

Chapter Seventy-One—Getting better at that pranking thing

When I got back home the next morning, I was in dire need of a shower. I landed and stood in front of the door for a moment, stretching my aching back. It was not happy about me being in armor for so long. I let myself in and found Shining Armor heading to the door.

He barely spared me a glance before pushing past me to get outside. I closed the door behind him and continued inside, stripping my armor off as I walked in and casually tossing it on the floor to be picked up whenever I felt like it.

Fuck yeah, home ownership. No more Twilight telling me not to leave shit lying around.

I found Cadance in the kitchen, looking rather depressed. The puppy was with her and seemed to be trying to cheer her up or something. Cadance jumped back and let out a startled sound when she saw me. The puppy seemed to grin and walked over to me, jumping up onto one of my legs.

“What?” I asked as I patted the dog’s head.

“Your... your face...” She shook her head quickly. “Sorry, I’m just not used to seeing you looking like a night soldier.” *Oh yeah, I forgot about that.* I left before I could get Luna to turn me back. “What did you do to Shiny?”

“You know, the usual. Just embarrassed him by beating him with around twenty casualties. I also tore out his throat in front of his troops.” I was walking over to the fridge to see if there was anything to eat while I was saying that, the wolf trailing behind me. “I gotta say, that was an easy fight.”

“I can never tell when you’re being serious...”

I pulled my head out of the fridge after finding nothing readily edible. “Oh yeah, he went down with almost no fight at all.” I closed the fridge and leaned back on it. “The game actually ended last night after he was stupid enough to capture Princess Luna. She was not amused. Of course, by that point, I had already snuck into his camp and killed off most of his officers and planted a changeling spy, so the game was over anyway.”

“I see.” She didn’t sound all that amused. I wasn’t surprised, since she was the princess of love or whatever and it was her husband that I was talking about humiliating.

“Anything cool happen here?”

“Not really, no. Can we talk about Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy?”

“No, we can’t. I’m going to go take a shower. I don’t imagine I smell pleasant.” I started to walk out, but she stepped in front of me. I crossed my arms. “Look, I know this love shit is your job. But I suggest you back the fuck away from my life. I know what I’m doing.”

“You obviously don’t, if you can’t see what’s right in front of your face!”

“What, you mean Fluttershy’s crush on me? I’m not blind. I thought I had already dealt with it, but it came back. It won’t be a problem for much longer. Now stand aside.”

“I will when you explain why it won’t be a problem for much longer.”

I shrugged, turned around, and walked over to the back door that was thankfully

connected to the kitchen. She teleported over there and I spun and sprinted out the door to the hallway before she could recover.

Of course, I wasn't wearing my ring, so I got as far as to the staircase before she grabbed me with magic. "That's cheating!" The puppy whined, sensing my unpleased mood.

"Playing fair is reserved for when I'm playing, Navarone," she answered as she dragged me back to the kitchen. "Something you apparently know much about, if what Shining Armor said is true. So what did you mean by it not being a problem? Are you and Rainbow Dash going to start dating or something?"

"Dash is a lesbian, so no. If I tell you this, you have to swear to tell no one else either directly or indirectly."

"Nav, I would never tell anypony your secrets."

"That is not a swear, Cadance."

She rolled her eyes. "You sound just like Celestia. Fine, I swear."

"I'm leaving Equestria in less than a year and I might not ever come back."

And there's the gasp. But she actually took a moment to consider it before nodding and saying, "I suppose I understand. But why can't I tell anypony?"

"Because if anyone knows, they'll try to get me to stay and that would just get annoying. I *will* leave. The only thing that isn't decided yet is if I come back. Now put me down. I need a shower."

"Not just yet. What about Fluttershy? You know she has feelings for you. Why would you throw that away, even after what you've been through?"

"Just because she feels for me doesn't mean I do for her. Besides, I think the only reason she wants me is because she sees me and thinks I'm hurt and wants to help heal me. That isn't the kind of relationship I want to be in."

She put me down. "I'll talk to her and try to dissuade her from you, then. Maybe I can spare at least one heart from you."

I nodded. "Thank you. I do not handle these things well." Understatement of the year. "I'm going to go take a shower. If you ever find out that anyone else has a crush on me, please do your best to extinguish it."

She sighed, looking away. "Navarone, I want to *foster* love, not kill it. I do this because you are my friend and because I don't want to hurt Fluttershy. I will try not to make a habit of it."

I shrugged. "Whatever. I'm gonna go take a shower."

She mumbled, "Why do I put up with this?" as I walked back out. That's a fair question, honestly. Thankfully, the dog didn't try to follow me out. I assumed he knew what a shower was.

When I got out of the shower and back downstairs, I found that all of the armor I had so carefully strewn about was gone. Before I could ask where it went, the naga entered the house, slamming the door shut. When he saw me, he grinned.

"Human, I need your assistance with something."

“What with?”

He held up a bouquet of lightly photoluminescent flowers that seemed somewhat wilted. “I have an admirer that I need to get rid of.”

“Dude, it’s a giant fucking squid. Just stay away from the lake, problem solved.”

He scowled. “Human, that thing is evil. I caught it trying to sneak into the fortress today. I quickly had the gate shut before it could get in. It threw these over the wall.” He dropped the flowers to the floor in disgust.

I was still trying to take that in. “It... walked here? Are you sure you aren’t still drunk?”

“The bug saw it as well.”

“Huh. Did you try telling it that you weren’t interested?”

“...I did not. I assumed running away from it and slamming the gate in its face would be enough.”

“Well, let’s go tell him, then. I’ll stand back so if he goes crazy and drags you to the bottom to rape you, I won’t get caught.”

“Yes, that makes me feel so much better.” I think that’s the first time I’ve ever heard a naga try sarcasm. “Maybe if I tell it that I am married with children, it will leave me alone.”

I shook my head. “No. Tell it that you aren’t interested at all. Don’t mention your wife or kids. If it’s smart, it might think that you aren’t interested because of your wife and kids, and that he needs to get you away from them.”

He groaned. “Relationships outside of the clan are so strange. Do things like this actually happen?”

“Don’t know. Let’s just go before Cadance shows up and uses her magic to send it straight to shit.”

He looked behind me down the hall to the kitchen. I turned that way and saw shadows looming ominously. “That would be a good idea, human.” He led the way to the gate that was still closed. Instead of getting it opened, he pulled himself up to a tall height, turned his tail in a corkscrew, and propelled himself over the wall in what was probably one of the most terrifying things I had seen in a while.

I flew over the wall and followed him as he slithered toward the lake. “Cain, if this does not work, we are going to be eating squid tonight.”

“I never was a fan of calamari...”

“I have never had it.” *I wouldn’t be so sure about that.* “It looks disgusting and rubbery, but I would not let it go to waste.”

“Well, here’s hoping it doesn’t come to that. I for one don’t want to eat that shit.”

And we were about at the moment of truth, now; we could see the lake where we were. “Are you sure about this?” he asked as we stopped.

“Absolutely.” *Not at all.* “If he drags you in, I’ll be sure to go and get help.”

“Your bravery brings tears to my eyes. I will be back soon, Cain. Either with this squid’s head or alone.”

I crossed my arms and settled in to wait while the naga inched toward the lake. Soon enough, he was standing right in front of it. I saw a dark blemish in the water before the squid surfaced. Its eyes widened when it saw the naga and all of its legs that were above water spread apart, presumably for a hug.

I couldn't hear what the naga was saying, but it looked like it was having an effect on the squid. Soon, its legs were pulled back in and I could tell it was quivering. Two of the legs went to its eyes and I saw crocodile tears begin to fall into the lake. After a few more words were said at it, the naga turned around and quickly moved back my way. I could hear distraught noises coming from the squid and it bawled its eyes out.

"Let's go, Cain," the naga quietly said. "Quickly. I do not want to be seen near this thing."

I was looking back at it. "Shit dude, you broke its heart."

"I do not care. Let us go." I shrugged and began following him back home.

"So what did you tell it, anyway?"

"I called it a hideous beast and that if I ever saw it again, I would murder it."

"...Huh." *Well, at least there's someone out there that cares less about hurting people than I do.*

"You do not sound like you approve, Cain."

"Oh, it got the job done. But it was needlessly mean. You could have at least tried being nicer."

"I will remember that the next time I wake up coiled with a monster. Since I am never touching alcohol again, I do not think that will be a problem."

"Well, whatever." Not like it mattered. I mean, even if the squid did try to attack my house, I'm pretty sure we could take him down. Still, I imagined that it was lonely in that lake.

"So why are your wings different?"

"I just got back from a competition. I was helping the night guards, and I needed to match. I forgot to get turned back before I left."

"I assume you won?"

"Completely dominated. With the mix of your training and my human knowledge, the enemy fell quickly. The games usually last a week or longer. I ended them in two days."

"It is good to see what I am teaching you is working, though I am hardly close to finished. I will make a naga warrior out of you if it kills you."

"I think I would give up long before the point of it killing me. Trust me though, I know what good training will do. I've been almost killed too many times."

"Good, then that means you won't mind training today."

"Need to find my armor first. I don't know where it went."

"The bug took it. I was wondering why she was cleaning up after you when the squid showed up."

I don't guess they have servants. "Then I'll clean it and we can start training again. Easy

enough.”

Half a month later, I got a crazy looking purple unicorn visitor. I let Twilight in and sat her down in my living room, since I knew it wasn’t her heat cycle. “Nav, do you remember when you said you’d help me prank Princess Celestia?”

“Can’t say that I do,” I answered, sitting down and leaning back on my leathery wings. I hadn’t been anywhere near Ponyville in two weeks because of how I looked, which made both the naga and the puppy ecstatic. *I really need to name that dog...*

“You know, during Cadance’s wedding?”

I shook my head. “I don’t remember much of anything that week. I know a lot of important stuff happened, but I can’t for the life of me remember them. I occasionally have to read over my journal to remind myself that week even happened.”

“Oh... Well, you promised to help me prank the princess.”

“Yeah, I could see that happening. That was over a year ago, though. Why is this just now being brought up?”

“Navarone, you do not get revenge for rape and attempted murder in a simple mindless prank. This took a year of planning and setting up the stage. I’m just missing two pieces, now. I need you to get me to Princess Luna, and if she agrees, I need you to make sure Celestia is very deeply asleep one night.”

“Easy enough. So what’s the prank?”

She shook her head. “I can’t tell you. Sorry Nav, but the fewer ponies that are aware of what’s happening, the more effective it will be. It’ll be just me and Luna. And if you ask her, it’ll ruin the entire thing. I need you to pretend this conversation never happened.”

“Eh, I’ve done weirder. I have an easy excuse for visiting Luna, too. When do you want to do this?”

“Tonight.”

“Well shit, thanks for the fucking heads up.” It was already three in the afternoon. “We leaving now or what?”

“Sorry for not being able to tell you sooner, Nav, but I’ve been busy keeping the library in order around whatever’s happening in there. That little ghost thinks it’s getting the better of me... IT’S NOT!”

Yeah, she’s nutters. “Let me just grab my sword and we can go. I think my train pass allows a single guest, if you don’t have a ticket yet.”

“Oh no, we’re not going by train. I took the liberty of sending Princess Luna a letter saying you wanted to see her tonight. The chariot is already outside.”

“...What if I had said no?” She shrugged. “Well, I need to go tell Taya and Cadance where I’m going. I also need to make sure the dog is fed, because I probably won’t get back until tomorrow morning.”

“How exactly are you going to make sure she stays asleep, again?”

I just grinned.

The two night guards pulling the chariot were leery about allowing Twilight to get on, but they weren't about to tell me no. Not after helping them curb stomp Shining Armor, at least.

"So if we're going to see Luna, why are we going so early?" I asked.

"Because we aren't going there immediately. I have some other small things I need to do in the castle first."

I sighed and muttered, "Don't know why you need me for this anyway..."

"Because the princesses trust you, though Celestia only knows why." Those little curse things make less sense when you're talking about the princess in question. "Luna might deign to see me, but she would never listen to much of what I have to say without you there to support me."

"But I don't know what you're trying to say."

"Nav, just you being there and asking her to hear me out will probably be enough." I just shrugged, since I didn't really care.

Twilight left me at the chariot pool, saying she had some arrangements to make and something to draw. I had no idea what she meant by that but I also didn't really care. Since I didn't want Celestia to know I was there just yet, I went to the library and read one of the few books I hadn't touched yet.

Twilight found me just as the sun was setting. "Are you ready, Nav?"

I shut the book with a clap and put it back on the shelf. "I've only been waiting for hours. How'd you even find me?"

"You aren't wearing your ring. I just used the eavesdropping spell. Now come on, I don't want to keep Princess Luna waiting."

We got there just in time for her to wake up, it seemed. She was walking out of her door as we came down the hall. She lit up when she saw me, smiling happily. Seeing Twilight did little to dampen her grin. I wouldn't be surprised if she assumed we were here for a repeat of the deal I made with her.

"What brings you two here?" she asked, walking our way.

"A question," I answered. "And I need my wings and teeth turned back. Every time Cadance opens her mouth, I consider cutting a piece of her off and eating her. That needs to change."

Her horn lit up and my wings went back to normal and I could feel my fangs receding into my mouth. I ran a tongue over my teeth, happy they were normal again; I kept biting my tongue and the side of my mouth while they were large.

"And what question did you have?" she asked.

Twilight finally spoke up. "Can we go somewhere more private for that, please?"

Luna turned to look at the guards that formed up behind her as soon as she walked out her

door. "I suppose." We followed her to her room, Twilight using her magic to shut the door behind us. "So what is this about?" Luna asked, giving the two of us some interesting half-lidded eyes.

Twilight answered with a grin, "Pranking Celestia."

Luna's look changed from sexy to confused. "Oh. That's... Well, I suppose that's more interesting, at least. What is the occasion?"

Twilight and I answered at the same time, "Revenge." *She has been spending too much time around me.* I continued, "Since it was Celestia's fault that Twilight raped and then almost murdered me at the wedding, and since Celestia has done so much bullshit to the both of us, we figured we could get her back. Twilight has done most of the work. We just need your help to put some of the final pieces together."

"...And what pieces are those?" she asked.

"Absolutely no clue. Twilight?"

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Nav, you go talk to Celestia. Do whatever you need to do to make sure she won't wake up easily tonight."

"Easy enough. I'll see you two later, then."

I heard Luna sighing as I left, closing the door behind me. I started walking away, but one of the guards stopped me. "My son loved the autograph, sir," she said, saluting.

"I bet he loved that you got home about a week early even more."

She grinned. "Yes sir. He enjoyed the tale of how you scared the day guard with those teeth of yours, too."

"I'm not certain that's a good thing. I had chunks of squirrel in my teeth for days. Anyway, I need to go talk to the other princess. Keep up the good work, troopers." They both saluted as I left to go find sunbutt.

Since I knew where she was, it wasn't that hard to find her. I walked into her private dining hall without being challenged. She looked up, expecting Luna. She grinned when she saw me instead. "Hello, Navarone. I didn't know you were here."

"Yeah. I'm stressed and need something to fuck. You interested?"

She nodded. "Meet me in my bed chamber. As soon as I finish changing the court over for Luna, I will meet you there."

"Awesome. See you soon, sunbutt." She rolled her eyes at the name, but let me leave without calling me out on it.

It was looking to be a good night. Twilight and I get our revenge, Luna gets to fuck with Celestia, and I get laid. Everybody wins.

I don't know what Celestia's obsession is with putting me to sleep after we fuck. Normally when she does, I wake up cuddling her. This time she was holding onto me. I tried prying her legs away from me with no success.

Since that didn't work, I managed to twist around in her grasp and gently kissed her

awake. Her eyes fluttered open and she took a moment to realize what was happening before trying to return the kiss. By that time, I already pulled back. "Can you let me go?"

"Do I have to?"

"Unless you want to go again, yes."

She looked extremely excited about the idea and I readied myself for yet another fucking, but she sighed and let me go. "I... can't. You need to go back to Ponyville, Nav."

I shrugged and pulled myself out of bed. "Alright. If you want any more action, just let me know. Last night was a lot of fun." Though I wonder just what the hell Twilight did. I don't suppose it mattered, at least not for me. I walked around and started gathering clothes as Celestia wearily sat up. She somewhat creepily watched me get dressed.

"Nav, when was the last time you spoke to Luna?"

"Last night, before I spoke to you. Why?"

"Was she behaving strangely?"

"Not really. Has she been?"

She nodded. "A little, yes. If she comes to you and seems paranoid, don't pay any mind to what she says. I think I know the problem and I will confront her about it today."

"Celestia, I'm her knight. I may not like her anymore, but it's my job to make sure she's okay." She didn't seem that happy when I said I didn't like Luna, but she could get over it. "Do you want me to talk to her instead?"

"Navarone, I am her sister. I think that trumps your knight status. If I am correct, she needs to be left alone for a little while. I will do my best to make sure she does not disturb you. If she does try bothering you, please let me know."

"Whatever. If you need my help with her, just let me know."

"I will, Nav. I think I will be fine, though."

"Meh." I finally got fully dressed. "As always, you make a fine booty call, Celestia. I will see you the next time any of us gets stressed, I suppose."

Another one of her eyes twitched. "Before you go, can I have one last hug?"

I shrugged. "Sure." She was still lazily sitting up in bed, so it wasn't that hard to lean in and give her one. I felt her forelegs and wings pull me in tightly. After an uncomfortably long hug, she let me go. "See you later, Celestia."

"Bye, Nav..." She sounded rather depressed to see me go. I casually flung open her window and let myself out, flying back to Ponyville.

My first stop was Twilight's library. I landed in front of it and let myself inside. I heard Spike cooking breakfast in the kitchen and saw Twilight using magic to push books into their proper places.

"Twilight, what did you do to Celestia last night?"

"Why, was she acting strange this morning?" She turned and I saw that she had a rather manic look on her face.

"...No? But you had to have done something to her if you needed my help to make sure

she slept heavily.”

She just grinned, some of the mania going away. “Don’t you worry about a thing, Nav. It’s in motion now. Just avoid Canterlot if you can.”

I shrugged. “That won’t be too hard. Celestia asked me to avoid Luna and I’ve been doing so anyway, so I don’t really have any reason to go to that place for a while.”

“Was what happened really that bad?”

“Yes. Have you been in contact with Shining Armor recently? The last time he visited Cadance was right after the war games.”

“I haven’t. I did, however, see the records for this year’s game. I had to have them triple checked before I admitted to myself they were right. Navarone, how was it possible that your team only had twenty casualties?”

“I know more about war and fighting than just about any pony alive. Simple as that. I’ve been wanting to talk to Shiny about training his troops to not lose, but if he’s going to be a sore loser, I can’t. He also needs to visit Cadance. The last time he was there, he said something that upset her, I think.”

“That isn’t like him...”

“Twilight, he was probably really pissed. I tore out his throat with my teeth in front of his troops.”

“... You what?”

I waved a hand. “Not important. If you see him, tell him to come by. Even if he doesn’t want to talk to me, he needs to talk to Cadance.”

“No, what was that part about you using your teeth to tear out his throat?”

I rolled my eyes. “During the war game, he made the incredibly stupid decision of using his overpowered shield to capture Luna. When I rescued her, she told me to use my fangs to rip out his throat. I did. Now, I’m heading back home. I’ll see you later, Twilight. Tell your ghost that I politely asked it to stop fucking with you. I doubt it will work, but you never know.”

I actually heard something whispering in my ear at that. It wasn’t any kind of voice I could really hear, though. I could barely tell if it was anything more than wind. Either way, it made me jerk, looking around.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, joining me in examining the room for anything amiss.

“Nothing... Just thought I heard something. I’ll talk to you later, Twilight.”

She nodded and saw me out. I went back out into the summer day wondering at what just happened.

There were a few waves and called greetings as I walked through town. I was Equestria’s golden child, now. I saved the life of royalty and I apparently had the highest honor just about anyone can get. Now I wish I was planning on betraying them or something instead of just leaving. It would make it so much more fun.

That said, I did not want to burn a bridge if I didn’t have to. Having Equestria as a fallback home would be good. Even if I didn’t plan on coming back, just the option to would

make me feel safer.

I got a messenger from Luna that night that asked me to meet her in Canterlot. For some reason, she didn't use a night guard, but instead a random messenger from Canterlot.

Remembering the two warnings I got, I didn't go.

And so things went for another two weeks. I would train, do things with my messed up family, fuck Doppel silly most nights, and then get a message from Luna asking me to come to Canterlot. I had taken to wearing my ring at all times, just in case she really got desperate.

By the third week, I was getting tired of fucking messages. I sent one of my own via Spike to Celestia to get her to tell Luna to fuck off.

That night, I got a visit from Luna herself. "Navarone, I really, *really* need your help," she told me.

I leaned back against the chair I started using while I was building, one of my hands going to where I kept the gun just in case. "You aren't supposed to be out of Canterlot."

"No, *Luna* is not supposed to. I am not Luna."

I looked her over. "So you're a changeling."

"Navarone, Luna did... something. I woke up in her body and I think she's in mine."

"...Luna, go home."

She stomped a hoof down. "How can I convince you I'm really Celestia, then?"

"You can't. I write everything in my journals and you have been reading my journals."

She huffed. "Even when I turned you into a baby?"

"It twinged to write down, but I wasn't expecting that one to be read. I suppose I will have to protect my collection better. Look, if you go home now, I won't tell Celestia you were outside of Canterlot."

"Nav, if you'd just take off your ring I could *show* you."

"I'm not letting that horn anywhere near my head. Not after last time, no thank you. Maybe you should try your luck with Twilight. She might be easier to convince."

She lunged at me and knocked me backwards. I ripped the gun out of my pants and jammed it under her chin as she struggled to get to my finger. She stopped as soon as she felt metal there.

"...Navarone, what is that?"

"Do you remember when I told you the different kinds of weapons humans have? Well, I made one of them. If you don't get the fuck away from me, your brains will be decorating my lawn."

"Nav, please! If I can't convince you with what I can show you, then I swear I will never bother you again! I'll never talk to you, never send you a message, never ask you to do a thing. I... I just really need your help."

"That is not the first time you've told me that, Luna. What makes this time any different?"

“Because this time I know how to make oaths magically binding.”

“Get off me and we’ll talk.” She used her wings to propel herself off me. I rolled out of the chair and set it back upright. “Forgive me if I’m not exactly trusting right now. It’s just the last time I let you anywhere near my mind, I got fucking raped and stabbed in the chest.”

“Then can we get this over with? I am very interested in why Luna decided this would be a good way of taking over my power.”

“No. You wait here. I’m going to go get an assurance you won’t do anything I’ll regret.”

She sighed as I went inside, tucking the gun back into my waistline. I wasn’t exactly happy with having something that explodes next to my dick, but I didn’t really have anywhere else to put it.

I quietly pushed open Cadance’s door and let myself in. The baby was sleeping peacefully in a crib next to the bed. Cadance was curled into a ball and twitching.

Until I poked her awake, at least. She blearily sat up, trying to see what woke her up. I whispered, “I need your help with something, Cadance.”

“Can’t it wait until the morning?” she almost silently asked, barely able to make a sound.

“No. According to Luna, this is important.”

She sighed and stretched before rolling out of bed and catching herself as she fell. “Fiiiine.” She followed me back downstairs, muttering darkly. Luna and Cadance seemed somewhat surprised to see each other. “I didn’t think you’d actually be here. You haven’t left Canterlot in ages!”

“This is an emergency. Well Navarone, are you willing to trust me now?”

“Cadance, if this takes longer than five minutes, stab Luna in the face with your horn.”

“...What?”

Luna rolled her eyes. “I am going to show Navarone something. He does not trust me. If I take too long, use your magic to pull him away from me.”

“Oh, that makes sense. Nav, as happy as I am to see you trusting Luna again at all, why are you trusting Luna again at all?”

“Because I’m stupid.” I slid my ring off and said. “Do whatever the fuck you wanted to do.”

Luna sighed and her horn lit up. My eyes jerked open wide as Luna’s spell went through me, showing me memories only Celestia could have, from her perspective. It didn’t take long to end, though.

And when it did, I was able to fit some pieces together. “When did it happen?” I asked her.

“About three weeks ago. I woke up like this.”

“I think I know what happened. Do you know the body swapping spell?”

“...No. I know where I can find it, but the spell book was missing when I went looking.”

Cadance spoke up. “What’s going on?”

“Not important,” I answered. “Go back to bed. I need to wake up Taya.”

“She needs her sleep, though!” Cadance said. “She doesn’t get nearly enough.”

“This can’t wait,” I answered. “The only other people that know the spell are Twilight and Luna, and they’re both in on it.”

Celestia jerked back. “*Twilight* is in on this treason?”

“Nav, Luna is right there.”

I shook my head. “Cadance, go to bed. Yes, Celestia. It’s not treason, though. Just a prank. But this is too far.”

Cadance stomped down a hoof. “That’s not Celestia!”

We both looked at her and said, “Go to bed, Cadance,” at the same time.

Celestia turned back to me. “How is this in any way a prank? Navarone, do you know what she told me? She said I had a recurring problem where I thought I was her! Every few months since I got back from the moon, I had an episode, she said. The goal was to make me think I was insane!”

“WHAT ARE YOU TWO TALKING ABOUT?!” Cadance shouted.

We ignored her. “Well, if you don’t want to fix this immediately, we can get her back,” I said, crossing my arms.

“Nav, she could be ruining my country! It is imperative I regain control.”

“And ruin your chance for revenge? I have a more fun idea.”

Cadance finally walked away, grumbling and muttering. “What did you have in mind?” Celestia asked.

I gave her my most winning grin. “Want to go on a date?”

Of course, it’s hard to just take the night princess on a date without giving someone any kind of warning. Most places are closed at night, after all, and Celestia didn’t know any of Luna’s friends in the city in any of the clubs Luna occasionally visited, so it might blow her cover if we went to one of those.

So instead we went back to Canterlot and waited, continuing to plot ways to make Luna suffer. Assuming, of course, she didn’t just break down as soon as I told her that I decided to give ‘Luna’ another chance.

When Celestia told me that we had to plot somewhere other than her room, I found out the night guards were in on the prank. Or at least, some of them were; Celestia had to tie up her two guards so she could leave without them telling her sister.

So instead we used the center of the maze. Almost no one ever goes in there, especially not at night.

“So how do we tell her?” I asked, leaning against the marble basin near the center of the maze.

“When she wakes up, go to her room and ask her for advice. Tell her you decided to try a relationship with Luna again on the basis that we’d go much slower this time and that there would be almost no magic at all.”

“Easy enough. If she doesn’t cave immediately, what should we do?”

“Go on a date, of course. We just keep progressing as time goes by until she cracks. If she doesn’t break before the Gala, we’ll just use Taya to teach me the spell and I’ll forcefully take my body back.”

“That will take some planning. It requires a magical circle drawn in a certain location. They put it under your bed.”

“I thought you didn’t know anything about the prank?”

“Twilight asked me make sure you were sleeping very deeply one night. Before that, she said she had some preparations to make and something to draw. I assume she drew it under your bed. When I woke up the next day, Luna was in your body and holding onto me.”

“I see. What was this prank even for, that it took such planning?”

“Revenge. I’m not a fan of getting raped and Twilight isn’t a fan of raping people. And neither of us liked it when she tried to murder me. Since both of those were your fault, we decided to get back at you. But this is too far.”

She looked away. “Oh...” Luna’s face is very good at showing shame.

“So, any other ideas to get back at her?”

She took a minute to recover from her period of shame. “Well, we can sit together at breakfast and kiss, to see the reaction on her face.”

“I might hold off on the kissing, but the sitting together works. Remember, we’re pretending to take this slow.”

“Of course. I’m... not exactly certain I know what that entails, but I will try.”

“Dates, for one. I actually had one planned for Luna, before... Well, we could go with that. I got some info about a nice place that’s still open around the time Luna usually wakes up. I still have some nice clothes Rarity made me, if the moths haven’t eaten them.”

She nodded. “And Luna has some nice clothes I can wear as well. When do you want to do this?”

“As far as I can tell, we’ll need to get a reservation a few days in advance. Normally I’d say that it wouldn’t matter because you’re the princess, but this will give us plenty of time to prepare and all that. If Luna gives in before then, we can just cancel the reservation.”

“Very well. Will you make the preparations, or should I?”

“I’ll do it. You just know that if you walked in and asked for a reservation, they would tell you to pick a time. Besides, I’ll be awake and ready to move tomorrow anyway.”

“Good.”

We sat in silence for a few moments.

“So... what now?” I asked.

“Well... This whole thing has been rather stressful for me. And I have been wondering what it’s like as Luna. What do you say, Nav?”

“Doesn’t that seem wrong, though? Using Luna’s body for that, I mean.”

She rolled her eyes. “You can’t tell me she hasn’t been using you, Nav.”

“Actually, she hasn’t. I even offered, when I woke up next to her. I was completely naked and woke her up by kissing her and she still said no. She didn’t seem happy about it, though.”

“Well, that is more restraint than I expected from her. But then, I suppose she knew what would happen if she did take advantage of you and you found out. However, I believe this is one situation in which she brought it upon herself.”

I shrugged. “Whatever. Let’s bang.”

And so we did. It was awesome.

The next morning, Luna found me sitting on one of Celestia’s many clothing drawers. She jerked back when she saw me. “What are you doing here, Nav?” she asked, yawning.

“I need some advice. As you know, Luna has been sending me messengers for the past three weeks. I got tired of it after you didn’t do anything about it and finally came by to talk to her last night.” She seemed to shrink in a little at that. “We got to talking. Long story short, she somehow managed to convince me to go on a date with her.” Her mouth dropped. “I know, I can’t believe it either. The conditions were that almost no magic could be used at all and that we went slowly. I’m already planning one date, but if I’m going to do this again, I’m going to do it right this time. What do you suggest?”

“You... you gave...” She shot out of bed. “I need to talk to my sister immediately.”

I jumped over and grabbed her tail before she could get to the door. “Relax, Celestia. I made it very clear that she has exactly one chance and that if she messes it up, that’s that forever.”

She jerked her tail and I let it go. She changed tactics, saying, “Don’t you remember when I said Luna was acting strange? How do you know this isn’t a symptom?”

“Maybe this is the cause. Maybe she finally realized what she did to me was horrible and she’s been feeling bad about it, expecting some manner of retribution until she was finally able to attempt to make amends. I mean, it could be a terrible idea, but nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

She narrowed her eyes. “Fine.”

I sighed. “Look, I know you wanted some kind of future for us, but Luna acted first. Both times.”

She looked away, sighing. “It is hard to let somepony else be happy when they have what you want.”

“Them’s the breaks. I was hoping you’d have some advice? I’ve never been on a date before. I was planning one for Luna right before it went to hell, but planning for it doesn’t mean much.”

“...What were you planning?”

“A dinner—well, breakfast for her—at Ethereal Cuisine followed by a hopefully romantic walk under her night. That’s what I was planning on doing here.”

She looked away, saying, “I thought you wanted to take things slow.” She sounded on the

verge of tears.

“That’s what I need help with. I don’t know how to take things slowly. That was the only relationship I’ve ever been in, and even then, it was hardly anything but sex with a promise of something more eventually. Based on how it went, I’m pretty sure we both did a number of things wrong.” Mostly her, of course. “That’s why I’m trying to get advice.”

“I’m afraid I can’t help you, Navarone. I have... very little experience with that myself.”

“Ah well. Maybe I can get someone else, then. You mind if I join you for breakfast? I wouldn’t mind seeing Luna again before I make reservations.”

“...I’m not hungry. Tell her I won’t be joining her for breakfast today, but that I do want to see her before she goes to bed.”

“Easy enough. I’ll see you later, sunbutt.”

She didn’t say a word as I left. I smiled and whistled a song as I walked down to their dining hall. Celestia looked up as I walked in and noticed my mood. “Did she give in already?” she asked.

“Nope. Got her feeling bad enough to not be hungry, though.” I joined her at the table. “She said she wanted to talk to you before you went to bed. I wouldn’t be surprised if she cracked then. We are officially taking it slowly, so if you need, I can come back during breakfast or something and we can make out in front of her.”

She smiled darkly. “Yes, I would like that. Assuming she doesn’t give in, of course.”

“Of course.” I grabbed a goblet of milk, set out for Celestia. “To winning,” I said, holding it up.

She gently tapped it with a glass full of something dark. “To winning,” she answered with a smile.

Before I left Canterlot, I stopped by the fancy restaurant and got a reservation. We would be able to dine in a week. Thankfully, the ponies haven’t perfected the art of making people wait years for an exclusive place.

Right before night fell, I got a messenger from ‘Luna.’ With that messenger was a chariot. I shrugged and hopped on, letting them take me to Canterlot.

After tipping the private chariot drivers, I met Luna in the palace gardens, as the message had said. “Ah, Nav! I was hoping the messengers would be able to find you.”

Flo hissed in my mind. “Something’s wrong!”

I got on my guard, but didn’t say anything just yet. “My house is pretty noticeable, Celestia. What do you need?”

“We’re going to be bothering Luna during dinner.”

Flo hummed. “That’s Luna, Navarone. The real one.”

I opened my mouth to say something, but got an idea. An awful idea. A wonderful, awful idea. “Sure. Shall we?” *We need to be certain, Flo.*

I knew she nodded as she said, “Yes, but if you go through with what you’re thinking, bad things might happen. You know what this might drive her to.”

Think it’s worth it?

“If you want to crush her, yes. But that’s just cruel, Nav.”

While my inner monologue was going, Luna and I were walking to dinner. She was explaining how ‘Luna’ had been so supportive of ‘Celestia’ going on a date with me. Flo seemed to grow more and more certain with every word that this was the real Luna, though I’m not certain how she knew.

When we got to the dinner hall, Celestia casually greeted me as Luna and I sat close to each other. We did some silly little things lovers do, though it felt wrong for me to do them with the plan I had forming in my mind.

As soon as dinner was over, I excused myself away from Luna’s presence to use the bathroom and then go home, which was my final proof that it actually wasn’t Celestia I was dealing with. She would have called me on that lie after the baby incident.

While I was working on some more weapons and whatnot in my yard, I was forming plans on how to make what I was going to do work. I’d need to make sure my house was empty, just in case it backfired. I’d also need a way to get a message to Celestia and to Luna, though I could use Twilight for that.

The week dragged by slowly as I started poking around. I got permission from Applejack to let Cadance and Skyla stay there for a night. I got permission from Twilight to let Taya stay with her. I had to do some... intense negotiating to get her to agree to let Doppel stay as well. I already had a plan for me, the naga, and the wolf since I couldn’t be anywhere near society.

During the nights, I occasionally visited Luna to keep up the impression that I still thought it was her. It was easy enough to keep up the charade, because she had no idea I knew.

And all week, Flo would passive-aggressively try to get me to call off my plan for Luna.

Finally, the day of days came. The date was scheduled at eight. I wrote out two quick notes and trudged through town to Twilight’s house, letting myself in because it was a public library.

I found Spike dusting one of the bookshelves or something. “Yo Spike, I got some messages for Celestia.”

He turned around. “Well, let me see them.” I passed them over and he sent them on their way.

“Thanks, man. You need me for anything before I disappear for a few days?”

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Forest. I got a camping trip planned with the naga. If you can get some time off from Twilight, you’re welcome to come.”

“Ehhhh... I want to, but I’m not certain it would be a good idea. Whatever that problem was we had for those few months, it seems to have disappeared, but Twilight’s still thinking it

might come back. I'd hate for her to be on her own dealing with that evil ghost or whatever it was."

I shrugged. "Suit yourself. We might bring you back some meat, if there's any left."

"Cool. See you later, Nav. Gotta get back to pretending I'm busy so Twilight won't make me do actual work."

And so on I went, back home.

Now, for those of you that haven't figured it out yet, this was my plan: I was going to stand up Princess Luna at the fanciest restaurant in Equestria. One of the notes I sent told Luna to meet me at the restaurant, since we hadn't made any plans yet. The other was a note to Celestia, telling her to wait until nine to open it. It detailed my plan and that I would be hiding in the forest for a few days for Luna to cool off. It also told her that she should be fucking ashamed for betraying me and then using that betrayal to try to set me up with someone I already told her I wanted absolutely nothing to do with.

Yeah, I expected this to go poorly.

I made no sign of the fact that I was leaving until about seven that night. "Cain, are you sure it is wise to be leaving into that forest so late at night?" the naga asked as I put my crossbow over my back.

"Let me put it this way: If we are in this house in two hours, there is a good chance we will not survive the night." I added another dagger to the two already adorning me before throwing my sword belt over my back as well.

"Now when you put it that way... I think we could face whatever would come to kill us. Cain, we are naga. We face our enemy and kill it. We do not run and cower."

"Ames, the enemy coming to murder us will be a very angry night goddess that I'm standing up. You can stay here if you want. The wolf and I are leaving. If there is a building here when I get back, I will be surprised."

"...So how far are we going into the forest, again?"

"Hopefully far enough. You ready?"

His hand went up to the sling I got Rarity to make for his crossbow. "Yes."

I made one last check for my pistol before nodding. "Let's go, then. We have a lot of ground to cover in two hours."

Flo spoke up in what might have been the loudest voice I've heard from her in a long time. "Navarone, why are you doing this? You've given her all week to look forward to this! Please, for your sake and hers, stop this now! You don't have to go on the date. Just send her a message telling her you know. Please! There is no reason to hurt her just to prove a point."

"I assume you have a location in mind, then?" the naga asked as he pushed the button to lower the gate.

"Yeah... I just... Wait here. I forgot something in town." Flo was right, sadly. I really wanted to do this to prove that I wouldn't take kindly to being betrayed or deceived, but I couldn't in good conscience do it. I quickly flew into town while the naga jumped over the wall.

I landed in front of the library and let myself in, even though the sign said closed. “Spike, you in here?”

He poked his head out of the kitchen. “Yeah?”

“Sorry to bother you, but I really need to send another message. You mind if I borrow some paper and ink?”

“Go ahead.” I wrote out a message to Celestia telling her to open the letter I sent her immediately, and to do with that knowledge what she would.

“Send it on, Spike. After this, I’m going out of town for a few days. Whatever response comes, don’t bother trying to find me or catch up with me.”

“What’s going on, Nav?”

“Don’t worry about it. Just send the message. And try to fuck Doppel, if you can; it’d be good for you.” I ran out of the building before he could reply, since I knew if I was still in town when Celestia got that message, bad things might happen. I slipped on my ring as I ran down the road to my house, all my supplies and weapons rattling and bouncing on me.

I fucking hope you’re happy. Flo just answered me with silence.

Soon enough, I got back home to find the naga and the puppy waiting in front of the gate. “Shall we go, Cain?”

“Yeah. And be on your guard. I don’t know how far in you’ve been, but we’re going in farther than I’ve been in a while. Hopefully your scent won’t attract anything that might think you taste good.”

“Navarone, I do not think anything will be foolish enough to try to eat something my size.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that. I’ve seen monsters in there that make you look the size of this wolf.”

He laughed as we quickly moved into the woods. “Cain, you should know by now that monsters have little finesse when they fight. Especially ones so large. They do not fight for food at that size, I imagine. They just have to run it down. They are large, yes, but they do not know how to fight, especially against something that is trained as I am.”

I shrugged, because I really didn’t care. If something like a hydra attacked us, I was planning on finding out how hydra tasted. Although if it was anything like the hydra from legend, I imagine that its body was highly toxic.

An hour into our escape, I called for a short break next to a river. “Let me check my mental layout of the forest. The forest can seep into your mind and get you lost on purpose if you aren’t careful,” I said.

The naga nodded as he moved to the river, setting his crossbow and bolts down on the ground. He shoved his head into the river, presumably for a drink, but his entire body jolted backwards a second later and he let out a shout of surprise.

I jerked my head that way and saw a massive purple familiar river serpent sliding his upper body out of the river. *Oh fuck me.*

In hindsight, that might not have been the best thing to have thought. “Ooh, a new friend!” the insane serpent said, looking over the naga. And then his eyes shifted to me and his grin grew. “And my little ape! It’s wonderful of you to visit me again!”

“Human, what is this thing?” the naga asked.

“That,” I whispered, “is a gay river serpent that tried to rape me a year ago.”

“So kill it?” he quietly asked.

“Not just yet.” Louder, I said, “Hello again. Unfortunately, stopping for us means death, or we would stay and talk. We were just taking a short break before we continued again.”

“I see... You know, I never did catch your name, my tasty little morsel.”

“...Navarone, at your service.”

“At my service, you say? Well well... I am Stephen Magnet, river serpent extraordinaire! And who is that next to you? He’s quite a cutie!”

The naga growled, his hand wrapping around the hilt of his sword. I answered before anything hasty could be done, “That’s a naga. They don’t give their names to outsiders. Also, he’s married. Now, we’ll just be on our way...”

“Oh, leaving so soon? You know, we never did get properly acquainted...”

The naga was slowly drawing his sword at this point. I said, “Hey, if I give you the location of a creature that’s just looking for a loving mate, would you let us pass?”

Stephen stroked at his mustache, thinking. “And how do I know you’re telling the truth?”

I gave him my best winning grin. “I would never stand in the way of two possible lovers.”

“How romantic! I’m listening, Navarone.”

“In a lake outside of Ponyville lies a lovelorn squid, aching after my dear friend here. Their love can never be, so he needs someone to take his mind off the naga. That someone could be you. You’re both aquatic, you’re both...” I almost said flamingly homosexual, but stopped myself at the last instant. “Available,” I said instead. “Who knows? Maybe you’ll find your match in him.”

“Wellll... Okay. It’s worth a look, my cute little ape. And if nothing else, I can visit Mistress Rarity again. But if I don’t find a lovely little squid waiting in the lakes, I’ll track down a monkey to make up for it.”

Run run run, fast as you can... “Deal. Good luck, Magnet.”

“Tata!” He ducked his head under the surface of the lake. We could see his body undulating as he swam downriver.

“Disgusting,” the naga muttered, slamming his sword in its sheath.

I just let out a sigh of relief that I didn’t have to fight a giant serpent. I took a moment to collect my thoughts and form a mental map of where in the Everfree we were. The naga bent back down to the river, slipping his face into the water. The rest of his upper body slowly joined him until it was just his tail outside.

A few minutes later, a fish came flying out of the river and onto shore, flopping around

like mad. The little wolf barked at it before running over and biting it, shaking it around until it wasn't moving anymore. Two more fish joined it, the wolf repeating the process. Then the naga pulled himself out of the water and looked down at its work. "Good enough. Hungry, Cain?"

He grabbed one of the fish and bit into it. Raw. While it still had scales, bones, and organs.

"...I'm good." He shrugged and devoured two fish while the wolf gnawed at the other.

When there was nothing left of the three of them, we followed the river upstream until we got to the base of a very large hill that in most places would be called a mountain. "Now, a word of advice: Do not touch any of the gold or jewels inside this cave," I warned as we walked in.

"...Navarone, where are we?" he asked, his eyes and mine showing us mounds of gleaning treasure.

A long serpentine neck slowly pulled itself from one pile of gold, individual coins and gems falling from the pile with a huge racket. "Hello, Navarone," Reginald's deep voice rumbled. "What brings you to my humble cave?"

"My friend and I are camping," I said. "And I for one do not want to get eaten at night. You mind if we spend the night in your cave and the day outside?"

"As long as neither of you steal, I am fine," he answered before looking at the naga more closely. "You... you smell..." His tongue flicked out in front of the naga for an instant and the dragon's eyes lit up. "You smell of home!" The dragon's body shot out of the pile of treasure, sending gold flying everywhere. "Are you from the naga clan with the room of sapphires?"

Ames nodded. "Yes, dragon. How do you know of it?"

Reginald grinned. "You've never heard the tales of Great Reginald, Defender of the Naga? Of how I held off the minions of Discord in their last assault on the forces of reason?"

The naga looked rather surprised at that. "Surely that isn't *you*! What would the hero of legend be doing aging away in a musty cave?"

"*Musty*? I keep my treasure clean, thank you!" He grinned, though. "I am retired. I spent as long as I could in your clan, but eventually I outgrew the caves there. Then I started spending time with the ponies instead. They were a weak race at the time, with many predators and enemies. After what they had done for us by extinguishing that tyrant, though, I knew I could not let them die off in good conscience. Celestia was leery of my help, but Luna readily welcomed me. Between the two of us, we built a nation for the ponies. I fear I have much to do with the fear of dragons, given that my ferocity in battle was what kept so many of their weaker predators away. But all stars must fade, and when there were no more battles left to fight, my services were no longer needed. I fell into obscurity, Celestia not wanting her ponies to know that they had to be saved by a *dragon*, of all things. The first time in over a thousand years I even left this cave was when Navarone told me that my old friend Luna was looking for her friends." He snorted steam. "That's when I learned my place in the history books was erased. All that time, all those deeds... Remembered only by a few..." We shared a silence for the bullshit of Celestia before he said, "So what has the clan been up to? Navarone told me they had fallen on hard times."

That was an interesting history lesson. It was the naga's turn to speak, though. "Yes, we have. The times of war and battle are long over. The lands of the waste have finally lived up to their name. Many of the monsters that did live there died out over the years. Those few that remain know to leave the sapient races alone for fear of reprisal. Pony railways cover the land, crisscrossing the vast wasteland and bringing a semblance of civilization. With the lack of monsters and predators came the lack of work. There is only so much you can grow in such a harsh land, so we began getting less food as we got less gold. A once-proud mercenary civilization was brought to its stomach by the harshest enemy there is: Peace. We are but a shadow of our former selves. Where once ten thousand strong warriors thrived, now mere hundreds eke out an existence."

The dragon let out a long breath that filled the room with steam. "Such is the way of things," he finally said. "In war, our kind thrives. In peace, our prey reigns. Enough of this depressing talk. Navarone, what adventures have you had in the time since we last spoke?"

I grinned. "I thought you said you had enough of depressing talk. There are few adventures that aren't depressing."

"Speak, or not. I see you have gained a pet, unless that timberwolf is here to challenge me."

I looked down to my wolf, who decided to sit right next to my leg. "Yeah, I got a little pet." I told him that story. He traded me a story.

A few days passed like that. During the day, the naga and I would train. At night, we would tell stories until the naga fell asleep. Honestly, it was awesome. Sadly though, all good things must come to an end.

Not so sadly, Reginald offered to carry the three of us back home. That saved us a few hours of trudging through the woods and possibly running into something that would eat us. He dropped us off right outside the gate of my house and took off again before anyone from the town had a chance of calling the guards.

"Well," the naga said, "it seems you still have a house."

"Not damaged at all," I answered with a smile. We let ourselves in and I quickly found myself hugged by a happy daughter. "Yes, Taya, we're back. Did we miss anything?"

"Yeah," she answered, her voice muffled by being jammed into me. She pulled back and said, "Spike got a few messages demanding your presence in Canterlot immediately. The first demand came with a letter for you." Her horn lit up and an envelope on a conveniently placed table flew over at me.

I ripped it open and pulled out another envelope with Twilight's name on it and two letters for me. I read the one from Celestia first. 'You did the right thing by telling me, Navarone. Luna would have been devastated, though I admit she was depressed as it was. You're right—it was wrong of us to deceive you like that, and I apologize. Please, give the other letter to Twilight as soon as you can.'

I flipped over to Luna's letter. 'I just wanted a chance to prove I wasn't what you thought I was, that I could be a good special somepony. Was that really too much to ask?'

"Good news?" the naga asked.

"Not really," I answered. "I'm going into town."

"Daddy, you stink," Taya said.

"Okay. I'm taking a shower and then going into town. Is Cadance here?" She nodded. "Is she mad?" She shook her head. "Good, she doesn't know." I folded my two letters up and jammed them in a pocket. I carried Twilight's letter upstairs and set it on the bed as I hastily undressed and took a very quick shower.

Less than ten minutes later, I was on my way to Twilight's house, Taya following close behind me. I had tried to get her to stay behind, but she was having none of that. "I haven't spent much time with you in days!" she said. Even if it wasn't going to be much time she could spend with me, at least it could be some.

We talked about her studies and my time in the forest while we walked. She seemed to have hit a stone wall of sorts, and was no longer progressing in strength. It was also taking her much longer to learn some of the spells Twilight was trying to teach her. Taya was not the sort to take failure that happily, and did her best to ignore Twilight's teachings on how friendship increases magical strength. She instead poured her time into practicing and reading as many magic texts as she could.

We got to Twilight's house to find... nothing! Or rather, no one. There was a note on the table with Twilight's very well-planned schedule if anyone needed her. And her creepy owl watched our every move until we get back outside, heading to Sugarcube Corner to hopefully catch Twilight.

We found her there with Pinkie, Fluttershy, and Rarity.

Of course, Pinkie was immediately in my face when I walked in the door. "Oooh, hi Nav! Where ya been? I've been trying to find you to tell you that I was planning a party but I couldn't find you so I couldn't tell you and I tried looking everywhere but you weren't anywhere and now here you are! I'm planning a party in a few days and you're going to be there!"

"We'll see." I gently pushed her down and walked around her, allowing Taya access into the shop. Rarity and Fluttershy seemed to be trying to talk Twilight into joining them at the spa, since they were going there soon after they left the shop.

I interrupted their little conversation by giving Twilight her letter. "Who's this from?" she asked.

"The princesses," I answered. "I found it in a letter that was addressed to me."

When she heard it was from them, her eyes lit up and she tore it open, quickly reading it. Her face paled and the light in her eyes disappeared as she gulped. "Well girls... I can't make the spa trip." Her voice sounded nervous and morose. "Nav and I have been summoned to Canterlot. I need to find Spike..."

She jumped out of her chair and ran out of the shop. The three of them turned to me.

Rarity said, “Nav, is everything alright?”

“Fine and dandy,” I answered. “I should go with her. Rarity, do Aloe and Lotus cater to fillies?”

She nodded. “They’ve been known to, yes.”

I tossed her a coin pouch. “Spa’s on me. Taya, go with them.” Taya opened her mouth, but I kept going. “No, you don’t have a choice. Rarity, make sure she gets the deluxe treatment, or whatever is the best for someone her age. If she fights back more than is necessary, let me know. Now, I gotta jet.” I ran out the door before anyone could say a word.

I had no idea where Twilight was, but I did know that when she was in a panic, she didn’t worry about any kind of mess or anyone’s feelings. That in mind, I followed the trail of upset ponies, running as quickly as my legs would take me.

I found Twilight at Applejack’s apple stand, shaking Spike back and forth and babbling. I rolled my eyes, walked over to her, and began scratching her behind the ear.

She calmed down almost immediately, dropping Spike to the ground. He looked up from his perch on the trodden earth and asked, “What’s going on?”

Without stopping on Twilight’s ear, I said, “Go get some paper and write out a quick message to Celestia telling her that Twilight and I are ready for a chariot to Canterlot.”

“But what about the apple stand?”

“I’ll watch it until you get back,” I said. “Go.”

He shrugged and started running to the library. When he was out of sight, I stopped scratching at Twilight’s ear. Her mane immediately frizzled out and she gave me the insane look. “Nav, Celestia knows!”

“I know.”

She curled into a ball on the ground, using a hoof to pet her tail. “She’s gonna be so disappointed and I’m gonna be punished for pranking her and... Oh Celestia, what if she disowns me?!”

“You knew the risks when you decided to prank her.”

“She wasn’t supposed to find out!”

I shrugged and took my place behind the apple stand. With Twilight rocking back and forth on the ground, I didn’t get any patrons.

Spike came running back soon enough. “Letter sent!” he said before noticing Twilight. “So uh... What’s wrong?”

I answered for Twilight, who seemed incapable. “Twilight decided to prank Celestia and she went way too far. Celestia is summoning us to Canterlot because of that.”

“Ooooh... Have fun with that.”

“Yeah, thanks for the support. How do I get Twilight back to the library?”

Spike walked over to her and started poking her. “Twilight, you in there?” Her crazy eyes locked on him and he flinched. “You need to go back to the library, Twilight.”

“It won’t be my library for long,” she said in a crazy voice. “The princess is gonna

disown me and I'll lose everything! You, the library, the books... I'll have to move back in with mom and dad!"

Spike looked up at me. I rolled my eyes and joined him next to her. "Twilight, you are fucking retarded. The princess isn't going to disown you. She's going to give you an Aesop about why what you did was wrong and tell you that if you have any problem with her in the future, to talk them out instead of pranking her. Then the two of you will hug and you'll forget this crazy episode ever happened."

"You don't understand—"

Spike's turn. "He's right, Twilight. Princess Celestia would never do that. You may have made her angry, but you're still her number one student. She isn't going to disown you."

"But—"

"Chariot's here," I said, looking up. "Time to go, Twilight."

She whimpered and curled tighter.

"Spike, grab her back legs." He did. I grabbed her front ones. "On the count of three, we lift her up and put her in the chariot." He nodded. "One, two, three." We lifted her up and tossed her in the back. "We should be back shortly," I told him, stepping into the back of the chariot.

"See you then, Nav," Spike said as he walked back to the apple stand.

One of the guards pulling the chariot looked back at me. "Sir, is she okay?"

"She'll be fine. Let's go." He shrugged and the two of them took off. On the way there, I tried getting Twilight to a more dignified position than huddling on the ground. "What will Celestia think if she sees her prized student like this? I imagine she'll be quite ashamed that the student who faced down Nightmare Moon is huddling on the floor like a filly." That might have been the wrong thing to say. She whimpered and curled tighter.

I sighed and began doing dirty things to her, since I knew that tended to calm her down at least a little. It worked, and she did the roly-poly act of slowly uncurling and twitching her legs around.

When I was done, she was slightly drooling and we were just about to land. I cleaned my hands off and stepped out of the chariot when it hit dirt and stopped. "Twilight, you coming?"

"You bet I did!" She shook herself. "I mean, yes!" A blush crept down her face as she got to her shaky legs and removed herself from the chariot. As we walked past the two guards, they winked at me. I just grinned. Not long after we started walking to the palace entrance, Twilight quietly said, "Nav, if... If Princess Celestia does disown me... You wouldn't leave me, would you?"

"Of course not, Twilight. Not that we'll have to worry about it, though." Although if Celestia did kick her ass to the curb, I could probably scoop her up for my trip around the world. That would be useful.

"Right. Of course..."

We continued in silence up to the throne room. There was no line, so we were let in immediately. Twilight shuffled her way up to the front of the room, looking down the whole

time. I had an encouraging hand on her back. Since Twilight wasn't looking up, Celestia was giving me a look that promised words for later.

When we got close enough, Twilight stopped and fell on her stomach, probably trying to beg forgiveness or something.

"Twilight, rise." She slowly stood up, still not looking at Celestia. "Twilight, if you ever have a problem with me or anything I do, come and tell me. We can talk it out together. Now, while what you did was wrong, you will not be punished for it this time. Just please, in the future, talk to me."

Twilight sniffled and mumbled, "I'm sorry, Princess."

"I forgive you, my dear student."

And that was enough to get Twilight running at Celestia for a hug. I rolled my eyes and crossed my arms, waiting for Twilight's little moment to end. When it did, Twilight took a spot next to Celestia and stood there, beaming. Celestia looked disapprovingly down on me. "And you, Navarone? Would you care to explain yourself?"

"I suppose I could. I realized immediately that you and Luna swapped back. Different mannerisms, not important. I knew you were planning on turning the prank around on *me* instead by making me go on a date with Luna. So I decided to take the initiative and hit you two first."

"I see. And how, exactly, did you expect this to end?"

"Luna would come home pissed and slightly embarrassed that I saw it coming. I expected her to fly to my house and try to hurt me. I had a guilt trip right before I left for the forest and decided to put the prank in your hands."

"Navarone, the point of what we did was not to prank you. It was to show you that Luna is not what you think of her. She *is* capable of love, affection, and being a good special somepony. She wanted to go on a date with you, Navarone. She did not want to prank you."

"Oh."

"Thankfully, you saw that what you were doing was wrong and I was able to tell her what was about to happen. I am glad that your conscience shined through on this matter, though I wish it had happened sooner. Luna was quite looking forward to the date."

"Maybe she should have thought of that before—No, I'm not doing this. Do you need anything else, Celestia?"

"I know you may not like this idea, but would you be willing to talk to Luna and perhaps apologize?"

"No, I would not. I did nothing wrong."

Celestia sighed. "Navarone, sometimes you have to learn to swallow your pride. What you did *was* wrong, even if it was to fight back against the wrong we were doing to you. You doing something cruel to us to make us answer for our cruelty is still cruel."

Flo butted in, the first time I heard her speak since she got me to cancel the prank. "She's right, Nav. It may have been justified, but it was cruel and it probably merits apologizing."

"Be that as it may, I'm not apologizing." That answer was for Celestia and Flo both. I

consider what they were trying to do to me worse than what I was going to do to Luna. If she wants an apology, she can start by giving me one.

Celestia shook her head sadly. "I can't make you. Will you at least talk with her before you leave?"

"Does she want to see me?"

"Well... No."

"Then I'm going home. I will see you later, Celestia."

She just sighed as I walked out. Before the big doors shut behind me, Twilight joined me. Together, we walked back to the chariot pool and rode on home.

When we got back to Ponyville, I was treated with an adorable sight. Taya was all dolled up and beautified and she had the cruelest, most evil glare on her face that I had ever seen.

I grinned when I saw her. "Taya, you look adorable."

She shifted her thousand yard stare of hate to me. "Daddy, this feels terrible."

I feel that I should point out that we were all in the library at the moment. Rarity, who was tittering, Spike, who was trying not to laugh at Taya, Twilight, who was also trying not to laugh, me, and Taya.

"You can clean up when we get home," I said. "We'll walk back in... Well, I guess we can do it now."

Rarity levitated a mostly full bag of bits over my way. "I used my bits, dear," she said. I opened my mouth to demand she keep the bag, but she kept talking, "Consider it my way of saying thank you for getting Stephen Magnet such a loving partner. I spoke with him yesterday and he seems so happy! Although... I have to wonder, just how does that... work?"

"River serpent and squid..." I mused. A few things came to my mind that made me feel uncomfortable. "I don't want to think about it, that's for sure. Thanks for watching Taya for me, Twilight. I hope she and Doppel weren't too problematic."

"They were fine, Nav. I'll see you later." Taya and I began the long walk home.

And I made sure to walk slowly, so Taya could show off her temporary new look. Several passing ponies complimented her on it. Some colts around her age did as well, much to her blushing chagrin.

When we finally got back, she tried to rush to her room only to be stopped by a grinning Cadance. "Taya, you look so cute! What's the occasion?"

She whimpered and looked back at me. I sighed. "Leave her be, Cadance. Taya, you've suffered enough." Taya teleported away, presumably to her room, if the slam I heard upstairs was any indication.

"Geez, what did I miss?" Cadance asked.

"Eh, nothing much. Anything important happen while I was gone?"

"Aside from the letter from Celestia, no. Is Luna still acting really weird?"

"Nah, I think that's cleared up. Has Shining Armor decided to stop sulking yet?"

She nodded. “Yeah. He was just in a really bad mood after what happened with the games. I bet if you set up a meeting, he would be happy to talk to you about training the troops better.”

“I’ll think about it. For now, I just want to relax for a few weeks. It’s been a hectic... well, year.”

“It sure has...”