

Brotherhood of the Moon

Chapter 12

Nothing. The world was nothing. Just a white void of endless light, searching for something to illuminate. At this point, Dash was no stranger to this purgatory; she knew it was just a matter of waiting to reach her destination. She wasn't conscious in the waking world, and yet, she wasn't consumed by memory either. She was waiting for the spell to warm-up fully, and for the world to build itself beneath her.

Sure enough, a great crashing sound soon arose, and entire mountains were built before Dash's eyes. Whole towers and century old cathedrals materialized, their bricks and mortar flying into place as if by magic. The whole of Equestria built itself instantly, and soon the white void Dash was staring at became the great city of Canterlot. Her bird's eye view of the city shifted dramatically, jumping all around the city, as if it was looking for something, or somepony. Eventually it located its target, and Dash's viewpoint flew down into the city to focus on a white robed mare with blue hair and an unusually diverse armory. Firefly: the assassin.

Dash assimilated into the body, their points of view becoming one. She could feel her hooves pacing the ground, but still couldn't quite grasp control over them. Dash was a watcher, not a driver. Still, she could see the mare's path, and had a feeling she knew where Firefly was headed.

The young pegasus kept her head low as she walked, her hood covering her face and keeping her presence generally unnoticed. As she walked, a small piece of paper caught her attention. It was a wanted poster, hung on the wall by an arrow. It bore the image of a young mare, with a boyish mane and a serious expression. Her head was covered by a hood. It took Firefly a moment to realize who the mare in the poster was, and she hastily ripped it off the wall.

She instantly realized the stupidity of her action. Civilians gasped behind her as she defied the government issued warning, and gasped again when they realized she was the outlaw it was about. They backed away, some ran for their lives. Down the road, a group of guards on patrol began to notice the disturbance.

"*merde!*" Firefly cursed under her breath. She had to escape, and she had to do so quickly.

She pushed herself up the front of the building to her side, and dashed away along the rooftops. She jumped, rolled, and climbed across the treacherous and un-even environment. Still, although she avoided the attention of the guards in the streets below, the guards on the roofs quickly took interest in the fleeing pony. Soon, Firefly had to watch her step even more as she ran, while avoiding arrows and crossbow bolts that whizzed by her head by mere inches.

A safeguard came into view. Over the edge of the rooftops rose a familiar banner with the familiar symbol. "The Apple Core", Cortland's thief guild. There she would be able to escape the guards, or whatever was left of them. Most were archers, content with attacking from afar and not pursuing their victim too much. She was almost home free, just a little

more and...

whack A blunt force struck Firefly in the hoof, sending her tumbling to the ground. She rolled along the stone tiles painfully, skidding to a stop at a dangerously short distance from the roof's edge. Now on her back, she looked up to see her attacker approaching. A city guard, a burly grey unicorn, had been hiding behind a chimney. Seeing Firefly coming, he'd struck her in the fore hooves with a heavy looking war-mace. He now levitated the weapon high above his head, rearing to bring it down on Firefly's skull.

Just as he was about to strike however, something caught his eye. He looked to the side and redirected his mace, swinging it horizontally to his left. A thief pony jumped into Firefly's view and in front of the guard. He ducked under the mace's swing and turned himself around. With a powerful buck, the thief kicked the guard in the head, and off the roof, falling to the street below. Firefly heard a dull crack and the shouts of many surprised pedestrians, confirming the guard's death.

The thief sighed and wiped his forehead. Turning to Firefly, he reached out a hoof. "Need a little help getting up?" he offered with a smile.

"Haven't you done enough?" Firefly said viciously. She didn't know why, but she felt an aggressive tone was necessary for interaction with a thief. However, this thief had saved her life. It was a thief who was going to help her get at Gilded Sword, a thief who gave her a place to stay in Canterlot when she was a wanted felon, a thief who was above all else, her sworn brother assassin. She had the notion that she needed to interact with these thieves aggressively, but now that she really thought on the idea, it made no sense. These ponies, thieves as they may be, were her allies.

"Whoa, excuse me." the thief said, retracting his hoof. "I thought I was talking to a pony, but you seem to have the attitude of a griffon."

"Actually, you're right." Firefly said, getting up. "I should be thanking you. Sorry." she apologized. The thief's smile returned. He waved a hoof.

"Don't mention it, all in a day's work. These guards practically kick themselves off the roof, and I'd do anything to help an ally."

"That's...very nice of you to say." Anything to help an ally? Firefly had thought that sort of loyalty was absent in dirty thrives like this. It was the reason they stole, because they had no morals. Yet, in the last few months she'd only met moral-less ponies in the ranks of Templar politician and city guards, whereas every organized thief had been welcoming and kind to her.

Maybe these thieves weren't so bad?

The familiar stench of beer and sorrow was present when Firefly entered The Apple Core once again. However, a certain feeling of welcome was also present that hadn't been there her last visit. Of course nothing had really changed; the thieves had given her their full hospitality the moment they realized she was an assassin, but regardless, the thieves' guild seemed friendlier now. It was obviously Firefly who had changed, that any feelings of hostility she might have felt before were simply a reflection of her own attitude toward the bandits.

She made her way to the back room once again, and as expected, she found a yellow earth pony waiting there; Cortland.

"The tunnel entrances have all been renovated." Firefly said. "You might find a few guards down there, but other than that they're free to use."

"Ha ha, fantastic!" Cortland replied, clapping his hooves on the ground a bit. "On behalf of The Apple Core, let me extend mah most sincere thanks to ya Firefly. Now, ah have another task for you tah complete around the city." Firefly frowned. He had another task? No doubt one filled to the brim with angry guards. Out of the frying pan and into the fire it seemed.

"I'm not too sure I want to do this 'task' for you," Firefly confronted. "Especially after you promised the last one would be so simple, which, by the way, it wasn't." Cortland dismissed her worries with a roll of his eyes.

"Oh, Ah'm sure ya can handle this, it should be nothin above tha 'great assassin' Firefly's level of expertise." He said in an almost mocking tone. "why, Ah'll bet a simple recruit ca'd do this job, it's just a messenger's task. The only reason ah ask you tah do it, is because it's relevant tah yer mission regarding the Gold family..." Firefly's ears perked up. Just as Cortland predicted, she was quite suddenly interested in the petty mission he had set up for her. Cortland bore a smirk at her interest, and continued. "The Gold family's stronghold is well protected, but tha bastards aren't rich enough to hire their own set of guards, at least not yet. The buildin's protected by a fleet of Canterlot city guards instead, boastin the excuse that as a political target, they need protection in the interest of Canterlot's well bein." His face twisted in disgust for the lazy excuse to luxury.

"Anyway," he continued, "the point bein that the guards there have other responsibilities, and probably would rather be out an about in the city than stuck patrolin one place for so long, so...here's mah plan." Cortland rolled out another map of Canterlot, this one with a visible diagram of the streets and buildings above, no tunnels in sight. "Ah'll organize a few of mah boys tah cause a ruckus around town all at once, that way, a bunch of the guards will be drawn away from the patrol tah help calm the streets. The weakened defense will make it easier to get ya into that place, so I'm thinkin you can fly yer way in, an-"

"I-I can't fly." Firefly interrupted. Cortland looked a bit confused by the notion of a flightless pegasus.

"But, uh, yer wings..." Firefly spread her wings outward for the earth pony to see. It took a moment, but he eventually noticed the unnatural look of the damaged wing. "Oh..." he said. "Um...Ah'm sure we can get one of mah boys tah fly you in then, but that means you'll have tah find yer own way out once we drop yah in there."

"No problem, understood" Firefly responded.

"Anyway, what ah need you tah do, is just go around the city and let the bandits there know when tah make trouble with the guards." Cortland pulled out a few scrolls, supposedly letters to his recruits. "Like ah said, a simple messenger's task."

Unlike the last mission, Cortland was not understating the difficulty of this task; it really was easy, almost boring in its simplicity. A few guards here and there, but nothing Firefly couldn't handle. It wasn't a mob of them like before, just an occasional archer, usually easy to sneak past or out-run. It seemed like things were finally looking up.

"Alright, so we attack on Cortland's signal." a relatively young thief said to Firefly, reading the note she just gave him.

"Signal?" Firefly asked. She had been wondering how the attack was to be coordinated, but all the other thieves had simply mentioned that they would attack on signal. What that signal *was* remained to be seen.

"Oh, you'll see, don't worry." the young thief replied. "Let's go guys." He called over to his fellow thieves, and the group of rascals disappeared onto the rooftops. With a nod of satisfaction, Firefly went the opposite direction.

"Okay, just two more." Firefly told herself as she ran across the Canterlot skyline. In all honesty, she was quite tired, and welcomed the idea of a nice bed to sleep in at the Apple Core, as dirty as it might be. Pretty soon she'd settle for another haystack to sleep in.

Firefly slowed down her pace as she approached a large gap in the rooftops. She'd arrived at Mane Street again, and numerous roof guards would be watching this route in particular. Luckily, the road below was so packed with ponies even at this late hour that she would easily be able to blend in with the crowd. Thus, the busy street was hardly an inconvenience, maybe even a fortune. It was a simple matter of changing her route's height level, nothing more.

She calmly pulled her hood over her face to hide her identity, and dropped down inconspicuously from the heights of the shops lining Mane Street. She made her way calmly down the road, trying to drown out the noise of street vendors and shop callers. Although noisy, the walk down the normal street with no parkour, guards, or thieves to deal with was a nice break from the discord of Firefly's everyday life lately. In fact, Firefly found herself smiling. She was temporarily lost in the happiness of normality, and gained a certain spring to her step as she walked down the road. Soon enough, she stopped suppressing the cries of cheap wares and low prices, and embraced them as the soundtrack of an average pony's walk down the street. Her gaze moved upward, and her hood slid off her head onto her back, letting in a flood of lights; candles, torches, glowing unicorn horns, and almost the most brilliant, stars. The aroma of fresh vegetables and burning metal filled her nostrils as she inhaled. Dash found herself quite happy as well; the scene was hardly what she was used to, but something about the town reminded her of Ponyville on a market day. She felt like prancing down the street along with her ancestor, smelling the air, seeing the lights, feeling as if everything in the world was going normally.

At this point, Dash noticed she was actually doing these things. She was actively prancing down the Canterlot of the past and taking in its atmosphere. She didn't know how long she'd been in control of Firefly's body, but it felt right. Being there, hearing ancient ways of speaking and seeing out-dated machinery, it was as if Dash had always lived in the past. She felt strangely at home among the ponies of days that were long past and widely forgotten. Her mind and that of her ancestor synchronized to a new level; it was difficult to tell who really had control here. Dash found herself even having trouble differentiating between who was moving the body and who was taking a backseat, but frankly, it didn't matter much. Both ponies were enjoying the simplicity. The burden that was the fight for control had all but disappeared, and both Firefly and Dash couldn't feel better.

But of course, the greatly malevolent murphy and his law would not allow this simple joy to last. Firefly froze up in a shock that jerked body control away from Dash. No more than a few feet ahead of her was a pink unicorn with a striped white mane walking with a

green and purple baby dragon on her back. Twilight Twinkle.

Before Firefly could even think of moving away from the pony, it was already too late. Twilight moved her gaze ahead of her and spotted the assassin, almost mirroring her expression of surprise. Firefly couldn't approach the mare, there was too much Twilight didn't, and couldn't, know. Trying to explain why she'd graciously accepted her invitation to stay and then disappear the next morning without even a nod of thanks would only lead to more issues. Firefly liked Twilight; she'd been a good friend and helped her in a time of need, but for the sake of preserving whatever good impressions she had left on the unicorn, she'd hoped to never see the Canterlot scholar ever again.

With a hasty quickness, Firefly pulled her hood over her face once more and started moving in the opposite direction. She tried to walk as fast as possible without drawing suspicion, but it was difficult.

"Wait!" she heard a voice call behind her. "Firefly, please wait!" She didn't need to turn around to tell who the voice came from, and she didn't dare. She only boosted her pace a bit to leave the area faster. "Firefly, please stop!" She couldn't hold out anymore, Firefly broke out into a full-fledged sprint. The complaints of pedestrians arose in all directions as Firefly pushed and shoved her way down the busy street.

"Watch it!"

"Why such a hurry?"

"What the- Hey, slow down!"

"He must be late...and she must be beautiful."

A crash broke out as Firefly knocked over a pony carrying a wooden box. He proceeded to curse and shake his fist at her, but Firefly was too preoccupied running, she could still hear a set of hooves chasing her and the Twilight's cries for her to halt.

"Firefly, I just want to talk!"

Ignoring her further, Firefly turned a corner, quite hazardously, and ran into a group of guards on patrol. They looked at her dumbfounded as she got up and dashed away as fast as hooves would carry.

Spotting an apple cart up ahead, Firefly leaped up and bounced onto the wooden transport, propelling herself up onto a wooden post, then a tile balcony, and then swinging on a potted plant around a corner and to the rooftops of Canterlot, where Twilight couldn't follow.

"Firefly! Please, wait!" she heard her yell from below. Still, she couldn't stand to wait. She knew the unicorn could not follow her here, onto the roofs of the city where only guards and thieves roamed, but she kept running regardless. Not from Twilight, but from herself, from the thought of abandoning such a good friend behind, from not being able to enjoy a leisurely walk in the evening, from having to hide, steal, and murder other ponies. She wasn't running to escape the unicorn behind her, she was running to escape the un-escapable.

She was running away from what she'd become.