

Fluttershy awoke with a start, her eyes agape. Frantically scanning her vision across the room, she tried to make sense where she was. *'This isn't where I fell asleep...'* The memories of the previous night flooding back to her.

Then the quiet mare facehoofed, coming to realize this was her own room. She was sleeping in her own bed. She figured Luna must have brought her back. *'Oh no! Luna may have left for Canterlot already,'* She thought, literally flying out of her bed towards the stairs. *'I didn't get a chance to say goodbye!'*

As Fluttershy zoomed downstairs, she lost control of her speed and bumped her head into the slanted ceiling above. "Ow!" She squeaked out loud, rubbing her forehead as she landed at the base of the stairs.

"Fluttershy, are you okay?" A voice called from another room, before showing itself. Luna stepped out from a doorway, trotting over to her.

"Luna!" Fluttershy said in shock, her surprise numbing her pain, "I thought you'd left for Canterlot already..." She said, her voice lowering.

"Hehe, no silly." A new warmth was in her voice that the pegasus couldn't place, "I wouldn't dare leaving my best friend without saying goodbye." Her eyes glistened as she looked at Fluttershy. She guessed her next question, "After you fell asleep, I brought you back to your bed..." Luna looked away towards the ground. "I thought about leaving a note... But it didn't feel right," She confessed, looking back up, "So I stayed here for the night until I could properly thank you."

Fluttershy looked a little confused, "Thank me for what?"

"For being so hospitable and nice, of course!" She said, before moving in and giving her a hug. Luna wrapped her arms so tightly around her, that Fluttershy had trouble breathing.

"Oof... Lu-Luna... It w-was... Noth-Nothing." The yellow mare managed to say, trying to breathe.

The alicorn maintained her snake-like grip, "Aww, sure it was!" She said happily, smiling.

Fluttershy tried to inhale, but all oxygen going into her lungs were repelled by Luna's bearhug. "Luna... I-I can... can't," She attempted to speak, in between gasps for air.

"Can't what?" Luna said, frowning. Her grip loosened a little.

"Breathe..." Fluttershy finished. Instantly, Luna let go over her, as the other mare coughed and took a huge breath of air.

“I’m so sorry!” Luna apologized, before adding, “I guess I got carried away.” She blushed.

Fluttershy put a hoof up, trying to catch her breath. “No, it’s okay,” She said after a few seconds, “I understand.”

“Anyways...” Luna said, trying to break the mood, “I’ll be back in a few days to see your performance. I’m sorry I couldn’t stay longer, but Celestia needs my help for planning next year’s budget.”

“Really?” Fluttershy said, mild astonishment riddling her voice. The Apple Harvest Festival was a small thing and no royalty ever attended it, unlike the Running of the Leaves or Summer Sun Celebration.

“Yeah, I wouldn’t miss it for the world!” Luna said eagerly, the odd warmth coming back into her voice.

Fluttershy just smiled, as she looked out the window. The sun was approaching it’s zenith. “Luna, I’m not trying to rush you... But it looks like I overslept, and it’ll be noon in a bit.” She hesitated. “I think you might worry Princess Celestia if you stay too long.”

Luna frowned, knowing she was right. “I guess you have a point.” She walked up next to Fluttershy and opening the door with her magic, her heart trying to give her confidence, *‘This is your time to tell her.’* The alicorn hesitated, looking over at her. *‘Go on... She’ll understand.’*

“Fluttershy, I... I” She couldn’t muster the strength to finish the sentence.

“What?” The other mare asked her, her soft blue eyes staring directly into Luna’s. Fluttershy’s gentle voice almost coaxed the words out of the goddess’ heart.

“I- I’ll miss you.” Luna’s frown deepened as she accepted defeat.

Meanwhile, Fluttershy smiled warmly to her, “Stop worrying, I’ll miss you too. But, you’re going to be back in a few days, right?”

Luna gave a half-hearted smile of her own. “Yeah, I guess.” She said, walking out the door. As she took off, she called back to the Fluttershy, “Bye!”

“Bye!” The quiet mare said, her voice raising to an unusually strong level as she waved goodbye.

“Luna! There you are!” Celestia said, as the dark blue mare entered the castle. “To be honest, I was a little worried. But you look fine... Now come on, you can tell me about what you learned back at your room. I managed to get you a small surprise while you were gone.”

“Okay,” Luna responded, her tail sagging sullenly. Celestia didn't notice as she was already leading the way up the stairs.

“So, I got your letter that you found somewhere to stay overnight?” Celestia said, trying to start the conversation as they walked down a windowed hallway. Adorned with marble, they sun bounced and reflected everywhere, even Luna's coat shined a little brighter.

“Oh yes,” Luna replied, unfocused, “The pony was real nice about it.” She didn't feel like talking much.

Celestia turned to her right and opened a door, which led to Luna's room. She walked inside, as Luna followed. Using a flick of magic she opened a closet door, floating out an object as her younger sister sat down on her bed.

“Surprise!” Celestia said, drawing out the object from behind her back. It was Luna's cherished abacus, it's fading colors now repainted and the cracking frame was now replaced with new, polished wood. “Since you were finally away from your abacus so much.” The larger princess explained, “I managed to get the royal carpenters to fix it and refurbish it to it's former glory.

Luna looked up, only the slightest warmth sparking in her eyes. “Oh...” She said quietly, “It's looks good, I guess.”

Although she was one of the wisest ponies in Equestria, Celestia couldn't help but leave her mouth agape, utterly stumped and confused. She expected her younger sister to be giddy with delight, not so... Disinterested and melancholy as she was now.

She frowned, “What's wrong Luna? Didn't you enjoy your stay? Didn't you learn a lot?”

“Oh, I did really like it there,” Luna answered, trying to sound more appreciative of her experiences, “And I learned a lot too.” She counted back all she found out, “I went to the spa, I shopped at all the neat stores... I even got to enjoy a nice walk in the woods. I truly did learn more than I expected.

If Celestia was confused before, now she sounded utterly lost. “Wait... You? MY Luna went to the spa, and did some shopping?” She tried to hold in a chuckle, to no avail. “You're joking,

right?”

Luna looked up at, giving her a glare that could freeze the sun. Celestia's chuckling died instantly, realizing she was serious. Luna's voice grew intense, “I did. I did all of it, and you know, what the hay, I enjoyed it too. It's just...” Her voice trailed off, before setting her head down gloomily on her forehooves, sighing.

“Luna, you know you can tell me what's wrong.” Celestia said, reassuringly.

The smaller alicorn looked up at her, “Yes, I know...” She replied, before adding in, “And I will, someday. Although... Not yet.” Luna zoned off into space, concluding, “Somepony else just needs to hear it first.”

The sun had set and risen twice, as Fluttershy found herself staring at Canterlot once again. Perched on a cloud up in the sky, she usually enjoyed watching the whole town and its surrounding forest from here. But now, only one place caught her eye, and that was the distant capital of Equestria.

Growing accustomed to her newfound friend, Fluttershy felt partially empty with Luna now gone. Sure, she'd be back the next day to watch her performance, but the pegasus knew that they couldn't enjoy the same experiences they had only days before.

The royal alicorn brought a sense of openness to the timid mare. Fluttershy didn't feel the need to always apologize for saying what she thought, and she felt she could trust Luna with her fears and dreams.

Now, there was no release valve, nothing to keep emotions from building inside her. She had tried confiding with Angel, but it felt like it did no good. Luna was just something different completely, and it only made Fluttershy feel worse because she couldn't place it.

Sighing, she took one last weary at the grand, white city on the mountain before turning around and flying down to earth.

Tomorrow was going to be a big day, so the yellow pony decided to get home early to rest for her performance; anxiety was already rooted in her bones.

Mayor Mare just started her speech as Fluttershy paced behind the curtain. Streaks of nervousness shot up through her hooves. Her stomach had passed away hours ago, flipping and flopping so much she barely noticed it now.

Her mane had been styled nicely by Rarity that morning, who surprisingly, didn't make any suggestions when Fluttershy showed her the new dress she'd bought. Now, the earrings shone in the dim light, her necklace swaying a bit as she walked in circles. Her light blue dress was reaching all the way to the floor, making swishing noise as she traipsed on the dim stage. Her birds were all lined up on an elaborate lateral metal bar, which was connected to another, vertical bar that was firmly secured into the hardwood flooring.

Luckily, the timid pony wouldn't have to face the audience as she conducted her ensemble, her back turned to them to monitor the music being played. But, the thought didn't comfort her much... She'd still be playing in front of all those ponies, a daunting variable that she hoped wouldn't wreck her performance.

Fluttershy had been practicing the same melody for weeks now, sure her birds knew it by heart. Even she could hum it in perfect tune, and had the pitch of each bird memorized. She may not be a perfectionist like Rarity, but she still wanted this to go as smoothly and as un-attention-attracting as possible. The only thought worse than performing in front of such a crowd, would be to mess up.

Her coat began to turn hot with extreme worry, almost turning into temporary paranoia. This was much, much worse than she imagined. She began to breathe rapidly, coming close to hyperventilating. This was too much.

“Fluttershy!” A voice called out, before a familiar blue mare stepped up onto the stage with her. Or, perhaps less than familiar. Fluttershy had never seen Luna in a dress before, a maroon and navy blue skirt going over her flanks. A maroon bow was tied cosmetically on the back, with two ruby earrings to match it.

“L-Luna?” the pegasus said weakly, “Is that you?” She was still breathing hard, but the comfort of her friend being there had taken the edge off.

“Of course it's me!” Luna replied, “I told you I wouldn't miss this for the world...” Fluttershy's ears ticked in remembrance. There was the odd warm tone again, and she was getting irritated that she couldn't place it.

“Oh...” She replied, in between breaths, “Thanks so... Much for... Coming...”

The alicorn walked straight up to her, placing a hoof on Fluttershy's shoulder. “Hey... Hey calm down. You're going to be just fine, okay?” Luna's reassuring tone further slowed her breathing, forcing the yellow pony to take a few deep breaths, albeit shaky.

“There we go...” Luna said, “Think, Fluttershy, you've been practicing and rehearsing for weeks. The song is beautiful. You have **nothing** to worry about.” Her voice grew confidently

towards the end.

“But... But what if they don't like it?” Fluttershy asked, her breathing now lessening in speed. “What if I mess up?”

Luna brought a hoof up to her chin, staring directly into her eyes. “Listen, no matter what you do, no matter what it sounds like... I'll always be there for you.” The blue mare said, before giving her a gentle, reassuring hug.

Fluttershy was choking up a bit, those words lifting her spirits out of the dark hole they were previously in. She returned the hug, her friend's grip no longer like a constrictor, but now much more considerate of her. A sole tear of raw emotion dripped down her cheek.

Luna let go of the pegasus, wiping away her tear, “Besides, you look gorgeous. We don't want you to wreck your makeup with crying, now do we?”

Fluttershy could only nod, taking a deep breath as confidence rose within her chest. Her friend's calming words made her feel like she could do it. Like she could take on the crowd of ponies, and give them the best classical performance they've seen. Maybe she was over-exaggerating a bit, but she felt more confident than she had in a long time, perhaps ever.

“If it makes you feel better.” Luna concluded, “I'll stay behind the wall here, and you can look to me if you have trouble... Okay?”

Fluttershy could only nod, smiling as she turned to her birds. “Okay, let's get ready. Mayor Mare should be done any second now.” Her voice sounded as crisp as mountain air, even if it was her usual quiet level.

As if on cue, Mayor Mare raised her voice a bit to be heard well enough through the velvet curtain, “... And now, we have Fluttershy performing a musical treat for us, before we get this festival underway!” Luna retreated to a safe distance, as Fluttershy took a deep breath and pointed at her birds with a hoof.

Shaking it in a steady beat, she counted off quietly, “And a one, a two, a three, and...”

Fluttershy shone as the curtains opened, the light meeting her dress. The soft sound of birdsong floated in the air, as the majority of the stage was now in view of the audience.

Just as she had heard before, Luna listened as the melody rose steadily, happily. Fluttershy raised her forehooves at a section of her ensemble, a higher tone added in to the mix.

The notes kept dancing higher and higher, skipping and jumping around. The birds' music

radiated everywhere, even the night's crickets tuned out. The joyful sound was all around, and only two ponies knew what came next.

Without warning, the happy timbre died with a few short notes and plummeted to deeper octaves. The newer notes were stretched out, the birds holding sullen sounds for seconds at a time. Then the beat slowly rose, and so did the tone.

The tunes were still long and drawn out, as their pitch finally reach it's starting point. Unlike the first time Luna heard them, however, they began morphing into the same cheery notes as the beginning. After half a minute of a more happy melody, the song finally slowed to a stop.

Fluttershy turned to face the crowd. After some initial clapping, a few ponies stood up and kept clapping. More and more ponies followed suit, until it blew up into a full standing ovation. The mare wanted to cower in her shyness, but a sideways glance at Luna changed her mind. The alicorn was beaming, her expression giving Fluttershy the strength the stand firm on the stage.

After awhile the clapping died down. "Thank you." Fluttershy said before exiting behind the stage. A cheer broke out, as the other ponies began to gravitate towards the festival's numerous attractions.

As soon as Fluttershy got behind the curtain, Luna began jumping up and down in excitement, "You did it!" She cried, "Yay!"

Fluttershy looked around to check if no one was around, before unorthodoxly joining in on the hysteria, "I know, I know!" She exclaimed, "They even liked it! And I didn't hide or anything, but I stayed there! I did it!" The rush felt so... Liberating to her.

"I'm so proud of you." Luna told her, now quieter. She gave her a quick hug.

"Aww, thanks." Fluttershy said bashfully. A rush of emotion overcame her as she looked at the other mare, adding in, "I could have never done it if it weren't for you, Luna."

The pegasus' mind ticked again at the sound of that reemerging, excessively warm tone. Within that same second, she realized Luna hadn't said it.

'That was in my own voice.' She thought, shocked, *'...By the stars, what is it? I know... I know I've heard it before.'*

Fluttershy browsed through her memories, trying to find it. She thought back to her recent times with her friends in Ponyville... But no, it wasn't there. Reluctantly, she pried into her darker memories of flight school. Again, no, it wasn't amongst the bullying, name-calling, and crying.

Concentrating more, she forced into her days as a foal. There, she found it. She could only remember the voice of her father, although it was all she needed.

“Fluttershy, you're the best thing that's ever came into my life.”

It wasn't quite the same, but the realization hit her like a train. It all made sense now... The feelings of emptiness when she was gone, the tolerance for everything she did, the simple joy of just being around her.

The warmth in her own voice, nearly an exact copy of her father's. It was unmistakably the same. It... it was primal, unbreakable, undeniable, unsurpassed love. This love, this was not shared to any other being for Fluttershy. She loved her animal and equine friends all the same, but this one for... For Luna, it was many times stronger than anything she'd ever felt.

The warmth in her voice now enveloped and covered her whole body. It made her feel impervious to anything. Like a suit of armor, she could go through anything. Luna was all she needed.

'Luna... I love you.'