

Blood, Wings, and Talons

Rainbow Dash groaned as the burst of light at her back faded to a dim glow which barely illuminated the ornate stone floor beneath her. As she rose to her hooves she glanced around, and found herself in a large room that easily rivaled the one she had just left in size. At her back was a massive stone archway, molded into the face of a cave wall and etched with runes that far surpassed her comprehension. A glowing orb floated at its center, barely illuminating the room around her. Dash turned her attention to the yellow pegasus still strewn about on the ground next to her, wearing a simple cloak and saddlebags similar to her own.

Dash lightly rubbed a hoof against Fluttershy's back as she continued to look around the cave. "Ummm, Fluttershy. Wakey wakey, we're here. Hopefully..." Dash looked back to the archway as she heard Fluttershy let out a small squeak, and her eyes fluttered open. Dash could barely see the images of gryphons and pegasi etched into the the archway, with Celestia's symbol located at its peak. She muttered to herself as she floated up to the symbol, "... Maybe this *is* the right place."

Fluttershy shook her head as she stood up, trying in vain to remove the aching pain in her forehead. "Dash, are you sure we can even find who we're supposed to be looking for?"

Dash took another glance at the etchings before she landed next to Fluttershy. "Well... Twilight said she read about rebellions that were in those history books, and she overheard Aqua talking about someplace called Airlon all the time, or read about it, or... something." Dash rolled her eyes as she left out a chuckle. "I-I'm sure we can find it." Dash looked into the darkness, seeing a faint light in the distance. She helped Fluttershy to steady herself for a few moments before she moved towards the light. "Come on, this should be the way out."

The two stumbled through the darkness, feeling the hard stone walkway under their hooves as the light grew closer. The floor was smooth, as if it had been ground down by someone, or something long ago. Before long the light grew from a dim speck into a bright flame: a torch that burned at the side of barred door. With a bit of trouble, the two pegasi managed to remove the large wooden bar that kept the door locked, its iron joints creaking as it crept open.

They walked out into a shallow connected cave, the night sky visible only a few feet away. The cave opened up to a cliff, overlooking a small section of forest far below. The bright lights of several cities and villages were visible in the distance, both along the ground and in the clouds above. Dash flapped her wings lightly as she lifted off from the cliff, taking in the geography of the area before she turned back to Fluttershy. "Twilight said travelers round Equestria are common, and I don't think Nightmare Moon is going to have a picture of us to plaster on a sign somewhere. Let's go to that town over there."

Fluttershy looked to the village at the edge of the forest, shining dimly compared to its larger counterparts. “I-I don’t know Dash. What if she *does* have pictures of us? Or somepony starts asking questions we can’t answer or-”

Rainbow Dash placed a hoof on her forehead as she let out a sigh. “Fluttershy, we’ll be fine. Some of the ponies in the guard said Cloudsdale is still around, and it’s not like we can’t just, make up a name or something. Who’s going to know right?” She glided down to her companion, motioning a hoof for her to take off. “We need to be quick about this Fluttershy... We aren’t going to get anywhere if we sit around and just think about things.”

“B-but, I-... Okay,” Fluttershy said with a small frown, and lifted off from the cliff to follow Dash. As the two made their way towards the village, the cliff behind them shifted silently, melding into a solid face of rock that blocked the path they had taken from sight. Dash could feel the cold wind blowing across her wings, amplified by the cold steel that still rested beneath, hidden from sight.

Fluttershy noticed Dash shuddering as she flew, moving closer before she spoke up, “Are you sure you’ll be alright with those Dash? I know we couldn’t take everything, but-”

“We have to be ready for a fight Fluttershy, and there’s no way I’m going to fly around here without a weapon. Besides, Twilight said her spell will keep them hidden,” Dash said, her vision scanning over the forest below.

“I know, but she said if you use them it won’t work anymore, and, well.” Fluttershy looked away from Dash for a moment.

“Fluttershy, don’t worry about it. We’re not going to have to fight anyway. That’s why we’re keeping a low profile.” Dash slowed down enough to get beside Fluttershy, giving her a small nudge with her hoof. “I promise, okay?”

Fluttershy smiled and nodding, looking down at the forest below as they continued towards the village.

The small town near the edge of the forest was bustling with activity amongst the lights of its street lamps. Along its well-kept streets were merchants peddling their wares or travelers making arrangements or deals before they departed for a more important destination. Most of its occupants were gryphons or pegasi, but the occasional unicorn or earth pony was not an uncommon sight. Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy landed near the edge of the town before making their way quietly through the main street, whispering to one another.

“Let’s see if we can ask someone about where we are,” Dash said, taking a look around before she noticed an aged gryphon at a small stand, focused on grabbing the attentions of passersby.

“You there young colt, can I interest you in a fine saddle all the way from Fillydelphia? Made from the finest silks Equestria can offer. Ma’am, perhaps you’d be willing to look at a few of these perfumes from the southern provinces? They’re brewed with flowers from the edge of the Wilds that will drive any colt mad for you.” He quickly turned his attention to Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy as they passed the stand. “Or you two fine mares, perhaps a few jewels from the Airlon mines? They’re said to be the most precious in all of the world, and that a dragon had to be slain just so that they could be reached.”

Dash blinked in response before she turned to Fluttershy, whispering, “W-wait, did he say Airlon?”

The gryphon’s ears peaked as he smiled, nodding in response. “Of course, one of the largest mines in all of Aeolus, and the most successful at that. It’s been producing anything from gems to metals to minerals for close to seven hundred years now.”

Dash smiled as she whispered to Fluttershy, “See? No fighting. No problems.” She stepped forward to the stand and chuckled. “We’re trying to make our way to Airlon to meet someone, but we’re not exactly sure where it is. Do you have a map or something?”

The gryphon peaked an eyebrow in response. “M-meet someone... *there*? I think you two must be mistaken. No one works in those mines except convicts and vagrants who can’t hold down a job in a factory or... mules. And even the town is barren except for guards and the occasional merchants doing business.”

Dash let out an agitated sigh, cursing under her breath before she looked back at the gryphon. “Look, we just need a map, do you have one or not?”

He quickly rummaged behind the stand, some of his miscellaneous wares flying up before he pulled out a rolled parchment and placed it in front of them. “It’s not up-to-date, but it’s not like Airlon is going to move somewhere anytime soon. It’ll cost 50 bits.”

“50 bits?! That’s outrageous!” Dash shouted before feeling Fluttershy tug lightly at her cloak.

“D-Dash... Maybe we shouldn’t make a scene out here in public?” The yellow pegasus looked around, several bystanders staring awkwardly at Dash’s outburst before they began moving along. A few guards, however, kept their attention focused on them. “Besides, we don’t even have anything.”

Dash laughed nervously, noticing the guards as she looked back at Fluttershy. She offered them a calm wave before turning back to the gryphon. "Look, I'm... sorry." Dash showed a bit of trouble finishing her sentence before she continued, "We've been traveling for a while and we don't have very much money left. Can you just point us in the right direction or something?"

The gryphon let out a tired sigh and unfolded the parchment on the table, pointing to a dot labeled "Faeroc". "This is where you are," he stated as his talon slid above the map before resting on a small mountain range labeled "Airlon". "And this is the mine... If you fly non-stop it should only take a few hours to get there, but the curfew is starting soon."

Fluttershy moved forward, speaking softly under her breath, "Curfew?"

The merchant cursed under his breath. His voice was strained with irritation, "You think someponies would read a history book... After a few revolts and what not happened in what *were* gryphon lands, the *Queen* instituted a curfew anywhere north of Cloudsdale. Only guards and traders are allowed out past it, and that's only if you have a license for it." The gryphon glared at the back of his stall, muttering under his breath, "Like anyone except a pony could even get one of those."

Dash looked back at the guards for a moment, their eyes still locked on the three. "Do you know an inn where we can stay?"

The gryphon suppressed a chuckle. "Not without any coin I'm afraid, but there is a shelter down the road. Some of those poor unicorns that still believe in giving out something for nothing. If you're only looking for a place to lay your head I guess it would work."

The two said their thanks to the gryphon before departing, looking for the shelter as they waltzed down the street. Fluttershy swore she saw a pair of violet eyes watching from a nearby alleyway, but as she turned to them they were nowhere to be seen in the dim glow of the streetlamps. Her eyes snapped back to Rainbow Dash as she called out for Fluttershy to speed up. She quickly galloped to catch up to her friend, leaving the merchant to his end of day proceedings.

Rainbow Dash trotted through the streets with her head raised high, Fluttershy following her closely. The meek pegasus' head turned from side to side as several ponies and gryphons on the street were busy wrapping up their business for the day. She kept her voice low as she got beside Dash, "Dash? Maybe this isn't the best idea."

"What are you talking about Fluttershy? We just stay the night down the road, head out tomorrow, make it there in a few hours and find someone to help us. Easy as learning to fly."

Well, in my case at least.” Dash’s trot picked up speed as she saw the faint glow of a lantern illuminating a sign on a large building up ahead. It bore the image of a unicorn and gryphon with a small lantern and bed etched next to them.

Fluttershy noticed a few bystanders watching her and Dash as they arrived at the front of the building, which was well-lit compared to those around it. She could see about a dozen ponies and gryphons inside through the front window, mingling or heading up the stairs near the back of the room. She could also see two unicorns, a mare and stallion, working behind a small counter near the stairs.

Dash led the way, opening the door wide. The faint sound of music mixed with the gentle undertones of a few conversations filled the pegasus’s ears, and the warmth from a nearby fireplace overwhelmed the faint breeze that had begun blowing across their haunches as they stepped inside. A lone pegasus trotted past the pair before the door shut firmly behind them, and a pale green unicorn behind the counter looked up at them with a smile.

“Oh, good evening, and welcome to The Lantern.” She waited for the pair to approach her before continuing, “My name is Emerald, what can I do for you?”

Dash’s gaze floated over a few shelves behind Emerald and the counter, stocked with a few supplies and loose records. She turned to Emerald as she spoke, “Yeah, we heard from someone that you offer rooms for ponies that can’t afford a place to stay?”

The unicorn’s face brightened up even more as her smile grew to a wide grin. “Why of course. We’re always willing to lend some help to travelers, as long as we have room of course.” She looked back, and spoke to a light blue stallion busying himself with a few open record books, “Dillium, can you check and see if we still have that corner room available upstairs?” The stallion nodded as another book floated over to him, its pages flying open. Emerald looked back to Dash and Fluttershy. “Just the two of you?”

“Yeah, we’re just floating through and figured we’d stop to rest. We’ve been traveling for a while and don’t have a lot of bits left.”

“Oh I understand. No reason to explain to me,” she said, looking back at Dillium, who offered her a nod. “And it looks like we have the perfect room available. Would you like me to show you?”

“Sounds fine, come on Fluttershy,” Dash said to her companion, following Emerald to the stairs.

The meek pegasus fidgeted in place for a moment before following Dash. “B-but Dash, what if this isn’t-”

“Would you stop fussing so much? It’ll be fine,” Dash said, keeping her voice low, though her eyes glared at Fluttershy. “It’s *just* a room.”

“I know, but... Sorry.” Fluttershy conceded what few arguments she had against the action as she followed Dash and Emerald up the stairs. The unicorn led the two pegasi to a small corner room at the end of the hallway labeled “19”.

Inside were two small beds set up near the corner, each in front of a small window. One overlooked the still-lit street, while the other faced the building’s neighbor and gave a clear view of its roofing and the starry sky above, as well as the dark, damp alleyway below. The remaining walls were decorated with a few paintings or portraits of ponies and gryphons the pegasi couldn’t say they knew, and a large dresser and mirror were set up along one wall.

“I know it’s not a lot, but it should be more than enough for the two of you,” Emerald said, motioning a hoof into the room as she let Dash and Fluttershy walk inside. “If you need anything at all, please feel free to ask. Dillium and myself will only be up for another hour, but the room behind the desk is ours.” She smiled a wide grin as she continued, “Please, don’t be afraid to disturb us if it’s something important. There will be a little bit of food served after the early bell. It’s not exactly a feast, but I’m sure it will be enough to get you going on your journey.”

“Thanks, we really appreciate it,” Dash said, throwing her saddlebags on the floor before she laid down on one of the beds, while Fluttershy slowly trotted towards the dresser.

“Again, think nothing of it,” Emerald said as she bowed her head, closing the door firmly, her hoofsteps fading down the hallway.

Dash’s legs stretched on the bed as she looked out over the street, seeing the few citizens and guards left heading off to their homes or a nearby inn. It wasn’t long after that the streetlamps began to dim, and the quiet sounds from downstairs were the only thing the two friends could hear. Dash let out a rough sigh as she turned over in the bed, looking at Fluttershy. “Are you *still* worried? We’re fine, warm and toasty with a bed and a meal tomorrow. We’ll be fine Fluttershy.”

Fluttershy placed her saddlebags down beside the other bed before she crawled onto it. Her head was almost glued to the covers as she looked at Dash. “I know, but it’s just-”

“Just what?” Dash asked, closing her eyes as she tried to find a comfortable position in the bed.

“Well, we came here barely knowing where we were going, and now there’s this place and these ponies that are just... willing to help us. And the place we were looking for is really a prison and... I just don’t like it.” Fluttershy looked out of the window at the starry sky, which now shined brighter as the lights of nearby cities began to dim as well.

“Nothing is ever gonna go the way you want it to,” Dash said as she finally found a comfortable pose on the bed, shuffling just a bit over the covers. She let out a long yawn before she continued, “You just gotta... just gotta find a way through... no matter what.”

“Umm, right.” Fluttershy said, getting up to turn off a lantern on the dresser. “Good night then Rainbow Dash.” Her wishes were only met with a loud snore as Dash quickly drifted off to sleep. Fluttershy smiled as she climbed back into bed, sliding beneath the cover before she turned away from the window. “Dash is right,” she whispered to herself. “Everything will be fine...”

Hours passed by like seconds for the two sleeping pegasi, and soon the faint sounds of The Lantern’s common room had faded, leaving only the silence of the empty streets in the dead of night. Fluttershy and Dash’s sleep was peaceful, but in the dark of the alley under their window a figure stirred. Being careful not to cause any noise as it tumbled over a few trash cans in the darkness, it made its way under the window. The rugged brown and white feathers along its body bent in the breeze as its neck craned up, its wings unfolding.

In seconds it was hovering outside of the window, its bright purple eyes glancing through the pane. A talon extended from its claws, jiggling against the lock for a few seconds before it gave in with an audible click. With a grin across its beak it opened the window wide, enough for its head to get inside. The gryphon gave one glance to the open streets outside the alleyway before taking a deep breath. With a light touch its talons moved over the covers, gently pulling them away from Fluttershy’s body. It took one small moment of hesitation before the gryphon made his move.

Fluttershy’s slumber ended abruptly as she was yanked up from the bed by the gryphon’s talons. She let out a shriek, quickly silenced by a talon gripped over her muzzle. Fluttershy was soon face to face with a the gryphon, her body trembling as he shook his head from side to side. His voice was calm and light as he spoke, a sharp contrast to the situation Fluttershy had found herself in, “I’m trying to help. Just stay calm and I can ex-”

“Let go of her!” Dash shouted as she barreled through the air, trying to deliver a buck to the gryphon’s face. However, a combination of the darkness and her drowsiness ended in a size-able chunk of the wall caving in under her hooves instead. The gryphon was quick to grab Fluttershy tightly, yanking her through the open window as gently as he could before he hovered down to the ground. Dash shook the sleep from her eyes as she flew through the window, squinting to see his form below.

Fluttershy let out another squeak before the gryphon covered her mouth once again. “Stay quiet,” he said, glaring at her. “I’m trying to help the two of you and you need to be qui-”

The gryphon stopped, jumping back as Dash landed on the smooth cobblestone in front of him.

She scrapped a hoof across the ground, glaring as her wings extended at her sides. "Let her go... Now!"

"I'm trying to help you here. You two need to calm do- Ow!" The gryphon grunted as he felt a hoof from Fluttershy impact his breast. He was quick to restrain her, his talons retracting. "They're going to be here soon if we don't hurry!" he whispered urgently.

"Why am I supposed to trust someone yanking my friend from her bed in the middle of the night?" Dash asserted, keeping her stance. She could feel a light vibration along her wings, the feeling of steel sliding across her feathers. However, Twilight's words of caution were still at the back of her mind: "*Dash, this spell will hide them for a while, but if you use them it will stop. And it won't come back after that. Avoid fighting unless you have to.*"

"Because I'm not the biggest problem you have right now," he stated calmly

The gryphon's words were soon followed by a crash coming from their room and the shattering of glass as the large wooden door crushed the window the three had escaped through, sending shards of glass into the alleyway. The sound of hooves stampeding into the room followed before a faint glow shone through the window. One voice spoke out clearly, barking orders, "What's the hold up? Where are they?! The two downstairs said they were in this room, I want them now!"

"Sir, we don't know. The beds are empty."

"Idiots! They couldn't of gotten far! I won't have Lord Zephyr hearing about my failures caused by your bucking *incompetence!*" The gryphon started to back down the alley slowly, motioning a claw for Dash to follow as he lightly tugged Fluttershy along. The blue pony's eyes darted between her friend and the window before she followed. Luckily, she was gone from the window's view just as the broken door was torn away and a unicorn's head peaked out, shining a spotlight back and forth across the alleyway.

"They might've gone through here sir."

"I don't want *mights* I want them found, *now!* You three, start searching nearby houses and businesses, and get the standbys looking too. You two, go and find the merchant. I want as much information as he has to spit out for a bit. You, you're with me. We're going to find out if these pathetic charity saddles are *lieing* to me."

Dash peered around the corner for only a moment before her focus was drawn to the gryphon. "Explain. Now."

The gryphon released Fluttershy peacefully, holding his talons up as he spoke, "Can't,

it's not safe here. There's a bar not far from here called The Aviary." He pointed down the alleyway towards a fork as he continued, "Left, right, right, left, straight, left, right. Go to Bri and ask for a bucking bronco on the rocks. If she asks who sent you, just say 'Skyreil'."

Dash's wings flared out once again. "And how am I supposed to-"

"There's no time. Would you rather have been with the guards who would've bucked you into submission without a second thought, or the gryphon who wants you to be alive and can *help you* get to Airlon?"

"I... B... Dang it." Dash turned to Fluttershy. "Are you okay?"

"Y-yes. I mean, he didn't try to-"

"Good. Let's go." Dash turned to the fork in the alleyway, looking over her shoulder at the gryphon. "If you're lying. You don't even wanna know." The two vanished into the maze of buildings as the gryphon let out a sigh, flying up above the building as the streetlights of Faeroc began to buzz back to life.

The calm silence of the night had quickly been replaced by the shuffle of hooves and the murmur of rumors amongst the populace. However, while the streets were filled with citizens and guards alike, the dark maze of alleyways only held two pegasi quickly searching for a promised safe haven. Luckily, the gryphon's directions held true, and Dash soon saw a hanging sign in the alleyway just above a wooden doorway, shaped like a gilded bird cage.

She let out a sigh of relief at the end of her sprint. "Well, I guess he wasn't completely full of horse apples," Dash muttered to herself. She turned back to Fluttershy, whose legs were shaking as she took deep, heavy breaths. "You okay Fluttershy?"

"Just... fine... A little... out of breath," Fluttershy said between gasps of exhaustion. "Can we just... stop for a-"

"Let's get inside first, come on," Dash said, keeping her voice hushed. She waved a hoof in Fluttershy's direction, her eyes looking up and down the alleyway suspiciously before she pushed the door open.

The doorway opened into a large room, dimly lit by candles scattered across a few tables occupied by a hoofful of gryphons or ponies. The walls were barren except for a few candle stands near the ceiling, although they were left unlit. At the far end was a bar and a burly white gryphon seated behind it, calmly cleaning a glass in her claws. A few eyes around the bar idly watched the two pegasi make their entrance, but were soon drawn back to more important

events: conversations or a game of cards.

Fluttershy stayed close to Dash as they calmly trotted up to the bar. The gryphon looked up from her glass, a pair of blue eyes glancing over the pegasi. A small grin grew on her beak as she spoke, her voice deep, "Welcome to the aviary chicks. What can I get for you?"

Dash looked back at Fluttershy for a moment, who was still recovering from her exhaustion. She turned to the bartender, placing a hoof up on the bar. "Yeah, a umm... Bronco Bu- Bucking Bronco on the rocks?" Dash questioned her own words, raising an eyebrow as she did.

The gryphon returned Dash's confusion with a blank stare. After a few moments she turned around, pulling out two cloudy bottles and a small tumbler filled with a few chunks of ice. After filling the glass to the brim she pushed it forward, her talon gripped tightly over it. She leaned forward, her face only a foot away from Dash as she spoke, "Who sent you?"

"Skyreil," Dash stated calmly, Fluttershy still recovering behind her.

At Dash's answer, several gryphon patrons in the bar looked up as their conversations came to an abrupt halt. The bartender's talon tightened on the top of the glass, sending a small crack down its side. Her eyes narrowed as she picked up the tumbler, bringing it to her beak and taking a long sip. After the glass rested back on the bar, sending a splash of liquid over her claws, she shouted, "Quill! Look after the bar. I don't want anything missing when I get back from talking to our little hatchlings."

A unicorn nodded from across the room. He had a dark orange coat and a scroll across his flank, and quickly took a spot behind the bar. The gryphon flexed her talons for Dash and Fluttershy to follow as she headed to a door in the back, holding it open for the two.

They were led down a short hallway, and soon found themselves in a storage room stocked with various sacks, bottles, and crates. In the corner were two gryphons. One busied himself with sharpening his talons, while the other was contemplating a move on a small chess board between them. They each shot up out of their seats as the bartender led Dash and Fluttershy inside, closing and locking the door behind them.

One of the gryphons took his spot at the door while the other sat back down, busying himself with a talon once more, though his eyes stayed locked on the girls. Dash looked between the three gryphons as she spoke, "So... Are you Bri?"

"Yes, I am, for what it's worth to a nopony. Who sent you?"

Dash looked back at Fluttershy, who could only offer a timid shake of her head. "Well, umm, we thought the guy who told us to come here wa-

"I need a name feather brain, now," Bri stated flatly, scratching her breast with a talon.

Dash stamped a hoof down on the floor as her wings flared out. "Look, my friend nearly got snatched out of her bed by your *buddy* and then these guards busted into our room. We just want to know what the hay is going on, who you all are, and why this Airlon place is so important!"

Bri's wings spread out, their span nearly twice as wide as Dash's. Her glare focused on the pegasus intently. "I'd take a look around you. Three on two in small six by eight that's gonna make your wings about as useful as they'd be on a brick." She leaned closer, her eyes staring through Dash. "You'd best watch your tone with me hatchling, I'm not about to take orders from a pony in *my bar*. First, names, now. Both of you."

"... I'm Dash, and this is Fluttershy," Dash responded, her wings still spread.

"There, was that so hard? Now that introductions are out of the way, who sent you?"

"What, it wasn't Skyreil? That's the name he gave us."

Bri's eyes relaxed as her wings folded. "Wait, this gryphon. Brown and white? Purple eyes? Stupid enough to think grabbing you from a bed was a good idea?" Dash responded with a nod to each question. "Bloody hell..." Bri muttered, rubbing her forehead lightly. "Of all the dropped eggs, it had to be him."

There was a knock on the door, followed shortly by a groan from Bri as the guard at the doorway opened it slowly. Dash and Fluttershy were greeted by the same gryphon who had snatched Fluttershy from her bed not long before. He gave a small chuckle as he stepped inside. "Well, glad to see you found the place. Meeting the Steel family I take it? Sister Bri isn't being too rough is she?"

"Would you stop calling me that?" Bri asked, her voice strained as a vein showed through her feathers. "Why did you bring them here?"

"Oh come on, we're practically siblings. We were born in the same nest after all." He placed an arm around Bri's shoulder, which was quickly shoved away.

"Because *your* mother got sick for two weeks and *mine* had to hatch *your* egg in *my* nest!" Her eye twitched unnervingly as she repeated herself, "Why did you bring them *here*?"

"Same difference, and they were asking about Airlon," he stated plainly.

"What does that have to do with anything?" Bri demanded as one of her claws grabbed him by the breast.

“Whoa whoa, calm down Bri. You’re scaring the timid one,” he said motioning to Fluttershy. “Sorry about being a little... rough earlier. Pressing matters.”

Fluttershy started to speak up before Dash cut her off, “Hey! We still have no idea what the hay is going on!”

“Bri, if you’d be so kind as to let me go?” He smiled once he was free, patting his breast lightly with a talon. “Well, for starters *Bri*. If they don’t know about Airlon, where do you think they’re from?”

“That doesn’t mean anything you dolt.”

“Yes, it does. It’s practically a threat hung over every gryphon and pegasus’ head. If you don’t eat your veggies you’ll go to Airlon. Don’t clean your room and it’s off to Airlon. Stage a coup and it’s you’ll be locked up in Airl-”

“Would you act like you’re not still in the nest for once?!” Bri shouted. She turned to look at Dash and Fluttershy, and sighed. “You’re from the Wilds then, huh? Is that it?”

Dash blinked, still confused by the gryphon’s odd actions. “Umm, yeah. We came here to look for help. Airlon was mentioned in some reports and we thought it was important.”

“It is, and we’ve talked to you and your people enough for my taste,” Bri spat, turning away from Dash.

“I think what Bri *means* to say is that we know who you’re here for, and we don’t really have anything to offer you.” The gryphon blinked before rubbing his chin idly. “Oh, right, name is Beryl by the way,” he said, extending a talon.

Dash remained where she was, glancing between the two. “Riiight. Listen, this is really important.”

“Oh, really? What is it, more of that Legend pigeon crap?” Bri scoffed, letting out a chuckle. “Like I’m gonna believe what you let yourselves get spoon-fed before it’s even out of the oven.”

“They aren’t made up! We’re from before Nightmare Moon was in charge. We’re the Elements of Harmony *from* those Legends,” Dash stated, noting that Beryl raised an eyebrow at her words.

Bri merely chuckled, turning back to face Dash. “Oh, isn’t that just rich? They went and brainwashed themselves too!”

"It is true! We're trying to get *your* help so we can all stop her!"

Beryl held Bri back as she seemed ready to tackle Dash to the ground. "Bri, I don't think it matters if it's made up or not. If they're honestly here to get our help-

"And how do we know they're really from the Wilds? They could just be more of her lackeys trying to get the rest of us locked up."

"Listen, I was there. Guards broke in right after I got them out of that room. They were even questioning a merchant they talked to. If they wanted one of us either of them could of grabbed me and-

"Would you stop arguing?!" Fluttershy shouted suddenly, garnering a baffled stare from everyone in the room, especially Dash. However, her body started shuddering once again as she looked down at the floor. "I'm sorry I didn't mean to interrupt, but we're... this isn't accomplishing anything."

It took a few moments for Dash to speak up, "Fluttershy is right. We don't know someway we can prove who we are to you, but we need your help."

Bri sighed, shaking her head in a talon. "Oh, well, if that's the case let me just throw inhibition out the window." She turned away from them again. "It's all well and good, but we can't help you anyway."

"Why?!" Dash demanded, stamping a hoof down.

Beryl stepped up, hoping to stop another fevered outburst from Bri. "Skyreil, the name I told you to use, is our leader. About two weeks ago he was taken by the Queen's guards on a raid, and thrown into Airlon. We've been trying to work on some way to get him out, and we think they're using him as bait to get the rest of us."

"Exactly," Bri stated, crossing her arms. "We can't go rushing into Airlon and just expect to drag him out either. *Beryl* was supposed to be working on a way to get us in."

"Already taken care of. Demi finished the pigment I was telling you about."

"Pigment?" Dash asked, raising an eyebrow.

Beryl nodded. "Yeah, it's kind of hard for a gryphon to disguise themselves with our feather color being a dead giveaway." Beryl smirked as he continued, "Guess it's the same for a pony huh? Especially with those marks." Beryl's smirk faded as Dash stared at him. "Anyway, Demi's an old friend of ours, pretty good with chemicals and stuff. He said he made a paint that works on feathers and coats, and doesn't wear or wash out."

“Took him long enough to deliver on *that*. We’ve been waiting for months to get this from him,” Bri remarked, moving over to a shelf and pulling a few scrolls from them.

“Bri, maybe this could be what we were looking for,” Beryl whispered, though his voice carried enough for Dash and Fluttershy to hear.

“What are you rambling about this time?” Bri asked, unfolding a scroll.

“Well, you were worried they’d still know who we are if someone tipped them off about Skyreil, right? *This* is a chance to avoid that.”

“Wait, what are you talking about?” Dash asked, her stance finally relaxing. Fluttershy stepped out from behind Dash, her exhaustion all but gone.

Beryl smiled, letting out a small chuckle from his beak. “Well, if you need our help so bad.” He leaned closer to Dash, and pointed a talon at her side. “How’d you like to be a blank flank again?”

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