

Day 3

The skies were overcast, the sun hot and muggy, and the breeze was blowing just the wrong way. Anypony with any sense would be inside with a bucket of ice trying to think cold thoughts.

Luna could not have been happier.

Sure, the weather could be better, but it was weather! Real weather! The moon had been barren. No wind, no clouds, and what little sun did reach the surface had no warmth to it.

She shook her head in disbelief. Less than a week ago, all she could think about was how sweet revenge would taste. How everypony would finally see her nights and give them the glory they deserved. Now she was strolling through the capital in the evening sunset without a care in the world. Life was certainly surprising sometimes.

A low whisper from one of her black-furred pegasus guards brought her back to reality. “Your Highness? If I may be so bold to ask, could you please keep your hooves on the ground? It is not befitting a Princess to be seen skipping.”

Luna paused, stopping herself mid-skip. “Oh, yes, of course.” Even though the castle walls were a short flight away, her retinue had insisted they accompany her. And now they were treating her little errand run like it was official royal business. ‘Tia was right, they were just a bunch of spoilsports.

They soon reached their first stop: the Central Seasonal Offices. Founded when a mix-up in weather orders had half the unicorns preparing winter and half preparing summer, the sky-blue dome stood proudly over the Canterlot skyline. Here, the seasons of the year were scheduled with the utmost care. Luna motioned for her guards to wait outside.

Inside, a tan pegasus stood idly at the front desk, flipping through a few magazines. Without looking up, he started, “May I help you....”

And then he noticed whom exactly he was addressing. His eyes went from half-shut to pinpricks in an instant. There was a light *thunk* as he hit his head on the floor from bowing too quickly. “My most humble and earnest and honest apologies Princess, I did not see it was you. H-how may I be of today service? Service today, a thousand pardons, I’m so sorry.”

Luna smiled demurely. “Don’t worry, it’s quite alright. I wanted to see your copies of the sunset projections for the rest of the year.”

He kept his face firmly planted on the floor. “Y-yyes of course. Right away, your Highness, no trouble at all, your Highness, just a few minutes, your Highness, please excuse me...” In an

impressive display of flying prowess, he managed to fly three stories straight up, find a storeroom, search through several filing cabinets, and return with a bundle of scrolls without lifting his head or ceasing to apologize. "Here they are, your Highness."

How he managed to hand them to her without looking was beyond her. "You don't have to bow, I promise not to be offended." He finally got his face off the floor, and tried to look relaxed. She nodded. "Much better. Flying's much easier when you're looking where you're going, after all."

Silence.

She casually glanced through the scrolls. "These seem to be in order."

Silence.

She tucked the scrolls into her pack. "Lovely weather today?"

Silence.

The poor pegasus had not budged an inch and was sweating far more than could possibly be healthy. She turned to look outside...no, her bodyguards weren't glaring at him. "Is everything all right?"

He fidgeted with his front hooves. His mouth hung open, then closed. Open. Closed. Finally, he found his words and mumbled out, "T-t-there isn't a problem, is there?"

Mental note: she would have to have a word with her sister. Celestia really needed to get out more if a visit from royalty could only mean bad news. "No, no, everything is fine. You're doing a-

"See, because it's not our fault Summer's been so late this year. We would be on time except the unicorns were slow with winter this year. N-not that we're complaining, just wanted to be clear that we're just catching up and it's just been a lot of work. Not too much for us to handle though!" He laughed nervously, forcing out every chuckle.

Luna kept up the polite smile while she waited for him to stop "laughing".

A few minutes later, it was fairly obvious that awkward pauses had not only survived the last thousand years, but were thriving beautifully. She mercifully cut him off. "I was going to say you're doing a wonderful job. If there is anything else I need, I'll let you know."

She left the building, her guards falling in behind her. Back at the desk, the pegasus waited until they were out of sight before fainting straight away.

A few stops later, and Luna was heading back to the castle, leaving behind a trail of nervous and terrified receptionists. To their credit, some ponies at least tried to hide it. Seeing them cower at the sight of her, Luna couldn't help but remember Ponyville, just a few days ago:

She shivered, even though it was the middle of summer. The royal carriage was the last place she wanted to be right now, but Celestia had insisted that they ride into town together. She just wanted to disappear again, and then maybe the ponies would forget all the horrible things she had done. Her sister put a reassuring wing around her, and motioned the carriage forward.

Luna blinked. Were those...streamers in the trees? And balloons? And...how was confetti falling alongside them this whole way? She didn't have time to think this over, as soon they cleared the forest. A roar of voices and hoofbeats met their arrival. Everypony in the town must have been out to see them. No pony was sad, or angry, or even scared. They were cheering their little throats out to see the Princess's lost sister.

As the carriage rolled to a stop, two pegasi fillies placed a wreath of flowers around her head. Both were wearing the biggest grins she had ever seen. And there, standing fearlessly before them, were the six ponies who had stopped her. The six ponies she had tried and failed to...well, she didn't want to think about that.

And then, they bowed their heads in respect, the morning light catching the Elements they wore around their necks. Celestia said something to the purple one, but Luna wasn't listening. She was too busy trying to hold back the tears.

The ponies of Canterlot must not be so quick to forgive, or maybe they just had longer memories. Maybe it wasn't a royal visit that brought fear.

It was a visit from a Nightmare.

She shook her head, silencing her doubts. No. That part of her was dead and gone. Her nights may not get the recognition they deserve, but she had nearly lost everything trying to get it. She would learn to accept her place, and soon they would learn to accept her. All they needed was a little time, and they would see a Princess walking down the streets of Canterlot, not a monster.

After delivering her batch of scrolls (and a lovely sisters-only teatime), Luna retired to her room. She would have to be back soon to take over for the night. Apparently, Celestia managed to run the whole kingdom 24/7 while she was gone. Unbelievable. What must that pony have been drinking to stay awake and sane for that long?

But now, it was time for night.

Luna heaved a long sigh. She had missed her subjects. She had missed the sun. She had missed the grass. But her nights? Well, apart from her sister, the nights she had missed most of all.

She took a quick flight to her observatory. Attached to her own room, it was her private work area. The room was completely barren, save for a plush pillow and a small pedestal in the center. The ceiling was made of a single piece of glass, stronger than the rocks it sat on. Luna had built this study ages ago specially for raising the night. Here she could see (with a little help from the glass dome and some magic) the skies over all of Equestria. Here she could paint a night sky in peace.

She passed over her star charts. After a thousand years with little else to do but watch the skies, she doubted she would ever need to consult those old things again. She perched on her pillow, took a deep breath, and closed her eyes. When they opened, she was no longer in her observatory.

Complete darkness. She could feel the empty expanse before her. Blank. Formless. With a thought, she turned it a deep, dark blue, ripples of color reverberating around and through her. A single light twinkled into existence in the distance, then another, and another. Soon their sheer numbers coalesced into a massive, brilliant orb, as big as the sun at noon.

Then the ball shrunk as dots of light spiraled out from it. They lazily drifted through the void, stopping at designated spots. The constellations she had designed eons ago took form. Raising all the stars at once like this took a great deal of effort and concentration. But the flair it added was priceless.

Soon, only one star remained; Polaris, standing ever proudly in the North. With all the stars in place, the way was set for the grand centerpiece. Luna reached out, deep into the night sky, until she found her moon. Its pockmarked surface seemed as close to her as the ground beneath her hooves. Its soft glow enveloped her, warm as the afternoon sun. Its vast presence filled her mind. She rose, dragging the full moon with her. The two climbed higher and higher, moving as one, until, with one mighty push, she sent it along on its nightly journey as she drifted back down to reality.

The magic that had set her eyes aglow faded, bringing her back to her observatory. She looked up at her handiwork; a perfect night sky.

Beautiful.

The ponies below could think what they wanted. There was one thing for sure; this was her night. And nothing they could think or do could take it from her. Not this time.

Luna just sat and admired the sky for a few more minutes. 'Tia would understand.