

Author's note: while not strictly connected, the assumptions I made in my [previous fanfic](#) more or less hold for this one.

The Sun Doth Not Shine, The Moon Doth Not Glow

The moon did not rise. Twilight was as scrupulous in her astronomical observations as every aspect of her life, so she knew something was wrong even before the ground trembled. The library shook underhoof, rattling her telescope and knocking books off shelves.

"T-Twilight? What's going on?" Spike poked his head out from under his blanket. The dragon was nearly as rattled as she to judge by his expression.

"I don't know!" She said, her legs splayed out to try and stabilize herself against the unsteady floor. "Something's wrong!"

"No, really?" The ground stopped shaking before he could say anything more, and he flopped back into his bed. "Well, at least it's over."

"I don't think it is." Twilight glanced worriedly out at the moonless night, and then cantered down the stairs.

"Hey, wait up!" Spike tossed aside his blanket and ran after her, vaulting onto her back before she trotted outside. She wasn't the only one; Ponyville was in an uproar. Doors opened as ponies flooded out of houses and onto the streets. Their voices were raised in confusion and concern, except for one particular high pitched squeal of glee further down the road.

"Again! Again! That was fun! Wheel!" Twilight would recognize that voice anywhere, and she waved in the direction of a certain pink pony as her head appeared above the crowd. After a moment, Rarity slipped through the press, looking worried.

"Twilight dear, do you have any idea what's going on? Is there something in any of your books?"

"I don't remember anything offhand, but I have a good suspicion."

"Yeah? What is it?" The two of them glanced up at Rainbow Dash, who'd appeared above them at some point in the conversation. "I could hear the commotion from Cloudsdale," she explained parenthetically. "What's your suspicion?"

"The moon should be up by now, so I think something must be wrong with Luna." Twilight explained. "I think we should go find out, because I don't think Celestia would have let this happen under normal circumstances..."

"Oooh, we're going to the *moon*!" Pinkie grinned delightedly into their faces as she appeared among them. "What do you need to pack to the moon? Do you pack air? How would you pack air? Oh I know, *balloons*! That's good, I have balloons." Rainbow Dash buried her face in her hooves for a moment, and Twilight rolled her eyes upward briefly, then laughed. "No Pinkie, we're going to Canterlot. I'd really like to get Fluttershy and Applejack, but I don't think there's time."

"No time? It's going to take a while to get there no matter what." Rainbow Dash protested.

"Not the way I'm planning to get there. Hang on." Twilight shut her eyes, concentrating. Her horn glowed, softly at first, and then with a coruscating brilliance. The world seemed to shift about them, and then the four ponies were on the front step of the royal castle at Canterlot.

"Since when could you do *that*, Twilight?" Spike asked from his seat on her back.

"I've been practicing." She replied primly. "Now let's go see what Celestia and Luna have to say."

"I hate to disappoint you, but I think there's going to be a problem with that." Rainbow Dash said, pointing to the door. And indeed, the entrance was blocked by grim looking guards.

"Oh, I'm sure it'll be fine," Twilight replied, even though her voice betrayed a significant lack of certitude. She led them up the stairs and approached the apparent leader of the guard detail.

"Hello, I'm Twilight Sparkle and I'm here to see the Princesses."

"Nobody gets through," the guard Pegasus said gruffly. "You'll have to stay out here, ma'am."

Rarity stepped up next to Twilight. "But we're the close, personal friends of Princess Celestia and Princess Luna! Surely they'll be willing to see us."

"Nobody I said, and nobody I meant."

"Ugh. This isn't getting us anywhere." Rainbow Dash sounded exasperated, and the guard looked at her suspiciously.

"Look, we just-"

The ground shook again, and in the distance there was the faint crashing of glass breaking as something fell. "All right then, we don't have time." Twilight's horn flashed again, and this time they were inside Celestia's own room.

It was chaos. Celestia herself was sprawled out on her couch, unmoving, her normally flowing mane limp and lifeless. A half dozen guards surrounded Luna in one corner of the room, kept at bay with a dark shield surrounding the alicorn.

"What is going *on* here?" Rarity demanded in an imperious tone, while Spike jumped off Twilight's back and ran over to Celestia. Luna looked at them, her eyes wide and terrified.

"I didn't do it," she pleaded with them. "It wasn't me!"

Dash zipped in front of the guards, placing herself between them and the princess. "You heard her. Back off!"

"But Nightmare Moon-"

"Look, we fought Nightmare Moon. Luna isn't her. So *back off*."

The guard bared his teeth at her, and then more of them burst through the door – the ones Twilight had left at the entrance. "Stop, you!" One of them shouted.

"Everypony, be quiet!" Rarity rarely raised her voice, but when she did, it got attention. Her horn flared with a brief dazzle of color, bringing everyone's attention to her. "Good. Now if we all *calm down* and listen to Princess Luna we might find out what has happened."

"But-" The hard-bitten pegasus who had dared speak found himself quailing under Rarity's glare. After a tense moment, Luna's shield disappeared and the alicorn trotted forward. "Thank you, Rarity," she said, giving the unicorn a shy smile.

The Princess looked around at the tableau and walked over to where Celestia lay. Spike looked up from his place at her side. "She's still alive," he reported, "but she's just barely breathing."

Luna lowered her head, then lifted it again to look around at them. "Yes," she said softly. "We have both paid a terrible price for our mistakes of a thousand years ago. When we fought

each other, we cut open a deep wound in Equestria, which you know as the Everfree Forest.”

She dipped her head again, and her horn glowed softly as she unlatched the golden pectoral collar Celestia always wore. “It is a wound that my sister bears as well.” The pectoral collar came away.

The princess always wore it, just as Luna always wore hers, but nobody was expecting what was underneath. A deep wound was slashed across her white coat, oozing bright red blood with each beat of the alicorn’s heart. “It couldn’t heal without the balance between us being restored,” Luna continued quietly, “any more than the Everfree Forest could be returned to what it was.”

Everyone stared. Spike pressed both paws to his mouth, his eyes wide. Even Pinkie Pie sobered. “Perhaps a thousand years of this was too much for her. Perhaps she has been trying to heal it herself, to spare me the guilt.” Luna smiled sadly down at Celestia. “She always did try to protect me.”

“We are truly out of balance now. I do not dare raise the moon, or use my full power to any extent. Without Celestia to balance me, I would tear Equestria apart. And my sister...” Luna shook her head and looked up at them. “I cannot fix this. But...perhaps you could?” The alicorn cocked her head, her eyes entreating. She was not looking at the guards, but at Twilight and Rarity, Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash.

“But what can we do?” Twilight blinked at the alicorn.

“Oh that’s easy.” Pinkie Pie had recovered her usual peculiar aplomb. “We’ve already defeated Nightmare Moon and a dragon and a stampede and the parasprites and well we didn’t do so well with the buffalo but come on, that’s because they didn’t listen to me!” The pony bounced in place, beaming. “So we can do *anything!*”

The floor trembled again, and Luna turned to gaze out the window. “I don’t think we have much time,” she said softly. The rest of them crowded around to look. From the middle of the Everfree Forest came a menacing red glow. The hellish radiance reflected off the low clouds and washed the stars from the sky.

“Then let’s not waste any,” Twilight said decisively. “Spike, you stay here with the Princesses, they could probably use your help.”

Luna shook her head. “I can’t stay here. I may not be able to fix this myself, but I have to help. I know *how* to fix it, and you’ll need me there.”

“We’ll be glad to have you,” Twilight said warmly, then turned to the guards. “You need to stay here and keep order.” As if to underscore her words, something in another room cracked and crashed to the ground. They all winced.

“We’d better get back to Ponyville before it falls apart.” Rainbow Dash observed. “Do you think you can take us back the same way?”

“Well, I think so.” Twilight glanced at Luna, somewhat more worried about her abilities now that a goddess was involved. “Spike, you stay with Celestia. Hang on everypony.” Spike nodded, holding onto Celestia’s pectoral collar and looking more than a little lost. He and Celestia had always had a special rapport; Twilight hoped it would help the Princess. Luna stepped forward to join their little group, and Twilight took a breath. She closed her eyes and concentrated, horn glowing.

She opened them on a swarm of confused fireflies. That was what it looked like, at

least; after a moment the lights resolved themselves into a myriad of lanterns that the residents of ponyville were carrying about, to illuminate the moonless night. A slow wave of stillness and silence spread out from where they had appeared as the ponies glimpsed Princess Luna, going down on their knees.

It was not reverence and relief in those faces, as it would have been for Celestia. It was a mixture of fear and hope, confusion and dread. Twilight Sparkle saw Luna shrink back slightly from those faces, and then visibly gather herself up. "My little ponies," the princess addressed them, her voice soft but carrying in the hush.

"I know you are afraid. But we are going into the Everfree Forest to the source of this problem." Luna gestured at the four ponies with her. "Stay calm and stay safe, and soon everything will be fine again."

"I hope ya'll weren't planning on going in there without us! Right, Fluttershy?" It was Applejack, shouldering her way to the front of the crowd. "Ah, begging your pardon, Princess," she added hastily, ducking her head to Luna.

"We wouldn't dream of leaving without you," Luna favored Applejack with a smile, "but I don't see Fluttershy."

"She was right behind me!" Applejack protested, turning around and peering around. "Oh for..." She trotted back into the crowd, and they followed. The yellow Pegasus was crouched down next to closed-up fruit cart, looking terrified.

"Come on, Fluttershy," Applejack urged, bending her head down to nose at the Pegasus. "With all this going on the animals of the Everfree Forest are going to be in a right panic. We need you if we're going to get past them."

"But...it..." Words failed her, and she just pointed at the ominous wash of red light emanating from the depths of the forest.

"I know, Fluttershy." Twilight Sparkle said, stepping up next to Applejack. "But we still need your help. Please?"

"You can do it!" Pinkie pranced around Fluttershy. "It can't be any worse than a manticore and a dragon and a cockatrice and oh there was that time you exploded twice." Fluttershy looked nonplussed for a moment, then closed her eyes and gave a tiny nod. She rose to her feet, wobbling a bit as the ground trembled, and Rarity looked worriedly in the direction of the trees. "I hope there's some forest left when we get there."

Five of them cantered down the road, three of them carrying their own lanterns. Rainbow Dash flew close overhead, inside the band of illumination, and Pinkie bounced her way along as usual. As they neared the border of the forest, a pair of eyes gleamed up ahead. They slid to a halt, but after a moment the owner of the eyes stepped into the light, and they could see it was just Zecora. "Glad I am to see you here," she told them. "It seems the end of the world is near."

"Is it bad in there?" Twilight asked the zebra. "What's going on?"

"The creatures within howl and scream. It is like a terrible dream. The earth cracks and beasts roam. Soon I fear I will not have a home." Zecora shook her head. "Of this night I have had my fill. I am going in to Ponyville."

Luna glanced briefly at Twilight – the Princess had never encountered the zebra before – and then addressed Zecora herself. "You should be safe there, but we have to go in to deal with

this. We'll tell you when it's safe to go back." Zecora glanced over them again, nodded, and swept past on her way to Ponyville.

They walked into the Everfree Forest, and it seemed Zecora was not exaggerating. The branches of the trees and the underbrush rustled with the sound of fleeing, panicked animals. Something large and fast-moving slammed into Pinkie Pie, knocking her sprawling, and the beast squealed and fled before they could even get a good look at it.

"Hey! That was *rude*! Rudey McRudepants. You could at least say you're sorry!" Pinkie called after the vanished animal.

"We're gonna get trampled if we're not careful," Applejack observed, and they all looked at Fluttershy. The yellow Pegasus took a breath and stepped to take the lead, talking in a soothing tone to the surrounding animals. "It's all right, little animals. We're here to make everything better. Just let us through and everything will be fine."

She continued her litany of reassurances as they moved deeper into the forest, and the noise in their immediate vicinity abated at least a little. Luna looked around uncertainly as they walked, and then tossed her head in a short, sharp movement. "I wanted to say thank you," she told them quietly, "for coming to help me. If you hadn't showed up, I don't know what would have happened."

"Think nothing of it, dear," Rarity told her. "That's what friends do."

Luna arched her neck in surprise then favored them with one of her infrequent smiles. "Thank you, anyhow."

"So...Princess, what exactly can we do to fix...all this?" Twilight waved a hoof to indicate the chaotic forest and the malevolent light staining the sky. Luna looked up and took a breath before replying.

"All those years ago, Celestia and Nightmare Moon cracked the foundation of this world. Not just the rock and mountains, you understand, but fundamental essence. That's why the Everfree Forest has always had different rules than the rest of Equestria. But you represent all the fundamental nature of Equestria. I hope that Twilight's magic, and the power of your friendship...will..." The princess trailed off with an odd look on her face, her legs trembling and then collapsing under her.

"Luna! Are you all right?" They crowded around her, except for Fluttershy who just threw back a quick, worried glance and continued trying to soothe the wildlife.

"I'm...fine. I just didn't realize how much Celestia was doing to protect me." She gave Rainbow Dash a grateful look as the pegasus helped the alicorn to her feet. But Rarity gasped, pointing at Luna's chest. A dark stain was leaking from under her pectoral collar, nearly black in the lurid illumination of the breaking world.

Rarity's horn glimmered as she removed the pectoral, revealing a deep wound matching exactly the one Celestia had. "You have to rest, darling! You can't keep walking with that!"

"It won't get any better." Luna sighed, her own horn flickering as she took the pectoral back from Rarity, settling it in place. "Not until this is fixed." She looked around at them. "I can't afford to rest."

"Lean on me, dear," Rarity offered, stepping up next to Luna. "We can't have too much further to go." The princess ducked her head to Rarity as the group started up again. Rainbow Dash dropped down to walk next to Twilight. "Do you think she'll make it?" The Pegasus asked

quietly.

"She'd better," the unicorn returned, equally quietly. "Even if I actually knew what we were supposed to do, what would we do without the moon?"

"Uh...guys?" Fluttershy's voice came from ahead. "I don't think I can talk this one down."

They turned to look, and were confronted by an enormous hulk in the path. It went up and up, the translucent form blotting out the sky. It growled, and Fluttershy squeaked, backing up fast enough that she ended up under Pinkie Pie. "An Ursa Major!" Twilight stared at it. It really was an Ursa Major this time, and there was no possible way she could take care of it in the same way as she had the Ursa Minor. It rose even higher, the growl rattling the branches of the nearby trees.

"Hey, ugly, over here!" They all turned to look at Applejack, who had run off to the side and was shouting at it. The massive bulk of the animal shifted as it glared at the pony. "Yeah, you!" She continued, running further away and drawing the attention of the beast.

"Applejack!" Twilight hissed, horrified.

"Don't worry, I got this!" She grinned at them, then stuck out her tongue and blew a raspberry at the Ursa. It growled and swung its paw, crushing a half dozen trees, but Applejack dodged easily. "You couldn't hit the Apple family barn!" She taunted it, dashing off and away from their path.

"...I hope she'll be okay," Fluttershy said, from her hiding place underneath Pinkie.

"Of course she will! Applejack is amazing!" The pink pony bounced forward, and Fluttershy picked herself up.

"But there are all those animals out there. I don't want her to get hurt!" Fluttershy watched the hulk of the Ursa Major recede, punctuated with Applejack's voice echoing through the trees.

"I'm sure she'll be fine, dear. She does this sort of thing for a living." Rarity gave the pegasus a somewhat strained smile. "Shall we carry on?"

The source of the red light was close now, as they approached the site of the old castle ruins. The creaking and groaning of tortured rock echoed through the trees as the ground underhoof writhed in agony. Luna's mouth was set in a hard line, and blood had dripped down her dark coat to stain her hooves, but still she pressed grimly on.

The forest ended abruptly at a pile of scree, clattering and slithering into slowly swirling vortex of shattered stone. Even larger chunks of rock, earth, and whole trees were floating in an ever widening maelstrom of baleful light. It stretched up into the sky and down into the earth, a bottomless abyss that had already swallowed an immense chunk of the forest.

"Dear Celestia." It was a terrifying sight, and even as they watched, another tremblor broke off a large section of rock and tree to their right, where it spiraled in toward oblivion. Twilight wasn't entirely certain who had spoken. It might have even been her, because she fully agreed with the sentiment.

She looked over at Luna. "So...what do we do?"

Luna straightened, giving Rarity a murmured thanks as she stepped up beside Twilight. "This is...worse than I thought," she admitted. "But it can still be fixed." She took a slow breath and let it out, her horn glowing softly as she lowered her head to talk to Twilight. "Follow my lead."

The four ponies watched as Luna murmured into Twilight's ear, the light purple and dark purple glow from their horns mixing as it flowed forth against the red. It flattened itself, spreading around the entire enormous funnel. "What do you think they're doing?" Rainbow Dash whispered.

"Something far beyond us, I'm sure," Rarity whispered back.

"Oooh, I hope it works." Fluttershy had crouched down behind a tree, only peering out at the progress once or twice. "All the animals are just so scared. And so am I." The last words were in a far quieter tone.

"Aww, it's okay Fluttershy." Pinkie Pie bounced over to her. "They'll make it all better, you'll see! Now gimme a hug." Before the pegasus could react, Pinkie had pounced on Fluttershy, and Rarity giggled at their expressions. "There, do you feel better now?" Pinkie grinned at Fluttershy, and the pegasus had to smile back. "...yeah."

The wind stirred, and they peered out to see Twilight's horn glowing brightly, purple energy swirling against the red, the dark lines of Luna's energy rippling through both. The unicorn and the alicorn stood together, silhouetted against the end of the world. They held that tableau for a minute, for two, and then Twilight's horn blazed painfully bright.

The wind did more than stir now, it swept in toward the vortex in a breeze, then a wind, then a gale. It stripped the leaves from the trees and flung them onward, keening through the branches of the forest. The four of them flattened themselves against the trees, in the lee of the wind, but the two on the lip of the precipice didn't seem to be affected.

Magical energies roiled around them and lightning flared in the maelstrom beyond, casting staccato shadows into the woods. But all the chaos seemed afraid of the alicorn and the unicorn, not daring to touch them as the funnel began slowly, oh so slowly, to shrink.

Luna's horn was barely glowing, while Twilight's had grown ever brighter, flashing and flaring until it illuminated the forest in a stark monochrome, shadow edges sharp as razors. And the still it shrunk, leaving clean-swept, bare rock behind it, the abyss diminishing. And then, as the wind reached its peak, Luna collapsed.

It may have been that she was trying too hard. It may have been that the strain of the wound had taken too much of a toll. It may have even been that she saw the magic working, and in her hope had lost her focus. Regardless of the reason, the princess scrabbled at the rock, and then the wind pulled her in.

"Luna!" The shout came from four throats; Twilight was insensate, her eyes closed and her horn too bright to look at. The four looked at each other and then Rainbow Dash narrowed her eyes. She spread her wings and leapt into the gale and she, too, was gone.

"Rainbow!" Rarity cried out after her, but Pinkie Pie just waved happily. "She's the best flyer in Cloudsdale, remember? I bet she'll come back *any second!*" But as the seconds passed, and the vortex and the abyss grew smaller and smaller, there was no sign of them.

"You're crazy, you know that, right?" Rainbow Dash muttered to herself as she let the wind fill her wings, propelling her into the middle of a hurricane of rock and debris. Her coat tingled as she passed through the purple static surrounding it. She didn't even know where to begin looking, and it took all of her skill and concentration to avoid the rocks that seemed to fling themselves into her path.

Still, she drove deeper and deeper into the confusion until she seemed to break into the eye of the storm. There was a narrow beam of red that seemed to go down and down forever, and she couldn't even see the sky. But far, far down was a glimpse of something with a dark coat. "Luna!"

She dove. It reminded her, strongly, of her dive to save Rarity, but this was far more surreal. Instead of clouds, she was surrounded by whirling rocks. Instead of ground, there was an infinite emptiness. Instead of a white unicorn, there was a black alicorn. But it was just as desperate. She was dimly aware that the walls were closing in.

Luna grew slowly closer, no matter that Rainbow's wings ached from effort her hooves tucked up ahead and behind to minimize air resistance. Her vision narrowed, focusing down to just one object. One breath, and then another. It seemed like hours as she drove downward until finally her hooves touched the alicorn's coat.

Eternity seemed to compress into a few seconds. She grabbed Luna, slewing wildly to change direction, distantly cognizant that she was rebounding from a spreading ring of light as she angled upward, but more immediately aware that the tunnel she was in was very long, very narrow, and closing rapidly.

Rainbow knew she had to reach the surface, but the alicorn's weight seemed to drag her down. Her wings felt like lead, but she worked them anyway. Again her vision focused down, but this time on the tiny, tiny dot that was the end of the tunnel. Breathe in. Breathe out. There was no wind, there was no weight, there was no world. There was only speed.

Her surroundings blurred into monochrome, the wind tore at her like claws, but the exit barely seemed to grow closer. Breathe in, breathe out. The aches and pains seem to vanish. The pressure in her chest eased and her eyes stopped watering from the sensation of the wind. The light fluctuated, shifting up-spectrum from red, to orange, green. But that light was growing dimmer by the moment.

The hideous red light was almost gone, and still there was no sign of Rainbow Dash or Luna. The wind had slackened enough that they could creep out of the trees, but the sheer pressure of the magic crackling around Twilight made it impossible to reach her. They could only watch helplessly as the last few chunks of windswept stone whirled into the narrow gap.

"Are...are they going to make it?" It was Pinkie, for once, her eyes wide and full of tears. "I don't know, dear. I don't know." Rarity put her hoof on Pinkie's shoulder, while Fluttershy simply hid her face against the ground and wept.

Three things happened at almost exactly the same time. A beam of coruscating blue shot into the heavens from the last tiny hole, competing even with Twilight's illumination. The afterimage left on Pinkie's retina was that of a pair of wings, of one pegasus holding an alicorn.

“Dashie!” Pinky exclaimed.

The last rock slammed into place, leaving a broad flat face of rock, clean of everything but a depression in the shape of Twilight’s cutie mark, writ large in the middle of the forest. The red light winked out forever, the trembling of the ground was silenced. The stars were visible again.

And Twilight’s light winked out, the unicorn collapsing to the ground, utterly prostrate. Residual magic sparked in cracks that covered her horn like a fine patina, spattering over the mangled grass. “Twilight!” Rarity cried out, almost at the exact time that Pinkie shouted.

The white unicorn rushed over to Twilight’s side, while Fluttershy looked up, following Pinkie’s hoof as she pointed at the ascending column of blue. “It’s Rainbow Dash!” The pegasus was ascending like a meteor returning to the heavens, moving so fast that they could see only the light she left behind.

The blue light winked out. Fluttershy and Pinkie pie gasped, looking at each other. And the moon appeared, suddenly and full, directly above them.

Rarity looked up from her friend as moonlight soaked the scene around her. Unimaginably high above them, there was the impression of vast wings, and then Luna descended from the heavens. She had more in common with Nightmare Moon than the Princess Luna they were used to, a being of darkness and stars and the infinite night, and on her back she bore Rainbow Dash.

The pegasus looked terrible. The wind had stripped off most of her coat and feathers, leaving her with bloodied skin and a cutie mark. But she bore a smile on her face, and on her chest was a lightning bolt in the same brilliant blue as the fading column she had made. “Did we do it?” She whispered, her voice hoarse and strained.

“Yes, Rainbow Dash,” Luna said, the goddess’ radiance diminishing as she became once again their Princess Luna. The blood was gone, the alicorn once again whole and hale. “You both did it.”

Rainbow Dash blinked blearily. “So. Cool.” She said softly, and then closed her eyes.

Pinkie Pie looked down at her, her lips quivering, and Luna put a hoof on her shoulder. “She will survive. But my sister is not back yet.” Luna looked in the direction of far-off Canterlot. “I only hope we are in time.” Rarity looked at Fluttershy and Pinkie, then dipped her head down and lifted Twilight onto her back.

“Finally lost that bear. Now that’s how you do a rodeo. I bet - Twilight! Rainbow!” It was Applejack. With all the light blazing from their location, it was no mystery as to how she’d found them. “What happened?”

Pinkie Pie took a deep breath. “Well, Twilight and Luna were closing up the hideous horrible hole thing and then Luna got swept into it because of the wind did I mention the wind yeah there was a lot of wind and so Rainbow Dash went in after her but Twilight didn’t know it so she kept closing the hole and we thought that they weren’t going to make it out but they did and Dash went really really high and was glowing and then Twilight collapsed and then Luna came back and then you showed up.”

Applejack blinked, disentangling the flow of words. “What do I need to do?”

“We need to get to Canterlot, as fast as possible,” Luna told her. “Can you go ahead and prepare a carriage for us?”

“Of course! I’m as fast on the ground as Rainbow is.” Applejack kicked up her rear hooves and was gone. The rest of them trotted behind, as fast as they could.

Canterlot was in shambles, but Celestia’s room was still intact. The guards took charge of the two injured ponies, spiriting them away to the hospital while Luna proceeded into the room. Spike was still there, stroking soothingly at Celestia’s head. He looked up as the princess entered the room. “She’s not better,” he said, half accusingly-half pleadingly.

“I know,” Luna said softly. She looked down at her sister, closed her eyes briefly, and went to the east window. She looked out at the sky, and her horn glowed as the moon sank down behind the horizons. Then took a deep breath, and her horn glowed brighter.

The sun came up.

The light spilled across the room, and as it touched Celestia, her mane stirred and shimmered. Her eyes opened and she took a deep lungful of air, the wound in her chest vanishing like a shadow as the light sparkled on her coat. She glanced down at Spike, then turned to meet Luna’s gaze. After a very long moment, the sisters shared a smile.

My Most Faithful Student, Twilight Sparkle.

I have said it in person, but I want to put in text my gratitude for your skill and determination and bravery in your defense of Equestria. I know you and Rainbow Dash will be some time recovering, and if there is anything you want, anything at all, you have only to ask. Equestria owes you much.

I have sent a separate note to Rainbow Dash, as has my sister. It is not often that a pony exceeds the calling of her cutie mark, and it has marked her indelibly. I suspect that when she’s older, she will not have any problems making it into the Wonderbolts.

*As always,
Princess Celestia.*

Twilight looked up from the letter. She held it awkwardly in her hooves, her horn still swathed in mineral-soaked bandages. Now and again a small spark of purple would flare underneath the wrappings, sending a twinge of pain into her head.

“Thank you for bringing this, Princess Luna,” Twilight said, fumbling the letter onto a table near the hospital bed, which held a stack of similar missives. “But you didn’t have to come yourself.” The unicorn frowned as the letter slipped off the side, but it glowed briefly as Luna picked it up and set it neatly down on the others.

“I did have to come. Not only did Rainbow Dash save my life, but it’s my fault that you ended up like...that.” The alicorn dropped her head, looking younger than ever. And Twilight felt very, very old, even though she knew how ridiculous that was.

“What, this?” Twilight tried a smile, reaching a hoof toward her horn. She stopped halfway, wincing, as purple spat under the bandages and a wisp of smoke curled up from

scorched cloth. "It's...well, it's not fine. But at least I earned it doing something that matters. Same as Rainbow Dash."

They both glanced over to the adjacent hospital room, where the pegasus lay. Where Twilight only had a dressing around her horn, the pegasus was covered muzzle to hoof. While Twilight's horn would likely be covered in crazed lines for life, Dash's coat would no longer be smooth and unmarred. She was sleeping now, curtains drawn, and Luna lowered her voice.

"But at least Dash will heal. There's no telling if you'll ever be able to cast properly again. I...I failed you, and not just this time, but thousand years ago. This was all my fault to start with, and I couldn't fix it."

The unicorn was silent for a moment, then reached out a hoof to touch Luna's shoulder. The alicorn looked at her and Twilight smiled softly. "I won't say that you're wrong. But sometimes you can't do things alone, and that's what friends are for. Sometimes you make mistakes, but friends forgive you. You're still our friend, Luna."

The alicorn returned Twilight's smile with her own. It was a small thing, that smile, but it was there. "Thank you. I suppose I'm not used to..." Luna shook her head, unable to find the proper words to finish the sentence. They stayed that way for a moment in silence, then Luna glanced at the other hospital room again.

"I'd like to leave a note for Rainbow Dash. Could I borrow...?" She nodded at Twilight's supplies. The pen and ink were next to Twilight's bed, and Spike had put in overtime transcribing for the unicorn.

"Certainly, go ahead." It was in some ways a reminder of how much of an invalid Twilight was, even if there wasn't a thing wrong with most of her, and she couldn't quite keep the pain out of her voice. Luna dipped her head to Twilight and unrolled a piece of parchment.

The pen floated as she tried to come up with something adequate to say to the pegasus. She couldn't think of any sort of apology that would suffice, and she didn't have practice in formal thanks like her sister. After a long time, she scribbled three lines on the piece of parchment and placed it at Twilight's bedside. "Will you make sure she gets it?"

"I'll make sure."

Luna looked out at the sound of the nurse, coming to make the rounds. "It looks like it's about time for me to go. But I'll come back later, all right?"

"I'm looking forward to it." Twilight watched Luna go. The alicorn glanced back once, not quite managing to hide the worry in her eyes, and then her hoofsteps faded down the hall. On the table beside her bed lay the parchment, and Twilight touched it with a hoof, waiting for Rainbow Dash to wake.

Dear Rainbow Dash,

You were awesome. Thanks.

-Luna.

