

My Little Alicorn

A “My Little Pony Friendship Is Magic” fanfiction

By InsertAuthorHere

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Chapter Seven

Luna had lived for thousands of years. Over that time, she had been everything from a little filly to a goddess, a princess, an evil overlord, and finally a princess again. She had enjoyed countless triumphs and suffered numerous hardships, but there were three days in particular she could regard as her worst.

The first was the day Discord almost killed her older sister.

The second was the night she gave in to her jealousy and became Nightmare Moon.

And the third was today.

After Twilight’s friends had finished their audience, she was certain she could easily handle the rest of her subjects and their requests. Unfortunately, she soon learned the first few appointments were the gentle ones. Pony after pony marched into the throne room and demanded that Celestia be released from the sun, or the moon, or wherever else she had shoved her. After all, why else would Celestia, that most wonderful and perfect of ponies, ever leave her post?

The breaking point was after once such meeting with the Orange family from Manehattan. Once the couple had left the chamber, Luna leaned over to one of the guards and whispered, “At least they didn’t bring any pitchforks.”

It’s often said that humor was the first thing a member of the Royal Guard lost. What was less discussed was what went after that: tact. “The guards at the front gate have already confiscated seventy pitchforks, thirty-seven torches, twenty knives, and three apple pies.”

Luna fell totally silent. She had meant it as a joke, something to alleviate the mood a little. Not only had her guards taken her seriously, they had confirmed that some ponies were indeed dumb enough to try and kill a goddess. When the next pony entered the room, Luna didn’t even

bother to raise her head anymore. She ran the rest of the day's court with her eyes closed, mechanically listening and responding to a chorus of ponies all demanding the same thing: to know when Celestia would be back.

By the time Luna left the throne room, she was looking almost every bit as old as she actually was. Hearing her ruler and employer open the doors, Ruby finished her quick conversation with one of the guards and trotted up to her monarch's side. "Your Highness, I need to step out for a few minutes."

"What is it?"

"It's...a personal matter, Your Highness."

In other words, you don't want to be around me when I'm in a bad mood. Considering what she saw earlier today, I can't blame her. "Very well. I won't need you for the next short while. But do not take too long; we have a lot of work to catch up on today."

"Understood, Your Majesty," said Ruby. She turned on her hooves and started cantering out of the palace, breaking into a full gallop once outside the building itself. Luna shook her head at the sight and turned her attention back to her *other* problem: Celestia.

Luna could make out her once-bigger, now littler sister before she even reached the garden doors. Celestia's small, spunky form was recognizable from any angle, at any size. The mud-covered filly in front of her was a new sight, however. *I suppose one of Canterlot's many foals snuck into the palace. Oh well, just a quick lecture, and they ca-*
WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH?!"

The night princess' jaw went slack at the sight of her sister. Celestia was covered from head to hoof in mud and dirt, along with a few more pungent substances. Her mane and tail were both tangled in branches and bird feathers, and had lost much of their wavy consistency. Realizing how terrifying she must look, Celestia flashed her sister a grin, revealing a set of cookie-stained teeth. Luna could barely mouth a response. "Wh-Wh-What happened to you?"

"I...had fun?" Celestia said incredulously. "That was the plan, wasn't it?"

"I said you could play in the garden!" snapped Luna. "I never told you to splatter yourself in filth! Honestly sister, did you just turn off that sensible part of your brain today?"

Celestia gritted her dirty teeth. "For your information, I did have fun. In fact, I had more fun today

than I've had in the last *century*! I'm sorry if my idea of enjoying myself isn't as pomp and pristine as yours, but you have to get with the times already! This is what foals do all over Equestria nowadays. Have you even been reading all those reference books I give you?"

In truth, Luna *had* been reading said books. Unfortunately, she had never taken the time to put them into practice. In fact, the few times she did appear in public since her return, she had either devolved into a quivering mess of stage fright, or reverted to her old way of speaking as a sort of security blanket. Right now, though, was not one of the best times to push her buttons. "I am not going to take advice from a mud-soaked filly."

Before Celestia could give a retort, she found herself being telekinetically hoisted onto Luna's back. The aura of Luna's magic refused to vanish, pinning her to the alicorn's back. Luna whistled, and two mares in maid uniforms dashed to the princess in response. "Ladies, I want you to prepare a bath for our darling Princess Celestia."

Luna's stomps could be heard throughout the palace. Each step she took left a small crack where her hoof had struck, leaving the royal masons and carpenters sobbing at their misfortune. Celestia was still flung across her back, held down by Luna's magic. Her sister's mess was no doubt jumping from one coat to another, but at least it wasn't getting on the ground again.

By the time they reached the bath, Celestia was squirming and struggling against her sister's telekinetic hold. The glistening marble tub was already filled with steaming hot water, while a pair of attendants was ready for their child-like regent's cleansing. The sight of the tub was bad enough; having other ponies in the room was more than Celestia could handle. "Listen, Luna, I can take care of myself!"

"Just like you took care of yourself outside?" said Luna. She started levitating the filly off her back, floating her over the tub. "You had your fun, now you have to pay for it."

Celestia looked down at the mass of water beneath her. At this size, it might as well have been a pond, another reminder of her tiny frame compared to an adult alicorn's. She looked pleadingly at her older sister, putting on her best sad expression and quivering her lips a little. "Pweeeeeeease?!"

Luna tapped her chin, not daring to take her eyes off the filly lest she break free. Celestia's heart burned with renewed hope, until she saw Luna's deadpan face. "Neigh."

The aura around Celestia vanished, and gravity finished its work. Celestia tumbled into the water with a resounding splash. The instant she submerged, several layers of dirt and muck peeled off and spread across the water's surface. One of the attendants immediately went at it with a net, pulling out the loose branches, leaves, and as much muck as she could. When

Celestia reemerged, still soaking but otherwise fine, the other leaped forward and began applying shampoo. The filly struggled and groaned against the two, desperately pushing away in the vain hope of getting Luna to relent.

“Now remember, I want her coat and mane glistening,” Luna laughed. “The guards outside will escort the princess back to her chambers once you’re finished.”

“Understood, your Highness!” the ponies said in perfect unison.

Seeing her sister turn to leave, coupled with the sheer agony and humiliation of having other ponies help clean her, set Celestia off yet again. Her thrashing intensified to a fever pitch, her tiny hooves splashing wave after wave of soapy water out of the tub and onto the tile floor.

“Wait! I can clean myself! I don’t need anypony to do this! I can-”

Luna didn’t turn around. She couldn’t risk letting Celestia see just how much she was grinning. “You’re just a little pony right now, and little ponies need big ponies to take care of them. When you get a little older, I’m sure you’ll be able to do this on your own, but until then just be a good little filly and get cleaned up.”

With her vengeance complete for the moment, the princess resumed walking towards the door, ignoring Celestia’s growing screams. “NO! Don’t leave me here! I’ll...AAGH! Not in the eyes!”

The guards quickly arched back to attention as Luna exited the royal washroom. Celestia’s calls and groans for help echoed through the hall, even after Luna willed the door closed. The two pegasi turned their attention towards their other princess, a look of confusion etched across both ponies. “Gentlecolts, I want you to escort Princess Celestia to her room once she’s finished her bath. Once there, you are to make sure she doesn’t leave her chambers for any reason. Understand?”

“Understood, your Highness,” the guards said in perfect unison. Even their head nods were in sync with each other.

Satisfied that her orders would be followed, the princess started trotting away, wanting to place as much distance between herself and her no doubt angry, vengeful sister. Her attention was returning to the rest of her day. Court had been a disaster, sure, but she knew that was to be expected all along. Even if she hadn’t tried to bring about eternal night twice over, the fact remained that with Celestia gone, everypony was in a blind panic. No pony was going to give her a fair shot.

Well, if I can’t impress them in person, I’ll do it through action! If I can get all of Celestia’s little projects done, I’m sure I’ll be able to win our subjects over!

"Your Highness!"

Luna's attention immediately shifted to the new voice behind her. Twilight Sparkle cantered towards the princess, stopping only when she was right in front of the alicorn. Every tiny little bit of her body was brimming with newfound confidence and glee, something even Luna could sense. "Princess Luna, I think I figured it out!"

Luna raised an eyebrow. "Figured what out?"

"How Kuchen's spell worked!" gasped Twilight.

Luna took pause for a minute, searching her brain for any idea of who this "Kuchen" was. When she finally stumbled upon the answer, she couldn't help but visibly gasp. "You mean, you've been researching the Unicorn himself? I do not think this is a wise course of action, Twilight Sparkle. Some secrets are lost for a reason."

"But it's the only way to find a counterspell. The magic he used was lost five hundred years before his time."

"Lost five hundred years before then...and it's five hundred years later..." As the fancy mathematics clicked along her mental abacus, Luna began to break into a cold sweat. "You mean...he used *my* magic?"

Twilight shook her head. "No, not yours...technically. According to Professor Gaze's thesis on illegal magic, Kuchen managed to tap into the same dark powers you used as Nightmare Moon." The Unicorn nervously scratched her head with one hoof as she pondered what she had just said. "Um...sorry to bring that up."

"You wouldn't be the first today. Please, continue."

Twilight's anxiety calmed enough for her to stop scratching about and get back on topic. "If the magic is the same, we should be able to remove it in the same way: with the Elements of Harmony."

"You mean...you wish to use the Elements on my sister?" Luna asked incredulously.

Twilight nodded in affirmation. "I know it's a rather blunt way to do it, but if the magic is the same, it just might work."

Luna's mind twisted back and forth, putting all the variables in place. Her sister's safety was of the utmost concern, and firing a massive rainbow of light into her wasn't exactly the most pleasant of options. *Nevertheless, Celestia is getting too used to this situation. If something isn't*

done, she might decide she really does want to stay this way. I can't allow her to do that.

Luna closed her eyes and raised her head high, portraying as much of a regal attitude as ever. "Very well. We shall attempt to use the Elements of Harmony. The sooner this situation is resolved, the better."

"I'll run it by the rest of the girls tonight," said Twilight. "We should have the princess back to normal in time for tomorrow." She turned to leave. "Well, I should go tell her the good news."

A sudden pain raced through Twilight's body as something stomped on her tail. She yipped and turned around, her wide eyes locking with a rather upset Luna's. "I am afraid Princess Celestia is bathing right now. It seems she decided that drenching oneself in a multitude of substances is how a princess is supposed to behave."

Twilight shuddered, both from the shooting pain in her tail and from her growing comprehension of what Luna was talking about. "Is this about those toys I left the princess this morning? They were some of Spike's old ones, and I thought..."

"I thought I made my position clear," said Luna. "You were to treat my sister like her adult self, not as a mere foal. Forgive me if I am out of touch with the times, but the last time I checked, grown ponies do not play with toys."

Twilight gulped as Luna released her hoof from the Unicorn's tail. "I remember, but...after what you said about Celestia's foalhood, I thought she could use a little diversion. Besides, I didn't just push them in her face. I left them in there in case she *wanted* to play with them."

"And that's the problem," said Luna. "My sister is in a very delicate state of mind right now. As of right now, we need to keep a tighter leash on that filly. I've already ordered the guards to confine her to her quarters for the time being."

"You WHAT?" gasped Twilight. "Princess, you can't do that! She should be enjoying this time off, not just moping in her room!"

Luna scoffed. "Are you trying to challenge my authority on this? I have known my sister for thousands of years longer than you have even *existed*. I believe I know what's better for her than you do."

Twilight couldn't hold back any longer. Luna's smarminess and self-conceit was insufferable right now. "You didn't see her last night, at least not when I did. She was scared and embarrassed of being a filly again. I wanted to give her an idea of what a modern foalhood was like. That way, she would at least have some good memories of this experience."

Luna's reply was stern. "If you want her to be a sloppy, lazy filly, then it is my duty to stop you."

She is mine to raise as I see fit.”

“*RAISE?* She isn’t going to stay like this for much longer!”

“No, she isn’t! And I would very much appreciate it if you kept her in the right mindset!”

“And I think she should be doing what she wants to do!”

“What she *wants* is to return to normal!”

“And we’ll do that! But in the meantime, she can make up her own mind what she does with her time! She’s a growing filly, and she needs to expand her horizons. And she certainly doesn’t need some bossy pony like you ordering her around all the time!”

“*HOW DARE THOU SPEAKEST TO THY PRINCESS IN SUCH A CRASS MANNER!*”

“Oh, I’m sorry, didst thou forget thy speech lessons, Your Highness?”

“MY SISTER IS MY RESPONSIBILITY! WE SHALL HEAR NO MORE OF THY INSUFFERABLE...”

The two stopped as a glass fell and shattered on the floor. An entire army of onlookers had gathered around the two, drawn by the sight of a pony daring to argue with the former Nightmare Moon. The frazzled ponies managed to give a quick, weak giggle to the crowd before shuffling far, far down the hall.

The two came to a stop inside Celestia’s chambers, the night princess figuring it to be the safest place to continue talking. The awkward scene and long walk had done wonders for each others’ nerves. “Now, what sayeth thou...” Luna paused, reworking her brain back into modern linguistics. “I mean, what were you saying earlier?”

Twilight gulped. “I was saying I thought we should let Celestia have some more freedom. I didn’t mean we should take her out of the palace or show her off to everypony. I just thought she might enjoy some time off.”

“Twilight Sparkle, I’m not objecting to my sister having fun,” said Luna. “I just want her to keep to the right mindset.” The princess leaned in closer to Twilight, their muzzles and horns touching. “And do not dare raise your voice like that to me again, especially around other ponies. I am just as much a princess as your dear Celestia, and it is time you and every other pony in Equestria realizes it.”

Twilight slowly stepped back, trying to keep as much distance between herself and Luna as possible. "I never said you weren't a princess. But Celestia..."

Their conversation came to a grinding halt at the sound of the door opening. The guards from the bath stood at attention, accompanied by a lump of towels that was, apparently, Celestia. "We have delivered Princess Celestia as ordered, Your Highness."

Luna turned to the door. "Thank you. You are dismissed."

The lump of towels slowly shambled into the room, while the two guards quickly closed the door and started back to their post. Once she was in the very center of the room, the disgruntled filly shook the annoying cloths to the floor. In their place was the cleanest filly to ever grace Equestria. Celestia's coat was a bleached white, her mane and tail were combed and tied with little pink ribbons, her hooves were filed and mended, her teeth were brushed until they were like a set of pearls, and her cutie mark was even shinier than before thanks to some makeup.

Twilight smiled. "Princess Celestia, you look beautiful."

"And how was your bath, *little* sister?" said Luna.

Celestia growled at her big meanie of a sister. She quickly started making her way closer to Twilight, just in case Luna got some more ideas. "It was horrible. Those two servants...they prodded every inch of me! I can still feel the brushes tearing into my coat, taking off more dirt than I thought possible! And then they started brushing my mane! I swear, they were trying to pull off my whole scalp! A-A-And then..."

Luna's hoof jumped in front of Celestia's mouth, stopping her complaining. It did little to stop her death glare, however. "It's your fault for making such a mess."

"You didn't have to have others wash me!" Celestia hissed.

Twilight could see where this conversation was headed a mile away. She loudly cleared her throat, ensuring the two would turn their attention back to her. It worked; both alicorns turned back to her, their faces perfect replicas of the ones they wore during yesterday's fights.

"Princess Celestia, I think I've found a way to turn you back to normal."

The Unicorn paused, expecting to be showered with praise from her mentor for her hard work and dedication. Instead, Celestia seemed more downtrodden than anything else, kicking at the ground with one limp leg. "Oh...I see."

"We can use the Elements of Harmony to turn you back to normal," said Twilight. "You see, the magic Kuchen used is the same as Nightmare Moon's, so..."

Twilight stopped as she caught Celestia's deflated expression. "You mean, you found a cure already?"

Luna glowered at Twilight, giving her a silent but epic "I told you so." Twilight looked down at the floor, trying her best to avoid any eye contact with the upset princesses. "A-Anyway, just let me know when you're ready, and we can have you back to normal in no time."

"She's ready right now," said Luna. "Grab the rest of the bearers and..."

Celestia suddenly snapped back to attention. "NO! I am *not* ready! There's still so much I want to do!"

Luna facehoofed at her sister's declaration. "Stuff you want to do?"

Celestia perked herself back into a regal position: back straight, head raised, and eyes looking over who she was talking to. Or in this case, *trying* to look over. "Why, yes. While I was enjoying the fresh air, I found myself thinking about all the things I've never been able to do before without sending everypony into a blind panic. This may be the only opportunity I'll have. I refuse to go back until I've done everything I can."

"You...*REFUSE?*" shouted Luna. "You cannot refuse a direct order from your elder sister! I order you to get ready to..."

Celestia smirked. "What's wrong, Lu-Lu? Is ruling Equestria's daytime too hard for you?"

Luna froze in an instant, choking back on her sister's candy-coated venom. The memories of the day's events crashed back to the forefront, and the princess found herself reliving every painful, agonizing memory of her court, the ERS meeting, Blueblood's threats, and that contemptible sun. "...No, sister. I am not having problems. Tonight, once the daytime business is concluded, you are going back. And that. Is. Final." With that, she stormed out of the room, telekinetically slamming the door so hard one of the hinges popped off.

Celestia and Twilight stared at the broken, sagging door, even as a new workcrew immediately arrived to fix it. Celestia turned back to the still-startled Twilight. "And what about you, Twilight Sparkle? You were the one who showed me how fun this could be. Do you think I should go back right now?"

Twilight was silent for several seconds, mentally weighing the pros and cons. She wanted so bad to keep Celestia happy, but between the incident with her friends and the latest outburst, the right course of action was obvious. "Princess, I wanted you to be happy while we looked for a counterspell. But Princess Luna is downright miserable right now. Would it really be fair to her if you forced her to keep doing your job?"

Celestia pouted. "I did hers for a thousand years."

"And you were wonderful, princess. But that must have been a lot of hard work. Do you really want Luna to go through the same headaches and problems you did, while you get to have fun?"

The filly continued to pout, even as Twilight's words rang true in her ears. *Luna had all the fun as a filly. I never got to enjoy myself without an entourage wondering if I was laughing at their ensuing destruction or fearing I would slay them all for some minor inconvenience. But...Equestria has grown in a thousand years. I can't really expect somepony who just skipped all that time to be able to manage both day and night without problems.*

With a heavy sigh, Celestia stopped moping and turned back to Twilight. "You're right. It was selfish of me to want to keep this going while Luna's having so many problems. Prepare your friends for tonight. And Twilight..."

The princess was upon her student in an instant, warmly nuzzling the surprised Unicorn. "Thank you for a wonderful time."

Twilight smiled and returned the pony hug. "You're very welcome, princess." The two slowly broke apart, still smiling. "Well, I need to talk to my friends. They need to know what's going on."

"That...would be kind of important," said Celestia.

"I was thinking of taking them to Pony Joe's. It's close to the palace, and we really enjoyed it the last time we were all together in Canterlot. Do you want me to bring you anything?"

Celestia shook her head. "No, no. I'm sure your flanks need the calories more than mine. Have fun!"

Twilight gave a giggly nod before trotting to the door. She stopped, listened to make sure nopony else was on the other side, slowly pushed the good half of the door open, and cantered off into the hall. Celestia watched her student with a mixture of pride, love...and envy.

Yes, you need to go back to your friends. Those friends I sent you to find in Ponyville. The ones that'll stay friends with you no matter what. The same ones that helped save the closest thing to a friend I ever had. The same sister who probably now hates me because I'm a fool who didn't know when not to prank somepony...

She was ready to fall back into her depression completely, had she not spied a small toy sitting on her bed. Celestia quickly galloped over and tossed the figure onto her back. "Come on, General Smashemup! We've only got a few hours to avenge Lady Pinkinstuff!"

Luna sauntered her way into Celestia's private offices, half-expecting a massive wall of paperwork to come crashing down at the sound of the door opening. Instead, it was neat, tidy, and impeccably organized. The books on the shelves were sorted both alphabetically and by category, as were the tightly-bound scrolls. A dozen ink wells sat next to a pile of purple pillows, along with several cups filled with rainbow-colored quills. There was still a massive pile of papers, scrolls, and books laying about, but the rest of the room was so relaxingly ordered that it almost made Luna forget just how terrible the day was going.

Then again, it made perfect sense. Celestia almost never used the old room anymore, preferring her old study or the throne room itself for any official business. The office was kept clean and dusted, of course; none of the cleaning staff would dare leave even the most miniscule of dust mites, lest it offend a royal's nostrils. However, over the years of Luna's banishment, her sister had transformed it into a place to store any and all official correspondence still waiting for approval and/or transit.

In laypony's terms, it was a place to dump all her work so she didn't have to be constantly reminded of it.

Luna's horn glowed, levitating a few pillows into the air. Within a few seconds, said cushions were fluffed and laid out on the ground in a straight line. Once her padding was secured, the princess lay herself upon it, stomach-side down, and telekinetically pulled up an eight-hundred page mound of papers. On the top page sat the words, "Equestria National Budget, Abridged Edition." And below, "Approval needed" was stamped in red ink.

Okay, first things first. It's been a thousand years since I finished a budget, but surely it's not that much different from how things used to work. This should not take more than an hour...

Blueblood's estate had been transformed into a fortress. An extra squadron of guards had been posted around the grounds, guarding the main building and any possible entrance or exit from the premises. Only a handful of servants were allowed in and out, and always carefully inspected at each checkpoint. The Captain in charge of the operation had gone so far as to procure a detailed map of the estate from the Canterlot Records Office, detailing every secret passage the imprisoned prince could possibly use to escape.

It was about four hours into the operation that a dusty brown Earth pony walked up to a side gate. His saddlebags were filled with several large brown loaves of bread, still bearing that fresh-from-the-bakery aroma. The two pegasi at the gate gave each other a sideways glance at the stallion skipping his way up the road towards them. He would have gone so far as to plow right through the gate had a pair of razor-sharp wings not appeared before him. "HALT! State

your business!”

The stallion stopped and saluted. “Bread pony, sir! I’m here with the afternoon delivery for the master of the house!” he said in a very thick Trottingham accent.

One of the guards raised an eyebrow. “Bread pony?”

“We’re a new service sir, straight from Trottingham to mighty Canterlot!” The stallion’s exuberance was laudable, even if his accent was thick enough to crush somepony. “Prince Blueblood here, he wanted to give our new bakery a shot!”

The guards were skeptical, but alas were also susceptible to the bread’s wonderful smell. A quick check of the bags, and the stallion was inside. He resumed his merry gait, hopping along the stone path until he reached the kitchen doors. One of the prince’s cooks was waiting at the window, as was expected during such things.

The bread pony flipped up on his front legs, launching the saddlebags through the window and onto a nearby counter. The cook quickly removed the good loafs, shoving them onto the various corners of the pantry. Once that task was done, she reached inside a cupboard under the shelf and pulled out a large, moldy dinner roll. “Would you mind disposing of this for me, please?”

“Sure will, ma’am!” shouted the bread pony. The cook took one last, deep breath and shoved the whole roll into the bag, along with a few bits for the delivery. She then grabbed the strap in her mouth and tossed it onto the waiting stallion’s back. His task for the day completed, he hopped, skipped and jumped his way back to the guards at the gate.

“HALT!” One of the pegasi pointed at the moldy bread. “What is...that?”

“I promised the cook I’d take it to the dustbin for her! Gotta earn a few more bits, after all!”

The guards pawed at the air with their hooves. The horrid smell assaulted all their senses at once; their eyes burned, their taste buds shriveled in fear, their sense of touch went numb, their ears rang in agony, and the less said about their noses, the better. “Fine! Take it out of here...now!”

The guards couldn’t open the gate and kick the pony’s caboose out of there fast enough. The bread pony didn’t seem to notice their relieved sighs when he left. He just kept skipping down the street, turned a corner, and kept going until he reached a sufficiently dark alley to finish his work.

After a quick glance to confirm the coast was clear, the pony stepped into one of Canterlot’s alleyways, right behind a Chewy Pony’s Amusement Center. A roll of his back was enough to send the saddlebags falling to the ground. An additional smash from his hooves broke the bread

completely, revealing the hidden note and two pairs of tickets. After once again assuring the coast's clearness, the pony picked up the note with the backside of one hoof and began reading:

"Princess Luna has ordered my unlawful arrest for speaking out against her most assuredly horrid reign. I will need some leverage if I am to both ensure my release and punish the ponies who ruined my best night ever. Attached are two tickets for a banquet tomorrow night. I want you and one associate to infiltrate the castle during the party and find something I can use against Princess Luna. If successful, I will pay triple your usual fee. –Prince Blueblood of Equestria."

The pony mulled over the assignment even as he was eating the note. Prince Blueblood was not his favorite pony to work for. In fact, the stallion was more like a foppish, annoying brat who threw violent temper tantrums when he didn't get his way. Nonetheless, he was a private investigator, and Blueblood's generous payments kept him out of the gutter.

The fear of discovery long since passed, the pony quickly dropped the obnoxious faked Trottingham accent and switched to his gruff, natural voice. "Guess I need to get fitted for a tux."

"Are ya sure about this, sugahcube?"

At Spike's request, the gang had decided to celebrate their reunion with another trip to Pony Joe's, Twilight's favorite late night stop. Given the circumstances of their last visit, the seven found themselves enjoying the place far more without a trail of destruction behind them. The donut shop itself was still dirty from the lunch rush, but with the exception of the Twilight, Spike, their friends, and Pony Joe himself, was now totally empty.

The six sat around a round white table, half-eaten donuts and quarter-filled coffee mugs before them. The only exception was Pinkie, who was barely visible behind the two dozen glazed confections she was currently turning into a pyramid. By this point, none of the other friends were really paying attention to her antics, especially Twilight. She needed to wait until the others were gone to find out why Pinkie knew things she shouldn't have.

"I know it sounds rather...drastic," said Twilight.

"No, dear, that isn't 'drastic,'" Rarity interjected. "'Drastic' would be like that time I had to use Rainbow Dash as a model." The blue Pegasus yipped as Applejack reflexively stamped on her tail. "What you're suggesting sounds...how do I say this politely..."

"Totally *gack* insane?" grunted Rainbow Dash.

“Yes, that’s it!”

Applejack, satisfied that Dash wasn’t going to leap over the table and tackle Rarity for the not-so-subtle jab at her “brutish ways,” finally lifted her hoof off the other’s tail. The Pegasus grabbed the poor clump of hair between her forehooves and stroked it gently. “I wasn’t gonna do anything.”

“Better safe than sorry,” said Applejack.

“Um...excuse me, Twilight,” said Fluttershy, “but what if something goes wrong? We certainly don’t want to hurt the princess.”

“And we won’t,” said Twilight. “If the magic is the same as Nightmare Moon’s, then only the curse will be broken. Luna was fine when she returned to normal. At worst, all we’ll have to worry about is a temporary loss in power.”

“It won’t work,” Pinkie said, still hidden behind her donut pyramid of power.

Twilight raised an inquisitive brow. “Really? How do you know that?”

Pinkie shrugged, desperate not to drop her masterpiece’s last donut. “I just do, Twilight. You know, Pinkie Sense and all.” Her hooves gently placed the pastry on top of the others, creating the most gluttonous pyramid seen outside of a carriage stop in Bridlesville. The ponies and dragon admired the monument to all things fattening for the whole five seconds it took for Pinkie to swallow it whole, like some sort of all-devouring Elder Pony from on high.

“That’s...nice, Pinkie. Gross, but nice,” said Twilight. “But as I was saying, how did...”

Spike groaned. “Ugh, are we going here again? I thought you gave up on the whole ‘figuring out Pinkie Sense’ thing.”

“Please tell me we ya’ll don’t hafta go huntin’ fer hydras,” moaned Applejack. Fluttershy responded to the memory by squealing and ducking under the table. “Err...sorry ta bring that back up.”

The Unicorn facehoofed. “I am not trying to figure out Pinkie Sense. I got enough broken bones and bee stings the last time I tried that. Pinkie, back at the palace, you said the spell Luna used was from the Arcanus E Draconus. How did you know that?”

“...The Arcany-Eh what now?” said Rainbow Dash.

Twilight sighed. She really didn’t want to get into this, but now it looked like she had no choice. “The Arcanus E Draconus. It’s the spell book that Luna used when she cast her spell. It’s one of

the most illegal, forbidden tomes known to ponydom. It was apparently locked up so tight Luna herself had to steal it.” She turned her attention back to Pinkie. “So...how did you know?”

All eyes turned to the pink pony. Pinkie’s jubilation at her monumental meal eroded into a growing sense of fear. “U-U-Um, you see...” She looked to and fro for a way out, her pink coat slowly darkening from her sweat. Her friends regarded her more with curiosity than malice; even Twilight, the chief accuser, had visibly relaxed at seeing Pinkie’s growing anxiety. Nonetheless, she couldn’t tell them the truth. She wasn’t *allowed* to. No pony in the Pie Clan was allowed to. “I-I read about it in the *Equestria Daily*! Yeah, Mr. and Mrs. Cake were wrapping up some old lemon drops in newspaper, and I saw it on the front page!”

Everypony was silent for several seconds, taking in Pinkie’s obvious lie. Pinkie continued to tremble in the far seat, unsure herself whether the excuse would hold.

“Well, that answers everything!” said Spike.

“Sure does!” added Rainbow Dash.

“I’m so sorry we put you on the spot like that,” said Fluttershy.

A few similar apologies later, and Pinkie was back to her happy, perky self, bouncing around the table without a care in the world. Twilight was the only pony not satisfied with the answer. *Frosty Gaze mentioned the article in the Equestria Daily. But when I mentioned the Arcanus E Draconus to him, he was surprised that it was connected. Given the time it takes to walk from Ponyville to Canterlot, Pinke would have had to read the emergency printing. That means there’s no way she could have read it at Sugarcube Corner! Besides, everypony knows there are never leftover lemon drops, not when there’s a certain sugar-obsessed pony living...*

Out of the corner of her eye, Twilight spied a nearby clock. “Drat! Come on, girls! We need to get back to the palace and get ready!” *We’ll talk later, Pinkie Pie.*

Ruby stood outside Celestia’s office, watching the clock with growing concern. Over the course of the last two hours, her small errand had mutated into a very large, very big one. She could only hope the princess was forgiving; getting fired the same day you got promoted tended to reflect poorly on a résumé.

Princess Luna was still inside the office, obviously hard of work from the rhythmic scratching noises. It was with extreme trepidation that the Pegasus knocked on the door. “Y-Your Majesty?”

No response.

Feeling a little bolder, the attendant pushed the door open. Her hearing immediately regretted it, as the loudest, most offensive scrapping noise the pony had ever heard. Her ears flattened on reflex as she walked into the room itself. The room itself was virtually untouched, save for one thing: the loudly snoring alicorn lying on a pillow bed. Next to the princess was what looked like the budget for the next year, almost completely untouched.

Ruby was ready to start backing out when her hoof scrapped against the floor. Luna's snoring ceased immediately, her eyelids opening like a window curtain. The princess sat up with an alarmed snort. "What? Miss Dream, when did you get here?"

"Umm...just a few seconds ago?"

Luna's head spun towards a nearby alarm clock. Sure enough, an hour had passed since she had first entered the room. "What? I...I could not have slept that long!"

Ruby motioned towards the budget. "Your Highness...is that the National Budget?"

The still very flustered Luna levitated the paperwork towards her face. "Why yes, it is. I was working on it before I..." Her eyes snapped even wider, threatening to devour her whole face. "Before I fell asleep. I fell asleep in the middle of my duties."

Ruby's "assuage the god-princess" mode kicked in immediately. "It's not a big problem, Princess Luna. I know you've been working day and night, and..."

"It's not that simple!" Luna snapped. "I am supposed to be Equestria's ruler, the Princess of the Night! It does not matter how much or how little I sleep, I must always put Equestria's needs before my own! I was supposed to be finalizing the national budget. And instead, I was sleeping!"

"Um, Your Highness..."

"And what if I had slept through the sunset?" Luna's panic grew a thousandfold as she thought of the ramifications. "The sunlight would throw off sleep cycles everywhere! The heat would bake crops and ponies alike! It'll be just as destructive as an eternal night!"

"But...it's still a couple of hours before sunset..."

"How could I have been so irresponsible?" The princess collapsed onto all fours, burying her face in her forelegs. She had already shown too much emotion twice today, and she certainly didn't need to add a third incident to the list. *This was my one chance to show everypony I could rule just as capably as my sister. And what happens? I'm humiliated by one audience after another, almost lose my sister to this curse, and fall asleep when I should be working.*

“Couldn’t you just...ask for help?”

Luna raised her head, her lips formed into a cruel sneer. “From Celestia, I presume? Yes, that would be *wonderful*.” She jumped onto all fours and started pacing around the room, grumbling and groaning at everything she could see. “We can go right back to how it was before. She can be sitting out here, soaking up all the praise she gets from this nanny state she’s formed, while I just languish in the shadows with all the real work!”

Before Ruby could say anything in response, Luna was back at the paperwork. Her eyes were beginning to water from her frustration. “I never wanted to rule Equestria by myself forever. I didn’t even expect everypony to love me. I just wanted to prove I was as good as my sister.”

There was nothing to say to that. Ruby couldn’t find the words to comfort the despairing princess, and even if she could, Luna was in no mood to receive any pity sympathy. The entire room felt darker and heavier as the Princess of the Night slumped back on all fours. The Pegasus was about to leave the room altogether when the door slammed open. The poor red pony yelped and jumped back as one of the Unicorn guards entered the room, a letter firmly placed in his mouth. He looked genuinely surprised to see anypony, much less the princess, actually using the office like an office instead of an oversized sorting tray.

The guard spat the letter on the desk, bowed in apology, and walked out of the room. Once he was gone, all it took was a quick nod from Luna to give the order. Ruby instinctively snatched up the envelope, grabbed a nearby letter opener with her teeth, and started opening it for her princess.

“So, what did they send this time?” muttered Luna. “Threats? Demands for Celestia’s release? A bomb?”

Ruby scanned the letter quickly; she knew Luna didn’t have the patience right now for a formal reading. As its words rang through her mind, she could feel her tension gradually lifting. “It’s from the Canterlot Medical Center.”

Luna rolled her eyes at the name. “Are they trying to bill the palace for all the widespread panic losing Celestia for a day caused?”

“No, it’s actually something better. Apparently, they were hoping you could make an appearance tomorrow.” Luna’s ears perked up. “It’s something about inspecting the recent renovations in the children’s ward.” The ears went flat. “And they were wondering if you would also stay to visit with the patients for a little while after.”

The letter suddenly found itself flying off the table, stopping in front of Luna. Her attendant wasn’t lying; it was indeed a request from one of the local hospitals, asking for her to come by and make a public appearance. “In other words, they want to use me as a public relations stunt.

It sounds like something Celestia would do.”

Something Celestia would do...

A bolt of inspiration struck the princess the moment she reflected on her own words. She hopped back to all fours, her wings half-extended from surprise. “That’s it! Ruby, what is our schedule like tomorrow?”

The Pegasus scrambled for a copy of the next day’s calendar. A quick flip through was enough to find some good news. “Tomorrow morning is open after an eight o’clock meeting with the Canterlot Royal Orchestra. Princess Celestia was hoping they would perform at tomorrow’s function, but...after the Gala incident...”

Luna shuddered at the thought of Blueblood’s crashed party. “Please, say no more. Miss Dream, take a letter.”

Ruby fired a quick salute and went right to work, grabbing a quill with her pastern and pulling out a blank scroll. Seeing her attendant was ready, Luna began to pace about the room in a far more proper, royal manner. “To whom it may concern: I have received your invitation, and will be more than happy to attend this function. Although I am somewhat distressed by the short notice, I am certain I can be at the appointed place at promptly ten o’clock. Please make the necessary arrangements. Signed, Princess Luna.”

Ruby’s quill slid off the last “a” with a flourish, adding to the illusion that the princess herself had written the actual note. Luna’s horn lit up yet again as the scroll folded and sealed itself. The finished document was then slit in front of Ruby’s face. “I want this delivered immediately to the Canterlot Medical Center. Once you’ve finished with that, I want you to start supervising the preparations for tomorrow’s party. I have some other matters to attend to in the meanwhile, and will join you there once I’m finished.”

For the first time in months, Luna actually felt like skipping. The smile she now wore wasn’t that of a beleaguered ruler trying desperately to stay presentable, but instead revealed her genuine glee. The whole day had gone wrong so far, but now there was a glimmer of hope. For the first time since her return, somepony had actually *invited* her to official business. It wasn’t Celestia trying to drag her out of her room again, and she didn’t have to dramatically fly in and crash whatever party was being held. It just felt great to be wanted.

And even better, Twilight Sparkle had finally found a way to reverse the spell. In but a few minutes, Luna’s mistake would be fixed. And once Celestia was an adult again, she would take her old job back, and Luna would go back to just ruling over the night. That darling Celestia would get all the love and admiration that was rightfully due to both sisters, while Luna would be

spoken of in hushed whispers for generations to come. No pony would care that Celestia had spent the last two months taking out her work-related woes on her younger sister, or that said little sister was unable to actually accomplish anything because every pony regarded her as a horrible monster. Nope, she would go right back to being Nightmare Moon Junior while Celestia regained her position as the God-Empress of Ponies.

Luna's hoofs skidded to a halt. She hadn't thought this all through. *I can still do this. I just have to tell Celestia to hold off for a few days. By then, I should at least have enough of a hoofhold that I won't...*

She shook her head, angry at herself for having such thoughts. *No. I was just Celestia's steward in all this. There's far more to being a princess than popularity. Or, for that matter, having any pony actually like you.*

Luna gave a mournful moan at the thought. She knew what she had to do. *Celestia, it's time you came back.*

All six ponies were ready by the time the two princesses entered the throne room. The six bearers of the Elements of Harmony had their respective Elements on, the candlelight dancing off the exquisite gems like a thousand little rays of sunlight. The room itself was almost completely dark, the sun having been blocked by the approaching storm. The dramatic appropriateness was not lost on anyone involved.

Celestia's steps were slow and uneven, while her mind still tried to process a way out of this predicament. *There's still so much I never got to do. I wish I had just a few more days. I haven't had so much fun since...*

"Are you all right, sister?" asked Luna.

Celestia looked up at her sister, forcing a small smile. She had had thousands of years of practice, and was a certifiable master of hiding her real emotions. Granted, her sister knew her better than any pony else, and could easily tell when she was lying her head off, but that was beside the point. "I'm all right."

"Are you...sure you're ready to go back?" *Please say no please say no please say no...*

Celestia frowned. "How ready I may be isn't important. I am a princess, and I have my royal responsibilities to fulfill." *And the most important one to me is seeing you happy...*

Luna nodded. "Spoken like a true princess." *And just when I had something to look forward to...*

Celestia stopped halfway through the hall, about twelve feet from the ponies. The air was cold and solemn as the two parties looked at each other. "Princess, are you ready?" asked Twilight.

Celestia gulped. "R-Ready."

Twilight nodded to the others, and the process began. The jewelry glowed brighter and brighter, each intricate gem glistening with its own hue. The energy resonated off the necklaces like shockwaves, showering the chamber with afterimages of the cutie mark-shaped objects. All six pairs of eyes turned bright white, while an aura of brilliant light shined forth like several small lanterns. The powers finally coalesced into a massive rainbow, which shot to the roof, curved right back down, and struck Celestia dead center.

For all the times she had wielded the Elements, Celestia had never experienced being struck with the power of Harmony itself. Judging from the effects their power had on both her sister and Discord before her, she had expected something fierce and strong, possibly even cruel. Instead, it was warm and nurturing. She couldn't quite decide what it was exactly, but she felt better than she ever had before. It was like raw magical power was being pumped into her soul, or whatever it was she and Luna had.

Celestia felt invigorated as the rainbow continued to spin around her. She stretched out her wings and spread her hooves out, eager to finally be an adult again.

Then she felt a horrible coldness run up her spine. The same feeling that had hit her when Luna first cast the spell returned...

On the other side of the rainbow, Luna was keeping a close eye on the situation. Her eyes were locked on the external, focusing on both the Bearers and the rainbow they had created. At the same time, her horn was glowing with an intense light, her magic feeding her information on Celestia's condition. The princess herself was at the far corner of the room, anxious to see if Twilight's plan would actually work.

On the surface, it seemed that everything was going according to plan. The rainbow's appearance perfectly matched what she had seen over a thousand years ago, when she and her sister defeated Discord and became the nation's formal rulers. And yet, her horn was telling a different story. Celestia's heartbeat, brain activity, and general vitals were not changing. Even worse, the rainbow was taking far too long. It should have broken apart over a minute ago.

Then she felt it. It was like some invisible force had cracked a whip across her back. The layers of enchantments weren't just still there, *they were about to recast the spell by themselves.*

Luna tried to scream out a warning, but the rainbow suddenly exploded in a blast of white light. Her words were drowned out as the entire throne room disappeared into a white void...

TO BE CONTINUED...

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)