

Chapter Four—Nightmare Night

I was lying on a patch of moss outside of Fluttershy's house when night fell. I had a bunny over my eyes, blocking out as much of the remaining light as I could. Twilight was pacing back and forth, jingling with every step; she was wearing some costume of a wizard or something and it was covered in bells. Fluttershy was watching Twilight with increasing nervousness, occasionally darting her eyes to the sky. Every time a bit of wind rustled the leaves or a cloud passed over, she flinched and whimpered.

Fluttershy, as I'm sure you might have been able to guess, was not a fan of this Halloween-esque festival. She doesn't like scary. And if she didn't have Twilight's guarantee that Luna wouldn't hurt her, she would be locked in her house.

Night fell. Luna didn't show up.

"M-m-maybe she decided not to c-c-come!" Fluttershy stuttered. I imagined she was looking at her door hopefully; my eyes were still covered by a warm bunny that was twitching slightly in its sleep.

"Nav said she would come," Twilight said. "But I don't plan on waiting here all night. Fashionably late is one thing. Outright tardy is another!" God, don't get Twilight started on being tardy...

"She'll be here," I calmly said. The bunny flinched.

Fluttershy squeaked when she heard my voice. That made the bunny look up, allowing me to open an eye. *Nothing happening.* The eye closed again and the bunny, seeing the same thing, fell back asleep. "Sorry," Fluttershy whispered. "I thought you were asleep..."

Not a second after that, though, a loud clap of thunder sent the rabbit jumping away in terror. I opened my eyes and saw a pair of demons descending from the skies wherein dark, stormy clouds were suddenly forming.

Fluttershy straight up fainted. Twilight openly gaped. I just stared.

It didn't take us long to discern that the demons were pulling a chariot. And once we realized that, we discovered that Princess Luna was in the chariot. *That is totally badass.*

As it turned out, the 'demons' were actually ponies with bat wings. Luna's night guards, I later learned. They were dark grey with purple armor. The crest on their chest piece looked reptilian and their helmet had something jutting straight up like a mohawk. And then I saw their eyes: Light amber, reflecting light, with cat-like pupils. They were, as I said, completely badass looking.

Twilight was still gaping when the chariot landed and Luna stepped off. I got to my feet and gently tapped Fluttershy with my foot. She just responded with a light groan. *It's going to be one of those nights, isn't it?*

I finally got a good look at Luna, too. The moon was finally full and Luna seemed radiant in its glow. She was much taller than Twilight and her horn was much larger. Around her neck was some manner of black necklace, with a half-moon featured in the center. She seemed to be

wearing some kind of light blue slippers, though that might have just been strangely carved hooves. On her head was a tiara of similar color and design as the necklace. Her eyes were a light turquoise. And her hair and tail seemed to flow in the night sky, moving of its own volition.

“Well Princess,” I said, “you surprised the hell out of me. Nice ride. It’s going to scare the shit out of ponies, though.”

Princess Luna looked down at Fluttershy and then back up to me. “I will work on finding... more accommodating transportation.” She shifted her gaze to Twilight. “Twilight Sparkle, or perhaps Starswirl the Bearded. I hear you have some manner of plan?”

“I knew somepony would understand this costume!” Twilight was somewhat upset that no one we ran into knew who she was dressed as. “Navarone, you already know all this. Try to help Fluttershy while I explain it to the princess.”

I knelt down next to the catatonic Fluttershy and tried shaking her. “Fluttershy, it’s time to wake up.” She muttered something. I poked her in her side. “If you don’t get up, I’m going to find out if ponies are ticklish.” Nothing.

As it turns out, ponies are ticklish. And Fluttershy is very susceptible to it. I had her giggling and squealing in no time. “Now, are you going to faint again?” I asked when I finally relented.

“Not if it means you’ll tickle me again!” She suddenly looked terrified, remembering why it was she fainted in the first place. “Are the demons gone?” she asked, trying to huddle against me.

“They weren’t demons. They were Princess Luna’s guards.”

She started stuttering something about Nightmare Moon.

“No, not Nightmare Moon’s servants. Princess Luna’s servants. You have Twilight’s word they won’t harm you.” She didn’t seem very placated. I sighed and added, “Would it help if I offered to protect you or something?” She nodded weakly. I rolled my eyes. “Fine. I won’t let Princess Luna hurt you.”

I stood and offered her a hand. She gave me her hoof and I helped her up. As soon as she saw Luna, she held onto my hand as tightly as she could, despite not having fingers. I pried her hoof off my hand and she immediately huddled against me. I sighed again, putting an arm around the cowardly mare.

“Princess Luna,” Twilight said, “this is Fluttershy.” Princess Luna held out a hoof. Fluttershy jerked back and Luna got an unpleasant look on her face. After a reassuring squeeze from me and a small look shared with Twilight, Fluttershy shook hooves with her. *Progress.*

“I have heard much about you, Fluttershy,” Luna quietly said. “Would you care to show me some of your nocturnal animals?”

That perked Fluttershy right up. Any chance to talk about her animals drove most fear away from her. She fled from my arm and took the princess in hand. Or hoof, I suppose. They walked around Fluttershy’s menagerie of critters, talking about some of them.

Twilight and I shared a look. “Long night?” I asked.

“Yeah...” We shared a sigh. “But if she got Fluttershy on her side, the rest should be fairly easy. The ponies back in Ponyville know what kind of pony Fluttershy is. It should all go well enough when they see her next to Princess Luna.”

No plan that ever should ‘go well’ has run into Pinkie Pie and survived. She is a magnet for trouble and has no real manner of impulse control, not unlike a furby.

The four of us were walking back into town when we ran into Pinkie Pie and a large group of kids. Fluttershy was still talking our ears off about some manner of animal or something; I try not to pay attention when she starts going on about them.

Mind, Pinkie Pie knew the princess was supposed to come by tonight. She knew that and she knew what we were trying to do with her.

So of course, as soon as she saw us, she screamed something about Nightmare Moon and bolted. The children ran with her. *Dammit, Pinkie.*

I was rubbing my temple, Fluttershy was looking flustered, Princess Luna was looking depressed, and Twilight was looking confused. Twilight finally said, “I don’t understand. She was...” She sighed. “...Pinkie Pie. Nav, can you go figure out what she’s doing?”

I was the odd one out of that group anyway. Or rather, one of the two odd ones. It made the most sense to send me. The thing is, I had no idea where they may have gone. I quickly pushed my way through the crowd of curious ponies that had formed around us, trying to get away before too many could show up. Twilight began saying something or another to the assembled masses. I jogged onward, trying to find the horrid pink menace and her crowd of minions.

I bumped into Spike and Applejack not long after I got out of the crowd. Spike was dressed as a... dragon. *Well, why not?* Applejack was dressed as a scarecrow, or something. Me, I wasn’t dressed as anything yet. My outfit was at the treebrary, waiting for me to put it on. After all, why get it dirty by lying on the ground with it on? Spike pointed me off in the right direction. I made a pointed reminder to the two of them that Luna isn’t supposed to be scary.

It didn’t take me too much longer to find Pinkie and the group of kids with her. I had almost caught up to them when a massive bolt of fucking lightning shot down and hit the ground between us. They ran off squealing again and I stood my ground, trying to blink the after-image from my eyes. Lightning isn’t something you just see and dismiss, after all.

I was partially blinded for a few minutes and the full after-image didn’t depart my eyes for a few days. After the thunderclap stopped echoing in my ears, I heard a very Rainbow Dash-esque laugh and was barely able to make a dark figure zooming off into the night with a rainbow tail following it.

Instead of doing the smart thing and chasing her down to admonish her for almost frying my ass with lightning, I continued my search. I figured if I followed some leads on who was giving out the most candy, I could find Pinkie’s group pretty easily. So I started paying attention to conversations. It took me a few minutes to sort through the unimportant conversations and pick up the piercing shrills of children. *Cheerilee.* I had heard that name before. It was the name

of a teacher or something. But I had no idea where she lived, so it was back to wandering for me.

Thankfully, Pinkie Pie is always incredibly noticeable wherever she goes. It didn't take me long to find her again. Nothing impeded my access to her, so I pushed through the gaggle of kids surrounding her. I found myself face to face with a chicken. After taking a second to actually look over it, I realized it was Pinkie Pie in a chicken costume. *Yup, that's Pinkie Pie for you.*

She broke into a smile when she saw me, though. "Navarone! I thought you would be with Twilight and the princess. What are you doing away from them? Or... Or are they hiding nearby, waiting to eat one of us?" The kids looked alarmed at that and began fruitlessly searching the shadows.

"I thought we had been over this," I said, crossing my arms. "Luna is here to make friends. Your fear-mongering and running away with a gaggle of children is not helping."

"But sometimes being scared is fun!"

"Not for the person that you're scared of. Seeing all of you run away screaming cut Luna pretty deeply. She regrets what she became. How is she to go about making friends if every time she tries, ponies flee?"

She harrumphed, but thought about it for a few seconds. "Fiiiine!" I nodded and turned to go. "Wait, where are you going?"

I turned back to her and said, "To go get dressed, of course. I left my costume in the library until the party truly started. Now that the princess of the night is here, I think it's time for things to really get started."

"Oooh, what are you dressing up as?" she asked, wonderment in her eyes.

"Oh, you'll see," I said, my smile turning dark. "You'll see..." To add an even darker undertone to what I said, Rainbow Dash kicked off a bolt of lightning somewhere near us. Thunder roared and light flashed around us, bouncing brightly off my smile. Pinkie and all the kids flinched at the lightning, looking toward where it touched down.

By the time they turned back to me, I was gone. I had to run pretty damn fast to get away like that, too. By the time I got to the library, I was panting and making resolutions that I wouldn't keep to exercise more.

It was worth the sprint when I got up to the room that Twilight grew out of her tree for me. Lying on the bed was the costume I spent so much time making. Well, Rarity made the cloak and the robes. But I spent literally *minutes* on the headpiece. It was a bleached skull of some kind of crazy-ass critter I found in the Everfree just lying on the path to Zecora's house. The thing had horns like a ram but the teeth of a sabre toothed cat. I'm glad I didn't run into it when it was alive.

...Or worse, whatever killed it.

Hunting was a hobby in my spare time back on Earth, so I picked up a few friends that knew taxidermy. I didn't learn that much from them, but one of the things I learned was how to bleach bones. I put those skills to use on the skull, thinking it would be a cool ornament. Then I

decided it would make a badass costume piece instead.

So on went the black robes, the cloak, and the gloves. After a moment of pointlessly making sure my hair was down flat, I slowly put the skull over my head, making sure not to hit myself with the fangs or any of the jagged pieces where parts of it broke. As the finishing touch, I picked up the tall scythe that Applejack let me borrow from her farm. Why the ponies had a tool that took two hands to use, I don't know.

As I walked down the stairs in what I was hoping would be a good costume with which to scare ponies, I couldn't help but lament the fact that I still didn't have new shoes for the cold weather. Imposing on Rarity risked owing her a favor and owing her never ended well for me. *One of these days.*

Right when I got to the door, there came a knocking that I recognized as trick-or-treaters. Seeing that as my chance to begin the reign of terror early, I pulled up my hood and readied the scythe as I slowly pulled the door open.

And so I was revealed in all my horrifying glory to the fillies and colts of Ponyville. "Who dares disturb Death itself?" I growled under the mask, leaning in to the colts that were starting to back up. When I gripped the scythe with both hands, the group of them screamed and bolted. My dark, evil laugh followed them in the night. "God, I love Halloween," I said to no one, putting the scythe back in a one-handed grip and stepping out of the library, closing the door behind me.

When I was turning back to confront the night, I saw the next group of trick-or-treating foals coming by to the library. I couldn't help but lock eyes with the one in front, a small white colt with an eye patch. None of the rest of them had really noticed me at that point, so I pulled my hood back, revealing my skeletal appearance.

The little colt up front immediately froze, his eyes locking onto the hollow eye sockets of my mask. "Thou dare approacheth Death?" I darkly intoned, stepping closer and grabbing the scythe with both hands yet again.

That got the attention of everyone in the group and they all turned to me. When they realized just what it was they were standing before, their mouths dropped. I advanced another step and each one of them bolted, leaving just their chaperone behind. "That scythe looks familiar..." Granny Smith said, eyeing it.

"Shouldn't you be in bed?" I asked, dropping the dark voice. *Or maybe in a grave. Either or.*

"Shoulda been there five hours ago!" she angrily answered. *Or five years.* "Durn foals and their newfangled games! Why, back in my day—Hey, where you going?" Any old person that starts talking about things back in their day should have stopped talking long since. As soon as she whipped that phrase out, I just turned around and started walking off.

Anyway, I walked on toward the main party area. Now, I knew I couldn't get away with scaring foals all night. Oh sure, it would be really fun, but I'd eventually get in trouble. Besides, my reputation in town was still rather fluid and scaring all the foals could ruin what I worked so

impassively to build.

So I couldn't just scare foals all night... But I could at the very least play games or whatever. Maybe just be seen participating in a way that wasn't hurting anyone. Especially since I had a fucking scythe on hand, though I don't know if scythes here have the same dark history to them that those on Earth do.

With the purpose of cooperation in mind, I lifted the cowl on the cloak so my mask couldn't be seen. I did it just in time, too; right when I got it to cover me, I entered the large area that was set aside for games and the like. A few of the ponies looked up to see me entering the area, but not too many. Most of those that did look up didn't bother keeping me in sight for long.

But a few of them just stared, presumably either trying to figure out what I was dressing up as or unsure if I was going to be safe. I didn't pay them much mind, instead walking to where Luna was throwing some manner of stuffed spiders at a web. For someone that had never played any kind of fair games, she seemed to be doing well.

Twilight was standing a little ways back from her, watching the princess with a smile. "So?" I asked, quietly sidling in next to her.

She jumped when I spoke, since I moved so softly that she didn't even hear me. "Oh, it's just you... Things are going well! I completely forgot that you were going to dress up. What are you, anyway?"

"Death."

"...What? How can you be a concept?"

"It's a human thing. I'll explain later." It's a good thing I chose to hold off the explanation, since Luna turned around a few seconds later, beaming. Her smile took a hit when she saw the cloaked and cowed figure in front of her with a weapon, but it recovered quickly enough when I spoke. "I see things are going well, Princess. Having fun?"

"Indeed! It is... a new experience. One that has been sorely lacking over the long years!"

"I can imagine," I replied. "You know, it's a lot better when you're competing against someone, trying to outdo them."

"Oh?" she said, a small hint of a daring tone starting to pop up. "Wouldst thou care to compete against me, Navarone?"

"Hey now, don't look at me. I meant Twilight, here." I used the butt of my scythe to press against Twilight's flank, trying to get her to move.

The purple mare just looked at me in confusion. "I don't know anything about those games! I... I never played them either..."

"Well there you go," I said, smiling under the mask. "It's a lot more fair to have two inexperienced people competing."

"What's the matter?" Twilight said, turning to me. "You afraid to lose, Nav?"

"More that I'm apathetic," I answered with a shrug.

That was the wrong answer. A blue aura surrounded one of the spiders and it floated to me. "Your Princess commands you to play," Luna said, taking a haughty stance.

“Alright,” I said, taking the stuffed spider in hand. I walked on up to the throwing area, let the scythe lean on my shoulder, tossed the spider up twice to judge its weight, and then tossed it about a few inches to the right of the bull’s eye, closer than any of Luna’s little spiders. “Eh, been a little while.” Since there were another two spiders in front of me, I threw the two of them as well. The first one was overcorrected and landed a few inches left. The last one fell a bit too much ending up dead center but low.

When I turned back, Luna’s eyes were slightly narrowed and Twilight seemed at least halfway impressed. “I didn’t know you could throw like that,” Twilight said.

“Not too dissimilar to knife throwing,” I replied. “I had an uncle that was really into that and showed me all about it.”

“Luck,” Luna declared before looking down to Twilight. “What other games may we participate in?”

“Oh, there are all kinds of things set up, Princess! But first I want you to meet my friend Applejack, who has an apple bobbing game set up. So that’s one you could do.”

“Lead the way, then.” Twilight started walking off and Luna began following.

I shrugged and went to join them, but the mare running the spider game stopped me. “Ah, sir?” she quietly said. I turned back to her and she seemed to blanch for a moment before continuing, “Uh... Do you want your prize?”

“I won something?”

“Of course! Well, it’s not much, but those were some of the better tosses I’ve seen all night. Good enough to win one of my prizes, that’s for sure.” She reached down into a bag next to her front hooves and somehow pulled out a beanie baby-sized blue bear. “Here you are!”

“Uh. Thanks.” I’m not used to actually getting anything when I play things like that. “Have a good night. I gotta catch up.”

“You too, sir,” she called as I started quickly walking away, wondering what the fuck I was going to do with a beanie baby.

It didn’t take me but a few seconds to catch up with Luna and Twilight, though I wasn’t entirely certain that Luna wanted me around at that point. After all, she had just ‘lost’ for the first time, it seemed, even if it was just a silly carnival game. But I followed anyway, since the only other thing I had to do was scare kids.

When we got to Applejack, she only had two foals that were trying to get apples from her. One of them was the colt from the group I scared earlier. He actually fell into the bucket of water when we approached, but that was more because he was clumsy than because he saw me. I jumped forward, grabbing him around one of his kicking back legs, and pulled him out, holding him up to look the colt eye to eye socket.

“Death has come for thee, foal,” I whispered, leaning in closer. He started screaming and flailing about until I carefully dropped him on the ground. Then he galloped away as quickly as his small legs would carry him. The other foal he was with fled as soon as she saw me.

“That was mean, Nav!” Twilight admonished.

“Yeah, but it was funny,” I replied, stepping away from the bucket. “And besides, if they’re too busy being scared of Death, they won’t be fearing the night,” I added with a nod to Luna.

“Your... assistance is noted,” Luna dryly said, stepping closer.

“But I’d prefer you not scarin’ off my customers!” Applejack somewhat angrily added. “It’s hard enough to get anypony over here in the first place!” *Host a better game, then.*

“Eh, I’ll try. But with a face like mine, it’s hard *not* scaring people.” As I said that, I pulled the hood back, revealing my pale visage for all to see. Applejack and Twilight gasped, since neither of them knew I grabbed the skull or cleaned it up.

Luna, however, didn’t seem all that shocked. “Hm. I didn’t know any of those were still alive. I suppose I have to send the royal hunters into the Everfree to recreate my menagerie. But that is a task for later.” She turned to the bucket of apples and peered into it. “How does one play this... game?”

“It’s real simple, Princess!” Applejack merrily said, happy to have a princess as a customer. “You just stick your head on in and try to grab an apple using only your teeth.”

“Simple!” Twilight and I shared a smile behind her back as Luna’s horn lit up and her crown lifted from her head. “Navarone, I dub thee temporary tiara holder.” Before I could answer, she thrust the thing into my hands and then shoved her head into the bucket.

“Hm. Wonder how long she can hold her breath,” I idly said, putting the little bear inside the tiara so when she took it back, she’d have a guest.

“What d’you think her hair will look like wet?” Applejack asked, tilting her head at Luna’s bent over form.

“I bet it’ll be funny,” I said with a smile.

“Either way, you shouldn’t laugh!” Twilight hastily said. “You really shouldn’t act so poorly in front of a princess, Navarone!”

“Man, royal blood don’t mean shit to me. If she gets offended by that, oh well.”

Twilight snorted and was probably about to comment when Luna’s head ripped out of the bucket. “Insolent apples! Come into our mouth!”

Once again, I hopped forward, laying a hand on her side. She flinched at the contact and then glared at me. “There’s a technique to it,” I said. “Get one against the wall and then do it. Or go for the stem. Most of these games are fairly easy once you understand how they work.”

“If it’s so easy, *you* do it!” she commanded, pulling the tiara back from my hands.

I rolled my eyes and pulled the skull off my head, setting it and the scythe down next to me. With them out of the way, I stuck my head near the water, nuzzled one of the apples to the side, and then very easily bit into it, using the wall to hold it in place. I could practically hear Luna’s teeth grinding behind me as I pulled my head and the apple, both dripping, out of the bucket. “What do I win?” I asked Applejack when I pulled the apple out of my mouth.

“One apple,” she answered with a grin. *Oh, you cheap bitch.*

“Ugh. I haven’t had any fruit other than fucking apples in *months*. Twilight, Luna, either

of you hungry?" I asked, turning back to face them.

Luna seemed to be over her initial anger and was studying the stuffed bear I left in her crown. "From where did this come?" she asked, tilting her head.

"I think that mare with the spiders was using them as prizes," Twilight said.

One of Luna's eyes twitched and the bear shot toward me, slamming into my chest. "We do not accept *pity*, Navarone."

All three of us just stared at her in almost complete shock. "Pity?" I asked. "What are you talking about?"

"You giving me the prize because I could not win it myself. Do not pity your princess!"

"I... think it was a *gift*," Twilight slowly said.

"Yeah..." *Jesus, this bitch is crazy.*

"A... gift?" Luna asked, the fire in her eyes dying down to more of a simmer. "What is the purpose of a gift?"

I let Twilight field that question as I grabbed my mask and scythe again. "A gift is when one pony gives another an object they believe the other might desire. It's a sign of friendship, not pity." As she was saying all of that, I was putting the mask and cowl back on. No reason to walk around possibly scaring anyone, after all. But my hands were starting to get very full, with the scythe, bear, and apple to hold.

"And this... bear... was a gift for me?" Luna asked when Twilight finished, looking back to me.

"Sure." *After all, I don't want to carry it around and I have no need for stuffed animals.*

"Then... thank you," she said, a small tinge of red appearing on her cheeks. I imagine she was slightly surprised, for some reason.

Thankfully, Applejack finally did something useful by breaking up what might have been an awkward moment. "So you wanna try your luck again, Princess?" she asked.

"I shall. Navarone shan't outdo me in everything this night." She stepped back up to the water, once again shoving her crown into my hands. I set the bear back into the tiara and backed away from the bucket, letting her do her thing.

"For a second there, I thought she was about to kill me," I said to Twilight.

"I wasn't worried so much about *that*," she answered with a hint of relief. "But she definitely seemed rather upset for a moment. Is she really so unused to receiving gifts?"

"Obviously. Speaking of which, you want this apple? I'm not hungry and I can't eat it through this mask anyway."

"Sure. I haven't eaten dinner yet." She took the apple with her magic and went to town on it, devouring the thing before Luna finally pulled an apple from the watery depths.

"Huzzah!" she shouted, dropping the apple and catching it with magic. "'Twas most fun, farmer Applejack! What is our prize?"

"One apple," Applejack responded with a smile.

"...Oh. Well, I was hungry anyway. Come Twilight, Navarone! There is much more fun to

be had!” Her horn lit up slightly brighter to pull the crown from me, setting it back on her rather wet head.

“Well,” Twilight said, “I think there was a pumpkin catapult somewhere over there.” She waved a hoof to our left, where several more booths were set up. “That should be pretty interesting.”

“Then lead the way!” As Twilight started walking, Luna began eating her hard-won apple.

I started to follow, but Applejack grabbed my robe somehow. “Be careful with her,” she whispered, eyeing Luna. “I know she don’t want to hurt nopony, but she had fire in her eyes when she threw that bear at ya.”

“Trust me, I have no intention of pissing her off,” I just as quietly answered. “I’ll definitely take care.” Applejack let me go and once again, I caught up with Luna and Twilight, both of whom seemed to be having fun.

“Mayhaps I should have come to Ponyville sooner,” Luna mused aloud as we walked. “The citizens here seem rather accepting. And this ‘fun’ is a most enjoyable experience!” *No shit, Sherlock.*

“You’re welcome back at any time,” Twilight said. “But things probably won’t be as fun without a festival going on.”

“Then perhaps a year-long festival is in order,” Luna replied.

“That would get boring quickly,” I said. “The point of festivals is to take a break from normal life. If they became normal life, it would just become routine rather than something special.”

“There is... wisdom in your words,” she reluctantly admitted. “‘Tis a shame, but an understandable one.”

“And we’re here!” Twilight said, waving a hoof at the small catapults that were set up.

“What is the purpose of this game?” Luna answered, a smile already forming as she walked up to one of the weapons.

The mare working the game said, “You launch a pumpkin at the target, Princess. The goal is to hit the center.”

“Once again, simple!” the moon princess declared, grabbing one of the pumpkins next to the catapult she appropriated. Without any prompting, she pulled the arm down and shot the pumpkin perfectly toward the target, splattering the pumpkin in a juicy mess. “Let me see thee best *that*, Navarone!” she said, shooting a smile my way.

“You’re disturbingly good at shooting catapults,” I replied, stepping up to the firing line.

“I have much experience with them,” she said, lifting a hoof to blow on it nonchalantly. “But I believe those are stories my sister does not like telling others about.”

“Eh, whatever. You aren’t the only one with experience. High school physics.” *And a few clubs.* It took me a little longer to aim my catapult, but my shot was just as true and sure. “It also doesn’t hurt that the target and ammo are both so big.”

“High school?” she asked, not really caring that I did as well as she. “Is that a school for those that live among mountains?”

“Not quite.” I once again took the scythe in hand, moving away from the line of catapults. “Hey, are there any prizes for this one?”

The mare shook her head. “You get to *blow up a pumpkin*! What more could you want?”

“...You raise a very good point. So what next, Twilight?”

“Hm... Princess, have you ever done a strength test?”

“Nay, we have not. We tended to test myself differently. Against who would I test myself?”

“You’ll see!” Twilight said. “Come on, let’s go find it.”

As we started walking off again, Luna asked, “So what is a high school, Navarone?”

“Well, public education in my land is broken into three basic tiers. Elementary, which is basic. Middle school, which is more advanced. And high school, which is the highest tier of the still relatively basic—Hold on.”

I saw a familiar colt trying to sneak past my line of sight. As soon as I realized he was trying to avoid me, I knew what I had to do. So I began slowly walking toward him, lifting my scythe.

Luckily for me, some mare giving out candy caught his attention, getting him to turn his back on me. Which, as it turned out, was a big mistake for the poor kid. I snatched him up by his neck, whispering, “Death stalks thee this night, colt.” He squealed as soon as I touched him but went deathly silent when I started whispering. “Run as fast as thy legs will take thee and you might yet escape.”

By the time I dropped him, I honestly didn’t think his legs would even hold him. Seemed like the kid was a fighter, though, as he immediately turned to check it if was me. Upon determining that it was, the eye of his not covered by a pirate patch went extremely wide and he just made a squeaking noise before booking it.

With the colt now even more traumatized, I went back to where Luna and Twilight were waiting, the latter with a look of extreme disapproval. “Navarone, what did I just tell you five minutes ago?!” she demanded.

“I dunno, something about watermelons?”

“Leave the poor foals alone! You aren’t supposed to be scaring them!”

“But it’s so much fun!”

Luna snorted. “I fail to see what is so scary about his costume.”

“One who is immortal holds little fear of death,” I said by way of answer. “Of course *you* wouldn’t be scared. But to those of us that have to worry about rotting in a hole, it’s a slightly more pressing concern.”

“...How can you be dressed as death?” she asked.

“It’s a human thing. Twilight, lead the way.”

“Ugh. You better not scare any more foals, Nav!”

"I'll think about it."

As we continued walking, Luna asked me more about the personification of death. I explained it as best I could, which honestly wasn't all that well. Not paying much attention to the history of folklore makes stuff like that difficult to talk about, after all.

There wasn't any kind of line at the tall strength machine thing. "Step right up!" the stallion in charge said. "Care to test your strength, ladies?"

"We would like to give it a try," Luna said, stepping forward. "How do I play this game?"

"Easy as pie, Princess," the fellow answered. "Just step right up and use your hind legs to buck this plate here," he said, tapping the target plate. "The little tab here will rise according to how strong you are."

"All these fun games are so simple!" she joyously said, moving to the line and casually bucking the plate with a large smile on her face. That smile disappeared at the sound of something shattering behind her. "Um..."

The plate she kicked was cracked in half, broken down the center. And the tab that was supposed to rise up to hit the bell shot up so quickly that it tore the bell off and continued past it into the air. I could barely see it still rising and watched as it slowly started to fall. It smashed right into Rainbow Dash, who was about to slam her hooves down onto a cloud to create lightning. She tumbled down off the low hanging cloud, hitting the dirt with a solid thud. Twilight galloped off to make sure she was okay.

"Damn," I said, both my eyebrows lifting. *You'd think all that time on the moon would atrophy her muscles.* "Well, you definitely got me beat in that department, Princess," I said.

"You... you broke my machine!" the guy said, just completely shocked.

"Uh... My apologies, citizen."

"Just uh... send a bill to Canterlot Castle," I said, wrapping my arm around Luna's neck and leading her away before the guy could get over his surprise and get angry.

"Send a bill?" she asked, somehow too confused to pull away.

"That machine isn't free and repairing it will take money. You accidentally broke it, so you should pay to fix it. This way he doesn't complain about the princess that ruined his business."

"Hm. I see. Times have definitely changed... And why is thy arm around our neck?"

"Sorry." I let her go and put some space between us. "Just wanted to get you away from that guy before something happened. You never know how some people will react."

"That is acceptable. So where did Twilight go?"

"When the tab broke free, it hit Rainbow Dash. Twilight went to go check on her." I looked over that way to see that neither of them were there. "Looks like she took Dash off to get checked on by the doctors, I suppose. We might be alone for a few minutes."

"How can we be alone if there are two of us?"

"Just a phrase. Let's walk around, see what we can find."

"Very well. Let us... roam." We started walking, looking around at all the games and shit

being played. "So you said that I have you beat 'in that department.' What does that mean?"

"You're a hell of a lot stronger than I am. If you lose every other game here, at least you have that as a consolation."

"It hardly feels consoling. Celestia and I have been stronger than almost all ponies for thousands of years. Hm. What game is that?"

I followed her gaze and saw a few ponies throwing darts at balloons. "Oh, darts. The point is to use the darts to pop balloons. Sometimes the balloons are worth different points."

"We shall compete," she declared, stepping up to the game booth. "Is there an unused board?" she asked the fellow behind the counter.

"Indeed there is, Princess!" he answered, pointing to the board that obviously wasn't being used behind him. "You want to play with your friend, there?"

"Yes. Navarone, step forth."

"Eh, alright..." I did as she commanded, joining her at the front of the booth. "This reminds me that I need to get a dart board in the library. It gets boring there."

"Then read," Luna said as the guy put five darts before each of us.

"No magic," he said before Luna could pick one of the darts up that way.

"Reading gets old when that's all you have to fucking do. What are the point values?" I asked.

"Red is worth three, yellow is worth two, green is worth one," he said. Of course, there were a lot more green than the other two. He basically had several large targets on the board, with green balloons set on the outside and red and yellow on the inside.

I casually tossed one of my darts at the center of one of the targets, impaling a red balloon. She sniffed and tried to match me. Instead, she hit a yellow. I proceeded to hit two more reds, a yellow, and a green. She hit a single red, two greens, and another yellow. She snorted in anger as the guy pulled the darts off the board with magic.

"Care to try again?" he asked, setting the darts back in front of us.

"Nay," she darkly answered, glaring at me.

"You can't expect to get better without trying," I said. "And I have a lot more experience with carnival games than you do."

"We can practice on my own time!" she answered, turning and starting to walk off.

"Special somepony not like losing?" the guy behind the counter quietly asked.

"We're not dating," I replied. "And no, she doesn't like it."

"Then you get the extra large stuffed animal. I think you know what to do with it." He pulled down a very large fluffy bunny and shoved it at me.

"Really?" I sighed, taking it.

"She seemed pretty upset."

"Ugh. Thanks, I guess." I took the giant thing and walked off to find Luna, who thankfully didn't wander off too far. Since she was facing away from me, I just laid it across her back, making her jump. "Relax."

“What did you put upon me?” she asked, turning her neck to peer at it.

“Another gift. Consider it an apology for showing you up.”

“Your apology is unneeded.” Her horn lit up and an aura appeared around the bunny, but I put a hand on it before she could remove it.

“Keep it anyway. I want to see if we can cover you entirely in these things before the night is out.”

“Hmph. That hardly seems enjoyable.”

“But it would be really adorable.” She blinked in surprise. “You want to keep looking for games?”

“Princesses are not and never will be *adorable*,” she replied. However, she didn’t make any efforts to remove the bunny from her back. “And yes, we shall continue looking for games.”

“Excellent.” I took a quick moment to peer around the area before spotting something that made me smile. “Just wait here a sec. I got to take care of something.” She rolled her eyes as I quickly walked toward the same colt I’d been tormenting since I got dressed up, who was playing a skee ball game. The butt of my scythe came down right in front of his head, slamming into the ground with a loud crack. “Dost thou have no sense of self-preservation?” I hissed, leaning down.

His eyes slowly followed the scythe up until he was peering into my heavy mask once again. The ball he was holding fell from nerveless... whatever he was using to hold it. With it on the ground, he began galloping away again, screaming about the monster that was stalking him.

I stood back up straight and walked over to where I had left Luna. “Sorry about that. Let’s go.”

“You are going to traumatize that colt, Navarone.”

“Yeah, probably. I’ll be extra nice for a day later to make up for lost karma.”

“...Karma?” she asked as we began to walk, looking for more games.

“Human concept. Good deeds net you good karma. Bad deeds net you negative karma. The theory is that the more bad karma you have, the worse things that happen to you. And of course, the more good you have, the more good things happen to you. Of course, it’s complete bullshit, but it sounds nice.”

“I see. What is that game there?”

“Uh... Ring toss. Though I’ve never seen it done with unicorns.” In the booth, two unicorns dodged back and forth as the players tried to get rings around their horns. “You interested in trying?”

“It could be interesting. We shall try it, yes.” We stepped up to the booth and waited for the two players to give up before getting closer.

“You two want to try?” the female unicorn asked, pulling the ring around her horn off.

“We do,” Luna said with a nod.

“Alright. Standard rules apply, which means no magic!” she said. The guy with her used his magic to put fifteen rings in front of each of us, blue for her and red for me. “We’ll use the

colors to tell you apart, so you can aim for either of us. Ready?" We both nodded. "Go!" Before she could move, I threw one of the rings at the guy, just barely making it around his horn.

That was the only ring either of us got. Those two were ridiculously good at dodging. "Cheap shot," the stallion said when Luna and I both ran out of rings.

"Cheap but fair," I said with a smile.

"Yep," the mare answered, pulling a beanie baby monkey down from where she had them stored. "But you still only got one, so you don't get a big prize. Unless you'd like to try again?"

"This game is not amusing," Luna answered. "It is far too difficult."

"Yeah," I agreed. "You two are too good."

"We get a lot of practice," she said with a shrug. I just grabbed the stuffed monkey and the two of us left that booth behind.

Before Luna could say anything, it joined the bear in her crown. "We're getting you there."

"This is highly unnecessary."

"But funny," I replied. "And in the end, that's all that really matters."

"You seem to really care for things that are 'funny.' You have given me the definition of fun, but not *funny*. What does it mean?"

Man, how do you explain humor? "Alright, you know how having fun yourself is enjoyable?"

"Yes, after this night."

"Alright. Basically, something is funny when someone else does something that you enjoy watching or hearing. Like, if I told a good joke that made you laugh, the joke would be funny. Or if I tripped on my robes and fell and you thought it was amusing, that would be funny."

"Hm. That is... a more difficult concept."

"Eh, you'll get it in time. Oh hey, do you like pie?" I pointed off to our left, where it looked like a pie eating contest was about to begin.

"Of course," she answered with a nod. "What is the point of that game?"

"The point is to eat pie. Whoever eats the most wins."

"...That is a game we can both enjoy, win or lose. We shall play!"

"Awesome. I fucking love pie." We walked up to the sign-up area. "We too late to join?" I asked Mr. Cake, who was on the other side of the table.

"Not at all!" he happily answered. "We decided on an easier way to play this year. Anypony can play at any time. They have ten minutes to eat as much pie as they can. We'll record what they eat and the top winners will get prizes when we can track 'em down. Do you want me to add you both to the list?"

"Yeah. You know I love eating your wife's creamy pie, dude." He was about to start writing until I said that, then his head jerked up, his eyes blinking a few times. "Wait, that came out wrong." He just shook his head and added our names to the list.

"So we can start eating?" Luna asked, looking at one of the tables of pies.

“Yep! We just gotta get you both seated and set up a timer. Shouldn’t take but a second. Cup Cake, you got the stop watch?”

“Of course, dear,” she answered, walking over from where she had been messing with the pies. “Who’s compe—Oh, Princess! I wasn’t expecting you to stop by...”

“I quite enjoy pie,” Luna replied. “And I believe this is something at which I may be able to beat Navarone.”

“Oh, definitely!” Mrs. Cake answered. “The poor colt needs some meat on his bones, but he just won’t let us feed him much!”

“There’s nothing wrong with being that skinny,” Mr. Cake told her. “But they’re both competing, so do you mind setting them up?”

“Of course, of course. Right this way, dears!” The fat-bottomed girl led us to a picnic table set up for ponies, which was just a picnic table that was exactly the same as a human one. I don’t know why. “Just have a seat and I’ll bring some pies over.”

Luna and I sat next to each other, her hair hitting against my shoulder because of the wind it seemed to be in. She set her bunny next to her. “You’ll probably win,” I said, pulling the skull off my head once again and setting it next to me. “I’m not much one for eating contests.”

“Then it is hardly a fair win. But I shall take it anyway.”

Mrs. Cake started putting pies down in front of us. “What kind of pies are these?” I asked her as she went to get some more.

“Pumpkin,” she replied. “We thought it fit the season.”

“Second best kind of pie,” I said, smiling in delight. “Only behind cheesecake.”

“Cheese... cake?” Luna asked. “Wouldn’t that be a cake and not a pie?”

“You’d certainly think so,” I said with a shrug. “But I always considered it a pie since it has pie crust. Anyway, Mrs. Cake, you got a knife I can use? My face isn’t exactly suited for plunging into pies. Cutting it would make things easier.”

She brought over a simple butter knife with the next batch of pies. It was plenty enough for me, so I just nodded, taking the thing in hand.

“That’s hardly fair,” Luna commented. In reply, Mrs. Cake set one in front of her as well.

“Now, are you two ready?” she asked, lifting the stop watch.

“Yep,” I said with a nod.

“Ready!” Luna answered.

“Begin!” The watch beeped and both Luna and I snatched up the first pie. She just shoved her face in while I cut it into slices and started eating it that way. I was in the contest for free pie, not to win.

However, I could definitely tell that Luna was in that one to win. She shoved down so many fucking pies it wasn’t even funny. In the end, she got down upwards of thirteen of the damn things. I ate two and a half.

“It is nice to know we won,” she sighed happily, leaning back and rubbing her belly.

“You say that now. We’ll see how you feel in a few minutes when you realize that you

just ate *thirteen fucking pies*. Your stomach's gonna hurt like a bitch."

"It was worth it, although I am unaware of how a dog hurts."

"Thirteen pies?" Cup Cake asked, her eyebrows lifting. "You must have been quite hungry!" She gave the two and a half empty tins in front of me a cursory glance before rolling her eyes.

"They were most delicious," Luna said, struggling to pull her newly fat ass out of the bench. To be fair, I had trouble extricating myself as well, but that's just because I was in robes.

"I'm happy you liked them, Princess!" she answered, the dollar signs practically appearing in her eyes. "Thirteen full pies is definitely a new record, so we'll have to think of some new prize."

"The thought is appreciated," Luna answered. "Now, I believe Navarone and I need to walk off that extra weight."

"Psh. Speak for yourself," I said as I put the skull back on. "But I suppose I can grant you some company. I'm a nice guy, after all."

"So gracious," she sarcastically replied, floating the bunny to her back. "Come, then. There must be an activity we can find while this pie settles."

Back into the night we began walking, looking around for some new trouble to get into. Surprisingly enough, the 'trouble' actually found us instead of the other way around. "Ah, Princess!" Rarity said, hopping off a stage near us. "We were just looking for you."

"What is it you need, Generosity?" Luna asked.

"There's a costume contest going on right now and the other organizer wanted to ask if you would help us judge. I'm sure the contestants would absolutely adore having a princess judge them!"

Luna looked from Rarity to me for what I assumed was advice. I just shrugged and said, "Go for it. Hey Rarity, who all can be a contestant?"

"Oh, anypony," she answered. "There's a separate category for adults and foals, though."

"I will judge," Luna answered with a nod. "But only if Navarone competes."

"Of course! Wait... Navarone, what *are* you supposed to be, anyway?"

"It's the human's personification of Death itself."

"That's... interesting. Why anthropomorphize it as another of your kind instead of making it something completely different?"

"Because we killed all of the monsters we ever ran into, save for ourselves and Death. What better way to respect death than to give it the form of the only monster we could never kill? Now, where are we supposed to go?"

"Navarone, you and your kind... scare me," Rarity said, shaking her head. "But just follow me." She began walking around the stage. "So, Princess, what brings you to Ponyville?"

"I am here for the festival," Luna answered. "Navarone, your kind are monster hunters?"

"That depends entirely upon what you consider monsters."

"Such a ghastly topic!" Rarity said, shivering. "Surely not suitable for something to

discuss in front of a princess.” I just shrugged. “So why this festival, Princess? There are many others that tend to be more enjoyable.”

“We prefer the night,” Luna answered. “And the cool air, of course. There are other festivals, but not many that occur at night.”

“Hm. That’s understandable. But you should really make an attempt to come to next year’s Summer Wrap Up festival. There will be considerably more ponies here and many more contests to take part in. I’m sure you’d love it!”

“I will... consider it,” Luna tactfully answered. Thankfully, finally getting up onto the stairs saved us from going through more of Rarity’s torture.

“She said yes, everypony!” Rarity merrily called out, getting the attention of everyone on the stage. Unfortunately, the little colt I’d been fucking with wasn’t there. Although honestly, that probably wasn’t a bad thing. The poor bastard was probably already going to have enough nightmares.

“Wonderful news,” a stallion that I didn’t recognize said. “It’s good to have you judging with us, Princess.” From that, I assumed he was Rarity’s other judge.

“...Anything to assist,” Luna awkwardly answered, not sure what else to say.

“The rules are fairly simple,” Rarity said. “There are a few categories. Cute, realistic, and scary. Each contestant will say a few words and then step aside for the next one. At the end, we judge everypony and decide on a winner.”

“Very well,” Luna said, nodding. “‘Tis a simple sounding task.”

“Good, good. Navarone, go stand with the other contestants. We’ll be starting shortly!”

“Alright. See you in a few minutes, Luna.” I didn’t even realize I forgot to say princess until I was already walking away. Nothing was made of it, though, so I assumed no one else noticed either. Anyway, I walked around to the large gathering of ponies that were chatting amongst themselves, each in costume.

I was rather out of place in that group, but it wasn’t long before Pinkie approached me, smiling widely. “Nav, you *did* dress up!”

“Did you expect me not to?” I asked, rolling my shoulders.

“Well, I kinda expected you to avoid everypony all night, actually. But I’m so happy you didn’t!”

“Eh. I like scaring kids. It’s a lot of fun.”

“Silly Navi, there aren’t any goats in Ponyville! What are you dressed up as, anyway?”

“Humanity’s personification of death.”

“Neat! Is that why your face is a skull?” I have no clue how she was able to see into the cowl I was wearing, but I suppose the area was lit up enough that it was possible.

“Yeah.”

“Aww... I liked it the way it was before, when it was all mushy and soft!”

“Eh, it’ll go back to normal when I take the mask off.”

“Oooh, that’s a *mask*! Can I try it on?” she asked, starting to bounce in place.

“No. Your face is shaped too strangely.”

“Aww...” That killed most of her enthusiasm.

A new voice cut through the conversations all around us. “Would the first contestant please come forward?”

And then all of Pinkie’s enthusiasm was back. “That’s me! Wish me luck, Nav!” With that, she happily skipped to the front of the stage and began strutting like a chicken. After nearly a minute of making a fool of herself, she very elegantly bowed and walked back over to us. “Totally nailed it,” she said with a smile.

“If you say so,” I replied as the next contestant was called forward. And so the contest went until I was the last one left.

“Good luck!” Pinkie quietly called as I slowly stepped forward, using the scythe as a walking stick.

“So what are you?” the male judge asked, smiling up at me.

“Death,” I hissed, slowly pulling myself to my full height. “And thy time has come, stallion.”

“W-what?”

I started slowly walking toward him. “Thou hast liveth for far too long. I am here to drag thee down to the dark pits of hell where thou belongs.”

“You’re... a very good acto—”

“Who is acting, knave?” I angrily said, flinching to a stop. My head tilted slightly, as though confused. “Dost thou think thee still be living? Nay, thou art dead.” I once more began walking to where the three judges stood. The stallion began backing away. “Run not! There is no escaping thy fate.” One of my hands lifted to my cowl, slowly pulling it back as I said, “Look into my eyes and know only darkness!” With the hood fully back, the skull I had on was visible for all to see.

The stallion’s eyes went extremely wide and he started stammering, his legs shaking.

“Thy. Time. Has. Come,” I slowly announced, drawing closer with each word. Finally I stood before him, glaring down with empty eye sockets. He stood, transfixed, as I lifted the scythe up with both hands. Without a word, I brought it straight down... and it stopped right in front of his face, held in a blue aura.

“That is more than enough,” Luna said, pushing me away from the poor guy that could do nothing more than stare at the tip of the scythe.

“Oh come on. I wasn’t actually going to hit him,” I said, smiling behind the mask.

“Your time was up,” is all she said.

“Ahem...” Rarity daintily coughed, getting our attention. “That was quite a performance, Navarone,” she said. “Now, please return to the group so we can deliberate.” I shrugged and started walking back, settling the hood back over my head as I did.

“That was really cool!” Pinkie said when I got back to the group. The others didn’t seem to think so, however, as they all edged away from me. “I didn’t know you could act!”

“I have a lot of skills you ponies don’t know about,” I replied with a shrug. “But really, acting isn’t all that hard. You just have to know what you’re doing and be careful not to hesitate at the wrong moments.”

“You should teach acting classes, then.” Some of the unimportant ponies around us muttered at that.

“...Nah. That really doesn’t sound that fun.” Of course, she kept bothering me about it right up until the judges called for our attention.

“Everypony, we’re ready to announce the winners!” Rarity yelled over the talking horses around me. “Cutest foal goes to Twist, for her candy costume.” The little filly in question stepped forward, beaming. *Okay, that kid is not at all cute.* Her candy cane outfit was amusing, though. Rarity placed a medal around the neck of the candy cane and pointed the filly off to the right.

The stallion called, “The winner of the most realistic foal goes to Snails for his... ugh, *snail* costume.” The ugly colt stepped—er, *slid* forward, leaving a disgusting trail of slime behind him. *God, I don’t even want to think about what a young teenager would use to make slime.* The stallion put a medal around his neck, trying his hardest not to touch the kid. As soon as it was in place, he backed away, pointing Snails to stand next to Twist.

“And the winner for the scariest foal is Scootaloo,” Luna called out. A beaming Scoots stepped forward, showing off her cute little wolf costume. *How is that scary? Come on, guys.* Luna put the medal around Scootaloo’s proud neck and motioned for her to join the other two. She definitely made sure to stand away from Snails.

“That’s it for the foals,” Rarity said. “Next is the adult category. The winner of the cutest costume is Nurse Redheart!”

“Oh shoot,” Pinkie muttered, lightly kicking the stage.

The nurse stepped up, showing off her somewhat adorable nurse costume. *Man, back on earth she would probably be wearing a slutty costume. Well, she’s a horse anyway, so it’s not like I’m missing anything.* Rarity put the medal around Redheart’s neck and pointed her off to the side where the foals weren’t standing. She stood there proudly, waiting for the two others to join her.

“The winner of the most realistic prize is Pinkie Pie!” the stallion called out, smiling this time.

“Yay!” Pinkie jumped forward, hugging the judge. He awkwardly patted her on the back before prying her away to give her the medal. She took it and bounced off to join Nurse Redheart.

“And of course, the winner of the scariest costume is Navarone,” Luna announced, nodding at me. I shrugged and stepped forward, feeling the stares of everyone in the small crowd behind me. It took some slight kneeling for her to be able to easily put the medal around my neck, but she eventually managed. Unfortunately, it ended up with her hooves all over me there for a second, but we both ignored the moment and I marched on to join the other two.

“We won!” Pinkie excitedly whispered as Rarity launched into a speech meant to make the losers feel better about sucking.

“Sure did,” I just as quietly answered, not overly excited. I mean, I entered the damn thing on a whim, not caring if I won or lost. She didn’t seem to pick up on my apathy. Or if she did, she was too excited to comment on it. I just studied my medal as Rarity continued talking.

...All it had on it was a carved pumpkin head that was frowning. But it felt like real metal, so I wasn’t about to complain. It’s a better reward than I ever got from a costume contest back home, that’s for sure.

It didn’t take Rarity too long to shut the fuck up, thankfully. “And that wraps up this year’s costume contest, everypony!” she finally announced. “I hope to see you all next year.”

The crowd didn’t waste too much time dispersing. I barely even saw Pinkie as she darted away to find more candy. Only Rarity, Luna, and I stayed on the stage. I walked over to them.

“It was an honor to have you with us,” Rarity said to the princess. “And I know it meant a lot to everypony here.”

“It was a... fun contest,” Luna answered. “Though I believe I would have preferred being a contestant rather than a judge.”

“Oh, you can certainly compete next year, if you’d like! I can even make you a costume!”

“...We shall consider it,” Luna answered, one of her ears twitching slightly. “Navarone, I would like to go and find more fun.”

“Alright, let’s go see what we can find,” I said. “Have a good night, Rarity.”

“You too, Nav,” she said with a smile. “Enjoy your date!”

“It’s not a—” Luna started dragging me away at that point, using magic to pull me along. Rarity giggled before turning away to go about her own business.

“Why did Rarity tell you to enjoy your date?” Luna asked, releasing me. “You do not have any fruit with you.”

“Uh. Dates have two meanings, these days. The first is the fruit. The second is a romantic outing between a pair that is involved in a way that involves more than friendship.”

She stopped in her tracks, staring at me. “And dost thou consider this a *date*, Navarone?” she very calmly asked.

“No? That’s what I was trying to tell Rarity when you dragged me off.”

“Hm. Very well. Let us continue, then. But you will correct Generosity when next you see her.”

“Alright. No need to be so defensive, Princess.”

“...You may call me Luna, Navarone,” she said, starting to walk.

“Cool,” I said, falling into step next to her. “And of course, you can call me Nav.” She smiled, happy that she finally earned the right to use my nickname. Not that I cared either way, of course. Maybe people really were that much more formal in her time.

“So what other games are there for us to play?” she asked as we walked through the festival.

“Well, there’s pumpkin carving, if anyone is hosting a contest for it. That would be pretty fun.”

“Are there any games in which we may cooperate rather than compete?” she asked, watching two fillies run past, yelling in delight about something.

“I don’t know. Scavenger hunt, maybe? Each team gets a list of things to find and they prowl around to look for everything. I don’t know if anyone is doing something like that, though. Hell, most of the games we’ve already played could be done against other groups, if we had anyone to compete against.”

At the sound of more intense screams than usual, the two of us looked up toward a building that was very decorated for the holiday, covered in all kinds of spooky scary things, like miniature skeletons. As we watched, a group of mares galloped out, each screaming at the top of their lungs.

“And what is that?” she asked, watching another group going in.

“If I had to guess, I’d say a haunted house. There are several actors in there that try to scare you. The goal is to make it to the end without running out.” The group that just walked in quickly extricated themselves, running away like their lives depended on it. “Some places have prizes at the end. Some don’t.”

“We shall enter the house of horror,” she said, nodding resolutely. “You shall keep me from being scared. I shall keep you from being scared. We will beat this building!”

“I’m in. Let’s go.” We both walked to the rather large building, what looked to normally be a mansion.

“So what manner of horrors lie within?” she asked.

“No clue,” I replied with a shrug. “I’ve never been to a pony house of horrors. I wouldn’t be surprised if it was just a pony in a white sheet jumping out and yelling boo.”

“That would be most disappointing.”

There was no one at the door, so we just stepped through easily enough. From what little I could see, the place was obviously dark and slightly misty. When we entered, I could hear the hissing of a fog machine expelling more of its foul product. I snorted softly upon hearing it.

This’ll be fun.

The first ‘scare’ was a simple jump scare, doing essentially nothing but making the two of us flinch. The clown that jumped out tried his hardest, but... he was a clown. Not even a scary clown, either; the guy’s lips were painted as a smile.

We just walked past him, seeing a few props on our trip. Bowls of spaghetti for worms and a few grapes for eyes. Our second jump came from a sheet with a string on it, being thrown down at us from above.

“Really?” Luna asked as it bounced off me and slid back. We just shook our heads and continued onward.

The next little area was set up with a few spider webs and shit, but all the spiders were stuffed and looked relatively cute. A few fake snakes sat on the ground as well. Some black and

white striped pony jumped out in front of us. “Ooga booga!” he shouted. We both jumped in surprise, but did little more. “Oh come on, that gets everypony!”

“Never break character,” I said as we walked past him. He just sighed.

The next area had a dentist standing in front of a patient that was strapped down. “CAVITIES!” the stallion happily yelled, pulling out a drill that looked like a toy and moving it close to the mare’s mouth.

I almost burst out laughing, but managed to control myself as we walked deeper into the horrible haunted house. The next place had a mail mare named Derpy, whose head was on a platter. As normal, both of her eyes were skewed, making it look like she had been in some kind of horrible accident. But of course, she couldn’t help but wear the goofy smile she almost always had on her face, even as we walked by and barely spared her a glance.

The next room had two ponies that just groaned, “Brains,” as they slowly shuffled toward us. They didn’t have any makeup or anything on them, so they were completely indistinguishable from any other ponies, other than their groans. We easily skirted around them and continued.

The final room was a little bit different. In it was a large amount of mirrors, all angled so that it was hard to tell where to go. “Ugh, I fucking hate mirror rooms,” I sighed, starting to walk in with one of my hands outstretched.

“I never did enjoy mirrors either,” Luna commented, joining me in attempting to find the path through the maze.

The maze that ended up being a straight line. There were no side paths. *Did they even try? Jesus, this is pathetic.*

When we got through, a smiling stallion was standing there at the end. “So what did you think, Princess?” he asked.

“Your ‘house of horrors’ was more of a house of mild annoyances,” she replied. “It was most disappointing.”

The guy’s smile very quickly disappeared. “Really? Everypony else ran screaming!”

“Everypony else is not an ancient princess,” she replied. “Come, Navarone. Let us depart.”

“I have a more fun idea,” I said, a plan forming in my mind. “Are you looking for tips to make this place scarier?” I asked the stallion.

“Well, if it didn’t manage to make either of you scream... Yes,” he said. “We would happily take any advice you have. And if you want to help, that would be even better!”

I turned to Luna. “What do you think? Scaring people is a whole lot of fun. And hell, I think we about ran out of things to do anyway. We could spend a few hours here, kicking these guys into shape.”

“Was my goal here not to become more accepted, Nav?” she asked. “I do not know how scaring others would assist in that plan.”

“Sometimes it’s fun to be scared,” I replied with a shrug. “As long as you don’t actually hurt anyone and allow them to win in the end, they’ll definitely remember you for it. And not

necessarily in a bad way, either.”

“...Very well. We shall assist you.”

“Wonderful!” the stallion gushed. “Oh, and I’m Filthy Rich, by the way. This is my home. If you two need anything, just let me know.”

“Oh, I already have the perfect plan,” Luna said with a dark grin.

I knew right then that the night just got good.

“Who dares to approach the house of horrors?” I darkly intoned, lifting the scythe up slightly and slamming it on the ground with a dull thump. Luna changed my appearance in a few key ways, adding glowing red orbs to the skull sockets that only other people could see, completely remaking my scythe into something that Death would actually carry to ceremonially kill people, and adding an overlay of some kind of bony substance on my gloves.

Of the four ponies before me, I only recognized two: Flitter and Cloudchaser. I didn’t know the stallions with them. “We do,” the stallion said, obviously trying to be a tough guy for the mares.

“Ye are all of age. Do ye all truly wish to enter?” I asked.

“Of course!” the other stallion said, smiling.

I slammed the staff down again and the door opened behind me. “I am Charon and will guide your way this night. Come.” I began slowly shuffling into the house, giving them plenty of time to follow me. “There are many things in life of which to be afraid,” I calmly said, waiting until they were all inside before turning. “Tell me, what do you expect to find in this house?”

“Nothing much,” the first stallion said. The two mares both rolled their eyes at his shitty bravado.

“Then we shall see how you manage.” When I said that, the doors slammed shut behind them, locking instantly. “Come. Dark things lurk in these halls and it would not do to stand still for them.”

“Hmph. Spooky,” the other guy mocked as they all started following me into the dark building, mist licking at their hooves but seeming to completely avoid me.

As we walked further in, a faint sound of laughter slowly became apparent. It wasn’t normal laughter, happy or dark. It was an insane laugh, something summoned forth from a broken mind. The girls seemed to be somewhat worried by it and the stallions lost a little bit of their bravado, but one of them quipped, “Somepony telling a bad joke up there?”

“There are many ways for a pony to succumb to fear,” I said. “One is to lose himself in it, to find everything funny. His mind grows so blank with horror that it cracks, making everything he sees into some kind of sick, sick joke...” A shadow flickered to our left and we could hear someone running very, very close. “...And as every good clown knows, his goal in life is to share jokes.”

The same guy from before jumped out from the right, but this time his costume and design were completely different. Luna did something to his eyes, turning them from a rich

orange to a sickly glowing yellow. The smile he had painted on before now appeared as a frown and the red makeup seemed wet, as though he had been eating flesh and drinking blood. The outfit he wore was in complete tatters and smeared with unidentifiable substances.

Each one of the ponies behind me squealed when the clown stepped into view. The fellow laughed for a few seconds before immediately stopping and gazing at my charges with wide, wide eyes. "How does one get a stallion down from a tree?" he asked in a voice that didn't match his lips. There was ten seconds of silence before he snarled, "ANSWER ME!"

"H-How?" one of the mares whimpered.

The clown grinned, showing chipped and broken teeth, each blackened slightly. Then he held up a noose. "You cut the rope!" Suddenly, another rope dropped down from the ceiling, landing on one of the stallions I was supposed to be guarding. All four of them screamed and huddled together until my scythe reached out and cut the rope hanging from the ceiling.

"Run," I whispered. They needed no further compelling, each galloping forward as quickly as they could go. I followed at a more sedate pace, the butt of my scythe tapping on the ground dully with each step.

I caught up with them at the next door, which they couldn't open without me. "Hey uh... I think we saw enough," one of the stallions quickly said. "This place is kinda lame and—"

"There is no leaving," I said, stepping past their group. "You go until you reach the end. That is the way of life and what is life without fear?"

"That's not cool at all!"

Instead of answering, I tapped my staff on the floor twice, opening the next door. "Then I suggest you conquer your fears quickly. Worse things remain ahead." I had a feeling they all shared very uneasy looks before falling in behind me. "Death and decay come for all eventually," I said, peering into a bowl of spaghetti that Luna animated to look like worms. "We rot and they play..." One of my hands reached out and caressed the top of the bowl before continuing on.

None of the ponies commented.

"When it does come for you..." I started looking at a bowl of eyes. "...will you accept it? Or will you linger on, bringing fear and pain unto those you refuse to leave behind?"

A ghost fell from the ceiling, considerably better animated than before. It actually appeared to be on fire, though a deep chill rather than heat came from the blue flames on it. Once more, all the ponies squealed, trying to get around it. But the ghost didn't appear to like that and it snatched Flitter up, slowly dragging her into one of the dark corners. She burst into tears, using her hooves to claw uselessly at the floor. The others just scrambled to the other door, beating on it with their hooves.

I calmly used my scythe to bisect the ghost, dispelling it and 'saving' Flitter. "The dead must always move on," I said, helping her shaking form stand. "As must the living."

"T-thank you," she whispered, huddling against me.

"Charon guides all," I answered, ignoring her thanks and leading her up to the group. "Conquer your fears, ponies. Once more, worse things lie ahead."

“I don’t wanna go on!” Cloudchaser said.

“The only way out is forward,” I answered, tapping my staff twice more, opening door number three. “Come.” I once more started walking, leading them into the brighter room that looked like something out of a Tim Burton version of *Jungle Book*. Evil spiders danced about in the vegetation above us, Luna’s animation spell bringing the flimsy stuffed spiders to life in the most horrifying of ways. Each pony eyed them with unrestrained fear.

While spiders owned the top, large snakes ruled the bottom, slithering through the undergrowth and around the legs of each pony. Once more, each of them seemed to avoid me, going out of their way to not touch me.

“While some fear the dead, others fear the living,” I said. “Spiders that climb, snakes that slither...” We suddenly heard several branches snapping to our right. “...and other creatures that are even larger. After all, there is no greater fear than the monster that lies inside, waiting to be released.”

The ‘zebra’ from before jumped out behind the group, war paint covering his face and large piercings in each of his ears. He had a collection of dried scalps and ears hanging from his neck and a crazed look in his eyes. “Chew the flesh, mash the bones!” he howled, charging us. The ponies screamed again and took off running deeper into the jungle, toward the next door.

I wrapped my hand around the zebra’s neck and used the leverage and his momentum to sling myself around his neck, essentially riding him as he chased the ponies to the door. When we finally caught up to where they were all groveling and pawing at the door in horror, I used the scythe to slit the zebra’s throat, relying on the enchantments Luna said she was using to not hurt the poor guy.

The enchants worked, because he slowly ground to a halt before falling right before the group, fake blood leaking from his neck. All four of the ponies were crying now.

“The living only give you fear if you do not resist them,” I said, calmly walking to the group and through them, not sparing any of them a glance.

“I wanna go home!” one of the stallions wailed.

“Then find your courage,” I said, tapping my staff twice more, opening the next door. They reluctantly followed, none of them wanting anything more to do with this place. If I hadn’t saved them from every monster they’d run into, they probably would have all abandoned me just to run to the next door. As it was, they huddled as close to me as they could get. “Some fear pain,” I simply said, turning my head to the left.

A light suddenly turned on, revealing a dentist ripping a tooth out of a mare’s mouth as she cried and writhed in her bonds, groaning in pain and horror. Both of her hindlegs were nailed into the upwards stretcher she was on and her eyes pleaded with us to help her.

The ponies with me froze, their eyes stuck on her. However, the dentist followed her pleading gaze and saw us. We could see his mouth move under the mask he wore in what might have been a rictus grin. “New *customers*,” he growled, his horn lighting up. This time it was Cloudchaser that was grabbed and he dragged her struggling form to another stretcher, forcing

the straps around her. “I’m thinking... eye surgery,” he said, lifting his drill up and turning it on.

I don’t need to add, of course, that Cloudchaser was screaming the whole time and so were her friends. As the dentist leaned in to start his dark work, I rushed in, kicking the drill from his hoof and using the butt of the scythe to push him back. As he tried to recover, I cut Cloudchaser’s bindings loose, allowing her to bolt away without a backwards glance. The other three were already gone, leaving us all behind.

“Be more careful next time,” the stallion muttered, rubbing at where I hit him.

“Some ponies fear pain,” I happily said, walking away. When I joined the four this time, they were all huddling, holding each other. “Pain is impermanent. Life goes on and pain can be forgotten.”

“I won’t go anymore!” Cloudchaser yelled. “I won’t! I—” The sound of a drill and more screams cut her off.

I tapped my staff twice more, allowing them to sprint into the next room. “Sometimes, we all need a break from things,” I said, my voice making a table partially light up. “Refresh. Calm down. Do not wander.”

The four of them slowly approached the table. On it were strings of tofu sausages, cups of strawberry juice, a few tofu meatballs, a tub of very dark jelly, and a few other yummy looking things. After several seconds of hesitation, they began to partake.

I allowed them five minutes respite before saying, “It is time for us to move on.” As I said that, the rest of the table lit up, revealing a carved up Derpy, who appeared to be missing her intestines, eyes, blood, brain, and several other organs.

All four of them flipped their shit when they realized what they just ate.

When they finally recovered enough to go on—which took a good while, mind—I said, “There are three more fears you must all yet face.” I tapped my staff on the ground twice, opening the next door. “The next... is the fear of yourselves.” I walked into the room of mirrors, allowing them to follow me.

The first thing they noticed is that my reflection didn’t appear in any of the mirrors. The second thing they realized is that neither did theirs. Or at least, not their own reflections. No, what confronted them were several reflections. Some were them at old ages. Some were them after a few months of being dead. Some were normal. And there were some that didn’t match any of what I said.

After about the fifth mirror, each had their eyes glued to my back, trying their hardest not to look to the side. Every time one did so, I heard a soft whimper or groan behind me. “There are many things to be afraid of. But you will always be yourself. Why fear it? Revel in what you are and fear not what you will become. By the time you become it, the skin will fit you so well it’ll be like you never changed at all.”

That room was probably the second most disturbing room for all of them, since it showed a very real concern that each had. And of course, I loved every minute of it.

When we got to the next door, I stopped. “The going will become tough from here,” I

said.

“It was already impossible!” one of the stallions yelled. “Without you, we’d be dead!”

“You’re the only reason we’re still here,” Flitter said. “If even you think it’ll be tough...” The other two just whimpered as I tapped my staff twice.

The door slowly opened, revealing an entirely empty room. I walked in, the four of them reluctantly following me. “The next fear you must face is simple but dark,” I said. “It is all-consuming and can devour even the stoutest of souls. It is the fear of...” All the lights went out in the room and they all jumped and whimpered in fear. “...abandonment,” I whispered, the sound echoing softly through the room.

When the lights popped back on, I was no longer in the room with them, or at least not that they saw. Luna had a spell of invisibility that she used on me, allowing me to watch and step in if needed.

They all freaked the fuck out when they realized I wasn’t there anymore, especially after what they had said before about how they only made it with my help. After a minute or two of panicking, one of the stallions took a deep breath and got his shit together. “We have to keep moving!” he called, trying to get order over his little group. “Charon said there was only one more fear left. We have to get past it!”

“But only he could open the doors!” Flitter yelled.

“No, only he *did* open the doors. All he did was tap his staff twice!” the stallion said, walking over to the next door. He tapped his hoof on the floor twice, making the door open. “See? We have to keep going.”

“But... what if we run into something?” Cloudchaser asked. “We only made it because he saved us!”

“We’ll protect you,” the other stallion said, grinning.

The two mares gulped, but walked to the door. The first stallion led the way, then behind him, and the other stallion behind them. I followed before the door could slide shut. They were now in what they thought was the final room.

“This... doesn’t seem so bad,” Flitter whispered, looking around.

She spoke too soon. When the last word came from her mouth, a dark blue misty form shot out of the final door, slowly coalescing into Nightmare Moon. “Dost thou truly think ye can escape?!” she yelled with her ‘Royal Canterlot Voice.’ “WE SHALL NOT ALLOW IT!”

Unfortunately, I couldn’t stay to see the result of that final battle, as I had to get back in place. I quietly rushed past the group and into the next door and then used my staff to seal it back, walking to the center of the room. I faced away from the door as the invisibility spell faded, just waiting.

Soon enough, it opened and the four ponies entered, panting for breath. It slid shut behind them, cutting off dark cackling. “We... we made it!” one of the stallions said.

“Charon!” Flitter called. “Why’d you leave us?!”

“I lied to you,” I slowly said, not turning. “Twice. First, my name is not Charon. And

second, there is one more fear you yet have to face.”

“Well, we already beat Nightmare Moon!” the leader stallion cockily said. “What else can this place throw at us?”

I didn’t answer until the four of them got close enough to me. Then I slammed the butt of my staff down again, making them stop. I slowly started to turn, reaching up to pull back my hood. “My name is Death,” I said, revealing the skull that Luna had carved dozens of horrifying symbols upon. “Your final fear is *betrayal*!” I shouted, lifting my scythe up and bringing it down, just barely missing the leading stallion.

They all jumped back in horror, their beloved protector and guide turning on them.

“Stand still and let me drag you to Tartarus!” I hissed, swiping at one of the mares. She squealed and used her wings to fly over me, running to the wall where a door should have been. The others crowded around that wall, all trying to tap a door open as I stalked forward, my red eyes glowing brighter and brighter. “Submit to your fate!” With one last swipe, I dragged the scythe through the air all of them previously occupied as a trap door under them opened, sending their screaming forms down to the final room, where Filthy Rich waited to congratulate them.

...At the end of the night, he told me that not a single pony stayed in that room long enough to talk to him. They all bolted from the house, screaming, as soon as they could.

“‘Twas a most glorious night, Navarone!” Luna announced, pulling me into her in a very unexpected hug. “Fun was had continuously!”

“I’m happy to hear that,” I replied, hugging her back. “That haunted house was a lot of fun.”

“As were the rest of the games,” she said. “And I have many new... gifts... to add to my possessions. My sister will be quite happy with me, I believe.”

“That’s good. I know I definitely had a blast. You ever want to hang out again, just come find me.”

“I shall take you up on that offer,” she said with a nod. “Now, I must return home. I am needed ere the dawn breaks. I will see you again, Nav.”

“Have a good ni—er, day, Luna,” I said with a nod as she spread her wings and took off into the night.

As I walked back to Twilight’s house, the purple mare finally found me. “There you are! I’ve been looking for you and Princess Luna all night! Where have you two been?”

“Haunted house,” I answered with a shrug. “Luna and I helped Filthy Rich retrofit the place to make it actually scary. It was a lot of fun.”

“So *that’s* what those ponies were talking about...” she said, looking away for a moment. “So where did Princess Luna go?” she asked, looking back to me.

“She went back to Canterlot. She told me that she had a lot of fun but had to get back before dawn. Now, I’m fucking tired.”

“Oh, me too. You can tell me later how the night went, I suppose. But I want to hear all

about it!”

“Of course, Twilight. Of course...”