Celestia and I stood at the top of the staircase at the back of the grand foyer. Last month, we awoke to total darkness and learned that the unicorns had all been drained of their magic from raising and lowering the sun and moon. When we took over the duties, we finally got our cutie marks, and Princess Platinum insisted that we hold a gala to celebrate. It sounded pretty boring to me, but Celie thought it was a good idea.

 “Pleeeease can I prank the guests?” I begged, making the best puppy dog eyes I could.

 “No,” Celie said firmly. “Now that we have our cutie marks, we're adults, and we need to start acting like it.”

 Not many ponies were brave enough to travel through the Everfree Forest to get to our castle even though Melvin made sure nothing attacked them, so Celie was disappointed that there weren't as many guests as she had hoped. She pretended it didn't bother her as we welcomed everypony to the Grand Galloping Gala.

 When everypony had gone to the ballroom, I went to find Princess Platinum. *Where is she?* I thought as I scanned the room. *Oh, yeah...* Princess Platinum got sick and couldn't come. Celestia and Star Swirl were across the room, but they were talking about books again. Chancellor Puddinghead was so busy eating cake she didn't even hear me say hello. Melvin couldn't come because everypony would've freaked out if they'd seen him at the gala. When Celestia wasn't looking, I quietly snuck out through a secret passage and went to talk to Melvin.

 I told Melvin all about how Celie had been acting lately. Celie had always thought I acted childish sometimes, but while she didn’t approve of my pranks, she was always willing to play in the castle with me. But when we got our cutie marks, she decided we had to act differently. She says adults don’t play hide-and-seek. Adults don’t prank ponies. Adults don’t play on slides. Adults do *mature* things for fun, like reading and drinking tea and dancing and going for walks and flying and having pleasant conversations. Walking through the Everfree Forest and flying are fun, but those other things are boring! I pointed out that Chancellor Puddinghead doesn’t act like that. Celestia pointed out that Chancellor Puddinghead is an incompetent ruler. Anytime I asked Celestia to play with me, she passed it off as childish. It’s like she cares more about being mature than spending time with me.

After a while I heard hoofsteps.

 “Luna Alicor!”

 Celestia was trotting towards me, and she did not look happy.

 “Luna, you can't leave the gala! We're the princesses of Equestria! It's our duty to be there!”

 “But Celestia, it's boring and there wasn't anypony to talk to!” I whined.

 “I think it’s boring, too, but it doesn’t matter. You have to go anyway.”

 “I thought we ruled together! Why should *you* get to make all the decisions? You’re only two years older than me!”

 Celestia was silent for a moment. Then she sighed and said, “You're right. We do rule together, so I can't *make* you go. But you still shouldn't have left without telling me! The gala is over now, so let's go back to the castle.”

 “Fine...” I grumbled, and followed Celie back to the castle.

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 Ever since I got my cutie mark, I've been up mostly at night. I've always loved the night, but when it became my responsibility, I loved it even more. As the Princess of the Night, it was my duty to protect the citizens of Equestria from danger during the night. But Equestria was usually peaceful, so I spent most of the night exploring the forest.

 The Everfree Forest was awesome during the day, but at night it was like a whole different world! Nocturnal animals like cragadiles and bats were awake. The trees overhead were thick, so the only light came from the yellow glow of thousands of fireflies. It was so beautiful. So peaceful. But I was all alone. I sometimes visited the village at the edge of the forest, which was where Star Swirl lived, but everypony was going inside when I got there. Except for Star Swirl.

Star Swirl and I had nightly lessons on how to move the stars. *If I can move the stars, everypony will stay up at night to see them,* I thought. One night, as sparks flew from my horn, the stars started moving! I’d finally done it!

“I did it! I finally did it! I moved the stars!” I cried. I bounced over to Star Swirl and hugged him. “Thank you, Star Swirl!” *Now there will be big changes!*

After mastering the spell, I started changing around the stars. They were just scattered randomly before, but if they formed pictures, I was sure ponies would stay up to look at them! Soon the sky was filled with subtle but beautiful pictures of ponies, animals, and all sorts of things. When my constellations were complete, I walked to the village with a new spring in my step.

But nothing had changed. Just like before, everypony was going to bed when I got there. *I’ll just wait a few days,* I thought. *Soon they’ll see the sky and want to stay awake.* But days turned to weeks and then months, and still nopony stayed up. Even Star Swirl didn’t stay up more than long enough to tell me how beautiful it was. But if he really thought it was beautiful, why did he go to sleep like everypony else?

My nighttime walks became less and less frequent, then stopped almost entirely. Nopony was ever out at night, and I knew every inch of the Everfree Forest, so what was the point? The only other ponies I ever got to see were Celestia, Star Swirl, and Princess Platinum. I only saw Celestia twice a day, at dawn and at dusk, and I saw Star Swirl and Princess Platinum even less. Sometimes an emergency would come up and Celestia and I had to help, but nopony cared anymore when it was over. Most of the animals in the forest only helped build the castle because they liked Melvin, so I was alone all night.

 One evening, after Celestia lowered the sun and I raised the moon, I said, “Celie? Can we hang out tonight?”

 Celestia yawned, shook her head, and said, “I'm sorry, Luna. I'm too tired tonight.”

 “Okay, I understand,” I said with a sigh. That was always her answer. I sadly stared down at the stone floor as I slowly walked to my room.

 I couldn't stand another night of just staring at the sky, crying and hoping that somepony would need me for something. So when I thought Celestia was asleep, I teleported to the library. I didn’t want anypony to see me. I quietly flew over to the fiction section and grabbed a book with my magic...

 “Luna?”

 I almost jumped out of my skin when I heard Celestia's voice. The book fell to the ground with a *thud*. *Uh-oh.*

 “Celestia! W-what are you doing here?” I stuttered.

 “I couldn't sleep, so I came to get a book,” she replied. “What are *you* doing here? I thought you hated reading.”

 “I, uh, thought I'd give it a try,” I said, faking a smile. *I thought she said she was tired...*

 Celestia stared at me, then at the book. “Well, have fun,” she said with a small smile. “But that book is in French.”

 I looked at the book. She was right. “Oh...”

 “I think I know one you may like.” She levitated a small, red book down to me.

 “*Cindersella*? That's for babies!” I protested.

 “Not this one,” Celestia said with a grin. “It's by the Brumbies Grimm.”

 I huffed and teleported myself and the book back to my room. I had nothing else to do, so I opened up the book and began to read.

 It was creepy. I liked it.

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 Months passed like this. I eventually gave up asking Celestia to stay up late to spend more time together. Some nights I would read creepy stories in my room. Other nights I would stare at the sky that I worked so hard on and cry. Why didn't anypony care about the night, or about me? I was just as good as Celestia... right?

 One freezing November morning, Celestia and I were having our morning meal together. I barely touched my pancakes while I tried my hardest not to cry. As Celestia sipped her tea, completely oblivious to my sadness, a servant poked her head through the doorway. I quickly dried my eyes, being careful not to smudge my makeup.

 "Y-your Highnesses?" the magenta Earth pony said nervously. "King Bullion is in the throne room. He wishes to see you. He says it's very important."

 “Thank you,” Celestia said. “Tell him that we will be out shortly.”

 I gulped. If King Bullion had come all the way here through the snow so early in the morning, it must have been an emergency. We hurried to the throne room where he was waiting for us. He bowed, then looked up at us with a grave expression on his face.

 "Princess Celestia, Princess Luna," he said. "I bring news regarding the Crystal Empire."

 "What has happened?" Celestia asked, her eyes filled with concern she never showed for me.

 "Some time ago, an important message was sent to Princess Amore, and she didn't respond. After a few weeks, guards were sent to investigate. They just returned with bad news. The Crystal Empire has been invaded. Princess Amore is dead and the Crystal Ponies have been enslaved. All the crystals have turned dark. A Unicorn named King Sombra is responsible. He was already an extraordinarily powerful Unicorn, but he stole the Alicorn Amulet long ago, making him even more powerful than an Alicorn. Only *you* can defeat him."

 I was really scared. King Sombra sounded a lot more dangerous than the dragon who stole the Crystal Heart a few years ago. But that meant it was even more important for us to defeat him. And if Celestia and I could defeat this King Sombra, everypony would see that I'm just as good as she is. We had to do this.

 Celie and I spent the day preparing for our journey. We had no idea how long we'd be gone, so I filled a chariot with food, warm clothes, a first-aid kit, and other supplies we'd need while Celie researched spells and made a plan. I stayed up all day and slept that night so Celestia and I would be on the same schedule. After Celestia raised the sun the next morning, we climbed into our chariot and two Pegasus guards began to carry us to the Crystal Empire.

 The journey was awkward. Ever since we'd gotten our cutie marks, Celestia and I had been talking less and less. It had been well over a year since we'd spent any real time together. It didn't seem to bother her because she was too busy with her royal duties, but she had no idea how I was feeling. She never asked.

 After a while, I broke the silence. “So how are we gonna defeat King Sombra?” I asked.

 Celestia thought for a moment. “Well, I read about a really powerful spell that might work. But it'll take both of us to perform it. Do you think you're up for it?”

 "What do you mean?"

 “Well, you must be tired after staying up all day yesterday.”

 I gazed down at my hooves sadly. *For a moment I thought she had finally noticed something wrong...* “How do we do the spell?” I asked, looking back up at Celestia.

 “Well, we start by…”

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 After a few hours, we finally began to descend.

 “We're almost there!” one of the guards called back to me and Celestia.

 Celestia and I had spent most of the ride going over her plan and practicing the spell we were going to use. As soon as the chariot landed outside the Crystal Empire, I hopped out and stretched my legs, then looked around. For some reason it's always summer in the Crystal Empire, even though it's surrounded by snow and ice. It's a green spot in the middle of a frozen wasteland. Or it normally is. The grass we saw now was *orange*. So was the sky above us. And as we got closer, we could see that the once blue castle in the middle of the city was black.

 “This must be because of King Sombra's dark magic,” Celestia said solemnly.

 We made sure we had everything we needed in our saddle bags, then cast invisibility spells on ourselves. When we landed outside the empire, the guards stayed with the chariot and we flew to the Crystal Empire. Hopefully the spell we'd practiced on the way would work.

 Celestia and I were shocked by the state the crystal ponies were in. Things were pretty bad when the Crystal Heart was stolen by a dragon, but that was nothing compared to now. The crystal ponies were once again in a deep state of depression, and they were all chained together and marching through the streets. We couldn't tell what they were actually doing, but it didn't matter. What mattered was that they had been enslaved and King Sombra was obviously treating them very cruelly. There were black crystals jutting out of the ground. Some were small, while some were as tall as the castle. Many of the buildings had turned black as well.

 Celestia and I flew over to the castle, looking apologetically at the enslaved crystal ponies. We'd be able to help them soon. The castle had a balcony high above the streets, and on that balcony stood a gray unicorn wearing a red cape.

 “That must be King Sombra,” Celestia whispered.

 I nodded, then remembered I was invisible. “Yeah.”

 Celestia and I approached King Sombra as quietly as possible. The plan was to attack without him knowing we were there. That may not sound fair, but we had to defeat him somehow. Alicorns age differently from other ponies, so even though Celestia and I were in our 30's, we were still adolescents and had not yet reached full power. There was a chance that King Sombra would win if he had the chance to fight back. We couldn't take that risk.

 Suddenly, King Sombra stared right at us.

 “You can't fool me with that invisibility spell,” he said with an evil grin. His horn glowed and Celestia and I were visible again. *Oh no...*

 King Sombra took a few steps towards us. “So you're the pretty pretty princesses I've heard *so* much about. Princess Amore told me you'd come.” He laughed. “But you're only children! You don't stand a chance against me!”

 “Don't be so sure of that,” I said through gritted teeth.”We *will* stop you.”

 King Sombra laughed again. Then he was gone.

 “Where'd he go?!” I exclaimed.

 “Let's look inside the castle,” Celestia said.

 Celestia and I went through the door to the castle. We looked around the room, but King Sombra wasn't there. Then we heard his laugh again. It sounded like it was coming from below us. We quickly ran down the stairs, following the sound of King Sombra's laugh. In the middle of the throne room there was a huge hole in the floor with stone stairs leading down. The stairs seemed to go on forever. When we got to the bottom we saw a wooden door in the dirt wall.

 “He must be through here!” I said. I dashed to the door, opened it, and stepped inside.

 Suddenly Celestia and I were back in the throne room of our castle. Hundreds of ponies were gathered before us. We beamed at the crowd as they cheered for us.

 “Celestia, you saved us!” one pony called.

 *Celestia?*

 “Thank you, Celestia!” another called.

 More ponies called Celestia's name. Not a single one called my name. I tried to say something, but nopony heard me, not even Celestia. Everypony had forgotten me, even my own sister...

 “Luna?”

 I looked up. I was still in the room at the bottom of the stairs. Celestia was looking at me with a concerned expression on her face. I realized I'd been staring at a wall.

 “Luna, what were you looking at?” Celestia asked.

 “I... I don't know,” I said. But I did know. That door had led me to my worst fear. I heard King Sombra's laugh again, this this time coming from right behind us. My head snapped around. He was standing there watching us.

 “You foals walked right into my trap,” he said, leering at us. “You can't stop me now.” A purple and green cloud began to form around his horn.

 “Yes. We. *Can!*” Celestia said. “Now, Luna!”

 Celestia and I started the spell we'd practiced, our eyes glowing white. King Sombra looked at us in mock horror as a rainbow colored beam of magic struck him...

 But he didn't die. His body disintegrated, but he turned into a shadow. We'd done the spell wrong.

 “I told you you couldn't defeat me,” he said maliciously. He started to move towards us.

 “Luna, we have to get him out of the empire!” Celestia said as her horn began to glow.

 “*What?!*” he cried. I teleported the three of us out of the Crystal Empire. We were back in the frozen wasteland surrounding the empire.

 “Make a hole in the ice!” Celestia commanded. There was a great cracking sound as I pulled the ice apart with my magic, and Celestia began to force King Sombra into the crack.

 “You won't win,” King Sombra said. “I have one last thing planned for my crystal slaves...”

 Before we could do anything, the ground started to rumble. I looked behind us in alarm.

 “Celestia, the empire!” I screamed. Celestia quickly closed the crack and turned around. But it was too late. The Crystal Empire had disappeared, leaving behind nothing but snow and ice.

 We had failed.

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 Celestia and I trudged through the snow back to the chariot. We didn't know how we were gonna tell Equestria that we had failed to protect the Crystal Empire. Suddenly Celestia stopped dead in her tracks and gaped at the sky.

 “Celie, what's wrong?” I asked. Then I looked up.

 Celestia and I hadn't been able to make night at the normal time because we were fighting King Sombra. But the sun had already been set and the sky was filled with stars. My moon was glowing as brightly as ever. How had we not noticed it was dark sooner? Who did this?

 Celestia and I flew back to the guards as quickly as we could.

 “We have to go back to Equestria immediately!” Celestia exclaimed in a panic. “Somepony else is controlling the sun and the moon!”

 The guards were startled, but they relaxed after hearing why Celestia was freaking out. “There's nothing to worry about,” one said. “The unicorns probably realized you might not be able to lower the sun on time and did it themselves. Doing it once won't hurt them.

 “So how did it go?”

 I bit my lip and Celestia looked pained.

 “...We failed,” Celestia said quietly. “We imprisoned King Sombra in the ice, but not before he put a curse on the empire that made it vanish into thin air.”

 Everypony was silent for a few minutes until one guard broke the silence.

 “It's pretty late,” he said. “I recommend that we sleep here tonight and leave in the morning.”

 Celestia nodded. We set up the tent, crawled into our sleeping bags, and went to sleep.

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 I woke up to bright light shining through the walls of the tent.

 “Ugh... What time is it?” I muttered. I looked at Celestia. She was still asleep. *That's odd. Shouldn't she be awake before sunrise?* “Celie, wake up,” I said, shaking her awake. “It's morning.”

 Celestia groaned as she slowly opened her eyes. Then she sat bolt upright.

 “How can the sun already be up?! It hasn't been nearly long enough!” she said in alarm. “This can't be good. Luna, we need to leave right now!”

 Celestia almost never leaped into action so quickly, so that meant it was really, really bad. We quickly rolled up our tents and sleeping bags, packed our saddlebags, and began our flight. It only took a few hours, but day turned to night and back twice. We didn’t talk much, but I could tell Celestia was really worried.

 As we got closer to home, we saw that the clouds were *pink*. But they weren’t pink like the sunset. They were pink like cotton candy. There was rain, but it didn’t look right. It was brown. When we passed under the clouds, I caught a drop of the rain on my tongue. *Chocolate milk?* The ground looked like a chess board, and things were floating. Then I realized what the floating things were.

 Buildings and plants, with chunks of earth still attached, were floating everywhere. Fish were flying. Some of the ponies looked grayish and were behaving very strangely. One was chasing a little red dot. And, sitting on a throne on top of a tall, thin hill that wasn’t there before, was a bizarre monster. His body was made up of parts of tons of different animals. I looked at Celestia. She was staring at the monster in absolute terror.

 “Luna, we need to get back to the castle,” she said shakily. “*Now.*”

 “Why?” I asked. “Who is that?”

 “I’ll explain later. We need to get back to the castle before he sees us.” Celie began galloping through the Everfree Forest. I followed close behind her.

 When we got to the castle, I asked, “What’s going on? What was that thing?”

 Celestia began pacing back and forth. “That’s a draconequus,” she explained. “I read about them in a book I found in Star Swirl’s library. They have very powerful magic, even more powerful than our own. They use it to spread chaos everywhere they go. Legend has it they were defeated by the six original Alicorns hundreds of thousands of years ago, but some must have survived. This one must have taken advantage of our absence and taken over Equestria.”

 “Well, I’m gonna use the Royal Canterlot Voice! That’ll scare him away!” I started running towards the door, but Celestia teleported in front of me, blocking my path.

 “No! Before we do anything, we need to go talk to Star Swirl. He can tell us more about what’s going on.”

 Just then I heard bells jingling. I looked over Celestia’s shoulder and saw Star Swirl walking up the path. He was soaked in grape juice. The only time I'd seen him so solemn was when he failed to lower the moon alone and was drained of all his magic.