

My Little Alicorn

A "My Little Pony Friendship Is Magic" fanfiction

By InsertAuthorHere

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Chapter Seventeen

It was several minutes before Celestia's eyes could fully adjust to the space around her. The mist and blinding explosion had left stars in her eyes, but even before the blurry sights around her could return to normal, she could feel the changes. Old injuries and pains, all of which had been absent as a filly, returned in an instant; it was a miracle the princess did not collapse immediately. Her muscles felt like they had been stretched and pulled in every possible direction, as well as a few even she had not thought possible. There was a throbbing pain in her forehead, as if her horn had been grasped and pulled out by some invisible force. A steady beating sound and rush of wind could be heard and felt at each of her sides, and her hooves were as shaky as her breath.

It was just as the last of the little white dots vanished that reality finally homed in on Celestia. She was still standing in Luna's bedroom, but everything was quite a bit shorter than it was before. In fact, so was the dark blue alicorn standing before her. Luna's eyes were locked on her sister's changed form, taking in the familiar figure before her with a mixture of joy and dread.

"I...I do believe it worked," Celestia said slowly.

Luna barely resisted the urge to squeal as she threw herself upon her sister, nuzzling her older sister's neck in joy. "I...I missed you so much!"

Celestia smiled. "I've missed you..."

"TWILIGHT!"

The two sisters turned towards the rest of the ponies assembled. The five Ponyvillians, Ruby and Lofty were assembled around two downed foals. It did not take Celestia and Luna long to recognize the two as Twilight Sparkle and Prince Blueblood, now both at the same (relative) age Celestia had been only moments before. The alicorns took a step back in alarm as the filly and colt began to awaken.

Twilight was the first one to snap back to the conscious world. The filly yawned and stretched her tiny legs, her waking form barely acknowledging the crumbled suit she was in. Her eyes naturally drifted upwards, towards the now much bigger Princess Celestia, and her mouth popped open in a surprised smile at the sight. "PRINCESS! The counterspell worked!"

"Why...yes, I suppose it did," Celestia stammered.

Twilight continued to grin...until her attention drifted slightly to the left. The moment she caught how much bigger Princess Luna was, a memory she had tried to push out of her brain came charging back like a runaway train. Panic welled up inside the filly as she spun around, catching all of her much bigger friends, the enlarged attendant, and the Pegasus pony that was now her size.

"Wh-Wh-What happened?!" she gasped. Then her hoof caught the small tear in her suit. Even with her brain a few sizes smaller, it didn't take the Unicorn long to recognize the exact series of steps that had led to this point. "Y-You mean..."

Rarity glared at the still-rising Blueblood. "That...That ruffian of a brute that dares to call himself a prince must have torn a hole in your suit."

"Th-Then all the magical energy the spell dispersed must have gone through the tear and...and..."

Luna's horn was at work almost immediately, scanning the two. Her widening eyes told the whole story. "Th-This is not right!"

"What happened?" Applejack asked.

The younger alicorn wiped the sweat from her brow as she continued. "It is not the same spell from when the Elements were used! When the enchantment was removed from Celestia, it must have triggered a release of the excess energy keeping her trapped as a filly. It would have faded back into the ether quickly, but if two unprotected ponies were close enough to her when the power was released..."

"C-Can you repeat that for the...less magically-inclined?" said Rainbow Dash.

Celestia's own horn began a scan, and soon found itself arriving at the same conclusion as Luna's. "It means that the same power that kept me from changing back naturally is now affecting the both of them!"

Twilight sniffed. She could feel her fear overwhelm her logical reasoning. "Y-You mean we'll never..."

“YOU CUR!”

Before anypony could react, Blueblood had violently charged ahead at Twilight, slamming into the filly and sending the both of them flying back a few meters. The colt had a crazed look in his eyes as he stood over the stunned filly; obviously being turned back into a foal had done little for his disposition. “You...You cursed me, you witch! I will have your head for this! No pony harms a prince and get away with iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiit!”

Blueblood let out a scream as a pair of blue-furred hooves scooped him up and lifted the royal brat up to the ceiling. Rainbow Dash glared as the colt continued to squirm and struggle against her grasp. “Let me go, you filthy Pegasus!”

Dash’s teeth mashed against each other. “You have *no idea* how much I’d love to do that right now, buddy!”

At the same moment, Fluttershy, along with Spike as a rider, walked underneath the two, stopping right next to Twilight. The filly was barely fighting off the urge to cry, both from the actual damage Blueblood had inflicted and her own outrage at this whole situation. The yellow Pegasus lowered herself next to her younger friend. “Twilight...are you all right?”

Twilight sniffed back a few flustered tears and pressed herself against Fluttershy. “Y-Yeah...”

Spike hopped down from the yellow pony, scratching the side of his head in puzzlement at the sight. “So wait...the whole ‘you turned into fillies’ thing wasn’t just a dream?”

“Fraid not, Spike,” said AJ. The farm pony, the fashionista, and the party pony quickly trotted up to join in the comfort circle. The dragon was a little standoffish at first, but soon found himself being drawn into the crowd.

Fluttershy smiled...until she felt another body against her side. She turned her head around just in time to see Lofty pressing herself against her fur, a smile on her face. Fluttershy blushed. “Um...excuse me, but...would you mind, um, not doing that right now?” she squeaked.

Lofty sighed and took a few steps back. Her attempt to snuggle up against her idol once again defeated thanks to simple bad timing, the dejected filly walked back to her waiting (and rather disapproving) mother.

Dash would have joined in, but she still had her hooves full with Blueblood. “I command you, LET ME GO THIS INSTANT!”

The Pegasus grimaced as the colt’s squirming and attitude became more and more intolerable, but soon caught some measure of relief. The two sisters had moved themselves underneath the two, their eyes narrowed on the prince. Celestia and Luna looked at each other, nodded, and

then turned back to the flying pair. "You may release our troublesome nephew, Rainbow Dash," said Luna.

The Pegasus' growl disappeared. In its place was the mischievous smile of a cat just before it pounced on its prey. "Whatever you say, Your Highness!"

Rainbow Dash's hooves pulled apart like she was holding a boiling potato. Blueblood quickly realized the folly of his earlier demands as gravity took hold, sending the colt tumbling to the ground. The other ponies gasped in horror; even Rarity could not help but feel sorry for the doomed former token of her affection. The fear turned to relief, however, as a golden yellow field of energy enveloped the colt mere inches from the ground, slowing his fall and plopping him safely on his rear

Blueblood sighed in relief...and then gasped as he saw his "savior" standing overhead. For the first time this entire confrontation, the prince realized that his dear Aunt Celestia, the same one he had tried to foalnap only moments earlier, was now not only an adult again, but was not looking at all pleased with her nephew. "Prince Blueblood, would you mind explaining what drove you to desecrate the sanctity of your office with your actions today?"

The terrified colt stammered and pointed a hoof first at the Ponyvillians, and then at Luna. "Th-These are the peasants that destroyed the Grand Galloping Gala! When you refused to pass sentence on them, I had no recourse but to ask Princess Luna. And SHE banished me to my household rather than see logic! There was no alternative, Aunt Celestia-"

"That's **PRINCESS** Celestia to you." The entire room quaked at the pitch in Celestia's voice, and if a pony looked close enough at the sky, a tiny burst of fire would have seemed to poke out of the sun for just a tiny moment before subsiding. "I have *never* seen a member of the royal household behave in such a way in my entire life! I tried being diplomatic, I tried telling you to drop the issue, but it seems you are just too stubborn to see any reason."

"And don't forget being a royal pain!" Rarity shouted from the back. The others glanced at her rather worryingly, prompting a shrug from the Unicorn. "What? He was."

Blueblood waved his forehooves desperately in Rarity's direction. "There, you see? How can you allow such an insult to our noble blood to go unpunished? That rude little creature should-"

The prince yelped as a purple creature seemingly popped out of nowhere in front of him. The dragon's fangs were barred and his eyes crossed, scaring the colt even more. "And just what do you think you're saying about the fair lady Rarity?"

"The dragon!" Blueblood screamed. He scampered back on his behind about a meter before skidding right into a baffled Ruby Dream. "Quick! Somepony slay that beast before he can devour any of us!"

Celestia's eyes narrowed even more. From within her circle of friends, Twilight wished she could still use the full extent of her powers, just so she could give Blueblood the shellacking he deserved for such a statement. Spike could feel a fireball brewing in his gut, and it took all of Rarity's decorum to hold back to urge to throttle the colt by his scrawny neck. "Blueblood...I happened to help raise that 'beast,'" Celestia admonished. "I would recommend that you watch yourself right now. You are already in enough trouble."

"B-But..." Blueblood could feel a burning beneath his eyes.

"So wait, *he's* the mean pony that tried to beat us up?" Lofty asked confusingly.

A startling transformation coursed through Ruby as the words struck her ears. The Pegasus mare leaned over until her eyes were perfectly locked with Blueblood's. "You...tried to hurt my Lofty?"

"Sh-She was in the way!" Blueblood screeched. "It was her fault for being there!"

Ruby did not blink, or even appear to breathe for that matter, as she spoke in a harsh, demonic voice. "Now listen here, you spoiled, pompous runt! No pony...BUT NOPONY...***TRIES TO HURT MY BABY LOFTY AND GETS AWAY WITH IT!***"

The mare pulled her head back up and gave the colt a smooth kick, sending him flying right to his aunts' hooves. The small foal looked up, teary-eyed, as his menacing aunts. "P-Please! Make them stop!"

"I am afraid that is not the end of the matter," Luna said. "I had a very interesting chat with your employees during their blackmail attempt. They have not only agreed to give testimony against you in the coming trial, but they have surrendered evidence of many of their other dealings with you and the other nobles. I believe that with enough time, this spy ring you have been amusing yourselves with will be dismantled."

Blueblood could feel his defeat. He hung his head sadly as reality crushed in on all sides.

"N-No...this can't be..."

Celestia shook her head. "I'm sorry, Blueblood. I really wished things could have been different, but you leave me no choice. For your admitted acts of conspiracy against the crown, your title and holdings are considered forfeit. Your disgraced personage shall not be allowed within the walls of Canterlot Castle until such a time that you have proven yourself worthy to approach us again."

The colt could restrain himself no more. He threw himself upon his aunt's hooves, sobbing like the small foal he was. "Please, I beg of you! I'll...I'll never do anything like this again! I'll be a

good pony from now on! Just don't make me...normal!"

Celestia was quiet for a short while, just staring at her distraught nephew in a profound sadness. It was with great reluctance that she turned to her sister. "Luna...I believe an additional punishment is in order."

Luna nodded. "Of course, sister."

The alicorn trotted out towards the door, opened the entrance, and then turned back to her nephew. The colt shouted as his far scarier aunt's telekinesis grabbed him by the ear and pulled him away from Celestia. The mare then trotted away, dragging the crying Blueblood behind her.

Nopony moved for quite a while, waiting for the sobs to vanish before speaking again. "So...what are you gonna do with him?" Rainbow asked.

"I have something in mind," Celestia said. Her mood suddenly lifted. "But now, I believe Pinkie Pie mentioned something about a party?"

Pinkie snapped to attention at the word "party." "Absolutely! Meet me in the Palace Ballroom in an hour, and be ready to shake your hoof thing!" The pony zoomed away immediately after finishing that sentence, leaving the rest of the room's occupants rather befuddled by the turn of events.

"Well...I guess that gives us an hour to get ready!" Celestia said. "Everypony please feel free to wash up beforehoof. I am certain this will be a most wonderful party." She then turned to her smiling student. "Twilight Sparkle, I would like to speak to you in private."

The other ponies quickly cantered out of the room, ready and eager for whatever festivities had been planned. Soon, it was only Twilight and Princess Celestia left in Luna's bedroom. The filly took a few small, nervous steps towards her teacher. "So...can we use the counterspell to turn Blueblood and myself back to normal?"

"I believe so," Celestia said. "This time, though, we need to find protection that won't rip so easily."

The two of them giggled at the princess' small joke. "Well, I guess that's it, then," Twilight said. "You can change me back now..."

"Actually, there was one matter we still had to discuss," Celestia said. Her voice and features suddenly became very solemn, setting the filly's fur on edge. "A few days ago, you happened to burn one of my books, remember?"

Twilight gulped. "Oh...that. B-But it was my mom's, and she said it was all right, so..."

"But you still committed an act of arson," Celestia sighed. "And as Princess of Equestria, I cannot allow such a flagrant violation of the law to go unpunished."

Twilight hunched over into a little ball. She could already feel Magic Kindergarten clicking at her hooves. "P-Please! I...I'll do whatever you want! Just don't..."

"As Princess Celestia of Equestria, I hereby sentence Twilight Sparkle to..."

Celestia's magic locked in on the nearby wooden chest, flicking it open with ease. "...Play a little dress-up with me!"

Twilight pulled her head from the fuzzy ball she was close to becoming. "Huh?"

Bluebloods yells and screeches echoed throughout the halls, his body doing everything it could to fight the force pulling on his ear. Luna, however, proved to be a far more capable foe than he could have ever imagined, and her magic did not wane for even a moment. "Let me go, you fiend! I will not allow you to-"

"Nephew, if you want to live to see another sunrise, you will keep your mouth shut this instant!" Luna growled. She didn't even bother to look at the terrified little colt, instead simply dragging him along into the very depths of the palace, down the ancient stairwells that led to the Canterlot dungeons.

Blueblood's eyes widened with terror as he bounced along the stone staircase. The room grew increasingly dark, with only the light of Luna's magic to keep showing the way. The princess paid it no heed, but to the colt it felt like being dragged into Tartarus itself.

When they reached the bottom, his worst fears were seemingly confirmed. Sitting before the two were several empty cells, having obviously fallen into disuse over the centuries. Blueblood's struggles became more frantic as the two stepped inside one of the cages. "N-No! Please don't..."

Luna sighed as her magic hoisted the deposed prince onto the wooden bench. "I want you to sit here and think about what you have done. Celestia will retrieve you once she believes you have learned your lesson."

The white colt stared up from the bench in surprise. "Y-You mean you aren't going to throw me on a rack or hang me from my hooves?"

"Of course not," Luna said. "Despite what you may believe, I do not enjoy seeing *any* of my

subjects suffer, even if they are fools. Nonetheless, Princess Celestia will be down here later to pass judgment. Until then, I recommend you reflect on what has led you to this point in your life.”

With that, Princess Luna strolled out of the cell, slamming the door behind her with just a gentle push of magic. The same spell worked its way through the keyhole, sealing the only way out shut. Blueblood hopped down from the bench and galloped to the bars, wrapping his legs around the iron rods and shaking in a desperate bid for attention. It was all in vain. Whatever affection Luna had held for the colt was currently snuffed out by such outrage at his actions that she could not even bear to look at him any longer.

Without another word, she departed up the staircase to the actual palace, leaving Blueblood alone in the darkness...

Twilight growled as she stared at the mirror. Her indignation was matched only by the fiery red dress her teacher had forced her to put on. Celestia barely stifled a roar of laughter at the sight. “Oh, Twilight Sparkle! You are just soooooo adorable!”

“Yes, *adorable*,” Twilight mumbled. She looked up at the smirking Princess Celestia, a heavy frown on her face. “D-Do I really have to do this?”

“I am afraid so,” Celestia said. She bent over and nuzzled the filly, calming Twilight down just a little. “Don’t worry about it too much, my beloved student. Don’t you think this is a much better punishment than rebinding and shelving every book in the Canterlot Archives twice over?”

Twilight gasped. “Y-You mean *that* was going to be my punishment?”

“Well, I really cannot play favorites, can I?” Celestia said with a smile. “If everypony knew they could get out of trouble with just some cake and a few fine words, we would have no order left to speak of.”

The Unicorn frowned at the thought. “I...I see...”

“And besides, I couldn’t really punish you.”

Twilight’s eyes suddenly lit up. “What?”

Celestia turned towards the mirror, her eyes closed in that authoritative way that signaled an incoming lecture. “What you did was wrong, but I can understand why you would react in such a way. And besides, you have already done so much for my sister and I these last few days. You have even created a new spell, one that we used to avert the loss of one of Equestria’s

princesses. I believe that is more than enough community service.”

“And...what about my parents?” Twilight asked.

“You are very lucky to have somepony to take care of you,” Celestia answered. “I had to raise Luna from infancy by myself. We never had anypony to comfort us when times were tough, or when disaster seemed to loom at every corner. My time in the cave reminded me of that fact, and I couldn’t bear the thought of you making another visit to Canterlot without at least stopping by their home for a short while. You are a very special pony because they raised you properly, and were it not for their support you would have never found yourself in Ponyville with your friends. I just hoped you would realize that.”

Twilight blushed and smiled. “Th-Thank you, Princess. I’m just glad this is all over. As much as I love it here, I can’t wait to go home. At least nothing else can go...”

The door suddenly creaked open, allowing Lofty and Ruby to step into the room. “Excuse me, Your Higness,” the adult said, “but the party should be starting...soon.”

The two ponies froze as they saw Twilight’s current outfit. The older Pegasus blushed from the sheer cuteness of the whole scene, while the younger had to fight off the laughter threatening to burst free from her lips. The humiliated Unicorn quickly slid around behind Celestia. “L-Let’s just get this over with.”

By the time the small party had all gathered at the ballroom doors, Pinkie had already been hopping back and forth for almost the full half-hour. Despite the obvious exertion she was under, there was no indication that the pink pony would be stopping anytime soon. In fact, she seemed even more hyped than ever, as if she had downed an entire fruit punch bowl after spiking the thing with more sugar than could be safely recommended for consumption.

The rest of the visiting Ponyville gang was already assembled by the time Celestia and her entourage had emerged from the Moon Princess’ quarters. Luna had joined just a short time later, her anger cooled to “slightly annoyed” levels. Needless to say, Twilight’s appearance was met with no small measure of laughter and gentle mocking from her now-older friends, causing the filly to blush and silently bemoan her current situation. “Yeah sure, laugh it up,” she muttered.

“I-I’m sorry!” Rarity snorted. “But that dress...that body...it all looks so...*gah*...CUTE!”

Rainbow was laughing so hard her wings seized up, sending her tumbling to the ground on her back. The Pegasus didn’t miss a beat, however, choosing instead to roll about on the stone ground in her hysterical fit. “Oh, this is just too RICH!”

"It's not that funny!" Twilight snapped.

The filly's protest was met with a gentle hooftap to the head from Applejack. "It's nothin' ta be upset about! I mean, we all were little once ourselves!" She paused in mid-thought. "In fact, weren't y'all fillies just a day or so ago?"

Through pained tears, Rainbow raised herself on her back. "Yeah, but we were more awesome than this! At least we didn't have to parade around all fancy like that!"

"Yeah, I never realized you were such a dork as a foal!" Spike rudely added.

Fluttershy said nothing. It was taking every bit of her energy to avoid swooping up the filly and hugging her until every last drop of air escaped from her lungs.

Twilight looked up at the watching princesses. Her eyes were beginning to water from the humiliation she was experiencing, and for just a moment Celestia could feel doubt course through her. *I never expected them to act...quite like this. Even when I did this to Luna, they never actually laughed at her.*

The room grew uncomfortably quiet for a short while, and everpony feared for the worst. That is, until Twilight looked herself over long and well. The small, slightly chubby legs, the mismatched red party dress, and even those little bits of purple in her mane; all of them really did seem rather...cute. The filly snorted a bit, then broke into a roar of raucous laughter herself. "You're right! I really AM adorable!"

The six ponies broke into a unanimous laugh, smiling and cheering in a way neither princess had seen in some time. The same mares that had been chiding and mocking Twilight now moved forward to embrace her, both out of relief that their good friend was safe and out of regret for making fun of her scant moments before.

From the back, a rather confused Lofty poked at her mother's flank. "Mom, what's going on? Weren't they being mean a second ago?"

Ruby smiled down at the one actual filly in the room. "You'll understand when you're older."

Lofty scoffed. "That's your answer for everything! 'Why is the sky blue?' 'Why can't Unicorns walk on clouds?' 'Where do foals come from?'"

Celestia and Luna, meanwhile, simply smiled at the sight. It was no small measure of relief that things had gone as smoothly as they had. Even Twilight now seemed to be having some fun with her situation, gleefully accepting the pats and noogies offered by her compatriots.

"All right, all right, all right!" Pinkie barked. The ponies froze immediately and turned to face the excited party planner. "Now that everypony is back to the way they should be..." She turned to Twilight. "More or less."

Twilight grumbled. Pinkie continued as if completely oblivious to her friend's frustrations. "I figured a situation of this magnitude deserves a party that dwarfs all others, a celebration that will make the very heavens tremble at all its glory!" The pink pony reached a hoof up to the castle ceiling. "And to this end, I have busied myself studying every kind of party imaginable, from the tribalist of dances to the fanciest of prances!"

The pony struck a new, overly-dramatic pose with each declaration. "I have learned every culinary art, created every balloon animal, performed every clown act, designed every invitation, and even built party favors the likes of which nopony has ever seen before! All this was for the sole purpose of creating the most fantabulous party ever seen in the city of Canterlot!"

Luna sighed. "Miss Pie, may we please see this party you have planned?"

Pinkie gave a quick bow, then pressed both hooves against the door. "Of course, Your Highness! And now, without further adieu, I give to you...PRINCESS CELESTIA'S 'WELCOME BACK EVEN THOUGH YOU NEVER REALLY LEFT' PARTY!"

The door swung open with just a heavy push of the mare's hooves. Everypony else's jaws dropped at the sight. Sitting before them was the most elaborate party layout any of them had ever seen. Even amidst the reconstruction, Pinkie had managed to build a chocolate fountain that reached to the very ceiling. Sitting around it were all manners of snacks, ranging from fine cheeses and strawberries to marshmallows and tiny pretzels. Paper lanterns of every color imaginable lined frilly streamers from every column, providing a gentle rainbow glow across the entire chamber. There was plenty of room set aside for a small dance floor, as well as even more tables set out along the perimeter with party favors, hats, and even a few small gifts for the various guests. And then there were the games, with everything from piñatas to apple bobbing tubs all ready and willing to take whatever ponies were brave enough to accept their challenge.

As the ponies filed into the chamber, their mouths still opened in amazement, Pinkie caught a glimpse of Celestia entering last. The pink pony smiled up at her ruler, causing the alicorn to pause. "Well, what do you think? Isn't this the greatest party you've ever seen?"

Celestia did not respond immediately. Her eyes looked around the room, taking in all the different ponies.

Rarity and Applejack were already at the fountain, plunging wooden sticks into the various foods before smothering them with chocolate.

Rainbow Dash and Luna were at one of the piñatas, the later blindfolded and swinging the bat with her mouth like a trained soldier.

Fluttershy and Lofty were at the snack table, the latter eagerly prodding the nervous former with every query she could think of.

Spike had sequestered himself on the dance floor, shaking up a groove that would make many ponies envious.

And Twilight and Ruby were sizing up the gifts, the Pegasus helping the Unicorn filly slip on a party hat.

The Sun Princess smiled. "Pinkie Pie, this is the best party I've ever seen."

It was about an hour into the party when Luna found Celestia again.

The older sister and Twilight had seated themselves a bit farther away from the rest of the party guests, eagerly summing up everything that had happened to them so far. "...And so you say Kuchen is...still inside Pinkie Pie?"

Twilight nodded. "I know it doesn't sound like the best thing, but it was her decision to make. And besides, she hasn't poisoned us or anything? I mean, that's a good thing, right?"

Celestia patted her panicking student on the shoulder. "Has anypony ever told you how easily you worry sometimes? Whatever he may have done, I'm glad he had the chance to atone for his sins, whatever the circumstances." She looked down sadly. "I...I still wish it was I who saved him sometimes. If I hadn't been so foolish, perhaps he would have never gone down the dark path he did."

Luna sighed, catching the two's attention. "I thought we talked about this. You cannot keep blaming yourself for one pony's actions. No matter what happened, it was his choices that are to blame, not yours."

Celestia looked away sadly. "That still doesn't mean I can't bear some of the blame."

Twilight was equally nervous about the subject. "I...I guess whatever happens now, Kuchen is gone for good. Or at least, the part that was in Pinkie's head." The filly groaned and rubbed her forehead. "Aargh, this is so aggravating!"

"It always is when you discover new magic," Celestia said. "In any case, Kuchen will no longer find himself living through one Pie."

Luna cleared her throat. "And there is another issue we have to discuss. We cannot keep the fact that you have... 'returned' hidden for long. Our subjects deserve to know the truth."

"Yes," Celestia said depressingly. "Yes, they deserve to know that things will be back to normal."

The white alicorn looked up as she felt a hoof touch her own. Luna's gaze locked onto her sister, showing the warmest smile she had ever given anypony. "No, things will not be normal. They will be better."

Celestia smiled back at her sister. "Yes. I suppose we have all grown from this experience. We have been given another chance as sisters, and I shall not let this opportunity pass us by."

Everypony froze at a sudden crash from the other side of the room. The three ponies spun around towards the piñatas. Lofty was sitting atop her mother's back, a bat firmly stuck in her mouth, while the broken stuffed toy sat split open on the ground, its candy innards spilled out for all to feast upon. The other ponies cheered the smiling filly on as she spat the wood out and cannonballed onto the pool of treats.

Celestia smiled. "And I suppose I found a friend, as well."

Twilight grinned at her teacher/princess. "Are you having second thoughts? We have a counterspell now."

Celestia shook her head sadly. "No, this is how things should be. Lofty has a long life ahead of her, and I still have a far longer one to endure. My time as a filly is over, but at least I have some good memories to reflect on this time. And it's all because of you, Twilight. If you hadn't encouraged me to find some enjoyment in all this, I would never have..."

"Um...sister?"

Celestia turned around towards Twilight...or rather, where Twilight had been sitting only moments before. The filly was gone. Curious, the sun princess turned towards her sister, who motioned back towards the candy mess. Sure enough, Celestia's faithful student had buried herself in a pile of lollipops, gum drops, and even a few candied apples.

Luna shrugged. "She is such a filly."

Celestia smiled at the laughing Unicorn. "I suppose so."

The press conference was a hasty affair, with only a few hours' notice that the thing was even

going to occur. The stage was wheeled in from the palace's backroom, along with a simple podium several sizes too small for either sister. The palace gates were cleared of all traffic, as a small battalion of guards prepared to act as security for Celestia's speech.

Even with such last-minute preparations, news quickly spread across Canterlot that something was happening at the palace. Before long, the gossip had mutated in a dozen different directions, ranging from Princess Celestia's grand return to Princess Luna declaring herself Equestria's sole ruler. Throngs of ponies quickly converged around the stage, their loud murmurs echoing throughout the entire city.

When the clock tower bells struck three, six guards, standing in groups of three, blared out a long series of notes on massive horns. Everypony gasped as they recognized the familiar beats, for they were the calling card of Princess Celestia herself. The same tune preceded the apex of every Summer Sun Celebration, playing at the very moment Celestia raised the sun and began the longest day of the year. The excitement in the crowd swelled to epic proportions, a few ponies even licking their chops in anticipation.

Finally, a familiar beating sound filled the courtyard. Everypony's eyes glanced upwards as a pair of winged Unicorns lowered themselves onto the stage. The city shook with the force of a thousand hooves as the ponies eagerly stomped their admiration for the two sisters, eliciting a smile from the two alicorns.

The horns stopped, and Celestia stepped up to the podium. The crowd fell silent as the ponies waited for their long-lost ruler to say something. The princess herself took the opportunity to scan the crowd; she could see plenty of eyes looking up in joy, while more than a few seemed either indifferent or a little hostile to Celestia's sudden reappearance.

Celestia cleared her throat. *This isn't going to be an easy speech.* "G-Greetings, my subjects. It is wonderful to be back in Canterlot."

The princess paused, half-expecting a rotten tomato or apple to come flying for her at any second. When no produce emerged to assassinate her, she continued. "As you know, Princess Luna has been ruling in my stead these last few days. I was...away on a vacation, the first one I have had in many years. And as you have all witnessed, she has proven herself to be a decent – nay, I say, strong – ruler in my stead."

A small chorus of agreements broke out amongst the ponies, only to be silenced as Celestia continued. "But during my time abroad, I have taken the opportunity to reflect on myself as your ruler. And I have not liked all that I have seen. For generations, I have sat upon Equestria's throne, watching over both our land and our ponies. And I fear that I may have taken much of it for granted. I lost sight of what a princess is supposed to be, and instead became something I never wished to be."

She looked at a small group of foals from the hospital, having been allowed outside for this special occasion. "I neglected to visit the weakest and neediest of my subjects, even when they wished for me the most."

She looked at a nearby huddle of nobleponies, all of whom shied away shamefully from her glance. "I forgot that my actions, or inactions, could have a profound impact on ponies from all walks of life, and that I must think of all my subjects."

And finally, her gaze turned to her sister. "And worst of all, I had forgotten how much I loved the one pony that had always been there for me. She really has grown into quite the mare, despite her occasional protest to the contrary." There was a small laugh from the crowd as Luna blushed, her bright red face meshing terribly with her coat's color.

Her apologies all issues, Celestia turned back to the crowd. "But I promise each and every one of you that things will not be the same anymore. I shall do everything I can to make sure that our land and lives remain safe and content. Never again will I forget that the joy on everypony's faces are the real rewards for this position. And even if I have made mistakes and poor decisions in the past, I will learn from my mistakes and become an even better princess than before. From this day forth, you shall see a whole new Princess Celestia!"

The crowd exploded into an uproar of applause and stomps. Celestie smiled, inwardly cheering that one of her most hastily prepared speeches ever had been so warmly accepted. Even Luna was swept up in the excitement, trotting up next to her sister and giving her a nuzzle on the cheek. "Come on, big sister. We have a lot of work to do."

"Are you feeling better?"

Twilight stretched out her now-adult legs, admiring every extra inch of height they gave her. Her horn glowed for no other reason than it could, and her eyes fluttered with rediscovered maturity and grace. "Why yes, I do."

Celestia smiled. She had gotten the counterspell down perfectly, it seemed. Even if it was a bit draining, it was certainly worth the effort just to make sure her student did not have to repeat school again. The princess quickly stepped out of the suit and nuzzled her student on the back. "Thank you for everything, Twilight."

Once the two broke contact, Twilight looked back up at her mentor. She smiled as she recognized the warm smile and subtle wrinkles around her face, the telltale signs of a mare that had truly seen and knew just about everything there ever was. It was the same expression that had driven the Unicorn as a filly to study magic as best she could. "Th-Thank you, Princess."

"Now, you really should be heading back to Ponyville," Celestia said. "I know your friends are probably already waiting for you, and I don't want you to miss the last train."

Twilight smiled and nodded. "Understood. I'll see you soon, I hope?"

Celestia smiled. "Absolutely."

Twilight turned to leave, but only managed a few steps before Celestia called to her again. "And tell your friends Applejack and Rarity that their tax extensions should come through with no trouble. The ERS can be tricky at times, but you will be amazed what heroes can get away with."

The Unicorn's smile grew. "I'll be sure to tell them." And with that, Twilight was gone.

Celestia stared at the door as it slowly closed. A part of her wanted desperately to go to Ponyville after her, but those urges were now much easier to control. Levelheaded responsibility seemed to be ruling the day once again. *Goodbye, my faithful student...*

She snapped from her reverie as an armored hoof caught the door. One of the Pegasus guards pushed the wooden barrier open, revealing the dirtied, depressing visage of the once-mighty Prince Blueblood, now little more than a young colt. "You asked to see Pr- I mean, Blueblood, Your Majesty?"

Celestia quickly adopted her stern face, the kind she used when lecturing misbehaving students or undisciplined guards. "Yes. Please, show him in."

The guard unceremoniously pushed the colt into the chamber before slamming the door shut. The colt regarded his dirtied features briefly before glancing pitifully up at his aunt. "P-Princess Celestia...what will you do to me?"

Celestia could feel something break inside as she stared at the terrible sight. The poor colt before her had committed so many crimes in the past that she did not even care to think of a number. His current situation was a direct result of his own actions, and he had no pony to blame but himself. And yet, she could not deny the heartache his pain caused her. No matter how rotten he was in the present, she could still remember the sweet little foal that snuck cookies out of the pantry for her, or stared absentmindedly at her as she drafted one proclamation after another.

He was still family. *And, I suppose, family deserves a second chance...*

"Blueblood, have you realized what you did was wrong?"

The colt nodded. "Yes."

“Do you promise to never do anything like this again?”

The colt nodded. “Yes.”

“I wish I could believe that,” Celestia sighed. The colt made no response, verbal or physical. “I’m sorry, but I cannot simply excuse what you have done. Nonetheless, you claim to have learned your lesson, and I cannot dispute that out of hand. Certainly, what has happened to you today is far more...extreme than a simple jail sentence.”

Blueblood looked up sheepishly. “Th-Then what will become of me?”

“There is a kindergarten class about a half-block from the palace,” Celestia said. “I will enroll you in that class for a week or two.”

Blueblood’s lips quivered. “B-But those ponies are so...*not noble*.”

“And that is exactly the point,” Celestia said. “If you can show me that you have learned something from this experience, and promise to never even mention the possibility of razing Ponyville again, I might agree to remove the spell and give you back *some* of your status. Keep proving yourself after that, and I can grant you a little bit more. But if you slip from the path, and become the same pony you were before, I can promise you that being a colt will be the least of your worries.”

Blueblood was stunned. He had emerged from the dungeon expecting a flogging, perhaps even a visit to the Rack, but this was something far more troubling. *I have to lower myself to the level of commoners? The shame! The scandal! The... Well, what choice do I have?* “If that is your wish, then so be it.”

Celestia smiled. “I am glad you are taking this so well. The guards will show you to your chambers. And I want you to remember that, while I may not like all the things you do, I still love you.”

Blueblood smiled. It was the first genuine smile he had given in such a long time, and the first in years without any sense of malice or self-fulfillment behind it. The colt slowly pushed the heavy doors open and followed the guard down the hall. Soon, they were long gone from sight.

Her round of lectures done for the evening, Celestia walked over to the window. She rested her forehooves on the windowsill as she willed the sun down. At the same moment, from elsewhere in the palace, Princess Luna raised up the moon, beginning yet another beautiful night. Soon the sky was covered in a blanket of stars, all of them shining brighter than ever.

The princess sighed. Soon, she would be heading her first nighttime court in a long time. And from there, she would segue right into her daytime duties, just like when Nightmare Moon was

banished. There would be more challenges to overcome, but after so many centuries of the same thing over and over, it would be nice to finally have some new challenges.

And besides, there was the matter of those sketches that had mysteriously popped up in the Canterlot Library. They were the only survivors of a valuable collection that had been burnt to the ground years before, and showed the work of a promising young Unicorn who died before he could live up to his genius. No pony had to know that they were really just shoved in Celestia's old dresser all these centuries, or that the same Unicorn had written the still-missing Arcanus E Draconus. *And besides, I owe him that much.*

She watched the beautiful night sky for a little longer, then turned back to her dresser. There, sitting on top of a pile of books, was the recovered figure of General Smashemup. (Or rather, Colonel Buck, as one of the servants corrected her.) She picked up the toy with her telekinesis, bouncing it along the dressertop like the foal she had only been a short while ago.

"Are you having second thoughts?"

Celestia froze as she remembered her student's words. She was right, after all. They still had the counterspell, and Luna could use the thing at any time. It would be so simple to just have herself zapped again, play around with Lofty some more, and then resume her duties like nothing happened.

But then again, there was so much to accomplish right now.

The princess sadly set the toy aside. *Another time, General. For now, get some R&R. Your princess has a country to rule.*

And with that, Princess Celestia of Equestria trotted off to face her destiny. It may not have been the most pleasant job, but it was what she and her sister had truly been born to do.

THE END

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