

Maledictum Insania

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Chapter 15: Memories

The battle was over. Slendermane won once again. Obsidian just couldn't defeat him and what made this even worse is that his failure was paid with the life of an innocent pony. The teenagers were horrified, running around in the broken sphere, yet unable to climb out of it. Suddenly, the reaper heard something behind him. He jumped in battle stance again, expecting to see this ancient demon reappearing to kidnap more ponies. Though he quickly relaxed as he realized that it was not a demon that stood there.

"Fluttershy?" he mumbled with the scythe in his mouth. He really didn't expect to see her of all ponies to be out here during Nightmare Night, especially when there was such a powerful demon on the loose. Before the yellow mare could respond, the teenagers started shouting.

"Fluttershy! Help! Get us out of here!" they screamed. The mare quickly walked over to the broken sphere.

"It's okay! You are safe! Obsidian, could you please..." she spoke. The yellow mare didn't even have to finish the sentence for the black stallion to understand. He planned to just let them free now anyway, so Obsidian made the broken sphere disappear again. The teenagers all gathered behind Fluttershy and stared at the reaper in fear.

"Oh no... what are we gonna do now?" Applebloom worried.

"There, there. It's alright. He won't hurt you," the yellow mare explained.

"Won't hurt us? Won't hurt us?! He kidnapped and trapped us in this thing!" Diamond Tiara exclaimed.

"That was simply for your protection. I apologize for not informing you of what was going on, but I did not have the time for explanations," Obsidian stated after making his scythe disappear again.

"Well you did a damn good job on *that*! Thanks to you, Snails is gone now!" Snips shouted with tears in his eyes. Fluttershy became shocked from that statement.

"Snails is gone? What happened?" she asked. Now, finally, the teenagers realized what had happened. After a short moment of shock filled silence, Snips started crying heavily. The

crusaders, Twist and Pipsqueak hugged him. None of them were able to put in words what they experienced, so Fluttershy rose her gaze from them to Obsidian.

"I could not protect all of them from Slendermane... He caught a young stallion and disappeared..." the black stallion explained.

"Oh no..." the yellow mare commented in consternation. She barely knew Snails, but it still came close to her. Fluttershy told herself to keep it together. Somepony just had to act strong to comfort the children.

"I am so, so sorry this happened to you... Is there anything we can do, Obsidian?" Fluttershy asked. The black stallion slowly shook his head, causing Snips to cry even more.

"Why do you ask this black monster for help? What is he anyway?" Silver Spoon questioned, aiming the black stallion. Obsidian took the insult indifferent with his usual, expressionless face.

"Oh, he's not a monster. He is a reaper. An elder to be exact," Fluttershy answered. The cutie mark crusaders lifted their heads and stared at the black stallion.

"He doesn't look like Derpy at all!" Scootaloo commented.

"That is because I am more than two hundred years older than-"

Obsidian started explaining while coming closer, but suddenly was struck by a strange feeling. Now that he could concentrate on them, he noticed one of the school kids had an unusual aura. A kind of aura only those ponies have which... Obsidian had to suppress any kind of reaction that might expose what he discovered and just finished his sentence.

"-than her."

"Wow... you're old. You don't look that old to me!" Sweetie Belle said.

"Reapers age in a different way," he explained.

"Yeah, whatever!" Diamond Tiara interposed. "You're still in big trouble, mister! Trapping and scaring me like that! I'm going to have a talk with my dad! He's so gonna file a lawsuit on you!"

"I totally agree with you. Fluttershy, guide us out of this forest without us having this monster around!" Silver Spoon requested. The yellow mare was about to say something in defence of Obsidian, but he just bowed down to them.

"If my presence bothers you, I shall leave. Fluttershy, I trust you know the way back?" he asked. The yellow mare nodded.

“Then we shall meet at your cottage,” the black stallion concluded and lifted into the sky.

Almost fifty minutes later, the group finally returned from the defiled forest. Fluttershy managed to get the crusaders curious about Obsidian and they asked her many things. The yellow mare, though, preferred them to ask Obsidian directly to avoid her revealing anything the reaper may not want them to know.

While Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon were walking home quickly, playing upset to mask their shock and fear, the others followed Fluttershy to her cottage. After what happened, they felt very unprotected and needed some time to recover mentally.

The black stallion answered their questions as far as he was allowed to and the yellow mare prepared some tea and biscuits for the school kids. It took some time, but their first impression of Obsidian finally changed as they found out he and Fluttershy were in a relationship. If a sensitive and shy Pegasus like her trusted him, then they figured they could do the same.

Only Snips was still very angry at the reaper. He blamed him for not being able to protect his best friend. Obsidian promised to take responsibility for the loss of Snails by personally informing his parents and arranging a farewell. Though this hardly made it up for the young stallion.

After the teenagers somewhat recovered from the shock, they walked out of the cottage again and aimed to go home. Only the crusaders stopped at the front door, thinking about everything Obsidian told them. Sweetie Belle turned around.

“So, Fluttershy... he is your special somepony?” she wondered.

“Yes. He is,” the yellow mare replied, blushing a bit.

“And Fluttershy is yer special somepony, Obsidian?” Applebloom asked.

The reaper nodded.

The three teenage fillies started whispering to each other. Then Scootaloo turned to them again.

“As weird and unexplainable as this is, you two match pretty well,” she stated.

“Grātiās tibi agimus,” Obsidian responded. The crusaders sunk in thoughts for a moment and dropped their gazes in sadness.

"Thank y'all kindly for what yer've done for us tonight... We'd have been in quite a jeopardy without y'all. It's just... oh... that poor Snails," Applebloom spoke.

"I regret I failed in protecting all of you. Please forgive me," the reaper apologized.

"Well... I think you did the best you could," Scootaloo responded. Now, the young mares headed home as well. The front door closed and Obsidian gained a thoughtful expression.

"Such a thing happening on Nightmare Night... I wonder what this means," he stated. Then, he turned around to Fluttershy. "How did you manage to find me in the forest?"

"Well, it was actually pretty easy. I felt you. I just needed to follow," she stated.

"You are developing very fast. But why did you follow me? I do recall that you were afraid of going outside during Nightmare Night," he kept on asking.

"I... I wanted to help you. Remember when I helped you in the house after you got hurt so bad? It was the same this time. I just couldn't take the idea that you fought something so strong all by yourself," the yellow mare explained. Obsidian came close to her now and looked her deep into the eyes, trying to look gentle.

"Your intentions were good, but you are not ready to face such an opponent, yet. I gave Rainbow Dash my word to guard you with my life. Please, do not put this promise to test if it is avoidable," he spoke gently. The yellow mare blushed from his caring words, but she also felt a bit embarrassed that she acted so rash.

"Okay..." she spoke lowly. The reaper then walked up and down the living room, sunken in thought.

"Um... I'm just wondering... why didn't you defend yourself when these two kids insulted you? Back when those guards at the Everfree Forest passage disrespected you, you got so angry," Fluttershy asked.

"I was acting my anger, Fluttershy. You do know I do not have such emotions. There also is a difference between royal guards and innocent children. It is the duty of every reaper to protect pony-kind. I am a servant of Equestria and my mistress and as such, I try to behave," Obsidian explained, then walked over to the front door.

"Now that we are speaking of duties, I owe two unlucky parents the favor of putting them out of their worries with bad news. It may take a while before I can return. Please, just try to get some sleep by yourself. Bene dormī, Fluttershy," he spoke, then started walking towards the home of Snails' parents.

Two days later, Snails was pronounced dead. His parents took the news with disbelief and trauma. They were unable to even cry until they heard the farewell speeches in Snails' honor. All of his classmates had prepared one. Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon had barely anything positive to say at all, but Cheerilee prevented them from talking bad about the lost young stallion. Snips never was a pony of great smarts or words, but his speech was by far the longest and most emotional. He couldn't even finish it before breaking open in tears and caused more than half of Ponyville to cry with him. After the farewell ceremony was over, Obsidian walked straight to Pinkie Pie and started whispering to her.

"You lied to me, Pinkamena," he started coldly.

"Huh? What do you mean?" she whispered back.

"You did not tell me about one of the teenagers from the local school," the reaper continued.

"Oh, that. Silly me!" Pinkie stated, giggling a bit. Obsidian's face became serious.

"We had a deal, remember? And a deal is based on trust. If you keep things secret from me, I can not trust you," he spoke.

"Sheesh, calm down, Obsidian. I just forgot about it, that's all! I'll tell you everything you want to know. Go ahead! Ask me!" the party pony responded.

"For how long has this been going on now?" the reaper asked. Pinkie shrugged and grinned a bit.

"Hm, not sure. A few years," she replied.

"How often do you two work together?" Obsidian kept on asking.

"Well, we used to *play* together at least every other time when I needed new ingredients. But now that the graduation is coming, we can't do that so often anymore. I hope that silly stuff will be over soon," Pinkie explained.

"And the cutie mark... you helped on it? And it is not what the ponies think it is, right?" the black stallion wondered.

"Oh! You're a sharp one! Yes, it appeared after a while when we were playing together. It can be misunderstood, but we both think that's actually pretty funny!" the pink earth pony responded.

"Good. That is all for now. I would like to dine with both of you at some point. There are a few

things I would like to ask, which require this special, secured atmosphere,” Obsidian requested.

“Oooh! That’s a great idea! I’ll see what I can do. Bye!” Pinkie agreed and started bouncing away.

Obsidian was right about his discovery. This might become a really big problem. The reaper had to inform his mistress instantly. He walked into a silent backstreet and secretly wrote a short letter, only containing a single sentence:

“There are two of them.”

An hour later, the reaper met up with the keepers of harmony at Twilight’s library to discuss the Slendermane incident. Eversince he kidnapped Snails, he did not reappear again, which was strange. This ancient demon was known for always hunting after easy prey. Even with both, Derpy and Obsidian in Ponyville, the village provided enough situations where he could have at least tried to kidnap another pony. Even more curious was the fact that Slendermane chose Nightmare Night to appear in the village. He even went so far as to pick Fluttershy’s cottage as first location to make an appearance. It was pretty obvious he wanted to attract Obsidian’s attention. The reason for this remained unknown for all of them, though. None of them could recall any other incidents happening during that night.

“It appears we are running into a dead end,” Obsidian stated. “Whatever the reason may have been for his actions, it seemed like he only wanted to appear this one single time.”

“Those darn demons are unpredictable,” Applejack commented.

“I can’t shake off the feeling something is going on around us,” Twilight worried.

“You may be right, Twilight. We do know Despair has a plan. It could be that Slendermane’s appearance had something to do with it,” the black stallion agreed.

“Well, what are we going to do?” Rarity wondered.

“At this moment, all we can do is defend ourselves,” Obsidian responded. “I would like to ask you all to practise your combat abilities. Also, Rainbow Dash: I need to request your assistance in supervising the village. If you spot anything suspicious during your weather patrol, please report it to me.”

“You got it, O!” Rainbow responded, saluting. Rarity sighed in antipathy.

“By practising *my* abilities, I would have to sacrifice so many gemstones...” she worried.

“Oh, I don’t think that will be a problem. I’m pretty sure Spike would love to go gem digging with you again. Right Spike?” Twilight asked. The baby dragon instantly jumped up as he heard his name and appeared to be very nervous.

“Eh, yes, Twilight. Of course, Twilight. Anything you wish,” he responded and ran out of the library.

“Um... Spike? I said *with* Rarity, not all by yourself...” the purple mare spoke in a confused tone.

“Is it just me or is Spike being weird lately?” Pinkie wondered.

“Well, I don’t know what’s gotten into him. He refuses to talk to me. It’s so strange... we never had such problems before,” Twilight replied.

“Has anything happened between you two?” Applejack wondered.

“No, nothing!” the purple mare responded. “He just started acting like that from one day to the other! Well I *did* have a talk with him about putting my copies of the Daring Doo Adventures in the wrong shelf and lining them up in a completely chronologically wrong order, but that was just a small thing and I don’t think-”

Before Twilight could finish, somepony knocked at the door. A second later, it opened and four young ponies entered. The cutie mark crusaders and Pipsqueak.

“Howdy, everypony!” Applebloom greeted.

“Hey, sis! What are y’all doing here?” Applejack wondered.

“Well, little Pip here got tired of waiting for his cutie mark to appear. So he asked us for help. We figured it would be the best if he just did what we did at his age and started touring around Ponyville with him to hear everpony’s cutie mark story,” Scootaloo responded.

“So? Did you learn anything new, Pip?” Twilight asked.

“Well... not really. At least nothing that could help me,” Pipsqueak replied.

“We were about to give up, but then Appleboom had a brilliant idea!” Sweetie Belle explained and looked over to Applebloom, telling her that she should present it.

“I was thinkin’, maybe we should talk to an older pony. One with plenty of experience, but yet not too old to fall asleep while tellin’. A pony like.... Obsidian!” she stated in excitement.

The eyes of the six mares grew wide and focused the black stallion. He bowed down before the teenagers.

"I appreciate your interest, but my cutie mark story is not one suitable for your young ears," Obsidian replied.

"Oh come on. What can be so bad about it?" Sweetie Belle wondered. The reaper's face became a bit more serious. These kids had no idea what they were asking for. He figured he should make it clear.

"I am a reaper, children. Not a pony. Although I used to be one a long, long time ago. What do you expect my story will be like? Do you even realize what this symbol means?" he asked while turning sideways and lifting his cloak to present his skull cutie mark.

The four school kids gasped a bit. They didn't actually see his cutie mark before.

"On second thought... Maybe it's not such a good idea to ask you," Scootaloo responded nervously.

"Pardon, buddy. Ah guess we'll just have to try something else then," Applebloom spoke. Pipsqueak sighed and dropped his gaze.

"Sorry we disturbed you..." he apologized and turned around.

Pip's disappointment caught the reaper's attention. It seemed like he really wanted to hear his story. Obsidian was unsure. He avoided talking about his short life as a proper pony for such a long time. Usually, he refused to tell anypony about it. But this time, for some reason, he didn't mind.

"Wait, please..." Obsidian finally requested. The cutie mark crusaders and Pipsqueak focused the black stallion with curious faces.

"Would *all* of you like to hear the story how I earned my cutie mark and became a reaper? Even though it is not a happy one?" he wondered.

The jaws of the keepers dropped from the question. What made him change his mind? This was an opportunity none of them could let slip by.

"Yeah, of course!" Pinkie Pie responded.

"It sure would help us understanding y'all better," Applejack stated.

"Come on, mister mysterious. Tell us something about your past!" Rainbow Dash added.

Obsidian hesitated. He wondered if he really was going to do this step and how he would present the story. Putting personal affairs in a mission wasn't very professional. But on the other hoof, it might improve his relationship with the keepers of harmony.

"As you wish. I shall tell you how I lived as a child, how my home city fell and how I earned my cutie mark. But I can not tell you every last detail, for there were things happening that are unfit for children's ears," the black stallion replied. The keepers and the school kids smiled a bit. That was good enough for them.

"Please give me a moment... This is all so long gone by now. I need to remember first," he requested. All the ponies in the room nodded in agreement and made themselves comfortable.

Obsidian closed his eyes, searching through his three centuries of memories for those which where the earliest he could still remember. It slowly came back to him. He could hear the Seven Sounds Bell of Coltholm ringing, the screaming of all its citizen, the sounds of countless steps rushing over the city, buildings collapsing, blades swinging, and slowly, he started seeing pictures.

Coltholm. A city that had been long forgotten by now, despite the fact it was rather unique. Coltholm was solely inhabited by a very rare type of ponies: monochrome ones.

Purely black, white and grey ponies nearly became extinct in the modern days. The fall of Coltholm is the main reason for that. Although ponies from other parts of Equestria referred to it as 'the monochrome city', the city itself was actually very colorful. It overall consisted more of statues, art and fountains than buildings, due to its low population. Yet, no art piece was more magnificent than the trade mark symbol of Coltholm: The Seven Sounds Bell.

It was a one of a kind piece. A golden bell in a very unique shape, crafted to be able to play up to seven different sounds depending on where it was hit. Seven small figures of earth ponies, pegasi and unicorns, representing the founders of Coltholm were located around the bell, wielding small hammers. The Seven Sounds Bell was not only a masterpiece of art, but also of magic. It was enchanted to occasionally play melodies on its own, by letting the pony figures hit the bell with their hammers. The melodies always were very meaningful and represented what the citizens would have to expect for the day. Such a majestic bell of course also needed a majestic tower to present it properly. So the bell tower as well was a piece of art. It was a thin, filigree structure made of iron, with the individual parts being bent and shaped to look like vines and leaves.

Coltholm was a beautiful city. It also was the home of a certain stallion. As impressive as the city may had been, there was one event that always outshined all the decor and art. On this one

particular day, the said event happened again. Many ponies were gathered at the front door of a rather common looking house. What was going on inside it, though, was everything but common. The crowd waited, mumbling in both excitement and worry. Then finally, a nurse stepped out of it, speaking to the crowd in the language which was common for these days.

“Equuleus est!” she shouted. The crowd responded with loud cheering. Monochrome ponies were rare, even back then. So the birth of another one always was a reason to celebrate.

Inside the house, two adult black earth ponies were sitting on a bed, gently holding their sleeping, newborn foal and keeping it warm. It was a colt, just as black as his parents.

“Our precious, little son,” the mother said quietly, smiling happily.

“Yes. Our beautiful little boy,” the father responded and gave his wife a kiss.

“How should we name him?” he asked.

“A wonderful, special child like him also needs a special name. What do you think about Obsidian?” the mother suggested.

“It is perfect,” her husband responded.

“Then it’s decided,” the mother spoke and kissed her sleeping foal on the forehead. “Welcome to Equestria, Obsidian Shards.”

The little colt had a good childhood. He had multiple friends and spent most of the days playing with them. His favorite game was hide and seek, as he was very good in both, hiding and seeking. At school, he was an average pupil, learning with a lot of enthusiasm. At home, his parents met him with a lot of love. They cared a lot for their precious child and did an admirable job in raising him.

Obsidian was quite a responsible child. At the age of two, his parents could fully trust him to roam around freely with his friends. They explored the city in all its details and found many small passages where only they were fitting through. They also enjoyed to play at the borders of the city, taking care of the animals there or just watching the tall mountains in the distance. These first two years of his life were carefree and filled with happy moments.

But all good things eventually come to an end in a cursed land like Equestria. One morning, the Seven Sounds Bell played a melody it never played before. It sounded dreadful. The ponies wondered if the bell was broken, since the tones were very off-key. The whole melody only lasted a short moment, though.

Today, Obsidian was playing with his friends at the city border again. A Pegasus filly brought a big, light ball and they tried to keep it up in the air. It was a lot of fun, until their game was interrupted by strange noises from far distance. A kind of growling echo, mixed with faint giggling. The children looked around, but couldn't find the source of these creepy sounds. Just moments later, the ground started to shake lightly, gradually getting worse and worse. Finally, one of Obsidian's friends spotted the reason for the noises and the earthquake.

Multiple caves opened in the mountains before them and a huge, black mass flew out of it. The mass seemed to have some kind of red aura around it and rolled down the mountains, towards them. It was Obsidian who first realized that this mass was not a single thing. It was made out of an uncountable amount of black creatures. They all had glowing red eyes.

Demon strongholds are scattered all over Equestria. What the citizens of Coltholm couldn't have known is that there was one in the mountains close to the city. Every few hundred years, a stronghold houses enough demons to make it possible for them to launch a large-scale attack. On this day, Coltholm should fall.

The foals turned tail and ran back to the city. But the black creatures approached very fast. Obsidian was one of the more physically fit children. He could run at a good pace. Though not all of his friends could keep up. The black mass of monsters rolled over the slowest ones, leaving nothing remaining of them but a single, agonized scream of terror. However, Obsidian had no time to look back. He just tried to stick with his other friends and narrowly made it back to the city before the black creatures arrived there too.

What happened then could only be described as hell breaking loose in Coltholm. The black monsters rushed down the main street. They caught the ponies, ripped their hide off, tore them to pieces, ate them alive and flung their innards around. Blood, flesh, organs, body parts and bones were flying through the air, giving all of the city's art pieces a macabre makeover. The water in the fountains turned red from all the blood spilling in them. Even the air became red from the demonic aura of these brutal creatures.

The Seven Sounds Bell started playing again. The same melody it played earlier today. But this time, it just wouldn't stop anymore. Mixed with the screams of torture, the sound of raw flesh getting sliced in bits, the breaking bones and necks of all the ponies and the moist splashing of blood hitting the stone ground made this melody all the more traumatizing.

While all the adults around them died, Obsidian and his friends somehow managed to escape the demons so far. They used all the secret paths they had found to escape the monsters. Yet, the number of friends falling behind and getting ripped apart by the black monsters kept increasing.

The demons attacked the buildings, tearing them down and assaulted the ponies hiding inside

them. Within the first few minutes, a majority of Coltholm was already destroyed.

The foals started to run out of places to hide in. Finally, a building collapsed just above Obsidian. None of his remaining friends could help him. The walls crumbled around the little colt and buried him. Wondrously, Obsidian was almost unharmed by that. The building chunks trapped him, creating a sturdy prison that provided barely enough room to move at all. Through tiny gaps, the colt could watch the monsters rush past him. Obsidian didn't dare to move. If he just gave the smallest hint he was stuck under the chunks, it would mean his end.

He tried to stay as calm as possible, reducing his breath to a minimum despite the intense fear he suffered from. Obsidian could see more black creatures appearing. But they seemed to be different. They looked like ponies, wearing cloaks. The sound of swinging blades hinted the little colt that they were fighting the other black creatures.

After a while, Obsidian could hear one of the cloaked ponies collapse near his hideout, followed by crunching and splashing sounds, indicating it got torn apart. Seconds later, the pony's blood flew under the building chunks. The colt had no chance to stay away from it, since he already could barely move and any additional movement might reveal his location. He was forced to endure the sensation of the body warm life juice running over his legs and stomach, sending him into a state of extreme disgust and nausea. He wanted to scream. He wanted to throw up. He wanted to cry. But all that would only expose him. It didn't take long for the blood to lose its warmth, leaving Obsidian shivering in a cold, wet, smelly and slowly turning sticky puddle. The little colt proved a lot of endurance to retain consciousness for such a long time. But finally, the trauma, fear and disgust simply became too much for his brain to cope with. Obsidian blacked out.

As the little colt awoke again, all the loud, disturbing sounds disappeared. The air was still dyed in a terrible crimson, but the only sound that remained was that of the wind blowing through what was left of the city. The smell of death and decay hit Obsidian as he lifted his head out of the blood, which had formed a crust around his body. Looking at the dried fluid below him, Obsidian remembered what happened and shivered in trauma and revulsion. He peeked through the gaps. But as soon as he did, his nausea intensified. Everything was destroyed and covered in blood. Carcasses in various states of abuse were covering the landscape. Silent tears rolled down his cheeks as he now finally realized that most of his friends died around him, along with the entire population of Coltholm.

Obsidian spent another hour shivering in the red puddle he was laying in, battling with his mind. Despite his young age, he somehow managed to somewhat calm down and sort his thoughts. The little colt realized he was forced to leave his cover sooner or later, unless he wanted to die of thirst or starve in here. Trying to cause as little noises as possible, he slowly fought his way out of the building chunks.

Obsidian was unprotected now, standing in a scenery no normal pony would be able to handle mentally. The black monsters steamrolled everything. Coltholm was none-existent anymore. The little colt had only one desire at this moment: looking for his parents.

He snuck between the remains of buildings, statues and ponies, avoiding the open areas. He carefully looked around every corner he planned to go around. Some of the monsters might still be here, he thought.

Obsidian searched. For his parents. For friends. For anypony. But all he was able to find were gutted corpses.

Finally, the little colt managed to find the collapsed building which used to be his home. In there, Obsidian found his parents. But they were not in the state he hoped them to be. They were gutted and half eaten. The black monsters cleanly tore the flesh off their heads and necks.

Obsidian collapsed. The sight of his parents' corpses was too much for him. This was the worst fate any child could experience. His parents were dead. He was all alone in the middle of these blood, flesh and rot covered ruins. The little colt finally let out everything he fought back so far. He cried loudly and screamed in trauma. His entire world shattered around him. Nothing was left that could comfort him.

Yet, his cries were heard. One of the black monsters with the red eyes had been hiding behind the bodies of Obsidian's parents, feasting on them. The colt was stealthy enough to not attract the monster's attention until he began to cry and scream. It chuckled at the sight of the colt, already getting excited to taste fresh, living flesh. The little colt stared at the blood covered monster with wide open eyes and tiny pupils. As it was about to pounce him, he turned around and ran away as fast as he could. The monster, though, was very fast and agile. Despite Obsidian using narrow passages and changing direction several times, he could not shake the creature off. The colt spotted the Seven Sounds Bell, laying nearby. The entire bell tower had been broken down and destroyed the bell, creating a narrow gap Obsidian could use to hide himself in. This was the only chance he had.

Without hesitation, he aimed for the bell and crawled inside it. The monster was too big. It couldn't fit inside. Instead, it reached a claw inside the bell, trying to grab the little colt. The arm of the black creature stretched out more and more, forcing Obsidian to retreat further and further inside the bell. It was hopeless. In just a few moments, the monster would get him. But then, the moment came that changed Obsidian's life forever.

During the battle against the demons, several reapers found their end. Almost all of the freed reaper cloaks had flown off to seek a new owner at a different place. Only one remained in the fallen city, to the little colt's great fortune. It was attracted by the reaper blood Obsidian was covered in and sought him out, finally finding the colt under the broken Seven Sounds Bell.

Obsidian Shards had achieved the impossible. He survived what was unsurvivable, thanks to his stealthiness, self-control, physical abilities and logical reactions. He was still very young, too. A perfect host for the reaper curse.

The little colt felt something grabbing him from behind. It was the cloak, squeezing itself through a hole in the bell. Before Obsidian could react, the cloak wrapped itself around his body and emitted a dark aura that soaked into him. He could feel how the reaper curse changed him violently. It rearranged his body, mind and soul. Obsidian was in pain. A strange kind of pain that can not be described with any words in the world. Obsidian's mind drowned in chaos as everything he felt and knew became newly arranged. The curse reached into the deepest parts of his soul and fused with it in a dark symbiosis.

The pain vanished. The chaos in his mind was replaced with a calmness and order he never experienced before. The fear, shock, trauma and disgust he felt the whole time were gone, just like that. Obsidian was unable to feel anything anymore, giving him the idea he had died now for some reason. But he could still move his body. He could still look around and he could still breathe.

No, he wasn't dead. But he knew, whatever just happened to him, it changed him into something entirely different.

While his sight was at first very blurry, he now was able to focus again. He saw so much now. So many details he was unable to see before. He also could hear even the smallest sounds of everything around him now. His sense of smell and taste sharpened enormously too, allowing him to not only taste the blood and decay in the air around him, but also the fine dust from the crumbled buildings and the aroma of the trees outside of Coltholm. As he focused on everything he could discern, he noticed that one was missing now: the black monster.

It ran off the moment it noticed a reaper cloak was grabbing Obsidian and changing him into a reaper. The colt's new gained instincts were now awakening inside him. Whatever it takes, he had to catch that monster and make it pay for what it had done to his parents.

Obsidian crawled back outside of the bell, now wearing the reaper cloak that would accompany him for the rest of his life. Although he could not see the demon anymore, he could sense it.

The chase had now turned upside down. Obsidian tracked down the demon and used several shortcuts to close up. While running, the colt noticed changes on his body. He still looked the same, but was able to run much faster, jump much higher and had an a lot greater endurance than before. With these new physical abilities, it didn't take him long to cut in the monster's path and pounce it.

A fierce fight between hooves and claws ignited. Obsidian punched the monster hard,

sometimes even sending it flying a bit. But all that didn't seem to drain it in the least. Everytime, the monster just jumped back up and charged the colt again. Its claws sliced over Obsidian's face, but he didn't care. He kept on fighting, finally pinning the demon to the ground in a defenceless position.

His instincts took over again and Obsidian turned into a black cloud of smoke, surrounding the monster. While in this state, he held it firmly and formed countless sharp, black teeth that soon rammed in the monster. Obsidian absorbed the demon inside himself. He made it a part of his own being by tearing it apart. The monster's physical appearance dissolved into a black cloud, too, that fused with Obsidian.

After the monster was entirely gone, the black cloud turned back into the little colt. Obsidian felt a strange sensation of satisfaction. Consuming the demon recharged him and even made him still a bit stronger.

The colt's senses remained sharp and alert. He heard the sound of hoof steps behind him. Obsidian quickly turned over and went into some sort of battle stance, looking grimly. His expression changed again as he realized it was one of the cloaked ponies he had seen before. This one was a female, brown one with black eyes, bat wings and a curved horn.

"You are very talented, young reaper," she spoke calmly. "You just became cursed and already consumed your first demon. All that without any instructions."

Obsidian remained silent. He had the feeling he could trust this mare and got up from his improvised battle stance again.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Obsidian Shards..." the little colt replied quietly.

"Greetings, Obsidian Shards. My name is Claymore. I am a reaper. The same kind of being you have turned into," she explained.

Obsidian still remained silent. He wasn't sure what to say or think right now. Claymore seemed to read the little colt's mind.

"You have been through a lot. I know you are very confused right now and you may have a lot of questions. But I ensure you, everything will soon make sense. I have been looking for you. Please, come with me and I will explain everything to you," she offered.

Hesitatingly, the little reaper nodded. Claymore turned around and started walking. Obsidian followed her, but after just a few steps, once again something strange happened. A large black book appeared in front of the colt and opened up on the first page. Claymore noticed that and

turned around to him again.

"Your book of death already appeared? You indeed are quite a skilled apprentice, Obsidian," she stated.

The little colt looked at the book in confusion. What was he supposed to with that?

"You can read already, right? Please read the first name on the first page," Claymore requested.

Obsidian started reading. His eyes grew wide as he realized whose name that was. He instantly read the second name, also recognizing it immediately.

"Mother! Father!" the young reaper spoke out in surprise. Then, the book disappeared again.

"Hm... it appears we did not reap all of the citizen, yet. Do you know where they are?" Claymore wondered.

Obsidian nodded and guided her back to his destroyed former home.

Upon arrival, the young reaper realized the corpses of his parents had changed their position. As he came closer, they even seemed to move again.

"M-mother? Father?" Obsidian asked unsure.

The broken bodies of his parents moaned and tried to get up again, looking at their child. Although their faces were removed, their eyes were still intact, but lost the shine of life. The two undead ponies gazed at Obsidian in a way that made him realize how much they were suffering.

"It is a tragedy that your first two reaps are your own parents. But if you truly love them, then do them the favor of releasing them from their agony," Claymore stated.

Obsidian looked up to her in confusion. If they already were like that, how was he going to kill them? As soon as he thought that, the colt realized how much even his mind had changed. He considered killing his own parents as if it was nothing.

"Summon your scythe, Obsidian. You already know how to do it. Just follow your instincts," Claymore spoke.

The young reaper nodded and closed his eyes. He moved his head to the side and opened his mouth. Seconds later, a black scythe materialized in front of his face and he grabbed its handle with the mouth. Obsidian looked back at his undead parents. They stared at their son in both,

fear and begging for release. They had done so much to raise him and he loved them so much...

He just couldn't allow himself to hesitate and let them suffer just a single second longer.

Obsidian brutally decapitated them with his new weapon. The bodies collapsed again and their souls escaped, gently lifting into the air. Obsidian allowed his scythe to dissolve again and kept tracking the souls as they lifted into the sky. Even after they were gone, he kept on gazing into the red firmament above him for a while longer. Suddenly, a bright flash caught his attention. He looked around for the source of this light, but couldn't find it. Claymore stopped him and pointed on his flank. The young reaper lifted his cloak and saw that his cutie mark had appeared: a skull.

"Impressive," Claymore stated. "You have potential, Obsidian Shards. You could become a very powerful reaper."

Obsidian didn't respond. He just stared at the ground, thinking about everything that had happened.

"Let us go now, Obsidian. Mistress Celestia is waiting for us," Claymore explained and turned around.

"Wait..." the young reaper requested.

Claymore turned again and watched as Obsidian walked over to the skulls of his parents. He gently picked them up, removed everything that was still inside them and stacked them on his back. The young reaper wanted to keep something with him that reminded him of what he used to have and what he had become. Though the skulls were almost as big as his entire body. He could barely carry them.

Claymore decided that she should help him. Using her dark magic, she levitated the skulls over to her and carried them for him.

"Grātiās tibi agō, miss Claymore," Obsidian thanked and bowed down to her.

"Nihil est. Claymore is enough, though," she replied.

Now, Obsidian was ready to leave. He and Claymore left the ruins of Coltholm behind them and walked towards Death Rock Mountain, beginning Obsidian's long, dark and lonely life as a reaper.