



DAY SEVEN

Do You Want to Live Forever?

or are you simply stuck?

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One of the disadvantages of a Stable was that there were no clocks, anywhere. Everypony had a pipbuck, and inside the Stable it synchronized with the maneframe automatically, so everypony was basically wearing a rather heavy wristwatch. Lemon Frisk glanced at the staticky screen on his own piple, and sighed inwardly.

Carefully, he leaned towards Misty to look at her pipbuck. As he expected, it was still a few solid hours before morning. After skillfully switching his once-again captured leg with Misty's original pillow, he silently walked out of the residence, into the Stable corridors. There was one luxury of the Stable he had really missed, and before they were leaving, he'd bloody well get it. He'd traveled for six days now, and had spent that time burying charred corpses in Scorch Mark, getting shot at by zebronies (or whatever you should call those), raiders and a Stable Door guard, and reliving some of the worst memories of his life.

He *really* needed a shower.

He had already noticed Stable 69, unlike Stable One, had no showers in the residences, which would inevitably mean there was one central communal shower area. Once again missing the basic luxury of a

working pipbuck, though, he had no way of knowing where it was.

As he walked through the dimly lit corridors, he heard hoofsteps approaching. He decided to call out to the other pony, to reduce the risk of scaring him or her away.

"Hello?" he said. "I need some directions."

The security pony, a mare with a purple coat and a flashlight as a cutie mark, rounded a corner, and shone her flashlight on the ground before Lemon Frisk. She blinked a few times.

"Oh." she said. "You're that ghoul, aren't you?"

"Yep. I'm Lemon Frisk" he nodded. "I'm kinda looking to take a shower. Since I don't sleep anyway, I thought I could make good use of lost time, and do it now. But uh, I don't know where to find 'em."

The guard nodded. "I'm Blacklight. The showers are on level three. You'll have to take the elevators to get to them."

"Oh. Thanks. Are there any, uh, signs, there?"

The mare instinctively looked at his pipbuck, but quickly realized her mistake when she saw the mangled mess with the staticky screen. "Oh. Right. No plans, huh? I guess I'll come along with you."

As they made their way to the elevator, Lemon Frisk noticed she kept glancing at him. He sighed. "What?"

"Sorry!" Blacklight said. "It's just... I, well, never saw anypony like you before."

Lemon squinted his eyes. "Don't you *dare* poke me."

Blacklight frowned. "Poke you? Why in name of the Forefathers would I want to *poke* you?"

"That's what I keep wondering." Lemon Frisk replied. "But Misty still keeps doing it."

Blacklight raised an eyebrow. "Well, I have no such intentions."

They had reached the elevator, and Blacklight pushed the button to open it. In the brighter light in the elevator, she got a better look at Lemon Frisk's appearance.

"How did you get like that?" she asked. "I mean, undead, and all that."

"Huh." Lemon Frisk frowned. "Didn't I explain that on the radio?"

Blacklight shook her head. "I'm pretty sure you didn't. You just sort of rambled on about being an ex-pony."

"Yeah, we got a bit carried away there, heh." Lemon said, grinning apologetically. "Basically, the poisons used in the war were necromantic. A small portion of those that died from them got back up. And a small portion of those didn't become mindless monsters."

"So, you died, soaked in necromantic poison?" she asked.

"Yeah. The Pink Cloud of Canterlot." he replied. "Nasty stuff."

"Aren't you kind of saturated with that stuff, then?"

Lemon blinked. "I guess? It generally doesn't come out, though. And nowadays, I live on radiation."

The elevator stopped, and the doors opened. The two ponies walked out, but Blacklight didn't walk on. "You do realize the Stable is a closed water circuit, right? Anything that goes down the shower's drains is eventually recycled for the plants and ponies. It might not be a good idea to mix trace amounts of necromantic poisons into that."

Lemon Frisk groaned. "What, so you're saying I *can't* take a shower? It's been a bloody week! Seriously! This is how stereotypes about bad-smelling ghouls are born! I swear, most of those idiots think that dying is an excuse to stop showering! Just because they don't sweat anymore..."

"Well, radiation is one thing; we got filters for that. But that pink cloud, uh, really, no way."

"So, what, I just need to take a dip into the Lakes of Whinnyapolis then?" Lemon grumbled.

Blacklight gave him a pensive look, and then smiled. "We *do* have another shower, actually. One that isn't linked to the recycler. Though if radiation keeps you alive, I guess I'd better reconfigure it not to spray Anti-Rad."

Lemon Frisk smiled. "Of course. The decontamination shower." He looked at the elevator, which was just beginning to close again. He pushed the button next to it to reopen it. "Up to the Door level then, I guess?"

Blacklight smiled. "Let me grab you some shampoo first, now we're here anyway."

"I got shampoo!" Lemon Frisk said, nodding towards the saddlebags on his back.

Blacklight stopped. "Oh. Where'd you get it?"

"Canterlot. Scavenged it."

Blacklight frowned. "Doesn't that mean it's, uh, very likely *also* saturated with that pink poison stuff?"

Lemon blinked. "Bloody hell! *That's* why nopony else would scavenge it!"

The security mare gave him an unsure look. "I'll just... grab you a bottle, okay? I suggest you get rid of that stuff once you go outside again. Can't be healthy for those around you."

* * *

A bit later, they were standing in the main entrance hall of the Stable, its big cogwheel-shaped Door still wide open. To the side, Lemon Frisk could see the radiation cleansing shower. He followed Blacklight into the small control room. The mare went over the controls with surprising swiftness, and it didn't take her long to reroute the showers to spray water.

"Done!" she said. "I hope you don't mind a cold shower, though; the hot water circuit simply doesn't go here. This is actually just meant to clean the anti-rad out of the pipes."

"No problem." Lemon said. "Not like I have a body temperature to keep up."

"Don't worry about the lost water, by the way." she said. "I heard the WRD is working on a water reclamation project. Apparently rain water is practically radiation free, after it rained the dust out of the air."

"Thanks. You're really good with this stuff. I mean, for a security mare."

"Oh. Yeah, well, I'm actually from the night patrol crew on the deeper levels. The pumps and recycler, and all that. We're trained to fix pretty much anything, so we don't have to wake up Maintenance for every small problem. But with the city excursion, they've been kinda low on security ponies, so they dragged me up here."

Lemon nodded. "I see. Well, I'm off to shower, I guess."

* * *

Lemon Frisk entered the shower, and saw Blacklight behind the glass of the control room. She didn't seem to take much notice of him; she was only there to shut off the water when he was done, after all. She seemed to be keeping herself busy fiddling with her pipbuck.

Lemon quickly washed himself, and let the cold water soak his body. The water streams were much harder than what he was used to in Stable One. They weren't meant to be gentle.

He remembered showers like that.

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*"Room f'r one more, pony?"*

*Lemon Frisk looked up at the biped canine walking into the shower. "Wasn't planning on wet dog smell in my shower, but sure, knock yourself out, T.B."*

*"Fonny as always, Tvitchy." the female Diamond Dog grinned. "Yoo gets de schedule f'r tomorrow?"*

*"Yeah. Obstacle course, again. Then gun training."*

*"Didn't find moch obstacle last time."*

*Lemon Frisk smiled. "There was a note at the bottom. «No digging allowed. If any part of the course has to be rebuilt again, I'm gonna have your hide, T.B.!»"*

*"Ah vell. Fon while it lasted. How's tings vith yoo, Tvitchy? Ken't be eezy, stuck here vit da tuff guys fer months."*

*"It ain't too bad. And I gotta do it anyway." He looked at the wet dog and smiled. "I mean, would you take orders from some Ministry of Morale bastard that hasn't even gone through boot camp?"*

*"Hah. I see. Not a chence. At leest yoo iz in good company! De lady in de mess, ve seen yoo look at her, Tvitchy. She nice pony, yah?"*

*Lemon Frisk sighed. "Blossom Tree?" He smiled. "Oh yeah. She's a really nice pony."*

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Memories.

Lemon Frisk stared in front of him, without seeing the white wall of the decontamination shower.

Memories kept flooding in. His selection as crisis manager. The mandatory military training. Meeting Blossom Tree in the mess hall of the base. That evening when T.B. and the others had locked the two of them inside said mess hall, to get him to finally talk to her.

Something had changed after he met Misty. Before that, he'd been on a mad dash, day and night, trying to outrun his memories. All of them. Just because they had ended so badly. Now he had finally let the bad ones catch up with him, he was remembering things he'd stuffed away together with those.

*"You weren't kidding. That **is** spooky. His eyes are wide open."*

The voices didn't really reach him. He was still lost in his own world, standing there, staring at nothing. He hadn't even noticed Blacklight had turned off the water more than half an hour ago.

"You think he's still alive? This is freaking me out. What should we do?"

His son. Finally, he could think about his son again, without just seeing lifeless eyes staring back at him. He could think about Blossom Tree's face, without the constant reminder it was molten into a wall in Stable One.

It wasn't just the talking that had done it. Adjusting to Misty's sleep pattern had left him quietly watching over her at night. It had forced him to stop. To just sit down and do nothing, and let his mind rest. He never realized how much he'd needed that rest. Ghouls didn't sleep...

...did they?

"I'll go get Misty. She'll know what to do. Hopefully."

* * *

As a matter of fact, Misty knew *exactly* what to do. One firm poke in the side was really all it took to get a sign of life from the old ghoul. That sign was, of course, a surprised whinny followed by an indignant glare at the owner of the appendage that had committed the offending action. Unsurprisingly, touching him was the one thing Blacklight, and the colleague she'd called in, had not tried.

"Equestria to Lemon Frisk?" Misty said, smiling. "Are you okay?"

Lemon Frisk blinked. "Misty! Uh, I think so." he said. He looked around, and realised where he was. "Oh. The shower. Right."

The two security ponies looked at each other, and, seeing as everything seemed to be all right, they decided to leave the two alone.

Misty gave the ghoul an inquisitive look. "What happened to you?"

Lemon walked towards the door of the decontamination room, where Blacklight had dropped off some towels. Misty followed him. He turned towards her and gave her a radiant smile. "I think I slept!"

Misty gave him a puzzled look. "You look like you figured something out. Care to share?"

"Nothing too world-shattering." Lemon Frisk said, pulling a towel onto his hoof and carefully starting to dry off his head. "I've just been... remembering stuff, lately. All the bad stuff that happened to me. Everything I'd repressed."

Misty nodded. "Go on..."

"Stop that!" Lemon Frisk said, glaring at her.

Misty grinned. "Sorry. Force of habit."

Lemon Frisk rolled his eyes. "Anyway. I just remembered something that *wasn't* awfully messed up, for once." He smiled. "A happy memory."

"Oh? Do tell."

Lemon Frisk paused to dry himself off further. "Do you mind?" he asked, when noticing how the mare was eyeing his every move.

"Nope." Misty said, grinning. "Do you?"

Lemon Frisk shot her a glare. "Out. Now."

"All right, all right." Misty said, walking out of the decontamination shower and waiting just outside. She left the door ajar. "But tell me, what was it you remembered?"

"Blossom Tree." Lemon Frisk's voice came from behind the door. "I met her when I was going through basic training here in Whinnyapolis; she worked in the mess hall. I was just remembering when T.B. and the others locked the two of us inside together."

Misty grinned. "I gather it worked?"

"Still wanted to buck T.B. in the face for that, though. I was so embarrassed! She had no business messing with that!"

"You, embarrassed?" Misty laughed. "Sorry, but I really can't imagine you as a shy teenager not daring to ask a mare out."

Lemon Frisk groaned. "Yeah well, even if life gives you a whole damn lemon tree, you still have to reach out and pick the lemons. T.B.'s way of handling that problem was to dynamite the tree so it'd fall on top of me."

"Who was this T.B.?" Misty asked. "She sounds like quite a character to me."

"She was our squad leader. Well, technically not *my* squad, I was just there for the basic training, but still... I was *sort of* part of the group. Honorary member, if only for putting up with them. She was a Diamond Dog. She would've been Top Dog, but she was female, hence, Top Bitch. T.B."

"Charming nickname." Misty said.

"Charming canine, too." Lemon Frisk said as he opened the door and walked out. "Good-natured, with a mischievous streak a mile wide. She had this funny way of stepping way out of line without ever actually crossing the lines. Anything not explicitly forbidden was allowed as far as she was concerned, and she took any punishment with a smile. Nearly drove our drill instructor to depression. In the end, he tried taking it out on the rest of us, giving us punishment for the stuff she did wrong. That didn't work either; T.B. was our leader, and we'd take any flak for her. And her pranks were usually worth it, anyway."

"I never knew you had military training." Misty said. "Was that because of your Ministry work?"

Lemon Frisk nodded. "Ministry of Morale crisis managers get involved in all kinds of situations. We were

allowed to take control of military personnel if we needed to, so they made sure we at least got some training to justify that."

Misty looked at the dusk sky outside the Stable Door. It was a gloomy morning, with no visible sunrise. "Did you ever see the front lines?"

"We had our own front lines. Terrorist bombings, theft of important documents and memory orbs, zebra assassins... I've seen them all. I wouldn't be surprised if some of the ancestors of the Slags were down there because of me."

"Zebra assassins? Sounds dangerous."

"Yeah, after dealing with one of these guys I definitely never regretted those hours of sparring with a diamond dog. Those zebra bastards were vicious."

The two ponies walked outside, and looked at the immense remains of the once mighty city. Lemon Frisk was once again struck by the stark contrast between his memories and the city's current state. The city used to pulse with energy, dirty and dangerous, but alive and wonderful. The current ruin of Whinnyapolis was nothing like that. It just looked dead.

Lemon Frisk knew better than to trust that look, though. It'd be full of radroaches, ghouls, giant ants, and possibly even manticores. And if the wildlife wasn't enough, there were probably also plenty of old malfunctioning security systems, possibly with roboponies.

"I wonder if there are any ponies down there." Misty said, apparently thinking along the same lines. "Living ones, I mean. Scavengers, and traders. We should've asked Capsworth about that, actually. I'm sure he would've known."

Lemon Frisk shrugged. "Too late for that now." He threw another look at the city in the distance, and walked through the Door again. "Come on, we better get ready."

* * *

When they arrived at the living quarters of Misty's parents, Winter Gale was already there, fully packed, but, without his battle saddle. Slung across his chest were two gun holsters, each holding a pretty impressive Ironshod pistol.

"You left the big guns at home?" Lemon Frisk asked. "We might need them, you know."

The white stallion gave him an unsure look. "Uh, we really only had one of those. And Misty kinda... destroyed it."

Lemon blinked. "That's right... what's up with that anyway?" He turned to Misty. "In the Sparkle-Cola factory, you wrenched open a door nopony had managed to open for two hundred years, and here at the Stable, you crushed a freaking huge rifle like it was made of tinfoil. Are you sure you're not some illegitimate offspring of Twilight Sparkle?"

Moonstorm chuckled. "I doubt that. She's not too good with magic, overall. It only happens when she panics."

"Mom!" Misty yelled, visibly embarrassed. Chaotic release of powerful magic was *not* a positive thing for a unicorn; in fact, since it most often happened with babies, it was quite akin to bedwetting.

Hailstorm looked at the two with an amused look on his face. "I remember when you got your cutie mark.

We weren't sure it was because you helped that filly, or because you could throw couches around when somepony jumped out and yelled 'boo' at you."

"Oh, be kind." Lemon Frisk interjected. "Both of the magic boosts I've seen seemed to have been aimed quite specifically." He decided not to continue the bedwetting simile, even mentally.

He grabbed his saddle bags, and slung them across his back. "Right. Misty and I both got ourselves some new armament in Hayden, but we haven't actually used it yet. Misty, you still got my old mouth gun, too. You can keep that if you want, but keep it more accessible."

"Would that even stop a ghoul?" she asked.

"Sure, if you hit it in the face." He smirked at her. "You can always just freak out and throw a house at it, though."

Misty rolled her eyes, but still smiled at him. "So much for being kind."

* * *

It didn't take the three ponies long to get ready. Misty had always kept her stuff packed, since she never planned on staying, and Lemon Frisk didn't really have anywhere to unpack anyway. Winter Gale made a quick trip to Security to get Misty a holster for Lemon Frisk's gun, and some extra ammo. Misty took the opportunity to take a quick shower. As soon as they were all ready, they made their way to the Door.

They found an unfamiliar stallion waiting for them there. Well, unfamiliar to Lemon Frisk, anyway. Misty and Gale seemed to know him all too well.

"Greetings!" the purple-maned stallion said to Lemon Frisk. A cutie mark of a computer terminal was visible on his pale green coat. "Wow, I almost missed you. That'd be really embarrassing. Stupid WRD, monopolizing your time." He cleared his throat. "Ahem. Eh, I'm Vector Field, the Overstallion of Stable 69."

Lemon Frisk glanced at his companions, unsure what to do. Misty put on a sour face, and Gale rolled his eyes. That didn't help very much. Vector Field looked at Lemon Frisk almost pleadingly, as if he fully expected him to just walk past him without saying a word. The Overstallion position was clearly a pale shadow of the days of Summer Rain.

Lemon decided to play it tactfully, and smiled. "Hi. I'm Lemon Frisk, as you, eh, probably already know, seeing as you waited here for me, and you're the Overstallion, and all. Um. How can I help you?"

Vector Field gave him an excited smile. "Oh! Well, I really just wanted to meet you, actually. With you being, guest of honour and all."

Lemon Frisk decided not to glance back at his companions. He could almost *hear* Misty's eyes rolling. "Right." he said. "Well, it's very nice to meet you, Vector Field. It seems the WRD has pretty much replaced you here, hm?"

Vector Field nodded sadly. "Yes, they pretty much have. I wasn't even involved in the decision to open the Door, imagine that. It's been like that from before I was Overstallion, though. Ever since the WRD was set up, they've been handling more and more of the Stable's affairs."

Lemon smiled, and faced his two companions. "Can you wait outside? I think I have some things to discuss with this gentlestallion."

Misty Cloud raised an eyebrow, her look clearly telling him that Vector wasn't worth the effort, but his own stern look made her give up and go on. Winter Gale followed his cousin closely.

Lemon Frisk turned to the Overstallion. "Take my advice." he said, suddenly very seriously. "Organize an excursion to the west. You will find an abandoned Sparkle Cola factory there. If you get there within this week, you should find people from two nearby settlements there; ponies and half-zebras. They're trying to set up a farming operation together, and for that, they'll need crops. Apple trees, cauliflower, broccoli... all things you have here. Your Stable will need a figurehead when trading with other communities. You can earn back your position by *being that figurehead*."

Vector Field blinked at him, dumbstruck, then nodded. "Th-thank you."

Lemon Frisk gave Vector a short nod, and turned towards the Door. "Don't get shot." he said. "Ponies out there are mighty twitchy." He walked through the Door, without looking back at the Overstallion. A smile crept over his face. *Just add a lot of little bits together, and we might just get there*, he thought. *And that's another little bit taken care of*.

* * *

The trip to the city was a lot quieter than Lemon Frisk had expected. Winter Gale was a pretty quiet guy, overall. Spray Paint had been quiet too, but he hadn't hesitated to throw in a snide comment at the right time. Winter Gale, on the other hand, was just plain shy. Lemon would've wondered how he ever got into security, if the crosshair on the pony's flank hadn't already revealed his special talent. Lemon just hoped he'd actually use it when they were being attacked by rabid ghouls.

As they moved through the suburbs, Lemon Frisk couldn't help once again comparing the city with how he'd known it. Canterlot sort of just rotted away, and since he was in it when it happened, he never really saw the sheer contrast of the living city with the dead one. The only immediate difference had been the dead and the ghouls. But here... with his memories refreshed just mere hours ago, it just made him sad. This had been the rich neighbourhood of Whinnyapolis. Expensive-looking mansions had been blown apart like stacked playing cards, their private swimming pools either cracked and empty, or filled with stinking brown sludge and undoubtedly turned into breeding grounds for some sort of mutated insect monstrosities. He'd never seen live bloatsprites or paradores, but he'd read about them in the guide, and he wasn't too keen on meeting them while travelling with two ponies who could actually die.

"Hey, Winter Gale?" he asked.

The white stallion turned to him. "Yeah?"

"Did you meet any insects here? Like, big nasty things."

"Oh! Yes. We cleared out a few nests of them in some of these pools. Nasty stingers, but they went down pretty easily." He frowned. "I guess I never even reported that," he said, going back to his usual diminutive voice. "I was too shaken."

Lemon smiled at him. "Oh, don't worry about that. They're in that Guide we gave 'em. I just thought these pools looked dangerous. If you already got rid of them, all the better."

Misty frowned. "The zombies up ahead will be plenty dangerous, though. We better look ou—"

"Incoming!" Winter Gale hissed suddenly, hitting the ground and grabbing his gun. Neither Misty nor Lemon saw anything though, until a ghoul jumped out of the ruins of a nearby building and launched itself straight at Misty. Winter Gale fired his gun, and the ghoul's head exploded, mere inches from Misty's face. The monster dropped on top of her, the remains of its head sprayed all over her.

"What's the *matter* with you?" Gale asked, almost panicking again. "I thought you two were *good* at this!"

"H-how did you *do* that?" Misty asked, frantically kicking the dead ghoul off herself.

"S.A.T.S." Winter Gale said, seemingly surprised. "You didn't even check the manuals, did you?"

Lemon Frisk looked at Gale. "Wait... your entire squad had trouble taking out these ghouls while using E.F.S. and S.A.T.S.?"

"I *am* a security pony, you know." Gale said, nervously scanning the area around them. "It's kind of, standard training. But they showed up as friendlies, and there was a weird glowing one with them. Whenever it came near the others, they just got back up."

"Time out." Misty said, having liberated herself from the decapitated ghoul. "What on earth are you two talking about?"

Lemon Frisk sighed. "I'm sorry." he said to Winter Gale. "This is kinda my fault. I had the training, but those systems haven't worked ever since this blasted thing melted into my leg." He turned to Misty. "You kinda got, um, a detection system in there. Look for it in the settings. It's called *Eyes Forward Sparkle*. It detects creatures and ponies around you even if you can't see them, and it can somehow see if they're hostile."

Misty's mouth hung open, and her eyes widened. "What?" she said, weakly.

Lemon went on, not noticing Misty's distress. "S.A.T.S., or the *Stable-Tec Arcane Targeting Spell*, temporarily freezes your perception of time, allowing you to line up shots at enemies. When the time-suspension ends, you actually perform the actions you did during the slow time, as fast as you possibly could. That's what you just saw Winter Gale do."

Misty stared at Lemon. "Y-you mean..." she said, the words barely audible. Her voice picked up a bit of volume as she went on. "Oh Goddesses. All this time, we walked around with that. If we'd known this..." She looked at her pipbuck, disbelief in her eyes. "We didn't even know what we were carrying. Pipbucks are just..."

"Glorified alarm clocks." Winter Gale said. "I know. Most ponies don't have a clue what a powerful weapon a pipbuck can be."

Misty stared at the deceptively simple thing on her leg. "Big Apple would still be alive if—"

Lemon Frisk shook his head. "Your father was right, Misty." he cut in. "This is the WRD's fault. They should've been training everypony *before* opening that door."

The three stood there in silence. The fact Winter Gale allowed this told Lemon Frisk he hadn't spotted any immediate threats. Still, distressing as the new information was to Misty, they had to go on. If she seriously wanted to leave her Stable forever, she had to get familiar with both systems.

"Come on." Lemon said, walking up to Misty and looking down at her pipbuck. "Let's get you acquainted with these systems."

Misty nodded, and raised her pipbuck to her face, using the mental commands to go through the lists until she found E.F.S. She blinked when it activated. "Woah. This is weird."

Lemon smiled. "See anything?"

"Yeah," she said, nodding. "Some information on my health and radiation levels. Blue indicators on you two. Hmm... and something red, behind you."

Lemon and Gale turned around immediately, but Gale relaxed. "Bloatsprite. It hasn't seen us yet. You can pretty much kill those by throwing rocks at them. Just don't let them shoot their needles at you; that's some nasty stuff."

"A rock, huh?" Misty looked on her pipbuck and found the S.A.T.S. option. She lifted a nearby rock with her magic. She suddenly paused, looking at Lemon and Gale. "Can I use S.A.T.S. with a rock?"

Lemon Frisk smiled. "Sure. You can use it for hoof-to-hoof combat, if you need to. It's pretty versatile that way."

Misty nodded, a concentrated look on her face. "All right. Let's try this."

The orange glow launched the rock at the insect with surprising force. The bug blew apart in big leathery chunks.

Misty smiled. "I could get used to that!"

Lemon Frisk nods at her encouragingly. "Great! Next time, please use a gun though. Ghouls won't go down that easily."

Misty floated the gun out of its holster, and looked at it. "I've, uh, never really used those things. Except on that molten ghoule."

Winter Gale smiled. "If you ever come back to the Stable, I'll be happy to get you some gun training."

"Fat chance." Misty replied. "No, I can handle this. I mean, with this S.A.T.S stuff, I should be all right, no?"

Lemon Frisk raised his eyebrow. "You're still the one taking the shots. It's only as good as you are." He glanced at the bloatsprite corpse. "You're just pretty good at throwing rocks."

* * *

It didn't take them long to find the ghouls. As Winter Gale had said, they showed up as blue pips on Misty and Gale's E.F.S. Lemon Frisk went on alone to check it out, leaving the other two hiding in the still mostly standing remains of a large mansion.

There were about a dozen of them, flocking together around a ghoule that was literally glowing with radiation. *Blue* radiation. Lemon Frisk frowned. First the Shard, now this ghoule... something strange was going on. He'd never heard of blue radiation before. He decided to spend some other time overthinking that issue, though. Right now, he had to figure out how to take out that glowing ghoule without getting torn to shreds by the others.

He noticed a few of the ghouls seemed to be wearing the same familiar pieces of clothing. They were tattered, torn and nearly rotted away, but still clearly blue. Stable uniforms. His gaze immediately drifted down to their forelegs, and, indeed, all of them were wearing pipbucks.

The males of Stable 69. Part of the 25% he had calculated to have gone back to the city. Lemon Frisk sighed. Sometimes, he just wished he was wrong when he said things like that. No wonder they showed up as friendlies; their pipbuck ID signal probably made other Stable 69 pipbucks ignore the actual hostility

check.

He looked at the ghouls. Twelve of them, swarming around the glowing one. He'd need a grenade or something to clear them out. He never thought of getting stuff like that in Hayden. All he had were some guns, and a ton of bottlecaps. He quietly snuck back to the other two, and told them his findings.

Misty gave him an incredulous look. "Twelve!? That's more than those raiders at the factory! And we had an *army* to back us up, there."

"They're slightly less intelligent than raiders though." Lemon said, smirking. "I could pull off the same plan."

Misty shook her head. "You may survive getting riddled with bullets, but these ponies *bite chunks out of you!* They'll rip you to shreds! And even if you kill that glowing one first, it won't magically stop glowing. It'll keep healing the others."

"And me." Lemon remarked.

Misty let out a tired sigh. "And you. But not enough. It'll still be twelve to one!"

Winter Gale looked at the two. "Um... I think I got an idea. It's risky, though."

Lemon turned to him. "Please, do tell. Risky is better than nothing."

Gale nodded. "All right. Lemon, if you sneak around them, and we start shooting, they'll come stampeding towards us. If you run with them, you could take out the glowing one without them noticing. If they keep coming to us, they'll move away from the glow."

"No!" Lemon said, resolutely shaking his head. "That'll put you two at risk!"

Winter Gale nodded. "I know. But you're the only one who can get in between them."

"Discord's beard." Lemon Frisk grumbled. "What was I thinking, getting us into this?"

Misty smirked. "You were thinking," she said, "that our Stable security ponies were as clueless out there as I was. And, you were wrong."

"Yes, thank you." Lemon said flatly. "Anything more helpful to add to that?"

She nodded. "You're afraid of losing me." she said, in a more serious tone. "I'm the first person you bonded with in two centuries, and it makes you deathly afraid to put a horde of ghouls between the two of us, because there's no way you could possibly get to me if I need saving."

Lemon Frisk's eyes narrowed. "Don't psychoanalyse me."

She smirked. "You asked."

"Well, can you blame me?" he spat back. "You barely know how to hold a gun! Or... float it up, or whatever."

"I never said I blamed you." Misty retorted. "But you're going to have to trust us here."

Lemon sighed. "This is madness. We should just go back."

Winter Gale shook his head. "I'm not going anywhere until those things are killed."

Misty and Lemon exchanged a worried glance at those words. Perhaps bringing Gale along hadn't been such a good idea after all. They could both hear the unspoken "or I am" at the end of his sentence. They were both intimately familiar with the concept of survivor's guilt.

"That's... not a very healthy attitude, you know." Lemon remarked.

Winter Gale shrugged. "There's nothing else in the Stable that can help us anyway, and nopony else who wants to or dares to. And *somepony* has to clean up this city eventually. We might as well give it a start."

"I guess you got a point." Lemon said. "But, no heroics. We're all in this together."

* * *

Lemon Frisk snuck around the ghouls a second time. They stared back at him with dull, vacant eyes, but let him go about his business. He glanced back at the mansion in the distance, and sighed. She'd been right, of course. He had grown really fond of her, and compared to him, she was so fragile. He was reminded of an old wasteland paradox he'd heard from some merchant that wandered into Stable One. *In the Wastelands, you need friends to survive... but not true friends. True friends just die and make you stop wanting to survive.* Perhaps that's why the guy had been crazy enough to go to Canterlot in the first place.

He sighed, and walked towards the blue glowing pony in the middle of the group. Winter Gale would start shooting from the moment he reached it.

* * *

"He's in position." Misty Cloud said, lowering her binoculars. The two were standing outside the mansion, far enough to go unnoticed by the ghouls, but close enough to shoot at them. "Look, Gale... you don't have to do this, you know."

Winter Gale smiled, without looking away from the ghouls. "Bad time to finally start doing your job."

Misty stared to the ground. "I'm sorry. I should've been there for you."

He shook his head. "You left. That was your choice. You can't blame yourself for what happened to us afterwards." He finally looked at her. "Misty... I don't blame you. I blame those undead abominations down there. So please, let's focus on taking them out."

Misty nodded, and floated out the shotgun Lemon Frisk had picked out for her in Hayden. It was a unicorn weapon; a gun that kicked like an angry mule, and that would kick out the teeth of anypony stupid enough to fire it by mouth. Which was exactly why it didn't have a mouth trigger. She wondered who ever came up with the trigger design for it, though. Maybe it had been made for griffins, or something.

She tried aiming it at the ghouls, but Winter Gale shook his head. "Not yet. Wait until they're close. A shotgun is a powerful weapon, but it doesn't have much power at that range." He looked at his cousin. "Oh, and don't aim it even slightly towards a friendly target; it spreads."

Misty nodded nervously, getting really close to reconsidering Gale's offer of going back to the Stable for gun training. She hoped Lemon Frisk would stay far behind the rest.

"Right. Get ready." Winter Gale said. He grabbed one of the heavy Ironshod revolvers in his mouth.

* * *

A loud shot cracked through the air. One of the ghouls at the edge of the group fell down, its head reduced to a slimy crater. The others looked up at the source of the sound, let out terrible shrieks, and dashed off.

Lemon Frisk didn't waste any time. He bit the glowing ghoul in the neck, pulled it down to the ground, and crushed its neck with his hooves. Not taking any chances with something that regenerated, he used his teeth to pull the head off completely.

He looked up to see how far the others had gone on, only to find his view blocked by four of them looking straight at him, and standing way too close to the still-glowing ghoul corpse.

"Ah, crap!" He ran to the side, trying to get around them, but they cut him off quickly. Beyond them, he saw a glimpse of the other seven, running towards his companions.

* * *

"He's pinned!" Misty yelled. She looked at the remaining ghouls galloping towards them with deadly madness in their eyes. "Can we handle those?"

Winter Gale fired another shot, and another ghoul went down. "Dowt it." he said, through the gun in his mouth. "Fiwe shome shotsh, am' get rewwy to rum back imto de housh."

Misty frantically activated her S.A.T.S. and targeted the closest ghoul. With its head only showing a mere 15% hit chance, she aimed both of the gun's shots at it.

When the spell finished, the shotgun roared once. The second shot never came, on account of the gun getting blown out of Misty's magic field. Panicked, she ran back to retrieve it, not even noticing the ghoul she targeted was now missing half of its face, and falling to the ground.

"Rum!" Winter Gale yelled behind her. He fired another shot and cursed, and then quickly joined Misty in her mad run towards the mansion.

The two ponies rushed inside, quickly followed by the ghouls. In the cramped corridor, Misty's shotgun would probably be an ideal weapon, but with her S.A.T.S. spell still recharging, all she managed to accomplish was blowing a sizable chunk out of the already decaying wall. The doors they slammed into the ghouls' faces did little to slow them down, and they ended up running up a decaying wooden staircase in an attempt to stay ahead.

The two rushed to the end of the long corridor, and slammed the door shut behind them. Misty frantically rummaged through her saddlebags with her magic, and levitated two new shotgun shells out to put into her weapon.

She never got the chance to put them in her weapon; three screaming ghouls crashed through the rotted door.

* * *

Struggling through a barrage of rotting hooves and teeth, Lemon Frisk finally managed to grab his gun, and finished the ghouls off quickly. They had done quite some damage; his skin was torn in several spots, and a large chunk of his neck was ripped open.

Canterlot ghouls were pretty much indestructible due to their regenerative ability, but most of the ones

that weren't prone to biting your face off preferred using healing potion, because the process was far from pleasant. The flesh hanging from Lemon Frisk's neck started to hiss as small wisps of pink cloud came out of the wound. The slab curled back up and glued itself seamlessly back to the rest of his neck. Lemon Frisk winced at the sensation, and wondered how much longer he'd be able to do that, now he was out of Canterlot.

He looked up as he heard gunshots coming from the mansion, and dashed on. As he ran through the broken front door, he started noticing small objects around him floating into the air, suspended in an orange aura. He ran further and entered the main hall, where one of the ghouls was frantically jumping in a useless attempt to get up a collapsed staircase. The walls glowed orange too, now, and Lemon saw the ghoul enveloped in the same aura.

"Discord's testicles!" he yelled, as he ran back towards the door. He ignored the orange glow pulling at his saddlebags, and flung himself through the doorway.

Behind him, the whole left half of the mansion collapsed, a cloud of dust rolling to all sides.

"Misty!" he yelled, running into the dust cloud. He cursed his own lack of E.F.S. as he blindly walked into the rubble. The first thing he found was the ghoul he'd seen at the bottom of the stairs. The creature was quite dead, impaled on a large piece of wood that had fallen onto it. As the dust around him started to settle, he saw another rotten hoof sticking out of the large pile of rubble that used to be the mansion's left wing.

He looked around frantically, calling Misty's name, until he heard a hopeful sound coming from behind the left wing's remains: coughing. He ran towards the sound, and with a goopy splash, he fell right into a murky swimming pool.

"How nice of you to join us." Misty said weakly from the other side of the pool. She was covered in slime and what seemed to be the remains of a bloatsprite's nest. As the dust cleared, he saw Winter Gale lying next to the pool, his soaked, previously-white coat showing he'd made the same dive to safety.

Lemon Frisk grumbled something that included another one of Discord's body parts, before raising his voice to audible levels. "Misty, next time you take my advice and drop a house on something that attacks us... please take one we're *not* inside of?"

* * *

"So, where to next?" Misty asked. She'd found an old curtain in the remains of the right wing, and was using it to wipe the muck off her coat. She was in a surprisingly good mood, after everything they'd been through, which made Lemon Frisk envy her ability to produce adrenalin.

"I'd like to go to the army cemetery." he said. "Pay my respects to some old friends."

"Um, they can't... come alive again, can they? As ghouls?" Misty asked, frowning.

Lemon Frisk laughed. "No, don't worry." he said. "It doesn't work that way. You actually have to die from radiation poisoning to become a ghoul." He looked at the east side of the city, and sighed. "No... these died from simple old-fashioned zebra bullets."

Winter Gale glanced at the big road leading back to the Stable. "I uh... won't be coming with you." he said.

Misty frowned. "You're not? We could use your help, to get there."

The young stallion shook his head resolutely. "I'm the only one left, Misty. The last of the original security

force. They need me to train more ponies." He gave her a pleading look. "Come back with me. Just for some training. It'll help you, out here!"

Misty looked away. "I'm not going back there. It's too cramped."

Lemon Frisk rolled his eyes. "Right, right. You both got your minds set on your own goals. Let's just say goodbye like civilized ponies, and be on our way."

Gale gave him a grateful smile, and hugged Misty. "Take care, cousin." he said.

"You too, Security pony."

Lemon smiled. "Give my regards to Fog Light."

Winter Gale gave him a polite nod. "Will do." he said. "And I better tell the WRD about the E.F.S. problem."

Lemon frowned. "Ooh, yes. You need to get that fixed. There are about a thousand Stable 69 pipbucks out here. Whether they're on ghouls or not, seeing them all as friendly could be a serious problem."

Gale nodded. "Well, bye then." He trotted back down the road they'd taken, towards the Stable.

Misty looked at Lemon Frisk. "So... let's find that graveyard of yours."

* * *

The clouds had gotten an orange shine to them, indicating that the day was nearing its end. Misty and Lemon were still making their way through the abandoned streets of Whinnyapolis.

"Are you sure we're going the right way?" Misty asked. "We've been walking for hours."

"We should be, yes." Lemon Frisk said. "What does your map say?"

"Nothing about a military graveyard. Maybe the whole thing was blown into the lakes."

Lemon shot her a sharp look. "Don't joke about that."

"I wasn't!" Misty shot back. "This place *did* get blown up with a balefire megaspell, you know!"

"Halt!" a gravelly, almost growling voice suddenly yelled at them. "You are entering a military zone! Please leave this area!"

The ghoul, dressed in the tattered remains of what had once been a beige military uniform, was standing in the remains of what had once been a gate. Lemon Frisk hadn't even noticed they had passed the remains of a fence, but apparently the ghoul had.

Misty frowned, remembering some things from her Wasteland Survival Guide. "Is that a Steel Ranger?"

Lemon Frisk shook his head. "I think we found the place I was looking for. He's Equestrian Military."

Misty's eyes widened. "You mean... he doesn't realize the war ended two cen—"

"Hush." Lemon Frisk cut her off. "I've seen this a few times in Stable One. This guy is balancing between what I am, and those rabid things we just killed. I don't want him tipping to the wrong side."

"Civilians!" the ghoul yelled at them. "Leave now, or I will be forced to use violence!"

Lemon Frisk walked towards the ghoul. "State your name and rank, please."

"Private Petal Luck. And you are?"

"My name is Lemon Frisk. I'm a crisis manager for the Ministry of Morale. When dealing with military crisis situations, that gives me an honorary rank of Master Sergeant."

"Sir!" the ghoul soldier said, standing to attention. "What about her, sir?"

"My personal secretary. I've come to take control of the Whinnyapolis situation."

"I see, sir. Do you have any news from high command? I haven't heard anything for weeks!"

"Weeks. Uhuh." Lemon Frisk said, suppressing a sigh. He realized the soldier might be a lost cause anyway. "How many weeks, private? Did you keep the logs?"

"Yes, sir! The logs are complete!"

Lemon smiled. "Come, we'll go over them."

They walked into the building. Misty stopped when Lemon's pipbuck started crackling.

"Ma'am? Are you coming?" Petal Luck asked.

Lemon Frisk glanced at his companion, and disabled his rad-meter. "She'll stay here, to alert us if there are any trespassers."

The other ghoul nodded, and walked over to a desk. An orderly stack of notes was lying at the side. A broken mechanical clock showing both date and time was standing on the back of the desk. Lemon Frisk opened the last journal, and checked the date on the last entry. It was identical to the one on the clock. He frowned, went back a few pages, and checked the date. Again, it was identical to the clock. Every day, the ghoul had dutifully written down the clock's date in the journal, and reported the day's events. For two hundred years. He had never realized the clock broke about four years into his futile exercise.

Lemon Frisk knew this was a critical moment. Pointing out the mistake could send the ghoul over the edge. He just didn't know to which side. With Misty out of the way, he decided to risk it.

"Private, it seems your clock is broken." he said.

"I'm sorry, sir. I never checked."

Lemon Frisk nodded. "You have been writing down the same date in all of your previous entries, private. Could you please count the amount of entries for me, and tell me how long you've been making this mistake?"

The soldier looked uncomfortable now. He'd been caught making a mistake that messed up all the paperwork. Hesitantly, he went over the logs, page after page, desperate to find one with a different date. He felt a hoof on his shoulder.

"Calm down, private. I'm here to fix a mess, not to reprimand you. I just need you to tell me what time span we're talking about. Weeks? Months? Years?"

Petal Luck looked through the previous notebooks. "It can't be years, sir. It just... can't be." He grabbed notebook after notebook, looking at the first page, and seeing the same date. His face looked more desperate with every notebook he grabbed. "How long have I been here?! This is impossible!"

Lemon Frisk put his hoof on the pile of remaining notebooks, preventing Petal from taking the next one. "Tell me, private Petal Luck. How old were you when you joined the army?"

"T-thirty-two, sir." the ghoul stammered.

"And what, according to military rules, is the maximum age of an active soldier?"

"Fifty." Petal Luck said, the change of subject distracting him from the notebooks.

One by one, Lemon Frisk flicked the notebooks off the pile, onto the ground, until only the last one remained. He opened it, and showed Petal Luck the same accursed date. "This pile was approximately twenty years of notes. The cabinet behind me has at least five times as many. I'll spare you the counting, since I *know* how long you've been here. One hundred and ninety six years, private. Which means that, by Equestrian Law, you are no longer a soldier. You should've retired more than a hundred and seventy five years ago."

"What?" the ghoul said, weakly.

"Rise and shine, Petal Luck. You're a free stallion. What do you wish to do with that freedom?"

"Sir, I can't—"

"Don't call me 'sir'. You're no longer a soldier."

"But I've been here so long! I can't just—"

Lemon looked at the ghoul soldier. "About two hundred years ago, this city was destroyed by balefire. Like it or not, you died in that explosion. The necromantic poisons brought you back. You've been guarding this place for two hundred years too long, Petal Luck."

The ghoul looked devastated. "No... that can't be..."

Lemon Frisk used his mouth to grab a random notebook from the middle of the cabinet, flicked it open in the middle, and held it before Petal's face. He didn't need to look himself; he knew the same date would be staring back at the ghoul soldier.

"It ish." Lemon simply said, and he spat out the notebook. He pointed a hoof at the cabinet. "Check for yourself. Start at the beginning. Find the moment the world died."

Petal Luck looked at the cabinet, and started going through the first notebooks, until he found the date indicated on the clock. He leafed back through the previous notebooks, and found the one he was looking for. He read it aloud, his voice shaking.

"Th-thirteen hours twenty three minutes. The rest of the guard squad is dead. I woke up amidst them. Somehow, it seems I was knocked out for several days. There appears to be structural damage to the gate and building, and all personnel inside appears to be dead as well. I stored the bodies in the morgue, b-but the doctors appear to be dead as well. I l-left the bodies, because there is no space..."

He squeezed his eyes shut, Opening them again, he read one of the next entries. "Zero Three hundred

hours. Still no response from command. I went out to the gate, but it appears to be destroyed. I guarded the perimeter until my shift was over. There appears to be nopony left to take the next shift. I don't feel tired, so I may just take it myself."

He leafed through the next pages, as if trying to confirm a suspicion, desperation growing in his eyes. When he reached the end of the notebook, he looked up at Lemon Frisk, shock in his eyes.

"I... haven't slept in all these years." he said.

Lemon Frisk nodded. "Indeed."

"I guarded this gate for **two hundred bloody years!**" he yelled in anger. He ran out of the building, and looked around him, truly seeing the destroyed city for the first time. For a moment, Lemon Frisk was worried he'd lost his mind and would attack Misty, but Petal just stopped and stared. "Oh dear Celestia. Everything is gone."

"Yes." Lemon Frisk simply said.

"No orders, no supplies, no reinforcements... because there was nopony left." He sobbed, face in his hooves. "There's no one left."

Petal Luck suddenly looked up at Lemon Frisk, a glimmer of hope in his eyes. "What about the Stable? That huge bunker they built?"

Lemon Frisk tilted his head. "You had relatives that were accepted in the Stable program?"

Petal nodded. "Yes. A daughter. What happened to her? Did it work?"

Lemon Frisk nodded, glad it hadn't been a son. That might really have driven him over the edge. "It did." he said. "We just visited the place. What's your daughter's name and cutie mark?"

"Tulip Wishes." Petal replied immediately, enthusiasm audible in his old voice. "She has a purple tulip as cutie mark." He smiled. "A gardener, like her old man."

The ghoul soldier stared off into the distance. "But it's been two hundred years... she must be dead." His eyes widened, and he turned to Lemon Frisk again. "I got grandchildren? Great-great... g-grandchildren?"

"Misty?" Lemon asked the orange mare. "Do you have any records of the Stable population in your pipbuck?"

Misty frowned, and looked through the tons of options in the mobile computer she'd been carrying. To her surprise, there were indeed genealogy records in there. She nodded at Lemon Frisk.

"Check the genealogy register, and tell me how many living descendants she has."

Misty inserted the query into her pipbuck, and nodded. "One hundred sixty-five current residents are descendent from her." She blinked, and frowned. "Woah. Uhh..."

"There are two options, now." Lemon Frisk said softly. "You can finally get the rest you deserve, and leave this world behind. Or you try to live in it, and we can go to Stable sixty-nine and find your family. I'll respect your wish, whatever you choose. You've been through hell, and the current wastelands aren't much better."

"Lemon?" Misty said, sounding distressed. "I need to talk to you."

"Not now, Misty." he said.

"Lemon, I'm serious. You need to see this. I'm freaking out here."

Lemon walked towards Misty. "What?"

"I'm one of them." she whispered into his ear. "One of these one hundred sixty-five."

Lemon Frisk blinked, looked at the ghoul, and back to her. "Woah."

"Well then!" he smiled, making no effort to keep his voice down. "Let's make this a happy reunion right away."

"No!" Misty yelled. "Wait!"

Before Misty could react, Lemon Frisk grabbed her pipbuck leg with both forelegs, nearly dragging her to the ground, and opened the genealogy tracing with the hoof controls.

"Tulip Wishes," Lemon Frisk read out loud, "gave birth to Winter Breeze." He glanced up at Misty and smirked. "Weather name; we all know what *that* means."

Misty sighed, and reluctantly stopped struggling while Lemon Frisk read on. Petal Luck frowned, unsure what this was about, but listened intently.

"Winter Breeze, fathered Spring Melody, who gave birth to Green Meadow, who gave birth to Rusty Wrench, who fathered Red Dasher, who was the mother of Soft Breeze, who was the father of Raindrop, father of Hailstorm, father of Misty Cloud."

He got up, looked at Petal Luck, and pointed his hoof out at Misty. "Well, Petal Luck. Meet your great-great-great, great-great-great, great-great-granddaughter, Misty Cloud."

Petal Luck frowned, and hesitantly walked towards Misty. "Really?" he said, hope in his voice.

Misty stared at the broken concrete. "Yes. I grew up in the Stable, and the Stable records confirm it."

Petal walked towards her, slowly, and touched her coat, somehow feeling the need to assure himself she was real. "You... you're the current generation."

He put his hoof down again, and looked at Lemon Frisk. "It's enough." he said with a smile. "It's enough for me, to know they live on. To know I live on in them. In her."

Misty's eyes widened, as she realized what he was saying. "No, wait..." she said, weakly.

"I've been here far longer than I should have." Petal Luck said, shaking his head. "I'm one of the ponies from the generation that helped mess it all up. I have no right to claim any role in what you're doing to make it all right again."

"Please," Misty said. She was trying to yell, but somehow couldn't muster the volume. "I just met you."

Petal Luck shook his head. "I'm sorry. I died two hundred years ago. I just needed you to help me realize it." He gave her a sad smile. "Please, just let me rest."

Lemon Frisk nodded. "We'll bury you by the Stable, and let your family know." He grabbed the gun from his saddlebag.

"You can't do this!" Misty yelled, both at Petal Luck and Lemon Frisk. "Please don't do this..."

Lemon Frisk shook his head. "I shaid I'd reshpect his wish, Mishty." he said, the gun in his mouth. "He made hish choish."

Misty looked away and squeezed her eyes shut. It did nothing to stop her tears, or to stop her from hearing the gun shot.

* * *

The way back was quiet. They travelled through the area they had cleared before, and were now on the road through the suburbs. Misty kept trying to look away from Petal Luck's body, lying on the improvised sled Lemon Frisk was dragging along. He hadn't visited the cemetery, in the end. The cemetery could wait. He had a new grave to dig.

"Why?" she finally asked. "Why would you do that? After your son..."

Lemon shook his head. "This was different, Misty. This was the opposite, in fact. I've had an aunt who became demented by the end of her life. She kept forgetting things that happened five minutes before, or would suddenly forget an entire day and wonder where her visitors of the previous day had gone. The worst part was, she knew it was happening. She knew she couldn't trust her own memory anymore, and it depressed her. In the end, she just lost the will to live."

He looked at Misty. "Petal Luck had just found out that he'd been like that for two hundred years. Forgetting one day after the next, barely aware of his surroundings, not even noticing the time or date on the clock didn't change. He had been haunting that base as a soldier for two hundred years. The risk of him falling into the same pattern again was very real to him. What if one day he'd look around in the Stable and wonder who those trespassers were? He'd become a threat to his own family. I think he wasn't, mind you, or I probably wouldn't have given him that choice. But that doesn't change the fact he'd be living in constant fear that he might be. He deserved his rest, Misty."

"It's not fair." she said.

"Life rarely is." Lemon replied. "At least he got a choice, and made it by himself."

* * *

"Here lies Petal Luck, father of Tulip Wishes." the sign read. "After two centuries, he finally found his peace."

A funeral was an odd and new thing for the Stable residents, and it resulted in a lot more than just Petal Luck's descendants to come outside to witness it. They couldn't give him back to the Circle of Life; the old ghoul's body was saturated with the poisons of the city. As promised, they buried him close to the Stable where his descendants still lived, in the far end of the flattened area of the gravel quarry, where the forty dead males found outside the Stable had been buried too. His grave was the only one with a headstone and an identity, though. It would be visible to anypony looking out of the Stable Door.

Lemon Frisk turned towards the gathered Stable ponies.

"Ghouls exist in many kinds." he said. "Some are like me, quite normal, but undead. Some are just flesh-eating monsters. And some are dead inside, but keep repeating the things they did in the last days

of their lives, forever a broken record of the old days. If anything disturbs them, they become mad monsters as well." He paused, and closed his eyes. Misty knew exactly whom he was thinking of.

"But some balance between the two." he continued. "I used to think that the dead repeating the actions of the living were the most tragic type, but they aren't. Petal Luck made me realize that. He walked that balance for two hundred years, barely aware of whom he was, dutifully guarding a destroyed base, in a dead city. But he was not a broken record. He wasn't dead inside, and that's the tragic part. He had really been there, for those two hundred years, lost in the monotony of his actions, until we managed to reach out to him."

"And he decided the future was in your hooves. He was a remnant of the past, and his chance of dying together with his loved ones was stolen from him. So he reclaimed it. Don't judge him for that. He had been a restless ghost for two hundred years. We just gave him a moment of clarity to realize that. Petal Luck deserved his rest."

Footnote: Level Up! Still no clue on what level. We'll see when it maxes out?

New Perk: Hoof-To-Hoof Combat (level 1): Long-forgotten fighting practice remembered once more, you no longer need to bite the heads off any hostiles you meet. Just bashing their heads in works fine, and is slightly less prone to creeping the hell out of your travelling companions.

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