

# Constellations

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In most ways, things were as bad now as they had been a thousand years before.

Princess Luna tried very hard, she really did. When her ever-gracious sister had allowed her to once again become the caretaker, engineer, overseer, and artisan of the night, Luna had sworn to herself that things would be different. Never again would she allow a petty need for thanks, for appreciation overtake her as it had before. She had ruined her life once, and she would not let the darkness of her nature to take her down that path again.

So she poured herself into her occupation and her art. Though Princess Celestia had done adequately in filling her shoes over the past millennium, she no more had Luna's gift for the night than Luna had Celestia's way with the day. The nights that had followed the end of Nightmare Moon were consistently the most wonderful Equestria had ever known; even before losing herself to her jealousy, Luna had rarely managed such works of art as she now wrought with each day's end. A thousand years of a denied instinctual need to work her craft burst forth every 24 hours. Quiet winds whispered a mystic wonder only the natural world could truly understand. The sounds of the seasons flowed more clearly than ever before, singing the night's lullaby through a symphony of nocturnal musicians living secretive lives under cover of darkness...and in winter, the frosted silence filled the air, an impenetrable shield of calm carried through whispers. The warm lanterns of civilization shone brighter than before to beckon late wanderers, and the land itself cooled under the darkness's protection, resting after many hours under Celestia's warm yet unrelenting sun. Her namesake cast a pallor over all that its soft light gently caressed, adding a touch of mystery to even the commonplace. And the stars...Princess Luna had no need to labor upon these, her signature, for they were still her greatest pride, and their greatness and vast beauty could not be improved, only shown as well as possible.

But just as before, no pony saw.

By and large, the citizens of Equestria did as they had done a thousand years prior. When dusk visited them, they brought their day's activities to a close, went quietly to their homes, and slept through Princess Luna's daily masterpiece. Those few who stayed awake did so in their homes, with the lights on, more removed than even the slumberers from the night's joys.

Luna tried hard each night to stay strong. Appreciated or not, her nights served a function. That should provide satisfaction enough. And Celestia, at least, ever had a kind word to impart on Luna's divine work, when she sensed that her little sister especially needed it.

But Luna could not help it. There were nights now that she wept as she had before her imprisonment. She gave so much of her heart to her subjects, tried to bestow upon them the best gifts she could create...and their lives went on so blithely that her thousand-year detainment might as well not have ended.

After a thousand years of warming herself with thoughts of vengeance, her only companions demons of jealousy and rage, it was...difficult not to fall back into bad emotional habits when all that had led to her self-destructive attitude repeated itself before her once more. But Luna held strong. She loved Celestia. And she wanted to love her subjects. This time, she wouldn't let herself forget this. And one way she endeavored to keep control of herself was in listening for the wishes.

You see, I did start this story by saying that things were as bad as ever in "most ways." Most, but not all. There was one thing that had changed in the lifetimes that Luna had been away, one part of her half of the day that engaged her interest and fought off the lingering darkness within her. Ponies wished on the stars now.

All Celestia could tell her on the matter was that at some time during the past thousand years, a superstition had arisen that said that a wish made on a star would surely come true. Celestia did not have any real idea as to exactly when and how this belief had been born, nor how it had come to be so widespread amongst her subjects. She also couldn't really say for sure how it was that her little sister could hear these wishes.

Yes, Luna could hear them. She had but to step onto her balcony as her stars shone upon the world and gaze to some spot in Equestria, near or far, and if there were desires being spoken there, she would hear them. Even if the wish was not directed at the stars, it might still reach Luna's ears if made in the quiet late hours.

It was an amazing thing to hear, a direct line to the secret yearnings of any and all the subjects she shared with her sister. She alone heard the whispered prayers of her ponies, she alone shared their secret hopes with them. And Princess Luna loved it, soaked in this honest outpouring of emotions and wishes both simple and grand. It was not the exchange of love and appreciation with her subjects that she strove for with her glorious nights, but it was an intimate connection with everypony, and that alone brought her joy.

Each night was interesting. Many of the same wishes repeated themselves night after night, from the same locations, as many ponies continued to hope for something that had not yet been granted them. Some were of a small scale...many young fillies and colts would wish for the stars to grant them toys, or pass exam grades, for example. Many ponies would hope aloud in the evening for business to be good, or fortunate turns of

events. Some just mildly mentioned a hope for good weather. Others had grander requests...wishes for true love, contentment, good health, the well-being of loved ones, and so on.

Princess Luna wished at times that she could fulfill these desires, or at least attempt to. But Celestia had wisely warned her against it. The biggest wishes were beyond even Princess Luna's ability to grant. And the smaller ones, desires of a more material nature, were best left to the wisher's devices. Strength came from wanting, and worth came from having worked to achieve your dream.

So Luna just listened, and used this interesting and touching distraction to stave off other, more bitter and sad feelings. She stood on her balcony tonight, as had become her custom once she had set her evening's life in motion, and waited to begin hearing her ponies.

She began by staring keenly in the direction of Fillydelphia. It took a bit of time, but eventually, the words began to softly reach her ears.

*Please let me get the job, it's what I've always wanted to do...*

*Finally, the restoration's been finished...my goodness, I hope we never have a pest problem like that again!*

*Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight, I wish I may, I wish I might, get the most wicked awesome cutie mark of all time tonight! Maybe like a snake holding a knife that's crawling through the spokes of a wagon wheel, or...*

Luna let the wave of wishes roll over her, and when being immersed in the desires of an entire city began to feel overwhelming, she let her gaze wander from the distant city, over the countryside. This was quieter, a sprawling expanse of land only sparsely populated by her wishers. Though a few still made themselves known to her, it was generally a good way to rest before attuning herself to the hopes of a populace again.

"Listening to the wishes again?" came a voice, interrupting Luna's concentration right in the middle of somepony's wish for proper recognition of her great and powerful magic and beauty. Luna turned her gaze from her darkened kingdom to see that Celestia had joined her.

"Ah, Celestia...yes, I was," she answered, surprised, and feeling, as always, a slight discomfort at being near her older sister. For all Celestia did to be welcoming and return their relationship to the happy days of so long ago, it was difficult for Luna to feel totally

at ease with her. For a thousand years her jealous hatred for Celestia had steeped within her...Celestia had forgiven her for everything, but for Luna, such accepting forgiveness was difficult to take in.

"Such a lovely night...you've outdone yourself once again," Celestia commented. Luna blushed at her sister's praise and scuffed at the flooring with a hoof. And yet, as pleasing as it was to have her sister say such things, she still wished, she still needed, it to be somepony else...to hear appreciation come from somepony who did not already love her and care for her feelings, praise from an unbiased source!

"I don't mean to interrupt you, my dearest sister, but there is something I'm curious to know," Celestia continued. Luna looked up at her with interest. It was not often that Celestia did not already know everything about a subject. "What is it that my most faithful student wishes for?"

Luna thought about it, and blinked in surprise. "I haven't ever heard her wish before."

"No? Well, I suppose that's not surprising...she is so very pragmatic! She probably does not believe in star-wishing. Thank you anyway...I'll leave you to your listening." And with that, Celestia made her exit.

Luna turned back to her task. This time, she concentrated her sights on Ponyville. She didn't know why she had been so surprised at never having heard Twilight Sparkle's wishes before--not everypony wished on stars, and Celestia made it sound like Twilight Sparkle was not the sort of pony to do so.

Still, Luna was now curious. What sort of thing would Celestia's favored apprentice desire?

*Eeyup, won't be long now till the next harvest...sure hope Ah don't ever get hurt at harvest like last time, Applejack's fit to kill 'erself if she tries it all alone again...*

*Wish that crazy servant of mine would learn her proper place. She's here to feed me, not entangle me in her dress-making nonsense.*

*Hmph! I hope somepony ruins THEIR Cute-ceañera some day! If they even ever have one!*

Sorting through the many spoken desires of a smaller town like Ponyville was much easier than it would have been for Canterlot or Fillydelphia, but in the end, Luna didn't hear Twilight's voice anywhere in the wishers' midst. She tried again the next night, and the night after, but if Twilight Sparkle wanted for anything, she didn't do so vocally.

Eventually Princess Luna resigned herself to Celestia's opinion and let the matter slip from her mind, going back to her usual routine of distracting herself from her dissatisfaction.

Oddly, that small aggravation had seemed to sour the experience a bit for her...or perhaps her unfortunate bend toward bitterness had been leading there anyway. Whatever the cause, there began to be times when Luna shut herself from the wishes early in the evening, times when she felt stirrings of anger to hear them. It had been charming at first, but...was that all the stars were to these ponies? Totally unappreciated until somepony wanted something from them? Was the vast, stunning cosmic art Luna had painted for them worth nothing if it couldn't give them something?

Luna would catch herself thinking such things. And she would stamp them out in her mind, her willpower a sharp set of hooves to crush and shred the weeds of angry thoughts. If they only wouldn't grow back so quickly.

On one evening she was particularly proud of she went flying, determined that it should be enjoyed by at least one pony. The sky was perfect, a breathtakingly beautiful deep indigo through which the moon and stars shone so clear that if anypony were to look up at them (not that they ever seemed to), Luna herself would be the only obstruction to witnessing the sky's millions of diamonds...although Luna's figure, a regal silhouette of grace against a sky colored as she, was as beautiful a part of the night sky as the celestial jewels.

Whether by chance or some subconscious remembrance of the question of many weeks prior, Princess Luna found herself trotting the sky over Ponyville. This close to her subjects, she heard the town's wishes too loudly to shut out, and their hearts reached out to hers as usual.

*Maybe I'll have lots more muffins tomorrow! That would be nice!*

*Oh dear, I don't like how fast Angel ate his dinner tonight, I hope he doesn't get a tummy-ache...*

*Just once I'd like to see her clean this place up all by herself. This was not in the job description. Does she even READ these things before making me clean them up?*

Luna paid as little attention to them as she could, trying to focus on the pleasant sensation of the breeze filtering through her mane. As she approached the large tree into which Ponyville's library was built, however, Luna spied a familiar figure on the library's

high balcony. Carefully landing in the tree's branches as quietly as the flutter of an owl's wings, Luna took a better look and confirmed that Twilight Sparkle was the one standing there. Her gaze was skyward, seemingly fixated on one of the sky's stars.

Luna's ears perked up in interest. So, her sister's prized pupil did cast wishes to the stars, after all! Determined to hear it so she could tell Celestia about it later, Luna listened intently.

*Please please please let me do the Sonic Rainboom right at the competition next week, I just can't seem to stick it and I really need to impress the Wonderbolts!*

*I never, ever want to be up at 4 AM making chocolate pudding again. Please, never let it be repeated. Give me back my life.*

Luna frowned. She still couldn't hear Twilight Sparkle's wish, and she was practically next to her! Luna focused her eyes and ears on the unicorn's figure and concentrated as hard as she could.

*Still not ginger! Why can't I ever be ginger? It really just isn't fair!*

Luna snorted in irritation, then realized her mistake and crouched down to let the leaves hide her presence as Twilight turned to look quizzically in the direction of the unusual noise. The foliage and the princess's dark coloring obscured her from Twilight Sparkle's sight, though, and after a moment of peering, Twilight turned back to the star she had been looking at.

Hidden well enough for the near future, Luna sat and continued to watch Twilight with growing confusion. Why couldn't she hear Twilight's wish? Luna could hear the wishes of everypony. Was Twilight's magical ability blocking her out, somehow? Her horn wasn't glowing, so it didn't seem likely, but Celestia had often spoken of Twilight's truly limitless potential. Perhaps she did not even need to consciously activate her talents now to...to what? Make her wish a secret? Why would she do such a thing? Who would she think could be listening?

Maybe Celestia had mentioned in her frequent correspondence with Twilight this wishing phenomenon of Luna's, so Twilight knew Princess Luna would hear whatever she said to the stars, and was hiding her hopes. Why? Were the dreams of her heart embarrassing? Or hurtful somehow?

Celestia had held a mild curiosity to know what Twilight Sparkle might desire, but Luna now felt a burning need to know. She was not to find out this night, however, for, her

wishes apparently completed, Twilight turned and went back into her library home. A quick peek through one of the upper windows revealed that the unicorn was readying herself for bed. Luna stamped her hoof lightly on the branch she balanced on with a little irritation, and then took to the air, leaving for her own bedroom far off.

For the next day, Princess Luna was clearly distracted, so much so that Princess Celestia gently asked her at one point if she was not feeling well. Realizing that she must have been acting very strangely and worried what notions her sister might have about the cause, Luna self-consciously assured Celestia that she was fine, just a bit tired from flying late the night before. She could have told her sister the truth of the matter, but she now wanted to unravel this mystery on her own.

That night was not her best. The air was a little too heavy, the wind unpleasantly strong, and somehow, the moon and stars just didn't seem to be so clear and bright. Luna could not have blamed anypony for taking no appreciative notice of it, but her interest just hadn't been in her work that night. She just wanted to get it done quickly so she could return to the branches of Ponyville's library and continue to puzzle at the situation with Twilight.

Unfortunately, Luna was in for disappointment as she touched down in the same boughs as she had occupied the night before. Twilight was not on her balcony. Thinking that perhaps it was just early for wishing, Luna sat for a time, but her object of interest did not come out, even as other ponies' wishes began to swim through the night to Luna's ears.

Eventually, the princess snuck a look through a window. Twilight Sparkle was inside, busy examining and carefully working on one of the various scientific tools that sat beneath one of the library's other windows. Luna had been gone for far too long to have any idea of the functions or names of most objects of technology in Equestria nowadays, but whatever the device was, Twilight was completely engrossed with her work on it. Luna watched with impatient intent for an hour, but the only interruptions from fiddling with the tool was when she turned from it to scribble something in a notebook. Doubtless she was conducting some experiment or another and recording its process; Celestia had impressed on Luna the fact that Twilight Sparkle was constantly engaged in the learning process.

The violet pony never once even glanced toward her balcony, and when she ceased whatever she was doing to join Spike (who had been asleep this whole time) in slumber, Luna turned and flew back to the castle, disappointed and annoyed.



The next night was more or less the same. Princess Luna gave the world a night even less impressive than the last in her impatient distraction, went to Ponyville's library, and found Twilight Sparkle once again using the unknown machine for an equally unknown experiment that Luna had very little interest in. Luna huffed in frustration and left early.

The next day, Princess Luna found herself pacing in her room in aggravation. Twilight Sparkle's scholastic hobbies were getting in the way of Luna's obsession with knowing what she wished for (and why she couldn't hear that wish). Eventually, however, she caught herself as she realized just how vexed she was. With a fearful shock, Luna realized that she was letting herself get upset, overly so. Taking a deep breath, Luna forced her feelings of frustration away. She couldn't let her emotions get the better of her. Not ever again.

Deciding she needed to distract herself from this situation, Princess Luna put particular effort into that night, spending almost twice the time she did for even her best nights on it. When that evening came around, it was spectacular.

Luna took to the air again, calmer tonight after such a dedicated session of night-crafting. She reveled in the beauty of her sky as she flew, and tried to ignore the fact that the ponies below did not. No longer quite so single-minded in her interest in Twilight's wishing, it was later that night when Luna reached Ponyville. When she did, she was pleased to spot in the distance a faint glow of a magic horn from the library's balcony. Approaching her hiding place quietly, Luna saw that Twilight was once again outside and looking upwards. The princess crept along the branches as closely as she dared and then some.

Still, none of the many wishes prancing through Luna's mind were Twilight's. Making the situation stranger still was the fact that Luna could hear, through normal means, Twilight Sparkle occasionally mutter something to herself as she looked starward. Clearly she was making SOME wish or other, but Luna couldn't make it out.

Then, however, Luna realized something: Twilight Sparkle was occasionally using her horn to write something in her notebook. Thinking back, Luna realized that she had seen the unicorn do this occasionally the night before when she was on the balcony. Perhaps that was the answer! Twilight was writing the wishes down!

It all made sense now. Whatever Twilight was mumbling, it must have been half-formed ideas about wishes at the very most. The true, complete wish she must be writing down, rather than speaking aloud, for the stars. It was a bit of an unconventional method, but it

would fit her personality. And if they were only written, never fully spoken, it would make sense that Princess Luna would never have heard them.

Finally satisfied that she knew how Twilight's hopes were evading her, Luna made herself comfortable and waited for Twilight to finish and go inside. She then watched as Twilight settled in for the night. Luna continued to stay still and hidden for a couple hours after the lights of the library were shut off, until it was certain the unicorn inside was asleep. Luna then carefully entered the book-filled tree from the balcony. Though she knew why she had not heard them, the princess was still curious to know what, exactly, the wishes had been!

Finding the notebook was not difficult, thanks both to the gracious moonlight that filtered through the windows and to the fact that it had just been left lying on a small table near the device Twilight had been fixated on the previous couple nights, resting at a precarious slant atop a few books and some paperwork. For someone as talented at organization as Celestia had occasionally mentioned Twilight Sparkle to be, she certainly did have a lot of clutter in her home.

Luna gently gripped the notebook in her teeth and flew out to the balcony with it, where her sky would make it easier to read. She opened it up and began to examine the first page. Her eyes widened in shock. She flipped to the next page, looked it over, and the next, and the next, the amazement on her face growing with each one.

Stars. The pages were filled with stars. Twilight Sparkle's notebook was a comprehensive journal of observations of the night sky. Through illustrations and charts, Twilight detailed countless constellations, explaining in innumerable notes the star formation's name, shape, movements through the sky, everything a pony could ever want to know about it. She charted the skies with detail that was technically flawless. Halfway through there were a few pages consisting solely of writing, author's notes for the book she planned to publish all these notes and observations in. In this part, Twilight Sparkle outlined her fascination with celestial movements, telling of her nightly vigils to observe and record the evening sky--on her balcony when the nights were clear, bright, and pleasant, and from her telescope (so that's what the device was for!) for the rest.

These observations were exact. Analytical. Intricately detailed, carefully illustrated, born from an insatiable need to know and understand. This was the most dedicated of critical appraisal, a scientific approach to knowing every aspect of the stars...of Luna's great gift to her land...in every detail. These notes were the review of a critic so amazed by a work of art that she could not rest until she understood its every nuance as intimately as its creator.

By the time Luna reached the final notes and data, there were a few wet spots in the notebook from where tears had fallen. Luna gently shut the notebook, giving a smile that was quiet, yet overpowering in its joy. Lifting the book with reverence, Luna deposited it where she found it, and left the library just as Princess Celestia's daily miracle began to disperse Princess Luna's.

That day, Princess Luna did something she had not done in far, far more than a thousand years...she tampered with her stars. You see, she knew how much of the vast sea of stars Twilight Sparkle had so far mapped, and what parts and constellations the unicorn had not yet recorded...and so she rearranged a tiny part of the night sky that Twilight had not yet observed, forming a new constellation of stars, this one in the same shape as Twilight Sparkle's signature cutie mark, an outpouring of love from the princess for the one who loved her night sky so, her pure joy transforming all the pent-up frustrations and bitterness that she had repressed into inspiration and beauty. Twilight would surely see it sooner or later in her stargazing. Maybe she would recognize it and know. Maybe she wouldn't...it was as perfect a representation of the unicorn's flank as Princess Luna could create, but as with many other constellations, one could find many interpretations of its form. But Twilight Sparkle was both smart, and wise...Luna had a feeling she would understand it.

And from that day forward, Princess Luna never feared herself again, for she knew now that one pony, one wonderful pony, at least, had an appreciation and love for her work as great as any Luna could have wished for.