Brotherhood of the Moon

Chapter 14

The air was rushing around the two as Firefly and Swift soared over the city of Canterlot. The feeling was invigorating, and Firefly was loving every second of it. She'd forgotten the feeling of flight, the wind in her face, the expansive land below her, the minuscule ponies walking below her. Out of sheer instinct, she spread her wings wide, if only to feel like she could fly. She wished Swift would live up to his name and fly a bit faster, as her cutie mark's thirst for speed soon recognized flight once again, and desired more. Of course, it was doubtful that Swift would actually be able to go much faster, given the extra weight he was carrying, but the sensation of soaring over the city was bittersweet none the less; she was loving ever second, but she realized it would soon end.

Sure enough, the Gold stronghold soon came into view above the surrounding spires and towers of the inferior buildings beside it. Notably less protection patrolled it now, only a few earth guards and virtually no pegasai.

"You ready?" Swift yelled over the sound of rushing wind.

"...Yeah!" Firefly shouted back. She didn't want the flight to end just yet, but she needed to keep her priorities straight. The mission was her focus, it had to be.

Swift made one last dive toward the building and headed for its center. The two were descending at a monstrous speed, simultaneously satisfying Firefly's longing for speed and almost giving her a heart attack. The winged thief shouted something over the wind that Firefly could only assume was "Good luck" and violently swung his trajectory upward into the sky, releasing the assassin and leaving her in a perfectly vertical free-fall. Extending her own wings, Firefly adjusted her angle of decent to the right, and entered enemy territory.

Below, a group of unicorn guards were patrolling the perimeter of the Gold Family's residence. None of the four stallions looked particularly interested in their duty, especially the one in the very back, who looked as if he was about to fall asleep mid-trot.

"Dear Celestia...what time is it?" He asked sleepily.

"Time fer you tah shut yer trap and stop whinin' like a little filly!" The patrol group's head snapped back at him. The sleepy guard proceeded to mumble something under his breath, but for the most part stayed quiet as he was demanded. Still, his undeniable fatigue caused him to lag behind the group by some distance.

A sudden noise caught his attention. The hay bale behind him shuddered as if something had moved inside it. Of course, that was impossible; They would have seen anypony sneaking around on their patrol. The only way somepony could have sneaked into the hay bale would be if they fell from the sky or something. Still, his paranoia got the better of him.

"Wait, I think...." The guard called out to his patrol group, but it was obvious they had

no patience for him. He could only see their shadows moving away around the next corner. He paused, unsure what to do, before turning around and approaching the hay bale. He carefully leaned into it, looking through the stack to see if anything was visible inside.

A hoof shot out and grabbed the guard by his neck. A second hoof covered his mouth and pulled the surprised unicorn into the haystack. There was small sound like metal clicking into place, and then silence.

Firefly cautiously peeked her head above the surface of the haystack, scanning the surrounding environment for trouble. When she saw the coast was clear, she slowly walked out of the stack of hay, shaking of pieces of dead plant material as she did. It would be a while before anypony noticed the guard's body, but she still needed to hurry before another patrol group found her.

She looked around. The inside of the stronghold's walls were surprisingly busy. Small buildings outlined the corners, most likely servant homes and storage rooms, and a few windows actually protruded from the sides of the wall. These would make good holds to climb on, and the homes would provide platforms. Most importantly however, were the wooden posts extending to various parts of the complex. Firefly eyed them all gleefully, they would make maneuvering through the compound very easy, especially one in particular that extended from the far left corner all the way to the central tower itself.

She took no more time for scouting, now was the time for action, and quick action at that. Firefly took off on a running start and used the momentum to propel herself up the wall of one of the servant homes before grabbing onto its higher sections. She carefully but steadily took hold of the wall and began to climb. Cracks, dents, misplaced bricks, anything Firefly could get a hold of she griped and pulled herself up with. Climbing seemingly flat surfaces was nothing new.

Not a moment after she lifted herself up to the roof, the second patrol group came trotting slowly around the corner. The four unicorn stallions did not appear to suspect anything amiss. Firefly had officially done what was apparently impossible; she was now hidden inside the Gold family's stronghold. The vengeance she desired so much would soon be hers. What would happen? Would the wretch regret his choices? Would he try to justify them? Would he even remember who she was? The internal questions only served to fuel her will to succeed. She turned to the wall beside her and resumed her accent.

The guard swung his heavy sword down on the pegasus behind her back. Before the weapon could impact however, she ducked to the side and avoided any injury. Whether the evasion was due to the assassin's honed skills, her acute perception, or just dumb luck, she managed to spin behind the brute as he strained to lift his weapon and slashed at his back hooves, piercing him through the chest as he fell to the ground afterwards.

A stunned silence followed the encounter, as if Firefly expected another guard to attack her. Once it became clear that one would not, she re-gained her composure and sheathed her sword. The roof of the building, like the surrounding ground, was not heavily patrolled. The three guards Firefly just dispatched seemed to be the only ones in sight. Resistance to her presence had been dealt with, and it seemed as though she could finally get

inside the building.

As she turned to leave, a thought struck her. She returned to the corpses and began patting them down. Sure enough, she soon found a total of about 35 bits inside the deceased guards' coin purses. Thinking of Cortland and his thieves, she pocketed the money and decided to put it toward good use. She then resumed her exit and walked away. All that was left now was to find a way in.

Alas, her salvation came in the glowing form of an open window. Practically begging to be entered, Firefly leaped through the portal without a second thought, and soon found herself in the rafters above a stunning indoor garden. Mystical torches burned all around the room, glowing a bright white light that didn't seem to ignite the surrounding foliage despite its fiery appearance. Colorful flowers and blossoms bloomed in every direction, and a few birds and butterflies had seemed to make the artificial Eden their home. Though the cold wind outside suggested late fall, the warmth and splendor of the garden gave Firefly the impression that it was surely spring time. Her thoughts went back to Posey; the earth pony would have loved this room, despite its Templar owners.

A noise clattered at one side of the room. Firefly instinctively hid, before realizing that the shadows of the ceiling and her high position were more than enough camouflage to mask her presence. The door swung open, and walking into the room was none other than Gilded Sword, along with his brother Golden Shield and two lance wielding guards. Even in the safety of his home, the unicorn was still too hard to reach. Firefly had to restrain herself from pouncing on the noble from her perch, but managed to keep her ambiguity intact.

The two bureaucrats began slowly walking down the garden path, carrying on a previous argument as they did.

"I swear brother, at times it seems like you aren't thinking at all." Gilded Sword spewed with an aristocratic and sarcastic tone. "You are an excellent strategist, how can you not see the tactical potential in Canterlot?"

"This is about more than mere strategy brother, this is about morals!" Golden Shield replied, his tone a more aged and stressed accentus.

"Pfft, morals." Sword replied with a scoff. "What you speak of is not morals brother, but foalishness! The real moral thing to do would be to help ensure a brilliant future for ponykind! Is that not a noble goal, to help create a better future?"

"But this is not the way to do it!" Shield said back. "I want nothing more than that of which you speak Sword, but there are other ways of attaining this goal. You speak of treachery and blasphemy!"

The statement impacted Firefly. Half of her was burning in rage at the affirmation of her suspicions. Gilded Sword and the other Flames of the Sun wanted to control the government themselves, and rule how they saw fit. However, part of Firefly was also somewhat shocked and surprised. Gilded Sword was already a huge political figure, and could graft his political power without the slightest consequence, and yet he still aspired for

control? What more could he do? How much more authority could he attain? What did he actually plan on achieving to gain complete control of Canterlot?

Gilded Sword stopped walking. He abandoned his sarcasm; the tactic obviously did not persuade his brother. "Please brother, you have to find a way to see the light in our efforts! We can change things for the better, all we need to do is try! Why, we just got a report this morning that suggests we may be close to locating The Globe of Elation in Trottingham!"

"No, I'm sorry Sword, but I can't go on living like this." Shield stated firmly. "I have to tell the public, this can't be the way things change, it will only turn bad for us later on." He turned away and trotted to the room's exit with a quicker walking pace.

"Brother please!" Sword cried out behind him, but it was too late. The doors slammed shut behind the Templar strategist. His disheartened brother let out a sigh of despair. He glanced shortly at the beautiful flora that surrounded him, attempting to lighten his mood presumably, but failing in doing so. "I can't believe it's come to this. My own brother abandons me." he said to himself. Exhaling once more, he continued down the path toward the door.

Firefly followed him along the rafters, still trying to process all that had just been said. It was now obvious that Gilded Sword wanted power, but it seemed that it wasn't limited to political influence. Whatever the wealthy aristocrat was aiming to do, it was enough to lose the affinity of is best tactician and own family. What could be so immoral about his plot, and how could it be so easily justified by attempting to sooth the burdens of future generations? Could something that sounded so beneficial be so corrupt?

And then, there was a particular detail that stuck out to Firefly; the supposed "Globe of Elation". Whatever it was, it was instrumental to the Templar's plot. Perhaps, after this business was over, Firefly would go to Trottingham. Something this important had to be powerful, and therefore dangerous in the wrong hands. She couldn't allow someone like Gilded Sword to obtain it, no matter what.

It could have been a few minutes, maybe an hour or two, but for Firefly, it felt as though she had been stalking her target from the shadows of the ceiling for ages. The two lance holding guards, who Firefly mentally dubbed "Seekers"due to their habit of stabbing lances into hay bales and flower piles in search of stowaways, had shadowed the politician where ever he went in the castle. She had waited through task, after task, after mediocre task of Sword's duties, just waiting for an opportunity to strike unnoticed. Even worse, through the entire timespan of observing the Templar write documents, talk to officials, order servants, and other such things, not one thing was revealed to her that could possibly prove useful. Needless to say, though Firefly's fiery thirst for retribution had not burnt out completely, the flame had definitely weakened a bit.

Currently, she was watching the bureaucrat enter the Gold family's dining area. The long table, despite seating dozens, was totally empty. If she had to guess, Firefly would have predicted that Gilded Sword and his brother would be dinning alone.

"That should be enough for today, you are both dismissed." All at once, the ears of

both Seeker guards and Firefly perked up to attention. Hiding smiles of relief, the two guards calmly made the way to of the room, leaving the unicorn completely alone. At last, it seemed that Firefly's long awaited punishment would be given. Her late parents would finally be given peace.

The aristocrat took a seat at the table's head. Already laid out on the surface was a neat arrangement of plates and cups, a layout for two. The main course was some sort of marinated grass topped with an indiscriminate dressing and with a side of fresh daisies. The smell wafted up from the display, reminding Firefly just how hungry she was. The meal would provide a perfect distraction, as long as she could strike before Golden Shield arrived, she could-

"I'm sorry that it came to this..." The unicorn suddenly said aloud.

Firefly could swear her blood froze with fear at that moment. No one else was in the room but her, who could the Templar be addressing? Surely he wasn't aware of her, was he?

"I desperately wish I could have convinced you. Maybe if I had tried harder, maybe, but it's too late now." Gilded Sword reached into a pocket on his red coat and pulled out a tiny green vial. He turned it over, looking at it from every angle, as if the pony he was conversing with was within the vial's contents. "I simply cannot allow you to reveal everything we've worked for; I must do this...for the good of all ponykind."

Firefly's mouth fell open as she witnessed the aristocrat open the small vessel and pour a clear liquid into his drinking cup. He lifted the glass, made a melancholy expression, and switched it with the glass of the dinning set up adjacent to his.

Once again, anger welled up inside Firefly, giving her the urgent desire to distribute punishment. If she understood what she was seeing correctly, the corrupt politician had just poisoned his own brothers drink. He was committing murder for personal gain once again, and his own family none the less! All the worse, from how empty she had seen the Gold residence, the victim was possibly his only family left that was still alive. Of all the ponies she'd met in her short experience in being an assassin, this was the most despicable stallion she'd ever seen, and this crime made it all the more difficult to stop herself from descending onto him from above and giving him the retribution her deserved.

The doors of the dining hall opened, and as if called by his own death, Golden Shield entered the room. He shut the doors behind him, once again isolating the room, now to him and his brother. Sitting down at the table and remaining silent, he closed his eyes and gave a short prayer to the meal, then began eating. All the while, Gilded Sword stared at his brother, his stoic face betraying his previous actions.

"Have you re-considered brother?" He finally asked. Shield was mid-chew and did not answer immediately, but soon enough swallowed and responded.

"It's something I must do. I'm sorry, I realize how convinced you are in your actions and what you see as their beneficial results, but this is just not right Sword. We can't deceive so many people at once, even if it does benefit them." He reached for his cup and lifted it to

his face. "Tommorow I will call a meeting of the Solar and Lunar Courts. I will explain what we've been doing, and what we expected to occur. I trust our peers will forgive us when we reveal our motives."

Gilded Sword took a large breath. It seemed he had given up on persuading his brother, and decided to allow his fate to pass.

"Well then." Gilded Sword said, lifting his own glass in toast. "I wish only the best for you, for both of us." The two drank from their glasses in unison.

Firefly was leaning over the edge now. Her rage was uncontrollable, almost feral now. She didn't dare reveal herself now, but she could not calmly watch this abominable injustice pass before her. Her self restraint was at its peak now, all she wanted to do was drop down onto the table and...

A sudden shift in balance caught Firefly off guard. Caught up in the emotion of her internal tirade, she'd leaned too far over the edge of the rafter, and found the muscles in her forelegs were no longer able to sustain her weight in such a skewed position. With no surface to land on, she found herself falling off the rafter and onto the floor below, making a rather loud crash.

She wearily got up off of the floor, rubbing her head. The impact had not been very comfortable, but luckily she had no major injuries. The far more pressing concern was the two unicorn nobles that were now staring at her as if she'd just fallen from the sky and through their ceiling, which for all they knew, she might have. An awkward pause followed for a moment, filled only by the silence of the three ponies staring at each other in shock. It was as if father time himself had stopped moving, for fear of breaking the silence with his footsteps.

Finally, Firefly found her voice, and her conscience returned to her with it's pleas for justice

"You!" she said, pointing an eccentric hoof at Golden Shield. "You're in danger! This *bastardo* poisoned that drink!"

Shield still seemed lost in confusion. His eyes quickly darted to his brother, then to his cup, and back to the peculiar pegasus in front of him. At first, his face was one of disbelief, like he though the unexpected visitor to be insane. However, as if on a verbal cue, his face dropped in realization as a tinge of pain flashed in his eyes. The poison had begun taking its effect, he could feel it strongly now. He directed his expression of absolute dread toward his brother, looking afraid to be near the unicorn.

"You...didn't...but you did! How...why...." he erupted into a violent fit of coughing, his body trying its hardest to expel the liquid saboteur.

"I...had to brother. I cannot allow everything we've done to be ruined by anypony, even you." His face still hid any traces of compassion or pity he might have had, but deep inside, Firefly could sense a glimmer of guilt.

Golden Shield's coughs grew louder, more scratchy. He spit, his saliva staining the floor bright crimson with blood. His fearful eyes moved all across the room, but eventually focused in the Firefly's direction.

"You...Assassin! You m-must...the Globe...fi-find...The pieces...." His voice shuddered, struggling to hold together. Finally his strength failed him, and he collapsed on the floor, blood sputtering from his mouth as his body convulsed in pain.

The dying pony's gaze was painful even to receive, but Firefly took the words to heart none the less. Still, the scene was horrible, Firefly couldn't stand it. For a moment, her consciousness almost seemed to give up the body to Rainbow Dash, but her mind was none the more willing to be near the frightening display.

"Guards! Guards! An assassin has killed my brother!" Firefly recognized the shouts immediately, and to her further surprise, she found that The dinning hall's doors now swung open, and the steady beat of running hooves could be heard in the hallway. The Templar had escaped.

"...Eden...."With a last, pitiful breath, Golden Shield finally passed from the mortal world. He lay on the floor, the front of his coat drenched red. Firefly couldn't leave him like this, the unicorn had begun to see the light and turn away from his evil, only to be stabbed in the back by his own kin. The circumstance was depressing just to think of. Firefly quickly made her way over to the pony, laid his body in a more dignified position, and gently pulled his eyelids closed, making his eternal rest seem a bit more comfortable.

"*Requiescat in pace.*" she whispered.

Not a moment left to loose, with the sound of metal clanging now audible and nearing the dining hall, she pulled up her hood and made a swift sprint for the window.

Firefly was backed into a corner, three guards now focused on her position. The one in the center, a particularly angry looking Seeker, seems poised to skewer her through the front at any second.

The assassin's creed was held sacred among the brotherhood, and it was now especially that Firefly realized just how important "hiding in the dark to serve the light" was. As soon as the call went out that an assassin had infiltrated the Gold stronghold and killed Golden Shield, nearly every guard within a mile's radius pooled back to their normal positions, even exceeding the normal amount of guards present at the Gold residence. Firefly had used all her medicines, smoke bombs, and other assassin tricks to escape the Templar headquarters, and still found herself deeply wounded and surrounded by enemies.

Still, she would not die so easily. As the Seeker thrusted his weapon forward, Dash felt the same feeling of blind action she'd experienced at her cloud home back in Ponyvile now overtake Firefly, filling her with energy, sharpening her senses, and accelerating her mind to process battle at sonic-rainboom speeds. Firefly expertly deflected the lance, using the edge of her hidden blade to circle the point away from her body as it approached her. Not

only that, but she managed to retract the blade and let part of the lance fall into her own hoof, pulling the weapon away from it's owner and using it to trip all three guards in front of her. She leapt over the three, kicking of the back of another guard and knocking him to the floor. With the path ahead of her clear, she made her escape.

A sword flew in her direction, but she battered it with the front of her brace and executed it's wielder. More swords, axes, maces, all sorts of weaponry came in Firefly's direction. It was hard to even see who was attacking at times, how many there were, or where they came from, but none of that even mattered. The instincts that drove both Rainbow Dash and her ancestor ignited, and she quickly, efficiently, and expertly subdued anything that came her way. Her movements were unnatural, alien, but also very graceful. It was like a strange dance, the way she would bring her hoof up to somepony's chin, then spin around to block the sword of the guard behind her. It was like nothing Dash had ever seen before.

Currently, Dash watched as Firefly jumped onto a lone guard. The momentum pushed him to the stone floor, and Firefly to sit on his chest. She reared her hoof back and extended her blade, reading the kill. Just as she did, a voice arose over the sound of battle.

"Hey! Firefly!"

She turned her head, her hoof still ready to strike, and saw a yellow earth pony standing on the outer wall above her.

"Cortland!" she exclaimed. Completely forgetting the guard in front of her (whom had been knocked unconscious by the fall anyway), she turned and ran eagerly to the wall's base to greet her friend.

"What are you doing here?" she called to him from below.

"Well, ah got tah thinkin; after all Miss Firefly did for us 'dirty thieves', it wouldn't be very nice of us tah just drop her inta the fryin' pan and let 'er claw her own way out, so once we made sure you were in, ah rallied up somma the boys and threw together another little...diversion tah help you get out easier!" He directed his sights toward the front gate, and by following his line of vision Firefly could see her short-notice rescue party.

Sure enough, a bit more than just "somma the boys" were charging a full frontal assault on the stronghold's front entrance. The scattered collection of street riffraff and alley rats were attacking the well armored and well equipped guards with whatever weapons they could gather, and faring quite well to Firefly's surprise. The poverty-class militia made up for their lack of protection and arsenal with superior aspects of speed and agility, avoiding more attacks than they actually dealt. Still, while the fatalities they were achieving were minimal, the battle provided a perfect gateway for Firefly's departure.

"Come on!" Cortland yelled playfully. "Race you to The Apple Core!" With that, he took off. Firefly followed not far behind, maneuvering around swinging steel and clashing hoofs. The world around her was convulsing with battle, but for a brief moment, running alongside the earth pony in playful sport, Firefly felt her old life again. However, it wasn't in sad remembrance like before, but a strange feeling of excitement as the simple joys of her

past fit into the chaotic environment of her present. What had been done was over, there was nothing she could do about it. She was an assassin now, so she might as well enjoy it.

The silhouettes of two ponies sat alone on the roof of the infamous Apple Core tavern. After all of the night's excitement, it seemed that both Cortland and Firefly felt it best to get lost in the beauty of Canterlot once again. It was a much different scene now, the Gold family residence was still loud with the sounds of continued battle, and quite a few fires had started in the confusion, but still, the disorderly scene held a sort of strange, disfigured beauty that both ponies found relaxing.

"...I failed." Firefly said softly. It had been the first words spoken since their encounter at the stronghold. Cortland didn't respond, or seem to react at all even. He just kept smiling, maybe even a bit wider than before.

"Yeah, ah figured." he said finally. It was a simple response, and sounded very much inappropriate, but for some reason the stallion's charm made it seem perfectly normal.

"I didn't manage to kill Gilded Sword, I came all this way to get revenge, and I couldn't do it," Firefly reconfirmed. "But you know what?..." she paused, as if expecting a response. "It doesn't matter to me anymore. After all this time, I think I've finally realized what being an Assassin means. It's not about getting revenge, or what you want, it's about a different kind of justice. It's about helping the little guy, it's about showing compassion when nopony else does. It's about making sure that eveypony, even the lowest of the low, get what they deserve, and that nopony gets taken advantage of. "

"'Work in the dark to serve the light.'" Cortland quoted. "So, do yah still need tah go out an make Gilded Sword pay then?" Cortland asked, turning away from the cityscape to look Firefly in the eyes.

"No." she responded simply.

"Well shoot, ah guess ya learned somethin' after all!" Cortland's mouth didn't move. The accent was familiar, but it was not his voice that said it. Firefly turned around to see a third figure on the roof along with them. She was standing tall, with a proud look on her face.

"Applejack!" Firefly said, shocked at her presence. "What are you...." She trailed off, aware of a growing snicker coming from the stallion beside her.

"Ah'm sorry, this is just too perfect." he chuckled.

"Do ya remember the story ah told yah back in Lunagrad Firefly?" Applejack said, finding a seat on the roof's edge beside the two others. "'bout how ah was in the same place as you, family murdered and the killer got away. Ah can tell yah, ain't nothing more ah wanted than tah give that sonuva-mule a good beatdown, but you know what?"

"You didn't get to." Firefly finished.

"And?" Applejack hinted.

"And...it was okay. Because you had a new family now." The uncanny resemblance to their situations now became clear. Applejack nodded in satisfaction.

"That's right. Ah wasn't lyin' when ah said you're family now, and families don't run on hatred and grudges. Ah sent ya here in hopes ya would figure that out, and by the looks of it, yah did." It all became clear now, the reason Applejack switched missions, the reason Cortland didn't believe her story, and the reason he helped her out anyway. Applejack had set up the entire trip to Canterlot in hopes Firefly would find out what her creed meant. Like the thief she was, she had deceived, cheated, and taken advantage of Firefly to get what she wanted, and Firefly couldn't be more grateful.

She wrapped her hoof around Applejack and pulled the orange earth pony in closer.

"Thanks Applejack." Firefly said, tightening her embrace. Sure enough, the thief soon returned the hug, feelings of mutual gratitude and trust now flowing through their hooves and into each other.

"Aww shucks, ain't this a tear jerker." Cortland said jokingly. Applejack gave him a condescending look and reached over to him as well.

"You get in here cuz." she said, dragging him into the group hug. Despite a brief moment of resistance, Cortland did not seem too off put by the hug either and soon shared the gesture with the two mares.

After a short amount more of affection, the three ponies unanimously decided to separate, and discuss other matters.

"Welp," Applejack began. "Ah reckon we should probably get back tah Lunagrad. Need tah report tah Steelwing and all that, maybe he won't-"

"No." Firefly interrupted. Applejack chocked on the words she was prepared to say next.

"What was that sugarcube?"

"I can't go back to Lunagrad, not yet." Firefly's expression was grim. "There's something else I discovered in there." Applejack seemed sincerely intrested, and leaned in closer, as did Cortland to a lesser extent. "The Templars are planning something...something big. I don't know what it is, but I do know I have to go to Trottingham and find something called 'The Globe of Elation'" Both of the Apple family thieves seemed puzzled greatly by the vague importance the pegasus placed on the even more vague treasure.

"Well, why do yah suppose it's so important?" Cortland said curiously.

"I have no clue, but I just...feel that it's really special." For no particular reason, Firefly turned her gaze skyward, once again looking above to the moon for comfort. It almost seemed to Dash that Firefly knew Luna was watching, even if indirectly and from the future.

This particular night was perfect for star gazing; it was mostly cloudless and the moon was full and shinning bright, it's surface surprisingly pristine.

"I have a bad feeling about this." Firefly said quietly.