

Day 95

Luna tried to stifle a yawn. What was she doing up this early again? Right, a meeting. Celestia was off for the Running of the Leaves, leaving her in charge for a few days. She would have to see about getting some of the stuff that kept Celestia going for those thousand years. These early afternoons were murder.

An earth pony walked into the room carrying a huge binder stuffed with papers. He glanced around the room as he bowed, "My apologies, Your Highness, but I believe I have the wrong room. I had a meeting with Celestia today, could you tell me where she is?"

"I'm sorry, but she had a personal matter to attend to, and I'm handling daytime affairs while she's away."

He nodded. "Ah yes, of course. It is no trouble at all." He opened his binder and the bulging thing nearly exploded with documents. He quickly went to work setting up a series of complicated-looking charts and passing out a small mountain of reports, findings, and memos. Luna mentally braced herself. This would be a rough one. Unless...maybe it would actually turn out to be interesting topic?

"Now, as you may be well aware, the berry farmers to the east of Mareyland have been complaining about a steady rise in their irrigation costs. As you can see, we track a .2 percent increase..."

No. Such. Luck.

The meeting was, as expected, horribly dull. Kingdoms had to be run, and sometimes that meant somepony had to sit down for a few hours and figure out how the current schedule of rainfall affected the lower-plain berry-growers in the late spring. But at least the farmer ponies could rest easy knowing their crops would continue to get sufficient water, and that certainly made it worth her while.

After what felt like ages, they had outlined a plan for maintaining the current rain forecasts, albeit with a compressed schedule during the height of the growing season to make up for...long-term low-level soil dehydration, was it? Luna sat down heavily and resisted the urge to heave a sigh of relief.

The earth pony gathered his charts and papers (leaving behind copies in triplicate) and bowed respectfully. He had somehow managed to go through the entire meeting without once showing weakness or signs of tiring. "Thank you for your time and attention, Your Highness. If you could let me know when Celestia receives my reports, I would be most appreciative."

Luna nodded, "As soon as she returns I'll make sure to tell her all we've discussed. I'm sure she will approve of the changes we've made to the schedule."

"Thank you, but may I also ask that you show her the papers I have left for her?" He motioned to one of the stacks. "I have sent ahead my schedule if she would like me to explain in greater detail."

Luna paused. She thought she understood what he was saying, but part of her still hoped she was mistaken. "Very well, I will make sure she sees them." She added, "And rest assured, I can explain all we have gone over today."

He bowed, ever the courteous one. "Thank you, Your Highness, I assure you that your input here has been most helpful indeed, and your suggestions will no doubt be of great service."

No, she was not mistaken. Her teeth were gritted every so slightly as she smiled back. As soon as the door closed behind him, she stuffed the papers unceremoniously in a sack and handed them off to a nearby courtier to deliver to Celestia's room. She was far too busy storming back to her own chambers to do it herself.

Suggestions?! She had sat there and listened to that stuck-up busybody of a pony ramble for hours about his precious findings and oh-so-important theories. She had sat there attentively and made sure she understood every last footnote of his tiresome research in perfect detail. She had given up her sleep to ensure this pony got the meeting he was promised, and for what? Only "suggestions" that he would no doubt bring up as his own brilliant ideas when he finally got his precious audience with Celestia.

She remembered his expression when he first bowed to her, and knew what she had seen in his face:

Disappointment.

He came in expecting to speak to the ruler of Equestria, and instead got the little sister. Who did that pony think he was talking to?

Certainly not a Princess

She hurried back to her chambers, not bothering to tell the voice to go away. It was too early to be awake, too early to be arguing with herself, and too early to deal with uptight ponies with the wrong ideas of how things were run here.

She reached her room just as the sun was going down. Perfect. Now she didn't even have the

time to catch up on a little sleep first. At least it would be night soon. She paced the floor a while, taking several deep breaths to calm herself down. With each breath, she felt a little tension leave her system and soon she was calm. Well, calm enough to manage the night anyway. As she stepped onto the pillow, she finally let herself smile. Much better now. No pony else owned the night. This was hers.

Luna let the magic rise in her, let it take her to her blank sky. She colored it navy blue and summoned the initial star cluster. All of a sudden, the sneering face of the ungrateful earth pony flew through her mind. The dots of light scattered in all directions before fading away. She tried again, but this time could only manage a handful of stars before losing control. No matter what she tried, she could only focus long enough to get a single star to appear at a time.

After a few minutes, it was clear she would have to make the stars appear in their proper positions, one by one. She groaned. That would easily double her usual time, if not triple it. Though...this would mean she could take her time and enjoy this, and she really needed something to enjoy right now. One-by-one it was then.

She used her horn as a pointer, flashing every time a star was added. They winked into place as she slowly made her way across the sky. She settled into a regular pattern, even humming a little ditty as she worked.

She was nearly done with Taurus when a little nagging thought stopped her. Something about the Bull just wasn't right. She brushed it aside, and kept working. But after placing a few more stars, her doubts refused to leave her alone. She sighed and inspected the last constellation.

Missing one.

Impossible. She had been making this same night sky for as long as there was a night sky. There was no way she could simply forget a star. And yet, there it was. There was definitely a star missing and she could not remember where it went. As hard as she tried, Luna could not muster the focus to see where it belonged.

Maybe you should get your star charts.

"This is my night, I know how it goes.' She was no longer thinking to herself, her voice the only sound in the empty void. "I can manage without." Count again. Go back through the motions. Count again. Use one of her mnemonics. Count again. Go back through the motions. Trace it out by hoof. Count again. Count again. Count again.

A star chart would fix this. Just a simple suggestion...

"Be quiet!" she yelled to no pony. She was back at her observatory in a flash. The expanse faded away, leaving the few stars she had placed shining overhead. She took a few deep breaths to

calm herself down. There was no need to get upset; it was just a single group, after all. She could always come back to it later. After a few more minutes, she summoned her magic again and picked up where she left off. Hydrus...or was it Hydra? She frowned. No, it was certainly Hydrus. She had started working on his tail right before she had noticed the missing star. Except Hydra's tail looked awfully similar.

This was no time for hesitation, she had to pull herself together! She picked one and started again. Right, after Hydra comes another field of stars, then we start on...

Two stars too many.

She gnawed her lip. ...then start on Ursa Major. Finish his head, then...

His teeth are too short.

Drops of sweat collected on her brow. ...then a long expanse before...

Missing five.

Tail is too long

Belt askew.

Three too many.

Too far apart.

Wrong.

Wrong again.

All wrong.

After an hour of wrestling with the stars, she stopped, although collapsed would be more accurate.

From her pillow, she turned up one eye to look at the night. Her ruined night. She doubted half of the constellations were right, and she must have been missing at least a hundred stars. Maybe more.

She could still fix this. Just had to swallow her pride and grab the star charts...that she had ordered back to the palace library a month ago. She facehooved. As if this train wreck couldn't get any worse, now she had to go all the way to the other side of the palace and pick up the charts personally. Embarrassment on top of disaster. Must be her lucky night.

She flew out of her chambers, heading straight for the library as fast as she could. She was so focused on getting this over with that she didn't notice a commotion behind her until she was nearly there.

"Your Highness! Wait!"

Her guards were sprinting to catch up. They took a few seconds to recover their breath, although the captain managed to stay upright. "Your *huff* Highness...what's wrong? *puff*"

The Princess they were supposed to be guarding had just torn out of her chambers without a word. That...probably didn't look good. She forced back her irritation and struggled to keep her voice level. "I'm fine. Just business I have to take care of. You may head back to my chambers. I'll only be a moment." Her guards were skeptical, but didn't refuse a direct order. They filed back towards her room.

She continued to the library at a slightly less frantic pace and barged in the main entrance. The unicorn librarian nearly jumped out of her seat, launching the book she had been reading across the room. She quickly composed herself and gave a polite bow. "Your Highness! What can I do for you?"

"I need the star charts."

"Which ones?"

"All of them."

"All of-" The unicorn caught herself. "Yes, of course. Just a few minutes."

As she fetched the charts, Luna thought she saw her sneaking a few peeks up at the sky. No doubt taking note of her mistake-riddled sky. At least she kept it to herself, and had soon returned with a small pile of scrolls.

Luna grabbed them and marched out without a word. She had to move fast if she was to fix this before too many more ponies noticed.

Back at her study, she dumped out the pile of scrolls. Her guards were relieved to see she was still alright, but it took a bit of convincing before they agreed to leave her to her work. She opened the first chart and was about to start correcting her mistakes when something hit her:

Nothing was happening.

Luna had just crafted the worst night she could remember (and that covered a long time) and there was no panic. No pony had asked her what went wrong. The librarian hadn't been noticing mistakes; she was wondering why she even needed the charts. Even her own guards didn't realize it, even when they knew something was wrong. If Celestia had brought the sun up in the wrong place, it would have been a grade-one disaster. So why was nothing happening now?

The scroll dropped from her grip as the truth dawned on her.

No pony is worried because no pony noticed. No pony noticed because no pony cares. About the night or about you.

Luna was unsure of how long she stood there. When her senses returned, all she could feel was anger.

How dare they. Those ungrateful ponies. Ponies that she endured boring meetings for. Ponies she lovingly crafted a night for. Ponies who gave her nothing but disrespect. Ponies who treated her like a monster. Ponies who...

She was about to kick over the scrolls in her rage, when a memory flashed in her head:

A young Alicorn with a deep purple coat opened her eyes as her magic dimmed. She surveyed the heavens and gave a warm smile. This night was perfect. Every star was shining just so, and the moon was full and bright. No doubt about it; this was the best night she had ever made.

She flew over Equestria, taking in the sights. She would have to return to the palace, but on a night like tonight? 'Tia could manage a few hours more, couldn't she? Besides, she just had to see her subject's faces when they saw this wonderful night.

She looked down, expecting to see stargazers eager at their telescopes. Ponies marveling at her work. But all she saw were empty fields. Quiet streets. Ponies in bed. As she flew farther and farther, her hopes fell lower and lower. Her smile turned into a frown. Why were all the ponies asleep? She made her nights for all her ponies, why didn't they want to see her gift to them? They always saw 'Tia's days, why didn't they want to see her nights? Her frown turned into a grimace.

No pony was watching because no pony cared.

She halted her flight and stomped a hoof angrily, decimating a small cloud. How dare they. Those ungrateful ponies. Ponies that she endured so much for. Ponies she lovingly crafted a night for. Ponies who ignored her. Ponies who...

Her eyes went wide. She mouthed "No." She reeled back from the pedestal. "No...no...no..."

It was all happening again. Nothing had changed. Despite a thousand years, not a single thing had changed. Celestia was still the older sister. The ponies would still ignore Luna. And she would grow more jealous and bitter by the day until...

"Banishment..." she whispered fearfully.

No, she couldn't go back again! Not for another thousand years, not another millennium away from home. There had to be something she could do; something she could change this time around. Luna paced the observatory, her movements growing frantic as she thought. Nothing! All this time and she could think of nothing! Every idea she could think of was a variation of the same one she had a thousand years ago; force the ponies to pay attention to her.

Every idea except one.

The librarian had just settled back into *Silver Lining and the Pirates of Ponyzance* when Princess Luna re-entered the library. This Princess was a different Alicorn entirely. She was shuffling her hooves as she walked, her eyes were obviously watering and puffy, and she looked...defeated?

No time to wonder about that. She discreetly shoved her reading in a nearby drawer. Luna didn't seem to notice. She returned the charts, and quietly mumbled, "I'm sorry for my attitude earlier. It was no fault of yours."

The librarian took the charts back and smiled her usual cheerful smile. "Happy to be of service, Your Highness. And a lovely night as usual, I might add."

The Princess turned away to leave. Her voice wavered as she quietly thanked her, then she left the library without another word. Huh. That Luna always seemed so emotional. Normal one second, then sad the next. She shrugged. Royal business had always been too complicated for her. She picked up her story again, reading by the light of a night with too few stars.

All through the night, Luna waited. Waited for the pony to come and tell her she missed a few stars. Tell her that they had noticed. Tell her she was wrong.

That pony never came.

She returned to her chambers for a quick nap. In a few hours, she had another meeting to

attend to. As she laid down, she realized the little nagging voice in her head was silent. Her plan had worked. Now she didn't have a night to make her jealous. Respect would come in time, but at least it would be through hard work, and not tyranny. This time, things would be different.

She closed her eyes, tears staining the pillow.

It's better this way...right?