

## **Rain**

by HyunSu

Whether they visited the capital city once to scratch some deep-seated tourist itch, or if they made regular trips for business, diplomacy, or entertainment, most ponies returned home with a word about Canterlot's exceptional weather. Grafted into the side of the Equestria's tallest mountain, the city soared above even the highest weather factories of Cloudsdale, and anypony standing on any of the capital's many balconies often saw a carpet of clouds swirling like sea foam beneath the city. Though Princess Celestia could raise the sun in any weather, thunderstorms had ways to kill the mood for any pony who journeyed to the Solar Plaza to watch her work.

However, the truth behind the city's weather was more a logistical issue than an aesthetic one. Powerful unicorn magic kept the air around Canterlot and the winding roads leading to it thick enough to breathe, but the maintenance spells were too expensive to extend into royal airspace. Any pegasus flying at those altitudes, whether they were a guard, Wonderbolt, or weather team, needed special training or magical assistance in order to fly safely through the thinner, colder air. The hazard pay alone from flying in Celestia's armor was enough to set up a comfortable pension for a pony well before the normal retirement age.

But Canterlot needed rain just as much the other cities of Equestria did, if not more—without the occasional storm to soak them up, the high mountain winds would intensify, and eventually they would whisk every pony out of the city into thin air. To prevent this, elite teams from the Royal Weather Service flew to the tops of the waterfalls curving around the capital every summer, where they crafted humongous towers of rain and lightning visible all the way from Hoofington. On these occasions, most ponies shuttered their businesses, banked a high fire on the hearth, and settled in with steamed cider for the foals and hot ginger rum for the grownups while grape-sized droplets pelted the streets outside.

Presses around Equestria from the Manehattan Times to Playpony called these storms "stunners." Any pony caught outside in one agreed the name was overwhelmingly apt.

Unusually one year, the RWS scheduled the stunner the week after the Summer Sun Festival, and notices posted throughout Canterlot cautioned that, on Princess Celestia's advice, it would be the largest storm the city would have ever endured. All ponies were required to remain indoors for the first time since records began, and the media had no luck prying an explanation from the solar royal. All she had offered in the press room, smiling into her microphones, was this:

"The calculations from the Royal Weather Service demand a storm the likes of which we have

seldom seen here in Canterlot,” she said while levitating a pointer at an informative graph at her side. “However, I have also lived here for more years than I care to count—and I think a vigorous storm does a pony good from time to time.” She winked. “Indulge an old mare and her funny request. I promise nopony will be hurt under the watch of my Guard.”

On the day of the stunner, Weather Teams Six, Eight, and Nine took to the sky in the hour before dawn, and the first drops of rain brushed against Canterlot's topmost spires minutes after the princess ushered in the day. Every wing of the Royal Guard marched through the streets, encouraging ponies to head indoors and lashing down anything they could find that might turn into a lethal projectile if the wind picked it up. As the stunner whipped into full force by noon, the streets of Canterlot were empty, passing between them the echoes of low thunder and runoff surging into the municipal drains. If not for the rays of light squeezing out of curtained windows and the laughter of close friends diffusing through the walls, the capital would have appeared devoid of any pony presence whatsoever.

Save for one. She stepped out of her room onto her balcony, her horn shimmering as she channeled a minor spell to keep the rain off of her. Her alabaster wings rustled in the stiff gales the stunner put out, but she stood as firm as any earth pony could, her pastel-striped mane and tail rippling as if there was nothing more than a breeze bothering them. A spear of lightning reflected in her magenta eyes as it exploded in the clouds above, followed immediately by a blast that left her ears ringing and the balcony shaking. She willed the ringing away with a gentle laugh. Two events in recent memory compared to the storm's concussive clout: on the second, she had given a very deserving pegasus an entire day with her foalhood idols. It was hardly adequate pay for what Miss Rainbow Dash gave her for the first event: a talented unicorn filly whose appetite for knowledge permeated her spirit, providing her mentor with a faithful, unswerving student.

And how appropriate it was to think of Twilight Sparkle—this stunner was close to the one year anniversary of her sister's return to Equestria. Though she had faith her student would succeed where she had failed so many, many years before, the burden she had placed across those innocent withers had been an impossible one.

No. By rights, it had been unforgivable.

But then that unicorn made the impossible happen. The Elements of Harmony had reclaimed her sister from the darkness, and the friends Twilight had made were already teaching the young mare lessons she could never find in the deepest corridors of the royal archives. And not only did she receive her student's forgiveness later that blessed day, as they conversed in private over cupcakes at Sugarcube Corner—she had also received it from her beloved sister.

Even though she flew with the sun at the start of each day, she found it easy to forget how often the lights of hope contained the shadows of despair, and how transparent the borders could be. It was a lesson she had to learn over and over again, and she relished it every time. The means were behind her now. She filled her lungs with the heavy air and turned to retreat into her chambers when she spotted movement in the street leading to the western gate.

Curiosity overcame her as she peered over the rail. Certainty followed a short while later.

“Morning Star?”

A light yellow unicorn with a pale mane wrapped in a bun and a winged quill for a cutie mark stepped onto the balcony, quill and pen poised for dictation. “Your Majesty?”

“You may put those away, Steward,” said Princess Celestia. “I believe the time is right for a walk.”

Morning Star raised an eyebrow. “A walk? Where? In the castle?”

“No.” The alicorn waved a golden-shoed hoof over the rest of Canterlot. “Out there.”

“O—of course.” Despite her superior’s unorthodox impulse, the unicorn composed herself the next second with a small bow. It was no secret that resilience to surprises was the key qualification of being the Princess’s assistant, and Morning Star had the most in the field. She also had the horse sense to know when to ask questions, and when they were not welcome.

“I will not require an escort where I am going. Call it a long while since I’ve been in a good storm. I will return shortly. If you could relay a request down to Ram Hay to have dinner for two delivered to my chambers tonight, I would be grateful. Tell him to keep it simple. I don’t want him overwhelming the new help.”

The unicorn bowed. “At once.” She made off to fulfill her duty when the princess spoke again.

“Morning Star, may I ask you something else?”

“As you wish, ma’am.”

“Are you not curious as to who I will be receiving in my chambers tonight?”

“Your Majesty,” said Morning Star, turning around with a small frown flickering on her face, “If you were any other pony, I would be insulted to hear that. You have cancelled all afternoon engagements for this past week and the next, and no creature, pony, beast, or shade, calls on you without my knowledge. Need I describe the exact hue of her breathtaking teal eyes? Or the number of minutes she prefers to steep her daffodil tea? Or the humble manner in which she still passes the staff daily, hardly able to believe their reverence for her?”

“I yield,” laughed the princess. “I suppose I am not as subtle as I thought.”

“If I may speak freely?”

“Since when has it ever been otherwise?”

Morning Star drew herself up but struggled to keep her face straight as she spoke—she had had this on her mind for a while, it looked like. “Then I say that, while you have a way of outmaneuvering your opponents, you are as subtle as a Wonderbolt’s appetite at times. Perhaps you are taking lessons from your guest tonight?”

“It is on the agenda, next to the millions of other items I deliberately withhold from my steward, and have since the beginning of her employment.” The Princess broke into a knowing grin and shooed her assistant off with a hoof. “You may go.”

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By her request, Luna’s return to Canterlot had been a quiet one. On the day of Nightmare Moon’s escape, the sun had failed to rise in more places than just Ponyville. News of the obsidian alicorn’s rise had traveled as fast as that one pink pony—she never had Tia’s facility with names, but how had she beaten the royal chariot to Ponyville back from Everfree with a party going by the time she and her sister arrived? Astonishingly, the Elements of Harmony had been just as quick to welcome her back to Equestria, and the rest of their hometown had followed suit.

She was not as certain the citizens of Canterlot were the same way. On the chariot ride back, she groaned when she heard that, aside from moving it from midday to late evening, the Grand Galloping Gala had not changed much from the stuffy, high-society bore it had been when she... left. Who knew what the nobles would think about her? Though Tia had tried to convince her that she would handle the introductions, Luna simply asked to be brought to the castle’s back gates and shown to her chambers. Even then, the staff had received quite a shock when the iris-colored alicorn walked into the castle, and Tia had to step in front of the Royal Guards before they attacked her sister.

Once they grew used to having two royals in the castle, however, the staff became as friendly to her as the citizens of Ponyville had been. Still, one thousand years of solitude would not shake off so easily. Barely more than a year ago, her only companions had been the rocks on the ground, the stars in the celestial rings—and Nightmare Moon. To come back and dig up memories of dealing with living, talking ponies, who carried with them hopes and dreams and fears and worries, was nothing short of exhausting.

She was not ready for the rest of the world. Not just yet.

So when Luna learned of the first stunner since her return to Equestria, a part of her heart felt like it had emerged from the moon's silent core. It would be a welcome break to venture outside of the castle for the first time, as living on the moon had taught her two things:

One, she was comfortable with loneliness. Yes, the friendship of the Elements of Harmony had freed her of the hatred and jealousy Nightmare Moon once embodied, and every conversation she shared with her sister in recent days always ended too quickly. But being alone in the castle was impossible—there was always a servant or a guard looking after her needs—and she found herself used to solitude, because for once, the silence did not come with whispers from shadows.

And two, she hated confinement. Even before she went to the moon, she spent a great amount of her time outside of Canterlot, gliding down to visit the ponies for whom she raised the stars, looking for those rare ponies who stayed awake past sunset. Tia had even built the castle in Everfree to give her a place to rest on her long trips from the capital. The latter had always felt a little prison-ish, but never more so than this past year, when she couldn't bring herself to trot back into the public eye.

As she turned onto Sunset Promenade, her blue mane clung to her face, her tail sagged straight down, and water began to seep through her wings. The warm glow of a nearby streetlamp cast a green tint over her teal eyes as she approached the gate. If anypony saw her like this—well, what did she care if they did? The important part was that she had her freedom back.

She was happy.

As a formality, every gate leading into Canterlot remained open, even though several wings of the Royal Guard kept the lower roads blocked off until the stunner subsided. As she passed beneath the western portcullis, she nodded to the guards stationed there. They were surprised to see her out in such weather, but they managed to snap off a professional salute in return.

A lowered drawbridge spanned a broad stream beyond the gate, but Luna turned south onto the grass instead, following the city walls as they curved to the east. Even in a downpour as this, the stalks of grass maintained their verdant appearance and squeaked pleasantly against Luna's hooves. A stand of pine trees rose up between her and the stream, infusing the wet air with a pointed aroma she had missed for a very long while.

The stand thinned out quickly, and soon Luna walked on the edge of an open lake fed by the waterfalls tumbling down the mountain. Thunder and lightning chased over the water with ferocious, but undirected abandon. Wind whipped the lake's surface until it resembled the contents of some monolithic cauldron close to boiling over. Up ahead, a simple wooden pier reached into the lake and pointed at a small, forested island at the foot of the largest waterfall.

She took her time flying over there—it was just her and the air, rocking back and forth in gentle arcs. She dragged her wingtips in the water and watched the droplets scatter away in parabolas.

Arriving at the island, she made her way through the trees toward the side facing the waterfall. Here her heart began to beat a little faster, and a smile began to creep over her face as familiar sensations enveloped her—the earthy smell of rehydrated loam and lichens, the muted roar of the waterfall, flecks of leaf and dirt sticking to her fetlocks. These surroundings all but shattered the decorum of Canterlot's upper crust—a *princess* would be scandalized. Luna laughed out loud at the very idea, her amusement ringing through the trees like the chiming of a crystal bell. Was she really a princess? What kind of silly world accepted a princess who hoped to wish away a millennium of absence by donning a new crown? Tia had gone to great lengths for its creation, and Luna acknowledged it was a thing of wonder—Equestrian filigree and zebraic diamonds set in a single piece of carved Neighpoli black coral—but the steward never got a single jewel of it into the lunar chambers. The understated, three-peaked tiara resting behind the base of her horn was more than sufficient for her needs.

She left the trees behind at last and emerged onto a grassy bank, its edge no more than a hundred yards away from the waterfall's base. This, combined with the endless fall of raindrops and the concussion of thunder beating against clouds, made a white noise to banish frets and sadness from anypony's thoughts, and it was a secret she felt deserved more attention. Wet enough to draw a bath from her coat, Luna tucked her legs under in the grass, closed her eyes, and let the rain wash over her. Her innate magic kept her from growing cold, though nothing was as cold as the perpetual chill of the moon. Buffeted by noise and water, she was soon lost somewhere in her head, enveloped in comfortable warmth as real as a visit to the Ponyville spa. It was hard to believe her only visit had been during the year before. The royal masseuses were wonderful mares, but they lacked the small-town charm of a family-owned business.

“Ah, the old island hangout. I haven’t been here since, well. I thought I would find you here.”

How much time had passed? Luna did not open her eyes. She let her ears do the work as they picked up on the squeaking of hooves on wet grass somewhere behind her. They drew closer, and louder, just as the sound of falling water grew more and more distant, fading behind a still background.

A hoof brushed against her mane and transferred it in stripes to the other side of her neck. An affectionate nuzzle touched down just after, behind her poll.

Luna opened her eyes and looked at her visitor with a sidelong smirk. “Hey, Tia.”

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Princess Celestia chuckled. “Don’t give me that look,” she said, settling in next to her sister.

“What look?” Luna rolled her eyes away.

“The same look you gave me when we were growing up and mother served alfalfa for dinner. You always came up with such creative ways to dispose of it.”

“But of course. You always had to chew and chew and chew it and ugh—” Luna stuck out her tongue—“I never could get used to the stuff.”

The two sisters shared a quiet laugh before the younger alicorn looked out over the waterfall. When the winds picked up, columns of spray whirled like silk threads from the mist and dissipated into the air.

“Thank you for doing this,” said Luna. “Even in my deepest rages under Nightmare Moon’s influence, as I schemed as many ways as there were stars to banish you and plunge this land into eternal darkness—remembering the rain gave me some moments of peace.” She tilted her head toward the clouds and sighed. “It’s every bit as good as I remember it.”

“Should I be surprised?” asked the elder alicorn, arching an eyebrow. “You came up with it, after all.”

“No.” Luna looked straight up and rolled onto her back, letting the rain play polyrhythms over her barrel. “I—I remember how I grew jealous of you and your daylight. You always had ponies frolicking outside, enjoying the blue skies and those wispy little clouds. Ha ha—I can still see the

look on your face the first time I pulled those thunderheads across the sky.”

“Goodness, I know. You certainly scared our little ponies with that stunt of yours. They didn’t come out of their homes for a whole week.”

“Yes. And they bothered even less to come out at night after that. They hated the darkness, Tia.” Luna looked over at her sister, her smile faltering. “They hated *my* darkness.”

“I don’t think you could be any more wrong, Luna,” said Princess Celestia, running her hoof along her sister’s withers. “Your nights let them relax and rejuvenate from a hard day’s work. And look what they did with the rain. They learned to collect it so they had an alternative to the long journeys to far-off springs and rivers. They learned to welcome it when the summers get hot. And they learned to use it to feed their families. One of Twilight’s friends is a hard-working farmer who provided the food for the entire Summer Sun Festival last year.” At the questioning look from her sister, she continued, “Oh, you didn’t know? Applejack’s family holds a very strong presence in the apple market, and her triumph would not have been possible without your ingenuity.”

“I’m glad that’s changed.”

“It took them time, dearest sister. But they came around.”

Luna waved a hoof to the sky. “I can hardly believe how desperately I wanted to be recognized back then. Everything I did, I did for my ponies. The stars, all the hundreds of thousands of them, the nebulas, the meteor showers, the comets, the auroras—nothing I came up with ever worked.” Her eyes snapped wide at the arrival of an unpleasant memory. “Oh, horsefeathers—I even asked you if we could trade one day. I take over the sun, you take over the moon. You agreed.”

Princess Celestia cringed. It had not been one of her better moments, but enough time had passed since then that she could extract a small laugh from it. “You kept the sun in the sky for three straight days. The astronomers still talk about it, you know.”

“When you tried to talk me down, I bolted and pulled the sun too close to the ground,” Luna continued. “Whitetail Woods went up in flames and Everfree creatures terrorized the nearby towns for weeks afterward. I remember how bad I felt—” and here the younger alicorn flailed her hooves in tight, manic circles—“I can still fix it! I can still fix it!” But I was too exhausted to carry the sun anymore. I’m just glad you were there to hold them both at once while I brought the rain. I never felt so horrible in my life.



“What made it worst of all, though, was when you brought out the moon that night. All the ponies came out of their hiding places and celebrated—celebrating something that should have been mine to enjoy.” Overhead, a low peal of thunder rolled over the lake. For a long time, the two sisters lay there with wings draped over each other in silence.

“But you know what?” Luna asked after some time. She got up on her hooves and flipped her mane out of her face with a turn of her neck. “That’s in the past now. It can’t hurt me anymore—it can only teach me, Tia. And I never realized how much I learned from that day until now.”

“Oh my.” Princess Celestia raised a hoof to her mouth in jest. “You’re beginning to sound a lot like my student.”

“I may have been on the moon for a while, but it’s obvious to anypony what you see in her.”

“And that is?”

Luna pointed at herself. “What you see in her is a second chance, don’t you, Tia? You always were a kind sister to me, being there at my side every time I began to doubt myself. You tried to talk me down to the bitter end, even as Nightmare Moon swept me away. Not a day passed on the moon when I did not feel your love reaching out to me.”

Luna’s expression darkened. “You loved me so much that you were willing to bind the fate of an innocent filly to mine, so that I could return to you.”

Princess Celestia stood up, her brows furrowing with worry. “Luna, I did no such thing. I simply guided Twilight Sparkle in her studies and dropped her hints of Nightmare Moon’s return. She did the rest herself.”

“I don’t know, sis.” Luna walked in slow circles around her sister. “You are the most powerful pony in all of Equestria. You may see it as teaching and hint-dropping, but every word you speak tugs on the fates of those you address. What would have happened had you not been there when Twilight Sparkle received her cutie mark?”

“A pony’s cutie mark is determined from birth by forces beyond our power. You and I have both watched the Genesis Scales cast the sparks of lives into the realms beyond Equestria. Even had there been no need for her to redeem you, Twilight would have still excelled in her studies, even without me.”

“Can you say that for sure?”

“Look at where Twilight is now—”

*“Can you say that for sure?”*

The words died on the solar royal’s tongue, and she took a step back as parts of Luna’s mane and tail began to levitate of their own accord.

“Luna...”

A small vortex swirled into being beneath the younger alicorn, whipping water droplets in all directions. “I know you realize the power you wield. The moment you told Twilight Sparkle of her magical potential, you gave her the chance of a lifetime to become Equestria’s most powerful unicorn—but I heard the strings of her fate screaming as your words bent them on another course. Had you overestimated her love of learning new things—”

“Luna, the past is the past. You were rescued. That is all that matt—”

“Tia, please.” Thunder crashed over the two sisters like the meeting of shields, but Luna’s voice only grew more resolute. “Hear me on this. You’ve done this before, too. You were the first to speak to the ponies when the world was new and they emerged, stumbling, into the light. Do you remember what you said? You told them, ‘I love you.’ They were content before they knew you, but your words gave them souls. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen—to see their minds spark to life, their hearts quickening with newfound emotion. They came together before you, bowing, with tears of joy in their eyes. They loved you from that moment on.”

Princess Celestia sat on her haunches, the trace of a cherished memory dredged up for questioning subduing her countenance. “What are you getting at?”

“Back then, you didn’t know any better, speaking to everypony. But now I’m afraid of what will happen if you do something like that again, even if you think it’s for the greater good. I don’t know what happens if a pony’s destiny snaps when all you tried to do was bend it.”

“That is the risk I must take if that is what it takes to protect Equestria.”

Luna stamped a hoof on the ground. “Taking those risks is nothing but selfish—realize that there will always be other ways—”

“That’s enough, Luna.” Lines of light began to travel over the solar royal’s pristine coat.  
“Everything I do, I do for my ponies.”

A lightning bolt split the air with a bone-rattling crack as it surged into the tip of Luna’s horn. In that one split second, she and the air around her turned hot white, hot enough to shear away the light lines collecting on her sister. Luna’s mane and tail blazed like novae, and she glared down at the elder alicorn with eyes that shone with the whirling force of galaxies, throwing Celestia’s shadow all the way back to the walls of Canterlot.

Luna rose off the ground, her wings spread to their fullest reach but unmoving, rearing up on the very air beneath her. *“That is the thing that scares me most, Tia. Do you not see it? Those exact words twisted me into Nightmare Moon. I worked so hard and searched so far for the one thing to win them over to me as I made wonder after wonder, and I wondered why they would not love me. That question turned into an obsession, and it blinded me to everything else. It consumed me. It empowered me.*

*“It made me hurt the pony I cared for more than anything else in the world.”*

The terrible aura surrounding Luna cut out with a sudden suck, but strands of electricity crackled around her hooves as she touched back down on the ground. For a long time, the two alicorns stood their ground, their lungs heaving, legs trembling.

When Luna looked up at her sister, her eyes were brimming over with tears. “P... please don’t do the same thing to me. I—I don’t know what I would do if that happened.”

Words failed Princess Celestia for the second time—the tears streaming over her cheeks said enough. All she could do was walk over to her sister, and the two closed into a tight fore-leg embrace. “Luna,” she finally whispered. “Luna, Luna, Luna. My lovely, lovely Luna. I am so sorry.”

“It’s okay, sis.” Luna nuzzled her sister’s mane. “It’s okay. Did I not forgive you back at the Everfree Castle? And didn’t Twilight Sparkle do the same as well? I know that nothing less than your utmost love could have brought me back here with you today. And you above all know that I could not be happier than how I am this very instant: talking to you, as friends, once more.”

“Having you here was worth everything I put forth.”

“Yes. But you must be careful,” said Luna, stepping out of the hug. “You need not ask ‘what if?’

about Twilight Sparkle and her friends, and me. We know that story has a happy ending. But I am certain the time will come again when you must weigh the lives of those who love you in the face of an insurmountable crisis, and you will reach for the strings of fate. They will break, Tia, and the snapback will be heard in the cries of those you couldn't protect."

Princess Celestia, Regent of the Sun, and sole ruler of Equestria for the past one thousand years, suddenly looked as vulnerable as a blank filly at a cute colt. She nickered and crossed her forelegs, looking away. "I know."

Luna walked over to the island's edge, stopping when she had all four hooves in the water. She gazed up the waterfall to where it disappeared into the clouds in a column of white. "Nightmare Moon took to whispering to me on some nights," she said as her sister arrived by her side, her eyes now far away. "She spent a lot of time talking about you—what you would become. White flames would ripple over your coat, your mane and tail would become jagged blazes of violet blue. Your eyes would turn dragonish with a hue surpassing the deepest amethyst in their hoards. Your steps would incinerate the ground beneath your hooves—your wings would lash fiery scars across the heavens. You would be the sun brought down to Equestria, reducing the world you once loved to agony and vapors with waves of iridescent fire.

"Nightmare Moon knew how distressed that future made me. She never ceased her attacks on your nobility and loveliness, and she forced your corrupted image into my mind at every turn. She held a bit I could never spit out because I knew you saw Solar Flare in your future, too." Luna stood up on the tips of her hooves and kissed her sister on the forehead, just below the base of the horn. "Do not give her the chance to be right."

Princess Celestia nodded. "Of course."

The storm began to lighten as afternoon lapsed into evening, the weather teams high above preparing the last of the clouds to pour over Canterlot. The two sisters decided to take their time returning to the castle, their hooves sending out gentle ripples as they walked on the lake. Somewhere in the pine trees ahead, a whippoorwill threw its whooping song into the settling winds.

"I had a feeling you were leading up to something like this," said Princess Celestia. "I could tell you had something on your mind every time we ate together."

"And I had a feeling you twisted a few yokes to give me the chance to do so," said Luna.

The elder alicorn tossed her mane to the side. "I was curious. You were hiding something from

me ever since you returned to Equestria. You could have told me this as soon as we came back to the castle.”

Luna drew up a hoof in uncertainty. “I didn’t know how to say what I did back there, back then. I was too busy adjusting to all the changes that happened in my absence. And I needed you alone. No pony knows of Infinite Day, do they?”

“Not a soul.”

“Not even Twilight Sparkle?”

“No.”

“I hope she’ll never have a reason to learn about her.”

“I do, too.” The solar princess turned to her sister. “You’ve grown so much in this past year. I’m very proud of you, and I’m sure mother and father would think the same.”

“You think so?”

“I know so. In fact, you should take a look in the water.”

“Hm?” Luna paused, unsure what to make of her sister’s suggestion.

Princess Celestia kept walking, her horn giving off a curious glow. “Go on. You might be surprised.”

Luna heard a loud clop as her hoof touched down on something hard. The water beneath her had turned as flat as a mirror—it *was* a mirror. Curious, Luna looked down.

She was not sure who looked back up at her, but it had to be somepony else—magic mirrors were useful for looking at others as well as viewing one’s self. The other pony’s proportions belonged more to her sister—her legs were longer and more elegant, her trunk greater. The other pony’s mane twinkled with pinpoints of light against a deep yet familiar void, its perimeter undulating on currents the wind did not supply. For a chilling moment, Luna thought it was Nightmare Moon gazing back at her, but the eyes looking back at her were not Nightmare Moon’s eyes. They were wide open and curious, and teeming behind with compassion, artistry—and regality.

“Tia? Who am I looking at?”

Laughter like the light of a summer dawn filled the air. “Stars and light, Luna. For all the love you give to other ponies, don’t you ever save any for yourself?”

“Yes, and we all saw what happened the last time I—”

The lake crashed over her head—or rather, she fell in, as the mirror spell cut off before she could finish her sentence. Luna scrambled to the surface amid a wreath of bubbles and broke free, gasping for air.

“Tiiaaa! What in Equestria?”

“Really now. You were already wet from the rain.” Snickering, Princess Celestia offered a helping hoof out of the water. “Oh ho ho, though—I must say I’ve missed having my little sister around.”

“You and your pranks,” said Luna, but there was no venom in her voice. She stepped back onto the surface of the lake and looked herself over, turning round and round and round. “So it’s true? This is what I look like now?”

“You’ve always looked that way to me, my dear sister.”

Luna tilted her head. “How is that possible? I gave you a kiss after that and I had to stand on my hoof tips to reach your crown. We’re almost the same height now.”

“I think you’ve known the answer to that for a while. I just had to make sure.” Smiling, the solar princess stepped onto the lakeside pier. Her sister did likewise, and soon they were coming around to the western gate. “You know, I’ve handled both the sun and moon for more than a thousand years, and I could go on doing it for another thousand. But I think it’s time that a certain Princess Luna stopped freeloading on Canterlot hospitality and pitched in on her fair share of the work. Wouldn’t you agree? I also have some regalia for you to try on, and a crown that would like a second chance with you.”

Luna bowed her head as the gravity of those words fell like stones on her back. Negative thoughts bubbled up from the depths of her mind—she couldn’t possibly do it, the accessories meant nothing, she had no right to serve the ponies of Equestria again, she couldn’t, she hadn’t, she didn’t deserve, not yet, no, no, no, no—

And then there was only her, and her sister, overflowing with filial love, and the weather, the rain that fell on all things without prejudice or favor, good or evil, and everything else in between, suppressing oppressive thoughts for those which arose from the very foundation of a pony's soul.

To help. And, just as importantly, to be helped.

Luna might have struggled to balance the two needs. But Princess Luna could handle the both of them as easy as setting one hoof in front of the other. She raised her head high until her regal eyes were level with her sister's.

"Yes." She tapped her forehooves on the ground. "Yes, yes, yes." Her gait acquired a small bounce, compounding with every bound. "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!" She spread her wings and leaped into the air with a twirl. "Yes! Yes! I'll do it, Tia!" she cried, beaming down at her sister. "Once the weather teams clear the skies, I'll make this night the best night ever! Oh, Tia, I'm already getting so many ideas that I can hardly keep up with them! Tell me, have you ever heard the stars sing before?"

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A trail of smoke with green sparks whiffled into the solar chambers through the chimney and halted before an alabaster alicorn, who was close to retiring for the evening. She caught the scroll that fell out of the smoke with magic, smiling to herself as she anticipated the note's contents.

*Dear Princess Celestia,*

*I can't believe I was not in Canterlot for the stunner! I always loved them growing up—no having to hassle with other ponies asking to hang out or anything. I could read and study to my heart's content without any interruptions. But I should get to the point.*

*The stars are singing. Everypony in Ponyville is outdoors listening to them except for me, because I'm turning the library upside-down and I can't find anything that explains why the heavens suddenly decided to form a choir. Though I admit the melodies are very pretty, even if they don't follow any established times, tonalities, or theories—you'd think hundreds of thousands—no, millions of stars, singing at once would all sound terribly uncoordinated, but... they don't.*

*Now I'm starting to wonder if I'm missing out on something by staying inside... I should go. Oh—how is Princess Luna? Does she still remember who I am? I never saw her at the Gala. I figure if she spent a thousand years on the moon, she had a lot of time to look at the sky, right?*

*Ow! Spike just hit me—no, Spike, I bet she's really good at astronom—hey what are you doi—*

**This is Spike. I'm writing this on the run since Twilight's chasing after me, but sometimes that filly is so concerned about studying and learning that she forgets the proper things to say at times. Like when we met Fluttershy—that filly was as fragile as**

There the writing cut off—there were ink smudges and rips marring the parchment from the disagreement, but Princess Celestia rolled it up and placed it in a rack with the rest of her protégé's friendship reports. Outside on the balcony, the skies were bereft of clouds, and a lovely alicorn with an iris-colored coat and a mane resplendent with the night sky sat beneath a full moon, focusing her gaze on this star one moment and that one the next. Each star responded to her attention with a few wavering notes, which spread over Equestria like love letters addressed to anypony who found them.

Princess Celestia joined her sister on the balcony and closed her eyes, listening to the melodies raining from the sky. She hoped somepony, somewhere, was recording it for posterity, though a vinyl record could never truly match the subtle grace of the notes currently swimming through her ears. Everything caught and reflected the sound—the high towers, the stones in the street, the bridges, and the lampposts.

“I do feel bad for saying this, sis,” said Princess Luna as she turned her gaze at a pentagonal cluster of stars, “but Nightmare and I did agree on one thing. We hated being bored. It was a pure accident during one of our fights when I bent the light of a star one into waves I could hear instead.” She caught a passing meteor in the corner of her eye and strummed a long, low note from its tail before it sped beyond the horizon.

“She thought it was another way to win over me. I was grateful for finding something else to do. It evolved into occasional truces as the two of us tried to outperform the other, and she was actually something of a talented musician.”

“You're no slouch either, Luna,” said her sister. “But I think it's noble to find a quality you admire in somepony who wished you harm. You have already won over a pony who wishes you well with tonight's music.”

“Is it Twilight Sparkle?”

“You heard the scroll coming in.” It was not a question.



“Will you send her a reply?”

“I think, just this once, I’ll do it your way and let her go back out on her own. The poor thing was tearing up her library for the reason the stars were singing.” Princess Celestia chuckled. “You might also be pleased to hear all of Ponyville is outside listening to your music.”

Princess Luna nodded. “That’s nice.”

“Oh, drop the act, Luna. You’ve loved performing the better whenever you had an audience.” The solar royal stamped her hoof in sudden inspiration. “You know what? I think it’s time you stepped out of the castle and reintroduced yourself to the world. You rule this land just as much as I do, and the ponies deserve to see your face once more.”

Princess Luna lilted a tetrad from an arc of stars in Orion’s bow. “That’s been on my mind for a while, Tia. But you know how I am. And you know what happened when I tried chasing after everypony’s affection.”

“But you don’t have to chase them anymore, Luna. That’s the beauty of it. This time, your ponies will come to you.” Princess Celestia’s mind returned to the damaged scroll in her chambers. “And I’m sure Twilight Sparkle will be among the first of them to welcome you back.”

“I hope she does. I never did have the chance to thank her and the Elements of Harmony for saving me way back when.” Princess Luna paused in thought. “Yes, I think I will announce myself sometime soon.” She turned to her sister with a knowing gleam in her eye. “Trust your sister to pick the right time.”

That was all Princess Celestia needed to hear. She leaned over and kissed her sister on the forehead. “Good night, Princess Luna. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Good night, sis.” With a gentle swing of her horn, Princess Luna struck a soft, soothing gong on the moon, and continued playing the night.

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Author’s Note: (oh, I’ve always wanted to do one of these!)

If you told me at the beginning of the year that I would write a fan-fiction set in a universe of collection of pastel-colored cartoon ponies teaching lessons about love and friendship, I would have slapped you. Now I’m probably the most pony-obsessed individual in my circle of friends. I blame the awesome community surrounding Friendship is Magic—scores of talented authors

adapting the cast to a plethora of scenarios ranging from original flavor to high fantasy to hilarious crackfics and everything in between, just as many wonderful artists creating clever crossover comics and crafts (pardon the alliteration), the musicians, the modders and modelers, and the enthusiasm general of every brony in the fandom, each with their own humor or spark to add to the collection—all of these phenomena are important (Walt Whitman? Marianne Moore? In my thank you-note?).

Thanks are in order. I first need to thank RizCifra for posting enough about ponies to get me to watch the show in the first place, as well as for revealing a beautiful parallel between Twilight and Luna in one of her comics, which I took advantage of here. Without her, I would not be here. Period.

Next are the artists who have inspired me/provided the spackle for the gaping holes in the wall that is my creativity: Jetfire91 and his magnum opus, “Dangerous Business”, reached levels of epic (an increasingly difficult term to justify under the abuses of modern culture) I’ve rarely read before and is required reading for any brony.

Murgurgle’s “Secret Tub Fun” series, despite its name, began as a hilarious read (Twilight Sparkle and toy battleships!) but matured, throwing lovely, complicating shadows into the royal sisters’s pasts. It needs to update again.

I must thank Egophiliac for her wonderful interpretations of Princesses Celestia and Luna, and for giving the fandom alfalfa and me an idea for Luna’s God Mode. People (ponies?) are taking up all the good ideas!

And, though he didn’t have any direct influence on this story, I must thank CapnChryssalid for writing his 300 page (!) World of Ponycraft crossover fic for his inspirational dedication to productivity: chapters topping 11,000—12,000 words on a weekly basis, *while* maintaining his 25-man raid schedule and God knows what else.

I’m sure there are more I’ve missed out on thanking here—literally every new comic or fanfiction I’ve come across has shaped my perceptions of MLP:FiM’s cast in some subtle way, and I would not be here were it not for them.

I’d also like to thank UnoSombrero, a longtime writer friend of mine, for putting up with the repeated revisions I continued sticking into her face while writing this. I wouldn’t have done this without your support.

And finally,

thank you for reading.

~ HyunSu