

The Steadfast Sky : Chapter 18

The Grey Potter

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~Luna~

Things were happening. I didn't really know why. I didn't really care why. I didn't think about it. Trying to think was hard. Trying to move was harder. So I stopped doing things. I watched.

There was some smoke, some ponies appeared, but then they left. Other ponies wandered around, then I was lifted onto a cart. I stayed there until they took me off, and brought me indoors, somewhere else. They may have said where I was, but it didn't really matter. Then they took my cloak and necklace and saddlebags, then there was only one guard. The one who held the pillow I rested on. It was moving, pushing at my face sometime, sloshing around the leather bag. That would be strange, but I guess it wasn't really.

Another pony entered the room, a unicorn. He was pink and wore glasses. He yelled at the guard. 'Do you know what the something something young minds damage something.' My pillow was taken away and my head clunked on the floor. And it sort've... sparked a little, tingled. I could feel my skull pressing into my skin.

"... Ow. ..." I think I said.

I took a breath. Had I been breathing before?

The glasses pony was trying to be comforting by stroking my mane. I could feel the hairs on my back being tugged... but it was like he was pulling at my clothes. I could feel the movement, but it didn't feel like I was being touched at all.

"Don't worry, child, don't worry," He started repeating himself, over and over, almost humming as he tried to shush me. "You're safe here, nobody wants to hurt you. You'll be taken care of, you'll be taken care of. They shouldn't have used that nasty, *nasty* stuff on a filly like you, don't worry..."

"We did what we had to." I think the guard said that, but it was hard to see past the pink pony's big head. "And you better careful with that one. Spurs saw her break at least a dozen windows on one block."

"Really?!" The glasses looked up, dropping his babying tone. "Was it raw? Or an actual spell?"

"Yeesh, I don't know. She just shouted at them."

"Hm... it could be either then..." Glasses glanced at my side, then grinned down at me, teeth perfectly white and straight. "Don't worry, you'll be taken care of here!" He sunk down, trying to get at my eye

level. "I'm Pockets, the patron here. What's your name? Can you tell me little filly?"

"...I." My snout felt numb, and moving it was difficult. Pockets leaned in closer, nudging up my chin with his hoof.

"Yes?"

"Loo... Luna," I sputtered.

"Luna! What a wonderful name." He gently set me back down, turning to the guard again. I could clearly see his cutie mark, a big lollypop, one with rainbows slowly circling outward. I wondered, did he have a sweet tooth? "Don't worry," he continued, "I can take this from here."

"You're sure?" the guard replied, "We still need some answers from her."

"Nothing I can't handle. Now, it's getting late. I'll line up her report for you by noon tomorrow."

The guard nodded, then walked out the door. Pockets was back beside me, holding a stiff and toothy smile, like his teeth were plastered in place.

"Now, Luna, you must be so tired!" And his voice changed again, back to high and cutesy. "Getting dragged in by the city guards... let's have you sleep all these nasty feelings off, and we can talk about the bad, bad things you've done in the morning?" He leaned in close, "Okay, Luna?"

I may be little... but I didn't really like how he was talking to me. I wasn't a full-grown mare, but I wasn't a tiny little foal either. I tried to raise my head, move my mouth and tell him my age.

"I... aup... egh..." I screwed up my jaw, "Aeim... buh!" I flopped to the ground, defeated. "Kaaae. Oh-Kaaye."

He nodded, then waved off to somewhere I couldn't see, calling over another pony. I closed my eyes and was lifted off the floor, letting them take me wherever again.



Clang clang clang clang. "Good morning, My Little Ponies!" Clang clang clang clang.

My face scrunched up. What was that banging sound? I lifted my head, and it a sort've... didn't go as planned. There was a sheet on my head, stuck on my horn. I waved my face up and down and up and down, light peeking in on the ups, and vanishing on the downs. The sheet wasn't coming off so easily.

"Eaugh!" I rolled sideways, pallet scrunching under me, sheet tangling on my legs. I shook my head again, squinting and blinking through the small gap in the sheet. I still wasn't thinking straight at all! My brain still felt all muddy and soppy, I could almost hear it sloshing as it rolled around my neck. And there

was that clanging! Why was there clanging?

"C'mon sleepyheads, time for another bright and shining day!"

Through a gap in the covers, I stared over a line of beds, several squirming with sleepy ponies, but many empty, without sheets or pillows even. The floors were wooden, the walls white plaster, and on the far side of the room I could see a line of little wooden cubbies, some empty, and some packed with stuff. Daylight was streaming in from somewhere above me, brighter than I ever remember it being. An older green mare moved into my vision, back to me, banging a little silver gong above the heads of some of the sleeper.

"I'm up first!" somepony squealed.

"No, I was!"

"Five more minutes..." one pony moaned, a pretty young voice.

"Race you to the washroom, Chip!"

A thunder of hooves, of shouts, of more *clanging*. There was more squealing, and suddenly a wet snout shoved itself under my sheet, sniffing inches from my face.

"Miss Buttercup! Miss Buttercup!" It screeched right in my ear, "Is that a new student?! There's a new student!" The sheet was yanked off of me, and I stared up at the face of a very eager blue filly, maybe a little younger than me. She jammed her hoof in my gut, propping herself up into my face. "Hi! Hello! Who are you?"

"Taffy! Go freshen up, you can talk to the new girl later!" I green aura lifted the pony away from me, and the older mare replaced her, still holding up her iron gong... thing. "Good morning, Luna. How are you feeling today?"

"All sloppy and weird."

The pony tutted. "Poor filly... You should be all better in a few more hours."

"Okay." I looked for my sheet and yanked it back on the bed, flopping around on the pallet. More sleep sounded pretty dang good right about now. Ding Ding Ding. I popped open one eye, the mare was still clanging her gong, specifically over my head.

"I'm sorry, Luna, but Mr. Pockets needs to see you!" she said, "Can you get up for me?"

"But I'm all sleepy and wobbly!" I whined.

"Come on! Wake up!" Miss Buttercup said sweetly. Too sweetly. It was that tone again. That little kid tone, meant for teeny tiny foals. Did I look that little? I frowned into the pillow. Well, the first thing I should do is show them that I am no baby!

I stood up on the pallet, and with my head held high and proud, I gracefully hopped off the bed. Using all

my years of duchess or baroness training or whatever, I magically made my bed all neat and tidy, tucking and folding the edges under the pallet, gently placing the pillow over the top. Now, how would this gong lady take this clear proof that I was a mature filly?

Her smile was exactly the same, but she may have nodded a little.

“Nicely done, Luna.” No! There was no change! “Let me wake up the other fillies, and I’ll take you to Mr. Pockets.”

She walked away, and I stayed where I was left to wonder. Were Celestia and Discord here? Did they have to deal with cutesy-wutsey voice? We needed to all meet up and get out of this weird place, fast.

It wasn’t long until the green mare, Miss Blossom, led me out of the room. The rest of the building was very clean, walls all covered in plaster, floors and corridors and even wood. The halls had glass windows a few times, peeking out over the city, almost bright and cheery compared to Canterbury. Were the white clouds up above letting in more light? Was there actual sky here, poking through the cloud dome? I couldn’t tell. I was on the city’s hill, and could see long rows of buildings, but some windows only showed the wall of a structure nearby. What a silly place to put a window!

We headed down a wide wooden staircase that squeaked quietly with every step, or loudly when more fillies or colts were running down it. The first floor had really, really cold stone floors, as well as bigger areas. At the bottom of the stairs and to the right looked like a cafeteria, and across the hall from that, a door opened into a small piano lounge. Or... that’s what it looked like, it had a piano.

No matter where we went, there were small ponies, led by mares or just running around. Some were littler than me, but most were older, around Celestia’s age. But that’s not the weird part. It took me a bit, but I realized as we passed an orderly line of Celestia sized ponies, that all of them were unicorns. All the older mares and stallions, all the little and older kids. All unicorns.

Was this some sort of unicorn... only... sleep-inn... orphanage? I frowned. I thought my head was done being so sloshy!

“Here we are Luna.” We had walked down a wide little corridor, lined with doors and no windows. Miss Blossom pulled open the door at the end, and I walked inside, head low and curious.

One time, way, way back in Canterbury, I was sent to the headmaster’s office for something that was totally not my fault. It was a rich room, packed with books and knickknacks and really expensive looking stuff, none of which I was supposed to touch.

Well, Mr. Pocket’s room looked like that too. The desk was varnished wood, he sat on a throne-like plush chair, and there was a very pretty rug on the floor with a complicated design. That must have taken ages to make, even for a unicorn. A big window was framed behind him, though it was one of those that just looked down a street of fancy houses. It was a hint of wealth that I hadn’t seen in a while, even more than the plaster and glass corridors. I mean, plaster is kind’ve nice, but not super duper nice...

“Good morning, Luna.” Mr. Pockets grinned from his armchair, comfortably resting his forelegs on the

heavy desk. "Please, have a—"

"Mr. Pockets!" I declared regally, snapping spine straight. "We have something of utter importance to discuss!"

He placed a hoof over his mouth, smile growing a little wider. "Oh? Really?"

"Yes!" I bounced up on a wobbly wooden stool and smacked myself down into a sitting position, spine still straight and very serious! "Thank you for letting me sleep in a comfy bed last night, since I haven't done so in a very, very long while! But I really must be going now! Inform me of where my friends are, and also my stuff, um, I mean things! My friends and my things, so we can continue our very important quest!"

Mr. Pockets stared at me quietly, eyes wide, hoof still suppressing his plaster smile.

"Your, your quest, little Luna...?"

"We're the Bringers of Harmony," I declared, "A very, very important adventure team!"

"I see! Well!" He straightened himself, horn glowing as he pulled open a drawer, or something. I heard the sound of wood scraping. "I regret to inform you, little Luna, but you're going to have to stay here a while. I'm sorry, but your 'quest' will have to be put on hold."

"Huh?! Why!"

"Well for one, I need to ask you a couple questions for the authorities." He waved a fancy red quill towards me, peering over his glasses. "You made a lot of people angry with that spell of yours, young lady!"

"Oh... well..." I catch myself. "Those two guys were making my sister feel really bad, and were jerks!"

"Yes, yes..." he nodded at me, setting a piece of paper on his desk, quill hanging over it. "But also... well, I take it you're a traveller? Where are you from?"

"Canterbury." Oh shoot, I was supposed to say I was from Canterlot! Silly lies, always coming to me a second after I say something! And this, of all things, is what makes Pocket's smile vanish.

"Really? Canterbury."

"Um... nnnnn...y-yeeeeesss." Shoot! I know we always make fun of Discord for his really terrible liar face, but I just can't do this at *all*!

"Well, then you *really* wouldn't know." And his smile returned, as fake as it ever was. Ooh! I just realized! That's why it's weird and plaster-ish, it's so *fake*! He's not happy at all! Wait, is he still saying things? "... And unicorn magic is *very dangerous*."

Dangit, missed some! "It is?" I asked.

“Let me finish, Luna.” He leaned on his desk, fake beaming directly at me. “Now, even though we unicorns are very, very dangerous to keep around, there are just some things we can do to make life easier for all ponies. So Big Apple, our chancellor, makes sure all unicorns are properly and safely taught, here at this school. And when they begin working, he watches them very, very closely, so that nopony gets hurt.”

He’s still using that baby voice! Like I just wouldn’t get it!

“Mr. Pockets, please!” I demanded with a stomp of my hoof. “I may be a young filly, but I’m not that young! Tell me exactly what’s going on!”

For a second, his smile twitched into a smirk.

“You’re going to be kept and taught here. And when you graduate, you’re going to work for the city, your magic tightly regulated and controlled.”

“What? But I don’t want to spend time on school or a job. I’ve got better stuff to do!”

Pockets dipped his quill into an inkwell, tapped it twice against the rim, and hovered it over the page, smile returning to its normal fakey state.

“For now, I have a few questions for you. If you answer them all honestly, I’ll give you a piece of candy.” He placed a piece of taffy in a wax wrapper in front of him, and looked up at me expectantly.

I frowned down at it. It seemed... really wrong, in a really strange way. Was this a bribe?

I don’t think I like this place.