Brotherhood of the Moon

Chapter 6

Equestria had always been a beautiful place. Of all the many planets of the universe, ponykind was blessed with one of the most stunningly perfect, fitting for such a delicate race. Everyday Celestia raised the sun, pegasai pushed away the clouds, and birds flew without a care. The air smelled of summer, and the wind blew at just the right intensity and frequency to keep the outdoors a comfortable temperature. What some might consider a once in a lifetime perfect day, was often common place for ponies.

It was perfect for training. Firefly ran along the rooftops of Lunagrad, chasing Applejack as she swiftly leaped and climbed over and across tile roofing. When Firefly had told Applejack that she was already an expert at parkour and free-running, she had insisted on teaching her anyway. After a few minutes of arguing, Applejack had suggested a race. If Firefly won, then obviously she was beyond training. If Applejack won, they would start from the very beginning and follow all the way through. It had seemed like a good plan, but regardless of how good Firefly was, Applejack was better. Even though Firefly might not have needed training, Applejack was still much more experienced. She was keeping ahead of Firefly by barely a foot, but still ahead.

The goal was fast approaching; the flag post above the Thieves' guild that had been their decided finish line. A large gap lay between the roof and the end, it was just a jump away, and Firefly was losing.

"Heh," gloated Applejack. "Looks like yer not as good at this as ya thought!" She sprinted for the edge, and made a graceful jump toward the adjacent rooftop. She fell short, but still managed to cling onto the side. This turned out to be Firefly's saving grace, because when she made the same jump, she had wings. Faulty wings, but wings nonetheless. And spreading out her wings, along with a lucky updraft, gave her just enough lift to meet the edge of the roof. While Applejack was climbing up, Firefly still had the momentum to keep moving. The winner of the race turned out to be Firefly.

Firefly snickered, waiting by the flagpole as Applejack arrived. "Looks like the student turned out to be the teacher!"

"No fair, ya cheated with yer wings." Applejack said panting.

"Heh, sounds like sour apples to me." Dash interjected, already having experienced this conversation with the Applejack of the present. "Besides." Firefly said, taking control again. "My wings don't work, see?" She flapped them around a bit, but gained no lift. All she did was cause a slight breeze.

"Hmm...I definitely saw ta spread yer wings though."

"Force of habit." Firefly replied quickly. "Now, since we have that out of the way, what's next?" Applejack smirked.

"Oh, eager aren't we? We'll lil filly, next we get to the fun stuff. Combat."

Applejack and Firefly stood in a small clearing. The dirt was patted down from the constant beat of hooves, and a few straw dummies stood at the edge of the wall. "Now, the first thing ya gotta know about bein an assassin, is that we only strike once. An assassin is suposed to come out of nowhere, swiftly kill their target, and then disappear. Here, I'll give ya an example. You be the guard, and I'll be the assassin. Protect that dummy." She handed Firefly a sword and pointed at one of the straw dummies.

"Okay." Firefly said, determined to once again surpass her master. "You won't get to him though." she said smugly.

"Oh ho ho, we'll see about that." she said, and then ran off. Firefly drew her sword and scanned the area. She saw the building applejack ran behind, and she was going to watch it for her next movement. She knew what Applejack might attempt though, and was careful to keep the rest of the field in her peripherals.

A short time passed. Firefly got bored. Very bored. But that was probably what Applejack wanted, and her will to beat her surpassed her boredom. Still, she needed entertainment. She began talking to the dummy in her boredom.

"So, where ya from?" she said. The dummy was silent. "Oh, that's nice." she replied, imagining an answer. "I'm from Hoofington, great little town, very small-time. Good if you like a place in the country, but that's probably not for you huh? Being the big, important official that you are." the dummy's expression did not change. "Did you hear about that assassin around here?" Firefly said, scanning the area. "Pretty crazy huh, thinks she can sneak into here. I mean come on, right?" she turned around to face the dummy, as if expecting a reaction. She received none. She returned to her work. "Don't worry sir, I'll make sure to keep you safe. You can count on me." suddenly, Firefly heard the sound of fabric ripping behind her. She quickly turned to see applejack with a butcher's knife plunged into the neck of her target, a devilish smile on her face. "Hey!" Firefly said, running at Applejack. Applejack quickly sidestepped and grabbed Firefly by the back. She spun, threw Firefly to the ground, and thrusted her knife at her. Inches before impact with her stomach, Applejack stopped her hoof. Firefly was on the floor, her target had been killed, and she probably was considered for the sake of the scenario, dead as well. Applejack had won.

Applejack sheathed her knife and held out a hoof to help Firefly off the ground.

"And that..." said Applejack. "is how you pull of an assassination."

"How did you do that?" Firefly asked, fascinated. Applejack had not been kidding when she said assassins were supposed to come from out of nowhere. Applejack pointed a hoof at the roof of the building.

"Yer first technique, the Air Assassination." she said. She gestured for her to follow her up to the roof. The two ponies scaled the building and stood at its edge. "When yer target is within jumpin distance of ya on a rooftop, ya can assassinate 'em from the air." She pointed to the two dummies. "Jus jump down and stab em before they can react." she said. She proceeded to show Firefly how she'd killed the dummy before, jumping from the rooftop and landing on her hoofs. She quickly struck the dummy in the neck once again. "Now you try!" Applejack called up to Firefly. Focusing on her target, Firefly readied herself to jump. She envisioned the dummy as Gilded Sword, it's wooded frame his white legs, it's ragged cloth his golden mane, it's disfigured

head his diabolical mind, filled with thoughts of power and death. Needless to say, jumping off the roof was very easy for Firefly. She extended her hidden blade with a metallic shing, and jumped onto of the dummy, stabbing it through the skull and using it to cushion her fall. Unfortunately, the wooden legs were not made to bend, and so Firefly broke them with her weight. Regardless, Applejack seemed impressed.

"Woo-ee!" she swooned. "That's one way ta do it! And a mighty fine way too, why I'd bet ya could do it from much higher if you use them as a cushion like that..." she then noticed the state of the dummy.

"...but uh, maybe let's not do that on the dummies anymore, alright?" Firefly blushed a little.

Applejack set up another dummy, this time on the edge of a roof. She showed Firefly how to stab them and take them down from the ledge, that way even if the knife didn't kill them, the fall would. She showed Firefly how to counter attack against sword attacks, she showed her how to hide in hay bales and use them to hide bodies, and she showed her how to defend against a sword using only her hidden blade or a small dagger. Applejack slowly taught Firefly the basics of being an assassin, and as she learned, so did Rainbow Dash

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"Alright now, let's put ya sword skills to the test!" Applejack said. She set Firefly up with a sword, and placed her face to face with a dummy. She placed not a sword, but a war mace at the dummies hooves.

"You expect me to spar with a dummy?" Firefly said skeptically.

"One thing an assassin should never forget Firefly..." The dummy was enveloped in a lime glow. "...nothing is ever as it seems." the dummy sprung to life, picking up the mace and moving toward Firefly. A green unicorn colt appeared from behind a corner. He was animating the dummy with magic so she could spar with it. The dummy swung at her head, Firefly ducked. He swung again, vertically, and Firefly narrowly jumped out of the way. She took a stab with her sword, only to be deflected. She brought her sword up to push back another swing from the dummy, but was pushed back from the sheer force and weight of the weapon. She fell to the floor, her sword clattering beside her. She found herself in the same position as the when she'd tried to kill Gilded Sword, her enemy poised to strike, and her helpless. However, the dummy never tool the final blow. "Heh, looks like you need some more trainin in that department." Applejack gloated. "Alright Sawyer." she said turning to the Unicorn. "You can make it-" Before she could finish, an arrow flew through the air and embedded itself in the left side to the dummies head. Instantly the magic cut off, and the dummy fell to the side. Sawyer cried out and brought his hooves up to his head, pain in the spot where the arrow struck the dummy. He didn't bleed, and there was no physical wound, but any bystander would have said he was struck by a real arrow.

"Oh dear!" said a voice coming from the left. Firefly turned to see a white unicorn with a purple mane running towards them. She held in her magical grasp a levitating bow. "I'm terribly sorry; from far away it looked like this poor dear was being attacked! Oh Sawyer dear, are you alright?" She gushed. Sawyer gave her a fierce look as he rubbed the side of his head. She turned her attention to Firefly. "Oh, and you must be the new recruit everyone has been talking about."

"Uh, yeah?" Firefly didn't expect the news to spread so soon.

"Ah, you and yer gossipin." Applejack replied. "Glory, this is Firefly." She said, gesturing toward Firefly. "Firefly, this is Glory." She said, moving her hoof to motion at the white unicorn. "She's the 'frou frou' pony around here."

"I am not!" Glory insisted. "I simply want to look my best while doing my best." Dash saw what she meant. Her light leather armor was nice and clean, not a scratch of cut visible. Her arrows seemed to be tipped with diamonds, and her long beautiful mane was pulled back into a bun for efficiency. Her flank bore the image of a shooting star.

“This pony looks like a lot like Rarity…” Dash thought to herself. Perceiving the thought, Luna flipped through her database of the past and found an entry on Glory. “Glory.” She began. “She was actually the daughter of a rich noble in Canterlot, but ran away at a young age, dissatisfied with her life as a noble. She fled looking for a smaller town, more specifically a colt that would catch her eye and lead her to a life of excitement and adventure. She was recruited by The Assassins due to her proficiency with ranged weapons, becoming one of the few unicorns in the Stars of the Moon. Her talents include finding gems, as well as projectiles; the two gifts coming together and represented through her shooting star cutie mark.” Luna finished her entry there.

“…and?” Dash said expectantly. Luna paused before comprehending the hint.

“…Oh!” Luna said. “Yes, as you probably already know, her lineage carries down to your friend Rarity.”

“This is…impossible!” Dash said. “How can this be? So far I’ve meet six ponies from the past, and five of them have been my friends’ ancestors! It wouldn’t surprise me if Pinkie Pie is wandering around this town!”

“Dash…” Luna said slowly. “Look, there are things that you should know, but not yet. Trust me when I say that you’ll learn them soon enough, but now is just not the right time.” There was a long silence afterwards. Dash did not like the secretive attitude Luna was displaying, but she would have to put up with it for now.

“…Alright….” She said, returning to her ancestor.

"Well, nice to meet you Glory." Firefly said.

"A pleasure to meet you as well darling, now if you'll excuse me I have business to attend to. Once again I'm truly sorry Sawyer." she rushed off at that, leaving the other three behind. Sawyer did not seem very forgiving.

Days passed, days filled with nothing but training. Days became weeks. Weeks, a month. Soon Firefly could hold her own in a sword fight, with only her hidden blade. With a proper sword she could not only defend against, but slay multiple guards at a time with relative ease. She was trained in other fields aswell; Glory taught her how to fire a crossbow, Posey taught her how to treat light wounds. Breaker, the yellow pegasus that had helped Firefly and Applejack escape, helped her learn to avoid brutes, guards with heavy armor and powerful weapons far too hefty to deflect with her sword. And as Firefly learned, so did Dash. She was with her every step of the way, doing exactly as she did. Dash was learning how to be an assassin with her ancestor.

The time came when their training was complete. It was a dark night, not very menacing,

but not entirely calm either. Lunagrad was bathed in light from the top of a high tower. The highest in the assassin's fortress. Torch light blazed inside, as almost the entire assassin brotherhood crowded into one room. At the head of the room was Steelwing, along with Applejack and Firefly and a few other ponies. Steelwing began the ceremony.

"My brothers." he said to the crowd. "We are here tonight to welcome another into our ranks. From this night forward she shall be a sister to us all, and us all brothers to her." He turned to the fire, raising his hoof as it intensified. *"Laa shay'a waqi'un moutlaq bale kouloun moumkine*. These are the words spoken by our ancestors, that lay at the heart of our creed." He then turned to face Firefly, his blind eye shimmering from the fires. "Where other ponies blindly follow the truth, remember..."

"Nothing is true." Firefly finished. Steelwing nodded in satisfaction.

"Where other ponies are limited by morality or law, remember..."

"Everything is permitted." She once again replied. Steelwing turned back to the general assembly. "We work in the dark, to serve the light. We are the Assassins, The Stars of our beautiful Moon."

"Nothing is true, everything is permitted." The line was repeated by every pony in the room. Applejack went to the blazing fire and pulled out a white-hot iron.

"I'm warnin ya now sugarcube, this is gonna sting a little." She whispered to Firefly. Firefly held out her left hoof, and Applejack proceeded to sear the bottom of it with the iron. Firefly winced at the pain, but reacted no further, biting her tongue to keep from yelling out. What was left was a burned imprint of the Assassin's insignia. Applejack returned the iron and gave Firefly a quick pat on the back before returning to her position.

"Welcome Firefly." Steelwing said. "You are one of us now. A true assassin." He gestured toward a window in the tower, which an assistant to the ceremony opened up. It opened up to the night air, a drop to the ground. “Go now, and bring glory to the brotherhood.”

"Meetcha on the ground-side" Applejack said before running and jumping out the window, falling to the ground many stories below. It was Firefly’s last test as a Trainee; she had to exercise her trust for the brotherhood, show them that she would willingly jump out a window and trust her brothers enough to assume they'd catch her. She moved toward the window, carefully got up on its edge, but did not dare peer down. Looking instead up at the beautiful moon, still as stunning as ever, she threw herself off the side of the tower.

She took a leap of faith.