

# **My Little Alicorn**

*A "My Little Pony Friendship Is Magic" fanfiction  
By InsertAuthorHere*

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## **Chapter Six**

It didn't take Twilight long to realize she just made another mistake.

The baby dragon and five ponies made only a few steps towards Luna, as if afraid she was going to vaporize them all in an instant or wink the lot of them into the cornfield. "So...an evil unicorn did this, huh?" said Rainbow Dash.

Luna reared back a few steps, spreading her wings in case things got ugly. A part of her wanted to use the same magic she had used on Blueblood, terrify the Elements of Harmony into letting her go. It would be so easy; just inspire the fear-of-alicorns in them and they'd all go home, tails between their legs. Even as she thought this, however, the more decent part of her actively rebelled, telling her how giving in to the darkness of her past would only make things worse. All this inner turmoil did was made her outer self look even worse. "I had not intended to lie to you, but I..."

"I bet that's why you asked Twilight over here yesterday!" said Spike. "You were using her as part of your joke!" The other ponies gasped in horror, their resentment towards the current situation and its instigator growing with every passing moment.

Fluttershy looked at the still-cowering Celestia. "Princess...is this true?"

Celestia was quiet at first, not sure whether to give a straight answer or lie to save Luna's bacon. Unfortunately for her sister, Fluttershy's kindhearted demeanor and sincerity overwhelmed her protective mindset. "Y-Yes, it's true, but..."

Pinkie Pie suddenly popped out of a vase behind Luna, her body uncompressing as it left its confines. Her eyes locked with Luna's almost instantly. "That's the meanest trick I've ever heard! You know how Princess Celestia feels about Twilight, and you embarrass both of them anyway just for a laugh. I mean, if you turned me into an itty-bitty teeny-weeny winkie-Pinkie, I wouldn't want you to invite my sisters over and make me your little joke!"

“Uh, girls?” chimed Twilight.

“What sort of ruffian would do such a thing?” said Rarity. “Reducing your own flesh and blood to a mere foal. How do you sleep at night?”

Luna winced. “I have not slept for more than two hours these last two days...”

“Because you were too busy taking over Equestria!” shouted Spike. His confidence grew as he took a few steps towards the princess, still pointing an accusing claw. The princess could feel her control starting to slip, and that terrible power was calling to her, begging to be released. “I told Twilight she couldn’t trust you! And now, we’re going to...”

*SCREW IT.*

***“I WAS NOT TAKING OVER EQUESTRIA, LIZARD.”***

The force of Luna’s voice was enough to propel Spike into the other ponies, sending them toppling like bowling pins. The dragon’s impromptu flight stopped right next to Twilight with a resounding thud. The unicorn quickly dragged Spike back to his feet via telekinesis, and was preparing to help up the rest of her friends the same way, when Luna walked up to her. “I want an explanation.”

“I...I don’t know what’s going on,” stammered Twilight. “I just wrote Spike to take care of the library, and he...”

“Sister, don’t worry about it,” said Celestia. She wrapped one of her front legs around one of Luna’s front hooves and started slowly nuzzling. Even as a filly, she could tell when a situation was about to get very, very bad. “Twilight Sparkle, please explain to your friends they have nothing to fear. Luna...we need to get going. Now.”

Luna sighed. “Very well. Twilight Sparkle, I leave things in your hooves.”

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The first thing to strike Celestia was the cool breeze. Free from the stagnant prison that was the palace, she could finally take in fresh air for the first time in weeks. Even better, there were no outdoor meetings to discuss how Equestria was falling apart today, no schoolfoals wandering the hedge maze, and no urgent matters to attend to outside of Canterlot. For the first time in so long, the princess was actually free to enjoy the very gardens she had personally built centuries ago.

So naturally, her reaction was to run outside screaming before flopping on the cool grass. The princess rolled onto her back, unfolded her wings, and squirmed about like a lopsided worm. It

was crass, it was simple, it was something totally unbecoming of both a princess and, for lack of a better word, a physical goddess.

And she loved every minute of it.

From her vantage point at the door, Luna watched as her once-older sister frolicked about the grounds, taking in every sight and smell like they were brand new. In any other situation, she would have taken at least some comfort in Celestia's jubilation. At the very least, seeing the most important pony in the world to her being happy in her dire situation would give her a little bit of happiness. Not so.

*They are the ones that freed me. They are the ones that saw the real me that day. And yet, the minute Celestia disappears, they all come to Canterlot just to lock me away again? Her thoughts inadvertently drifted back to Blueblood's earlier threat. That waste of genetics really was right. If even those ponies hate me...*

"Luna? Are you all right?"

Luna broke from her self-demotivation session at her sister's words. Celestia was standing in front of the princess, her once-pristine white coat now covered with grass stains and splotches of dirt. The filly repeated her query. "Is something wrong, sister?"

"I-It is nothing," said Luna. "I was just...thinking about the rest of the day. I...I really need to get going. There's an awful lot to do today, and I have fallen way behind, so if you will excuse me..."

Luna wasn't able to turn five inches before Celestia spoke again. "It's about Twilight's friends, isn't it? I have no idea where Spike was getting his information, but I can assure you Twilight is going to get to the bottom of this."

"It is not that," said Luna. "If Twilight Sparkle's assistant and friends could come to that conclusion, what can I expect from everypony else?"

Celestia paused for a few seconds, mulling over what exactly to say. "Luna...when you hold court, there's a few things you need to know."

Luna scoffed. "I have held court before, you know."

"Not mine," said Celestia. "This isn't strictly business like yours. Here, anypony can come and voice their concerns about the land. And if you want everything to move smoothly, you have to watch yourself."

"...Watch myself?"

"First, always smile." Celestia's mouth turned into a warm, friendly smile. "This will show the ponies how much you care for them and their problems."

Luna was silent for several seconds, before finally giving a smile of her own. It wasn't quite as motherly as Celestia's, but it would do. "Great!" chirped the filly. "Next, make sure to listen to each pony's problem, no matter how trivial it may seem to you. Remember, these are your subjects, and as princess it is your responsibility to listen to your ponies."

Luna rolled her eyes. "I know that, sister. That is not the issue at hoof, however. How am I suppose to conduct business if everypony's still afraid of me?"

Celestia sighed. "Luna...do you remember how scared ponies used to be of me, back in the old days? Well, it's still true today." Luna's eyes widened at the thought, trying to picture anypony doing anything but praise and honor Celestia's whims. "The bowing, the reverence, the insane lengths they go to please me; that's not because they love me. It's because they're afraid that if their manners aren't perfect I'll send them all to the moon or something."

"You mean...all this time, they were scared of you as well?"

Celestia nodded in affirmation. "It comes with being a princess. Things may be more relaxed than they used to be, and certainly a lot smoother on the larynx, but that doesn't mean everypony has forgotten we're in a position to affect the rest of their lives. Just...don't think about how they're afraid of you. What's important is, they've overcome their fear enough to come to you with their problems, and you must respect that."

"...Thank you for your advice, sister." *Even if it does me no good.*

Luna gave Celestia a farewell pat on the head and walked back inside, the guards closing the door behind her. The filly princess turned her attention back to the massive gardens that lay before her. The ground was still wet from the gardeners; many of the pathways were still quite muddy, the grass was soaked, and the flowers glistened like they were covered in morning dew. Most of the animals were still locked away in the most secluded part of the grounds, just in case somepony got some wild ideas and released them again.

Celestia's mind reeled as she took in this moment's ramifications. For the first time in over a millennia, she had *free time*. And with Twilight taking the bulk of the research duties, she didn't have a whole lot to worry about afterwards.

With a squeal of glee, the filly leaped into the air and bellyflopped back onto the grass. She had a lot to accomplish, and only a short amount of time to do it...

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“And that’s about it. Luna’s prank went wrong, and I’m helping her and Celestia fix things. Nothing more.”

Twilight had taken her friends to Celestia’s study, hopefully as far from Luna as possible at the moment. Spike was busy in the back, begrudgingly lighting a fire; his spines were still on edge from today’s earlier encounter. The others weren’t much better. Dash was ready to charge right back and take the princess on personally, Rarity looked more sassed than anything else, Pinkie was hopping mad, Applejack was sore at being lied to, and it took the unicorn almost twenty minutes to calm Fluttershy’s mama bear tendencies.

“Okay, let’s say you are telling the truth,” said Dash. “Why did you send Spike that letter, then?”

Twilight raised an eyebrow. “What letter?”

“You know, the super-duper secret spy letter!” said Pinkie. “Has anypony told you how *good* you are at hiding things? I mean, I’m the number one pony at hide-and-seek, and even *I* couldn’t find your hidden message! Good thing Spike is a whiz at code breaking!”

Now Twilight was even more confused. “Code...breaking?”

Spike, now satisfied with the fire’s roaring, rejoined the group. “You know, the one you sent me last night. You obviously had to write it in code so Princess Luna wouldn’t catch you.” He pointed a thumb at Applejack, eliciting a groan from the farm pony. “Applejack here, she didn’t believe me. She thought you just wanted me to stay at the library while you helped Nightmare Moon rule Equestria! But now that we know the truth, we can grab the Elements and get to the banishing, right?!”

Twilight didn’t know how to respond. Her brain twisted in upon itself trying to find her dear baby dragon’s train of logic. She only stopped when the threat of an aneurysm became far too great. “Spiiiiiiiiike,” she said in a low growl. “I did not want you leading my friends on some sort of crusade in Canterlot just so you could play hero.”

Spike was taken aback at Twilight’s words. The others were more than a little confused. “Th-Then, what did you want?” asked Spike.

“I wanted you to stay at the library while I helped **PRINCESS LUNA** find a cure for Celestia’s condition! In other words, **WHAT I TOLD YOU TO DO IN THE FIRST PLACE!**” She groaned from her *soon-to-be-former* number one assistant’s crass stupidity. “I told you to stop reading those stupid spy books! They’re rotting your brain!”

Her attention turned from the guilt-ridden purple dragon to the rest of her friends. The ponies drew themselves back as Twilight’s frustrated rage continued to take hold. “And you. What were you thinking back there? You know Princess Celestia and I are perfectly fine, so why all the

hostility?”

“A-Are you kidding?” said Dash. “Luna lied to us!”

“As did you, dear,” added Rarity. “Or do I need to remind you about Celestia ‘taking a vacation?’”

Twilight shied away from the fashionista’s (rather accurate) comments. “That was the lie the princesses and I agreed on. We didn’t really have much of a choice.”

“Yah could have told us ta truth, sugahcube!” shouted Applejack. “Don’t ya see how worried we all were? You had us scared stiff.”

“About what?!”

“Um, about the princess, duh!” said Pinkie.

Twilight let out a deep, mournful sigh. “You don’t understand. How do you think everypony would have reacted when they found out the truth? In case you haven’t noticed, Princess Luna isn’t exactly the most popular pony out there right now. If anypony even *thought* she had meant to hurt Celestia...”

“But she’s a nasty-wasty!” shouted Pinkie. “Anypony that would do something like that to their own sister deserves to be tarred, feathered, and driven out of Equestria! Dethroning her sister, using the Arcanus E Draconus, and lying to everypony? She’s the worst pony ever!”

“NO SHE ISN’T, PINKIE!”

The entire room went silent, save for Twilight’s echoing voice. The unicorn coughed and cleared her throat before continuing. “What Luna did was wrong. I’m not arguing with that. But having you guys stand here and accuse her of being a monster isn’t helping. She’s committed to fulfilling both her own and Celestia’s obligations, not because she wants to rule Equestria by herself, but because she made a mistake and wants to make up for it. And it would be great if you gave her some support.”

The five ponies (plus dragon) looked about each other, trying to come up with a silent consensus. Twilight watched the group with a gnawing sense of dread, as well as a growing disappointment in her assistant’s behavior. Finally, the group dispersed. “Are...Are you sure Luna is all right?” asked Spike.

“She’s a good pony, Spike,” said Twilight. “Just give her some time, and I’m sure she’ll prove that to you and everypony.”

“...Well, we *did* have an appointment already,” said Rarity. “We...certainly do owe the princess

an apology.”

“Ah feel like a molded-up hay seed,” muttered Applejack. Her declaration was summarily followed by a chorus of nods, shrugs, and agreements. Even Pinkie Pie, who had by now exceeded Spike in the hostility department, was looking rather ashamed.

Twilight sighed in relief. “Thank you. It means a lot to me, and I’m sure Princess Celestia feels the same way.”

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Luna strode back into the throne room, already pushing the memory of Twilight’s friends’ reactions out of her mind. Ruby was already seated next to the throne, reviewing the list of visitors for today’s court session. The attendant tore her head up from her duties at her regent’s approach. “Is everything all right, Your Highness?”

Luna froze about ten feet from her seat, willing herself to put on that loving, friendly face Celestia had worn for so long. “Everything is just fine, Miss Dream. I just...lost track of time dealing with my sister.”

She resumed her walk up the steps, seating herself upon the most powerful spot in Equestria. “Very well, court will begin shortly. How does Celestia do this again?”

Ruby shrugged. “Everypony is herded into a waiting area just outside the doors. I announce their name, and they come in. You listen to their concerns, and they leave.”

“And...who do we have today?”

“Well, there’s been a lot of issues around Equestria recently, so there is a pretty long list of unannounced visitors today. As for the announced ones, a few farmers from just outside of Canterlot need to speak to you about the city’s water conservation efforts, the Astronomy Guild wants to discuss some issues with last night’s night sky, and we have representatives from Sweet Apple Acres and the Carousel Boutique requesting a tax extension. And then there’s the...”

As her assistant went over the day’s notes, Luna’s mind was already piecing things together. *This does not sound too difficult. A few simple declarations, a few judgments here and there, and the day is done. I shall be back to work in no time. I just have to handle this like Celestia, make sure everypony is comfortable, and I might even walk out of here with everypony loving me.*

“...And that’s just about everypony we have so far.”

Luna snapped out of her thoughts and quickly turned her attention back to Ruby. "Thank you very much, Miss Dream. Now, can you please assume your position? I would like to get this over with as quickly as possible." Ruby bowed in acknowledgment and walked out the door. From the throne, Luna could see her take a position to the side of the doorway and start unfurling a scroll before the doors closed.

Luna gave the best smile she could at a time like this. *Think positive, Luna. You can do this. You can show these ponies there is nothing to worry about.*

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Celestia hugged the bush, her eyes locked on her target. The guard was a relatively recent addition to the palace's security detail, his coat's original color still peeking out from beneath the white dye the guards used to maintain their identical appearances. His attention was turned away from the princess, instead focusing on a nearby door in the palace walls leading to the city's sewer system. The palace's age made updating the entire structure rather difficult, and more than once an industrious thief, burglar, enemy invader, spy, filly scout troop, and paparazzi had tried to sneak inside using the old tunnels.

Fortunately, only a few ponies still knew of the passageway, and fewer still were dumb enough to try and arouse their princess' wrath. Because of this, the post was used as a training ground for new recruits, something to cut their teeth on before moving onto the more pressing areas of the palace.

Today, however, Celestia had a different reason to be out here. It was almost lunchtime, and she wanted something sweet. Her target was inside a pouch hanging around the guard's neck, the sweet aroma striking her nose from even back here. She slowly snuck closer and closer to the clueless pegasus, her light hooves barely making any noise on the soft grass. Finally, when she was but a few feet behind him, she tapped him on the left rear ankle.

The pegasus snapped out of his dozing and spun about, wings extended and ready for a beatdown. Instead, he found himself staring at a cute, white-coated, rainbow-haired filly. The guard couldn't help but grunt in surprise. "Pr-Princess Celestia?"

Celestia quickly flashed a friendly smile. It was the same kind that frequently accompanied a knife in the back. "Hello, good sir. I was wishing to inquire about the contents of your bag."

"This old thing?" he said. "It's just some cookies. My wife baked some for me this morning." He shifted his eyes to and fro, as if some unseen and horrible force was about to jump him for admitting such a thing. "I...I apologize if it's not allowed."

Celestia continued smiling. *His resolve is weakening. Time to go in for the kill.* "I see. Well, do you suppose you could share one or two with little ol' me?" She fluttered her eyes and twisted



her mouth into a cute little pout, amplifying her sheer adorability into a WMD.

The poor pegasus could feel his will faltering. “B-But princess, these cookies...”

Crocodile tears formed in both of Celestia’s eyelids. “Wh-Wh-What are you saying? Are your cookies \*sniff\* so special you can’t share them with your princess?”

“No, I didn’t-”

“You’re a mean pony,” Celestia whined. “I’m gonna tell Luna on you!” The princess threw herself onto the ground, throwing the best hissy fit she could muster. She pounded the earth with her front hooves, bucked and kicked with her back, and wailed and screamed.

The guard’s very sense of being crumbled to dust at the sight before him, and he quickly tossed the bag at Celestia’s hooves. “Here, your Majesty. Take as many as you want! Just...please, stop crying!”

Celestia continued sniveling, if only to keep up the ruse, and flipped the bag open. Sure enough, inside were several round, chocolate-chip cookies, all individually wrapped in tissue paper and neatly stacked to avoid crumbling. The sun princess leaned in, grabbed two cookies with her mouth, and quickly ran off. The guard just stared, flabbergasted at what had occurred.

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A group of five ponies unhurriedly walked into the throne room. The three Earth ponies and two unicorns had their heads hung low, peeking up only to confirm that the alicorn sitting on the throne was, in fact, not Celestia. Luna kept up her royal appearance, wearing that same queenly mask and flashy grin her sister always carried in public. Ruby was still stationed outside, keeping things perfectly organized. This left only Luna, the guards, and her subjects in the room.

The five ponies stopped and bowed, following the same traditions as during Celestia’s reign. Luna acknowledged the five’s reverence with a quick nod. “Please, stand and introduce yourselves.”

The small group quickly rose, their eyes still locked on the floor. Finally, one of the Earth ponies spoke. “Your Majesty, we...really don’t want to inconvenience you...”

“We run some of the farms a few miles out of Canterlot,” said another Earth pony. “Most of our produce is sold in the capital’s marketplace.”

Luna nodded. “Very well. And I understand you have some concerns about the city’s water conservation efforts.”

One of the Earth ponies took a step forward. His entire body was shaking with a growing sense of doom. "Um...yes, princess. We understand there's been water shortages, but our farms depend on the runoff from the mountains, and the city is swallowing most of it."

Luna hummed to herself, shifting an appropriate response. "I see. Well, we are scheduled for some rainfall today. I'll speak with the weather teams and see what we can do. Unfortunately, there is not much I can do right now, not until I have a full idea of the city's current water supply." The five ponies nodded in semi-approval, their problem still unsolved. Luna tilted her head slightly and widened her smile, trying to match her sister's sense of charm and grace. The look of horror on the ponies' faces was evidence enough that it wasn't working. "Do not worry. I'm certain a solution can be found quickly. In the meantime, I just ask that you be patient. Now, is there anything else I can help you with?"

The five looked amongst themselves nervously. All five were terrified to say what was *really* on their minds. Luna was ready to dismiss them when one of the unicorn farmers stepped forward. "Y-Your Majesty, I have a question."

"Of course, good sir. How can I help you?"

"Well...we were wondering about the schedule for the next few days."

"You mean the weather? After tonight's storm, it should be clear for the next few days."

The other unicorn spoke next. "Wh-What my friend means is, what are the *daylight* hours tomorrow?"

Luna raised an eyebrow. She could see where this conversation was going, and she really didn't like it. "Daylight hours?"

"You know...how long do we have to harvest before the sun vanishes forever?" asked one of the Earth ponies.

"The more food we have, the better chance we can survive the eternal winter," said another.

"I can't let my coconuts freeze out there!" said one of the unicorns. The others just...kind of looked at him, their brains unable to comprehend the imagery he just suggested. The unicorn, for his part, just shrugged at their confusion. "What? Do you have any idea how hard it is to grow coconuts in this climate?"

Luna kept up that smile as best she could, even as she wanted to scream out inside. "If you think I am going to just...rip the sun out of the sky or something of the sort, I can assure you that you are mistaken. I am serving in my sister's stead, and I promise I will keep each day's sunrise

and sunset to the posted schedules. Now, is there any other business?"

The five workhorses dared not bring anything else up. They instead chose the safer, saner route; they bowed to Princess Luna, turned about on their hooves, and trotted out of the room single file. The very moment the door closed behind them, Luna dropped her guard. She slumped her shoulders, gritting her teeth as the meeting ran through her mind.

*Okay, so far all the ponies I have seen think I am either incapable of comprehending Equestrian law, or I am an evil monster bent on taking away their sun. Still...the day is young, and I have a lot more ponies to meet. Things will get better.*

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It didn't take Celestia long to find her second stop.

Nestled deep in the gardens, far away from the rest of the royal menagerie, sat the royal aviary. Beneath the glass and steel sat some of the rarest trees and plants known to Equestria, relics from the planet's tumultuous past. And even deeper inside sat one of the most majestic creatures to ever grace Equestria.

Celestia nodded to the guards at the aviary's entrance, cookies still wedged firmly in her mouth. The two pegasi quickly pushed the door open, waiting until their miniaturized monarch was well inside before closing the door and exchanging perplexed glances.

Celestia saw her target almost immediately. Sitting on a lush, green-foliated tree in the cage's center, was the princess' pet bird, Philomena. The phoenix's feathers still glistened and glowed like a raging fire in the sunlight, and even from her low vantage point the princess couldn't help but be stunned by the sheer beauty of it all.

The fire bird paid no heed to the visitor, instead spending its time preening its left wing. Celestia carefully set the cookies on the ground and raised her head towards the treetop. "Philomena! Come down here for a second, please."

The phoenix's head perked up at the sound of her name. Her gaze drifted downwards until she saw the filly staring up at her. Curious, the bird spread its wings and glided downward, landing on a low branch just in front of the foal's face. Its beady eyes looked the pony over, finding something strangely familiar about the apparent stranger.

Celestia giggled at her pet's indecisiveness. "Don't worry, Philomena. It's me, just a little on the small side."

Philomena cooed and cawed in response, the bird's brain trying to figure out the whole spectacle. Celestia just kept on smiling before reaching for the cookies. "I know I haven't been

able to visit you as often as I used to these past few months. Things have just been so busy lately that...half the time I can't even get out of the office before midnight. But look! I brought us some cookies!"

The phoenix turned its attention to the two lumps of bread and chocolate chips. She gave them a quick sniff before cawing in excitement and flying down, grabbing one of the cookies between one of her talons. With a caw of triumph, she began to dig into the treat, pecking off a piece at a time before swallowing it whole. Celestia had no idea how Philomena's digestive system worked, but she had seen her swallow entire three-course meals when hungry enough, and the bird could certainly handle something like chocolate.

Smiling, the princess held her cookie between her hooves and started digging in. "This is good," she said between mouthfuls. "Next time I see that guard, I have to get his wife's recipe. I should probably also throw in a few more bits into his next paycheck."

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Luna's next guest was a green-coated, orange-haired unicorn mare. She carried herself with a demeanor not unlike that of a queen demeaning herself by hanging around the peasantry; an attitude that most top members of the Astronomy Guild shared, unfortunately. Behind her were a large tripod and several sheets of paper, levitating in an energy field.

Luna kept up the fake smile, a new hope burning its way through her very being. The astronomers were among the few ponies that actually cared for her nights, even if they never actually enjoyed them beyond a very professional level. Indeed, they were among the few ponies that had gladly taken Luna back. Her expression was forced, but inside she was cheering for the first good meeting of the day.

The mare stopped and bowed, her equipment still hovering behind her. She quickly stood before Luna could even mouth a word; instead, she unfolded the tripod and set the whole mess neatly down. Once that was done, the mare finally returned her attention to the confused princess. "Um...please introduce yourself," said Luna.

The astronomer cleared her throat. "Your Highness, my name is Starsign, and I am here today to discuss a matter of grave importance to the Equestria Astronomy Guild."

Luna nodded. "Very well."

The mare levitated up the first page of the presentation, showing several very familiar constellations. "As you know, the Equestria Astronomy Guild has devoted its entire existence to the study of the heavens you and your illustrious sister provide us every night." Luna couldn't help but blush a little, even beneath her dark coat. "To do this, we have set up observatories across every corner of the country, recording the very motions of the sun, the moon, and the

stars.”

“I am pleased that you appreciate my work,” said Luna. “But I already know all this. What is it you wanted to address?”

The astronomer floated the page up, revealing an enlarged photograph of a night sky. At the very center sat *Canis Major*, one of Luna’s favorite constellations. “This picture was taken from our Hoofington observatory. Do you notice the problem?”

Luna stepped down from the throne and walked to the photo. A quick scan quickly confirmed her fears. “The topmost star...is too far to the left.” *I was so tired last night, I forgot to double-check my work!*

“Exactly. And that throws the entire constellation’s structure off as well. I’m afraid the guild has to make a formal complaint about your sister’s handling of the night sky.”

Luna turned to the mare, eyebrows raised. “My sister?”

“Well, this is her work, is it not? I swear, the millennia before your return were tumultuous indeed. Her Highness is a fine ruler and can manage the sun and moon well enough, but she never could get a hang of the stars.”

Luna raised a hoof. “Excuse me, but...why do you think my *sister* is responsible?”

The mare turned the page, revealing a heavily-distorted *Lupus Minor*. “This is a copy of one of our records, from roughly one thousand years ago. By all accounts, Princess Celestia mangled every single star’s placement, but this constellation here was considered the worst.”

Another page turn, and the two were looking at a giant happy face made of stars. “This was supposed to be *Orion*, until her Highness managed to somehow turn it into a caricature of our very science. She claimed to be pointing it at the moon, but I find that highly doubtful.” Luna couldn’t help but genuinely grin at the sight, not to mention feel a bit warmer inside.

“And *this* was the biggest affront of all.” Starsign turned to the last page. Luna held back a laugh as she looked at the image. Her sister had moved the stars out of position, wrecking every constellation Luna had designed, so she could spell **KEYSORE SUCKS**. “This occurred after the princess had a falling out with Keysore, one of the founders of the modern astronomy guild. Fortunately, he was ill and couldn’t see the stars that night, or things would have been much worse.”

“This has all been very...illuminating,” said Luna. “If I am understanding you correctly, because *one* star was out of place last night, Celestia is to blame.”

Starsign nodded. "Yes, I'm afraid so. The lady outside, Ruby, told me she is on vacation, so I wish to bring this to your attention. As required by the agreement Princess Celestia signed approximately 517 years ago, we astronomers must report any and all deviations from the norm to prevent any future errors. We cannot allow such novice mistakes to besmirch our pristine heavens. Our night skies must be the very picture of perfection."

Luna cleared her throat. The next sentence was going to be painful. "Starsign...I did last night's sky." Starsign's eyes suddenly dilated into dots. "I was not at my best last night, and I do apologize for making a small mistake, but I fail to see how this meeting was beneficial in the slightest."

"W-W-Well," the mare stammered. She was really not prepared for this. "You see, the heavens are just so beautiful, we hate to see them besmirched in such a way. And after Celestia turned them into her plaything for a thousand years..."

"You have nothing to worry about," Luna sighed.

"And...with the eternal night coming up, we want everything to make a good impression."

Luna felt her right eye and both ears begin twitching. For the third time today, somepony had casually brought up the darkest period of her life, expecting her to be the exact same pony. It was all she could do to keep from repeating the Blueblood incident with Starsign right now. For now, she just limited it to some gritted teeth. "Miss Starsign, I can assure you, I will not make the night last forever anytime soon. As long as ponies are enjoying the sunshine, I will keep Celestia's sun in its proper place. I thank you for your criticism, but I am fully capable of fulfilling my own responsibilities. Now, do you have any more pressing business?"

Starsign quickly shook her head, magicked the pieces of her presentation back into the air, and darted out of the room. Luna slowly returned to her throne, more defeated than ever.

*Alright...two of my appointments went bad. The next one has to be it! This is going to be the best moment of my day!*

The princess closed her eyes, relaxing her mind for her next guests. She could already hear a small cacophony of hooves trot into the room, no doubt belonging to some of the best subjects the princess had. *According to Ruby, these are representatives from Sweet Apple Acres and Carousel Boutique. They sound so...professional. I am certain nothing can go wrong with this audience.*

Filled with renewed confidence, Luna opened her eyes...and saw the same five ponies that had accosted her in the hallway, as well as that contemptible baby dragon.

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Celestia had been out in the garden for hours, and was finally beginning to feel exhausted. Philomena had retreated back to her perch after finishing her cookie, leaving Celestia to wander out of the aviary and back to the garden proper. By now, her once-luxurious coat was covered with grass stains, mud, dirt, bread crumbs, and some rather unsettling assorted messes. Her mane and tail were frizzled and scruffy from all her running about, as were her guards' patience. She had to wrap this up, before one of them finally grew some nerve and sent the filly back to her room "for her own protection."

There was just one more thing she had to do.

Behind the palace, outside the royal hedge maze, sat a recently-replaced statue. Discord, the embodiment of the chaos that had once ruled Equestria, was once again on display, a birdbath held between his outstretched arms. The filly felt a knot of fear return as she saw him, accompanied by long-repressed memories of his mad reign. Her small size wasn't helping things at the moment, either; at this angle, he looked even more like the monster he was.

After a few moments of shuddering, Celestia's nerves calmed enough to talk. "Hello, Discord. Are you enjoying the view? I made sure they put you in the exact same spot as before."

There was obviously no response. Celestia smirked and began circling the statue, giving it the longest, hardest stare she had ever given anything. "I just wanted to see how you were doing this fine day. This fine, peaceful, chaos-free day. I can assure you, it will not be the last for a long, long time."

The princess parked herself at the statue's front. She leaned into a sitting position, turning her head upwards until she was eye-to-eye with the monster. "I lied, Discord. I didn't want to just rub your defeat in your face. I just wanted to let you know how wrong you were. Do you remember that time you burned Roam to the ground, just as we were getting things running again? You told me I would never know what fun was, that I'd be a grumpy old mare forever while Luna got to enjoy herself."

Celestia hopped back on to her hooves, filled with renewed purpose. "I almost believed you. I take Equestria's well-being very seriously. And that's why you had to go, why the Elements of Harmony defeated you not once, but twice. But today was the first real time I've had in centuries to enjoy myself. And with Luna running Equestria, I have all the time in the world to do it. I can attend parties without a mayor pulling me away to discuss corn production, I can wander the gardens without worrying about a thousand other commitments in the next hour, and best of all, I can actually have fun without everypony trying to lecture me about my indecorum."

"In other words," said finished, "Celestia rules, Discord drools! Oh, and..." She clasped her tongue between her teeth and blew a raspberry at the statue. Her thirst for revenge sated, the princess started towards the garden doors, pausing only to stomp in one last mud puddle.

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The throne room was completely silent, the two sides engaging in an informal staring contest. Luna's queenly mask had deteriorated almost completely, leaving her to stare coldly at the ponies before her. The ponies and dragon simply stared back, afraid to break eye contact lest their next breaths contain a healthy dose of moon dust. Even the guards could sense the terrible events that were about to occur.

Finally, Luna spoke. "Guards. Leave the room. *Now*."

The two guards immediately turned to their monarch. Their faces were trembling with fear and confusion. "B-But we must not leave this post! Our orders are--"

"I am a very old, very powerful mare, gentlecolts," said Luna. "And a princess does not reach this position without learning how to protect oneself. Now, I wish to speak with these ponies alone. If I find that any of you were within ten feet of this door, I will personally oversee your termination from the palace staff. *UNDERSTAND?!?*" The guards quickly gave a whimpering nod and bolted out of the room. The minute the door slammed shut, Luna's mental focus returned to the ponies in attendance. "As for you, you have some nerve showing your faces here after what you did."

"Your Highness, we are so sorry about that," whispered Fluttershy. "We wanted to apologize for what we said."

"Twilight explained the whole situation," said Rarity. "And while we are still upset that you lied to us, we can understand why."

"Oh, *can* you?" sneered Luna. "Do you know what I have had to endure these last few hours?" The ponies took a few steps away from the princess. "Is it too much for ponies to just accept that their great and powerful Celestia might, just *might*, want to take a vacation once in her lifetime? Oh no no no, the first thing they think is 'Princess Luna did something to her! Well, we had better enjoy these last few hours of sunlight before Nightmare Moon comes **roaring** right back!'"

The five non-goddess ponies glanced at Spike. The dragon was somewhere been terrified and genuinely guilty. "Y-Your Highness, I...We didn't..."

Luna angrily trotted off the throne and started pacing about the throne room, growing darker and more frustrated by the second. "And that is not the most deplorable part of it! Just this morning the ERS, the same branch of government I founded, thought they had to lecture me like some schoolfoal on some tax law! I can read and interpret Equestria's laws just as well as Celestia, thank you very much!"



"Wait, *you* founded the ERS?!" shouted Dash. Applejack immediately clamped her mouth around the pegasus' tail, just as a precaution.

"And then the farmers! I try to handle the situation just like my sister, and what do they do? They ask me how many hours they have left before I push the sun out of orbit! Do they really think I have no knowledge of how plants grow?"

Once she was sure Rainbow wasn't going to make things worse by actually assaulting the angry moon princess, Applejack spat her friend's tail out of her mouth, coughing a little from the taste of hair in her mouth. "Your Highness...Princess Luna, we didn't mean ta say ya didn't..."

"And those...astronomers!" She hissed the title like it was some kind of curse. "They send their ponies over here to waste my time by badmouthing Celestia's work on Equestria's night. Do they have any idea how hard that job is? You have to get the stars just right, match their positions to the moon's orbit, make sure the moon is in the right phase, and keep it locked in the right trajectory so it does not veer off course and smash into the planet itself! And because I get *one little* star wrong, they feel they have the right to march in here and tell me how to best fulfill my royal duties?!"

"Um...excuse me, Your Highness?" said Rarity. "As a fellow designer, I can assure you I know-"

Luna's rage was quickly reaching critical. She gritted her teeth and turned back to the ponies. "And *yoooo!* You didn't even wait for an explanation before you came rushing in here! And do you really think so low of me that I would willingly trap Celestia like that?"

"Wait a second!" said Pinkie. "You said you did it yourself!"

"It was a joke!" said Luna. She was exasperated from having to state the same fact a million times over two days. "And I only did it because *she* started pranking me first! I never meant any harm. I never wanted to dispose her, even temporarily. And if I had a choice, I would never set a foot on that throne again! How Celestia suffers these fools, I will never know!"

The princess turned her back to the other ponies, focusing her eyes on the overtly fancy chair at the other end. "I tried to make things comfortable, tried to be like Celestia. I only want my temporary rule over the daylight hours to go as smoothly as possible. But...everypony is so worked up over Celestia's disappearance. We all knew this was going to happen, but..."

Silence fell over the throne room. There was not much else that could be said. She had already said far too much. Luna just sat there, eyes closed, waiting for the five to leave so she could finish her venting in private. *Any second now, that door will open, and the ponies will go. No doubt they will take Twilight with them and tell everypony the truth. My life in Equestria is over...*

Her self-pity session came to a sharp, pointy halt as a sharp, pointy claw tapped her back.

Luna's head twirled about at whiplash speeds, causing Spike to hop back in alarm. "Dude...did you teach owls to do that?"

"As a matter of fact, no," said the princess. Her voice was starting to crack from the sheer pressure of it all. "In any case, why are you still here?"

Spike nervously fidgeted with his tail, avoiding eye contact with the princess. He looked back at his circle of friends, all of whom were sharing the same look. "Princess Luna...it's my fault. I read too much into Twilight's letter, and...I kinda told everypony you were evil."

"You...what?"

"I don't know why I thought that was the case. Twilight told me how the Elements of Harmony saved you and everything while I was asleep that night. But...I've never heard of Celestia leaving her post here, even for a day. She's a serious workaholic, even by Twilight standards. I was afraid something had happened to her, and...I blamed you."

"You were not far off," sighed Luna. She rose back to her hooves, turning to fully face the ponies. "Very well. I will accept the dragon's explanation, and will forgive you for your transgression. I just ask that you promise not to mention what happened to Celestia to anyone. I fear they will accept my rule even less if they knew the truth."

"You know what that means, girls?" said Pinkie. Everypony nodded and raised a hoof/claw.

"CROSS MY HEART AND HOPE TO FLY, STICK A CUPCAKE IN MY EYE!"

Luna stared at the sight of the ponies and dragon making the most bizarre swear she had seen since the days of the nomadic herds. When they poked themselves in the eyeball, she finally burst out laughing. The others quickly joined in, and for a few moments, something good had come out of the day's mess.

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Frosty Gaze's thesis was the big break Twilight was looking for.

For all her teacher's coldness and cruelty, his research was impeccable. He had transcribed entire pages from Kuchen's works, including graphs and charts chronicling the relation between the different types of spells at work in his enchantments. There was even a section on desserts, for some reason. It was fascinating. It was breathtaking.

It was also making her head hurt.

The diagrams opened up whole worlds of magic she had never dreamed of before. Kuchen, for

all his evil insanity, had a genius almost equal with Star Swirl the Bearded. The way his spells all interacted with each other was more like a series of building blocks, each reinforcing the other for a stronger whole. Sadly, this made it all the more difficult to think of a counterspell; as the long-dead unicorn's one remaining book had said, attempting to remove the spells in an incorrect or improper manner could cause a serious backlash. *I need something stronger, something that will wipe out the whole thing in one shot.*

That was when she hit the killer paragraph:

*It is also intriguing how Kuchen the Mad's entire spell body resembles those found in old pony tales, in particular those of the so-called "Mare in the Moon." While there's nothing to link Kuchen to cannibalism like in the old legend, his magic made use of illusions, curses, and offensive spells, all designed to cause harm to other ponies. This stands in stark contrast to the traditional theories of magic, most notably those of the legendary "Elements of Harmony" and their effect on modern magic. Were these elements real, it is highly doubtful Kuchen could have succeeded in his dark pursuit of power as he did.*

"That's it!" said Twilight. "Kuchen was using the same kind of magic as Nightmare Moon! That means we might be able to save Princess Celestia the same way we saved Princess Luna! Oh thank you, you mean old stallion! You may have saved us all from the horrors of the Arcanus E Draco!"

*"Anypony that would do something like that to their own sister deserves to be tarred, feathered, and driven out of Equestria! Dethroning her sister, using the Arcanus E Draconus, and lying to everypony? She's the worst pony ever!"*

A terrible thought suddenly entered Twilight's mind. *I never mentioned the Arcanus E Draconus to Pinkie, and I doubt Luna would have told them that much. She's not a unicorn, she's never studied magic, and I know something like this wouldn't interest her.*

*Then...how does she know where the spell came from?*

TO BE CONTINUED...

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