

Celestia peered through her window into the gleaming city below. The ponies were partying late into the night, their revelry illuminated by the dim stars, and the strangely empty moon. It was not at all the sort of night that anypony had been expecting, not after the day that had proceeded it. It would have seemed, had anypony cared to guess, like its artisan had simply thrown it together at the last minute, and this was indeed the case. Tonight, there were much better things to do. Better things even than celebrating amongst her subjects; Celestia had slunk away from the festivities in Ponyville and returned to her grand palace quite early on, in fact. She had needed to escort someone very special to her new home.

Turning away from the window, Celestia walked to the center of the room, where a large pillow had been laid out. She lay down on it beside her beloved sister, who pressed her face firmly against Celestia's neck.

"...Missed you so much," Luna whispered to her. Celestia smiled, and nuzzled her sister.

"I missed you too, Luna," She said, "It's been too long...I almost forgot how cute my little sister was." She nipped playfully at Luna's ear, who giggled.

"Stop it," Luna said happily. Celestia's smile widened, and she nipped again.

"You aren't fooling anyone," She teased, "You loved this when we were fillies, and you love it now, don't you?"

"Y-yes," Luna giggled as Celestia played with her ticklish ears, "N-now stop it!" Celestia did as she was asked, and allowed Luna to push her face against Celestia's neck once more. They sat together for the longest time, not speaking at all, simply laying on the pillow and basking in the glow of the fireplace and each others company, for the first time in so many centuries. Luna began to slip from against her sister's neck, her head nodding forward, then snapping back, only to repeat the cycle a few moments later. Celestia smiled warmly, and put a wing around the younger Alicorn.

"It's alright," Celestia said, "Sleep. You've had a long day."

"No," Luna mumbled, shaking her head gently, "It's night. It's my job. I need to do it."

"Hush," Celestia purred, "I've been doing this for 1000 years now. You sleep, tonight. You're tired. I can handle this." Luna mumbled something incoherent, and shook her head again.

"Oh, Celly," She said, "I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry."

"No," Celestia said, "Don't be sorry. It wasn't your fault. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I didn't see it happening sooner. I'm sorry I had to do that to you. It was awful of me; I was an awful sister for doing it." Celestia swallowed hard, fighting back the memories of the guilt that had plagued for decades after the incident. "I'm sorry that you had to-"

"That's not it," Luna interrupted, "I'm sorry about what I did. But Celly..." She looked up at her sister with frightened eyes, and said, "Oh, Celly. I tried. I really did try, but...I couldn't leave him there. He came back with me, Celly, and now he's here...don't you hear it? Don't you hear him?"

"Him?" Celestia asked. Her eyes narrowed, and an all-to-familiar voice drifted into her ears.

"Oh, my Celestia," It whispered, "I'm hurt. Truly, I am. After all I've done for you, all the time we spent together, and you've forgotten me already?" Both sisters looked to the window, Luna with fear and Celestia with irritation. A strange purple smoke drifted through the window, playing on some unseen current as if it were alive, dancing with some sort of perverse glee. It

danced around the room before gathering in front of the sisters, blending and twisting into form. It took the shape of an Alicorn stallion, spectral and ghastly. Smoke trailed from the tips of his wings and horn, and from his front ankles. He had neither flank nor tail; its body ended past its wings and trailed into a tail of mist, ever twitching and moving. "Surely you must remember - "

"I remember you," Celestia interrupted the Alicorn.

"Oh, good," He cooed, drifting closer to the princesses, "I know you and I never really saw eye to eye, but I thought maybe we could start over." He drifted in between the two sisters, Luna cringing away from him, and swirled around Celestia, rubbing his cheek against hers. "After all," He whispered in her ear, "You're making up with Luna, like good sisters do. And after everything you did to her, too..."

"That wasn't her fault!" Luna cried, "She was just doing what she had too!"

"Ah, that's right, isn't it?" The Alicorn laughed, "Yes, it wasn't her fault. You were having another of your little fits, weren't you my dear? And Celestia, well, she just had to put her hoof down."

"I...i-it wasn't a fit," Luna insisted, "I was...you -"

"Oh, don't you worry," He said, drifting over and stroking Luna's mane, "I don't blame you at all. No pony does, I'm sure. After all, you were so young, and artists can be so temperamental. Nobody even looked at your beautiful sky..." He looked up and gasped happily, as if something had just occurred to him. He spun around to Celestia, and declared, "Your sister is an Artist! Oh, that's what she thought. She poured so much of herself into those skies, and they really were lovely. I'll bet you didn't know that, did you dear?"

"I knew." Celestia said sharply. The spectral pony nodded happily.

"Did you?" He asked flippantly, "I'm sorry. It really has been a long time, Celestia. Luna never told me before we were on the moon together...all those years, and she couldn't even make the nights to keep her busy. She was heartbroken, you know." he drifted onto Luna's far side and leaned in against her, laying a wing over top of her. "She cried, and cried, and cried, for sooooo long. But you got over it, didn't you Luna?" Luna gave no reply, only whimpering into the pillow. The Alicorn chuckled under his breath, and continued, "Oh, yes. Eventually. After all, she had me there. I kept her company for all those lonely, lonely years. We learned so much about each other, didn't we, Luna?"

"...Go away," Luna sniffed. The Alicorn drifted away, sailing under a scowling Celestia's chin, and flying around the opulent room.

"Oh, but listen to me go on," He said, inspecting the room, "Tell me, Celestia, how have you been? You've done well for yourself, I think... Such a wonderful home, not at all like that dreary, boring old stone castle you used to live in." He flew to the fireplace, running a hoof across the mantle. "Yeeess," He remarked, "It's absolutely lovely. How long did it take? How many slaves?" He spread his wings excitedly, filtering the light of the fire and casting a palor over the room.

"I didn't use slaves," Celestia snapped at him, "I didn't even ask for this. The ponies built it for me...as thanks."

"Ah, of course," He mused, drifting closer to the princesses "They love you, don't they...that's always been so much more...you, hasn't it? Let them adulate you. That way, they won't see it coming, eh?" He peered meaningfully at Luna, and laughed. "Oh, I'm so proud of

you, my Celestia.” He flew to the window, and looked out. “This whole kingdom...I’ll bet it’s grown even bigger, hasn’t it? How far? The Griffins? The Zebras?” He drifted back to the princess, asking with a sinful sort of pleasure, “The *world*?”

“None of it,” Celestia told him, looking away from the hideously eager face, contorted by the furls of smoke that drifted up as he lost focus.

“None of it?”

“No. The Kingdom is the same as it ever was. It’s enough for the ponies.”

“Oh, Celestia,” The Alicorn moaned, “Not at all? A thousand years, and you haven’t budged an inch?”

“No.”

“Oh, you really are just like her,” The Alicorn sighed, “Where was that ambition you had a thousand years ago?”

Celestia narrowed her eyes. “What are you talking about,” She asked. The ghostly pony turned away, and grinned slyly to himself.

“Don’t play the fool, dear,” He said, his voice smooth and calm, “It doesn’t become you...I know you didn’t have to send us away. You could have used that magic to do anything, couldn’t you? But you sent us away.” He swirled around Luna, nuzzling against her sympathetically. “You remember, don’t you Luna? Of course you do, poor little Luna, betrayed by her big. Mean. Sister...” He pouted at her mockingly, and a small sob escaped the little Alicorn filly.

“Stop it,” She begged. The specter laughed cruelly, and continued to goad Celestia, stroking her chin with his tail.

“The greatest magic in the world, and all you could think to do was make yourself more powerful.”

“That’s not true,” Celestia said, her voice cracking slightly. The ghostly Alicorn smirked as she continued, “I was young. I didn’t know how to use them. I didn’t know any better...”

“Don’t lie,” The Alicorn sneered, “You wanted me *gone*. You wanted us both gone...you wanted everything for yourself, and you got it, didn’t you?” He trailed away, remarking flippantly, “I never wanted anything more than to rule with the two of you. But you wanted more, and you took it.” He turned back, inches away from Celestia’s nose, and smiled. “I’m. Proud. Of. You.” He said, lingering on each syllable. Another sob escaped from Luna, and she looked up, her eyes red from crying.

“Oh, Luna,” Celestia said, wrapping a wing around her sister, “Don’t listen to him. You know-”

“LEAVE US ALONE!” Luna screamed, lashing out at the spectral Alicorn in front of them. Her hooves sailed through him harmlessly, and as he reformed she squeezed her eyes shut and sobbed, “Just...just for one night. Can’t you just leave me alone for once?” The Alicorn laughed.

“Oh, Luna, you know better than that,” He cooed, “I won’t ever leave you. I just can’t. You need me. You’re just a scared little filly, who needs someone to hold her hoof. You can’t count on big sis Celly after what she did to you anymore, can you? But don’t you worry, I’ll be here for you...” He drifted in circles around the young filly, slowly coming closer and closer until he was wrapped around her neck, pressing his face against hers, and slowly whispering, over and over, “I’ll be here for you,” as she broke down into sobbing. He laughed gleefully, stroking her with his wing. “Don’t you worry,” He said, “Everything will be alright. Just like it always was.”

"That's enough!" Celestia declared, standing up and shaking a wing through the Alicorn Stallion's body. He dispersed, and reformed in front of the white mare. "Leave." She demanded, "Now."

"Ah, so regal," the specter taunted, "But I really have been gone for too long. You've forgotten everything I tried to teach you. Come now, Celestia, what's the magic word?"

"Please leave us alone." Celestia seethed at him.

"Oooh... so close. One more try, now, I know you can do it." Celestia glared at him, looking away and shutting her eyes tight. Slowly, she said,

"Please leave us alone...Father."

"Look me in the eyes and say it."

Celestia's eyes snapped open and she stared daggers at the ghostly form before her.

"Please leave us alone Father." She said, hate and acid seeping through with every letter. The Alicorn before her grinned victoriously, and flew away.

"That wasn't so hard, was it?" He drifted to the window, laughing all the way. "Just remember, I'll always be here...I'm a part of you, after all. Every bit as much as you are a part of each other." He clapped his hooves together, and said, "Oh, I'm so happy. We can finally be a family again."

With that, he was gone, leaving only Celestia and the still-sobbing Luna. Celestia lay down beside her, nuzzling Luna's neck and laying a comforting wing over her. "It's alright," She whispered, "He's gone now." Luna sniffled and pressed her face into Celestia's neck, but she had stopped crying. "It will be different this time," Celestia promised, "I won't let him hurt us. Not again."