

BROKEN WINGS

ALLIE LYNN

Broken Wings

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Broken Wings

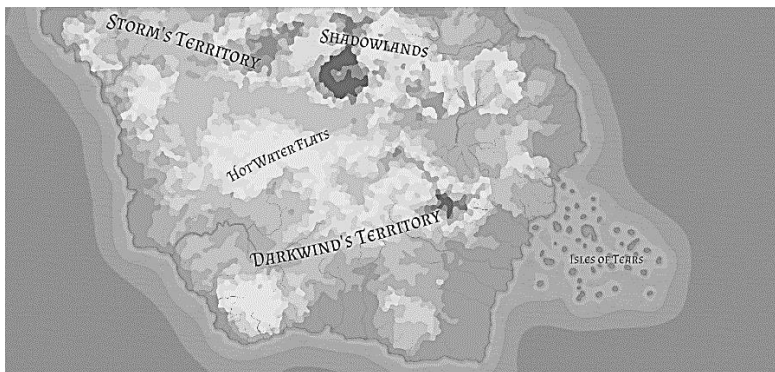
For my mom, who always believed, always supported, and encouraged a young girl to take up fantasy again when the depths of a heavy novel weighed her down.

Broken Wings

SOUTHEASTERN EQUINOX



SHAKIRANA (SHAKIRA ISLAND)



~Characters~

THE PRISONERS:

Cascadesky: Blue roan Prairie Tribe mare with blaze, four socks, black mane and tail. Purple feathers. Goes by Cascade

Thunderhoof: Bay Ocean Tribe stallion with two hind socks, blaze, black mane and tail. Mint feathers. Goes by Thunder.

Chance: Black Prairie Tribe stallion with bald face, blue eyes. Black mane and tail, black feathers.

Sunrise: Buckskin Prairie Tribe mare of Sand Tribe descent, thick black mane and tail, star, snip, pale pink feathers.

Luna: Silver Rock Tribe lead mare with white mane and tail, blaze. Gray feathers.

Rainstorm: Olive dun Sand Tribe Chief stallion with stripe, hind coronet, fore sock, black mane and tail, navy blue feathers.

Rosesand: Brash palomino pinto Sand Tribe lead mare with blaze, cream mane and tail, blood-red feathers.

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SURFACE ORDER SHAKIRA:

(SHA-~~KT~~-RA)

Darkwind: Silver gray stallion, dark gray mane and tail, with blue wings tipped gold. Bald face, blue eyes, two socks. Chief stallion of the Surface Shakira. Rumored to be a hybrid.

Fireheart: Solid liver chestnut mare with rust red feathers. Former Dark Shakira demoted to the Surface Order. Queen.

Singeblade: Bay roan stallion, black mane and tail, one blue eye, one sock, dark blue wings frosted with white. Head Commander.

Reefblade: Lowest Shakira commander, bay stallion with blaze, mint feathers, two socks. Black mane and tail. Head of the Prison guard.

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SHAKIRAN LAND HORSE HERD:

Storm: Slate dapple gray with gray-black mane and tail, lightning bolt shaped blaze, two socks. Lead stallion.

Kestrel: Formerly Kestrelmist, Queen of the Surface Order. Chocolate Palomino, ivory mane and tail, four-point star, three socks.

Shade: Solid smoky black two-year-old colt. Son of Kestrel and Darkwind.

PRAIRIE TRIBE:

Rowansun: Bay stallion with black mane and tail, bright blue feathers, blaze. Chief stallion of Prairie Tribe, father of Cascade, Dovespring, and Chance.

Crimsonpine: Lead mare of Prairie Tribe, mother of Cascade and Dovespring. Red dun mare, chestnut mane and tail, stripe, three socks, lime green feathers.

Emberpine: Black pinto mare with bald face, black and white mane and tail, red feathers. Former lead mare of Prairie Tribe, mother of Chance. Deceased.

Eaglefeather: Gold dun stallion with gold feathers, dark brown mane and tail. Head Commander. Mapleberry's mate. Blue roan mare with crooked strip, black mane and

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tail, two half socks, one sock, dark blue feathers dappled with light blue. Mother of Dawnwillow.

Dawnwillow: Bay blanket appaloosa filly foal, two half socks, half blaze, black mane and tail, teal feathers, one runt wing.

Mapleberry: Chocolate palomino pinto with four-point star, ivory mane and tail, four socks, green feathers with pink tips. Healer of Prairie Tribe.

Brightsilver: Silver dapple mare, silver mane and tail, snip, three stockings, bright yellow feathers. Mapleberry's Apprentice.

Hawkfeather: Copper bay stallion, black mane and tail, feather-shaped star, two half socks, rusty red feathers flecked with gray and half painted with tan. Prairie Tribe Commander.

Blackfeather: Gray pinto stallion with two tone gray and black mane and tail, patched with white. Black feathers laced with white. Dawnwillow's father, Bluetwig's mate. Prairie Tribe Commander.

Dovespring: Lilac dun filly with one sock, stripe. Pale gray-brown feathers tipped with blue.

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OCEAN TRIBE:

Tidebeach: Yellow dun stallion, brown mane and tail, snip, two stockings, alternating light blue and red feathers. Chief stallion of Prairie Tribe, father of Thunderhoof and Everblaze.

Coralwave: Red dun rabicano, turquoise feathers, blaze, chestnut mane and tail. Lead mare of Prairie Tribe, mother of Thunderhoof and Everblaze.

Everblaze: Blue roan filly, black mane and tail, blaze, three socks, purple feathers.

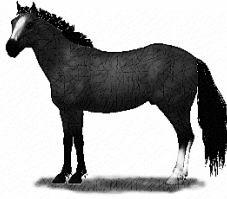
Sharkfin: Slate grulla stallion with snip, two stockings, pale green feathers, black mane and tail. Thunder's best friend.

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~Chapter One~

“WATCH OUT!”

Cascade swung around in mid-air, wings flared, just in time to kick the attacking Shakiran stallion in the chest. She looked around for the owner of the voice who warned her.

A dark bay stallion with mint-colored feathers flew to her side, concern in his eyes. “You okay?”

“I’ve been better.” Cascade gritted her teeth as a Rock Tribe battle mare screamed as the fiery breath of her Shakira attacker singed her skin. “How long have we been fighting?”

“I don’t know.” The stallion turned and attacked a Shakira about to strike a Sand Tribe warrior. The buckskin nodded a brief thank you before flying higher into the sky towards another Shakira. “It feels like days.”

Cascade glanced at her rescuer, trying to see if she recognized him. From his slick dark pelt and stocky size, she guessed he was from Ocean Tribe. She was just about to ask his name when he darted away to assist a herdmate. Remembering where she was, she narrowed her eyes, searching for an opponent.

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Where was her father and brother? Her mother had stayed behind to watch the weanlings with the Grounded pegasi who couldn't fight, but Dad and Chance were somewhere around here.

A quick glance towards the sound of a trumpeting battle cry answered her first question. Her father, Rowansun, was attacking three stallions. His mighty blue wings kept him aloft as his sharp hooves dashed his foes. As the Chief Stallion of Prairie Tribe, he was a target, but the enemies were soon learning that an attack against her father was futile. He finished off the last of them, caught sight of Cascade, and gave her a quick nod before going to his next battle.

She found her half-brother tearing at the throat of a chestnut Shakira mare, unaware that another Shakira stallion, smoking with his fire-breath ready, was creeping up on him.

"Chance!" Cascade flew to help her brother and bit the wing of the stallion. The heavily muscled dun turned around, simultaneously twisting his wing. Cascade struck it with a forehoof, feeling sick as the bone snapped and the stallion crashed to the ground to be finished off by the Grounded Warriors.

"I had it handled." Chance grumbled, disarming the mare and sending her to the same death.

"Just trying to help." Cascade lowered her ears, feeling a little incompetent. Chance was only six springs older than her. How on earth could he always give her the feeling that something she did was wrong?

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His blue-eyed gaze softened. "Sorry." He looked around, hooves tensed and wings beating faster. "Does Rowansun know you're talking to me?"

"Why would it matter? We're allies in a battle." Cascade dipped down to strike a dark gray Shakiran stallion attacking another mare she knew as Echobreeze. The silver dapple mare nodded her head before flying off.

"I know we're allies." Chance shook his black mane. "I just know that Rowansun and I... still aren't on good terms."

Cascade huffed softly to herself. "Maybe it's because you don't try hard enough. You tell me how much you hate him every day." She never knew the circumstances of her half-brother and her father's falling out, only that it had something to do with the death of Emberpine, Chance's mother and the previous lead mare.

Chance pressed his lips together and shook his head. "Focus on fighting, Cas."

That condescending tone was really beginning to get her mad.

There was a sickening grunt behind her, and she whirled around in time to see that the bay stallion who'd warned her earlier had broken the wings of a brown Shakiran mare behind her. "Do you want to get killed?" The stallion asked, hovering beside her.

"Sorry." She shook her head. "I was just thinking."

"Thinking, at a time like this? We're in the middle of a battle!" The stallion sent a Shakira spiraling with one kick.

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“If you haven’t noticed, your herd members are being picked off one by one.”

“I’m sorry, okay?!” Cascade snapped. She charged toward an unsuspecting Shakira and aimed a kick at his major wing bones. The wing bent at an unnatural angle and the Shakira screamed as he fell to his death. She closed her eyes and shuddered.

The bay stallion gave her a sympathetic look. “Yeah, I understand.”

“Understand what?” Cascade asked.

“You hate fighting. The violence makes you sick?”

Cascade blinked hard. “It just seems so pointless. There’s enough death already. What’s the point of causing more?”

“Well, think of it this way.” The stallion said. “It’s not who we’re fighting. It’s what we’re fighting for.”

Cascade blinked. “What we’re fighting for?”

“Yeah. Our home, our freedom. I mean, we can’t let these slanderous haters of the King win. What happens to Equinox?”

Cascade inhaled and nodded. “Okay. Thank you. I needed to remember that.” She cocked her head. “What’s your name?”

“Thunderhoof. Son of Tidebeach and Coralwave.” He jumped up and struck a Shakira mare in the jaw, knocking her out in an instant. “But I’d rather be called Thunder.”

So he’s an heir too.

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“Don’t let the Shakira know that you’re the son of chiefs. It’ll make you a target.” She said, mimicking her father’s warning to her before the battle.

“Let ‘em come.” Thunder’s eyes flashed in defiance. “I can take them.”

“Show off.” Cascade flicked her tail, charging a red roan Shakira stallion and slashing his wings with her hooves. His bloody blue feathers exploded in her face and suddenly she found herself blinded.

A hoof smacked into her head, sending sparks into her vision. Her wings faltered and she was vaguely aware that she was falling.

Open your wings. Slow your fall. Her brain pulsed out the instructions that had been drilled into her head a hundred times, but her body wouldn’t cooperate.

She didn’t even feel herself hit the ground. Everything just faded to black.

~*~

Thunder panted in exertion as he broke the spine of a Shakira stallion with one kick. Sweat dripped off his flanks as he soared above the battle, trying to assess and count the dead.

He was still shaking from what happened earlier. Thunder squeezed his eyes shut, shaking his head to rid the horrible memory of his sister’s screams as she burned through the sky.

Why did you have to be so bold, Ev?

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The blue roan with the purple feathers that he'd warned looked so much like his sister that for a brief moment, he thought Everblaze was still alive. He'd shouted before he realized that the mare had four socks and was a Prairie Tribe mare. Probably about the same age as Ev, maybe older.

In a burst of frustration, he turned on an unsuspecting Shakiran mare, whipping her by the tail and smashing her into a tree, breaking her back on impact.

If only he'd noticed Ever's attackers earlier. He might have been able to save her.

"Thunder!" His friend Sharkfin, a scout, flew up to his side. "Things are looking good my friend." The slate grulla stallion grinned. "The Shakiran's only have twelve hundred warriors left."

"Twelve hundred?" Thunder's eyes flitted over the battle, trying to count the amount of Equinoxian warriors. There were too few bodies in the grass for there to be only twelve hundred Shakira left.

"What's wrong? I counted them right." Sharkfin snorted.

"It just... it feels too easy. They came in with at *least* five thousand. I'm only counting fifteen hundred dead on their side."

"But that doesn't make sense." Sharkfin said. "Where's the other twenty-three hundred?"

"That's what I want to find out." Thunder heard a scream and suppressed a shudder. He'd had enough battle for today to last him a hundred years. What he had said to the

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blue roan mare had been more to convince himself that it was all worth it.

“Who were you talking to?” Sharkfin asked. “She looked like Everblaze.”

Thunder shot an involuntary glare at his friend. “Please... I’d rather not talk about her.”

“Sorry.” Sharkfin winced.

“We need to report to Eelfeather about the missing Shakirans.” Thunder said, changing the subject. “I’m worried they might have planned on a different sort of attack...”

Sharkfin’s eyes widened. “The pregnant mares and foals back at the Tribelands...”

“Exactly. Come on!” Thunder flew higher, searching for the chestnut head commander of Ocean Tribe. A flash of blue-gray and purple turned his eyes to the right, just in time to see the blue roan mare from earlier fall through the sky.

His brain was racked with the image of his sister, burning with her own fire.

He dove down to catch her wings, braying a cry to Sharkfin. Her eyes were closed, and she tumbled over and over.

Come on, come on... Thunder narrowed his eyes and folded his mint feathered wings, gaining speed. The wind tugged tears from his eyes as he strained to reach her.

He failed with Everblaze. He wasn’t going to fail now.

Just a little more...

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A gray and pale green streak next to him told him that Sharkfin had heard his cry. Mentally, he thanked the King that He'd brought such a good friend to him, especially since his twin brother's capture years ago.

Sharkfin, more angular than Thunder, zipped forward and grabbed one purple wing. He slowed her fall long enough to let Thunder grab the other wing.

Together, they slowly landed the unconscious mare onto the ground.

"Wow. She really does look like Everblaze." Sharkfin sniffed a bloody cut on her head. "She's out cold, but at least she's still alive. What's her name?"

"I don't know." Thunder admitted. "I didn't ask."

"She looks familiar." Sharkfin grunted. "I can't remember why."

"I think she's from Prairie Tribe." Thunder said.

"We'd better find one of her herdmates so they can put her with their injured." Sharkfin's head shot up. "Thunder, look out!"

Thunder whirled around just in time to see a black stallion with a white face and blue eyes charge him. He jumped out of the way, mint-feathered wings flared.

The stallion struck the ground with a hoof, black feathers rattling and ears pinned. "What are you doing with my sister?" He demanded.

"Your sister?" Thunder blinked, looking between the mare and the stallion. "I wasn't doing anything with her. We were about to take her to a Prairie Tribe healer."

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“Oh.” The black stallion relaxed. “I know you. You’re the Ocean Tribe heir, Thunderhoof. I remember you from the Leader meeting years ago.”

“Leader meeting?” Thunder shook his head. “I was barely a weanling then. Why were you there?”

The stallion shook his head. “That doesn’t matter. We need to get Cas out of here.” He glanced at Thunder. “I’m Chance, by the way.”

“You’re Grounded?”

He shook his head. “No. I can fly perfectly well.”

Odd. Normally Grounded were the only ones with one-part names. Maybe Chance was a nickname?

He flipped his forelock out of his eyes and grabbed one wing in his teeth. Chance glared at him. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“Helping.” Thunder muttered through the feathers.

“I can take her myself, thank you very much.”

“Okay.” Thunder quickly stepped away despite the confused thoughts in his head. He wasn’t going to question Chance. The stallion was probably sixteen hands and his wings were enormous. It was smarter not to say anything.

It was painful, however, to watch him struggle along, dragging her across the ground and sharp rocks. He couldn’t stop staring at the mare’s bruised face.

She’s beautiful. Thunder nearly choked when the thought came into his head. He shook his ears, making them snap. He needed to go fight someone and clear his head. His thoughts were still jumbled from Everblaze’s death.

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“Where should we go next?” Thunder turned to talk to Sharkfin, but with a surge of panic realized his best friend was no longer standing next to him. “Sharkfin?”

His heart raced as he surged into the sky, eyes scanning the ground and air for his friend.

Something brushed against his shoulder with a nicker of “Surprise!”, making him jump. He knew it was Sharkfin. Only his best friend would clown around in a battle. He turned around. “Fin, now’s really not the time for—”

He caught a flash of blue feathers before a hard object smacked into the back of his head, blackening his thoughts and his vision.

That wasn’t Sharkfin.



~Chapter Two~

WAKE UP!

A sharp voice, whether her own conscious or someone else's, brought Cascade out of unconsciousness and her eyes slowly opened, only to find the ocean trailing below her hooves at a ridiculously fast speed. The air was humid and thick, smelling of a storm close by.

Was she flying?

She felt the teeth on the base of her wings and writhed from side to side. A sharp hoof smashed into her flank. "Be quiet!" A muffled voice growled, masculine in tone. "Darkwind doesn't have much patience for antsy prisoners."

Prisoners?

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She lifted her head and managed to catch a glimpse of another pegasus being carried. This one was a palomino pinto, and she was screaming curses to her captors, bucking and see-sawing, trying to free herself.

But what was wrong with her wings? They were dead and lifeless, gray in color, like a tree branch in winter. She seemed to be in a great deal of pain, despite the defiance in her eyes.

“I am Rosesand, the lead mare of Sand Tribe and I order you to put me down!” She shrieked, churning her gold and white hooves.

Her stomach dropped. They managed to capture a lead mare?

Then she noticed the fire in her shoulders... and the numbness in her wings. She looked up at her own feathers and winced.

Dead. Gray. Smoking.

Her wings were useless.

She blinked against the self-pitying tears that surfaced and tried to assess who was here, and what was going on. She saw the bay stallion, Thunder, carried beside her, as well as an olive dun stallion she recognized as the chief of Sand Tribe,

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Rainstorm. There was the Rock Tribe lead mare, Luna, although she had half a wing missing, and then...

She gaped as she saw the black stallion with the white face. Her brother, Chance. His gaze was worried and trained on a small, nervous-looking buckskin mare. She vaguely recognized the mare as Sunrise, a Sand Tribe mare who had been cast out for her unusually thick mane and tail.

They've captured two lead mares, a chief, two heirs, and then Sunrise. Why would they capture her? Cascade tried to make sense of everything in her mind, but she was too tired. Her brain refused to cooperate, and her head spun. Electricity from the coming storm confused her senses even further, filling her nose with the smell of bitter smoke and muffling her ears with faint thunder.

"We're almost there." The leader, a bay roan stallion with a scar over one eye and slate-colored feathers, hovered in place. "And if any of you pull tricks..." He slashed the air with a forehoof threateningly.

"Just wait until we get on the ground." Rosesand muttered darkly. "I'll give you what for."

Cascade wondered what exactly Rosesand defined as "what for" without the use of her wings.

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A somewhat ominous gray-green island loomed before them, steadily growing larger. A volcano rose out of the middle, belching smoke. The storm clouds seemed to gather around it like flies to sweat. Shakira Island. A place few Equinoxians returned from, and less came back alive.

The roan stallion grinned wickedly. “Welcome, captives, to your new home.”

They soared over the rocky beaches, the sound of the waves crashing against the rocks almost deafening. The sky flickered with white and blue lightning.

A small herd grazed in a valley. A mare reared up as she caught sight of the commanders and prisoners, flapping her wings. The herd took notice of her cry and they all gathered in a circle, snorting and stamping their hooves, as if they were eager to spill blood. Even the foals darted around in anticipation.

Cascade noticed the gaze of a silver stallion with pale blue and gold feathers, in the center of the ominous circle. His face was white, his eyes cold. He seemed to be staring directly at her, into her deepest inner being.

The Shakira steeds landed them on the grass in the center of the circle before the silver stallion. Every single steed in the herd seemed to be staring at them, their eyes greedy and black.

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“Singeblade!” The silver stallion shouted toward the roan. “Did you bring healthy captives?”

“Indeed, Darkwind.” The roan snorted. “All fit and sound. We smoked the wings as you instructed us. Do you wish us to restore or torch what remains?”

“They’ll be the deciders of that.” Darkwind trotted around them, cold blue eyes staring at them. He seemed to be counting them, assessing them. Thunder glared at him. “What are you going to do with us?”

He shouted in pain as the stallion holding him twisted his wing. Darkwind snapped at his neck, ears flat. “Do not speak, unless spoken to.”

Thunder snorted, gritting his teeth.

A dark, liver chestnut mare with rust-red feathers trotted beside Darkwind. Her black eyes were glittering and deceptive; Cascade sensed she had a deeper, more evil kind of magic than the Shakira around her.

She would bet every bit of Shakiran culture she’d learned that Fireheart was a Dark Shakiran at some point, the second most evil caste of their nobility.

“Fireheart, my love.” Darkwind said in a silky tone. “Would you look over the mares while I assess the stallions? Feel free to order to execute anyone who doesn’t cooperate.”

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“With pleasure.” Fireheart’s voice was as oily smooth as her gaze. She stood next to Rosesand, her black eyes burning into her vision. *Maybe even an Elite.* Cascade thought, shivering at the presence of the foreboding mare.

“Tell me, filly, what is your name?” Fireheart asked to Rosesand,

“I am no filly.” She snorted. “I am seven springs, and therefore a mare. I am Rosesand. I am a lead mare and warrior, a follower of the true King!”

Fireheart leapt backwards at the mention of the King. “You will not speak of the King, or any of the Names while in my herd.”

“Is that so?” Rosesand stepped closer. “Why not? Does it make you uncomfortable?”

She is going to kill herself. Cascade thought.

“Say one of them, and you will be executed on the spot.” Fireheart’s eyes glowed orange. “Trust me, Rosesand, death will be painful. And slow.”

“Fine. All the sooner I am home with my King!” Rosesand jerked out of the stallion’s grasp and reared, slashing Fireheart in the chest and barely dodging out of the way as two stallions grabbed at her and Fireheart clacked her teeth, peeling off a layer of skin on her shoulder.

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“Stop saying that!” Darkwind shouted. “Do not say the Names!”

But Cascade could read the rebellious gaze in Rosesand’s eyes. Rumors had said that this mare had become the youngest lead mare in Equinoxian history through determination, fighting, and ingenuity. She wasn’t going to back off without a fight.

“Jehovah! Adonai! Elroy! Elohim!” Rosesand screamed, biting and kicking, a fire in her eyes and pummeling any Shakirans who got too close, despite her mate Rainstorm trying to contain her. She suffered several bites and a bone-breaking kick from Darkwind that cracked her last rib, but she didn’t stop.

“Kill her!” Fireheart screamed, backing away and glaring fiercely between Rosesand and the warriors. “Kill her! Kill her now!”

Singeblade seemed frozen in fear. The other stallions backed away.

They’re afraid of the Names? Cascade wondered. *How strange.*

Fireheart flared her wings and her mouth began to glow orange. “Why must I do everything myself?” She growled, smoke pouring out of her nose.

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Rosesand stood, dead wings limp. “You can kill my body. But you cannot kill my spirit.” She stepped forward, bearing another kick from Darkwind that she countered with a slash of a sharpened hoof. “Emmanuel. Morning Star. Prince of Peace. Wonderful!”

“Be quiet! Or I will inflict pain worse than death!” Fireheart snarled, yet she continued backing away. Despite her anger, a flicker of unease settled in her glowing eyes.

Even she is afraid of the Names.

Rosesand smiled, tossing her mane and drawing herself to her full height. “Go ahead. Do your worst. Kill me. I’d rather be a dead mare than your slave.”

“As you wish.” Fireheart’s eyes glowed red and her mouth yawned open. From it, fire engulfed what was left of Rosesand’s wings. Rosesand screamed, snapping the stallions out of their fear trance and causing Rainstorm to surge forward, only to be held back by his wings.

“Do not worry.” Singeblade said. “She will not die. Unfortunately for her.”

The wings turned to ash. Before the fire began to consume the rest of Rosesand, Fireheart closed her mouth and flapped her wings, extinguishing the rest of the flames. All that were left was two black scars. Rosesand collapsed to

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her knees, coughing and moaning. Fury still sparked in her eyes.

“Let that be a warning to you all.” Fireheart growled. “To anyone, *anyone*, who dares to say the Names of the...” She sputtered and shuddered. “King.”

“Take her to the Caves. Let’s see what a few days of darkness will do to her spirit. She may be useful to us.” Darkwind ordered. Two hefty stallions dragged Rosesand by her mane and tail.

“Anyone else wish to end up like her?” Darkwind asked.

Complete silence. Even the thunder stopped crackling.

“The rest of you will stay in the herd for today.” Darkwind looked at Fireheart with something like concern. “But trust me, tomorrow you will be sorted.”

Cascade didn’t like the sound of the word *sorted*.

The stallions shoved Cascade to her knees. “You will sleep outside of the herd.” One said, taking them to the outskirts of the sheltered trees. The other mares and yearlings flicked their tails as if bored and turned back to grazing.

Thunder nosed her shoulder. “You okay?”

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“I can’t feel my wings.” Cascade blinked. “And Rosesand...”

“I know. She’ll be grounded for life.” Thunder sighed. “She won’t be able to be a lead mare anymore by law.”

“She will still be lead mare.” Rainstorm growled. “As long as I live, she shall be lead mare.”

The gray Rock Tribe lead mare, Luna, huffed a sigh. “At least we are all still alive.”

“Thank the King for that.” Cascade looked over at Chance, who was nosing Sunrise in a tender, concerned way. Sunrise looked pale and was talking to him in a low, inaudible voice.

Thunder looked between her and Chance. “You know him?”

“That’s my brother... half-brother, Chance, and a mare named Sunrise.”

Thunder flipped his forelock out of the way and peered at her with his warm brown eyes. “Are they mates?”

Cascade looked up at him, a little surprise. “I don’t know. I don’t know a lot of things about my brother’s private life.”

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He stared at her, looking as if he was thinking very hard. Cascade lowered her eyes. "What?"

"Sorry. I just realized that in the chaos of all this, I totally forgot to ask you what your name is."

Didn't I tell you? Cascade shook her head. It had only been a day, but it felt like centuries. "I'm Cascadesky. Daughter of..." She lowered her voice to a whisper so only Thunder could hear. "Rowansun and Crimsonpine."

His eyes widened and for a second, he was silent. Then he whispered, "You're an *heiress*?"

She nodded. "Just call me Cascade, for now."

He nodded too, with something of an odd look on his face. "Good idea." He glanced back at Chance. "So... half-brother?"

"My father's only living foal with his previous mate, Emberpine. She died somehow, years ago. I never got the whole story. He and my father kind of hate each other."

"Sounds like a whole story waiting to be unearthed." Thunder whispered, half muttering.

"No one's ever told me anything about it." Cascade sighed. She looked back toward Chance. She'd never seen him look so worried in her life.

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“Excuse me for a minute.” Cascade stepped over to where Chance and Sunrise stood. “Chance?”

Chance looked over to her with something between a glare and an apology. “Now’s not a good time, Cas.”

“I was just wondering... do you know Sunrise?” Cascade tried not to wince as a strong wind blew her wings and jarred them.

Chance gave a small sigh... slight frustration, slight disbelief, and a little adoration as he looked at Sunrise. “She is my mate.”

“I see.” Cascade smiled to the buckskin. “Hello. I’m Cascade, Chance’s half-sister.”

“I’ve seen you around the herd.” Sunrise said softly. “Chance has told me about you.”

“He has?” Cascade looked at her half-brother in surprise. He lowered his head.

Sunrise nodded. “He won’t admit it himself.” She smiled lovingly at Chance, then her gaze turned from love to questioning. Chance inhaled, glanced between Cascade and Sunrise with a mixture of concern and worry, then nodded.

“Were you at the battle?” Cascade asked. “I don’t think I saw you.”

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“I was in Prairie Tribe, with the weanlings and Grounded. The Shakira attacked the camp there. I was helping a weanling hide, and then I was spotted. I was taken faster than I could run.”

Cascade sucked in a breath as she realized what Sunrise meant. “You weren’t fighting because...”

Sunrise swallowed hard and nodded. “I’m with foal.”

“Oh my...” Cascade blinked hard, breathing a sigh of amazement and slight horror of what it implied. “I’m going to be an aunt.”

Chance nodded, face pink as if he was embarrassed.

Cascade shuffled her hooves. “What if the foal is born here?”

Sunrise’s eyes darkened. “I really don’t want to think about it...”

“We’ll be out of here before then.” Chance struck a hoof on the earth. “I promise.”

“We can’t fly.” Sunrise snorted. “How on earth are we going to get back home?”

Chance switched his tail. “I’ll find a way.”

He strode off toward the cliff, obviously wanting to be alone. Cascade lowered her head. *You’ve upset him again.*

Broken Wings

She chided herself. *You have to think of a way to help, not make him angrier.*

Although these days it seemed that her brother was always angry.

“It’s not your fault.” Sunrise nickered, giving her a small smile and trying to be comforting. “We have a month. I’m sure we can escape before then.”

A month.

A month wasn’t going to be enough time. And if the foal was born among the Shakira, there was no telling what they were going to do to it.



~Chapter Three~

EVERYTHING ACHED WHEN CASCADE WOKE UP. Someone was nudging her shoulder. Her eyes flew open, expecting it to be her little sister Dovespring, asking her to play.

Then she remembered her wings. And that she was on Shakira Island.

It was, in fact, Thunder who was shaking her. She got to her feet, wincing at the pain in her shoulders. “What is it?”

“They’ve taken Chance!” Thunder said, his voice breathless. “I think he tried to pull something overnight; they’re going to burn his wings! Come on!”

Broken Wings

She and Thunder galloped across the field, where a jeering crowd of pegasi had gathered. Rainstorm, Luna, and Sunrise were at the edge, unable to squeeze through. Sunrise looked sick and Rainstorm was glaring fiercely at the backs of the Shakira in front of them. "They won't let us through to see what's going on." He grumbled to no one in particular.

"Blast these stupid, useless wings!" Sunrise shouted. "I wish I could see what they're doing to him."

Cascade craned her head up as far as it would go, but her sight was still limited. "What happened?" She asked Sunrise.

She fidgeted her hooves. "I don't know. I woke up to find him gone and saw hoofprints leading to the prison and drag marks leading away. But by then they had already taken him."

Luna, being a full few hands higher than the rest, lifted her head, squinting. "I can see him. And Fireheart. She's going to—"

There was a shout and a scream. Red-orange flames rose into the sky.

Then silence. Terrifying silence.

"Did they..." Sunrise whispered, looking pale.

Broken Wings

Luna wrinkled her nose and stretched a little more. “I see him. He is on the ground. His wings are gone. Burns all over his back... but he is breathing. He is... alive. For now. I’m not sure what Fireheart has planned for him next... oh wait, she’s speaking.”

“Now, I would put you in the dungeon, but we’re going to get a nasty storm here soon, plenty of sleet to be had. Should feel *lovely* on those burns, won’t they?” Fireheart’s sneer rose above the crowd’s mumbling. “Take him back to his friends.” She directed to her commanders.

The powerful stallions dragged Chance through the crowd, parting the pegasi like a sea. Everyone glared at them as Chance was thrown to his knees. “Enjoy the storm.” Singeblade sneered.

Already a few drops of rain had begun to fall, frozen as tiny pellets. *Sleet. Wonderful.* Cascade groaned. Chance cried out in pain as they hit his raw wounds.

“Come on, we’ve got to get him to shelter.” Luna said. “Thunder, Rainstorm, pick him up by his mane and tail. There’s some trees over there that will do well.”

Thunder and Rainstorm nodded, taking him over to the willows that Luna pointed out. The frozen rain began to fall harder and faster, stinging Cascade’s back like a thousand tiny needles. Normally she would have put her wings over her

Broken Wings

head to block out the onslaught, but she couldn't lift them, let alone raise them above her head.

Strange magic. Cascade thought, looking at the dead feathers. *Keep the wings on the back and make them useless.*

Everyone stood around Chance, enduring the onslaught of sleet for themselves. He was half delirious in pain, mumbling to himself.

"Will he be okay?" Sunrise asked.

"He will. But he may have scars." Luna was picking aloe vera and spreading the juice on his wounds. Cascade cocked her head, curious. "I didn't know that you were a Healer."

"I'm not." Luna snorted. "But my mother was. She taught me a bit as a filly, even though I became a Warrior's apprentice. My sister Cedartail became a healer." She spat out the leaf and licked her lips. "Stuff's bitter."

"Why are you 'Luna'?" Thunder asked. "You're not Grounded, or a Land Horse."

"I was born Moonbreeze. As I grew older, I noticed the strife between the Warriors and the Grounded. So, when I became leader, instead of taking on the suffix of 'song', like every lead mare before me, I became just Luna."

Broken Wings

Sunrise looked at Chance. “He told me his name was Nightleaf until the day his mother died. Then he was Chance and nothing else.”

Cascade blinked, trying to decode the cryptic reasoning as she looked at the stretched-out form of her brother on the ground. “I guess it doesn’t matter now. We’re all Grounded, perhaps for life.”

Rainstorm struck the earth with a forehoof. “I detest the thought of my role being taken on by another.”

“You can’t be a chief stallion or mare if you’re one of the Grounded. It’s part of the Equinoxian law.” Thunder said.

“Then I’ll change the law.” Rainstorm said. “I’m not going to give up everything I’ve worked hard for without a fight.”

“Hush now, Rainstorm.” Luna chided. “We can’t have them overhear you. Otherwise, you may end up like Chance.”

Rainstorm shook his mane. “They can’t hear us over the sleet.”

Lightning flashed in the clouds above them, followed by a sharp clap of thunder. Rainstorm looked toward the

Broken Wings

prisons where they had taken Rosesand. "I hope Rosesand is all right."

"I am sure that she will be okay. It's only a few days." Luna said. "Gives us enough time to think of a plan to get out of here."

"I'm not sure that's possible." Thunder said. "We're surrounded by cliffs on all sides, if not to briars and thickets, to water. There's little hope of us escaping by ourselves." He sighed. "It's too bad that none of them will help." He tossed his head toward the herd. "I'm sure they know pathways and trails that we do not."

"We can't take that risk, Thunder." Cascade said, feeling shocked he would suggest something like that. "They are our *enemies*. Thirty-six hours ago they attacked us!"

Thunder pricked his ears. "I don't know... something inside of me says that there's more than the eye can see."

"Says the stallion who told me that they were 'slandorous haters of the King'." Cascade huffed.

Thunder switched his tail, seeming distracted and slightly upset. He shuffled away from the group, mumbling something about scouting.

"Thunder... come back." Cascade said.

Broken Wings

He glared at her, but he didn't respond and continued on his way.

Great. Now I've hurt his feelings. Cascade grumbled. Why do I keep opening my big mouth?

Sunrise jumped as another lightning bolt hit the sky. Chance's eyes flickered open. "Back... hurts." He mumbled.

"Stay still." Luna said. "There is a lot of frozen rain falling right now and it would be better if you didn't move."

"Sunrise?..."

"I'm right here." Sunrise nickered.

"Are you okay? Did they... hurt you?"

"No." Sunrise nuzzled his mane.

"Good." He breathed a sigh of relief.

"What happened?" Cascade asked. "What did you do?"

Chance pressed his eyelids shut. "I... something stupid."

You can say that again. "What was it?"

"I... I tried to break Rosesand out of the prison. I wasn't thinking straight."

Broken Wings

Cascade was so stunned she just stared at him with her mouth hanging open.

“Why in the name of the King would you do that?” Sunrise snapped.

“You could have gotten yourself killed.” Luna scolded.

“I was feeling frustrated. It feels like everything is against us, and I just wanted to help.” He closed his eyes and groaned. “My back feels awful.”

“You’re going to have scars for life.” Luna sighed. “Your wings are completely gone.”

“I figured.” Chance mumbled, drifting off again.

~*~

Thunder grumbled to himself as he moved away from the others. It probably wasn’t a very good idea to leave them alone, but he needed to think.

It *was* a stupid idea to suggest. He knew it. But there was this strange stirring from his inner being, this internal *knowing*, that somewhere in this herd, there was someone who would help them.

He wandered over to the rock cliffs, facing the sea and the east where home lay. He gritted his teeth. Who was

Broken Wings

he kidding? They were alone here. No one was going to help them. No one could come for them. A rescue party from home meant death for all of them, and the herd was already ravaged since the battle. The missing twenty-three thousand were pegasi sent to raid the herd of mares and foals. That was probably how they had captured Sunrise.

He dared himself to look at his dead wings. They felt like lead weights on his spine and shoulders and clawed at the muscles on his back. He couldn't lift them, let alone fly. What kind of magic allowed a creature to do something so cruel?

He looked over to the Surface Order Shakirans. All of them were just pegasi, some former Equinoxians who turned from the King, some hybrids of blood-born Shakirans and turned Equinoxians, and some grew up on the evil soil of this island. Powerful as they were, they were the weakest of the Shakira. Fathoms below his hooves were others, turned Alicorns, Unicorns, and Pegasi who were darker, possessing magic of the blackest kind. There were Hydrequids, along with Skolins, Equagons, and Zephyrs. Some pegasi he knew dismissed them as fairy tales, or extinct creatures from days past. Until now he'd thought so too.

But now he knew they were real. He'd seen them creeping out into the moonlight the night before, their twisted, horrifying forms replacing the beautiful, graceful

ones from their days of following the King. The island reeked of evil and dark magic.

It reminded him too much of Everblaze's death.

He stomped the ground and watched as a lily, pink and delicate, grew in its place. That was his Talent. He could grow any plant at will. Eight yearlings each year were chosen to be given a Talent, him and his siblings among them.

He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to recall Reefstar and Everblaze's faces. Ever's was clearer than his twin's—it had been nearly three years since his brother had been captured, when they were two springs. He remembered the blazes. All of them had the same blaze, ending just before the muzzle and fading to black. He recalled his older twin's thoughtful dark eyes and his sister's lively amber ones. Reefstar's ears were black-shaded, like his, but bigger—other foals used to call him *Muley*. It made Thunder mad. His father always told Reef that it just meant he would be tall and strong when he became a stallion. Everblaze's ears were small and finely curved, always twitching to catch every sound. Her nose twitched a lot too, which became the source of Tidebeach's nickname for her, Rabbit.

He missed both of them. In normal circumstances, he and his family would have found the body of his sister—whatever was left, that is—and take her feathers to weave into

Broken Wings

the last few hairs of their manes. They would have mourned her for a week, then afterward they would have removed all but one of her feathers from their manes and placed them on top of her grave, a silent symbol that they were ready to move on and were done grieving.

His parents were probably mourning *his* death.

He gritted his teeth. *Heir*. From the moment his twin was captured, he became the heir. The future leader of Ocean Tribe. His father had drilled him over and over about what was expected of him. All of the weight had fallen on his shoulders.

At least with Ever alive, he had a bit of relief. Everblaze was intelligent, bright, and very capable to be a lead mare herself someday. He could have let her take his place and know that she would rule well.

But now she's dead.

His thoughts were running around his head like startled fish. He felt very drained and exhausted as the weight of the past two days finally settled.

He was captured. Everblaze was dead. And now there were six other pegasi captured as well, one with foal.

What could he do about it? The whole situation was hopeless. No one could rescue them. They couldn't fly.

Broken Wings

He paced back in forth, trying to think. His tired mind wouldn't cooperate. Then again, he was never one for ideas. That was Reefstar's role.

If only Reef was here now. Thunder sighed. His twin had been captured by Shakiran's years ago.

Maybe he's still alive.

The thought intrigued Thunder. If his brother was still alive, then that could be their way out. He would know the terrain and the fields. He could get them out of there.

"Don't be stupid." He scolded himself. "The chances of Reefstar still being alive are almost none."

But he couldn't get rid of that flutter of hope.

He flung his head up and looked at the faces of the Shakirans. He knew he would recognize his brother as well as he recognized his own face—the catch would be making sure that Reefstar hadn't fallen prey to their dark minds.

I'll use that little code we used to have as colts. He chuckled to himself. *Are the eels running? It was stupid then but it might work...*

A flutter of bright feathers caught his eye. Hardly daring to believe himself, he followed the mint-colored wings.

Broken Wings

~*~

Thunder came back, looking strangely shocked and thoroughly overexcited.

“What’s wrong?” Cascade asked. “You’re sweating.”

Thunder lifted his head and she noticed his dark eyes were misted with tears. Whether from the sleet or what had made him so antsy, she couldn’t tell.

“The guard... over by the prison.” He mumbled indistinctly. “It... it’s someone I know.”

“Someone you know?” Luna asked. “How is that possible?”

“Well, you would know your own twin.” Thunder nickered.

“Twin?” Sunrise gasped.

Thunder nodded. “My brother Reefstar.... He is the guard at the entrance to the prison!”

“Okay, back up a minute.” Cascade said. “How on earth is your brother among the Surface Order Shakirans?”

“It’s a long story. The short version is that the Shakira raided our herd several years ago and took him when he was just a yearling. We... we all assumed he was dead.”

Broken Wings

“So how is he still alive?” Luna asked. “No pure-blood Equinoxian would dare stoop to the ranks of these heathens.”

Thunder flattened his ears. “That’s just the thing. He’s not Reefstar anymore... he’s Reefblade. A Shakiran Commander.”

“A Shakiran Commander?” Cascade gasped. “How is that possible?”

“I don’t know.” Thunder shook his head.

“Did you speak with him?” Luna asked.

Thunder shook his head, looking sheepish. “No.”

“Why not?”

Thunder blinked. “I haven’t seen or talked with Reefstar in three springs... since we were both two springs. I... lost my nerve.”

Chance groaned again and tried to stand up, shouting in pain. “Got... to get to my feet.” He groaned.

Luna shoved her nose under his barrel and used her strong head and neck to help him get to his feet. Chance snorted and leaned against the tree, trying not to show the pain. “So... what’s this about Thunder having a brother?”

Broken Wings

Another flash of lightning interrupted him, immediately followed by thunder. The wind picked up speed.

“I think it would be better if we found shelter.” Rainstorm said. “This rain could bring hail and if the storm brings striking lightning...”

Cascade lifted her head. “I saw an empty cave in the cliffside a while back. It might be useful.”

“Good idea.” Thunder nodded. “Let’s go scout it out.”

“Be careful.” Luna said. “I know it’s hard, but try to fold your wings onto your back, so you don’t get blown around like a sail.”

Cascade nodded, but try as she might, she couldn’t move her dead wings. Feathers had begun to drop off the ends and her shoulders felt like they were on fire from carrying the weight around.

Thunder picked up one wing end with his teeth. Pins and needles ripped through her shoulders and she winced.

“Sorry.” He said. Carefully, he stomped the ground and a vine grew from the ditch he made.

Her eyes widened. “You’re...”

Broken Wings

He nodded. “A Trek yearling? Yeah.” He used the vine to hold her wing in place.

Her head spun. A Trek yearling. One of eight yearlings chosen each year to gain a special Talent from the Cave of Gifts. To be chosen to go was a high honor.

He wrapped her other wing in the vine and stomped twice more to make two more vines. “Can you do the same for my wings? I can’t reach them myself.”

Luna looked at the vines in interest and murmured, “Telekinesis.”

Cascade’s head shot up. “What?”

“My Talent. Telekinesis. And I can tell that you have the Talent of Polytongue.”

Cascade, ironically unable to speak, nodded as she began to wrap Thunder’s wings in the vines.

“I’m Invisibility.” Sunrise whispered. “Though nowadays I barely have enough energy to make my wings disappear.”

How can an outcast get a Talent? Cascade wondered. Most outcast pegasi were accepted into other herds but otherwise ignored, though some became excellent

Broken Wings

commanders and warriors in their new home. At some point she would ask Sunrise about it.

Thunder shifted his hooves. "All right, let's go. The storm is only going to get worse."

"We'll be back." Cascade nickered. "Here's to hoping that the cave is big enough for all of us."

She cantered ahead, the soreness in her shoulders somewhat relieved by the folding of her wings. Thunder trotted, ears pricked toward the larger caves to the west that were alit with fire. "Looks like the herd has already found shelter."

Cascade pinned her ears. "Of course they did."

She came to the edge of the cave and peered inside the darkness. It smelled damp and earthy, but it was big enough.

"It'll do for the night." Cascade nickered, trotting around. Her eyes adjusted and she could get a better sense for how big the cave was. If her wings were functional, then she could brush her feathers along the edges.

Thunder looked at her, a sort of a smile on his face. "You've got the sense of a lead mare."

Cascade flipped her forelock, silently pleased with the compliment. "My mother taught me about it from a

Broken Wings

young age. She hopes that I become lead mare of Prairie Tribe someday.”

“My father expects me to become chief stallion of Ocean Tribe.” Thunder grunted, as if not terribly excited with the concept. “I had been hoping that my younger sister Everblaze would...” He stopped, shaking his head. “Never mind.”

Something in his voice changed. Something like pain.

Cascade exhaled. “Let’s go tell the others that the cave is big enough.”

“Right. Good idea.” Thunder coughed, turning to go back to the tree.

Cascade winced as the strong wind jarred her wings while she followed him. She wanted to ask more about this sister, but Thunder seemed too tense.

“Is the cave big enough?” Chance asked as they came closer.

Cascade nodded. “Do you think you can walk all the way?”

Chance nodded. He moved stiffly, but he managed to walk out from under the tree. Sunrise, Rainstorm, and

Broken Wings

Luna followed behind. The sleet had melted into heavy, fast rain.

Sunrise stuck her head inside the cave. "Looks fairly dry."

"Smells of mildew but should do nicely. Good eye, Cascade." Luna nickered.

Cascade shuffled to the side. "It feels like it has been a very long day."

"I think it's been two days." Thunder snorted. "My concept of time is all out of whack."

Sunrise sighed and managed to roll onto her side, wincing somewhat. "My legs are killing me."

Chance shifted his back feet. "I'm going to stand for a while longer."

Rainstorm nodded, looking towards the prison longingly without saying anything.

Luna lowered her head, cocking a hind hoof and closing her eyes. Sunrise was already lightly snoring. Thunder stood by the other stallions, dozing but keeping alert for danger.

Cascade was too alert to sleep. She stood by Thunder's side, enjoying the heat radiating off his body.

Broken Wings

I surely hope you're right about your brother, for your sake if no one else's. She wanted to tell him aloud, but no sound formed and she stayed silent, letting them ring in her subconscious.



~Chapter Four~

SUNLIGHT WOKE HER UP FROM DOZING THE NEXT MORNING. The sky was a clear blue, unlike yesterday's stormy gray. She shook herself, stretching her legs carefully to work the stiffness out of them.

"Good morning." Thunder nickered, standing just outside the cave eating grass. Cascade blinked her sleep bleary eyes. "Where is everyone else?"

"Grazing while the other Shakira are still in the caves. There's no telling whether or not they're going to let us eat while they're out here." He shivered his skin, shaking off flies.

Cascade nodded. Her shoulders ached, but not as bad as yesterday. The vines holding her wings provided a sort of balance.

Broken Wings

“Wrapping our wings in vines was pretty smart.” Cascade said.

Thunder flipped his mane. “Just a random idea.”

Two Shakira stallions, one chestnut, one bay, marched up to them. “We have orders from Chief Darkwind to bring you to the twin maple trees for the rest of your assessment.” The bay grunted, seeming as if he was still half-asleep. “If you come along quietly, there will be no trouble.”

Cascade nodded and trotted after them, hoping that there *wouldn't* be any more trouble. Two more Shakirans gathered Chance, Sunrise, Luna and Rainstorm.

Fireheart looked crueler than ever as she stood next to Darkwind under the maples. A gleam of something like pride was in her eyes, staring Cascade down.

“Why do I feel like she can read my mind?” Cascade mumbled.

Luna narrowed her eyes. “Perhaps she can.”

They were separated by mare and stallion. Fireheart pranced over to the mare group with a haughty look of self-importance. She smirked when she saw Luna's fine white hairs flicked over her face. “Much too old.” She snorted. “I suppose you'll be dead within the year.” Her eyes fell on

Broken Wings

Luna's right wing; the upper part had been snapped in half like a brittle branch.

"Defective." She turned to the commanders. "Take her to the prisons."

Luna ground her teeth, glaring at Fireheart. "I've led my herd for fifty years." She snorted. "And I can tell you that I've never met a lead mare as unworthy as you."

She shoved past the commanders, shuffling towards the prison with the pace of a mare who knew her true worth.

Fireheart's eyes swept over Cascade. "Now I see you here... you look as if you come from good blood. Your stance is that of a lead mare, but you are no doubt not more than three or four winters."

She put her face close to Cascade's so that her smoky breath filled her nostrils. "I'd say that you are... an *heir*."

Cascade kept her face blank despite her inward trembling. *Give her nothing to work off of.*

Fireheart stared at her; her black eyes narrowed. She watched Cascade for what seemed like hours, apparently waiting to see if she would crack. It took every ounce of strength to not bolt.

Broken Wings

“I am Cascade.” Cascade said finally, barely managing to keep her voice level. “And nothing more.”

“An orphan?” Fireheart asked, sounding suspicious. “No mother or father?”

“Yes.” Cascade lied.

Fireheart’s gaze was slightly confused. She waited a few minutes longer, staring. Her gaze turned to one of boredom, and she went to Sunrise. “And why did my commanders pick you up?”

Sunrise snorted. “Ask them yourselves.”

Fireheart towered above Sunrise by several hands, but Cascade noticed that she stiffened even more when she noticed Sunrise’s rounded barrel. “You’re with foal.” She said dryly.

Sunrise said nothing.

Something in Fireheart’s gaze flickered for a minute, like grief. She was remembering something, but as soon as Cascade could read past it, Fireheart replaced it with a cold-eyed stare.

“I can’t have invalid warriors.” She snorted. “Take her away too.”

Broken Wings

“No!” Chance shouted as the commanders began to take Sunrise. He shoved past Darkwind, wincing as the stallion struck his back in retaliation.

“Insubordination!” Darkwind shouted. “You want to be with your mare? Fine! In the prisons.” He shoved Chance into the commanders and Chance galloped ahead of them, nipping their shoulders and sticking close to Sunrise’s side.

Darkwind walked back to his maple tree. Fireheart stared after Sunrise, the unreadable expression on her face, before following him.

Thunder looked around. “So I guess we’re the only ones left.”

“Seems like it.” Cascade sighed. She felt like she had just flown through a tornado.

Rainstorm was silent, staring at Rosesand’s crimson feather in his mane. His gaze was forlorn.

“What are we going to do?” Cascade asked, feeling slightly hopeless. “Four of our friends are in prison. We’re surrounded on all sides. There’s no one we can trust.”

Thunder narrowed his eyes. “There is someone.” He said. “Follow me.”

Broken Wings

Cascade had a pretty good idea about where they were going.

They went to the cave that served as the prison. Cascade wrinkled her nose at the stench of mold that flowed from the opening. A bay stallion with mint feathers and the same blaze and socks as Thunder was standing at the entrance. It was most definitely Thunder's twin.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Cascade asked Thunder cautiously. "What if..."

Thunder sighed, gritting his teeth. "He's my brother, Cascade." He said. "I know it."

"I just... I don't want you to get hurt." She admitted.

He caught her gaze with a sidelong look and a smile spread on his face.

The stallion guarding the cave caught sight of them and narrowed his eyes. "Halt! Who goes there?"

Thunder stepped forward, chest out, a pride in his step that only the son of a chief stallion could have. There was a flicker of fear in his eyes, but he stepped in front of Reefstar.

Reefstar's eyes widened. "You're one of the captives. You're not supposed to be over here."

Broken Wings

He inhaled deeply. “Are the eels running?” Thunder asked softly.

Cascade and Rainstorm exchanged glances. *Was that supposed to be some sort of code?*

Whatever it was, it got to him. The stallion stumbled back, mouth open. His eyes ran over Thunder, in shock. “Who... how... how do you...”

“Are the eels running?” Thunder repeated.

The bay blinked. “Only... only when...” He choked and gasped, a strange shudder shaking his frame. “Only when the moon burns bright.”

“Then it is you. You’re Reefstar!” Thunder flipped his tangled forelock out of his eyes.

Without a word, the stallion glared at all of them. “Come inside.” He snorted, his tone menacing. “Quickly.”

Thunder blinked, confused.

“If you value your life.” The bay growled. “Then come quickly, and *quietly*.”

Thunder turned toward Cascade and Rainstorm and tossed his head. The guard led them inside the cave, not saying a word.

Broken Wings

The prison stank of rot and mildew. Worms and salamanders squirmed in the darkness. A moan echoed from somewhere deep inside.

Cascade shivered. "I'm glad that we don't have places like this on Equinox."

"No kidding." Thunder grunted, peering inside a cave that had branches blocking the exit. Cascade followed his gaze. A hollow-eyed Shakiran stallion lay in the corner, unmoving, barely breathing except for a gasp every few seconds. Cascade hurried on, unwilling to watch the stallion die.

When they were deep into the tunnel, some of the rigidness and tension in Reefstar's shoulders melted, though he stayed alert. His dark eyes searched the shadows. "Okay, I think we should be safe here." He gazed at Thunder, blinking away tears. "I can't believe you're here, T."

Thunder's shoulder's twitched as if he was trying to shrug his wings. "We all thought you were dead." He said.

"I suppose I am." Reefstar said coldly as he shifted his hooves.

Thunder blinked. "What do you mean?"

Broken Wings

“I mean what I say.” Reefstar said. “I’m not the colt that was captured, Thunder. I’ve changed; I’ve adapted. I’ve had to survive.”

“You haven’t... taken on their ways, right?”

Reefstar had an odd look in his eyes. “What do you think?”

There was an uncomfortable silence. Thunder backed away as if he had been kicked in the chest.

“They worship Abaddon.” He spat. “They’ve murdered thousands of our people. They use black magic and they killed—” Thunder inhaled sharply.

Reefstar whipped his black tail across his flanks. “You try standing for the King when you’re a two-spring on the point of death.”

Thunder avoided his gaze, his breathing heavy as if he was in pain. *They killed whom?* Cascade wondered. Whoever it was, they were close to Thunder’s heart.

Reefstar twisted his lips. “Do you want me to take you to your friends?” He asked.

“Yes.” Cascade nodded.

Broken Wings

“Fine.” He took them down a dark, drippy corridor without saying another word. Two caves covered by branches held Chance, Sunrise, Luna, and Rosesand.

“Rosesand!” Rainstorm bolted forward and stuck his muzzle through a gap in the branches. “Are you hurt?”

“Stiff and I desperately want to kick some Shakiran butt.” Rosesand snapped. Her eyes narrowed at Reefstar. “You hear that? Let me out of here and I’ll show you what a true warrior can do!”

“This is my brother, Reefstar. He was kidnapped as a colt.” Thunder said, twisting his head around when he saw Reefstar shaking his head sharply.

“Sorry.” Reefstar grunted. “I’ve been called Reefblade for three springs. It takes some getting used to, hearing your old name again.”

“He still joined their ranks. He’s just as bad as the rest of them.” Rosesand snapped.

Cascade glanced over at Thunder, wondering if he would defend his brother. There was still a look of grief on his face, indecision etching his forehead as he stared at his twin.

Reefstar sighed and stepped forward. “I can help you escape.” He whispered.

Broken Wings

There was a rigid silence. “*Escape?*” Sunrise asked softly, as if hardly daring to believe it.

Reefstar nodded. “But it’s a complicated situation. I know of a certain ridge that will take us out of the field and into the forest... but it’s heavily guarded. In fact, the only time they ever take pegasi up there is for banishment and... executions.”

“Wouldn’t executions be carried out in the middle of the herd, like with torture?” Chance asked, glancing nervously at Sunrise.

“From what I’ve heard, they used to, before they understood the... smell and cleaning up that came with it. Most of the time, they take the pegasi out to the woods, kill them, and then bring back a limb, wing, or head as proof of death.”

Sunrise shuddered. “That’s disgusting.”

“I’ve never been able to do it.” Reefstar murmured. “That’s why they’ve kept me as a guard.”

Thunder’s eyes flickered out of their grieved look for a minute.

“So what you’re saying is, if we’re able to annoy Fireheart and Darkwind enough that they want to kill us,

Broken Wings

then we can escape?” Luna shook her head. “Sounds too risky.”

“We don’t really have that many options.” Reefstar sighed. “But “annoying” Fireheart and Darkwind the right way is a... delicate business. They prefer torture to death. Fireheart is quicker to kill a pegasus herself than let someone else do it.” He looked uneasy. “I will say, this plan might mean that you lose your wings completely.”

Cascade looked down at her dead feathers. There was no point in restoring her wings if she was never going to leave Shakirana. “Well... if that’s what it takes, I don’t mind it too much.”

“But you’ll never be able to fly again.” Thunder said.

“I’d rather be Grounded for life than dead.” Cascade replied.

“I don’t like this plan.” Rainstorm snorted. “But... I agree with Cascade.”

“All right.” Reefstar nodded. “I will try to plant the idea as much as I can. But please be careful... if Fireheart gets into a mood...”

“We’ll be okay.” Thunder said. The stiff anger had subsided from his gaze as he turned to his brother. “Thank you, Reefstar.”

Broken Wings

“You can call me that when we are alone.” Reefstar said. “But to avoid arousing suspicion, I have to ask you to call me Reefblade while we’re among the others.”

The hurt and angry gaze returned. Thunder nodded, not saying anything.

~*~

“So, annoying Darkwind and Fireheart enough so they don’t kill us on the spot, but instead they send someone else to do it?” Rainstorm snorted as they left the cave. “How on earth are we going to do that?”

“I have no idea.” Thunder sighed. His brain was still reeling with the pain that his brother had *accepted* the ways of the Shakiran. He’d heard them call him Reefblade the other night, but he’d never imagined anything as drastic as this. “I wish we knew what could get them to that level of annoyed...” He looked at Cascade. “Any ideas?”

She swished her tail against the flies on her ribcage determined to suck her blood. She stared at them thoughtfully. “Small annoyances.”

“What?” Thunder narrowed his eyes, confused.

“Like flies!” Cascade said. “We annoy them in little bits. Nothing spectacular, just little things, here and there.”

Broken Wings

Finally they'll get so fed up, they'll just give the command to execute us."

"I don't know. It sounds really risky."

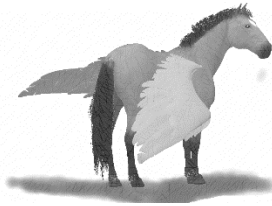
"Sounds like a game they play in Water Clan." Rainstorm snorted. "Where they hang over a pool of alligators to see who will retreat last?"

"How do you know that?" Thunder asked.

"I travel a lot. But it's none of your business." Rainstorm sniffed.

"Okay, but how do we know it's enough?"

"Same way that we know when it's time to kill the flies." Cascade switched her tail so that the long black hairs killed a horsefly on her flank. "When they become so much of a nuisance we have no other option."



~Chapter Five~

THIS PLAN, THAT THEY HAD PUT INTO PLACE, WAS GOING TO BE FAR MORE DIFFICULT THAN THEY EXPECTED. Not because of the fear of torture or anything like that—they realized over the next few days exactly how short Fireheart's temper was. Within her own herd, a yearling had one wing removed for bumping into her while playing, and one mare who had talked back was killed on the spot with a strike of her hoof.

She seemed especially irritated by foals. On more than one occasion, Cascade had seen her glaring at the pregnant and nursing mares with a strange mix of hatred and sorrow. Then Darkwind or a captain would come over and the look would disappear.

Life for themselves wasn't awful—they often had feathers plucked one at a time from their wings, and the herd

Broken Wings

shunned them, but they were allowed to eat, and the cave they had found was big enough for the three of them. There was a darkness among the herd that always gnawed at the edges of Cascade's mind, and three times a week the whole herd, including Reefstar, went down into a cave far away on the other side of the field, where smoke and fire often rose from the mouth of it.

Something dark was in that cave. What it was, Cascade didn't know, and she didn't want to know.

Thunder always looked so pained when he'd see Reefstar going in. Something was bothering him, something that had happened at the battle grounds, but Cascade didn't know what.

They always tried to push the limits. Rainstorm flirted with mares seemingly without hesitation, although Cascade always knew when he was faking by the cold look in his eyes. His anger about Rosesand burned deep inside of him, like a river that looked calm on the surface, but was flowing with dangerous currents beneath it.

Thunder simply got as close as possible to the herd. He would graze until a Shakiran commander asked him to stay back in their own place, then he would stop, slowly circling back, repeating the process all over again. She wondered if he was sometimes trying to spy on Reefstar to

Broken Wings

see exactly what he had done to “take on” the Shakiran ways.

Cascade snuck into the prison. This suited her well, because then she was able to talk to their friends and keep messages going. Reefstar would allow her to talk long enough to share most of the news, then he would “see” her and bring her out again, reporting it to Singeblade. To avoid suspicion, she rotated the times she went so that Reefstar wasn’t the only stallion on shift when she arrived.

A week went by. Then two.

In the middle of the night, the three of them went inside the prison on Reefstar’s shift to talk with their four captured friends. Cascade felt sick when she saw them. With so little food Sunrise had gone to ribs with a rattling cough, and Chance was even thinner. She knew he’d been giving most of his food to Sunrise. Rosesand and Luna were thin as well, but somewhat brighter.

“We have to get out of here.” Chance snorted. “I don’t know how much more we can take.”

“We have to be patient, Chance.” Sunrise whispered. “The Heart of Equinox wasn’t built in a day, and our opportunity to escape won’t come in one either.”

“We don’t have time...” Chance mumbled.

Broken Wings

Sunrise glared at him and swished her tail over her flanks. "How are things outside?"

"Not well." Cascade sighed. "Fireheart's been unusually snappish lately. A foal was grounded for being too loud and boisterous. We've kept up our little annoyances, but I'm a bit worried."

"And so you should be." Luna said. "Fireheart's state of mind is tainted by some past grief and anger. I've tried to break through to see what, but it's almost like she's blocking me."

"I might know." Rainstorm said quietly. "I've overheard... rumors."

Rosesand lifted her head. "What kind of rumors?"

"About the past. Her past, more specifically. Apparently, she wasn't the herd's first lead mare. She's only been lead mare for a year." Rainstorm licked his lips. "According to what I've been hearing, she was a Dark Order Shakiran kicked out for some kind of insubordination, and then she came up here and fought the previous lead mare, Kestrelmist, for position. Kestrelmist was grounded and banished along with her yearling son Shadeclaw. No one has heard from them since."

Broken Wings

Reefstar came around the corner, looking somewhat bewildered. "Did you say Kestrelmist?" He asked.

"It's just according to what I've been hearing."
Rainstorm said.

"Why? Did you know her?" Thunder asked.

"She was the lead mare, when I was captured."
Reefstar nickered. "I always wondered why she was a Shakira when I was younger, because she had such sympathy. She was... unusually good to me, and she even got mad at Darkwind for capturing me." Reefstar sighed. "I was pretty upset when they banished her. But my opinion didn't matter."

Cascade tapped a hoof. "I think we're beginning to burn Darkwind and Fireheart's fuse. I don't know how much longer it'll take."

"Knowing Fireheart? Not long. Just be careful. At this point you're as likely to lose your wings as be executed by a commander." Reefstar sighed. "I hate to break up the party, but I have to bring you back up to the surface. Things could start to get suspicious if you're down here for too long."

"We understand." Cascade turned to Sunrise. "Are you going to be okay waiting a few more days?"

Broken Wings

“Despite what Chance thinks, I will live.” Sunrise said. “You stay safe. And try to hold onto your wings.”

“I’ll try.” Cascade huffed a sigh onto her friend’s face in an exchange of breath, then she turned to follow Thunder and Rainstorm. Thunder gave her a sidelong glance. “You worried?”

“A little.” She admitted. “I just have this sick feeling in the pit of my stomach that something is going to go wrong.”

“I have it too.” Thunder sighed. “But we’re in too deep to turn back now. We have to keep moving forward with the plan.” He slid his lower jaw from side to side.

She desperately wanted to ask what was bothering him, but she knew he would never tell her. He talked to her late into the night about everything except family—clearly it was a touchy subject.

Her skin prickled as they stepped from the humid cave into the crisp night air. A dark moving shape caught her eye and she instinctively darted into the shadows. Thunder followed her, looking concerned. “What is it?”

“Shh.” She said softly, pointing her nose in front of her towards the shape. “Who is that?”

Broken Wings

Thunder squinted. “I don’t know. I can’t see them very well in the dark.”

She narrowed her eyes, trying to get a better look, but the shape was gone.

“Maybe it was just my imagination.” She said with a twinge of uncertainty. She was sure she had seen something there.

“Come on, let’s get some sleep.” Rainstorm sighed, yawning. “I have a feeling that tomorrow is going to hit like a rockslide, and we’re going to need all the sleep we can get.”

“You’re right.” Cascade followed him and Rainstorm to the cave, unable to get rid of the feeling that something, someone, had been watching them in the prisons.

~*~

Pain flared in her side as a kick to her ribs startled her awake.

She bolted up, slightly breathless from the pain, bewildered. “What? What’s going on?”

Three Shakiran commanders were at the cave. The bay in the middle lifted his chin. “By order of Chiefs Darkwind and Fireheart, you three are to be brought for burning.”

Broken Wings

“Burning!” Thunder sputtered. “But why? What did we do?”

“That is not for me to know. I’m only following the orders I was given.” The stallion replied flatly. “If you don’t come quietly, we will drag you.”

“We’ll come quietly.” Cascade said, glancing between Rainstorm and Thunder. “Come on, guys.”

Burning. Cascade swallowed down the force of panic threatening to choke her, blinking back tears. Permanently flightless. No hope of reversing the magic when they got home.

She would be *Grounded*. Without wings her family would disown her. She’d become a filly without a family among the grounded pegasi, the shame of her father and mother.

“I can’t... I’m...” She looked toward Thunder helplessly, hot tears spilling down her face.

Thunder shuffled close to her, a tender look in his eyes as he nuzzled her mane. “It’s going to be okay.” He said.

He knew it wasn’t. She knew it wasn’t. But he was trying to calm her, and for a minute she was able to breathe again.

Broken Wings

The Shakiran commanders led them to the twin maple trees, where Darkwind and Fireheart stood. Cascade was beginning to understand that these two trees were the center for all punishments that Darkwind and Fireheart gave out.

Darkwind stepped forward as they came closer. "I have news from a reliable witness that you three have been conversing with prisoners on matters of escape."

Each one of them stiffened. Cascade wasn't sure how she should react. *That shadow that I saw last night... that was a pegasus.*

"Well?" Darkwind demanded. "Were you or were you not at the prison?"

"We were." Thunder said.

"And who let you in?"

It's a trap. Cascade lifted her head. "We snuck in, sir."

"Ah. Snuck in." Darkwind paced in front of them. "See, I have a hard time believing that, since my witness says that you only snuck in on Reefblade's shift."

Broken Wings

Don't react. Cascade tried to keep her gaze blank, but she'd always been a terrible liar. She was relieved when Rainstorm spoke. "I suppose it is just a coincidence, then."

"I don't believe that for a second." Fireheart snapped. "If I know one thing about you Equinoxians, it's that you don't believe in "coincidences". Trust me, if you tell the truth, things will go a whole lot easier. Maybe we'll only reduce it to one wing being burned."

"Lovely." Rainstorm muttered.

"What we have said already is the truth." Thunder said. "I know nothing about this Reefblade."

"Hm." Fireheart tapped a front hoof, her amber eyes glinting. "Why do I sense that you all are lying?"

They stayed completely silent. Fireheart tossed her mane. "Fine then. I'll start with Cascade. Perhaps if one of you stallions tells the truth I might stop... then again, I haven't grounded anyone in a week and I'm quite eager to do so."

She snorted, ash and sparks falling from her nose and burning the grass. Cascade glared at Thunder, clearly torn.

Was he considering betraying his own brother for me, so I won't be grounded?

Broken Wings

She couldn't let him break the mending relationship with his brother for her. If Reefstar was given away, their whole plan would be ruined, as well as the building trust between them. Before she could stop herself, she stepped forward. "Fine then." She said with a courage in her voice that she didn't know she had. "Burn me. We've got nothing else to hide."

Your family is more important than me, Thunder.

Fireheart's cold black eyes stared at her, like she was trying to piece out the information. She blinked and inhaled sharply.

"What is it, my love?" Darkwind asked.

Cascade almost thought she saw a flicker of pain in Fireheart's eyes.

"It's nothing." Fireheart snorted. "Nothing at all."

Cascade noticed she was avoiding her gaze this time as she raised her wings and breathed a fan of fire onto her dead wings.

She felt nothing at first. The "smoking" of her wings had completely lost all sensory abilities. It was when the flames began to lick the living hide on her back that she screamed.

Broken Wings

Thunder shoved forward, trying to get between Fireheart and herself, but Rainstorm held him back. The searing of pain and agony along her spine almost paralyzed her. She fell to the ground, trying to find comfort in the wet grass.

Suddenly, and slightly unexpectedly, it stopped. Thunder was sniffing her mane, the anger radiating off his sweating hide.

She looked up, trying to understand why it had felt shorter than when she saw Fireheart burn Chance and Rosesand. Fireheart was closing her eyes, weaving slightly.

“Fireheart?” Darkwind asked, deep concern in his voice.

“I’m fine.” She snapped, opening her eyes and steadying herself. “Just dizzy.”

“Perhaps you should rest?” Darkwind suggested.

“No!” Fireheart hissed. “There is more to be done.” She looked at Thunder, stumbled slightly, and breathed the flames on him. He gritted his teeth, but didn’t shout, not even as the fire singed his flanks.

He sank beside Cascade into the wet grass, a bit of a grunt moaning from his throat as the dew smothered the

Broken Wings

flames. Fireheart was looking pale now. She tripped over her own hooves.

“Away with you all.” She snapped as some of the commanders tried to help her. “I am fine. I just need some rest.”

She stumbled toward the shade of a willow, Darkwind following close behind. The herd dispersed, concerned looks being thrown toward the willow. Rainstorm looked between Thunder and Cascade. “Are you two...”

Her vision was being distorted by the pain. She groaned and closed her eyes, shifting to a cooler piece of grass, letting her burns be soothed by the wet dew.

“Something is wrong with Fireheart.” Thunder mumbled, panting with pain and exhaustion. “Otherwise she would have torched us all.”

“I think it happened after she looked into my eyes.” Cascade said. “She seemed to be... almost scared of what she saw when she looked at me.”

She glared at Thunder. “Were you really going to betray your brother to save me?”

Thunder ducked behind his forelock. “The thought crossed my mind.”

Broken Wings

She closed her eyes as another wave of pain hit her. She didn't want to look at her back. She didn't want to deal with the visual reality.

"Well..." Thunder mumbled, somewhat humorously. "On the plus side, we won't have to tie our wings up again."

She opened her eyes and saw his back. He only had two round black smoking scars on his back. He looked like a Land Horse without his wings.

She looked at her own back. It was very red, and some of the hair had been singed off. But she had the same round, black, smoking scars on her shoulders.

I'm never going to fly again. The realization hit harder than a crash-landing.

She closed her eyes and sobbed. It was going to happen. She knew it would.

But that didn't mean it was any easier to take.

~*~

"Are you three all right?" Reefstar asked as he came up to their cave later that evening.

"You shouldn't be here." Thunder said. "They're onto you, you know."

Broken Wings

“Yeah.” Reefstar snorted. “But I had to make sure she hadn’t completely torched you. How do you feel?”

“Sore.” Cascade groaned. “But... the dew helped.”

Reefstar nodded. “I’m worried that trying to annoy Fireheart any further might end up with your actual deaths... it might be best just to lay back a bit. Just until she’s in a better mood.”

“But we’re so close!” Cascade said.

“He’s right, Cascade.” Thunder said. “It might be best just to lay low for a while.”

“I hate to agree, but I do.” Rainstorm snorted.

Cascade closed her eyes and sighed, before glancing at Reefstar. “How are the others?”

Reefstar opened and closed his mouth. “They’re fine.”

He was even worse at lying than she was.

“You’re lying.” Cascade growled, using all of her strength to stand up. “What happened? What’s wrong?”

Reefstar hesitated. “They made me promise I wouldn’t worry you.”

Broken Wings

“Tell me!” Cascade exclaimed. “Please. What’s wrong?”

Reefstar sighed. “Sunrise is weak and coughs all the time. At this point...” He shook his head. “Don’t let them know that I told you.”

Cascade stepped back. “Well then, we have no choice.” She said. “We can’t keep sitting around. We have to escape on our own.”



~Chapter Six~

“NO. NO WAY.” THUNDER SHOOK HIS HEAD. “We’ve come so far already, Cascade. How could we ruin all of that?”

“What other option do we have?” She asked. “We either escape or we end up killed.”

“Or we escape, get caught, and end up killed any way.” Rainstorm said.

“Well then, at least we have a chance.” She snapped.

“Please keep your voice down.” Reefstar begged. “The last thing we need is to draw attention to ourselves.”

“What do you think?” She asked. “Do you think we could escape?”

Reefstar held his breath, glancing between her and Thunder. He let out a long exhale. “With the right distraction... I suppose it’s possible.”

Broken Wings

“Then it’s settled.” She said, flipping her forelock out of her eyes. “We wait for the right time and escape.”

“I don’t like this.” Thunder said. “Not at all.”

She lifted her chin, straightening so that she was at her full height. Her eyes gazed at him, every fiber of her being set into her plan. She knew it would work. It had to. For her unborn niece or nephew’s sake if not their own.

He tried to match her gaze and stance. For a long while they just stared at each other. But he finally relented and sighed. “Fine. You win.” He huffed. “We’ll try to escape.”

She smirked, trying to ignore the spasms of pain in her back.

Rainstorm looked slightly amused. “I’ve got to say.” He nickered. “For a second there, you two looked like a lead mare and chief stallion, both set in your ways.”

Cascade lowered her head. “Thank you, Rainstorm.”

Rainstorm grunted and went back to grazing. Thunder was still looking at her.

She felt heat spread over her face. “What is it?”

“I like the way the sun lights up your eyes.” He murmured. “Makes them look gold.”

Broken Wings

She couldn't help but give a shy nicker, ducking behind her long forelock.

He suddenly shivered. "Did I just say that out loud?"

She bit her lip and nodded. "You did."

"Oh dear." He shook all over and looked back at her. "Well, I meant it."

Now she was the one shivering.

"Come on." Thunder winced as he arched his spine. "Let's see if we can find some of that aloe vera stuff for our backs."

"Good idea." Cascade, reluctantly shaking out of the wonderful feeling.

She had recognized that look in Thunder's eyes when he was staring at her. It was the same look she had seen her father give her mother, and Chance give to Sunrise, and Rainstorm give to Rosesand.

It was the feeling that warmed her heart now. And she never wanted it to leave.

~*~

"Cas, wake up!"

Broken Wings

Cascade snorted as she opened her eyes to see Chance staring down at her. She scrambled to her feet, in shock. “What? What’s going on? Why are you...”

She looked around and saw Sunrise, Rosesand, and Luna standing next to him. Reefstar stood with Thunder and Rainstorm on the other side of the cave. She shook her head. “I must be dreaming.” She snorted. “How on earth are you all here?”

“Stop talking for once. Listen.” Chance whispered. Cascade huffed, but she followed his advice and listened.

There was a strange arrangement of moans and shrieks coming from outside. She stuck her head out of the cave and saw the light of fires near the caves, but no Shakirans.

“I’m not exactly sure what I am supposed to be listening for.” She mumbled, focusing on the screams. “Why does that tone sound familiar?”

“Because it’s Fireheart.” Reefstar whispered. “She is in labor.”

Cascade blinked. “She was with foal?”

Reefstar nodded. “Apparently so. But now is the time for our escape. Everyone will be preoccupied with her. I

Broken Wings

was the only one on duty, and I can take you guys to the woods. I have an idea of where we can hide.”

“We’re actually getting out?” It was hard to believe that after all this time, it was finally going to happen.

Reefstar nodded. “Follow me. Please, quickly. Single file, think as quiet as an owl.”

Cascade flexed her hooves with precision, watching the ground carefully for anything that could make her stumble as Reefstar took them up a briar-covered ridge into the cliffs. The long, sharp thorns scraped at their flanks, drawing thin red lines of blood.

Sunrise tripped once on a root. She didn’t cry out, just grunted, but a shower of sand and rocks fell from her hooves, rattling a tree below them. Everyone held their breath.

A figure came out of the cave. Cascade went rigid. *They’ve found us. It’s over.*

Reefstar mumbled something under his breath, looking oddly calm. Cascade squinted and recognized the pegasus as the Shakiran commander Singeblade. He turned his head toward them, staring straight at the ridge.

No one made a sound. No one breathed.

Broken Wings

Even though it seemed he stared at them for hours, he didn't sound an alarm. He finally shrugged his wings and ran back inside the cave.

Rosesand blinked. "How on earth? Wait... where is everyone?"

"Keep your voice down." Reefstar grunted. "I've performed a disappearing spell."

"Magic?" Thunder whispered with an unusual vehemence. "Shakiran magic?"

"I've... learned a bit since I came here." He said. "And it was the only thing I could think of." He mumbled again and everyone came back into view. "You can see yourself, but not others. And Singeblade couldn't see us."

"I was so certain they were going to find us." Sunrise said.

Thunder was vibrating in anger. "I can't believe you, Reefstar." He snorted. "Shakiran magic? You know what that has been used for!"

"I'm sorry." He said. "But please keep your voice down. Do you want us to get caught?"

Thunder gritted his teeth, considering the possibility. He switched his tail. "Come on, let's keep going."

Broken Wings

Reefstar nodded, turning towards the woods. Soon the briars closed behind them and the shadows of the evergreens cloaked them entirely.

“Okay, we’re safer than we were before.” Reefstar said. “But not quite out of the woods yet.”

Chance groaned. “Please, no puns.”

Reefstar blinked, confused. Cascade shook her head. “Ignore him. Where are we going?”

“To a place called Hot Water Flats.” Reefstar said. “It’s a salt flats, with geysers pocketed throughout the area. Because of the geysers, pegasi can’t approach from the air, but there is a narrow path between them that we can pass without being burned.”

“Narrow. Oh goody.” Sunrise huffed.

“You’ll be okay.” Cascade whispered. Sunrise nodded. She shifted her legs and Cascade saw how swollen they were.

“I’m sure we’ll get to rest in a bit.” She whispered to Sunrise.

The trees began to thin. A whitish tan spread of earth, pocked with dark holes, stood in front of them.

Broken Wings

“This is it.” Reefstar said. He slowly picked his way down the side of the hill, using his wings for balance. He turned as he got to the bottom. “Everything’s pretty slick, so you’ll have to be careful.”

A bubbling, gurgling noise echoed from behind him. He bolted to the side as one of the holes spewed steam and water high into the air. Water droplets landed on Cascade’s hide and she skittered as they scalded the still-raw skin. “That’s hot.” She grimaced.

“Yeah, so we’ve got to be careful.” Reefstar said. “Follow me, and don’t put your hooves anywhere that I don’t.”

Single file, they tracked behind him, weaving in between the holes. Geysers shot up into the air, but nothing more than a few droplets would touch them. The steam made the air very humid, and Cascade soon found herself sweating.

The sky was slowly changing. The deep blue-black had faded to a slate, and the stars were beginning to disappear.

“See that cave up ahead?” Reefstar asked. “We’ve got to get there before the sun rises. We’ll be safe once we get into that cave.”

“Where are you taking us?” Rosesand asked.

Broken Wings

“There’s a valley not too far from here. A herd of Land Horses lives there. Once we’re in the cave, I’ll perform a spell to make the rest of your wings disappear, and then we can blend in there until we can figure out a way to get off the island and back home to Equinox. Maybe we can build a raft or something.”

“What is a raft?” Cascade asked.

Thunder snorted. “Ocean Tribe secret.” He glanced at Reefstar with apprehension. “More magic?”

Reefstar shifted his wings. “I’m sorry, Thunder, but it’s the only way.”

Thunder shook his head. “Fine. Are you sure you still remember how to make a raft?”

The stallion grinned. “It was the last lesson I learned before my capture. I practiced everything I learned so I wouldn’t forget it.”

“What sort of other things do Ocean Tribe do?” Cascade asked, tilting her head toward Thunder.

“Well, I can’t tell you, same way you can’t tell me what secrets Prairie Tribe has.” He snorted. “Even here we can’t break the Equinoxian laws.”

She huffed. “I still have no idea what a raft is.”

Broken Wings

“You’ll find out then.” He looked at a volcano, a plume of smoke rising towards the horizon. He tossed his head toward it. “What’s that?”

“Mount Smokebelch.” Reefstar snorted. “Original name indeed. Not a good place. There are some... dark things in those hills.”

Cascade shivered. “Good thing we’re not going there.”

“Yeah.” Reefstar stopped at the mouth of a black tunnel. It was barely big enough for him to stand in. “We’re here. Watch your head as you go in.”

Cascade ducked down, stopping to let her eyes adjust. When she could see a bit more she moved forward.

“It’s completely pitch black in here.” Luna said. “What is this?”

“A tunnel through at least five hundred wingspans of rock.” Reefstar snorted. “Too bad we don’t have some kind of light.”

Rainstorm stomped his hooves twice, then waited. His faded, dead wings began to glow a weak orange.

“Luminosity Talent?” Reefstar nodded. “Impressive. I guess not even Shakiran magic can kill a Talent.”

Broken Wings

Rainstorm nodded, shifting to the front so everyone could see the rocks littering the floor.

“Thank you, Rainstorm.” Sunrise nickered, picking around the rocks.

“How long is the tunnel itself?” Rosesand asked.

“I don’t know. I’ve seen it through the air on scouting mission, but I’ve never actually been inside.”

“Oh great. There could be a whole horde of wolves in here and we won’t know it until it’s too late.” Chance snorted.

“Stop being such a worrywart.” Rosesand snorted. “You’ve done nothing but whine since you came to the prison and I am sick of it, so shut up.”

Chance’s blue eyes flashed in indignance, but Sunrise brushed his shoulder, a bit of a reprimanding look in her eye. He huffed and didn’t say a word.

They shuffled through the darkness, Rainstorm in front, lighting the way, and Luna in back, reflecting the light off her silver hide. The air was beginning to grow stuffy, and even with the light, the darkness was suffocating.

“How much longer?” Thunder whispered.

Broken Wings

“Not too far.” Reefstar lifted his head and inhaled. “I think I can smell fresh air. We’re getting close.”

“Why do I feel so much like a mole?” Cascade whispered.

“I don’t know.” Sunrise said. “I feel more like a groundhog.”

“Did you say groundhog?” Rosesand’s eyes widened.

“Yeah, why?”

Rosesand snorted. “Groundhogs are my mortal enemy.”

“I’m sorry, what?” It took every ounce of self-control for Cascade to not burst out laughing.

“It’s a long story.” Rosesand looked around shiftily. “But they are nasty creatures. Always shuffling along underground, making burrows in the worst of places, waiting to trip someone and make them break their leg so they can gnaw their hooves with their ridiculously sharp orange teeth.” She shuddered and flattened her ears. “They are out to get us. Trust me.”

“Okay.” Cascade desperately wanted to know the source of Rosesand’s groundhog conspiracy theories, but

Broken Wings

Reefstar had stopped. Up ahead at a bend in the tunnel, early morning sunlight lit the rocks.

“We’re here.” Reefstar mumbled something and Rainstorm, Luna, Sunrise, and his own wings disappeared. Sunrise glanced at her back. “I can’t feel the weight anymore.”

Thunder shook his head, mumbling something about the magic.

Cascade jostled his shoulder. “What’s wrong?”

His head snapped up. “Why would you think anything is wrong?”

“Because before, you thought we could trust your brother with everything. And now you think that it’s a terrible thing for him to use magic.”

Thunder opened his mouth, closed it, and sighed. “It’s... a long story.”

“Come on, we’ve got to get in with the herd and blend. They shouldn’t suspect anything, but if they do...” Reefstar tapped his hooves. “Let’s just get out there.”

Cascade shuffled past Thunder, blinking as the sunlight stung her eyes. She could see multi-colored horses

Broken Wings

grazing peacefully and was able to pick out a dark gray stallion.

Reefstar shivered all over, as if shaking off the darkness of the cave. “Just go to grazing.” He whispered. The grass was lush and reached almost to their knees. It didn’t take much convincing. Cascade found the grass to be luscious and sweet. She dipped her head and chewed the tender blades.

“Uh, guys?” Thunder snorted. “I think someone is coming over.”



~Chapter Seven~

CASCADE LIFTED HER EYES AND SAW A DARK CHOCOLATE PALOMINO MARE APPROACHING THEM. “Who are you?” The mare whispered. It was her accent that made Cascade jerk her head up high in the air and drop the grass from her mouth.

Maybe Land Horses had different accents than pegasi here, but she knew that this mare’s accent was distinctly similar to that of a pegasus.

Reefstar looked startled and jerked back. “You can’t possibly.... You...”

The mare blinked. “Reefstar? What are you...” She looked around, eyes narrowed. “I am guessing you are not Land Horses.” She said in a low, cautious tone.

Cascade shook her head. “We are Equinoxians.”

Broken Wings

“Equinoxians?” The mare shook her head. “How on earth?”

“It’s a long story.” Thunder mumbled.

“But you’re... you’re Kestrelmist!” Reefstar mumbled.

“Wait... Kestrelmist?” Cascade’s eyes widened. “As in the former lead mare of the—”

“It’s just Kestrel.” She said quickly. “I’d rather not let everyone know about my... past. They all think that I am a Land Horse, and I’d rather keep it that way.”

“How on earth did you end up here?” Reefstar asked.

“It’s a funny story.” Kestrel flipped her golden mane to the side. “Me and Shade... he’s just Shade, now that we’re... grounded.” She cleared her throat. “We were wandering and the stallion, Storm, he found us and said that we could come with him to his herd. He promised safety and refuge.”

“Has he been good to that promise?” Reefstar asked.

“Very good to it. I was surprised and pleased.” Kestrel tossed her head. “Come on, I’ll introduce you. He will take you in, I’m sure of it.”

“Is that a... safe idea?” Thunder asked. Cascade recalled how the stallions in the Land Horse territories threw

Broken Wings

out the colts past the age of three and killed foals that weren't theirs.

"He is not like the Land Horses in Equinox." She snorted, sounding offended. She trotted towards the dappled gray stallion, nickering. He lifted his head and caught sight of them. "Ah, Kestrel." He said, warmth in his voice. "I see you have found some friends."

"They were wandering alone. I said that you were good and kind and you would give them a place to live within the herd." Kestrel's voice was fluttery—not quite nervousness, more of an excited twang.

"I see." A charming sound had been strung into Storm's tone. "Greetings, friends. Have you traveled far?"

"Very." Sunrise snorted.

"Well then, rest and eat. The field is at your disposal, and you are allowed to stay as long as you like."

Why did Cascade get a feeling of déjà vu from his gaze? It had that same black, swirling darkness that she had seen in the look of Fireheart. But he was supposed to be helpful and kind.

Something felt fishy.

Broken Wings

His eyes were running over the stallions and a slight stiffness had formed in his shoulders. But he said nothing and returned to grazing.

“Well, that was pleasant.” Rosesand said, as they moved away to find a better place to graze.

Luna sniffed. “A bit suspicious if you ask me. He sounded nothing like a Land Horse.”

“Well I’m not sure what kind of Land Horses you have in Equinox, but here they all sound like that.” Kestrel said dismissively. “Go ahead and eat. The grass isn’t poison.”

“I can attest to that.” Rosesand mumbled through a mouthful of grass. “It tastes like the pear cactus fruit back home... sweet and delicious.”

Thunder looked sideways at Cascade. “You okay? You seem... disgruntled for some reason.”

She shivered her skin to flick off a fly. “I don’t know... something didn’t feel right about him.”

“I didn’t notice anything.” Thunder pulled up a hunk of grass. “I was more surprised that he said we could all stick with the herd. Land Horse stallions back home are normally more anxious about other stallions being near their mares.”

Broken Wings

“I guess that’s part of what unsettled me.” Cascade mumbled. “He doesn’t act like a Land Horse, sound like a Land Horse, or move like one.”

“He is definitely a Land Horse.” Kestrel said. “I told you, maybe they’re different on your island, but that’s how they all act here. Now keep your voice down, otherwise the others will get suspicious.”

Cascade nodded. “You’re right. I’m probably just overly tired.”

She lowered her head to graze, unable to get rid of the feeling. Something about Storm just wasn’t right.

But then again, it had been a long day.

She was sure it would all be clearer tomorrow.

~*~

“Cascade, wake up!”

Sunrise’s panicked voice startled her from sleep. She shook her head and heaved herself up. “What’s wrong? Is it the foal?”

“No.” Sunrise said. “It’s the stallions. Rainstorm, Reefstar, Thunder, Chance... All of them are gone!”

Broken Wings

“Gone?” Cascade noted the flattened areas of grass where she had last seen the four stallions. “What do you mean by gone?”

“You know what I mean.” Sunrise snorted. “Luna and Rosesand noticed earlier and they were looking around the field when I woke up. They’ve gone out to look around again.”

“Do they know when they disappeared?” Cascade sniffed the grass beds, inwardly groaning when the scent was cold and stale. They had been gone for a while.

“Maybe they just wandered off and got lost?” Cascade suggested.

“I highly doubt it. These days Chance starts freaking out if I’m out of his sight for more than a few minutes.” She shook her mane. “No, something’s wrong. They were taken by force.”

Cascade trotted around the area. “There’s no sign of blood or trauma, so at least we know it wasn’t a predator.” She glanced at Sunrise. “Will you be okay if I go try to find Kestrel and ask her what happened?”

“I’ll be fine. I’m just worried about what’s going to happen to the stallions.”

Broken Wings

Cascade nodded, galloping across the field to where Kestrel was grazing with a black colt. The colt raised his head, and Kestrel noticed her. "Cascade!" She exclaimed. "Luna and Rosesand already told me about the stallions. I already told them I had no idea where they could be."

"Where are Luna and Rosesand now?" Cascade asked.

"Talking with Storm about them. I'm not sure what he expects them to do... if they're lost in the hills or woods it could take weeks, even months to find them."

Cascade sucked in a breath, glancing over to where Storm stood. He seemed to be trying to carry on a rational conversation with the irrational-minded Rosesand, who was currently feigning hits with her hooves, threatening him.

"I'd better go stop her before she gets us all killed." Cascade huffed, loping over to her friends. Luna, looking as if she were a mother trying to soothe a weanling having a temper tantrum, was jerking on Rosesand's mane, trying to calm her down. Cascade took hold of her friend's tail, narrowly missing being kicked by Rosesand's flying hooves.

"Going berserk isn't going to solve anything!" Cascade shouted through a mouthful of hair. Rosesand whipped around, switching her ivory tail to free it. "How dare you insult me with such impudence!" She snapped.

Broken Wings

“How dare you insult him!” Luna stepped in between them. “This stallion has been kind enough to let us stay in his field and rest, and you accuse him of a crime without evidence!”

“It’s all right, Luna.” Storm said, his silky, charming voice soft. “I am sure our friend Rose here is just upset over the loss of her mate.”

“That you stole!” She screamed, charging forward only to be blocked by the muscled body of Luna. Cascade jerked on Rosesand’s mane, reaching up to whisper in her ear. “Look, we can’t prove anything. Just shut up, before you get us all killed.”

Eyes flashing and head bobbing so fast Cascade’s teeth ached, Rosesand reluctantly backed off.

“I am very sorry, Storm.” Luna said. “My friend is quite distraught and not in her right mind.”

Cascade shoved Rosesand’s head into the grass as she opened her mouth to argue. “Be quiet and listen.” She hissed.

Rosesand rolled her eyes, but for once, she took Cascade’s advice.

“Now, what we were trying to ask before my friend lost control: is there anything that you can do to help us find

Broken Wings

our friends? We are rather worried about them. We don't know this area well and they could very well be lost."

"I am sorry, but I don't think there is anything that we can do." Storm said. "I do not have hundreds of horses to spare to send a search party. Half of the mares are still with foal and predators are high this time of year. I cannot leave my post. You could go out and search by yourselves, but I wouldn't advise it. It's more than likely they were taken by a predator, or perhaps they left by themselves." He arched his neck. "I believe searching is futile."

His voice changed with that last sentence. It deepened and stretched, and Cascade was sure that she had seen that darkness again in his eyes.

But just when she began to think that she wasn't imagining it, he regained his charming tone. "Let's wait a day. Perhaps they will turn up on their own."

Luna sighed and dipped her head "Perhaps. Thank you, Storm."

"My pleasure." The stallion turned away to talk with the lead mare, Crystal.

Rosesand snorted. "Please tell me that you don't believe him."

Broken Wings

“Well, it has only been a few hours.” Luna admitted. “It’s possible that they are out scouting an escape route. I’m sure they will return quickly.”

“We’d better go update Sunrise.” Cascade nickered. “I left her behind... she seemed pretty upset about Chance.”

“All of this stress can’t be good for her, or the foal.” Luna grunted. “Perhaps we bend the truth so we don’t upset her too much.”

“Lying, in my opinion, is still *lying*.” Rosesand snapped. “No matter how upsetting the truth may be.”

Cascade looked towards the place where she had left Sunrise and blinked. It was empty.

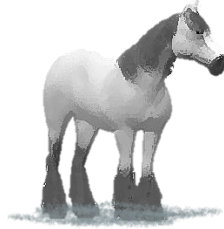
“Sunrise?” She looked around, trying to find a glance of her friend. She saw two chestnuts and a bay grazing nearby, but no buckskin.

“Maybe she went to talk to Kestrel?” Luna suggested.

Rosesand sniffed the grass. “Guys... there’s blood here. Fresh.”

“Blood?” Cascade lowered her head. “Is it possible...”

Luna lifted her upper lip as she smelled the blood. “It’s not the stallions.” She muttered. “It’s Sunrise’s.”



~Chapter Eight~

“SUNRISE!” ROSESAND SHOUTED. “WHERE ARE YOU?”

“Sunrise!” Cascade trotted forward, panic rising in her chest. “What if... she...” Thousands of possibilities swarmed her head. Luna tugged at her mane gently, forcing her to turn around.

“Cascade, if you’re going to be a lead mare someday, you’ve got to always remember one important rule.” Luna said. “Never, EVER panic. Panicking can sometimes make the difference between life and death. So take a deep breath, close your eyes, count to something, and calm yourself.”

Cascade’s heart was still racing, but she followed the older mare’s orders. She inhaled, slowly exhaled, and waited until her heartbeat had somewhat returned to normal. Then she opened her eyes, feeling calmer.

Broken Wings

“Now, think. When you talked with Sunrise, did she seem anxious? Was she sweating or pacing?”

Cascade tried to remember. “Other than the fact that she seemed worried about Chance, nothing seemed to be wrong, physically.” Her eyes widened. “You don’t think...”

“Stop.” Luna said. “Being aware of all of the possibilities is a good thing. Immediately going to the worst is not.”

She nodded. “Okay.”

“And to answer your previous thought, no, I don’t think she is foaling.” Luna sniffed the blood again, then lifted her head. “But I do think that Sunrise is injured very badly, and we need to find her before she bleeds to death.”

“You’re close to her.” Rosesand nudged Cascade’s shoulder. “If Sunrise was injured, what would she do?”

“Probably try to find help.” Cascade said. “Unless it wasn’t a something, but a someone, and they were going after her. Then she would probably try to hide.”

“*Someone?*” Luna looked around cautiously. “While I would love to discuss your theories on that, you’d probably agree that we should check out the rocks to see if she is hiding there and possibly can’t hear us.”

Broken Wings

“I do agree with that. And I will tell you about it after we find Sunrise.” She shook her mane and galloped toward the rocks. Her long legs instantly took her ahead of the other two mares.

I'm the leader on this. The realization hit her so fast she almost tripped over a root. *They're lead mares with years of more experience than me, and they're letting me lead. I guess this is how Mom feels when she takes charge back home.*

She stopped, waiting for them to catch up, feeling slightly inadequate. She dipped her head. “The rocks are just ahead.”

Something like a smile was on Luna's face. “She's your friend. Where do you suggest we start?”

She caught the look in both of their eyes. They were in it together. They were testing her and her capabilities.

She turned towards the rocks. A wide cave caught her eye. “Let's check there.” She said.

Rosesand trotted ahead and stuck her head inside. “Sunrise!”

Her voice echoed around in the darkness for a while, before bouncing back.

Broken Wings

“It’s not very deep.” She said. “I can see all the way to the back. Sunrise isn’t in there.”

Cascade inhaled, looking down the crevices and crags, picking out the second widest hole. “Maybe there?”

“There are no maybes.” Luna whispered. “Say what you mean, and mean what you say. Speak with confidence, even if you don’t have it.”

Cascade flipped her forelock out of her eyes. “That cave, then. We should check it next.”

Luna trotted toward the cave. “Sunrise!” She shouted.

Cascade prayed to the King that Sunrise was inside.

Once again, only the sound of the echo answered. This cave was much longer than the one before, and Luna trotted around in it to make sure that Sunrise wasn’t there.

“I don’t know what to say. All of the rest would be too narrow for her.” Cascade said as she came out. “She’s always complaining about tight spaces.”

Rosesand tilted her head. “Unless she found a cave that had a tight opening, but was large inside, to try to get away from her attacker. He wouldn’t expect her to fit in, and it would give her an advantage.”

Broken Wings

Cascade nodded. "That's true, I guess."

"So?" Luna looked at Cascade. "Which one do we check next?"

Cascade narrowed her eyes and looked down the rows of caves. Her eyes were drawn to one with a triangle shaped opening, very small and narrow. She was probably the only one that could fit inside.

"That one." She said.

"I highly doubt that Sunrise could fit." Rosesand scoffed.

"She's a small-boned mare. And nothing is impossible." Luna snorted. She nodded to Cascade. "You go check it out and report to Rosesand and me when you find something."

Cascade released a sigh of nervousness and squeezed in between the crack. Her muscles and skin complained, but finally, she made it onto the other side.

"Sunrise!" She shouted. "Are you in here?"

She waited, holding her breath.

Please let her be here, please let her be here.

"Cascade?" Sunrise's voice was faint and weak, but it was there.

Broken Wings

Relief flooded her heart and body, making her limp in the knees. She forced herself to stiffen. “Sunrise! Thank the King that you’re alive. Where are you?”

“Deeper into the cave.” Sunrise coughed. Cascade ducked down the passageway that it was coming from. “How did you get all the way down here?”

“I don’t know. I don’t remember much. I was unconscious for a bit... I ache all over.”

Keep her talking and follow her voice, Cascade thought. “Is the foal okay?”

“As far as I can tell.” There was a faint sound like sand or pebbles falling. “It’s making for laying here pretty uncomfortable, but I didn’t want to move in case something was broken and I couldn’t tell.”

“Smart idea.” Cascade turned a corner and saw Sunrise laying on the floor of the cave, a few steps below. Blood seeped from a cut on her front leg and her body was covered in bruises. Smaller lacerations covered her chest and neck. “You look terrible. Do you remember what happened?”

“I can’t really remember. I can sort of recall grazing while I waited for you guys, and then this black colt came up to talk to me... that’s all I can remember.”

Broken Wings

Cascade froze in suspicion. “A black colt?”

“Yeah, about two springs. Shade, Kestrel’s son. Remember him? I hope he didn’t get hurt.” Sunrise closed her eyes and groaned.

Cascade snapped out of her brooding thoughts and looked at Sunrise. “What’s wrong?”

“I’ve got this killer headache, and talking is making it worse.” Sunrise mumbled. “Can you help me get up? I don’t think I’ve broken anything...”

“Give me a minute.” Cascade jumped down the steps and examined Sunrise. While her belly was still very wide with foal, there wasn’t any unusual swelling that would indicate an internal problem.

“Okay, sure.” Cascade grabbed her mane in her teeth and gently helped Sunrise up. Sunrise swayed, blinking rapidly.

“Please don’t pass out on me.” Cascade muttered as she used the mouthful of mane to steady her. “I was the only one who could fit inside here.”

“I won’t. Don’t worry.” Sunrise slowly began to walk forward, weaving a little bit. “Which way is the exit? I forget what way I came.”

Broken Wings

Cascade stepped in front of her, feeling disoriented. What way had she come from? She couldn't remember. She should have tried to track her path. Now she had gotten both herself and Sunrise lost. They were going to be stuck in this cave—

Stop. Remember what Luna said, she told herself. Panicking won't do any good. Calm down, wait, and think.

She took a deep breath, clearing her mind, and then opened her eyes. She sniffed, trying to find any scents that would lead them home.

She caught the scent of salt air and turned towards it. Moving slowly so she wouldn't lose Sunrise again, she fixed her nose on the salt air and began picking her way around the rocks and out of the tunnel.

It felt a lot longer going out than it had been going in, and she was worried she had taken a wrong turn several times, but suddenly, she heard Luna and Rosesand's voices floating in from outside.

"Guys! We can hear your voices. Keep talking."
Cascade called ahead.

"Does 'we' mean that you found Sunrise?" Luna asked.

"It's good to hear your voice, Luna." Sunrise said.

Broken Wings

“Praise the King!” Luna exclaimed. “How bad are your injuries?”

“My head and leg are the worse.” Sunrise admitted. Cascade turned a corner and saw the opening. She examined the small crag. “Should I break it more to make it easier?”

“I can do it. But maybe you should go first.”

Cascade nodded, slowly squeezing herself through. She blinked as the sharp sunlight burned her eyes, then as soon as she was out, turned to see Sunrise come after her with much difficulty.

“Are you okay?” She asked.

“I’m fine. I’m glad to be out of there.” Sunrise winced and ducked her head down. “That sun is bright.”

“You’ve got bruises and cuts all over you.” Luna said. “Did you see who did this?”

“I have no memory of it. The last thing I can remember is talking to Shade. But I remember what we were talking about now.”

“What was it?” Cascade asked.

“Equinox. He’d asked about where I came from. I got the sense that he was sad about leaving his own home when

Broken Wings

he was younger and he felt sympathetic. He said that Kestrel is with foal as well. I didn't notice that earlier."

"Interesting." Luna's eyes seemed distant, like she was thinking about something deeply, but her mind had apparently shifted into a different gear. "There's some white willow over there that you can take for the pain. I'm so glad that you're not worse."

"Me too." Sunrise mumbled. "Did you find out anything about the stallions?"

There was an uncomfortable silence. They exchanged glances between each other, Luna's glare meeting Rosesand's half-smirk, half-I-told-you-so.

"Storm isn't willing to help us look for them. He said we should wait a day and see if they turn up." Cascade said.

Sunrise nodded. "Okay. And then what happens?"

"We go out and look for them. We aren't leaving this island without them." Luna said firmly.

"We're going to find them." Cascade said. "*We are.*"

"The King willing." Luna mumbled.

"You'd find it best not to mention the King here." Kestrel's voice startled all of them as they whirled around to

Broken Wings

find her standing behind them. Rosesand's ears flipped back. "How long have you been standing there?"

"I just got here." Kestrel looked at Sunrise. "What happened? Did you fall?"

"She was beat up." Luna said. "She doesn't remember anything."

"But that's absurd." Kestrel said. "Who would want to do something like that?"

"We don't know. But apparently, she last remembers talking to your son, Shade." Rosesand snapped. "Perhaps he decided to do something more than just make friendly conversation."

"Rosesand..." Luna warned.

"You have no proof of any such thing! Shade is a good colt, and he would never do something like that."

"Just like Storm would never hurt one of us? And yet he was probably the one that—"

"Rosesand!" Luna nipped Rosesand's flank, turning the enraged pinto's mind toward the older lead mare. "You are in no place to accuse such things!"

"We all know that it's true." Rosesand snorted.

Broken Wings

“Getting into fights and arguments with no evidence to back them won’t do anyone any good.” Cascade said. “So just back off and calm down.”

Sunrise closed her eyes, gritting her teeth. “Everything’s starting to spin...”

Cascade’s head snapped toward her. “You’ve been standing up for a while. You probably have a concussion.”

“Legs... hurt.” Sunrise staggered before collapsing onto her side. Cascade darted over to her head while Luna ran to get herbs.

Kestrel looked down at Sunrise’s still form in horror. “Is she okay?”

“Probably not, no thanks to you.” Rosesand snapped.

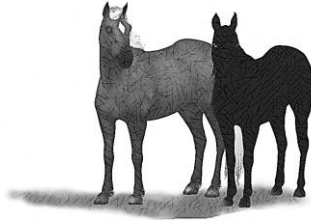
“That’s enough, Rosesand.” Cascade snapped. “We have to get Sunrise out of the light. Help me take her to that first cave we found.”

“Fine. But I want this *Kestrel* to know that I’m onto her. I don’t trust you one bit.” Rosesand clacked her teeth toward the chocolate palomino. She picked up Sunrise’s tail in her teeth. “Come on.” She mumbled.

Broken Wings

Cascade bit into Sunrise's mane. She caught a glimpse of Kestrel's face and saw two tears streak down her dark cheeks.

Why was Shade talking to Sunrise? She wondered. And why do I get the feeling that Kestrel knows more than what she says?



~Chapter Nine~

THUNDER'S EYES SUDDENLY FLASHED OPEN. A sense of panic was inside his gut, though he wasn't really sure why.

That's when he noticed he was inside a pit.

"Oofff..." Chance's groan came from somewhere behind him. "Why does my head hurt so bad?"

"And why is my leg tied up?" Reefstar jerked at a thick vine tying him to the side of the pit.

"Where are we?" Rainstorm reared up onto his hind legs, but the pit was too deep to climb out. His hooves didn't even brush the edges.

"How did we get down here?" Thunder asked. "I can't remember anything."

Broken Wings

“Neither can I.” Chance’s blue eyes widened. “I hope Sunrise is okay...”

“She’s probably got the other mares with her.” Rainstorm tapped a hoof and stared up at the light. “The real question is, how do we get out?”

Thunder paced around the perimeter, then looked to Reefstar. “If we untie you, do you think you can fly us out of here?”

“I don’t know... it’s a pretty tight fit as it is. I don’t think my wings could fit.” He turned and began to gnaw at the vine.

“So with all of the magic that you’ve learned from the Shakira, you have nothing that could help us?” Thunder snapped. “The magic banned by our people?”

“I only learned a few spells. I had this hope that someday I could get back and I didn’t want to be rejected because I had fallen too deep into their ways.”

“But you didn’t mind doing everything else.” Thunder closed his eyes and inhaled deeply, trying to block out the image of Everblaze. Her own fire consuming her. Falling to the ground like a burning star. Her beautiful purple feathers flickering on the breeze, slowly burning to ash.

Broken Wings

He couldn't think about it. He would break down, and that was the last thing he wanted to do here.

"Forget that I said anything." He grunted. "Your magic is evil."

"It's not my—"

Thunder had stopped listening. *Out. I need to get out of here.*

He paced around, digging at the walls with his hooves, ignoring the other stallion's questions over what was wrong. His mind couldn't stop replaying the scene.

But one thing always came back. He hadn't gotten there in time. Everblaze was dead because he failed to protect her.

"Thunder." Reefstar stood next to him, his tall body shielding them from the other stallions. He hadn't realized how much he had grown into his "mule" ears. "What's wrong?"

Thunder bristled. "Nothing."

"I'm your twin, not Dad. You can't fool me that easily." Reefstar swished his tail. "You've never been so uptight about magic."

Broken Wings

“I was two springs when you were taken. I didn’t understand the destruction... the evil of it.” Thunder blinked hard.

Reefstar inhaled sharply. “What brought you to understand?”

Thunder lowered his head. “We had a sister.” He began.

Reefstar blinked. “A sister?”

Thunder nodded. “Everblaze. Blue roan coat, three socks, blaze, and the prettiest purple feathers in all of Ocean Tribe. Would have been three springs this year, around the Flower Moon.”

Reefstar widened his eyes. “Would have been?”

Thunder coughed, hiding the fact he was on the edge of tears. “She insisted on coming to the battle, even though she was only in her second year of apprenticeship. Dad didn’t like it, but she had such a will and a personality that he finally agreed.” He blinked back the grief that threatened to choke him. “About an hour into the battle, she met with a Shakira stallion much stronger than her. She’d gotten the Fire Talent and tried to use it on him.”

Reefstar closed his eyes and shuddered. “I have a feeling I know where this is going...”

Broken Wings

“The Shakira stallion said a bunch of jumbled words—a spell, I guessed, and by the time I’d gotten over there to help, he’d used his magic to burn her with her own fire. I got to her side just as the flames melted her wings. She... died from the burns and from the fall.”

Reefstar lowered his head. “Wow.”

“And now I’m stuck with that image of our own sister, burning, falling, and stuck with the truth that if I had been there sooner, I could have saved her, and she would still be alive.” Thunder snorted.

“You couldn’t have done anything to prevent it.” Rainstorm said. “He was going to burn her regardless of whether you were there or not.”

“I could have killed him. Cut off the magic.” Thunder shook his head.

Chance lifted his head, their conversation apparently not so private as Thunder thought. “She was a blue roan with purple feathers?”

Thunder nodded.

“Is that why you were sticking so close to Cascade later that day?”

Broken Wings

Thunder sighed. "I saw her fighting. I thought she was Everblaze for a second. Then I had this desire to protect her... so that she wouldn't end up like my sister." He kicked at the hole. "And now we're all stuck in here, and who knows what's happening to them."

"I'm really sorry, T." Reefstar said. "I had no idea..."

Thunder huffed. "It really isn't your fault. It's mine. And anytime you use magic, all I can see is her burning."

"Well then, I won't use any more magic than necessary." Reefstar looked up at the top of the hole. "So, any ideas on how we're going to get out of here?"

"No clue." Chance paced around the edge. "The soil is pretty soft. Maybe we could dig a tunnel?"

"We'd run the risk of it collapsing on top of us." Rainstorm snorted. "But perhaps, if we could dig ledges and footholds, using rocks and roots as supports... we might be able to climb out of here."

"Sounds like a good start to me." Reefstar nickered. "Thunder?"

Thunder nodded and began tearing at the earth with his hooves. Something constructive was just what he needed.

~*~

Broken Wings

Cascade lifted her head as Luna trotted out of the cave. "How is Sunrise?"

"Still unconscious." Luna shook her head. "I'm mostly worried about an internal injury, something that we can't see. Especially with only two weeks until her foaling-time."

"What about the stallions?" Rosesand asked. "We have to go look for them, but we can't leave Sunrise alone."

"You two go." Luna said. "I will stay behind. You're probably more adept to weaving through tight forests than I am."

"We're no Forest Tribe warriors, but we'll certainly try." Cascade looked up at the sun. "How many hours of daylight do you think we've got left?"

"Four or five. Start coming home when the sun is a winglength above the horizon." Luna said. "I will give you an update on Sunrise when you come back."

Rosesand bolted towards the woods. Cascade paused for a second and looked at Luna. "Luna... about your guidance, earlier, when we were looking for Sunrise?"

Luna pricked her ears. "Yes?"

Broken Wings

“Thank you. For believing in me.” Cascade sighed. “You have no idea how scared I was.”

Luna smiled softly. “You are going to be a lead mare someday, Cascade, regardless of whether your brother and father mend their relationship. I teach you because I see great things for you. You were born to lead. What the King will use that for, only He knows.” She huffed a warm breath over Cascade’s face. “Now you’d better catch up with Rosesand before she leaves without you.”

“All right.” Cascade dipped her head. “Thank you, Luna.”

“You are welcome.” Luna coughed as she turned to go back to Sunrise’s cave. A pang of worry for the mares settled in Cascade’s stomach, but she focused her attention on trailing after Rosesand.

“Any ideas on where to start looking?” She asked.

Rosesand narrowed her eyes. “If my gut is correct about Storm, then it could be a pretty unusual place, like a cave or a pit. A trap, basically.”

“I haven’t mentioned this earlier, because I was unsure, but do you ever get a feeling that Storm is... more than what he says?” Cascade asked.

Broken Wings

“Oh for me, it’s more than a feeling.” Rosesand growled. “I know it. I’d bet my wings... that is, if I had wings to bet... that he’s a pegasus. Maybe even a Shakiran.”

“His gaze... it gives me the same feeling that Fireheart’s does.” Cascade’s eyes widened. “You don’t think...”

“That they could be related?” Rosesand flipped her forelock. “The thought has crossed my mind.”

Cascade shivered. “Let’s stop talking about this. It’s giving me chills and it makes me think that we’re never going to find Thunder and all of them again.”

“Thunder?” Rosesand swished her tail. “You mention him by name. You two are awfully close.”

“We actually only met at the battlegrounds.” Cascade bit her lip. “He saved me more than once.”

“Oh ho ho, I *see*.” Rosesand smirked.

“I doubt it’s like that. And since when did you play matchmaker?”

“Don’t call it that.” Rosesand said, making a face. “It sounds so *meddling*. Besides I don’t do it all the time. I just observe certain chemistry between individuals, and I happen to think certain things about it. I don’t speak up, and I don’t

Broken Wings

say anything, unless the topic comes up.” She looked towards Cascade. “So?”

Cascade blinked, still trying to process Rosesand’s lengthy definition. “So what?”

Rosesand rolled her eyes. “Do you think that there might be something between you and Thunder?”

She stopped as the true meaning of the question hit her. Was there something between her and Thunder? Those looks he had been giving her, the small comments he made... did they all mean something more? Or was he trying to be courteous?

“I know this *sudden* revelation that he might be more than interested in you as a friend comes as a shock, but we’ve got to keep moving if we’re going to find something before dark.” Rosesand said with more than the usual sarcasm, already several winglengths ahead.

She trotted after her, mind still reeling. “I mean, even if we did have... something... it would never work. He’s an heir, and I’m an heir. We can’t leave our tribes. We’re both expected to lead someday. Besides, I’m four springs. I’m a year into being considered an adult. My father would never agree to a betrothal.”

Broken Wings

Rosesand sniffed. "I'm gonna tell you a secret, but you can't tell anyone that I told you this or mention it to any living thing, otherwise I will murder you personally."

Cascade nodded, slightly disturbed.

"I was born noble. But I was the youngest—and only—daughter of my father." Rosesand continued trotting forward. "I had three brothers that my father adored and fawned over. I was a shame to him. As my mother's favorite, I learned all of her secrets. I was the only one that held them at her death. And one by one, my brothers were taken out of the way."

Cascade's eyes widened. "You didn't..."

"Of course I didn't!" Rosesand snapped. "I'm not a barbarian. I would never kill my own brothers for the sake of power. Not even if some of them deserved it." She shook her head. "No, it was more... confusing than that. My oldest brother just disappeared. Some wondered if he came too close to the Unicorn Territories and was executed. My second brother broke several laws of magic and disrespected my father's position, but my father didn't banish him until he executed a mare without consent."

"And your third brother?" Cascade cocked her head. "What happened to him?"

Broken Wings

A sort of sorrowful look came over Rosesand's face. "He was my best friend." She whispered. "His name was Nightthorn. Always looked out for me. We were only a spring apart." She sighed. "Rattlesnake bite. Didn't know he was allergic. He went into shock and died at my side. I tried everything Mom had taught me, helped the Healer, but it wasn't enough." Rosesand grunted and leaned down as if to scratch her hoof, maybe hiding tears.

"So then you became heir." Cascade interjected.

"Well, I was, but my father made up a stupid rule that I had to find a stallion to be my mate if I was going to be lead mare." She rolled her eyes. "Do you know what pompous idiots Sand Tribe stallions are?"

"I can't imagine." Cascade grunted. "What about Rainstorm?"

"Aha. Therein lies the second part of the tale. He's a half-breed. Forest Tribe mare, Sand Tribe stallion. Kicked out of both herds for not having pure lineage. He wandered into Sand, and I kicked his butt while on border patrol. And then he kept coming back. And coming back. Always when I was the only one out there. And suddenly, instead of tanning his hide, I found myself talking to him, spending more and more time on patrol."

Broken Wings

“I’m guessing your father wasn’t very happy about this?” Cascade ventured.

“*His* opinion didn’t matter.” Rosesand sniffed. “But he never got to put his two cents in. He went to a negotiation meeting with Fire Clan because they were kind of spreading onto our territories and threatening the patrols... he was speared by Cindernight. I chose Rainstorm as leader, and I punished anyone who disagreed.”

She stopped, quivering. “Did you hear that?”

“Hear what?” Cascade paused, listening. Rosesand pricked her ears forward, every muscle in her body tensed.

“Rainstorm?” She nickered, her voice sounding unusually small and lonely.

No reply.

“I could have sworn that I heard voices.” She shook her head and listened again.

Cascade strained, but she couldn’t hear anything. The setting sun had cast the light throughout the trees as a golden green. The forest floor was so dark it was hard to see anything.

Broken Wings

“We should probably go back.” Cascade said. “The sun will be setting soon and there’s no telling what kind of creatures are hidden in this forest.”

“I guess you’re right.” Rosesand sighed. “I was so sure... I really did...” She shook her head.

“We’ll come back in the morning. Maybe we can get Shade and Kestrel to help.” Cascade suggested.

“I don’t trust Kestrel any more than I trust Storm. Nice or not, she’s still a Shakiran. And I get bad feelings about Shade.”

“Well, so far they’re the only ones who are willing to help, and they know the area better than we do. It might be a good idea to ask.”

Rosesand shook her head, turning around. “Let’s just go back.”

“All right.” Cascade followed, looking back over her shoulder once.

Why did it feel like they had just missed something?



~Chapter 7en~

THUNDER SLUMPED AGAINST THE SIDE OF THE DIRT WALL, SWEATING, EXHAUSTED, AND VERY THIRSTY. “We can’t keep doing this.” He said. “We’re going to need water at some point, and hard work is just going to make that come sooner. We need to stop and think of some other way.”

“You’re right.” Reefstar groaned. “If only this stupid soil wasn’t so squishy.”

They’d been digging for hours. All they had been able to do was make about three more inches of soil cover the bottom and widen it enough so they weren’t breathing on each other.

Broken Wings

Chance tapped the earth with his hoof. “Maybe if we dig enough, we can add enough soil to basically lift us out of here?”

“That could take days.” Thunder said. “Weeks, even. We’d die of dehydration before we’d add a foot.”

“I’m just trying to think out loud!” Chance snapped.

“Okay, everyone calm down and take a breath.” Reefstar said. “I know we’re all tired and frustrated, but losing our tempers won’t help anyone.”

Rainstorm had been silent this entire time. Now he pricked his ears and his nostrils quivered. “Everyone quiet!” He said.

“Rainstorm, I thought I just said...”

“No, you moss-brain, I hear something.”

Reefstar blinked, a little confused over the insult, but nevertheless everyone was quiet. From above, faint, echoing voices that sounded like Cascade and Rosesand drifted down into their pit.

“It’s the mares!” Chance shouted. “We’re down here!”

Broken Wings

All of the stallions started shouting. Thunder nearly screamed himself hoarse until Reefstar flapped his wings for quiet.

The voices were gone.

“They left us!” Reefstar sputtered.

“I don’t think they could hear us.” Thunder said, trying to think positively despite the despair clawing at him. “And besides, it’s probably about to get dark. I’m sure they’ll come back in the morning.”

“We’re not really going to spend a night in a hole, are we?” Chance groaned.

“Why are you always so *whiny*?” Rainstorm asked, annoyed.

“I’m not *whining*.” Chance said. “I’m just...” He muttered something indistinct. He turned away and began scraping at the wall with his hooves.

“Chance, I thought we agreed we’d take a break from that.” Reefstar said.

“I need to do something. I’m going to go crazy if I don’t.” Chance continued on with his scraping.

Something was up. Thunder couldn’t tell what, but it was clear that Chance had something on his mind.

Broken Wings

But, being a stallion, he knew that Chance would not want to talk about it.

He looked up at the hole and the darkening sky, hoping that tomorrow would bring more success than today.

~*~

Cascade's eyes flickered open halfway through the night, expecting that something was going to wake her up.

But nothing did.

She was the only one awake. Across the field, Storm's herd dozed. The tall graze rustled gently in the wind, and somewhere she could hear the soft, whispering sound of a mare singing to a foal. The sky was a velvet ebony, pricked with thousands of stars.

She settled back down into the grass. Nothing had woken her. There was no danger.

So why did she feel so tense?

She stretched out her head, trying to sleep. But her brain was whirling with memories of the past day's events.

Sunrise was sick. The stallions were gone. They were stuck here with no way to get to Equinox and the clock ticking down faster than before.

Broken Wings

Had they escaped the Shakiran herd just to get stuck here for the rest of their life? Would Sunrise have to raise a foal without a father, under the hard eye of this shifty stallion?

Would her own parents pronounce her dead and put all of the weight and responsibilities she had to endure on her little sister Dovespring? She was barely one spring. The expectations and orders that came with being an heir would crush her delicate sister.

And what about the Sand and Rock Tribes? Rock Tribe was without a lead mare. Sand Tribe had no leaders at all.

She shifted and got to her hooves. She needed to walk. She had too many worries and fears and if she didn't move then she would never get to sleep.

She trotted over to a short cliff that overlooked a long stretch of beach. When high tide came the waters smashed against the side of the cliff. Now, at low tide, the soft white sand stretched before her.

She went out onto it; the feeling of the sand shifting under her hooves was calming. She stood at the edge of the surf, staring out at the water and letting the waves lap her hooves.

Broken Wings

Somewhere across this water was Equinox. Home. She felt so close and so far away all at the same time.

Her ears pricked as she heard a sniffing noise. It sounded like crying.

Someone else was on the beach.

She turned her head, searching for the source. Not too far away, a darkish figure with a silvery mane and tail was staring out at the water, sobbing.

It was Kestrel.

Should I go over and talk to her? Making conversation when her trust was in the balance might not be a good idea.

Nevertheless, Cascade found herself wandering toward her. "Hey." She said.

Kestrel's head shot up in alarm, relaxing somewhat when she recognized Cascade. "I didn't know anyone else was here."

"Neither did I." Cascade stood parallel to her, facing the sea. "I couldn't sleep."

"I couldn't either." Kestrel shivered her skin. "The sea is always calm at this time of night. I like to go out here, to clear my head." She inhaled sharply, as if in pain.

"Are you okay?" Cascade asked.

Broken Wings

“It’s nothing.” Kestrel said, glancing sideways at her flank. “These two just always seem to wake up when I’m close to the sea.”

“Two?” Cascade blinked. “Wait...”

“Oh.” Kestrel shifted her hooves uneasily. “I thought it was pretty obvious at this point...”

“You’re with foal with twins?” Cascade shook her head. “I had no idea.”

“That’s okay.” Kestrel said. “I don’t... talk about it much.”

“Are they... Storm’s foals?” Cascade asked.

Kestrel was silent.

“Kestrel?” Cascade turned her head and noticed tears sliding down Kestrel’s face.

What did I say? Cascade bit her lip. “Sorry... I didn’t mean...”

“It’s okay.” Kestrel sighed. “They’re not Storm’s... please don’t tell him that, I don’t know what he would do to me. They’re Darkwind’s.”

“Oh. Wow.” Cascade briefly wondered in her subconscious why others kept telling her these bombshells about their back stories.

Broken Wings

“I can’t tell Storm... I’m not sure what he’d do. Land Horse stallions are finicky about that.” She turned to Cascade. “I know you think Shade is the one who beat up Sunrise. I’m telling you, it’s not possible. I’ve never known a sweeter colt than Shade.”

“I wasn’t accusing anyone.” Cascade said. “Rosesand tends to say the first things that come to mind.”

“I know. It’s just... I don’t know. I don’t know anything anymore.” Kestrel shook her head.

Cascade lowered her head to sniff a wandering hermit crab. The crab, startled by her, retracted into his shell. She sometimes wished she had a shell like that she could retract into, to get away and feel safe.

“Tomorrow, I’ll help you look for the stallions.” Kestrel said. “I’m sure you’ll be happy to be reunited with your mate, Thunder.”

Cascade’s head shot up. “Thunder? Oh no, he’s not my mate. We met like two weeks ago at a battle and I haven’t known him before that...” She realized she was flustered and rambling and forced herself to close her mouth.

“My mistake. I just thought...” Kestrel flipped her mane. “Just looked that way to me.”

Broken Wings

“I mean, I thought maybe... I don’t know... it’s way too complicated. I don’t know...” Cascade groaned. “Now I feel like my brain is muddled.”

“Sorry.” Kestrel chuckled.

“You find this amusing.”

“I rarely fluster anyone. It’s not a skillset I own. And with one sentence I have managed to totally derail you. So yes, I do find it amusing.”

Cascade huffed. “Glad to hear that I could provide comic relief.”

Silence fell again as the warm sea filled their conversation. Cascade inhaled the saltiness of the air. “I don’t get to see the ocean much. There’s a thin strip of Prairie Tribe territory that leads to the sea, but I don’t go there much.”

“Do you like it?” Kestrel asked.

“I do.” Cascade nodded. “I’ve only swam in the ocean once, but it was amazing.”

“Hmm.” Kestrel swished her tail. “I come out here because I find a sort of peace in it. Something about the sea calms my mind.”

Cascade turned her head. “I have a question... you don’t have to answer if it’s too upsetting.”

Broken Wings

“Ask away.”

“When the foals are born... what are you going to do if they are born with wings?”

Kestrel sighed. “I’ll have to remove them, before Storm sees.”

Cascade’s stomach churned. “That’s... grotesque.”

“Better they be grounded for life than killed.” Kestrel said. A yawn escaped her. “I think I’m finally ready to go back to sleep. I suppose I shall see you tomorrow.”

“Sure.” Cascade nodded. Kestrel went back to the field, while Cascade stared out at the slowly sinking moon.

She closed her eyes. *Adonai*. She called out the Name of the King, the Name that brought peace and help. *We are surrounded on all sides by enemies. Sunrise is sick, and the stallions are missing. Please help us to get home.*

She tried to recall something from the Sacred Writings, the inscriptions of the King’s own words taught to all Equinoxians.

But nothing came to mind. Her brain was filled with the sound of owls, the lapping of the sea, and the light of the stars.

She felt impossibly small.

Broken Wings

The moon dipped toward the horizon. She prayed that the day would bring solutions and deliverance.



~Chapter Eleven~

THUNDER GRUNTED AS HE WOKE UP WITH A WING IN HIS FACE AND A HOOF IN HIS FLANK. It was still pretty dark outside, but he could hear the heavy snoring of his brother, and indistinct mumbling of Chance.

Oh great, I'm tangled. He groaned inwardly. There was no way he could get up without waking someone.

He tried to make sense of where all of the parts of himself were. After a long period of careful consideration, he managed to wiggle himself out of the pile.

Chance was mumbling, a look of anxiety written all over his face. He twisted his head from side to side. He was having a nightmare of sorts. From the foam on his back, it had been going on for a while.

Broken Wings

“Chance!” Thunder used a hoof to shake the stallion’s shoulder. Chance’s blue eyes snapped open, a half-shouted mumble rising from his throat and surged upward.

“Be quiet, unless you *want* to wake everyone up.” Thunder hissed. Chance closed his eyes and groaned softly. “Thank you for waking me.”

“Nightmare?” Thunder grunted.

Chance nodded and shivered. “I was... trapped inside of it. I couldn’t wake up, no matter how hard I tried.”

“What about?”

“Sunrise. I just have this really bad feeling that something awful has happened.”

“You want to talk about it?” The words sprung out of Thunder’s mouth before he could take them back in, and he immediately regretted it.

Chance blinked, a little stunned. “I guess I’ve never considered talking about it.”

What have I gotten myself into? Thunder wondered.

“Not sure you would really understand...”

“Oh for the love of seaweed, just tell me already.” Thunder grunted.

Broken Wings

Chance narrowed his eyes. "Seaweed?"

"Common snack in Ocean Tribe. Now instead of acting like a moody yearling, why don't you tell me what's bothering you?" *Before I decide to slap you instead of trying to help.* He mentally added.

Chance sighed. "I guess... it's just this whole prospect of being a dad. Sunrise could foal any day and I'm stuck down here in a hole... and if that stallion Storm does something to either her or the baby..." Chance grunted as he flashed two hind hooves to kick the dirt wall in frustration.

When I woke up yesterday, I never imagined playing therapist to another stallion in a hole. Dad would laugh at me. Thunder grumbled.

"I don't have... a good relationship with my own father. I used to. And now... what if I'm like him? What if I'm not a good father?"

"Enough with the 'what ifs'." Thunder snorted. "What ifs" never bring any good."

Chance huffed. "So what am I supposed to do? Why should I take advice from you?"

Thunder so badly wanted to slap Chance with his tail. It took every ounce of self-control that he owned not to groan. "I don't know what you want, Chance. I'm trying to

help, but you're right, I don't know anything about this. I don't know anything about mares, or romance, or anything like that."

He shook his head as a picture of Cascade came to mind. That was random. This wasn't about Cascade; this was about Chance. *Unfortunately.*

Chance lowered his head. "I want to be there. I feel like I failed the day that we were captured, and I've been failing ever since."

"Failure." Thunder snorted. "My dad always said that Failure was just another rock on the Path of Success that you stumble on."

"You Ocean Tribe pegasi have weird analogies."

"You Prairie Tribe pegasi have complex mood problems."

"What gave you that idea?"

"Oh please! You whine and complain like a weanling. It gets really annoying. If you weren't the brother..." Thunder bit his tongue so hard he tasted blood, finally managing to capture at least half of a sentence that would have gone very badly had he spoken it out loud.

Broken Wings

Oh sand fleas. He wanted to dig himself into a hole and stay there for eternity as Chance's blue eyes widened.

"Wait a second..." Chance's mouth dropped open. "You're... you and... this is..."

"Please, spare me the humiliation of this moment and spit out the words." Thunder moaned.

"Or keep your mouth shut." Rainstorm groaned, half asleep as he stood up. "You two are bickering like a pair of old woodpeckers."

"Or Darkwind and Fireheart." Reefstar chuckled.

Thunder switched his tail. "I take high offense to that."

"So do I." Chance snorted.

"Sorry." Reefstar said. "But you are."

Chance looked at Thunder with a profound realization and somewhat anger on his face over the info that Thunder had accidentally given him.

Perhaps, if I say nothing, he won't kill me.

He could hope.

Broken Wings

He wished... no, he was done with wishing. If Chance took one step closer he was going to dig his way to Equinox. Not that it was possible.

"I have no clue why Chance is sort of half glaring at you, but I think we have bigger problems than your spats." Rainstorm said. "Anyone dream up any ideas overnight?"

"No." Reefstar sighed. "I guess we'll just have to keep digging. Maybe if we make this bigger, it'll make our voices louder. More of an echo."

"I guess that could work." Thunder said.

Rainstorm made his wings glow. He blinked and shifted his shoulders. "I think I'm starting to regain some feeling in my wings."

"Really?" Thunder asked.

"It's all pins and needles. Hurts, but hurting is better than feeling nothing."

Reefstar cocked his head. "Most curious."

Thunder tried not to look at his back. He knew he would never fly again. It was a truth he would have to live with.

"So I guess we just keep digging." Chance sighed. "And hope that we make some progress."

Broken Wings

“I’m sure Sunrise is fine, Chance.” Reefstar said.

~*~

Cascade met Luna at the entrance of the cave. “No difference. Her cuts are getting infected and she’s starting to hallucinate.”

Cascade blinked, slightly stunned at the harshness of the bad news. “What does that mean for the foal?”

“It means that if she doesn’t turn a corner, then it’s going to get worse. She might lose the foal.” Luna shook her head. “The King willing, it doesn’t happen. But she keeps calling out for Chance. So you two need to go out again and look for the stallions.”

“We searched a good deal of the forest yesterday.” Rosesand said. “I’m not sure how big the forest is, but I’m not really sure where we’re supposed to look.”

“Too bad we don’t have a pegasus with us with the Tracking Talent.” Cascade sighed. “That would be really helpful at the moment.”

“Indeed. But we don’t, so you two will have to do. I don’t know the terrain of this area very well, but do you think it’s possible that they could be in some sort of hidden trap? Like a pit or a cave?”

Broken Wings

“Probably. There was a lot of brush around the forest floor, so it would be pretty easy to trap someone.” Rosesand said.

“We’ll go to the point where we ended up last night and keep going from there.” Cascade added. “Maybe we missed something.”

“Excuse me.” A voice from behind interrupted them. Cascade turned her head to see Shade. He cocked his head. “Can I come with you?”

“Where?” Rosesand asked, clearly trying to restrain the suspicion in her voice.

“To look for your friends. I know this area really well and I can be a guide.”

“How do we know that we can trust you?” Rosesand asked.

He lowered his head. “I know you think I’m the one who beat up Sunrise. I didn’t.”

“How can we trust you on that?” Rosesand asked.

“Rosesand, he’s only two springs. Do you really think he has the physical capabilities to beat up Sunrise like she was?” Cascade looked at Shade. “You wouldn’t happen to know *who* did it, would you?”

Broken Wings

“No.” he said quickly. “I talked with her, then I left. My mother was calling me.”

Cascade looked over at Rosesand. “I say we trust him.”

Rosesand swished her tail. “Ehhhh...”

“He’s a colt, Rosesand.” Cascade said. “Let him help us. He knows this area better than we do.”

Rosesand rolled her eyes. “All right, fine. The kid can come with us.”

Cascade tilted her head. “Do you have an idea of where we should look first?”

Shade nodded. “There’s a part of the forest with a lot of sinkholes from old lava tubes. It can be really easy to fall in there. Maybe they got stuck.”

“That sounds plausible.” Rosesand said. “Although it doesn’t explain what they were doing in the first place.”

“Well for now we can focus on finding them.” Cascade said. “Lead the way, Shade.”

Shade nodded, somewhat meekly, and trotted ahead of them towards the forest. Rosesand glared at Cascade. “I’m letting him lead because I’m desperate to find them.” She

Broken Wings

said. “But I’m letting you know now— I don’t trust him one bit.”

“We have no choice.” Cascade said. “Trust him or not, he may be our only way of finding them.”

“All the same.” Rosesand switched her tail. “If this blows up in our faces, I’m blaming you.”

~*~

Thunder scraped hard and fast at the walls of the pit. They had slowly managed to scrape away a few more inches of soil, which they were now standing on top of. Chance’s white face was stained with brown, and he was tearing away at the dirt like there was no tomorrow.

He thought that the opening seemed a little closer than before. Good thing too. He was as parched as a beached whale.

Good grief, Chance was right. He shook his head. *I do have weird analogies.*

Chance was slowly working his way toward him. That same half-shocked, half- angry look was in his eyes. “So,” he grunted, so low you could barely hear his voice over the sound of their work. “You like my sister.”

Broken Wings

“Well...” Thunder pried a large rock out of the wall. “I’m not really sure... I don’t know...”

“Do you find her attractive?” Chance asked.

Thunder turned his head. “Why do I feel like a colt being interviewed by the chief stallion?”

“In the absence of Rowansun, I get to play the role of over-bearing guardian.” Chance said. “She’s only my half-sister, but I need to feel protective over someone, and, well, you’re easy to annoy.”

“Then I won’t give you the satisfaction.” Thunder grunted, snapping a wayward root with his teeth. “And to answer your earlier but slightly off topic question, I suppose I might find her attractive.”

“Aha.” Chance pawed out stones in the dirt. “You know it would never work, right? She’s an heir, you’re an heir, and heirs becoming betrothed to heirs from other tribes gets messy.”

Wow, talk about putting the kelp before the otter. Thunder groaned. *I really need to get rid of these stupid analogies.*

“So why aren’t you an heir?” Thunder asked, desperate to change the subject. “As I recall, you’re older, and you’re a stallion, which would make you the obvious choice.”

Broken Wings

Chance huffed, looking offended. “My relationship with my father is none of your business.”

“Sorry. I was just wondering because if you were to take over Prairie Tribe, then it would fix this little problem that you brought up.”

“So you *are* thinking about it?”

This conversation is running in circles. Thunder began digging at the wall, ignoring anything else that Chance said. Talking with him was way too complicated.



~Chapter Twelve~

“THE SINK HOLES SHOULD BE AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE.” Shade said as they came to the spot where they had left off the night before.

“We’ve already checked this place.” Rosesand snapped. “We didn’t find anything the first time. What makes you think we can find anything now?”

Shade trotted forward, stepping with great deliberation. Suddenly he stopped and leapt back just as a variety of dead branches crumpled into a hole.

“Doesn’t take much to set off a pit.” He said. “I listen to my hooves. Once the noise hollows out, then I know that I’m getting close.”

Broken Wings

“So how are we supposed to find the stallions?” Cascade asked.

“Simple. Try to find a hole that’s already been triggered. They can be hard to spot—the winds from the sea always rattle the branches and knock down more over the pits. But my guess is that they’ll start shouting once they hear us coming.” Shade stepped forward. “Tread lightly. If the sound of the branches beneath your hoof’s changes, get back immediately. It only takes a second to be trapped.”

They picked their way around the pits, Shade darting left and right to trigger them and make a clear path.

“This would be so much easier with wings.” Rosesand groaned, managing to twist between a gnarled tree and a rather ominous hole.

“There’s two pits ahead that have already been triggered!” Shade exclaimed.

Rosesand pricked her ears. “I hear voices. Faint, and far away, but they’re there.”

Cascade paused and listened hard. Finally, she picked them out. They were very faint, but she could hear it.

“Come on!” Shade darted ahead. Rosesand and Cascade followed behind, heading towards the holes. They

Broken Wings

stopped in front of the first one. It yawned out of the earth like an angry mouth.

“Rainstorm?” Rosesand called out, pausing to hear if there was any reply. No answer.

“There’s something glowing in the bottom of this hole.” Shade said, sticking his head toward it.

“Glowing?” Cascade looked down and saw an orangish glowing blob. “Guys?”

“Cascade!” Thunder’s voice echoed up to her. “We weren’t sure if it was you. Thank goodness!”

“We’re going to get you out.” Cascade said.

“How? This pit is really deep. And I don’t think Reefstar could fly out to help us.” Rosesand said.

Cascade swished her tail and looked around the forest for anything they could use. A rather long fig root, entwined from the top of the tree down to the earth, caught her eye. “What if we used that.... and then strung it over the top of that tree branch... and used it as a pulley to lift them up?”

“It could work.” Rosesand said. She stuck her head in the pit. “Hey Rainstorm!”

“Yes?”

Broken Wings

“Don’t they use pulleys in Forest Tribe?”

“They do sometimes.” He said.

“Would you know whether making one to pull you guys out would work?”

There was a pause. “Well, I don’t see why it couldn’t.”

“Do you know how to make one?”

“No. I’ve only seen it done.”

“Guess we’ll have to figure it out on our own.” Cascade said.

“Do you know where we should start?” Rosesand asked.

“We need to get that root down and see if it will be long enough.” Cascade said.

Shade grabbed the fig root in his teeth and wiggled it around. The root thankfully hadn’t taken hold of the earth, and it came down in one long strand.

She took the root from Shade and lowered it into the pit. “Owch!” Chance yelped. “Watch where you’re poking that thing.”

Broken Wings

“It’s a nice young root.” Rainstorm said. “Should be flexible enough.”

“Plenty long enough to stick down here.” Thunder said. “But I think you’ll need twice the length if you’re going to use it as a pulley, and then perhaps another two winglengths so we can tie it around ourselves.”

“He’s right.” Rosesand said. “This root isn’t long enough.”

Cascade sighed. “Well this is the longest one I can find.”

“Wait! I can make one that’s longer!” Thunder stomped and a large vine curled out of the earth, ensnaring around the root and growing in length until it appeared at the top. Then Thunder cut it at the base with his teeth. “I think that should be long enough.” He said.

“Couldn’t you use your fancy plant powers to free us earlier?” Chance snapped.

“And how would you suggest I do that? There’s only so much you can do with vines.”

“I don’t know, make them into steps so we could climb out?”

Broken Wings

“I don’t have the Biosynthesis talent. My abilities to control the growth of the plant are limited.” Thunder shook his head. “Why are we even arguing about this? Quick, make the pulley system before I go insane.”

Rosesand had already finished unwinding it. “So how do we get it over that branch?” She asked. “And are you sure it’ll hold their weight?”

“I’m sure.” Cascade said. “And I think that if we tie a rock to the end, or something equally heavy, then we can throw it over the branch and then use the weight to guide the vine down to them.”

“Okay.” Rosesand nodded. “So we need a weight.”

Shade picked up a short log with his teeth. “How about this?”

“That looks good.” Cascade wound the vine across the log and pulled it tight with her teeth. Then she picked it up by the vine, in her mouth, and looked at the branch.

She twisted her neck and tossed the vine. It didn’t even hit the branch.

“Thorns!” She growled.

“Well don’t just stand there. Try again.” Rosesand said.

Broken Wings

She sighed, picked up the log, and threw it. It hit the branch with a clunk, but still didn't make it over.

"Try again." Rosesand said. "They say that the third time's the charm."

"Who said that?" Cascade grumbled.

"I have no idea. I just heard it somewhere and it sounded inspiring for the moment. Now stop gabbling and throw it already."

"All right, all right." Cascade sighed. She twisted her neck and threw the vine again.

And this time, it sailed it a perfect arch above the branch,

"Excellent!" Rosesand said. "Now lower the vine down."

Cascade stepped forward, slowly releasing the vine inch by inch. The rock dipped down, swinging slightly, disappearing into the blackness of the hole.

"Grab on!" Rosesand shouted. "Tie it around your belly."

The rope tightened. "Got it!" Rainstorm shouted.

Broken Wings

Rosesand bit the extra end of the vine, and they pulled back together. Slowly, they lifted Rainstorm up to the edge of the hole.

“Thank you.” He scrambled onto solid earth and shook, spraying dirt everywhere.

One at a time, they pulled up the other stallions. Thunder smiled at Cascade. “Thanks.”

“Let’s hope there’s a river on the way back.” Reefstar said. “I’m parched.”

“How did you guys get stuck in a hole?” Cascade asked.

“I don’t know.” Thunder said. “We kind of just woke up there, with no memory as to how we got inside.”

“It was weird.” Reefstar snorted.

Chance looked between the two mares. “Where is Sunrise?”

“Back at the herd.” Cascade said. She lowered her gaze, not wanting her eyes to give away her thoughts.

She should have known she couldn’t fool her brother.

“What’s wrong?” He asked. “Cas?”

Broken Wings

Rosesand swished her tail. "Sunrise was beaten up the other day. She's sick."

"Sick?" Chance blinked. "Like how sick?"

"She lost consciousness and still hasn't woken up." Cascade said.

Chance clenched his teeth. "Take me to her. Now."

"Okay. Follow us." Rosesand trotted ahead, everyone trailing behind her.

Cascade glanced over at her brother's face and her heart ached. She had never seen such a deep look of despair cross over him.

~*~

As they entered the valley, Storm met them at the entrance. "I see you found your stallions." He grunted.

"They fell into a pit." Rosesand said briskly.

"Well, I suppose that can happen when you wander in these woods." Storm said. "You shouldn't have wandered so far."

There was something menacing in his gaze. Something that made Cascade want to run very far away.

Broken Wings

“Shade, your mother has been asking for you. I suggest you go see her before you worry her any more than you have.” Storm said.

Shade nodded. “Yes sir.”

They trotted past the stallion, Chance’s paces uneasy. “Maybe...” He was muttering. “Maybe she’ll be awake by the time we get back. Maybe she’ll be better.”

“I’m really sorry, Chance.” Cascade murmured.

“It’s not your fault. It’s that creep, Storm’s. I know he has something to do with this.” Chance lashed his tail. “I just hope she’s better by now.”

But when they met Luna at the front of the cave, her face was grave. “I’m glad to see you have all returned safely.” She nickered.

“What about Sunrise?” Chance asked. “I was told she was sick.”

Luna sighed. “There is little difference. She has a high fever and I worry for the baby.”

Chance’s eyes widened. “Can I see her?”

“Of course.” Luna nodded. “She’s in the cave over there.”

Broken Wings

She paused and turned toward Cascade. "Think as hard as you can, my dear. You have many ideas in that head of yours. Sunrise needs to get home, and I know you can think of a way to get there."

Cascade nodded solemnly. Thunder nudged her shoulder. "Talk about pressure."

"Got any ideas?" She asked.

"Just like I said before. A raft. But I was thinking seaweed and driftwood. Reefstar and I could probably work on one tonight and be done by morning."

Cascade nodded. "Just... please watch your back. I don't want you to disappear again. You really scared me."

"Don't worry. I'll be working with two hooves and fighting with the others." He nuzzled her mane. "I missed you."

Her heart skipped a beat. "You did?"

He nodded. "You could have helped me combat Chance's whining. That's literally almost all he did in that hole."

She found herself laughing. When was the last time she had done that? "He does whine a lot."

Broken Wings

“Yeah.” Thunder chuckled. “You wouldn’t happen to know anything about this feud with his father?”

“Dad and Chance don’t let me know anything about their past. All I know is that Chance is the son of my father and his first lead mare. Emberpine’s dead, so I can’t ask her about it, and Mom doesn’t know anything about it.” She cocked her head. “Why? Did you find out anything?”

“No.” Thunder shook his head. “He just mentioned a fear of not being a good dad.” He looked over at Reefstar. “I’ll go inform Reefstar of our plan.”

“Good idea.” Cascade nodded. She watched Thunder trot away, talk with Reefstar, and the two brothers galloped towards the sea.

She also saw Storm’s face in the distance. His stare was terrifyingly angry and cold.

Storm was definitely more than who he said. And they needed to get off this island before he decided to reveal his true colors.



~Chapter Thirteen~

“WAKE UP! ALL OF YOU NEED TO WAKE UP!”

Why does this feel like a sense of déjà vu? Cascade wondered as she and her friends got to their feet. Kestrel was standing in front of them, a look of alarm on her face.

“What’s wrong? Why did you have to wake us at this unholy hour of the morning?” Rosesand grumbled.

“You have to get off the island.” Kestrel said. “I just came from informing Thunder and Reefstar. Storm plans to kill you just before dawn. You need to get out *now*.”

“Why would Storm want to kill us?” Luna asked.

“I don’t know.” Kestrel shook her head. “I heard him talking it over with an older colt. I don’t know his name... but I heard it all. Trapping the stallions. Beating up Sunrise. It was all Storm, or at least his accomplice.”

“This doesn’t make any sense...” Cascade said.

Broken Wings

“That’s just your sleep-deprived brain talking.”
Rosesand snapped. “Makes perfect sense to me.”

“I don’t care what kind of sense it makes to you. You have to get off the island.” Kestrel said. She paused for a moment to wince.

“Are you all right?” Cascade asked.

“I’m fine. I’m more worried about you.” Kestrel said, biting her lip. “The stallions are waiting for you all at the beach. I have a diversion in mind that should buy you enough time to get away safely.”

Luna had a queer look in her eyes– something like suspicion mixed with screened horror– but if she was disturbed by something, she didn’t show it. Instead she dipped her head and turned to Cascade. “Go help your brother get Sunrise. Pass the news on.”

Nodding, Cascade cantered over to the cave. Chance was stretched out next to Sunrise, a look of despair on his sleeping face.

“Chance, wake up!” Cascade whispered.

Her brother snorted and shook all over, his blue eyes suddenly wild. “What? What is it?”

Broken Wings

“Storm plans to kill us *tonight*.” Cascade replied. “I need your help to carry Sunrise to the raft that Reefstar and Thunder have made.”

A look of anger flashed in Chance’s eyes and he jumped up to help Cascade. Sunrise groaned slightly but didn’t stir. It was probably for the better that she stay asleep.

Slowly, eventually aided by Rosesand and Rainstorm, they managed to get to the beach. Kestrel was talking with Luna, who had that odd look again on her face, except now it was blatant horror. Kestrel flashed her a pleading glare and Luna was silent.

It wasn’t a threat. Luna knew something, and it was a silent request to not say anything.

Cascade was impressed with the stallion’s work. The “raft” was an intricately woven connection of thick pieces of driftwood, what seemed to be tube coral, and seaweed. It was quite large and actually seemed to be somewhat comfortable.

“All aboard!” Reefstar whispered. “We’ve got to put some distance between us and this island.”

Kestrel was gritting her teeth, the pain obvious in her eyes. Cascade felt a growing sense of concern for their new friend. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

Broken Wings

Kestrel and Luna exchanged glances. "It's nothing I haven't already experienced. Luna can explain later. I must get back to the herd." She smiled. "May the currents be in your favor."

"And may the King keep you well." Cascade nickered, choosing to use an Equinoxian greeting.

Rosesand and Rainstorm gently set Sunrise onto the raft. "Come on, Cas. Time to go." Chance said.

Cascade smiled to Kestrel. "Thank you for your help. I hope that one day, the King will show His light and glory in its fullest to you."

"My dear, I think you've already done that just by coming here. You are quite a leader. I expect that you shall be a good ruler." Kestrel turned, looking over her shoulder. "I have to go. Goodbye, Equinoxians."

Murmured goodbyes were said. Thunder and Reefstar shoved off the raft, pushing it out farther and farther into the water. Reefstar mumbled the spell and Rainstorm, Sunrise, and Luna's wings returned. Rainstorm managed to flex his navy-feathered wings. "I think I might be able to fly again now."

"In that case, take a vine." Reefstar said. "You and I can pull while my little brother acts as the rudder."

Broken Wings

“How generous of you.” Thunder grunted, now bobbing along in the waves. Cascade sniffed the salt water. “Is it hard to swim this deep?”

Thunder cocked his head. “You’ve never swam in the ocean before?”

“Only in the shallows, where it’s safer. Besides, we don’t have waterproof feathers like you Ocean Tribe pegasi.”

“All right then.” Thunder said. “It’s like this— you have to keep your hooves moving. It’s called “treading water”.”

She slipped into the waves. At first, she was shocked with the coldness of it, but after paddling for a bit, she found she could keep her head afloat.

“All right!” Thunder nodded. “That’s the way it’s done.”

“So now I guess I can help you.” She said.

“I suppose you can.” Thunder said.

The island was growing smaller behind them. A scream, far off and distant, echoed from the beach where they had left.

Cascade’s head whipped toward the island. “What on earth was that?”

Broken Wings

Luna closed her eyes and shuddered, immediately opening them.

“Luna?” Rosesand asked. “Is there something you’re not telling us?”

Luna sighed, a look of grief in her eyes. “When Kestrel came to warn us, I thought I smelled wormwood on her breath.”

Wormwood. Cascade knew little about the herb, other than it helped with parasites and could induce labor. Her eyes widened. “She ate it?”

Luna nodded. “I talked with her privately, asking why she would eat it. She said that there needed to be a distraction strong enough that Storm wouldn’t notice that we were gone. That was probably her scream we just heard.”

“But if the twins are born with wings...” Cascade said. “Then he’ll know she’s a Shakiran. She could end up dead.”

Luna shook her head. “She chose to take that risk. I told her on behalf of all of us that we appreciated it deeply.”

Sunrise’s eyes fluttered open. “Hungry...” She mumbled.

Broken Wings

Chance was at her side in a minute. Cascade continued paddling in the water beside Thunder, trying to drive out the resurfaced thoughts in her mind of Sunrise going into labor early and not surviving.

They were free. But there was no telling if it was too late.

~*~

Five days.

Cascade was fairly sure she never wanted to see the ocean again. She had caught onto swimming pretty quickly and traded shifts with Thunder, steering. Rainstorm and Reefstar exchanged turns pulling. Between wind and currents, most of the shores they saw by the end of the first day were Western Unicorn territories, where Earth Clan resided. The distant mountains of Rock Tribe looked like tiny trout teeth on the horizon.

Slowly, however, those mountains grew. By the evening of the second day, Mt. Ashfield was in view. Cascade couldn't help but remember the battle that had taken place around it– the battle where they had been captured.

The battles usually went down in the Records with names– the Battle of Anger, Shredded Manes, Fallen Tears, things like that.

Broken Wings

If she could name the battle they were in, she would name it the Battle of Broken Wings.

The mountains loomed, rose, fell behind, and shrank as they made their way towards the south. Though the mountains were in Rock Tribe territory, landing was impossible with the black cliffs that rose over the ocean. It took hours just to get out of the current pulling them toward the jagged rocks.

Day three came and went. Luna knew a secret for purifying salt water, and Thunder dove for seaweed, but there was no shade. The end of Cascade's nose and her socks blistered with sunburn.

Day four brought a storm. It was brief, and they survived the waves and wind, but it set them off course. They'd lost the shoreline. It took swimming all night until the dawn of the fifth to get back on course. They were soon approaching Feather Island, the once-peninsula piece of land that had been battered and torn by waves and wind until it was a feather-shaped island barring the sandy inlet between Prairie Tribe and Forest Tribe from the brunt of the sea.

It was the first glimpse of her home that Cascade had seen in three weeks.

Sunrise squinted. "Is that what I think it is?"

Broken Wings

“It is.” Chance’s blue eyes were cloudy with tears. “It’s home.”

Reefstar stopped flying and set down on the raft. “Current’s pulling us in, Thunder.” He said. “You can take a break.”

Thunder heaved himself onto the raft, shaking. “I feel like a shriveled prune with hooves.” He grunted.

“What’s a prune?” Rosesand asked.

“It’s a dried plum. Favorite Ocean Tribe treat. Plums fall from the trees to the earth and then we bake them in the sun, then store them in caves. They keep for a really long time. Better than oranges.”

“Oh!” Rosesand said. “We do something similar with dates in Sand Tribe.”

The raft floated between the arch under Feather Island. Now the sandy beach was in full view. Sunrise leaned so far forward Chance yanked on her mane before she tipped the whole raft over.

“I wonder if there are any patrols out there.” Cascade said. “Maybe they’ll see us.”

Luna lifted her half wing, her silver feathers shining against the sunlight. The wings of those who’d been smoked

Broken Wings

had healed, new feathers growing in to replace the brittle dead ones. Luna's new feathers were unusually reflective.

"That's bright." Sunrise winced.

"Good. That means they'll see it." Rosesand replied.

They waited, slowly drawing closer to the island.

Suddenly a black-brown speck rose in the air. Cascade squinted and realized that it was a pegasus.

"There's a patrol!" She shouted. "Up there! Can you see it?"

Luna shifted her wing, making it flash. Another lighter speck rose, and Cascade heard faint shouts.

"They see us! They see us!" Rosesand squealed.

The sound increased in volume as they got closer. Suddenly a stampede of bright-winged pegasi galloped over the hill, their long legs marking them as members of Prairie Tribe.

"It's them! They're here!" Joyous voices called out and shouted to each other, spreading the news from steed to steed.

A red dun with roaning on her flanks and light lime-colored wings flapped toward them. Cascade felt hot tears in her eyes when she recognized her mother, Crimsonpine.

Broken Wings

“Eaglefeather, Hawkfeather! Come help me.” Crimsonpine shouted as she hovered closer to the raft, swallowing her tears of joy to get to business. The strong commanders flew after her and each took a vine. Flying in tandem, they quickly pulled the raft to shore.

“Home!” Sunrise squeaked, flopping down to the sand to roll and scratch her back. “Land! Glorious land!”

Crimsonpine nosed Cascade all over, nosing her with her muzzle like she would for a scared foal. Cascade nibbled Crimsonpine’s forelock. “I’m glad to see you too, Mother.”

“You had me so worried.” Crimsonpine snorted. “When I heard you were captured... I thought we would never see you again. Yet here you are! Thank the King!”

“Cascadesky!” Rowansun shouted, galloping forward. “I am glad to see you well, daughter.”

“Hi Daddy.” Cascade nickered, shoving her nose into her father’s broad chest, feeling secure like she did when she was a small filly.

“Your wings...” he began, great grief in his voice.

She’d forgotten her wings.

Her head dipped down. This was what she had been afraid of. “I have caused you great shame, Father. They took

Broken Wings

my wings... I am one of the Grounded. I am not worthy to be your daughter.”

“Do not say that.” He said. “You are as much my daughter... as Chance is my son.”

Cascade jerked her head up and stared at Chance. Chance pinned his ears. “Don’t call me that.” He grunted. “I’m not your son. You said so yourself.”

“When are you going to let–” Rowansun shook his head. “Never mind.”

Cascade eyed Chance, noticing the fury in his posture. A new possibility opened up in her mind.

Had it been Chance all along who had disowned himself?

“You may be Cascade as a permanent name now... I cannot change the laws. But it is what we have always called you. You are still my heir. You are still my daughter. And you shall still one day be lead mare.”

He turned to the others. “I know you must want to get back home to your tribes as soon as possible. I will make arrangements for patrols to escort you back home.”

“Thank you.” Rosesand said.

Broken Wings

Rowansun dipped his head in respect to the tribal leaders. “Stay if you would like, however. We will have a feast to celebrate the return of my children!”

The Prairie Tribe pegasi cheered. Cascade chuckled. *Who doesn’t love a feast?*

“Come! We’ll go back to the fields and feast there.” Rowansun said.

Everyone began moving in that direction. There was a certain oneness that came with being in her herd... the sense that as she was walking, she was a part of something. It was her tribe. Her people. Her family.

She was home.

Her sense of peace was suddenly shattered by a shout. Chance came running up behind them, eyes wild. “Help!” He said. “I need help!”

“What happened?” Luna asked.

“Sunrise... she just collapsed!”



~Chapter Fourteen~

“OUT OF MY WAY!” Mapleberry, Prairie Tribe’s Healer, paved a path through the pegasi with her strong voice. Relief rushed through Cascade. If there was anyone who could help, it was Mapleberry. The mare knew her job well.

Cascade managed to get to the front, just behind Thunder. Sunrise’s eyes were glazed and she was writhing from side to side, her sweat tinged with red.

She hadn’t realized how dehydrated her friend had been.

“Back up.” Mapleberry’s apprentice, Brightsilver, spread her wings to push back the crowd so Mapleberry could work. Fear threatened to choke Cascade as the Healer and apprentice blocked her view.

“What’s going on?” She mumbled. “What’s wrong?”

Broken Wings

Luna shook her head, eyes grave. "Could be a number of things."

Brightsilver ran to her mentor's side, at her aid. "I need wormwood." Mapleberry whispered, so low Cascade almost didn't hear it.

"Wormwood? Why do you need wormwood?" Cascade asked, her heart dropping to her feet.

Mapleberry turned, her dark brown eyes sorrowful. She said something to Chance, then walked over to the five companions.

"Was Sunrise ever... in an accident? Did she fall or... gain physical trauma?" She whispered.

"A stallion beat her to the point of unconsciousness. She managed to escape into a cave before passing out." Rosesand said.

Mapleberry sighed. "She's bleeding internally, dehydrated, and I think she might have some brain swelling... perhaps a head injury, aggravated by the sun and salt water."

The heaviness of what Mapleberry was saying fell on Cascade like a pile of rocks. "She's..."

"She's dying." Mapleberry sighed, in a voice thickened with sorrow. "I'm giving her wormwood so we can

Broken Wings

hopefully save the foal... that in a combination with feleran root should at least ease her pain.”

Feleran root. Cascade vaguely remembered that it was a plant native to Equinox that had a sedative effect. “Have you told Chance?”

“He refuses to believe it, but yes, I have. There’s little chance of her surviving, and not much better for the foal’s survival.” Mapleberry said. “But Sunrise managed to come to her senses long enough to ask me to save the baby, so I will honor her wishes.”

Brightsilver came back with the wormwood and feleran, handing it to Mapleberry. She backed the crowd up farther. “Please people, provide some breathing room.”

Mapleberry’s large green and pink wings were spread over her patient. Probably for the better. Cascade wasn’t sure that she wanted to see what was going on.

Pegasi dispersed. Some who knew Sunrise better stayed behind— others who considered her just a name wandered away, whispering in sorrow.

It seemed like all of creation held its breath as the precious minutes to save the foal ticked by.

A small, whinnying squeak jerked heads up. Ears pricked as Mapleberry handed the wet newborn to her

Broken Wings

assistant as she worked to make Sunrise as comfortable as possible in her last moments.

Brightflower suddenly gasped. “Uh... Mapleberry... you need to see this.”

Cascade watched as she lifted her wings. The foal, already struggling with its feet, was snow white, from the tip of her muzzle to the end of her brushy tail. Each feather was a glistening, blinding white, and the wide, fluttering eyes were dark brown, the color of good soil. Her hooves were pinkish tan, and her muzzle was lightly shaded with the same tone.

“I never...” Mapleberry mumbled.

“Colt or filly?” Chance asked, coming closer to see his foal.

“Filly. Snow white in color with dark eyes... is it possible?” Mapleberry said with wonder.

A memory... a lesson from long ago, from the Sacred Writings, about the Filly of Snow. One of two fillies who were to pave the way for the King’s second return. It, like many other prophecies in the Sacred Writing, had been assumed to be far away.

But there she was, laying on the ground in front of them! A white filly with dark eyes.

Mapleberry turned to Chance. "Your daughter is the Filly of Snow."

Chance blinked, seeming to be in shock.

"Where is she?" Sunrise's weak, rattling voice was barely more than a whisper. Mapleberry nodded to Brightsilver and the two brought the foal over to Sunrise's head.

Mapleberry looked behind at Cascade and nodded. She, Thunder, Reefstar, Luna, Rainstorm, and Rosesand slowly crept closer to their friend.

Sunrise couldn't move her head. She only managed to stretch her nose toward the white filly, a smile creeping on her face. "She's got your head, Chance." She mumbled.

Chance nodded, eyes not on his foal, but Sunrise. The buckskin coughed painfully. "I suppose I'm dying."

"Don't say it." Chance hissed. "Don't say it. You're going to be okay."

She ignored him. With all of her strength, she managed to lift her head to nuzzle the foal's wide, white ears. "Snowfire." She whispered, setting her head down. "Your name is Snowfire. Be proud of it, little one. It carries your history."

Broken Wings

The white filly let out another timid squeak, bobbing her head.

“You watch out for her. Don’t let her get into trouble.” Sunrise said, eyes on Cascade. “Chance needs all the help he can get.”

Tears were collecting in Cascade’s eyes. She managed to nod.

“Be there for our daughter, Chance.” Sunrise said, taking another painful breath. “Don’t... run away in your grief over me.”

“You’re going to get better.” He said, in a voice that sounded more like he was trying to solace himself than convince her.

“I’m sorry.” She whispered. “And I... I love you.”

She inhaled and exhaled with terrifying difficulty. She managed to shove her nose closer to her daughter’s ear. “You behave well for your daddy.” She said. “Don’t scare him too much.”

The filly nibbled her muzzle.

Another breath. Cascade could tell it was only her determination to say these last few words that had kept her alive for so long.

Broken Wings

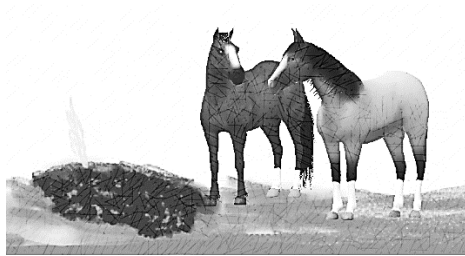
“And Cascade...” She blinked hard. “Watch out for Snowfire. She’ll need you.”

Cascade nodded, letting her tears fall to the ground. “I promise, Sunrise.”

Sunrise nodded, letting her head rest on Snowfire’s back. Her eyes flashed opened and an otherworldly look of utter joy spread on her face. “I see the King!”

Those four words were the last she spoke as her body suddenly softened and relaxed into the endless sleep of death, still wrapped around her daughter.

Chance laid down next to her, rested his head on her mane, and sobbed without shame.



Epilogue

“SUNRISE WAS MORE THAN A MEMBER OF PRAIRIE TRIBE,” Rowansun’s strong voice carried out to the Tribe as he stood by the fresh grave. Pink feathers and flowers stuck up from it, put there by those who knew and loved Sunrise best. Cascade shuffled closer to Thunder, unable to take her eyes off of the dirt mound. He nickered and nibbled her mane comfortingly.

“She was a friend. A daughter. A mother. A mate. And while her time here in this world was far too short, she will be remembered well by those who loved her most.” He looked at Chance. “Would you like to say anything for your mate?”

Chance shook his head. He’d been silent since Sunrise’s death, never speaking to anyone.

Broken Wings

Rowansun nodded and turned to the grave. “May the sun shine and the grass be sweet for you in the King’s Eternal Pastures, Sunrise, daughter of Sandfeather and Starshine. Let His ways always guide you home.”

There was the customary moment of silence. Cascade didn’t cry. She had already shed tears in grief—all that was left was a hollow mourning and the comforting knowledge that Sunrise was reunited with her mother in the King’s eternal pastures.

She glanced over to the side. Little Snowfire stood under the protective wing of Bluetwig, mate of Second Commander Blackfeather. Under her other wing stood her newborn filly Dawnwillow, a bay Appaloosa who, according to Crimsonpine, caused much distress between her parents over her runty left wing. The family was under a lot of strife, and while it wasn’t Cascade’s first choice, Bluetwig was the only mare with colostrum. Snowfire’s survival depended on that mare.

She leaned against Thunder, enjoying the solid feeling of his shoulder. Even after the funeral was over and everyone dispersed, they still stood there.

“You okay?” Thunder mumbled.

“I just need a minute.” Cascade sighed. “At least she’s at peace now.”

Broken Wings

“Yeah.” Thunder nodded.

She looked over at him. “The others are leaving right after the funeral... what about you?”

He chewed his lip. “I’m going home. I haven’t seen my parents in a long time... not since Everblaze died. I need to see them.”

“Everblaze...” Cascade’s eyes widened. “That Everblaze? The one you mentioned to me? She... died?”

“About three hours before I met you.” Thunder said. “She looked almost exactly like you, too.”

“So, that’s why you were so protective of me.” While the thought was sweet, it also kind of deflated her thoughts. *I guess I was wrong all along.*

“Well... I watched my sister burn before my eyes with her own fire because of what I thought was my fault.” Thunder said. “I had this... drive to protect someone. To try to make up for what I had failed to do the first time.” He sighed. “And then I realized something.”

Her ears pricked. “What was that?”

He ducked his head, flipping his forelock in front of his eyes. He glanced at her with one eye. “I realized I was falling in love with you.”

Broken Wings

Cascade inhaled sharply as her brain processed his words. She felt her skin prickle as he set his gaze on her. "Thunder... I don't...I don't know what to say."

Thunder smiled. "Oh indeed?"

"I'm not sure how something... like this... could work out." She stuttered. "We're heirs, Thunder. We have responsibilities."

"With Reefstar home, he's the one who'll be next in line. And if your brother and dad ever work things out, then both of us will be free."

Cascade nodded. "I suppose that's true... but what about tribes? You're going back to Ocean Tribe."

"Well... that's the second part of my plans." Thunder said. "I do want to go home. But I have two missions there. One is to comfort my parents and mourn the loss of my sister. I haven't had the chance to do that since we were captured right after the battle... and you know the rest."

"The second... is to ask their blessing for you to become my mate." He looked at her. "What do you think of that?"

Cascade's jaw dropped. She stared at him. "Thunder, you're serious?"

Broken Wings

He nodded, dark eyes shining. “And then when they give their blessing, I’m coming back here and asking the blessing of your father. Then, I’m going to ask you.”

“Thunder...” Cascade blinked. “I can’t believe it.”

He tilted his head. “If I were to ask you now, what would you say?”

She stood still for a moment, her brain reeling. Then she shoved her nose in his mane. “I would say yes. Yes, I will become your mate.”

Thunder nodded. “Oh good. Now I have that vote of confidence to go off of when I announce to my father that I’m moving to another tribe.”

“You’re going to stay in Prairie Tribe?” She asked.

“After floating on a raft for five days, I’m not sure I ever want to see the ocean again.” Thunder chuckled.

Reefstar approached them from far off. “We’ve got to get going if we’re going to be there before sunset.” He said. He looked at Thunder with something like a smirk and a hopeful smile. Thunder nodded and Reefstar slapped his back with a wing. “Way to go, little bro.”

“Ow.” Thunder shifted his weight. “My back is still raw.”

Broken Wings

“Oh. Sorry.” Reefstar said.

Thunder looked at Cascade. “I’ll come back. Don’t worry.”

She nodded. “I know you will.”

~*~

Chance stood on the beach, looking at the sea. The wind was cold and chilled his skin, but he didn’t notice. He was too numb inside.

His mate, the love of his life, had died on the sand that he stood on.

This entire place... he would never be able to think of it without thinking of Sunrise. Everything from the trees to the grass would remind him of her.

And that precious daughter, the Snow Filly? He wasn’t ready– he couldn’t be a father. Not without Sunrise.

Perhaps he needed to take a short trip away from the Tribe. Clear his head. Come back when he could figure out what he wanted.

He began to walk towards the forests. Hoofsteps behind him made him stop and turn.

It was Rowansun.

Broken Wings

“Hello, Nightleaf.” He said.

Chance switched his tail. “That’s not my name.” They were the first words he’d spoken in days, and he meant it.

“It’s what your mother and I named you. So yes, it is your name. Though you chose another does not make it any less than that.” Rowansun sighed. “I didn’t come to argue. I came to talk.”

Chance huffed. “I’m really not in the mood.”

“Well I think it needs to be said. For the good of your sisters and my grandfilly.” Rowansun said.

Chance inhaled sharply. “Is this... grief what you experienced? When Mom died?”

Rowansun nodded. “It’s a terrible sorrow, that feels as if you have been ripped in two.”

“I can’t go back to the Tribe. Not yet.” Chance sighed. “I’m leaving for a bit. Clear my head. Not forever, just until I figure out what I need.”

“Running away isn’t going to solve your problems.” Rowansun said. “Trust me, I know.”

The question that had been lingering in his mind for the past five springs finally came tumbling out of his mouth.

Broken Wings

“Why did you get another mate, Dad? Not even *three months* after Mom’s death.”

Rowansun pressed his lips and sighed. “Emberpine was my first love. After she was gone, I felt like I needed someone else. And not just to fill in the role of lead mare. Crimsonpine sparked a piece of hope inside of me. That things... could be okay.” He shook his head. “But if I had known it would drive us apart like this...”

Chance coughed, eyes misting with tears. “I don’t think I could ever have a new mate.”

“Perhaps not. I don’t think running away is the best option either. Your daughter will need you in the years to come. Especially given her... destiny.”

“I’m not ready.”

“You’re never ready to be a father, Chance. It’s a role you have to step up to when it comes.” Rowansun smiled. “I certainly felt that way when it came to you.”

Chance was silent, staring toward the forest.

Rowansun shook his mane. “Go or stay. Just know that even though you’ve cut yourself off, I still consider you my heir and my son. The choice is yours.”

Broken Wings

He trotted back up the embankment. Chance stood for a long time, halfway between the forest and the field.

Finally, with a heavy breath, he inhaled and ducked into the forest.

~*~

TWO WEEKS LATER...

Cascade's skin prickled as her little sister Dovespring wove a lily into her mane.

"You're gonna be so pretty!" She squealed.

"Thank you." She looked at her reflection in the creek. Petals sprinkled through black mane and tail, filling her nose with the fragrant scent.

It was the day of her Promise Ceremony with Thunder. He'd returned, as he'd said, and her father had agreed to let them be betrothed.

And now today was her day. The first day of the rest of her life, her new life, with Thunder.

Rowansun blinked as he came close to her. "You're beautiful, Cassy."

Cascade smiled. "Thank you."

Broken Wings

“Is Chance coming to the Ceremony?” Dovespring asked.

Rowansun shook his head. “I’m afraid not.”

That was disappointing. Chance had disappeared the day of Sunrise’s funeral and hadn’t returned since.

She was hoping he’d come back for Snowfire’s sake. But at this point she was inclined to believe that he was never coming back.

“Come on now, you two.” Crimsonpine said. “We can’t keep the boy waiting forever. He’s looking awful silly, standing up there by the willow all by himself.” She smiled at Cascade. “You look beautiful.”

“Thank you, mother.” Cascade said.

She followed Rowansun towards the willow tree. Thunder shifted at the front, looking nervous. His eyes widened when he saw her. “Wow. You’re radiant.” He muttered.

Rowansun gave him a sidelong look. Patches of sweat formed on Thunder’s flanks.

“Today we stand here to complete the Promise Ceremony of bringing Thunder, son of Tidebeach and Coralwave, and Cascade, daughter of Rowansun and

Broken Wings

Crimsonpine, in union. Exchange...” Rowansun blinked, pausing uncomfortably. Normally at this point, they would exchange feathers. But the burning of their wings had made this impossible.

But they had something else in mind.

Thunder carefully picked up a piece of blue-green coral. Careful drying had made it flexible. He wove it into her mane where the feather normally would be placed. Bits crumbled off and sprinkled her mane with glittering blue.

She took a long, purple leaf and wove it into his mane. It looked somewhat more like a feather, except more prickly.

“I therefore complete the Promise Ceremony of Thunder and Cascade!” Rowansun shouted.

Whoops and hollering exploded from the herd. Pegasi reared and flapped their wings while foals squealed.

Cascade looked at Thunder and smiled. “Never thought that a battle and a capture would lead to all of this.”

“Neither did I.” Thunder said. “But I couldn’t imagine anything better.”

~About the Author~

Allie Lynn is a passionate and talented writer who first and foremost desires to honor God with her writing. She has been passionate about “all things horses” from a very young age, which greatly influences her work. Her desire is to produce equine-based fiction that is inspiring and entertaining without compromising her faith.

When she is not diving into her fictional world, she is writing articles and short stories for magazines and websites. You can follow her work at www.equineonthemind.com.