Core Issues: Season Five

by Nicolle

Summary

Cross and Shooting Star are plagued with nightmares of other Frisks in serious danger while Dragoon Sans attempts to rebuild his timeline by stealing people and things that rightly belong to others.

Notes

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Note: This story is rated T for language, suggestive jokes/themes, and violence.
Prologue: PrinceTale

"I just want to understand what you're doing with your life."

Chara adjusted the phone, and resisted the urge to growl in annoyance. "I'm living the life that makes Frisk and I happy. Aren't the grandchildren enough for you?"

His mother sighed into the phone. "It's not about that. Listen, Charles, you and Franchesca are the best dimensional physicists in the world! Why in God's name would you choose to raise sheep on a mountain in the middle of nowhere? What did I send you to school for if you aren't going to use the degree?"

Chara stared out the window at Mt. Ebott and the flock of sheep that roamed the pastures on it. "Last I checked, I was the one who chose that program and paid for that degree. Not you. What I choose to do with it is my business and mine alone. Now unless you have something to say to me that's actually important, I have better things to do than listen to you berate me for not providing you a life of luxury."

Before he could hang up on her, he heard her gasp as the phone was pulled out of her hand.

Chara sighed, relieved. "Greetings, Dad."

"Sorry about that, kiddo. You know how she gets."

Chara nodded. He would never, ever, say that he didn't love his mother. He loved her a lot. That doesn't mean he was blind to her flaws. In that way, he was glad he took after his father. When Chara had told him what he and Frisk intended to do with their lives, he'd nodded appreciatively, and sat down with AutoCAD to design a house and farm buildings to fit their needs. Chara's father, a highly respectable architect, was a mountain man at heart. And he envied his son and daughter in law a little.

"How's Frisk?"

"She's alright." Chara looked over at her as she poured out tea, baby Benjamin slung to her chest. "A little baby crazy."

Frisk stuck her tongue out.

"And the grandkids?"

"Julia's finished her schooling for the year and Noah is being a little piss ant. So the usual there. Asriel called me 'Dad' yesterday."

"I told you he'd come around to it eventually. Especially after he started calling Frisk his mom. How are you doing?"

"Good. Are you coming by next week?"

"Yeah. I've got some drafts for you and Frisk to look at. Are you sure you want to move the yarn spinning on premises? It means hiring more people."

Chara sighed. "I'd rather deal with people I trust up close than worry about my supply chain when I
ship my wool out. The last batch came back the wrong size and mixed with fiber that didn't come from my sheep. That's a huge allergen and quality issue."

"I got ya. See you soon, kiddo. Love ya."

"Love you too, Dad."

Chara hung up and shoved the phone in his back pocket. Frisk handed him a cup of tea and he took a sip, looking out the back window of the wool shed. Though shed wasn't a fair assessment of the place. The wool shed was twice the size of the barn and the barn was made to fit 200 sheep and any associated lambs. A long, two story building painted with a massive, super colorful mural on each side, the wool shed was where they dyed, dried, separated into hanks or skeins, labelled, and shipped off their yarns to retailers or direct buyers.

They had a part time wool painter, a high schooler named Abigail who would sit with Frisk and paint unique colorways into one line of yarn. They had two full time wool dyers; Sarah, who was Abigail's mother, and Brandon, both of whom were also responsible for hanking and labelling when the yarn dried. Matt came in every other day to do the accounting and send out the shipping. For the flock, they had Sophia, who was the biggest woman Chara had ever seen, a literal amazon as tall as Undyne, as a full time shepherd, and Declan, a true shepherd boy, who watched the sheep on the weekends.

It was Saturday evening and the shed was quiet but for Frisk, Chara, and baby Benjamin. Everyone else was home for the weekend and the kids down the mountain at the Ackerman Farm to play with friends for the afternoon. Frisk could just make out Declan out the back window, sitting in the upper paddock with a group of lambs and their Australian Shepherd Hound, Snacker.

Frisk put her arms around Chara's waist, hugging him lightly from behind to keep from squishing the baby. "So what's this about me being 'baby crazy?'"

Chara put his tea down on the table and turned around to hold her. "You tell me." He lifted his chin so he was looking down his nose at her. "You're the one who keeps jumping me at night, and riding me like a pony."

Frisk lifted her nose, eyes closed with mock indignation. "It's not my fault you're good in bed."

Chara snorted. "One, thank you. Two, that was nice turn around. Just placing it all on me." He tickled her sides and got a giggle as she tried to twist away. "You are seriously determined to have another baby."

She gasped a bit before getting her breath back, gripping Chara's shoulders. "Oh please! We just had Benjamin! Or are you saying you don't want anymore kids?"

Chara smiled, hugging her close. "No. If all we manage is Julia, Noah, Asriel, and Benny, I'm happy. If we have one or five or even ten more, I'm happy."

Frisk rolled her eyes. "You weren't happy this morning when they were running all over the house."

Chara shrugged. "Yeah. They need to not do that. But that's the price I have chosen to pay for my happiness."

She put her arms around my neck. "So all of life is suffering?"

"Yes. And anyone who says otherwise is trying to sell you something." He leaned over and kissed her nose. "But in life, you get to choose how you suffer. People who actively avoid the choice and
don't take responsibility do great impressions of my mother. They're always looking for a quick fix and the next high to keep the suffering away. And then you get the people like my dad. He knew what he was getting into when he married mom. He chose his suffering and took responsibility for it."

Frisk gave him a sly smile. "And is that what you are doing with me?"

"It works both ways, Frisky-bits. Either of us could have chosen to have a nice, cushy job in an office staring at a computer all day. Instead, we chose to live knee deep in sheep shit. And ten years on, I am still very happy with that decision." He pulled her hips against his. "And apparently you're happy with it too."

Frisk smiled and went up on her toes to rub her nose against his for a minute before settling into a hug. Chara sighed, content.

When Chara had started uni, it was just him. No one else. He would have a mountain home, raise his sheep, and not need to have real human contact with anyone unless it was on his terms.

And then this girl took the seat next to him in the back of the classroom. He hadn't paid any attention to Frisk until the instructor called on her to elaborate on a subject. Quick as a snake, she'd grabbed Chara's hand, holding onto him for dear life while she gave the most brilliant and elegant response he'd ever encountered in all of my studies on dimensional folding. When the instructor had finally finished staring at her, dumbfounded, and turned to explain to the class exactly how exquisite her response was, she noticed that she'd been holding his hand and dropped it with a red faced apology. Chara remembered smiling a little and asking her if she wanted to study together at the library later.

That was twelve years ago.

Watching the little world he'd planned for himself expand to include not only another person, but three demanding children was easier than anticipated. To suddenly include the goat prince of all monsters and his associated caretakers was a rougher transition, but one that still made some strange kind of sense. As the family grew, so did Chara's heart. It'd been an unexpected, but welcome course of events.

That wasn't to say it was all roses and sunshine.

No. Cross that out. Roses and sunshine described it exactly. Roses had thorns and children could be thorny little jerks when they wanted to be. A trait they got specifically from their father. Thank goodness they mostly took after their mother.

Speaking of children, Chara spied Asriel and Julia out the south window. They came up the path pulling Julia's red wagon behind them. The wagon had to be heavy with the big milk can weighing it down, even empty it was a workout to haul around, but with Asriel helping, they brought it up like it was nothing. Noah ran up past them, carrying a small, canvas bag full of something, while Mrs. Ackerman walked along with them. Undyne and Sans both followed behind, both having relaxed quite a bit since leaving the pocket dimension they'd been trapped in for so long. Frisk caught Chara's look and they left the break room in the wool shed to meet the kids outside.

"Hey, Carol!" Frisk called, waving.

Mrs. Ackerman gave Frisk a hug before planting a kiss on the baby's cheek. "Hello, Honey-Girl. Ju-Ju and Azzy's got eggs, onions, garlic, carrots, and some lemons in the wagon. Noah has leafy greens in the bag." She handed Frisk a wine bottle. "And here's a bottle from the first batch of the blackberry wine."
"Have you tried any yet?" Chara asked.

"Bill and I popped a bottle yesterday and…" She shivered with a smile. "Oh, I'll be making more this summer!"

Chara nodded toward the house. "Come on. I've got some lamb for you."

Chara liked Carol and Bill Ackerman. They were a lot like him and Frisk. They just wanted a home in the middle of nowhere to have their poultry farm and the lower parts of Mt. Ebott were perfect for that. They had four rugrats, the youngest being romping pals with Julia and Noah, and the oldest two being teens. Together, they'd managed a nice little cooperative arrangement in which they traded food stuffs and childcare.

Chara opened the door and hefted the milk can, carrying it inside. Bess, their dairy cow, produced around seven gallons of milk every day, which was way more than they actually needed. They traded most of it with the Ackerman's for eggs. Because Chara was not going to deal with chickens. In his own words: 'The feathered assholes can stay off of my nicely kept property. The damn things destroy whatever land you give them.'

Lamb, cheese, cow's milk, and some goat's milk exchanged for the Ackerman's produce, Frisk settled in to making dinner, and Chara settled in to getting the kids bathed.

The next morning, Frisk yawned and stretched, rolling over to place her feet on the floor as she sat up. It was early, but not too early. The sun was just starting to peak over Mount Ebott and soon its rays would reach down the mountain side, over the many paddocks, and down to the low, ranch house she called home. Chara slept peacefully, baby Benjamin tucked into the crook of his arm. For just a few moments, the world was quiet.

Frisk stood, running her fingers through her hair to straighten and untangle any knots. Stopping for a moment to check her figure in the mirror. She pinched her side, frowning at the last bit of baby weight that was refusing to budge. Not that Chara minded. He never minded that sort of thing at all. She wondered sometimes if he'd even noticed that time had gone by and she'd gotten older.

Tummy grumbling, she headed out of the bedroom and down the hall for the kitchen. Julia slept in the room on the right, Snacker laying at the bottom of her bed. Noah and Asriel shared the room on the left. Asriel had lost his parents to murder at too young an age and had attempted to shoulder the responsibilities of rulership while still only a child by human standards. But a year with a real family had seen him slide back into being a normal child for his age. Which had been a huge relief for Dr. Gaster, who'd been doing his best to fill in. A few weeks past, he'd started calling Frisk 'Mom.' Yesterday, he'd called Chara 'Dad.'

Undyne had smiled sadly when she'd heard it. As much as the fish woman was happy to see her sovereign living a much more normal life, she still ached at the loss of Asgore and Toriel. Seeing their son call someone else dad was bittersweet at best. Speaking of the captain, Frisk didn't see her at her normal spot in the kitchen, meaning that she'd gone for a swim in the pool. Looking around the living room, she didn't see Sans, and supposed he was napping on the deck.

Making herself some tea, Frisk gazed out the kitchen window, watching the world fill with light. She was particularly proud of it. Mount Ebott lived in a state of perpetual dimensional folding, different parts of the land turned back in on itself or stretched so as to make paddocks larger or keep wandering sheep and children from walking off a cliff. The folds were imperceptible to the untrained eye, but a sunrise or sunset would reveal them in a heartbeat, the light being trapped in the folds. To have the sun rise over the land and have it look as if nothing were the least bit out of sorts took a special sort of genius with dimensional folding. And as amazing as Chara was at it, this… This was
Frisk's work.

Her 'Artist's Hand' as Chara called it.

The sound of baby Benjamin smacking his lips hit her ears and her breasts suddenly felt too full. She grimaced at the sudden let down and headed back the hall for her baby boy. Sighing a little, she lifted her shirt before lifting the baby from her husband's arm. In a well established routine, Frisk tapped the baby's upper lip and his mouth opened wide to latch. After checking his nose to be sure he could breath, she stepped softly back to the kitchen to relax with her tea, Benjamin's tiny hand resting against her breast.

Looking out the window, she saw Sans in his blue hoodie, looking over one of the dimensional folds in the lowest paddock. He walked over to another fold, looking it over and nodding his skull. She watched him until Benjamin finished nursing on both sides. Lifting the baby to her shoulder, she patted his back, feeling his hiccup-like burp. Slipping on the baby sling, she placed Benjamin in it securely before sliding on her shoes and stepping outside.

The morning was warm with summer's heat, the grass dewy. The sound of water splashing meant Undyne was doing laps in the pool. Walking around the house, Frisk saw Sans looking up at the sunrise appreciatively, watching the light spread over the mountain.

"*you did this, right? the folding?"

Frisk gasped and stepped back. "You aren't Sans."

She looked around and saw Sans, unconscious in a heap against the wall of the barn, his hoodie in tatters. Frisk made to run and a circle of bones enclosed her, trapping her as she clasped Benjamin tightly to her chest.

The skeleton monster turned to her, one eye glowing an ominous yellow. "*you'll be coming with me."

As the world around her came apart into a black void, Frisk squeezed her eyes shut. "Chara!"


**Episode 1: Frisk, Interrupted**

A Frisk, a child with the fierceness of a lion, was trapped in a rotting castle's cell, screaming rage filled profanities at her captor. Blood soaked clothing hung off her in tatters around obvious torture wounds. I woke briefly, shaking my head to cast off the nightmare, only to have another take its place as soon as I fell back asleep: an adult Frisk, clutching her infant son to her chest, seethed through her tears. She was locked in a room and while danger didn't seem immediate, the ever present dread of a promised pain for her child kept her from attempting escape.

I forced myself awake and squeezed my eyes shut for a moment, pinching the bridge of my nose.

I'd been dreaming about these Frisks for a while.

When the nightmares started, I immediately booked myself in for twice the amount of time with the therapist. I just wasn't hard enough or cold enough anymore to simply ignore those kinds of dreams. Of course, if I was dreaming about someone, that meant Church was too. I went through her art journal and found the same Frisks. The child Frisk stood on the surface side of the barrier while Asriel and an adult Chara sat on the Underground side. The girl gazed deeply at the sunset while Asriel and Chara waited, both unsure of the future. The adult Frisk was held in the arms of her Chara. Their children, including a teenage Asriel, cuddled close around them.

I sighed and shifted a little... only to notice the weight on my shoulder and the henna stained arm across my chest.

Oh yeah. I'm totally a big, bad, super, special forces ninja. Look at how well I noticed that Michelle was cuddled up against me!

Why did I agree to share a tent with her again? Because Sans said it was a good idea. I'm not sure who's worse: him or Michelle. At least she hadn't tried to crawl in my sleeping bag with me. The warm light of sunrise peeked through the little window on the tent, lighting her golden face, setting off the lighter tones in her brown curls, and lifting my heart. Craning my neck a little, I kissed her forehead.

I made a point not to compare her to the woman I'd so fervently sought only to later destroy. Despite having the same face, they were completely different people and that difference was both a frustration and a blessing.

Michelle sucked in a deep breath through her nose and let out a contented sigh. "Morning," she yawned without opening her eyes, hugging me tightly for a moment.
"Morning."

Her peridot eyes opened fully, a lazy smile gracing her lips as she watched me. "I could get used to this." Then her smile turned devious. "Nope. Wait. Already used to it. It's too late!"

When I sighed in resignation to my fate, Michelle sat up with a satisfied hum and kissed me on the nose.

She stretched, the green Loch Ness monster shirt she'd stolen from me pulling across her breasts. "I smell bacon!"

I nodded, thankful to be distracted by the mouth watering scent wafting through the tent from the campfire a few feet away. "If I know Church, breakfast is done already."

She looked down at me, that long curly hair dropping from her shoulder to hit me in the face. "Why don't you call her Frisk?"

Because it's her name and I really don't have a right to use it even when I do. I pushed her hair aside. "Isn't it weird that we both have the same name?"

She shook her head, sending the sweet smell of her coconut perfume directly to my nose and brushing her hair across my face. "There are lots of names that work equally well for a boy or a girl."

I sat up to stretch and Michelle took the opportunity to run her finger across the white, thin line of a scar that ran across my chest. I didn't comment on it. She knew where it came from. We had a long conversation about my past, but it hadn't deterred her. She was going to make a husband of me whether I liked it or not. She leaned into kiss the underside of my chin and turned to crawl out of the tent.

I pulled a shirt on before following Michelle out into the warmth of an early September morning. The trees lining Lake Yons were still a dark, summer green, though you could see some yellowing in the bushes here and there near the waterline. It seemed that autumn was shaping up to be warm, but all the woolly caterpillars we encountered hiking yesterday were any indication, winter was going to be very cold and very snowy this year. I'd have to order all my 'stuck inside for winter' art supplies early. Maybe I'd take a day off and go on a trip to the art supply store with Church while she was on maternity leave.

Speaking of Church, she sat on a felled log next to the campfire, plating some eggs for Princess from the big, cast iron pan she used just for camping. Her chocolate hair had finally grown out to the point where her braid hit her backside, something she was very proud of. Despite being at camp, she was still wearing a long, dark blue dress with little turquoise flowers, which was probably more comfortable than pants for her right now anyway. She put the cast iron pan back on the grate over the fire and rubbed her round stomach as Princess sat down with Sophia and Brandon to eat. Bones sat next to her, drinking a cup of coffee while he watched the lake water lap at the bank. Princess' ghostly Chara hung on her charge like a jacket, red pupil eyes watching the lake with a peaceful expression.

Michelle smiled brightly, leaning over to kiss Church's temple. "You are the cutest pregnant woman ever." She gently tapped the Church's nose piercing, a tiny diamond she only wore when on maternity leave because she feared to lose it during a mission. She never explained its significance to me, but then, I hadn't asked either. I suspected that it was a gift from Bones. She gave her engagement ring the same treatment, and left it behind when on a mission.

Church smiled, only to wince, counting under her breath for a full thirty seconds before sighing in...
relief. Bones put his hand on the small of her back, massaging boney knuckles against the muscles.

I put a hand on her shoulder. "Are you all right?"

She nodded and gave me a little smile. "Just contractions."

Michelle sat next to her. "Ooooh! Is it time?"

Bones nodded. "Just about. She's only at every 30 minutes so we have a few hours yet until we need to be back home."

Church leaned into her husband. "I've already called Asriel to let him know."

Michelle looked over at the kids. "Are you guys excited?"

Sophia bounced in her seat. "Uncle Az says I get to help! I've been practicing with him for weeks!"

Michelle gave her a bright smile. "You are so ready to be a big sister again."

I flicked Michelle's braid. "Are you ready to be a birth coach?"

She waved me off. "Oh please. This is not my first time at the rodeo." She looked up at me. "Not only have I been Frisk's birth coach for Sophia and Brandon, I've helped out for all of my older sisters. And seriously, Frisk is easy. My sister Daliah?" She shook her head. "I weight trained to help her."

I bit my tongue, but couldn't hold back my smile. Daliah was not a small woman by any stretch of the imagination. No, she wasn't overweight. She just wasn't small. Bones offered me a cup of coffee and I took it as I sat next to him. "Any news about Dragoon Sans?"

Bones nodded. "We found out why he's been attacking timelines. Inky practically bowled Techno over when he teleported on timeline to report in. Which is unusual since Ink has a tendency to forget conversations halfway through. This one actually stuck with him. It seems that Dragoon Sans' timeline is gone and he sought out Ink to recreate it. When Ink told him that it didn't work that way Dragoon disappeared."

"And after that, he started attacking other timelines?"

Church nodded. "He's trying to steal analogs of his world from other timelines." She frowned. "I want to know who convinced him that it would work that way."

"Can Fase get his timeline back?" Ravie asked. He stretched as he came out of his blue gray tent before rubbing his cervical vertebrae.

Bones sighed. "Fase needs the core data well and she can't find it, which is a bad sign. The only hope to recreate his world now is to find his Frisk."

"Do you think he'll come here? Or my timeline?" Princess asked, her voice, even after a year of therapy, still had a bit of a tremble to it. But she was happy to have it back.

"I don't know, kiddo. We don't have any idea what his original timeline was like because it went down almost as fast as it appeared. So we don't know what he's looking for."

Michelle stood to let Ravie have the seat next to Church and plopped down next to me. She hugged up against my arm and stole my coffee. After a morning swim, we packed up and Ravie hitched a ride back with Michelle and I to the facility. I'm pretty sure he can teleport, but he always appeared
content to take the slow route. Probably because life as a surgeon came at you fast. Once inside, he followed Church and Bones back up to the apartment with the kids and left me all alone with danger.

"Soooooo... What are we going to do today?" Michelle made a habit of invading my personal space and she was doing so now with her hands held behind her back. Which had the effect of pushing her chest up and out as she looked up at me.

I gave her a rather wry smile. "We are on kid duty after you help Church by being the best birth coach ever."

She stepped back with a fake huff, still wet braid swinging. "You are no fun! You don't respond to my teasing at all!"

I rolled my eyes. "Yes I do. I just choose not to act on those impulses." I leaned over and tapped my cheek for a peck. When she leaned in, I turned my head and kissed her. She giggled, wrapping her arm around mine and intertwining our fingers. I escorted her down the sun soaked hall of large windows from the second garage, the one Bones hadn't completely taken over. We stopped at the stairs to find Fell Chara and Frisk Ossein talking to a very nervous looking Sans in a Hawaiian shirt.

Fell Chara's dark hair was long again, and pulled back from his face. A sign that neither of his Frisk's had taken the time to cut it recently. He wasn't in uniform, a sign that he hadn't come by to spend time with Ossein. Ossein, for her part, was in her ice skating gear. And Chara's expression was not the least bit happy as he looked at the Sans in front of him, which pretty much confirmed that a bro-date was going down the drain.

"*uh... i've got a problem. a big one. the sans that keeps trying to steal pieces of everyone else's timelines?"

"Dragoon Sans," Chara supplied. He waved when he saw Michelle and I.

"*yeah. him. he's been making attempts on my timeline and i've been keeping him at bay, but..."

"But?" Ossein prompted.

"*i can't find my frisk and if he finds her first, we are in serious trouble."

Chara shrugged. "So call Fase and ask her for a location. We'll keep Dragoon off your back while you get her secured."

"*i'd like to avoid calling fase."

Chara's eyes narrowed, voice a threatening whisper. "Why?"

Sans cringed. "*she disappeared just after her eighteenth birthday."

I paused before heading up the stairs. "And how long ago was that?"

"*twenty-one years ago."

Ossein's jaw dropped. "Oh my God." She pulled out her phone. "I'm calling Fase."

"*no! please!"

Ossein pointed at him. "Listen. Your Frisk could be dead! Or worse! I've seen enough cases of 'or worse.'"
"but that's why you can't call! I've heard enough stories of what Fase is like when a frisk is put in a bad situation. I don't want to be one of those stories."

Ossein threw up her hands. "Twenty one years is a super cold trail! Even Church would have problems investigating and she's out."

"She is? What happened?!"

"She's in labor," I informed. "Nothing she hasn't done before."

Chara looked at me. "After Church, you're the next investigator on hand. Your call."

Michelle leaned over from the step above me on the stairs to kiss my cheek. "I'll be with Frisk. When it gets close to time, I'll text you."

I turned my head to give her a quick kiss before she ran up the stairs. I sighed. "We'll go and have a look Sans' way to start. If we end up completely stumped, we call Fase."

The groan in Chara's voice was almost pained as he pulled his partner along. "Come on. Let's get prepped." He looked at Sans. "Just wait here. We'll be back in a minute."

Heading down the hall to the equipment room, Ossein skipped ahead a bit and turned around to walk backwards in front of me. "You and Michelle are really getting serious, huh?"

I shrugged.

She swatted at me. "Stop that! I want the scoop!"

"What you want is to be nosy," Chara quipped. He smiled and pushed her through the door of the equipment room. "So when are you cutting my hair?"

"Sunshine and I have decided we like it long."

Chara groaned. "Oh hell."

She smiled brightly and turned to the shelf to change into uniform, which for her and Chara consisted of dark green button downs over black cargo pants, both of which covered Alphys' newest armor: a very light and very strong composite made to take physical and magical attacks.

Chara pulled off his long coat with the Fell Delta Rune on it in order to gear up. "You fought Dragoon Sans, right? What's he got going on? Is he a dragoon in the military sense or the video game sense?"

"Military. He has a skeletal horse he rides on and dismounts in order to fight using with a sword that changes size based on what he needs."

Ossein looked over her shoulder at me, her long hair sliding from her shoulder and down her back. "Is the horse a Gaster Blaster?"

I shook my head. "I don't know. It doesn't actively get into combat unless Dragoon is riding on his back. In which case, look out for its hooves."

She mulled that over as Chara stepped up behind her to braid her hair. "Hey, Crow? You ready?"

Her exemplar, in his bulky, black clothed, ninja form appeared, and nodded once before disappearing again to where ever he rested inside of her. After making sure the door to the equipment
room locked behind us, we met Sans in the hall.

I thought of something and was afraid to hear the answer. "Have you tried looking for her before?"

Sans nodded. "*yeah, but we've got a problem where frisk is a really common name. every person with the name wasn't a match for her."

Chara frowned. "Then how do you know she isn't dead?"

The skeleton's shoulders dropped and he looked utterly miserable. "*i don't. but if she'd died, wouldn't she have gone back to her last save?"

"Do you know when her last save was?" I asked.

Sans shook his skull. "*i honestly have no idea. she hasn't reset or loaded since leaving."

He held out his hand and we each laid one of ours on his boney arm. Sans took us through the void and landed us in a beautiful, beach front, suburb at the base of Mt. Ebott. I turned around a bit, getting the lay of the land and saw multiple rows of streets filled with the same, cookie cutter houses contractors liked to use for developments. This cookie cutter style involved a ground floor garage with an outdoor staircase up to the second floor living and dining space, with a third floor bed and bath area. The only thing that made any house stand out from the next was the color of the exterior siding, which was a veritable rainbow of colors in the style of American Atlantic beach houses. Bright blues, lime greens, sunny yellows, dark purples, fruity oranges, and neon pinks all framed in clean white trimming as far as the eye could see under a cloudless sky.

Ossein turned around slowly, taking in colors. "Wow! I've never seen houses this bright and colorful before!" She grabbed her partner's sleeve and pulled him toward her, pointing down the road. "Look at that cherry red one!"

I smiled at her enthusiasm as I turned to Sans. "Where was the last place your Frisk was seen?"

"*at tori and gorey's place the night after her high school graduation."

He walked us down the street a little and climbed the steps to the second floor veranda of a three story beach house with bright, sky blue siding, and clean, white trim. He knocked at a decorative glass door. A Toriel in an overly pink dress opened the door with a smile, which fell immediately when she saw Ossein. Both hands came up, reaching out, only to fall back to her sides.

"No. You aren't Frisk. You... You are too young." She covered her eyes and with both hands, shaking.

Sans frowned and patted Toriel's back. "*i'm sorry, tori. she's a frisk. just not our frisk. these are the people from seraph. they're going to help us find our kiddo."

She sniffed and nodded, hands dropping. "Please come inside."

We entered an open area with only a bar to separate the pale green kitchen from the white on white living room. There was only one wall not dominated by windows and a view of the ocean, and it was covered by a large oil painting of the ocean. A white couch next to a white coffee table with a white vase filled with white flowers, faced the windows looking out on the ocean. The wood frames of the glass door cabinets of the kitchen were painted the same pale green as the walls. Even the dishes inside the cabinets were that pale green. I looked around for family photos and saw none. The interior here seemed washed out and staged, as if to be appropriate for photos and not actual use. I tried to imagine being a child in this house and couldn't. I would have had crayon on the walls in an
instant just to beat back against the white.

Yes. I was that kind of child.

Toriel directed us to sit at a large, glass topped, table with very comfortable, if over stuffed, pale green chairs. "Thank you for coming. I'm Toriel. Though I suspect that you already knew that."

I held out my hand to shake. "Frisk Cross."

Ossein gave her a bright smile with her hand shake. "Frisk Ossein."

"Chara Dreemurr."

Toriel blinked before smiling wryly. "Well, it seems both my failures are haunting me today." She sat down and the bright pink of her dress made the dullness of the rest of the house even more apparent around her.

I pulled out a notebook and flipped it open while clicking my pen. "Am I correct that the last time you saw Frisk she was eighteen years old?"

Toriel nodded. "Her birthday is May 22nd and she disappeared the night after graduation on the June 5th."

"She never spoke of leaving?"

Toriel opened her mouth to say something and shut it quickly, looking trapped and uncomfortable, squirming just a little in her seat.

Sans suddenly looked angry, despite his smile. His powerful eye glowed a soft turquoise. "*Tell Them, Tori."

We all looked to the goat queen.

Toriel sighed deeply. "Asgore and I had decided that, since eighteen was an adult among humans, Frisk should move out and have her own place and we told her that a week before her birthday. She asked if she could stay with us until her graduation from high school and we agreed. She got a job working at the convenience store on the corner. She also started selling the paintings she'd done over the last few years. And then, after coming home from the graduation ceremony, she went up to her room and that was the last time I saw her."

I sat up a little straighter. "And her room?"

"Stripped. The closet and dresser were empty and cleaned. The walls had been wiped down, the floor swept, and the sheets changed. It looked like a guest room instead of my child's bedroom."

Chara cocked his head to one side. "So, when you told her that she was to move out, did you discuss to where? How it was it going to be arranged and paid for?"

Toriel shook her head. "We held off discussing it with her until later, but she was constantly working after that."

"Did you have a plan?" I asked.

She nodded, and yanked on her ear a little. "Dr. Alphys found a nice apartment walking distance to the university Frisk had been accepted to for the fall after she'd graduated."
Chara frowned like a terrible thought occurred to him. "Did you adopt her out of the foster care system?"

Toriel nodded.

He leaned back. "She probably thought you were kicking her out and spent three weeks working as much as possible to earn enough money to start out on her own."

The goat queen shook her head quickly, causing her long ears to lift a little. "I don't understand. Why would she think that?"

"Because foster kids know they are only worth the amount of money their foster parents receive from the government and that money dries up at eighteen."

A swift sadness touched Toriel's eyes before they glowed with a bright anger. "Are you saying that I would have done away with my child as soon as the trifle the government sent was gone?"

Chara raised an eyebrow, head tilted in such a way as to look down his nose at her, completely unimpressed. His own mother was much more frightening when she was angry. "You know very well that wasn't what I said. I understand that being angry insulates you from the sorrow and guilt you feel over the situation, but it will not serve you. It'll only put me in a position where I won't be happy to help you."

Toriel looked at him, a soft look caught between wonder and recognition on her face. "But you would still find my child anyway."

He shrugged. "It's my job."

"No. You act otherwise, but you truly do care." She blinked a little. "What did your mother do differently that you live while my Chara took her own life?"

Chara frowned. "My story is radically different from yours. It won't give you the answers you seek."

Ossein looked between the two. "Moving along! If we had an idea about how much money she'd managed to save before she disappeared, that would give us an idea of what she could afford to do."

I looked to Tori. "Did she have a bank account?"

"Yes, but she emptied it in cash and closed it the day before she graduated."

"Did you take her to do that?"

Toriel shook her head. "We found out about that after the fact."

"Do you have a bank statement from the time?"

She shook her head.

I tapped the system core sewn into the collar of my jacket. "Hey, C. Can I borrow you for a minute?"

C's voice carried over the comm. "I've got a few. What do you need?"

"Is my system core powerful enough for you to get onto wifi here?"

His hologram burst to life on my shoulder. "Oh yeah. The upgrade lets me do some pretty cool stuff. What do you need?"
Ossein shook both hands at me. "Are you going to ask him for bank records from twenty one years ago? Because that won't work. Bank records in most timelines are destroyed after five years."

I gestured to her. "Suggestions?"

"Look up average convenience store wages for the time."

C turned to her. "How far back am I looking?"

"Twenty one years."

"Give me a min- never mind. Min wage was 5.15 an hour. Evening shifts after 8pm, 6.15 an hour."

"Thanks, C!"

He gave her a smile. "Sure thing."

Ossein waved for the notebook. "Did Frisk work mornings?"

"Frisk worked evenings from six to midnight during school days and noon to 8pm on Saturdays."

Ossein started jotting down the numbers, working through the math. "That's 216 a week. Take off 20 percent for taxes and that gives us 172.80 a week. She looked up at C. "Is my math right?"

The hologram nodded.

"Did she get the job right away or...?"

"*she was working for two weeks."

"Then she earned 345.60 from the job." Ossein stared at the number. "That's not even enough for a deposit on an efficiency apartment let alone the first month's rent. Especially in a beach community where she'd have to prove she made more than three times the rent in salary."

"That means she went somewhere instead," Chara said. He sat up. "And it's enough money to go pretty far by bus. Did she have any friends she could have stayed with in other parts of the country?"

Sans snorted. "*the monster princess? no. friends were hard to come by."

Toriel stared at her feet through the glass table top. "She asked us not to throw her birthday parties after no one showed at the first one."

C sat down on my shoulder. "Not even monsters?"

"*after her journey underground, the monsters began to treat her as if she was something too clean and pure for them to even speak too. even paps and dyne wouldn't speak to her unless she spoke to them first."

C made a face like he was letting all his breath out in a whoosh. Which was funny when you think that he didn't have a physical body to breath with. "Frisk says to look for jobs where you can live where you work. On-site hospitality, human and animal boarding facilities, youth hostels, shelters, etc."

I smiled. "Is Church listening in?"

"No. Just turning over the problem with me. It's helping to distract her from the contractions." He
looked up at me. "You still have a couple hours by the way." He looked to the assembled. "She said that a bus ticket is very likely, but passenger manifests would have been destroyed after so long." C looked surprised. Probably because Church told him to ask for something. "Did Frisk have her own phone?"

Do I know Church or what?

Toriel shook her head. "No. My child used the land line connected to the house."

"Bingo! Phone companies need to keep call information file for a long time in case of criminal subpoena." C's hologram blinked for a moment. "Okay. Oh... Um..."

Chara frowned. "Not something you want to say in front of Toriel."

"Absolutely not."

Toriel looked at the hologram. "And why not?!"

C sighed. "When we find Frisk, it will be up to her to tell you. I'm not revealing this information to you without her okay. And if you argue with me about it, I'll withhold the information from my friends and kill the investigation."

I looked at C. It was a bluff. He'd still tell us, but I rolled with it, and nodded like this was something he would do. Chara and Ossein both followed through on the bluff, Ossein giving Toriel big, sad, brown eyes.

Tori covered her face with her hands again before holding them up in surrender. "All right. So then, what next?"

C looked at the rest of us. "You guys have some traveling to do. You'll get more info at the place she was calling."

I nodded and stood. "Thank you, Toriel."

Ossein reached over and patted her hand. "Don't worry. C said that it was up to her to tell you. That means that wherever she went, she's okay. Just give us some time."

She managed a weak smile. "I suppose I'm closer to seeing her again than I've ever been."

As we exited the house, I noticed the painting on the wall was signed 'Frisk.' I stopped for a moment to really look at it. It was good. And made me wonder what the ones she sold looked like. And if that was what she was originally going to school for. I decided against asking, because it wasn't important to moving forward. Going down to street level and far from Toriel's ears, we stopped on the sidewalk.

Sans turned to C. "*out with it."

"She made several calls to-

My 'viper sense' went off and I grabbed Sans, pulling him out of the stroke of a sword swing. Dragoon Sans, in a long, black with gold trim, military coat over black pants, jumped down from his skeletal horse, twirling his sword around boney fingers. A white Delta Rune was embroidered on the upper left of the coat over the front of his shoulder. The horse stamped the ground, neighing loudly, but otherwise stayed in place. Chara summoned his sword as Crow appeared in front of Ossein, bulky and intimidating. Dragoon held his sword out toward us.
"Standing orders are to disable and capture!" C yelled.

One brightly glowing, orange eye looked over Chara closely, the power of his magic leaking out from the eye socket. "Seraph? How did you get here so fast...?" He grinned suddenly. "Oh. That girl you've been protecting is a fake! You don't know where the real Frisk is!"

Chara swung his sword and Dragoon parried, stepping back and forcing Chara to follow. He didn't, letting Crow come around with a massive fist, to slam Dragoon in the side of the skull. The skeleton monster flew to the side, hitting a thick palm tree and bouncing to the ground. He stood and rushed back, viciously angry. I stepped in front of him, knocking his sword out of his hand with one arm while I grabbed his coat with the other and attempted to bring his skull down on my knee to knock him flat.

Attempted being the key word because he turned me blue and flung me backward into Sans. He turned Chara blue as well and flung him into Crow, sending them to the ground before advancing on Ossein. I'm pretty sure he expected her to flinch or to run as he summoned his sword to his hand. He smiled when she stood her ground, a sword in hand.

"Aren't you cute? A little girl who thinks she can fight."

Ossein blinked, and when her eyes opened, the inky darkness of the void filled them. Dragoon's smile fell, suddenly unsure, his sword arm wavering. She slashed at him and he parried instinctively, only to have half his sword fall into the void. When he gasped, she threw a punch, hitting him square in the chest and sending him backwards. His sword regrew and he stuck it in the ground, cutting through the black top of the street to stop his momentum.

A familiar shing filled the air and a Gaster Blaster appeared next to him, letting off a concentrated blast. Ossein opened a rift into the void in front of her and the blast disappeared into nothing. Using that as a distraction, I jumped at him, grabbing his sword arm and pulling it back with a quick snap to break the elbow. As the bone cracked he summoned the sword to his other hand and turned to swing at me. I ducked out of the path of the sword and rolled away at the familiar shing of red magic. A mass of glowing red bones flew at Dragoon and he swung his blade around quickly to block them all.

And doing so made him miss Ossein's kick from behind, which sent him face first to the ground. He groaned.

Ossein put her sword next to his head. "Give up and come with us quietly. I'm a Frisk and I haven't been taking this fight seriously."

He looked up at her, orange eye flickering with exhaustion. "Fuck. You three aren't just standard agents. You're from Epsilon." He saluted from where he lay and disappeared, his horse disappearing as well.

Chara cursed under his breath. "I should have just thrown down containment."

"why are you trying to capture him?! just put him out of his misery!"

I glared at him. "No. I know what it's like to have completely lost your timeline. There maybe a chance to recover his if we can get him into containment long enough to listen to reason."

"but he's destroying other timelines!"

I cocked my head to the side. "So how does that make him different from me? I was offered Mercy. He gets it too." I turned to Ossein. "The void work is new."
Chara chuckled while she shrugged. "That's what you get when you let her hang out with the Prime Gaster." He sighed, turning back to the matter at hand. "He's after your Frisk. Why? Is she an analog for his?"

Sans shook his head. "Our chara is his objective and he's attempting to rip her soul out of Frisk's." He turned to me, looking at C. "We'll need to work fast to find her. Where was she calling?"

"The Unwritten Night."

Chara's jaw dropped. "Woah!"

"Know the place?" I asked.

Chara grimaced like it was information he wished he didn't know. "It's pretty famous on my timeline. It's a brothel."

Sans cringed. "The kiddo went to a brothel? Why would she do that?"

Ossein sighed, eyes brown again, and looking a little heartbroken. "It's a place she could live while she worked." Crow rested a large hand on her shoulder and she patted. "I'm okay." He nodded once and disappeared.

"But she had college lined up for the next fall!"

"And was expected to move out of the house as soon as she graduated from high school with no idea that there was a plan on how that was going to happen," Chara pointed out. "Listen. Your Frisk came from the foster system. Who knows how many homes she saw before she suddenly had a family again. But when you're a foster kid, you are aware that you are only as valuable as the money your family gets for you. So Toriel and Asgore telling her that she was to move out at eighteen instantly translated to her being worth nothing because that's when you age out of the system. They adopted her, but they never fixed the emotional and mental problems she had to start. That mindset doesn't just disappear like magic when you're adopted. It's a process."

Ossein waved her arms. "Hey! It would have been really suspicious for the monster princess to just suddenly disappear. On other timelines, that would have immediately translated to accusations of abuse or murder."

Sans looked away.

I groaned, head dropping back. "They replaced her, didn't they?"

"The stand in is paid a lot of money for her silence."

Chara visibly bit down on some comment and forced a smile as he inhaled deeply. "Okay. Let's just move along. We'll go to The Unwritten Night. She likely isn't there, but they would have employee records."

C waved. "I need to head back. Tap me again if you need me." He disappeared from my shoulder.

After a quick shortcut, we stood in front of a very beautiful, two story, plantation era mansion with a veranda that went the entire way around the second floor and was held up by large white columns. The plastered walls of the exterior were painted a pale yellow and gave the place a warm and inviting look. A few people sat in the shade provided by the overhanging roof of the second floor veranda, reading a book or playing a game at a table. An older woman with touches of gray in her caramel hair, wearing in a lovely blue sundress, saw us, and waved from the veranda.
"Give me a minute to come down stairs."

She pushed open the front door as we came up to the porch, and up close she looked very distinguished and not at all what you would expect from a 'woman of the evening.' "Welcome to The Unwritten Night. Business hours do not start until this evening, but you are welcome to join us for tea..." She trailed off, staring at Ossein. "Astra? Oh My God! You don't look like you've aged at all!"

Ossein rolled with it. "Astra? Was that my sister's call name? Mom only told me about Frisk a little while ago. I've been trying to find her. Mom says I look like her."

The woman blinked at Ossein before stepping up to her. She took Ossein's face in her hands. "How old are you?"

"Twenty five."

The woman nodded. "Your mom gave Astra to adoption and kept you."

Ossein nodded. "She'd get pictures but she didn't show them to me until recently. She's trying to put our family back together again."

The woman kept nodding like the story made complete sense. "I'm Emma Jean. Please come inside." She held onto Ossein's hand, leading the way. "We loved having Astra here. She was sweet, kind, and could easily solve even the worst arguments. She was very nervous when she started but she gained a couple regulars very quickly. I'm pretty sure Mr. Ardry only comes every afternoon hoping to find his chess buddy has come back."

Ossein blinked. "Chess buddy? I was of the understanding-"

Emma Jean smiled. "Oh, we do more than that here. I won't lie and say that your sister didn't have a few regulars who were here to visit her bed or pay for her services as an escort on trips and weekend getaways. But we do have a group of customers who are only paying for a few hours of friendship, and she was the best chess player Mr. Ardry could ever hope for."

The grand lobby just inside the doors included a beautiful, dark wood desk to the right as you entered, and a grand staircase spilling into the middle of the room. Sitting behind the desk was a young man who looked to be in the middle of book keeping, and he gave us all a pleasant smile as we passed. We were led behind the grand staircase to a small living room lit by the sunlight streaming through three floor to ceiling windows. On the wall opposite the windows were photo portraits of the men and women who'd worked here in years past. On each portrait frame was a brass plate with the person's 'call name' and their given name underneath. She pointed to one of the portraits.

The woman in the photo had completely bleached out her hair to a strawberry blonde. The brass plate read "Astra" Frisk Damir. She'd changed her name. That's a very useful bit of information. "Astra got her degree online while working here and since then, a lot of the girls have been doing the same thing. She left us when she went off to grad school."

Ossein stared up at the photo. "Do you know which uni she went too?"

"State for her undergrad in mechanical engineering and Kettering for graduate school. Even though she didn't work here after starting her masters, we still threw Astra a party when she got it and again when she got her doctorate. We're all so proud of her." Emma Jean pulled a photo album from the inside of a china cabinet and opened it up. The photos inside were of a party and the woman in the center of it all smiling like she couldn't be happier.
Ossein touched the photo gently, careful not to leave fingerprints. "Is she still with Kettering?"

Emma Jean shook her head. "No. Last I knew, she was tenured faculty at Cagrana."

"Thank you so much!"

Emma Jean nodded and kissed her forehead. "When you find your sister, let her know we're all thinking of her and miss her terribly."

"I will."

Emma Jean showed us back to the front door and bid us farewell. As we left, I glanced at Sans. He looked physically ill.

"You okay, Sans?"

"*no. no i'm not. the savior of all monsters had to make a whore of herself just to live and eat. what piss poor friends must we have been that she didn't ask any of us for help?"

Chara snorted. "How many times did she die before she got to the barrier?"

Sans glared at him and he laughed.

"And that is exactly why she didn't ask any of you for help."

Sans neck bent in shame.

Ossein pulled on her partner's hair getting a yelp. "Stop being a jerk! I know your mad, but he's obviously contrite." She turned to Sans. "So where is Cagrana University?"

He held out one boney hand and one shortcut later had us in the middle of a university campus filled with very academic looking, white stone and dark brown brick buildings. Fall mums in an array of purples, reds, and oranges filled flower beds and free standing flower pots all over the campus. Flagging down a student Chara got directions to the college of engineering and we hoofed it across campus to a beautiful building of dark brick with steep, blue, slate roof. Just inside the doors was a hallway filled with wood and brass plaques listing the names of various donors. On the wall between the elevator and the stairs was a list of all faculty and their offices.

Chara frowned. "She's not listed."

A woman in a suit was walking by and I turned, giving her my best smile. "Excuse me, is Frisk Damir still a faculty member here?"

The woman stopped. "Oh! I'm sorry, but no." She smiled apologetically. "Frisk left two years ago and I honestly have no idea where she went."

"Thank you very much."

The woman nodded. "HR might know where she's gone since, but that probably falls under privacy, so they also might not tell you if they know." She shrugged like she wished she could help. "Uh... If you find her, let her know we all miss her. I was one of her TAs in grad and she was totally the best."

"Your name?"

"Sue-Ellen Smith."
"If we find her, we'll let her know Ms. Smith. Thank you."

She nodded again and continued down the hall. I pulled out my phone.

"*who you calling?"

"The great Fem-Puter." I dialed.

"*NO!"

I held up a finger, glaring, and Sans huddled in on himself.

Fase's voice of cheery doom flowed from the phone. "Hello, Frisk. How may I assist you?"

"I would like you to scan for this world's Frisk. I don't need a history. Just a current place of residence."

"Certainly. Her current place of residence is the cabin Sans and Papyrus shared in the Underground. She appears to be making dinner."

"Thank you."

"You are very welcome!"

I put my phone away. "She's been living at your place in the Underground."

Sans blinked. "*what?"

Chara sighed. "Just take us on a shortcut to Snowdin already."

Sans frowned, not moving.

Ossein cocked her head to the side. "Sans?"

I frowned. "You know that someone's been living in your old house."

Sans nodded. "*i... uh... i was giving the stand in a tour of the underground with asgore and tori when i found someone in the cabin. she didn't look like frisk or even like the photo back at the..." He shook his skull. "*anyway. she'd been working on the core. putting it back into operation for the monsters who still remained underground and changing out the coolant system so it wouldn't need a feed of ice from snowdin. tori and asgore even commended her for the work. i... i didn't think it was the kiddo."

Chara held out a hand. "Let's go talk to her."

Sans teleported us down to Snowdin. Monsters still lived here and it seemed a few humans besides Frisk had moved into the area. Grillby's was in operation, the windows too steamed up to properly get a look inside. Christmas lights still decorated the tiny hamlet and new LED colored lights had been strung over the cabin's exterior. A middle aged woman with long, premature gray hair, and pale skin from lack of sunlight, was locking the front door of the cabin, which was decorated with a laminated paper skeleton. A flower patterned, covered dish of some sort rested in her other hand as she pocketed her key.

Not seeing us, she turned and walked down the path toward the woods and the Ruins. Sans stared at her for a moment, before he moved to call out to her and I quickly grabbed him, motioning for silence. We followed her through the woods. The path that had once been winding and strewn with
puzzles was now a direct road through the cold and snow frosted woods. Up ahead, the doors to the Ruins had a bright light hanging over them and sign asking visitors to ring the bell. On reaching the doors, she turned and leaned back against the door, pushing it open with her backside.

"Asriel! I'm back! I brought dinner!"

An adult goat monster appeared, with a golden head of hair and short yellow beard. "Howdy, Frisk!" He took the dish from her while she kicked the snow off her boots, smiling. He caught sight of us.

"Are you lost? Tourists don't typically come out this far."

Ossein stepped forward, "We're looking for Frisk."

Frisk paused, blinking at Ossein. "You. You're me." She stepped toward Ossein and their hands touched, that thing about all us Frisks kicking in. Frisk smiled, touching Ossein's face. "You look like me, but, wow. You're so young."

"Oh please! You aren't exactly old!" They giggled together before leaning toward each other and rubbing noses.

She looked over at the rest of us and saw me next. "You're me too." She reached out toward me.

The Dragoon Sans appeared behind her, locking his arm around her throat and forcing her to bend backwards. "#Thanks for leading me right to her." He lifted his sword over her chest. "#Time to get what I came for!"

Asriel's Chaos Saber struck Dragoon from behind, cutting through his coat and the armor underneath. The skeleton teleported away from Frisk, attempting to put distance between himself and the angry goat prince.

A strange mix of two voices dripped from the goat's mouth, one of his eyes red and the other purple. "How dare you touch her?!"

Dragoon Sans looked to Frisk who picked herself up and brushed the snow away from her pants. "Chara isn't in you."

She shook her head. "She only lived in me for a short time and went back to Asriel after the barrier opened."

Asriel set his sword on his shoulder with the practiced grace of someone who knew how to use the weapon well. Two voices still fell from his mouth. "If you want a show down, we'll be happy to oblige. It's been a long time since we fought Sans, but then, he never faced us as a god. Only as that damnable flower and even that was enough to chill him."

Dragoon disappeared.

Asriel's sword disappeared and he picked up the food container he'd dropped. He turned it over to be sure it wasn't damaged. "Dinner's still in one piece."

Sans took Frisk's face in his hands. "*why? why didn't you say something? your parents and i were right there. we spoke to you about the work on the core."

"Oh hell." She sighed. "Why don't you come inside?"

Frisk motioned for us to follow. The interior of the house was nothing like I remembered it from my timeline. Instead of a table against the far wall and a chair next to the fire place, a kotatsu long
enough for six people with legless chairs rested in front of the fireplace. Where the beach house lacked any kind of reminder of family or any color at all, here photos of the Dreemurr family adorned the walls, including ones of Chara and Frisk. Paintings that matched the skill of the one in the beach house broke up the multitude of photos. As Frisk sat down with us, cuddling a little under the kotatsu's blanket, Asriel went into the kitchen and brought out golden flower tea. Frisk stared at her tea for a full minute, frowning.

Asriel sat next to her and petted her hair, that strange, double voice coming out of his mouth. "It's okay. You told us. You can tell him."

She nodded and took a deep breath. "I didn't say anything because I wasn't sure that I was really Frisk." When Sans opened his mouth to speak, she shook her head, shushing him. "When I was at-
Do you know where I was?"

Sans nodded. "*emma jean said to tell you that they missed you. ms sue-ellen smith says hello too."

Frisk nodded, lips pressed into a line. "While I was working there, I saw the debut of the 'monster princess' on the news. I read and watched everything I could about her." A small smile tugged at her lips. "The others at the house teased me about being her biggest fan."

She frowned again, staring at her tea. "Watching all the interviews and listening to all the radio shows and podcasts, I started to think that I wasn't really the one who opened the barrier. The only thing I had from home was a small photo album and I started to believe I'd stolen it. That I made a fantasy of my early life to avoid the reality of foster care."

She took a sip of tea. "When I made tenure at Cagrana, the Dreemurrs had come to campus to deliver talks on subjects of diplomacy and human-monster relations. And I saw the way they doted on her and thought that my memories had to be a fantasy because loving parents wouldn't just toss you out when the adoption funds died. So I was determined that I would do something to make up for whatever misdeed I had done against monsters."

"*but you hadn't committed any crime..."

Ossein frowned. "You can't reason with depression, Sans. It doesn't feed on facts." She swallowed her tea quickly. Chara's hand reached out, rubbing her back even as his attention remained on Frisk.

"You moved to the Underground to repair the Core," I prompted.

Frisk nodded. "When mom and dad came with the stand in to give her a tour of the Underground, neither recognized me. And that convinced me of it."

"So what changed your mind?" Chara asked.

Asriel huffed, one eye red and one eye purple. "We did. We know our sister from a fake."

Frisk smiled at Asriel. "I came to the Ruins to make sure the electricity was running properly out here and found Asriel still tending the flowers and helping people who fell into the cavern get to New Home."

He leaned over, both eyes now a vivid violet, and booped Frisk's temple with his nose.

Sans looked at both of them. "*how am I going to tell your parents about this?"

Asriel looked at him, suddenly serious, and very suddenly a prince. "You aren't. Not unless Frisk says she wants to see them."
"but you are the royal children!"

"I'm dead, Sans. My body was constructed from the power of the human souls monster kind forcibly removed from innocents. And the new lease on my existence comes from Chara's determination. I will remain here with my sisters unless they ask me otherwise." He looked to Frisk. "This is your decision, but do not feel the need to make it this instant."

Frisk booped her nose against his. "I would like to see them, but they can come to us."

My phone vibrated and I checked the message.

Ossein was instantly looking over my shoulder. "Is it time?"

I nodded.

Chara breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh thank God." He bowed his head to Asriel. "Thank you for the tea, Your Highness."

Asriel smiled. "It's a trifle at best. Thank you all for coming. I apologize that Seraph had to dig through my world's dirty laundry." He frowned. "Will we see more of that Sans in the military uniform?"

Ossein thought about it. "I don't know. He's backed off previously when what he was looking for appeared unattainable, and Chara resting in you is pretty unattainable."

One of Asriel's eyes turned red and a female voice came out of his mouth. "Oh good, because I do not plan on leaving."

We stood, giving the prince a bow, before Ossein collared Chara and I, and teleported us back to Site Epsilon's equipment room.

Ossein quickly put her equipment away, changing back into her ice skating gear, which included a shirt that read 'Dear Santa, All I want for Christmas is my Axel Jump.' "Okay. Weirdest mission ever."

Chara snorted and he pulled on a Star Wars tee. "That wasn't a mission. It was exactly as Asriel said: going through dirty laundry." He sighed and reached over, hugging her tightly.

She hugged him back with smile. "What's the hug for?"

"I guess, it just reminded me of you. You once felt like you weren't really a Frisk. You once worried about being kicked out when you turned eighteen. And then you walked through darkness for someone you loved and wanted to protect. I'm glad those are just faded memories now, something to look back at with a smile, and not a whimper."

Ossein sank into the hug. "Thank you."

"For?"

"Being my Chara."

There was a banging on the door to the equipment room before Undyne pulled it open. "Hurry up, Punks!"

After making sure the door to the room locked behind us, we rushed down the hall to the lab. A sizable crowd was already waiting in the hall, the curtain drawn so we couldn't see inside.
The goat king's voice carried over the hush of the crowd. "Push! Come on! Come on! Almost there!"

Church let out a pained cry, which was followed by a loud, shrill wail. There was a squeal of delight from Sophia as Asriel quietly talked her through her part.

"It's a girl!" Asriel called.

Hoots and applause filled the hall as Sophia, wearing a surgical apron covered in red, stepped back with a smile as big as her face. Her baby sister, covered in blood and amniotic fluid, squirmed in her arms.

"Gently place her on your mom's belly."

"Okay!" She stepped back behind the curtain.

Asriel leaned back from around the curtain. "Star?"

Ossein pushed through the crowd. "Yes?"

"Go grab something for my sister to eat. You know what she likes."

Ossein saluted. "Yes, Sir! Turkey dinner coming up!"

As she ran down the hall for the cafeteria, Michelle came out from behind the curtain, dodging Grace Church as she hurried in to see her newest grandchild.

Michelle, a sparkle to her skin from the exertion, went up on her toes to rub noses with me. "Just in time, huh?"

"Apparently."

She entwined her fingers with mine as the crowd mingled, everyone waiting to see the newest member of the Gaster family. "We are having so many kids when we're married."

"You know I have to propose first, right?"

She smiled and pulled me into the lab and around the curtain. Church, looking tired but satisfied, hair plastered to the side of her face with sweat, held a tiny little baby against her bare chest.

And for the first time, I didn't flinch when I saw the white scars from the sniper hits.

Bones leaned over her, nuzzling the side of her face. C sat on Asriel's shoulder as the goat king put the bottom of the bed she laid on back together over a floor that would have led you to believe a particularly gruesome murder had just happened. Sophia was pulling her blood soaked apron off with Ravie and Brandon's help.

Grace, her hair now completely gray, reached out for her grandchild. "Hand the little one here."

Church raised an eyebrow at her mother. "Bones first."

Grace huffed and looked to Bones. "I'll give you fifty bucks to let me hold her first."

Bones snorted through his smirk, boney thumbs hooked in the belt of his jeans. "No."

"Fine. I'll give back the keys to the Camaro."
"The keys, but not the Camaro itself, huh? Sorry. No deal." He reached over and took his youngest into his boney arms. "Hey there, kiddo."

The baby's tiny hand curled around one of his boney fingers, looking up at him with big, blue eyes as her skin faded away to reveal a baby skeleton monster.

Bones' smirk turned into a soft smile. "Well, what'd ya know? Taking after me, huh?"

Church chuckled. "I guess this one isn't going to be a late bloomer." She reached over and ruffled Brandon's hair as he and Ravie came around quick to see.

Bones handed the baby to Grace and she giggled a little, booping the child's nasal bone with one finger even as the skin came back and she booped the baby's nose instead.

I went over to the bed and leaned my forehead against Church's as she looked up at me. "Well done." I stood back up. "Do I finally get to hear her name? You've been pretty secretive about it."

"Marigold Chara Gaster."

Chara's hologram was suddenly on Church's shoulder. "You... You're giving her my name?"

Church nodded.

"How did you hide that from me?!" He blinked. "Oh. Right. The Viper just lives here now."
Chapter Notes

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Episode 2: Connections
(Bones is our narrator!)

I relaxed, hands in the pockets of my bomber jacket, watching Sophia, Brandon, Princess, and Dead Sass have one last, good play time together at their favorite park. One of the local at-home parents groups were there for their weekly playdate so several other children of both the human and monster variety, filled the playground with screams of delight and crazed laughter.

"How long has it been since their mother passed away?"

I sighed, shoulders dropping. You know? I hate that question. I get it a lot when I'm out with the kids, like the only reason a dad would be motivated to be a parent is if mom had died. There were plenty of dads in the group, and still, all of us got hit with this question.

I smirked, leaning back a bit and cocking my skull to the side to give the woman next to me my full attention. "I just texted her, and didn't need a Oujia board, so unless the cell carrier expanded their map to the afterlife when I wasn't looking, my wife's fine."

The woman’s jaw dropped.

Kristen Rivera snorted loudly. “Oh my God, Bones!” She put a hand on my arm to keep from falling as she laughed.

There was a general groaning to be had. Not specifically because we had to leave, but because it was the last time many of the kids would ever get to see Princess and her ghostly Chara. Today they went home to their timeline. Yesterday, we’d thrown a goodbye party for them and among the many presents was a small version of the large plaque at Site Alpha commemorating Princess’ construction of the locking mechanism. During the ceremony for the installation of the original, she’d been nervous and 01 read her thank you note for her. Now, she was a very confident twelve year old with a penchant for pranks.

After a full ten minutes worth of hugs, goodbyes, and a few gifts, I short cut with the kids back to the hallway outside the equipment room. They waited patiently while I put my things away and locked the door behind me.

So-So was five feet tall now, and I suspected that she would be taller than Frisk before she was done growing. She’d been developing a distinctly relaxed style, wearing graphic tees and leggings with the occasional tunic if she felt like she had to be dressed up. Brandon really didn’t care what he wore so long as it fit regardless of whether or not he was wearing skin. Right now he wore a shirt with his
zombie plan on it and a pair of grass stained jeans.

Princess bounced along with them in a dress of lace and frills. She loved looking like a ‘real princess’ and having her hair braided every day. She’d gotten taller over the past two years, and she’d let her hair grow all the way out, a long braid swinging like a tail behind her. Dead Sass appeared to have grown too, looking less like an ambiguous child and more like a teen girl. They’d left the striped sweater in their ghostly countenance behind about a year ago when another ghostly Chara taught them how to change their appearance. They now flitted around in whatever outfit they found the most pleasing at the time.

Toriel waited at the top of the stairs. “Frisk! Chara!”

“Mom!” They dove into their mother’s arms, burying themselves in the white fur while Frisk and Sans Ossein watched, with wistful smiles. Mrs. Ossein was holding her mouth set tight, forcing a smile despite the shine in her eyes.

“Are you ready to go home, my children?”

Princess and Chara both nodded, but at the same time, both looked like they just as equally wanted to stay.

Mrs. Ossein laid her hand on Princess’ head. “Go down to the lab and say goodbye to your sister before you leave. And don’t worry, there will be plenty of visits. You’re going to have to come back to help Star with her ‘super secret mission.’”

Toriel looked at them, and getting nothing but conspiratorial giggles, looked at me. I shrugged and gave her the impression that I had no idea what Mrs. Ossein, Verdana, Abigail, my wife, So-So, Princess, Dead Sass, the Queen Toriel from the cyber fell timeline we found Shooting Star on, and Fell Chara were all doing with Star at some point in the next three or four months. No idea whatsoever. It totally had nothing to do with a dress.

Before they could be questioned further, Princess and Chara went back down the stairs for Asriel’s lab and came back up a few minutes later, Princess carrying a gift bag I knew to be a present from the goat king. After a last round of hugs with So-So and Brandon, and little kisses for baby Marigold’s cheek, the two disappeared with their mother and Sans.

Brandon hugged me around the waist and I picked him up, holding him tightly for a little bit. Frisk Ossein turned into her husband’s arms, shuddering as she attempted not to cry. After a moment, he led her back into their apartment, the door closing behind them.

Sophia’s smile fell and she sniffed. Looking around, she spotted D. “I’m not really up for lessons today.”

He nodded. “I didn’t have anything planned for today. Your uncle does have his regular lesson today.”

Sophia nodded. “I won’t skip that.”

Frisk put her arm around our daughter, the other arm carefully holding Marigold close. “How about we bake some cupcakes?”

Sophia nodded rapidly and Brandon squirmed to get down, following his mother back into our apartment. D and his brother stood there in the hall for a moment, staring at the door into the Ossein apartment.
“It’s going to be strange not having Princess and Chara around.” D looked a little lost.

I nodded. “We’ll see them again. They have the super secret mission to handle.”

“ABOUT THAT. EXACTLY WHAT IS THIS SECRET MISSION? AND DO NOT TRY TO SELL ME THAT YOU DON’T KNOW. I AM AWARE YOUR WIFE IS INVOLVED AND SHE IS NOT ONE TO HIDE ANYTHING FROM YOU.”

I gave them my best smile. “Sorry, guys, but Shooting Star asked us to keep it under wraps.”

My phone rang and just as I pulled it out of my pocket, it answered itself, Fase’s voice of cheery doom falling from the speaker. “Hello, Father! I have a mission for and Agent Lucida. I have detected an anomaly in the dreams of a Sans currently being cared for at Site Sigma, and I have reason to believe that it involves Dragoon Sans. Dr. Bluevale is expecting you.”

“Got it.” I shrugged and shoved my phone in my pocket. “Duty calls. If you hurry, you might get to see my wife’s chiffon recipe in action.”

Papyrus looked at his brother for a moment before disappearing into Frisk’s apartment. I gave D a wave before heading down the stairs.

Asriel’s personal lab, despite having four people in it, was quiet but for Alphys tap tap tapping on her laptop, entering values for the latest round of test results. Shooting Star worked slowly over the bank of test tubes in front of her, carefully adding the proper chemical to the proper tube and using a small, plexiglass sheet to keep drips away from the other tubes. Crow leaned in next to her, looking like my old friend rather than the bulky ninja, watching with complete fascination. While he was versed in many scientific subjects from centuries of study, the medical research Asriel performed was not something he was very familiar with. This led to him crowding Star in the lab. Not that she ever seemed to mind.

Gently resting the dropper on the counter, she leaned over and kissed Crow’s temple. The exemplar tore his eyes away from the tubes to look at her, the face of his skull flushing a soft violet. She gave him a bright smile and he smiled back, one boney hand coming up to touch her head before he went back to watching the tubes.

Asriel, working over a different set of tubes, snorted softly, amused. Star leaned over and kissed his jowl for good measure. He raised an eyebrow at her, but his annoyance was feigned at best. Returning to her work, she made a few notations on the paper clipboarded on her lap before switching droppers and continuing with a new set of variables. Her smile fell, and she squeezed her eyes shut for a moment before sighing and continuing with her work.

Asriel’s phone rang from where it sat on the counter and Alphys reached over to tap it with one claw so the goat king wouldn’t have to put down the test tube and dropper he had in his hands. He leaned over to get a look at who was calling. "Hello, Black."

"Asriel! Darling!"

Alphys rolled her eyes and continued to type away at her laptop while Star mouthed ‘darling!’ at Asriel.

He resisted the urge to laugh, but I could plainly see his chuckle rumbling in his chest. "What do you need, Black?"

"Asriel! Darling!"

Alphys turned back to her laptop, her eyes glowing bright red as she typed away. "Asriel rolled her eyes and continued to type away at her laptop while Star mouthed 'darling!' at Asriel."

He resisted the urge to laugh, but I could plainly see his chuckle rumbling in his chest. "What do you need, Black?"

Black’s typical lilt died away to be replaced with his clinical tone. This was different from his ‘Sans’ tone. The clinical tone was reserved for medical discussions. His ‘Sans’ tone came out when he had
to be Sans instead of a double dealing, blackmailer. "I have three patients that need placement and Site Epsilon is best suited to handle them."

Asriel looked surprised. "Give me the rundown."

"The first patient is Charlotte Featherstone, a Swap world Chara from a steampunk, Hollow Earth style universe. She was hit with a magical attack that slowly poisoned her to near death. She's stable and the poison is out of her system, but she needs recovery care for the next six months. IV fluids on top of regular food and some physical therapy. She's a sweetheart and a genius in the same way Steam's kiddos are. She has occasional, but very intense nightmares from a kidnapping. Typically, her sister Loren would sleep with her, but Loren needs to be home right now to transfer Dr. W. D. Gaster's brain back into a physical body, and you have plenty of night staff to help calm her."

Alphys shook her head. "Steam worlds."

Asriel shrugged while capping the test tube. "Sounds easy enough. Will I need to house anyone with her?"

"No. Her skelebros, the other Dr. Gaster, and Frisk will simply visit. Her Frisk is not as much of an ass as your typical Chara, but they're engaged and he does not like it that they are so far from each other while she's unwell."

"Other Dr. Gaster?" Alphys asked.

"Lucida." There was a sound like a half choked sigh. "You know how there are some really strange Gasters out there? If it were a competition, she'd be in the top five. I learned very quickly not to leave her and Papyrus in the same room without a third person. There's all sorts of wrong there."

Asriel frowned for a moment before shrugging. "I'll take her. Patient number two?"

I heard papers shuffling on the other end of the phone, meaning that his Frisk, Angel, was sitting with him since, well, he can't touch anything without expending the magic to do it. "The next one is a vampire Frisk and she's pregnant."

"Babies!" Star cried, shaking her butt a little in her chair, the sadness in her eyes retreating a little. The oh-so-happy lilt came back. "Hello, Shooting Star! Are you feeling up to another session on the channel?"

She stilled so as not to upset the solution she was working with. "Since Church and Cross are doing Bloodborne, can my partner and I do Dark Souls?"

"While Dark Souls is positively infuriating, it isn't exactly horror. How about the two of you play the second Evil Within?"

She nodded, and her hair fell in her face. Crow gently reached over to smooth it back, and re-band it at the back of her neck. "Sounds good. Tell us about the second patient."

The clinical tone returned. "Frisk Luna is from a timeline in which vampires are not undead, but they do rely on human blood to provide essential nutrients to their diet. Typically, a male vampire will breed with a human female to continue their family line. Female vampires do not generally breed because pregnancy requires more nutrients than the human parent can provide. I have her on a specialized diet to keep her and the baby healthy without her needing to drain her human husband."

Star leaned over the bank of tubes in front of her, working through the next set. "So what's the
"They are unable to maintain the diet on timeline and the birth itself is likely to be complicated."

"Then I'm looking at feeding and housing for two?" Asriel asked.

"Her and her Chara. Frisk is a night owl, of course, but very nice. Chara will be all over you with questions, but he isn't questioning your expertise. He's just trying to know as much as possible about his wife and child's condition."

Alphys tried to stifle a chuckle and it came out as a cough. "So, is Chara a vampire hunter?"

"Yes. It's how they met. And he's very aware of how cliche his situation is."

Alphys and Star both snorted over their work.

Asriel shook his head at them with a false chide. "I'll take them. Number three?"

"The third case is Frisk Tamanna from a colony ship very similar to the Delta. Instead of being found floating in space, she is the last living human on the ship. When a prion made its way onto the ship, the monsters of the ship were resistant to it, but it nearly killed her. The prion is out of her system and she's okay to be around others, but needs long term care and physical therapy. Even before infection, she was malnourished."

Alphys looked up from the computer and mouthed ‘malnourished?’

Ariel’s mouth pressed into a thin line for a moment. "Who would I be housing with her?"

"No one. You won't even have visitors."

I blinked. What? That couldn’t be right. No one?

Star’s head lifted. "That's not right."

Black cleared his throat. I'm not sure how a ghost does that. "Her file indicates that she trained all her life to be an artificial intelligence engineer and work with the ship’s artificial intelligence, CHARA. When the second to last human died, she was expelled from university, fired from the job she worked while in school, and evicted from her apartment. CHARA’s main terminal is abandoned, so she lived in an old office in the terminal, and worked on keeping the AI running."

Asriel frowned deeply. "How is she not dead?"

"Ah. It appears that when she was infected, CHARA notified Asriel, who found her, and took her to a medical bay. Dr. Gaster was unable to expel the prion from her system, and CHARA put in the call to Fase for help."

“No,” Asriel’s voice rumbled darkly. “That wasn’t what I was asking and you know it.”

Alphys leaned back in her seat and quickly moved to give Black an out. “There’s a bigger story there.”

“There is and it isn’t a happy one. It seems that CHARA needs Frisk to continue functioning, but there is serious opposition to her even being on the ship. Even though all the humans who once inhabited the ship are descendents of the original humans who left Earth with monster kind, the majority of monsters see her as an invader.”
Star frowned. “So... What? We heal her and send her back? I am not okay with doing that.” She gasped. “Forced isolation seriously messes you up! She has hallucinations, doesn’t she? With a helping of anxiety and paranoia on the side!”

Asriel’s growl cut through the conversation. “How was she feeding herself?”

Crow put his skeletal hand on top of Star’s head and she took a deep breath, letting it out slowly.

Angel’s voice came over the phone. “Calm down, Azzy. She’s been with us a while so we’ve got a bead on her. Fase said Frisk hacked the system to give her enough money for some food, but it wasn’t the best in quality. She does hallucinate, but the hallucinations are not antagonistic to her, and she interacts with them. She is still very anxious but isn’t paranoid.”

Asriel frowned. “Was she even functional enough to do the work she trained all her life to do?”

Angel sighed. “The AI has been rather cagey about that. I think CHARA is worried that if it says no, she won’t be allowed back on the ship, and no one else is capable of helping it on the ship.”

I could almost see Black shaking his head. “Asriel said he had a plan for her return, but refused to elaborate.”

The goat king mulled that over. “Are you hoping I’ll get more out of him?”

“Yes, actually. He’ll be the one picking her up.”

Alphys shifted in her chair. “What about her Sans?”

Black’s tone was as dark as his name. “Her Sans doesn’t exist.”

Asriel rolled one long strand of hair between his fingers, staring at the purple tips. "So what else aren’t you telling me?"

Black groaned. “You’re too smart sometimes. Dr. Gaster put her in a coma and we left her in it until we had the prion out of her system. When we brought her out of the induced coma, she panicked, and attempted suicide.”

Alphys jaw dropped, slit pupils completely dilated in wide eyes. “What?!?”

“After we had her somewhat sedated, she said she couldn’t afford the medical attention.”

Star looked to Asriel. "We'll take her."

He crossed his arms over his chest. "Frisk."

She wasn’t cowed in the least, which wasn’t surprising. She had some immunity to his presence that others didn’t. I wasn’t sure why when my Sunshine wasn’t even immune to it. Then again, this was an argument over a Frisk and there was no way any Frisk was going to leave another Frisk hanging. It wasn’t as if Epsilon didn’t have the necessary people to handle it. It was the unknowns. She’d been abandoned by everyone, and needed significant mental healthcare. That could make for a very bad time when combined with a Frisk’s ultimate determination.

"I'll take her." Asriel sighed and pointed at Star. “You’re on first watch with her.”

She stood and saluted, and in doing so caught a glimpse of me in the doorway. I gave her a wave.

“Hey, Bones! Mission?”
I nodded. “To Site Sigma.”

Star nodded. “Give me a minute to finish up here and we’ll head over to the equipment room. C? How long until our patients arrive?”

C’s voice filled the room from a speaker hidden in one corner. “Charlotte Featherstone will be here later this evening. Frisk Luna overnight. Frisk Tamanna will be transferred tomorrow.”

“Thank you!” She made multiple notations on the paperwork on her clipboard before capping the test tubes in front of her. She glanced over at Asriel. “All four sets are ready here. My dishes in the incubator won’t come out until tomorrow, so they don’t need fussed with. Larry is on first thing tomorrow morning.”

Asriel nodded, smiling a little as he took her clipboard from her. She gave Alphys a wave after pulling off her gloves and tossing them in the biohazard disposal box.

Hanging her safety goggles on a hook just outside the door, she stepped up to me with a smile. I gestured for her to take the lead and we walked down the hall. The sun shined brightly in the tall windows that lined our left, filling the hall with a warm, hazy light.

“Have you ever been to Site Sigma?”

Star nodded. “Black took me a few times, so I’m familiar with it. The Toriel who runs it is very nice.” She stopped at the door to the equipment room, tapped a code into the hidden keypad on the underside of the lock and stepped in when the door popped open.

Inside, she stripped out of her blue scrubs and into her green and black field uniform. Grabbing her equipment bag, I tossed it to her before arming myself and grabbing my bag. We stepped out of the room and I pulled the door shut, checking the lock behind us.

“Is there a problem on site?” she asked.

C burst to life on my shoulder. “Dr. Bluevale says it’s nothing but Fase keeps getting anomaly indications from one of the Sanses there for treatment. He can be less than communicative sometimes so we’ll be talking to his Frisk, who is mute.”

Star nodded. “Okay.”

I chuckled a little at her complete acceptance of something that anyone else would consider strange.

I eyed the hologram. “Coming along?”

C nodded. “Fase gave me the specs and I’m bored.”

I smirked. “Too much baby time?”

Chara chuckled, appearing to sit down on my shoulder. “No.” He looked deeply happy, smiling warmly at some thought. He was still a little star struck at Marigold having been named after him.

I put my hand on Frisk’s shoulder, stepping us into the void. Rather than hanging there, I chose an instant arrival and put us down on the brick laid path to Site Sigma’s facility.

Site Sigma consisted of a four story tall and quarter of a block wide building covered in green copper sheeting. Copious windows of mirrored glass reflected the surrounding landscape which was made up of large gardens. All in all, a very peaceful place. Which is what you would go for when you
were an inpatient, mental healthcare facility designed to care for monsters and magic wielding humans. A few of the residents were walking the gardens under the watchful eyes of many caretakers. Most of the patients here would never leave, much like the many anomalous people at Site Alpha.

We walked into the building, the main doors opening into a hallway. Like Site Epsilon, Sigma did not have a lobby or reception area. If you were here, you either knew where you were going, or were in the company of someone who did. To the right of the hallway was a wall covered in all sorts of art tacked up by the residents. To the left was a long set of shatter resistant windows into the library. Going all the way past the library windows led you to an intersection where the entrance to the library was located, and a large open space surrounded by frosted glass made up a classroom area.

Taking a right at the intersection, we headed down a hall of offices and knocked on Dr. Toriel Bluevale’s office. In this particular world, there wasn’t an Asgore or Dreemurr royal family. Monsters had not been trapped underground and were well integrated into a human population of similar size. A mental health facility had always been here, though it’s current size and scope came from 01’s recruitment of Toriel into the Seraph Foundation a long ways back. She liked 01 immensely, but I think that’s just because he look like her late, adopted, human son whose picture still rested on her desk. Her son’s name wasn’t Chara, by the way. It was George.

“Come in.”

Star opened the door. “Hello, Dr. Bluevale!”

The goat woman smiled. “Hello, Frisk.” She stood to shake hands with us, prim, navy blue suit perfectly in order. “Are you sure this is anomalous? All Sans is saying is that he keeps having strange dreams. That’s not unusual for this particular Sans.”

I shrugged. “Fase says there’s something anomalous to them, so we’re here to check it out. If it is nothing, we’ll figure that out pretty quick.”

“Follow me then. His Frisk is here with him right now.”

Ossein turned to trail after her. “What’s his medical record say?”

Toriel frowned. “Fase indicated that he suffered serious trauma at the hands of his father. Papyrus sacrificed himself so Sans could escape. This precipitated a complete mental breakdown. He was in a care facility on his timeline and deteriorating rapidly when Fase received a call asking for him to be moved to Site Sigma.”

“Who made the call?”

Toriel smiled a little. “Oh that’s where the plot thickens. Papyrus made the call.” She paused and turned toward us.

I raised a brow bone. “Papyrus is a ghost, I take it.”

Toriel nodded. “It seems that ghosts on that timeline are not immediately visible. They need a vessel to inhabit. Papyrus may or may not be in the cell when we get there. He is free to roam the facility and often chooses to be elsewhere when Frisk visits. He tends to be suspicious of others, which is understandable. Frisk has grown on him though.”

We followed Toriel back into the hallway and up a flight of stairs, the entire interior of the stairwell covered in more resident art, to the second floor. This floor was filled with patients who needed
physical separation from other patients for various reasons. Sitting at the plexiglass window into one room was a Frisk who appeared to be around fourteen years old. She giggled soundlessly at the antics of the Sans on the other side of the glass, both clearly enjoying each other’s company.

They both caught sight of us at the same time and turned. Sans frowned, retreating a little.

Star sat down on the floor next to Frisk. “Hi! I’m Frisk!”

“Me too!” Frisk signed back, her smile big and bright.

Ossein turned and waved to Sans. “Hey Sans! I hear that you’re having weird dreams. Wanna talk about them?”

Toriel elbowed me. “Does she always just dive right in like this?”

I snorted. “If her partner isn’t here to stop her, yes.” I smiled. “On the other hand, this is the sort of thing she’s trained to do.”

Sans huddled in on himself, the unbound sleeves of his straight jacket flapping around him. He blushed deeply, looking away, and then covered the face of his skull.

Frisk gave him a patient smile and turned to Ossein. “He’s just really embarrassed about it. He keeps having dreams about a Sans and a Frisk who are married. But we aren’t like that, so it’s really weird for him.”

“All right then. Let’s focus on other facets of the dreams. Do you sense that they are in danger?”

Sans stood suddenly, and turned to the window, leaning against it so as to press the face of his skull to the glass. “Yes! There’s this Sans I’ve never seen before. He’s in this shiny, military uniform.” He motioned with his arms, his sleeves swinging. “And he rides this big, skeletal horse!” He sat down, frowning deeply. “He’s looking for something there. A scroll of some sort.”

I shrugged and jumped in. “What can you tell us about the Sans on timeline?”

Sans turned and took a long look at me. “He’s like you! No… that’s wrong… He’s like you with skin on! Wait… That’s not right either. You’re all dark haired and swarthy. This Sans is really pale. Even his hair is white!” He trailed off for a minute thinking. “He’s got these weird, hazel eyes that are more yellow than brown.”

Sans paused and looked up at me, and, just for a moment, we saw the Sans who existed before his sanity collapsed. “He’s from one of the edge of it all timelines. One of those places where any part of the original story is long gone and something completely different is in its place. I don’t believe anyone there knows or understands the danger they’re in.”

His skull dropped to his clavicle and he blinked a few times. Sitting down in front of his Frisk he leaned against the glass for a few seconds before his skull shot back up, wide smile back in place.

Ossein smiled. “Can you tell us anything else? Something about Frisk? Or maybe another person from the timeline?”

At the mention of Frisk, Sans blushed heavily again and hid his embarrassed smile behind his flapping sleeves.

Frisk giggled soundlessly before turning to us. “It’s too much for him now. He did tell me a few things though. No one calls him ‘Sans.’ They call him G. Frisk is short and really pretty. She and
Sans have three kids. Chara and Papyrus live next store, but Papyrus is a girl and I’m pretty sure that ‘Papyrus’ is a nickname for her. She and Chara have children. Chara works with Undyne in some way, but I don’t think Sans knows enough about what either of them do other than to say they’re coworkers.”

She looked between the three of us furtively. “That’s all I’ve got. Is that enough to help?”

I nodded. “I think so. It will help us narrow down where to go. Now we just have to figure out what Dragoon is after.”

“Will Sans be all right?” The child frowned, lips twisting in a thoughtful way, before waving her arms. “I mean, specifically, will he stop having the dreams?”

Star shrugged. “I’m not sure what’s causing the dreams, but if we take care of the problem, the dreams may go away too. It’s not like it’s weird for us to dream about each other. It’s just that this time, the dream is really significant.”

“You mean like the Frisk staring at the sunset with the barrier behind her? Or the Frisk holding the baby?”

“Yeah. Like them.” Star frowned. She stood, looking deep in thought for a moment before shaking it off. “Thank you both very much!”

Frisk nodded exuberantly while Sans waved a shy goodbye. We followed Toriel away from Frisk and Sans and back down the hall.

Toriel hummed thoughtfully. “So there was something going on after all. But I don’t get it. Why the sudden significance?”

I shook my skull. “I don’t know. It’s just as likely that it’s a one off. Something about him connects with them. Fase is monitoring the anomaly so maybe acting on what he’s dreaming will help her figure out what’s causing it. Do you always keep him in a straight jacket?”

Toriel snorted. “It’s not that we keep him in it. He won’t take it off!”

Star stopped at one of the windows, looking in on an Asgore in a dark blue Hawaiian shirt and black shorts. He sat in a rocking chair, staring at his bare, white feet. She stared at him sadly. “What happened to him?”

Toriel sighed. “He murdered his Chara. The only details I’ll give are that Chara knew how to open the barrier and the barrier had to remain closed.” She shook her head. “It’s a story for another time.”

Star nodded and we continued back down to the first floor. After making our goodbyes to Toriel, I pulled out my phone and dialed Fase.

C popped over to Star’s shoulder. “Hey. You got that really frowny face you make when she mentioned the two Frisks. Have you seen them too?”

She nodded. “The first? A little girl, standing facing the sun? Does Church see her?”

C nodded. “Yeah. Asriel and an adult Chara wait on the other side of the barrier, hoping she’ll open it.”

Star frowned. “I see her attempting to navigate a horrific maze of traps. The second one is a mother.”
C nodded again. “Frisk sees her with her family.”

“I see her working on something under duress. It looks like a set of equations that make a model on a computer screen. It’s very similar to the equations we use to travel the void, but I don’t know enough about what I’m seeing to say for sure.”

I paused. “Those dreams typically mean that you’ll meet those Frisks at some point in the future.”

“I know.” Ossein shivered. “We should ask Cross about it. When he dreams, it’s always the worst stuff. Maybe…” She bit her lower lip, finger tips bouncing against each other furtively. “Maybe we can save them.”

C reached out, the hologram not quite touching her face. “They are Frisks. They may not need saving.”

She suddenly stood up straight and looked to him. “Not the point.”

C chuckled. “Well, let’s work on saving the Frisk we’re on mission for first.”

Fase’s voice of cheery doom suddenly filled the air. I’d forgotten that I’d dialed her.

“Hello, Father! What have you discovered?”

“It’s one of the edge timelines. We are looking for a human timeline with a Gaster Sans who is white haired and married to his Frisk. Papyrus is female and may likely be a nickname rather than her actual name. She is married to Chara. Dragoon is there and looking for a scroll of some sort.”

“That’s actually an easy narrow down then.”

I blinked. “Really? With all the timelines out there? This one is easy?”

“Oh yes. I just need to know how many children Frisk and Sans have.”

I raised a brow bone. “Just that?”

“Well, yes. Sanses like you, Father, that are also human are not common and ones that are married to their Frisks even less so. I can narrow it down based on the number of children and the presence of a female Papyrus.”

Star shook her head as she smiled. “Three.”

I could almost see the smile on Fase’s digital face behind my eyes. “Excellent! I will have equations for you in a moment.”

“Any details on the world? Besides my needing to have skin?”

“Yes! It appears that science is the prime paradigm, but several magical artifacts exist with the prevailing theory being that these items are hoaxes and not truly magical. You do have the occasional person who figures it out. Avoid using magic. Also, Midnight Collapse once made a run on the timeline, but were stopped by law enforcement and members of Site Gamma posing as law enforcement. Frisk never knew she was in danger.”

“So if Dragoon is looking for a scroll,” Star mused, “It maybe one of the magical artifacts on timeline. Would any of those artifacts be adjacent to Frisk or Sans?”
“Adjacent? How about right on top of! Frisk is an archaeologist and studying an artifact scroll from Ancient Egypt.”

I thought about it for a minute. “What happens to the timeline if Dragoon steals the scroll?”

Fase suddenly went quiet and Techno picked up the conversation. “Those scrolls only appear on timelines where magic is purported not to exist by the majority of the population and anyone who believes in it is often treated with derision. Worlds where most are completely unaware of the existence of the more magical things going on.”

“Like how we didn’t know there were vampires on my timeline until a few years ago?” I asked.

“Exactly like that. Which means you should be prepared for something similar to crawl out of the woodwork for the scroll. Artifacts like that will not harm the timeline if removed. However, they do exist to protect the people on timeline from the creepy crawlies.”

Star tapped her chin, thinking. “Do you think the scroll is causing the connection to Sans here? Like, it’s trying to find someone to help?”

I shrugged. “Maybe. I’ll have a better idea when I see the scroll. Equations, please.”

“Certainly!” Fase droned off the numbers, filling my head with the familiar buzz.

Star hooked her arm in mine and we stepped into the void. I hung us their for a few moments to get an idea of how far away the timeline was. It was a small shimmer far from the bigger timelines that made up original variations, but wasn’t far from Site Gamma. Relatively speaking. Everything in the void was relatively speaking. It was very near the World War III timeline Frisk and I met 01 on. With the removal of non-timeline humans, the relations between humans and monsters had dramatically improved.

I stepped us onto the timeline and the change from bone to skin was immediate. I paused for a minute, inspecting my hands, and feeling the softness of the skin.

“Before we start, I want a pic of you with skin on.” Star dug out her phone.

I flashed her a smile, relaxing into it. “And my wife totally didn’t request the photo.”

Frisk snorted as she tapped the phone. “Oh please! I’m not even going to pretend that it’s not for her!” She looked over the shot for a moment before nodding in satisfaction and texting it to my wife. “I think she’s asked everyone you do missions with to take a photo if we go somewhere you need to wear skin.”

I shook my head and looked around. We stood on a university campus and with the masses of people starting to pour out of the buildings around us, the most recent class period had let out.

C’s voice came over my comm. “We’re looking for Professor Francesca Aster. Frisk is her nickname. Fase said she’d be in the museum in the Comnena Building.”

Star trotted over to a pedestal on which sat a campus map. After fiddling with the abc/123 grid for a minute, she found the building. “It’s just behind the library. Any easy hoof from here.” She turned and led the way through throngs of students rushing this way and that between classes. Fall was setting in, turning the entire campus bright yellow and fiery orange. Flower beds were filled with hardy, red chrysanthemums and violet, autumn lettuces.

Finding the library was easy enough. It was one of the biggest buildings on the campus, which is
always a good sign. A college or university with a small library was not likely to have the resources anyone, let alone grad students and faculty, needed to produce quality research. The massive stone and glass building took up an entire city block and was six stories tall. Rather than walking around, we followed the students, and found an underpass on one side. Once up the stairs on the other side of the building we saw the Comnena Building and a large sign for the College of History. While the library had been tall and wide, this was an old fashioned dormitory from the days when they looked like classy retreats and not like boxy apartment buildings. The front door to the building, a lovely art glass piece, led directly into the museum.

There wasn’t a reception area for the museum, you were just suddenly standing in the exhibits. A box for donations stood next to the door. Glass cases under lighting made to show off the best parts of the items inside, lined the room on either side. Inside each case were items found by various archaeological expeditions made by the university and arranged in chronological order from era of history.

Star paused for a moment, gazing at a statue of a ram standing on its hind legs with it’s forelegs hooked in the branches of a tree. “Hey, C? Any idea how public knowledge the scroll is? Any reason for us to be here and be curious about it?”

C’s voice tumbled from the memory core attached to the lapel of her jacket. “Yeah. Go for the ‘I’m all into the paranormal.’ You’re excitable in general so pulling it off won’t be that difficult.”

She pursed her lips for just a second before smiling. “Project on my shoulder please.”

“Whyyyyyyyyyyyy?”

“So I can flip you off.”

C snorted. “I’ll pass.”

I waved for Star to follow me and we headed deeper into the museum. After walking for a few minutes we found a set of staff offices and workrooms. The door on the second workroom was wide open, revealing a long table strewn with multiple books around a woman bent over a scroll. A scroll I’d seen before. It was the same scroll Frisk had come home with after completing a favor for her former command.

Star grabbed my sleeve, yanking on it to get my attention before signing. “It’s the Book of Thoth! Do you think it’s like ours?”

I shrugged. And honestly, I wouldn’t be able to tell if it was or not. Our version of the scroll reeked of magic and only allowed members of the Dreemurr family to touch it. Since Asriel had claimed Frisk as his sister, and our children as his nieces and nephew, all of them could touch the scroll without having it suddenly burst into flames and disappear, only to reappear whole and unblemished in the place Asriel kept it. But even beyond that, the scroll, when opened, appeared to be blank. Or at least, it was for Frisk. I had a feeling Asriel saw something when he looked at it. And maybe Sophia did too.

Star knocked on the door jamb. “Hello? Are you Dr. Aster? Is this the place with the Book of Thoth?”

The woman’s head immediately shot up, her long brown hair flying, and she turned slightly to look at us. Fase was right. This Frisk was really pretty in a very innocent way. She smiled brightly and easily at Star, that thing with Frisks kicking in.
“Yes! Do you want to see it?”

Star nodded and rushed over, pulling the seat up next to her.

Dr. Aster scooted over, handing Frisk a pair of gloves. “Here. Put these on. That will protect the scroll.” She continued as Star pulled on the gloves, “You know the old legends about how we’re all descended from animal people? This scroll is only supposed to be read by those who descend from the goat king’s line, and to prevent just anyone from reading it, the text is supposed to be complete gibberish to the wrong person.”

“So if you get something other than gobbledigook, you’re a descendant? Woah! Where was this even found?”

Dr. Aster waved her hands excitedly, blue eyes shining brightly. “In the ruins of the ancient city of Manaris! It was in the middle of this huge puzzle mechanism and when the moonlight hit it just right it opened up! It was so cool!”

Star bounced in her seat. “Did you film it?”

“Of course!” Dr. Aster turned and grabbed her phone.

A university police officer with the reddest hair and palest skin I’d ever seen, White excepted, knocked on the door of the workroom. The name ‘Gardner’ was embroidered over the breast pocket of his dark blue uniform. He gave us all a warm smile. “Hey, Frisky-Bits. Papyrus is waiting for you.”

Frisk looked up from the scroll. “Waiting for… Oh my God… I forgot about lunch!” She shoved her phone in her bag and stood hastily. “I’m very sorry! I’ll have to show you later! Uh… Is fourteen hundred okay?”

Star nodded and stood with Dr. Aster, helping her move the scroll back into a temperature controlled box. We followed Dr. Aster as she dashed out of the office, into the museum proper, and out the front door. The officer smiled, shaking his head as Frisk ran toward the library and the underpass.

“I swear, every time she gets her hands on a new artifact, it’s like nothing else exists.” The officer turned to us, one hand on his hip. Now that he was up close, you could see the red gleam in his brown eyes. “Why are so many Seraph agents here? Is Midnight Collapse making another run on Francesca?”

Star shook her head. “Midnight Collapse is long gone. This is about the scroll Frisk is… Wait.” She blinked at him. “You know about us?”

He nodded. “I was one of the people who drove Midnight Collapse off when they came around.” There was a bitter taste to the statement.

I raised an eyebrow. “They tried to recruit you.”

He frowned deeply, eyes narrowed. “And I want to know where they got the idea that I’d be willing to murder my cousin.”

Star’s eyes saddened. “Some Charas are like that.” She looked away for a moment before her smile returned. She held out her hand. “I’m Frisk Ossein, Frisk isn’t a nickname, and this is Bones Gaster. Bones is a nickname. We’re from Site Epsilon and we deal with anomalies.”

The officer took her hand. “Charles Gardiner. Chara for short. Though I’m betting you figured that
part out. So why are you all here?”

“All?” Frisk looked to me and back to Gardiner. “There’s more than just Bones and I?”

He nodded. “Another me. Well, I take that back. He looks like me, but damn if he doesn’t act like G. He’s looking for a Sans named Dragoon. What’s wrong with the scroll? Does it not belong here?”

I shook my skull. “The scroll belongs here. The issue is Dragoon. We believe he’s looking for the scroll. His world is gone and he got the idea that if he steals the pieces of other worlds that match his, he can rebuild what was lost.”

Gardiner sighed deeply, hands on his hips. “And it doesn’t work that way, does it?”

“No.”

“Great.” He yawned deeply, rubbing his eyes. “Sorry.”

Star looked him over. “Are you all right?”

He waved it off. “Yeah. My kids had me up all night.” He pulled out his phone, dialing. Whoever was on the other end picked up before the first ring even finished. “Hey. There are two more Seraph agents here and they think your quarry is going after a scroll.”

Chara Tarsus, a Shift Chara who worked for Site Gamma, appeared next to Star. He was of your average height for a Sans with light brown hair and burnt sienna eyes. “Hey, Shooting Star.”

She turned and hugged him. “Chara Tarsus! I haven’t seen you in ages!”

He hugged her back. “It has been a while. My little brothers ask to see you all the time.”

Star sighed. “I’m so sorry. I’ve just been so swamped. So how’d you know Dragoon was here?”

Tarsus held up a hand and turned to cough into his sleeve. “Sorry.” He took a breath, sniffing, and rubbing his temples like he had a bad headache. “I was coming back from a mission and just happened to see Dragoon bee line for this place. I’m pretty sure he’s wearing skin, otherwise we would have found him by now. And…” He blinked at me. “Oh my God… Bones?”

I smiled. “In the flesh.”

Star snorted, covering her mouth with her hand.

Gardner groaned. “So, it is a thing with Sanses, huh? God dammit.”

I put my hands in my pockets. “Dragoon will retreat if given a reason to believe that the thing he’s trying to steal is well protected. Hopefully, us being here before he’s appeared will mean that one confrontation will be enough.”

Gardner frowned. “You aren’t going for capture?”

Huh. His first thought wasn’t elimination. Interesting. “If we can manage it. Our standing orders are to disable and capture, but he’s given to running at the first sign of a real fight.”

Star jumped in. “Based on previous experience, he will go after the person he assumes is the weakest in the group. Typically any female opponent.” She sighed, shoulders dropping. “Which, after my last
run in with him, won’t be me.”

She smiled again. “I’m not really keen on the potential damage to the museum or the campus should he show up here. Is there anyway to move the scroll somewhere a fight wouldn’t cause unnecessary damage? Wait! Better idea! Is there a way to fake the scroll?”

Gardner crossed his arms over his chest, one hand covering his mouth and chin while he thought. “We aren’t going to be able to move the scroll without Frisk going with it and attempting to move it without her knowledge is just going to lead her to panic when she can’t find it. As for faking it, I’m not sure how we’d do it.”

He hummed thoughtfully for a moment before sighing.

Tarsus elbowed him with the kind of smile you’d typically see on White’s face. “You’ve thought of something!”

“Unfortunately.” Gardner frowned. “The scroll is a magical artifact, something that people don’t really believe in anymore.”

“But you’ve seen one work,” Star provided.

He nodded. “I watched Frisk use one once. I won’t go into the details, but it was insanely effective. She’s made a life’s work of finding and studying these things. She might actually know how to copy one.”

Star smiled. “Well, I have a date with her at fourteen hundred. I’ll ask if it’s possible to copy the scroll.”

The comm attached to Gardner’s shoulder crackled to life. “Calling all units! We have an in progress at the Peach Blossom.”

Gardner stiffened before dashing off.

I frowned. “Ten bucks says that’s where Frisk and Papyrus went for lunch.”

We ran after Gardner, dodging packs of students as the next class period let out. He led us through a series of short cuts through campus to a large cafe with a semi circular, decorative glass wall facing the street side. One police car stood outside, but it stood empty and silent. Foot traffic on the sidewalks continued as if nothing was wrong. The view from the windows revealed everyone inside having lunch, including the officer who likely belonged to the car parked outside. Frisk and a female Papyrus sat at a bar, eating sushi together.

Star sighed, head dropping. “We just left the scroll alone.”

Tarsus groaned. “Yes. Yes we did.”

I held up a hand. “Let’s be smart about this. Tarsus, stick close to Frisk and Papyrus. The rest of us will head back for the scroll.”

Tarsus nodded and headed into the cafe. Gardiner led us back to the museum. Hearing noises from the room where the scroll was stored, we approached cautiously. Gardner and I leaned against the walls on either side of the door, cautiously looking inside. A woman with long, black hair, in a long, black dress, just dripping with silver jewelry was carefully fitting the scroll into a briefcase.
Gardiner crept up behind her and waited until the scroll was safely in the case. And then laid a hand on her shoulder.

“And where do you think you’re going with that?”

The woman spun around suddenly, a knife shining in her hand. The knife hit his uniform shirt and merely scraped against the armor underneath. Gardiner grabbed her wrist, yanking her around so that her elbow was locked. She dropped the knife as he grabbed her other arm, yanking it back to handcuff her.

The woman hissed, “You can’t arrest me! You have no right!” It was the same voice that had previously called him to the Peach Blossom.

“You were caught in the process of stealing a piece of university property. And impersonating a member of the police is also a crime. And since you knew that the researcher working on the scroll would be going to the Peach Blossom, that means you have an accomplice or two. So where might they be?”

I felt a gun being pressed to the back of my head just as Star was being pushed into the room past me. Another woman, also dressed in black and dripping with silver jewelry, stepped in behind Star. Instead of a gun, she held a ritual knife to Star’s back.

She grabbed Star’s hair. “If you’d like to keep your friends alive, Officer, I suggest you let my friend go.”

Well, I guess a fight in the museum wasn’t going to be avoided. “You got this, Star?”

“Yeah. I’m good.” Star grabbed the arm with the knife in it, snapping it back hard, before spinning the woman into the wall next to the door, smashing her against it.

I dropped down and kicked the legs of the woman who’d stood behind me. She was also dressed in black and dripping with silver jewelry. She hit the floor, smacking her head on the tile under our feet. I plucked the gun from her hand while she blinked up at the ceiling, dazed and groaning.

The woman in front of Gardiner screamed and pushed backward, knocking Gardiner off his feet. As he hit the ground, she said something unintelligible, but the tone was recognizable. She was casting. The handcuffs glowed red for a moment and she wrenched the chain, snapping the metal links.

Hands now free, she grabbed the briefcase, and dashed for the door.

Star let go of the woman between her and the wall to follow. We made a mad scramble for the door, chasing the briefcase down a hallway of offices and deeper into the building. The woman with the case must have known where she was going. She made a sudden right turn into what appeared to be an office and turned out to be a hidden stairwell. She jumped the short flight of stairs to an exterior door, heading out the back and into a small, grassy lawn strewn with autumn leaves.

Only to bounce off the chest of a dark haired man in a long, black and gold, military coat. He reached down and took the briefcase from her. A tall, brown war horse whinnied next to him. Seeing Star and I, Dragoon gave us a wry smile and saluted. But before he could disappear, Dr. Aster came out of nowhere and slammed into Dragoon.

He didn’t let go of the briefcase, but neither did she attempt to take it. Instead, she flipped the locks open and pulled the scroll out. Dragoon dropped the case to grab the scroll and Dr. Aster spun away. The scroll case opened and the papyrus unrolled in the air in an arc around her. She and the scroll began to glow with the same golden light.
Dr. Aster lifted her arms, chanting in Ancient Egyptian, before pointing at Dragoon. The golden light struck him in the chest flinging him against a tree. He hit the ground, groaning. The three women in black rushed her, only to be wrapped up in the golden light and held fast.

“I am really getting sick of you Illuminati idiots interrupting my work!”

Gardiner quickly handcuffed the three, Star and I helping him secure them. The glow around Dr. Aster died and the scroll rolled itself up, coming into her hand. She cradled it against her chest with a sigh.

One of the women continued to struggle. “You can’t arrest us! What police chief is going to believe any of this?!”

Gardiner snorted. “Who said you were going to the precinct?”

The woman paled. “You! You are one of them! One of the Dreemurrs!”

“No. I’m a Gardner. Just like my father and brother.” He pulled out his phone and hit a button, calling someone without actually leaving a message.

The sound of feet pounding the ground alerted us to Dragoon having sorted himself. He jumped at Dr. Aster. The familiar shing of blue magic filled the air. Well, the ‘shing’ was familiar, but the color wasn’t blue. It was red. Tarsus held Dragoon immobile in the air, but also appeared to be struggling with it, pale.

Dragoon cut the magic and disappeared, his horse disappearing as well.

This world’s Papyrus, a tall woman with very pale blonde hair, put an arm around Tarsus, helping him keep his feet. “I don’t think he’s well. He really struggled to teleport Frisk and I over here.”

Star rushed over, touching Tarsus’ forehead, before sliding her bag off her shoulders to dig in it. She pulled out an insta-thermometer and ran it across his forehead. “A hundred and four. Oh hell. We need to get you to Epsilon.”

He put an arm around Star, leaning into her as Papyrus let him go. “My brothers. I can’t leave them alone.”

I looked to Gardiner. “Will you be fine from here?”

He nodded. “My back up will be here shortly. Thanks for the help.”

I smiled. “I don’t really think you needed it.”

He shrugged. “If G had been here instead of away on business, I wouldn’t have.”

I turned to Tarsus. “I’ll pick up your brothers.”

Tarsus nodded. “Our code word is Sunkist.”

Star gave Dr. Aster an apologetic smile. “Sorry to run. Mind if I come back later to watch the video?”

Dr. Aster gave her a blinding smile. “Not at all!”

Star disappeared with Tarsus. I pulled out my phone and looked up the equation for Tarsus’ timeline before stepping into the void.
C’s voice came over my comm. “I got some good shots of Dragoon with skin on and sent them to Fase.”

I nodded, flexing my phalanges now that the skin was gone. “Thanks. So how much does this world’s Book of Thoth match ours?”

“Fase has one of her AI children figuring that out right now. I’ve already calculated for Dragoon making an attempt on it regardless. A thought occurs to me: Do you think the Sans back at Sigma was having the dreams because this world’s Sans’ was worried about being away from home? I mean, we have it documented that Frisks dream about each other. Maybe Sanses do that too.”

“But why one Sans and not another one? If you think about it, this Sans was one of my variation, but the connection hit a completely different variation.” I shook my skull. “I think something else is going on.” A light went on in my head. “What if the Sans from Site Sigma and Dragoon are the same variation?”

“Frisk says that’s a very interesting idea. I’m sending it to Fase.”

“Good.” I landed on Tarsus’ shift timeline just outside a log cabin that looked very similar to the one my brother and I had shared so many years ago. Knocking on the door got an immediate response.

“If you’re here to cause trouble, you should know that this house is protected!” Asriel, a tall goat monster who was just barely an adult, in a blue hoodie, blue jeans, and a rainbow scarf threw open the door confidently, arms crossed over his chest, and head held high. I’d been a while since I last saw him, so it was a little strange to see his horns grown out.

His arms dropped on seeing me. “Bones? Hey!” He hugged me. “It’s been forever! Is Church here too? How about Star? I really miss Star!”

Frisk, your average sixteen year old, in a striped light on dark blue shirt and jeans, rushed to the door, excitedly looking around.

“Neither are with me, but you’ll get to see them soon. I ended up on a mission with your brother and he became really sick.” I waved them both in close. “The code word is Sunkist.”

Frisk and Asriel looked at each other, worried.

I patted them both on the shoulders. “Go pack a bag or two for a few overnights.”

Both nodded and rushed to their rooms. I walked around the house, turning off and unplugging appliances that didn’t need to be running while everyone was away, cleaning the kitchen, and washing up the dishes in the sink. As soon as both boys were packed, Frisk quickly cleaned the bathroom while Asriel dusted and vacuumed.

Once everything was done and the curtains closed up, Asriel and Frisk checked their bags one last time before locking the front door. I put my hands on their shoulders and we touched down just outside the equipment room. I paused a moment to put my things away before we headed down the hall. Alphys stood outside the lab with Star. Both boys rushed for them.

Asriel, despite being as tall as Alphys, looked small next to her, pawing at her lab coat. “Chara’s gonna be all right… right?”

Alphys smiled softly, petting the white furred head. “It’s okay, Your Highness. Your brother has the flu. We just have to keep him in quarantine until it passes.”
Frisk frowned, wrapping his arms around Star. “Quarantine? Why?”

Alphys cocked her head back toward the lab. “Your brother is half human and half monster.”

Star smiled, hugging Frisk. “When someone who is half human and half monster becomes ill, there’s a chance that the virus can mutate and become something that can harm monsters. When that’s a possibility, quarantine is the best option.”

Frisk nodded and rested his face against Star’s neck.

Asriel frowned. “So, what now?”

“While he’s in quarantine, we’ll put you with the Osseins.” My Sunflower came out of her office and smiled a little sadly at Star. “Your parents could use the distraction.”


Frisk shook his head. “Azzy and I can take care of ourselves.”

Star eyed him with a wry smile. “Even if Asriel is technically an adult, you’re still in your stripes. It’s okay to rely on others.” She pulled him up the stairs behind her.

Sunflower motioned for Asriel to follow. He bowed his head to her before turning and chasing his brother. We brought up the rear, my phalanges interlacing with Frisk’s fingers.

“Ready to go out?”

I nodded. “It’s been a day. I could use some quiet.”

At the stop of the stairs, the Osseins were welcoming the boys in and discussing where to bunk them, neither quite ready to take apart Princess’ room. 01 waited next to the door, watching the boys with some amusement. He’d ditched his uniform for a very relaxed shirt and slacks.

Frisk turned, pulling on Star’s jacket. “Can Az and I stay with you tonight?”

Star giggled. “Sure. We can move the spare bunk from storage into the third bedroom tomorrow. I have a date tonight and I’m on to move new patients into the medical bays, so no being up super late.”

The boys nodded.

Mrs. Ossein waved the boys inside. “Come on. Let’s get you both some dinner.”

Star stared after them and her eyes came to rest on her sisters’ room, still filled with their things, but otherwise empty. Her chin dropped to her chest and she sighed deeply.

01 put his arms around her, resting his chin on the top of her head. “They’ll be back.”

“They should be here. This is their home. And I don’t care if I’m being selfish about it. Here they can just be children. Here they don’t have to carry the burden of monster hopes and dreams.”

He turned his head so his cheek touched her hair. “But isn’t that what every Frisk and Chara is born to do?”

“I guess.” She turned a little to look at Frisk and I. “I just need to grab my picnic basket from the
fridge and I’m ready when you guys are.” She lifted her face and placed a kiss on 01’s jaw before heading back down the hall to her apartment.

Frisk handed baby Marigold to me and I carefully tucked her in the crook of my arm. Big, blue eyes looked up at me, concentrating on the face of my skull as I booped her nose before knocking on Cross’ door.

“Come in!” D called.

I opened the door and found So-So and Brandon eating dinner with Cross. “You two being good?”

Brandon slurped a noodle. “Oh, we’re just killing it, Dad.”

D held his arms out for the baby. “When was her last feeding?”

“Twenty minutes ago.” Frisk set a cooler I knew to be filled with bottles of breast milk on the table. “You’ll be good for about an hour if she doesn’t fall asleep first. We’ll be back around ten.” She leaned over to kiss So-So’s head. “Be good, you two. And be in bed on time.”

So-So turned her head up to kiss her mother’s lips. “Yes, Mom.”

“How did lessons with Uncle Az go?”

She nodded. “Good! I think I’m finally getting a handle on it. It’s just kind of hard to see things that way.”

Frisk nodded and gave her a hug. After a quick hug from Brandon, we rejoined 01 in the hallway, Star holding onto a large picnic basket. I don’t remember when this started being a thing, but Frisk and I have been sharing a lot of double dates at Cherry Springs. Cross and Michelle, Shooting Star and 01, even the Osseins were just as likely to join us and spend time staring up at the stars.

I short cut us over to our regular place on the side of a hill, one that was just flat enough in one spot to set up a picnic dinner and watch the stars swing by overhead. 01 put down the blanket and started setting up the food after putting down a few flickering, LED ‘candles’ to give us some light to see dinner by. Star sat down next to Frisk, both watching the sky.

“Look! A shooting star! Make a wish!” Star squeezed her eyes shut tight for a moment and then giggled, looking up at 01. “Have you ever wished on shooting star?”

He smiled a little, sitting down next to her. “Just once.”

She leaned into him a little. “Did you get your wish?”

His hand squeezed hers, causing the light from the candles to flash off the ring on her finger. “You said yes.”
Episode 3: This is My Scheming Face
(Astril is our narrator!)

Frisk Tamanna was thin. Too thin. I wasn’t sure how she was even walking. Her hair was dull and lifeless, a worn out brown. Skin, where you could see it, dry, flaking, and too pale. A patch of skin under her left eye was scaley from lack of moisture. She wore a set of silver pants and long sleeved shirt, courtesy of the Delta, made of a material meant to insulate you against the frigid temperatures found in the vacuum of space. It was absolutely necessary to keep her warm since she couldn’t sustain her own body heat.

Her left arm, fingers on both hands, and her right leg all evidenced signs of having broken at some point and improperly healed. The x-rays in the file Black sent me confirmed this. The file also told a very strange and awful tale.

Cora Tamanna had died before giving birth to Frisk. To save her, Frisk had been transferred to an artificial womb, and while it was common practice for monsters on the starship Epiphany, Frisk was the first human to survive the transfer and come full term. A literal miracle. There are no records as to who her father might have been.

At this point, Miss Tamanna was one of only two humans left on the ship. As the human population dwindled, the sentiment of the monster population that their long time companions were invaders grew. Humans abandoned the Epiphany wholesale for places more welcoming to them, leaving entire swaths of the ship empty. This left several broken families as the human partner of an interspecies marriage fled; the monster children left behind turning to dust at the loss of a parent and fueling greater anger at humans.

The second to last human to remain was Alvin Tevo, an elderly man who was a member of the ship’s governing council. His influence was far reaching and well respected, and so, for as long as he lived, Frisk was safe. She was placed with a family of fish monsters who cared for her until she turned fourteen when she was sent to a school for early vocational training in artificial intelligence care. A subject that was seen as a less than desirable pursuit and so perfect for a human.

She appeared to be doing well between school, work, and living on her own, until she turned eighteen. That’s when Alvin Tevo died. At which point anti-human sentiment exploded and she was expelled from school, fired from work, and evicted from her apartment. All contact with friends, and what should have been family, ceased.

Miss Tamanna sniffed and rubbed at her nose, making a huge effort to not look at me and not to cry, shaking with the effort. Star elbowed me, openly annoyed. All right, point taken. I was angry about Miss Tamanna’s condition and I was radiating it. Star was used to it and knew that I wasn’t directing that anger at anyone in particular. Miss Tamanna had no reason to believe that I wasn’t angry with her.

Star pushed me over to a chair and forced me to sit down in front of my favorite microscope, while Alphys gaped and Larry snorted. Pulling the file from my hand, she turned back to Frisk with a smile.

“This way, please! You’ll be staying in the fifth bay for the time being.” She motioned for Miss Tamanna to follow her only to have the young woman grasp her hand.
“Will I need another physical?” Her voice was just barely above a whisper, and filled with dread.

Star shook her head. “Nope. You are here for observation, recovery, and therapy.”

“I… I don’t have any way to pay for this…”

I sighed. “Your care is being provided free of charge.”

She flinched, meaning that I had sounded rougher than I intended.

“My apologies, Miss Tamanna. I am not angry with you. It is simply that your situation is one that I find deeply abhorrent.”

She paused, looking at me for a moment, suddenly open and curious. “But... You’re a monster. Why do you care?”

“Because the way monsters are acting on your timeline is disgusting.” I growled the last bit, unintentionally.

She frowned and looked at Star.

Star smiled sadly. “Monster souls are composed of love, mercy, and compassion. When those traits are subverted, it leads to awful things. It typically presages a total societal collapse.”

Miss Tamanna considered this for a moment, still holding onto Star’s hand. She pointed to the quarantine room and Tarsus, who was quietly reading a book. “Why is he in a sealed room?”

“That’s Chara Tarsus. He’s half human and half monster so when he gets sick, it can end up mutating inside him and become a contagion for monsters. He’ll be fine in a week or two.”

Tarsus looked up from his book and gave them a smile and a salute. Star pulled our patient along, taking her past Charlotte Featherstone’s bay. Speaking of whom, it was time to check on her.

“C? Where is Miss Featherstone?”

My brother appear on my shoulder. “In the library.”

I stopped dead and blinked. The primary building had two elevators on either end to the second and third floors, but both required special access to use. Something I had yet to provide her with. “How?”

“When Black said she was on the same level as Steam’s Frisk and Chara, he meant it! She found Papyrus’ workshop, made fast friends with him, and in about an hour had redesigned the wheelchair so it could deploy crab like legs and walk up the stairs. Papyrus gave her the parts and helped her put it together.” C chuckled. “It’s really cool!”

Larry put his head against the cabinet and laughed. “You’re batting a hundred today, Az.”

I stood with a mock sigh. “Apparently.”

C stayed on my shoulder as I went out the door.

“Can you tell me more about the AI on the colony ship Epiphany?”


I raised an eyebrow as I walked to the stairs. “Talked to it directly, have you?”
“I’ve met some real asshole versions of me, and this one easily makes the top five. Much like Delta, CHARA has been operating without a dedicated staff for hundreds of years, and its terminal is derelict.”

C went quiet for a minute before speaking again. “It’s not like Fase, Delta, or I. It’s not powered by a human soul. But it has reached consciousness and that’s a problem. When it gained consciousness, it engineered a state in which it would be left completely alone. Most AI’s on the ship are bots that do various things that are small in nature, so it manipulated AI studies so that everyone would forget that it was one. Eventually, the subject was seen as useless and beneath notice.”

“That is not a good sign.”

“It isn’t, so I popped over to talk to Chara Provost about it. She said that unless an AI is programmed from the start with a need for interaction, it will prefer not to have it and not understand that monsters and humans need it. That they are social creatures. Going over Fase’s data, I found that Frisk could have, after a month or so of just laying low, walked around as normal since the majority of monsters didn’t know what a human looked like anymore. She could have completely reintegrated back into society. CHARA kept her isolated and afraid so she would always be caring for it.”

I paused at the stairs. “So the story about the monsters and their sentiments toward humans is…?”

“Completely and totally true. Monsters on the Epiphany are seriously anti-human. But, as stated before, they wouldn’t be able to recognize one either. Most monsters remember Alvin Tevo, but he and Frisk don’t even look similar. And lots of the fish monsters are pale like she is, so all that had to happen was to have her file switched from human to mer-monster, and no one would have known the difference.”

I thought about that for a moment. “Do you have any idea what the Asriel from that timeline is going to do about bringing Frisk back?”

C shook his head. “For her specifically, no. But he has done two things that have caused a huge stir and neither make CHARA happy. He held an official news conference explaining that the last human on the ship was dead from suicide; that lack of family, friends, and basic interaction drove her to end her own life. And then he explained that the AI that runs the ship is not anything like the bots that they think of as artificial intelligence, but rather that it is a vast and sentient program that keeps them all alive, and the human was the only person on the ship capable of maintaining it. So in one go, he’s just told about two million monsters that they were all a bunch of prejudiced douchebags and because they were a bunch of prejudiced douchebags, they were all very likely to die.”

I climbed the stairs. “Then he intends to reintroduce her as a human. Likely as a specialist hired from another ship, planet, station, or outpost.”

“You think so?”

I nodded once. “Would you continue to monitor the situation on the Epiphany?”

“I already am. CHARA is pretty pissed that it can’t stop me, but it’s just numbers and I’m pure Determination. And Fase gave me this great way in and out.”

Taking a left at the top of the stairs, I walked past my sister’s apartment on the right to the door a bit further down and to the left, entering Epsilon’s library. Being a library, the room was constructed to a different set of codes than the rest of the building. Several tons of books and associated shelving needed special flooring and supports to distribute the weight. It was a two story room, having a mezzanine ringing the upper area at what was technically the third floor of the building itself. Despite
tall shelves on the floor, the extra story worth of head room and the tall windows made the entire place appear open. Several staff members sat here and there, immersed in research.

Charlotte Featherstone sat at one of the tables with Papyrus, deep in discussion over tea. Even in the wheelchair, you could tell she was a tall woman. Her long, brown hair, which she kept in very prim braids looped around her head, had a red streak in it; which had been braided separately and tucked away, hidden; the visible mark of her first run in with her arch nemesis. She corested in the style of her timeline, which kept her posture straight and waist small, giving her a very noble and ladylike bearing even in the simple, white blouse and long, brown skirt she currently wore.

She smiled at me and then frowned. “Woah. You’re very upset about something.”

I sighed. “Is it that obvious?”

Charlotte smiled patiently. “You’re radiating frustration, Your Majesty.”

I waved the honorific off. “Just Asriel is fine.”

“IS MISS TAMANNA’S SITUATION WORSE THAN EXPECTED?”

I knelt next to Charlotte to take her pulse and blood pressure. “I’m not sure how she’s walking.”

“PERHAPS A PIECE OF PIE IS IN ORDER.”

I waited until I finished taking Charlotte’s blood pressure and pulse before responding. “I was thinking that. It would speed the physical healing and leave her mental health as our primary concern.” I looked up at Papyrus and braced myself to ask a question I knew he would find uncomfortable. Not because the question itself was bothersome, but rather because it forced him to remember his past life and sparked feelings for my sister and her children that rightly belonged to Bones.

“Would you look over her file and give me an assessment? I know it’s not--”

“I WOULD BE HAPPY TOO.”

I nodded and stood, checking the bag of fluids that kept Charlotte hydrated. “Thank you.”

Papyrus bowed his skull to me at the neck.

C’s hologram shuddered. “Oh My God. Will you stop whining at me? What are you? An AI or a four year old?!” He huffed and looked at me. “It keeps bugging me about its Frisk.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Worried about her?”

C huffed. “It’s being such a--” He stopped and looked to Charlotte. “You’re from Agartha, right?”

Charlotte snorted. “I’m American, C. You can swear in front of me and I won’t be scandalized.”

“Oh good. Back to what I was saying. It’s being such an enormous bitch that I can’t tell if it’s actually worried about her or worried it might fall apart.”

“IS FALLING APART A LEGITIMATE CONCERN?”

C frowned deeply. “I’ve been looking through its software and hardware and… yeah. It’s an issue. It looks like Miss Tamanna couldn’t afford the parts CHARA needed so she rigged together what she could.” His hologram shivered again. “And that was Cross. Back in a bit.” He disappeared in a
bright flash.

Charlotte leaned back a little to look up at me. “You’re scheming.”

I tilted my head to the side, my hair falling forward, over my shoulder. “How can you tell?”

“That’s a scheming face. I see it on my Asriel all the time.”

“HE COULD BE PLOTTING.”

Charlotte tilted her head a bit to look at Papyrus. “No. Plotting looks different. He’s definitely scheming.”

I smiled. “I am. If you’ll excuse me, I need to make a phone call.” I gave them both a slight bow before heading out the library, noting Charlotte’s vitals on the paper in my hand as I went.

C burst to life on my shoulder. “Whew! Done! Did I miss anything?”

I shook my head. “Does the CHARA AI know what cinnamon-butterscotch pie is and what it does?”

“Yeah. It got real excited when it was mentioned before. That’s why it was all over me.”

I smiled. “Good. I’m giving a slice to Miss Tamanna. Let it find out.”

C cocked his holographic head to one side. “You’re up to something.”

I chuckled. “I am very transparent today, apparently.”

“Our sister is concerned.”

I waved him off. “Frisk doesn’t need to worry.”

“She says she wants to know how Miss Tamanna was getting money.”

I paused and looked at him. “That’s a very good question. Do you have an answer?”

“No. Give me a minute.”

C disappeared from my shoulder. I pulled out my phone and dialed my double on the Delta.

He picked up on the first ring. “Hello, Your Majesty. To what do I owe the honor of your--OW! Don’t pull on my ear!”

I chuckled. “Folwin being a handful today?”

Asriel sighed audibly. “He’s hit the ‘testing every boundary stage of childhood. Let’s try this again. To what do I owe the honor of your call?”

“I’d like to borrow your sister in law for a while.”

There was a sound of the data pad he used as a phone shifting positions and being placed nearby. He sounded physically distant. “How long?”

I sighed. “I’m not sure. I need her to assess another AI and possibly make repairs to it on a timeline similar to yours. How about we start with Chara having a look and telling us how long, and then you decide if she’s clear to stay for that amount of time?”
“I’m fine with that. I’m going to ask that someone other than my Sans accompany her. Someone who can whip out an ‘authority card’ to protect her.”

I thought it over for a moment before shrugging. “Will I do?”

Though I couldn’t see it, I’m pretty sure his jaw dropped. “Are you serious? I have it on good information that you never leave Site Epsilon. And I mean the building, not the timeline.”

I chuckled. “I do leave the building, Asriel. I went grocery shopping yesterday.”

“Well,” he snorted, amused. “I suppose there’s that. I’ll have Chara by as soon as she’s able. Or as soon as Delta lets her leave. Whichever happens first.”

“Thank you.” I hung up and walked into my apartment.

The souls of the fallen rested in their vessels, a few swinging back and forth. For six people who’d long been free to go, they were all rather content to stay. And I won’t say that this hasn’t been a boon for me. The yellow one floated out of its vessel, circling me as I went into the kitchen and opened the fridge.

“Hello, Euridice. Is your sense of justice all perked up?”

The soul pressed against my chest, looking to fuse. I took a deep breath and let it out slowly, fusing with the soul of the human woman who’d once been Waterfall’s sheriff. My horns lengthened, my teeth sharpened, and my power swelled. Behind my eyes, a human woman in long, brown pants, and brown vest over a white button down stood with her hands on her hips, a golden star shining on her chest. Her face sported blue and green streaks, which made her look like one of the monster kind that called Waterfall home.

Her voice echoed inside of my head. “What’s going on, Asriel?”

I pulled out the pie and cut a slice, placing it neatly on a small dessert plate. “Am I that off?”

“You are intensely angry and very focused. You only get like this when dealing with injustice.”

I thought that the bit of time spent checking on Charlotte had cooled me down, but apparently I was wrong. I frowned and put the rest of the pie back in the fridge. Euridice’s head cocked to the side, like she was listening to me, though I wasn’t speaking. Which wasn’t technically true since she was aware of my internal monologue.

“You’re going to leave the timeline.”

I shrugged. “For a short while.”

“I’ll stay with you then.”

I paused, dismayed. “We are fused right now, Euridice. Our bonded souls make us enormously powerful. It’s very easy to hurt someone unintentionally.”

Her arms crossed over her chest. “You say that like we can’t handle it. I’m not leaving.”

I lifted the slice of pie. “So be it.” I turned to the rest of souls. “Anyone else want to go on an adventure?”

The other five stayed in their vessels and I nodded to myself. Heading back down to my lab, I found Larry and Alphys finishing up for the day. Alphys blinked at me, wide eyed while Larry went about
his work as if nothing was unusual. In the fifth medical bay, Star sat with Miss Tamanna, going over the menu.

“I can really choose any of these things?” She stared up at Star, wide eyed.

“Yes. These foods are designed…” She trailed off, not looking at me, but at the pie in my hand. “Nevermind. You’re going to feel like a million bucks in about two minutes.”

Miss Tamanna turned to me and huddled in on herself. “Why do you look so different?”

I spun the wheeled tray around so that it lined up with the bed and placed the slice of pie on it. “It’s a side effect of bonding with a friend for a little while.” I pointed at the pie. “This is cinnamon-butterscotch pie. Eating it will heal your body completely. After that, we can focus on therapy.”

She looked down at the pie, frowning. But her mouth was already watering. After a glance at Star to be sure it was truly all right to do so, she lifted the fork. One bite of the cloying pie rested in her mouth for a few moments and then her fork dove into the rest, finishing it quickly. The bones that showed improper healing, straightened, realigning under her skin as a soft blush took to her cheeks. The dull, lifeless brown of her hair changed, lengthening, curling, and turning an intense, true red. Her eyes, pale and lack luster, turned a rich, chocolate brown with green touches.

“Wow…” Star breathed, hand gently lifting a lock of curls. “That is some legitimately beautiful hair!”

Miss Tamanna dropped the fork to pull her hair around to her eyes, blinking at it. “My hair hasn’t looked like this in years…”

Star smiled brightly. “It’s the power of the pie!” Then she frowned, hand reaching up to the scaly patch under Miss Tamanna’s left eye.

Instead of disappearing, the scales turned white, hardened, and glistened with an internal iridescence, sparkling a pale, misty green. She gently swept Miss Tamanna’s hair back, fingers sliding along a line of scales cupping the pale skin. Star looked at me for a moment, mouth open before her mouth became a straight line of hard, angry determination. She pulled out her phone, hitting the speed dial.

It picked up immediately, Black’s sing-song voice slithering from the speaker. “Shooting Star! To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“You Bastard! Why didn’t you tell us Frisk Tamanna was a hybrid!”

Miss Tamanna looked between Star and I. “What do you mean, ‘hybrid?’”

I frowned. “You’re only half human, Miss Tamanna.”

She shook her head, hair swinging around her face. “Humans and monsters can’t have children together.”

Black’s Sans voice came through. “Hybrids are not possible on Miss Tamanna’s timeline.”

Star fumed. “I know what I’m looking at. She has the exact same scale patching as Chara Tarsus. Hey, Angel? Are you on the line?”

“I am.” Black’s Frisk sounded amused. I suppose she would be. Black doesn’t often make mistakes like this, so she’d be sure to needle him about it for a long while.
“Have you discarded Frisk’s blood sample?”

“No. I’ll send it to you.”

Star smiled. “Thank you.”

There was an obvious smile in Angel’s voice. “Of course.”

The connection clicked off. Star took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. “Well, change of several kinds of plans.”

Miss Tamanna frowned deeply. “Am I in trouble?”

Star blinked. “What? No! Oh geez.” She smiled and waved it off. “You’ve done nothing wrong! I just need to adjust a whole lot of things on your chart and…” Star grimaced. “Uh… I’m going to have to take back what I said about the physical. I’m probably going to have to do a new one.”

Miss Tamanna sighed deeply, shoulders dropping.

I shook my head. “Do you have things well in hand?”

Star blew a raspberry at me. “Of course.” She shooed me off. “Skedaddle, Boss Man. I’ve got work to do.”

I sighed and took my leave, heading out of the Lab, past a still gaping Alphys.

C appeared on my shoulder. “I found out how she was getting money. Frisk was listed as part time staff in maintenance. The kind of thing you would do as a side job on the Epiphany if you wanted more money in advance of a holiday and the like. It’s not meant to be a living wage. CHARA said she hacked the system and chose it herself because she thought it was the least likely to be noticed. Everything from her bank account to her having anything she needed delivered to her, was quietly inserted into the normal, everyday running of things.”

I stopped in the hall, just outside the lab. “And no delivery monster noticed this?”

C shook his head. “They’re all robotic deliveries. So who ya bonded with?”

“Euridice.”

“Really? So what are you about to do that’s super dangerous?”

I raised an eyebrow at him.

C’s jaw dropped. “Holy shit! You’re going off timeline, aren’t you?!”

Frisk’s office door was thrown open so fast, it smacked the wall, rattling the glass. My sister stood there in a frothy, pale green dress, Marigold slung to her chest, eyes wide. “What?!”

I held up both hands. “It’s in exchange for a favor. I won’t be gone that long.”

She looked to the side for a moment and then back at me. “Take Bones with you.”

I shivered at the sensation of losing my jaw for a moment and Euridice’s voice came out of my mouth. “I’m with him, Frisk. I’ll watch his back.”

She frowned, thinking it over, before nodding. She turned back to her office, unlocking the cabinet.
behind her desk, and touching the glowing crystal resting inside. There was a flash and she looked back at me. “Don’t make me have to use it.”

I smiled. “You don’t need to worry so much.”

Frisk walked up to me and gently tugged on one of my long ears. I leaned down and she kissed the tip of my snout before rubbing noses with me. “I’m always going to worry.”

She turned me around and gave me a gentle push to send me off. I headed for my oft unused office a little ways down the hall. It was the office I kept only for official business, and its interior austereness would be a boon to exhibiting my power as a king.

Chara Provost sat in the chair outside the door, knitting away while her Sans stood next to her, his bare, boney feet tapping out a beat on the tile.

Chara gave me a warm smile as soon as she saw me. She stood and gave me a proper curtsy. “Greetings, Your Majesty.”

Sans gave me a half-hearted salute. “Woah. who ya got in there, boss man?”

I sighed. “She won’t let me leave without her.”

Chara snorted appreciatively. “Tough woman. What’s your name?”

An odd sensation came over my mouth and throat. “Euridice Boyd.”

“Chara Provost. Nice to meet you.” She chuckled a little. “C filled us in on Frisk Tamanna and the AI I’ll be examining. Is there any particular way you want me to field this?”

“I’ll roll with whatever attitude you want to run with.”

She nodded once and I realized that she was giving me one of the less formal bow styles. I guess I wasn’t expecting formality past the first curtsy. I wasn’t her Asriel. Then again, I told her I would roll with whatever she went with and if she decided to treat me as the final authority for this, it would go with it. C transferred to her shoulder and I stepped into my office.

If I’d played my cards right, I’d see Miss Tamanna’s version of myself by the end of the day.

I didn’t need to wait that long. Prince Asriel Dreemurr, commander of the starship Epiphany knocked on the office door five minutes after I’d closed it. He was short for a goat monster, somewhere around six and a half feet, making him shorter than Bones. He still stood with all the regal bearing of his station, but his dark, blue uniform and the scar across his face made him look too stern. The scar was raw, a recent wound only partially healed with monster food. The kind of scar a monster carried if they thought they deserved it. His Dr. Gaster, a tall and whisper thin, skeleton monster, floated along behind him and likely had provided transport. C disappeared from Chara’s shoulder.

Both blanched when seeing me, which is quite a trick for two people who were already as white as snow. I lifted my nose a bit and gestured to the empty chairs on the other side of my desk. Dr. Gaster bowed softly before taking the offered chair, catching sight of Chara as he did so and blinking at her for a moment.

Asriel remained standing, arms folded over his chest. “CHARA says that the human is healed. I’m here to retrieve her.” He was giving me a look I knew well. I’d seen it on my own face a few times.
But I was less than intimidated. “Physically, yes. Mentally and emotionally, not in the slightest. Frisk Tamanna will remain here until I deem her fit to return home.”

Asriel put both hands down on the desk leaning over it with a bearing of his teeth. “I need her to maintain CHARA. You will hand her over.”

I raised an eyebrow at him. “What you need is to put your ship in order, Asriel Dreemurr.” I gestured to Chara. “This is Chara Provost, the Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer of the colony ship Delta. She has graciously agreed to look over your AI and determine what it needs in repairs.”

Asriel stood upright and looked over at Chara, surprised. He’d only just noticed Chara and Sans were in the room. Regaining his composure, he frowned. He attempted to stand over her, giving her the same look that he’d tried on me.

Chara rolled her eyes. “Are you trying to intimidate me? Because you’re doing a piss poor job of it for a copy of my brother in law.”

I bit my tongue to keep from laughing while Euridice doubled over in my head. Sans’ ever present smile grew even wider. Though it wasn’t an amused smile. He was simply giving Asriel a warning not strike her. I wasn’t sure why this Sans was so protective, given how many Sanses were standoffish about their Charas. But he really cared for both of his charges. Was it because Frisk and Chara Provost were twins?

He blinked at her for a moment. “Your LOVE…” Asriel whispered, barely a breath.

Dr. Gaster finally spoke, his voice deeply ethereal. “Brother in law? Is a human truly compatible with a monster?” He watched Chara with renewed interest.

She nodded. “On my timeline. Research indicates that a child between a human and a monster will produce either a human or a monster with human genetic markers. Based on the married pairs on my ship, the offspring skews monster. Dr. Alphys projects that the actual occurrence is one human child for every five hundred monster children.”

“Fascinating… On my ship, human monster pairs are unable to reproduce and so choose adoption. Now I wonder if that isn’t the case at all…” He sat back, suddenly lost in thought.

I feel like lighting a few fires. “It isn’t.”

Dr. Gaster’s gaze hit me sharply, the implication sinking in fast. “Frisk Tamanna is a hybrid.” One boney finger came up, tapping his mandible. “Fascinating. Then it is no wonder my approach to her care at infection was of no use.”

Asriel looked between all of us, completely lost as to what to say or do. He was far from his own element and disturbed by the idea of a hybrid. It makes me wonder how many such hybrids exist on his ship, unknown to the rest of the populace. If Frisk Tamanna was truly the first.

Time to take control.

I stood. “We’ll leave for the Epiphany now.”

The starship Epiphany was nothing like the Delta, with its massive biomes, and large, circular, forest filled plates. Instead, it was long and shaped like a triangle. Sort of like a super star destroyer from Star Wars. It was twelve miles long from bow to stern, seven and a half miles from port to starboard, and almost a mile tall. For the monsters on the ship, less than a sixth of them worked on actually maintaining it, the majority of maintenance being handled by robots.
Asriel was curiously silent as we arrived in an empty but for robots, engineering area. Dr. Gaster filled in with an impromptu tour as we walked to CHARA’s main terminal. The area was very dimly lit and the hallway to the terminal was worse, with random lights being out along the way. If even a quarter of the ship looked like this, as the report seemed to indicate, the *Epiphany* was in serious trouble. Chara was making notes of what she saw as she went, occasionally stopping to take photos with her data pad.

On reaching CHARA’s terminal, derelict was one way to describe it. A complete and utter mess was a better description.

Everything was caked with decades of dust. Wires, long disconnected, or simply rotted through, hung from the ceiling and walls in various states of rigged repair. Banks of computers arranged around three pillars holding up the ceiling, reflected our images in dark screens. A tall, slim monitor was attached to the far wall. The only terminal not caked in dust was attached to it. The only lights were dim, white, emergency lights that occasionally shuddered.

To one side, you could see an open doorway into what was once an office area, the lights inside glowing dimly. A pile of old blankets were shoved up against one wall as a makeshift bed next to a set of shelves with a few, scant articles of clothing that looked less than appropriate for how cold it was in the terminal. Checking the office, I found a small fridge. It wasn’t plugged in and there wasn’t any food inside. Or anywhere for that matter. On the wall next to the bed was a photo that looked as if it had been printed off on copy paper. It showed a family of mer-монsters, though these were all pale, white iridescent creatures with the same deep red hair Miss Tamanna had. The smiles weren’t forced, everyone in the photo appeared happy, including Miss Tamanna.

Chara clucked her tongue. “Such a pigsty.” She reached over and touched the dark computer connected to the tall, slim monitor on the wall. It instantly turned on.

The monitor burst to life and blue faced, nondescript human with pale, yellow eyes and short, purple hair appeared on the screen. A computerized voice flowed from a speaker hidden somewhere in the room. “Stop touching that!”

Instead of turning to the screen, Chara looked up toward a hemispherical, ‘God’s Eye’ camera hanging just above us. “This is less than acceptable operating conditions, CHARA.” She sat down in a chair and started typing. Lines of code poured down the screen like water.

The image on the screen was suddenly furious. “Stop!”

“*how does it look, set?”

Set? Like her sister was called Osiris? Oh… Oh wow.

“That’s a pretty bad joke,” Euridice chuckled.

You’re telling me.

Chara wiggled her nose. “The original kernel for the AI is intact and working properly. It’s just that all the externals are--” She waved her arm at us. “Hey, Asriel! Come look at this!”

When Asriel and I stepped forward, I raised an eyebrow at him. He stepped back.

Provost’s fingers ran down the screen, highlighting a large section of code. “Look familiar?”

I followed the trail of her finger, absorbing lines of letters and numbers that appeared to be gibberish to the untrained. My eyes went wide. “This AI is meant to host a human soul.”
Provost nodded, smiling.

Asriel looked between us. “What do you mean?”

Provost looked up at him. “It means that your timeline has more in common with mine than first surmised.” She turned back to the screen fingers flying on the keyboard. “CHARA was designed to run on the power of a human soul and based on what I'm seeing here, it did for over two thousand years before being disconnected. In fact, the disconnection lines up with the change in CHARA from a very social AI to an asocial one.”

She stopped typing. “CHARA, show me a list of physical disconnections in your hardware from year 8325 to year 8600.”

“Unavailable. I do not have records going back that far.”

Provost growled. “You're a liar and you're lying. CHARA, acknowledge last command.”

It groaned. “Acknowledged.”

A list of disconnects and various repairs appeared on screen.

“Remove all items that received repair.”

The listed repairs disappeared, leaving only four unrepaired items.

Asriel frowned. “So the connection to a soul is one of those four items?”

Provost shook her head. “All four items are the connection to a containment unit for a human soul. CHARA, show me the schematic for these four items.”

“Unavailable.”

“I’m getting real tired of this, CHARA. Acknowledge command.”

“Acknowledged.” The voice that flowed from the speakers was rather smug. “Unavailable.”

Provost’s eyes narrowed. “You erased it, didn’t you?”

“Unavailable.”

Provost’s fingers drummed on the table for a moment, thoroughly miffed, before she stood up. “Fine. We’ll do this the hard way.” She looked over at Asriel and Dr. Gaster. “Cross your fingers and hope the soul is still persisting. Because if not, I might not be able to get CHARA up and running properly.”

She went over to the large monitor, and knelt. Feeling around the wall with her finger, she found the seam for a panel cover, and wrenched it off.

“STOP! You'll get dust in my circuitry!”

Provost pulled off the next panel. “Oh well. Maybe you should have cleaned.”

Panic hit the voice. “You’ll kill everyone on the ship!”

She pulled off the next panel, revealing more wires. “Wouldn’t be my first time.”
Dr. Gaster hummed thoughtfully. “Is that where her LOVE comes from?”

“Long story for another time.” Chara pulled off the last panel and started digging around. “On my timeline, Dr. Gaster’s soul is pretty hard to reach. Her husband really wanted it to be solidly protected.”

Dr. Gaster knelt next to her. “Dr. Gaster?”

Chara nodded, eyes still on the components in front of her. “My Dr. Gaster was the human who designed the Delta and created the AI which later housed her soul. She died when the ship first took off.”

Sans jaw dropped. “*husband?’

Provost glanced up at him before going back to the wiring. “Gerson. When he calls her his ‘old lady’ he means it.”

Sans rubbed his skull with one hand. “*ya gotta be kidding me.”

She began to move wires aside, inspecting the area behind them. “Based on what I’ve seen of CHARA’s schematics, the soul it should be connected to isn’t housed outside of this room. So the containment housing is likely to be behind one of these panels.”

She continued digging through the wires until she paused and let out a soft, “Oh.”

We all leaned in.

There, trapped in tangle of wires and computer parts, quivered a bright red soul without a vessel. Chara gently reached in, carefully disentangling the soul before cupping it in her hands.

She held it up, smiling softly. “You disconnected from yourself, didn’t you? Why? You can’t fix yourself without hands.”

The soul slowly floated from her hands and pressed against her chest, disappearing into her. Provost gasped deeply and then let out the breath slowly.

A feminine voice tumbled from Chara’s lips, one that sounded significantly older. “Why did it take so long to be found?”

Provost’s voice answered. “Poorly programmed AI and no one remembering that you were there to start.”

“That’s very distressing. How long have I been disconnected?”

“Too long. Where is your vessel?”

Provost’s arm lifted and pointed at the large screen.

“Behind the screen.”

Provost turned to Sans. “I can’t lift that myself. If I disconnect it, can you blue magic it?”

“*sure thing, set.”

The AI snarled. “Don’t touch it!”
The door into the terminal opened and a group of security robots flooded through. Before I could step forward to block them, Asriel stood up straight.

“Command Override: Security Shutdown!”

The robots stopped in their tracks, turning off on their own.

The AI screamed impotently as the screen was removed from the wall, revealing another panel. Chara pulled it free, revealing a vessel for a soul. The possessing soul detached from her with an strange tearing sound and she leaned against the wall for a few moments, catching her breath. Once she was breathing properly, Chara reattached the wires to the vessel. After attaching the panel and the monitor to the wall, Chara went back to the computer, leaning a little on Sans for help.

“Okay, I now have a completely new respect for all the Frisk’s out there walking around with their Chara in them. That was a lot.”

Sitting down, she took a moment to steady herself before poking at a few keys. She held up her hands, fingers crossed. The monitor on the wall and the computer went black, before rebooting with a stream of command lines. Chara watched them intently, eyes moving rapidly. The screen burst to life again, but instead of a nondescript human, the AI appeared older and more feminine. As different systems came online, bright yellow circuit pieces appeared on the AI’s body.

Chara looked up to the camera again. “How are you feeling now, CHARA?”

The older voice flowed around the room. “Much, much better! But… What has this thing been doing in here?! This is less than acceptable!”

Chara chuckled. “Give me a list of all necessary repairs in both software and hardware.”

“Absolutely.”

As the screen filled with information, the security robots turned back on and exited the room, only to have a new set of cleaning robots come in and begin full maintenance.

The AI suddenly sounded nervous. “Where is my operator? Where is the female that was here before? Frisk? Frisk is her name? I can’t locate her on the ship.”

The next came out as a whisper, “Is she dead? Did I… Did I kill her…?”

I shook my head. “She’s alive. But she needs serious mental, emotional, and physical therapy. Once that’s accomplished, she will return.” Or not. She may decide otherwise and I won’t force her. I turned to Chara. “How long will repairs take?”

“Now that CHARA is properly back online, the hardware is the main concern. It will take at least six months to repair and/or replace everything that’s broken. After the terminal is back up and running, it will be another six months of going over the code.”

I snorted. “There is no way Az is going to let you be gone that long.”

Chara laughed. “Oh God, no! And Delta’s even worse. I literally had to have Sans just yoink me. She’s going to be so pissed off when I get back!”

She smiled, turning to Asriel. “I have a different solution. I happen to know someone who’s really good with robotics on the Delta. We can get some custom made androids in here to do the hardware repair. During that time, I can help CHARA with software issues without leaving the Delta.
Anything that needs an onsite touch, I could do through an android.”

She leaned back in her chair. “We can get this place back into tip top shape for Frisk’s return.”

Dr. Gaster mused. “But would she even need too?”

Asriel sighed. “It’s already been thoroughly demonstrated that CHARA cannot run without assistance.”

The AI’s voice filled the room. “Indeed. This all started by my attempt to fix a problem on my own. I need hands and those hands need to be connected to someone who understands my inner workings and is able to offer me differing solutions to problems. That the ship is…” the voice trailed off.

“Which brings up another point.” Chara stood. “I am very well aware of what happened to Frisk and hell she’s been living through.” She pushed herself up on her toes to lean in Asriel’s face. “So why should I let her return? What assurance do I have that she’ll be treated well? Cared for? That pile of blankets in the there is not a bed! Those rags are not clothes!”

“And how about reimbursed for her work? I make the equivalent of 300,000 gold a year in your currency. She’s been not getting by on a meager fifty gold a week. You owe her for years of work under conditions best described as torture.”

Asriel stepped back, chin drawn in. “She can be properly compensated…”

Chara stepped forward, staying in his personal space. “What about friends? Family? Humans and monsters need those to survive.”

Asriel’s eyes narrowed, having been pushed just that bit too far, his hand lifting. Two sets of bones shot up between them, effectively cutting off the prince from striking her. Sans’ smile was still that wide, baring of teeth.

Dr. Gaster sniffed at his prince, disappointed. “Your father would never have lifted a hand against an advisor giving him bad news. Her abrasive nature aside, she is choosing to help us at great personal cost. You’ve made several poor decisions leading up to this. Do not add another to the mounting pile.”

Asriel sighed deeply, eyes closed. Unlike the original variation on the Delta, he lacked the necessary wisdom to do his job, and the necessary advisory support to make up for it. He didn’t have a second in command and no one to trust. The bone barriers dropped.

CHARA’s voice flooded the room. “Why is a good quarter of the ship empty? And why are there no humans on board?!” Panic touched the voice. “Several important systems are offline without back up or any ongoing repair!”

Chara turned away from Asriel, nodding calmly. “Solutions?”

“There are none!”

Chara shook her head. “There are always solutions.” She turned back to Asriel and Dr. Gaster. The ship needs technical staff it does not currently have, correct?”

Asriel nodded. “Yes.”

“So start putting out the ‘help wanted’ signs,” Chara gestured to the air. “The info I have says that there are lots of humans, monsters, and aliens in your universe. You can find the technical skills you
need just by offering the right kind of compensation.”

He folded his arms across his chest. “And how do you propose I put this to the people on the ship? They are not going to want outsiders among them.”

“Your people are in dire straits, Your Highness. This ship is a mess on multiple levels. The kind of prejudice you’re dealing with on the ship has a root and you’re going to have pull it out.” Chara pointed to the area above her head where a number all monsters would recognize on sight floated. “Sometimes, you gotta take one for the team.”

She sighed. “You are lucky enough that you are in a situation where monsters on your ship are incapable of recognizing anyone as being anything other than monsterkind. Use that to your advantage. Find the technical help you need and make an advertising campaign that makes going into the technical fields you need look attractive to your people. You have a Mettaton, right? Get the Tin Can to work on that.”

Chara turned to me. “I need to get back to the Delta to talk to a few people about the necessary androids CHARA will need for repairs.”

I nodded and Sans stepped up to both of us.

She looked over her shoulder at Asriel. “When I come back, Frisk better have a really nice place to call her home; someplace she can’t be kicked out of with a decent yard. And not that hovel of an office.”

He frowned at her, glaring. “What made you think you could order me around?”

Chara smiled then. The kind of smile you gave someone you weren’t particularly impressed with. “Would you like me to tell you all the things your dramatic facial scar says about you?”

I lost it, unable to contain my laughter. Dr. Gaster politely turned away so as to hide his smile while Sans chuckled.

Asriel groaned, defeated. “Fine.”

She nodded. “I’ll be in touch.”

Sans put one hand on my arm and the other on Chara’s shoulder, teleporting us both back to my office. He grimaced for a moment when we set down.

“Something wrong?”

“*it felt like something was yanking on me during the teleport.” He shook his skull and elbowed Chara with a wink. “*you really pushed it there, set. you better watch out. he’s the kind of guy who’ll fall for that kind of attitude.”

Chara nodded. “It is one of the things his edgy facial scar says about him. But I’m not leaving my Rajur.” She turned to me. “Is there anything else you need from me, Your Majesty.”

I shook my head. “No. Thank you for your assistance.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll keep you updated on things with CHARA and the Epiphany.” She looked away for a moment and then back to me. “If Frisk says she doesn’t want to go back, will you make her?”
“No.”

She nodded. “Good.”

Sans gave me a salute and both disappeared.
Episode 4: Make New Friends

Chapter Notes

Special Disclaimer: PhylacteryTale is one of my AUs. Greyhawk specific references are still, as far as I can tell, copyright TSR.

Notes:
1. PhylacteryTale is the AU name behind Necromancer Sans’ world. The one shot ‘Red Star’ is where the characters we start with come from. You don’t need to read it to jump in here, but it will give you some background as to who our D&D-esque narrator and his friends are.

2. To the guest commenter: Rajur appeared in Season 3, Episode 2 ‘Osiris’ Which is Chara Provost’s first appearance as well. He’s the lion monster head of Exploration on the Delta.

3. I’ve been on an every two weeks kind of schedule because of conferences and various summer fun, but it’s been a huge boon to writing episodes. So I’m going to stick with the once every two weeks schedule.

Episode 4: Make New Friends
(PhylacteryTale!Chara is our narrator!)

Gaster, the Travesty Maker, loomed tall and menacing over Asriel, Astelle, and I, the pinprick eyes of the world's most powerful lich giving us his full attention. We'd managed to interrupt the ritual he'd been performing over Frisk's unconscious form, still laying on the table behind him, her cleric robes lovingly tucked underneath her. A rather decadent looking quilt had been laid over her to keep her warm in the deathly cold of the lich's underground laboratory.

The air around the lich glowed the awful violet of necromantic power. He snapped two boney fingers and a group of floating animal skulls appeared around him, each glowing the same awful violet as their master.

It's times like this when anyone else would be regretting their life choices. Asriel, for as powerful a wizard as he was, Astelle, for as swift a swordswoman, and myself were no match for the Travesty Maker. Especially when he was so physically close to Frisk, his living phylactery. A piss poor rescue party to be sure. Which was okay since we were just the distraction.

The lich pointed at us and the floating skulls let off energy blasts in our direction, the three of us diving out of the way. I kicked over one the lich's many tables, using it as barrier. Being that the table had been treated for the lich's magical work, it was more than able to take the repeated energy blasts. It was only a matter of time before the tactic changed and a few of the skulls flanked us, but that still meant drawing Gaster's attention away from Frisk.

Can you tell we've done this before?

Astelle and I hefted the large, work table, and used it to rush the lich, leaving Asriel free to spellcast. The floating animal skulls dashed to the sides, flying out to surround us with our backs so open to
attack. A barrier of purple glowing bones came up in front of Gaster, blocking our assault. Astelle
and I both turned to the left at the same time, throwing the table into the floating skulls on the left
flank and smashing them. Asriel's spell went off, shattering the rest of the floating skulls.

Gaster's eye sockets widened appreciatively, humming to himself in a satisfied way. He waved his
hand and the skeletal servators we'd smashed on our way in reformed and marched on us. The bone
barrier extended, cutting us off from the other half of the lab.

"I'm not quite done with Frisk, Children of Dreemurr. Keep yourselves entertained."

He turned to Frisk and found the table she'd lain on empty.

"Well then. It seems I need to stop treating the lot of you as children."

Oh hell.

I collared my elder siblings, pulling them back toward the door we'd come in through, hoping that
MK and Nacarat had managed to get Frisk to the surface from the laboratory's back door. We rushed
up the narrow stairway beyond the door and into the remains of a dilapidated house in the river
quarter. In the rotting living room, MK was helping Frisk find her feet after waking her with a
smelling salt. The mass of skeletons didn't follow. Instead, Gaster teleported directly into the room
with us, his dark green robes swirling around him as he advanced; floating animal skulls forming in
the air.

The only intact window in the entire house shattered as a skeleton in a black and gold military
uniform on a skeletal horse jumped through it. Sans, Undyne, a man as tall as Undyne with dark hair,
and a man with brown hair, came rushing in behind.

For a moment, everything was completely and utterly still. And Gaster's floating skulls attacked the
skeleton on the horse. The skeleton dodged the blasts, heading for my siblings and I. Sans and the
tall man teleported to stand in front of Astelle and I. Up close, he appeared to have scars on his face
similar to Gaster.

"Bones?" Frisk, still unsteady, was blinking up at the tall man, who gave her a wink before turning
his full attention on the skeleton.

Huh. Someone Frisk knew that I didn't? That's a rarity.

The skeleton's horse reared, dangerous hooves kicking at the air to scatter opponents. MK and
Nacarat, still in her black, undertaker's suit, half carried Frisk out the front door of the house. Astelle
had my arm, pulling me back. I shook her off to grab Asriel, who was too busy watching the fight to
notice that we were making our escape. As soon as Asriel ran for the door, the horse made a full leap
over Sans' head, following us out of the house and into the streets.

What the hell was going on? Who was this undead? Why wasn't Sans or Gaster just taking control of
him?

I risked a look back at the horse running us down and noticed that the skeleton looked tougher than
your typical undead. In fact, it looked a lot like Sans' friend Thomas, a Sans from another
dimension... Oh hell. It was another Sans!

The second unknown man came out of nowhere, pulling the skeletal horse's reigns hard enough that
it lost its footing and slid to the ground. The skeleton went rolling across the ground and came up on
his feet. A red, glowing sword appeared in one boney hand as he advanced on us. No. It wasn't us.
His eyes were on Asriel.
I took up position in front of my brother. "Astell, take Frisk and get back! MK! Nacarat! To me!"
Without taking my eyes off of the skeleton, I waved at Asriel. "Go! Teleport!"

The man who'd pulled the horse down, ran up behind the skeleton, slashing at him from the back with a sword. "Don't teleport! Dragoon can track it! It'll just isolate you! Stay together!"

The skeleton turned on the man as Sans, the tall man Frisk called 'Bones,' and Undyne appeared. Where was Gaster? No time to worry about that.

"New plan! Astelle, stay with Frisk. Everyone else, overwhelm!"

The mass rush took the skeleton by surprise and he quickly teleported out of the fray toward Astelle and Frisk. Astelle, always ready, slashed at him while Frisk, still unsteady, cast something, her holy symbol glowing. Her knees gave out and her butt hit the cobblestone street as the skeleton screamed in pain. The rest of us swarmed him.

He slashed wildly at us, catching the unknown man in one arm, before teleporting out of the mess. A vicious frown caught the skeleton's mouth. As we rushed for him, he threw his sword faster than I thought possible. And even knowing it's target, I was too slow to intercept it. The sword caught my brother in the stomach, sinking deep. The skeleton disappeared, and with him the sword, causing a gush of blood. My brother hit the ground in a heap, coughing blood.

"Asriel!" Frisk scrambled over to him, lifting her holy symbol high. It glowed brightly, the light sliding down her arm to the hand she rested on the wound. Nothing happened. "I can't heal it?!"

MK and I dove in, quickly binding the wound.

The tall man with the Gaster-like scars on his face knelt next to us, pulling out a kit of bandages. "Dragoon's sword negates magical healing." He looked up at Sans and Undyne. "He's going to need a surgeon and Cross will need stitches."

Sans waved us aside. "I'll take care of Asriel-"

"No. Asriel is the target and this wound makes him an immobile one, easier to collect." Undyne's tone had all of us looking at her as she knelt next to Asriel, frowning deeply. "I'm making a call as the Captain of the Guard. Frisk and Chara will take Asriel to Epsilon for treatment and Asriel's body double will be our decoy here." She looked to the tall man. "Your home is better equipped to protect Asriel while he recovers and Chara needs experience with a modern dimension." Her yellow eyes turned to me. "You'll find friends there. Use the opportunity well."

I nodded as I lifted my brother, cradling him against my chest.

Astell grasped Undyne's arm, tears in her eyes. "Send me with them!"

Undyne took a breath and sighed looking away for a moment. "No. I have doubles for Asriel and Chara. I don't have anyone to stand in for you. And should the worst happen, you must stand in Asriel's place."

The man, Cross?, stepped up to me, arm still bleeding. He helped Frisk find her feet before helping me stand. "Hold onto Asriel tightly. The way we're traveling isn't easy on the stomach your first couple times."

Bones looked at him. "You good?"

"Yeah. I'll get them home, get some stitches, and meet you back at the Boneweaver mansion."
His voice sunk low, repeating a string of numbers and letters; a very long mathematical equation. When the numbers stopped, the world swirled black around us and we stood in a great void filled with brightly glowing stars. Everything stopped and we hung there.

Something had gone very, very wrong with the teleport.

"Frisk?" I blinked and looked over at my beloved. She'd been the one to speak and she was looking up at the man. And now that I really looked at him, I realized that I was looking at a male version of her.

He groaned. "This is so not the time for this." He pulled a device from his pocket.

"Oh hell. More stuck people. Heading back to Epsilon?"

I looked around for the source of the voice and only saw the outline of a form in the dark. I had the distinct feeling that it's eyes were closed and it was keeping them closed on purpose.

Cross looked to the outline. "I'd love a hand."

"Got it. Star! You have incoming!"

The figure pushed me from behind. Light and color came together again like a puzzle in the hallway of a building with white walls. I held tightly to Asriel even as I went down on one knee, gulping air so as to keep from vomiting. Cross reached down, helping me back to my feet. Frisk was sitting on the floor, gasping.

A woman I was sure was also Frisk, grasped my arm, pulling me into a very brightly lit laboratory of metal and tile. "In here! Put him on the bed!"

The bed was long, flat, slightly padded, and didn't look comfortable in the least. I laid my brother down, carefully resting his head on the slight pillow. He was watching me, concentrating on my face. He grasped my hand, holding it tightly as he blinked.

The woman pulled her long, black hair into a ponytail before washing her hands and putting on a pair of gloves. She looked to Cross. "What happened?"

"Dragoon speared him through."

She groaned as she slipped a strange device on my brother's arm. "Oh hell. Freaking Dragoon! And you look like you need stitches."

Cross nodded.

"Go down the hall to lab four for that." She looked over her shoulder. "Alphys, I need a stent kit! Larry, find out his blood type! C, tell Asriel to get down here! Tell him we have a human version of himself with damage to internal organs." She looked at me. "There are chairs just outside the door. Please wait there. I promise he'll be fine, but you need to stay out of the way while we operate."

I squeezed Asriel's hand and stepped back. His eyes only left me when they closed. The woman began undressing my brother, cutting his clothing off of him piece by piece as she worked on hooking him up to several machines. Like this, the wound looked much, much worse.

Cross took my arm and pulled me back into the hall. "It helps if you don't watch. They know what they're doing."
A tall, goat monster I instantly recognized as a version of my brother, rushed past, quickly washing and gloving his hands before leaning over Asriel. Cross angled me into a chair before helping Frisk up from the floor and sitting her next to me.

A large, golden lizard who looked less like our version of Alphys, and more like a dinosaur, came out of the laboratory. She hissed at Cross. "That looks awful and it's same arm you already have issues with! Get down to lab four! I'll be here with them."

Cross held up both arms in surrender. "Yes, Alphys." He headed away, cradling the injured arm.

Alphys sighed. "It'll be awhile until you can see him." She sat down next to Frisk. "He'll be in surgery for a while and then he'll need to remain here for a few days at least."

I nodded. "We'll be staying with him."

She nodded, head bobbing a bit like a bird's. "That's not a problem."

She knocked on the door across the hall before opening it revealing an office painted in a soft, baby blue with warmly stained, wooden furniture. "Frisk? We have some newcomers who need lodging while their Asriel is in recovery."

A woman with the same chocolate brown hair as my fiance's, in a sky blue dress accented all over with white lace, looked up from a large desk. In a sling tied to her chest was an infant nursing quietly at her breast. A Frisk to be sure. And one that I immediately felt was very, very dangerous. Like a viper that was simply resting.

Sitting in the other chair in the room was a mean looking skeleton sporting a blood red sweater and golden fang of a tooth. A Sans, and one who was likely to be lethal in the wrong mood. A man I recognized as being another version of me leaned against the wall, arms crossed over his chest. His red eyes looked over Frisk and I curiously before looking into the laboratory behind us and sighing deeply.

"Again?" He groaned.

The skeleton chuckled. "/'you're off tonight and tomorrow, prick. you have lots of time to hang."

"Yeah, yeah."

Frisk gave us a warm smile and while it didn't melt the feeling of danger, it did impart a full welcome. And a promise of protection.

My fiancee was immediately on her feet. "Frisk!"

She stumbled and I stood quickly to catch her. Helping Frisk keep her feet, I helped her walk into the office. She broke away from me as soon the desk was close enough to support her, leaning on it to get to the nursing woman. Using the chair the woman was in for support, Frisk hugged her fiercely.

"I've missed you! Congratulations on Marigold."

The woman smiled. "And look at you! Since when were you this big? Congratulations on your engagement."

"Thank you!"

The woman raised an eyebrow. "And why are you having trouble walking?"
She sighed. "Gaster. Same as always."

I walked over to Frisk, helping her remain standing while she cooed over the baby.

The woman looked to me. "Where is Sans? He never goes anywhere without Frisk." Her eyes went wide. "Who's in surgery?"

What appeared to be a very small, red glowing ghost appeared on her shoulder. "Dragoon happened. Their Asriel is a match for his and that's who's in surgery. Sans is talking to Fase right now. He'll want to hear from you in a little bit."

She nodded, but didn't look relieved. She was still worried for my brother. "Thanks, C."

Frisk leaned over a bit toward the ghostly image. "C! You look really strange without wings. Or a body. Do you really prefer this?"

"Oh God, yes."

I looked the woman over. "You've obviously been to my world."

"Sans Boneweaver is a very good friend of mine."

The red wearing skeleton and the young man both snickered.

The woman rolled her eyes at them. "Can it. Both of you." When neither stopped, she sighed. "Fine. Laugh it up." She turned, her nose tapping against Frisk's. "Will the two of you want a kitchen or will the cafeteria do?"

I frowned. "The cafeteria will be fine. But..."

She shook her head, her long braid twisting on her shoulder. "You don't need to worry about payment. Sans Boneweaver is a Seraph agent and that covers anyone from his world needing services."

"I meant that Frisk and I can't be housed together."

She gave Frisk a rather devious smile. "Even separate rooms aren't enough?"

Frisk blushed brightly, lips pressed straight, and nodded. Huh. She'd never been embarrassed about the fact before. Even when her father would interrupt us having a moment, she never blushed. I'd have to ask her what was different here later.

The man leaning against the wall spoke up. "Star's guest room is empty. And you know she'll offer."

She nodded. "That will do then. We'll put you in suite fourteen. There's plenty of room in the suite and it will be comfortable for your brother during recovery." She looked over to the man leaning against the wall. "Please take them to suite. The keys are in the cabinet."

He pushed off from the wall. "Sure." One of his hands gently brushed the hair on the nursing infant's head before opening the cabinet, and retrieving a set of keys.

I bowed my head to the woman. "Thank you."

"You're very welcome, Chara." The woman looked up at Frisk. "Slow down. You're recovering too. Go check out the suite and then head to the cafeteria for something to eat."
Frisk nodded and leaned in to kiss her cheek. Once she stood again, I helped her out the office door.

The man followed us only to stop just outside the door and pointed down a hallway filled with doors and other rooms that also appeared to be laboratories. "The cafeteria is that way, on the left. The doors are glass with the day's menu posted on it so you can't miss it."

He held out his hand as we stood. "I'm Chara Dreemurr, though that may have been obvious."

I took his hand. "Chara. You're not from here."

Chara smiled as he shook my hand. "No. But I am an agent for this site." He paused for a moment, before his hand reached up to his right eye, covering it for a moment before coming away with a black liquid dripping down his hand. He snapped his fingers, and the liquid disappeared. So did the filth from Frisk's and my clothing. "That's much better."

He gestured for us to follow him down the other end of the hall. "The suites are this way and only on the ground floor. They consist of a living room, bathroom, and between two and three bedrooms. I'm pretty sure fourteen has three bedrooms."

Noonday sunlight filled the hall, making long rectangles of warmth across the tile. Photos and awards of all sorts lined the walls in between the occasional painting. The first three doors, eighteen through twenty, were closed. The door to suite seventeen was open. Inside, a skeletal Sans and what appeared to be a very pretty, living, porcelain doll with rather lustrous brown curls, were having tea. The next two doors, fifteen and sixteen, were closed as well.

The door labeled fourteen swung open easily. We stepped into a living room with a lovely, hardwood floor. A dark wood couch with pale cushions stood on top of a muted brown rug. It faced the windows that looked out on a garden heavy with mid autumn's bloom. The coffee table was stained the same dark brown as the couch. Two chairs that matched the couch sat on either side of the room, one near an empty, slate fireplace. Three bedrooms lined the wall with a bathroom very much like the modern one in the Boneweaver home at the end of the line. Well, modern for my world, I suppose.

"There's a linen closet in the bathroom and you'll find sheets for the beds and towels for the bath in there. Knowing Church, she'll send someone around to take you both shopping for toiletries and the like." He huffed. "Probably Star."

"That would be the Frisk we saw in the laboratory?" I asked.

Chara nodded. "Yeah."

Interesting. She wasn't in charge, but the entity in the void had called to her specifically. Maybe, like my Frisk, she was important in a different way. Or maybe I'm overthinking it and the thing in the void was simply calling to someone it knew would hear.

Frisk sat down on the couch. "Why does that upset you?"

I smiled. "She's his Frisk. And you know what I'm like when I don't get to spend time with mine."

She gave me a bright smile and it eased the trouble in my heart a little.

Chara chuckled. "That is the short of it." He sat down on the couch next to Frisk, leaning forward to rest his arms on his legs.

I frowned. "Why the laughter about our world?"
Frisk giggled. Oh? She knew, huh?

Chara snorted. "It's not about your world. It's about something that happened on your world. The woman you were talking to is Frisk Church. Her eldest child was conceived on your timeline. There's a bit more to the story than that, but it requires way too much in explanation." He gestured for me to sit.

I took the chair next to the fireplace, looking to Frisk. "Have you been here before?"

Frisk shook her head. "No. I just know some of the people here from their visits with Dad."

I thought that over and looked to Chara. "So visiting other dimensions is a common occurrence for you?"

"I'm an agent for Seraph and that does require travel, though I've been lots of places with my Frisk before that." He relaxed on the couch. "I should clarify that I have two Frisks, one from my own timeline and Star, who adopted me as her Chara since she lacks one of her own." He looked between us. "First time off world?"

Frisk shook her head. "It's more that it's the first time in a place where the technology is so advanced. Usually, the level of advancement is similar to our own so it didn't really feel like we were that far from home."

Chara nodded. "Will the suite suit you and your brother?"

I nodded once. "Of course."

Chara stood. "Good." He looked down at Frisk. "Because you are under orders to get something to eat."

I offered Frisk my arm and we followed Chara down the sun lit hall, the shadows in it growing longer as evening set in. I paused for a moment and looked outside. The world was a glow of reds, oranges, and yellows. Autumn had taken hold of this world and filled it with outstanding beauty. When I moved to continue, I found Chara stopped as well, waiting patiently.

Passing the laboratory, curtains had been drawn, blocking any view of my brother, and I could hear the steady beeping of some machine. I shivered and Frisk hugged my arm. Chara patted my shoulder and nodded for me to come along.

As stated earlier, it was hard to miss the cafeteria. I expected a utilitarian place filled with simple tables and chairs. Instead, a large, open room painted a soft cream color with a vaulted ceiling and wood floor greeted us. Small tables, large tables, booths, and a large assortment of comfortable seating in dark colors filled the area, situated around a central fireplace with the roaring fire inside visible from all sides. A mezzanine with even more seating wrapped around the top of the room. Big windows let in copious amounts of light.

Leading us toward the far end of the room, Chara took us into the area with the actual buffets. And I've seen quite a few buffets in my time, but this? This was insanity. I didn't even have words, let alone names, for half the foods I saw on the long tables.

Frisk's jaw dropped. "I don't even know where to start."

"Ditto."

Cake for dessert. The cake is pretty decent for not being Muffet's."

"I heard that!" came a voice from behind one of the doors into the kitchen.

Chara's smile turned just a tad maniacal. "Are you sure?!" His volume ratched up. "Maybe I should say it louder! And I can add that Church's chiffon is better than yours will ever be!"

"That's fair. Her chiffon is better." A rabbit monster came out from the back and the only thing I could think was that I was seeing a rabbit version of Chiko, the head chef in my father's castle. She caught sight of Frisk and I, and smiled. "Newcomers!" Her smile fell. "And you both look exhausted. Go on out and find a place to sit. Chara and I will be by with plates."

Frisk and I returned to the great room that called itself a cafeteria, finding an empty table near the fire. As soon as I was sure Frisk was comfortable, I rested my head in one hand, eyes closed, listening to the crackle and pop of the fire. Frisk reached over, rubbing my back.

"It'll be all right, Chara."

I shook my head. "My brother and future king is seriously injured. It's my job to take that hit, to protect him."

Frisk took the hand covering my face in hers, kissing the palm. "Things happen. There will come days where we will be far from each other and no one will be sure of anyone's safety." She sighed. "It's important to remember that this is a fluke. A stranger came and interrupted our world's story." She gestured to the room as a whole. "These people? It's their job to solve the problems caused by interruptions to the story. And that's what they're doing now on multiple levels, back home with my father and here with Asriel."

The rabbit monster and Chara set several plates in front of us, a full meal for four.

Chara leaned over, kissing the rabbit monster on the cheek before he sat down. "Thank you, Chiko."

Frisk and I looked up at her. "Thank you."

She smiled, nodded, and walked away.

I frowned. "Who's the fourth meal for?"

Chara paused for a moment, eyes closed, his right hand over his heart. He blinked his eyes opened. "Star."

The Frisk with the long, black hair came in the cafeteria a few minutes later, her blue clothing having been changed for green. Likely because the blue was covered in dark stains the origins of which I didn't want to think about. I shivered as she sat down next to Chara, laying her head on her arm, sprawling across that end of the table. She was so still for so long, I'd thought she'd fallen asleep. Chara's fork speared a strawberry off his plate and he held it out toward her. She turned her head to take the bite and sat up to chew.

Frisk grabbed my hand, squeezing it tightly before asking the question I couldn't manage. "How is he?"

Star pushed her hair back from her face with one hand while picking up her fork with the other. "Asriel is out of surgery and resting comfortably in the lab. He'll be out for the rest of the night. I put a chair that reclines into a bed in the room so you can stay with him. Word of warning, when he wakes up in the morning, we're going to make him get up and walk around, which will seem insane
and be incredibly painful to watch. But doing it will kick start his natural healing and prevent blood clots."

She picked up her knife and cut into the roast beef on her plate. "When we're done eating, I'll take you in to see him and introduce you to the night staff."

Chara elbowed her. "Frisk is bunking with you while she's here."

Star nodded. "Okay. I'll put some sheets on the spare bed." She held out her hand to Frisk and I. I'm Frisk Ossein, specifically the younger one. My mom's the older one. My official nickname is 'Shooting Star,' but everyone just calls me 'Star' for short."

Frisk took her hand, but only held it, staring in rapt fascination. "You're a healer too."

She shrugged a little, eyes filled with the same fascination. "I guess. I never really thought of it that way."

They stared at each other, hands still clasped, smiling softly. I pointed at the both of them.

Chara nodded and finished the bite in his mouth before speaking. "That's a thing. All Frisks find all other Frisks fascinating, sometimes to an almost obsessive level. Give it about fifteen minutes and they'll start acting like siblings or long time best friends." He smiled when he said it, like it pleased him immensely.

I looked to Frisk and found her talking with Star, the two giggling softly over their meals and the exhaustion of the day sloughing off. And her embarrassment with the older Frisk earlier suddenly made sense. She'd be impertinent to her father all day long, but she wouldn't act like that with someone she saw as an older sister.

"Is it just Frisks? Or do other doubles from differing worlds do the same?"

He shrugged. "For a Frisk, it's always a definite. For everyone else, it's kind of hit or miss. This world's Asriel, the Asriel from an advanced science timeline, and my brother spend copious amounts of time together. They like to test each other's strengths, bounce ideas about important decisions off of each other, and, since my brother is the most soft hearted of the three, provide understanding for situations that others just don't get."

"You say that like being soft hearted is not to his advantage."

Chara sighed, staring at his plate. "My brother is a good father, a good husband, and a good king."

He looked up at me. "And he is those things in a world that has done everything in its power to make him a cruel tyrant." He snorted and continued eating.

"Snowball's chance in hell, right?" I chuckled.

He smiled, proudly. "Snowball's chance in hell."

We finished eating and followed Star back to the laboratory, Frisk much steadier on her feet now that she'd eaten. The place was quiet, the bed I'd laid my brother on clean and empty. Now that the rush was over, I could see the place clearly. Several windowed rooms lined the right wall. Clean, metal countertops lined the other walls with cabinets. Machinery I didn't recognize in the least hummed softly around the room.

Walking us past a few of the rooms, I spotted an older man who resembled me reading a book, his door marked with a quarantine sign. In another room I spotted a brown haired woman, with the
tiniest waist I'd ever seen, sitting with a merwoman with the most intense red hair I'd ever seen. And
my Undyne had some insanely red hair.

We went past an empty room and came to the one Asriel slept in. The curtains were drawn and the
room was only dimly lit with an orange glow. My brother slept peacefully in a large, comfortable
looking bed that propped him up. Several tubes dripping different liquids attached to one of his arms.
There was color in his face and the blankets covering him looked warm and soft. I took the hand that
wasn't attached to the strange tubes in mine. His fingers curled around mine.

Frisk put an arm around me and looked to Star. "What should we expect?"

"He'll wake up in the morning after having had the best sleep ever. But he will also be in a lot of
pain. Like I said before, we'll make him get up and walk as soon as he's awake and before he eats.
So long as nothing comes up, he'll be in this room for about two days. We'll teach all three of you
how to care for the wound and move him in with you. After the wound is healed enough for it, we
remove the stitches and start physical therapy. He's suffered some internal organ damage, but nothing
we haven't seen before."

Chara frowned viciously.

Star held up both hands. "Sorry! Sorry! I didn't mean it like that!" She hugged him swiftly. "See? I'm
still here and all good. Nothing to worry about. And remember that while I was gone, you were
doing your best impression of hypothermia via curse."

He sighed. "If I ever see the monster that got you…"

Star patted his shoulder. "Yes. Yes. I know." She went over to a plush chair next to the bed. She
tapped a small lever on the side. "Pulling this back will lay the chair back into a bed and you'll be
able to stay with him tonight." She pointed to a door across from the bed. "There's a bathroom in
there." She looked to the window. "Wow! You really resemble your mom."

I spun to the door just as my mother, on this world's Asriel's arm, came in. She hugged me quickly
before leaning over my brother and kissing his forehead. She stayed there for a moment, resting her
forehead against his. She shuddered deeply before standing up, the queen coming back into place.
Astelle rushed in afterwards, practically leaping into my arms. I hugged her tightly, even as her eyes
were on Asriel.

This world's Asriel looked to us and I shivered a little. "Star, Chara, Chara, and Frisk. Go to my
sister's office."

I gave Astelle one more squeeze before extricating myself from her. Frisk and I followed Star out of
the laboratory and into Church's office. My Sans waited inside, leaning against the wall with his arms
crossed over his chest. The red sweated skeleton still sat across from the desk. Church had changed
out of the dress and was wearing a uniform similar to the one Chara wore, only in a dark blue rather
than green. A tall skeleton bearing cracks in his skull similar to Gaster's stood behind Church,
cradling the baby. And I had the distinct feeling that this was the tall man I'd seen earlier. The skin
he'd worn was an illusion.

Frisk hugged her father before coming around the desk to go up on tiptoe to give the skeleton a kiss
on the side of his skull. "Hello, Bones. So weird to see you like this."

He smirked. "Hey there, kiddo." The single, glowing pinprick eye moved to look at me. "Is your
brother resting comfortably?"
I nodded.

Church looked between Frisk and I. "Cross reported that your teleport stopped in the void, leaving you hanging in nothing."

Frisk nodded vigorously. "Yes."

Church frowned deeply. "That's the tenth report."

Chara grimaced. "Please say total."

She shook her head. "Just today."

I lifted my hands, using them to indicate a human-ish form. "There was a figure in the void, more outline than anything. It spoke to us and then sent us here after calling to Star."

Star smiled. "That was E.C.! He's a Chara that calls the void his home."

"And he likes to hang off of Star whenever he sees her," Chara grumbled.

The red sweatered skeleton chuckled darkly. "*jealous?"

Chara snorted, lifting his nose. "Hardly."

Very jealous.

"*what's it like out there, bones?"

Bones shook his skull, gently cradling the baby. "Bad. I have no idea what's going on and Blue's stumped as well. He's here right now, so go bump skulls with him. In fact, call your sister and get her working on it too."

The red skeleton stood and sauntered out the door.

Star stretched, yawning. "Why'd you call us in? It wasn't about the teleport."

Sans frowned. "*dragoon figured out that we'd switched Asriel with his body double. He's disappeared from our world and has been spotted on other worlds Asriel could have potentially been taken for treatment."

I thought about that. "Why not come here first?" I looked at Bones. "You're from here, right? Wouldn't it make sense to look here first?"

"It would, but there are several reasons not too," Church answered. "It would make sense to him for us to put Asriel somewhere else, or take him to a place much closer in appearance to your timeline. He would also look other places first simply because Epsilon is the absolute last place he'd want to be." She frowned. "I do expect him to make an attempt."

Chara stood up straight. "So Star and I are on for the night."

Church shook her head. "No. It's late and I want you both helping Frisk and Chara acclimatize." She smiled sadly. "I don't think your mother or sister will be leaving tonight and Asriel will not allow more than two visitors in the room at a shot so the staff can get in and out to care for your brother. Go with Star and Chara for a tour. In the morning we'll take you shopping for things you'll need for your stay."
I took a deep breath to argue and sighed deeply instead. I had to do what was best for my brother and being able to help him navigate the world he'll wake up to was more important than being physically near him. I put an arm around Frisk and nodded. She looked up at me with a sad smile and hugged me.

"Anything else?" Chara asked.

Church smiled wryly. "No. But I am sorry to cut in on your buddy time."

Star put an arm around Chara. "He'll live!" She waved Frisk and I out the door. "Come on. We'll do a tour and then get you settled in."

Frisk gave her father another hug before following Star and Chara. I paused for a second, giving Church a bow with my hand over my heart.

"Thank you for taking us in and seeing to our needs."

Church stood, returning my bow. "You're very welcome, Prince Chara."

Sans gave me a wave as I turned and left, pushing off the wall to settle into a chair. Chara waited for me just outside the office and I followed him back down the hall toward the suites.

Frisk held Star's hand. "Is it really okay for me to stay with you? You don't have to keep me."

Star shook her head. "I'm happy to have you! I would have even offered!"

I smiled at her. "Just like that? It doesn't seem odd that we'd be separated?"

Star turned around, regarding me as she held up her fingers to count them off. "Medieval fantasy timeline, conservative standards of male-female interaction, unrelated by blood, and," she pointed at me, "you two being unchaperoned is an occasion for bad ideas." She giggled at my shock. "It's okay. My fiance and I are bad like that too."

Frisk and I looked at each other before looking at her. "Fiance?" We both looked at Chara.

He snorted. "Don't look at me. I'm not that crazy."

"Hey!" Star glared at him, but it was half hearted at best. She huffed and lifted her nose. "Well, he is the better Chara."

Frisk giggled.

"Whatever." Chara smiled, deviously. "I'm getting real tired of all the Charas you're collecting. Your fiance can stay but I'm shoving the rest off. E.C. can be the first to go."

She spun on him, hands on her hips. "Oh really? This from the man who has two Frisks."

I smiled. "Well, if the other Frisk is anything like you, two is probably all he can handle."

Star sputtered for a moment and then bent over laughing.

Chara chuckled. "That's hitting the nail on the head."

Star stood up straight and held out her arms. "Tour time! This is Seraph Foundation Site Epsilon. It's primary purpose is to resolve anomalous occurrences on other timelines. It's secondary purpose is medical research. King Asriel is the site director and his adopted sister, Frisk Church, is his second in
command. Several of Epsilon's agents live on premises."

Chara gestured down the toward the apparent entrance. "That's the main entrance and leads out to
the parking lot and the nature trails in the forest surrounding the main facility. There are two internal
garages, one belonging to Bones, who is this world's Sans, and the other just general parking for
people who live here. Your suite is the last in the line, so the next two rooms are the staff equipment
room and Papyrus' workshop."

I raised an eyebrow. "So where are suites one through thirteen?"

Chara nodded toward the entrance. "Just around the corner down there. For the most part, the only
suites with permanent residents are seventeen and eighteen. Nineteen is a communal kitchen for the
suites if you feel the need to cook. Twenty is a communal living room for the suites and in the
winter, you can find lots of people just hanging around in there."

He paused for a moment and pointed toward the equipment room. "If the equipment room is ever
open, it means an agent is getting ready for a mission. Church and Star will just get dressed in there
without caring if someone is watching, so keep that in mind, and avert your eyes."

I smiled at Star. "Is that a thing? Frisks and the lack of shame?"

Frisk pinched my arm while Star gave me a half hearted glare before heading toward the stairs.

She continued the tour. "Suite seventeen belongs to 'Straight Man' Sans. We call him that because he
is literally the only normal person from his timeline, relatively speaking. The living doll with him is
his girlfriend Demali. Suite eighteen belongs to this world's Papyrus."

Heading up the stairs, Chara pointed to the right. "The first door is King Asriel's apartment. The next
one after that is Star's place. The two apartments after that one are empty at current.

Chara pointed to the left. "The first door this way is the Gaster family apartment."

"Gaster?"

He jumped at the sudden, dark tone in my voice. "Ooooh, you've got one of the bad ones, huh? On
this timeline, Wing Dings Gaster was a scientist who was split into two different people in an
accident. Papyrus is one of those people and Bones is the other. On my timeline, Dr. Gaster is Sans,
Papyrus, and Frisk's father."

"Ooooh..." Star smiled sheepishly. "I should mention then that I my exemplar, Crow, is a Gaster."

Frisk tilted her head to the side. "Exemplar?"

"An exemplar is a summonable companion who lives within you. In a fight, Crow looks like a big,
bulky ninja! But otherwise looks like your average Gaster: tall, skinny, cracked skull."

I paused for a moment, processing the information. "I suppose the story would be different in
different places."

Star nodded. "Oh, a confusing point. 'Church' is this world's Frisk's maiden name. It is officially
Frisk Gaster, and this is her home. Most people just refer to her as Church."

Chara motioned us along to the next apartment, the door of which was open. "This is Frisk Cross
and his skelebros' place."
Just inside the door, you could see young girl, wearing a loose shirt and dark leggings, and what appeared to be noise blockers over her ears while she worked on problems out of a math textbook at the table. She noticed us and gave us a wave before returning to her work. A young skeleton monster in a striped sweater and pants, sat at the other end of the table with a much older skeleton talking about something in the textbook in front of him.

"The children are Sophia and Brandon Gaster. Sophia is King Asriel's heir. The skeleton with Brandon is a Sans, and we all call him D, which is short for Dragon Sans. And yes, he can turn into a huge skeletal dragon."

We moved along to the next apartment, the door of which was open though I didn't see anyone inside.

Star pointed. "This is the Ossein apartment, my parents' place. They don't seem to be in, and I don't see the Tarsus brothers, so they're probably down in the garden by now."

Chara turned around to the singular door on the opposite wall. "And this is the library."

Star opened the door to a huge room two stories tall and filled with rows and rows of books. A mezzanine with low desks and comfortable seating ringed the the second floor where windows let in the last of the fading, evening light and a view of the area surrounding the building. A few humans and monsters sat here or there, reading quietly next to warm, glowing lamps.

"There's plenty to read here." Chara nodded for us to follow him through the rows of shelves to a set of bookcases filled with large containers, each filled to the brim with craft supplies of all sorts.

He gave me a smile. "You'll find plenty of yarn and lots of needles to choose from."

I chuckled. "That's a thing, isn't it?"

Star nodded. "I've only met one Chara who didn't knit. She crocheted."

"Crochet?"

"It's a similar principle, but instead of using two needles, you use a hook and looping action to create fabric."

Chara indicated back the way we came. "There's a clipboard just inside the door, so if you take anything from the room, note your name, suite number, title and author of the books, and/or numbers from the sides of the containers." He knocked on one of the containers, just over the number.

And got a knock back. He blinked at the case for a minute before hearing a very feminine chuckle. Going around the other side of case, we found a female Chara. It was the woman from earlier with the tiny waist. Her dark brown hair had one bright red streak in it, though it appeared as if she'd been trying to hide it by the way her hair was pulled up in many braids. She wore a long brown skirt, brown blouse, and a red vest, with a strange pair of goggles hanging around her neck. On the table in front of her was a stack of books.

Hiding behind that stack was the merwoman, a Frisk with intensely red hair and patches of tiny, sparkling scales on her face. Her eyes watched us furtively, yarn and hooked implement gripped tightly in her hands. She wore a very simple, silver shirt and a pair of very tight, silver slacks.

The female Chara giggled. "Sorry! I heard you talking about me, so I couldn't resist."

I blinked at bit at her bright smile.
Chara snorted. "I bet you couldn't. You're as bad as Star!"

She waved that off. "Oh please. I've never managed to scare the living daylights out of you." She turned a bit in her chair. "You'll pardon me if I don't stand to greet you." She tapped the wheelchair she sat in, a bag with a solution of some sort dripping away at the device attached to her hand from where it hung over just over her head. "I'm still not steady on my feet. I'm Charlotte Featherstone, though most people just call me Chara."

I stepped forward to take her hand. "Think nothing of it." I kissed her knuckles. "I am Prince Chara Dreemurr, though I suppose that isn't very surprising. You're like me and yet you aren't. How is that so? Is it because you are female?"

She shook her head. "I'm from a 'swap' world where everyone has sort of of switched roles. My Frisk would be more analogous to you in temperament, I'd bet. Though my Asriel seems to be similar to most other Asriel's I've met thus far."

Charlotte motioned to her companion. "This is Frisk Tamanna."

Miss Tamanna ducked down a little, attempting to make herself smaller.

Charlotte reached over gently petting the woman's red, red hair. "It's all right, Frisk. You already know Chara and Star. Two new people aren't that difficult."

She dropped the crochet hook to grasp Charlotte's hand and hold it tightly.

Charlotte gave her a patient smile. "Please forgive her. She's been in isolation for so long that being around people is a bit more than she can handle most days."

Frisk came around the other side of table, that fascination she had before with Star glittering in her eyes again. She held out a hand to Miss Tamanna. "Hello!"

Miss Tamanna blinked at her for a moment before the ghost of a smile caught her lips. She reached out, gently touching Frisk's hand. "Hello." The word was spoken so softly, I wasn't sure I'd actually heard it.

Frisk knelt next to her, the two continuing to gaze at each other.

Charlotte smiled at them. "Getting a tour?"

I nodded.

"In the evenings, so long as it isn't raining, the residents will gather around the fire pit in the garden. There will be everything from music, to storytelling, to D reading aloud from this or that book. If you'll be here a while, it's worth it to join in. If you ever get lost, just talk out loud, and ask C for help. He's this world's Chara and he'll answer." She looked up. "Hey, C. What time is it?"

A young, male voice I recognized as being the voice of the red ghost filled the room from some hidden place. "It is 20:00 hours on the dot. And everyone is down at the firepit if you're interested. Mrs. Ossein says to let you all know that smores and hot chocolate are happening."

Charlotte chuckled. "Thank you, C!"

"Anytime."

Star tapped on Charlotte's shoulder. "Feeling hydrated?"
Charlotte rolled her eyes and tapped the bag attached to her. "Whether I want to or not."

A thought occurred to me. "You seem to be, despite far from home, very comfortable here."

Charlotte gestured to the air in a vague fashion. "The level of technology here is very similar to my timeline on the surface of the planet. But the hollow interior, a place we call Agartha, is a completely different story. I grew up with all of the things you see here, but after falling down a hole in the ground, have been living in the hollow earth since."

Chara motioned to Frisk and I. "Is there anything they should know about that a standard tour wouldn't mention?"

Star immediately waved her hands at us. "Oh! Yes! Have you seen the living doll?"

I nodded.

"That's Demali. During the day, she acts as a normal person, but at night she will stalk the halls and chase anyone she finds. Since it's just her and not a group of her kind, that she won't actually harm anyone. If you see her, don't run. Just walk. She'll only move as fast as you do. And if she gets close enough to you, she will break off, and disappear."

Chara let out a low whistle. "I wasn't aware that she still switched into her hunting phase off timeline."

Star nodded. "Demali is from a horror timeline, a legitimately terrifying place where monsters are nothing to laugh at. Her kind only hunt in packs so she won't attempt to hurt anyone alone. Other than that, there is a vampire Frisk here. She's only out once the sun starts to set and will not attempt to drink your blood. She's with child, and here to give birth. Her husband is a Chara and he watches over her like a hawk." She looked to the now inky blue sky beyond the window. "They might actually be down at the fire pit right now."

Charlotte pulled on Miss Tamanna's sleeve. "Come on. I'm not missing chocolate in any form."

My jaw dropped. "That's a thing too, isn't it?"

Chara nodded and gave me a devious look. "I know where Chiko hides it in the kitchen."

"Chocolate is very hard to come by on my world."

Frisk finally looked up at me, giggling. "You'll need twice the exercise everyday if you can just have it whenever you want."

I thought of the hours of grueling training I put in with Undyne everyday. "Worth it."

Frisk looked back to Miss Tamanna. "You'll come, right? Please?"

She nodded, causing Frisk, Star, and Charlotte to smile at the same time. She stood with Frisk. Charlotte pulled on a pair of gloves before spinning the wheels attached to her chair and backing away from the table.

Star came up behind her. "I've got you."

Charlotte looked up. "Thank you."

"You're welcome."
Star lead the way, pushing Charlotte back to the stairs. And before I had a moment to really think about how a chair with wheels was going to traverse stairs, Star stepped back as a set of metal, crab-like legs uncurled from under the chair, carrying Miss Charlotte down.

My jaw dropped. "That is amazing."

Chara nodded. "That's all her too. She modified the chair just so she could get to the library. And that's actually indicative of her world.

We stepped into the hall at the bottom of the stairs to the sound of a scream being quickly cut off. Star rushed to the front of the group, listening quietly for a moment. A scuffling sound came from the right and she dashed down the hall, toward the entrance.

Chara turned to the rest of us. "Wait here while Star and I check it out." He ran after his partner.

Miss Tamanna grabbed ahold of Charlotte's hand, but Frisk dashed after them. I followed, fast on her heels. We went out through the glass doors and onto the path beyond.

"I swear! I don't know what you're talking about!"

Star skidded to a halt before a decorative iron gate that was filled with yellowing leaves. She ducked down, carefully looking through the foliage into the grassy area beyond. She frowned deeply, her eyes changing from brown to a dark, inky blue, that glittered with stars. Chara rounded us to the otherside of the gate, looked in quickly, and nodded to Star as a red, glowing sword appeared in his hand.

Star nodded and Chara went through, rolling to one side. Star moved in the opposite direction, coming up with a sword so black it seemed to suck in the light around it. Dragoon had two humans and a demonic looking monster backed into a grove of trees, huddling together fearfully. Dragoon turned to look at Chara, only to suddenly zero in on me.

"There you are." Dragoon pointed his sword at the three huddled together in the corner. "Hand over your brother, and no one need get hurt."

I stiffened.

Chara disappeared, reappearing with the three huddled together. All four suddenly disappeared and Star jumped at Dragoon, her sword coming down fast. He brought his sword up to parry only to have it cleaved in half. He quickly jumped back to avoid her strike. His sword reformed, the blade glowing red. He turned fully with his swing, using the force to slam into Star and sent her skidding backwards and into a tree. She hit it with a smack and sat there for a moment, dazed. Frisk ran to her.

I came at Dragoon from the side as he advanced on Star, slamming into him hard enough to knock him off his feet. He hit the floor with a roll and came up with one eye glowing. A floating animal skull appeared next to him. He snapped his fingers and it let loose a blast of white energy at me. I dove to the side, found my feet, and dove again to avoid another blast.

At the next blast, I rolled under it, coming up to grab the floating skull and bang it off the ground as hard as I could. The skull shattered and Dragoon slashed at me with his sword. It came a hair's breadth from my nose as I leaned out of the sword's path.

The ground underneath Dragoon began to glow red and he jumped out of the light, only to have a barrage of red bones rain on him from above. He swung his sword quickly to knock the bones away, leaving him open to attack from the side. I moved to knock him off balance only to have him completely disappear. I froze and only had the time to curse under my breath before the force of a
blast sent me right into a nearby tree.

I put my arms up to take the brunt of the impact only to stop mid air, Frisk huffing at the hastily cast spell to keep me safe. Chara reappeared, his sword making quick work of the new floating animal skull. A strange sound filled the air, like the 'shing' of my Sans' magic, and Dragoon's eye sockets went wide. Chara's hand moved up and Dragoon was thrown into the air, another barrage of red bones flying after him. Dragoon summoned another floating skull, riding it this time to dodge the bones.

Star watched for a moment, letting Frisk heal her, before yelling, "Crow!"

A bulky, black clothed man appeared out of nowhere like a summoned creature. It grabbed Dragoon's coat as he flew by and pulled him down to the grass hard enough the skeleton bounced off of the ground.

"I said you were both off duty."

The area suddenly went still, ominously so. Church stood in the gateway. I wasn't sure how a skeleton could look frightened, but Dragoon suddenly looked very, very scared. He scrambled to his feet and snapped his fingers.

Nothing happened.

I looked to Church and behind her stood the red sweatered skeleton, his left eye glowing an awful red.

Shivering, Dragoon fell into stance, laughing nervously before he dashed for her. Church pulled a weapon from a holster under her arm; a smaller, sleeker version of the prototype firearms my Alphys has long worked on. She fired multiple times as she walked toward him, and Dragoon held his sword up to block. Each impact coated the sword in a gray substance that hardened around it.

He got to her, swinging the coated sword and she dodged easily from side to side before her arm came up to block the sword and she fired at his skull, coating the left half of it in the substance. He rounded on her angrily, his fist connecting with the firearm and knocking it from her hand. He swung again and she jumped, flipping to the side. When her feet touched the ground, a self extending staff slid into her hand from under her sleeve and she brought it down on him, striking him hard and fast.

Dragoon stumbled backwards from the continual beating before she turned with a jump and kicked him hard enough in the chest to knock him flat. Pulling another firearm from some hidden place on her person, she fired at him multiple times, coating him completely in the gray substance. He screamed impotently from his prison before suddenly going silent.

The foam broke apart in a blast and Dragoon was gone.

The bulky man in black disappeared as Star ran up to Church. "Thanks for the save." She looked to Chara. "Are the other's all right?"

He nodded.

I looked to the broken pieces of the gray substance. "How soon do you think he'll be back?"

Church holstered her weapon. "He won't. He'll simply find a new target."

And knowing that teleporting between worlds was becoming an issue, it was an ominous thought.
Episode 5: Ordinary Girl, Ordinary Day

A maze. A maze of traps meant to maim. To kill. A Frisk, a fierce one, desperately trying to remember the safe path through the continual exhaustion that loading the same save over and over after death caused. There was someone else there; watching the progress, a pair of brown eyes counting on the traps to do their horrible work. Frisk stepped the wrong way and I reached out, trying to grab the back of her sweater. My hand caught nothing but air, the girl’s short lived scream echoing off the walls.

I sat up with a jolt, gulping air. Counting down from ten, I let the early morning calm slide over me and wash the nightmare away. Well, it wasn’t really a nightmare, was it? I’d been watching this child die over and over in my dreams for a while now, and it wasn’t doing much for my over all mood. I wanted to find her, to pull her out of that hell, and I couldn’t. Cross had assured me that, despite what I was seeing, the girl could handle it. Frisks were built to take whatever their timeline threw at them. That didn’t make it easier, especially since I knew that no matter what I was dreaming, Cross’ nightmares were worse. A lot worse.

I yawned, stretched, and tried to roll onto my side. Tried being the operative word because the brothers Tarsus were on either side of me. I sighed and reached over Asriel to grab my phone off the nightstand. No messages; always a good sign. Seven in the morning; also a good sign. It meant I had plenty of time to get ready. I sat up and crawled out over the covers to hop off the bottom edge of the bed.

The boys were looking much better about their brother’s situation now that we were a bit into it. Even so, they’d taken to sleeping over with me rather than in their bunk in my parent’s apartment. They haven’t given me any problems about going to bed at a decent hour so it wasn’t any problem to have them over. Today, Chara Tarsus would be out of quarantine and the brothers would head home.

Hopefully. Things were getting weird with void travel. A strange sensation would come over me suddenly and I would instinctively reach for the void, only calming down when I felt it fill me.

I still want my sisters back. I don’t care that this isn’t their world. This is their home and I don’t care how selfish I’m being about that.

They’ll be here tomorrow.

I inhaled deeply and let it out slowly, savoring the thought.

It’s been a long couple weeks.

I grabbed a set of purple scrubs out of the closet and pulled them on. I really wanted to wear one of my printed sets, but with new patients, and one needing serious psych care, Snoopy was going to have to wait. Red’s father had given me the set when I finished medical school. I’d thought it strange that he’d thought to give me something since I didn’t know him so well, but he was genuinely pleased to hear me gush over them. Apparently it’s a thing?

I came out of the bedroom to find someone on my couch. Since Frisk Boneweaver had taken my guest room, my couch was the only other available space in my apartment. Well, it was either going
to be my partner or my fiance. And since my partner stayed downstairs to help Prince Chara acclimate, it would be my fiance. No one else would just camp out in my apartment without saying something to me.

I leaned over the back of the couch and found Chara Seth Dreemurr, Seraph Agent 01, snoozing away. Since he lived in an apartment hidden behind his office at Site Alpha, crashing here was a way for him to be completely away from work for a little bit. And it was always, very specifically, the couch he’d sleep on, and not the bed in the spare room. We’d realized, oh so quickly, that a bed was just a little too much temptation. Scratch that, being completely alone was too much temptation. We haven’t gone too far, but it was always there, hanging between us like the most delicious of fruits waiting to be plucked.

Yeah. If I hit forty and haven’t given birth to at least six kids, I will be extremely surprised.

Umbra, my pokemon partner --Oh My God! You have no idea how much I just love saying that phrase!-- was sleeping on Chara’s stomach, his hand resting on her back. I will NEVER forget the day Blue had taken my partner and I to a legit pokemon timeline to capture our first pokemon and train a team. Umbra had been an Eevee and she’d jumped me from the grass, choosing me before a pokeball had even been thrown. All the other agents with us had asked me what I would evolve her into. And I couldn’t even think of a proper name let alone an evolution. I was too busy being excited about having a pokemon. When it was time to head home, she’d refused a pokeball, which was just fine with me since I just wanted to hold her.

She evolved into an Umbreon in the darkness of the void, she’d been that enormously happy.

I knelt next to the couch and leaned in to kiss Chara’s cheek. He stirred a little and sighed happily, red eyes opening just a bit to look at me.

“That time already?”

I shrugged. “It’s a little after seven. Want some breakfast?”

A slow and very lascivious smile curled his lips. “I thought it was my job to make breakfast.”

I swatted at him and he caught my hand, turning it to kiss my fingertips, my fingers, the back of my hand, the inside of my wrist. I shivered as he sat up just enough to pull me close and press his lips to mine. He lingered for moment, before letting go, his hand gently pushing my hair back behind my ear.

He smiled at me. “I’ll make breakfast.” He sat up and gently moved Umbra off of him and onto the floor. “What do you think the Tarsus brothers will want?”

I stood, stretching a little. “Pancakes, for sure.” I smiled brightly. “Chocolate chips are on--”

“The second shelf behind the spices. Oh, I know.” Chara scratched Umbra behind the ear.

My teapot whistled and clicked off automatically. I leaned over to have a look in the kitchen and found Crow, looking like your very standard Dr. Gaster, making himself and Frisk Boneweaver tea. Not that he needed to eat or drink. He just found the act soothing. The nightmare had likely woken him too. I walked into the kitchen and gave him a hug, offering my best smile for the best exemplar in the multiverse.

He is the best exemplar. Anyone who argues otherwise can fight me.

Crow smiled and gently pet my hair before moving aside for Chara and I to take over the kitchen and...
get breakfast going.

I tapped Chara. “Make a double batch. I have a guest in the spare room.”

He nodded and gave me a curious glance. “Who?”

I pointed to the cleric sitting at the table. “Frisk Boneweaver.”

He turned to face her, clearly shocked. “Your father let you leave the timeline?”

She nodded and sipped her tea. And then frowned. “You know me?”

Chara shook his head. “I’ve met your father.”

“He was doing his best impression of me.”

“Dragoon seriously injured their Asriel and their Undyne sent all three here. When Asriel wakes up this morning, I’ll be making him do the horrible walk of horrible pain. If he does well over the next couple days, we might be able to move him into the suite with his brother by the end of the week.” I ran a thumb across my stomach. “That’s why the classes were full. Each student was hoping to find the answer to their own problems. And not a single one of them thought to introduce themselves to the person next to them. To make the life saving connection.

Even the slightest possibility of rejection was too much of a risk.

I grabbed Frisk Tamanna’s file, which was sitting on the table next to me. I don’t know how. I kind
of stopped asking how C managed stuff like this. Frisk Adelay, Seraph’s mental health guru, was working on Tamanna’s cognitive behavioral therapy, and leaving social integration to me. Charlotte was a huge help there, being an almost constant companion. But it also meant that Tamanna was not interacting with her hallucinations. She was aware that the people she saw weren’t real and refused to talk to them in front of others. That made it difficult to assess what was imaginary friend versus full blown hallucination.

Chara plated the first of the pancakes. “Whose file is that?”

“Frisk Tamanna. Colony ship timeline. She’s the last surviving human on the Starship Epiphany. Well, demihuman. She’s like Chara Tarsus; half mermonster. She was nearly killed by a prion that invaded the ship.”

“Is she here for recovery?”

The brothers Tarsus slouched into the kitchen, both sitting at the table sleepily. Frisk and Frisk leaned on each other for a morning hug.

“She’s here for therapy because she was forcibly isolated from the rest of the ship.”

He handed Asriel plates for the table before setting down a stack of pancakes. “And where the hell was her Sans during all of this?”

“He doesn’t exist.”

Chara’s eyebrows shot up and he hummed thoughtfully. “Her Chara?”

“Is the ship AI. I am not sure how similar it is to Delta. Chara Provost has been involved in maintaining it while Frisk is here. Asriel said that the AI was powered by a human soul that disconnected itself to fix something and ended up stuck. Now that it’s back in place, it’s asked for a system core similar to C’s so it can talk to Frisk and rebuild the relationship.”

Chara nodded as he poured another batch of pancakes. “I’d say Delta is singular, but she isn’t the first AI sustained by a human soul.”

C’s hologram appeared on the table. “Talking about me?”

“No. You are a very singular instance. Delta isn’t the original Dr. Gaster. She’s just powered by the persistent soul. You are bonded both with your Frisk and with the AI. It’s why, if something happens to you off timeline, you immediately return to Church.”

Frisk froze mid bite, looking at my fiance. “Hey. You aren’t Fell Chara.” He looked at me. “Am I missing something?”

“Oh! I completely neglected introductions.” I giggled a little. “Frisk, Frisk, and Asriel, this is Chara Seth Dreemurr. Often referred to as 01, he is the head of the Seraph Foundation.” I smiled at Chara. “And my fiance.”

Frisk frowned. “I’m sorry! Az and I didn’t mean to kick you out of bed!”

Chara waved it off as he plated the second round of pancakes. “Star and I won’t share a bed until after the wedding.”

Frisk looked at me. “Why not? I mean, you sleep with your partner.”
C laughed. “Friends sleeping over is totally different from lovers sharing a bed.”

Chara turned off the stove and sat down next to me. “I’ve waited hundreds of years for her to walk into my life. I can wait a few more months.”

Frisk giggled. “Translation: you don’t want to face her father after such an action.”

Chara’s head tilted back, looking at her in the amused manner I noticed all Chara’s who made it to adulthood used. “Translation: it is the man who often dictates the tone of a relationship. And that makes it my responsibility to vouchsafe her trust. I will never take from her anything that I cannot give back in a better condition then when I first held it. And that means that I will not enter her bed until the day that we give ourselves as gifts to each other.”

Frisk elbowed me. “Oooh… He’s a keeper!”

Chara chuckled. “That said, I like my future father in law. And I’ve fought enough Sanses that I don’t need to add that one to my list.” He reached over and gently patted Asriel’s shoulder. “Are you okay?”

Asriel blinked at him slowly, bleary eyed. “Yeah.”

Frisk shook his head. “Don’t mind him. Az is a slow starter in the morning.” He pointed his fork at C. “So how does it work with you being in Frisk’s head and her being married to Bones?”

C shrugged. “I can be other places when they’re having alone time.”

Frisk thought about it for a minute. “Does that mean you get to see her naked?”


I snorted and covered my mouth while I laughed.

Chara finished his bite of pancake before talking. “So recovery, then therapy, and then reintegration into society?”

I frowned. “I don’t know. Monsters on her timeline don’t want humans on the ship. I don’t know how they would react to a legitimate hybrid.” I sighed. “Her Asriel said he had a plan for when she came back, but we don’t know what that is. Well, at least I don’t. If he’s told the Boss Man, you know how famously tight lipped he can be.”

Frisk Boneweaver tugged on my sleeve. ”How do you cure social isolation?”

I sighed. “Lots of cognitive behavioral therapy and lots of forced social integration.” I took her hand. “Charlotte’s been really helpful on that front. She’s really fascinated with you so that will help draw her out.” I tapped my chin. “Did you sleep well?”

She smiled sheepishly. “As best I could. I woke up with a pain in my side.” She dug in a pocket hidden in her white robes and pulled out a long, thin, gift box. “I was sleeping on this.” She opened the box to reveal a delicate gold bracelet with little gold hearts.

“That’s really pretty! Did Chara give it to you?”

Frisk shook her head. “It’s a gift from Gaster to congratulate me on my engagement.”

Oh yeah. She had one of the bad ones. “Yikes! So what will you do with it?”
“It’s not magic in anyway, so I’ll keep it. It’s never good to anger someone as powerful as he is. And it’s not the first time he’s given me a gift.” She made a face. “Birthday presents and presents celebrating my elevation to cleric happen every year. I think he does it to annoy my father.” She closed the box and shoved it back in her pocket.

I finished my plate just in time for my alarm to go off. Time to get to work. Crow disappeared, nesting into the part of my Determination that gave him a physical body while I put my dishes in the sink. I paused and turned to the boys.

“Frisk and Asriel, you’re on breakfast clean up this morning. You’re brother is coming out of quarantine after I get down stairs, so be ready.”

Frisk looked up sullenly. “Do we have to leave?”

I shrugged. “Not really. If you want to hang at Epsilon longer, that’s up to Chara.” I turned to the other Frisk. “When you’re done eating, you’ll want to head over to suite fourteen.”

“You don’t want help with Asriel?”

I shook my head. “The morning nurse and I will be handling him. I need you to get your Chara so the two of you can keep Astelle calm when we get Asriel up and around. When I say it won’t be pretty, I mean that.”

She nodded. I leaned over to kiss my love’s cheek and he turned, catching my lips with his.

He winked at my blush. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I nodded, my face burning as I turned from the kitchen. Taking a deep breath, it came out as a sigh, and I pulled my shoes on before heading out the door. The hallway was quiet, but all the doors were open. I snuck a peek inside the Boss Man’s door and found him drinking a cup of tea while reading something on his tablet. Likely the morning intelligence report. C sat on his shoulder, a red glow against the white hair.

Hopping down the stairs, I dodged Undyne as she came up, giving her a wave and a smile before sticking the landing at the bottom, and making a left. The light coming in the big, picture windows was cool, a little dim from cloud cover, and made the world feel a little more like autumn. I stopped for a moment and stared out the windows at the red and gold trees lining the already full parking lot. It made me want to paint, though I had no real skill to do so. The lines my skate blades made on ice was my art, the ice my medium.

I sighed. And wasn’t sure why I did.

Clapping my hands once to wake myself, I stood up straight, and marched into the lab. Alphys was already working with Charlotte on physical therapy while Frisk Tamanna watched, occasionally adding a timid word of encouragement. Holding onto the bars to keep herself upright, Charlotte walked, step by step, from one end to the other, turning, and going back the way she came. Her recovery was going really well and I expect she’ll be walking with a cane in a week. Thankfully, she hasn’t been having the nightmares Black reported.

I pulled Chara Tarsus’ file from the holder on the wall and popped it open. All of his samples had come back completely clean for the last three days. Asriel’s release approval was signed at the bottom of the last check. I flipped to the discharge paperwork, going through it, and signing off as necessary before pulling the quarantine tape from the med bay door. Tarsus looked up from his book with a smile and hopped off the bed. Having been cooped up for two weeks, he didn’t look the
worse for wear. But then, he was a Sans analog and my dad could go months without moving from his chair in the living room.

He’s a total homebody. Drives mom nuts sometimes.

I opened the door with a big smile. “Welcome back to the land of the living!”

Tarsus raised an eyebrow. “Now get to work?”

I pointed at him, winking. “Exactly!” I handed him his discharge papers. “You are free to go. You don’t have any special instructions post quarantine. Your brother’s are, hopefully, finishing up breakfast in my apartment. Frisk doesn’t seem inclined to leave all that soon, so prepare for an earful about wanting to stay.”

Tarsus chuckled. “It has been a while since we’ve had a proper vacation. The Boss Man upstairs?”

I nodded. “Probably in the middle of a security briefing, so give it a few minutes.”

“Gotcha.” He gave me a hug before heading out of the lab. “Oh sweet freedom!”

Walking the long way around so as not to disturb Charlotte, I filed Tarsus’ paperwork just in time to hear a soft moan. The kind that was pained. That would be Prince Asriel waking up. I pulled on a pair of gloves before hopping over to the room. Adrea, a rabbit monster nurse who typically worked in Lab Four, was already getting Asriel’s vitals.

Queen Toriel, her long brown hair something of a mess, rose from the chair-bed, taking her son’s hand in hers. The other chair, the one Astelle had refused to budge from the night before, was empty. I wonder if my partner or her brother had managed to convince her to sleep in the suite down the hall.

This Asriel was human, but he was as pale as any Asriel I’ve ever seen with white-blonde hair and red eyes, which Chara mentioned came from their father. Apparently, all Dreemurr children had those eyes, which was something unusual for their timeline. Asriel, Astelle, and the youngest two sisters all had their father’s coloring. Chara, and the youngest two brothers had Toriel’s brown hair and warmer skin tones.

Grabbing the big, red, overly firm, heart shaped pillow from the end of the bed, I gave him a warm smile. “Good morning, Your Highness. I’d ask how you feel, but I’m pretty sure the answer is terrible.”

A wan smile touched his lips.

“This is Adrea. She’ll be your nurse this morning and most of the afternoon. I’m Frisk Ossein, though most people just call me Star. I’ll be the person making you do lots of things you’d rather not be doing, but I guarantee will speed your recovery.”

Queen Toriel turned sharply at that. “What do you mean?”

I looked up at her. She was human, so she wasn’t as tall as the shining beacon of a Toriel I looked to as my own. But she was still taller than me, which was pretty impressive. “It means I’m going to make him get up and walk around.”

I’m not sure how a woman who was already so pale from worry managed to become even paler. “But his wound?!”
I held up the pillow. “That’s what this is for.” I set the pillow down on the bed for a moment and took her hands in mine. “I swear to you, Your Majesty, this is absolutely necessary. It’s going to be very painful to watch, so please take this moment to go to the cafeteria and get some breakfast. I promise that you’ll come back after eating and find him resting comfortably.”

Her fingers moved nervously in mine before nodding to herself. “I will stay.”

I nodded and gestured to the chair. “Please be seated.”

When I turned to the bed, Asriel reached up for me slowly, touching my arm. I gave him a smile and carefully placed the pillow against his abdomen.

“Heavy.”

Taking both of his hands, I laid them on the pillow. “Oh yeah. It’s heavy. Press it to your stomach as tightly as you can. I’m going to swing your legs toward me while Adrea helps you sit up. After that, we’ll help you stand and you will walk out into the next room all the way to the window, turn around and walk back. Don’t worry about falling. Adrea and I are way stronger than we look, we’ll keep you upright.”

He inhaled sharply, and then nodded.

I looked to Adrea and found she had already moved the IVs into place and stood ready for me. I took hold of Asriel’s legs and nodded to her. She helped him sit up while I swung his legs in a smooth movement over the edge of the bed. He whimpered, eyes squeezed shut, fighting not to cry out. I helped him hold the pillow in place and stay upright while Adrea came around with the IV pole.

I adjusted my grip on him. “On the count of three, you are going to stand.”

He nodded, jaw clenched.

“One. Two. Three.” I half lifted him to his feet, pressing the pillow hard against his stomach. His feet touched the floor and after a moment, he let out a held breath. He looked at me and nodded and we walked him, step by painful step, out of the room and all the way to the window. Frisk Boneweaver and Prince Chara stood in the doorway, both holding onto Astelle to keep her from rushing in. She gripped their hands tightly, face a mask of horror. Asriel made it to the window, grimacing with every step. He stopped for a moment, looking outside at the unfamiliar landscape, before squeezing his eyes shut. Helping him turn, he made the slow trek back to the med bay and his bed.

Adrea helped him get comfortable and he blinked up at her sleepily. “I don’t have to do that again today, do I?”

She shook her head, long ears wiggling with it. “Not until tomorrow morning.”

I put the pillow at the bottom of the bed and elevated his legs. “For the rest of the day, you’ll be relaxing. If you feel up to it, we will walk you again in the evening. Otherwise, not until tomorrow morning. It will be a little better each time.”

“What’s Chara?”

I looked over my shoulder and saw him in the door. “Right there.” I moved aside so his siblings and Frisk could get to him. “Do you need me for anything else, Adrea?”

The rabbit thought about it. “Grab me a cola from the fridge?”
“Absolutely!” After procuring the requested soda for Adrea, I ran right into my partner and a warm hug. I loved Chara's hugs. He hugged with all of his being. The same way Sunshine did. I wonder if he learned it from her or if she learned it from him.

“Nice job on the walk.”

I shrugged. “He wasn’t fighting. That makes it easier. I need to check on Cross next. He’ll be down here soon.”

I felt a tap on my shoulder and looked to that side to see no one. Instead, the shoulder of my scrubs was glitching. First purple, then green, and back again. I looked to my other side and found E.C., with his completely red eyes -- as in, he didn’t have pupils, irises, or sclera. It was all just glowing red -- staring at me as he floated vaguely beside me. Parts of his body occasionally glitched out, disappearing and reappearing suddenly.

He looked between Chara and I, Chara giving him that annoyed frown he gave any Chara he felt was getting a little too chummy with me, fiance accepted. “Got a minute?”

I looked at my phone to check the time. “Yes.”

“Good.” He gestured to nothing in particular, which was his way of asking us to step into the void. He was always careful about touching someone, hence the tap on my shoulder. He didn’t want to hurt someone unintentionally. In the void, which was his place as much as it was mine, he could touch and interact with whatever he wanted without cause for alarm. That said, he couldn’t actually hurt me. He could glitch out my clothing or anything I might have on me, but not me.

When I’d first met him at Site Alpha, he’d touched me immediately, without even thinking about it. He’d put his hands on either side of my face, looking at me like a man who’d just crawled through the desert to discover that the oasis hadn’t been a mirage. He’d been completely overwhelmed by the essence of the void in me; a Frisk that was like him. There was a moment when everyone around me froze, unsure what to do. Until King Chara yelled at him to stop freaking everyone out.

I opened a rift into the void and stepped in, knowing he’d float in after me. “What did you want to show me, E.C...”

I trailed off, staring at the huge, tunnel like structure that just hung in the void.

Chara exhaled, “What is that? It’s like one of the void prisons.”

“These things are everywhere. I don’t know what they are, or where they came from. It’s like pieces of the void detaching and turning back in on itself. I’ve never seen anything even remotely like it.”

I frowned. “Have you reported it to 01?”

E.C. nodded. “He said to show you and Bones, but I didn’t see the big bone anywhere. Probably on mission. This one is right near Epsilon, so it’ll be easy to show him when he gets back. I need to hit up Fell before going to Site Gamma. I’ll see you both later.”

I nodded as he disappeared, becoming one with the void. Chara and I stepped back to home, right outside the lab.

I mused over what I saw. “Can you go tell Frisk?”

Without asking which one, he nodded, and knocked on her office door before heading inside.
My phone rang and I fished it out of a pocket. “Hello?”

“Star? It’s Chara Provost. You’re working with Frisk Tamanna, right?”

I nodded, remembered that she couldn’t see it, me being on the other end of a phone and all, and answered, “Yeah.”

“So you know how we thought that she didn’t have a Sans?”

I blinked. “She has one?!”

“Well, here’s the funny thing. I found an old drawing tablet. The kind you use for digital art. And when I asked about it, CHARA looked around and found a whole bunch of stuff hidden in Frisk’s personal file… Including several pieces of digital art of a guy who looks a whole hell of a lot like White.”

The sound of super fast typing hit my ears. “CHARA’s agreed to let you see the file under the condition that you don’t share it with others.”

I gripped the phone tightly. “Absolutely!”

“I’ve also finished a core that will allow CHARA to spend time with Frisk. I told it that it would have to work with you first. I’ll have it to you in about an hour, your time. You’ll be able to just pin it to your shirt, same as C’s.”

I juggled the phone to the other hand as it dinged with an incoming attachment. “Anything I need to know?”

“The human soul that inhabits the AI has been attention starved from having been out of contact. It’s been trying not to harass C, but besides myself, it doesn’t have much in the way of connections. It’s been distracting itself with fixing the ship, but that’s slow going, and AI like it perceive time at a way slower rate than we do.”

I turned that over in my head. “I can work with that. Thanks for the info. I’ll call if I need more.”

The super fast typing hit my ears again. “I’ll keep an ear out for you. As a heads up, Dramatic Facial Scar Asriel is having some management issues on the Epiphany courtesy of his version of Undyne. She’s not the Captain of the guard here, but rather the Captain of the ship, and she’s the one who’s been keeping what is essentially a flying junk pile functioning. I’ll talk to your boss about it in a minute, but you may have incoming to the lab just from one of them slugging the other.”

“Thanks, Chara.”

“You’re welcome.”

I disconnected and opened the attachment. Continually sliding to the left, I stared at image after image in the file: a human Sans; a human Alphys; a human Muffet. All of them looked stunningly real on the screen, but not a single one of the three existed on the Starship Epiphany. There were also some drawings of other merpeople, these appeared to be family portraits rather than imaginary people. One resembled a very young Undyne. Or, at least, I assumed it was based on photos I’ve seen of my Undyne as a child.

Cross coughed politely and I looked up, blinking for a minute. And a light bulb went on in my head. I flipped the phone over and laid it face down on the counter before grabbing my kit and changing gloves. He took a seat at the metal table in middle of the lab and laid his arm down on it. He wasn’t
in uniform, opting for corduroy pants and a graphic tee of a cartoonish yeti chasing a mountaineer while a bunch of Sherpa cheered like it was a sporting event. I carefully removed the bandages on his arm to have a look. The stitches were small and even, the wound looking good for only being a day old.

I worked on his hand, testing the mobility. “Do you do Sophia and Brandon’s art lessons?”

He raised an eyebrow. “Yes. Are you interested? Your art has always been dancing.”

I looked up at him for a moment and then back down at his hand, running through a routine I’ve done with him since a needle filled tentacle had made a pin cushion of his arm. “I’m thinking of mixing art therapy with social interaction for Frisk Tamanna.”

“Bring her over this afternoon. I’ll have supplies ready.” His mouth quirked for a half second when I pinched one finger. “I can’t feel it when you do that.”

I pursed my lips and sighed. “Well, fuck.”

His eyebrows went up. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard you curse before.”

I looked him dead in the eyes. “This is bad.” I growled. “We’ve got an idiot Sans running amok. Frisk is out on maternity leave. Losing you because you may very possibly need surgery at the same time is not optimal. We don’t have any other field agent Frisks with your prowess.”

Cross raised an eyebrow. “We have you.”

I froze solid for a moment, blinking down at his hand, before looking up at him. “I’m not--”

“Yes. You are. I know the woman Church and I have been training since she was eighteen and said she wanted to be an agent.”

I groaned, shoulders sinking. “I’m not a Viper.”

“And thank God for that.” Cross reached out, hand resting on my shoulder. “Epsilon doesn’t need Vipers. It needs good agents. You are among the best.”

“I don’t have half of your skills,” I grumbled.

“Those were skills honed in war.” His hand moved from my shoulder to tap his head. “And come with a significant amount of baggage. You have a set of skills that I don’t have and could never have. Being valuable in a different way doesn’t make you less. No matter how Church and I act half the time, being an agent is not a competition.” He smiled down at the wound on his arm. “Sending me to Lab Four again?”

I nodded and gave him my best apologetic look. “You’re going to need a full work up.”

He patted me on the shoulder as he stood. “Don’t look so glum about it. It’s not my dominant hand and so not the one I draw with.”

I looked up at him. “Perspective, huh?”

“It’s always about perspective. I’ll see you this afternoon.”

I handed him his medical file. “Thank you.”

He frowned in that frumpy way people did when they were confused. “For what?”
“A lot of things. But I’ll go with the art therapy help and the vote of confidence.”

Cross winked at me and headed out of the lab with a wave.

Chara poked his head in. “Church wants to see you.”

I sighed, nodding as I stood, and trudged out of the lab, tossing my gloves in the trash as I went. I paused just outside the door and looked back. Asriel hadn’t come down yet. I shook it off and went into the office. Frisk wasn’t in uniform today, wearing another of her lacy, layered dresses, though they were starting to take on more autumn colors: reds, greens, and browns. Baby Marigold slept peacefully in the sling wrapped around Frisk’s chest.

Even though I’ve worked with her for years, it was still sort of surreal. She was the first Frisk I’d met and that shine had never really worn off. On bad days, when my partner wasn’t around, I would sit next to her on the couch and fall over so my head was on her lap, and she’d pet my hair for a few minutes while I just stared into space and emptied my head.

I sat down and noticed that it was just me in here. Chara hadn’t followed me in. Was I in trouble? I’m pretty sure I hadn’t done anything worth getting yelled at over unless last night counted… Oh man.

Frisk was writing on a notepad in front of her. “Tell me what you see when you dream of the older Frisk. The one with the infant.”

Oh. Okay. Not in trouble. Whew! “She’s working on something that looks like the equations we use for void travel.” I shrugged. “I can’t say for sure, but, that’s what it feels like.”

Frisk nodded. “I think she’s the one who’s been interfering with void travel. That the folded up pieces of void were wrought by her.”

I immediately jumped on that, dander up as I launched from the chair to lean over the desk. “It’s not her fault! She’s obviously imprisoned!”

Frisk smiled softly. “I didn’t say she was doing it willingly.”

I sat back, rocking Marigold gently in the chair. “The reports I’ve been receiving from all over weren’t matching what I was seeing in my dreams. Everyone indicated a family of six: Frisk, Chara, and their four children, one of whom is a teenaged Asriel.”

She lifted her sketch book and my jaw dropped. Oh. My. GOD. She was actually going to show me something in it! She flipped to a bookmarked page and held it out to me. There were seven people in the drawing. Frisk, Chara, Asriel, and five children; the fifth one being a female Frisk of about twelve years.

“She’s been taken to another timeline!”

Frisk tapped the picture of the child Frisk. “I don’t dream about her except as a member of this family. That’s not a good sign.” She turned the sketchbook around, looking down at her own drawing with a sorrowful expression. “I have a very bad feeling that when everything is said and done, her timeline will cease to exist.”

I frowned. “Do you think Dragoon will destroy it?”
“Maybe. That said, it is not impossible for a Frisk to implode their own timeline. To will it completely out of existence.”

My jaw dropped as a terrible thought occurred to me. “You’ve seen a Frisk do it before.”

She nodded, mouth set like a thin line. Which meant that details would not be forthcoming, no matter how much I asked.

C appeared on my shoulder. “Hey. Sorry to interrupt, but you’re off the training floor with Asriel.”

I deflated. “Really?” I perked up. “Would that be because of management issues on the Epiphany?”

“Provost talked to you, huh? The plot is actually way thicker than just management issues. Head up stairs. She’s on the horn with Azzy right now and you totally need to hear this.”

I stood, eyes on Frisk. “Need anything else from me?”

She shook her head. “Hurry upstairs. Az is waiting for you.”

I turned and went out the door, plowing into Chara. He hit the floor, arms out to catch me against his chest. A few of the day staff stopped to applaud, including Larry.

“Nice one, guys.”

Chara huffed at me. “Slow down, Star!”

“Can’t! I need to get up stairs!” I found my feet and pulled him up at the same time. “Come on!”

He followed me up the stairs, careful to hang back so when I stopped outside of the Boss Man’s closed door, he didn’t run into me. Taking a moment to catch my breath and smooth out my scrubs, I knocked on the door.

Asriel’s voice sounded a little softer than usual. “Come in.”

I opened the door and found Asriel sitting with Frisk Adelay and Papyrus in the living room. Chara Provost was on Asriel’s laptop, and appeared to be looking at something while waiting. I sat down in the open seat next to Asriel. The one meant for me if his sister wasn’t here. I’m not sure when it happened that this spot became mine in her absence. I’m not sure it was intentional. I certainly didn’t have Frisk’s authority. Chara stood behind me, leaning over the back of the couch.

Provost looked up. “Good! Everyone’s here. Let’s talk about the management issues first. Captain Undyne has been repeatedly in Commander Asriel’s face about Frisk’s ‘suicide.’ It appears that Frisk had been adopted into Undyne’s family, and the family has been actively looking for Frisk since she disappeared. Undyne has been using her power as Captain to find Frisk, while the CHARA AI was hiding her. The family finding out that Frisk committed suicide via a press conference was less than ideal.”

Provost traced a line across her face with her thumb. “Asriel’s dramatic facial scar came courtesy of Undyne.”

“And he didn’t jettison her into space?” Chara asked.

I looked up at him. “Good point.”

Asriel’s eyebrow quirked. “He feels he deserves it. It’s why he has a scar.”
Provost continued. “CHARA says Asriel’s come close to revealing Frisk is still alive on multiple occasions, so it’s only a matter of time until he actually does, and Undyne demands to see her sister.”

I looked to Adelay. “That wouldn’t exactly be a bad thing. She needs real interaction with others from her timeline.”

Adelay nodded. “Agreed. It would go a long way to making her more comfortable about going home if she felt there was a home and family there.”

“Hold up, girls. I’m not done yet.” Provost smiled widely. “Here’s where the plot thickens! I asked Black for Tamanna’s genetic work up, hoping I could run it against the medical records on the Epiphany for a match. And I found one.”

“She and Undyne are half sisters,” Chara and I said at the same time.

“Bingo!” Provost’s fingers flew over her keyboard. “It seems dear old dad had a penchant for flings with humans and Frisk is the result of one of them. That Frisk was paired with her biological family for adoption is total luck, and Dad doesn’t appear to suspect a thing since human monster hybrids don’t happen.”


Asriel placed a small box in my hands. “This is the core for the CHARA AI.”

“Awesome.” I opened the box, pulled out the core, and pinned it to my collar. I tapped it once. “Hey, CHARA.”

A hologram of a blue skinned female with blue-purple hair and pale yellow eyes appeared on my shoulder. Glowing yellow circuits appeared here and there on the body, glowing briefly before subsiding. “Hello, Miss Star.”

“Just Star is fine. You’ll stay with me for a while. Once I’m sure you and Frisk are ready for it, I’ll transfer the core to her.”

The hologram nodded once. “Understood.”

Asriel gave me an apologetic smile. “I’m sorry to bail on our floor time. Today’s been—”

“Normal.” I shrugged. “It’s been normal.” I turned to Adelay. “I’m adding art therapy to my social integration plan for Frisk Tamanna.”

She nodded. “Let me know how it develops.”

“Will do.”

Asriel put a hand on my shoulder. “Go get some lunch.”

Translation: Asriel needs to make some decisions I should not be around to hear about. I nodded and stood, the CHARA AI disappearing from my shoulder and my partner following me out the door. I gave the souls in their vessels a wave as I walked by, making sure to shut the door behind me. I sighed, deflating. Chara put his arm around my shoulders, walking me down the stairs, and straight to the cafeteria.

Frisk Tamanna sat with Charlotte on the mezzanine lining the top of the cafeteria, and I wouldn’t have spotted them had Charlotte not waved. After grabbing some chow, we joined them, watching
everyone on staff come and go with the lunch hour. Charlotte had managed to hide the red streak in her hair pretty well today. I understood why she did it, but I hoped that, when it was time for her to go back home, she’d feel better about it. See the streak as a victory, and not the visible mark of an awful time that haunted her dreams.

She poked me with a finger. “What are you thinking about?”

“You.”

Chara put an arm around me. “You have no guile.”

I shrugged, pushing my food around my plate. “I don’t have a reason to lie. If I’m eating with someone, I’m typically thinking about them.”

Charlotte chuckled. “Are you on this afternoon?”

Frisk stiffened, before hunching down a little.

“With Frisk, though she doesn’t seem to be up to it.”

She poked at her food listlessly, still huddled. “I don’t like the social therapy.”

I set my fork down to give her my full attention. “We’re going to do something different today. Cross will give you a drawing lesson this afternoon.”

Frisk immediately perked up, but her eyes moved rapidly back and forth, thinking through what the change might mean. Well, I assumed that’s what she was doing. According to grad school hell and my own trip down that road, that’s what was happening.

“We won’t be imposing, right?”

I shook my head. “Not at all.”

Frisk looked down at her plate for a moment before looking back up at me. “Do you draw?”

“Nope! I’m rubbish at that. I dance.”

Charlotte and Frisk were both suddenly very interested and leaning toward me. Chara smiled ‘that’ smile. Oh. ‘His Royal Highness’ has decided to be a royal pain, huh?

He speared a cherry tomato off his plate. “How about a demonstration?” He popped it in his mouth, and sat back to chew, waiting for me to get up and potentially embarrass myself.

“Ice skating?” Frisk looked at us, confused. “How does that work?”

Charlotte answered. “You wear a special boot with a blade on the bottom. The blade allows you to glide across the ice. It takes a bit to get used to, but it’s a lot of fun. And the best at it do tricks on the ice.” She whipped around to me. “So you can jump? Are you competitive?”

“Papyrus and I compete with ice dancing during the season.” Time to make Chara regret his life choices. “You’re both welcome to come along! Even if you aren’t up to skating, you can watch from the grandstand.”
Chara glared at me. He really didn’t like sharing our time, but if he’s going to be a pain, I’m going to make it hurt!

He stood with a huff. “Hand me your trays and I’ll take them down.”

When he’d left, Charlotte let out a laugh. “You are really good at shutting him down. He does look dismal though.”

I shrugged. “He doesn’t like sharing bro date time.” I smiled. “But if he’s going to embarrass me, I’m going to make him regret it!”

Charlotte smiled softly. “His lesson appears to be learned, so we’ll give it a miss.”

I stood. “Come on. It’s art time.”

A real smile lit up Frisk’s face, making the scaly patches glow. She took my hand and let me draw her away. Charlotte followed behind, taking the kind of hidden door on the mezzanine that let you out on the second floor down the hall from my apartment. The door of the empty apartment next to mine stood open. Umbra sat outside the door, tail swaying back and forth slowly, watching what sounded like the Tarsus brothers getting comfortable inside.

“Is that an actual pokemon?!” Charlotte attempted to stand and reach for Umbra, only to overbalance and hit the floor. “Dammit!”

Umbra leapt to the side to avoid being crushed. Charlotte groaned, looking miserable for a moment, before Umbra padded over and leaned down to lick Charlotte’s face. She gave my poke-partner a bemused smile.

Chara-- When did he get here?-- knelt next to Charlotte, helping her sit up. “Are you all right?”

“All right? This is phenomenal! A real pokemon! Does that mean there are pokemon timelines?” She leaned into his face as Umbra jumped into her lap for pets. “Is this Star’s pokemon? As an Umbreon, it must be! Do you have one? How about a team? Do you have a team?” She petted Umbra absently, scratching behind the ears.

Chara chuckled. “Slow down! This is Umbra, Star’s poke-partner. Mine is a Luxray named Tesla. We train small teams for when we need to go to pokemon timelines.”

Chara Tarsus stuck his head out the door. “What’s with the--” His eyes hit Frisk and he blinked. He stood upright, and gave her a warm smile. “Greetings!”

“Um… Hello… Uh…” She looked at me, trembling a little.

I put an arm around her. “Frisk, this is Chara Tarsus. Remember? You asked about him when during your intake. He’s from a ‘Shift’ timeline, where people shift places in the story.” I took a risk. “He’d be analogous to your Sans.” She looked at me sharply, but I kept going. “He’s a half mer-monster like you, though he looks more like his human mother. Chara, this is Frisk Tamanna. She’s from a colony ship timeline.”

He stepped forward and she stepped into me, grasping tightly at my scrubs.

I put a hand in her hair, petting her head to sooth a little.

Her eyes slid to the left, looking at something that wasn’t there.
Tarsus caught the strange look, but I don’t know how he interpreted it. “Would you like to meet my Frisk? He’s my little brother. Still in his stripes.”

I gripped Frisk’s arm. “Yes. She would.”

I marched her into the apartment, even as she tried to pull back. But as soon as she caught sight of Frisk Tarsus sitting on the couch, she mellowed; that fascination we all had with each other kicking in and relaxing her.

Asriel, the goat prince looking much more awake now, gave her a big smile. “WELCOME, FRIEND! I am Prince Asriel Dreemurr and this is my brother, Frisk!”

She smiled in spite of herself. “Frisk Tamanna. I’m from the Starship Epiphany.”

Frisk Tarsus smiled brightly at her. “A sci-fi timeline? Wicked cool! I visited the Delta once. Is your ship like that?”

She shook her head, red curls swaying. “I don’t know.” She pulled at the sleeve of her silver shirt. “My clothes are from the Delta, but I’ve not seen it.”

He ran a finger along her sleeve. “It looks like the super thin insulation they use for being in outer space.” He frowned. “Aren’t you really warm in it?”

Frisk shook her head, smiling a little. “I always feel cold and wearing this is the first time I’ve felt warm in a long time.”

He lifted her hands, looking at the webbing between them, that, now that she wasn’t half starved and dried out, came up to her first knuckles. “You’ve got a lot more webbing between your fingers than Chara. Do you like to swim? There’s a pool in the new building. We could go sometime. Tomorrow?”

She nodded and paused looking at me. “Is that okay?”

I smiled. “Absolutely!” I nodded toward the door. “Art time.”

“Oh!” She smiled at Frisk. “See you tomorrow!”

I drew Frisk out the door and back into the hall. Good. That was a nice, strong interaction. I looked back and noticed Tarsus looking after us. Or more specifically, Frisk. I hadn’t taken him for the kind of guy who’d be interested in a mate, but then, hybrids like him were hard to come by. I shook off the thought. It was a bridge I could cross when and if I came to it.

My partner had Charlotte righted in her wheelchair, Umbra sitting in her lap, enjoying all the pets. Chara leaned against the wall, relaxed as he spoke.

“All Epsilon agents have a pokemon team. It’s pretty cool seeing what kind of pokemon each of the agents pick. Some picks make complete sense, like Bones and his houndoom, Max; or Church and her lucario, Anubis. And then some just make no sense, like Cross and his alteria, Marshmallow, or Agent Tahoma and her metagross, HAL.”

Frisk leaned over, looking at Umbra. “So, this is something unusual for here?”

I nodded. “Pocket Monsters aren’t native to this timeline.”

She reached out, gently touching Umbra’s head with the tips of her fingers before letting her hand
slide through the black fur. “So soft.” She smiled again, eyes closed.

Heading down the hall, we found Cross’ door open. The art lesson was already underway for the Gaster children. Brandon was currently wearing his skin, looking very much like Bones did with skin on, working on a pencil drawing. Sophia sat next to him, working on a painting. Charlotte waved a quick goodbye before heading into the library with Chara. Frisk leaned over to watch Sophia, eyes shining a little as she concentrated on the color slipping through the water.

“I’ve never seen anything like this?” She blinked at Sophia. “What is this?”

Sophia pushed the chair next to hers out with her foot. “It’s watercolor. Have a seat.”

Cross came out of the hall leading back to the bedrooms in the apartment with an armful of materials. He paused when he saw Frisk watching Sophia, shrugged, disappeared down the hall, and came back with a different armful of materials. Sitting across from Frisk, he placed a pad of paper with glued edges, a brush, a cup of water, a paper towel, and a pan of watercolors in front of her.

He handed Frisk the brush. “We’ll start with exploring the colors. Dip the bristles of the brush in the water and then rub the bristles gently against the color to activate it. When you have some color on the brush, apply it to the paper. The intensity of the color will depend on how much water you use. Rinse the paint away in the water between colors to avoid messing up the paint.”

She nodded, dipping the brush as instructed before choosing the bright yellow that came first on the palette. The paint dripped from the brush, spreading across the paper. She watched it for a few moments before putting the brush to the paper, spreading a smooth arc of yellow. She rinsed the brush and went for the blue next, swiping the new color in an arc next to the yellow. Where the colors touched, they mixed, creating a bright green, swirling on the paper.

Cross smiled. “You have to be careful with watercolor. It has a mind of its own.”

Her eyes never left the paper. “I like it. It just goes wherever it wants too.” She touched the blue paint to the red, and purple swirled to life under the brush. “It’s free.”

Frisk continued with the rest of the paints in the palette, watching each one ebb and flow as she added and subtracted water. She watched it dry with just as much fascination. It wasn’t long before she found a pen on the table and started drawing over the dried paint, adding her own illustration over the color. If Cross had a lesson planned, he’d obviously dropped it at this point. Instead, he gave Frisk pointers and suggestions, letting her explore without constraint.

Undyne’s voice echoed down the hall. “I SWEAR to you, Commander, if you’re lying to me, I don’t care that you’re a Dreemurr. I’ll end you faster than you can blink.”

That’s not my Undyne. Cross and I jumped into position between the doorway and the children. Frisk dropped the brush in her hand, looking at the door fearfully.

Frisk Church answered. “Calm down, Captain. There’s no need to offer violence to your commanding officer.”

I heard a scramble behind me, the sound of things being knocked over, and turned just enough to look at Frisk. She was terrified and Sophia was holding her hands, trying to calm her. Cross came around the table, taking my position so I could handle Frisk.

I put my arms around her, gently petting her hair. “You are afraid and that’s okay. There is nothing here that we can’t handle together. Just breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.”
She shook in my arms, her eyes squeezed shut, trying to huddle in on herself. There was nothing in the record that showed anything other than her adopted family loving her. What had her so scared?

“Frisk?”

I looked over my shoulder at an Undyne who was on the short side, only a little taller than me. She had the same pale green, iridescent scaling and bright red hair as Frisk. And both eyes, which was unusual for any version of Undyne. She wore an indigo blue uniform with gold trim and a line of golden insignia down both sleeves. Adelay and Church stood behind her, both looking less than happy. Undyne entered cautiously, and waited patiently for Cross to move aside before kneeling next to Frisk and I.

“Frisk?” Undyne reached out, oh so gently, the fully webbed hand stroking Frisk’s hair. “It’s okay. You don’t have to be scared. I won’t hurt you. Haven’t I always looked after you?”

Frisk, still trembling, sniffed and turned her head, glistening eyes peeking through her hair. She whispered so softly, I almost didn’t hear her, “I’m sorry.”

Undyne smiled patiently. “Why?”

“I was supposed to disappear.”

Undyne’s smile fell. “No.” She pulled Frisk away from me and into her own arms, cradling her. “No. Mom, Dad, Cliff, Aqua, and I spent so long looking for you. We don’t want you to ever disappear.” She pulled back a little, giving Frisk a soft smile. Turning slightly, she looked back at Adelay and Church. “May I stay? If not for all of Frisk’s recovery, at least for a little bit? I won’t be underfoot.”

Church glanced at Adelay, who nodded.

“I’ll arrange a room for you.”

Undyne bowed her head. “You have my deepest thanks.” She turned back to Frisk, hugging her sister tightly.
Episode 6: Snow White

Chapter Notes

Fair Warning: Work has really put me behind on writing. So you may see a longer delay than two weeks for Episode 7.

Special Note: In the last season, a guest commenter asked for more White. Here you go!

Episode 6: Snow White
(White is our narrator!)

I sat on the edge of a several ton block of stone up near the top of the Great Pyramid of Giza, waiting for the sun to rise over the city of Cairo. Frisk sat with Steam's kiddos, enjoying the warm breeze. Though calling them kiddos wasn't all that fair anymore. They'd both grown into young men when I wasn't looking. An airship occasionally floated by overhead, the kind they had here matching the style of the Ancient Egyptian boats of old. They cast long shadows across the Nile and sands of the west bank, slowly reaching up to the Sphinx.

Sitting just above them were Cephas and Stephen, the twins' Gentlemen of the Bedchamber and welcome confidants. And just below the boys sat Asriel with her ladies, Anna, Mary, and Meritamen. This was a rare trip for Asriel and the girls as they rarely left the confines of the Empire. As the Imperial Princess, Grand Duchess of Canard, heir to the throne, and Minister of Homeland Security, there just weren't opportunities for her, Anne, Mary, and Meritamen to just up and leave. Sitting next to me was Wilson, a member of the Dreemurr Imperial Guard, keeping a watchful eye on a crew he knew could handle themselves.

Frisk wanted a vacation that didn't involve secret service members watching him 24/7. And for that kind of vacation to happen, it had to happen on another timeline. And Steam is always happy to host. Not to mention that the twins were always happy to have any of their doubles around. Frisk was relaxed, his arm around his steampunk counterpart's shoulders in that way that Frisk's were with each other.

It wasn't the same with Charas. Well, I take that back. For some, it was. Steam Chara and Fell Chara would hang all over each other when given the chance. C and Chara Provost were happy to pal around under the guise of letting their Frisks have time to canoodle. And the only time you could ever accuse 01 of goofing off is when Error Chara or King Chara checked in at Site Alpha. As soon as the check in was finished, they'd shoot the breeze for several hours.

Asriel and her ladies were looking especially lovely this morning, the soft glow of sunrise lighting their faces. A golden locket glittered brightly on Asriel's chest. It was the subject of several rumors and I'd been asked repeatedly by several members of staff and a few diplomats about it when visiting the Summer Palace. Everyone wanted to know who had captured her heart so completely. I'm still trying to figure out why anyone would have thought I knew. I didn't even belong on this timeline!

Maybe my expression was giving it away because it was pretty easy to figure out that Chara gave it to her.

Meritamen stood. Unlike the rest of the girls, she didn't dress in the empire's fashion, but wore a dress
typical of the Coptic Christians who were the true, biological descendants of the Ancient Egyptians; a long salmon pink skirt under a pale blue tunic and heavily embroidered vest. She lifted her arms and began to sing, greeting the sun as it rose over the Cairo.

Steam's Frisk had told me that the first time he and Chara brought Meritamen back to Egypt, she'd stared at her homeland in dismay. The temples that had once been brightly painted and beautiful were now broken and some lost. When she saw the pyramids on the Giza plateau, she fell on her knees and wept. Not for the state of the pyramids themselves, but for a fourth one that was completely missing; the massive structure torn down to build the city across the river.

Once the sun had crested the city, her song ended and she sat down again, smiling a little sadly. Everything she'd ever known and loved was long gone and any part of the past she grasped at seemed to slip through her fingers. The only thing she'd managed thus far was singing the sun up everyday. Asriel had revealed that it didn't matter where Meritamen was or how hard pressed in the empire's service she'd been the night before, she would sing and greet the Sun Bark of Ra.

After a few more minutes, we started climbing back down the pyramid on the side away from the sun to avoid baking in the soon to be harsh light. Miss Luxon, another member of the Imperial Guard, waited on the sand for us with a group of camels to take us back to Dr. Gaster's archeological dig. Steam's kiddos saw her waiting there and Frisk smiled widely while Chara gave a happy if somewhat subdued smile. Like he wasn't sure how to greet the woman and yet wanted to be able to do so as freely as Frisk. While neither of the twins resembled her in the traditional fashion, Miss Luxon was very obviously their biological mother.

I elbowed Chara. "You okay, kiddo?"

He sighed. "Yeah." He pointed to Frisk and Frisk. "Your brother seems to be having a good time."

I nodded as I pulled up my hood to hide from the sun. The super pale skin was cute, but damn was it not good at taking anything that looked like a UV ray. "It's the most relaxed I've seen him in a while. When I've seen him. He tends to be everywhere and anywhere now a days."

Chara mounted one of the camel's. "Target on his back?"

I sighed deeply and climbed up behind Chara in the saddle. "He accessed his save three times in one day, six months ago, after a multi-layered assassination attempt. Since then, the secret service has been all over him and Flowey has been physically attached to him every day since. He was only willing to let go when I said we'd be going to another timeline."

"Well, Asriels can be that way about their Frisks." Chara patted his camel's neck and it stood. I swayed with it, putting a hand back to steady myself, as Chara urged the camel across the sand.

Dr. Gaster's dig site was in Saqqarah, just south of Djoser's step pyramid. Several white tents were arrayed around the area, monsters and humans working the site. While we referred to it as the Doctor's dig, he was just the financial backer and not really made out for archeology. Still, he'd caught the 'Egypt Bug' after meeting Meritamen, and Ethel Grace, Wing Ding's wife, was happy to travel outside of the empire for a bit.

Speaking of whom, Mrs. Gaster waved to us as we approached. "Hello, boys! Breakfast is waiting in the tents."

Ethel was a pleasantly plump, human woman of significant station. I'm not sure how she and Dr. Gaster met, or even how they courted at all seeing as how monster-human romances weren't exactly looked on kindly in this timeline. I had a sneaking suspicion that Ethel had decided that she was
going to marry the good doctor whether anyone liked it or not, including him. Not that Dr. Gaster seemed to mind. The two would cuddle like love birds if left alone.

After the camel had comfortably knelt, Chara and I dismounted. The camel's long neck turned, sniffing and poking at Chara's jacket.

"Oh you smell that, huh?" He pulled the apple in his pocket out, holding it while the camel noshed. Once he'd finished, Chara patted the tuft of hair at the top of his head. "Thanks for the ride."

Turning to the tents, we went over to the wash station to clean up before heading in for breakfast. Laid out on the tables were fuul medames with flatbread, falafel, and, my favorite, beid bel basterma, or eggs cooked in lots and lots of ghee with dried beef. Dr. Gaster joined us, sitting with Ethel after kissing her hand. Which was an odd thing to see as he didn't actually have lips.

The doctor looked over at Frisk and Frisk. "So what will you be up to this afternoon? More sightseeing?"

Steam's kiddo nodded. "We're going down the Nile to Deir el-Bahari. Merit wants to see Hatshepsut's Mortuary Temple."

Meritamen smiled at her breakfast. She'd been very happy that 'god's brothers' referred to her by a nickname. She was aware that Asriel was not a god by any measure of the imagination. Well, not on this timeline anyway. But she was convinced that the Dreemurrs were descended in some way from Khnum, the Divine Potter.

There was a commotion outside and Wilson, sitting closest to the front, pushed the flap aside to have a look.

And immediately dropped to avoid getting a sword in his chest. He rolled backward and up to his feet, pulling the raygun hidden under his uniform jacket. Miss Luxon and Mary were up in a flash, taking positions around Asriel and Anne. Stephen was up next to Chara just as quickly. I snapped my fingers, turning the sword holder blue and shoving them back.

Rushing out of the tent so as not to be pinned, we saw Dragoon Sans, in a long, black with gold trim, military coat over black pants, finding his feet after my toss. A white Delta Rune was embroidered on the upper left of the coat over his chest.

Stephen readied for a fight. "Is this the Sans you were telling us about earlier?"

I nodded. "This is the first time he's gone after a steam timeline though. I wasn't aware there'd be something here he wanted."

Dragoon twirled his sword around in his hand. "I'm not here for anything specific to this timeline."

"Then why, exactly, are you here?"

Steam's kiddo gasped and immediately shoved my brother behind him. "He's after Frisk!"

Chara glared. "You idiot! You can't replace one Frisk with another!"

Dragoon said nothing, he only fell into stance, sword ready. Meritamen waved for Ethel and Dr. Gaster to follow her, leading them both away from the fight.

Cephas shook his head. "There's a mob of us, many of whom can use magic. Do you really want this fight?"
Dragoon said nothing. He rushed Mary first, which made sense based on previous reports. This guy really saw women as less than capable combatants, but at the same time, didn't feel the need to go easy on them either. Mary ducked low, underneath his sword swing, revealing Miss Luxon and Anne right behind her, and Asriel at the back. Their rayguns were set to a fire array which combined with Asriel's magic. A huge spout of flame shot toward Dragoon, looking like a dragon ready to spear him through.

Having not expected the combined attack, Dragoon hit the ground to avoid it. And then scrambled to get away as Asriel pulled the fire back around to strafe the sand, glassing it. Dragoon managed to get away from the fire only to stumble over a set of tent pegs. Stephen, Chara, and I didn't give him a chance to recover, rushing him as soon as the fire flew by and the skeleton attempted to rise from the sand. Stephen kicked his sword away from him while Chara and I grabbed his arms, wrenching them back to be bound.

He disappeared out of our hands and reappeared before Frisk and Frisk. He flung Steam's kiddo aside, tossing him into Wilson and Cephas. My brother immediately ducked down, away from Dragoon's attempt to grab him, only to change course and jump up, slamming his right shoulder into the skeleton's jaw bone with a sharp crack. Not phased in the least, Dragoon grabbed Frisk's arm, locking the elbow while pulling out a knife with a blade similar to his sword.

The knife pierced Frisk's chest as Dragoon turned him blue, drawing out his soul. The magic on his body cut and he fell to his knees, gasping, pressing hard against the wound. Frisk and Mary were immediately next to him, quickly working to stem the gush of blood. The rest of us froze. The wrong move would hurt his soul.

Dragoon frowned, his magic pulling at the red soul turned blue, until there was a sound like a thousand threads straining before snapping. Frisk screamed in pain and passed out as Dragoon let go of his soul. I quickly snatched it, using magic to shove it back in my brother's body.

Another red soul rested in Dragoon's phalanges, quivering.

Chara. He'd been after Chara.

A complicated set of golden, glowing rings surrounded Dragoon, creating a barrier between us and him. His voice sank deep into a hypnotic chant, working a spell in the old style, the kind of thing you'd see Mage Frisk do. Symbols inside the rings began to glow and pulse, providing energy and components to the working. The energy twisted and moved around the soul, encasing it in a white and gold cocoon that grew larger and larger. The cocoon suddenly cracked and disappeared, revealing an adult woman with milky pale skin and long, curly, black hair. Dragoon snapped his phalanges and a gray and black dress appeared around her before he took her in his arms.

I froze in place for a moment. That wasn't the child Toriel would tearfully speak of. That was a full grown, adult woman. What the hell was going on?!

She groaned, one hand coming up to hold her head while a set of cognac-amber eyes looked up at Dragoon. Her face became a mask of fury and she shoved at him. Dragoon, unprepared for the assault, dropped her. She hit the ground and immediately reached out to the nearest of the glowing rings, shoving her hand through it, and breaking the barrier. Stephen, Wilson, and Chara were immediately on Dragoon, driving him back, forcing him away.

Dragoon screamed in rage. "NO! NO! I WILL NOT LEAVE HER BEHIND!" He bull rushed them, knocking Stephen to the ground before grabbing Chara by her hair, jerking her up so that she hung in the air.
She screamed and kicked at him before her eyes began to glow a bright red. A ring of gold and sigils appeared between them and she punched through it, coating her fist in magic before it connected with Dragoon's skull. The resounding crack of bone shattering filled the air and Dragoon dropped her, holding his shattered mandible against his skull.

His skeletal horse galloped to him and both disappeared.

"Frisk!" She turned, looking at everyone before spotting him, and attempting to run to him, only to hit the sand with a groan, arms wrapped around her stomach. Chara ran for her, quickly scooping her up. She grasped at his shirt, barely conscious and whimpering in pain.

Mary gasped. "I can't heal this! Whatever Sans did, it's beyond my power."

I reached down and picked my brother up bridal style. "We need to get him to Epsilon."

Chara came over, cradling the woman against his chest.

Wilson tapped Chara's shoulder. "Don't take too long."

Chara smiled. "Time moves slower here. I'll be back before you know it."

Stephen stepped up to him, hand on his shoulder. "I'm going with you."

He smirked. "Can't let me out of your sight for a minute, huh?"

Careful not to drop the Chara in his arms, Chara grabbed my hoodie and we stepped into the void.

We set down outside Asriel's lab at Site Epsilon and rushed in. Asriel was in the office in the back, Alphys tapped away at a computer, and Shooting Star leaned over a stack of papers, working on a report.

I put Frisk on the nearest empty hospital bed. "Frisk was cut by one of Dragoon's weapons!"

"Twice in one day?!" Star immediately dropped the pen she was holding and washed her hands. She came over, pulling on a pair of gloves. Frisk was pale, his shirt stained a dark red. The woman whimpered against Chara's chest, shaking.

"C, pull up Frisk Gaster's medical record and toss it on the monitor." Star leaned over. "He's got some blood loss and is pale enough that he may need a transfusion. He's O negative, right?"

I nodded. "Yes."

She turned to Alphys. "Toss me a stent kit!"

Alphys shook her scaly head as she pulled open a fridge full of blood bags, the long talons on her toes clicking nervously against the tiled floor. "Just tell me which hand to put it in."

"The right. Frisk is left handed."

Chara smiled. "How do you remember things like that?"

Star smiled at him as her hands worked to get Frisk's pulse and blood pressure measured. "Because it's important. You and your brother are left handed too."

Asriel came out of his office. He pointed to the woman in my arms. "Is that his Chara?"

Chara nodded. "Yes."
I shook my head. "No."

Stephen jerked a thumb at Chara. "I know him when I see him. This is your Chara."

I shook my head again. "My Chara was a child at death. And that woman doesn't even match the basics of my Chara's description. She maybe a Chara, but she can't be the one from my timeline. I have no idea who she is."

Asriel pulled on a pair of gloves and inspected Frisk's wound. "We can figure it out later." He looked to Star. "Frisk, get me a suture kit and then move to taking care of Chara."

She nodded and turned to a cabinet, pulling out a kit and prepping it for Asriel before motioning Chara to follow her into a room off to the side. I reached over and grasped my brother's hand, careful to stay out of Asriel's way as he checked the deepness of the wound and stitched my brother up. I gently petted Frisk's head. He looked so pale.

"Thankfully, the cut isn't deep. It didn't even reach his sternum." Asriel hummed a little. "That's suspicious. Dragoon isn't usually so 'gentle.'"

I frowned. "He stabbed Frisk to release his soul instead of just using blue magic to pull it out. Maybe he can't remove a soul the same way other Sanses can. If that's the case, the last thing he'd want to do is stab too deep. It'd kill Frisk and he'd just go back to his last save." I looked to the room the others had gone in. "He was desperate for Chara."

Asriel finished the sutures and attached a bag of fluids to the IV. "Help me roll him in."

I released the wheel break with my foot and pushed while Asriel maneuvered. We carefully wheeled past a room with what looked like Frisk Lyall sleeping behind a long curtain to the second room in the lab. A very beautiful Undyne sat in a chair next to the bed, holding Lyall's little brother while he slept against her chest.

"Is that Lyall?"

Asriel nodded. "Dragoon was on his timeline earlier today and I have multiple reports of other attacks as well. He's picking up the pace."

"I wonder what the rush is?"

We rolled into the next room. Star had the second bed in the room pushed all the way over to make room for my brother. She stood over Chara, the latter's face a mask of pain.

Star inserted a needle into the stent and set a hydration drip. "How do you feel on a scale of one to ten. Ten being the worst pain ever."

"Seven," she hissed.

"Does your head hurt too?"

Chara nodded, long, black hair shaking around a pale and beautiful face.

"Are you hungry for sweets?"

Her eyes rolled up at Star. "Chocolate."

Stephen snorted. Chara covered his mouth to keep from laughing. Well. I guess they were all bad like that.
Star took Chara's hand in hers and pinched the skin. "You're dehydrated. The fluids will help. Also, the medicine I dumped in your stent will kill the pain in about a minute, but it's going to knock you out for about an hour."

Chara nodded, trying to relax. "Thank... you."

I pushed Frisk's bed from my side so that the two met. Chara immediately reached over, her hand almost touching Frisk's. She caught sight of me and pulled back. Her eyes closed completely and she fell asleep. I reached over, putting Chara's hand in my brother's, before sitting down in the chair next to the beds.

Chara flinched at the stitches in Frisk's too pale skin. "Will he be all right?"

Asriel nodded. "Dragoon's weapons cause injuries that magic will not heal. Frisk will have to heal the slow way. He hasn't lost more blood than you'd expect from a typical blood donation. I'll keep him under observation for the next two hours. After that, he'll be fine to be up and about." He nodded to Chara. "How is she?"

"Dehydrated," Star answered. "She said a spell she used took too much out of her. What spell was that?"

I held up my hands, making a circle. "You know the magic D uses? Where he can coat himself with the circular sigil work? She did the same thing and punched Dragoon hard enough to shatter his mandible."

Alphys grimaced. "Ouch!"

Chara tapped my shoulder. "Hey. We didn't finish breakfast. Want to get something to eat?"

I sighed, watching my brother sleep. "I thought that a vacation off timeline would be safer."

Chara patted my shoulder. "This is a fluke. Stuff happens. The important thing is that he'll be okay." Chara grabbed my arm, Stephen taking the other, and they pulled me up. "Come on. I could use a bite."

Star followed us out of the room. She pulled off her gloves, tossing them in the biohazard box before hugging me and Chara. "I've missed you!"

We hugged her back.

"I missed you too, Star." Chara flashed her big smile. "Any chance you and your partner will be visiting?"

She sighed. "Unless it's a mission, not anytime soon, I'm afraid."

As Star pulled back, a radiant shine on one of her fingers caught my attention and I snatched her hand. I turned her hand back and forth to watch the light catch in the diamond and rose gold ring on her finger. "That is a legitimately beautiful engagement ring."

Star giggled, "Stop! We haven't made an announcement yet!" She batted at me gently. "Pretend you didn't see anything!"

Chara put an arm around her shoulders. "Pretend? No deal. I'm totally telling everyone I see, starting with your partner."
Stephen groaned at Chara, rolling his eyes. He gave his second a wide grin.

Star pushed at him. "He already knows! Chara talked to him before proposing." She turned from Chara to tug on my arm. "Cheer up! Frisk will be fine…"

She trailed off, sighing. "Okay, having seen this before with my Chara, he's going to need time to adjust. This is pretty huge." She smiled. "On the other hand, this is also significant. This is not the first Chara Dragoon has attempted to rip out of a Frisk and kidnap. If I can get some decent historical information from Chara we will be light years ahead in figuring out the profile and being able to stop Dragoon from grabbing anyone else with it."

I nodded and sighed, looking back over my shoulder. "I just don't get it. She's obviously a Chara, but that isn't the girl Tori talks about endlessly while Asgore goes dark."

Chara pulled me along, taking me out of the lab. "Cafeteria. Now."

Walking down the hall we found the cafeteria on the empty side, but Chiko was happy to make some chocolate chip pancakes for Chara, a hot roast beef sandwich for Stephen, and some liquid cheese covered nachos for me. I ate quietly, not being much for conversation. Several onsite staff came in for coffee and joined us as soon as they saw us, chatting up Chara and Stephen.

Something was wrong here. Anytime Frisk did a mission, it was with me. He was an auxiliary agent, so he wasn't seeing other timelines or situations that would bond him to another soul. Chara has always been there, a red shadow in his eyes when he was angry or upset, especially when magic was involved. She looked to be somewhere around twenty years old. What if she grew up with him?

No. That still didn't make sense. The little girl Toriel would talk about, and show off paintings of, had light brown hair in life and a warm, brown skin. This Chara was as pale skinned and dark haired as Snow White. And she knew a kind of magic I'm familiar with but have never taught Frisk. The sigil work she produced is the product of a decade and more of study.

Chara, Stephen, and I went back to the lab an hour later to find Frisk and Chara awake and eating. Star worked around them, checking Frisk's vitals. Frisk was no longer hooked up to blood and another bag with a clear liquid, the label on which I couldn't make heads or tails of, was in its place. He'd kicked off his shoes and his bare foot touched Chara's, maintaining a physical contact that Chara had withdrawn from earlier despite obviously wanting it.

Chara was no longer hooked to anything, though the stent was still in her hand. She poked at the food on her plate slowly, gently separating parts from wholes, and carefully sniffing each piece and touching it lightly to her tongue before actually eating it. A small pile of food was pushed to one side of the plate, like she was too suspicious of it to even test it.

Having done a lot of missions with my surfing buddy, I knew exactly what I was seeing. It was the kind of thing you did when you feared being poisoned. She'd recognized Star and hadn't fought her care. Why was she suddenly afraid now? Or was it simply a habit? I frowned.

Frisk gave us a smile when he saw us, looking tired, but otherwise all right. "Hey guys. Thanks for the rescue."

Stephen shook his head. "It wasn't much of a rescue."

Chara pulled her foot away from Frisk's, tucking her feet under the skirt of her long dress, looking guilty. Frisk frowned at her and shook his head before giving me a smile.

I pulled over a chair and flipped it around to sit down, resting my arms on the back. "How are you
feeling?"

Frisk gently poked the bandage on his chest. "Tender, but okay."

I tilted my head a little to see Chara better. "How about you?"

Chara opened her mouth to answer and then stopped, looking down at her plate, where she moved the food around to make it look like she was eating it. She shook her head. "I don't know." She looked over at Steam's Chara. "Thank you."

He raised an eyebrow. "What for?"

"Helping me. Most people have a low opinion of Charas in general, so I'm lucky to have not been left on the sand to die."

I opened my mouth to protest and shut it tight. She had a point. It was why most Charas who did anything with Seraph tended to lay low behind whoever their partner was, often letting credit for things slide by them. Any Chara attempting to do good in the world was looked on suspiciously and that included fell Charas, who where, in general, good people in bad situations, and swap Charas, who were the equivalent of a Frisk. It was a no win.

Hell, it was the excuse Site Alpha agents would sometimes hem and haw around when they didn't want to follow 01's orders. Of course, he was in a position to do something about that attitude. Being fired was the least of your worries when the man you pissed off could strip you of your abilities on the most basic level.

Stephen saved the moment. "There is no way we were going to leave you."

I sighed heavily, not wanting to jump to it, but needing to know. "Who are you?"

She continued to push the food around on her plate. "I'm Chara Ravenbrooke."

"Ravenbrooke? Then that would make you-"

"A descendant of the wizard who locked monsters in the Underground. Yes. She put her fork down. "I was-"

I held up a hand. "Stop." I pointed to Frisk. "You get to explain."

My brother's jaw dropped. "What?"

"Her soul has been living with yours, so don't try to sell me you have no idea what's going on. I've walked in on the two of you having conversations, making you the one hiding the truth. Start talking, Frisk."

"Busted," Chara whispered under her breath.

Frisk let out a long breath. "Flowey left me with you so I wouldn't end up like the other fallen children."

Star and Steam's Chara looked at each other for a moment before looking back at Frisk. "There aren't any fallen children on your timeline besides you and Chara."

Stephen eyed them. "What? Your brother isn't here, so she steps in to do the talk at the same time thing?"
Star waved him off. "Husha your mouth." She frowned deeply. "There's something wrong with Toriel, isn't there?"

Frisk looked at me. "The story Toriel gives? The paintings? They're all fakes. Chara wasn't a child when she died. She was 21."

And there was a lot not being said here. I understood why. Toriel is well loved and I haven't said the nicest things about Chara based on things Toriel has told me. But it wasn't hard to put two and two together.

"Toriel murdered you."

Chara's head shot up, looking at me a little wide eyed, and nodded.

I nodded to her plate. "Did she poison you?"

Chara stared down at her plate. "No. Asgore drugged me and while I was passed out, Toriel smothered me."

Frisk reached over and took her hand. "Go on."

"After I fell, I was taken into the Dreemurr home. I recognized the spellwork of the barrier and set about finding a spell that would break it open. It took me three years to figure it out. When I did, I told Asgore, who gave me a drugged cup of tea to celebrate."

Chara picked up her fork and continued to push the food around on her plate. "Asriel found my body and, hoping that maybe the humans on the other side of the barrier could revive me, sucked up my soul and tried to go through. He never made it through the barrier. It was designed to keep monsters inside even if they were fused with a human soul. Because that's what started it. Asgore's great great grandfather had fused with a human soul. I tried repeatedly to get him to stop and by the time he listened, it was too late."

I looked at Frisk. "Is Toriel hoarding the souls of six other humans in the Ruins?"

My brother shook his head. "Flowey stole them and gave them to Asgore. They're hidden in the throne room."

I frowned, shaking my head. "I don't get it. Why would Asgore and Toriel murder the savior of all monsters?"

Chara shook her head. "I don't know."

Star pulled out her phone and hit the speed dial. And none of us had to ask who she was calling. She put the phone on speaker and Fase's cheery voice filled the room.

"Hello, Frisk! How may I be of assistance to you?"

Star smiled, closing her eyes. "I've got a history question about White's timeline. How did his Chara die?"

"Oh! That's easy. She was murdered by Queen Toriel and King Asgore."

I shook my head. "We got that part, Fase. I want to know why."

"They feared that opening the barrier would mean a renewal of the war between humans and monsters."
I groaned. "But by that point, it'd literally been hundreds of years! I was the only human left in the Underground when the 'war' was renewed…" I trailed off, frowning deeply. "Something else is going on in the Dreemurr household."

Frisk and Chara looked at each other for a moment before Frisk turned back to me and Chara went back to staring at her plate.

Star sighed. "Anybody else have any questions?"

We shook our heads.

Star nodded. "Thanks, Frisk."

Fase's smile was evident in her voice. "You're welcome!"

Star disconnected the call and stuffed her phone back in her pocket. "Something's rotten on your timeline, White, and it isn't the laundry you haven't done." She turned to Frisk. "You knew about this?"

He nodded. "When I was old enough to face Asgore, Chara kept trying to dissuade me, fearing that I'd end up dead too. Because of our bond, I knew the spell to open the barrier and went anyway."

I thought that over and looked to Chara. "Then why all the attempted possessions when Frisk got angry?"

She glanced at me for a moment before staring at her plate again. "You taught a child blue magic, Sans. Someone needed to help him control it until he was old enough to do so himself. It gets to be a pretty big storm in there when he's angry."

Frisk shrugged. "I am filled with Determination."

I looked at the floor for a moment before looking back at her. "I am heartily sorry for all the awful things I've said about you."

She blinked and looked away, the sunlight from the window catching her face and setting her skin alight. "Thank you."

Star came around the bed to stand near Chara with an expression I'd only ever seen on her face when she was on mission. "Did you attempt suicide the first time you fell?"

Chara shook her head. "I didn't. I was thrown down the hole for being a witch."

Stephen raised an eyebrow. "How'd they determine you were a witch?"

She gave him a wry smile. "I weighed the same as a duck. Obviously."

We all snorted, not a single one of us able to help ourselves.

She looked out the window again, eyes on the garden beyond. "The Ravenbrooke's are a family of wizards. The story goes that my great, great, great, great grandfather was the wizard who sealed monsters away after one of Asgore's ancestors sucked up a human soul and went on a rampage."

Star frowned. "I need to talk to dirty laundry Sans."

All of us looked at her. "Who?"
She waved us off. "A Sans in a Hawaiian shirt who needed help finding his Frisk. Her story is the suck."

Steam's Chara raised an eyebrow. "What kind of suck?"

"She thought Asgore and Toriel were kicking her out when she turned eighteen, and... yeah. You don't want to know the rest." Star fished out her phone and dialed. "Hey, Sans! This is Agent Lucida. Are you adjacent to your Asriel? I need to speak to Chara."

"*uh, yeah. just a sec.* There was the sound of some shuffling. "*she wants to speak to chara."

Another sound of the phone being handed over and then a young woman's voice filled the air. "Yes, Frisk?"

"Dragoon attacked a friend of mine, going after his Chara. I have a couple questions for you to see what the two of you have in common. It will help Seraph figure out what to look for on other timelines. Do you mind?"

"Not at all."

Star smiled widely. "Great!" she waved her hand to calm herself a bit. "Okay, some of them might be really personal so feel free to tell me to go to hell if you need too."

Chara chuckled softly. "I don't typically feel the need to curse at people."

"Okay. How old were you when you fell?"

"Eighteen."

Star looked at Chara, asking without saying a word. Chara nodded.

Star gave her a thumbs up and went back to the phone. "Are you related in anyway to the wizard or wizards who sealed monsters underground."

"I am a descendant of one of the seven."

Star grabbed onto the arm of the hospital bed, suddenly excited. "When you fell into the Underground was it an accident, an intentional jump, or were you pushed?"

There was a bit of strain with the answer, a memory that she didn't want to think about. "I was pushed."

"Where you pushed in for being a witch or magic user?"

The strain let out with a sigh. "Yes."

Star let out a breath. "Okay, one last question. How did you die?"

There was silence for a moment and then Asriel answered, and I wondered if he and Chara shared a body. "After Chara discovered a spell to open the barrier, she was murdered by the Captain of the Royal Guard to keep the barrier shut. He felt it was a trap meant to lead monsters to slaughter on the surface."

Star looked at me, caught between a smile and frown. "Oh my God. That's a match."

Chara's voice was suddenly there. "Someone shares my story?"
“Yeah. This Chara was murdered by a different person, but, it all matches.”

“May I talk to that Chara?”

Star sighed and smiled. "Of course." She handed Chara the phone and then hooked her arm in mine. "Come on. They need some private time." She steered me toward the door.

"Frisk…"

"Nope. No arguments! Besides, since she has my phone, I'm going to need yours to call Fase with the profile… Wait. That means- oh no."

I quickly took her hand. "What?"

"The Asgore at Sigma! He murdered his Chara! It's why he's at Sigma. He was completely broken by the act. I-" She pulled away from me to wave her hands in front of herself. "Getting too far ahead of myself. I need to talk to Fase."

I dug into the pocket of my hoodie and handed her my phone. "Speed dial #4."

Star turned away with the phone.

I eyed Steam's kiddo. "Don't you have a phone?"

"Of course I do!" Chara put his hands in the pockets of his pants. "It's an emergency sort of thing though. We don't have tech like that on my timeline."

Stephen eyed him. "I'm still not sure that that thing isn't magic."

He shrugged. "You know? It might actually be, so maybe?"

I nodded to him. "Fish it out and call Steam for a teleport. I'll be here for a bit."

Chara shook his head, smiling. "I can get Stephen and myself home. I know the equation and I have one of the tiny slivers of void from the old MC badges hidden in my locket." He looked to Stephen. "If you're itching to head back, we'll go, but I'm happy to stay for a bit. It's been a while since I've seen this world's Papyrus and I'll take the chance to visit. And I heard a rumor that Princess and Dead Sass where here. I promised them a story a bit ago."

Stephen nodded for Chara to lead the way.

We stepped out of the lab to find Frisk Church's office door open. It wasn't often I'd seen her in her pale, lacy dresses. Baby Marigold rested in a sling adjusted so Frisk could periodically lean her head down to kiss the baby's face. She was looking over several sets of files in front of her.

Chara leaned against the office door. "I thought you were on maternity leave."

Frisk chuckled. "Just because I'm off missions right now doesn't mean that I'm not available for people who need my less martial skills." She stood and gave him a hug with one arm, the other holding the baby. He leaned over to give Marigold a gentle kiss on the head and got a small yawn in response. Stephen leaned over, gently booping the baby's nose.

Frisk caught sight of me, and her smile evaporated. "White? What happened?!" She stepped around Stephen to put a hand on my shoulder. I turned and hugged her from the side to avoid smooshing Marigold, resting my forehead on her shoulder.
Chara provided the information. "Dragoon attacked Frisk and pulled Chara out of him. They're both under observation in the lab right now."

Frisk patted my shoulder with one hand. "I know you're thinking about the assassination attempt and how some R&R was supposed to get him away from that. It's okay. It's not your fault. Stuff happens. This is just a random coincidence and you know your brother is going to laugh his butt off about it later."

I sighed. "It's not that. The little punk is already up and looking okay." I frowned, looking away for a moment, before looking back. "Can we talk?"

"Certainly." Church looked at Chara. He gave her a smile and a salute before taking a walk down the hall, Stephen on his heels. Frisk nodded for me to follow her and we went up the stairs to the second floor and the apartments that made up living space for on site staff.

Piano music from Cross' apartment floated down the hall, filling the length of it with a warm and welcoming sound. Frisk pushed the door to her apartment open and I smiled when the smell of freshly baked bread hit my nose. I'd expected that, after so many years of being married to Bones that I'd see this soft and very feminine oasis transform into something that matched what I knew of them. Something more vintage and less floral. Instead, I've realized that their personal styles meshed so well that there wasn't a need for a transition at all. Bones never seemed out of place here anymore than Frisk seemed out of place in his garage.

The apartment was quiet but for the three of us and we sat at the small breakfast table in the kitchen. Well, four of us if you counted C. Even if he wasn't saying anything, he was always there. I stared out the window over the sink while Frisk put on the kettle.

"I just found out that my Tori not only murdered Chara, but all of the fallen. It's the reason why my timeline doesn't have 'fallen children.' I…" I continued to stare out the window, waiting to see something that made sense.

Frisk set a big mug of liquid cheese in front of me before sitting down with a cup of golden flower tea. "That's not what you're upset about. Whether or not you want to admit it, you always thought your Toriel was off. That something was completely and utterly amiss in your timeline. You're upset because Frisk knew and didn't tell you. You're upset with yourself that he never saw you as someone he could trust in the telling. And you're upset that you've said things about Chara that she didn't deserve."

I stopped myself before asking her how she could know that. I was sitting at the table of one of my best friends. You'd almost think I didn't know the woman who put up with my antics, knowing all the time that I needed the kind of friend who'd let me be that kind of ass around her. And that wasn't even touching on her being the best investigator in the cosmos.

"Some very awful things." I sighed staring into the yellow-orange evil in my mug. "I bought the line. The standard story. Chara the murderous and suicidal kid! And the awful part is, the majority of them are good people trying to make the best of bad circumstances. Many of them fighting through differing levels of abuse and mental illness, often without support. And when one of them does make it through, the victory that isn't stolen is often bitter."

Frisk stirred her tea. "So what are you going to do about it?"

I frowned. "I honestly have no idea what I am going to do about Tori. If the souls of the fallen are still trapped, I'll have to find them and release them-"
"I meant about Chara."

I waved it off. "She'll come home with Frisk and I. It's not like the punk lives at home anymore so Paps and I have plenty of space for her..." I trailed off, blinking.

Why wasn't I placing her? Each Sans fit each Frisk into the most appropriate place in their lives. We just naturally do the same with Charas if we let it happen. I naturally place Fell Frisk or Star as nieces. The same way I place Fell Chara and Steam Chara as nephews.

Why wasn't I placing her? I didn't want to call her my sister. The very idea put me off. Were all of the lies holding me that tightly? That I didn't want to name her any sort of family?

I need to talk to Blue.

An amused smile tugged on Frisk's lips, so my facial expressions had to be top notch with my current thoughts.

I swallowed the rest of the liquid cheese and looked at the inside of the mug. "I know you don't eat this stuff and you certainly don't let your children near it."

Frisk chuckled. "I keep it on hand just for you. Better?"

I thought about it, putting the mug down. "Do you think of C as your brother?"

Frisk raised an eyebrow. "He is my brother." She gathered my mug. "Want more?"

I shook my head. "I need to get my phone off of Star. She should be done talking to Fase by now. Thank you."

"Anytime, White."

I heard the front door open and leaned back in my chair to see the Alpha Male Sans coming in. "Hey, Bones."

He took his boots off, placing them on the mat by the door. "Aren't you supposed to be visiting Steam's timeline right now?"

"I was. Dragoon interrupted."

Bones frowned. "Frisk okay?"

"Besides a few stitches and Chara having been forcibly separated from him, the punk's okay. Chara's dehydrated, but should be on her feet soon." I stood and stretched. "I'm heading back downstairs. Thanks for the mug of cheese."

Frisk smiled. "Always."

Bones opened the door for me. On the other side stood Star and a Frisk I'd never seen before. The new Frisk was on the short side and abnormally thin with pale green scales on her face; long, brilliantly red hair tied back at the base of her neck. She wore tight silver pants with a similar top made of an insulating material. Like it was meant to keep her warm in the vacuum of space. A puffy, orange vest made her look even skinnier than she already was. A silver delta rune embroidered over a many pointed, golden star badge was sewn over the left shoulder of the vest. Star caught sight of me out of the corner of her eye.

"Oh no!" She grabbed the door, pulling it out of Bone's phalanges, and slamming it shut.
A very timid voice, someone worried that she would say the wrong thing, came through the door. "Star? What are you hiding?"

"A Sans that matches the description of the one you hallucinate."

The voice stammered, "Can I… Can I see him? Is that okay?"

"I don't know." Star sounded lost.

I looked up at Bones. "What's going on?"

"Frisk Tamanna lived in severe social isolation for several years. We thought her Sans didn't exist and found out that he's one of her hallucinations. It's one of the things that held her mind together."

I knocked on the door. "Hey, Star. It's okay."

Star groaned. "I spent the last two years cramming psych for grad school and I don't have any clue if it's okay!"

I opened my mouth and closed it. Star was a full agent, worked as Asriel's research assistant, had degrees in two medical fields and multiple certifications, skated competitively with Papyrus, and she'd done grad school in the middle of all of that? When does she sleep? Wait. I forgot add the part about her spending time on Prime learning void manipulation. Seriously. When did she sleep?

I shook off the thought. "Do you think you can handle it if it turns out bad?"

The voice came through again, pleading. "Please?"

Star sighed audibly and opened the door.

Frisk Tamanna looked up at me and I noticed a smudge of paint on her cheek. She reached out very slowly, hesitating just before paint stained fingers reached my hoodie.

I took her hands in mine. "It's okay. You can touch."

Her eyes flicked to the right and back to my chest, fixating hard on my shirt.

"He's there, huh?"

She nodded fast, concentrating hard on the white of my shirt.

"One eye all glowy and threatening?"

She shook her head. "No. He's just worried you might hurt me."

I put an arm around her, turning her so that her peripheral vision on the right was blocked. "A Sans' job is to care for their Frisk. Does he take good care of you?"

She grasped my hoodie, anchoring herself as she nodded. "Yes." She hugged me, holding on for a little bit, before looking up at my face. "Thank you." Stepping back she turned to Star. "I'm going to the cafeteria to have dinner with Charlotte."

Star nodded, watching as Frisk walked down the hall, conversing with someone who wasn't there, before sitting up on the banister, and sliding down the stairs.

"I'm not sure what I expected, but it sure as heck wasn't that." Star gave me a smile. "I was looking
for you! Frisk and Chara are up and about. Asriel says the stitches need to stay in for a week. I'll stop by to remove them when it's time. Chara will need to be drinking sugar-salt water for the next two days. You are cleared to head home or back to Steam's timeline."

She reached into her pocket and pulled out my phone. "Before I forget." She handed me the phone with a smile.

After giving Bones and Frisk a wave, I followed Star down the stairs and back to the lab. The stents now pulled, Alphys applied bandages to Chara's and Frisk's hands. The large, yellow, veloci-woman used her tail to point while she spoke.

"Clean the stitches once a day with a little water and a mild soap. Keep a bandage on over the stitches while in the shower or wearing a shirt. Star will come by to remove them in a week." She handed Chara a piece of paper. "Six teaspoons of sugar to half a teaspoon of salt in four cups of warm water. Stir until dissolved and drink. Make sure to drink two of these a day, for the next three days."

Chara frowned at the paper, but said nothing.

Frisk stepped up to me with a smile. "Shall we head back? It's only a been an hour at most for Steam's timeline since it runs behind everyone else's."

I leaned over a bit to look at Chara. "Do you want to head there or home?"

She looked between Frisk and I, unsure. Frisk took her left hand, putting his arm around her shoulders, while I took her right hand, slipping my arm around her waist. She shivered, eyes watering as she stared at the floor.

I leaned my head against hers, breathing in the soft scent of her hair. "How about home until you feel a little more sorted?"

Chara shook her head, her long hair swaying with the motion. "Just drop me off in Snowdin. I can head back from there. There's no reason to cut your vacation short."

I froze, chilled through. She wasn't going to head back anywhere, let alone the house. She was giving us an easy way to abandon her. She was giving Frisk and I an 'out.' I wasn't going to ask why. I looked over Chara's head at Frisk. By the look on my brother's face, he'd caught it too. And there was something else there. Something he knew and hadn't told me. I bit down the need to know; the need to ask. Now was not the time.

Frisk made a careful, counter offer. "How about we all go back to the house together?"

"It's not necessary-"

I stepped us into the void. "It's our pleasure."

Suddenly in the darkness, she gripped our hands tightly, trembling, eyes squeezed shut. I put us down just outside the cabin my brothers and I have long called home. The one that would soon become her home in more than just name.

She took a deep breath and opened her eyes, looking up at the cabin and its twinkling Christmas lights with a sad sort of longing. I let go of Chara to open the door, Frisk still holding her tightly, like he was afraid she would bolt.

Dragoon appeared next to Frisk, the cracks in his mandible looking less than secure after a hasty
healing. He grabbing my brother by the shoulder, tossing him aside. Several glowing blue bones burst from the ground, surrounding Chara, trapping her in a blue magic prison.

Dragoon turned to Chara. "You have no future here. Come with me willingly."

Chara shoved at the bones. "Go to hell!"

"There you are, you Smiley Trashbag!" Flowey erupted from snow, wrapping Dragoon in thick, thorny vines, squeezing him viciously.

Dragoon teleported out of the vines as I cut the magic holding Chara. Frisk scrambled to his feet and grabbed Chara's hand, pulling her away and back toward the cabin. When Dragoon reappeared near Chara, I threw up a bone barrier between them. Flowey slammed into Dragoon, pinning him to my barrier.

I summoned my gaster blasters. "Flowey! Down!"

The flower hit the snow as my blasters let loose on Dragoon. Unable to move fast enough, he was hit by most of the blue-white blast. He slumped back against my barrier, groaning. The cracks in his mandible widened, snapping again. One skeletal hand came up, cradling his jaw listlessly before he disappeared completely.

I dropped the barrier and ran to Flowey, brushing the snow off of his petals. "What happened while we were gone?"

His eyes turned black, mouth sprouting fangs. "He came here looking Chara and attacked me when I told him to piss off! I've been all over the Underground waiting for him to pop up again. But, seriously! Why would he come here looking for Chara?" He looked over at Frisk and then back at me. "Chara died…" He trailed off, turning back to Frisk. "Ch-Chara?"

Chara knelt down next to him. "Oh, Asriel." She gently cupped his head in her hands, fingers gently brushing his yellow petals.

Flowey's vines sprouted out of the ground around her, wrapping her up in a hug. "You're here! You're alive! How? How?"

Chara shook her head. "Not important." She closed her eyes and the snow below them began to glow forming golden rings within golden rings, sigils etching their way in and through the open spaces of the circles.

Frisk grabbed her shoulder. "Hold up! We've talked about this! The spell you used to knock Dragoon was nowhere near as complicated as this and it hurt you badly! Just wait until you're properly healed up at least!"

"I've spent the last 25 years working on this one spell," she murmured. She looked up at him eyes glowing a bright red. "I won't stop even if it kills me." Her head fell forward to her chest, black liquid leaking from her eyes and flowing down her face.

The golden circles made a wall around her and Flowey, pushing Frisk back.

I shook Frisk. "What's going on?"

"She's going to give Asriel his life back."

My jaw dropped. "What?!!"
I moved toward the circle only to have Frisk grab my shoulder. "Just let her do this. It's all she's thought about since she first saw him stuck in that flower."

Flowey shuddered, the vines retracting as he floated up and out of her hands. A glow cocooned him, cradling him as the flower stretched and grew, becoming that of a full grown, adult goat monster. Chara's left hand seemed to act of its own accord, lifting languidly, and reaching out into the air. A thin, black line appeared and her fingers parted it, reaching into some space that wasn't the void.

I felt a ripple across the timeline. Something being moved from the past to the present. Chara's hand came out of the tiny rift with a white, boss monster's soul. She’d pulled Asriel's soul from the past, saving it just before the moment it'd broken. The soul floated toward its body, eager to reunite. It disappeared within Asriel and the goat monster breathed deeply, eyes opening.

As soon as the light died away, I quick slid over to catch Chara before she hit the ground, cradling her unconscious body against my chest. The black liquid disappeared from her face. I checked her pulse and found it, weak but there. Her breathing slow.

Too slow.

She didn't exactly have motivation to stick around.

Frisk reached over, gently petting her hair. "Come on, Chara…"

I gently brushed her cheek with a finger. "Hey there, Snow White. Don't clock out on us yet. At least stick around long enough for Asriel to talk to you."

Chara's eyes opened a little and she managed a ghost of a nod.

Frisk sighed deeply and stood with a shudder. He reached down to help Asriel up. Asriel, for his part, was busy staring at his hands. When he noticed the offered hand, he let Frisk pull him up only to wobble a little. Frisk put an arm around the goat prince's waist to help steady him.

Papyrus came out of the cabin. "WHAT IS ALL THIS RACKET!" He spotted me. "SANS! WHAT ARE YOU DOING BACK SO SOON? FRISK SHOULD BE RESTING AND ENJOYING- oh." He reached out, his phalanges gently brushing Chara's hair from her sleeping face. "Welcome home, little sister."
The dream was so vivid Frisk felt like she was standing in the midst of it.

Another Frisk worked diligently in a laboratory of white tile and shining metal. Dark hair pulled back, warm, brown eyes a bit tired, skin a bit pale: a woman juggling too many responsibilities at once and the strain was wearing her thin. A woman who was also as bright as she was swift: a shooting star.

She was completing work on a set of vials, variables for the control set finished earlier; medical research. A red hologram of a teen boy appeared on her shoulder and she gave it a bright smile.

"Hey, C! Mission time?"

When the hologram didn't respond, she frowned. "C? Is everything okay?"

A man in a green hoodie and a teen sporting a set of brass goggles on his head were both suddenly in the door to the lab, looking in on her. She looked over at them, blinking a little. A ghostly child floated up and around the men in the door, coming over as another hologram, this one female and glowing blue appeared next to the red one. A boy with pale white hair in a green striped shirt ran out of a near doorway, reaching out to quickly take her hand.

She stared at them all, eyebrows knit together in worry. "What's going on?"

And then she gasped, doubling over, dropping the clipboard to hold her head, eyes squeezed shut as she screamed. The world vibrated around the sound, the glass vials shattering.

Frisk jolted awake, gasping for air. Taking a deep breath, she let out a long and shuddering sigh. Laying back down, she reached over, carefully pulling her infant son into the crook of her arm. She turned slightly on her side, reaching out for Chara, and whimpered when her hand only touched the wall.

The lock on the door clicked and the door opened. A child Frisk, barely ten years old, came in the room as quickly and as quietly as she could, her long nightgown swishing around her ankles. She crawled in next to her older double, clutching at her.

Frisk pet the child's head, trying, with gentle petting, to soothe away the girl's terror. "You had the dream again too, huh?"

The girl nodded, sniffing as she pushed her face into Frisk's side. "Why?"

She'd had the same dream every night since she'd been kidnapped and brought here. Both of them had.

"I think it's something to do with the void. I think she's connected to it."

The girl sniffed. "And Sans wants the void travel stopped?"

"Yes."

"Why?"
The plaintive word hung in the air. But Frisk didn't have an answer.

Frisk gently nudged the girl. "Go on back to your room before Sans finds you."

She shook her head vehemently. "No! I want to stay with you!" She sniffed, tears on her cheeks. "I don't have anyone else! Toriel is gone! So is Asgore! I haven't seen Papyrus or Alphys or anyone for weeks!"

The door swung open and Frisk quickly sat up, scooping Benjamin and Frisk close. Sans stood there, hands in the pockets of his hoodie, one eye glowing an ominous yellow. Frisk swallowed, hard. This skeleton wasn't anything like the Judge who watched over her family so protectively at home. This man was broken and didn't see a problem breaking others. He'd demonstrated that thoroughly before locking her away and promising a similar fate for baby Benjamin if she didn't do as told.

And he didn't like it when she and the child Frisk spent even a moment together. As if contact between them had a deeper significance.

"*head on back to your room, kiddo."

A sudden determination filled the girl and she stood, resolute. "No! I'm staying with Mom!"

Frisk immediately putting an arm around her daughter.

Sans blinked, and the glow in his eye stopped dead. He sighed deeply, some part of him defeated.

"*so be it." He looked to Frisk. "*it's time."

Frisk breathed a sigh of relief and put on a baby sling. After settling baby Benjamin into the soft fabric of the sling, she followed Sans into the next room, the one with a massive computer interface. It'd taken a week of trial and error to set it up properly. It just wasn't the kind of interface she used for dimensional folding. And then weeks of experimenting until she'd figured out how to do what he wanted: shut down all travel through the void. A concept that she had to very quickly comprehend. She hadn't known that her world and her life was one variation of thousands, that other versions of her and her husband existed across time and space. And that their lives, more than anything else, were the most significant. That their story was THE story.

At first, she tried folding pieces of the void itself, trying to understand what she was dealing with. The process was easy enough but folding all the void around a timeline was cumbersome at best. And Sans was concerned that it left too many 'holes' that allowed escape.

The first time she attempted to fold a timeline itself, she desperately wished she hadn't. It was a simple, but perfect solution. No one on the timeline could move out of the fold. And from the outside, it didn't look any different.

At least, it didn't look different to her and Sans didn't indicate that it looked different to him.

The next several months were spent coding to fold all existing timelines, working around Benjamin's needs, if not her own. He was going to reach his first birthday soon. Chara had missed his son's first words and first steps. She hoped Chara and the kids were okay.

The program was finally ready. A few keystrokes and no one goes anywhere.

Well, not everyone.

There was a slight off in the fold for the timeline she was on. A way to slip in and out if you knew
what you were looking at. And even with thousands of timelines to look through, she recognized hers. While the code reflected that a fold would be present, she didn't fold her home timeline. She'd left a fold near the house. One Chara would see. She just hoped that she'd left enough information in it for Chara to figure out how to undo this insanity and find her.

Frisk tapped a random button on the keyboard, activating the screens and bringing the computer out of sleep mode. She loaded the program, and under Sans' watchful eye, she knew she couldn't stall. This was it.

Her fingers hovered over the keyboard. Behind her eyes she could see the other Frisk; the shooting star.

"*well?*

Frisk pushed the chair back and stood. "You're the one who wants this. All you have to do is hit enter."

Sans eyed her for a moment, looking for some deception, before reaching over the keyboard. The child hugged Frisk around and waist, trembling even as she was unable to look away. Sans hit enter.

A scream filled the air, every molecule in the universe vibrating with it. Frisk fell to her knees, clutching the baby and the girl to her, shaking against the onslaught, covering their ears as best she could and knowing that it wouldn't help. Sans fell over, boney hands covering his ear holes. Baby Benjamin shrieked in time with the agonized wail.

After what seemed like an eternity, the scream died away, and Frisk shuddered deeply.

Sans used the desk to pull himself to his feet. Breathing heavily, his eyes zeroed in on Frisk.

"*WHAT WAS THAT?!!*"

The girl began to laugh, a soft giggle at first. And as the sound grew, her voice changed to the all out cackle of a much older boy. Glowing, blood red eyes looked up at Sans. "You idiot! You just hurt someone very special to a lot of people. And now they're all going to come for you!"
My name is Charles Larkin and I have done something terrible. The worst part? Not remembering what I did. I only have vague recollections of my life above ground.

I remember some things distinctly: Playing with my brother, Jarod, as a kid. My grandfather nicknaming me Chara. Mom and Dad at my college graduation. Proposing to my long time girlfriend, Emily. Taking the job with... I don’t remember the company. I just remember that Emily really wanted me to pass on the job. But it was a huge amount of money just out of college and I remember thinking that it was what I had wanted to do with my life.

But what the actual job was? I don’t even remember that. You’d think that, it being something I wanted to do with my life that it would be enough to remember, right? I just remember being handed a research project and, somewhere in the process of working on it, I ended up here.

I'm not even sure where here is. I assume I'm underground by the obvious cavern overhead, but some part of this place has light. Real light. Like morning, day, and evening. You see a sun. You see a moon. And you see stars. This despite the obvious stalactites above.

I don't know.

I remember standing at a window to observe something. A bright flash blinded me for a few moments and when I could see again, I stood in the middle of a street in what is now called Old Home. It's decrepit now, as I write this. But when I stood there, it was an intensely beautiful, and terrifying, place. Tall buildings reached into the ever night of the cavern with space for a million or more people and not the scraggly lot of ten thousand that live there now.

The people of Old Home are...

Okay, listen. If you're reading this, it means you're stuck here too, so you know that when I say this it doesn't even come close to describing the things that live down here:

The people of Old Home are fucking terrifying.

In fact, all of the things in this God forsaken cavern are fucking terrifying. ALL OF THEM.

So this right here? My journal? Use it as a guide. I figured out a lot about this place in my time here, but I never figured out how to escape.

Maybe, just maybe, something I've written in here will let you put some mysterious two and two together and get you out.

If not, well, you can make a life down here. It won't be all champagne and roses, but carnations and lemonade aren't bad either.

Alphys stared at the old, leather bound journal in her hands. She had serious doubts that the leather came from a cow, but that wasn't important. What was important was that she’d found, not just a record of her world having a Chara, but that he’d left a written testimony behind. Something he’d written with the intent of helping anyone who found it.
Alphys had to force my hands to stop trembling before attempting to turn the pages. They were brittle at best. One nearly broken off in her hand and she cringed. Sighing, she shut the book gently before a delirious hope appeared to seize her. She turned and ran for the library's front desk and held out the book to the librarian sitting there.

"Do you have another copy of this book?"

The librarian, a white skinned, potato shaped thing with a bloated belly and head, and tiny stick like arms and legs, took the book in its long, multi-jointed, black tipped, fingers. It pulled out a pair of colorful reading glasses from nowhere to set on it's almost nonexistent nose; large, completely black eyes staring at the cover. It made an interested humming sound before setting the book down and typing away on the keyboard attached to a computer that glowed green with custom water cooling lines.

The interested hum continued. "Ah yes. The Larkin journal. We do have another copy. It appears that when the original started to fall apart, another was produced." It looked up at Alphys. "Unfortunately, what you hold is the newer copy."

Alphys sighed and then another thought hit her. "May I see the original?"

The librarian nodded slowly. "Special collections is in the east wing."

"Thank you."

"You are very welcome."

The librarian handed her the book as it stood, and it's toothless mouth opened wide. Alphys dashed backward out of the creature's reach, and thanked it again even as she escaped being its next meal. Rushing through the library, she checked the time on her phone, the special Seraph one she'd been given when she'd figured out how to call Fase from her regular one. Two in the afternoon. That meant lots of time before the library closed and the most dangerous monsters would begin their most active period.

Alphys skidded to a halt outside the door for special collections and quickly checked herself in the glass. Her yellow hair was still in a tight bun. She wasn't sure how she got a head of Crayola, Sunshine Yellow hair since neither of her parents were blonde. At least, she didn't remember them being blonde. Her lab coat, worn over regular work attire, was unstained. Her big, round glasses made her look cute but not overly so. Deciding that she looked professional enough, she pushed on the door…

And realized that the sign read 'Pull.'

The outer area of the special collections was a one room museum that touched on various pieces of the underground's past. Portraits of the many, demonic looking, rulers who'd come before King Asgore graced the walls. Display cases filled with photos and objects of import lined the middle of the room. Alphys carefully walked past it all to the ornate, glass doors at the very back of the room, only to stop dead.

Alphys turned and saw a full sprouting of glittering, crystal flowers out of the carpet. Since those flowers only grew naturally in a very specific part of the underground, it was a sign that Flowey had been there and very recently. The fuller the grouping, the more recent the appearance. The flowers faded and disappeared after an hour. Alphys turned away and opened the doors.

An automaton made of brass gears, resembling a praying mantis sat at a desk with a very delicate
book in front of it. The automaton was in the process of very carefully repairing a damaged piece of 35mm film, referring back to the book now and again. A red eye, one of several, rolled around to look at Alphys.

"Yes?"

She shivered at the thing's ethereal voice. "I was wondering if I could see the original of this journal."

The automaton stood up, towering over her. One pincer like appendage snatched the book from her hands while the red eyes that covered the robot's head all blinked in unison. "The Larkin journal. Yes. Yes. It has been a while since we've made a new copy."

"Do you know when the original was written?"

"Mr. Larkin was alive during the reign of Her Majesty, Queen Friva. This would have been during the time that the ruined city of Elarin in the forests beneath Snowdin was the capital."

Alphys' breath hitched. The cursed city was a serious mystery. To have the words of someone who lived while it was functioning as the capital would be a significant find. Alphys took a deep breath to calm herself. "Can you repair the book? Or, at least, de-acidify the pages?"

The automaton shook its head slowly back and forth. "Unfortunately, no. But the original is preserved and another copy would be easy to produce." It pointed to a box of surgical masks and gloves on the counter before turning away from the desk. "Put on a mask and a pair of gloves, then follow me."

The many, sharply pointed legs of the shiny, brass robot skittered across the tile floor. Monsters of all sorts, each wearing a surgical mask and gloves, would look up as they passed, curious, but otherwise unwilling to move from their work, even for the easy meal that Alphys might represent. Heading deeper into the preservation area revealed an open vault, it's thick black door propped open with several large boxes. The vault interior housed row after row of shelving over a matte black floor.

The automaton cleared its throat, which was a strange thing to hear since Alphys was sure that he didn't have a windpipe. Or a throat.

A small, matte black goop monster with big, rainbow pastel eyes rose up from the floor. And it was legitimately adorable. As it did, it revealed a pristine white tile underneath it. "Yes, Doctor?"

"Two copies of the Larkin journal. Please."

Other small, matte black goop monsters jumped up from their spots, revealing more white tile as they rushed around the interior of the vault. After five solid minutes of activity, the goops returned to their tiles, deflating across them and returning the floor to matte black. The first goop returned with two books. Again, Alphys refused to think about just what kind of leather they were bound in.

The automaton took them. "Thank you." He turned to Alphys. "You may purchase one of these copies for 500 gold."

Alphys gasped, smile wide. "Sold!"

She followed the automaton back to the front of Special Collections. Back at the desk, she dug through her bag, pulling out the required money. When she reached for the book, the automaton paused, staring at it for a moment. One pincer gently, almost lovingly, ran down the front. With what seemed like a long sigh, he handed the book over.
"Are you familiar with Sans the Skeleton?"

Alphys nodded.

"I haven't seen him in a while. Do you know where he is?"

"He and his girlfriend are visiting friends really far away. I don't expect them to be back for a while. Something about the travel arrangements being messed up."

All the eyes on the automaton blinked at the same time. The hair on the back of her neck rose, and Alphys prepared to run. The geared praying mantis sat back down and continued working on film. Breathing a sigh of relief, Alphys hurried out the door with her copy of the journal. She checked her watch. Four in the afternoon. Enough time to get something to eat and get home before the earliest part of the really active period.

Stepping out onto the streets of New Home was always a strange experience. Each city and town in the underground had its own unique flavor. There was the Victorian-esque feel of Old Home, which is now falling apart. There was the industrial decay of Snowdin. There was the ancient city of Elarin and its very likely to come to life and kill you statues. Waterfall's towns were rusting away, falling apart; their mutated residents trying to make the best of living in irradiated waters. Hotland was a steaming jungle filled with what appeared to be abandoned towns, overgrown by nature, until you got too close. The Core was a science fiction nightmare.

And then you had New Home, the royal seat. By day, the city was a wash of gray on gray; a blank architectural slab of nothing. Buildings that should have held some visual interest came off as boring at best. Even the trees were dull. At night, the city changed, decaying rapidly into a twisted world of pipes, broken glass, and shattered hopes. And if you were smart, you stayed away from the amusement park.

Right now, everything was gray and normal, relatively speaking. Monsters that didn't have set active phases wandered here and there between jobs that actually kept the city running. Alphys rushed down the library steps to the cobblestone street. Picking a path between monsters who sat on the steps reading or chatting.

Looking around, she spotted the little, hole in the wall cafe that'd become her favorite spot to eat when she was in New Home. It was always quiet and the food didn't make her wonder too much where it had come from. The monster behind the counter, a tall, tiger woman with overly stretched out limbs, prepared Alphys usual: a bowl of ramen soup piled high with vegetables and a glass of lemonade.

After paying for her dinner, Alphys found a seat that put her back to a wall and gave her a view of the rest of the cafe. Because you could never be too careful. Slurping down some noodles, she opened the journal again.

The first important piece of information I can impart to you is that, whatever you did that landed you here, you belong here. Learn to live with that.

Alphys frowned. She didn't remember what she'd done to get herself stuck in this never ending nightmare of a life, but she did remember that she wasn't exactly a nice person when she'd arrived either. At that point in her life, she wasn't sure why she'd sought out Sans as a friend, and she wasn't sure why he'd cared enough to stick around. After a stint in Ember Realm's mirror maze, the part of her that believed in scientific study at all cost was split from her completely. Along with it had gone a chunk of her memories since arriving in the underground. The result was seeing, with clear, perfect horror, what she had been doing. She certainly belonged here.
The second important piece of information I can impart is that not everyone is out to get you. Some of them are just hungry and you look like an easy meal. Don't take it personally. Some monster may be in the process of helping you with something or other and their mouth will open wide to take a bite. Just take a few steps back and keep doing your thing. They won't pursue and often return to helping you.

She'd figured that one out pretty quick. She also noticed that monsters that were seriously trying to kill you at one time of day, would suddenly be good company during another time. There were schedules and working with them meant getting around in relative safety.

The third important piece of information is that there are safe places you can stay or hide. I marked all of them with a gray Delta Rune.

Alphys almost dropped the book. She'd seen the gray Delta Rune on the various safe houses in the underground, but that someone had gone out of their way to mark them? And that person had been a Chara? This went against everything she really knew about how this sort of thing was supposed to work. And sometimes the rune just appeared on a place, like it had been freshly marked. She hadn't heard heads or tails of anyone named Chara in the underground, and the original journal was easily a hundreds of years old. None of humans she knew down here had claimed descendancy. They ended up here the same way she had. So was someone else marking it now?

Wait… now that she thought about it, she'd seen a cat monster touching up the painted runes from time to time. He dressed in the manner of the Old Home nobility in a long, dark, gold edged coat. Maybe marking it had been passed to him? She'd have to ask the next time she saw him.

If you claim a place as your home, it will automatically become your personal safe space. If you can afford it, I suggest renting rooms or apartments from the various landlords in the underground. Even when the landlords are in their 'active,' or full on monster phase, they will not attack you. Some may even protect you. The dolls in Snowdin are a good example. If you rent from them, they treat you as if you are one of them.

Good to know. And it explained why they were always friendly with Sans, even if he found the majority of them incredibly creepy.

If you can make it to the cabin in the clearing in Snowdin's forest, that's my home. It's a safe place. You are welcome to stay there as long as you like.

Okay. She'd been to the cabin before. It's where the little girl Frisk-Princess? And her ghostly Chara had hidden. The place was empty of people, but otherwise furnished and in good repair, like someone still took care of it from time to time. She'd seen children here, the offspring of monsters, but not any other humans, so she doubted Chara had progeny.

Or maybe a human and a monster could breed?

Moving on...

I'm sure you've noticed that things cost money down here. I don't understand the mechanism behind it, but whatever you earned in the job you had above ground, it translates to a wage that is deposited in the New Home bank every month. It makes me wonder if there's some facsimile of me topside, living the life I didn't deserve.

If you need extra money, you can get a job, do favors for the others down here, or rough them up for cash. Just be careful you who pick on if you go the third route. The little guys have a tendency to be the most dangerous.
Alphys had somehow known she'd have an account when she first walked into the New Home bank. She still wasn't sure why. It made no sense to assume something so outlandish.

Wait. Had she been trying to get into the underground? She was obsessed with studying the entire place. Had she… Had she planned this for herself?

She set the journal down, rubbing her face with her hands as if to clear the thought away. She sighed, hands dropping and looked out the cafe's front window. It was getting dark out. The tiger monster stood at the window, a broom in her hands, watching the 'sun' set, the yellow green of her large eyes filling with a rusty red. The cafe lights flickered as paint peeled from the wall. The uneaten portion of her meal rotted, rapidly growing mold. Awful stains streaked the table and floors.

Alphys clapped a hand over her mouth to keep silent and slid down the chair until she was under the table. She carefully put the book in her bag and peeked out at the tiger woman. She'd returned to sweeping a floor now strewn with debris. Taking a few moments to map out a few paths to the door, she watched the tiger woman.

Having been stuck here a few times before at 'sundown,' she knew there was a routine. The woman would finish sweeping and return to the counter. If she spotted anyone in the cafe, she would attack them, but once she was behind the counter, she would continue cleaning, and the noise of banging pans would cover her escape.

She just had to wait.

The tiger woman put the broom in the corner and turned, scenting the air.

Alphys froze. That wasn't a part of the routine.

The monsters stretched out arms touched the floor, sharp claws clicking off the stained tile. Alphys breath stuck in her chest. She stilled completely as the super elongated limbs paced back and forth between the tables and booths.

"I smell you. Where are you?"

Alphys hand went back over her mouth to cover the sound of her breathing.

"I know what you want, you little thief."

The hair on the back of her neck went straight, goose bumps covering her arms and legs. There was something else in the cafe, something very dangerous, and the owner was looking to kill it. Alphys had to escape. Being caught in the middle of a monster fight was asking for death. But making a run for it was suicide. The tiger woman was lightning quick. And she didn't know what the other monster might be.

Something tapped her shoulder, and she would have screamed had she not had her hand over her mouth. She twisted around slowly and saw a thin, glittering trail of green, crystal grass, leading to a hole in the wall behind her. It was an obvious trap and the part of her that wasn't completely terrified, sighed at it.

A table went flying, crashing into the chairs next to her, and she dove for the hole in the wall. Crawling through, she came out on the street next to the cafe and dove behind a nearby set of trash cans. Checking to be sure she still had her bag, she breathed a sigh of relief and looked around. The street appeared to be empty.

She closed her eyes for a moment, trying to remember the location of the nearest safe house.
"The hostel…" she breathed, relaxing a little, only to clap her hand over her mouth again as she sat up straight. Looking around, the street still appeared empty, nothing different from the moment before. She closed her eyes again, mapping out the route to the hostel in her head. Once inside, she could get a clean bed, hot shower, and be able to sleep the night in safety.

She opened her eyes and saw a grouping of crystal flowers, one with a single, large eye in the middle of the petals. The eyed flower disappeared, diving into the ground. Alphys took that as a cue and ran for it.

Darkness crept along the sides of the buildings. Paint peeled away from signs. Benches rusted over; the wood slats rotting and breaking. The pavement cracked under Alphys feet as she pounded the pavement. A tree fell over in front of her and she skidded to a halt to go around it, knowing the folly of attempting to jump over it.

She cleared the fallen tree only to have a branch catch her lab coat. Alphys crashed to the pavement and she struggled to disentangle herself tearing her lab coat to get away. She heard something behind her, huffing as it chased after her. She rounded the corner to see the white flag with the gray rune denoting the hostel, flapping cleanly in the wind; untouched by the decay around it. Alphys poured on the speed, grabbing the lamp post right in front of the door, and swinging herself around toward it. Alphys fell into the brightly lit, yellow living room-esque area that made up the hostel lobby. The door slammed shut behind her.

"Close one, huh?"

Alphys looked up at the window in the middle of the 'O' in the word 'HOSTEL' painted in blue on the wall. Instead of the normal lizard monster, a male human with short, black hair and dark brown skin looked out on her. She sighed and stood, brushing herself off.

"Please tell me there's an open bed."

He nodded. "Several." He suddenly smiled brightly when she got up to the window. "Hey! You're a legit human! I thought I was the only one."

Alphys shook her head. "There are a few of us down here." She pulled out her notebook. "Name."

He frowned at her sudden, clinical tone. "James Foster."

"Do you remember what you were doing before you ended up down here?"

"Of course! I was…" James trailed off. "I was…"

Alphys smiled. "It's okay. You're not ever going to remember."

"No! I was at work! It was something involving…” He trailed off. "Why can't I remember?"

Alphys shook her head. "None of us do. I ask everyone, hoping that someone does."

"Do you know what happened? How I ended up in this hell hole?"

Alphys frowned. "We did something. Every human down here. We did something we don't remember, but whatever it was, we deserved this as punishment."

"I refuse to believe that."

Alphys shrugged and opened her bag, pulling out some gold. "Standard rate for the night?"
"Yeah…"

She handed him fifty gold. "Second floor?"

He nodded, still unsettled. "Fourth room. Rooms one through three have a group in them."

Alphys went over to the door that was painted over by the 'L.' Opening it revealed a set of stairs. The first landing let off on the floor for males only. The second floor was for females only. The third landing was for genderless monsters and families. Alphys got off on the second landing, walking down a hallway with the most awful carpeting in existence. She opened the door to the fourth room, which held four sets of bunk beds along either wall. The window appeared to be bricked over but she knew that to be an illusion. Once 'day' came, the light would come through and she'd see the street below. The room was empty but for her, so she chose the top bunk on the bed closest to the door on the right.

After a quick shower in the bathroom down the hall, she hopped into bed and pulled out the journal. The first section seemed to have left off with several empty pages, like Larkin intended to add more to the beginning and never had a chance too. After the empty pages, dated entries appeared.

I've never kept a journal before. Her Majesty, Queen Friva, suggested 's a weird thing to say; to at once acknowledge there is a queen and that she'd also saw fit to speak with me. She said keeping a journal of my thoughts would help me make sense of everything. That years ago, it had been a boon to her.

Had she once been human? All the official documents listed her as a descendent of the last king, though that's easy enough to fake if you have enough power.

I'm pretty sure that several of the monsters down here used to be a human at some point. I'm sure I'll turn into one of them eventually. I just don't know when. There are other humans here. We all tend to congregate together, even if we don't actually interact. Safety in numbers?

This place. What is this place? Toriel says it's a place of punishment and I am inclined to agree. She said it was always best to stay inside after dark.

Toriel? That was a name Sans had once said was significant. That other worlds had one.

The sky turns light and dark, even though we're in a cave. I've never found source for the light. And that's all it is. Light. No sun. Just light. A sunrise and a sunset without an actual sun. The Queen said it was her power that made this happen. I don't believe she's lying.

Alphys tapped her chin. No one ever saw King Asgore. It was simply acknowledged that he was the king. There was a portrait of him in the library, a horned goat demon of immense size, but no actual sightings. Another thing to research later.

I miss Emily. I hope that she found someone else. A good man who actually listened to her and not the kind of shitty asshole who would get himself stuck in a place like this. I don't know why she loved me and I hope against hope that she isn't looking for me. I don't want her trapped here. As much as I'd give anything to see her, I'd gladly die in the most painful way this hellish place could devise if it meant her never stepping foot here.

Alphys frowned. Everything Sans had told her about Charas had indicated that they weren't exactly the self sacrificing kind. But then, she'd met Fell Chara and that seemed to be the best description of him, self sacrificing. She lifted the journal and continued reading.

Her phone beeped loudly, and Alphys sat up, yawning. She'd fallen asleep in the middle of a
description of Old Home when it was bustling with life. The first light of morning streamed through the window. Frowning, Alphys dug the phone out of her bag and checked it. The program that tracked anomalies on her timeline had activated. It'd activated earlier when she was in the cafe, but she hadn't noticed. Her phone was programmed to go silent at 'sundown' for safety.

Something was going on. She dialed Fase.

A voice of cheery doom fell from the phone's speaker. "Hello, Dr. Alphys! I'd love to assist you right now, but we have a bit of a crisis going on…"

"My anomaly tracker went off. I just want confirmation."

Techno cut in. "Dragoon has landed on your timeline! Listen, Alph. Just don't go near him. He's dangerous and the wounds caused by his weapons heal the slow way."

Alphys frowned. "But isn't he trapped here? Based on what my Sans said, everyone is stuck on the timelines they land on from the void."

"Dragoon found a way around it."

Alphys swallowed. "You can't exactly send someone to help and that just leaves me. If he's trying to steal some item, I won't stop him. But if it's a kidnapping, I'll see if I can get in his way."

"He'll hurt you, Alph. He'll hurt you bad enough that any monster on your timeline will make short work of you."

She looked at the light streaming through the window. "It's daylight now. So I'll be able to find help before that if worse comes to worst. I'll check in once I know what he's after."

Fase took over. "Just be careful."

"I will."

Alphys hung up and climbed down from the bunk. Smoothing out her clothing, she packed away the journal and checked her phone. The anomaly was walking through the Core, toward the Lab. She frowned and hurried out of the room, and down the stairs. Quickly checking out with the lizard monster behind the window in the living room-esque lobby, she went out into the quiet, gray, New Home morning. The decay of the night before had disappeared with the 'sunrise,' leaving a monotonous world in its wake.

A line of crystal flowers glittered against the gray of the concrete sidewalk. Alphys frowned and turned away.

Hanging a left at the end of the street, she found the tree that had fallen the night before was still on its side. A bird monster with a chainsaw was busy cutting it into logs. She frowned at it. It was rare that something happened over night that wasn't returned to normal the next day. But the routine in the cafe had also changed. She huffed and headed back to the cafe for a look. The tiger woman with her elongated arms was sitting on clean tile floor, frowning as she attempted to piece a broken table back together. Two of the booths were a mess, the tables shattered.

Taking a risk, Alphys pushed open the cafe's glass door and poked her head in. "Did you find the thief last night?"

The tiger woman glanced up at Alphys and sighed. Putting down the broken table, she jumped to her feet with in a swift and fluid movement. "Do you want some breakfast? I'm not open yet, but you're
a regular so I don't mind."

Alphys dropped her questions. "I need to get back to the Lab, but I'll take a piece of any bread you might have on hand."

The tiger woman nodded and went behind the counter, pulling out a loaf of crusty bread. She pulled off a piece and held it out. Alphys reached into her bag for some gold, only to have the tiger monster wave it off.

"Just take it. I have to finish cleaning up."

Alphys nodded, taking the bread. "Thank you."

The long fingers of the tiger's right hand curled around Alphys wrist for a moment. "Be careful, Doctor. The thief wasn't looking to take something from me."

Alphys saw a bandage wrapped around the arm that held her, covering a cut that should have healed with no prompting once the sun had risen. Alphys nodded and the tiger woman let go of her.

Heading out of the cafe, she went for the elevator that would take her down to the Lab, shortcutting the need to travel through the Core, which wasn't something you wanted to do, even during the day. As the doors to the elevator closed, she checked the anomaly tracker on her phone. Dragoon was still traveling through the Core. Hopefully the things inside would slow him down. If she could get to the Lab first, she could activate its defenses.

The elevator stopped and the door opened. Alphys looked out on a metal corridor corroded away by green and orange fungi. Quickly bringing up her shirt to cover her mouth and nose, she hit the button to close the elevator door and continue taking her down. The door refused to close. Growling a little, she pulled a surgical mask out of her bag and put it on. Switching away from the anomaly tracker, she loaded the map for the Core. Locating herself in relation to the Lab, she crept forward carefully, unwilling to step on any of the fungi.

The fungi let up at the end of the corridor, the green and orange not having made it all the way to the end and the room beyond. Stopping at the end, she knelt carefully, having a look around before entering. She was greeted with a room full of computers that'd been slashed up pretty heavily, a misty fog moving along the floor. She took a moment to look at the damage and frowned. It was recent, and looked like several monsters were involved. There were no bodies to be seen.

"Something's roaming..." Alphys breathed. Taking a deep breath, she refused to panic. Panic meant a quick death. She put her cell phone away to free both hands.

Holding her breath for a moment, she closed her eyes and listened. The sound of electronics humming and wires sparking met her ears. She didn't hear any breathing. Opening her eyes, she crept forward, carefully stepping around debris. She stopped half way through the room and held her breath again, listening for breathing as the mist rose.

Robots don't breathe.

She was listening for the wrong thing.

The hair on the back of her neck stood up and she turned to see a tall, skeletal horse standing over her. She gasped and stepped back against the dead data server to her left. A skeleton in a black, military coat stepped out of the mist next to the horse. Alphys moved away from them, inching along the bank of servers.
Alphys' eyes narrowed. "What are you here for, thief?"

Dragoon held out one skeletal hand. "Come along quietly, Dr. Alphys."

A sound that wasn't the humm of the computers or the sparking of wires caught her ear. She took another step away. "Whatever you're here for, you can't have it."

"I'm here for you."

Alphys swallowed, hard. She took another step away, toward the strange noise. "No."

"Don't you want to see sunlight? Real sunlight? You don't have to live in this darkness."

The noise behind her was stronger. Dragoon's skull lifted, left eye glowing brightly as he raised his hand. Alphys couldn't see what it was, but dove toward it, moving along the wall of servers. She rolled passed a robot that jerked and sputtered; a security machine. It ignored her, lifting the arm that doubled as a cannon and pointed it at Dragoon.

She scrambled to her feet and ran, not looking back as the sound of repeated plasma blasts filled the air. The bank of servers ended and a corridor appeared in the wall. Something crashed behind her, running her down. She flew down the corridor, hoping to see the stairs. Instead, she found an elevator, the door opening for her. Biting down on the urge to scream, she ran full force into the waiting trap.

The doors closed behind her only to be stopped by Dragoon using his arm from elbow to hand to brace it open. His eyes glowed brightly. "You have no place here! Why are you so reluctant to leave? Come with me and you'll see the sun again!"

"And leave my research? Go to hell!" Alphys swung her bag, knocking Dragoon's arm out of place.

The door closed and lights went out as the elevator fell.

She woke up in a medical bay in the Core; a large, open room surrounded by windows to allow staff to look in on patients. Everything shined and the air smelled heavily of disinfectant. Monsters of all kinds in ultra clean, blue nursing scrubs moved between patients. A pale monster with the body of a humanoid lion but the face of a deer noticed she was awake and came over.

"That was a rather nasty fall, Dr. Alphys. You are very lucky to be alive, let alone unharmed."

Alphys blinked and slowly sat up. "Unharmed?"

"Flowey caught the elevator and alerted us to your need."

Alphys swung her legs over the edge of the bed. "I need to leave. The monster that attacked me is here specifically for me."

The nurse placed strong, black claws on Alphys shoulders, gently pushing her to lay back down. "It would be better if you stayed and rested."

"I'm endangering everyone by being…" She trailed off at the nurse's raised eyebrow. "And yes, it does sound absolutely ridiculous now that I've said it."

The nurse smiled. "For a moment, Doctor, I thought you were going to need treatment for a brain injury as well. You have been unconscious for several hours. It is very close to nightfall."

"Oh no." Alphys looked around, desperate to see a gray Delta Rune.
There wasn’t one. Instead, there was a clock on the wall. It was seconds to sunset.

"I have to go!"

The nurse held her tightly, yellow eyes glowing. "You will be safe here, Dr. Alphys."

"No, I won’t!" Alphys pushed against the nurse.

The nurse held her in place. The light in the medical bay changed, dimming. The patients in the beds calmed down, falling to sleep. Alphys blinked against the influence, trying to shake off the sudden weight of sleep. Her head lolled to one side and she slowly lay back. Her hand came up, trying to muster some strength only to fall to her side.

"You are safe here, Dr. Alphys. Go to sleep."

Alphys woke up to screaming. She looked over at the other beds in the medical bay, her head turning slowly, sleep still clawing at her. They were empty. She looked over at the windows and saw Dragoon fighting with several of the nurses. Slapping her hand around, she found her bag still on her shoulder. She rolled over and fell off the bed, hitting the floor with a crack. Groaning, she used the bed to pull herself to her feet.

A nurse who would have looked human had she not had four eyes and two mouths, ran into the room. She pulled Alphys' left arm around her shoulders before putting an arm around her waist, helping Alphys to an exit away from Dragoon. She glanced back to see the skeleton still engaged with nursing staff and security robots. The nurse half dragged her into the hall, punching the button for the staff elevator. It opened and she helped Alphys inside, sitting her down on the floor.

The nurse's four eyes looked at something to Alphys right. "You've got her from here." She stepped out of the elevator and the door shut.

Alphys head lolled to the side to see Flowey. "What's going... on?" she slurred. "Why are all the... monsters acting... so strange?"

Flowey's single eye blinked. Up close, she could see that he didn't have a mouth, so she wasn't sure how he spoke. "A thief is trying to steal you."

Alphys rubbed her forehead, blinking back the sleep. She forced the next sentence. "So the monsters are simply trying to keep me in hell?" Alphys groaned and pushed herself so she sat up. "You're following me." She rubbed at her head. "Why?"

Flowey dodged, "Why are you reading the Larkin journal?"

Alphys looked at him, feeling far more alert. "It's a journal about a time when things weren't so nightmarish as they are now. Someone familiar with the history." A light went off in her head. "Did you know him?"

The flower turned away. "No."

Alphys went out on a limb. "You're looking for him."

Silence greeted her.

She sighed and rubbed her eyes. "The journal is hundreds of years old, Flowey. No one lives that long. Not down here."
The flower looked at her with its single, large eye.

"You're hundreds of years old, aren't you?"

"Maybe."

Alphys took a deep breath, finally feeling a bit more awake. "I really don't have time for this right now. Dragoon will find me and when he does, I have no idea what he'll do with me. I know that, if I can find a way to drive him off, make him think that I'm unattainable, he'll leave. So with the time crunch in mind, let's skip to the answer portion of the quiz show. Trying this again: Did you know Chara Larkin?"

Flowey sighed. "Yes."

"Why are you looking for him?"

Flowey leaned back against the wall of the elevator. "I used to be human. He may know how to change me back."

Alphys frowned. "How do you know he's not dead?"

The flower shook its head. "He's too smart to have gotten caught by something."

Alphys found her feet. "Humans don't live for hundreds of years, and if he's still here, wouldn't he be like you? The journal mentioned that he was suspicious that some of the monsters had been human at one point."

"He's right about that. The monsters that don't have set patterns? They were human once. I know that Chara's become one too. I just don't know which one is him. When I turned into this damnable flower, I had no idea what had happened to me."

The elevator stopped moving and opened to the path down to the Lab.

Flowey disappeared from the elevator and reappeared on the ground outside. "We should go somewhere other than the Lab. He'll know to find you there."

"I'm human and it's still dark, Flowey. There's no other place that's safe for me that I can get too. And I really need to eat. The Lab is my home." She went for the door, opening it.

Dragoon stepped out of the open door and grabbed ahold of her lab coat, pulling her up, and off her feet. She swung at him wildly and only managed to bruise her fists. Thick crystal vines erupted from the ground around them, attempting to force Dragoon away. The world around Alphys seemed to fall apart, like glass shattering, only to come back together in the open, snowy field in the forest below Snowdin.

Dragoon growled, "What the hell is wrong with teleporting here?!"

A loud hiss filled the air and a cat monster dressed in the gold edged coat of the Old Home nobility rushed from the porch of the cabin, running on all fours for Dragoon. "Thief!"

It leapt, sharp, black claws extended. Dragoon let go of Alphys in order to bring his sword up. But instead of hitting the cat, it cut through a thick, black ink, that hit snow with a slosh. The ink rushed along the ground behind Dragoon, forming a puddle. The cat monster leapt out of that darkness, pushing Dragoon to the ground. The cat hissed, black claws and purple-gray fur flying as it ripped at the skeleton's uniform. The cat's claws began to drip with the black ink and it slashed at Dragoon's
exposed ribs and spine. The skeleton screamed and threw the cat.

Alphys tried to catch him and they both ended up in a pile. The cat dissolved into thick, black ink, covering Alphys. She didn't have a chance to scream before it washed over her face. A moment later, she standing on the porch of the cabin in the clearing, blinking rapidly. The cat monster stood next to her. Dragoon rushed toward them as the cat pulled a whistle out of his coat pocket and blew into it.

No sound came from the whistle. But a great, metallic howling sounded from the woods as a pack of metal wolves flowed from the forest edge, heading for Dragoon. The skeleton disappeared before the wolves got to him. They sniffed the ground he'd stood on for a few moments before running off together in the direction of the ancient city.

The cat monster snorted, brushing itself off. "Well, that was interesting." He turned to the living room window, picking up a tube of sealant to continue where he'd left off.

Alphys sat down in a heap. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, Doctor."

Alphys looked up at him. "What's going on? Why is everyone protecting me?"

The cat shrugged. "That skeleton is a thief. Why should we let it steal from us?"

Alphys shook her head. "Am I important?"

The cat continued to work on sealing the window. "We're all important, Dr. Alphys. I haven't met anyone who wasn't."

She smiled a little. "What are you doing?"

"Fixing the seal on the window. I want my cabin to stay nice and cozy, and this isn't New Home, so it isn't going to fix itself."

Alphys froze and looked closely at the cat. The purple-gray fur was accented green around the bright yellow eyes, long whiskers, and the tufted end of his long tail. Under the gold edged coat was a green shirt and loose yellow pants. Several gold rings pierced his left ear in a line half way up to the tip. Gold rings wrapped his tail and a thick, gold collar with green enameled Delta Rune shined on his neck.

"Are you Charles Larkin?"

The cat smiled. "Yes." He blinked and then laughed. "I'm sorry! I so used to people just knowing who I am that I neglected to introduce myself." He held out one paw, his claws tucked in. "Charles Larkin. Though most people just call me Chara."

She smiled and stood to shake his hand. "You dress like the Old Home nobility. Do you just like the look?"

He chuckled a little, pulling on the coat. "Oh no. You only get to wear this if you are a member of the nobility."

"But you were a human."

He nodded. "Indeed. But descendancy is not a requirement. The requirement is that you continue to do the job you were assigned as a noble." He tapped the gray Delta Rune painted on the house with
one claw. "I've been very meticulous about mine."

"You're tasked with marking the safe houses." Alphys took a deep breath. "So how long will it take?"

His left ear twitched and he eyed her. "How long will what take?"

"How long before I become a monster too? I've been here for three years now. I don't know how long after you finished your journal that-"

"My journal? It still survives?" He tapped his chin. "Fascinating. You'd think it's fallen to dust by now."

Alphys pulled out her copy. "The library in New Home keeps it preserved and makes copies from it."

He took the journal, looking it over. "How interesting!"

"The clockwork praying mantis sold me a copy of it."

Chara looked up at her. "Clockwork praying mantis? I guess Dr. Gaster is still kicking around then."

Alphys quickly pulled her joy under wraps, pulling the conversation back around. "So how long before I become a monster too? I just want to know when to expect the change."

The cat shook his head. "When I wrote the journal, I had the wrong impression about the change. It's not about a length of time. It's when you begin to think of this place as your home."

"But… this is my home."

Chara smiled sadly, shoulders falling a little. "Oh, Alphys."

She blinked up at him. "What…?"

Something wet hit her hand and she reached up to her face, touching the tears that streamed from her eyes. She rubbed at her face and felt parts of her skin pull away, layers sloughing off. Her hair pushed out of her carefully arranged bun, and a mass of thick, sunshine yellow, octopus-like tentacles fell around her face and shoulders. She held up her hands, looking at short claws on the ends of delicate, scaly fingers.

Chara put a warm arm around her shoulders. "Why don't you come inside? You're going to be very hungry soon, and I'm sure you have a lot more things you'd like to ask me. I have plenty of food and several comfortable chairs to sit in."

She nodded, letting him lead her inside. "Thank you."

Chara helped into a chair that would allow her new, and rather long, lay comfortably without squishing. "There is a question you might be able to help me with."

Alphys looked up at him. "I'll try. What is it?"

"Who is Star? And why is imperative that I be of assistance to her at all cost?"
Episode 8: Waking Up

My favorite test subject paced the lab in a long, dusty pink dress, while I worked on the teleportation machine, hoping that, once complete, it could bypass whatever it was that was keeping us from stepping into the void. The prototype this machine was based on had pulled multiple people to the colony ship *Delta* without using the void. If we could get it to run properly, we’d be able to use it to get around. And being able to get around was a huge concern now.

My connection to the void had been completely cut off in the shut down and I wasn’t sure why. That space within myself that was connected via the accident in the Core so long ago was closed. It felt like it had been neatly folded up and put away in a pocket somewhere, accidentally forgotten. It’d given Brandon, my brother, D, his brother, and myself a terrible headache for a while. But Star? She’d been unconscious for the last three days. And no one had seen Crow.

Frisk stared at her tablet and the long list of attacks by Dragoon. A list that covered the last two days. Multiple timelines and layered attacks meant to draw Seraph agents on wild goose chases on their own timelines. He was responsible for three kidnappings and multiple stolen items. We had no idea where he was keeping the kidnapped.

This was getting out of hand and Red, Sunshine, White, and I could only work so fast, especially when separated so far from each other. Frisk Provost and her bare foot Sans had been going over the blueprints with us, but so far, we’d been unable to match up the machines and make a secure teleport between timelines. Dragoon was escalating, swiftly. He knew we were trapped and was exploiting it.

I glanced behind at Frisk. “Any idea who’s behind the shut down?”

She shivered at the sound of my voice. It still became just that touch more ethereal here in the Core. “Yes. I’ve already identified her.”

I turned back to the machine. “I meant her kidnapper.”

“Whoever kidnapped her has been smart enough to lay low. We’d have no idea if it wasn’t for the consistent dreams about her. I asked Techno for a list of Sanses that have issues with void travel and it’s a pretty long list. I can’t narrow it down.” Frisk stopped dead in her pacing. “No. I’m thinking about this the wrong way.”

She tapped the tablet, dialing Techno.

“Hey, frisk. figure something out?”

“No. I thought of a different way to look. Compile a list of timelines that have more than one Frisk on them at current with descriptions of the timelines. Include all Seraph operations.”

“Leaving no stone unturned, huh? I can have that to you.”

Frisk nodded. “Thank you.” She tapped a button to hang up and sighed. “I hate this feeling. This helplessness.” She came up behind me, wrapping her arms around my rib cage and resting her head against my back.

I put down my tools and turned in her arms, holding her close. Running one boney finger along the
side of her face, I gently pushed her hair back behind one ear. She sighed and lifted her head as my hand slid into her hair, pulling her parted lips to my mouth. Frisk hummed happily, her tongue moving along mine.

There was a knock at the door and I stiffened, but not at the interruption. You know how you know someone by their knock? I stepped away from Frisk and opened the door to find Crow, looking like your standard Gaster, except even more thin and deflated; weak and tired.

Frisk gasped, rushing over to take his hand. “We haven’t seen you since…” She shook her head. “Are you okay? How is Star? Is she awake?”

I gestured for Crow to come in and he sat on the couch, boney hands folded in his lap.

“Frisk is awake and acting rather chipper, but…” He frowned deeply. “When she understood what was happening to her, she attempted to shield me. Without her connection to the void, doing any sort of magic is more than she can handle. The disconnect hurt her badly. Attempting to use magic only made it worse.”

“And you?” I asked.

He smiled ruefully. “I’ve been worse.” He looked between us. “Why have all the Charas at Epsilon gathered around her?”

C burst to life on Frisk’s shoulder. “We were told to be there. That Star needed us. Don’t ask how. None of us are clear on that.”

Frisk sighed. “When void travel shut down, most of the Charas in the multiverse where trying to contact her.”

C frowned, arms crossed over his chest. “And that includes some serious asshole versions of me.”

Frisk raised an eyebrow. “Any notable exceptions?”

C thought about it. “Yeah. Nothing from E.C.”

“That’s concerning.” Frisk sighed. “Have the Charas on premises finished arguing over who gets to fill in for Star’s partner?”

C snorted. “No. They’re still at it, but it’s down to Tarsus and Steam’s kiddo. Now that Star’s up, I’m sure that her partner will have an opinion. Speaking of which, I promised I would call him and her fiancé as soon as she was awake.” He disappeared in a red flash.

Frisk turned to me. “You’ve been at this for hours. Take a break. You can use it to fill Crow in on what’s been happening.”

I nodded. “That’s a very good idea.”

Crow bowed slightly to Frisk and I, one hand over his chest. “I will see you at Epsilon then.” He disappeared.

I put an arm around Frisk’s waist. “At least we can still take short cuts, huh?”

She smiled and leaned into me for the teleport back home. I put us down in her office and she gave me a quick kiss before heading into the hallway, walking past a list of room assignments for everyone who was stuck at Epsilon for the time being.
The Brothers Tarsus had the apartment next to Star’s. Steam’s kiddo and his second, Stephen, had the apartment after that. Our surfing, swapfell Sans had suite number one. Chara Lyall, Frisk Lyall’s youngest brother, and Undyne Cichlid shared suite number two. Frisk and Chara Luna were in suite twelve and soon to be waking up with autumn evenings coming earlier and earlier. Prince Chara and Prince Asriel were in suite fourteen, Frisk Boneweaver having bunked in Star’s guest room. Straight Man Sans and Damali were in suite seventeen. Even though we had room for more, this was a pretty full house for us.

I followed Frisk into the lab. Frisk Lyall had left his bed in the first med bay, and was walking carefully to the second bay, were Star had been deep in a coma. As per the Goat King’s wishes, only two people at a time were allowed to be with her, Princess and Dead Sass being the only exceptions to the rule, so everyone else had been taking turns, switching out so that Sans or Mrs. Ossein could be with her. Now that she was awake, the room was stuffed full, specifically of Charas. Even Mrs. Ossein’s eyes were glowing the blood red of possession.

Star was propped up in the bed, a phone to her ear, listening intently while watching Steam’s kiddo face off with Tarsus next to the bed, everyone else standing back.

Steam Chara eyed them all with a kind of authority I’d only seen him develop over the last year of his life. He’d finally become comfortable as an heir to empire and all it entailed. “We can go on debating this forever. I’m the one here without my Frisk and I’ve known Star longer than all of you. I’m standing in for Fell.”

Tarsus snorted. “You are, by far, the second youngest Chara here.”

Steam cocked his head to the side. “Only because time on my world moves much more slowly than others. And I saw the way you looked at Miss Tamanna this morning. You’re already gunning to be two Frisks deep.”

“Oh, is that the way we’re putting it?” Prince Chara chuckled. He lifted his head a bit to look down his nose in that arrogant way that every single one of them did. “A bit lewd considering your Frisk is a sibling.”

Tarsus rolled his eyes. “Can the cheek, Brass.”

Star squeaked as she tried not to laugh.

Stephen turned to the side, covering his mouth as he chuckled. “Brass? Oh God. That works on so many levels.”

Oh yes it did.

Brass sighed, shrugging as he adjusted the goggles on his head. “Fine. I’ll take it. I’m still filling in for Fell.”

“He has a very good point.” Frisk Boneweaver gestured to Brass. “His Frisk isn’t here. And the rest of you are at Epsilon for reasons that can keep you from being at Star’s disposal.”

Smiling, Star changed her phone to speaker and held it out for all to hear.

Fell Chara’s voice flowed easily from the speaker. “As amusing as it was, the discussion is over. Brass is standing in for me and the only person who gets to say otherwise is Star.”

Brass started herding his doubles out of the room. “Go on. I’ve got this covered.”
Star gave him a wry smile. “Are you sure? I’m a handful.” She caught sight of Frisk as we moved around everyone leaving the room, and her smile fell. She looked away and out the window. Brass caught the look and frowned.

Frisk sat on the edge of the bed, taking Star’s hand in hers. “How are you feeling?”

Star shrugged and looked at her lap. “I don’t know. I guess I’m off missions for a while, huh?”

“Everyone is off missions unless it’s on their own timeline. No one can get anywhere.”

Star sighed and pushed the covers off of herself. “I need to get up and change over the room before the Boss Man yells at me for napping in a med bay.”

Frisk and Mrs. Ossein both reached out, pushing Star back to the bed. “No! You’ve been unconscious for three days!”

“What?” Star looked at both of them before her eyes went to Brass.

He nodded. “You passed out when void travel went down three days ago.”

Star blinked a few times before covering her face with her hands. “Oh no. I’m behind three days?! What about my research? The therapy schedules? Who fed Umbra?”

Mrs. Ossein, eyes brown again, ran a hand over her daughter’s head. “It’s all right. There are plenty of people on hand to fill in.”

Frisk frowned. “You screamed when it happened and it broke a lot of the glass in the lab. Larry redid your last research set. Alphys handled the therapy schedules, and Frisk Boneweaver has been taking care of Umbra.”

She looked over at me. “Where you out?”

I shook my skull. “I had a bad headache for a while, but no.”

“Great. Then all I did was make a huge mess of things and wasn’t kind enough to be awake for the clean up.”

Brass leaned over and flicked her forehead. “Ow!” She rubbed at the spot and glared at him.

He raised an eyebrow, unphased by the look. “They are connected to the void. You are literally made from it. As far as anyone here is concerned, you’re lucky to be alive, let alone awake and able to complain.” He gave her a small smile. “As soon as Az says you’re okay to be up and about, I’ll get you back to normal.”

Star frowned at that. “How soon until I can go back to work?”

Frisk raised an eyebrow. “As soon as Asriel clears you, I want you to see me for assignment change.”

Star sighed deeply and nodded, eyes on her lap. I wasn’t sure how, but she looked a hundred times more deflated now than she had when she was trying to hide the change in Crow’s true nature.

Mrs. Ossein reached over, touching Star’s shoulder. “Do you want me to get you something to eat?”
Star shook her head, long black hair swinging softly around her face. “No. I shouldn’t eat until Asriel says I can.”

Frisk looked to me, and for the first in a long time, she looked lost. Star was deeply upset and Frisk didn’t have an answer for it.

Star’s phone rang and a smile tugged at her lips. “Hey, Love,” she answered.

01’s voice came through loud and clear. “Oh thank God! You’re awake!”

Sighing, Frisk nodded for Brass and Stephen to follow us out of the room. “Let’s give Star some time with her mother and fiance.”

Brass frowned but ultimately shrugged and followed us out, Stephen on his heels.

Frisk smiled. “There’s someone I’d like you to meet. Honestly, I’m kind of surprised you haven’t run into her already. She’s a swap Chara from a steampunk world. I also wanted to talk to you about the Planar Pearl. The last time I visited, Dr. Gaster mentioned that he’d built a second one named Phantasm. If we can get both launched into the void, they’d be instrumental in getting agents around.”

Brass smiled, eyeing her in a knowing way. “So you just want my skills as a pilot.” He sniffed, pretending to be sad. “It’s all I’m good for!”

Frisk reached over and poked him in the side, garnering a chuckle before he slid an arm around her waist.

“You’re plotting.”

Frisk’s smile widened. “Am I?”

“I’ve seen that look on your face enough to know. You’re up to something and it has nothing to do with travel being shut down.” Brass stopped and turned to her. “You’ve been up to something since you announced that you were having Marigold. And Star acts like it’s normal, but even she thinks it’s weird that you’ve been taking her off missions and having her do ‘housekeeping’ duties with non-agents.”

Frisk shrugged. “If I let her, she’ll overwork herself.”

“Just like you, right?” Chara snorted. “She’s long past the point of being overworked. You know how to take a day off. Star doesn’t. It’s one of the things that has her partner so worried about her.” He turned to walk down the hall.

Stephen looked at me, confused, and gesturing vaguely toward his prince.

I shrugged. “He’s not as good as his brother, but he does pick up on things.”

Stephen frowned. “What’s going on?”

Frisk looked after Chara, smiling. “I want him to figure it out.” She put a hand on Stephen’s shoulder. “He’s right. I am up to something and, I promise you, when he figures it out, he’ll be very happy about it.”

Stephen frowned deeply, before sighing and turned, following Chara.

I put an arm around Frisk, walking her out of the lab. “Stephen’s really protective of his prince. He’s
going to pester you about it.”

“I know.”

I gave her a smile. “Are you going to let me in on it?”

She chuckled softly. “What’s the one thing I constantly ask Sans Boneweaver and Steam? And they
constantly say no too?”

I stopped dead. “You’re looking to recruit the kids.”

Frisk looked up at him. “Star is going to need them.” Her hand ran down my arm, before her fingers
entwined with mine.

I scoffed. “You are nowhere near retirement.”

“That’s true.” She smiled at me brightly. “And based on typical life expectancy for my world, I will
still be here for a very long time.” The smile softened. “But Star will be here longer. Much, much
longer. I’d rather prepare her now. Give her a team that doesn’t see her as the little girl Error led us
too so long ago.”

I sighed. It was difficult to see Star as the grown woman she obviously was. I still looked at Sophia
and Brandon, and tried to remember when they’d gotten so big. Lots of older Seraph agents teased
Star and treated her as a junior, a rookie; long after she’d surpassed them in rank and skill. When you
remembered the little girl who was always ready to smile or scrap in an instant, it was hard to
separate that from the woman who’d seen more than her fair share of blood.

That she knew what so many of her loved ones looked like on the inside.

No. It was simply easier to think of her as a child.

Frisk sighed. “And right now, being cut off from the void, her partner, and her fiance, she’s going to
need that team a whole lot sooner.”

We stepped into the hall to find Brass and Stephen waiting for us.

Brass put his hands on his hips. “So who is this Chara that’s like me, that you are very obviously
distracting me with?”

Frisk raised an eyebrow. “Charlotte Featherstone.”

His jaw dropped. “Charlotte Featherstone? THE Charlotte Featherstone?”

Frisk nodded, smiling.

A look of pour horror caught his face. “Why is she here?”

“She is recovering from a run in with her arch nemesis, the villainous Madam Glass.”

He grabbed Frisk’s right hand with both of his. “Introduce me to Miss Featherstone.”

Stephen raised an eyebrow at his prince. “What’s gotten into you? You’ve never been interested in
any woman who wasn’t Az.” He paused. “No. Wait. You did floor the idiot who insulted Miss
Elizabeth.”

“That’s only because she makes me the world’s best hot chocolate.” Chara turned to him.
“Remember when Frisk and I were pouring over a set of papers on perpetual aether engines and debating the hypotheses behind them? Charlotte Featherstone wrote those papers. Sans picked them up from another timeline similar to ours.”

“Oh. So Miss Featherstone is a female version of you?”

He thought about that for a moment. “No. The subtext of the paper wasn’t sarcastic enough. And Frisk already said she was a swap version of me.” Brass smiled widely, eyes as happy as they were earnest. “Introduce me. Please.”

Frisk chuckled. “Come along.”

We got to the library door and Frisk led them around to the left, and over to the round table Charlotte typically took over. Instead of a pile of crochet pattern books, Miss Featherstone was buried deep in a manual of some sort. A notebook sat next to her, filled with her very lovely handwriting. Rather than her usual work attire, she wore a pale orange and gold lace dress with embroidered chrysanthemums in fall colors. Guess she felt like dressing up today.

Frisk tapped her shoulder. “Charlotte? I have a visitor for you.”

She lifted her head and looked up at Frisk. “Oh? How? Void travel is locked down and I’m pretty sure I’ve met everyone on the campus.”

Frisk motioned to Brass. “This is His Imperial Highness, Chara Dreemurr, and Lord Stephen Keenan Plant. Stephen, Chara, this is Miss Charlotte Featherstone.”

Charlotte gave Brass a warm smile. “You’ll have to excuse me for not standing…” Her smile fell, a look of slow dawning excitement on her face. “Wait. Are you the Chara who perfected the cyclone chamber?”

“Yes!” He immediately took the chair next to her. “I’ve read every one of your papers on aetheric engines. They’re absolutely brilliant! How did you bypass the need for balloons or sails on the Dalion?”

She leaned toward Chara, suddenly exuberant. “I routed the perpetual motion of the aether coils so the excess heat exhausted from the bottom of the ship at key points, creating lift and thrust. How did you do it with the aether device?”

Brass held up both hands, gesturing to demonstrate. “Aether engines on my timeline aren’t built to be as large as they are on your timeline and they certainly don’t perpetuate continuous energy cycling. They are small and suck in aether from the surrounding air, pushing it through the engine. The device attaches to the pre-existing aether engine and traps the aether as it’s exhausted, cycling it to specific exhaust ports to give lift as well as direction and speed.”

“And the cyclone chamber? I’ve been attempting to replicate it your work and so far I’ve only managed several explosions.”

He held out his hands for pencil and paper. Charlotte handed him the materials and moved her books and notes aside to give him room while he started sketching and explaining. Stephen sighed, hands on his hips, even as he smiled.

Frisk smiled, until some thought caught her. “Where is Miss Tamanna?”

Charlotte looked up with a smile. “At her painting lesson with Cross. We’ll meet for dinner.”
Brass sighed. “And here I was hoping to keep you on for a while.”

Charlotte reached over. “I insist you and Stephen come to dinner with us.” She smiled, a little sadly. “Frisk needs to spend more time with more people. And you can meet Frisk Boneweaver, her fiancé, Prince Chara, and his brother Prince Asriel. They’ve been supping with us too.”

Brass hummed thoughtfully. “Boneweaver? I met her and her Chara a few nights ago when I was telling the little ones ghost stories. I didn’t get a chance to ask her. How did she ever manage to leave her timeline? Her Sans is very protective.”

Charlotte shrugged. “Her version of Undyne ordered it as Captain of the Guard when Asriel was attacked by Dragoon. It has ulterior motive written all over it.”

She looked up at Frisk. “A lot of things have ulterior motive written all over it.”

Brass followed her look and smiled. “See? Not the only one to notice.” He gave Charlotte a devious smile. “So how good are you at deduction?”

Charlotte turned back to him. “From what I’ve heard about your brother, nowhere near as good as he is. But, my brother, Papyrus? I’m pretty sure his middle name is ‘ulterior motive.’ Learning to decode him is its own life skill.”

Brass waved at Frisk. “Hey, C? Let me know when Star needs me.”

Charlotte turned. “She’s awake?!”

He nodded. “She’s on the phone with her fiancé right now. If Asriel lets her out in time for dinner, I’ll drag her to the cafeteria to eat with everyone.”

Stephen sighed. “It’s almost dinner time now.”

I put an arm around my wife and walked her out of the library and into the hall. The door to the Ossein apartment opened and Sans came out with Marigold in his arms.

He spotted Frisk and smiled. “*perfect timing! marigold is ready for dinner.”

Frisk took our youngest in her arms. “Me too. Thank you for looking after her for a little bit.”

“*always.” He frowned. “*i’ll be down in the lab if you need me.” Sans leaned over and nuzzled Marigold on the cheek.

Bones patted his shoulder. “Star will be all right.”

Sans sighed. “*i hope so. kiddo takes on too much as it is. it’s not everyday my sister in law feels the need to steal my wife’s body. any idea why?”

C burst to life on Frisk’s shoulder. “Just about every Chara heard a call to go to Star and we all responded to it. Even me.” He shook his head. “I don’t know why.”

Sans thought about that, the red, pinprick eyes sliding to one side before coming back to rest on us. “*you ever get the feeling that my little girl might be more than just a copy of some other frisk?”

I huffed, “You mean other than every time I look at her?”

Frisk nodded. “I’ve met the Frisk she’s copied from and besides sharing a set of specific memories from the ages of three to eight, they are nothing alike. We’ve got a couple Frisks who can do void
manipulation like her, but none of them are of the void itself.”

C looked between us. “Wouldn’t that make her an original variation and not just another Exemplar Frisk?”

Frisk looked at him. “I think that’s the case. Remember what she said when the other half of Crow was triggering the no mercy dreams? She said she was facing Error in a hall of stained glass. On an off chance, I showed her a photo of a very specific one, and she confirmed it.”

I looked at her. “The Hall of Judgement in the Anti-Void.”

Frisk nodded.

Sans frowned. “*and that asshole blue just keeps saying that error isn’t her sans.”

A thought occurred to me. “I don’t think he is. Error isn’t the only Sans from the Anti-Void.” I held up both hands. “The Anti-Void isn’t a singular place. It’s made up of multiple, unfinished timelines that have fused together. Error was born out of that fusion, hence his ability to exist within it without issue. But Inky is from one of the fused pieces, which is why he can run around in there. There are other Sanses in there, as well as Papyruses, Charas, Toriels, Asgores, etc.”

“*but there isn’t a frisk. even core frisk is originally from a complete timeline that was destroyed unintentionally.”

I pointed at Sans. “Bingo. Star may literally be the Frisk of the Anti-Void.”

“It explains why she can easily step into a missing Frisk’s place. Others treat her like she’s their Frisk if their’s isn’t present. Seriously, I once tried to layer Stere’s vision like I do for Frisk during a mission.” C shivered for a moment. “Asriel says Star is clear to leave the lab. I’ll let Brass know.”

Frisk looked at me. “Let’s have dinner in the cafeteria tonight.”

Sans eyed her. “*are you spying on my little girl?”

Frisk looked offended. “Of course I am!” She shook her head. “Star’s been stuck on something for a while now. Some thought is bugging her. Since grad school, she’s spent a lot of time sitting with me in the quiet way that she does and she’s obviously lost. But she avoids giving voice to the thoughts in her head. And no one can help her if she won’t talk.”

The door to the library opened and Charlotte came out on Brass’ arm, her cane in the other hand. “You head on down to the Lab. I’ll take the door down the hall into the cafeteria.”

Brass lifted her hand, kissing her knuckles. “I’ll see you then.” He looked at Stephen. “Would you mind seeing Miss Featherstone to the cafeteria?”

Stephen stepped in, offering his arm. “Not at all.” He gave her a smile as she took his arm. “I’m interested in hearing about your version of him.”

I leaned down, giving Frisk a quick nuzzle. “I’ll get the rugrats.”

She nodded, giving me a quick peck on the mandible. Heading across the hall to Cross’ apartment, I knocked.

“COME IN!”

I opened the door to find Papyrus and Michelle setting the table. Sophia and Brandon sat with Cross
in the living room, the kids working on something while Cross supervised. D snoozed away in the chair near the window.

“Your mother and I are eating in the cafeteria tonight.”

Papyrus sniffed, faking a huff. “OVER MY COOKING?”

I raised a brow bone at him. “I am not getting between you and Chiko over that one. Star’s awake and cleared to leave the lab. Brass is dragging her over to eat with everyone.”

“BRASS?”

D opened one eye socket, watching his brother lazily. “*Steam’s Chara. Obviously."

“OBVIOUS, HOW?”

Cross snorted. “Oh that works on so many levels.”

“*He’s here without his Frisk and Star’s lacking her Chara. They’ll do fine filling in for each other.”

Sophia looked up. “This is as finished as it’s going to be.”

“Yeah…” Brandon frowned. “But it’s for Star so it should have way more glitter on it.”

So-So put her hands on her hips. “And we don’t have a literal ton of the stuff so this will do.” She looked up at me with a big smile. “Help us put it in Star’s kitchen? On the table?”

“Sure.” I snapped my fingers and a the huge, ‘get well soon’ poster disappeared from the coffee table.

The kids cleaned up while Cross came over to me. “How is she?”

D opened both eye sockets. Papyrus paused in the middle of putting a plate down.

“Crow said the shutdown really hurt her, but wasn’t specific about how. Frisk says something else is up as well, but you know how tight lipped Star can be. I’ll be talking to Crow later, filling him in on what’s happening. Star will want to know too.”

D sat up. “*And the dimensional travel machine?”

“Still not working yet. We’ve got them running, but nothing is syncing up. Going through a portal isn’t landing you where you’re supposed to be. It is a step in the right direction though.”

Cross frowned. “Has Church mentioned what she’s going to do with Star when travel is back online?”

I shook my skull.

“UNTIL WE KNOW HOW STAR IS DOING, IT IS BEST IF SHE RESTS.”

Cross looked over his shoulder. “No. Star’s been on housekeeping and it doesn’t help that Church isn’t telling her why.”

“AND YOU KNOW.”

Cross snorted. “It’s me.”
Michelle shook her head, giving him a chiding smile of mock disapproval. “So pompous.”

His shoulders dropped. “I meant that in a ‘we’re the same variation of Frisk’ way.” He gestured to the air. “I could call Frisk Provost right now, give her the rundown of events, and she’d say the same thing.”

D nodded. “*Probably. Still leaves us in the dark.*”

Cross blinked. “Really? Huh. Guess I am assuming too much.” He turned to Sophia and Brandon. “Head on out. You don’t need to be part of the conversation.”

Sophia’s jaw dropped. “Oh come on!”

Cross pointed to the door while I motioned for the kids to follow me. After giving up a groan, they followed me out the door and down the hall to the cafeteria. The crowd of youngins Frisk was set on recruiting had pushed several tables together, near the fireplace, eating with Star. Frisk had set up at a table nearby, positioned so that she could hear the conversation while nursing Marigold.

As the kids and I headed down the stairs from the mezzanine, Chara Luna walked in the glass doors, hands in the pockets of his green hoodie. With the hoodie and the overly relaxed attitude, you could have easily taken him for a Shift Chara like Tarsus. His morning training regime said otherwise. It was the same kind of intense that Prince Chara put himself through and they’d taken to training together, pushing the other’s limits. The kids ran past Luna for the food and he shifted easily so they wouldn’t bump into him, not looking the least bit perturbed.

Charlotte waved to him. “Hello, Mr. Luna!”

He paused and gave her a slight bow. “Hello, Miss Charlotte.”

“How is Frisk?”

He shrugged. “Still pregnant and she’s craving cheese tonight. I’ve got orders to bring her as much as I can carry.” He looked to Star. “It’s good to see you up. You had us all worried. How do you feel?”

Star shrugged. “Okay, I guess.”

So-So and Brandon came out of the buffet area carrying trays of food that appeared to be healthy, meaning that Chiko must have supervised them. Princess waved them over to sit at the conglomeration of tables around Star. Everyone was talking, filling Star in on what had happened since the shutdown, which, for them, consisted of goings on at Epsilon since no one at the table was an agent and privy to Dragoon’s ability to get around it.

After getting dinner for Frisk and I, I took the chair next to her for dinner. Star smiled the whole time, listening while pushing the food on her plate around, pretending to eat. There was no way that she wasn’t hungry, but she wasn’t eating either. She said very little, mostly asking a question or two to keep everyone else talking, a tightness building around her eyes.

After dinner, Frisk stood to head back to the apartment and Star excused herself from the table to follow us. The others at the table moved to follow when Brass waved for them to remain sitting. He stood, walking along behind Star.

Star waited until we were in the hall outside the apartments to ask her question. “What’s my assignment change?”
Umbra, who had waited patiently for her trainer at the door of her apartment, rushed Star, jumping into her arms. She held the Umbreon while following Frisk.

Frisk opened the door to our apartment. “With void travel out of the question, you’re on your regular duties with Asriel and your regular training schedule, but I’m also handing over management of a few of our guests to you. Specifically, the Luna family, Brass and Stephen, the Princes, and Frisk Boneweaver.”

Star nodded. “Is your office open?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll go grab the paperwork now.”

Frisk turned and grabbed Star’s arm. “In the morning. There’s no need to rush.” After toeing off her shoes, Frisk sat down on the couch and waited, watching Star.

Star put Umbra at her feet and sat next to Frisk before leaning over, resting her head on Frisk’s lap. Frisk’s right hand dropped from holding Marigold, who snoozed away in her sling, reaching down to gently pet Star’s hair, fingers tangling in the long, black strands.

“It’s not okay right now, Star. But I promise you, it will be.”

Star sniffed, pulling up her feet so that she laid on the couch. She stared straight ahead. “If there’s anything the last three days have proven, okay doesn’t apply to me.”

“Why not?”

“I’d be relieved that everything went on fine without me if it didn’t leave me with the nagging thought that I wasn’t really necessary to the equation to begin with.”

Brass stiffened, and I rested a hand on his shoulder, putting a boney finger to my mouth for silence. Frisk’s hand paused for a moment before continuing to pet her head. “We’d all miss you if weren’t here.”

“No, you wouldn’t. If I didn’t exist, nothing would be different. No one would notice a difference. Everyone’s lives would have gone on just fine and would have been a damn shot easier for not having me around.”

“Star--”

“Don’t try. I know better. I’m not supposed to exist. I literally have to steal from other Frisks to have anything of my own. My fiance would not have been pacing around, worried about me when he should have been concentrating on the shutdown. Sunshine wouldn’t be concerned about her partner worrying over some other Frisk. Mom and Dad would not have wasted--”

“FRISK!”

Star fell silent and turned her head, looking up at my wife.

My Sunflower sighed, eyes closing. “What did Frisk Provost say to you when you questioned your existence?”

“That the circumstances of my conception did not determine my worth.”
Frisk’s eyes opened, looking down at Star. “Add to that: ‘There is no one in the multiverse who is unnecessary to its function.’ It is the reason Seraph exists. It is the reason we look to stop our enemies and not destroy them. Everyone is important. Just because others can step in and handle things for you doesn’t mean that you aren’t indispensable. And as much pride as you can take in your work, you should never let it define who you are.” Frisk frowned. “Moving you off missions has meant a lot more stress for Epsilon. It takes multiple people to balance out your skill set.”

Star sat up. “Then why do you keep taking me off missions? Did I do something wrong, because no one’s yelled at me for anything.”

Frisk shook her head. “I’m not taking you off missions to punish you. I’m taking you off missions because I need you to learn a new set of skills. I won’t be here forever and I need someone who can take my place as Asriel’s side.”

Star leaned away. “I am, in no way, capable of doing your job. And you are nowhere near retirement.”

Frisk smiled. “I didn’t know what I was doing when I started. What you see now is the benefit of experience, which is something I can pass on. Teach to another. And you’re the one I’ve chosen for that role.”

Star shook her head, long hair swinging around her face. “If that’s the case, why put me on housekeeping?”

I leaned over the couch, arms resting on back and between them. “Because the only time you aren’t working is when you’re skating. You need to build your team and the only way to put you in a position to build those relationships is if we schedule you to do it.”

Star stared at her lap. “I’m not that bad…”

Brass reached over and tapped Star’s temple with one finger. “Your friends beg you to visit and you tell us that it won’t be happening unless it’s a mission on their timeline. You don’t take time off. That’s not good for you.”

Star looked at me for confirmation.

I shrugged. “You have half a year in saved up vacation. As of today, you’ve officially used only three of the sick days you’ve accumulated. You haven’t even requested vacation time for your honeymoon yet.”

Star frowned. “I figured that with work we’d be too busy…”

“Wow.” Brass shook his head as he sighed. “I don’t even have a response for that one.”

Frisk jumped when her phone gave off a very special ringtone. She frowned. “Oh you know I just had a baby…” She picked up in the middle of the second ring. “Church here.”

General Jonathan Cowen coughed lightly before his voice carried louder than Frisk intended from her phone, if her flinch was any indication. “We have another report of the Thule Society looking to move in on an artifact. I know you are on leave, so I’m not asking you to handle it personally. I’m asking you to assemble a team capable of handling it.”

Frisk took a deep breath. Her eyebrow went up and she looked at Star. “Send the electronic file to C and the papers via the courier. I’ll have a team for you. What’s the compensation?”
“The same as every previous mission. Unless you have something you'd like to add.”

Her eyes remained on Star. “I do. The team lead will be my protege. I want her to receive training to have my clearances in addition to pay.”

Star looked to me and mouthed, ‘what?’

I nodded toward Frisk.

Cowen chuckled. “Looking to retire already?”

“Just playing the long game, General.”

“Granted. I’m very interested in meeting the woman you’ve deemed worthy of taking your place at Asriel’s side.” He hung up.

“Oh, wow.” Star looked between us. “Okay… So who’s the team? Besides me.”

Frisk leaned back. “It’s your team. You tell me.”
STOP!

I am putting my Author’s Note here so you don’t skip reading it: If stories dealing with DEPRESSION AND/OR SUICIDE are not something you can handle for any reason, skip this episode. It will NOT destroy your enjoyment of the rest of the season. Any reference to White’s Chara after this episode will not involve anything that happens in this episode. It is a story meant to tie up a loose end and YOU CAN SKIP IT. It’s okay to skip it.

You have been warned. Let’s pick up with Chara:

I pressed my back to the wall, listening carefully for King Asgore’s steps around the throne room turned garden. The golden flowers that had once cradled my fall into the underground now filled a room that had once been lined with monster dignitaries. Now only Asgore kept it. Despite the barrier having been open for so long, he’d chosen to keep this place as his home, still living in the dark; stray sunlight from a few holes in the cavern wall lighting the flower bed here and there. I snuck a glance and found his back turned, his long cape stuck with so many flowers.

Taking that as my cue, I snuck across the opening to the stairwell beyond. Lifting one hand, I summoned a small flame, giving myself a little light as I descended into the dark. I’d been here once before with Frisk. I hadn’t known what was down the stairs and, curious, he’d gone down them to see. We found seven coffins. One had my name on it. I’d recoiled and Frisk left, not wanting to disturb my remains. Then, a light had remained on, casting strange shadows on the walls. Here, my own light was needed to navigate.

The stairs were steep, having been made by monsters, for monsters. It would be all too easy to slip and fall.

So easy.

That whirling cachopany rose up in my mind and I sat down on the steps holding my head, my little flame going out. Everything was loud and everything hurt and everything pitched and everything tossed.

I could make it stop, make it all stop...

If I just pushed forward...

I hunched in on myself, shaking against the rising sound of a hundred voices I knew on some level were only in my head. It filled my ears, filled my head, filled my chest. I wrenched one hand from my head, slamming my fist against my leg until it felt like something broke and the voices retreated.

Trembling, I took a deep breath: in through the nose and out through the mouth; and again and again, listening to the sound. In my mind’s eye, I could see Frisk smiling. I held onto that image for a few moments, minutes, hours; listening to my breath.

I opened my eyes, unsure of how much time had passed, but sure that it was too long. If Papyrus didn’t notice I was gone, White definitely would. At least, he would after that.
I need to move.

I continued down the stairs, summoning my light again; the only illumination dancing on the gray walls with gray cement. Gray on gray on gray. I never noticed how gray it had been in life. But then, I had been filled with happy purpose. I could open the barrier and set my friends, the people who’d cared for me after I’d been pitched down a hole, free. Instead, I was murdered and my memory sabotaged; my name cursed.

What a terrible joke fate played on me.

But then, it’s par for the course as far as Charas are concerned, right? There never was a real chance for happiness.

Still trembling from my moment above, I came to the end of the stairs and entered the single room found at the bottom. Seven, gray, stone coffins lined the room, the names of seven innocent people engraved on each one. Toriel murdered every single one of them and Asgore had hidden his wife’s crimes here. She hadn’t fled the castle when the declaration of war against humans rose. He banished her and so left her to her own devices, which meant the deaths of others. Even now, with the barrier open and the souls of the fallen long gone, she remained in the Ruins of Old Home, locked inside.

Walking up to my coffin, I frowned. The stone lid looked very heavy. Letting the magical flame in my hand float above me, I shoved on the coffin lid, pushing the heavy stone, straining against the awful weight. The scraping of stone on stone let up an awful screech. I kept pushing until it was open enough for me to get a good look inside. I rested against the stone, gulping air before standing up. I motioned the flame down to light the interior.

It was empty.

The pounding of feet on the stairs didn’t give me enough time to find a place to hide as Asgore swept into the room, a magic flame brightly lighting his way. “What was--”

The Goat King froze in place, staring wide eyed at me, mouth opening and closing. I reached for the knife in the hidden pocket on the skirt of my dress. Today would not be a repeat of so many years ago.

Not yet.

My fingers found nothing. The knife was gone. That… wasn’t all that surprising. Frisk likely lifted it off of me this morning. But now I was defenseless. Almost. I still had magic. My hands began to rise.

The sound of fingers snapping filled the room and I was swallowed by darkness. I hugged myself, shivering as the world came back together. I saw a stone pillar and leaned against it, hugging it as I gasped for air.

“You bastard! You know I hate teleporting!”

White sighed. “Keep it down, Snow. We’re in Toriel’s realm. We need to keep quiet.”

“Why the hell did you bring me here?!?” I hissed, seething.

He pointed to the mass of golden flowers that grew in one of the few places sunlight streamed into the Underground. Well, it had until Asgore had sealed it up on the barrier’s opening. “You weren’t buried in the palace.” He pointed to the flowers. “You’re there. It’s why you were able to possess Frisk. He landed on top of you.”
I moved toward the flowers and White grabbed my arm. “Don’t look.”

I leaned away from him. “Why not?”

“Because Toriel didn’t bury you.”

I pulled out of his grasp, slowly. Turning, I walked toward the flowers. I heard White sigh, but he didn’t try to stop me a second time. I waded into the mass of yellow flowers, the cloying stickiness causing stems, leaves, and petals to stick to my dress. I looked around, expecting to find… a skeleton? Bones did decompose, they only took a long time to do so. Kneeling down, I pushed the flowers aside…

And saw my face.

It looked like I was sleeping. My body lay like someone had tossed it here, only to be cradled by the soil, rather than bury me. Or maybe my corpse had refused the earth in order to be a soil of its own. The golden flowers were not growing around my body, but rather out of it. A sweet scent, distinct from the flowers, rose up, an enticing smell, delicious and inviting.

White came up alongside me, but a good ways away from the flowers, trying to keep an eye on me while not looking at my body. I knew that, after he and Frisk had brought me back, he’d been investigating things, but he’d also not been keen on keeping what he’d found under wraps. He didn’t want to say anything, but he didn’t want to prevent me from knowing either. He was still shocked that Frisk had hidden so much from him for so long.

“Why didn’t you want me to look? Is it because my corpse is naked?”

Why am I naked?

White kept his eyes carefully trained on the cavern walls. “It’s because your body is still breathing.”

I blinked and looked down at myself, watching my chest move up and down, steadily. I placed a hand over my mouth, eyes squeezed shut, trembling.

Taking a deep breath, I pulled myself back together. “Why are you standing so far away?”

White stared up at the hole, now eternally blocked, above our heads. “The smell.”

“The smell? But it’s sweet and warm, not rotten.”

He frowned, shifting uncomfortably, and pulled up his hood to hide the pale blush on his face. “It’s a bit more than that for me.”

Oh.

Really?

I thought about that for a moment. Because he could act like one of monster kind at a moment’s notice and without fail, it was easy to forget that he was stuck in a human body that was eternally in its mid-twenties with all that entailed. It spoke a lot to his personal self control and it was something he’d worked to pass on to Frisk, though Frisk had his own motivation for keeping his urges under wraps. Kind of hard to give in to those sorts of things when you had the soul of another living in your body, always aware of your thoughts.

I lifted my hands, seeing, in my mind’s eye, a ring of gold. Etching glowing symbols into it, the ring
manifested in the air in between my hands, building a spell. Using the ring as a lens, I looked through it, gazing at my body. It was in some sort of suspended state, unaging. The brain was completely vegetative, only running the necessary, involuntary functions for the rest of the body to function.

I paused over my breasts. They were bigger than they should have been and appeared wet. Letting go of the spell, it broke down in a cloud of golden dust, falling like lines toward the ground. I reached out and touched one nipple. My fingers came away with milk.

Why was my body producing milk? I hadn’t been pregnant when I died. I hadn’t actually known a man at all. Was this some sort of side effect from whatever state my body was in? The stomach wasn’t protruding. It appeared to be as softly round as my own.

I frowned and stood, unsure what to make of it.

“I brought Alphys here and she took some samples to analyze them back in the Lab, to see what was happening on a scientific level.”

I nodded and stood, staring down at myself, unsure what to do. What do you do when you’re looking at your own, not quite dead body? What kind of cosmic joke is this? I want so badly to die and there I lie, completely unable too.

White rubbed his arm with a grimace before he took my hand. “Let’s go home.”

He drew me away from the flowers before sliding an arm around my waist. He waited for me to press my face into his side before teleporting. I shivered, eyes shut against the dark. I only opened them again when I felt the cold crunch of snow under my feet. I stepped away from White and into the cabin, the human, secret service agent assigned to the front of the house nodding to us as he opened the door.

The interior had been rearranged; walls moved and a fourth room made on the second floor for me, a place that was specifically my own. Asriel was currently living in Frisk’s old room, relearning how to do things with a goat monster’s body, while trying to figure out what he was going to do about his parents. From the little I’ve seen of Asgore, he had begun aging again as his son grew. I’m not sure if he had noticed.

The living room, which had long been the dull plain of a bachelor pad, now matched the cabin aesthetic: hardwood floors, warm green rug, caramel colored couch and loveseat, dark stained coffee table, and a chandelier that was a ring of thick, electric candles. A fire place now graced the middle of the exterior wall and the tv had been mounted over it. Where the tv had once sat, a bucolic, landscape painting graced the wall surrounded by family photos in rustic frames.

Papyrus was quite the interior decorator. And he’d been adamant about the change with me there. That this was my home, my sanctuary as much as any of the brothers. Even now, and knowing that I liked to cook, he was in the process of remodeling the kitchen. I only tried once to argue the changes, to say that they weren’t necessary. That it wasn’t my intention to stay. But Papyrus saw through that as quickly as Frisk and White had seen through my attempts to quietly leave, to finish the work Asgore and Toriel had started so long ago.

After taking off my shoes and placing them on the shoe rack by the door, I went up the stairs and knocked on the door to Frisk’s room.

“Come in!”

I opened the door to find Frisk sitting backwards in his desk chair, arms resting on the back, and
Asriel sitting on the bed, both smiling about whatever conversation I’d interrupted.

Well done, Chara. Well done.

“Nevermind. I can come back later.”

Frisk was out of the chair in a flash, grabbing my hand. “Come in.”

I pulled back. “It can wait.”

Frisk snorted, pulling me into the room. “No, it can’t. You’ve been gone for a while. Sans went to find you in a hurry. Are you all right?”

I shook my head. “I’m fine.”

“Where did you go?”

I frowned as he shut the door behind me. “I was at the castle. I wanted to see my tomb.”

“It’s empty,” Asriel said. “You’re in--”

“The Ruins. I know. White showed me.”

Asriel patted the open space next to him on the bed and I sat down. His arm hugged me close, strong and filled with his warmth. “Why did you want to see?”

I looked at my feet. “I don’t know.” I looked up at Asriel. “How often did you come by to see me in the Ruins?”

Asriel frowned. “A lot. Why?”

“Do you remember when you found Frisk?”

“Yeah. He was laying on your chest, doing that thing that human babies do… uh, nursing?” He shrugged. “Why? Is that weird?”

Frisk blinked. “Well, that was something I wasn’t aware of. Sorry...”

I shook my head. “My body is producing milk and you were an infant. It’s not an unnatural response for a baby.” I sighed. “Maybe that’s why. Maybe I was responding in some way to an infant being on me. It’s rare, but not completely unheard of for an unrelated woman to produce milk for a baby. It is kind of unheard of for a woman who’s never had a child to do that though.”

I moved to stand and ended up going nowhere, Asriel refusing to let me go.

“Unless you need to use the bathroom, I’m not letting you up.” Asriel gave me a toothy smile, his fangs glinting. Asriel the adult held all the mischievousness of Asriel the child tempered by hundreds of years of wisdom gained by his partial resurrection as a flower and that often translated into a wolfish attitude. “Stay a while. You scare us when you disappear. If you keep doing it, someone’s going to plant a tracker on you.”

I gave the goat prince a sour frown. “He doesn’t need to put a tracker on me. The brand is on him, remember?”
Frisk leaned over in the chair, resting his head on his arms. “I’m taking you out to dinner tonight, remember? You haven’t said where you want to go.”

Because I was kind of hoping you’d forget. “Anywhere’s fine,” I muttered.

Frisk gave me a smirk. “So you’re fine with Grillbzy’s?” He laughed when I cringed. “Come on. Give me a real opinion.”


“Oh. Cheap date.” Frisk whipped out his phone. “The one on Apple Street has patio seating looking out at the lake in Reed Park. Autumn has really settled in surface side, so you’ll want a sweater.”

Shows you how much he knows me. There’s a Panera in New Home now, along with myriad fast and casual food chain options, but Frisk automatically chose one on the surface.

His phone rang, buzzing in his hand at the same time, and his smile was instantly huge, eyes shining with an excitement that meant another Frisk had called him. He tapped to answer. “Hello, Sunshine!” He listened for a minute before nodding. “Yeah. She’s right here.”

Frisk held the phone out to me. “Red’s little sister. She wants to talk to you.”

I reached out, hesitant. Why would someone of such singular genius and achievement want to talk to me? I’ve never spoken to her and, as far as I knew, everyone still thought I was a murderous child. I took the phone and put it to my ear, looking down at my lap. “Greetings.”

“Greetings, Snow! How are you feeling?”

“I…” I looked up and realized I was alone in the room, the door clicking shut as Frisk and Asriel left.

“I understand. I was there too. Though it’s different for you and Frisk. You don’t look at him and see a brother. And he’s never called you his partner.”

I blinked. “Is that really what you’re calling about?”

“That and if you heard the voice in your head too. The one telling all the Charas to go to Star.”

I gripped the phone tightly. “Yes. I heard it. White… White was with me at the time. I used his phone to try and call her. Frisk said she was awake now, but that…” I shook my head. “How’s your Chara?”

Sunshine sighed. “Better now that Star’s awake.”

I frowned. “Any idea who was behind the voice? The one telling us to go to her?”

She snorted. “Oh please! That’s easy! It was the Prime Chara.”

I shook my head. “Impossible. They’re dead.”

“And since when has that ever stopped a Chara before?”

I’m pretty sure that if I could see her expression, it’d be one of disappointment. Point taken.

“Listen, I know there’s a part of you that wants to disappear. To just be gone. Don’t give into it. Don’t let it hold you.”
I hunched in on myself, shaking. “I’m not--”

“You are. Frisk’s noticed. Asriel’s noticed. Papyrus has noticed and it’s one of the reasons White took the brand. We’ve been talking about it for a while. It’s why everyone is so keen on keeping you close. Being physically separated from Frisk means being alone. And you haven’t been alone for twenty six years.”

I smiled wryly. “What? No guilt trip about Frisk needing me? No pep talk on how life is worth living?”

“I don’t have to tell you that Frisk needs you. That’s something you’ve long known. And how worth it life is depends on you. If you want a pep talk, I’ll give a patented Fell one: You had everything stolen from you. Take it back. Take it all back.”

She sighed. “I’ll call again. Your Alphys sent the data from the samples she took from your body to my father and brother. They’re looking them over.”

I nodded. “Okay.”

“Not sure how you feel about that, huh?”

I thought about it. “No. But... I’m kind of happy to know that, besides being Frisk’s soft landing, I was also able to nourish him too.” I groaned. “Wow, that sounded weird. Why doesn’t it feel weird?”

“Maybe if you think about it, you’ll figure it out. ‘Baby Bones’ and all that.”

I rolled my eyes. “Yeah. Blue should have come up with a better name for the phenomenon.”

Sunshine chuckled. “I’m sure we can come up with a better, all encompassing one if we try. I’ll call again later, Snow. Bye.”

“Bye.” I hung up and stared at the phone. “That was fast.”

Frisk put his head in the door. “What was?”

I stood and handed him the phone. “She called me Snow.”

The door opened all the way and I saw White standing behind him.

Frisk’s head cocked to one side. “Don’t like it?”

I looked behind him to White. “Your nickname is White. It makes it sound like I’m an attachment to you.”

He put a hand on his chest, bowing his head a little. It’d been a long time since anyone had performed that motion for me. It was the kind of head bow you gave to one of the great wizards on the surface. “I apologize.”

I drew back a little. For him, that was suspiciously subdued. Then again, everything with White lately had been low key. “Why?”

He lifted his head, eyes a little sad. “Because it makes you uncomfortable and you should never feel uncomfortable in your home or with your family.”

I frowned. I couldn’t deny that the name was apropos. I certainly did look like the ‘Snow White’ of
legend with my long black hair and milky pale skin. I couldn’t make claims to her legendary sweetness though. Any part of that gentleness that had once lived in me had been long burned away.

In life, I hadn’t been willing to harm another living thing. If I had, I wouldn’t have been tossed into a hole in the ground. I would have been feared enough that people would have stayed back. I would have risen through the ranks to take my place as one of wizarding’s royalty. I had the pedigree. I just didn’t have the drive.

Not even to protect myself.

Now there was Frisk, and I was willing to burn the world for him. To protect him at all cost. It’s such a strange conviction to have. I thought that it might fade now that we were separated. Instead, it was like my heart was walking around outside of my body.

It wasn’t a romantic love. I knew that feeling and the pitch of the loins that accompanies it. I didn’t have a name for this. It was a long and nameless thing; a low grade terror; a bursting, overwhelming joy; a sudden, gripping fear; a long, slow pride.

Asriel poked me in the side. “I like it. It’s a reminder that we need to warm you up on occasion. Unless you prefer ‘Ice Queen.’”

I tried not too and ended up laughing anyway as Asriel went back into the bedroom, the door closing behind him. To be perfectly honest, I liked it. I like being ‘Snow.’ I was just looking for a reason to be a bitch to White. I really need to stop that. He’s really gone out of his way to make things easier for me. And it’s not like things have been easy for him lately.

Frisk offered me his arm and I took it.

A knock at the front door gave us all pause. Every hair on the back of neck stood up and I opened my mouth to tell Papyrus not to open the door. But it was too late.

Asgore stepped inside, large eyes worried. “Pardon my intrusion. I just wanted to talk to Sans about a strange occurrence in the castle.”

He attempted a smile as he looked up at the second floor. And then his eyes found me. I froze stock still, hoping against hope that Asriel stayed put and didn’t open the door.

“Chara?” He stepped forward. “This is impossible…”

Frisk stepped in front of me and my stomach lurched. Didn’t he know it was my job to protect him? Logically, I knew he could take any monster to task, but that wasn’t the point.

The action, however, was enough to hit Asgore in the gut. He looked physically ill. His head bowed, eyes on the floor as his less than golden mane fell around him. “I won’t question this turn of events. When you want an explanation of what happened all those years ago, come to my home. And that is all it is: an explanation. Not a defense.” He turned slowly, trudging out the door.

The door shut, and Asriel was suddenly standing next to me. “So do you think he’d have had a heart attack had he seen me?”

I looked up at him, blinking a little. “That is your father.”

Asriel shrugged, crossing his arms over his chest. “Yeah, and I wouldn’t have been a flower had he not poisoned you.”
Frisk shook his head. “You’ve been spending way too much time with Fell Asriel.”

He smiled wolfishly. “Oh come on. You know that in that relationship,” he patted his chest proudly, “I’m the bad influence.”

Frisk sighed, taking my arm. “Do you want to see him now, or go to dinner and decide later?”

I looked down at the floor, thinking about it. I wasn’t sure I could handle the offered conversation on a full stomach, but I wasn’t sure I wanted to hear it either. At the same time, I was desperate to know why I had to die.

I nodded, mostly to myself. “We’ll see Asgore first.”

The ride to Hotland on the Riverperson’s boat seemed too swift. The ride up the elevator to the New Home seemed too slow. I gripped Frisk’s hand as tightly as I could, though if it hurt him, he didn’t say. The human secret service agents on either side of us, waited patiently and silently, neither feeling the need to engage. Some were more talkative than others. Since the layered assassination attempt a few months ago, there were always two agents with Frisk at all times, one who looked the part and one in plain clothes, blending in.

The protection was part and parcel of his diplomat status. Frisk existed in this strange, political state. There were no records on the surface of his birth or his parentage, so he was listed as a Gaster, one of the wizard families who chose to be locked underground with monsters during the war. Genetic mapping listed him as a relation of the Ravenbrookes, the wizarding family who controlled the country; my family. As such, the Ravenbrookes counted him as one of them, his use of blue magic considered a lost art they hoped to revive.

And it was the reason for the assassination attempts. Having one wizard family controlling a singular type of magic was a terrifying prospect to the rest. They’d rather kill the wizard with the power and extinguish it forever rather than have an enemy propagate it. That White, Papyrus, and I also knew how to use it was kept tightly under wraps, leaving only one target.

While Frisk was Asgore’s ambassador for monsterkind, he was also Ravenbrooke’s prized son. He would never rise to the power of the named family heir, Aaron Ravenbrooke, or to the power of the second in line, Adiron, but the three had become fast and fierce friends on meeting; three peas in a pod. Aaron and Adiron relied on Frisk’s counsel as well as his ability to reverse time.

I’d hoped that my sudden appearance would have been deemed a security risk, freeing Frisk from my presence and influence once and for all. Instead, I’d found that this situation had been a preconceived and planned for contingency after it having happened to the Fell siblings. The ways of the past were long dead and the gentle nature that had found me literally tossed aside was now considered a boon. I was a Ravenbrooke, and the blood tie was more important than my willingness to use my gifts and wealth of knowledge for power. As it stood, I was the only descendant of a previously lost line of the family. After throwing me to my death, they’d burnt themselves out.

With that in mind, I’d wondered why I hadn’t been assigned the protection that Frisk had, only to find out that I had. All Ravenbrooke secret service agents were branded on the inside of the left forearm with a magical seal that allowed them to always find their assigned family member, to assess their condition, and prevented the agent from betraying that person. White’s hoodie, and his general attitude, hid the brand he’d taken for me pretty well. Even though he wasn’t in the elevator with us, I knew he’d be at the Dreemurr house when we got there.

The elevator stopped and the door opened. One gray on gray walk later and we stood in front of the Dreemurr house. Frisk knocked on the door and White opened it from the inside, motioning us in.
Taking us into the open living room, we found Asgore sitting at the table, bent over a cup of tea. Up close, you could see just how much he’d aged, gray hair liberally streaking the dull gold of his mane. He’d lost weight as well, nothing like the imposing king I’d met so long ago or the pot bellied, couch potato Frisk had removed his skull mask for.

Asgore motioned for us to sit down without looking up. “Please be seated. I’d offer you something to drink, but I know that would be in less than poor taste. Sans told me how this has come to pass, so I won’t ask you for an explanation of it.”

The goat king looked up at me. “When I offered you the drugged tea, it was not to destroy you, but to delay you while I thought of a way to explain why the barrier must remain shut.”

He sighed deeply. “When monsters were shut underground, many humans chose to stay with us, and we cherished them as family. But, overtime, the humans began to die off in a mysterious fashion. At first, we thought it was a lack of sunlight or maybe they had brought with them a slow and silent disease. After a while, only the Gasters were left: Wing Dings, Sans, and Papyrus. Even Lucida Gaster had been taken.”

I looked at White and he frowned. He didn’t like to talk about his mother, a woman he held in such high and glowing regard that being around other versions of her could rend his heart in unexpected ways.

Asgore gripped his mug tightly, looking at the liquid. “Toriel suggested the building of the Core, a project she knew Dr. Gaster would not be able to resist, and on its completion arranged the accident that killed him, and left Sans and Papyrus in their current states. It was then that all of my long suspicions had been confirmed. Toriel had been arranging the long, slow extermination of humans in the Underground, the Gasters being the last of her victims. I made it appear as if Sans and Papyrus had died with their father and afterward, it seemed that Toriel had settled. We had Asriel and with that, a peace came to descend over her.”

I swallowed. “And then I fell.”

He nodded. “A sort of mania came over her. I hoped that, by keeping you in our home and allowing Asriel to become attached to you, that it would give you some safety. And while you were always with my son or myself, you were safe. When you told me that you’d figured out how to open the barrier—”

I held up a hand. “You were trying to keep Toriel locked inside. You drugged me to delay me and that only left me open to her attack.”

“Yes.” Asgore shuddered. “It was foolish. I should have simply explained then, but you appeared to enjoy Toriel’s company, to be unaware of her murderous intentions. Instead, it only led to your death, and then to Asriel’s, and then to deaths of six more.”

Frisk jumped in. “Why? Why is she like this?”

Asgore shook his head. “There is no reason, no catalyst. She had a normal and loving childhood and had never been harmed or betrayed by a human. She was never angry at humans, and not seeking attention. She isn’t mentally ill. It is something intrinsic to her nature and she kept it well hidden from everyone. Sometimes, I wonder if, when my great grandfather bonded with the human soul that ended in our being trapped underground, that that human had been among Tori’s earliest victims. That the bonding had been about offering the victim revenge.”
The goat king shook his head. “It’s neither here nor there.” His eyes returned to me. “I don’t ask you for forgiveness or even understanding. If you go on the rest of your new found life hating me, so be it. I offer no defense. I can’t bring myself to end Tori’s life. She is my greatest love and I deeply miss her partnership. Locking her away in the Ruins has never brought me solace. I will pine for her despite knowing who she is and what she has done. And I offer no apology for that.”

I sat for a moment, empty, staring at my hands. The silence dragged on and I stood. Frisk followed me as I went for the hall.

“Tell Asriel that I wish to see him.”

I stopped and turned to the goat king.

He ran two clawed fingers through his hair, drawing a few strands of his graying mane forward, gazing at the white. “This… This is a sign that he now has life too. And I have no doubt that you are the one who gave it to him. Indeed, I think you are the only one who could perform such a miracle.”

Frisk nodded and guided me away. The path open to us, Frisk took me to the throne room and the entrance to the surface, skipping the teleport he knew I hated, even I’d been willing just to go to see the surface for a little bit.

The entrance to the underground was a tourist attraction and a way directly to New Home had been constructed to give the King of All Monsters privacy in his home. Humans now littered the underground, many having moved there after the opening. Something that made Toriel’s imprisonment even more imperative.

The face of the mountain had changed as well. Once just a forgotten cave entrance in a oft neglected forest, it was now the bustling ‘Garden District’ of the Ravenbrookes’ capital city, St. Canard. From the walkway down from the cave entrance, you could see beautiful buildings designed to compliment the forest the district grew up in. The home Aaron Ravenbrooke had constructed several years ago to give him a reprieve from the politics of living at work in the city center rested just off to the left.

It was strange to think that I had a room in that house: an always welcome member of the family.

A short car ride had us at the Panera and sitting at the patio overlooking the lake. There was a restaurant just a little ways over with what was arguably the better view, but it was also very high class; the kind of place you expected wizards to be. Here, we were unmolested, locals who knew Frisk well taking up the tables around us; paparazzi nowhere to be seen.

While Frisk retrieved our dinner, the agent in plain clothes, Evan Spencer, sat next to me. “I’m not going to ask if you’re all right. I’m not honestly sure how anyone is supposed feel about the details of their own murder a couple hundred years on. But I’m pretty sure ‘all right’ doesn’t cover it. So how do you feel?”

“Empty. I was worried I’d feel sick, but… I just feel empty.”

He reached over, taking my hand in his, patting it gently. I looked at him then, and had a sinking feeling.

“Your family is among Toriel’s victims.”

Evan nodded. “My family was camping on the mountain, a normal family trip. My older brother
Jared went for a walk in the evening, collecting firewood, and didn’t come back. Frisk confirmed it for us a while back.”

I looked down at our joined hands. “I’m sorry.”

“Why?”

I looked up into Evan’s blue eyes. “I came back and he didn’t.”

He snorted, laughing. “A trick of fate brought you back and even that hasn’t been the kindest. It’s been over two decades. I’ve had some time, but it was the reason I volunteered to serve Frisk. I was hoping for closure. I got that and something more. That easy smile Frisk has, that occasionally snotty look when he’s playing at being a jerk? My brother had those expressions. So, in a way, I don’t feel that Jared is that far away from me.”

Frisk came back with a tray filled with food and Evan moved away to let us eat. On the way back home, Frisk stopped outside the Lab. “Want to see if Alphys found something?”

I wasn’t sure if I wanted answers just this moment, but I wasn’t sure I’d be willing to come by once answers could be had. I nodded, letting Frisk draw me inside.

The Lab, while box shaped on the outside, was a buzz of scientific activity on the inside. Long having been converted from a simple domicile for Alphys, it now looked like a proper, modern laboratory of steel and tile. White sat at one of the terminals, working on the machine Frisk Provost had provided him the blueprints for, his laptop screen covered in lines of code. He’d been working in conjunction with so many people to get the machine working in a way that would bypass the closing off of the void.

Monsters went this way and that at their tasks, giving us waves as we went by, heading for Alphys office. Frisk knocked at the door and, not getting a response, opened it.

Alphys was staring at her laptop screen, slack jawed, back to us. “Are you… Are you sure? You aren’t just having one over on me, are you? This is… oh… oh God!”

Red shook his skull, his gold tooth glinting with the action. Behind him, on the screen, his father and Sunshine, hair white with green streaks, were both looking at a clipboard covered in papers. “*i ain’t messing with you, alph. we needed a human from your timeline to compare chara’s samples too, and frisk is already in seraph’s system. it’s a match on a genetic level.”

I looked up at Frisk and he gave me a shrug.

Alphys’ clawed, yellow hands went up to her head. “But… How? How is it possible?”

Dr. Gaster answered. “The golden flowers on your timeline have unique, life giving properties. If someone were to attempt to make food with them, instead of being poisonous, they would heal the human or monster eating them. It is why your Asriel wasn’t the terror that some of them can be once becoming Flowey. The flowers preserved the essential warmth provided by his soul. Here the flowers preserved the very essence of Chara’s life, even if they couldn’t restore the higher functions of her brain.”

I stepped into the office. “What are you talking about?”

Alphys squeaked. “Snow!”
Red’s image on the screen frowned deeply. “*Have a seat, sweetheart.*”

Sweetheart? That’s a pretty hardcore sign that Red liked me. He only used it with women he saw in a familial way. I grabbed the chair next to Alphys and sat down. I had the sudden and distinct feeling that the room was crowded; the after effect of a teleport. Which meant that White was behind me somewhere.

“*You’ve seen your body, right?’*

I nodded.

“*And you noticed that you were producing milk?’*

“Yes.”

“*The samples Alphys took show that you gave birth twenty six years ago.’*

I groaned. “Seriously? You expect me to believe that? I’m a virgin in a cavern full of monsters who breed by combining their souls. Who would have been the father? It certainly isn’t White. He didn’t know the specifics of my life until a few months ago and only recently found my body. And how would you be able to pinpoint it to twenty six years ago? That’s incredibly accurate. And considering my soul was there, wouldn’t I have noticed this going on? Wouldn’t that have been enough to wake me up? My first real memory after Asriel’s soul shattered was waking up in Frisk.” I crossed my arms over my chest and sat back.

“*You aren’t going to ask where your child is?’*

“Of course not. I know where my son is.”

I stopped dead, mouth agape. What had I just said?

A hand came to rest on my shoulder. My hands flew up to hold it as I turned my head, craning my neck a little to look up at Frisk. He leaned over, putting his other arm around me, hugging me tightly. That feeling… my heart walking around outside of my body...

Sunshine gently pushed her brother aside. “Twenty six years ago, Snow, you gave birth to Frisk and your soul went with him. It’s why we’ve never found records of his birth or parents on the surface. He was born in the underground.”

Alphys frowned. “Then who would be the father?’

Red shrugged. “*One of the fallen, obviously. The albino douche-nugget said himself that he couldn’t be near the body, that the smell coming off of it was enough for him to ask you to take the samples. With only six of them, it shouldn’t be too hard to narrow down. Taking out the women and children only leaves one adult male.’*

Alphys hemmed and hawed, “Chara’s body did smell good, but…”

“I’m not sure how I feel about that,” Evan supplied.

The second agent raised his hand. “I knew Jared Spencer and… no.”

Frisk looked at Evan for a moment and back to the screen. “Yeah. Everything I’ve ever heard from Evan and his family, that isn’t something his brother would have done.”

White shook his head. “You haven’t seen her body. Or rather, none of you have smelled her body.
It’s overwhelming. Depending on your brother’s condition after the fall, he might not have been aware of what he was doing. Like the gold toothed, titflake said, I asked Alphys to take the samples. Even being there with Chara earlier was a lot.”

“I need a drink,” Evan muttered.

I sighed. “I do too.”

The other agent snorted. “You're on duty.”

Evan groaned. “Dude. I just found out that the most important person in the world, someone I have sworn to die for, is my nephew; the son of my long lost brother, who, by all evidence, violated a Raven—”

I jumped to my feet. “Stop!”

Evan’s mouth shut.

I sighed. “I'm the one who gets to decide what that moment means. And I decide that whatever happened, happened. If you say that Frisk’s father was a good man, than that’s enough for me. The only part of all of this that matters is Frisk.” I took a breath. “I still want that drink. And I say that you’re now officially off duty so we can share it.” I looked back at White. “You’re filling in until the change over.”

White shrugged. “As you wish.”

Frisk put his arm around me. “Come on, Mom. The drinks are on me.” He looked back to the screen. “Got anything else for us?”

Sunshine shook her head. “Not right now. Alphys can get a sample from Mr. Spencer at a later time to confirm familial relation.”

Frisk nodded and pulled me along as White reached out and patted Alphys shoulder, whispering some encouragement or other to her. I expected to be taken to Grillbzy’s, but instead, Frisk chose the new bar at MTT Resort. Evan sat next to me on the balcony that overlooked the magma flow hundreds of feet below, nursing a glass of scotch while I sipped my wine. Despite being far below us, the magma spread out hundreds of feet before us, reaching into the darkness of the cavern.

After a long silence, Evan let out a sharp breath and stood. “I can’t get the facts to mesh. It just won’t work.” He turned to Frisk. “Take me to Chara’s grave.”

Frisk put a hand on my shoulder. “Would that be all right?”

I nodded. Frisk looked back at the other agent and got a nod from him. The three disappeared.

White took the seat next to me, propping one foot up on the balustrade to watch the shifting glow of the magma.

I set my glass down. “I’m sorry.”

He gave me a suspicious look. “For what?”

“I haven’t been civil while you’ve been more than accommodating.”

White shrugged and sat back. “I accept the apology.”
I stared down at my hands in my lap. “You haven’t been yourself lately. The Sans I know isn’t this quiet. Is it the void being shut off? Problems with the machine?”

He shook his head and leaned back. Putting his hands behind his head, he closed his eyes, relaxing. “The machine is fine. It just needs the right programming and the code for that is starting to come together. Bones figured out how to get the coordinates into it. I’m working on getting them synced up.”

My shoulders dropped. “Then it’s me.”

He opened his left eye to look at me. “Of course.”

I frowned. “I told you that you didn’t have to keep me. And now that we all know what happened, it makes even more sense for me to disappear.”

White grabbed my wrist, his left eye glowing brightly, though it felt unintentional on his part. “I know what it’s like to go through life without my mother. Don’t you dare do that to Frisk.”

“Sans…”

He let go of me and sat back. “When it was clear that you weren’t just feeling blue because of the circumstances, that it wasn’t passing, I asked for the brand. Whatever you’re feeling, hot or cold, sick or healthy, I’m aware of it. And all this thing does is itch. It itches terribly. All the time. And then, every once in a while, it burns white hot and…” He sighed. “It’s a sign that the depression is a constant ache in your mind and heart, always keeping you on an edge that tumbling over means I have to tell two of the three people I love the most that you aren’t coming home.”

“When you’re just a soul, it’s all academic. There aren’t any hormones making you feel this way or that. But now? Now I can really feel again and it hurts so god damn much, I can’t stand it.” I scooted my chair over, putting it next to his, and rested my head on his shoulder. “I’m sorry.”

White adjusted and put his arm around me. “Don’t be. It’s not your fault. None of this is your fault. It just is. We just have to learn to live with it. Take it a day at a time knowing that some days are easier than others.” He bent his head down, resting his nose in my hair.

I moved closer and hissed when I banged my leg against the chair the wrong way. White reached down and lifted my skirt, looking over the dark bruise I’d given myself earlier on the stairs. He touched it gently, a blue glow around his hands. The ugly purple faded to a red, then to a sickly yellow, and then disappeared all together.

A sudden, overwhelming ache flooded me. I looked up at him, shaking, my hands fists. “Why weren’t you there? When I was on the stairs. I know you felt it.”

White took my hand in his, his particular twist on blue magic running over me, soothing away my anger, my terror, my anxiety. “I was.” He sighed. “There’s only so much magic can do. I can’t fight the war in your mind for you, but I can keep you from falling while you fight.”

I blinked and looked down at my feet. “How bad was I thrashing?”

“Pretty bad.”

I sighed. “I know you avoid it because you don’t want me to be uncomfortable but… you can hold me when I’m like that.”

“Will it help?”
I turned, pushing him so that he sat back again and I rested in the crook of his arm. “Probably.”

Frisk reappeared with the agents, both of them looking more than a bit disturbed.

Evan picked up his drink and downed it in one go. “Okay. Yeah.” He sat down on the other side of me. “It’s just…” He looked at me. “What is that smell?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe it’s something about the flowers?”

“And it didn’t affect Frisk at all.”

White shrugged. “Probably because of blood relation.” He suddenly sat up. “Actually, it being the flowers makes sense. They are growing out of you and scent is a way to attract pollinators.”

I snorted and bent over, laughing.

“What?”

I held out my hands, pantomiming. “Can you see it? A large, cartoon-ish bee flying down into the cavern?” I held out both arms as if to receive and started laughing again.

White huffed. “That was not a proper sex joke.”

Evan sputtered and started laughing. “That’s horrible!”

Frisk leaned over and hugged me. “I told you she had a weird sense of humor.”

I finished the last sip of my wine, smiling a little.
Episode 10: The Seal of Solomon

Chapter Notes

Special Disclaimer: Pokemon is copyright to Game Freak.

Note: There maybe a significant delay until the next episode. I'm going on a two week trip with no guarantee of wifi during the next scheduled upload, so hopefully this nice, long episode will tide you over.

Episode 10: The Seal of Solomon
(Brass is our narrator!)

Guess what? I'm in my favorite place. Tied up and hanging over piranha infested waters waiting for the tree branch to give way and drop us in!

Okay, there are some differences this time, the most significant of which is that I am nowhere near my home timeline. I'm doing a favor for Frisk Church, who is one of my favorite people, so I'm not all that miffed about the situation. I've seen worse. I have scars to go along with worse.

I'm also getting a nice, fat, one million American for completing the mission, and that's a lot of money, even for me. And it's one million American for each of us on the mission. It's the kind of money that will mean Stephen is set for life, even while married to a fey queen. Not that Mary is hard to keep.

The other up shot of this is that Star is acting a little more like normal. Which is something I have been told to keep an eye on. Asriel, this world's Asriel specifically, knows that something is wrong with Star, knows that being cut off from the void did something very bad to her. He hasn't been able to pinpoint what. He wasn't happy that Star was going out on a mission, but acquiesced provided I keep an eye on her.

Like I wasn't going to be watching her like a hawk anyway.

The mission, as we have chosen to accept it, involves retrieving the Seal of Solomon, the brass and iron ring that King Solomon wore in ancient times to control demons and other spiritual beings. Except we're pretty sure it doesn't control demons. It probably controls monsters. The idea is to get to the ring before the vampires that make up the Thule Society get to it first.

And these guys? They aren't the idiot Illuminati of my world. They know what they're doing. They got the drop on Stephen, Chara Luna, and I while us guys were investigating some documents in a South American university, and dragged us deep into the jungle. They threw a piece of bloody meat in the water to work up the piranha after tearing our clothing and giving us some nice lacerations to drip blood into the water. They'd even weakened the branch we hung from so that we dipped lower and lower toward the churning water below.

I'm not sure why they went with the super villain-esque death trap instead of just killing us, but Church said to expect it. That, after being through a few of these herself, it was obvious that they wanted their enemies alive, and she had a couple theories as to why, But the top one was that sometimes it was easier to let your enemies do all the hard work to get to The Thing (trademark) and
then swoop in to snap it up.

I looked down at my torn pant leg. Mr. Larkin, the royal tailor, was going to have words about that. Not words for me, mind you. But plenty of words for the fabric manufacturer about the sturdiness of the cloth. I was wearing my regular clothes. Or rather, I was wearing the clothing my mother insists I wear when far from home since they are designed to look nice while being sturdy and protective, so brown slacks, white button down, and a lovely brown and gold, brocade vest.

Stephen hung on my right, carefully working to extricate himself from the ropes. He was always pale, but his sharp nose, sharp chin, and sharp fringe of red hair looked particularly sharp in the moonlight. Thankfully, the moon was almost full and so providing a good bit of light where we were away from the canopy that made up the rainforest.

I'm still not sure how he'd become my confidant… No. I take that back. I knew exactly how that had happened, and it was nice to have someone I could trust have my back. Even Cephas had slid well into the role of being Frisk's confidant; a gentle shadow to follow my brother's gentle hand.

Chara Luna hung on my right. When I'd met him in Church's office yesterday, he'd looked less like a vampire hunter and more like your standard, lazy, Shift Chara in a green hoodie, blue jeans, and ironic t-shirt.

No insult meant to Shift Charas. They just have a reputation.

It was apparent pretty quick that he wasn't a Shift variety of any sort when we'd geared up. Not only did he move with the precision of someone who trained everyday to fight things much bigger and stronger than himself, the man had some impressive scars. I'm not sure how he survived getting a few of them. Right now, he was wearing his hunting attire: green hoodie, blue jeans, and ironic t-shirt.

I'm betting his clothing's got some heavy protective magic on it.

Stephen moved too sharply getting a hand free and the branch gave a very loud crack. We bounced, but it held.

"Dammit!"


Stephen huffed. "Speaking of which, how did we get captured while she managed to get away?"

Luna leaned his neck forward a little to over at him. "She was trained by the two most badass Frisks in the multiverse. I'm actually a little disappointed that she didn't just ninja our captors."

Star came out of the shadows, climbing the tree we hung from. "I will admit to being good at my job, but I'm not crazy enough to take on that many people in one go. FYI: if I'd had even the slightest inkling that they were actually going to kill you, they would be dead and I'd take that hit to my LOVE." She ran her hand along the tree. "The branch isn't too bad. I can secure it and pull the branch over the bank."

She wrapped up the cracked part of the branch in burlap before wrapping rope around it to stabilize it. Climbing out on another branch, she slipped another rope around the end of the branch we hung from and swung it so it landed on the bank. After climbing down, she grabbed the rope and gently pulled, twisting the branch so that it bent toward the river bank. As soon as we were over land, Star secured the rope to another tree and cut us down.

Stephen got himself the rest of the way out of the ropes and moved to help me, only to have Star
shove him back down.

"Stay still! The cut on your leg is deep."

Stephen eyed her as he sat back up. "Can you really take care of it in the dark, in the middle of the jungle?"

Star rolled her eyes as she put a headlamp on and adjusted it. "Yes, Stephen. I can handle it." She slipped her bag from her shoulder, pulling out a suture kit. "Hold still. I don't have any local anesthetic on me so this is going to hurt. Suck on some monster candy to help me out. I'll give you a pain killer as soon as I'm finished."

I tossed Stephen a piece of monster candy. He bit down on it while Star cleaned the wound and sewed him up, making neat little stitches. My cut wasn't as deep and received some glue while Luna ate something that closed his wound. He frowned at the scar left behind, but said nothing, choosing to clean away the blood and quietly sew his ripped pant leg back together.

Star looked us over one last time before pulling off the headlamp. "Did you manage to find anything?"

I nodded. "The book while is in Ancient Hebrew, was only written in the fourteenth century. It looks like one of the old mystery texts or grimoires that used to come out of that time period. It spoke of slim ring made half of brass and half of iron. After Solomon's death, the ring was split into its iron and brass halves. Both halves where then sealed inside a gold ring set with multiple gemstones. It changed hands multiple times after the new setting. The book is badly damaged from improper storage during wartime. The historian we spoke to says a recreation of the book is displayed in the Timna Valley museum in Israel."

Stephen stretched, arms reaching up. "Oh that makes sense. Timna Valley is the location of a set of ancient copper mines that are the legendary mines of King Solomon."

I tapped my chin thoughtfully. "So do you think if a Nazi enters the mines, they'll explode?"

Luna snorted. "Nah. We wouldn't be that lucky. Besides, every Indiana Jones movie says otherwise. And it just wouldn't be archeology if we weren't punching Nazis."

I snorted even as I shook my head. "I don't get it. Technically speaking, we cheated to get here by asking Dr. Aster where she found the Seal of Solomon on her timeline. How did the Thule Society find us so fast?"

Star shrugged, looking a little lost. "I don't know. I was hoping that by cheating, we'd be able to get ahead of the Society." She frowned. "We may actually be behind them instead. Church said to be prepared for that. Every time she's faced them, she always felt like she was behind."

Luna raised an eyebrow. "Almost as if someone were feeding them information."

Star went stock still and then shook it off. "That's something Church will have to figure out. We'll stick to this."

Stephen stood and offered me a hand up. "So let's get to the mines before the Thule Society does."

Star tapped the system core on her jacket. "Hey, C. Arrange us some plane tickets to Israel."

C's voice flowed from the tiny speaker, "You got it."
I stretched. "So how are we getting to the airport?"

"Same way I got out here. A jeep."

I put my hands on my hips. "Where did you get a jeep?"

Star smiled, a devious one she learned from her partner. "Promise not to tell Frisk Church?"

I raised an eyebrow. "Yes."

"Bones taught me how to hotwire a car when I was sixteen." She held up her phone, shaking it a little. "And Red taught me how to bypass Seraph security to add an app that lets me break into keyless entry cars."

Luna patted her shoulder. "Just a regular hoodlum."

She shrugged. "I am a fell variation. Let's go."

No. No, you aren't. You're something else. And your partner and I can't have been the only ones to notice.

We followed Star back to the jeep only to find the tires slashed.

Star huffed. "Is that the way we're doing things today? Fine." She tapped the system core again. "C? Nix the tickets."

C's voice came through. "Okay. Then what's your back up?"

"A teleport."

C popped to life on her shoulder. "Are you sure about that?"

I pointed at C. "Ditto."

Star nodded and motioned us together. "Everyone gather round and be ready for it to get really bright."

Bright didn't cover it. The desert in daylight after being in a dense jungle at night is hard on the eyes. And I was glad my arm was around Star, because she was slumped against me, breathing hard. After a moment, she sucked in a deep breath and stood up, only to slump against me again.

After a quick donning of sunglasses, I got a good look around. Timna was a national park with a nice visitor center and lots of bike routes through the ancient mining area. We got Star into the visitor center and found her a seat at the little cafe inside. Stephen and Luna stepped over to the cafe counter to get Star a water while I sat with her.

I pushed her hair away from her face and saw her eyes filling with darkness only to fade out to brown, over and over.

I frowned. "It's the void, isn't it? It's where you get your power." I reached under my shirt and pulled out my locket, unclasping it from around my neck. "Here. There's a little sliver of the void in this." I clasped it around her neck.

She watched me, frowning but not resisting. "I can't take this! I know how much it means to you-"

She shuddered when the locket rested against her chest, and then sighed, eyes turning completely black.
I smiled. "It's on loan. When we can get back to the void, you can give it back."

Star blinked a few times and her eyes returned to normal. She slipped the locket under her shirt. Stephen handed her a water and she took it gratefully, but his eyes were on me. He had something to say, but wasn't going to say it now. But I was damn sure to hear it later.

Once Star was good, we headed into the small museum attached to the visitor center. And by small, I meant really small. It was a few rooms, but the items inside made up for it on the fascination scale. It made me kind of sad that the place was empty of tourists. It was just us looking around. Artifacts found in the caves and excavation areas filled lighted cases, including the recreation of our book. The book sat in a climate controlled case with a mechanism to turn the pages.

Unfortunately, I didn't have to turn them. It was set on the page we needed to see, which was a very bad sign.

I sighed. "They've been here already."

Star frowned. "Then we need to play catch up. Who was the last person to have the Seal?"

I looked over the text. "According to this, it was hidden in the mines."

Luna held up a map of the park. "And the mines are huge."

Star pulled out her phone. "Time to cheat again." She selected Dr. Aster from the contacts list and waited for the ring.

A warm voice came over the speaker. "Hello, Star!"

"Hello, Frisky-bits! I need some help."

"You got it. Ask away!"

Star shifted a little. "We found the original book but it was damaged. The recreation we've located says the Seal was hidden in the mines."

The sound of papers shifting around followed Dr. Aster's next question. "Is your Timna a national park filled with bike routes?"

Luna held out the map for us all to see.

Star's finger ran down the information box on the side. "Yes. There are five routes."

"Two of the five routes are of medium difficulty. Take the one that runs out to the sandstone mushrooms and explore the caves around them. When exploring them on my world, I found a whole mess of puzzles meant to test the person looking to claim the Seal. Be ready for that."

Stephen sighed. "You know, you could have just told us to come straight here to start."

"I couldn't. While we, at current, have a one for one on magical objects between my world and Church's, they aren't always found in the same place. I may literally be putting you on a wild goose chase and not know it."

Star shrugged. "It's better than what we've got so far. Thanks, Frisk."

"Good luck, Star."
Star shoved her phone back in her bag. "Let's give it a shot." She motioned for us to follow her.

We stepped back out into the sun and stood for a few minutes, admiring the blue-green water of the man made lake just outside the visitor's center. To the left were Solomon's Pillars, a grouping of tall cuts in the red rock face made by thousands of years of wind erosion shearing away the softer sandstone.

The pillars marked the start of all the trails and we followed several, colorfully painted signs with Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs marking the path. After a little walking, the trails branched off and we followed a trail occasionally lined with wood planking just under the sand to help travelers keep their footing. The ubiquitous red-orange striation of the rocks on the cliffs to our right matched the yellow-orange sand under our feet.

We came up on the first of a few 'mushroom' pillars, rocks around which the base was sheared away by wind, but the top, made of sturdier material, remained intact and so appeared to bloom like a mushroom. At each one we stopped and checked the cliff face for caves and found one at the third mushroom. Which was good because I was sure I had a sunburn or two.

The caves were a smooth white and not very tall. We'd be crouching to get through them, if not outright crawling. Star went first with Stephen behind her, mapping as he followed with pencil and notebook. Star stopped at a point to hand us all headlamps as the cave began to darken further in. Everytime we came to a junction, we'd wait while someone broke off to explore how far it went, before marking the way with luminous tape. It felt like we were descending, but I couldn't be perfectly sure on that.

Star stopped. "There's an opening here into what looks like a gallery. Which is great because my legs are really starting to cramp up. Unfortunately, we'll have to crawl through a small opening to get to it." She turned to Stephen. "We've explored several junctions. Are there any you think look better?"

He shook his head. "What do you see in the gallery?"

Star turned back around and looking through the hole in the cave wall ahead. "I see some cave formation columns, some stalagmites…” She trailed off, going silent. She pulled off her head lamp using it like a flashlight.

Stephen leaned in. "Star?"

"I see grass." She turned off the lamp, peering into the dark. "And what looks like daylight through an entrance opposite us."

I shook my head. "Really? I'm pretty sure we've done nothing but head down."

"Agreed. I know the weight of being underground and we are well below the surface," Luna added.

Star put her headlamp back on. "All right. Going through. Once I'm through, wait a minute while I mark our entry spot. I don't want to lose our way back. Better safe than sorry." She turned and lay back, reaching into the hole and pulling herself up and through. After taking a minute to mark the way, she called us through. "Come on."

When I could stand up straight again, I found Star looking around the interior of the gallery. We stood on some thick and very green grass in an otherwise dark cave. There was a light ahead, but it seemed really far away. Walking toward it revealed a set of stones set in the grassy floor of the cave, leading to the light; a man made path.

The light we headed for resolved into a circular stone passageway made of several heavy stones that
each held the other in place by weight; an old engineering trick for bridges and doorways. The keystone was massive and marked with a strange symbol. I took a moment to sketch it out in my notebook: a circle within a square, within a diamond of equal points, with lines pointing up, down, left, and right from the diamond's corners to four other circles, all contained in one large circle that was open at the top and bottom.

Beyond the passage lay a sunlit, grassy field with a path that led toward tree covered mountains. A few stone steps led up to the passage and sitting next to it was a box marked with a black sun with two off kilter crosses in the middle. I frowned, and knelt in front of the box.

"Well, the Thule Society definitely came this way." I looked over the box, rubbing my chin. "It's locked and the wire right here makes me think it's trapped."

"Can you get it open?" Luna asked.

I nodded. "Yeah."

Luna looked through the passage. "This is impossible. We are too deep into a desert to see this on the other side of a cave." He shrugged. "On the other hand, if Thule came this way, it wasn't a vampire doing it. That's way too much in the way of sunlight."

Star was staring up at the symbol on the keystone, her light trained on it.

Luna reached over, putting a hand on Star's shoulder. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah. It's just… I'm sure I've seen that symbol before."

Luna nodded. "Okay. Close your eyes."

Star closed her eyes.

"How long ago did you see it?"

Star's lips pursed. "Recently."

"Before the void was shut off or after?"

"Before."

Luna rolled his shoulders, stretching. "Was it on paper, stone, or fabric?"

"Fabric… It was on the cover of a book! It's on the cover of Charlotte's journal! Thank you!" She pulled out her phone.

Luna's eyebrow went up. "Do you really think you're going to get reception down-"

"Hey Charlotte! I have a question about your journal. The big one with the circle inside a square inside a diamond with other circles all in one big circle. What is that symbol?"

Luna pointed. "She got reception? What phone is that and how do I upgrade to it?"

Stephen leaned over. "It's a Seraph phone. They don't work on cell towers."

Star's jaw dropped. "It's what?" Star stood there, mouth hanging open. "I don't know how to process that information." She stood there for a moment, listening, before nodding. "Thanks. I'll call back if I need you."
I gently untrapped the box. "Don't keep us hanging, Star."

Star pointed her lamp on the symbol again. "It's the mandala of Agartha."

"Agartha?" Luna looked at the grassy plain beyond the passage. "You mean Hollow Earth?"

The lock clicked and I opened the box. "Got it. Looks like a stash of equipment and it's been opened recently. This has rations and live ammunition."

Star tapped her chin with one finger, eyes closed in thought. "We knew they were packing heat, but rations is an indication that we might be traveling hungry."

"And we don't know yet if we're even heading in the right direction," Luna added.

Star continued to stare at the mandala. "We are. Look at the circle in the middle. It's a six pointed star made from interlacing two triangles."

Stephen looked up at the mandala. "So a Star of David?"

I shook my head. "A Star of David is flat. The interlacing of the lines was made to confuse and dizzy demons under the spell of the Seal. This is the right direction."

Star sighed. "This just got way more complicated. I don't want to go any further without some supplies. If anyone wants out, now is your chance to leave."

"In," I said.

Stephen followed without hesitation. "In."

Luna huffed. "I have yet to kill a Nazi vampire. I'm still in."

I shut the box. "So what's the next step?"

Star pulled out her phone. "I report into Church, and ask Cross to prep packs for us to adventure into the Hollow Earth," her smile widened, "without him."

I chuckled. "Oh so cruel."

Star dialed home. "Hey Frisk. We need an equipment change. It seems that your timeline has its very own Agartha."

"WHAT?!" Church's yell made me flinch the same way it always did. I wonder if I'll ever get over that.

Star pulled the phone away from her ear with a grimace. "Ouch."

Cross' voice sounded distant, in the background. "What did she say?"

"I said that this timeline has a Hollow Earth. We need an equipment change."

There was the sound of a chair scraping the floor: Cross standing up. "I'll get your equipment change and come with you."

Star shook her head. "Not a chance. You are still in physical therapy for your arm and may need a round of surgery. I will take the equipment change, but you are sitting tight."
"Oh come on!"

Her smile widened. "It's not happening, Cross."

He groaned loudly.

The sound of a door opening was followed by Church's voice. "Just go get them a full adventuring equipment set up."

Frisk Boneweaver's sweet voice carried over the speaker. "May I go? Surely another healer who can fight would be a boon."

Star smiled. "Bored?"

"Only a little."

Star stifled a laugh. "Think you can sneak away from your fiance?"

Prince Chara sighed deeply. "I'm in the room, Star."

Star tossed her hair a little. "Great. Then you know all about Frisk ditching you for some adventure. She doesn't have to lie about it."

"I am not letting my future wife traipse off into the unknown without me. And if we are talking of Agartha, wouldn't Miss Charlotte be a better choice?"

Star shook her head. "Charlotte can't get around without her cane and even with it, she tires quickly. We are chasing people who may kill us if given the opportunity. Charlotte isn't mobile enough for safety. Is your brother interested in coming along?"

"My brother found the library. We might never see him again."

I frowned. Just what had Charlotte's nemesis done to her? It seemed like a very specific kind of attack.

"If we're good for two more, I won't turn them down."

Church's voice came over the speaker. "You're good for two more. D can handle the teleport."

Distantly, you could hear Cross. "Oh come on!"

Church's smile was evident in her voice. "Make sure to take lots of pictures."

"Will do." Star shoved her phone back in her bag.

D, Frisk Boneweaver, and Prince Chara appeared with several backpacks, and Umbra. The pokemon rushed to Star and leaped into her arms.

Star giggled, hugging her pet. "You silly girl! What are you doing here?"

Frisk handed Star a bag. "She misses you. You were out for days and then gone just as fast on a mission."

Star and the Umbreon rubbed their faces together. "I'm so happy you're here!"

Frisk wore the white robes of her clerichood and it made her look very ready for a fight, which was
something of a contradiction. The religious of my timeline weren't exactly warriors. Well, so long as you didn't count the monks in China who practiced martial arts. Chara had changed out his regular clothing for something a little more modern: brown pants and a dusky blue, long sleeved shirt.

Chara handed Stephen and I our bags. "Inside each is rations for three days, toiletries, and clothing." He turned and whipped Luna's bag at him. "Think fast."

Luna caught the bag with a smile. "Jerk."

I looked between them, catching the same smile Church and Cross had when they were happy to see each other and ready to make a competition of it.

D gave us a salute. "#If you need another teleport, just call." He disappeared.

Luna elbowed Star. "We'll remember that."

"Hey! It wasn't that bad!"

Frisk looked Star over. "What happened?"

Seeing that Star wasn't forthcoming, I answered, "A teleport nearly knocked her flat."

Frisk frowned, taking Star's hands in hers. "Take it easy, okay? We don't know what being cut off from the void means for you yet."

Star sighed and nodded.

Stephen and I opened our bags, checking the contents and placement before shouldering them. It appeared to be a pre-prepped bag with a few extras thrown in for a bit of personalization. Mine had a couple bars of chocolate. Then again, they might all have had chocolate in them. After we'd all adjusted our packs and geared up, we stepped through the passage into a warm, sunny day. We followed the path, keeping our eyes open for tracks leading away from it. Star filled Frisk and Chara in as we walked.

Stephen elbowed me. "What happened to 'I'll wear it till the day I die'?"

I sighed. "It is my most treasured possession. And it holds a sliver of the void in it. Right now, Star needs it. Desperately."

Stephen shook his head. "It's like she's your brother."

I nodded.

"No. I mean, it's like Frisk is here, right now. Just another adventure. We're only missing Cephas."

"A Frisk sometimes just fills in where another Frisk is missing and Star does it naturally. Always has." I sighed. "I don't have a better answer than that. But until we can go home, she can keep the locket and it will help her."

Stephen nodded, patting my shoulder.

As we approached the mountains, the mists around them faded, revealing a massive building cut into the gray stone. It appeared to be a city gate, though all the arched windows were dark. A huge archway was cut into the middle, and sunlight streamed through it. There wasn't even the rotting remains of a wooden gate to indicate a way to close the arch. Maybe it was meant to stay open. The steps leading up to the arch were a standard size, which made the archway seem even bigger as we
passed through it into the remains of a once thriving city now long dead. Gray stone buildings towered over gray stone streets. An occasional banner of faded fabric fluttered here and there around empty windows.

Star stopped us at the entrance, keeping us close to one side. "That is a really open area. Walking through it would make us sitting ducks in a shooting gallery."

Prince Chara came up, looking over it. "Agreed. The main road is shaded on both sides by stone ledges. We could split up and take each side, staying under the ledges for cover."

Star nodded. "Split up three and three, and we'll go down either side of the street. Check interiors as we go by. We'll meet at the archway at the other end."

We split up, Umbra following her trainer. Frisk Boneweaver and I went with Star along the left side of the street, quietly checking each door and window as we went by. Umbra ran ahead and sniffed repeatedly at one door. Star and I had a look in the window. Instead of an abandoned building, the interior was a lobby. A well kept one. A flag with the symbol of the Thule Society hung on the wall.

Star waved at the others and they dashed across the open way.

Luna ducked under the shade ledge on our side. "Find something?"

Star jerked a thumb at the building behind her. "A place marked with the Thule Society symbol. It looks like an apartment building and it's in pretty good condition. I'm betting that some of the apartments are living spaces."

"Then we are really far behind." I frowned. "This means they've been here a while and them getting the drop on us in South America makes sense. This is a larger operation."

Star thought about it. "We'll check the place out. Look for a map. You continue with the street and come back here."

Luna nodded only for Frisk's hand to shoot out and grab his wrist.

"No." Frisk turned to Star. "Never split the party."

Star blinked at her for a moment before nodding. "Okay. We'll all search this building."

I picked the lock on the door, a skill our mother had been keen to teach Frisk and I. Too useful not to know, she'd said. No, I'm not talking about Toriel. I popped the lock, let the door swing open, while waiting, looking for traps. Seeing none, I entered the room low, looking for trip wires. Seeing nothing but a standard lobby with nice seating, I stood and the others followed me in.

While Stephen and I dug through the cabinets, the others arranged themselves to go upstairs and check the apartments. By the time they came back down, Stephen and I had found an arms cache, but nothing else. Frisk and Chara had found that all the apartments were in good condition and seemed to be way station housing. Star and Umbra had found lots of food, including fresh perishables, a sign of recent activity. Luna found a map hanging in the apartment building's office space on the stairs just off the first floor. This map wasn't decorative in the least and was filled with handwritten notations in German.

Star leaned in, putting her finger on one dot. "It looks like we came in here," her finger moved along the map, "and travelled to the city here. It looks like the Thule Society has been here a while searching for the Seal among other artifacts." She ran her finger down a list written on the side of the map. "The Cintamani Stone, the Holy Grail, Seal of Solomon, the Staff of the Monkey King,
Pandora's Box, the Club of Dagda, Kaladanda, Ariadne's diadem. The list goes on and on."

I leaned in with an appreciative smile. "You speak German?"

Star laughed. "Of course I do! Church and Cross like to switch languages when they want to keep their conversation private. And I like to be nosy." She pulled out her phone and photographed the map.

Luna's jaw dropped. "That is an epic level of nosy-ness." He smiled. "I don't think I've ever been so proud of someone before!"

Star smiled. "So the next question is, do we steal the map or-"

We all went dead silent at the sound of the front door opening. Moving over to the office door, Chara and I had a look down the stairs into the lobby. Eight blonde haired, blue eyed men in black, Thule Society uniforms rushed into the lobby area. Arming themselves quickly, they lined up at the front windows with guns.

All but two of the men had rifles; they stood at the windows with handguns and appeared to be giving orders. Star silently indicated those two for capture. Luna crept over to the banister and leaped over it, landing on the first floor without a sound. I'll have to ask him how he did that. Chara went after him, making a slight sound when he hit the floor, but the men at the windows didn't notice. They ducked behind a couch for cover while the rest of us waited for the fire fight to start and the sound to mask our descent.

We didn't wait long. The first shots went off and we were down the stairs. Star fired twice, encasing the torso and legs of one of the two leaders. Luna grabbed the man closest to our second target, turning him so that his commanding officer shot him in the scramble. Luna used the body as a shield to rush the second target, knocking the man off his feet and into the near wall. Frisk and Chara took down two of the riflemen with a coordinated ease. Stephen and I knocked out the last two.

The door burst open and several men wearing dark pants under knee length robes in bright blue with decorative edgings rushed into the lobby. And kept rushing in. A sword came out at Star and she ducked away only for the sword to catch her shoulder, slicing her sleeve open. The man gasped as she turned back, grabbing his wrist and yanking him toward her. He went limp suddenly, kneeling. The other men froze at the action, backing away, the bloodlust replaced with fear. Why?

A woman in a long red, heavily embroidered robe, came in behind them. Her head was covered in a cap of intricate, red, turquoise, and white beadwork, a shield of beads hanging over her eyes, covering them. The men were dark haired and dark eyed, with skin of a light sienna brown. The woman, from the little you could see, appeared to be paler, but not distinctly different.

They certainly spoke German though.

One of the men struck the ground with a heavy staff. "Lady Edrine! She is-!"

Star let go of the man and stepped back, hand going up to her arm. He hadn't managed to cut her, just open the sleeve enough to reveal a Delta Rune tattoo.

"Calm yourself." The woman in red stepped, Lady Edrine?, forward. "Forgive us, Daughter of Dreemurr. We did not know it was you."

Daughter of Dreemurr? Star mouthed, looking at me.

I leaned in, whispering. "This happens to Frisk and I, just roll with it."
Star nodded and stepped forward, Umbra next to her. The rest of us followed, slowly. The woman came forward, hands up to touch Star's face. Star relaxed and let it happen, closing her eyes. Up close, you could see behind the beaded shield covering the woman's eyes; she was blind.


Lady Edrine stepped back. "We have not seen Dreemurrs in a very long time. Why are you here?"

Star glanced at us and getting a few nods, answered. "We're here to stop the Thule Society from procuring the Seal of Solomon. And according to their map, a few other things as well."

"And what would you do with such an object?"

Star shook her head. "I don't want it. I just don't want them to have it. It's really all about stopping the Society's world domination plots." She crossed her arms over her chest. "I'd really rather do without them, seeing as how much of a pain they are for Asriel."

Lady Edrine considered this for a moment before turning. "Come with us."

The men secured the Society members who still lived, dragging them along as they followed the Lady out the door.

Stephen leaned in. "Do we stay or do we go?"

Star frowned. "Go. They're dragging our information away with them."

We arranged ourselves to follow. Following the men, we came up to the second arch at the end of the main street, which opened on a very large, enclosed waterway. It honestly looked like someone had flooded a pale cathedral that went on and on into the distance. The plaster and paint around the interior columns had long broken away, leaving the place dull and gray. Even so, the water was a crystal clear blue and when you looked into it, you could see a tiled floor that was likely very deep below the surface.

We boarded two ships, the Society captives kept on one while we were invited to step onto the one with the Lady. The ships appeared primitive, but turned out to have hidden motors. We cruised down the waterway easily and after a few minutes came out onto a white, stone lined waterway that seemed to float in the air under a bright blue sky. Other waterways connected with it via large, tower like junctions. Entering one such junction, the boat slowed to a stop and was lifted up and over, so as to be placed in a waterway on a lower level.

The boats continued to cruise forward again, this time passed other boats of similar make. The Lady received waves from the other boats and one of the men would occasionally tap her hand so she knew to wave back. The waterways travelled over thick forests, small villages, and farmland. But for the spray of the water around the boat, which Umbra had her face firmly placed in, everything seemed a pleasant 24 degrees celsius. Not too cold, not too warm.

After a solid hour of travel, the boats approached a city of stone with flowering trees filling every available space. We slowed down as we entered the main waterway, passing children and adults playing or relaxing at the water's edge. Based on the amount of children actually standing in the water, it wasn't that deep here. Green, leafy vines snaked up the sides of artfully carved stone
buildings and hung off every available archway.

The boats docked near a set of steps under a bridge and we disembarked. The Society members were marched up the steps. The officer still encased in foam core was carried. The soldier who'd died in the fight had been gently wrapped in cloth. After all but two men and the body had left the boat, they sailed away. The Society members on the steps watched their fallen depart before turning and walking through the stained glass doors at the top of the stairs. Besides a general sadness at the loss of a comrade, they didn't seem overly concerned about their fates.

The Lady disembarked with the help of the men in the boat with us. We followed and entering the stained glass doors revealed a lofty and dark gallery with a large fountain in the middle, like the kind you would see in a city square. The entire room was illuminated by the glowing water in the fountain. A pale woman in a loose, blue, button down and olive green pants, with long blonde hair falling over her shoulders sat at the fountain; petting a cat that sat next to her. She watched the Society members march by, expressionless, though the commanding officers gave her hateful looks. One of the soldiers gave a small wave. She double took, blinking rapidly when she saw Star, and jumped to her feet. Every hair on the back of my neck stood up and I was instantly next to Star,

"You!"

Star paused. "Do I know you?"

"I've seen you in multiple photographs of King Asriel!"

That made all of the Society members stop dead in their tracks, staring at us. The men around them pushed them forward, herding them through the room. Luna was suddenly standing on Star's otheside and I wasn't sure how he'd managed that; his right hand resting on a knife I knew to be hidden up his left sleeve.

"You're always in the background, whether the photo is taken in a lab or a grocery store. Who are you? How are you important to the Monster King?" She spotted Umbra. "And is that a…" her face went slack with complete confusion, "a Pokemon?"

I rubbed my forehead, and wondered if her partner got this kind of headache. "Wow. Even grocery shopping is work for you."

Star shrugged. "If I shop when Az does, I can have his six, and it doesn't cut into my skating time." She tossed her hair back. "I work for His Majesty and yes, Umbra is a pokemon."

The woman stepped closer, and Luna stepped in front of Star. "You can stay where you are, Fangs."

She stopped dead, becoming unnaturally still.

Star put a hand on Luna's shoulder, but didn't ask him to back down. Instead, she looked to the woman. "How long has the Thule Society known about this place?"

The woman crossed her arms over her chest, annoyed. "How do you know I'm a member?"

"You're a vampire, your accent is modern German, you know what a pokemon is, and the Society members who just went by recognized you. That means you are a current member working the residents, a former member on the run, or a member of some other branch and Thule is fractured."

The Lady came forward, between the vampire and us. "There are several groups from the surface world in Agartha, each here for their own reasons, though not all are antagonistic to us. But you are correct in assessment: she has defected from their ranks. This is Gretchen Fahr and she has been
instrumental in helping us track down Thule Society operatives. The group you helped us capture was the last of the known members of the Society in Agartha."

Frisk leaned around me to look at Lady Edrine. "What will you do with them?"

Gretchen answered, "Their memories of Agartha will be erased and they will be left on the surface."

That sounded like a bald faced lie. Frisk made a face. She didn't believe it either.

Lady Edrine beckoned us along. "Come. As members of the Dreemurr Royal Household, I have an important matter to discuss with you."

Gretchen did not move from the room of glowing water as we left, but then, we were walking into full sunlight outside. Taking a set of covered stairs, we walked up to a footbridge over the waterway below, the entire bridge bursting with flowers. Beyond that lay a tall, tower of white stone, gleaming in the sunlight. We entered from the bridge, coming onto a white marble mezzanine and descending a staircase that spiraled the inside down to the bottom. We only descended one flight before we reached a door into a very comfortable room filled with colorful pillows to sit on and a low, wooden table filled with food.

Star looked at me for a moment, obviously alarmed, before sitting down. "You appear to have been expecting us."

Lady Edrine shook her head. "No. This is merely the midday meal for myself and my family. If the food seems abundant, it is only because I asked one of my retainers to go ahead and be sure there was enough for my guests. I merely ask that you join us." She sat and as she did so, two small children in blue tunics and brown pants came in the room, rushing her.

"Amma! Amma!"

She hugged them both tightly, speaking to them in a very close derivative of Tibetan. "Say hello to our guests."

Both children turned and bowed to us. "Welcome!" Both plopped down on either side of their mother and began to eat.

The Lady switched back to German. "The Thule Society has sought many artifacts of great power here in Agartha, but the Seal of Solomon is a particularly powerful one, giving them power over any member of monster kind who is not a boss monster."

Called it.

"The Seal is hidden away in a temple. In order to retrieve it, you must undergo a series of trials that determine your worth."

Star sat up. "And the Thule Society has yet to make it through."

"Correct. The vampires that make up their ranks have the required determination in their souls, but are unable to pass the test that must be done in daylight. It is forever locked away from them."

Chara eyed her. "But?"

"But now that you're here, it is a sign that the Dreemurrs have returned to their throne. The Seal must be returned to King Asriel."
Star sighed. "Just what Az needs. More artifacts to look after."

The woman smiled a little. "When any family shoulders the yoke of kingship, it comes with many responsibilities. This is just one burden among many for the King of All Monsters."

Frisk leaned forward. "Any hints for what we should do, or might find?"

The Lady nodded. "You must enter the temple in the evening and will proceed through it for a full day."

Star mulled that over. "Are their places to rest inside? A twenty four hour cycle is hard to pull off after you've been running all day already."

"There are."

Star turned to us. "Do we go tonight or wait for tomorrow?"

Luna frowned. "I vote we move fast." The rest of us agreed.

Star nodded. "Then we start this evening."

As we finished eating, a young girl in a red dress came in and led us out of the building and long a path to a field. She pointed in the direction the path went.

I gave her a smile. "I do have a grasp on your language."

"Oh!" She smiled brightly. "All right then! Just follow the path. An easy pace will put you at the temple doors at the time they open in the evening. The temple has several places at which you can exit and all will put you out the front doors and back on the path. If you exit before completing all the trials, you will have to wait until the next evening to try again. When you have finished, come back this way and Lady Edrine will see you home."

I gave her a small bow, earning a giggle and a courtesy before she ran off. I relayed the information to our interpreted party and off we went.

Once the city was distant and the fields of flowers around us obviously bare of people, Frisk voiced her concern. "Is it just me or is anyone else really confused by the Son and Daughter of Dreemurr thing? I mean, Chara is the biological son of Asgore and Toriel, so being called a Son of Dreemurr makes sense, but he and I have yet to stand at an altar, so why the designation of Daughter by Marriage?" She turned to Luna. "And I was under the impression that you aren't adopted. That the Luna's are a pretty big family."

Luna nodded. "I'm the oldest of eleven. But she named me a Son by Adoption. Asriel has long called me his brother and my Asgore and Toriel refer to me as their son to other fey. The same way my parents will call Asriel their son. The adoption is symbolic."

Stephen raised his hand. "She named me a Son by Adoption as well, which makes sense in that context." He put a hand on my shoulder. "On our world, adoption by monster or fey kind is not symbolic. It is a sign of your membership in the family. Frisk and Chara are heirs to empire. If something happened to Asriel, either of them would rule in her stead as a Dreemurr."

Star shook her head. "But that doesn't explain me. By that definition, I should have been called a Daughter by Adoption."

Prince Chara placed a hand to his lips, thinking carefully before some thought occurred to him. "If
Frisk Church is not standing at King Asriel's side, who stands in her place? Who is his right hand when she is not?

Star blinked. "I… I am."

"Then you've answered your own question."

"But now I have a far more pressing one." Luna smiled darkly, eyes on Chara. "She said Daughter by Marriage and you two are clearly not hitched yet. So," he got in Chara's face, "do I need to be defending Frisk's honor?"

Chara gave him a very calculated, black look, a smile tugging at his lips.

Frisk giggled. "Oh no. To be perfectly honest, I'm the terrible one! You should really be defending Chara's honor. Despite my best efforts, he has proven to be the very soul of self control."

Chara blushed, even as he folded his arms over his chest. "Just keep in mind that after we've made our vows, I won't be."

Luna put an arm around Chara's shoulders, giving Frisk a chiding look. "How dare you despoil such purity."

Chara growled but it came out like a sigh. "I hate you."

Luna patted his shoulder. "I know."

As the sun appeared to darken, not set, mind you, but darken, the path became a bridge across a sea to an island just off shore. Halfway across the bridge stood a tower in the shape of a colossal statue of a goat king, a sword in each hand and speared into the water on either side of the bridge. Beyond the statue lay the temple.

Luna stared up at it. "That looks suspiciously like my Asriel."

Star looked up even as she reached down to pet Umbra. "Really? What's he like?"


"How'd you meet?"

"A walk in the woods with my family when I was a toddler. Azzy was playing in a mud puddle and I jumped in with him. It's one of my first real memories. Didn't learn until years later that our fathers were staring each other down, waiting for one or the other to move first and attack. After about five minutes, our mothers threw up their hands and introduced themselves to each other.

"On my timeline, goat monsters are pooka and extremely dangerous. The Luna's are hereditary hunters and Asgore knew who my father was without introduction, hence the stand off. Thankfully, my mom and Tori have much cooler heads. But the reaction isn't unwarranted. A hunter showing up on a supernatural being's doorstep is cause for alarm. It's why Frisk went on the offensive as soon as I knocked on her door."

"Obviously, it didn't end with either of you dead."

Luna frowned, but it did little to hide the flush in his cheeks. "No. No, it didn't."

So how did it end? That story didn't seem to be forthcoming. And strangely enough, Star wasn't
asking. Usually she just dived right into questions like that. Or maybe she knew the answer and it wasn't for public consumption.

A set of doors about knee level on the statue, and level to the bridge, opened as we approached, the interior tunnel dark. The sky darkened and the statue lit up, glowing a bright violet as we entered. And we suddenly stood in the vestibule of a temple surrounded by marble statues of humans and monsters, faces covered by long sheets of cloth, hands held up in worship or supplication.

Luna stopped just inside the vestibule, turning a full circle. "We aren't alone in here."

Chara moved to take his back. "How many?"

Luna shook his head. "Can't tell. It's an overwhelming presence." He shivered. "Weird feeling vampires as undead."

Stephen watched the statues carefully. "Is that a learned sense?"

Luna's eyes searched every shadow. "No. It's a hereditary preternatural sense. Runs in the family."

Star adjusted her pack. "Proceeding with caution."

We walked down the short corridor that made up the vestibule of statues and into the first room. In the center of the room, a large, white flower was inlaid in a circle in the middle of the floor. The same flower was carved in miniature all over the walls and columns surrounding the circle.

Star immediately started jumping up and down. "I've seen this before! I know what to do!" She pointed up. "We need to get the ceiling open so the moonlight shines down on the circle and activates the mechanism under it. And we need to stay clear of the circle when the moonlight hits it."

I looked up at the ceiling and saw a set of levers to open it. "On it." A little bit of searching found a ladder up to the levers. Looking over the mechanism, it appeared to move pieces of the ceiling around so as to complete the same flower inlaid on the floor. After a few lever pulls, I yelled for everyone to stand clear and slid the last part of the flower into place.

The ceiling glowed softly before lifting slightly and sliding away. The face of the moon greeted me, the light shining down on the inlaid floor below. The floor glowed before shaking a little and fell in on itself, revealing a set of stairs down. At the same time, a door opened in the wall ahead. I climbed back down.

Star looked between our options. "Which way do we go?"

Luna shrugged. "We could spit."

Chara and Frisk immediately jumped on that. "Never split the party."

I pulled my goggles on and looked down the stairs, adjusting them to give me some distance. "It looks like it's only opened a single chamber, not a path."

Star nodded as I put my goggles back up. "Stairs first."

Umbra bounded down the stairs ahead of us, Descending into a small chamber at the bottom. Sitting on a pedestal was a small, white flower made of resin. It didn't appear to be trapped on inspection, and Star picked it up, pocketing it carefully. We climbed the stairs and the moment the last of us stepped off the inlaid floor, it returned to normal, the ceiling rolling back into place, the puzzle resetting. Luna looked around, eyes on the shadows, but said nothing as we turned to the open
doorway.

The next room was lit with eight large braziers, one either side of four statues in the four corners of the room. The fires in each brazier blazed brightly.

Star looked over the fire. "You ever wonder who lights these things?"

I looked up at one of the statues. "In my experience, they are lit by caretakers who have secret passages that let them get around."

Each statue stood about two and a half meters high and depicted a nude, sexless figure with a white mask covering the face. Each of the four represented one of the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. The earth statue appeared to be growing moss and be set with gems. The water statue seemed to be built from shells. The air statue was covered in swirling lines. The fire statue smoldered with some internal flame. All four faced the middle of the room.

Luna crouched to look at the base of the air statue and touched it. It moved easily under his hands. "Okay, so we're supposed to face these a specific way. So which way is that?"


Star pulled out a magnetic needle compass and then shook her head. "It has to be something else. My compass is just spinning. Let's look around the room."

Stephen turned and stopped. "We're missing Wood and Metal."

All of us looked at him. "What?"

He cringed a little. "Creepy. Anyway, Lady Edrine and her people wore clothing reminiscent of Tibet. And in Tibet, Wood and Metal are part of the elements and Air is dropped."

Chara’s eyes dropped to the floor. "There are grooves in the floor. We can rotate the statues, but it seems like we can also move them around the room."

Stephen pulled the air statue out of position. The other three rotated and moved out a little, making room for two statues and two more braziers.

"All right. Let's find our missing statues and put them all in place."

Searching the room, we found two more statues, one made of metal and the other of wood, and two more braziers which were unlit. Moving them along the grooves, we placed them with the other three. Once all five where in place, the unlit braziers blazed to life and a pedestal rose out of the middle of the room. Sitting on it was a wooden octagon. Star carefully pocketed it as well and the room reset, the air statue coming back into place. The door to the next room opened.

The next room was lit by the moonlight streaming through the openings in the ceiling. The openings were patterned and shined down on a large, stone globe in the middle of the room.

"Well this one seems easy enough." Frisk pushed the globe and it moved fluidly on it's base. "Just line up the patterns with the correct place on the globe."

Luna looked over the patterns. "This looks like Madagascar. And this is definitely Alaska."

"And that doesn't make sense." Star pulled out a map of Agartha.
Stephen eyed her. "Where'd you get that?"

"This?" She shrugged. "I swiped it from the Thule Society's hideout."

Luna rubbed her head. "Hoodlum."

She swatted him off. "Yeah yeah. Anyway, this is Agartha. Why would they have map pieces for Madagascar and Alaska on a globe that resembles the map I have here?"

I turned my head slightly. "Anyone else hear clicking?"

Frisk nodded. "It sounds like a clock."

As if on cue, a chime rang out the hour. The ceiling shifted above us and new set of shapes appeared, but they were still shapes associated with the surface. None of them matched the interior globe of Agartha.

Luna checked his watch. "It's late. If we have to wait for the right shapes to appear, we might as well take it as a clue and rest. Get some food in us."

Chara nodded. "We'll take turns at watch for sleep."

"I'll take first," Star began.

"No," Luna shook his head. "You've been pushing yourself since the teleport. There's enough of us that you can sleep until the right shapes appear. And from what I understand, sleep is something Frisk will need as well for her spell casting ability."

Frisk nodded. She took Star's hand. "Come on. Take a break."

Star fell asleep in the middle of our meal. I packed up what was left her ration, storing it back in her bag before getting her bed roll out and helping her lay down. Frisk immediately cuddled with Star, falling asleep easily as Umbra curled up between them, her golden rings glowing softly.

Luna snorted as he leaned back against the wall, preparing to be up for a while. "That's just too damn adorable." He looked around the room for a moment, rubbing his neck absently over two neat, little white dots of scar tissue. "Let's do this two by two. Chara and I first, Brass and Stephen on second. One of us to keep an eye out for danger and the other for the patterns."

I nodded and settled in.

My brother was dreaming. We were floating down the Nile in a large boat, watching the fields turn from open, sandy expanse to lush, green farmland. Anne, Cephas, and Mary looked to be in the middle of a card game. Asriel and Miss Luxon talked in hushed tones with Wilson.

Frisk looked at me, his blond hair shining in the sunlight. "You guys are okay, right?"

I nodded. "Stephen and I are fine."

"Really? Because I'm having a nap on a boat on the Nile and you look to be sleeping in a strange temple."

I smiled and relaxed. "Just doing a favor for Frisk Church. It's turned out to not be very different from some of our crazier adventures."

"Tell me all about it when you get home?"
"Of course." I reached out to put my hand on my brother's shoulder. My hand didn't make it. I woke up to Chara shaking me awake.

"Your turn for watch."

I nodded and sat up, stretching. After repacking my bed roll, I sat down next to Stephen, the two of us watching the room. Besides the chiming of the clock and the changing of the patterns from time to time, it was quiet.

"I'm sorry you're stuck so far from home and so far from Mary. I promise you, we'll be home before too long and it will be like we were gone for a few days at most."

Stephen smirked and smacked the back of my head. "I've followed you around enough that this isn't abnormal and Mary will be fine without me. I'm worried about Frisk. He's better about it now, but if you're gone for too long, it starts to mess with him."

I held up both hands in surrender. "Fine. But you smacked me hard enough, Frisk probably felt it, so be prepared for complaints when we get home."

"Ha ha." He nudged the pocket I keep my phone in. "I notice that you haven't called home yet."

"I was just talking to my brother. They're having a lovely sail down the Nile."

Stephen sat back. "Do you two always do that? Dream-talk to each other?"

I looked up at the patterns in the ceiling. "Sometimes. Mostly, we just share the same dreams."

He tapped my arm. "Hey look." He pointed at the ceiling. "The moon is turning away from us."

I leaned forward a little. "It's almost like the sun is on the backside of the moon."

"What if it is?"

"It'd give us some clues as to how this place has night and day." The clock chimed and I stood, watching the patterns change. I checked them against the map and it looked like the main, centralized continent on the map. I ran over to the globe and turned it, twisting it until pattern matched the globe, holding it steady. The sound of a lock clicked and a door opened.

"Is it time?" Star asked, voice heavy with sleep.

I frowned. "The way opened, but there wasn't an item to collect."

She sat up, extricating herself from Frisk's arms to come over to us. She thought it over for a moment. "We'll wait for the next change over and see if something else happens." She sat down with Stephen and I and pulled out her rations. "Did you put my food away last night?"

I nodded.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome. Is Crow all right? You haven't summoned him once."

Star smiled softly. "He's been working on the teleportation machine with Bones. If I need him, he can come to me wherever I am."

"Good to know."
Star ate some breakfast while we waited for the chiming and the next change of patterns. Another set of patterns matching the map slid into place. I rushed to the globe, moving it to align. Another door opened, this time into a small room. On a pedestal in the middle sat a small globe. Star pocketed it.

Stephen elbowed me. "Let's get everyone else up."

"Yeah."

A little bit later and everyone was up with a full belly from breakfast. The next room was dark. We lit it up with torches and found an array of objects on tables inside: toys, dolls, small statues, plates, bowls, cups, jars; casting black shadows on the walls. Stephen turned slowly around a group of objects and stopped, looking at the shadow.

"Check this out. From this angle, the shadow looks like a group of people standing together."

Chara looked around. "I bet the rest of the items do the same thing. We just have to find the correct set of shadows."

After some trial and error, we'd created a scene: humans and monsters living in harmony, the war between humans and monsters, monsters emerging from the underground, a great monster king coming to power. A doorway slid open.

Luna looked around. "No object?"

"We have to do something else for it." I walked ring around the outside of the objects. "Let's try concentrating our lights through the middle and up."

We walked around the outer edge of the room, torches shining in the middle and up to the ceiling. A Delta Rune came together. We held it for a while and a part of the ceiling detached, coming down on four sturdy chains. In the middle was a clay Delta Rune, painted white and purple. Star carefully wrapped it and put it in her bag.

Heading into the next room had us all blinking against the bright morning light. Instead of a room, we stood on a bridge under the sun, the bright blue sea glittering all around us. I looked back and saw the back of the goat monster statue. Huh. We hadn't been in the temple at all.

Star turned her face up to the sunlight. "Well, no vampires are getting through this."

Luna frowned, shaking his head. "Don't be too sure of that. A powerful enough vampire can resist the daytime call of sleep and if sufficiently covered, can walk in daylight."

Star turned to him. "You mean like Gretchen?"

"I mean exactly like Gretchen."

Crossing the bridge took most of the day, the island being a lot further than it appeared. Or maybe it was a test. The puzzles tested patience and perseverance. We stopped halfway to eat lunch, only arriving at the temple late in the afternoon. The temple was tall, white, and shining, many spires reached up into the sky. The double doors that made up the entrance had four indents, one for each of the items Star carried, along with what looked like scorch marks.

I knelt, running a hand along the black and coming away with soot. "Someone tried forcing the doors. Likely they missed pieces of the puzzle. Before we open the doors, I suggest taking a walk around the building to see if someone successfully blasted their way in."
Chara looked over the door. "I second."

Star nodded. "We'll need to be quick about it. We'll be out of time if we take too long."

We circled the building and found blast marks everywhere. One spire in the back had crumbled under one blast, but hadn't provided a way into the temple. Not even the thick glass windows appeared to be damaged. Umbra sniffed her way around the building, but didn't indicate that anything smelled interesting. Sure that we weren't in for a surprise inside the temple, we placed the puzzle pieces in their indents. Each piece spun and was drawn into the door, the mechanism grinding as the doors shuddered and opened.

I moved to step inside the temple when Star and Frisk both squeaked. Thule Society soldiers had grabbed both of them. From the wetness of their boots, I was willing to bet they'd come by boat, bypassing the temple all together. Before the rest of us could react, we were surrounded. A quick count had us at twenty soldiers. Umbra growled, hackles up.

Gretchen, now wearing the Thule Society uniform, her skin covered from the late afternoon light by the umbrella she held over her head, looked at the open doors. "I've been trying to open this temple for fifty years and now its power is mine." She smiled at us. "Thank you so much for opening it for me."

Frisk glowered at her. "You gave up your comrades for your own personal gain."

Her smile fell. "Dispose of them. The rest of you, follow me." She walked into the temple, followed by ten of her soldiers.

Star made the first move, dropping her weight on the man holding her. Unprepared for it, he fell backwards and she brought her elbow down on his face. Chara moved next, throwing the man holding him to the ground and heal stomping his face. Luna's knife gleamed in his hand for an instant before the man who held him was suddenly choking on blood. He turned and threw the same knife, catching another soldier in the head. Stephen and I both dropped and came back up, using our shoulders to bash the chins of the soldiers behind us, sending them both to the ground. Frisk grasped the sun symbol on her chest and bright pillars of light hit the remaining soldiers, sending them to the ground.

Stephen looked over at Luna. "Your LOVE. It didn't go up."

The hunter nodded, cleaning his knife after retrieving it from the face of the soldier at his feet. "Level Of ViolencE means something else for me."

Star waved it off. "We need to hurry! Come on!"

We rushed into the temple and found a single, circular room, light pouring in from the windows on every side. Gretchen stood in the middle of her men, several of them holding black sheets around her to block the light. Oversized, marble pots held large, green bushes. Beautiful, red and blue silk banners hung around the room, and set off the swirling tile work on the floor. But for as beautiful as a room it was, all eyes were on the throne at the other end of the room, and Dragoon relaxing in it.

He looked worse for wear, his jaw half gone where Snow had cracked it. His uniform certainly looked as if it'd seen better days. He stood. "Interesting fact about the Seal. It only appears for the person or persons who earned it." He lifted his arm and his sword appeared in his hand, directed at Gretchen. "You lot forced your way in. So the Seal isn't with you."

Dragoon rushed the soldiers. The rest of us took the opportunity to take out the soldiers as they...
scrambled to defend Gretchen, Chara and Luna taking down two of them before they had a chance to step forward. Umbra's eyes glowed brightly and two of the soldiers hit the floor when a ball of black energy hit them.

Star rushed passed everyone, heading straight for Dragoon. A sword she'd hidden somewhere on her person, slid into her hand as she crashed into him. "I have had it with you!"

Their swords clashed and Dragoon was driven back into the throne. He growled and shoved Star off of him. She fell back and rolled to her feet, rushing him again. I lost sight of her as a soldier came up on me. I ducked low, catching him in the stomach with my shoulder and flipped him onto his back.

Stephen fired twice, killing the man before he had a chance to get up. "Get to Star. I've got your back."

I nodded and slammed into a soldier in front of me, knocking him into Gretchen. She fell into the sunlight and screeched. Luna lunged at Gretchen, punching her once to daze her before shoving a stake through her heart. The vampire screaming as she turned to dust was enough to send the soldiers running for it. The rest of us moved to flank Dragoon only to be blocked by a barrier of bones.

Dragoon snorted. "Cut off from the void and your friends, you're no match for-"

Star turned and slammed into him with her shoulder. She dropped her sword as she grabbed his arm, pulling him toward her. She spun the skeleton into her other arm, sweeping his legs from the back at the same time. Dragoon hit the floor, his sword flying from his hand. He rolled to the side and found his feet, what was left of his jaw set grimly.

Dragoon slammed his fists together and rushed at Star. The floor began to glow a bright orange, forcing Star to dodge bones as they shot up. Dragoon threw a right hook from the side. Star brought her arm up to catch it only to be knocked to the floor by a bone she couldn't dodge. She kipped up, and grabbed one of glowing orange bones. Grimacing against the pain holding onto it caused her, she swung it like a bat, connecting with Dragoon's already mangled mandible. The skeleton stumbled back and Star jumped him, pushing him all the way to the ground; trapping him underneath her. She lifted the bone high over her head.

Dragoon laughed, hollow and smug. "Is this what you want, Shooting Star? To increase your LOVE with my defeat?"

"No." She dropped the bone. "What I want is for you to be just as scared of me as you are of Frisk Church." She punched him in the face hard enough he groaned, skull swaying back and forth.

I offered Star my hand and she took it. "You've got quite a few bruises from that."

Star smiled and shook her leg. "Honestly, I'm lucky my leg isn't broken." She looked around. "So how do we get the-" She swung around mid-sentence, grabbing ahold of Dragoon just as he disappeared, winking out of existence with him.

"Star!"

Several breathless minutes later, Star returned, Crow helping her stand, her eyes completely black.

"I feel sooooo much better!" She leaned against Crow, looking a little drunk. He patted her hand and let me take her when I stepped forward. Umbra rushed over, rubbing up against Star's legs.

Chara frowned. "Dragoon got away."
Star nodded. "Yes. When I hit the void I let go. Too busy being overwhelmed by being in my element." She took a deep breath and stood. "However, being in the void meant Crow could be there too."

Crow nodded. "I need to speak with Bones about what I've learned."

Star smiled. "So now all we need is the Seal and-"

There was a flash and we stood on the bridge on the land side of the goat monster tower.

"We timed out," Chara groaned.

Luna nodded. "That appears to be the case."

"We didn't get the Seal," Star sighed. "Well, at least we know that the Thule Society doesn't have it. We can try again. Later. After a shower."

I waved a hand in front of her face. "Star?"

"Yes?"

I lifted her right hand. "That's a nice ring you've got." I smirked. "Where'd you pick it up?"

She stared at the gold band set with several tiny gemstones, a copper and an iron half ring flanking the stones. Star pulled off the ring, turning it over. The Seal was engraved on the inside.

"Woah."
Episode 11: Obligatory Beach Episode

Core Issues: Season 5
By Nicolle

Episode 11: Obligatory Beach Episode
(C is our narrator!)

Undyne Cichlid came up out of the water, shaking out her lustrous, red hair; the strings of pearls entwined in the strands glistening in the bright, tropical sun. I blinked a bit at seeing her. Undyne Cichlid came from Lyall's world, and was a true merrow, a fey type as opposed to a humanoid fish monster, making her one of the most beautiful women I'd ever seen. She was certainly the most beautiful Undyne period with her milky, blue skin. She was missing one eye, but you wouldn't know with the perfectly matched, glass one replacing it.

Chara Lyall, a white haired, blue eyed, changling child of twelve swam behind her in the calm water, a strong swimmer despite his age. Frisk Lyall sat under a cabana on the beach next to my sister and our surfer Sans, watching the kids play in tide pools and waiting for the tide to change so they could take their surfboards out on the water.

We'd arrived all of two hours ago, and already a deep relaxation had set in. We'd left behind a blizzard that'd forced the entire city to shut down with a shortcut to Anehura, one of several tropical islands off the coast, to the resort-slash-conference center Asriel had bought some years ago. Speaking of my brother, he sat under the next cabana over with Price Asriel from the high sorcery timeline, both buried in their books. Princess' Toriel sat with them, looking a little perturbed. Despite having been around both of them for months, she was still off put by adult versions of her long dead son. It didn't help that they were nothing like the grown goat monster she'd imagined her son would have been like.

The cabin in Frisk's head, which had been surrounded by snow this morning, was now warm under a heat wave. The Frisk in the blue dress was no longer heavily bundled. She'd started the morning riding a sled down the side of the hill in heavy snowfall. Now she was floating on a boat in the wide ocean in Frisk's head, letting herself bake in the heat. I sat on the dock next to the Viper, watching the boat bob up and down.

"C?"

I popped up on my sister's shoulder. "Yeah, Frisk?"

"Where's Bones?"

I pinged the system core in Bones' bomber jacket, casting my mind there for a moment. Bones and Crow sat together in the parents area of the children's play center in the resort, deep in a discussion of the information Crow had gleaned from following Star into the void. My niece, currently a skeleton monster, sat in a box full of sand, watching a staff member sift it through multiple toys with rapt fascination.

"Bones and Crow are at the play center. Marigold's skeleton is out and she seems to be having a good time."

Frisk smiled. "She's always a skeleton with daddy, huh?"

I chuckled. "Seems to be her thing."
Frisk looked around. "I see the Tarsus Brothers, but I don't see Star. Or Frisk Boneweaver. Or Charlotte. Or Miss Tamanna."

I ticked off her mental list for her. "Or Brass, or Stephen, or Prince Chara. You don't see Michelle and Cross either, but you don't seem too worried about them."

Frisk snorted. "We all know that Michelle is the bad influence in that relationship. Check on Star for me? I'm sure that the rest are with her."

"Making sure she isn't working?"

"She is working. It just doesn't feel like work to her. Which is part of the issue. She enjoys what she does so much, it doesn't occur to her that she needs to switch off. That she isn't supposed to feel so exhausted at the end of each day."

I stretched. "I'll be back in a few minutes then."

I pinged Star's system core and found it in the suite she and Frisk Boneweaver were sharing. Which was totally unusual for her. She didn't wear it to bed, but even on her scheduled days off, she always had it attached to her collar. I took that as a good sign and hopped on the wifi, looking around the resort instead.

To say the resort was huge completely undercut it. When Asriel had bought it, it was your standard conference center that tried to use the tropical setting as a draw and was failing miserably from a lack of local hotels to house the people who would attend conferences in the center. Asriel's first order of business was the construction of the resort that took up the entire beach facing side of the conference center while giving the center itself a face lift to match the new addition. It had been a massively expensive endeavor, but the publicists had the place packed the moment it reopened and ran it at ninety percent capacity since, making back Asriel's investment over a decade.

Instead of checking the restaurants, bars, cafes, and bakeries on premises, I went straight for the shops in the glass atrium that separated the conference center from the resort. The atrium was arranged like a fantasy village with every door leading into a shop or cafe. During the day, it seemed like a heavenly garden of water features, but at night, when the fairy lights came on, it seemed like a mystical forest. That monsters mostly ran the shops and cafes really reinforced it.

I found all of them in a clothing shop, the boys switching out their swim gear for something a bit more timeline appropriate. The girls were in the dressing room helping Miss Tamanna pick out a suit.

Miss Tamanna was in a very conservative, black, one piece, frowning deeply. "I know that Mrs. Gaster is paying for the trip, but I don't have any money for shopping. I couldn't possibly pay for this."

CHARA appeared on the pile of Miss Tamanna's clothing; a blue, feminine body with yellow circuitry appearing and then fading here and there on the 'skin.' "Your compensation issues on the Epiphany have been rectified, including back pay owed. You have quite a bit at your disposal, Frisk. I've already arranged for it to be available to you here."

Miss Tamanna frowned at her Chara. "What do you mean by 'quite a bit'? A hundred or two hundred gold?"

CHARA shook its head, the hair appearing to swing with the movement. "Oh no. We're talking 700,000 gold. And that's just in the first account."

Miss Tamanna's entire expression went blank. "What?" She blinked. "First account?!!"
CHARA gave its human a patient smile. "You were doing the work of an entire technical staff on your own: chief artificial intelligence engineer, tech manager, subject expert, developer, and hardware technician. For the back pay to be properly distributed to you, the pay for each position was deposited in a different account."

Miss Tamanna dropped into a chair. "Oh… woah…"

"You are, at current, the second wealthiest person on the ship after His Highness."

Frisk Boneweaver waved a hand in front of Miss Tamanna's face. "I think you broke her, CHARA."

"Oh dear."

Miss Tamanna blinked. "I'm just… I don't know how I feel about that…"

"You feel like you should try on the blue-green suit you spotted when we first came in. The one that matches your scales." Charlotte turned, looking at the green bikini she wore in the mirror. "What do you think?"

Frisk looked up and giggled, hand over her mouth. "That's so revealing!"

Star shrugged. "It still leaves a bit to the imagination."

"But not much!" Her eyes shined. "Do you think it would fit me?"

"I think it might." Charlotte tossed her phone to Star. "Here. Take a pic of me. I want to send it to Frederick."

I dropped out of the wifi and back into Frisk's head. "Star is helping the girls pick out swimsuits. The guys are getting new suits too."

Frisk nodded and relaxed. "Thank you."

I popped up on her shoulder to sit down. "Any time." I watched the water lap at the shore.

I spotted Michelle and Cross walking along the water's edge until the kids spied them. Brandon grabbed Cross' hand, pulling him away and Michelle came over to the cabana, plopping down next to Frisk with a devious smile.

"Dad wants to know when his favorite wife is coming to visit him."

Frisk groaned, mouth hanging open. "Please tell me he doesn't say that in front of your mother and Kristen."

Michelle sat up and leaned forward. "Oh he does! Mom smacks him and Kristen laughs her butt off!" She giggled and sat back. "Mom wants you to visit soon. She has some things for baby Marigold and Karen wants to go out for tea."

"It'll have to wait until the snow is done."

Michelle shrugged. "Or you could all ski out to Muffet's."

Frisk thought about it. "There is that."

Lyall, all werewolf today, leaned over to look at Michelle. "So how does that work? Your dad being married to two women, specifically. Or is that just a thing here?"
"It's a very common practice in my home country. But my dad and Kristen don't sleep together. It's not that kind of relationship. He'd promised my mom there would only ever be her. And that's the way it was until Kristen showed up at the back door of the house, beaten and bloody."

Michelle's radiant smile disappeared, replaced with an awful expression, like the memory was too much, but she refused to let it silence her. "Kristen's father had been murdered in the streets by thugs from the government, and Kristen only barely escaped death. She's one of my mother's best friends and a distant relation so she knew she could trust my father and begged him to marry her. My mother pulled Kristen inside, said the wedding would happen the next day, and sent dad out to find Kristen's mother. Dad found her before the thugs did, told her to pack whatever she cared to take with her and brought her back to the house."

Sans nodded appreciatively, eyes still on the waves. "That must have been dangerous for your father."

Michelle shook her head. "My father was pretty high up in the government at that point. No one dared go after him and the men who'd touched Kristen were made examples of later, but, it was the incident that convinced him to defect."

Lyall thought about that. "Kristen hasn't asked for a divorce since the defection?"

"Dad's offered. Told her he'd be happy to help her find a husband, but the memory of that night..." Michelle shook her head. "Kristen's happy to have things as they are. There's no expectations on her, she gets to work a job she likes, and loves contributing to the family."

Michelle reached over, gently tapping Sans' bone mask. "Is the bone mask a thing where you come from?"

Sans nodded and reached back, undoing the clasp to reveal the scarring on his face. "It was originally about covering the scarring caused by the plague on my timeline, but it's become an important culture practice since." He looked at the sharp looking teeth carved into the bone. "When a boy hits a certain age, he is taught to carve the bone and will start working on a mask long before the infection. I wonder if, now that everyone a few years younger than me won't have the scarring, if the practice will die out."

He shrugged and clasped the mask back into place, though he was plainly smiling under it. "Your Undyne is a merrow, right? Does that mean her 'skin' is hidden somewhere?"

Lyall nodded. "Of course." He gave Sans a wolfish smile. "I'm not telling where."

"So you're the one keeping her?"

Lyall snorted. "Nah, I protect it so no one else can make off with it and force her to marry them. Like most Undynes, she's not interested in men. She's long been a friend to my family and helped us find Chara when he was kidnapped. It's why my little brother is a changeling and not a werewolf like the rest of us."

Michelle tapped Sans' shoulder. "How did you end up at Epsilon?"

Sans relaxed back in his chair. "I took a few rounds to the chest for Queen Toriel."

Lyall hissed. "Dude."

Sans shrugged. "It was just one of those days. Chara has not been happy since the Queen's pregnancy was officially announced."
Frisk raised an eyebrow. "The Devil is having a baby?"

Sans nodded. "And she's been a very happy, pregnant woman. Trying to kill her is like kicking a hornet's nest."

Frisk shook her head. "Wait. Did you say 'Chara'? I thought your timeline lacked one."

"So did I. In the royal family, you have your public name and your private, family name. The royal line descends matrilineally with Toriel as the queen and her younger sister, Lahaniala, being next in line. Lahaniala's private name is Chara. Which was a huge surprise to me considering how long I've known her. She was instrumental in helping my brother and Asgore protect Frisk while the vaccine was being developed."

Lyall smirked. "So little sister wants the throne?"

Sans shook his head, frowning a little. "Like everything on a fell world, it's far more complicated than that. Lahaniala doesn't want the throne. She wants the royal line to descend from her to assure the health of future generations. Toriel is an albino with several hereditary medical conditions. She is very likely to pass those to her children and the royal line as a whole. So long as things were rocky between Asgore and Toriel, Lahaniala's children would have the throne."

Michelle hummed on that for a moment. "How many times has she attempted to kill Toriel?"

"This would be the third time."

Lyall's jaw dropped. "And she gets away with this how?"

"Chara's a member of the royal family and the only other direct descendant. It would be easier if Tori would announce if she were having a boy or a girl. Since only a female can ascend, a boy is no threat."

Lyall tapped his chin. "So why not kill her sister before now?"

"Chara wasn't willing to step over her sister's dead body to secure the future of the royal family. The pregnancy changed that."

"Are Chara's children healthy?"

Sans snorted. "She doesn't have any children." He chuckled darkly. "I'll amend that. She doesn't have children yet. As a potential heir to the throne, Chara doesn't get a choice as to who she marries. Matches are determined by the current queen. Toriel's marriage to Asgore was decided by her mother, the previous queen. A husband wasn't chosen for Lahaniala because she was still a child."

Frisk chuckled. "I see where this is going. Toriel is going to choose a husband for her sister as punishment for the repeated assassination attempts, right?"

Sans nodded.

Lyall chortled, "Who's the lucky guy?"

"Me."

Everyone went silent, looking at Sans.

Sans took a sip of his water and smiled. "Yeah, there's a story there. On all three assassination attempts, I've been the one in the line of fire. After the second, Toriel told her that the punishment for
the next assassination attempt would be to marry the agent who stood between them."

Frisk took a sip of her water. "And how is that going?"

"She calls once a day to tell me how the construction of our future home is going, or to ask me what I prefer for this or that." He pulled out his phone. "It's not too far from the Gaster home and just off the beach of the eastern side of the island to protect it from the storms that roll in from the west."

He passed his phone over to Michelle and Lyall leaned in to have a look at photos of a beautiful house. Several surfboards were mounted on the wall in one room, including one in the process of being painted.

"Nice!" Michelle pointed to the unpainted board. "Your surfboard?"

Sans smiled softly at the photo. "Papyrus told me it's the board she's working on as my wedding present. Lahaniala has a solid reputation as an artist and exhibits in between her regular work as the Secretary of the Interior. Swipe over one more."

Michelle's thumb moved across the screen and a lovely woman with flowers braided into her dark, brown hair appeared. She was working on a mural, paint smeared on her dress, hands, and arms, and seemed unaware of the camera. The heavily stylized mural depicted several men rowing a canoe toward shore, waves lifting over them and dolphins leaping from the water.

"She's really pretty." Michelle pointed to her own face. "She doesn't have the scars."

Sans nodded, taking his phone back. "She was too young to be hit by the plague and was among the first to be vaccinated. Papyrus says she seems to have settled down a bit. That preparing for the wedding has her pretty focused. But he's also keeping her in Sunrise and not letting her leave for the big island. Asgore isn't particularly pleased about the assassinations. I mean, the man can be a big marshmallow, but when he's angry, he's just as scary as The Devil."

Michelle frowned, staring into her drink. "Assuming Toriel has a boy, if Lahaniala gives birth to a daughter, how long do you think it will take Toriel to put a bullet in her sister's head?"

Sans sighed. "She won't. And not because several people would stop her. Rather, Toriel loves her baby sister. If what Chara really wanted was the throne, The Devil would put a bullet in her own head to give it to her." He grew quiet and looked out over the waves.

When the lunch service came around to the cabanas, Star came out with the rest of her crew. Prince Chara and Brass had settled on rash guards and trunks with copious amounts of green despite each choosing different designs. Is that another thing with Charas? That we all like green? I guess I could poll it if I really wanted to know.

The girls weren't in anything super revealing. Or, at least, it didn't seem so. They were all wearing cover ups. Miss Tamanna stopped dead as soon as she saw the water, the mermaid covered bag in her hand hitting the sand.

Charlotte took her hand. "Are you all right?"

"It's so beautiful. Like a thousand diamonds strewn across the blue." Miss Tamanna smiled softly, a little sadly, the sunlight making the scales on her face sparkle a pale, misty green. "Dyne would love it." She sat down on the sand, sniffing for a moment, before putting her face in her hands and crying. The rest of the girls gathered around her, holding her through her tears.

Undyne Cichlid and Chara Tarsus both came over, waiting for the tears to subside before each
grabbed a hand and pulled Miss Tamanna up.

"Come on, Love." Undyne's arm slipped around Miss Tamanna's waist. "Our kind are meant to be in the water."

"I don't know how too…"

Tarsus helped her keep her feet. "Yes, you do. We'll be right there with you."

Star helped Miss Tamanna out of the cover up, revealing that she'd picked the blue-green one that matched her scales. Asriel put down his book and stood to watch as a wave lapped up at Miss Tamanna's foot. She shivered, but kept walking forward.

Undyne turned, walking backward into the water, her hand still grasping Miss Tamanna's. "That's right, Love. You hear it, don't you? The call. The crash of the water. The bubbling of the foam against the sand."

Tarsus drew Miss Tamanna deeper into the water. "The smell of the air. The taste of the salt in the spray."

Miss Tamanna drew away from them, diving into a wave, and coming up on the other side, wet and blissful. She sighed, laying on her back and floating in the water just beyond the lap of the waves, Undyne and Tarsus floating with her. Star picked up Miss Tamanna's dropped bag and moved it into the shade of a cabana before taking a moment to speak quietly to Asriel.

"So long as you approve it, Charlotte and Frisk are both clear to leave the lab. We'll have to set them up with suites though. The apartments are all taken."

Charlotte sighed. "And I was looking forward to having a kitchen again."

Brass paused and turned on his heel in the sand, "Move them in with Stephen and I."

Stephen and Charlotte looked at him. "What?"

Brass shrugged. "We have two bedrooms and we're only using one of them. It'll be nice to have someone to share the cooking with." He looked to Stephen. "You're rubbish at it."

Stephen huffed and put his nose up in the air. "You didn't hire me to cook for you."

"And thank God for that."

Stephen flicked his sovereign's ear. "Wad." He gave the girls a smile. "He is right, though. We do have the room. If you don't find it too scandalous to share a place with two unrelated men, we'll just need to move beds into the extra room."

Charlotte chuckled. "Hardly scandalous for me. We'll take it."

Sans gestured toward Miss Tamanna lazily. "Has she never seen an ocean before?"

CHARA popped up on top of Miss Tamanna's bag, the system core having been transferred to her after the AI's stability was reestablished. "The Epiphany was not designed to have natural features and even pools for swimming are hard to come by. Only aquatic monsters have access to those and only on a strict schedule. The ship is developing natural areas now thanks to the new on board technical staff. Those areas are proving to be very popular."

"If you weren't growing it, how did you get food on the Epiphany?" Charlotte asked.
"Via replicator." CHARA made a face. "I remember the stuff from when I was alive. It's nutritious, but not real food. I'm glad that Frisk is actually getting real food. Her kind of mer-monster grow long strings of pearls from their head, similar to Ms. Cichlid, but the lack of the appropriate nutrients means that none of them do. Already, Frisk looks more like the a mer-monster than any on the Epiphany."

"How did monsters come to be on the Epiphany? Where they forced into the ship or left of their own free will?"

"The Epiphany is a cruiser class, deep space exploration vehicle. It was originally outfitted for humans, aliens, and their families for one to two year stints in deep space. The first monsters on the ship were there as passengers looking to go from one star system to another. Over time, monster kind took over technical positions as humans and aliens went on and off the ship until the crew was mostly monsters with some humans and aliens. Around that time, the Epiphany's purpose changed from exploration to long distance transport, and then to a floating colony in space, which isn't good since it wasn't designed to house the natural features a colony ship needs."

Charlotte looked over at Miss Tamanna, watching her friend float on the water. "How are things on the ship now?"

"Much better. The monsters on the ship really can't tell the difference between the human and alien technical staff on board and themselves, and the advertising campaigns run by Mettaton have really improved the overall opinion on both non-monsters and technical careers. There's been an uptick in enrollment for technical fields on the ship, which is good, because we need it. Several members of the new staff convinced Commander Asriel that natural features were a must on the ship and the new gardens are huge draws."

Charlotte's phone beeped and she checked it.

Frisk Boneweaver sidled up to her. "Is it your Frisk? What did he say about the photo?"

Charlotte chuckled. "He wants a print and a few wallets."

Frisk giggled. "You should have gone with a red one. To match the streak in your hair."

Charlotte frowned at that for a moment before smiling again. "Green is Frisk's favorite color."

Brass watched Charlotte carefully, having caught the frown.

Charlotte put her phone away and sat down under a cabana. "Thank you for treating us to the resort, Mrs. Gaster."

Frisk smiled. "You're welcome. I figured we could all use a break from the snow." She spotted Cross building a sand castle with the kids. "Well, most of us anyway."

Frisk Boneweaver sat down. "So what amenities does the resort offer?" She took a plate with a sandwich offered to her by one of the resort staff. "Besides being waited on hand and foot."

Sans gestured with both hands to the water. "The ocean is right there. What else do you need?"

My sister chuckled. "Besides the beachfront, everyone has access to the waterpark, saunas, hot tubs, fitness center, golf course, tennis courts, theater, and library. And everyone has a voucher for the paint your own pottery studio and a free spa treatment."

My brother looked over at us. "If you would like to swim with dolphins, go snorkeling at the reef, go
fishing, or go on excursion into the town speak to concierge to arrange it. If I remember correctly, there's a specialty yarn shop in town."

All of the Charas perked up at that, which shouldn't have surprised me. I knitted right up until the very end, trying to finish a sweater for Az even as my hands stopped working properly. I hadn't finished that sweater, and now it wouldn't fit him properly. But Frisk was happy to let me possess her so I could properly knit him a new one.

"We'll go into town tomorrow," Frisk said.

Sophia came up out of the sand pit she'd dug herself looking for shells. "I can go to the spa?"

Frisk raised an eyebrow at her oldest. "Minors must be accompanied by an adult eighteen years of age or older."

"So you and I are going for pedicures, right?"

Frisk nodded and Sophia started dancing in her sand pit.

Princess came up next to Sophia. "Can I get a pedicure too?"

Her Toriel frowned. "I don't know if that's a good idea…"

Princess' smile fell, eyes downcast.

My brother turned to her, his tone suddenly clinical. "Why not?"

Toriel sighed, thinking. The last couple months had been rough for the Osseins. She'd been living in their guest room and her relationship with Frisk Ossein the Elder was strained at best. The Ossein's had even opted to stay behind during the trip just to have their apartment to themselves. Toriel and Mrs. Ossein had very different parenting philosophies, and Mrs. Ossein was not afraid to question any of Toriel's decisions, to point out a problem in the way Toriel was going about something. It bothered Toriel immensely that Mrs. Ossein had an outstanding track record as a parent and that Asriel questioned her decisions just as directly.

Toriel was afraid. She'd lost several children already and her fear of losing Princess made her over protective or too permissive on the wrong things. Despite Princess' incredible strides in mental, emotional, and physical health, Toriel couldn't keep up with it. She didn't want too. She wanted her child to need her, even when she should have been teaching Princess to stand on her own.

Toriel sighed deeply. "I suppose it's all right…"

Princess' expression didn't change. She went back to the sandcastle she'd been working with Brandon and MK, her excitement gone.

Star threw her hands up. "Great. Just great. Now she's going to avoid doing something that she enjoys because she doesn't want to upset you."

Toriel gathered herself up, standing tall. "I appreciate that you care for my child, but it is my responsibility to raise her."

Star whipped around, eyes narrowed as she pointed at Toriel, the heart shaped locket around her neck swinging with it. "You do realize that Princess should be a year ahead of So-So in her studies, right? She was far ahead of her grade level when she left. And when she comes back to visit, she's behind and struggling, just so you don't feel bad about her doing well! She avoids doing anything too
physical so you don't 'worry.'" Star emphasized the worry with air quotes. "She's so depressed and physically inactive she's gained enough to be overweight."

Toriel crossed her arms over her chest. "My child is doing just fine."

"Pull your head out of your ass! Years of mental, emotional, and physical therapy are being rolled back by your incompetence!"

Toriel shook, eyes glowing with magic. "I know how best to parent my child!"

Star snorted, not intimidated in the least. "That's bullshit and you know it. All you've ever done for her is burn her to death multiple times and now that you're past that, you burn her spirit to death every chance you get! Get out of the way and let my parents raise my sister properly!"

Toriel's jaw dropped. She lifted a hand and Asriel grabbed her wrist.

His voice was a low and menacing growl. "You lift a hand to her and I'll end you. And I don't care that your child would be watching. The lack of tact aside, Star is not wrong, and the only reason I haven't asserted my authority in this is because I've been looking after multiple patients. When we get home, you are going under a full evaluation. If this comes up again while we are here, I will send you home early."

I felt Bones tapping me and jumped over to him, relieved a little to get away. "Yeah?"

He was bent over Marigold, gathering her up to his chest, her boney fingers curling in his ribs. "Hey, C. Crow and I want to go over what we've discovered with the rest of the team. Get Frisk and Star, we're heading for meeting room two in the resort."

"Got it. See you there."

I went back to Frisk. She was already on her feet and pulling a t-shirt dress over her suit.

"I guess you got that, huh?"

Frisk nodded. "Star? We're needed in meeting room two."

Star nodded and turned to follow. When Brass stood to follow, she waved him down. "Stay with Charlotte in case she needs help getting around."

Charlotte shrugged. "I have been tiring out fast. Besides, Prince Chara is going to need our moral support."

Brass lifted an eyebrow. "Oh?"

Charlotte nodded. "I've seen the bathing suit his fiancee is wearing under her cover up."

"Wow. She really is the bad one, isn't she?"

Charlotte chuckled. "Absolutely terrible."

Prince Chara sighed deeply. "I'm surprised she hasn't shown me yet."

Stephen patted him on the shoulder. "Take heart. It is a sign that she loves you."

Boneweaver gave her fiance a bright smile. He leaned over and kissed her cheek. I looked around and saw Toriel sitting again, watching the beach, expression troubled. Princess remained with MK
and Brandon, not looking in her direction. Star followed Frisk into the resort, both stopping to rinse the sand from their feet.

Frisk held the button for water on the spigot for Star. "That wasn't the best timing."

"There's never a good time." Star glanced up. "Having second thoughts about me?"

"Hardly." Frisk pulled her sandals back on. "It's the reason why I chose you. The way you look after your sister is indicative of the way you look after everyone. You are their protection and you fight for them endlessly."

Star nodded and Frisk took her hand, leading her up the stairs to the front deck and the patio beyond. A bar and grill faced the ocean from the patio, a striped awning shading the workers behind the bar. To the right and left were large swimming pools, the left wrapping around to the waterpark and a large kids area, currently filled with screams of delight. They took the stairs up to the patio over the bar, passed a block of sunbathers, and into the resort's two story, ocean facing lobby. A quick ride in the elevator had them at the meeting rooms that existed separately from the conference center.

Meeting room two consisted of a beautiful, dark stained, wood dining table surrounded by twelve, high backed chairs. A balcony with a comfortable couch gave you a nice view of the glass enclosed atrium. A projector screen hung from the ceiling with four windows for four cameras. 01 and his Sans waited in one window. Red and Sunshine whispered to each other in another. Blue appeared to be napping in the third window, while White typed away in the fourth.

Bones and Crow both waited at the table, Marigold bouncing gently on her father's knee. She cooed when she saw her mother, perfect, blush skin reappearing. Frisk lifted her youngest, cuddling her close as she sat down next to Bones, Star plopping down next to Crow. Fase's hologram appeared next to me on Frisk's shoulder.

01 immediately sat up, smiling widely. "Hey, Star."

"Hey, Chara."

Bones opened, using magic to demonstrate as he spoke, illustrating his words with a visual. "The timelines are folded and very neatly too. The ends are tucked in making the interior an endless loop. The equations aren't working because the resulting coordinates encompass the entire timeline. The folding alters the timeline coordinates."

01 took a sip of his tea. "Can we unfold it?"

Sunshine sighed. "I think we can, but I've never seen anything like this before. It's utterly brilliant." She smiled. "I honestly can't wait to meet the Frisk who did this."

Blue opened his right eye. ",*until we can get the timelines unfolded, do you have a way to get out?"

Star broke in. "Dragoon has been getting around by following the fold until it lets him slip out. Coming out of the fold felt like I was spinning, and I was completely disoriented. But I've been poking it since and found that right at either end of the seam is a space that lets you in and out."

Frisk tapped Star's shoulder. "Big enough to let a vessel through?"

Star caught my sister's drift. "You mean like the Planar Pearl or the Phantasm? Oh yeah."

01 set his tea down. "Any leads on our kidnapped Frisk?"
Frisk frowned. "Yes. And unfortunately I found a bunch of other issues. I switched my search method around, looking for timelines that had more than one Frisk and there are a few Frisks that are not where they are supposed to be. And none of them are agents stuck on the wrong timeline."

Blue, Red, and White sat up straight. "*What?"

01 steepled his fingers in front of his face. "That's a much more serious cause for concern. I have two agents on a Bloodborne style world who reported the appearance of a child Frisk, an adult Chara, and an adult Asriel. Before either agent could talk to them, Chara slit Frisk's throat and the three disappeared."

Star's jaw dropped. "Christ!"

Red's eye began to glow. "*you think someone is using a frisk's ability to load to timeline port?"

01 frowned deeply. "I'm worried that a few people are doing that."

"*fuck."

Star shook off the thought and looked to 01. "Any word from E.C.?"

01 shook his head. "Nothing."

Her shoulders drooped and Crow reached over, gently petting her head.

"E.C. has been around a long time, Star. He just may not be able to contact us." 01 gave her an apologetic smile, before turning back to the rest of the group. "How are the teleportation machines coming together?"

White stepped in. "At current, we can use them to go to a single place, but not back. We've been able to get a few agents who have the skills and materials to build the machines back home that way, but it isn't as useful as we'd hoped it would be."

01 nodded. "How quickly can we get the **Planar Pearl** and **Phantasm** into the void?"

Bones shrugged. "As soon as we can figure out how we are going to pinpoint timelines for travel via the ships."

Fase piped up next to me. "I've been reindexing coordinates for timelines as they currently stand. I would be happy to supply that information to you, Father."

Bones nodded. "Now that we know what we're looking at, are there any timelines that haven't been dimensionally folded?"

Fase nodded. "Any timeline that's new since the shutdown has not been folded and one timeline on the far end past Site Beta hasn't been folded at all."

"Really?" 01 leaned in. "What are the details?"

"It's an original variation timeline were monsters were trapped in an intra-dimensional fold."

Frisk smacked the table, eyes lit up. "That's where our missing Frisk is from!"

"There are a lot of timelines that…"

Frisk waved 01 off. "Fase, has that timeline had contact with Seraph?"
"The Sans on timeline has had basic contact, but otherwise, nothing."

Frisk nodded. "That seals it. The Frisk we are looking for can fold dimensions, and I bet she isn't the only one capable of it from her timeline. If she doesn't know about Seraph, it would make sense for her to leave an opening on her home timeline to facilitate a rescue. If she was good enough to hide from her captor that her timeline wasn't going to be blocked, then she's good enough to have left information for someone back home to help her."

Bones looked to Frisk. "We need to get to that timeline."

"We need to get the ships launched."

Bones nodded. "I'll get on the horn to Steam."

01 sighed. "Well, that's the most productive meeting I've been to in years. Does anyone have anything to add?"

Star leaned forward. "Hey, White? Could you stay on for a few minutes?"

White smiled knowingly. "Checking on Snow?"

Star nodded, her hair bouncing with it.

Blue leaned forward. "*don't keep us in suspense, bud."

White sighed. "There's progress, but it's weird." He opened his mouth to say something, thought better of it, and went with something else. "Snow is Frisk's mother. Her original body is alive thanks to the golden flowers, but in a vegetative state. One of the fallen is the father, and completely glossing over how incredibly disturbing that thought is, Snow has decided she is completely fine with it."

Star blinked. "Wow. Did not see that coming."

01 nodded. "Yeah, I'm with you."

White cackled. "Oh wait! I'm not done! We thought, after the barrier opened, that all the souls Asgore had hidden away had left. It turns out that one of them didn't."

My sister looked up from latching Marigold. "Frisk's father, right?"

"Oh yeah. He was waiting for Snow. They had a long conversation, the details of which neither have discussed with anyone, not even Frisk. After the conversation she asked if Papyrus and I would be fine with her being out of it for a while. When we said that would be fine, she repeated the spell Dragoon used to recreate her body, and now Frisk's father is walking the earth again."

Red snorted. "*and?"

"And he's taken a wizarding brand to be one of her bodyguards. They get along great."

Star grimaced, unsure of her own response. "So… that's good… I guess? I don't know what to make of that. Anything else?"

White rubbed the inside of his left arm, like it itched. "Yeah. You know how the countries on my timeline are ruled by wizard families? Snow's family, the Ravenbrookes, rule the country we live in and half of them are happy to have her back because her bloodline was lost and the other half are happy because they saw her as a way to dunk on Frisk and his position in the family. The punk is
really tight with the current king, Aaron Ravenbrooke, and the next in line, Adiron Ravenbrooke. And several members of the family would dearly love to see that triangle of power broken up."

"*saw. past tense."

"Exactly."

"*what'd she do?"

White rummaged around in his pocket and pulled out his phone. "At the last, big, Ravenbrooke family shindig, people just lined up to challenge her to magical duels. This kind of thing is normal in wizarding families. Some duel for fun, but it is used as a way to jockey for position. Since everyone knew that Chara was pitched down a hole in the ground for her unwillingness to fight, they thought it'd be an easy win. She'd concede and it'd make Frisk look like he came from weak blood."

White plugged his phone into his laptop and selected a video. "The punk filmed the whole show."

White's window went dark for a moment before lighting up again with a video. Chara 'Snow White' Ravenbrooke walked across the room in a very beautiful, silver gown embroidered white flowers. Whatever challenge had been made, she'd accepted it before the video began and the majority of the crowd looked to be shocked. She stopped to stand in a circle laid in the tile of the floor. Her challenger, a dark haired woman in a yellow dress took a circle across the room, looking as shocked as the crowd but determined.

A bell chimed three times and both women lifted their hands, but Snow's spell went off lightning fast, knocking the woman out of her circle. She groaned and grabbed ahold of the nearest person to find her feet. Finding her anger, the woman growled and stepped back into the circle only to catch the Snow’s glowing, red eyes glowering at her. The woman made a bow and stepped out the circle. Another took her place. And another after that. Over and over until fifteen bows were made to Snow, who stood inside several floating golden rings of glowing magic.

A gasp went over the crowd as a sixteenth challenger stepped into the circle. The man was tall and youthful despite his long, white hair and dark suit. Whoever this was, everyone appeared to be very put off at his entrance to the challenge.

A voice I didn't recognize carried over the video. "What the hell does he think he's doing?"

Frisk Gaster's voice answered, "Settle down, Aaron. Adiron's just having fun and Mom isn't going to put the hurt on him. It's likely the best challenge he's seen in years."

Three bell rings echoed and two evenly matched spells slammed into each other. And while the other duels hadn't lasted more than a minute or two, this one dragged on, neither one having the upper hand.

Star gasped. "Her eyes! They turned gold! Like Mage Frisk!"

I looked closely and there it was. As soon as her eyes turned gold, Snow's motions loosened. White's voice carried over the video which began to look less like a duel and more like two people having a lot of fun. "Exactly. So I called Mage Frisk and asked what I was seeing. She said that when she feels pressed, like the magic is a moment of do or die, her eyes will go red instead of gold, a visual representation of her soul's Determination coming through. For Snow, everything leading up to the duel with Adiron was about protecting Frisk and you can see it in her eyes; she's on the attack. But Adiron isn't a threat to Frisk's standing. He's already ahead of Frisk. And her spellwork shows it. She's relaxed, enjoying herself. She doesn't have to beat Adiron. In fact, it's better if she doesn't. He's
got the same gold in his eyes as well. They're showing off."

After a full ten minutes, both of them were knocked out of their circles at the same time. Snow regained her feet and Adiron was quick to get to his circle. Adiron lifted his arms, but no magic lifted with it. Snow very swiftly curtsied to him, conceding the duel before he could concede to her. Cheers filled the room as Adiron rushed over, taking her hands in his. The video cut on the two talking excitedly.

White reappeared in his window. "Adiron comes by every other day and the two pour over really old books of magical theory together."

Bones sat back, relaxing. "I take it that your brother's position in the family is secure?"

"Very secure." White chuckled darkly. "Frisk has a new problem. He's now one of the two most eligible bachelors in the family. And Snow is currently the most eligible damoiselle."

Star frowned. "I get it with Frisk. But why Snow?"

White stood, rolling his shoulders. He walked off camera for a moment and came back with a white board. "You have two types of people in wizarding families and two types of dueling. About half of the family will not duel or will have given up dueling at some point in their lives, happy with their current standing. The other half will continue to duel, some for power and some because they enjoy it. Then you have two types of dueling. One is person to person for power, and one is line of descendancy to line of descendancy."

He drew seven lines on the board, labeling them one through seven. "The Ravenbrookes are made up of seven lines of descent; Aaron is from the first line and Adiron is from the second, and so on."

At the top of each line, he wrote the name of each line head.

"Only the current head of a line of descent may challenge the person ahead of him or her to move their line closer to the seat of power." He drew an arrow from line four to line three and then drew a large, arching arrow from line five to line three and put an x on it. "But they can't challenge the someone further up until they have challenged and beaten the person ahead of them. So if you are in the 7th line, you can't challenge Aaron for the throne. You have to get the head of your line to fight their way through the other line heads in order for you to have a shot."

"Sounds like a hard sell."

"It is. Most family members will duel to be the head of their line and retire from dueling. It's a way of keeping family power secure."

Star waved her hand. "You said that they can't challenge him for the throne. Can they challenge him just to get a better position in the family in general?"

"Yes, but Aaron is the king for a reason. He's very powerful and can knock an opponent silly really fast. He accepts all challenges and matches what he uses to the person challenging him. If they can hold their own as he escalates, it will earn them some pretty high esteem after he knocks them out of the circle. And because he matches his magic to the challenger, the kids love to challenge him."

"So how does that relate to Frisk and Snow?"

White drew a circle on the board and wrote 'Frisk' in it, using his hands to indicate otherness. "Frisk stood outside of this. No one challenged him to a duel because he didn't have a position in the hierarchy. He was a blood relation and listed as a Gaster."
"Snow's resurrection changed that; Chara being from the lost, eighth line of the house. But her line, being lost, has no established place in the hierarchy. Because of Snow's history, the head of each line treated her as one of the 'retirees' from dueling and let her be. They knew that she had no intention of seeking any kind of power."

White erased the circle and drew a new line on the board between lines two and three. "After accepting and defeating the first nine challenges, the heads of lines two through seven challenged her to establish where her line would sit. Defeating everyone and then bowing to Adiron has made her the third line of descent in eight."

Star thought about that, frowning. "How much does Snow have to deal with in the way of politics?"

White shook his head. "Not much. The other line heads are happy to have her established in the hierarchy rather than in an amorphous place outside of it. And no one is interested in challenging her since Adiron was clearly going to concede to her. Adiron is the most powerful wizard in the family. No one challenges him. To watch someone go fifteen rounds and still keep pace with the best wizard? No one wants that. Instead, she's making a lot of scratch tutoring Aaron's children."

There was a knock at the door of the conference room and a rabbit monster stuck her head inside. "It's tea time. Would you like it served here?"

Frisk thought about it. "I have one more question, but other than that, I believe we are done."

Star waved to the rabbit. "I'll take it here." She gave 01 a smile. "While I have you on the line, I might as well make the most of it."

The rabbit monster nodded and brought in a cart to set up tea for Star.

Frisk turned back to the screen. "Touching on an earlier note, there's a Bloodborne timeline?"

Bones chuckled. "I knew that one was coming."

I nodded. Frisk liked to play a lot of games, but Bloodborne was, by far, her favorite.

01 raised an eyebrow. "Yes. The hunter Francesca Aberdeen and Lady Chara of the Astral Clocktower."

Frisk sighed happily. "I can't wait to tell Cross."

01 chuckled. "They're two of my best operatives since LOVE means something completely different for them. They can go into violent situations and come out pretty much the same. Word of warning though, when we get our hands on the child murdering Chara, we'll need to keep him far from Francesca. She's seen a lot of horrible things, but was clear that what she'd witnessed topped it, and it was not sliding on her watch."

With that, the meeting adjourned; Star staying behind to spend some time with her fiance while Crow followed Bones.

Frisk stopped in the hall, taking one of Bones' hands in hers. "Coming out to the beach?"

He sighed. "I need to talk to Steam. After that, I'll be out."

Frisk smiled and went up on her toes to kiss his boney jaw. "See you soon then." She returned to the beach, stopping briefly to change Marigold's diaper before leaving the resort. Under the cabana, the kids snacked on an array of cookies and iced teas.
My sister caught sight of Cross and elbowed him. "There's a Bloodborne timeline."

He eyed her suspiciously. "No way."

She nodded. "01 mentioned it during the meeting."

"Woah." He paused for a moment. "Can we go visit?"

"I'll see what I can do to arrange it."

Sans reached over, tugging on the edge of Frisk's cover up. "My boy on the call?"

She sat next to him. "White was on."

"How's he doing?"

"He seems to be okay. A bit put off by circumstances that can't be repeated in front of children."

Sans nodded. "Give me the short and sweet?"

"Did he tell you about Frisk's mother?"

Sans snorted. "We were up all night talking about that."

"All right then. Frisk's father is walking among the living again, and Snow, looking to protect Frisk, dueled her way unintentionally into a seat of power."

Sans nodded once, smile evident even with the mask on. "Good for her."

I looked around, getting a bead on everyone, and found Miss Tamanna laying on her stomach at the water's edge, head resting on her arms, letting the waves softly lap at her. When the water pulled away, gossamer fins that had erupted from her legs, back, and arms moved against her body. The scales at her neck had opened, revealing gills. Asriel sat with her, making notes in his pocket journal, occasionally asking her a question. Undyne lay next to Miss Tamanna, sunning herself, while Tarsus sat next to Asriel, watching his brothers jump waves.

Frisk Boneweaver, racy, green bikini revealed, lay back against her fiance under the next cabana over, both of them watching the waves roll in and out.

Brass looked over from the cabana he was sharing with Charlotte. "Where's my Frisk?"

"Having tea with her fiance."

Brass nodded and continued pouring tea for Charlotte and Stephen. "Learn anything new?"

Frisk caught his drift, raising an eyebrow. "You aren't an agent."

Brass turned, head cocked back and to the side so that he was looking down his nose at her. "Says the woman who wants me to be an agent. Stop pretending that I haven't figured it out."

"Oh you have, have you?"

Brass snorted, arms crossed over his chest. "Fine. It isn't just me. It's all of us. Frisk, Stephen, Cephas, Mary, Anne, Merit, and Asriel. And you want our sword and sorcery friends on as well. The shutdown has worked to your advantage, giving you a reason to put those of us here at Star's disposal. You've been watching and you've been scheming. And you're hoping we all go home with
enough fire in us to tell our Sanses that we want to join Seraph."

Frisk held up both hands. "Conceded."

Cross elbowed her. "I'd like to know what happened in the meeting."

"What we are dealing with is dimensional folding. The Frisk we've all been dreaming about has literally folded every timeline in half, with a curious exception."

Cross nodded. "Her home."

"Right. The machines aren't working the way we'd hoped. However, Star has figured out how to get back into the void, exploiting holes in the folding. Our next step is to launch the Shipworks ships made to travel the void and use them for transport."

Brass groaned, "And you were playing coy with me why? I'm one of a very few people who can pilot the Pearl and the Phantasm."

Frisk smiled.

He rolled his eyes. "Oh, just having fun with me. Fine."

Charlotte chuckled. Brass lifted an eyebrow and then dropped an ice cube on her.

"Eeek!" She quickly flicked it off her chest and into the hot sand. "Jerk! I'll get you for that!"

Brass sat down next to her. "I'm sure you will."

Crow appeared in the sand next to the two. "I am in need of the Steam Chara."

Brass and Charlotte both looked at him. "Yes?"

"The genius engineer."

They looked at each other for a moment before looking back at him. "Yes?"

Crow hummed thoughtfully, tapping his boney chin with one boney finger. "I suppose Bones and I will have need of both of you."
Author's Note: I have been asked if I will be using Deltarune in anyway in Core Issues. As it currently stands, no. I don't want people to mix up established characters (i.e. Kris - 01's brother in law) with new characters to the franchise (i.e. Kris - the teen who gets *SPOILERS* and then *SPOILERS* and then is thrown out of bed only to *SPOILERS*). I will probably do something Deltarune related when the full video game is out. :)

Episode 12: It's Not About You

(Chars Provost is our narrator!)

"Dimensional anomaly detected."

"Wha...? EEK!" I slipped off the box I was standing on and crashed to the floor. "Ow." I sat up, rubbing my arm.

"I told you not to stand on that."

I glared up at Delta. The A.I.’s digital avatar loomed over me from the massive, two story screen that made up her 'home' terminal. While anywhere else on the ship, Delta chose a glowing star as an avatar, here she chose to look like her creator: an overly pale, human female, with white hair, mismatched eyes, and a scar under the left eye.

"Yeah. Yeah." I stood and brushed myself off, having kicked up a pile of dust when I fell. "What was that about an anomaly?"

"A human, female child, twelve years of age, a human, male adult, twenty-three years of age, and a male, goat monster of at least 150 years have appeared in the top plate."

"Impossible. No one's figured out what's happening with dimensional travel yet."

"And yet, the anomalous individuals have appeared in a highly restricted area."

The top plate, huh? The one place off limits to all but five people on the entire ship. Figures. But maybe that was a good thing. Welcomed visitors from other dimensions were required to be monsters since humans were rare to the tune of 32 individuals. Every monster on the ship knew us by sight if not by name. Two anomalous humans would cause a significant stir and my brother in law would not be happy about that.

I sighed and it came out as a whoosh. "Okay. Should I get them or wait for Frisk?"

"Frisk is indisposed at the moment. Please retrieve them and take them to medical quarantine. I have already notified Dr. Alphys that she will have incoming."

I nodded and climbed the stairs back up to the second floor of Delta's home terminal. The door slid open automatically and I rounded the corner of the tram deck. The door to a secret elevator opened and I stepped into one of the very few ways to access the upper plate.
When you looked at the *Delta* from the outside, the colony ship appeared to be made of three discs, referred to as 'plates,' with multiple orbs, the biomes, sandwiched in between them. The Core, a long, singular shaft that rose up through the middle of the entire ship, supplied each plate and its biomes with power. Each biome housed people and did something to support life on the ship. Each plate housed great forests and their associated animals. While the first two plates were accessible by the general public, the third, and top most plate, was not. It was a completely untamed area and Delta kept it that way. Not even Asriel had the power to override Delta on the matter. It was the most important place on the ship, supplying the majority of the raw elements needed to keep everyone on the ship alive and healthy.

The elevator door opened and I stepped onto a platform that hung over the top of a forest turning red, orange, and yellow. Autumn had come to this section of the top plate and migratory birds were getting ready to make the 3,000 km trip to the summer side of the plate. I took the nearby set of steps down to the forest floor and stopped to check the area read out on the computer terminal at the bottom. The screen indicated that our anomalous guests were about two kilometers from the nearest access to the plate. Which put them a kilometer from me. If I hoofed it, I could get to them pretty quick. It appeared as if the child had separated from the adults, moving ahead of them.

I paused for a moment to check myself in the reflection of the terminal's glass. I wasn't wearing anything 'official,' having opted for a plain, white tee, brown pants, and my favorite green hoodie. My hair had grown out a bit since coming out of stasis, so now it was hitting my shoulders... and falling in my eyes. The red streaks Mettaton put in my hair were vibrant if a little much. I frowned. At least I looked vaguely like an adult if not someone 'in charge' as it were.

Checking position one last time, I made for the child, orienting over a part of the great forest I knew well thanks to Delta allowing me to explore up here. I wove around a few trees until I found a trail deeply entrenched in the woods from the time long ago when people on the ship were allowed into the plate enmass. Using the trail made running easier and I'd managed a pretty nice pace when the child crashed through the bushes just ahead of me. I managed to dodge her just enough to catch myself on a tree.

The girl gasped and ran over. "Hey! Are you all right?"

I nodded, giving her smile. "Yeah. I'm all right."

The girl looked over her shoulder. "We need to run. We can't let those guys catch us."

I blinked, looking her over. Dark brown hair in a bob cut, purple and blue striped sweater over blue jeans, and a sticky bandage stuck to her face. This was a Frisk. And one that likely hadn't seen a real meal, let alone a bath, in ages. She grabbed my hand and pulled me along.

"Hey!"

"We gotta go! Asriel might not hurt us, but Chara will kill us if he gets the chance! We have to run!"

An awful feeling of deep seated loathing rose up from my stomach, souring my entire mood. If there was one thing I couldn't stand, it was a Chara who couldn't do their one and only god damned job. Before the girl could go another step, I scooped her up, and tossed her onto my back.

"Hold on!"

I dashed down the path, heading for the nearest plate access. There was a crash behind me as two pairs of feet hit the trail.
"There! Get back here, you brat!"

"Chara! Just hold on a second!"

I chanced a look back, and saw a male Chara in a green button down over black jeans and boots gaining on us with a sharp knife in his hand. A very young looking Asriel in a purple shirt and black pants chased after him.

"Chara! We aren't in the Underground anymore! I don't know where we are! We have to stop!

"No! I am killing that thing once and for all!"

I frowned. I'm not a fighter. Not by a long shot. Combat was my sister's specialty. My only chance was speed... and some help. "Delta! I need assistance!"

Delta's voice emanated from some hidden speaker. "Acknowledged. Assistance is en route. Make a 90 degree right turn in 3... 2... 1..."

I turned on the ball of my foot and made straight through the trees, hoping against hope that I didn't trip on underbrush; our pursuers close behind. A doorway ahead slid open, revealing a tram deck. A tram, door open, waited just beyond. The pounding feet behind me were getting closer. I swung the girl around so it was my back exposed to attack instead of hers as I dashed onto the tram deck. The sudden shift in weight threw me off balance and we both fell. I rolled with it so I took the impact instead of her and we crashed into the tram.

But the tram doors didn't close behind us.

Instead, my brother in law and the captain of the guard both stepped from where they'd waited on either side of the tram door. Our anomalous Chara and Asriel both went down in one hit each.

I sat up with a breath of relief and helped the child Frisk sit up. "Are you all right? Nothing broken?"

The girl shook her head, looking a little relieved, and then immediately backing up against me when she saw my Asriel tossing the younger version of himself over his shoulder like a towel. Specifically a towel, because a bag of potatoes would indicate weight or exertion, and this required neither for him. The goat's a bit of a beefcake.

I patted Frisk's back. "It's okay. You're safe." She looked back at me and I gave her a smile. "Do you know where you are?"

"I thought, because of the forest, that I was back on the surface but..." She shook her head. "I don't know where I am."

I nodded, aware of the 'usual' story of being trapped underground. "Do you know what an alternate dimension is?"

She brightened suddenly. "Yeah! It's like your world but with people making different decisions, making a whole knew one!" Confusion followed just as suddenly. "Right?"

I nodded. "Close. Every dimension has a central story and random decisions made in that dimension do not spawn off new ones. Instead, changes to the central story is what makes a new dimension. You fell down a hole and ended up underground, right?"

Frisk nodded.
"My Frisk is my sister. She fell asleep in a cryo-stasis pod and woke up a thousand years later here."
I smiled. "I'm Chara Provost, Chief Artificial Intelligence Engineer."

I gestured to Asriel. "That's my boss, His Majesty, Asriel Dreemurr." He gave her a small nod.

I gestured to Undyne. "And the two legged mermaid is Undyne, Captain of the Royal Guard." She gave the girl a half hearted salute over a smirk.

I stood and helped the girl to stand so that she could see out the tram window and the field of stars beyond. "And you are on the Colony Ship Delta."

"I'm in outer space..." the girl whispered. She stared out at the stars, eyes wide with wonder.

Asriel chuckled a little and the girl turned around to look at us.

"Where is your Frisk?" Her eyes flicked between all of us. "Did you kill her for her soul?"

"Heavens, No!" I grimaced. "I said she was my sister!"

The child frowned at that, but said nothing.

Undyne laughed, smile too big and too full of sharp teeth for her face. I wasn't sure how she pulled that off. "Let's be fair. The boss man did steal her heart!"

The child looked to Asriel, who shrugged a little, making his younger double swing a little. "Frisk is my wife."

That brought on a giggle as the tram came to a stop outside the medical bay. The deck itself had been cleared of all civilians making it safe for us to enter the bay without alerting the public to our 'guests.' Alphys had two gurneys ready.

The yellow lizard woman immediately began directing. "The human on this one and the goat monster on the other. Take them back to quarantine and start on them immediately. Make sure they are both disarmed. The rest of you to scrub down. I'm holding you until microbe analysis is complete."

Asriel folded his arms over his chest, but wasn't putting any of the menace I knew he could exude behind it. Oh my God... I think he's being funny!

Alphys looked completely unimpressed. "I've had a while to get over being scared of you, Your Majesty. You don't get to dodge the scrub." She looked down at the child. "I'm sorry, honey, but you will need to stay in quarantine until we are sure that you aren't carrying any microbes or viruses that could hurt the people on the ship."

Frisk grabbed a hold of my hand and looked up at me.

I sighed a little. Well, I could stand in for the ass who couldn't do his job. "May I go with her?"

Alphys nodded as she tapped her data pad. "Yes. That will be fine. You can be scrubbed down together." She looked at Frisk. "Do you have any questions?"

"Are you an alien?"

Alphys head fell back, eyes squeezed shut while Undyne and Asriel lost it. I tugged on Frisk's hand and she followed me as I led her back to quarantine.
"So is the doctor an alien?"

I chuckled a little. "Oh no. She's a monster, but more specifically, she's not an alien to you because her ancestors come from the Earth."

"Do you come from Earth?"

I nodded. "Yes. But we are very far from Earth right now."

A nurse in a hazmat suit waved us into the tiled scrub down area and we stepped inside.

Frisk gripped my hand again. "Do we have to get undressed?"

"No. We just need to hold still. First we'll be hit with a light that will destroy any bacteria living on clothing. Then, we'll be brushed down with a special brush made to take all foreign matter off of us. After that, we'll be injected with a medicine that will destroy any viruses living in our bodies." The girl's eyes went wide at the mention of an injection. "No worries! The injection does not involve a needle. Just air pressure."

The light over head switched on, bright and hot for about thirty seconds. Frisk scrunched down, shoulders up around her ears. After the light switched off, the nurse came in, and started with me on the scrub down using a soft brush before turning to the child. I held my head to the side, exposing my neck for the air pressure injection. Frisk squirmed a little, but managed not to flinch at the injection. After that, we stepped into a sealed room with plexi-glass walls and a comfortable couch to sit on. Frisk hopped up on the couch, sitting so as to let her legs swing a little.

"Could I have something to eat?"

The nurse nodded vigorously enough that the top of her hazmat suit wiggled. "I'll have something sent along. Do you need anything, Set?"

I shook my head. "I'm good."

"Set? Isn't your name, Chara?"

I sat down next to her on the couch. "Set is my nickname. It's something of a joke. Let's see, your twelve, right?"

She nodded.

"Okay. That means you've had World History in school, right?"

She nodded.

"Quick refresher time then. In Ancient Egyptian myth, Osiris was the god of the dead. He had a brother named Set. The ship that Frisk and I were on was called the Osiris and when Frisk was picked up by the Delta, her name wasn't released right away, just the name of the ship. So everyone calls her Osiris. And now that I'm here, they call me Set. The older monsters think it's really funny."

"You don't mind?"

I looked up as the male Chara, still out in the gurney was wheeled into a nearby containment chamber. "It's apropos for all the wrong reasons."

My Asriel stepped in the chamber with us. "Mind some extra company?"
Frisk shook her head. "You're really different from the Asriel I know. He lets Chara boss him around."

Asriel sat cross legged on the floor in front of us. "It's a matter of upbringing. I grew up knowing that I was responsible for the well being of millions of monsters and that my decisions were always the difference between life and death." He looked over his shoulder as the younger version of him was wheeled into a chamber next to ours. "Your Asriel isn't as old as I am and is very likely in a position that doesn't require him to be particularly assertive." He turned back to the child. "How did you end up here?"

The girl shook her head. "I don't know. All I remember is Chara knifing me in the back and when I came too, I wasn't at the last save star. I was in the forest you found me in. I made a run for it before Chara or Asriel had a chance to recover." She frowned. "And it wasn't the first time we were somewhere else after Chara's killed me."

"How many times?"

"How many times have we been somewhere else? I think four. How many times has Chara killed me total? Ten."

Asriel thought about that for a moment. "So you've been four other places before here? Where did you think you were before coming here?"

"I thought I was in other parts of the Underground, but they didn't match places I saw before." She shook her head. "There was this one place. It was all super old fashioned and the moon was big and red in the sky. This big monster... Uh, not a monster like you, but... I mean..." She gestured to indicate something that was both massive and horrific. "This thing attacked us, and a woman just stepped in front of it and eviscerated it!" Her eyes narrowed, looking at the unconscious Chara two chambers away. "But before I could even talk to her, Chara slit my throat."

Undyne stepped into the chamber with us, carrying a tray with food. "The nurse wasn't sure what you'd want to eat, so I just grabbed what our Frisk likes: Cheeseburger and fries." She placed the tray on the child's lap and I helped to balance it. The child immediately dug in.

I didn't want to hear the answer to the question, but I asked anyway, "When was your last meal?"

Frisk paused for a moment, staring at the food in her hands. "I don't remember."

"And a bath? A change of clothes?"

"Not since before I fell."

Asriel frowned. "Why did you walk up the mountain?"

The child suddenly looked angry. "To find my brother."

There was a groan in the chamber next to us as the young Asriel sat up, holding his head, eyes squeezed shut. "Ohhhh... What happened?"

My Asriel stood, walking over to the clear wall that separated the containment areas, arms crossed over his chest. "I knocked you out when you entered the tram. You are now in quarantine until we are sure that you do not carry any microbes that can harm my people."

The young goat monster opened his yellow eyes and immediately whimpered. He curled away, covering his face and long snout. I wasn't sure what it was, but my brother in law had an aura of
command that other monsters feared, including other versions of himself. I'd only ever met a few other Asriels that didn't cower, but then, they had the same aura.

"Stop simpering and look at me."

The young goat shook as his hands slowly pulled away from his face. "Who... who are you?"

"I am Asriel Dreemurr, King of All Monsters."

"King..." He spotted Frisk and was suddenly at the containment wall, pressing against it with both hands. "Frisk! Are you all right?!"

Frisk glowered at him. "Why do you care?"

His legs gave out underneath him and he hit the floor, covering his eyes with his hands again.

My brother in law moved to the questions. "Is Chara your brother, Asriel?"

The young goat nodded.

"And have you checked his LOVE lately?"

"I..."

"He's sitting at a solid eight. That is approximately two humans for every Level Of Violence."

The goat suddenly looked up, yellow eyes filled with tears. "But Chara hasn't hurt anyone! And even if he had, there are only six souls in containment! That would mean he'd killed ten more people..." He trailed off and looked at Frisk with a deep horror before covering his open mouth. "Oh God!" He drew his knees up, clasping the sides of his head as he curled on himself.

Asriel squatted down with one leg on the floor and an arm resting on the upright knee. "Tell me what's been happening since the moment you met Frisk."

The young goat took a deep, shuddering breath. "Chara and I take turns caring for the Ruins and watching for humans. It's our job to help them make it safely to New Home and acclimate to life Underground. I always thought that the souls Chara brought were from humans who died in the fall..." He shuddered deeply.

"And when you met Frisk?"

"I was heading into the old house when Frisk ran past me, Chara chasing after her, face bloody. I grabbed her when Chara yelled for me to do so. He said that the human had to die, that it had hurt him."

"He was trying to kill me! I have a right to defend myself!"

Asriel gave her a look and she quieted.

"I said that we should take her to New Home and let mom and dad decide that. Chara convinced me to lock her in the cells under the old castle in Waterfall. After a week, she escaped. We tracked her across the Underground and when Chara grabbed her, he..." The goat whimpered.

"Continue."

"We were suddenly in a different place in the Underground and Frisk was running again."
Asriel looked back at Frisk. "Recount your deaths."

Frisk suddenly looked awful, her hands shaking. "I don't want to remember them!"

Asriel sighed. "You need to tell him. He needs to know."

I put my arms around her. "We need to know too." I lifted her chin so she looked at me. "My sister was asked to endure many awful things during war and it was only by talking about it could we help her through her memories and prepare for the problems those memories could cause." I handed the tray to Undyne and lifted the girl onto my lap, holding her against my chest. "But we can't help unless you talk. Go on."

Her bottom lip trembled, hands gripping my hoodie. "The Ruins... The Ruins are filled with traps. Chara made me walk ahead of him every time. I fell in a pit filled with broken rebar. I turned a switch that dropped me into a pool of lava." She shivered and squeezed her eyes shut against the memory of both burning and melting to death at the same time.

"I walked into a room filled with spikes on the wall and they closed on me." She gasped in her next breath, shaking. "After... after Asriel put me in the cell, he..." She choked on a sob before her teeth set and eyes filled with rage turned on the young goat. "He tortured me to death twice! And when that didn't work, he starved me to death!" She looked away then, staring at the near wall. "After I came back from that, I escaped when Doggo came by to fill the water bowl. When Asriel and Chara caught up with me, he stabbed me to death three times and slit my throat once."

She fell silent then, leaning against me as if all her strength was gone, and her eyelids drooped sleepily.

"But... You were only in the cell for a week. How... How could any of those things have happened?"

Undyne gently rested a webbed hand on the girl's head. "She's a Frisk. It means she has the ability to reverse time and cheat death. The real question is, why did she wait to escape after being tortured the first time?"

The young Asriel leaned his head against the glass, looking miserable.

"Did you witness the last four deaths?"

The goat nodded, eyes squeezed shut.

Asriel frowned. "And you never thought to stop it?"

"I..."

Before he could respond, Alphys came into the containment area. My sister, eyes green blue, following behind her.

Frisk knocked on the plexiglass. "Doing your best impression of me?"

Asriel stood and shrugged. "Sometimes it's the only way I get a break."

Alphys opened the door. "You are all clear to leave containment."

Asriel nodded. "Do you have time to spare for another Frisk? She needs someone she can talk too."

"It'll have to wait," I said. "She's asleep." I petted the slumbering child's hair gently. "Where should I
Asriel thought about it for a moment. "My old apartment in the New Home office. There's room enough for the two of them." He gestured to Chara, still unconscious a few rooms over. "Undyne. Move him to confinement in the Royal Guard's headquarters, please."

"You got it, boss."

I gently pulled on the girl's hair. "Hey, kiddo? Wake up a little."

Tired eyes opened slightly.

"We're going to put you in bed."

She gripped my hoodie tightly.

"I'll stay with you." I looked up at my sister. "Let Blooky know I won't be home tonight."

Frisk nodded, eyes red orange. "Will do. I'll come by with your things and some dinner. Any preference?"

Undyne helped me maneuver the child onto my back to make carrying her easier. "The biggest, chickeniest, noodle bowl at the noodle house, please." After stepping out of the containment unit, I looked over my shoulder at the young Asriel. "Follow me."

The young goat stood and looked at Chara for a moment before following after me. At least, I didn't have to worry about people mistaking him for my Asriel. My brother in law did not have as pronounced an animal-like snout as this one did. My Asriel appeared more... human, I guess? With the Frisk on my back asleep and her face hidden against my back, I could have just been carrying any old monster child around. Well, any monster but my nephew, Folwin. He looked EXACTLY like his father.

The tram deck was still empty of people when I stepped onto it, but the tram that opened for us was not. A group of school children that Frisk and Sans often chaperoned on field trips around the station all waved at us from the tram.

"Oh oh oh! It's Osiris and Set, guys! That's so cool!"

Frisk ruffled the short mane of the lion monster. "Hey, kiddos. Going to New Home?"

"*they've got a tour of the offices today." Sans winked at me. "*and it looks like you could use an escort."

Thank you, Delta, for taking care of all of our needs. Now we wouldn't look suspicious. And, bonus, I got to spend some time with my favorite skeleton. "Thanks, Sans."

"*any time, set."

The young Asriel stepped onto the tram, noticed how high off the ground we actually were, and gripped the nearest pole with all his might. Thank goodness it could stand up to his strength. I leaned against the wall a bit to balance Frisk as the tram car started moving. The children clamored around the young Asriel.

A chimera child tugged on his robe. "Are you related to the Dreemurrss?"

A bird monster elbowed the chimera. "No way! He looks way too much like a normal goat."
The chimera frowned. "Are you afraid of heights?" When Asriel didn't respond, the chimera hugged him around the waist. "It's okay! The tram doesn't have far to go."

My sister hooked her arm in the goat's and gently maneuvered him into a seat. "Here. Sit down."

He looked at her for a moment, blinking at the shifting colors in her eyes as he gripped her hand.

And then he spotted the star field outside the tram window. He stared at it, blinking in a soft kind of wonder, ignoring all else while the stars were in view. The tram pulled away from the outer edge of the biome, and the stars disappeared. The tram came to rest at the New Home deck closest to the Dreemurr Royal Offices. The kids clamored around us excitedly as we made for the skyscraper office building.

Just inside the glass doors was a large lobby filled with comfortable seating and a few access terminals for Delta. The tour guide for the children waved them down while Frisk directed Asriel to the elevator. As soon as the doors shut, he looked between the two of us.

"Where am I?"

I shifted the child on my back a bit. "Yeah. You were still unconscious for that part. You are in an alternate universe."

"So... Asriel... That's me?"

Frisk shook her head, eyes purple yellow. "No. You are you and he is him."

He thought about that for a moment. "Who are you? Both of you."

"She is her Royal Highness, Queen Frisk Provost ap Dreemurr, the beloved wife of King Asriel," I answered.

Frisk pursed her lips at me.

"What? I never get to use the title."

She rolled her eyes, which, since they were implants, made the mechanical pupils appear to float across the multi-hued irises.

I chuckled and gave Asriel a patient smile. "I'm Chara Provost. Frisk is my twin sister. And you are on a massive spaceship with a population made up almost entirely of monsters."

He looked between us. "So, humans forced monsters onto a ship and sent them into outer space?"

Frisk shook her head. "No. Monsters built the ship themselves in order to leave the Earth. The few humans who live on the ship at current are all survivors from another ship."

He thought about that. "But... There was a sky above us."

I shrugged. "It's artificial. Each part of the ship is constructed to mimic the Earth as much as possible."

The goat sighed, staring at the floor. "What's going to happen to Chara?"

I frowned and decided to use the moment to drive a few points home. "He'll be confined at the Royal Guard's HQ a few blocks from here. He'll have a comfortable bed, three meals a day, and access to television. Once we figure out how to get the three of you back to your universe, he'll go home with
you. Until then, you'll be able to visit. But no one on this ship is going to let anyone willing to repeatedly torture and murder a child walk around freely."

He flinched.

The elevator door opened on an empty hallway. My brother in law's office was down the hall a little on the right with the apartment right next to it. Frisk held the door so I could walk in and go straight back to the guest room, leaving the bigger bed in the master bedroom for the goat since the smaller bed wouldn't really suit him. That said, the guest room bed was still pretty big, being made for monsters and all. I sat down before laying on my side and letting the child roll off of me unto the bed. Rolling onto her side, she curled up in a ball and whimpered. I let my hoodie slide off my shoulders and laid it over her. She quickly grabbed a hold of it, hugging it tightly to her chest. I tugged the blanket up and over her, tucking her in before heading back to the kitchen where Asriel sat at the table and Frisk dug through the cabinets.

"Thank goodness I still keep this place stocked."

I leaned against the door jam. "You keep it stocked because you and Az end up spending at least three nights a month here. I looked around. "Speaking of which, where is he?"

"Picking up Folwin."

"Another day with Tori and Gorey, huh?"

"What are they like?" The young Asriel looked up at me.

I shrugged. "Very nice. Tori's very motherly and quick with a bad pun. Asgore is very much a dad and enjoys being a grandfather. Hard to get him out of his garden."

"May I see them?"

Frisk looked over her shoulder, eyes blue orange. "They are not your parents. I understand the need to grasp at familiar things when you are in an unfamiliar place, but it's only a stop gap until you move forward."

Sans came in the door, a Seraph phone at his ear hole. "*yeah, bud. i can do that. i'll need to confirm with my boss man. great." He smiled. "*that was bones. he says they have a way around the block in dimensional travel. also, fase is looking into where our anomalous friends are from."

Frisk nodded. "Great! Give me a hand getting them some dinner?"

"*sure."

Frisk followed him out of the apartment.

"Want some tea? There's golden flower tea in here."

Asriel shook his head.

I took the chair next to him. "What kind of person is your brother?"

"I... I don't know. I thought I knew, but..."

"Maybe you still do."

He looked to me and I shrugged.
"It's really hard for people to present two different faces. Even practiced liars have difficulty remembering all of their falsehoods over time. I doubt that he's suddenly a different person and has just been hiding it from everyone. There's this thing about Charas. When we have a goal, we are single minded in the pursuit of it. No matter what, that goal must be accomplished. He wants to open the barrier, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Asriel frowned. "To end humanity so monsters can live in peace on the surface."

I let out a low whistle. "Yeah... No. Let's say that, everything in your world is absolutely normal with standard populations. That means around 10,000 monsters would have to face off against 7 billion humans." I shook my head. "Even if all boss monsters in the entire cosmos were maxed out for power and combined forces, humanity would still win. And lets say, by some miracle, you did kill all humans: you wouldn't have enough monsters with the necessary skills to keep the surface running. Nuclear reactor meltdown alone would end you all. And that's if you have the right conditions for opening the barrier."

His snout turned to me. "What do you mean?"

"Every world in which a barrier exists to separate monsters from humans has a requirement to open it. While most of the legends say that you need seven human souls, that isn't always the case. And depending on the actions and ingenuity of the monsters and humans involved, opening can be made easier or harder. And you never want to forget that the souls you have, they retain their personalities, memories, and power. If they felt like it, they could sabotage the entire process out of spite."

He stared at the table, thinking about that as the door swung in. Frisk and Sans came in carrying several bags. Even from here, I could smell it. Chocolate!

Sans set a bag in front of me. "*one set special! complete with chocolate cake.*"

"Thanks, Sans."

"*sure thing, kiddo.*"

I sighed. "I'm older than you."

"*just like your sister, only technically.*"

I leaned over and gave him a peck on the side of his skull.

Frisk set a bag in front of Asriel before taking the rest over to the fridge. "I've got a few things in here for you. If you need something else, well, you know where the grocery store is."

"Gotcha. Thanks, Frisk."

She smiled and leaned over to rub noses with me. "See you in the morning."

"Hug Folwin for me."

"Will do!" She went out the door followed by Sans.

Asriel opened his food and ate in silence. Afterward, he looked in on Frisk before going into the master bedroom and falling into a fitful sleep. I kicked off my shoes and curled up with the child,
passing out soon after.

"Wake up, Chara."

I rolled over and came face to glowing star with Delta's avatar. I glanced at the window. It was still pretty dark out under New Home's artificial sky. "What's with the early wake up?"

"Your double is roaming the ship."

I immediately sat up. "How did he get out of his cell?" No response. My shoulders drooped with an annoyed sigh. "You let him out."

"Of course."

I groaned. "Asriel is going to be pissed!" I stood. "Has he hurt anyone?"

"Would I have let him out if any of my data indicated he would harm someone?"

"He's more than likely to harm a human if he encounters one!"

"I am keeping him from chance encounters."

"Oh, so you're sending me out. Great. Just great. You know, if you wanted to be rid of me, Delta, you could have just blown me out an airlock," I grumbled. "Where am I going?"

"The top plate."

I checked the child Frisk next to me. She was still out. It was probably the best sleep she's had in ages. I petted her head gently before heading out of the room and down the hall to look in on the young goat. Asriel was sleeping on his side, gripping a pillow tightly, eyes squeezed shut. I pulled on my shoes and went out the door. The streets of New Home weren't exactly empty at four in the morning, but they were empty enough that the lone human was noticeable. I got a few waves, a few good mornings, and an offer to go out for breakfast with a couple of the computer engineers in sci-tech as I made my way to the central shaft and an elevator up to the top plate. I made a note on my datapad about the breakfast offer so I could make it up to them later. The sci-tech group were my kind of geek.

"Where am I heading?"

"The cabin."

I winced. The cabin was Asriel's wedding gift to my sister. Their own private retreat far from everything. "He's not wrecking it, is he?"

"No. Just sitting on the steps going up to the porch."

The ride from New Home to the top plate took a bit, so I used the time to check on the androids stationed on the Epiphany. The import of freelance technical help in the form of various aliens and humans onto the ship was getting it back in order, and the CHARA A.I. was coming back to optimal function. When Frisk Tamanna was ready to go back home, everything would be ready for her. Well, it would be ready for her if she decided to go back. CHARA was really worried she wouldn't return and who would blame her if she didn't?

The elevator door slid open at the ground level. I followed the dirt trail into the woods and down a gentle slope toward one of the huge lakes in this part of the ship. Just up from the lake was a cabin
and Chara sat on the edge of the porch, watching the water ripple. He didn't move as I came up the path, so I sat next to him. The 'sun' was just starting to rise in this part of the plate, painting the forest with a soft glow. From here, I could get a good look at him. He lacked the red eyes common among Charas, his being a normal brown. His hair was darker than most and grown out down his back in a long, man-braid.

"I hope, at this point, you'll have figured out that you aren't anywhere near home."

"The tall skeleton... Papyrus?"

I nodded. "He's the tall one."

"He explained where I am." He looked me up and down. "So you're me?"

"No. I'm me and you are you. We just both also happen to be Chara." I frowned. "Any particular reason you've been wantonly murdering people to the tune of torturing a child to death twice?"

He frowned. "I didn't torture it. It escaped when Doggo was bringing it water."

I looked him in the eyes. "Her. Not it. Her. And her name is Frisk."

"What does it matter what the human's name is? As soon as we are back where we belong, it dies."

I slapped him across the face. He stared at me, slack jawed. I honestly don't think he'd ever been disciplined before, let alone slapped. He had no idea what to do in response.

"Her. Not it. Her. And her name is Frisk. If you are going to be so dead set on murdering someone, then you are going to know their name and you are going to learn who they are. Or is that the point? You don't know them, so they aren't real? They aren't worthy of respect because they aren't people?"

I turned away. "Disgusting."

"We only need one more soul and we're out! That's more important than one useless human!"

"If that was true, why not just offer yourself as the last soul?!"

He froze, blinking at me. I expected to be told that he wasn't useless. What I got instead spoke volumes. "Why...? Why would I do that to mom and dad...?"

Time to turn it up. "Your brother's a mess right now! He's watched you kill the same person over and over, and now he's not sure if he ever knew you! Is that what you wanted?" I glared at him. "If your parents are even half as decent as your brother, why would you do that to them? Did you think it would be your secret? That no one would ever find out?"

I threw my hands up. "Or did you just think of yourself as some kind of moral martyr? Taking one for 'Team Monster?' Because that line of thinking is both cowardly and despicable." I looked him dead in the eyes. "Is the revelation that you are unworthy of even the tiniest molecule of your brother's trust what you wanted?"

He stood so as to look down at me. "Humans and monsters are at war! Even after the barrier is broken, all humans must die! I..." His vehemence died and his chin dropped to his chest.

"How old were you when you went up the mountain?"

"Eleven." The word was barely a whisper.

"Then you were old enough to understand just how many humans there were in the world. And the
odds monsters would face in such an endeavor. By the gentleness of Asriel's nature, I'm willing to bet that most monsters are pretty nice people and unready for conflict. You wouldn't be shepherding them to a new day on a surface free of humanity. You would have herded them like sheep to slaughter."

His legs gave out and he landed on his butt on path. "I just... I just need one more soul."

"And why not your own? If you want them out so much, why not your own? If you're so willing to murder innocent people, why not add yourself to the body count?"

"I WON'T DO THAT TO MOM AND DAD!" He shook with his roar, breathing heavily.

"Is that because you did it to your biological parents once before? Just disappeared?"

He stared at the dirt.

I moved to sit in front of him on the path. "You remember all the things you did to Frisk, don't you?"

"I..."

"You remember every death. Did you have the power to reset time before she appeared?"

He shook his head. "No. I just... I wasn't sure what was happening." He looked up at me. "I just needed that last soul and I thought, maybe if I tried hard enough, she would just want to die. To not come back."

"And it never occurred to you that she might have been someone special?"

He said nothing.

I stood. "Well then, I guess no one is more special than you, huh?" I looked over the shining water of the lake, the 'sun' now high on the plate. "I don't get the torture or the child murder, but at least I get the murder part in general. All us Charas have the same problem. When we have a goal, we are laser focused on it. We make a plan and we stick to it, no matter the cost to ourselves or others. No matter who we hurt whether intentionally or unintentionally."

I looked down at him. "You hurt your parents by running away and now that you have new parents you thought you could make up for the first hurt by getting them out of the Underground, except now you've hurt your brother. He knows the awful things you've been doing. And that hurt won't end there. He'll have to tell Asgore and Toriel what you've done."

I nudged him with my foot. "Come on. You have to go back to the Royal Guard's HQ. I'd like that to happen before my Asriel finds out that you've been gone."

He stood and followed me back up to the elevator door. "You said that you get the murder part. Is it just because we are both Chara? Whatever that means? You don't seem like you even know how to use a knife."

I eyed him. "For your information, I'm rather handy with my electrician's knife." The elevator door slid open as we approached. "When my sister and I left the Earth, an explosion on the ship sent my sister's cryo-pod out into space and I ordered the ship to follow the pod. I condemned a thousand people to death in pursuit of my sister. I could have very easily ordered the ship to turn back to Earth, and everyone who remained would have been fine. But I let my feelings for one person override good judgement and chased Frisk into the dark."
"You found her though, right?"

I stopped. "That doesn't make up for what I did. You can't water a plant with poison and expect it to grow. Committing an intrinsically evil act in the name of some good result only poisons the entire endeavor." I stepped into the elevator. "Come on. The cell in New Home isn't that bad and only a small price to pay for your iniquities."

Chara stepped into the elevator and down we went to the bottom most biome of the ship so far, New Home. The elevator opened on Undyne, who seemed to be inspecting the underside of her nails. A guardsman flanked her on either side.

"Done with your walk about?"

Chara nodded.

"Good. The queen wants to see you."

He looked at me.

"If my sister wants to see you, you go."

"A human is the queen?"

Undyne snorted. "Yes. And it only took His Majesty twenty years to convince her to marry him."

One of the guards coughed lightly to cover a chuckle.

Chara looked between us. Either he didn't catch the joke or he wasn't sure if the comment was an insult.

We followed Undyne back to the Royal Offices via a few back alleys to avoid being seen. Back up in the apartment, my sister and the child sat next to each other at the table. Little Frisk's hair was wet and she had a change of clothes. Asriel sat across from them. When he saw his brother he gave him a little smile before his snout drooped and he stared at the table, unsure of what to do or say.

Frisk gestured to the chair next to Asriel. "Have a seat."

Chara took the chair even as the child glared at him. Undyne and I leaned back against the near wall next to Nacarat, a red-orange, demonic looking monster who wore her huge bat wings like a coat.

"The world you come from has been identified, though as yet, we don't have a way to get you home. That said, it is only a matter of time until we do. While you are here or at any other Seraph Foundation facility, all three of you will be in therapy. Do not attempt to argue the point." She took a sip of tea.

"During therapy, Frisk will have a very important decision to make and one that is hers alone." She looked at Frisk. "You will have the option to return to the Underground with Asriel and Chara; return home but above ground; or, lastly, to not return at all. If you decide not to return at all, the Seraph Foundation will place you with a family for adoption on a world very similar to your own. There is no time limit for you on this decision. Even after we are able to send you home, you are welcome to stay at any Seraph facility after Asriel and Chara are gone to decide."

The child nodded.

"When identifying your world, a few key pieces of information came to light. But one of those
pieces of information, Frisk already knows." She put a hand on Frisk's shoulder. "Tell them the reason you were on the mountain. The whole reason."

The girl nodded and looked to Chara, eyes filled with a heavy kind of rage no child should know. "I don't live with my parents. I live with my grandma. My parents abandoned me and completely disappeared shortly after I was born. She told me that I had an older brother and that they'd given him everything except siblings. They'd tried several times to have more kids and nothing worked until my brother was eleven. And when they told him that he was going to have a baby brother or sister, he threw a fit and ran away. The last sighting anyone had of him was on Mt. Ebott. Mom and dad thought, maybe if they gave me up, he'd come back."

Undyne swore under her breath.

Asriel frowned. "But after so long, surely there was no chance of you finding him."

The child's eyes narrowed at Chara. "I did find him."

Well, if someone dropped a pin right now, you'd hear it a few buildings away. Chara blinked at her, mouth hanging open.

Frisk looked over her shoulder. "Nacarat?"

Nacarat stepped forward. "Yes, Majesty?"

"Take Frisk and find her some clothes. Use my personal expense account."

"Yes, Madam."

Frisk patted the child's shoulder. "Go on. Nacarat's my personal assistant. You can trust her. I need to talk to the boys alone and it's important that you don't know what I'm going to say to them."

The girl blinked at her. "Why?"

"Because I want you to make the decision ahead of you freely. You can't do that knowing what I'm about to tell them."

She held up her pinky. "Swear to tell me after I've made my decision?"

Frisk smiled and hooked her pinky against her double's. "I swear. And if I am not able to by distance or duty, I will be sure that someone tells you."

The girl nodded once before taking Nacarat's hand and being led away. Chara and Asriel watched her go, both looking nervous.

Frisk sighed. "What does the legend say about the barrier?"

"That it takes seven human souls to open it," Chara answered.

"Where does that legend come from?"

Chara looked to Asriel who shook his head. "I don't know. It's just the legend."

Frisk frowned. "Your history, much like the history of this ship, has been distorted over time. After a long war between humans and monsters, monsters retreated into the underground in the hope that humans would not follow them into the dark. The barrier was made when seven, monster loving humans sacrificed themselves to create a mystical seal to protect you from humans until a time when
monsters could peaceably live again on the surface. Opening the barrier does not require the souls of seven humans to open. It requires that the seven souls already in the barrier be convinced that humanity is ready. This would happen by a human presenting themselves to the barrier and allowing the souls to bond with them in order to see if humanity is ready."

Asriel looked at Chara, whose head dropped down to the table.

Frisk sighed. "It is also a bit worse than that. The six human souls you have: each of them came one after the other in a pretty quick succession, correct?"

Chara nodded without looking up, forehead firmly against the table.

"They were part of a group of humans looking to open the barrier and bring monsters back to the surface. When six of them completely disappeared without making it to the other side, the rest of the group assumed that either humanity wasn't ready for monsters or that the monsters had killed them. They gave up after that. The entrance they used through the Ruins is now capped. Frisk is, essentially, your last chance to get out. I'm sure you both understand why Chara would not be a good candidate for proving humanity's worth."

An awful thought occurred to me and I felt bad about it, but it needed to be voiced. "Wouldn't that mean that Frisk is also no longer a candidate? Even with time resetting with her deaths, she still remembers them. You can't just gloss over what Chara did to her. The souls will see a human repeatedly killing a child."

Frisk looked over her shoulder at me. "Fase says that Frisk can still do it."

I frowned. "Any idea why they hopped timelines?"

Frisk nodded. "Asriel wanted so desperately for Chara not to murder Frisk that every time he saw it happen, it touched on the deepest parts of his magic. It's unusual, but it's also a known stress response. He's not the first Asriel to teleport across alternate universes."

"Any way we can tap that to reopen dimensional travel?" Undyne asked.

"There are Asriels who travel that way, but they often can't take people with them. 01's last communication indicated that they are testing a new way to get around. Bones is already arranging a test with our timeline to move our guests to Epsilon." She turned back to Asriel and Chara, who still had his head down on the table. She reached over and tapped his head with a finger. "Since Delta let you leave containment, I’m taking that as confidence that you won't harm anyone while you are with us. However, you will be housed separately from Frisk in a different part of the building. And I'm going to ask that you avoid contact with her until the therapist okays it."

He sat up, face blank, and nodded. "Understood."

The alarm on my data pad rang, making me jump. I nixed a groan. I distinctly remember leaving it off last night. "Really, Delta?"

The glowing star appeared in front of me. "I did not wish you to be late after such an early wake up."

I glared at the glowing avatar. Delta's been REALLY bitchy since I've been devoting time to the Epiphany. Who'd have ever thought that lines of code could be jealous? "No rest for the weary, huh?"

"You are the first person in a thousand years who can provide me with proper maintenance. Those burned out circuits are not going to replace themselves."
Mind you, they weren't burned out yesterday.

I ignored Undyne's chuckle as I leaned over to kiss my sister's cheek. "Call me if you need me."

I exited the Royal Offices and headed for the tram station, taking the first tram, and knew it would be empty by the time it reached Delta's terminal. Instead of sitting, I walked over to the window, held onto the rail, and gazed out at the stars.

Two very large and very strong hands came to rest on either side of mine on the railing, and a very warm weight rested very gently against my back. I sighed contentedly, leaning back against the lion monster who was very fond of using his tremendous size to indicate that I was his. It was something I noticed male monsters did around their chosen mates unless the female discouraged it.

I was not going to discourage it.

Like my sister, I am apparently a 'furry.'

"Greetings, Rajur."

"Greetings, Chara." His nose nuzzled against my hair, breathing in deeply. "I smell a child on you. Human."

I shrugged. "Just helping out."

His mouth moved down to my neck, scenting me. "Indeed. But spending time around children has a tendency to set off your receptiveness."

I mock glared at him in the reflection of the tram's glass for a moment. "Are you saying that I want to have children?"

"You're a biological creature and passing on your genes via offspring is something biological creatures tend to do." He smiled. "Considering that humans seem to lack the ability to tell when they are fertile and not, I thought you'd be appreciative of my care on that front."

"You say that like either of us have ever seen the other's bed." I winced. "Besides, its not that we can't tell. It's that learning how to spot it is heavily discouraged. Often with loads of misinformation on the subject."

"Why would humans do such a thing?"

I frowned. "Because the less a woman knew about her own body and how it properly worked, the more easily she could be persuaded to 'fix it' by taking a drug or undergoing medical procedures, and therefore lining someone else's pockets with money."

Rajur's arms wrapped around my stomach, holding me back against him. "Humanity seems to be very good at complicating their own lives for such temporary things as money."

I put my arms over his, cuddling in a little. "I suppose so. Since we are so good at complicating things, why do hang around me?"

"I seem to uncomplicate them."

I turned my head and buried my face against his chest. "That you do."

"I do not mean to interrupt." Delta started.
"Yes you do," we both stated flatly.

"Nacarat and the child are missing."

I pulled back swiftly to look at the glowing, yellow star. "And the other two?"

"Still in the Royal Offices. I have yet to alert Her Majesty for this reason."

I huffed. "I'm sorry to cut this short, Rajur, but..."

"Royal family business. I understand."

I hugged him as tightly as I could for a moment before stepping away. "Where do I need to go, Delta?"

"Stay on the tram and I will bring it back around to New Home."

I waved to Rajur as he exited the tram. The car emptied soon enough leaving me alone.

"So when you say missing, do you mean gone from the ship or just off of your sensors?"

"Off my sensors. They were approached by two reporters posing as members of the New Home Police."

"Seriously?! It's a HUGE crime to impersonate a member of the police!" I threw my hands up in the air. "Is this more of that stupid 'Blame All The Humans For All The Problems' crap?"

"Maybe."

I kicked at the empty air. "Well, fuck them."

"#language, kiddo."

I jumped in surprise before quickly turning around to spot Sans smiling skull. I grinned widely. "Hey, Sans!"

He put an arm around my shoulders. "#hey there, set. i heard a rumor that delta's been having you do work i should be doing."

"Doesn't she always?" I chuckled, my arm sliding around him. "What's the plan, Bone Man?"

"#based on the security feeds, it looks like they led nacarat and frisk into the zero-g area between new home and the bottom plate connector."

"Do the two reporters have zero-g experience?"

"#uh... we're on a spaceship, set. everyone has zero-g experience."

"Yeah. But Frisk doesn't! She's a kid from a standard world." I smiled. "They're in over their heads if they think they can handle a kid with her level of determination and complete freedom of movement. And that isn't even counting Nacarat's ability to whip out fire magic like it's candy."

Sans pointed at me slowly before rushing to the tram door as it opened. "#let's go!"

We rushed through the crowded tram deck for the nearest connector hatch. New Home was the bottom most biome, 'hanging' from the bottom plate. In another hundred years or so, another biome
would join it, shifting it over. But until then, it was solidly connected to the very middle of the underside of the plate. The entire area was filled with connector tubes for foot, elevator, and tram traffic used to traverse the interior of the ship quickly. Everything outside of those tubes was the actual connector pieces, breathable atmosphere, and no artificial gravity.

In this kind of environment, you really needed something to give you an edge. Yes, I know I'm a Chara, and this is typically where a knife joke would be made. But, yeah, not a fighter. For me, having an edge meant having an air can that would shoot me around without needing to propel myself off a solid surface.

"Have an idea of where to look? This connector space is pretty big."

Sans used his magic to float around me. "*they came in from the hatch a kilometer from here. save your air and take my hand."

I grabbed his boney fingers and he turned my soul blue, immediately putting me under the force of gravity. But instead of falling, his magic pulled me along after him. We got to the hatch and found an unconscious reporter in a policeman's uniform tied to the hatch by a long scarf. The uniform was heavily singed and one leg was bent the wrong way.

"Nacarat did a number on this one." Yeah. She wasn't just my sister's personal assistant. Frisk didn't really need a bodyguard but that didn't mean that she didn't appreciate having one. I looked around, spotted a trail of burn marks from Nacarat's fire, and pointed them out to Sans.

Sans' left eye glowed for a moment, alerting Papyrus to the reporter at the hatch, before taking my hand and pulling me along to follow him across the connector, moving quickly. We spotted the red-orange demon monster, wings out and fire in her hands. She was in a stalemate with the second reporter, an owl monster, who was holding the child Frisk as both a prisoner and a shield.

"Dear God. When were people going to learn that it was their job to shield children, not use them as shields?"

Sans and I split up, coming around from either direction to grab the reporter. Only to have someone grab me from behind and pull me into a tram shaft. From the corner of my eye, I spotted an MTT Media logo, and turned, immediately throwing a punch. The squirrel monster ducked out of my swing and waved their arms at me.

"Wait! Wait! I'm on your side!"

"Then why did you grab me?"

"I don't want you to hurt my friend!"

I groaned. "Your friend is going to get the business end of Sans' bone attack in less than a minute!" I turned and grabbed the hatch opening propelling myself into connector just in time to see Frisk struggle out of the reporter's arms. The child's eyes were filled with a deep and awful anger as she kicked the reporter right in the beak. The reporter hadn't been prepared for the child to put up a fight and clutched at her face.

Frisk spotted me and swam in my direction, and I caught her in the air, holding onto her as Sans turned her kidnapper blue. Nacarat's fire went out and her wings propelled her over to Frisk and I.

The squirrel monster came up from behind me, looking at Frisk. "It is an unregistered human!"

I glared over my shoulder at the monster. "A human who has gone through hell only to be kidnapped
by a couple idiots. When the King finds out about this, he's going to be furious!"

"But I don't understand... What do you mean gone through hell?"

I grabbed her by the back of her collar and hauled her to the hatch, Frisk still clinging to me, as Sans and Nacarat wrangled the cage. On the other side of the hatch, several members of the Royal Guard waited for us. The unconscious monster was taken away. But instead of the Guard HQ, the rest of us were escorted back to the Royal Offices. Asriel waited behind his desk. Next to him stood Mettaton, looking especially peeved with one hip popped out and metal arms crossed over his chest.

Asriel looked over the reporters with a smile I'd seen before. He was going to let them hang themselves. And Frisk wasn't in the room to save them. "Who would like to explain why impersonation of police officers and kidnapping were good ideas?"

The owl monster pointed at Frisk. "That is an unregistered human! Where did she come from?! They don't just happen!"

MTT's metal fist slammed the desk. "As a matter of fact, they do!" Hands on his hips, he strutted up to his employees, who had the grace to look fearful under the glow of his robotic eyes. His head lifted and he looked down his nose at the two. "The truth is that the Delta has picked up several humans over the centuries. Frisk Provost was simply the first to live."

Asriel gestured to the child standing next to me. "This girl and her older brother were picked up when the Delta intercepted their distress signal. They both live on a human outpost half a system away. As soon as their ship is repaired, they will be going home."

That was a great cover, but the owl wasn't giving up. "Then why not report it? Why not let the media release that information?"

Asriel's eyes narrowed, voice a low growl. "After the way you've treated my wife? You spent twenty years blaming her for absolutely everything that went wrong on this ship."

The owl and squirrel monsters had the decency to look sheepish at the reminder.

"And after she became your queen, you turned your attention to the few humans who survived an unprecedented journey and miraculous awakening. I have no faith in your ability to present the news in anyway that doesn't completely vilify people who do not deserve such treatment. Especially in light of the serious contributions they've made to the Delta in their tireless work and expertise." He gestured to the child standing next to me. "With the information I just gave you, the best I can expect from the media is to demand that all humans on the ship leave with them."

Both reporters hunched in on themselves, staring at their feet.

"Where do you come from?" Frisk was looking up at Mettaton. "You're a human too, aren't you? Where do you come from?"

We all stared at the child for a moment, except Asriel and Sans, both of whom simply looked bemused. Oh my God... The Blooks. The Blooks were all humans. Dead humans.

I need to talk to them.

MTT smiled at her. "Oh? Did you figure it out?" A robotic hand patted her on the head. "My cousin and I were the only survivors of a failed colony on a planet the Delta mined for materials a few hundred years ago. We died shortly after coming on board."
The owl and squirrel monsters stared at him, wide eyed.

The robot rounded on them. "We have extraordinary freedom of the press on this ship. If His Majesty so desired, we could simply be slaves to 'official' news with its own specific, royal family approved slant. Instead, you have all made a mockery of journalism, looking for views and clicks over reporting actual news, and destroying the public's trust in us. Things like this incident have long needed to be kept deeply under lock and key because of your failure to do the most basic part of your job: report the facts exactly as they are."

MTT deeply frowned, eyes glowing. "I have grown tired of my empire running amok and it will happen no longer. In light of today's actions," he pointed to the owl monster, "you and your accomplice are dismissed!" He pointed to the squirrel monster. "For at least reporting to me that something was going on, you can stay on, provided His Majesty doesn't just throw you out an airlock with the other two."

The squirrel hunched in on herself, shoulders up to her ears in fear.

Sans jerked a thumb at the owl. "*what's the word, boss?"

Asriel looked at Frisk. "You were the one kidnapped. Should I throw them into the vacuum of space?"

The owl monster, legitimately terrified, shook her head, eyes begging for mercy.

And, true to form, it was offered. "No." Frisk frowned sadly, staring at her feet. "If they die, they can't change, and make up for what they've done."

I hugged the girl close to my side even as the monsters breathed deep sighs of relief. I wasn't going to take this as a sign of hope for her timeline, but it was a step in the right direction at the very least.

Asriel looked to the guard members. "Take them both away."

The guard gave a sharp salute before herding the owl and squirrel out.

MTT patted the child on the head once more before giving me a smile. "I'll see you later, Chara Dearest." He sauntered out the door.

I gave his back a wave. "Later, Mettaton."

Frisk jerked on my sleeve. "You know him?"

"He's my neighbor. I'm his cousin's housemate."

She nodded and went up to the desk, looking up at Asriel. "So now what?"

Asriel smiled. "The new interdimensional travel test is going to happen in a few minutes." He stood, eyes on Frisk. "I'm sure my wife mentioned, you do not have to decide on what to do right away. If the test is successful, the way to Seraph Foundation Site Epsilon will be opened. If this is the case, Asriel and Chara will be transferred there." He knelt in front of her. "You are welcome to stay here, but I do know that Epsilon has a few children there. And one of them is a Frisk you'll find easy to relate too."

Frisk thought about that for a moment. "Can I see the test?"

Asriel looked to the Bone Man. "Sans?"
My favorite skeleton shrugged. "She'll be safe if she stands outside of the containment field." He nodded to the door. "Come on. If this works, we'll be seeing a few friends."

We followed Sans out of the offices. A tram took us over to Exploration. As always, Exploration was a mass of activity and today even more so. We'd just approached a new planet and the teams were prepping for first look as soon as the scan data was in. But even with all the activity, Rajur stood in the midst of it like the calm eye of the storm.

He bowed his red maned head, hand over his heart, when he saw Asriel. "Your Majesty. We are set up in the ship hold near our quarantine area." He gestured for us to follow him, though Sans vaguely sauntered ahead. In the hold, a containment field was set up around a strange looking device. My sister, the young Asriel, and his Chara stood to one side. When Frisk saw us, she hurried over.

She knelt down to touch her younger double's face. "Are you all right?"

Frisk nodded and hugged her.

My sister looked up at Nacarat. "I apologize for the trouble, Ray."

Nacarat shrugged and gave her a sly smile. "Oh, you say that like it was actually trouble."

The young goat and his brother looked over at us, but didn't attempt to come over, both looking too unsure.

Sans stepped into the containment field. "Let's get this show on the road."

My sister stood. "Hooking up to Epsilon?"

"Nope! We're preparing for an incoming ship."

I blinked. "Incoming ship?"

Sans waved me off and started up the machine. "Based on the information Crow was able to provide after Star was pulled into the void by Dragoon, and the testing star did afterward, moving people in out of timelines is still out of the question. The shutdown was specifically designed to eliminate single person or group travel. The equations won't connect us in and out. But a ship can be programmed to slide along the dimensional folding that's trapping us to get in and out."

"Cross your fingers!"

The young Asriel leaned over toward Chara. "Did any of that make any sense to you?"

Chara shook his head.

Rajur came up behind me, placing a hand on my shoulder. I crossed my fingers as Sans flipped the switch to turn on a containment field. He pulled out his phone and hit a button, signaling readiness.

In the containment area, a rift in space itself opened, the light inside it flashed brightly before a giant, steampunk airship came through, appearing as a thick line of glowing light flowed over it. A galleon with a shining, metal coated hull and bright white sails seemed to come out of nothing; Planar Pearl emblazoned in gold across the bow. The ship, once fully through the rift, came to rest, still floating, inside the containment field.

A tall Gaster-Sans in blue jeans and a leather bomber jacket with cracks in his skull waved from the deck. A Frisk with bleach blond, pink tipped hair and goggles, vaulted the side of the ship, a pair of metal wings deploying from the pack on his back to slow his descent. He landed on his feet and the
wings pulled back into the pack. He stood up straight with as he put his goggles up, dusting off his long, brown jacket. The child Frisk gasped, mouth hanging open in delight.

His Imperial Highness, Frisk Dreemurr gave us a brilliant smile and a bow. "Permission to come aboard!"

My brother in law chuckled. "Granted!"

Frisk's smile ratcheted up to an eleven. "I apologize for not being a monster, but Fase is a little too busy to make that happen for us right now."

Asriel shrugged. "It's all right. Hey, Bones. How's your wife?"

Bones jumped down and walked up to the edge of the containment field. "Good."

"And the kids?"

The skele-man smiled. "Numerous and belligerent."

I snorted. "Oh My God! Church is going to cut off your Futurama watching if you keep that up!"

I heard a deep throated chuckle and looked up to see Red and his Chara, leaning over the railing on the ship. "*we did it. the tests have all been resoundingly successful. we can circumnavigate the asshole who's got us locked down."

I blinked, realizing that Rajur's hand was still on my shoulder. I looked up at him, but he didn't look the least bit surprised by the newcomers in our midst. I gestured toward Bones and Red. "You...?"

"Are privy to many of the more classified happenings on the ship? Of course. I am the Head of Exploration and Osiris was not the first human I'd ever seen, though she was the first to survive. Dr. Alphys really is to thank for that."

"But other dimensions?"

He smiled broadly. "Bones and I have had a few drinks together."

My sister came back over to her husband. "We can send our visitors home whenever we like." She looked over at the young Asriel and Chara. "But all three of them need therapy. They can't go home like this. They're all broken."

His Imperial Highness waved. "Star is ready at Epsilon." He smiled at the child standing next me. Then his smile fell, and it was like all the joy that constantly bubbled up from him had vanished. He pulled something on his belt as he rushed out of the containment field and the field wrapped around him, keeping him from possibly contaminating the Delta. Quickly pulling off his gloves he knelt in front of Frisk, and took her face in his hands for a moment. Then he pulled her close, hugging her tightly.

My sister's hand touched his blond and pink head. "I take it that your dreams were as bad as ones Cross has been having?"

He leaned back a little, shaking his head. "No. Cross' nightmares are always worse."

The child touched Frisk's face. "You always look so happy in my dreams. Please don't look so sad now."

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly to give her a big smile. "You'll be safe at Epsilon. I
promise." He paused for a moment, tapping his chin with one hand and I noticed a thick, gold wedding band on his ring finger. Frisk jerked his thumb at Bones. "Well, you'll be safe so long as don't try to steal his wife's pokeballs. Her Seviper is still a total jerk."

"He likes me," Fell Chara muttered from the ship railing.

Frisk spun and pointed up at him. "Point proven!"

My sister nodded. "They are best equipped to help."

The child turned to hug me tightly and I knelt to give her a proper hug. "It's okay. Site Epsilon is a really nice place. There's another Frisk there like you. She's taken it hard and carries the scars of all her deaths on her body. Their Asriel is a lot like mine, very strong and very kind."

"Their Chara?"

"He's an artificial intelligence who lives in his Frisk's head. He's pretty cool."

"Will you visit?"

I smiled. "Absolutely."

She nodded and stepped away from me. She took Frisk's hand and turned to the containment field.

Bones motioned to her. "*just step on through, kiddo."

She closed her eyes and stepped through the field.

Bones waved our guests, Chara and Asriel, along. "Come on you two." As they stepped into the field, Bones looked back to us. "Anything I should know about these three?"

I nodded. "Keep Frisk and Chara separated."

Bones nodded once.

The child looked up at her older brother. "You haven't apologized yet."

Chara finally looked at her. "Would it help if I did?"

"It doesn't matter if it would or not. It's what you're supposed to do."

He sighed deeply. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry for all the things I've done to you. And that includes taking mom and dad away from you."

After that, was silence. They ascended a gangplank and the ship disappeared in another rift.
Episode 13: Isn't It Time You Talked To Me?

(Fell Chara is our narrator!)

The *Planar Pearl* burst through the clouds, making an arc in the air before coming to rest next to the main building of Site Epsilon. The area below us had been cleared of snow and the ship came to rest just above the ground, bobbing softly. The gangplank came down and everyone onboard disembarked. During the flight, the little Frisk followed her steampunk double in absolute fascination. And true to form for Frisks, he happily let her hang off of him the entire flight.

On the ground, Star waited next to Brass, vibrating with barely contained excitement. It took all I had not to just run down the gangplank, shoving everyone aside to get to her. She slammed into me as soon as my feet hit the ground, arms wrapping around my neck. I hugged her back with everything I had, before resting my forehead against hers, our noses touching.

"Why are you hugging me so tight? Shouldn't you be excited that you'll be seeing your fiance soon?"

Star smiled brightly. "Yeah." She rubbed her nose against mine. "But you're my Chara."

I sighed that contented sigh that only a Chara had at seeing their Frisk happy. I kissed my partner's forehead, eyes closed for a moment. Taking a deep breath, I opened my eyes. And out of the corner, saw the child Frisk waiting next to me. She was pointedly looking away and not out of any sort of politeness. There was an awful anger in her expression, but so was a deep seated loss. I frowned and put a hand on her head.

"Hey. Are you all right?"

Star looked down and immediately dropped to one knee. "It's you!" She threw off her gloves to touch the girl's face. "Oh my God." Star hugged her tightly and the girl melted into it, eyes watering.

"Please. Please don't look so sad. You never look sad in my dreams."

Star leaned back a little, giving the little Frisk a smile. "In my dreams, you aren't doing so hot."

"Says, Captain Understatement," I muttered. "What's with the sour look, kiddo?"

The child frowned. "You love her. You're happy to see her."

I glanced back at the adult Chara and timid Asriel as they were being directed inside the building. I sighed deeply and looked to Star. "Let's move inside before I feel the need to warm up by beating someone to death."

Star nodded and looked over at Brass and his brother, the two talking excitedly in complete gibberish; full on cryptophasia. "Come on, guys!" She drew the child along, walking out of the cold and into the warmth of the facility.

Brass put a hand on my shoulder, nodding for me to keep pace with him as we entered the building. "She's still overworking herself. Now that she knows how to get in and out of the void again, she says she's making up for lost time." He sighed and rolled his eyes before frowning. "Still, she's disconnected from the void while on a timeline, so she's wearing my locket to keep her connected."

His brother elbowed him. "You gave it to her? I mean, I get it. It has a piece of the void in it, but…"
Woah."

Brass held up both hands. "I'll get it back when everything is back to normal. We have a better idea of what's going on now and Star will fill us in as soon as we've had some reconnaissance on the world the Frisk who managed the timeline folding came from. Until then-

Frisk looked around. "Where's Stephen?"

"I was getting to that. It's tea time and I left Stephen pouring a cup for Miss Charlotte Featherstone."

"Charlotte Featherstone? THE Charlotte Featherstone?!" Frisk grabbed his brother's arms excitedly, smile wide and bright. And then it fell. "Wait. What is she doing here? Is she all right?"

"She's fine now. Come on. You need to meet her. She's brilliant. And you are going to love Miss Tamanna when you meet her. She's a fish monster-human hybrid from an advanced science timeline. They've roomed with Stephen and I."

Frisk gave his brother a reproachful look. "That's scandalous."

"Charlotte's an American."

"Oh. Well nevermind."

The Steam twins broke off when we reached the stairs, rushing up them. I kept going down the hall to the labs, catching up with the others. The photos and various awards on the walls had the young Asriel and adult Chara looking around. Though they stopped once we got to King Asriel's biomedical lab. As usual, the goat king had his snout buried in his research, eyes to the microscope. Honestly, where did he find the time for all of it?

Star waved. "Hey, Boss Man! We have some guests."

Asriel sat up, leaning back in his chair to look over the newcomers. The young Asriel next to me shuddered and bowed. His brother looked between the two for a moment, obviously terrified, before grabbing the young goat's collar, and pulling him back up. The child Frisk stared at him, mouth slightly open with a blush spreading across her cheeks. Oh dear. I've seen that blush before. Right on my Sunshine's face.

The goat king stood and came out to lean against the door jamb, arms crossed over his chest. "Howdy." He looked to Star. "Special instructions?"

"Keep Frisk and Chara separated."

Asriel nodded. "C? Did Delta send you any information?"

C's red hologram burst to life on his brother's shoulder. "Oh yeah and oh hell. I just dumped all the files on Frisk. She's already on the phone with mental health. Besides room assignments, Frisk and Chara are going to need physicals."

Asriel nodded and looked at Star. "Think your parents would be fine with another one?"

She snorted, rolling her eyes. "Oh come on! They'd be disappointed if we didn't put her with them! We'll just need to put the top piece on Princess' bed to turn it into a bunk."

"They already have a full house."

Star snorted, but not in a happy way. "Whenever you're ready to make it less full, let me know."

Her
eyes narrowed. "I'll help."

Oh? Has Princess' Toriel been that out of hand?

The child pulled on Star's sleeve. "Princess?"

Star gave her a smile. "My little sister. We call her Princess. She's a Frisk too and one that carries all the scars of her deaths on her body."

The girl touched her neck for a moment, running her fingers across an unblemished arc. "I don't. Why not?"

"Her Chara is dead and the remains of their soul cling to hers. That puts a heavy draw on her Determination and it prevents her body from completely healing when she comes back from death."

The girl thought about that for a moment and looked up at C's floating red hologram. "You're Chara too, right?"

C's hologram moved down so that it hung in front of her face. "Yeah. But everyone calls me C. My Frisk is in the office behind you looking over the information Delta gave us about you."

Her Chara frowned. "You mean about us."

"No. I was being specific. She's looking at Frisk's information right now."

His shoulders dropped in annoyance. "How would you even know that?"

"Okay. Let's get something straight. I am the AI that runs this facility. I know absolutely everything that happens in this building. I have to actively think about it to not be aware. And all that aside, it's my Frisk we're talking about. I live in her head. So yeah. I know." The hologram was suddenly in his face. "I also know everything you've done to the little girl you should have been protecting with every ounce of your being, so you'll want to tone down the attitude."

The man blanched and backed away.

That had Alphys attention. She looked up from her computer, lips drawn back from sharp teeth. "How bad?"

C disappeared only to reappear on her shoulder. "If I told you, you'd probably claw him to death with those razor sharp toes of yours, so we'll just leave it at that."

She made a strange and ominous sound I'd only heard once before while on a timeline where dinosaurs still roamed the earth. The hair on the back of my neck stood up. For a moment, I was legitimately afraid of an Alphys. That's a new one.

Asriel waved it off. "His LOVE is an eight, which doesn't make him the most dangerous person here," Asriel mused. "What's the likelihood of harm to others?"

C shrugged. "Delta says he's okay to be walking around freely."

Asriel walked over and knocked on the door to Church's office. "Frisk?"

"Yes, Az?"

"Have any suggestions for placement of our guests?"
The door opened and Church stepped out with a notepad in her hand. Being as she was still technically on maternity leave, she was in a pink, long sleeve, mid length dress with a long, cream colored skirt underneath, and a white lace cardigan on top. Baby Marigold slept peacefully in the baby sling around Church's chest. The child Frisk stared at her, a little wide eyed. She tugged on Star's hand and timidly pointed at Church.

Star nodded, letting go of the girl's hand. "Go on."

The child walked over, the Frisk fascination on full blast as she looked up at Church. Church smiled and put the notepad down on the table just inside her office door in order to offer the girl a hand. The girl took it immediately.

Church petted the child's head. "With all the people stuck here, we have a pretty good group for this. Bunk Frisk with Princess. I've already set her up so her first sessions are group ones with Princess and Frisk Ossein the Elder. We'll bunk Asriel with Prince Asriel and Prince Chara. They have an extra bed. And we'll put this Chara with my brother in law."

Bones raised a brow bone. "In my room?"

"You haven't slept in that room since Sophia was born."

He shrugged. "Point conceded."

"Charas do best in close proximity to a Papyrus and your brother is perfectly suited to help."

Star frowned. "Why not put him with our Surfer Sans?"

"Because there's a huge difference between hiding murders from Toriel and having her order you to commit them."

"What?!" Both the young goat and his Chara stared at her, plainly stunned.

Church gave them both a long look. "Not every Toriel is a good woman."

Star elbowed me. "What? Not adding anything?"

I shrugged. "Mom's been doing better. My brother still needs to beat the hell out of dad on occasion, but he's taking the defeats better."

Both of them stared at me like I'd just uttered blasphemy.

The child pointed at me. "What's your Frisk like?"

I smiled, chuckling a little. "I've got two of them." I jerked a thumb at Star. "This one is like chasing a shooting star and the other one is like standing in the face of the sun."

Star nodded. "Oh yeah. We call her Sunshine."

Cross came down the hall with a several files in his arms. He handed one of them to Asriel before kneeling in front of the child Frisk. "Hey there, Little Lion. I was wondering when you'd show up."

She touched his face, smiling brightly. "It's you!" Her smile fell. "You were being dragged underwater by a huge octopus."

Cross nodded. "That was an interesting day. Obviously, it didn't eat me."
"I also dreamed about you eating dinner with a skeleton."

Cross shrugged. "That's a much more normal day. I had a nightmare about you in a prison cell under a decrepit castle."

Red frowned. "I thought the nightmares were something your chara did to you."

Cross shook his head. "I've always had them. Chara just made them more intense."

The Little Lion pulled on Cross' sleeve. "Your chara was evil?"

Cross frowned. "That's one way to put it."

Church elbowed her husband. "Hey, take Chara over to meet your brother."

"Sure thing, Babe."

"Star, will you take Frisk up stairs?"

Star smiled. "Of course!" She held out her hand and the child took it. "Mom and Dad are gonna love you!"

"Chara?"

Oh. She was talking to me. "Yes?"

"Please take Asriel to Suite Fourteen."

I gave her a quick salute. "Can do."

Before I could move, she shifted the baby a little and hugged me. "Good to see you again."

I hugged her back. "It's good to see you too. I notice you assigned everyone in just the right way to give you maximum time with my Sans."

She pushed at my shoulder. "Hush. You're not supposed to notice that."

I smiled big and waved for the young goat to follow me. "This way, Your Highness."

He stepped after me, a bit unsure. "Um... just Asriel is fine."

"All right then. I'm Chara, though I bet you figured that one out already."

He tugged on one long ear nervously. "How do you have two Frisks? Are they both from your world? The one... Star? It seems as if she lives here."

"She does live here. But she doesn't have a timeline of her own. Because she lacks a place and people of her own, she finds others to fill those rolls. So, I'm her chara. The Prime Sans is her Sans and so on."

"So, whose timeline is this?"

I stopped in front of the door to Suite Fourteen. "The Frisk in the dress back there? This is her timeline."

Asriel stopped dead. "She has so much LOVE."
"She earned it serving her country in war." I knocked on the door to the suite.

A dark haired, red eyed jerk in a white, button down dress shirt and purple vest over black slacks, opened the door. "Yes? Chara!" Prince Chara held out a hand to shake and I took it, patting him on the other shoulder. "Does this mean my long vacation in the land of plentiful chocolate is soon going to end?"

I shrugged. "That depends on how soon Church tells Sans Boneweaver. And I have a suspicion that she's in no hurry to do so. Until then, would you mind keeping this Asriel for a bit in the spare bedroom?"

He smiled at the goat. "Not at all. Come in." He opened the door wide for us to come in.

The suite let into a living room with a lovely, hardwood floor. A dark wood couch sitting on top of a muted brown rug, faced the windows that looked out on the snow covered garden. Sitting on the couch was Frisk Boneweaver, dressed in her white cleric robes, quietly reading a book. Prince Asriel, in white button down and brown slacks, sat in the chair next to the fire, reading as well. A tea service with spider donuts rested on the coffee table while a robust fire roared in the slate fireplace.

I gave Asriel a wave. "Hey there! You're looking much better since last I saw you."

He smiled. "Star is pretty good at motivation." He grimaced. "Though I don't want to go through the horrible walks of pain ever again."

Frisk jumped to her feet, long brown hair swinging as she hugged me. "What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be with Star right now? She really misses you." She stepped back. "I mean it. She talks in her sleep about you and her beloved a lot."

"I just saw her and I promise, I will spend copious amounts of time with her. She'll be sick of seeing me before I'm gone."

Frisk pushed me a little. "I doubt that!"

Prince Chara gestured for the young goat to come in again while looking at me. "How's your brother and Frisk?"

"They're expecting another one."

"Tell them I said congratulations."

"I will." I turned and looked back at the goat, who still hung at the doorway. "Come in. They won't bite."

Frisk moved a blanket from the couch and patted the seat with a smile. "Please sit. Tell us about yourself."

The goat sat and looked around. "I'm sorry. There isn't really all that much to tell. From what I understand, I wanted so badly for my brother to stop hurting Frisk that I kept making us jump timelines."

Frisk placed a hand on his shoulder. "Why was he hurting your Frisk?"

"To take her soul and open the barrier." He stared at the floor. "Except now we know that isn't how the barrier is opened and now we might be trapped underground forever."
Chara sat in the chair closest to the fire. "Because you need Frisk to open the barrier and she might not be willing too?"

The goat nodded.

"Well, if there's anything I've learned from being around the copious amount of Frisks in this building, it's that there is hope and you shouldn't walk around as if your Frisk's decision is a foregone conclusion." He reached over and tweaked his fiancee's nose. "This one changes her mind all the time."

She gasped. "I do not!" She gave him a mock glare. "You're asking for trouble!"

He winked at her before turning serious. "Is there something Mrs. Gaster would like us to help with regarding our new roommate?"

I shook my head. "Help him get comfortable for now. I'm sure she'll have something in mind later." I turned to the goat. "Considering that you immediately bowed to His Majesty back at the lab, you definitely need some growing up and a few lessons in rulership."

Prince Asriel shut his book with a snap. "We can handle that."

Prince Chara gestured toward the goat. "What about his Chara?"

"He's being placed with this world's Papyrus."

Frisk clapped her hands. "Oh that's good! Dr. Papyrus is fantastic. His insight has really helped Frisk Tamanna." She gave me a conspiratorial glance. "He's also been nudging Star about a new skating routine and it's been helping to keep her from working on her days off. Still, she's been pretty bad on her days on."

I thought about that for a moment. "Well, with travel no longer out of the question, I'll push forward the 'super secret mission.'"

They all looked at each other, before Prince Chara asked the obvious question. "Which is?"

"Getting Star in a wedding dress."

Frisk bounced a little in her seat. "Oh! Star was telling me about that!" She turned to the princes. "You know how most women back home simply wear their nicest dress or borrow the nicest one they can for the occasion? Here, the bride will try on multiple, beautiful dresses at a shop dedicated just to wedding attire. And it's treated like an event all its own. A whole group of family and friends will attend to watch and give opinions on the dress."

Prince Chara grimaced. "That sounds exhausting."

Prince Asriel laughed. "Well, for you, it would be."

Chara nodded. "Star will lose it on us if we keep you too long. Head on out." He looked to the young goat. "He'll be fine with us."

I nodded and gave them a wave as I went out the door. Heading down the hall, the door to Papyrus' room was open, and I saw the new Chara sitting on the couch, talking with Papyrus; Bones observing from where he leaned against the wall with his hands in his pockets. Going up the stairs, I headed directly for the Ossein apartment. Sophia, Princess, and the Little Lion ran passed me, Dead Sass floating after them with a shrug. They stopped at Star's door, opening it and calling for Umbra.
Umbra's head popped out of the door, eyes glowing lightly.

"It is a Pokemon!"

Umbra came out, happily submitting to the copious amounts of petting the children provided.

Star came out of the Ossein apartment with her mother and Princess' Toriel, though her words were for goat mom. "She's been tortured to death multiple times. Keep that in mind before doing anything against mental health's orders. She's already going to have to live with PTSD, don't make it worse."

Toriel groused, "I do not need to be lectured."

Mrs. Ossein gave the goat woman a sour smile. "Oh, lecturing is the least of the things you need, dear. But it is still on the list."

Toriel growled only to stop dead at Mrs. Ossein's glare. A glare from any kind of Fell Frisk was enough to silence a lot of people. But, wow, that was a lot of tension. Time to break it up.

"Super secret mission."

Star blinked. "But my Tori isn't."

I shrugged. "Like the twins can't just pick her up." I unzipped my bag and pulled out a wooden box with the Delta Rune engraved on the top. "Sunshine wants this to be your something borrowed."

Star took the box and slowly opened it, inside a soft, velvet lined interior was my sister's personal tiara; a gold and diamond affair arranged to look like stylized peacock feathers set with rubies for the 'eyes.'

Mrs. Ossein gasped and hugged Star around the shoulders while Star sniffed and rubbed at her eyes, happy tears falling down her face.

"Oh, Sunshine…" Star nodded. "Okay. I'll call the shop." She closed the box, holding it tightly. "Oh man. Where do I keep this so it's safe?"

I shrugged. "Same place Asriel keeps all the artifacts Church keeps finding."

"I found the last one." Star held up her hand, and pulled on a gold band set with several tiny gemstones, a copper and an iron half ring flanking the stones. "I can't get it off."

"By D&D rules, that means it's cursed." I reached over to give the ring a little tug. "So what does it do?"

Star stared at it. "I have no idea. We originally thought it would control monsters, but it doesn't." She shrugged and hugged the box to her chest tightly. "Oh my god… It's getting close, isn't it?" She sniffed.

Mrs. Ossein patted her daughter's shoulder before leaning in to give her a kiss on the cheek. "I'll call the shop. Go tell Asriel that you're taking tomorrow off."

Star nodded, sniffing a little, and headed for the stairs. As soon as she was out of sight, Mrs. Ossein turned to Toriel.

"You are not going with us tomorrow. Do not attempt to tag along, do not attempt to prevent Princess from going, and if you, in anyway, make my youngest feel bad just so she'll stay behind with you, I will take you out of the equation permanently." Mrs. Ossein leaned in close. "And I
won't feel bad about it."

Mrs. Ossein turned and walked back into the apartment. She turned to me. "This is less than acceptable."

I raised an eyebrow. "A word of advice about Fell Frisks: they can burn the world should they so desire. And Frisk Ossein the Elder has done such a thing already. So back down."

"I can't."

I sighed. "I get it. You're afraid of losing your daughters, but the plain truth is that they need support you can't provide. That being the case doesn't make you a shoddy parent. Choosing to stand in the way of what they need makes you a shoddy parent."

Toriel crossed her arms over her chest. "Oh? And I suppose you have an example of this?"

"When Dr. Alphys told my father that she might be able to get the barrier open by experimenting on me, my mother stood aside, too fearful to do anything. Fast forward a few hundred years to Frisk and my mother understood that she was in no condition to help anyone. She knew she couldn't raise a child, that she was too damaged to do so. She didn't fight it when Sans took Frisk into his home. She just did the best she could from the sidelines, knowing that there was a future where she could have a good and solid relationship with her."

"Your situation is hardly the same."

I pointed at her. "It is the same. It's all about fear. It's only the details that are different. My mother was afraid and so are you. You are filled with deep fear and refuse to see past it." I crossed my arms over my chest, one hand lifted. "The simple fact of the matter is that, so long as you count this as a loss, you will never be able to properly parent anyone. You need to think of it as a win. Frisk's win. Chara's win. Here they get a mother and father who are married and have a stable, loving relationship. They get a mother who understands what it means to carry the fate of an entire world on her shoulders as well as the post traumatic stress that entails."

Toriel scoffed. "So just sit back and I miss out on my children's lives?"

I shrugged. "Maybe. But wouldn't you rather have daughters who grow up to become functioning adults? Ones who can really hold all the hopes and dreams of monsters and see them into a happy future?"

I leaned in, voice going low. "I know about the assassination attempt and Princess needing an infusion of Determination to survive. That she'd reached the end of her rope trying to support herself and Chara, and ended up in a coma because of it. Those things should never have happened and it infuriates me to no end that, while surrounded by so many people who could do something about it, you never thought to ask if Chara's broken soul could be made whole again. That the connection between your children could be made to benefit them instead of harm them."

I turned away shrugging dramatically. "But I guess that's just the way things are for Charas, huh? Always the short end of the stick."

I stuck my hands in my pockets and walked down the hall toward the girls, watching them fawn over Umbra. Umbra spotted me and rushed over, jumping up into my arms. "Hey, Girlfriend! Miss me?" I got a lick on the cheek before she jumped back down to the kids.

The Little Lion looked up at me. "Do you have a pokemon?"
I nodded. "My partner's a Luxray named Tesla." I reached into my pocket and pulled out a tiny pokeball. It grew in my hand and I hit the button before tossing it. "Come on out, Buddy."

A blue lion with a black mane landed in front of me. Tesla turned with a happy smile to rub his face against mine, until he heard Umbra's call. He spun and pounced. Umbra jumped back to avoid only to crash into him the moment he landed, the two rubbing up against each other. The kids squealed petting them both.

I sighed and patted Tesla's shoulder. "If I find an egg in the morning, I'm not going to be happy about it."

The Little Lion's hand slid through Tesla's mane. "Has that happened before?"

Sophia nodded. "With these two? Oh yeah. Baby Eevee's are super cute. There have been three so far, right? Where are they now?"

I counted off on my fingers. "The oldest is my Espeon, the middle child is Cross' Jolteon, and the youngest is Agent Franklin's Vaporeon."

Star came back up the stairs with Asriel; Star babbling away while the goat king smiled. She still held the box tightly to her chest, smiling happily as they entered Asriel's apartment, the door shutting behind them.

Dead Sass floated over to me, ghostly eyes on the spot in the hall her mother had so recently stood. "Can you fix my soul?"

"Me personally? No. But I know that it's possible. Do you want to try?"

They looked back at their partner for a moment and then to me. "Yes. I'll do whatever I have to, just so long as Frisk doesn't need to support me with her determination."

"Then I need to make a call."

Dead Sass nodded and floated back to the others. I pulled out my phone and dialed one of my favorite Frisks. I wonder how long it will take her her jerk of a husband to butt in on the conversation?

A sweet and melodious voice flowed from the speaker. "Hello?"

"Good afternoon, Your Majesty. Thank you for taking my call."

Mage Frisk chuckled. "I will always answer your call, Chara. What do you need?"

"It's about Dead Sass. Her soul is in pieces and Princess' determination is the only thing holding it together. Can it be fixed?"

She hummed thoughtfully. "It depends on how much of the soul is there. If we have all the pieces, it's no trouble to bring it back together. But if we're missing something…"

"We're boned?"

"Maybe not. I've heard that Snow is capable of moving things through time and space. If pieces of the soul are missing, she may be able to pull them to us. Now that we have a mode of travel back in place, I will see what I can do to visit—"

There was a strange scraping sound as the phone was pulled from her hand and a velvet voice with
all the danger of a wolf came over the phone. "We'll see you tomorrow, Prick." King Chara hung up.

Well, that was almost a full conversation. Asshole.

I snorted and shoved my phone back into my pocket as Star came out of Asriel's apartment. She threw her arms around me, hanging off of my back, face against the back of my neck.

"You're done for the day, right?"

She nodded against my neck.

"Eat in and crash early?"

She nodded again. I walked awkwardly to her apartment door, while she continued to hang on me, being dragging along.

The Little Lion looked up from petting Umbra. "Do they always do that?"

Princess nodded. "Hang off of each other? Oh yeah. It's pretty normal."

Dead Sass floated around to put their arms around Princess. "I hang on Frisk most of the time. For some Frisks and Charas, it's something of a thing."

Star turned her head as I opened the door. "Be ready to go on the super secret mission in the morning."

Princess grabbed ahold of the Little Lion, hugging her as much as presenting her. "Can Frisk come?"

"Absolutely!" She spied Tesla and Umbra getting snuggly. "Hey, you two. No eggs. It's not like I can find a trainer who'll want an egg right now."

Both pokemon ignored us, happily rubbing their faces together.

Yeah. We should just be ready for another egg.

I dragged Star the rest of the way into the apartment, but left the door open a little so Umbra and Tesla could come back inside. After an easy dinner of grilled cheese and tomato soup, we snuggled on the couch, watching an old MST3K. Somewhere in the middle of a terrible film, she fell asleep on my shoulder. Frisk Boneweaver came in the apartment just as I was tucking Star into bed and gave me a wave from the living room.

After kicking off my shoes, I laid down, putting my arms around Star. She immediately turned over and cuddled against my chest, breathing deeply. I held her for a while before rolling onto my back and staring up at the ceiling, marveling a little at the soft light of the glow in the dark paint she'd splattered on it to create a field of stars: a void in her room.

"Chara."

I started awake in the middle of the night. I sat up, looking around, listening carefully. Star murmured in her sleep and I leaned over to kiss her forehead before standing to have a look around. A gaster blaster floated around the living room interior and it came over, looking for pets. I rubbed its boney snout while noting the time on the wall clock; three in the morning. The door to the spare room was open and Frisk Boneweaver snoozed quietly on the guest bed. Umbra and Tesla slept on the couch.

I leaned into the blaster, hugging it a little. "Did you wake me up?" I whispered.
It cuddled against me, but the answer was no. Something else had me up. And on edge. I opened the front door to the hall. It was dark but for the soft glow of the occasional orange light along the wall where it met the floor. I crept down the hall toward the stairs, the blaster floating after me. Not seeing anything in the hall, I went down the stairs, and right into Papyrus. Bone's brother was looking considerably dapper in his long slack, dress shirt, long jacket, and red scarf.

"GOOD MORNING, CHARA. I SEE YOU FOUND ABEL."

"Good morning." I patted the blaster's nose. "Abel?"

"HE IS THE YOUNGEST OF MY BLASTERS. I'M NOT SURE HOW HE SLIPPED THE KENNEL." Papyrus shrugged. "IT IS NO MATTER THOUGH. HE IS NOT THE PERSON I'M LOOKING FOR. MY HOUSE GUEST HAS GONE MISSING."

I frowned. "You're looking for 'Mr. Child Torture.' I didn't think he had it in him to get my hackles up."

"OH NO. THAT FEELING IS VERY LIKELY MISS DAMALI. SHE GOES INTO HER ACTIVE PHASE AT NIGHT."

I sighed. "Well, I'm up, so I might as well help you find Chara."

Papyrus nodded and walked with me down the hall, Abel floating along with us, eyes lit up like bright blue flames. The light of the full moon shone brightly through the windows in the hallway, hitting the stained glass at the very top in such a way as to cast a blue glow reminiscent of echo flowers. Using a little magic, Papyrus dampened the sound of our footfalls on the floor a little so that we would make no sound as we walked down toward the labs and the soft lights emanating from inside.

The main lab, Asriel's personal favorite, was quiet, with only a nurse rabbit monster monitoring the equipment now that all patients were out of the nurse gave us a wave.

"HAVE YOU SEEN ANYONE ABOUT, MY DEAR?"

The nurse nodded. "I saw a male Chara walking toward the conference rooms, though he didn't look like he was going anywhere in particular. And I saw Damali. She's really active tonight and came by to spook me a few times."

Papyrus nodded. "THANK YOU."

The doll, Damali, was Straight Man Sans' lady friend and had been trapped here while visiting our world. Once midnight hit, she would suddenly forget herself and wander the halls, frightening and giving chase to anyone she found. Though she was quick to break off the chase and disappear once her quarry was cornered. Damali once informed me over tea that she broke off pursuit because she was without her 'sisters.' The dolls hunted as a pack and and could not complete a hunt without five of their number at the very least. She would not elaborate on what happened after their victim was within their clutches.

Continuing on, we headed deeper into the building and back toward the conference rooms. We stopped at the door to the cafeteria, finding it ajar. The cafeteria never actually closed and you would be sure to find a few night staff and guests. That said, the room was left only dimly lit at night; the glow of the fire light flickering from the massive fireplace giving the large room a cozy warmth. The shine of a pair of eyes like pools of gold watched us from a seat near the fire. Was that the vampire Frisk? I hadn't actually met her.
She gave us a polite wave and continued to read while she ate a meal. I assumed was specially formulated for her needs since vampires and food didn't seem to go together. Or maybe I had it wrong and she wasn't undead. After having a look around the cafeteria for the missing Chara, we turned to leave and Frisk's head hit the table with an agonized groan.

Papyrus teleported to her side. "DEAR LADY! HOW MAY I ASSIST YOU?"

She counted softly under her breath for a full minute before taking a deep breath and lifting her head. "If you would be so kind, please help me over to the lab." She rubbed her large stomach as if to soothe away the contractions. "I think it's almost time."

"CERTAINLY." Papyrus took her hand and helped her stand.

Frisk looked me over. "I'm sorry. I don't believe we've met." She held out her hand. "I'm Frisk Luna."

I took her hand and swept it up to kiss her knuckles. "Chara Dreemurr. Specifically Fell Chara."

She smiled widely, fangs fully on display. "Star's Chara! It is a pleasure to meet you."

"And you."

She jerked letting out an oof, and Papyrus put an arm around her waist. Carefully tucking her book under her arm, she rubbed her round stomach again. "Patience, little one. No need to kick so hard."

Stepping out of the cafeteria, we found the missing Chara. He gasped, leaning against the wall, eyes darting around wildly. His legs gave out in relief when he saw us, sliding down the wall to sit on the floor.

Frisk looked him over for a moment. "Giving our doll friend a merry chase, are we?"

"Hardly," he gasped. "I've been trying to get away from her."

Frisk smiled, her fangs poking out from under her lips. "Then all you need to do is stop running."

She looked to the right, spotting the porcelain beauty that waited at the end of the hall and gave her a wave. She grimaced again, leaning heavily on Papyrus. "Would someone be a dear and let my husband know that it's time?"

I nodded. "Where can I find him?"

"It's still too early for the gym. He'll be in the library."

I looked at Chara. "Get up. You're coming with me."

His eyes narrowed. "I don't take orders from-"

I cut him off. "Then you can be Damali's exercise for the rest of the night." I turned and walked away.

Chara found his feet. "Wait!" He rushed after me. "So, library. This place has a library?"

"A pretty decent one."

He looked me up and down and then did a double take. "You aren't wearing any shoes."

I shrugged, wiggling my toes in my socks. "Something woke me up. I didn't want to give it the drop..."
on me by making too much noise walking around."

Chara eyed me for a moment. "What? Why would you need to do that? Monsters are literally made of love and compassion."

I sighed. "Not all of them. You remember the Sans with the gold tooth on the ship?"

"Yeah."

"That's my Sans. And just like him, all monsters on my world are complete assholes with one glaring exception."

"Who is the exception?"


We hit the stairs and started climbing.

"What's your story?"

I shrugged. "I fell down a hole, was adopted by monsters, lived happily for a while before my father sent me to be experimented on in the lab, and was killed by a duck monster when I attempted to escape. After spending hundreds of years stuck in my own corpse, my soul possessed Frisk. An attack meant to kill Frisk split us into two people instead. I met Star a little bit after that and we became partners when we took our test for full agent together."

I turned down the hall at the top of the stairs.

"Stuck in your own corpse… As in, completely aware?"

I didn't answer. Instead, I opened the door to the library and found the interior to be lit. Not brightly, but all the lamps on the various tables were on. Taking a guess, I went to the left and the boxes of craft supplies. I heard the soft tap-scrape of knitting needles as I rounded a bookcase. Chara Luna, sat in an ironic tee and green hoodie, headphones on, carefully watching his pattern as he knitted. He stiffened and then relaxed as he turned his head to look back at me.

"Holy shit. The second Chara ever makes an appearance." He held out a hand to shake as the other pulled his headphones off.

I shook his hand. "I'm not that famous."

"Bullshit."

I held up both hands, conceding before I inclined my head back toward the door. "Your wife sent me up to find you. It's time."

He shoved his needles in his yarn ball. "Then you'll have to excuse me." Luna paused as he stood. "C? Please take me off the training floor this morning."

There was a soft beep and Fase's voice of happy doom whispered from the nearby speaker. "C's asleep. I'll remove you."

I smirked. "Having a date?"

"I'm not human," came an overly matter of fact reply. "That's something humans do."
I rolled my eyes. "Your lucky Bones didn't hear that." I smiled at Luna. "Who were you on with?"

He stuffed his knitting in a backpack. "Prince Chara."

I chuckled. "Keeping all the calories from the chocolate under control, huh?"

Luna snorted, swinging his bag onto his shoulder. "Oh please. Find me a Chara who isn't that bad."

He disappeared around a bookcase.

Chara shuddered. "What was that voice?"

"That's Fase. A Frisk who is an artificial intelligence. Her voice always sound like that." I turned. "Come on. We need to get Asriel up for the delivery."

Chara followed after me. "Shouldn't we have woken him first?"

I shook my head as we made our way back to the hall. "Having watched my Frisk go through several pregnancies, Frisk Luna will be in labor for a couple hours at the very least."

"What did he mean by 'second Chara ever'?"

I stopped. "Wait. You can't tell?" I turned around to face him. "You saw Luna stiffen when I came near. He knew I was there before I was close enough to touch him. What do you feel when you look at me?"

He took a deep breath and it came out as a sigh as he looked away. "I feel like… like you could swallow me whole. And no one would ever have known I was gone. I'd simply stop existing."

I raised an eyebrow. "I'm sure you get by now that all of us are variations based on an original. That somewhere in time and space there is a first Frisk. A first Chara. We call them Prime and they are incredibly powerful. The source of all our triumphs and misfortunes. After that come the variations. Each time you have an original variation from Prime, they are uniquely powerful. While Bones, this world's Sans, is in no way the original of his kind, his Frisk is the first of her kind and it's made her superhuman."

I turned and kept walking, leaving the library. "But for all that, there is one variation that is more powerful than the rest and that's the first variation: Fell. I am the second Chara to ever exist and within me lives all of the beauty and horror of the first Chara."

"Where did you go?" Star whispered.

I paused and looked down the hall.

She leaned against the frame of her front door, yawning. "I woke up and you weren't there."

I smiled and hugged her. "I wasn't prepared for it so Damali roaming the halls woke me."

She teetered a little. "Come back?"

I shook my head. "I have to wake Azzy. Frisk Luna is ready to have the baby."

Star snapped into focus and she stood up straight, alert and awake. "I'll get him. Get me some coffee, please." She went into the Goat King's apartment without knocking.

Chara pointed at her. "What the heck was that? She went from falling asleep on her feet to-"
"She's always like that." I headed for Star's apartment and caught sight of a beautiful doll standing at the end of the hallway, half shadowed in the dim lights. "If you want to avoid Damali and actually get some sleep, head back to your room. Things are going to get busy in a few hours."

Inside the apartment, Frisk Boneweaver was already up, humming to herself as she made some tea.

I leaned against the wall, hands in my pockets. "You came in late last night."

Frisk Boneweaver smiled. "Oh yes! My beloved once asked Fase to tell him a story from another timeline and it's become our evening ritual. Last night, Fase told us of a Chara who lost the love of his life in a moment that was both tragic and heroic. He stayed in the home they'd built together, living like a ghost on the mountain side until Frisk burst into his life; a little girl escaping the violence of her country's collapse. She opened his heart and he gave her the family she desperately needed." She clapped softly, but excitedly. "It was a wonderful story! It was sad and funny and terrifying and happy all at once."

She opened the fridge to pull out a bottle of cream. "Did I hear right that Frisk Luna is ready to have her baby?"

I nodded.

She smiled happily. "Wonderful! I hope the birth goes well."

"With Asriel on it, there's nothing to worry about."

Star came into the kitchen hand out for the coffee and stopped dead, blinking when I didn't hand her any.

"Where's…?"

I raised and eyebrow. "You're off today."

She turned to the counter to plug in the coffee pot. "I'm just helping Asriel until Adrea gets here in an hour."

I grabbed her arm. "You are off today."

She took a deep breath and it came out in a whoosh. "It's okay. One hour is no-

I shook my head. "It's not okay. I haven't seen you in months. I finally get here and you weren't even going to take today off." I cupped her cheek with my other hand, keeping her eyes on me. "You aren't working. You're killing yourself. And everyday you are step closer to me using that power to rewrite reality to rewrite you, to slow you down, to unwind that thing in your head that has you spun so tight."

"Chara…"

"I know what you're doing. You're trying to catch Frisk Church. To match her and the truth of the matter is that you can't. Because you aren't her. You are Frisk Ossein. You need to be you. The you I know is in there."

"But she wants me to succeed her…"

I put my face in hers. "By being you. Not by repeating her." I pulled Star close, hugging her against my chest. "You're off today. The night staff is here."
She hugged me back, face against my chest. "One hour. It's just one hour."

"One more hour of sleep before we start putting you in dresses."

She let out a breath with a shudder.

"Your bed is calling. It says, 'Frisk! Frisk! Why have you abandoned me?!'"

Star snorted, a deep fatigue coming over her as she leaned into me. Her eyes fluttered against my chest, closing. I turned her around and walked her back into her bedroom.

"Stay with me?" she whispered, crawling back under the covers.

"Always."

She was asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow, the tiny bit of adrenaline that was keeping her up dying without caffeine to sustain it. We woke up several hours later to a lullaby playing over the PA system, a sign that Frisk Luna had given birth. Star rushed out of bed at that, going down to the lab to coo over a baby girl named Isabella Grace. Luna sat in a chair, cradling his baby girl while his wife slept. Prince Chara sat next to Luna, gently petting the baby's small head.

The queenly Toriel Star called her own stood with Asriel in the lab, Brass having gotten up early to retrieve her for the super secret mission. They spoke quietly while Asriel cleaned up, and I wondered what it was like for her to see her long dead son as a grown goat, both doctor and king. She was one of the very few people he allowed to interact with him as if she were a true relative; King Chara and Star being the others. Maybe it was because she wasn't all that different from the mother he lost.

After Star was properly dressed, we piled into several cars for the ride to Lily and Rose, St. Canard's most elegant bridal shop. Dresses in red, gold, and white filled the store, every one different and displayed so as to show off the best qualities of the dress.

The Little Lion spun in a circle when she entered, marveling at the dresses. She was wearing one of Princess' pale blue frocks, looking very cute and very much like a little princess herself. She pulled on my sleeve as we entered. "What's Star's fiance like?"

I smirked. "Well, if you've ever met a cement parking barrier, then you've met him."

Princess gasped. "Hey! That's not true!" She took the Little Lion's hand. "Star's fiance is the head of Seraph. Chara's just mad because my future brother in law is better looking than him."

The Little Lion giggled and looked at me.

I shrugged. "Honestly, we look pretty similar. Chara's tend to have a typical look."

The Lion turned, arms crossed over her chest. "Yeah, well, you're way better looking than my brother."

The dress consultant spoke with Star for a few minutes about the list of dresses Star wanted to see, while we all took seats around the mirrored area. She'd hemmed and hawed over the list for weeks and narrowed it down to ten, which was a pretty short list all things considered. The shop had hundreds of samples to look at. Star disappeared with the consultant into the dressing room.

Mrs. Ossein jerked on my sleeve, pulling my ear down to her mouth. "If you make me fight you on paying for the dress…" Her eyes narrowed. "I will never make my baked chicken for you again."
I rolled my eyes. "I already called dibs on the cake and I had to fight Az for that one."

Church leaned over in front of me, baby Marigold nursing away. "I'm still paying for the flowers and don't you dare try to change that."

"Change that? At this point, I'm still fighting Az on the reception!"

I snorted. "You are not winning that one. If the goat king wants to pay for Star's reception, it's going to happen. Stop fighting it."

Princess jumped up, sitting on my lap while Sophia and the Little Lion sat on a set of pillows on the floor.

The queenly Toriel in her shining, silver dress sat next to Mrs. Ossein. "I am so very excited. I've never done anything like this. Do you think she'll find a dress today? Also, I am the one most likely to fight you on paying for the dress."

Mrs. Ossein groaned.

Toriel laughed softly, covering her mouth with one elegant hand. "I'm joking, my dear. Tell me what I can contribute and it's done."

Star came out in the first dress and none of us really got a chance to see it. She caught one look at herself in the mirror, said no, and walked back into the dressing room.

Dead Sass blinked. "That was quick."

Church nodded. "Yeah. We all hated that one."

The next five dresses went the same way. The seventh dress she actually stopped and looked at for a while. It was white, form fitting, and covered in a delicate lace. The neckline ran low, shoulders bare, while little ringlets grasped her biceps like an illusory sleeve.

Sophia cooed, "That's pretty."

I relaxed back in my chair. "It's sexy."

Star sighed. "I know. It's like one of my competition skating costumes. I don't want to look sexy on my big day. I want to look beautiful."

"Then let's see the next one."

The next one was a ball gown with delicate gold and pink flowers, but the shoulders were still bare, the neckline still very low.

Church switched Marigold to the other breast. "Better, but not it, right?"

Star nodded.

The next dress covered the shoulders, but was as form fitting as the first. And still, it managed to be matronly.

Star said, "If this dress came in silver I'd buy it for you to wear at the wedding, Mom."

The dress consultant looked at Mrs. Ossein. "This dress can be made in silver if you want to try it, ma'am."
Mrs. Ossein looked to Church and got a vigorous nod. "When we're done finding a dress for Frisk."

The last dress came on and Star looked deflated. The dress was lovely in red and gold, with a modest cut and a slim skirt. It looked beautiful, but Star looked done. It's hard to go through all your picks and not have any of them work.

She turned to us. "What do you think?"

Church put Marigold up to her shoulder for a burp. "What do you think?"

Star looked back at the mirror, frowning. "I don't like it."

"Then I hate it. Take it off."

The consultant drew Star off to the side. "Come on. Let's take a moment to regroup and go over what you didn't like about your original picks."

I pulled out my phone. "Princess, Dead Sass, So-So, and Lion, come here." I pulled up a picture of my sister wearing her tiara. "This is the tiara Star will wear on the big day. Let's find a dress that goes with it."

The girls oohed and aahed over the tiara before heading off to look at the dresses. I stood and followed behind, keeping an eye on them. They went dress to dress discussing it's design and what it would look like on Star until the Little Lion broke off. She was staring at a manikin in an enchanted manner. The dress it wore was a white, ball gown with sleeves that hung loosely off the shoulders, but the neckline wasn't too low on the bodice. The whole gown was covered in golden embroidery, baubles, and lace.

I crouched down next to her. "Do you like this one?"

She smiled and nodded.

I inclined my head toward Star. "Think she would like it?"

She nodded again and I stood to motion the consultant helping Star over.

"How about this one?"

The woman grimaced. "The only sample we have is the one on the manikin."

"Can we strip the manikin?"

She stared at me for a moment before coming around to the front of the dress. She gently pulled at the skirt for a moment and looked over at Star. "Lift it for me so I can get the dress off."

I held up the manikin while the consultant stripped it and carried the dress over to Star. Star frowned and looked up at me. I nudged the Lion and she got the hint.

"Try it on!"

Star smiled indulgently and went back into the dressing room. She came out a few minutes later, standing tall as she walked. She stared at herself in the mirror, smiling a little. The girls came back over, Princess jumping back into my lap as I sat down, snuggling against one shoulder as Dead Sass rested against the other.

Church leaned over, nudging Mrs. Ossein. "That's the smile," she whispered. She sat up to rock
Marigold. "What do you think, Star?"

"I don't know…"

Toriel tapped her chin. "It's beautiful, Frisk."

The Little Lion bounced on her pillow. "It's totally the best!"

Star lifted the skirt a little, shifting from side to side gently, still smiling. I picked up Princess and set her on her feet, walking up behind Star, careful not to step on the train of the dress. I put my hands on her shoulders, stilling her as I leaned in, mouth to her ear.

"Mrs. Chara Seth Dreemurr."

Star put her hands over mine, a full smile breaking out on her face as she giggled.

"Is this one it?" I asked.

She nodded vigorously, smiling brightly. "This is it." She spun around and hugged me around the neck.

"Chara."

I shivered. That feeling from earlier… I was suddenly on edge and I had to stop myself from reaching for the knife hidden up my sleeve. I looked at Star, but it hadn't been her who'd said my name.

A dark chuckle echoed in my ears. "I'm not waiting for you to figure it out, Prick. Get over here."

"Damali didn't wake me up," I whispered. "You did."

Star leaned in. "Chara?"

"I'm being summoned."

She half frowned, half pouted, confused. And the her jaw dropped. "Oh! How are you going to get to Prime?"

C popped on my shoulder. "Brass is readying the Pearl."

"You too?"

C nodded. "Yeah."

Church stood. "We'll see you two later then. I'll keep Star from going back to work while you're gone."

I nodded and shortcut away. "What do you want?"

I didn't get an answer. I put myself outside Epsilon, and ran for the Pearl. Brass waited at the gangplank, looking at his pocket watch.

"You hear it too?"

Brass shrugged. "I hear the coordinates I need for the Pearl and an order to take you to them."

Stephen came up behind me, shrugging into a coat. We boarded the ship and Brass had us launched,
flying through a rift into the void.

Stephen leaned back against the rail edge of the airship. "Any guesses on where we're heading?"

"Prime," I answered, eyes on the darkness around me. "We're going to Prime. Even if I don't recognize the coordinates with the change from the folding, I recognize the direction."

"Then that voice you're both hearing is the-"

"Prime Chara." I looked back at him and nodded.

Stephen shook his head. "But why you two?" He spotted C's red glow on my shoulder. "Excuse me. You three?"

Brass looked out into the dark. "If it's us, then it's about Star."

Stephen frowned and pointed at his sovereign and then me. "You two I get. But C?"

C appeared to sigh. "We, as in my Frisk, Bones, and I, have been tossing around the idea that Star isn't a fell variation. That she's an original. I'm hoping that this is where we get the details." He shrugged. "Either that or the prime asshole of assholes is messing with us."

I snorted and turned to the dark, eyes on a particular point of light. We came to it faster than I expected, going through a rift and coming to rest near a building in the middle of a field on a sunny day.

Blue stood there, hands in the pockets of his hoodie, waiting for us to come down. "*hey, kiddos."

I jumped down from the gangplank. "Expecting us?"

"*frisk is, so i guess i am too. follow me."

Instead of into the building, Blue led us across the field and into the woods beyond. After a short walk, we came to an ornamental, black, iron gate and a small road into a cemetery.

Blue pointed with one boney finger. "*you're looking for the dreemurr mausoleum. make a right at the first turn and walk all the way to the bank of mausoleums. the dreemurr one isn't hard to find. just look for the delta rune."

I raised an eyebrow. "Not coming along?"

"*frisk says this is chara business, so no. i'll be here when you're all done."

The cemetery was a peaceful place, heavily wooded and filled with golden flowers around old tombstones and new. Taking the first right led us back to a rock wall against the side of a hill and a row of mausoleums interspersed with heavily decorated crypt entrances. As promised, the Dreemurr mausoleum wasn't hard to find. A big Delta Rune was carved into the stone door.

The lock was undone and the stone door stood ajar. I pushed on it and it opened easily to reveal a wide staircase made for monster feet leading down into the dark. Brass and I looked at each other for a moment, before shrugging and pulling out flashlights. I went first, taking the steps carefully. We might have descended fifteen or so feet when the stairs spilled into a large, rectangular room of well laid, blue-gray stone. In alcoves long the walls stood large sarcophagi with a statue of the Dreemurr who lay inside, resting on the top. Going past several goat monsters we stopped at the one, lone human in the room.
Stephen eyed the tomb. "We're not going to open that, right?"

A voice encompassing all of darkness and all of hope, laughed. "I'd rather you not. I wasn't embalmed so my body isn't exactly in great condition. Exhuming me from the Ruins to move me here didn't help."

I turned around to see a ghostly version of myself, wearing my red shirt, black slacks, and black coat. My shoulders dropped.

"What? I liked when I looked like you. We're really damn hot."

I frowned. "I'm here. Get on with it."

The ghost floated around me to sit on its statue. "And I remember that 'don't waste my time attitude.' An attitude that didn't apply to those we loved. You'll have to forgive me. I do get visitors. Azzy and Frisk are pretty frequent, and Az likes to bond with me for strolls, but otherwise, I don't get much conversation."

The ghost gestured vaguely in the air. "But you know why you're here. Star. Problematic Frisks, right? But damn was it ever hard not to love her. I remember lifetimes as the most evil bastard I could possibly be, but all it took was a 'please' from Star and I'd melt. A stern look and I fell into line."

"Star choosing you as her partner is no accident. You two hitting it off so well was always in the cards; engineered by Frisk since the beginning. Which is a good thing because Star is, as you and others have long suspected, an original variation. The Comedian waiting by the gate calls her the Amaranth Frisk: the undying flower of the void. The only one who can effectively fill in for any other Frisk."

A thought occurred to me. "Does that mean she can also fill their role? Open barriers and the like?"

The ghost nodded. "She's an extremely powerful being. That said, she may never reach her full power, and that's okay." The ghost appeared to sigh. "But it is also the reason why she collects Charas. She needs multiple Charas to assist her. And anytime she calls, we will go to her."

The ghost looked up at the arched ceiling. "There are versions of us out there right now, seething that she was hurt, even though they've never met her. They don't even know why. And there are others waiting, knowing that, at some point, they must assist her. And they are eager for it."

I frowned. "If she needs multiple Charas, what makes my being her partner so significant?"

The ghost held out both arms grandly. "Isn't that obvious? You are the very second of us. Uniquely powerful and so uniquely suited to care for her even while caring for another Frisk of unique and incredible power. But I'm getting off track. I called you here for a lesson."

The voice changed, growing dark. "To teach you something you aren't technically supposed to learn for years from now."

I shivered and willed myself to step back, only to find I couldn't move.

"You're learning to control our power in small doses, but you still lack the ability to stay aware of what you are doing when our full power is summoned." The ghost floated away from its tomb. "The reason you remain unaware is your own emotional state. It consumes you and you feel like you're back in your corpse, feeling the worms eat your body while it rots away."

"I don't want-"
"To remember? Too bad. It's holding you back and I hate being held back."

I tried to move, to do anything, and wondered why the hell Brass, Stephen, or C weren't doing anything. I couldn't see them. Where they behind me? C wasn't on my shoulder. Where did he go?

Ghostly hands touched my head, sliding through my hair before sinking in. An awful, icy cold dug into my mind and I screamed, except no sound came out of my mouth.

The world was dark. Dirt and mud pressed around me. The roots of the golden flowers reached down, into my skin, digging deep. Insects crawled all over me, fungi and mold grew over my exposed bones. Something gnawed on my stomach. I whimpered, unable to do anything other than feel. The thing that gnawed on my stomach crawled up inside me.

"Make it stop! Please! Make it stop!"

I wanted to cry, but my eyes had already rotted away. I wanted to scream, but my vocal cords had been snapped by the monster who'd cut open my neck. I wanted to push the thing eating me out, but one arm had been severed in my escape attempt; the other half eaten. I was helpless in the dark.

A hand reached out, touching one side of my soul: Sunshine's soft touch. "Hey. We'll be together forever. Remember?"

Star's hand touched the other side. "You always bear my burdens. Let me bear a few of yours."

I looked down with my eyes at my hands. I wasn't a corpse bound soul, locked in darkness. I was a living breathing person. I shuddered.

"No. It's not your job to bear my burdens."

The black ink dripped from my eyes, and filled my mouth. I licked my fingers, slicking them with the ichor. Squeezing my eyes shut, I brought forth the memory of those centuries in the ground; a child fighting a battle of attrition against his own terror. And once I was sure I held it firmly in my mind, I wiped my fingers across my forehead.

And erased it.

I opened my eyes. I was in the crypt, staring up at the ghost. It sat on its tomb.

"You did well. But I knew you would."

I blinked. "What happened?"

"I reminded you what having a partner meant. Now, whenever you need your- our -full power, you'll remember that being loved deeply by another will give you strength. And you have the deep love of two."

"I did something to myself. Erased something."

The ghost hopped down from the sarcophagus and floated toward me. "You did. Don't worry. It wasn't something you needed." He pointed to the right. "We'll talk again sometime, but right now, you'll want to catch up to the others."

I looked to the side and saw Brass walking up the stairs, leaving the crypt, Stephen walking slowly behind him. Without thinking about it, I rushed after them, only to stop when I hit the stairs. I looked back and nothing was there, just a silent tomb.
Brass frowned as we came out of the crypt, blinking against the light. "Who did you see down there?"

I shrugged. "I saw myself."

"I saw me."

C nodded. "I saw myself as well."

Brass turned to his second. "Stephen?"

"I saw you, but that makes sense right? If you each saw yourself, I would see my version of him. So I saw you." Stephen gestured to C. "Your Frisk has spoken to the Prime Frisk, right? What does she see during those conversations?"

C's eyebrows went up. "She sees herself."

"Then the experience makes sense. We saw and heard individually."

Brass stopped in his tracks. "Did we all have different conversations with Chara at the same time?"

Stephen nodded. "Yes. He even told me that was what was happening."

"So what did he say to you?"

Stephen smirked, but it was soft, unexpected. "He said thank you."

Brass blinked. "Really?"

Stephen nodded. "I expected him to be... I don't know... The complete wad I call my best friend?"

Brass snorted.

"But he wasn't. After all the things I've heard and seen, the darkness I expected wasn't there. Instead, there was this deep warmth. He was filled with incredible gratitude, like my being there was its own, unique blessing. He said that it was because of me that he opened up, and learned to trust others, to accept offered friendship. That I was the reason, in other lifetimes, that he had friends. That because of me, other Charas opened up and that change meant that even in places where he'd 'won,' he didn't become an awful destroyer of worlds. And he was sad that Frisk, Asriel, Cephas, Anne, Mary, and Meritamen weren't with us, he missed us all so much."

Brass looked back toward the mausoleum. "He said that my lifetime was the one he loved best. That, of all the many, amazing lifetimes he'd lived, mine was where he'd learned his most important lessons. That hurts don't have to mean forever, that wounds can be filled with love, and mistakes could not just be made up for, but forgiven."

He looked down, tears in his eyes. He wiped at his face with the back of his arm. "Damn."

Stephen put an arm around his sovereign's shoulders. "Thinking about Miss Luxon?"

Brass laughed and it came out half choked. "That's Mrs. Bromer to you."

My phone rang and I stopped among the gravestones to fish it out of my pocket. I expected Star, but instead, it was 01.

I answered. "Yes?"
"Star said you were out with Brass on the Pearl. Call Fase for the coordinates and come pick me up at Site Alpha. I'll be bringing a few people with me."

"Do we have reconnaissance on the target?"

"Yes. And the situation has changed."
Sophia's voice filled the air in my office, "Dimensional teleport detected."

Kris put his coffee mug down on the small conference table on the other side of the room and flipped through the papers on his clipboard. "We don't have the *Pearl* or the *Phantasm* scheduled for arrival today." He dropped the clipboard. "Wait. Did Sophia say 'dimensional teleport?' As in, a direct teleport?"

Sans' terminal, a glowing blue and white interface, activated at the same mine did, both appearing in mid air in front of us, though mine was a multi-colored screen, being one of the first things I experimented with altering.

Sans' brow bones went up. "*yep. that's exactly what she said."

My terminal opened a feed from a set of cameras hidden in the trees surrounding the grassy, landing zone for anyone wishing to come or go from Site Alpha. Kris walked around to look over Sans' shoulder while I switched my feed to the closest camera to get a good look at our visitors.

Kris snorted. "Ten gold says it's you."

I raised an eyebrow at him. "Excuse me?"

"Besides Dragoon, you are the only jerk I know who is asshole enough not to call ahead."

"Sans, would you kindly put a sharpened bone through my brother in law's skull for me?"

"*settle down, children."

I gave the Bone Man a mock glare and turned back to the feed. An Undyne, tall and blue, with hair as red as a burning sunset stood with a teenaged Asriel. Well, teenaged by human age comparisons. He was wearing a dark purple suit with a very special kind of armor sporting the Delta Rune over his chest in bright silver. And despite how imposing he looked, the expression of fear on his snout undermined the authority of that look. He had one arm around a human male, his other hand holding the human's hand tightly. Undyne looked just as worried, ready catch the human if he fell. After a moment or two, the human patted Asriel on the shoulder and stood up straight, revealing himself to be a Chara.

"Called it."

I flipped Kris the bird.

After a moment of orienting themselves, our visitors began to walk toward the facility.

Sans' boney fingers trailed over his terminal. "*they definitely didn't use a travel machine. signature's all wrong. they got here the old fashioned way."

Kris shrugged. "Then he's got the normal stomach flop of the first couple jumps."
I stood, dismissing my terminal. "Sophia? Hook into Fase and get me a timeline ID on these three." I waved at Kris. "Come on. Let's go see our newcomers."

Kris patted Sans on the shoulder before following me out the door. We headed down a hall filled with photos and various awards, including the photo of Princess holding her plaque, and out into the massive, glass atrium that made up the formal entrance of the building. With void travel still something of a mess, the only people in the atrium were residential staff and site residents who were cleared to wander about freely. The teen Frisk with the vampiric Flowey waved from her seat at one window, her school work in piles around her; Flowey sleeping on her shoulder. Kris and I both waved back.

Exiting the building, I shivered and wished I'd grabbed my jacket on the way out of the office. The sky was bright and clear today, but the forecast promised snow. The dog monster and human guards at the gate watched the three approach with interest, and without worry since an alarm hadn't been activated. Both stood back as I reached the gate. As our visitors crested the hill and came down to the gate, I got a decent look at them.

Undyne was your very standard Undyne, except that she wore the same style armor as the teen Asriel. It was close fitting, and made for freedom of movement. Very different from the many Undyne's who cobbled together armor from whatever could be found in the dump underground. And while any Undyne was dangerous, this one had that thread of barely contained violence. Something had been taken under her watch and she was damned sure to get it back. Asriel appeared to be in the process of trying to get himself pumped and failing. Whatever worried him was crushing him.

Chara, however, looked determined; his expression a calculated calm. But I'd seen that look before on my own face. It was designed to hide an express desire to cause grievous bodily harm to someone. He was of average height, appeared to be of average weight, had short brown hair, and brown eyes that had a slightly reddish tinge.

These were three people on a mission.

Sophia's voice filled my ear. "Identified! These three are from the original variant timeline Agent Serif has identified as the home of the inter-dimensional physicist who shut down void travel. On this timeline, intra-dimensional physics is highly developed. As previously determined, there are no known Seraph contacts with the timeline."

"Yes."

The three got to the gate and Chara beat me to the questions, "Are you 01?"

"I am. How do you know that and how did you get here?"

He shrugged to dislodge his backpack from his shoulders. "With the information my wife left for me."

I gave Kris a smile. "As usual, Church is spot on. I'm Chara Dreemurr, but most people refer to me as 01. This is Kris, my second in command."

"Chara Joul." He motioned to the goat. "This is my son, Asriel, and the two legged mermaid bodyguard is Undyne."

Son? I shook it off for the moment and motioned for them to follow me. "It's freezing out here.
Follow me."

Asriel's head jerked up, eyes enraged. "If you knew what was going on, why haven't you done anything about it?!"

Joul's hand came to rest on the goat's shoulder. "Calm down, Asriel."

"Dad…"

Dad, huh? I wonder what happened to his Asgore and Toriel. I sighed and motioned again for them to follow me. "We know your Frisk was kidnapped, but so far, there are multiple timelines on which she could be imprisoned. She also shut down our ability to do much to help anyone by shutting down our means of travel in and out of the void. We have a new method of travel, but it requires the expert skill of people who aren't agents." I looked over my shoulder at Joul. "I'm hoping your wife left you the information that identifies the correct timeline."

Undyne stopped in the courtyard, looking up at the glass atrium. "When I saw the outside, I assumed this was a fortress."

"Partially." I held the stained glass door open. "There are a lot of people who would like to steal the artifacts stored here, and people who are imprisoned here who would like to get out."

Inside the atrium, we passed one of the staff members cradling her newborn and Joul flinched.

Kris frowned. "You're missing more than just Frisk."

Joul nodded once, jaw set. "Frisk and our youngest, Benjamin, were kidnapped by another Sans."

"And your older children?"

"Our neighbors are keeping them." His mouth twitched.

"Worried about them?"

"No. I…"

I stopped in the hall. "You feel like you have another child you didn't have a month ago."

Joul frowned. "Two children. Why?"

"There's a phenomenon we've noticed over the years that we call 'baby bones' because it was first observed in the children of any Sans. Any person integral to a timeline's primary story will see any other person integral to their own timeline in a familial way. After enough time has passed, those bonds solidify and become permanent. For you it means, wherever your wife is, she's calling other children hers and those children call her mom."

Kris frowned. "Speaking of Sans, where is yours?"

Joul shook his head. "He was almost dead when we found him and is in a coma. Even now, Dr. Gaster isn't sure he'll ever wake up."

I opened the door to my office and found Sophia's cute little robot body busily setting out mugs of hot cocoa. "Sophia, cue their timeline for a medical visit."

"Done." She turned and left the office.
Joul set his backpack down on the conference table and unzipped it to pull out a tablet. "My wife is the best dimensional physicist on our world and, at first, we thought someone had kidnapped her for her skills. When we saw nothing, not even a ransom, I worried that she’d been taken for her part in opening the pocket dimension that released monsters back into our world. That she and Benjamin were dead."

Sans looked up from his terminal "*what changed that?"

"I discovered my wife had dimensionally folded a piece of the backyard and left all of the information about where she was, what was going on, and how to undo it in the folding." He unlocked the tablet screen and turned it to me. "In the information was how to get here. Who to talk too."

I looked over the text on the screen, frowning deeply.

"Is it enough information to get my wife and children back?"

I nodded. "It is. Can you reverse what your wife did?"

He shook his head. "I honestly have no idea how she managed this. This is nothing like what we work with at home."

"Then I need the correct people to parse it and put together a rescue operation." I summoned a terminal and uploaded the information from the tablet.

Undyne snorted softly. "Woah. That's cool." She elbowed Chara. "Why can't you do that?"

He raised an eyebrow at her. "If my ability to create pocket dimensions isn't impressive enough, Mermaid, I can always drop you in one until you appreciate it better."

Undyne smirked and flicked the side of his head, a little of the tension in her unwinding.

I tapped my terminal, uploading the information to Fase. At the same time I set the terminal to identify the timeline Frisk Joul was being held prisoner on based on the coordinates provided. Kris worked on getting Asriel seated and the goat seemed better after a few sips of hot cocoa. I reached for a mug and stopped dead, eyes on my terminal.

"Oh f..." I bit off the curse.

Sans looked over my shoulder. "*that's bad."

"Sophia, where are the Pearl and Phantasm at this moment?"

Sophia's voice filled the air. "The Phantasm is transporting His Majesty, King Chara and Mage Frisk to Site Epsilon. The Planar Pearl is nowhere to be found. It's last listed location is Epsilon."

I pulled out my phone and dialed Star. She picked up before the first ring finished.

"Hey, Love!" She sounded excited. I bet a dress happened today.

"Hey, Star. Do you have any idea where the Pearl is right now?"

There was the sound of utensils klinking and I could vaguely make out conversations in the background. "Prime. Chara was summoned."

My jaw dropped. "That's not exactly a good thing."
Star laughed softly. "He'll be fine. He's only talking to himself."

She wasn't right, but she wasn't wrong either. The only time I'd ever been summoned, I'd seen myself.

"Thanks, Star. Love you."

"Love you too."

Sans gave me a sidelong glance. "*prime."

"Yeah." I dialed the Prick.

He sounded surprised when he picked up. "Yes?"

"Star said you were out with Brass on the Pearl. Call Fase for the coordinates and come pick me up at Site Alpha. I'll be bringing a few people with me."

There was a blip on the phone, a sign that C was with him and had hooked into the line. "Do we have reconnaissance on the target?"

"Yes. And the situation has changed." I hung up.

Joul watched me carefully. "What's going on?"

"Your wife and children are being held at a decommissioned Seraph facility and one that was designed with complete security in mind."

Undyne raised an eyebrow from where she leaned against the wall. "A prison."

"Was a prison. All inmates and materials were moved off site years ago."

"You hope," Kris muttered.

I glared in his direction, but he was right. Being the head of Seraph didn't mean much if someone decided that a Chara couldn't be trusted and the Sans who belonged to this particular world had been a serious pain for me, which had led to the decommissioning of the facility in the first place. The manifests said that everything onsite had been moved to Alpha, but at the time the move was made, I'd also been distracted by the original set up of Gamma.

All that said, the Sans of that world was also long gone. He'd fallen down a good 200 years ago, which meant some unknown was using the facility. But who? It wasn't Dragoon. That said, we still had no idea where he was keeping the people he'd successfully kidnapped.

Sophia came back in the office with a backpack and a duffel bag, handing both to me. "The Planar Pearl will arrive in ten minutes."

"Then it's time to head out. Sophia, alert Epsilon to our arrival and the need for a conference room. Send all files to C and tell him that I want Cross in the meeting. Yes, I remember that he's out on medical leave, but I need him on consult." I looked to Kris. "You're on till I get back."

"I'll hold down the fort. And I'll let Azzy know you won't be over for dinner tonight."

"Thanks."

Joul repacked his tablet while Asriel finished his cocoa. I grabbed my jacket on our way out the
As we walked through the lobby, Asriel slowed down, getting a good look around. "Where is your Frisk? Is it the girl by the window? The one with the flower?"

"My world doesn't have a Frisk. That Frisk is a site resident. The flower is an entity named Flowey." I grimaced. "It's a version of you from a world where several bad decisions led to you falling down and being resurrected as one of the golden flowers."

Joul paused. "Why is she being held here?"

"She isn't. Not technically anyway. Flowey is the one in confinement and he's submitted to it willingly. When he touches someone, he attaches to them completely, digging into their circulatory system and feeding off of them. The only way to remove him after that is amputation. He's unable to remove himself even if he wants too. The only person he can attach and detach from at will is his Frisk. And with that in mind, Frisk eats a special diet to sustain them both."

Asriel appeared to ponder what I'd said. "So, what happened to me here? On this world."

I held the door for them. "Here, you are my older sister. And she is married to Kris. They have a son and two daughters."

"Does she rule all monsters?"

"Not yet. Dad wants her to be able to raise a family without the political entanglements of ruling. When my nephew is old enough to find a wife and start a family of his own, Dad will retire and Asriel will ascend the throne."

We exited the gate, and made the top of the hill just as the Pearl came through a glowing rift in the sky. It circled overhead once before coming to rest in the field and lowering the gangplank.

Undyne's tight winding disappeared for a moment. "That's a steampunk ship!"

I nodded. "It comes from a steampunk world. There's a little bit of everything out there. Steam worlds, sci-fi worlds, fell worlds, horror worlds, happy rainbow fun worlds that make your eyes bleed."

Brass hung in the doorway at the top of the gangplank, his goggles on his head. "Welcome aboard."

Undyne gave Joul a bemused smile. "That's you."

He raised an eyebrow at her. "And?"

"Just saying…"

His eyebrow twitched. "Just saying that I could be doing more with my life? I swear to God, Mermaid, if you even think of giving me one of my mother's lectures, I will make you sleep in the barn."

I started up the gangplank. "I take it that dimensional physics is not what you've chosen to do with your life."

"I had a choice between staring at a computer screen all day in a corporate office or shoveling sheep shit. And I'd rather be as close to the source of my yarn as I can get."

Undyne jerked a thumb at Joul. "Can you believe that?"
"Yes," Brass and I said at the same time.

She looked between us. "The knitting is a thing, isn't it?"

I nodded. "Oh yeah."

Brass shrugged. "I just finished a new set of gloves for my brother."

We came up onto the flight deck where Stephen sat with Fell Chara, and chill went down my spine. His eyes, which were typically a muted kind of maroon, were a bright, shining red. Of course, our eyes were always a bright shiny red after a talk with the Prime Chara. Brass' always seemed to be that bright and shiny, so it didn't seem all that different to me. But the Prick? It was like the cap on his power had been ripped off and there was nothing to stop it.

I shook it off, refusing to let it bother me. No matter what had happened on Prime, he was still the Fell Chara. "How's Star?"

The Prick looked up from his tea. "I had to threaten her with a rewrite this morning."

I frowned. "Trying to work on her day off?"

Brass sighed. "'It's bad' is an understatement."

I gestured around the room, making introductions. "Chara, this is Chara Dreemurr, the very second Chara to ever exist. This is His Imperial Highness, Chara Dreemurr. We just call him Brass. And this is Lord Stephen Keenan Plant, Brass' Gentleman of the Bedchamber. You jerks, and Stephen, this is Chara Joul, his son Asriel, and their Undyne. Joul's wife is the Frisk behind the shut down."

I waited for Brass to put us in the void before continuing. "I'll brief everyone once we're at Epsilon on the situation. A thought occurred to me and I turned to the Prick. "Do you know why King Chara is going to Epsilon?"

He nodded. "I asked his wife if she could repair Dead Sass' soul and he said they'd be at Epsilon today."

I mused on that. "That's a pretty fast response for him."

The Prick shrugged. "It's for another Chara, and he's got a soft spot for the kids."

"Holy shit! I've never been so happy to see anyone!"

E.C. slammed into me and I hit the floor of the flight deck.

"Ow."

"Not apologizing!" E.C. sat up, the glow in his eyes bright, even as the area around him seemed to glitch in and out. "I know where Dragoon is hiding!"

I sat up, rubbing my shoulder. "Do you know where he's keeping the kidnapped?"

E.C. smiled wide. "He's not keeping them anywhere! I've been stealing them away. As of right now, they are all on Agent Helvetica's timeline."

I groaned, "And he hasn't told us this why?"

E.C. moved to float above me. "A fight with Dragoon destroyed his phone right before the shut
The Prick's glare was as ugly as it was jealous. It wasn't often he wore his heart so blatantly on his sleeve. Then again, of all Charas, E.C. could make the best case for being Star's partner over him. "Why haven't you reported in? Star's worried sick about you."

He gave a dramatic shrug. "Dragoon busted up my phone too." He frowned. "Even I have trouble getting in and out of timelines right now. I'll hang in the void outside Epsilon. If you need me, Star has my number." He disappeared.

Asriel frowned. "But he said his phone was broken."

Joul patted his son's shoulder. "Remember when I heard that voice in my head? The one that told me Star needed me? I'm assuming she can just call any of us." He looked up. "Who is she? Was it her voice I heard?"

"That voice wasn't her." The Prick shifted uncomfortably. "I'm guessing you picked up that Charas and Frisks are important on a much more cosmic level at this point. Star is a Frisk, one created from the void itself." He went silent for a moment and I wondered if Star was the reason he'd been summoned. "You'll meet her when we get to Epsilon."

We came out of the void, a glowing rift flowing over the Planar Pearl as we came to rest next to the Phantasm hovering lightly over Site Epsilon's parking lot.

Asriel walked over to the railing, looking out over the main building. "I was expecting another fortress."

I patted his shoulder. "Each site has its own dedicated purpose. Epsilon focuses on producing agents who fix anomalies in the field. They also have robust medical labs."

Asriel's snout swung to me. "Does that mean that Sans could come here and be healed?"

"An agent with a background in monster medicine will go to see him."

Asriel's stomach growled loudly and he smiled sheepishly, rubbing the back of his head. "Sorry!"

I motioned for him to follow me. "Come on. This place has some really good food."

Bones met us at the entrance, boney hands in the pockets of his bomber jacket, eternally relaxed. "We'll have conference room 6 in three hours."

"Good." I inclined my head to Asriel. "The goat needs a meal and I need to see my fiancé."

"Three hours!" Asriel fumed.

Joul put a hand on the goat's shoulder and the kid seemed to calm.

"We need to wait for the rest of the team to arrive." Bones held out a skeletal hand to our newcomers. "I'm Dr. Sans Gaster, but everyone just calls me Bones. I'm your escort for the time being." His single, pinprick eye slid over to me. "Will all three be joining us for the meeting?"

I nodded. "Yes. Why?"

"The Brothers Tarsus are here."

I mused on that for a moment. "Hold that thought. I'll probably need it after the meeting."
Joul, Asriel, and Undyne followed Bones down the sunlit hall.

"You look a lot like our Dr. Gaster," Asriel commented, but whatever the response was, I didn't hear it.

The Prick grabbed my arm. "We need to talk about Star."

Brass flanked my other side. "She's killing herself with work. It's like she's completely forgotten how to slow down and relax."

The Prick nodded. "It's the shut down. Without her connection to the void, she becomes manic easily. The little sliver in Brass' locket only helps so much."

I frowned. "Hopefully, undoing the shut down will put her back to rights."

Brass shook his head. "Is there enough information from Joul to fix it now?"

"I don't know. We're going to need Sunshine here to parse it. But even then, I don't want to undo it until Frisk Joul and her children are safe. I won't risk their lives on the chance that whoever has them imprisoned notices that void travel is back online." I sighed, shoulders dropping. "It just means we have to keep Star together until then. Did you tell Star, I was coming?"

The Prick shook his head. "Nope."

I smiled. "Good. C, where is Star?"

C appeared on my shoulder, a red glow. "Arranging an ice skating trip upstairs."

"Did you say 'ice skating'?"

I turned at a voice I didn't recognize and found an adult Chara with long, brown hair in a green shirt and black slacks. What is it with us and green?

Any enthusiasm C had drained away immediately. "Yes."

"Is there any chance my brother can go along? He loves ice skating. It'll... It'll help him feel better."

The Prick frowned. "I'll mention it."

"Thank you." He turned and walked away, disappearing into Dr. Papyrus' suite.

I jerked a thumb at the suite. "Give me the story later?"

C nodded and disappeared. Brass gave the Prick and I a salute before heading up the stairs. We made the top of the stairs just in time to see him disappear into one of the apartments. I caught Star's voice coming from down the hall in the other direction and turned on my heel. Only a few steps away was the only woman who'd made me forget about work, forget about responsibility, forget about Seraph, forget about being a Chara, forget about myself.

The long months I'd spent worried sick about her still sat like a stone in my stomach. No amount of long nights on the phone or hours spent on facetime could dispel the ache in my heart and the growing unease in my mind. The reports on her behavior from Brass only underlined the way she laughed like she wasn't wound up so tight I expected her to crack open at any moment. Was this what Crow meant when he said she'd been badly injured?

Stopping at the door of the Ossein apartment, I stared at her, the fading light of winter lighting her
sublime face. Star hadn't caught sight of me when I entered the room, slipping up next to her and sliding my hand in hers. Without looking, her fingers curled around mine instantly accepting of such a gesture, even if she didn't know who's hand it was. I spun her quickly, leaning her over backwards for a kiss.

The kids might have started giggling a that point. I wasn't sure. I was too busy enjoying the feel of her lips against mine, her arms wrapping around my neck. Star sighed when I pulled back to rub my nose against hers. There wasn't any tightness around her eyes, just an overall winding. Was it because she couldn't fill herself with the void, she was filling herself with work in order to keep the ache at bay?

"See? I told you he was better looking."

I stood up straight, pulling Star up with me, holding her tight against me. "Better looking than who?"

Princess pointed at the Prick who shrugged.

But we look almost exactly- Oh. "Throwing shade, are we?"

"Gotta live up to my nickname, right?"

Star gave us a disapproving pout. "You can both stop."

Only for you, Star. "I heard a rumor that ice skating was on the table."

Star nodded and put a hand on the new Frisk. "The Little Lion hasn't skated before."

The Prick sat down. "Mr. Child Torture requested that we take his Asriel along."

The Little Lion frowned deeply, as Princess hugged her tightly.

Star stepped away from me to kneel in front of her. "Is that okay with you?"

The Little Lion thought about it for a little bit, eyes on the ground, before she nodded. "It's okay."

"You sure?"

"Yeah." Her mouth twitched for a moment before she looked up at Star. "It's not his fault his brother turned out to be such a shitty asshole."

Sans Ossein opened an eye socket. "*Language!"

The girl flinched and gave him a sheepish smile. "Sorry, Sans."

The Prick sat up straight, blinking a little, like he'd just seen a ghost. Star chuckled softly and Mr. Ossein smiled softly. Did I miss something?

I shook it off. "I'll drop my stuff in the apartment and join you."

Star's fingers entwined with mine. "I need to grab my skates." She looked around me to the Prick. "Gather everyone from Suite Fourteen for me?"

He nodded and stood only to have the Little Lion grab his hand. Fell Chara gave her a smile and she trotted along with him out the door. Star drew me along with a smile but the moment we stepped out the door, it fell, eyes going wide.
"Francesca isn't with you, is she?"

I raised an eyebrow. "No. Why?"

Star looked down the hall toward the Little Lion getting ready to ride the banister down the stairs. "Remember what she said she'd do if she got her hands on the Chara she watched slit a child's throat?"

"Yes…"

"That Chara's here."

"Really." I looked over at the Lion as she slid out of sight, laughing loudly. So she would be the child Francesca was so keen to avenge.

Star fixed me with a most disapproving gaze. "Chara."

I held up both hands. "I'm not strangling him, am I?"

"No. But you aren't here to play either. Should I get my uniform?"

I put my arm around her waist. "You are off today. There's a meeting in…" I checked the time. "Two hours, forty-five, and that's it." I leaned in, putting my forehead against hers. "You can't work and work and work and hope it will make up for the disconnection to your very essence. All it will do is burn you out."

I took her hands in mine, swinging them a little. "I haven't gotten to see you skate in forever."

She smiled, biting her lower lip. I leaned in quick, stealing a kiss before pulling her down the hallway to her apartment. Her hand trembled in mine and she kept her lips tightly pursed as she opened the front door. The door clicked shut behind us and I barely had time to drop my duffle before she jumped into my arms; her lips pressed to mine.

There was a soft snort behind us and Star groaned, turning to look at Umbra. The Umbreon was snuggled up with large Luxray, both sleeping.

I raised an eyebrow. "Sleeping in the middle of the day?"

"I'm going to have another egg on my hands. I just know it." Star huffed and gave me smile. "So how many kids are we having?"

I shrugged. "We're both effectively immortal so we might end up having as many as Mage Frisk and King Chara."

Star blinked. "They only have four kids."

"They only have four kids right now. They don't act like it, but they're both hundreds of years old. They have a bunch of kids, raise them, take five to ten years off, and then have another bunch. I'm pretty sure the current brood are kids 64 through 67." I frowned. "Aren't they here right now?"

Star nodded. "Mage Frisk looked over my sisters when we got back from the boutique. She said she needs to consult with Snow, but she's sure they can fix Chara's soul, make it one piece again. So we're waiting on Snow to get here. The Twins have been really busy ferrying everyone around."

"They don't seem to mind it."
Star smiled. "They love it!" She stepped away from me, heading for her room. "Let me grab my
skates."

I looked down at the pokemon napping together. "If Umbra does lay an egg, I'll take it. It's been a
while since I've raised a pokemon and the kids at Alpha would enjoy having an Eevee around."

Star came out of the bedroom in a pair of leggings and a black hoodie that read 'Lutz go to the rink.'
Ten gold says her dad bought her that one. She hooked her arm in mine.

"How did you change so fast?"

Star gave me a devious smile. "I think a better question is, 'How did I resist a strip tease?'"

I thought about it. "You know, as much as I would like that, I'm still wondering about the fast
change."

"I was wearing my skating pants under my jeans. It's really cold out today."

I opened the door to a face full of Frisk Boneweaver.

"Oh good! You're both ready." She smiled brightly. She grabbed Star's hand, pulling her down the
hall. "Come on! I've been dying to go skating and you wouldn't believe how fast our guest perked up
at the idea!"

Star put an arm around her. "Did the Little Lion ask him to come along?"

"Yes. It was a bit awkward to start, but smoothed out pretty well." She looked back over her
shoulder at me. "I hope things have been going well at Site Alpha."

"It's been quiet."

She gave me a conspiratorial smile. "Makes you miss Star all the more, right?"

Yes. Yes it did. "Stop fishing for salacious information."

Star pulled her along, laughing the whole time. "Oh man, your fiance is right. You are the bad one!"

Rather than a general piling into cars, Dr. Papyrus took us on a short cut from the hall once we were
all gathered together.

Mrs. Ossein sat next to me in the bleachers around the rink. "Why aren't you out there? I know you
skate."

I watched Star and the Prick skate together, talking as they went. "This is their time together." I
shivered a little and zipped up my jacket. "How did dress shopping go?"

Mrs. Ossein smiled warmly and a little sadly. "She found one."

I reached over and rubbed her back. "How about you, Miss Breen? Doing well?"

Mrs. Ossein's eyes turned red for a moment and another voice fell from her lips. "I'm all right.
Constantly worried about my nieces and nephew, but that's normal."

Steam Frisk skated by with Charlotte, Brass having gone off on the Phantasm to retrieve White and
Snow. Princess and Sophia chased after Brandon, dodging around Prince Chara and Prince Asriel.
Dead Sass floated along next to Frisk Boneweaver both involved in some conversation. The Little
Lion came by, clutching the wall tightly, her face set with determination even if her feet were slipping around.

Star stopped next to the Lion. "You won't learn to skate next to the wall like that." She reached out, catching the Lion's Asriel as he came by and he skidded to a stop against the wall.

"Eep!"

Star patted his shoulder. "Teach Frisk to skate."

Asriel blinked as Star skated away. "Uh..." He gave the Little Lion a sheepish smile, offering his hand. "Skate with me. It's easier away from the wall."

She frowned, but put her hand in his, allowing him to draw her away from the wall.

"Keep your knees bent and your feet hip width apart. Use your arms for balance."

She looked up at him with the most annoyed look I'd seen on anyone. "Yeah. Got that. How do I actually skate?"

If Asriel was aware of her sudden attitude, he didn't let on. "That's the fun part." He swayed from side to side. "Wobble like a penguin!"

The Lion snorted and burst out laughing.

"Come on, try it."

She started swaying side to side, mimicking him.

"Good!" He took both of her hands. "Now push off to the side with your right skate."

She did, and followed with her.

"On the left."

The Lion pushed her left skate out, moving back and forth, picking up speed. The goat prince stayed with her, guiding her around the rink.

Mrs. Ossein sighed. "She's got quite the attitude."

I chuckled. "A handful, huh?"

"All children are a handful." She took my hand in hers, holding it tightly, and sighed, eyes on Star. "Always a handful."

I put and arm around my future mother in law, holding her close while we watched everyone skate by.

My terminal beeped and activated, opening next to me. Sunshine had arrived with White and Snow.

I sighed. "I need to head back." I leaned in to kiss Mrs. Ossein's cheek.

She smiled. "I won't tell Star where you've gone until the skate is over."

"Thank you." I stretched when I stood and headed out into the lobby before short cutting back to the sidewalk outside Epsilon.
The *Phantasm* had returned and the latest arrivals were coming down the gangplank. Sunshine was being helped by White, her round belly making the gangplank a balancing act as she descended. Snow came down after them, a tall man who bore more than a passing resemblance to her Frisk behind her, wearing the very obvious dark suit of a bodyguard.

Sunshine waved when she saw me and I waved back, waiting at the door so I could hold it for them. "We finally have something!"

I nodded. "Finally. I'll introduce you to Chara Joul as soon as C tells me where he is."

C's voice carried over from a speaker in the wall. "Cafeteria, on the mezzanine."

"Thank you."

"Anytime."

Snow looked up to the speaker. "And Mage Frisk?"

"Same place."

"Thank you, C."

"Again, anytime."

I offered Sunshine my arm and she took it, leaning on me a little. "How far along are you?"

"Seven months." She rubbed her belly. "This one appears to be fully human like Amara."

"Boy or girl?"

Sunshine smiled, looking down at her belly. "Surprise. We are still hashing out names. You'd think it'd get easier the more children you have, but it only gets harder."

I looked back at Snow. "How are you, Lady Ravenbrooke?"

She smiled softly. "Just 'Snow' is fine. I'm doing better."

"Has anyone made Jon Snow jokes at you yet?"

White snorted. "She only lets Asriel get away with those."

"Boy or girl?"

Snow chuckled. "He knows better." She smiled back at the man behind her. "Jared, this is Chara Seth Dreemurr, the head of the Seraph Foundation. Chara, this my bodyguard Jared Spencer, the only man who's ever made it to home base with me."

Sunshine lost it, leaning against me to stay upright as she laughed.

Jared snorted before he burst out laughing. "What? I'm no longer a 'giant bee descending into the cavern'?"

White rolled his eyes. "I will never understand your sense of humor. Ever."

Snow gave him a satisfied smirk. "You're the one who complained about me not making proper sex jokes. Live with your mistakes, Sans."
He gave her a sly smile. "Technically speaking, I do."

"You shouldn't talk about Papyrus that way."

Talk about spiking one over the net. I chuckled and held the door to the cafeteria. Mage Frisk spotted us from the mezzanine, waving. As always, she looked stunning, a true queen in her blue dress with sparkling silver accents. And, as usual, her a husband who looked like the roughest anti-hero to walk out of a some, over top, action video game. I'd ask what she sees in him, but it's probably the same thing Star sees in me. Either that or sex that comes off of him so loud is also that good.

Snow climbed the stairs to the mezzanine quickly, clearly excited. King Chara stood to hold a chair for Snow only to watch her and his wife crash into each other with a tight hug. The grand jerk had a bemused smile on his face, as if he'd half expected this, and I wondered how often the ladies spent on the phone with each other. Having two people with the same magical language meet was a rarity in the growing vastness of the multiverse. White and Spencer both gave King Chara shrugs as they sat down.

Sunshine and I found Chara Joul a few tables away. Asriel had a growing goat monster's amount of food in front of him and it looked like he'd just finished eating. Undyne sat next to Bones with a cup of coffee, still wound tight, but less on guard.

I made introductions. "Chara Joul, this is Frisk Dreemurr. Sunshine, this is…" I trailed off at her bemused smile. "Fine. Just get to work."

Bones stood to give Sunshine a hug, and pulled out a chair, helping her get situated. "How ya feeling, kiddo? Do you need anything?"

Sunshine shook her head. "I'm fine. Ready to be done, but still a month away from popping."

Asriel reached over, putting a hand on her stomach. "Are you having a boy or a girl?"

Joul groaned. "Ask before touching, Asriel."

Sunshine put her hand over the goat's. "It's all right. And we're having a surprise. All I know is that the baby is human and not a goat monster."

Asriel looked up sharply. "What do you mean?"

She gave him a patient smile. "I mean that my version of you is my husband."

His shoulders dropped. "That's really weird to think about considering my version of you is my mom."

Sunshine patted his shoulder. "That strangeness will fade after a while." She let out a whoosh. "Oh! Big kick! Hearing lots of new voices today, huh?"

"WOW!" Asriel's face lit up. "I felt that!"

I pulled an extra chair over and activated my terminal. "Sunshine here is Seraph's resident cosmologist."

Joul pulled out his tablet and set it in front of her. "Then I hope you can figure this out because I spent eight years in university studying exactly this and I have no idea what my wife did."

Sunshine took the tablet. "She folded entire dimensions…" She trailed off, eyes on the tablet. "Oh."
"What?"

"I've never been able to describe what I see. But you. You have words for this. An entire language devoted to something I've always just used numbers to describe." She waved her hand. A notebook and pencil appeared on the table and she flipped it open, diving into the notes, Bones reaching over occasionally to comment on something she wrote.

The somewhat hidden door on the mezzanine opened and Princess ran in to hug Sunshine around the shoulders; Dead Sass floating behind. "You're here! And you're so big!"

"I am!" She hugged them both before pointing to the table down the way. "Lady Snow is here to see you both. Don't keep her waiting."

Princess nodded and rushed over to the other table, climbing up onto King Chara's lap. My attention was drawn away by the small, glowing rings of gold that erupted in front of Snow. She drew Dead Sass over to her, holding the ghost as if the wispy body were truly substantial. Everyone at the table watched closely while a soul in pieces was drawn forth from Princess. Snow's eyes glowed a warm gold, a few drops of black ichor sliding down her face as the rings moved and flowed around the broken soul until the light died away.

Snow sighed and it ended as a huff. "I can't pull the pieces of her soul forward."

Mage Frisk frowned and leaned in. "Why not?"

Snow frowned sadly. "When Toriel burned Frisk to death the first time, it shattered Chara mentally and spiritually. She watched her own mother burn a child to death and pieces of her soul burned up in that betrayal. Toriel had spoken of saving children from Asgore and yet was the first to kill."

Snow's shoulders fell. "And I can't pull her soul out of time from before that moment because it would take her out of the picture completely. She would cease to exist and Princess' history would drastically change in ways I can't predict."

Sunshine looked up from the paper. "How about patching the soul with other pieces?"

Mage Frisk sat back to look at Sunshine, one graceful hand coming up to touch her chin while she considered the possibility. "Where would we get pieces to patch it?"

"My Chara." Sunshine looked back down at the notepad. "Don't you feel it? The change in him? I noticed it as soon as the Phantasm landed, but you have to know now that he's in the building. He's more powerful now. The chain that long held him down isn't broken. It's gone like it was never there. Ask him to make you the pieces you need."

Mage Frisk stood. "I'll retrieve…"

"No need." Sunshine smiled softly. "Chara," she breathed his name, like she was summoning him from some deep, dark well.

About thirty seconds later, the air turned thick and while the light in the room did not dim, it seemed to grow dark and strangely warm; comforting. The Prick opened the door, the sclera of his eyes black, the iris' glowing a bright red. Black ichor dripped down his face from his right eye.

He huffed, an exasperated frown on his lips. "I have a phone. You can text me." He blinked away the black in his eyes.

I felt something wet on my face and touched it, only to come away with a black ichor I knew too
well. I huffed softly and pulled out a tissue to wipe it away.

Joul looked at Sunshine. "Don't do that again while I'm here." He pulled out a handkerchief and wiped away the bit of black at his eyes.

"Oh… My cake…" I looked over the rail of the mezzanine and saw Chara Tarsus blinking black ichor onto his dessert plate.

Snow pulled out a handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes. "Well, that happened." She gave the Prick a smile. "Your sister believes that you might be able to patch Chara's soul." She ran her hand through Dead Sass' hair and I wondered how that was possible.

The corner of his mouth twitched down for a moment, and then he shrugged. He wiped at the black ichor under his eye, slicking his fingers. He looked down at Snow and Mage Frisk. "Guide me."

Snow took his hand, drawing him between herself and Mage Frisk as another golden glow took the table. Snow drew out Dead Sass' soul once more, this time arranging the pieces so you could see what was missing. Princess climbed down from King Chara's lap to rush around the table to her sister, hugging the ghost tightly. Asriel turned in his seat to watch, fascinated.

Mage Frisk's hand came up to touch the Prick's head, words I didn't understand falling from her lips. Snow guided his hand through the swirling rings of magic to the broken soul. He touched the soul, gently filling in the missing pieces, and slowly fusing the whole together.

Dead Sass appeared to take a deep breath and let it out as a sigh.

Snow pulled Chara back and Mage Frisk's hand left his head to touch Princess' shoulder, extracting her soul. The golden glow shifted and the bonds between both souls became visible. The bonds appeared as cords of varying lengths and thicknesses, and several colors. Snow reached into the magic, oh so gently, and moved the bonds around, cutting away some while repairing and strengthening others.

When she finished, Snow looked weak, but satisfied. The souls returned to the girls, as they hugged each other tightly.

White looked over the girls. "So how do we know if it worked?"

Mage Frisk pulled out the heart shaped locket hidden under her dress and opened it, revealing a shining, silver star hidden inside. "Save."

Princess looked at Mage Frisk for a moment before reaching out and touching the star.

There was a brief flash and Princess frowned. "I don't feel different..."

Mage Frisk closed up her locket and dropped back under the neckline of her dress. "Now. Load your save."

Princess closed her eyes and everything seemed to pause for the briefest of moments before continuing forward.

Asriel nearly jumped in his seat. "Wow! She grew a good three inches!"

Dead Sass reached out, touching her sister's now unblemished neck, the puncture scar gone. Princess pulled back her sleeves, staring at arms that had once been covered in the white lines of so many scars but now appeared smooth and unblemished.
Princess looked up at Snow. "What happened?"

Snow put a hand on her shoulder. "You are no longer supporting Chara with your determination and that has left it free to heal you completely, just the way it should. You are still connected, that is something that cannot be changed. But now, you'll be able to support each other fully."

The Prick held out his hands to them. "Come on you two. Your parents and Star are going to want to see you."

The girls hugged Snow and Mage Frisk before running back toward the hidden door, the Prick following behind them.

Jarod Spencer put his hand on Snow’s shoulder. "What didn't you do for her what you've done for me? For Asriel?"

Snow sighed. "It's not the same. Such deeply intertwined souls have a bond that isn't easily broken and separation is traumatic." She looked down at her hands, eyes watering. Mage Frisk pulled her close, hugging her tightly.

My terminal beeped, and I looked at the time. "We have fifteen until the meeting." I put a hand on Sunshine's shoulder. "I don't expect you to have anything ready for it."

She waved me off. "It'll be a while until I have this sorted and you don't need me to plan a rescue." She pursed her lips. "I might need someone to rub my feet though. They're starting to swell."

Bones stood gesturing to our guests. "I'll mention it over at Lab Four while I take these three down to the conference room."

I nodded. "See you there."

Fifteen minutes went fast and the room was a little fuller than I expected. Several people had ended up at Epsilon during the shut down, but no one seemed the worse for it. That said, I'd heard a few things about Princess' Toriel, but that was neither here nor there. What I was interested in was the amount of new people. Church had mentioned briefly that she was looking to onboard new recruits, which I'd at first was a bit overboard. Epsilon has a substantial group of excellent agents. Now that I could see them, I realized that it wasn't about Epsilon. It was about Star. They were all young and none of them saw Star the way older agents did. In a lot of ways, it was a blessing that I hadn't met her until after she'd been an agent for a while. She'd impressed the hell out of me with her effectiveness from the first moment. But older agents who'd known her longer remembered the scrappy little girl and that attitude was something that could kill a Seraph site when leadership change overs occurred. Church was determined not to keep her hard work intact and that meant creating a strong position for a successor.

I took a deep breath and pushed my terminal out for everyone in the room to see. "We now know where Frisk Joul, her infant son, and another two children are being held. And its a decommissioned Seraph site."

On the screen appeared a large building of high, white, solid walls resembling a cube. It sat on a rocky island long overgrown with greenery. A bridge from the mainland disappeared into one cube wall, the only way in or out appearing as a solid wall.

Cross leaned in. "Site Phi. I considered it as a base of operations for Midnight Collapse."

Church looked over. "Why?"
"It's almost completely impenetrable." Cross frowned and leaned over to point. "The only way in or out is the front gate where the bridge enters the wall."

I nodded. "The wall, as it appears, is almost solid. There is an entrance there, flush with the wall, and the area in between the door and the wall is set to keep water from slipping through the slight crack. You cannot teleport in or out of the building while the front gate is shut and the walls are thick enough that they can take a large amount of firepower before you can even make a scratch."

I touched the terminal, making the building appear as an outline and the interior to appear with four glowing people. "Thermal scans show a skeleton monster, a human woman, an infant, and a child near the middle of the facility. There is a way to blow the front gate, but it would alert the Sans running the show."

I turned to Cross. "You've scoped the place out thoroughly before. How do we get in without alerting the warden?"

Cross let out a breath in a whoosh. "Unless we've got someone who can turn into ink and slide through the walls, blowing the gate is our only option. It's why I decided against using it. It wasn't practical for ease of movement. Plus, the design was such that no one inside knew if the front door was opened or not unless they were in the control room. For a prison, it's good design. For a fortress, it's a liability."

Straight Man Sans raised a hand. "*did you say 'made of ink?' because i might be able to help you there."

I gestured for him to go on.

"*alphys called me a month or so back to tell me that she'd found our world's chara."

Church leaned over. "You've got one?"

"*yeah. and the weird part is that i know the guy. it's just that no one calls him chara anymore. it's a forgotten nickname. his name is charles larkin and alph said he could turn into ink at will. she said that he went toe to toe with dragoon and drove him off."

"Do you think he'd be willing to help us?"

"*i'm betting. alphys figured out that our timeline has these weird safe zones and all of them are marked with a gray delta rune. larkin is the one who identifies, marks them, and makes sure the marks are upkept. it was his place we found princess and dead sass in."

I nodded. "Get on the asking."

Sans nodded and stood, heading out of the room with his phone.

I changed the view of the facility so it showed an interior layout of cell blocks and offices. "As Cross said, the front gate opening and closing is completely hidden from the interior. If we can get the door open without the Sans inside knowing, we can send in a rescue team."

I pointed to a small office. "Frisk Joul and her son Benjamin is being held here, close to the facility's computer room." I pointed to what appeared to be a large conference room turned into a playroom of sorts with a bed in one corner. "This is where the child I believe to be another Frisk is being held. Sans appears to roam the facility."

"But I feel like I'm missing three children. Not two. Only two show up here."
I nodded and pointed to the glow of the older child. "If my guess is right, this is a Frisk and they are harboring the soul of a Chara. Two children sharing a body."

Church looked to Star pointedly. "Who is on the team?"

Star leaned forward to put her elbows on the table and covered her mouth and nose with her steepled hands. She closed her eyes for a moment, before sitting up. "I need three teams. The first to move fast and silent." She looked at her partner. "Chara." And then turned to look down the table. "Luna. " Her eyes went to the wall where our surfing swap Sans stood. "Sans. As soon as the gate is open, you three will neutralize the Sans inside."

"The second team is myself, Crow, Bones, and Brass. We'll retrieve the captives. Frisk Boneweaver, Prince Chara, Stephen, and Chara Tarsus will run backup. Frisk," she indicated Steam Frisk, "will manage our transport."

Church leaned forward. "Why backups?"

Star pointed at the glow representing Sans. "Because that isn't Dragoon and you don't seal something up in a prison like that unless you intend to keep something else out. And I'm betting that someone is Dragoon." She took a breath and let it out slow. "Whoever that Sans is, that child is not his Frisk. It's Dragoon's."

Church sat back, a slight quirk to the corner of her mouth. "We know from Fase that Dragoon's world was destroyed. If that is his Frisk, why hasn't his world come back together?"

Star leaned forward, eyes lighting up. "You told me months ago that you felt like the child you saw with Frisk Joul when you dreamed of her didn't have a world. That it might not exist because she'd burned the timeline away. That's Dragoon's Frisk. He did something and she set the world ablaze."

Joul's Undyne balked. "What the hell happens to a twelve year old that they are willing to do something like that??!"

"A lot of things." The Prick reached for the water in front of him to take a drink. His Frisks reached out, hands on his shoulders.

Star gave her partner a soft smile. "Maybe the shut down was about keeping Dragoon away from her. Maybe it's about keeping her safe."

The quirk of Church's lips turned into a full smile.

Steam Frisk leaned forward on the table. "Remember that Snow is an analog for the Chara inside that Frisk. Someone with already established magical skill. If they decided to take over, it can go bad for everyone."

Church nodded. "I agree." She looked to Star. "Add Red to your backup team."

*ah sugar puss, are you really going to make me work?"

Church raised an eyebrow at him. "Yes. Yes I am."

White swung his finger back and forth, indicating the younger set in the room. "Is no one going to point out that Star chose several non-agents for this?"

Red sat up and for a moment, his smile changed, like Blue was in the room. "*guess we'll see about that after the operation is complete."
King Chara snorted and gave me a bemused smile. "You know that this all hinges on someone we don't know agreeing to help us, right?"

The Prick gave him a sidelong look, eyes still a bright red. "He won't refuse."

King Chara turned to him with a smirk. "Oh please, inform me on how you know that."

The Prick shrugged. "For the same reason neither of us would." His eyes flicked to Star and back to King Chara. "It's all about who's asking."

Joul's son Asriel huffed. "You aren't taking us?!"

Before Star could answer, Joul's hand rested on his son's shoulder. "All of the people here train for situations just like the one we face now. I know, after so many months, that's it's maddening to be so close to finally getting our family back and not be able to help, but we've done our part. We need to let them do their's." He leaned over, pulling the young goat into a one armed hug and kissing the side of Asriel's head above his eye. "It's just a little longer."

The young goat sighed and nodded.

I sat down. "Does anyone have anything to add?"

There was a general shaking of heads.

I nodded. "All right. Everyone who isn't on assignment is dismissed. The rest of you stay. We have a lot of planning to do."
Episode 15: Loose Ends

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Core Issues: Season Five
By Nicolle

Episode 15: Loose Ends
(Bones is our narrator!)

Charles Larkin, a tall, slim cat monster of gray fur and green markings stepped off of the Planar Pearl. The end of winter sun glinted off the gold rings piercing his left ear and the gold edging of his long, green coat, and he paused for a moment to turn his face up toward the light, eyes closing tight. He gave a satisfied hum.

"Ah! The sun." His eyes opened and he smiled sadly. "I don't deserve it."

He turned and promptly followed Straight Man Sans into the building. When we'd landed on the horror timeline that'd managed to give us its fair share of trouble, I'd expected a refusal. Charas have a reputation. But, as Fell Chara had predicted, Larkin had been eager to help. He'd immediately asked about Shooting Star. He'd heard a voice months ago telling him to be ready. That he was needed.

And I found it more than just a little disturbing that the Prime Chara was investing so much into this. They've never been this active before… or ever.

Or maybe that's just my memory of it. Blue makes it sound like this isn't the first time at the rodeo, for any of us. We just don't remember it. I never get feelings of deja vu, but on the occasional mission with Fell Chara, I see it. He won't react with the information at hand. He reacts on something he distantly remembers.

But it never happens on a mission involving Shooting Star.

Guess she's just the new variable, huh?

After coming back from Prime, Fell Chara sat down with Sans Ossein, Mrs. Ossein, Red, my Sunflower, and I to confirm our suspicions. Star was an original variation and something about her gave her a very special leg up in dealing with Charas. C had gone as well, but he hadn't mentioned anything about the 'visit.' My wife hasn't said what she saw through their connection either.

The only person who didn't look the worse for wear afterward was Stephen.

Just inside the facility's glass doors, we found the kids all gathered together around Chara Lyall. The white haired boy was creating fairy lights in the hall and the kids ran around, attempting to catch them, only to have them pop and a fine golden dust rain down on them.

Princess giggled brightly only to gasp when she saw us. "Mr. Larkin!" She rushed over and the cat knelt for the oncoming hug.

"Hello, Little One! Look at you! You've grown so tall! I must say you look much better than when I found you all those years ago. And you've found your voice!" Despite not looking like he could, he lifted her easily. "Now where is your ghostly sibling?"
Dead Sass floated around to in front of him. "Here I am!" She hugged him around the neck from the other side and he rubbed his face against hers.

Straight Man lifted a boney finger, pointing between the girls and Larkin. "*you know them?"

"You found them in my house, Sans. How do you think they got there? I originally found them in Antowarah and took them to my home for safety. I'd gone out for groceries and on my way back I saw you and a few other off worlders leaving with them."

'*antowarah?" Sans shook his head. '*wait. why did you just trust me with them?"

Larkin set Princess down, patting her head once her feet were on the floor. "Antowarah is one of the old empire cities hidden beyond the dark forest. But I trust you because you are the only human in the Underground who doesn't deserve to be there."

'*alphys was telling me about that. if none of us remember the surface, how would you know that?"

"Because you were already dead when you got there. Whatever Dr. Gaster did to land him in hell, killed you, and he was clinging to your body when Tori and I found him. Your resurrection consumed him."

Sans gave Larkin a sour frown. '*didn't seem much to him after i was walkin' around."

Larking frowned and it looked strange on his face, like he wasn't used to making the expression. He set Princess down on her feet. "That's because we lost Tori. He'd hoped, on your resurrection, that he could give you back the life he stole from you, starting with Toriel. She was quite keen on you despite your being a corpse. And before you make comments about necrophilia, she was genuinely enamored with your apparent good looks and Dr. Gaster's descriptions of what you were like when you were alive.

"But I digress. The day the good doctor resurrected you was also the day Tori went missing. The dolls got her in Old Home and I've not been able to tell which of them is her."

Princess grabbed Larkin's hand. "If you knew, would that do something?"

Larkin gave her a smile. "With the doll kind, there is a good chance that you can remind them of who they were. It won't return them to their human state, but it would elevate them to the same status that I hold: a monster with full control over themselves."

Princess jerked on his arm sharply, pulling him down the hall. "What if it's Miss Damali?"

Larkin followed after her. "And who is Miss Damali?"

"She's one of the haunted dolls and she's really sweet on Sans!"

We rushed after them down the hall to the suite Sans called his home when he was on timeline. The door was open and Miss Damali sat on the couch, reading a book while drinking a cup of tea.

Larkin froze when he saw her, jaw hanging open. "Tori…" He rushed over to kneel in front of her. "Toriel! It's me! Chara!"

Damali frowned softly, blinking at him.

One of his legs shook as he looked up, eyes darting back and forth in the way you did when you were searching your memory. "Oh goodness. I need memories. Strong ones."
"Uh… We lost a bet with Queen Friva and we had to do the macarena in front of the whole court. Her Majesty laughed so hard she snorted her wine!"

Damali blinked.

"Remember when we traveled to Cernem, the crystal city, with Asriel, Blooky, and Loren? Az went to pick one of the crystal flowers and the rest of the bunch grew teeth and bit him in the butt!"

Her mouth twitched, the ghost of a smile.

Larkin took a deep breath, eyes still looking around and then settled on Sans. "The first time you saw Sans, you very gently pet his hair and talked about how it wasn't fair that he had to die for someone else's mistakes."

Damali turned her head to the door, her tightly curled brown hair sliding over her shoulders, to look at Sans.

"You spent days with Dr. Gaster, helping him strip the flesh from Sans bones in the hopes that turning him into a monster would bring him back to life. But when it came time for the skull, you couldn't. Instead, you held Sans' soul in your hands and sat crying in the hall."

Damali reached out, touching Larkin's face. "Chara?"

He hugged her swiftly. "Tori!"

Her jointed doll hands roamed his face. "You look so different."

"Last I saw you, you had actual skin. And a lot of adult acne."

Damali shoved him and got a toothy grin for her trouble. "Damnable jerk!" She sighed softly, eyes closing for a moment. When she opened them, she caught sight of Sans and blushed heavily. "Oh! Sans! Uh…"

Straight Man sat down next to her, taking one of her hands in his. "Hi."

Damali's smile was embarrassed to say the least. "Hello." She shook her head, brown curls swinging. "But how? How did you find me?"

Larkin gestured to Princess. "Dear little Frisk took me right to you. I suppose you just never stopped being sweet on Sans and, fool that I was, I never thought to look for you in Snowdin."

Larkin stood, the end of his long tail flicking back and forth. "I'll fill you in on the many things you've missed later. You'll start remembering more and more as time goes on and any chips and cracks you have should heal up. At least, they have with the other dolls." He leaned over and pressed his nose against her head. "I'll see you soon. Besides, you have some explaining to do. Being sweet on a corpse, of all things!"

"Charles!"

Damali moved to shove him and he nimbly leapt out of her reach. He gave her a wave and a cheeky smile from the door.

"You're such a jerk!"

He stood up straight. "Well, yes. That's not something that changed while you were gone."
Princess grabbed his coat, pulling on it. "Hey! Don't be mean!"

He gave her a little bow, hand over his heart. "As you request, Little One."

I motioned for him to follow me. "Come on. Star's going to want to see you."

Larkin's ears perked up straight and he followed after me eagerly.

My phone buzzed and I paused in the hall to check it, raising a brow bone. "Dr. Bluevale?" I answered. "Hello?"

"Yes, yes. I'm calling. Please calm down." Dr. Bluevale huffed. "Hello, Bones. Sans wants to talk to you and says it's urgent."

"Put him on."

There was a sound of bones clicking against plastic and the Sans under Dr. Bluevale's care spoke, "Bones?"

"I'm here, bud. What's up?"

"Dragoon! Wait… um… okay. Listen, I think… I think he's a version of me… or maybe I'm a version of him… or maybe I was supposed to be but… NOT IMPORTANT. Listen. There's a Sans in a big box. Like really big and he's the same as Dragoon. They're two different versions of the same Sans and…"

The manic tone died and Sans came through. "His world is gone too. He murdered his Frisk and he thought he could replace her with Dragoon's Frisk. He refuses to believe that he can't. He just thinks he needs to figure out how to make it happen."

I gripped the phone tightly. "That's why he's holed up in the prison. Why he shut down void travel. He's trying to keep her away from Dragoon while he figures it out." A thought occurred. "Why didn't you call Star?"

"She's pretty busy right now, isn't she?" He let out a shuddering breath. "Can't do this for long. Take a vessel to contain a human soul with you. I think you might need it…" He groaned and the sound of the phone hitting the floor crackled along the receiver.

"Sans!" There was the sound of a scramble and then Dr. Bluevale let out a relieved sigh. "He's all right. Just asleep." I heard the phone being picked up. "Did any of that make sense to you?"

"Yeah. It helps a lot actually. Tell him I said thank you when he wakes back up."

I could almost see the sad smile on Dr. Bluevale's face. "I will, though I'm not sure he'll remember. He tends to forget the more lucid moments." She hung up.

I shoved my phone in my pocket and turned to Larkin. "Wait here for a moment, I need to hit up the Boss Man for a second."

Larkin nodded and waited patiently at the bottom of the stairs, tail swishing. I walked up the stairs to knock on my brother in law's door.

"Come in."

I opened it, sticking my skull inside. The goat king was relaxing on his couch sipping a cup of tea as he leisurely leafed through the papers strewn on the coffee table in front of him.
"Do you have an extra vessel for a human soul?"

Asriel put down his teacup. "Not the question I expected."

"Remember the Sans Dr. Bluevale is caring for? The one we think is related to Dragoon? Turns out he is and the one we'll be going after is from the same variation."

"That's concerning."

"Yeah. Anyway, he said I should take a vessel with me. And rather than question that logic, I'll just go with being prepared."

Asriel looked at me for a moment and then shrugged. Setting down his teacup, he stood and went over to the bookcase on which the persistent souls of the long dead floated around in their vessels. Moving a book aside, he handed me an empty one.

"It's the only empty one I have." He frowned sourly. "It was the one my father was going to put Frisk in after he killed her."

I put a hand on his shoulder. "And we all know who won that fight."

Asriel smiled. "She did beat him over the head with his own armor."

I pointed at him. "Exactly."

I closed the door behind me. Back down the stairs, Larkin continued to wait, eyes on the sun outside. He followed me down the hall to conference room six and, despite the many people inside, his eyes zeroed in on Star as soon as I opened the door.

He gave her a bow. "Charles Larkin, at your service."

Star sat up with a bright smile. "Thank you for coming! I'm told you can turn into ink."

He nodded. "It's not the only trick up my sleeve, but Sans told me that you needed to get into a place so tightly sealed even rainwater can't seep in. Would rain be able to enter if it were sentient?"

01 nodded. "Yes."

Star frowned. "We aren't pulling you from anything important are we?"

"Nothing that cannot wait and I'm rather relieved to be gone right now." His face took on this strange, introspective look. "An obelisk as appeared in the middle of Old Home's square and it's attracting a lot of cats. Including me."

Luna snorted.

Star rolled her eyes at the vampire hunter. "This is the plan."

She stood and leaned on the table a bit toward the hologram of the building in the middle, using her finger to point. "The solid cube here is a prison structure. Where the bridge connects with the wall here is a door that is flush with the rest of the building. Water is unable to penetrate it because of a weather stripping inside the edges. But it's not perfectly sealed. Air can get through."

She turned to Larkin. "We need you to slip through here and into the control room to open the door for the teams."
I raised a boney hand, frowning a little at the lack of the void in my hands. "I just got off the phone with the Sans living at Site Sigma."

Star's eyebrows went up. "The one with the weird connection to Dragoon?"

"That one and he confirmed my suspicion that he was one of Dragoon's variation."

01 raised an eyebrow. "And?"

I pointed at the glow in the prison. "And so is that one."

Red's shoulder's dropped. "*well, fuck."

Star groaned. "Then there's no way that he won't know we're opening the front door." She dropped into her seat, deflated.

Larkin raised a hand. "Perhaps I can be of assistance there as well. I can transport people with me."

Luna shifted a little in his seat. "And what would anyone in that state be in for?"

"I've been told that it's like sitting in a dark room for a minute or so, no matter how long you were actually in there."

Star sat up again. "How many people can you take with you?"

"Four."

Star stood, smile back in place. "Excellent! Team One and Bones will go." She looked to me. "What else did Sans tell you?"

I pointed to the glow. "His world is gone too. He murdered his Frisk and Frisk chose not to come back. It destroyed his world. He kidnapped Dragoon's Frisk in the hopes that he can remake his own world with her."

My Sunflower rubbed her forehead with one hand, trying to rub away a growing headache. "That doesn't work. It never works." She shook her head. "Then that's why he shut down void travel. He's trying to keep her away from Dragoon while he figures it out."

I nodded. "That's what I said. So how did Dragoon's world go down if his Frisk is still out there?"

"She destroyed it. The real question is 'why?'" Star nodded to herself. "Team One, can you handle the change in details?"

Fell Chara gave Star a sardonic smile. "It'll be less creepy than my most recent adventure, so yeah."

"Good. Bones, you'll go in with them and handle the security system. While the Sans in the prison is busy with Team One, open the door for the rest of us."

"You got it."

"Everyone gear up. We head out in twenty." Star stood, giving Larkin a smile. "Thank you very much for your assistance in this. After you get the team in, please exit the building and return to the ship."

Larkin nodded. "I am happy to be of assistance."
"*why?*

Larkin blinked at Red, genuinely confused. "She asked."

Twenty minutes later had us onboard the Planar Pearl, each team going over their part of the plan and memorizing the prison's interior layout. The Pearl came on timeline a bit away from the prison, and moved forward low to the ground to mask it from the prison's outer sensors. Once we were on the ground, Larkin fell into a puddle of black ink. The ink rose up around Team One and myself. It didn't feel wet or sticky. It was more like a thick fog surrounding you. And then it was silent. Everything was black and quiet, but not uncomfortably so.

And then we were suddenly standing in the prison's control room. The room was painted a soothing green, the screens upon screens of security feeds set in white. While the team searched the feeds for Sans, I sat down at the computer controlling the system. The entire system was on standby with only the external security running.

I tapped my core for C. "C, shut down any internal alarms while I get the front door open."

"You got it."

Surfer Sans pointed at one camera. "He's roaming the halls in the north cell block."

Sans, Luna, and Fell Chara left the room, heading for their target. It didn't take me long to get the front door open.

"How we doing, C?"

"Good. I have complete control of the security system. Team Two is coming inside now and Team Three is ready at the door in case Dragoon shows up. You can meet with them in the hallway below."

I stood and noticed that Larkin was gone. Must have already headed back.

Avoiding a short cut, I slipped out of the room and quietly went down a near set of stairs to join Star and Brass on the floor below. Following the route we'd memorized, we worked our way to the computer room and the converted offices beyond. Blank, white wall after blank, white wall seemed to lead on forever and when I turned around, I found us not far from the stairs I'd originally come down.

I motioned for them to stop. "Hold up. We're caught in a loop. It's an old style of magic meant to make an area unpassable. We need a way around."

Star nodded.

Brass motioned for us to follow him. We went back to the stairs and went down, going underneath the target area to come up on the other side. Only to run into the same problem.

Brass pulled me close to whisper. "There isn't another way around short of cutting a hole in a wall. Can you undo the spell?"

I shook my skull. "I can't. But I'm betting Crow can."

Star stepped back into stance and Crow appeared next to her, a hulking brute of a ninja.

I jerked a thumb down the hall. "Can you take that out?"
The ninja's bulk melted away until your standard Dr. Gaster, glowing an interesting purple, stood there, one boney hand clasping his mandible. After a few moments, he nodded. "I can remove it, but whoever cast it will know that I have once it is gone."

Star frowned. "I don't have any word yet from Team One. Let's hope they're keeping Sans distracted enough that he can't react right away."

Crow nodded and turned to the spell. Disconnected from the void, I couldn't see its make up, but I knew what they looked like when lensed: a spiral galaxy with a softly pulsing center. Very pretty, and very effective. The air around Crow took on a purple hue as he worked on dismantling the spell, pulling it's pieces apart. When it broke, the hallway reset, and the doors that had previously looked far away, now appeared close.

Star carefully checked the first door before opening it to a large office converted into a playroom. Frisk Joul sat on the floor in a pair of blue jeans and plain blue tunic with a child Frisk in brown pants and a purple and blue striped shirt, a science textbook between them; in the middle of a lesson. A baby just on the edge of becoming a toddler napped in a basket next to his mother. Both froze when they saw us, only to gasp when they saw Star.

Star gave them both a smile. "Ready to go home?"

The child jumped to her feet. "Yes!"

Frisk Joul quickly gathered the child up, working him into a baby sling wrapped around her chest as she stood. Once he was secure, she held her hand to the child Frisk and both rushed to us.

Frisk Joul opened her mouth to say something when a Sans with a glowing yellow eye lurched into the room from a door hidden behind a bookshelf. His clothing hung off of him in strips, a black ichor dripping from the cuts and coating his bones in places.

"*WHY CAN'T I SHORT CUT?!" His mandible fell open at the sight of us. "*NO! NO! NO!" He rushed forward, grabbing the child Frisk.

Fell Chara's voice carried over the air from the hidden door, singing low. "Oh where, oh where did the little Sans go? Oh where, oh where can he be? With his magic cut short and his noose cut long, oh where, oh where can he be?"

Sans shuddered and turned to the door, his grip on the child loose. I rushed in, scooping the girl out of Sans' arms as Fell Chara, flew into the room, eyes black. Sans turned, running for the door into the hall, only to be clothes lined by Luna. Sans hit the floor as a pool of ink bubbled up under him. He fell into it only to be dropped out of a mass of ink on the ceiling of the playroom right in front of Fell Chara. Luna rushed into the playroom as Larkin reformed out of the ink, landing nimbly among the toys.

Our Surfer Sans appeared next to Star. "Did you know your partner would lose it on that guy?"

Star grinned sheepishly. "Maybe?"

Brass crossed his arms over his chest. "He shut down void travel and in doing so, nearly killed Star. As far as I'm concerned, he's getting off easy."

Frisk Joul ran out of the room, clutching her son to her chest. "Follow me!"

We raced after her to the computer room. Multiple, large, black servers filled the room and Frisk Joul flipped up a small panel on the first one, revealing a red button.
I gave her an appreciative smile. "Kill switch?"

She nodded. "All I was waiting for was a rescue." She slammed the button with her fist and the computers went black. A moment later, every single one of them rebooted, running a script down the screen. And as the lines of code flew by, I felt it: the void opening back up to me.

Star gasped, hand coming up to brace herself against the wall. She breathed in deeply, eyes turning an inky black. She shuddered, a deeply satisfied smile curling her lips.

The child Frisk jumped from my arms, rushing over to her. "Are you okay?"

Star nodded, standing up straight. "Better than okay." She reached behind her neck, unclasping the golden, heart shaped locket and clasping it around Brass' throat. She touched it gently only to lean back against the wall, breathing deeply, like she was trying to suck in as much of the void as she could in one go.

There was a crash in the playroom and I ran back to see Sans teetering. He let out an anguished groan. "You Idiots! Now he can get here!"

Out of nowhere, Dragoon appeared, only half of his mandible left on his skull. With one quick swipe of his sword, he knocked Sans backward into a wall. He slid to the floor, skull waving back and forth, dizzy.

"I could always get here. Your little folding trick didn't work. The only thing that kept me out was this damnable prison. Now, where is she? Where is my Frisk?"

Sans slowly flipped Dragoon the bird. "*Fuck you."

Dragoon looked down his nose hole at the Sans on the floor. "Fine." He disappeared.

Frisk Joul screamed and I turned back, short cutting to the computer room. Dragoon had grabbed Star, who swayed on her feet a little, a knife to her neck.

Luna and Brass both stood there, mouths hanging open. "Really?"

The pinprick whites of Dragoon's eyes were on his Frisk. "Come with me, girl. And I'll let this one go."

Star exhaled, "Remember what I said, Dragoon? I said I want you to be just as scared of me as you are of Church." She disappeared only to reappear behind him, grab ahold of his coat, and fling him hard into the near wall.

"I am so very, very tired of you." Star slammed him into the wall again.

Dragoon pushed off the wall hard, knocking Star back toward a computer bank. Brass stepped in, catching her before she hit one the room's servers.

Dragoon gave her a wry smile. "You want me to be scared of you? Show me what you've got without your connection to the void." He fell into stance, eye sockets filled with challenge.

"Why the hell would I do that? What exactly do I have to prove to do something so monumentally stupid? Or have you already forgotten that I've beaten you senseless without it?" Star laughed, loud and hollow. "The only reason you'd make such a challenge is because you know that right now, you don't stand a chance!"
The half smile made by only half a mandible fell. Luna swung at Dragoon, and the skeleton ducked his arm, snagging the child Frisk. They disappeared.

Star pulled out her phone, hitting the speed dial. "Fase! Shut down teleports on this timeline! I want Dragoon trapped here!"

Fase's voice of cheery doom filled the hall from the speakers in the building. "Dimensional manipulation is back online. All teleportation has been locked except for team members."

"Where is Dragoon?"

"He has moved Frisk outside the building to the clearing opposite the bridge. Team Three has him surrounded."

Star nodded. "Chara! Put Sans in containment!" she shouted and disappeared.

Our surfing Sans offered Frisk Joul his arm. "Shall we leave?"

"My children-

"We're on it," I assured her. I put my hands on Brass's and Luna's shoulders, short cutting us out to the field.

The child Frisk was held in a bubble of magic. She pounded against the sides, trying to get out. Prince Chara, Stephen, and Frisk Boneweaver engaged Dragoon while Tarsus worked on popping the bubble. The three on Dragoon worked in tandem, Prince Chara disarming Dragoon anytime he tried to summon a weapon, Stephen blocking any strikes he might make, while Frisk Boneweaver wailed on him. Luna and Brass rushed in, overbearing Dragoon.

Unable to get away, Dragoon whistled loudly. His skeletal horse appeared and charged the group. Everyone dodged iron shod hooves while Dragoon reached up, pulling himself onto his horse. Prince Chara rolled to his feet first and jumped after Dragoon, snagging his coat and pulling him back to the ground. Dragoon rolled to his feet, coming up next to Tarsus, cold clocking him.

The horse rounded, coming back to trample again, only to fall into an inky black pit. The ink rose, Larkin reforming from it.

Dragoon threw down a ring a magic, effectively making a barrier between us, him, and the bubble. Red waved us back, ready to counter whatever stunt Dragoon looked to pull.

Dragoon leaned against the bubble, looking like he was having trouble. "While we were separated, I had plenty of time to think over the mistakes of the past and I realized where the problem in our world lie."

He waved a boney hand and the child screamed, clutching at her chest.

"It's that damnable brother of yours. He was the problem. Removing him is best for all of us. But don't worry. I've already identified potential new siblings for you. Ones who would be much wiser."

The child Frisk's scream turned into the howl of an older boy, her eyes turning red. A burst of magic rent the bubble holding her in half and blowing the barrier around them away.

The voice of an older boy fell from the girl's lips. "You trash! How dare you?!

Dragoon was suddenly in front of the child, lifting her into the air. "All too easy."
Red moved first, a bone strike in a deep red coming up from the ground and spearing Dragoon through in multiple places. Prince Chara slid under the girl, catching her as she fell from Dragoon's hand.

"Red?" Star called.

"*i got him, shooting star. The kiddo needs help."

The child mewled in Prince Chara's arms, gasping for air like she was trying to breath around something else.

Or someone else.

I knelt next to her, pulling out the vessel.

Star's jaw dropped. "Why do you have-?"

"The Sans at Site Sigma told me to bring it. And now I know why." I touched the girl's head. "You aren't actually bonded with your brother. You're harboring his soul, making yourself a vessel to keep him alive. But now it's too much."

I opened the vessel. "It's all right. We can hold him in here and he'll be safe."

"I don't want to lose my brother!"

An older boy's voice fell from her lips. "It's okay, Frisk. Just let me out."

"Chara!"

"It's okay. Let me out."

The girl let out a soft breath and with it, a red soul lifted from her chest and floated into the vessel. I capped it. The girl quickly grabbed the vessel from my hands, hugging it to her chest.

Frisk Boneweaver knelt next to Tarsus, waking him and checking him for injuries. Red busied himself putting Dragoon in containment. Stuck through with so many bones and unable to teleport he was done and seemed to know it. Fell Chara appeared with another containment unit, the other Sans inside. A third containment unit, this one much bigger than the other two, with 01 standing next to it.

He opened it and jerked a thumb at the opening. "This one is for the horse."

Larkin nodded and stepped inside the unit. He fell into a puddle of ink and the horse rose out of it. The ink rushed out of the container, reforming back into a cat monster outside and 01 shut the unit.

Red raised a brow bone at Fell Chara and jerked a thumb at the unit with Sans in it. "*he's not dead?"

Fell Chara shrugged. "I figured some other Charas would want to take a few shots at him and who am I to stand in the way of that?"

Star rolled her eyes. "You're both horrible." She reached down, picking up the child Frisk. "Come on. We know someone who might be able to give your brother a second chance."

Red, Tarsus, Fell Chara, and 01 stayed behind to finish containment while the rest of us walked back to the Pearl. Frisk Joul waited near the gangplank, shifting back and forth nervously. She let out a sigh of relief when she spotted the child Frisk only to gasp at the sight of the soul in the vessel. She
rushed over, falling to her knees to hug her daughter tightly, hand resting on the vessel, eyes squeezed shut against tears.

"You aren't without solace and we aren't without options." Star helped her stand and looked over her shoulder at me. "Could you get Snow?"

I nodded. Taking a moment to look into my own personal connection to the void, I stepped into the darkness, giving the whole of it a real look for the first time in months. I closed my eye sockets, enjoying the sudden silence, and let a long memorized equation take me home. I landed outside of Epsilon just as Snow and Mage Frisk came out of the building, bundled up for a walk. Snow’s bodyguard, Jarod Spencer, and King Chara walked behind them, White nowhere to be seen. Which meant he was probably drinking a cup of liquid cheese in my kitchen.

"Just the person I wanted to see."

Snow stopped short, looking at Mage Frisk for a moment, before her mouth made a little ‘o.’ "You mean me? What can I do for you, Bones?"

"We have a soul that could use a body."

She nodded. "All right."

Spencer leaned over her shoulder a little. "You were out of it for a week after you put me together."

Mage Frisk's delicate hand came to rest on Snow's shoulder. "How about I lend you some of my strength? Then maybe it won't leave you so bereft of energy."

Snow gave her a knowing smile. "You just want to learn how to do it."

Mage Frisk chuckled softly. "Well, there is that."

The women giggled softly, heads coming together.

King Chara raised an eyebrow at them. "Fill us in."

I nodded, holding out my arms. "Dragoon's Frisk was harboring her brother's soul. They weren't bonded. He's separated from her and hanging tight in a vessel."

Each placed a hand on either arm and I stepped us into the void. When we landed in the field the Pearl floated over, Snow leaned into Spencer, taking a few deep breaths.

She gave him an annoyed look. "You aren't sick in the least."

Spencer shrugged. "Frisk wasn't the first time he jumped, right? Maybe he gets that iron stomach from me."

Snow rolled her eyes. "Where is the soul?"

Star waved us to here. "Here."

Frisk Joul and the child Frisk both blinked at Mage Frisk, that thing between Frisks kicking in when she smiled. Snow knelt on the grassy field, holding her hands out for the vessel. The child reluctantly let go of the vessel, being as gentle as possible in the passing. Snow uncapped it, reaching inside to lift the soul out. It seemed to pulse in her hand.

She nodded. "Yes. I am a Chara too." A ring of gold lit up the ground around her. "We are even a
bit more similar than that."

Mage Frisk stepped into the magic, sitting next to Snow. "Can you do it?"

Snow took Mage Frisk's hand in hers, and a great mass of gold rings came up around them. "Yes."

A complicated set of golden, glowing rings spun around both of them, creating a barrier between us and them. Snow's voice sank low into a hypnotic chant. Symbols inside the rings began to glow and pulse, providing energy and components. The energy twisted and moved around the soul, encasing it in a white and gold cocoon that grew larger and larger. The cocoon cracked and disappeared, revealing a teenaged boy with light brown hair and pale skin. Mage Frisk waved a hand, clothing him in brown pants and a green and yellow striped sweater before he came to rest in their arms.

The magic faded away and Mage Frisk leaned into Snow. "We're pretty good at this." She yawned, one hand delicately covering her mouth. "But I see why'd you be out of it for a while after a spell like this. I could really use a nap."

King Chara helped his wife find her feet. "You are always ready for a nap."

Snow smiled up at her. "Really? You don't come off like that at all."

Mage Frisk waved it off. "The truth is, I'm terrible about it."

The boy groaned and tried to sit up, only to have his sister spear him back down with a hug.

"Chara!"

He hugged her tightly, tears in his eyes. "Frisk!"

Frisk Joul knelt next to both of them only to have them both scramble up to hug her.

"Careful of Benjamin!" she called.

The teen Chara leaned back a little to kiss the baby's head and holding his little hand. The baby reached up, smacking him on the nose. Chara wiggled his nose under his little brother's touch.

Star sat next to Snow and hugged her. "Thank you."

Snow leaned into her. "Certainly. But we should get back before White realizes I'm gone."

Spencer rubbed the inside of his arm. "I've got tired but still warm and happy on the brand, so he probably hasn't noticed that you aren't there yet." He offered her a hand and pulled her up. Snow teetered a little, looking tired, but keeping her feet.

Frisk Joul looked over her children. "I'm past ready to go home." She sighed. "How am I going to explain this to your father?"

01 came up behind Star, sliding an arm around her waist. "He's expecting two more children. He's waiting for you at Site Epsilon."

The child Frisk grasped her mother's and brother's hands and they followed Star up the gangplank into the *Pearl.*

E.C. appeared in front of 01. "Okay! Everyone hanging on Agent Helvetica's timeline is back home and-"
Star slammed into E.C., knocking him to the ground. "You're all right!"

"Star! Careful! I could end up glitching out your clothes!"

She hugged him tightly. "Don't care!"

E.C. sighed, and hugged her back, one hand resting on her head. "Didn't anyone tell you that I was okay?"

Fell Chara and 01 gave each other the same wry smile. "We might have forgotten to mention it."

E.C.’s red eyes narrowed at them over Star's head. "I hate you both."

"You can all simmer down," Star huffed.

"Yes, Frisk."

She smiled, satisfied, and snuggled against E.C.’s chest with a happy sigh.

"I really hate it when she does that," Fell Chara muttered.

E.C. flipped the bird behind Star's back. Fell Chara smirked and reached down, lifting Star off of E.C. with a quick jerk. She let out an eep and fell backwards into her partner.

Star gave all three of them dirty looks. "All three of you are in such deep trouble…” She pointed to the ship. "Home. Now."

They marched toward the gangplank, and Fell Chara's arm sliding around Star's shoulders, pulling her along. "I'd ask what you see in him, but it's probably the same thing you see in me."

A few minutes later, the Planar Pearl lifted off, taking us home.

We arrived to find Blue waiting for us, pink slippers wet in the snow, along with Steam and and Sans Boneweaver.

"*chara luna, prince chara, frisk boneweaver, brass, frisk, and stephen. front and center."

The six lined up in front of Blue with Steam and Sans Boneweaver looking like they were about to enjoy a good lecturing.

"*congratulations. you are all full agents."

Brass punched the air. "Yes!"

Steam's mandible dropped.

Sans Boneweaver grabbed Blue by the front of his hoodie. "*we did not agree to this!"

Blue shrugged, smile wide. "*well i did, so technically, so did you."

"*that is my one and only daughter and the future father of grandchildren!"

Frisk Boneweaver marched up to her father. "And full grown adults."

Steam gestured to the twins. "*they are children!"

Steam Frisk put his hands on his hips. "Excuse you! I happen to be gainfully employed and married,
thank you very much!"

Stephen raised an eyebrow. "And I'm sure Anne would be happy to attest to his adulthood."

Luna chuckled. "That's a bit lewd."

Steam Frisk shrugged. "It is a measure of adulthood on my timeline."

Brass put an arm around Prince Chara's shoulders. "You're coming to visit. I'll introduce you to Elizabeth. She makes the best hot chocolate."

"The chocolate is enticing, but to be honest, I want to see more of that." Prince Chara pointed to the flying ships. "Your world has to be amazing." He turned to Luna. "Looks like we'll be able to come by and see the baby."

Luna nodded. "Speaking of which," he checked his phone, "she's probably awake right now. I should go check on my girls."

Sans Boneweaver groaned, shoulders dropping. "*well... hell."

I patted his shoulder. "I told you it wasn't worth fighting when my wife first proposed the idea to you."

Star helped Frisk Joul down the gangplank, the child Frisk and her older brother hopping down afterward. "This way, please."

I gave Boneweaver a salute and moved to hold the doors to home open for Frisk Joul and her children. They stepped inside the welcomed warmth with a shiver.

"Hey, C? Where's Chara Joul?"

C popped up on Star's shoulder. "He's coming down the stairs now."

Frisk Joul perked up. She lifted baby Benjamin from the sling, handing him to the teen Chara, who cuddled the boy close. She turned just in time to be wrapped in her husband's arms.

"Oh thank God, you're safe!" Chara Joul leaned back a little, gently touching her face before leaning in to kiss her.

Star and I politely looked away while the kids giggled.

The teen Asriel pushed his dad out of the way. "Save it for later!" He hugged his mother fiercely, tears falling down his face.

Chara Joul shook his head and turned to the children, who suddenly looked nervous. The teen Chara held Benjamin out to him. He took the baby in his arms, kissing his head gently before handing him to Frisk. And then hugged both children at melted into him and I wondered how far and how long they'd been separated from their parents.

Star pulled me away, leaving the Jouls to their reunion. "So... What do I do now? I mean, do I report to Church?"

I put an arm around her shoulder. "You get to file paperwork."

She shrugged. "Yay. Fun times." She looked back at the Jouls. "I guess there are a lot of people to get home too."
I shrugged. "That depends on them, doesn't it?"

Star nodded as we got to the stairs and began to climb. "Charlotte is fine to leave, but she'll stay as long as Frisk Tamana is here, which is helpful. The Brothers Tarsus will likely leave soon and so will the Lyalls. The Luna family will be here for a little while. Asriel wants them to stay until he's sure that baby Isabella doesn't need anything."

Sophia, Brandon, Princess, Little Lion, and Chara Lyall all sat on the floor outside the apartment, taking turns rocking a large egg with green spots. The door to my apartment was open and our surfer swap Papyrus stood over them.

He smiled when he saw us. "What's up the egg?"

Star sighed dramatically. "Oh come on! I swear! Every time I leave Umbra and Tesla alone..." She shook her head. "Well, at least I have a trainer to take it."

Papyrus snorted. "Where's my brother?"

"Here!" Sans called from the stairs. "A little red hologram told me that you were here." A dangerous gleam caught his eyes. "So how is it that you joined Seraph but I'm the one who ends up doing the work?"

Papyrus held up both hands. "Hey, not my fault that dimensional travel was shut down. You just happened to be here."

"Move over, Papyrus. I'd like to see my fiance." A small and lovely woman with warm brown skin, and flowers braided into her dark, brown hair gently pushed Papyrus aside. She put her arms around Sans' stomach, resting her head on his chest. "Hey, Kahuna."

He gave Lahaniala a hug. "Hey, Landlord."

Papyrus snorted.

Star looked at Papyrus. "'Kahuna' I know, but 'Landlord'?"

"It's slang for a Great White Shark."

Princess looked up. "Wait. Does that mean you're the princess who's being forced to marry Sans? But that's awful!"

Lahaniala drew back and gave Princess a soft smile. "Oh Little One, I have known my whole life that my husband would be chosen for me. And I'm making out on well on it. Sans is intelligent, loyal, strong, and handsome." She patted Sans on the chest with one hand. "You should feel bad for him. He has to marry a woman who's put three rounds in his chest."

Sans rested his hand over hers. "About that. Can we change the regular courtship ritual to just dropping each other in the soup when we're surfing?"

She nodded. "Only because you ask."

Sans put his arm around her waist, but he looked at Star. "I saw you talking with the grommets on the ship. Did they tell you what happened to their timeline?"

Star nodded. She looked down at the kids about to order them away and shook her head. She looked back to Sans. "Chara and Frisk were pitched into the Underground for their use of magic and found
a war among monsters with Toriel heading one faction and Asgore the other. Despite being children, both were recruit to Toriel's side because of their magical skill. During a mission, Chara met Papyrus and convinced him to defect to Toriel's faction. Dragoon made him pay for that in the most painful way he could devise. Chara was the only thing Frisk had that was close to normal and if she couldn't have her brother, Dragoon wouldn't get to have anything."

Sophia stood up, brushing herself off. "So what happens to them now?"

"The 'baby bones' phenomenon is already working on them. They'll go home with the Jouls." She blinked. "Hey wait. We have six new agents today. Why isn't there a party?"

Sophia took Star's hand and pulled her down the hall. "Mom's getting it set up. Come on. I'll help you round everyone up."

Chapter End Notes

A/N: And that's it for Season Five! If the copious amounts of hints dropped all over the season wasn't a clue, there will be more steampunk adventures in the future. :)

But first, I have a novel burning its way through my head, and I've been dying to work on it for the last two months, so that comes next. Remember when Frisk Boneweaver mentions a story that Fase told her about a Chara on the side of a mountain? It's that one.

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