

Brotherhood of the Moon

Chapter 9

It was late at night; Canterlot had dimmed its lights and fallen into a hazy state, though the city did not truly rest, even at this hour. Firefly soon found that just because she was a wanted criminal, didn't mean she could stay up all night in the streets. She needed somewhere, anywhere, to stay. Any of the inns were out; even if she had the money, they'd ask for her name, and that was something she'd like to keep to herself at this point. She was running out of options, besides maybe sleeping in a hay bale. The idea was stupid, however it didn't seem too bad at this hour. The warm, comfy, soft embrace of the hay cushioning her head like a...

Her eyelids grew heavy just at the idea, and she stopped her train of thought midway. She kept lazily walking through the streets, avoiding any guard she saw. Even as notorious as she was at the moment, the streets of Canterlot were still a very dense place, full of tons of ponies. There was no way the Royal Guard could find her as long as she stayed away from them, their reach was not so far as to restrict her from the common roads and streets.

And yet, energy leaked from her hooves with every step. With each passing moment, Firefly could feel the powerful grasp of sleep approaching ever closer, threatening to leave her unconscious on the ground where she stood. Firefly was not a very religious pony, but at a time like this, she prayed.

"Dear Celestia..." she mumbled lazily. "Just give me somewhere to lie down." Obviously, such a request was not answered very spectacularly, and even as she said this, Firefly began to give into the desire of her eyes to shut. She kept walking strangely enough, but put her head down lower than it already was. Maybe if she could just close her eyes for just a few moments...

"Whoa!" Firefly felt another body slam into her and sent her sprawling to the ground. Her eyes snapped back open, to an open view of the night sky. She was on the floor.

"Oh my, I'm so sorry! I wasn't looking where I was going, and I'm in quite a rush to...Firefly?" Firefly looked around for the source of the voice. She saw a few books scattered on the ground, probably dropped when they crashed, and a pink unicorn with a white and purple mane staring at her.

"...Twilight?" Firefly responded, pushing off her hood to get a better view of the unicorn.

"It is you! Gosh, I haven't seen you in weeks, especially after you left so suddenly, I got a bit worried to be honest." Twilight responded, telekinetically putting her books back into her saddle bags. "How have you been? And what's with the...uh...get up?" She looked Firefly over, a bit skeptical at her fashion choice.

"Oh this?" Firefly said nervously. "It's uh, really cold out tonight, so I thought I'd cover up!" she said with a chuckle. "Anyway, I've been fine thanks, and you?" she said, quickly changing the subject to something less dangerous.

"Oh, great, just fine. Scale and I have actually finished our apprenticeship! I'm all on my own now." Twilight responded happily.

"Oh, that's great!" Firefly said.

"So, what are you doing out so late? I was just coming back from the merchant's, I had to get some books for my library." the unicorn inquired.

"Oh nothing, just looking for a place to settle down for the night. To be honest, I'm a little low on bits..."

"Really? Well if you don't mind sleeping in a guest bed, Scale and I have some space, and we'd love to have you over."

"Oh I couldn't, I don't want to impose..." Despite Firefly's words, she was shouting with joy in her head. Luck had shined on her yet again, and it seemed that luck's name was Twilight Twinkle.

"No no, it's no trouble at all!" Twilight insisted. "It's always nice to help out a friend in need."

"Well, alright then! Lead the way." Firefly said, holding out a hoof to motion Twilight forward. *Yes yes yes!* She thought. *Finally, a place to sleep!* Twilight was surprisingly hospitable for a high-class unicorn. Even if she was loyal to the Flames, and technically her enemy, Firefly found she did like the unicorn very much. In fact, were she not on a mission, she might actually want to get to know her a little bit better, her so called "friend".

Twilight's "place of her own" was quite meager for a Canterlot house. It was one room, with two levels, though the top one was barely half the size of the first floor. Still, it had an extra bed, and that was all Firefly really needed. The fact that there was also a small kitchen and library was just a plus, and in general the entire place was very lavish. Meager for a Canterlot house yes, but still far above what most other cities could offer. Currently, Twilight had to go through and sort all her new books into their proper places, and along with Scale, and Firefly had offered to help. In reality, Twilight was quickly organizing tons of books at the flick of a horn, while Scale and Firefly worked together to sort books at a slower rate, seeing as one of them had fingers and the other could reach high places.

"So, lots of books ya got here." Firefly commented. She and Scale had already put up a few dozen, but Twilight had even more to store, as if she spawned them from thin air.

"Yeah well, I am quite the studious type." Twilight replied.

"You can say that again." Scale interjected. "Sometimes this pony gets 3 hours of sleep, spends the whole night studying. There isn't even a test or something to study for!"

"Thank you Scale." Twilight said with disdain. She rolled her eyes, then got back to work.

"Still," Firefly said. "What are all these books for? I mean 'Super Naturals', 'Teakettle's Tome of Transformations', 'A Foal's Guide to Alchemy', these sound like a bunch of different spell books. Aren't unicorns only supposed to have magic based on their special talent?"

"Oh yes, but I'm sort of a special case." Twilight said, pausing for a moment and setting her books to the ground. She turned and pulled back her clothes to show off her flank. Firefly's wings stiffened a bit, but the thought was soon dismissed from her mind. Twilight was just showing off her cutie mark; a collection of nine five-pointed stars in an almost circular pattern. "You see, my special talent *is* magic. I can replicate any spell I see or read about, so I try to read about lots of them."

"Oh yeah, Twilights amazing with magic!" Scale bragged, suddenly enthusiastic rather than sarcastic. "In fact, she was almost taken in as Princess Celestia's personal student!"

"Scale!" Twilight scolded. "There's no need to brag." She turned to Firefly before the pegasus could ask. "It was nothing big, I casted a few spells for my entrance exam at Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns, and lost control. Spells went everywhere; one of them turned the furniture into solid diamond, one made sunflowers sprout from the chairs, and one turned one of the examiner's mane into a bunch of snakes." She added a smirk. "I didn't particularly like her."

"Solid...diamond?" Firefly asked stunned.

"It was only temporary of course, everything went back, but The Princess was nearby and saw some potential in me. She wanted to make me her personal pupil at the school."

"Wow! That's amazing!" Firefly said. To think, she could've been so close to royalty, no, divinity? "Why didn't you take the offer?"

"Well...I didn't actually pass the exam." Twilight said sadly. "You see, the exam was hatching a dragon egg, which I couldn't do. I was only a filly at the time." her mood visibly shifted down. A glimmer of sadness lingered in her eyes, but she snapped out of it soon enough. "Still, it wasn't all bad!" she said happily. "I did actually get my cutie mark that day, and they let me keep the dragon egg, which eventually became Scale." Scale took a quick bow.

"And look how great that turned out!" he said with pride. Twilight laughed.

"Yes yes, you're my number one assistant and I couldn't be without you. We know." she said,

putting one last book away. It seemed that sometime during her story, Twilight actually started organizing books again, and had finished all of her and Firefly's pile. "Now then, it's getting kinda late." she said, glancing at a clock. "Let's all get some rest. Who knows what tomorrow will hold for us?" Firefly snickered. If only Twilight knew the gravity of her words.

Right on time, at 6:00 sharp, the sun rose over the horizon and spread light over all of Equestria. Firefly gently opened her eyes as the light from the window came streaming in. She lazily sat up and yawned, stretching out her hooves. It had been a while since she had gotten a good night sleep on such a comfortable bed, and it would likely be another while before she could do it again. In this thought, she savored every moment she had left in the plush bed, getting up as slowly as she possibly could. Once she got on her feet, she moved to the small drawer beside the bed. Opening the bottom drawer, she pulled out her assassin robes and put them on again. It took a few minutes to tie all the knots and don all the folds, especially by herself, but she eventually got her uniform on. She closed the drawer, as the rest of the drawers were occupied by Twilight's clothes. She experimentally extended her blade, and retracted it again, repeating the process a few times to make sure the mechanism was in working condition.

A marvel of pony engineering, she started to wonder about its origins. Who made it? And how on earth did they do it? Surely her father was not that skilled, and some of the other assassins had similar blades, though most were variations. The strange device fit somehow perfectly around her hoof, yet the blade extended to a great extent. Its inner parts must be very small, and difficult to make. It seemed as though even magic could not explain such wondrous workings.

A knock at the door broke her concentration. She looked over the railing of the top floor to see Twilight already awake and dressed, going to answer the door. She pulled it open with her horn to reveal two white guards at her doorstep.

"Good morning miss, we're conducting a search for a criminal that was last seen in this district. Have you seen any suspicious activity around here?" Firefly simply could not have a calm morning it seemed. The guards were already awake and eager to resume yesterday's activities. She quickly backed away from the railing and looked for another way out. There was no back door, but there was a window on her level. She turned back, hesitant. Twilight had been gracious enough to give her a place to rest, and here Firefly was, about to run off for the second time with not even a "thank you". Some friend she was. Still, she couldn't afford to be caught, not in here. They might hurt Twilight for sheltering a criminal, or worse.

"Oh uh, no not at all." she heard Twilight respond.

"Is there anyone else in the household?"

"Just my baby dragon and another pony upstairs. Scale! Firefly! Could you come down here?" It was best for both of them. She had to go, *now*.

With a running start, she jumped out the open window and grabbed onto the windowsill of the adjacent house. Climbing up to the roof, Firefly took off along the rooftops, leaving Twilight and the guards behind. *Sorry Twilight.* She thought. *Maybe one day I can explain this to you.*

The Canterlot town square was a very expansive place. It was a good 100 yards across and was generally flat. On this day however, the area in front of Saint Redhoof's basilica was occupied by around 70 different ponies. All of them wore a wide red hat and read robes inscribed with a sewn-on replica of Princess Celestia's cutie mark. With so many ponies wearing such wide circular hats, it almost looked like the square had become a sea of red. Around the perimeter of the square, a line of gold armour-clad unicorns held a strong line; allowing only officials through, while pushing and sometimes beating any stray peasants away. Above the streets, similarly equipped pegasi walked along the rooftops. There was no way unto the square it seemed, but such an outlook did not faze the pink pegasus in the white hood. She stood alone, silently watching from the rooftops. She didn't

expect full entry, but she hadn't anticipated this much security. Still, she didn't necessarily have to get into the meeting; she just had to wait for a certain unicorn to come out. The meeting was almost finished anyway; she most likely would be still working her way in by the time it was done with.

She went over her plan in her head, or really her lack thereof. Despite the effort it had taken her to get to her current position, her main source of drive was still her rage full thirst for vengeance. As soon as she caught sight of him, she was going to pounce. Afterwards, she didn't necessarily care if every guard in the city was alerted to her presence, as long as she could make the noble suffer as she had.

Still, it seemed as though Applejack had not truly left her. A small, nagging voice remained at the back of her mind, telling her to stop, pleading her to reconsider her plan. She'd been lucky enough to escape this pony with her life; it would be pointless to throw it away in taking his. An assassin needed to be able to disappear after being seen, but that meant waiting until the time was right to strike, and frankly it was hard to think she could hold herself back. Of course, if she didn't, then she was to die soon after her kill. What would be the point of that? Perhaps this was the entire wrong way to complete her task. She needed him alone...

Lost in her thought, time passed around Firefly, and the meeting soon ended. The crowd began to disperse. The guards left their posts and continued on their way, as red cloaked ponies left the square and began to flow out of the exits. Firefly scanned the crowd, looking for Gilded Sword, but did not see him.

"...where are you." she muttered to herself. As if answering her, the white unicorn noble then left the square, careful to have his personal guards form a barrier around him, as to not let the other pedestrians touch him. With him inside the circle of guards was another white unicorn, this one had a tired face, bags under the eyes and wrinkles all over, most likely from excessive stress and lack of sleep. He wore almost the same red clothes that Gilded Sword did, and had the same golden mane, though it was much more ravaged and generally unkempt. It was a stark comparison, Gilded Sword's happy and well-groomed smile, against this pony's tired, depressed frown. He group moved to the side wall of the street. They were positioned directly below Firefly. It took every ounce of self-control she did not to fall on top of them with an outstretched blade.

"What a long meeting, ay brother?" Gilded Sword said.

"Yes, though not a particularly productive one." the pony Firefly now assumed was Golden Shield, the noble's brother, said.

"Oh, lighten up will you? The people love us! And the government is under our hoof."

"How much longer will we have to lie to these people Sword? How long until we reveal our true intentions?" Shield asked.

"Don't say it like that, we're not lying." Sword replied. "We simply chose to not mention certain details for the good of everypony."

"For the good of everypony', do you even believe yourself?" He asked disgusted. Gilded Sword grew visibly angered, but the expression soon faded.

"I wish you wouldn't be so dramatic. We are doing this for the good of Equestria."

"I...suppose so..." Golden Shield said solemnly. "I just wish there was another way. We can't hope to find all the pieces. All we have is The Core and one of the-"

"Shh!" Gilded sword shushed urgently. "Let us speak in the privacy of our home, he open streets are no place to discuss these matters."

They began to trot away slowly. Firefly followed on the rooftops, keeping a keen eye on the pair. What was it they spoke about, The Core, and lying to the public? Nothing good, but what could they have meant? She needed to follow them to their home, surely she could get inside and listen to them speak unrestricted.

The Gold family did not have the humble abode Firefly expected. This was not a simple tower, or a large spiraling building, but a castle. One the almost rivaled the Royal Castle, falling only a bit smaller. Not only was it big, but it was protected. Guards surrounded the walls, and a large gate stood at the front. Firefly could see more guards patrolling inside even. The two unicorns were brought inside, and the gate was immediately closed. There was no way Firefly could get in alone, she needed help. But she was alone in this mission, how could she get help in a Templar city? She was a wanted criminal, why the only people who would so much as look at her if she talked to them were...

A crack came from behind her. Firefly turned to see a group of four dirty ponies jumping across the rooftops like she did, a loaf of bread in one's mouth, an apple in another's.

...thieves. Firefly smirked and made her way over to the group.

"Hey, you!" she called when she got close enough. Some of them drew their blades in reflex, but most stopped when they saw the source of the voice.

"Who the hell are you?" One asked.

"An outlaw." Firefly said. "Just like you all."

They retracted their attacking stances, and relaxed. Still, they didn't lose their looks of suspicion.

"Well...what do you want?" the one asked.

"What do you guys think of the Gold family?" Firefly asked. Most frowned in disgust. One spat at the name's mention. She leaned in, and took out a few bits. The thieves instantly became interested.

"I have a job for you all..."