The Doctor’s Charges

by Aeris_Blue

Summary

Doctor W.D. Gaster is seen as the greatest mind of the Underground and he is content for that to be all he is known for. However, after meeting two skeleton children he wonders if he can be something else.

Notes

... I’m actually posting this... I started working on this back in January and I just really hope it’s enjoyable to others. I plan on updating it weekly though I might post the second chapter later this week because this leaves off at an odd spot. Anyways, please enjoy
Gaster stood outside of the Hotlands Orphanage with vacant eye lights as he mentally prepared himself for the wall of sound any group of children created. Work on the core had finally developed from a painful grind into a mile a minute sprint as they developed ways to take the fully functioning cores magical energy and spread it evenly throughout the Underground. This particular corner in the Hotlands was far from the common path, deep in the terra cotta colored caverns.

The orphanage had filed a- Asgore didn’t call it a complaint- grievance, to the King of all Monsters requesting that the creator of the Core survey the land to discern the problem. Of course the literal minded King took this, well, literally. Gaster had tried to argue that any of the divisions assistants could handle the issue with relative ease let alone if he sent a regular employee, but no, the letter had requested the creator of the Core.

Perhaps Asgore had seen this as an excuse to force Gaster out of his office, he actually couldn’t remember the last time he’d left the labs at all. He scratched the back of his head as he thought on the subject but he failed to reach any conclusion. He pulled up on his shoulder bag that carried his equipment before pressing down his black coat and fixing its collar. He’d stalled long enough, with annoyance reading plainly on his face he opened the door to the building.

A quick glance around the entry room proved that he was still alone, he sighed leaning in the entryway without any attempt to hide his annoyance at the situation. He was supposed to have been greeted by the manager of the facility upon arrival and he arrived promptly at the time he was expected to arrive.

From the entryway he could hear the cries, screams, giggles, hiccuping, of the children taking up residency in the dwelling. No doubt the manager had merely been distracted by some child with a nose drip. He was not cruel, he did pity them, growing up without parents or family was a trial he was experienced with, but the constant sound would undoubtedly drive him to the brink if he couldn’t get to work on some sort of a distraction.

At least the hall he currently was in was presentable enough. A warm, and not vibrant, yellow paint coated the walls around him. The wooden floor looked freshly polished and a scent resembling lemons wafted about the entryway. There was a vacant desk made of a matching wood to that of the floors littered with picture frames.

Each frame was standard: with a simple plate at the base of each with the year carved into it. He looked at the children’s faces and felt disappointment coat his ribs, more children that had no idea how the breeze buckled their clothes or the scent of air across an open field. He was working on freeing Monsterdom but making this dingy cave into an actual habitat had to come first. Work on shattering the barrier was taking far too long to let people suffer on their own whims. As it stood
now, well, these children who were without anything but their names, a few clothes, and uncomfortable memories were proof enough of their need for advancement.

His oval eye lights stayed fixated on the current years frame, studying the faces he would probably encounter, before picking it up. Despite the difference in species they were all standing, in the means they could, side by side with the same ‘we have to take this picture’ smile, aside from a few more photogenic individuals. It was interesting seeing a collection of young ones from such a variety of species. No longer did monster communities form based around species but, instead, their differences were now celebrated as they all attempt to coexist in captivity.

His brows furrowed as his eye lights fell to a child posing dramatically in vibrant orange colors, a skeletal grin plastered across his face. The monster’s enthusiasm could almost be felt in the captured image, though he noticed his hand was blocking the expression of the child beside him. This one was further off from the group by a decent margin clad in blue with their hands in their pockets.

Even with the low quality of the photo it was easy for him to recognize his own kin. A few skeleton had survived the raising of the barrier, they had kept their distance from the rest of the other monsters choosing seclusion. Their species resemblance to the ones that captured them often lead to confrontation, a shame really, most skeletons were known for their friendliness. He had believed they’d stayed behind in, what was now, the ruins or died off entirely. His thumb traced the boisterous child’s skull, he wasn’t the last one after all.

He pondered what to do with the information, there really wasn’t much of a point investigating if there were others, he was too busy for such sentimentality. An old fear lingered against the back of his mind as he quickly returned the frame to its’ resting space. His boney fingers scratched along the rib closest to his soul as it emitted an odd pinching sensation across his bones.

A dog monster rounded the corner in a rush, “Ah! Dr. Gaster right?” Her fur was short, blue-gray in color, with black pointed ears, and the occasional freckle of the brown. Her brown eyes were searching for his response before her paws clumsily spelled out his name.

He let out a sigh, ‘yes, yes,’ he signed raising his fist half heartedly. In a flurry of hand signs he added, ‘please just speak normally I understand just fine.’ The dog woman tilted her head to the side so he slowed the movement in his hands as he repeated what he had just signed.

He was growing rather tetchy and, as per the usual, this resulted in him speaking while he signed. He was fairly used to keeping his mouth shut around the labs so he didn’t distract his colleagues with his broken font but he didn’t plan on seeing this individual again. His odd voice proved near repulsive for most monsters but it prevented them from trying to prove he was helpless.
“Oh I’m sorry,” she started.

He quickly signed, ‘don’t apologize.’

“R-right, I was told you wanted to look around and see if you could fix the lights?” Her voice was a confused whine but Gaster merely nodded as he was lead out of the entryway.

As they passed through the rooms, each painted in a different pastel off-color of a true shade, he was quite impressed how well maintained the building was. From the frames he learned this settlement had been open for at least fifteen years, despite the hordes of children that had passed through these walls there was hardly any sign of abuse. That spoke well to those who worked with the young monsters.

In each room she waited patiently for him to finish his note taking. He carefully checked each outlet and ran a machine along the wall to check the buildings receivers.

She paused down a long windowed hallway with a view to the fenced off area outside where a handful of children were playing. A worried look swished from her tail but Gaster found it impossible to tell what the cause was. Two of the older looking children were practicing their magic in a mock battle, the enthusiastic skeleton from the photo watched with a look of sheer excitement, a young Whimsum was trying to figure out how to play hopscotch while flying, and the other skeleton was reading from a rather hefty sized book while his eyelights bounced between the pages and the other skeleton.

The dog’s eyes were pinned to the children on the other side of the window but, try as he might, Gaster saw no cause for concern. The mock battle had his attention for a moment, children had a habit of being very excitable and their magic unpredictable because of it. Though the two children seemed inexperienced enough to be incapable of even getting their attacks to go in the direction they desired. The excitable skeleton’s mouth was moving and the pair of battlers would give him an odd look before summoning their next attack. There was no need for concern, or to hinder his progress.

Gaster folded his arms waiting for his escort to resume progress, “what is wrong?” he said to get her attention and then signed giving clearing to her confusion.

“Oh nothing you need to worry about sir, I’m sorry, I worry about all the little pups here,” she scratched behind her ear then turned to lead him again. As Gaster went to follow he noticed the reading skeleton’s eye sockets had fallen on him. The child’s fingers gripped around the edge of the book as his eye sockets widened.
Gaster proposed that to anyone else the child’s expression remained unchanged. Too often people looked to the lips to deduce emotions when the truth was more often laden in the eyes. Skeletons did not have lips, or eyes, but the sentiment remained true. The lights in the boy’s eye sockets gave a sparkle as he looked away from his book towards the scientist.

Gaster raised a brow as the child gave a shy wave. Gaster absent mindedly returned the gesture before continuing on his investigation.

For the most part the rooms were as one would expect: a game room full of well worn game boards, a meager library with thin books bearing colorful spines, a dining room full of hand me down furniture, and a few bedrooms with two to three beds a piece. Further along the hall they found a room with a single bed, perhaps for a night worker?

As he checked each room using the small screen he was carrying he was quickly concluding that the problem wasn’t in the building itself but simply that the caverns blocked the transmission. He’d have to bring a whole crew in to build a receiver in the area to amplify the signal to reach.

‘Kitchen?’ He signed and the woman nodded heading back the way they had come. Down the hall he heard the padder of unstealthy feet as the two skeleton children attempted to hide from them. He sighed, the pair had been following them for a while, noticabley eavesdropping on their every word. Fortunately they never ventured close enough to hinder his progress. Gaster’s best bet was that they were merely curious of the language he spoke, he remembered Asriel being quite intrigued by it as well.

They crossed through the dining room again and entered into the kitchen looking at the well equipped cupboards with well kept tools. After checking the outlets and wiring in the room he recognized his previous belief was correct, they needed to build a receiver out here. He leaned against the counter closing his eyes as he let his brain trace the path he had taken down to the building. The caverns were so narrow he’d need an engineers opinion on where to place it.

He was pulled from his thoughts by a sound akin to unglazed ceramic jittering against itself. He looked behind him and the sound stilled, he shut his eyes again drawing his ring finger up to the corner of his mouth, he was smiling despite himself. It was a distant memory that rolled through his mind like fog as he recognized the sound of the infamous skeletal rattle. He hadn’t had a lot of interaction with his own kind growing up but it was so distinctly skeletal he couldn’t misplace it.

He leaned a little further back against the corner catching a glance at the two skeleton huddled as close to the counter as they could. Gaster shook his head as he caught the narrow black eye sockets of the smaller of the pair. The child quickly tucked their head down as if avoiding continued eye
contact would once again conceal him.

Gaster inhaled, recentering himself to his work, as he reached his conclusion, ‘I am going to need to install a receiver in the area until we can fix the core’s output. We will work to install it at hours more convenient to you and your charges but there will be some noise.’ This was a typical grievance anytime a developmental project blossomed throughout the Underground. He could never understand why some monsters fought so vehemently against progress.

Another common complaint, especially with businesses was aesthetic so he decided to cover that as well, ‘Perhaps in time we will be able to remove it, I hope it is a temporary solution at best.’

She tapped her hands together a few times as her mind tried to piece together what he had said. When last she formed her opinion she looked a little concerned, “well I guess that will be better than our magic lights, safer for the kids too, they tend to move about.” As if on cue the lights stuttered and some over dramatic child could be heard giving a scream somewhere deeper in the house.

‘I will keep you posted as to what the King says,’ she nodded, ‘might I show myself out?’ He waited for her response before he walked back through the, now familiar, halls finding himself at the reception desk again unsurprised that he was not alone.

The two skeleton children were sitting at the desk scribbling some nonsensical images onto a scrap of paper. He gave them no heed continuing to the door however, the more petite of the two stopped in front of him. He wore an orange sweatshirt, perhaps a tad too large for him, decorated in yellow stripes with bright red pants. “Hi, I’m Papyrus!”

This child had obviously not been taught the difference between indoor and outdoor voices. His voice had a quality to it that left it lingering in Gaster’s skull for a while after he spoke. Gaster observed the boy’s font lingering in the air written in scratchy capitals, a true uppercaser then, he pondered how often the child got in trouble for his forced decibel.

“And that’s my brother Sans!” He gestured to the larger skeleton still frantically writing something at the desk. He was wearing a navy blue t-shirt with a single cyan stripe across it, “Are you a skeleton mister?”

Gaster sighed, patted the child’s head in a mock of pleasantness, and nodded a yes before continuing to the door. Papyrus tried again to cut in front of him but was given a stern glare from the Doctor.
Adults shied away from his eyes, monster’s of stature more impressive than his own feared him, but
this child stood defiantly in the way. There wasn’t a trace of intimidation in this face, as if he didn’t
see anything harmful in the monster before him. The day had been fruitless enough he didn’t need an
incessant child standing in his way but moving around them seemed improbable, and he certainly
wasn’t going to use force.

“Hey um,” Sans’s voice was much quieter than his brother’s and sounded as if it hesitated to even
exist, the short curly letters that floated through his mind proved him to be a lowercaser. He turned to
look at the boy hoping his face did not show his exasperation.

The child held up the piece of paper he had been working on. Gaster’s eyes widened in surprise at
the sloppily written Wingdings reading: ‘r u dr gstr’. He studied the boy curiously. Where, yes,
skeletons had a type of synesthesia toward spoken word he’d never seen another skeleton try to
utilize it to understand him.

“Come on brother you can ask!” Papyrus encouraged. Gaster was curious now so he allotted a bit
more of his day to be stolen. He waited patiently while Sans squinted his way through another round
of Wingdings.

When at last the child was satisfied he held up another piece of paper: ‘sign’. Gaster curled his
fingers into fists alternating which was further in front as he opened and closed his fingers for the
phrase sign but the child simply looked confused.

The child crouched under the desk, sliding off of the front of the chair, before struggling with the
effort of pressing a book to the seat. He crawled into the chair himself before placing the hefty book
to the desk with a focused look. He tapped on the cover as he turned it to face Gaster.

The textbook was well kept with only a few niches and scratches along the binding, it had obviously
been cared for. Gaster ran his fingers over the Wingdings at the bottom, this was the book Asgore
had forced him to write after the initial phases of the Core were complete. It was a comprehensive
guide going far beyond the level that a child could comprehend.

“My brother loves your book,” Papyrus giggled, “he’s a big nerd like that!”

“Papyrus,” Sans rubbed his face in embarrassment. Sans tipped his head down from the looming
Gaster but his eye lights turned up to him, “would you sign my book?”
The children were both looking at him with sparkles in their eye sockets, Papyrus, whose sockets normally remained vacant, conjured soft glowing dots of light. Gaster’s eye sockets widened slightly as his soul pulsed a foreign sensation through his bones. He straightened up to his full height extending his hand for the pen.

Sans’s face lit up and he quickly passed him the one he had been writing WingDings with. Gaster signed his name in his own crisp clean font before passing the book back to Sans who began to chuckle excitedly looking at the fresh ink on the page. Remembering his manners he added a simple, “thanks.” Gaster rubbed his hands together with thought before pointing to a piece of paper, Sans quickly passed the sheet up to him.

When Gaster wrote the book he had been forced to finally learn to write thoroughly in common. It was a bitterly tedious task as he found himself having to write whole pages over because he mistranslated one of his symbols to the wrong letter of the common alphabet. So, as his own bitter declaration of refusal, he wrote several notes and equations off in the margins in common. He wrote down each letter in Wingdings, as well as a few punctuation marks, perhaps the child would enjoy translating his spite. He paused for a moment before passing the paper back to the child, he was fairly certain it was just sarcasm and equations, hopefully there wasn’t anything obscene.

Sans looked up at him confused before studying the sheet. He very quickly picked up on what it was before him and started writing common in lower case below the letters he recognized. Papyrus gently tugged at Gaster’s sleeves, “thank you Doctor Sir your book makes my brother really happy and that makes me happy!” Gaster got the distinct impression this child was nearly always happy.

He signed a quick, ‘glad to hear,’ before realizing that the child had no idea what he had said. He tapped his wrist hoping the children had an idea what that meant, they seemed to, “will we see you again Doctor Sir?” Gaster merely shrugged noncommittal before bowing his head down towards their direction and heading out.

The walk home felt distinctly different than the walk there seemingly taking both less time and more to return to his lab. The receiver was going to be a lot of work but once they figured it out they should be able to utilize it in areas with similar reports. His mind was already toiling away on blueprints despite the fact he hadn’t even presented the proposal to the King yet.

Perhaps this time he would be able to utilize the extra bodies around the lab to deal with the installation so he could brainstorm on things more important than the Core. It was his greatest achievement, the mechanical embodiment of his pride, but he had to have something better left within him.

He smiled as his brain fidgeted through the day surprised that what kept coming to mind were the two skeleton children. He paused in his walk, what were their names again? He shook his head
returning his thoughts to the proposal he was needing to write up.
A Hiccup in Logic

Chapter Summary

Gaster returns to the Orphanage for purely professional reasons, obviously.

Chapter Notes

I’m so good at this I posted the second chapter to the wrong work! Hopefully not making the same mistake twice!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Gaster found himself facing the Hotlands Orphanage again a few weeks after the initial visit. His shoulders dropped, being out of the lab was ‘healthy’, Asgore had said, not working on intense projects all of the time would make him ‘relax’, Asgore had cooed, spending time with strangers was- Gaster’s eye sockets fell to their default glare, pointless. Asgore had done everything except order him to return to view the developments on the receiver.

As he walked towards the open expanse they had designated as their location his feet hesitated. He pressed his teeth together tracing the holes in his palms with his fingertips before he changed his course to the front door. He figured he should inform the manager of his presence so she was not startled by his dark, deathlike, appearance lurking within eyesight of the windows.

He pulled open the door and crossed briskly to the desk, his oval eye lights fell over the images of the children. Gaster had intended to wait in the entryway but he heard the manager’s voice from the next room over. He had no intention of prying, especially since she seemed to be scolding a child, but perhaps if he just poked his head in the room she would understand the intention.

She was sitting across from the larger of the two skeletons. Her ears stood tall and alert deceiving the patience in her voice. The skeleton child’s eye lights were fixed on the center of the table, he appeared to have given up on whatever argument he had been utilizing.

“You understand don’t you?” Her tone proved she had been on whatever subject for a while. The child merely nodded his head before she sighed dismissing him with a wave of her paw.

The child scooted his chair out and fell heavy footed to the floor before seeing Gaster. He smiled pleasantly but didn’t say anything, no doubt still feeling scolded, he tucked his hands in his pants pocket heading along the hall. “What can I help you with Doctor?” the manager asked with a dramatic tilt of her head.

He quickly signed that he was here to check progress, take some measurements, but he did not want to intrude without permission. “Yeah, that fine sir;” her voice hesitated as she spoke, her ear gave a slight twitch.

He hesitated debating on asking about the tail end of the conversation he had heard but decided against it. He nodded his thanks and returned the way he came.
As he opened the door his soul shuttered in shock and he grasped at his sternum, looking up at him with wide eye sockets was the blue-clad child from earlier. Gaster was fairly certain the child had headed the opposite direction when he left. Gaster looked to the child with a displeased expression until they pulled out a notebook, scribbled something on the page, then turned it to him: ‘hey’, it read in Wingdings.

Gaster looked back to the house and then down to the child, he spoke as slowly as he could muster and in a tone he hoped didn’t sound cruel, “are you. supposed. to be. out here?” The young boy narrowed his eyes trying to see the characters that formed in his mind as Gaster spoke.

The child grinned unabashedly and after a beat wrote, ‘nope.’ Gaster let out a sigh before opening the door and gesturing inside the building with as pleasant a smile he could muster. The child turned to a new page sloppily writing out, ‘can I watch’.

Gaster rubbed the sides of his skull, this child wasn’t supposed to be out here let alone amongst the large, potentially dangerous, equipment. Gaster studied the bright glow the child’s eyelights were giving off as the boy stared up at him. The expression was nothing short of hopeful.

The child had an unfortunate defect common in their kind: a fused jaw. He wondered if monsters that came in for adoption found it unsettling or not. The child was still looking up to him, begrudgingly he bit out a curt: “stay. Quiet.”

The child lit up in excitement nodding as he clutched his notebook to his chest. Gaster could not for the life of him remember this child’s name. His own synesthesia would allow him to guess the child’s font, assuming his parents had been traditionalists when it came to names, but the child had not spoken since they met today.

He remembered that this child was a lowercaser though so noise shouldn’t be too much of a problem. He hoped the child would just grow bored and return to the rooms that offered more age appropriate stimulation. Regardless he had work to do, if the child with the notepad could keep quiet he didn’t really care if he was being observed.

Gaster pulled his supplies from his lab coat pockets and began to check over what was already started and double check the marks already made by the development crew. As he took measurements he noticed the child writing behemitly in his booklet, squinting at the tape Gaster was using for measurements. Gaster exhaled and began saying the numbers aloud not caring if the child was keeping up or not.

After a couple he realized he had only given the boy the alphabet, he was uncertain if the numbers were even recognizable vocally. That was hardly relevant though, he pulled a small bag out of his pocket to retrieve a chunk of chalk before tossing the bag on the ground.

He knelt down drawing some circles and lines indicating where the lines would be laid out and how to position the receiver itself. From the corner of his eye he saw the child copying the marks in his notebook. Gaster wiped the chalk from his hands, mindful of his black attire, and, with a stubborn difficulty, rose to his feet. He bounced the fatigue from his knees before his eye lights fell upon the piece of chalk still on the ground.

He let out a groan before deciding to just leave it however the child scooped up the bag and placed the chalk inside holding it out to him before sheepishly scurrying back a few steps. His face was flush with, some expression Gaster couldn’t identify with his limited knowledge of the child. “Thank you,” he said as the child closed his notebook.

He put his hand out about to ask if he could see his notes before a concerned bark of a voice rang
from the front of the establishment, “Sans?” The child’s bones let out a rattle as he frantically ducked behind some of the equipment. The child had said he wasn’t supposed to be out here, comeuppance was only natural.

A second much higher voice called out the child’s name, “I’m over here Papyrus!” Sans called out stepping out from his hiding spot. Suddenly a bolt of orange flew around the corner of the building, throwing itself at Sans. The child was braced for impact but barely moved when the smaller skeleton tossed all of its weight into his brother’s ribs.

The smaller skeleton clung to Sans burying his face his chest, “I didn’t know where you were!”

“I’m sorry Paps, I should have said something,” he rubbed his brother’s back as his breath trembled. Gaster observed the display hoping his gaze wasn’t intrusive. Gaster’s eye lights dimmed as he found himself fidgeting with his sleeve, the pair were a family. Not just because they were brother’s, he could feel a warm compassion ripple from their magic as they comforted each other, they genuinely cared for each other. A somber feeling settled in Gaster’s soul as he turned to the pants coming from the manager.

She met eyes with Gaster, “was he out here with you?” Gaster nodded preparing to sign his apology but the manager’s stern gaze was already off of him. “Sans you know you are not supposed to go outside without supervision.”

“The Doctor was watching me,” Sans looked away guiltily still holding onto Papyrus who was, in turn, clinging to Sans.

“And by that you mean you were bothering the Doctor while he worked, right?” Sans sort of shrugged without commitment and she sighed, “we’ll finish this inside pup.” As the two trudged back inside side by side the manager signed a quick ‘sorry’ to Gaster before following after them.

Gaster chuckled humorlessly to himself pocketing the bag of chalk. He looked about the cavern walls as realization slowly dawned on him that he had nothing left to do today. Free time was not anything Gaster was accustomed to anymore. He hadn’t had any new ideas to brew on either making his office seem undesirable for a change.

As his mind roamed his eyes fell to the equipment Sans had been hiding behind, then to a notebook laying discarded on the ground. With a creak of protest from his bones he leaned down and scooped the book up. The cover was nearly as thin as the paper inside, the spiral binding had been stretched, and several pages stuck out at slight angles. His fingertips drummed against the book a moment before he opened it.

He thumbed through the contents quickly, not wanting to hesitate over anything the child may consider personal, but was surprised by the mass amount of equations decorating the pages. He paused on a page with a list of names with several numbers bracketed off by years below them. It only took a moment for him to realize that these were estimates of the full grown height of his peers.

The next several pages followed suit until a page that had both Sans’s name and his brother’s, Papyrus, at the top. There were more sections crossed off on this page then the others. Eventually Papyrus’s equations came to an end while Sans’s were all crossed out with ‘whelp’ written below the mass of scratches. Must not have liked the results, Gaster chuckled. Gaster had to admit he was rather impressed, perhaps the equations were not very complex but a child content to slew through math problems in their spare time was rather uncommon.

At the very bottom of the page was a doodle of two monsters, resembling skeletons, one drawn tall in an orange pen holding the other, smaller, royal blue one. He noticed that the starting point for the
pairs measurements started at the same year, twins apparently, an exceptional oddity in monsterdom.

The next page was covered in sloppily written Wingdings writing out a multitude of common phrases over and over. He traced his finger tips along the wingdings, gently feeling the exact pressure that had been pressed to the page, “Hey Doc” was the first phrase on the page. He pressed his teeth together deciding to return the book to the child- Sans, he hesitated putting the name to his memory, and his brother Papyrus.

The manager had returned to the front desk, she was hastily scratching through a packet of papers with narrowed eyes. Gaster stood in the entryway not wishing to disturb her. He turned the notebook over in his hands a few times waiting on imitated patience for her to finish. As she put her pen down she sighed, “thank you for waiting Doctor.”

‘Not a problem, I am certain dealing with children as a profession is-’ he searched for the word, ‘problematic,’ he signed after tucking the notebook under his arm.

She laughed, “it’s not that bad, they just keep you on your toes,” she raised her brows, “what brings you back in here?” He displayed the notebook to her, “that boy,” she shook her head. “Would you like me to return that to him?” she held her paw out.

Gaster’s fingers fidgeted with the spine of the book before dropping his head, without speaking he signed, ‘would you tell me about those two?’

She blinked in astonishment lowering her paw to the desk, “are you looking to adopt?”

Gaster signed a ‘haha’ while his face remained flat to make sure the sarcasm read. He gathered his thoughts and spoke as he moved his hands, ‘perhaps I have merely grown sentimental in my age but it has been a great deal of time since I have seen another skeleton.’ He looked to the air trying to gather exactly why he was intrigued but it fell flat, ‘so I am merely curious,’ he found his hands hesitating in their relay of his thoughts.

He had to pause a moment to realize he was not thinking through this logically, something had taken his soul into a different light then normal. He fidgeted his fingers atop his soul disguising the gesture as adjusting his collar, surely getting more information would have no negative consequences.

She turned a chair around and gestured for him to sit, “those two came here together under, unusual circumstances that I can only disclose if you are interested in adopting.” He put his hand up shaking his head, he was merely curious. “Well then I can tell you that they are very very close. They are rarely apart for more than a few minutes and are difficult to deal with when they are separated.”

“Papyrus is a brilliant ball of energy and creativity. He cares very much about anyone he encounters, even if he just met them, a real blessing when a new shy child comes in. He gets great joy out of pleasing others and helps out whenever he can,” her smile grew warm thinking over some act or another.

Gaster nodded and she continued, “Sans is, special,” her voice hesitated , “in a lot of ways. He is incredibly bright and observant,” she chuckled, “he almost always has that book of yours on him, you should have seen him after you signed it, the other pups weren’t exactly jealous but it was nice to see him in high spirits.”

Gaster could have inferred most of this information from his short time he had spent with them but it wasn’t like he had a practical use for the information. ‘Can I ask about the conversation I walked in on earlier?’
Her eyes narrowed for a moment trying to remember, “I told Sans he can’t sit in on his brother’s adoption interviews anymore.” She looked quite downtrodden as her eyes glanced up into the infamous ‘puppy dog pout’ unique to her kind, “they’ve been here for just over a year now, Papyrus has had lots of interviews.”

“He always insists that Sans sit in with him but for every question Papyrus answers he throws in what his brother would say or just asks for Sans to speak up,” she places her paws on her lap. “Most families can’t handle a child like Sans and seeing how endeared they are to each other makes most potential guardians worry about separating them.”

Gaster nodded and she followed the action herself, “I just care about all of the pups and Papyrus has such a good chance of moving on to a better life I just hate seeing him sabotage himself for his brother.” She shook her head, no doubt understanding that the statement bore some cruelty to it.

“They are so happy together,” her voice let out a slight whine before she focused, “but you have to look for what is better for them in the long run.”

‘I understand your logic,’ he assured her, ‘that is the most probable course to allow them to progress quickly from this environment.’ Gaster did not know the exact situation that made the intelligent Sans such a poor choice but he did not need to pry any further. ‘Do you mind if I return this to him?’ He gestured to the notebook.

“Yeah that should be fine, just don’t let him out of his room he needs to finish his time out for leaving without permission,” she looked at him with an impatient huff. “It’s the single bedroom do you want me to show you?”

‘I recall thank you,’ he nodded returning his chair from where she had pulled it from. He followed the circular hallways then headed to the back where the bedrooms were. A little orange lump was sitting in front of the door ‘whispering’ through the keyhole. The child’s natural uppercase letters merely meant he was speaking at a level more accustomed to a stage whisper than his usual boisterous voice.

Gaster was prepared to speak slowly to the child before wondering if he would even understand him any better than the last time. He put a hand on the child’s shoulder causing Papyrus to spin around quickly, seeming to do so without even moving his feet, with a short scream that managed to be quieter than his whisper.

“Oh Doctor Sir! What are you—“ his eye sockets widened and he bounced up and down a bit, “wait wait! Let me start over!” He giggled with a secret before he let out a calming breath, ‘hello, I am the great Papyrus!’ The signs were clumsy, a bit shaky, but Gaster could still read them.

Gaster raised his brows in surprise and signed back slowly a teasing smile crossing his teeth, ‘hello Papyrus, I already knew your name.’

‘Remembered?’ Papyrus smiled with excitement in his eyes.

Only recently didn’t seem like a fair response so he nodded, much to the child’s delight, ‘when did you learn to sign?’

Papyrus put his hands on his hips and began to open his mouth before hesitating looking at his hands. His brows knit in concentration, ‘sad if I talk?’ Gaster looked confused by the statement but shook his head no. Papyrus let out a disappointed sigh, “I really did want to learn so I could talk to you! My brother and I wanted to learn how to talk like you so you’d be happy… but the letters were hard so I asked Ms.Dogealer to teach me the hands!”
Gaster… wasn’t sure what to say to that. These two children he knew little to nothing about were trying to communicate with him, on his level. He tapped his long thin fingers to his forehead before cutting up and out with his pinky extended, ‘why?’

“Cause we’ve never seen another skeleton before, and you looked so sad,” Papyrus tapped his fingertips together.

Gaster didn’t have the slightest trace of an idea what expression he was making at this moment. He’d been, sad? He recalled last time being aggravated about being drug out here but how had they interpreted it as- sad? His soul felt hot in his chest making him borderline uncomfortable before he remembered why he was having the conversation in the first place.

He showed the young boy the notebook then pointed to the door. Papyrus quickly knocked on the wooden frame, “Sans! Doctor Sir wants to see you!” Without waiting for a reply he opened the door for Gaster and stepped aside before ‘whispering’ to him, “I’m not supposed to be out here.”

Gaster nodded, already having made the inference before shutting the door behind him knowing, full well, Papyrus was going to be listening in, even if he didn’t understand his verbal language. Sans was sitting on his bed looking half asleep with a notebook pulled into his lap which he quickly displayed, ‘hey Doc.’

Gaster smiled despite himself and extended the notebook to Sans, “you left this. Outside.” He was uncertain how quick Sans was with his font and elected to continue the slow pace from earlier.

Sans smiled taking it from him before writing out, ‘thank you’.

Gaster stood there awkwardly in the dimly lit room observing the posters on the wall that were obviously torn out of water logged surface books: periodic tables, constellations, and a couple of topographical maps. A few scraps of recycled papers were decorated with drawings and hung very deliberately among the other posters.

A small bookshelf sat beside the boy’s bed but the only book on its’ shelves was the textbook with Gaster’s symbols along the spine and a few stray notebooks. The boy turned his notebook over again, ‘pretty nice huh, I’ve got my own room,’ once Gaster’s eye lights stopped moving he flipped over the page, ‘though it’s unofficially Paps room too.’

That explains the crudely, though perhaps decent considering their age, drawings that were hung up amongst the posters. His eye lights scanned for anything else that resembled the ball of energy that was listening on the other side of the door but didn’t see anything that stood out to him, “I spoke. To the manager.”

Sans chuckled and wrote out ‘yeah.’ But his face did not sway to any particular expression, if anything Gaster felt like the child was trying to judge his reaction.

“I wasn’t. Allowed. Access. To much.” He shrugged, that really did summarize the discussion. Gaster ran his fingers over the bookshelf, “must be nice. Not sharing a room.”

The child’s eye lights drooped as he rested his head on his knees his eyelights small but pinned to Gaster. Groggily he grabbed for the notebook and wrote, ‘speak.’ Gaster extended his hand asking for the pen and corrected the mailbox to a symbol similar to a hand holding a pencil, “of course,” he added verbally.

“I like the space, I do, and no one touches my book and I can hang up posters,” he nuzzles his chin back between his knees, “but I don’t like why I have a separate room. And I don’t like that Paps isn’t
supposed to be in here.”

The uncomfortable feeling from before pushed from his soul, he acknowledged he had pressed too far for no reason other that to satiate his own curiosity. The child was speaking so honestly to him, “why is that?”

 Sans laughed giving up in his fight against fatigue as he situated himself in his bed, “Check.”

“What?”

“Check, I don’t like saying it but I don’t mind if you look,” he scratched his head as his right eye socket gave up on remaining open, “I don’t mind if you know.” He heard shifting from the hallway that made it obvious Papyrus was attempting to get as close to the door as possible.

Gaster fidgeted for a moment before letting his eyelights take a bit more of a glow to them. Sans was facing him with a somber expression waiting for any reaction with his one still open eye. Gaster’s face remained in a decisively neutral expression as his eyes scanned the rows of ones that made up every statistic of the boy. His voice hesitated as he struggled for words, “they think. You’re… made of glass.”

“Got it in one,” he chuckled his laugh pushing humorless.

The doctor scratched at his jawline as his brain attempted to wrap around the peculiarity in front of him. A newborn of nearly any monster type had at least two hp and on average around three to four. The attack and defense stats did begin at one until they were ambulatory where it would gradually rise with exercise. It was completely understandable that the workers would try to keep a distance between him and the other children. Children, by nature, were rough and unpredictable as they had little knowledge on how to control their emotionally charged magic.

By all means the child in front of him should be immobile, in a state more akin to stone then a living being. His bones should have a hollow quality to them that would make them nearly translucent, his eyelights should lack any trace of focus, but, the piecing eye light bearing into his own lacked any of these traits. “Hey Doc, I’m sorry, I’m really tired,” he rubbed his eyes with his palms attempting to force his eye to stay open, “will you come back?”

Gaster saw little means in replying as the child was now in a state of stasis, his ribs feigning as if he had lungs. Gaster’s soul fluttered in his chest for a moment before he shook his head bringing his thoughts to an end. He picked up the notebooks tearing a page out of one, quickly jotting a note across it, before setting them down atop the bookshelf.

He tucked the note into his pocket as he stepped towards the door but was his attention returned to the bed when he heard a discontent mumble. Without much thought Gaster leaned over pulling the blankets over the boy’s shoulders gently. Sans repositioned himself under the new weight nuzzling into the top of the blanket as his features relaxed. Gaster’s magic shuttered as his shoulders tensed, he found himself taken in by the simplicity of the actions he’d just performed. He took in a sharp breath turning to the door with heavy feet to alert the monster on the other side of the door.

He shut the door quietly behind him and looked down to the child who was trying desperately to look as if he hadn’t been eavesdropping. Gaster crouched down to the boy’s level and handed him the note. Papyrus looked to him curiously as he signed out ‘S-A-N-S’, the light that spread across the boys face indicated that he was very familiar with the letters. He nodded, took the note, and tucked it away in his pocket with an impressive amount of care.

Gaster patted the boy’s head before he rocked himself back onto his feet. He turned to leave but the
boy gripped his hand. The boy’s tiny fingers were curled around the hole in his palm. Gaster’s magic screamed against his form as an electric pain burnt from his palm up to his soul. Gaster’s hand started to shake as his soul pulsed desperately begging him to escape the hold. Papyrus dropped Gaster’s hand quickly, his eye sockets widening lightly, as he pulled his hand close to his chest.

Gaster had absolutely no idea what his expression was reading as but he quickly wiggled his fingers, happy to be free of the contact. His magic calmed to its’ normal rate and he slid his fist over his soul in a clockwise motion, ‘sorry.’

The boy seemed uncertain but he looked back up to the scientist, “he told you, right?” Gaster gave a short nod in response and the boy made an expression Gaster couldn’t rightfully identify, “until we got here I was the only one that knew. He didn’t want anyone to know so if he told you Doctor Sir then,” he paused changing his approach as enthusiasm laced his words, “my brother must think of you as a friend! And he needs more of those!” He stood there with his hands on his hips grinning triumphantly up to Gaster, “And if you’re his friend then you are mine too!”

Papyrus laughed an enveloping, infectious laugh, that Gaster saw written out as Nyeh heh heh in the boy’s scratchy, tall font. Gaster found himself smiling, a laugh threatening to spill from him, but he quickly covered his mouth to stop the escape of the unwarranted noise. Once the boy settled Gaster signed, ‘goodbye,’ before turning down the hall.

Papyrus followed Gaster out to the front door before running back through the halls to, undoubtedly, return to his brother’s door. Gaster stood in the entryway collecting himself beside the reception desk. He raised his ring finger up to the corner of his teeth confused by the broad smile written across his features. It dropped as soon as he recognized its’ presence.

He sat down with a rather dramatic sigh in the front desk chair. His eyes fell to a standing clock which forced him to realize just how long he had been there. He rubbed between his eyes with the bend of his index finger letting out another, longer, sigh. It had been a definitively different day to say the least. He grabbed the corner of the desk to support him as he stood, his fingers grasping the edges of a folder that read application’ on the front. He counted each tick of the clock until he was sick of the noise, he slid a form from the envelope before heading out the door.

Chapter End Notes

From now on updates should be on Wednesday’s hopefully until it’s completed.
Chapter Summary

After a week of thinking Gaster is finally willing to change his life. Now if only he could keep that resolve for more than a few minutes.

Chapter Notes

This chapter, the one after it, and the two before it were originally one giant chapter because I thought this was going to be a one shot. Boy was I wrong!

Thank you all for your kudos and support I am glad that the story is enjoyable so far.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was a long morning, that was an understatement, it had been a long week. His hands fidgeted in the air as he pulled a file in and out of his inventory as he walked down the winding Hotland road. After leaving the orphanage he returned to his lab to prepare his report, but he didn’t. Instead he spent hours reading the application form, over, and over, until the words looked less like a series of letters and more like the characters of an unknown font. He’d successfully memorized it within a few hours and recreated the form in his notebook writing the information out in his own font to make the words familiar again.

He slipped the file back into his inventory with a dramatic sigh, he couldn’t still his jittering magic. Why was he doing this? He’d never seen himself as patient, he’d had enough trouble with the magic to know it wasn’t a strong suit, and children were known to test the trait.

He was old, he’d gone his entire life without a single thought as to children. It would be excessively cruel to adopt the boys just for them to end up back there.

The boys, the intelligent Sans and the enthusiastic Papyrus. He paused in his momentum as he curled his toes against his black shoes. They were a family, a real one, a seemingly happy one. The idea of them being separated, of growing up without each other, felt unjust, wrong. Gaster had made his family from patchwork, the stitches were made through terrible shared experiences but the thread still heald. A few more stitches, made with more pleasant string, would hardly look out of place.

He picked up his pace allowing his long strides to carry him at their usual pace. He wanted to see the pair happy, he wanted to believe that he could do that. For once in his life he wanted to fight for a cause that didn’t involve fighting, that didn’t leave him to his own whims, he wanted to be there for someone else instead of everyone being there for him.

He scoffed, what a nice ideal. The chances of him actually succeeding at something domestic were quite slim. His magic stung at his bones begging his body to stop progressing but Gaster found himself- determined, he rubbed at his eye sockets in annoyance. You are the face of progression in the Underground, you have no fear of change, he chuckled at the thought, it was dramatic but he appreciated it.
However he did not appreciate the orphanage standing in front of him and its efficient talent for heightening his nerves. If Gaster had a stomach he had no doubt it would be desiring to expel itself from his form. As it was he felt borderline nauseous, a rare condition for a skeleton, typically reserved for sickness or over consumption of alcohol. Perhaps he should have had some liquid courage before coming here, he paused tsking aloud that the thought had crossed his mind.

He resolved himself once more, mimicking the swallowing motion he had seen other monsters perform, before wrapping his boney fingers against the well worn door knob and throwing the door open. A bit too forcefully, he had to work to suppress the urge to flinch at the sudden sound.

“Oh hello Doctor Gaster,” the manger seemed unaware of the forced condition the door was opened. Gaster inhaled sharply, thankful his anatomy didn’t make it painstakingly obvious, as he forced his eye lights to focus.

‘Hello,’ he signed bolstering as neutral of an expression as he could muster.

“What brings you in today?” Her tone made it obvious she wasn’t expecting to see him.

‘I was wondering if I could talk to the boys for a moment,’ he folded his hands together after he finished signing in an attempt to avoid fidgeting.

She tilted her head to the side, “yes that should be fine. You’ll have to wait though, Papyrus is in an interview at the moment but Sans is in his room.” Gaster nodded, “any particular reason for the visit?” Her ears perked up and her eyes softened.

‘They asked if I would speak to them the day we installed the receiver,’ he shrugged nonchalantly.

“Thank you for humoring them,” she chuckled.

Gaster’s magic spiked in his bones as his nerves began undo themselves, he glanced quickly down the hall, ‘may I?’ he gestured.

“Oh of course,” she laughed before she turned back to what she had been working on.

Gaster walked through the halls, his steps slow, painfully hesitant, as he worried his fingers. Before arriving here today Asgore had met him in his office to calm him of his anxieties. He’d never be ready, he had accepted that, but it still didn’t cease his anxieties crawling about him like maggots.

He knocked on the door but received no answer, perhaps he had wandered off somewhere? The doorknob turned in his hand as he opened the door he peeked around the crack, “Sans?”

Gaster could just barely make out the slight jostling of the blankets, “Sans?”

“Go away!” The child ‘yelled’ his lower case letters barely allowing him to reach the decibel of his brother’s ‘whispering’ from the previous visit. Immediately Gaster was taken aback but he steadied himself. This was his opportunity to prove to himself he could properly handle the outbursts of children, to comfort them when they were uncertain of their footing in the world.

He pulled the door shut in front of him and was greeted with the hallway he had walked down.

He rubbed his face, tilted the back of his head to the wall, and let out a long sigh. Excellent, just excellent. This was the crowning proof that the mere notion was a terrible concept, a failed experiment from the get go. He pulled the papers out of their folder and scratched his head trying to calm his mind by working on transferring the letters into his own Font. It would be up to the boys, he had no right showing cowardice before he allowed them to make a decision.
The door opened beside him which ripped him from the quiet nature of his thoughts with enough force to make him flinch. They stared at each other for what felt like minutes, their eye lights never meeting before Sans turned his notebook up to Gaster, ‘I shouldn’t have yelled.’ The child’s cheekbones were stained with gray-blue streams that pooled around his permanent grin. Gaster looked at the pad surprised that the child was still intent to play this game after they had spent much of last time talking.

“It’s alright,” Gaster replied his voice hushed as his tone attempted to be softer than normal.

The two stood in awkward silence until the boy started to sniffle, he quickly covered his mouth in an attempt to stop the sound, “I’m sorry.”

Gaster hesitated a moment before kneeling down to look the child in the eyes, “it’s alright. Do you mind telling me what's wrong?”

Sans responded promptly, “w-what if Papyrus gets adopted and I never see him again?” The child scratched at his chest above where his soul was, the notepad was quickly discarded, “he’s talking to someone right now. I bet they’re nice… and he’s so cool who wouldn’t want him?” He rubbed at his eye sockets, no doubt they were filled with fatigue from the effort of crying, “is it selfish?” He looked directly to Gaster, “is it selfish to want to be with him?”

His small hands curled into fists, “Ms.Dogealer told me that he’d be happier in a real home. And I want him to be happy,” his eyelights swelled, “more than anything else.”

Gaster steeled himself against the wave of emotion Sans’s magic was emitting as he formed his argument. “Child. You love your brother very much,” Gaster started trying to calm the panic growing in the boy and himself. “It is not selfish of you to want to be with him. I also believe it was rather blunt of-” he hesitated on the manager’s name, the boy had just said it, “Ms.Dogealer to imply it was your fault he hadn’t been adopted.” She had explained her logic, it was sound, reasonable, but the adverse effect it had on the child wasn’t worth trying to explain another's perspective.

The boy’s face plainly read that his next statement was going to include why it was but a burst of orange streamed down the hallway and clung to its’ brother, “Sans! Sans! Are you hurting? Are you okay?” Papyrus was inspecting every inch of his brother while Sans laughed.

“I’m okay Paps,” Sans rubbed away the tear stains on his face, “I’m fine.”

Papyrus investigated Sans’s face with little sense of personal space, “But you were hurting.” He backed away holding his hand above his soul, his expression set on worry.

“How did the interview go Paps?” Sans smile was tight and the question lacked any trace of interest.

“Oh they were very very nice!” Papyrus beamed, “we talked about puzzles and I told them all of the stuff I knew about human cars! They laughed when I told them your joke!” His eyes narrowed as he placed an index finger to his chin, “though I still do not understand how it is funny.” His gaze shifted ever so slightly to the side and he startled flailing his hands in dramatic gestures, ‘I am sorry Doctor Sir I didn’t see you!’

The doctor chuckled into his hand, ‘it is quite alright,’ he signed back.

They still had a tendency to be too quick to read but he really had come a long way in a week. Gaster remembered how frustrated he had grown learning the physical language. A large part of his difficulty had been his anger at needing to learn them in the first place when he believed he spoke
just fine. “Too cool bro,” Sans smiled genuinely, “I can’t remember any of it after Ms.Dogealer shows us.”

That was rather interesting in its’ simplicity. Sans had utilized the synesthesia that skeletons possessed to decode his Wingdings based off of the responses he had received from the manager. Papyrus on the other hand was much more adept at picking up the multitude of gestures that went into Hands after a few lessons from the dog monster. Gaster took note in the difference in their means of comprehension realizing that balancing both would take some effort.

Without the boys frantic emotional displays Gaster was quickly reminded of why he was there, he looked between the two and his shoulders dropped with wavering confidence. “I have something to ask you boys,” he signed while he spoke so both boys could understand him.

They showed their attention, Sans focusing on his face and Papyrus looking down to his hands, “your answer is entirely yours to make. I will not hold any ill will towards you boys based on what you say.” He let out a long breath, “I am still uncertain myself and thus see no reason to act rashly.” His voice was calm, his hands patient, repeating the same mannerisms he had practiced with Asgore that morning.

He suddenly became painfully aware of how long he had been kneeling, his joints writhed below him, vibrating in distaste of their position. Asgore had assured him that he had a good century over Gaster, and that Gerson had both of them beat by far, but he was not a boss monster nor a turtle, but looking at the boy’s curious faces he sucked up the grievances and shifted to a sitting position. Papyrus’s hands signed a simple, ‘what?’

Gaster displayed the folder, pulled out the documents, and showed them to the boys, “I would like to apply to adopt the both of you.”

Papyrus’s face immediately lit up, he drew his hands up in front of him but kept pulling a blank on how to get his thoughts into his hands. He shook them up and down in loose little fists before he looked to his brother, “Sans?” The excitement immediately drained from the boy’s meager frame.

Sans eyelights were tracing the floorboards, his hands tucked into his pocket, “that’s uh, really nice of you Doctor Gaster.” His gaze fell over to Papyrus who looked at him curiously. “But if you don’t mind me askin’ why?” His eyelights locked onto Gaster’s own taking in every slight movement or hesitation.

Gaster nodded, a reasonable question, “honestly, I don’t know. Like you, I grew up without parents, so perhaps a form of sympathy,” he theorized. “I have never loved another monster.” He pressed his teeth together tightly before continuing, “I have a few close friends that I would do anything for, but since meeting you something has changed in my soul.” He put his hand over his chest, “you two are something to me, I’m not sure what, not yet, but I think this is what I need to do.” It was some distant part of himself he’d never met that bid him to add on, “and I want to see you two happy.”

Sans expression didn’t falter, “you’ll change your mind.”

“Sans?” Papyrus’s confident voice came out more of a squeak compared to his usual gusto.

“He’s gonna see it Papyrus,” he fidgeted his thumb rubbing against his wrist, “he’ll change his mind like everyone else.”

Before Papyrus could speak Gaster cut in, “is this about how you two came here?” Both boys averted their gaze with a quickness that answered the question. His eye lights fell to a space between the boys, “my mind will not change. Whatever it was it is nothing compared to what I have seen.”
He chortled internally, he could promise that.

Sans still looked uncertain but Papyrus tugged at Gaster’s sleeve and signed, ‘I believe you Doctor Sir. It’s still...just scary.’

Gaster smiled at Papyrus signing while he spoke, “regardless of the circumstances. Surrounding your arrival. I will do everything I can. To adopt you. If you both desire the outcome.” He spoke slowly, signed slower, wanting to make sure his conviction read to the boys.

Papyrus hugged his brother, “you wouldn’t have to worry about us being separated anymore.”

“Just because he puts in some paperwork doesn’t mean it’ll happen like that Paps, what about that couple you were talking to today?” Sans hugged Papyrus back, curling his fingers into his brother’s sweatshirt.

Papyrus laughed nervously, “I might have left them when I thought you were in trouble,” he looked away sheepishly causing Sans to laugh.

“Told her she needed to let me sit in,” he smiled, “okay Doctor Gaster but on two conditions.”

“Make your demands,” Gaster smirked.

“One,” Papyrus held up a finger to punctuate his brother’s statement, “whenever you read our file you don’t talk to anyone about it. Not even us.” Gaster hoped his confusion didn’t register as he pondered what would require a vow of secrecy, but he nodded. “And two,” Sans snatched the papers, “we get to turn them in.”

Gaster chuckled, “we will need to work on your negotiation skills, you hold all of the cards in this situation after all, but I agree on all terms.” Papyrus bounced up and down, Sans simply smiled with bright eye lights as they fell to his brother. “Well shall we?” Gaster moved to his knees then extended his long legs to stand, his bones gave out a creak of protest. As soon as he was to his feet the two boys dashed down the hallway, papers secured in their tiny hands.

Those documents represented everything he had been for the last several decades, as soon as they were accepted, if they were accepted, he would have to become someone else again. This was a definitive point in his prolonged existence, a fixed point that could not be altered once placed. He focused on his breathing, it was unnecessary, he had no lungs after all, but it was soothing.

The manager, Ms.Dogealer, was still at the front desk when they returned. The two children stood in front of her with their backs straightened to their full height, shoulders back, and eye sockets focused on Ms.Dogealer’s eyes. In unison they slid the file onto the desk keeping as professional of an expression as they could muster, though Papyrus was grinning as much as he could muster.

She let out a soft sigh, “we’ve been over this Sans you cannot adopt Papyrus and Papyrus cannot adopt you.” Gaster touched his fingers to his teeth to stifle a laugh, that seemed like something the pair would have tried to pull.

Sans placed his fingertips to his chest looking insulted, “It’s not mine.” Ms.Dogealer looked down at the paper and then over at the skeleton standing behind her.

Her ears leaned slightly to the side, a look of knowing held in her eyes, before she nodded, “I will get this processed as quickly as I can.”

Gaster touched his fingertips to his chin arcing them down in the same position: ‘thank you.’ He crouched down to the boys level his eye lights giving them one last once over as he felt his heart
stutter in his chest. The sensation wasn’t one he was accustomed to, it had a light airy feel to it and yet still felt like lead against his ribs. He looked to the floor, he was ready for this, he nodded his head letting the feeling settle across his being, he could do this. “I’ll be back,” he signed while he spoke. He received a giddy Nyehheheh from Papyrus and a shy thoughtful look from Sans before he headed back into the caverns.

The installation was effortless, the team was made up of professionals after all. Gaster’s assistance was requesting on some of the wiring, his boney fingers were well acquainted with quickly agile movements, and the machine hummed to life. There was still some worry over whether the receiver would cause some sort of a backlash in the Core and cause it to overheat, which would need to be monitored closely.

With his work out of the way he placed his shoulder blades firmly against the stonework building and shut his eyes while the crew put the finishing touches on the receiver. It had been a long day, his magic exhausted from his mood swinging more than it was accustomed, and he was fairly certain it wasn’t over yet. He opened his left eye socket as a cheer rang out from the crew, they were finished.

However, as per routine, they were to leave the caverns exactly as they found them. Trash was quickly discarded, tools were slipped into inventories, and stray grains of stone from drilling were quickly swept up. Their banter was light, enjoyable, as they worked on the simple minded task in front of them. They debated playful on where they should go to celebrate another jobs completion before they decided on ‘a neat rustic little bar in Snowdin’. Gaster felt a smile broad enough that he didn’t have to check to tell if it was there, it had been too long.

A few of the newer recruits turned with halfway parted lips to speak to Gaster but the words never seemed to leave their mouths. A few were persistent enough to stay behind but it didn’t take long before they left with their colleagues, not daring to speak to the Royal Scientist. It was routine, a common occurrence as his dark clothes and lack of common font left him unapproachable. He chuckled to himself, and yet two small children barely even hesitated.

He stretched, a particular stiffness in the movement had him considering proper sleep. He heard a pop from his shoulder as bone clicked against bone, he couldn’t go home just yet. He looked to the stones that dotted the cavern ceiling and observed the hot orange within them begin to dim to a dull brown. It was the closest thing they had to a day night cycle and, outside of Snowdin and the Capital, it was almost entirely unnoticeable.

When the last of the crew petered away from the receiver to think of sleep he headed inside, his knees cracked a laugh in annoyance. He straightened the cuffs on his sleeves and the fold of his collar before stepping back inside the establishment.

He was only slightly surprised when the ‘royal’ part of his job title had made him a priority candidate for adoption. He couldn’t help but wonder if a certain goat like monster had called in to check progress at some point or another to expedite the process. Regardless he was now holding the file that had made the boys so nervous, apparently it daunted the manager as well, her warm eyes lingering on the folder as she passed it to him. He’d asked for privacy and was left in the dining room to muse through the files in silence, or as close as a house full of children could get to it.

Most of the information consisted of hobbies or interests which was all well and good but he barely skimmed it. He wanted to learn that sort of information from them. More immediate was a list of foods the boy’s prefered. He hadn’t even thought of his atrocious cooking skills when he was ranting to Asgore all of the reasons he couldn’t be a guardian. Sans enjoyed foods that were easy to eat and avoided particularly hard foods, Gaster theorized that was probably because of the boy’s fused jaw. Papyrus would apparently eat anything in front of him, not even squirming from the vegetables most
children detested.

The last section Gaster thumbed through was health. Papyrus was labeled as a candidate for ADD or ADHD being described as having ‘troubles learning’ with no real cited incident. He found it odd that a child that had learned so many signs within a few weeks had such notable troubles concentrating. They were not doctors though and might mistake the boys excitable nature as problematic. It merely needed channeled into something useful not ridiculed into suppression, though, he supposed he was not the kind of doctor charged with recognizing behaviours, especially in children.

Sans was listed as narcoleptic but other than that the majority of his health documents was pages of information concerning how to properly care for him due to his traumatic stats. That alone explains why so many parents would be leery of adopting the child, they described him as if a simple hit would dust him. Only things that were permanently damaging truly drained HP, breaking an arm would fall under this but a simple stubbing of a toe would not kill the child with how sturdy his bones appeared to be.

He shut the files and pressed them aside for future reference before he opened their ‘history’ file. The boy’s first demand rang through his skull as he slipped the pages from their folder, an envelope labeled pictures was sitting atop the documents but he pressed them aside for the time being.

They’d been brought to the Hotlands Orphanage over a year ago after reports of a child who had Fallen Down reached them. The pair had been living within a small cavern, isolated from other monsters, within Hotlands at the time. Papyrus had refused to leave his brother’s side no matter the kind words from the rescuers. The pair were brought to the orphanage when they were unable to separate Papyrus from Sans.

The workers had seen his attachment as unhealthy, children weren’t supposed to see such unpleasant things, but all attempts to separate them were failed from the start. The kind hearted Papyrus would surround the pair in an array of bone bullets if needed. On the sixth day after arriving at the orphanage Sans woke up. It wasn’t for another four days that he could get out of bed but no one could believe the child had awoke at all. Getting Up was only occurred in the rarest of cases and usually in monsters with incredibly strong wills, for a child to bolster that sort of strength was nothing short of miraculous.

Gaster leaned back in the chair shutting his eye sockets. That’s why Papyrus had been so desperate to get back to Sans whenever they were separated, the lingering fear of this happening again was always at the back of his mind. Gaster leaned against the table letting the weight of their experience settle over him. He had lived for many years and seen monsters Fall Down but for a child to have to experience that, with his only relation in the world forced to do nothing but watch, he couldn’t even imagine how that felt.

Gaster exhaled a breath of cold air as he grabbed the envelope he had pushed to the side. There were images of the cavern in Hotland the pair had been found in, several of the pair while at the orphanage, and at the back was a single shot of Sans lying in his bed with Papyrus clinging to his arm curled up beside him. His eyes traced every inch of the boys taking in the diminished gray bones on Sans and the fear in Papyrus that was almost palpable.

Gaster was undeterred however, it was obvious that separating them would be detrimental to their development, as a scientist he was prepared to deal with health complications, and if he wasn’t, he knew the people who were. He was the only one with adequate knowledge on skeletons, for the first time since the thought entered his mind he felt confident in his decision.

The manager poked her head around the corner to check on him, “well what do you think?”
Gaster stood in proper posture, “I believe I am the right person to care for these children.” The manager was trying desperately not to allow her confusion to read on her face. His cheekbones caught a touch of lavender before he repeated the declaration with his hands and she displayed a soft relieved smile.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter originally had about seven pages of Asgore convincing Gaster that the adoption was a good idea. I cut it at last second because it was just TOO much of Gaster worrying. I regret that now I have to set up his relationship with Asgore later, and I did like the scene, but I think cutting it was a good idea.
No Longer There

Chapter Summary

Gaster takes his first steps in convincing himself he can be the pair's legal Guardian.

Chapter Notes

My work schedule has changed so these should be going up in the morning instead of in the evening.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The boys were alone in the playroom with well-worn bags slung onto their backs. Papyrus was in the midst of saying goodbye to all of the toys while Sans sat atop a suitcase that was held together by willpower alone.

Sans glanced over to the doctor with a look of scepticism before he turned back to his brother. Gaster understood the look: it was one thing to socialize with the older skeleton, something else entirely to accept him as a guardian. Sans had accepted the offer but it seemed only now was he had considered the repercussions. Gaster didn’t expect either of them to trust him, not at first, maybe not ever, but hopefully they could all come to a mutual respect of one another.

Papyrus seemed to finish his farewells to the inanimate soldier monsters, which were neatly lined against the bookshelf, with a royal guard salute before he finally recognized the doctor’s presence.

He tapped his fingers together as he decided on his gestures, ‘did you really adopt us?’ Gaster just nodded, not trusting his hands to be still enough to be read. The boy jumped into the air in response, by some sort of trick of the light he seemed to stay suspended for a moment, before he stiffened up standing proper, “I’m going to make you proud!” He declared as he put a fist over his soul in a formal vow.

Gaster tensed, he couldn’t place what ran through him at that moment. He felt his soul weigh in his chest with this undecipherable, foreign, emotion before he forced his logic to overlay it. He smiled lightly to Papyrus who looked shyly to the side.

“So uh, Doctor Gaster,” Sans rubbed the back of his head, “what should we call you now?”
“Don’t be silly Sans he’s our Dad now!” Papyrus’s eager smile returned though he looked away from Gaster the second he made eye contact.

Gaster hoped his expression hadn’t grown cold but he was caught off guard twice in a row now without any idea on how to respond. He blinked in a pathetic attempt to stall for time before he crouched down, “this is a new situation for all of us. I am officially your guardian.” He signed very deliberately as he spoke slowing his hands down to make the signs clearer for Papyrus.

“I am now in charge of you. I want to do my best by you two but I don’t expect you to look to me as a dad. Especially not right away. If you want to call me,” his bones gave a slight shake but he would not permit them to rattle, “dad, that is acceptable.” His eyelights drifted over to Sans, “but if you don’t want to you don’t have to.”

“I want to call you Dad,” Papyrus nodded but looked to his brother for approval. Gaster was suddenly very aware that the files had no amount of information regarding their parentage. Was Papyrus’s over eagerness an attempt to establish normality? Perhaps to cover up a negative connotation he associated with the word?

Sans was quiet for a long while, “do you mind if I just call ya Doc?” Sans averted his eye sockets nearly missing Gaster’s immediate nod, Gaster was much more likely to respond to that than Dad anyways. Sans bobbed his head in thought a few times before he stood, the suitcase clasped in his hand.

“Thank you Ms.Dogealer!” Papyrus hugged her firmly and she patted his back. “We promise to be very good for Doctor-Sir?-Gaster- Dad ,” Papyrus looked confused by his own statement. It would take time for the peculiarity of the situation to settle even for him, though he seemed the most eager to try.

Sans extended his hand but Ms.Dogealer glared at it skeptically before removing some sort of device, Sans shrugged, but shook her hand, “Please try and be good Sans.”

“Of course,” he raised his shoulders, “I won’t give him a ruff time.” Ms.Dogealer chuckled, Papyrus groaned, and Gaster felt he’d missed something. With final words of departure, only Sans found it necessary to say goodbye to any of the other kids, they found themselves outside of the orphanage facing down Hotland. No turning back.

“Tonight we are going to stay at the labs, since it is so late, tomorrow we shall go to your new
home,” Gaster spoke without much tone, he felt himself growing tired and was uncertain what to do at this point.

“Labs?” Sans eyelights caught a glow to them.

“Labs?” Papyrus asked with a slightly concerned expression, “are they nice?”

Gaster looked between the two and had the distinct impression they were asking different questions but he couldn’t sort out what the difference was, “yes?” he said with a drop of his fist. The two looked to each other but Sans snickered, Sans seemed to know what the difference was.

Gaster tried, and failed, to think of a subject of conversation, he really knew nothing about the pair. They were chatting amiably amongst themselves so he decided against distressing them with his questions. He folded his hands behind his back as he walked tugging absentmindedly at the base of his sleeves as they overlapped into his hands. He’d check back every so often on the pair, they looked up to him with a curious expression before he’d turn his head to face forward.

The labs stood tall their steel gray exterior clashing against the molten colored stone their stature swallowed. As they approached the twins hovered near his legs, it was odd seeing such tiny skeletons that barely came past his knee hiding beside him. Sans timidly spoke up to him, “can we have a tour?”

“Sometime,” Gaster looked down to him, “for now I think rest is important.”

Papyrus jumped as the door slid open in front of him before he ran his eyes along where the door had vanished to. His narrow eye sockets widened as the door shut behind them. He wrapped his fingers around Sans’s femur, “magic doors,” he whispered, Sans chuckled.

They walked down the gray and white halls of the lab, Gaster’s steps echoing about as he walked in the pace he was accustomed to. Though the echo bore a different sound as two pairs of smaller legs attempted to keep up. He slowed in his pace which allowed the boys to keep up with him as they shyly clung near his legs.

Sans gave a half attempt at a wave to the night workers and nocturnals that they passed along the way, Papyrus did his best to hide from the employees in their clean white coats, and Gaster did his best to push them forward along the numerous halls not desiring to answer any of the questions that read across his colleagues faces.
He placed his hand on the scanner outside the door to his office, the door slid open with a soft beep. Tomorrow he may install the twins hands into the board in case they needed him, though they wouldn’t be here too often. He debated on the necessity of it as he pushed the bookcase forward a bit and pulled out a foldable bed. “Why do you have a bed in your office?” Papyrus asked.

‘I forget to go home sometimes,’ he signed, ‘a friend bought it for me for such occasions.’ He stretched the bed open tightening the safety locks, “for tonight however it belongs to you two.” Sans happily slumped into the portable bed before leaning over to pick Papyrus up, he held one hand firmly to the other side so it wouldn’t tip over while he did so. Gaster grabbed a few towels from the cabinet for them to use in place of blankets which they happily accepted.

“Tomorrow we shall have to learn more about one another,” Gaster nodded as he sat in his desk chair, “for now I believe it is time for bed.”

He reached for his office light before Sans interrupted him, “do you mind if I read to Paps for a little bit first, he gets cranky without a bedtime story.”

“Do not!” Papyrus protested crankily.

“Of course, disrupting a routine will be unlikely to grant us any progress,” he handed Sans a flashlight. Sans placed it to the side then reached down for the suitcase but the bed gave a wobbly shake in protest. Gaster pushed his chair back and grabbed the suitcase.

Sans took it mumbling a thanks as he undid the latches, the only thing in the box was the textbook Sans had asked Gaster to sign. Gaster looked at the suitcase confused as he placed it, still open so its contents could be returned, on the ground. Papyrus had said it was precious to Sans but that was a lot of care for a child to take for a textbook. “I’m going to turn off the lights if you don’t mind,” he pointed to the flashlight.

“Yeah,” Sans turned the flashlight on nuzzling underneath the towels with Papyrus drawn close to him. Gaster flipped off the light and sat in his desk chair, he could sleep anywhere he just needed to give himself the time for it to occur.

Sans read from the book, they were on the chapter about how geothermal energy from the magma was converted into magic. Gaster found it odd: his own words being spoken back to him in common. He listened to Sans low yawn like voice read about concepts far too advanced for a child his age and looked with one open eye socket to Papyrus who had his brows furrowed in an attempt
Papyrus was the first one asleep, seemingly exhausted from trying to grasp a concept beyond his years but Sans continued aloud until the end of the chapter. He turned off the flashlight, set it and the book down on the end of the bed, before he curled back into Papyrus. He pressed his teeth against the back of his brother’s skull, “night Paps love ya.”

He snuggled his shoulder underneath a towel before he added, “thanks doc.”

Gaster’s eye sockets opened fully as he stared at their forms just barely visible from the light leaking through the door in the hall. Tomorrow would be the official start to a new page in life, he hoped the results would prove favorable, “good night Sans.”

It was early morning when Gaster felt bony fingers pressed lightly against his skull, by instinct his magic flared, his eye lights yellow as he glared over at the intruders who quickly hid behind the desk. He let out a soft sigh while he rubbed his eyes awake, obviously an excellent start. The yellow dimmed from his eyes and he pushed the chair around the desk so he could see the duo.

“Sorry,” Papyrus squealed.

“I’m sorry I acted so poorly,” Gaster let the last of the rude awakening escape him in one breath, “What were you doing?”

Papyrus looked to Sans who gave him a stern look before Papyrus continued regardless, “we were curious about… the scars.”

His finger traced the indent still remaining from what had once been a crack. He considered a moment, “war wounds.”

“You were in the war?” Sans’s browline knit together. Gaster nodded his response, he hadn’t thought about the scars in ages, not since they finally healed back together. Of course children would find them odd and desire answers. The crack that ran down from his left eye would be hard for anyone unaccustomed to healing bones to recognize, the one above his right however was still pretty prominent.

“Are your hands war wounds too?” Papyrus asked. Gaster grabbed his hands defensively but
nodded again, if the boys had also been poking at his hands he was rather impressed he hadn’t noticed it. After all of these years they were still grotesquely sensitive.

“How?” Sans asked.

Gaster considered telling them, he’d been made to talk about it enough times and they deserved to know about him, but he reconsidered their age, “perhaps when you are older,” his hands hesitated a before he added, “and we know each other better.”

The twins looked to one another as if confirming whether this answer was acceptable before Papyrus turned back to Gaster, “what do you wanna know?”

Gaster shrugged, “whatever you would like to tell me, or you can ask me questions if you’d like.”

Papyrus radiated excitement as his hands fidgeted out what signs he could recall as he spoke, “I like superheroes, human cars, puzzles, playing, the color orange, oh and red, bright yellows, I like drawing with markers better than crayons, practicing magical patterns, and my brother Sans.” The paragraph of text rolled from the boy with an enthusiasm and volume Gaster wasn’t accustomed to.

Sans chuckled, “thanks bro.”

“Don’t laugh! It’s all true!” Papyrus folded his arms and looked toward the ceiling away from his brother.

Sans realized that Gaster’s eyes were expectantly on him and tensed a bit, “I, uh, I like, science,” he shrugged, his eyelights cast down to the floor for a split second before they looked to Gaster, “what made you get into science Doc?” The child shoved his hands in his pockets and made a casual tone fall into his voice.

Gaster noticed the redirect but that was a viable option, “when I was very young I didn’t have friends or siblings and so I read, a lot. Once the war started I began to develop new uses for magic. From there my curiosity into the workings of things consumed me until I found myself here.”

“What types of science do you specialize in?” Sans eye lights had a soft glow around them.
“Magic Sciences, Soul Sciences, and Energy Conversion though I also excel in Chemistry, and Geology. Meteorology has always been a subject that I turn to in my down time,” he replied with confidence. “I would state the physical construction aspects of engineering as a weakness of mine, luckily I have a team for that,” Gaster knew what each component of a project did, how it connected to one another, but he never had the patience to actually assemble a machine, properly.

Sans eyelights took a particular glow to them and his smile noticeably widened, “could I read your reports sometime?”

Gaster felt his bones grow warm, he pushed his chair back to his desk, opened a drawer, and flipped through some old folders. Sans had read a large enough amount of the book on the core he figured Sans would appreciate the initial failed attempts, “all of these are invalid but you should find amusement enough in them.” Sans happily accepted the folder, immediately opened it, and was surprised for a moment at the WingDings written across the pages, “sorry, it’s easier for me to-”

“S’fine,” Sans smiled at the reports.

“Sans you haven’t told him about you yet!” Gaster was rather impressed by the energetic Papyrus’s patience up until this point.

Sans fidgeted with the folder, “I also like-” Sans grew quiet and his eyelights searched about the room as if his interests were floating about.

The child seemed to have a great difficulty speaking about himself, “what do you think I need to know about your brother?”

Sans eyelights focused intensely, “Papyrus is the coolest,” he said very matter of factly. “He is amazing with magic and can do so many cool things with it, but he’d never hurt anyone. He has the best control over it I’ve ever seen- he can stop a bullet mid attack- who do you know that can do that?”

“That is actually quite impressive, especially at his age,” Gaster placed a finger to his chin thoughtfully, at least Sans was talking now.

“Thank you,” Papyrus said cutely, “but Sans you need to-” It would appear Sans was on a roll as he jumped right back in.
“That’s cause he’s the greatest,” Sans fidgeted with the folder, “he draws really good too, and he does everything with his whole soul,” his eyelights drifted over to Papyrus with a slight tinge of sadness, “which is very very bright.”

Gaster nodded along with the information, he looked to the boy in question who was conflicted between boasting about the truth of each statement and making Sans talk about himself. Gaster started to ask another question when one of his assistants came in, the cat like monster locked eyes immediately with Gaster, “good you’re here the core is overheating it’s-” his eyes drifted down to the children, “did you get some lab rats?”

Sans eye sockets widened as he gave Gaster a skeptical look. Gaster’s eyes grew stern, ‘no. This is Sans and Papyrus I am their legal guardian. Much more important at this moment is the core.’

“Right right sorry,” the cat’s eyes went back to Gaster, “we’re working to cooling it but nothing is working.”

Gaster slipped from his chair and pulled on his lab coat, ‘I’ll be right there.’ He started to the door, “are you two going to be okay in here for a while?”

The children looked at one another with uncertainty, “I’ll watch them,” his assistant spoke forcing Gaster to weigh his options, two young children did not need to be anywhere near an active core.

“Be good,” Gaster spoke verbally and with his hands.

“They’ll be fine,” the assistant pawed away the concern.

‘I meant you,’ Gaster sneered and the assistant’s head dropped. Gaster dashed down the halls of the labs towards the core.

It was a complete mess people whose job it was to remain calm were panicking. Gaster prefered cold rational which he embodied as he slipped into his usual mask crossing to the main computer. The problem was being handled within the wrong the section, to be fair all indicators did point to the chamber they were working in.

He redirected the team and they began to cool the correct chamber which allowed the core to resume its’ regular work. They really needed to find a better solution to this. As he looked around to his crew
he was very glad he was not a fur or skin based creature. The condensation off his bones was minimal in comparison to the large drips that fell from the other monsters. He’d tell the team good work but it would be lost in translation so instead he simply headed back to his office.

As he opened the door he was immediately met with, “are we an experiment?”

He turned to the loud and excited Papyrus with a shrug, “in a sense.” Apparently this was the incorrect answer as the child looked nervously to his brother and then to the assistant who laughed rather smugly.

“What did you tell them?” Gaster’s glare leveled into his assistant’s eyes. The assistant merely shrugged before sliding out of the doorway like the cat he was.

Gaster was left alone with damage control, again, for a situation he was unaware of the details of. ‘Are you going to keep us here?’ Papyrus signed.

“No,” Gaster replied with a roll of his eyelights, “in fact why don’t we head home now?”

“Really?” Papyrus smiled and Sans seemed relieved, he’d have to get more information from them later in regards to what was said. Gaster nodded as he collapsed the bed returning it behind the bookshelf.

As they left the office Gaster let out an uncertain breath as the two held each others hands several paces behind him. He shook his head uncertain if it was even worth attempting to talk the situation out while they were still in the labs.

“Where do you live?” Papyrus asked a few tones quieter than normal.

‘The capital city in New Home,’ Gaster signed back, “I hope you two will accept it as your home too.” The boys didn’t answer as they pressed themselves as close together as the laws of physics allowed. Day one and they were already afraid of him, his mind burned as he tried to think over how to make amends.

Chapter End Notes
Papyrus is very literal with words which is why he didn’t hesitate to call Gaster dad, he is a male who is in charge of him, but it doesn’t have quite the implication yet.

Thank you again for all of your comments and Kudos it really makes my day!
Sparks of Color

Chapter Summary

With the boys now uncertain of Gaster he decides it’s best to take them home. So they can start to make the place their own.

Chapter Notes

This chapter isn’t as heavily edited as the others (largely because I spent the week giving it a massive rearranging) so I apologize if it doesn’t feel quite finished.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The walk from the lab to Gaster’s home in New Home was unnervingly quiet, the boys whispered amongst themselves instead of speaking casually. Anytime he’d look back to see them they froze, their eye sockets would grow wide as they clenched their teeth. The three of them were barely past being strangers and now the pair were having doubts which weren’t helping his own. He pulled his key from his pocket and turned it in the handle of the large gray door.

The capital had a very low crime rate, everyone was sealed here and making things worse just really wasn’t in monster nature, regardless Gaster had always tended towards caution. He pressed open the door expecting the children to take to curiosity but they clung together atop the ceramic tiles of the entryway.

Gaster slipped his coat off and hung it on the hook that hovered to the right of the doorway. The living room consisted of a large, well worn, dingy green couch located in the epicenter of the room with a long pristine condition coffee table placed in front of it. There was a handmade desk in the corner with a mirror above it, though it would take some cleaning to see one’s reflection. The decrepit carpet laid flat, suppressed by years of being trodden against, and was an indecipherable shade of gray. Whether it was originally that way or if it had taken on the color through age Gaster couldn’t really remember.

He sat with an undignified flop onto the couch as he looked at the children standing against the front of the door. He rubbed the back of his skull before he moved his hands to sign, “this is your home now, feel free to explore,” he prompted. Papyrus seemed tempted, a slight bend in his knee to start a step gave him away, but he stood firm beside his brother. “Is there anything I can do for you two?” Gaster tried again.

Papyrus tapped the toes of his shoes together, “we haven’t eaten yet.”

Gaster blinked, right food. He gripped the arm of the couch firmly as he pulled himself to his feet. He started towards the kitchen as his mind mentally scanned over the insides of his fridge, monster food didn’t expire but that didn’t mean it was as nutritious months later.

The kitchen was the only other room in view of the living room. It had simple gray countertops with wooden cabinets that lined the back wall of the room. His stove, had seen better days, there was a
crack along the glass of the oven and it had several sections of flaked metal that could easily shake to the floor, he’d never even thought about repairing it.

In the center of the room was a table in desperate need for a sanding, though it seemed less rugged than he recalled. The left corner usually begged for prone limbs to splinter with shards but it seemed to have been smoothed out. He eyed it curiously as he crossed to the fridge hoping to find something appealing to children.

He opened the door surprised to see it stocked with take out containers and raw vegetables. Gaster’s brows furrowed as he tried to process when the last time he had ate at home was. He opened the containers just enough to view their contents, definitely not his leftovers, everything was pristine and freshly made.

Gaster felt a chill go up his spine as he realized someone had been in his house uninvited, they were courteous enough to stock his fridge but they were still uninvited. He shut the door to the fridge as he turned back to the table in the center, he ran his thumb along the corner.

Gaster ran his thumb over what should have been splintering wood as he observed the slight scorching done to the wood to remove the pesky thorns. Gaster felt his face reflect his confusion, there was no reason why Grillby needed to endure the River Person’s boat or, worse, a trek through Waterfall to do something like this while he wasn’t present.

“Are you okay Dad?” Papyrus asked in a quiet tone, Gaster tensed at the last word. Perhaps he should have asked Papyrus to call him something else but it was his decision.

He tapped his index finger to the edge of his skull, ‘thinking’. He opened the fridge to search through the containers before settling on spiral roll ups with meats and vegetables inside of a thin tortilla. He opened the lid showing the content to the boys. They both looked at the rolls curiously, there were no objections, so Gaster grabbed plates from the cabinet. He placed a few rolls on each plate before he sat at the table and gestured for the boys to sit wherever they like.

Papyrus sat down to Gaster’s left and Sans to his right, though the way Sans glanced to the remaining chair may have meant he’d desired to sit by Papyrus and not across from him. Papyrus was the first to begin to nibble away at the rolls and Sans gave him a weary glance.

Sans watched as Gaster began eating his own before his eyes turned down to his own plate. His shoulders dropped as he pinched his wrap with such care that one would wonder if it were made of spikes.

He held it up to his teeth and Gaster watched as it began to dissolve slowly. The boy grimaced and put the wrap down on the plate again. He let out a slight exhale as he stared down to the rolls with a perturbed expression. Gaster wiped his teeth, “would you like something else?”

Sans looked up to him as if he’d been wounded, “nah, I’m fine just not that hungry.”

“Sans, you need to eat!” Papyrus scolded.

“I’m not hungry Paps,” Sans glared back.

“We haven’t eaten since yesterday! How are you not hungry?”

“Just not,” Sans looked back down to his plate.

“Being in a new environment can be quite intimidating,” his hands changed intimidating to scary for Papyrus, “a loss in appetite wouldn’t be odd.”
“But Sans needs food so he can stay awake better,” Papyrus folded his arms. Gaster wondered if the boy deliberately ignored the logic or if he still wasn’t accustomed enough to hands to understand it.

“Eat what you want Sans if you find something more to your tastes while we’re out let me know,” Gaster provided. Children had a tendency to be picky eaters so Gaster figured it wasn’t worth a fight, especially not this soon into their relationship. If Sans was hungry he would eat simple as that.

“Out?” Papyrus asked as he glanced guiltily to Gaster’s plate then to his own, an unasked question read plainly across his eye sockets. With a slight smirk Gaster slid a roll off of his plate to the child who happily ate it.

“I had some help organizing your room but I want it to be a place you feel comfortable in so I’ve yet to,” he searched for the word, “elaborate?” That wasn’t the correct word, his brows furrowed as he thought over his words.

“We get our own room?” Papyrus sat up to his full height.

“Yes, but if you each want your own room I should have enough space,” Gaster began to take apart his office in his mind, it would have to be Sans’s room, he had the distinct impression Papyrus needed more space.

“I’m fine sharing,” Sans supplied quickly to which Papyrus nodded in agreement. “Can we see it?”

Yes, was already on Gaster’s teeth before he hesitated, “are you done eating?” Sans looked at the roll up he had started and exhaled with a brave expression. He finished the roll before he nodded eagerly to Gaster. Gaster placed the remaining wraps into the box then returned it to the fridge. The pair eagerly followed him along the hallway to the first door.

It wasn’t much but Gaster had made an attempt to make his second study into a room for the pair. There was one bed against the wall closest to the door and a fold out bed across the room. A table with a desk chair was placed against the right wall with a bookcase placed beside it. Though it was empty there was a chest against the opposite wall for whatever personal belongings they had brought along. In the same gray as the rest of the room was a door with minor embellishments.

Sans opened the door taken back by the dark stairway that met him, Papyrus clung to his side and the pair looked back to Gaster, “that’s my room down there you may see it if you like.” The pair shook their heads and promptly shut the door.

“So this our room?” Sans stood in the center of the room, his eyelights traced every corner, while Papyrus looked into the chest disappointed by the lack of anything in it.

“Yes, I know it is not much, but I thought we could go to the market so you two could decorate it yourselves,” Gaster folded his hands when he was done speaking. The boys looked to one another before they slid their backpacks onto the bed.

Gaster grabbed a notebook from one of the drawers on the desk, “what are some things you boys need?” When Papyrus’s face lit up he added, “need I have every intention of allowing you some toys for stimulation but I believe a list is necessary for direction. Papyrus? Why don’t you start,” he certainly seemed eager enough.

Papyrus looked a little confused now, perhaps trying to piece together a few of the odder words from the sentence together before he smiled up, “I would like a pair of new shoes,” he started reasonably enough. He listed off a few articles of clothing, some supplies for drawing, and a, “super soft blanket!” Gaster raised a brow which caused Papyrus to sheepishly draw into himself, “I’ve just
always wanted one.”

‘I think we can manage that,’ Gaster signed. He looked down to Sans whose eyelights dashed to the side of his socket, “and you Sans?”

He shrugged, “I don’t need anything.”

Papyrus opened his mouth to say something before Gaster interjected, “is there anything you want?” Papyrus looked at Sans with a tinge of jealousy but Sans shook his head. Gaster scrutinized the child, this sheer avoidance to talking about himself was going to make it difficult to get to know him, perhaps he preferred it that way.

He tore the page of the notebook out folding it into his pocket, “well just let me know Sans, alright? If you’re tired we can try another day?” Perhaps the walk from Hotlands to New Home as well as the foreign experience was just too much for the boy.

Papyrus looked wounded, “I want to go!”

Sans shrugged, his eye lights pointed to the floor, “me too.”

“Please just let me know if you need something okay?” The pair nodded as they took towards the living room.

“What are the other rooms?” Papyrus asked before they reached the door.

“My study is the room next to yours, you’re more than welcome to go in there just please don’t touch anything on the desk,” maybe he should have laid down some ground rules. “The glass doors are my personal lab, please, for your safety don’t go in there if I’m not there, okay? The door is locked when not in use.” Gaster wondered if he should make a list as the boys looked to him curiously. “And at the end of the hall is the shower room,” Gaster shrugged.

“Oh,” the lack of interest that hung from Papyrus’s voice indicated he’d been hoping for something more- fun, probably.

Gaster opened the front door and the trio slipped out and into the afternoon. They walked as they had before Gaster with his hands behind his back Sans and Papyrus holding hands behind him. They spoke as amiable as they had the first time, which meant whatever had transpired this morning wasn’t permanent. Gaster listened in on their conversation, glad to hear the pair seemed excited about the outing.

“Maybe we’ll finally be able to explore the whole Underground!” Papyrus shouted.

“Not really up to us now Pap,” Sans looked to Gaster after he turned at Papyrus’s comment. “We were gonna go from New Home to Snowdin just to say we’d seen all of the Underground,” Sans shrugged.

“Oh so you two are from New Home?” Gaster asked.

Sans drew his hands into his pockets but Papyrus answered for him, “yep! Though all of this looks new to me, Sans did we live around here?” Sans shook his head obviously desiring the conversation to end. Papyrus stood on his tiptoes trying to get a better look around, “yeah I don’t think so either.”

“Why did you leave your home?” Gaster asked flatly. He hadn’t intended to pry but the quickness to which Sans’s eye lights faded indicated he had.
Papyrus even seemed to draw back a bit, “we didn’t have parents anymore so we left.” He supplied as he looked to his feet briefly before his head shot back up, “is that the market?” He pointed ahead to the collection of tents in the not-too-far distance. Gaster nodded and Papyrus pulled Sans up ahead with him, “wowie!”

The market was a gathering of amateur merchants and collectors who moved about the Underground from time to time. Most of the vendors sold repaired items from the dump though a few sold monster made clothing, materials, or home baked goods. All were concealed in their own uniquely colored tents with hand painted signs outside just on the outskirts of New Home.

Gaster lead them to a shoe vendor figuring if the shoes bothered Papyrus enough to mention them they were worth exchanging quickly. The boys seemed surprised at the multiple shoes displayed on the foldable push carts inside the tent. Papyrus fussed at his shoe laces as he sat upon one of the benches while Gaster skimmed the rows for anything close to the child’s size. He found a pair of short western style boots and a pair of tennis shoes he thought could work.

Sans helped Papyrus pry his shoes off, even with the laces untied they came off with such a force Papyrus nearly toppled off of the bench. Papyrus stretched his boney toes with a look of complete relief. Gaster’s gaze fell on the discarded shoe which was far too small for the boy’s foot. Much longer it might have caused deformations but he kept that information to himself.

“Did you sleep with your shoes on?” Gaster asked.

“Yes,” Papyrus nodded swinging his bare feet. He knit his brows together with thought, “yes, they are really hard to put back on so it’s easier to sleep in them.” The pair supplied that they hadn’t ever brought the subject up to Ms.Dogealer because there were other children who needed so many different things they didn’t want to impose. It was selfless of them but still foolish.

Papyrus tried on both pairs preferring the look of the boots but Gaster advised him to pick whichever pair would last longer. Gaster paid the vendor leaving the old shoes with them, recycling wasn’t optional down here it was mandatory to cut back on waste to sustain themselves. Papyrus was jumping up and down outside the tent ecstatic his feet could finally stretch out.

Gaster smiled as the boy went on about how much cooler he was going to be, how much faster, and better at magic all because of the sneakers. Gaster felt his soul grow a bit distant as he was reminded of a scratchy wool cape and the thin black fabric of top with the chest stitched up to cover his ribs. A smile twitched at the corner of his teeth as Sans snickered and fed into Papyrus’s enthusiasm bolstering him with more compliments.

“Thanks Dad,” Papyrus smiled up to him. Gaster’s oval eye lights rounded into circles as he looked down to the boy. His soul warmed against his ribs as a fondness he hadn’t anticipated enwrapped itself around it.

They went from tent to tent and found several new shirts, a few that were too big so they would fit into them later, and matching shorts or pants, though Sans seemed to have a preference for shorts. He never made a mutterance of complaint but he began to fidget with the seams when trying on pants.

Gaster tried to pay close attention to Sans as he looked about the tents. Sans would never say if he wanted something, or even give much indication, his eyelights simply hesitated over a few things longer. One such object was a blue jacket with gray stripes that was a little on the large size but Gaster grabbed it anyways.

Next was a home interior tent where Papyrus was rather over the top excited to see it set up like a bedroom. Without much warning he flopped onto the bed, his tiny frame bounced slightly as the
springs settled. Sans looked to the bed with longing but strayed away from it. “We can’t get a bed right now unless one of you has a problem with the cot,” Gaster really didn’t want to lug a mattress and bedframe across New Home on top of the other purchases from the day. Both the boys shook their heads before they took to browsing about the store.

Gaster looked around for some lights to expose his dungeon like bedroom a bit more so the boys wouldn’t be afraid to go down there. He didn’t really see anything of use, at least not that his engineers couldn’t do more thoroughly. He began to flip through blankets and throws in the cabinets.

His hands lingered on a red throw with frays at the end. The yarn on the inside was worn and battered and there were several spots a slight tug would cause a rip. He fingers traced the holes wondering if he could mend the discarded fabric. The longer he stared at it the stronger the pulse of magic through him grew until he sealed his eyes shut and shoved the throw into the cabinet he had found it.

Papyrus looked away from Gaster quickly and poked his head in a cabinet and retrieved a soft light brown blanket. It was hardly bigger than a towel but that didn’t seem to matter as the boy happily rubbed it against his face.

Gaster quickly surveyed the tent when he noticed a missing presence. It took a moment to find Sans standing in front of the vendor placing a few gold coins on the counter. Sans turned back to Papyrus and Gaster with a mischievous light in his eyes.

He handed the folded black fabric to Papyrus, “here ya go Paps,” he smiled.

Papyrus looked curious for a moment before he unfurled the fabric, something fell to the floor but Papyrus seemed distracted by the folds. He opened it up to reveal a pirate flag and let out a high pitched noise of excitement and a few fussy noises before stating, “it’s a skull!”

“I bought that for the skull decision to make you smile,” Sans smiled and Papyrus let out a groan.

“You ruined it Sans!”

Gaster raised a brow, “the expression is soul decision,” he supplied. Sans looked to Papyrus with a spark of energy he had not seen the boy have. Papyrus’s face flushed with worry. Gaster looked between the pair confused before he paid for the blanket.

Papyrus suddenly recognized that something had fallen from the flag and he reached down to pick up the figure. It was painted in primary colors, posed in a means that was seen as ‘heroic’. Papyrus studied the figure before he threw his arms around his brother clasping the figure and the flag in one hand as he buried his face in his brother’s chest, “maybe we can get them all again,” Sans rubbed Papyrus’s back.

There was so much about these two and what they had been through he knew nothing about. He was used to playing the onlooker so he hardly paid the stone like feeling in his soul much heed. Papyrus let go of Sans then looked up to Gaster as he left the tent, prizes in hand.

The day was winding away and they found themselves lingering in tents for shorter and shorter intervals. Papyrus was easily excited by any sort of puzzle toy they found. ‘What about an jigsaw?’ Gaster offered after summoning his hand shaped bullets. His hands were preoccupied with a near excessive amount of bags but he wanted the boys to feel comfortable, he hoped this wasn’t already pushing towards spoiling. He blinked, he really hoped it didn’t read like a bribe of some sort.

Papyrus was entirely distracted by the magic hands he hadn’t even recognized that they were
communicating. “I’ve never done one before,” he looked up to Gaster and down to the image on the box. The box’s color had worn with age but the image was of a human night facing down a dragon.

‘They are a bit time consuming but they are good mental exercises,’ Gaster’s bullets supplied, ‘I can help you if you like.’

Papyrus’s face lit up and drifted away from the magic bullets over to Gaster’s face, “really?” Gaster nodded. Papyrus’s smile grew relaxed as the tightness in his shoulders faded, ‘I would like that!’

Gaster returned the smile before he purchased the puzzle. He gave the tent one last look to decide if there was anything Sans would enjoy. As he traced each corner of the tent he realized the blue clad skeleton wasn’t anywhere to be found.

‘Where’s your brother?’ Papyrus went wide eyed and the child’s rib cage noticeably expanded and collapsed in shallow breaths.

‘We’ll find him,’ Gaster’s hands spoke though Papyrus didn’t seem comforted in the least. He grasped tightly at the base of Gaster’s jacket as his only means of repressing the urge to run off. It had been one day. Gaster’s soul sank, he had already lost track of one of them.

Gaster watched Papyrus’s breaths become shorter until he was clutching his ribs dangerously near hyperventilating, which was preposterous, the child did not have lungs. Gaster considered possible ways to calm the child. He placed a hand firmly onto Papyrus’s shoulder, “we’ll find him,” he spoke quietly. To no surprise his voice lacked any sort of soothing the boy needed as Papyrus looked to him with a pained expression.

“Sans!” He called out as he unclenched Gaster’s jacket and dashed from the tent.

“Papyrus!” Gaster called following after him. Gaster observed as Papyrus froze mid run in the middle of the road with his hand placed firmly over his soul. A small glow was just barely visible against Papyrus’s hand as his soul began to radiate. He nodded and ducked into a tent just a few down from the one they had been in.

A bookshop, Sans had looked at it intently when they went into the puzzle tent but hadn’t said anything. Sans was asleep with his chin on the lowest shelf of a rack, his knees curled under him. It wasn’t a natural sleeping position, it was almost as if the boy had just collapsed.

Gaster let out a sigh of relief, happy to have found him, but Papyrus dove to his bigger brother. He wrapped his fingers around Sans’s shoulders and jostled him lightly, “Sans? You’re okay? You’re okay right?”

Gaster crouched in front of Papyrus, ‘he is fine. Just asleep. Let him rest a little.’ Papyrus’s breathing slowed. ‘You’re okay too,’ Gaster’s face was devoid of emotion but he’d be lying if he said Sans’s sudden disappearance hadn’t given him a start.

The vendor had flinched awake at Papyrus’s outburst and quickly rubbed his eyes at the sight of the three skeletons. He placed a hand to his chest as he willed his heart to still, Gaster waved to him with an apologetic expression.

Gaster took advantage of their location and scanned the books in an attempt to find suitable materials. Papyrus stayed beside Sans whispering to him until he finally appeared to come to. Gaster let out another sigh of relief, he hadn’t anticipated the boy being hurt but was happy to see him up. He skimmed the books quickly with hope of finding something to the boy’s interest. Sans eye lights were fuzzy as he leaned against the bookshelf and scanned the spines.
Gaster grabbed a meteorology book he didn’t already have and showed it to Sans, “ya mentioned that before,” his words slurred together as if he’d fall asleep in a moments notice, “whatzit?”

“Meteorology is the study of weather on the surface,” Gaster flipped through the book.

The child made a disapproving noise, “what’s the point in studying that now? We’re all stuck down here.”

Gaster looked down to the child whose eye sockets were half closed, “I find it interesting.” He skimmed the books again, “perhaps astrology is more to your taste?” He remembered the posters in the boy’s room at the orphanage and handed him a book. Sans eye lights reignited to their full glow as he turned the pages over, “what is the point of studying that now?” Gaster rebutted.

Sans looked at the book with such a sudden onset of sadness that Gaster winced, Sans started to close the cover but Gaster held it open, “it’s so when we get there. We’ll be prepared.”

Sans eyelights were focused as they peered into Gaster’s own, “I find it interesting.”

“Then study it,” Gaster smiled, “there’s no such thing as pointless knowledge, never forget that.” Sans nodded and held the book close to him.

His eye lights were full as they looked up to Gaster, the toes of his shoes dug against the ground as he built up the nerve to ask, “Can I have this?” Sans’s eye sockets dropped down to his toes. The request had been barely audible but it brought a smile to Gaster’s face. It had taken the entirety of the day but Sans had finally made a verbal request of him.

“Of course,” he replied it was progress, measurable progress. “We should also probably get some books closer to your age level,” he skimmed over the thin books.

He pulled one out that had a soft brown rabbit on the cover. Sans attempted to crinkle his lack of a nose, “do you think we’re toddlers?”

Gaster returned the expression, “no but I think this would be much easier to read before bed than a book over geothermal conversion methods.”

Sans chuckled at the expression and appeared to have another argument but Papyrus looked at the book with a big grin on his face, “Sans would you read that to me?”

Sans let out a sigh, “if that’s what you want Paps.” Gaster chuckled, it seemed whatever Papyrus desired was law, he took this to note as he paid for the books.

“Anything else?” Gaster asked, Sans’s eye lights widened at the site of the hand bullets.

“No I am really happy,” Papyrus declared and Sans shook his head no still gawking.

“Well then, let's go home,” Gaster concluded.

It had taken several hours to set up their room to Papyrus’s specifications, luckily he left the furniture where it was. The chest became Papyrus’s project after he had dismissed both Sans and Gaster for their lack luster folding skills as well as their inability to sort the colors into proper shades. Light blue and Sky Blue were apparently not the same color and neither was Red-Orange and Orange-Red.
Gaster and Sans had been banished to sorting the books into the bookshelves and lining them with the varying toys and puzzles. The flashes of color across the room made it unique from the rest of the house and appear more as a room for children.

Once they finished Gaster emptied the contents of the puzzle box onto the desk. He gestured for Papyrus to sit in the chair as he leaned against the desk. Gaster turned to Sans but Sans was nestled in blankets atop the cot with his astrology book. Papyrus was sorting the puzzle pieces with flat edges together and ones with similar colors had their own pile.

They’d been working on it for about half an hour before Sans spoke up, “Hey Paps, I think it’s storytime.”

Papyrus mumbled under his breath focused intently on the puzzle, “five more minutes.”

“Aw but Papyrus we’ve got that new book, it’s got lots of pictures,” he waved the book in the air in an attempt to flaunt it.

Gaster stood in sight of Papyrus, ‘we can leave this here for tomorrow.’

Papyrus considered this then nodded as he rubbed at his eyes tiredly. He crawled into the bed underneath the newly hung pirate flag, then curled his blankets around him as Sans pulled up the desk chair, and began to read.

It was obvious right away that Sans felt the book was below him his eye socket twitched with his annoyance. He grew more bitingly sarcastic until he was doing ridiculous voices for the characters that managed to get a laugh from Papyrus, which only encouraged Sans to be more dramatic in his reading. Almost immediately after reaching the end Papyrus was sound asleep.

Sans smiled pleasantly then tapped his teeth to his brother’s forehead after he fixed the bedding. “Good night bro,” he looked over to his cot and inhaled sharply before crawling into it.

Gaster’s hands hesitated over the lightswitch as he looked between the two boys a content smile crossing his teeth, “good night boys,” Gaster clicked off the light and quietly pulled the door to his room open. His smile faded with the lack of response before he headed down the stairway to his room.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is a mess! But it’s so much better then it was originally but I still just. Don’t. Care for it. But hey! I’m finally free from the two chapters I loathe! (This one and the one before it)
Chapter Summary

Old habits die hard but Gaster is willing to try to give them up.

Chapter Notes

One of my greatest weaknesses as a writer, I feel, is going from point A to point B. I hate writing characters deciding to go somewhere instead of just writing them there already. So with that I assure you the chapter gets better.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The second day had been spent in quiet, slightly awkward conversation, until Gaster retreated into his lab. The boys came in to watch but Papyrus quickly grew bored which prompted Sans to leave. Gaster had attempted to make them lunch, as well as dinner, but each attempt had left them eating from Grillby’s containers instead. He had no talent for cooking.

Nothing in particular happened and the only new knowledge gained was that his assistant had insisted the pair had been adopted for immoral experiments.

Gaster woke up that morning feeling as if he had missed an opportunity and eager enough to correct it. Following breakfast however he was lost again in his notebook but he justified it as at least being in the same room this time. Papyrus let out a long sigh and Gaster was pulled from his equations to observe the twins. Sans was propped up against the other corner of the couch curled around his astrology book while Papyrus grabbed at a brown marker to color the sky from the human coloring book. Gaster curled his fingers around his pencil, there had to be something he could do with them.

He was glad the boys were comfortable enough in his home to relax to such a state but it hardly seemed fitting of their age. He clicked his teeth together a few times as he traced over the few days he had spent with them. He crouched down on the floor near Papyrus with a smirk across his skull, “I believe you two mentioned something about wanting to explore the Underground correct?”

The pair looked to one another then nodded, “what do you say to going to Waterfall today?” Considering the boys were from New Home and Sans had Fallen in Hotland it made sense for Waterfall to have been their next destination.

“That sounds like fun,” Papyrus smiled already putting away his markers.

Sans shrugged but shut his book, “why not Doc?”

Gaster was surprised by the giddiness his magic displayed at the prospect of leading them through the Underground. He smiled broadly as he helped them pick out clothes a bit more appropriate for the marsh like conditions.

Neither of them possessed rain boots or coats so they layered their clothes to help fend off the falling
condensation. Gaster made sure the children knew that the condition of their shoes at the end of the trip was their responsibility. He wasn’t going to ban them from stomping in puddles, as children allegedly do, but he did not have the knowledge on how to clean the sludge that seeped into any open cranny.

They were nearly ready to head out the door when Gaster disappeared into the kitchen and grabbed a small tote that he filled with various condiments and a packet of buns. He returned to the boys and they left locking the gray door behind them.

As soon as they stepped into the humid tunnel that connected Hotland to Waterfall the pairs demeanor changed. Gone was the lethargic lull of a cloud that had surrounded them that morning. Now they were awake with a buzz in their magic as they tugged one another along to point out anything new.

Gaster chuckled as they explored a bit before he gestured to a small crack in the wall, just barely wide enough for his skeletal shoulders to fit through. Papyrus’s eyes widened and Sans looked uncertain until Gaster slipped into the crevice. It took a moment, and Gaster had to light his eyes a bright yellow before they entered, but they followed behind him. It was a bit awkward navigating the narrow pathway backwards but he wanted to keep the light in the pairs view as much as he could.

When at last they were met with pale luminescent blue of WaterFall they were far above a series of stalagmites on a narrow bridge just barely wide enough for both feet to stand comfortably on. The bridge was decorated with varying colors of stone that filled long winding cracks across the meager surface. Gaster started along the bridge, “Doc- do ya- um really think it’s safe for someone like me?”

Gaster turned back to Sans, “just don’t fall and you’ll be fine.”

Sans stared at him dumbfounded before his eye lights brightened and he pressed forward carefully across the bridge. “Brother be careful,” Papyrus shifted anxiously from foot to foot still holding to the wall in the cavern they had traversed. Sans smiled with a bold mischievous look as he stuck his chest out and looked back to his brother.

“I can do this,” he laughed as he trotted up to Gaster.

Papyrus sighed and pressed his foot across the stone, “bridges should have railings,” he mumbled as he stepped forward. He breathed slowly and measured each step with his eyes before he pressed forward. Gaster and Sans sat on the ledge at the edge of the bridge to wait for him, Gaster’s legs dangled over the edge but Sans curled his to his chest.

“Hey Paps, I got a bridge I can’t scratch over here, wanna help?” Sans mused.

“Sans that didn’t even make sense,” Papyrus muttered as his eye sockets fell over the edge.

“Come on bro it’s just a short rock over here,” Sans smiled.

Papyrus leveled his eye sockets at Sans and stomped his foot firmly on the bridge, “SANS!” A small stone dislodged itself from somewhere within the cavern and Papyrus flinched with a squeak. He sat down on the walkway, curled into a ball, his eye sockets just barely poking out from his arms as he looked to his brother.

Gaster put a hand on Sans’s shoulder, “I don’t quite understand but you should probably stop.” He reached his hand out and turned Papyrus’s soul blue, ‘I’ve got you,’ he probably should have done that in the first place. ‘I won’t let you fall,’ he smiled.

Papyrus’s face lit up as he slowly rose to his feet. Was the boy familiar with blue magic or did he just
trust his word? Gaster’s eye lights drifted to Sans who was looking rather guilty. “We’re almost there,” he assured him.

When Papyrus finally stepped onto the landing Sans hugged him quickly, “sorry.”

Papyrus hugged him back, “I don’t understand why you insist on punishing me,” he grumbled. He held Sans’s sockets with a firm glare before he smiled up to Gaster, “thank you for holding me!”

Gaster adjusted the collar of his coat that laid directly over his soul, ‘you did it on your own, I merely provided reassurance.’ He looked away from the pair as he released his hold on Papyrus’s soul, “that was the hardest part, we’re almost there.”

Their feet echoed about the wide smooth cavern they entered until they were met with pale cyan light. The boys paused before they ran forward, still holding hands, to look over the new chamber. The walls were decorated with brilliant crystals that sprouted from the stone in bouquets of impersonated light. The echo flowers in this chamber were undisturbed, standing tall with pristine petals that imitated the glow of moonlight across the cavern floor. A large waterfall crashed down to the floor below them passing through the area with the scent of surface water, undisturbed by the piles of trash a few miles below them.

The twins wasted no time exploring the nooks and crannies of the room with eye lights that sparkled like stars. Things that had become mundane to Gaster caused the twins to light up with a sense of wonderment Gaster hadn’t expressed in ages. Everything from the glowing mushrooms poking their way out of the earth to the grand crystals that lined the walls was new.

“What’s this?” Papyrus asked tapping on a large cyan blue flower.

“What’s this?” The flower mimicked startling Papyrus enough to stumble over his own short legs.

Gaster extended a hand to help the child up before signing, ‘that’s an Echo Flower. Peculiar flora capable of mimicking sounds and storing them until they catch another sound. They are often used to leave messages for others.’

Papyrus looked over to the flower and tapped it, “What’s this?” It replied to the contact which caused Papyrus to laugh in excitement.

Gaster leaned over and tapped another flower near the tiny skeleton, “what’s this?” The flower called back. He tapped the next flower to hear the same question again.

Papyrus smiled, ‘are there any other messages?’ He signed, not wanting to disturb the flowers that hadn’t caught his question.

Gaster shrugged, ‘as far as I know I’m the only one that knows of this place, the entrance is a little small for most monsters.’

Gaster’s eyes cast over the Waterfall, the Underground had been fully excavated when he found this place. It had seemed there was little left to explore but by chance alone he’d found this oasis. The bobbing of the flowers against the push of the Waterfall imitated the wind he missed from the surface. Lost in the pale light of echo flowers and the subtle brush of water droplets across his bones he vowed to himself to make the Underground a better place.

Papyrus tugged on his sleeve to get his attention, ‘I’m going to find one!’ With that Papyrus pushed himself carefully through the flowers, mindful of his every step, to find a flower with a message on it. Gaster shook his head before he scanned for Sans.
Sans had wandered just a bit further back to look at the reeds sprouted near a small puddle caused from the waterfall over head. Sans’s head was cocked slightly to the side as he stared intently at the cattails. He knew Sans wouldn’t actually ask so Gaster provided the answer unprompted, “they are Typha plants also known as Water Sausages.” He plucked one from its’ stem, “everyone thinks I’m crazy but they are quite tasty when cooked properly.”

Without missing a beat Sans smiled up to him, “I doubt that’s the only reason people call ya crazy Doc.” Gaster made a feign at annoyance before he plucked a few more water sausages. Papyrus bounded over as Gaster found a dry patch to build a small fire using the enchanted lighter Asgore had gifted him. The small campfire bloomed from the lighter and sat unrestrained against the stone.

He wedged a few of the plants to the ends of sticks as he instructed the boys how to cook them. He opened the lid on the container he’d brought laying out several condiments. He passed a bun to each of the children who looked at Gaster with a confused expression.

Once satisfied Gaster wrapped the bun around the Water Sausage and removed it from the stick watching as the boys followed suit. Gaster gestured to the condiments before putting some relish and yellow mustard on top of his. He sat back indulging in the only thing he was confident in cooking while he watched the boys stare at the foreign object in front of them.

Papyrus was the first one to dare a bite, at Gaster’s curious expression he responded, “it’s not bad.” Obviously it wasn’t going to be his favorite anytime soon but the boy had no issues eating it. Honestly Gaster wondered what it would take for Papyrus to dislike something edible.

Gaster’s cooking was questionable at best, he was trying but it didn’t seem to help much. Papyrus was seemingly undeterred at the idea of eating the wide assortment of charred, crisped, and undercooked foods Gaster had made the previous day. Gaster did not allow the boy to eat them though, not while there was still containers in the fridge.

Papyrus began trying a different condiment on each bite before deciding that he liked it best plain. Sans had still yet to take a bite until Gaster’s eyes landed on him expectantly. Where Papyrus would eat nearly anything in front of him Sans was much pickier, even after the initial nervousness of the situation had settled. Gaster couldn’t blame him for not wanting to eat the charcoal he usually wound up making but he hoped to find something the boy would enjoy. Sans noticed the glance with a sigh his magic absorbed a part of the plant as it was placed to his teeth. He let out a shrug, “it’s not bad.”

He grabbed the ketchup pouring a stripe on the plant his smile read up to his eyes after he took a bite, “that’s better.” Sans scrutinized the ketchup a moment before squirting some onto his finger then touching it to his teeth. His face lit up sparking his eye lights to glow brighter, his face flushed a slight touch of blue before he turned his head away. Ketchup was hardly a food but Gaster would look into finding some recipes that featured it as a component if it got the boy to eat better.

Gaster’s curiosity got the better of him as he squirted a bit of the condiment onto his own finger before he pressed it to his teeth. It took a little bit to remember the process but slowly he began to absorb the red liquid and he was surprised by the difference in flavor.

The sweetness was toned down considerably making the natural tanginess of the tomato more prevalent. He looked to his water sausage and absorbed a section, the texture was thick, nearly paste like, as the magic left a phantom impression in his mouth. The bread was a touch bit sweeter but the sausage held much more of a smokey flavor to it.

Sans had his hand extended asking for the ketchup which Gaster returned to him. Sans doused the rest of his sausage in the condiment. Gaster shook his head and put a new sausage to the flame while the boys began to chatter over the course of their day. “I think Pops would have loved these-
whatever they are,” Papyrus said with a smile looking into the fire.

Sans’s shoulders dropped, “maybe.”

“Your father?” Gaster asked.

“Yes, he was,” Papyrus smiled, “he was really nice and smart he got Sans your book and would-”

Sans rose to his feet in a single effort, Papyrus immediately put his hands over his mouth and tapped the toes of his shoes together, “sorry.”

Sans just shrugged, “if ya wanna talk about ‘em go ahead,” he shoved his hands in his pockets as he crossed to a crystal covered wall gazing at the sparkling gems.

Papyrus sighed, “I wish he wasn’t like that about them.”

‘What happened to them?’ Gaster signed with a sideways glance to Sans.

Papyrus looked away as he signed, ‘no idea.’ he stood up quickly, “let's not talk about it…”

Gaster nodded his head, ‘I’m here if you change your mind. I’m told talking can help.’ Not that he had ever indulged to test this advice outside of completely uncontrolled break downs. Papyrus trotted over to his brother before he could walk too far down the caverns halls, Gaster took note to avoid the subject in the future.

He stayed in his spot near the fire as he watched the boys start a game where they would run around trying to draw out the others soul first without their own being extracted. It was rather impressive how quickly Papyrus could pick up Sans’s spirits.

Gaster watched surprised at the amusement that crossed his face. They were so content in one another's company he was hardly needed, still he enjoyed the opportunity to observe young skeletons at play. He found himself wondering if he was ever like them, carefree, relaxed, content, he figured not but he was glad to give the boys the opportunity to enjoy their youth together.

Suddenly Sans reached for Papyrus’s soul before falling to the ground, “Sans?” Papyrus’s eye sockets grew wide as he began to shake his brother, “Wake up!”

Gaster was startled at first before remembering Sans’s narcolepsy. Papyrus didn’t need to be so set on waking him up, he walked over and placed a hand on the boys shoulder to get his attention, ‘let him sleep. He is fine.’

“How do you know that?” Papyrus looked offended as tears threatened to spill over his sockets.

Gaster sighed trying to think of a means of proving it to him. Gaster wrapped his hand around Sans’s and gave it a slight squeeze. Sans’s hand twitched back in response, ‘he’s just sleeping.’

Papyrus let out an exhale, “I’m sorry,” he rubbed at his eye sockets, “it just scares me.” He pet Sans’s skull gently as he watched his brother’s ribs imitate breathing.

‘I understand the,’ trepidation? No Papyrus wouldn’t know that one, ‘fear.’ Papyrus nodded and looked down to his sleeping brother before pulling him onto his petite lap. ‘Has he always been like this?’ He hoped he didn’t need to reference the Falling incident because he swore he wouldn’t.

Papyrus nodded, “yes, everyone always thought it was because of his stats but he might just be that lazy,” he smiled with a soft laugh. Gaster pondered for a moment, it would be an interesting study, though fields of the mind weren’t his forte he did have a general knowledge of it. Now that he
thought about it he should probably have the pair more thoroughly examined. “He really likes to sleep but he’s been doing a lot better at night so he hasn’t been having as many,” he gestured, “of these. And that’s good! I think we just did a lot today.”

‘Good theory,’ Gaster smiled and Papyrus laughed causing Sans to stir. ‘Might be a scientist yet,’ Gaster chuckled.

Papyrus made an almost pained expression, “I’m sorry but I’m not really interested in that stuff, I don’t really know what I want to be yet though.”

‘Take your time,’ Gaster patted Papyrus’s head, he clenched his teeth as Papyrus leaned into the touch, he just wasn’t expecting it. He stretched pulling his hands to the cavern ceiling, ‘perhaps we should call it a day once Sans wakes up.’ Papyrus looked disappointed but he nodded in solemn agreeance. So the two chatted, well more so Papyrus, about anything that came to mind to fill the empty quiet.

It wasn’t too long before Sans woke up rubbing his eye sockets a bit confused at his surroundings until his mind woke up more. Gaster was surprised that Sans seemed as disappointed as his brother that they were leaving but he didn’t attempt to fight the matter. This time as they crossed the bridge Gaster had them cross one at a time so he could hold their souls with blue magic though Sans requested defiantly that he could do it on his own.

They squeezed through the narrow corridor and entered the first cavern when Gaster heard a “Wa ha ha” style laugh pulse through the caverns.

His shoulders tensed as he quickly looked down to the children who were trying to find where the sound came from. Gaster exhaled trying to still his squirming magic, he was an adult, he didn’t need to be this upset about- “Hello old friend,” came a voice similar to cracking rock.

The tension in Gaster’s shoulders spread across his sternum then shot down towards his legs before he turned around to face the decrepit turtle. The reptile’s age was now apparent across every scale of his body as they flaked like molting feathers to the ground. Gaster’s hands flew to the hem of his sleeve as he stared down the turtle trying not to grimace at his bulging eye, that was a new injury.

The children looked up to Gaster expectantly but seemed confused by his expression. ‘Hello Gerson,’ Gaster signed crisply before returning his fingers to the edge of his sleeve.

“So what lab did you grow those two in?” Gerson’s smile would read to anyone else as teasing but Gaster knew better.

Why does everyone keep suggesting that they were some experiment? They are children, Gaster exhaled summoning his hand bullets so his physical hands could stay pressed against his sleeve. He faced the children, “Boys this is Gerson, a colleague of mine, why don’t you two play a bit more while we catch up?”

“Hello Mr. Gerson,” Papyrus stepped around Gaster, “I’m Papyrus and this lazybones is Sans,” he gestured to his brother who waved. “Sans say hi!”

“Hi,” Sans said flatly before he shoved his hands in his pockets. He looked up to Gaster as if he was ready to back him up in a fight, “we’re gonna go play by the echo flowers okay?” Gaster nodded but Sans looked hesitant to leave until Papyrus tugged him along.

Gaster let out an exhale his eye sockets fell to a glare as he looked to the turtle, ‘no I did not make them in any sense of the word.’
“Well I sure didn’t think ya had a partner,” Gerson laughed humorlessly. “Do ya really think it’s wise to be keepin’ two youngins with ya?”

‘No,’ Gaster shrugged as he answered honestly, ‘but it was my decision to make.’ Gerson let out another of his signature laughs and Gaster felt anger flood his features, ‘what?’

“Since when do you make good decisions boy?” Gerson was staring up at him in as condescending of a manner as the shorter monster could muster. Of course that’s what this was about, Gerson had finally caught him and was going to force him to apologize. How childish, Gaster rolled his eyelights at the thought before realizing the hypocrisy of the action. He had avoided the turtle for years because of his fear of one conversation but he wasn’t willing to concede defeat now that he was backed against a corner.

The worst part of it was, now that he was an adult, Gaster knew Gerson had been correct in his judgement. Still, the hate that had boiled in his magic as he thought of the turtle stung at him for too long to forgive. Gaster had spent years destroying himself wondering what would have happened if he’d have been at the final battle. Gaster couldn’t let it go, he realized he was the childish one.

“There’s a little tadpole runnin’ around here,” Gaster’s eye sockets widened in shock at the change of subject but he couldn’t deny he felt relieved. “I’ve been keepin’ my good eye on her best I can. Kids’ a real handful,” he shook his head.

“Did ya know I retired from the guard? I guess that was years ago now, anyways I still get asked to do some small tasks every now and then around the Waterfalls.” He smiled obviously enrobed in the memory, “this little tyke saw me stop a burglary and has basically been my side kick ever since.”

‘Odd that a child would look up to you,’ Gaster smirked causing the old monster to frown.

“I raised a lot of you tykes and don’t you forget it,” Gerson nodded his beaked lips pierced the air. ‘Where would we be without you,’ Gaster folded his arms.

“So those two,” he hitched his thumb in the direction of the boys, “what’s their story? How’d they end up with you?”

Gaster looked down to them running from flower to flower leaving various messages for any passersby or each other. He watched them before he felt the gaze of Gerson scrutinizing him. He touched his secondary finger to the corner of his teeth trying to gauge his expression but nothing seemed off, ‘I don’t know their story, not really.’ he answered. ‘They were orphaned, traveled from the Capital to Hotlands before some monsters brought them to the orphanage, and then I adopted them.’

“Sentimental huh?” Gerson laughed, “I know that well enough. I was surprised to see a couple a lil skeles let alone with you of all Monsters.” He scratched between the wrinkles in his neck, “I still don’t think your really parental material, but best of luck to ya.”

‘Truthfully, I doubt I am,’ he shrugged, ‘but they are good kids,’ he looked over to them, ‘and they take care of each other so I consider myself lucky.’

“They seem like good tykes,” he extended his hand to Gaster, “best of luck to ya kiddo.” Gaster’s fingers twitched against his arms before he hesitantly extended his hand. Gerson shook it, surprisingly firm for how feeble he appeared. As Gaster went to pull away Gerson gripped tighter and pulled Gaster’s hand closer to his eyes to look over the holes in his palm. Gaster ripped his hand away quickly receiving a sad smile from Gerson, “looks a lot better than they used to.”
Gerson situated his hat on the top of his head as he watched the two skeleton children play for a while. They were less active now then they had been, even Papyrus seemed to be wearing down though he was still attempting to drag Sans to the next flower. “A lots changed I suppose, who am I to judge?”

Gaster studied the turtles face before calling out to the boys, “It’s time to go,” Gerson looked up impressed.

“Do they understand yer gibberish?” Gerson scratched at his chin as the boys ran up.

‘No,’ Gaster looked to him flatly, ‘well sort of. Sans can read it and I think he’s starting to pick up the sounds of it but Papyrus knows hands fairly well.’

Gerson bobbed his head a few times as he reached into a pouch on his vest, “interesting, interesting,” as the boys approached he tossed two crabapples to the pair. Sans dodged it with a narrowed socket glare to Gerson but Papyrus caught his looking it over.

“Oh, thank you Mr. Gerson,” Papyrus smiled holding onto his apple with both hands.

“You’re quite welcome Papyrus,” the corners of his beak like mouth was raised. Gaster knew he had just tested the pair, the scene was almost nostalgic to the time he first met the turtle. Neither of the boys responded the way he had. Gerson held out another apple to Sans who took it a bit sheepishly, embarrassed he had sidestepped such a harmless object.

“Thank you,” Sans said looking up to Gaster. He could feel Sans’s analyst stare before he looked down to greet it. Sans seemed to reach some sort of a conclusion as his body relaxed subtly.

“You two had better take care of this one ya hear?” He pointed with his thumb up to Gaster who scoffed at the notion. “He has a habit of not carin’ for himself so you’ll have to help out okay?”

Papyrus nodded, “we already make sure he eats at least twice a day,” he folded his arms glowing with accomplishment. Yesterday Papyrus had noticed that even when he fed the pair, whether Grillby’s leftovers or his own shortcomings in the culinary arts, he hardly ate anything himself. Papyrus had chastised him after he’d attempted to skip out on dinner the evening forcing him to promise he’d eat a meal at least twice a day.

“Wa ha ha,” echoed through the tunnels as the turtle laughed from his core again, “you weren’t kiddin’ Gaster you got real lucky.” Gaster feigned annoyance but he slid his fingers over his teeth to cover the laugh that threatened to manifest.

Finally the three of them left the old turtle alone and Gaster had to admit his soul felt a bit lighter after having finally talked to him, maybe not about what was needed to be discussed but he felt better regardless. The children walked closer behind him then usual as they tried not to show their fatigue. Papyrus tugged on the end of his coat and sheepishly pointed to an echo flower. Gaster narrowed his brows before he crossed over to the flower and tapped its petals lightly. “Today was a lot of fun! Thank you dad!” Papyrus’s chipper voice sang.

He turned back to Papyrus with a smile across his face but he noticed Sans pointing to another flower just a ways away from Papyrus’s. “Thanks Doc,” came Sans quiet voice. It was so simple, so like the boy, he sat there crouched against the stone tracing his eyes over the white veins of the flowers. He took his time as he steadied his soul which was fluttering erratically in his chest before he turned back to the boys.

“Thank-” he started but he bit down and started again, “I’m glad you are happy.” The pair smiled to
each other then up to Gaster, who had to pause again to still his soul. He hoped he wasn’t coming
down with something, he scratched at his sternum as he walked a few steps ahead of the boys back
into Hotland.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your continued support you have no idea how often, when I’m having a
bad day, I think of the Kudos, Comments, and Views. I really wasn’t expecting this to
go anywhere so thank you for your support.

This is the first of the “patchwork family” arc. I love writing introductions to characters
so I hope it will be interesting to you too.
Vague Feelings

Chapter Summary

Nightmares, work, and old habits.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a little bit to “fast-forward-y” for my tastes but it will do.

Gaster was snug in the darkness of his room entrapped in his blanket of shadows until a loud wail startled him conscious. His eyes flickered between purple and yellow as his magic tried to process how to respond to the disturbance. It took him a moment to process what was making the sound, *children*, he concluded. The wailing cut out suddenly but choppy breathing replaced it. *Sans*, he was the one close enough to his door to hear breathing.

He was surprised that the idea of getting up in a few hours for work didn’t even dawn on him as he swung his legs over the edge of the bed, tidied up his pajamas, before he headed up the stairs. As he approached he could plainly hear Papyrus’s attempt at whispering calming words to his brother. He opened the door to their room which was met by a quick screech that made Gaster rub his temples, his eyes emitted a soft purple light about the room.

“Dad?!” Papyrus shouted.

Gaster summoned his hand bullets which glew in a pulse of the same color as his eyes, ‘yes.’

Papyrus let out an exhale, “your eyes scared me, they were all I could see.” Gaster touched the rim of his eye sockets an unspoken sorry written across his face. Sans covered his face as hiccup like breaths grew louder. “It’s okay, it’s okay,” Papyrus repeated the phrase as he rubbed San’s back in circles.

“What’s wrong?” Gaster asked.

“Sans had a nightmare,” Papyrus said with a practiced ease.

“What about what?”

“Sans, what was your nightmare about?” Papyrus tried but Sans just hugged him closer. Gaster let out a sigh and turned the lights on. He sat on Papyrus’s unoccupied bed watching the two for a while as they went about, what had to be, their routine. It took Sans a while but he eventually relaxed. Papyrus let go of him sitting beside him their backs against the wall.

“Sorry,” Sans mumbled as he rubbed his eye socket, “you can go back to bed, I didn’t mean to wake you up.”

“Want to talk about it?” Gaster asked his bullets still signing lazily beside him. Sans shook his head,
his shoulders giving a slight shudder. Gaster leaned back his head knocking against the pirate flag, “I find myself frequented by nightmares.”

Both of the boys heads perked up and Gaster let out a sigh, “they’ve dwindled in occurance in recent years but I’ve spent many nights in a state of panic.” He began to fidget with the hem on his sleeve as he stared into the middle distance, “I fought in the war between humans and monsters, not as a soldier, just as a friend to the King. I did some—” he searched for a word more befitting but he simply murmured, “bad things. When I was awake my actions didn’t bother me, but in my sleep, my thoughts warped.”

Gaster took a moment to still his breath as flickers of unwanted memories tried to surface, “I woke up screaming, more nights then not, but I got over it with time,” he shrugged.

The pair looked over to him and Sans eye lights scrutinized the floor, “what were they like?”

Gaster thought for a moment, not because he couldn’t recall them but because their content was difficult to describe to children, he held his hands up to sign, his fingers twitched a moment as he looked to the holes in his hands, “the humans that gave me my injuries, some of the bad things I did, sometimes they were just vague feelings and remaining sentiments, those were probably the worst,” he looked away from the boys to relax the tightness that was building in his ribs.

“Yeah, they are,” Sans rested his chin against his knees. By the way his eye sockets hung half lidded it was obvious the boy desired sleep but his mind was too alert now.

“Oh! When I used to have nightmares mom and pops would let me sleep in their bed,” Sans eyes were wide, “do you think Sans could—”

“I do not think that would be for the best, I do not feel any of us have enough trust in one another for that to be beneficial,” Gaster replied flatly before the idea was fully proposed, Sans noticeably relaxed.

“I trust you,” Papyrus stated so earnestly that Gaster had to hold back a cringe. Monsters were creatures of compassion, thus, trust came naturally to them but Gaster had never earned it so effortlessly before. He looked to the boy for any sort of lingering fear or dishonesty but there wasn’t anything to see.

Gaster pressed his fingertips to his chin moving them down in an arch, his fingers shakier than he’d like, ‘thank you.’

Papyrus smiled in return, “well if that doesn’t work then do you mind if I sleep with Sans? He doesn’t have nightmares if we’re together. He hasn’t been sleeping well since we left—” Sans nuded him in the ribs a bit, “what? It’s true! That’s why Ms.Dogealer gave up on making me sleep in the bedroom with the others.”

“If that’s what keeps you comfortable that is fine, I had assumed you’d want your own space while you slept,” Gaster explained, “my apologies for not asking.”

“Oh no, no need to apologize, Sans just wanted to try it,” the child in mention was doing everything to not be seen as he clenched the blankets around him.

“Are you sure you don’t want to talk about it?” Gaster’s eye lights fell to Sans who gave two short nods. If the child wouldn’t talk to him there was little he could do to assist him. He seemed so privy keeping everything inside of himself but Gaster had no rights to chastise the child over it, that would make him a hypocrite.
He got off the bed, held the blankets up, and stepped aside with a gesture for the boys to take the bed, it wasn’t much bigger than the cot but it was definitely softer. Papyrus attempted to carry his brother off the bed, the height difference made it improbable but Sans seemed to appreciate the effort. Once they were situated Gaster pulled the blankets over them then reached for the light, “are we good?”

The pair nodded and Gaster flipped off the lights, “how do you get your eyes to do that?” Papyrus asked.

Gaster realized his eyes had been purple for the duration of the conversation, “magic,” he signed hand bullets aglow, “you’ll be able to do it too someday, but for now: sleep well.” Papyrus curled back into Sans as Gaster shut the door to the basement.

He laid back down, his eyes pinned on the darkness above him as he pulled his blankets around him. What could a child of that age have such frightening nightmares about? He traced circles around the holes in his palm, perhaps the world was just scarier when you are so small. An odd smirk grew across his face as he thought of tiny dainty fingers and wide eye sockets, he pressed his hands to his face, he needed to sleep.

He took several deep calming breaths as he forced his eye lights to disperse. Papyrus said Sans hadn’t been sleeping well since they arrived here, that would explain the frequency of his episodes. He really should consider getting the pair a proper evaluation.

Had he handled that alright? Sans could still be in distress. What did he do when he started having nightmares? Right. Nothing. Maybe he shouldn’t have dismissed Papyrus’s suggestion so quickly, it should have been Sans’s right to decline it. Gaster resigned himself to the fact he was going to be tired tomorrow, he couldn’t get the thoughts to stop.

His shoulders slouched to his bed before he sat up. He crept as quietly as he could up the stairs and gently pushed the door open. Without casting magic to his eyes he could still make out the edges of their forms curled up against one another, he leaned in the doorway. They were okay. They had developed their own way of dealing with the problem during their time on their own.

He wrapped his hands around his arms, they were fine. He grabbed the door handle, “good night Dad,” Papyrus’s tired voice tumbled clumsily from his mouth.

“G-Good night Papyrus,” Gaster’s words tripped over themselves after he realized the long pause he’d left after Papyrus spoke. He shut the door behind him quietly then trotted down the steps back to his room. Before he placed his face firmly against his pillow, that kid was something else.

Gaster’s eyes glowed brighter as he focused on waking up for the morning. He stretched his back and flexed his shoulder blades before he swung his legs off of the side of the bed. It was his first day back to work and he was surprised he wasn’t more eager.

He had already taken the initiative to allow himself the ‘weekends’ most monsters partook in. Two days off were supposed to be good for moral and mental health but he’d never really believed that.

He slipped out of his pajamas and into a charcoal gray button down shirt and black slacks, grabbed
his phone off of his dresser then headed quietly up the stairs so as not to disturb the boys. He took a quick glance to their bed and shut his eyes tightly at the sight of the empty bed. He held his breath until he heard Papyrus’s hushed tones coming from down the hall, he exhaled before making his way towards the kitchen.

“Good morning Dad!” Papyrus’s chipper voice sang.

“Mornin’,” came Sans’s nearly inaudible greeting. The boy had his face buried behind his arms which were being smothered by the too big blue jacket with the cyan stripe Gaster had bought.

“Good morning boys,” Gaster signed quickly, “what are you two doing up?”

“I wanted to make you breakfast- but it’s gone,” Papyrus looked perplexed by his own statement.

“Disintegrated,” Sans’s voice was so indecipherable Gaster had to utilize his synthesia to even begin to make out what he’d said.

“What were you making?” Gaster tried to think of what he even had along the lines of breakfast foods.

“Toast,” Papyrus provided.

Gaster tipped back the toaster to see the charred ash of what was once bread sitting at the bottom of the machine, ‘I see.’ Sans let out a soft snort of a snore that made Gaster cover his teeth to hide the smile that sprung onto his face.

“Sorry,” Papyrus pouted. “I will do better next time,” he punched his fists into the air.

‘I’m sure you will,’ Gaster rubbed the top of the boy’s head, ‘I’m going to go to work now, you two are going to be okay right?’

“Of course! I will watch Sans very thoroughly and keep him out of all of the troubles!” Papyrus declared with a Royal Guard salute.

Gaster shook his head, ‘I knew I could count on you.’ Gaster winced when he saw the excessively joyful look on Papyrus’s face.

“You trust me?” Papyrus had conjured his eye lights to look up at him.

Gaster tensed as his soul writhed in heavy beats in his chest, ‘with your brother,’ this kid was going to be the death of him.

“Sans!” Papyrus hugged his sleeping brother, “he trusts me!”

Gaster blinked, at a complete loss of what to do he pointed to the living room before he went over to work at getting his shoes on. “Oh boys,” Sans was begrudgingly awake due to his brother’s affection, “I’m going to set up a Doctor’s Appointment with the health division of the labs to-”

“No,” Sans was suddenly very alert.

“No?” Gaster raised a boney brow.

“No doctors,” he pulled away from his brother. “We’re fine so we don’t need to go,” Sans shoved his hands in his pockets in an attempt to regain his casual composure. He shrugged as he turned his attention to the gray floor.
Gaster shifted in his shoes as he weighed his options in his mind, “you know this will happen eventually correct?” Sans appeared repulsed at the notion but he nodded, “then we will do this at a later date.” It was hardly worth upsetting the boy so soon in their relationship, “but I will need someone with a better knowledge on the subject than myself to examine you before you go to school.”

“We get to go to school?” Papyrus asked.

“You’re going to let us go to school?” Sans asked at the same time.

“Yes, but you will need to go to the doctors first,” Sans’s enthusiasm waned, “so once you have your nerve about the subject let me know, okay?” Sans shrugged without any evidence that he was interested in committing to the statement. “Now if you two are alright I’m going to head to work, be good okay?” Sans nodded.

“Go before you’re late!” Papyrus pushed Gaster towards the door and in the next moment the door pulled shut behind him.

Gaster was relatively relieved at how easy it was to slip back into work mode. It didn’t take him anytime at all to happily plow through the tower of proposals that sat on the corner of his desk. It had been a long while since all of the departments had taken the time to research their own subjects. He’d gone through enough of these in his time as the Royal Scientist to effortlessly tell which projects hadn’t been thought through or had been rushed at the last moment, those were immediately disregarded.

He was around halfway through the stack when he looked to see the time for the day. According to the clock he was supposed to go home in two hours, he’d worked straight through the day without even a moment of thought to the time. Two hours. He took it to memory. Two hours. He turned his attention back to the pile on his desk.

He flinched as the quiet of his work was disturbed by his door sliding open. His assistant slunk into the office, his slit eyes dilated as they adjusted to the darker lighting of his office, “staying late?”

Gaster rubbed his temples, ‘no I just-’ he looked at the clock on his desk, his eye sockets widened. He quickly began shoving the remaining files into his bag, he slipped out of his lab coat and shoved his ID into his drawer. It was only forty minutes, that wasn’t as bad as it could have been. He’d have to keep a closer eye on the clock in the future.

“Wait, you’re actually taking this seriously?” his ears twitched.

‘Yes,’ Gaster signed incredulously, ‘I just lost track of time, thank you for getting me.’ He put a hand on the cat’s shoulder before he sprinted down the hallways.

“You’re welcome?” The cat monster was completely puzzled.

Gaster placed his forehead against the pale gray of his front door, he focused on his breathing, he didn’t have lungs, why was running so frustrating? That was a separate question, the boys had been left together for the duration of the day, why did he feel the need to return quickly? Things were
changing at a much quicker rate than he’d anticipated. He sat against the door as he felt the slight tug as his ribs expanded and collapsed. He rested his head on his knees, he ran all the way home and now he was sitting outside. He pressed his fingertips over his soul as he attempted to decipher the sea of thoughts that had been plaguing him within the boundaries of his own home. Gaster flinched backwards as the door opened behind him. He tilted his head upwards to see the very top of Sans’s skull, he repositioned to view him properly.

“Heya Doc, lose your key?” he smirked.

“No, I am just taking a moment to catch my breath,” Gaster’s shoulders relaxed, “you boys hungry?” Sans shrugged, “depends, are you cooking?”

Gaster groaned, “I hope we still have some of Grillby’s food left.” He was surprised to find himself hungry and he really wanted to go down to Grillby’s in Snowdin for a nice greasy burger but it was a bit late for kids to be in a bar.

Sans chuckled, “yeah we have a few left.” Sans stepped back so Gaster could get off of the ground.

“Sans a few more minutes!” Papyrus shouted from the living room.

“Too late bro,” Sans chuckled.

Newspapers were strewn across the coffee table as Papyrus worked at painting the individual bulbs of a strand of lights. “Where did you get those?” Gaster asked.

“We wanted to hang some lights around the railing to your room so we can see the stairs! I got the idea to paint them like your eyes!” Papyrus beamed as he displayed the purple and yellow bulbs. He had diluted the ink from his markers to make a transparent paint to cover the bulbs.

“But where did you get those?” he asked again.


Gaster blinked, “you walked all that way by yourselves?”

“Yeah,” Sans looked confused, “can’t just teleport there or anything.”

Children were supposed to stay with their guardians, and when their guardians weren’t around they were supposed to stay home. He hadn’t even thought to explicitly state it, he scratched alongside one of his scars. Waterfall was one of the more dangerous areas in the Underground, if something would have happened to them he wouldn’t have even known.

“Dad,” Papyrus sounded as if he’d already been scolded.

Gaster drew his ring finger up to the corner of his teeth in an attempt to discern his expression but he couldn’t place it. Papyrus was intimidated by it though, ‘Not right now Papyrus, I need time to think.’

Gaster went into the kitchen and zapped the personal sized pizza from the container. The boys could share that, he wasn’t really hungry anymore. Agitation had built in his nonexistent stomach and successfully replace his hunger as he tried to process what he was supposed to do in this situation. He pulled his phone out from the bag he was still wearing and texted Asgore. It would probably be a while before he got a response.
He set the pizza on the table before he went to sit in his study. He pulled out the remaining proposals, placed them on the desk, and let out a long sigh. “Dad?” Papyrus’s voice sounded wounded but his eye sockets looked vindictive. “I didn’t get to make you breakfast,” even without eye lights it was easy to tell the boy wasn’t making eye contact, “and you didn’t bring anything for lunch. So- so-” his voice grew hesitant, “you need to eat dinner.”

Gaster placed his head in his hands, “I just need a few minutes Papyrus, I- I don’t know what I’m supposed to do, I don’t know why I’m feeling the way I am, I don’t know why my soul suddenly has an opinion on things. It’s only been four days and I’m already unsure about so many different things.”

Papyrus couldn’t understand any of Gaster’s font which allowed him to vent without consequence. Papyrus let the quiet stretch between them before he quietly repeated himself, “you need to eat dinner.”

Gaster let out a, admittedly, dramatic sigh before he rose to his feet and followed the small skeleton into the kitchen. Sans was already happily eating at a slice of pizza when the pair entered, he offered a slice to Gaster who shook his head. Gaster made himself a simple sandwich then sat at his usual spot. The three sat in awkward silence as they picked at their food.

Gaster was surprised at himself for breaking the silence, “I don’t want you two leaving the house for more than a quick food run if I’m not home.” As a child he’d ran free on the Surface which was infinitely larger and considerably more dangerous so he wasn’t going to ask them to stay cooped up in the house for nine hours a day. The pair had already proven themselves savvy enough to get from the Capital to Hotlands on their own. He could trust them in the Capital where other monsters would be able to keep an eye on them.

“Cause I’m weak,” Sans’s voice was barely audible as he stared at his pizza slice.

Gaster felt the last of his sandwich dissolve from his teeth as his soul stuttered, “no, its because Waterfall is dangerous no matter your stats. Skeletons can’t swim, simple as that, one wrong step could land you in the river and carry you away.” He left out that since they didn’t need to breathe they just had to wait until their magic gave up.

“The muck can swell between your bones, we don’t have enough mass to quite pull ourselves out the way other monsters do,” he added. “Regardless of species falling stalagmites or sudden movement in the garbage heaps can do a lot of damage, sometimes more than that.”

Papyrus fixed his widened sockets on him, “If it was just one of you, I’d ask you to stay home without exception but I know you two will take care of each other. Provided the environment is safe, if you were to get hurt I wouldn’t have means of knowing.” He scraped some crumbs off of the table, “I’m working on getting you two replicas of my communication device, and maybe then we’ll talk about more freedom but for now, please understand I don’t want to see you hurt.”

“I’m sorry Dad,” Papyrus locked eyes with him.

Sans sat back in his chair, “ditto.”

Papyrus’s eye socket twitched in annoyance as he leered at his sibling and he opened his jaw to speak but Gaster interrupted him, “I should have been more clear. I just- hadn’t thought about it. I’ll try to think ahead better.”

“Nah Doc, we probably should have thought it through better,” Sans looked down to the crust of pizza on his plate.
Another awkward silence hung in the waiting as Gaster traced a symbol onto the table with his finger. “I like the lights though,” he pushed the silence back, “would you help me hang them?”

“Yes!” Papyrus seemed to float out of his chair, he grabbed Gaster’s sleeve, “come on!”

The three worked together at coiling the purple and yellow lights around the railing that lead down to Gaster’s room. He figured this meant they were planning on bothering him in the middle of the night but he was certain it would only be if it was for something important. Gaster grabbed a small box from his closet that would allow the strand to receive transmitted power from the core. The bulbs lit up and Papyrus gasped, “they’re so pretty.”

“You did a good job on them,” Gaster smiled. The twins sat on the steps while Gaster leaned against the wall watching the bright lights cast circles against the stairwell. Gaster rubbed at his eyes as they tried to match, he couldn’t quite deal with both of the colors at once but it was a cute idea. Cute, since when was that even in his vocabulary? Gaster chortled quietly to himself, “since you two were in the dumps today why don’t you take a shower?”

Sans started to scale the steps with a mischievous smile, “Nah it was a pretty good day actually.”

“Sans!” Papyrus ran up the stairs to give chase to Sans who grinned mischievously back to him.

Gaster chuckled as he followed them up, at a much more reasonable rate, before he turned into his office. He pulled his desk chair out and sat firmly against the back of it. His phone vibrated inside of his bag, he took a moment before he slid out the keyboard to display the message from Asgore: Just breath Dings. You just need to tell them why they shouldn’t have done what they did. Just talk to them and don’t hide in your office to avoid the problem.

Gaster smiled as he pushed the keyboard back in and set the phone back on its corner of the desk. He leaned back, everything was changing, odd, and foreign, but maybe there was a chance this wasn’t a mistake.

Chapter End Notes

I kept writing a scene where his coworkers chastised him for leaving his kids at home but I couldn’t get it to fit anywhere.

Might be getting the next chapter ahead of time? No promises I just feel sort of ‘eh’ about this chapter and the next one is almost finished so... maybe?
Gray and Gold and Gray

Chapter Summary

A simple trip to the castle to meet Asgore- but someone else is there too.

Chapter Notes

Despite finishing this Saturday the chapter after this one isn’t really working for me so I decided to maintain the update schedule. Speaking of which this marks the quarter-ish mark for the whole story and the halfway point for the first act.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The looming gray towers of the castle cut deep against the cavern ceiling and glared down to the trio below. The two small skeletons clung to Gaster as he approached the guards. Best behaviour, he had informed them before they left the house. The boys seemed daunted by the idea of meeting the King of Monsters and with Gaster being so firm with them being on their manners it sounded more severe than it needed to be.

Gaster was more concerned with the pair exploring the less favorable corridors than Asgore himself. Asgore had been trying to convince Gaster to bring the brothers to meet him for the last several days. “It’s been over a month Gaster, please?” The King had begged at Gaster’s last proposal, it was growing rather difficult to keep the King on subject and he had given them more than enough time.

Of course Papyrus was more than eager, happy to abandon his coloring book at the idea of going somewhere new. Sans had been less so, actively engrossed in one of Gaster’s Meteorology books as he tried to grasp the concept of what weather was at all. Sans had attempted to describe what he was learning to Papyrus but both seemed at a loss. Gaster did his best to explain the surface to them but he was surprised at the difficulty of describing such things to children who had never felt wind before or seen the seasons recolor the land.

His resolve for escape from the Underground was building in him once more.

The guards let them pass with little more than a glance in his direction, it wasn’t difficult to ID the skeleton even if he didn’t come by weekly. The boys walked behind him as they usually did trying to find something of interest in the gray hallways but seemed to fail in that endeavor.

Gaster smirked as his eye lights gazed over the buildings in the distance. He paused and pointed to a smaller section of buildings off by itself, ‘that’s our house.’

“I never realized it was so tiny!” Papyrus eye lights sparkled at the tiny building in the distance. Sans looked over to his brother with a chuckle before it died out suddenly, his eyelights fell to a taller building in the middle distance. Gaster stiffened up a little and tried to follow his brother’s line of sight. Gaster marked the building in his mind, he could decipher its importance even if it wasn’t necessary for him to do so.
Gaster started along the hallway but when he didn’t hear any accompanying footsteps he turned back to the pair. He gestured with his eye lights that it was time to move along to which they slowly turned away from the city before them. “That was pretty neat is there anything else like—” Papyrus paused mid-sentence with his jaw left slightly agate as the golden hall reflected its’ colors across his bones, “wowie...”

The hallway that stretched before them sparkled with the slight traces of sunlight that leaked from the surface. Their steps were marked by alternating orange and yellow tiles that were polished to a fine glow. Each pillar stood with purpose as the delta rune from the stained glass reflected proudly upon their cores. The ceiling tossed each noise, each miniscule step, back to them with enough tenacity to wonder if the hall could hear even the faintest of soul beats.

The boys walked cautiously through the room, their sockets traced over every line in the floor, the walls, the pillars, and the grand arching ceiling. Gaster was rather surprised at the pairs silence as they stuck to each other’s side, they weren’t even whispering amongst themselves. Sans paused in the middle of the hall, “H-hey Doc, is this room important?” Sans’s quiet voice returned and settled around them.

Gaster paused in his momentum before he turned to face them, “any who wish to meet the King must pass through here.” His voice was softer than usual, his signs direct. The room had always had a quiet influence it seemed even those unaware of its’ history could feel it. “It’s called the Final Corridor because it’s the end of the journey,” he looked down the room towards the King’s garden.

“When the room was first built it was called the Judgement Hall,” Gaster let out a soft sigh that sounded louder when it bounced back. “If a human were to pass into the Underground in an attempt to finish what they started they would have to come here to—” he looked at the small children looking up to him, he cleared his throat, “meet judgement.”

After the Queen left the position of Judge was needless, all humans were enemies. Gaster still wasn’t certain which position he stood behind, until the first human he wouldn’t have hesitated to agree with Asgore with all of his soul. He slipped his hands into his pockets, it was just a mess.

Papyrus tugged on his sleeve, he didn’t speak, or sign, he just looked up to Gaster with his narrow eye sockets as if he understood all of his thoughts. Sans stared into the middle distance, his eye lights missing as he stared with empty sockets at his own thoughts. ‘The King?’ Papyrus signed. Gaster blinked to refocus his thoughts before he headed towards the exit. They were nearly at the entryway when Sans’s feet pat across the floor to hastily catch up.

The golden flowers swayed to greet them but the King did not. The giant Boss Monster was fighting at the back of the garden with a small blue child. It was apparent in the King’s slow movement he was in no immediate danger as the aquatic monster launched waves of blue spears with powerful thrusts. The King looked over to the company and gave Gaster a short nod before his attention returned to the child.

Their short messy red hair clung to their face as they exhausted themselves with their excessive movement. Each attack was plainly broadcast in a series of grunts or screams, their golden eyes fixed on the King with the tenacity of a predator. Their earfins began to sag as their attacks shrunk from spears to arrows, but they didn’t show any intention of stopping.

Asgore summoned his ruby trident and in a single movement penned the young monster to the ground without so much as a scratch. “Very good Undyne!” Asgore bellowed with a smile plastered across his face.

“How was that good? I didn’t even hit you!” Undyne smacked her fist against the ground after she...
was released from the trident’s hold. Asgore offered his paw but the child stubbornly got up on their own.

“You are getting much faster in your summonings,” Asgore praised as he placed his enormous white paw on her narrow shoulder. “Your aim has also improved considerably! There were a few that I was just barely able to avoid!” He laughed proudly.

“Yeah but you did!” Undyne snarled.

“It’s only a matter of time before you are able to hit me I’m sure,” he picked her hair off of her face and rubbed it back into the rest of her messy red mane.

“Dad what was that?” Papyrus asked quietly as he huddled behind Gaster. Gaster looked down to the boy but simply shrugged, he really wasn’t sure what that was about. He had heard a few weeks ago about a child making an attempt at the King’s life but he’d assumed the issue was resolved. Gaster scratched the back of his skull, that seemed to be what they just witnessed, the oddest resolution he’d seen but it seemed very- Asgore.

Asgore waved over to the skeletons and treaded carefully across his flower garden to greet them, “Howdy! I’m Asgore Dreemur!” His miniscule fangs poked out as he grinned to the pair of children hovering behind Gaster’s legs. Gaster put a hand on each boy’s back and pressed them forward gently.

“What’s your- oh wait! Let me guess?” The monster kneeled down to get as close to their level as he could. “Sans and Papyrus,” he pointed to each in turn with a sparkle in his eyes. When neither responded Gaster nodded in approval, “I knew it! Golly your Dad has told me a lot about you two!”

Sans let go of Gaster’s pant leg to fidget with his fingers, “he’s uh- he’s-” his eye lights looked up to Gaster with a trace of concern.

“Oh right, right,” Asgore shook his head his floppy ears moved with the motion, “you just call him Doctor don’t you?”

Sans looked to the floor, “you’ve goat that half right.”

Asgore narrowed his eyes, “did you-”

Both were interrupted by the stomp of Papyrus’s foot, “Ugh Sans!” He wrapped his arms around his brother, “I am terribly sorry for my brothers terrible jokes!”

Asgore chuckled, “it’s quite alright Papyrus,” his eyes glistened with cyan magic as he gave a distant smile, “I actually enjoy that sort of humor.” Sans’s eye lights brightened and Papyrus clenched his teeth as he bit down some sort of comment. Gaster furrowed his brows as he tried to figure out the joke.

Undyne let out a groan from behind Asgore, “this is boring!”

Asgore dropped his head his mighty horns bowed just in front of Gaster, “well why don’t you introduce yourself?”

Undyne punched her fist to her chest, “I’m Undyne! I’m part of the Royal Guard!” She beamed but when Asgore tuned his head her eyes looked up to the ceiling, “I am part of the Guard because I’m in training to be part of the guard,” she scoffed. Gaster raised a brow to Asgore who raised his paw in a gesture that said he’d explain later.
“Really?” Papyrus stood on his tip toes in an attempt to be eye level with the fish monster. “The Royal Guard is the coolest!” Gaster flinched he hadn’t pieced together Papyrus’s admiration for the guard despite the salutes and the boy’s general disposition, that wasn’t a talk for now though.

“Yeah they are!” Undyne punched a fist into the air, “hey Asgore, can we go play?”

Asgore stroked his beard, “that would be up to their Fath- their Guardian.” Undyne placed her fists on her hips and looked up to the skeleton who looked to his charges. Papyrus had his hands curled into fists as he bounced his knees in anticipation but Sans didn’t seem to have much of an opinion.

Gaster drew his hands to his chest, ‘that is fine but please no rough housing,’ even though the child didn’t seem to know Hands he glared at the little fish monster.

Undyne looked up to him confused but Papyrus grabbed his brother’s arm, “Dad says we can! Lets go explore the Castle!”

“I’m into it!” Undyne punched her fists into the air and tore across the garden with little care for the flowers but the skeleton children careful stepped around the flora to the best of their ability.

Gaster’s shoulders relaxed but his eye lights were focused on the doorway the children left through. He rubbed at his sternum, that child was wild- reckless even, he didn’t know what to do if they got hurt, he couldn’t heal them. It wouldn’t take much to dust- his hands pulled back quickly as a rough texture tickled the edge of the hole in his palm.

“Asgore,” Asgore said firmly his eyes were locked on Gaster’s sockets and his paws gripped Gaster’s hands, “goodness are you alright?”

“Sorry,” Gaster murmured.

“Lets have some tea,” Asgore spoke wearily as he lead Gaster to the tea table he had set up. Gaster sat to where he could still watch the doorway barely noticing Asgore had poured two cups of tea. “You know that’s an expression I never thought I’d see you wear,” he took a long sip from his cup.

Gaster traced the rim of his cup with his fingertip before he picked his hands up to sign, ‘U-N-D-Y-N-E?’

Asgore ran his claws through his fur, “she is an interesting one.” He sat back still delicately holding his tea cup in his paw, “Gerson is actually looking after her. He seems to be of the impression that she is quite determined.”

Gaster drew his cup to his teeth, just barely able to make out the heat of the liquid, he took a sip before he set it back down a bit more firmly than he had wanted to. ‘Are you sure?’ Gaster signed slowly.

“Well there isn’t a sure sign,” Asgore admitted, “but certain behaviours are- well- identical to a monster I used to know.”

Gaster looked down to the tea in his cup, it was a dirtied red color and it’s flavor was strong with a slight taste of fruitiness he couldn’t identify. He let his fingers squeak rudely across the plain ceramic, ‘so you’re throwing her in the guard for safe keeping until your war.’

“Gaster,” Asgore spoke firmly, “that is not it at all!” He set his cup down his eyes burning with flickers of orange, “that child came to me in an attempt to prove her strength, the guard is going to give her those opportunities.”
Gaster pressed his shoulder blades against the back of his chair, ‘sorry,’ he slid his hand across his chest. ‘I could tell by her enthusiasm that it was her idea,’ his eye lights shrunk.

“I know your feelings Gaster but that was her decision,” Asgore exhaled and regained his usual composure, “she actually idolizes Gerson, it’s rather adorable seeing that old codger embarrassed.”

‘Well then, there’s at least one major difference,’ he teased.

Asgore smirked, “speaking of which I heard you spoke to him recently.” Gaster coughed into his hand trying to find a suitable way to dodge the subject.

“Dad can me and Undyne spar?” Papyrus yelled as he poked his head into the room.

“So loud,” Undyne twisted her lips to the side, “I LIKE IT!” She shouted her common switched into uppercase with the new decibel.

‘I said no roughhousing,’ Gaster glared.

Papyrus shrunk away, ‘well I thought with you AND,’ he emphasized ‘and’ with a wider dramatic gesture, ‘the King watching it would be okay.’

“That sounds fine, we’ll just lay down some rules first,” Asgore placed his finger to his lips, “provided that is okay by you.”

‘First hit to connect and the game is over,’ Gaster folded his arms when he was done signing.

“Gaster, monsters don’t play like that anymore, they don’t dodge,” Gaster looked rather alarmed.

“Monsters are kind by nature part of appreciating another’s magic is to take the hit as a result dodging has sort of drifted out of emphasis.”

“Doesn’t stop you,” Undyne grumbled.

“Well I am very old fashioned!” Asgore laughed from his belly, the warmth of it filled the room. “So how about first one to lose a quarter of their health loses, turn based combat, and Undyne no soul magic,” Asgore leered.

Undyne puffed her chest out, “I don’t need Green to beat this nerd.”

“I’m not a nerd I’m a skeleton,” Papyrus corrected.

‘Green?’ Gaster signed annoyed at the quiet jealousy in his soul.

“I told you she idolizes Gerson,” Asgore nudged him, “so sound fair?” Gaster nodded in agreeance and the combatants stood apart from each other while Sans moved to stand behind Gaster.

As bones and spears began to dance back and forth it was fairly obvious Undyne was holding back. Her attacks weren’t nearly the size as what they were against Asgore and they sailed through the air with the tenacity of lake water on a still day. Papyrus on the other hand appeared to be trying his hardest even if after two solid hits he was nearly at the quarter limit. “Come on nerd I thought you were tough!”

“I am tough!” Papyrus stomped. “Fine I’ll unleash my coolest magic!” A cyan bone flew across the battlefield, “blue means stop!”

Gaster’s eyes widened as the bone made contact with Undyne who had attempted to guard from the attack. The attack did a considerably higher amount of damage, enough to make the undaunted
Undyne flinch. Cyan magic was a natural skill that skeletons possessed but they usually didn’t learn it until their adolescence the fact that Papyrus was just at schooling age and capable was- “You’re Blue now!” He raised one hand above his head and stuck the other by his hip as he inflated his chest.

A ping was heard as Undyne’s soul was brought to the surface in a vibrant blue hue. Gaster’s mouth hung slightly agape as he stared at the color, this was a child that had just managed to perform a task some adults were even incapable of. He’d imposed his will onto another monster’s soul. Sans looked up to Gaster with a frustrated expression.

“Why don’t we call it there?” Asgore pressed his brows together. “I believe Undyne has won, but that was very impressive Papyrus! Has Gaster been working at magic with you?” Gaster shook his head as he finally had the decency to shut his mouth. Asgore snickered, “well then you are very talented aren’t you Papyrus?”

“My brother says I am very great!” He trotted up to Gaster, “did I do good dad?”

Gaster crouched down to Papyrus’s level, ‘I am very proud of you Papyrus you did a very good job. Some tuning here and there and-’

Papyrus’s sockets collected water at the base, “you’re- you’re proud of me?”

Sans looked up to Gaster his eye lights pins, ‘of course Papyrus you did very well.’

Sans curled his hands into fists, “hey Undyne can I try?”

Gaster’s sockets widened, “Sans I don’t think-”

Undyne punched the air, “I’ll go again!”

Gaster placed a hand on Sans’s shoulder, “Please be careful.”

Sans slipped his hands in his pockets and pulled away, “I’ll make ya proud Doc.” Gaster’s soul dropped, in that moment he couldn’t read Sans, the boy’s intent was lost behind the facade of his grin. He stood across from Undyne, “we stop when I say stop, okay? No turns either, unless you want to be here all day.”

“Heck yeah! I didn’t think you had it in you punk!” Undyne rolled her shoulder.

Asgore put his paw on Gaster’s back, “we can stop it if anything even looks wrong.”

“N-no,” his voice was shaky, even if it couldn’t be understood, ‘we don’t intervene until he says to.’ Asgore looked at Gaster’s hands as he ran through the signs in his head, he nodded, uncertain, but turned his eyes to the pair.

Undyne launched a spear only for it to be intercepted by a bone that pulsed in yellow light. “Doc!” Sans bit out, “let me do this!” Gaster pulled his hand back to his chest and signed a quick sorry. He hadn’t even thought about it, his magic just reacted, but Sans looked to him as if he’d been betrayed.

Gaster bit down his flaring magic as the next spear was launched, Sans effortlessly dodged it. Undyne scowled as Sans shrugged, “I’m a little old fashioned,” a confident grin crossed his eye sockets.

The room was filled with a blue glow as Undyne summoned a ring of spears around her, with practiced ease she sent them one at a time to Sans. Sans managed to stay a step ahead at all times even when she started sending multiples at him.
“Stay still!” She shouted.

“Nah,” Sans shrugged with his hands confidently secured in his pockets. The assault grew faster and Sans’s eye sockets narrowed in concentration as he danced around the glowing weapons. She moved her circle of spears to surround Sans then continued to throw them mercilessly towards him.

She was growing carried away, each new attack was bulkier and wilder than the last. “Stop,” Sans shouted as loud as his lower case allowed as a spear whizzed beside his skull, “Undyne stop!” Sweat cascaded down his forehead as he ducked below a golden spear, it turned at last moment and-

The hall erupted in a flurry of bones and dancing flames as each spear was pierced through effortlessly by the adults magic. Gaster’s eye lights shifted to Sans-

The world froze.

Papyrus stood directly in front of the bullet closest to Sans, he stood with his arms outstretched as he attempted to form the best shield he could muster. Gaster’s soul coated itself in stone as the child dropped to his knees.

Gaster wasn’t for sure what happened next, he couldn’t hear anything, he couldn’t see anything. A burning cold traced the rim of the holes in his palms as his ribs grew heavy like wet clay. His breathing shuddered as he fought away the sensation and was completely unaware that he had even moved. Papyrus was in his arms and Gaster’s fingers were tingling as he tried to force a magic he didn’ts possess.

Gaster pulled Papyrus closer to him only then realizing that Sans was equally attached to the boy. Sans looked helplessly up to Gaster but he couldn’t do anything. Gaster could hear Sans’s bones rattling as hope was crushed, he clung tighter to his brother. Asgore dropped down beside, his paws cast in an emerald light, as he worked at recovering the boys health.

Sans pulled his brother away from Gaster and clutched him to his chest as he shot a glare up to Asgore. “I am healing him Sans, please,” Asgore spoke softly and allowed his chocolate eyes to hold a warm calmness as he looked down to the boy. Sans’s eye lights flicked over to Gaster who nodded numbly. Sans still held his brother to his chest and watched intently as Papyrus’s eyes slowly opened.

Gaster blinked as he tried to focus on his surroundings, he was grateful Asgore was present. His eyes flared yellow as he scanned for Undyne but she appeared to have ran off. “Dad,” Papyrus mumbled, “can we go home now?”

Gaster opened his arms up and neither boy seemed to know exactly what to do at the gesture. Gaster pulled his arms in and held them in front of his sternum, “I was going to carry you two- I don’t think Papyrus should be walking right now.”

The pair looked confused until their souls pinged blue and they floated towards his chest. He hesitated before he wrapped his arms around them to steady them against the weightlessness of blue. Papyrus leaned his head against Gaster’s arm as Asgore pulled his hands away.

Gaster stood up his eye lights didn’t budge from the twins. “I had a nice dinner planned,” Asgore spoke calmly, “but I think it is for the best you go home now.” Gaster nodded awkwardly still a little dizzy off of the rush of his magic. “Would you like me to accompany you?” Gaster shook his head as he watched the pair shudder against his ribs. “They’re both healthy,” Asgore assured, “I will be speaking to Undyne.”
Gaster nodded again before he stepped through the garden hardly paying heed to the golden flowers. Gaster walked back to the house in silence, his shoulders awkwardly bounced off of passerby monsters as his feet focused solely on not tripping over the uneven bricks. He approached the gray door of his house and stared the door down, he needed to get the key from his pocket.

He looked down to the pair Papyrus was resting his head on Sans’s shoulder who was stretched out as far as Gaster’s arms allowed him to be. Gaster stared at the door, “you need a key Doc,” Sans rolled his eye lights. Right. He knelt down then released his hold on their souls to fish for his key.

“Why did you do that?” Sans cried.

“I wanted to save you!” Papyrus shouted back.

“But you got hurt,” he clenched his fists, “you shouldn’t get hurt because of me!” Gaster inhaled as he pressed the door open. The pair stormed into the living room as soon as it was open a crack.

“It’s different when you get hurt Sans!” Papyrus stomped his foot.

“It doesn’t matter if I get hurt!” Sans choked back tears.

Papyrus whimpered, “yes it does Sans,” his shoulders dropped, “it matters a lot.”

The two erupted at each other a torrent of well meaning words shot aggressively at one another as the pair attempted to explain feelings they weren’t old enough to properly describe. Gaster was speechless every time he formed an argument or a well meaning statement he was interrupted by one of the pairs counters. His ribs decompressed as he finally gave up.

Gaster sat on the floor, his back against the couch as he watched the pair fight for air they didn’t really need. He looked at his hands, the way they shook was caused by his magic expelling itself only to be pulled back in. The motion was too quick. It had disturbed his form. That’s all it was, he’d just exhausted himself. That’s why he was so useless to them, that’s why he couldn’t calm them.

His bones rattled and he pathetically laid his skull against his knees. They were both safe that’s what mattered, that’s all that mattered.

The pair couldn’t hold back anymore the adrenaline of the day caught up to them and they wailed. They were still so young, they tilted their heads back and gave into the emotions that they weren’t prepared to feel. Their bones rattled pitifully against one another as they grasped each other in a deathlock of a hug.

Gaster smiled, they were alright. He rose to his shaking feet and approached the pair, “I think it’s an early bedtime night.” Papyrus reached his arms up to Gaster who arched his brow in return. They stood there in an awkward silence until Gaster pinged his soul blue, ‘this?’ He signed as the boy floated back up into his arms.

Papyrus nodded, ‘Sans too,’ he signed after he rubbed at his eye sockets.

“Sans too?” Gaster asked down to the rounder skeleton who looked sheepishly away. Gaster lifted him into his arms as well and shifted his arms so the pairs could sit comfortably as he walked to their room. Bone arms wrapped around his shoulders, both of his charges hugging him with all of their might. He could tell his eye lights were unfocused by the way his vision blurred around the edges, he pulled them closer.

“Sorry Dad,” Papyrus sniffled, “I should have trusted you to protect him.”
“Sorry Doc I shouldn’t have-” he clenched his fingers against Gaster’s sweater his boney fingers worked their way through the knitting, “I just-” he placed his head against Gaster’s shoulder deciding that best explained the words he couldn’t form.

“Boys,” he wrapped his hands around the back of both of their skulls, “you are both exhausted, if the need arises we will talk about it tomorrow, okay?” The pair nodded their eye sockets just small lines above their cheekbones. He placed them onto their shared bed one at a time then carefully pulled the blankets over the pair. He rubbed at his right eye socket, tomorrow would be a nice quiet day so they all could recover. He looked over at the bookshelf, this was the first time he’d seen them not read before bed.

He pulled up the desk chair and slid the thin book off of the shelf. He’d never been good with emotions but he’d learned they weren’t a solution to be overcome but instead something to work through. He’d never been able to relate to his companions when they were upset but today, seeing them cry, fight, be hurt, he began to think he was capable afterall. He crossed his legs, he was capable and he would start now, “Once Upon a Time there was a Fluffy Bunny...”

Chapter End Notes

This is actually one of my favorite chapters so far, I hope you enjoyed it too.

As always thank you for your continued support and have a nice day!
Apologies

Chapter Summary

After what happened at the castle the Skeletons are ready for a more relaxing day.

Chapter Notes

I started editing this chapter and thought: oh no it’s one of those stream of conscious rough chapters I end up rewriting but no, like most of them, it just takes a while to get where I wanted it to be. A bit of editing and I think it’s improved.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A rather exuberant knock rang through the house with enough force to startle the three skeletons gathered around the coffee table. They had been working on a jigsaw but at the sound Papyrus sprung up to answer the door, “Hello Undyne!” Papyrus chirped.

Gaster let out a discontent breath of air.

Sans’s eye lights dimmed.

“Hey Papyrus,” her voice had a gruffness to it that would one day do her well in a position of authority. For today though she was just a little girl, specifically, a little girl whose carelessness had nearly dusted the children Gaster had promised to protect. The guardian’s eye lights burned into a vibrant yellow, he felt his magic burning in his bones with a hostile intent he thought he’d forgotten. He took a breath, his eyes dimmed to purple as he folded his arms.

Gaster approached the door, “and what brings you here today?” He glanced down at the child hoping every inch of his frame could impose intimidation onto the child.

Undyne looked confused to Papyrus then up to Gaster, “you talk funny.”

What a blunt observation, Gaster glared and the girl glared back on instinct. She was dressed in a black tube top under a pair of overalls, which exposed the gills along her ribs, her red hair was a mess of frizz about her face, her ear fins were a bit too large for her face as she struggled to keep them in an alert position, and she clutched a scavenged backpack to her chest.

“Can I come in,” it should have been a question but Gaster’s synesthesia confirmed it had been a statement. He simply nodded and the child stormed into the house.

“You guys have a pretty nice place,” she slipped her red shoes off and left them at the door as she quickly walked around the living room. Sans eyelights followed her no matter where she went, his expression a near scowl. She plopped up on the couch at the far end from Sans with her bag pinned to her chest.

“Why are you here?” Sans’s tone was particularly cold but Gaster was glad one of them could speak
Papyrus scolded Sans, “she is our guest! We have to be nice to her,” he smiled, “what brings you here?” His eye sockets leered towards Sans to inform him this was the correct way to ask.

She clenched her fists and puffed out her chest, “I’m here to apologize!” She near shouted at a decibel that surpassed Papyrus’s natural voice.

“For what?” Papyrus asked. Gaster’s eyes widened in mild shock, Papyrus was not that dense but when he looked down to the child he seemed genuinely confused by Undyne’s desire to apologize. Sans was matching Papyrus’s perplexed expression but surely for the reason Gaster was confused.

Undyne looked straight to Papyrus, “for hurting you and your brother the other day,” her shoulders squared as if she was talking to a superior.

“That’s alright Undyne, we are both fine,” he smiled and gestured to him and his brother, “everything is okay!”

“But it wasn’t, I lost control and could have really hurt you,” she drew the bag to her chest, “I didn’t want to, I just forgot, and I didn’t know,” her yellow eyes tried to look subtly to Sans but that was obviously not the child’s strong suit. Sans shot her a glare that told her not to finish her sentence, she swallowed in response. Gaster couldn’t help but smirk at the fact the child had managed to put some tact into the unruly monster.

“See Sans,” Papyrus looked up to his brother, “I told you she didn’t mean to.” He had a smug look across his face, happy to be right, “it is okay Undyne I forgive you.”

“A-are you sure?” The child was obviously confused, unaccustomed to such soft reprimanding for her actions. If Gerson was truly the one looking after her then Gaster could understand how she had expected much worse.

“Of course I am,” Papyrus placed his hands on his hips and radiated with a proud light, “and Sans does too right?”

Sans looked incredibly conflicted as he fidgeted his hands in his pockets. He shifted his position and locked eyes with Undyne. His eyelights were piercing, cruel, for a moment before he shrugged, “yeah I forgive ya. I just fish you cod play a little nicer next time.”

“Sans! She’s our guest! Don’t terrorize her with your terrible puns!” Papyrus folded his arms. Gaster narrowed his brows, Puns? His mind itched for a definition until Tori- until the former Queen came to mind. That faulty wordplay that brought such a smile to her face, he’d actually forgotten about it.

“Yeah I can do that,” she grinned her pointed teeth poked out from her lips. “Oh but first,” she reached into her bag and pulled out a few items. There was a hardbound copy of one of the ‘Fluffy Bunny’ books, a plastic figure holding a fist to the sky, and a tiny sword. “I wanna give you guys these so you know how sorry I am, cause this is some good stuff!” She laughed and Papyrus looked happily over the loot.

Papyrus picked up the figure, it resembled the one Sans had bought him back at the market, and looked to Undyne thoughtfully, “does this mean we’re friends?”

“Heck yeah it does,” she slugged him playfully in the arm.

Papyrus looked to the figure with a soft smile before he jumped into the air, “I have a friend!” He seemed to stay suspended for a moment and Gaster couldn’t rationalize it this time, he’d never seen
anything like it.

“You're my very first friend!” He smiled and Undyne couldn’t help but smile back, “I’m going to be having lots of friends once I start school but you are my first and greatest!” He boasted. Gaster let the poor grammar slide as he was still stuck on how the suspension trick worked.

“Can we go play in our room?” Papyrus asked.

‘Go ahead,’ Gaster signed. The boy nearly toppled Undyne over as he pulled her towards their room, Sans dropped his head before he slid off the couch slowly to follow them.

Gaster folded his arms and waited a moment in anticipation of the ensuing sound of children creating chaos that he was met with promptly. Sans seemed to recognize the ruckus and shut the door to give the three of them their privacy. Gaster shook his head, this was not at all how he had anticipated the day going but there hadn’t been any real plans.

He walked into the kitchen to retrieve his phone from the charger. He returned to the living room and flopped onto the couch without any trace of dignity or properness then slid the keyboard out of his phone.

There were several missed messages from Asgore and a few from a number he didn’t recognize. Sure enough they were looking for the child that now sounded as if they were playing pirates with his boys. He simply sent the word ‘here’ to both then shut his phone.

He fidgeted with it absentmindedly for a while before he placed it on the coffee table next to the abandoned jigsaw. He picked up a piece, twirled it in his fingers, then set it against its’ mate. He leaned back against the couch and folded his hands in his lap as he allowed his mind roam.

Flashes of his dream from last night flickered through his head in undesired blinks. Pinned to the wall. An army of skeletons dusting themselves. His form becoming more and more of a liquid as he struggled to help them. Useless. He groaned, not there, his mind was not supposed to wander there.

He mimicked the action of swallowing as he realigned his thoughts, the girl was- interesting. He wondered what Asgore had meant when he said there were similar traits when the child seemed to be his opposite: loud and unruly, defiant, stubborn, eager to fight for the sake of it- okay maybe there were a few similarities. Gaster had a strong enough base to work off of towards checking their theory.

He drummed his fingers along his jaw before he pulled up a notebook and unclipped the pen from it. He opened to a mostly blank page and began scribbling away all of his knowledge on Determination. The subject was one he usually avoided, too many negative memories were tied with it for him to mess around with without the aid of less favorable liquids. He squinted, his font was hard to write normally let alone as small as he was trying.

“Hello Sans, how are you today?” Asgore’s voice filled the room and Gaster flinched. He furrowed his brows as he slowly pieced together what had occurred, he got wrapped up in his thoughts and hadn’t heard Asgore knock but Sans did. He put the notebook back to the side of the couch in a sly manner, though he acknowledged he had already been caught, and approached the door.

“S’good,” Sans mumbled. He clenched and unclenched his hands as he struggled with what he wanted to say, “thanks for the other day... helping my brother means a lot.” Gaster felt a pain of guilt echo through his ribs, Gaster hadn’t done anything.

Asgore smiled pleasantly, “it is quite alright I am sorry he got hurt in the first place.”
“He says he’s fine now and that’s all that matters,” Sans shrugged though he didn’t seem to believe the words.

‘Sire,’ Gaster signed, ‘feel free to come in,’ Gaster steered Sans away from the door so the bulky form the King possessed could fit in the meager doorway.

“I am sorry she got away from me as I was talking to Gerson about,” his horns scraped across the entryway despite his attempt at ducking, “the incident.”

‘It’s alright, Papyrus seems to have taken a liking to her,’ he looked down to Sans and was thankful he wasn’t familiar with the hand signs, ‘I think it would be good for him to have someone he can be a bit rougher with.’

Asgore laughed from his belly, “he is quite the energetic child.” Gaster lead Asgore to the couch where the pair sat, Sans chose to sit on the floor near the coffee table. “Don’t you want to go play with them?” Asgore asked.

Sans shook his head, “they’re really loud.” As if to prove his point a loud ‘Ngahhh’ filled the air shortly accompanied by a ‘Nyeheheh’ and the King smiled. Sans chuckled, he pulled out the Meteorology textbook from beside the couch and sat beside the coffee table to read.

‘I’ll go tell them to quiet down,’ Gaster stood but the King grabbed his arm.

“It’s no problem,” Asgore chuckled, “it’s nice hearing children play again.” His eyes went distant and Gaster’s expression defaulted in response. They had gone the duration of yesterday without any sort of trigger to Asgore’s sadness, at least none that Gaster had recognized, a shame they couldn’t repeat it.

Asgore’s attention was drawn to Sans as he watched him read through the text, “do you understand all of that?”

Sans placed his finger deliberately against the word he was on before he looked up to Asgore, “sort of?” He squinted, “I can read it but like my other books I’m never sure how much I actually understand.” He rested his elbow on the book, his chin rested firmly on his fist, and fixed in a thoughtful expression.

Asgore smiled, “you seem very bright Sans.” Asgore looked at the boy’s posture then over to Gaster with a knowing smile.

“Nah, not like Papyrus is,” Sans smiled before turning back to his book.

Asgore looked confused by the child’s deflection of his compliment but left him to his book, “By the way Gaster, how did Undyne know where you lived?”

Gaster’s eye lights went out as he realized he hadn’t even thought to question how that had happened. Asgore snickered at Gaster’s expression, “you’re so easy to read Dings!”

Sans raised a brow, “Dings?”

Asgore covered his mouth as a full laugh threatened to escape, “that’s his first name: Wingdings.” Gaster flushed in annoyance and looked deliberately away as Sans laughed. The rough housing duo poked their heads out from the hallway.

“What’s going on?” Papyrus locked sockets with his brother who was in the middle of a near fit of laughter.
“Doc’s first name is WingDings,” Sans smiled, “and he makes this funny face when you call him that!”

“Oh,” Papyrus said flatly not finding nearly as much humor in it as his brother. Gaster looked down to Sans who was now trying to still his laughter by placing his hands over his teeth. The child did always seem so amused by others reactions to things, the puns, the simple pranks, it would be logical to assume he enjoyed these things so much because of his inability to express himself in such means.

“Undyne,” Asgore turned to the aquatic monster with a sternness to his voice.

She scoffed, “yeah, yeah, I shouldn’t have ran off it was terrible of me to make you worry I’m sorry,” she rolled her wrist as she spoke batting away any sort of response.

Asgore let out a deep sigh, “you’ll have to talk to Gerson too.”

Undyne let out a noise of protest, “I’m done apologizing for it! Old Man Gerson doesn’t care, it’s fine.”

Asgore’s paw slid down his muzzle, “I’m sure he does.”

Gaster rolled his eyelights, ‘I’m sure it is of no insult to Gerson.’ Asgore fixed the skeleton with a chilly glare his eyes flickering with an orange fire in his irises.

“What did he say?” Undyne leaned over with her hand cupped beside her mouth to ask Papyrus.

Papyrus looked to her, “he doesn’t think” he clamped his teeth shut as he tried to remember whose name was made of the signs ‘old,’ ‘salt,’ and ‘turtle,’ “Gerson will care?”

She let out a laugh, “see Fluffybuns he gets it!” Sans started laughing at the completely wrinkled muzzle on the King of all Monsters.

“Fluffybuns?” Sans chuckled.

“Gerson’s nickname for the king it was a slip of the tongue from the former Queen and Gerson has held him to it,” Gaster explained quickly.

“Okay,” Sans snorted but he was obviously hoping there would be more to the name.

When Gaster looked back to Asgore he pulled back a little bit, the king’s eyes were glassy as he looked to Gaster with an undecipherable expression. Gaster checked over the last conversation, he had meant to just speak it, his hands were still sitting comfortably in his lap so he hadn’t signed, there’s no way he would have caught the mention of Toriel. He looked cautiously to Asgore who smiled softly, “he can understand you?”

Sans flushed as his eye lights pointed to the ground, “sort of?” He looked back up to Asgore but refused to look at Gaster, “I kinda just read it when he talks.” He pressed his finger tips together with a nervous expression, “I can recognize some words by sound now though!”

“That’s delightful,” Asgore looked between the pair. “I know not being understood has always been a-” he searched for a word but didn’t seem to have one. “But for someone after all of these years-,” he smiled pleasantly with a distant look on his face, “I’m so happy for you Gaster.”

Gaster hoped to the stars his face wasn’t as purple as it felt it was but a quick look over to Sans who was tracing each line in Gaster’s face with his eye lights made hoping pointless. He covered his face with his fingers in a pathetic attempt to hide it. How many rants had he screamed at his long term
friends for centuries of continued existence together and still none of them could tell why he was upset? He’d kept hoping for years that someone would just magically figure it out, that he could talk to them normally, and, well, it seemed someone finally did.

Asgore looked over to Papyrus, “Do you have any board games you like? With so many people it should be fun.”

Papyrus thought for a moment before he dashed to his room to fetch a game. Gaster had only tried a handful of times to play a game with Papyrus. Where the child enjoyed the games thoroughly and did his best to play by the rules as he understood them, he just understood the rules to be different. Chutes and Ladders was a near nightmare and had been banned after Gaster nearly lost his temper keeping up with the child’s interpretations of the rules. Luckily when Papyrus returned it was with the human board game ‘Sorry’.

Despite the game’s intention to cause arguments, evidently, the rules were very straightforward once you got Papyrus away from the idea that the different colored pieces had soul magic and played by different rules. ‘Only four people can play this at a time,’ Gaster informed him.

“I thought we could play on teams!” Papyrus smiled.

Undyne punched in the air, “Yeah that’d be awesome!”

Gaster pointed out how the math behind that didn’t work, Papyrus grew thoughtful, “alright me and Undyne will be on a team against you guys!” Sans’s sockets narrowed as he scowled at the inside of the box.

“Oh! I’m into it!” Undyne shouted repeating her assault on the air.

Gaster let out a sigh, arguing was futile at this point, he looked over to Sans who was picking out the blue pieces in quick jabs down towards the box. The board had taken severe damage from its fall into the underground. Several pieces were missing which Papyrus had promptly replaced with painted noodles, carefully matched to the sun damaged colors of the board. There were supposed to be cards with the game but they were lost, with nothing to go off of they just rolled the one pair of dice they owned.

Sans placed his pieces on the board with a sluggish effort that placed his thoughts elsewhere. Undyne grabbed the red pieces from the box, Asgore chose green, which left Gaster with yellow.

The game worked, fairly well, apparently since Undyne and Papyrus were a team they were allowed to choose who got sent back to the start, no one seemed to mind. Sans would forget it was his turn from time to time until he suddenly fell asleep with his head against the coffee table, much to the King’s shock. Papyrus folded his arms and seemed to emit steam from his bones as he refused to go unless Sans took his turn. Eventually Papyrus managed to wake Sans up forcing him to play the game ‘correctly’.

Throughout all of it Asgore seemed quite happy in the chaos and, with the skill of an experienced parent, managed to negotiate the children out of most of the arguments choosing exactly which ones to fight over. Gaster curled his knees to his chest as he observed his methods, Asgore really was meant to be a father.

He couldn’t help but feel insignificant in comparison, yesterday had been the first day he’d ever even held the boys and here Asgore was, barely more than a stranger, so seamlessly playing peacekeeper. He’d just let the boys yell at each other until they burned out, this apparently wasn’t the ideal method. Worse yet when Papyrus was hurt he froze, completely unaware of his surroundings, deaf to
the world as he hopelessly attempted to cottle the boy while Asgore actually helped him.

Deep in his thoughts he picked up the dice, his magic bit through to his fingers as the small cubes slipped through his palm. He stared at the dice on the board in disbelief as he turned his wrist as he analyzed his palms with eye lights the size of a single grain. Undyne let out a small laugh but covered her lips as she read the atmosphere. Gaster let out a long sigh and moved his piece forward the amount the dice exposed, it was just another reminder.

As the game wound to its’ conclusion it was obvious most of the energy for the day had been exerted as everyone began to relax. Even the dynamic duo were throwing the dice with less vigor, watching Undyne chase them across the room had been quite tiring in and of itself. In the end Sans managed to win the game, though no one had noticed he was so close to winning, and everyone was still companionable.

Gaster’s eye lights fell to the clock to see it was past when he usually attempted to make something resembling food. ‘Excuse me,’ Gaster stood as Papyrus returned the pieces to the box.

Gaster opened the fridge hoping he had something in a large enough quantity for everyone. He tossed containers around and looked at ingredients, specifically ones he knew what to do with. He grabbed onion, lettuce, a wedge of cheese, and a pack of burger meat. He shut the door nearly dropping all of his findings as he was startled by Asgore, who was standing directly behind him.

As big as the Boss Monster was he was surprisingly quiet on his feet. “Mind if I help?” Asgore asked extending his hand. Gaster nodded and Asgore took the packet of hamburger meat, “why don’t you take care of the vegetables and I will take care of the patties?” He asked, but it was obvious that’s how it was going to be and Gaster had no problem stepping away from the chef position. Having the boys around had forced him to try more than he ever had but he still lacked any talent for the profession.

Gaster was however pretty adept with a knife, he smiled as he sliced the onion into rings. His physiology made him impervious to the tear inducing reaction most monsters dealt with when cutting onions which allowed him to work quickly. He watched Asgore from the corner of his eyes as he threw the shaped meat into the hissing skillet. Gaster wondered for a moment how oddly shaped the patties would be if he had tried making them, his shoulders bounced as if he was laughing but no sound came out.

“You’re doing a great job Gaster,” Asgore spoke not looking away from the complaining skillet. It took Gaster longer than he cared to admit to recognize that Asgore wasn’t referencing his vegetable prep work. He wasn’t going to actively deny the compliment even if he felt it wasn’t earned. “I’m sure you don’t believe that,” he poked at the patty with a fork.

‘I don’t,’ Gaster set the knife down firmly on the board. He hadn’t broke them yet, harmed them, they hadn’t out right stated their distaste for him but he was obviously ill equipped for the job.

Asgore fell into silence before he continued, “do you remember the first time you held Asriel?”

Gaster considered correcting the statement to ‘only time’ but he kept his hands on the lettuce he was working with. It had taken a great deal of coaxing to get Gaster to meet the young prince to begin with. Even then he had a complete refusal to hold the squirming heir until Toriel just handed the infant to him to ‘go check on something’. He had no idea what to do with the thing in his arms as it stared up to him. He placed a finger in front of the child’s face, as he had seen others do, and cringed when the child grabbed his finger. When his boney finger was quickly pulled into the infant’s mouth Gaster nearly dropped the child.
“You looked so offended,” Asgore chuckled, “as if the child had just insulted your intelligence. I sort of knew at that point we couldn’t ask you to babysit,” he grinned mischievously as he felt Gaster’s eye sockets level a mocking glare to him.

“I mean no ill will by that statement Gaster, but the you then and the you now,” he smiled, “I don’t think they’d recognize each other.” He put a hand on Gaster’s back, “you really are doing a great job.”

Gaster’s face warmed with his magic, he quickly cupped his face with his long fingers in a pathetic attempt to hide it. He summoned his bullets away from him so the King would have to look away to view his response, ‘I am flattered sir but I am nothing compared to you. If I would have adopted them as babybones I’m sure they would be ruined by now.’

Asgore smiled to him his eyes twinkling in their mischief as he smiled, “probably.” Gaster shook his head and pointed to the burgers which were overdue to be flipped. Gaster turned to the cheese and began to slice it in even cuts, it was odd, all of his uncertainty from moments before seemed to fade, it was still there, just not in the forefront of his mind anymore. He felt his bones relax as he focused on the mundane task in front of him.

Chapter End Notes

It has genuinely surprises me that this fic has received any attention at all so I want to thank all of you for your continued support. I appreciate any thoughts towards improvement of this fic. I have a few things that bother me that I am still trying to work out but if you see anything please let me know.

Thank you all and enjoy the rest of your week!
Monsters and Magic

Chapter Summary

Magic has always been a source of pride for Gaster so of course it is the easiest way for him to connect with the boys.

Chapter Notes

After posting a chapter I usually start editing the chapter for the next week (provided it’s written). I did that with this one but yesterday evening I decided to just rewrite the whole thing so it might not be as polished but it flows better.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Gaster’s work notebook was open on his lap, pen in hand, but he couldn’t quite tear himself away from Papyrus’s project. A happy smile teased at the corner of Gaster’s teeth as he watched Papyrus layer bone construct upon bone construct as he created the towers of Asgore’s Castle. The boy had conjured up well over forty bones at this point but there wasn’t any sort of indication that he was growing tired. Papyrus summoned a bone that he moved carefully up to the top of the tower wall.

“Little smaller bro,” Sans looked down into the book open across his lap, “we’re on the battlements now.”

“Battlements?” Papyrus parroted back.

“Those tiny little niches on top of the tower,” Sans leaned the book towards Papyrus and traced the shape in the air.

“Okay!” Papyrus pressed both of his hands to either end of the construct he had summoned and shrank it down before he placed it on top of the tower. Gaster was rather impressed, most monsters would simply disregard the original bullet and make another one if they wanted another size. It took considerably more effort to reshape a summoned attack but the boy didn’t seem bothered by it.

“All of them are that size?” Papyrus tilted his head back to his brother.

“Yeah looks like there’s thirty of them,” Sans scratched the top of his head. Papyrus nodded then started the laborious process of creating battlements summoning bone after bone to layer on top of his tower.

Papyrus was graced with considerable magical potential, Gaster was surprised he hadn’t known this until the fight with Undyne. As terrible as the day had ended he was still glad to have learned something new about the more energetic child. For the child to be able to do both Cyan and Blue magic before he could even light his eyes was quite the achievement.

In no way whatsoever had Gaster helped him acquire this skill but still a pulse of pride echoed in his soul as he thought about it. The question did remain though: how did he learn it? His first thought
was that his parents might have taught him but he knew better than to ask with Sans around. He’d be
lying if he said his thoughts didn’t itch with curiosity anytime the pair’s parents came up but he wasn’t
going to pry. He just had to hope that one day the boys would be willing to talk about it.

He leaned over towards Sans’s side of the couch and peaked into the book he had on his lap. It was
just a print of the Castle but on the margins of the page were all sorts of calculations on how to scale
down each segment to make a replica. Gaster sat back to his side, it seemed Sans was secretly as
detail oriented as his brother.

It was easy to see the differences between the energetic Papyrus and the lethargic Sans but they
weren’t complete opposites. Gaster furrowed his brows, now that he thought about it Sans hadn’t
issued a single attack of any sort against Undyne. His dodging was rather impressive, no doubt
necessary with his stats, but it seemed odd the boy hadn’t dared to counter at all.

Not even at the very end where a single bullet could have dissipated the attack before it even reached
him. Was the boy incapable then? Gaster hadn’t heard of any cases like that though, a monster
without magic was one without a soul. He could just be a late bloomer then but he had felt the boys
magic try to fester in the few displays of emotion he had seen.

“Sans,” the boy looked over to Gaster, “would you like to help Papyrus? I can read off your numbers
for you.” Without much thought he had slipped into scientist mode, he had a hypothesis and he was
going to find his answer.

“Nah, I am helping Doc,” Sans smiled up to him before he turned back to his book.Gaster folded his
arms, so much for that approach, he leaned back again as he revised his attempts. Papyrus turned to
look at the pair on the couch as he tried to figure out what had been said.

Gaster drummed his fingers against his arm before he picked them up to sign, “Sans, don’t take this
the wrong way,” with a bit of effort he coaxed his expression into one of worry, “can you perform
magic?”

Sans’s fingers wrinkled the page he was on as his fingers curled tight against them, “Doc–” his voice
trailed off. Gaster chastised himself and his unyielding curiosity, he’d found yet another of Sans’s
sore spots.

“Sans is very good with magic,” Papyrus tapped his teeth together a few times as he thought. Sans
propped the book up with his knees and attempted to hide behind it, “he’s the one that taught me
Blue magic!” He placed his fingertips proudly to his chest, “and I taught him light blue magic,” he
laughed proudly.

“Is that so?” Gaster eyed Sans who was still hidden from sight. “That’s very impressive,” he figured
Papyrus would take it as a compliment regardless so he decided against directing it towards either of
them, “How did you learn it?”

“I did it on accident once while I was playing,” Papyrus’s attention was completely away from his
Castle and as such it dissipated into spent magic, well most of it did. A few of the bones dropped
directly onto the carpet with a light thump, just loud enough for Papyrus to recognize his mistake.
“No,” Papyrus howled in defeat, “we were so close!”

“Sans peaked his eyelights above the book, “I had a lot of spare time when I was little.” Sans curled
the book to his chest, “I’m just not very good at it.”
“Sans! You are awesome at magic!” Papyrus chimed after he picked up the remaining bones and placed them in his lap, “your patterns could use work but you are good at magic!”

“No I’m not Papyrus,” Sans spat out, “if I was Ms.Dogealer would have let me play with the other kids.”

Papyrus’s shoulders dropped, “it is kinda scary,” he admitted. Sans shut the book with a louder snap than he had intended as he jerked away from the sound.

“Would you show me?” Gaster asked.

Sans shook his head, “I’m not supposed to.”

Gaster tilted his head to the side slightly, “I apologize if I ever gave you any implications that you weren’t allowed to use magic.”

“No it’s not that,” Sans looked up to Gaster with worry in his eye lights, “it’s just not good magic okay?”

Gaster had pressed the boy too far about a subject he obviously cared little to speak of. If the boy was deliberately not using his magic it could lead to some rather nasty health issues. Repressed magic had a tendency to very quickly become unproductive volatile blasts of half formed constructs at any sort of emotional disturbance. He rubbed his wrist as an idea sparked a crazed smile across his face. He looked up to the ceiling, he should have enough room. Without a word he pushed the coffee table against the front door. “Dad?” Papyrus asked wearily. Gaster gestured for Sans to hop off of the couch before he summoned a line of bullets to push the ugly green piece of furniture into the hallway.

“Doc, what are you doing?” Sans was at Papyrus’s side, the pair was huddled against the wall looking with cautious sockets to Gaster.

“Boys,” Gaster hated how brightly he was grinning, he didn’t even need to check it, “magic is a reflection of oneself. A basic bullet shape is the immediate impression of oneself,” he summoned a single white bone into the air about the length of his arm. “Papyrus would you summon a bullet for me, right beside mine just whatever feels natural,” he prompted.

A single bone bullet about half the length of Gaster’s floated beside his, “we are both skeleton thus the natural form for our magic is a basic bone shape but they are both still different.” Gaster traced his finger an inch away from the bullet, “the core of mine is very thin but as it stretches to the edges they become wider and take to a slight point.”

“Papyrus’s almost have a band before they turn out,” Sans observed, “they are also a bit more squared off at the ends.”

“Very good,” Gaster smiled. “Regardless of what patterns we make it take or how we choose to shape it our magic is a representation of ourselves.” He dissipated his bullet and Papyrus follow suit, “magic is the pride of monsters to dislike ones magic is to revoke the idea that they even are one.” He folded his arms, “you are a monster aren’t you Sans?”

“Of course,” he said defensively, “but what does it say about you if your magic is-” he made a series of gestures with his hands that Gaster couldn’t make out to be anything sensible. Luckily, this was exactly the point he was hoping to be brought up.

“Magic takes the form most natural to ourselves, for some monsters this means they have multiple
bullet types so, why should we be limited to bones?” He summoned his hand bullets, “back on the
surface I began to experiment with the exact cause of why monster bullets seemed locked into a
particular shape and tendency towards certain patterns despite all of us being unique.”

“It took a lot of research, even more time, but I managed to make several different shapes, all still
preset to a skeleton’s natural disposition,” the hands he’d summoned tapped their fingers together,
they slowly festered into one another until they formed a pair of ribs. The shape lingered for a
handful of seconds before the ribs broke off of one another and shrunk, they linked themselves
together to form a vertebrae before they dispersed into spent magic.

Papyrus’s eyes widened as his eye lights flickered on brightly, “wowie!”

Sans shrugged, “that’s pretty neat Doc.”

Gaster’s smile dropped, “but all of this was developed during a time of war, of violence. Once we
were sealed Underground my developments were seen as unnatural and were chastised for their
shape.”

Gaster clenched his teeth together, there were a lot of definitions he’d had to fight against once the
Underground started to grow as a civilization. A time of crippling uncertainty where he’d pushed
everything away from himself out of fear of unanswered questions. His fingers twitched at his side,
“one in particular.”

“It was deemed as ‘bad magic’, it scared other monsters, who believed it to be ‘wrong’ but it was still
me,” Gaster knit his brows with thought, “when people rejected it I believed it was me they had the
problem with.” He shook his head, that wasn’t the point of this, “I’m gonna show it to you two
alright?”

Gaster’s magic was beating wildly in his soul, a wave of eager energy awoke in his old bones. It
wasn’t logical for him to be excited about this but that didn’t seem to change the feeling. Magic was
something he knew, if he could get through to Sans then this would mark his first achievement.

His eye lights shrunk, should he really be thinking of this like that? He just wanted to help the boy.
He pressed his pointer finger to his thumb firmly, this was for Sans.

“Doc you really don’t-” Sans started but was cut off by the snap of Gaster’s fingers.

The center of the room was consumed by a twisted mass of magic resembling an animal skull.
Papyrus let out a yip of concern as he flinched back but Sans’s eye lights shone brightly as he took in
every point on the creature.

The skull’s teeth were long and pointed locked over and under one another like a crocodiles, its
horns were like a rams, long and twisted to a dangerous points. Its’ left socket burned white light cut
into wide slit shape, the other eye was hollow, infinitely black as it stared back with a half squint.

Two massive cracks permeated the creatures face. Gaster ran his finger over the top of his right eye
seeing them so plainly on his magic made him question if his had healed. He placed a hand gently on
its’ angular cheekbone, its eye slid over to him as it responded to his touch.

They weren’t fully sentient but they responded to emotion the same way as their wielder and could
recognize touch. Gaster’s eye lights searched over the skull as if he was seeing an old friend for the
first time in ages. It was the culmination of his research, his saving grace on the surface, and yet so
utterly useless down here. He looked sheepishly over to the twins who had completely different
reactions to the new occupant of their living space.
Sans approached timidly, one hand extended to the skull like one would a stray dog, until he gently tapped his hand to the muzzle of the skull. An involuntary warmth filled Gaster at the moment of contact, he looked up to his attack which looked down to him. Sans traced his hand down the creatures muzzle, along his cheekbone, then down the twisting horns, or what he could reach of them.

“What is it?” Sans’s voice was weighed down with a sense of reverie as the magic’s one good eye light followed him.

“Asgore calls them Gaster Blasters,” Gaster rolled his eye lights, he’d never thought of anything better.

Sans seemed disappointed, “I’m naming it Skully!” His eye lights shone like stars in his sockets as he patted the newly deemed Skully’s snout. It was actually a worse name than Gaster Blaster, Gaster chuckled.

Papyrus groaned but seemed to finally muster up the courage to approach the blaster as Sans finished his walk around it. Papyrus hovered behind Sans who nudged Papyrus encouragingly. Papyrus extended his hand and just barely touched it before he pulled his hand back to his chest. A rumble sounded from the blaster, something resembling laughter, but Papyrus clung to his brother’s back.

Gaster covered his teeth as his magic threatened to bubble into a laugh of his own, ‘it’s okay, it’s no different than a normal bullet.’

“I’m not afraid of it,” Papyrus blurted out quickly, “if that’s what you’re thinking. I’m not.”

‘I suppose it is sort of scary isn’t it,’ Gaster brushed his hand along the back of the creatures jaw.

Papyrus stepped towards him, “I’m not saying you’re scary,” he scuffed the carpet with his toes, “please don’t look so- Sans! What are you doing! Get down!” While the two were talking Sans had firmly planted his foot between two of the blaster’s teeth and pulled himself up by the crack that ran under the left eye. He was now sitting, quite proudly, between the two horns.

“Nah bro, it’s warm,” Sans’s lids seemed heavy as he looked down, “think I’m gonna take a nap up here.”

“Don’t you dare Sans!” Papyrus’s tone was sharp as he stared defiantly up to his brother.

“Too late bro, already asleep,” Sans laid down.

“Stop your bonedoggling at once and get down here!” Papyrus folded his arms.

“Nice one bro,” Sans teased his voice lilted into slothfulness.

“What? No! Sans!” Papyrus stamped his foot onto the ground and the blaster rumbled again.

Gaster couldn’t help himself this time, there was too much of himself present to resist the laughter that hiccuped out from his teeth. He clutched at his ribs as it poured out of him, terrible and awful with all of the pitches in the wrong place. He’d heard it once in an echo flower and the odd automated noises coupled with the fact it sounded as if he was being held underwater had made him immediately self conscious about it.

Sans clung to the horn as he peered down at the top of Gaster’s head, Papyrus had a brow raised but his jaw was fixed in worry, Gaster stilled himself and wiped at his sockets, “sorry,” he circled his fist across his chest, “I shouldn’t laugh-” he cut himself off there, it got the point across.
Sans slid his fists under his chin, “I like it,” he smiled lazily.

Gaster’s face grew warm, he looked away, okay the blaster had to go he was responding too strongly to every hint of emotion. “Sans,” he ran his hand over the edge of the eye socket directly below the boy, “I know about bad magic, I know about good magic.” He smiled up to him, “can you trust me with your magic?”

Sans’s eye lights scanned his mind as he processed his thoughts, “I’ll show ya Doc, but you gotta promise me you’ll teach me how to do this!” He patted the top of the blaster’s head.

Gaster raised his ring finger to the corner of his teeth to feel the soft smirk that tugged up towards his cheekbones. He could teach someone his magic, it was an inheritance he was more than happy to bequeath. “I will teach you,” the boy sucked in air, “once your eyes glow.”

“Can you teach me to glow?” Papyrus grinned tearing his eyes away from the skull as his brother slipped down.

“It’s the mark of adulthood for skeletons,” Gaster’s hand signs were quick as they cut through the air, “it just happens when the magic and the soul sync.” Of course he’d found a means to artificially stimulate the sensation to allow himself a multitude of magics but he would never attempt to replicate his experiments. He looked down to the pair as he dissipated the blaster, especially not on them.

“So Sans, will you show me your magic?” Gaster folded his arms, his eye sockets burned with eager light as his curiosity hung about him like a coat.

Sans eye lights cast down to the floor, “sure Doc, but we should probably go outside,” he scratched at his humerus. Papyrus seconded the motion then pushed the coffee table back to its proper place so the door could be used.

Sans and Gaster stood in the center of the uneven cobblestone street a short distance apart from one another. “Whenever you are ready Sans,” Gaster wasn’t sure what to expect as he watched the child squirm against the sight of his sockets. Just when Gaster thought he would need to prompt the child again a ping, at the sound he instinctively wrapped his fingers over his misshapen soul that pulled to the surface.

Gaster lurched to the side, his feet stumbled momentarily as he tried to secure his purchase against the stones. When his soul was released his eye lights shone like stars, “Sans that was absolutely impressive!” Most monsters with Blue magic merely used it to increase the difficulty of their opponents mobility, to actually throw a monster took a very complex understanding of the magic.

Sans covered his face with both of his hands, his eye sockets just barely peeking out, “I- can normally do better.”

“I’m probably a bit bigger than what you normally try throwing around,” Gaster rubbed his fingers across the bottom of his jaw as he thought. “How did you figure it out?”

Sans gaze fell to his feet, “I had a lot of spare time when I was little,” he picked at his fingers.

“And what about bullets?”

Sans shrugged, “yeah I can do those too.”

Gaster quirked his brow, “will you show me?”

Sans looked over to Papyrus who nodded eagerly but it didn’t seem to give the boy any sort of
encouragement as he looked back to Gaster with blurry eye lights. They flickered off as he held his hand out, his ribs expanded as he calmed himself.

Gaster wasn’t exactly sure what he had been expecting when Sans kept saying his magic was bad, perhaps it was the wrong form, or maybe it functioned differently. He certainly hadn’t been anticipating the massive wave of white bones that rushed to him so quickly he didn’t even have time to think about dodging. Gaster braced himself as the wave washed over him, he counted six rows before it finally petered out.

Gaster’s eye lights blinked off as he processed what had just happened. A young child, without any real training or focus, had just released a move most monsters had to build up to on his first turn. He checked his stats, despite the multitude of the bones and the speed of them he’d only take six damage, one for each row that hit him.

Gaster’s teeth curved into an eccentric smile as calculations ran through his mind, it dropped quickly when he saw Sans hugging his knees. Papyrus sprinted from the steps over to his brother who shrugged him off with some mutterance of being fine. Gaster crouched in front of the pair, “I’m sorry,” Sans blurted out his vision lost somewhere between his knee caps.

“There’s no reason to be sorry Sans I asked you to show me your magic,” he looked to the cavern ceiling with thought, “I must say it is very- intriguing.” That could be an understatement but he didn’t feel the need to elaborate, “I can understand why others might have forbade the use of it.”

“I think we can improve on it though,” Gaster’s eye lights shone bright as Sans finally looked up to him, “how in control of the ratio are you?”

“Uh,” Sans stammered, “not really much at all? Sometimes I can make patterns with them like Paps likes, but it takes a lot of effort. There’s always a bunch of them though. If I am really tired I can sometimes summon, like, three of them?” His brows moved with thought as he spoke as if fact checking himself with his memories.

“But Sans can do some cool patterns,” Papyrus chimed before his voice lowered into more of a whisper, “even if they only last a few seconds.”

“I can go about four turns before I’m completely spent,” Sans shrugged.

Gaster weighed this information in his mind, “what would you boys think of me helping with your magic after work each night? I doubt I have time for both of you in the evening so we can rotate every other day.”

“That sounds fu-” Papyrus started before Sans cut him off.


Gaster sighed, he really was off today wasn’t he? It had been a while since he was so, he searched for a word, excitable. He wasn’t a capable guardian but he was an excellent magician, this could be his first step towards closing the gap between himself and them. He could help them be an asset, help them better themselves, and that’s what he really wanted out of all of this wasn’t it?

“I know I am just your Guardian but I really do want to see you two grow into the best versions of yourselves,” Gaster tapped his fingertips to his chest and stuck his chin up a bit, “and I happen to be very good at magic,” he winked.

Papyrus giggled but Sans seemed uncertain, “it’s your call, I won’t make you.”
“I want to do it,” Papyrus smiled. Gaster nodded, he wasn’t exactly sure how to go about teaching formative minds magic, or if he had the patience for it, but he wanted to try.

Sans shrugged, “sure I guess.” It might not have been a resounding yes but it wasn’t a no either.

Gaster rubbed the top of both of the boys heads before he rose on shaky legs to his uncertain feet. “I think it’s best for now that we head to bed, it’s going to be a long day tomorrow,” Gaster left it open ended anticipating one of them to ask.


“The deadline for registration to school is this week so tomorrow you two are going to have a physical examination,” Gaster opened the door for the pair but neither entered the house. Papyrus grabbed Sans’s hand, the latter’s sockets were deep and fathomless in their darkness, his smile, ever permanent, felt cruel.

It had been a long time since Gaster had felt like a villain but his soul sank in his chest. He wanted to ask why he had such trouble with Doctors, stars he wanted to ask, but he knew he wouldn’t get any sort of an answer. All of the energy, all of the hope at the potential of teaching them drained from his form, “I’m sorry Sans, it has to be done.” Gaster’s fingers coiled themselves in his sleeves as the two walked wordlessly past him and over the couch wedged in the hallway, “good night,” he whispered.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like I need to explain the “there was too much of him” comment Gaster makes in regards to his blaster. Maybe I don’t but here is what I meant:

Monsters magic is made of their emotions as such I imagine that when a large amount of it is present, the Blaster, the weilder is more susceptible to emotions.

This was inspired by how in the Sans fight in the game the more magic he summons the more down he seems to feel. He is summoning his magic for a negative reason he doesn’t seem to really believe in and as such it reflects on him.

Meanwhile Papyrus seems to grow more enthused throughout his battle as he starts to have more fun.

Just a thought. Don’t know if it needed to be explained I just felt I didn’t describe it well.
Chapter Summary

No Gaster is not /that/ kind of Doctor but at least there is ice cream in the end.

Chapter Notes

So I write this mostly at work but I post it from my iPad and for some reason google drive mashed my edited and unedited versions together so please let me know if anything is particularly off.

I love the second half of the chapter the first is normal in adoration from its creator.

“Why do we have to go to the doctors?” Sans asked for the twelfth time that morning.

“Before I can enlist you in school they want to make sure you are healthy. I believe there will be no problems, or complications, as you are both fine,” Gaster replied for the tenth time that morning. He had ignored the question twice but Papyrus nudged him to reply after the second failure to respond.

The child had been adamantly against going anywhere near a doctor’s office from the moment Gaster had adopted him. He had tried within the first week to bring the pair in for a check up but it was too soon for a fight. This marked their first one and it ended for the most part when Gaster had threatened to carry Sans with Blue if necessary. At that the child had given up, “I can walk,” he nearly growled.

Gaster decided to take them to the health division of his labs, he had hoped that the familiar setting and faces would put Sans to ease but he seemed equally bitter after they stepped through the threshold. Typically Sans was impossible to keep track of in the halls as he stopped by every window and stretched to his tiptoes to get a glance at what they were working on. Today however, he seemed intent on his sour demeanor barely glancing up from his feet when other monsters passed.

A Whimsun hovered above a keyboard bobbing lightly in the air as they turned to the trio, “welcome Dr. Gaster!” Gaster nodded and gestured to the boys, “I’ll let her know you are here,” they squeeked.
Since it wasn’t actually a doctor’s office there wasn’t a waiting area forcing the three to stand in silence, something Papyrus was never a fan of. The young skeleton looked about the entrance with a curious expression, he’d venture a few steps towards the halls then quickly return to his brother’s side to whisper whatever discoveries he found. Sans’s eye sockets were pinned towards the open hallway they barely even twitched to make sure his brother wasn’t going too far.

Doctors, of the medical persuasion, always had the astonishing talent of waiting until the exact moment of sheer boredom before making an appearance.

“Papyrus? Sans?” Came the hissing voice of the Opossum monster Doctor Hills. “This way?” She gestured as she waddled down the hall her cord like tail slid back and forth behind her.

She opened the door to her office with a quick gesture for them to file in. Papyrus bounded straight through the doorway but Sans froze at the entrance. His eye sockets grew dark as the light faded from them, his small fists shook by his sides. Dr. Hills looked up to Gaster who put a finger up, she nodded then shut the door giving them some privacy. Gaster crouched down to be eye level with Sans, “I will never deny that you tend to run stubborn but this is uncharacteristic of you, what is wrong?”

Sans shoved his hands in his pockets, “nothin’ I’m fine.”

Gaster let out a groan he had, apparently, suppressed all morning, “child I cannot assist you if you can’t tell me what’s wrong. I’m not asking you to divulge onto me your secrets but I can’t have you hiding everything from me, I want to help.” He put his hands on the boys shoulders and looked him in the eyes until, eventually, Sans’s eyelights returned to face Gaster’s.

“I just don’t like doctors okay?” Sans mumbled his eyelights flicked to the side out of habit before the scanned back to Gaster. He let out a sigh, “I used to go to a lot of doctors, a lot,” he emphasized. “I just don’t like anyone seeing my soul,” he scratched at his ribs over where his soul sat in his chest, “doctors or anyone, they always have the same look on their face.”

His sockets narrowed in a disgust strong enough for his magic to boil like humidity in the air. “Everyone’s does, except for Papyrus,” he looked a little confused as he added quieter, “and you.”

Gaster nodded and placed his hand on top of the boys head, “thank you for telling me.” He thought over the information for a moment before coming to a conclusion, “would you be alright if I did the parts of the physical involving your soul? I’m not that sort of a Doctor but given instructions I can follow through most tasks.”
“You’d do that for me?” Sans asked his hands noticeably tensed in his pockets.

“I wouldn’t have volunteered it otherwise,” Gaster nodded and rose unsteadily to his feet, he ended up quickly grabbing the top of Sans’s skull in an attempt to not fall over. In an attempt to give the boy’s privacy as they discussed the impending visit Gaster had slept on the couch, it didn’t agree with him. He reached for the doorknob: Sans inhaled as the door was pushed open.

“And exhale,” Doctor Hills said as Papyrus did what he was instructed. He was shirtless on the stool and she had her hand pressed to his back. Gaster looked down to the marsupial curious, “skeletons don’t really have lungs so I am simply feeling for any hesitation in breath. There isn’t really a way to test Skeletons more unique physiology nor has there been a particular to study it considering-” her pupils shrunk under Gaster’s gaze.

“I would love to know more about your kind, a lot of us would actually, but there’s no need,” she helped Papyrus back into his shirt. “Alright now would you bring out your soul for me?”

“Actually if you would wait a moment,” Gaster spoke and the monster looked as if she had just been threatened. He rubbed between his eyes, “Sans would you translate?” The boy nodded which only made the Doctor more confused. “Would you mind if I mirrored your evaluation on Sans? I am curious of the procedures when looking at a soul medically, I have studied them thoroughly over the years but not in this sort of setting.”

The doctor looked to Gaster the end of her muzzle twitched quickly, “he says he wants to check my soul while you do Papyrus’s,” he shrugged, “for science,” he smirked mischievously up to Gaster who sighed in response.

“It’s a bit unorthodox but you are more than qualified I suppose,” she scratched quickly behind her ear. “Would you like me to explain the process?” Gaster nodded and she pulled up a stool for Sans to sit on. Papyrus grabbed Sans’s hand with a smile, Sans nodded and held his breath as their souls formed above their ribs.

Papyrus’s soul glew a brilliant white light that was visible even in the well lit office. It seemed quite content being on display as it gave a pulse that sent a warm wave of magic in the air. It was a pure, untainted, specimen that’s only flaw was it was a bit too large for the average soul.

Sans’s on the other hand was a dingy gray and every bit smaller than Papyrus’s was large. It pulsed,
not with magic, but in that it needed to in order to sustain its’ existence out in the open. Sans’s bones gave a slight rattle before he fixed his sockets in that analytist glare of his that felt as if it could see all of your secrets. Gaster challenged the look with a smug smile across his teeth which seemed to appease the boy.

Dr. Hill handed Gaster a clipboard and they went to work quickly examining different components of the soul. Gaster mirrored Dr.Hill’s gestures in perfect time and even managed to scribble his WingDings across the page in the same time as her common. Gaster was surprised as they finished off the list how little they really delved into the soul for a basic physical but he assumed Sans prefered it that way.

The pairs souls were returned to their chest and Sans let out a shiver as his body acclimated to its location once more. “Are you alright to let Doctor Hill finish?” Gaster asked and Sans nodded.

“I’ve got a pretty good story about a hill, I bet you won’t be able to get over it,” Sans winked and Papyrus groaned all the way off of his stool.

The pair leaned against the back of the room and gave encouraging smiles when Sans would look back to see if they were still there. ‘I’m thinking you boys need ice cream after this,’ he signed and Papyrus’s face lit up.

‘Really?’ he signed not wanting his loud voice to distract the Doctor. Papyrus was an uppercase which meant his voice naturally made his sentences declarations and with Papyrus’s energy it normally also incorporated near shouting as his regular vocal range.

Gaster nodded to the boy who threw his fists up in victory.

“Very good Sans you have very healthy bones,” Doctor Hill smiled.

“Are you telling a Fibula?” Sans chuckled as he pulled his shirt back on.

“Sans! Dad says we can have Ice Cream but your terrible jokes are going to ruin it!” Papyrus stomped.

“Oh my that sounds exciting, can I talk to your dad first,” Dr.Hill asked Sans with a smile. Gaster and Sans exchanged a look. Gaster still saw himself as more of the boys guardian than a parent and
Sans never seemed to consider Gaster a father. Gaster wouldn’t deny now that he was past ‘enamored’ by them he cared about their well being and hoped he was a positive mark in their life, though he had no proof of it. He looked back to Sans who was stared at the floor some unasked question burning in his eyes.

Their awkward exchange caused Dr.Hill to fidget with her fingers but Papyrus merely took Sans’s hand and pulled him to the door, “come on Sans the sooner Dad finishes the sooner we can get ice cream!” Papyrus shoved Sans out of the office and closed the door behind them.

“I’m sorry he called you dad and I-” she started but Gaster held a hand up. He looked around the room and found a handheld dry erase board, he uncapped the marker, ‘it’s fine.’ He showed the board to her then added, ‘I adopted them a few months ago and I don’t think we are there yet.’

“Oh,” her tiny black eyes were focused on Gaster but without much intent or expression. Perhaps that was more information than he needed to divulge. He looked over the board and confirmed that was the case, he wondered why he brought it up at all. It wasn’t like him to speak needlessly about his personal life.

She cleared her throat with a hiss like hiccup, “Papyrus is very healthy and well ahead of schedule in both magical development and his statistics, though the two do go hand in hand. His soul, is something else,” her ears twitched on her head as her whiskers fidgeted in the air.

“I’ve never seen a specimen-” he crammed the ‘n’ into the corner of the board, his large sloppy common quickly took up the small space. He showed her the board then quickly erased it, “like that.”

She shook her head, “well that might have to do with them being twins actually.” She leaned against the desk, “twins only occur in instances where there is a surplus of magic. During the developmental stage a new soul will split to form two nearly identical copies.” She itched quickly behind her ear, “monster twins nearly always look identical, maybe different coloring but nothing as unique as them.”

“So, you think when the-” Gaster glared at the board with a huff as he erased it, “soul split Papyrus-” why was his name so long? “Got a bit more of the original soul?” He squeezed the capital letters so close together they appeared to be a single drawn out word. “That’s probably why Sans’s stats are the way they are,” he added.

“Yes what are they?” She squinted at Gaster’s clipboard. He drew a straight line down the boar, “no all of them.” He tapped the board, “seriously?” He nodded and there was that look Sans had been
dreading. Her brows knit together in pity as she stared the clipboard down, her shoulders slouched as her black eyes traced the number up and down.

“Do you have his previous medical files?”

Dr. Hill blinked out of her trance, “not yet, the secretary is working on compiling them. All I know right now is that it’s quite extensive.” Her tail smacked against the tile, “it doesn’t make sense everything physically indicates he should be, a tad weaker than his brother, but otherwise completely fine.” She gestured with meaningless signs, “by no accounts should he be weaker than a Moldsmal!”

Gaster felt his magic burn in his bones in some sort of futile emotional defense of the child. She wasn’t saying anything he wasn’t aware of but hearing that child called weak was rubbing him towards-something he wasn’t exactly sure what it was. She stiffened up, “and you are planning on putting him in school?” Gaster nodded uncertainty creeping across his features as her tone shifted, “I will give them the results but Dr. Gaster as a medical professional I advise against it.”

“Children are particularly prone to frequent unintended summoning of attacks, it would take one tap with the right intent-”

Gaster slammed the dry erase board onto the desk with enough force to make Dr. Hill flinch and even startle himself. He rubbed his fist across his chest in a circular motion, he’d just wanted her to stop.

The child had been so smitten with the idea of school, so proud that he was going to get to go, and she wanted him to take that away from the child? Gaster was growing quickly overwhelmed by the waves of foreign emotion his magic was pushing towards his soul. He didn’t know how to respond to it in order to quell it but it was smothering out his rational thought.

He picked the board back up, “I appreciate your concern.” He hesitated before he added, “we can talk later.” The boy’s had earned ice cream and then some, he apologized again and returned the board to her. He shut the door softly behind him, his mind already processing how to apologize for his outburst.

Papyrus smiled up to Gaster but without missing a beat continued on his list about the pros and cons of each flavor of ice cream. Sans chuckled but focused on his brother as if he were listening to the words of some great sage.

Gaster looked down to Sans and wondered if perhaps he should be more worried. He figured the
reason parents fussed over their children’s well being was their inability to cope with the idea of losing their genetic link to the future, or perhaps more of an irrationality with their children’s own capabilities to guard themselves. Sans’s resilience thus far had proven him capable on his own: he was alert of his surroundings, adept at dodging, and had Blue magic at his aid should he need to defend himself.

He knew this and yet the idea of dust slipping through his fingers wouldn’t leave his mind. He shivered just barely short enough to not cause a rattle, what would he do? It would only take one misstep, one tiny miscalculation on the boy’s part and Gaster would- no Papyrus would- he looked down to the boy. Instances of his concern for his brother fluttered inside of his skull as he imagined the smiling child wracked with grief for his last shred of family in the world.

Papyrus smiled up to Gaster, “you okay?” Gaster pulled himself from his thoughts at the boy’s voice.

Sans reached forward and laced his finger’s between Gaster’s, “ice cream?” Gaster looked down to the boy’s fingers in his, he squeezed lightly and Gaster squeezed back in reflex. A warm feeling pushed through him as he looked down to the boy’s wide grin.

He let out a breath then nodded. Papyrus took his other hand and the trio walked down the halls of the Science Division with little care for the monsters around them. When they braced the heat of Hotland once more Papyrus pulled towards the capital but Gaster kept walking straight.

“I thought we were getting ice cream,” Papyrus stated, disappointment painted his tone.

“We are going to go somewhere very special for ice cream this time,” Gaster let a smile tug across his face as the twins exchanged a glance. “We’re going to Snowdin,” the boys faces lit up with equal levels of excitement at the prospect of exploring. Gaster turned towards the River Person’s boat as his magic fizzed with warmth more comforting than that of the Hotlands.

The pair were weary of the River Person at first, or maybe they were just uncertain of the small wooden boat. Gaster lifted them one at a time across the gap between the landing and the boat before he stepped in himself. “Snowdin,” he directed simply then the boat took off along the river.

Sans’s eye lights darted over to Gaster, “can they understand you?” Gaster shrugged, he honestly didn’t know, it was rather impossible to carry a conversation with the monster but they always went where he asked. Sans seemed confused by the statement but quickly preoccupied himself with keeping Papyrus’s hands inside of the speeding boat. The River Person sang some sort of ditty that was either nonsensical or brilliant, Gaster never knew, and the kids didn’t seem to either.
As the boat docked at the Snowdin landing Papyrus quickly jumped out of the boat, “Is all of this ice cream?” Gaster dropped a few gold coins into the River Person’s bucket and before he could say anything to the contrary Papyrus shoved a fistfull of snow into his mouth. Sans looked up to him with sheer curiosity before Papyrus concluded, “it is very bland ice cream and it melts very fast.”

Gaster put a finger to his chin, should he correct the inaccurate statement or see how long it took the child? Sans looked up to Gaster, “Isn’t this,” he paused searching for the word, “snow?”

“Like a snow cone! We just need syrup!” Papyrus jumped giddily into the air staying noticeably suspended while he kicked his legs.

Gaster’s gaze lingered on Papyrus as he was once again compelled to ask about his strange quirk of magic but one question at a time, “yes this is snow. The cavern here receives a surplus of cold air during winter months on the surface through the Ruins of Home.” He gestured towards the Ruins, “this cold air becomes trapped and allows the stones of the cavern to create a type of ice. This builds up overtime and, thanks to the wind, can scatter and become more like snow than ice, the fluctuating temperature helps as well with this.”

“So it doesn’t fall from the sky like on the surface?” Sans asked his brow bones knitted together.

“No it does not,” he gestured to the cavern sealing, “unlike in Waterfall and New Home there are no openings to the surface in this area.” Sans nodded a few times before he crouched down and picked up a handful of snow that sifted between the divisions in his hands.

Gaster let them play in the snow a little while before he reminded them of the promised ice cream to which they happily continued on their way for.

Once at the vendor Sans requested plain vanilla while Papyrus hesitated longer as he considered the entire selection before deciding on something chocolate with fudge in it. Gaster paid the salesman and the boys happily began to eat their treat before they realized he was walking away. “Where we going now?” Sans asked taking as large of steps as he could muster in the shin deep snow.

“Are needed to be in that sentence Sans,” Gaster corrected. Lower casers like Sans were prone to mumbling, which he could tolerate, but lazily skipping over words entirely would not be allowed. “There’s a park nearby but first I need to drop something off with a friend of mine,” he supplied.
“You have a lot of friends,” Papyrus stated his face full of chocolate ice cream, with how much food the boy wore you’d think he was the one without use of his jaw. Gaster chuckled a little bit, he had two good friends, technically three, and whatever Gerson was to him, that hardly counted as a lot.

“When you start school I’m sure you’ll have twice as many friends as I do,” Gaster opened the door to the bar when he finished signing to let the pair in. It was an odd hour in the midafternoon which meant there were hardly any other monsters in the bar.

The fiery bartender crackled with a teasing yellow in his flames, ‘do you even sleep anymore? Your sockets are dark.’

Gaster chuckled as he approached the bar, ‘raking in the business I see, maybe you should try being a bit more social.’

‘You’re one to talk, you had to go adopt friends,’ his flames stretched towards the ceiling.

Gaster looked down to the pair, Papyrus was doing his best impression of a whisper to Sans to translate what the pair were saying. Sans’s expression was mostly one of confusion as he stared back at Gaster. Gaster gestured for the boys to sit up on the stools, “boys this is Grillby, Grillby meet Sans and Papyrus,” he gestured to each of the boys in turn.

Grillby extended his hand, Sans was the first to take it, “you’re really ho-” Sans corrected himself, “warm.” Sans turned his attention quickly back to his ice cream cone to trace the drip down the side of the cone.

Grillby chuckled as Papyrus eagerly took his hand, “it’s nice to meet you! Dad’s been worried all day but then he saw you and it stopped! So you must be really good friends!”

Gaster stiffened up, his eye lights slid over to Papyrus, who was currently wearing most of his ice cream, ‘I’m fine,’ he signed with a quirked brow. Papyrus gave him a level ‘don’t believe you glare’ before he turned back to his brother.

His fingers rubbed against his sleeves, was he being that blatant? He just couldn’t get Dr.Hill’s discouraging tone out of his head. Maybe he wasn’t taking Sans’s condition seriously, he needed to discuss his concerns with them but after how stressed Sans was about the day anyways he just wanted them to enjoy themselves for a while. He pulled his hands away from his sleeve to grab his phone.
He opened up his inventory application and tapped it to the counter where a series of containers appeared on the counter. Grillby folded his arms, ‘I will give you the application once I can figure out how to apply it to each individual phone. We don’t need to be taking each others things.’ Grillby leaned on the counter, his flames highlighted in yellow. Gaster pulled away, ‘no I am not putting things in there I don’t want you to see.’

Grillby pulled away his campfire laugh spawned the occasional spark into the air. ‘Thank you for the food,’ Papyrus signed to the flame.

Grillby’s flame laced with hot magentas and he turned to Gaster who looked away, ‘me too.’

Sans looked between the pair not entirely certain of the exchange, “thanks for the food, Doc here can’t even boil pasta,” he teased.

The flames shoulders bounced, “thank you,” his voice was quiet, nearly a whisper, almost drowned out by the sounds his flames made.

Gaster slipped off of his stool and the tiny skeletons mirrored him with tiny thuds to the floor. ‘I’ll text you when I get back home,’ he signed before he turned to the door.

“Nice meeting you,” the flame crackled his small voice nearly drowned out by the wintry wind outside.

Papyrus hopped along behind Gaster and Sans, his tiny legs almost entirely submerged by the snow but he had no interest in asking for help. As they approached the handmade playground he plowed forward his near electric enthusiasm pulled him up over the snow, his tiny feet leaving minimal marks along the top of the snow. Gaster sighed, he’d ask later.

He sat on an ice covered bench and encouraged the boys to go play but Sans sat beside him. Papyrus let out a huff of air, ‘are you O-K?’

“You’ve been off since the Doctor’s,” Sans looked up to him with just his eye lights.

They were both too young to be this perceptive, he was too good at hiding for them to be that
perceptive, or he thought he was. He laced his fingers together nervously before he uncurled them to sign, “Should I worry about you two more?”

The boys shared a confused glance to each other and Gaster let out a sigh, “I just don’t know if I am doing what I am supposed to as your guardian. Dr. Hill informed me I shouldn’t be so,” he rolled his hand on his wrist as he thought of the word, “casual, about Sans’s condition.”

Sans noticeably slouched but he kept his eyelights on Gaster, “if I falter in my care for you two please let me know,” he chuckled to himself. “I’ve been told I’m brilliant but most the time I feel like I don’t know anything,” more for his own sake then theirs he added on, “I am trying.”

Papyrus looked thoughtful, “more hugs would be nice,” he smiled swinging his legs giddily, “but I think you are doing a good job.” His eyelights sparkled, ‘very good,’ he signed.

Gaster blinked at the simplicity of the request, it made sense coming from Papyrus, the boy craved praise by physical confirmation. He didn’t want any of the parties involved to feel awkward: they weren’t exactly a family even if Papyrus called him dad. He wondered what it would take for Gaster to feel a familial bond with the pair but he doubted he would, he never believed he felt things as deeply as others did.

“Mom and Pops,” Sans’s voice came out softer than normal but still surprised both of them. “They were good monsters ya know? They were great with Papyrus games and picnics, puzzles,” his smile was false as his eye lights flickered. “Papyrus deserves those things so I’d never be mad at that.” He curled his knees to his chest which made it obvious he regretted starting the subject.

“Sans you don’t-” Papyrus started to say as he began rubbing his fingers together. This was what Gaster had wanted, the boy was opening up to him, so why was there a pit in his nonexistent stomach?

“I want to,” Sans nearly whimpered, his eye sockets grew vacant as he formed his words carefully. “They were very,” he rubbed at his collar, “protective of me, worried about me?” He was attempted to piece together a motive he couldn’t confirm, “so I had my own room.” He shrugged, “no corners or sharp things, had some stuffed animals, paperback books, Pops would bring in games when he’d come to visit me but they left with him.”

The child attempted to look detached from the words that were coming from him but they echoed softly as he spoke. “Mom would carry me to Doctor’s appointments,” he chuckled, “so I didn’t trip,” he tacked on. “As I went to more and more Doctors that became the only time I’d spend with her,” he rubbed the back of his hand.
“If I wasn’t hanging out in some Doctor’s wing or another it was just me and my room,” he shrugged as if nothing he said mattered. As if he hadn’t just exposed something he’d never had any intention of anyone knowing. He rubbed at the base of his socket as if to discard tears but there were none.

Gaster looked curiously over to Papyrus who squirmed under his gaze, “I would try to visit him! A lot!” He deflated, “they were just afraid I’d be too rough with him.”

“I don’t hold it against Paps,” he smirked at some memory or another, “he’d come down at night some times and we’d explore the house,” he trailed off, “until mom found out about it.” His laugh was dry and humorless, something more befitting of a teen then a child of schooling age, “I don’t hold it against them either, wouldn’t do me any good.”

His expression grew considerate as his eye lights burned back into his skull, “but you, you don’t give me, that look,” he gestured to nothing in particular, “the one of sympathy and pity that I saw on every doctor’s face, on every parent who knew, and on our parents faces too.”

He looked directly at Gaster for the first time the whole conversation, “so no, for the first time I get to feel like a normal monster. I know that there are risks with this ‘condition’ of mine but you trust me.”

His cheekbones tinted with a pale blue as he added, “and I think you’ll be there if the situation calls for it.”

“Thank you,” Gaster’s hand froze at the end of the sign. He had no idea what to say, his hands twitched without any meaning as he tried to form any sort of words. What does one say after that?

Papyrus put a sticky hand on top of Gaster’s, “thank you for listening,” he smiled, “can we go play now?”

Gaster nodded lost somewhere in his own thoughts as the eager skeleton pulled on his brother’s sweatshirt. Sans pushed himself up from the bench, “Um… Doc? Would it be okay if I- could I?” He looked over to Papyrus’s face, “nevermind.” He let his brother pull him along to the wooden playground equipment where he then helped him into a swing.

Gaster tilted his head back to see the cavern ceiling, the boys deserved the sky. He slipped his notebook out of his inventory and got to work brainstorming.
Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for your continued support, I about died when I saw this was near 1000 views and almost 100 kudos. Thank you so much. I’d really like to do something special to celebrate but I don’t know what people would be interested in.

Here is my Tumblr if anyone has any questions or comments:
LINK
Grillby and Asgore had both insisted that Gaster should make something simple for the first day instead of relying on the oatmeal cookies he’d bought in town. After a rather extensive group texting session, that was only mildly insulting, they all agreed on eggs.

He cracked the shell against the edge of the skillet then drained the contents onto the hot metal, which hissed back at him like a wounded cat, and pushed the runny substance around with a spatula until it was a fluffy yellow solid. He scraped it off onto a plate then did two more without anything catching on fire, burning, or evaporating into the air: that had been a very weird pasta attempt.

Asgore had suggested making a fried egg for Sans, since he preferred runny, messy, soft, foods, but Grillby said it would end up scrambled anyways ‘so don’t even try’. Well, he’d show him. He watched carefully as the egg jigged lightly in the skillet before he attempted to flip it over, success! He grinned, more thrilled with himself than he thought he would be, when he heard a chair pull across the floor.

“Good morning,” he turned to the pair to sign.

Sans still looked half asleep as he half heartedly raised his hand up to his shoulder then dropped it as if it was too heavy in a poor attempt at a wave. Sans was, at least dressed, he was wearing the still too large jacket from the marke zipped up to his collarbone and a white t-shirt of some sort that was just barely visible. Papyrus on the other hand was vibrating in his chair in his sky blue and white striped vest buttoned over an orange t-shirt.

“Good morning!” Papyrus cheered, a bit too enthusiastic even by his standards. Gaster placed the heaping plates of eggs in front of the pair after they finished pulling their chairs in.

“Wowie! Where’d you get these from?” he was obviously enamored by the color since he hadn’t even tried any.

Gaster proudly tapped the tips of his fingers to his sternum, “I made them.”

Sans snorted, “is that why it smells so burnt in here?”

Gaster raised a brow before his sockets widened, he spun back around to see his attempt nearly charcoalafied, a word from Papyrus commonly used to describe his cooking. He scratched stubbornly at the dark egg but it refuse to separate from the skillet: he’d clean it later. Gaster sat down at his plate of scrambled egg and began to pick at it quickly.

Papyrus was nearly finished with his own plate but Gaster couldn’t tell for certain if Sans had even
had a bite of his. Papyrus dropped his fork onto the table with enough force to steal Gaster’s attention away from Sans. He shook his tiny hands in front of himself then pointed to his brother, ‘nervous.’

Gaster nodded, logical enough, ‘you?’

Papyrus shoved his hands in his lap before he pulled them back out. He tapped his thumb to his curled up index finger, ‘a little bit.’

“I have no doubt that both of you will do well,” Gaster smiled in an attempt to be as reassuring as he could muster. The boys didn’t exactly seem moved to action but Sans’s chin came off of the table so it wasn’t a wasted effort.

Gaster helped the pair into their backpacks before he escorted them out the door. “I’m walking with you today but you need to take notes of your surroundings;” he looked back to them. Typically he’d be sitting in his office by now but he’d informed his assistants he would be late today and would be leaving early as well. This seemed to baffle them, for reasons he wasn’t entirely sure of, but they seemed to understand regardless.

The boys held hands as they walked behind Gaster, it had been a while since they had strayed so far behind him, they really must be nervous. He really had no means of assuring them he just hoped that the ‘school’ Toriel had always gushed about wasn’t anything like his apprenticeship.

Proper education wasn’t as widespread in the Underground as it, apparently, was on the surface. There were only two schools in the Capital, the private school the twins would be attending, and the Center of Education, a large building that studied many different fields that was intended for adults.

Aside from that most children were homeschooled or attended ‘Circles’ where a couple of times a week a teacher would hold a small class with a group of young children to provide basic education. Gaster hadn’t really known anything about the Educational system until he looked into it for the boys.

He was pulled from his thoughts when a tiny hand missed his fingers and wrapped around his palm instead. He ripped his hand away as the jolt of magic passed up to his shoulder in a mere instant. His soul stuttered when he heard the alarmed whimper that came from Papyrus. ‘Sorry,’ he apologized quickly as the last of the stinging magic left his arm.

Papyrus clung to his brother and nodded as his only means of response. This all seemed far too familiar for his tastes, hopefully their nerves would settle once they got there. He rubbed the last of his own tension out of his arm as the building came into view.

On first glance the building was cold, isolated, and stood like a tombstone amongst others in its’ somber gray rectangular shape. That didn’t say as much as one would think, all of the Capital was gray and built in rather standard shapes. The residential area around it was kept at a wide enough distance for the children to have an adequate schoolyard around the building. It probably assisted the neighbors to have space from the loudness children were prone to when in large groups.

Observing the building further revealed a simple garden of inviting green shrubs and the occasional flower poking out. The green reflected on the wide polished windows that gave a clear view to the inside of the building. The interior was decorated with warm orange woods that lined the floors and made up the few desks they could see from outside. A short narrow fence marked a path straight up to a dark brown door that had the word ‘School’ written in gold paint.

Gaster looked back to the boys who were staring down the door as their eyelight pulsed in varying emotions. “Whelp,” Sans shoved his hands into his pockets and slipped into his default lazy grin,
“it’s school that you walked us here but I guess we gotta go.” He paced down the path, only now did Gaster realize Sans was still wearing his pajama pants. Apparently Papyrus couldn’t get him fully motivated this morning.

Papyrus tugged at the edge of his coat, “you’re going to come back right?" He pulled against the straps of his backpack, “you’re not going to leave us here are you?"

Gaster scrunched his brows together and crouched down to Papyrus’s level, ‘I’m sorry I ever gave you any idea that I wouldn’t be here.’ He scrutinized the child’s face in an attempt to find what he had done wrong to instill such a thought. Papyrus’s narrow eye sockets tore away from Gaster’s gaze and focused on the path home. Gaster tapped the boy’s sternum then held out his pinky and waited for Papyrus to face him again.

Papyrus tapped his teeth together as he stared at the extended digit, he tapped the palm of his right hand to the side of his left fist, ‘promise?’ Gaster nodded to which the boy happily wrapped his tiny digit around Gaster’s and they shook. “I’ll see you after school Dad!” Papyrus ran down the walkway to catch up to his brother before they gave matching waves back to him.

Gaster stood as a somber statue for an amount of time he couldn’t identify as his thoughts began to roam. The school bell perturbed the silence that had fallen over him and he snapped back to the present. He’d thought that would be the end of his uncertainty but as he returned to his work nothing went as he intended.

He’d erased equations from his board only to rewrite the same string of numbers moment later. They didn’t even look like numbers at all to him. He sat on the corner of his desk and stared at the cursed board with an expression that matched the blank surface. His magic flickered and curled inside of his bones in shapes of anxiety and discomfort but he couldn’t place why. Unless he really had messed up the eggs somehow this morning. Leave it to him to try to do something nice and make his kids-his sockets widened, the boys sick.

How were they doing? They were both very bright, though in different fields, they shouldn’t have any problems with the academic side of schooling. Socialising could be a different situation. Children had a habit of being blunt with one another and based on their interactions with their peers it could determine their ability to function as adults.

Dr.Hill’s advice on whether Sans should have gone to school at all drifted into his mind.

They were fine. If they weren’t they would be.

What if they hated it? What if they loathed every second and despised him as a consequence. They were just opening up to him what if they- he slammed a series of bullets into the far wall like darts. He was at work, that’s what he was supposed to do.

“Hey Doctor Gaster have you figured out-” his assistant’s lanky form stood at attention, his whiskers gave a slight twitch as he took in the new holes in the wall. “I’ll take that as a no,” his green eyes fell down to his board, his black slit pupils widening in the dimmer lit office.

‘No I haven’t,’ he rubbed his hands down his face and looked over to the clock discreetly, it had only been two hours. He groaned as he moved to sit in his desk proper.

“Well, here is what I have figured out so far,” he slipped the clipboard to Gaster who rubbed his temples as he squinted at the documents attached. “Are you alright?” His ears twitched at the top of his head.
‘I’m just having troubles focusing today,’ Gaster dismissed.

“Coffee?” The cat suggested. Gaster tilted over two recently emptied mugs on his desk, “too much coffee then!” The assistant smiled but Gaster didn’t return it. He shoved his hands in his lab coat and sat on the back of a chair with his feet planted flatly where most would sit. “First day of school right?”

Gaster nodded, that really didn’t have anything to do with the equations in front of him. His assistant chuckled, “First day of school, turns a parent to fool, try as they might, it’s a rule they can’t fight.” Gaster clapped sarcastically. He had the odd quirk of giving advice in poems but it was rarely ever appreciated. “Happens to my brother all the time,” he waved his paw, “it’s all fine by the end of the first day, well sometimes the first week.”

“But you don’t really strike me as that kind of person to- I don’t know? Get distracted?” He rubbed the fur on the back of his neck, “I’ve seen you sicker than a fish in Hotland and still pull yourself together.”

Gaster looked down to the board again, ‘can we just work on something else today?’

“You’re the boss,” the assistant laughed, “what do you want to do?”

Gaster placed the board on his desk, ‘let’s take readings on the barrier.’

His ears twitched as his fangs poked out in a smile, “you onto something Doc?” Gaster nodded as his response and gathered his supplies.

Working outside of the office helped, working on breaking the barrier helped, and, sadly, being in the Capital helped as well. They just took readings, they were about the same as when they took them right after the Core’s completion. Whatever magic made this thing was by far more formidable than anything Gaster could conjure. He was able to get into the numbers more and compare them to his previous attempts. Despite finally slipping into work mode he didn’t miss the second the clock ticked over to the time he’d asked to leave.

He instructed his assistant to return the materials to the lab and a matter of minutes later he stood in the same spot he had dropped the boys off hours earlier. He had been planning on leaving from Hotlands so he’d arrived considerably earlier then he had originally intended.

After a while the solitude of his thoughts was taken as a mother approached, “Hello! I haven’t seen you before, are you a new parent or just new to the school?” It was a plucky avian monster of some sort, with bright orange feathers that would fit well in Hotlands.

‘Sorry, I don’t speak common,’ he signed quickly.

“Oh you poor dear,” their singsong voice sang. The attempt to communicate further was quickly dropped, which Gaster was relieved to see.

Another monster approached the pair, a large scaly beast with teeth as sharp as a blaster’s, and oddly soft eyes. “Hello! I haven’t seen you before-” she started her voice a permanent snarl but it wasn’t unpleasant. It was the same approach, it must be some Underground equivalent to talking about the weather. No one really cared to know but it was an easy way to start a subject.

“He’s mute,” the bird chirped in, “the poor dearie, must be hard to teach the kids.”

Gaster had to force every ounce of his magic to still so he didn’t cringe, he wasn’t mute. He’d tell them, but he was uncomfortable enough. It was one thing as a child being pitied for his font, seeing
the same look as an adult was rather embarrassing. He didn’t know why he’d believed so strongly he’d just wake up one day and be able to speak common but centuries had passed and here he was—still being called a mute.

Luckily as more parents came he was able to maneuver himself to the back of the crowd and was forgotten entirely, even though a few seemed to recognize who he was, as children began to leave the building. It was rather interesting to see the bold range of expressions, the wailing, the tears, the face splitting smiles from both parents and children.

The tears were the more interesting reaction, some of the parents had to have had several first days of school at this point, how could they still be this emotional? He could feel happy waves of magic pushing through the air filling it with intoxicating waves of joy. Would Sans and Papyrus be that excited to see him? He watched a lion cub smile up at her beaming father who quickly smothered her into his mane. Gaster chuckled to himself, why would they?

They had barely known each other a few months, there wasn’t any established codependency, so there was no reason for his soul to be fluttering like it was. He scratched at his forehead as several monsters stepped away from him, his magic must be putting off something depressing. He took a breath to calm himself and waited as the crowd dwindled in numbers.

Sans and Papyrus were the last ones out of the building, they were talking amiably with a SnowDrake, their teacher if he remembered correctly. The teacher extended her wing and pointed along the path, the pair turned and smiled down the way to Gaster. He waved over to them, his soul already soothed by their presence, they were happy. One by one his bones began to relax until he had no idea why he was worried in the first place.

Sans casually strolled up the path while Papyrus skipped in front of him, “you came back!” Papyrus smiled.

‘I promised,’ the smile across his skull came effortlessly as the boy hugged his leg.

“I told you he would,” Sans smiled paying the scene little heed before he headed home.

“I knew he would too,” Papyrus pouted but it quickly melted away, “school is awesome Dad!” After that sentence the boy made full use of his lack of lungs and proceeded to recount every moment of the day from the second after they went through the front door. Each student was described in vivid detail, each desk or cubby was named in order of closeness to the door, and all of the ‘get to know you games’ rules were recited word for word.

“And Sans only fell asleep twice!” Papyrus smiled proudly over to his brother who pulled his hood over his head.

“Twice?” that was uncommon, it had been several weeks since the last major incident. He looked over to the baggy jacket that completely enwrapped his form, “I already told them about your chronic fatigue, they understand.” Sans pulled the strings tighter on the hood in an attempt to disappear completely.

Gaster looked over to Papyrus who shrugged before he continued on about their first day adventure.

It was surprising how quickly everything fell into routine. Gaster would wake up Papyrus, who in turn woke up a constantly groggy Sans, while Gaster attempted breakfast. Eventually the boys would take their spots at the table and start to eat while Gaster left for work. The fogginess of the first day of
work lifted into a distant memory and he was relieved that he was able to return to work. It was a pattern, so it was odd when anything broke it.

Sans was the first to the table, his eyelight bright and alert as he looked down at the fried egg in front of him. It had taken two months but Gaster had finally managed not to ruin it. Sans poked at the yolk with a delighted grin as the yellow slid over the white, he took his equivalent of a bite and smiled up to Gaster, “this mean we can stop having eggs for breakfast everyday?”

Gaster bit down on his teeth as he tried to maintain the pride he had built up at completing the procedure that had plagued him for months. “You’ve gotten very good at making them though,” Papyrus smiled as he climbed into his chair, “but we would very much appreciate something else now.”

Gaster sighed as he shoveled a forkful of eggs into his mouth, he’d fixated on it hadn’t he? “So what has you so bright eyed?” Gaster leaned casually onto his hand to leer at Sans.

Sans pulled his shoulders up to his ears, “nothing.”

“We’re doing a lab today!” Papyrus smiled, “that means we’re going to do some of that sciency stuff you both like so much.” He didn’t seem nearly as thrilled at the idea as Sans but was content to see his brother excited for a change.

“Well I wish both my junior scientists luck today,” Gaster smiled, “and I hope that nothing explodes.”

“But how cool would it be if something did!” Papyrus smiled dangerously and Gaster chuckled. Gaster rubbed both of their heads then headed for the door, “see you after work.”

“Bye!” They spoke in unison.

It was one of those days where one could walk into their place of work and know exactly how the day would go. The entire day had been one giant waste as the only thing they had achieved was scraping their current train of thought about the barrier. It should have been a terrible day that weighed heavy across his shoulder and yet Gaster was excited as he headed back home.

He was certain the children hadn’t been finding physical proof of quantum physics or proving string theory but they were still working towards expanding their problem solving horizons through a means he was familiar with. He had learned he didn’t have much patience for most subjects, the History homework in particular seemed to drive him mad, but science? That he would gladly help them with.

His key was stuck in the door but as he went to turn the knob it opened for him, “hi Dad! How was work?” Papyrus sang. Gaster narrowed his sockets, Sans was nowhere to be seen.

‘Disproved all of our work from the last few months, how was school?’ He studied the boy’s face but it didn’t flicker away from the innocent expression he was wearing.

“Oh it was very good!” Papyrus opened his mouth to let out the regular torrent of a description for the day before Gaster stopped him.

‘Where is Sans? I think he’d like to tell me how the day went since he was looking so forward to it,’ Gaster folded his arms.

“Asleep!” Papyrus blurted out quickly, “yup he was tired, too tired, he got too excited this morning! Yup!” Papyrus followed after Gaster as he headed towards the pairs room, “if you open the door he
might wake up!” Papyrus fidgeted with the end of his shirt as Gaster opened the door and turned on the light only to be met with an empty room.

‘That’s strike one Papyrus, do you care to test me again?’ Gaster’s face fell into a glare as he stared the child down.

Papyrus physically squirmed under the expression before he finally caved, “he’s in your lab!”

Gaster’s teeth clicked together, he locked his lab whenever he left how could the boy have gotten in? The door turned effortlessly in his hand. Through the glass door he could see Sans working under a single light in the back of the room. He walked quietly up to the boy, he had no idea what the child was working on so he didn’t want to startle him. Sans’s eyelights flicked back to Gaster but he didn’t seem to have any intent of ceasing what he was doing.

The materials scattered about the table were all harmless. It was a simple experiment targeted towards children, they would place the powder of their dispersed bullet into a catalyst and watch as if formed again in a beaker. Gaster sat on the end of the bench and watched, at least he wasn’t playing with anything dangerous.

Sans sprinkled his dispersed magic into the mixture and leveled his face to the side of the glass to watch, an extra set of smaller sockets leaned in close to his brother’s. Slowly a small bone formed inside of its’ glass container much to the pairs delight. It slowly stretched to the length of the liquid it was concealed in before it began to rupture and twist sprouting more bones off of itself and reaching towards the top of the glass in a flurry of motion that only halted once it left the catalyst. What was left was a white chunk of magic filling the glass container entirely.

Sans’s shoulders slouched, he slid the beaker away from his line of site, “what did I do wrong?” He asked to no one in particular as he scanned through his notebook.

“Nothing brother that was very much like your magic!” Papyrus looked the vial over.

“It’s ugly Papyrus,” Sans couldn’t even look to his brother, or maybe it was the glass Papyrus was looking over.

“Sans we talked about this you can’t call your magic ugly, it’s a part of you,” Gaster supplied. Many nights the child had complained of the nature of his magic and he understood. When control came so effortlessly for Papyrus why was his so difficult to manage? Still, one couldn’t hate their own magic.

“Well it is,” the child pouted, “you should have seen Papyrus’s Doc! A single pretty pale blue bone, it looked like a crystal from Waterfall.”

“Sans, you are brilliant, your magic is unique, yes, but so are you,” Gaster placed a hand on the boy’s narrow shoulder, “this experiment doesn’t reflect anything other than shape, I believe you will learn to use your magic for great things. That starts when you accept it,” Gaster squeezed his fingers around the boy’s clavicle before he dropped his hand.

“Thanks Doc,” Sans didn’t seem entirely convinced but he wasn’t moping either.

“Now onto the subject at hand, how and why are you in here?” He signed while he spoke, Papyrus was more than able to give him answers too.

“In class today they didn’t let me do the experiment in case it was dangerous,” Sans said flatly as if he was standing a trial.

“Why didn’t you wait until I got home?” Gaster asked in the same tone.
“I-” His eyelights pointed to the floor.

“Is how did you get in here an easier question?” Sans emptied his pockets and placed an assortment of long, flat, hand twisted pieces of metal onto the table. Gaster spun a piece in his fingers as his mind scanned over what the object was. “Did you break in my lab?” He looked over the other pieces, a lock pick set, he felt his ribs grow hot.

Both boys placed their hands on their skulls, “please don’t yell,” Papyrus spat out quickly.

Gaster took a few deep breaths to calm himself, “how did you even learn to do this?”

Sans’s expression read he knew full well what he was about to say was wrong, “before the Orphanage, we’d sometimes find abandoned houses…” Gaster didn’t need to know anymore, he placed his head in his hands and leaned against the table.

“I need time to think,” he finally exhaled. Papyrus took the hint and pulled his brother out of the lab.

Gaster folded his arms to rest his chin atop them. Sans had broken into his lab where he could have potentially been harmed by the multitude of not-for-children materials and tools he kept in here. The boy had been mindful and kept to only what he needed, as far as he knew, in order to perform the task they wouldn’t let him do at school.

Papyrus wasn’t innocent in this, he’d lied directly to him to protect his brother. This was a breach in trust and needed to be dealt with- parentally. They had to be shown that their actions had consequences, he rubbed his face, but they both knew what they did was wrong. What was he supposed to do send them to bed? Sans would be thrilled! He couldn’t exactly make them stay up late, that wouldn’t be fair to the teacher.

His food was punishment enough he didn’t need to starve them more than it already did. He’d never hit them, stars even the thought was enough to make him sick. His nonexistent stomach squirmed against his vertebrae as his magic twitched through the motion of it. Never.

He chortled, he could yell at them they seemed to hate that, but he hated it too. The only time he’d yelled had been a single word to ask them to stop arguing but his font didn’t do well at an increased decibel. The screeching, grating, sound of gears crashing against themselves was enough to stop the children’s petty fight but it had embarrassed him entirely.

He rubbed his temples, he really didn’t like thinking parentally. “Doc?” Sans’s voice hesitated in its’ existence. “Are we in trouble?”

Gaster deflated into the table before he pushed himself up and turned to face Sans, “you should be. Both of you. But I don’t know what to do, this,” he gestured to his lab.

“Our trust,” he gestured between them, “is broken. I don’t know what to do now when I leave for work, there is dangerous stuff in here not meant for children.”

“I won’t do it again,” Sans rubbed his humerus.

“But how do I know that Sans? How do I know next time your teacher excludes you from a lab your not going to do the same thing?” Gaster leaned against the work table. “Do you even realize how quickly your brother was willing to lie for you?”

Sans’s fingers clenched tight, “it’s just been him and me for a while Doc, we aren’t used to this either.”
Gaster’s shoulders dropped, his magic pushed towards frustrated tears but he wasn’t going to allow it, “I don’t know what to do but I’m pretty certain I’m not supposed to tell you that.”

Sans smiled a bit at that, “no, I don’t think you are.” His eye lights traced the lines in the ceiling, “how about this Doc, all three of us go out in the living room and talk, we can figure this out together, okay?”

Gaster chuckled, “that sounds like a logical solution.” He rocked himself off of the bench and crossed to the entrance where Sans was, “I like those best.”

Sans looked up at him, “I know.”

Chapter End Notes

I thought I hated this chapter, I have a habit of editing them to the point the words look weird, but I reread it this morning and... I’m not going to complain!

Thank you so much for your continued support of this project, I hope you all enjoy it.
Any questions feel free to ask or if there’s anything off let me know.
It was a stroke of luck that the somber digital tone played from Gaster’s phone while they were in between steps on installing a safety feature to the Core. It took Gaster a moment to process what this meant: someone was calling him.

No one called Gaster it was embarrassing and awkward for all parties involved as they stuttered to find some means of communication. He pressed the green button on his keyboard, after a heavy beat of silence a blubbery voice finally spoke up, “Dr.Gaster?”

This was an interesting opportunity, should he attempt to carry on a normal conversation and see how long it took for the gentleman to recognize his mistake? He tapped his teeth together, his automated voice would be odd enough to hear over the phone, “speaking.” He said simply, he heard papers rustle on the other line.

“Sorry I didn’t quite get that,” came the reply.

Gaster sighed, he passed the phone to his assistant, ‘see what they want.’ Phones weren’t a common thing Underground thus most calls were important, or the occasional teen pulling a prank, this one seemed to be the first case.

“Why me?” The cat hissed.

‘Assistant,’ Gaster raised a brow in challenge as his phone was stolen from him.

“Assistant not secretary,” they grumbled as he turned the phone to himself. “Speaking for Dr.Gaster, go ahead,” his skit eyes glared Gaster down despite his pleasant tone. “Alright I’ll tell him, thanks,” he slid the keyboard back into the phone. “Sans and Papyrus are playing hooky,” when Gaster looked confused he added, “they aren’t in school today. No worries it’s just a thing kids do sometimes.”

Gaster’s mind was filled with a high pitched static, he couldn’t process any response so he just held out his hand for his phone. He turned the screen towards himself and saw several missed messages from the boys shared phone.

hey doc.
paps isn’t feeling too good
makin’ him stay home

He took mental note to check his phone more often. He rubbed his thumb against the corner of the device as he thought, ‘one hour break. Meet back here.’ The notion wasn’t met with any sort of argument which allowed Gaster to quickly make his way through the Core then up to the Capital.

When he opened the door he wasn’t sure what he expected but it certainly wasn’t the scene in front of him. Papyrus was dragging Sans across the floor as he clung to his brothers backpack. “Get off Sans,” Papyrus moaned, his voice cracked in such a way that Gaster’s eye sockets watered involuntarily.

“Doc don’t let him go,” Sans pulled hard against the backpack and Papyrus toppled over the top of it.

Papyrus’s bones rattled as he sat back up, they had a yellow tinge to them, clear sweat dripped from his skull, and his tiny eye sockets were half lidded. Gaster didn’t need nerves to recognize the child was hot to the touch. Gaster sat on the couch and pulled Papyrus into his lap with Blue magic, ‘how do you feel Papyrus.’

“I feel fine,” the boy didn’t make any exuberant gestures and a few of his letters were lowercase, “I just want to go to school.” His shoulders dropped and Gaster feared for a moment he may topple off of his lap.

‘How do you feel Papyrus,’ Gaster signed again.

“Fine!” He groaned, “my head just hurts, and I feel sticky, my bones hurt too, my magic is all tingly and feels like it wants to hurt me, everything feels spiky, and- and-” he leaned forward and began to cry into Gaster’s ribs, “everything hurts Dad.” It was a moment of pure instinct: Gaster wrapped his arms around the boy and held him close.

He rubbed circles along the boy’s back until his rattling stilled, “Sans will you call work for me? I won’t be back in.”

“Is he really sick?” Sans’s eyelights were full white moons in his dark orbits.

“He’ll be fine,” he replied flatly. Gaster hooked his heel against the bottom of the couch, his knees creaked as he forced himself to stand. He placed the boy on top of his bed with such care as if he was made of glass tempered by the summer’s sun. He ran his hand across the boy’s angular cheekbone and gave his best effort at a smile, ‘I’m going to get you a washcloth okay? I’ll be right back.’

Papyrus nodded into his soft brown blanket before he curled his knees into his chest. Gaster left the door open a crack so the boy could be heard if he needed something. Gaster pulled out his drawers one after another in search of a washcloth. “I can’t call your work if I don’t have your phone, they won’t answer mine,” Sans shrugged.

Gaster reached into his pocket to retrieve his phone then passed it to Sans, “has something been bothering Papyrus?” He grabbed the cloth out of the drawer and ran it under the faucet.

“No, until today he was completely fine,” Sans supplied, “is it bad?”

“Depends on the source,” he coiled the fabric between his hands, “how about at school anyone particularly off?”
Sans’s expression grew thoughtful as he mentally looked over his classmates, “there’s one kid whose magic has been kinda-” he looked for a word, “heavy lately. I don’t know, why?”

“Monsters are constantly putting off waves of magic based on their emotion. Most of the time it’s undetectable but extreme bouts can fill the air and affect others souls,” Gaster headed back to the room, “if it’s from an outside source he’ll be fine with some adequate time away from school but I don’t think that’s the case. It wouldn’t be this- severe,” Gaster pushed open the door.

That wasn’t the only source of ailment for monsters but it was the easiest one for a child with a soul as untainted as his to catch.

“So it’s ba-” Sans started but Gaster pressed his finger to his teeth.

“He will be just fine, some positive energy and we’ll have him running up and down the streets making ridiculous patterns in no time,” Gaster took extra care to hold tight to the cloth so his hands wouldn’t sign from habit. He sat along the side of the bed then gently laid the fabric across Papyrus’s forehead.

“Everything hurts Dad,” Papyrus whimpered.

‘I know Papyrus but you are very strong you’ll get better,’ he signed quickly.

“I don’t feel strong,” Papyrus pulled his blanket up to his teeth, his tiny little sockets the only part of him exposed.

‘You need some food in you, I’ll be right back,’ Gaster rubbed the boy’s shoulder. “Sans? Would you mind assisting me?” He stepped back towards the kitchen and waited for Sans to follow.

Gaster opened the fridge and attempted to find something soft for the poor child. “Sans I need you to listen to me,” Gaster shut the door behind him as he pulled out some vegetables to steam. “I know you don’t like hearing it and I don’t like bringing it up, but I need you to keep your distance from Papyrus until he is better,” his expression was as flat as he could manage while Sans gave him that stare of his.

“Why?” Sans asked defensively.

“You know why,” he gestured vaguely to the room on the other side of the wall, “Papyrus is currently missing a quarter of his HP, monster’s souls can’t do decimal points like humans can.”

His thoughts drifted back to the scene at the castle, he couldn’t do anything then either, he just lacked the touch for healing. “I’m useless in situations like this so I’m just going to do my best to stay positive, so please, keep your distance,” Gaster pleaded.

Sans’s eye lights went out, “s-sure Doc, I can do that.”

Gaster let out a breath of air, “thank you.”

“Dad?” Papyrus croaked from his room.

“Coming Papyrus!” He called back, forgetting for a moment the unintelligible gibberish of his voice. “Sans would you bring me those once they’re done?” Gaster asked quickly.

“Done like normal food or done like your food?” Sans teased.

“Use your best judgement,” Gaster retorted with a glare.
“Can skeletons throw up?” Papyrus’s hands tightened on the blankets near where his stomach would be.

‘Yes but not like most monsters, do you think you need to?’

Papyrus shook his head, “not yet.”

Gaster sat at the edge of the bed and placed his hand on top of Papyrus’s. He gently rubbed each bone in the boy’s hand. They were so small, so petite, he’d honestly forgotten what proper hand bones were supposed to look like before he met them. They were so soft, so perfect, even with the sickly yellow tinge they managed a pristine appearance. ‘Papyrus is something bothering you?’ he finally worked up the nerve to ask.

“I’m sick,” he stated flatly as he laid flat to the bed.

Gaster sighed, ‘I mean emotionally.’

Papyrus narrowed his sockets, “what do you mean?”

“Whatcha tryin to figure out?” Sans entered with a plate of soggy vegetables.

“If anything is bothering him,” Gaster passed the plate over to Papyrus.

“What’s eating you bro?” Sans smiled.

“Nothing eats skeletons Sans,” Papyrus stated curtly.

‘Is something happening in school that has you upset?’ Papyrus shook his head. ‘Is someone in your class upset?’ Papyrus hesitated before he shook his head. ‘Anyone say anything that bothered you?’

Papyrus furrowed his brows, “no! I’m just sick!” His voice cracked unpleasantly and he spiraled into a coughing fit.

Gaster sighed. He wasn’t going to get anywhere and the boy didn’t need to be anymore upset than he already was. He placed his hand on the Papyrus’s back, “Sans would you please call my work?”

He looked over to his his brother and heaved a mighty breath then passed the plate to Gaster, “yeah Doc.” He gave his brother one last glance before he headed into the hallway. Gaster heard him sit down on the other side of the door as he started to talk, that would have to do for now.

Gaster placed the plate on the bed, ‘have you eaten anything today?’

“No and I don’t want to,” Papyrus declared stubbornly.

‘Gotta get your health up kiddo,’ he slid the fork closer to him, ‘just one and you can pick which one you like.’ Papyrus seemed satisfied with these conditions, he looked the plate over and speared a carrot with his fork.

Was this because they were the smallest vegetable on the plate or because the boy was attracted to the color orange? Perhaps it’s because they were sweeter than most vegetables? Granted Papyrus never cared for sweets too much- he cut off his thoughts, that didn’t really matter right now did it?

Papyrus took pathetically meager bites of the carrot at the end of the fork. He even dared to venture a second before he pushed the plate away. His body relaxed as the healing effects of the food took hold, Gaster felt his soul mimic the expression.
He rubbed the side of the boy’s skull gently with his thumb while his fingers cupped the back of his skull. He continued the motion until the child drifted into sleep, he smiled softly to the slumbering form, readjusted the blankets around him, then turned off the light as he left.

“Sans are you interested in some zucchini? Broccoli? There’s a few carrots left,” he leaned the plate down to him.

Sans shook his head, “we can heat them up later when he wakes up.”

“You need to eat something too,” Gaster narrowed his glance.

“He’s going to be okay isn’t he?” Sans whispered, “he’s never been sick before.”

“He’ll be fine, he’s got a brother like you looking out for him,” Gaster supplied. Sans snickered at that, his eyelight focused as he looked up to him. “I’m going to need you to make a few more calls for me, alright?”

That day was one of the longest Gaster had experienced in ages. Just seeing the upbeat, unstoppable, and great, as Sans kept insisting, Papyrus down was unfortunate. Hearing him in pain when Gaster knew full well he couldn’t do anything to alleviate it, anything more than what he was doing anyways, was chipping at his soul. He couldn’t tell if he was doting on the child too much or not enough.

He’d texted Asgore several times on what he should do, aside from what he was already doing the only advice he had was if it got much worse take him to a healer. Sans made good on his promise to stay away from his brother but if Gaster was in the room with him Sans always sat in the same spot outside the door.

When it was time for bed Gaster gave Sans his room after making the boy swear he wouldn’t come up in the middle of the night to sit with his brother. Gaster laid on the lumpy uncomfortable couch alone with his thoughts for hours. He couldn’t get his soul to still as he ran over if he was missing something simple that had happened to throw the boy’s soul off. He sat up to see the door that was cracked open just enough for Papyrus’s shaky uppercase letters to get through.

Gaster got up for the fourth time that early morning to check on him. Papyrus was sleeping with his fingers loosely curled toward his chest, his HP was just short of full, with all of his bones free of the tension they’d carried all day. Gaster grit his teeth together and pulled the chair over from the desk.

He cleared his mind, green fields, emerald eyes, green stems that bound flowers to the earth.

Kindness: he thought of Toriel and her infectious laugh, he thought of the King with his own children, he thought of Grillby, he thought of the boys. Their smiles. Their joy. Their wonderful love of each other and the wonderment at each new discovery in the Underground. He knew kindness, he held his hand over the boy’s soul.

He sealed his sockets and concentrated on sending warmth into his magic. He channeled it down towards his hand. He kept his thoughts focused on the feeling: the way Papyrus laughs, the way Sans scrunches his nasal cavity when he doesn’t understand something, the way they play with their magic together.

“Dad. Stop, it hurts,” Papyrus wrapped his fingers around Gaster’s.

Gaster pulled his hand away as if he’d just been burned, “I’m sorry,” he clicked his teeth together and returned the chair. He was going to ask if the boy needed anything but he was already back to sleep.
Gaster nearly threw himself back onto the couch, why had he even tried that? He knew he couldn’t, nothing was going to magically change but he just hoped that maybe-. He rested his sockets against the heels of his hands, he just needed to stop thinking and go to sleep. He sighed and grabbed his phone off of the coffee table.

*IF IT CAN WAIT UNTIL SUNDAY WOULD YOU MIND WATCHING SANS WHILE I TAKES PAPYRUS TO A HEALER?* He set his phone back on the table and laid back. Four days of this? Could he really handle that? He rubbed harshly down the sides of his skull, he didn’t want to take Sans to an establishment where more sickness would be found but he didn't want Papyrus to suffer for that long either.

Gaster’s phone lit up, he mentally chastised Grillby for being up this late. It was bad enough he was the only employee in one of the few food establishments in the Underground and was constantly kept busy he didn’t need to be tired on to of all that. He slid open his keyboard to view the message, *if you don’t want to wait…* the phone buzzed again, *I could come over Saturday morning…*

*I’LL KEEP YOU UPDATED BUT IT WOULD BE WONDERFUL IF YOU COULD COME OVER SATURDAY*

...*sure thing…*

...*you have a nightmare…?*

*NO, JUST- WORRIED. DID YOU?*

Yeah…

*DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT?*

...*No…*

Gaster sighed, *GET TO SLEEP*

...*probably not but you should…*

*Good night…*
NIGHT. Gaster discarded his phone to the floor. His eye sockets finally fell heavy and he drifted off
to sleep.

The next day was more of the same but much more of it. Sans hadn’t slept at all and was rather
agitated because of it. Gaster kept hoping the boy would just conk out but he seemed stubbornly
devout in staying awake. At one point in the day Gaster sent Sans into the shopping district to buy
some ready made soup just so the child could do something productive.

Papyrus was tired of being confined to his bed, he would go over to work on their puzzle for a while
before he’d fall asleep on top of it and separate the pieces. Gaster kept returning him to his bed but
before he knew it the boy would be up doing something else. His HP was dropping at about the
same rate as it had the day before but today he refused to eat at all. It wasn’t until Sans got back with
the soup that he dared a bite.

Gaster sat on the couch while Sans and Papyrus chatted through the door between spoonfuls. He
was exhausted. It was rude to think of himself at a time like this but he was past the point of tired and
hoping to the stars that he didn’t disconnect at the joints. He heard the door press open, “Sans,”
Gaster warned. He turned his head and just barely saw Papyrus rush into the bathroom.

Papyrus had never been sick on his cooking , Gaster mused to himself as he followed after Papyrus
to the bathroom. He pulled open the door to see Papyrus curled up on the floor of the shower, his
head near the shower drain. ‘Well, looks like you made it in time,’ Gaster smirked.

Papyrus shook his head, “didn’t get sick.”

‘Well that’s even better,’ Gaster folded his hands in his lap when he was done signing. He watched
Papyrus’s short, shallow, breaths as he laid against the cold stone floor completely devoid of any
Papyrus-like expression.

Papyrus held his arms out to Gaster, he locked sockets, and made a grabbing motion with his hands.
Gaster tilted his head, this was infantile behavior wasn’t it? Helplessness showered itself across the
boy’s tiny frame and Gaster’s soul buckled as he pulled the child to his lap and held him against his
ribs.

He leaned back against the shower wall with little intention of moving further. Gaster looked down
to the sleeping child that clung to him, he was resting comfortably. His features were held in relaxed
positions even if his fingers were curled tight against his black jacket. Gaster’s breath hitched as he
felt his eye lights round at the sight of the sleeping child against him.

He glanced just past the bathroom door to the wide black sockets peering around it. Gaster moved
his arm just enough to give the boy in the hall a thumbs up. He rested his hand against the tiny
skeleton clinging to him as if he were a life line. He could feel the distress in the boy’s soul but it
wasn’t any particular emotion he could detect.

It felt like hours before Gaster’s magic ran so cold he had to get off of the ground before he was
stuck there. He steadied himself against the wall, his magic trickled lamely through his legs and he
nearly toppled over. His soul turned blue as he was enrobed with another monsters magic that righted
him. He looked over to Sans who had been sitting in the doorway the entire time.

He nodded to the boy as he approached, “thank you,” he whispered.

Sans looked down to the floor, “I didn’t want you to drop him.”
Gaster returned Papyrus to his bed, searched around for the boy’s brown blanket and tucked it against the side of his skull. Gaster headed into the kitchen, he needed to replenish his own magic levels. Sitting at the back of the fridge was a bowl of barely touched soup, “Sans, are you not eating?”

Sans hid in the collar of his jacket, “I’m not hungry.”

Gaster pressed his head against the freezer door, “is there anything you would eat or munch on?” Sans’s eye lights pointed down to his bare toes. Gaster opened the fridge again then pulled out a bottle of ketchup. The bottle was set down on the counter with a pointed look towards Sans before he laid back down on his temporary, lumpy, uncomfortable, bed. Just a few minutes rest and he’d be better.

He was awoken the next morning by a soft knocking at the door. His knees shot electricity at him as he attempted to straighten them to their full length. He rubbed them until they were a dull pulse of pain then answered the door. The flames crackled, ‘are you sure you’re not the one sick?’

Gaster deflated a bit, ‘your clothes are soaked did you forget an umbrella?’

‘At least I changed my clothes since yesterday,’ Grillby’s flames popped as he entered the house.

‘Yeah, yeah,’ Gaster yawned as he stretched. He looked down the hall to see Sans already in position for another day of staring at a door. ‘You-’ Gaster rubbed the back of his neck and bit down on his teeth, ‘didn’t happen to bring anything to drink did you?’ Gaster hated the way the words twitched so naturally to his fingers.

Grillby smirked and pulled a bottle out of his inventory, Gaster turned it in his hands only to be equal parts relieved and disappointed, ‘orange juice?’ The gears in Gaster’s mind clicked together until finally they aligned: an old conversation made in a half delirious state. He swatted Grillby lightly in the arm, though the monster responded as if it was an agonizing assault. Gaster signed a quick ‘ha ha’ before he placed the juice in the fridge.

‘Sans has been incredibly grouchy lately because he has refused to sleep, this is a child with near narcolepsy,’ Gaster started. ‘So I’m sorry if he says anything a bit curt. I also can’t get him to eat,’ he tilted the bottle of ketchup that still sat on the counter, ‘more than a little a bit,’ he sighed as he shoved it back in the fridge. He really thought that was going to work. ‘So just watch him I guess-’ he dropped his hands in frustration before he picked them back up haughtily, ‘will you stop laughing!’

Grillby’s entire form was shaking, “I never in a million lifetimes would have thought I’d hear such Dad speak from you.”

‘Well they’re in my care I’m going to care for them,’ Gaster responded flatly.

Grillby composed himself, a few stray sparks still crackled in the air, “I’ll take good care of him I promise.”

With basic instructions out of the way Gaster busied himself getting Papyrus ready, he grabbed an oatmeal cookie out of the sack and tried to coax the boy into eating it while on their way. “Bye Paps,” Sans rubbed at his eye socket, “get better okay?”

Papyrus nodded, “I’ll be all better in no time brother!” Gaster smiled, it was nice to hear the bounce back in his voice. Maybe he was getting better on his own, but it never hurt to check.

‘Thank you,’ Gaster signed to Grillby before he was shooed out of the door.
It was a long walk to the healer they were visiting but Papyrus’s restless spirit seemed soothed by being outside again. He was even well enough to provide commentary about the passing monsters at a decibel they could, unfortunately, hear. Gaster hardly minded though, he was just excited to see the boy chatting amiably again.

The appointment went simply enough, a basic healing treatment was used, green magic to restore the HP with the extra benefit of a Healer knowing how to restore a soul’s natural rhythm.

The toothy withering plant monster asked Papyrus what had caused his soul to falter but he refused to tell them until Gaster left the room. It was unnerving and settled in his bones like a toxin that the boy would trust a stranger and not him. He inhaled sharply this wasn’t about him.

He rubbed his face, the boy was fine, that was all that mattered. Papyrus smiled up to him when he emerged from behind the door. Gaster was surprised by his disappointment when the child laced his fingers against his instead of asking to be picked up. This was normal. This is how it was supposed to be. He raised his ring finger up to the corner of his teeth to make sure he was smiling, he wasn’t but that wasn’t uncommon.

As they walked back home Papyrus stepped hurriedly in front of Gaster and pulled him along ever so gently. They pushed the front door open together to see Sans curled up asleep against a very uncomfortable Grillby. Papyrus clasped his hands over his teeth as he tried to avoid waking his brother.

Gaster smiled softly at the scene, ‘well, well, isn’t this something.’ He was elated to see the boy finally asleep, Grillby’s warmth had a habit of lulling even the most restless of souls to sleep.

Grillby’s voice was a sharp whisper, “how do I get up?”

‘Just let the boy sleep Grillby,’ he stretched, ‘I think I’m going to do the same.’

“Gaster!” Grillby barked as the skeletons walked right past him, “I need to go to work, Gaster!” But it seemed to fall on deaf ears.

Chapter End Notes

Gaster made a big show of going down to his room before he came back and relieved Grillby. Sans then fell asleep on his lap.

Goodness this chapter. So I was really down this week, really down, and so I kept trying to make this chapter way more dramatic then it needed to be. I had a version where Sans basically broke down, had one where Gaster did, it was- yeah. Really dramatic. Now I feel it’s sort of plain and boring but I think next week is gonna be better! Sorry
Alas Poor Yorrick

Chapter Summary

Where some questions finally get answered.

Chapter Notes

This chapter might be a little heavy? Just a warning. It is definitely longer than the others.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Dad, you just got home from work! Why are you working?” Papyrus kicked at the bottom of Gaster’s chair.

Gaster gave the boy a harsh look, ‘we’ve been over this. My work is important, sometimes I need more time than I allow myself.’ He pressed his notebook to the table to take a bite of macaroni. The noodles turned into a paste almost immediately, the cheese sauce was burnt, and the shredded cheese over the top of it just added an odd consistency to the mush.

Papyrus folded his arms, “bet you wish you could just stay there all night.”

‘Sometimes,’ Gaster rolled his eyelight.

Papyrus had become clingy recently, making a spectacle of himself to get Gaster’s attention away from whatever it was he was engaged with. For the first few days it had been acceptable, Gaster played along easily enough, but they were on nearly two weeks of it. It was growing exhausting trying to keep up with the child.

“Will you stop signing I want to know what you’re saying,” Sans folded his arms.

But the child wasn’t the problem it was the children. For so long he had thanked the stars for the pair of them. So often they took care of each others issues before he even had to intervene but now they were obstacles in each others way for Gaster’s limited attention. He hadn’t even realized Sans was upset by Papyrus’s over affection warranting more time with him until he happened to catch on that Sans ‘not being interested’ in what they were doing was him retreating.

“I’m sorry Sans,” he spoke while he signed. He’d fallen out of habit of performing both actions at home because one child didn’t want the other to be involved in whatever they were doing. With Sans it was usually a casual activity such as reading in the same room as one another or sometimes working on a small project in the lab. Papyrus on the other hand had to be doing something productive. They’d clean together, work on puzzles, or try the occasional board game but Gaster only had so much patience.

This wasn’t an issue that had a simple solution, he needed to figure out what triggered this codependence in the first place. Neither of them seemed capable of providing a reason and he felt
rude asking when it was going to stop. He cared for the pair, he really did, more than he ever imagined he would but if this kept up he'd probably start drinking- His eyelights flicked off.

“What’s wrong?” The burnt cheese sauce dripped down the base of Sans’s jaw and onto his clothes after his poor attempt at drinking the half liquid. Gaster summoned a pair of hand bullets to retrieve a washcloth for the boy’s face.

“Why don’t we all go to the park after dinner, take a break from magic lessons?” Gaster’s bullets passed the fabric over to Sans who swiped at his face.

“Sounds good to me Doc,” Sans’s ever present smile was relaxed.

“But it’s my night to practice,” Papyrus huffed.

“Paps, lets just go to the park okay?” Sans gave a sideways glance over to Gaster then back to Papyrus who seemed to stubbornly accept.

As was the new tradition Gaster and Papyrus cleaned the dishes together before the three of them went outside. It was an odd time of the day so by the time they made it through the dull chatter of the capital the park had very few inhabitants.

“Dad come push me on the swings!” Papyrus thread his fingers between Gaster’s the second they passed the threshold.

“Hey Paps, would you show me how to do those sand forts?” Sans shoved his hands in his pockets, “I would really appreciate it,” he winked.

Papyrus clamped his jaw shut as a small aggravated sound escaped him, “you make one pun and I will not show you the secrets of my magnificent forts!”

Sans chuckled, “ah man maybe not then that sounds really hard,” he relaxed his body with a groan.

“Sans you lazy bones!” He grabbed his brother’s arm and pulled him towards the sand pit. “I’m not going to give up until you can make a fort almost as great as mine!” With that the pair finally took to entertaining themselves, Gaster deflated on a park bench and rubbed his face. Just a little bit of alone time.

Children ran about happily making the noises that only the outdoors granted them permission to use. Their expression were bright, exuberant, as they greeted their friends with embracing hugs. Parents grinned broadly with tired but content eyes as they chatted with other adults about all of their children’s achievements. He looked down at his black attire. At his scarred hands. At his mangled form. Happiness came so naturally to them and Gaster was happy, or he thought he was.

Who was he kidding? He was nothing like these parents with their shining faces that their children could look up to. He wasn’t a parent, he was their guardian. He didn’t push them on swings or encourage them down slides- That’s what the boys deserved. They shouldn’t be alone by themselves for hours in a day then barely spoke to as he watched them play amongst themselves.

He could do those things, he fidgeted his fingers together, but would that really make any sort of a difference? They could have had that, if he hadn’t taken them from the Orphanage they could have had a life filled with pleasant smiles and an enthusiasm he didn’t have. With two parents who both had the kindness to truly love them. His soul beat in angry tones against his thoughts but he was having difficulty silencing them.

“Oh my are those your boys? They’re adorable,” a wide chested badger of some sort commentated
as they sat on the bench beside Gaster.

He was relieved to be pulled out of his own head but he really wasn’t in the mindset for interaction. He nodded his head in response, ‘sorry I don’t speak common.’ His failsafe, the one good thing that came from his Font was the ability to decline conversation with a simple gesture of his hands.

‘You speak Hands?’ the badger signed with practiced gestures.

Gaster tried his best to suppress the frustrated yell that bubbled up inside of him, ‘yes.’ Papyrus fixed the intruder in a blank expression before he positioned himself to be able to play while he watch.

‘So nice of you to take them out for your wife, I’m sure she appreciates the break,’ she smiled even as Gaster held his favorite mask tight to his face.

‘I don’t have a significant other,’ he didn’t want to make anymore conversation with this monster than necessary.

‘Oh I’m sorry did she Fall?’ She wasn’t being cruel, she wasn’t making fun of him, she was just making small talk to alleviate herself from the isolated normality of her day to day. He scanned the equipment for whatever monster was her kin but didn’t seem to have any luck.

‘No, I’ve never been,’ with anyone romantically, ‘married,’ his gaze stayed level as he tried to politely indicate he wasn’t interested in the conversation.

She hummed as her immediate response, ‘oh, so are they adopted?’ Gaster raised and dropped his fist in a single half hearted gesture for yes, ‘What happened to their real parents then?’

Gaster’s soul stuttered in his ribs and he feared for a moment the ancient thing might give out entirely. He calmed his breath, he wasn’t really their parent, he had just finished his tangent about his inadequacies as such. He was their guardian.

He turned to tell her as much but his hands had a different story in mind, ‘I am their parent.’ He was about to retract the statement, his logic demanded it, but his soul resolved itself under the word. He really felt that way, he touched his fingertips just over his soul. How long had he felt that way? His eye lights shifted to the twins, they might not be there yet but it didn’t really matter to him, to his soul, to his very essence that’s what he was. He tapped his finger to the corner of his teeth, it was such a soft smile.

The badger chuckled, ‘I know that but you know they’ll always be closer to their biological parents. You’re really brave for adopting though I hear a lot of stories about adopted children with behavioral issues, I certainly couldn’t do it.’

Gaster’s magic crackled around him like fire as he refused to form his intent into a shape. ‘They are good boys, I don’t deserve them,’ he stood up, he couldn’t take this anymore. He wasn’t used to his soul burning with strong emotions, there was too much to feel and he couldn’t process it. His mind turned turbulent as thought after thought collided in crashing waves against one another. His ribs inflated and collapsed at an accelerated rate as he tried to calm his mind while his soul raced in its’ cage.

He flinched when tiny fingers wrapped around his, ‘I’m gettin’ tired Doc can we go home?’ Gaster looked down to Sans who was acting as innocent and naive as he could muster, his eyelights were sparkling diamonds in the dark caverns of his sockets.

“We too Dad,” Papyrus leaned heavily against his leg and made a show of rubbing at his sockets. Gaster was very aware they were giving him an easy out of the conversation before he made a
complete fool of himself.

‘Thank you,’ he signed promptly to the boys, he gave the badger monster one last look over, ‘sorry to cut this short,’ he feigned a smile.

“Oh I understand how it is,” she obviously didn’t, “well it was nice talking to you.”

Gaster paid her no attention as he started on the path home, he froze in his progress just outside of parks boundaries, “are you two sure you were done playing?” He hadn’t had the time to take them around the Underground like he used to. Children needed to run around, or at least Papyrus did, Sans seemed rather content in slothfulness.

“It’s no fun if you can’t relax Doc,” Sans shoved his hands in his pockets. “You uh, told her you were our parent?” his eyelights fixed on Gaster’s.

He fidgeted with his sleeve, “I did. Is that alright?”

“Sure Doc,” Sans sockets tore away from his without any real impression of how he felt but his fingers were still curled around Gaster’s.

Gaster’s eyelights met Papyrus’s sockets whose expression read absolutely guilty, “Papyrus did you still want to play?”

“I’m fine,” he kicked at the loose gravel, “I really am tired.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t push you on the swing,” Gaster fumbled awkwardly with his one free hand and the singular bullet as he signed. He was tired of the children constantly needing his attention but that didn’t change the disappointed feeling that settled over him when he couldn’t follow through.

Papyrus smiled up to him, “there will be other times!” Gaster smiled the thought was by far more pleasant than he had anticipated. There was still time.

The child must have been tired, they walked through the door and Papyrus headed straight to his room. Within minutes he was shouting for Sans to read to him fully dressed in his button down footy pajamas. Sans smirked lazily as he sauntered into their bedroom.

Gaster had fluffy bunny memorized at this point, every single line, all of the boy’s regular inflections fell to his soul like a song. Sometimes when he’d stare off into the unknown the words would drift into his mind and a short smile would inspire itself across his teeth. At the market he’d find soft bunny plushes and have to stop himself from impulsively buying it for their room. Every time they went to Snowdin he bought the pair a cinnabunny, even if neither of them asked for it. It was sentimental and odd for him but he couldn’t help the fondness he had for this children’s book.

The pair spoke in hushed whispers to each other after the book had ended, an unusual break from the normality of their routine. Papyrus typically fell asleep before the end of the book and, if he didn’t, he normally made it very clear he was trying to go to sleep. Gaster worked in his notebook while he waited for the whispers to fade out. Once they seemed to be resting he headed down to his room for the night.

It was a short lived attempt at sleep. After a few hours with his sockets sealed his soul thrummed against his chest in beats of fear as his, unknowingly, summoned bone bullets cut through the air. As he took in the sombering darkness of his basement room his soul slowly stilled to a normal rate as his bones began to rattle.

That wall. It was always that accursed wall. He curled his fingers tight against the holes in his palms.
until they poked through and sent searing magic up into his shoulders. He held it there grounding himself in reality before he collapsed back onto his bed. He reached over for his phone and selected Grillby’s number: NIGHTMARE. SAME AS ALWAYS. He hadn’t had one in a long while, not since the boys at least anyways.

How long had they been with him? He was watching the clock more than he used to but the calendar less. Days were marked by what happened not when they were. He looked over to his phone, good, Grillby must be sleeping for a change.

Gaster headed up the stairs to the boys room. He gently readjusted their blankets as he passed through to the kitchen where he started a cup of coffee. Sleep wasn’t necessary tonight. He rubbed his temples as the pot gurgled, it had been so long since he’d had a nightmare what happened?

He rubbed his sockets with his fingers, when he pulled them away he flinched at the empty sockets staring back at him. “Sans?” He really shouldn’t need to ask it was obviously the child. Tear tracks stained the boys cheekbones as he fidgeted with the bottom of his ‘Tired to the Bone’ nightshirt. The hem of his shirt twisted against his tiny hands until the wrinkles stretched up towards his collar.

“You have a nightmare Doc?” Sans chuckled dryly.

Gaster opened his arm against the back of the chair he was sitting in, it was quickly filled with young skeleton. He held him close then pulled him up into his lap, “you too, huh?” Gaster smiled lamely.

“Yeah,” Sans’s eyelights seemed hesitant to form.

“Want to talk about it?” He knew the answer, the boy only talked to Papyrus about his nightmares but it was worth a shot.

Sans grew silent, “your coffee is done,” he pointed back to the maker. So it was, he set the boy down on his chair and poured himself a cup then returned to his spot. “You really like that stuff huh?” Sans’s nasal cavity crinkled at the scent but his eye lights finally conjured themselves.

“I sort of traded one addiction for another,” Gaster replied flatly. He took a long drink with his spare hand rested against Sans’s hip. They sat in a somber silence as they both processed their similar ailment.

“I’m always in my room,” Sans’s hands returned to the base of his nightshirt. “The walls kept getting smaller so I pulled open the door but there wasn’t anything. Nothing at all. Just endless nothing.” His fingers snagged at the cloth in an odd angle that forced him to pull his hand back.

“And it’s dumb, I shouldn’t get upset about that but,” he started to rattle and Gaster discarded his mug to hold the boy with both arms. “I don’t want to be alone, I don’t want to be the last one left,” he wrapped his hands around Gaster’s arm. “I’m fine if it’s just me and Paps but I don’t know what I would do if it was just me,” he clung tighter around Gaster’s ulna and radius.

“When he was sick I was so scared,” his voice was barely more than a whisper. “Pops-” his voice buckled, “Pops got really sick before they went on vacation.” Gaster’s brows furrowed, surely he didn’t hear that right. They went on vacation? And left their children alone? Gaster wanted to ask him to repeat himself but the boy was crying softly now, trying very desperately not to.

“It’s okay to be afraid Sans, no matter how silly the fear it normally comes from good reason,” Gaster rubbed his fingers along the boy’s ribs. “You were alone for so much of your life it makes sense you’d be horrified to go back to that,” his fingers stopped as the boy looked up to him.

“But you’re not afraid of anything,” he said flatly, “your nightmares are bad things Humans did to
“That may be the case but I am afraid of some pretty ridiculous things,” Gaster chortled.

“Like what?” Sans turned around in Gaster’s lap to face him.

Gaster smirked, “well, spiders for one.”

“What?” Sans tried his best to hide the smile in his sockets.

“Yup, I so much as see a web and I freeze up, that’s why I keep the house clean,” he chuckled. Now that he was actually home he was considerably more successful at the task.

“You’re making that up,” Sans laughed.

“Ask Grillby sometime what happened when he tried to take me to the Spider Bake Sale, he thinks it’s hilarious,” Gaster huffed. Sans laughter relaxed into giggles before he rested his head against Gaster’s chest.

“Thanks Doc,” Sans curled up against him.

“Come on, let’s get you back to bed,” Gaster hefted him up from the chair and carried him back to his side of the bed.

Sans held onto Gaster’s sleeve as he turned to leave, “sorry we’ve been such a pain lately Doc, this was,” his eyelights dimmed, “this was just when they-” The boy’s hand dropped down to the bed, “would it be okay if I-” his voice trailed off as his eye sockets slid shut. Gaster rubbed his thumb along the edge of the boy’s skull, no one as protective as his parents would just up and leave. Something didn’t add up.

The next morning as Gaster prepared to leave he noticed something rather odd: Papyrus was taller than Sans. Try as he might he couldn’t place when that happened, surely he didn’t just shoot up over night. As he walked to work he thought back to the notebook Sans had accidentally discarded at the orphanage with the list of heights, Sans’s timing seemed to be accurate. He wondered if they’d noticed yet.

The day passed in its’ usual shape. Work kept him busy and freed him of the usual home life worries, he actually had a home life now, until it was time to return home. Sans celebrated when Gaster entered the house with a pre-made meal, no burnt mush tonight. After dinner they laid their current jigsaw across the coffee table and worked diligently at piecing it together.

After a while Gaster’s eye lights fell on the clock in the kitchen, “isn’t it story time?”

“Oh yeah!” Papyrus ran over to his backpack and returned with a softbound surface book, a rare find. “Dad would you read to me tonight?”

Gaster knit his brows together as he looked over the cover of the book, ‘Papyrus I can’t read to you.’

“Yes you can! You’ve done it before when we were asleep!” Papyrus argued.

“That was the weirdest version of Fluffy Bunny,” Sans chuckled to himself.

“Papyrus this is Shakespeare it’s hard enough to understand without my Font in the way,” not to mention everything being so needlessly wordy.
“Just point to the word you’re on!” he stomped his foot.

Gaster gestured to the word ‘Hamlet’ plastered across the front, “This is a tragedy it hardly seems suited—”

“It wouldn’t be a tragedy if you’d just read it!” Papyrus huffed, Sans was snickering now.

“Fine Papyrus but don’t blame me if you don’t like it,” Gaster said flatly.

“Don’t worry I got the abridged version,” Papyrus cheered as he headed into his room, “so it only has scenes with bridges in it!” Gaster paused in the doorway, he should probably correct that.

Papyrus quickly tugged on his pajamas, “would you read it in your bed?”

‘Why?’ Gaster signed.

“Because it’s a ghost story right? And ghosts prefer dark areas where they aren’t easily seen,” Papyrus smiled. “Please?”

“You’ll have to go to your bed when we’re finished,” Gaster eyed him with an edge of force in his voice,

“Yes, yes, just read!” Papyrus demanded as he tucked Sans into Gaster’s bed and then himself.

“If my voice bothers either of you please tell me and I’ll stop,” embarrassment was building in his cheekbones, this really wasn’t something he was comfortable with.

“Doc, we hear you talking all the time,” Sans assured him.

“Yeah so stop making excuses and read it,” Papyrus grumbled.

With a hefty breath Gaster started reading the story, he did his best to provide different inflections but every twitch in the boy’s eye sockets told him just to read it flat. The boys were rested against him, Papyrus’s eyes carefully trained onto Gaster’s finger as he read while Sans seemed to fall asleep fairly early on. He couldn’t blame the boy for his lack of interest.

“But Hamlet loves Ophelia!” Papyrus curled his fingers into tiny fists, “why would he say that?”

‘Because this is a tragedy, bad things have to happen because they have to,’ Gaster provided, ‘plus we don’t really have proof that they do, she is his betrothed he didn’t pick her.’

“I know he does,” Papyrus pouted as he leaned back into his spot.

When Ophelia met her end Gaster looked down to Papyrus who seemed utterly confused. He didn’t speak but his teeth were taut with thought as his sockets scanned over ‘[Ophelia Dies]’ over and over again. Gaster paused but Papyrus sharply told him to keep reading. Needless murder after unnecessary monologues after plotting and broken promises the story reached its climax.

“I knew he loved her,” Papyrus whispered at Hamlet’s confession. His voice was eerily quiet but he seemed well past ready to fall asleep, the fact he stayed up this long was impressive. Finally nearly the entirety of the cast Fell as the senseless act of revenge wrought everyone to their demise. The neighboring nation’s prince came in and vowed to give Hamlet a heroes burial with promise of rebuilding the Kingdom.

They sat staring at the closed book for a while before Papyrus crawled to the edge of the bed. ‘What are you doing?’ Gaster signed with knitted brows. It wasn’t like Papyrus to get out of bed once set in
it, even rarer for him to do so after a story had concluded.

“You said we had to go to our bed, so, night,” he ran up the stairs to their room quickly. That was a little too prompt, a little too upbeat after how quiet the boy had been. He looked over Sans’s sleeping form before he headed up the steps.

He attempted to turn the knob to their room but it was held firmly in place by the other side, “go away,” came the very un-Papyrus reply. He pressed his head to the door and he could hear the sharp short breaths between rattles.

Luckily, he was fairly versed at one sided conversations through a door, and this one didn’t have an enchantment. He imagined the walls of the bedroom and approximated the amount of space Papyrus took up, he conjured a pair of hand bullets, judging by the scraping sound against the door he’d succeeded. ‘I’m not going anywhere Papyrus,’ he signed.

Papyrus was silent long enough for Gaster to wonder if he’d fallen asleep, “Ophelia loved Hamlet.”

He furrowed his brows, ‘yes.’

“And Hamlet really did love Ophelia too, even if he said he didn’t,” Papyrus’s voice was as small as when he was sick.

‘Yes, I suppose so,’ Gaster just had to play along in hopes to coax the problem out of him.

“I really think the Prince will fix the Kingdom up just like Hamlet wanted,” he fell into silence again, a deafening and pulling silence that had Gaster straining for any sound. “Is it wrong for the people to like the Prince if Hamlet is gone?”

Gaster considered this, ‘Well, no. You have to remember Hamlet wasn’t the King yet and that it was his uncle in charge. Hamlet was well liked yes but he had yet to be put into a position of power.’

“But if he was?” Papyrus asked, “would it be bad?”

‘No,’ Gaster replied flatly, ‘they are entitled to their own opinion. Some will surely rally behind Hamlet’s image while others will have no trouble being loyal to the Prince.’

“So it’s not bad if Hamlet and Ophelia are gone for the people to like the Prince,” it should have been a question but it was a statement.

‘What are you thinking Papyrus?’ Gaster tried.

“I shouldn’t like the Prince when Hamlet and Ophelia are gone,” Papyrus whimpered, “but I do.”

‘Whose Hamlet and Ophelia,’ Gaster asked. Papyrus was audibly crying now, his bones rattled against the door once more as he tried to fight the emotion building up in him. ‘Please let me in,’ his soul sunk in his chest, he had little idea what to do but not being able to see the child was bothering him.

He heard Papyrus let go of the doorknob but when he pushed on it Papyrus was still sitting against the door, one step at a time. “Pops was a good skeleton, he was fun, and silly, but really smart, he wanted to work at the labs but he got sick,” Papyrus took his time with each word as he worked his way around them.

“Sans thinks Mom was really cold but he didn’t get to see her like I did. She liked art, drawing, painting, she was really good and she let me help!” A cheeriness returned to his tone. “She loved
Pops a lot, a lot, she was really sad while he was sick.”

“I wasn’t supposed to see Pops, Mom didn’t want me to get sick, but I did when she wasn’t around. We’d talk,” Papyrus’s voice buckled, “then one day– he wasn’t there. It was just dust and I didn’t know what had happened!” He attempted to stifle his breaking voice as best as he could, “so I got Mom and she–” he couldn’t speak anymore, his voice was a cross between a sob and a wheeze as he tried to force out words that wouldn’t come.

Gaster pulled the door open quickly, which cause Papyrus to tilt backwards but Gaster wrapped his arm around the child and pulled him into his lap. They sat together as Papyrus tried to catch his breath, he stuttered when he tried to speak. He rested his face against Gaster’s shoulder, “she loved him so much dad. She couldn’t- not without him–”

Gaster wanted to secure him tightly against the seas of sorrow but his grip was strained at best. He wished he could just still the sadness that plagued the boy but all he could do was hold him tight. This child who thought of everyone else before himself didn’t deserve to have met this sort of knowledge. He rubbed circles against his tiny back as it heaved with impressive breaths.

“Please don’t tell Sans,” he whispered, “I don’t want him to know.”

Gaster moved the bullets over his shoulder so they could be read, ‘I won’t but I think you should.’

Papyrus shook his head, “not now.”

‘Not now,’ Gaster agreed, he made a mental note to not let the child anywhere near Romeo and Juliet. He kept his grip around the child until he began to tucker out, out of breath, out of tears, he nestled closer to Gaster. ‘I’m glad you told me Papyrus,’ he turned the boy’s soul blue so he could rise to his feet.

Papyrus mumbled something incoherently into his clavicle. Gaster rubbed his shoulder blades and attempted to place the boy down in his bed, “I don’t want to.”

‘You’re exhausted child, you need to rest,’ Gaster’s bullets bobbed.

He curled his tiny fist into Gaster’s black robe, “everyone keeps telling me you’re not my Dad.”

Papyrus pulled away to face Gaster with heavy rimmed sockets, “sh-should I not call you that?”

Gaster cupped the back of the boy’s head with his hand and brought his teeth against the boy’s forehead. It was an impulse but he felt it was what was necessary, ‘I love that you call me Dad. If it bothers you, if you feel like you are replacing your birth parents than you may call me Doc as Sans does.’

Papyrus shook his head and buried his face again, “so the people won’t get in trouble for liking the Prince?”

Gaster nearly blushed, ‘no. They have every right to their own opinion,’ he repeated.

“Dad,” Papyrus started softly, Gaster felt his soul pulse in warmth, it had been a while since he thought about the meaning behind that word. Papyrus had called him such since the beginning with full knowledge of what it meant but only now was Gaster realizing the true definition. Only now was he capable of the boy’s expectations, “I think I am ready for bed.”

Gaster maneuvered his blue magic to rest Papyrus in his usual spot by the wall. He pulled the blankets around the boy who had already fallen fast asleep. Gaster raised his ring finger to the corner of his mouth, it was a sad but proud smile. ‘Good night sweet prince,’ Gaster signed before he shut
Gaster turned towards his bedroom to retrieve Sans but his fingers slipped over the knob’s surface. He walked through the graveyard silent house and out the front door, he sat down on the stoop and stared at the cavern ceiling. His hands shook as they moved against the base of his eye sockets to remove tears that had not yet fallen.

As the night interrogated him he had the distinct impression he was being watched. “I don’t know if you can hear me,” he spoke clearly. He’d never believed in the afterlife or any sort of continuation of existence after the presence but he hoped his voice could reach past his own beliefs. “I hope- I hope I am doing well by you, by them.”

“They are such wonderful boys and,” he scraped at his socket, “I fear- I might love them.” He chuckled not in mirth but in a disgusting amalgamation of emotions he knew he’d drive himself mad trying to decipher. “I don’t think I am what is best for the pair but they deserve for me to keep trying and I will,” Gaster clasped his hands together as a cold settled over his bones.

“I hope that if you can hear me, if you can see them, you see their happiness and the happiness they have brought me,” the tears fell freely now against his cheekbones as the last several months finally sunk into the core of his soul.

Chapter End Notes

Did I need to say that this train of thought is what lead to Papyrus getting sick in the first place? I think you are all smart cookies but just in case there it is. The next chapter will sort of reinforce the thought.

There’s some Grillstertember prompts on Tumblr right now. I’m only doing a few but some of them will be The Doctor’s Charges related.

Thank you for your continued support of this project. I hope it’s enjoyable for you all, I feel like the last few chapters have been kinda dull but last chapter seemed to go over fairly well.
Building Tensions

Chapter Summary

Gaster meets with the pairs teacher and has an unexpected meeting with Dr.Hill

Chapter Notes

Sorry this one is a lot of tell over show I hope it is still enjoyable.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gaster was sent home. Gaster’s assistant sent him home.

He leaned back in his desk chair as he attempted to continue work from his personal study. The last few days had introduced him to a new type of stress that had thrown a wrench in his work ethic. He’d slipped up on simple equations, accidentally broken safety protocol, and nearly broke the scanner to his door when he couldn’t remember the passcode after the scanner failed. He rubbed his face and stared down at his empty notebook.

Three days ago Gaster was called in to speak with the boys teacher, a Snowdrake eloquently named Mrs.Snowdrake, before school. Gaster had met each explosion, situation, or addiction in his prolonged life with a steadfast determination that allowed him to press forward. Yet now, sitting in front of their teacher his soul seemed to sing unthought fears to him.

Mrs.Snowdrake, being a birdlike creature, hadn’t had much of a need to learn hands. Which was why the principal, a portly bipedal fish like creature, added his gaping black eyes to the series of eyes staring him down.

“Shall we get started?” The Snowdrake asked. Her voice was calm, pleasant, and, despite her chilly demeanor, managed to produce a warmth that smothered out the tension in the room. Gaster nodded, “Well,” the Snowdrake fluffed her feathers, a dusting of snow fell from her wings, “there were a few things we wished to discuss yes. With you being a new father and all we thought you would appreciate a bit of a debriefing on your children’s time here.”

Papyrus always spoke openly as to how his day went, Sans stayed quiet for the most part but would occasionally spit out some factoid from the day. He didn’t feel he was unaware of what happened in these walls. Gaster raised his fist and rocked it down on his wrist, ‘yes.’

It was interesting, hearing about their school day from a third source. She made sure to praise the pairs intelligence stating that they were both ‘very bright’. Gaster took particular pride in the statement, even if he didn’t feel he had done much to warrant the feeling. History was a subject the pair were both lacking in and Gaster had to bite back his comments about the accuracy of the book they were given to study.

Sans’s sleep pattern was brought up, not because he was falling asleep sporadically, but because it was always during math and science. Gaster was puzzled by this, those were the boy’s favorite
subjects after all, but the teacher insisted he was probably bored. “I don’t think we have the proper facilities to educate a youth of Sans’s caliber,” she hummed.

“If it were a normal case I would push for advancement, even if he does not excel in all subjects he is a very quick learner,” she nodded.

Gaster pinched the very top of his right index finger with his left thumb and first finger, “except,” the principal interpreted.

“His health is too low to put him in with older kids who possess wilder and more unpredictable magics,” snow danced off of her wings as she gestured wordlessly, “if he cannot properly wield magic I cannot, in good conscious, advance him.”

“Well then what do you suggest?” Gaster prompted.

“Home schooling,” she stated simply.

Gaster’s mind blanked. How would he do that? Could he do that? As it was he threw calculus, geometry, physics, and theory books at the child whenever he could find them but he’d need more structure than that surely. He leaned back in the chair and snagged the edge of his sleeves as he thought. Homeschooling. It was the most common form of education in the Underground but he wasn’t certain he had the constitution for it.

‘Would you provide me with more information on how that works,’ he signed with a raised brow. That was something he’d need to mull over. The teacher cheerily agreed and the principal took a note down. ‘P-A-P-Y-R-U-S?’ He spelled out each letter.

After discovering that sign didn’t naturally compensate for names Papyrus had insisted that his name be signed: Cool Skeleton. Gaster didn’t quite get it and the two words together wouldn’t explain his intention very well.

Papyrus had troubles with staying quiet in class and his Uppercase letters seemed to be a large source of the problem. Gaster attempted to explain that was a skeleton tendency and nothing to hold the boy accountable for but they didn’t seem to quite understand. Other than that Papyrus was social and more than willing to help his peers.

“There are times I really don’t think he understands what is being discussed, but he’s still very enthusiastic,” her beak seemed to straighten out into a carefully hidden grimace. She pulled out a few papers to share a few generalized points of the boy’s confusion. Words with multiple meanings were often used for the opposite one required, find x style equations had circles over x, and square feet equations had 8-bit style doodles of feet that eventually lead to much more detailed drawings.

Gaster nodded, he had mistaken the boys odd miscommunications as his creative mind wandering, not a failure of proper understanding. “Sometimes he’ll get up in the middle of class to ask Sans for help,” she hummed. “His enthusiasm has lead to some- rather rude comments from his peers,” she fidgeted uncomfortably, “we hadn’t brought this to your attention before because he never seemed insulted.”

Gaster knit his brows together and looked between the other two adults, ‘I had heard of some students chastising the pair about their relationship with me but I hadn’t heard of anything else.’

The morning after reading Hamlet he’d sat down with Papyrus and Sans to see if they wanted him to talk to the teacher about their peers comments about their adoption. They’d both explained what they had experienced and insisted that he didn’t need to go that far.
“Well that’s most of what has been heard,” she turned back to him after listening to the principal’s interpretation. “Occasionally, more personal comments have been heard,” a smile crossed her beak, “but Papyrus always interprets them positively. A student referred to him as being ‘dumber than a rock’ to which Papyrus explained he knew some very smart rocks from Snowdin.”

Apparently nearly any comment was met with the same Papyrus-isms and Gaster resolved to speak to Papyrus about being open with him if he was bothered. When the discussion was finally had Papyrus seemed confused: ‘of course he would’, was his response.

There was little left to discuss with Mrs.Snowdrake after that, he waited around for information about homeschooling, then returned to work.

He had yet to discuss with the boys the idea of Sans not returning to class the next year. He’d yet to mentally prepare himself for the pair responding negatively to being seperated. Gaster resolved to discuss it with them today which had put him on edge that morning. Then that morning happened and he didn’t know what to do.

His thoughts had already been a bit- distracted, but when Dr.Hill pounded on his office door, a snarl laced across her tiny muzzle Gaster wasn’t sure what to expect. “He fell down!” she snapped, “this is complete negligence! Do you even understand what that means?” The files seemed to have finally finished being collected.

Gaster’s eyes burned with a color he couldn’t identify without seeing them as he ushered the marsupial into his office. He looked over his dry erase board hesitant to erase any of it. He quickly copied it into a notebook under Dr.Hill’s impatient, beady eyed, glare before he erased his board: ‘Sans asked me not to discuss it.’

“So you did know!” her tail smacked against the tile.

‘You will speak to me professionally or you will come back when you can,’ his sloppy Common spelled out in red marker.

She inhaled sharply then started again. She explained that monsters that fell down didn’t live much longer after they got up, of course cases in children were unheard of. Sans’s soul would be exceptionally responsive to negative emotions which made him much more likely to get sick.

Papyrus was a perpetual ball of positivity but even he’d gotten sick, though Gaster knew why now. Gaster subconsciously rubbed over where his own decrepit, broken, soul sat in his chest, he wasn’t exactly known for giving off good magic.

The conversation ended when Gaster promised to bring Sans in that weekend for a check up and a print of his soul. It was easy enough for her to mandate, she wouldn’t have to deal with the boy dragging his feet for the next two days. After her lovely visit he was little more than useless and dismissed by a vote from his colleagues. Now he was just hoping to the stars he could figure out how to tell the boys all of this without losing their opinion of him.

There was only a week left in this school year but they had the entire summer to decide on whether to homeschool Sans or not, the doctor’s appointment was a bit more pressing. He laid his head in his arms and rested atop his desk, hours had flown by and he was still no better off then when he shut himself in there.

He heard the front door open and panicked over to his cellphone to see the time, the boys were home from school. “We’re home now I wanna try it,” Sans’s voice yawned.
“No, we have to wait until Dad’s home, teacher said!” Papyrus sang in his tall ‘proper’ voice.

Gaster sighed back into his arms, five more minutes, he just wanted five more minutes to resolve himself- “hey his shoes are here,” Gaster’s head smacked on the overhanging shelf on his desk when Sans’s observation quickly changed to Papyrus shouting his name. Habitually he ran his fingers down his scars to ensure they hadn’t opened. It would take serious trauma for them to do so but it was habit.

Papyrus peeked his head in the study quickly followed by Sans ducking under his brother’s arm, “Dad we want to show you something!”

Gaster tapped his index finger to the corner of his teeth, it was almost effortless for him to tell when he was smiling anymore, “go ahead.”

“No, we have to go into the living room!” Papyrus demanded as he spun a tight circle without moving his feet to face the opposite direction. Sans followed after him quickly, oddly excited about whatever it was. All of Gaster’s dread and the boys didn’t have the slightest idea. He pressed his hand against the back of his chair and headed into the living room.

Before he could move to sit on the couch, the boys had already moved the coffee table back so they could sit on the floor, and a ball was tossed up to him. His fingers scratched against the grainy texture, it was a stone of some sort not a ball. He turned it around in his hands and sat on the couch, “what is it?”

“It’s a magic ball!” Papyrus stated as if that was the only explanation necessary.

“It can show you what color magics you’ll be good with even if it hasn’t developed yet,” Sans smiled.

Huh, Gaster hadn’t heard of such a thing, it must have been a newer discovery, a lot of the stones in the Underground were embedded with unique magics, not unlike the gems on the surface. “So what do you do?” Gaster turned the ball in his hand.

“Well you have to have a pretty good understanding of color magics,” Papyrus smiled coyly, “which I happen to have an extensive knowledge of!”

“Because we learned it in class today,” Sans snickered.

“Which I memorized extensively!” Papyrus declared agitation edging into his voice. From that outburst he began to list off the colors and the principal most commonly associated with them. It had been the first subject Gaster had researched thoroughly as a child, the first subject he’d truly obsessed over, he scratched at his chest. He could almost feel the cracks he’d torn in his soul with his tinkering.

When Papyrus finished Gaster nodded, “so, what do you want me to do?”

“Well skeletons have cyan and blue magic so start there,” Papyrus smiled.

Gaster furrowed his brows, cyan had never been a talent of his, he was a little rusty on blue too, “why don’t you boys show me first?”

“I didn’t get to try at school,” Sans held his hands up and Gaster tossed him the ball. It’s stoney gray surface turned blue and seemed to grow heavier the longer it was enwrapped. Sans tried to stand with the ball, he grunted with the effort, before it was dropped to the ground with a loud crack. Gaster looked over, the ball was fine, the carpet was fine, if anything broke it was the floor itself.
Gaster was rather impressed but Sans seemed mortified as he felt along the carpet to try to find the source of the sound.

Papyrus turned the orb blue as well but it didn’t ever seem to get quite as heavy. The ball was passed back up to him, blue, he focused on the sphere then flinched away from it as purple coils began to spring off of the stone and into the air before they faded. “You can do purple magic?” Sans tilted his head to the side.

“Yes, it was the first color I learned,” Gaster looked to the ball sheepishly, definitely not blue.

“I didn’t know skeletons could do purple magic,” Papyrus hummed.

Gaster sort of half shrugged, he really wasn’t certain what skeletons could and couldn’t do. His time with his own kind had been limited, and foggy at best. He focused on the ball, this time it enrobbed in blue, it rolled from his hand and hit the ground with another tile breaking crack. Sans seemed to enjoy his embarrassed expression judging by his laugh.

“Cyan,” Papyrus cheered as he grabbed the ball, nothing seemed to happen but when the boy tried to move he dropped it, “it bit me.”

“You can’t move with cyan bro,” Sans held the ball in his lap. The longer he sat the more cyan dots began to appear on the ball.

It was almost completely coated when Papyrus got bored of watching his brother do absolutely nothing at all and passed the ball to Gaster. “Do green dad!” Papyrus smiled as he sat back down.

Gaster held the ball with both of his hands, emerald eyes, green fields, he thought over every trace of kindness he’d experienced but nothing happened. “Dad you’re supposed to think of kindness,” Papyrus prompted.

“I can’t Papyrus,” Gaster signed quickly, an old mental wound started to pick itself open.

“Of course you can! It’s Kindness! All monsters are made of niceness and cinnamon!” Papyrus sang.

“Compassion,” Sans corrected.

“He knew what I meant!” Papyrus chastised, “so even if you can’t turn a soul green you can use it to heal!” He took the ball from him and it became encircled in a brilliant green flame, “see?”

Sans took the ball slyly from him, he held it in his lap and tiny sparks of green danced away from the orb. He passed the ball up to Gaster, “kind of cool.”

Gaster held the ball between his hands, it sparked with a burning yellow that shot out like electricity, yellow. He shut his eyes and tried again a rolling cloud of orange lazily bobbed around the stone, he felt his eyes burn with purple. Every monster could do this. No matter how small, he was a monster he should be able to- his eyes burnt red and a large crack ran across the surface of the sphere. He dropped it onto his lap and quickly rubbed his eye scockets.

Papyrus and Sans were entranced, focused on where the ball had been even after it had been placed aside. “Wowie,” Papyrus muttered.

“I can’t do it!” Gaster broke the silence and the boys winced at his sudden outburst, unprepared for his font. “I’m the only monster in the Underground that can’t heal a single HP, I’ve torn my soul apart- it’s not there,” he cupped his face in his hands, “there’s no kindness in me.”
The boys fell silent and exchanged a look to each other as they tried to figure out what to say. He’d messed up, he didn’t mean to, but it had been picking at him for so long. He couldn’t heal Papyrus when Undyne hurt him, he couldn’t help when he was sick, he was completely useless where most parents shown.

His soul had burned in his chest the day Papyrus had asked him to heal a tiny little scrape and he had to tell him it was unnecessary. Parents often dazzled their children with tales of healing kisses as they pressed their kindness to their lips to alleviate a wound.

He wanted to be able to heal them, to help them-his soul constricted itself sharply in his chest, divert to anything else, ‘but you are very good at green Papyrus.’ The boy perked up and Gaster cleared his throat, “I wouldn’t be surprised if your eyes were green.”

“My eyes?” Papyrus summoned tiny white eye lights which he crossed in an attempt to see inside his sockets.

Gaster chuckled, “like mine,” his eyes glew purple. “When a skeleton’s eyes can manifest the color most prominent in the soul it’s seen as a mark of adulthood.”

Papyrus smiled, “that would be so cool! I want my eyes to glow!”

Gaster relaxed, this was much better than him tantruming, “what color would my eyes be Doc?” Sans expression carefully tried to mask his curiosity.

“Blue,” he didn’t hesitate, it would explain why the boy was so adept with gravity magic. “In rare cases skeletons can have two different colors,” his eyes pulsed purple before they faded to yellow.

“But you have- a lot,” Papyrus laughed.

It dawned on him that his eyes had been shifting with the ball, he’d been a bit too intent on spontaneously being able to use green. “Naturally a monster only has two,” Gaster signed, “I did some stuff to my soul that sort of- broke it.”

“Is that why you can do red too?” Sans had him fixed in that stare, maybe his eyes would be yellow, he certainly had an eye for judgement.

“Red? What’s red?” Papyrus seemed worried he’d forgotten about something.

“Red is human magic, will power I think,” Sans mumbled.

“Where did you hear that from?” Gaster glanced over to the child.

“Your notes,” Sans shrugged. He had given the child permission to read through anything he found, he didn’t realize that meant the child was going in the basement while he wasn’t home.

Gaster’s fingers scratched against each other through the fabric of his sleeve as his eye lights faded out, “um no,” he took care just to speak, “I don’t think so.” Sans’s eye lights turned off as he tried to process the same train of thought Gaster had when he first found his bullets burning crimson. The room fell silent as the two skeleton’s magic burned their thoughts into the air.

“Hey Dad when’s your birthday?” Papyrus chimed, never one for awkward silences.

It was a very quick change in topic but Gaster was surprised how used to that he was, “I don’t have one, they didn’t keep records back then.”
“He just knows it was a reeeeeeeaaaaaaaaally long time ago,” Sans beamed and Gaster found himself laughing at the insult.

“Yes,” he nudged Sans with his foot, “why do you ask?”

“Well it was Flint’s birthday today and I was thinking how we’ve almost been with you a whole year and haven’t celebrated yet,” Papyrus bounced his crisscrossed knees.

“A whole year?” Gaster nearly coughed, he hadn’t even noticed. Were they keeping track?

“Yeah in two weeks I think,” Sans scratched his chin, he looked over to his brother who nodded. They were keeping track. That meant they were probably expecting something. Wait-

“When is your birthday?” He asked to neither of them in particular.

They both shrugged in unison, “we don’t remember.” He’d missed their birthday, he’d nearly missed- their adoption day? Was that something that normally got celebrated? He sat against the couch, maybe not but it was important to him. It was important to them too if they had taken the time to track it.

“Well Dr.Hill has your medical files perhaps we can find it in there?” Gaster suggested, oh yes, that’s what today was supposed to be about.

Sans turned up his non-existent nose, “yeah it’s not that big of a deal.”

“Actually you have an appointment Sunday with Dr.Hill so we could check then,” Gaster suggested casually.

Sans’s eye lights burned out, “what?” His voice had an odd echo like quality to it.

“Your record has finished being compiled and Dr.Hill would like to discuss with you things to be concerned with because-”

“You told her he Fell Down!” To his surprise it was Papyrus’s outburst.

“No it’s in the records, the same ones I received, I’ve kept my promise,” even when they were discussing the subject he gave her no details.

“And if I don’t want to go?” Sans fingers curled around his pants.

“I’ll be forced to take you regardless,” Gaster stated matter of factly.

Papyrus pulled his brother into his lap, “don’t worry brother! I will go with you and keep all of the bad things away! As long as we’re together nothing bad will happen,” he rested his chin on his brother’s shoulder, Sans didn’t seem comforted.

Gaster bowed his head, one down, “Papyrus are you having a hard time in school?”

“No, I like it a lot!” Papyrus sang.

“Would you still like it if Sans weren’t there?” Gaster tapped his hands together.

Sans’s face paled as his eyelights shrank to pinpricks, “why wouldn’t I be there?”

“The teacher has proposed homeschooling for you since you seem bored to sleep in class,” he raised his brow.
“I’m not bored it’s just easy!” Sans folded his arms.

“Can I be homeschooled too?” Papyrus smiled.

“But you like school Papyrus and I think it would be beneficial for you two to start doing things on your own. You are both very different little skeletons and I don’t want you to hold each other back,” Gaster rubbed the fatigue away from his eye sockets.

“I help him and he helps me,” Sans furrowed his brows, “that’s not holding each other back.”

Gaster sighed as his mind searched for a hypothetical, “lets say Papyrus wants to go stay the night at Gerson’s with Undyne. Sans would you want to go?”

“Sure,” he shrugged.

“This is an imaginary situation Sans, would you?” he pestered.

“I mean not really I guess,” Sans shifted in his brother’s lap.

“What? But Sans! Undyne is your friend too! She likes to play with you- even if it is a little bit rough… but what would you do if I wasn’t there?” the words formed in the air in a hasty manner almost too quick to read.

“I don’t know, probably read, do some math,” Sans crawled off his brother’s lap to face him.

“Sans that’s boring! You need to actually do something! You can’t just do nothing-” Papyrus pouted.

“It’s what I like to do Papyrus I’m not like you,” Sans ducked his head.

“Boys this is just a hypothetical situation,” Gaster intervened, “we don’t even have to decide now, break is just around the corner, we can run some simulations of this homeschooling thing and see if it even works.”

“Simulations? Really?” Sans snickered, “I guess it doesn’t hurt to try Doc.”

“And Papyrus if we do this Sans and I will be here to help you with anything you need,” he smiled.

Papyrus’s sockets seemed darker as he lowered his head, “yeah,” he reached forward and pulled Sans close to him.

“I know,” Sans hummed as he returned the hug. His eye lights turned back towards Gaster, “Hey Doc what charcoal is for dinner? Kinda hungry,” he muttered, a cue for Gaster to give them some space.

He watched the pair, a bit dazed as he tried to process what they were feeling. He walked to the kitchen just barely in earshot of their tiny fonts as they whispered to each other. In the end this would be for the best, even if they didn’t believe him now.

Chapter End Notes

This was one of those weeks where I really considered taking a break from updating but I really do enjoy it. The last chapter was the first one in a while I was excited to post and
this one was so blah. I hope you are still enjoying it. We have two chapters left before the next act which will be a little less self sustained chapters.

Thank you for your continued support! I really appreciate it and it drives me to keep trying!
Dr.Dread

Chapter Summary

It’s time to go back to the Doctor’s but Sans isn’t going down without a fight.

Chapter Notes

It’s still Wednesday... it’s late but it’s Wednesday!

Here’s the first completely unedited update because I’ve been sick since the start of this week.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sans did everything in his power the next day to convince Gaster he didn’t need to see Dr.Hill. It had started out as small arguments that eventually developed into full-fledged lectures, once he got Papyrus involved they were even illustrated, but Gaster would simply out logic any point the boy presented. Eventually it turned into a one-sided yelling match, though that was a bit of an exaggeration as Sans’s lower case font didn’t allow him to yell very well, which resulted in Sans slamming the door to his room and refusing to come back out for several hours.

Once he did a rather dangerous game started. It was simple at first, there were small holes in Gaster’s pens that would drip ink onto his pages. When that grew ineffective in aggravating him, tape was a wonderful tool, he moved on to rearranging his office. All of his books were on the shelves backwards, the plant of Asgore’s, that Papyrus had taken to keeping alive, was on his desk, and all of his papers were scattered around the room.

It was an interesting thought process that resulted in Gaster’s next move. “How did you even do this?” Sans plopped a joke book into his lap.

“Do what?” Gaster leered.

Sans picked the joke book up and flipped through it until it revealed a smaller quantum physics book, which in turn had a joke book in it, and so on. Sans gave him a firm glare as his fingers scratched across the binding. From then on it was an all out war: salt shakers had their caps unscrewed, clear plastics coated any object to be as inconvenient as possible, ketchup bottles were filled with sand, soft foods now had solid chunks of ice in them, and Gaster’s lab was very quickly deemed off limits in this ridiculous game. Through all of it Papyrus just colored in his books or entertained himself claiming he wouldn’t sink to such low quality pranks.

The game finally ended shortly after dinner. He’d reacted poorly. He knew that. If he didn’t the pair sentencing themselves to exile in their room would have proven the point. Gaster turned on the overhead light in his office to be greeted with the large silhouette of a spider’s shadow cast on the wall. It was an impulse, immediate and overwhelming, that conjured his blaster in the small room and fired at the wall. The house shook which Gaster could barely feel over his racing soul.
He’d attempted to talk to them as he headed down to his room for the night, apologize, explain, something, but neither child was much up for talking.

Sans’s actions were an act of rebellion against him for making him visit the Doctor, he had fueled the boy’s distaste by playing to his level. Gaster’s mind raced as he crawled into his bed attempting to decipher how badly he had ruined their relationship. No, it wasn’t like that simple mistakes and asking a child to do something they didn’t want to do didn’t result in ruin just strain. Tomorrow would hopefully be a return to normalcy.

Gaster chuckled to the darkness, nothing about this was normal. Nearly a whole year of not normal was almost up and he still had the rest of his life to adjust to this new normal. How had he not recalled that it was so close to a year? They were obviously counting the days, expecting something, maybe they just wanted to commemorate it? Well, perhaps not anymore, taking a child for a discussion with a doctor had probably sunk their excitement.

He laid flat on his back, the subtle pinch of his silk pajamas in his vertebrae slowing his descent into sleep. He readjusted his night shirt and slowed his breathing until he felt his magic ripple until it calmed to a smooth surface. It was just as his magic began to enter a state of dormancy that a creek was heard from the top of the steps. He whimpered internally as his mind stirred to life in order to ponder on what Papyrus needed.

“Hey Doc,” the voice was quiet as if it dared not exist but Sans pressed forward, “are you awake?”

What were the chances Gaster could just drift into unconsciousness and ignore the child? No, Gaster rubbed his face, that would hardly do. He couldn’t turn him away for something as petty as sleep. He sat up in his bed, his eye lights were particularly small as he looked up to Sans.

The boy’s nerve seemed to fail him as his hand hesitated on the doorknob. Sans gripped the railing fiercely his long white nightshirt cast with colors from the painted lights on the rail. Gaster patted the bed to reassure Sans he had permission to be there. The child pulled himself up and sat along the edge of the mattress, his short legs barely grazed the top of the bed frame.

Sans’s hands clenched at his nightshirt as he struggled to bring his thoughts into reality. Gaster’s bones let out an audible protest as he sat up to sit beside the boy, his long legs placed firmly on the ground, he wrapped a hand around the boy’s knee after some debate. They had all of the time they needed whatever it was had to be important if the boy was being so hesitant.

Gaster’s weary mind had little idea how much time had passed when Sans finally spoke up, his voice choked as he tried not to emote, “I don’t want Papyrus to come to the Doctor’s.” A small hiccup that threatened to release a dam of emotions tore from him, “does that make me a bad monster?” The boy was rattling now as his bones attempted to soothe him, Gaster added to the effort as he rubbed his thumb against the boy’s femur.

Of all the things he had anticipated Sans saying that wasn’t anywhere near the list of estimated questions. The boy leaned against him without any prompting, Sans never initiated contact, he curled into Gaster’s ribs just underneath his [Collar bone], and hid his face as he finally broke against his emotions. Gaster stiffened Sans was beside himself, he could feel the tears against his shirt, “no that does not make you a bad monster.”

“He just wants to help,” Sans shook his head, “he always wants to help,” he looked up to Gaster, “and I like his help!”

Gaster nodded rubbing along the boy’s spine, “I know.”
“Mom-” Gaster wrapped his arms around the child, “she said Papyrus didn’t deserve to hear about it. I don’t want him to.”

Gaster’s expression softened as he placed his hand on the back of Sans’s skull, “you don’t deserve to hear these things either.” Gaster looked away as the child’s wide eye lights focused on him, “you shouldn’t have to, but some things in life aren’t pleasant but they have to be faced eventually.” He looked down to him, “you just had to meet them a little sooner.”

“But Paps doesn’t have to,” Sans eyes narrowed in focus, “not yet.”

Gaster put his hands on the boy’s shoulders, “I’ll tell you what, I will text Grillby and Asgore right now, see if either of them are willing to watch after Papyrus while we are at the appointment. If one of them says yes then he won’t come but I can’t leave him alone, you know this will worry him sick right?”

“I know,” Sans’s eye sockets grew lidded, “and I’ll tell him about it when we get back.” Sans looked down at the bed with longing, “I just want to be the one to tell him.”

Gaster held Sans in his arms before he laid him against the pillow, “I understand.” He pulled the blankets over Sans, “I’ll see what I can do okay?” A nod was Sans’s only means of response as his eye lights flicked off and he was cast into sleep. Gaster rubbed the side of the boy’s skull gently taking in the bones ceramic quality before he reached for his phone on the nightstand.

He flicked out the keyboard, the backlight of the phone was the only light in the room. His thumb absentely pressed the spacebar before he would the empty progress in an attempt to discern what to say. **SORRY FOR THE LATE NOTICE,** he looked at the display clock, **VERY LATE NOTICE,** he corrected. **WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO WATCH PAPYRUS FOR A FEW HOURS IN THE MORNING WHILE I TAKE SANS TO A DOCTOR’S APPOINTMENT? HE HAS JUST DECIDED HE DOESN’T WANT HIM TO COME ALONG. THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION.**

He sighed, as he set the phone back down in its’ place for the night. He wrapped the blanket tightly around Sans then turned his soul blue to carry him to his room. “No,” came the pathetic response.

“You need to go to bed,” Gaster chuckled.

“No,” the child muttered again as his small hands latched around the blankets he was ensnared in.

“Well then, what would you propose,” he smirked as the child fixed him in his eyelights. There was a soft ping in the darkness of the room as Gaster toppled over onto the bed. “Sans, you won’t be comfortable down here.” Another tug on his soul had him in the center of the bed, “fine, but only until you fall asleep.” Sans released his soul to look at him with weary sockets, he wrapped his arms around Gaster’s ribs and nuzzled against his flat ribs.

“I’m sorry for the spider,” Sans hid his face away from sight, “Undyne gave Paps that toy a while ago, we thought it would be funny, don’t be angry.”

Gaster tapped his teeth to the top of the boy’s skull, “I couldn’t even if I tried.”

He wasn’t sure when he fell asleep but as his sockets slowly opened he was vaguely aware there was one more child with him than he remembered falling asleep with. They were both nestled in his shoulders with their ribs slowly swelling and shrinking with their synchronized breaths. As he looked between them something caught in his own ribs, it was light but tangible as his soul pulsed to absorb every nuance of it.
His fingers wrapped over each of his boys’ ribs, his boys. A smile broadened across his face with enough force to push tears towards his sockets, they were his kids. They’d been together just short of a year and he’d never anticipated them trusting him like this. He’d never expected for them to show concern for him, to come to him with their concerns, as his mind raced he couldn’t imagine what in the world he was thinking would happen when he first adopted the pair.

His magic fluttered into the air in giddy, unfamiliar, waves that he couldn’t care enough to stop. A picture! He should get a picture. His hand bullets made quick work of the closet door at the end of the room and retrieved a small cardboard box from the closet. Cameras were a luxury item in the Underground and a little frivolous. He’d been fascinated at the first one he found, he absolutely fixated on it until he repaired it to working condition.

His bullets clumsily repositioned themselves to grip the device properly. His finger hesitated over the switch, it would be disappointing to wake them up even if they probably need to be at this point. The camera clicked and with a loud whirring sound began as a small slip of white and black paper slipped out from the base. Papyrus sat up suddenly at the sound, he seemed a bit dazed by his surroundings before he laid back down, Sans on the other hand was entirely unperturbed.

“What’s that?” Papyrus’s voice was scratchy as it struggled to wake.

“A camera,” Gaster tilted his hand bullet to hold the device on its’ own while the other one removed the paper to shake it dry. He set the camera back in the box and brought the picture up for Papyrus to see.

The boy sat up to look at the image closer, “wowie,” his face brightened, “that’s us!”

Sans eye sockets slowly slid open at his brother’s excitement, he eyed the slip of paper before he curled back into Gaster’s chest. “You look real happy there Doc,” Sans muttered.

Gaster looked over the printed version of himself, his sockets were wider than usual, their permanent glare diminished. He’d been told he looked different whenever he spoke of the boy’s, that he seemed like a different monster, this must be what they were referencing. His bullet’s thumb traced the effortless smile on his face. He sighed, he didn’t want to ruin this moment, everything was perfect but they had things to do.

He hugged his arms tight around each child, “Alright boys time to get ready.” Sans emitted an annoyed whine but he made no gesture towards movement. Papyrus on the other hand sat up and started to crawl off of the bed. Gaster sat up and Sans was forced to follow suit, the pair looked at Papyrus with matching puzzlement.

Papyrus looked between the pair, “what?”

Gaster retraced the dialogue, he’d had his hands around them there was no way he had signed. “Did you. Understand me?” He spoke slowly as his soul begged for it to be true while his mind rationalized it as a fluke.

Papyrus squinted into the empty air as he tried to catch the characters of Gaster’s font. His face scrunched up, “um, no? But yes?” He fidgeted with the bedspread with his free hand. “I couldn’t get all of it but you said ‘boys get ready,’ right?” His eyes searched for some sort of confirmation he focused on Sans for a beat before gaining some confidence, “then you said ‘you, me’ as a question so i thought you were asking if I understood you.”

He looked down, “sorry if that’s disappointing.”
Disappointing? How could he be disappointed? Papyrus was on his way to figuring out Gaster’s broken language. He could actually be understood, his boys could understand him. He reached forward receiving a startled yelp as he pulled Papyrus and Sans into his chest. Just a few more minutes of this, please, Gaster willed.

“Doc, about last night?” Sans looked up to Gaster who reached back for his phone.

Asgore was busy, to no surprise, but Grillby said he could watch Papyrus while he set up the restaurant in the morning. Gaster looked down to Papyrus, an actual task might be just what the boy needed. He nodded to Sans then returned his phone.

Sans’s tiny fingers fidgeted with the ends of his nightshirt as he tried to find the words. Papyrus was aware something was wrong as he stared warily between the two. Gaster rubbed Sans’s back, this was his to say he was just there to support him. “I don’t want you to come with me,” Sans mumbled in a swift breath.

Papyrus’s sockets widened, “did I do something wrong?”

“No of course not,” his attention went back to his shirt, “I just- I’ll tell you all about it when we get back,” he tried.

“Is this what you want brother?” Papyrus’s voice had an odd weight to it as he stared down at his bare feet.

“Yeah,” Sans replied flatly. The two exchanged a look before Sans slipped off the bed, “better uh, go get ready.”

Papyrus watched Sans climb the stairs before he glared up to Gaster with a terrible impression of Sans’s all seeing stare. ‘Did you tell him I had to stay behind?’ he signed pointedly.

‘No,’ Gaster tapped his finger to his thumb, ‘he asked me last night.’ Papyrus didn’t seem entirely convinced as he tried to find the sign he wanted. ‘You’re going to get to help Grillby set up for lunch, I think you’ll enjoy that,’ Gaster tried, ‘and we’ll be back before you know it.’ Papyrus slid off the bed in a similar fashion to Sans before he headed up the stairs.

Gaster looked down to the discarded photograph, everything was going to be fine. He tapped his phone to the image to transfer it to his digital inventory, he’d find a good spot for it later. For now he had to get ready himself.

It wasn’t much longer after that when they met Grillby on the bank of Snowdin after taking the River Person’s ferry ride. After a quick goodbye Sans and Gaster were left alone on the boat as it sped towards Hotland. Sans was eerily still as he sat with his knees curled up to his chest, his sockets matching in their absolute darkness. Gaster reached towards him but the boy leaned away, he was nervous, he understood that but what was he supposed to do?

“Fear is best served with a side of fear,” their faceless captain hummed.

The boat pulled up to dock and Gaster slipped a few gold coins in their bucket, “thank you for taking us back and forth today.” The monster made no movement towards response but he had the distinct impression he was understood.

To Gaster’s surprise Sans gestured to be picked up as they approached the labs. He thought briefly about teasing the child for never wanting to be held but he decided against it and carefully scooped the child into his arms. Now he could feel the gentle rattle in Sans’s bones as they vibrated against his, “it will be fine Sans.” Sans shook his head and curled up tight against the scientist as they
walked down the gray halls.

Gaster went directly to Dr. Hill’s office where the Opossum monster quickly greeted them from behind a pile of folders stuffed to the brim. “Please have a seat,” she gestured to the stools in front of her desk as she began to move the folders into one pile.

Sans shook his head no and clung desperately to Gaster as he attempted to put him down. Gaster repositioned his grip on the child, this was needlessly clingy but what was he supposed to do? After some internal debate he sat on the stool and made Sans to sit in his lap facing the Doctor. She tapped the files, “I can see your parents were very concerned for your health.”

Those were all Sans’s? That had to have all been taken from before the time he was approximately four. Gaster found his hand wrapping protectively around the boy as if he needed shielded from his medical files. The entirety of his formative years had to have been spent entirely in and out of health divisions.

“Actually,” Sans chuckled, “it was more my lack of health they were concerned about,” his tone was incredibly casual.

Dr. Hill’s ears twitched, “a normal parent should be,” she replied with a subtle glare towards Gaster. “Now Sans I’m not going to give you the whole hat and dance about how to maintain your health that you have obviously heard enough,” her eyes darted to the files. “I’m here to talk specifically about you having Fallen Down,” she laced her fingers together.

Sans’s hands clasped around Gaster’s his tiny fingers slipped through the hole in his palm and Gaster did everything he could to suppress the flinch that shuddered up his arm. “Now there are no cases in this happening in children so I can only tell you generalized cases,” her muzzle twitched.

It was unknown as to why monsters just fell down but Dr. Hill ran over the more popular theories including the Hope theory. Sans dismissed that saying he wasn’t without hope as long as he had Papyrus with him. She moved on to the rarity of Getting Up and told him his soul must be very strong since he did. Sans almost brightened up at that before she stated that a monster that had got up usually only lived another three to five years after that. She insisted with him being younger that might not be the case but it didn’t seem to have any positive affect.

“The most important thing is to make sure you don’t get sick, your soul is going to be incredibly susceptible to negative emotions,” she looked over to Gaster.

Sans had been silent while Dr. Hill spoke but now he looked up to her, “so just don’t get sick, cool, can we go now?”

“I would like to take a scan of your soul to see the da-“

“No.” Sans cut her off quickly.

“It’s a harmless test you just-“ she tried but was cut off again.

“We can go now right Doc? You said we were just going to talk,” Sans looked pleadingly up to Gaster with vibrant round eye lights.

“Sans I think it would be in your best interest to let Dr. Hill perform a scan,” he rubbed the boy’s back. “It really is quite harmless,” Gaster provided.

Gaster glanced over to Dr. Hill who gave him a confused shrug. Right, in this case it was his job to reassure the child, but what could he do? He scratched at his soul, the River Person’s words came to
mind as his hands fidgeted with his sleeves.

He’d avoided the Health Division as if it were the plague since they started doing appointments for employees and only came around when he had an evaluation to do so he’d have an excuse to leave. In all of his years only very few monsters had even seen his soul. He reached for the board and marker that sat on the corner of the desk, ‘Evaluate my soul first.’

Dr.Hill’s teeth poked out from her lips, “do you really mean it?” Her tail swished around the wheels of her chair.

‘You have to remain professional,’ he wrote hastily.

“Of course!” She replied before she moved from her seat to prepare the device.

Gaster let out a worried tuft of air then looked down to Sans, “I’ll show you it won’t do anything alright?” Sans’s eyelights fell to the floor but he gave a short nod.

Dr.Hill set up the small tablet and returned over to the desk, she stared at Gaster expectantly. He set Sans on the stool and pulled another one up to sit on. He held his hand in front of his chest and with a shaky breath pulled his soul from his chest.

The dingy gray orb pulsed in dark waves, the sphere was divided by a multitude of cracks that sparked like synapses in colors of the rainbow. Gaster tensed as his soul was openly scrutinized by the other two monsters in the room. His magic ran cold with his soul outside of his ribs, a chill ran up his spine, “can we carry on?” He wrapped his hands around his humeruses.

“It looks like a star,” Sans whispered, “like those really close up pictures.”

Gaster looked at the orb that seemed as uncomfortable being exposed as he was having it. Dr.Hill held two small cables around the soul tracing over every inch of it. The screen flickered with numbers and bursts of color as the cables sent signals to it. She put the chords down then picked up the screen and Gaster quickly returned his soul to his body with a shiver.

Dr.Hill showed them the screen, “This- this is absolutely amazing! There’s no way your soul should be able to sustain itself in that sort of condition! This could prove Necromancy Theory-”

“DON’T,” Gaster’s voice didn’t need to be understood for the intimidating echo to cut the Doctor off completely.

Her ears flattened against her skull, “I’ve never seen readings like this.” She showed the screen to Sans and walked through what she could understand of the readings and how the device worked. Sans seemed more alert then he had been as he looked over every inch of the screen.

“So Sans?” Gaster asked with a raised brow.

Sans sat back from the screen and placed his hand over his soul, he took a cleansing breath like he had seen Gaster do, and pulled his soul to the surface. Dr.Hill worked quickly around Sans soul, no doubt it’s proper shape being easier to work with.

“Well Sans your soul is very healthy,” she showed him the image. “And your magic is already beginning to develop color,” she pointed to a tiny sliver of blue next to a line of charcoal gray in the center of his soul. Sans’s eyelights were focused on the gray streak, he pointed to it looking to Dr.Hill with his analyst expression.

“That is sickness, gray in a monster’s soul indicates something is wrong, from your medical records I
can deduce that this is a scar from when you Fell Down,” she considered him. “You see most monsters that Fall Down don’t get back up, the gray consumes their soul, until—” this was a child, she wasn’t going to mention dust. “But those that Fall always have a mark, a little scar in their soul that can’t normally be seen.”

Sans stared at the line as if he could will it out of existence, Gaster returned his hand to his boys shoulder. “Once the gray is there it spreads until the monster Falls again,” Sans turned to her with a look of utter resentment.

Sans appeared to shrink in his chair, “can I go home?” The question was directed at anyone who would answer. Sans was close to breaking and he didn’t want to shatter here, not in front of a near stranger. Gaster turned Sans’s soul blue to pick him up but Sans shook his head and grabbed his hand.

Gaster fumbled writing on the board while he balanced it upon his knee before he passed it to Dr. Hill, ‘I will talk to him at home but I think we are done for the day.’

Dr.Hill nodded, “goodbye Sans, stay determined,” she smiled.

It had been a phrase the King had used frequently when monsters were first sealed underground. Overtime it grew to such a common phrase that a lot of monsters used it as a pick me up. It was verbal proof of the hope Asgore could inspire in others.

The phrase lingered about Gaster’s mind even after they had boarded the River Person’s boat. Sans watched the water rush out from under them with the amount of amusement a Pyrope might have in a freezer. Gaster rubbed at his chest, it had been such a wonderful morning. Stay Determined .

Gaster’s soul released a pulse of magic to which Gaster responded by screwing his eye sockets shut. “Be leery of safety rails,” the River Person sang as they came to a stop. Gaster looked up to the figure clad in a cloak with bewilderment as he waited for some sort of explanation that he knew would never come. Sans hopped out of the boat the second before it ceased movement and started on his way to Grillby’s before Gaster could even take the G from his pocket.

Sans opened the door to Grillby’s as Gaster caught up to him. They stood in the doorway taking in the full swing of the restaurant during the lunch rush. The place was packed with monsters, several of which were guards, packed in side by side as Grillby, without any trace of effort, served the multitude of guests carrying multiple meals and drinks on a tray.

Papyrus turned quickly from a booth, “sit wherever you can!” He shouted as he dashed back to the kitchen.

Gaster blinked, Papyrus was wearing an apron around his waist that had been folded over several times to make up for the boy’s meager height. When Grillby returned to his spot behind the bar Gaster approached him with a chuckle, ‘free child labour?’

Grillby’s flames popped a couple of times as he continued to work, once he finished the drinks he signed, ‘I didn’t ask, he started to help on his own.’

Gaster laughed, ‘I’ll believe that.’ He watched as Papyrus tore from the kitchen to carefully grab the sodas Grillby had poured and walked them to the table he had been at before. Papyrus hadn’t even noticed the newest customers were his own family, it was rather endearing watching him work so diligently.

Sans struggled to hop up onto the stool before he laid his head down on the counter. Grillby raised a
brow to Gaster, ‘you’re busy. Later.’ Still Grillby disappeared into the kitchen returning with a basket of fries along with a bottle of ketchup. He offered a smile to Sans, to Gaster’s surprise he received one in return, before he slipped back into the kitchen.

Gaster turned to speak to Sans who held up a hand, ‘I. Think,’ he signed before returning to his slouch.

Papyrus came by and took their drink order curious as to how they got past him without detection. Papyrus spoke quickly about his day before he went back to serving customers. Gaster smiled rather excessively as he watched the tiny ball of energy bounce from table to table socializing with the monsters while he took their orders or checked on their satisfaction. It was in stark contrast with the gray cloud hanging about Sans but at least he had taken to eating a few fries here and there after dousing the whole basket in ketchup.

Eventually the lunch crowd trickled out the door leaving the restaurant barren except for the owner and three skeletons. Papyrus collapsed in a vacated booth receiving a laugh from the Eternal, who tilted his hand down from his chin, ‘thank you.’

“It was a lot of fun, but also, really hard,” Papyrus laughed as Grillby picked him up out of the bench sitting him down on a stool by Gaster. “So how did it go?” Papyrus looked up to Gaster.

‘We thought we’d take a walk home and talk about it, are you alright with that?’ The child was clearly exhausted, a rare state for Papyrus. Papyrus grinned widely and put his hands out like an infant would to ask for contact, Gaster sighed, though his smile deceived his attempt at annoyance.

The child leaned into Gaster who scooped him into his lap, ‘Thank you Grillby, I’ll ask what I’m allowed to tell you and fill you in,’ he signed sloppily around the child in his lap.

Grillby nodded waving goodbye as they left the bar, “bye Uncle Grillby!” Papyrus sang. Gaster turned around quick enough to watch the plume of smoke erupt from the flustered bartender. Gaster let a laugh escape as the bartender shot him a rather crude hand sign before covering his mouth in an attempt to still his smoke. Gaster took in the moment wishing he still had his camera on him, but for now there was some serious discussion to be had. He placed his hand gently across the top of Sans’s head as they entered Waterfall.

Chapter End Notes

I hope it isn’t too rough without editing I’m a bit of a perfectionist... but hey next week will mark the end of act 1, thank you for sticking around this long! Thank you all for your continued support!
The office lighting was considerably brighter than normal as Gaster flipped through his presentation notes. His eyelights skimmed over meaningless word after meaningless word as his brows narrowed with tension.

This last week weighed heavily on his mind. After the Doctor’s appointment Sans had gone quiet. He wasn’t reading, he wasn’t writing in notebooks, or playing pretend with Papyrus, Gaster couldn’t even think of the last pun he’d heard.

Sans tugged at his sleeve, “Doc you are-”

“I’m sorry Sans I’m busy at the moment,” Gaster replied gently and the child’s eyelights turned to the floor. Gaster rubbed the top of Sans’s skull, “would you go ask my assistant, the cat like one, about progress on the barrier model?” Sans’s eyelights pointed up to him before he nodded and slipped out the door.

Gaster watched the child take slow, cautious, steps out the door then down the hall. The kid was aware of his HP now and not in a healthy way. Monday Gaster had to leave work early to retrieve Sans from school after his steam train of bullets tore through the gymnasium. A ball had gotten out of the hands of one of their classmates and Sans had overreacted. Since then Sans had refused to go back to the last week of school, now he was now at the labs with Gaster.

That wasn’t the only thing on his mind. Less than a handful of days away was their one year anniversary of their becoming- he hesitated but he knew it was right to call them a family. Maybe not a conventional one, but they were happy together, or at least he was happy with them and that was enough. There were times it was nearly too much as his broken, pushing ancient, soul throbbed with more emotion than it was accustomed.

He wasn’t sure if adoption days were normally celebrated but he wanted to do something since he’d missed every holiday that year including their birthday. This was his chance to show them how much they meant to him but he was coming up with blanks at every turn.

The door to his office opened back up but the shadow that loomed across his floor was far too large
for the tiny Sans. “Your majesty I was just-” Gaster flustered before he repeated his confusion with his hands.

Sans crossed to sit on his stool, “he’s been sitting in the conference room for an hour, I tried telling you.”

Gaster turned to look at his clock, how had he lost track of time so completely? He drug his hand over his soul, ‘sorry, would you mind if we just did this here?’

Asgore laughed, “you’re the one that insists on presenting proposals in the conference room.” He looked around from something to sit on but was at a loss until Sans forfeited his stool to sit on the floor by the desk. “Thank you Sans,” Asgore smiled.

Gaster straightened his papers up, ‘Asgore I desire your permission to-’

“What are you doing for your anniversary?” Asgore’s ears perked up. Gaster stared at him with a fair amount of skepticism, “it is next week isn’t it?”

‘Sorry sir, I just didn’t notice myself,’ his eyelights fell to his forgotten-for-now files, ‘they told me.’

“So what are you thinking?” Asgore prompted.

‘The boys really love playing in the snow so I was thinking we’d go down to Snowdin, get some cinnabunnies, explore the woods around the ruins, then go to Grillby’s for dinner,’ he drummed his fingers across the desk. In truth he was hoping he could introduce the pair to Toriel if by some crazy random happenstance she happened to be at the ruin door. It wasn’t the most exciting of plans but Gaster didn’t want to over stimulate the weary Sans.

“No, that won’t do,” Asgore shook his head, his massive horns cut through the air, “Papyrus hates Grillby’s menu.”

‘I was going to ask him to make something off menu,’ Gaster signed flat faced. It was interesting, where Grillby’s bar menu was about the only thing Sans ate happily Papyrus, who would eat Gaster’s charcoal, could barely stand the smell of it.

“No, no,” Asgore insisted, “here,” he dug into his pockets and produced a brochure. “It just opened up this week, it will be something new to do,” he smiled, his tiny little fangs poked out from his lips. Gaster looked over the brochure, it was for a shopping district, a stationary fixture meant to sell multiple goods for long periods of time.

“There were a lot of advertisements in human magazines for visiting things called malls, so we made one of our own! It’s decorated just lovely, I grew the flowers myself special for the new establishment. They have the lights the boys like, it’s perfect,” Asgore cheered.

Gaster leaned over the desk to look down at the top of Sans’s head, “does that sound fun to you?”

Sans tilted his head up to look at Gaster, he shrugged, “sure, sounds like we’ll have a mall.”

Gaster raised a brow before his socket twitched with understanding, “was that a pun?” He did his best to remain annoyed on the outside but internally his magic rolled in waves of happiness, that was the first pun in days. Maybe he was finally doing better then? Maybe he’d stop looking at Papyrus with such sympathetic glances, perhaps he’d go back to doing magic practices with him, even if he didn’t it was a step in the right direction.

‘I accept your proposal,’ Gaster signed before he tapped the brochure into his inventory.
“Now what is yours?” Asgore laced his fingers together then rested his hands atop his belly. Gaster gave him a curious glance before his presentation. He threw the papers together but as he stared at his friend, when he acknowledge Sans was right there, he couldn’t quite shift into professional mode, not when this was a personal project.

He sat back in his chair, ‘I want to resume the DT experiments.’

Asgore’s face darkened, “why would you of all monsters want to resume those atrocities?”

Gaster clicked his teeth as he passed some files to Asgore, ‘I believe that with proper testing of the determination trait dormant in all human souls we can trigger a phenomenon known as Reset. If it can be applied directly to the barrier we can turn it back to the time it was created.’ Sans crawled out from under the desk to read over Asgore’s shoulder.

‘I want to focus on the barrier, I believe why I had any luck in cracking it in the first place was because of my red magic,’ Gaster fidgeted uncomfortably. ‘Eventually, depending on the results of the studies, I would like to resume research on the effects of Determination and monsters.’ Asgore gave him a harsh glare as the abomination not-monsters from Gaster’s former master’s experiments during the war drifted unspoken between them.

‘Injecting monsters with the magic had unfavorable results,’ Gaster signed cautiously.

“That’s an understatement,” Asgore bit with a coldness his appearance would lead one to believe was impossible.

‘But a monster with Determination is resilient, they can turn a singular HP into a chance for victory,’ he swallowed, even just thinking about it had him fearing his ribs were going to melt to the floor. ‘It is secondary research, not the focus I promise you, but I think it could cure spontaneous Falling,’ his eyelights slid over to Sans who was peering at the notes over Asgore’s arm.

‘But the focus is the barrier,’ Gaster reaffirmed.

Asgore inhaled, “if I were to trust anyone with this research it’s you. I know you fully grasp the ramifications but I need some time to think about this. There are so many things that could go wrong.”

‘I understand, please keep the papers and take your time,’ Gaster proposed, ‘and thank you for the brochure, I’m sure the boys will enjoy it.’

He hummed in response, “I certainly hope they do.”

The following days met the end of the school year which meant Sans no longer came with Gaster to work. The boys were getting into some sort of mischief or other as they prepared the anniversary. Gaster’s phone was peppered with texts throughout the day: ‘we are at Gerson’s.’ ‘We are at Asgore’s.’ ‘We are in Snowdin.’ Never with an explanation of why, and asking the boys was met with Papyrus’s exceptionally clumsy verbal dodging. In the end he stopped asking questions.

He was in the basement getting ready for the trip to the mall, Papyrus had insisted everyone look their best to celebrate which had inspired Gaster to pull out his old tailcoat. He smirked at his reflection, it had been ages but it was one of his favorite jackets. As his eyes traced up and down his
black attire he couldn’t help but wish for a pop of color of some sort, like those pocket squares he’d seen humans wear. He opened his closet door to see a wall of black look back at him, surely he had something with a spark of color to it.

He dug through his closet with half hearted care, several of his long black coats fell off their hooks in his pursuit. “Dad!” Papyrus bellowed. Gaster stuck his head out of the closet, “your phone has been ringing nonstop!”

Gaster rolled his eyelights, ‘I told them not to call me today.’

“What if it’s important?” Papyrus fussed.

‘It’s always important,’ Gaster scoffed.

“Well you have an important job!” Papyrus stomped his foot and Gaster admitted defeat. He stepped out of the closet fully, “wowie!” Papyrus sung.

Gaster’s face was wrapped in a haze of purple, ‘you look very nice Papyrus,’ he signed. The boy was wearing brown slacks with an orange button down shirt that had subtle darker orange stripes in it and shiny black shoes that Gaster wasn’t certain where he’d gotten them from.

“You too dad!” Papyrus smiled until the phone began to sing again. Gaster sighed as he took the device, he didn’t ask off that much they really couldn’t leave him alone?

“Hello Doctor Gaster, we got a problem, the Core is overheating, we need to shut it down now,” his assistant barked, an odd thing for a cat to do. Gaster couldn’t respond, he couldn’t argue, his fingers squeaked around the device.

Gaster handed the phone to Papyrus, ‘tell him I’ll be there soon.’ He stripped off his jacket, if they were shutting down the Core that would mean the first complete blackout in over a decade. What had changed to cause it to grow unstable in the first place? He put on his typical peacoat and began to storm up the stairs with Papyrus in tow.

Sans greeted them when they emerged from the basement, he had a dark blue vest on with a charcoal gray button down with white stripes and black slacks, Gaster knew he hadn’t bought any of that ensemble, “so I take it we aren’t going now?”

Gaster’s shoulders dropped, “I am so sorry boys. I know you were looking forward to this,” he was too. “The power is going to be out for a while we won’t be able to do much of anything,” he rubbed his hands together. “You are more than welcome to stay here until I get back, just be careful,” he pat both of their heads.

Papyrus grabbed his hand, “can we go with you?”

“There’s not going to be anything to do,” he signed clumsily around the boy’s grip.

“My favorite,” Sans smiled lazily.

Gaster wrapped an arm around each of them then pulled them close, “lets go then.”

When they entered the labs they immediately split up, Sans and Papyrus went up into his office where they were instructed to enter in the door jam code which would leave the door open when the power went out, while Gaster near sprinted in his full stride to the control panel for the Core. There he greeted his assistant but after several minutes of panicking at the ever rising temperature they decided the kill switch was the only option.
The two dashed to the Core itself and crawled into the bowels of the great machine. Gaster didn’t mind the heat but his assistant could barely touch the metal surfaces over the pit of magma. The machine shook violently and Gaster stumbled over to the switch. He wrapped both hands around it then pulled down with all of his might, the machine released a groan as tier by tier the glowing coils began to darken.

Gaster rested against the railing to exhale a nervous laugh, that had been a bit too close for comfort. The Core groaned as it gave one last tremendo's tremor.

The rail came loose behind Gaster.

His soul jammed itself against his spine as his magic pumped fear through his body as he slipped towards the magma below. His soul froze as his wrist was snagged by his assistant who leaned dangerously over the edge before he heaved Gaster back onto the platform.

Gaster dropped down to his knees, they felt as soft as a moldsmal as he tried to collect himself, “ya know you’re lucky you’re so light or that could have gone terribly!” The assistant chuckled nervously. Gaster pointed towards the edge of the platform where his draconic blaster rose to meet them. “Ah, you were gonna catch yourself,” the assistant tilted their head back as they laughed, “glad I risked my neck for no reason.”

Gaster shook his head, ‘thank you.’

“Yeah, yeah, don’t go all mushy on me,” he smirked. “So what are we gonna do about this overheating problem? More and more monsters are taking advantage of our free power system and your first born can’t handle it.”

Gaster chuckled, it had been ages since anyone had referred to the Core as his child. He placed his hand along the broken rail, he’d obviously been a neglectful parent lately, he ran his hands across his skull as the last of his adrenaline rush faded from him.

They debated back and forth on mechanisms vs chemicals for creating a coolant system. In the end they decided on utilizing the river systems to ship the ice from Snowdin to the Core. It would be grueling work to get a proper harvesting machine set up in the first place let alone finding someone comfortable with manning it through all hours of the day.

“So I guess I’ll make the arrangements to open a facility building down there for study,” the assistant’s claws picked at their lab coat, “is there anything in particular you want for comfort items? We’re probably going to have to build a new housing unit.”

‘What? No, I’m not going,’ Gaster’s brows knit together.

“It would only be for a few months I thought for certain you would want to see to it yourself,” the assistant pulled back from the skeleton.

Gaster shook his head, ‘I’m not going to leave my boys for the summer over something I can trust another to be capable of.’

“Your boys?” the assistant chuckled, “I- I never thought I’d see the day you chose anything over science.” He stood up his tail twitching with thought, “I’ve tried over the last couple months to figure out what in the Underground possessed you to take in two children but nothing ever comes up.”

He tapped the railing affectionately, “we built all of this together, I thought I knew you but I guess I never did.” He shrugged, “your kids have been alone in the dark for a while now, you should probably get to them.”
Gaster pulled himself to his feet, he tapped on the assistant’s shoulder, ‘I’m sorry. For a lot of things. If you want to know my thought process towards them though,’ he shrugged, ‘there really wasn’t one. I over thought it alot but in the end- I still don’t really know what possessed me but I’m glad it did.’

His assistant looked up to him with curious eyes before he smiled slyly, “you’re just getting old.”

Gaster scoffed as if it was the most ridiculous thing he’d heard but it wasn’t untrue, his age could have been a major factor. Some last ditch effort to make something of himself, some lingering fear of being forgotten. It didn’t really matter what had caused him to do it what mattered was that he took the chance and now had two wonderful boys as a result, it had been his favorite experiment.

The boys were chatting in the darkness of the room, their eyelights a bright sparkling white as the two pairs turned to him. No sooner had he stepped into the dark room than he was greeted by a hip high tackle, “welcome back Dad!” Papyrus cheered as he tightened his grip.

“Papyrus,” Gaster smirked as he returned the hug. “Thank you boys for following instructions,” he commented.

“Of course,” Sans shrugged, “not like there’s a lot of fun things to do in the dark.”

“Although someone thought it would be the ideal time for a nap,” Papyrus groaned.

“Who would think that? Nap me,” Sans’s voice grinned as Papyrus’s foot clicked against the ground.

Gaster smiled, there really was nothing else he’d rather be doing right now. He crossed over to his desk and grabbed a few branches he kept in the drawer then placed them on the tile floor. He pulled out his enchanted lighter to spark the branches with flame, “do you boys mind if I give you your gifts?” He sat with his back against the desk facing the fire that the boys quickly plopped around.

“If you want to we can,” Papyrus leaned towards Gaster in anticipation his eyelights still tiny dots of white in his narrow sockets.

“I was going to save these for this evening,” he retrieved the boxes from his inventory and set them in front of each of the boys, “but it doesn’t seem we’ll be doing much today.”

The pair wasted little time moving past the flimsy paper and onto the contents of the box. Papyrus pulled out two different jigsaws, one of an intricate stained glass window and the other a scene with three rabbits nuzzled up together.

It was rather embarrassing how attached Gaster had gotten to the image of bunnies but hearing the boys read the same book nearly every night had endeared him to the iconography. Bunnies were now associated with a happy home, with two warm skeletal smiles, and the promise to see each other again in the morning. When he saw the large black bunny nuzzled with two smaller gray ones he’d felt his magic dull with sentimental feelings and he couldn’t not get it at that point.

There were a few knick knacks inside as well: a packet of markers with bottles of ink refills, a few small toy cars, and one of those plastic heroes. Gaster still didn’t know the reason the boy was always so excited to receive one but, seeing the way his face lit up, why hardly mattered. “Thank you Dad,” Papyrus smiled. He placed the box diligently to the ground then grasped firmly around Gaster’s shoulders.

“Doc- this is,” Sans was staring awestruck into the bottom of his box.

The telescope hadn’t been in the best condition when he bought it and his attempts to repair it didn’t
seem to help much. He ended up passing the project along to one of his colleagues. Now it shined at the bottom of the box as if it had never been touched before. Sans reached into the box before he pulled his hand back, afraid to ruin the pristine condition of the treasure.

Sans permanent grin somehow managed to widen as his eye lights sparkled brighter than Gaster remembered the stars to be. Sans clutched the box tightly to him as he placed his head on Gaster’s shoulder, “thank you.”

“I hope you get to see the stars through its’ lense,” he whispered. Sans nodded into his shoulder and the three of them clung to each other in the gentle light of the fire.

There wasn’t much else to do but talk, and so they did, about everything and anything that came to mind. Papyrus happily chirped about his favorite school memories, how excited he was to go back, some of his fears about going without Sans, and how happy he was they were all together. Gaster’s smile brightened, he was still the same child he’d first met, bright, excitable, and fun loving, Gaster’s dourness hadn’t ruined him like he’d feared.

Sans had come a long way since the first time they had tried to play the question game in this very room. He spoke casually about his readings, about some projects he’d like to start, magic as a whole, and that he was scared to be alone because he was afraid he was just going to dust. He acknowledged he knew it was irrational that the ball hitting him in class, or the books falling off the shelf, or bumping into another monster wasn’t going to dust him but he was afraid. Gaster and Papyrus both assured him they would be there for him, he shyly stated he knew that.

“Oh Dad! Did you know Sans can do impressions? He’s really good,” Papyrus puffed his chest out proudly.

“Papyrus,” Sans groaned, his hands slid over his face.

Now that was a familiar sight, “you don’t have to if you don’t want to,” Gaster smiled.

“Do Gerson!” Papyrus cheered.

Sans covered his growing blush that almost seemed to glow in the dim lighting, he hummed to adjust his magic, “listen here kid, ya can’t just go grabbin’ the Crabapples like that! You even listening? Gently!” He barked the last word like a sergeant and Gaster found himself laughing louder then he intended.

Gaster clenched his teeth in embarrassment, “sorry,” he let the last of the laugh escape as Sans smiled up to him. “That was almost spot on,” he smiled.

Sans pointed his face to the floor then hummed again, “Howdy, how are you doing little ones? It’s so good to see you, my how you’ve grown, don’t worry I have just what you need!” That was easily Asgore, he even copied some of the King’s mannerisms while he spoke. Gaster covered his teeth as another laugh escaped him, he couldn’t help it, seeing his tiny little boy perfectly mimic the giant boss monster was too much.

Sans didn’t hum this time as he jumped to his feet, “Ngaah! I’m gonna be Captain of the Royal Guard someday you’ll see!” He punched into the air, “AND I WILL DO IT BY SCREAMING!” Gaster tilted his head back and gave in laughing louder then he intended.

The boy’s face was absolutely ecstatic as his magic released waves of energy into the air, light and
happy that settled on those that felt it like a warm blanket. Sans sat back down, a bit closer to him this
time, “I like your laugh.”

Gaster wiped away a stray tear, “you and you alone, but thanks,” he wrapped an arm around Sans
who leaned against his shoulder.

“Oh Sans do- do-” Papyrus ran over to the other side of the fire and whispered in the side of Sans’s
skull.

“Oh,” Sans said simply, “okay, I want to try it but you can’t get mad,” he looked very urgently up to
Gaster. When Gaster nodded Sans hummed and what came from him next was rather difficult to
describe. It was similar to a waterlogged machine of some sort, it had a strange half echo that
bubbled around the digital tones. Gaster narrowed his brows, “you said you wouldn’t get mad,” Sans
dropped his shoulders.

Gaster tapped the corner of his teeth with his ring finger, “no I’m not angry I was just trying to figure
out who it was.” He nudged Sans, “one more time please?”

Sans tilted his head back and forth then hummed again before the sound repeated. Sans was
definitely imitating him but it was just the sound of his voice there weren’t any actual words being
formed, an impressive feat regardless. Sans finished with a sideways glint to Papyrus before he
returned to Gaster.

“Well,” he tapped his skull against the top of the desk while he thought, “you’re not actually making
letters, your Font would have to change to be able to properly imitate me but you do have the sound
of it figured out.”

Sans grinned up at him, “I’ll figure it out.”

“If you figure out how to overwrite Fonts let me know I could use a new one,” Gaster smiled, “can
you imitate Papyrus?”

“Nope I am un-inimitable!” Papyrus declared sticking his chest out.

“Bro that means I could do it,” Sans suggested.

“Nuh-uh that’s what the ‘un’ is for,” he argued back. Gaster was just about ready to argue when the
lights flickered back on. The three of them flinched at the sudden brightness as their eyelight
readjusted or, in Papyrus’s case, turned off entirely. Gaster quickly returned the flame to the lighter
then returned the slightly burnt wood to their drawer.

He opened his phone quickly to see the time, “we could still go to the shopping district if we hurry
over.”

“Nah pretty tired,” Sans fell back to lay on the tiles.

“There are lots of good things to do at home! We could start my new bunny puzzle,” Papyrus
grabbed his box off the floor.

“But what about the Nice Cream parlor?” the idea of eating ice cream inside was foreign to them let
alone how many flavors were being offered.

“We can go some other time,” Papyrus sang in tones of disappointment, “I think we will have much
more fun at home!”
“Okay,” Gaster had sort of been looking forward to it himself but today was about them. They tidied the office then as Gaster was prepared to head out the twins each tugged on his sleeves, “yes?” The two shared a mischievous grin with each other before they threw their arms up in unison. He looked between the pair, he could argue they were too big to carry both of them, he could argue they were a bit too old to need carried just cause, or he could ping both of their souls blue and let them awkwardly fumble with how to lay between his arms. He liked that one best.

Carrying them through the Capital like this made him realize just how much they had grown, Papyrus had enough to be able to see but even Sans hardly fit between his arms when he had to factor in Papyrus’s length. They had fit so neatly together the say he had carried them home from the castle in a state of half shock. Now they rested comfortably but this would probably be the last time he could carry both of them in his arms. As the thought dawned on him he slowed his stride to soak in each step.

He’d never got to carry them as babybones, when they were preambulatory and helpless, crying out in rattles for attention. In his soul he knew he wouldn’t have been able to handle it but still something about them being so tiny, so needy, brought a foreign warmth across his magic. The pair looked up to him as his magic stitched itself in the air, he tossed his head up, “you two are the best thing that’s ever happened to me, I’m not apologizing for it.”

“Love you too Dad,” Papyrus leaned his head against Gaster’s shoulder. Sans went quiet but he mirrored the action, it was a bit much for the boy and he was fine with that.

He set the children down to dig for his key but they pushed the door open, he always locked the front door. He stepped in after them as the lights were flipped back on. He flinched at the sheer amount of monsters standing in his living room. Gaster took a step back to take in the streamers, the monsters, the half melted cake, Grillby stepping out from the kitchen, and the bright colors everyone was wearing. “W-what’s-” he started to speak but then pulled up his hands, “someone explain?”

“Papyrus thought it was rather unfortunate you’d never had a birthday party,” Asgore laughed in high spirits, “I assured him it wasn’t from lack of want.”

Gaster looked over to the skeletons with wide sockets, “your little tykes have been all over the Underground tryin’ ta get this together,” Gerson cackled.

He wanted to make a quip about if this was for him why was Gerson there but he couldn’t speak, he could barely think as his soul thrummed in his chest. Grillby’s flames sputtered in sparks of laughter, ‘why don’t you sit down? You look like you’re about to have a panic attack numbskull.’

Gaster nodded as he was escorted to the corner of the couch Undyne was bouncing excitedly on. ‘Thank you, thank you all, I’m just a bit… overwhelmed,’ he signed.

“Take your time boy,” Gerson cackled as he pulled a struggling Undyne off the couch.

Sans and Papyrus slipped back to their room to drop off their boxes then came out with one of their own. It was meticulously wrapped in newspaper with clean, precise, edges that had to be Papyrus’s doing, Sans wouldn’t have bothered with something that was going to be discarded. “Open it,” Papyrus nearly demanded.

Gaster carefully worked his long fingers around the tape then lifted the box’s lid. He was met with an expanse of a vibrant red that sang to his magic. He picked it out of the box carefully and unfurled the fabric. It was soft, fleece, must have been a good quality find from the dump, they couldn’t make stuff like this down here. He ran his thumb over the precise but loose stitching down the sides.
“Told you it should have been black,” Sans whispered.

“No, no this is perfect,” Gaster intervened.

“Red is his favorite color Sans, when we color together that’s always the one he grabs first!” Papyrus declared.

“That’s cause red is the best!” Undyne leaned in close to observe the fabric, “but what is it?”

Sans flushed, “it’s a-

Gaster wrapped the scarf around his neck and let it hang over his black peacoat, “it’s a scarf,” he signed while he spoke but Undyne didn’t understand either. “Thank you boys, for all of this,” Gaster put a hand on each boys shoulder.

“Now it’s time to party!” Papyrus declared as he turned to turn on Grillby’s old radio.

“Hey Doc, would you help me get plates before Grillby melts the icing off completely?” Sans gave him a look of ulterior motives but Gaster let himself be pulled up and towards the kitchen.

Gaster grabbed the plates off of the top cupboards and handed them to Sans who passed them to Papyrus who stood professionally beside his brother. “Canitalktoyou?” Sans mumbled under his breath.

Gaster set down the dishes he retrieved to kneel at eye level with Sans who rocked awkwardly on his feet. “Do you- do you want to be our dad?” His eye lights grew fuzzy around the rim as he tried to hold eye contact with Gaster, “cause I mean-” He rubbed the back of his head. “We really like you,” Sans hands squirmed in his pockets, “and um, I mean, I know Papyrus said you were our, um yeah- from day one but- you looked so uncomfortable- I didn’t think you really wanted to and I didn’t know you,” he gestured vaguely with his shoulders, “ya know?”

“I think you want to now but if you don’t that’s okay,” he clenched his hands into fists, “c-can I call you dad?”

Gaster covered his mouth with his hand as he tried to swallow down the emotion building in his nonexistent throat, as it was his vision was particularly blurry, “I-” he fidgeted with the end of his scarf and forced his eye lights to focus, “I still want to see you happy,” he pressed his teeth together. “But I want to do more than that now. I want to watch you grow, I want to see you become better than I could ever be, I want to watch your faces as you explore every cranny of the Underground, and hopefully the Surface too.” Gaster rubbed a thumb under the rim of Sans’s eye socket as he reached for Papyrus with his other hand, “I want more for you boys then I have ever wanted for myself.”

“So if you want to call me Dad, if you think I have earned that honor than Sans,” he placed a hand on the child’s shoulder as purple tears formed in his sockets, “then please call me Dad.”

Sans sniffled before he dove into Gaster’s chest, “I love you Dad.”

The tears bubbled over and ran down his face, “I love you too Sans.” The monsters in the other room had the decency to give up their blatantly obvious eavesdropping to allow them their moment.

“See Sans! I told you there was no need to worry,” Papyrus’s shoulders relaxed as he took in the scene. The pair exchanged a mischievous look before they pulled Papyrus into their embrace.

Gaster wasn’t alone. He squeezed the boys tighter, he was in a room surrounded by monsters that
cared for him no matter his flaws, no matter his scars. He’d never be who he was before again but he was a much better monster now.

Chapter End Notes

There it is! The end of Act 1 next week we are going to be rolling the clock forward a few years.

This is the most fun I have had writing a chapter, I don’t think it’s the best one, but it was enjoyable.

R.I.P. Pancake scene

Thank you all for your sweet comments and Kudos I really appreciate it and hope you continue to enjoy!
Time is a Funny Thing

Chapter Summary

Grillby and Gaster catch up.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your continued support I feel this chapter is a little heavy handed but we will be back to our normal schedule after this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Gaster snorted as he was poured another glass of a soda as dark as the liquor he used to drink, ‘okay and then what?’

Grillby’s flames crackled, ‘the guy was so drunk he basically danced himself out.’

‘Stars I wish I would have been there to see that,’ he shot his pop back as if it was a much harder drink and scrunched his face as the fizz crinkled along where his nasal cavity should be.

‘Yeah I don’t see much of you around here anymore,’ Grillby replied flatly without any real intent behind the words but Gaster still felt the need to apologize. ‘None of that,’ he lowered his friend’s hand down to the table, ‘it just means we get to catch up and talk until the ridiculous hours of the morning.’ He gestured to the empty bar that had technically closed hours ago.

‘It is rather late isn’t it?’ he looked down to his phone in anticipation of a slew of missed messages from Papyrus but was surprised when he didn’t find any. Maybe he was done thinking his father couldn’t take care of himself? He smirked, that would be the day.

‘Luckily I live just behind here but if you need to go feel free,’ Grillby provided an easy out as he leaned back against his liquor cabinet.

‘No I’m enjoying myself too much,’ Gaster smiled as he rested lazily against his hand.

‘You were getting ready to say something about Papyrus before I interrupted you,’ Grillby sat up on the bar then slid into the stool next to Gaster.

He narrowed his brows as he tried to remember, ‘right, so Papyrus is almost done with schooling now so he’s at that age.’

‘That age?’ Grillby’s fire did it’s best impression of confusion.

‘The one I- never really-’ he could feel purple taint into his cheek bones and he wished desperately for it to stop, ‘he sees a lot of his peers forming couples and he- also wants to-’ he rolled his hand on his wrist.

The fiery bartender crackled into his hand, ‘stars Dings I forget how innocent you are behind that
cold Royal Scientist persona.’

Gaster playfully nudged at him, ‘knock it off,’ he smirked. ‘I couldn’t really give Papyrus any real dating advice so he found a book that he basically lives by now and I don’t know what to make of it.’

It had only been a few weeks ago that Papyrus sat on his bedroom floor not so carefully slicing off the lower half of his tank tops. Sans had pulled Gaster off the couch with blue magic, the boy was a bit too dependent on his talent for the color, and directed him to the bedroom, Gaster had been speechless.

“Okay Papyrus, what is this about,” finally crossed his teeth as Papyrus stayed steadfast in his work. It had been years since he had to sign at home but every so often he had to sit back and revel in the fact that after all of his years, centuries, there was not one but two monsters who truly understood him. Maybe it wasn’t fair because they could read it but he wasn’t going to complain about how when it brought him so much happiness.

“Well the Dating Manual mentioned that one should not be ashamed to show off their body!” He spoke cheerily, “so I am going to show off my physique!”

Sans couldn’t do anything to hold back his snickering, “Paps you don’t have a physique.”

“That’s not true, Undyne says I have very strong bones!” He nodded his head up at them before he turned back to his work. Sans covered his teeth as he tried desperately to suppress his growing chuckles. He tapped Gaster’s arm then left the room, it took a moment for him to realize Sans had just ‘tapped out.’ He sighed as he watched the monster cut jagged lines across the bottom of another tank top.

Gaster looked down to the ground, it was far too far away, he groaned internally and opted to sit on the bed instead. “Why does this matter Papyrus?” he rested an arm against the footboard.

Papyrus was quiet for a bit, the snipping of his scissors adding more to the conversation then he but eventually Papyrus put his project aside. “I deserve kisses don’t I?” he shyly glanced up to Gaster.

“Of course you do Papyrus,” Gaster narrowed his brows.

“My classmates are all so happy and they all seem to have someone but I don’t,” Papyrus tilted his jaw to the side as he thought.

“Is this something that you really want?” Gaster’s long fingers drummed against the board.

“Yes,” Papyrus puffed his chest out, “I want to be liked, and showered in kisses, and popular!”

“Then it will happen Papyrus,” he smiled, “you are a brilliant boy with far too many talents to count, you’ll make someone so happy they won’t know what to do with themselves. It just might take time.”

The skeleton didn’t exactly seem pleased with this answer, “have you ever been with someone dad?”

To this Gaster immediately brightened to violet, “um no not really-” his head tilted to the side, “not exactly.” He rubbed the back of his skull, “I never really wanted the intimacy of that sort of connection. I wanted a companion, someone to be with, but it wouldn’t be fair of me to deprive them of their wants because I didn’t.”

Papyrus moved away from his mess of ruined shirts to sit up on the bed with Gaster his face tinted
slightly orange, “I probably shouldn’t ask you stuff like that.”

“No it’s fine, you can ask me anything, you’ve always been allowed that,” he rubbed the younger skeleton’s back, “I’m just sorry I don’t have any experience to help you out.”

“You never wanted to be with anyone?” Papyrus leaned against Gaster.

“Well there had been individuals I was attracted to, or smitten with I suppose,” his eye lights bounced around the room as he attempted to find something to ground his racing mind, “and there was one monster in particular but it never really worked out.”

“That’s sad, I think everyone should have someone!” Papyrus smiled pleasantly.

“I have you boys,” Gaster replied as he wrapped an arm around Papyrus. It was so odd to remember that the child didn’t even reach his hip when they first met. The skeleton beside him had a broad chest with lanky bones and now came just below his shoulder in height but it was still the same child. Papyrus’s optimistic nature never diminished and as he grew he was able to put his energy into a multitude of outlets.

He was an incredibly talented artist, he managed to recreate the world around them by capturing it in paint. Recently he had began painting rocks, like rocks, it was impossible to tell they were painted which was an odd hobby but he was very good at it. Undyne had taken the skeleton’s magic training under her own care recently and Papyrus reported great success.

Grillby’s flames roared as he tried to contain his mirth, ‘well that had to have been awkward.’

‘Of course it was! You know he asked me where baby skeletons come from?’ Gaster rubbed his face.

‘Well you see Gaster when a Mo-’

‘Don’t you even start,’ Gaster pointed directly towards Grillby’s face, ‘I know how babies are made I just don’t know about skeletal development.’ He clamped his teeth together, he really didn’t know much about skeletons as a whole. When he’d adopted the boys, what felt like a lifetime ago now, he had imagined himself as keeping skeletal culture alive but he hadn’t spent but maybe a few weeks with his own kind.

Gaster’s eye lights looked towards the front door and his hands snagged against the red scarf he was wearing over his shoulders, ‘I think about how much of their life I missed a lot. Do you think I could have handled little babybones?’ He’d been thinking about it a lot recently, holding a tiny little Sans in one hand and a Papyrus in the other, so young they couldn’t even cry yet. Tiny little babybones that needed him for everything.

‘No,’ Grillby looked to him plainly, ‘you wouldn’t have been able to deal with their neediness. Chances are you would have shoved them in some cardboard box in the labs and asked an assistant or intern to babysit while you worked or begged Asgore to adopt them from you.’

‘Some monsters preface statements like that with ‘can I speak honestly’”, he summoned another pair of hands to form air quotes as he fixed Grillby in a glare.

‘Since when do I hold anything back?” A smirk faintly formed across his face before it vanished amongst his flames, ‘but it’s true. It’s only because of those two being the way that they are that you caught dad so bad.’

He groaned as he rocked back in his stool, ‘I did catch it bad.’
‘Orange juice level bad,’ his flames sparked.

‘Orange juice level bad,’ Gaster agreed.

‘So what does Sans think about Papyrus wanting to date?’ he rested his arm against the bar.

‘Same as everything: if it happens it happens. I’d be annoyed about his constant nonchalance if it wasn’t for the fact that Papyrus cares about everything so much that they balance each other out,’ he chuckled.

‘Home school still working out?’ Grillby signed.

Gaster pulled back and shrugged a bit, ‘yes, recently it has been a bit more difficult though.’

‘That secret project?’ Grillby tried.

Gaster hummed as he tugged at his scarf, ‘and other factors.’ That was why he was here wasn’t it? He should have put the Knight Knight in the room to sleep hours ago but he’d procrastinated. ‘I’ve been letting him do a lot of independent projects lately- by that I mean I told him to find one project to work on and I think he has at least ten open.’

His personal lab, which had been changed into Sans’s personal lab as Gaster stayed later and later at work, slowly became consumed by a mess of different research materials. The walls were coated in blueprints and math, the tables were covered with in progress experiments, and the floors were covered with literally anything else one could think of. “When I said you could use the lab I figured you’d have the good grace to keep it organized,” the toes of his shoe nudged against some food remnant that had began experimenting on its’ own.

Sans scratched the eraser side of the pencil to his skull, “yeah Doc, I’ll get right to it.”

Gaster sighed, he knew that expression Sans had learned it from him. The way his eye lights narrowed as he scrutinized the documents with a glare held in his sockets, “alright which one are you picking at?”

“Uh,” Sans pulled away from his work and rubbed his sockets, “I actually don’t remember what this math was for.”

“Alright up and at' em,” Gaster nudged Sans.

“Ten more minutes,” he shrugged the older skeleton off.

“You don’t even know what your working on,” he prompted.

“Doesn’t stop you,” he mumbled.

Gaster would have argued if it wasn’t the truth. He sat down on the workbench and rubbed his knees while Sans worked. After a while Sans shut his book, “are they bothering you?”

He pulled his hands away like a child who had been caught with two pieces of monster candy, “it’s alright, this bench is a little lower than what I would prefer to work on.”

“Coffee?” Sans quirked his brows.

“How can I argue with a proposal as sound as that?” Sans helped him off the bench and made quick work of brewing a pot of coffee for them to split. Gaster felt terrible he had passed his bad habit onto his son but it had helped with his chronic fatigue. The lanky skeleton scrunched himself onto the
Sans passed him a mug before he sat on the far end of the couch. After a few sips Sans melted into the furniture, “that’s better.”

“You remember what you were working on?” Gaster held his mug between both hands simply enjoying the warmth in his achy bones.

He seemed too tired to raise his shoulders to shrug so he just tilted his head a bit, “kind of.”

“Which project?” Sans mumbled his answer to which Gaster leered at him.

“Necromancy theory,” Sans’s eye lights were very interested in the mirror above the old desk.

Gaster tilted his mug back, thankful for his lack of nerves as the hot liquid met his bones, “what do you need?”

“I’m just trying to disprove it- I know you think you’re part of it but… wait… you’re not mad?” Sans scanned over Gaster who was wiping stray coffee from his jaw.

“I’m not going to deny you the right to learn because I am uncomfortable with a subject,” Gaster laced his boney fingers together to hide the subtle shakes. “So what has you stumped?”

Grillby’s flames popped, ‘I’m proud of you, a few years ago and you would have tried to burn all of his research.’

‘I would like to hope that would have been more than just a few years ago,’ Gaster reached over the counter to grab the bottle of pop to refill his glass. ‘I don’t have a lot of time to help him at the moment, he’s wanting samples that I can’t afford to give quite yet,’ he tapped the top of his glass. They fell into a companionable silence as Gaster stared at his drink hoping his nerve laid somewhere amongst the dark liquid.

‘I’m sorry I’ve been talking so long, you have work in the morning and I’ve kept you well past close,’ Gaster rubbed his skull his fingers just barely managing to find the smooth ridges of what had once been cracks.

Grillby shook his head, ‘it’s never too late to catch up,’ his chest shrunk in as he exhaled, ‘hey would you do me a favor?’ His expressionless face was somber as the tongues of flames barely moved when Gaster nodded, ‘why are you wearing the scarf?’

Gaster uncurled his fingers from the fabric, ‘I can’t just want to?’ He smiled broadly, Grillby knew, he probably knew far before Gaster walked in tonight that something was off.

“Dings,” he said firmly, ‘you only wear that for important occasions or when your performing tests you anticipate blowing up in your face, what’s got you nervous?’

His eyelights fell to the warm rustic floorboards, his boys found out despite his best efforts to keep it a secret, he’d told Asgore, he’d talked to the ruins door about it, even Gerson had accidentally found out, so why was he hesitating now? He straightened the expanse of red, it wasn’t nearly as soft as it had been the day he received it but it was still in good shape complete with the original stitching. It was just worn and tired like he was.

‘I’m slowing down,’ his hands raced. Grillby’s white fleck like eyes vanished behind licks of fire as he tried to process what was said. ‘My red magic, what’s kept me alive thrice as long as I should have, it’s almost undetectable now. Just a tiny little dot on a graph,’ he drew his fingers up to show
how small the dot was.

He spent his evenings with his joints wrapped in fabrics saturated with healing magic as he couldn’t alleviate his own pain. He’d been sleeping on the couch for over a month now as walking down the stairs to his room became increasingly hazardous. They built an elevator in the labs and moved his office down to the basement so he didn’t have to scale the steps anymore. Walking was a burden, he could feel his tibia and fibula trying to detach from his knees as the flow of magic grew weaker by the day.

His colleagues often tried to push him to return home early or give up halfway through an experiment to avoid his frustrated pacing. He’d informed Asgore of his pitiful state, after one of his assistants decided to inform the king first, the ‘r’ word had been thrown around a lot. He couldn’t just give up, the experiments to Reset the barrier were going so well if he had to reti- give up they’d lose their right to work with DT. What then? Wait until another soul just happened to fall down here so Asgore could lose himself in another war?

He didn’t want Sans and Papyrus to experience any of what he had growing up. They deserved to live happily on the surface without the background of murder and bloodshed. He wanted to give them the sky, he wanted to free Asgore from his commitment, he wanted to stop Grillby from having to fight ever again, it was these wants, these thoughts that made up the tiny speck of red left inside of him but it was only a matter of time until it was snuffed out completely.

When he shut his eyes he could see it, his boys smiling at the sunset just barely shining between mountain peaks. The world at their feet as a map of potential unfurled for them to explore. Asgore and Tori, though not resolved in their own issues, oversaw the birth of their hard fought second chance. It would take a while but Grillby would cautiously return to the world he was afraid of and find a better life than the fire’s imagination could conjure. No matter how he worked the beautiful shades of color in his mind he couldn’t see himself there with them.

He was old, he’d been old for a long time but now fate set him on a timer. Now all that was left was to watch the days slip by until he couldn’t anymore, “I don’t understand I thought that magic came back with nourishment how can you just lose it?” Grillby’s flames puckered an aggravated hiss, “you said someone had tried to take it from you before.”

‘This is different, this is just time,’ Gaster gestured half heartedly, ‘there is a chance that something could spark it again but even so,’ he worried his fingers, ‘I’d just be borrowing more.’

Grillby burnt hotter as his glow faded from him, he clenched his fists tightly around his pant legs. Gaster set his hands on top of his friends, he felt the warmth pass through the joints in his fingers in soothing bursts. He looked up to Grillby’s fogged over glasses, ‘I’m still here and you know I have no plans on rolling over until I feel the wind one more time. It’s hard right now, stars is it hard, but I’m going to keep trying.’

He returned his hands to the top of Grillby’s as he listened to the hisses, the pops, and the crackles of the Language of Flames as Grillby argued with himself. Gaster’s synthesia filled the air with ellipsis but the sound was robed in nostalgia. Grillby pulled his hands away to sign, Gaster was a bit disappointed that the soothing warmth was gone but he wouldn’t say anything. ‘We’ve known each other forever Dings and I know the timing isn’t ideal but-

A gust of cold air blew through the bar as the door opened breaking their shielding from the terrible ice filled gusts. “Dad you said you were going to be back hours ago- hours ago!” Papyrus fussed, “oh hello Grillby, sorry to barge in.”

“Someone is in a bit of a flurry ,” Sans lazily commentated, “I told you it was snow big deal.”
“Sans-” Papyrus started but Gaster tuned them out.

The pair had been overbearing as of late in their efforts to take care of him. This was his first time in weeks he actually got to go out and do things on his own. Either the boisterous Papyrus would follow him anywhere he needed to go or the careful Sans would keep an eye on him from the distance. He knew they meant well but he was their parent, he was supposed to keep them safe.

Gaster gestured over to the arguing brothers, ‘sorry about them, what were you saying?’

Grillby’s flames burnt a vibrant pink, “don’t worry about it. They seem to be really worried,” he gave that look, the one that suggested he knew exactly how much Gaster was downplaying his ailment.

‘Always,’ Gaster signed, he let out a sigh as he slipped off his bar stool.

“I’d better see you soon,” Grillby’s soft voice called.

‘I’ll see if the wardens will let me come around a bit more,’ he grinned. ‘They’re good boys,’ Gaster’s fingers scratched above his soul.

“They are,” Grillby sat back against the bar his flames peppered with a multitude of colors as he thought.

Papyrus looped his arm around Gaster’s, “what were you thinking? You needed your medici-”

Sans elbowed Papyrus in the femur, “outside,” he hushed harshly.

Gaster gave one last look back to Grillby who waved before they slipped into the frigid night air.

“Just a moment,” Gaster bit out breathlessly as he rested against the side of Grillby’s. He clutched to where his sternum would be as he attempted to catch the breath he apparently did need. His slab like ribs itched in spirals of pain as he could feel where each individual rib was supposed to be. He put his hands up to Papyrus, “I know I messed up. Can we please just go home?”

Sans pulled the walking stick from his inventory and passed it to his father. He gripped the subtle bumps in the stick, he hated it. He hated all of this, his kids having to take care of him, his colleagues worrying about him, his friends fearing for him. He was going to die, not on the battlefield, not from some experiment gone wrong, but just from living.

Yet, that’s what he’d done: he’d lived. He’d stood against the test of time and pioneered a future single handedly. His hands gripped around the walking stick as Papyrus helped him into the River Person’s boat, he wasn’t going anywhere just yet. Like he’d told Grillby, there was a chance he could turn things around still.

His eye lights went distant, what was Grillby trying to tell him? They’d been together a long time, he ran his thumb across the edge of his other hand, a very very long time. Anything that needed to be said had, he was fairly certain. They didn’t have secrets, they couldn’t keep anything from each other without the other finding out, so what hadn’t been said?

Sans leaned against him with lidded sockets as the boat came to a gradual halt. Gaster wrapped an arm around his son as Sans’s groggy state threatened to push him into the water as the boat docked. The three of them hobbled awkwardly through the Hotlands then towards the Capital between several breaks for Gaster to catch his breath.

When they arrived at home Papyrus wrapped Gaster’s joints and he took special care that Gaster consumed his medicine. “I’m sorry,” Papyrus apologized, “I know you hate it when I smother you
but I can’t help it."

“No,” Gaster shook his head, “I obviously refuse to accept limitations and as such you have every right to ensure I do.” He’d never accepted his limitations before, he wrapped an arm around Papyrus’s neck, “good night Papyrus, thank you for taking care of me.”

Papyrus let out a soft ‘nyeh,’”Night Dad.” Papyrus tapped his teeth to the top of Gaster’s skull before he turned to his bedroom.

Gaster pulled the blankets up over his shoulder and propped his legs up on the armrest, even then his feet hungover quite a ways. Sans dropped a book onto the coffee table with an ornery glint in his eyelights. Gaster reached over and pulled the book towards him ‘Dating Manual’ was plastered on the cover of it. Gaster groaned, “I don’t need to read Papyrus’s ridiculous book.”

“I think you do,” Sans winked, “night Dad,” Sans turned the lights off and tucked into the hallway before any further argument could be made.

Chapter End Notes

And that is the closest we will get to shipping in this piece.

I really hate ‘time skips’ I hate reading them, I hate writing them, but it’s done and out of the way!

I have a question for all of you. Do you want to know about Gaster’s scars? I keep trying to write it but it really isn’t necessary. I’ll gladly write it though if you are curious. Any feedback is appreciated!
Sans is getting a hang of his magic until something new happens.

Thank you all so much for the kind words and Kudos, I really appreciate it!

Sans and Papyrus were tossing attacks back and forth across the stoney pathway of their street. It had taken a lot of persuasion to convince Papyrus to work with Sans but the pair had come a long ways. Balancing out Undyne’s attack oriented training with the mandatory control of sparing with Sans had allowed the Papyrus’s magic to develop in spectacular ways. The boy had some rather creative patterns ranging from useful to ridiculous but they all performed exactly as intended.

Sans’s magic was still much more of a tidal wave but he had gained some semblance of control. No longer were his attacks an uncontrollable mass of bones stuck at the perpetual force of a locomotive, now they were capable of forming patterns of their own. They were still all consuming and elaborate but something about the sheer complexity of the constructs mirrored their wielder’s elaborate nature. Somewhere behind that lazy facade was an unparalleled mind just waiting for the right challenge.

“Boys I think we should call it a night!” Gaster called from the front steps of the house, “there’s some Puppy Dough ice cream in the freezer, what do you say about a little bit before bed?” He smiled but the pair didn’t falter in their match. He laughed to himself, they were both so dedicated. As their attacks cut through the snow Gaster sat back against the wreath on the front door. A fuzz began to develop in his skull as his vertebrae crunched against the pine needles.

Finally, Sans knelt in the snow to rub furiously at his eyes in a pathetic attempt to keep his eyes open. “Sans you really need to try actually training! Maybe I could see if Undyne would be willing to coach you too!” Papyrus grinned.

“I can’t imagine the pasta bilities,” he chuckled as Papyrus scooped him into his arms.

“Papyrus Sans can walk on his own,” Gaster smile broadened as the two approached him, without so much as a glance in his direction.

“I swear Sans you get lazier everyday,” Papyrus tossed the door open and it phased right through Gaster.

His eye sockets widened as he dug his fingertips into his ribs in a fool’s attempt to ground his thoughts. The door swung shut behind him with little consequence from his presence and his breathing quickened. Small black flecks bled across the snow diminishing all of its’ features, the cavern walls around him darkened as he watched the flecks bubble and fester.
He recoiled away from them as they began to pop against his clothes. They weighed heavier against him until the black began to crawl up him, pull him towards the ground-

“Dad!” Sans startled him awake with a firm grasp of his humeruses. Sans’s eyelights scanned the Doctor’s face until his breathing fell into a normal pattern.

Gaster traced the surrounding area, they were outside the house, he was sitting on the front steps. “You scared me there,” Sans laughed nervously, “odd being on the other side of the spontaneous sleep thing.”

Gaster blinked as he focused on Sans, right, that was a dream, he rubbed his skull.

“Maybe we should turn in for the night,” he suggested with a shrug.

Gaster stood up finally having his bearings, “no, I’m fine we were making good progress.” He brushed the gray dirt from the back of his black trench coat, “lets run it two more times.”

“Easy for you to say you don’t have to do it,” he scoffed lazily as he shoved his hands in his pockets.

“If I can see you are making an actual effort I’ll be satisfied with one attempt,” Gaster smirked in challenge.

Sans pondered which one required less effort, “kay Doc, have it your way.” He floated a stone off of the ground and into his hand.

Blue magic was the manipulation of gravity on an opponent's soul, to Gaster’s understanding. Sans however believed the magic could reach past the soul to grasp at objects without one. It had been an interesting theory, one that was delightful to watch unfold, but here he was now with a weak but growing talent for faux telekinesis. The boy really was blessed with a strong aptitude for the magic that reached far beyond what Gaster had thought possible.

Both of the boys had taken Gaster’s aptitude for magic as a source of inspiration and ran with it. Sans developing his talent for blue magic as he had and Papyrus was working at shaping the magic into unique shapes. Papyrus discovered a means of shaping simple bone bullets into what he referred to as ‘cool’ shapes: bones wearing sunglasses, though no more or less effective as an attack, were beginning to appear more and more often.

Speaking of Papyrus: “hi Dad!” The gangly skeleton called as he marched towards the house from his own practice session.

“Oh hey bro, well if he’s done I can be too right?” Sans’s eyelights sparkled in challenge but Gaster leveled a glare to him and held up a single finger.

Satisfied enough Sans launched the stone along a conjured walkway of bones that undulated along its path as he pulled the rock along. “Come on Sans, you can go faster than that!” Papyrus cheered.

Sans pushed a little further as he forced the stone to navigate the labyrinth of his own making. His left hand tore from his pocket to cover his left socket as he focused. Multitasking magic at this level took a strong sense of focus most monsters never cared to utilize. Bones cut down towards the rock in x like patterns until the stone flew of its’ own velocity.

“Very impressive Sans,” Gaster called but as he looked to the trembling form of his son all pride was replaced with fear. “Sans?”

“S-something is w-wrong Dad,” his voice wasn’t stuttering it seemed to be vibrating. His fingers
were curled tight against his socket.

Gaster reached towards Sans but in that moment he was gone. His soul fell like stone from his chest as his eyelights shrunk to pinpricks. “Dad?” Papyrus’s voice shook, “where’s Sans?”

He tapped his fingers against the base of his jaw as he tried to think, “Papyrus do you recall your parents eyes?”

Papyrus stiffened at the sudden mention before he slowly stated: “I don’t even know what they looked like anymore.”

He let out a shuddering breath, he’d just have to follow his first instinct then. He slipped into the house to grab the ‘lab bag’ with his medicine and wraps, he quickly coiled the red scarf around his neck then grabbed his walking cane. “Sans has dislocated himself, without any knowledge of the magic chances are he’s appearing and disappearing all over the place,” he took in Papyrus’s widened sockets and softened his, ‘we’ll find him,’ he signed resolutely.

Gaster had insisted their odds were better if they split up but no attempt of persuasion would allow him out of Papyrus’s sight. In the end it was probably for the best, Gaster couldn’t ask nearby monsters for information but as they neared the end of New Home no one seemed to have recognized anything odd. Fatigue was already beginning to work against the older skeleton as he fidgeted with his lab bag. “Is that ketchup?” Papyrus asked as they stood on the border between Hotlands and New Home.

Gaster raised a brow as he observed the single streak of glossy red, ‘I believe it is,’ he signed in a trance.

“Sans was here then!” Papyrus did a quick sprint around the area but it yielded no new merits. “Come on we have to hurry!” he grabbed his father’s wrist and pulled him towards Hotlands.

“Papyrus relax the Underground is a safe place,” Gaster assured him.

“Y-yeah,” he muttered, “but if he’s just appearing and disappearing he could be anywhere! The magma pits of Hotland, the Snowdin River, the falls of Waterfall- he’s alone and scared and I have to help him I have to!”

Gaster’s sockets widened, he rubbed Papyrus’s back, “we’ll find him Papyrus and if not I’m sure he’ll find his way home.”

Papyrus didn’t seem the least bit reassured as they were met by the smoldering heat. It was so egregiously early that not a single monster was present against the molten orange stone. They tore through areas that were usually crowded with little effort or hindrance before they headed to the labs.

Out of a nervous habit Gaster checked to make sure the doors were locked, a few nocturnals may be working but only those with key cards could enter at night.

“More ketchup,” Papyrus muttered as he pointed out a sloppily written ‘4’ on near the building. “If that’s four that means we’ve missed him twice!” he lamented.

“Papyrus, he’ll be fine,” Gaster reassured him but his own confidence.

“I’m going to text Undyne and-” he opened his phone, his thumb tapped against the keyboard, “well Undyne will surely be great enough!” He stated proudly, “you text Grillby, Asgore, and Gerson!”

“No one is awake at this time but us,” Gaster pulled out his phone regardless.
“Then I will call Undyne and wake her up! We aren’t going to find him in time!” he fussed as he selected her contact. Gaster reached to give him reassurance but the boy was far too upset to acknowledge it as comfort. He pulled out his keyboard and sent out the message as he had been told. His eyelights moved back to Papyrus when he was done, he’d tear up the whole Underground if that’s what it took to find his brother.

Papyrus shoved his phone back in his inventory before he pried Gaster off of the building to explore every nook and cranny of Hotlands, all the while bemoaning about their terrible taste in puzzles. Gaster found himself being tugged around more and more as his body fought against his continued wakefulness. “Papyrus we haven’t found anymore clues of his presence, perhaps he’s already found his way home?” he tried.

“We haven’t even checked Waterfall or Snowdin yet!” Papyrus stomped his foot, “you choose now to be lazy?” Gaster recoiled from the boys burning spirit, he was right he shouldn’t be faltering now. “I know it hurts and your tired,” Papyrus’s expression softened, “but I know you’ll want to be there when we find him! You love Sans very much and I know you don’t really want to give up, you never do!”

“Fine, fine,” he rubbed his sockets, “lets go to Waterfall,” he leaned heavily against his walking stick as they entered the dark hall illuminated by nothing more than the dull neon sign that read ‘Hotlands.’

Sadly, Waterfall was very quickly turning out to be more of the same. They found a few more ketchup numbers: ‘12,’ ‘18,’ and ‘6’ in various alcoves but there was little they could do to form a pattern without the missing numbers. Hopefully Sans was figuring this out faster than they were.

As the night stretched on Papyrus never lost his vigor, no object was too small to be overlooked or too large to be overturned, he was relentless. Gaster on the other hand was nothing more useful than Migosp without a crowd. His eyelights followed after Papyrus far before his feet would, he should be just as enthusiastic if not more. He wanted to find Sans he really did but his body just wasn’t cooperating with him.

How humiliating would it be if Papyrus had to carry him back? Maybe it would be best to part ways here. There wasn’t the slightest chance Gaster would be able to sleep until Sans was found but he was feeling particularly useless as water weighed heavier and heavier against his clothes. Papyrus was enthusiastically pressing through rushes, puddles, and cattails without so much as a flicker of hesitation but Gaster had to cautiously choose each step. He was just holding Papyrus back.

“They really should have railings on these bridges,” Papyrus bemoaned as he glanced down at the spike like pillars reaching up to him.

“Come now Papyrus perilous adventures are a part of growing up,” he chuckled leaning heavily on his cane.

“You’ve made that the most obvious,” Papyrus folded his arms in mock annoyance.

Papyrus kept walking further along the bridge as Gaster’s breathing began to shutter against his ribs. Cold sweat formed over his bones as his body informed him he’d reached his limit for the night. He’d need to call into work, he was going to be completely useless there too. He fidgeted with the zipper on his bag to grab his medicinal tablets when Papyrus stopped suddenly.

His soul shone bright as his eye sockets traced every crack, stone, or crevice, “Sans is here.”

“What do you-” He felt the disturbance of magic in the air before he could finish his own question.
His head snapped towards the cavern ceiling just to the right of the bridge. Sans appeared a fraction of a second later plummeting to the black chasm of spikes below.

“Sans!” Papyrus called as he reached out with blue magic but the boy had no talent for grabbing a moving target. Gaster knew his own magic was useless, knew whatever he conjured wouldn’t last. The cane left his hand before he thought about it, his bag fell to the ground as the thought reached the front of his mind, but it wasn’t until he was in the air that he realized his body was actually moving.

He wrapped his arms around the tiny skeleton whose sockets were gray with fatigue, his skull was stained with cyan tears that dampened his skull. “Sans I need you to fold space,” Gaster stated as if their free fall in the dark was a regular occurrence. Sans was beside himself, curled in Gaster’s arms in a way he never had as a child, his tiny fingers ensnared themselves against the black fabric as he whimpered into his father’s ribs.

Gaster reached deep for his blaster but his magic wasn’t materializing, he was too tired for such a raw concentrate. There was only one thing he could try, Asgore was going to have his head if they lived but, it was their best bet.

His eyes pulsed in beats of yellow before slowly a ting of pain echoed in his skull when cyan began to form. This was too slow, the stalagmites greeted them in the darkness. Gaster pulled deep, his eyes responded to the desire as the stone attempted to break their fall but with a shout Gaster and Sans disappeared.

Gaster had just enough time to drop Sans on the golden tiles before he was thrown into the wide stained glass window. It cracked against his meager weight as he slumped to the ground, his ribs writhed as his magic twisted in venomous spirals inside his bones. A cough erupted as his chest contorted inwards in heaving pulses. Acidity built up along the inside of his jaw but he hardly had the magic for it to develop into anything.

With half lidded sockets he looked to Sans whose body slowly adjusted to the ground below him as he staggered to his feet like an alcoholic. His sockets widened, his right went vacant while his left sparked to life in a flicker of bright cyan blue before it was immediately replaced with a bright yellow. He screwed his sockets tight, “Sans look at me,” Gaster barked.

“No, no, I don’t- I- can’t,” he scratched at his sockets but when Gaster made the demand again he reluctantly locked onto Gaster’s topaz eye lights. Sans swallowed hard as his magic slowed its’ flickering until his eye light settled on a matching shade. Gaster breathed a sigh of relief, his shaking arm extended to Sans who slowly slumped into it.

Gaster tapped his teeth to the side of the boy’s skull, “you’re alright. You’re fine.’ He cooed softly.

Sans laughed shakily, “о-of course y-you know me just- uh- just,” he rubbed his face with both of his hands as his laughter grew louder, “I can’t think of a pun!”

“You must be scared if you fall to think of one,” Gaster ran his thumb against Sans’s ribs.

Sans snickered, “that was pretty terrible.”

“But you’re smiling,” Gaster grinned.

The smaller skeleton pulled away just enough to fix Gaster in a very serious glare, “I’m always smiling.” Gaster covered his mouth but between the nerves, the adrenaline, the burning pain throughout his entire body, the laugh escaped him anyways. It was loud and awkward with pitches
in all the wrong places but still he laughed without restraint.

A shadow loomed across them as the pair laughed in their delight to be alive. Sans was the first to look up, “h-hey uh Fluffy Buns,” he wiped his sockets, “can I borrow your phone? I need to call my brother.”

Asgore’s purple cape hung over his bright pink night robes as he reached into his pocket to pass Sans the phone. Sans clumsily fumbled with the enlarged device before he paced off down the golden hall. Even when he had reached the other end of the corridor Papyrus’s worried scoldings could be heard over the receiver. Asgore reached down to Gaster who declined the gesture, “I can’t move until I have some medicine in me.”

Gaster made his best attempt at a clumsy jawed explanation as to why they were in the Final Corridor at such an unusual time and of course how they found themselves there. Sans listened quietly as Gaster signed while he spoke so Sans could understand whatever outburst Papyrus was very likely to have. The King had been suffering from a bout of late night insomnia when he saw the text from Gaster but as he’d been preparing to leave it appeared they’d found him.

“Sans!” The name echoed around the hallway to announce Papyrus’s presence, “next time you plan to do experimental magic tell me where you’re going first!” He huffed.

“Sorry for making you worry bro,” Sans snickered as his weary sockets did their best impression of mischievous.

“I was not worried in the least!” He declared but Gaster snorted at the hypocrisy. “You are alright aren’t you?”

“Just tired bro, nothing new,” Sans smile seemed to be the exact reassurance the taller skeleton had been longing for all night.

“And you!” He pointed dramatically to Gaster, “what on earth were you thinking jumping off a bridge like that?” He shoved the pill bottle in Gaster’s hands.

“You did what?” Asgore frowned. Gaster had conveniently left that part out of the story.

‘It all worked out in the end,’ he signed sloppily as he messed with the pill bottle.

Papyrus’s eyelights seemed as if they were attempting to escape his skull as they pulled forward but he eventually accepted the recklessness of his family and sat to talk as they waited for Gaster’s medicine to take effect.

His soul was having an increasingly difficult time pushing magic down towards his legs. It had started off as simple pain but he’d been informed recently that if his limb were to detach from lack of magic flow it would probably dust. After that Gaster had finally started taking his medicine seriously. Really all the pill did was help his magic flow but he didn’t have any other means of doing the same thing.

Once he finally stood up Asgore suggested they use the guest rooms after the three skeletons fell asleep in a heap together on the floor.

When the night was consumed by morning Gaster found it impossible to sleep in the large plush guest bed. Perhaps he had grown too accustomed to the lumpy uncomfortable couch- now that was a terrible thought. He untangled himself from the cushy covers, that could very well be softer than clouds, to slowly steady his feet against the ground.
Gradually he applied pressure to his knobby knees until he pushed up from the bed to stand over them. His weary sockets sat half lidded as he made his way to the former heirs’ room where the boys were currently tucked in.

He opened the door just enough to loom in the entryway, Sans sat up to face him while Papyrus’s soft ‘nyeh’ like snores filled the air. He’d anticipated Papyrus to still be awake, the boy hardly slept at all anymore, “can’t sleep?” He whispered to Sans as he sat at the end of the bed.

Twin eyelights focused on the wadded covers between his hands, “had a busy day.”

Gaster nodded in agreeance, “it was.” The night fell between them to twist the casual tone into one more reserved. The gentle crunch of the mattress as Sans fidgeted was surprisingly grating this late in the evening.

“Sans,” his eyelights swept over to his son, “I’ve told you boys that a glow is the indication of adulthood for skeletons hadn’t I?”

Sans nodded with furrowed brows, “hard to feel like an adult when you spend most of the night just trying not to cry.”

“I was terrified,” Sans continued, “I had just enough time between jumps to put a dab of ketchup on the ground and hope I could figure out if I had some sort of a pattern going, but not really.” His fists rubbed at his socket, “I started thinkin’ what if I end up on the surface? What if I just pass straight through the barrier and up there all alone.”

“That’s not how the barrier works Sans there’s no means for any magic to escape the Underground,” he stated flatly. “What did Papyrus say about that?” He knew if Sans was bothered enough to tell him than Papyrus had already heard of it.

“He said if I wound up on the surface he’d find a way up there to come get me,” Sans replied flatly.

“After what I saw tonight I bet he could,” Gaster agreed as Sans fell back into silence. “Typically colors develop one at a time but your magic has always been a sort of all or nothing deal,” he stated to stop the quiet before it could settle over them again.

He focused on his son fidgeting with the blankets and imagined the yellow that had stared back at him. Sans was an adult, or at least was mature enough to glow. The tiny child from the Orphanage had developed into a wonderfully brilliant mind with a terrible sense of humor and an unbreakable spirit. Pride began to fester in his bones, “Sans,” he stated firmly, “I think it’s past time we discuss you working at the labs.”

His eyelights brightened enough to trace the edge of his smile with white light, “you mean it?”

“When do I speak without meaning it?” Gaster raised a brow in challenge but at the child’s expression he raised a finger, “don’t start.” Sans gave a half laugh as he laid back against the headboard, “I’m not just giving this to you though, I want you to write a thesis over your alternate applications to blue magic and turn it over to my assistant by the end of the week. From there they will evaluate whether or not you will receive an internship to the labs.”

Sans’s magic hummed in the air with waves of ecstacy and thought, “I wouldn’t have it any other way,” he smiled lazily, “I’ll make you proud dad.”

Gaster pulled himself up by leaning heavily against the footboard, “you do everyday Sans.”

“Good night,” Sans called as Gaster tentatively made his way to the door.
“Good night Sans,” Gaster replied with a sleepy half smile before he pulled the door shut.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter has had more variations of any so far. It was one of the first six I wrote and had started out as Gaster giving a lecture after Sans had shown a few sparks of color here and there. I think this is better than that at least!
Battle of the Mages

Chapter Summary

Sans is finally working at the labs and as great as that is it doesn’t prepare him for the conversation he’s about to have.

Chapter Notes

I asked two chapters ago if anyone wanted the story of Gaster’s scars I got one vote yes so here it is.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gaster had to pause as he approached the front door of the labs, he still wasn’t used to seeing him there or the warmth that burned in his cheekbones every time he saw the glistening white coat hanging off his son’s frame. “So how was the first real day?” Gaster smiled without thought. Proper procedure had orientation days, safety days, procedure days, it was a whole week before Sans could officially state he was an intern in the Labs.

Sans looked down to his toes as a pale blue tinted his cheekbones, “I really love it.” He rubbed the back of his head still not making eye contact with Gaster, “everyone is really nice and helpful. That other intern that did all of that procedural stuff with me, you know, Alphys? Yeah Al’ she’s over in the robotics section now.”

“Good to hear,” he’d read her thesis and had instructed for her to be put in the department but he was glad to hear it had been followed through.

“Yeah met with her at lunch, she really likes it to,” he shoved his hands in his pockets.

“But what about you?” He was glad to know Sans had finally started making a friend of his own, the boy had no trouble socializing but he rarely seemed to get close to anyone, but that wasn’t what his mind had been buzzing about all day.

“Oh, uh, I’m over in the magic research and development because of my work with Blue Magic,” he shrugged. “After lunch they were workin’ on something they couldn’t afford to have a novice like me help with so I went over to the physics department and kinda watched.”

“I didn’t know you were interested in physics,” Gaster smirked.

“I got a couple of projects open with it and, after going here there and everywhere in the Underground, I started leanin’ into it more;” he nodded his head. “They really liked havin’ an extra set of hands, their team is a little smaller than the other ones I’ve seen.”

“So are you wanting to transfer?” Gaster proposed, it wouldn’t be too difficult for him to arrange.

“Nah, it’s just day one, besides the magic stuff is a lot of fun too. You know me, I just like science;”
he grinned unabashedly. “Hey you check your phone recently?”

Gaster furrowed his brows as he pulled his phone from his pants pocket, “oh no.”

**DON’T WORRY ABOUT DINNER DAD! UNDYNE AND I ARE MAKING PASTA!**

“Yeah should probably hurry home while there is still a home to get to,” Sans strode towards the door.

“Coat stays in the lab,” Gaster corrected.

“Oh,” Sans looked over his arms, “forgot I was wearin’ it.” In the next moment he had disappeared. It had taken some coaxing to get Sans to practice the magic at all after his initial shock. Once Gaster figured out simple means of limiting its’ range Sans began to practice within the house. He was still uncertain in his capabilities with the skill but he was coming a long ways very quickly. Gaster was sure he would be abusing the ability to avoid walking in no time.

Sans flickered for a moment before he was fully solid in front of Gaster. He inhaled deeply before he released a slow exhale that allowed his eye to extinguish.

They walked as briskly towards the Capital as Gaster’s achy bones and Sans’s short strides allowed until they were on the front steps. Gaster reached for a key but Sans vanished and opened the door from the other side, surely it wouldn’t be long before the boy forgot how to walk.

“Papyrus. Undyne.” Gaster barked in his best impression of a soldier. The offenders were relatively unstained as they poked their head out of the kitchen doorway. Gaster pulled a board and dry erase marker from his inventory, “Undyne why are you staying here instead of your own home?”

“Because I burnt it down,” she replied flatly when she saw the board.

He rubbed his sleeve over it, “and why aren’t you at Gerson’s then?”

“Because I burnt his rug after cooking in his fire place,” she replied without remorse.

“So?” Gaster prompted.

Undyne puffed her chest out, “so I have to do something to show my thanks!”

“Not burning the house down during your stay would be thanks enough,” he cut between the pair, “I’ll start dinner.”

Papyrus and Undyne begrudgingly left the kitchen with the promise to brainstorm something even better as thanks. Gaster assumed he’d be able to handle just about anything as long as it didn’t involve fire.

The pair had already sorted the ingredients for pasta across the counter so he might as well resume where they left off. He’d never call himself a chef but it had been a long while since he’d served charcoal. His dishes still tended to be under salted or spiced, whatever the phrase Grillby used was, with a tendency to be over cooked or undercooked but it was at least recognizable as food. He placed the noodles into the already boiling pot as he went to work on making a sauce, getting to work with a knife was still his favorite part.

Regardless of skill level spaghetti was a rather easy meal to make, provided you didn’t burn down the house in the process. He turned towards the living room where Undyne was regaling his boys with a tale from her most recent job.
She’d made her way into the Royal Guard ranks and was doing very well. Her energy was encouraging to her comrades, her strength was unmatched, and her enthusiasm was unfathomable. Gaster decided it best not to interrupt one of her stories for fear of a spear shaped bullet being launched out the window.

He dished everyone up a plate: extra sauce for Sans, extra meat for Undyne, and a proper balance of it all for himself and Papyrus. He set the plates down on the coffee table, it was unique seeing the couch completely full. Undyne was in full story telling mode as she gestured wildly and Papyrus was full entranced by every gesture. His fists clenched and unclenched in his excitement as his eyelight sparked at every spoken word.

Undyne spoke with such enthusiasm that, even though he didn’t care for the subject, Gaster had no choice but to listen. He shook a dozing Sans lightly, then showed him his plate, pulled a chair in from the kitchen, and sat to listen to her tale.

There had been a string of robberies in Waterfall as of late but it had only taken the Guard a week to track the culprit down. Gaster was rather impressed with how much of the detective work Undyne had participated in. The child, she was still a child compared to him, was bronze over brain but her intelligence wasn’t lacking.

“Then when we cornered the culprit six more bandits dropped from the stalactites on the ceiling!” She dropped her hands quickly to show their descent. Gaster shook his head with a smile on his face, there were no stalactites in that part of Waterfall. “It was just myself and Doggonit but the crooks didn’t realize we were the ones with the upperhand!”

Light blue dots appeared on the floor, Gaster only had a moment to summon a few sets of hand bullets to pull the coffee table out of range before the spears erupted from the ground. He rubbed at his temples, that was a bit too quick, his poor faithful hand bullets were covered in pale gray cracks. He sighed as he dispersed them, “come on Dr. G that would have been perfect.” Her snaggletooth yellow grin was wild as she brushed her red hair back into place.

“Gaster, please,” he wrote on the board, she was always coming up with asinine names to call him.

She waved her webbed hand in dismissal. Gaster rolled his eye lights while he pushed the table back into place. “So once we beat them into submission, we had them return all of the stolen goods and sent the group to the holding cells for a week,” she shrugged, “I thought it should be longer but Asgore’s pretty lenient.”

“Your amazing Undyne!” Papyrus cheered, “the Royal Guard is so cool!”

“Yeah we are!” She flexed, “you ever thought about joining Papyrus?”

Gaster choked on his spaghetti and Sans seemed to find himself in a coughing fit. “Of course I’ve thought about it,” Papyrus sang oblivious, “I definitely want to finish school first though before I decide what I want to do.” It was a sly look but Gaster caught the glance over towards Sans.

“Papyrus,” Gaster rubbed the residual pain from his fit out of his chest, “why would you want to join the Guard?”

“Because they help monsters,” he smiled as he bolstered his posture, “and I want to help!”

“That’s the spirit!” Undyne punched the air.

Gaster’s eyelight flicked off, he remembered the skeletons that proudly wore armor for the Kingdom they loved. That fought to protect their friends, their family, tooth and nail at the front lines. There
were so many skeletons, they were expendable, magically gifted but that hardly mattered when forced to brandish a weapon. No matter how skilled or trained they were it wasn’t long before they were dust on the battlefield.

As a child he’d watched over and over again as the commanders failed to utilize his kind’s gift for magic only to watch them dust over and over again. Chainmail needed to be specially crafted to make up for the lack of mass they had but the army didn’t have the time or materials to deal with weakness. They made due with what they had, what they had were bodies in suits of armor that understood death was a consequence of their decision to fight.

He could see it, Papyrus clad proudly in the old armor, pike in hand along skeletal comrades. His smile plastered plainly on his face even as everything fell apart around him, his allies dusted, he wouldn’t give up but- he wouldn’t kill either. Papyrus would fall to the ground as little more than a memory.

“Hey what’s your deal with the guard anyways?” Undyne folded her arms as Gaster’s eyelights focused back on her, “Asgore said you were almost one until you chickened out.”

Gaster’s sockets narrowed into a glare as he wrote, “I highly doubt he said it like that.”

“Of course not,” she rolled her eyes, “but why didn’t you? Asgore says you are crazy strong with all sorts of crazy magic! Don’t you think if you’d have helped out things would have been different?”

“STOP,” Sans interrupted her tangent, “it’s his business not yours.”

Gaster hands wrapped around the base of his sleeve, he attempted to reach for the board but mentally he couldn’t tear his hands away from the fabric. “Papyrus would you transcribe for me?”

“Of course,” he reached over the edge of the couch and grabbed a notebook from the basket. He flipped the book open to a new page then looked to his Dad who was still fidgeting with his sleeve.

The base of Gaster’s ribs writhed as he tried to will his mouth to open, “I was—” His eyelights fell through the holes in his palms, “weak. I’d been surrounded for a long time by monsters much greater than me.” He tapped his teeth together, “I passed on my opportunity to join the Guard because I could not fight like them.”

“The Royal Guard, as it is now, is much better at understanding its’ members strength and weaknesses but it wasn’t like that then.” He sat back in his chair, “Toriel offered me an apprenticeship with the Royal Alchemist, which was essentially the Royal Scientist before me and I took that instead.”

“What was that like?” Papyrus asked, it was an innocent question but it sent a shiver down Gaster’s spine.

“Not good,” he stated simply, “there’s a lot I am willing to share with you but that is something I have told very, very few monsters,” he clicked his teeth together with finality. Asgore had been involved in the whole fiasco but Gaster had been sworn to secrecy afterwards. He’d gone a long time without even mentioning his apprenticeship until Grillby tried to take him to a bake sale, a spider bake sell. At that point Gaster thought he’d owed it to his friend to explain why he’d become a shaking mess of bones.

He shook the thoughts from his head, he really didn’t need to go there right now. “So to answer your question Undyne, where I could have been in the guard I couldn’t live up to their expectations. After the barrier went up I, like a lot of monsters, misplaced my anger onto them,” his eye lights dimmed,
“simple as that.”

The eyes that fell on him told him they knew there was more but no one seemed quite bold enough to pry. He forced himself out of the chair then grabbed his plates, “I’m going to throw this in the sink anybody want me to take theirs?” The remaining plates were passed to Gaster who turned to the kitchen.

“If you didn’t fight how’d you end up with the scars?” Undyne asked bluntly. “I mean I think their wicked cool but how’d you get ‘em.”

There was the question, he knew it was coming, but he’d hoped he’d be able to hide away before it formed on their teeth. It had been ages ago that he’d promised his sons they could hear the story when they were older. They were well out of stripes and in a few months they were going to be drinking age, but they’d gone so long without knowing he’d hoped they no longer cared. “Boys do you want to know?”

They exchanged a glance that held more words than they could have ever spoken in such a short time, “we’re curious,” Sans stated.

“But only if you want to,” Papyrus added.

“I don’t but I never will,” he placed the stack of plates onto the table before he sat back down in the worn wooden chair he’d had forever at this point. His boney fingers felt the patches where the clear coating glaze was beginning to crack away and rubbed at the wood beneath. The splintering wood gave its’ best attempt at stabbing into the bone but there was no means for it to lodge itself into the surface. He sighed as he tilted his head back, “it was towards the end of the war.”

His ill fated apprenticeship had just ended, the battle of AshFall had been the cornerstone in a turn around in the course of the war, things were finally looking up for the monsters. It just, didn’t really seem that way to Gaster. As the monsters celebrated and drank with one another over their hard won battle he’d been rather uneasy. His fears would prove to be well founded when the King was murdered in the night by a group of seven human mages.

“Asgore is dead?” Papyrus gasped.

“No,” Gaster pressed his brows together, “Asgore’s father.”

Asgore was beside himself with grief while he, barely an adult, was handed a country ruined by war. Toriel focused her efforts on assisting her betrothed take the throne. Gerson fought to compose the troops under his division, without the King were they still his soldiers? Several Soldiers had attempted to run claiming the war had already been lost.Grillby was- recovering.

“I didn’t have ties to the military though, I could work on my own and do what I thought best,” Gaster messed with his fingers. He’d deemed it his responsibility to trail after the assassins. “I saw my friends sacrifice, their burden, their strength, and knew I had done nothing to prevent that pain,” he looked at his fingertips, “but I knew how to fight on my own.” Most of his LV had been accumulated before he started traveling with the soldiers from picking humans off, in a one on one battle, he had the advantage.

“So I pursued the King’s murderers,” he dropped his head, why was his soul racing?

It was a foolish mission anyways but he was well aware that running in headstrong wasn’t an option for him. No matter his skill, no matter his magic, he was still just a fragile little skeleton. It was a gut instinct that the billowing red tent belonged to the leader of the group and he marked them as his
main target. In the night he was silent, nearly undetectable as he laid traps around the other tents that were a mix of practical and magical. He just needed to discourage any interference in case the fight grew more difficult than he anticipated.

One on one. If he could just keep it that way he’d have the advantage, he knew every last point of weakness in a human’s body that was all the easier to exploit if they didn’t have their armor on. His eyelights traced around the clearing until he found the perfect spot to hide. He settled in between two high branches of a nearby tree.

From his hiding spot he conjured a single hand bullet with a pale glow to loom around the tent. A matter of moments later the red clad mage tore themself awake from their slumber and emerged in little more than a red tunic. There was no hesitation as bone bullets pierced straight through the human’s throat.

Undyne jumped to her feet, “I didn’t know you had it in ya Doc! That’s amazing!”

“Y-you killed them?” Papyrus’s voice shuttered,

Gaster chortled, “it was short lived.”

It felt like a blink that lasted just a moment too long but the next thing he knew the Mage was coming out of their tent again this time brandishing a weapon at their hip. They turned to the tree line and fired a single bolt of lightning into the forest canopy far from Gaster’s location. It didn’t take long for the bone bullets to slice through his enemies throat once more but another odd blink later the Mage was leaving their tent again.

“How?” Sans asked with narrowed brows.

Gaster shrugged, “a strange, rare, magic that can only be acquired by humans that allows subtle manipulation in time.”

It was oddly quiet for her but Gaster could hear Undyne mutter: “I should write that down.”

It was three more of the blinks later that the Mage discerned his hiding spot. It hardly mattered though without Gaster’s eyelights to lead the human they had no idea where he was. He kept his magic to standard bullets without any glow, the darkness shielded him better than his cloak, as time and time again his blows landed true.

The human took longer to escape their tent this time and when at last they emerged they had fastened a lantern to their belt. Still, it wasn’t enough time to put on armor, but piercing the dark seemed effective enough. Suddenly Gaster was dancing around the tip of a rapier as he did his best to keep his distance. As long as it was one on one he was in control, his bones parried the sword and landed true once more breaking straight past the ribs to the soul of the human.

His fingers curled around the bark as he found himself in the tree again, the LV he’d acquired from his deed once again slipped away like a phantom in the night. The human already had the lantern ready so the bolt of lightning came faster than Gaster had anticipated. His sternum to his toes were momentarily paralyzed as the electricity charged through him.

An oddly proud smirk crossed Gaster’s skull, “I won’t ever forget the look on their face as they realized their would be murderer was a tiny frail little skeleton.” The mage had red brown eyes and well kept brown hair tied back with gold lining it. A nobel then. Gaster rolled to the side as the rapier made to pierce his soul and crawled back to his feet.

A yellow magic charged arrow snagged against his cape and pinned him to a nearby tree luckily, the
fabric was very thin. Gaster summoned his blaster and drained the red mage’s HP to one before he finished the job with a single bullet. The yellow mage kept joining the battle sooner and sooner with their bow. A spark of yellow would catch in the distance then he’d only have a moment to parry or side step the launched arrow.

There wasn’t any space for him to disable the mage from the distance between them but it wasn’t too much of a burden until he found an arrow lodged directly against his sternum and a space in his shoulder blade. He was pinned helplessly to a tree but his blaster kept the red mage at bay. It did not however hinder the Violet Mage whose mighty Axe freed him from the tree at an expense of a large chunk of HP.

He dropped to all fours, his eyes caught a brilliant red as his bullet fell uselessly against the violet mage’s armor. They’d come prepared. His eyes burnt hotter and his bullets changed color in response, suddenly mustering intent was effortless as he focused back on the red mage. “They called me a demon,” Gaster chuckled, “they weren’t wrong.”

He didn’t have a moment to catch his breath anymore, when the world blinked in front of him he was pinned to the tree by the glowing yellow arrow again. His soul pumped for any possible reserve to harden his defense against the axe swing that followed. None of his magic was in place this time around to defend himself. He’d lost the darkness, he’d lost his one on one, as he faced the ground he realized he’d lost.

But his magic didn’t seem to understand this, it sang hot in his bones a low somber tone that began as a whisper. It compelled him to move, to keep trying, he had to figure something out. Bullet after bullet was smashed to bits as he summoned them for sloppy shielding. He couldn’t hear the mage’s speech as his magic thrashed around his skull in a song he’d never heard but felt nostalgic regardless.

It cloaked his soul in magic, his gauntlets grew spikes marked with the symbol of a human soul, his cloak spiked out at the ends and fell sturdy against him, his boots coated in a thin lightweight metal that somehow made his movements swift. Suddenly each weapon missed him further and further as his magic hummed to him.

Now when the world blinked his magic song was already embedded against his soul. For the first time in his life he was strong. It didn’t matter where his attacks hit they did damage, massive chunks of HP fell away at a time as bullets flew carelessly in the air. It was sheer euphoria that curled though his bones in wave after wave of ecstatic bliss. It hardly mattered when the world blinked anymore, he could handle it, he could do anything in this state.

This was what it felt like to be a real monster, to be strong as a soldier with heaps of LV, like a boss monster. He laughed with delight at the mere thought of fighting toe to toe with Asgore without the monster pretending they weren’t holding back. “I-” he ran his fingers harshly against the chair giving it a fair chance to press its’ splinters into him, “I was reckless. Absolutely high off of whatever it was my red magic had conjured inside of me.”

Never in his life had he been allowed to be reckless but as he gave in to the magic more and more he found his thoughts washed away in a sea of red. His red eyes burnt so brightly in the darkness when the lantern was broken there wasn’t any difference. The mage’s were eventually joined by the Indigo, Cyan, and Orange mages. He was outmatched and outnumbered but as he skirted away from close blow after close blow he hardly cared.

Until the Indigo Mage’s staff sent him to the ground, in the next second his vision was clouded by the Red Mage’s rapier being wielded like a broadsword.

“There wasn’t a crack,” Gaster recalled, “it sounded more like stepping through a puddle than metal
against bone.” The sound startled him into an alertness as he pushed aside his adrenaline to watch white drip down the edge of the weapon, “it took me a few moments to recognize that was my bone.”

“Drip?” Sans asked with concern plastered across every spoken letter.

Gaster nodded, “monster bodies can’t handle red magic,” he pressed his thumbs together, he could almost feel the light give to his bones as if they might melt into each other.

Undyne swallowed harshly as she gaped at Gaster, “how did you escape?”

“I didn’t.” Gaster replied flatly. The humans were right to be puzzled, monsters turn to dust when they are defeated but this one was sitting at a fraction of HP and was melting in front of them. “They saw an opportunity in my oddity,” his finger tips dug against the flat of his hand. The green mage finally made their appearance, she was instructed to heal him up to a single solid number of HP. His body wasn’t at risk of draining away anymore but it was still far too soft to maintain its’ true shape.

“They pinned me to the Capital’s walls,” he could hear the ringing of hammer against spike as they pressed it through his palms, “they shoved a note in my pocket for the ‘New King’: the war is lost, surrender or suffer a fate worse than death for all your Kingdom.”

Grillby had been the only one that had any idea of Gaster’s escapade but it was Toriel that found him on the city wall. It was Gerson that did his best to salvage his miserable mess of a body. “I truly shouldn’t be here today,” his eye lights were distant as he stared at his past self, “I was a foolish child and it is only the kindness of others that I have to thank for my life.”

“Undyne, I hope that as a member of the guard you can take something away from this story,” Gaster stated, if he was being frank it was probably best for the child to have heard about this. If there was even a chance that red magic was in her- well, he’d have appreciated a warning. “Sans. Papyrus. I hope-”

He hoped they would still look at him the same after hearing about his ugly scars from one act of recklessness that had permanently disfigured him. He hoped this wasn’t a terrible back step as they realized what their guardian was capable of. He hoped- “You said you did that as a kid?” Sans asked to which Gaster gave a curious nod, “well then it’s ancient history at this point,” he shrugged when he was given a short glare.

Papyrus ground his teeth before he smiled over to Gaster, “yeah, I don’t think our dad would do anything like that.”

Gaster covered his mouth, screwed his sockets shut, they could still see him as their dad. Dad, a singular word, a title he’d yet to tarnish, “thank you, thank you so much for letting me be your father.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m trying to decide if I’m starting to get tired of consistently writing or if it’s because I aged the pair up, which I did for a very specific reason, but still. It could also be that I just don’t have as much time to write as I did starting this project. But- 20 consecutive weeks! That’s crazy to me! I normally give up on maintaining a schedule around 4 updates and drop a project entirely before 10. So thank you for your support!
As always I hope this chapter was enjoyable, thank you for the kudos, and I appreciate the comments.
Meeting the gray carpet was a rather abrupt awakening after an evening spent in the perilous grasp of nightmares. His fingers scraped against the carpet and he wondered briefly if they were merely so coated in grime that they were gray to begin with. The ever so slight stickiness was annoyingly tangible as he strained against his own meager weight to sit against the couch.

With a grimace across his face he popped his spine back into proper alignment. A long sigh escaped him as he moved up to his knobby knees that swore a physical and verbal complaint as he pulled himself onto the couch. Pressure stung against his ribs now that he was conscious enough for magic to flow through his bones. Being attached to a pill bottle was a grievance in and of itself let alone what occurred if he didn’t cling to it.

He grabbed the pills from his bag then ground them against his teeth. There was still an hour to sleep but there wasn’t much point, he’d just be thrown into another vague nightmare that would only increase his fatigue.

Papyrus’s light was still on, the boy either didn’t need to sleep much anymore or he had an outright refusal to do so.

Gaster knocked gently on the boy’s door before he pushed it open, “good morning Papyrus,” he called sleepily. Papyrus feverishly shoved a mess of papers and books into his backpack, “you know it’s honestly more peculiar that there’s never anything out of place in your room.”

Papyrus chuckled, “oh no, just- finishing a project!” He looked down to his bag, “absolutely nothing else!”

“Heck?” Gaster raised a brow before he sat on Papyrus’s bed.

The bedroom had hardly changed at all from when the boys first came to live with him, in fact Papyrus seemed absolutely incessant that everything remain the same. There were a few more of those plastic figures he’d gained over the years, a small table that their current puzzle was sat atop, and, with Sans now rooming in what was once Gaster’s study, it was forced into a perfect pristine
condition, not even a Woshua could warrant a complaint. Papyrus took his time rearranging the rest of his school mess before he pushed the rolling desk chair over to Gaster.

“Are you excited?” Gaster prompted.

“For what?” Papyrus looked to the air in search of the something obvious he’d forgotten.

“You’re going to be graduating soon,” Gaster smiled, “all of your hard work has amounted to this.”

“Oh yes, very much excited, very greatly,” his sockets pointed down to the bed. “What time is it Dad?”

“About four,” he replied flatly as he scrutinized his son’s face.

“Oh my well I simply must get some sleep! I have a busy day of projects tomorrow,” he dove under the covers, “night dad!”

“I’ll get the light for you,” his finger latched around the switch, “good night Papyrus,” he flicked off the light.

That was the first of several unique encounters with Papyrus. Speaking about school or graduation always equated in a quick diversion to just about any other subject. The boy’s backpack was seen at home less and less despite the boy’s need to meticulously organize it for the new day. When Sans and Gaster would return from the labs they would find the house in increasingly better conditions. Sans didn’t seem concerned by this until the evening they had to eat outside because the door was too wet with paint to touch. Dinner as a family was no longer a regular occurrence as Papyrus spent most nights training with Undyne.

“It’s like he doesn’t even want to see me anymore,” Sans explained as they walked home from the labs.

“Perhaps he is just trying to become his own person, monsters tend to do that around his age,” Gaster shrugged.

“Yeah from their parents, not me,” Sans shoved his hands in his pockets, “has he said anything to you?”

Gaster shook his head, “no but I’m sure he will when he’s ready.”

“I can’t stand him being upset about something and not being able to do anything,” he gestured vaguely with his left hand, “and I know he’s upset.”

“He’ll tell us when he’s ready,” Gaster repeated.

Unfortunately when he was ready happened to be in the early morning a few days later. Papyrus shook Gaster gently awake, “you were shouting,” he stated as he sat down on the floor.

“Sorry,” he yawned, “what time is it?”

“DoyouthinkIamdumb?” Papyrus spat out.

Gaster’s mind reeled in an attempt to figure out what time that was intended to be before he turned to his synthesia to read the runaway word, “no,” Gaster said harshly and the boy flinched. The couch listed its’ grievances as he pulled himself to sit, “you are brilliant Papyrus, a bit naive but you can afford that at your age.”
Papyrus scratched at the back of his hand, “yes I am very brilliant, and very great.”

He rubbed his weary sockets as he revisited the original question, his hands folded into his lap as he thought. “Have I made you feel that way?” His mind traced along branches of memories to try to discern if he had ever unintentionally insulted the boy. Perhaps it wasn’t something he had stated directly. It could be Papyrus was upset that Sans was working in the labs but the boy hadn’t ever shown interest. He never would have had the patience to properly educate the boy but that wasn’t because he was idle minded but-

“No, no,” Papyrus waved his hands in assurance, “whatever you’re thinking isn’t true.” He inhaled, “I’m just-” he squeezed his sockets shut before he relaxed but his fingers were caught against the end of his sleeve.

Gaster uncoiled the boy’s fingers from the fabric one by one, “Papyrus, please. Why do you feel that way?”

“There isn’t any reason,” Papyrus assured him.

“Then why do you need reassurance?” he stated flatly.

“I don’t,” he trapped his fingers amongst each other, “I’m just not like you and Sans so I forgot.”

Stars, it was like pulling teeth, it was impossible to get the boy to speak openly if he didn’t want to- actually, that was exactly the same as Sans. It would take a great deal of arguing to decipher which was actually worse about it. “No you aren’t,” it was a simple fact, “but we aren’t like you either.” The immediate withdraw from the conversation that tore a warpath across Papyrus’s features was soul shattering. Silence slid between them like an obese snail with a particularly repulsive trail.

“What happened at school?” Papyrus’s sockets widened at the question before they pointed down to the floor.

“Nothing, absolutely nothing has happened, a lot of nothing, so much nothing I don’t know what to do about it,” his bones creaked as he squeezed his hands, “lots.” Gaster was ready to give up when the boy looked up, “I’m the son of the Dr. W.D. Gaster and nothing has happened.”

“I just want to be popular- liked even, that’s not a lot,” Papyrus ranted with hotly air.

“No it isn’t,” Gaster agreed with a raised brow.

“No it’s not,” Papyrus threw his hands into the air, “but I’m evidently weird, which is like being different and unique but apparently I’m such a spectacle that I appear unapproachable!”

Papyrus had learned hands and how to decipher WingDings but Gaster had still yet to truly grasp the language of Papyrus. “Surely you have some friends in class,” Gaster tried.

His shoulders slouch as his sockets fell to the edge of the couch, “uh no actually, I am just too great for my peers I suppose.”

That hardly sounded right, sure the boy was rather boisterous and rash but he was far too kind hearted and steadfast to not have any friends. In comparison Gaster was cold, standoffish, and naturally intimidating, between his height and scars, yet he’d earned a small but close group of friends.

Papyrus shifted as he pulled a slip of paper out of his inventory and displayed it to Gaster who scanned it over. None of this seemed accurate, “Papyrus what is this?”
“My teacher thinks it might be best if I share my talents with the next class,” he shrugged in a surprising impression of Sans’s indifference.

Gaster was surprised by the stuttering in his soul, quick pulses of, what-fear? Disappointment? Frustration? His eyelights scanned over the paper in a quick attempt to ground himself, “you have time to turn this around, we can fix this, your teacher says they’ll accept your late assignments and allow you to retake a few of the tests.”

Gaster was the most brilliant mind in the Underground and he’d let his son slip through the cracks. The paper crinkled as his grip tightened on the flimsy sheet, he’d been neglecting Papyrus. His continual failure to recognize social cues as well as his belief they’d come to him if they had problems were both to blame. This was preventable, and easily, but he hadn’t noticed.

“It’s okay,” Papyrus smiled.

“No it’s not Papyrus,” this was his fault, “why didn’t you come to me before it reached this point?”

“Oh that’s easy! You have a lot to worry about right now and I didn’t want to make it worse,” he stated simply.

Gaster furrowed his brows, “Papyrus I always have time for you, nothing is more important. No secret project at the labs, no ailments from old age, or nightmares are more important to me than you.”

“I know,” Papyrus’s gaze was trapped in the kitchen.

“Even if you were concerned about me why in the Underground didn’t you go to Sans?”

“Sans is-” He paused after his voice cracked, “happy. Really, really happy. His magic is so- weirdly positive! It’s hard to recognize him,” he singsonged, “and I’m happy to see him like that!”

“But?” he prompted.

“There are no buts,” he stated, “I really am happy for him! So much so I don’t want to make him upset!” He ran his hands over his skull, “I’ve been trying, I always do! I ask more questions than anyone in class, or I did before they kindly asked me to stop, I take elegantly organized notes, I’ve been going to Gerson’s-”

The glare that crossed Gaster’s sockets was not one he was proud of, “you went to Gerson but you wouldn’t come to me?”

Papyrus shrunk, “Undyne says he is a very good teacher but he doesn’t really teach what’s in the book.”

Petty. The tar spinning to fairy floss in his his nonexistent stomach was petty. He knew and acknowledged that but it didn’t change the feeling or diminish it in the slightest. It was a bitter taste he should have washed from his mouth ages ago but he couldn’t quite muster it. His relationship with the monster was better than it had been in a long time but it was still there. That itch of black on the back of his soul he couldn’t quite rid himself of.

Gaster deflated into the couch as he pressed his hands against his sockets, what was he supposed to do? It wasn’t too late to fix the papers, the tests, but the boy’s unbreakable belief in himself had a crack in it. That needed to be addressed first or the boy would be closed off to the idea he could learn.
Papyrus’s intelligence was arguably of a different sort than Sans and Gaster’s but by no means was he unintelligent, or dumb. The boy had an uncanny ability to recognize patterns in just about anything, a mind for comparison, an eerily brilliant memory when it came to the way things looked, and a dexterity to his hands that served him well in his independent projects. “Papyrus, I’m going to prove to you that your incredulously deprecating perception that you might be even in the least bit dumb is inaccurate,” the boy’s head seemed to be spinning as he read over the symbols.

Stubbornly he pulled himself up from the couch before he tUCKed into the lab. Sans had definitely made the workspace his own which essentially meant the room was a mess. Gaster pushed a few stools out of the way to open up his ‘junk drawer’, he pulled out a bag full of several pieces, a few wires, and an old radio.

Gaster scattered the objects across a work table then gestured for Papyrus to sit. “This is Grillby’s old radio, he asked me forever ago to fix it and I’ve yet to get around to it. I want you to do it for me,” he folded his arms.

“I will not do your work for you!” Papyrus shot him an offended look, “besides I don’t know how to do that.”

“No but you can figure it out,” Gaster rested his hand on Papyrus’s shoulder.

He felt the boy’s shoulder buckle under his grip, “I don’t-t- I can’t-” Papyrus struggled against his flawless personality and his current self doubt.

The scientist leaned against the table, “now this is called a soldering iron, the tip gets hot enough to melt thin pieces of metal so be careful.” Gaster went through each tool he would need as well as a few he might not. As he went along he would back track to quiz the boy over some of the tools and their uses. “Now this,” he gestured to the radio, “still has all of the pieces in the place they need to be. Feel free to use it as an example.”

Gaster ran his fingers over the borderline decrepit device, this was the first radio in the Underground. He’d gifted it to Grillby while he still lived in Hotland to hear the King’s speeches without having to attend them in person. It was the very first in what eventually became a rather widely used item. It had a place of honor in Grillby’s for a long while before it finally gave out, it had been a long painful slow crawl before it quit altogether. Grillby didn’t even want it to be fixed but Gaster had insisted and it had sat in that drawer ever since.

“Dad!” Papyrus barked sharply. Gaster blinked as his eyelights focused on his son, “my you were lost in thought but don’t worry I brought you back!” He laughed.

He rubbed his weary sockets, “thank you for that,” he mumbled. “Well, think you can do that?”

“I don’t know,” he opened the back of the radio.

“I’m sorry I didn’t hear you?” Gaster eyed him.

“I will try,” Papyrus nodded.

“I spaced out again, what?”

“I’ll do it,” Papyrus shot.

“Come now, you can do better than that.”

“I will do it! I will fix the radio because I am great!” Papyrus gripped the tool firmly then turned
eagerly to the device.

“That’s my boy,” Gaster smiled as he rubbed the top of the boy’s head receiving a focused, ‘Nyeh’ in response.

Gaster collapsed into the kitchen chair and rubbed his face as he looked to the clock with disdain. Luckily, it was the weekend so he wouldn’t be deemed useless at work tomorrow but it was still far too early to be up for the day. He leaned back in his chair while he drummed his fingers against the table. The repetition of the drumming calmed his mind as he focused on each distinct thump, the way the pitches varied per fingertip, the rate they hit the table, gradually slowing.

“Dad?” He startled awake as he looked with blurry eyelights up to Papyrus, “I think I finished it.” Gaster’s eyes slid to the clock, it was almost time to be up for the day. He twisted from side to side, maybe short bursts of napping were better for him, he felt more rested then he had in a while at least.

“Well,” he yawned, “lets see it.”

“Oh, yes of course!” Papyrus slipped back into the lab to grab the radio while Gaster worked at waking his mind. Already he could tell a difference in Papyrus’s steps, they were lighter then they had been, that eager challenging smile held in his sockets, Gaster didn’t need to see the radio to know he’d succeeded.

Still, when the radio was presented to him he happily looked over every detail. There were a few wires that weren’t connected all the way but other than that everything looked exactly like the original. Gaster rubbed Papyrus’s back, “you did it, see? No instructions necessary.”

“Of course! It is only natural for I am a master at all puzzles!” He placed his hands on his hips as he laughed.

“You’re too cool for us Paps,” Sans mumbled as he sluggishly pulled himself onto the table, “what’d ya do?” Gaster handed the radio to Sans whose eyelight sparked to alertness, “you made this?” He turned it over in his hands.

“I made the inner workings yes,” Papyrus’s voice was cautious as his brother moved to turn on the device. The audio was warped, particularly brassy, but it played the waltz regardless. The boys seemed off put by the sound quality as they pulled away.

Gaster raised his hand, “the speakers are ancient at this point it wasn’t ever going to sound pretty,” his mind drifted off as he remembered the melody, however broken. Toriel and Asgore used to dance to this style of music in fantastic displays of grace and magic. Their dancing was as beautiful as it was inspiring as it blossomed across the Underground in grand sweeping movements. For a long time the pairs happiness was the symbol of hope and prosperity in the Underground, it hadn’t been the same since they split.

“You did a very good job Papyrus,” he turned off the device, “fix those few wires and we’ll bring it to Grillby this evening, he’ll be happy to finally have it back.”

“How hard would it be to fix the speakers?” Papyrus turned the device over in his hands.

Gaster considered this, “we’d have to find some that would work.”

“Yes! Let's do that! I want to fix it all the way,” Papyrus beamed.

“We can try,” Gaster hummed, “but I believe there is something else that needs fixed first?” Papyrus raised his brow and tilted his head ever so slightly to the right with thought, “something Sans could
assist you with?” He was unphased to which Gaster sighed, “your homework Papyrus.”

“Right,” his smile dropped.

“Of course bro, I’m always happy to help,” Sans leaned onto his hand, “whatcha wanna work on?”

“Everything,” Papyrus stated enthusiastically as he went to grab his bag.

“Everything?” Sans asked.

“Everything,” Gaster reiterated, “he’ll explain I’m sure.”

It seemed the reasoning hardly mattered. The moment Papyrus emptied the mass amount of papers from the inside of his bag Sans grabbed the books while Papyrus sorted the assignments by type. They divided the work up into manageable loads and Sans even created a time table for how long they’d spend on a subject before they moved on to prevent mental fatigue, though Papyrus removed the breaks in between subjects. Once everything was blocked out they got straight to work.

It was a tedious task that the two fell effortlessly into their well rehearsed routine. Sans seemed to have Papyrus’s learning pegged having created a complex system of color coding and sticky notes that was far too many steps for Gaster’s tastes but at least it was effective. Pages were decorated in sparks of color as equations were explained as if they were organic beings instead of constructs, he was relatively surprised by both of the boys level of abstract thinking.

He didn’t need to be hovering over the boys while they worked, he pushed his chair out. “Hey Dad, would you help with history?” Papyrus asked with his sockets still focused on his sheet.

Gaster rubbed the back of his head, “I’m sure Sans has it covered.”

Papyrus glanced over their battle plan, “no he’s going to fall asleep right here,” he pointed to the line between english and history.

“Hey I’ve been doing really good about not just falling asleep,” he folded his arms with an over the top wounded expression.

“So you’ll help right?” Papyrus glanced over slyly.

“Of course,” Gaster replied as he grabbed the history book off of the table.

The book was faulty by nature, the great battles of the war all occured in the order that they happened but the ones that were emphasized Gaster had found hardly noteworthy at the time. Monsters that he knew to be rather cruel to their soldiers were praised as great heroes to such a point they were unrecognizable. He flipped forward a ways in an attempt to find the battle of Ashfall, he missed it by several decades and found himself staring at a singular paragraph that covered the LV trials of the Underground. He scoffed, that’s all that was warranted from the near toppling of their monarchy? Interesting.

Gaster was lost in this faulty glorified version of the past when Papyrus sat down on the opposite side of the coffee table. “Did he fall asleep?” Gaster raised a brow to which Papyrus nodded quickly while he set up the table.

There had been very little reason for Gaster to develop communication skills outside of his workplace. Being able to relay important details to a physicist or engineer was completely different than trying to explain something to his son. He was picking up very quickly that Papyrus’s biggest issues were trying to remember the who and the when by the time they got to the end of the chapter.
Gaster held up the questionnaire close to his chest and listed off the questions to no avail. Papyrus was frustrated as he stood up to pace the length of the living room when he only got two of the questions right. Simply telling the boy the answers in black and white wasn’t working.

Papyrus sat back down with a frustrated groan as he focused on the questionnaire again. “Lets try something different,” Gaster pulled up a notebook from the side of the couch.

He proceeded to describe a general, or king, or person of interest in as great of detail as he could instructing Papyrus to draw them. From there Gaster would list off the years the individual was associated with and Papyrus would write the numbers inside of their clothing. Once they had the persons of interest set up their own war against homework as Gaster reread the chapter. Papyrus would point to each figure as they were mentioned and scrutinized his drawings occasionally adding a few new lines to them as a detail stood out.

Papyrus tensed with his over the top focus when they approached the questions again. This time there were no problems as every question was answered quickly and promptly with little more than a glance down to his drawings. “You got it,” Gaster smiled.

His son’s face lit up with excitement as he jumped to his feet, “I have conquered the war!” Gaster wasn’t going to inform him it was just one of the longer battles, he was far too distracted by the gleeful magic that laced the air with inebriating waves.

The old monster’s face was painted by nothing more than pride as he watched his son, “you are very intelligent Papyrus, you can do so many great things, just because you learn different than your peers doesn’t mean you’re not.” Gaster’s eyelights traced over the drawings, “you are my son, you couldn’t be anything but.”

Papyrus’s sockets took a wide sweep over his father’s form as some thought stitched itself in his mind, “you know, you’re a pretty cool skeleton yourself.”

His smile was lopsided as he regarded his son, “well I have learned a thing or two from the coolest of skeletons.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter overall is still sort of ho-hum for me but I’m glad I didn’t skip it like I was going to.

Next chapter is going to be a big one so if this was a little ho-hum for you the next chapter will be different.

Here’s my Tumblr if anyone wants to see it. I have a few Doctor’s Charges pieces coming up soon. Tumblr
Hotdogs

Chapter Summary

After a rather stressful day at work the skeleton family decide to take a break in Waterfall.

Chapter Notes

Happy Halloween! Thank you all so much for reading! The comments last chapter really made my day! It surprises me so much that people are still picking this up to leave kudos so thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Dad relax,” Sans stepped in front of the pacing scientist.

“My assistants sent me home Sans,” he ran his hands over his skull, “they think I’m incompetent.”

“No they just want you to rest, which you aren’t doing,” Sans slouched on the couch as his eyelights slid lazily back and forth while the other monster wore a rut in the floor.

“Not everyone is content in idle behavior,” Gaster bit out, “speaking of which shouldn’t you still be at work?”

Sans shrugged, “they understood.” He tucked himself into the corner of the couch, “a nap wouldn’t kill ya you know.”

“We’re so close Sans, this project has finally started yielding the results we wanted and they sent me home,” finally he collapsed onto the couch painfully aware of the pulse in his knees. He placed the end of his hands against his scrunched up sockets, they were so close. When Gaster shut his eyes he could see the pulsing white of the barrier giving way to darkness. The substance they’d discovered on accident was doing more than they had ever believed possible.

Gaster used to spend weeks shut in his lab with only Asgore giving any note of grievance and Grillby would text him on occasion. Now his assistants seemed to believe his well being was their responsibility.

The subtle shaking in his fingertips tapped against his skull, “I’m tired,” he admitted shallowly, “but I’m not content doing nothing.”

Sans nodded, “yeah I know,” his eyelights traced the ceiling, “hey let’s go make hotdogs in Waterfall!”

“Hotdogs?” Gaster tilted his head to Sans’s direction.

“Yeah,” he reached over the side of the couch, “those fire roasted typha plants you like.” He curled back into proper sitting position and opened up a magazine, he skimmed through the pages briefly
before he tilted the book to Gaster. The page was decorated in a plethora of red white and blue with little stars all over the page where humans were smiling brightly as they ate in a bright green field.

Gaster clamped his teeth as his eyes fell to the blue expanse of sky around them, it stretched forever, stamped with billowing puffs of white clouds. There was so much just out of reach beauty in the image but Sans was focused on what they were eating. He didn’t know how wonderful the grass felt as it crunched below bare feet, the way it pinched into the joints of one’s toes gently staining them green, or how the wind felt when it carried a cool breath of air from somewhere far away.

“They do look quite similar,” he stated sadly, “why hot dogs though? They don’t look like dogs at all.”

“What do you want them to have little ears or something?” Sans laughed.

“It would help,” he shrugged.

“So you wanna go? I happen to know a shortcut,” he winked but excitement quickly lightened his features, “we should get Papyrus make a whole day of it!”

“I don’t think Papyrus needs to be skipping school right now,” Gaster drummed his fingers against the edge of the couch, it did sound nice.

“Come on,” Sans needled, “just once.”

“Fine,” he rolled his eyelights in a feign of annoyance but the idea of spending a day with his boys was far too inviting to fight against.

It wasn’t too long after the word was muttered that they found themselves fully stocked on all of the necessary fixings. A short explanation to a flustered Papyrus later and they were met by the cool spray of Waterfall. Sans plopped to the ground with sweat permeating his brow, “I think I need to stick to one passenger at a time.”

“But you’ve come so far with the magic brother! Even if it is incredibly slothful,” Papyrus placed his hands on his hips.

Gaster released the flame from his lighter and set it inside their circle of stones. They skewered the collection of typha plants and listened to the soft crackle of the fire. He released a soft tut of air, this was actually perfect. His mind was slowly easing away from the fever pitch he’d worked himself into as he focused on the company he was in.

Papyrus was chatting happily about his day, he’d caught up on enough of the assignments he was no longer in danger of missing graduation but not enough for his own image of perfection. He’d started doing a lot of community service projects in an attempt to get a feel for what he would like to pursue after school. In the name of personal betterment half of the personal lab had become a workshop as Papyrus began to work on larger and larger projects.

Him and Sans had always been a team but watching them work together in the lab/workshop never failed to bring a smile to his face. They were both such brilliant boys.

Sans was doing exceptionally in the labs, a regular chameleon, he stayed late most nights to work with other departments that gladly accepted his assistance. The only downside to Sans’s growing popularity was that his terrible sense of humor was spreading around the departments like a virus.

He slid the typha plant into the bun before he decorated it with relish and yellow mustard. As he took a bite he let out a content sigh as he leaned against a stalactite, this was what his soul needed. His
eyelights slid over to Sans who was making careful cuts into his water sausage, “what are you doing?”

His permanent grin appeared to widen as he turned the food to face Gaster, “it’s a hot cat.”

Gaster covered his teeth a short lived chuckle escaped him, “I thought you said they were hotdogs?”

“On the surface,” he shrugged, “we can have hot cats down here.”

“Sans no one would recognize what you were saying just call them hot dogs,” Papyrus groaned before he took a bite. Sans observed his creation for a moment before he doused it in ketchup.

Gaster’s attention fell away from his sons to the glistening crystals that danced shadows on the dark cavern walls. The orange sparks from the flame raced to meet the stones and paint them with their orange light for a fleeting moment. It was nothing short of beautiful.

It was difficult to admit but the Underground was no longer some horrid testament to their imprisonment. This place he had detested for so long was now the home of his boys, his home. Memories of that blue sky were fading and distant. Despite the pictures, the drawings, photographs, textbooks, anything he could get his hands on really, his time on the surface felt like a distant dream not something that had happened.

Sans and Papyrus were happy. This was their home, they didn’t long for the surface the same way he did. They were content, and there was nothing wrong with that. Did they even want to go to the surface? They’d been fascinated with human culture for as long as he knew them but they would be completely uprooted from everything they knew.

“Boys, do you want to go to the surface?” He tried to pass it off as nonchalant but it was eating at him now. He’d put so much effort into breaking the barrier for their sake yet he was beginning to wonder if it was just for himself.

“You know how to get there and you didn’t tell anyone?” Papyrus’s tone was harsh.

“No,” he dismissed, “but I’m making one. I think we’re really close.”

“How close?” Sans brow raised.

A smirk teased across his skull, “within the year if everything goes as planned.” The air became stagnant as not a single breath was released, not the most encouraging sign.

“That’s, uh, wow,” Sans’s fingers scratched at the back of his hands, “I guess I thought about it but never,” his voice trailed off, “thought we would, ya know.”

“Of course we would! Dad has been working very hard at it and he can do anything he sets his mind to,” Papyrus cheered but his smile dropped, “but it is kinda scary.”

“Everything is weird up there isn’t it?” Sans stated flatly, “I like reading about weather but it seems like some sort of a story to me.”

“I’d really like to meet the sun but I can’t even imagine what it looks like,” he scratched his chin, “in Sans’s books it looks like Hotland but in pictures it looks like when you stare at a light for a long time and look away.”

“Not just nature what about people?” Sans looked to his brother.
“I am sure they are all very nice, it will take no time to befriend them,” he smiled.

“Not if Asgore has his way its’ gonna be another war isn’t it?” his eyelight flicked off.

“No, I am sure we can find another way,” he tapped the edge of his fist to his hand in resolve, “we can live together peacefully I just know it!”

Gaster had attempted to jump into the conversation a few times but the pair knew what the other was saying even before they finished and formed their own thoughts before he could catch on. “The surface is weird,” he nodded in agreement with the first point. “The sky is indecisive and unpredictable no matter how much you study but it prevents any two days from being the same.”

He’d always assumed if he found a way to break the barrier that didn’t involve the souls Asgore wouldn’t need his war but he hadn’t considered it past that. If there was another war would he be expected to fight? He looked down to his slightly shaking hands, in his condition he’d be dust after a single battle. Sans and Papyrus didn’t deserve to fight but what if they wanted to? Probably not Sans but if Papyrus thought that was the right thing to do then his brother would surely follow. Then they would fight in meaningless battles knowing only the worst of humanity as he had.

“I don’t know what would happen if there was a war,” he finally stated, “but I really do hope we can all get along peacefully. My old bones can’t handle another war.”

“If we just talk to the humans I know they’ll see how nice we are!” Papyrus was particularly gleeful in the statement as his magic twirled positivity into the stagnant air.

“If anyone can do it it’s you Papyrus,” Gaster rubbed the top of his head. “Anyone want anymore Typha plants?” He stretched up the stalagmite he was sitting beside with awkward stumbles until he was up on his feet again, “I’d like to stretch my legs a bit before you have to carry me home,” he winked.

“I am very strong I would do it happily,” Papyrus grinned.

“As mortifying as that sounds I’ll just take a short walk,” he summoned his walking stick from his inventory.

“Yeah I’ll take another one,” Sans smiled lazily up to him, “I’d go with ya but this fire is really comfy,” he yawned with half lidded sockets.

“I’ll go with you!” Papyrus jumped to his feet with an effortless motion that rendered Gaster jealous.

“If you don’t mind Papyrus I’d really prefer to go on my own.” He knew the boy meant well but he couldn’t keep up with his bouncing strides and forcing the child to his own pace was frustrating.

Sans wrapped his fingers around Papyrus’s wrist and gave his argument nonverbally, Papyrus didn’t seem convinced but he sat back down, “five minutes,” he stated.

He had to stop the roll of his eyelight, he was so gracious to have permission from his child to walk around at his own snail of a pace. No, he had to mentally stop the agitation from earlier from ensnaring him once more.

The rushes swayed gently along the river’s edge as the current lapped against the shore. The air was fresher than usual as a gentle breeze made its’ way into the Underground.

It was a phantom impression of what it was truly like on the surface but he hardly cared as he uncurled his fingers to feel every ounce of the wheezing breath of fresh air as he could. This was the
one memory he carried true to his soul no matter how much time passed, the feeling of wind against bone. No matter how weak this was it brought a pleasant softness to his magic.

Typha plants bowed to greet him as he passed. Perhaps he did need to get out more, not to do anything or go anywhere in particular just go. As the cyan water babble its’ nonsense a melancholy he’d never observed sang to him from the surrounding caverns: they could be leaving. No, they would be, sometime soon.

All of the giddiness he’d had working on the project just wasn’t there at this moment. Far too many things would have to be taken care of once they reached the Surface. Housing, development, mapping, peace talks, it was as if they had climbed to the top of the mountain only to find another one. It was necessary though, they didn’t have the resources to keep living like they were, but once the barrier dropped he’d be a useless old monster.

No, if nothing else his boys needed him and since when did he shirk from a challenge? He might not be as determined as he once was but it was still in there. The only thing that could stop him was his own dust slipping through his fingers.

He snapped a few typha plants from their shoots with a gusto more befitting of Papyrus than himself before he slipped them into his inventory. As he approached the hallway they were settled in he could hear the distinct voices of his boys as they spoke amiably to someone. The font that drifted through his mind was standard but sent chill ran down his spine. His cane clicked against the, suddenly far too, silent dark blue caverns.

The distinct rainfall like sound of shattering magic dusted the air, “it’s okay we aren’t going to hurt you,” Papyrus’s voice had a tremor to it.

Gaster held his breath as he rounded the corner, the creature standing in front of his sons was a human. His fingers dug into the wood grain sharp enough to leave indents: there was no way his boys could handle a human. What was he supposed to do? What could he do? The human was around adolescent in age, not quite an adult but no longer a child, judging by the dust that clung to their shorts they’d killed a monster before.

Their LV was minimal, he read as his eyes flared yellow, but any EXP on a human was bad news for an untrained monster. Undyne had to be on patrol somewhere in these caverns, maybe he wouldn’t have to slay the human, he could just serve as a diversion for his sons to escape. The human raised their fists above their chest as they locked eyes with Papyrus, “please you don’t have to do this,” Papyrus assured, “I have a feeling we could be very good friends!”

Sans shot his brother a look Gaster couldn’t quite read from here. It was his responsibility to protect them. He wouldn’t deal with the repercussions of his fear. His body shook as his fingertips flaked the bark on his walking stick, “Sans take your brother and run.” Gaster’s broken Font echoed around the cavern and drew the human’s attention.

“I really don’t-” Sans started.

“That is an absolutely terrible no good idea!” Papyrus reprimanded.

“Please, I just want you to stay safe,” Gaster expressed flatly. That really was all he wanted to know no matter what the pair were safe and far away from the action that had to be performed. This was a human, they’d be one step closer to freedom.

“Call Undyne,” he glared over to his boys.
“We aren’t leaving you!” Papyrus shouted but in the next moment he and his brother were gone.

The human looked between where the boys had been standing and Gaster who seemed to resolve that the monster in front of him was the bigger threat. Gaster had no hope of communicating with the human in front of him. Their orange brown eyes burned deep into Gaster’s sockets as they focused their intent directly into him. He could nearly taste the intent the human set in the air as they tensed their body to strike first.

It pained him the similarity, he was around Papyrus’s height with a similar lanky build. At the end of the day human or not this was a child but there was only one thing he could do. Gaster focused his thin trickle of magic into as much of a stream as he could muster. All he had to do was stall until Undyne arrived.

His eyelights trailed to the hem of the boy’s bright orange shorts, who had he killed? A streak of orange from the child’s glove just barely missed the side of Gaster’s face as he stumbled backwards. Gaster’s soul stuttered as it realized before he did that this wasn’t going to be about tactics and skill this was about survival. The walking staff was returned to his inventory as he balanced himself on two legs.

Gaster summoned a bullet he’d hoped to use as a shield but it shattered to powder when it met the child’s fist. A quick jab landed flat against his sternum, the pain spiraled along the shape they should have had and cried out to him for comfort. He folded around himself as he observed a chunk of his HP drop. This child was too quick for him in his current state, he drew up a fence of bones and kept layering them as the child viciously smashed through them.

Their ginger hair was wetted down by the sweat that drenched their bandana as they bashed their fist against bullet after bullet. Gaster reached deep in himself pooling together everyone ounce of his magic to the shape of his infamous skull bullet. The cannon half moaned to life before Gaster’s concentration was broken by a sweep to his ankles that sent him spiraling to the ground. It fired a singular unaimed blast in the general direction of the child before it dispersed into nothing.

Gaster didn’t have a moment to catch his breath as the child struck their heel into the air in preparation to bring it crashing down into his opponent. It was a split moment of thought that conjured the bone bullet to lodge itself against the child’s chest. They recoiled from the attack as the skeleton pried himself from the ground thankful for the life saving fear pumping through his bones. A smirk twitched on his face as he saw he had dropped a quarter of the child’s HP in a single blow.

For once in his life Gaster was glad to have his LV. The child didn’t take long to recover and was quickly back to shattering every bullet Gaster could muster. Just a little bit of distance, that’s all he needed, the child was obviously not a mage and his reach was considerably shorter than Gaster’s. His heel caught against the cavern wall and his soul sank with the cold realization he was cornered.

They howled in pain as the nursed the four points of damage to their health. He snickered despite the crippling nature of the situation: it was still a child. It wasn’t sure of its’ skill or strength and was clearly just pushing forward the best they could. What compelled them? Was it some false sense of justice? The child launched a kick that hooked around his femur and sent him tumbling to his knees. As he stared up ever so slightly into the child’s eyes he could see the brilliant pulses of orange that spiraled from their soul.

It was reckless but the child had moved this far thinking they were doing the right thing. Thinking that the scary monster in all black was an enemy that needed to be smited. He didn’t see the foolish
old father nor the brilliant scientist he saw a random encounter that needed to be overcome in order to progress. He struggled to move from his knees but his body wasn’t responding, everything was as slow and bogged down as molasses. The child’s fist was drawn back, Gaster had just enough time to observe this before it moved toward the arch between his sockets.

The first thing he noticed was the sound of his bone splintering, the next was the way the world blurred away from him in a foggy surrealistic painting, and last was the back of his skull grating against the cavern floor. He was too dazed to move, too distant to respond, he exhaled a long overdue breath as he anticipated the finishing blow.

He’d died in battle, protecting his children, if he had to go he would much rather it be this. His fingers curled towards his palms, everything felt loose, chalk like. The bones grit against each other like sand and as he waited for the final blow he realized he’d never made it back to Grillby’s. His breath rattled uselessly in his ribs as a sickeningly sweet serenity laid over his bones and traced his teeth with an ease he’d never known. Shouldn’t he be screaming, crying, anything to defy the cruelty fate had thrown to him?

Footsteps echoed away from him, a small yawn like voice chuckled across the cavern, “hey there’s a lot of other things you could be doin’ pal.” The short curly lowercase letters drifted through his half conscious skull like boney fingertips against a blackboard. He could only hope it was some delusion that looped through his skull, some lingering regret, but now he could hear the sound of bullets cutting through the air. Of magic shattering under the force of the brave human’s fist.

Gaster could feel the start of tears form in his eyes, one hit, one solid hit and his boy would be dust. He’d have died for nothing. His magic thrummed in his chest, he willed it to pull him together for just a little bit more. His fingers scratched at the ground as tiny cracks began to form at their tips but he wasn’t done yet. If he fell here barrier research would be put on hold and Asgore would be the only one shouldering the hopes of the Underground. He couldn’t be done.

His form crumpled to lay flat against the stone surface, he could hear the bleak sounds of a battle he couldn’t assist with. It was as if he was tearing his soul open searching for any nuance of himself he hadn’t called upon. He wouldn’t let it end like this somewhere inside of him was an unquenchable will to fight, he needed it back.

A low somber song began to thrum in his soul, quiet, forgotten. It hummed in his ribs with a voice not quite his own but far too familiar. He strained his jaw as he reached for his magic, there was so little left but- he was determined.

His eyes burned red in his skull as he willed himself to sit up, to stand. Dancing at the end of his vision was a blur of blue and a smudge of orange. He staggered in his footing as his body swayed from side to side, but the song echoed its’ whispers through his skull. The smudge was so close to the blur, for a moment he wished his vision was clear enough to see his son’s nimble dodges but as it was a delicate pride sat atop his soul.

He reached deep into his magic, raised a shaking hand to the sky, and conjured his infamous blaster fully. He stumbled forward with the effort and rested his hand firmly against the overgrown bullet whose sockets shone crimson. One shot, one chance, his magic hummed a note that crescendoed into a mighty roar. His vision sharpened, “Sans!”

Sans’s sockets widened but in the next moment he was gone, a single clear shot fired straight to the human. The music grew louder as he watched the human drop to the cavern floor, black twisted inside of his soul in tendrils of tar. His bullet dispersed and with it his balance. He stumbled forward as the bright orange upside down soul lifted from the human’s body, he smiled, Asgore didn’t have to kill that one.
The world spiraled away to him in twists of dull blues and grays as his skull once more hit the stone floor, but it was cushioned by his disorientation. A deranged smile spread across his face, that meant he really was a monster. He’d have to tell Gerson. Two vague shapes towered over him, both of them were safe, that was all that mattered.

Everything fell to sleep behind the black curtain as the world slipped away.

Chapter End Notes

Don’t worry he’ll be fine...surely.

This chapter has to be one of the most fickle I have written probably because this is the tipping point.

I love reading action/adventure novels but I never thought I was any good at writing them. Which is probably why I wrote this with the yellow and blue humans as well before deciding on orange.

Minutes away from whatever the reveal on the Undertale Twitter is gonna be. I’m curious but cautious!
Chapter Summary

The battle seems to have been harsher than anticipated.

Chapter Notes

Every time I post I think: this is it. This is the one that ruins it and all of your support always just floors me! Thank you so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There was a lingering fear that greeted him when he found himself surrounded by a rolling white fog like light. It felt like hours that his conscious lingered in this half aware state before it all gave way back to darkness.

A burning sensation grounded him to a world of tactile touch. It started in a small patch but it spiraled up a thin but detached surface until he couldn’t tolerate it anymore. His eyes were a blur as he opened them, there was a shriek, then some mumblings, before his sockets proved too heavy to keep open.

Gray? No, it was moving like- like a flame, gray fire? No. There were traces of orange but they were quiet. White thin fingers were wrapped around his, they hung over his metacarpals like a blanket, not quite resting against him. He was vaguely aware of what he was, or that he was anything, but he couldn’t quite place what.

Shifting drapes over a window caught his attention as his sockets fluttered open. The gray flame was still at the foot of his bed but he could make out the tweed jacket the monster was wearing. A low rumbling but warm voice was speaking pleasantly to scratchy uppercase letters somewhere out of his sight. Blue and white was curled up in the chair next to the flame. That was- the name escaped him.

He hated being restrained. His ribs gasped for breath against the soft flickering texture that lined his ribs. Everything was bright, far too bright.

“He will be fine,” Papyrus’s tone was nothing short of assuring. A smirk forced itself across Gaster’s face, a bit tense and pulling but prominent. His son was right there, sitting on the foot of the bed wearing the worn but soft red scarf around his shoulders.

“Paps w-” Sans’s voice was shaken as he adjusted his position in the chair. They were both safe, a smothered laugh attempted to escape him but he couldn’t quite manage the strength for it, he hadn’t failed them. The fight felt like a distant memory smothered in layer upon layer of cotton but knowing they were safe was enough.

“No what ifs!” Papyrus scolded harshly, “unless of course it’s what if we get ice cream later!” He fumed before his tone softened, “you’re going to make yourself sick.”
His elbow dug against the unfamiliar bed as he attempted to pry himself up, give any sort of an indication he was there. As he strained forward he found himself restricted by a throbbing pain in his ribs, a cough manifested as he pushed harder. Papyrus sat up straight, “Dad please we are trying to—” he paused when he locked sockets with Gaster, “are you- you’re awake!”

Gaster winced as Papyrus gingerly wrapped his arms around his father’s shoulders, “you’re awake! I knew you would!” His sockets widened as he threw himself off of the bed, “I’m sorry are you okay?”

A groan like creak escaped his mouth as he attempted to pry it open but it seemed his body wasn’t much in the mood for cooperating. His eyelights scanned his surroundings with a growing sense of distaste as he took in the white walls, the pristine windows with the view of musty green walls, chips and cracks in the walls that resembled bullet holes, and the mass amount of equipment around him. He was in the health division of the labs, his breathing quickened as he recognized himself to be strapped to the bed, his left hand pinned to the bed rail.

Undesirable memories surfaced as he found himself restrained. He couldn’t move. “Hey Dad,” Sans’s voice was as soft as melted chocolate, “you’re in the health ward. You uh, took a bit of damage,” he wrapped his fingers loosely around Gaster’s right hand, “but everything is going tibia okay.”

Papyrus muttered something hostile that was too quiet for Gaster to catch, “you’re both okay?”

“Of course we are!” Papyrus put his hands on his hips, “we aren’t the ones in bed!”

Sans chuckled, “yeah no problems here. A bit scared,” he shrugged, “but gettin’ better.”

His soul lightened in his chest as his magic hummed pleasantly through his bones, despite the protest of one machine or another, “I’m glad to hear it,” tears welled up at the base of his sockets, “really glad.” He rubbed his free hand under his eyes to wipe away the liquid but hesitated as his fingers rubbed against fabric. “What is this?”

“Yeah, gonna pass on that one. The Doc will fill ya in on the details, it’s just wrapping to help with healing,” Sans’s eyelights pointed towards the door.

“I’ll go get them,” Papyrus declared but Gaster snatched his wrist.

“As long as you’re safe,” he muttered as he rested back into the bed. It was incredibly uncomfortable, somehow worse than that accursed couch, as it threatened to pinch into every last of his vertebrae but as long as his boys were here everything would be okay.

“Yeah, gonna pass on that one. The Doc will fill ya in on the details, it’s just wrapping to help with healing,” Sans’s eyelights pointed towards the door.

“Please stay,” it was so weak, childish but he just wanted his boys with him so he could ground himself in their presence, prove it wasn’t some sort of a dream. They were safe, he’d protected them— he’d killed a human. His eyelights slid over to Papyrus, he’d murdered a child. He cupped his hand over his mouth as he felt the tar in his soul, a machine began to chastise him as his magic attempted to form any sort of shape.

“It’s okay Dad, I’ll stay! Dr.Hill has been very attentive,” his smile was a bit sad as he rested his hand on his father’s shoulder. “I’m really glad you’re okay,” his expression brightened as his sincerity shone through.

“As long as you’re safe,” he muttered as he rested back into the bed. It was incredibly uncomfortable, somehow worse than that accursed couch, as it threatened to pinch into every last of his vertebrae but as long as his boys were here everything would be okay.

“We’re not the ones that fought a human,” Sans shook his head.

Gaster fixed him in a curious glare, “but Sans you—” Sans squeezed his hand firmly and gave him a warning look, “would have done it if it were for Papyrus.”
“Nah I’m too lazy for that,” he shrugged as if nothing was amiss, “it would take the whole world falling apart for me to do anything.”

“Sans,” Papyrus groaned. He shifted uncomfortably before he delicately crawled onto the corner of the bed, “I’m really glad you’re okay Dad,” he reiterated, “but did you have to- I mean.” His sockets fell to the floor, “I know they were a human but what if someone up there misses them? They didn’t even dust, they’re still here.”

Shame washed over him, “I- I’m sorry Papyrus. I had been intending to just stall until you returned with Undyne but,” he looked to Sans briefly then to his hand in his, “I wasn’t strong enough.”

“I’m glad you’re still here but it’s okay that I’m sad for the human too isn’t it?” Papyrus’s expression was guilty as his hand moved down to his sleeve.

Gaster peeled his fingers away from the fabric, “of course Papyrus, you don’t have to forgive me for what I did. Killing is terrible and it hurts the soul in ways I hope you never have to experience,” both of the boys grimaced as they looked over to one of the machines. His eye sockets grew heavy as he took in their image, “I understand if you can’t forgive me.”

“Oh course I can!” Papyrus declared, “I trust that you will do better next time!”

Gaster let out a snort of a laugh, “I hope there isn’t ever a next time.”

“Me neither,” Sans agreed.

He fought with all of his might to keep his sockets open but he couldn’t quite muster the strength for it. Everything slipped away from him in a lazy blur until he found himself asleep once more. His boys were safe.

His eyes were particularly watery as tears fell down his cheeks and blotted the bandages with tints of watered down purple. A large body of white was adjusting bobbing yellow dots over a clear object. Several minutes passed by as slowly he gained the cognitive thought to recognize the figure as Asgore. His magic hummed to form his Font but he realized slowly it was a useless effort. The crumpled sheet was smoothed out in some pathetic attempt to maintain appearances.

“Oh?” Asgore turned to face him his mighty horns just barely short enough not to scrape the ceiling, “howdy Gaster, glad to see you’re awake!”

The skeleton in question sort of half shrugged, he didn’t really feel awake. Everything was awkwardly far from him even though his vision told him otherwise. It took him a moment to recall he was in the hospital and likely still under the influence of some drug. His eyelights slid wearily around the room, where were Sans and Papyrus? Frustration with his own ailed thoughts blossomed across his face, they were safe, unless he’d dreamt that.

His magic fought against him to sting the air but it was cut off by the screech of a machine. “Gaster relax,” Asgore hummed as he pulled a chair, several sizes too small for him, up to the bedside, “you are in the health ward of the labs, your boys are fine, they are at work and school by my request that they seek out normalcy, and you are on your way back to good health.”

Restraints still kept his left hand from signing any sort of a response, he scoffed as his only means of displaying his aggravation. “When your boys return Doctor Hill is going to inform you of a few things regarding your condition,” he leaned against the bed his eyes grew distant as he thought. “It
wasn’t your responsibility to do that you know,” his dark brown eyes glinted with sparks of orange, “you shouldn’t be here at all.”

His smile didn’t reach his eyes as he looked over Gaster’s wrappings, “you should be in your lab right now tinkering away while secretly planning what to do with your boys in the evening.” His ears drooped as his head bowed, “I am so sorry. If I’d have headed out when I heard the reports instead of waiting you wouldn’t-” Gaster placed his hand on Asgore’s fist.

This was- eerily familiar. Once again the King was blaming himself and once more it was no one’s fault but Gaster’s. Cold magic shuttered like freezing rain between them as the King’s soul began to retreat back into shadow. His head hung heavy as he wrapped his giant paw around Gaster’s skeletal hand, “I’m glad to see you are alright old friend.”

“If there is anything I can do for you, anything at all, please just ask,” the scratchy pale pink pads on his hand rubbed against Gaster’s metacarpals, “it’s the least this silly old king can do for you.”

Gaster’s eyelight rounded as he took in the subtle shaking from the King of all monsters, he couldn’t allow himself to display his frustration. This was far too public of a place, he had to be the symbol of monsterdom's hope, even if he was about to fall to pieces. Gaster set his jaw and pinched sharply at the padding engulfing his hand, “ow,” Asgore bit out as he pulled away completely caught off guard.

‘No,’ his good hand signed.

Asgore’s brows fixed themself in puzzlement before he let out a weary laugh, “I suppose you are right! Shouldn’t be sitting around upset perhaps we should plan a celebration for your release!”

Gaster shook his head frantically to which Asgore began to laugh, “well perhaps we’ll let you recover a bit more but I can’t guarantee you won’t be pestered before that!” The skeleton figured that would be the case and the flutter in his soul informed him he really wouldn’t mind.

Asgore began to chatter aimlessly about his garden which allowed Gaster to relax into the mattress. Experimentally he flexed the fingers in his left hand to feel the dull ache that spread from his fingertips down into his palm. That was probably from his attempt to climb to his feet. His ribs ached from the humans initial attack and was aggravated by the rest of the battle until cracks began to form.

The cloth around his skull he wasn’t really certain of. It took him a moment to recognize that his fingers had snagged against the bandages, it would be too much of an effort to just-

His fingers wrapped around the edge and pulled forward, he just wanted to see the damage then they could wrap it back up. Asgore casually glanced down to Gaster before he pulled Gaster’s hand gently away from the wrapping, “my friend. I know you’re curiosity gets the best of you but those need to stay on.”

Gaster held up his index finger to indicate how long he was going to have the bandages removed.

“No,” Asgore informed him as one would warn a pet not to knock over a vase. “We enchanted the bandages so you won’t be able to remove them but that doesn’t mean tugging at them will do you any good,” Asgore stayed matter of factly. “We’ll break the seal when the Doctor says so,” his eyes fell flat.

It spoke to his mood that he flashed a cocky smile and pointed to himself.

“A medical Doctor Gaster,” Asgore elbowed him lightly. A small chuckle escaped from the pair before it was cut short by Papyrus barreling through the door.
“Oh good you are awake! And in high spirits! That is even better,” he beamed, “did you bring Grillby with you?” His sockets turned around the room as if it was easy to miss the living flame.

“Oh no, I fear Grillby is still not doing too well,” Asgore smiled, “I’m sure the good news will perk him right back up though.”

Gaster knit his brows together then looked between the pair but it was Sans who answered as he sauntered into the room, “eh, he wasn’t doing too hot so Asgore has been takin’ care of him.”

Oh.

The opossum doctor knocked quickly on the door before she entered with a clipboard, “good evening everyone, I wasn’t aware there was going to be such an audience,” she adjusted her glasses at the edge of her nose with a feign of shyness.

“I apologize Dr.Hill,” Asgore smiled, “it takes an army to get this skeleton to take care of himself.” Gaster’s eyelights fell to the side, he was a little difficult to care for he supposed.

She pulled up a chair and sat beside the bed, “well then would you like the good news first?” She flipped through her papers.

“I’d prefer the bad news,” Gaster stated as he sat up the best he could muster.

“Yes please,” Papyrus deliberately mistranslated.

“Well, your red magic appears to have adjusted your magic flow. It is theorized you should have an increase in mobility and an ease in daily activities,” she stated plainly. “There are several factors we don’t have: a lack of research on Skeletons and a lack of information in this red magic at all,” she gave him a daring glance, she’d been needling him for answers since she found out about the magic. “So the permanence of such effects are debatable but for now your magic should be much more responsive,” her snaggletoothed grin peaked out from her lips.

“That is good to hear,” Papyrus cheered and Asgore nodded in agreeance.

It truly was, Gaster’s magic hummed happily as he recognized this meant he was no longer a prisoner of his own body. The pair would finally allow him to take walks truly by himself. No more clinging desperately to a pill bottle in hopes of desperate relief. His eye sockets began to water as he realized he could finally return to his bedroom, the nights spent on that glorified pin cushion of a couch were finally behind him.

Dr.Hill flipped through a few pages before she cleared her throat, “there were several hairline fractures along your left hand, ribs, knees, and tailbone but we have had you on a steady treatment of green magic that should have those remedied by now.” She displayed a few pictures of the damage that made Gaster bashfully aware he’d been entirely exposed at some point.

Every twist or drip or merging of his bones fully analyzed and prodded over. They were medical professionals he understood but he couldn’t help but feel ashamed over the matter. His body was wrought with with wounds that were nothing short of hideous despite how much they had healed. His exposed socket widened with understanding as his fingers began to tug at the bandages, they were back weren’t they?

His eyelights were meager dots as Papyrus moved his hand away from the wrappings, “it’s okay,” he spoke in a hushed tone. “We’re right here with you,” he smiled broadly but Gaster’s fingers twitched in his son’s grip mentally peeling the bandages away.
“Now Dr. Gaster,” she turned to a new set of images on her clipboard, “you faced a human and lived. That is a feat in and of itself, you protected your family, and served your kingdom you should be very proud of yourself.”

“Just show me the pictures,” he bit out flatly.

Her ears twitched as she managed to decipher the hostility in his voice between the mechanized noises that accompanied his Font. There they were, two jagged lines one along the top of his skull from his right socket and the other towards his mouth down to the corner of his teeth. He placed the back of his skull firmly against the thin pillow, they were back as if they last several decades had meant nothing.

His breathing stuttered, he was being pathetic but he knew what this meant. Slowly his paranoia of monsters staring at him was going to return, he was going to cover his face if he ever dared to express himself, each expression was going to trigger a burning sensation, it was a testament to the healing magic he was on that he didn’t feel that now.

“The damage was rather extensive,” she fidgeted with her pen clicking it a few times before she continued, “we are anticipating blindness in your right socket.”

“What?” the air was filled with a mix of scratchy and curly letters that were accompanied by a series of symbols. Asgore however remained calm, steel faced, as he gave a sympathetic look to the monster.

“I thought you said if we kept the bandages on for a few more weeks that wouldn’t happen,” Papyrus fussed.

“Yes with proper rest and care there is a chance his vision can be spared but the chances are slim,” she gave Gaster a cautious glance before she returned to her notes. “We plan on discharging you around this time tomorrow evening but we have several medicines you’ll need to maintain usage of for at least a month.”

“They are all just typical healing tablets and wraps with the exception of the suppressants,” she wrote something down on her clipboard just narrowly avoiding the intimidating glare from Gaster.

“Suppressants?” He leered over to Sans who bobbed his head a few times.

“Yeah your nightmares you keep downplaying have been particularly difficult to play off as nothing during your stay here,” he folded his arms as his eyelights fell to the bullet holes around the room. Gaster shuddered as he realized he was going to need to reallocate some funds over to the health division for repairs. That was the least he could do.

So then that’s what the accursed machine that kept squealing at him was for. He flexed his fingers in front of his exposed eye, sure his magic had always been a bit unpredictable in his sleep but it shouldn’t be anything that would need this level restriction. Unless, he glanced up to Asgore as his soul sunk in his chest, ‘LV,’ he signed simply.

Asgore took his time, a shallow inhale, a slow exhale, as he turned to face Gaster proper, “yes.” A turbulent whirlpool of a mess of thought filled his mind as he processed the information.

Dr. Hill held the clipboard in front of Gaster who flinched in surprise at the movement. “If you have no further questions please just sign that I informed you of everything.”

His socket focused on the clipboard surprised by how close it looked despite the fact it was at arms length. He hadn’t recognized her pressing the pen in his hand, or at least it looked to be much closer
than it actually was as he grabbed at the air a few times in an attempt to grab it. Once he had it rested between his fingers he faltered to place the tip of the pen against the line. He made several dots on the page in various locations before he scratched the back of the pen against the wrappings.

Asgore took the pen from him to spare him from any further embarrassment before he signed in Gaster’s stead. Shortly afterwards Asgore left with promise to return the next day and assured the skeleton all he needed was some rest and care. Sans and Papyrus had aimed to stay the night but Gaster insisted they sleep comfortably at home. He had to promise Sans he would rest and Papyrus that he would relax. Rest and care, the words repeated over and over in his mind as he stared at the darkness around the room.

He was capable of relaxing.

He’d taken a week off of work and was going to be expected to take at least another but if he was taking medication for a month- he scratched at his arm they were going to fall off their deadlines. His chest heaved as he attempted to wiggle out of his bindings to no avail, how was he supposed to relax like this? He took a few cleansing breaths. He’d be home tomorrow with his sons that would help considerably.

It felt as if he’d been in the accursed room for another week before his room was once again full of an assortment of monsters while Dr.Hill preached about eating properly and moderate exercise by controlled releases of magic. Everything she said passed by him in a pathetic whisper as he focused intently on being released from his bindings. His left hand flexed into the cold air as the bandages fell to the bedding. He moved his hands over his chest and fidgeted a few meaningless signs to no one in particular.

Tension fell away from Gaster with each removed restraint until finally he could sit up and breath full breaths of air. It was in a pure state of childish giddiness that he crept to the edge of the bed and hung his gangly legs over the edge. He bit down as his magic hummed waves of ecstatic energy to him until he dropped to the floor. His legs were stiff from lack of use, his body battered and sore as it tried to stabilize without the healing magic, but it was still better. He curled his toes against the tiles then flexed as best he could along each of his bones.

Dr.Hill reiterated how important it was that he rested as he pulled his own clothes back on over his scraggly bones. Shrouded in his usual black he’d swear it had all been a bad dream, if it wasn’t for the wrapping around his skull but he was in no mood to let that damper his spirits. Papyrus uncoiled the red scarf from his own shoulders and wrapped it around Gaster with a content look of satisfaction as he pulled away.

He wrapped an arm around each of his boys as they strolled out of the labs and into the muggy heat of Hotland. No more humans, no more fears of falling apart and dusting before his work was done, just him, his sons, and a future to make.

Chapter End Notes

Deltarune huh? Just general opinion: I really liked it and found it visually really appealing. I like that it’s going to have a more in depth story and I can’t wait to see where it goes! (Even if it takes 7 years!)
Sorry this update is about ten hours later than usual it was... a tricky chapter. Originally this was like a few paragraphs at the end of the last chapter but I felt it ruined the flow and they certainly didn’t fit in the next chapter so I had to stretch a few paragraphs into an entire piece. I swear I rewrote this four times in the last week.

But next week is a chapter I’ve been looking forward to since chapter six if that’s a hint ;)}
Crimson Tea

Chapter Summary

Where Gaster ignores Doctor’s orders almost immediately.

Chapter Notes

Thanks you for your kudos and nice comments!

I really enjoyed writing this chapter and it’s one I’ve looked forward to writing for a long time now so I hope you enjoy it too!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gaster’s eyes flared with light as he shoved his phone into his desk drawer, couldn’t they leave him alone for just a few minutes? Asgore had been texting him incessantly the last week about anything from the lighting in his garden to inquiries about the current project while Grillby had taken to texting him periodically through the day about self care dribble. He appreciated their concern but he was fine. Of course he was fine.

He crossed over to his white board and erased all of the symbols that decorated it but in his haste he dislodged the magnet that held a small photograph. In a half panicked state he nearly dove after the scrap of paper. He held the image close to his chest before he pulled it into view. They were so small, his thumbs traced over the edge of both of his boys on either side of the photo.

They were both sleeping so peacefully until the sound of the camera had woken them up. It was easy to note the changes in Papyrus, the boy had grown up fast as a beanstalk, but Sans’s changes were more subtle. His soul ached as he saw their prone figures against him so blissfully comfortable in their surroundings, it was the first time he’d really felt like their father. First time he had to concede himself to an emotional defeat and accept that the snuggling boys he’d adopted weren’t his charges but his sons.

They didn’t need him for that anymore though, he carefully pinned the photograph to its’ designated spot, they needed him to carve a future they could truly live in. The marker he uncapped screeched hideously short screams against the board as the ink escaped. His mind stuttered at the sound like a stone lodged in gears as his magic prickled the air dangerously.

His fingers snagged against the bandages as he ran his hands down his face. He grit his teeth and attempted to pull the flimsy fabric off of his skull but the enchantment held. Finally past the point of control his bone bullets formed around him and dug themselves into his walls adding to the plethora of holes that decorated them already.

Air escaped him in a long hot huff as he tried to focus himself, he was fine. Everything was fine. Just needed to finish- no- to work on- no- just keep moving forward, don’t stop. His magic quivered inside of him as his eyes lit purple, a snack, something substantial, he was running himself ragged.
When was the last time he ate? Stars, when was the last time he slept? He’d grounded himself between his office and his lab for a week now, no he’d been home at some point, hadn’t he? The skeleton collapsed into his desk chair reveling in the sensation of being off of his feet for a minute before he opened his drawer. Sans had been dropping off lunches Papyrus had assembled for him daily but he’d barely regarded them at all.

Which was the most recent? He pulled far more than seven sacks out of the drawer as he investigated the varying inedible contents. Papyrus might actually be capable of putting Gaster’s own terrible cooking to shame he realized as he opened lid after lid over inedible servings of dubious origins. One particular container held what he assumed was intended to be a salad of some sort. The container held one head of lettuce, a carrot, a few tomatoes, and two eggs, none of which was cut or cooked.

None of his drawers provided him with any suitable silverware to attempt to remedy the problem either. The pleather of his chair protested as he resolved himself to a bag of popato chisps from the vending machine.

When he pulled opened the door he was greeted by an unusually green landscape atop roaming beige hills underneath a brilliant blue sky. He pulled back towards his office to find it nothing more than a shroud of darkness.

It sang a soft lullabye to him as it gave his meager mass a solid form, he relaxed into its’ depths like a warm blanket. The darkness was all there was, it was everything infinite and finite as it stretched on into the depths of infinity. There was something comforting in its’ absoluteness: there was nothing to do, no problem to solve, he didn’t need meaning here where there was none. Enrobed in this black tar he was finally free from everything, finally alone.

But he hated being alone. Straight to the center of his soul he knew full well solitude had never once agreed with him. His transparent bones reached into the darkness, it was so full, so tangible, it was his companion, it was all he needed. Finally he slept nuzzled in his blanket of starless night every bit as blistering cold as it was a comforting warmth.

Sound? Sound didn’t exist but the letters of chatter came to him anyways. They were a strange series of sticks strung together to create backwards symbols. It stuck in his mind until he peeled his sockets open to gaze lamely at the open doorway. Why were they bothering him? His sockets flinched as he moved back to the light of the other room.

The light didn’t settle on him as he lingered in the doorway it was as if it missed him entirely. He gave a casual glance back to the darkness he’d always known but curiosity blossomed in his chest as he observed the strange figures amongst the beige hills. They were a multitude of size and shapes with colors that he could just barely think to name. Yellow and white. Blue and red. White and purple. His chest stung with his confusion with his loneliness.

He looked back to the eternity to ensure it was still there, waiting for him. His fingers clung to the door frame until the air danced tall scratchy letters. Two figures white and blue and white and orange bounded over to the group with wide eager grins. Could they smile like that at him? Everyone was so happy, their faces plastered with smiles, he tapped his featureless face his finger tracing the dark ridge. His soul ached. It hurt with a longing he didn’t know for individuals he couldn’t remember.

The pain grew worse as he attempted to move towards the shapes the darkness entangling him, drowning him to its’ depths, he gasped for air he didn’t need, and shouted names he couldn’t hear into the darkness. He curled in on himself. He sobbed to himself. But no, he wasn’t alone, the darkness was there. It was always there. Infinite and finite.

Large purple tears streamed down his face into his hand and down towards his elbow as Gaster
slowly brought himself back into consciousness. He scratched the tears furiously away but they kept falling against his desk and staining his papers. His eyelights began to focus on the wrongness of his environment.

All of the furniture was a tarnished steel color with brown accents, the walls were painted a tacky green color, the floor was tiled, and a giant goat like skull stared him down from the other side of the room. He scrunched his brows as he tried to discern when he came into the lab. Pulsing pale pink hand bullets were tapping away at his tablet, the collection of slides he’d been analyzing were on the desk, and a bag of popato chisps were wedged into the drawer.

A disturbed laugh escaped him as he realized he’d bought his chisps, set up his work, and started taking notes all while unconscious. Magic began to build at the base of his sockets but he squeezed them tight, took a deep breath, and grabbed his notes. ‘Darker yet darker. The darkness keeps growing. The shadows cutting deeper. Photon readings negative. The next experiment seems very. Very. Interesting. What do you two think?’ he read with his sockets narrowed in confusion.

Well, what had he really expected from notes taken in his sleep? He discarded the tablet to turn towards the black tar like substance they had recently discovered almost entirely on accident. It was truly fascinating, he turned the slide between his fingers against the light, it consumed light just by existing but when given the stimulus of DT it was capable of actual consumption. To what extent they were still trying to decipher but it held promise.

He stretched tall to alleviate the last of the fatigue that had possessed him before he got to work. Time no longer held meaning as progress marked his path and determined the duration of his activities. He had little idea when it was that his quiet work was disturbed by an echoing pounding hollow sound. His eyelights caught yellow as he glared over to the door, the knock was unbefitting of Asgore and unnecessary for his assistants.

It was a quick notion of a thought that elected to neglect to answer the door. What he was doing was far more important than whatever the individual desired. His eyelights flicked off as he recalled he was in the basement, no one should be down here. Boney fingers dug at his scattered papers as he debated on the door again.

When the knock sounded a second time Gaster’s magic rushed bullets into the air in a multitude of directions. He flinched something fierce as he gazed over the DT extractor for signs of damage, he really didn’t have time to build another one. Fine. Whoever it was appeared to be incessant enough on disturbing him he might as well grace them with his presence.

As he pulled open the door his magic fell atop him like steel as he bolstered his defense. It was with empty sockets that he gazed down at the reptilian monster that stood without insult in an environment they didn’t belong.

The monster scratched the scales at the base of their chin, the start of a thin white beard snagged under thin nails, as piercing yellow eyes locked onto Gaster’s sockets. The skeleton’s ribs froze mid breath while his visible eyelight sparked in his socket the size of a pinprick, this was the last monster in the Underground he wanted to see right now.

“Wanna invite me in boy?” Gerson’s dry voice cracked.

‘You aren’t supposed to be here,’ Gaster signed harshly.

“I got special permission,” his claws fidgeted against the snaps of his cargo vest to create tedious clicking noises.
"L E A V E ." His voice was as empty as his sockets.

“None of that nonsense boy,” his beak clicked, “not gonna work on me. Now are you going to invite me in?” The scientist gave his best effort at not scowling as he stepped aside for the older monster. Gerson made quick work of pulling a chair up to a short file cabinet before he began to boil tea.

He knew Gerson had been around Asgore since the Boss Monster was first born but he never knew which of the two had started the tea habit. It hardly mattered, there was no reason for the monster to have been given permissions to enter his labs. Yet he had no doubt the old codger was telling the truth, it seemed very Asgore to send the ex-captain after him. “You just gonna gawk at me kid?” Gerson chortled, “come over here and have a seat,” his lanky neck stretched over the back of his shell to watch the skeleton’s hands.

‘I really don’t need the stimulation that Sea Tea provides and I have things to take care of currently.’

“If it ain’t your boys I ain’t movin’,” the monster tsked. “Come sit with me,” Gerson’s voice was coaxing as he pulled out a tin container that looked as battle worn as the monster in possession of it. Gerson was obviously not going to move until he got what he wanted but Gaster was never any good at doing what the Turtoise desired.

His soul pulsed in childish shouts that drowned out the constant river in his mind. Hand bullets pulsed through a multitude of colors as they carried the chair from the desk over to the file cabinet. It took a bit of clumsy resituating before he figured out how to rest his gangly legs against the cheap beat up metal.

The gurgling of the kettle made more of a conversation than either dared. Gaster’s magic began to build up in him in pulsing spikes before he rose to his feet, “you’re fine boy. Sit down.”

He really wasn’t, he itched at his arms as his magic stung into the air like needles, ‘I can’t.’

“There’s this kid I knew once,” Gerson’s tone was entirely nonchalant as he checked the tea, “poor kid had a bad day. Had to kill a lot of humans in a single battle and a few monsters were lost in the crosshairs. They got a lot of LV real quick.” He shook his head, “couldn’t even recognize the boy, it warped his mind, turned him into a real demon of flames.”

“I’d never been scared of another monster before, not a boss monster or nothin’, but seein’ this poor kid like that,” his breathing hitched with the memory, ‘didn’t sit well with me. Made me question the soldier life entirely.” His golden eyes slid over to Gaster who was wringing his humeruses in an attempt to calm himself, “but this other kid. A tiny scrappy little fella stared down the demon his friend had become with the solitude I couldn’t muster.”

“Told the fire off real good, explained how humans with LV gain a higher blood lust but monsters lose control of their magic, real logic like,” he poured a glass of tea then another. “Now the giant monster wasn’t exactly impressed, they were in a lot of pain-sort of hard to concentrate on Hands.”

“But the kid kept going, no matter how uncontrollable the magic it was still them, they’d control it again because monsters are the masters of magic,” he passed the cup to Gaster who hesitantly sat back down with a rather guilty expression. “Can’t remember who that was,” his finger traced the rim of his cup.

‘It was me,’ his hand bullets signed a bit sloppily, ‘right after Ashfall.’ His physical hands fidgeted to take in as much of the warmth of the cup as he could. His head fell to the china as he observed the liquid, a brilliant red. He clenched his teeth and focused on the border of the room as his soul pulsed.
“Aw shoot you’re probably supposed to take your medicine with some food,” he reached into one of his pockets and produced a crabapple.

‘I don’t have it on me,’ his soul sunk as his bones squeaked against the ceramic.

“Must be upstairs then,” Gerson’s eyes pierced into Gaster harsher than any bullet, “I’m not goin’ anywhere fast if you wanna go get it.” Gaster shook his head, he’d very deliberately left it at the house.

The green tablets weren’t any different than he had been taking, though luckily they were needed with less frequency than he had previously needed to take them. No, his problem laid with the suppressants. It was impossible for his mind to work on them, simple tasks like boiling a cup of coffee would take thrice as long as it needed to as his ailed mind failed to comprehend what he was doing. Often times Sans would have to stop him from just staring off into nothingness for chunks of the clock at a time. They made him feel useless, old, he’d pull up a notebook just to crunch some simple numbers only to find himself completely incapable.

His mind was all he was good for. It was the only gift he had to offer, sure launching bullets with minimal warning was a frightening side effect to not taking them but that’s why he was here. He’d given his assistants some well earned time off so that he could have the basement to himself until he could get sorted. No one could get hurt. No one would get hurt.

“Heard ya almost hit Sans,” Gerson’s beak tapped over the rim of his glass as he sipped at the piping hot liquid.

So he knew. Gerson was here to tell him how he’d failed as a parent now. It was bad enough that any waking moment not spent working on something it played in his mind over and over with repercussions that had never occurred. Sans’s sockets squeezed tight as he braced for impact, the sound of his magic being shattered by Papyrus’s quick thinking, the traumatized look the pair gave him as they realized that could have been it plagued his mind with phantom loss.

He cupped his teeth with his hand, Papyrus had been so cross but Gaster couldn’t hear the screaming at the time. Couldn’t process anything happening around him as he resolved himself to his labs. He’d left with little a word to the pair except that he was leaving. What was he kidding? He had failed as their parent, if he’d have just taken the medicine it wouldn’t have happened now he’d hurt them in an irredeemable way.

Of course that’s why Gerson was here. It seemed the old monster would chase him to the ends of the earth to tell him he’d never measure up to a real monster.

“That wasn’t your fault,” Gerson set his tea down and reached for Gaster’s knee. His claws curled back towards his hand as he gauged the skeleton’s down trodden expression before he rested his hand against the boney joint. “Sans is okay, Papyrus is okay, they just want you to be okay,” his voice was soft as sifting sand, “when’s the last time you were home?”

‘A week ago,’ he signed resolutely.

“Try again,” Gerson’s voice could crack stone with its harshness.

He was disappointed that he was trying to mentally count the sack lunches he’d thrown on his desk, ‘two. Two weeks ago.’

“There ya go, harder question,” he chuckled, “when’d you eat last?”

‘I don’t know.’
“Sleep?”

‘A few minutes ago actually,’ a cheeky smile crossed his teeth that Gerson caught immediately.

“How long?” Gaster shrugged to which Gerson sighed before he barked, “drink your tea before it gets too cold.”

The liquid reflected Gaster’s bandages back to him in shades of crimson as he pondered the contents. He couldn’t recall any red teas from Asgore’s collection. A cautious sip rewarded him with the image of a rainy afternoon spent lingering inside of tents with a book across his lap. Nostalgia bubbled inside his bones as his eyes glew a soft red, ‘this is raspberry- how in the Underground did you find this?’

“I preserved some with magic and was waitin’ for an ideal time to brew it,” Gerson sipped from his own cup to escape the self deprecating gaze from Gaster.

‘I’m sorry you’re wasting it on me,’ he smiled down to the cup.

Gerson shrugged, “I was savin’ it for the day we made up kiddo. Got it right after our little spat.”

Gaster tapped the phrase little spat against his teeth before it snarled from his teeth before finally it caught in his hands. ‘Gerson. You called me your biggest mistake. You told me you should have known human remains weren’t ever going to amount to anything.’ His magic was rolling in spires of fire inside his bones while the air popped dangerously with unformed magic, ‘you said you should have killed me when you met me! That’s a little spat to you?’

“Kid I-”

‘I looked up to you! You were the first monster to even try to understand me,’ his hands almost lost meaning as he flicked them too quick to catch.

“Now listen here kiddo-”

‘You’ve never once called me by my name!’

Gerson pulled back from that, “you’re joking right?”

‘Not once! Not WingDings, not Dings, not Gaster, always, always, kid, kiddo, boy, child,’ his magic scattered a multitude of bone bullets around the lab which caused Gerson to shrink towards his shell.

Will you stop it? He screamed internally, you’re only proving his point screaming like a pathetic attention grabbing adolescent.

Despite his inner wishes he couldn’t bring himself to stop, ‘and don’t give me that when you’ve earned it crap! I created a purified water system that minimized sickness in the Underground! I created communication devices that solidified the Dreemurr’s rule to all of the kingdom! I created means for artificial light and I created the Core all of it from nothing! What will it take Gerson? When do I suddenly get to be a living being to you?’

Gerson took a long sip and in a hostile fit Gaster mirrored the action desiring nothing more than to slip into that feeling from earlier, to hide away in a raspberry jaded bliss. “I can’t believe you’re still holding on to all that it’s nearly ancient history bo-” he bit down on his teeth, “WingDings.”

Why was he being so childish? He wrapped his hand over his sockets and squeezed until the fresh
cracks burned. ‘I-‘ he couldn’t get his hands to move, ‘I just–’

To his surprise Gerson rubbed at his glassy yellow eyes, “I hurt ya that bad huh?” He exhaled, “you were wrapped in bandages then too, right across your face like they are now, but your hands too, your ribs, your feet. Tiny little fella but when you found out we were waging one last fight for the mountain you finally decided to play soldier.”

“You were high off uh that red magic of yours, completely set on the idea of fighting when you could barely even stand,” Gerson shook his head and turned it away from Gaster, “I had to break ya. Squash that determination of yours however I could. Tellin’ ya humans couldn’t fight with monsters was the fastest way.”

“If this is centuries too late I understand but I truly am sorry.” He turned back to face Gaster the scales along his cheeks a bit more slick than when he turned away, “And if it means anything to ya,” he sort of half shrugged, “when I see ya with your boys I really can’t see ya as anything but one of us.”

Silence hung between them pompous with pride but without purpose until it was replaced with a soft hiccup like cry from the skeleton. ‘I don’t know what’s wrong with me,’ he rubbed his face, ‘why am I here? I should have talked to them, I don’t want to end up like us with them.’

“That’s an easy one,” he refilled Gaster’s cup, “you were just met with the fact that despite out livin most ‘uh your kin and survivin’ a battle with wounds that any other monster would have died of that you’re still just as mortal as the rest of us.” He ended the statement with his booming wahaha of a laugh. “Not tah forget you just took a mighty blow to your noggin. You ain’t a kid anymore kiddo you can’t just walk it off!”

Gaster looked down to his long spindly fingers as they massaged the sides of his cup happy the refill had warmed the edges once more. The thought had never really surfaced, not fully, that could have been it, he could have made a world without him. The raspberry tea stung behind his teeth with a lingering tartness, what then? What would the world be like if he wasn’t there? He was capable of dying, just like anyone else, but the thought had never crossed his mind. Now not only did he know it, he had proof of it.

“That and its been a minute since ya had that little red voice in your head telling you to keep moving,” Gerson’s voice cut straight through Gaster’s thoughts, “you’re sick kiddo you’ll get better though.”

Gaster blinked, Gerson was being logical: no long drawn out stories, or come back later, or all of a sudden I don’t remember just cut and dry logic. Gaster had just accepted the mood swings, the pain, the fatigue, the loss of control, as a new part of his life.

‘I’m an idiot,’ he stated simply.

“Wa ha ha,” Gerson laughed nearly rocking from his stool, “you ain’t an idiot you’re exhausted but I got a prescription for ya Doctor Gaster. You’re gonna sit and drink this tea with me and we’re gonna finish up whatever unfinished business we got before we talk about lighter things. Then you’ll clean up whatever mess ya got strewn about before ya go home to your boys.”

‘What if they don’t want me back?’

“They do boy,” he put his hand on the skeleton’s shoulder, “but let’s start with the first step alright?” He rose his cup towards Gaster’s who shakily followed suit before, after a soft ting, they sipped at their tea.
His nonexistent stomach shrank away from the solid gray door in a slow attempt to leave him entirely. It took him a moment to realize that the rattling was not from the keys in his hand but from his too tense bones. These were his boys, his children, his sons, there wasn’t any reason to be this terrified.

Three attempts later and his key finally sunk into the keyhole. After a few cleansing breaths he pushed the door open. The house was just as pristine as when he’d returned from the hospital, Papyrus had excessively cleaned the house while he was gone and it seemed he’d managed to maintain it. Everything was exactly in its’ place except for the angry blue fish woman staring him down with topaz eyes. Undyne had her boots atop the polished coffee table, her red locks hung messily against her face, with a discontent snarl across her lips that forced Gaster to still his rattling.

“Hey,” she said simply in her Royal Guard voice. Gaster attempted to pull his dry erase board from his inventory but forgot it was no longer in there. His teeth skrit against each other as he gave a pathetic half wave back. “Papyrus,” she tilted her head toward the back of the couch her yellow fangs barely moved as she spoke, “wanna come out here?”

Gaster flinched as the lab/workshop door swung open but froze under Undyne’s icy glare. Papyrus’s feet planted firmly outside of the entryway, “Sans?” Papyrus beckoned eerily quiet. Neither he nor Gaster made anything close to eye contact as everything in the room proved to be more interesting. When Sans poked his head around the corner Gaster could feel his magic reaching out only to be met with a cold wall as both of the boys shielded themselves from his presence.

An old habit festered in him as he childishly covered the crack over his right eye until he felt the bandages and dropped his hands to clasp at each other. “A-are you home?” Papyrus’s letters shook lightly as he finally looked up to Gaster from across the room.

He inhaled sharply, “I am.”

Papyrus covered his teeth, “really?”

Gaster moved his eyelight to match Papyrus’s sockets, “really.”

Papyrus took a step towards him but his brother blocked his path. Gaster focused on Sans, took in the weariness of his form and the near exhaustion that pushed towards sickness as he glared defiantly at Gaster. “Paps, tell him,” Sans’s voice was oddly authoritative.

The taller brother was positively wounded as he shifted in his black fluffy boots, “I’m so sorry I made you leave!” His fingers wrapped against his sternum as a torrent of words far too fast for even Gaster’s synthesia to make out. They buckled together without spaces as run on word after run on word ran away as breaths in the air.

Gaster’s head reeled, that was all one breath, it was for the best the boy didn’t have lungs or they’d have probably failed him. “Papyrus please breath,” he put his hands up in a soft gesture that imitated breathing. What was he even talking about? He’d remembered Papyrus yelling at him but the actual words had fallen on deaf ears. He was far too shocked by what had almost happened to understand anything else.

“I didn’t leave because of you Papyrus, I was terrified of myself, what I almost did, I couldn’t face you,” he dropped his hand, “I still don’t deserve to.” He inhaled a shuddering breath, “I understand if
you two don’t want me to go back to pretending I’m your dad but I don’t want to be away from you anymore. I’m sorry for my foolishness and I’m prepared to grovel if I must but-

Sans chuckled, “never took you for the actin’ type.” Gaster’s face loosened with his quizzical expression, “I’d have never guessed you were pretending,” his eye caught a glint of yellow magic as he stared his father down. It was odd how small he felt under the gaze of his shortest son, how that gaze of his had only grown stronger with age. It was as if ever wrong doing he’d ever performed was shivering up his spine.

“Sans that’s not what he meant and you know it,” Papyrus groaned.

“Of course I do,” he shrugged, “how could he pretend to be what he is?” Gaster pressed his teeth together surprised there was any emotion but shame left inside of him. “Don’t get me wrong Doc, I’m not forgiving you for walking out not just like that,” Sans folded his arms.

“Sans,” Papyrus’s sockets widened as he looked between the two.

“No Paps,” Sans bit, “if you’re coming back you’re taking your medicine, if it stops you from working it stops you from working and you’d better swear you aren’t walking out on us again.”

Gaster bowed his head in humility, “that’s it?” He rubbed at his exposed socket, “after everything you just want me to take care of myself?” After all of this time the boy still failed to realize when he held all of the cards.

Sans’s tone softened, “yeah.”

“Of course I will,” he smiled whole heartily for the first time in what felt like ages, “I promise both of you boys I won’t ever disappear again.”

“And?” Papyrus caught on effortlessly to the side stepping of the first order.

“I will take my medicine until the doctor says I no longer need to,” he mumbled quietly to the floor. Before he could raise his gaze back to his boys he was lifted into the air in a tight hug from Papyrus.

“I knew you’d come back I just knew it!” From the closeness the squeeze provided Gaster could feel the weak pulses of the boy’s pristine soul gradually grow stronger. Had he been ill? Papyrus paused in his exuberant shaking, “when is the last time you ate?”

Gaster’s face took on a lilac tint as he was set on the ground, “a um, while ago,” he didn’t quite have the nerve to tell Papyrus the whole truth.

“Well worry not! I have just the cure for that!” He untangled himself from his father before he trotted into the kitchen giving praise to something called Anime Noodles.

“If you don’t mind me,” Sans stretched, “I’m gonna take a nap.”

“You look like you need it,” Gaster smiled sympathetically knowing it sounded hippocratic coming from his own weary sockets.

“Heh,” was the only response he received as the monster turned towards his room.

That left him alone with Undyne who decided to make the silence between them as tense as possible, she was definitely Gerson’s child. “Hey Doc,” she glared, “I want you to know, you worried them sick. And. If you ever do that to them again,” she drew her hands up to her chest, “I will kick your boney butt!”
Gaster chuckled as he grabbed a notebook from the side of the couch, ‘I deserve it.’ He displayed the book then added, ‘you can sign?’

“Just that,” she huffed, “Paps said he didn’t want me to say it to you.”

Gaster nodded his head, that sounded about right. It would take a while to mend the gap he’d placed between them but he had no doubt it wasn’t unfixable.

**Chapter End Notes**

I was really surprised at how much I enjoyed writing Gerson considering how nervous I was in even taking him into the story in the first place. It’s just- so rare to see him be anything more than an exposition dump or a friend of Grillby’s *shrug* don’t know I kinda like him as the stubborn old dad character.

Next week we will be back to the regular Dadster and sons routine tell he end of the fic. Thank you to those that have stuck around since the beginning and to those who are not daunted by the 100,000 word mark thank you (oh my goodness this is officially a long running fic o.o)

Oh, I’ve been wondering if there were any particular scenes people would like to see drawn. I’ve been wanting to draw something for this that I don’t want to delete afterwards but can never decide what.
Fragments

Chapter Summary

Things are getting back on track

Chapter Notes

Okay I know I say this every time but thank you so much for reading, your kudos, and especially any kind comments. I keep thinking “this is it. This is the week I’ll miss!” But I see the kudos In my e-mail and I read the comments then I have to write! We’re also almost at 200 kudos which was my hope I set for the end of the fic after chapter ten posted so thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gaster ran his fingers along the top of his computer, ‘I- I think I’ve got it.’ Gaster’s smile was as bright as the computer screen that projected across his skull. He pressed his fingers to his teeth as his one visible eye light rounded in its’ pool of darkness. It might have taken longer than he desired but this was well worth the wait. ‘Asgore if this is right then we won’t need anymore souls we’ll be able to Delete the barrier,’ Gaster’s bones rattled in his excitement.

Asgore forced a small smile as his eyes grew distant, “then all of it was for nothing?”

Gaster’s smile dropped while he absentmindedly picked at the wrapping across his skull, ‘no your majesty it wasn’t.’ Not all of the humans had been violent, some were barely even aggressive, but they still had to lose their lives. ‘If the humans demand war when we reach the surface we can have five generals with the strength to match them,’ they had the souls, they couldn’t bring the kids back so they might as well use them. ‘I will gladly-

“No Gaster,” Asgore’s expression was just short of a glare, “you’ve done enough already.” It was quick but Gaster saw the pity that warmed Asgore’s eyes with hints of cyan as he stared to the covered socket.

‘I get to take it off soon sir,’ Gaster smiled as pleasantly as he could muster.

Asgore barely paid the signs any heed, “I want you, and Sans, and Papyrus far away from any wars.” Asgore’s large arms wrapped around the meager skeleton without warning as he pulled the monster close to him. Gaster’s fingers curled tightly while his shoulders stiffened but as he was overwhelmed by the scent of yellow flowers he relaxed to return the gesture.

“You’ve done enough,” he whimpered. “Breaking the barrier is my job but if you can do that for me,” he pulled away to look the skeleton in the sockets, “then I will fight for your family.”

Gaster’s hand rose to his chin, it lingered as he made sure of his sign, ‘thank you.’

The future loomed over the pair, frightening and distant with ecstatic hope and dawning realism.
There was no telling what would happen when the barrier fell or how they would handle the citizens but that screen informed them it needed to be discussed. Gaster had no choice but to put his faith in Asgore, as all of the monsters of the Underground did, but if he could do this one thing for his friend maybe it would make up for everything else.

Asgore’s feet padded at the ground before he pulled up a stool and conjured a sealed envelope from his inventory, “now then about your personal matter.” The skeleton perked up, his good eye light laid against the folder as his breath fell entirely from his ribs.

‘You found them then?’ A multitude of conflicting emotions sparked through Gaster’s soul.

The King nodded, “are you sure you want to do this?”

Gaster considered the words then shook his head, ‘I have messed up a lot lately. I think the boys have right to,’ he pressed his teeth together, ‘this information. If it changes their opinion of me, well,’ he chuckled nervously, ‘they’re adults of the Underground as of tomorrow.’

“Gaster,” Asgore put a paw on his shoulder, “you are a good father and they are great sons.” He lifted the file, “I don’t see this changing anything but if you take this you have to follow through. No running.”

His ribs inflated as his breath hitched inside of them, his fingers fell to the framed picture on his desk of three smiling skeletons. It was taken a few days before the human fell. The way they smiled so wholeheartedly, he’d never forget it.

‘I promised them I never would.’

His eyes softened as his ears sagged, “I have to admit old friend as excited as I was at the prospect of you adopting I had my fears.” He rubbed the back of his neck, “you never, I mean- I don’t intend to sound cruel Gaster.”

Gaster chuckled into the side of his fingers, ‘don’t worry I know full well what you meant. It’s only through your support that they’ve survived me for so long!’ His teeth stretched into a lopsided smile, ‘I’m glad to have you as a friend.’

Asgore’s expression was childlike as he smiled, “do you think they’ll see the sky Dings?”

Gaster looked down to the tiled floor, ‘I know they will and I think-’ he rubbed at his socket to stop the joy from manifesting as tears, ‘I’ll get to see it with them.’

“You’ve earned as much my friend,” his face laced with sympathy as he handed the file to the skeleton.

It had taken a while for their home life to settle into mostly regular routine. Papyrus was a bit too attentive in the days following Gaster’s return. Constantly checking on him, asking if he was okay, going out of his way to help with any task no matter how trivial. Pencils that were just barely out of Gaster’s field of vision were pressed in his palm before he could even begin to search for them, it took at least two days of attempting to survive Papyrus’s cooking before Gaster was allowed in the kitchen, and he hardly needed his other eye as his son almost always flanked his side.

It wasn’t too long ago Gaster was at his near breaking point asking for independence from his son's
constant worrying but now— it was still frustrating but he could see it differently. Papyrus was attempting to make up for lost time, trying to prove whatever cruel things he said, that Gaster couldn’t even remember, were spoken out of fear. He was more than happy to spend the extra time with his son who wasn’t the only one with a guilty conscious.

While things were smoothing out rather effortlessly with Papyrus Sans was a much more difficult battle. Gaster didn’t miss the fact ‘Doc’ had become his regular title again. It was a well deserved sting to his soul each time it crossed his son’s teeth. He was steadfast in his desire to appease the damage he’d done but Sans hardly gave him the chance. The boy was almost always in his room or at the labs, most kids his age were reclusive but he couldn’t help but take it personally.

He finished wrapping the frames in used newspaper with an air of regret around him. This was the first birthday they’d decided to spend with their friends with promise of celebrating together after Papyrus’s graduation. His thumb traced the edge of one of the frames, what would you think of them now? If you could see how well they grew up I don’t think you’d be able to hold back your pride.

The stomping upstairs indicated the pair were nearly finished getting ready, or more so, Papyrus was finished and Sans had lagged behind. Gaster shook his head, how long had he been able to tell what they were doing by indistinct steps above his head? He leaned his head slightly towards the door to just barely make out Papyrus’s begrudging comments from the next room over. He slipped the gifts into his inventory before he made his way upstairs.

He didn’t need to open the door to Sans’s room to understand his hypothesis was correct. A content sky escaped the old monster before he made his way to the living room.

It finally looked as if monsters lived their again as notebooks were put on display against the coffee table and a puzzle occupied the desk that sat beneath the mirror. Surprisingly, even Papyrus could not extract the dingy dark gray from the carpet.

A bouncy tune began to play from one of the boy’s phone that cut their argument short. Papyrus’s voice dropped into a proper indoor decibel as he spoke to the individual on the other side of the line. If he recalled Papyrus was going to hang out in the Capital with an off duty Undyne while Sans was going to Alphys’s house to work on an application of some sort.

It had never been stated but he figured the groups would meet up for dinner, it tickled him a bit to imagine the nervous robotics enthusiast with the robust Undyne. If it wasn’t for Sans and Papyrus being there to even it out it could be rather awkward.

Papyrus tore from his room into the living room grinning from cheekbone to cheekbone, “hey Dad, that was the doctors.” Sans leaned against the entryway a weary but excited smile across his sockets as he waited for his brother to deliver the news. “They say you can take off your bandages!”

Gaster ran his fingers along the fabric ensnaring most of his face, he already had a pretty good idea what the damage was going to be. “Why don’t we take care of that some other time?” His mind flickered with dream like impressions of when he saw the cracks the red mage had granted him for the first time.

“Dad you are not fooling me!” Papyrus sang, “as soon as we leave you’ll take the bandages off on your own. We want to be here for you!”

“I mean if you don’t blind that is,” Sans immediately winced at his own pun.

“That was terrible Sans,” Gaster muttered with as disapproving of a glare as he could muster with one socket.
“I know,” he muttered. He looked up to his brother who looked obstinately away from him, “so uh, how about those bandages?”

“I’d prefer to do them on my own,” Gaster rubbed his sternum. His reaction last time had been, well, he’d frightened Grillby and Toriel half to dust he didn’t want to put his boys through that. Surely he could handle it better by now, that was ages ago, literal lifetimes, but he didn’t want to risk it.

“You can, we just want to be here,” Papyrus smiled.

Sans pulled a pair of scissors from the desk drawer then held them out to his father. Gaster’s hand had more of a shake to it then he cared to display as he wrapped his fingers around the steel, “it’s your birthday boys don’t you want to do something a bit less depressing?”

“It’s not depressing it’s the first step to the last step of finishing your recovery,” Papyrus folded his arms.

“We can finally put all of this human nonsense behind us,” his shoulders sagged as a weight seemed to lift from him.

Gaster glanced between the pair before his eye light fell down to the utensil in hand, “fine, just- can I have some space?” The boys gladly agreed then disappeared into the kitchen to leave Gaster alone.

He rocked forward letting each and every spring on the way up from the hideous piece of furniture make their own grievance before he crossed to the mirror as if leading a funeral procession. There was no haste in his movement as he lined himself up with his reflection to take in each fold that had managed to hold true no matter his fits.

The seal was broken now but he was suddenly free of any desire to tear at them. He knew what the damage was, he knew what he was going to see, so why were his hands to shaky?

He fixed his eye light on his reflection and raised the scissors to the wraps. His fingers pressed against the handle but, at the sound of each strand of stitching giving way he flinched.

Last time it was with a broken piece of scrap metal as he gazed into his reflection in a broken mirror with only thoughts of the vile humans in his head. He pulled the scissors away to observe the solemn expression he gave himself.

“Actually boys,” his font lacked opacity as he turned to the kitchen, “would you mind helping me?”

“Ohmygoodness yes!” Papyrus blurted out a bit too eagerly as he flounced over to the mirror.

Even Sans appeared more awake then he had in days as he pulled over the coffee table to stand on top of it, even with the assistance he was on his tiptoes, “why’d ya change your mind?”

“My hands are a bit shaky, I didn’t want to further aggravate the injury,” Gaster replied flatly.

“I’m very proud of you for asking for help then,” Papyrus sang as he took the scissors from Gaster.

As the metal pressed against the fabric he could sense the trepidation that built until the first snip cut into the air. Sans worked at uncoiling the fabric from his skull while Papyrus cut at the stubborn pieces. Fragment by fragment the distasteful headwear fell from his skull which allowed it to breath for the first time in weeks.

Gaster swallowed hard as the cracks gradually exposed themselves, a long wide one along the top of his right eye and a shorter thinner one that just barely tapped the left side of his mouth. Both were
decorated with purple, red, and yellow marbling caused by his magic attempting to aid the healing process. It was all for nought though. Despite the weariness in his sockets and the crease along their base that plainly displayed his age he felt he was staring at his past self.

It had taken centuries for the accursed wounds to recover, now, it was hard to believe they had ever left.

His fingers flexed and relaxed at his sides as he did his best to look indifferent. His soul thrummed in his chest but he wouldn’t allow his magic to sing of fear, distaste, or hatred. It was an effort but he tore his eyelights away from the pitch black pits across his off white skull to look at happier things. Both of the boys were waiting for some sort of a reaction but he didn’t quite have the nerve to speak.

Sans’s sockets narrowed as his finger hovered over the wound to barely tap at the base of it with such a quick movement Gaster couldn’t even recognize the pain from the contact, “it stops right here if you were wondering.”

That was considerably further then last time, he should be grateful his skull hadn’t been cracked clear open.

“All of the tiny cracks look like they healed without any scarring,” Papyrus stated ever one for the silver lining.

His left eye light searched desperately for its’ mate in the glass surface of the mirror. He reached into his magic in an attempt to conjure one in his half lidded right socket to no avail. He inhaled, his eye burned red and a glowing pulse of light echoed in his right but it was quickly flooded with a burning heat.

He buckled down and burned the magic brighter, hotter, the red glow began to project against the desk as sweat pooled against his skull. A small sphere formed in his right socket but disappeared immediately as Papyrus wrapped his arms around him and Sans placed his palm against his back.

Gaster stomped like an impetuous child, “why did you do that? I almost had it!”

He bit back a shout and covered his eye with a low moan as he sunk against the coffee table. The whole socket pulsed with tremors of pain while he began to rattle in an attempt to soothe himself.

“Y-you were hurting yourself,” Papyrus whispered.

As he covered the wound with his fingers he realized his socket was still open, but he couldn’t see the fingers rubbing furiously at his orbits. He really was blind in it. There hadn’t been any point in removing the bandages other than exposing his old wounds.

What was he doing? He scared the boys again, he was supposed to be done frightening them but the wounds were right there- those scars that had mocked him for so much of his life but now with an irreversible addition.

That was it though.

It couldn’t be fixed.

“Pretty awful isn’t it?” He didn’t look back up to them or the mirror, he focused on his hands that were each tugging at a different sleeve. He took a few cleansing breaths to still his rattle, “but it’s your birthday! I made something special that’s actually edible,” he laughed as cheerily as he could muster.
Sans leaned against Gaster, “it’s not that bad,” he mumbled.

Papyrus fidgeted with his fingers, “we could stay home! Just us! That sounds much better!”

Gaster chuckled, “this was why I didn’t want to do this today. It’s fine,” he rose to his feet, a bit dizzily as the air passed into his skull and stung at his aggravated magic. “Your friends are looking forward to seeing you,” he hummed, “you don’t have to entertain a silly broken old skeleton.”

“Dad!” Papyrus stomped his foot, “I will not stand for that sort of talk! You are not broken!” Gaster gave a soft smile that didn’t seem to be satisfactory, “say it!”

Gaster nearly snorted, “I am not broken.”

“Good!” Papyrus nodded.

Gaster chuckled as he made his way to the kitchen, they weren’t much but he’d tried. He pulled a tote out of the fridge then opened it before he set it against the counter.

They were sugar cookies, rather easy to make, he’d done his best to frost them but he wasn’t much of an artist. Sans picked a blue bunny shaped cookie out of the box, “very bunny,” he chuckled.

Papyrus beamed as he picked an orange cookie of the same shape, “they are very cute dad!”

“Wait- are they all bunnies?” He sifted through the container his cheeks growing a more regal purple as he went, surely he’d made different shapes. He’d planned on doing some bones and beakers but as he reached the bottom of the container he only found a multitude of different colored rabbit shaped cookies. He wanted to blame the suppressants but they hadn’t been affecting him as heavily as they had initially.

Sans was smiling brightly, “eh, it’s okay ya just gotta bit of fluff in your old age,” he winked knowingly.

“I hadn’t intended to-” Gaster scratched at the better half of his skull in his perplexment, he really thought he’d made other shapes.

“Thank you Dad,” Papyrus smiled sincerely enough to cut through Gaster’s bashfulness, “I think they’re perfect!”

“Mind if we take a few for the road?” It was hardly a question as Sans placed a few in his pocket.

“Sans do you really think-” Papyrus urged but he was quickly interrupted.

“He’ll call us if he needs us,” his right socket went empty as the left one caught magic, “right?”

“Of course,” Gaster responded involuntarily in his guilt. “But before you go,” he took a deep breath as he pulled the two packages out of his inventory, “this is, well, it’s a little different then what I would normally consider a gift.” He held them out to the pair, “I know you both have very different feelings on the matter so I am sorry if any ill comes of it.”

This gave the twins the same amount of suspicion as they reflected on the recycled paper, “it’s uh-not going to blow up is it,” Sans teased.

Gaster chuckled in good humor, “no it is not.”

“Just making sure.”
“Oh,” Papyrus stated without much expression as he pulled the paper off of the frame. Gaster held his breath, waiting for some sort of confirmation as to how the pair felt about the gift. Sans stared at the portrait with empty sockets his unreadable mask laid close to his face.

Papyrus rubbed at his socket, “c-can I ask why?”

Gaster clicked each of his vertebrae into their proper place, “I think now that you two are adults it’s important to recall where you came from. I don’t care what you do with these, they are yours but I felt-” He dropped his hand he was gesturing gibberish with, “regardless of your opinion of them they are an important part of your life.”

He sat down at the kitchen table and both his sons flanked his sides, “and I am happy to finally have faces to thank for the best part of my life.” He wrapped an arm around each of them and tapped his teeth to their skulls in turn.

The three of them fell into silence as they gazed at the portrait of two skeletons holding a pair of tiny baby bones. Gaster still had enough sense of self to be disgusted by the short ‘aw’ that escaped him without permission when he first saw the two newborns.

Sans’s sockets were screwed shut in the image as he attempted to find a means to project his discomfort. Skeleton children didn’t develop the magic to speak or make noise until they were several months old so they relied on rattles until then. Papyrus’s expression was fixed in wild bewilderment as he reached towards whoever was taking the picture. Apparently his unyielding desire to see everything possible had started very young.

The infamous ‘Pops’ was easy enough to figure out, he looked nearly identical to Papyrus but his bones were of a wider build. There was a look of mischief in his sockets as he held the fussing Sans to his chest. Only from Asgore’s digging had he learned their father’s name, how proud he must have been when Sans spoke for the first time to show his inherited his font.

Their mother seemed a bit uncertain on her hold of Papyrus but despite that she was dazzling, beautiful even, by skeletal standards. Her bones were pristine white, with sharp precise angles all across her form, she had wide expressive sockets that burned with a faint hint of cyan magic that could be felt through the picture. There wasn’t any doubting that she was a potent magician in her own time.

Gaster had been hoping to learn more about them but all Asgore could manage to find was this picture and a small article about their Dust Ceremony. Gaster looked over to Papyrus who he could feel start to rattle.

“Thank you,” Papyrus’s hands were shaky as he gripped the portrait, “I forgot what they looked like.”

He rubbed at his eye socket as he averted his eyes entirely from Sans, “I’m going to put this in my room okay?” He hugged Gaster tightly then turned down the hall.

“So, they’re really gone then,” Sans confirmed to himself. “I mean the whole vacation story seemed a bit made up but I wanted to believe my bro. I guess- they could have died on vacation,” he chuckled humorlessly, “but that doesn’t seem to be the case.”

After all this time Papyrus had still kept his secret to himself.

“Are you alright?” Gaster nudged him lightly.

Sans shrugged, “I understand why you did this,” he shifted his grip on the frame, “but you’re my dad
and,” his eye sockets softened, “I’m really grateful for that.” He leaned into Gaster, “thank you for adopting us. Thank you for caring about us.” He craned his neck, “and thank you for treating me like a monster.”

Gaster wrapped his arms around his son and pulled him tight against his shoulders, “thank you.” He tapped his teeth to the top of Sans’s skull, “for being patient.”

Sans smiled, “eh, it’s kinda my thing,” his eye glew cyan for a brief moment. “I’m gonna go put this in my room,” he squeezed his way out from his father’s grasp.

“Hey, what are you going to do today?” he paused at the mouth of the hallway.

“Honestly?” He chuckled, “probably going to take a nap. My socket is killing me.”

“Alright,” Sans seemed satisfied with this as he slipped into his room.

A few minutes later the pair each left their room to exchange a few more words before they left to meet up with their friends. Gaster watched as the door clicked shut behind them and stared at the foreign concept of being home by himself.

The silence grew deafening enough that he finally tore his sockets away from the door. He crossed over to the mirror in the corner. He ran his finger along the crack on the right side of his skull then over his socket, he didn’t see his phalanges at all. Not a trace. It was strange and unfamiliar but interesting.

His eyelight fell down to the holes in his palm. He rose them up to the mirror than quickly unbuttoned the top few buttons of his shirt. Grainy white slabs hung from his collar in a poor artist’s imitation of ribs. It was all there, every foolish endeavor, every clawing attempt at pathetic selfish ordeals, smiling back at him as if they had never left.

He thought he’d be mortified, greeting his old scars again but he was already having troubles imagining his face without them.

He’d been traumatized when he saw the damage that first time, completely bereft that he could no longer be himself. His hands were wrong, his ribs were nonexistent, and his skull was a glorified excuse for one. This time was different though.

He had his sons, the right side of his teeth curled up in its’ best attempt at a smile, his wonderful sons. What would he do without them? His smile dropped as he pulled out a silver key from his pocket. He wrapped his fingers around it then held it over his soul, what was he going to do without them?

Chapter End Notes

The terribly timed ‘blind’ pun was inspired by me accidentally stating someone’s unresponsive cat was CATatonic and immediately feeling terrible for it. I also have gone to decorate sugar cookies and accidentally cut all of them to the same shape!

I hope you enjoyed and thank you for reading!
Today Papyrus graduates from school and the Underground recognizes the skeleton brothers as adults. It’s time Gaster did too.

You guys went a little silly with the kudos last week to reach that 200 and I’m thankful for that! It absolutely tickled me when I would open my e-mail to a pool of them. And so many comments last week too! You all are so sweet thank you! I did a little thank you image on my Tumblr If you guys would like to see it. (Sorry can’t figure out how to link the image directly on my iPad)

Gray cobblestone cut through the lush green and deep gray bushes that lined the path. Any direction one looked they would spot brilliant golden flowers and glowing cyan echo flowers that greeted monsters as they passed through. Tall purple columns indicated the end of the trail as it flood into a wide opening where the cobblestone spiraled below them. The darkness of the Underground served to illuminate the beauty of the garden, the King’s first attempt at harvesting his green thumb, which made it the perfect place for a celebration.

Several parents and extended family had already gathered around tables decorated with more food than could ever be consumed by such a meager crowd. A few chairs peppered the edge of the circle for elder monsters that couldn’t quite make it through the social event without a reprieve, how thankful Gaster was he wouldn’t need to join them.

As a monster turned to face him he quickly covered the crack along his forehead with his long fingers though his socket still visible through the hole in his palm. “Is your socket bothering you again?” Sans looked up to him with his brows knitted together in concern. When Gaster shook his head Sans’s expression narrowed, “you can tell me if it is. I can’t heal nearly as good as Paps but maybe I could take the edge off of it.”

Gaster shook his head, “I’m fine,” he pulled his hand away from the crack surprised by the moisture that caught the heel of his palm. Was he crying?

“Oh alright so you’re just still upset you couldn’t find your tailcoat then?” He shrugged as an obnoxious shine took to his eye lights.

“No,” Gaster bit sharply but shirked away when one of the parents looked over at the odd sound. His soul sunk in his chest as he wiped away the trail the meager tears had made down his cheekbones, “I just-” he paused thinking over his words.

He chuckled to himself, “it feels like I just met both of you and here you are,” he gestured to the pavillion the graduates were going to pass through, “Papyrus is graduating from school, you’re
working in the labs, you’re both going to Grillby’s tonight as adults, and then-” he cut himself off, he wasn’t going to ruin the surprise because he was being emotional.

Sans smiled up to him with warm encouragement before he turned his head towards the Snowdrake teacher with the rest of the crowd. She began to speak over the importance a pursuit of formalized education in the Underground was and how proud she was of the class but Gaster found himself a bit distracted, “what are you doing?” He whispered sharply to his son. They were a ways away from the rest of the crowd but his voice still turned a few heads.

“Getting ready,” Sans smiled lazily as the trombone he had conjured from his inventory glistened with ill intent in the pale cyan light.

“We are not going to be one of those obnoxious families that makes a scene.”

“C’mon it’s for Paps!”

“Why a trombone?”

“You know why,” Sans bounced the ridges above his eyes.

Gaster paused in thought for a moment, “trom bonen” Sans snickered, it would have been an outright laugh if he wasn’t afraid of disturbing the rest of the crowd before his joke came to fruition. “No.”

They had missed the first several students crossing through the pavilion and the soft claps that followed each young monster. Graduation was much more of a social event intended for the fresh to society monsters to mingle with their peers one last time or mix it up with a few of the more prestigious guests to gain favor to a profitable field. As each monster joined their parents they were seen as equals to the rest of monsterdom.

Papyrus was now in view as he waited his turn to make an entrance. From here Gaster could see his tailcoat over his son’s frame. It was a bit too small in the shoulders and chest but it hung from him as a memento of thanks and appreciation. A blue button down shirt, the same blue as Sans’s magic eye, rested underneath the coat so that both of those who supported him were present. He smiled broadly as he caught Gaster’s lanky figure in the back of the crowd though he quickly pretended he didn’t notice as he marked his spot at the front of the rest of the class.

That little energetic skeleton that wouldn’t let Gaster leave the orphanage without speaking to his brother was now an adult. A proud and capable one at that. He’d never imagined the way his soul would pulse in this moment, the way his magic would hum in the air with waves of pride knowing exactly what his son had done to get to this point. This was his son, these were his boys, and they were ready for the Underground if not the world. He rubbed sheepishly at the base of his socket as Papyrus stepped forward to be announced by the teacher: “Papyrus Gaster.”

Everything froze. He couldn’t hear the clapping from the other parents. Didn’t see the excited look from Sans as he felt the magic in the air change. Papyrus Gaster. After everything- when had he started using the name his foolish father made up as his last name? He looked down to Sans as the clapping finally registered to him. Sans squeezed his fingers between Gaster’s as he looked back up to his beaming son who proudly walked towards the back to join his family.

The sound that escaped Gaster wasn’t supposed to surface but as his magic thrummed in the air as he let loose a nonsensical hollar far above his usual decibel. The other monsters all ceased their clapping to flinch at the sound they couldn’t recognize. Gaster’s face grew hot with his purple magic as the other monsters began to mutter. “Don’t make a scene, huh?” Sans chuckled with a bounce of his
shoulders.

When Papyrus joined them Gaster threw his arms around him, “I am so proud of you!”

Papyrus laughed into his father’s clavicle, “thank you! I don’t know where I’d be without you.” He turned to his brother with a mocking sneer, “or you I suppose.”

Sans clutched his soul and stumbled back, “you wound me.”

“You’ll get over it,” Papyrus scoffed before he grabbed Sans off of the stone walkway to hold him under the arms like an overgrown stuffed animal. Sans seemed to accept his fate as he quickly fell to sleep in that half hanging position.

Sans’s spontaneous episodes of narcolepsy had returned to full calibur since Gaster had returned. It was concerning to say the least but the boy insisted he was fine and Papyrus was always eager to wake him up. Something about it just wasn’t sitting well with Gaster as his mind tried to figure out what had triggered the habit to reoccur.

Still, seeing the pair stand separate from the crowd still every bit as close as the day he’d adopted them the problem seemed insignificant.

The class finished being called out and the mingling began, a task that only Sans took even the least bit seriously. The boy was a master of jumping into conversations and working his way through a crowd to grab whatever food he had his sockets on. A few jokes here, a strong observation there, and within half an hour Sans had a stronger relation with Papyrus’s peers then he did.

“Don’t you want to talk to your classmates? Might be the last time you see them for a while,” Gaster prompted.

Papyrus considered this before he proudly strutted up to his nearest classmate, a matter of seconds later they were seemingly called away by one of their peers. The boy tried a few more times but a pattern quickly formed, he returned to his father with less of a perk to his step then he’d had before.

Gaster straightened the collar on the tailcoat, “I bet their intimidated,” he hummed, “you look awfully sharp.”

“They are probably just too sad to tell someone as great as me goodbye,” he smiled halfheartedly.

Gaster’s fingers picked nimbly as the end of his sleeve, “that would be very difficult.”

The three skeletons stayed until the end of the event, at the insistence of Papyrus, to clean up afterwards. He helped the teacher and the few lingering parents pack away all of the food, then the tables, they paid him many a compliment which he gladly accepted before the three finally started their way to Snowdin.

There was a thin layer of frost across the golden bar handle outside of the establishment. It flaked off underneath Gaster’s boney grip as he steeled himself for the warmth of the bar.

He’d been home a few days before he’d worked up the nerve to apologize for ignoring Grillby’s texts. The poor flame had been a pale lemon color when he finally poked his skull in to apologize, a hug and a few threats later everything seemed to slip back to normal. A flurry of hand signs indecipherable by anyone else due to their swiftness later and the plan was set to bring the boys in today. Yet, Gaster’s guts still squirmed in their miserable nonexistence, just one step closer.

Sensing his trepidation Papyrus placed his hand above Gaster’s and pulled the door open. The
regular customers were seated at the benches and far table tonight as the seats in front of the bar were for the skeleton family and guests. Asgore smiled as they entered from the stool at the table closest to the bar, the height of which allowed him to sit much more comfortably. In, what had once been, Gaster’s regular seat Gerson sat with a pile of books stacked in front of him.

Papyrus’s sockets moved nervously towards Gaster but Sans had him beat, “heya Gerson don’t normally see ya this far outta Waterfall.”

Gaster smirked, “it’s okay boys we are working on making amends.” He sat down next to Gerson and gave a wry smile before he gave his attention to Grillby who crossed over to his boys.

“Did I miss a chapter?” Sans muttered as he opened the beverage menu Grillby passed him.

“There’s a lot of choices,” Papyrus scratched the side of his head in bewilderment, “what do you normally get Dad?”

“Soda,” he replied.

“Orange juice,” Grillby brightened.

Gaster rolled his eye light, ‘will you knock it off that joke was old when you started it.’

Grillby tilted his head up with thought, “I still enjoy it.”

With that he poured a glass of the orange liquid and slid it down to Gaster. “Gerson a beer?” The turtoise nodded before a tumblr was sent down the line. He folded his arms as he considered Asgore, “hard crabapple cider?”

“If that is what you recommend,” Asgore chuckled.

“Why aren’t you drinking?” Papyrus asked while Grillby fetched the king his drink.

Gaster traced the rim of his orange juice glass with his finger as he contemplated how fast he’d be willing to drink it in order to obtain something carbonated. “I don’t drink anymore, I got into a bit of trouble with it and now I’m permanently forced into sobriety”

“Oh, I don’t want to get in trouble,” Papyrus grimaced.

Gaster smiled fondly, “everything in moderation, we are all here to ensure no one gets carried away tonight.”

“Alright but what did you drink when you did?” Sans’s sockets were about to be stuck in the expression the way he was glaring at the menu.

“Fairy floss,” the bartender and the scientist grinned in matching mischief that was not befitting of their age but it didn’t look misplaced across their faces.

Gerson laughed heartily, “you two kept drinkin’ that swill? A single cup uh that’s enough to make a grown monster sick.”

Sans smirked in a smug challenge, “I’ll try that.”

Grillby’s flames crackled as he gave Gaster a sideways glance but only received a shrug.

Papyrus fidgeted with the menu in his hands, “could I just have a glass of milk?” His cheeks flushed with color as he looked away.
“You can change your mind later Papyrus and you don’t have to drink at all if you don’t want to,” Gaster assured him.

When the swirling sparkling oil slick of pinks and yellows was set in front of Sans it was obvious by the shrinking of his eyelights he didn’t know what to think. Papyrus on the other hand commented on the aesthetic as Sans swirled it around with a nervous grin. The monsters at the bar were all silent as he lifted the glass to drink.

“Sans-” Asgore pressed his lips together, “if I may you might want to start with a sip.”

Gerson smacked Asgore’s leg, “don’t ruin it.”

Sans tilted the glass back long enough to absorb a sip before he set the glass down with a cough, “it tastes like the chemistry lab smells on a bad day,” he wheezed.

Gaster started a soft chuckle before Grillby’s flames began to crackle which encouraged him into a full laugh. “You boys leave him alone, monsters don’t have the constitution for the stuff that they used to,” Gerson scolded.

“It’s quite possibly the worst thing I’ve ever tasted,” Sans winced, “and I survived Dad’s experimental cooking.”

Asgore’s booming laugh filled the air which received a sharp glare from Gaster, “you have improved immensely my friend but you are by no means a chef!”

From there the evening swelled into a merriment of exchanged laughter and memories, no matter how embarrassing. It took Sans a good deal of time to polish off his glass of Fairy Floss and by the time he did his cheeks were stained in cyan magic with little blotches of yellow around the outside. The longer you drank it the more the bitter alcoholic sting of flavor was replaced by a sickeningly sweet sugary taste that the drink was named after.

When the glass was finally down Grillby substituted his drink with a ketchup based bloody mary that was more ketchup than alcohol. Papyrus didn’t exactly seem fond of the way Sans’s gestures grew more exuberant or the way he’d fall to fits of laughter over just about anything but the atmosphere was contagious. As sober as he was it wasn’t long before the jovial skeleton was in high spirits himself, without the aide of spirits, and jumping into every conversation.

Papyrus nearly lunged off of his stool in his attempt to catching the ever leaning Sans, “m’fine,” he mumbled.

“You are not,” Papyrus scolded.

“Hey, hey dust between you and me, I’m good,” Sans winked as he steadied himself back up on his stool.

“Sans that’s not funny,” Gaster stated flatly.

“I know, I know, cause you’d be bone ly without me,” he stirred the ice in the drink with the celery stick before he slid it out to nibble on the stalk.

“Sans would you come here please?” Asgore asked his eyes a bit glassy from his drink.

“I goat you,” Sans snickered as he stumbled off of his stool to cross to the king. Asgore’s paws caught a very faint green glow as he ran his hand over the top of Sans’s skull as if he was just giving him a head pat.
“You remind me of her a lot,” Asgore’s voice was soft as his eyes fell on Gaster, “are you feeling well Sans?”

Sans shrugged, “a bit dizzy at the moment but just as fine as always.” Asgore removed his hand then pulled out his phone.

“Boys,” Gerson scratched at his neck, “I brought a few books to look through.”

Gerson had brought his compilation books, drawings of his ‘children’ throughout the years. The old monster looked over each drawing fondly explaining to the boys the exact reason why he had sketched things a certain way or what was happening. Gaster smiled fondly at the orange and purple hand bound books occasionally sitting up to see an image of a much younger Asgore or Grillby. All of the drawings were in immaculate condition considering how old they were.

Gaster’s phone buzzed and he’d intended to ignore it until Asgore lifted both of his index fingers up towards his right shoulder then cut them downwards to the left: ‘answer.’

I BELIEVE SO, he replied.

I BELIEVE SO, he replied.

WHAT?

lk sk

Gaster scrunched his sockets at the text then looked over to Asgore holding the perplexed expression. Asgore gave a quick look to ensure the boys were still distracted by Gerson’s books before he signed, ‘sick.’

Grillby’s flames crackled as he watched the exchange, ‘perhaps the booze?’ He flicked quickly.

‘He has been under a lot of stress but he doesn’t have any symptoms,’ Gaster barely signed before Papyrus looked over to him.

“Where are the pictures of you?” Papyrus smiled.

“Those books are for his children, aside from the few in Grillby’s there-”

“Now you clamp your teeth boy,” Gerson bit as he pulled a black book out of his inventory. Gaster blinked as he saw his given name written in a scratchy lopsided attempt at WingDings across the cover. “I keep a book on all my kiddos,” he stated firmly as he opened the book to an image of a skeleton in a bloodied wool cloak.

Sans looked over to Gaster then back to the book his finger placed against the skeleton, “is that you?”

“That’s my cloak,” he took care not to sign as he studied the figure. Those were definitely his sockets, that permanent glare sang true but the monster in the drawing had a nasal cavity and detached jaw line similar to Papyrus’s, the shape of the skull was also much more square. The strangest were the hands though, long and thin against the booklet he was holding.

Sans snickered, “you looked like an angry Papyrus!”
Papyrus turned the pages in the book a smile teasing at his face as he saw Gaster with a tiny flamling Grillby, studying signs with a very young Toriel, and sparring with Asgore, who at the time completely dwarfed his meager frame. Later on there were articles on the Core pressed in amongst sketches and a very detailed chalk drawing of him with two very young skeletons in the corridors of Waterfall. Gaster was crouched down by an echo flower as the pair waited behind him in eager anticipation.

Gaster looked to the weary eyed Sans who was smiling fondly down at the image. His own mind kept bouncing between the previous conversation and the meaning behind the book.

They didn’t even notice as the last of the patrons slipped out into the cold of the night as closing time drew near. It was Sans falling asleep against the corner of the bar that finally encouraged the family to leave. Papyrus thanked everyone for the lovely time on behalf of his snoozing sloth of a brother as well as for himself before he headed out the door.

Gaster took a bit longer in his farewells, there was one last event tonight after all and it took considerably more courage than he’d anticipated. He took a deep breath as he pressed his palm against the worn wood of the bar’s door. This was it then.

A warm soft touch fluttered against his shoulder, he didn’t need to turn to know it was Grillby’s. ‘I’ll keep an eye on them,’ he crackled softly as he signed.

Gaster nodded a few times as his gaze fell to the window watching as Papyrus tried to force Sans to stand. The smaller brother seemed to want no part in it as he swooned to whatever side Papyrus wasn’t guarding. It was a deliberate annoyance but highly effective as a matter of moments later his shouts could be heard inside of the bar, and likely down the street as well.

‘I know you will,’ he wrapped his arms around Grillby then signed to the remaining ex-soldiers in the back, ‘thank all of you for your support.’

The brisk cold stepped atop the smiles of his friends as he turned back to his boys. They were ready for this, he knew they were.

Papyrus started towards the River Person’s landing but Gaster strolled to the right of Grillby’s instead. The boys followed him until he paused outside of the former research retreat during the ice excavating process for the cooling of the Core. It took a bit of persuading to get Asgore to let him buy the place, he was more than willing to give it to him but Gaster wanted to pay for it.

The darkness in the windows seemed to peer back at him. He shivered at a lingering nightmare though it could be passed off as the cold.

“Dad why are we standing outside of an empty house in the middle of the night?” Papyrus looked the building up and down with little interest.

Gaster took his time to collect himself before he smiled lamely to his sons he could see both who they had been and who they were now. He wondered if in that moment they could say the same of him.

“I’m staring at your house in the middle of the night.”

Sans rubbed at his socket, “we live in the Capital Dad, or are you going looney on us?”

The two stared at the building for a while as the words set in, “this is our house?” Papyrus smiled.
“You got us a house?” Sans suddenly seemed as alert as the chill in the air.

Gaster pulled a key for each of them out of his inventory, “there’s a lab in the basement Sans so you can spare your room some of your collection. Just promise me you’ll keep it cleaner then the one at home.”

“No promises,” Sans smiled as he took the silver key.

“And Papyrus there’s a storage shed,” he hitched his thumb in the direction of the shack, “it should be perfect for stowing your pieces and to serve as a workshop." He handed him a bronze key, “I know no one is as paranoid as I am about locking doors put there is a padlock on it if you’d like to utilize it.”

Papyrus was practically bouncing up and down, “can we see it?”

Gaster nodded his head a few times then was nearly bowled over by the pair approaching the stoop of their house.

Papyrus was a literal hurricane of excitement as he fluttered from the living room to the kitchen opening then shutting every last door to each cabinet. He turned heel before he leapt up to the second floor with a series of steps. Gaster had to resolve himself years ago that this was just something he couldn’t comprehend.

Sans took his time, checked out the space piece by piece. His eyes plotted over each area as he took in various factors. He didn’t even make it upstairs before he stood alongside Gaster seemingly satisfied, “where’s your room?”

He pressed his molars together harshly enough to aggravate the crack that ran up from his mouth. His mind raced with feathered thoughts as he did his best to stop the more negative ones from fully forming.

Papyrus came out from the smaller of the two upstairs room, “you seem to have miscalculated! There are only two bedrooms, and I will not allow you to sleep on the couch again. You made quite the mess last time.” He folded his arms to punctuate his point as he threw his head in disgust to the air.

Gaster shook his head, “this is your house.”

Papyrus’s facade dropped as he slipped from the upstairs hallway and fell with a complete disregard to gravity to the floor below. “Yes, but where is your room?”

“Back in the Capital.”

“You’re running away again?!” Papyrus’s ribs hitched as they fought for air they didn’t need, “but you promised!”

“I’m not running away.”

“You’re making us run away?”

“No, no, Papyrus listen,” he ran his hand along the top of his skull before he settled it on Papyrus’s shoulder then his other atop Sans’s skull.

“I’ve been thinking about the future a lot lately,” his thumbs moved against both of the boys as he gave his best attempt at sounding neutral. “When you make it to the surface I want to know that you can experience all of the things you deserve. If your adventures take you far away from me or if I’m
He was going to miss them so much, the Underground wasn’t that big but imagining himself alone in that quiet house it felt so far away. He would be locked behind his gray door or spend an increasing amount of all nighters at the lab. Until eventually one of the pair bothered him into socializing or dragging him to their house to see the newest thing. He wrapped his arms around the pair and bent his knees just enough to rest his chin on Papyrus’s shoulder.

“I just want to know that you’ll be okay then,” his voice cut out in an odd spot that stabbed briefly at the magic that formed his font. “I don’t want you to be held back by me in anyway,” he was surprised to find as he wiped his tears away that they were yellow and not his usual violet.

The house was completely silent, even the tantrum the wind was throwing outside couldn’t pierce it. Papyrus fidgeted with the edge of his sleeve, while Gaster took in the absolutely hideous off purple color of the carpeting, but Sans stared directly up to his father.

“I’m sorry but we can’t accept this,” he curled the key into Gaster’s fingers. His eyelight shone bright as he smiled up to him, “it feels like we only just met.”

Gaster’s fingers curled around the key, “this is your next step boys.”

Papyrus shrugged, “we’ve done a lot of things out of order so far. Why start now?”

His soul thrummed in his chest as he placed the key against his ribs and shut his sockets tight.

“There’s a large closet in the lab, it’s big enough for a bed maybe a dresser,” the pair brightened, “I’ll stay with you for a month, just so I know you’re settled in, or until you feel you’ve had enough of me.”

“We will never have enough!” Papyrus declared.

His good eye light rounded as a lopsided smile bloomed across his face. Home was Fluffy Bunny before bed, the rattling of bones, the stomping of feet with shouts, abandoned notebooks, and his boys ever smiling up at him. “Well how can I argue with an argument as sound as that.”

Chapter End Notes

My writing process involves writing whatever I want when I want to write it so typically I either have to rewrite an entire chapter or I have a couple of paragraphs with a general direction to go off of. This chapter was literally just “I want Gaster to say “but it feels like we just met” at the beginning and then Sans to repeat it at the end... Ta-da!!! So the transitions in this chapter are a bit harsh and I apologize for that if it was irksome to anyone.
Moving Day

Chapter Summary

The skeleton family start their big move down to Snowdin.

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your kudos last week! And any comment always makes my day!

The carnage of Sans haphazardly shoving his possessions into boxes with minimal care displayed itself in a mess of papers against the floor. Gaster shook his head as he scooped down to pick up a series of waxy papers similar to the backs of bandaids, either he decided to wear twenty at once or he’d become quite the collector. His hand bullets made quick work of the remaining fragments of discarded research notes and tiny scraps from the torn edges of notebooks. He discarded the waste to the barely used bin then lifted it off of the ground to dump it in the larger bag.

Removing the bin revealed a brightly colored rolled up ball of paper that had evidently missed the trash bin. Gaster grabbed it to add it amongst the other rubbish but his curiosity got the best of him. He set the bin down to carefully unfurl the pamphlet from the adult learning facility.

Sans was wanting to expand on his education by seeking views outside of Gaster’s own, a touch of pride burned in his soul. The boy was going to surpass him he just knew it.

But why was this thrown aside? Was he afraid Gaster would disapprove? Maybe he just changed his mind?

The door to the bedroom flew open and the pamphlet was quickly shoved into the trash. “Dad you haven’t packed any of your belongings!” Papyrus stomped.

“I’m not taking anything more than the essentials.”

“Well essentially you have yet to pack the essentials!”

“Fair enough.” Papyrus took the trash bin away from him in a fluid motion before he turned back out the door. With nothing left to hold Gaster shoved his hands in his gray sweatshirt pocket. It had been a gift from Sans and, where Gaster was initially against the unprofessional attire, he was surprised at how comfy it was. “Where is your brother?” Gaster asked before he tucked into the basement doorway.

“Somewhere slacking off I’m sure,” Papyrus grumbled.

Sore subject, Gaster ruled as he made his way down the stairs.

It was easy enough to tap his mattress and blankets into his digital storage space. He’d given up entirely on creating a finished application that could be used by the general public. His attention had
just drifted elsewhere so he hardly had the time the project deserved. However, when he mentioned it in passing to Alphys she seemed quite excited by the potential.

She was a unique one. Her specialties lied in her robotics, technical engineering, and computer sciences but it was as if she couldn’t see her own talent. Sans had invited her to several lunches but she always seemed far too intimidated to speak in front of him. Her scales would tint across her cheeks in pink and her answers were always presented in mouse like tones, he could never piece together why. He trusted her with the project though and figured she’d be able to finish what he couldn’t.

As his mind roamed he tapped what he could fit into his storage space before he stubbornly began to collapse the bed into pieces so it might fit in a box. The frame clattered to the ground in a sudden burst of noise that received a startled shout from Gaster.

“Are you okay dad?” Papyrus shouted from the top of the stairs.

“Yes Papyrus,” he called back but the boy came down anyways to check.

“If you needed assistance you should have asked,” Papyrus took the wrench away from his father to work at the bolts.

“I built the Core Papyrus I think I can handle taking a bed apart,” he scoffed.

Regardless of his protest Gaster figured it was best to move on to whatever else he needed. As he looked around though he was uncertain as to what else he needed his bedding and clothes were already tucked into his storage, was there anything else? He opened the door under the stairs a bit disgusted by how many abandoned webs decorated the ancient boxes and knick knacks.

Two large metal flag poles decorated with an overgrown metal point fell from the closet gracious to be free of the door. It was Papyrus’s turn to jump at the clang of metal against the ground. “Dad! Will you stop making a ruckus!?” He turned his head over to see what had fallen. An ecstatic grin blossomed across his face, “are those giant spears?”

“They’re glorified scrap metal,” he retorted flatly. He’d intended to melt them down ages ago for material but he never got around to it.

“Can I have them?”

“What use could you possibly have for twelve foot flag poles?”

Papyrus scratched the bottom of his jaw while his sockets narrowed with thought, “I don’t know yet but I will find a use!” He poked his head into the stairwell closet, “what is this your trashcan?”

Gaster chuckled, “it’s my ‘I’ll get to it later’ closet. This was everything that was in your room before I cleaned it out.”

“But I’ve always cleaned my room,” Papyrus tried.

“From before you boys,” he smiled pleasantly as Papyrus’s face lit with recognition.

“So then these are all of the secrets you didn’t want us to see,” he grinned mischievously.

“Some yes, but mostly it's just junk I thought was far too dangerous for children to be around,” he scratched the side of his skull, “I believe there’s a broken cannon in there somewhere.”
“Can I have it?”

“Spears and a cannon? Since when did my little pacifist develop such destructive tastes?”

“You don’t have to use them destructively,” Papyrus nodded, “you could use it for intimidation!”

That was laughable, “what in the world are you intimidating?”

Papyrus’s expression went completely blank while his teeth sealed together. He hummed thoughtfully before he poked his head back through the doorway, “what’s the chest?” He reached in to grab the former treasure box before Gaster could warn him. The rest of the contents of the closet fell to the ground in a touching tribute to all of the worlds breaking sounds.

“Are you alright?” Gaster asked as he helped Papyrus to his feet.

“Yeah,” he wiped a few webs from his face before he finished pulling the chest out, “so what’s in here?”

Gaster drummed his fingers against the decrepit leather that attempted to flake away at the vibrations. It had been lost to the years decorated in scars that time had lashed into it, the wood was rot, the leather was scratched, rust consumed any piece of exposed metal, and the lock was broken but he couldn’t quite get rid of the old thing. From the moment the Underground was formed that glorified box had been the closest thing he had to a home until developments finally started.

His fingers traced the worn edges with a tainted fondness as his bones pushed back the potential splinters. “Got something you wanna get off you chest?” The other skeletons groaned their disapproval.

Sans’s sockets appeared twice as wide, despite the fact they were half lidded, due to the deep dark circles under them. His hands were secured tightly in his sweatshirt pocket but the way the fabric was wrinkled it was obvious he was grasping it tightly. Exhaustion wrote itself over his form in a fine mess of calligraphy.

“Don’t just show up out of nowhere with terrible jokes!” Papyrus shouted.

Emerald eyes, green fields, before the thought came to full fruition Gaster had magic pooled into his hand as he cupped the side of Sans’s skull. Sans leapt away with both of his hands covered over his cheek and his sockets were wide with shock. “What was that for?”

Gaster curled his fingers into his palms while he guiltily bowed bowed head, “I am so sorry- I didn’t think.” Sans just looked so pitiful, so small. He’d reached out before the idea could even process as a terrible one.

All of this time with them, all of his growth as an individual, it still wasn’t enough.

“Dad was trying to heal you because you look like what the dog just drug in,” Papyrus stated with a worried glance.

“I think the expression is cat,” he shrugged, “just tired. We about packed up? Can’t wait to take my first nap in the new place,” he stretched his arms up towards the ceiling.

“You just woke up!”

“And I’m egghausted,” he winked.
“Where are you getting eggs from?”

“Preferably the fridge, but nah, just sounds good.”

A harsh gravelly Nyeh had Gaster wishing he had stopped the pair sooner. “Nearly packed,” he tapped the top of the trunk. “Just need the bedframe tucked into a box.”

“Are you taking that?” Sans pointed to the chest.

“I don’t think so,” he looked between the twins, “I’ve just never been without it.” It wasn’t as if he used the box for its’ intended purpose anymore it was just the sentimental anchor that tethered him to his past.

“Well let us investigate further! Then the answer will reveal itself,” Papyrus opened the lid, thankfully he seemed to take care of the age as he gently folded it back.

All of the contents of the box belonged to WingDings, they were things far too sentimental to lose but far too close to consuming him to keep close. When you’ve lived for centuries who you were is a lot longer than who you are and it was easy to be swallowed by it.

Papyrus gave him a cautious glance as he resisted the urge to dive into the antiques himself.

A saber sat at the top of the boxing squinting up to them from inside its’ worn leather sheath. He passed it to Papyrus with little care but the boy was enamored with the dull gray of the blade, “you know how to fight with a sword?”

“Gerson believed I lacked discipline and that training me with a weapon would help me focus my strengths,” he shrugged, “he was wrong of course. The weapon was far too clunky in my hand.” He pulled out a rusty carving knife that was missing its’ mate, “knives on the other hand I liked but I’d take magic any day.”

Sans’s eyelights kept adjusting themselves as he tilted the knife in the dim basement light. “It hasn’t ever seen battle,” Gaster assured him after reading the unsettled expression.

Most of the box was full of knick knacks and trinkets that really didn’t warrant being explained but he couldn’t quite let them go either. He pulled out a wadded mess of dingy white and dirty purple fabric, his fingers lingered across the surface before he separated the capelet from the long white tunic. The Deltarune, symbol of the monster kingdom, was still emblazoned across the chest of the shirt no matter how faded it was.

“This,” he tapped his teeth together, “was the formal wear for the Royal Guard back when I was a child.”

Papyrus gingerly took the white tunic from Gaster and unfurled it proper. A cockeyed smile graced his teeth as he held it up, “it’s so tiny!”

Gaster chuckled, “and it was still too big for me.”

“But you never joined the guard,” Sans narrowed his brows as he fidgeted with the clasp of the capelet that also beared the crest.

A smile teased across his teeth, “no but I had tried. I wanted to fight with Grillby, keep him safe, camp out in the night sky as we faced the dread that was just on the horizon.” He chuckled, “I happened to be incredibly frustrating to the recruiter but Gerson pulled a few strings.”
“When I wore this the first time,” stars, how could he even describe it? He’d stood in front of the mirror with Grillby and took in the wrongness of it. The way the fabric hung so heavy off of his frame as it attempted to grip across broad shoulders that didn’t exist. It sagged so much in the front that the proud emblem of his kingdom, that he would proudly bear, was warped, lost in folds of fabric. “It just didn’t fit, it wasn’t meant for someone like me.”

He’d attempted to run away: discarded the uniform, left behind his books, his lighter, and ran. Toriel caught him, if it wasn’t for her kindness he didn’t know where he’d be today. Asgore had returned the chainmail that accompanied the uniform to the military but returned the fabric to Gaster. The Boss Monster assured him there was more than one way to serve his country.

It had meant giving up on everything he’d known up to that point, and he’d risked losing his only real friend, but he’d refused his assignment with backing from the Prince and his lady.

“If I’d have followed through and joined I assure you I wouldn’t be here right now.”

Papyrus’s sockets softened with thought as he gave a pitiful look over to his brother who did his best impression of wakefulness. “Hey! Do you have that cloak from Gerson’s pictures?”

Gaster’s amused smile dropped, “no. I don’t. It was stolen from me during a rather uncertain time in the Underground.” He reached into the box and pulled out a thin piece of scrap metal with a clasp on the back. His thumbs worked deftly at the grime until the thinly carved ‘WD’ in wingdings was fully exposed. “But Grillby got this back for me, I’m still not sure how he found it,” his thumbs traced the sharp edges.

What would the monster who carved these initials think of the one he was now? Would he think he’d wasted his prolonged existence on frivolous pursuits? Would he curse him for not having freed everyone by now? The child in the cloak was logical and obstinate and he was- perhaps he hadn’t changed all that much.

He stood up suddenly and carelessly tossed the piece of metal back into the box, “let's get going there’s no point in lingering in the past when the future is right in front of us.” That’s right. It was all behind him. He shut the lid back on the box then shoved it back into the closet.

It took a bit of effort but the three of them managed to collapse the bedframe enough to fit in a few boxes that in turn slipped into the enchanted boxes Gaster had rented from an enthusiast. The living room was full of a complex castle of precariously stacked boxes that could only be the work of Papyrus. He turned to his son who was scrutinizing his display, “I thought there was a wall around it as well.”

“This is why you should sleep more,” Sans mused.

“Papyrus I asked you to sleep,” Gaster folded his arms.

“I did sleep! For a full eight minutes!” He laughed triumphantly to which neither skeleton could argue.

They began to load up a scavenged wagon full of more boxes than could possibly be safe to transport. Papyrus grabbed a net with magnets and stuck the corners to the metal sides safely securing the overflow of boxes. “Clever,” Gaster nodded in appreciation, he’d been planning on summoning a multitude of hand bullets to keep them in place.

Each skeleton carried a box in their hands, though Gaster had a few extra pairs to spare, while they alternated who was in charge of managing the wagon through the terrain of the Underground.
“I’m so excited for the Great Papyrus’s new lair!” Papyrus sang out as they carefully maneuvered the wagon around Waterfall’s marshes.

“I thought villains had lairs,” Gaster pointed out, “you’re much more of a hero.”

“Yes but ‘The Lair of the Skeleton Family’ sounds much better than ‘The Hideout of the Great Papyrus, his Lazy Brother, and the Overworked Scientist!'”

“Can’t argue with that,” he shrugged.

Sans sat against a stalagmite, his cheek pressed firmly against the cool stone. His skull beaded with sweat while his ribs inflated and collapsed in shaky patterns. “Sans! Come on,” Papyrus called.

Sans rubbed his face, “I’m gonna take a shortcut, I’ll meetcha there.”

“Ugh! It’s your codependence on those infernal shortcuts that has you so tired in the first place! You should try exercising for a change.”

“Nah, it’d be outta character,” he winked.

“Do what you need to do Sans,” Gaster assured him. Sans nodded a thanks before he disappeared.

“He didn’t even take his box,” Papyrus pointed out before he scooped it under his arm.

Sure, Sans had a habit of exerting the bare minimum of efforts towards regularly strenuous tasks but lately there was a complete avoidance. Gaster threw thoughts about in his head for a while before he turned back to Papyrus, “is Sans alright?” Perhaps Sans was just hiding something from him.

Papyrus’s sockets pointed to the ground, “he says he’s fine. His magic doesn’t really feel fine but he says he’s just been running tired lately.”

“Do you believe him?”

“Not really, but I have to. He’s my brother and I trust if it’s something important he’d tell me,” one of the boxes tumbled from his grip only to be caught by a pair of conjured hands. Papyrus blinked before he looked around at the caravan of box toting hands that followed them, “are you okay? I don’t think I’ve ever seen this many at once.”

Gaster smirked, “I might be beating Sans to the first nap in the house but I’m alright.”

Papyrus groaned, “what about unpacking? We have to decide on everythings absolute most perfectly ideal location!” Gaster chuckled happy to listen to Papyrus’s ramblings of what he thought these ideal places were.

It was amazing how uplifting it was just to listen to his taller son ramble about pretty much anything. Everything was said with such confidence and gusto it was very difficult to think of anything else.

Of course, Gaster knew the quiet side of Papyrus as well. The child that would hide away until he could slide his mask back into place and be the Great Papyrus Sans knew him to be. Gaster was honored to be his confidant, the one he could confide his uncertainties in. Papyrus loved his brother but for some reason the confidence bolstering compliments of his never seemed to be the right fit.

If Papyrus really knew anything he trusted the boy would have come to him. Which left him back to puzzling over Sans’s increasingly odd behavior. Hopefully it was just his desire to be lazy.

The blinding white light of snowdin pierced straight through the dark of their sockets as they
squinted into the snow filled land. Papyrus stiffened as his magic stung out into the cold to declare the iceland his new home.

The snow banks proved to be quite the challenge for the poor bogged down wagon as ice piled up against the wheels until it was far too difficult to pull. Gaster reached into the last of his magic reserves for one last set of hands but Papyrus held his hand up dramatically, “I have a solution!”

The boy conjured three pairs of bones at a subtle incline then hoisted the wagon atop them. He pulled forward with more bones summoning themselves along the base of the rickety wagon allowing for the wheels to turn along clunky tracks, “color me impressed,” Gaster hummed engrossed in the display. He’d grown so codependent on his hand bullets he’d forgotten that bone constructs alone had many merits.

“What color is that?” Papyrus asked chipperly.

Gaster shook his head as a thought scratched to the surface of his mind, “why didn’t you do that in the marshes?”

“That is quite simple,” he declared pointing to the air, “I didn’t think of it then,” his voice dropped as his posture shifted to uncertainty.

When at last they arrived at the house the pair inhaled in unison. The entire building was decorated with an assortment of brightly colored red and green lights that reflected in the blanket of snow. “Wowie! They’re so pretty,” Papyrus’s magic sang of his wonderment as a watery smile crept across his face, “we’re gonna celebrate Gyftmas together now right?”

“I’m pretty sure we’d be kicked out of Snowdin if we didn’t,” Gaster mused. They never quite got around to the holiday, it wasn’t as big of a deal in the capital, despite Asgore’s efforts, but in a city covered in twinkling red and greens it seemed it would be inevitable. A new experience, in the boy’s new house, time seemed as if it had little interest in relenting its’ flow.

“Did you do this?”

Gaster shook his head as he opened the front door surprised to see the ugly green couch from the house against the wall. The coffee table was now in use as a side table, and the kitchen table was near the entryway.

He tapped his finger to the corner of his teeth, he was stunned. Completely befuddled. His eyelight slid over to Papyrus who bore a matching expression which only meant, “Sans?”

The house was empty with silence as the pair awaited some sort of a response. Everything seemed to be set up already, hours of work was put into place to allow for this. Just as Gaster was about to call again Sans peeked his head out of the smaller of the two upstairs rooms, “hey.”

“Did you do this?”

“Nah, couldn’t’ve been me,” he yawned, “far too lazy for that. Must have been Santa or something.”

“It’s not Gyftmas yet so it couldn’t have been Santa!” Papyrus informed the room, “but whoever it was is quite crafty indeed.” He rubbed the bottom of his chin, “I shall track down this house making culprit to give them proper thanks!”

Sans snickered, “good luck,” he saluted leaning heavily on the doorknob to what he seemed to have claimed as his room, “you should see the mess they made in your room.”
Papyrus’s brows furrowed, no doubt processing what sort of cretin would make the house nice just to make his room a mess, before he trotted up the steps. Gaster brought the last of the boxes inside then dispersed his hand bullets, his limbs went cold as the effort settled upon him. He stumbled over to the no-longer-kitchen table to steady himself as his head rushed with magic sent from his soul to balance him back out. His fingers ran against his forehead in an effort to collect himself.

Papyrus began to ramble borderline incoherently in his excitement, Gaster could just make out something about a racecar bed and fire? He wasn’t exactly sure what it meant but the boy was happy about it. Slowly though his mind began to process that whatever this racecar bed was had not been something he’d previously purchased.

He was a bit hesitant on his feet but he made his way up to the room to peek inside. Papyrus was a mess of flailing arms and giddy excitement until he flopped without any semblance of grace into his new bed. “Maybe now you’ll actually use it,” Sans snickered.

“I can cruise while I snooze!” Papyrus shouted excitedly. “What did they do to your room Sans?” He dashed excitedly out of the room then down the hall. Sans deflated into the desk chair that was in front of a newly refurbished computer. Even from here Gaster could see the subtle shakes as the boy did his best to prevent his bones from rattling.

Gaster leaned in the doorway, “what is all this,” his voice was soft as his own capital letters allowed.

“Pretty cool right? Thought Paps deserved a nice space,” he chased the mouse to the computer with little interest.

“This is a ton of money Sans, not to mention work,” he gestured wordlessly to the room, “you’ve always been a bit frivolous in spending towards Papyrus but this is borderline excessive. Is this why you’ve been so exhausted lately?”

Sans went silent. His fingers tapped against the keyboard as his gaze drifted out over the snowbanks. “Actually Dad I’ve been mean-”

“Sans! Your room has been sadly neglected by the gracious intruder!” Papyrus poked his head back in the room.

Sans’s demeanor shifted in a second, his eye lights brightened, hands slid into his pocket, as he casually threw his shoulder over the chair, “nah, I think it’s perfect.”

“There’s nothing in it but a mattress!” Papyrus woefully reported.

He shrugged, “all I need. Trying out a minimalist lifestyle.”

Papyrus eyed him in an attempt to find the pun but he came up short handed, “alright,” he stated flatly. “I suppose if that’s all you want,” his teeth tapped together as he looked his brother up and down one more time, “I’m going to go make sandwiches if anyone wishes to partake!”

“I’ll be right down Papyrus,” Gaster called as the boy dashed down the stairs. “What were you saying Sans?” His eye light, though only one, pierced against the boy’s facade in an attempt to see what was hidden but he wasn’t nearly as skilled in the technique as Sans.

“Oh uh,” he stammered, “I just appreciate what you do for us. Thought it was time your no good lazybones of a son pulled his own weight.”

Worry flushed his features, “I am so sorry if I ever made you feel that way-”
“No,” he put his hands up defensively, “not you- just.” His eyes traced the flame pattern on the rug in the center of the room, “think I need to sleep a bit more, I’m really in my head right now.”

“Well, why don’t we eat first then you can rest,” he smiled fondly at finally hearing a bit of truth from him. Sans’s sockets slid shut slowly before his chin came to rest on the back of the chair. “Alright, sleep first I suppose,” he pinged Sans’s soul blue then carried him gently over to his room. Gaster rested him gently atop the old mattress before he pulled a blanket from his inventory. He wrapped the blanket gently around his son’s slumbering form while he took in all of the soft lines of his gentle resting face. His fingers traced around the side of his skull to place the moment as a tactile memory. A tap of his teeth to the side of Sans’s head and he left the boy to his rest, after all, someone had to make sure Papyrus wasn’t putting sand in the sandwiches.

Chapter End Notes

When I originally drafted this story out I never would have anticipated moving while I was writing the “moving on” section of the story! But my attention can finally be back on this story fully and I’m really glad cause we are gonna be getting into some- things here shortly!

The entire time I wrote this chapter I was frustrated: I don’t know what I’m doing, this is stupid, he doesn’t sound like that- but when I reread it before editing I was really surprised that... I didn’t hate it! No it’s not the most exciting chapter in the world or my favorite but it’s not nearly as bad as I thought.

By the by Gray and Gold and Gray I’m fairly certain is still my favorite chapter.
Inheritance

Chapter Summary

Gaster realizes he doesn’t quite have anything he can pass on to his boys so he resolves to remedy this.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your continued support! I got caught smiling at my phone like an idiot one day this week when I got an e-mail alert about Kudos and Comments. I hope you all continue to enjoy and I’m sorry I did not get a chance to edit this chapter thoroughly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A fresh round of night terrors enwrapped Gaster in such a fright that he awoke tangled in his blankets suspended a mere foot above the ground. He rested his head back as much as he dared. A laugh formed at gravity’s defiance at its’ own laws as he rested his eyes a few moments longer. It was getting rather ridiculous the rate of occurrence and he was beginning to grow paranoid in wondering if his subconscious knew something he didn’t. He debated writing down the flickers of recurring images he always remembered when he woke up but he feared that would only encourage the nightmares.

Finally gravity remembered its’ singular job and Gaster dropped to the floor with a shwip from the falling sheets. He slouched against the floor for a moment before he began laughing at nothing in particular, maybe the lack of sleep was getting to him, but as he laid there he realized he just sort of felt good. There wasn’t any pesky reminders of his age permeating his body and his mind felt stimulated as if he’d already fed his coffee habit. He drummed his fingers against his sternum in contemplation, something had to be done about this.

It was a rather tedious embarrassing fight as the great mind of the Underground fought to untangle himself from his bedding. Once freed he got dressed as his mind raced on how to take advantage of the day.

He couldn’t make up his mind so he decided to start it in the most mundanly accepted fact: a good day starts with breakfast. As he headed to the kitchen a growing concern pitted his stomach as the room already abuzz with the sounds of cookery.

He leaned in the doorway as he watched Papyrus struggle to make scrambled eggs. The jovial skeleton hummed a quick upbeat tune as he bounced about the kitchen, it must just be a good day. Papyrus finally turned to face Gaster as he plated the eggs and startled, “how long have you been there?” He clutched at his soul as if it had attempted to leave his ribcage.

Gaster shrugged in response with a mischievous smile across his face, “you’re making breakfast?”

Papyrus laughed nervously, “well I tried.”
“Can’t be any worse then what I make,” Gaster laughed, “want me to get your brother?” Papyrus was about to say something when the monster mentioned sluggishly crossed the threshold of the kitchen and performed his best impression of slime as he slumped in a chair. Gaster took in the pathetic display with a curious glance then took a seat of his own while Papyrus laid down the plates.

The eggs seemed innocent enough but there was an odd scent to them that warranted caution. Papyrus eagerly awaited for the pair to try them before he’d touch his own, and so, with sealed sockets they scooped up a forkful, both of their faces attempting not to screw up in distaste.

They were gritty no doubt this was because of the overwhelming amount of salt and sugar that made up most of their mass. The pair exchanged a glance, “well?” Papyrus asked nervously, his gloved hands tangled and untangled themselves.

The pair hesitated as neither desired to hurt his feelings before Gaster finally relented, “they’re indescribable Papyrus.”

Sans laughed, “looks like you inherited Dad’s cooking prowess.”

The three of them laughed together the warmth of which filled their new kitchen enough to fight back the cold of Snowdin. Gaster paused in thought, these were his sons. Nothing could convince him otherwise, not anymore, but their was one thing that disqualified him from his role as a father: there was no inheritance he could pass on to them. No thumbprint in his life that he had pressed to them that even after he was gone would remain alongside them. He leaned his chair on its’ two hind legs as he sunk into quiet contemplation.

“Well I went to put salt onto the eggs but the cap was suspiciously unscrewed,” there was no accusation in his voice but Sans chuckled in guilt anyways. “I thought they were ruined but then I thought maybe I could fix it with sugar...you could call it… an eggs-periment!”

The resident scientists rolled with laughter, it had been unexpected and well timed. “That’s not even fair Paps,” Sans was almost in tears, “that’s my thing,” he rubbed at his cheeks.

“What can I say? I am great at all that I do, even making terrible jokes,” Papyrus finally tried a bite of his eggs, then shrugged in indifference before he finished the plate. He really would eat anything provided it wasn’t covered in grease.

“Let’s go on an outing today,” Gaster stated as he rocked back in his chair. The boys exchanged a considerate look and then nodded. The trio had been through the entire Underground, with the exception of the sealed ruins, together so no doubt the twins were of the opinion that they’d seen all of it.

Shortly after breakfast the trio set out with Gaster being the only one with a clear vision as to where they were heading. They had stopped by Bonny’s convenience store for some sandwich fixings before they continued onto the River Person’s boat. The talk was amiable amongst the three of them and the River Person's humming fell into background noise. As they exited towards Hotland Gaster handed a few gold to the River Person. “Might pay to be wary,” they called out in thanks as they headed down the canal.

Gaster tensed but relaxed as he rationalized it as the usual random garble the River Person spat before he continued down the path with his sons. Behind him the twins exchanged looks of varying curiosity and confusion as they crossed along thin corridors that overlooked the pits of magma.

Sans’s feet stumbled over nearly any rock in their way, no doubt too lazy to pick them up, which put Papyrus on edge. Eventually Papyrus’s soul had had enough and he elected to carry his brother. The
temperature began to cool as the sealed cavern opened up into an open expanse with a clear view of the ceiling that spanned the entire Underground.

The pair looked to Gaster who nodded, they ran ahead and found themselves on a wide fenced off ledge that overlooked the caverns of Waterfall. If you looked around the section of Waterfall that connected to the cavern ceiling you could just barely make out the tallest trees of Snowdin.

The cold breeze from the rush of Waterfall’s namesake had allowed the stone out here to cool to a pleasant temperature and tainted it to a dark brown color. Tiny plants had began to grow around the posts despite the rough terrain. Gaster leaned on the fencing his eyes traced up the caverns of waterfall that stretched up to the surface. Sans leaned against the rail his posture, unknowingly, matching Gaster’s own but Papyrus had opted for safety and took in the sites a few feet behind the pair.

“This is one of my favorite spots to think,” Gaster smiled, “I found this place shortly after I became the ‘Royal Scientist’ and quickly got annoyed with sharing my ideas.” He turned to face his sons, “but for today I think it would make an excellent picnic spot!”

Papyrus quickly agreed and began to unload the tote bag he’d filled with all of their purchases. He laid out a pathetic excuse for a blanket that appeared to have been through a war all its’ own. They all sat upon it, Sans offered a hand up to steady Gaster as he knelt down to the floor. Papyrus began to lay out the condiments, he had to slap Sans’s hand away to prevent the ketchup from being swiped, and Gaster leaned back resting on his hands.

A soft breeze sucked up through the caverns of Waterfall and passed over the picnickers and Gaster relaxed. Papyrus and Sans were both studying him curiously and his singular eye light moved away from their gaze, “the breeze, it reminds me of the wind on the surface.”

“It makes you that happy?” Papyrus asked and Gaster had to touch his face to recognize the large content grin that had sprouted there.

Gaster chuckled, “I suppose it does.”

“What’s the surface like?” Papyrus asked and Sans looked away from the mess of a sandwich he was constructing.

“Bright,” he summarized. “Waterfall blues that cut through valleys of green planes that put the pine of Snowdin to shame.” He looked to the tiny buds growing by the fencepost, “more plant life then you could imagine more diverse than monsters themselves. On days where the sun shone you could feel its’ energy in your very bones energizing and relaxing at the same time.”

“On days where the sun hid behind clouds, large accumulations of vaporized water, the sky would grow gray and silver droplets of water would fall with little pattern or reason. Each incident completely randomized,” he could almost feel the pinging as the cold droplets bypassed his clothes and fell to his bones.

“And then there was the wind,” he felt the expression grow across his face again, “always present but ever fickle. There would be days where it was nearly still just barely detectable and then others where your bones would fight for traction against the ground as it roared against you.”

“The best days it was gentle, tugging at your cloak or pushing you forward,” his mind was swimming with memories of days gone by.

Papyrus’s eye sockets were misty but nowhere near crying, “that sounds so beautiful Dad.”
He couldn’t wait for the boys to the Surface with their own sockets. Papyrus would no doubt be overwhelmed by all the sights and sounds and demand that they do everything at once with Sans dragged behind him. He imagined when they saw the moon their first night and Sans eyes sparkled in a means that would make the stars jealous as he forced Papyrus to sit quietly in the grass for hours as he pointed out constellations. The real ones he’d studied for years.

What would he do then, when the boys were finally up there, finally living the lives they deserved. He wanted to break the barrier, that was the one thought his determination had ensnared around so tightly that, at times, he couldn’t breath a thought of anything else.

He smiled softly, Grillby would open a new restaurant and be far busier then he knew what to do with. He’d actually get to hire help and maybe take more than a single day off. Asgore would make a garden, far more beautiful and vast then anything that had been seen before by mortal eyes. Toriel would leave the ruins she’d banished herself to and finally get to meet his boys. She’d spoil them, stars, he knew she would. He could see them all together, delighted, elated, ecstatic- just, happy.

But where did he fit on the surface? They were so close to cracking it had he really not given it any thought? Maybe- a nice little home that the boys would always be happy to visit. Where Gaster could watch his tiny family grow. He supposed hed tinker with things to break the silence of being alone again after all this time. His thumb traced circles over its’ mate, after the barrier broke there wouldn’t be much need for his determination- unless there was a war. It was a naive hope that assured him it wouldn’t come to that.

“You said within a year if everything goes right, didn’t’cha?” He raised his dripping condiment stuffed mess of a sandwich in a ‘cheers’ motion before he squeezed down on the bread. Gushes of varying half liquids dripped out of the back end and down his shirt. He barely paid heed while the other two monsters grimaced as if personally insulted.

Papyrus scoffed as he finished creating his masterpiece: a towering hero sandwich, with layers of meat and cheese stacked perfectly atop one another so that they would not escape with a bite. Gaster looked at his sparse little deli sandwich with two pieces of meat and a singular condiment it was funny how much time they’d all spent together yet they were so different from one another.

Papyrus began an argument with Sans over how they could possibly put the blanket in the nice clean tote bag now that it was so utterly filthy to which Sans retorted with “it’d just be a matter of folding it.” Gaster stayed away from the feud as he finished his sandwich when again the thought of inheritance poked into his mind.

There had to be something he could give to them. A keepsake of some sort that would endure even after he was gone. His mind roamed before it slowed it’s steps to stand upon a resolve. He snapped back to current scene to view Sans with a ketchup bottle aimed to squirt onto Papyrus who was giving him a very stern look, “boys. I think you’re ready.” It was amazing how quickly they could drop their shenanigans.

He rose to his feet and walked along the fence to an open platform that suspended itself above Waterfall.

“Boys I’m going to show you my special attack,” his eyes went a little cold as his smile crossed his teeth, “and I believe you will be capable of imitating it.”

Both boys looked at one another nervously before an eager look burned in their eye sockets. Gaster flicked his wrists and two floating draconic skulls flanked his sides. The boys startled at the overgrown bullets sudden appearance, Papyrus flinched backwards while Sans stepped forward.
“Skully!” Sans declared as he rubbed the snout of the one closest to him with the fondness a family pet that had just been returned after running away.

“No offense Dad but why would we need to summon something this- um-” he struggled to find a compliment, “terrifying.”

Gaster’s smile dropped as he recognized the implications of the blaster, it was forged in war, intended for battle but this was all he could think of.

“Think of it like Dad’ll be watching us,” Sans’s thin fingers ran along the bullet’s cheekbone, “even if he isn’t here.”

Gaster’s eye light darted quickly away from the pair, “where else would he be?” Papyrus asked honestly.

Sans shrugged really not having much interest in delving into the subject of mortality. “So uh, how do we do it?”

Gaster held his hands out to them, each cautiously wrapped their fingers around his and waited in silence for further instruction. He allowed his magic to pulse from his soul, then pool in his hands in waves of rolling fog. The pairs grip loosened in unison for a moment before they readjusted, “this is how it feels.”

Gaster held out a hand to each of the boys which they both took the hand stretched out for them. Gaster shut his eye sockets gently and let the magic he put into the blaster flow through him into his hands. The boys shut their eyes feeling the magic their own naturally aiming to imitate it. Gaster broke the connection and stood the boys in directions that would cause the least amount of damage if there was an accidental firing.

He watched the boys concentrate with mild humor at their different approaches: Sans appeared as if he was about to sleep any moment and Papyrus was concentrating with such effort that he was shaking. “Papyrus, it’s no different then a normal bullet, summon a few and think of the feeling you get from them then amplify it.”

Papyrus shook his limbs loose and then tried again his body remaining lax. Gaster looked over to Sans and began to feel a thoughtful expression cross his face, Sans’s magic had always been an all out offense perhaps- Sans shouted an expletive that was smothered in the roar of the blaster. The stream continued for a long moment until Sans dropped to his knees panting heavily. “Well that was a blast ,” he muttered as he curled into himself. The blaster dissipated and Papyrus was already over beside him green magic already flaring from him.

“That was quite impressive,” Gaster chuckled but his face grew stern as he saw the expression on Papyrus’s face. He stood behind the pair and watched the exchange.

“His HP is fine but,” Papyrus kept his magic flowing to his brother whose breathing wasn’t getting any better.

“I’m fine just got the wind knocked out of me,” Sans smiled through wheezes. “It’s all good bro, just feels weird,” he stood stumbling forward a bit catching himself on the remains of the safety rail. “As long as you don’t fire it you’ll be fine Paps, you’re so much stronger than me,” he stretched his breathing still ragged, “I’m gonna walk for a bit why don’t you keep trying?”

Papyrus’s face was entirely unconvinced, “okay, but take dad with you I’ll stay here and practice,” he spoke as if this was a list of demands and the pair happily surrendered to them returning to their
picnic area from earlier. They were quiet for a long time as Gaster listened to Sans wheezing grow lighter and with a few soft coughs it faded a bit.

Sans leaned heavily against the railing, his sockets half lidded as he gazed across the Underground. There wasn’t any sort of a pulse from his magic not even a heavy setting sense of fatigue, the air around him was rich with nothingness. Gaster struggled to fill the awkward gap with words of concern but nothing crossed his teeth.

“Hey Dad,” Sans started his eyes never leaving whatever they were fixated on, “why is it when you talk about the future you always get this look on your face like you’re not gonna be a part of it?”

Gaster inhaled a short breath, caught off guard by the question, before he relaxed. He placed his hands onto the railing, “can I be frank with you?”

Sans chuckled, “I’d prefer if you’d be Gaster but sure.”

A smirk appeared despite his best efforts to remain straight faced. It dropped quickly though as his eye light searched for the future. “I just don’t see myself enduring long on the surface. All of my determination, my will to keep going, has been placed on shattering that barrier for so long I fear I’ll be dust on the wind once I feel the breeze I’ve longed for again.” He locked his fingers together, “I know that’s probably morbid but I don’t think there’s anything up there for me.”

“Yeah, it is a bit.”

The boy considered this for a while his head nodded in solemn agreement before he turned his skull up to face Gaster. He observed him for a quiet moment as if making sure he remembered him properly before his eye lights grew distant, “nah. The you I see on the surface is ridiculously busy. Workin’ hard for monster’s rights in between making inventions and marvels that just confound humans minds.”

“I mean look what you’ve made out of magic and literal garbage,” he gestured vaguely to the lights in the distance, “you and Asgore are the only reason there’s hope down here at all.” He shoved his hands in his pockets, “so yeah, you’ll be busy. When you’re not doin’ that royal scientist stuff you’ll live in a tiny house way too close to the mountain for anyone’s taste.”

His grin broadened, “Papyrus will complain at you all the time to move closer to the city but you’re a bit too stuck on the past for that. You’ll put on a big front whenever he comes to visit about living alone but really you’ll be spending most of your time at Grillby’s.”

“Oh?” Gaster half laughed as he lost himself in this handcrafted fantasy.

“Yeah, you’ll hate bein’ on your own but you’ll make Paps call before he heads over so you can beat him back home,” Sans’s eyelights danced like flames as he stared off into this imaginary life.

“And Paps? Aw man Paps is going to be so happy. He’s gonna live in the city in a simple house that he decorates to the max with all that cool stuff he loves. Humans, monsters, he’ll be a host on a regular basis-” his eye lights flickered in hesitation, “though his guests will insist on supplying the food.”

The two snickered in quiet agreement, “and what are you doing Sans?”

To this Sans’s shoulders dropped, his eyelights lost focus as he turned his attention back to the ceiling of Waterfall, “probably takin’ a nap somewhere.”

Gaster placed a hand on the boy’s shoulder blade as they shared the middle distance. A fond smile
teased at the edges of his smile, “there’s one little problem with your fantasy.” He waited for Sans to face him again before he continued, “if the barrier breaks I plan on passing down the title of Royal Scientist.”

Sans laughed, “no you’re not.”

“It’s true,” Gaster fidgeted with the corner of his sleeve, “and if it doesn’t I’ll go back to Reset research until I hit a dead end.”

“You talk to Asgore about this?”

“Not too seriously, not yet, I-” he pulled his fingers sharply away from his sleeve as he recognized the habit, “am hoping that the heir to my title will finish schooling first.”

“Trusting someone right outta that learning facility seems like a bit of a numbskull mistake to me.”

“Not if they’ve already worked in the labs,” Gaster hummed. “No, the monster I’m thinking of has exceptional communication skills, a well rounded education. both through tutoring and self pursuit, experience in the labs, and thusly with the team, not to mention they seem to be quite liked.”

“Sounds too good to be true,” Sans chortled.

“Well there are flaws,” he shrugged, “they’re a bit of a slacker and have difficulties applying themselves. Not to mention they prefer to springboard off of others ideas then start new ones,” he rolled his eye light, “or else they’ll start ten and not finish a single one but I am hoping secondary schooling will correct that.”

Sans furrowed his brows as he thought, the pieces clicked together in his mind like a well made puzzle, “you’re talking about me.” The letters in his Font grew a bit scratchy as he inhaled.

“I wasn’t trying to be nosey,” he elbowed Sans, “I haven’t got one to begin with.” He received a sympathetic smirk for his efforts, “but I saw that pamphlet in your room. I think it’s a great idea Sans.”

“Oh that,” his eye lights ran to the floor, “I uh, changed my mind on it. I’m not cut out for school.”

“Just because it didn’t work when you were younger doesn’t mean you can’t do it,” he explained.

“What about Alphys?”

“What?”

“Alphys, Al, you know she’d probably make a real great Royal Scientist.”

A sidestep. A quick dodge in a different direction to avoid the subject at hand, Gaster caught it but he played along anyways. “Alphys is indeed a well accomplished engineer, despite her age, and capable of learning other trades very quickly but I fear her desire for fast results will be her downfall. She is too impatient and too nervous to direct so many people.”

“Valid points I guess,” his eye lights dimmed, “you’ve, uh, been giving this a lot of thought, huh?”

“Of course, I think about everything thoroughly,” Gaster folded his arms and gave a smug smirk.

“The Royal Scientist Sans,” he chuckled, “no one would take that seriously.”

“You think WingDings was much better? That’s why I changed my name in the first place.” He
watched the way Sans’s feet squirmed against the stone, the cautious glance up to where Papyrus was, the way his fingers clenched in their pockets around the fabric that pulled the collar down Sans was... apprehensive? That was understandable but something else was written plainly on his features that Gaster just couldn’t decipher.

“You can say no of course, but, I expect a valid reason,” he pestered.

“I just-” His breath hitched in his ribs for a moment before he slipped into his usual facade, “I’m not sure if that’s what I want to do. The whole science thing ya know?” He shrugged as if that statement didn’t make Gaster’s soul drop.

“Sans since the second I met you you have been completely enamored with science and, as far as I know, that has only grown since you entered the labs so what do you mean you don’t think you want to pursue it?”

Gaster needed to pull back, he was taking this far too personally. It was Sans’s decision but he’d always imagined- always hoped that Sans would follow his footsteps. He didn’t have to be the Royal Scientist that would be a commitment that no child his age would be willing to tether themselves too but surely he’d stay in the labs.

He gave his best attempt at a chuckle but it turned into a sad snort of sound, “what else would you do?”

“Take a real long nap I suppose,” Gaster almost missed it, almost misinterpreted the statement as his son’s usual slothfulness but when he saw his eye lights flick off he knew full well what he’d meant. His soul threatened to implode on itself as an ache burned through every ounce of his magic. The sensation of dust through his fingers tingled against every joint until he had to shake the feeling free.

“Sans, is something wrong? Please, talk to me, don’t just-” He was gone. A quick flick of his magic then Gaster was left to speak to the open air.

The bereft father slipped down the railing to sit on the ground crushed under the weight of his thoughts. Sans hadn’t been this depressed, this low, since he was told that he’d never get up if he Fell regardless of the factors around him. That listless child had disappeared into a distant memory, when had it resurfaced? Was it best to let him work it out on his own or would that be detrimental? Should he bring it up again? No Sans would just pull away slip further behind that accursed smile of his and smother himself in his thoughts.

But he’d been so happy lately! So content. He was excited to go to work in the mornings, he was hanging out with friends in the evening, his eye lights glowed with enthusiasm every time they were all together. What was he missing? How much was Sans suffering to even let such a statement slip?

Sans would tell him if it was serious and if not him then Papyrus. He trusted him to do this. He had to continue to trust him even if all he wanted to do was wrap his arms around him and coax the truth out of him by whatever means necessary.

He made his way back up to the platform they were practicing at just in time to see Papyrus’s continued efforts rewarded. The skull shaped bullet was equally as animalistic in build with a squared off muzzle capped with impressive incisors. Its’ sockets were filled with wide rimmed halo eyelights that looked around the surrounding area with a state of confusion. “See you got it bro,” Sans smacked his arms.

“Indeed it appears I have,” Papyrus approached it cautiously before he rest his hand against the end of the muzzle. The bullet let out a soft groan as if it had just been insulted before it rolled its’
eyelights up towards the cavern ceiling. “Hey! I am giving you affection!”

The bullet didn’t quite seem to care as it floated lazily in front of the skeleton. It was strange that the magic was so obstinate when Papyrus was typically in control of his magic’s every movement. It was considerably softer than Gaster’s own bullets, the edges were all smooth and rounded out, even the angular spikes off of the end of it were rounded.

Gaster snickered, it would be rather difficult to intimidate anyone with how expressional those eyelights were though. “Man, wish I could get a better look at mine,” Sans ran his hand along the sharper molars towards the back of the jaw, “yours looks so different than dad’s.”

“I can probably help with that,” Gaster stepped forward finally making his presence in the clearing known. “Go ahead and summon your blaster Sans, point it right at me,” he folded his hands behind his back but kept his stance just barely wider than shoulder distance.

The pair exchanged a wordless nervous conversation before Sans turned his sceptical glance to Gaster, “you sure about this?”

“Do you trust me?” Gaster fixed his sockets on Sans’s burrowing his intent into the boy’s soul.

“Of course,” his eye lights squirmed under the older skeleton’s glare.

“Then fire away,” he gestured arrogantly as his content smile warped into a sneer.

Sans took a deep shaky breath before he reached deep into his magic to conjure the mighty skull behind him. It opened its’ massive jaws but no light erupted from it. Slowly the jaws came to a close and Gaster found himself in a fit of nervous laughter. “What’s so funny?” Sans asked as he tore his gaze away from the blaster.

“I didn’t think that would work,” he rubbed his skull to calm himself, “I just figured you wouldn’t hit me.”

“That was an incredibly foolish plan!” Papyrus stomped and his blaster seemed to chuckle behind him.

“But it worked!” Gaster pointed out.

Sans’s eye lights moved back to his blaster as he rubbed the creatures snout affectionately, “eh, what’s one HP of damage anyways?”

The newest blaster floated next to Papyrus’s blaster as close as it could muster. Its’ eye lights were white with transparent pupils that seemed trained on Sans. This one looked much more akin to Gaster’s own with needle like teeth and twisted horns.

Gaster threw his own blaster into the scene, it was considerably larger than the other twos making the clearing significantly smaller but there was a resemblance across all three. The idea that there was a similarity that linked them together by their own will. Gaster’s blaster seemed to smile broadly as its’ summoner wrapped an arm around both of his boys. This was their inheritance, their connection to him no matter what.
Trying to quickly upload this at work! Sorry if it’s rough!

But yay! Blasters!
Expectations

Chapter Summary

We finally learn what’s going on with Sans and Alphys gets to make her first appearance.

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys so much for your comments last week! I was genuinely floored more than once and managed to write this chapter in record time because of it!

Gaster had his head rested on the back of his office chair, his long fingers cupped across his face as he focused on just existing for a moment. The rise and fall of his ribs, the gentle creek the chair gave when he re-positioned himself, the sensation of his toes curling on the inside of his shoes.

They did it.

This was their answer.

Just a few more tests, a few more failsafes, and the Surface would be in their grasp.

He’d anticipated in this moment being elated, completely over the moon with an uncontrollable excitement that was unparalleled but the mood that settled over him was disappointingly somber. His assistant seemed to be in a similar state as they poured over their own monitor. Perhaps, it was just too good to be true, maybe it was dread over what came next or maybe-

The cold atmosphere settled over him he was met with the distinct sensation of foreboding. The dark substance, the nightmares, the general sensation of waking in dread that had become his normalcy felt nearly prophetic in the gloom of the room.

He conjured a pair of hand bullets that tapped the top of his assistant’s screen. Their fur stood on end as they hissed, “don’t do that to me!”

‘Take a break,’ he signed with definitive punctuation.

“I just wanna check the device’s-’

‘I’ll unplug it.’

They turned to face him, “you wouldn’t dare!”

A smile tugged across his face, ‘you are simply staring at the screen you can do that after you grab some coffee.’

“Fine, fine,” their tail straightened out in their lab coat as they pulled their arms forward a small pitch
of sound escaped from them. “You want one?”

‘I’ll be down there shortly,’ he rubbed at his weary sockets, it had been an all nighter, he’d have to check in with Papyrus soon so he wouldn’t worry.

“This is it… isn’t it?” His assistant’s fur had once been a vibrant shade of blue before the flecks of gray settled in. Now their fur was a patchwork of silvers, whites, and grays with the occasional stubborn tuft of blue. This was the only one of his assistants that had stuck around for all of these years, the last founding member of the Science Division aside from Gaster. Sure, the monster was a bit finicky, the rhyming that spewed from him as advice got old from time to time, but he’d endured Gaster for all these years so something had to be said about his dedication.

‘It appears to be.’

They shook their head, “I didn’t think it would actually happen. I know it was the end goal but—” A soft half laugh escaped them, “just a few more weeks and we’ll be ready to pack up and see the sun and grass and— I know you know what it’s like but,” he ran his paw over his ear, “I’ve never seen it.”

“Hey Doctor Gaster I just want to say—”

‘Now is not the time for sentimentality, there is still work to be done and coffee to be had,’ he leaned against his hand, ‘none of that until we break the barrier for good.’

“Probably for the best, don’t wish to be depressed,” they muttered before they finally made their way towards the breakroom.

Coffee sounded delightful. He reached for his phone a bit startled when it vibrated in his grip. Hello Dr.Gaster? It was an unknown number and where his mind recognized the letters instantly it took him a moment to recognize the oddness in them. The text was written in WingDings.

_I hate to be a bother but I need to talk to you._

**WHO IS THIS?**

Meet me by the locker room.

_Oh my gosh sorry please meet me by the locker room!_

_So sorry! This is Alphys :D_

Despite the rather unique diction of the writing Gaster had difficulty placing the name when it was written in his own Font. That was rather a marvel in and of itself being able to instantaneously read the words without flipping them over in his mind.

It dawned on him a bit too slowly that it was Sans’s friend. His phone slipped into his inventory while he pried himself out of his office chair. It seemed coffee would have to wait, sadly.

Alphys’s dark eyes darted behind her thick spectacles as she waited for Gaster to arrive. Everything about her posture was nervous, the subtle twitches in the frills along the top her her head, the way her teeth tapped against her lower lip. Whatever it was she was already on edge just waiting for him.

‘A-L-P-H-Y-S,’ Gaster’s fingers elegantly signed with clean flicks, ‘that was quite the interesting surprise.’

“What was?” Her eyes darted away from him quickly as she cleared her throat in a near giggle like
fashion, “oh um yes the text! Sans and I have been working on an app to where other monsters could text you WingDings so you could um- well maybe read it easier?” Her nails tapped together, “Sans said you read uh- common? Yeah he called it common just fine but sometimes you get frustrated with it.”

Gaster furrowed his brows in an attempt to pinpoint a time Sans would have observed this. He had to admit since losing his other eye he had found the letters of common were growing increasingly frustrating to keep straight but it never hindered him. Still it was, thoughtful, for Sans to aim to assist him, as quietly and underhanded as always.

She rubbed the back of her neck, “we were wanting to reveal it to you by having someone like Asgore text you but I uh- well I just thought you’d respond better to a strangers text in your own Font?”

‘We are hardly strangers A-L-P-H-Y-S,’ he tapped his teeth together, ‘if you don’t mind me asking why did you wish to speak to me?’

“I-I’m so sorry you were probably in the middle of s-something super important,” her hands worried around each other as if she was trying to wring them out.

‘We were in between phases coincidentally,’ anything to calm her nerves and get to the point so that building sense of dread in himself could ebb away.

“Right,” she clutched her phone between both of her hands. “I-I don’t- I mean I- I can’t…” Her protruding front teeth nibbled at her bottom lip, “have you talked to Sans today?”

Gaster’s soul froze in his chest, ‘no I haven’t is there something I need to know?’

Her eyes grew half lidded as her gaze fell to the side, “he texted me and-” She held her phone out to Gaster.

Hey al. just wonderin’ if you’d like some of my books? i know the surface ones don’t really interest you much but i thought maybe you’d like ‘em.

He ran over the message a few more times, ‘I don’t understand.’ Despite Sans’s mass amounts of garbage collections he wasn’t really a hoarder if things no longer interested him he would sell them somewhere or another for spare G that he would then spend on Papyrus. It was always odd though what he considered worth keeping though.

She ran her hand along the frills against the back of her head, “I just- I’ve been there before. I- he’s just been so weird lately I’m afraid- something bad has happened?” Her posture straightened, “I mean I know he’s been spending a lot of time in the health division lately.”

Sans had? He hadn’t heard anything about that. How could they share a workplace and still have no idea what was going on? They met every day for lunch, they talked at home, why was this new information?

“I- I know it’s not my place to a-ask b-but I’m his friend and he won’t tell me!” She squeaked. “I just- I’m scared.”

Gaster clutched the pink sequined phone firmly, ‘I don’t know.’

Her eyes grew distant as her tail smacked heavily against the floor, “I’m sorry.”
His eyelight burned red, ‘thank you for the information,’ he returned her phone to her, ‘I am going to retrieve more. I will keep you up to date.’

Her mouth hung slightly agape as she stared up at his glowing eye, “so cool- I mean that’s cool. Thank you.” When he turned to start towards the health division Alphys snagged his sleeve, her face reddened and she quickly dropped it, “I just- Sans is scared right now whatever happens just- just keep that in mind okay?”

‘Thank you.’ Her concern was heartening if Sans only had one friend he was grateful it was one so considerate.

The halls blurred around him as he made his way to the health division, he couldn’t make out faces, or recognize who he passed at all, but that hardly mattered right now. He needed to know what he was dealing with and waiting for Sans to tell him was obviously going to be detrimental for all parties involved. In the wake of his storm his magic softened from red to violet but that didn’t change the intimidating sight of the skeleton looming in the greeting room.

“G-good morn-ning Dr.Gaster,” the Whimsun receptionist greeted.

‘I need to speak to Dr.Hill. Now.’

“Um yes.”

When Dr.Hill emerged Gaster directed her very pointently back to her office, the poor monster kept their head down and allowed themselves to be escorted. She sat at her desk while Gaster paced frantically in front of her as he attempted desperately to calm himself. He knew full well that if he made any sort of a statement in the state he was in he’d only regret it.

“This is about Sans, I presume?” She reached into her desk and pulled out several files. She didn’t wait for a response, “this is the original picture we took of his soul.” The image was slid carefully out of the file and across the desk for Gaster to observe the tiny gray scar at the soul’s core. “This is the most recent one,” her black eyes pierced up into Gaster’s sockets as she judged his expression.

An intricate spider web of gray had grown out from the scar to taint most of the soul. Gaster cupped his teeth with his fingers, he screwed his eye sockets shut, and just barely felt his knees give out. He knelt on the floor trying desperately to calm himself or work himself into a strong enough rage to lash out against the Doctor.

How dare she treat his child without his consent. How dare she not come to him with this. His magic rippled into the air in a suffocating sauna of bitter emotions that burned yellow into his socket.

“How?” Choked out of his teeth, he couldn’t move his hands to speak, certainly couldn’t hold a pen to a board. The image shook still locked in his grip, “how?” How could he be so unobservant? How could he let it go this far unchecked? Why didn’t he press Sans for answers? Why did he trust the boy to tell him anything?

A gross sob escaped him as he recalled the photograph of a child with dingy gray bones and his brother clinging to his side in a desperate attempt to tether his only family to this world. His fingers clenched tightly around his teeth as he tried desperately to calm himself.

“Tracking the situations around the initial start I can confirm that Falling is mostly caused by a surplus of negative emotions either inwards or outwards. This is why monsters fall in groups:
mourning hurts the soul of all those around them.”

It didn’t matter. For the first time in his life there wasn’t an ounce of curiosity in him. His soul wept as he outwardly gave his best effort to appear professional despite still sitting against the floor. She was being professional he should do the same.

“This all started after your run in with the human,” she stated simply.

So it was his fault? He chuckled internally, of course it was. He could understand it now, why Sans’s mother had insisted on locking him in a safe room. Why she drug him to every healer in the Underground for any hopes of preserving his delicate life force. He understood it and for the first time wondered if he’d made a mistake in not doing the same.

“Someone’s negative emotions after the event latched onto Sans’s own and it spiraled from there.”

She pulled out a box, “we were developing a type of H-Patch for him, a simple adhesive packed with some potent healing magic but he appears to have built up an immunity to them.”

She walked around to the edge of her desk and faced Gaster directly, “what Sans needs now is positive healing magic from someone he loves. That’s the only thing that is going to bolster his soul. I told him that a week or so ago but I guess-”

“He was too afraid,” Gaster whispered. He rubbed furiously at his sockets as he did his best to regain composure, he needed to be strong. His fingers coiled around the edge of the desk as he pulled himself up. Several breaths later he extended his hand to Dr.Hill who shook it cautiously, ‘thank you for your assistance Dr.Hill I will see to it your efforts are rewarded after you publish your study on Falling.’

“Understood,” she replied firmly despite mentally retracing each of the signs in her mind. Gaster had found himself in the health division more frequently which had prompted those that worked their to pick up at least a little bit of Hands.

“And Dr.Gaster,” she waited for his eyelight to fall to her, “this isn’t going to just be a wave your hands and it gets better situation.”

‘I know,’ he signed patiently.

Stars he knew.

His mind dulled over in shades of gray as he checked in Sans’s regular stomping grounds for the boy. He was just about to poke his head in the physics department when he received a call from Papyrus. “Hello?” He anticipated the usual tirade that he received when he stayed late at work without calling in the morning but the other end of the line was oddly quiet. “Hello?” He called again.

“Dad,” Papyrus’s voice was soft, his letters italicized, “Sans is home and he’s locked himself in his room. Is everything okay?” When the line went silent the boy stammard to fill it, “of course! The lazybones was probably fired for his slothfulness! His dream job and he can’t even bolster the will to pursue it!”

“That’s not-” Gaster sighed, “he’s home?” When Papyrus confirmed it he took a deep breath, “just stay downstairs for now, I’m going to talk to him.”

He hung up the phone and concentrated, cyan, yellow, cyan- a bit faster- the magic jarred itself in his mind unaccustomed to performing at such a level with a singular eye to fulfil the action. A burning sensation built up along the cracks in his skull until he found himself slammed against a dresser the
lamp atop it tumbled into his lap. Despite his best efforts a pathetic moan escaped him as he straightened his spine.

“What the heck Dad?” Sans threw his hoodie back on and brightened his eye lights.

Gaster fixed Sans in his gaze. He hadn’t thought about what to say. What he should do before he came here. He just wanted to find the little monster that translated WingDings as a hobby, that poured over a textbook far too advanced, that gave Gaster distrusting looks when he thought he wasn’t looking. That tiny skeleton was hurting and he had to do something.

“That expression you’re wearing,” he shoved his hands in his pockets, “you know don’tcha?” Gaster gave a short nod as his mind burned Sans’s image into his mind. “Sorry,” his shoulders bobbed, “bad timing I know.” He flopped to sit on the mattress still positioned lazily against the floor, “but hey- you could take me up to the Surface with you-”

Gaster ensnared his child in his arms, “it’s not too late. We can fix this.”

Sans nodded, “I thought about that, about asking Paps to pour his healing magic into me for an undetermined amount of time that still might not be enough. But I realized this was inevitable and I’d just be putting it off further.”

He wrapped his arms around Gaster burying his sockets in his father’s shoulder, “lasted a lot longer than anyone thought I would. Got to meet some amazing monsters, do some things I’d have never dreamt being allowed to do-” His breathing broke until his posture buckled entirely and he fell into his father’s grasp, “I’m so grateful- for Paps, for you, for everything but I still- I don’t want to go.”

Sans needed to talk, no matter how much his soul burned Gaster couldn’t interrupt him. Couldn’t tell his child he’d fix everything no matter how desperately he wished he could. He rubbed the boy’s vertebrae and let him talk, let him cry, let him scream if that’s what he needed but once it was out of his system they’d have to have a serious discussion. Gaster wasn’t going to let his child go without a fight. His eyes burned crimson as he rubbed his son’s back in simple practiced motions.

When the jerking breaths ceased along with the sobbing and the shutters when only a rattle remained Gaster pulled Sans out to arms length, “we’re going to have to tell Papyrus.”

“Please don’t,” Sans’s hoarse voice hiccuped.

“I’ll give you a few minutes to straighten yourself out.” He clumsily rose on his stiff joints to his far too heavy feet before he drug himself to the hallway. “I love you Sans,” he stated with his hand wrapped firmly on the doorknob.

Sans chuckled, “I know.”

He pulled the door shut behind him before he entered the hallway. His reflection caught in the ridiculously large painting of a bone Papyrus had framed for their new home. It shone exhaustion back at him, which was disappointing, the real trial had yet to begin. The sockets gazed back at him his left with its’ near permanent glare and his now lazy half lidded right one before the burned together in focus.

Emerald eyes, green fields, algae on ponds, moss in a creek bed, the way Asgore smiled with Asriel on his shoulders, Toriel’s delicate touch, Grillby’s cooking, Papyrus shouting his concerns as if they were insults, and Sans- He forced his magic into his singular socket only to meet a glowing red dot.

His fingers scratched against the glass of the portrait over the light’s reflection. This entire situation was- deplorable but knowing he couldn’t help was going to be a fight on its’ own. “Dad?”
Gaster spun around nearly throwing the picture off of the wall. “Papyrus don’t do that!”

Papyrus physically pulled away from his father, “sorry you normally know when I’m around.”

The increasingly older skeleton placed his hand over his soul as he focused on the steady breathing of his ribs. Papyrus, stars he just wanted to tell him everything explain this entire terrible situation. Just wrap his arms around the boy and try to make sense of everything, but this was Sans’s to say.

“So did you find out what’s wrong with Sans?” Papyrus asked curiosity manifesting itself across every inch of his skull.

“Why don’t you ask him?”

Papyrus folded his arms, “he won’t talk to me.”

“Try again,” Gaster prompted with a gesture to the door.

Tentatively Papyrus knocked gently, “hey bro come on in.”

Sans sat at the end of the bed as he had been but he ditched his hoodie to reveal bright green patches down his arms. The color was so vibrant a few could be seen against his ribs through the thin white fabric of his undershirt. The look of utter confusion mixed with pity from Papyrus caused Sans’s confidence to falter as he reached carefully for his sweatshirt.

“What’s all of that?” Papyrus swallowed.

“Oh these are my HaPpy Patches they’re supposed to balance out the negative feelings that got stuck in my soul,” his sockets were trained on Papyrus as he took in every twitch as a vibrantly painted expression. “Started off just wearin’ one but they just aren’t workin’ too well anymore.”

“I’ve never heard of-” He looked to Gaster, “where do we get more?”

“Dr. Hill made them up for me when the little gray patch in my soul started growing,” his fingers dug at his sternum. “Basically I’m sick and the patches told my body my soul was lyin’ but they can’t do it anymore.”

“Why not?! Talk to the Doctor and have her make better ones!”

“Paps, she can’t this is the best she can do-”

“Dad! Make better ones!” He grabbed Gaster’s humeruses firmly, “you can do it! You can do anything!”

Gaster pulled the boy close to him, “not this Papyrus. This is going to be up to you.”

“What?”

Sans let out a loud sigh as he laid against the bed, “Paps you don’t gotta do anything.”

“I’ll do anything!”

“It’s gonna be a lot of work.”

“I love work!” He wiped fresh tears from his sockets, “I’ll help you brother. I always have.”

“I know but it could take weeks, that’s a lot of energy to waste on a lazy bones.”
“Brother,” Papyrus moved the wads of clothes and blankets away from the mattress with a minimal look of distaste, “you are a lazy bones. You’re messy, you never clean up after yourself, your clothes always smell like the labs, you don’t tell anyone when anything important happens, and you tell terrible puns! But none of this will deter me in my quest to help you!”

“You’re too cool bro,” Sans smirked with his eyelights cast downward.

Gaster stood in the corner of the room doing his best not to distract from the scene. Papyrus was going to take care of Sans and Gaster would have to take care of Papyrus. They were going to get through this. He knew they would.

Chapter End Notes

So this is it. We are back to the first stuff I wrote that started this whole thing. I’ll go into it in more details next week but it is crazy to see just how much this story, these characters, have changed.

We’re almost done guys! I’m excited and terrified and super not ready for it to end but ready to give my hands a break from all this typing ^^’
It’s hard to deter Papyrus when he sets his mind to something, especially when it involves his brother.

30 consecutive updates! Thank you for everyone that’s been here since the beginning, those that picked it up later, and the brave souls that are going to wrestle with it starting from here, it is only through your support that I’ve been able to maintain this vigor so know I mean it when I say thank you!

“Papyrus,” Gaster called as he opened the door to Sans’s room, “you need to eat something before I go to work.”

He gently pushed open the door to Sans’s room to see Papyrus half asleep over Sans with healing magic still flowing from his palms. Papyrus’s bones had a property more akin to a flaky mica stone then their usual proper shape. Sans for the most part appeared to be asleep but a quick analysis showed a horrendously slow pull of magic through his meager form.

They were both just doing what they could, this was a lot to ask of anyone let alone children. If Gaster could heal he could take some of the pressure off of the boy so that he might actually take care of himself.

Gaster was supposed to take care of him. He’d tried, that first evening to morning, to do everything he could: heating pads, ice packs, actually edible food, pillows, blankets, he’d tried it all but apparently he was little more than a distraction. Papyrus had mandated that Gaster go to work since he was incapable of assisting and his constant pestering kept breaking his focus. Gaster clutched the small plate of oatmeal cookies he held as he waited for some sort of a response that it was okay to enter.

It was about keeping Papyrus comfortable enough to keep going. Many a monster would have crumpled over the near constant output by now but no one had control like he did. He was so proud of his son but apparently gushing over it right now was also not appreciated.

“I brought those oatmeal cookies that you like, or I have cinnabunnies downstairs, I could make some eggs or-”

“I’m fine dad,” Papyrus replied bluntly and Gaster shrunk in on himself.

Utterly useless. The voice in his head was kind enough to remind him.

“Please just something small before I go, you need your energy,” he smiled as pleasantly as he could
muster.

The weight on Papyrus’s shoulders was visible as it compressed him into a shell of himself. Every ounce of love the boy had was being used to push back the gray tendrils in his brother soul even a tiny bit. Just healing wasn’t going to be enough, it had to be by a monster that knew Sans’s soul to a T and no one knew it better than Papyrus.

But seeing the child devoid of all energy, exhaustion written across his typically undaunted features, the subtle flecks that fell away from his form, was a lot to take in. He extended the plate to him, “just one and I’ll leave you alone.”

Sans reached up lazily and placed the full weight of his hand atop the plate to reach for a cookie which he tipped off the plate. His movements were sluggish and his time being fully conscious were fleeting but he knew the weight this put on both of them. When he felt good enough to speak he did his best to reassure his brother, bolster his confidence, pester him with a pun or two until he couldn’t anymore.

When he wasn’t feeling well enough he was typically asleep, his body’s go to defense mechanism. The occasional twitch would run through his form in a startling jolt as his magic felt inclined to remind him he was alive.

Gaster knew this was hard on him too, knew that the boy would never admit he’d already given up but that was the gray in his soul talking. Unless he suddenly materialized the will to keep going or Papyrus’s magic pulled through the boy’s future seemed bleak.

“Lookie I have a cookie,” Sans grinned.

“Sans that was a rhyme not a pun,” Papyrus mumbled.

He pressed his shoulders into the mattress as an attempt at a shrug, “if that’s the way the cookie crumbles.”

“Oh my gosh Sans! Not right now!”

He nibbled lazily at the pastry, “you should have one their definitely better than the last batch.” He chuckled, “and they’ve got those little dragon sprinkles you like!”

“They are dinosaurs.”

“How can you know if you haven’t had one?”

Papyrus hastily grabbed a cookie from the plate and shoved it in his mouth though Gaster didn’t miss the way the cookie crumbled along the inside of his chin. “They’re dinosaurs!” He declared.

Sans snickered his smile laughing,“I’m actually pretty good right now bro, go take a shower or something, you smell like my room,” Sans chuckled.

“Really?” Papyrus looked over his attire to observe the crumbs of cookies and various other remainders across his bulky sweatshirt.

He passed a quiet concerned look over to his brother in an attempt to judge his current condition. “Okay. But only a quick one! And only because if my odor is so bad that you insist then it must be truly horrendous!” He attempted to bounce back to his usual self but the weariness in his sockets sang true to the poisoned gestures.
“And eat something more than that please!” Gaster called after the skeleton as he sauntered into the hall. Gaster’s form melted into the chair Papyrus had been inhabiting rather undignified in his posture.

Sans snickered, “when is the last time you slept?”

“I’ve had six cups of coffee this morning,” he bemoaned.

A tight smile tugged across his skull, “that wasn’t really the correct answer.”

Gaster bounced his head a few times before he tilted it against the back of the chair, “it has been a while.”

Sans’s eyelights pinned to Gaster in an intent focus as he tried to find something specific across his features. His sockets closed slowly as if he’d just slipped back to sleep before he spoke quietly, “do you really not think there’s any kindness in you?” Gaster’s shoulders gave a pathetic sag of a shrug. “Do you ever think you’re just too determined to be kind?”

“Yes, I have considered that determination sort of filled that section of my soul and-”

“No,” Sans cut him off, “I mean don’t you think you just try too hard? You want to heal so bad, you want to help so much, and I think being determined just comes easier to you.” He placed his hands over his sternum as his breathing grew a bit unsteady, “I mean in the time I’ve known you you’ve adopted two kids that had nothin’ going for them and gave them hope, inspired them to be better monsters, continued to renovate the Underground to increase ease of living, moved far beyond where you were comfortable with emotionally- heck Dad you jumped off a cliff without a second thought! I just- if you’re not kind, if it’s truly devoid of your soul then no one is.”

Gaster drummed his fingers against his slab like ribs above his soul, “you really think it’s in me?”

Sans grinned lazily, “nah I just felt like sayin’ something dramatic.”

He rolled his eye light, “well you must be feeling pretty good right now.”

His eye lights dimmed, “not really. If I’m being honest I can’t really move my feet at all and I’m oddly cold for something that’s nerveless.” Gaster pulled up a blanket and tucked it around him, “ya know that’s pointless right?”

“It’s all I can do,” he chuckled sadly as he ran his hand along the side of his son’s skull, “let me pretend it helps alright?”

“Hey if you’re wanting to be helpful,” Sans’s voice lingered as he debated on finishing his request, “wanna lock my door on you’re way out?”

It took Gaster longer than he’d dare to admit to realize the intention behind the request, “why would I do that?”

“I just- I can’t stand seeing Papyrus like this! This isn’t who he is! He hasn’t done anything but dote on me for what a week?”

“It’s been three days,” he assured him.

His eyelights flicked off, “o-only three?” His hands crept up from his sternum towards his sockets, “please? He’s suffering so much… I’m making him miserable.”
Gaster slipped into his own mask, he straightened his posture and narrowed his sockets into a glare, “Sans. As long as Papyrus believes he can do this then we must believe in him. He is fighting so hard for you right now and you just want to throw-”

Sans froze, his eyelights barely sparks as he stared wide eyed to Gaster before they slid back up to the ceiling, “it’s all my fault.”

“Sans-”

“I wanted to go to Waterfall that day, I told Paps he didn’t have to stay with you, I ran away,” his hands wrenched at his sockets.

“Sans that was all circumstantial by that logic I could have easily denied your request to go, I could have decided against being stubborn, and I was the one that told you to run. *None* of what happened was your fault,” he made sure the boy was looking at him to read that every ounce of his form meant what he said.

“You should have seen Grillby Dad, his face was all gray and soot?- Ash? Kept falling everywhere and seeing him like that because you were hurt- it was all my fault.”

Gaster leaned towards the bed to lock eye contact with him, “No. It wasn’t.” He wrapped an arm around his son, “Sans you came back. You saved me. I am so grateful you came to my rescue,” he rubbed the back of Sans’s skull in smooth strokes. “You’re my little hero and I’m sorry I didn’t thank you sooner.”

A soft rattle escaped the boy as he slipped back to sleep in his father’s arms. He wrapped his arms tighter around Sans in a desperate attempt to create some semblance of comfort. They weren’t giving up neither him nor Papyrus would ever allow that to happen.

“He’s asleep?” Papyrus asked sopping wet and wearing a cut up t-shirt that had ‘RAD’ written across it in red ink. Gaster nodded while he adjusted the blankets.

“You’re doing a very good job Papyrus.” Papyrus hummed as a half response before he took his spot back, a long sigh escaped him as he began to form the magic again. “If you need anything quickly just call Grillby, if it can wait please call me. I’m here for you.” Another noncommittal noise. “I love you.”

“Love you too Dad.”

Gaster grit his teeth before he made his way out the door taking considerate care in his effort to drape the scarf around his shoulders. He tapped the picture frame that held the three of them smiling, the one he’d moved from his office when this started, with ‘DON’T FORGET’ scrawled across the bottom. They’d all smile like that again, his fingers tugged at his scarf before he trudged into the Snowdin chill.

It was frustratingly difficult to focus on work knowing what was going on at home. He knew full well the exact scene he left was going to linger for the duration of the day. Still it was with a practiced effort that when the coat went on it was all behind him. He needed his Royal Scientist guise to give him some semblance of peace.

Whirring from the elevator drowned out all of his thoughts as he sank to the bottom floor. The world blurred past him until it settled at the ground level. A few hallways later and he was back in the Determination chamber. The billowing fountain of darkness greeted him pushing the dark substance high into the air.
‘Still stable?’ Gaster signed when his assistant turned to him.

“Sure is, transporting it is going to be a pain though. I’ve already started testing on the containment vessels and it’s consuming all of them,” he replied professionally.

Gaster hummed, ‘not like we could bring the barrier here.’ They’d made a multitude of different devices intended for the purpose but nothing had come up with positive results. It didn’t help his assistant seemed to be incapable of remembering what test they were on after it was complete but he supposed that was the nature of being deleted. The better question could very well be why Gaster remembered the devices.

“How’s the Fetching device coming along?”

‘Equally as wonderful, that hunk of junk is just going to sit in the basement collecting grime for all eternity.’ They wanted to collect more precise data on what happened to the objects once they were consumed but it seemed retrieving them was a long ways off. ‘Anyways let's get-’ Gaster’s phone sang to him the same somber tune he’d been using since he made the device.

‘Just a moment,’ he signed quickly when he recognized the number.

“Of course, just throwing junk into goop anyways, how I love to spend my days,” he tsked.

Gaster walked just outside of the testing range before he answered, “Hello Papyrus what can I-”

“I can’t do it!”

“P-Papyrus?”

“I’m not giving up I can’t give up but I’m so tired Dad! I can’t even eat right now,” he could just barely make out the stuttering of breath on the other end of the line. “I can’t give up- I won’t! But- I’m not enough to fix this- I’m not enough to save him! I’m not great enough to help my own brother!”

“Papyrus, listen to me,” Gaster softened his voice, “you can do it. I believe in you. Ask Grillby to make you a milkshake, nice and thick it’ll be easier to eat and, while not the most beneficial, it will recover some of your reserves.”

“Dad I’m scared,” his voice was a pathetic squeak that reminded him of the night they read Hamlet.

“Papyrus,” he couldn’t ask the boy to be strong he already was so strong, he was trying so hard. “I- I’ll work on an alternative. I can’t make any promises.”

“He’s up now I have to go-”

“Please pace-” Papyrus hung up and Gaster sighed, an alternative? What other option did he have? His mask shattered to shards as he stared down at his phone, there was nothing left he could do. His fingers dug sharply at the crack along his cheekbone before he quickly jerked it away.

“Wow you look worse than what I drug in,” the cat snickered, “what’s up?”

Gaster exhaled a long hot breath, ‘do you mind if I get emotional for a moment?’

Their ears twitched, “If you need to I guess, venting might be best.”

He collapsed back into his chair, “I have one child at home draining themselves in a desperate attempt to keep their brother alive while the other has all but decided he isn’t worth the effort.”
"You could just let him fall," the assistant’s ear’s shot up to their full height at the sharp glare they received, “it’s rare but some monsters get back up-"

"Not an option," he folded his hands in his lap.

"Why not?"

Gaster laughed, all these years and he hadn’t told a single soul. Always so diligent with promises, not like they did any good. “It’s just not."

“Alright, mind if I ask a rhetorical question?” His assistant’s white whiskers twitched, “what’s kept you alive for so long?” Gaster’s sockets widened as the words needled into his soul- he couldn’t try that. “I’ve got this for now, why don’t you think on how?”

It didn’t take anytime at all for him to find his way back to his office, even less time to remove the metal shelving unit from the wall and retrieve a mess of research notes. Determination. He flipped through every page with careful consideration and poured all of his focus over each of the files until he came across an ancient book bound in red.

He’d never once opened the journal but there was one monster who had as extensive of research on Determination as he did. He traced the gold embossing on the cover as a thunderstorm started in his soul, was this really the only way? It wasn’t worth the risk of turning his son into one of those- not monsters.

But what else could he do? His rattle bounced around the office as he curled the book to his chest, if there was even a chance he could save Sans he should take it. The rattle grew to incessant shaking as every joint in his body jittered his confusion, he needed a second opinion.

He slid his keyboard out of his phone, impulsively scrolled to Grillby’s number but there was only one monster who knew the full consequences. I NEED YOU AT THE LABS AT YOUR EARLIEST CONVENIENCE. IT’S A TIME SENSITIVE ISSUE.

By the time Asgore made it to the Royal Scientist’s office the room had been torn apart. Scraps of paper were pinned to walls by pointed bone bullets while a carnival of hands rotated notes into the Doctor’s view. The entire office was submerged into one of his researching fits that left nowhere available to even stand. Asgore cleared his throat in an attempt to garner some sort of attention but the skeleton was far too distracted for that.

Gaster had torn the journal into sheets of paper to organize it in order of relevance while cross referencing it with his own research. It was a blessing to have so many hands but only one mind to process them with would always be a conundrum he’d never overcome. He crossed quickly to the far wall to analyze the notes on administration, most of which were invalid for his desires.

The journal had insisted on injections but that was far too much far too fast. It absorbed within forms in minutes and distorted them within hours. He rubbed his sockets, that wasn’t going to happen. A hand bullet tore his own thoughts on administration off of the wall when his attention was drawn to the new figure in the room.

His hand bullets dispersed in shock only to quickly manifest themselves to catch the falling sheets of paper. “Is this about the barrier?” Asgore asked professionally.

‘No. I’m sorry it’s nothing for the Kingdom- it’s Sans I just-’

“Well then,” he placed his giant paws atop the skeleton’s narrow shoulders, “what do you need my friend?”
‘This is a terrible idea, I swore, you swore, these experiments were dead and buried at least until after
the barrier was broken,’ his singular eye light was a fleeting star in the morning light as he stared up
at the Boss Monster. ‘I can’t do this to him but I don’t have any other choice.’

“What is this Gaster? I see you are panicked but you need to speak clearly so I can understand,” he
paced his words slowly to assure he was understood.

A hand bullet delivered the remains of the red book to the King. He narrowed his brows as he
flipped the cover over in an attempt to make heads or tails of it while the other monster went back to
his papers.

It took a moment to recognize a pair of bullets were trying to get his attention, ‘the research journal of
the Royal Alchemist.’

“You’re wanting to do that to Sans?” Asgore’s voice bellowed.

‘Of course not,’ his bullets signed while the monster puppeteering them turned in a fit of rage back to
him. The air filled with a strange mechanical bubble of noise that challenged the shuffling papers in
the room to fall silent. ‘But I will not let my son dust trying to save my other one! I don’t have any
more options Asgore!’ The monster signed personally.

“Tell me why I’m here Dings,” he placed the decimated book onto the nearest available surface.

‘If something goes wrong I don’t want him to be… like they were.’

“And how are you going to prevent that?”

‘For one I am using monster determination not human.’

“You aim to take a sample from yourself? Gaster in the state you’re in-”

Gaster held his hand up, ‘I took the sample back when I initially observed my levels were dropping.’

“You were losing your magic and you thought the best thing to do was deplete it further?” Asgore
folded his arms to give an almost paternal look of disappointment.

He shrugged, ‘I had questions I needed answered but that’s besides the point.’ He took a few
calming breaths as he set up his equipment, ‘I am going to use monster determination. I am leaning
wards administering it as a dissolvable tablet that will be diluted further with water.’

“Isn’t it a liquid? Wasn’t that why there was a need for injections?”

‘Monster magic when separated from the host for prolonged periods of time becomes a powder, just
like we all become dust,’ he half shrugged as his eye light skinned over the papers. ‘And I guess
from there I’ll just pray to the Angel for the first time and hope that works.’

“Are you sure this is what you want to do?”

‘Do I have another choice?’ It was a genuine question as the last of the stern faced scientist faded
away into the concerned father. He wanted another option, something he hadn’t thought of. A means
of magically amplifying healing magic without ripping his son’s soul out of his body and
reconfiguring it but he didn’t have research on that- nothing that had ever worked anyways. But he
had a plethora of work with Determination.

“It is with a weary heart my friend that I say perhaps you should just-”
Gaster’s eye caught color so quick his cracks caught the glow for a moment, ‘when Chara was sick what did you do?’

Asgore took a step back from the piercing expression completely taken aback by subject. “I asked you to resume DT experiments.”

‘I couldn’t help them- I didn’t even get the chance to try. If this is the only chance I have to help him then I have to try.’

“I can do nothing if you are set on this but please my friend stay-”

‘Determined?’

“Cautious,” Asgore corrected.

‘One attempt and that’s it. No additional supplements or trials if my first attempt fails it- it has to be that way.’

Asgore nodded his head, “how can I help?”

A matter of hours later Papyrus and Grillby arrived with Sans. Grillby appeared to be the only thing keeping Papyrus from collapsing as weak green flickers of light passed from his arms then into the brother he was holding so closely. Sans was deep asleep, his bones tainted with tiny patches of gray as one hand instinctively clawed around his brother’s shirt as an anchor to the waking world. The mingling of magic between the pair was strangely hopeful for how wasted the pair looked.

Gaster signed a thank you to his dear friend for all of his efforts before he turned his attention to his sons. Despite the setting and his current lab attire he couldn’t resist tapping his teeth to both of his boy’s skulls, “I am so proud of both of you.”

He escorted the group to a hallway lined with chairs where they met Asgore. Gaster crouched to be at eye level with Papyrus and just hoped some part of Sans was awake enough to understand. He displayed the red tablet he had created and explained in as precise of detail as he could muster exactly what he was going to be doing. What the benefits and cons would be and what would need to be done if things took a turn for the worse.

Papyrus looked up to Asgore who tore his gaze away from the young adult. “I- I don’t know. Maybe things are already getting better and we just have the wrong readings or-”

Gaster took a cleansing breath, “how much longer do you think you can keep this up Papyrus?”

He squeezed his brother tight to his chest the green pulse of his healing magic left a glow of kindness across their faces. “Worth a shot,” Sans muttered.

“Papyrus,” Gaster tapped his hand to the side of the boys face, “you have done your job and then some. Please.” He reached for the smaller brother but Papyrus stepped away from him with a distrusting glare more akin to Sans then himself. “Please Papyrus I promise I will take the best care of your brother, of my son, I possibly can.”

“Let me be in there with you,” Papyrus pleaded, and even if he didn’t the round eyelights that looked directly to his father’s sockets did.

“You’re going to stay out here with Grillby and rest,” Gaster’s voice was stern his own fatigue clipped into it.
Papyrus looked down to his brother whose left socket opened partly to stare up at him, “o-okay,” he
sniffled, “but he’s going to be alright. He’ll be back to telling terrible jokes and cheating at walking
and doing science in no time.”

“That’s the hope,” Gaster smiled doing his best not to let his magic fester in his sockets.

“No, he will,” Papyrus passed his brother to Gaster who held the boy just as close as his brother had.
He smirked fondly down to the permanent grin that smiled up at him even in times as dark as these.

Sans was set up in a chair in the middle of the room with a plethora of monitoring equipment secured
to his bones and soul. The scan of which revealed Papyrus had managed to erase several of the thin
lines of gray and successfully pushed the gray away from the edge of the shape. It was a bit of a
relief to confirm with better equipment that Papyrus’s efforts weren’t wasted.

Asgore kept a steady stream of green magic against the boy, if even Papyrus’s pure white soul
couldn’t push back the gray all the way then Asgore’s didn’t stand a chance but the effort was still
needed to ensure the 1 HP stood strong.

A rattle escaped Gaster as he dropped the red tablet into a glass of water. He took steadying breaths
as he swirled the liquid until it was a pale pink color. This was it, this was his only hope but it
crossed a line he swore he never would. He couldn’t help but imagine Sans as one of those shapeless
conglomerates of not monsters that dripped their magic in puddles wherever they were. But no, that’s
why Asgore was here, it would never come to that.

“Gaster I think it’s good,” Asgore prompted successfully tearing Gaster from the space he had
inhabited and stopping his mad stirring of the glass.

Gaster attempted to sign but he couldn’t move the glass away from his hands, didn’t dare risk spilling
any. He simply stopped what he was doing then bowed his head slightly as his only means of
response. “I know the process was rushed but I have faith in you Gaster, no one knows
determination like you do.”

The reassurance was– welcomed as he carefully adjusted the chair to force Sans into a sitting
position. Gaster wrapped his hand around Sans’s, “I need you to drink this, do you think you can?”

A smirk teased at the corner of his teeth but he couldn’t quite get the words to form. His eye light
fluttered down to Gaster’s hand and he squeezed it with his own as tightly as he could muster. Gaster
pressed their hands to his teeth in a desperate attempt to still his emotions, to hide behind the logical
mask that at one point was unbreakable, unfaltering, but now the boys that had littered the facade
with holes needed it in pristine condition.

Sans squeezed his hand, “Water you waiting for?”

Gaster glanced over to Asgore who nodded, it was time. One last shuddering breath then he sat Sans
up and slowly tilted the glass back. It took a long time for the boy’s weak magic to process each
increment of the liquid. Keeping Sans awake and focused on the task was another challenge but
eventually the last drop slid from the glass. The doting father ran his thumb along the back of the
boy’s hand a few more times before he stepped away.

After that all there was to do was monitor screens and wait. Gaster started off impulsively checking
every screen in the span of seconds but so many nights without sleep began to wear on him. His
motions became sluggish after an hour without any changes. Eventually he devolved into messing
with the wires attached to his son: straightening them if they appeared even the least bit curled.
Periodically he would hold his son’s hand, ask a few questions just to assure himself his son was still responsive before he’d check the screens again. “Gaster why don’t you rest, I assure you if a single decimal changes I will wake you.”

Gaster shook his head, he had to tell Papyrus every last detail no matter the outcome. Though he did concede to reposition the screens in such a way that he could sit and watch them.

Which is what he did for hours yet he had little idea how much time had truly passed.

Occasionally Sans would give a subtle jolt that would startle the all consuming silence of the room and cause both of the older monsters to flinch but it wasn’t long before he settled back down. Sometimes he was awake enough to throw out a few jokes, it admittedly helped ease the aching pain in Gaster’s souls by measurements his weary mind couldn’t determine. Mostly though, it was a quiet that attempted to swallow the room whole.

His head rushed as his minimal amount of sleep threatened to dip him into darkness of its’ own volition at the sight of static across one of the screens. It blurred deep into the recesses of skull as foreign until he recognized the importance. He wrenched himself away from the chair that bound him like an anchor to walk wearily to the screen. It was a miracle he managed to cross over to the screen that had his attention.

The Chromagraph had just taken another picture of his soul and was in the middle of reloading after an error occurred in the numbers. And another. And another. Gaster’s magic sparked in the air in pops of ecstasy. “What’s going on?” After hours of performing healing magic the weariness in the King’s voice was earned.

“It can’t read it,” Gaster smiled. ‘It can’t read it!’ He signed. ‘The machine can’t process a color spontaneously appearing so it’s attempting to correct the issue!’ Gaster quickly printed off the last several scans before he reset the machine. His breath grew stagnant in his ribs as he watched the program reboot, each percent was a beat of his soul as the program loaded before it began to run.

Slowly Sans’s soul materialized on the screen a beautiful cyan with a pale glow of white around the edges almost completely drowned out by the gray webs ensnaring it. A circle of yellow rested at the base of one of the semicircles but the percentages revealed something new. Gaster magnified the image and took careful care over each quadrant of the soul until, in the center of the original scar, he found a splinter of red.

There it was, sitting in his son’s soul just a tiny fleck of himself. ‘It took,’ Gaster turned back to Asgore, ‘it took!’ Purple tears formed at the base of his sockets and quickly poured down his cheekbones.

It was so small, at no risk of consuming of him, of eating away at his shape and consuming his brilliant colors until only it remained. Just a tiny beautiful fragment that could inspire a will to continue, a drive to exist. He wanted to rip his child off the table and wrap his arms around him then never ever let go! It wasn’t quite yet time for that though, Sans still needed time for his body to adjust unperturbed and for that, he’d need to sleep.

He was the best at that.

Just in case Asgore cast a sleep spell over the boy to assist him while Gaster tore open the door. “Papyrus!” The boy startled from his comfortable position against the fiery monster, not even the Great Papyrus could resist the lulling heat of the bartender.

“As long as Sans sleeps for a while he’s going to be alright!” Of course there were still risks but it
wasn’t worth going into now.

“No one is as good at sleeping as Sans!” Papyrus hugged his father tightly.

“I know!” Gaster replied excitedly while his toes attempted to find the ground as he was hoisted into the air in a bone crushing grip.

“He’s going to be okay! I knew you could do it!”

“Thank you for believing in me.”

“Of course! You are almost as Great as me how could I not?” Finally the vigor was back, the bounce in his voice, the pops of his postures leading into clean precise gestures.

Gaster could hardly contain his excitement, they really were going to be okay. He slid the heel of his hand under his sockets before he wrapped his arms around Grillby. Judging by the hot pink streak that ran diagonally up his form he seemed to have startled the monster, ‘thank you for your assistance.’

Grillby’s flames crackled as the yellow in his face brightened, ‘of course.’

Gaster wanted to run through the science up and down every hall to tell every last monster in the labs- no, in the Underground that his son was going to be okay but against the warmth of the flames his fatigue finally won. His knees sagged as he tumbled forward. His soul pinged with Papyrus’s blue magic as Grillby reached out to catch him. Running down the hallways would have to wait for another day, he proposed, as his sockets finally sealed themselves with sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Throughout high school I had a pretty negative view of fan fiction in what it was and what it had to be. The Undertale fandom though- man there is /a lot/ of good things to read that defy expectations and hold true as just amazing stories.

While I was reading through them I noticed a trend Determination=Bad. I love the Sans is determined theory (though now I think my favorite explanation for the red in his fight is the Deltarune theory) but it was always so painful and done by the cruelty of a madman. I became enamoured with the idea Gaster administering it to him out of compassion or mercy over a blind “for science” approach.

Those thoughts lead me to write about 12,000 words of a stand alone story where Sans fell down and Dadster had to save him. But I hated the way Gaster wrote. He was super flat and his motives seemed just as clouded as the particularly cruel Gaster’s so I wrote a few more short stories to try to figure out what his relationship was with them- and then it evolved into this monstrosity! Haha

I really hope this chapter isn’t as clunky as my brain is making it out to be but I might have edited it to death. I still wonder if I should have made a chapter specifically of a day of Papyrus trying to help his brother but gosh I didn’t want to write 10 pages of ‘no hope in site’ especially the day after Christmas! Speaking of which I hope you all had pleasant holidays!
Awake

Chapter Summary

Sans finally wakes up from the DT experiment and everything is strangely normal.

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year everyone! May 2019 be considerably more positive than 2018. Thank you so much for your comments sorry if I reply awkwardly to them sometimes but I always try to make a point to respond. And thanks for the kudos I’m seeing a lot on other projects recently too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gaster felt exceptionally out of place against the red frame of the racecar bed but here he was waking up on it once again. Papyrus refused to sleep in his own room until Sans woke up but that meant Sans’s mess of a room had been cleaned immaculately. He’d made a regular nest out of blankets on the floor that he took care to tuck away into the closet whenever he woke up in the morning. The child was nothing if not dedicated. Occasionally he would catch Papyrus casting gentle healing magic across his brother, just in case.

As much as he had tried to encourage Papyrus that his doting was unnecessary Gaster didn’t exactly have firm ground to stand on when he refused to go down to his own room.

The trio had initially crashed in the back room of Grillby’s when it proved a bit too difficult to awaken Gaster once he’d committed to sleep. Despite the fire monster insisting it wasn’t a problem and they could stay as long as they liked it seemed a little silly when they lived next door.

He needed to do something nice in return for Grillby, for Asgore, even his assistant for all he’d put them through. It was never a strong suit of his but he could surely figure out something. The clock glared back the time that informed it was well past time to get up. The flash of color from his cyan blue pajama pants disoriented him for a second before he remembered purchasing them on his way home from work yesterday evening along with the bright orange sweatshirt he was wearing. It was sentimental, pushing towards obsessive if he was honest with himself, but they were just pajamas no one would see them.

Just as he began to discard his nightwear he heard a startled shout from the next room over, “Papyrus?” He called out.

“Sans!” Was the only response that came but that was all it took. Gaster bolted into the hall just in time to watch his son’s sockets open halfway. He was awake- or waking- it didn’t matter he was right there!

Gaster plopped at the foot of the mattress while Papyrus sat on the floor with an over the top enthusiasm radiating from him. Gaster’s own grin was a bit too wide made all the more awkward by the fact the crack on the left side of his face didn’t allow him to raise the corner of his teeth all of the
way. Far too slowly for either of his family member's taste the Sans's eye lights floated into his sockets, they rolled about the room as his expression reflected his disorientation.

"You’re awake!" Papyrus cried and made a desperate grab for his brother who chuckled as he was pressed against his brother’s chest.

“No I’m not,” he mumbled in a half attempt at speaking.

"Yes you are! You’re awake and you’re going to be okay!” Papyrus squeezed him tightly. “You are not allowed to do that ever again! Not even a little bit!”

Sans’s finger’s coiled against his brothers yellow t-shirt, “nah if this is what it takes for you to let me sleep might have to try again. How’s Saturday sound?”

“It is Saturday, and I do not appreciate the joke,” Papyrus glared.

“I slept for two days?” a teasing grin grew across his skull, “that has to be some sort of a record!”

“Don’t you dare-”

“Records are meant to be broken gotta go for three days next!”

“I will never let you sleep again!” He shouted in a fit before he gently discarded his brother to the mattress.

“You’re so cruel bro,” Sans placed the back of his hand to his forehead dramatically.

“I think you mean cool,” he leered.

Sans chuckled, “yeah whoops slip of the tongue.”

“You don’t have a tongue.”

He blinked, “heh, good one bro.”

Papyrus furrowed his brows with thought before he lowered them in frustration, “that wasn’t a pun! You really don’t have one!”

This was so normal. Gaster smiled as his eyelight slid between each of his boys as their conversation volleyed just fast enough for him to be incapable of inserting his own two cents.

Sans smile slipped slightly before it twitched back into place, “Hey bro,” Sans slid one of his eyes shut, “would you wanna grab me something to eat? I haven’t eaten in days.”

“Of course brother! I’ll make something really special!”

Gaster could almost see the sweatdrop run down the side Sans’s skull, “actually toast sounds awesome, oh if you wanna be creative you could do that pizza toast stuff that-”

“Absolutely not!” He wrinkled his nasal cavity in disgust before he threw himself dramatically to the door, “I shall fetch you some toast.”

“Good boy,” Sans teased as if speaking to a dog.

“What?” He hollard back from the hallway.
“Fetch? Like dogs? Nevermind.” He laid flat on his back but his hands scrunched against the mattress, “Alright Dad why does my magic feel like it’s made of fire?”

Gaster cast his eyes in yellow to watch the trail of magic through his son’s bones, everything seemed normal. “I suppose you should consider it an allergic reaction to the DT. Your body needs time to acclimate to it.”

“DT?” His sockets knit together, “right, I forgot that’s what we were…” His voice trailed off as he winced his sockets shut, “so you feel like this all the time?”

Gaster pried his son’s hand off of the mattress to fold it between his, “not particularly, my body has been handling it for a long time. Though I do recall periods of time where it would wrack me with pains.” He ran his thumb across the top of the boy’s hand, “I’m going to recommend you rest, take it easy, at least for a week maybe more to get used to it. We really don’t need anything triggering it until your body has acclimated.”

“Is that permission to not do anything? I think I can handle that,” he stretched his arms far above his head in an action resembling a cat. Gaster poked the boy’s sternum causing him to curl into himself in a half laugh, “okay I’ll at least read or something.”

“Speaking of which,” he retrieved a book from his inventory, “thought you might like this one.”

Sans chuckled, “if you got it the same place you got those pajamas I probably don’t want it,” he winked. Gaster’s face ripened in a wine color as he attempted to cover the garish outfit with the book.

Gaster plopped the book on the bed in disgust earning a genuine smile from Sans who held it in the air so he could remain in lying position. “This is new?” He thumbed through the clean white pages, “like brand new!” He sat up to better look at the highly detailed images of stars. The boy’s eyes brightened with each page as he smiled over every every word he met, “how in the world did we get this down here?”

“You’d be surprised what humans take for granted.”

Papyrus nearly trampled on Gaster in his haste to deliver the toast to his brother resulting in an immediate tirade of bread based puns. They were smiling again, all three of them without any hint of dishonesty, though it was surprising how quickly Sans could cover up his aches and pains in the face of his brother. Gaster pulled his old fashioned camera out of his inventory and took a shot just as Sans raised his toast in a toast to good health and Papyrus begrudgingly agreed but with his milk.

He fanned the photo in the air before he turned it to himself, such brilliant smiles. When he went to return the camera he noticed it was out of paper, a quick scan of his inventory revealed he was entirely out. Not bad for a final image, he supposed as he tucked it into his sweatshirt’s pocket. He tilted the camera in his hand a bit disappointed to see its usefulness retired but it had taken so many wonderful images.

“Hey dad toast with us!” Sans smiled as he raised his crust of bread and Papyrus passed him the glass of milk he’d intended for Sans. “To good food, good drinks, good friends, and more terrible puns!”

“I will not toast to that!” Papyrus declared haughtily.

“To a cool dude, a lazy bones, and a visionary leader of scientific advancement,” Gaster bounced his still mobile brow but without the other the expression was lost.
Evidently it was still not a proper toast, “to family,” Papyrus declared.

“I’ll drink to that,” Sans smiled as his sockets fell upon his brother and father.

“Here, here,” Gaster smiled, and they drank, well, he and Papyrus did.

It took awhile for the warmth and merriment to seep away enough to remind Gaster he wasn’t the only one that had been waiting for good news. He plopped onto the ugly green couch and pulled out his phone happy to have the background noise of Papyrus explaining everything Sans had missed to him. SANS WOKE UP, he inputted then deleted an exclamation point several times before he decided it wasn’t quite his style.

He rested against the back of the couch and nearly managed to doze off before his phone buzzed in response: Thx exlnt to her! Congrtlnz! Gaster chuckled at the King’s terrible texting skills but he understood regardless.

Good to hear kiddo! You’ll have to bring them over for some sea tea to celebrate! It took Gaster a moment to recall he’d incorporated Gerson into his go to group message.

NO STIMULANTS FOR A WHILE

Well that’s a shame maybe I could bring you some Crabapple pie then! Wahaha!

Gerson typed his laugh exactly as his synesthesia read it, interesting. YOU BAKE?

I do a lot of things that would surprise ya boy.

He chuckled maybe he should take him up on the offer sometime. A loud explosion of nonsensical sound rattled the windows in the house. Gaster attempted to decipher where it came from but it had ebbed away so quickly it escaped without true detection. Still he crossed over to the far window to see Grillby’s oddly busy for this time of day. He tapped on his phone a few times, he probably wouldn’t get the news for a while then.

Maybe, he should tell him personally?

He looked up to the bedroom, no, he shouldn’t go anywhere today. Papyrus carried his blankets out of Sans’s room and returned them to his own before he quickly changed his mind to throw them in the wash pile instead. As he crossed back to Sans’s room he waved down the stairs to his father.

Gaster smiled up to him, “hey have you told anyone he’s up yet?”

“Yes, I have, have you told Undyne?”

“Not yet,” he wiggled his phone, “had to get it from the charger in my room.”

“Make sure you do,” Gaster shrugged. “See if Sans feels up to texting Alphys I’m sure she’d appreciate hearing it from him.”

Such a- mundane conversation disappointingly uninteresting. So much had happened lately it was foreign just talking casually without dust lingering at the end of their words.

Papyrus had rested and was getting better from his own exhaustion and Sans was finally on his way to recovery as well. He traced the rim of the socket with his missing eye light, everything was okay. It wasn’t going to be it was. After being propelled by panic for so long he suddenly felt dislocated. He furrowed his brows as he tried to will the sensation away from him, everything was fine now.
Papyrus studied his father’s expression curiously, “have you told Grillby yet?”

“I texted him but he didn’t respond they seem pretty packed over there today.”

“You should go tell him,” Papyrus nodded.

“He’s obviously busy today and Sans just woke up I want to spend the day with my boys.”

Papyrus looked out towards the window, “okay, but at least put something appropriate on you hardly look like yourself.”

“They’re just pajamas!” Gaster called over his son’s Nyeheheh laugh as he tucked back into his brother’s room. He supposed he had been in his nightwear considerably longer than usual maybe that’s why he felt off.

A matter of moments later he’d slipped into his black trenchcoat with his plum turtleneck and black pants. As he straightened the garments in the mirror he had to admit he felt better, he was never one for wasting a day with idle behaviors. When he turned to leave his room his reflection was caught in the unofficially named fetch machine. Perhaps he could work on that for a while, he opened his phone to see the time, it was nearly lunch he should ask the boys what they wanted.

“Burgers and fries from Grillby’s!” Sans rolled over on his bed in a state of bliss, “about twelve of each.”

“Maybe you should eat something healthier than the slime from Grillby’s,” Papyrus folded his arms.

“Hey,” Gaster and Sans chastised synchronized.

“What? I really think something healthy would be a much better choice!”

“I think Sans deserves to eat what he wants today. After we eat why don’t we try to get you down to the living room for a while? Have you tried walking at all yet?”

Sans chuckled nervously, “yeah… didn’t uh exactly hit the ground running per se.”

Gaster slid his eyelight over to Papyrus who gave him a resounding, ‘don’t ask,’ in Hands. “Alright we’ll try again after you’ve had more than toast and juice in you.”

He nodded a bit wearily, “tell Grillbz I said hi.”

“Will do,” Gaster smiled before headed down the street.

As his hand wrapped around the golden door handle to the bar he could feel the vibrations from the excessive amount of chatter inside the establishment. When he finally worked up the nerve to open the door the wall of sound hit him in a critical fashion. His breath hitched in his ribs as the noise jackhammered against every bone in his body.

He clumsily reached for his phone, he’d just text the order to him. He might have to wait outside a while but it was better than this. “Shut the door,” came an incredibly low pitched smooth voice that Gaster couldn’t place where it came from, “you’re letting all the heat out!”

The door swung shut behind him which forced him amongst the mass amount of words floating in the air. Of course they weren’t really there, they were all in his head, but they were so many they were hard to sort. The bar looked absolutely giant when there were so many monsters packed wall to wall within it.
Gaster scrunched in on himself in an attempt to bolster his defense as he tried his best to find footing that wasn’t over anyone else’s foot to creep towards the bar. “Oh my, you’re Dr. Gaster right?” Came a cheery maternal voice.

His eyelight traced over the floating words to find where the voice came from. Facing him was a brown bunny in a southern belle style hat, “so glad to hear Sans is going to be alright!”

“Thank you,” he signed in a short bob of motion before he pushed onward but a moment later he was stopped again this time by an adolescent hooded dog, “so glad to hear your pup is alright.”

“He pulled through! I was really rooting for him!” A slurring voice muttered.

“It’s hard being a parent when your kid is ill but it’s behind you now.” A masculine gruff voice called.

“Ya wanna drink? I’ll buy for ya!” Came a whiny.

‘I don’t drink-’ he signed quickly as he found himself a different type of overwhelmed. They’d just moved to Snowdin a few weeks ago how in the world was everyone this concerned? Why were they making a point to approach him? He couldn’t talk back to them- why was everyone so- so, kind?

When finally the crowd gave way and he found himself at the bar the world was still equally topsy turvy. There was Grillby sparking a multitude of colors as he flipped bottles over his arms and filled cups with a flare Gaster hadn’t seen in ages. Each movement was a dance, each color was a song that pushed away the storm of voices. Suddenly the world was quiet, isolated with the exception of the sunset of color in front of him.

Grillby poured another row of drinks before he caught sight of the skeleton, “Gaster!” His usually quiet voice popped over the sound of the crowd. He hooked his fingers around the edge of the bar before he leapt over it to greet the scientist. “You didn’t come for a free drink did you? Cause best I can do is some rum and coke minus the rum,” his colors twinkled in bashful shades of green as he teased.

‘Two burgers and two fries,’ Gaster signed to the floor.

The flame tilted his head to the side, ‘it’s too loud isn’t it?’ Gaster nodded his head quickly. Grillby hooked his arm around the skeleton’s with a mischievous neon orange hue to as he lead Gaster to the back room.

Gaster stretched each vertebrae one at a time while he clenched and unclenched his teeth in an attempt to get the ringing out of his head. ‘Take all the time you need,’ Grillby smiled patiently.

‘What was all that?’ He signed shakily before he gestured to the door, ‘why in the world are you so busy?’

‘May have promised all of Snowdin a free drink if Sans ended up okay,’ he shrugged, ‘got your text by the way sorry I didn’t respond. I may have been busy telling everyone in the bar he was up, they in turn told everyone they knew, and well, I wasn’t expecting everyone to take me up on the offer for drinks.’

‘Why were they being so nice? They were congratulating me and wishing me well-’ it felt as if his eye light was spinning.

Grillby chuckled, ‘cause they care.’
‘We just moved in here a few weeks ago- we haven’t even introduced ourselves to anyone but the shopkeepers really.’

‘Welcome to Snowdin!’ He raised his arms in a grand gesture, ‘it’s what we do here. We take care of each other. It’s a tight knit sleepy little community that gets a bit gossipy from time to time but we take care of our own.’

Gaster looked to the floor, ‘interesting.’

‘Just you wait till tonight Bonnie’s gonna bring you a dozen cinnabunnies at least, Fisher has a casserole that might be a bit over salted but it’s usually pretty good, Johnny has this cake that he refuses to give me the recipe for, oh and little Jen made some pictures for your boys.’

‘I don’t know any of these people.’

‘You’re gonna get to know them real quickly,’ Grillby flickered. This was… very different than what Gaster was accustomed. ‘I love this town,’ he smiled contentedly, ‘doesn’t matter if you’re a newborn, a new neighbor, or older than the town itself they go out of their way to show they care.’

‘That’s going to take some getting used to.’

Grillby crackled, ‘for you it might. I think Papyrus has already settled down pretty well Sans-‘ His flames lowered, ‘he is alright isn’t he?’

‘He’s awake and that’s what matters we’ll have to work on alright a bit slower.’

‘Right…’ He ran his hand through the flames atop his head, ‘you’re okay too right?’ The vibrant colors he had behind the bar settled back into their usual flare. Gaster smiled but before he could sign Grillby interrupted him, ‘really scared me when you fell into my arms like that I thought you’d-‘ he held the sign for several swaying ticks of the clock in the back of the room.

Gaster could read every twitch in the monsters flames as an expression of his thoughts, he knew what every rise and fall meant but now he was left to wonder if he really recognized their intent. Grillby was there, he was always there, in the early hours of the morning if one of the kids were sick, at the bar leading a non-existent ear, and for all of the greatest moments. Gaster’s soul filled with a warmth much like the one that tinged through his magic when he thought of his sons but a little different, softer.

‘Fallen,’ Gaster supplied for him as he realized his friend couldn’t finish the sentence no matter how much time passed, ‘not the first time in recently either.’

Grillby’s flames laid flat against his core, ‘Sans told you about the hospital? Of course he did.’ He looked away from the other monster his hands closed in fists beside him, “sorry I-“

‘I’ve been trying to think on how to make it up to you,’ Gaster’s soul constricted, he wasn’t really going to do this was he?

“You really don’t it was all my-“

‘I’d promised you far too long ago that when I had things figured out I would-‘ he cut himself off to cool the creeping warmth in his cheeks. ‘I still- I’m still uncertain of my origin, my eyes have never even teased at green, and I still just don’t think I’m what you’re looking for.’

He looked to the monster he’d known for nearly all of his life the one that had stuck beside him through a war, through imprisonment, through falls and rises, from the LV trials, to the Core, to
children. They’d had their spats, gone their separate ways but at the end of the day no matter what Gaster knew the flame was there for him.

‘We’re in the final phases of testing on the latest project but-’ he laced his fingers together as he hesitated his eyelight anywhere but on Grillby, ‘I know you said you were done chasing the cowardly runaway skeleton but I haven’t been that monster in a long time.’

He summoned a pair of hand bullets in place while he paced, ‘only if you want to of course I understand if it’s too late.’

“You’re really asking me?” His voice was as quiet as always and without any real impression of emotion.

Gaster cupped his face in his hands as he continued his back and forth pace, this was not how he’d anticipated this trip going at all. What happened? What got away from him? This was entirely irrational something he was incapable of- but he wasn’t. He’d had two boys that proved to him his soul was capable of warmth and love.

He turned on his heel to face Grillby, “would you want to try that date thing?” His cheeks tainted in splotches of varying colors as he did his best not to look away from the bartender. Far too slowly he realized his hand bullets hadn’t so much as twitched, stars, he wasn’t going to be able to say that again.

Grillby’s fleck like eyes were hard to read behind his lenses but his glow was soft as his colors spread evenly across his form, ‘of course, after this project right?’ Gaster nodded tightly as his fingers scratched at each other. ‘I’ll come up with something,’ the flames across his hands were a bit wild, far hotter than usual, as he signed. ‘For now though-’ He dared to tease as he stepped close enough to Gaster for him to be able to make out each scratch in the lenses of his glasses, ‘two burgers and two fries right?’

Gaster stood outside the door to Sans’s room a sack in each hand and a completely dazed expression across his soul. He’d just done the thing that had frightened him so much for so long. There wasn’t any backing up or running away or alternative idea this was unavoidable now. What even was a date?

His cellphone began to play up at him and he opened the door, Papyrus quickly pulled his phone shut, “good we were starting to worry you weren’t-” Papyrus pulled back before he lunged towards Gaster, “did you eat too much grease? Are you okay? Did the dogs try to get your bones?”

Sans sat up at an odd angel to look at his father, “I just asked Grillby on a date.”

“Finally!” Papyrus punched his fists in the air.

“About time,” Sans chuckled.

“Both of you-”

“Knew you were hopelessly smitten with the Eternal Flame? Yeah we knew.”

“...Oh...” Was this obvious to everyone but him?

“When is it?” Papyrus squealed.

“After the Barrier test for Delete.”
“I’m going to find the absolute most perfect outfit for it!” He gasped, “I should get my dating manual!”

“Please don’t.”

“Gonna add a little bit more heat to your life? Are you happy to finally go after your flame? Is he the light of your-“

Gaster buried his face in his hands, apparently normal was never going to settle over them after all. Life would continue to be very very interesting.

Chapter End Notes

Forgot to mention last week: someone had asked if there were going to be Deltarune references in this and I said one by coincidence. I thought a black fountain of darkness sounded really cool haha also if you think the man that gives you an egg is Gaster you can look at the most reoccurring food in this as a reference.

This chapter didn’t actually get set up right so none of this was in the original draft... which is why ta-da Grillster. I just wanted something light and fluffy and apparently my brain couldn't resist. Plus it seemed a lot of people were for it judging by the comments.
Chapter Summary

It’s only day two of Sans being up and he is already sick of his family’s hovering.

Chapter Notes

Comments and Kudos are always appreciated! Thank you for your continued support.

Thought I would give you a heads up: we are either two or three weeks away from this being completed! If I can think of a family hijinx chapter for next week then it will end on the last Wednesday of the month. Almost done guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Papyrus’s knees were drawn to his chest with his arms snug around them and both hands placed firmly against his phone while he nearly hid in the corner of the couch. His features were fixed, focused, as he tapped out some long-winded message for the umpteenth time this morning. Gaster held the laundry basket securely between both hands then, knowing full well his presence was not known leaned over the back of the couch, “are you texting your girlfriend?”

The phone flew from Papyrus’s hands to be snagged by a pair of hand bullets and returned to the snickering Gaster. The twins had decided it was their job to tease him about the potential development in his social life so it was only fair he return it when he could. Gaster passed the phone back to his son, “no it’s nothing important,” he smiled.

“Papyrus you’ve been curled up on the couch for half an hour,” he chuckled, “it has to be something.”

“Oh, well-” His sockets looped to the ceiling then to the border of the room, “Undyne has some very good news and I am celebrating with her from afar.”

“What is it?”

“She was just announced Captain of the Royal guard! Today was her crowning-corona-” he hummed as he tried to figure out the word, “Knighting!”

Gaster was surprised Asgore hadn’t called to boast about it, that was quite the achievement. No doubt, Gerson was positively beaming though he’d never show it. He furrowed his brows, “that’s a pretty big event, you didn’t want to go?”

Papyrus’s posture slouched, “she knows I very much support and appreciate all of her efforts.”

“It’s not like you to not want to be there with her,” he placed the laundry on the cushion next to Papyrus, “maybe it’s not too late.”

He worried the side of his phone, “Sans just woke up,” his sockets leveled, “I want to be here with
Gaster’s sockets relaxed, “I understand.” Sans had just woken up yesterday and, despite their best efforts, still wasn’t in any condition to be left unattended for long. It seemed his body was having a nasty sparring match with the DT but Gaster was confident it would pass. Currently though the child couldn’t walk without support and he spent most of his time asleep, which was good, it’s what he needed. Gaster felt horrendously guilty that he couldn’t afford to take work off tomorrow with Sans in such a state but he knew the boy understood.

“You should go,” Sans called.

The pair turned their head their expressions were equal parts frustrated to see Sans leaning heavily against his bedroom door frame, “you are supposed to ask for assistance.”

“I’m fine,” he casually untucked his hand from the fold of his elbow in a vague proof of good health. “I don’t want you missing out on stuff because of me,” his brows knit together as he peered down from his higher footing.

“Oh it’s fine,” Papyrus assured.

“No it’s not,” Sans urged, “if I don’t get better-”

“You will brother!”

“All of this is just temporary Sans,” Gaster assured.

“Please just go to the Undyne thing?” Sans’s voice was soft as his eyelight burned brightly.

“It’s fine, I’m sure she will tell me all about it!”

“Alright,” Sans’s sockets went vacant, “but whatever happens is your fault.” With that eerie message delivered he returned to his room. The pair exchanged their confusion before they started folding the laundry.

Lunch slowly rolled around which left Papyrus to fetch Sans while Gaster attempted to find the kitchen. Grillby hadn’t been kidding, just about every dish one could imagine flooded out from the fridge and across the countertops all of which were graciously provided by the citizens of Snowdin. He scratched absentmindedly alongside the crack under his left socket, he’d have to repay them somehow but they certainly didn’t want his cooking. A small chuckle clicked against the back of his teeth, at this rate the boys wouldn’t even remember how terrifying the phrase ‘a home cooked meal’ truly was.

Now there was a thought. He grabbed the casserole from- he strained his mind in a desperate attempt to remember what monster brought it. So many had been in and out of his domain lately he couldn’t keep track of names or even faces, not that either had ever been his strong suit. It was a fruitless effort so he settled for slipping the casserole into the oven with a quiet thank you to whoever it was.

Gaster’s sockets cautiously drifted over to the cinnabunnies on the counter. He really shouldn’t, he drummed his fingers against his humerus while he watched the oven light undulate luminosity. Finally, he gave a cautious glance to the living room before he grabbed a cinnabunny to nibble on.

“Father!” Papyrus scolded, “deserts are for after lunch!”

Papyrus’s voice was coming from the stairs, how did he- perhaps he was just that predictable? He shoved the rest of the pastry into his mouth like a guilty child before he turned his attention to the cupboards to grab the settings for the table.
It was sort of curious eating at the kitchen table that was now in the living room, whenever he headed back to the Capital he’d need to get several furnishings again. He smirked, at least he was finally free of that ugly green couch.

He could see Sans concentrating with all of his might on something as simple as walking. It wasn’t that long ago the Gaster’s own magic refused to move towards his legs but watching his son struggle with the task was sickening. Each movement was placed deliberately and carefully as if one piece of out of place carpet could topple him. Papyrus held tight to his hand but Sans was done being carried, done being smothered, after a single day of it the child was already sick of it.

Sans gripped the chair tightly as he discarded Papyrus’s hand to slide up into his chair. “Nobody say anything,” he buried his face in his arms while his ribs scrambled for air. The pair had, perhaps, been a bit too vocal in their praising of him for his efforts. Whether the child was merely embarrassed or frustrated by it he was uncertain but they both agreed to back off.

Papyrus took his seat and the three sat in a clumsy silence as they waited for the casserole to heat up. Sans chuckled, “so this talent agent calls this actor after their audition and he says congrats you’ve been casserole!”

“That’s pushing it,” Gaster sighed.

“I don’t get it,” Papyrus furrowed his brows.


“Oh,” Papyrus crinkled his nasal cavity, “that’s terrible.”

Sans scoffed, “you guys just don’t get what’s funny.”

The oven emitted a horrendous buzz to which Gaster responded by retrieving the dish. They each took their helpings of the more or less mystery goop but they were so accustomed to his garnished garbage the overly salted casserole was a welcomed change.

“You heard from Undyne lately?”

Papyrus pondered for a moment, “well no, the ceremony should have just finished up a little bit ago so I doubt she’s had the chance.”

Sans’s smile twitched into a smirk, “make sure ya tell her congrats from me alright?”

“Just text her yourself lazybones!”

“Can’t...fingers...too...weak,” he swooned in his chair and nearly tipped himself off of it before he caught his fingers around the backrest. Papyrus groaned in annoyance but his face was wrought with concern until his brother righted himself.

They finished their plates and scraped them clean before there was a knock at the door. A single precise knock. So many monsters had been coming to the house lately it was an immediate response to go answer it but apparently that wasn’t quick enough. The door flung open and brought the cold with it as a blue fish woman stood firmly in the doorway, “Papyrus!” Undyne barked.

“Oh, hello Undyne!” Papyrus called as he stepped into the living room to greet her.

“Hey punk!” She wrapped her arms firmly around the base of Papyrus’s ribs before she bent backwards which forced the squirming Papyrus head first into the floor. Gaster flinched at the impact
but Papyrus chuckled light heartedly.

“I missed you too Undyne!” Papyrus sang cheerily as he escaped from her grasp. With a practiced ease he positioned his neck to proper alignment before he climbed off the floor. “Congratulations on your promotion!”

“Fuhuhu,” she laughed as her grin enveloped her face, “it was only a matter of time!” She punched her fist into her hand, “but hey we’re throwing an after party and you’re invited!”

“Oh, that’s very kind Undyne but I have to-”

“Nope,” she glared down at him with her golden eyes, “you’re coming.”

“Undyne I have to-”

“No you don’t, Sans is a big skeleton he can take care of himself!” Everyone’s attention shifted to the skeleton in question who grinned with mischievous intent. This was his plot then, though Undyne seemed all too happy to participate.

Papyrus gave a panicked look to his brother, “I’ll be fine bro just an hour or so okay?”

He fidgeted his gloved fingers against each other, “I don’t-”

“Just for an hour,” Gaster assured, “if you have fun you can stay longer. I’ll take care of-”

Undyne interrupted him with a laugh that was accompanied by a Wahaha that Gaster flinched at from habit. “C’mon kiddo you’re coming too!” Gerson trotted through the entryway to grab Gaster’s wrist.

“Sans what is-” ‘Please let go,’ hand bullets signed but the grip didn’t falter. “Why me?”

“You both need to relax,” Sans replied lazily as he leaned against the counter.

“Nothing about either of these monsters is relaxing!” Gerson began to tug him towards the door while Undyne hoisted Papyrus onto her shoulder despite his squirming protests.

“Have fun,” he waved, “oh and congrats Undyne!”

“No shortcuts, glowing, or external magic of any kind, if you get fixated on something stop immediately, please take it easy don’t try to over exert yourself-”

“Bye Dad,” he smiled as Undyne pulled the door shut.

Papyrus and Gaster exchanged a panicked look to each other from the grips of their respective captors. “Gosh Papyrus you’re so tense,” Undyne bemused as she bounced the shoulder Papyrus was leaning over, “you’d be pretty pathetic in a fight right now.”

“Luckily,” Gerson cleared his throat to distract the girl from the budding idea of a snow filled fight, “that’s not what we’re doing.” The pair escorted their hostages into the only dining establishment in Snowdin.

The place was already in a state of chaos as the guard dogs of Snowdin arm wrestled the guards from the Capital for some sort of stakes judging by the civilians cheering. The monsters present were all of the unruly sort with the exception of the brightly colored king of all monsters who shifted on his feet in debate over whether the match needed stopped or letting it go in the spirit of things and the tiny yellow dinosaur curled up in one of the benches. It took Gaster a moment to recognize Alphys
outside of the labs, he’d have never guessed her to have become an acquaintance with the boisterous monster.

He was tempted to wave when the current competitor was flipped onto the next table by the force of the Draconic Guard’s grip. The defeated dog monster howled in laughter as they threw a few treats onto the table. This was definitely not Gaster’s scene. “I play next winner,” Undyne sneered as she moved to drop Papyrus on a stool. “What do you want Paps I’m payin’.”

Papyrus eyed Grillby, “just a milk please.”

“C’mon,” she bumped his arm, “lighten up a little.”

“I really don’t want anything but milk Undyne.”

“Dr.G?”

‘Equally as boring sorry,’ he signed forgetting his audience but Grillby shook his head as a translation.

“Fine, fine,” she bemoaned ordering a pint for herself and another for Gerson but she passed both of them to the turtle monster. She rolled her shoulder on her quick cross to the table, “alright who’s fighting the captain?”

The rabbit monster flexed confidently with his arm locked in place as Undyne locked her arm against his. Undyne’s grin blossomed across her face into a full-blown smile as she threw the rabbit guard’s fist straight into the table successfully knocking over all of the wagers. She leaned confidently against the table, “who’s next?”

The group of guards murmured, a few dared a glance to Asgore, but Papyrus sat down across from her, “I’ll try your game Undyne!”

Before she even accepted the bets were already placed against him. Gaster sighed, he was a skeleton, there was no mass nor muscle to compete with Undyne’s grit. Of course, he couldn’t blame the boy for wanting to try when placed in this sort of an environment.

She raised a brow, “you sure Paps? Like I know you’re tough but I don’t wanna break you like a toothpick.”

“Don’t worry I just drank a glass of milk,” Papyrus smiled though his sockets lowered in challenge.

“Alright,” Undyne chuckled.

As soon as the countdown finished Papyrus’s arm was pinned to the table, he stared at it in disbelief before he raised it back up, “I wasn’t ready!” He chastised. “Wait one moment,” he smiled as he moved the stool out of the way. Papyrus carefully tested his ribs against the table before he adjusted his feet, “Okay, one more time.”

There wasn’t a single bet placed in his favor this time as Undyne clasped his hand, “I can go all day,” she grinned.

“I doubt that,” Papyrus smiled. When the countdown started her forceful lunge tilted his hand towards the table but he managed to prevent contact. He chomped down hard on his teeth as he focused solely on his opponents’ eyes. Slowly, his hand began to return to the starting point for the pair to be locked in a stalemate.
Papyrus was strong? Gaster watched with morbid curiosity as his son closed the gap between species that he’d always believed impossible. Skeletons were weak physically their only hope was a reliance on magic but Papyrus was using none of that. Simple mathematics and he’d locked himself into a stronger position than Undyne. It didn’t seem enough to turn the tide but the effort was impressive.

His hand inched back towards the table until finally it gave with a resounding thunk that sent his shoulder into the table. Gaster smiled entirely prepared to consul the child but he was practically glowing, elated with the feat. The guards began to swarm him asking for tips, slowly a since of pride that had always been a facade for the boy became solid and real nearly touchable as he explained the importance of posture.

After the excitement calmed down from the match the pair of skeletons joined Alphys in the booth. She seemed a bit off put sitting across from her boss until Papyrus picked up the lead for conversation. Eventually Undyne threw herself into the booth to join in.

It was odd listening to the quickness of their banter over subjects Gaster wasn’t even aware existed. Some sort of animation kept resurfacing into the conversation whenever it wasn’t filled with feats of bravery from Undyne or meticulous projects of Papyrus’s. It didn’t take long for Gaster to recognize how out of place he was, he should probably talk to Asgore anyways.

“I’m going to get a refill,” Gaster smiled as he turned out of the booth.

“Wait,” Papyrus clamped his teeth down before he looked Undyne directly in the eyes, “I want to join the Guard.”

Gaster’s magic shot into his hand and shattered the glass, “you want to what?” He turned around quickly but Papyrus didn’t even acknowledge him.

“I want to join the Guard but I don’t want you to just accept me I want to earn it! I want to help monsters and the guard is going to be the best way!”

“I don’t know Paps, don’t get me wrong you’re tough but-” She looked at the other guards, “well you know the Guard fights humans, right? Not just little matches.”

Would she stop sugar coating it? “You’ll have to kill Papyrus,” he slammed his hand on the table, “you could never-”

“I think there’s another way,” Papyrus looked down at his glass of milk, “and if I join the guard I can prove it!”

Gaster could see it, his son garbed head to toe in that clunky, boxy armor that never quite fit, his grin hidden under a helmet that gave his form the illusion of shape. A pike thrown into his hands as he pressed his grit against human’s. One by one the monsters around him would fall until-

He slipped out of the booth, ‘I’m getting a refill, anyone else want anything?’ He scraped the remains of the glass into his hand with little care for how the thinner pieces slipped through to the floor. He didn’t hear their responses, if they even said anything, as he made his way up to the bar with the two pieces that lingered in his grip.

He discarded the fragments onto the warm orange table as he took a seat in the stool closest to him. The world around him was spinning, the air smothering, toxic, as his mind reeled: just a quick break. ‘Can I have a drink?’

“Your soda or-”
‘Fairy Fizz, Dragon Spit,’ he chuckled humorlessly and picked at his sleeve with distant eyelights, ‘orange juice and vodka if you must.’ It had been decades since his last drink, he could handle it better now he knew he could.

“Dings I can’t do that.”

‘I’ll pay you double.’

“Dings-”

‘Triple if I have to- please Grillby.’

Grillby placed a dark soda in front of him, “no.”

Gaster set his head down against the table, he’d just saved one of his children but he couldn’t do anything to protect against this. Was he allowed to forbid it? Over and over again the image of Papyrus’s dust seeping through open spaces of armor played in his mind. Most soldiers never got cleaned off the wet grass to be given back home? What would he have of his son then? ‘I’m going to sit outside for a minute.’

‘Might be for the best,’ Grillby signed quickly, ‘text me what’s wrong please?’

He nodded his weary head before he shuffled out into the snow to plop in the nearest snowbank. Unmoving, unthinking, he attempted to separate himself from that sensation of dust through his fingers but it was ingrained on his soul. By the time the door finally opened his clothes were saturated by the snow. His eyelight tilted up to see who had allowed the trickle of warmth out from the bar and was surprised to see Asgore cautiously staring down at him.

“Gaster it’s his decision to make,” he stated firmly but the skeleton just chuckled.

‘We could be free by this time next week. On the surface. With the humans that hate us,’ he peered up at Asgore, ‘they hate us. They still do. They always will.’ He was going to free them and doom his son to a life of violence and murder and LV and night terrors and soldier’s sickness and-

“Times have changed Gaster surely they-”

‘You’re the one that declared war!’ He snapped, ‘are you going to back out now? After everything you lost? This is what you wanted! This is your dusty war path and you’ll drag all of us down with you. A kingdom of dust! Is that what you want?’

“Of course not Gaster!” He dropped his hands and slowly all of his form crumpled with the gesture. “I just want to give my Kingdom the surface just as you wish to give it to yours.”

His kingdom? Gaster looked down at his hands, maybe he’d never quite realized how much they had grown up. He rested his head against the side of the building, ‘I don’t like it.’

“But?” Asgore prompted with a half-smile.

‘It’s not my decision,’ he drummed his fingers against his knees, ‘I will hear him out… Later.’ He ran his hands along the top of his skull, ‘for now I’m going to check on Sans. I don’t think it’s wise for me to be in there bothering Grillby for a drink.’

Asgore patted his shoulder gently, “take care my friend. I’ll see you soon.”

Gaster bowed his head, ‘we’ll meet at the barrier instead of the labs alright’
Asgore nodded while Gaster clawed the wall behind him to anchor himself to his feet. His spine let out a protest as it popped under the added weight of his waterlogged clothes. He waved towards the bartender through the bay window then turned towards the house he shared with his sons.

Gaster fished his key out of his pocket but grabbed his phone instead, his eye light dimmed, he’d just barely managed the mandatory hour that had been set in place for him. What would Sans do if Papyrus marched into battle? Surely he wouldn’t follow but he knew from experience that not fighting would be a scar that never healed.

“Dad wait,” Papyrus huffed.

It was odd that he couldn’t bring himself to respond, he couldn’t say anything, he couldn’t even turn his head in his son’s direction. Gaster knew that if this was what Papyrus wanted to do he should support the decision but he couldn’t make himself do so, not yet. “Are you angry at me?” Papyrus’s boots crunched against the snow as he shifted.

The words strangled themselves against the back of his teeth as he struggled to emote some sort of a response. “I know you wanted me to be a mechanic or an engineer and I know that they help monsters but I can do more in the guard. If we go to the surface I could try talking to the humans! They wouldn’t let me do that otherwise, I don’t want there to be a fight, I don’t want a war, or glory, or any of the things Undyne makes sound cool and awesome but aren’t.”

“Dad, I want to help monsters,” he reiterated, “you help everyone everyday with all of your work- I just,” he folded his hands, “I’m not like you and Sans I can’t do that sort of thing.”

The pull of the river could be heard as it slunk into Waterfall uncertain of its’ own voice. The cold air settled between them in a sharp chill that made the warm glow of the house lights all the more desirable. Gaster placed his hand against the warm brown door of his son’s house as he attempted to decipher who had hung a wreath on the door, any train of thought was more tempting than the one he needed to be on.

“Dad I’m sorry if you don’t want-”

Gaster turned his head slowly to face Papyrus, “did you not see how scared I was to lose Sans? Do you think you are any different?”

“I’m not going anywhere, I’m still right here, in the cold, with gloves being the only warm clothes I am wearing,” he chattered.

“I-” He had no idea what to say, what could he say? This was a fear he should have prepared himself for a long time ago. “Papyrus,” he scratched at the base of his sockets, “I am very proud of you, I always have been. If you really think this is your path in life than I cannot deny you but...I can’t accept it quite yet either.”

“I understand,” his shoulders dropped as his sockets pointed to the snow. His bones locked together in a pathetic defense against the cold.

“We can talk about this later, for now can we please go in?” Papyrus happily accepted the offer.

One child was following in his footsteps the other had decided to run in the complete opposite direction and all he could do was hope that both reached the goal that they wanted. That was his role as their parent after all.
The “I want to be in the Guard” conversation originally happened right after the incident with the human. Actually I really can’t even begin to describe how different everything is from the time I originally wrote this section. Since we got to them being adolescents I’ve pretty much had to use the original concepts as outlines instead of drafts.

When this is all the way done would there be an interest in opening requests?

EDIT: Whelp after three good attempts it looks like it’s going to be 34 chapters total.
It was interesting the amount of time he had dedicated to observing the slight disturbances in the paint on the ceiling. Occasionally the paint along the border bubbled out just barely enough to be observable, probably more difficult if it wasn’t for his eyelight in the dark environment. Perhaps they could paint over it and fix the imperfections? No, there was no point, he’d be moving back to the Capital soon- provided today didn’t go as planned.

His ribs stuttered with the weight of the hours that still lingered until he could finally push all of the last several month’s efforts into action. With the blankets curled snug around him it all seemed so far off but the clock had been moving forward-hadn’t it? He turned his head to take in the glowing numbers, time was moving just- slowly. How could Papyrus tolerate being up during these hours?

The blankets attempted to bind him to the bed until they finally they gave way to the effort as he sat up to rub his sockets. Papyrus would still be up and that was certainly better than identifying what forms the dots on the ceilings correlated with. He threw the gray robe over his black silk pajamas before he braced the cold early morning air of Snowdin.

The door to the house opened effortlessly in his hand and he sighed before he stomped the snow off his boots. Papyrus was curled up on the couch working on some sort of a button mechanism. “Morning,” he muttered without looking away from his project.

“Morning,” Gaster replied, “you boys really need to get in the habit of locking that door.”

“Why?” Papyrus asked, “everyone is welcome to come by!” Gaster opened his mouth before he tapped his teeth together, Snowdin had proved to be safe it was just his own paranoia. “You’re normally asleep at this time I’m not one to mandate excessively long naps but you’ve got a pretty big day today,” he smiled a bit sleepily to him.

“I can’t sleep,” he rubbed his sockets.

“Nervous?” Papyrus supplied.

“No, not quite nervous just exceptionally uncertain,” his eyelight pointed toward the floor.

Papyrus tilted his mechanism in the light a few different ways before he placed it in the box in front
of him. “Let's make breakfast then! Nothing starts the day better!”

“Have you had my cooking?” Papyrus seemed to elect to ignore the question as he moved towards the kitchen. Gaster leaned against the counter while a tight yawn displayed itself over his teeth with more vigor than he had yet mustered this morning. He rubbed at his socket before he moved to make a cup of coffee over the clattering of pots and pans.

“Okay Papyrus what are we going to burn this morning?” He asked with a bit of amusement in his tone caused by the meere scent of coffee.

“Pancakes!” He declared as he sloshed the mix together, slowly the descriptor dawned on him, “and we will not burn them!”

“Challenge accepted,” Gaster chuckled.

“The challenge will not be accepted because we will do a very good job!” Papyrus huffed as he pulled eggs out of the fridge.

Gaster quickly returned them to the fridge, “this is a mix you don’t use eggs.”

“But they are pan cakes eggs are a necessity!”

He furrowed his brows as he attempted to decipher why he knew that statement to be wrong, “the pack says just add water,” he finally muttered as he caught the packaging in his gaze, “so the eggs must already be in it.”

“Oh that stands to reason,” Papyrus smiled as he went back to vigorously stirring the batter. Gaster poured himself a mug of coffee reveling in the warmth that hummed against his hands and the fragrance that even with his limited sense of smell he could still make out. Slowly he savored the bitter taste as it filled his empty form with relaxing waves of magic.

He took one more long, slow, sip before he placed it on the counter and turned on the stove. Papyrus leaned over to turn the heat up further but Gaster shoved his hand away, “Undyne says you have to heat your cooking with a passion that matches your desire for culinary excellence!”

“Yes and this is the same Undyne whose desire for culinary excellence has left her homeless three times since we’ve met her. We are following the instructions,” Gaster stated with absolute authority. Papyrus seemed to admit defeat before he flooded the bottom of the pan with the batter. The pair scrutinized the light colored liquid with matching expressions as the same question played in their minds: aren’t you supposed to flip it somehow?

Gaster grabbed the packaging, “oh, you’re just suppose to make little circles.”

“But aren’t they supposed to be the size of the pan?” He drummed his fingers against his jaw.

“I don’t think you’re supposed to take that too literally,” he mused. Still, they watched the pancake until a dark smoke began to roll out from the overcooked bottom and admittedly a little bit longer than that before they got to work scraping off the remains.

“It’s odd how the top is still all goopy,” Papyrus poked at it, “think we can put it back in the bowl?”

“Maybe it’s for the best that we don’t,” he couldn’t see a problem with doing it but they really didn’t need any of the charred chunks falling into the batter so they opted to discard it entirely.

The next pancake was proper size but the pairs brows were once again furrowed in confusion, “how
do you know when to flip it?”

“The instructions say when it’s golden brown,” Gaster hummed.

“But we can’t see it to know.”

The pair tilted their heads to the side slightly as they attempted to discern what color the bottom of the pancake was. Curiosity got the best of them and Papyrus flipped it over to reveal a mess of partially cooked batter that flung against the side of the pan. In the end that pancake was an incredibly dark brown top with a mushy base but it was an improvement.

“What are you two doing?” A yawn like voice muttered haughtily.

Gaster flinched and knocked the pan to the floor while Papyrus quickly turned around without moving his feet, “don’t sneak up on busy monsters Sans!”

Sans chuckled in appreciation for the dramatic expression he was given, “the house smells terrible what are you doing?”

“Making pancakes!”

“Uh-huh,” Sans’s eyelights traced over the mess of discarded batter and burnt chunks that decorated the kitchen.

Sans had been doing infinitely better which was easiest to see by his increasing willingness to be coddled. It seemed he was content to the attention only if he didn’t truly need it. There had been talk of him returning to the labs soon but Gaster cautioned against it. He wanted to perform a few tests before he put Sans in any sort of a potentially over stimulating environment. Still, he’d been cleared for independent walks around Snowdin, by Gaster first then to the begrudging approval of Papyrus, which the boy happily took in stride.

“Well don’t mind me,” he hopped up onto the nearby counter then gestured for them to carry on.

They decided they had flipped the last one a bit too soon so obviously they needed to wait longer which resulted in a solid black disk. “Psh,” Sans covered his laugh, “that’s more of a pan puck then a cake.”

“If you’re so smart why don’t you try,” Gaster relinquished the spatula to the boy who realized their wasn’t a real opportunity to say no. Sans poured the last of the batter into the skillet to create a circle about the size of his hand.

“You’re not going to be able to flip that,” Papyrus sneered.

Sans shrugged as he listened to the batter hiss its’ complaint up at him until it settled into a quiet vote of grievance at that point he flipped the breakfast pastry over without incident. The misguided chefs watched with their arms crossed as they leaned against the counter on opposite sides of the stove. Sans grabbed a plate from within the cabinet then slid the golden brown disc onto it.

“See? Piece of cake.” Sans snickered as Papyrus groaned, “bone appetite?” He tried which received another groan but in stereo.

They cut the soul survivor of the morning’s cooking in thirds which Sans and Gaster sat down to nibble on their respective triangles while Papyrus took to cleaning the kitchen. “How do you feel today?”
“Sans ational,” He winked.

“Seriously please,” Gaster glared.

“Well Sans you asked I still have that strange sans ation where my soul sort of takes a few extra beats,” he grinned unashamed of his ridiculous puns.

“You know,” he took a bite of his pancake, “when I adopted you two I thought Papyrus was going to be the problemed child.”

Sans nodded his head a few times, “ya know I like to think I’m a lot like Papyrus.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, just sans all the confidence,” he rocked back in his chair in an effort to avoid the full force of the glare thrown at him.

“What has gotten into you?”

“Well, I’ve got this whole new lease on life right? So I’ve been really thinking about what I wanna do since there’s not some all doom timeline in front of me,” he leaned onto his hand tiredly. “I think I wanna be a comedian.”

The sound of metal grinding against metal as the world grate to a stop so quickly Gaster’s non-existent stomach flopped muted everything around him. His soul clenched in his chest, a comedian? All of the work, the late nights, the internships, and Sans wanted to give everything up to tell a few cheap jokes?

Slowly Gaster took in the obnoxious glow in his son’s eye lights and had no choice but to lighten up, “that’s your worse joke yet.”

Sans nearly fell out of his chair as laughter overtook him, “you’re face was priceless!” Cyan magic pricked the corner of his sockets in the shape of un-fallen tears as he succumbed to his fit.

“What’s so funny?” Papyrus asked as he crossed out into the living room.

“You’re brother’s terrible sense of humor,” Gaster sighed.

“Oh,” Papyrus wrinkled his nasal cavity. He promptly decided no to ask any further questions, “There’s still some time left before you have to leave for work, wanna watch a movie?”

Gaster opened his phone to see the time, “I’m not going to be able to finish it.”

“We’ll finish it when you get home,” Papyrus smiled.

“I suppose that’s fine, go ahead and start it up and I’ll pop some popcorn,” Gaster suggested.

“I’ll start the popcorn,” Sans hummed as he slipped off his chair then into the kitchen.

Shortly after the last kernel ruptured from its’ shell the three of them were snuggled on the worn down broken couch. Papyrus had taken special care to ensure Sans’s comfort by swaddling the poor child in a mess of blankets and sticking him on the right hand corner of the couch, though Sans didn’t seem to mind. Papyrus and Gaster shared a blanket across their lap as they munched on the popcorn sockets trained on the human archaeologist who was stealing some relic from booby trapped ruins.
The puzzles were obviously monster inspired, humans never cared for them to this extent. Despite being abandoned for years everything still worked splendidly. Papyrus was absolutely entranced as he muttered under his breath exactly how he believed each trap worked as well as throwing out ideas on how to make them perform better. Sans would throw out the occasional suggestion but Papyrus usually dismissed it.

Nestled shoulder to shoulder, or more so shoulder to blanket made padding, the rest of the world seemed so far away. Gaster held his coffee firmly between both of his hands with a soft smile written plainly across his face, there was no place else he’d rather be. He’d fought so hard to give them the surface and now that it was almost in his reach he couldn’t help but feel they didn’t need it. What they needed was more moments just like this, where everything was comfortable and content.

Of course, being able to do that after a long day of exploring amongst clean air or after a long night of collecting fireflies would be nice. His smile broadened as he imagined Sans with his socket pressed to the lens of his telescope as he pointed out stars to Papyrus who was just excited to see his brother happy or Papyrus in the light of the high sun painting a breathtaking landscape decorated with more colors than one could count while Sans slept obnoxiously off center within the portrait. Gaster would- this was always so hard for him to figure out but he knew no matter what he’d be right there with them. It was much more enjoyable imagining the world at a time of peace than the war he dreaded.

No, right now even those thoughts were a far off shadow in the glow of the moon or the light of the sun. His coffee slowly drained away as he lost himself in thoughts of plants swaying gently in the breeze, of phantom sensations of his clothes being pulled along the air’s path, or the gentle relaxing nature of a cool breeze that crossed you on a hot day. He convinced himself of peace, though he’d never have the nerve to interact with the humans himself, he believed they would find a way to achieve coexistence, they had it once before after all.

His fingers clawed at the bottom of the metallic bowl only to rattle against a few stray kernels and seeds. “Boys? Do you want more popcorn?”

“You’re going to get up now? It’s the best part!”

“Bro you’ve said that every scene,” Sans chuckled happily swaddled in his mess of blankets and pillows his sockets just barely exposed.

“I think I’ll be able to catch up quickly enough,” Gaster smiled as he stretched his legs off of the couch before he stood up to his full height to pop his back. This was the perfect scene: his boys happy, healthy, nested up on the couch in a moment free of worries or cares. His soul warmed, softer than usual, whether they made it to the surface or not as long as his boys were happy and together that’s what mattered.

Gaster grabbed the popcorn bowl off of the couch, “be right back,” he hummed but was taken aback when the twins fixated on him. From an old cautionary habit he did his best to cover the cracks in his skull, “what?”

The pair exchanged a broad smile before they turned it up to their father, “so uh what did you think of that last green?”

He furrowed his brows as it took a moment to figure out what the pun was intended to be, “I thought the lining of the scepter with the city was a lot of happy coincidences and the chances of that happening without any waiting at all is highly unlikely.”

“I see what you green ,” Sans nodded.
Gaster looked down to the tacky green couch, “perhaps I could couch you in critiques?” He tried.

Papyrus groaned, “don’t you start too!”

Sans chuckled, “alright, alright eye ’ll stop.”

“What are you getting at?” Gaster asked before the conversation morphed into the need to create a ceasefire.

“Your eye dad,” Sans pushed himself out of his cocoon far enough for his lazy smirk to come into view.

“It’s green,” Papyrus smiled.

Gaster blinked then tapped his fingers to the bottom of his good socket as if he could observe it that way. He tilted the remainders of the popcorn out of the way to see the bottom of the metallic bowl, an odd shade of green glowed back at him.

After all of this time, after all of the frustration and tears and shoving everyone away it was green. Why now? After everything getting popcorn is what triggered it? Not meditation, nor study, or even tearing his own soul apart gave any proof to the color.

“Woah, whatever you’re thinking go back, it’s turning yellow,” Sans wiggled his hands in some meaningless gesture under the blankets.

A cleansing breath. He watched his eye shift back into the foreign color, there was kindness in him. His slender fingers wrapped tight over his teeth as he tried his best not to tear up, there was no point in crying but- so much of the hurt in his soul was ebbing away the longer he gazed at the glow.

Sans chuckled, “it’s the same color as the couch.”

Gaster looked between the couch and his warped reflection, “you have to be kidding me.”

Papyrus did his best to cover his boisterous laugh, “maybe this is a sign you need to take it back with you to the Capital, we could get a new one!”

“No, I am getting a new couch,” Gaster snapped.

“Aw, we’d hate to take it from you, you’re a matching set !” Papyrus mused which received a good chuckle from his brother.

“Will you both knock it off you’re ruining this!” He stomped.

The pair finished their fit of laughter as Gaster threw his head into the air to retrieve a fresh round of popcorn.

While it popped he kept catching his reflection in various objects, the oven, the fridge handle, the sink, it was still there, emblazoned upon the world around him and a flickering candle of hope within him. His smile stung tight against his face but he couldn’t rid himself of it or the incredibly wispy airy feeling that his magic sung around his bones.

He pulled his phone out to send a quick message but he was discouraged by the time. The popcorn bowl was restocked before it was passed to the boys who grinned up to him with some unseen plan before he dismissed himself to get dressed for the day.

The weight of the day’s deed crashed down upon him as he donned his white turtleneck. Every
terrifying notion of what it would mean to reach the surface, the overwhelming shadows that crept into his mind that promised of his failure, and the promise of his boy’s smile when the sun kissed their bones with a quiet warmth. The wind. The subtle stirring of leaves. It was worth whatever the repercussions might be for that one single moment for his tiny little Kingdom.

They were ready. He picked a few lingering threads off of his black pants before he slipped his long black trench coat over his shoulders then tied the belt firmly. His reflection still smiled a pulsing green at him even if his soul felt as if cast in Blue Magic’s light. Papyrus would tell him to be more confident, to believe this would work then surely it would. Sans would explain the sound logic of how it all was going to go exactly as planned. The pair would chase all of his worries away if they knew how much he was fussing right now.

His sockets were still fixed in that permanent glare of his, the cracks along his skull were intimidating to other monsters, the folds at the base of his sockets and his dingy coloration were proof of his age but, whether it be the new color or something else, he couldn’t help but feel he was looking at a different monster. Boney fingers ran along the ridge of his socket once more, judging by the prickling sensation he should probably stop but he was terrified he’d never be able to do it again. An idea flickered a spark into his dead socket as he rose his fingers against the crack on the right side of his head.

It was- pitiful really, the slow pull of magic that tingled a cautious healing sensation along the ridge, he knew better than to expect such a strange color to have strong healing properties but it was still there. A soft touch that ebbed away the pulling itch of the wound. It was weak, maybe it could heal a single HP but surely that would be enough. He flexed his hand and stared at it as if it was foreign, so many new things lately, he thought he’d seen it all, done everything, but obviously the world was too vast for that and soon it would be even bigger.

The Underground’s hopes rode with him even if they didn’t know it quite yet, he hated letting others down. He turned away from the mirror in his glorified closet turned bedroom before he headed up the flight of stairs to the blistering cold of Snowdin. His phone informed him he’d dawdled in his thoughts a bit too long to pop back in the house, his shoulders slouched, normally it wouldn’t bother him but-

“Love you Dad!” Papyrus shouted from his bedroom window. Gaster turned to face the second story window.

“Go save the Underground,” Sans smirked from the base of the window pane.

He felt his eye glow a bit brighter as he waved up to the pair, “I love you both!”

Gaster lingered a bit longer as he took in the sight of his sons before he headed to the River Person’s landing. A warm orange glow came into his peripherals and he turned to watch Grillby fight with the ice covered bar door. He chuckled to himself before he playfully smacked the fire’s shoulder.

The monster flared for a second until he recognized Gaster walking away from him. His flames threw sparks, ‘green?’ He signed to the backwards walking skeleton.

Gaster grinned unabashedly, ‘green,’ the sign slid off from his shoulder. Grillby’s yellows glew brighter as Gaster turned his attention back to the landing.

It was with a brash naivety that he jumped into the River Person’s boat though it barely bobbed under his meager weight. “You’re quite the spirit today,” they retorted without turning to face him.

“*In* quite the spirit,” Gaster corrected under his breath, “but yes I suppose I am. A day like today
isn’t going to come again.” He scratched at his eye as his magic burned a bit too hot in the socket. It was with much disappointment that he slowly let his eye return to its’ usual white oval light, he knew that it was in him now. Another mark in the proof he is a monster column. He traced the shape of a proper monster soul over the top of his own misshapen one.

When the boat lurched to its’ resting spot Gaster tipped the cloaked monster handsomely before he stepped a bit more cautiously out of the boat.

The labs peered down at him like an obelisk against the burning oranges of Hotlands. He sneered, as if they dared to judge him. They were so much more than the glorified two tiered box he’d started with and he’d built each expansion with his own hands. He had carved the Underground into a liveable domain and now he was going to leave it all behind.

His eye burned red, he was determined.

Chapter End Notes

The pancake scene is back! Of course it’s different than the original one because they are older but I still hope it was cute. I also hope that both Sans and Papyrus feel like his sons or at least that he loves them both more or less equally.

Next week the titular characters are taking over.

I hope even if the ending isn’t as you anticipated/wished you’ll be able to enjoy it.... cause frankly I’m nervous as heck haha! But I feel I have to stay true to my original intentions with this piece.
The _______ Charges

Chapter Summary

It’s just sort of a strange day for everyone.

Chapter Notes

This is it guys! I really don’t know what else to say. This project has meant a lot to me and I’m so glad I could share it with you all. I saved so many of the comments for when I’m feeling down and I can’t tell you the smile that crossed my face when we passed 250 kudos by exactly one. I hope you all enjoyed this as much as I enjoyed writing it for you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Everything was dark, the only sensations were a splitting headache and how tightly he had his sockets sealed. A vague sense of wrongness pervaded his soul as if what his eyes would reveal was something terrifying. He was distantly aware of the smoldering heat around him and that he was hunched over with his hands crossed over his skull as he made himself as small as possible.

Flickering orange teased at the darkness which coaxed him to slowly unseal his sockets. Tongues of orange flame were just inches from his face. Instinctively he jerked away just far enough to make out the glasses pressed against the fire and the neon green bow tie around a white button down shirt. It was a flame monster of some sort, what was it doing in Snowdin?

The monster was still buckled over the top of him several large rocks fell from its’ back as it straightened to full height.

Right, he was in Hotlands when there was an earthquake. There hadn’t been an earthquake in the Underground since- well it had been far before he was born that was for certain. This monster must have shielded him from the stones that discarded themselves from the ceiling in the aftershock. It had been pretty startling he’d have to check and see if Paps was okay back home.

“Hey uh, thanks,” Sans rubbed the back of his head, “you really saved me there.” The flame didn’t do anything in response for a long while, it seemed to be focused on him but without any features it was hard to tell. Sans scanned over the monster’s brown leather jacket and matching slacks before his eyes landed on the green picnic basket around the bend of his arm.

“You hear about the picnic where everyone forgot to bring beverages?” He waited for a response but was beginning to recognize his would be fiery hero was a bit stone faced, “it was soda depressing,” he winked to no avail. Not a single lick of flame moved in anyway to indicate humor, that was a pretty good picnic joke on the fly, maybe they were just without one?.

“You’re picnic basket- it was just a joke forgetaboutit.” He shoved his hand in his pockets as the monster suddenly looked down to the basket as if it didn’t know it had been carrying it, or at least that’s what he guessed that expression was. “Well you’re probably on a hot date or something so I’m
gonna go ahead and go.” He started to walk away before he turned back, “hey if you’re ever in Snowdin look me up I’ll let you crash at my place as a thank you.”

Sans returned his hands to his pockets, as if that would ever happen. Fire monsters didn’t normally leave Hotlands just like the icy monsters of Snowdin didn’t come here. Actually that was a fair question, why was he in Hotlands? He and his brother both hated this place. They’d had such a rough time of it as kids here they both avoided the place if they could.

He looked down at his green jacket, must be the color of the day, but it reminded him: he was going to the Capital to go Gyftmas shopping for his brother. That had to be it.

Hotland was such a bleak landscape just stone, magma, those infuriating vent puzzles and- he paused in the shadow of the abandoned laboratory. It was odd, when Pops talked about it growing up he’d always made them sound so big, so grand. Though that was probably from when he was a kid himself… what was he doing? He never thought about either of his parents. It was him and Paps and for all he cared that was all it had ever been.

For a frightening moment Sans thought he saw some phantom gaze down at him from behind the boarded up window but it was gone when he focused on it. A shudder ran up his spine which inspired him to expedite his steps towards the Capital.

The Capital city of New Home was a mess of monsters running about. Apparently the earthquake had unsettled the Core and caused a fire to grow out of control enough to scorch a large section of housing. No one had been harmed, but they were still calling it a disaster.

Of course good ol’ King Asgore would be by once everything was settled so he could pretend he’d done something about it. Sans sighed as he was forced to recognize his awful, gloom, mood. A gnawing feeling nibbled at his soul like a zealous caterpillar but he couldn’t figure out why. Everything felt further away than usual as if there was something distinctly terrible that no one else could observe.

Still, where there was fire there tended to be discarded goods, maybe he could find something worth cleaning up.

A lot of other junkers were already amongst the charred buildings scavenging what they could find to turn a profit. Sans pushed through a few bens but nothing caught his eye, everything was junk. No, he turned a well kept china doll that had suffered only minor damage in its fall to the Underground and slight scorching on the dress, he just wasn’t in the mood.

On a day like this there wasn’t much of a point trying to be productive.

He turned back up an alley to head back to the main street with little interest in his surroundings until he froze. The thought didn’t even occur to him. His feet just stuck to the soot covered cobblestone without any sort of will from their owner. A sense of wrongness coiled cold inside his bones and sat like lead until he turned his head just enough to catch it:

A gray door.

There wasn’t anything special about that, everything in New Home was gray, but the fact it was so pristine against the black that engulfed everything else. His toes curled against the insides of his shoes before he took a step towards the door, then another, he knocked on it in two short bursts, “heh, knock knock.” He observed the soot on his knuckles curiously then he ran his fingers along the clean door only for them to come back covered in ash.
Okay, his eyes were playing tricks on him. Maybe Papyrus was right, maybe he still wasn’t well enough to be out on his own for so long. That last round of sickness had really kicked his nonexistent butt.

The door creaked open as one of the cleaning monsters pushed a wheelbarrow packed full of things through the door. “Out of the way please,” the female opossum monster snapped as Sans jumped off of the stoop. “You scavengers can’t even wait for us to finish unloading the houses,” she scoffed.

Bringing anything of potential value out of burned or abandoned buildings prevented monsters from going into them to retrieve items and risk injury. Not that that really stopped rebellious teen monsters from doing bravery tests in whatever house went up in flames but it was a useful deterrent and with resources as low as they were it was important to recycle as much as they could.

That was the joy of the Underground: one human’s trash was the only luxury a monster could afford. He furrowed his brows, this was a special kind of gloomy, was he always like this?

“Got anything good?” Sans asked eyeing what appeared to be equally unscathed items in the wheelbarrow.

“There was a chest in the basement full of war goods from before the barrier, we’re sending that to Asgore though, this is all just nick knacks and whatnots from whatever family lived here.”

“They make it out okay?” Sans hummed in half interest as he dug through the pile surprised by the burnt, fragile, textures he met.

“Oh no one has lived here for at least a century,” her ears twitched. “Have fun digging through garbage, real bad for your health you know.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” he watched her leave but when he turned back to the pile he nearly jumped out of his metaphoric skin. A tall white monster-? No it hardly seemed to be one, there really wasn’t any word to describe the thing that loomed over the barrow.

Wispy strands of white moved in strange nonsensical patterns away from the vague shape that served as its’ body. Something akin to an upside down egg had a cut out of it while two indistinct hands with holes in the center phased through everything it touched. It was looking frantically through the charred belongings for something.

Sans chuckled nervously before he noticed the monster was pawing at a figure, it was one of the ones Papyrus collected for his battle regiment. The poor thing looked like it had seen better days, maybe it got wedged behind a piece of furniture somewhere… but the house had been abandoned for at least a century, as far as he knew these were released when they were kids. “Do you mind if I-” It froze. As if the entire world lost its’ meaning and nothing were more interesting than Sans.

A strange noise like a drowning radio shot symbols into Sans’s mind, he winced, he didn’t mean to be rude but the sound was altogether unpleasant. The egg shape drew close to him before it pulled away frantically scratching at something in the base of the wheelbarrow. Sans pushed a few things, mostly old notebooks and a few well loved jigsaw puzzles, to the side to see a telescope at the base of the pile.

His eye lights glowed bright, a real telescope! What were the chances of finding one in the Underground? Let alone one in condition as good as this. The whatever it was kept scratching at it but it’s fingers phased through over and over again. “Here,” Sans wrapped his fingers around the metallic surface surprised at how well cared for it was.
The thing pulled its’ arms to its’ chest and seemed to stare at him for a long time before a crescent shape imprinted itself across the egg shape and an inverted one right above it. A face of some sort, it was smiling so Sans figured that was good. “Is this for me?” It didn’t answer as it faded from view slowly leaving Sans with the telescope.

He turned it in his hand and caught the strange symbols engraved by the eye piece: a teardrop, a peace sign, a skull and crossbones, and another tear. They matched what his synthesis had shown him when the whatever had spoke or at least he’d assumed the sound had come from it. Strange as the rest of it was.

The deformed action figure was slipped into his inventory, there was a chance he could repair it, but his hands hesitated around the telescope. He wasn’t big on keeping things for himself but maybe- nah. What was the point of a telescope down here? There weren’t any stars to see.

He chuckled, those stupid books he kept were just another false hope he didn’t need. He should probably sell them, a few were in really good condition, they’d probably catch a pretty G. Actually, the telescope could bring in a pretty G. Monsters would do anything for a bit of luxury and how many of these were there in the Underground? Maybe there was a nice crystal cove somewhere in the Waterfalls that would be perfect to set up. Well, that settled that, if he could make money off of it or it would make Papyrus smile it was worth keeping.

On his way back home he passed by the elevator that ran by the Core surprised to see the area swarming with monsters. The entire Core had been blocked off. Evidently the earthquake dislodged some chunk of the machine that in turn released some mystery black ooze. It was deemed dangerous but no one seemed to have any idea what it was or did.

The Core was the cornerstone of life in the Underground but no one had any idea how it worked or what it took to run it and just sat around with their fingers crossed hoping the thing would stick together. It had been unattended for years, just an ancient mass of half rusted metals held together with nothing more than the lingering will of whatever mad scientist concocted it.

Sans pulled his hood over his head, regardless of how true the gossip was it seemed he’d be taking the long way back to Snowdin.

Papyrus hummed an upbeat ditty while he folded the last of the laundry. He didn’t recall owning so many black clothes but they certainly wouldn’t fit Sans. Granted he was wearing a bright green sweater currently and that certainly wasn’t a favorite color. There was a particularly pesky coffee stain on a gray turtleneck sweater that he just couldn’t seem to place- surely Sans just bumped into him while he was half sleeping through his daily obsession, but that didn’t feel right. He shook his head, no matter, he had socks to attend to! He put the turtleneck to the side to mess with later.

Socks were always a frustrating task largely because Sans couldn’t manage to figure out how to keep them together. His own socks all matched up immaculately however Sans’s failed to find a single mate. Such a waste of good socks, he bemoaned.

His phone buzzed and for a moment he was incredibly excited, who could possibly be texting him? But slowly he remembered it was just him and Sans, it had always just been him and Sans.

Besides that his phone had been odd for the last several hours, he kept receiving messages from monsters in his contacts but he didn’t know them. Sometimes the message would only appear for a few minutes before it would delete itself. Even this message from Sans had a strange time on it.
He ran his finger along the side of his phone, he loved his brother, more than anyone in the world but- he was basically an adult why didn’t he have any friends? Someone to tell his feelings to at least, tell him he was cool, he was good. He clenched the hole-y sock he was holding firmly, Sans did those things, why wasn’t it enough? Why did it feel like he’d already had that? He clenched his teeth and uncoiled the poor, strangled, sock to lay it atop another.

The message from Sans explained that he was going to be a while coming back. It still didn’t explain where he had disappeared to or why. The monster had just been bed ridden you would think he would take better care of himself. They only had each other after all he didn’t know what he’d do without his dear lazy loveable sloth of a brother.

The basket was hoisted into the air but as he turned to take it up the stairs a flash of red caught itself in his peripherals. Hanging up alongside yet another black article of clothing he didn’t recall purchasing was a red scarf. Slowly he set the basket down, he forgot his scarf, hummed in the back of his mind.

He uncoiled the fabric from the coat rack, this wasn’t Sans’s- he was fairly certain it wasn’t his. There were a few stubborn patches of a soft fleece but most of the material had been worn down. The stitching wasn’t the greatest but it was obviously done by hand. Someone cared about this a lot, that’s the feeling he got, but who did it belong to? As he concentrated on his vague recollection pressure built hot and harshly behind his sockets until his whole skull throbbed.

Well, surely the owner couldn’t have gone far. He’d just wear it around town and see who commented on it! Yes! A most ingenious plan from a most ingenious skeleton! He laughed proudly to himself as he reached for the black peacoat. It slipped over his frame a little oddly, his shoulders were too broad but the waist and base hung too low on him.

The scent was of lingering coffee that was so strong one could imagine the very fibers of the coat were made from the beans. That wasn’t it though, there was a chemical scent, like cleaning supplies but more bitter, that the coffee attempted to hide away. It wasn’t a good smell- not in the least in fact the two scents didn’t belong together at all. The smell was so offensive that Papyrus's sockets were beginning to water, yes, that was the only reason. It had nothing at all to do with the way his soul was quivering in his chest.

He slipped the coat off promptly and hung it back up on the rack, it must belong to the mysterious monster who also owns the scarf. The mystery of the missing skeleton was opening up!

Skeleton? He furrowed his brows, where had he gotten that from? He shook his head, it hardly mattered he would find this mystery monster no matter the cost! But right now he needed to get groceries, he pulled out his list surprised by the sheer amount of items along the page.

Were they throwing a party? Oh! A gyftmas party! They would invite all of their neighbors, that they had yet to really meet, and become the greatest party hosts in Snowdin! How could he forget his first chance to become the idol of the sleepy little town?

His smile slowly dropped as he recognized that didn’t sound right- he wasn’t very good in crowds and neither he nor Sans could cook half of these things. Or any at all. Why was this list so long? Well, he’d get the essentials then discuss the surprise-to-even-him party whenever Sans got back.

Papyrus swiftly returned to the laundry and tucked each article away in its’ proper space, for his clothes, Sans’s he just dropped carefully to the foot of his bed where he was aware they would rest for an undetermined amount of time. After the chore was finished to completion he coiled the scarf tightly around his neck a bit perturbed as that tear inducing scent pervaded his nasal cavity.
He stepped slowly out into the cold air hoping that he’d catch someone frantically dash back to their house to retrieve their lost items but there wasn’t anyone there. Just a strange spiking sensation in his magic that came with paranoia. A soft rattle escaped him as a looming sense of loneliness? Loss? He didn’t know what it was exactly but it didn’t feel very nice, wrapped around him like a hug.

Something important, he’d forgotten something important—but his memory was impeccable, and great, because he was. His fingers rolled against each with the sweatshirt sleeves hem between them.

The distinct sound of shoes crunching against fresh snow drew his attention away from his worrisome habit. The hope that this mystery guest was coming to him sang in his soul until he noticed the squatty form of his brother. Not that he was disappointed to see him he was actually quite glad to know he was safe. Papyrus rubbed at his socket, he needed to be strong like how his brother saw him. His soul slowly ceased its’ fluttering but he couldn’t quite bring his smile across his teeth.

Sans stared up at his brother for a long while but neither made a sound. He could see it plain as day, the gloomy cloud hanging around his positive brother. For a moment Sans wondered if he’d also been visited by the strange figure but it wouldn’t be like him to just ask that.

He took a deep breath then his eyelights pierced up into his brother’s vacant sockets, “that expression… looks like you’ve been scarfed for life.” He shrugged with an over the top wink that was as infuriating as it was comforting.

Papyrus glared down to the monster, “I have no brother,” he declared as he dramatically crossed his arm over his skull before he turned into the house.

Sans smiled as he stepped towards the warmth of his house, the comfort of his brother, when a chill, not from the cold air, ran up his spine. He tilted his head over his shoulder to see a standing shadow with a broad white chest and an upside down egg shaped head. Two cracks fractured its’ mask like face while white hands with wide holes in them worried themselves.

It wasn’t there, he didn’t see it, he flinched as the symbols entered his mind again, quieter, with a barely noticeable hint of concern behind them. Despite the appearance it was the same thing from earlier. He wrapped his fingers around the doorknob, “look I don’t know what you are. But please don’t bother me here, don’t bother him either.”

It reached out to him and a chain of symbols vibrated in his skull, “please, just go back from wherever you came from.” He shut the door firmly behind him.

That was it. He was out in the cold… not like he could feel it. Had he already seen this scene? Played this part. The worrisome spirit that lingered in a world unwanted.

His form flickered and in the next moment he was by the window. The glass was thicker than usual and distorted the figured inside no, that was just him. Everything was warped.

Papyrus found the picture, the one of all three of them smiling, it was the only lingering image the rest had burned when the Core erupted. He’d checked. The ‘don’t forget’ scrawled out at the bottom in sloppy common seemed like a cruel joke now, there was nothing to remember. Lingering pieces of writing that could be from anybody. Inventions that were made by some mad scientist without name. Nothing was left that mattered.

He must have been here before, he could see the dialogue without hearing it. Papyrus asked his brother who the figure was, why they looked so happy together, and Sans, being the monster of logic he was, explained the monster in the photo must have done something terrible. You don’t forget good things.
Did he do something bad? Did he deserve this, he didn’t want to think he did. What had he done to deserve this? No, no, no somewhere else something better brighter.

His form bent away from him in a quick snap and he was in the back room of Grillby’s watching unnoticed as the flame opened the green basket to pull out a fluorescent green flame. A baby Eternal. The first of the Underground, born of the devastation that struck the Capital.

Grillby held the tiny splotch of green close as he could while his flames whispered sweet words to the little fireball. He was trying to be sweet, compassionate, do what he thought one did to comfort a newborn, but his flames were a deep green as he stared down at the innocent form in his arms.

“What was I thinking?” He pulled out a sandwich topped in green bread to tear off a tiny corner for the flamling.

He wanted nothing more than to assure him it would be alright, that he could do it, he wanted to help him, pour him glasses of orange juice. But he couldn’t even get close to the light he just lingered in the far corner until he couldn’t watch anymore.

A much bigger jump in space as he found himself just outside of Asgore’s home. The King bent down as he inspected the trunk that had just been delivered. It was worn. Beaten. Tired. That was him, but the chest also. The mighty unkempt mane of the Boss Monster fell in his face as he inspected it. His paw opened the lid effortlessly then he sorted through the junk. A rusty knife that he still had the mate too, though he kept it in the room of the child who owned it, various scrap, but one piece he lingered on.

It was a small metal clasp with W and D carved in his font. When the monster’s gaze hesitated over it he couldn’t help the hope that shone in his eyelights as he searched his old friend’s gaze for any trace of recognition. But no. The symbols were merely interesting and it was discarded with the rest of the scrap. His scrap. Pathetic reminders that he was a was once.

Why did he do this? Why did he check in here? Where it hurt. Where everything was still fresh? He covered his face, no, no. He fell ages ago, minutes ago, days ago, hours- it was hours ago. His fingers picked at each other though they never quite made contact, this hurt because it was new. He gave Asgore one last glance and saw the monster who had been abandoned by everything that mattered left to find cheer all on his own before he flickered away from the well lit garden and into a dingy dark blue cavern with the angel’s mark above it.

Gerson cursed as a black book fell to the ground. His eyes narrowed, as much as they could muster, in puzzlement as he opened the book. Old drawings of some skeleton or other. No one specific. No one worth sipping on tea over while he reminisced about old memories just a silly little skeleton.

He’d been that once before he was this that he’d always been.

Just burn the book, he urged to the Turtoise. The monster seemed tempted as his head turned over to the fireplace but he held onto it.

He pulled up an old chair and opened the book across his lap. The pages turned slowly in his hands as his black slit pupil looked up and down each page. As the book grew thinner the pages were mostly blank aside from bits of reports about the development of the Core.

Gerson scratched at his larger eye as it began to water, “Kiddo, you weren’t supposed to go first.”

He clasped his hands over his mouth as the monster’s eyes glew glassy. He didn’t remember- he couldn’t but- loss. Loss was palpable in the air as the turtoise tucked the book into a tin box with drawings of monsters who had fallen since the war.
He felt- he felt! He wanted to go home! He was a someone! He was a monster! A very smart monster with a name and a family and those that could tell he was gone! It wasn’t fair! He didn’t do anything to deserve this!

His form gave way and he found himself in the basement of their house. The monsters he knew he needed to watch, needed to be there for.

He clawed desperately at the machine with the stupid name but he wasn’t real enough to touch it, to fix it. He wanted to go back he wanted to be there. He-

“Hey,” Sans tried his best not to let surprise read across his features, “whatcha workin’ on there?”

He recoiled from the door. Sans. Sans could see him. He was the only one.

Sans seemed in better spirits then earlier as he ran his hand over the machine and flipped the on switch. “This important?” He pulled a blueprint off the counter as he looked over the machine.

It took a moment for him to figure out the movement pattern but he slowly bobbed his head.

“Look, I’m sorry about earlier I’m having a bit of a strange day,” he chuckled. Sans reached into his pocket and unfolded the photo that had been in the frame, “is this you?”

Was, he wanted to correct but he nodded his head again. “Got yourself in some sort of a mess then, huh?” His gaze was stuck on the image as he tried to place the not-monster in front of him to the scientist in the picture, “I can’t remember the last time I saw my bro smile like this. I didn’t think I ever had,” a sharp inhale of air that served as a replacement for a laugh, “granted I smile all of the time… even when everything is a mess.”

He slid his hand over his empty chest in a circular motion: sorry. It didn’t stop there. Over and over again he rang out the sign until black tears imprinted against his white face. “Hey, hey,” Sans looked exceptionally uncomfortable, “I get the feeling you didn’t want this.” He gestured vaguely, “and that machine can fix this?”

Sort of? It was the only hope he thought he had for returning, his palms raised up to the ceiling in his best impression of a shrug. Sans folded his arms as he looked the machine over, “Never had a bit of schooling in my life and yet looking at these prints it all seems familiar.” He scratched the side of his skull, “look I can try my best. But you have to promise if you come back again you’ll make my brother smile just like this.” He pointed to the picture.

Always about his brother even though he could see the hurt in his sockets plain as day, he pointed to Sans then held up the number two. Sans chuckled, “that’s gonna take a bit more effort.”

His form began to flicker, give way to the call of his forsaken home, the time he was allotted was limited in this when. “Hey I got some-“

He didn’t think he’d ever heard the end of that sentence. Back in the darkness he was alone cut off from everything including most of himself. There wasn’t any texture or surface, ceiling or floor, just an emptiness that could never be filled no matter how many times he fell.

Emptiness surrounded him.

Solitude invaded.

There was no warmth.
No comfort.

Or even a piercing cold.

Everything was nothing.

Still. There was one advantage. One tiny flicker of hope here.

The image was blurry at first, just daubs of uninteresting orange until it grew brighter and he stepped through the way one would a doorway. Here in the void he could see the happiest ending. The only one they deserved.

Asgore stood with a proud smile against the setting of the sun, his gold mane bathed in its light. Slowly his eyes relaxed until sparks of genuine happiness grew within them as centuries of solitude since his wife left ebbed away. His shadow stretched tall behind him as his glassy eyes took in the treelines before him.

Undyne was there with Doctor Alphys by her side as they figured out their place in this new world. He was touched when Undyne mentioned the air. He couldn’t feel what pulled through the branches, couldn’t recognize the stones below him, or the heat of the sun across him but he was glad to know she appreciated it.

Then there was them. His sons basking in their hard earned happy ending as they finally met the sun. Papyrus always eager, always ready, gave his cheerful two cents. It was harder to tell with Sans, but he knew what to look for, the proper posture as he gave the scene his full attention, the raise in his sockets as his eye lights tried to take in every ounce of the world before him. They both smiled without a trace of a gray cloud having ever been in their life.

This was the happy ending to their story and just for a moment, in the shadows of the setting sun he could pretend he had been a part of it.

Chapter End Notes

Here is my Tumblr if you have any comments questions or concerns you’d prefer to address there.

Thank you for reading.

EDIT: May 19th, 2019

I want to talk about the ending a little bit more. As I mentioned in the notes the first chapter I wrote for this was the one where Sans fell down. From there is spiraled into a series of shorts exploring the Dadster relationship. It didn’t really have a point or an end goal. A week before I started posting this my dog passed away. She was in good health, everything was fine the day before, then the next morning... I’ll spare you the details. She clung desperately to me and the second I gave her to the vet she died.

I read so many Gaster fics where it was a relief he was destroyed or of zero consequences. I wanted him being shattered, sentenced to the void, to have meaning. To be grounded in the story itself instead of treated like an item on a checklist.

I wanted to leave it open enough to where if I wanted to write a follow up (The
Doctor’s Debts by the way) I could but more importantly I wanted Gaster being erased to mean more. I know some people were very upset with this, and I know there’s this weird thing right now where stories have to have a happy ending, but I am happy with this story. It was very cathartic for me and all of the support I received on this project encouraged me to try.

Without spoilers I promise Debts will have a different ending.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!