

Night of the Fright Flight

Part One: The Disgraceful Scout

“Scout Correl, watch where you’re going!” Commander Rockwall barked. I snapped back into consciousness and saw that Fuchsia was headed straight for the rocky wall of the gorge.

“Fuchsia! Look out!” I screamed, trying to turn the huge Ornithocaerus* around before she struck the wall head first. She heard and banked left, but it was too late. She roared in agony as the edge of her right wing scraped the rugged surface of the wall. A small rocky outcrop tore the thin membrane of her wing close to the edge. I heard the slim bone splinter and crack as it connected with a protruding rock. She plunged towards the landing dock as I struggled to hold on. Tears of pain were heading towards my temples. The huge parachute of her wings opened as we almost crashed into the landing dock. She tried to land properly, but the pain in her wing sent her spiraling out of control. And down we both went. I woke up in the Base’s infirmary, head pounding, some four hours later. My left ankle was swollen to almost three times its normal size. A splint was on my right arm, which in turn was almost as purple as our plumwatts. One of our nurses, Vale, came to my side, chuckling as she handed me a beaker of warm chicken broth with barley and a scone smeared with damson preserve.

“You took a might fall young ’un, I’ve never seen anything like it in all me born days!” she whooped as I downed the broth in one might gulp and scoffed the scone in record time. In the midst of all the merriment, Commander Rockwall strode in, scowling. Vale jumped up and snatched the beaker from my hands as she scurried out the door, casting back a fearful glance. The Commander looked down his nose at me.

“Never in all my twenty-four seasons have I seen such horrible control!” he boomed. “You could have gotten your mount killed at your expense!” He placed his right hand on my ankle, and his left on my arm. I could feel the magic of all the born commanders beginning to heal my wounds. My arm and ankle shrunk to their original sizes; everything to normal, except for the steady pounding in my head. “Now go tend to your mount, then report directly to my office. You are a disgrace to me and to the flying forces! *Do you understand me scout?!*” I saluted weakly with my limp arm.

“Yes, sir; understand perfectly sir.” I mumbled. After he had exited the room, I let out a sigh of relief. Then, stumbling out of bed, I went in search of Bella, our animal healer in charge of poultices and splints. Rounding the corner I rammed into my best friend, Daniel. His longish brown hair hung in his eyes as he spoke to the wall.

“Sorry Correl, I heard that you were in bad shape, but I didn’t think it would be *this* bad.”

“What?!” I demanded. Grabbing his shoulders, I spun him around. I looked into his eyes, they were brown. “You lazy lump! Didn’t you remember your lenses this morning?” I cuffed him upside the head and picked up a small plastic case from where it

lay on the floor. As he protested, I put in the lenses. Looking into his eyes again, I was satisfied to see blue instead of brown.

“Do you have to always be so motherly?” he said, scowling. “Where were you going in such a hurry anyway?”

“I’ve got to go see Bella, because Fuchsia needs some spli—” A dull roar interrupted me. Getting louder by the second, it shook the walls of our building. I fell to the floor alongside Daniel, both of us covering our ears against the horrific symphony of sound. But hundreds of voices reverberated around inside my skull, each one crying out the same think, over and over again.

“Correl! Come to the nesting grounds, deep trouble is at hand! Correl!”

I screamed, bellowing out my response. Moments later, the roaring ceased, and all returned to normal. I looked over at Dan; he was staring at me like I had three heads.

“I have to go get Fuchsia, something’s wrong at the Iguanadon nesting grounds.” I said, turning away.

“I’ll go with you.”

“It could be dangerous, besides, I’m already in trouble as it is. What does it matter if I get into a little more?”

“You’re hurt, I have to take care of you.” He said smugly.

“Fine, but let’s go!” I grabbed his hand and we ran down thirty flights of steps to the pens.

As we entered Fuchsia’s stall, I was surprised to see her wing neatly bandaged and splinted. Dan grinned.

“Not bad for a boy’s handiwork, huh? He said, elbowing me in the ribs. I looked at him in bewilderment.

“You did that? For me?”

“Uh-huh.”

I threw my arms around his neck and hugged him. “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”

“You’re welcome,” he panted, “Now will you please stop crushing my ribs?” I giggled and jumped back. “Sorry, Mama always used to say that I didn’t know my own strength.”

“Oh, how charming. Go ahead Daniel, kiss her now.” A mocking voice said from the stall next to mine.

I gritted my teeth. “Who asked you for your opinion Mavix?” I turned to see a redheaded boy leaning on the gate to Fuchsia’s stall. Before he could respond, a horn blew in the distance and Fuchsia snapped her dangerously sharp beak not a fraction away from his freckled nose. He fled, but not without a short, you-know-the-commander’s-going-to-hear-about-this speech.

I turned to Daniel, and shook my head. “Let’s ride.”

As we descended into the nesting grounds, I could single out the dinosaur who wanted my help. Her muscles were bunched and tight underneath her scaly skin, and I didn’t like the way she raised dust by pawing at the ground impatiently. When we had landed, the Iguanodon formed a ring around us. The leader’s name was Aurelia; it was the female that I had seen from the sky. She jumped on me, and held a dangerous forepaw on my throat.

“My baby wandered off! And he is the only survivor of this year’s batch. You have until dawn tomorrow to find my only hatchling.” She growled. “I don’t think you can, so if you don’t...” she pressed down harder on my throat. I nodded feebly, I got the point.

Once we were in the sky again, I attacked Daniel.

“How come you didn’t do anything? I was so scared!” I yelled through my tears. “She could have killed me then and there!” A deep, bellowing roar drowned out his response. It rang out twice more, and then silence reigned again. Dan looked at me, his eyes as wide as dinner plates.

“A female Tyrannosaurus, big, aggressive, and angry.” He looked at the Iguanodon herd in the distance. “You don’t think...” He gulped.

Flying full force towards the crags, we barely made it before the rain started coming down in bucketfuls. Thunder boomed and forked lightning tore apart the sky. Peeking out from behind the dense foliage, we could see her, the most dangerous thing on the planet, and she was about to have baby Iguanodon for supper.

“Got any ideas?” I asked Dan. Fuchsia snorted.

“Really, who’s the sensible one here? Him or you?”

I looked at Daniel. “She’s right, there’s only one thing we can do here.” We readied our crossbows and shook hands.

“Goodbye Dan.”

“Goodbye Correl.” He looked into my eyes. I threw my arms around him and we hugged. Mounting, we flew out to meet our dooms.

“Rain pounded down, soaking me in seconds. A huge shadow loomed in front of me, I shot, but the slim bolt barely pierced her thick hide. The dinosaur turned, charging at something she could hardly see. As I fumbled with a second bolt, Fuchsia took control. She flew over the edge of one of the crags. The Tyrannosaurus let out a deafening roar as she tried to follow but stepped into empty air. An enormous THUD shook the earth, and the big reptile moved no more. Landing on the outcrop, I dismounted and ran to Dan.

“You’re alive! Praise God you’re alive!” I threw my arms around him. He picked me up and swung me around, burying his face in my shoulder. Warm tears trickled down my cheeks. We had succeeded!

“Sorry to bread up the happy reunion, but will someone *please* get him off me?!”

We looked and laughed. The baby Iguanodon was curled up on Fuchsia’s back, fast asleep. We camped there that night, and in the early morning left to deliver the young one to his mother. The sun shone on the blades of newly sprouted grass as we descended near Aurelia.

The young one squirmed in my arms as I set him down on the wet grass. Aurelia looked at me. If dinosaurs could cry, she would have been bawling.

“Thank you.” Those were the only words that she spoke. I bowed my head in respect.

Two hours later, Dan and I were seated in the Commander’s office, waiting to hear the verdict of his superiors. Mavix waltzed in, a smug grin on his face. He sniffed, “I’m the best scout here, and I heard that he’s picking an apprentice, so naturally he’ll *have* to pick me.”

The Commander strode in, a small smile playing on his lips. “Scouts Correl and Daniel, I am happy to inform you that the charges against you have been lifted.”

My jaw dropped to the floor.

“Sir? Dan and I said in unison.

“You heard me. You two risked your lives to save a hatchling of a dinosaur that is becoming rare in some parts.” He smiled a real smile this time. “And I want you *both* to become my apprentices.”

Dan and I whooped and hugged the Commander.

“But...” Mavix started to protest, but stopped and slunk away when the Commander glared at him.

“Congratulations, you two really earned it.”

I looked up at him. “Commander?”

“Yes”

“Am I still a disgrace?” I whispered.

Leaning down, he kissed my forehead.

“Never.”

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