

Brotherhood of the Moon

Chapter 11

Luna magically levitated the glass to her mouth and took a sip of the liquid inside. She and Rainbow Dash were sitting in the tower room, eating lunch. Luna ordered the food be brought to her, so she and Dash could discuss the Animus session over the meal. Still, Dash didn't want to talk very much, or eat for that matter. Her appetite had been stunned by the event. She had calmed down a great amount, thinking her tears were a bit melodramatic in retrospect, but still could not refuse the gravity of the situation. All she could do presently was stare at her food and try to remind herself how hungry she should be.

Luna replaced her glass on the table and looked at Dash. She was still staring at her dandelion sandwich like it was talking to her. Obviously, she was still in shock about before, but Luna was starting to worry that she'd never recover from the incident. It took some time to adjust to the new era she was in after her return from the moon, but at times like these Luna had to keep reminding herself that these ponies were not the ponies she knew. Celestia had reduced the crime rate in Equestria to be almost non-existent; Dash would not be so accustomed to Firefly's new assassin mind-set.

Both ponies, Dash and Luna, sat in silence. Neither pony wanted to address the metaphorical elephant in the room, but both knew somepony had to eventually. Luna decided she'd finally break the ice and get it over with.

"So," Luna said, shattering the silence that had overtaken the room. Dash jumped a bit, as if she'd forgotten ponies could talk in the long period of quiet. "Are you feeling better now?" Luna asked

"Yeah, I guess..." Dash replied in a dry voice, an effect of keeping quiet for so long.

"Do you think you can handle another session?" The question was just a formality. Time was of the essence, and Luna simply couldn't wait for Dash to feel up to the occasion.

"I'm just..." Dash couldn't think of the right word to describe her feelings. On one hand, she could understand Firefly's want for vengeance, Gilded Sword's thirst for power, the guard's hatred toward felony. But at the same time, it was hard for her to imagine Equestria, her home, in such a poor state that anypony would resort to such awful violence as a solution to their problems.

"It was a very different world, the past..." Luna said, reading Dash's expressions, though it seemed more like she was reading her mind. "I'm amazed that my sister somehow put the world in order while I was gone. The Equestria I knew was one of never ending conflict. There was always a war going on, always a fight breaking out, no matter what you did somepony somewhere was angry, and willing to harm others to get what they wanted."

"But...I just don't get it." Dash said. "Why? What does that accomplish?" She found it hard to believe sane ponies would be so quick to kill; she saw the real Firefly, she felt her before her parents died, and it wasn't the pony she'd been watching in the tunnels under Canterlot. Dash had felt almost identical to her ancestor; Firefly shared her thirst for speed, her zeal for adventure, her energetic love of the wind in her mane and the air below her hooves. Dash felt Firefly the night before her parents died; she'd seen an image of herself in her ancestor. The pony she was following now was nothing like the Firefly she'd seen.

Luna shook her head.

"I don't know myself to be honest. Any logical pony will see that in the end, violence leads to more violence." She turned to look out the window of the tower, as if remembering an event long past. "I think it's just an unfortunate part of pony nature. Sometimes we tend to act without thinking..." Her eyes floated away from the window. "...or considering the consequences of our actions." A sense of regret lingered in Luna's tone. Dash herself could feel a bit of remorse as well, many times have her friends reminded her to think before doing something drastic.

Luna lifted the weight of her past off, and focused back on the topic at hand. "Still," she continued. "That's why we have to make sure we stop the Flames now while they're small. The fact that my sister somehow put Equestria in order for so long is a miracle in itself, we simply can't allow these ponies to bring us all back into an age of violence." Luna looked more determined than ever now. It was clear that the attack on her had struck hard on a personal level. She didn't just want this for the good of Equestria, she had an emotional need to defeat the Neo-Templars before they could cause any more harm.

Dash finally managed to take a bite of her lunch. The princess' words weren't the most motivational ones she's heard, but they were comforting enough to calm her stomach enough to consume. This of course was also helped by her body's hungry cries for sustenance.

"There has to be another way to do this though, I mean, what kind of order are we bringing if we have to kill them too? We're just like them, using violence to solve our problems!"

Luna sighed. She couldn't blame Dash for feeling like this, but she still needed the young pegasus to understand.

"Rainbow Dash," she said, a bit softer than her former tone. "Do you know why the Animus broke its spell?"

"I dunno, it overheated or something?" Luna once again shook her head.

"The Animus allows the user to view memories of the past through their ancestor's bodies. It usually only allows you to view the memories as a bystander, with no control over what's happening." She paused to take another sip of her drink, levitating the cup to her lips and drinking without moving a muscle. "But," she continued. "sometimes, usually in the time between important memory sequences, it allows the user to control the body they possess as well, allowing your consciousness to manipulate the ancestor's mind so that it decides to do what you want to, giving you control while not disturbing the ancestor's consciousness. By watching their ancestor, and eventually controlling them in the context of their memories, the users of the Animus tend to develop talents and skills known by their ancestors quicker and more thoroughly than they would through simple teaching." Luna continued, now in a very scholarly tone. "It's called 'The Bleeding Effect'".

"However, this method has its flaws." Luna's tone changed from one of insight to one of warning. "This type of magic, putting two ponies' minds in one body, causes problems. The matter of who is in control is usually determined by strong emotional impulses, which makes it hard to determine who has superiority at times. If both minds feel strongly about opposite choices, they could effectively tear the pony apart from their fighting!" Dash cringed. In all honesty, she was understanding very little of Luna's colourful word choice, but

the idea of being ripped in half sounded unpleasant regardless. "This is why the Animus ended your session." Luna continued. "Your feelings were overtaking Firefly's, and thus your minds fell out of sync with each other. The world dispelled before you could harm yourself."

"I can't help it!" Dah interjected. "I...I don't want to be like that."

"And you don't have to!" Luna retorted. "At least not completely, but you still have to go along with the memories as they flow. If you keep tearing away from the main synchronization, you could permanently drop yourself out of sync."

"Permanently?" Dash asked. Luna nodded.

"Yes, permanently. Eventually your subconscious will be so displeased with its environment, that it will reject any invasion of privacy by magic. I won't be able to cast the spell and put you under the Animus' visions. You'll be locked out forever." A pleading look invaded Luna's eyes. "Please Rainbow Dash, if you can't do this, no one can. You're the only one who has the ability to learn these skills, and I need them if I'm going to solve this problem."

The last part of Luna's qualm brought up a question in Dash's mind. One she'd considered before, but didn't think to ask before now.

"Why is it that I'm the only pony who can do this by the way?" Dash asked. Her quick personality did not stop her from asking a question completely out of context, and the surprised look on Luna's face only enforced this notion.

"...Why?" She asked simply, Taken back by the seemingly random question.

"You keep talking like I'm the only pony in all of Equestria who can fight these guys. What about the Royal guard? That one who woke me up today seems a lot stronger than me, I'm sure he could fight better than I ever could."

"Well, he's strong yes." Luna explained. "But this type of enemy doesn't require brute strength to defeat, you need stealth too. And-"

"But you guys have to have some sort of 'special forces' group right? Or why don't you ask a pegasus who's faster than me, like the Wonderbolts?"

"Well, that's because the Wonderbolts are...stunt ponies!" Luna said, grasping for excuses. "Yeah, not good for something not planned out, but you are-"

"Or what about any of the other twenty-something ponies I saw in the memory? There's gotta be hundreds of other ponies in Equestria who have ancestors in the Stars of the Moon! Why me? Out of all the ponies in the world, why me?"

"Because...you're just special!" Luna said desperately. "You have to trust me on this Rainbow Dash, you'll understand later, but just know you are the only one who can do this." Again, Luna's only defence boiled down to trust. Dash was finding it hard to trust somepony who holds so many secrets, but the look on the princess' face let Dash know she was sincere. Still, she was *not* about to believe everything the moon goddess said out of sheer trust. A familiar phrase floated into the back of Dash's mind: "Nothing is true, Everything is permitted".

"Please Rainbow Dash..." Luna begged quietly. "Just please believe me now and do this, not just for me, for all ponies everywhere." The words triggered something in Dash's head. The familiar faces of her five best friends floated into the view of her memory. Her friends, taken. Captured. Stolen. If not for the good of her homeland, Dash was most definitely going to do this for her friends. They'd always trusted her unconditionally, and she wasn't about to betray that trust. She'd get them back, even if she had to resort to resort to

violence against these so called Templars.

Dash had insisted that she was different from Firefly, at least her more recent self. They were very similar once, she had to admit it, but she had made it clear she didn't want to be anything like Firefly the assassin. Despite this, she could feel herself mirroring her ancestor now. The irony was that it was an inverted similarity; whereas before she'd thought Firefly to resemble herself, what she barely noticed now was her current state becoming more like Firefly's. At the thought of her friends capture and the spiteful ponies who took them, she felt the flame that had consumed Firefly's heart ignite in her own; Revenge. She wanted to lash out, make them pay for what they've done. Normally she would have spoken against this kind of feeling with all her heart, but this was different. She was too drunk on the feeling to reprimand herself, too occupied by vengeance to realize her moral contradictions. It wasn't nearly as passionate as Firefly's, she wasn't about to *act* on her desires just yet, but the feeling was there, and it wanted nothing more than to go out and wreak havoc on the Flames of the Sun.

"You have to do this Dash." Luna said, filling in the void of quiet that had filled the room. "You have to stop them from continuing. If you don't, the results could be deadly."

Another realization suddenly hit Dash. If the Flames weren't stopped soon, the horribly violent world of the past would become the present once again. If Luna used sheer military force, or if the Flames succeeded in killing her, there would be an outcry. Ponies everywhere would shout out for revenge and war. The world would quickly spiral down into another age of fighting. That's why Luna needed an assassin, she need the Flames to go quietly and quickly. If she made a show of it, there would be recoil. She was a prime example herself, just the brief encounters she's had with them was enough to consume her mind in violence.

No, that wasn't her world. This reality of blood and rage, this wasn't real. Her world was a peaceful one, a simple one. The worst that happened was an occasional creature near Ponyville, which usually could be tamed with compassion and understanding. She didn't want this, she wanted her peace. She wanted a world where she could ascend to the clouds and fly for hours on end, where she could play pranks or go to parties with her friends, where she didn't have to worry about anything but the occasional weather problem. She extinguished her vengeance for now, she put away her thoughts of fighting. She just wanted this over with, so she could go back to normal and forget this entire ordeal.

Dash still hadn't reacted verbally to Luna's argument, and Luna had not answered Dash's question. No progress was being made, and eventually Dash and Luna silently agreed on one thing, they wanted this whole ordeal to be over as soon as possible. Dash wanted her friends and her life back, and the sooner this was dealt with the sooner she could return to Ponyville and pretend this never happened. With a renewed vigour, Dash grabbed her glass of the table and quickly chugged down the rest of its contents. Slamming the glass down, she stood up from her seat and held a confident stance.

"Alright, let's do this." she said with fierce determination. Luna nodded, pleased.

"Yes, let's."

The set-up for the Animus was pretty much the same as before. Dash laid down on a

blanket resting her head on a pillow. Luna carefully place the delicate crown on Dash's head and knelt as well in order to get into a more comfortable position. She closed her eyes and let the magic flow through her body and converge at her horn.

"Ready?" she asked slowly, as if in a dream state already.

"Yeah." Dash replied simply. She closed her eyes as well, and tried her best to relax. Luna's horn meet the crown's jewel, and Dash was pulled away into the memories of the past once more.