

The Trials of The Elements

Part 1

The chariot landed smoothly in the inner courtyard of the Royal Palace. Valiant helped Dr. Mend unload his suitcase and black doctor's bag. Valiant guessed the hour to be close upon midnight; the chariot had made remarkably good time.

Dr. Mend sighed and looked around, "Canterlot," he sounded relieved, "It has been a long time since I set hoof here." he paused for a moment and looked around as if he was only just realizing where they were, "I wonder why we set down in the Royal Palace?"

Valiant glanced sideways at his companion, Dr. Mend. The good doctor was an older looking jet black Earth pony stallion with ice white mane and tail, both grown to lengths one might think would drag the ground. His mane and tail stood out in the moonlight, making him look more like a ghost than a living, breathing pony and his cutie-mark was that of a stethoscope with a scalpel and tweezers crossed behind it.

For Valiant, on the surface he appeared to be a young Earth pony stallion as well, probably in his late teens to early 20's at a glance. In truth he was 25 years old and a pegasus. He had lost his wings to a hungry bear some months previous. He was royal blue in coat and his mane and tail were light brown and worn long. His cutie-mark had only recently been given back to him by a particularly generous, perfectly groomed, white unicorn. The mark was of a gem rimmed mortar and jewel encrusted pestle with a mushroom, a root, and a flower inside then a trio of Dock leaves behind it.

The night was pleasantly cool and comfortable. The sky overhead was clear of clouds and a gentle wind blew almost constantly, cooling the four stallions in the Inner Courtyard of the Royal Palace.

Valiant surveyed the courtyard. The entire affair was circular, as far as he could tell. From one side to the other, Valiant judged the distance to be roughly 600 paces. Green, healthy plants grew in overabundance covering every wall. Tall trees, blooming flowers, and fruit-bearing plants surrounded the two stallions and their white pegasus escorts. The grass under hoof was soft and lush, like a gentle cushion for them to walk on. Fireflies lit the entire courtyard with a dazzling display of flashing lights while an orchestra of crickets chirped out a hypnotic melody that Valiant could only describe as chaotic, yet utterly melodious.

"It's so beautiful." Valiant said distantly, "Like the perfect dream you never knew you longed for."

"Times have indeed changed since my exile. At least one pony can appreciate the night." said a soft feminine voice from behind the two stallions.

Dr. Mend and Valiant turned slowly toward the voice. Behind them stood a dark blue alicorn with a mane and tail only just barely a few shades lighter. Adorning her hooves were a quartet of opaque

crystalline slippers, around her neck hung a shining obsidian-link sash emblazoned with a crescent moon. Crowning her head, around her horn was a simple yet regal onyx tiara. She stood as tall as any adult mare but her voice indicated a young filly, not yet come to maturity. Her folded wings looked abnormally long compared to the rest of her body and her cutie-mark was that of a crescent moon.

Neither stallion harbored a single doubt about who they stood before. They both quickly bowed deeply to Princess Luna, muzzles pressed firmly to their hooves. The courtyard was silent for the briefest of moments before the prostrate stallions heard another set of hooves come running toward their position.

"Rise." the Princess of the Moon said simply.

Both stallions were quick to do as they were told. They saw a bright yellow unicorn mare, with veridian mane and tail setting up a writing table next to Princess Luna. The unicorn worked with precision and speed. In mere seconds she had the table set up with parchment, quill, and ink vial at the ready.

"Topaz, write down every word they say exactly." Princess Luna ordered the unicorn. Turning toward the two silent stallions she nodded, "Describe the Valiant-Mend Procedure and how to perform it in as great a detail as you are able."

Dr. Mend began the description, with Valiant adding bits as needed. Valiant didn't know the proper terms used between medical professionals so he happily allowed Dr. Mend to take the lead. After Dr. Mend had described it as accurately as he could, he asked the unicorn to repeat it back to him so he could make double sure everything was accurate. The entire time, Princess Luna simply stood by watching and listening. Valiant felt nervous, being so close to the Princess.

"Everything sounds good. I believe that's as good as it's going to get." Dr. Mend said after two run-throughs of the directions.

Princess Luna turned her head toward Topaz,
"Thank you Topaz. Take the document to the courier's office, have them copy it, and send a copy to every city, town, and village in Equestria with instructions that every medical practitioner is to have a copy by noon today. After you are done with that, have the scribes at the University put it directly into the Medical Curriculum by royal decree."

Topaz bowed deeply to Princess Luna then turned and sped off carrying the document in her mouth.

The Moon Princess turned her head and addressed the two white pegasus escorts who had flown the chariot,

"Thank you, you may depart." she said.

The two white escorts took to the air and sped away into the night. Valiant watched them go and longed to be able to fly again. He subconsciously flapped his nearly invisible wing stumps a few times, his body remembering the natural movement. Valiant realized what he was doing and stopped immediately. He dug at the ground a couple of times and snorted in aggravation, shaking his light brown mane around.

"Don't be rude!" Dr. Mend hissed quietly, "Remember you're in the presence of royalty."

Princess Luna cleared her throat,
"Ahem. Twilight's letter indicated you both wished to provide personal instruction to the medical community regarding the Valiant/Mend procedure. Is that correct?" she asked.

"That is only part of the reason we are here your majesty." Dr. Mend began, "I can't speak for Valiant, but I'm here to catch up on recent medical breakthroughs."

Princess Luna nodded, apparently accepting Dr. Mend's explanation. She turned her head toward Valiant,
"I take it you are Valiant? What brings you here?"

"I'm here to learn about pharmaceuticals and alchemic formulas." Valiant said simply so as to not seem braggadocios.

Princess Luna regarded Valiant seriously for a brief moment before asking,
"To what end do you seek to study at the University?"

"I've made some discoveries about potions and salves and I want to learn more. I want other ponies to be able to benefit from what I've learned. After I've learned enough, I plan to buy a wagon and travel around from city to city to teach other ponies how to make potions for themselves." Valiant explained.

"How do you plan to fund this venture of yours Valiant?" Princess Luna asked.

"I was hoping to get a job at an Apothecary while I was studying at the University." Valiant said.

"Why not a pharmacy? You would make more money." Princess Luna ventured.

Valiant scuffed his right fore-hoof on the ground, his head slightly lowered,
"I have no formal education and I'm not certified. Besides, not everypony can obtain the types of ingredients needed for pharmaceutical drugs, but anypony can get a hold of apothecaric ingredients."

Princess Luna raised an eyebrow,
"So you plan to make your fortune selling your potions and knowledge as you travel?" she asked.

"No your majesty," Valiant said, "I plan to provide my wares free of charge."

"Why?" Princess Luna asked.

Valiant took a deep breath,
"Several ponies, including Dr. Mend here, provided for me when I had nothing. I want to pass that selflessness on to every pony I can."

Princess Luna gave Valiant's words some earnest thought before turning to Dr. Mend,
"Is he being truthful?" she asked.

Dr. Mend took a small step forward, toward the Moon Princess,
"I don't know. I can only tell you what I've witnessed from him."

"And what would that be?" Princess Luna asked.

"I've seen him look past his own feelings to do what he believes is right. I've also seen that he is willing to take any action he can, to help others, no matter the cost to himself, and I have personally seen him die to save somepony's life." Dr. Mend explained.

Princess Luna's gasp was nearly silent,
"He died?"

Dr. Mend nodded solemnly,
"From injuries he received while saving three little fillies and an older mare from a burning house. He suffered a shard of glass through his left lung and sustained second and third degree burns all over his body."

"You said he died though." Princess Luna repeated.

Dr. Mend nodded,
"Valiant was dead for a day and a half. A combination of one of his potions and the Valiant/Mend procedure brought him back. I will give him this much, he's a walking testimony to his own skills. He came up with the idea for the Valiant/Mend procedure. His potions work well too. The potion he took before dying, heals the body so effectively he doesn't even have any burn scars."

Princess Luna processed the information for several long minutes before moving on to the next topic,
"Twilight's letter also mentioned that you used to be a Vagabond yet you use your name freely. I take it you have been forgiven?" she asked.

Valiant nodded,
"Yes your majesty."

Princess Luna smiled warmly at the two stallions,
"Excellent. The current semester is half over. Enroll in the upcoming semester. That should give you ample time to get settled in. Your first semester will be paid for out of the royal coffers, also you will be staying in the dormitories. Your lodging, text-books and food will be paid for but only for the first semester as well. In regard to providing personalized instruction on the Valiant/Mend procedure to the medical community at large, I cannot authorize such an arrangement. I have however arranged to have you two speak about the new procedure in a series of sessions which will be held twice a semester. Each session will be four hours long and should provide ample time for you two to demonstrate how it is done and so forth. I've had a dormitory prepared for your arrival. If you will follow me, I'll show you the University." she said trotting away.

Valiant and Dr. Mend scrambled so as to not keep the Moon Princess waiting. They grabbed a bag each and trotted briskly behind the regal alicorn. Princess Luna wound her way through a dizzying series of corridors, hallways and chambers, but finally, the trio emerged onto the drawbridge of the Royal Palace.

Princess Luna indicated a series of buildings in the distance, with her left fore-hoof,

"The Canterlot University. Home to more than seven thousand students each semester. I have arranged for a carriage for you. It will take you to your dorm room." turning to the two stallions behind her, Princess Luna said, "I'm afraid I must go now. If you ever have need of anything simply request an audience with either Celestia or myself. I may be easier to reach though, Celestia is often busy. Farewell good stallions, may your work bring peace and prosperity to Equestria."

Princess Luna took to the sky with a grace and elegance neither stallion had ever witnessed before. Valiant watched her go, wondering how she could have recovered so quickly from her 1,000 year ordeal as Nightmare Moon.

Dr. Mend nudged Valiant's side gently, "Don't go getting any ideas about her Royal Highness now. She has plenty of things much more important than a pair of ordinary ponies like us, to take care of. Come on, let's get settled in."

Valiant reluctantly pulled his eyes away from the sky and followed Dr. Mend down to the carriage waiting for them.

Princess Luna landed on the tallest parapet of the Royal Palace and looked down at the two stallions entering the carriage, far below. She knew of the deeds that former Vagabonds were known for, and hoped she had made the right decision regarding Valiant, but he was not her concern. The jet black stallion Mend worried her to no end. She had seen something deep down in his soul, something she recognized, something she feared. He had a wound deep inside him that had been festering for many years. Something deep and terrible that had eaten away at him for almost his whole life. Mend's issue was old and profound and the wound ran deep, poisoning him to the core of his being. Princess Luna could only hope that Valiant was up to the task before him. Mend needed healing, or his soul would shrivel up and die very soon.

"His pain is already taking its toll on his body. The most powerful magic in Equestria was not made to handle things such as this. The Elements of Harmony cannot save Mend. He needs something more geared toward his type of wound." Princess Luna said leaping from the parapet, "There are other Elements which need to awaken. It has been 1,000 years and they have slept for far too long. As Twilight is Celestia's champion, so too is Valiant mine." she said, then whispered a prayer to the citizens of Canterlot, "Awaken soon sleepers. I pray you, awaken soon."