star, he asked in a pained voice: "*Why?*"

"First, because it's funny. Second, that was excruciating to even *watch*. Third, and most importantly: what's gotten into you?"

"...Pardon?"

"You were *flirting*, Snapshot," said North Star incredulously, "*Flir-ting*." After a brief pause, she added, "In the time I've known you, I've never seen you even get *close* to flirting. Except for Dee," she

added with a shrug, "But only barely."

Snapshot twitched visibly at Dee's name, his mouth creasing downward. "I guess you're right," he said, his voice wavering.

North Star's expression morphed from that of mild irritation to one of concern. "You alright, Snapshot?"

He shook his head, sighing and slinking onto his backside. "I miss Dee," he muttered pathetically.

North Star looked at him sadly. "I know, buddy," she said in a comforting tone, "And I wish I could help somehow -" Suddenly, with her mouth still half-open, North Star's eyes widened. An idea was taking form in her head. "Snapshot..."

"Yeah?"

"You know how the Canterlot Garden Party is tomorrow, right?"

"Yeah, and...?"

"And the paparazzi are usually there in full force, right?"

"I still don't see what you're getting at..."

"Which would include Dee, wouldn't it?"

Snapshot's head rose, and an overjoyed smile briefly stretched across his face. As it faltered, he dejectedly pointed out, "That would only matter if I could get in, though."

North Star, unfazed, gave him a sly smile. "Trust me," she said in the smuggest tone of voice she could muster, "I have my ways."

"Luna, please be reasonable -"

"DON'T PATRONIZE ME, YOU ARCHAIC SOLAR BITCH!"

"...Well, this clearly isn't working. You there, guard!"

"Yes, Princess?"

"Do you know how to get to Pony Joe's donut shop?"

"Yes, your highness."

"Then I need you to gallop down there as fast as you possibly can, find Pony Joe, and bring him back here to the castle. Drag him here if you have to. Understood?"

"Yes, your majesty. Permission to speak freely?"

"Granted."

"I told you your sister was bucking insane."

"Noted. Now get going!"

"Right away, ma'am."

Six hours earlier...

"Blueblood, may I inquire as to what in the goddess' name are you doing?"

Blueblood turned away from the stage his lackeys - ahem, *prized servants*, were busily setting up. "Oh, good day, Luna," he said with a bow that was somehow more pretentious than it should have been, "My servants are simply setting up for the magic show I'm preparing to do at the party tomorrow."

Luna was literally unable to speak for a few moments. "I'm sorry...*magic show?*"

"Oh, don't you worry," said Blueblood assuringly, "It's not going to be anything like those that you'll find in the peasant country. It's rather tasteful, in fact. I even arranged for an assistant with some experience in the field, although she, sadly, won't be arriving until tomorrow..."

"Blueblood...do you even know how to perform magic of this caliber?"

"What? Oh, yes, of course I do, Princess. Here, allow me to demonstrate."

"No, no, that's quite alright -"

"*You two!*" bellowed Blueblood, pointing at the nearest two of his 'servants,' "***Bring out...the SAPPHIRE TOMB!***"

In a matter of minutes, a large and decorative box, more than big enough to fit even princess Luna, was set up in front of the unfinished stage. Blueblood, stepped in front of it, assuming a rather dramatic posture.

"Now then," he said loudly, "I need a volunteer...Luna, if you'd be so kind?"

Luna rolled her eyes before trotting inside the tomb, closing the door behind her. "From the depths of Equestrian history," began Blueblood to his invisible audience, the hamminess growing with every word exiting his mouth, "Comes a relic of untold power and mysticism! Why, not even I, the *Great Sangbleu* -"

"*Sangbleu?*" asked Luna incredulously from inside the tomb.

"...It's sophisticated."

"If you say so."

"Anyways...not even the Great Sangbleu cannot grasp its full power. But be warned...even with my limited understanding of the Sapphire Tomb's abilities, I cannot discount the possibility that it is, in fact..." Blueblood paused, opening the door to the tomb. "*Cursed.*" Inside the tomb, Luna was nowhere to be seen. After a few seconds passed, during which there was nothing but the sound of the stage's construction, Blueblood shut the door, and continued. "Do not fear, plebians, for I, the *Great Sangbleu*, will do what I can to return this unfortunate mare from whatever nether regions she has been cast to!"

Blueblood hunched over, his horn glowing as a magical aura swirled around the tomb. After several tense seconds of this, there was a brilliant flash of light, and Blueblood strolled over to the door. "Lo and behold," he bellowed, opening the door, "She has...returned?"

To Blueblood's surprise and horror, the tomb was empty. Panicking, he looked around for where Luna might have ended up. "Princess?" he shouted, "Princess Luna?"

BLUUUUUEBLOOOOD!

Blueblood cringed, then turned to face...the duckpond, from which Luna was emerging, sopping wet, covered in pink lily pads, and a rage in her eyes that was almost lethal.

"...You know what?" said Blueblood as he sheepishly stepped back towards his servants, who were already packing up his magic tricks in a panicked rush, "I think I'll try out my show on the road, first..."

"*What a wonderful idea,*" hissed Luna through bared teeth, not breaking her gait towards Blueblood.

"...Well, then, I suppose I'll see you...another time."

The hardening of Luna's glare was response enough.

"...Alright, then," said Blueblood, still walking backward in an utterly terrified fashion, "Come on, lads, I think it's about time we were going..."

"Yes," agreed Luna, "*Yes, it most certainly is.*"

Luna kept her furious visage centered on Blueblood until he and his cohorts had all departed. Afterwards, she finally relaxed, sighing and attempting to shake some of the water out of her mane.

"Could things get any *worse* today?!" she said to herself.

Yes, yes they most certainly could.

North Star tentatively knocked on her boss' door, Snapshot close behind her.

"Vait, vait, one moment!" North Star waited patiently until a certain gray-maned, accented fashion

photographer answered the door. "Ah, North Star, good to see you. Who eez your friend?"

"Er, Snapshot, ma'am." A beat. "...The new photographer you hired just a week ago."

"Ah, yes, yes, of course, I remember," Photo Finish lied, "Come een, come een."

North Star and Snapshot followed Photo Finish into her office. Snapshot took the opportunity to survey his new boss' office, noting the numerous photos lining the walls. He realized that he couldn't even tell what the color of the wallpaper was through the swath of photographs; there seemed to be *layers* of them. The weird thing was, more than half of them seemed to be of the same pink-maned pegasus.

Aside from that, there was a desk at the back of the room (also covered in photographs), behind which Photo Finish sat herself down. "Now, what eez it you were needing, North Shtar?"

"Well, ma'am, I was thinking...do you remember the shoot you had scheduled for Friday?"

"Of course I do," Photo Finish replied in her thick accent, "I haven't forgotten a shoot date seence I first started thees agency."

"Right, my apologies, ma'am. Anyways, I had an idea: why don't we have it tomorrow, instead? At the Canterlot Garden Party?"

"...Vat?"

"Bear with me: what would make the outfits look better than showing them off around the Canterlot nobility? Not just catching everypony's attention, but absolutely *stunning* them." Allowing a beat, North Star continued. "Plus, the publicity would work fan-*tastically* for the agency, not to mention the clients supplying the outfits. Not only would the magazine-buying public adore these...these 'fashion in-action' photographs, but word of mouth would seal the deal. And I'm sure you have enough pull to get us in on such short notice." North Star leaned back, a smug grin on her face. Meanwhile, her gut was doing cartwheels. "What do you think, ma'am?"

Photo Finish rubbed her hooves together thoughtfully. "I don't know, North Shtar...it seems rather _"

"Who's the pony in all these pictures?" asked Snapshot, who'd yet to listen to a single word of this conversation, or even keep his gaze on Photo Finish for more than a second. North Star facehoofed quietly.

"Who?" Photo Finish followed Snapshot's line of sight. "Oh, herr," she said with a hint of nostalgia, "Flootershly. My greatest creation."

"Really?" Snapshot leaned forward, sliding one of the photos on Finish's desk toward him. "How so?"

"Oh, she was like nothing you'd ever seen!" gushed Photo Finish in a dramatic fashion, "She was graceful...elegant...everything you'd want in the perfect model. But, most importantly, she was a *natural* in front of the camera. She truly had...*de magicks*."

"A real natural, huh? I get how rare those can be." He carefully set down the photo he was holding, and began looking at another. "What happened to her?"

Photo Finish shrugged. "She go. Just...up and left. Poof." Photo Finish put her hooves in the air to illustrate her point. "Sad, really." Photo Finish sighed, picking up one of the photos herself and gazing longingly at it. "Never got around the nude shoots," she muttered.

North Star shifted uncomfortably, while Snapshot simply chuckled, setting down the other photo. "Sounds like you really had your perfect model."

Photo Finish nodded, not changing her position.

"Well, her natural essence was what mainly caught your eye, yes?" Another nod from Finish. "All the more reason to do the shoot tomorrow, then."

Photo Finish shifted slightly for a better look at Snapshot. "Vat?"

"Think about it, ma'am. If you want natural, what better than to be photographing your models in a setting like this? Sure, things can be a tad stuffy around the nobility at times, but at least a few of your models are bound to be in a much more casual demeanor for this party. Chatting with friends, laughing at

each other's jokes, all the while slipping into a much more *natural* form of grace and elegance...I tell you, this photo shoot could be the closest thing to your Flootershy you could get."

Photo Finish considered this very carefully. "...Fine, then," she said, "I'll make the needed arrangements." She waved them away. "Now, you go. Leave me to my musings."

"Yes, ma'am," they both said. Snapshot and North Star exited the office, and the latter made sure that the door was shut perfectly before asking the question most prominent in her mind:

"What the buck just happened?"

Snapshot gave North Star a self-satisfied smirk, smugly straightened his fedora, and replied with total honesty: "I have absolutely *no* idea."

Three hours earlier...

Luna reclined in her office chair, smiling contendedly as she popped open another bag of donut holes. It had been a...less than enjoyable morning, no doubt. However, after a few donut holes, a quick shower to wash off the pond scum, some more donut holes, and a confirmation from the city watch that Blueblood was indeed off the city limits, she was finally beginning to relax. *Now*, she thought as she grabbed another hoof-ful of donut holes, *Only one thing left to make it better.*

Instinctively looking about to ensure her solitude, Luna began rummaging through her desk. "Where *is* it? Where is...ah!" From the second-down right drawer (which had otherwise contained an unused cup of quills, several awkward attempts to write a love letter to PJ, and a moldy bag of cinnamon-swirl donut holes that Luna had long since forgotten about stuck to the back), Luna drew forth one of her most recent but cherished acquisitions: a record, encased in a red-and-white sleeve with the title '*Popular Equestrian Love Songs: Extra Amorous Edition*' emblazoned on the front in reflective gold lettering.

Growing more relaxed by the second, Luna levitated the record to the phonograph tucked away in the back of her office. Seconds later, the soft sounds of her favorite song were flowing through her office, wiping away any remnants of stress from Luna's psyche. A small smile grew across her face, and she began:

"*You know, I can't smile, without you...*" she sang in a proud (albeit in a slightly off-key) voice. She'd found the record a few weeks ago in one of the Canterlot antique stores, and ever since, she'd spent much of her free time listening to it with a bag of donut holes beside her. The songs were positively delightful, and they'd matched her recent moods to a T. The current one playing, track number eight, was her personal favorite. "*I feel glad, when you're glad...*" The relaxed joyfulness in her voice was palpable as she continued to sing, growing stronger and stronger so that by the time she hit the song's apex, she was nearly shouting the lyrics.

"*I just can't **SMIIIIILE, with-out** -"*

"Your majesty?"

Luna jolted, snapping her gaze towards the door. The pony standing in the doorway looked shocked as Luna's record continued to blare in the background, though not quite as shocked as the full tour group standing behind him.

"...Alright, then!" The tour guide quickly turned back around, waving the group down the hallway. "Now that we've seen the Princess of the Night at work, I think we can head on down to the gift shop! Come right this way please..."

Luna remained frozen for the rest of the song, and through the opening verses of the next before magically moving the needle of the track. She then groaned, slamming her face into the desk.

"Goddess," she said into the mahogany desktop, "Discord, Flying Alfalfa Monster...whichever of you is doing this to me, can you please just cut me a break?"

None of those divine beings, of course, had anything to do with Luna's misfortunes. Not that said misfortunes were in any way over just yet.

Celestia impatiently paced about the hallway. "Luna, I'm telling you, you're not -"

"DON'T LIE TO ME! I CAN SMELL LIES!"

Celestia turned, pacing back the other way. "Sister, please, this is ridiculous -"

"SILENCE, THOU IMPISH, AGITATING HINNY!"

Celestia sighed, rolling her eyes. "Great," she muttered, "Now she's waxing Royal Canterlotian."

"Your (*huff*) majesty!"

Celestia whipped around, seeing the Royal Guard, thoroughly worn out, and Joe galloping down the hallway. *Oh, thank goodness.*

"Sorry it (*wheeze*) took us so long," panted the Royal Guard, "There was (*cough*) a little emergency on the way down."

"Emergency?"

"Well (*huff*), I was turning onto Golden Trough Boulevard when I saw a baby carriage on fire and rolling down an incline -"

"Yes, yes, wonderful, we can discuss it later!" Celestia turned to Joe, a pleading look in her eyes. "PJ, please - and pay attention, because I only say this to somepony once a century - I need your help."

"What's wrong?"

"DON'T LISTEN TO THAT BLATHERING WITCH, PJ! SHE'S MAD, MAD I TELLEST THOU!"

Celestia sighed. *That's* what's wrong."

"Would you care to explain?"

"Well, she's..."

"THERE'S NOTHING TO EXPLAIN! NOW, RETURN TO THY PASTRY SHOPPE AND PRETEND THAT NOTHING HAST OCCURRED HERE!"

"...As I was saying, she's been under a lot of stress, and today...well, she just snapped."

"Any lead-up?"

"Oh, yes." Celestia shook her head pityingly. "Yes, indeed, there was."

Forty-five minutes earlier...

"Pins 'n' Needles?"

The royal tailor looked up from her sewing, smiling brightly at the princess. "Your highness!" She stood up, giving a quick bow. "What can I do for you?"

"You said that my dress would be finished this afternoon?" asked Luna tensely.

"Right, of course!" The tailor slipped to the back, making a fair ruckus as she looked around. "Sorry it took so long," she said as she delicately carried it out in an aura of unicorn magic, "But I wanted to make sure that it fit *exactly* to your measurements."

Luna sighed with immeasurably relief. "Finally, something goes right today..." She looked around nonchalantly. "Is there anywhere for me to try it on?"

The tailor gave Luna a puzzled stare.

"...Well, you certainly don't expect me to change clothes right *here*, do you?"

"What cl -" The tailor stopped herself. "No," she said, still rather puzzled, "I suppose not. There's a fitting room back there you can use."

"Thank you." Luna trotted to where the tailor had shown her, disappearing behind a curtain. A

minute or two passed before she spoke again: "Erm, Needles?"

"Yes, your highness?"

"You tailored this to my measurements, correct?" asked Luna, her voice quavering.

"Yes, ma'am."

"To my *exact* measurements?"

"Um...yes."

A pause. "...When did I last have my measurements taken, again?" she asked hesitantly.

"Not too long, I don't think -"

"*When?*" repeated Luna in a volume just a few decibels short of the royal Canterlot voice.

"Erm..." The tailor took a few moments to recall. "A few weeks ago, I believe."

There was another pause, one that stretched into rather uncomfortable territory. "Princess Luna?" The silence stretched on for a little longer, only to be brutally crushed by one of shrillest and most blood-curdling shrieks in the history of Equestria.

"***I'M REPULSIVE!***" cried Luna through her office door, "***FATTER THAN A FARMYARD SWINE!***"

PJ looked at Celestia. "...Seriously?"

Celestia nodded. "She's put on a couple pounds over the last month or so. Not noticeably, but -"

"***NOTICEABLY? NOTICEABLY?! I CAN'T EVEN WEAR A GARMENT THAT WOULD HAVE FIT ME NOT A FORTNIGHT AGO!***"

"...But she won't believe me, in case you couldn't tell. I think it's all those donut holes, personally. I see an empty trash can in the morning, and it's filled with paper bags by nightfall -"

"***OH, NOW I'M AFFLICTED WITH AN EATING DISORDER, TOO?***"

"What? No, Luna, I was just -"

"***WELL, I WISH I HAD ONE, NOW! PERHAPS IT WOULD PROVE USEFUL IN LOSING THE EXCESS MASS I'VE ACCUMULATED!***"

Celestia sighed once again. "Okay, this is just getting preposterous...PJ, you're up."

"What do you expect me to do?" PJ asked incredulously.

"I don't know!" Celestia threw her hooves into the air in exasperation. "You're her coltfriend, *you* figure something out!"

"Fine. Erm..." He tentatively trotted up to Luna's office door. "Uh, Luna? Maybe you want to...oh, I dunno...come on out of there?"

"...NO."

Quietly, Celestia and the guard facehoofed. PJ ignored both of them, sitting up against the door. "Mind tellin' me why not?"

"***BUT...CELESTIA JUST TOLD YOU -***"

"She told that you're stressed," interrupted PJ, "That's not exactly the whole picture. Talk to me, Luna."

"***WELL...***" Luna sighed at a decibel level equal to an Equestrian Filly-monic Orchestra concert. "***TO BEGIN WITH, THERE'S AN UNHOLY AMOUNT of paperwork that goes into the Canterlot Garden Party...***" Luna's voice had now reached decibel levels below the threshold of pain. "...There's streamer orders, then there's spreadsheets for the maintenance costs, and don't even get me started on the squirrel euthanization forms -"

"What, now?"

"Just making sure that you were listening." PJ heard a small chuckle through the door, and he smiled. "Still, it was not a relaxing week for me, especially considering that *I* ended up doing most of the paperwork."

Celestia, in another rare moment for her, shifted uncomfortably. Luna went on.

“And then there’s today, which was meant to be a fairly light day for me. I’d finished the last of the paperwork, and I’d had only four things to do: get pens to replace all the ones I’d used up for said paperwork, greet the early arrivals, relax in my office for the afternoon, and then pick up my dress. Somehow, each and every one of those things managed to go wrong. I got a papercut on my tongue, was teleported into a duckpond, had my private habits exposed to a tour group, and found that I can’t fit into an absolutely *beautiful* dress.” She paused, then there was another light chuckle.

“What?” inquired PJ, ignoring the awestruck/confused looks from Celestia and the guard.

“Nothing, just...it seems rather stupid, doesn’t it? I’m a *princess* complaining about a bad day off.”

“No,” PJ disagreed, “You’re a tightly-wound mare that had a bad day to end a bad week, and now you have to act prim and proper and pretentious for the full day tomorrow. Ponies have gone crazier over more ridiculous things.”

“Like what?” asked Luna, giggling.

“Come on out and I’ll give you some examples.”

No one spoke for several moments, a silence ringing through the hallway. Finally, the door clicked open, and Luna timidly poked her head out.

“...E-evening, all,” she said, smiling weakly.

Without missing a beat, PJ strolled inside her office, already starting: “So this colt - Hayseed, I think his name was - comes into the shop...”

The door closed behind them, leaving the still-dumbstruck guard and equally stupefied Celestia standing in the hallway. Finally, the guard slowly turned towards the princess, asking, “Permission to speak freely, your majesty?”

“...Permission denied.”

Greetings once again, everypony, from Katalus!

Once again, sorry this took so long to make, I quite literally have no excuse aside from general laziness. This time, though, I promise - *promise*, cross my heart, hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye - that the next one will be out sooner. A month, at most, rather than three.

Anyways, hope you enjoyed this part. The next part should be the big finisher, not counting an epilogue. Thanks for sticking around for the story, and I think (hope) you’ll like how it closes out!

-Katalus

P.S. Wow, I just realized that I finished this on the last day of the season. Time flies, no?

P.P.S. Please forgive the real-world song I used. I couldn’t think of a good song to ponify, and I was *not* about to try and write one of my own.