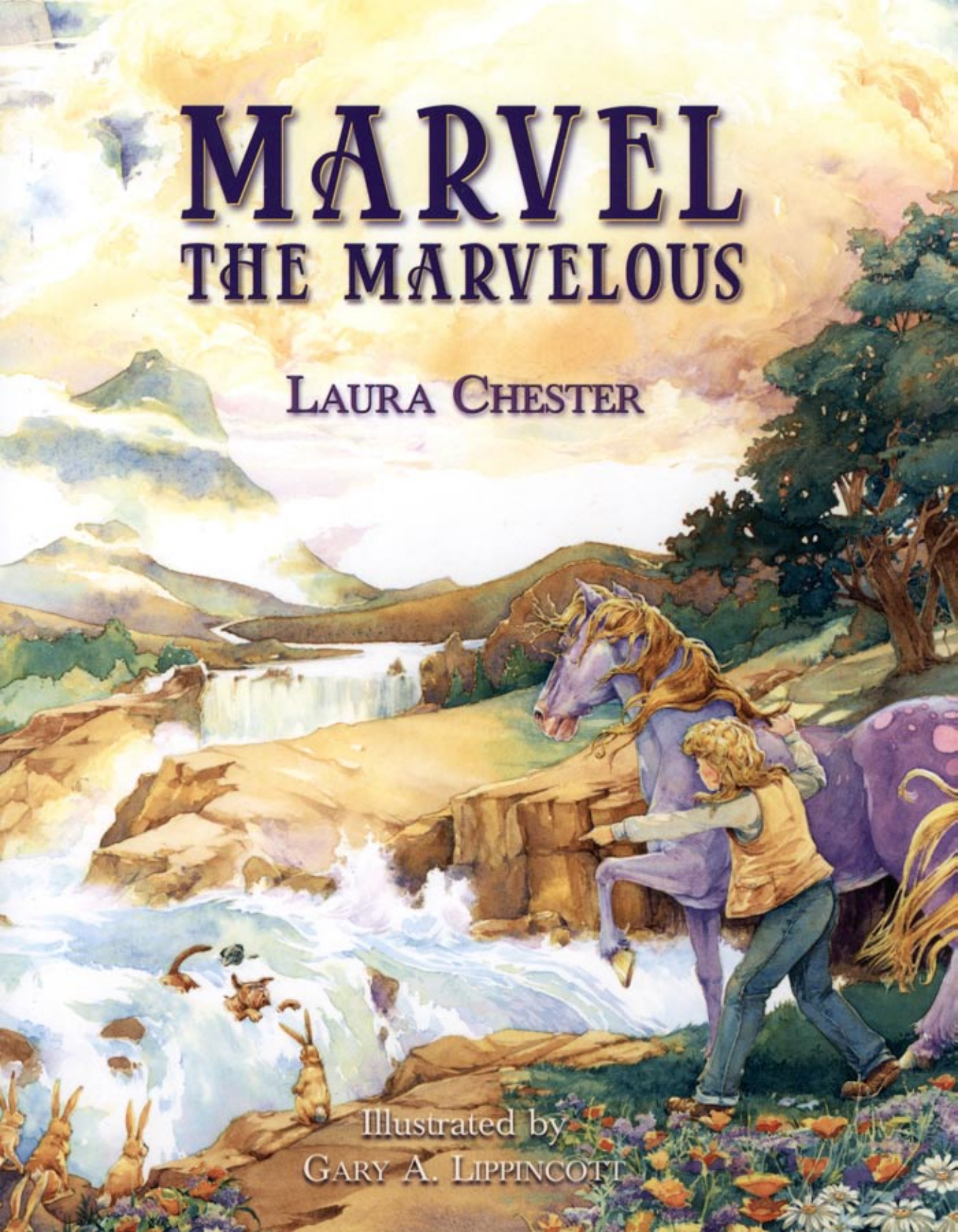


# MARVEL THE MARVELOUS

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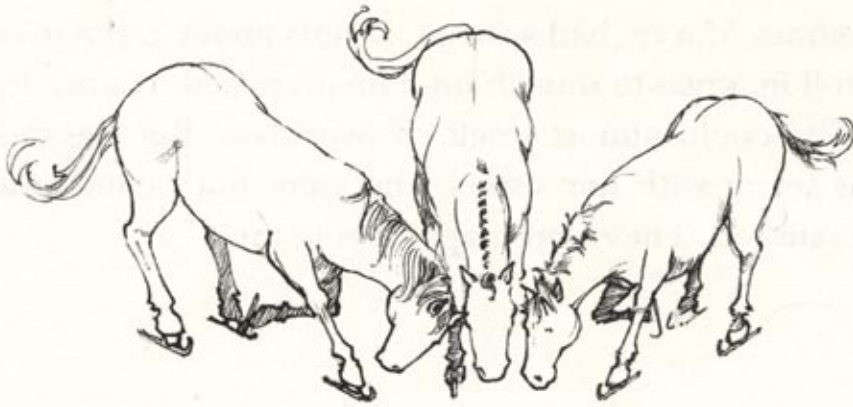
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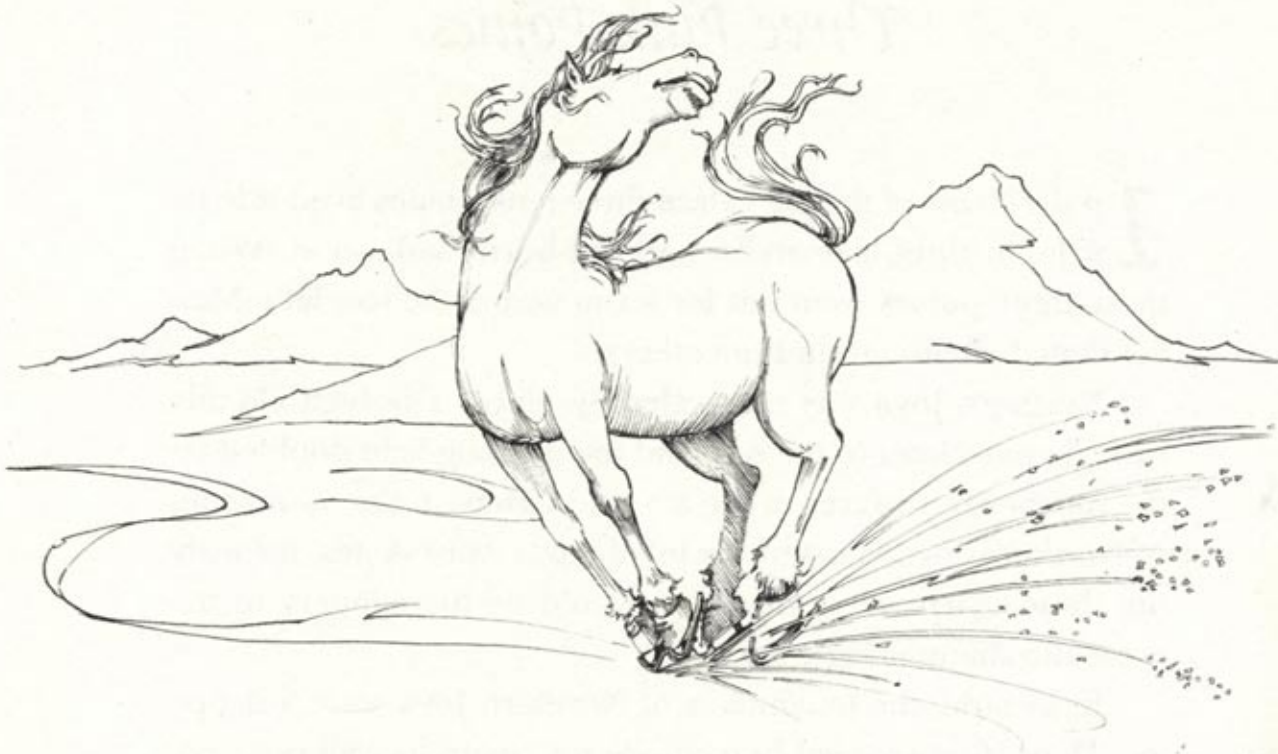
## *Three Pink Ponies*

**I**n the stable of the Ice Palace three pink ponies lived side by side, in three fine stalls made of burnished wood. When these three ponies went out for a run across the ice, little Marvel skated circles around the others.

Northern Joya was not a gloomy place. The high altitude brought one closer to the sun, and the dazzling light doubled on the mirror-like surfaces of the ice fields. Here in the far reaches of Northern Joya, most of the inhabitants wore skates, for without these sharp, silver blades, it would be too slippery to traverse the shimmering expanses.

In general, the inhabitants of Northern Joya were a happy lot. They often enjoyed homemade ice cream as well as a concoction of sweet slush, made from frozen violets. But the mainstay of the horses' diet was brittle feed, broken off from semi-frozen cubes in hard grey chunks.

Sometimes Marvel had strange dreams about green grass—fields to roll in, grass to munch on, rain-drenched, warm, fresh cut hay. She could almost smell its sweetness. But she didn't share this secret with her sisters who were both content and quite self-satisfied. They were happy being pink.



Marvel would have preferred almost any other color, but you are what you are, and you get what you get. She and her sisters had all sprung from three different blossoms on an iced-pink hollyhock. The oldest sister, Luster, arrived to greet the light of day two minutes before the second sister, Brilliance, who arrived thirty seconds before little Marvel.

Despite the close proximity of age, the three pink ponies always retained this order of superiority, (or inferiority, as some might say). Luster, being the tallest as well as the oldest, liked to look down her long elegant nose at her two younger siblings, or “*sublings*,” as she called them.

Behind her sisters’ backs, the youngest pink pony whispered, “*First is worst, second the same, last the best of all the game!*” Then she’d prance around in glee, posing on the sharp teeth of her figure skates. She liked to skate very fast and then cut to a sharp stop, spraying a fantail of ice chips just for fun.

Luster thought this exhibitionism not worthy of encouragement, for Marvel was always rushing about so, mussing up her mane and matting her golden forelock. Luster felt that Marvel’s antics didn’t improve their status in Joya. She was too unruly, an unpolished pink. How would they ever meet any nice stallions with such riff-raff running around?

Luster was known for her silky platinum mane and tail. She also had perfect proportions, and enjoyed a daily inspection of herself, which was easy enough to do, considering the fact that the ice surrounding them was as reflective as a mirror.

Brilliance, the middle pony, often called “Brince,” had a

mahogany-colored mane and tail. But she was as slow on her feet as she was fast in her mind. She walked gingerly, and preferred to keep her mane neatly braided and out of the way, believing that the tight red-brown braids helped her to focus, to concentrate.

Brince liked to ponder every situation, every nuance and proclamation from every possible angle. It could be dizzying for poor little Marvel to follow her *chew-chew* train of thought. But it was even more dizzying for Brilliance to watch Marvel dashing about like some kind of dervish.

Little Marvel, the youngest, rarely groomed herself, but most of the creatures in Northern Joya thought that she was the prettiest pink pony of all, though they wouldn't dare say so, for fear of offending the two older sisters. Little Marvel's mane and tail were a luscious gold even if a bit wild looking.

"I AM wild," she proclaimed.

Marvel didn't have time for complaints or worries, gossip or slander. She was too busy carving pictures in the ice.

Despite Little Marvel's special gifts, her older sisters liked to point out her failings—that she was impetuous, whatever that was supposed to mean, and kept the messiest stall and never polished her blades. Big deal!

In turn, Marvel complemented them on how beautifully they kept themselves and their nice, neat stalls. "I'm sorry I'm not a bit tidier, but what's the point, really?"

She appreciated a clean stall as much as anyone, but it seemed to get messy in no time, and one could spend one's

entire life cleaning things up, and she had much better things to do than primp, preen and pamper herself in the confines of a box stall! What's the point of polishing your skates when blades are dull in a day?

"I doubt if I'll ever change," Marvel admitted. "Horses are born the way they are, and change only comes in pinches."

With this proclamation she gave a little buck, and went racing across the ice fields. Nobody could catch her.

Marvel didn't care much for argument. Whenever there was a quarrel amongst the three pink ponies, it was Marvel who tried to keep harmony amongst them, saying— "We have to play together, not fight each other."

Brilliance, who was very well read, corrected her. "Play is not the important thing—everyone knows that work is what we should be doing. We all have to *work* together, like three strands of a single braid, made strong by being woven together, clasped at the bottom with a single cord."

"Yes, Unity!" replied Little Marvel, not wishing to expend so much brain power in following that scenario. She preferred a rhyme when it came to making sense, or nonsense for that matter.

*"Three against three is not for me. Three for One is much more fun."*

"Number One, are you referring to me?" asked Luster, tossing her platinum mane back and forth over her slender shoulders.

But Little Marvel had actually been thinking about the One and Only golden Pink Cloud of Perfection, wondering when it

would appear in Northern Joya again, bringing happiness and opalites along with the sweet smell of cut apples.

Whenever it arrived, the golden Pink Cloud left the entire population very still, yet exuberant. It made Little Marvel think of a hummingbird's heart, the whirring of its wings—all stirred up, but suspended in the air—perfectly still, yet full of life! It made her incredibly happy. The mysterious Pink Cloud appeared in Joya irregularly, and it was only the youngest pony who was able to hear what the Pink Cloud said.

I wonder why it doesn't speak to me, thought Brilliance, since I'm the intelligent one.

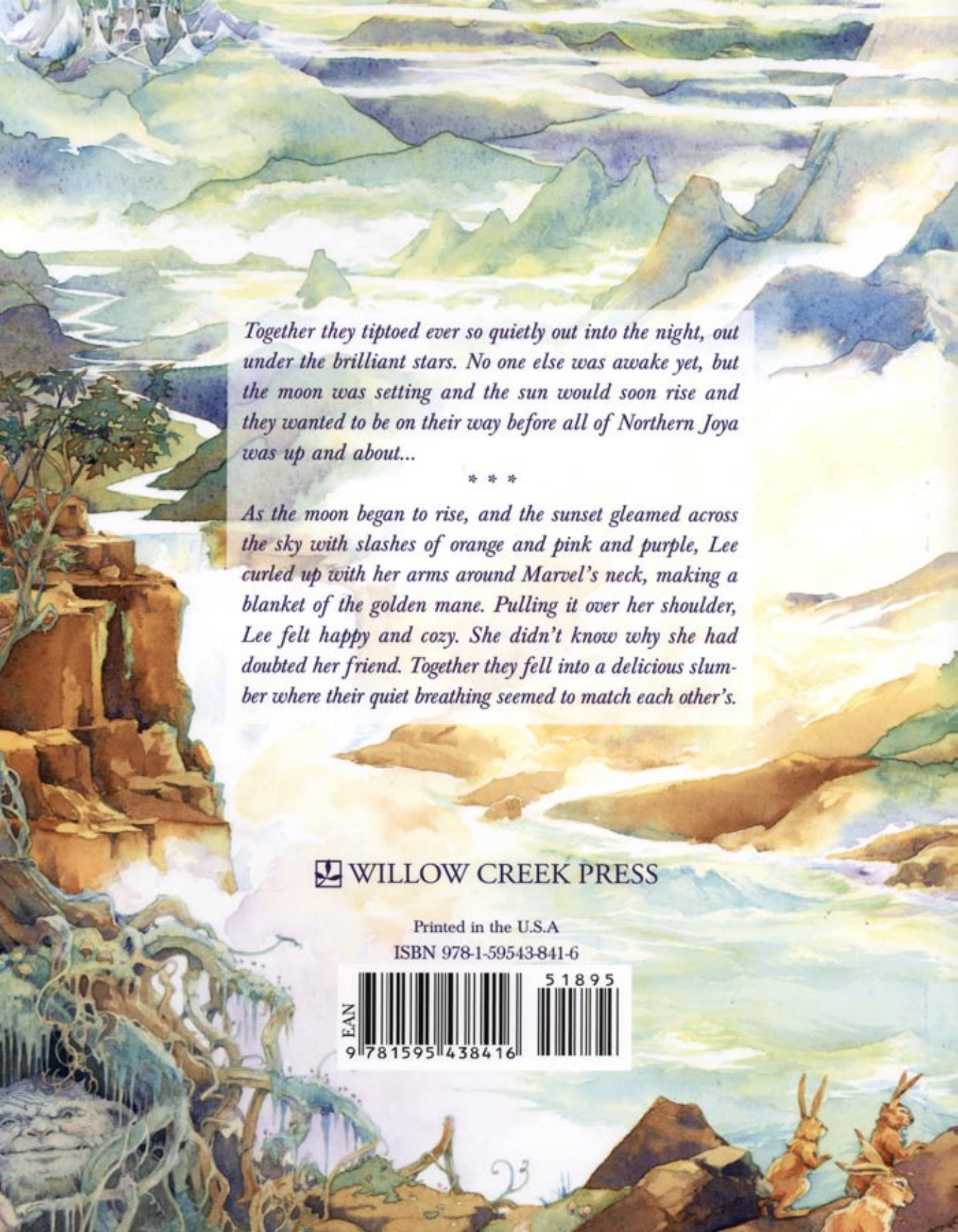
Luster thought the golden Pink Cloud should have been attracted to her, since the shine of her coat resembled the sparkles of the mysterious, heavenly cloud. But they had to admit that Marvel had a gift for listening, and only she could interpret what the Pink Cloud said.

As if Little Marvel had sensed it coming, that evening around sunset, the golden Pink Cloud came tumbling across the sky, flashing with silent lightning and radiant-colored opalites. It hovered above the Ice Palace and all the creatures became intensely still.

Little Marvel listened carefully, but all she could discern was this message—*Special visitors coming soon. Prepare yourselves. Be true.*

The older sisters didn't think that was much of a prophecy. Couldn't Marvel be more specific? How were they supposed to prepare themselves? Should they have their manes combed out or braided? Should they prepare a feast or begin a diet?





*Together they tiptoed ever so quietly out into the night, out under the brilliant stars. No one else was awake yet, but the moon was setting and the sun would soon rise and they wanted to be on their way before all of Northern Joya was up and about...*

\* \* \*

*As the moon began to rise, and the sunset gleamed across the sky with slashes of orange and pink and purple, Lee curled up with her arms around Marvel's neck, making a blanket of the golden mane. Pulling it over her shoulder, Lee felt happy and cozy. She didn't know why she had doubted her friend. Together they fell into a delicious slumber where their quiet breathing seemed to match each other's.*

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