

Kanathara wiggled her feathered wings as she banked around a low cloud heavy with snow. The long, wispy piece of fluff wasn't that big, though it was a part of a much larger chain of the things which dominated the sky. Flying above them was difficult, however, as the demons were growing increasingly cold the higher they ascended into the sky.

Not like a true demon cared much for the weather, but that didn't mean Kanathara enjoyed the sting of frost building on her altered body. Disguised or not, the keeper of secrets found that she could not resist the altitude's effects entirely. Even distracting herself with the view did little, though that was partially due to the fact that the moon was now massive.

Be it a trick of the eye or some form of magic, the celestial object was almost uncomfortably close to Equestria. Its cratered face peered down at the world like a child staring into a terrarium, its expression cold, uncaring, yet curious. Looking at it for long made Twilight's head begin to swim, and she assumed that the Nightmare had altered its properties somehow.

One small part of Kanathara wanted to gaze longer, to stare at the enormous pale dot until something changed, though she resisted that temptation. There lay madness, of that the demon was fairly certain, though the how of it all eluded her for the moment. She pondered summoning an imp or other expendable creature in order to test this, but was soon interrupted.

"It sure is getting cold," Rainbow Dash remarked.

"It is," Kanathara replied.

Glancing to one side, she noticed that the vengant was in her vaguely pony form, with only her primary colors having changed. Instead of the rainbow mane and light teal fur, she had a slate grey body as well as a head of stark white hair. Kanathara herself was a little brighter, sporting an orange mane and red fur with a flaming star for a cutie mark, contrasting significantly with the lonely puffy white cloud emblazoned on Rainbow Dash's flanks.

"Think we'll get to Canterlot in time?" Rainbow Dash asked.

"We still have a few days," Kanathara answered calmly.

"Still. Without long range teleportation, it is going to be difficult to gather everyone before things start hitting the fan," Rainbow Dash continued.

"Difficult, but not impossible," Kanathara stated simply, raising an eyebrow at her familiar. "You're not getting dissuaded, are you?"

"Never," Rainbow Dash replied immediately. "The logistics are merely... annoying. Made even more annoying by how slow you fly."

Kanathara rolled her eyes. "I told you. I can't simply inhabit you. We're too close to Cloudsdale, and attracting any undue attention at this point would be a bad idea."

"You've said that for the last half hour though. Why aren't we there yet?" Rainbow Dash whined.

"Actually... I think we are," Kanathara remarked.

The demons crested another large fluffy cloud and found themselves no longer in the sky, but amidst a mountain range. With Cloudsdale anchored to the top of a tall snow-covered peak, the range seemed abnormally tall. Though the position of the city was expected, the numerous fires sighted across all levels were less so.

Easily from the distance of several miles away, Kanathara could make out the shape of numerous buildings burning uncontrollably. Some of the flickering orange light was contained to medium-sized areas, illuminating groups of ponies carrying torches. Other lights revealed a small group of shawl-covered equines huddling around a burning garbage can or flaming dumpster.

With her sharp eyes, Kanathara could see that fighting was relatively common, and numerous skirmishes could be spotted. Divided between pegasi and non-flying ponies, the battle lines were clear, though the reason they existed in the first place was less obvious. The guard had seemingly been disbanded, Kanathara reasoned, as its members could be seen fighting amongst both sides of the conflict.

"I didn't know the Smoky Mountains were that close," Rainbow Dash muttered.

"These are just outliers, the main range starts another thirty miles west," Kanathara explained. "It seems as though things have only devolved after our last visit."

"Looks like it," Rainbow Dash remarked, whistling when she watched some poor earth pony get tossed over the side of the city. "Damn, they are really going at it, and I don't even see a single demon among them."

"It seems as though they didn't need much prompting," Kanathara added.

"What about those ones with the vacant expressions? You don't think they are possessed or something, do you?" Rainbow Dash asked.

"May I borrow your eyes? I don't see these ponies," Kanathara answered.

"Go ahead," Rainbow Dash replied.

Kanathara focused on their connection and peered through her familiar, finding that there were indeed several strange ponies. Most were pegasi, though there were a few unicorns and earth ponies whose gaze was empty, their pupils burned away to a featureless grey expanse. These creatures' movements were also slightly jerky, as if they were being manipulated by an uncaring puppeteer.

"They just seem to be wandering around," Kanathara murmured. "I don't think they are possessed. Even if it may look that way."

"True. If that were the case, they would be burning, looting, or generally causing chaos. Those poor sods look like they were exposed to either concentrated chaos or a heck of a lot of dark magic," Rainbow Dash added.

"Maybe we should interrogate one of those groups over there," Rainbow Dash offered, gesturing to the one of many lynch mobs roaming the streets.

"Perhaps," muttered Kanathara, her vision sweeping over the area.

Only to land on a familiar set of colors which she recalled having last seen the previous time she had been in Cloudsdale. The pony in question was a taller mare with yellow fur, an off-white mane, and gold eyes that were visible even at a great distance. Her and four fully clothed others had cornered a pegasus near a burnt-out bakery and were advancing on him in a slow, threatening manner.

"Is that one of those familiar ponies?" Rainbow Dash whispered.

"I believe it was," Kanathara replied. "Come on. That seems like a good place to start."

Taking wing, the pair proceed to fly in the direction of the small mob, landing a few feet behind them with an audible thwump. Immediately, two of their number turned to face the disguised demons, their eyes lighting up as they beheld the abnormally tall pegasi standing before them.

"B-boss, we got incoming!" shouted a diminutive stallion.

"Keep the slave maker from taking off. I'll handle this," replied the gold-eyed unicorn who turned towards the pair of new arrivals. She subtly rested her hoof on a hidden blade tucked within her warm clothing.

"What business do you have here, featherbrains?" she spat, glaring intently at the duo.

"We were just hoping to ask a few questions, is all," Kanathara replied, pouring a bit of her succubus powers into her words.

The effect was immediate, with the unicorn relaxing visibly and placing all four of her hooves against the ground.

"Questions? Can they wait until after we've had a chance to deal with this one?" asked the mare.

"Of course," Rainbow Dash replied, gesturing back to the cowering stallion.

"It will just be a minute," exclaimed the gold-eyed unicorn.

Who turned back to her gang and immediately waved her forehooves in the air. "What are you looking at? Cut the dumb bastard's wings off and throw him off the side!" she shouted.

"No wait, stop! I'm not like them, I was just a security guard for those crazy assholes!" shouted the pegasus as he backpedalled quickly. "I didn't know about any of the shit they did in there!"

"Out of ignorance or spite, you made slaves of the innocent. All who would rob us of our freedom deserve not their lives," exclaimed the unicorn in a low tone.

"I didn't know! I just stood by a door and looked intimidating all day. I couldn't have known!" he shouted, his eyes going wide when he backed into the wall.

"Every last one of you genocidal bastards deserve to die," declared the unicorn, who nodded to her closest companion. "Do it."

"No! Stop, I have a family! Ahhhh!"

Kanathara watched as the unicorn made good on her threat, amputating the poor stallion's wings before tossing his partially conscious body over the lip of the cloud. His screams sparked back up a moment after he flew over the side, and they continued until finally fading into nothing. With their grisly deed done, the mob turned back to the two demons, who stood there nonchalantly, unbothered by what they had seen.

"So, you stuck around. I suppose I owe you some answers," stated the golden-eyed mare in a low tone.

"If you would be so kind," Kanathara exclaimed, adding a bit more power to her voice.

*Damn, I love it when you break out the sex magic,* Rainbow Dash exclaimed.

*It's not sex magic, it's... Just look out for any surprises,* Kanathara retorted.

The unicorn blinked rapidly, her eyes briefly turning a soft pink before returning to their normal coloration. "Of course. We don't mind helping those few pegasi who are not evil," offered the unicorn. "Golden Gaze, at your service."

"Flaming Star," Kanathara replied, stepping forward and clasping the other mare's smaller hoof.

"Now then. What can we do for you?" offered the pony.

"We have not been in town for a while, you see, thus this entire situation is rather distressing. We were hoping you could let us know what is going on," Kanathara replied.

"When were you in town last? Because if you say a few months, we might be here a while," Golden began.

"Only a few days. Last I had heard, some big demon outbreak had occurred. We had fled the city for the safety of a relative's cottage, but have chosen to return after that turned out to be not very safe," Kanathara explained.

"That's still a decent clip, but I'll summarize it for you," replied the unicorn, who cleared her throat. "The old warrior houses turned out to be behind the whole thing and had been using one of the Elements of Harmony to enslave people."

Rainbow Dash gasped. "No way. So that's what that guy meant when he said..."

The unicorn nodded slowly. "It is true. I was enslaved by those bastards and was made to serve them. Thankfully some absolute angel appeared and wrecked the place. After that the paladins showed up and arrested just about everyone involved."

"That couldn't have gone well. There were no doubt quite a few ponies in on the conspiracy," Kanathara remarked.

"No kidding. Nearly a quarter of the city was implicated in some way. The prisons filled up overnight, and the mayor lowered the bail for nearly everyone just to ensure they weren't overfilled," Golden Gaze announced.

"Shoulda packed 'em full," muttered one of her cronies.

"Let 'em eat each other in there," added another.

"Woulda saved us the trouble," Golden stated. "Either way, with a whole bunch of criminals out free, things started going sideways just about immediately. Folk started taking the law into their hooves after it was discovered how long the investigation and prosecution would take."

"With that many people involved, the courts would be overwhelmed for years," Kanathara reasoned.

"Right, but thanks to the leader of the paladins releasing a list, we knew who had done what. Now it's just a matter of hunting them down and making sure justice is done," Golden Gaze declared with a righteous stomp of her hoof.

"And the whole moon thing?" Rainbow Dash asked, gesturing over her shoulder.

"Barely even noticed it was a thing, to be honest," Golden replied with a shrug. "By then the guard had dissolved into a mess of infighting, so the whole city was anchored in order to make sure it didn't blow off course."

"The whole disappearance of Celestia thing isn't quite such a big issue when you got a city full of slavers to kill," added one of her cronies.

"Very fair," Kanathara muttered.

*I say we find out where this paladin guy is situated. He seems to be about the only one with their head still on straight,* Rainbow Dash offered.

*Right,* Kanathara replied.

"Just one last question for you. Where are the paladins located right this moment?" Kanathara inquired.

"Corner of Third and Seventh. A good three layers up or so," Golden replied, then paused and gave her head a firm shake. "Wait a second. Who did you say you were again?"

"Nobody important," Kanathara replied. "Good day to you."

Before the unicorn or her underlings could respond, both Kanathara and Rainbow Dash launched into the air. Flapping their wings hard and fast, the pair of demons quickly departed before the small mob even had a chance to react. Leaving behind the first group of angry, ground-bound ponies, the duo had to swiftly fly away again a moment later.

"Hey, look, it's another group of pegasi! Get 'em!" shouted an earth pony.

Kanathara merely rolled her eyes and poured on the speed, following behind Rainbow Dash after she had done the same. Not like the insignificant number of barely armed ponies was intimidating, but rather they were a waste of time. Even if a small part of both of them wanted to stop in order to consume the flesh and souls of their would-be attackers.

However, their objective was clear, and they moved towards it with all the haste they could muster without burning a spell.

*Ya think this paladin guy would know where Fluttershy is?* Rainbow Dash asked. *She may have been a primary eye witness, but I doubt he would keep close tabs on her or lock her up.*

*If he doesn't know, then he'll at least have a good idea where to start,* Kanathara reasoned.

*Fair,* Rainbow Dash admitted.

Emerging up onto the previously mentioned level, the duo found themselves in another district. Though this one lay at the edge of the division between flighted and non-flying areas, with the majority of the buildings they could see being accessible by those without wings. Including an

apartment building that appeared to be mostly abandoned, with only a few squatters left, who didn't notice the demon's arrival.

As one, the pair landed on an empty balcony and slipped inside, using their advantageous position to scan the street. Burnt and looted businesses were less common here, with the few they saw having been marked with the word 'SLAVER' painted across the front. Those were few and far between, however, with most structures still in perfect shape despite the relative anarchy of the city.

At the center of this bastion of order and stability stood what had likely been a guard station at one point. Now it was home to what appeared to be a very small number of paladins, and a good amount of volunteers. Only three of the golden-armored ponies were visible either standing guard outside or through what few windows weren't boarded up.

Those former civilians who had signed up in order to help the beleaguered order were far more numerous. Marked by the golden pins on their jackets, overcoats, or basic leather armor, these ponies moved about the area with at least some amount of decorum. That didn't mean they looked the part of trained soldiers, but clearly they had received some manner of training.

"At least they're organizing the mob somewhat," Rainbow Dash muttered.

"True. Though their magical defences are lacking," Kanathara pointed out.

"I mean, their only foe so far has been pegasi," Rainbow Dash stated.

Kanathara nodded slowly. "Still. It makes me wonder what they are even doing here. Shouldn't they have been recalled back to Canterlot?"

"Maybe they disobeyed a command and stayed behind?" Rainbow Dash offered.

"A distinct possibility. Especially given the failings of the guard," Kanathara reasoned. "There is only one way to find out for certain, however."

"So, are we breaking in, or will an invisibility spell work?" Rainbow Dash inquired.

"A simple notice-me-not enchantment should do it," Kanathara replied. "So, unless we meet someone we know in there, things will be fine."

"You know you've just jinxed it, right?" Rainbow Dash exclaimed, poking a hoof into the keeper's chest. "Now we're doomed to run into someone we've seen before."

Kanathara rolled her eyes. "I don't believe in your silly superstitions."

"When have I been wrong before, huh?" Rainbow Dash challenged.

"Plenty of times," Kanathara retorted. "Like that time I said the tower wasn't going to collapse anytime soon."

"I guess. But come on. You can't keep tempting fate like this," Rainbow Dash pressed.

"This is easy. We'll be out of here with Fluttershy in a matter of hours. It won't rain anytime soon. This-" Kanathara was stopped when Rainbow Dash's hoof was suddenly stuffed into her mouth.

"Would you be quiet? I can almost feel Discord's magic on us," Rainbow Dash hissed.

Again Kanathara rolled her eyes and removed her familiar's limb from her mouth. "Fine, but you know I don't appreciate such conspiratorial thinking."

"Yeah yeah. Now could we just keep going? All this standing around is making me antsy," Rainbow Dash muttered.

"Love youuu," Kanathara teased.

Rainbow Dash blushed and looked away. "Love you too."

Kanathara chuckled to herself as she lit her horn and began to cast the necessary spell to make them unnoticeable to most. The magic itself wasn't difficult to formulate, but making it work with their disguises added an extra minute or so. Thankfully no one tried to enter the dilapidated apartment nor fly past the shattered sliding glass door that had once separated the outside from inside.

With a final flash of light, the pair of demons gained a shimmering, slightly purple coating over their bodies. This glimmering field faded quickly after being cast, leaving behind a faint sparkle only visible when looked at in the right light.

Kanathara gave her familiar a slight nod before running towards the exit and leaping over the railing. The other demon swiftly followed suit, with the duo turning to the right and descending down to ground level. Careful to not make too much noise, they landed not far from their target, though they had to make a swift detour.

A group of volunteers led by a single paladin had emerged from the front entrance and barreled right at them. Thankfully they hadn't noticed the demons and simply continued past them, heading towards some unseen emergency. With that bit of danger passed, Kanathara trotted up to the entrance and waited patiently until it opened again.

She didn't have to wait for long, as a middle-aged stallion with a slight hunch departed less than a minute later. Together the demons slipped in through the entrance before it could close, allowing them to enter the station fully. Where they found that it had become one part command post, and one part impromptu barracks.



Food was being cooked, small areas had been cordoned off for families, and there was even a training area set up near the back. The entire thing was a bit more ramshackle than anticipated, but given the circumstances, it wasn't as bad as it could have otherwise been. It also meant that maneuvering through it was a bit more difficult than Kanathara had planned for, leading to a few uncomfortable situations.

First of which was Kanathara having to squeeze herself against a wall when a young colt suddenly sprinted by. His young brother close behind, the pair giggled profusely as they ran around another cubicle and disappeared a moment later. Sharing a quick glare at Rainbow Dash who was only just barely holding back a snicker, Kanathara continued on.

Thankfully it wasn't difficult to find their location, as the second floor was far more organized. With most offices still intact, Kanathara was able to find the correct room relatively quickly. Or at least she assumed it was the right one, as the name beside the door had been removed at some point.

It was the largest single office, however, and based on the fact that there was an empty receptionist desk sitting out front, it had likely been the chief guard's at one point. That alone was enough to make Kanathara reason that this was where their target was located, though she couldn't be sure. Glancing around the area, the keeper of secrets found that what few inhabitants were on the second floor were all distracted.

Allowing Kanathara to lean down and peer through the keyhole to find that-

The door opened suddenly, prompting the demon to stumble backwards just in time for a familiar pegasus to appear. He stood about as tall as the average pegasus, though he was a bit lankier than most and had a quiet, unassuming demeanor about him. One made only even less intimidating by the empty silver platter he held atop his hoof.

*Is that the guy we mind-controlled the last time we were in Canterlot?* Rainbow Dash inquired.

Kanathara spared a quick glance at the stallion's cutie mark, which was of a sunflower growing on a cloud. *That it is.*

*Which means-*

*We should be fine. He won't recognize our disguises.*

A second later, their eyes met.

"Oh my stars in heaven," he muttered. "You must be new around here. The name's Nimbus Sprout, and who might you fine mares be?"

"I thought you said he wouldn't recognize us," Rainbow Dash whispered.

"He doesn't," Kanathara whispered back.

"Well, something went wrong," Rainbow Dash declared.

"Sorry, what was that? I couldn't quite hear you," Nimbus inquired with a helpful smile.

"This is Lonely Cloud, and I'm Falling Star," Kanathara declared.

"I thought you were Flaming-" Rainbow Dash tried to interrupt, only to be hushed before she could do so.

"Well, it's a pleasure to meet you two. Try not to let the folk around here bother you too much. I know you aren't a bunch of evil slavers," Nimbus Sprout exclaimed. "Heck, most people don't want any violence. Things are just a bit crazy right now."

"You can say that again," Rainbow Dash muttered.

"I'm sure Mister Dawn will have everything fixed in no time," Nimbus Sprout proudly declared.

"Is he the head honcho around here?" Rainbow Dash asked, glancing over the stallion's shoulder curiously.

"He sure is. Him and a few of his friends stuck around after the other paladins were recalled back to Canterlot. The poor guy is overworked as heck, but he's kept everyone's spirits up!" exclaimed the stallion in a chipper tone.

"Is he in there?" Kanathara asked.

The pegasus nodded eagerly. "Sure is. You best go on and chat with him. He's pretty good at figuring out where best to put people, though if you don't mind me saying, you two would make great deputies."

"That's very kind of you, now if you'll excuse us," Kanathara stated, gently shooing the stallion away from the door.

"Oh, right. Well, best of luck to you guys. If you ever need anything, you'll find me in the kitchen most times," Nimbus exclaimed before eagerly trotting away.

"What a happy little guy," Rainbow Dash murmured.

"I'm surprised he wasn't scarred from what we put him through," Kanathara remarked.

"If anything, we saved him from getting some kind of mental damage," Rainbow Dash countered.

“True,” Kanathara agreed.

Together the pair turned towards the door, with Kanathara choosing to simply pull it open and step swiftly inside. Where a tall, though rather old, stallion sat behind a large table, a map held aloft in his hooves. Rainbow Dash was swift to follow her mistress and quickly closed then locked the door behind them.

“What, who is...” The stallion’s questions fell apart the second he laid eyes on the now undisguised pair of demons standing before him.

To his credit, he nearly managed to summon a blast of holy magic before Rainbow Dash had grabbed his horn in both hooves.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you. Wouldn’t want to lose something now, would we?” Rainbow Dash whispered, squeezing the stallion’s horn slightly.

“Wh-what do you want?” he asked in a shaky tone.

“We want to know the location of a particular pony. One who goes by the name Fluttershy,” Kanthara answered.

The wrinkled, stallion hummed thoughtfully. “The one from the big warrior house case. I remember her,” he murmured.

“Then you know where she is,” Kanathara reasoned.

“I might,” he replied, flashing the demon a wide smile despite the circumstances he found himself in. “Though I’d like to propose a trade.”

“A trade? Do you look like you’re in a position to bargain?” Rainbow Dash whispered harshly.

“I do,” he replied simply. “To get the answer out of me, you would need as much time as it would take to get me to simply give it to you. Besides, as you likely already know, answers gained from torture are notoriously unreliable.”

Kanathara chuckled. “You’ve got stones. I’ll give you that.”

“You two seem smarter than the rabble we’ve occasionally had to clear off the street, so I figured you might be worth talking to,” exclaimed the stallion.

Kanathara nodded, and Rainbow Dash released his horn, allowing the male to slump back into his chair and rub the appendage absently.

“Thanks for that,” he exclaimed.

“So,” Kanathara began, sitting down across from the paladin, “what exactly do you have in mind?”

“Simple. You keep the majority of the plates from falling out of the sky, and I’ll give you not only Fluttershy’s location, but all the info I have on the ponies she’s now in league with,” declared the unicorn.

Kanathara glanced at Rainbow Dash and received a shrug, the vengant clearly considering it but so far unconvinced.

“Go on,” Kanathara encouraged.