

Tempest touched down right outside of the unicorn's royal palace with a soft crunch. The feeling of solid ground was a bit strange, and he realized just how long it had been since he left the clouds. He ran inside, not wanting any lookouts to spot him before he'd had a chance to make peace. A small gasp escaped him when he saw the inside of the palace.

He tried to notice everything around him. He'd never been here before, with good reason, and was wary of any potential traps and ambushes. The entrance from outside led into a huge, arched corridor, which was lined with torches for light, but was otherwise disturbingly empty. Not only was the hall devoid of decoration, save for an ornate blade on a wall, but Tempest couldn't see or hear any signs of life. His shoulders shook from the tension.

"Hello?" he called out, his voice echoing greatly. Just being here was bad enough, and he definitely didn't want to be accused of spying. "Is anypony here? I need to speak with Princess Platinum."

His voice seemed to echo eternally through the halls, but was soon drowned out by soft hoofbeats on the stone floor.

"Who's there?" an elderly grey unicorn came from around a corner, followed by a small, white filly. His face tensed when he saw the lieutenant, and his horn glowed a soft green.

"I'm here to speak to the princess. Some of my soldiers attacked here and stole some food, and I want to apologize for their actions and make peace. They acted against my orders," Tempest said. He made to walk towards the elder, but realized his hooves were stuck to the ground.

"Tia, I'd like you to go wait in your room while I talk to our guest," the unicorn said to the filly. "It's alright, I'll be right there."

The filly looked back and forth between the two older ponies, then walked off, but not before giving Tempest a sour expression. When she was out of earshot, the elder turned towards the lieutenant. His face contorted with rage.

"You have some nerve, coming back here," he said quietly. "Where's my granddaughter?"

"What?" Tempest twitched his head in surprise.

"I'm being patient," the elder raised his voice, his horn glowing brighter. "You sent your troops to raid our tribe, and one of them foalnaped my granddaughter. Now tell me where you're hiding her."

Tempest's wing extended, though not of the lieutenant's will. It was enveloped in an eerie

green glow. He looked on in fear as the elder began twisting it with his magic.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Tempest said frantically. “Those troops acted on their own. I thought they just stole food, so I’m here to return it and make peace.”

“You’re lying!” the elder shouted. The wing twisted more, and the lieutenant could swear he heard bones crack. “You sent those three to attack us, and take my granddaughter hostage. If you enjoy your ability of flight, you’ll tell me where she is. I’m not an idiot, I know she isn’t in the clouds. So just give me a location.”

“No, I’m telling the truth!” Tempest said, growing desperate. “I don’t even know who you are, or who your granddaughter is. I definitely don’t know where she would be, but I think I know who does. I can bring him here and you can ask him yourself. You’ve got to believe me when I say that I didn’t know anything about this!”

“Fine, if you want to be stubborn. I’m Elder Mulberry, temporary leader of the unicorns while the Princess is away. You knew that she was leaving, and thought to attack us while she was gone. I failed once when you’re little posse came and took Luna, but I won’t fail again.” He twisted the wing ever more, letting go after a sickening crunch was heard. “Tell me where she is, and you might be able to fly again.”

“I don’t know!” Tempest cried. He couldn’t move his body, but he felt his wing fall limp and useless to his side. “Gust acted against my orders, and I don’t know where your granddaughter is!”

“Then I don’t have a choice!” Mulberry shouted, pulling the blade from the wall with his magic. “Consider yourselves at war, only you’ll lose a leader of your own to even the odds!”

He aimed the blade at a gap in Tempest’s armor and drove it forward. A bright flash passed over the Elder’s eyes, and the lieutenant had disappeared.

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“What?!” Mulberry screamed in frustration as the sword clattered to the ground. A voice behind him sighed.

“I know your granddaughters are your life, but you can’t let it cloud your judgement.” The soft jingle of bells were heard as a blue clad, bearded unicorn stepped out from the shadows.

“Starswirl,” the elder sighed. “You saw everything, then?”

“Enough to know that the pegasus who’s life you were ready to take was innocent.”

“No, he had to know something!” Mulberry said, his eyes watering. “Why did you have to stop me? You could have let me have that, at least!”

“And what would you tell Celestia? Your other granddaughter is still here. What kind of message would it send to her?” Starswirl asked softly, putting his hoof on the elder’s shoulder.

“I...but...” Mulberry sighed again, feeling defeated. “You’re right. I just want to see her again.” He looked up, becoming determined. “And I will. I’ll find that other pegasus and make him tell me where Luna is. Tell the soldiers to prepare for a fight.”

“Have patience, we planted a seed in sparing that pegasus. He knows his underling betrayed him, and will want justification himself. Let us see how the situation grows before arming ourselves for war.”

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Tempest looked up into the cyan pegasi’s eyes from the flat of his back, trying to remember how he got there.

“Commander?” he said groggily. “Is that you?”

“Oh, you’re doing worse than I thought,” came a voice from above him. Not the commander, it couldn’t be. It was too soft. “I don’t know much about magic, so I didn’t know what to expect when you teleported in like that.”

“Magic... teleport?” the lieutenant muttered and rubbed his head. It was like trying to see through a cloud. He catapulted up, and started to remember. “Unicorns! I went to see them, to make peace. How did...? Oh my wing...”

“Please, rest, you’ve been through a lot,” the mare said firmly, and pushed him back into the bed. He could see clearly now, and was a bit embarrassed that he confused the mare with the commander. She was cyan, but her mane was a deep purple. Very unlike the commander’s distinctive coloration.

“You’re the nurse?” Tempest asked as he sat back up, not wanting to rest. His side felt heavy and he glanced over at his wing. He wasn’t an expert on anything medical, but he was fairly sure there were far too many bandages on the injured appendage.

“Yes, I’m Nurse Zephyr. I’m new here, but I bandaged you up as best I could!” she said happily, beaming at the lieutenant. “Don’t try to fly for a while though, your wing was pretty messed up.”

“Right...” he muttered as he closed his eyes and tried to focus. “When did I get here?”

“Uh, about four hours ago? That’s when you were found, I think.”

“Where is Corporal Gust?” Tempest asked firmly. He remembered now. Gust must have foalnapped that unicorn elder’s granddaughter.

“I’m not sure, you did have a visitor earlier. A dark grey pegasus. He just walked in, grinned and walked out. It was a little creepy.” Zephyr frowned, too lost in thought to notice the lieutenant climbing to his feet.

“I need to find him. He knew that the unicorns would attack me if I left. I owe him a... speech,” Tempest grumbled, getting angry at the thought.

“But, sir, uh, Lieutenant!” the nurse stammered. “Please, you have to stay here. You were hurt, and-”

“I’m going, but I’ll come back after I speak with Gust,” he said, walking out of the building.

“But... Oh, okay. Be careful!” Zephyr called out. She sighed, then muttered under her breath. “Stubborn nit.”

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“Ugh, you haven't seen him either?” Tempest sighed, after asking what felt like the hundredth bystander.

“No, sorry, sir,” the bystander said nervously, and flew off.

‘Probably doesn’t want to be around after the show this morning,’ Tempest guessed.

It was nearly sunset. He was nearly ready to give up looking for the corporal when he saw a familiar silhouette on the edge of town. It was Gust, looking down from the edge of the clouds towards the other two tribes.

“Oh! And if you look over there, that’s where I had my wing broken because of you!” Tempest snarled as he approached, his anger rekindling.

Gust remained still, as if refusing to acknowledge the lieutenant’s presence.

“Turn around before I give you the same kindness I got from the unicorns,” Tempest snarled. “All because you decided to take up foalnapping.”

The corporal chuckled softly, then turned towards Tempest with a smile.

“You know, we pegasi are strong,” he said. “Stronger than any of those ground-bound ponies below.”

“Where’s the foal, Corporal?”

“We could easily defeat them, you know.” He gestured towards the other tribes. “We have enough power and ability to conquer them all. The pegasi could rule over them, and make them work for us. It would be better than dancing around some treaty.”

“Answer the question, Gust,” Tempest said firmly. “That’s an order.”

“It’s funny, really, that the commander doesn’t see that,” the corporal continued, his voice completely calm. “But then, she doesn’t see much of them anymore. With her running off as soon as things got tough, and all.”

“What?” the lieutenant stepped back. “What are you talking about?”

“Oh don’t pretend you don’t know,” Gust said smiling. “Everypony figured out that Hurricane was gone when you started your silly little tough act.”

Tempest growled, but the corporal kept going.

“You *are* tougher than you look, though,” the corporal admitted. “I didn’t expect you to survive your encounter with the magic-mongers. A shame, too, makes things more difficult. Not impossible, mind, just difficult.”

“What are you talking about now?” the lieutenant asked, trying to keep himself calm and focused. “Explain yourself.”

“Well, the idea was I send you to go chase your tail with the unicorns, and you don’t return,” Gust said simply. “Then I would reveal to everypony that both you *and* Hurricane are gone, and I step up to fill the resulting power vacuum.”

Tempest was stunned. He must have hit his head after being teleported. Either that or he was hearing a plan for a coup told straight to his face.

“Well, then I’m sorry to disappoint you,” the lieutenant spat. “That won’t work while I’m still here.”

“Technically true,” Gust admitted, giving a small shrug. “Although I suppose I can always- what was that you said earlier? Oh, right, ‘kick you out of the sky’. It’s not as if you can get back,

anyway.”

“Really?” Tempest remarked, amazed at the gall. “I think there’s a key flaw in your plan. I’m not going anywhere, and you really are a dolt for thinking you can beat me.”

“Oh please,” the corporal laughed. “I’m surprised you’re still even here. I’d have expected you to turn tail and run back when Hurricane did. It’d fit your style.”

Tempest lost it. He yelled something that was planned to be some witty retort, but came out as an incoherent mass of syllables. He lunged at Gust, tackling and grasping him as hard as he could as they both fell out of the clouds.

Gust smiled, then kicked out with all four limbs, causing the lieutenant to spiral towards the ground below.

“Twice in one day,” he said, chuckling to himself. “This is easier than I expected.”

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Tempest cursed as he fell, watching as Gust’s silhouette shrank into the distance. He couldn’t believe he let his anger get the best of him again. Looking down, however, he had more pressing concerns.

He couldn’t fly, he knew that much, but he still had one good wing. He flapped as hard as he could to try to slow himself down, with little success. He then tried to keep it steady to glide, but just wound up spinning faster.

It was getting difficult to breathe, and he was losing focus. Through the blur of colors that was landscape, he saw a spot of blue. A lake? It wasn’t much to aim for, but the lieutenant had few options. With his good wing, he tried to steer himself towards it. As he reached the ground, he heard a loud shattering sound. He felt freezing cold all over as his vision went black.

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End Chapter 2