

## Chapter One Hundred and Sixty-Six

Our first guest was ushered in as I slowly ambled down the stairs. It was Twilight Sparkle, and her eyes were all over me as I walked down. When I finally got to the bottom floor, they met my own. “Wow,” is all she could say.

I lifted my arms up and gave her a little spin, letting my dress poof out. “What do you think?” I asked.

“I think you look *great*,” she said with a warm grin.

Fleur snatched one of my arms with magic and placed it on her neck. “We put quite a lot of work into my pretty date,” she said.

“It looks like you put a lot of work into the house, too,” Twilight replied, looking around. “Where did you get the tree?”

“Celestia’s garden!” Gloomy shouted from the second floor.

Twilight sighed and lifted a hoof to one of her temples. “I didn’t order her to do that,” I said. Gloomy giggled and fell silent again. “I had no idea until it was too late. Hopefully Celestia won’t notice.”

“She’s been so busy with all the work you’ve piled on her that she hasn’t really been able to get out much,” Twilight said. “So with luck, she won’t. Am I the first guest to arrive?”

“I’m afraid your inner nerd is showing,” I said. “No one ever shows up to parties early. Not unless they’re gonna help.”

“Well... Do you need anything?”

“I’m sure Doppel has a spare maid dress somewhere,” Fleur said. “Nav is unfortunately very low on hired help...”

“That’s not true, actually,” I said. “I have plenty of guards. I’m just low on house staff. Not that I’m gonna ask you to be a maid, of course. I wouldn’t mind if you wanted to wear the outfit for me, though...”

“I’ll certainly remember that,” she said. “So who else is gonna be here?”

“No fucking clue,” I said with a shrug. “Fleur?”

“...You never thought to ask until now?” Twilight asked.

“She trusts me,” Fleur said with a smirk. “I *know* Fancy Pants, Soarin’, Queen Moonbeam, and Captain Midnight Blossom will be attending. I only sent out invitations to a few ponies that you might not know.”

“I thought the point of this was to build new alliances,” I said. “I’ll certainly be happy to see some friends, but wouldn’t we be better served by bringing in more new people?”

“The new ponies must understand with whom they are dealing,” Fleur said. “Being seen with such a broad range of powerful friends will be wonderful for your reputation. And bringing in only a few new ponies at a time will make them realize that they are being granted a fairly unique opportunity. There will be a time for large parties later. For now, it’s better to keep things close knit.”

“You’re so adorable when you’re plotting,” I said, scratching at her neck. She sighed in joy and leaned into my hand. Twilight grit her teeth, but chose to stay silent. “So do you actually know that all four of them are coming? Or are you just assuming?”

“I know. I spoke to my ex-husband, Queen Moonbeam, and the captain about it personally. I’ve exchanged correspondence with Soarin’. All of them promised to attend, though Captain Blossom will likely be late to avoid the sun as much as possible.”

“She’s... the vampony, right?” Twilight asked.

“That is correct,” Fleur said with a nod. “Do you have an issue with that?”

“If she’s friends with Nav, I know she’s safe,” Twilight said. “Ever since Nav mentioned her to me, I’ve been interested in speaking to her. I suppose tonight’s my chance!”

“It might be wise if you take Taya in hoof, as well,” Fleur said. “I’m worried that she might try acting up, should she be left to her own devices.”

“Taya told me she’d behave,” I said. “I’m going to give her the benefit of the doubt. You can watch her if you want, but I don’t think it’ll be necessary.”

“Taya’s always a pleasure to be around,” Twilight said. “She’s quite sweet to those she likes. I certainly wouldn’t mind watching her for you.”

“It’s how she behaves to those that she does not like that worries me,” Fleur said. “And how she behaves toward those she does not know.”

“...Yes, she seems to have ignored all my pointers on how to make and keep friends.”  
*Understatement of the year:* “I’m hoping going to school will help temper her.”

“If not, she’ll just have to get her shit together,” I said.

Twilight sighed and said, “She’s a hormonal teenager, Nav, and you aren’t exactly making things easy on her.”

Fleur scoffed. “That filly has things about as easy as they come. She has a wonderful home, a loving mother, all the food she could ever eat, a noble title, more money than she could spend in a lifetime, several loyal retainers, and I’m sure Nav would be happy to give her whatever else she could possibly want.”

“Except for a normal life,” Twilight shot back. “Her original parents were murdered in front of her and Nav was pretty vocal about not wanting to keep her. She’s horrified that he’ll get tired of her and leave her or worse, get killed. Part of why she spends so much time with you is because she’s afraid if she isn’t around, she might never see you again. Given your propensity for almost dying, I can honestly understand that. Because she spends all of her time around you, she never had a chance to get friends. Even if she did, she’s never had any normal interaction with fillies her own age. She has no idea how she’s even supposed to act. She’s scared and confused. She’s seen horrors that have made even veteran soldiers quiver in fear. She’s been lied to and betrayed. I don’t blame Taya at all for her behavior. It may be inappropriate, but it’s hard for her to know what is and isn’t okay to do without testing her boundaries.”

“...I was not aware of all of that,” Fleur slowly said.

“It isn’t exactly something she advertises,” I replied. “It took her a while to tell me what happened to her parents.”

“That’s because you didn’t ask,” Twilight replied. “I knew less than a month after meeting her.”

“And you didn’t think that was something I should know?”

“I thought you did,” she said with a shrug. “How was I supposed to know you’d wait more than a year to ask her?”

“I dunno, because I’m emotionally broken, have a hard time connecting with people, am bad with personal discussions, and hate talking about painful subjects?”

“I was assuming you could make an exception for the filly you rescued and adopted as your daughter.”

“Yeah, well, you know what they say about assuming.”

“...Are you *assuming* I know what they say about assuming?”

“Go fuck yourself. Point is, Flo had to use my mouth to ask Taya, because I wouldn’t do it myself.”

“That’s... kind of sad,” Fleur said.

“Go fuck yourself, too. I told everyone I could that I’d be a shitty parent.”

“Saying you would be terrible at something doesn’t give you a pass for not attempting to better yourself,” Fleur replied. “For her sake, if not for yours.”

“Can we go back to talking about the party instead of talking about how I’m a shitty person?” I asked. “I get enough of that from myself.”

“Neither of us said you were a bad person,” Twilight said. “We just implied that you were a bad parent. Also, Doppel is glaring at you.”

Doppel happened to be behind me. I chose not to look back. “That’s very unfortunate,” I said with a shrug. “So who else did you invite?”

“Princess Gilda, since she was in town for the contest. Kumani as well, because she seemed to know you.”

“You invited Kumani?” Twilight asked.

“I did,” Fleur said with a nod. “Is that an issue?”

Twilight’s head slowly moved to me. “*Is* that an issue, Nav?”

“I already had a conversation with her,” I said. “I don’t regret our relationship, but I do understand that it was a bad idea and I’m grateful that it ended with no hurt feelings.”

“Your... *relationship*?” Fleur asked.

“Kumani was Nav’s special somedragon,” Twilight said. “They were together for a few months when Nav’s trip first started.”

“Things started going downhill when her heat cycle ended and they turned practically icy when I got turned into a chick,” I said. “She finally left when I got trapped in a haunted human bunker at the bottom of the world. I ran into her again while I was a dragon. She didn’t recognize me, but told me and Spike that she wanted to speak to me. I told her about the contest and

mentioned that I would probably be in Canterlot. The last time I spoke to her, she seemed to come to the conclusion that she wanted nothing more to do with me. I doubt she'll come."

"That would be disappointing," Fleur said. "I want all of my contestants to get along. Honestly, I was somewhat hoping your home might become something of a gathering place for the others."

"...Nah."

"Why not? Kat already lives here and I know you're at least acquaintances with Princess Gilda and Kumani. The changeling race as a whole seems to adore you, so the changeling representative would likely be delighted to visit. We still haven't picked the pony candidate yet, but I'm sure she would be happy to meet and speak with the famous Lady Navarone. I don't know much of your relations with the other races, but I'm sure they'd all be happy to meet you."

"I think it would be good for you, Nav," Twilight said. "You can always use more friends!"

"And I'm sure your staff would enjoy the extra company," Fleur added. "It would give them more chances to show off their abilities."

I had a feeling that Doppel was back to grinning, but I still steadfastly refused to look. "Because I'm an introverted homebody who finally has a chance to avoid people. I don't want my house to become the party house. I want to actually be able to relax here, not constantly feel on edge because I have company over all the time. I don't mind doing the occasional event here and there, but I am going to need time to unwind. I've just been through too much bullshit recently. Some time to myself would be nice."

"...Why would you ever want *that*?" Fleur slowly asked.

"Some of us happen to enjoy our own company," Twilight said. "It's definitely something I understand. Friends are nice, but sometimes solitude is preferable. Especially after so long in such cramped quarters."

"Unfortunately, it seems that everyone has been conspiring against me," I sighed. "Kat has been with me as much as possible. If it isn't her, it's someone else."

"We're not *conspiring*, Nav," Fleur said.

"That's exactly what your other co-conspirators said."

"And it's what I've already told you," she sighed. "We're trying to make your life better, Nav. If you could just get past your strange and unhealthy self-loathing, you might see it."

"Tch, good luck," Twilight said. "I've been trying to get her over that for *years*. It's dug in deep."

"Well well, it seems I may have found my newest... co-conspirator, according to Nav. Perhaps we should make time to speak in private, Twilight."

"Perhaps you should both go fuck yourselves," I said.

"I think that sounds lovely," Twilight said with a grin. *God dammit*. "Don't you feel lucky to have such wonderful friends, Navi?"

“Eat a—” More knocking at the door cut me off. Twilight smirked at me while the guard at the door hurried to answer.

“Put your smile on, Nav,” Fleur said. “It’s starting.”

As soon as the guard started opening the door, the person on the other side kicked it open. It slammed into her face, knocking her back. Doppel immediately jumped in front of me as a familiar white unicorn walked in, glaring. His look of anger turned to shock when he spotted me. “Y-you!”

“...Pelt?” I slowly asked. “What the hell are you doing in my house?”

“I... I heard there was a beautiful unicorn held captive by an evil monster here! I thought this house was still abandoned!” *Then why did you knock?*

“You wouldn’t happen to have been told this by a hideous green pegasus with bright red hair, hm?”

“That’s the one,” he slowly said.

“The unicorn she’s referring to is one of my employees. In particular, the one I rescued from Pertz, who had kept her in a cage until I saved her. I then gave her a job so she wouldn’t have to live on the streets, since everything had been taken from her. The pegasus you met happens to be insane.”

He slowly lifted a hoof to his forehead, sighing deeply. “I need better sources of information...”

“Get the fuck out of my house.”

He sighed again and walked away, head hung low. The guard slammed the door behind him, then Twilight trotted over to heal her.

“God, I need a drink,” I sighed, turning to walk to the sun room.

Doppel jumped right back in front of me. “There’s no alcohol in the house, my lady,” she sweetly said.

“Of *water*,” I added as I brushed past her. “Though with none of my vassals here, I wouldn’t mind getting drunk again.” Thankfully, she let me walk past with no more problems. All three of them followed me into the sun room. Two more guards stood watch in there. They both bowed when I stepped in. “Where is Kat, anyway? I figured they would have been back by now.”

“Silver’s upstairs. Spider is out back. Kat is getting ready,” Doppel said. “She’s going to be your shadow tonight, once she gets down here.”

*How is this my life?* I sank into a chair at one of the tables with a sigh.

“So how do you know that stallion?” Fleur asked, planting herself in the chair next to me.

“He came to Ponyville one day to kill me shortly after I first got here,” I replied.

“Twilight wouldn’t let me fight him and got Celestia involved. She talked him down. Then another friend beat the shit out of him, which was kinda funny.”

“None of us were expecting that from Fluttershy,” Twilight said with a grin. She took the other seat next to me. “Wasn’t he also at Lyra and Bon Bon’s wedding?”

“Yes. Apparently he didn’t get the memo about the peace treaty between ponies and changelings. Or, you know, he’s just a bigoted asshole, like most of the ponies.”

“Just the way our divine princess wanted,” Fleur said with a smirk. “It’s interesting how a nation founded upon the ideals of friendship can find itself so... unfriendly.”

“Fear of the outsider is a very dangerous thing,” I replied. “It’s something Celestia wields deftly.”

“And she guards her knowledge well,” Twilight sighed. “It’s... a shame, honestly.”

“Things are going to change soon,” Fleur said. “I just... have a feeling. Old walls are going to come down very soon.”

“That’s a feeling I share,” Twilight sighed.

“There is a time and a place for this conversation,” I said. “This is not that time.” *But it might be the place.*

“As you wish,” Fleur said, dipping her head.

Thankfully, Doppel was kind enough to bring me some water. I honestly wasn’t that thirsty, but I drank it anyway. As I set the glass back on the table, I looked out into the courtyard. My eyes spotted two flecks moving in from out west. “Looks like Soarin’s bringing company,” I said.

“He didn’t mention a date,” Fleur said. “But the invite wasn’t particular. Are you sure that’s him?”

“There aren’t too many pegasi who fly directly at my house with the speed of a storm,” I said. “I’m pretty sure that’s him.”

“Or Rainbow Dash found out you didn’t invite her to a party, especially one with Wonderbolts,” Twilight said.

“If it’s Dash, you’re in charge of her.”

She snorted. “No one’s in charge of Rainbow Dash but herself.”

I rolled my eyes. “Fine. If it’s Dash, Doppel is in charge of her.”

“I’ll rustle her up a maid dress pronto!” Doppel said with a grin. *Note to self: Get a maid outfit for Dash.*

“Before they get here, do you want me to turn you back into a human?” Twilight asked. “If anything happens and you lose your concentration during the party, you might have a lot of questions to answer.”

“That would likely be wise,” Fleur replied. “I have a feeling Blossom would be able to tell that you were a changeling as well, which would be awkward.”

“If you don’t mind,” I said with a shrug. “I don’t guess it would hurt.”

Twilight’s eyes narrowed and she sent a pulse of magic toward me. After a few seconds, I noticed that her horn was glowing. “That should do it,” she said.

I lifted one of my hands and tried to turn it into a hoof. Nothing happened. “Looks like I’m back to my normal ugly self.”

“There’s nothing normal or ugly about you,” Twilight said.

“Not even my fucked up demon wing?” I asked.

“Not even your fucked up demon wing,” she confirmed with a nod.

“She’s right, you know,” Fleur said. “Your body is most exquisite. One might even call it... *tasty*.”

“Creepy.” The pegasi were close enough now that I could tell one was definitely Soarin’. The other appeared to be Spitfire. They weren’t wearing their signature uniforms for once. Looks like Soarin’ was in a suit and Spitfire was actually wearing a pretty nice dress. “I guess I’m really popular, now,” I said. “I got the captain herself.”

“She is not a bad friend to have,” Fleur said. “These parties are about networking, Nav. Use your charm to get something you want from them.”

“I have, actually,” I said. “Soarin’s stamina was legitimately impressive. He had me begging, in a good way. Spits refuses to try, though. She apparently isn’t into chicks.”

“That is... not what I meant,” Fleur said. “At all.”

“Way too much information,” Twilight sighed.

“But good to know,” Doppel added.

“Think of it this way,” Fleur said. “They are celebrities. They have good reputations. You are a celebrity. You have a bad reputation. Spend time with them, get them to say good things about you, then your reputation becomes better.”

“I’m just sayin’, I spent some good time with Soarin’ already.”

“Yeah, we get it,” Twilight said.

“Did I mention how flexible he was?”

“Nav, *please!*”

“Just think about that when you greet his handsome face,” I said, standing up. Twilight groaned and her head hit the table. Soarin’ and Spits did a quick loop around the house before landing in the backyard. The guards opened the doors for them. “Howdy.”

“Heya, Nav,” Soarin’ said. “You’re looking amazing!”

“You ain’t too bad yourself, man. I can’t believe Spits got you in a suit.”

“I had to hurry him up, actually,” Spitfire said. “He was dilly-dallying.”

“A stallion can be quick for many things,” he said. “For a race, definitely. In a fight, absolutely. Getting away from trouble, oh yeah. But impressing a lady? A stallion never skimps on impressing a lady.”

“Well, what do you think, Fleur?” I asked. “You feel impressed?”

“Most definitely,” she sweetly replied.

“You aren’t the only one,” I said. “Though I’m more impressed with the saying than the looks. I didn’t take you for a charmer.”

“He has his moments,” Spitfire said.

“She actually gave me that line,” he said, rubbing the back of his neck.

“Way to ruin it,” Spits said, slapping him with a wing. “He’s useless with mares. Especially the pretty ones. I can’t believe he’s scored two dates with you.”

“Oh, are you saying I’m pretty?” I sweetly asked.

“That was never in question,” she said. “Though I do question your judgment. Like I said, I don’t know how you’ve been on two dates with this guy.”

“Would you believe me if I said they were on accident?” I asked.

“Yes, actually. I’ve heard enough weird rumors about you to believe literally anything.”

“Well, there you go,” I said. “I didn’t realize he was asking me on a date until after I agreed.”

“Isn’t that what a stallion is supposed to do with a pretty mare?” Spitfire asked.

“Yeah, which is why I was surprised he was wasting time with me.”

“You just aren’t used to anypony thinking of you as pretty,” Soarin’ said with a grin. “So you were shocked that I did.”

“Yes, actually,” I said. For some reason, it felt like I was blushing. “It’s still... taking some getting used to.”

“Looks like you’re doing pretty good to me,” Spitfire said. “And I love the house, too. Stormview is famous in Cloudsdale. It never stays on the market long. I can’t believe you snapped it up.”

“Going through hell has a few perks,” I said with a shrug. “A lot of money is one of them.”

“Maybe I should join your crew,” Soarin’ said.

“No chance,” Spits said. “You’re *mine* to order around. She can play with you every now and then, though.”

“Maybe you should pay him better,” I said. “Doppel, what was your last bonus?”

“Oh, I don’t pay that any mind, my lady,” she said. “Serving you is enough for me!”

“It was around four thousand bits,” Twilight said. “Everyone on the crew got it.” Soarin’s mouth dropped.

“...So you lookin’ to hire?” Spits asked.

“Our next destination is Tartarus.”

“On second thought, I think I’m good.”

“That’s certainly a nice bonus, though,” Soarin’ said. “I knew you were getting paid good, but that’s something else!”

“I got stabbed in the back for that money,” I said. “Figuratively, at least. I did literally get tortured for it, though.”

“...Tortured?” Soarin’ asked.

“Nav, we talked about this,” Fleur said.

“...Right. I had a very strong disagreement with the dragon king.”

“And he *tortured* you?” Spitfire asked.

“The details don’t matter,” I said, waving a hand.

“They kinda do, actually,” Soarin’ said. “Are you alright?”

“Psh, hell no. I’m completely mentally fucked up. That shit was straight up trau—”



“Nav!”

“I mean, I’m fine. His mother ended up legally adopting me, so I became the dragon king’s sister and he stopped,” I said. “I’m trying to get used to civilized society again. I always forget what I can and can’t say.”

“You can say anything around me,” Soarin’ said. “You don’t need to worry about a thing.”

“There is a time and a place for everything,” Fleur said. “This is neither the time nor place to discuss such... dark matters. This is a joyous occasion, a celebration of our dear friend Nav’s return to Canterlot. There’s no need to bring the mood down.”

“Fine, fine,” I said. “I’m just so emotionally dead inside that those kinds of things don’t bother me.” Fleur glared at me. “I mean... Nice weather we’re having, huh?”

“You really are something else,” Spitfire slowly said.

“Yeah, I’m a human,” I replied. “Well, sort of.”

Before she could shoot back with some kind of smartass reply, a new guest entered the room. “Good evening, everypony,” Fancy Pants said as he walked over.

“Welcome to Stormview,” I said as he continued up to me.

He grabbed one of my hands with magic and pulled it to his face to kiss it, getting his disgusting slobber all over me. *Seriously, why is this a thing? Ugh.* “Thank you for the welcome and the invitation, my lady,” he said. “You’re looking positively ravishing.”

“I suppose Soarin’ isn’t the only charmer tonight,” I said with a fake grin.

“Well, no offense to you, but he’s certainly looking much better,” Fancy replied, turning his appraising gaze to the poor fellow, which turned him bright red.

“Yeah, he really went all out tonight. I think I could just eat him up...” I said with a grin toward him, making his ears start twitching. “I mean, have you ever seen these two out of their flight suits?”

“I imagine *you* have,” Spitfire said with a dirty smirk. Soarin’s blush went even further down his neck.

“Well, not in a public setting,” I replied with a shrug. “Like I said, I’m honestly surprised.”

“Well, we have to wash them every now and then,” Spits said. “After enough time in them, they pick up a very... unique smell.” Soarin’ actually shuddered.

The next person to arrive was Kat, who was wearing a very demure dress. “My apologies for the delay, Lady Navarone,” she said with a curtsy. “We had a few issues at the library.”

“Did Spider scare them?” I asked.

“No, actually. There was a club for... ugh, cat lovers that was meeting there to research different types of cats. I’ve been invited to all future meetings.”

I smirked and said, “It’s good that you’ve been making friends, Kat.”

“I could do with fewer friends who try to constantly pet me,” she replied. “The belly rubs and ear scratches were demeaning.” *Note to self: Pet Kat more.*

“I think they’re quite enjoyable,” Fleur said. “Well, when the right person is giving them...”

“Yeah, Nav’s belly rubs are the *best*,” Soarin’ said.

“You’ve never offered to rub *my* belly,” Kat said. She almost sounded jealous.

“I didn’t want to get scratched,” I replied. “I thought that’s what cats did.”

“Then you obviously don’t know much about cats,” she said. “Well, we can make up for lost time later.”

It looked like Spitfire might also be interested. I hoped so, because I might be able to turn that belly rub into something lewd. Before she could ask about it, Queen Moonbeam teleported in with a loud pop that made Kat and I both jump. Everyone else seemed unaffected. “Good evening,” she said, looking at me with her pretty green eyes.

“Howdy, Moonie,” I said. Soarin’ and Spitfire raised their eyebrows. I don’t think they were expecting that kind of familiarity with the queen of the changelings. “Are things still going well in the palace?”

“There haven’t been any more sightings of Discord, thankfully,” she replied. “Though Celestia is still somewhat upset with you.”

“Yeah, well, she’ll get over it,” I said. “Or not. Whatever.”

“What did you do this time?” Fancy Pants asked.

“Slapped her in the face twice and called her a lying tyrant,” I said with a shrug. Spitfire actually gasped.

“That... was not wise,” Fancy said.

“She deserved it.”

“What could she have done to deserve *that*?” Soarin’ asked.

“She was trying to manipulate my daughter behind my back,” I said. “Among other things.”

“Still, to *slap* the *princess*...” Spitfire slowly said. “How could you?”

“With my hand. It was surprisingly satisfying.”

“It was also very amusing to watch,” Moonie said. “It’s been quite some time since I saw Celestia so dumbfounded. May I borrow you for a moment, Navi? I would like a word in private.”

“Sure,” I said. “We’ll probably be right back. Feel free to help yourself to the amenities, such as they are.” I walked over to Moonie. She led the way out into the backyard, then used magic to heat the air around us as we began walking to the fountain. “So what do you need?” I asked.

“To apologize yet again,” she said. “It appears that I have an unfortunate habit of putting my hoof in my mouth around you. I do not truly desire to own you.” She finally stopped in front of the fountain and turned to face me.

“I figured an equal partner might be more up your alley.”

“...Indeed. It’s just something I have not had in a very long time. That is what I appreciate most about you, Nav. And it’s something I will very dearly miss, should you not choose me. There are not many who could find themselves my equal.”

“I’m not gonna lie, it’s going to be a really hard choice.”

“...Polygamy is very much legal in my hives, Navarone. Herds are uncommon, but they do exist.”

“That just seems unfair to my partners. I wouldn’t ask anyone to go through that.”

“Should that not be *their* choice to make, Nav? Or rather, *our* choice to make. I know *I* would find such a thing acceptable. I’m afraid I would only have so much time to devote to a partner. Many of your other options might find themselves in similar straits.”

“Well, I don’t like that idea.” *My vagina couldn’t take it, that’s for sure.*

“Judging by their behavior last night, Twilight Sparkle and Fleur de Lis find sharing acceptable as well. They will learn to channel their jealousy into more productive things, I’m sure.”

“I’m not entirely sure that’s true. Especially given how they were acting this morning. I also doubt my daughter would approve.”

“Your daughter wants to see you happy. I believe that once you grew accustomed to it, you would find yourself quite happy indeed. Promise me you’ll think about it.”

“I will.” *Especially at night, when I’m alone and horny.* “But don’t get your hopes up.”

“You need not worry about that. It has been quite some time since I felt hope. Shall we return to the party?”

“I mean, I really don’t want to, but we probably should.”

“Hm...” She looked over my shoulder and smirked. “Just one more thing before we do...” She stepped closer and leaned in to kiss me. That was something we could both enjoy and it killed some more time, so I happily kissed her back. When she finally pulled back, it was with a smile. “I do so love putting on a show for your toys.”

*Oh fuck.* I looked back and discovered that Twilight and Soarin’ were staring quite pointedly at us. Soarin’ was blushing and Twilight seemed somewhat upset. “God dammit, my vagina is absolutely going to regret this.”

“You know you’ll enjoy it, slut.” She used magic to slap my ass, making me squeak in surprise. “Now let us return. I want to rub it in Twilight Sparkle’s face.”

“Trust me, rubbing it in her face is *really* fun.”

“Tch, harlot.” She finally walked around me and the two of us returned to the sun room.

Thankfully, it appeared that no more guests had arrived. The ones that were already there had broken off into smaller groups. Spitfire was talking to Kat and Doppel, Fleur was with Fancy, and Twilight was with Soarin’. Sure enough, Moonie walked over to Twilight with a smirk on her face. I didn’t really want to get in the middle of that, so I joined Fleur and Fancy.

“So how’s the bachelor life treating you?” I asked.

“Quite well,” Fancy replied. “My only regret is that I waited so long to return to it. My poor old body can scarcely take all I’m asking of it.”

“Apple juice, pineapples, and zinc supplements,” I said. “They’re a horny guy’s best friends. It might be different for ponies, though.”

“I’m afraid I’m not familiar with their benefits,” he said. “What do they do for a stallion?”

“Apple juice makes you produce more cum, pineapples make it taste sweet, and zinc makes it whiter and thicker.”

“Ah. That is... not quite what I meant, but I will certainly keep it in mind.”

“I suggest yoga,” Fleur said. “It helps limber up your body. It also helps with flexibility. You’d likely ache less should you stretch more often.”

“I dunno about that,” I said. “I stretch a certain part of me quite often and it still aches after.”

“*Nav!*” Fleur hissed.

“What? I’m going to Tartarus. I have to keep my sword arm in shape.”

“...Oh. I thought you meant... something else.”

*That’s probably because I did.* “I see where *your* mind is,” Fancy said with a smile. “And how’s the single life treating you, hm?”

“I’ve been enjoying myself,” she replied. “And I’ve most definitely been staying busy. It’s a surprisingly nice change of pace.”

“I’ve been keeping tabs on some of your projects,” Fancy said. “The beauty pageant shows promise. I know a lot of my associates are looking forward to it. It’ll be the first time several of them have seen how other races truly act.”

“I’m honestly surprised it hasn’t been done sooner,” Fleur replied. “I’m certainly happy to be organizing the first one, but you’d think such a thing would have been an event a long time ago.”

“The world is closer now than ever, in some ways,” Fancy Pants said. “Due in large part to the actions of our host.” He finished that with a nod to me.

“I’m not sure I agree with that,” I said, rubbing my neck. “I’m usually just a cog in the machine, someone for the princesses to order around. I haven’t really done much.”

“You’re either very humble or just *greatly* underestimating yourself, my lady,” Fancy said. “*You* brokered peace between the changelings and the griffins. And *you* saved Queen Moonbeam from a Tartarus sentence. You also helped end the civil war in Egypt. And you were apparently instrumental in some kind of peace in the far south between... spiders and monkeys, I believe? Then there was the matter of those criminal groups you helped wipe out. You’ve done a lot to increase the peace and prosperity in this world, Nav. You’re quite the hero and I know many ponies look up to you.”

“It always seems like more of them fear me,” I sighed.

“That may be so, but the *right* ones adore you,” Fleur said. “And that is all that matters.”

“Hear hear,” Fancy Pants said with a nod. “The ponies who matter like you a lot, Nav. The rest will come around in time.”

“I believe the pageant will help with that,” Fleur said with a smile my way. “Nav has an announcement to make...”

“I’m going to be participating,” I sighed.

Fancy’s eyebrows lifted. “Is that so? I thought you weren’t interested!”

“I wasn’t interested in becoming a noble, either. Life has a way of making me do things I don’t want to.”

“Oh, don’t lie,” Fleur said. “You know you’re looking forward to it!”

“Only so it’ll be over sooner.”

“Well, I know all of your friends and employees are looking forward to seeing you compete. Doppel and Rarity just *adore* the idea! Hopefully their excitement will be infectious. *I* certainly believe you’ll come to enjoy it, should you just give it a chance.”

“Probably. I just don’t *want* to enjoy it.”

“Well that’s just hard-headed,” Fancy said. “Why would you choose to participate in something you don’t even want to enjoy?”

“Fleur guilted me into it.”

“Nonsense. I presented a reasoned argument and you chose to accept the logic.”

“No, I chose to reject the logic. Then you, Blossom, and Kat told me you’d all be hurt if I didn’t accept your advice on the matter, which left me no choice. Blossom’s too adorable to ever see upset. You also threatened me with Kat’s sad kitty-cat eyes.”

“Oh... right. That did happen, didn’t it?”

“I suppose you really did have no choice, then,” Fancy said. “Still, I’m sure you’ll enjoy the experience, even if you dread the thought of it now.”

“Oh, I’m sure,” I said. “I just really don’t want to.”

“And when you say Blossom, are you referring to Captain Midnight Blossom?” he asked.

“Yep. She’s a real cutie-pie.”

“Hm. She was your date for my coming out party, wasn’t she?”

“Sure was. We’re just friends, though. She’ll actually be here tonight, too.”

“So Fleur told me. I never thought to hear a vampony called adorable.”

“Have you ever even *seen* her?” I asked.

“Oh, of course. I’m not going to disagree, but I would never have thought to say it myself. Especially given that she’s the captain of the guard.”

“I have a habit of doing and saying a lot of things others never would,” I replied with a shrug. “It’s gotten me in trouble sometimes. It also annoys Blossom, which is always amusing. She usually makes this super cute scrunchy face.”

“It’s true,” Fleur said. “I’ve seen her do it and it makes me want to pinch her cute little cheeks!”

“It’s a shame she won’t let me rub her belly,” I sighed. “She might not enjoy it, but I definitely would.”

“There are definitely downsides to being a vampony, I’m sure,” Fancy said. “But can she truly feel nothing?”

“Nothing but pain, according to her,” I said. “And she only feels that when she’s in the sun. I imagine the sun will become more debilitating as she gets older.”

“Which is, of course, why she’s going to be late,” Fleur said. “Neither of us would ask her to go through that, not without extremely good cause.”

“That’s quite understandable,” Fancy replied.

Before we could move on, the next guest walked in. Princess Gilda entered the room with a single griffin guard. She waved him off and joined the three of us. “Greetings, *Lady Navarone*,” she said with a smile. “I must say, it’s strange to see you in a dress.”

“It feels even stranger wearing it.”

“I imagine. It came as quite a surprise to me that your gender was swapped. Is that a normal human thing?”

“Nope. I’m just special, unfortunately.”

“I fail to see how that’s unfortunate.”

“Instead of going into heat for a week, our females bleed from their vaginas for a week. It also comes with extreme mood swings, general irritability, pain, and cramps. Also, I definitely prefer being a guy.”

“Surely there are at least a *few* upsides,” she said.

“Well, more people are calling me attractive now, so there’s that,” I said. “Guys in my time didn’t get compliments, especially about their appearances.”

“That’s strange,” Fleur said. “Why ever not?”

“I dunno, that’s just how it is. Before I came here, I honestly don’t think anyone ever said a single nice thing about the way I looked. That’s pretty common. No one compliments guys. Now that I’m actually getting them, they always sound insincere and I question the motives of whoever is giving them.”

“That’s... honestly sad,” Fancy Pants said. “Everyone deserves to feel complimented.”

“Yeah, well, them’s the breaks,” I replied with a shrug. “So how are things going in Gryphus?”

“At the moment, slowly,” Gilda said. “Most cities are preparing for a coming festival, during which we know little of note will be accomplished. But in general, things are starting to feel... uncomfortable.”

“Uncomfortable how?” I asked.

“It is no secret that my father is near death. He’s very old. I fear he has less than a year remaining.”

“That’s horrible,” I sighed. “I really like that guy.”

“Indeed. His loss is going to be difficult on all of us,” she said. “Especially given the new system of government he recently instituted. He’s worried that there might be an attempted coup when he dies, before his successor’s power is fully cemented. There are certainly whispers of discontent with the new way things are going. There are some who would prefer a return to a proper monarchy, along with a return of the war against the changelings. Peace sits poorly on us, I’m afraid.”

“That would be awful,” Fleur said. “Two steps forward and four back!”

“My thoughts precisely,” Gilda said with a nod. “There is no love lost between me and the changelings, but I believe we should have higher priorities than a pointless war. It’s time for our race to move forward into the future, not back into the failed ways of the past.”

“And of course, if there is a coup, you and everything you’ve accomplished would be in danger,” I said, crossing my arms.

“Should it be successful, yes,” she replied. “My kin and I would be hunted down no matter where we attempted to run.”

“...If anything happens, let me know,” I said. “I’m not going to sit by and let my friends get hurt. My help might not be worth much, but you’ll have it.”

“It would be up to my brother to accept or reject your services, but I will be happy to make the offer,” she said. “Though I would prefer you tell him yourself. As I mentioned before, many of our cities are in the process of preparing for a festival. If you have time, you are welcome to visit me in Gryphus next week. I’d be happy to teach you the history of the festival.”

*Whoa, what? Did she seriously just invite me to a crazy sex festival?* “What kind of festival is it? I heard some of the guards talking about it recently and they mentioned something about fertility.”

“That is correct,” she replied. “It is the oldest tradition we celebrate, the first and strongest breeding season of the year. It dates back to the founding of our nation. There are all manner of events associated with it. Griffins come from all over to the major cities to compete in various events. It’s quite the spectacle.”

“I think I might do that,” I said. “Though I wouldn’t want to take up too much of your time. There’s also the matter of the favor you owe me.”

“Involving the team?” she asked.

“Yep, that’s the one.”

“I have put together a full dossier. I can have them ready to go in three day’s time. Say the word and it’ll happen.”

“I want to do it after the festival. It’s time I put this matter to rest.”

“What matter is that?” Fancy Pants asked.

“I’m going to break into the most secure facility in the world, the place where all the original races were created by the person I would have been, Doctor Anonymous, after Discord caused humanity to destroy themselves in a vast nuclear firestorm. It’s the same bunker we were in when we went to the past.”

“Ah, I see. Do you need any assistance?”

“I think I got all the bases covered,” I said. “Between Gilda’s infiltration team and my own operatives, we should be good to go.”

“The only issue is getting there,” Gilda said. “The closest train tracks are at least a day’s hike away, given the terrain.”

“I have an airship. It’ll meet us in Gryphus.”

“Then we’re all set,” she said. “I had a very accomplished researcher look into it for me. He hasn’t been able to find much, but I’ll have all the information at your disposal when you come visit during the festival. It appears you know more about it than I do, however.”

“I held some information back the last time we met. I’ve learned the error of my ways. That is a human installation created before my kind were wiped out.”

“So there might be more information there?” she asked. “More artifacts like the laptop?”

“I highly doubt it,” I said. “But it’s being guarded for a reason. I’m hoping we can find out why. I’m also hoping there will be some information left, but the place is so old that I’m not holding my breath.”

“That seems like quite a risk for such a small chance of rewards,” Fleur said. “Are you certain it’s worth it?”

“No, I’m not. But I’m certain I’m doing it anyway.”

“That seems unwise, but I suppose it’s your choice to make...”

*Yeah, that’s right, it is my choice to make.* “Nav is astoundingly tough,” Fancy Pants said. “She’s been through numerous deadly trials. I’m sure if anypony can come out of this safely, it would be her.”

“I suppose, given what she did to Shining Armor, that is understandable,” Fleur said. “But I’ll still worry.”

“What did you do to Prince Shining Armor?” Gilda asked.

“I beat him in the Flankfurt contest.”

“That is not what she is referring to,” Fancy said. “I believe she means the war games, when you ripped out his throat with your teeth in front of his troops.”

“Oh yeah. I also did that.”

“You are quite the warrior, it seems,” Gilda said. “I suppose I got the wrong idea, seeing you lounging about in bed for a month.”

“After I got stabbed through the chest with a wound that magic couldn’t heal?” I asked. “That seems like an unfair judgment.”

“Hm, perhaps. Many griffin warriors brag about their deeds. You never did.”

“I don’t see any reason to brag about fighting or killing,” I said. “Those things should be avoided, not extolled. I figured if any of the griffins understood that, it would be you.”

“Your words have merit, as they often do. My blood sings for battle, but my mind knows peace and words are better. Such is the curse of royalty, I’m afraid. We want what’s best for our subjects, even if we find such a thing personally distasteful.”



“I gotta say, I don’t envy you,” I replied.

“Oh? I thought the last time we spoke, you were the princess’s lover. Is that no longer the case, or do you just not seek marriage with her?”

“That is no longer the case,” I said. “Though I never sought marriage anyway.”

“That is certainly surprising,” Gilda said. “I knew you weren’t particularly interested in me, but I assumed you would attempt to find a partner.”

“Partner doesn’t necessarily mean marriage. Vows are a little too... permanent for my liking. I’d certainly be happy to keep them should I ever make them, but it would take some convincing to get me to agree in the first place. I’d much rather be with someone out of love rather than forced to be with them through a vow. After all, it’s not impossible to fall out of love in time.”

“That’s a very pessimistic way of looking at it,” Fleur said. “Though I do understand your wariness of marriage. I would not be so quick to jump back into it myself.”

Gilda’s eyebrows lifted. “You’re no longer married?”

“We are not,” Fancy said. “Lady Navarone convinced me to reveal that I am homosexual and our marriage was absolved.”

“Ever the catalyst of change, aren’t you?” Gilda asked, looking at me. “Quite impressive, Navarone. I imagine there are many rulers who would be delighted to have you in their retinue.”

“So I’ve heard,” I sighed. “Being an advisor is way too much work.”

“It’s likely the best rank one can own, without a drop of royal blood,” Gilda said. “Even if you lack interest in power, such a thing must be tempting.”

“You’d be surprised,” I said. “Given the choice, I’d retire back to my estate in Ponyville and never give another order again. I never asked for this life and I never wanted it.”

“I’m surprised to see you throwing parties, given that you’re living a life you don’t enjoy.”

“I may not enjoy this life, but that doesn’t mean I don’t recognize its reality. This is the life I have. Trying to deny it or fight it only led to problems. Giving in and going with the flow seems like the best course of action. That, and it’s always nice to see friends.”

“I can’t believe you’re willing to call Chrysalis a friend.”

“One of the upsides of coming from the past is having no prejudices, either positive or negative. I see things for what they are and judge people for how they act in the present, not how they’ve acted in the past. As it so happens, Chrysalis, or Moonbeam as she calls herself now, is a big, cuddly cutie-pie once you get to know her.”

I found myself hugged from behind by buggy legs when I finished with that and Moonbeam stuck her head over my shoulder. “My ears are burning.”

“We’re talking about how cute and cuddly you are,” I replied.

“Well, there are certainly those who disagree,” she said. “After all, it wasn’t so long ago that my entire species were pariahs across the entire world. We were moments away from extinction when Navi here stepped in to save me...”

"Is that how you remember it?" I asked.

"That's how it *was*, Navarone," she replied. "Celestia was fully prepared to send me to Tartarus, which would have been the death knell for the changeling race. *You* talked her down, then helped us both realize the merits of peace. I owe you a debt I imagine I can never repay."

"Oh."

"As I said before, you are quite the hero, Lady Navarone," Fancy said with a small nod.

"So it seems," Gilda said. "I'm impressed. Not many would go out of their way to help one such as her."

"Navarone is certainly one of a kind," Fleur said. *God dammit, all of this is starting to make me blush.*

Thankfully, Gilda excused herself, probably to get away from Moonie. Fancy and Fleur also dipped to go get some refreshments. Moonie finally slid off my back and we were joined by Twilight.

"So, are you having any fun?" Twiley asked.

"Eh, I guess," I said. "I'd honestly prefer to be in bed right now, but this is an acceptable alternative." *I was kind of hoping there might actually be a few people here that I didn't know, though...*

"Well, I'm glad you invited me," Twiley said. "I've never actually spoken to Soarin' before, though I've seen him at a few of the princess's parties. He seems very nice."

"That's because he *is* very nice," I said. "I bet if you ask, he'd be another subject for your books." That made her blush bright red, of course.

"And what books are those, hm?" Moonbeam asked. As much as I wanted to answer that question, I knew Twilight would never forgive me. Instead, I looked at her with a smirk.

Her ears were twitching like crazy and her face was still bright red, but she met my smirk with one of her own. "They're under a pseudonym," she said. "Miss Shady Grey. Perhaps you've heard of them?"

"...I have, actually. Well well, that's quite surprising. I take it *you* are Miss Snow White, then?"

"You take it about as well as she does," Twilight said. "Navi is my test subject."

"If you should ever need a guest star, let me know," Moonie said. "*I* would have no need for a pseudonym and I'm sure I could teach you quite a lot."

"I think I might like that," Twilight said with an even bigger grin. *Oh boy, what have I gotten my vagina into this time?* "After all, Nav is always telling me that I need to learn more about other races, especially changelings..."

"Isn't it so much fun to use her own words against her?" Moonie asked.

"You're both bullies," I said, crossing my arms.

"You know you love it," Twilight said, using magic to pat my cheek. Thankfully, it was one of the ones on my face.

"Yeah, but you think it's cute when I pretend that I don't."

“True. But I think it’s *sexy* when you show that you do.”

“I don’t know, seeing her in denial has its charm,” Moonie said.

I was saved by the arrival of Soarin’, though the smile on his face told me he wouldn’t be much of a savior. “Looks like I picked a good time to walk over,” he said.

“They’re being perverted,” I replied. “But since you’re the perfect gentleman, you would never stoop to their level.”

“I dunno, Nav. Last time you saw me, you asked me to do some awfully ungentlecoltly things to you.” That made me blush even more and got Twilight and Moonbeam giggling.

“Fine, let me rephrase that: You would never stoop to their level at a party full of other people.”

He looked around the room for a moment before looking back at me. “Be honest, Nav: How many ponies here *haven’t* you had sex with?”

*God dammit.* I took a quick headcount and sighed. “Not counting the guards... three.”

“Multiple times,” Moonie added.

“And sometimes at the same time,” Twilight threw in there.

“Look, no one’s denying that I’m a massive slut,” I said. “But come on, my cummy laundry doesn’t need to be spread everywhere.”

“You’re the one who brought it up!” Twilight said.

“Yeah, well, you let me do it. It takes more than one to have a conversation, Twilight.”

She rolled her eyes. “Always an answer for everything, Navi.”

I reached down to tousle her hair. “Yep!”

“Oh good, so he doesn’t just do that to me,” Soarin’ said.

“No, he does it with everyone,” Twilight sighed, shaking her head to place her hair back in order. “Well, except for the princesses.”

“After Celestia molested me with her hair, I did my best to avoid it,” I replied. “It’s not worth it.”

“See, there you go again!” Twilight said. “We wouldn’t have to tease you if you stop giving us material!”

“Yeah, but I love being degraded and humiliated,” I said. “It’s fun. Pretending I don’t like it just makes you do it more.”

“So she finally speaks the truth,” Soarin’ said with a grin. “I’ll absolutely remember that, too.”

“Hey, my bed is always open to you and up to two of your friends,” I said. “So feel free to let me know if you ever need a place to chill in Canterlot. Though you won’t be doing much chillin’.”

“I might be asking Spits if we have any recruitment drives planned for Canterlot...”

“That’s quite the generous offer, Nav,” Moonie said.

“Well, I’m occasionally a generous guy,” I said.

“Not anymore you aren’t,” Twilight said.

“...Right, I suppose not. Well, I’m generous either way. You know, sometimes.”

“More like always,” Twilight said. “You definitely got Applejack’s tongue wagging about it. I’m sure the others are talking about it a lot, too.”

“Yeah, well, they need that money a lot more than I do,” I said. “Applejack’s farm might start falling into ruin without her there to maintain it. This’ll give them more of a safety net. I know Pinkie’s probably still set after the last time I gave her several thousand bits, but if not, she’ll be fine now. Rarity’s probably already blown it all on makeup, but maybe she put some aside for her future. Fluttershy’s probably just staring at the letter, wondering what she’s supposed to do with all that money.”

“Open an actual animal sanctuary, probably,” Twilight replied with a shrug. “She’s discussed it before.”

“...I recognize a few of those names,” Soarin’ said. “Especially Applejack.”

“They’re literally national heroes,” I said. “You know, the Elements of Harmony.”

“Oh.”

“And Applejack makes some famous pies,” Twilight said.

“Oh! That’s where I know the name. Anyway, why did you give some mare several thousand bits before?”

“I didn’t think I’d need them and I figured she did. Also, I was being a complete asshole to her and I felt like that might make up for it a little. I got that money by stopping a large crime ring in Flankfurt while we were at the festival.”

“I guess you were doing more important things than I was,” he said. “I was just chatting with groupies and having a good time.”

“That’s just how Nav is,” Twilight said with a shrug. “She’s a real hero.”

*I really wish people would stop saying that.* “If you say so,” I replied with a shrug.

“She isn’t the only one who says it,” Moonie said. “I don’t know of anyone alive today who deserves the title more.”

“You’re just too used to being ignored,” Twilight said, waving a hoof. “You’ll get used to being a hero one of these days. Until then, it’ll be fun to make you squirm and blush with the compliments.”

*God dammit, my face is just gonna stay fucking red all night, I guess.* Fortunately, my loyal maid finally came to my rescue. Doppel walked over and quietly cleared her throat to get my attention. “Can I borrow you for a moment, my lady?”

“Of course,” I said. “I’ll be right back, guys.” They all said their goodbyes or whatever and I followed Doppel out. It felt like I was sweating, despite the relatively cool temperature. When we got to the entry hall, she started going upstairs. “So what did you need?” I asked as I followed her.

“To give you a breather,” she quietly said. “It looked like you needed it.”

I sighed in relief. “Yeah.” We stopped at the second floor and she let me into what I’m pretty sure was her room. I hadn’t mapped out who had which room yet, but the slutty outfits and sex toys all over the place kinda gave it away.

“So how are you feeling?”

“Exhausted,” I said, walking over to the bathroom. Doppel followed, of course. “And like I’m getting flattered to death.” I got inside and stood in front of the sink so I could just stare at myself in the mirror. Sure enough, I was still blushing. “...Why does everyone look up to me so much?” I sighed, staring at my reflection. “I just... What did I *do*?”

Doppel chuckled in glee. “Really, my lady? You have no idea?”

“No! I’m a complete piece of shit!”

“Nav, if you ever say that again, I’m leaving.” Her tone turned very serious.

That got me to look away from myself and at her. She didn’t look very happy. “...Why?”

“Because I’m sick of hearing you demeaning the best person I have ever known. You are so much more to all of us and you know it.”

“I’m dragging you all on a mad quest to save the world. No one wants to be doing this. I feel like I’m just wasting everyone’s time! You could all be so happy doing whatever you want, but instead you’re stuck working for me. How could you be happy about that?”

“Working for you *is* what we want. All of us. Pony, griffin, dragon, minotaur, cat, naga, and yes, changeling. The only one on that boat that’s *really* unhappy is *you*. And maybe Fluttershy, but she doesn’t count. Why are you always pretending you don’t care about what happens to us all, Nav? We all know you would be devastated if anyone on that ship lost their lives, and you’d be horrified if we failed against Discord.”

“Because people I care about get hurt, Doppel.”

“That’s just dramatic and you know it. People get hurt all the time, whether they know you or not. It’s called *life*, Nav. You’re just afraid to hurt them yourself. I bet you’re afraid you’ll drive someone you care about away, aren’t you?”

“...That’s making a lot of assumptions,” I slowly said.

“Tell me I’m wrong.”

I sighed and looked back into the mirror. “God dammit, Doppel.”

“We aren’t going anywhere, Nav. We want you to be happy. Let us in. Tell us what’s really wrong. If we can understand what’s making you feel wrong, we’ll be able to help you get better.”

“...What do you respect most about me, Doppel?” I slowly asked.

“What do you think it is?” she coyly asked.

“Either my kindness or my forgiveness.”

“Close, but no. I respect your leadership. It’s like nothing this world has seen in a long time and it’s working better than anything else in the world.”

“What do you mean?” I asked. “What’s different about me?”

“Kat and I talked about this one day. It’s... difficult to put into words. She and I disagreed how to put it, though I feel her thoughts were accurate. I believe you delegate *very* well. You have surrounded yourself with very specialized employees and entrust them to do their work with basically no micromanaging. You actually *trust* your employees. You know we are capable of handling what you assign us and expect us to handle it with no oversight. I’ve spied on a lot of countries and nobles, but none were ever like you. I’ve seen them all, and you’re a step above. I want to work with you because you made me somebody. You turned me from an animal into a true servant with a real personality, just because you were the first person to ever trust me. There were nights when I first started working for you when I’d lie awake at night, wondering when the nightmare would end. When I finally got over the initial anger, I was... floored with how you treated me. With... *respect*. Like I was an *equal*. So I decided to earn that respect. *That* is why I will be happy to serve you until I die, my wonderful Lady Navarone.”

It took me several long and uncomfortable seconds to reply to that. For some reason, my own eyes seemed unreadable to me. Finally, I resorted to the age-old reply of, “...Oh.”

She giggled again and walked over to hug me from behind. She reared up to stand to my level and placed her head over my shoulder to look in the mirror at me. “You’re so cute when you’re embarrassed, Navi.” That just made me blush even more. “Oooh, I could just eat you up!”

“I-is that an offer?”

“As much as I’d love to have you even more red-faced, I think we’re low on time. Your guests are probably wondering where you are. But I’ll make you a promise, my lady. If you go down there and act like a good little lady, I’ll do *so much more* than just *eat* you up. Mmm, we could have some real fun together, now that I have you away from Miss Shady Grey. If *that’s* what you like, I’d be happy to be your temporary... hmm, *owner*, so to say.”

“...I thought *I* was the lady.”

“I think we both know which side of the leash you like being on more, you little slut.” She kissed my neck and pressed her fangs against it.

*God dammit, I am gonna be so fucking red when we go back out there.* “You’re gonna have to fight Kat off with a stick,” I warned.

“She’ll have her time, but only under *my* guidance. You may still see other mares while out and about, but in this household, you are *mine*. Is that understood?”

“...I get a safe word that I can use, no questions asked.”

“Agreed,” she immediately said. She used one hoof to turn my head so she could kiss me and the other moved down to my crotch and became a hand that she pressed against my slit. I suddenly regretted the lack of panties. She finally pulled back and whispered, “Say it. Say you’re mine.”

“I am yours... mistress.”

“Doppel will do. You are, after all, my lady. My lovely little *slutty* lady.” She turned my head back to the mirror and did something with her fingers that I won’t repeat, then said, “Now say it to *yourself*.”

“I-I am... y-yours, Doppel...”

“Yes, you are.” She withdrew her fingers and lifted them to my face. “Clean me up, my lady.” I did so with no complaints. When I was done, she pulled them out and turned them back into a hoof. “That’s just a... ahem, *taste* of what is to cum.” I’m giving her the benefit of that doubt in assuming that was what she really said. “Now shall we return to the party? I’d *love* to make you fuck Soarin’ tonight.”

“I’ll see which way that wind blows,” I said. “I came here with Fleur as a date tonight. It would be rude to send her packing when the party was over instead of inviting her to stay.”

“Fair enough. Are you ready to head back now?”

“Don’t you think I should let the blush die down?” *And maybe get a towel for my crotch?*

“Hm... No. *In fact...*” She giggled and said, “Be right back!” She trotted off, still giggling.

“What have I done?” I asked myself. I couldn’t tell if my eyes held fear or glee. Either way, they didn’t have answers.

I went to reach for a towel, but Doppel was back before I could with two things. The first was a garter belt. The second was a bullet vibrator with a remote.

“Oh, fuck me,” I sighed, eyeing it in horror.

“That’s the plan!” she said. “Sit still, my lady.” She lifted one foot and slid the garter belt up as high as it could go, which was thankfully below the bottom of the dress. She slipped the battery pack in it and forced the... the vibrator into me as far as she could. Once that was done, she lowered my leg and hopped back. “We’re gonna play a game, my lady!”

*Oh dear god no...* “What kind of game?” I slowly asked.

“One with lots of positive... or *negative* reinforcement! You’re gonna be the perfect lady or you’re gonna get to cum in front of everybody! Each time you misbehave, I’ll turn the dial up until you get better. Misbehave too much and... Well, you’re gonna have a hard time hiding the smell.”

“...Do I have a choice in this?” I asked.

“Choose your safe word and then use it,” she said. “That’s your only choice.”

“If it gets to be too much for me, I’ll send you for something,” I said.

“Deal. Just a quick test.” She flicked the remote and turned it to what I was really hoping was max, because much higher and I would have had quivering legs. As it was, I whimpered and flinched. “That was the lowest setting.” *Why have you forsaken me, god?* “What do you think, Navi?”

“I think I’ll behave,” I immediately answered.

“Perfect! Then shall we?”

“Of course, Doppel.” She cut the remote off and led the way out of the bathroom. As I followed her, I realized the way I was walking moved the thing around in me, making me shiver and slow down. For better or worse, I had to walk more... ugh, *ladylike*. *God dammit, I wonder if it’s too late to reconsider.* As if sensing my thoughts, Doppel turned back at her door with a

disturbing smile, then pumped the vibe again. *I wonder if the time guys could send me back to before I was born so I could kick my mom in the stomach.*

That wasn't a productive train of thought, so I just tensed my body up, tried to think calm thoughts to hide the blush, and then followed her out the door and down the stairs. Waiting for me at the bottom was a friendly vampony, wearing a cute little dress. "Heya, Nav," Blossom said, hopping up to hug me.

That was unexpected, but I hugged her chilly body back. "Nice to see you, Blossom. I didn't realize it was nighttime already."

"Yep! I had one of my soldiers wake me up early so I could get ready. She was even nice enough to do my makeup!"

"Well, you look even more cute than usual, so I think she did a good job."

She let me go and took a few steps back to look me up and down. "I'm not the only one, Nav." She licked her fangs and said, "I could just eat you up."

"If you need a snack, I'm happy to help," I said.

She sniffed and looked down. "It *smells* like you're in heat. Are you bleeding again?"

"...Oh shit, it's about that time of month."

"You're not bleeding, my lady," Doppel said. "I believe you would have noticed." *Or at least, she would have noticed.*

"Still though, it's close, which really sucks." *And might explain why I'm hornier than usual.* "Anyway, yeah, I'm not bleeding yet."

"Oh, too bad," Blossom sighed. "Oh well. I could still use a light pick-me-up, if you wouldn't mind."

Doppel cleared her throat. "I think it would be better if I—"

"Changeling blood is *disgusting*," Blossom said, scrunching up her nose. "It always makes me sick."

"Kat, then," Doppel said. "You shouldn't let her endanger you, my lady."

"I don't mind, really," I said. "I do the same for you all the time, Doppel."

"That's different."

"Is it?" Blossom asked, turning her scary vampire eyes on Doppel. "What you take from her drains her just as much as anything I could do. I saw Shining Armor after your *queen* got to him. At least I've never sucked anyone to the point of death!"

They had a small glaring contest, which made me sigh. "First of all, Moonbeam isn't Doppel's queen anymore. Doppel is *mine*. Second, Moonie's actually kinda here. Well, in the sun room, anyway. Third, I'd be happy to let either of you suck on me whenever you want, as long as it wasn't adversely affecting me too much. That said, at the moment, I have a better idea. Do you remember how we talked about getting Twilight to write that book about you?"

Blossom finally turned her gaze back to me, once again smiling. "Of course, Nav. I've put some thought into what I want to talk about in it, too."



“Good. She’s here tonight as well. I’d like to introduce you more formally. I want you to ask her if she’d let you drink her blood.”

“That’s... not something I’d feel comfortable doing in front of everyone.”

“If you want people to be comfortable with you, you be comfortable with them. It might be embarrassing or whatever, but think about how I feel in a dress. I damn sure don’t wanna be a woman, but I’m doing my best anyway. Let’s see you do your best at being a vampire.”

“...Alright. I can try that.”

“Cool beans. Let’s go talk to Twiley.”

“Oh, it’s *Twiley*, now?” Blossom asked with a grin.

“You can call her Twiley if you want,” I said with a shrug. “I do it all the time and she loves it.”

Blossom looked over at Doppel, who simply nodded. Blossom giggled and said, “Twiley it is, then.”

She joined me as I began walking to the sun room. Doppel followed behind us with a grin. It seemed that a few other guests had arrived in our absence. I kinda sorta recognized them from various meetings around Canterlot, but I didn’t know any of them by name.

As soon as we entered, Fleur started making a beeline for me. I really wanted to get Blossom talking to Twilight quickly, but I wasn’t about to ignore Fleur. I stopped and waited, letting her catch up. “Welcome to the party, Blossom,” Fleur said. “You look gorgeous!”

“Why thank you, Miss Fleur,” she sweetly replied, bending her front knees for a moment. “I see you actually managed to make Nav look like a proper lady. She’s even walking properly this time!” *That’s more the toy than Fleur, but whatever.*

“It’s ever so troublesome to get her to behave,” Fleur sighed, shaking her head.

“Not anymore,” Doppel sang as she held up the remote.

Fleur’s eyes went wide when she saw it. “Is... is that what I think it is?”

“Yep! She agreed!”

“Ah, I knew you couldn’t resist,” Fleur said with a huge grin. “Now that Doppel is in charge of your training at home, you’re sure to become a proper lady in no time!”

“This was *your* idea?”

“You can thank me later,” she replied, grabbing the remote with magic and flying it over. “I assume that I may borrow her for the night?” she asked Doppel.

“Of course, Lady Fleur,” Doppel said with a curtsy.

“You fuckers played me!”

Fleur toggled the remote, making me whimper. “You will watch your language, Navi. I saw how you responded to Queen Moonbeam and Twilight Sparkle. I see what you *really* like now. So I’ll give it to you better than either of them ever could. In the end, you’ll be begging me for more. Is that understood?”

“We’re gonna talk about this later,” I said, narrowing my eyes.

“As you wish. But unless you say the safe word, which is release, *I* am holding this remote,” she said, thankfully turning it off. “Now let’s go introduce you to your new visitors. And remember to be on your best behavior, *Lady Navarone*.”

*I wonder how long it would take them to realize I’m jumping off the side of the cliff...*  
“Think you can handle meeting Twilight on your own?” I asked Blossom.

“I’ll introduce her,” Doppel said with a sweet smile.

“I’m not afraid of a little social contact anymore,” Blossom said. “I’ll be fine introducing myself.” She walked over toward Twilight, who was currently talking to Fancy and Gilda. *I really hope Twilight doesn’t find out about all the shit I told Gilda. That could be awkward.* When Blossom left, Doppel rolled her eyes and stalked off, muttering. *Guess the two parasites don’t get along very well.*

I didn’t have too much time to think about either of those, because Fleur was pulling me by the arm toward the people I didn’t really know. I mentally steeled myself and put on my queenly empty grin.

About half an hour later, I was strongly considering ripping my dress off and using it to strangle someone. Fleur fucking dumped me on the three most airheaded ponies she could have possibly dredged up. One was a celebrity, one was a noble, and one was some kind of famous artist. Between the three of them, they might have had enough of a brain to satisfy a goldfish.

But they were apparently all very important, so I was smiling and nodding on the outside while inwardly plotting some brutal revenge on Fleur. Every time I started to make an excuse to leave, the vibrator pulsed, telling me that Fleur was still watching me like a hawk, even if she wasn’t actually there standing next to me.

Right as the urge to kill started to truly overpower me, a guard walked in from the entryway and up to me. “You have a few visitors, my lady,” he quietly said.

“Do they not have invitations?” I asked.

“No, my lady. They’re mages from the tower. They walked Taya home and would like to speak to you.”

“I’ll be right there.” He bowed and began walking out. I turned back to the airheads and said, “I’m afraid I must cut this short. I have a few important visitors from the mage’s tower I need to speak to.” They all said their own stupid version of goodbye and I thankfully walked out to the entryway, sighing in relief.

Sure enough, three of the members of the Seven were in my entryway. Taya was standing next to the head of destruction, but ran over to hug me when I entered. I hugged her back, of course, though kneeling doing so probably flashed the mages. “Good afternoon, Lady Navarone,” the head of destruction said with a nod.

“Howdy,” I said. “And it’s good to see you, Taya. How’d you do on your tests?”

“I passed all but one,” she sighed. “And they won’t let me skip the stupid beginner course for the one I failed.”

“Which one did you fail?” I asked.

“Alchemy. Apparently that’s one of the things they teach.”

“...Alchemy isn’t magic,” I said. “It’s science, using magical ingredients.”

“All the same, rules are rules,” the head of destruction said. “The introduction courses are all very simple. Given her abilities in a few of the other fields of magic, she should have no issue passing it. Several of us were quite impressed with her capabilities for destruction.”

“Yeah, she sure loves blowing stuff up,” I said. “You’ll have to be careful with her. She’ll hurt someone if you don’t take precautions.”

“We always do. Anyway, I’m sure you’re wondering why three of us decided to walk her back.”

“I’m not, actually,” I replied. “You’re gonna try your luck against the maze.”

“That is correct.”

“Well, follow me,” I said. “I want to talk to Athena before you enter.”

“As you wish,” he said with a small bow. I finally released Taya and started walking up the stairs. She snorted and teleported up. The other mages joined her, because they’re all geriatrics with no patience. By the time I got to the top floor, Taya had already sequestered herself in her room. I led the mages into my room.

“That’s quite a view,” one of the other mages said.

“Yeah, it’s always something nice to wake up to,” I said. “You should see it when there’s a storm coming.” I walked over to the desk, where I kept the book. “I’ll be right back.”

Before they could reply, I opened the book and got sucked inside. The first change I noticed was the lighting. It was much brighter and the light had a more golden tune to it. The second change was that a significant portion of the dust and grit was gone. The place was actually *clean*. Most of the piles of books had been placed back on shelves and all the books had been organized. *Hera works fast, god damn.*

I didn’t have long to look around. Before I could go hunting for Athena, I got hugged from behind by peacock feathers. “Welcome back, my dear friend,” Hera said. She pulled me even closer with her arms and continued, “You’re looking quite delightful this evening, Nav. Are you all dressed up just to see me?”

“I’m having a party, actually,” I said. “The mages came by and want to enter the maze. I just wanted to let Athena know.”

“Oh, you didn’t come back to see me...?” she asked.

“Don’t get me wrong, you’re quite the pleasure to see,” I said. “But at the moment, I don’t really have time to stay and chat.”

She sighed and released me, which let me finally turn to look at her. Her dress was just as tantalizing as last time, of course. “Oh, very well. But I do hope you’ll visit again soon. I think you’ll come to enjoy your time with me.”

“I’m sure. Is Athena available?”

"I am," the old lady said, suddenly appearing next to Hera. "My maze is prepared. The mages may enter."

"Alright, cool, I'll let them know."

"Before you go, I have a gift for you," Athena said. She held out her hand and a book appeared on it. "Hera has been relentlessly going through every single one of my things. A side effect of that is that I have found many books I thought long lost. This is one of them."

I took it and looked at the cover. I honestly didn't even recognize the shapes on it as words. They were utterly alien to me. "What is this?" I asked. "Some guide on how to kill Discord?"

"I'm afraid not," Athena said. "It is a book on tree siblings, written by an ancient tree brother of great power. It details all of their powers and abilities. With this book, you can learn what you are capable of and what to expect in the coming years, as your body continues to change. It is from a culture that died out ages ago, so you will need assistance reading it. I recommend you do so soon."

"...I'm not really certain I want to. But I guess it's better to be prepared for what's to come."

"I skimmed it before deciding to give it to you," she said. "I recommend you read this book as soon as possible, Navarone. The skills you already possess that you do not know about will be very, *very* valuable."

"Do you have any examples?" I asked.

"You can plant a tree that will grow into a replacement you. Should you ever perish, it will sprout and you will be born anew with all of the memories you possessed up until planting it."

"Oh shit." *Given my tendency to keep records of most of what I do, that could be extremely valuable.* "Alright, I'll make time to read it. Thank you, Athena."

"*Ahem,*" Hera said.

"And thank you for finding it, Hera," I said.

"You're welcome, my dear friend," she sweetly replied.

"Now, I'm gonna head out and talk to the mages. If they don't pop out in a few hours, I'll check their progress."

"Should all three still be alive when you check, my book will not open," Athena said.

"Well, that'll be a good enough status check. See you soon." I turned back to the pedestal and opened the book there, sending me back to my room. I placed the book from Athena next to the portal and turned back to the mages. "She's ready."

"Would you allow us to take the book back to the tower?" the destruction guy asked. "We would like to ensure it's kept safe while we're absent."

"I want to be able to check up on you guys in case something happens and you get delayed," I said. "When you succeed, I'll let you take it back for a little while."

"Very well. Then with your permission...?"

“By all means,” I said, stepping out of the way. The three of them stepped forward. One of them looked at the laptop that was sitting on the desk for a few long seconds before shaking his head.

“Are we all ready?” the destruction guy asked. They both gave affirmatives. “Pop your potions.” All three of them used magic to place six potions each on the table. They drank them one by one, shuddering at the taste. Once all of those were gone, he nodded to the one on his right. She used some kind of spell that put a faint glimmering sheen over all three of them. With that, the destruction guy finally opened the book and the three of them got yanked inside.

“Good riddance.”

Since I was finally alone, I took a deep breath and slowly let it out, then went to the bathroom for a towel. Once I was dry, I walked over to the dresser and pulled up a thick pair of panties, then shoved a washcloth right in my crotch to catch any excess liquid. That way, at least if Fleur did tease me too much, it wouldn’t really get visibly noticeable.

With my preparations in place, I took another deep breath and walked back out. Taya was waiting on the other side of my door, wearing an unreadable expression and a relatively plain dress. “How’s the party?” she dully asked.

“I’m tempted to stay up here.”

“Do we *have* to go down there?”

“Part of growing up is learning that sometimes, you have to do things you really don’t want to. Trust me when I say that it’s not an easy lesson to learn.”

She sighed and said, “I know, mommy, I know...”

“Well then, shall we?”

“After you.”

When we got back to the sun room, I discovered that Fleur had corralled all her idiots and was holding their attention fairly well. She didn’t notice me entering, so I led my daughter over to Twilight and Blossom, who were sitting at one of the tables and talking.

Taya’s super loud hooves made Twilight look up and she grinned when she saw the two of us. “How did your tests go?” she asked.

“I failed alchemy,” Taya said.

“But passed all the rest,” I immediately added.

“It’s okay, I failed all my alchemy classes, too,” Twilight said. “It isn’t *real* magic anyway. It shouldn’t even be a part of their program.”

“Tell *them* that,” Taya said.

“I did. They told me that if I didn’t want to abide by their rules, I was free to learn elsewhere. Since I was already Celestia’s student, I decided I didn’t need them anyway. Still, between Zecora and Nightshade, you should have no problems learning everything you need to know for the introductory course. How’d you do on the destruction test?”

“They never saw anyone crumble a stone target with sound before,” Taya said. “Apparently most students throw fire at them.”

“Sound is a very underrated group of spells,” Twilight said. “With the right combination of spells, you can very easily subdue any number of ponies. I suggest you keep that in mind while dueling in your coming courses. Most unicorns would never think to protect against that.”

“I’ll remember that,” Taya said with a discomfoting grin. “I’ll be taking more destruction tests tomorrow so they can decide which classes I should start with. It’ll be nice to have some way to really test my powers.”

“Fighting giant spiders and zombies wasn’t enough?” I asked.

“Tch, those were *easy*,” she said. “The spiders were too crunchy and the zombies were too squishy. I bet a few of the mages in that tower might give me a true challenge.”

*So much for her being cute tonight. Oh well.* “As long as you’re careful,” I said. “I don’t want you to hurt anyone. Or worse, get hurt yourself.”

“I’ll be fine,” she replied, waving a hoof.

“You better. Anyway, this is Captain Midnight Blossom. I don’t think you’ve ever met her. Blossom, this is Taya.”

“Nice to meet you, Taya,” Blossom said with a grin. “Your mother’s told me all about you.” *I mean, not really, but I guess it sounds nice.*

“That doesn’t really sound like her,” Taya said. “But she’s definitely told me all about you. You’re the vampire, right?”

“That’s right,” Blossom said with a nod.

“Cool. Can you turn me into one, too?”

“W-what?”

“Can you turn me into a vampire? I wanna live as long as mommy, so I can keep her safe.”

“Taya, Blossom’s not gonna turn you into a vampire,” I said.

“Says *you*. It’s her decision to make!”

“Taya, I’m not going to turn you into a vampony,” Blossom said.

“Why not?!”

“Because this is very much a cursed existence. I accept what I am now, but I would never wish it upon another. Besides, I know Nav would never forgive me.” Taya kicked the ground and started muttering.

“While we’re on the subject, how does one get turned into a vampire?” Twilight asked.

“The vampony sucks out all the blood of his victim, then forces her to drink his vampiric blood. We start out very weak and disoriented because of it, but our powers grow and stabilize as we feed on blood.”

“That sounds *awful*,” Twilight said.

“It was. I was like an animal when I first woke up. Thankfully, I don’t remember much of it. I only really came to after I killed the vampony who turned me. I had just enough presence of mind to remember my training. The only way to kill vamponies is with a stake through the heart.”

“Does it have to be a stake?” I asked. “Or would anything work?”

“I suppose anything through the heart would work, as long as enough of the heart was destroyed. As far as I know, we can regenerate from almost anything else, aside from complete bodily destruction.”

“What if the heart was removed?” Twilight asked. “There are spells for that in the necromancer’s text I’ve been reading. It’s possible to keep organs functioning outside of the body so you’ll be less vulnerable to attack.”

“I... have absolutely no idea,” Blossom said. “I didn’t even know that was possible. I don’t think I’d like to be your test subject, either.”

“I’ll do it!” Taya said. “If you make me a vampire, that is...”

“I’m not making you a vampony,” Blossom said, rolling her eyes. “Besides, shouldn’t you wait until you’re older?”

“I’m already passing my optimal cuteness age,” Taya said. “If I wait much longer to become immortal, I won’t be mommy’s little girl anymore and I can’t use cuteness against her enemies!”

“...I can’t tell if that’s cute or creepy,” Blossom slowly said.

“Welcome to my world all the time,” I replied, tousling my little filly’s hair.

“Ugh. I’m gonna wear you down eventually, even if I have to fight dirty to do it. Why can’t you just give up already and give me what I want?”

“Because... I’m not gonna do that?” Blossom replied. “I don’t care how dirty you fight. I’ll just tell Nav on you and he’ll rub your belly until you behave again.”

“Don’t tell her that!” Twilight said. “That’ll just give her incentive to keep asking!” Taya nodded.

“Wait, do ponies actually enjoy belly rubs?” Blossom asked. “I thought Fleur was just faking it.”

“They’re the best!” Taya said.

“Isn’t that... I dunno, demeaning?”

“Not at all,” Twilight said. “It’s only demeaning if you think it is, and I don’t see why you would. Nav most definitely enjoys giving them and we absolutely enjoy receiving them. It’s a very mutually beneficial arrangement.”

“Plus, most ponies make super adorable faces when I do it,” I said. “I’ll conquer your belly one of these days, Blossom. Just you wait.”

“It’s not like I would feel it anyway.”

“You don’t know that! I bet even vampires love belly rubs. Stop being so recalcitrant and just let it happen, silly.”

“Why would you want to rub her belly, anyway?” Taya asked. “Isn’t she cold and clammy? Wouldn’t you rather rub mine instead?”

“It’s the principle of the thing,” I said. “Being told I can’t only makes me want it more.”

“And now it sounds creepy,” Blossom sighed.

“There’s nothing creepy about belly rubs, geez.”

Blossom started to reply, but her head jerked to the door and her eyes went wide. “Uh... Nav?”

I followed her gaze and unwillingly muttered, “Oh shit...”

Princess Celestia was standing at the entrance to my sun room, a wide grin on her face. I had a feeling that Fleur didn’t invite her. A part of me wondered how she even knew I was having a party. Either she was eavesdropping at some point or she was having me watched. That was neither here nor there, however. I did my best to compose myself and walked over to her before she could come to me.

“Welcome to Stormview,” I said, trying to sound happy to see her. It probably didn’t work.

“Greetings, Lady Navarone. I’m afraid I didn’t bring my invitation; it must have gotten lost in the mail.”

“I didn’t send them by mail. They were all hoof-delivered.”

“Then I’m afraid you might need a new delivery pony. Your current one seems incompetent.”

“Well, he is one of your old employees, so probably.” *Fucking wrecked.*

She chose to take the high road and instead cast her gaze around the room. Several more of my guests had noticed her arrival and were blatantly staring at us. “You’ve brought quite the crowd, Nav. A queen, a princess, athletes, nobles... I haven’t had this prestigious of a crowd since the Gala! If you aren’t careful, you might make me *jealous*.”

*Maybe if you didn’t have a habit of murdering the shit out of your nobles, more people would attend your stupid parties.* “There’s no reason to be jealous of a gathering of friends, Celestia. Rank need not define us here.”

“Those are very dangerous words, Navarone. This world is defined by its ranks. You would do well to remember that.”

*You would do well to remember who you’re dealing with. I’m going to enjoy toppling your world down around you.* “This world, perhaps. But to friends, I see no reason to let it come between us.”

“Friends don’t typically *slap* each other.”

“You know how I get on my period, Celestia.” *Of course, I wasn’t on my period, but she doesn’t know that. And I didn’t technically lie, so let’s see your bullshit lie detector pick that up.* “I was... not pleased to hear that someone was trying to influence my daughter.”

“The world is full of influences, Navarone. If you believe that the mages at the tower will not try to use her to sway your mind, you are a fool.”

“I can slap them around a lot more often than I can slap you around.”

She actually smirked. “There is truth in that. Just remember that there are things *I* could teach her that *they* could not. Things that could be most beneficial on your journey to Tartarus.”



“What Taya needs to learn is social skills, and I saw how well you taught those to Twilight. She can learn how to socialize in school. If I happen to need any spells you could teach, it’s a very good thing Twilight is going with me.”

“Indeed. I see that she is in attendance as well. But you didn’t see a need to invite the other Elements of Harmony?”

“Twilight is... a lot more *predictable* than the rest of her friends,” I said. “She also happened to have already been in Canterlot.”

“Hm, I see. And the fact that she’s a famous author has nothing to do with it?”

“Nope, nothing at all.” *I’m honestly not surprised that she knows.* “You know, I gotta say, I’m surprised you decided to come to a party. I thought you didn’t typically do that.”

“I like to make exceptions for *good friends*, to remind them that I’m always keeping tabs on them. I’ve learned that it’s a good idea to keep your friends close. It’s much safer that way.”

*Safer for them... or safer for you?* “Well, you’re always welcome at Stormview.”

“Hm. You know, I’m surprised you moved in here. I always thought you were too superstitious to own a house with its kind of history.”

“I don’t know much about it, actually. The real estate agent didn’t go into much detail. She was too busy being literally insane.”

“Oh, I see. You know, that tree in your entryway looks awfully familiar.”

“Well, if you’ve seen one bonsai tree, you’ve seen them all,” I replied with a shrug. “They do all look pretty similar.”

“I find myself asking where you might have gotten one in the middle of winter.”

“My staff is very resourceful, but I don’t bother myself with micromanaging them. If you want one like it, you’ll have to ask them where they found it. I believe Gloomy is the one who picked out the decorations.”

“I admire how you always have an answer for everything, Nav. But one day, I believe I’m going to ask you a question that will choke you up.”

“Hopefully that day doesn’t come soon.”

“Hm.” She looked over to my side, where I could hear some loud hoofsteps approaching. “Hello, Moonbeam.”

“Greetings, Celestia,” Moonie replied. “I hadn’t realized Nav invited you.”

“That’s because she didn’t,” Celestia said. “But I saw no reason to let that stop me from visiting my *good friend*.”

“Aren’t you a little old to be gatecrashing parties?” Moonie asked.

“One is never too old to have fun,” Celestia said with a very mischievous grin. “You know, I’m surprised to see you here. When you told me you had something critically important to attend, I never thought you might mean a *party*!”

“Well, I understand that your priorities are skewed,” Moonie said with a shrug. “Perhaps you should get out more, maybe make a few new friends. You know, this might be a good time to do that. Would you like me to introduce you around?”

“That won’t—”

“Excellent. Come along, Celly!” Moonbeam grabbed one of Celestia’s legs with magic and actually dragged her away. *Holy shit, you fucking go, Moonie!*

Fleur didn’t waste any time joining me, now that Celestia was no longer an issue. “What is *she* doing here?” she quietly hissed.

“No clue,” I just as quietly replied. “She said she’s here for the party.”

“And you let her *stay*?!”

“What, do you expect me to kick her out?”

She sighed and hung her head for a moment. “Okay, this isn’t *necessarily* bad. In fact, it could be good, as long as we can keep her from saying anything negative. It isn’t often that Celestia attends private parties. This could do you no end of good, if we play it right.”

“I’m gonna go ahead and put you in charge of that. I guarantee you I’ll find some way to fuck it up, and—”

She cut me off by turning the vibrator up. “Language, Nav.”

“*Celestia* is here! Is now really the time for that?”

“That’s not the safe word I hear...” We had a small staring contest. I eventually sighed and looked away. She giggled and turned the vibe off. “I will attempt to handle Celestia, but I have no idea how effective I will be. We might be better off letting Queen Moonbeam handle her.”

“Well, keep an eye on them. Celestia’s currently pretty upset with me, so I think I’m better off avoiding her for the rest of the night. That might be the best case scenario.”

“As you wish. Luckily, things will likely begin winding down soon. I doubt many of the guests will want to stay here too much longer.”

*Looks like I just might make it after all.* “At least there’s that. Feel free to take over Celestia whenever you want. I’m gonna go find some food.” *And maybe see if I can hide for a few minutes.*

“Don’t stay gone for too long, missy. If I have to go find you, you’re gonna regret it.”

“I would never think of it,” I hastily lied. Her horn lit up and she went cross-eyed to look at it. “Well, I wouldn’t actually *do* it.” Her horn stayed lit up. She turned her judgmental eyes to me. “Anyway, have fun with that!” I quickly beat feet, thanking whoever might be listening that they didn’t shove me in heels.

Thankfully, all the food was in the entry hall. Given the view of the sun room, all the important people were congregating there. The only ones with me were a few guards and Silver Quill. One of the guards walked up when I entered. “Sorry about letting the princess in, my lady,” he said, his ears drooping down. “I just... Well, I couldn’t exactly say *no*!”

“No need to apologize,” I said. “I understand. Feel free to eat, if you haven’t already. I don’t think many of the guests came hungry.”

“We’ve been sneaking stuff since before the party started,” he said with a small grin.

“You guys are the shittiest guards ever.”

“Thank you, my lady. That means a lot, coming from you.” I flipped him off and continued walking to the table with the food, where Silver was stuffing her face.

“I’m kinda surprised you aren’t with the others in the sun room,” I said.

“Oh, I hate parties,” she said. “Besides, I didn’t think you’d want me there. I’m just your accountant, after all...”

“You’re certainly welcome to head in there, but I completely understand not wanting to. I definitely don’t want to go back.”

“Why not? I thought this was your idea.”

“It was. That said, I hate parties, too. I did this because it needed to get done, not because I wanted to do it. If I had my way, I’d be asleep right now.”

“Well... you’re the lady of the house,” Silver said. “Why don’t you just go to bed?”

“Because responsibilities suck super hard.”

“And because Fleur won’t let her,” Kat said, making both of us jump. I hadn’t heard her following me at all. “Are you sure you should be in here, Nav? All the guests are still in the sun room.”

“Forgive me for being hungry,” I said. “I wanted to get some food before dealing with more bullshit. Hopefully, we won’t have any more surprise guests.”

“I’m sorry to disappoint, but I’m afraid there’s one on the way,” Kat said. “Which is why I came to find you. Cascade has informed me that Flo is coming.”

“She’s *what*!?”

“Cascade believes Flo is coming now because she knows trying to throw her out would make a scene. She very much wants to speak to you and you have been avoiding her, so she is deciding to press the issue when you can’t turn her away.”

“Can’t turn her away my ass! Go get Taya. If she comes in here, she’s gonna get *evaporated*!”

“Please just talk to her, Nav,” Kat said. “You know you need to.”

“Is that *you* talking, or is that Cascade?”

“It’s both of us. You can’t avoid her forever. You know this needs to happen.”

“Yeah, it does need to happen. On *my* terms, on *my* schedule. I do *not* have time for this right now. Princess fucking Celestia decided to gatecrash my party. I need to keep things from getting out of hand.”

“Nav, you’re literally in here to avoid your guests,” Kat said.

“Prove it.”

She sighed. “You can’t stop her from coming in here without making a big scene and an even bigger mess, Nav. She’s very, *very* determined to speak to you, apparently. I’ll go get Taya, but I want you to hear Flo out before you try to throw her out.”

“No promises. Go get my daughter.”

She sighed and walked back into the sun room. “You want one of us to be with you when you meet?” one of the guards asked.

“Hm... No, I don’t think that will be necessary. She should be well aware that if she so much as touches me, she’s steam.”

“Still... Are you sure, my lady? Watcher wants us to make sure you’re never alone around them.”

“I don’t see his old grey ass here. Is he avoiding the party, too?”

“He is seeking out Zecora, at your order,” one of the guards said. “He should have her here before the night’s end.”

*Tch, he’s probably just doing that to avoid the party.* “One of you may accompany me if you wish.” He sighed in what sounded like relief as Kat and my daughter walked in.

“What’s going on, mommy?” Taya asked.

“Flo’s coming to have a chat. We’re going to meet with her in my room. Kat, tell Fleur that something came up and I had to meet with someone. Help her—”

“I’m not staying down here,” Kat said. “If you’re that worried about Flo, I’m going to be with you.”

“Fuck it, fine, whatever. Silver, tell Fleur that something came up and I had to meet with someone. Help her—”

“What, *me*?” Silver asked. “T-talk to F-fleur?”

“Yes, you, talk to Fleur,” I said. “Tell her I’ll be upstairs if she absolutely needs me, but that I don’t need to be bothered for anything other than an emergency. If she needs help keeping things orderly, do it.”

“Um. I... I don’t know if I can...”

“Soarin’s out there. You might can score him if you try hard enough.”

“M-m-me?! With *Soarin*?!”

“You never know until you try. Have fun with that. Taya, would you mind taking us up?” Her horn lit up and the two of us popped up into my room. I guess Kat and the guard would have to walk.

“Do you really expect Flo to try and hurt you?”

“Honestly, no. But I’m not comfortable alone with her. If she fucked with my mind once, she might fuck with it again and make me forget that she did it at all. According to Blaze, they have the ability to completely remake someone’s personality. I’m honestly afraid of what she might do. Keep that lie-detecting spell on. I don’t know if it’ll work on her or not, but I’d rather have it just in case.”

“Just try not to lie too much then, mommy. If that’s possible for you, that is.”

“Eat a dick,” I told my daughter, walking over to my chair. Kat and the guard entered right after I planted my ass down.

“So what’s the plan?” the guard asked.

“Talk to her until I can get her to leave,” I replied. “With luck, it won’t be difficult.”

“Where do you want me to stand?”

“I don’t care, dude. You do you.” He looked around the room at a few spots before walking over to my left-hand side. He stopped a meter or so behind me. Kat walked to the side of the desk facing the window and leaned against it. She pulled out a knife and started idly tossing it in the air. I kinda wonder if she’d fuck up her gloves doing that. Taya eventually shrugged and hopped onto the bed so she could roll around in my scent like some kind of weird pervert.

For better or worse, Flo did not take long to arrive. Instead of coming in through the balcony door like I was expecting, she actually came in through the front. She grinned when she saw me and turned very pink. “Hello, my friends,” she warmly said as she scooched closer.

“Howdy. You know, now’s really kinda a bad time.”

“I know.”

“Cool. So can we maybe reschedule this talk?”

“I’m afraid not, Nav. I know that my sisters have spoken to you about me. And I know that they have proposed to replace me.”

“Naiad gave me the talk before I went to Iceland and I spoke to Brook while we were in Iceland.”

“Have you come to a decision?” she asked, hope resounding in her voice.

“I have. At the moment, I am going without an elemental in me at all.” She sank straight into dark blue. “As Naiad said, it was a choice that was denied to me at the start, something I felt I had to do. Now, I have the option. I think I need time to decide what I really want.”

“...I see. And have you decided yet how you feel... about *me*?”

“Nervous.”

“...Why?”

“Some of my friends noticed how much I was changing, Flo. Some of them happened to wonder how much of it was me... and how much of it was *you*. That got me to wondering, too. You were in my head quite some time. If you were so inclined, it wouldn’t be difficult to turn me into a completely different person.”

“I was *not* inclined. I would *never* do that to you, Navarone. I will admit that some of my methods of persuasion might have been a bit much, but—”

“You mean hitting me?” I asked. “Or molesting me? Maybe all those lies you told, or the truths you hid?”

“Yes, I do mean those.”

“Then yeah, they *might have been a little much*. They might also have something to do with why I’m nervous.”

“Could you ever forgive me?”

“Yeah. I’ll let you know when I get around to it.”

“Stubborn as ever, I see,” she sighed.

“Oh, I’m sorry, should I immediately bend over backwards to make you feel comfortable?” I asked. “I thought you wanted me as a *host*, not a *slave*.”

“And I thought you cared about me. I thought you *trusted* me! How could you believe the words of my sisters over those of my own? I never sought to harm you, Nav. I did what I thought you needed, what you responded to! You just... you left me no other choice but to resort to such brutal measures!”

“There is always a choice,” Kat said, firmly gripping her dagger and glaring at Flo. “You chose poorly.”

“You would know from experience,” Flo replied, turning red.

“Yes. Navarone has chosen to forgive *me*. It is my advice that she not extend that forgiveness to *you*.”

“Well, it is not your choice to make,” Flo said.

“I do care about you, Flo,” I replied. “But you know I have a very hard time trusting anyone, even someone that shared my mind for some time. And to be fair, you did betray that trust in some ways. You’ve forced me to do things I did not want to, for example. And you’ve told others things about me that I would have preferred not known.”

“I regret my mistakes,” Flo sighed, turning blue once more. “And I readily apologize for them. But I believe you need my assistance now more than ever, Nav. Even if you aren’t interested in being my host, allow me to stay here and act as your advisor.”

I slowly leaned back in my seat and steepled my fingers. *That’s... somewhat tempting. And yet...* “You’d be doing a lot of sitting,” I said. “I’m going out of town for a week soon.”

“I would be pleased to go with you.”

“It’ll just be me and Twilight,” I said.

“I believe that to be unwise.”

“Be that as it may, I’m doing it. After that, we are going to raid the human bunker in Colorado. I will think on your offer until our return to Canterlot.”

“...Very well. I would like to hug you, Nav. Will you allow me that?” She sounded very sincere, at the very least.

“Yes.” Kat pushed back off the desk to stare at me in surprise. Taya actually sat up and stared as well. I stood up as Flo surged toward me and completely encompassed me in water for a moment. Soon enough, she formed back up in her normal shape, hugging me and glowing bright pink. I hugged her back, though doing so felt very strange.

She knew I was in a hurry, so she didn’t make it too long. She pulled back, still glowing pink. “Thank you, Nav. I will speak with you more in time.” She finally departed, this time using my balcony. The three of them watched her go. I just stared straight ahead, slowly wondering if I made a mistake.

When she was gone, I sighed and said, “If you put yourself in me, I will give you one chance to tell me. If I find out that you did and didn’t tell me about it, I’m going to have you evaporated.” No one replied.

“I don’t think she would do that,” Kat said. “Or at least, Cascade doesn’t think she would do that.”

“Why would you let her hug you, mommy?” Taya asked.

“Because I believe that she really didn’t mean to hurt or betray me,” I said. “She did, but I honestly don’t think that was her intention. I believe she loves me, she just isn’t sure how to show it because I don’t really respond well to the normal methods.”

“Well, that’s definitely true,” Taya said. “That must be why she started molesting you. Should I do that, too?”

“Taya, don’t,” I sighed. “Just don’t.” She started muttering again, of course.

“We should get back to the party,” Kat said.

“Yeah, we probably should,” I said. “I just *really* don’t want to.”

“Then why bother?” Taya asked. “You could just stay up here.”

“I mean, I *could*, but I won’t. Fleur would never forgive me and it would probably piss everyone downstairs off.” I stretched, trying to work out all the kinks that built up because I was standing like a proper lady. The guard awkwardly cleared his throat and Taya blushed bright red, which made me wonder if I had accidentally exposed the garter belt while stretching.

There was nothing I could do about that, though. “Ready?” Kat asked.

“As I’ll ever be, I suppose,” I said. “Let’s get back to it...”

The rest of the party went very smoothly, thankfully. Moonbeam kept Celestia in check, Fleur kept her idiots in check, and I was able to spend more time talking to the Wonderbolts and Blossom. It was not an entirely unpleasant experience.

Since Celestia obviously wasn’t going to get her way, whatever that way was, she left first, making up some excuse about having work to do or whatever. It was obviously bullshit, but I was so happy to see her leaving that I didn’t care. Fleur’s gaggle of ponies left shortly after her, leaving me just people I actually cared about. Fancy was next, citing old age and being too tired to stay up much longer. Since Gilda lost most of her conversational partners and she was apparently planning on heading back to Gryphus in the morning, she was next. Unfortunately, Soarin’ and Spitfire had no interest in staying to do lewd things, so they left as well, having a long flight ahead of them.

That left me, Blossom, Twilight, Moonie, and Fleur. Taya went up to get ready for bed and Kat went out to talk to Spider. Silver apparently chickened out and left as soon as she told Fleur where I was.

Once the Wonderbolts left, I sighed in relief and sank into a chair. Fleur giggled and trotted over to me. “So how was it?” she asked, joining me at the table.

“Exhausting.”

“Did you let yourself have any fun at all, or were you being too stubborn?”

“A little. I got kinda worried when Celestia showed up.” *And I’m honestly somewhat surprised that Discord didn’t rear his hideous head.* “And Flo popping up out of nowhere spooked me a little.”

“That’s certainly understandable,” Fleur said. The other three finally joined us, since that was apparently the cool thing to do. “So, what did you all think?”

“I think Celestia was trying to catch you off guard,” Moonbeam said. “And I’d say it worked.”

“Yeah, it did, Thank you for taking care of her,” I said.

“You are very welcome. I do so enjoy putting her in her place.”

“What did Flo want?” Twilight asked. I imagine Aqua was more curious than she was, but I decided to answer the question anyway.

“To see if I’d take her back. Failing that, to see how I felt about her now. Long story short, I did not take her back.” She sighed.

“Well, I had fun,” Blossom said. “This was the first party in a long time where I felt I could let my mane down, so to say. They’re usually boring and stuffy cookie-cutter noble parties. This one had a little bit of life to it.”

“I’m glad to know you think so well of my parties,” Fleur sarcastically replied.

“Not your parties, just your guests. Nav’s friends are a lot more fun.”

“And I’ve agreed to write a book about her,” Twilight said. “She’s going to begin compiling notes based off several questions I asked her tonight. I’ll have another list of questions ready for her before we leave town. I’ll begin when we get back.”

“Is this a book about vampires or a book about her?” I asked.

“Vampires in general,” Twilight said. “Though I’ll go into as much detail as she’s willing about her own experiences as a vampire. I’ll also let her put a few personal details in there, if I believe they’re pertinent to the topic at hoof.”

“Good. It better be as supportive as possible, or no bellyrubs for a month.”

“Got it,” she said with a nod.

“If you have no further need of me, I will return to the palace,” Moonie said. “I also need to leave in the morning, so I must be well-rested.”

“It was good to see you again,” I said. “You’re welcome here any time.”

“That is perhaps an offer I will take you up on. If nothing else, I imagine your guest rooms would have fewer ponies bowing and scraping to me every time I turn a corner.”

“Yeah, there’s not much of that here unless you’re me,” I said. “Though I’m trying to get them out of that habit.”

“Not anymore you aren’t,” Fleur said. “That’s part of the game, Nav. I’m afraid playing it is a must. It’s something *they* would insist on, even if you don’t like it.”

*Man, everyone cares more about me being a noble than I do. Ain’t that some bullshit?*  
“Tch, whatever.”

“You’re as adorable as ever, my dear,” Moonie said. “Remember, if you need me, use the mirror I left in your room. Farewell.” She teleported out before I even had the chance to hug her.

“I should probably get going, too,” Blossom said. “I only took half the night off. I need to get ready for what’s left of my shift.”



“And I have a lot of preparations to make tomorrow,” Twilight said. “We’re leaving in two days, Nav. I suggest you get everything in order before we go.”

“Will do,” I said with a nod.

“If you’re heading back to the palace, I’ll go with you,” Blossom said. “The streets of Canterlot aren’t always safe at night and that’s where I’m heading anyway.”

“Company’s always nice,” Twilight said with a grin. “And we can talk about ways of making Nav suffer while she can’t hear us!”

“Sounds great! Ready when you are.”

“You’re all sick and twisted,” I petulantly replied.

“And you love it,” Twilight said, blowing me a kiss. The two of them hopped up and walked over to hug me together. Twilight was warm and Blossom was cold, so it balanced out pretty well. “See there, Blossom? She isn’t even denying it anymore!”

“Oh, that’s too bad. I think she’s cute when she’s in denial...”

“Both of you go eat a dick.” That just made them giggle. Blossom nibbled on my ear and Twilight kissed my neck before they finally pulled back.

“I’ll see you later, Navi!” Twilight said with another short nuzzle.

“Don’t be a stranger,” Blossom added.

“Yep. See y’all.” They both finally left together, whispering quietly as they went. I’m sure they actually were discussing ways to torture me further. A part of me really regretted introducing Twilight to them, but I knew it was bound to happen eventually.

“You smiled a lot tonight, Navi,” Fleur quietly said.

“Did I?”

“Yes. I was watching very closely. You definitely enjoyed yourself. Oh, there were parts you didn’t like, but overall, I believe you had a good time.”

“Well, that’s because I did. Thank you for helping me with this, Fleur.”

“It was my pleasure.”

“What did your three friends think?”

“They did not tell me, but I got the impression that they were very impressed. Seeing you here and so comfortable around royalty itself did you a lot of good. I think Celestia’s goal here was to try to embarrass you in front of your guests, but Moonbeam expertly handled her.”

*Hallelujah.* “Good. What’s our next step?”

“For now, we wait and watch. I know you’re going out of town soon, so I’ll keep an ear out for discussions about you. Given what the three of them saw today, I imagine there will be several of those. I’ll likely have new ideas when you return. With Celestia actively targeting you, we’ll have to be very wary when planning events without Queen Moonbeam.”

“Thankfully, I don’t plan on doing many. I’d much rather go to a party than host one. At least then I can leave whenever I like.”

She set the vibe on high, which made me shiver and moan. “A proper lady enjoys planning parties for all of her friends,” Fleur said. “Mm, I do so love your cute expressions,

Navi. I've been looking for an excuse to turn it on max all night, but you never gave me one. I suppose I'll have to reward you... Later, that is. For now, as much as I would love to stay and finish the night with a bang, I'm afraid there's one more thing I must do tonight. After that, I'll likely head home."

"Um. C-can you... the toy?"

"Hm? Oh, yes." She flipped it off and I sighed in relief.

Once I was composed again, I said, "That's disappointing, but I understand. I'm glad you were able to give me as much of your time as you did."

"Well, I'm sure you'll be able to fairly easily find someone else to warm your bed." Doppel trotted over from where she had been cleaning and Fleur passed her the remote with a big grin. "It seems you have no shortage of volunteers."

"Yeah, but spending time with you is always nice. But I know that all good things must end eventually."

She leaned in closer and kissed me. It felt pretty fucking alright. When she pulled back, we were both grinning. "Until next time, Navi."

"I'll be waiting." She giggled and gave me another peck on the lips before finally leaving.

Once we heard the door click behind her, Doppel giggled. "You're so cute together, my lady."

"Who do you prefer, Fleur or Twilight?"

"I haven't decided yet. I think Fleur would be more likely to let me keep playing with you, but I might be able to talk Twilight into it if I worded it right."

"Moonbeam suggested polygamy."

"Oh. That would be an interesting choice."

"With her as part of it."

"Oh. That would be a *dumb* choice."

"I don't think I want to do that at all. It seems unfair to my partners."

"Compared to what you're doing now?" she asked. "You're very openly dating two mares, my lady. A herd would just make it official instead of giving them possibly false hope. The longer you continue dating both of them, the more difficult it will be to pick and the more hurt the other will be."

I sighed and leaned back. "I wish this was an easier choice..."

"A herd *is* an easy choice."

"It may seem like that to you, but not to me."

"Hmph."

I kinda wanted to keep talking about it, but the entrance of Zecora and Watcher precluded that. "How'd the party go?" Watcher asked as they walked over.

"It went well," I said. "I kinda figured you'd want to be here for it."

“No, I made sure to wait until the last guest left. I try to avoid them, these days. Too much work.”

“Aww, but you even had a date!”

“I am not much a fan of parties either,” Zecora said. “Especially pony parties. Too much frivolity and decorations. I prefer things simple.”

“Well, there’s plenty of food left if either of you are hungry,” Doppel said. “We kinda put it in the entryway, thinking more ponies would congregate there. I guess we’ll know better next time.”

“I haven’t eaten yet,” Watcher said. “I think I’ll grab something and then head to bed. I had a long day.”

“Are you staying the night?” I asked, looking at Zecora.

“Before I decide, I would like a small tour. Would you show me to my room?”

“Sure. I’m about ready to sleep anyway. I’ve also had a long day.”

“I’d be delighted to join you tonight, my lady,” Doppel said.

“If you finish cleaning before I pass out, you’re welcome,” I said. “But I actually really am tired and my body kinda aches, so I wouldn’t mind a night to myself.”

She sighed and rolled her eyes. “As you wish, my lady.”

That finally left Zecora and I to head upstairs. I was planning on giving her one of the rooms on the third floor. While walking through the house, I noticed that her gaze was drawn to various spots. Usually, places where there was nothing to really look at. “You seem... distracted,” I slowly said.

“What do you know of the history of this place?” she asked, staring at one of the railings as we ascended the stairs.

“It was built by a newly appointed noble a long time ago. He ended up going bankrupt and turned into a nobody.”

“Hm. Is that all?”

“Apparently there were a few deaths. One owner fell over the side. The real estate agent mentioned a few others, but didn’t really expand on them. She was... kinda completely insane. Celestia also mentioned a dark past.”

“I see. Do you know what a *true* haunting is, Nav?”

“God fucking dammit, is my house haunted?”

“...Extremely.”

“God DAMMIT! Why does this bullshit keep fucking happening?! Is there anywhere in this world that isn’t fucked up?”

“In short, the answer to that is *no*. I’m learning that more and more as times goes on. We are surrounded, literally *everywhere*, by tragedies. As you’ve traveled, have you noticed... similarities in the world? Places and events that seemed similar to things in your time?”

“...History repeats itself, yes. That’s something I noticed even in my own timeframe. We actually had recorded history and could see trends.”

“Precisely. So I ask again, do you know what a true *haunting* is?”

“...Are you saying that ghosts make history repeat itself?”

“Yes, Navarone. That is what I am saying.”

“Did you get more of those mushrooms without telling me?”

“I have no need for them now. I have seen that the main cause of hauntings is tragedy. Places where lives were brutally ended. The more traumatizing the event, the stronger the effect. Spirits pick those around them and invisibly guide their paths. A leader that destroys their people, for example. A genocide, perhaps. Suicide. Murder. The spirits from those tragedies relive their suffering through others. As they feed on more suffering, their powers grow. This place could *destroy* you if you aren’t careful, Nav. The spirits here are very powerful.”

“God dammit, I’m burning it to the fucking ground and starting over. I’ll go back to Ponyville for a few weeks while the new house is built.”

“That won’t help. Rebuilding it at all would give the spirits new lease, so to say.”

*Fuck.* “I’m gonna strangle the bitch the sold me this fucking place! She has been a thorn in my side since day one!”

“Then her soul would be on your shoulders as well, Navarone.”

“Fuck it, then. There’s gotta be another house in this shithole city I can move to. Fuck this place. I have enough money to let it just stay here to rot.”

“I have another idea,” she said as we stepped into one of the empty rooms on the third floor.

“Does it involve us staying here and dispelling the ghosts?”

“Yes.”

“I’m gonna go tell Silver to look for house listings again.”

Zecora looked at the door and nodded. It swung shut, trapping us inside. “That was not one of my powers, Navarone.”

“...Are you about to unleash angry ghosts on me?”

“I want you to hear me out.”

“This is *dangerous*. I’m already busting my ass to keep up the illusion this is a real noble’s house and not a façade for a fucking coup, Zecora. I don’t have *time* to cater to a bunch of fucking ghosts on top of it. I *cannot* risk letting them haunt us to an early grave because none of us have any idea of what we’re really dealing with! We can’t even get any of my ghosts to leave me alone. How the hell can we exorcise an entire fucked up house?”

“Make different choices.”

“Alright, thanks for that. Will do. My different choice is to move the fuck out of this house before it’s too late.”

“Nav, the world *needs* this. Have you ever wondered why Discord keeps building up strength? Why nobody ever sees it coming? Why history repeats itself again and again? It’s because of things like *this*. Tragedies happen because people do the same thing, over and over.

That brings Discord to power. Discord causes even worse tragedies, which ensures his dominion throughout time.”

“That’s a stretch and you know it.”

“I can walk the streets of Canterlot and know it. I can travel to any city and know it. I can see spirits everywhere, Nav. Of all kinds, of all races, of every nationality and type. They need help to move on. If nothing else, it would ease the suffering of the world. I feel like that is my new task in the world. I feel like that is why I have been given these gifts. Let me help the dead here, Nav. Let me free them through you. Perhaps this practice will help me as we travel, as we encounter hard times where another failed. We could prevent tragedies with this, Nav.”

*God dammit.* “If this goes poorly, I’m getting a new house, burning this place to the ground, and salting the earth.”

“Deal. Come to me at midnight. I want you to meet somebody.”

“...Is it a ghost?”

“Yes.”

“Fuck. Why midnight?”

“That is the time when the barriers between this life and the next are at their weakest.”

*Of course it is.* “Is there any reason we haven’t seen any spooky activity from the ghosts yet? You just got one to shut a door. Shouldn’t we have noticed shit like that?”

“I have a few theories. The first is that tonight is the first time you had a sizable crowd here. That could have possibly woken them up, so to say. The second is that the ghosts here are of the more passive sort. They’d likely still try to possess you, but they aren’t interested in throwing too much around. The third is that most hauntings try to change things that are different from what they recognize. A painting on a wall that didn’t have one, for example, or the placement of furniture. As you build up more decorations, they’ll likely become more active.”

*Oh yeah, it might be time to have another chat with that shitty real estate agent.* “Ugh, whatever. You might have to wake me up, but I’ll see you at midnight.”

“Excellent. I will attempt to converse with the spirits I see until then.”

“Good luck. Please don’t piss them off.”

“Of course not.” She nodded at the door again and it opened. I quickly left, not wanting to have a door slammed on me.

Despite the fact that my house was definitely haunted, I found myself smiling as I walked up the stairs to my room. If nothing else, at least that stupid fucking party was behind me.