# The Road Not Taken

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## Summary

After successfully living on the surface for four months and, much to Sans’ surprise, discovering Frisk is actually a magic user, Frisk initiates a reset. But why and to what end?

The story stemmed from the idea: "What if the stick Frisk had wasn't just a stick?" and the rest is history.

## Notes

This story is a rewritten version of a series of RPs we made between February 2016 and March 2017 wherein Harry Potter lore/universe is worked in, however the events of those books took place many, many, years ago prior to the events of Frisk falling into the Underground. The story deviates off of the true pacifist route to achieve a different ending result.

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The Reset

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —*

*I took the one less traveled by,*

*And that has made all the difference.*

-Robert Frost

The snow-covered forest was eerily silent. There was nobody in sight, not even a snowdrake. Just a snowy path lined with evergreens and an odd video camera hidden within a bush. The camera was pointed to one end of the path that led to an enormous royal purple door that had not opened in several years, as all monsters could attest.

It would have been quite a surprise then, if anyone had been in the forest to witness it, to hear the bitter silence in the air broken by the sound of the aforementioned door creaking open slowly. The hinges on the door groaned as the door reluctantly allowed the winter weather to enter the ruins it had been protecting. Had someone been present, they would have seen tiny fingers curl around the side of the door followed by the face of a child with unruly chin-length brown hair peering cautiously through the opening.

As the sound of the old door creaking open filtered through the quiet snow laden forest, the returning silence would meet the human’s ears. The first stretch into the rest of the Underground was as cold and unwelcoming as it had ever been.

They squinched their eyes shut as an icy blast of cold air and snow swirled past their face. The child braced themselves, took a deep breath, and stepped into the frigid forest as the door shut behind them.

The child, known as Frisk, looked around and noted the existence of the video camera in the bush. They crossed their arms, hiding their hands within the long sleeves of their striped shirt in an attempt to keep warm and pressed onward, hopping over a large branch on the path before them. When they left the branch behind them, it stayed like it was – unmoved, undisturbed. There was a stillness in the air…a sort of tension hanging around with the mist that clung low to the ground.

The only thing that broke the monotony of the moment was the figure of a lone skeletal sentry, standing at the far side of the gap with the too-wide bars and wooden bridge, his expression dark and unreadable as he waited, hands in his coat pockets. Frisk spotted Sans’ shadow on the ground ahead of them but didn’t look up to greet him, too sad to see their friend disappointed in them.

As he watched the human approach, the skeleton took in their demeanor. How they walked, how their clothes looked. Dark eye sockets searched for any sign of oddity…any signs of dust.

Frisk had been dreading this reunion. It’s why they had spent an extra week with their adoptive mother Toriel in the ruins before finally setting out. They had made it to the surface with everyone and had been living up there for a good four months in peace, but then the last week before the current reset occurred, something happened. Frisk had stumbled off of a rather large drop and much to Sans’ surprise (as he had been present) he had seen the child disappear out of thin air and reappear
safely on the ground as if they had used one of his many ‘shortcuts’.

The human then had no choice but to explain they were a part of something called the ‘wizarding world’ and that the reason they had never shown their magic (other than the ‘save’, ‘load’, and ‘reset’ abilities they had gained in their journey underground) was because they had broken their wand in their fall. When Sans listened to this explanation he felt that the child was hiding something more but had decided not to press them further.

Frisk had taken Sans into their hometown, finally, showing him the odds and ends of the magic village and had even shown him how to fly on a broomstick. Sans loved flying. It had been quite hilarious to watch his brother Papyrus’ reaction as he and Frisk had floated over his head hearing him yell, “THAT’S NOT WHAT THAT CLEANING APPARATUS IS FOR, SANS!” They had a good time and things seemed fine, so then, what caused the reset?

Frisk approached Sans, taking their hands out of their sleeves and held them in front, palms up so Sans could see for himself they had no weapon and more importantly, no dust. They still didn’t make eye contact with him as they slowly got on their knees, trembling slightly, from emotion or the cold the skeleton could not tell.

Their shoulders shook as they raised their right hand, formed a fist with their thumb on top, placed it on their chest, and slowly rubbed in a circle.
‘I’m sorry.’

Finally, slowly, the skeleton let out a quiet breath, remaining where he was even though concern and care for the kid made him want to comfort them. Frisk had to have a good reason for this reset, and although the anger, disappointment, and uncertainty inside him had him feeling physically ill, he knew that was true. This was at least a lot better than he had feared. Frisk seemed to be themself this time.

“…what happened, kid? just…why?”

Frisk could hear the sense of betrayal and disappointment in Sans’ voice and they felt tears well up in their eyes.

‘Chara appeared…I don’t know how,’ they signed slowly, still not making eye contact. ‘Attacked. You died. I reset.’

It took a moment, but the skeleton’s hands came out of his pockets, one raising to his head and the other reaching out to steady himself a little more against one of the pillars he was next to.

What Frisk had said…the reminder of it brought the memories back. Sharp pain, anguish muddling through his foggy skull, coming back as he clenched his eyes shut. Sometimes it took a while for him to remember what had happened in the previous reset. Sometimes it crept on slowly, reminding him of how messed up things were hours after it happened. Sometimes it was instant. This time… Well. It was splotchy.

When he could, Sans focused his gaze on the human again, watching them shake, listening to those small, difficult intakes of breath as they cried. His heart sank, guilt edging in to join the other unpleasant emotions already crowding his consciousness. Pupils dim but visible in his eyes again, he moved, each step making crisp crunching noises in the snow as he approached and stopped in front of them, his own knees meeting the cold white ground as he got on to Frisk’s level more and wrapped his arms around them.

Frisk was a victim here too. Despite how much he had held on to his anger during the long wait until Frisk made it out of the ruins, it evaporated at the explanation. His angered disappointment wasn’t directed at Frisk now, but rather the situation. He couldn’t see this happening, this child, his friend, crying and not be moved by it.

The child sobbed as they hugged Sans tightly as if at any moment he’d disappear.

Sans continued to hold them, his expression pained as he felt them shaking with each sob. How cold they were.

There was a feeling of displacement, almost a floating sensation, as the temperature abruptly changed to something much warmer, human and skeleton knees now touching purple and blue carpeting instead of snow and ice. They were in Sans’ room. Papyrus would have been by to check on Sans at his station soon, and he knew neither of them would have been ready to face him again like this, to pretend like nothing had happened again.

“…we’ll figure this out, kid. I’m not mad at you.”

Frisk sniffled as they continued holding on to Sans, but they nodded.

Slowly and carefully, Sans leaned back against the side of his mattress on the floor with the kid still in his arms, tiredly trying to figure things out. They had gotten so far this time…so much time had passed…so many new things had happened…how was he going to do this again? How could he
continue still, knowing that if they didn’t figure this out and stop Chara from coming back any moment, no matter what happens, it could all be reset again?

Frisk, too, had tried piecing together what to do but they had exhausted themself from crying and soon found themself asleep against Sans’ shoulder.

Closing his eyes, Sans sat there, feeling numb. Trying, for all that he was worth not to give in to his old coping mechanism of apathy again. After what felt like ages, Sans heard a voice calling from downstairs.

“BROTHER? ARE YOU HERE?”

Eyes snapping back open, Sans paused before carefully shifting and gathering the kid into his arms more, picking them up as he stood and then attempted to move them on top of the bed without waking them. Frisk seemed to be able to sleep through Papyrus’ voice, probably from being used to it.

“BROTHER?” the younger of the skeleton brothers called from below.

Undoing the sheet cabbage that was rolled up on the bed, Sans retrieved the blanket that had been hidden inside of it, quickly spreading it over the human before moving to the door, opening it, and stepping out, shutting it quietly behind him and walking over to the ledge that looked down over the room below.

“’sup, bro,” Sans greeted.

“YOU KNOW WHAT’S ‘SUP’ BROTHER!” Papyrus said, looking up at his brother leaning over the railing. “SANS, YOU WEREN’T AT YOUR STATION! AND I SAW FOOTPRINTS THAT WEREN’T YOURS! WHAT HAPPENED?”

“uh…”

Sans paused, trying to think quickly. He hadn’t even thought about Frisk’s footprints being out there. He couldn’t lie. As goofy as he was sometimes, Sans knew his brother was smart and highly observant. He’d know when Frisk came through again and he saw their prints that Sans had led him astray.

The shorter of the skeleton brothers glanced back at his door before walking over to the stairs and heading down them.

“i can explain that…”

“LET’S HEAR IT THEN!” Papyrus said, crossing his arms against his chest.

“well…”

Sans finished his descent into the living room and stopped a few feet away from his brother.

“…there was a kid out in the forest. they were cold, and they…uh…collapsed. so i brought them here.”

…Well, it was sort of the truth.

“ARE THEY ALRIGHT? WHERE ARE THEY?” Papyrus asked, looking around for the kid before clapping his gloved hands together. “OH! I SHOULD MAKE THEM SPAGHETTI! THAT
“WILL HEAT THEM RIGHT UP!”

“wait, bro. wait. there’s something else you should know.”

“WAIT,” Papyrus looked around the room again and raised a brow bone as he pieced something together. “THEY’RE IN YOUR ROOM?”

“…yeah. they’re passed out right now.”

Honestly, Sans had been hoping he could just keep Frisk hidden until he could take them back to his lookout station and try to set things in motion how they had always gone, but Papyrus seeing the prints had thrown the plan off course. …Well, putting it off wasn’t going to make it any less of a shock.

“papyrus…it’s a human kid.”

Papyrus looked dumbfounded at this information momentarily before smiling wide.

“WOWIE! YOU CAPTURED A HUMAN! THAT’S AMAZING!”

“nah,” Sans said, shaking his head. “i just found them laying around and borrowed them for a bit. it’s not a fair capture. i’ll wait until they’re feeling a bit better, then i’ll put them back where i found them and you can capture them the right way.”

“AH! GOOD THINKING!” Papyrus exclaimed, nodding his head in agreement. “THE GREAT PAPYRUS PREFERENCES A FAIR CHALLENGE!”

“yeah, bro. no way they’d stand a chance against your puzzles all unconscious like that.”

“AGREED! WELL, THAT’S SETTLED! I SHALL ATTEND TO MY PUZZLES IN THE MEANTIME!”

“sounds good, paps. oh…don’t tell anyone they’re here yet, okay? wait until…maybe…tomorrow or something.”

*Man. Trying to keep sequences of events in order when things were thrown off schedule was complicated. Undyne couldn’t find out until she normally would, giving Frisk enough time to get through everything. If she found out sooner, she might not be as reachable as she would eventually through Papyrus. Not to mention everyone Frisk had ever met in the Underground would be in different places doing different things. Complicated, indeed.*

“VERY WELL! WE SHALL SEE HOW THE HUMAN FARES AGAINST MY PUZZLE MASTERY! NYEH HEH HEH!” Papyrus exclaimed as he walked out of the house and closed the door behind him, presumably to check on his puzzles.

Sans kept his easy grin until Papyrus was out of the house, holding it for just a second longer before it cracked, eyes closing halfway and tiredness returning to his expression as he brought a hand up to rub at his face. It was both lucky and guilt-tripping that Papyrus was so trusting.

Making his way back up the stairs, Sans stepped back into his room, walked over to the bed, and sat down on the floor to lean against the wall next to it, going over things more in his head. He knew Frisk was a magic user now, that was different. Maybe if he could help them fix their wand or something they could figure out a way to both be rid of Chara and accomplish Frisk’s goal of saving Asriel this time around. Sans recalled the kid admitting to him that they had done a reset after getting to the surface at least once in order to try and save the fallen prince of the Underground.
…Damn, he already missed the sun.
What's a Save Point?

Frisk stirred, blinking a few times as they sat up and tried to take a look around. The room was pretty dark with the lights off, but those whose eyes were adjusted to it would be able to see decently.

Sans was still sitting near the top end of the bed with his back against the wall, partially underneath the window with his eyes closed, seemingly asleep when Frisk finally came to. It was hard to tell with this guy.

Frisk looked over at Sans, their eyes now adjusted to the lack of light, and then looked down at the blanket covering them. They smiled as they held it to themself.

Hearing the movement, Sans opened his eyes, glowing dots of light in his sockets turning to Frisk.

“hey. feelin’ any better?”

Frisk rubbed sleep out of their eyes and nodded.

“That’s good. papyrus came home while you were asleep,” Sans explained.

Frisk looked at Sans with curiosity in their eyes.

“I had to tell him about you ‘cause he saw your tracks in the snow,’” Sans brought an arm up to rest on the floor mattress, propping his skull against the hand attached as he leaned lazily. “he’s waiting for you to feel well enough to do his puzzles.”

Frisk lowered the blanket to their lap so they could sign, ‘Quick thinker, aren’t you?’

“It’s just a good thing papyrus is a considerate and fair sort of guy,” Sans replied.

Frisk nodded before a sad expression came across their face.

‘I wasn’t able to think fast enough. I should’ve taught you how to disarm.’

Frisk had been thinking again about Sans’ untimely death in the previous timeline that had caused them to reset. They pulled out the wand, broken in half from their fall, from their shorts pocket, and held it in the palm of their hand.

“…that a spell?” Sans asked before looking at the wand. “oh, i was gonna mention the wand. maybe i can help you fix it, somehow. we’ve got no shortage of magic down here.”

Frisk shook their head quickly, seemingly alarmed at the idea, signing, ‘Don’t fix it. Chara’s not gone for good.’

Frisk had seen what damage Chara could do with just a knife in the Underground. It made them feel ill to think what they’d be able to do with a working wand.

“well, not yet. unfortunately. but…well…i wish i’d done more human magic research when i had the chance,” the skeleton frowned some, still leaning on his hand. “we need to find out how they’re able to do what they do. taking over you. kid…it’s nothing like you. you don’t have that Level Of Violence in you. we need to figure out what loophole they’ve jumped through to be able to exploit you like that.”

Frisk thought hard about what they knew about Chara. It was clear to them that Chara must’ve been
from the wizarding world as well, judging from their ability to control Frisk’s body. Probably of pureblood magic lineage, Frisk supposed. It finally occurred to them.

‘Chara’s like that dark wizard from many, many years ago that was above ground. They must’ve done something to their soul,’ Frisk explained.

“dark wizard? i heard about that,” Sans responded, remembering what he learned during his time exploring Frisk’s hometown. “what was his name? ‘Moldy-wart’?”

Of course, Sans remembered the name. Sort of. …He at least knew that his ‘guess’ at it hadn’t been correct.

‘Voldemort,’ Frisk corrected. ‘My dad said Voldemort had separated his soul into pieces so even if he died he could still be brought back…or something like that.’

“got any idea how to undo something like that?”

Frisk tried remembering more of their father’s magical history lesson. Frisk’s father, having a bit of a rebellious streak, had decided to homeschool his child and teach them as much as he could on his own before Frisk turned 11 and would be sent to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. These lessons, in addition to some basic spellcasting, included some of the history of the wizarding world, particularly the stories of the life of Harry Potter from a long time ago. The stories had been exciting, so it’d been easier for them to sit and listen to them, in comparison to when they learned about the foundation of the British Ministry of Magic. They’d fallen asleep during that one.

‘Their broken soul pieces must be somewhere. We have to destroy whatever they are.’

“…‘whatever’ they are?” Sans asked, confused. “what do you mean?”

‘Chara must’ve made…’ Frisk paused, trying to remember the word. ‘Horcruxes? They put pieces of their soul into different items in the Underground. There’s no telling how many though.’

“…that’s messed up. if their soul’s not whole, i guess that explains how they act. the times i’ve met them they’ve seemed…really off. even before i saw them do anything bad.”

Expression dark, Sans sat up from leaning on his hand, frown serious as he thought about something, looking at nothing in particular.

“…that heart locket’s always felt weird to me.”

‘The locket’s in Asgore’s castle. Why does Chara take over me in the ruins sometimes?’ Frisk frowned, trying to figure out what Chara must have used. A thought occurred to them and they clenched their fists, clearly frustrated.

Glancing at the clenched fists then back to Frisk’s face again, Sans tried to read their expression, concerned, asking, “what? what is it? …could it be something you might have picked up before falling down here?”

Frisk shook their head and unclenched their fists to sign.

‘You guys don’t see them do you? Save points.’

Sans raised a brow, looking skeptical but curious.

“save points? i mean, i’ve seen you come back before at random places looking a little worse for
wear.”

Frisk stood up, letting the blanket fall back on to the bed and stepping back on to the carpeted floor. They motioned for Sans to follow them. Frisk took Sans by the hand when they stepped out of the house and continued holding it as they led him to the brightly shining save point near the entrance to Snowdin Town.

‘Do you see it?’ Frisk signed before pointing at what to them appeared as a brightly shining yellow four-pointed star shape.

Sans looked around, brow furrowing.

“i feel…something. some sort of…dunno how to explain it. i’ve felt it other places too, but nah…i don’t see anything. should i?” Sans responded.

Frisk made a frustrated face.

‘No one other than me and Flowey must be able to see them. I think Chara made one into a horcrux in the ruins. I’m usually myself…until then,’ the child signed before touching the invisible save point.

If Sans had hair, it’d be standing up about now. The skeleton was unnerved, feeling the sensation of magic pulsing through the air. Faint, but there. He’d always felt it right when Frisk came through his first sentry station in Waterfall too…and after…things happened in the judgment hall.

“what are you doing?” he asked.

‘This is a save point. For some reason, if I die I return to the last one I touched. This is why whenever you defeated Chara they could return to fight you again. It’s also how I learned your passwords,’ Frisk added the last fact looking a bit sheepish. ‘It’s the other thing I can do apart from a reset.’

This was all extremely interesting to the skeleton. For the longest time, he’d wondered how they did it. How Flowey had done it. How to stop it all. Reset after reset…reload after reload…all the timelines jumping back and forth.

Frisk stared at the glowing yellow star shape that only they could see, contemplating something.

‘I wonder if you can use it even if you can’t see it?’

Expression serious but calm, Sans stepped closer to the kid and held out a hand tentatively.

“guess it’s worth a shot,” he replied. “what do i do?”

Frisk calmly placed their hand on top of Sans’ and led him to where they had been standing. Sans let the kid guide his hand, determined to at least try to see if this would work, letting out a sound of surprise when he felt a jolt of…something fizzle through him, making him feel almost displaced before he focused in more, eyes picking up on some sort of distortion in the place his hand was now touching.
“h-hah. well. that’s something…i feel a lot more awake than i did a second ago.”

‘Knowing more than you did previously in hopes of solving everything…it fills you with determination.’

Turning a sort of funny expression towards Frisk after watching their hands sign that statement, Sans blinked, nodding as he grinned slowly.

“determination…yeah, yeah it does. this is…incredible,” Sans said, a bit bewildered. “so…after something bad happens, or you choose to, you can just…come back to any of these…‘save points’?”

‘Only the most recent one that I touched,’ Frisk continued signing but didn’t make eye contact with Sans for their next statement. ‘There’s…one in the hall.’

Sans hesitated for a moment before turning his gaze away from the kid and looking back at the odd distortion, trying to ignore the recurring feeling of pressure on his chest from that inevitable hit that always brought him down. The reason he knew so intimately what it felt like to turn to dust, but was still here all the same. Trauma did that to a person.

“that…makes a lot of sense.”
Taking in a deep breath, Sans brought his hand back hesitantly, curious at the fact that he could still see the distortion now when he wasn’t touching it. It was faint – not as visible to him as Frisk, but it was definitely there.

“there’s one of these next to my station entering waterfall too, isn’t there? it feels similar.”

‘Yes. There’s a lot of them throughout the Underground,’ Frisk replied.

“wonder how they did it, or if it’s just some…sort of condition that comes with the barrier and what happened with the core accident,” Sans questioned aloud, contemplating the save point. “i know that threw some things off. could be a failsafe the creators of the barrier placed too…huh.”

Frisk paused in thought. Based on what they knew, they were certain it was their fellow witches and wizards that trapped the monsters found near Mount Ebott underground hundreds of years ago. As to why other magical creatures such as Norwegian Ridgeback dragons or centaurs were still above ground Frisk assumed it had something to do with the differences between those creatures’ body compositions and those of their friends they met in the Underground. Their friends were made up entirely of their souls. The creatures on the surface they supposed were not. Perhaps there was more to the reasoning than that.

The save points might have indeed been a side effect of the barrier. While Frisk thought it was possible for Chara to have turned a save point into a horcrux they weren’t so sure they created them.

‘We need to find and destroy Chara’s horcruxes. I feel there’s something in the ruins. Maybe a corrupted save point. Only way back there is to go forward. Mom won’t open the door yet,’ Frisk signed to Sans as a sad expression came on their face.

“i’d say give me her phone number and i could try callin’ her, but we’ve gotta be careful what we change. probably is best to keep heading forward,” Sans turned towards the kid, smiling somewhat regretfully. “don’t worry, kid. now that i know how this stuff works, i’ll make sure you don’t have to go back to any save points. this time i’ll protect you right.”

Frisk smiled as they raised their right hand, palm flat, up to their mouth and brought it forward towards Sans.

‘Thank you.’

The skeleton’s grin grew a little before he turned to look back to the path leading to the forest outside Snowdin, thinking of what should come next.

“well. you ready to go ‘meet’ papyrus?” he asked.

Frisk grinned, putting their hands on their hips and throwing their head back in a silent recreation of laughter.

‘Nyeah heh heh!’

Grinning some at the kid’s imitation of Papyrus’ laugh, Sans waited a moment before reaching out to take their arm firmly in his hand before there was another small jolt and a millisecond of weightlessness, vision flickering into blackness before they’d both be on the path where Sans had ‘borrowed’ them from before.

“figured we could take a shortcut. i’ll go find paps, okay?”

Frisk smiled and nodded. It was time to get this adventure started.
Bringing out his phone, Sans typed out a text to Papyrus before hitting send. When his brother got it, it simply read:

*on break at ruins lookout. want a hot dog?*

If that didn’t bring the taller skeleton rattling to scold him for slacking off again, he had several puns up his sleeves.

Sure enough, the younger skeleton brother paused from rearranging snow in a puzzle to look like his face to read the text message and immediately made his way to Sans’ post.

Seeing his brother approaching down the path, Sans looked at Frisk and winked tiredly.

“you know the drill, kid. visit the lamp or stay here – m’sure either way’s fine at this point.”

Frisk nodded and scampered to hide behind the conveniently shaped purple lamp to listen to Sans and Papyrus’ usual conversation.

“BROTHER! WHAT ARE YOU DOING ASKING ME IF I WANT A HOT DOG!? IT’S BEEN FIFTEEN DAYS AND YOU STILL HAVEN’T RECALIBRATED YOUR PUZZLES!” Papyrus complained as he crunched through the snow heading towards his brother.

Sans looked back towards Papyrus as the taller skeleton’s voice boomed through the small clearing, putting his hands into his pockets.

“hey, paps. come on, take it easy. i’ve gotten a ton of work done today. …a skele-ton.”

He couldn’t really find it in him to be genuinely amused by this anymore, but he loved his brother enough to keep it up…for his sake. For some semblance of normalcy for how this should have gone the first and what should have been the last time they’d all been through this. Papyrus’ exchange stayed the same as usual, not noticing Sans’ lack of enthusiasm.

Papyrus then looked around, confused.

“WHERE IS THE HUMAN?”

Frisk was startled by the change in conversation but then remembered Sans said he had told Papyrus about them while they were asleep. They sniffled a bit before letting out a sneeze. The cold hadn’t bothered them in previous resets, but they had spent a longer amount of time in both the cold, dank ruins and the snow this time around. Crying and stress they supposed didn’t help matters much either.

Tilting his head to look over toward the lamp, Sans paused before winking at Papyrus.

“why don’t you ask that lamp over there? i’m sure it’d be de-lighted to point you in the right direction.”

“SANS, BE SERIOUS!” Papyrus stamped his foot on the ground in frustration. “ALSO I DIDN’T KNOW LAMPS COULD SNEEZE!”

A giggling, sort of wheezing sound was heard from behind the lamp at Sans’ pun and Papyrus’ subsequent reaction.
“…OR GIGGLE!”

“hey, i’m totally serious, lamps are brighter than you give them credit for.”

“SANSSSSS…!”

The lamp had trouble containing their amusement.

“not even yankin’ your cord, bro.”

“VERY WELL! HAVE IT YOUR WAY THEN,” Papyrus threw his hands in the air, having heard enough. “HOPEFULLY YOU’LL EN-LIGHTEN ME ABOUT THE HUMAN LATER! NYEH HEH HEH!”

Papyrus turned and left as Frisk stepped out from behind the lamp to stand next to Sans, tugging on his jacket sleeve to get his attention.

‘You’re rubbing off on him.’

Watching his brother go, Sans was grinning genuinely now. This was a new turnout.

“yeah. i love it when he lets one slip.”

Frisk grinned at Sans, signing, ‘Shall we then?’

Winking at the kid, Sans nodded before heading forward.

“sounds good. oh, first, though…”

The skeleton turned to head over behind his sentry station, digging around underneath the counter before producing the only other coat he had close to him right then – a darker blue, more wintery type that he stashed there for particularly chilling nights. Sure, cold didn’t bother him nearly as much as it would a human, but he liked to be cozy. Giving it a fluff and a buzz of magic to warm it up, left eye flashing blue, he walked over to Frisk, draping it around their shoulders.

“didn’t miss that sneezing, kid. don’t go getting sick on me.”

Frisk gladly put on the coat and let out a sigh of relief from escaping the chilly temperatures. Frisk noted to themself that Sans’ coat smelled faintly of ketchup, bones, and fresh fallen snow, somehow.

‘Thank you, Sans.’

Looking satisfied with the new addition, Sans gave the human’s shoulder a pat before turning towards the path and stepping forward ahead of them.

“sure thing, kiddo. i’ll see you with paps up ahead.”

Frisk, now pleasantly warm, walked onward on the path, pausing to save and to give Sans more time to meet up with Papyrus.

Further ahead on the path from the human, Papyrus heard Sans approach from behind him and turned to face him.

“THERE YOU ARE! UNDYNE WON’T BE HAPPY IF WE FAIL TO CAPTURE THE HUMAN PROPERLY!”
“don’t worry, bro. with your skills and my punch lines, we’ve got this,” Sans stopped on the path next to the other skeleton, grinning at him calmly. He knew Frisk could probably hear them now, as he heard crunching footsteps in the snow, and he turned towards the rock on the path to start the next bit in motion.

“ANYWAY,” Papyrus continued speaking to his brother. “AS I WAS SAYING ABOUT UNDYNE…”

Papyrus looked in the direction Sans was facing and went quiet.

Frisk stood next to the rock, watching his expression change, amused.

“So, what were you saying about undyne? you’ve really got to break that halibut of stopping in the middle of your sentences,” Sans said.

“SANS…” Papyrus pointed in Frisk’s direction, ignoring his brother’s pun. “WHAT IS THAT?”

Frisk looked down at the rock in the snow next to them.

“…i think that’s a rock,” Sans replied.

This part was harder to get through too. Sans sort of felt bad for tricking Papyrus with his matter-of-fact joking, always throwing him off guard here. Papyrus was smart, but he was also gullible with people he trusted.

“Oh,” Papyrus said, blinking.

Frisk stuck their hands in their coat pockets and rocked back and forth on their heels in the snow, waiting for the next bit.

“hey, what’s that in front of the rock?” Sans asked.

“SANS!” Papyrus looked and put his gloved hands on the sides of his skull in shock. “OH MY GOD, YOU CLONED YOURSELF!?”

Frisk looked confused for a moment but then remembered whose coat they were wearing and shook with silent laughter.

The shorter of the skeleton brothers managed a snort somehow, brief expression of surprise at the conversation’s deviance from how it normally went catching him off guard before he laughed too, struggling to regain his composure.

“oh my god, paps…” Sans grinned, eyes full of amusement. “i love you, bro.”

Papyrus gave Sans a confused look as he said, “I LOVE YOU TOO, BUT WHAT’S GOING ON?”

Straightening up and grinning a lot less tiredly now, Sans looked sideways his brother before motioning towards Frisk.

“hey, looks like the human borrowed my coat. maybe they’re trying to impersonate me to get past your puzzles. clever, right?”

Frisk had trouble collecting themself from laughing so much. They could feel their sides getting sore.
“INGENIOUS! ALMOST HAD ME FOOLEO!” Papyrus commented, placing a hand under his chin. “BUT NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO FOOL THE GREAT PAPYRUS!”

Papyrus looked over at Frisk, pointing a finger at them as way of challenge.

“HUMAN! COME FORWARD TO FACE MY PUZZLES IF YOU DARE! NYEH HEH HEH!”

Frisk gave the taller skeleton brother a salute before Papyrus headed off to his first puzzle.

Watching his brother go again, Sans turned back towards Frisk, winking at them.

“that was different. see you up ahead, sans jr.”

Frisk grinned and continued onward. This timeline was going to be interesting.
Not wanting to mess up anything further in the timeline, Frisk made sure to stop by Doggo’s sentry station and decided to use their broken wand to play fetch with him. After tiring the dog out, they went up the path to visit the snowman and made their usual promise to take a piece of him with them on their journey. Slipping the snowball into a pocket of Sans’ borrowed coat they returned to the main path and found themself on the edge of Papyrus’ electricity maze.

“SAN—I MEAN, HUMAN! I HOPE YOU ARE READY! FOR THIS IS THE INVISIBLE ELECTRICITY MAZE!”

Before Papyrus could explain and speak further, Frisk signed to Sans to get the orb and toss it to them. There was no sense in getting Papyrus zapped for no reason, so why not try an alternate solution?

Catching the signing and turning to Papyrus, Sans held out his hands.

“hey papyrus, let me borrow that orb for a sec.”

Papyrus looked down at it for a moment before handing it over to his brother with a, “HERE YOU GO!”

“thanks, bro.”

Turning, Sans gave a lazy toss of the orb, using his magic to propel it across the expanse of the maze and carefully into Frisk’s hands.

Frisk, wary of tempting fate in case the maze had changed along with the other things in this timeline, paused to figure out how to solve the maze without getting zapped. They came to the conclusion that by rolling the orb along the ground and using a large tree branch they found in the woods nearby they could test where the orb would or would not activate.

Watching, impressed, Sans waited at the other side with his brother. He appreciated what Frisk had done – saving Papyrus from getting zapped and making the puzzle more difficult for themself. Papyrus would probably have more fun this way too.

After Frisk successfully made it across, Papyrus applauded.

“WELL DONE, HUMAN! BUT I WONDER IF YOU ARE READY FOR THE NEXT PUZZLE! IT WAS MADE BY MY BROTHER, SANS! EVEN I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT!” Papyrus said, running off to the next puzzle’s location.

“nice job, kid,” Sans grinned when Papyrus was out of sight. “…thanks for always being so nice to paps, by the way.”

Expression softening, Sans looked genuinely appreciative as he held a hand out for the return of the orb.

“it’d be really easy for you to just bypass all of this, but you do it anyway for his sake. it means a lot.”

Frisk smiled as they gave the orb to Sans, turning around to look behind them at their handiwork. The snow in the area was a complete wreck, but judging from where their footprints were, the path
hadn’t deviated from the norm. It felt good to solve it properly though.

Continuing on the path, Frisk stopped to buy nice cream from the bunny salesperson and walked over to where Sans was now, having used one of his shortcuts, no doubt. They offered one of the desserts to the skeleton.

“hey, thanks, kid. i think this means you deserve a discount on my delectable fried snow,” he winked, taking the nice cream and unwrapping it, pausing to read the flavor text on the inside of the wrapper. It read, “Love yourself! I love you!” and the skeleton grinned a little more in appreciation.

Frisk held their own treat in their mouth as they looked down to read their own message. “Are those claws natural?” was the text on theirs. They glanced down at their fingernails and gave a shrug of ‘I guess those count.’

As the two finished their nice creams, Frisk heard panting and turned around to find their soul floating in front of them again as they encountered Lesser Dog. Grinning, the child pet the dog’s head.

Repeatedly.

Smirking a little at the ‘claws’ incident, Sans watched now as Frisk went up against one of his fellow sentries, doing nothing to stop it as the dog’s neck elongated. This was honestly amusing and he knew the dog would be fine – once he calmed down.

Once Frisk was too exhausted to continue petting, the excited dog did in fact return to normal size and ran off further down the path, seemingly inspired by the encounter.

Turning their attention to the snowball game, Frisk managed to kick the lump of snow to the goal, achieving a red colored flag – same as their soul.

“nice,” Sans praised, lazily leaning against a snowy rock face. “gotten pretty good at that.”

Frisk thought for a moment about what was coming next and turned to sign to Sans, ‘Got a pen?’

“…sure? one sec.”

With that, Sans vanished – popping up a second later holding an older looking plastic pen out towards them. Luckily, it still worked.

Frisk put the pen in another coat pocket and proceeded onward, spotting Papyrus, who in turn grinned when he saw his brother’s doppelganger.

“HUMAN! I HOPE YOU’RE READY FOR…” the skeleton frowned, spotting a problem. “SANS! WHERE’S THE PUZZLE?”

Sans, now next to Papyrus again despite having just been behind Frisk in the other room, motioned towards the paper sitting on the ground between them and the human.

“it’s right there. on the ground. trust me, there’s no way they can get past this one.”

Of course, Sans was too lazy to have changed this up at all.

Frisk calmly walked over to the paper, pulled the pen out from their pocket, and proceeded to work on the word search while using a nearby tree stump as a table. Sitting on their knees in the snow, they suppressed a shiver.
Wow. They were solving it this time. Grinning more, Sans looked at Papyrus, seemingly confident.

“see? told you they’d be stumped.”

“SANS, THIS IS NO TIME FOR JOKES.”

A few minutes later, Frisk looked confused as they finished as much of the puzzle as they could before handing it over to Sans. They had circled one of the words in the last column and wrote “Typo?” next to it.

Sans took the paper, looking over their handiwork before chuckling a little and responding, “nah. That’s a completely bone-afide legit word, kid. don’t go discounting the importance of giasfclfubrehber.”

Frisk then pointed to the “u” in the word search and then the “e” on the word in the list. Papyrus looked over it in curiosity.

“SANS, I THINK THIS WORD SEARCH IS IMPOSSIBLE.”

“come on, now. everyone knows that giasfclfubrehber is the singular form of the word and giasfclfебrehber is the plural. you’ve got a point though. whoever made this word search really failed to single that out,” Sans paused, looking amused at any possible confusion directed at him. “… what’s it mean? well. giasfclfебrehber, of course.”

Papyrus shook his head in exasperation.

“VERY WELL, HUMAN! YOU MAY PASS!”

‘Thanks,’ Frisk signed.

“maybe i should’ve used today’s crossword instead,” the shorter of the skeletons shrugged, stepping aside for Frisk to be able to pass.

Papyrus looked shocked.

“WHAT!? CROSSWORD!? I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU SAID THAT! IN MY OPINION, JUNIOR JUMBLE IS EASILY THE HARDEST!”

Frisk stepped in between the two to interrupt before the banter can continue.

‘Sudoku is hard for me.’

“What’s Sudoku?” Papyrus asked, blinking in confusion.

Using their broken wand, Frisk drew an example on the snow. Sans knew what it was, having been on the surface for long enough before to hear about it, but he feigned ignorance, watching his brother.

“looks like it’s right up your alley, paps.”

“IT DOES!” Papyrus a hand under his chin in thought and smiled. “THANK YOU, HUMAN! I SHALL KEEP THESE SUDOKU PUZZLES IN MIND FOR THE FUTURE! NYEH HEH HEH!”

‘You’re welcome!’
Papyrus continued onwards while Frisk handed the pen they borrowed back to Sans, who stored it in his own coat before putting his hands back into his pockets.

“i know i’ve said variations of this before, but papyrus seems to be having more fun than usual. you’re a good kid, frisk.”

‘We need to make the most of the situation,’ they signed, smiling. ‘Besides, you’re my friends.’

Reaching the next save point, Frisk looked down at Papyrus’ freezing plate of spaghetti in thought. Sauntering into the next area with them, Sans paused to watch what they’d do before continuing onward. He knew there wasn’t much hope for the spaghetti in Papyrus’ current level of cooking skill under Undyne’s tutelage and the fact that it was frozen to the plate, but hey, the kid had determination.

Frisk closed their eyes in concentration, not sure if their idea would work. A sense of magic seemed to be gathering around them as they remembered their father’s training sessions. Due to Frisk’s inability to speak, their dad wanted them to practice wordless magic as much as possible before they were to be sent off to wizarding school. They’d managed a few simple spells in the sessions, but wandless magic on the other hand was far trickier to accomplish as it was difficult to direct.

Sans watched curiously. He could feel the magic in the air, and wherein that might normally set him on edge, he knew Frisk was magical now. It wasn’t a concern.

After a few minutes, the spaghetti was no longer frozen, but not piping hot either. It appeared to just be lukewarm. Frisk on the other hand, fell to their knees in the snow, drained from the magic usage.

‘Wandless magic takes a lot of concentration. I’m okay,’ the child signed before the skeleton had a chance to be alarmed.

Sans had taken a step towards them but he relaxed a bit when the human explained, walking over to them anyway.

“looks like it. glad you’re okay.”

Frisk picked themself off the ground, brushing snow off their knees and wandered back to the table. They picked up a fork and took a bite of the lukewarm spaghetti, making an…interesting face.

Sans could be heard chuckling as he watched.

“well. at least he tries.”

Frisk placed the remainder of the plate back down for the mouse in the nearby mouse hole to eat later. Continuing onward, Frisk shuffled the snow off of the switch map with their feet and noted that the switch to turn off the spikes was still in the same location. As they walked up to hit the switch, they paused, turning to look at Sans behind them.

‘Who wrote that “WARNING: DOG MARRIAGE” sign anyway?’

“that’s one of the real mysteries of the underground, kid,” Sans replied, looking serious for a moment before it cracked and he just looked amused. “…i have no idea. whoever it was forgot to sign their name.”

The child silently shook their head at the pun and proceeded to activate the switch to remove the spikes. As they walked back down to where the barricade had been they suddenly dropped to the ground and rolled around in the snow, getting covered in it.
“getting ahead of the game, eh? smart plan. don’t want those dogs giving you the cold shoulder again.”

Frisk nodded as Dogamy and Dogaressa arrived. Unless something had changed, Frisk should already smell like a weird puppy to the couple.

Stepping back, Sans hid behind a tree, not wanting to distract from the usual order of events too much. He’d watch in case the kid needed help, but he knew if the married dogs saw him they’d just want pets and food scraps.

Approaching, marching together with their large axes held high, the two sentries stopped near the human, sniffing the air suspiciously.

“What’s that smell?” one of them piped up, ears perking up beneath his black hood.

(“Where’s that smell?”) the other said more quietly, her eyes narrowed in skepticism.

“If you’re a smell…”

(“…identify yoursmell!”)

Sans grinned widely from behind the tree, pleased with the dogs’ pun as he watched the couple proceed to run around Frisk for a moment before they stopped next to the child again. Frisk’s soul glowed brightly in front of them as they wondered if their idea worked.

“Hmm…here’s that weird smell…”

Ears perking more, Dogaressa seemed to hesitate, reaching a paw out to still her mate’s raised axe.
"It smells like a weird puppy...are you lost?"

The human smiled and shook their head ‘no’ before proceeding to scratch Dogarella behind her ears. Dogarella had been leaning down to get a closer look at them and was taken off guard with the pet, but didn’t seem to mind it since Frisk had started off smelling most unsuspicious this time. Pleased, she let out a small yip, eyes widening in wonder.

"A dog that pets dogs...amazing!"

Her husband whimpered to the side, not even trying to hide his excitement at the prospect of being pet too, axe lowering unthreateningly. Frisk smiled and pet Dogamy as well, scratching underneath his chin. Tail wagging as his tongue lolled out a little, Dogamy was pleased with this turn of events.

"Wow...Pet by another pup!!"

The dogs’ minds had been expanded, opening up their futures to more possible pets than they had ever before thought possible...their hostility was completely gone. Their goal achieved, Frisk returned their hands to their coat pockets.

"Dogs can pet other dogs???

"A new world has opened up for us..."

"Thanks, weird puppy!"

With that, the dogs continued on their way, tails still wagging as Sans stepped out from behind the tree and walked over to join Frisk.

"Wow. not even a single attack."

'Those axes hurt. I am more than happy to avoid them.' Frisk grinned.

"i’ve never been on the receiving end of them before, but yeah, they definitely would."

His smile faltered a little, seeming distracted as one of his hands flexed a little in his coat pocket as he watched Frisk continue on their way. He’d actually seen the kid get hit by those before. Blood on the snow, hurting until they healed themself with what monster food they had on them.

He’d been a lazy jerk, even if it was just because he’d lost hope in things. Especially after that first bad time, when they’d reset and he didn’t know why they’d done it all. He’d watched them be hurt, so many times, trapped between confused guilt and apathy. But he knew why now, and he was going to keep his promise this time around.
“WHAT!” Papyrus exclaimed, upon seeing the human. "HOW DID YOU AVOID MY TRAP? AND MORE IMPORTANTLY…IS THERE ANY LEFT FOR ME???”

Frisk had just solved the first of Papyrus’ switch puzzles when they reencountered the skeleton. Smiling, they signed that the spaghetti was so good, they decided to share it with a friend so they could experience it too. The determined mouse counted, right?

Sans held back for this, out of sight. This was one of the bonding moments between Frisk and his brother and he didn’t want to throw it off track. Papyrus needed to feel for them more, grow more fond of the human like he always did by the time they got to his “fight”.

“YOU SHARED MY MASTER WORK WITH A FRIEND? FANTASTIC!” Papyrus grinned. “ARE YOU SURE YOU’RE REALLY A HUMAN?”

‘Pretty sure,’ Frisk nodded.

“I’LL BE SURE TO COOK YOU SOME MORE SPAGHETTI LATER! IT’LL BE EVEN BETTER THAN THE FIRST TIME YOU TRIED IT! NYEH HEH!”

Frisk smiled weakly. Their stomach was beginning to feel a little odd. Their head was too, come to think of it. Was this just a result of eating the semi-warm spaghetti? Probably, they assured themself.

Papyrus walked alongside Frisk as they made their way to the next puzzle.

“My brother started a sock collection recently. How saddening… sometimes I wonder what he would do, without such a cool guy taking care of him???” Papyrus asked aloud, not really expecting an answer.

Frisk paused in thought wondering if Sans had ever heard this conversation before. They were aware of Toriel’s own sock collection from exploring Home. With a sly grin on their face, they turned around and began walking backwards so they could sign to their unseen follower.

‘Someon’s got a crush on moooooom.’
A certain shade of blue crept over the face of the skeleton hidden amongst the trees as he read Frisk’s signing, shrinking back more on impulse before grinning wryly, eyes dark.

A snowball flew from the branches of the nearest tree, aimed at the human. It was a miracle of gravity…a spectacular mystery of an event that no one could ever solve. …No one except Frisk. The child made a yelping sort of noise as the cold snow landed on their head and neck. Papyrus looked down at the human and then up at the trees with a quizzical expression.

“How strange,” the skeleton shrugged before continuing to walk onward.

Frisk brushed the snow off as much as they could, shuddering as some crept down the back of the coat under their shirt.

‘Okay. I deserved that,’ Frisk signed, facing back towards the trees.

Damn right they did. Satisfied, but face still blue, Sans moved on through the trees and down the cliff face, out of sight so he could listen before moving on to meet the kid where he usually did after this puzzle.

Papyrus proceeded to explain how the next puzzle was altered while waiting for Frisk to arrive. The child seeing no alterations between this timeline and the previous solved it with relative ease.

“WOW! YOU SOLVED IT! AND YOU DID IT ALL WITHOUT MY HELP! INCREDIBLE! I’M IMPRESSED! YOU MUST CARE ABOUT PUZZLES LIKE I DO!”

Frisk nodded enthusiastically in response.

“WELL, I’M SURE YOU’LL LOVE THE NEXT PUZZLE THEN! IT MIGHT EVEN BE TOO
Papyrus walked past his brother waiting on the opposite side of the switch puzzle. Was it his imagination or was his brother’s cheekbones a spectacular shade of blue? The taller skeleton shrugged the thought off as Frisk stopped next to Sans.

‘I’m pretty sure Alphys has something to do with the next puzzle’s solution being too easy.’

Sans grinned, brow raised, “yeah? i’m sure she has a hand in it.”

He was pretending like Frisk’s comment and the subsequent snowball incident hadn’t happened.

“hey. when you go onto the next area, i want you to take a good long look at that metal rectangle in there. lemme know if it looks…familiar to you, okay?”

‘What? Don’t want Papyrus pushing Mettaton’s buttons before Mettaton becomes Mettaton?’ the child signed, feeling cheeky.

“……i think you really like snow, kid.”

Frisk smirked before signing, ‘I’ll have you know, winter is my favorite season. Geeeeeeeeeetttttt dunked on!’

They finished signing quickly and ran off to the next puzzle before Sans could actually dunk them in snow. When Frisk turned around, Sans was already standing on the other side with Papyrus, hands in his pockets and watching the human with extreme interest.

Oh, it’s on, kid.

“HEY! IT’S THE HUMAN! YOU’RE GONNA LOVE THIS PUZZLE! IT WAS MADE BY THE GREAT DR. ALPHYS!”

Papyrus went into his lengthy explanation of the puzzle and Frisk quickly nodded that they understood the directions. Papyrus pressed a few buttons on the keypad of the metal rectangle, not noticing Frisk’s smug expression as they gave a knowing look to Sans.

Halfway through the jumble of mixing colors, Sans brought his hand out of his pocket, lifting it very slightly to hover Mettaton’s metal casing off of the ground the smallest amount, dropping him back where he was afterward. It wasn’t enough to damage him in the least – just enough to distract and surprise him enough to maybe make the puzzle a bit more interesting. He grinned at Frisk with feigned laziness.

Kid was determined to do them right this time, after all.

Frisk seemed to pale a little bit when they saw that the pattern was completely different. They did ask for a challenge… They looked carefully at the tiles, deciding not to rush in lest they get bitten by the piranhas.

Or, you know, fight a monster.

When all’s said and done, Frisk managed to only get the bottom of the coat nipped by piranhas once, stepped on one green monster tile, and ended up smelling like oranges.

“WELL DONE, HUMAN!”

Frisk frowned, ‘Who do I have to fight?’
“WELL…THAT…IS…AN EXCELLENT QUESTION,” Papyrus responded, looking at Sans hoping for an answer to this conundrum.

Huh. Sans hadn’t thought of that. It was too early for them to fight Papyrus, and there was no one else around…well. He felt uncomfortable about this for several, large reasons, but this was Frisk – this “battle” would be a completely different animal from anything they had been through before.

“…well, kid. guess this is my cue. you ready?” Sans asked, closing his left eye in a wink.

Frisk was surprised but nodded slowly, albeit a tiny bit worried.

“OH HO! MY BROTHER WILL FIGHT YOU, HUMAN! I GUESS HE’S NOT SO LAZY AFTER ALL!” Papyrus exclaimed proudly with his hands on his hips.

“uh oh. you’re ruining my reputation, kiddo.”

Sans grinned before stepping forward, watching the red glow from Frisk’s soul come into view as his intentions were made known. He was letting them make the first move, just standing there in front of Papyrus, relaxed.

Never really having “fought” Sans before on their own Frisk thought about what they should do. A few moments later, it occurred to them.

“What do skeletons hate most about wind?”

Of course, Sans had heard this before. He raised a brow and pretended not to.

“What’s that, kid?”

‘Nothing,’ the child shrugged. ‘It goes right through.’

“OH NO! NOT YOU TOO! YOU REALLY ARE A CLONE OF MY BROTHER!” Papyrus groaned, holding his skull with his gloved hands.

Sans chuckled from both the pun and Papyrus’ reaction, appreciating it anyway. Three solitary and short bones popped up from the ground and moved sluggishly toward the human. Frisk probably wouldn’t even have to dodge the “attack” to miss them.

The child bunny hopped over them easily anyway, causing Papyrus to raise a brow bone at Sans’ “attacks”.

“OH COME, BROTHER,” Papyrus said. “I KNOW YOU CAN DO MORE THAN THAT.”

“all of the excitement today’s got me bone-tired, paps,” Sans shrugged. “i guess with you cheering me on i can try a little harder though.”

Sans waited for Frisk’s next move, more sluggish bones moving toward them lazily. He’d be cool ending it whenever they were.

Frisk signed another pun. ‘When does a skeleton laugh?’

Watching Frisk, Sans supplied a pun answer – but not the one that was usually paired with this joke.

“When he finds something humerus?”

‘Of course! Because it tickled their funny bone.’
Papyrus loudly groaned in response. Frisk dodged the next set of bones and decided to toss a pun Sans’ way he definitely hadn’t heard yet.

‘What did the goat monster say to their child when asked about their feelings for a skeleton?’

“THAT’S A WEIRD SET UP FOR A PUN…” Papyrus said, looking confused, knowing a pun is surely incoming.

Listening intently when Frisk started with “what did”, Sans froze at that last part, mind seeming to blank briefly as that blue tinge crept back onto his face.

“…uh…”

Sweat could be seen on his skull, and it definitely wasn’t from exertion.

‘She told the child it wasn’t their business to know, but she sure looked baa-shful,’ Frisk smiled.

The implications of the pun went over Papyrus’ head.

“YOU TWO ARE RIDICULOUS.” Papyrus threw up his arms in exasperation. “I’M GOING ON AHEAD.”

Papyrus left, leaving Frisk still facing Sans. The short skeleton looked utterly defeated, blue more noticeable on his face as he seemed to have mentally stuttered out a little.

“……welp. i’m beat. You goat me good, kid.”

Frisk smiled at him as their soul returned safely within them.

‘She has a notebook of your puns, you know.’

“that’s just…research…right?” the skeleton brought a hand up to the back of his neck, looking nervous. Having this confirmed…it was…well. Distracting.

‘Welp. On we go,’ Frisk signed, leaving one embarrassed blushing skeleton in their wake.

They walked past the snow dog sculptures, pausing to save, and worked their way to the painted rock bridge.

Greater Dog blocked the way.

Frisk beckoned the large armored dog to come to them.

Sans was definitely staying back for this one, both because of the whole still being embarrassed thinking about a certain goat monster thing, and the fact that Greater Dog liked chewing on his bones. Not that he didn’t like the big guy…the dog just didn’t understand how awkward that was for a living skeleton.

So, he stayed hidden, watching as the armored pup bounded toward Frisk and began licking their face at the first opportunity.

Frisk laughed silently from the affection and used their broken wand once again to play fetch. The dog was excited…bounding, frolicking, and decimating several innocent snow poffs in its wake – each time bringing the wand back with tail wagging. It would tire eventually.

Frisk saw the dog flop over on the ground and began giving it a thorough petting session. Greater
Dog has acquired pets! Its tongue lolled out, tail swapping against the snow with vigor!

But now, it seemed satisfied. Rolling over, the actually much smaller than advertised dog jumped out of its armor and licked the human’s face affectionately before it hopped back into its armor and trotted off.

It had a bar to go beg for food at now that its affections meter was filled.

Frisk rubbed their face with a hand.

*Still slobbery.*

Turning around and noting the blue color still on Sans’ cheekbones, they gave a silent chuckle.

‘*Sorry to have embarrassed you, but I thought it was important to tell you,*’ Frisk smiled.

“…well. i…probably wouldn’t have asked her myself, so…heh…”

The skeleton walked over to Frisk again, stopping a couple feet away from them and looking a little awkward.

“…you think it’s legit? tori likes me that way?”

Frisk smiled and nodded.

*‘She turned bright pink when I asked her what she felt about you. I wasn’t joking when I did the pun,’* they blinked, taking a closer look at Sans’ face before signing, *‘I never knew you could even blush that much.’*

“oh. heh…” Sans responded simply, before his face went even bluer at that comment from Frisk.

Reaching up to pull his hood over his skull, the skeleton covered his face halfway with a groan.

“come on, kid. mercy.”

The human smiled at him and headed for the painted rock bridge. If Frisk looked back, the skeleton monster would be gone and already across the bridge, where he walked up from behind Papyrus to stand next to him – hood still over his skull. He hadn’t been prepared for these sorts of feelings today.

“get ready, bro. they’re coming this way.”

Papyrus raised a brow bone at Sans’ odd behavior and then turned to look at Frisk.

“*HUMAN! THIS IS YOUR FINAL AND MOST DANGEROUS CHALLENGE! BEHOLD! THE GAUNTLET OF DEADLY TERROR!*”

Frisk made a pleading look across to Sans along with a motion of “hell no” on solving this puzzle. Frisk drew the line at death traps. Puzzles were great. Death traps? Not so much.

Watching the various sharp, flamey, and all around much too dangerous assortment of objects move into place, Sans gave the kid a reassuring shrug from across the bridge before looking at his brother, waiting for his spiel.

“*WHEN I SAY THE WORD, IT WILL FULLY ACTIVATE!!! CANNONS WILL FIRE! SPIKES WILL SWING! BLADES WILL SLICE! EACH PART WILL SWING VIOLENTLY*
UP AND DOWN! ONLY THE TINIEST CHANCE OF VICTORY WILL REMAIN! ARE YOU READY!?! BECAUSE! I! AM! ABOUT! TO DO IT!

Frisk just blinked in response.

Sans waited through the few seconds of silence that followed, watching his brother’s inner struggle.

“well? what’s the holdup?”

Papyrus looked to be struggling with himself a lot. “HOLDUP!? WHAT HOLDUP!? I’M…I’M ABOUT TO ACTIVATE IT NOW!”

Frisk moved their hands back into their coat pockets to keep warm. Their head and stomach were still feeling weird, and they got their feet wet wading through the water tiles on the previous puzzle.

A few more seconds passed before Sans verbally nudged his brother again.

“that, uh, doesn’t look very activated.”

Of course, with variations in timelines, Sans knew that there was always some small chance of Papyrus setting it into motion…especially with how expertly Frisk had gotten through the other challenges this time. It had never happened before, but Sans was ready to float the human to safety if it did, all the same.

“WELL!!! THIS CHALLENGE!!! IT SEEMS…MAYBE…TOO EASY TO DEFEAT THE HUMAN WITH! AFTER ALL, YOU SAID YOURSELF THEY WEREN’T FEELING WELL EARLIER!” Papyrus stammered.

“that’s true,” Sans nodded, reaching a bony hand up to bring his hood back down to its normal place resting on his shoulders and back, mostly back to himself for now. “they do kind of look on edge over there.”

“AWAY IT GOES!” Papyrus waved his hand as the death trap vanished from sight.

“HUMAN!” Papyrus said, pointing a finger at Frisk. “I LET YOU OFF EASY THIS TIME! WILL YOU BE SO LUCKY LATER!? I WOULDN’T BE SO SURE!! NYEH HEH HEH HEH HEH!!”

The taller skeleton headed into town leaving his brother and the human behind. Frisk calmly walked across the fake bridge.

‘That went well,’ Frisk signed.

“better than it could have, for sure. don’t worry though. even if he ever did activate it i wouldn’t let it hurt ya,” Sans replied.

‘Thank you.’

Frisk walked past Sans, heading into town. There they visited the monsters of Snowdin, pausing to take a two minute nap in the inn, before touching the save point they used with Sans earlier. They felt somewhat better after the very brief nap, but they thought their head still felt a bit funny.

When Frisk left the forest and entered the village, Sans appeared to stop following them, popping off somewhere unknown. He’d be back in time for them to confront Papyrus, but…he had a dinolizard to visit and some books to check out. Time to see if Alphys had anything actually genuine in her
massive book collection.
A Visit to Alphys

Alphys jumped about three feet in the air when she heard the knock on her lab door. She’d been sitting at her worktable upstairs when she heard the noise and looked guiltily at a stack of unopened letters. Maybe if she ignored the knocking, whoever it was would go away?

She winced as the knock came again. So much for that plan.

“W-who is it…?” the dinolizard asked as she reached the door.

“…it’s me, alph,” the short skeleton responded somewhat reluctantly, feeling guilt now for how long he’d been sorta standoffish and avoiding the lab.

He had to remember; this Alphys hadn’t seen him in months. Even when he’d stopped by to drop off that oversized bag of dog food for her he’d been in and out before she knew it. He’d really let a lot of things that had been important to him go neglected when the resets started.

“Sans?” Alphys responded, opening the door and looking relieved. “I thought maybe you were someone else.”

Sans stood there, hands in his pockets as was his normal stance as he raised a brow ridge at her, curiously.

“who were you expecting?” he questioned.

“It doesn’t matter,” the scientist responded nervously.

“…sushi delivery?” Sans winked, knowing he might get the door shut on him but chancing it anyway.

Alphys decided to let that one slide and faked being irritated, responding, “Harhar, very funny.”

The skeleton chuckled, relieved at how easily they seemed to have smoothed back in to familiarity. Alphys motioned for Sans to step in, allowing the door to close and keep the warm air of Hotland out.

“hey, i was wondering…” Sans asked, coming into the lab. “weird question, but have you ever found any weird, not-manga books on your trips to the dump? anything maybe magical at all?”

“Maybe…?” Alphys replied, scratching the back of her frilled head with a clawed hand. “If I do, it’d be on the bookshelf upstairs. Y-you can take a look, if you want.”

“thanks, alphys,” Sans responded, stepping further inside and heading toward the conveyor belt that led upward, pausing to watch the screen when he passed the live feed of Frisk in Snowdin. He motioned to the screen with a tilt of his skull. “so. what do you think?”

Alphys practically had stars in her eyes as she responded, “They’re so…nice! Just like I hoped they would be! You seem really close to them…”

“They’re a nice kid,” Sans agreed, taking a moment.

Why hadn’t he thought about the cameras? He’d been so busy keeping Papyrus on the usual track, he hadn’t thought about Alphys… It must have been weird, watching that interaction when they exited the ruins and met him at the end of the path before his sentry station, getting onto their knees
like that… He hoped she didn’t have that clear of a view of that area.

Otherwise, it’d be obvious that more was going on here.

Alphys led the way upstairs and began helping Sans search the shelves.

“I think there might be at least one magic book…” Alphys said as she pulled a book down, checked the title on the cover, and then replaced it on the shelf. “But why are you interested anyway?”

Not putting effort in where he didn’t need to, Sans’ left eye flared with light as books started pulling off of the shelf, down in front of his eyes, then back to where they were in a neat line of succession.

“well…i figure, if we’ve exhausted all other options on getting the barrier lifted, maybe something like that might hold some clues. just ‘cause all of the magic humans we know of were the ones who sealed us in here, doesn’t mean some of this stuff isn’t legit.”

“Is this one…?” Alphys asked, pulling another book off of the shelf that looked extremely old and worn. She visibly shuddered. “This title…it gives me the creeps…”

Sans paused, floating books halting in mid-air.

“What is it?”

Alphys read the title aloud, “‘Secrets of the Darkest Art’. I…haven’t read this…I’m kind of thinking I d-don’t want to either.”

Sans focused on the books he was moving, raising a hand to get them to all return to their original places before stepping over to her.

“Huh. let me see it?” he asked.

Alphys gladly handed over the book.

“You can…keep it, if you’d like. I don’t know why, but holding it gave me the heebie-jeebies.”

“…where’d you find this?” the skeleton asked, frowning at the definite feel of unease it seemed to radiate as he opened it to the first page and eyed the fancy scrawl and detailed edging.

Alphys rubbed the back of her head again.

“It was in a box of books down at the dump. I-I decided to take the whole box with me and I didn’t bother reading them before I put them on the shelf. Most of the books were meant for human children though,” she looked down at the book in Sans’ hands. “Not sure why that one was in that box…”

“If you find any other that look similar to this or reference spells in any way, could you let me know as soon as possible?” Sans asked, hesitating before sitting down on the floor right there and setting the book down in front of him.

His left eye flared again as he looked at it with one of the darkest expressions Alphys had seen on him…raising a hand and using a light wave of magic to quickly flip through the pages, looking for something…

Alphys knew better than to disturb Sans when he got like this. She’d seen him focus like this a long time ago.
“Of course,” she finally said and headed back downstairs to let him be.

Some minutes later, Sans’ eye sockets were dark when the pages finally stopped flipping, reading over the word “Horcruxes” again to make sure he’d actually found it. This was unexpectedly lucky.

He read over the page – learning about what the process does to a soul. How it can be done – through murder…violating the natural laws of life. It would’ve been easy – monsters “fell down” all the time. This was…heavy. Dark. Swallowing, he stood after a moment, closing the book and slipping it under his arm as he grimly went about searching the other book shelves, just in case.

After searching for an hour, it appeared Alphys didn’t have any other human magic books on hand. Perhaps if there had been more, they had been destroyed in the past.

His search over, still not quite believing his luck, Sans vanished and appeared back in the lower of Alphys’ lab, looking around to see where she’d gone.

“Homura, no!!” Alphys sobbed as she watched what appeared to be the end of an anime on the giant screen. “GAAAAAH! This is so sad!”

Freezing in place, Sans watched the events playing out on the screen, at first just not wanting to startle Alphys when she was in the middle of something emotional, though as he continued watching, waiting, an uneasy feeling crept over him. It seemed to involve a character with time magic lamenting over their inability to change fate no matter how many times they repeated and relived various timelines.

This was…a little too close to home.

Alphys heard Sans behind her and paused the video feed, wiping her eyes with her lab coat sleeves.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Sans! Did that book help?” she sniffled, still emotional.

“…yeah,” the skeleton grinned somewhat unconvincingly, patting the book under his arm. “i’m gonna take this off your hands, since you’re okay with it.”

“Please do. And Sans…”?

He had gone to turn away, but paused, looking back.

“yeah, alph?”

Alphys placed one foot on top of the other; one of her nervous habits.

“Thank you, for coming by. It was good to see you again. It’s been too long,” Alphys said with a smile.

Oof. There was the guilt again. Sans grin turned more genuine, but sad, nodding a little.

“…sorry i’ve been so reclusive. maybe we can catch up sometime soon, if you’re up for it.”

“Yes! Of course!!” Alphys said enthusiastically but then suddenly shouted, “AAAH! The human! This is no time to be watching anime! What are they up to!!?”

Alphys quickly flipped to Snowdin’s video feed and flipped through the various cameras until she saw Frisk facing off against Papyrus. They appeared to be towards the end of their one-sided fight and Frisk looked exhausted.
“shiii–” Sans cut off his curse. “uh oh. gotta go, alph – we’ll talk later!”

With that, Sans vanished, reappearing in the trees at the side of the area, eye flaring. Ouch…he’d almost missed that one attack that there was no way the kid could avoid on their own.

Frisk was safely carried over the large bone thanks to Sans’ blue magic and accepted Papyrus’ mercy…only to fall to their knees and then their stomach on the snow, something other than fighting Papyrus exhausting them.

“HUMAN!?” Papyrus shouted, alarmed, and ran over to where the child had collapsed.

Pupils shifting back to their normal dots of white, Sans moved in from the side, kneeling down next to the kid and quickly checking them, worried.

“kid?? can you hear me?” Sans asked, gently turning Frisk over so he could see their face.

There was no response from the child. Frisk’s cheeks looked very flushed and they were breathing heavily. Papyrus knelt down next to them and Sans, looking concerned.

“BROTHER! I DIDN’T MEAN FOR THEM TO GET HURT THIS BAD!!” Papyrus said, fidgeting with his hands.

“i don’t think it was your fault, paps – they look sick. let’s get them back to the house, quick.”

“RIGHT!” Papyrus agreed, scooping Frisk carefully into his arms.

The snow fell silently as the two skeleton brothers rushed back to their house. While running back to the house with the human in his arms, Papyrus noticed something odd.
“SANS!” Papyrus said. “THE HUMAN FEELS VERY HOT! BUT THEY’RE SHIVERING!”

Grimacing mid-run, Sans inwardly cursed himself for letting this happen – both for not seeing the signs and for leaving them to face Papyrus alone. Papyrus definitely wouldn’t have meant it, but that last giant bone attack would have killed the kid in this state.

“we’ve got to get them into some dry clothes and set them up somewhere they can rest.”

Papyrus nodded as they finally reached the house. Opening the door, Sans stepped aside to let the human-toting Papyrus by, following him in before motioning to the couch.

“i’ll go grab something they can wear,” Sans pointed a thumb up in the direction of his room and with that, he was up the stairs and halfway there.

Left to his own devices, Papyrus laid Frisk gently on the couch and stepped back, looking concerned. The human’s cheeks were red, and despite appearing to sweat a little, the human was shivering. He’d never seen anything like this before, but he knew it was bad. He got an idea and retrieved a washcloth from the kitchen, putting a small amount of cold water on it, and placed it on Frisk’s forehead. The action seemed to help a little.

Once upstairs, Sans set his unnerving new book onto his dresser before opening the drawer and grabbing a clean set of clothes. They’d be sort of big on the kid’s smaller frame, but they’d work until something else could be gotten.

He appeared back in the living room next to the couch, where he paused for just a second, looking at the cool cloth.

“nice thinking, papyrus,” he praised before shifting Frisk so that he could remove their coat and get them changed. “can you get some blankets?”

“OF COURSE!” Papyrus replied before rushing off upstairs to fetch some.

Frisk appeared to be unconscious, likely due to the fever. Quickly, the shorter of the skeletons finished what he had started – switching out Frisk’s cold, damp striped ensemble for the shirt and pajama bottoms he had grabbed from upstairs.

Once they were changed, Sans set them carefully back onto the couch, trying to make them comfortable as he put the cloth back on their forehead.

“come on, kid…be okay…”

Papyrus rushed back downstairs with all the blankets he could find in the house and handed them over to Sans. Frisk looked a bit better in the fresh change of clothes, but they still clearly showed symptoms of illness.

“SANS, WHAT’S WRONG WITH THE HUMAN? I MEAN, THEY’RE SICK, BUT WHAT IS IT?” Papyrus asked, his concern very apparent in his voice. “ARE THEY GOING TO BE OKAY?” he asked, a bit quieter, bending down to get a better look.

“They’ve got a fever…” Sans responded, trying to make the couch a bit more comfortable with the blankets before shifting the kid one more time. He only used one blanket to actually cover them for now – watching for signs of the shivering letting up. “they’re going to be okay, bro…we just need to watch them, make sure they don’t get too hot or too cold…and figure out how to keep them hydrated.”
Sans’ actions seem to have helped and Frisk’s shivering ceased for now.

“YOU SURE KNOW A LOT ABOUT HUMANS, SANS!” Papyrus said, impressed.

“yeah,” Sans replied. “i’ve…done research.”

Had experience and time to learn things slowly at this point, more like.

Sans let a breath out, replacing the blanket with a thinner one before just…standing there, waiting. Thoughts of possibilities on things that could happen to them in their weakened state. Chara. He needed to find out more about how their control worked.

Papyrus spotted the clock on the wall and looked panicked.

“ACK! IT’S LATE ALREADY!” Papyrus yelped, standing back up to his full height. “I NEED TO CHECK IN WITH UNDYNE! WILL YOU BE ALRIGHT, SANS?”

“yeah, go ahead, paps,” Sans nodded. “oh, and – if you see that kid…the one with the yellow and the stripes, send them home.” He stood there for another second before quickly adding, “oh and papyrus – don’t tell her the human’s here, okay? if you haven’t mentioned them before, don’t.”

“OKAY,” Papyrus agreed before he took another look at the human, bending over again next to the couch at his brother's eye level. “MY BROTHER’S THE BEST AROUND. HE’LL TAKE CARE OF YOU,” he said as he turned to face Sans. “I KNOW YOU CAN DO IT!”

Papyrus gave his brother an encouraging smile before opening the door and beginning to make his way to Waterfall.

Giving a soft, genuine and incredibly fond smile when Papyrus said that, Sans watched him go. Damn he loved his brother. The only light he’d felt like he had for a long while…the person who’d kept him together, through all of the resets…except for when…he couldn’t be there.

Now alone in the room with Frisk, Sans turned around and sat on the floor next to the couch, leaning against it while rubbing a hand over his face tiredly.

“…you’ll be okay, kid. we’ll all be okay.”

Frisk slept, but judging from the expression on their face, the dreams they were having weren’t too pleasant.

Meanwhile…

Papyrus reached the spot where Undyne usually met with him, only to find she wasn’t there.

“AM I LATE? OR AM I EARLY?” he wondered aloud and waited. Just in case.
When Alphys saw the human collapse on the video feed, she placed a clawed hand over her mouth in shock. Seeing the skeleton brothers carry Frisk back to Snowdin, Alphys decided she needed to take action as well.

Rushing upstairs she quickly scanned her eyes over the bindings of the books on the bookshelf and yanked a human medical book off the shelf. She then wrapped the book in a scarf she would normally use to hold bento style lunches for when she’d visit Undyne and raced out the door.

Unfortunately, Alphys forgot that the river person was on their break.

“Damnit!” Alphys cursed as she ran back the other way, through Hotland, wishing she’d paid more attention to Undyne’s fitness lessons instead of admiring the glistening of Undyne’s scales and how wonderful she looked when she worked out.

Alphys’ stamina finally ran out once she reached the little bird by Undyne’s house. It was on the other side and upon seeing the wheezing dinolizard, began slowly (but determinedly!) to make its way across.

“Come on…I’ve got to get there…but…I’m…so…exhausted…” Alphys huffed as she put her claws on her knees and bent over in an attempt to catch her breath. She plopped down on the ground, the makeshift bag by her side.

“Alphys??” a familiar voice was heard from nearby.

Undyne eyed the scientist from across the gap where the bird had been for a moment before in the interest of time (she adored that bird – So much grit!! So much determination!! But, it was pretty slow.) she simply backed up and booked it forward, propelling herself through the air with red ponytail flowing out behind her – fearless, as always.

Landing safely on the other side, the fish lady walked over to Alphys and crouched down next to her, concerned.

“Hey, are you okay?” she asked.

“U-Undyne!” Alphys felt a blush creep on to her cheeks. “Y-yes. I’m fine…I have to get this to Sans and Papyrus quickly…but I ran out of breath.”

“Did you run all the way here?” Undyne’s eyes widened in surprise. “Wow, nerd, I’m impressed!”

Undyne looked from Alphys to her wrapped delivery briefly before grinning widely, very sharp teeth glinting against the glow from the water. Without missing a beat, she scooped Alphys and the package up into her arms, holding them firmly against her as she backed up, eyeing the gap again.

“Better hang on!!” Undyne said.

“U-UNDYNE!!” Alphys squeaked as she was held tight in Undyne’s embrace.

*Omgomgomgomshe’sholdingmeomgomgomg!*

Papyrus was still waiting on the overlook when he spotted a blur pass by below carrying what seemed to be a yellow dot.
“HUH. THAT LOOKED LIKE UNDYNE! I THINK…” Papyrus thought aloud.

A few seconds passed.

“…WAIT.”

It occurred then to Papyrus that Undyne heading to Snowdin probably wasn’t the greatest thing to be happening right now.

Still holding said yellow dot, Undyne continued to book it toward the skelebrothers’ house, making it there in surprisingly good time. Stopping in front of the door, scales glistening, she shuffled Alphys into one arm before knocking loudly on the front door – hard enough to make the nails rattle.

Inside, a half-asleep skeleton jolted awake, eye sockets wide in surprise as he scrambled to his feet.

“HEY, DWEEBS! SPECIAL DELIVERY!” Undyne shouted through the closed door.

Eye sockets going black, Sans hurried to figure out what to do with Frisk before Undyne broke the door down, grabbing them off of the couch and – it was too late. Papyrus didn’t lock the door and Undyne shoved it open. For a second, the skeleton just stood there with the kid in his arms, wrapped in the blanket, Sans’ eyes wide and sweat beading on his skull, staring back at a tall, intimidating Captain of the Royal Guard whose expression was quickly shifting from invigoration, to confusion, and then to rage.

_oh no._

Alphys covered her face with her claws. This wasn’t what was supposed to happen at all. Frisk was still unconscious in Sans’ arms, but their red soul emerged, sensing Undyne’s urge to fight.

“What. The hell. Is this?” Undyne demanded.

Holding Alphys a little bit tighter than she meant to then, Undyne raised the hand she had used to open the door, magic staticing through the air as a large, pulsating spear illuminated the room in its menacing light, followed by a blue ring flickering lightly in Sans’ left eye.

“undyne, there’s an explanation for this…heh…” Sans said, holding the wrapped up Frisk in his arms, preparing to back away. “…just…put the…spear away and…we can…talk…about it…okay?”

“YOU’RE HARBORING A HUMAN!!?” Undyne shouted, enraged.

Her teeth gritting dangerously, Undyne hesitated, but only because Sans was so close to Frisk. She didn’t want to accidentally hit him instead, but her patience was burning up faster than a pyrope.

Frisk looked to be in pain as their hands tightened on the blanket covering them, unaware of their soul floating carelessly about them.

“I’m sorry, Sans!” Alphys said as she looked guiltily at Sans, knowing her actions inadvertently brought Undyne here. “This wasn’t supposed to happen!”

Distracted at that, Undyne’s gaze immediately snapped down to Alphys.

“Wait, you knew about this?? What the hell, Alphys!?”

Taking that moment of distraction to his advantage, Sans quickly moved to get a better grip on the kid so he could teleport them somewhere safe, but the movement caught Undyne’s attention again.
Believing the human to be dangerous and a threat to not only her, but Sans and Alphys as well, she
acted, one spear piercing the old couch right where Frisk’s soul had just been floating as Sans
stumbled back, barely avoiding more spears that shot up through the carpet after them, left eye flaring
more dangerously as both himself and the kid shot up into the air, surrounded by that same blue
glow.

He tried to focus as he dodged again, vanishing and reappearing into the closest, most familiar place
he could zone in on – his room.

“SANS!” Undyne raged from the room below as she stepped over and set Alphys onto the couch,
heading up the stairs. “SANS, YOU HAD BETTER HAVE A DAMN GOOD EXPLANATION
FOR THIS!!”

Frisk stirred slightly from the noise, still suffering from the fever, and held on to Sans’ hand, curling
their fingers around the bones.

Feeling the pressure around his fingers from the small hand that clutched to him, Sans glanced down,
gaze focusing on Frisk in the dimly lit room as he heard Undyne coming up the stairs. Quickly, he
placed the human onto his mattress where they had been earlier, covering them with a sheet just in
case before leaving again.

He appeared outside of the room, left eye still alight as he conjured a wall of bones that shot up in
front of his door and the wall surrounding it, holding both of his hands up in an attempted calming
gesture as Undyne came closer, another large spear in each of her hands. She was poised to battle,
but she wasn’t going to just attack Sans – not yet.

“not gonna fight you, undyne,” the skeleton spoke, gruffly. “but you really need to back off now.”

“Oh my god, you really are protecting the human…” Undyne said in disbelief. “Why the hell, dude?
It’s your job to capture them!! That’s the last soul that we need to be free of the barrier! You can’t
seriously expect me to just walk away from this!!?”

Alphys mustered up her courage to speak up from the couch below to the two, “T-the human is sick,
Undyne…”

Despite how quiet she was, Undyne picked up on Alphys’ words, though she didn’t look toward
her.

“Sick? That’s why they were so unresponsive?” she grinned humorlessly. She got why Alphys was
telling her this – they wanted to protect the damn thing. But Undyne wasn’t having it. “Nice. That
means we don’t have to worry about them causing any damage before we can get them to Asgore.”

Mouth curving down into more of a frown, Sans’ eye sockets narrowed.

“look, undyne. that’s not how this is gonna go down. this kid’s harmless – they’re a child and
haven’t got a mean bone in their body. you wanna attack them? you’re gonna have to wait until
they’re better ‘cause you’re not getting past me,” Sans said, standing defensively behind the wall of
bones.

It was at that moment that Papyrus rushed in through the open door of the house.

“BROTHER! UNDYNE IS –” he stopped mid-sentence spotting his brother and Undyne on the
upstairs landing.

Without taking a second thought after seeing Undyne with her spears, Papyrus ran forward and
jumped up to grab the bottom edge of the railing of the second floor and pulled himself up, quickly positioning himself between Sans and Undyne, arms out to the side to shield his brother further.

Alphys covered her mouth in shock, both from the acrobatics Papyrus just pulled off but also from the situation itself.

Upon seeing Papyrus move in front of Sans like that, Undyne seemed to falter a little, though her grip tightened on her spears while Sans halfway reached a hand towards his brother, some sort of raw, fearful concern moving across his expression the moment the other skeleton stepped into harm’s way.

“Aw no, not you too,” Undyne growled out, glaring daggers at Papyrus now. “What IS IT with you guys and this human!??”

From behind Papyrus, Sans tried his best to regain his composure, outstretched hand trembling a bit as he took in a deep breath. Undyne wouldn’t hurt Papyrus. He knew that. She wouldn’t…but still, seeing him there, with his arms out like that, vulnerable…it made things flash in his mind that he really didn’t want to remember.

“UNDYNE, THE HUMAN SOLVED ALL OF MY PUZZLES FAIRLY. THEY DESERVE A FAIR CHANCE AGAINST YOU,” Papyrus declared, still poised to protect Sans if the need arose.
“T-the human doesn’t s-seem so bad. I haven’t met them yet, but they seem kind,” Alphys added from below, standing up on her own two legs again.

Looking between Papyrus and Alphys, Undyne seemed to look like she was about to boil over…and did, after about another second.

“NGAAAHH!!!”

Teeth grinding, the Captain of the Royal Guard raised her spears and slammed them both down into the floor in front of her, turning then to jump over the railing and head for the door. If these idiots wanted to protect the human so badly, let them. They’d have to leave here, eventually. She’d still end them – without harming her friends in the process.

“Fine. You all want to keep us trapped down here? Great,” Undyne paused next to the door, looking back at the three of them. “But I’m not going easy on the human when I meet them again, and you shouldn’t expect me to. You all know what’s at stake here. How long everyone’s been waiting for this. I’m disappointed in all of you.”

She left without another word, closing the door forcefully behind her with a bang.

Papyrus let out a sigh as Undyne left and said, “WELL THAT…COULD’VE GONE BETTER.”

Alphys looked to be on the verge of tears after hearing Undyne’s disappointment, but she knew she did the right thing.

“BROTHER, ARE YOU ALRIGHT?” Papyrus asked, turning to face Sans.

Unable to fully help himself at that point, Sans stepped forward to hug his brother as his bone barrier vanished, holding on to him like a lifeline. Part of his coat was scuffed, showing how close at least one of Undyne’s attacks had gotten to him, but he was unharmed.

“yeah, papyrus, i’m okay. the human’s fine too.”

He was shaken, but not for any reason anyone other than Frisk would understand.

Papyrus looked surprised at how tightly Sans was clinging to him and wrapped his arms around Sans in return. “I’M GLAD YOU’RE BOTH OKAY. I WAS WORRIED.”

Alphys fidgeted awkwardly downstairs and called up, “I-I’m really sorry, Sans! It’s my fault. I saw the human collapse and tried to bring you this.”

The scientist took the human medical book out of the bento scarf and held it up for the brothers to see. It took a moment, but Sans reluctantly loosed his grip on the taller skeleton, turning to look down at Alphys.

“honestly alph, it was just a matter of time anyway. the kid’s met a lot of monsters already and word was sure to get around,” Sans focused on the book then, interested as soon as he read the title. “that looks helpful. bring it up here?”

Alphys nodded and made her way up the stairs carefully, standing next to Papyrus and handing the book over to Sans.

“thanks,” Sans said, taking the book and opening it to the index to look through the headings as he turned to open the door to his room and step inside.
“kid’s in here. you want to make sure they’re comfortable while i see what i can learn from this, bro?”

Honestly, he didn’t even care if they both went in there right now. As private as he used to keep his room, it just didn’t seem important anymore.

Papyrus nodded and went inside, kneeling down next to the mattress where Frisk lay asleep.

“I should get going…” Alphys said as she fidgeted.

“okay alph. thanks for bringing this by,” Sans smiled reassuringly, sitting down on the edge of the random treadmill in the middle of the room as he leafed through the pages. “you can stick around and rest if you want. there’s food in the fridge…well, there’s lots of spaghetti…”

Alphys smiled weakly before responding, “T-thank you, but I should pass for now. Good luck.”

“okay, see you around then,” Sans told the receding figure of Alphys as she walked out.

Her mind seemed to be elsewhere, wondering if Undyne would ever forgive her. She continued this line of thinking as she dismissed herself, walked downstairs, and began the long walk back to the lab.

Papyrus suddenly called out to his brother, “SANS? THE HUMAN’S SOUL HASN’T RETURNED TO THEM YET…”

Sure enough, Frisk’s soul floated about their body, looking to be a much dimmer red than it was previously. Sans turned to look toward Papyrus before standing up and walking over with the book in hand, one phalange stuck inside to mark where he was in his search.

“no? that’s weird…”

…Oh damn. That didn’t look good. What was this…

“…crap. i don’t know…what…”

He flipped through the book some more, but there was absolutely nothing about souls. All of these horrible, crazy things humans could have happen to them documented in this book and not a word about the most important part of their being?

“…i think we might have to find a monster with healing magic to help us with this…” Sans said, closing the book.

“BUT…” Papyrus turned to look at his brother. “WE DON’T KNOW ANYONE LIKE THAT.”

“…i…think i do, actually,” Sans admitted, tucking the book under his arm. “but they’re not gonna be as easy to reach as i’d like…hang on a minute, i’ll be right back.”

Sans headed toward the door, going for a pile of Frisk’s old clothing that was still sitting in the living room. He’d get the kid’s phone and then call her from his. It’d be an unrecognized number, of course, but he had to hope that she’d answer it.

Papyrus watched his brother head downstairs and then turned his attention to the human. He reached out and held their hand in both of his own, giving it a gentle squeeze as a form of comfort. This tiny human was going to be okay, they just had to.

Once downstairs, Sans rifled through the pile of still damp clothes, locating the phone without too
much difficulty and copying the only number on there over to his device.

Then, he took a deep breath…and pressed the call button.
Toriel was leaning in the doorway of the small bedroom of Home lost in thought when her phone rang. She reluctantly pulled the device out of her dress pocket, thinking for sure it was the human attempting to call her. To her surprise though, the number wasn’t one she recognized. Curious, she answered it.

“Hello? This is Toriel,” she said, holding the phone up to one of her long ears.

“toriel, huh?” a very familiar voice responded from the other end, only much less muffled now than it had been in previous conversations. “glad we’re finally getting introduced. i’m sans.”

“Oh! It’s you!” Toriel’s expression lightened upon hearing and recognizing the voice. “From the door! It’s good to hear from you, but, how did you get this number?” she questioned.

Sans took a moment to grin fondly despite his worry, listening to her speak before he told her the bad news.

“i actually…kind of borrowed it from the kid’s phone,” he admitted, “they’re sick, and they need healing magic. badly.”

Toriel covered her mouth with her free hand in shock. She had vowed not to see the human again, to avoid suffering the heartbreak of losing another child again, but now she realized letting the human go on their own was sending them to their own demise, whether from fellow monsters or from the elements. She took a deep breath and regained her composure.

“Where are you?” Toriel asked.

“in snowdin, but i can bring them to you,” he headed back up the stairs while he was talking, fully prepared to pop over there as soon as she gave the word, “teleporting magic comes in handy in these situations.”

Toriel, despite being on the phone, nodded in agreement.

“Yes, please. And hurry!” she told the skeleton as she rushed down the stairs of Home to reach the outermost door.

Toriel stood at the door, waving her hands over it to remove the magic she had placed upon it and then clasped them together in front of her chest, anxiously waiting for Sans to arrive with Frisk.

Quickly stepping back into his room, Sans responded once more (“ok, see you soon”) before hanging up so that he’d have both arms free, walking over to the mattress and gathering the kid into his arms, blanket from his bed and all. Papyrus watched as he stood next to the mattress, ready to help if his brother needed it.

“i’ll come back for you in a minute, papyrus…or, if you want, you can go to the door of the ruins.”

Papyrus gave a wink to Sans, “RACE YOU.”

That said, Papyrus pulled an Undyne and leapt over the second floor banister and out the front door. Sans paused, staring after Papyrus for a second before letting out a snort of a laugh and vanishing with Frisk safe in his arms.
He reappeared not outside of the ruins door, but just past it, not wanting to expose the kid to any more cold than he needed to. Good thing Toriel had removed her magic barrier on the door and that he had decided to explore the ruins during one of the timelines where it had been opened, or he would have been stuck waiting outside. There was a sound of a fizzle of magic and a flash of blue that would alert Toriel to their presence a few feet behind her.

Hearing the noise, Toriel turned around, coming face to face with her pun partner and the human. She looked as lovely as Sans remembered, despite her worried expression. It was nice to see her again so soon, despite the reasons behind their early meeting. If he had to admit it, Sans stared for a moment, but he didn’t let it distract him from the importance of the situation.

“They’ve got a fever,” Sans explained, holding the child in his arms. “My brother and I tried to do what we could to bring it down, but their soul’s dimmed and I don’t know how to fix it…”

The initial surprise of seeing Sans wore off and Toriel rushed over to him and the human. Toriel looked at Frisk’s soul floating above them, confirming what Sans said was true. She then placed a hand on top of Frisk’s forehead and held onto one of their hands. Frisk seemed to react to the touch.
as Toriel closed her eyes and her magic could be felt swirling throughout the basement.

Sans continued to hold the kid, watching with hopeful concern as Toriel worked her magic, and also listening for whenever Papyrus made it to the door. He knew it’d take him a bit, but he didn’t want to leave him out there when he did arrive.

The two monsters took notice when Toriel’s magic began to work. Frisk’s soul returned to its usual vivid red and floated back into their body. Toriel breathed a sigh of relief when she saw Frisk’s cheeks return to their usual color as well.

The child was surprised to see Toriel looking down at them when they finally woke up. They were also surprised to feel tears welling up in their eyes.

‘Mom?’ they signed with their free hand.

Toriel nodded, looking very relieved, “Yes, my child.”

An equally relieved grin spread across Sans’ face when the human opened their eyes, letting out a breath he’d been holding as he stood there, looking down at the child in his arms.

“Welcome back, kid. I knew you could make it.”

Frisk smiled up at Sans and Toriel, looking happy to see the monsters they saw as their parental figures in the Underground watching over them. Frisk had latched on to the idea of Toriel being their mother almost immediately after arriving. The child’s own mother had been a muggle and had left Frisk’s life upon the discovery of their magic abilities when they were five years old. She had been unable to forgive Frisk’s father for deceiving her and claimed it was his “freaky” magic background that left his child unable to speak. So Frisk had grown up without their mother in their life.

After seeing the way Toriel treated them so kindly it had occurred to them, ‘Ah, this is what a mother is like’ and Toriel henceforth was “mom”.

Sans on the other hand was, of course, in no way physically similar to Frisk’s father, but something about the way he laughed and told silly puns reminded them a lot of their dad. …They missed him, a lot.

A knock on the ruins door brought the child out of their thoughts.

“HELLO!?”

Sans looked up, still grinning when he heard his brother’s voice from the other side.

“Heh. That’s papyrus,” Sans explained, “he’ll want to know they’re okay too.”

Toriel carefully picked Frisk up out of Sans’ arms and hugged them to her, responding, “Yes, of course.”

Frisk gladly hugged their mother back in return, resting their head against the soft fabric of her dress.

Letting Toriel take the human (trying not to think about how nice the fur on her hands felt brushing against his arms), Sans stepped around the goat lady and opened the door to let Papyrus in.

“Hey, bro. You’re just in time. They’re gonna be okay.”

“REALLY!?” Papyrus exclaimed, tears of relief in his eyes.
Frisk’s expression brightened spotting Papyrus over their mother’s shoulder. Toriel set Frisk back down on the ground and Frisk tackle hugged the tall skeleton, grinning all the while.

“THIS IS GREAT, HUMAN!” Papyrus exclaimed, hugging the human back. “YOU’RE OKAY!!”

Putting his hands into his pockets, Sans watched the two hug with fondness in his eye sockets before he looked back up at Toriel.

“thanks for helpin’ me keep my promise,” he said.

“And thank you for keeping it,” Toriel responded, smiling at the skeleton.

Frisk broke their embrace with Papyrus to grab one of his gloved hands and led him over to Toriel and Sans. The child stood by Toriel’s side, smiling as they proudly signed ‘Mom’.

Papyrus’ eyes brightened in recognition of this new bit of knowledge.

“AH! SO YOU ARE THE HUMAN’S MOTHER!” he said as he enthusiastically shook one of her hands with both of his. “I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS! IT IS AN HONOR TO MEET YOU!”

The goat woman smiled at the friendly greeting and introduction.

“Likewise! It is nice to finally meet you –” she paused, a disappointed look crossing her face. “Oh dear, that one doesn’t work…”

“What doesn’t work?” Papyrus asked, confused.

Toriel placed a hand on her cheek and gave a sigh of defeat.

“Well… I was going to say in the flesh but that seems tibia mistake.”

A certain shorter skeleton cracked up at that, laughing without restraint, very pleased with this. The other skeleton looked like he had been betrayed.

“Oh no! Not you too!” Papyrus shouted, throwing his hands in the air.

“Well, I still found it humerus,” Sans responded with a wink, grinning at Toriel proudly.

Frisk gave Papyrus a pat on the back as an act of solidarity.

“Don’t worry, tori,” Sans said, accidentally letting the nickname slip. “Papyrus usually skull-ks about hearing jokes for a while, but now that the kid’s over their femur I think he’ll forgive us.”

Toriel caught Sans’ nickname use and could feel her cheeks warming slightly. She giggled at his joke while Papyrus crossed his arms and made a “HMPH!” sort of noise.

“You’re lucky you’re right, brother!”

Frisk noticed the change in color on their mother’s cheeks and smiled. Frisk had avoided interfering with Toriel’s joke sessions with Sans during their extended stay in the ruins, mostly from the guilt of initiating a reset, but they had seen the aftermath of the sessions in Toriel’s demeanor. She always seemed to be in brighter spirits. Seeing the two getting along this early gave the child hope. Despite getting sick, this timeline was shaping up to be a good one.

Now that the kid was up and about, Sans could see how loose the shirt he had loaned them (reading
“Can’t we all just get oolong?” with screenprints of sad teacups next to the text) and he spoke up, pleased with the flush and giggle from Toriel. (His face might have tinted very slightly as well.)

“…guess we should find you some better fitting clothes now.”

Frisk looked down at themselves, noting the looseness of the clothing as well. They were currently barefoot and wiggled their toes on the cold floor. In the rush to get them to Toriel, Sans hadn’t had a chance to put Frisk’s boots back on the child. Spotting this predicament, Sans gave a quick “’scuse me” and was gone and back in a flash with them.

The child gratefully put the boots back on and agreed that a change of attire was needed.

“There should be another set of clothes upstairs. Come along, my child,” Toriel said.

Frisk nodded and began following their mother. Hesitating, Sans waited for a moment, watching the two. He didn’t want to just walk after them into Toriel’s home unless they were invited.

Frisk stopped and ran back to the two brothers, grabbing their hands and urging them to follow.

“Please, join us!” Toriel agreed. “It’s getting late, after all.”

Getting late…was she inviting them to stay over?

Not really one to refuse this even though he knew he probably should – the timeline had already changed a lot as it was, Sans gave a grateful nod before walking after the two.

“if that’s alright with you.”

“Of course!” Toriel smiled before turning and leading the group upstairs into the cozy atmosphere of Home.
Back upstairs, Toriel walked into the spare bedroom and pulled open the wardrobe, pausing a moment before pulling out a set of clothes for Frisk to change into. Seeing the clothes as they entered the room, Frisk understood why.

Toriel left to give them privacy to change and invited the skeleton brothers who had waited in the entranceway to the dining area and went to the kitchen to prepare tea for everyone. Thanks to her fire magic, the water boiled in no time and she returned with four cups of tea, the fourth cup for Frisk once they joined them later.

Watching Toriel reenter the room, Sans straightened a little from where he’d been leaning against the side of the fireplace closest to the bookshelf, accepting the tea when it was offered with a soft, “thanks”.

Any immediate tea-based puns he could think of were, he felt, probably far too flirty for so early in the game, so he kept them to himself until he could think of something more platonic. He didn’t know how she felt about him at this point of time after all…was it a slow, gradual thing? Best to be safe.

“THANK YOU, MS…”

“Toriel,” the goat woman smiled at Papyrus before spotting a changed Frisk in the doorway and taking a sharp intake of breath.

Frisk was wearing a green sweater with a yellow stripe and brown pants: Chara’s clothes.

Sans turned his head to look over toward the door when Toriel gasped, brow furrowing. This was nothing shocking to him. The only time he had “met” the child those clothes had previously belonged to, they had been wearing Frisk’s body and their blue and magenta striped ensemble. If anything, this was a little bit better to him than what they had had before. But something felt…off, anyway. He looked back at Toriel, concerned as he lowered his cup from his mouth.

Noticing Toriel’s reaction, Frisk signed to Papyrus, ‘I should get my own clothes. Is there a clothing shop in Snowdin?’

“YES! I BUY ALL MY CLOTHES FROM THERE! EXCEPT THIS,” Papyrus responded, motioning to his “battle body”. “SANS HELPED ME MAKE THIS.”

The child was unable to hide their relief. This outfit was making them uncomfortable, and they saw the sad expression on Toriel’s face, lost in thought about one of her deceased children.

Not really getting what all of the discomfort was about, but assuming it probably had something to do with Toriel’s history trying to protect kids from the Underground, Sans sort of regretted mentioning the kid needed more clothes, clearing his throat after a moment.

“hey, if you want, you can keep wearing the stuff i let you borrow for tonight. it’ll probably be more comfortable to sleep in,” Sans said.

Frisk nodded and smiled, agreeing that the shirt and pajama bottoms were comfy. Toriel seemed visibly relieved at Sans’ suggestion.

Taking another drink of tea, Sans grinned again after a moment, hoping to clear whatever was in the
air with his next words. Of course, it wouldn’t help Papyrus at all, but…

“this is some quali-tea stuff, tori.”

Toriel chuckled while Papyrus groaned.

“Thank you, Sans! I’m glad you like it,” Toriel replied. “It’s been oolong since I’ve last made it.”

“UGH…” Papyrus shook his head.

Sans let out a chuckle of his own at Toriel’s response, bringing the cup back up to his mouth. It was nice being around her again. Frisk gave Papyrus a sympathetic pat on the back before covering their mouth and yawning. Despite Frisk’s efforts, Toriel spotted it.

“Ah. I see it’s time for bed,” she said, clearing away empty tea cups before something occurred to her. “Sans, I remember you mentioned bedtime stories before. I have a bookshelf in the corner, if you can find something?”

“SANS IS THE BEST BEDTIME STORY READER!” Papyrus proudly told Frisk who was standing next to him.

Some hint of blue crossed Sans’ face as he grinned, nodding a little, “sure.”

Turning his face away from them all, he walked over to the bookcase and browsed over Toriel’s collection, looking for something both Frisk and his brother might like. Fact books…medical stuff…hmm.

While Sans perused the shelf, Toriel finished putting away the dirty teacups and Frisk left to go change clothes in the small bedroom. The padding of bare feet on the wooden floor alerted the adult monsters to their return.

After a couple more moments, Sans grinned and slid a certain book out of the shelf, looking toward his brother.

“well, would you look at this, papyrus…” Sans said, holding up the book cover to face his brother.
“peekaboo with fluffy bunny book three.”

Papyrus gave a gasp of delight as Frisk tugged on Sans’ hand and led him to the reading chair. Toriel smiled fondly at this sight.

Sans followed the kid over to the chair, waiting for their signal on what they wanted him to do…sit? He obliged, opening the book and giving a soft chuckle at Frisk’s and Papyrus’ excitement before holding an arm out, inviting the kid to join him. Papyrus too, if he wanted, though that could quickly get cramped.

Frisk grinned and sat in Sans’ lap. Papyrus decided to sit cross legged on the floor in front of the chair. Toriel turned a chair around from the table so she could face the group.
Feeling a little embarrassed at first but brushing it aside, Sans started reading the book, imitating the different voices, pausing at the right moments, doing what he could to make the story as enjoyable to his little audience as possible. He seemed to enjoy it – especially Papyrus’ reactions as the story went on. It was turning out to be a pretty good night.

Despite Sans being all bone, Frisk managed to get very comfortable in his lap and as the book was read, began to fall asleep. When the book eventually came to its end, Frisk had already fallen asleep, their head lying against Sans’ chest. Papyrus seemed to have nodded off from his position sitting on the floor as well.

Carefully and quietly, Sans closed the book and set it aside, looking over at Toriel and motioning to Frisk before shrugging a bit, grinning. He wasn’t sure where she wanted them.

Toriel smiled as she carefully picked up the sleeping human, cradling them in her arms as she walked to the spare bedroom and laid them under the covers of the bed. Meanwhile, Sans scooted off of the chair to gently nudge Papyrus, wondering if they should head out for now. Did Toriel even have space for them?

Papyrus, still half-asleep, picked himself off of the floor and wandered into the spare bedroom, grabbing a pillow Frisk wasn’t using and laid down on the floor next to the bed. Subconsciously, he must’ve still been worried about Frisk’s health and wanted to be nearby…just in case.

Toriel raised an amused eyebrow when she saw the actions of the younger skeleton brother. Sans had followed Papyrus, and he blinked, watching this happen before smiling fondly and shaking his head.

“guess we’ve got that ‘able to sleep anywhere’ gene in common,” he commented quietly.
Toriel managed to hear Sans and gave a polite chuckle.

“got some spare blankets?” Sans asked.

The goat woman nodded and retrieved two from her dresser in her bedroom. Stepping back into the hallway she handed them over to Sans.

“Will you be okay? The reading chair is comfy, but it’s not the same as being able to properly lie down…”

Nodding, Sans stepped back into the spare bedroom, using one of the blankets to cover his brother before walking back out and giving Toriel a wink.

“yeah. i’m a pro at sleeping,” he said, hands back in his pockets, the other blanket tucked under his arm. “i can even do it with my eyes closed.”

Toriel had to cover her mouth to prevent herself from laughing too loud.

“Well, everyone needs to have a little shut eye every once in a while,” Toriel replied. “Goodnight, Sans.”

“heh. g’night, tori. thanks for letting us stay,” the skeleton grinned more as he watched her, relaxed. This was definitely the best second night of a reset Sans could recall.

Toriel blushed fondly at Sans’ use of her nickname before turning to head to her bedroom. She couldn’t put her finger on it, but something about Sans using the nickname felt right to her.

Sans watched her go for a second before turning and heading back down the hallway to the living/dining room, taking up residence on the reading chair next to the warm, calming fire, wrapping himself up in the blanket Toriel had lent him, and breathed in the scent of cinnamon, butterscotch, and florals. Yeah, this would do just fine.
A Midnight Rendezvous

A few hours later, Toriel padded quietly down the hallway, retrieved a watering can from the entryway, and headed out the front door of Home. As she walked she hoped to herself that she hadn’t accidentally woken anyone up.

Hearing the shuffling of feet and the sound of a door quietly opening and closing, Sans opened his eyes, listening intently as his subconsciousness once again formed with reality and he shifted to stand up. He was at the door a second later, opening it just in time to see Toriel turn the corner to head deeper into the ruins.

Curious and concerned, he decided to follow, wondering why she was wandering like this in the middle of the night.

Toriel carried the watering can by her side as she took a relaxing stroll, heading for the entrance of the ruins, careful not to disturb its residents still sleeping away the night. As she walked, she stepped past chalk drawings left on the ground by Frisk they had made during their time at Home. Toriel did not notice or recognize what they were of, but where she hadn’t understood, Sans definitely did.

The drawings seemed to depict a happy stick figure flying on a broomstick next to another happy figure on a broom, this one having a piece of blue clothing on it. Sans paused to look at the drawings, grinning softly before he continued on, not wanting to let Toriel get too far ahead.

Toriel eventually reached the golden flowers beneath the barrier opening and watered them using the watering can she had brought with her. When she finished she looked up at the opening above her, giving a small sigh as a small amount of moonlight poured into the room.

Standing in the darkened room, Sans just…watched her for a bit. Her grace, the way her fur reflected the moonlight…it was hard to look away, but after a while he sort of started feeling...creepy. So he stepped forward into the light a little more, feeling a little sheepish.

“hey…” Sans started. “hope i’m not interrupting anything but…i heard you get up…you okay?”

“Oh!” Toriel turned to face him and smiled gently. “Someone has to take care of the flowers. I’m okay. What about you?”

“yeah, i’m okay. i sort of feel like i’m overstepping here, but i just wanted to make sure you’re doing all right,” he said, seeming sort of awkward – trying to balance between the times when this would not have been odd due to their familiarity and the current time of now, where they’d only just met face to face.

Toriel shook her head that Sans wasn’t overstepping.

“That was a little surprising, but it made sense, considering that, well, they had.

“tibia-nest,” Sans replied, “i know the feeling.”

“Thank you, for taking care of them,” Toriel said, referring to the child sleeping back at Home. “I can see that they’ve made great friends.”
“they have…pretty much every monster they’ve encountered from here to snowdin. they’re a really good kid,” Sans agreed, giving a shrug shortly after. “…heh…i’m actually supposed to be a sentry, but…well. what can i say – the kid’s won me over. they’re going to be okay. paps and i will make sure of it.”

“You’re both very kind,” Toriel nodded appreciatively before a sad smile crossed her face. “I’m glad they’re okay, despite my foolishness in letting them go off alone.”

“That’s not your fault. frisk’s pretty headstrong…it’d be hard to keep them any place for long,” Sans attempted to soothe her guilt, leaning against one of the stone pillars in the chamber.

“They certainly are.”

Toriel thought back to seeing Frisk in Chara’s clothes and wiped her eyes, feeling tears.

“I thought I was over this…”

When Sans saw the tears, his expression shifted to concern, and he didn’t hesitate before stepping over to her, though he paused a couple feet away.

“…you sure you’re okay?” he asked gently – coaxing, but not trying to press.

“I…thought I was,” Toriel said, looking at him sadly, thinking about her children…and those she failed to save.

“Hey, now,” Sans raised a hand, stepping closer and placing an attempted hand of comfort on her arm. “i might not have ears, but i’m pretty good at listening, if you want to talk.”

Toriel placed a hand on top of Sans’.

“Thank you, Sans. I feel you probably already know this story and who I really am, but I lost both of my children in one night, many, many years ago,” she closed her eyes, her expression pained as she remembered the details of the incident. “The outfit Frisk was wearing was Chara’s…and it brought back memories.”

Chara. At the mention of the name, Sans was glad Toriel had closed her eyes. It made him hesitate, and he didn’t want her to see that. How could he even begin to explain…that one of those children had caused so much pain? …No, actually both of them, counting what Asriel had become.

He knew the day would probably come when she had to know, but now wasn’t the time.

“i’m sorry. that definitely would do it. …in my opinion, though?” Sans gave her arm a gentle squeeze, smiling at her sadly. “it’s okay to not be over it. love’s a powerful thing…i’d like to see you happy, but it’s okay to be sad, even after so much time has passed. it’s okay to let it show.”

Toriel smiled before responding, “Thank you, Sans,” she paused before giving a small chuckle, “I feel like I’ve been saying that a lot lately.”

Giving a chuckle of his own, Sans closed one eye socket in that familiar wink of his followed by a light shrug.

“guess i’m just that kind of guy. it’s okay. i’m glad i can help.”

He was more than a bit distracted by the fact Toriel still had her hand on the one that he had on her arm, but he definitely wasn’t complaining.
It finally occurred to Toriel however that she was still holding on to Sans’ hand and she blushed slightly.

“It’s really good to see you finally,” Toriel said.

“it’s good to see you too,” Sans agreed, wondering what was happening here. Was he making her uncomfortable? While it was a concern, she hadn’t let go of him yet, so…that was encouraging. Though each moment spent in contact with her made him want to be closer.

“…nice to finally put a face to your laugh,” he added after a moment, causing Toriel to smile yet again.

“Likewise,” Toriel said before looking up at the chasm’s opening above them. “There has to be a better way to free everyone.”

She had felt that her ex-husband’s plan to get seven human souls had been a horrendous idea from the start. What was Asgore thinking? He could’ve gone through the Barrier with only one and then retrieve souls from perhaps recently deceased humans as opposed to fighting them, but instead he kept them all trapped below, waiting for unfortunate humans to survive a fall only to be killed by his hand. It was needless bloodshed, and Toriel hated it.

“we’ll have to find one,” Sans agreed, watching her for a moment still before lifting his own gaze higher, toward the entrance, so far above them both. “’cause i don’t think anyone would be happy about anything happening to the kid, once they got to know them. even the current royal scientist, alphys, is on their side. she defended them against undyne.”

Toriel seemed both surprised and impressed, “She did?”

“she did,” Sans nodded. “honestly, with a little help, i think frisk’s going to be just fine.”

Smiling reassuringly, Sans glanced up above them both again, hesitating. “…hey, do you know how far up the barrier starts, coming from this side?”

“I believe it goes all the way up to the opening,” Toriel replied.

“So…guessing by the light coming down, there’s a good chance of seeing at least some of the sky from up there, right?”

Toriel nodded, looking up as she spoke, “You can hear birds and insects sometimes, if you listen closely enough too.”

“…do you want to find out how much you could see?” Sans asked, looking over at her.

“Yes?” Toriel responded, looking down at the skeleton brother curiously, not sure what she was getting herself into.

Grinning a little more, the skeleton brought his other hand out of his pocket, reaching over to take both of Toriel’s in a firmer grip as he watched her, left eye igniting with a blue glow as magic surrounded them both.

“this should really lift your spirits then. hold on.”

There was a feeling of weightlessness as their feet left the ground – he took it slow, though, making sure that she was comfortable with what was happening as they drifted away from the flowerbed below.
Toriel gasped as she looked below them and then at Sans.

“You really know how to sweep a lady off her feet!” she joked, smiling at the skeleton.

That got the blue to spread across Sans’ face, though it was a different sort of magic than what lifted them now. Grinning wider, looking sort of sheepish but definitely pleased, he gave his own bold response as they rose higher.

“Don’t go falling for me just yet…” Sans winked again, definitely showing that he was okay with the flirting. “Let’s at least give it until your feet are back on the ground, eh?”

It was Toriel’s turn to blush as she turned bright pink and laughed at the pun.

“Good thinking,” she responded, continuing to hold on to Sans’ hands.

The slow ascent gave Toriel time to gather her thoughts. Sans was just the way Toriel had imagined, although for some reason she felt it was more based on remembering him rather than just going by what he’d said and the tone of his voice through the door. But, you can’t remember the appearance of a monster you’ve never met in person, right?

She wondered silently to herself if he had picked up on their souls resonating when their hands touched. It was a telltale sign of two monsters’ compatibility with one another. He did seem to be flirting with her though, so maybe he did.

Upon reaching the top, Sans spotted a secure-looking ledge on the far side of the opening and floated them over to it, letting their feet touch the ground before looking toward the opening and tilting his head to it in indication for Toriel to look behind her.

They were inside of a cave under a mountain still, but through the mouth of said cave, a little further up, the leaves of trees could be seen…and beyond them, starlight.

Toriel turned to look and her eyes widened at the sight. She hadn’t seen this sort of view in many, many years.

“It’s beautiful…”

It was a small piece of the grandeur of the entire night sky, with only the small section they could see from here, but it was beautiful. Not only that, but the air up here felt clearer…crickets chirping away beyond the cave opening.

“Yeah. It is.”

Sans looked over at Toriel as she continued to look at the night sky with wonder. He wanted to say “so are you” but was still worried about overdoing it. But there she was…
Hesitating, Sans paused before…just going for it. Speaking his mind honestly.

“…so are you.”

And there were the thoughts into real words. Whatever happened next, well…at least he’d know how into him she was at this point.

Toriel’s eyes widened in surprise at the compliment as the blush returned to her cheeks. She turned to look at him, feeling bold as she smiled and bent down to kiss him on the cheekbone.

“You really are *sansational*.”

If Sans was blushing before, it was nothing compared to the blue that spread over his face now, soul resonating inside of him when she kissed him. And that pun!

“h-heh…wow…” Sans laughed lightly, expression full of fondness as he looked back up at her. “wasn’t expecting that, but hey, i’m definitely not complaining.”

The goat woman looked fondly back at him as well before peering at the vast expanse below them.

“We should probably head back,” Toriel suggested.

Reluctant, but knowing she was probably right because of how late it was, Sans took a hold of Toriel’s hands again, white of his skull still tinted blue across his face as he took a deep breath and
they both became enveloped in the glow again, and carefully led her to the edge and stepped off.

The descent was a bit faster than the journey up, but still casual. Enough to get them down fairly quickly but not enough to be shocking. Gently, they both touched onto the ground next to the mound of golden flowers still illuminated by starlight.

“feeling any better? less _bonely_, at least?” Sans asked, still holding onto Toriel’s hands as he let her regain her footing.

“Yes, thank you,” she smiled at him, giving a gentle squeeze on his hands with her own. “It’s a shame we must _goat_ going.”

Unable to help it, Sans cracked up again as he gave Toriel’s hands a return squeeze.

“yeah. but i guess we don’t want _papyrus_ to have to get _sternum_ with us if they wake up and can’t find either of us.”

Reluctant once again, Sans slowly brought his hands back so that they could walk unhindered. Toriel picked up the long forgotten watering can and walked alongside Sans as they made their way back to Home.

Sans walked with his hands in his pockets, feeling like his soul was glowing but trying to suppress inner doubt. This was nice. It could turn into something a lot nicer…but what if it did, and this didn’t end up being the last reset again? …On the other hand, could he afford to be standoffish and not take these chances when what he could gain was so important?

Some time ago, he would have just ignored this. Pushed back the emotions. But things made more sense now. There was more hope. It was good that it was getting harder not to care, even though it scared the hell out of him.

Traveling through a puzzle room, Toriel passed through an archway, not noticing another chalk drawing at the bottom edge of the wall. No one would even know it was there unless they were coming from this direction. Sans on the other hand spotted it. He paused when he saw this previously unseen chalk drawing, leaning down to get a better look at it.

It depicted the stick figures from the previous drawing, but this image didn’t appear to be a happy one. The stick figure from before was no longer smiling, in fact, they seemed to be grieving, floating behind a new figure that was smiling widely. A few columns separated the two figures from the blue clothed figure from the earlier chalk drawing. Underneath, a few words were written, expressing the artist’s emotional states at the time of the drawing: “no more”, “please”, “stop this”, and an underlined “no more _resets_”.

Taking a moment longer than intended as he stared at the drawing, Sans straightened up before following after Toriel again, feeling sick. He knew exactly where that place was. He knew exactly how that story would end.

It hurt, thinking of the kid going through that. Possessed, hurt, and forced to watch your friends die by your own hands…repeatedly.

How had they remained so strong?

Sans remained quiet for the remainder of the journey back to Home.
Confession

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sans finally broke out of his thoughts when he saw Toriel paused in the doorway of Home and smiling nervously. Watching Toriel, Sans stopped next to her, glancing past her in an attempt to figure out what she was staring at. Had the “kids” woken up?

Frisk and Papyrus were standing in the foyer. Frisk had their hands on their hips while Papyrus had his arms crossed, tapping his foot in irritation.

“We’re home…” Toriel said with a nervous chuckle.

“YOU BOTH HAD US WORRIED SICK!” Frisk signed rapidly as Papyrus voiced both their sentiments aloud.

The child then made an irritated pouting face with their cheeks puffed out as Papyrus continued tapping his foot.

Toriel turned to look at Sans.

“I think we’re in trouble,” she said.

“i think you’re right,” Sans responded with a “caught red-handed” grin. “…sorry, bro, kid…didn’t expect you to be up yet.”

Not that that was an excuse, but it was true.

“WHAT WERE YOU TWO DOING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT ANYWAY!?” Papyrus demanded.

Frisk nodded in agreement with Papyrus’ statement, but the blush that suddenly appeared on their mom’s face didn’t escape them.

Sans’ face didn’t escape the return of his own blush and he laughed a bit, giving a shrug, “going for a walk. tori had to water some flowers…night’s the best time for that, you know?”

“IF YOU SAY SO, BROTHER,” Papyrus replied, not looking entirely convinced.

Frisk gave a sly look to Sans, thinking they knew what must’ve happened, especially hearing Sans using Toriel’s nickname so freely.

“guess we should have left a note,” Sans said towards Toriel, trying to ignore the look Frisk was giving him. He shifted his stance a little, giving a nondescript yawn. “…we didn’t mean to worry you guys. let’s not let it ruin your nights, though…would you forgive us in exchange for another story?”

Frisk and Papyrus exchanged a look and then looked back to the two delinquent adults and nodded. Toriel chuckled.

“good. i think i might have seen a fluffy bunny book four in there, too…” Sans grinned before looking to Toriel again, motioning toward her in an “after you” way to encourage her to go through the door first.
Toriel smiled and followed Sans into Home. Frisk grabbed her hand and led her into the living room where the reading chair was. Toriel sat down on the floor, putting her knees to the side of her and Frisk sat next to her, leaning against her side. Papyrus took a spot on the floor as well, eagerly awaiting another story. Following them into the room, Sans took a detour to the bookshelf to locate the next fluffy bunny volume he had spotted before, sitting on the chair again when he saw how everyone else had arranged themselves.

“peek-a-boo with fluffy bunny, part four,” Sans began after opening the book.

The reading went similar to the previous one – Sans imitating the voices, pausing to look at them when things seemed a little tense, giving life to the simple story in ways no skeleton ever had.

Papyrus managed not to completely fall asleep this time, but Frisk had once again nodded off. Toriel smiled down at the child sleeping against her.

Finishing up the story, Sans quietly closed the book to look at them all, commenting quietly, “looks like this one was another hit.”

Toriel nodded her head in agreement, remaining seated on the floor. Realizing the goat monster’s predicament, Papyrus got up and, after rubbing one of his eyes sleepily, picked up the human, allowing Toriel to stand back up.

The tall skeleton carried Frisk back to the spare bedroom and both ended up laying on top of the bed. Papyrus fell asleep the instant both he and the human touched the mattress’ surface. Frisk curled up next to him.

Sans had followed Papyrus back to the room, and took a moment to watch them, feeling his own tiredness tugging at him. It was heartwarming, seeing them like that…such good friends, still, despite how much of their time had been erased.

Despite being “caught”, it was still a really good night.

Toriel stepped past Sans to put the blanket that had fallen on the floor back on top of Frisk and Papyrus. As she did so, she leaned down to give Frisk’s forehead a kiss.

Sans watched her before going to the door and stepping out of the room, pausing in the hallway to yawn before stretching his bones. He’d used a lot of magic that day – both from porting around so much, the conflict with Undyne, and the trip to the face of the Underground’s largest skylight with Toriel. Muscles or not, it still felt nice.

“You seem bone-tired,” Toriel punned quietly, standing behind Sans, closing the spare bedroom door behind her.

Pausing mid-stretch, Sans turned around to look up at her, letting an easy grin slide over his face as he chuckled quietly.

“normally i might say that’s just my face, but you caught me. how are you holdin’ up?”

“I am fine,” Toriel replied as she smiled and nodded towards the door. “Without you, I probably never would’ve seen my child again.”

“a promise is a promise,” Sans responded, though there was a small edge of guilt behind that from the times he had been forced to violate that promise in the most final of ways. That is – it would have been final, if “save points” weren’t a thing.
She never did really have to know about all of that, right? …

Toriel picked up on the hidden emotion from Sans.

“You’ve been through a lot… I don’t know what it is, but I can sense it. You don’t have to tell me, but know that we’re all here for you, whenever you need us,” she said, smiling gently.

Something wanted to crumble inside of Sans when Toriel pointed that out and gave him those words of reassurance… taking in a deep breath and letting it out, the skeleton maintained most of the grin he had on his face as he closed his eyes for the moment – opening them again once that breath was gone.

“… thanks, tori… i mean it. it’s just… a lot. really hard to explain.”

He felt bad for this… for not telling her, when she had opened up to him, even if he had already heard her story before. But, it was just… so much.

Toriel took one of his hands and covered it with her own.

“The journey ahead will be rough for everyone, but somehow,” she paused to look fondly at the bedroom door, thinking about Frisk. “I feel we’ll all end up okay.”

Watching as Toriel took his hand, Sans’ expression softened again before he squeezed hers lightly, bringing his previously free hand up to cover hers in return.

“Yeah. I’d definitely say that things are looking up,” he commented, not sure if she’d get the honestly flirty pun or not. He was looking up at her… and she was a welcome sight.

Toriel turned her head back to look down at him, smiling as a bright blush appeared on her face. She tried to think of a flirty pun in response, but chuckled as she failed to get one to come to mind.

“Sans, you’ve left me speechless.”

“… tori,” San’s grin widened a little, hesitating as he decided how to word what he felt like he needed to. “… before I step any further, here… I need to be sure. I know we’ve only known each other face to face for less than a day, but… the truth is, I… like you. A skeleton. I don’t know if you feel the same way, and it’s okay if you don’t, or if you need to think about it. It’s just hard for me to stop myself, and I don’t want to make you uncomfortable, so…”

There it was, out in the open… despite how much he tried to hold the blush down, it wasn’t working.

Toriel’s face seemed to have gotten even pinker upon hearing Sans’ confession. He was right, of course. They only had known each other face to face for less than a day, and yet, she had harbored feelings for him after his repeated visits to the door, just to hear her voice and make each other laugh.

“I like you a skeleton as well, Sans.”

The grin grew wider as he watched her face, hearing those words… actually spoken, from her lips.

“… yeah?”

Toriel smiled at him, quoting him back, “Yeah.”

“Then I’ve got something else to say,” he shifted, standing up a little straighter. “Knock, knock.”
“Who’s there?”
“lenna.”
“Lenna who?”
“lenna little bit closer and i’ll tell you.”

Toriel complied and leaned down. Giving her time to react if she wasn’t comfortable with quite this much yet, Sans leaned closer to her in return, and, if she allowed it, he’d kiss her. Soft and sweet… with the danger of burning his own face up from how blue he was. He might be made of bone, but it was magical bone – and the same substance from which he was made that allowed him to close his eyes and mouth and be as expressive as he was, allowed him to make this work. He might not have had much in the way of actual lips, but there was definitely more than just teeth there.

Toriel leaned into the kiss, closing her eyes as she sensed the resonance between their souls once more.

Wishing this could last forever, but knowing it couldn’t – not this one, at least – Sans eventually had to break the kiss, reluctantly. As his own eyes reopened, he grinned halfway, a little crookedly this time as he watched her face, taking his chances and planting one more affectionate, shorter kiss on her lips before he managed to speak again.

“…wow. beautiful, kind, smart, good at making me laugh, and an excellent kisser. you really are special, tori.”

Toriel gave him another kiss on his mouth.
“And you really are *sansational.*”

Neither were sure when it happened, but they later managed to say goodnight and return to their respective sleeping quarters, contented smiles on their faces as they slept.

Chapter End Notes

Illustration is in color this time because it was completed for Sorel Week back in July of 2017.
Time for a Change (of Clothes)

The next day the group stood together at the door leaving the ruins. Concerned about possibly messing up the timeline further, Frisk declined this chance to explore the ruins to check on their save point horcrux theory. That, and they weren’t sure what to do if they found such a thing. Would there be a feeling that gave off a giant red flag whenever you were close to one, like saying, “Howdy! I’m a horcrux!”? There had to be an easier starting point for their horcrux conundrum and there would certainly be a chance to return later, now that Toriel had removed the magic barrier that had kept the door locked tight.

Shaking off their thoughts, Frisk double checked that their pajama bottoms were tucked inside of their boots, knowing that the harsh cold of outside awaited them. Feeling their mother’s hand on their shoulder they returned their focus back up to her.

“I must stay here in case anyone else falls down,” Toriel said as she leaned down to speak on eye level with Frisk. “Be good, won’t you?”

‘I’ll be okay,’ Frisk nodded in understanding. ‘Sans and Papyrus are with me.’

“If you need me though, my child, know that I will be there,” Toriel responded as she hugged the small human.

Frisk returned the warm embrace tightly, giving their mother a smile and nodding again.

Sans watched these interactions, hands in his pockets once again and looking pretty relaxed where he stood. Last night had been…more than he’d ever expected to happen. The romantic meeting in the fallen chamber, the confession, the kisses…her smile and the pun she had expertly made out of his name.

It would be hard to go. But it needed to happen. He had to make sure that he kept his promise. He had to try to make this timeline work.

He waited until Toriel and Frisk were done with their goodbyes before speaking up, stepping close to her and holding out his hand, palm up, “it was really good to see you, tori.”

“It was good to see you too, Sans,” Toriel replied, taking his hand in hers, like she had done the previous night. “I’m sorry I’m not coming along, but…I have this strange feeling in my soul that I’m meant to stay here for now. That probably doesn’t make any sense, does it?”

“hard to know what makes sense with gut feelings, but i’ve learned that they’re usually worth listening to. there’s the future though, right?”

Expression fond again as it had been often over the last few hours, Sans carefully turned Toriel’s hand in his and leaned forward to kiss the back of her hand, winking up at her afterward.

“i ulna want to be with you. but, until i’m back in your terri-tori, i can keep you updated on how things are going.”

“Thank you. I’ll try not to feel too bonely without you,” Toriel said as she bent down to kiss him, ignoring the shocked stares of their audience.

A little surprised, but certainly pleased, Sans returned the kiss, melting inside in the face of her affections. It was crazy how different something like this could make a guy feel. Papyrus’ jaw
dropped and Frisk grinned once they realized what had just happened in front of them.

“…i could definitely get used to this,” Sans half mumbled, almost seeming a little dazed. Damn, it was hard to say goodbye to her.

Frisk gave one last hug to Toriel and received a kiss on their forehead in return. The group waved goodbye (Papyrus waving enthusiastically with both arms) and headed back out into the frigid cold of the path to Snowdin.

As they walked, Frisk got only a minimal amount of snow on their pajama attire thanks to their boots and making sure to step where Papyrus, the current leader of the ragtag bunch, had stepped. They had decided to remain in pajamas to avoid wearing Chara’s clothing.

Sans couldn’t stop grinning, even though he was trying to avoid any potential gazes from both of his companions. He didn’t think twice about it before removing his hoodie and putting it around the kid’s shoulders, making sure they were as warm as possible.

“maybe i should give the kid a shortcut back…how are you feeling?” he asked of Frisk. No way he was letting them get sick again.

‘I’m doing good,’ Frisk replied before grinning mischievously. ‘So are you, apparently.’

The child continued grinning innocently at their statement to Sans as they let their hands go back down to their sides. Giving Frisk a look at first, the shorter of the skeletons paused, faltering a little before it turned into a grin he couldn’t quite help.

Shrugging, Sans didn’t try to hide the blue that came back to his face.

“…heh. yeah…i guess i am.”

The human smiled and caught up to Papyrus, tugging on his hand to get his attention.

‘You said there’s a clothing store?’ they signed.

“YES! WE’RE GETTING CLOSE TO IT NOW, ACTUALLY,” Papyrus replied, leading the group down a path Frisk hadn’t strayed to before.

‘Oh!’ Frisk recognized the structure at the end of the path as the building they could see below the mysterious cave with the locked door. ‘This is a clothes store? I thought it was a house!’

Papyrus raised a brow bone in confusion.

“HUMAN CLOTHING STORES MUST LOOK VERY STRANGE THEN, BECAUSE THIS IS NORMAL!”

Following along with the two, Sans tried to get his skull back into the swing of progressing the timeline and figuring things out. Toriel would be in the back of his mind now no matter what happened, but he had to focus on the here and now so he didn’t end up just popping back there and kissing her again.

“well. it is sort of a house…” Sans commented. He was pretty sure the owners lived here, anyway. “…it’s a house for clothes.”

Frisk shook their head and stepped in. The store was neat and tidy and seemed to be run by a member of the snow bunny monster family.
“let’s see what it has in store for us,” Sans added, following Frisk and Papyrus inside. He grinned at the shop owner in greeting and raised a hand in a lazy wave.

The shop owner waved politely back, looking curiously at Frisk, never having seen a monster like them before. Frisk, pretending not to notice the extra attention, picked up various items of clothing and entered a changing room.

They exited a little while later now wearing a t-shirt with a shooting star that had colors similar to their original outfit over top of a black long sleeved shirt. They had on purple shorts on top of black leggings and yellow boots in a style similar to Papyrus’.

As they stepped out they slipped the coat Sans gave them back on.

“EXCELLENT, HUMAN!” Papyrus applauded. “BUT SOMETHING IS STILL MISSING!”

Frisk looked at him questionably before Papyrus grabbed a red scarf off of a nearby rack and put it around the child’s neck.

“THERE! NOW YOU CAN POSE DRAMATICALLY WITH YOUR SCARF BLOWING IN THE WIND LIKE THE GREAT PAPYRUS! NYEH HEH HEH!!”

“nice touch, papyrus,” Sans grinned, giving them both a thumbs-up in approval. He wondered how many striped shirts Frisk had had to sort through before they found the shirt they’d decided on – the kid’s section was full of them.
He’d been keeping a casual eye on the store owner since they’d gotten there, checking to see if they acted like they were too suspicious. They definitely wouldn’t be the first monster to recognize Frisk as a human down here if they did, but it’d be nice if they didn’t attack out of fear like the rest had.

Looking down at themself to admire their new outfit, Frisk appreciated the fact that monster clothing stores didn’t appear to place tags on their wares. All prices were displayed on a sign near the shopkeeper, much as they were in every other shop Frisk had previously encountered. It was nice that they didn’t have to worry about trimming off price tags and could wear their new clothes straight away.

They liked their t-shirt the best out of the whole outfit, as it seemed to have been made with them in mind. The main colors were basically the same as their striped long sleeve shirt, but the colors coming out of the shooting star meant more to them. The red represented themself, purple was their mother, Toriel, and blue was Sans. The star itself represented Asriel, and Frisk’s desire to save the fallen prince. They were sure they’d figure out a way to save him this time.

Frisk walked over to the checkout counter and pulled out the correct number of gold coins to pay for the attire and politely motioned for the owner to hand them a bag for their pajamas. The owner did so, still looking at Frisk with curiosity. Frisk gave them a kind smile which the owner then returned and he waved goodbye to the group as they left his shop.

Stepping back out of the store with the rest of the group, Sans made sure that the door was shut to keep the chill out of the shop behind them before putting his hands back into his pockets and following Frisk and Papyrus back down the path.

“I’M IMPRESSED!” Papyrus said, looking down at Frisk. “WHERE DID YOU MANAGE TO EARN THAT MUCH GOLD, HUMAN?”

When Papyrus asked his question about the gold, Sans listened a little closer, also curious. Gold definitely wasn’t as rare down here as it was on the surface, but it was still pretty valuable.

Frisk looked slightly embarrassed. How would they go about explaining that they had stalled as long as possible in the ruins to avoid facing Sans’ disappointment when the reset occurred? They had earned enough gold to buy an item from Muffet’s bake sale later on in Hotland for goodness sake.

‘Mom gave me some gold for doing chores around Home and the monsters there would as well,’ they explained.

“AH!” Papyrus nodded understandingly. YOU’RE VERY HELPFUL THEN!”

That made sense, Sans guessed. Along with the absurdly long time it had taken Frisk to exit the ruins this go-around, which he definitely had noticed. He had waited out there in the snow and trees for the duration of their procrastination…watching, wondering, rationalizing. It had been difficult to stay patient, not knowing what was coming.

For now, Sans stayed quiet, lost in his own thoughts…some of them drifting back to the book he had left in his room back in Snowdin. It was something he’d need to talk to the kid about, probably, but not with Papyrus present.

‘Shall we head back?’ Frisk suggested to the skeleton brothers.

“YES! IT IS TIME FOR LUNCH, AFTER ALL!” Papyrus declared.

Frisk wondered if they’d be in for another plate of spaghetti or if they’d actually succeed in trying Grillby’s food this time. Of course, at the mention of “lunch”, Sans was gonna push things towards
Grillby’s, so Frisk had at least a chance of getting lucky.

“lunch sounds good. i could go for an order of burg and some fries right about now,” Sans said, knowing that there was a high probability of Papyrus objecting, but he hadn’t let that keep him from Grillby’s before.

Sure enough, Papyrus made a disgusted face.

“SO MUCH GREASE,” Papyrus said, shaking his head. “YOU TWO CAN GO. I HAVE LEFTOVER SPAGHETTI!”

Frisk managed to just barely hide their relief.

“well. if you get a large order of fries and cover it with ketchup, it’s sort of like spaghetti,” Sans offered unhelpfully.

“I SHALL RESPECTFULLY DECLINE,” Papyrus replied as the trio walked into the brothers’ house in Snowdin.

Frisk put the bag containing their pajamas on the couch and retrieved the coat Sans had previously given them that was lying on the ground next to it. They slipped the coat off Sans loaned them for the journey back to Snowdin and put the other back on. They gave the loaner coat back to Sans when they rejoined him at the front door, which the skeleton immediately put back on. Waving goodbye to Papyrus at work reheating his spaghetti in the kitchen with a blowtorch, Frisk followed Sans out.

Leading the way to Grillby’s, Sans was still fairly quiet, lost in thought. He was distracted. Still thinking about the book, about Toriel, and about the resets. …Those chalk drawings in the ruins.

How could one human child cause…all of this? It was unfathomable, but they had. Splitting their soul, putting Asriel into the position to become Flowey…Chara had ruined everything. Sans understood that a large part of their coldness was the fact that their soul wasn’t whole, but would it even change anything if it was – if they were to fix their soul, like the book had said was possible? He wasn’t sure if he wanted to take the chances that would be necessary to find out.

Frisk tugged on Sans’ sleeve, noticing how quiet and serious he was.

Startled out of his thoughts, Sans jumped a little at the touch, gaze snapping to Frisk before he tried to ease some of the seriousness out of his expression.

“hey, kid. what’s up?” Sans asked.

‘Are you okay?’ Frisk signed. ‘You almost walked past Grillby’s.’

At that, Sans stopped, blinking once and looking over to verify that they had indeed reached – and nearly passed – their destination.

“…oh. yeah, i…was just thinking,” he rolled his shoulders and let out a sigh. “…i didn’t get a chance to tell you before, what with the whole getting sick thing, but the reason i wasn’t there until the end of your ‘battle’ with paps is because i went to see alphys. to see if she’d ever come across any human books on magic.”

Frisk looked curious. Sans had found books on magic then?

‘So what did you find? What did I miss anyway?’ they signed.
What had they missed? Oh. Yeah…there was a lot more than that.

“nothing much.” Sans shrugged. “alphys saw you collapse on one of her cameras and tried to bring us a human medical book to help you out, accidentally picked up undyne on the way…undyne saw you unconscious on the couch and went on a rampage through the house. took me, paps, and alphys defendin’ you to get her to leave.”

Frisk suddenly got the most expressive Sans had ever seen them. They had listened intently at first, then moved on to shock, and then finally crouched on the ground with their hands rubbing through their hair in a “crapcrapcrapwhatamIgonnado” expression.

“woah, hey, kid, it’s alright…” Sans immediately responded, stepping closer to them and crouching down as well to put his hands on their arms, trying to be reassuring. “why’re you so spooked? you’ve gotten past undyne loads of times…”

Frisk looked up at him with terror in their face.

Sans paused, realizing that he had made an accidental (and frankly, terrible in more ways than one) pun by saying “loads of times” there, and he was about to comment on it before Frisk turned that look of terror to him, surprising him into silence.

‘You ever see Undyne the Undying?’ Frisk asked.

Sans’ expression darkened when the human signed that name.

“…this is an entirely different set of circumstances, kid.”

Sure he’d heard of Undyne the Undying. It was the name the surviving monsters always gave her after the fight that ended in her melting death in the bad times, after Alphys had recovered enough to tell people what had happened.

“being yourself, you're never going to get to the point where that happened.”

‘That's not the problem,’ Frisk shook their head in disagreement. ‘You guys protected me. Undyne is undoubtedly pissed. I'll eat my scarf if she hasn’t somehow gained determination from that.’

They paused their signing to look around.

‘…Is it just me, or is the town very empty?’ Frisk asked, looking worried.

“…well. while normally i might encourage you to get a little more fiber in your diet, don’t scarf it down just yet, okay?” Sans said. “it’ll be okay, kid…if she has or she hasn’t, i’ll still help you through it.”

That’s when the first spear slammed into the snow just behind the kid, barely missing them and the fluff of the coat Sans had given them. It was a warning shot – and Undyne probably wouldn’t give them more than this second to react before she filled the human with spears.
Frisk, the moment their soul appeared and before it had a chance to turn green, turned tail and ran past Undyne, hoping to catch her off-guard by running towards danger. They kept running, their hand barely snagging the save point as they ran past Sans’ sentry station at the entrance to Waterfall and they didn’t stop until they reached the tall grass they knew from past experience Undyne wouldn’t destroy.

Luckily for Frisk, their actions did throw Undyne off long enough for them to slip past – and a crazed-angered “NGAAAAAAHHHH!!!!!!” could be heard behind them as she came out of her defensive stance when the kid just ran instead of attacking.

She took off after them, unpatched eye glinted behind her helm as she went – now fully armored instead of in casual wear like she had been on her previous house visit. She had gotten tired of waiting. Tired of watching everyone continue to be trapped and suffering!! And she wasn’t going to let this BRAT delay their freedom anymore.

While good for defense, Undyne’s armor wasn’t so great for speed. She pursued Frisk out of Snowdin and past Sans’ sentry station, sure that she was catching up with the human before…damn it. Not the grass.

Coming to a stop near the edge of where the offending plants started popping up, Undyne ground her teeth. Where the hell had they gone?! In the grass? Past the grass, further down the path?!

“HUMAN!!” the Captain of the Royal Guard bellowed as she stepped into the mess of seaweed, stalking through it toward the other side as she looked around her. “YOU’RE NOT GOING TO GET AWAY WITH THIS!! I WILL find you…and when I do…you’re DEAD!!”

Frisk could hear Undyne come closer and trembled in fear, not knowing how they’d manage to get away. The spear attack Undyne had launched at them when she regained her senses chasing them was an attack pattern Frisk recognized Chara facing in the fight against Undyne the Undying. The pacifist human had never dealt with these types of attacks before; it’d always been Chara in their unrelenting attack as Frisk tried to look away from the horror of the situation. Seeing Undyne melt into nothing…

This timeline had suddenly become a whole lot more deadly.

Someone help, please.

Undyne came closer, her magic crackling through the air, and a low, menacing growl heard in her voice as she continued, “You’re NOT getting away from me…DAMN you.”

Through the gaps in the grass, Frisk could see several spears conjured, suspended in the air above Undyne, ready to rain down on them the second she caught a glimpse. Dodging was unlikely.

She was almost on top of them – one step, two more…her armored boot was an inch from crushing their hand–

That’s when rustling in the grass near the edge of the patch caught her attention and she veered a little, spears flying and sinking into the wall and the ground as the darkened shape of a blue-coated
figure with the hood up darted out of the grass and into the darkness further down the path, causing her to chase after them while leaving the actual human shivering in the seaweed.

Frisk, not really sure what had happened, took advantage of Undyne leaving and ran out of the grass, touching the next save point, assembled the bridge flowers at breakneck speed, and hid in the bench area with the abandoned quiche.

As they lay under the bench with the hood of their blue coat over their head, they prayed Undyne was unaware of this location.

There was a commotion – the sound of more spears flying, Undyne growling out threats and obscenities, but it died down fairly quickly as she got further away and realized she’d lost them.

It was quiet, for a while…nothing but the sound of flowing water and the whispering of the echo flower next to the bench.

Of course, quiet was a thing made to be broken and Frisk had been followed.

“Hey!” a voice called out from less than a foot away. “Ha ha…what are you doing hiding under there, dude? You okay?”

Frisk recognized that voice; it was the little monster kid. They slowly got up off the ground to look at them, a worried expression still on their face as they slipped their hood off of their head.

Watching them get up, the monster kid beamed with excitement, seeming barely able to contain themself.

“Oh maaaaaaan, did you see Undyne?? She was like…SO COOL!! I mean, I don’t know what she was yelling about, but you saw her too, right?? I saw you run by and then Undyne came through and…oh man, I’ve never been that close to her before!!” Pausing, the kid tilted their head, eyeing Frisk.

“…Hey, what are you? Some sort of skeleton monster?” There was another pause, then their expression turned a little nervous. “…Are you an adult? Ha ha, I…I’m allowed to play out here…”

Frisk shook their head and raised their right hand, palm flat towards the ground, from their stomach up to chest height.

‘I’m a kid.’

Letting out a breath of relief, the kid smiled wide, seeming much more comfortable with that revelation.

“Awesome! Yeah, so! You saw her, right? I wonder who that person was who jumped out of the grass before…maybe a bad guy?! She was chasing them like…well, like she was chasing you before. Weird! Maybe she thought you were them?”

Frisk looked alarmed putting two and two together.

‘Did you see what happened to the other person?!!’ they signed quickly.

“Huh?” The kid looked surprised at the intensity of Frisk’s signing. “No, they were going too fast, I couldn’t keep up…Why?”

Sans!!
Frisk looked ready to run off to search for him, fearing the worst.

Confused, and looking more concerned from Frisk’s reaction, the monster kid fidgeted by shuffling their feet.

“Are you okay…?” they asked.

‘That’s my da–’ Frisk stopped mid-tap on their wrists and wrapped the fingers of their right hand around their left and shook them slightly up and down instead**, ‘friend Undyne went after. She’s after the wrong person!’

“Your friend? That…that can’t…Undyne would never hurt an innocent person…”

‘I have to find them!’ Frisk signed frantically.

“H-hey, no worries! If you’re looking for Undyne I’ll help you! Let’s go!”

Taking off, the monster kid left the quiche room. Confused and worried or not, they’d take any chance to see Undyne.

Frisk thought they were panicked before, but the thought of them losing Sans again brought a new level of panic they’d never felt before.

_Sans! Please! Don’t die!!_

They ran their way through the wishing room and past the tablets detailing monster history, hoping they’d find some indication of what had happened to him.

_Dad!!_

There was no sign of him. At least not as far as Frisk could see… The monster kid tried to keep up with them but got left behind, tripping as they were prone to doing – it wouldn’t phase them, but it’d be a little while before they met up with their new friend again.

It was as quiet in that area of the Underground as it had ever been.

Frisk bent over, putting their hands on their knees, out of breath. A small frustrated noise escaped them as they felt tears come to their eyes.

_Dad…dad…Sans…where are you…?!

“kid?” came a familiar voice out of the darkness that Frisk had been calling for mentally, the reality of it backed by the sound of footsteps approaching. “how’d you get clear up this way…?”

Slowing down partway to them, Sans took a second to catch his own breath, seeming pretty tired himself, and pretty clueless about Frisk’s concern.

The child immediately ran over to him and clung tightly to the skeleton, tears coming down their face.
“wha–” Regaining his almost lost balance from Frisk’s running hug, Sans automatically put his arms around the human in return, hugging them back. “hey, what happened? she didn’t find you again yet, did she?”

Frisk stepped back and wiped their eyes with their coat sleeves so they could sign.

‘I thought Undyne got you. When I realized what you did, I couldn’t find you anywhere…’

“aww, kid…” Sans’ expression turned apologetic at the sight of their tears and the explanation. “after i lost undyne i backtracked to find you again, but i couldn’t figure out where you’d gone either. i thought about what you said about her seein’ us helping you and figured it’d be better to do it discreetly until she warms up to you.”

Frisk gave him another hug before taking a look at their surroundings and paled a bit. They were on the wooden platforms Undyne always chased them on.

Sans returned the second hug as well, gently rubbing the kid’s back.

“it’s okay. we’ll still figure this out. you’re gonna be okay.”

Frisk looked around for any indication of the usual appearance of Undyne in the area. There was no sign of her yet, but the threat hung in the air. That could change at any moment.

“So…how do you want to do this?” Sans asked. “do you want to go back to snowdin for now, or continue forward? it’s only a matter of time before she finds you again out here…”

Reaching up, Sans used a boney hand to wipe a little more of the wet from the kid’s face. He knew that Frisk was more mature than their physical form would suggest – they’d been through a lot of
 resets too. Sans would go with their decision and then help them through.

‘I think…we need to get out of here. Quick,’ Frisk signed, taking note of their current location.

Nodding, Sans acted immediately – wrapping his arms around the kid again before picking them up and vanishing back to Snowdin. With a flash of blackness, Waterfall faded out and traded its space for Sans’ room. Stepping over, the skeleton set Frisk on the edge of his mattress before straightening up again tiredly.

“undyne doesn’t know i played decoy, so i don’t think she’ll be back to look in snowdin again. you should be okay here again for a while.”

Frisk breathed a sigh of relief.

‘Thank you, Sans,’ they signed, as the sound of a stomach growling filled the air and Frisk’s cheeks turned slightly pink in response. ‘Lunchtime,’ Frisk explained, an amused smile coming to their face.

Taking the hint, Sans led the way back downstairs and Frisk followed him. As they headed down, Frisk spotted a note next to Sans’ pet rock and walked over to it.

I AM DOING IMPORTANT ROYAL GUARD TRAINING IN THE FOREST. I SHALL RETURN LATER!

– PAPYRUS

Wandering over to the kid and the note, Sans read it over their shoulder, a confused frown forming on his face, “important royal guard training…that’s new.”

Frisk frowned a moment and shrugged, not sure what to make of it either. Their stomach growled again, interrupting both Frisk’s and Sans’ thoughts.

“…i’ll check on him after we take care of that monster in your belly,” Sans teased, grinning at Frisk before walking to the front door and opening it…peeking outside suspiciously for a moment.

Once he was satisfied that the coast was clear and there were no angry fish ladies in the area, he stepped out into the snow and started toward Grillby’s for the second time that day. Hopefully they’d actually make it inside this time.

Chapter End Notes

** (skyechan) As our story takes place assuming the Underground is beneath Ireland, Frisk isn't speaking using ASL. Originally when I wrote Frisk's use of sign language during our RPs I mistakenly kept referring to ASL signs, in order to add more depth to my writing, not really thinking about the fact that Ireland would have its own sign language. (I should also probably point out that I do not know either language, although I'm interested in learning ASL.) Upon updating the writing for the purposes of making the RP into a story format, I researched Irish Sign Language (ISL) and figured out what the few signs I'd described would look like in ISL. Some of the signs appear to be similar ("Thank you" and "child" are either identical or close to it), but "father" and "friend" for example are quite different. "Father" or "dad" in ASL is your thumb against your forehead but in ISL it's your thumbs on top of your index fingers with both hands
and tapping your right wrist on top of the left. "Friend" in ASL is your two index fingers wrapping around each other (like they're hugging), but in ISL one hand wraps around the top of the other and gives it a small handshake. It was interesting to research this and I hope the added descriptions help add to the story!
Let's Have a Blast!

Frisk walked happily alongside Sans on their brief walk to Grillby’s, relieved to be toasty warm in their new outfit ensemble that reminded them of their new family comprised of monsters.

“so, as i was saying before, i went to see alphys to see if she had any books that might help us,” Sans said as they trudged through the snow, stopping to get the door for the kid once they had reached their destination, “and there was actually a book that talks about what you mentioned before.”

Frisk tilted their head, recalling their conversation, ‘About horcruxes?’

“yeah. that and lots of other stuff i didn’t like the sound of.”

Frisk wasn’t sure how to respond and stepped into Grillby’s, smiling a little as they saw recognizable faces. The warmth was immediate – full and welcoming and settling around them like the glow from a hearth when they got inside, door closing out the cold behind them.

Upon seeing Sans, several of the bar’s patrons raised their hands to wave over at the two, calling out various greetings to the place’s most regular skeleton. He grinned at them all, sauntering up to the counter.

“hey guys. hey grillbz,” Sans greeted, looking back toward the human afterward, “what are you in the mood for? burgers and fries?”

Frisk nodded enthusiastically before checking their seat at the bar for any whoopee cushions…just in case.

There was no whoopee cushion this time, but Sans looked amused that they’d checked. He sat at his own stool and grinned at Grillby.

“we’ll have two orders of burg and fries,” Sans said, indicating the number with his fingers.

Nodding, Grillby set down the glass he was cleaning and headed toward the mysterious back room past the fire escape.

Frisk turned in their chair so they could sign to Sans, ‘The only things I know about horcruxes are what I learned from my dad…which isn’t much at all. Just that they exist, and are pieces of a person’s soul.’

“It’s…pretty dark stuff,” Sans frowned, lowering his voice, “from what i read, the more times you split your soul, the more you lose yourself. i don’t know what the other kid was trying to accomplish with doing what they did, but it sounds like they pretty much destroyed themselves.”

Frisk wasn’t sure how to answer Sans. Chara had possessed them several times to be sure, but Frisk wasn’t exactly in a position to explain what the child’s motives were for doing anything, let alone something in the past involving dark wizardry. Maybe Chara just wanted to exist forever, or thought that if they and Asriel’s plan failed that a horcrux would be a backup plan to try.

But wait, hadn’t Asriel said something about Chara hating humanity? The ability to make horcruxes meant that Chara was actually magic, and quite powerful too. Maybe they were from one of those pureblood families Frisk’s dad mentioned existing during the time of Voldemort, who would have stopped at nothing to get rid of muggles and their supporters. The human decided to share their thoughts with Sans.
Asriel said Chara hated humanity. Maybe the horcruxes were a failsafe in case their plan failed when they went to go get souls to break the barrier. Asriel said he wanted to break the barrier, but Chara seemed to want to attack the town. On purpose.

Sans watched the kid’s hands as they signed, pausing after they were done to say thanks to Grillby as the fire monster returned with their burgers and fries, setting them on the counter in front of the two along with a large bottle of ketchup before going back to his general barkeep duties.

Picking up a fry, Sans seemed to be mulling this information over.

“…well. I’m not surprised about that. That chara-cter’s been all violence every time I’ve met them.”

Chara wanted to attack the humans…horcruxes…pausing, Sans’ expression darkened a little again as he thought of something. By killing the humans if they’d succeeded, had Chara been planning on splitting their soul again, then join with Asriel’s? That would have been a mess.

Frisk finally took a bite of their burger and they practically had stars in their eyes. It was the best burger they’d ever had. An extraordinary feat, considering Frisk was pretty positive that the meat was probably compressed “water sausages” put into a patty form, or something similar to that nature.

Sans watched the kid take their bite, grinning with a chuckle at their reaction.

“pretty good, huh? grillby uses his own recipe, but he won’t tell me what it is,” Sans said, looking over towards Grillby.

Picking up a glass to clean while somehow not burning the cloth he was using, Grillby tilted his head toward Sans to indicate that he’d heard that, but didn’t comment.

‘Worth the wait,’ Frisk signed, indicating the previous timelines.

“I’m surprised you’ve never just…picked up the burger and eaten it.太 concerned about doing things the way they happened the first time?” Sans raised a brow bone, picking up his own burger and taking a bite.

‘Usually by the time our conversation is done it’s too cold. So I just move on and eat cinnamon bunnies,’ Frisk shrugged. They didn’t bother mentioning the other timelines.

Truthfully, Sans had figured cold burgers served the kid right, all those times he’d had to pretend he didn’t know about the resets and had just gone through the motions. Now, though, knowing what he did about Chara being the cause, he felt sympathy for the human. Having Grillby’s delectable greasy foods dangled in front of them, only to let it get cold while they waited for him to finish talking…it was pretty cruel.

“glad we fixed that this time.”

Frisk nodded in agreement, a smudge of ketchup leftover on their cheek, the only remnant of their food.

“you missed some,” Sans commented upon seeing the ketchup smudge on the kid’s face, dumping large amounts of the stuff onto his own fries before beginning to devour them.

Frisk wiped the condiment off their face with a finger before licking it off, pondering asking Sans how he got into the habit of drinking the stuff, but deciding not to in the end.

Question unasked, Sans had simply continued to devour his “ketchup-fries spaghetti”, pausing to pay
attention when he noticed Frisk signing again.

‘Undyne was using attacks I normally don’t see,’ Frisk signed, looking at Sans.

“Well, yeah. She’s...pretty riled up,” Sans agreed. “We’re gonna have to step lightly.”

Frisk nodded, thinking back to the times they were forced to watch Chara fight Undyne the Undying in the bad timelines where their body was not theirs to control. Unlike Chara though, Frisk’s “health points” were far fewer...and even less so now. Frisk was relieved that no one so far thought to run a proper CHECK on them, otherwise they’d know what the timeline resets had done to them.

Done with his fries, Sans took a swig of what was left of the ketchup bottle, looking content. Well...as far as food went. The topic of Undyne had him concerned. He knew that no matter what, the kid would just come back if she got them, but...dying wasn’t a pleasant thing. At least not in his experience. He didn’t want Frisk to get hurt any more.

“I know you’ll be okay, kid,” Sans said, “You’re a pro at dodging things, and I’m still not gonna leave you to face her alone. I’m sure it’ll turn out okay.”

Frisk decided not to point out that it was Chara dodging all those times and not them. They nodded anyway so as to not worry Sans.

‘You wanted to check on Papyrus?’ Frisk reminded.

Shifting, Sans turned on the bar stool to get to his feet, taking a moment to pay Grillby rather than putting it on his tab (much to the fire monster’s surprise).

“Yeah. I know the places he usually goes to in the forest so I’ve got an idea where he could be.”

‘Thank you,’ Frisk signed to Grillby. ‘It was delicious.’

Grillby set down the glass he had been cleaning, nodding to Frisk in acknowledgement as the bird monster lounging against the counter piped up with a, “He says he knows.”

Of course, Grillby hadn’t actually said anything, but he didn’t seem to mind regardless.

Frisk hopped off their own bar stool and stuck their hands in their coat pockets as they followed Sans, who said his goodbyes to everyone (and paused to give each of the guard dogs a pat on the head) on his way to the door.

They didn’t have to disturb Papyrus’ training, what it was. Sans just...wanted to check. Something about him being off in the forest on his own always bothered him. ...No. It hadn’t always. Just after Flowey started talking to him.

The human followed the shorter skeleton to the snowy forest. As they got closer to where Sans thought Papyrus might be, Frisk’s red soul materialized in front of them. They were surprised at first, but then wrote it off as an impulse reaction to being in the vicinity of Papyrus’ training.

Thinking that was odd as well, but hoping it wasn’t caused by anything serious, Sans turned his attention back to the surrounding forest, listening and feeling for magic. He didn’t want to bother Papyrus if they didn’t need to, but there was still a nagging in the back of his mind. He needed to make sure that Papyrus was okay.

Frisk suddenly froze in place, hearing a sound they only ever heard when Chara had control of their body. They instinctively ducked in the nick of time as a blast of magic struck past the tree near them.
“HUMAN! I’M SO SORRY! ARE YOU ALRIGHT?!” Papyrus shouted as he ran out through the snow and underlying bushes to meet up with Frisk and Sans.

Eye sockets wide for a second before he seemed to settle again, Sans looked from the singed tree to Frisk, and then to Papyrus.

“...that was close. that’s a pretty good attack, bro.”

Frisk stood up as their trembling knees revealed the extent of their shock.

‘Your special attack...is a blaster,’ they signed.

“ERHM, YES?” Papyrus replied, confused.

It was fortunate for Frisk that the little white dog had stolen the attack all of the times before. Sans had known this, but he’d never felt the need to mention it.

“now you know why he always has such a blast with training,” Sans joked.

The human stared blankly as Papyrus just posed dramatically.

“IGNORING MY BROTHER’S PUN, YES! THAT WAS MY SPECIAL ATTACK! YOU FINALLY GOT TO SEE IT! HOW LUCKY FOR YOU!!”

“It was pretty awesome, paps,” Sans spoke when Frisk didn’t, looking sideways at the kid’s blank expression afterward.

Yeah. The blasters were definitely overkill against the pacifist. But...were they okay?
“...uh...kid...that did miss you...didn’t it?”

“LET’S SEE!” Papyrus exclaimed, running a CHECK on Frisk.

_Frisk_  _0ATK  5DEF_

_10 HP_

_The eighth human to fall into the Underground._

“only ten hp...?” Sans frowned, feeling the stats in whatever weird, magical way the monsters of the Underground were able to. “that’s not right. should be twenty.”

“IT SAYS THEY ONLY HAVE TEN OUT OF A MAX OF TEN,” Papyrus said with certainty.

Frisk clearly avoided looking the skelebros in the eyes as they deliberated over the state of the human’s hp.

“...huh,” Sans said, raising a brow bone.

That definitely wasn’t right. How could he discuss it in front of Papyrus though? Stepping closer to Frisk, Sans ran his own CHECK, feeling the answer confirmed, along with their LV1 and 0XP status. Those were normal for actual Frisk, but...

“...weird. you okay, kid?” Sans asked, looking at them.

Frisk looked away from his gaze. It wasn’t something to discuss right now.

Papyrus looked between the human and his brother, a little unnerved by the awkward silence and deciding to break it, “ANYWAY, MY TRAINING IS DONE FOR TODAY. TIME TO GO HOME.”

Deciding he’ll prod Frisk about it later despite his current concern, Sans put his hands into his pockets and looked to his brother.

“sorry we sorta interrupted your last blast there, bro.”

Papyrus waved it off.

“IT’S ALRIGHT. OH! IT’S TIME FOR METTATON’S SHOW! SEE YOU LATER!!” the taller skeleton exclaimed, rushing back off to their house in Snowdin, leaving Frisk standing alone with Sans.

“...oh. ok,” Sans blinked, response having come far too late for Papyrus to have heard it as he stood there. He turned his head to look at Frisk again, “guess it’s a new episode.”

Frisk didn’t reply and instead plopped down on the ground, hugging their knees to their chest. They rested their back against the tree behind them.

‘I...never knew he could do that too.’

“yep. us skeleton monsters are pretty powerful, you know,” Sans responded, leaning against a different tree. He was looking around the area; eyeing the ground and looking at the tracks. Looking for any signs of vines or impressions in the snow left by them.

‘He doesn’t leave any trace behind, you know,’ Frisk signed to Sans. Well, that was except for when
Flowey solved the puzzles for Chara, but that was in a different timeline.

Pausing, Sans looked back at Frisk, surprised that they knew what he was doing.

“...yeah. I’ve found him before though.”

‘Yeah. I know,’ they replied, hugging their knees again, waiting for the inevitable question about their hp.

Taking in a deep breath, Sans shifted away from the tree and stepped in front of Frisk, crouching down in front of them as he let it out. It really was inevitable.

“...frisk. what happened? why’s your hp so low?” Sans asked.

The humans hands rose off of their legs as they began signing.

‘The first time it dropped, I didn’t think much about it. I thought it was a fluke. ...Then it kept falling,’ They signed slowly, ‘Every time I see you die, part of me goes along with it when I reset.’

“...oh, kid...” Sans breathed out, frown visible on his face. “I had no idea it was damaging you to reset...”

Every time they saw him die. In other words, every time they were forced to murder him with their own hands. Having a thought he really didn’t like, Sans watched the kid, concerned.

“...do you feel any different? physically or emotionally, since it’s gone down?”

‘I’m...worried,’ Frisk looked up at Sans who was still kneeling in front of them, ‘Unless we get rid of Chara, they can come back and...do those terrible things. Chara I think knows that part of me goes when I reset after them. ...What will happen if eventually there’s nothing left for me to reset with?’

“Then you’ll die and you’ll die and you’ll die!” cackled a voice from nearby, who had been watching the conversation.

Upon hearing that voice, Sans’ gaze snapped toward the direction it was coming from, left eye flaring with magic as he shifted back into a standing position – the skeleton equivalent of adrenaline spreading through his bones.

“not if i can help it,” he stated coldly.

The voice seemed to be coming from behind Sans, somewhere in the forest. Frisk stood up quickly, moving closer to Sans and looking around, concerned.

“So, Smiley Trashbag has come to play! How very interesting! Of course, your dear brother already told me about everything,” the voice continued to cackle.

On alert, Sans’ eye sockets narrowed even as his mouth formed into a tight grin, watching for any sign of movement in the snow.

“everything, huh? what’s interesting about that to you?”

“Oh, nothing in particular. But you’ve caused me enough grief. Perhaps I should return the favor?” the voice responded.

A blanket seemed to float down from the treetops. Frisk picked it up as it landed on the soft snow, the faint smell of cinnamon wafting upwards. It was the blanket Sans had used when he was at
Confused for a split second, Sans looked at the blanket, realization dawning. Turning his gaze upwards, halfway expecting to see Toriel suspended from vines or something (it wouldn’t be the first time), Sans scanned the branches before looking back at the snow.

“wow. i’ve caused you grief and you wanna return the favor? that’s rich. you seem to have forgotten why i’m against you to begin with.”

“Oh right. I KILLED your brother before. Clumsy me! Oh well! In this world, it’s KILL or BE KILLED! So what’s wrong with having a little fun?”

“everything, if it involves hurting people,” Sans stated coolly, holding a hand out toward Frisk. “but i know that doesn’t matter to you the way you are now.”

Frisk grabbed a hold of Sans’ extended hand with a great deal of worry on their face. The way Flowey emphasized the word “fun” was of great concern to them. What had he done? Was their mother in danger?

Not wanting to waste his time on the dumb flower anymore, Sans focused on the ruins, concern for Toriel rising in his soul as he vanished – reappearing with Frisk outside of the door to the ruins.

The door was wide open; practically an invitation.

Hoping the worry was just his paranoia, Sans hesitated before stepping closer to the door, trying to see beyond the dark archway. This looked like a trap, but...he had to find her.

A cry of pain rang out from within the darkness beyond the archway.

That was it. Knowing he was being stupid, Sans moved through the doorway, looking around to try and find the source. Frisk waited outside, concerned by what Flowey had said still.

What’s wrong with having a little fun?

Frisk’s eyes widened when they realized the hidden meaning too late. During one of their resets they had encountered something that looked a bit like a jumbled mess of words and numbers, but one thing they remembered was the word “fun” being thrown in the mix. The child clapped their hands together in an effort to make a sound to get Sans to turn around in time, but the gray doors slammed shut.
Sans had turned – only catching a glimpse of Frisk back on the outside before he was shut in, blackness enveloping everything. On edge, Sans turned back the way he had been facing, gaze darting around the room. What...this didn’t seem like...it should...

A voice echoed within the darkness.

“You are stronger than I thought...Listen to me, small one...”

Part of the nothingness lit up, revealing a scene of a defeated Toriel, clutching the front of her dress, kneeled on the ground before the human, who looked horrified at what had happened.

Hearing the voice, Sans turned, gaze focusing on the scene before him as he held out a hand toward it.

“no, tori...”

This...it was off. It looked real, but this didn’t feel right. It didn’t make any sense. Frisk was outside. What...was this?

As Toriel’s body and soul faded into dust, Frisk collapsed to the ground, sobbing. It was then that a “menu” began floating in front of them.

Continue ♥ Reset

Brow bone furrowing, Sans stepped a little closer to the scene, staring at those words even as his vision blurred and he swallowed, watching this happen. He had never seen Toriel turn to dust before...and seeing it...definitely hurt. It ached. Even though there was some sort of disconnect, watching this. It might have been real, but it wasn’t happening right then. Frisk was still wearing their old outfit.

Was this memories somehow?

The Frisk in the memory reached out to “Reset” and the scene vanished.

“If you truly wish to leave the ruins...I will not stop you. However, when you leave...Please do not come back. I hope you understand.”


“Goodbye, my child.”

The ache subsided a bit, but it was still there, the strange emptiness around Sans pressing in as he continued to watch. This wasn’t the room he had meant to enter.

This felt...like the void.

Other scenes appeared. Sans introducing himself to Frisk. Frisk solving Papyrus’ puzzles. Going on a pretend date. Running from Undyne. Befriending Undyne. Struggling at Mettaton’s quiz and subsequent trials, only for Alphys to help...and then Mettaton to reveal it was all pretend. Finally...Frisk, hearing the story of Asriel and Chara from the monsters in New Home.

After hearing the sad tale, and facing Sans’ judgment, Frisk slowly stepped into Asgore’s throne
room and noted the distraught expression upon the monster king’s face. Neither party wanted to do this.

Sans watched all of this pass, fixated on it all. It was filling in gaps...answering a few questions, curiosities...Why was he seeing this? Distracted, Sans wondered if the current Frisk was okay, standing back outside of the door to the ruins. How far away was he from them now?

“Human...It was nice to meet you. Goodbye.”

Frisk looked shocked as Asgore’s trident slammed down in front of them. The sound of something breaking filled the darkness, but Sans couldn’t see what it was. The human appeared to plead with Asgore not to fight, but to no avail. The inevitable happened, and Frisk was struck down.

There was always so much blood, any time that Frisk died...whether it was their soul or Chara’s will controlling their body. It was always short lived until they reloaded, but it was messy. Feeling sick, Sans watched...remembering all of the times he had killed them. How many times he had seen them limp and lifeless. Bones sticking through their body... How many times he had felt the stickiness of the red life force in between his fingers on the deaths where they’d gotten too close to him...that coppery metallic smell in the air.

Pushing it down, uneasy, Sans continued to watch. Seeing what they’d been through. Watching from the void.

A reload occurred and Frisk realized they had no choice but to FIGHT. Using an old gardening knife they had picked up inside New Home, Frisk whittled away at Asgore’s hp, dodging his attacks as best as they could. A strangled yelping noise escaped them when Asgore’s flames singed their body.

As they got Asgore down to his last bit of health, they suddenly threw the knife down in frustration, once again refusing to FIGHT.

“After all I have done to hurt you...You would rather stay down here and suffer...Than live happily on the surface?”

Asgore told Frisk about how he and Toriel would take care of them. Frisk looked happy until they let out a small noise when they saw Asgore’s soul shatter from a surprise attack by Flowey.

“You IDIOT! You haven’t learned a thing! In this world...”

Frisk’s eyes looked up in horror as Flowey’s face contorted and twisted as the six human souls circled around him.

“It’s KILL or BE KILLED!”

The scene went black. When it finally reappeared, Frisk seemed to be lost in an area similar to Sans.

Oh, no.

Eye sockets wide as he watched this, a million thoughts going through his head, Sans frowned as the tension hung in the blackness. He remembered Frisk saying that Flowey had gotten a hold of the human souls, turned back into Asriel, and broken the barrier, but that had been after everyone had gotten strung up by vines. That hadn’t happened here yet. So what was this?

Frisk stepped forward in the darkness, reaching a save point. But the menu that appeared before Frisk suddenly shattered in a million pieces, revealing a larger than life version of Flowey’s face.
“Howdy! It’s me, FLOWEY the FLOWER! I owe you a HUGE thanks. You really did a number on that old fool. Without you, I NEVER could have gotten past him. But now, with YOUR help...He’s DEAD.”

Frisk shook their head in dismay. This wasn’t their fault, it wasn’t!

“And I’VE got the human SOULS!” Flowey cackled loudly. “Boy! I’ve been empty for so long...It feels great to have a SOUL inside me again. Mmm, I can feel them wriggling...”

Frisk looked like they were going to be sick.

“Awww, you’re feeling left out, aren’t you? Well, that’s just perfect. After all, I only have six souls. I still need one more...Before I become GOD. And then, with my newfound powers...Monsters. Humans. Everyone. I’ll show them all the REAL meaning of this world."

Flowey told Frisk about how he erased their “save file” and how he would tear the human to bloody pieces, over, and over again.

Frisk had heard enough. Flowey had to be stopped, and stopped NOW. They stepped forward, with determination in their expression.

“You...really are an IDIOT,” Flowey declared.

This was...This was all new. Sans had never seen this before. Staring, transfixed, he continued to watch. He was impressed with the kid’s courage. A monster with six human souls was...unfathomable in power.

Frisk’s soul emerged as they held onto the worn knife in front of them, knowing a fight was inevitable. But...they hadn’t expected what happened next.

The six human souls appeared, scattered, and faded away as a dark, looming, monstrous shadow appeared seemingly from up above. Frisk seemed to lose their composure a bit, stepping back slightly.

A TV screen with a smiley face turned on. It grinned down at the human, its eyes opening further to reveal red.

The scene finally lit up and Frisk was frozen in place, with the most frightened expression Sans had ever seen, and the most evil laughter he’d ever heard filled up the entire void, as Flowey’s new form revealed itself, absolutely grotesque and horrifying.

Even though Sans knew this...thing wasn’t in his current space, he was incredibly disturbed. He stared, taken aback, focused on the abomination before Frisk. H-how...how had the kid defeated this...?

“...holy hell, kid...” Sans muttered into the darkness.

The locket Frisk wore around their neck suddenly glinted with a small amount of light. Chara’s form floated behind them, similar to how Frisk depicted themself floating behind Chara in their chalk drawing.

Frisk dodged Flowey’s wild attacks somehow and eventually received help from the six human souls after reaching out to them.

The other humans’ faces and appearances could not be seen, but the items belonging to them could.
They were armed with an assortment of objects. A fake knife and ribbon, a boxing glove and bandanna, ballet shoes and a tutu, a notebook and glasses, a frying pan and apron, and finally a toy gun and a cowboy hat. They joined Chara and floated behind Frisk, offering them aid as they attacked and then defeated Flowey.

Woah. So the other souls...they were still conscious enough to rebel. This was all...a lot to take in. He’d seen so much, but he hadn’t had a clue about any of this. Damn. Sans was glad Flowey had never gotten the souls before Frisk had come to the Underground.

Flowey returned back to his usual size and appeared beaten. Frisk stood before him, Chara floating behind, but the other souls had disappeared.

The child offered Flowey MERCY, but he refused. Again they tried, but the flower refused again. They kept trying, but then Flowey threatened to attack everything and everyone.

Upon this remark, something changed. Frisk’s eyes turned red. The locket glinted and suddenly Frisk was now the one floating and Chara took control.

Frisk looked alarmed by this outcome, looking down at their body. They seemed almost transparent.

Chara raised the worn knife.

‘No, don’t!’ Frisk tried to stop Chara, but nothing happened, and Chara’s attack struck the flower down.

“I knew you had it in you!” Flowey laughed weakly as his face slowly disappeared and his vessel returned to being a regular golden flower.

Frisk openly wept as they held their head in their hands, distraught by the outcome. Chara grinned as “Continue” and “Reset” appeared in front of them and they gleefully chose “Reset”.

“AMAZING, ISN’T IT? THAT TWIST ENDING ALWAYS SURPRISES ME STILL,” a voice said aloud, sounding very...unique. Sign language hands and symbols floated in the air in the void, but were translated and voice aloud, seemingly by no one.

Jumping, Sans turned his head in what he thought was the direction of the voice, suddenly alert again as something seemed to be in his actual space. Any thoughts he had about what had happened in the scene were pushed to the backburner of his mind.

“yeah...it’s...something,” Sans responded, looking around more. Something was familiar...but off.

A figure approached him from the darkness. Two cracks upon their face, above and below their eyes, and a long flowing black cloak.

The figure’s sign language and symbols appeared and were voiced aloud as he moved his hands.

“HELLO...SANS.”
Once he appeared, Sans stared, taking in the sight of the figure and how he had changed from his memory of so long ago. There were scars above and below his eyesockets and his skull barely resembled one anymore. It was almost like he was wearing a mask. The lab coat he had worn had long since turned black, from the accident or from a side effect of the void, Sans wasn’t sure. It was like a shroud of darkness covering the monster entirely. The younger skeleton couldn’t respond at first, gaze fixed on the figure before him.

In the times he’d caught glimpses of him since the accident, they’d never been able to communicate. Sans had questions.

“...it’s...been a long time...dad.”

How corporeal was he? What exactly had happened? ...Was this even real and happening now, or was it a memory? Stepping forward, Sans reached for the doctor, wanting to verify that he was actually, physically there.

Doctor W.D. Gaster was indeed there, and touched Sans’ hand with his own. He looked worse for wear thanks to the accident that knocked him into the Core, his creation, and as a result, ended up in the void. It was incredible that he still existed at all.

“IT IS GOOD TO SEE YOU, MY SON. I AM GLAD YOU SURVIVED WITH ONLY MINOR SIDE EFFECTS,” Gaster signed as the disembodied voice from earlier spoke aloud, referencing Sans’ ability to remember things others simply could not.

Unable to restrain himself, Sans stepped forward more to hug Gaster, emotions flooding in the second he confirmed that he was real and actually there. It wasn’t right, what had happened to Gaster. He’d only been trying to help everyone...and...everyone had forgotten him.

Gaster’s arms wrapped around his son, returning the hug. How many years had passed on the outside? The doctor’s sense of time was null due to the effects of the void. He wasn’t sure entirely how Sans got in, but he was glad to be able to see him in person again.

“it’s good to see you too...damn, i...mean, i’ve seen you, but you’ve never been fully there,” Sans looked up at the taller skeleton with moisture in his eye sockets. “what happened to you? how are you still...here?”

“I AM NOT CERTAIN MYSELF. AS I FELL INTO THE CORE, A SPACE IN THE VOID OPENED AND I FELT MYSELF FALL THROUGH. ACCORDING TO ALL LAWS OF SCIENCE, I SHOULDN’T STILL EXIST. MY SOUL SOMEHOW PIECED BACK TOGETHER IN THIS EXPANSE OF NOTHINGNESS AND I HAVE BEEN STUCK HERE EVER SINCE,” Gaster turned to look at a scene that had just appeared next to them. “UNABLE TO DO ANYTHING, EXCEPT WATCH.”

The scene was one Sans had never known about, or at least, was unable to remember, despite his good memory. Frisk was standing in a void-like space with Papyrus and Sans opposite them, but the brothers’ faces were obscured.

“I MUST CAPTURE A HUMAN! THEN EVERYONE WILL...” void Papyrus’ voice trailed off.

“just give up. i did. why even try? you’ll never see ‘em again,” void Sans said aloud.
Hearing those words from his own mouth, in his own wavering voice, Sans froze, disturbed. It was true. He had given up – he’d given up so completely that for a few of the Flowey resets, he barely even left his room. It was his brother that pressed him to even live at all, during those times. He had given up on everything...except for Papyrus.

Frisk had a determined look on their face, focusing on void Sans, before smiling and signing a joke and then asking void Papyrus about a recipe for spaghetti. The skeletons returned to normal.

“NO! WAIT! YOU’RE MY FRIEND! I COULD NEVER CAPTURE YOU!”

“nah, i’m rootin’ for ya, kid.”

The kid had heard him say all that? He’d been so vulnerable there...so raw. Frowning, Sans shook his head lightly, looking away from the scene and back up at his father.

“...all this time...you’ve just had to sit here and watch everything happen? that’s...had to have been rough. i...we have to get you out of here, somehow. i’m not gonna leave you trapped here.”

Gaster shook his head. Apparently his son hadn’t realized the extent of the predicament they were both now in.

“UNFORTUNATELY, MY SON, IT WILL TAKE SOME SORT OF MIRACLE TO GET OUT OF HERE.”

As if on cue, the two monsters heard a voice in the distance. It wasn’t a voice Sans had ever heard before, but it felt familiar somehow.

“Dad?! Dad?! Where are you?!”

Confused, Sans turned in the direction of the voice, brow bone furrowed as he tried to find the source. Was it another vision of past events? If it was, why couldn’t he recall that voice?

“AH, SO THEY CAN BE HEARD HERE AS WELL. INTERESTING,” Gaster signed as his “voice” spoke.

“They?” Sans asked, looking back at the doctor. “whose voice is that?”

Sans’ father looked amused.

“LOOK FOR YOURSELF,” Gaster responded, pointing at a space far above them.

Following Gaster’s directions, Sans looked up and finally saw who he’d been hearing.

“Papyrus! I found him!!” Frisk signed excitedly as their words were spoken loudly enough to be heard through an opening behind them.

The child seemed to be riding on something very long, white, and...furry?

Upon closer inspection once Frisk had gotten closer to the two skeletons, Sans could see it was the elongated neck of Lesser Dog.

“woah,” Sans blinked, staring at the odd sight for a second before letting out a laugh, shocked at both the method of transport and hearing Frisk’s actual “voice”. “that’s some creative thinking, kid.”

As soon as they were close enough, Frisk hopped off the dog’s neck and ran to hug Sans. When the kid ran to him, Sans opened his arms to receive them, hugging them back and grinning.
“THAT’S A GOOD KID YOU GOT THERE,” Gaster commented, watching the reunion.

It took Gaster saying what he did just then for Sans to fully connect what the human had said before, calling for their “dad”. They’d been looking for him.

Touched, Sans looked from Gaster back down to the kid, hesitating only a second before he brought up a boney hand to ruffle their hair.

“yeah. they are.”

Frisk smiled up at him before looking behind Sans.

“Oh! You found your dad!!”

Frisk and Gaster had only crossed paths in a timeline once to their knowledge, after passing through a gray colored door, and even then the human wasn’t really able to interact with the ex-royal scientist. But somehow, they knew in their soul that this scarred being was Papyrus and Sans’ dad.

“HELLO, LITTLE ONE,” Gaster signed to them.

From back up above, the group heard a voice calling down to them.

“HUMAN! ARE YOU ALRIGHT?!” Papyrus shouted with his gloved hands cupped around his mouth to make his booming voice even louder than usual.

“Yes!” Frisk signed as the “voice” carried upwards before looking back at Sans and Gaster. “We should get out of here.”

“good idea.”

Turning, Sans extended a hand to his father, determined not to leave him behind. This was no way to exist.

“so, about that miracle you mentioned...let’s take it while we can.”

Frisk hopped up on Lesser Dog’s neck, giving the dog a friendly pat. Once Sans and Gaster were situated behind them, they signed.

“Okay! We’re all set!!”

“OKAY!!” Papyrus called back.

Slowly, the group ascended as Papyrus, Toriel, the guard dogs of Snowdin, and a surprising addition to the group helped pull Lesser Dog’s neck back up as he went back to a more normal size.

Nearing the top, Sans looked at them all, surprise on his face as they neared freedom. Undyne stood next to Papyrus, using her powerful strength to bring the dog’s neck up. Sans was impressed. The captain of the royal guard had been ready to bring down the entire cavern the last time he’d seen her.

Toriel and Sans locked eye contact once they were close enough to one another. Toriel – the relief Sans felt at seeing her. Just how much had happened while he’d been in the void?

The group hopped off Lesser Dog’s neck once they were safely out of the void opening and back on snowy ground. Once everyone had left the void, the opening shut and disappeared without a trace of it ever having existed in the first place.
Frisk hugged Lesser Dog and pat the exhausted pooch before signing, ‘Thank you.’

Papyrus, with happy tears in his eye sockets, ran over immediately to Sans to give him a huge hug.

“YOU’RE OKAY!!”

Readily hugging his brother back, Sans looked apologetic.

“sorry to worry you, papyrus. ...how long was i in there?”

“A WEEK!!” Papyrus exclaimed. “IT FELT LIKE AN ETERNITY THOUGH!!”

“a week?” Sans repeated, surprised by this revelation.

Sure, he’d spent a fair amount of time watching the visions swirling within the void, but he hadn’t thought that much time had passed. Still, it stood within reason that actual time would operate on a different set of rules from the void.

“None of us were able to open the door you fell through. We had to find another entrance,” Toriel explained.

“AND WE COULDN’T OPEN THAT EITHER!” Papyrus added. “UNDYNE HAD TO COME PRY IT OPEN!”

Frisk looked over at Undyne. Since the direct method failed, they had sat in front of Undyne’s house for three days straight just to even have the opportunity to ask for her help.

When the human looked at Undyne, she looked back at them, seeming to be mulling something over behind her slitted gaze. Undyne was definitely happy to have Sans back and see Papyrus not depressed and worried anymore, but she was still sort of suspicious of Frisk.

“thanks, guys,” Sans said. “it sounds like you all went through a lot to get me back here. which is a good thing, ‘cause i thought i was stuck.”

Toriel walked over to Sans and hugged him to her before bending down further to kiss him.

Sans tilted his head up to accept and return Toriel’s kiss, smiling at her, fondly and apologetically.

“I’m glad you’re alright, Sans. I was beginning to think I wasn’t ever going to get a response to my knock knock joke requests,” Toriel explained as the two monsters felt their souls resonate in each other’s presence. She felt she had lost a part of her when Frisk had told her what happened. Toriel was so relieved to see him again.

“well, you don’t have to worry about that now. i a-door knock knock jokes...and you.”

“I a-door you too,” Toriel responded, resting her forehead against his, blushing.

Grinning wider, Sans shifted to nudge her face with his again in another small kiss before looking at Papyrus who was looking at Gaster in confusion.

“BROTHER, THERE WAS ANOTHER PERSON WITH YOU?” Papyrus asked.

Sans’ gaze lingered on the doctor for a couple of seconds, feeling awkward and sad. Both for the situation and Gaster himself. Papyrus still didn’t remember.

Letting out a sigh, Sans nodded, motioning for Papyrus to come closer, “yeah, paps. i know you
don’t remember, but...he’s someone you should know.”

“OH. WELL THEN, HELLO!” Papyrus said, offering his hand out to Gaster who accepted it and shook it with his own. “I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS!”

When Gaster got his hand back he signed, ‘I AM W.D. GASTER.’

There was no voice to accompany his words anymore as he was no longer in the void. Feeling sort of sad at the loss of the voice, but lucky to have heard it, Sans watched his brother and his father “meet”, as he felt an ache in his soul. He should explain it to Papyrus. Let him know what happened. Why he can’t remember. He should, and he would, but now, with everyone around, wasn’t the time.

Sans looked around for any recognition of the name “W.D. Gaster” in Toriel – in any of them. Would seeing him, knowing his name again, jar any of their memories?

To his dismay, no one showed any recognition at the name, except Frisk.

“A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU!” Papyrus exclaimed.

Frisk in the meanwhile walked over to where Undyne was standing...but not too close.

‘Thank you for your help,’ Frisk signed.

“Yeah,” Folding her arms across her chest, Undyne eyed the kid skeptically before nodding, looking unsure about this. “...Didn’t want to see Papyrus crying for the rest of the decade. Don’t think this means we’re friends though.”

Papyrus overheard Undyne and suddenly got a great idea.

“WELL, THAT’S A SHAME,” Papyrus said, crossing his arms. “I THOUGHT FOR SURE THE CAPTAIN OF THE ROYAL GUARD WOULD BE ABLE TO BEFRIEND A HUMAN. BUT IT LOOKS LIKE SHE’S NOT UP TO THE CHALLENGE.”

‘AGREED, WHAT A SHAME,’ Gaster signed, knowing where this was going.

“Truly a loss,” Toriel added, putting a hand on her cheek.

When the challenge had been issued from Papyrus, Undyne’s expression had tightened, mouth twitching up into some mixture between a grin and a grimace...and as the comments kept pouring in, Undyne looked like she might explode.

“wow. pap’s brave enough to be friends with the human but undyne’s not? i thought you said she was courageous, bro,” Sans teased.

That did it. Eye twitching, despite all of the people around, Undyne let out a growling “NGAAH!”

“You guys think I can’t be friends with the human?! I’LL SHOW YOU! Just watch – when I’m done, this shrimp and I won’t just be friends...we’ll be BESTIES!!” Undyne pointed a finger in Frisk’s direction. “You won’t get away from me, TWERP!”
Frisk gave Undyne a huge grin the way they knew she liked to do.

‘Bring it on!’

“Pfft. ‘Bring it on’? You’re such a shrimp,” Undyne said, reaching out and plucking the human off of the ground, holding them at arm’s length. “You’ve got SPUNK though! I like that!”

This was a huge relief for the human. Everybody had safely returned from the void and now they were back on track to befriend Undyne in this timeline.

“maybe you guys should go to undyne’s house and hang out, papyrus,” Sans nudged, knowing that at least that resulted in Frisk and the fish lady being buds.

“WE SHOULD TEACH THE HUMAN HOW TO COOK!” Papyrus suggested as he walked alongside Undyne.

Frisk meanwhile had accepted their fate and waved goodbye to everyone from their vantage point in Undyne’s arms. The trio left the snowy wilderness as the guard dogs dispersed the area as well, presumably to take a lunch break at Grillby’s.

Sans waved to Frisk, Papyrus, and Undyne when they left, patting any of the dogs who got close enough before they went too. He made a mental note to do something special for Lesser Dog later to thank them for this. Once they were alone, Sans looked to Toriel and Gaster.

The eldest skeleton looked around at his surroundings, feeling the delicate snowfall land upon his skull. It had been years since he’d last been in Snowdin. Actually, he could only recall passing through it once. Before falling into the void, he had lived with Sans and Papyrus at the capital.

Toriel looked at the ex-royal scientist with curiosity. Should she know him?
Sans caught Toriel’s confused expression and stepped closer.

“hey, tori. papyrus doesn’t remember, but this is actually our dad. he’s been trapped in the void for...a long time,” Sans explained.

“Oh!” Toriel exclaimed, raising a hand to her face in surprise before turning to face Gaster. “I am glad you were able to get out. It’s a pleasure to meet you. I am Toriel, the caretaker of the ruins of Home.”

She extended a hand out to Gaster’s, who accepted and had decided not to comment that he was fully aware of who she was and her previous royal status.

‘PLEASED TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE.’
“UH, UNDYNE? SORRY ABOUT YOUR HOUSE,” Papyrus said as he rubbed the back of his skull sheepishly.

Frisk signed their sentiments as well as the trio watched as Undyne’s fish house was engulfed in fire. That was probably the fastest they’d ever seen Undyne’s house burst into flames from the cooking lesson. Probably because Papyrus was just as enthusiastic about teaching Frisk to cook as Undyne was and broke the dial off of the stove when turning up the heat.

“Oh well!” Undyne shrugged, not looking nearly as concerned at the situation as one might expect. “So what’s next? Scrapbooking? Friendship bracelets??”

She felt weird with this whole thing. Like she already knew the human, somehow, and that, along with Papyrus and everyone else being friends with them, was cracking her previous resolve on killing them. It was her duty. She knew people were counting on her, but...they wouldn’t sacrifice any one monster’s life to break the barrier. Why would it be okay to murder the shrimp to do it?

“You don’t seem like the type who’d want to do those sorts of things. How about sparring instead?” Frisk suggested, knowing full well Undyne had no interest in arts and crafts activities.

“OH, THAT’S RIGHT. THE HUMAN COULD USE SOME TRAINING,” Papyrus agreed, remembering how disastrous the fight was he’d had with Frisk. Granted, the kid was suffering from illness at the time.

“Oh ho! Good idea!” Undyne grinned, looking thoroughly pleased with this (and getting out of scrapbooking).

She held a hand up, focusing her energy as one of her spears materialized. This was definitely more her style!

Frisk prepared to FIGHT and got into a rather pathetic looking fighting stance. Despite their clear lack of knowledge regarding fighting techniques, determination was apparent on their face.

“Aw geez,” Undyne said after Frisk got into their “stance”. “And I thought you were a threat? You need some serious training, nerd.”

The human looked down at their stance, not quite sure what they were doing wrong. This is how they swore they saw people fight in the movies.

Papyrus looked at their stance as well, trying to solve the puzzle.

“You’re completely off balance,” Undyne explained, giving Frisk a light shove, proving her point and knocking them over too easily. “And too stiff. Loosen your stance.”

Undyne shifted, demonstrating what she meant – both feet firmly on the ground.

Frisk picked themself up and returned to a standing position, watching the fish woman closely.

“Feel the ground beneath your feet. Keep them apart, but not too far. Bounce back and forth a couple times to get the feel for it and make sure you don’t feel strained moving in either direction. If you stumble when you try to dodge, you’re toast,” Undyne instructed.
Frisk attempted to follow Undyne’s directions and Papyrus copied them as well.

‘Like this?’

“That’s better!” Undyne gave a slight nod, approving. “But the real test...”

Shifting quickly, Undyne focused as the spear she was holding rippled and turned purple, hurling it right at Frisk with every intention of hitting them. Frisk, noticing their soul had not turned green, bent forwards to have the spear fly over their head and then charged towards Undyne.

Undyne had not been expecting that. Bracing herself when she realized a hit was coming, the fish lady only had a split second before impact. Frisk delivered a fake hit on her with their fist, doing a grand total of...absolutely nothing. Undyne just stood there for a moment, blinking down at the human.

“...That’s it? Even with that awesome counter attack opportunity, you really can’t muster any intent to hurt me? ...Huh.”

Undyne hesitated before grinning, seeming to brush the lame hit off. She sunk down into a crouched position, poking the human in the shoulder now that she was closer to eye level with them, looking into their face.

“...Hey twerp. You know, at first I hated your stupid saccharin shtick, and I doubted your
authenticity, but...the way you hit me just now, it...really shows your honesty in how you’ve been acting. All of the friends you’ve made, by being who you are. And, it reminded me of someone I used to train with.”

Getting a thoughtful look in her eye, Undyne grinned a little wider. She had talked about Asgore while they had been cooking with Papyrus...leaving out the part about her not being able to send the taller skelebro into battle since he was present and listening at the time.

“Now I know you aren’t just some wimpy loser. Nah. You’re a wimpy loser with a big heart. ...Just like him,” Undyne said, still grinning widely.

Frisk gave Undyne a big smile back while listening to her praise.

Papyrus had an impressed look on his face.

“WOW! HUMAN, I DIDN’T REALIZE YOU COULD MOVE THAT FAST!”

“Papyrus is right,” Undyne agreed, shifting to stand back up to her full height. “I’m pretty impressed with that speed! You’ve got promise, nerd.”

She was more confident about training them now – in this place, intent meant everything. If the human did zero damage to her when they’d had the opportunity to do so much more if they’d wanted to, it said a lot about their character.

‘Sorry for running away earlier and tricking you into chasing someone else,’ Frisk signed before realizing their mistake. Undyne hadn’t known it was Sans she’d been chasing, had she?

“Wait, what?” Undyne frowned, eye narrowing. “Tricked me into... Who was I chasing?!”

Frisk rubbed the back of their head sheepishly before signing the answer, ‘Sans.’

“Sans?!” Undyne asked incredulously. “But I...do you mean in Waterfall, when...I thought you jumped out of the grass?”

This was really the only time she could think of where she’d been actively chasing them and hadn’t seen their face.

‘Sans gave me one of his coats and...I didn’t know at the time, but while I was hiding, he got you to chase him instead,’ Frisk explained.

“MY BROTHER DID THAT???” Papyrus asked, his jaw dropped in astonishment.

“...what. WHAT. That lazy...he can outrun me?!” Undyne looked shocked, then confused, and then angry, and then confused once more. “...That explains why he didn’t go down when my spear went through his side. Must’ve just missed his ribs and spine. Guess there’s one benefit to not having any guts.”

Frisk paled at the revelation of their newfound knowledge. Undyne probably didn’t know that Sans only had 1 HP to speak of.

“I CAN’T BELIEVE MY BROTHER MANAGED TO OUTRUN YOU, UNDYNE!” Papyrus exclaimed, still reeling from shock.

“It’s a good thing he did, now that I know the human’s not bad, but...damn it. I don’t know what I’d do if I accidentally...damn it. ...Well,” Undyne growled out a sigh, looking at Frisk afterward.
No, she wasn’t aware that Sans’ HP was so low – but still. She could have killed him even if it wasn’t.

“I’m gonna have words with that guy.”

Frisk winced in sympathy for their “dad” and the days of laziness he had suddenly coming to an end.

‘Go easy on him.’

“Go easy on him??” Undyne growled, unamused – before stopping to run a hand down her face. “...Ugh. Papyrus, what do you think? Should I go easy on your brother who’s been pretending to be weak and lazy?”

Papyrus paused to think about it before responding, “WELL...HE DID USE TO BE A LOT MORE ACTIVE WHEN WE LIVED IN THE CAPITAL. I NEVER DID FIGURE OUT WHAT HAPPENED. BUT HE’S NOT LAZY WHEN IT COMES TO HELPING OTHERS WHEN THEIR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT, APPARENTLY.”

Frisk nodded in agreement. Sans had already saved them three times during this particular timeline.

“I guess that’s a good point. There is some amount of credit that can be given when someone who’s lazy pushes past it when it’s important,” Undyne sighed, shifting to stretch – bones cracking as she did. “...Okay, fine. I’ll try not to be too harsh. But he’s still getting a piece of my mind.”

Frisk exhaled a breath they didn’t realize they’d been holding.

“WELL? SHALL WE THEN?” Papyrus asked, motioning back in the direction of Snowdin and the ruins.

“Yeah. Hey, we’ll train you more again later, okay?” Undyne grinned at Frisk. “With Papyrus and I training you, you’ll be a pro in no time.”

Frisk nodded and waved goodbye to their friends, wondering if they should’ve followed the two or continue their journey onward, despite Sans not being present.

Well...I’ve made it in the past.

Without further delay, they turned the other way and departed to Hotland.
Undyne didn’t even notice that the kid wasn’t following them – preoccupied as she was with getting to the shorter skeleton brother and having a talk with him. Papyrus continued walking quickly alongside Undyne, who definitely seemed like she was on a mission. Frowning, Undyne looked at Papyrus.

“So, you said Sans used to be more active, before Snowdin?” Undyne asked. “The cold slows me down, but I’m a fish monster. What do you think his excuse is? I wonder how he even became a sentry…”

“I’M NOT REALLY SURE WHAT HAPPENED TO MY BROTHER,” Papyrus explained as they strolled past Sans’ prank telescope. “ONE DAY, WE’RE LIVING IN THE CAPITAL. THE NEXT, WE’RE MOVING INTO SNOWDIN, AND THEN SOMETIME AFTER HE JUST...GOT...LAZY.”

“Weird. Well…” Undyne thought about Alphys and her laziness for a moment, looking curious. “Have you noticed anything else about his behavior, how he acts?”

Papyrus stopped walking, looking at the echo flowers nearby. He felt like he was missing something. His brother’s behavior had definitely changed since the move. Sans’ laziness was a puzzle that Papyrus felt somehow he didn’t have all the pieces to yet. Something in the back of his skull told him it might have something to do with the odd gaps in his memories.

“SANS PRETTY MUCH ALWAYS KEEPS HIS ROOM LOCKED AND HE USED TO DISAPPEAR SOMEWHERE, BUT HE HASN’T DONE THAT LATELY. IT WASN’T TO HIS STATIONS. I CHECKED,” Papyrus looked over at Undyne, recalling something else. “A WEEK OR SO AGO, WHEN THE HUMAN ARRIVED, I THINK? I GREETED HIM THAT MORNING, HE SMILED, BUT SOMETHING DIDN’T SEEM RIGHT.”

“Hmmm. Keeping doors locked, vanishing to places where you can’t find him, weird smiles, laziness…” Undyne didn’t seem to like how this was all adding up. “…Alphys does all of that, and I know she’s depressed. I don’t think she knows that I notice, but I do. I just…haven’t figured out how to talk to her about it yet. But, my point is, Sans sounds like he’s hiding stuff.”

Papyrus opened his mouth to protest the idea but then realized what Undyne said must be the truth. He sighed.

“I WISH HE WOULD JUST TALK TO ME ABOUT IT. HE’S MY BROTHER,” Papyrus said, sadly.

“Yeah. He should. I wish Alphys would talk to me too, but we’re just friends. She doesn’t have to if she’s not that comfortable with me. But Sans is your brother, and he should be more up front,” Undyne stated as she kept walking briskly, still seeming deep in thought…and less angry. “I wonder what could be affecting him like this...that guy’s always seemed unphased by anything. Especially my lectures on guard duty.”

Papyrus nodded in agreement at that statement. He’d been a witness to Undyne lecturing Sans once. Sans would probably have made a good limbo contestant with how far back he bent during Undyne getting in his face about being more responsible. Sans looked like he was napping standing up throughout the entire thing; not a care in the world.
Slowing her pace as they neared the border between Waterfall and Snowdin, Undyne looked back at Papyrus, hesitating.

“...Maybe you should talk to him, Papyrus. If that’s what his problem is, nothing I can say is going to help.”

Undyne might’ve been brash and passionate and violent sometimes, but...honestly, she’d learned to be gentle with Alphys...watching her expressions, seeing how she reacted to certain things. Seeing the sadness and stress when she tried to hide it. If Sans hadn’t talked to Papyrus on his own yet, there was no way she’d get anywhere with him if he had the same sort of emotional complex as Alphys.

“YOU’RE RIGHT!” Papyrus agreed, striking a pose. “THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL TALK TO HIS BROTHER AND GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS CONUNDRUM!”

“YEAH!” Undyne grinned widely, STRONGLY patting the skeleton on the back. “That’s the spirit!! Go get him!”

“NYEH HEH HEH!” Came Papyrus’ trademark laugh as he ran on ahead.

Undyne watched him go before slowing her pace and stopping, gaze drifting down to the frost crystals on the ground so close to the border as she pondered.

Maybe...maybe she should talk to Alphys. There were friends after all, and...Undyne hoped they could be more, some day. She didn’t like seeing the scientist downcast...which is part of why she always encouraged her anime and nerd obsessions. It made Alphys more passionate – full of life. But it didn’t take away that look in her eyes. It only masked it for a while.
Meanwhile, Sans, completely unaware of what had happened with Undyne and Papyrus, or the kid’s decision to continue on to Hotland alone, continued talking with Gaster and Toriel near the ruins entrance, lacing his bony fingers through Toriel’s affectionately, who smiled at his display of affection. Today had been good. Things seemed to be looking up, for everyone.

Gaster continued to look around at their snowy surroundings. It still amazed him that despite being in the Underground, the cavern was large enough to maintain its own weather system. The snow in this region fascinated him the most.

‘IT HAS BEEN YEARS SINCE I’VE LAST VISITED SNOWDIN,’ he signed finally.

“Truthfully, it has been far too long for me as well,” Toriel admitted.

“do you want to see it?” Sans asked, looking at Gaster. “not sure how much you saw in there, but papyrus and i have a house there now.”

Gaster nodded at the suggestion and signed, ‘NO REASON TO CONTINUE WAITING HERE.’

Toriel looked puzzled at Sans’ mention of “in there”, not knowing what the two saw in the void.

Sans looked back up at her, pausing when he saw her confused expression.

“ah...in the void, sometimes you can see stuff that’s happened. i don’t know how it works, but...that’s part of what it does.” he explained. “anyway, would you like to come with us, tori? don’t worry; even if you get snowdin i can teleport you back here when you want.”

Toriel chuckled at the pun.

“Well, as long as it’s snow problem for you, sure,” she punned back.

“nah, not at all,” Sans laughed a little and winked. “it’ll be ice to have you along.”

Gaster shook his head at the puns as the adults all started walking back to town.

The stroll in the snow was nice; it was cold, but not too chilling. At least not for skeletons and a furry goat woman. If only the sun could have been shining on them now.

When they reached Snowdin, Sans led the way into the cozy town, nodding and waving to whoever greeted him when he passed.

“we’ve got the shop, the inn, grillby’s; my favorite, the path that leads to the rest of the village, and then there’s the library,” Sans said and pointed at each building as they passed. “…and our house.”

He stopped outside of the building, gazing up at the nice exterior, gyftmas lights and all. Sans was about to open the door when he heard running footsteps crunching in the snow nearby.

“BROTHER!” Papyrus exclaimed, spotting Sans, but then also Toriel and Gaster standing outside of their house. “OH. MAYBE THIS SHOULD WAIT...”

Sans looked over immediately when he heard Papyrus’ voice, raising a brow bone when Papyrus said what he did after.

“what should wait?” Sans asked, completely unaware of what Papyrus was asking for. “we were just about to go inside and have a tour of scenic our house.”

“AH! EXCELLENT IDEA!” Papyrus remarked, going awkwardly quiet and fidgeting before
remembering what Undyne had said. “BROTHER, I NEED TO TALK TO YOU.”

At Papyrus’ actions, Sans grew a little concerned, hesitating mid-step toward the front door. What was he nervous about?

“...what’s up, papyrus? are you okay?”

“I’M FINE! IT’S...YOU, SANS. I’M WONDERING IF YOU’RE OKAY,” the younger skeleton asked out of the blue.

“...what?” Sans looked confused for a moment as something obscured crossed his expression. This was random and entirely unexpected. What exactly had happened during the hangout with Undyne?

“i’m okay, yeah. especially now that i’m back in the real world. why wouldn’t i be? ...and where’s the kid?”

Papyrus refrained from asking further to answer Sans’ question, “WE WERE TRAINING IN WATERFALL AND THEN WE ENDED UP TALKING ABOUT HOW YOU TRICKED UNDYNE, AND THEN UNDYNE AND I WALKED BACK HERE, BUT UNDYNE STOPPED BEFORE GETTING HERE, AND THE HUMAN DIDN’T FOLLOW US. I THINK THEY WERE HEADED TO HOTLAND?”

“on their own?” Sans asked, surprised.

Of course, Frisk had gone that way many times on their own before and been fine, but...they were figuring things out differently this time. They needed to find the horcruxes. Why would they continue on alone?

“YES?” Papyrus replied, a little unsure himself. “BUT I’M SURE DR. ALPHYS WILL HELP.”

Toriel had seen the concerned expression that crossed Sans’ face momentarily and gently put a hand on his shoulder.

“The tour can wait. You’re worried, aren’t you?”

Looking apologetic, Sans nodded, “i mean, the kid’s tough, they can probably handle it, but...well, you’re both welcome to stay at our house for as long as you want.”

“NOT TO WORRY, BROTHER. I AM AN EXCELLENT HOST!” Papyrus remarked, striking a pose.

‘BE SAFE,’ Gaster signed.

“Thank you,” Toriel said before bending down to kiss Sans. “We’ll be fine. Go find them.”

Sans kissed Toriel back, a blue tinge over his face as a result when he grinned at Papyrus and then nodded at Gaster.

“i’ll come back after i check on them. shouldn’t be too long.”
Frisk continued their stroll into the entrance of Hotland, removing Sans’ coat and tying it around their waist for safekeeping, and then rolled up their long sleeves. The “hot” in “Hotland” was no exaggeration.

Surprising or not, Sans was not at the sentry station across the gap from the water cooler this time, sleeping or otherwise. Instead, due to his teleporting shenanigans, he was standing in front of the two guards just up from where he’d felt another weird “save point” distortion, asking them if they’d seen a small monster with brown hair to their shoulders come through.

“Nah, dude. We, like, haven’t seen anyone like that, and we’ve been here for most of the day,” the rabbit eared guard explained.

Sans nodded, seeming satisfied. He didn’t think Frisk would have been their far on foot yet, but it didn’t hurt to double check.

“Thanks.”

Stepping away, Sans looked around, waiting. The kid should be by there soon, if nothing had happened between there and Undyne’s house.

Sure enough, a short time later, Frisk came into sight, heading for the save point. Upon spotting Sans, they ran a bit faster to meet him. Sans turned toward the kid when he heard their footsteps, stepping over to greet them in return.

‘Did you see Undyne, by chance?’ Frisk questioned with a wince, remembering the information they had let slip earlier. ‘She...found out she was chasing you instead of me that one time and said she was going to have words with you about outrunning her despite being lazy.’

“Nah,” Sans shook his head. “I haven’t seen undyne since you went off to her house. papyrus came by and said she stopped before he got to us. not sure why. ...i can see her wanting to lecture me about that.”

Frisk seemed surprised considering Undyne’s behavior when they left but nodded in agreement about the lecture. Looking over to where Sans walked from they saw the Hotland guards in their usual place, blocking the elevators to the Core. They made a mental note to help the guards out later, as normal. Frisk then turned to touch the nearby save point and encouraged Sans to do so as well.

Sans didn’t quite like touching these things, but he knew it would be foolish not to, so he did. Reaching out and focusing he felt the rush of energy flowing through him that verified the deed had been done. Okay...well. As much as he didn’t like the idea of them existing, it was sort of invigorating.

“Touching one of those things is like taking a nap. i feel pretty refreshed.”

Frisk nodded in agreement but then spotted something on Sans’ clothes, long since forgotten. When Sans reached out, the tear in both sides of his jacket from where Undyne’s spear had pierced through over a week ago was visible. It could be sewn up, but it was a definite reminder of what could have gone wrong.

The child pointed at the tear with a concerned expression on their face, ‘Don’t go dying because of me.’
Sans paused, looking at where they were indicating before shrugging with a grin.

“don’t worry. i’m pretty decent at dodging.”

Frisk sighed in response before leading the way onward into Alphys’ lab. Stepping in, the lab was very dark, as Frisk expected. The child stumbled around in the darkness attempting to look for the dinolizard, but she hadn’t appeared yet like she normally did. Frisk would’ve signed to Sans that something wasn’t right, but they realized they couldn’t even see their own hands in the dark and weren’t sure if Sans would be able to.

“pretty dark in here...” Sans commented, breaking the quiet. “hang on, kid.”

Knowing where the switch was, Sans moved towards it and attempted to flick it on, if it worked.

The fluorescent lights hummed to life thanks to the electrical energy from the Core. As they flickered on, Sans and Frisk heard a noise from upstairs.

Alphys came down the conveyor belt, rubbing one of her eyes. Frisk could see she looked tired, and her eyes were a little red. Had she fallen asleep after crying?

“I really need to fix that ligh—oh!” Alphys stopped after she saw Sans standing by the light switch and Frisk standing by her desk.

Wide awake now, Alphys ran over to Frisk, putting her claws out in front of her in excitement, almost like she wanted to hug them, but brought them back to her face at the last second, near her cheeks.

“O-oh! You’re okay!!” she remarked before looking over at Sans. “You’re both okay! I’m glad!!”

The human nodded and smiled patiently at her.

‘You helped save me. Thank you,’ they signed.

“you’ll be happy to hear that undyne’s decided not to take their soul too,” Sans said, walking over to them both. He was concerned about the redness in Alphys’ eyes, but he wouldn’t bring it up right then.

The scientist froze when she heard Undyne’s name but then put on a false smile.

“Well, t-that’s good!”

Alphys was happy for the human, she really was, but until Undyne said something, she was going to continue believing Undyne would never forgive her for betraying monsterkind in aiding the child. She could feel herself about to cry again and brought a claw up to her face to rub her eye.

Frisk looked at her with concern.

When Alphys’ expression had changed at the mention of Undyne’s name, Sans paused. Oh. So Undyne had something to do with the—oh. Frowning, also concerned, the skeleton watched as Alphys’ emotions started back up.

“...alph...you okay?” he asked.

“S-she sure was mad, wasn’t she?” Alphys remarked sadly.

Frisk made a move towards Alphys to console her but stopped as they heard...robotic beeping?
“aww, alph, i don’t think she...” Sans stopped, listening a little closer as the loud metal clanging echoed through the lab. “uh.”

The clanging continued, until it ended in a large hole being torn in the wall, through which a certain sexy rectangle rolled out on one wheel, that it was actually pretty impressive he could balance on.

“HELLO BEAUTIES, WHAT HAVE WE HERE? GUESTS? LOVELY!” Mettaton said loudly.

Frisk looked over at Mettaton, their mind working this situation out. Technically speaking, Mettaton and Alphys were friends...and Alphys had clearly been crying. Realizing their current predicament and how things might’ve appeared in comparison to what was supposed to happen in the timeline, Frisk slowly backed away from the entertainment-gone-killer robot.

“M-mettaton?” Alphys questioned as she rubbed her eyes.

Frisk thought the scientist looked genuinely surprised that the robot had been behind the wall the whole time as he usually had been in the other good timelines. Unknown to them, Alphys had abandoned her original plan around the time she had given the health book to Sans. Somehow, Frisk didn’t think this particular timeline would involve quiz questions. Least not the ones they remembered, anyway.

“OH YES, IT’S ME, DARLING,” Mettaton boomed, wheeling closer to the trio.

He was wary of Sans, truth be told, because of that whole levitating his metal body to make the tile puzzle come out differently thing back on the path to Snowdin, though he wasn’t a hundred percent sure that it had been the skeleton who did that. Either way, he wasn’t going to let that stop him from doing what he could to get that human’s soul.

“ALPHYS, ALPHYS, ALPHYS...WHAT’S THE MATTER? THIS FELLA AND THIS HUMAN GIVING YOU A HARD TIME? THERE, THERE,” the robot said as he somehow produced a handkerchief from inside his rectangular body, using it to dab at the scientist’s face, electronics scanning Frisk in the meantime. They didn’t seem so tough...and they’d be even less so, once he got them where he wanted them.

“O-oh, no, Mettaton. R-really, I’m fine,” Alphys tried to assure her metallic friend.

Behind the two, Frisk motioned to get Sans’ attention.

‘We need to move on. Now,’ they signed as discreetly as possible.

Nodding, Sans stepped over to Frisk and took a hold of their hand, moving for the exit.

“well. we’ve got places to get to. we’ll see you later, alph...mettaton.”

“NOT SO FAST, LOVELIES. YOU HAVEN’T EVEN—”

Mettaton had whirred toward them and had been speaking as he closed in, but they didn’t get to hear the rest of what the robot said as the heat once again closed in around them as they both ended up outside the back door of Alphys’ lab, in a spot where Sans knew there were no cameras.

“i’m not sure what papyrus sees in that glorified calculator,” Sans sighed. “could pretty much feel the hostility buzzing off of him...you should be careful. he’s bound to show up again.”

The child nodded in response before freezing a moment, making an “uh-oh” expression.
‘Cellphone. Alphys is supposed to upgrade the cellphone,’ they explained.

“oh. ...hm. we could stay hidden and wait until he leaves. or i could go back in,” Sans offered.

Mettaton had definitely had intent in there...stronger than Sans’ had ever felt from the robot before. ...Except in the bad times.

Frisk shook their head when Sans suggested going back in.

‘He might blame you for Alphys’ current state too. He has his own agenda, but he’s actually great friends with her. We should stay hidden.’

“ok,” Sans said, looking around the area before leaning against the wall. He pondered for a moment, seeming to mull something over before he spoke again. “...so. as long as we’re stuck here for a while, i may as well tell you something. the void’s weird. sometimes it works sort of like a theater for past events. while i was in there, i...saw stuff. like what that flower turns into when he gets the human souls. that...couldn’t have been easy to face, but you did it...and you won. and then...you saved all of us. you’re pretty incredible, you know that, kid?”

Frisk leaned against the wall before sliding down to sit. Hearing Sans tell them about what he saw and then praising them, they smiled, albeit embarrassed.

‘You’re my friends and family now. I couldn’t abandon you all.’

Shifting, Sans crouched down in front of the kid, reaching out to place his hands on either side of their arms, just below the shoulders, as he looked at them, watching their face as he grinned a little.

“and that, rather than a downplay on yourself, like you probably meant it to be...is one of the reasons you’re incredible.”

There was a hesitation, then a sigh, before Sans brought his hands back and his eyes dimmed a little.

“...you know, kid, i don’t know how much you know about this, but...that flower...reset. a lot. over and over... at first he was okay. the first couple of times i woke up days before where i should be, things were okay. better, even... a couple times, he befriended both me and papyrus. he was nice. helpful. considerate.”

Sans’ eye sockets were dark now, dots of light gone. His mouth turned down into more of a grimace.

“...but then, finally, one reset, people started dying. there were times when one or two would, and others when...the whole underground was covered in dust. hundreds of times. he reset... so many times. and the reason he doesn’t like me is because i remembered, and i tracked him down. over and over, until he started leaving papyrus alone and stopped hurting people so much. the only time he actually let any time stay passed was when the human before you came down here...'cause he wanted asgore to take their soul so he could steal them all later, i realize now. that’s when i moved papyrus and i to snowdin, because flowey has a harder time moving around in the frozen ground and i wanted to protect my brother.”

Sans paused again there, rubbing his hands over his face.

Frisk looked at the skeleton with concern but didn’t interrupt.

“...the resets kept on happening on from the point of asgore getting the last soul before yours, only papyrus was on the bad side of things less. kid, i...i let a lot of things happen that i...regret. i tried
stopping things, so many times, but nothing ever...mattered. i just...i...i gave up. and i’m not proud of it.”

Upon Sans reaching the end of this part of his story, Frisk shifted their position from against the wall to hug Sans tightly. They had only known that Flowey had been responsible for resets prior to their arrival in the Underground, and that Sans must’ve encountered him dozens of times, but they hadn’t known the extent of what Flowey had done. It was no wonder then that the resets they themself had done had taken such a toll on Sans. Now, with his help, Frisk was going to make sure they solved everything to stop a reset from occurring ever again.

Sans brought his arms up to hug the human in return, his face partially buried in the kid’s neck.

“..........he finally...let more time pass, without resetting. probably because he was curious about what would happen then,” Sans continued after a minute, and despite the attempts the skeleton made to remain unphased, there was a waver in his voice. This was a lot of emotional strain to voice out loud.

“and then...you fell. and somehow, you could control it instead of him. you...gave me a reason to try again. things were changing. i just...i’m glad that those other times weren’t really you. things are still bad – i know we’re not in the clear yet. but having someone on our side, who’s genuinely good, who cares about what happens to us enough to try again and again like you have...it makes a huge difference, frisk. i can’t even behind to tell you how important you are. you’ve been saving us – you have saved us...in more ways than one. despite everything, you’ve kept love first and foremost in your heart, and you haven’t given up, even in the face of what seemed like impossible odds.”

Sans pulled back from the hug, hand shifting to the kid’s head as he looked at them, eye sockets wet with what he couldn’t hold back, his mouth turned up into a wide, but somewhat hesitant grin.

“that’s why i say you’re incredible. and, you know... ...i don’t know if i’ve ever seriously thought about having a kid, myself, but...i’d be proud to call you my kid, if you meant what you called me when you brought me back from the void. heh...dunno if i deserve it, but...i’m here for you.”

Frisk’s eyes were wet now too with tears as they smiled at the skeleton.

‘Thank you, dad,’ they signed, before hugging him once more.
This hug, too, was returned – Sans embraced them tightly, feeling more hope for the future than he had in what felt like forever. Along with that hope though came a deep-rooted fear. One of it all being taken away again somehow, especially knowing that Frisk’s max HP was dwindling; that their soul was getting weaker. This could all be taken away. This kid, with so much love in their heart, could still be hurt, despite all of their ability to save and reset.

He had to protect them. He had to figure out how to free them from this. Right then, the thought of living with Toriel and the kid... having his brother and their father be safe finally, all living as a family – it was what he wanted, more than anything.

He looked at Frisk who was resting their head against his bony shoulder, still hugging him.

“...my kid. you know, i like the sound of it.”
Hearing movement from inside the lab, Sans shifted, picking the kid up and moved them both behind an outcropping of rock to the side of the building, away from the sound. Listening and watching from their hidden location, Sans attempted to discover the source of the movement without being noticed himself.

The lab door finally opened and it almost seemed like the air was suddenly filled with an explosion of sparkles.

“M-mettaton! W-wait!! You really don’t need to do this!!” Alphys could be heard exclaiming from within the lab.

“SORRY DARLING, BUT THE SHOW MUST GO ON!” Mettaton’s voice boomed from his box as he wheeled out, his gameshow music playing ironically from the large speakers built into his system. “DON’T FORGET TO TUNE IN TO ALL OF THE FABULOUS PROGRAMS WE HAVE PLANNED FOR THIS HUNTING SEASON!”

Hunting season...blech. Even though it was a decent pun because of Mettaton’s “television season”, Sans scowled lightly at the tacky and honestly tasteless reference to the robot’s conquest against Frisk. Sans would do what he could to make sure that box of bolts never laid a robotic finger on the kid.

Sans and Frisk waited for Mettaton to continue on out of sight before getting out of their hiding spot and going into the lab.

“Y-you’re okay! ...Again!” Alphys said, looking relieved.

‘Are *you* okay?’ Frisk asked.

“Oh...yes. I’ll be fine. But Mettaton is a friend and thinks you’re responsible for this. I tried explaining everything to him,” the dinolizard responded.

‘So that’s why he didn’t go after us immediately,’ Frisk signed, the realization dawning on them.

“I’m so sorry...” Alphys said, looking down for a moment before clapping her claws together. “That’s why I decided I’m going to help you! I-i don’t know what Mettaton will do. H-he’s built as an entertainment robot, but he still has the ability to fight. Do you have a cellphone? I-i’ll give you my number so I can walk you through everything.”

Frisk obediently held out their phone to the scientist, amused as Alphys made a “what the hell is that?” sort of face.

“Where in the Underground did you get that phone?” Alphys asked, bewildered. “It’s ancient! Here, let me upgrade it!”

Alphys took the outdated piece of tech over to her lab desk, dismantled it, and as quick as lightning (or so it seemed) reassembled it somehow to resemble a more modern cellphone.

Frisk noted to themself that they had never paid attention before, but they thought that they had seen a bit of electric magic when Alphys was doing her thing.

“T-there! I even signed you up for Undernet,” Alphys said as she handed the phone back to Frisk. “I
need to stay here to control whatever Mettaton messes around with in the Hotland and Core areas.”

Frisk nodded understandingly as they slipped the phone into one of their shorts’ pockets. Sans stepped away from the lab door once Alphys gave Frisk the updated phone, not having heard any signs of the robot returning. He called Frisk’s phone from his own, remembering the number from past resets.

“there, now my number’s on your new phone too,” Sans started, seeming hesitant as he said the next part. “hey, will you be okay here for a little while? i really need to talk to papyrus about gaster...”

Frisk nodded while Alphys looked confused at the mention of “Gaster”, not knowing who or what it was.

‘I’ll be okay! Alphys will guide me,’ they signed, motioning confidently toward the scientist.

The kid hugged their self-adopted dad and waved goodbye as they began their journey through Hotland.

Sans had been about to tell Alphys goodbye for now so he could hurry and get Papyrus to talk to him, and then get back to Frisk again, but he paused when his old friend suddenly spoke up.

“S-sans, are you okay? You were gone for so long. We were all worried,” Alphys stated, rubbing one of her claws on her arm. Despite being in a depressed mood from a lack of contact from Undyne, it seemed she had still monitored at least some of the situation from the past week.

“yeah, i’m okay, alph,” Sans grinned, somewhat tiredly. “thanks for asking. i’m actually more okay than i was before i vanished. found a family member who’s been missing for a long time.”

“Oh! That must be the Gaster you mentioned. I-i’m happy for you,” Alphys smiled and then motioned to her work station. “I-i better get started. Don’t keep them waiting too long.”

“yeah, that’s him. thanks, alph. ...hey, are you sure you’re o—”

“ALPHYS!” a voiced boomed through the lab, interrupting Sans mid-word and causing Alphys to jump about five feet in the air from being startled.

Undyne marched in through the front door, a little sweaty from her jaunt through Hotland before reaching the lab, like usual. Being a fish monster outside of a wet climate was a little distressing.

“We need to talk! ...Oh, hey Sans.”

“U-u-undyne!” Alphys practically squeaked. She brought her claws up to her cheeks in an effort to cover her abrupt blushing reaction.

“I-i-i thought you wouldn’t speak to me ever again...” she said, remembering Undyne’s anger at her and everyone else for helping the human.

Walking over to the lizard monster, Undyne got a weird look on her face, perplexed.

“Why would you think that? ...I mean, I was mad before, but I’m not going to disown you, Alphys. Hey, I...” she paused, looking at Sans again. “...Hey, are you guys busy, or...?”

“nah, i was about to head out.” Sans said, pointing a thumb towards the door. “i’ll talk to you later, okay, alph?”

“S-sure. ...Goodbye, Sans,” Alphys responded, not sure what to expect from Undyne next.
Sans wasn’t too worried. But then, he knew that Undyne was pretty much in love with Alphys and that she didn’t have anything to fret about. They’d both still have to figure that out on their own in this timeline. Seems like it would be happening faster than normal.

“see ya,” Sans said, walking out the door.

Once Sans was gone, Undyne looked back at Alphys, frowning when she spotted the residual redness in her eyes.

“...Alphys, I wanted to know if you’re okay. I know you always say you are, but I get the feeling you might not really be. And the hints. And the visual cues. I’ve...been worried about you.”

“I-i’m fin—not fine,” Alphys finally admitted, staring at the floor as tears formed in her eyes. “I-i’ve been lying to you about everything. Those human history books and movies aren’t real, they’re comic books and anime. And when I h-helped the human, it seemed like you’d never want to see or talk to me again.”

She sniffled, recalling the lack of contact from Undyne the past week.

“I-i’m not a good person. I’ve lied to you...and others... I’ve failed in the task King Asgore assigned me... I understand if you hate me,” Alphys sobbed, sinking to her knees on the floor.

“Alphys.”

Undyne had listened to the whole thing, intently, concerned, but that sob from Alphys pushed any usual response she might have had over the edge. Shifting, she raised a hand to pet at the scientist’s head while sinking down to kneel in front of Alphys since she had brought herself so much closer to the ground than she already was.

“Alphys. Come on,” Undyne said, continuing to pet Alphys’ head with her arms wrapped around the crying lizard monster.

“I don’t really care so much about that nerdy crap. I don’t hate you. You are a good person. I mean, look at yourself. You’re PASSIONATE! You’re ANALYTICAL!! It doesn’t matter what it is, you care about it at full power. 100 PERCENT!! ...Like the human, when you knew that they weren’t a threat to any of us. Besides the fact that you were scared, you stood up for what you believed in. I get it. ...So you don’t have to lie to me. I don’t want you to have to lie to anyone anymore. I want to help you become happy with the person you are. ‘Cause I think she’s pretty neat.”

“R-really?” Alphys stopped sniffling and hugged Undyne.

Alphys thought for sure she was dreaming. Undyne was so close to her, being affectionate. Part of her brain was still telling her, ‘This isn’t real and there’s no way it will ever BE real. You’re just in a fantasy again. You’ll wake up and realize none of this happened.’

“Yeah really, you nerd,” Undyne confirmed, using her free hand to pat her (very possibly more than) friend’s back. “Sorry I wasn’t around for a while. I was out there helping to find Sans, or I would have contacted you sooner. Like I said, yeah, I was mad, but...that’s not going to make me not talk to you again. I’d be pretty lame if that was the case.”

“I’m so relieved!” Alphys said as she tightened her arms around Undyne, sniffling now for a different reason.

Seeing Alphys like this, with the tears on the outside rather than bottled up like normal got to Undyne more than she had anticipated. Something felt right about being so close to her. Familiar,
even, somehow. Sure, they’d snoozed together while watching anime before, but...somehow, Undyne felt like this would work.

Leaning her face down, Undyne kissed the top of Alphys’ head. Why it felt familiar, she had no clue. Maybe that just meant it was right.

“...U-u-undyne...?” Alphys asked, turning bright red.

Could it be possible? Did Undyne like her? Or was she just trying to cheer Alphys up?

Undyne paused, looking down at the dinolizard.

“...Was that weird?”

“N-n-no! Not at all! I mean it was nice and I really like you and OH MY GOD I SAID THAT OUTLOUD I UNDERSTAND IF YOU DON’T...

Blinking, Undyne watched as Alphys all but exploded, acting in another way that somehow felt right and leaned down again to smooch the lizard when she finished fumbling over her words—this time on the mouth.

There were some benefits to partial resets leaving some residue from memories and instincts intact. Alphys had only heard about heaven mentioned in her manga and anime, but she imagine it must have been something like what she had experienced right at that moment. She leaned into the kiss, praying this time her dreams were reality.

Of course, Undyne was known for her boldness and passion—and although she was nervous, truth be told, she put that into the kiss, wrapping her arms around the other monster, interested in the way their different mouth shapes felt when pressed together like that.

Finally, when the kiss was broken, Undyne grinned down at Alphys, a pink tint present under the scales on her face.

“That’s to make up for the wimpy one.”
Alphys looked like she might melt into a puddle on the floor right then and there.

“Oh...I liked them both...” she responded.

Giving a hearty laugh, Undyne kissed Alphys again, pulling back with a sly look on her face.

“HA! Well I liked all three.”

Alphys wasn’t aware it was possible, but she fell even deeper for Undyne following that remark.

A beeping of a video monitor summoned Alphys back to normalcy.

“O-oh! The human is getting through Hotland. I need to see if they’re stuck.”

Without missing a beat, Undyne stood up, taking Alphys with her as she marched over to the monitor, only stopping to set her down when they got there.

“Do your thing,” she grinned, staying to watch.

Alphys smiled and nodded at Undyne, right before mimicking a pose she’d seen in an anime.

“Alright! Let’s do this!”

Stifling a smirk, Undyne grinned wider, getting the reference from all the stuff they’d watched together. She gave Alphys two thumbs up in enthusiastic response.
A Family Reunion Long Overdue

Not exactly meanwhile to current time, but back a ways before a fish and a lizard kissed, Sans appeared in front of his house in Snowdin, taking a second to figure out how he might word things before he stepped up to the door and went inside, looking around for wherever everyone was now.

He needed to get through this and then get back to the kid. Hotland wasn’t a concern really; Mettaton was. With things being so different in this timeline, there was no telling when he’d show up now or what he’d do.

“Oh! Sans!” Toriel greeted him from the kitchen as she saw him walk in the door. She seemed to be baking a pie, judging from the sweet aroma permeating through the air, filling the house.

“BROTHER!” Papyrus exclaimed upon seeing him. “TORIEL IS TEACHING ME HOW TO MAKE THAT SUGARY QUICHE!”

“hey tori, hey bro,” Sans responded as he shut the door behind him, grinning toward them both before looking around the living room and spotting Gaster. The scientist appeared to be invested in the Quantum Physics book that had been lying on the table. Upon hearing the door close, Gaster looked up and gave a wave to Sans which was then reciprocated.

“heh, and you thought i was crazy when i was making mine, papyrus,” Sans commented, referring to his earlier “quiche” attempts. “how close are you to being done?”

“We just finished. It just needs a little more time to finish baking,” Toriel answered.

Sans walked over to the open doorway to the kitchen, taking in a deep breath.

“it smells really good... i can’t wait to taste it,” Sans grinned. Smell and taste...more skeleton mysteries. “if it’s okay though, pa-pie-rus, i need to talk to you for a minute.”

“I can’t talk now,” Papyrus groaned at the pun using his name while Toriel chuckled, covering her mouth with her hand.

Sans looked only partially unapologetic, pleased at the chuckle he got from Toriel at least. He
winked at her from where he was leaning against the entry frame.

Papyrus wiped his gloved hands on a dishtowel to clean them off before walking over to his brother.

“WHAT DO YOU NEED TO TALK TO ME ABOUT?” he asked.

“stuff. let’s go up to your room, okay?”

Following his own suggestion and hoping Papyrus would too, Sans shifted back into the living room then and headed up the stairs. Papyrus looked a bit perplexed, but followed Sans up to his bedroom anyway.

“SO WHAT’S UP, SANS?” Papyrus questioned, sitting down on the end of his red racecar bed.

Good, he was sitting down. Sans shut the door quietly behind them before stepping further into the room and walking over to his brother, looking sort of hesitant.

“...so, you know that weird place i was trapped in? do you know anything about it?”

“NOT REALLY,” Papyrus said, shaking his head. “FRISK REFERRED TO IT AS ‘THE VOID’.”

“i’m not completely sure what it is either, but it’s...some sort of void of negative space in between dimensions. it’s tricky to get into, and nearly impossible to leave,” Sans attempted to explain the currently unexplainable. “when gaster got trapped in there, he wasn’t as lucky as i was. somehow, because of the circumstances of how he got there, almost everyone he knew here...completely forgot about him. it was like he’d never even existed.”

“THAT’S...TERRIBLE,” Papyrus said, looking sad. “FORGOTTEN BY EVERYONE?”

“yeah. nearly everyone. i remember, somehow. i know who he really is,” Sans hesitated, trying again to figure out how to word this.

“he’s...our father, papyrus. that’s why you’ve never remembered anything about him, even when you’ve tried. and why he couldn’t be with us, even though he would have if he could have. i thought he was gone forever, but...” Sans smiled, attempting to be comforting as he gave Papyrus a moment to work through the sudden information. “thanks to you guys, he’s back now.”

Papyrus looked for any indication of Sans telling an elaborate joke, but when he couldn’t, his jaw dropped slightly.

“HE’S OUR...DAD?” His expression went from happy surprise to sadness in a split second. “I FORGOT OUR OWN FATHER?”

Sans stepped closer to his brother, putting his hands on the other skeleton’s shoulders and squeezed lightly.

“it’s not your fault, papyrus. i think the only reason why i remember is because i was there with him when the accident happened that sent him into the void. ...i thought he was dead for a long time. no one who wasn’t there remembers him at all.”

“ACCIDENT?” Papyrus looked up at Sans, confused. “YOU WERE IN AN ACCIDENT? HOW? WHERE??”

“yeah...he...used to be the royal scientist. remember when i used to spend all that time working for
the king at the labs? it wasn’t on my own...it was with gaster. he was trying to research and find ways to break the barrier without the need for human souls. something went wrong. there was an explosion. everyone there died, except for me, because...” Sans paused, expression stressed and tired as he went through the events.

“...he shielded me. i thought he was gone too. you remember all of that ‘unexplained destruction’, when we still lived in the capital, right? when half of the king’s main lab near the core was just...missing, after that explosion, and no one could tell what went wrong? that’s when it happened.”

Papyrus covered his mouth in shock before reaching out to hug his brother, suddenly realizing just how close he’d been to losing him in the past.

“SANS...I...HAD NO IDEA. THIS...THIS IS SOMETHING YOU’VE BEEN KEEPING TO YOURSELF ALL THIS TIME?” he asked, incredulously. “YOU KNOW YOU CAN TELL ME ANYTHING, RIGHT? I’M YOUR BROTHER. YOU DON’T NEED TO TRY DEALING WITH THESE THINGS ON YOUR OWN.”

Sans hugged Papyrus back, feeling the guilt increasing as his brother spoke. As bad as this was, it was only the tip of the iceberg of things that he’d been keeping from him.

“i know, papyrus...i’m sorry. i should’ve told you sooner.”

How could he tell him that he had told him before, but an evil flower with no soul kept resetting the timelines and wiping his memory of it again? That was a whole other can of worms Sans wasn’t sure he ever wanted to open.

“THANK YOU FOR TELLING ME,” Papyrus said as he pulled away from the hug. “WOWIE! I GOT MY BROTHER AND MY DAD BACK IN THE SAME DAY!”

“we both did,” Sans grinned at him.

A thought had crossed Sans’ mind just then. If a week had passed out here, compared to the shorter time he’d spent in the void, if time ran on different terms here and there...would he have just been gone too if the kid had reset to try and get him back? Would they all have forgotten him too? Was that the damn flower’s plan?

“SANS, ARE YOU OKAY?” Papyrus asked, seeing the serious expression cross his brother’s usually cheery face.

Sans blinked, focusing back on Papyrus’ face when the question was asked, taking a moment to think about this.

Should he warn Papyrus about Flowey? If the flower had tried this, then...would he try to do something to Papyrus again? Would telling him put him in more danger, because he might try to ask his flower ‘friend’ if it was true?

“...i don’t know, papyrus. maybe not.”

“I’M LISTENING! IF YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT,” Papyrus offered. “I DON’T KNOW IF I CAN HELP, BUT THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS ALWAYS UP FOR A CHALLENGE!”

There was more hesitation from the shorter skeleton, then a deep breath, let out slowly.

“...how much do you know about your friend flowey?”
Papyrus looked perplexed at the sudden shift in topics.

“WELL, HE DOESN’T REALLY TALK ABOUT HIMSELF. WHEN I ASK, HE SAYS HE ISN’T WORTH TALKING ABOUT AND ASKS ME ABOUT MYSELF INSTEAD.”

Sans’ expression was tired, like it so often was, when people weren’t looking. He moved to sit on the edge of the racecar bed with Papyrus.

“...you trust me, right?”

“OF COURSE,” Papyrus nodded.

“...i’m sorry, papyrus, but he’s not really your friend. i know what he is and where he came from,” Sans said bluntly.

Papyrus was quiet, thinking to himself, working through Sans’ words. He did trust Sans of course, but it was difficult for him to believe. Flowey had been nothing but nice to him, right? Thinking more, Papyrus reflected on his other new friendships.

Undyne was definitely a friend, helping train him and with cooking lessons. She’d listen when he spoke about problems he was having and gave good advice (usually). She’d tell him about anime Alphys had shown her and would tell him stories about herself when she had sparring matches with King Asgore.

The human was a new friend that felt almost like part of their family. They enjoyed puzzles and always seemed excited to see him. They were the one to encourage everyone not to give up when Sans had been lost to the void.

Flowey on the other hand, when Papyrus had told him about his brother’s sudden disappearance, didn’t seem surprised at all. Actually, Flowey had told him, ‘I hate to say it, Papyrus, but your brother’s gone. It will hurt for a while, but eventually it won’t anymore. You might even forget all about him. It’s just the way this cruel world works.’

“...YOU’RE RIGHT, SANS,” Papyrus sighed sadly. “BUT...WHAT IS HE, THEN?”

Sans was surprised to hear Papyrus accept what he’d said so readily, though the quiet as he’d worked it out before responding had been both worrying and encouraging.

“he’s one of the results of the experiments that have been done, trying to find a way to break the barrier. he doesn’t have a soul, as much as he pretends. he is incapable of feeling love or compassion of any sort. ...he’s the one who tricked me into entering the void.”

“SANS...I’M SORRY,” Papyrus looked alarmed at this newfound knowledge. “I HAD NO IDEA.”

“it’s not your fault,” Sans quickly assured Papyrus, leaning against the taller skeleton’s side.

“he fooled me at first, too. but...papyrus, you can’t let him know that you know about this. i...he might try to hurt you if he knows you know the truth about him. that’s why he tried to get rid of me.”

Papyrus turned and hugged Sans tightly.

“I WON’T LET HIM. THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL KEEP HIS FAMILY SAFE!”
Sans leaned into the hug more, putting an arm around his brother’s back. He felt so weird this reset. There was hope. Things could come out better. Things could finally progress for long enough for a life on the surface. But, along with all of that, was the fear of...what if it didn’t? What if they couldn’t banish Chara, and the resets kept happening? How could he pick himself up again if it happened again? He felt like he was acting so strange from how he had been before this, but...when the masks started to crack...

“just treat him like you do normally, but don’t trust him. i don’t think i could get through all of this without you, so...” Sans paused, feeling heavier suddenly, somehow. He’d lost Papyrus so many times. Seen him turned to dust, in front of his eyes. “...just...be careful, okay? he’s trickier than he pretends to be.”

Papyrus hugged him tighter.

“I WILL,” he promised, pulling back from the hug to wink at Sans. “THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL SEE TO IT THAT HE IS NOT TRICKED.”

Sans grinned at the wink, looking up at his brother fondly, though the concern hadn’t fully left his eyes.

“good. thanks for believing me. you’re the best, bro.”

“OF COURSE! I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS! AND I HAVE THE BEST BROTHER! THAT’S WHY I’M SO GREAT!” Papyrus said, returning the grin.

Sans raised both brow bones when he heard that last line, looking surprised.

“you’re great because of me? is it because i absorbed all of the lazy before you could before we were born, so you came out tall, charismatic, and energetic?”

Papyrus shook his head.

“BECAUSE YOU’VE ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR ME. IT MAKES ME WANT TO BE A GREAT FRIEND FOR EVERYONE ELSE SO THEY CAN FEEL GREAT TOO!”

“aww, paps...” Sans’ expression lightened, touched by the sentiment. Even though it also made him feel more guilty for hiding so much from him. “you’ve always been there for me too. in my opinion, you’re the best brother, but i think it’s okay if we differ on this.”

“ALRIGHT,” Papyrus continued grinning before standing up. “WE HAVE A DAD! THIS IS FANTASTIC!”

“We do,” Sans grinned once more, moving to stand up as well after Papyrus did. “and he’s a good one. ...he was gone a lot because of his work, but we all had a good relationship. i think he’ll be happy that you know now.”

“I SHOULD GO TALK TO HIM!” Papyrus said excitedly and rushed out of the room.

Sans followed his brother out of the room, walking to the top of the stairs and slowly down them, watching Papyrus and Gaster by the couch. He’d stay for just another minute and then go find the kid again. He’d already been here for longer than he’d intended now.

Papyrus talked rapidly to Gaster who nodded, smiling in response to one of Papyrus’ many questions. Papyrus then gave a huge hug which Gaster returned.
Seeing this interaction from the kitchen entryway, Toriel smiled.

Sans made it to the main floor and walked over toward the two on the couch, waiting for a break in their conversation before raising his hand to get Gaster’s attention and giving him a smile.

“our house is your house. stay here with us?”

“SANS IS RIGHT! OUR HOUSE IS YOUR HOUSE TOO!” Papyrus agreed.

‘IF I’M NOT INTRUDING, OF COURSE,’ Gaster signed with a smile.

“there’s no way you could be. we both want you to stay,” Sans assured him. “i’d like to stay and chat, but i need to get back out there now. the human’s getting further into hotland and i need to check up on them. i’ll be back when i can.”

“TELL THE HUMAN I SAY HI!” Papyrus said.

Toriel walked over to Sans and handed him a small wrapped bundle.

“Butterscotch-cinnamon pie pieces for you and Frisk,” she explained.

“OH! THE PIE IS READY?” Papyrus asked.

“Yes, it’s cooled down enough now. Why don’t you try it?” Toriel suggested, motioning toward the kitchen.

Papyrus followed the suggestion and walked into the kitchen, put a piece on a plate, and took a bite. His brow bones rose in surprise.

“...WOWIE! I DID GREAT!”

“Of course! You are The Great Papyrus, after all,” Toriel smiled, reminding him.

“NYEH HEH HEH!”

Sans took the pie bundle from Toriel with a grateful “thanks”, before watching the interaction between Toriel and Papyrus, grinning at her encouragement toward him.

“We’ll see you soon,” Toriel said as she turned back around and bent down to kiss Sans.

When she bent to kiss him, Sans returned the show of affection, closing his eye sockets briefly along with it before grinning widely and winking at her after it was done. He felt that the blue tinge was back on his face, but he couldn’t really help that with the love of his life showing him this kind of affection.

“soon as i can. thank again for the pie, tori. i’m sure it will be his-tori-cal, with both you and papyrus as the chefs.”

Papyrus groaned while Toriel chuckled.

“Maybe when you get back I’ll have taught Papyrus how to make hot cross puns.”

Sans gave his own chuckle then, wondering how he’d managed to find this treasure of a woman, and have her like him too. She was perfect.

“sounds like you two are on a roll,” he returned, pleased. “i’ll see you all later.”
Frisk stretched a bit after solving the east and west door puzzles and getting past some lasers with help from Alphys. So far their exploration into Hotland had not changed from the usual timeline. If they weren’t mistaken, Mettaton’s cooking show would be up next.

The room was dark when Frisk entered, as usual. The warmth from Hotland permeated even here, in this more controlled environment, but that wasn’t surprising. It wasn't as though the heat bothered Mettaton or any of the other monsters residing in this region.

Lurking in the dark, Mettaton waited to see if Alphys would keep up with her side of the plan still, even if she'd tried to scrap it. If she didn't turn the lights on he'd just do the deed when the human came stumbling through the dark and be done with it.

The lights came on. It wasn’t like Alphys had much of a choice at this point. Frisk took a look around at their surroundings. So far the kitchen set seemed normal, with its countertops, fridge, and other accoutrements all accounted for.

“Be careful,” Alphys cautioned Frisk on speakerphone.

Seeing the lights flickering on, Mettaton wheeled around the side of the set where he’d been waiting, likely unseen by the human as they looked around. Across the room, a sign of the usual force field could be seen flickering to life, but instead of remaining stationary, it shifted and expanded along with the one that was also usually behind Frisk throughout the duration of Mettaton’s “cooking show”, growing until the whole area was domed in by what looked like electric glass, completely trapping the human in.

“SO NICE OF YOU TO DROP IN, BEAUTIFUL,” the robot’s voice sounded over a loud speaker as he floated into sight of the cameras outside of the “bubble” with the jet flames keeping him aloft blazing beneath him. “SO SORRY FOR THE CHANGE IN PROGRAMMING, BUT WE’VE GOT SOMETHING SPECIAL PLANNED ON TODAY’S THRILLING EPISODE OF ‘COOKING WITH A KILLER ROBOT’!”

The room was getting hotter. Slowly, steadily, heat trapped in by the force field was becoming harder to deal with every moment.

“Oh no!” Alphys could be heard exclaiming through the phone as she watched via the TV monitors in her lab.

“LET’S SEE IF YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO COMPLETE THE RECIPE ON THE COUNTER THERE,” Mettaton challenged. “YOU HAVE TEN MINUTES TO ASSEMBLE ALL OF THE INGREDIENTS AND GET THEM MIXED AND READY TO BAKE!! ...OR YOU’LL BE THE ENTRÉE AT THE FEAST TONIGHT CELEBRATING MY DEBUT ON THE SURFACE! BETTER GET COOKING, DARLING!”

Taking a moment to glare at Mettaton as he explained, Frisk took off their scarf, which they had left on despite rolling up their sleeves and tying their jacket around their waist earlier, and folded it into a triangle shape which they then wrapped under their hair to work as a makeshift bandanna.

Looking at the recipe it appeared they were making the usual cake recipe. They quickly retrieved the nearby milk, sugar, and eggs and whisked them together in a mixing bowl, which they noted had Mettaton’s face on the bottom. They might have taken some pleasure in covering it up with the
Frisk waved Mettaton down to check their handiwork, sweating from the ever increasingly intense heat. A round hole formed in the top of the force field, which Mettaton then glided down through, landing on the kitchen flooring and wheeling over with one hand under approximately where his chin might be if he had one in an animated gesture of thought and speculation.

“NOT BAD, LOVELY. AND WITH TWENTY-SEVEN SECONDS TO SPARE! BUT YOU’D BETTER GET IT IN THE OVEN; THE TRUE TEST IS THE TASTE, AFTER ALL! ...BUT WAIT, WHAT’S THIS? YOU MISSED AN INGREDIENT!” Mettaton said as he reached down to pick up the paper, revealing a section at the bottom that had been folded over and unnoticed. “YOU FORGOT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING!”

Reaching under the counter with one long, noodly robot arm, Mettaton grabbed...oh my. A chainsaw. Which he then started and edged toward the human with as the temperature in the kitchen continued to rise.

“A HUMAN SOUL!!!! CAN’T HANDLE THE HEAT, SWEETHEART? YOU SHOULD’VE FOUND A WAY OUT OF MY KITCHEN!”

Frisk was too hot to look frightened or glare at the robot; they were on the verge of passing out from heat exhaustion.

“WAIT!” Alphys shouted through the speakerphone loud enough to be heard. “W-what if someone is allergic!? Couldn’t there be a s-substitution?”

It was then that a huge, powerful burst of energy blew across the back of the set, disintegrating props and rigging, short circuiting the force field, and scorching the ground. The closed in dome vanished, sparking into nothing as Mettaton turned to do his version of gaping, staring at the destruction as he spotted a glowing, cyan colored eye staring at him from the darkness off-stage.

“...I THINK I’M ALLERGIC TO THIS SITUATION! SORRY DARLINGS, THAT’S THE END OF THE SHOW!”

Turning off the chainsaw and setting it on the counter, Mettaton’s jet activated again and he absconded into the air, moving quickly away from whatever the hell that was, and leaving Frisk in the slightly less sweltering normal heat of Hotland. Frisk was doing better now that they weren’t trapped in what had felt like oven level temperatures. They wiped off their forehead with the bottom of their shirt before turning to look in the direction of the darkness.

‘Hi, dad,’ Frisk signed with a relieved smile.

Not really caring about the cameras now that Mettaton’s were gone at least, Sans stepped out of the shadows and calmly walked over to Frisk, the glow in his eye fading as the normal white dots came back.

“hey, kiddo. sorry i took so long. you’re looking a little faint.”

‘I’ll be fine,’ Frisk signed, waving off the idea. ‘As long as he doesn’t try to barbecue me again.’

“Well, considering this is—was—the only cooking show set i’ve seen around here, i’d think you’re fairly safe from that specific thing happening. though this is hotland, so i wouldn’t completely write it off.”

Sans looked around the area, one hand in his pocket and the other at his side, holding the bundle of ingredients.
pie slices Toriel had given him.

“let’s find you some water soon, though. heat stroke isn’t something i want you having to deal with.”

Frisk wiped their brow again with the back of their hand and nodded in agreement. As far as they could remember though, the only water source in Hotland was the water cooler near Alphys’ lab. Thinking almost the same thing Frisk was, Sans frowned before looking back the way that they had come.

“do you want to take a break, or continue on? i could take us right to the resort for now. or...you got any nice cream on you still? that’d help cool you down, at least.”

Frisk pulled out their cellphone at the suggestion and perused their dimensional boxes, pausing a moment to deposit their scarf and coat, before looking for their food items. On the way to Hotland they had stopped to visit the bunny nice cream salesman and had bought several of the frosty cool treats. They pulled out two from a box and offered one to Sans.

“thanks for the offer, but i think you should keep it until you’re out of the heat. i’ve got some butterscotch-cinnamon pie from tori and papyrus here too, when you need it,” he replied, holding up the bundle for Frisk to see.

Frisk put the other nice cream away and quickly opened their own. Almost as soon as they opened it, the treat began to melt. Not being one to waste food, Frisk practically shoveled the nice cream into their mouth before pausing to clutch their head in pain.

‘brain freeze,’ Frisk signed with a weird expression still upon their face.

When the kid made that face their following statement of explanation, Sans chuckled and ruffled their hair.

“careful with the extreme temperatures there.”

Frisk smiled at Sans ruffling their hair before trying to tame it back to its usual look. They looked back at Mettaton’s now demolished kitchen set. The fridge was knocked over on its side, the countertops were non-existant, and the floor tiles were covered in scorch marks.

‘Thanks for saving me again,’ Frisk signed after looking at the devastation.

“anytime, kid. i’m actually pretty determined to do my job this time, so don’t worry. you ready to keep going?” Sans asked with the bundle of pie slices and Frisk’s nice cream trash disappeared from sight somehow.

Grinning at Sans’ mention of being determined, Frisk nodded.

The two continued on and after an uneventful elevator ride, came to Sans’ hot dog stand. Before Frisk could blink, Sans was gone from behind them and leaning against the service side of the sentry station counter, looking like he was bored and had been there the whole time, though he paused, turning around to serve a Vulkin when it came over, followed by a female bird-monster and a couple other stragglers. Apparently the stand was actually somewhat of a popular snack destination here in Hotland.

Once the monsters were satisfied and all of them but the bird-lady and the Vulkin left the area, Sans took up his usual pose behind the counter, hands in his pockets as he winked over at the human.
“heya, kid. fancy meeting you here,” he said.

Frisk shook with silent laughter and then walked closer to the stand.

‘Is thirty still an excessive number?’ Frisk signed, curious to hear the answer.

“hmm. good question. you wanna find out?” Sans grinned, holding up one of the “hot dogs” clasped in a set of metal tongs, seemingly up for the challenge.

His kid grinned in reply. Challenge accepted.

Ten minutes later, Sans was standing next to Frisk with his hands in his pockets, staring up at the fifty hotdog (and cat) tower balancing on the human’s head, with the help of his magic, of course.

“welp. looks like we have a weiner, folks. this is a new underground record, and you mustard the courage to tackle it. i condiment your skill.” Oh, but he wasn’t done yet. Giving a wink, Sans kept going, enjoying this way too much. “i’d say to relish your victory while you can, but i don’t think anyone’s going to be able to ketchup to this pristine level of perfection.”

The puns were too silly, so the child couldn’t help giggling, sending the tower gently crashing down to the ground; a mess of buns and hot animals. Oh well, they were just happy to spend time on something fun with Sans and not worry about the tasks that lay before them.

After the hot dog stacking record was broken, and cleaning up the mess at Frisk’s insistence, the duo continued their way down the path, encountering Royal Guard 01 and 02.

Frisk, deciding to jump ahead of the game yet again, told 02 that his armor had a smudge on it and proceeded to wipe it down with their shirt sleeve. The effect was immediate; 02 seemed to be sweating profusely.

“So...hot...”

The dragon guard took the offending piece of armor off to relieve some of the heat as Frisk just stood back next to Sans to watch what happened next. Sans watched as well, smirking a little as he observed 01’s own sweating and unbalance in the presence of 02’s toned torso.

He knew what this was about. Even if he’d never watched Frisk “battle” these two (which he had), he’d still know. In the last reset, back on the surface, he’d heard strange, suspicious shuffling noises coming from a group of trees and when he’d gone to investigate, well...he didn’t have to use his imagination. ‘Course, he immediately let them be, but he definitely knew that there was more to these two than just being patrol partners.

A dragon and a rabbit...a skeleton and a goat. It was a good thing monsters generally based things on love and soul resonance rather than prejudice.

‘You should be more honest with your feelings,’ Frisk signed innocently to 01 while 02 attempted to cool himself down.

Seeing what Frisk signed, the rabbit guard got more flustered, sweating underneath his own armor.

“Ha ha...I...don’t know what you’re...” 01 trailed off.

He paused to watch 02, pent up thoughts and feelings building more and more until he couldn’t take it anymore. How many times had he almost told him, and chickened out? How much longer could he pretend like this was all just platonic? He couldn’t put it off any longer. He couldn’t stand keeping
the truth to himself. He’d tried so hard to keep it in, but...now all of the times he had practiced confessing, stressing over what could happen came bubbling to the surface. He wasn’t talking to the mirror-like reflective surface of an elevator structure anymore, but he could still do this!!

“Dude, I...I can’t ignore this anymore. 02!! I like...I LIKE you, bro...the way you fight...the way you talk. I love training with you, doing team attacks...standing here, waving our weapons in sync...02, I...I want to stay like this forever...”

...It was then that he chickened out again, getting more nervous with each second he couldn’t see the other guard’s facial reactions behind his helm and stuttering over his words as he tried to back the heck up before he’d (in his mind) possibly ruined their partnership forever.

“Uh...I mean, I...uh...Psyche!! Gotcha, man!! Haha!!” the rabbit laughed unconvincingly.

“...01,” 02’s expression was unreadable behind his own helm, but Frisk smiled knowingly watching the scene play out.

“...do you want...to get some ice cream?” the dragon guard asked.

“S-sure, dude! Haha!” 01’s laugh this time was genuine and sounded like he was really happy. This couldn’t really be the human they were after anyway, right? Why would they have a monster travel buddy if they were bad?

As Sans watched, 01 moved over to the other guard, hopeful. The skeleton gently nudged Frisk, motioning past the guards and signing to them instead of talking.

‘maybe we should mosey on while they’re busy gazing into each other’s helmet slits,’ he signed discreetly.

Frisk nodded in agreement and the two quietly slipped past the distracted guards.

‘Maybe I should become a dating consultant,’ Frisk joked once they had gotten out of the guards’ line of sight.

“heh,” Sans grinned, talking verbally again now that they were out of earshot. “maybe you should. you’re pretty good at it. i don’t think i would’ve been nearly as bold towards tori if you hadn’t said anything.”

There was an awkward but pleased tint to his face when he said this, shoving his hands into his pockets as he walked.

The child led the way forward until the lights flickered off again. They frowned. It was time for “breaking news”.

“Frisk! Stay alert! I don’t know what he’s up to,” Alphys said over speakerphone before turning the lights back on.

When the lights returned, Sans was gone, out of sight. It was unlikely that the skeleton had actually left, but for now, Mettaton wouldn’t know that the human still had an escort.

As usual to Frisk, the news ticker set cameras flickered to life, and Mettaton boomed from his spot at the newscaster desk, seeming like he’d completely forgotten about the whole thing with his other set having been half disintegrated by a huge energy blast (he hadn’t).
“GOOD EVENING, BEAUTIES AND GENTLEBEAUTIES! THIS IS METTATON, REPORTING LIVE FROM MTT NEWS. AN INTERESTING SITUATION HAS ARISEN IN EASTERN HOTLAND! FORTUNATELY, OUR CORRESPONDENT IS OUT THERE, REPORTING LIVE! BRAVE CORRESPONDENT! PLEASE FIND SOMETHING NEWSWORTHY TO REPORT! OUR FORTY-THREE WONDERFUL VIEWERS ARE WAITING FOR YOU!!” Mettaton loudly announced.

Apparently, the drama and destruction on the set of the cooking show had drawn more couch spectators. Frisk was wary. Other than the viewer count, so far everything seemed normal. Not wanting to waste time, Frisk walked over to the nearest object, a normal looking basketball, and signed that they found something to report.

“BASKETBALL’S A BLAST, ISN’T IT, DARLING? TOO BAD YOU CAN’T PLAY WITH THESE BALLS...BECAUSE THEY’RE MTT-BRAND FASHION BASKETBALLS. FOR WEARING, NOT PLAYING. AFTER ALL, YOU CAN’T GET RICK AND FAMOUS LIKE MOI WITHOUT BEAUTIFYING A FEW ORBS. YOU WANT TO REPORT THIS, HM? FANTASTIC!”

With a flourish, the robot picked up a fake script and focused his attention on the camera, enthusiastic as always.

“ATTENTION VIEWERS! OUR CORRESPONDENT HAS FOUND...A BASKETBALL! AH, BASKETBALLS. CIRCLES OF FUN, ORBS OF JOY. SPHERES OF AMUSEMENT. BUT AS STATED PREVIOUSLY, YOU SHOULDN’T PLAY WITH THIS ONE...IT IS INDEED AN MTT-BRAND FASHIONBALL! PROPER MAINTENANCE IS REQUIRED TO KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD. AS YOU CAN SEE, EVEN EXPOSURE TO HUMAN BODY HEAT CAUSES THE PAINT TO SLOUGH OFF...WAIT A SECOND. THAT’S NOT A BASKETBALL. THAT’S A BOMB!”

As Mettaton spoke, the textured surface of the “basketball” slipped revealing his words to be true.
“OH NO!! THIS SPORT REVIEW...IS TURNING INTO A SHORT REVIEW! ...BECAUSE IT’LL BE OVER AFTER YOU BLOW UP. BUT DON’T GET TOO EXCITED! YOU HAVEN’T EVEN SEEN THE REST OF THE ROOM YET!!”

With that, the set backgrounds dropped off into the blackness below, revealing a large area connected by metal bridges.

“...OH MY! IT SEEMS EVERYTHING IN THIS AREA IS ACTUALLY A BOMB! THAT DOG’S A BOMB! THAT SCRIPT’S A BOMB! BRAVE CORRESPONDENT...IF YOU DON’T DEFUSE ALL OF THE BOMBS...”

The screen on the broadcast panned, as Mettaton jetted up to another area connected to the one Frisk was on, and he gestured to a huge supposed bomb sitting in front of the elevator tower.

“...THIS BIG BOMB WILL BLOW YOU TO SMITHEREENS IN TWO MINUTES! THEN YOU WON’T BE REPORTING ‘LIVE’ ANY LONGER! HOW TERRIBLE! HOW DISTURBING! OUR FORTY-SEVEN VIEWERS ARE GOING TO LOVE WATCHING THIS! GOOD LUCK, DARLING!”

Frisk received a call from Alphys at that moment and put her back on speaker.

“I can’t believe him! There’s a bomb defusal app on your phone. Just point it at each bomb and hit defuse!”

The child set to work, rushing around to each of the bombs to defuse them, pausing a moment to allow the extremely agile glass of water catch up with them instead of chasing it. They were convinced Mettaton was up to something. With the way the timeline had played out this time around, things seemed far too normal.

Mettaton jetted over to occupy the airspace above where Frisk had deactivated their last bomb, voice booming loud again, like a dramatic narrator.

“WELL DONE, DARLING! YOU’VE DEACTIVATED ALL OF THE BOMBS! IF YOU DIDN’T DEACTIVATE THEM, THE BIG BOMB WOULD HAVE EXPLODED IN TWO MINUTES! NOW IT WON’T EXPLODE IN TWO MINUTES!”

Robotic arms spread out, the palms of his hands directed upward toward the ceiling far above in a dramatic, and definitely deviant, display.

“INSTEAD, IT’LL EXPLODE IN TWO SECONDS! GOODBYE, DARLING!”

The dramatic set music played, counting down the two second before the bomb was supposed to go off...then past, to three seconds...four...

...Then a rumbling filled the ground beneath Frisk’s feet, synonymous with the bright light of multiple explosions lighting up the cave walls, fire filling the air. It was a good thing that the last item Frisk had grabbed was the agile “water”, because that wouldn’t go off until the fire hit its combustible contents. Green metal supports screeched and groaned under the destructive force of what had just happened, dropping the land chunks – and Frisk – down, down toward the deep pit and lava lake below.

Whatever had set Mettaton off this time, it was a doozy.

If Frisk had access to a broom nearby, they were certain they would’ve been able to use a summoning charm without the use of a wand through sheer desperation and determination alone, but
as this was Hotland and certainly not home to broomsticks of any kind, they plummeted towards the lava below.

They couldn’t give up now though. Everyone was counting on them.

Frisk, using gravity along with their willpower and determination, managed to twist and jump off of the falling platform they were on and hoped somehow they could make it to the next and so on.

Far up above, Mettaton watched as the human struggled in what he thought was futility, rather satisfied with this plan. He had evacuated all of the monsters in this area beforehand and made sure that the elevator tower had a protective field around it. Regardless of how intent he was on ending this human and getting their soul, he wasn’t going to allow anyone else to be hurt in the process.

Suddenly, in Frisk’s path, several of the larger chunks of land stopped falling...the red dirt looked strange enveloped in blue light, but it was definitely a positive change. On a more stable ridge up above stood Sans, left eye blazing with magic and both hands out as he tried to help the human to safety. He would have just grabbed Frisk themselves – that would have been much easier than holding the chunks of land, but there was too much debris coming down. He couldn’t have prevented them from getting struck while he tried to levitate them out of harm’s way.

Frisk continued hopping up the falling platforms until they landed on sturdy ground again, thankful for Sans’ assistance, but too exhausted to sign it. Instead, they sat on the ground, catching their breath, looking up at Mettaton, curious what he’d do next.

All Mettaton saw from up above was Frisk getting to safety – and the figure behind them who was staring at him from within the shadows of his drawn hood, one eye still glowing blue. If robots could get chills, Mettaton would have them upon realizing that this figure must have been the same one who had destroyed his other set.

Sure, Mettaton was brash. Yeah, he was confident. But he also knew when to back off so he could broadcast again another day.

“...NICELY DONE, DARLING! I’LL GIVE YOU AN A+ FOR AGILITY. I DIDN’T THINK YOU HAD IT IN YOU! EVERYONE, LET’S GIVE A BIG HAND TO OUR DARING CORRESPONDENT, AND THEIR SIDEKICK, WHO’S NEW TO THE SHOW! THANK YOU ALL FOR TUNING IN! IT’S BEEN A BLAST! WELL, TOODLES UNTIL NEXT TIME!”

Sans let the robot go, watching as he jetted away deeper into Hotland. He pulled out the butterscotch-cinnamon pie bundle and handed a piece to Frisk as they picked themself off of the ground.

“...welp. wasn’t expecting him to go that far,” Sans commented, in between bites of his own slice of pie.

‘Something isn’t right. He’s never been this aggressive before,’ they signed before pausing to think. ‘I’m beginning to think this isn’t just because Mettaton’s trying to get revenge for Alphys’ situation with Undyne.’

It was awkward trying to sign with the pie in their hand, so they quickly ate it, recovering their HP.

“agreed with you there...he’s always been dramatic, but this is beyond excessive.”

Pausing after the statement, Sans looked down at the ground beneath them a split second before grabbing Frisk’s arm and quickly pulling them further onto solid ground just as the crack he’d seen
forming broke all the way through and sent the ledge they had just been standing on into the depths below with the rest.

Both stared down into the depths.

“...nothing in this area seems stable anymore. we should keep going.”

Frisk nodded in agreement, still a bit spooked at how they would’ve fallen in if Sans hadn’t been paying attention, and led the way to the elevator, Mettaton’s barrier long since vanished.
Spider Donuts, Starfaits, and One Human Eradication Robot

Reaching the next area, Frisk paused to purchase a donut from Muffet’s table, carefully counting out the required 9,999 gold pieces. They’d always been curious if the hefty priced donut tasted any different than its ruins equivalent and since they had earned enough money, figured it was worth finding out.

They carefully nibbled an edge and decided that the taste was no different. Oh well.

Moving on, Sans agreed to meet up with the human further ahead, after Frisk insisted they could solve the northern and southern door puzzles on their own, without the risk of being attacked. Frisk suggested that Sans go ahead to see what Mettaton had in store for the musical segment.

‘Don’t worry,’ Frisk had signed. ‘Muffet should let me pass. Last time I showed her a donut from the ruins and she stopped attacking me immediately.’

Oh how wrong they were.

Entering Muffet’s parlor alone, Frisk was puzzled when the spiders started making their usual chatter about humans hating spiders. They stopped on Muffet’s web and turned to look at the giggling spider lady.

“Ahuhuhu...well, well~ There you are.”

Muffet stood partially in the shadows, many eyes glinting in the dim lighting of the parlor as she watched the human scrutinizingly.

“You know, deary, I truly wanted to give you the benefit of a doubt when you stopped by my bakery table. The spiders at the ruins have had so much to say about you! You gave them so much hope. How do you feel about yourself now, deary? ...You truly are despicable.”

As she had been speaking, the webs around Frisk had been creeping...winding...tangling...limiting the human’s movement, binding them to their now purple toned prison. It was nothing they hadn’t experienced before when facing Muffet, but these webs stung. Muffet was riled.

Frisk’s soul appeared in front of them as they struggled in the painful webbing, but it seemed that the more they struggled, the tighter the webs became. The whole experience reminded them of an encounter they had had with a neighbor’s boa constrictor when they were much younger.

Their hands were just still free enough to sign, ‘I don’t understand! What did I do?’

“Did you hear that?” Muffet asked of her fellow spiders. “Ahuhuhu...they want to know what they did. Playing dumb, deary? We know that all of that gold you paid us with is counterfeit. The moment you’re free, the magic on it will wear off and we’ll be left with pebbles.”

The pain the web was inflicting increased – stinging like poison, seeping into the human’s soul and tainting it purple.

“You know...the worst part isn’t even that it’s fake. The worst part...is that you made them think that they would be free, all so that you could have a few sugary treats. How cruel can you be? Ahuhuhu...at least you’ll make a decent snack for my pet~”

There was a strange tension tugging on the webbing as the arachnid beast, Muffet’s pet, crawled
toward Frisk over the edge of the pathway with its large, fanged mouth salivating with hunger. Bribery wasn’t going to work this time.

Counterfeit money? All the money Frisk had received in the ruins was either allowance from Toriel or from completing errands for various monsters. Mettaton must have been behind this as well, telling Muffet a lie so that she would attack Frisk.

Frisk mentally cursed themself for having sent Sans ahead and tried to figure out how to get out of the painful webbing. They knew struggling wouldn’t work as it only made the binding tighter. What if they tried relaxing...?

The reverse thinking worked. They were able to get their body free so that they were now standing on top of the webbing. They couldn’t escape the web entirely however because of their poisoned soul leaving them bound to it.

The only option Frisk had was to delay the inevitable and run from Muffet and her pet on the web. Frisk wasn’t sure how long they could last though. The web wrapped around them earlier hurt enough to take away about half of their 10 HP. Things didn’t look good.

With large, sharp legs scritching and clawing, Muffet’s pet continued its advance, fully pulling itself up over the edge and onto the walkway before crawling toward its would-be victim. As it moved closer, its mouth opened wide – drooling and lined with serrated rows of teeth. It reared up, and its sharp leg points came down, aimed at the human below it.

But it didn’t hit its mark.

Instead, the sound of screeching and the scraping of claws on bone sounded through the poshly upholstered cavern, clashing with a large, canine skull that hovered in the air above, shielding the skeleton it belonged to. Sans stood in front of the kid, not about to let them get skewered. A blue focus of energy surrounded his feet, preventing the web he was standing on from hurting him – for the time being.

“Ahuhuhu...? What’s this? Why are you helping this swindler, hmm?” Muffet questioned, looking at Sans. “I suppose you’re probably in on it. I was warned that they might have an accomplice... What a shame. I do dislike dust in my parlor.”

As the giant arachnid continued its assault, Sans stood in the way, not attacking so that he wouldn’t accidentally turn it to dust. Blow after screeching blow landed on the Gaster Blaster turned shield, causing a few cracks to form in the bone as it went on. Frisk was relieved at Sans’ intervention but was on the verge of passing out from the poison when, in their blurred vision, they spied a tiny spider carrying a note scurry past them to Muffet.

Pausing, Muffet bent over to take the note from the spider courier, carefully unfolding the fancy stationary. She took a moment to read it before bringing one of her many hands up to her mouth.

“Oh my...it’s a telegram from the spiders at the ruins,” Muffet said, reading over it. “They saw that you were there with them for a while, and...you did errands for them and others in the ruins. They saw you earning gold...and you never even attempted to harm a single spider! It seems that this has all been a big misunderstanding.”

Muffet folded the note and placed it into a pocket before snapping her fingers to signal her pet to stop. Reluctantly, it eased up on its attacks before hissing quietly and crawling back over the side of the walkway and the webbing lost its purple tinge, releasing Frisk from its hold. It was too little, too late. Frisk, as this was happening, had passed out on the walkway, so they didn’t hear this news.
Their soul returned to red and went back into their body.

“I thought you were someone who hated spiders! The person who warned us and asked for that soul...they must have meant a different human in a blue shirt. Sorry for all of the trouble. Ahuhuhu~” Muffet apologized.

The second Muffet’s pet was gone and the purple in the webbing completely faded, Sans turned to step toward Frisk and check their unconscious form with concern on his face. They were only passed out, but their HP was pretty low.

“Oh dear,” Muffet said from the side as she watched. “They’re not dead, are they?”

“no. but it’s a good thing you stopped when you did,” Sans frowned, gathering his kid into his arms to pick them up. They’d need healing, as soon as they could get it, and he didn’t have enough magic in him left to make the shortcut trip back to Snowdin where Toriel was. Somewhere closer, then.

“So sorry again, deary. Do tell them when they wake up that they can come back any time for a free donut – on the house. It’s the least we can do~” Muffet said.

“right,” Sans gave in response before heading back out the way Frisk had come in.

It was no good. He thought he could feel the disturbance of a save point nearby, but without Frisk’s help, there was no way he’d ever be able to locate it by himself. Plan B. Halfway through the doorway, he vanished with Frisk – ending up in one of the hotel rooms at the MTT resort. He knew that this room was always free at this time, so the chances of being disturbed were low.

Carefully, he set the human onto the bed, checking over their forehead and vitals. Whatever Muffet had done to her web this time had had the same effect his karma attacks against Chara normally did.

“hang on, kid...you’re gonna be fine,” Sans said, looking down at them.

He’d need to leave to get something that they could actually get down while half conscious. Maybe a Starfait would work. Turning, he headed towards the door to pay a visit to the cat monster everyone called Burgerpants.

“Welcome to MTT-Brand Burger Emporium, home of the Glamburger. Sparkle up your dayTM!!” the monster exclaimed seeing Sans walk up to the counter. His tone was cheery...with just the slightest hint of “end my suffering now, please” to it.

Letting the door close behind him, Sans stepped up to the counter, pulling his hood back as he went to avoid looking too odd or sketchy in the store – despite being a skeleton and possibly the rarest monster type. He’d certainly never seen another one besides himself, Gaster, or Papyrus.

“hey, thanks. can i get a starfait and a legendary hero?”

Sans knew the Starfait was sweet, but maybe the kid would need something more substantial when they woke up. That sandwich was expensive, but the food in the restaurant was even more pricey and he was too tired to pop anywhere else for alternatives or track down new save points he couldn’t see on his own.

“Thanksy! Have a FABU-ful day!!!” Burgerpants said as he handed Sans the requested food items, not recognizing Sans from his comedy sets at the hotel restaurant. Burgerpants never had proper breaks, being the sole employee of the Burger Emporium, so whenever his shift was over he always just went immediately home.
‘Onlytwomorehoursonlytwomorehours,’ he thought to himself.

“Thanks, buddy.” Sans responded, turning to leave after paying before pausing and turning back, laying an extra hundred gold on the counter. “Dunno if this is much around these parts, but there’s a tip.”

Sans headed back toward the door again. He was in this hotel every once in a while for his comedy routine, but he didn’t pay attention to the cost of living outside of Snowdin.

Burgerpants looked around, wondering if Mettaton was pulling a hidden camera prank on him or worse, that this was a legit tip and Mettaton would claim it was somehow taking away from his job and play one of those “you’re terrible at your job” songs.

He decided to risk it and pocketed the money.

“Thanks, buddy,” Burgerpants called out to Sans.

“No prob,” Sans grinned and stepped out of the fast food joint.

He knew Burgerpants – Sans had been told his woes of working fast food in the Underground when they’d gotten to the surface. The guy deserved something for putting up with Mettaton. Speaking of...

Sans took a moment to glance around the lobby. It seemed as clear as it had been when he’d come through: no obnoxious deadly rectangles in sight, other than the one on the memorial fountain.

The skeleton continued back to the room quickly, letting himself in via shortcut and double-checking the door was locked behind him before stepping over to the bed and shuffling onto it so that he could hold the kid up while feeding them the Starfait. It took a moment of maneuvering, but he ended up with his back leaned against the wall and Frisk held up against him. From there, he nudged the human, trying to get them to wake up enough at least to swallow the food he had brought.

“Hey, kid...c’mon, show me some life.”

Frisk stirred a bit. They were still out of sorts, but it looked like they’d be okay. The child wasn’t entirely sure where they were at the moment since they hadn’t really looked around yet, but they knew that they were leaning against Sans, so they felt safe and protected.

‘Oh. We’re at the MTT Resort,’ they thought to themself, spotting the Starfait in Sans’ hand.

“There you are,” Sans said quietly when he saw their eyes open a little, and he shifted a bit more to get a spoonful of the Starfait and move it toward their mouth. “Try to eat a little of this, okay? We need to get your HP back up.”

Frisk ate the spoonful of Starfait offered to them. They wondered in their haziness what on Earth Mettaton would think of actual parfaits from the surface. Maybe he’d realize they weren’t supposed to be what appeared to be mostly pure sparkling sugar in different colors. They had to admit it was tasty though, and human food just didn’t have the magic to heal HP like monster food did. ...Not that they had to particularly worry about such things prior to falling into the Underground.

Seeing Frisk eat the first bite, Sans waited for them to swallow before he coaxingly continued to feed them more spoonfuls of the sugary yogurt-like treat. He wouldn’t stop until they either refused it and their HP was back up to max, or they ran out of Starfait.

“That’s it. Let’s get you healed and then you can rest here until you’re ready to keep going,” Sans said
A few minutes later, Frisk appeared much healthier, their cheeks full of color again and their HP back up to its now normal 10 points. They weren’t quite ready to leave the cozy bed however, so they curled up against Sans to take a short nap.

Sans used his magic to levitate the Starfait and the wrapped up Legendary Hero to the nightstand before letting the kid get more comfortable. He watched them sleep for a couple minutes before his eyelids started to droop too, feeling drained from so much popping around and magic use. He could still keep going, if he had to – he’d shown that much in the bad times. But right now...sleep was really appealing.

It didn’t take long before Sans ended up on his side asleep, letting the kid stay cuddled to him. It was different, but...kinda nice. It reminded him of the rare times he and Papyrus would fall asleep together after watching too much TV or a long day doing guard work. ...Except for the fact that Papyrus was much taller than the small human.

Sleep was good.

An hour later, Frisk woke up and stretched a bit, careful not to bother Sans. They wondered if Sans had figured out anything regarding Mettaton’s musical portion shenanigans and if they should just avoid it entirely. Would that irreparably screw up the timeline more than it already was?

They shook their head. Better to not push their luck. Mettaton would’ve likely dropped them straight into lava instead of Alphys’ tile puzzle, and even if they could have found a broom this time, they were pretty sure they wouldn’t have been able to cast a good enough flying charm on it to get away from such a danger, especially not with their lack of experience and a broken wand. Besides, the timeline, they were pretty sure, was so far removed from a normal timeline that they thought they might have finally stumbled across an alternate one, so sticking to normalcy was pretty moot at this point.

Sans slept for a few more minutes after Frisk awoke, snoozing somewhat peacefully beside them. When they shook their head though, the subtle tickling movement of their hair against one of his hands brought him back into consciousness and he jolted awake, eye sockets snapping open as a surge of energy crackled through the air – one socket black and the other a blazing blue light.

Something about waking up so suddenly in such close proximity to the kid had set something off in him, and he had to take a moment to stare at them, calming himself down eventually that the magic fizzled out and his eyes returned to normal. Taking a deep breath, Sans shifted to lean against the wall, giving an apologetic grin.

“heh...sorry, kid,” he cleared his throat despite not having one visible to speak of. “how are you feeling? you look a lot better now.”

‘I’m fine now,’ Frisk signed after adjusting themself so they could face Sans. ‘Thank you again for rescuing me. Are you okay?’

Frisk knew that Sans had used an exorbitant amount of magic in the previous several hours. They couldn’t even begin to fathom how much concentration was required to use the “shortcuts” he took to skip around about the Underground or to summon his Gaster Blasters on command.

Relaxing a bit more while ignoring the slight perspiration on his skull, Sans gave a shrug, then a yawn, rubbing at an eye socket before grinning again.
“yeah. don’t worry ‘bout me, kid. it takes more than a sassy overgrown calculator to rattle my bones.”

He’d rather just pass right on by what his waking reaction had been just now.

Frisk had picked up on the reaction but pretended not to. They couldn’t blame Sans for having that kind of response, given how many resets he’d been through as a result of the bad times. Still, it hurt a little.

‘Did you find anything out about the musical? You shortcutted us right past it,’ Frisk asked, changing the subject. ‘I...didn’t really want to do it anyway.’

Sliding off the bed, they continued.

‘I wonder how ticked he’ll be that we skipped it?’ they signed, unaware that this might add fuel to Mettaton’s thinking of the human being dangerous and needing to be stopped at all costs. After all, Chara never did those segments either.

“probably hurt his pride more than anything...he loves his theatrics,” Sans said, scooting to the edge of the bed to stand as well before stretching a bit. “however he takes it though, he asked for it. with how he’s being right now and the fact that he’s popped up with a chainsaw before, i don’t want you standing that close to him.”

Frisk nodded, not sure if Sans was aware that the chainsaw was a regular occurrence in the timelines.

Frankly, if Sans wasn’t friends with Mettaton in another timeline, the robot would’ve already been busted.

The Core, if they were lucky and caught Mettaton off-guard by skipping, might not be full of powerful monsters if they left now.

“guess we’d better move on now, huh?” Sans asked, putting his hood up before stepping over to the nightstand to gather the uneaten sandwich. “how are you on hunger? got a legendary hero here if you need it.”

‘I’m not hungry yet, but thank you. Let’s move on,’ Frisk agreed, taking their coat back out from the dimensional box and putting it back on with the hood up, covering as much of their face as they could.

They led the way out of the hotel room, peeking around the corner to make sure Mettaton wasn’t standing there, ready to ambush them. When they saw that the coast was clear, they walked to the save point in the lobby and placed a hand on it, indicating to Sans where it was located.

Oh. So there had been another one of those here, huh?

Stepping over, Sans did as suggested while having no idea whether or not it’d actually work for him if he needed it to, but appreciated the surge of renewing energy anyway.

“let’s hope we don’t have to resort to finding out whether or not this actually works.”

Frisk froze in place before nodding. They hoped in the event of an emergency it would work for Sans, but also that it would never come to that.

Heading past the resort receptionist, the two walked down the corridor leading to the Core. Much to
Frisk’s surprise, the central elevator was functioning normally. They guessed they really did catch Mettaton off-guard. Frisk’s phone rang upon reaching the elevator and they answered.

“There you are! You had disappeared! I-I was worried,” Alphys’ voice could be heard saying through the receiver.

Sans had walked down this path many times, but never alongside the kid. He followed, paying close attention to their surroundings even as he caught the muted sound of Alphys’ voice over the phone Frisk held.

With the elevator working, he knew that they’d end up right next to the doorway that led into where the Mettaton EX battle usually took place...though, what would happen with that this time was still a mystery. Sans doubted it would happen the same as it had in the other resets.

The two rode the elevator up and stepped in the doorway of the aforementioned room. Frisk cautiously entered in, suddenly getting a chill as they lowered their hood. If they could get past this room, they’d be able to get to New Home where the locket resided. They were almost positive it was a horcrux, or at the very least, cursed in some way.

The room was darker than it normally was, and when the lights flickered on as they entered they saw it was larger too, somehow. Probably due to the rearrangeable nature of the rooms and pathways inside of the Core.

Mettaton stood on one wheel at the far end of the room, his entire screen lit up red and the unused musical dress scuffed and singed around the lower frills from his haste to get there when he finally gave up on waiting and his cameras informed him that the human was going through.

“WELL, WELL, WELL. IF IT ISN’T THE HUMAN AND THEIR TRUSTY SIDEKICK, HOODSTER.”

Sans actually smirked a little at that nickname from under the hood of his coat, despite the blue tinge already flickering in his left eye. Mixing “hoodie” and “monster” to resemble casual slang AND a plausible name for an actual sidekick...not bad. The skeleton could hear the mechanical hum of the broadcasting cameras floating about and knew that they were likely on air.

“SO NICE OF YOU TO JOIN ME HERE, DARLINGS,” Mettaton said. “I HAVE SOMETHING FABULOUS TO SHOW YOU.”

Frisk felt a chill come over them again. Whatever the robot had planned for them, it couldn’t be good.

Back in the Hotland lab, Alphys watched the broadcast live on her monitor as Undyne loudly spoke on the phone with Papyrus about what was happening.

Alphys had a concerned expression on her face, not sure what Mettaton was going to do. Was...was he going to flip his own switch?

“Undyne, I-I think we need to do something.”

Just then, back in the battle arena, there was a brilliant flash of light – colors streaming in from the sides of the room as Mettaton’s form changed, silhouette transforming from metal rectangle to the share of Mettaton EX...then further, shoulder armor spanning out and arching as wings made from pure magical and electrical energy spread out, adding more crackling to the air along with Sans’ magic as the skeleton braced, ready to summon another blaster to shield both him and Frisk with.
Sans didn’t want to hurt Mettaton; the robot just didn’t understand what was really going on. No matter what had caused Mettaton to act up like this in this reset, he was still their friend.

As the light died down and Mettaton NEO stood in the way, eyes narrowed with intent, Undyne slammed her hands down onto Alphys’ desk, growling out, “Damn RIGHT WE DO!! HELL, I didn’t know he could that!!!”

“Oh my goodness!!! We gotta go NOW!” Alphys exclaimed running out of the lab for the elevator. As she ran out she saw...Toriel? Was that the right name? And Sans’ dad rushing from the riverperson’s drop-off point, making their way to the elevator.

Back in the room, Frisk removed their broken wand from their back pocket and placed it down on the ground in front of them before stepping back a little, holding up their hands to show Mettaton they weren’t carrying any other items on them.

‘I don’t want to fight you,’ Frisk signed, feeling nervous. They had never had to fight NEO before. Only Chara had. Wait...Chara. That was it! ‘I understand now. This isn’t about what happened earlier with Alphys. You’ve had nightmares, haven’t you?’

“Nightmares? Ha ha ha, really, darling?” Mettaton NEO drawled, voice now smoother and more melodic than his rectangle form. He twitched a smirk before his mouth spread wider into a somewhat manic grin.

“It’s not really that, is it? Since you know about it then...that’s about as good as a confession, isn’t it? Are they as real as they feel?” Mettaton glared at the human. “It doesn’t matter either way now. As any true fan would know, I was first created as a human eradication robot. It was only after becoming a star that things were...altered a little. However, those original functions have never really been removed. And now that my defensive shielding is charged...”

The robot’s mechanical wings spread out further as he raised his right arm, blaster at the end drawing energy to it in bright, pulsing waves as his normally closed eye glinted menacingly.
“YOU WON’T GET PAST ME. I DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU’RE PLAYING AT WITH ALL OF THIS, BUT DON’T WORRY, DARLING! I’m not heartless. THE LEAST I CAN DO IS HELP YOU GO OUT WITH A BANG!”

With his last words the laser fired, destructive energy fanning out and making it pretty much impossible to dodge completely. In immediate response, a large blaster skull formed right in front of Sans and the kid, the skeleton grabbing onto them to hold them close behind the area he knew would be blocked the most.
Scooping up Alphys into her arms mid-stride, Undyne booked it to the elevator, whooshing past a certain goat lady and a forgotten scientist – irritably bouncing from one foot to the other as she waited for them to get in so she could punch the button.

“NGAAHHHH!! HURRY UP!!”

Toriel and Gaster ran to the two in the elevator as quickly as they could. Both were very out of breath.

“W-what are you two doing here?” Alphys asked, still being held in Undyne’s arms.

“We...were following...Papyrus,” Toriel said, trying to get her breathing back to normal. “He said Undyne told him on the phone that Mettaton was trying to kill Frisk.”

Undyne punched the elevator button HARD as soon as the two were in, looking antsy as she waited for it to start up and take them where they needed to be.

“He’s been trying pretty hard, yeah. But now he’s transformed into some sort of...pretty-boy Decepticon,” Undyne said. Of course, the only one who’d get the reference would be Alphys.

Undyne paused after that, blinking.

“Wait...PAPYRUS IS UP THERE?!”

Gaster nodded as the elevator began its ascent.

‘PAPYRUS CAN’T USE LOCATION “JUMPS” LIKE SANS, BUT HE RUNS FAST. I’D SAY HE’S PROBABLY AT THE CORE BY NOW.’

Frisk winced from the brightness of the laser’s light as they felt themself get pushed behind Sans. The force of the blast sent their wand flying through the air and coming to rest a great distance away. They kept close to Sans, holding on to the back of his coat. That Gaster Blaster couldn’t possibly last as a shield forever...

Suddenly, dozens of bones popped up surrounding Frisk and Sans, forming another barrier from the assault. A different Gaster Blaster appeared behind Mettaton NEO and blasted away, knocking out the robot’s defensive shielding.

Mettaton definitely wasn’t expecting the blaster that popped up behind him, and he stumbled forward from the force of the attack – though it just managed to singe him and throw some of his energy out of whack as his shielding took the brunt of the damage and burst.

...He also wasn’t expecting a certain other skeleton monster to be standing in front of him, and ended up pitching forward into said skeleton’s arms. Taking just a second to process this with his face pressed against a bony neck and red scarf, Mettaton reeled away, taking a couple of steps back before stopping, expression confused as his resolve wavered.

“Ha ha...ha...” Mettaton laughed weakly. What was this guy doing here?? “Hello, darling~”

And how the hell had his shielding been knocked out so easily?? In one hit?! Damn it,
Alphys...didn’t she think of these things?!

Sans barely had time to react as his shielding blaster fizzled back into nothingness, eye sockets wide as he glanced at the bone wall between them and Mettaton. That wasn’t him...so...

“papyrus?!” Sans exclaimed.

The younger skeleton brother stood in front of the bone wall, his own Gaster Blaster now floating above him. Papyrus looked conflicted.

“METTATON. I’M SORRY FOR CATCHING YOU OFF-GUARD, BUT AS YOUR FAN, I MUST ASK YOU TO STOP THIS,” he said and then motioned over to Frisk behind the bone wall. “THIS HUMAN IS MY FRIEND. THEY HAVEN’T HURT ANYONE SINCE THE DAY THEY ARRIVED IN THE UNDERGROUND. MY BROTHER IS THE HAPPIEST I’VE SEEN HIM IN YEARS, AND MY FATHER HAS BEEN RETURNED TO ME. ALL THANKS TO FRISK.”

Mettaton NEO listened to Papyrus’ speech, slowly tilting his head to peer behind the skeleton at Frisk and Sans behind him. Frisk was peeking out from behind Sans looking rather alarmed at the turn of events. The latter of the two was watching back with intense focus and a glowing eye that might as well have said, “touch that guy in front of you again and it all ends here”.

Trying to ignore “Hooster’s” glare despite the chill in his soul, the robot moved his gaze back to Papyrus.

“...Well. That all certainly sounds like good and valid endorsements, but I have to say that I’m still skeptical, darling. You may want to step lightly defending them,” Mettaton warned.

“But h-he’s right, Mettaton!” Alphys shouted as she ran into the room along with Undyne, Toriel, and Gaster. “Please don’t do this!”

“DON’T DO THIS OR I’LL KICK YOUR ASS!” Undyne fortified the last statement, sharp teeth flashing.

Toriel took a step forward before Gaster put an arm out in front of her to halt her advance. He knew she was more than capable of fighting, but to him, she was still his queen, and old habits die hard. Gaster was prepared to defend her if necessary.

Upon hearing the others, Sans turned, one socket still dark with the other glowing bright.

Toriel had seen this before, back when he’d floated them both to see the starlight, but this felt much different...hostile, though it wasn’t directed toward her.

Sans took a second to check the kid over, making sure that they were okay before vanishing from beside Frisk and appearing closer to Mettaton and Papyrus, hands in his pockets as he just watched the robot, ready to fight if they had to continue.

“...Well. It appears I’m outvoted. Bravo, human...bravo,” Mettaton said as his mechanics shifted, taking the transformation back a step, becoming Mettaton EX and giving a slow clap. “It seems that this was all a bit of a misunderstanding.”

In his soul and gears, Mettaton still didn’t believe it...but a dashing, winning smile hid that on the surface. He couldn’t fight them all...not when he only wanted to hurt one of them. He’d figure out some way to take care of this later.
Frisk gave a sigh of relief. They weren’t sure how to deal with Mettaton NEO since he only ever showed up whenever Chara took over, and Chara’s response to every “obstacle” was...well...predictable.

Gaster lowered his arm once he sensed the possibility of a fight had passed.

Toriel immediately ran over toward Frisk and Sans.

“Are you two all right?” she asked.

With Mettaton backed down and Papyrus out of danger, Sans calmed, taking on a more relaxed stance as he stood there. When Toriel spoke, the shorter skeleton turned to look back at her and Frisk past the wall of bones he’d popped past.

“maybe a little singed, but i think we’re okay,” Sans replied.

He made the effort to actually walk around the bone barrier this time, reaching a hand up to bring his hood back down from over his skull now that he wasn’t trying to throw Mettaton off anymore. At this point he had also decided to stop caring about what was “messed up” between the timelines and make the best of how things were happening now. Everything was already so different...nothing they could do now would make things how they were before without a reset...and he wasn’t going there if he had any choice in the matter, which, unfortunately he didn’t, but he made himself feel better by pretending he had at least some pull over it.

“that didn’t getcha at all, did it?” Sans asked of Frisk when he finally stopped next to them, crouching down to look at them again. He knew that they could take a hit, but he was more concerned because of their diminished max HP.

‘I’m okay,’ Frisk signed before turning to hug Toriel. It felt like it had been forever since they had last seen her.

Papyrus was relieved seeing Mettaton back down, before suddenly realizing he had actually held Mettaton in his arms earlier. An orange tint appeared on his cheekbones that only got brighter looking at Mettaton’s new form. Papyrus had thought Mettaton was “sexy” (whatever that word meant; Mettaton used it a lot on his products) before, but...WHOA.
Mettaton smiled at Papyrus, pleased at the orange glow on his face, unaware that it was mostly because he’d been holding him, however briefly. After all, the skeleton was staring at him in his fab new body, and an expression was worth a thousand words.

“Like what you see, beautiful?” Mettaton asked. “You’re privy to the premier of my new body~ I’m pleased to be able to reveal it to a fan.”

Papyrus removed the bone barrier that was behind him and blushed a bit deeper. Mettaton, THE Mettaton was addressing him. It was like a dream come true for the tall skeleton.

“IT’S VERY NICE! BUT I THINK YOU’VE ALWAYS LOOKED GREAT AND WILL CONTINUE TO NO MATTER WHAT!” Papyrus commented, indicating he appreciated Mettaton’s usual boxy form as well. He was more interested in his confident personality. If Mettaton were to ever appear in his original ghost form, not that anyone out of the know had seen it before, Papyrus would have still adored him.

“Aww, that’s sweet of you, darling. I can tell that you’re a true fan~” Mettaton replied.

This skeleton was precious...even if he had stood in Mettaton’s way. He enjoyed the compliments.

Away from the conversation, Toriel bent down to hug Frisk tighter to her. It was a bit like deja vu for Sans, having seen a similar image in the void when Frisk left the Ruins in a good timeline.

“My child, I am glad you are not hurt,” Toriel said before looking past Frisk’s shoulder at Mettaton who was talking to Papyrus. That robot had a lot of explaining to do. No one did that to HER child.

Sans watched the two hug, getting back to his feet from the crouch and grinning a little – until he saw the look Toriel was casting Mettaton’s way. ...Maybe he should tell her that pretty much ever
monster, including her, had attacked Frisk at least once. ...Or let the robot get the scolding of his life. Yeah, he’d just watch the second one happen. He deserved it. But with the kid mentioning him having nightmares and being scared, he knew he’d have to talk with Mettaton too.

Suddenly, a certain thought crossed Sans’ mind and he stood there, a faint blush crossing his face before he tried distracting himself. What if the kid called him “dad” in front of Toriel? What would she think, with them calling her “mom”?

“don’t worry, tori. frisk’s the toughest kid i’ve ever met. but regardless, i won’t let anything bad happen to them,” Sans reassured her.

He heard Papyrus speak again and glanced back over to his brother and the robot.

“I’VE WATCHED ALL OF YOUR SHOWS!” Papyrus rubbed the back of his skull, looking a little embarrassed. “IT’S A DREAM COME TRUE TO SEE YOU FACE TO FACE!”

Awwww. Mettaton smiled more, raising a hand to flip his hair lightly before resting it on his hip. Despite having a busy (and currently murderous) schedule, talking to fans was always a highlight of his day – and this one was particularly charming and flattering.

“What’s your name, darling?” he asked. “It’s always a pleasure to commune with such a dedicated admirer~”

“MY NAME IS PAPYRUS!” Papyrus exclaimed happily. Wowie! He actually got a chance to talk with Mettaton.

“I’m very pleased to meet you, Papyrus,” Mettaton responded with winning charm.

While Sans paid attention to Mettaton and Papyrus, Toriel stepped closer to Sans and held one of his hands. She gave it a gentle squeeze looking over at Papyrus and the robot.

“Thank you, for keeping your promise,” she said.

When Toriel took Sans’ hand, she took his attention too, and he turned his head to look up at her face and squeeze her hand back. He couldn’t quite reach her mouth, but...shifting, Sans turned the hand she was using to hold his, bringing it closer to him and kissing the back of it before winking at her with another grin.

“that overgrown calculator’s gonna get an earful, isn’t he?”

“Eventually...but I will hold off, for now,” Toriel commented, noting how happy Papyrus looked while talking to Mettaton.

“hopefully this settles the whole thing,” Sans replied to Toriel. He doubted it would with Mettaton having basically admitted to Frisk’s mention of nightmares, but at least now that they had an idea of what was going on with him they could begin to address it.

“Hopefully,” Toriel agreed.

“I-is everything okay, Mettaton? You’re not using too much energy?” Alphys asked as she walked over to the robot.

“Don’t worry about me, darling. I have at least enough energy to hold this form for a little while longer,” Mettaton said, posing with one arm raised stylishly.
The laser blast and the earlier transformation had drained him quite a bit, but without the constant attacks he normally threw Frisk’s way on a normal pacifist route (not that he knew what that was), he was still pretty stable. This could very easily have gone a lot worse for all three of them – Sans, Frisk, and Mettaton – if Papyrus had not intervened.

Alphys gave a sigh of relief at Mettaton’s explanation.

Undyne had followed behind Alphys, glaring daggers at the flashy robot while pointedly hitting one fist into her opposite palm. Mettaton tried to ignore the action.

Frisk stepped over toward the hallway that they knew led to the Capital...and New Home. They weren’t sure how things would progress, especially with everyone there, but they knew they needed to get that locket. Something else was bothering them though. They wandered back to Sans and gently tugged on his coat sleeve to get his attention.

When Sans felt the tugging on his sleeve his skull turned and those white points of light in his sockets focused on the kid, reading their troubled expression.

“hey, kid. you sure you’re okay?”

Frisk nodded.

‘I need you to learn something,’ they signed before retrieving their broken wand from the ground where it had landed after being blown back from the energy of Mettaton’s attack.

“learn something...?” Sans repeated in the form of a question, watching the kid retrieve the fancy stick’s pieces.

Mettaton’s gaze flickered to the human when they got closer, but he stayed relaxed. Now obviously wasn’t the time. Toriel and Sans were looking puzzled at Frisk, Gaster was keeping an eye on them, Alphys was distracted by Undyne, and Papyrus, likewise, was distracted by Mettaton.

‘I don’t know what will happen later, so I’ll teach you the word my da—family taught me. Please remember it,’ Frisk signed.

Remember a word? Sans blinked, watching Frisk’s hands carefully as they signed it.

“...‘expelliarmus’?”

Frisk nodded.

‘If something goes wrong, direct your hand at an opponent and shout it. ...At least that’s what my family said to do.’

“My child, what on Earth...?” Toriel asked, very confused.

...Expelliarmus. Sans did what he could to commit the word – spell, he assumed, to memory, guessing that he had pronounced it right since the kid hadn’t corrected him. He hesitated though, looking from Toriel to Frisk, knowing how weird and random this must have sounded to her.

“got it. thanks, kid.”

Frisk then grabbed one of Toriel’s hands. The next part of their journey wouldn’t be easy for her, Frisk was certain of that.

Toriel noted the concern on Frisk’s face before looking up towards the corridor that would lead to
the elevator to the Capital. She breathed in as this knowledge sunk in but then gave a gentle smile.

“I will be all right, Frisk,” she told them.

While Sans watched the two, he worked out the word Frisk had told him in his mind, thinking of how it sounded. Expelliarmus...Expel. Be rid of? Cast out? Armus...Arms? Weapon? Hmm. He’d either have to question the kid about it or wait and find out, but if the words had any logical similar to scientific meanings, he guessed out a general idea of what it might do, if it worked for him.

Sans knew why Toriel was nervous too. Asgore was waiting, somewhere beyond that elevator ride...but he shouldn’t know this would be an issue for her yet, so it was probably best not to comment on it for now. Instead, he gently squeezed the hand of hers that he still had in a reassuring manner.

Frisk led the way down the corridor, pausing to turn around to explain themself to the group.

‘There’s something I must do at the Capital, but know I have no intention of fighting Asgore.’

Alphys breathed a sigh of relief. She had been worried that she’d have to be the one to explain the only way to cross the Barrier.

“welp. looks like it’s time to move on,” Sans voiced to Toriel, giving another gentle squeeze on her hand before reluctantly drawing his bony one back to place in his (not as warm as Toriel’s hand) pocket. “we’ll catch up again soon.”

He moved to follow the kid, giving Mettaton a pointed look when they passed by. Yeah, “Hoodster” was still gonna be following the human. Which meant Mettaton had better not try any more funny stuff. ...Unless it was actually funny instead of murderous.

Frisk pressed the button for the elevator and both they and Sans stepped in.

Back inside the room, Toriel stood quietly, struggling internally with herself. Moments later, she reached her decision. She took a deep breath, and followed Frisk and Sans into the elevator.

Sans watched Toriel step in, a little surprised, but smirking slightly when the doors closed and the elevator started to rise.

“shoulda told me you needed a lift,” Sans commented, covering up his slight awkward moment of assuming they were going on alone again with a pun. “guess we’re catching up right now.”

...Or two.

Toriel chuckled as the elevator stopped and she and Frisk gathered out on the street.

“Thank you, Sans. You always know how to raise my spirits.”

Sans gave his own chuckle, winking at Toriel.

“seems like it’s time to take this journey to the next level,” Sans said just a moment before he stepped out after the two onto this upper level, having had to linger a moment to accentuate the pun.

Frisk smiled seeing their chosen adoptive parents getting along so well. They turned and led the group down the street towards New Home.

Sans followed after them then, a little distracted internally as he contemplated how to possibly tell Toriel about what exactly was going on with all of this. It’d be easier if Chara hadn’t been one of her
children, adoptive or otherwise.

The walk to New Home was a very quiet one.
New Home, Sweet New Home

Toriel and Frisk paused in the middle of the street once New Home was in sight. The child squeezed their mom’s hand reassuringly.

“I will be fine,” Toriel said, smiling gently at the human. “You may go on ahead.”

Frisk nodded, walked up to the doorway, and entered in.

Knowing what was in there, Sans followed them in, believing it important to be there when they retrieved the locket. He’d be lying if he said he wasn’t nervous. As innocent as Frisk themself actually was, the kid whose soul they were about to collect a part of was not by any description of the word. Everything could go bad here.

Toriel took a deep breath and stepped into the house cautiously, looking around and noting the padlocks on the stairway. How many years had it been since she’d last stepped foot in this house?

Frisk walked past the entryway, down the hall, and into Chara and Asriel’s old bedroom. Kneeling down, they untied the ribbon on the box holding the locket and picked it up by its chain warily, as if it might bite them at any second. They refused to put it on now, knowing the result in the previous timeline. Frisk looked over at the box that they knew contained the worn knife but ultimately decided not to open it. They didn’t want to fight anyone anymore.

Sans stood in the doorway, watching the kid as they opened the box and got the locket. He didn’t like the feel of it, even from where he stood.

“So. what do you think? is it one of them?” he asked quietly, trying to avoid Toriel overhearing too much.

Something did feel different, but Frisk couldn’t place what the feeling was and just nodded in response to Sans’ question. They decided to place the locket in their shorts pocket after taking off their coat and putting the coat back in a dimensional box. They didn’t need to hide from Mettaton or anyone else anymore and they were getting a little hot from wearing it.

Frisk looked around the room, paying particular attention to Asriel’s side of the room. They carefully picked up one of Asriel’s stuffed toys and brushed a bit of room dust off of it. Judging from the amount of the stuff, Asgore must not have stepped in the room for quite some time. Frisk thought to themself that the deaths of both Asriel and Chara had taken their toll on Asgore as much as they had to Toriel. In a different timeline, Asgore had admitted to Frisk that he had declared war in a fit of rage and despair.

Sans took a moment to step a little further into the room, looking around and focusing his magic in an attempted searching sense. He felt the faint, dark vibes coming off of the locket, to be sure...was there anything else here that matched it? Maybe he’d have to hold the locket. That had been one of his ideas for possibly sniffing the others out.

Frisk put down the stuffed toy back on the bed before stepping past Sans and back out to the hallway. Turning, they grabbed one of the needed keys for the padlocks blocking the stairs and spotted Toriel standing silently in front of the “room under renovations”. From process of elimination, Frisk always knew that this room had once been Toriel’s. It was the exact opposite back at Home. Despite not being together anymore, there was no denying that Toriel and Asgore thought similarly to one another.
Toriel decided not to go into the room. It would have only brought up memories that would make her cry. She sensed she was being watched and turned to face Frisk.

“Ah, so that is where the key was. I’m such a silly lady I walked right past it,” she said, giving a weak smile.

For Toriel’s sake, Frisk decided the group should try to get out of New Home quickly. Frisk walked back the other way to the kitchen to grab the second key.

Back in the children’s bedroom, Sans hesitated more, eyes on the other box on the floor that the kid had left alone. Something felt weird about it...similar to the locket.

Approaching, Sans crouched down and reached bony hands out to tug at the ties, lifting the lid and peering inside...before freezing at the sight of the knife that had cut through his bone so many times and turned him to dust. If a skull could pale past white bone...

He swallowed, hesitating before slowly standing up. He didn’t even want to touch the thing. But...was it wise to leave it here?

It was in this disturbed, contemplative state that Sans would be seen if Toriel passed by the door on her way back down the hall.

Toriel did pass by, but continued walking to the entryway. Looking at the front door frame, her expression grew pained and she clutched the fabric on the front of her dress.

It was then that Frisk came back from the kitchen and unlocked the padlocks on the chain. The child noticed Toriel standing silently and moved closer to her.

Back in the bedroom, Sans had considered wrapping the knife up in a cloth and taking it with them, but...no. It felt like some sort of moral violation to even touch it, and besides, Sans didn’t think it’d be a good idea to have Frisk in such close proximity with two horcruxes just yet. Not until they knew how to destroy them.

He put the lid back on the box and left the room, closing the door behind him before walking toward the main area and the stairs, pausing when he saw Toriel and what she was gazing at.

“...You two should go on ahead. I will catch up in a little while,” Toriel said, raising a hand to touch markings that were on the edge of the door frame.

Frisk tapped the nearby wall to indicate “okay”, since Toriel wouldn’t have known if Frisk had nodded or not. Frisk didn’t need to guess what the markings were for. Their father had measured their height too in their house when they were growing up.

Sans looked at the door frame. Was that...from her kid? Asriel? ...A bitter thought of how much shorter he was as a flower surfaced, but Sans buried it again as he watched the goat monster’s face. This must have been really hard for her...this is where she’d run from. This is what she’d been avoiding by keeping herself locked in the ruins for so long.

He assumed it was both that and her dedication to protecting future fallen from harm, but the whole thing just...

Reaching out, Sans touched Toriel’s arm, giving her a sad, gentle smile when she looked at him. He didn’t say anything – just squeezed her arm lightly, comfortably. Something that said that he was there, and that he cared about her sorrow, without forcing her to speak. He planned to turn and follow the kid and give Toriel her space after.
Toriel appreciated the gesture but didn’t move from her spot. She needed more time.

Frisk hopped down the stairs and waited for Sans at the bottom, hearing his footsteps following after them. As the two walked down the corridor, various monsters recounted the tale of Asriel and Chara aloud. The child tried their best to ignore them. They’d heard this story dozens upon dozens of times, yet it still made their heart ache as much as it had the first time.

Sans listened to the story as he walked, paying attention to the details, unlike Frisk. He’d heard versions of this before, of course, being a monster himself in the Underground...but still, hearing it knowing that the human was Chara and Asriel was Flowey...it brought new perspectives.

...That poor kid. He was just a soulless shadow of his former self, murdered just after his friend died and then brought back with the most essential part of any living being cruelly stripped from him. Brought back without love. Sans never thought he’d feel this much sympathy for that damned flower.

As Frisk stepped into what they referred to as the judgment hall, the locket in their shorts pocket had a sudden burst of magic emerge from it, catching Frisk off-guard. They removed it to examine it and yelped in surprise as it flew out of their hands and into the waiting hand of someone standing behind a pillar.

The color drained from Frisk’s face and their eyes widened in fear.

This couldn’t be.

A physical form of Chara stepped out from behind the pillar, slipping the locket around their neck.

“Ah. Right where it belongs.”

Frisk couldn’t believe their eyes, but there they were: short straight hair, green and yellow striped shirt, dark colored shorts, shoes...and a menacing smile.
Chara grinned maliciously as the shocked expression on Frisk’s face.

“‘You can’t be standing here’, you’re thinking. It’s all over your face. Well partner, that missing HP had to go SOMEWHERE. Don’t you know your magic history? Absorbing life energy allows a horcrux to take form. Oh, right. Your dear daddy died before you had a chance to hear the rest of his history lessons.”

Frisk winced at the mention of their human father.

“And you,” Chara continued, looking at Frisk. “You idiot. Resetting after saving that bag of bones over there time after time,” they pointed at Sans, “while I was wearing my locket just slowly drained your life away.”

Chara laughed gleefully.

Frisk pulled their broken wand from their pocket.

“Oh no no, my dear partner. I don’t think so.”

At that moment, Frisk felt something sharp pointed at their back. They jumped forward, turning around to see Toriel holding the forgotten knife from New Home. Her eyes looked dull.

“I wouldn’t try anything if I were you, lover boy,” Chara shrugged, referring to Sans. “It’s a shame you didn’t pick it up, but it’s equally entertaining to have dear old mom under an Imperius Curse.”

Sans’ eyes were wide with his own shock and creeping dread, first at the sight of Chara, which sent magic crackling through his bones...and then at seeing Toriel standing there with the knife in her hand. It looked so out of place, being wielded like that, by her of all people...
Toriel was one of the kindest monsters Sans had ever met, and the sight of those dull eyes sent a negative chill through him. She shouldn’t be here. Not now, damn it.

Turning to look toward the demon child, Sans’ eye sockets narrowed, only darkness within as he gazed at them.

“You. You’ve been the cause of everything.”

“Oooh, I’m scared. It’s the angry face,” Chara mocked before directing their attention to Toriel. “Take the wand and bring it to me.”

Toriel had no control over her actions and took the broken stick from Frisk’s hands before walking over to where Chara was standing.

“Good, mother. Now repair it.”

Frisk’s eyes widened. No, no, no! This is what they wanted to avoid! That was why they had never let Sans attempt to repair it.

Frisk, not thinking of anything except “stop Chara at all costs” rushed at the soulless child. Unfortunately, the action came too late; repairing the stick was an easy task for someone of Toriel’s magic ability.

“CRUCIO!”

Frisk crumpled on to the ground and screamed as much as their vocal cords allowed in extreme pain. The curse hit them like a thousand knives.

“You really thought leaving the knife behind and leaving your wand broken would stop me? Pathetic,” Chara sneered.

Frisk’s soul emerged from their body and floated helplessly above them.

“Time to claim my prize. I’ve waited so long for this.”

Oh hell no.

Darting forward, Sans stopped a little ways behind Frisk and to their left, sharply raising his hand up as his left eye socket flared with blue magic and he shouted out a word he hoped for all he was worth would have some effect, focusing his energy and intent into every syllable.

“EXPELLIARMUS!” His voice was loud – strong, and directed at Chara. He had been hesitant to use this on Toriel before he knew for sure what it did, but he had exactly zero reservations about damaging Chara.

The spell worked and caught Chara by surprise at the same time. The wand went flying through the air and zipped right into Sans’ outstretched hand as the force of the spell knocked Chara back a ways.

Chara glared at Frisk who was still collapsed on the ground with a level of vehemence akin to a ravenous caged beast.

“YOU. You filthy mudblood! How dare you teach a monster one of our kind’s spells! You aren’t even worthy to be using it yourself!” they shouted as they stormed over to Frisk and forced their head up to look at them. “I’ve been inside that little head of yours! It’s your fault your father is dead!”
One of your spells backfired and led to his death!”

Sans’ eye flared brighter as he took another step forward, focusing as more magical energy crackled around him, but this time it was directed toward turning both Frisk and Toriel’s souls blue and scooting them back far from Chara’s reach, a wall of bone cracking the golden tiles as they slammed up to act as a barrier between them.

He hoped that the control he had asserted over their souls from the “attack” would break whatever hold had been placed on Toriel, but...just in case, another bone also slammed into her hand in an attempt at knocking the knife free.

“not scared, huh?” Sans asked, regarding their earlier claim, turning his full gaze back on Chara.

He had more determination to end this than he ever had while facing Chara. It wasn’t like the past time. They all still had so much to lose. This was a path that could possibly fix everything...could finally set them free, for good. What happened here meant everything.

“You should be.”
Four Gaster Blasters formed, sending hot beams of pure energy aimed right at Chara. Hearing the knife clatter to the ground and without looking, Chara motioned their hand in that direction.

“ACCIO KNIFE!”

The knife handle landed comfortably in Chara’s hand and they did what they did best: dodge.

“How many times have we done this little dance, Sansy?” Chara teased menacingly. “I’ve learned every move you can throw at me.”

“heh. who knows? must be hundreds by now,” the skeleton gave a non-committal shrug, voice echoing through the hall. “tibia-nest, i lost count.”

Back behind the bone wall, Toriel had begun to regain her senses, now that she wasn’t under the control of the Imperius Curse placed on the knife.

“What am I doing here?” she muttered to herself, her vision clearing.

Toriel gasped recognizing Frisk on the ground in front of her and bent down on her knees to gently held the human in her arms.

“Frisk?!” she asked, alarmed. “Frisk, sweetie. Wake up.”

‘Mom...’ Frisk signed, their hands shaking. ‘You’ve gotta help dad...’
Toriel’s eyes widened as she looked up to see what was happening behind the barrier of bones. Sans was fighting someone.

Wait, that clothing.

*It couldn’t be.*

Toriel knew better than to call out Chara’s name. Having taken a quick assessment of the situation,
bringing attention to herself or Frisk would have been disastrous. This...couldn’t be her Chara though.

Her Chara. The sweet fallen child who had been like a sibling to her Asriel. Chara, who smiled cheerily helping her with baking. Chara, who wrote her cards addressed to “mother” and who helped Asgore take care of the flowers.

Chara wouldn’t behave this way...would they?

Magic crackling in the air around them, Sans summoned barrage after barrage of bones, hurling them toward the “child” with every intention of skewering them, hot energy warming the air every time another blaster fired.

“number of times aside though, how about we skip the sappy-feelsy deal this time and just get right to the point.”

“Fine by me!” Chara shouted as Sans began abusing shortcuts in an attempt to stop them.

The attacks missed. As Chara had said, they knew Sans’ moves. In the scuffle however, a bone had broken the chain holding the heart shaped locket around Chara’s neck and it clattered to the ground. They failed to realize its absence from their person because Sans was keeping them on their toes dodging his attacks.

“I don’t understand...” Toriel said, continuing to hold Frisk to her, taking in the sight of the battle.

‘Mom...please...remember...’

Frisk took hold of one of Toriel’s hands and pressed it gently to their soul, which was still floating helplessly above their body, hoping their idea would work.

Toriel closed her eyes and saw visions of all timelines Frisk had gone through, and saw herself be attacked, as well as everyone else in the Underground. It was Frisk’s body, but they were clearly possessed by a different life force. Her Chara.

Toriel’s eyes opened as she gasped, suddenly understanding. Part of the visions were of this timeline, and Frisk and Sans’ conversation of something called "horcruxes".

Chara grinned triumphantly as they dodged another of Sans’ attacks and saw that the skeleton had reached his limit. The child was about to strike a successful blow when they suddenly screamed out in pain.

“What?!” they exclaimed, finally paying attention to what was happening on the other side of the room.

Toriel was holding Frisk against her side, Chara’s locket in her other hand. While Chara had been distracted by Sans, Toriel had carefully slid her way across the floor around the bone wall with Frisk to reach the forgotten trinket.

“Mother! You can’t do this! I AM YOUR CHILD!” Chara shouted, in tears from pain, lunging towards the two.

Toriel used powerful fire magic on the locket again, melting it to nothing, and Chara collapsed to the ground howling in pain.

“You are not the child I remember. You are not my Chara,” Toriel said coldly.
With Chara collapsed, Sans slammed a bone attack at their hand, flinging the knife out of reach. Without hesitation, Toriel directed her fire magic at it, disintegrating the cursed object.

“This isn’t over, mudblood,” Chara laughed hysterically as their physical form faded from existence, looking over to Frisk. “I will be back. This is far from over.”

The relief Sans felt at seeing Chara fade out was immense, and the skeleton stumbled a little before leaning against one of the pillars lining the room, clearly exhausted and breathing hard from the overexertion caused by all of the magic use and the dodging he’d had to do to stay out of the knife’s path of destruction. He wasn’t completely sure what had just happened to make them vanish, but he wasn’t complaining. Usually his only way out of this fight was as dust.

“...well. that was close,” he breathed out.

Frisk managed to stand up on their own two feet again, having received assistance getting up from Toriel. The danger gone, Frisk’s soul returned to their body and they ran over to Sans, hugging him tightly.

Sans let himself sink to his knees when he saw the kid coming, returning their hug. The skeleton was shaking slightly in their arms, still catching his breath.

“hey, kiddo. glad you’re okay.”

Toriel rubbed her eyes with her hand. She may had said those words to Chara, but it still took a toll on her heart.

Sans looked up a little, past the human’s shoulder to Toriel, his soul twinging in his chest a little seeing the tear streaks in the fur on her face. She’d been so courageous...of all the people that could have had to do that, he knew it had to have been hardest for her.

Toriel managed to collect herself as best she could and walked over to Sans and Frisk, and Frisk backed away to give their mother room. Toriel fell to her knees and hugged Sans to her, her tears falling silently on his shoulder.

Though slightly surprised, Sans didn’t hesitate before wrapping his arms around Toriel in return, fully accepting this and holding her close. He took a couple more deep breaths, gently rubbing his hand over her back. A soft “i’m sorry, tori,” was the only thing the skeleton could think of to say...though he didn’t know what Frisk had shown her yet.

Toriel shook her head, her ear brushing against Sans’ cheekbone.

“No...I’m sorry. You’ve been through so much...” she said as she pulled away to sit on her knees. “When I touched Frisk’s soul, I saw...images...”

Frisk signed to Sans, seeing a puzzled expression cross his face, ‘I’m not sure why that worked, but it’s a good thing it did.’

The puzzlement turned to concern, and Sans’ brow bone furrowed.

“images?” he questioned, having an idea of what that meant she might have seen, but curious as to the extent of it.

“You’ve had to fight,” Toriel paused, “Chara, multiple times.”

‘I think through determination my soul showed mom what I was remembering that was most
Sans took one more deep breath. Ah, that made sense. That also meant that she’d possibly seen him turned to dust too. Morbid, but necessary for what had just had to happen.

“good thinking, kid,” Sans praised. “...i’m sorry you had to find out this way, tori, but...i’d be in bad shape if you hadn’t acted so quick. thanks.”

He smiled a little despite still looking tired, and raised a hand to rub over his left eye socket where his magic had been blazing not ten minutes before. It always ached a little whenever he’d had to use that much of that power at once.

Noticing Sans’ actions, Toriel placed a hand over Sans’. Closing her eyes, she concentrated, focusing healing magic on him.

Sans’ hand stilled when Toriel touched it, and he paused, seeming to relax a little and letting his eye sockets close halfway as the healing sensation coursed through his skull and tingled down his neck and over his shoulder bones.

After a moment, Toriel returned her hand to her lap.

“How do you feel?” she asked.

“tired, but okay. it just aches sometimes when i use too much – nothing too serious. ........that feels...really nice, though. healing aftereffect?” Sans questioned.

“Just healing magic,” Toriel smiled before leaning forward and kissing him. “That’s a healing aftereffect.”

Sans couldn’t help his inner grin as he returned the kiss, blue tint that wasn’t from exhaustion this time spreading over his cheekbones.

Frisk politely turned away from the display of affection, but smiled.

“heh...” Sans chuckled. “you’re gonna make me want to get scuffed up more often.”

“In all seriousness though,” Toriel kissed him again. “You don’t need to get hurt to get me to kiss you.”

“ok, i won’t do it on purpose,” Sans grinned more after the kiss before getting distracted by Frisk picking up something from the floor where he and Chara had fought.

Oh. He’d slipped Frisk’s wand into his sleeve after disarming Chara, but it must’ve fallen out in the struggle. Whoops... It was a good thing Chara hadn’t noticed.

Frisk tapped the wand on their hand, feeling that the magic had returned to it.

“How’s it feel, frisk?” Sans asked. “think you can use it now?”

Frisk waved it gently and a small light appeared on the end of the wand. They would’ve loved trying to repair some of the damage to the judgment hall from the fight, but even with proper training, it would’ve been impossible for a child Frisk’s age to accomplish. Chara was right. They lacked experience.

“My child, I had my suspicions, but you are indeed magic?” Toriel asked, standing up.
Frisk turned and nodded slowly.

’Sorry to have kept it from you,’ they apologized.

Thinking back to what Chara said to them, Frisk rubbed their eyes with their shirt sleeve.

Now back on his own feet, Sans walked over to the kid, crouching down before placing a hand on their head and smoothing their hair back gently.

“hey, frisk...what’s wrong, kiddo? don’t let what they said get to you,” he attempted to comfort as he watched their face. Chara might be back later, but he had more faith that they could handle it now.

“...i don’t know what happened, or what they were calling you means, but they’ve got nothing on you,” Sans paused, small smile faltering a bit as he stayed there, hesitating.

Nah. Frisk was tougher than name-calling. This was about their real dad, wasn’t it? He rubbed the back of his head once more before pulling them into a hug.

“...i’m here if you want to talk.”

Frisk hugged Sans tightly before pulling away.

‘I...was practicing magic without my dad’s supervision... A spell I cast went wrong and ricocheted back towards me. My dad happened to come back then and...’ Frisk looked down at the ground. ‘He pushed me out of the way. It hurt him. Bad...’

Frisk couldn’t stop their tears from overwhelming them and sobbed.

Toriel covered her mouth with her hand before walking over to crouch down next to where Sans was and pulled Frisk to her, gently rubbing their back to try to console them.

The end of that scenario sounded very familiar to Sans. Gaster had protected Sans from the explosion that would’ve ended his life.

Aww, kid...

Sans put an arm around the both of them, embracing them in the golden light that filtered in from the windows facing the barrier. It was familiar, yes...and Sans wished for the kid’s sake that they could save their dad too, but...human circumstances and afterlives were different than crossing into the void.

“i’m so sorry, kid.”

The three stayed in this embrace until Frisk’s sobbing came to a stop, too tired to cry anymore. The individuals of this group had been through so much, but now they had each other to go to for comfort and support.

Sitting on her knees again, Toriel gently ran a hand over Frisk’s hair, like Sans had done earlier and recalled something Frisk had signed.

“So, my child...I know you call me ‘mom’,” Toriel started. “…earlier, if I’m not mistaken, you called Sans ‘dad’.”

The second Toriel started going that way, Sans’ face had started to light up with blue, and he froze, holding his breath as Frisk responded with a confirmation.
“Well...” Toriel looked over at Sans, her face growing pink. “If you don’t mind me sticking around...I’d like that. For us to be a family.”

Ohgodohgodoh...oh. Oh.

Hearing Toriel’s words, a grin spread across Sans’ face, relieved and genuinely happy. Hopeful.

“tori,” Sans started, shifting and turning toward her more, still on his knees as he raised a bony hand and touched the side of her face, some moisture gathering in his eye sockets as he looked at her, adoration clear in his expression. “you have no idea how long i’ve wanted that.”

Toriel moved the hand that had been smoothing Frisk’s hair to gently stroke the side of Sans’ face, wiping away a tear she saw forming before leaning in to kiss him.

“Sans, I love you,” she smiled at him, a deep blush on her face.

Sans leaned in toward her in return, soul resonating at those words – kissing her back deeply, sweetly, wrapping his arms around her and pulling her closer.

“i love you too, tori,” he responded after the kiss, thinking this might be too good to be true but accepting it anyway, wholeheartedly. “so damn much.”

Those last words came with another kiss, and he reveled in it. She was so warm...and this felt right.

Toriel kissed him deeply, appreciating the way their souls resonated with one another. She looked down upon feeling Frisk curl closer to her side. They looked like they were starting to fall asleep, probably from exhaustion due to Chara’s Cruciatus Curse and crying.

“We should go somewhere to rest,” Toriel said, as she carefully stood up, carrying Frisk in her arms.

“we should probably go back down the elevator, in case the others are heading this way...” Sans suggested, not liking the idea of making Toriel go back that way. “if they come up and find this place all smashed up like this, i know papyrus will probably storm off into the throne room demanding answers.”

Toriel nodded in agreement and followed Sans to the elevator, Frisk resting soundly in her arms.

“Poor child...I had no idea what they’d been through. And you, as well,” Toriel said, looking at Sans.

“yeah. that’s one of the reasons i’ve always said they’re tough,” Sans replied. “i’m sorry you’re burdened with the weight of knowing now, but...i’m sort of glad that you do. i thought you needed to know, but i wouldn’t’ve known how to explain it.”

Sans upon stepping off the elevator and entering the room where Mettaton fought them wasn’t surprised to see that his brother was still preoccupied with the robot. Papyrus had had a crush on Mettaton for forever it seemed. He was sitting next to Mettaton, chatting away happily.

“Well, it seems they’re getting along famously,” Toriel commented quietly to Sans.

Sans let out a chuckle, eyeing the two and noting that Alphys, Undyne, and Gaster seemed to have left the area.

“never seen mettaton get so cozy with the papyrazzi before,” Sans punned.

Yeah, he was going to have to have a chat with Mettaton before this went much further.
“AH!” Papyrus exclaimed, spotting Sans over Mettaton’s shoulder. “BROTHER!”

He stood up and waved at the group animatedly.

“DID YOU FINISH WHAT YOU NEEDED TO DO?” Papyrus asked before noticing Frisk asleep in Toriel’s arms.

“OH!” He covered his mouth realizing he’d probably been too loud.

“Don’t worry,” Toriel smiled. “This child seems to be able to sleep through anything.”

Sans raised a hand to wave back at Papyrus, looking like he was ready to fall asleep himself.

“yeah. we’ve got it handled, bro.”

There were dark, exhausted circles under his eye sockets, and by how sapped his magic was he really seemed to have been through something. He hoped Papyrus wouldn’t notice from this distance.

Mettaton waited for Papyrus to get done with his conversation, leaning against the wall with his arms folded. Ah, the human was asleep...but still protected.

“IT’S A BIT FAR TO THE HOUSE IN SNOWDIN...” Papyrus said, putting a gloved hand under his chin in thought, realizing Frisk would need a proper bed.

“Oh!” Papyrus exclaimed, coming up with an idea. “YOU SHOULD STAY AT METTATON’S RESORT! NOW THAT THE ELEVATORS ARE WORKING PROPERLY, SOME MORE ROOMS BECAME AVAILABLE.”

Toriel looked down at the sleeping child in her arms and the exhausted Sans standing next to her. She was feeling tired herself. Fire spells were her specialty, to be sure, but something about destroying that knife and locket really drained her energy.

“Yes, I think that might be best,” she agreed.

“Oh, that’s a marvelous idea, darling!” Mettaton said from his position. “I’ll tell you what...as an apology for that fiasco earlier, I’ll arrange for you all to stay for free. You’re welcome to as well, Papyrus. Snowdin is rather far, after all.”

Mettaton moved away from the wall and headed for the exit, heels clicking on the smooth tile as he went.

“Come along, darlings,” he said.

Sans decided not to question why Mettaton was being so accommodating for now.

“OH! YOU’RE SO KIND! THANK YOU, METTATON!” Papyrus said as he happily followed behind Mettaton, a bit like a puppy.

Toriel began walking along as well, making an aside to Sans, “He’s got it bad.”

“heh, yeah,” Sans agreed. “he’s been a fan for a long time. never misses a show unless he absolutely has to...even reruns.”

Sans walked, expression turning a little more tired as he added, “…which means i’ve seen everything too, at least twice. did you know that all of his movies consist entirely of him laying on different
surfaces as rose petals float down around him? talk about a narcissist.”

“And your brother loves him none the less,” Toriel smiled gently as they continued walking.

“yeah. ...and i guess there’s nothing wrong with having confidence in yourself, heh. he’s actually come a long way in that respect,” Sans shrugged a little.

Sans knew of Mettaton’s true background: he was a ghost, and Napstablook’s cousin. Ever since receiving his robotic body, the ghost now known as Mettaton had gained more confidence than he’d ever had before. Sans doubted the ghost would ever be seen without the metallic body ever again.

“he’s a good guy...just a little brash sometimes.”

Toriel nodded her head, looking in Mettaton’s direction as Papyrus caught up to Mettaton and was all smiles as he walked alongside him.

It turned out that there were only three rooms available when the group got back to the resort, and things got arranged to where Papyrus had his own room and Sans ended up lingering in Toriel and Frisk’s, telling them the same made-up bedtime story about fluffy bunny that he had just finished contriving for Papyrus so he could sleep.

He knew Frisk was already passed out again by the time he’d uttered the tenth word, but he kept going anyway, completing the four minute epic tale.

“...and then fluffy bunny and her crush cuddled and ate carrots all day. the end, for now. ..........maybe that’s silly, but papyrus liked it.”

“It’s a good story,” Toriel chuckled.

She was sitting upright in the bed under the covers, Frisk curled up next to her, one of their arms resting on Toriel’s hip. She gently ran her hand over the top of Frisk’s hair before looking over at Sans.

“You must be exhausted,” she said.

“yeah. this kid’s adventures are really giving me a workout...” Sans grinned sleepily, looking down at Frisk. “i’ll probably pass out sitting here if you don’t kick me out soon.”

“Now why would I do that?” Toriel asked. “This bed is big enough for all three of us, you know.”

Immediately, Sans’ face tinted blue again and he paused before shrugging.

“can’t really argue with that logic,” he commented before standing up to take off his coat and shoes, skeletal arms and neck mostly visible now with just the t-shirt and shorts underneath. He slipped under the covers, letting out a slow breath as he rested his skull back against the pillows, relaxing.

...he started chuckling then a little for some reason, seeming both sheepish and pleased.

Toriel looked over at him, smiling.

“Knock, knock.”

Hearing that word repeated twice in such a familiar fashion, Sans reopened half-closed eye sockets and shifted, turning toward Toriel and propping himself up on an arm at full attention.

“who’s there?”
“Olive.”

“olive who?” Sans asked, trying not to grin too much before she delivered the punchline.

Toriel carefully leaned over so as not to disturb Frisk and kissed him deeply.

When he saw her coming in for it, Sans moved forward to meet her, having to struggle for a moment to keep the grin off of his face enough to kiss her back.

“Olive you, Sans,” Toriel said, finishing the punchline.

Sans broke into what he tried to make a quiet laugh when they broke off the kiss, looking at Toriel with more and more growing adoration.

“i love olive you too, tori.”

Toriel looked at him with an equal amount of adoration, before looking down at Frisk, who had shifted positions in their sleep to be right in the middle of the two, sleeping soundly and looking contented. She smiled at the child before looking back at Sans.

“We should get some shut eye too. Goodnight, Sans,” she said as she leaned over to give him one last kiss for the night.

The kiss was definitely returned, along with a hand touching the side of her face. After that, Sans settled back again, watching Toriel.

“you know...it’s a good thing papyrus is in another room. he’d put us both under a-rest for all of these puns. don’t get me wrong, papyrus is awesome, but...he just needs to learn more about what mattress in life.”

He closed his eye sockets halfway again, voice getting sleepier with each word.

Toriel chuckled softly at the puns, setting down into the bed and slowly falling asleep.

Chapter End Notes

skyechan: Illustration is in color this time because it was completed for Soriel Week back in July of 2017. The original version of the picture did not contain Frisk's soul or the bone barrier as I had forgotten to include them, and can be found here: http://skyechanart.tumblr.com/post/163715344769/sorielweek-soriel-week-2017-day-4-protection
Papyrus couldn’t seem to stay asleep for longer than a few hours. He was just too excited to have had the chance to be around Mettaton, and now Mettaton was being so kind and letting them all stay in his hotel.

The tall skeleton got up and decided after a few brief stretching exercises (which to a regular human would seem odd considering Papyrus had no muscles to speak of) to go for a walk around the hotel and grounds.

The resort was pretty quiet, what with it being the “nighttime” of the Underground and all. A macaw monster night janitor/security checker was wandering about, but they didn’t really pay much attention to Papyrus beyond a glance and an inner note that it was interesting to see the rare skeleton monster. They’d only ever seen one, and that was Sans for his comedy performances.

The garden area off to the side of the fancy MTT restaurant was still dimly lit by the reserve bulbs near the building and as Papyrus reached it he’d catch sight of a now familiar pink accented robot, sitting on one of the benches there and typing away at what looked like a multi-functioning cell phone, one fabulous leg propped up and hooked over the opposite knee.

Ah. So that’s why this place was unlocked.

Papyrus felt an orange tinge come to his face when he saw Mettaton. There was no denying that the robot looked absolutely gorgeous, no matter what he was doing. Mustering courage, Papyrus decided to walk over and greet him.

“AH! HELLO, METTATON! COULDN’T SLEEP?”

‘WAIT. DO ROBOTS SLEEP?’ the skeleton wondered internally.

When Papyrus spoke, Mettaton paused in his cell phone tapping and looked up, winning smile immediately spreading over his features at the sight of Papyrus.

“Hello, Papyrus! I was just taking care of some scheduling issues and finishing up on preparations for tomorrow’s filming venue, but now that you mention it, I should probably make my way back to a charging station soon,” he said, uncrossing his legs, hitting send on what he had been typing before closing the apps he was messing with and looking back to the tall skeleton. “How about you, darling? Are the rooms satisfactory?”

“OH, YES! EVERYTHING IS WONDERFUL!” Papyrus exclaimed. “I WAS JUST TOO EXCITED TO SLEEP, SO I DECIDED TO WALK AROUND AND ENJOY THE GROUNDS INSTEAD.”

Papyrus looked around at the greenery surrounding them.

“EVERYTHING IS VERY IMPRESSIVE. I HAVEN’T SEEN GREENERY WITHOUT SNOW ON IT SINCE LEAVING THE CAPITAL WITH SANS. ...WELL, THERE’S ECHO FLOWERS, BUT THOSE ARE BLUE.”

“Oh, you lived in the Capital?” Mettaton asked, seeming interested. “I can’t imagine why someone would want to leave there...but that could be just me. I love the lights and the activity and the excitement. The city never sleeps, you know...there’s so much enthusiasm everywhere. So many interesting people...you seem like you’d fit right in with them.”
“IT WAS NICE, BUT SNOWDIN IS NICE TOO. IT’S PEACEFUL,” Papyrus commented, not sitting down on the bench without an invitation, so he didn’t intrude on Mettaton’s personal space. “I’M NOT SURE OF ALL THE DETAILS, BUT SANS THOUGHT IT WOULD BE BEST FOR US. I THINK IT MUST HAVE HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR FATHER. I SEEM TO HAVE LOST MY MEMORY OF IT THOUGH. IT’S SAD, BUT I DIDN’T EVEN KNOW WE HAD A FATHER UNTIL A FEW DAYS AGO. STRANGE, ISN’T IT?”

“Oh dear,” Mettaton shifted, scooting to the side a little and lightly patting the bench beside him in the anticipated invitation. “That does sound like a lot to take in. You say you...lost your memory of it? Were you injured?”

Papyrus’ cheekbones turned a little orange as he accepted Mettaton’s offer and sat down next to him.

“Well...no,” Papyrus paused, thinking about it. “I DON’T THINK SO ANYWAY. FOR SOME REASON, I THINK EVERYONE EXCEPT MY BROTHER FORGOT ABOUT OUR FATHER. HE WAS THE ROYAL SCIENTIST FOR ASGORE.”

“That is strange,” Mettaton replied, raising an eyebrow. “He was in the position Alphys is now, and no one remembers?”

Pausing, Mettaton took a moment to focus on something unseen, seeming to space out briefly before he shifted to stand up.

“I’m so sorry for such terrible timing, darling, but it seems my energy stores are lower than I thought. I’m not used to staying in this form for so long. It’s just so much more...pleasing than my first iteration.”

Papyrus saw Mettaton’s odd movement and stood up as well, concerned. First iteration? Oh, he meant his boxy form.

“YOU SHOULD GO REST. DO YOU NEED HELP?” Papyrus offered, holding out his hand. “YOU DO LOOK VERY NICE, BUT YOU SHOULDN’T WORK YOURSELF TOO MUCH,” he then added, his cheeks still a little orange.

Mettaton gave Papyrus an appreciative smile, seeming to wave off the suggestion of him having a possible problem.

“Oh no, darling. I’ve got thi-i—”

The robot’s voice seemed to flicker out, cutting off as his eyes closed and he fell mid-step. He would have crashed to the ground if Papyrus’ arms weren’t within convenient proximity.

...Apparently, he really didn’t have this.

While it wasn’t so great for defensive purposes, it was a good thing for Papyrus that Mettaton was made of lighter metals. Papyrus caught Mettaton in his arms, his cheeks still very orange but also with the concerned look still on his face.

“METTATON?”

When he received no response from the unconscious star, Papyrus did some quick thinking and picked up Mettaton to carry him in his arms (and much to his surprise) with relative ease.
Papyrus held him carefully in his arms as he made his way to the only room with a bed he had access to: his. Papyrus delicately placed Mettaton on top of the bed before freeing Mettaton’s cell phone from the hand closed shut around it and dialing Alphys after locating her number at the top of the robot’s contact list.

A very sleepy voice responded on the other end. Alphys had probably been up all night watching anime with Undyne.

“...H-hello?” Alphys responded sleepily before hearing the voice on the other end. “Oh! Papyrus. It’s you. I was concerned you might’ve been someone else,” Alphys said, eyeing the dog food bag near her desk before looking at the display on her phone. “Wait, this is Mettaton’s number. Is everything okay?”

Papyrus explained his predicament and Alphys provided detailed instructions on how to charge Mettaton. The skeleton followed them to a “T”. After ensuring Mettaton was all set, Papyrus could feel his eye sockets closing as he sat down in a nearby chair.

Due to how far he’d let his energy deplete, it took a good three hours of charging time before Mettaton stirred, eyes flickering open as he let out a metallic groan.

Feeling the energy coursing through him, he turned to look for the source and sat up while eyeing the cord that extended from his back to the wall plug. How’d he get here?

...Oh. Papyrus.

Mettaton was embarrassed, but grateful...both for the fact that Papyrus had been kind enough to get him charged again and that the skeleton wasn’t one of his creepy stalker fans. That would’ve been awkward.

Poor darling. Mettaton shifted to the edge of the bed while letting his charging cord extend further out of his back, carefully moving to pick the skeleton up in his strong robotic arms and moving him back to the bed. He didn’t look comfortable how he was sleeping now.
Papyrus managed to stay asleep as this occurred. He seemed to be sleeping quite soundly, but he definitely seemed a lot more relaxed now than he had been sleeping in the hotel room’s chair.

Mettaton covered the skeleton up before pausing to watch him, mouth curling into a smile. He was adorable. Passionate, self-confident, complimentary, handsome... Oh. No, stop that.

With a little bit of pink on his face, the robot carefully lifted his charging cable out of the skeleton’s way before walking over and sitting on the end of the bed. He’d give the charge a little while longer and then he’d leave. He really needed to have Alphys work on this energy problem.

A little while later, Papyrus stirred and opened his eye sockets. He gave a little stretch before realizing where he was. He was back in bed? But that was where he placed Mettaton to recharge. Where was Mettaton then?

Papyrus suddenly became aware of some weight towards the bottom edge of the bed where he saw Mettaton sitting.

“Oh!” Papyrus exclaimed. “Mettaton, how are you feeling? I called Alphys earlier to ask her what to do.”

“I’m fine, darling. I’m sorry for all of the trouble, but I do sincerely appreciate it,” Mettaton responded, turning to look back at his current roommate. “I’m nearly back at full power now.”

Papyrus smiled big, happy to have helped.

“That’s great!” Papyrus smiled big, happy to have helped. “I was worried when you fell over. I thought for a moment you might’ve ‘fallen down’. So I was very relieved when Alphys said you’d be all right after getting charged.”

“Awww darling... I’m perfectly healthy and happy, you needn’t worry about anything so dramatic,” Mettaton brought a hand up, patting where the skeleton’s leg was under the blankets. “I was in quite a bind though, so thank you.”

Papyrus blushed bright orange, super happy to have been able to help his crush in a time of need.

“You’re welcome! Sorry again for attacking you yesterday,” Papyrus apologized, rubbing the back of his skull with a hand.

Bringing his hand back to his lap, Mettaton gave an “oh well” sort of shrug, not seeming bothered.

“I’m actually glad that you did. I might have accidentally hurt the other skeleton in the blue jacket – your brother, yes? Sans? While trying to do what I was doing. Honestly, I’m not sure what’s right anymore. I just have a very bad feeling about that human.”

Papyrus looked confused.

“About Frisk?” Papyrus thought about the human who was practically like family to him now. He couldn’t think of any reason to have a bad feeling about them. “Do you want to talk about it?” Papyrus asked, offering his support.

Mettaton watched the skeleton, seeming to regard him for a moment, considering. Should he?

“...I know it’s silly, but they felt familiar when I first saw them. Their image was...well, it felt more like a memory. There’s just something deep in my gears that’s telling me that they’re trouble.
Dangerous. I’ve had dreams that are barely in focus now about them hurting people.”

Papyrus froze. Now that Mettaton mentioned it, Papyrus recalled having odd dreams too. He had never told Sans about them though.

“IT’S NOT SILLY AT ALL,” Papyrus replied. “I’VE HAD A DREAM...A NIGHTMARE ABOUT A HUMAN TOO.”

Visions of snow falling and his sight growing dim came to his mind. He shook his head to try and knock them out of his skull.

“But this human is different. They like puzzles, and pasta, and they adore their mom and my brother,” Papyrus said confidently.

Mettaton was intrigued. So his hunch had been right. It wasn’t just him. Unfortunately, this only solidified his conviction that he had to do something about them.

“Perhaps...but still. I like humans, darling, don’t get me wrong – I adore them. It’s a dream of mine to perform for them one day. But I just don’t know if I can shrug this aside,” Mettaton said.

Papyrus grew quiet for a moment.

“I think my brother might be able to explain more,” he suggested. He wanted nothing more than for everyone to be able to get along.

“Oh?” Mettaton questioned. “Well, maybe I’ll talk to him about it then. I’m sorry for the awkwardness darling, but I do appreciate you hearing me out.”

Mettaton was most certainly not going to willingly approach Frisk’s bodyguard who had incinerated his kitchen set in one blast to talk to him about why he should not be on the human’s side, but he’d let this matter ease out of their conversation.

Papyrus blushed and smiled.

“The Great Papyrus is always willing to lend an ear!” he paused a moment, realizing something. “...despite not having any! But yes, I’m not sure why, but I think my brother has the answers you need.”

Mettaton’s voice sounded in a quiet laugh, mouth once again curved upwards at the corners in a smile.

“Ears or not, I think you’re perfectly charming as you are;” he said.

He was finding he sort of enjoyed seeing each time that lovely orange shade tinted the skeleton’s face. His compliment rewarded him.

“You think so? Wowie!” Papyrus smiled widely.

What an honor! The Great Papyrus received a compliment from the always charming Mettaton.

“Oh darling, I most certainly do!” Mettaton fortified his previous statement. He was about to add something on to that when he paused, blinking.

Oh. Charging’s done.

“Papyrus, could you be a dear and hand me my plug?” Mettaton asked. “It looks like I’m all set
Mettaton would have gotten it himself, but it was against the wall and he’d need to lay on Papyrus to do so. He tried not to think about that too much.

“OH! OF COURSE!”

Papyrus unplugged the cord and placed it in Mettaton’s outstretched hand. When their fingers brushed in the transference of the plug, a surge of the magical electricity from the CORE sparked through them and Mettaton let out a gasp as the pleasant effect of it touched all the way to his soul.

Combined with the growing attraction they both felt, it triggered a slight resonance and Mettaton brought his hand back quickly, trying to regain his composure and calm the pink flush that came to his face.

“Ha...ha ha...Thank you, darling.”

Yikes...ha. Hmm. Mettaton needed to call this a night and head back to Alphys.

Papyrus was pleased at the strange feeling. He attributed the blush on Mettaton’s face to just Mettaton being...well, Mettaton.

“Y-YOU’RE WELCOME!” the tall skeleton quickly responded. “I HOPE THE REST OF YOUR NIGHT IS WONDERFUL!”

“Of course, darling... I think that can be arranged,” Mettaton agreed with a still pleasant smile, face still a little pink as he reeled his cord back in and closed the back panel.

The robot stood up then, heading toward the door. He paused to look back before stepping out, giving the skeleton a light wave.

“Thanks again darling – Pleasant dreams.”

And then he was gone, closing the door behind him. Papyrus smiled happily before laying his head back on the pillow and drifted back to sleep.
Once out of the room, Mettaton took a few steps down the hall before half leaning against the wall, suddenly feeling a little frazzled. How. How was that skeleton eliciting such feelings in him? How was he so cute?

...He needed to stop thinking about it for now. Alphys needed to check his systems to make sure that blast against his shield hadn’t damaged anything. He felt fine, but it was also an excuse to get her to possibly look into his energy issues more.

It took a while, but the robot finally showed up at Alphys’ lab, and he entered, looking around the place. He didn’t entirely expect her to be awake at this early hour, but there was always a chance...

Much to Mettaton’s relief, it was then that Alphys emerged from the lab’s elevator, holding a bag of dog food, which she quickly tossed back in the elevator upon spotting Mettaton.

“O-oh, Mettaton! Papyrus told me you ran out of energy last night. Do you want me to check you over?” Alphys asked.

Seeing Alphys, Mettaton walked over to her. He looked a little disheveled...distracted, maybe, as he smiled at her.

“That would be wonderful, darling, if you would,” he replied. “I got a bit of a shock during that scuffle yesterday and I’m not sure if it damaged anything.”

“Of course!” Alphys nodded and motioned for him over to her work station where she cleared off a space for him to sit.

Mettaton took the hint and took a seat.

“I s-should work on improving energy efficiency for you. The new body is to your liking though?” Alphys asked, rummaging around in a drawer for the necessary tools.

“Yes, it’s absolutely fabulous, I adore it.” he responded, looking thoughtful then as he considered what she’d said about energy. “...On the energy though, I wonder if it will be more efficient once I fuse fully? I know we agreed that I should try to wait for that until after the final version is absolutely complete, but...do you think you’ll still be able to make alterations once this robotic body is fully me?”

Alphys paused for a moment before responding, “Y-yes, but...it’d be like a doctor giving a patient surgery. I’d need to stop you from feeling pain as I work on your body.”

Alphys grabbed a screwdriver and began checking Mettaton one small section at a time. As she completed checking that everything looked normal, she tightened screws and moved on to another section.

“When you fuse, you will be able to experience everything, including pain, so you’ll need to try to be a bit more cautious. And although I will adjust your body to be more energy efficient – you’ll be able to last a whole day on a charge without plugging in – you’d still need to rest as you will begin feeling tired, just like everyone else. You’d want to consider charging as having a regular sleep schedule,” she explained as she continued checking over him.

Mettaton nodded in understanding, just relaxing and waiting until the scientist was finished.
“An entire day without having to charge would be amazing. That all certainly sounds incredible...well, except for the pain, but if that comes with the rest I’ll accept it,” Mettaton said finally.

Alphys looked up from what she was doing to look at him and gave him a smile.

“But you’ll feel nice emotions more intensely too, such as feelings of love and happiness. Those are the best feelings ever.”

Feelings of love and happiness...being in love?

The ghost in the robot started letting his thoughts wander again, back to the events of the day...and night. Papyrus had attacked him to get him to stop attacking the human and his brother, but at the same time had been so careful not to actually damage him.

He’d really enjoyed the chats they’d had, but was it too soon to be feeling attachment? The skeleton had proven himself to have several desirable qualities.

Mettaton started looking a little flustered again, a pink tint faint on his face but there, despite only having a very partial fusing with his robotic body; just enough to control it properly and feel some amount of touch, but not the full deal.

...And just enough to betray some inner thoughts.

Alphys noticed and smiled, looking back down at a piece on her work bench meant to aid Mettaton with energy efficiency.

“It’s a good thing Papyrus was there to help you. He’s a very nice guy, isn’t he?” Alphys commented, knowing full well the answer. She admittedly didn’t know much about Sans’ younger brother, but from the way Sans and Undyne described him, Papyrus had to be one of the sweetest monsters in the entire Underground.

“He really is,” Mettaton responded with some hint of dreamy sincerity in his voice before he caught himself. “…I mean, he’s nice, yes. I’m grateful to him for getting me out of that energy predicament. Imagine how embarrassing it would have been to have the restaurant open up in the morning with me sprawled in the garden.”

Alphys couldn’t help but laugh at the sudden mental image before continuing her work.

“So...w-what do you think of him?” she asked, curious about the pink she saw on Mettaton’s cheeks.

“Papyrus? Well, he’s...nice. Considerate...charming, confident, handsome...I suppose he has several good qualities,” Mettaton said, trying hard to be aloof, but with his body’s expressive face it was a little difficult.

“Oh?” Alphys raised a brow, smirking a tiny bit when she realized Mettaton was trying to play it cool. “Is that all?”

“He’s also proven himself trustworthy. I admire his enthusiasm. I’d say my opinion of him is overall fairly positive. I like him,” Mettaton attempted to continue with his current demeanor, idly looking at his metallic legs as he extended them in front of where he was sitting.

“Well, that’s nice,” Alphys responded, working on the energy efficiency device. “It was definitely kind of him to carry you back. Considering the materials I made your body from, he must be
“No, Alphys. You don’t understand.”

Mettaton looked at the scientist with an expression of frustrated disbelief...and slowly growing acceptance.

“I think I might like him,” the robot admitted, not knowing quite what to do with himself.

Alphys looked like the cat that ate the canary and couldn’t help but squeak in delight, “I knew it!”

This was too cute and perfect. From what she had overheard from Sans and Undyne, Papyrus had a crush on Mettaton and was a huge fan of his. How adorable for Mettaton to fall for the tall skeleton.

Mettaton slumped back on to the work table more until he was laying on his back, staring at the lab’s high metal ceiling with a half flustered, half annoyed expression.

“How is he so...so GENUINE? And ADORABLE? I’ve never met someone so...openly, unironically self-confident...” Mettaton explained.

Alphys moved the device more out of the way just in case Mettaton accidentally switched poses.

“S-sounds like you’ve got it bad. But yeah, from what Undyne and Sans say, that’s just the way Papyrus is,” Alphys said before grabbing a wrench from off the table near Mettaton’s head and focusing her attention back on the device. “S-so. What are you going to do about it?”

“I don’t knooow yet...” Mettaton complained, over dramatic as always in his robotic body, shifting his legs so that one knee was bent and draping an arm over his face.

Now that he was in his Mettaton EX form he didn’t really feel like going back to his boxy form, more energy efficient or not. This form was much more his idea of a glamorous celebrity. He’d probably get along with Lady Gaga.
“What should I do, Alphys?” Mettaton whined.

Alphys looked up to raise a brow at him.

“All those times you teased me about Undyne and you don’t know what to do now that it’s happened to you?” she shook her head, amused. “Ask him on a date, silly.”

“Well, this is different, darling. I’m admitting it.”

...No. No, she was right. He wasn’t just going to admit it to her.

Shifting, Mettaton propped himself up, once again sitting on the edge of the table when he stopped again.

“I’m going to do it,” he said. “None of this sitting around, wondering, waiting, pining...I’m going to ask him out. But only under one condition.”

He turned to look at Alphys, completely serious.

“W-which is...?” Alphys asked as she looked back at him.

Keeping his gaze on her, Mettaton’s mouth curved up into a mischievous, but encouraging grin.

“I know you’ve actually smooched now, but you have to ask Undyne out, too. You’ve got to take the next step, darling. Remember, Undyne likes PASSION!”

Alphys turned bright red thinking about it. Well...he was right.

“...F-f-fine! I-I-I’m gonna do it!”

Alphys was suddenly hit with a feeling of...determination? She reached over for her cell phone, secondhand anime charms from the garbage dump hanging off of it and an image of a trash can next to a Mew Mew Kissy Cutie figure as its wallpaper.

She took a deep breath and dialed Undyne’s number. She seemed to be visibly sweating as she heard ringing of the call being placed.

Mettaton got more and more impressed, watching her with anticipation as she dialed the number. Alphys hated making calls! She was filling him with an elated sense of victory, and she’d better not chicken out.

Ring...Ring...

There was a pause before the intended call recipient picked up on the other end, and Mettaton could hear the vaguely electronic tones of her voice through the receiver, muffled from his point of listening, but clear and enthusiastic for Alphys.

“ALPHYS! Hey!!”

“H-h-h-hi, Undyne!” Alphys chuckled nervously, turning bright red. “H-h-how are you doing?”

On the other end, Undyne took a moment to step out of Asgore’s throne room where she’d just finished up on presenting an early-morning false report regarding how things were going in the Underground. She wasn’t going to tell him about Frisk now, even though it felt like a betrayal.

“I’m great, but...Alphys, are you okay?” Undyne asked. “You’re stuttering a lot.”
Alphys took a deep breath.

“Would you be willing to go on a double date with me?”

If anyone who didn’t know Alphys saw her now, they would have sworn that her natural scale color was a bright red instead of yellow.

Mettaton’s grin curved up more as he leaned forward a little, listening intently, trying to get what he could of Undyne’s reaction.

There was initial silence on the other end of the line, all of five seconds ticking away before Undyne drew in a breath.

“Oh. My god. HELL YEAH I WOULD!! WHEN?? ...It doesn’t matter, I’M COMING TO YOU RIGHT NOW!”

Alphys was about to respond with an “O-o-okay!” when she realized Undyne had already hung up in her excitement.

The dino lizard blinked before looking at Mettaton, absolutely bewildered.

“OHMYGODIDIDIT,” she said, covering her face with her claws. Still embarrassed, somehow turning even redder.

Mettaton let out a sound of barely contained excitement, hopping off of the edge of the table to pick Alphys up and spin her around before hugging her, all grins.

“Awww, darling, I’m so PROUD of you! I KNEW you could do it!”

“Thank you, Mettaton,” Alphys giggled, returning the hug.

She finished putting the finishing touches on the efficiency device and motioned for Mettaton to turn around so she could install it. A few moments later, it was done.

“How does that feel?” she asked.

Mettaton took a moment to allow the new energy to course through and sustain him, striking a few poses as he felt it out with his soul. It seemed good. Wonderful, in fact.

“It feels much better than before,” Mettaton said, impressed. “There was always a sort of... clash with the other one, like something wasn’t quite syncing right, but this resonates. I think you’ve done it, Alphys!”

Alphys smiled and adjusted her glasses, looking proud.

“If my calculations are correct, you’ll be able to do as I said: Go through a day like everyone else, only needing to charge when it’s time to ‘sleep’,“ she reminded him.

“That means I can start performing like this,” Mettaton observed, pleased as he struck another pose or three. “Thank you, Alphys. I should head out before your girlfriend gets here so I can make it back to the resort before everything opens. I’m not sure how much of an early bird Papyrus is, but I will uphold my end of the deal. How’s tonight for the date?”

“Tonight,” Alphys nodded in agreement.

As Mettaton headed out, Alphys called out to him.
“M-Mettaton! Good luck!” she said, giving him a thumbs up.

“Thank you, darling!!” Mettaton called back, giving her a half wave, half blown kiss with a smile before stepping out of sight.
A Due Explanation

Back at the resort, Frisk was the first to wake up in the morning, having been more rested than they’d been in what felt like years. Checking themself, they discovered that 5 of their stolen HP had been returned to them, bringing them up to 15 HP, as a result of the destruction of two horcruxes, no doubt.

They had been hoping maybe that defeating those would’ve restored all of their HP, but the remainder must have been spread amongst others. Frisk wondered how many more Chara possibly had.

They stretched their arms above their head and clambered off of the bed, careful not to disturb their parents who were still sleeping. Frisk had a hunch Toriel would be the next to wake up, as Sans didn’t seem like someone who’d be a morning person.

Frisk was right about Sans not being a morning person. He slept, only stirring a little when the kid moved, eye sockets opening the faintest amount before his subconscious confirmed that it wasn’t something he needed to be up for and he slipped back into sleep. He probably wouldn’t even remember the brief interruption whenever he actually woke up.

As things were, he rolled over to face Toriel without knowing it, closer to her now – almost touching her as he slumbered on.

The warmth was nice.

Letting them sleep, Frisk found some paper and a pen in a desk drawer and wrote a note saying they’d gone to the resort’s restaurant for breakfast and left it on top of the nightstand. They closed the hotel room door behind them as quietly as they could manage.

On their way, they encountered Papyrus standing in front of the Memorial Fountain, looking up at the statue of Mettaton. He seemed to be in a bit of a daze as he didn’t acknowledge Frisk’s presence until they gently tugged on one of his hands.

“Oh! Frisk, how are you?” Papyrus asked with a smile.

‘I’m fine!’ Frisk smiled back. ‘Did you sleep well?’

“Ah! Yes! Very well!”

The child noted a tinge of orange on Papyrus’ cheekbones. Frisk was about to ask what on Earth he was blushing about when their stomach growled loudly in protest.

“You’re hungry! Why didn’t you say so? They don’t serve spaghetti for breakfast unfortunately, but the restaurant should have other food!” Papyrus said as he led the human in the direction of the restaurant.

When Frisk and Papyrus entered the MTT Resort Restaurant, a different monster greeted them than the fish monster who was normally there. They looked like some cross between a rabbit and a lizard, and they smiled brightly in greeting when they spotted the two newcomers.

“Hello! Welcome to the MTT Resort Hotel Restaurant. Can I get your names please?” the monster asked.
“PAPYRUS,” the skeleton motioned to himself, “AND FRISK!” he motioned to the human.

“Frisk and Papyrus...” the host repeated, looking down at their logbook. “Oh! You’re in the special guest party! Mettaton informed us that you’re to receive anything you’d like, free of charge. Please, follow me and I’ll get you situated at your table.”

With another smile, they waved another monster over to take over the front desk while they gathered a couple of menus and stepped out of a hidden door to the left.

“Right this way!”

Papyrus motioned for Frisk to lead the way and he followed behind them. Both took their seats at the table as the rabbit-lizard host monster offered them their menus before stepping back politely.

“I’m Essel and I’ll be your server this morning. What can I get you to drink?”

“GOLDEN FLOWER TEA!” Papyrus responded.

Not really certain how it was available after spotting it on the menu, Frisk signed, ‘Juice, please.’ They were curious as it didn’t specify where the juice came from, but Frisk decided it was probably best not to ask. They were undoubtedly several hundred meters under the surface, after all.

Essel marked down their choices on a small notepad they carried.

“I’ll be back with your drinks in a moment,” they said.

They gave a small bow before heading to the back, walking briskly and with purpose. Despite how charming Mettaton was, he could also be frightening when his employees didn’t pull their weight.

“So, what happened last night?’ Frisk asked, still curious about Papyrus’ earlier blushing.

“O-OH!” Papyrus looked shy. “I GOT TO TALK WITH METTATON LAST NIGHT!”

Frisk raised an eyebrow. That couldn’t be all, right?

“...HE...ENDED UP RUNNING OUT ENERGY, SO I HAD TO CALL ALPHYS FOR HELP AND I BROUGHT HIM BACK TO THE HOTEL ROOM,” Papyrus explained.

Oh. That certainly was something.

Essel came back with their drinks and also set a basket of small, bite-sized muffins into the center of the table. They had a pleasant flavor that couldn’t be directly linked to anything on the surface...the closest comparison might be a mixture between an apple and a carrot with a hint of cinnamon.

Frisk took a sip of the juice Essel put before them.

...Huh. Peanut juice.

Essel waited for a break in their conversation before speaking up, notepad up and ready.

“Are you ready to order?” they asked.

Frisk ordered toast with golden flower jam while Papyrus decided on a slice of quiche. The human again decided not to question on the source of eggs in the Underground.
Meanwhile, in the hotel room, Toriel stirred a bit and upon being awake enough to realize Frisk was missing, she turned and saw their note on the nightstand. She let out a sigh of relief after reading it. The events of the previous day were still fresh on her mind.

Toriel put the note back down and turned her attention back towards the sleeping skeleton next to her who had seemed to have gotten closer in Frisk’s absence. Toriel smiled and gently pressed a kiss on the top of his head.

The small amount of movement on the bed combined with the warmth of the kiss on his skull caused Sans to stir a little, and he breathed in as he opened his eye sockets a little again, letting out the breath as they slid closed once more in a slow, sleepy sigh.

Before he realized he’d seen Toriel’s side in that brief moment and he blinked into more awareness, turning his head to look at her face, turning blue due to the fact that they were still in a bed together.

“heh...morning—” Sans yawned, stretching a bit, “—tori.”

Toriel smiled again, noting the blue on his cheekbones.

“Good morning, Sans,” she said, kissing him.

Sans kissed her back, reveling in every moment of it, hand up to move along the fur on the side of her face.

Before Sans could wonder where Frisk was, Toriel told him, “Frisk has gone off to the resort’s restaurant for breakfast. I guess they didn’t want to wake us.”

“nice of them,” Sans replied. “but i need to talk to mettaton before they go too far on their own...i’m pretty sure i can get him to back down. i’ll go find him as as soon as we get up.”

Toriel nuzzled against the hand Sans had on her cheek, bringing her own hand on top of Sans’ and lacing her fingers with his.

“Yes, that sounds like a good idea,” she agreed.
Sans’ expression softened when she nuzzled him and then intertwined their fingers, eye sockets closing just a little in a look of sincere affection.

“hey, tori,” he squeezed her hand gently. “knock, knock.”

“Who’s there?” she smiled back at him.

“honey dew.”

Sans knew that the two words together were a thing on the surface, whether or not Toriel remembered or if she had ever seen them before was unknown to him, but if she didn’t it’d just be a little less punny.

It’d still be sweet.

“Honey dew who?” Toriel could vaguely remember the fruit from the surface. She wondered where Sans had encountered one.

“honey dew you know how beautiful you are?” he leaned closer to her when he said this, hiding a little of his embarrassed, sap-induced blush by kissing the end of her snout, and commenting on the action afterward with a wink. “...you could say i got that one on-the-nose.”

Toriel giggled.

“You did! You are always quite sansational,” she said as she took the opportunity of their faces being close together and kissed him again.

The kiss was more than accepted and returned with sweet affection, and Sans wanting every moment to last. His bone “lips” might not have been as pliable as a normal flesh monster’s, but he hoped kissing him was still pleasant for her.

...It had to be. She kept doing it.

He tried not to let his grin at the thought ruin the kiss, and he gently stroked the side of her face and down one of her long ears with his free hand, willing it to last for as long as was...respectable, maybe? ...Nah, he wouldn’t stop until she did.

Toriel nuzzled against his touch. The fact Sans was all bone didn’t bother her in the slightest, for she appreciated every gentle caress and kiss.

“‘Honey dew’...I haven’t seen one of those in years,” she commented, remembering Sans’ pun.

She moved a hand to stroke the side of his skull.

“Does this have something to do with what Frisk showed me? ...You don’t have to explain of course, if you don’t want to.”

While she was curious, she also didn’t want to make Sans uncomfortable.

“nah, it’s all right,” Sans smiled a little, though he seemed hesitant. The hand stroking his skull felt really good, and he leaned into it a bit as he tried to figure out how to word this.

“......i’ve...been to the surface before. several times. we all have.”

He took in a deep breath and let it out.
“there’s...no easy way to explain this, so i’ll just go right into it. each outcome you saw from frisk was from different ‘timelines’. events play out where they fall, they go through the ruins, they leave, they travel through the rest of the underground and reach the barrier, battle the king, things happen, and sometimes we go free. sometimes the kid just disappears, without a trace. sometimes bad things happen and something takes over frisk and...we all die. it’s not their fault, but it’s happened a lot of times.”

Toriel listened patiently to Sans’ explanation, her eyes widening in alarm hearing the last part.

“So what Frisk showed me was one of those...timelines.”

The word sounded foreign on her tongue. She believed what Sans told her though.

“Only you and Frisk remember? ...You’ve both been through so much...” Toriel said, wondering silently to herself why only they did and no one else but let the question remain unasked.

“yeah. i know it’s a lot to take in. i have ideas for why i remember, but that’s a whole other story beginning back from before frisk ever fell. i’m not sure exactly why it happens or how, but i think it has something to do with...chara,” he paused, expression growing more regretful an hesitant.

“i’m...really sorry, tori. for what you had to do. but they would have killed me if you hadn’t...they’ve done it before.”

Toriel closed her eyes in thought, remembering all of the flashing images she had seen upon Frisk pressing Toriel’s hand to their soul. The image of seeing Sans turn to dust weighed heavy in her mind. It really was a lot to take in. She ended up hugging Sans close to her.

“Thank you, for telling me,” she said.

Sans hugged her back, partially resting his face against the fabric of her shoulder and the fur of her neck.

More guilt. For letting this come up again, for causing her pain with the knowledge. For how much was still hidden from her.

“there’s more, but...it gets worse. those parts can wait,” Sans said.

Toriel nodded, continuing to hold him close in her arms. They would actually need to get up at some point, but for now they could enjoy each other’s presence and soul resonance.
Mettaton walked through the resort lobby, smiling and waving to a couple of fans who squealed and followed him until he got to the restaurant, where the security cut them off from going any further without reservations.

Making his way down the entryway and past the front desk, he was stopped by Essel, who informed him that two of the special guests, “Frisk” and “Papyrus” had arrived a while ago. Pleased with the news that the skeleton was here, however the human dampened it, Mettaton strolled into the main part of the restaurant and looked around at the tables.

He was just intent on locating them for now...he’d approach in a moment.

At the table, Papyrus calmly sipped what was left of his tea, the quiche already eaten. Frisk wiped away toast crumbs from their mouth with a napkin. Placing the cup down, Papyrus smiled at Frisk.

“FEELING BETTER NOW?” he asked.

Frisk nodded. The food wasn’t anything they’d tried in the Underground before, but it did fill them up and had been pretty good.

Ah, there they were. Mettaton spotted the two, and it looked like they were finished eating, so he wouldn’t be interrupting anything. Mettaton took a moment to observe them before he started over, heels lightly clicking on the blue and reddish checkered tile.

“Hello darlings! Enjoying your stay, I hope?”

“METTATON!” Papyrus said, as his expression brightened even more. “YES, EVERYTHING IS GREAT!”

Frisk gave a polite wave and nodded in agreement.

“Wonderful!” Mettaton smiled back before he stepped closer and leaned on the table a little, focusing on Papyrus. “Listen, darling, I wanted to ask you something—do you have a moment?”

The skeleton’s cheeks flushed slightly from the sudden attention.

“S-SURE,” Papyrus said.

Frisk felt it would be best if they left, so they gave Papyrus a kiss on the cheek and a hug before waving goodbye to the two and walking back in the direction of the hotel room.

Mettaton watched the two embrace and say goodbye, another small part of him faltering on his convictions about the human before he shook it off, focusing on the current matter.

“Alphys and Undyne have a thing planned tonight,” Mettaton explained. “It’s something special...dinner, entertainment, getting to know one another better. I’m going as well, but I’d rather not go alone. I’ve quite enjoyed the chats we’ve had, so I was wondering...”

The robot leaned in a little, smile still spread across his handsome, hand-crafted features.
“Would you consider accompanying me, as my date?” he asked.

Papyrus’ cheeks turned bright orange. Mettaton, THE Mettaton, whom he had been harboring a crush on ever since catching his big debut in entertainment months before the human arrived, was asking The Great Papyrus on a date.

“O-OH!!! YES! I’D LOVE TO!” Papyrus responded excitedly.

Wowie! He had to be the luckiest skeleton in the world. Not only was he able to talk to and help out his crush the other day, but now he was going on a date with him.

Mettaton was incredibly pleased by this, and he voiced as such, not missing a beat as he laughed softly and let a hand rest on Papyrus’ arm, “I’m so glad to hear it, darling! We’ll be meeting in the lobby this evening at seven.”

That orange tint on the skeleton’s face was adorable, like the rest of him, and a mischievous part of Mettaton wanted to make it happen more often. He’d be getting the chance, it seemed.

“OKAY! SEVEN!” Papyrus repeated, committing the time to memory.

Papyrus looked down at Mettaton’s hand on his arm. He could have sworn he felt a sensation similar to what had happened last night with the spark.

Mettaton gave Papyrus’ arm a light rub before bringing his hand back to himself and straightening up from where he’d been leaned forward, a faint pink on his own cheeks. He’d felt it too, and he wanted to keep on feeling it – but not now. Maybe they could cuddle that evening. That sounded nice.

“I need to get back to the set, but I’ll see you soon, beautiful~” he said as he made to leave, blowing the skeleton a kiss before he was fully facing away. Mettaton had been on a few dates since becoming a star, but this was by far the one he had been most interested in.

Papyrus was in a complete daze.

“O-O-O-KAY...” he responded dreamily.

It wasn’t until Mettaton was gone from sight a slight problem occurred to him. He had no idea how dating worked.

In a panic, Papyrus ran out of the restaurant, past the lobby, and down the hall where he saw Frisk standing outside their hotel room, apparently debating whether or not to knock in order to be let back in.

“FRISK! I’M SO GLAD TO SEE YOU!” Papyrus exclaimed, stopping next to them.

‘Are you all right?’ Frisk signed in confusion.

“OH! I’M GREAT! METTATON ASKED ME ON A DATE BUT I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO DO! YOU’RE GOOD AT HELPING PEOPLE WITH THEIR CRUSHES, RIGHT?” Papyrus asked, looking a bit like a lost puppy.

Frisk blinked before the realization dawned on them. They never went on a “date” with Papyrus in this timeline because they had been sick and everything that normally happened had gone off track since then.
Papyrus continued giving Frisk what could only be described as the skeleton equivalent of puppy eyes.

‘Okay, okay. I’ll help,’ they signed.

The skeleton looked instantly relieved as the child knocked on the door.

Inside, Sans shifted a little when the knock, knock on the door came, pausing from where he’d been gently stroking the longer fur on the back of Toriel’s head before leaning back and looking at her.

“guess it had to happen sooner or later,” he said, regretful but good humored. “i’ll get it.”

Normally he might have told whoever was there to just come in, but the MTT Resort doors were weird in that they’d only open from the inside after the first time they let you in. He pulled back from Toriel’s warmth reluctantly before scooting to the edge of the oversized bed and off the side before walking over and opening the door.

“hey, kiddo,” Sans greeted before looking up and spotting Papyrus’ face. “...woah, papyrus, you okay bro? you’re all orange.”

Papyrus somehow turned even more orange at his brother pointing it out.

Curious, Toriel sat up in the bed so she could see what was going on.

“SANS! OH MY GOD!” Papyrus started suddenly, grabbing his brother by the shoulders. “METTATON H-H-HE ASKED ME ON A DATE!”

Both Toriel and Sans became fully awake upon hearing that bit of news.

“...woah, woah. uh,” Sans said, freeing himself from Papyrus’ grip.

It took Sans a second to properly circulate that statement through his skull before he let out a snort of a laugh, grinning up at his brother. It was sincere despite the snicker.

“that explains the marmalade,” he teased, even though Frisk (and possibly Toriel) would be the only other people present who understood.

‘Papyrus doesn’t know what to do though,’ Frisk squeezed past Papyrus in the doorframe to sign at Sans. They paused to look up at Papyrus’ battle body. ‘...He needs clothes.’

“how long have you got?” Sans asked, looking up at Papyrus.

“SEVEN!” Papyrus replied, still as bright orange as the marmalade Sans referenced.

“Well, there’s no time to waste then,” Toriel remarked, sliding gracefully out from the bed.

Sans glanced back to grin at Toriel when she took initiative in Papyrus’ benefit, and he took her lead. The shorter skeleton stepped back from the door, holding it open to let Frisk and Papyrus in before he walked over to the nightstand and put his socks and shoes back on, followed by his hoodie.

“good thing the ferry person’s pretty close. no offense to all of you, but i don’t know if i could safely transport you all.”

Frisk nodded in agreement and retrieved their coat from the dimensional box and slipped it on.

“YOU’RE ALL GOING TO HELP ME?” Papyrus asked, surprised and touched.
Frisk grinned and nodded.

“WOWIE!”

Sans stepped over and nudged his brother on the side with another grin.

“course we are. we’re your friends, and what’s important to you is important to us.”

Papyrus picked up Sans and hugged him.

“THANK YOU, BROTHER! THANK YOU EVERYONE!” he said loudly.

Sans hugged back, always up for a brohug.

Frisk had that determined look on their face again. It was time to make The Great Papyrus look like the Amazing Papyrus.

“Ready to go?” Toriel asked of the group.

Sans was still in Papyrus’ arms when he looked over to the other two, gently patting his brother’s back.

“i guess i’m ready when my ride is,” he said.

Toriel laughed at the comment as Papyrus put Sans back down on the floor and the entire group made their way out of the resort and to the elevator.

It wasn’t long before they met up with the river person and arrived in Snowdin.

“I’d say we made quite a splash with our puns, Sans,” Toriel joked, referring to the back and forth punning that occurred during the boat ride.

“water you docking aboat, tori?” Sans said, as he stepped out of the boat and on to the snowy bank, winking at Toriel and sparing an innocent glance at his brother.

“We’ve just been having a normal, intellectual conversation about clever word play. how we lake to pond-er the workings of our diverse language...i wood keep going, but by the look on papyrus’ face, i don’t know if i want to anchor-age it.”

Papyrus stepped out of the boat and picked Frisk up under their arms to place them on the snowbank.

“LUCKY FOR YOU, BROTHER, THERE IS MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT THAN YOUR OBSESSIVE PUNNING,” Papyrus said.

Papyrus then picked Frisk up and placed them atop his shoulders and the child pointed in the direction of the clothing shop to indicate, ‘Onward!’

Chuckling, Sans grinned at Toriel, “think we went overboard?”

Toriel walked alongside Sans, following after Papyrus and Frisk who had run off ahead.

“Nonsense,” she replied. “You should always seas the day when it comes to opportunities to be punny.”

The skeleton laughed, very pleased with this response. He moved a hand to take Toriel’s as they
walked, turning it so that he could kiss the back before simply holding it in his, snow crunching under their feet.

“i couldn’t’ve said it better myself.”

By the time Toriel and Sans arrived in the clothing shop, Frisk was sitting outside of a changing room, flipping through a fashion magazine. It was quite fascinating to see monster fashion trends.

Toriel approached them and asked, “Oh, I guess Papyrus is in there already?”

Frisk nodded.

‘He started grabbing...’ Frisk paused, knowing Sans would understand, ‘his usual sort of clothing...so I handed him something else instead.’

“Oh?” Toriel questioned.

It was then that Papyrus stepped out, causing everyone to take notice, including the rabbit shopkeeper who let out an impressed low whistle.
Papyrus was dressed in a well-fitting white suit with red lapels on the jacket over top of an orange with white striped button up dress shirt, a red tie, and black dress shoes.

“Oh!” Toriel held a hand up to her mouth in surprise.

Frisk grinned at their handiwork. Papyrus cleaned up really well.

“I’VE NEVER WORN SOMETHING LIKE THIS,” Papyrus commented as he checked to make sure the buttons on his shirt’s cuffs were done. “DO I LOOK ALL RIGHT?”

“all right?” Sans started, looking his brother up and down in an impressed manner.

“paps, you look fantastic,” he stepped over, walking around his brother before patting him on the arm. Nice, perfect fit. “and that’s not even a pun!”

“WOWIE!” Papyrus responded.

The tall skeleton wrapped his red scarf back around his neck and looked at himself in the mirror.
Yes, this would do. Turning back around, Papyrus ruffled the top of Frisk’s hair.

“THANK YOU, FRISK!”

‘You’re welcome!’ Frisk signed after patting their hair back down to its normal look.

Frisk then walked over to the shopkeeper and used their still enormous lot of gold to pay for the suit despite Papyrus insisting it wasn’t necessary.

“i bet mettaton will be impressed. i mean, you’re awesome all the time, but that outfit really suits you, bro,” Sans said, making sure not to emphasize the word “suits” too much for Papyrus’ sake, but he gave Toriel a subtle wink showing that it wasn’t unintentional.

“THANK YOU, SANS!” Papyrus replied, not picking up on the pun while Toriel smiled, catching it.

“IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I NEED? WHAT SHOULD I DO DURING THE DATE?” Papyrus questioned.

Frisk paused a moment, looking confused before getting an expression of realization. Ah, right. Papyrus probably didn’t have the dating guide from the librarby in his possession, and even if he had checked it out, he probably hadn’t had time to read it.

‘You enjoy each other’s company, but you could give Mettaton something if you’d like. ...Maybe not spaghetti though. I don’t think Mettaton eats food,’ Frisk suggested.

Papyrus put a hand under his chin in thought.

Sans pondered with him for a second before he walked over to Papyrus again, reaching out to take the end of his scarf.

“you did really good with this, papyrus. it looks professional. maybe you could make him a scarf?” Sans suggested.

Papyrus was struck with inspiration.

“YES! BROTHER, THAT’D BE PERFECT!” he agreed.

Luckily for Papyrus, half of the clothing shop had items for making clothes, and this included various colors of yarn. Papyrus picked up and paid for a skein of hot pink yarn.

Papyrus led the group back to the house in Snowdin where he ran upstairs to grab his knitting needles and proceeded to get to work on making a scarf in record time while sitting on the couch downstairs.

Frisk joined Papyrus on the couch, fascinated to see Papyrus focus and his dexterity with the knitting needles.

Sans sat with Papyrus for a bit too, wondering where Gaster had decided to go as he wasn’t in the house, before he wandered into the kitchen, hands in pockets as he watched Toriel prepare dinner for them later, as Papyrus would be eating in Mettaton’s company.

“you know, you don’t have to worry about cooking stuff...but thank you, tori. i should probably learn some of this,” he said.

“No time like the present!” Toriel smiled at him as she rinsed off some vegetables that had managed
Around 6’o clock, Papyrus loudly declared, “FINISHED!”

Frisk rubbed their eyes sleepily as they sat up. At some point they had drifted off. Looking over at Papyrus they saw that he was holding a very lovely and charming hot pink scarf. Perfect for Mettaton’s personality.

Distracted by Papyrus’ exclamation, Sans washed his hands in the sink (climbing up a step stool to reach) before stepping over to the archway between the kitchen and the living room, looking out at his brother.

“nice,” Sans said. “that came out really good, papyrus.”

“THANK YOU!” Papyrus replied, looking over at him and placing the scarf in a gift bag. “I BETTER GET GOING!”

Frisk gave him a thumbs up and Toriel waved from the kitchen.

“you want me to take you so you don’t have to go through hotland?” Sans asked, leaning against the arch’s frame.

Papyrus paused and then nodded.

“YES, THAT MIGHT BE BEST. ARE YOU UP FOR IT?” he asked.

“yeah, i slept pretty well last night. i’ve got a ton of energy,” Sans walked over to Papyrus, holding his arms out for a hug that would also serve as a connection point for transporting him safely through the void. “a skele-ton.”

“SAAAAAAAAAAAAAANS,” Papyrus groaned, giving his brother the needed hug.

“be right back, guys,” Sans said as he hugged his brother back and summoning his magic around them both, vanished with Papyrus.

When they snapped back into being, they were both standing outside of the doors that led into the resort, by the plants where Sans normally stood waiting for Frisk to come through.

“now arriving at mtt resort. thank you for choosing the skelebro express,” Sans joked.

Papyrus took a deep breath before turning to look at Sans.

“I’VE SAID IT A LOT TODAY, BUT THANK YOU, SANS,” he said gratefully.

“hey, i know how long you’ve wanted something like this to happen,” Sans winked, before grinning fondly. “what kind of brother would i be if i didn’t help out?”

Papyrus hugged Sans one last time and began walking toward the doors.

“call me when you’re ready to come home and i’ll pick you up. have fun, bro,” Sans said as his brother waved goodbye to him.

Sans watched Papyrus until he was gone from sight and then wandered into the back by the wall, taking his “shortcut” into the hotel to find Mettaton since they still had around 45 minutes before the appointed “seven o’clock” rolled around.
The suit Papyrus is wearing was designed by thecatatonic on Tumblr (https://thecatatonic.tumblr.com/post/134981745676/someone-asked-for-suit-designs-dresses-here). We really liked the design, so we wrote it into our story.
Due to the detour to have a chat with Mettaton, it wasn’t until thirty-five minutes after he’d left that Sans appeared back inside of his house in Snowdin, standing up on the walkway between his room and Papyrus’. He’d need to figure out where Toriel and the kid were, then he needed to check something in his room that had been nagging at him.

That book really hadn’t felt right, and after being so close to the knife and the locket, he thought he understood why.

Looking over the banister, Sans observed Frisk sleeping on the couch as he listened to sounds indicating that Toriel was still in the kitchen, humming a melody to herself as she cleaned up from dinner preparations.

Sans took a couple steps back and turned towards his room and went to unlock the door before realizing that he’d left it open this whole time. Oops.

Once inside, he shut the door quietly behind him, faint sound of the old hinges complaining and travelling into the downstairs area as his footsteps quietly creaked across the floorboards over the kitchen.

Warily, Sans approached the book, eyeing the worn cover and feeling uneasy at the awful aura it exuded. He’d touched it before and nothing had happened, but knowing now that a fragment of that killer’s soul was likely fused with it caused him to hesitate.

He had to touch it though, if he was going to keep it away from Frisk.

The instant Sans touched the book, he felt the presence of the evil aura in a way he hadn’t before. The room suddenly felt freezing cold and a sense of dread began to overwhelm the room.

Downstairs, Frisk woke up and sat up suddenly, as if feeling in their soul that something was horribly, terribly wrong.

Immediately, Sans’ soul shivered in his chest, and he moved to back away from the book. He could feel the unnatural chill in his bones, and the effects of the contact had his gasping for air like all of the oxygen had suddenly been sucked from the room, his left eye flaring brightly as his own magic pulsed within him. The house around him rumbled a little, bright blue spilling out from under the door into the upper hallway.

This feeling...he’d started getting over this, despite his lingering fears and doubts. Regardless of how well this timeline had been going and how much promise it had, there had still been a protective emotional wall around Sans, keeping him from fully letting go and living, protecting him a small amount from the fear of future resets.

But that was part of his downfall here, making his resolve weaker as whatever this was crept in and cruelly twisted itself around every shred of hope within him, clenching painfully, forcing the light out. Gasping, weezing, moisture on his face that he couldn’t even quite process yet, Sans stumbled back more and nearly fell onto the floor, stress and fear and pain and the struggles of an endless, cruel loop weighing him down so hard he felt like his soul might shatter.

He couldn’t hide anything from this. He couldn’t grin and joke it away. He couldn’t even stand up.

The door slammed open with a loud bang as it hit the wall and Frisk ran in, stepping in front of Sans,
holding their wand in front of them. They were filled with dread immediately, thoughts of failure, and the resets weighing on their mind. What if this wasn’t the end? What if something went wrong and they died? Or worse, one of their family died again?

But knowing Sans needed them now filled them with determination. They could do this. They had to do this. They would defeat Chara, free Asriel, and live on the surface happily together.

Remembering their human father’s stories, Frisk summoned immense magical strength, and a white light spread from their wand, forming the shape of a bird with long, flowing tail feathers. The bird dispelled the negative energy in the room, restricting it back to the book which now lay closed on the floor.

“f-frisk...” Sans rasped out from his place kneeling on the ground as he tried to catch his breath and sort through the pain as the pressure lifted. “d...don’t...touch...the book...horcrux...”

His energy felt sapped. The blue ceased crackling across the floor and the skeleton slumped forward, eye sockets black pits without light, skull facing downward at the magic-singed carpet around him.

Sans’ hand clutched the fabric on his chest and he shook, trying to get past the overwhelming effects of the ordeal. He...he could get through this, he just...needed a minute.

Frisk stumbled over to Sans on the floor and hugged him to them. Somehow their overwhelming determination had enabled them to pull off the extremely difficult Patronus Charm their human father had gone into great detail over when he’d taught them about Harry Potter’s years at Hogwarts. The effect the book had had been extremely similar to what their father had described a creature called a dementor created.
Remembering the story, Frisk opened up a dimensional box and pulled out a brand name chocolate bar. They broke off a piece and offered it to Sans and then munched on a piece themself.

‘Chocolate will help,’ they signed, recalling what their father had said.

Sans just stared at the piece of human candy as first, a little incredulous.

Chocolate...?

He only vaguely caught the signing, but took the offered piece anyway and numbly put it into his mouth. He didn’t know how this would help, but, hey, he’d try just about anything to stop his soul from feeling like it was about to crack in two.

Frisk was relieved that there wasn’t an actual dementor in the Underground, and was terrified at the prospect of what could’ve happened had that been the case. A “Dementor’s Kiss” removed a person’s soul from their body, but the monsters in the Underground were unique from the fantastic creatures on the surface and made up entirely by their souls. All that would’ve been left would be dust, if that.

With that realization, Frisk hugged Sans tighter.

Sans didn’t return the hug at first, still a little too numb. Unknown to him, it was true; the more darkness and regret and fear someone had in their heart and in their past, the worse a dementor – or similar spells woven with their negative energies would affect them. Sans’ entire being had been under attack when his soul had been gripped in that mimicry, and if he knew what a dementor was, he too would be grateful that he’d never met one before.

Eventually, bony arms ended up wrapping around the kid in a returned hug, and Sans took in a steadying breath.

“...wasn’t...expecting that. sorry for the scare, kid. thanks for getting me out of that.”

Frisk refused to move until they could sense Sans had returned to normal.

Both heard Toriel’s footsteps padding up the stairs quickly. When she entered the room, she winced and wrapped her arms around herself, feeling some of her fur sticking up on end.

“W-what is that aura?” she asked.

Sans winced a little when he opened his eyes fully, and he squeezed his left socket closed again before turning his head as much as he could in Toriel’s direction from where the kid still clung to him. As much as he wanted to just be past it already, the magic had hit him pretty hard.

“it’s the...book...horcrux.”

Toriel listened to Sans and without hesitation summoned forth her fire magic, directing it at the book, but the book’s energy wasn’t going down without a fight.

Once Toriel’s fire struck the book, the negative energy once again overwhelmed the room. She let out a scream of pain from the sudden attack upon her soul.

Mom!!

Frisk let go of Sans and immediately stood back up, using their wand to summon their Patronus once again. They hoped they’d be able to hold out long enough. If it wasn’t for the fact human
determination was seemingly amplified in the Underground, there was no way normally a witch or wizard would be able to use the Patronus Charm without years of study.

There was a sudden, odd sound of something warping into existence as a Gaster Blaster fired, magical energy aimed at the book as it blew a large, round hole out of the back of the house, replacing Sans’ window with a new exit...barely missing Frisk.

Whether or not it destroyed the book as intended was yet to be seen, but cold blue flames remained in the wake of the attack, licking at the partially disintegrated flooring and splintered wood beams.

Sans remained kneeled on the floor with his left arm outstretched and breath once again heaving. He’d attacked attempting to destroy it before it could cripple him again, or affect Frisk and Toriel anymore.

Frisk lowered their wand and saw a different energy float to them. They pressed their hand on their chest as warmth entered their soul, restoring a tiny amount of HP. The book horcrux was no more.

The family as a whole was worse for wear, Toriel now sitting on the floor, catching her breath. Frisk’s bird like Patronus dissipated into nothingness as they passed out from magic over usage.

Sans shifted to stand up, stepping over to Frisk to check their vitals and make sure they were okay before he collected them into his arms and went to Toriel.

The cold from Snowdin was seeping in through Sans’ new bay window when he sunk to his knees again in front of Toriel with Frisk still in his arms.

“you okay?” he asked.

Toriel gave a slow nod before responding, “Y-yes. I’ll be fine.”

She looked down at the unconscious Frisk in Sans’ arms, their wand still loosely held in their hand. Brushing some hair out of Frisk’s face, Toriel ran a CHECK. It seemed Frisk hadn’t lost any HP during the attack and had only passed out from the magic usage, much to her relief.

“What about you, Sans? Are you okay?” Toriel asked, making eye contact with him.

“...honestly, tori...the definition of ‘okay’ can be spread pretty widely,” he admitted, seeming more than a little drained. He didn’t want to lie to her – didn’t want to shrug it off, but the reasons he wasn’t okay ran deep and even though she already knew some of it he still wasn’t sure how to explain to her or Papyrus. “...as far as how things have been and the fact that we’re all still okay...yes, i’d say i’m doing pretty good. sorry this happened. if i had known, i’d never have brought that book here.”

Toriel moved closer to hug him, leaning over the sleeping form of Frisk.

“It’s destroyed now and we’re all safe. That’s what matters,” she said.

Sans leaned into her along with the hug, Frisk now in his lap, his arms encircling Toriel and resting on her back.

“you’re right,” he said as he let his eyes close, relaxing more against the feel of the fur on his bones. “...and papyrus wasn’t here to be in harm’s way, so i guess i can thank mettaton for that.”

He never wanted Papyrus to feel like he had under the effects of that horcrux.
Toriel smiled and nodded in agreement, closing her eyes as she felt Sans return the embrace.

“That bird Frisk summoned,” Toriel spoke, looking down at the human, “the colors were different, but I’ve seen it before, on the surface.”

“You have?” Sans asked, curious, following Toriel’s gaze back to the kid. “It looked like a pretty fancy one. Bigger than any of the ones I’ve seen flit through the gaps in the mountain to get stuck in here with us.”

Toriel brushed her hand over Frisk’s hair again.

“It is a phoenix. The very representation of a cycle of death and rebirth.”

Based on what Sans had explained to her about timeloops, the shape of Frisk’s protective spell didn’t surprise Toriel.

It didn’t seem to surprise Sans either; it sounded fitting for the kid – even though Sans had no idea what a Patronus was, let alone how special and specific each form they took was to the caster.

“Sounds like they’re a pretty big deal,” he commented thoughtfully.

The cold breeze from outside brought Sans’ attention back to his destroyed wall, and he shuffled to his feet before focusing on the still present bits of flickering blue fire. He brought a hand out, centering in on them until they went out, ceasing what damage they had been perpetuating.

Toriel felt that there was a pun about holes to be made, but decided against it. Now wasn’t the time. She carefully moved Frisk from Sans’ lap onto her own so he could continue examining the damage.

Looking at the opening, Sans figured there wouldn’t be that much of a long-term for repairs to be made. Either they’d head for the surface, or...there’d be another reset and his wall would be back how it was.

Still, with things being so different in this timeline, he’d probably let Papyrus push him to get it fixed anyway, what with the still unknown horcruxes being wherever they were. It could be that they’d end up spending a lot more time down here.

Tired, but wanting to salvage what he could of his clothes, Sans walked over to his half-disintegrated dresser and started pulling shirts out and shoving them into an old backpack. He stopped this task briefly to walk over and lean his (thankfully only grazed) trombone he’d never told Toriel about against his mattress, which was also partly gone. It wasn’t too bad of a loss; it was an old mattress, and sagging in some places. The springs poked him sometimes.

The snow was already drifting in through the gaping hole in his wall, and he knew this task would be a lot less convenient after a storm.

“You know...” he started, stepping past the destruction on his way back to the half-ruined dresser and glancing over at Toriel with a thoughtful but still joking expression. “I always wanted a bigger window.”

Toriel shook her head, amused just as Frisk stirred and blinked a few times sleepily.

“There you are,” Toriel said, looking down at them with a gentle smile.

Once finished with shoving his clothes (and a certain key that had been hidden in the dresser) into
the backpack, Sans headed back over to Toriel and Frisk, relieved to see the kid waking up.

The amount of love in Toriel’s face when she looked at the child made Sans pause, and an ache settled in his chest. He was going to help Frisk return Asriel to her. There was no way he wouldn’t do all that he could to make that happen.

Frisk slowly sat up, putting their wand down and rubbing their eyes. Despite their lack of experience they’d succeeded in casting the Patronus Charm twice within only minutes of one another. While they weren’t able to defeat the horcrux itself, they were relieved they could protect their parents if only for a little while.

Frisk looked over at the expanded window before looking back at Sans and signing, ‘Unexpected remodeling job looks good, dad.’

Sans crouched down next to Frisk and Toriel and gently rubbed a hand over Frisk’s hair, backpack now over his shoulder.

“thanks, kiddo. i’m thinking about going into contracting...specializing in skylights. think it’d take off?” he joked.

Frisk’s shoulders shook with silent laughter and they picked themself off the ground.

‘Sure, why not?’

“That’s enough excitement for today, I think,” Toriel said, getting off of the carpeted floor as well.

As she did so, a distinct growling noise was heard, courtesy of Frisk’s stomach.

“I believe it’s time for dinner,” Toriel said with a chuckle.

When they exited the room, Sans took a moment to glance back inside before shutting the door behind them to keep the cold out of the rest of the house.

He looked thoughtful.

“huh. i think my blanket’s still laying out in the forest somewhere. wonder if it’s still salvageable.”
Papyrus waited in the front lobby of the MTT Resort for Mettaton, holding the gift bag containing the scarf he knitted in one hand. He seemed a little nervous, but super excited at the same time. What would Mettaton think of the gift? Hopefully he’d like it.

About five minutes before seven, Mettaton strode into the lobby coming from the direction of the CORE with purpose, gaze sweeping the area as he looked for any of the three people he was meeting here. It didn’t take more than a moment before he was pleased to spot Papyrus and he promptly approached him, slowing as he got closer.

“Papyrus! Darling, ...oh my,” he looked the skeleton up and down, impressed and, honestly, a little flushed. “You look so handsome~! What taste! What vibrance!! You’re absolutely stunning!”

Mettaton was wearing his own version of something a little formal, his outer fitting switched out for a smoother, sleeker look that resembled something like a robotic suit. He was grateful that he’d nudged Alphys to design more options for him previously. With Papyrus showing up so dashing, he might have felt a little oddly dressed for the occasion in his usual stage fittings.

Papyrus’ face flushed bright orange.

“THANK YOU!! FRISK JOKED THAT NOW I AM THE ‘AMAZING’ PAPYRUS. ...WOWIE, METTATON, YOU LOOK AMAZING! I MEAN, YOU ALWAYS DO, BUT STILL!” he said, giving the robot a shy smile.

“Thank you so much, darling!” Mettaton smiled brightly, giving a pleased laugh at the compliment and the mention of him being called The “Amazing” Papyrus. “I’d say the little human was right! Oh, and by the way on that subject, you’ll be pleased to know that the whole thing with them has been sorted out! Your brother explained things to me earlier. I wanted to apologize for causing you distress with what I was saying about them!”

“Oh, that’s a relief!” Papyrus replied, happy that he wouldn’t have to worry about Frisk and Mettaton not getting along.

Just then the pair spotted Alphys and Undyne walking in through the front door.

“Hello, everyone!” Alphys waved as she walked over with Undyne, wearing her black and white polka dot dress. She looked quite adorable.

Undyne was wearing something nicer too – similar to what she had worn to the dump in another timeline while looking to find the lizard girl and discover her response to the passionate confession letter she’d written.

Undyne grinned widely at Papyrus, stepping right over and heartily clapping him on the back.

Papyrus nearly fell forward from the (usual) excessive force of Undyne’s “pat” on the back.

“Woah-ho-ho, look at this guy!! Such a charmer!” Undyne complimented. “I didn’t know you wore suits, Papyrus!”
“FRISK HELPED ME PICK IT OUT!” Papyrus explained.

“You really look nice!” Alphys concurred before looking over at Mettaton, admiring her handiwork on his “suit”. “You’re looking very nice too, Mettaton!”

When Papyrus was inadvertently shoved forward from Undyne’s enthusiasm, Mettaton stepped closer to him, bringing his hands up to steady the skeleton before he looked at Alphys.

“All thanks to you, darling~” the robot responded with the flash of a smile. “I’d say we’re quite the lovely set of couples, wouldn’t you?”

Alphys and Papyrus both blushed, seeming to agree with the statement.

“SHALL WE THEN?” Papyrus said as he held a hand out to Mettaton.

Alphys looked like she suddenly had inspiration for writing fanfiction.

Mettaton took the offered hand without hesitation. He definitely wasn’t shy.

“We shall! You all get to be the first guests at a new place I’ve been keeping as a little secret in New Home. It wasn’t supposed to be ready until next week, but exceptions can be made on these special occasions!” Mettaton announced.

Papyrus looked extremely curious and let Mettaton lead the way, still holding his hand, while Alphys took Undyne’s hand and they followed after them.

Once the group had taken the elevator past the CORE, Mettaton led the way into the capital, hand still clasped around Papyrus’. At the first opportunity (which didn’t take long to come around with them being so close to the popular resort) the robot hailed what served as a transportation service in the bustling, overcrowded underground city, and a “vehicle” of some sort stopped near them and the driver looked over and motioned with his many spidery arms for them to board.

Undyne was the first to hop on over, helping Alphys up before getting on herself, and sitting with her arm around the smaller female. She was used to the capital even though she much preferred Waterfall.

Mettaton was next, turning back after he had taken a seat to pat the space next to him in indication for Papyrus to do the same.

Papyrus gladly sat down next to his date.

“NS Five, near the Seasons Hotel, if you please,” Mettaton instructed the driver.

As the little “carriage-vehicle” started off, Mettaton took Papyrus’ arm and smiled at him.

“How long since you’ve been in the city, darling?” he asked.

Papyrus blushed from the attention from Mettaton. He wasn’t used to getting this kind of personal interest in his life.

“O-OH! ABOUT A YEAR, I THINK. MY MEMORY IS A BIT FUZZY,” Papyrus admitted.

Alphys noticed the skeleton’s orange cheeks and seemed to be silently fangirling at the situation. She remained quiet though and enjoyed the attention Undyne was giving her.

“A lot has changed even in that time,” Mettaton mused. He noticed Alphys watching them and
grinned at her a little slyly before glancing at Undyne, then back at Alphys.

The tall fish lady was blushing a shade of her own as she sat there with her arm still around Alphys, though she looked stoic and unshaken.

The further into the city they got, the more crowded the streets were. Monsters were milling about on walks and daily errands with flashy, neon lights glowing and beckoning from their places mounted on various buildings that reached all the way to the top of the cavern. Luckily, the entirety of the rock surrounding New Home had been hardened and strengthened by magic, so despite how crowded it was or the numerous buildings carved into the sides around the perimeter, it was still very secure.

When their ride slowed to a stop in a classier part of the city, Mettaton smiled at the group before stepping out.

“Here we are, darlings! Give me a moment and we’ll head inside,” he said.

Mettaton stepped out and went to the driver, paying the man before taking Papyrus’ arm again and leading them toward what looked like a fancy club and café with “MTT Downtown” emblazoned over the doors.

It didn’t look open, but when the four got closer, a mouse monster in a suit opened the doors to let them in to the dim but classy lobby lit by atmospheric candles.

Inside the lobby, a female sheep monster in a dressy waitress uniform and very curly hair approached the group. Papyrus noticed she was wearing a nametag reading “Cosette” on her outfit.

“Welcome back sir, and welcome honored guests. We’ve been expecting your arrival,” Cosette spoke softly to the group and then she politely motioned to a table within the café. “Please, step this way.”

Mettaton followed with Papyrus, and Undyne followed with Alphys as they were led further into the dining room.

Papyrus continued to enjoy the attention from Mettaton, looking at Mettaton adoringly as the robot led him into the lobby. He took his eyes off the sexy robot to take a look around and his jaw dropped in astonishment. He’d never seen anything quite like this. At least, not to his knowledge anyway.

The lighting was dim, but the walls certainly were not.

It looked like someone had scavenged the deeper caves in Waterfall and brought back a lot of the brightly glowing crystals from around that area – not from anywhere frequently visited, though, as monsters would have noticed.

The crystals had been carefully cut into different shapes and patterns to form a constellation-looking mosaic spanning from the wall, up across the ceiling, and sparkling from various random points in the rest of the walls and flooring with water accents trickling down.

The place was spacious, with a performance stage. Elegant, lovely, but definitely looking like it could host large parties.

Unlike the restaurant back in the MTT Resort, there didn’t seem to be any imagery of Mettaton’s boxy form adorning any of the tables. Mettaton had encountered a picture of a classy restaurant from the human world within a magazine Alphys had brought back from the dump and used it as his inspiration for his new venture. The tables were round, allowing for better conversation, each covered with a fancy dark red tablecloth and with a lit candle in the middle.
When they were seated at the table, Mettaton turned his attention fully to his two guests and his date, looking very pleased with himself.

“So, what do you think? I want there to be three areas, designed to reflect each of the main sectors of the Underground. Monsters of all kinds and locales will be able to come here and relax, enjoy a show and reminisce.”

Alphys looked just as amazed as Papyrus did.

“Y-you’ve really outdone yourself, Mettaton,” she commented, looking at the mosaic.

Papyrus squeezed Mettaton’s hand and grinned at him, “THIS IS AMAZING, METTATON!”

Undyne was equally impressed, and pleased with the familiar feel of the place, though she made a mental note to comb through Waterfall and make sure he hadn’t stolen any of the constellation crystals from the wishing room. She’d have his metal backside for that if he had.

Cosette brought glasses of water to the table and stood by holding her empty crystal tray down in front of her, awaiting instructions from Mettaton.

“Please, take your time and order whatever you’d like, darlings,” Mettaton explained to the group. “You’re our first trial guests, so there’s no charge~ All we need are honest opinions.”

Undyne picked up her menu, flipping through the pages until she found a side menu for sushi. She turned it toward Cosette and gestured to it, flashing her very sharp, serrated teeth in a wide grin.

“I’ll have one of everything in the sushi section,” she said.

Alphys looked excited upon the mention of sushi and chimed in, “O-oh! Me too! I love sushi!”

Ever since discovering sushi via anime, Alphys leapt at any chance she could to get some.

Papyrus glanced over the menu until he noticed the best item on the menu.

“SPAGHETTI, PLEASE!” he said happily.

Cosette gave a polite curtsey, acknowledging the orders and dismissed herself to the kitchen to tell the chef.

Mettaton leaned forward onto the table a little when Cosette walked away, tilting his head to smile at Papyrus, “So, darling...what do you do in your spare time? Besides watching my show, of course~”

Undyne watched the two before leaning down to whisper to Alphys, making sure to keep it low, “Mettaton’s admiring something other than himself...incredible.”

Alphys nodded in agreement.

“AH! WELL, I TRAIN WITH UNDYNE TO BECOME PART OF THE ROYAL GUARD! ALTHOUGH LATELY IT’S MOSTLY BEEN COOKING LESSONS,“ Papyrus replied, flattered again that Mettaton was paying attention to him. Papyrus may have been great, but he certainly thought Mettaton was far greater.

Despite Papyrus’ beliefs, Mettaton was a person and not nearly as infallible as the skeleton thought. He definitely had his flaws, but luckily he came with a lot of good points, too.

“Training as a royal guard? I already knew you were strong, darling, but I have to say I’m
impressed!” Mettaton replied.

Undyne tried to ignore the two even though it was hard to. She couldn’t help but grin wide and teasing at the sight of Papyrus blushing so much, even though she didn’t really care for his taste in robots. She looked at Alphys, ear frills quivering a little in the still present nervousness she tried to hide (she was way too tough for that blushing schoolgirl crap) as she reached out and took a smaller yellow hand in hers, intertwining their fingers.

“You wanna go back to your lab to your lab and watch nerdy anime for the rest of the night after this?” she asked.

Alphys blushed from the display of affection and replied, “O-oh, yes!”

She gave Undyne’s hand a squeeze.

“We could watch the Mew Mew Kissy Cutie OVA!” she said, and moved closer to Undyne so only she could hear. “Maybe... you could spend the night since your house is being rebuilt?” she asked, referring to Frisk’s cooking lesson gone wrong.

“That would work really well, yeah!” Undyne grinned widely, pleased. She’d meant the “watching anime all night” suggestion to include her staying there at least until the early hours of the morning, but this worked better.

Suddenly, the fish monster’s expression turned sly and she leaned in closer to Alphys, bolder now since they’d already sort of made out before.

Her sharp teeth glinted as she whispered into the scientist’s ear, “Then I can mew mew kissy cutie ova you.”

Alphys’ entire face turned bright red to Undyne’s delight, no doubt.

“I’d likethatverymuch,” she whispered back.

Indeed, the grin on Undyne’s face widened as she laughed. Ngaahh, this dork was so cute. Undyne leaned down more, smooching the lizard monster right then and there. Undyne’s grin didn’t even falter when Mettaton was heard chuckling from where he sat, only causing the fish lady’s face to heat up more.

“Darlings, you’re adorable,” the robot said.

Alphys’ entire body seemed to have turned bright red from the public display of affection and Mettaton’s comment.

Papyrus’ own cheeks seemed to be tinted orange again. When he saw Undyne kiss Alphys, he couldn’t help but wonder if he would ever have that close of a relationship with Mettaton.

Undyne laughed, looking toward Papyrus and Mettaton while sliding her arm around Alphys, “Yeah, well, same to you, nerds.”

Mettaton hmm’d in thought as he looked back at Papyrus, noting the blush.

“I’d say I agree~” he said.

Cosette returned, masterfully balancing trays of food on both of her arms, which she carefully removed and placed in front of their respective orderers. She stacked the two serving trays and held
them under an arm.

Undyne was rubbing her hands together, looking over the stacks of sushi she was about to devour, deciding where to start first. ‘Course, she had fish all the time around Waterfall...despite how closed off they were from the surface, the scaled swimmers still found their way into the Underground in decent numbers. But this was sushi...something that hadn’t existed down there until humans had decided to discard recipe books along with the rest of their trash.

It was even better infused with magic, the way that the monsters prepared it.

“Is there anything else I may do for you?” Cosette asked politely to the group.

Mettaton watched Undyne pause and glance up at Cosette when she asked if they needed anything else, and the robot smiled somewhat amused as the tough fish lady was caught with food in her mouth.

“Looks like she’s set, at least,” Mettaton commented, and Undyne gave a large grin and two thumbs up to verify the statement.

“We’re good, thank you,” Alphys smiled.

“THANK YOU, MISS COSETTE!” Papyrus said to the waitress.

Cosette gave a small nod and dismissed herself again to allow the group to enjoy the food and each other’s company.

Alphys happily ate sushi the way she saw in her anime and manga and managed to daintily pick pieces up with chopsticks that she happened to bring with her in her purse. (They were adorned with Mew Mew Kissy Cutie, naturally.)

Undyne was barely even bothering with her own chopsticks – only pausing to try when she noticed Alphys carefully using hers. She tried once...twice...each time grimacing when the roll of seaweed and fish dropped back to the table. After the third attempt she just stabbed it with a loud clunk and brought it to her mouth that way. It was a miracle she hadn’t cracked her plate.

Alphys, seeing Undyne’s frustration, decided to put down her chopsticks and pick up her next piece in her hand and dipped the fish portion into soy sauce, demonstrating the other method she had seen.
Undyne would probably appreciate this method more.

Papyrus took a bite of his spaghetti and looked like he was in heaven.

“WOW! THIS SPAGHETTI IS AMAZING!! THE NOODLES ARE SO SOFT!”

“So you’d say the dish is a winner then, Papyrus?” Mettaton asked, reaching out a hand to tilt his own water glass in an idle fashion, though he didn’t intend on attempting to drink any of it. He could have as a ghost, but right then he was fused partially with his robotic form and didn’t particularly feel like revealing himself.

“ABSOLUTELY!” Papyrus exclaimed excitedly. “I’LL HAVE TO TRY TO RECREATE THIS AT HOME! MAYBE MS. TORIEL AND FRISK CAN HELP!”

Mettaton chuckled, pleased, “I’m so glad you’re enjoying it, darling~”

Undyne stopped to put down her own (stabbing tools) chopsticks before following Alphys’ lead. She was indeed a lot more adept on eating things with her claws, and she happily stuck with this method – though she made a point to remember to maybe try the chopsticks again some other time.

“Yeah, not bad at all! This place is better than the resort,” Undyne agreed, very pleasantly full of sushi.

“Of course, darlings, it was my pleasure,” Mettaton responded before looking toward the sheep monster who had served them and had returned to pick up empty dishes, flashing her a smile. “Thank you, Cosette.”

“You’re very welcome, sir,” Cosette replied and turning to the rest of the group, gave a polite nod of her head. “Please enjoy the rest of your day.”

She finished gathering the rest of the dishes and returned to the kitchen.

Papyrus seemed to be in thought.

“I THINK I’VE SEEN HER BEFORE. ...YES, SHE VISITED SNOWDIN RECENTLY TO BORROW A BOOK FROM THE LIBRARBY, BUT SHE SURE SPENT A LOT OF TIME NEAR THE RIVER.”

“Oh? Near the river?” Mettaton questioned, curious. “I wonder why she’d be drawn to that slush of half-frozen water.”

Not to mention, Cosette shouldn’t have had much of a need to borrow a book from Snowdin’s librarby in the first place. The largest library in the Underground was located within the capital, actually not too far of a distance from the café’s location.

Mettaton paused, looking at the stage as some harried looking monsters crowded onto it and started playing some pleasant music. The robot frowned some, seeming annoyed.

“Aww, sorry darlings. They were supposed to have started playing ages ago...”

“MMM, THE ONLY THINGS THERE ARE THE SLIME MONSTER FAMILY AND ICE WOLF,” Papyrus shrugged before smiling and listening to the music. “IT’S ALRIGHT, METTATON. WE’VE ALL HAD A WONDERFUL TIME REGARDLESS.”

He subconsciously placed a hand on top of Mettaton’s, resting on the table.
The thoughts Mettaton had been formulating about giving the musicians a piece of his mind on being on time stopped when he felt Papyrus’ hand touch and cover his.

The robot blinked, a small pink tint crossing his face before he brought his free hand up and placed it over Papyrus’.

“I’m glad,” Mettaton responded. “Thank you for agreeing to come with me, Papyrus.”

Papyrus felt his cheeks turning orange yet again.

“YOU’RE WELCOME,” he replied.

Papyrus wished that this night would never end.

Alphys looked up at Undyne knowingly, linking one of her own hands with Undyne’s.

Undyne squeezed the smaller hand in hers, pleased that Alphys seemed to be getting more comfortable with showing affection. The scientist’s slowly increasing confidence made Undyne proud, and less worried, for her.

“So...you ready to head back to your place and start our marathon?” Undyne asked of her date.

Mettaton looked over at Undyne when she spoke, before shifting his gaze to Alphys and smiling slyly.

“It’s all right, Alphys. I know you don’t like to be out too long,” he said.

Alphys looked back up at Undyne, blushing, before nodding. Alphys, probably out of habit from watching anime, bowed her head towards Papyrus and Mettaton slightly after getting up from her seat.

“Please excuse us! Thank you for tonight!” she said.

“Have fun, darlings~” Mettaton said in a sincere tone with a hint of a tease to it, winking at Alphys.

Undyne got up, looking over at her skeletal buddy before they left.

“See you later, Papyrus!” Undyne said. “Don’t let that metal dork talk you into turning your battle body pink, okay?”

Papyrus shook his head at Undyne’s comment.

“ORANGE IS MORE MY COLOR. METTATON’S IS PINK, AND HE DOESN’T NEED A BATTLE BODY,” he replied.

Alphys waved goodbye to Papyrus and Mettaton and walked off hand-in-hand with Undyne, looking extremely happy, and quite pink.

“GUESS IT’S ALPHYS’ COLOR TOO,” Papyrus said as an aside to Mettaton.

That earned a laugh from Mettaton. The robot brought his hand down from returning Alphys’ wave, and he looked back at Papyrus while smiling brightly.

“I guess so! And it’s about time this happened. I’ve been trying for so long to get Alphys to admit her feelings to Undyne,” Mettaton explained. “It was so obvious they both liked each other... It’s good to finally see them progressing.”
Papyrus grinned and nodded in agreement.

“SO...” Papyrus’ cheeks were slightly tinted orange yet again, noticing he’d still been holding on of Mettaton’s hands. “WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO FOR A WALK? IT’S BEEN AWHILE SINCE I’VE BEEN IN THE CAPITAL.”

Mettaton didn’t mind the hand holding in the least – quite the opposite, in fact.

“I’d love to,” the robot responded, shifting to get to his feet, turning his hand over to clasp Papyrus’ so as not to break the connection quite yet. “Oh, but darling, you’ll need to be prepared. I’m bound to be recognized, so we may need to handle such things as they come up. But that aside, we’re free to go anywhere you’d like~”

Papyrus nodded, linking his bony fingers with Mettaton’s metallic ones.

“I THINK...I REMEMBER A PLACE.”

Chapter End Notes

skyechan: Cosette’s trip to Snowdin was a joke we didn’t end up using later in the story; long story short she had a crush on Ice Wolf. lol.
Papyrus continued holding hands with Mettaton as they walked through busy capital areas. Occasionally, Mettaton would be stopped and asked for autographs. Ironically, a few asked Papyrus for some as well, much to his surprise. They seemed to have thought Papyrus’ appearance during Mettaton’s televised battle with Frisk was all part of an elaborate script and complimented him on his “acting” ability as a guest start on Mettaton’s program. Some commented on how real the human looked.

Eventually the two ended up at the place Papyrus had in mind. It took some time to get there, even taking into account getting stopped by Mettaton’s fans, due to Papyrus’ memory being fuzzy and the capital having gotten more crowded.

It was an area similar to the wishing room back in Waterfall, with crystals adorning the ceiling and shining. The lights of the buildings in the capital caused the crystals to glow a little differently than the gentle natural lights that reflected off of the water in the other room. Regardless, the sight was still breathtaking.

Papyrus was relieved that despite the crowding of the capital, that this area seemed relatively untouched and still seemed serene.

With an intake of breath into metallic-synthetic lungs, Mettaton gazed around at the crystals.

“It’s lovely,” he remarked, gently tightening his grip on the skeleton’s hand. “Despite how often I’m in the capital these days, I’ve never seen this area before... I wasn’t even aware that the crystals occurred naturally this far away from Waterfall.”

Papyrus grinned, taking delight in Mettaton’s reaction.

“I’M GLAD I COULD BRING YOU HERE. I WASN’T SURE IF IT’D STILL BE HERE AFTER ALL THIS TIME,” he said, looking up at the crystals. “I THINK SANS IS THE ONE WHO BROUGHT ME HERE ORIGINALLY. WHEN I WAS VERY SMALL. ...I CAN’T REMEMBER THOUGH. THERE MIGHT’VE BEEN SOMEONE ELSE THERE TOO.”

Mettaton smiled some, turning his gaze away from the crystals to look at the monster next to him.

“You two seem very close,” he commented.

It reminded Mettaton of his connection to his cousins, and the robot pushed down the small twinge of guilt he felt for having left one in particular by himself for so long...family was important.

Papyrus noticed the change in Mettaton’s demeanor and turned to face him.

“METTATON, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?” Papyrus asked.

During dinner Alphys had mentioned that Mettaton shouldn’t encounter any more power troubles, but what if she had been mistaken? Papyrus noted however that Mettaton didn’t seem to be acting the same way he had been when he collapsed previously, so maybe it was something else?

“Mm?” Mettaton looked at him. “Ah, of course, darling. Just a little lost in thought is all.”

He turned his face back upward, light from the crystals shining against the more polished parts of his robotic form.
“I think I’ll be stopping here more often...” Mettaton said. “I’ve always loved living near the crystals in Waterfall, but it’s usually so far to travel between the times I’m at the set. Thank you for showing it me.”

“YOU’RE WELCOME, METTATON,” Papyrus said before picking up something in what Mettaton said and looked a tiny bit puzzled. “YOU’RE FROM WATERFALL?”

But, didn’t Alphys make Mettaton in Hotland?

Mettaton froze, looking like he’d been caught doing something he shouldn’t. One of the disadvantages of having lived in an inexpressive metal box of a body for so long – your ability to cover first reactions tended to slip.

“Ah...well...I never said I was from Waterfall...”

The robot paused, going through this in his mind. He hadn’t intended to even consider telling Papyrus about his past this early on in their communications, but that would have just been holding back truth. If he told the skeleton he wasn’t from Waterfall now and covered it up, it might be more comfortable now, but it’d be an outright lie he’d have to deal with later.

Mettaton really liked this monster. Papyrus was sweet, caring, determined, enthusiastic...he’d grown rather fond of him in such a short amount of time. He felt more of a spark with him than he’d ever felt with anyone else.

The robot sighed, looking uncomfortable...before he stepped a little further into the cave, once again gazing around at the glowing walls and ceiling.

“...No. I’m sorry, darling. It’s true.”

Papyrus saw that Mettaton was uncomfortable.

“AH, YOU DON’T HAVE TO TALK ABOUT IT IF YOU DON’T WANT TO. I DON’T REALLY KNOW YOUR PAST, BUT I GUESS THIS MEANS YOU WERE A LOT CLOSER TO MY HOUSE THAN I THOUGHT!” Papyrus gave a light chuckle.

“No,” Mettaton replied. “It’s all right, darling. I’d need to speak with you about this sooner or later.”

The robot spotted a small bench in an alcove off of the main cave, and he walked over to it, taking a seat and gently patting the spot next to him in indication to the skeleton.

“Here, sit with me for a moment,” Mettaton requested.

Papyrus tilted his head in curiosity and then sat down next to Mettaton.

Mettaton still looked uncomfortable, but he turned in his seat anyway, bringing one leg up onto the bench to sit on it halfway so that he could face the skeleton more fully.

“Before I say anything, will you promise not to talk to anyone else about this? It’s not...as dramatic as it sounds, but it would be...awkward for me if the media found out,” Mettaton said.

Papyrus had a determined look on his face and grabbed both of Mettaton’s hands in his own.

“I SWEAR ON MY LIFE THAT I WILL KEEP WHATEVER YOU’RE ABOUT TO TELL ME TO MYSELF! I WON’T EVEN TELL MY BROTHER!” he declared.

A pink blush rose to Mettaton’s face when Papyrus took both of his hands like that. He felt the
tingling again: the pleasant resonance that had sparked between them – along with a warmth in his soul.

Mettaton smiled softly, some fondness creeping into his expression though the nervousness was still there.

“All right. The truth is...I’m not really just a robot,” he admitted, looking away slightly. “...I’m a ghost. Alphys made me this body so that I’d have a form that better fitted my personality...so I could become a star.”

Papyrus listened closely to Mettaton’s words, surprised when he revealed the truth. He gave Mettaton’s hands a gentle squeeze and smiled.

“THANK YOU, FOR TRUSTING ME,” Papyrus said. “OH! SINCE YOU’RE A GHOST, ARE YOU BY CHANCE RELATED TO THE GHOST THAT LIVES NEXT TO UNDYNE’S HOUSE? THERE’S ANOTHER HOUSE NEXT TO THEIRS, BUT NO ONE IS EVER HOME.”

Mettaton gave a laugh that was somewhere between still nervous and grateful, smiling back at the skeleton.

“Yes, that’s where I used to live. Napstablook’s my cousin,” Mettaton explained. “I really should go back there more...they get pretty lonely sometimes...”

“I’M SURE THEY’D LOVE TO SEE YOU,” Papyrus smiled. He then removed his hands from Mettaton’s remembering he had something to give the robot. “I DIDN’T WANT TO ACCIDENTALLY MESS IT UP DURING DINNER, SO I DIDN’T HAVE A CHANCE TO GIVE YOU THIS BEFORE NOW.”

Papyrus pulled out his gift bag for Mettaton and handed it to him, his cheeks very orange.

“Oh? A gift? Darling...” the robot looked surprised and curious as he brought his hands up to receive the gift bag. He opened it carefully, reaching a hand in to pull out the knitted length of pink, spreading it out until he could determine that it was a scarf by the shape. “Aww, it’s lovely! And I adore the color.”

It really was well made, and Mettaton noted that mentally even though he didn’t yet know that Papyrus was the knitter. He shifted to lift a section of it over his head and wrap it around his neck, looking fairly delighted.

“OH GOOD! I WAS HOPING YOU’D LIKE THE COLOR. I’M GLAD I WAS ABLE TO FINISH IT IN TIME!” Papyrus commented, smiling at seeing Mettaton put it on.

The robot paused, blinking at Papyrus.

“Finish in ti – darling, did you make this?” Mettaton asked, surprised.

“YES!” Papyrus replied, giving Mettaton a big smile. “I WANTED TO MAKE SOMETHING FOR YOU.”

Mettaton ran his hands over the scarf with a new sense of appreciation, touched now along with everything else. Papyrus had gone through the trouble of knitting this, himself, with just him in mind...

The pink tint in the robot’s face spread more as his soul swelled with a feeling of deep appreciation
and fondness. He couldn’t help it. Well…maybe he could, but he didn’t want to. Shifting, Mettaton leaned forward and kissed the side of the skeleton’s face, smile bright and sincere.

“Darling…it’s beautiful... I’ll treasure it.”

Papyrus’s eyes went wide. Mettaton had just kissed him. On the cheek, but whoa… Was Papyrus dreaming? This feeling in his soul… was Mettaton feeling this too?

Papyrus raised a hand to Mettaton’s cheek affectionately.

Mettaton was certainly feeling it too. He watched Papyrus for just a moment, feeling the hand on his face. That was more than enough evidence for the definitely not shy robot to catch a hint, and he leaned closer once more to kiss the skeleton again – on the mouth this time. It felt like something they both wanted, and Mettaton wasn’t going to pass it up.

Despite having no knowledge or experience, Papyrus subconsciously used his magic like how Sans did when kissing Toriel. He felt like he was melting into the kiss. The feeling was far more intense than what they had felt previously with the handholding. In Papyrus’ soul, it felt like they were meant to be together. Papyrus sure hoped that his wishful thinking would come true.

Mettaton’s hands gently moved to the side of the skeleton’s face and the back of his skull, prolonging the kiss for as long as he could before the inevitable breakoff, but he stayed pretty close to Papyrus even after, looking into his eye sockets, those dots of light in the darkness. He wasn’t sure what to say for once… so he just the other monster another light kiss, affectionate and soft. He didn’t want to stop.

Papyrus kissed Mettaton again, not wanting to stop either. He’d never felt this way about anyone before. Papyrus realized that this must be how Sans feels about Ms. Toriel. No wonder Sans seemed so much happier lately.
Mettaton continued kissing the skeleton – until he jumped when a bright flash of light lit up the alcove for a split second, and he blinked a few times, looking over to see a very excited monster clutching a camera.

The robot gave a startled laugh, before shifting a little closer to Papyrus so that he was partially in his lap, posing artfully as another flash went off.

“Mettaton! Hey, is this your boyfriend??” the monster asked, excitedly.

It was intrusive, but the robot didn’t seem to mind beyond having had the kissing interrupted. Mettaton looked at Papyrus, smiling somewhat hesitantly, yet hopefully.

“Mmm. How about it, darling?” he asked quietly enough that the newcomer couldn’t make it out. “If it’s too soon, I understand...but I certainly wouldn’t mind you taking that title~”

Papyrus looked extremely happy and honored by the question.

“I’D LIKE THAT VERY MUCH, METTATON,” he replied, smiling down at Mettaton’s face below him.

Mettaton’s smile brightened more, and he took hold of the front of Papyrus’ suit jacket before kissing him again, turning back toward the monster who had just flashed another picture afterward.

“I can confirm that, darling~ This handsome monster here’s my boyfriend, Papyrus. You’d better be planning on sending a copy of those photos to my Undernet submissions box~” Mettaton requested.

The monster grinned widely, excitedly nodding, “O-of course!! I-I’ll leave you two alone now...but ah, careful, because there’s a couple other people trying to find where you went too. Ha ha...you might get ambushed again.”

“Thank you for the heads up, darling~ I’m sure we can handle it. Toodles!” Mettaton responded.

The monster got one last shot of them both smiling before he ducked away from the alcove and back toward the city, looking rather gleeful at his score.

“Ha ha, sorry about that, Papyrus,” Mettaton said once the monster with the camera had left. “One of the hazards of being well known~ though I certainly don’t mind what it caused.”

Papyrus shook his head quickly at Mettaton’s apology.

“NOTHING TO APOLOGIZE FOR!” he grinned. “WOWIE! THIS DATE HAS TURNED OUT FANTASTIC!”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Mettaton chuckled, leaning back in to kiss the skeleton one again. He couldn’t seem to get enough of that. “I’m already looking forward to the next one~”

Papyrus smiled again and leaned into the kiss before pulling away to look at Mettaton’s face.

“OH, METTATON. WE SHOULD START HEADING BACK,” Papyrus suggested. “ALPHYS TOLD US AT DINNER YOU’D NEED TO START CHARGING LIKE A REGULAR SLEEP SCHEDULE.”

Papyrus paused before adding on to his statement, “NOT THAT I MIND CARRYING YOU, I ACTUALLY LIKE THAT VERY MUCH...A LOT. BUT I WANT YOU TO STAY HEALTHY.”
“Aww. Yes, you’re right, of course,” Mettaton agreed, even though he wanted to object. He leaned against the skeleton for one more moment before getting to his feet and walking a few steps away, only to turn around with a flourish and toss the end of the scarf over his shoulder, making sure it was secure around his neck before striking a few poses.

“Mm, I’ll have to do a new photoshoot wearing this~” the ghost-turned-robot grinned. “Oh, and...I wouldn’t mind being awake for the carrying part some time.”

Papyrus smirked mischievously at his boyfriend and promptly took advantage of the offer, deftly lifting Mettaton in his arms, “VERY WELL THEN! SHALL WE?”

Mettaton let out a gasp of surprise, moving his arms around the skeleton’s neck on impulse with a pink tint over his face. He laughed, then, kissing Papyrus’ bony jaw from his new vantage point.

“We shall!” he agreed.

Papyrus continued grinning and walked off back towards the main part of the capital so they could return to the MTT Resort for the night.

Mettaton was more than happy to stay in Papyrus’ arms, and not bothered in the least by anyone seeing this transpiring.

The entire Undernet would know about this when morning came. Papyrus would become popular overnight through Mettaton. Popular, and probably envied, if a certain pair of garbage-selling girls in an alleyway were any indication of the mindset of the robot’s fanbase.

The walk was relatively peaceful...up until the point when Mettaton’s sensors picked up a faint sound of commotion and a couple of monsters ran past them, looking scared out of their wits. The robot turned his head to look down the street they had come from, hesitating as the smell of smoke filled the air, billowing out from a building about a block away that looked like it had a half-collapsed front.

“...The...library?” Mettaton questioned, his synthetic brow furrowed, feeling a creeping feeling through his soul as a dark aura radiated from the burning building.

What in the Underground...?

Papyrus noticed the smoking building and gently put Mettaton back on his feet on the ground, looking greatly concerned.

“I DON’T KNOW WHAT’S GOING ON, BUT SOMEONE MIGHT NEED HELP,” he said. As a future (?) royal guardsman, Papyrus felt it was his duty to help during times of crisis.

Mettaton placed a hand on Papyrus’ arm, concern in his expression.

“Be careful, darling... I don’t know what caused this, but something feels...bad,” the robot said. He hesitated a moment before he seemed to settle on something, taking a step toward the building as he started walking. “Regardless though, I’m coming with you.”

Papyrus had to agree with Mettaton’s sentiment. Something about this felt very bad.

“OKAY.”
A Turn for the Worst

Although Papyrus didn’t stop Mettaton from coming along, he made it a point to be the one in front. If something was horribly wrong, this would give Mettaton a chance to get away. If Papyrus had skin he would’ve had chills upon walking into the shattered entrance of the capital library. Instead, he just felt a dark aura forcing a tight pressure on his soul.

The lights powered by the CORE’s electricity in the library had all been shut off, leaving only the emergency lights given off by crystals as a light source as the couple made their way further into the building.

Besides cosmetic value, Mettaton had never been so glad to have a metal body around his own soul. He considered transforming back into his metal box form, which offered more defense, but it would take too long, and his wheel wouldn’t work so well around all of the debris.

Extremely disturbed, Mettaton took a step back from a pile of white powdery substance and cloth he’d almost stepped in, staring down at it briefly before going around it and quickly moving closer to Papyrus, trying to use his robotic sensors for anything useful.

A little ways further in, a rabbit monster could be seen laying on the ground, trying to move...before it became too much and they crumpled into dust. With the electricity out, only darkness lay beyond them.

Papyrus looked around as best as he could, but the glow of the crystals was weak, and only a little bit of outside light was shining in the destroyed building’s atrium, apart from the bits of debris strewn about that were on fire. Whatever was going on, he knew he needed to get any survivors out of this place as quickly as possible.

“HELLO!?” Papyrus shouted, putting his hands up and cupping them around his mouth to amplify his voice. “IS ANYONE HERE!?"

He put his arms down, turning his head left and right in an attempt to hear any possible response.

When Papyrus’ voice sounded through the building, a whimpering emitted from somewhere off to the side, and Mettaton immediately moved toward it, crouching down next to a large tipped bookshelf and looking underneath.

“There’s someone trapped under here! Give me a hand with this,” the robot called out to Papyrus before he carefully tried to shift the heavy mass of shelving.

Hearing footsteps approaching them, he called out, “PLEASE, IF YOU’RE NOT INJURED, HELP US WITH THIS! SOMEONE’S TRAPPED!”
The footsteps didn’t change beyond getting louder, and the owner stepped into the light of the fire still blazing around. A short bear monster moved their gaze to the two and started walking toward them... but something wasn’t right.

Their gait was slow. Shuffling, and not quite balanced. A broken length of carved wood that looked like it had been snapped off of a chair or something similar was clutched in one hand, blood and dust coating the side and tip. Their eyes were wide... wild, tinged with red.

“Papyrus!!” Mettaton gasped, trying very hard not to recoil from where they had managed to lift the shelf enough for the monster trapped underneath to try to crawl out – they’d be hurt worse if it suddenly dropped back down onto them. But the threat was inching closer, completely focused on them. Moving and twitching in unnatural ways as the force of the dark aura clenched tighter around the monsters’ souls.

Papyrus realized that they couldn’t let go of the shelf, so he did the only thing he could do. Focusing his magic on the trapped monster, he turned their soul blue and quickly but carefully slid them out of harm’s way, and to his own surprise, back towards the entrance. The bookshelf collapsed back down on to the ground.

Papyrus then summoned a long bone and held it in one hand, prepared to fight off the bear monster. He stood guard in front of Mettaton and tried his best to ignore the intense pressure on his soul.

“PLEASE STOP!” Papyrus begged of the bear monster. “I DON’T WANT TO FIGHT YOU!”

The monster Papyrus had freed managed to scramble out of the front of the building and into the safety of the streets while Mettaton stepped more to the side of the skeleton, still partly behind him but able to see what was happening and intervene if he needed to. There really was no telling what this other monster would do.

Instead of stopping, the bear’s hand clenched tighter around their makeshift weapon, and a slow grin twitched across their face as they lunged, aiming an attack at Papyrus’ chest. Whatever had come over them was aiming with every intention to kill.

Papyrus’ eyes widened as he jumped into action and parried the bear’s attack with the long bone before moving his other hand in front of him and summoning up his magic to turn the bear monster’s soul blue and push him back. However, after moving the trapped monster and feeling the increasing pressure on his soul, Papyrus worried that he wouldn’t be able to keep Mettaton safe while he tried bringing the monster back to his senses. No monster behaved like this normally. Something had to be the cause. The strange evil aura, no doubt.

Papyrus quickly removed his suit jacket to give himself more freedom of movement. There was no way to predict what the bear monster would do next.

His focus not leaving the bear monster, Papyrus spoke to Mettaton behind him, “METTATON, YOU NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE AS FAST AS YOU CAN. WE NEED HELP. FIND SANS! I’LL KEEP WHOEVER THIS IS FROM GETTING OUT ON THE STREET.”

“There’s no way I’m leaving you here alone, I–”

Mettaton’s words were cut short as the now blue-souled threat slammed their claw against a cracked part of the wall, causing the already weakened front structure to shudder and a large stone beam to split above them in a rain of debris.

“PAPYRUS!!” Mettaton shrieked, and he grabbed the skeleton, shoving him to the side as the larger
pieces of stone slammed down, crunching into his metal body. If it had hit Papyrus, it would’ve
dusted him for sure.

Papyrus rubbed his head, coming back to his senses, and looked alarmed at the spot where he had
just been, seeing Mettaton’s metal body stuck under the debris. Mercifully, Papyrus could still sense
Mettaton’s soul. It seemed the robot was still all right.

Papyrus began clearing the debris away that he could but then saw the monster approaching them
again.

“METTATON, PLEASE!” Papyrus begged, looking back at the looming threat coming to them. “IF
YOU CAN, YOU MUST GET OUT OF HERE AND GET HELP! FIND SANS! MY HOUSE
IS THE ONE WITH ALL THE LIGHTS ON IT IN SNOWDIN!”

Papyrus hated having to force Mettaton to do this, but he knew that if Mettaton were to abandon the
metal body for now and use his ghost form, he could at least get Mettaton to safety.

A pink glow resonated around the metallic body before Mettaton’s soul recentered, and a ghost with
a wisp of “hair” covering one side of his face just like his robot form did phased up through the rock,
looking both frightened and upset at the situation.

He focused on Papyrus, confirming visually that the skeleton was okay and he’d succeeded in
protecting him, before he spoke up, “Don’t worry about that thing, darling! It’s...just a shell. I...I’ll
find your brother! BUT THAT BEAR HAD BETTER NOT HARM YOU!!”

Feeling the urgency of the situation and wanting to help and get back to Papyrus as quickly as
possible, the ghost moved to zip through the air heading for Snowdin. Out of all of the monsters in
the Underground (not counting Sans), ghosts definitely had the advantage on fast travel.

There was nothing in Papyrus’ house in Snowdin to greet Mettaton. Just the chill of snow coming in
from a rather large opening in a bedroom upstairs.

A literal nightowl monster taking a stroll on the street sees the rather confused ghost double checking
to see that he had the correct house.

“Are you looking for the family?” the owl asked. “I believe they’re at the Snowdin Inn.”

“Ah – thank you, darling!” the ghost exclaimed in a voice anyone who had paid much attention to
television in the past while would recognize, before he zipped past through the air and snowflakes
coming down, not waiting for a response.

The hole in the building he saw on the backside was puzzling, but he couldn’t care less what had
caused it right then. All that was on his mind was getting help to Papyrus before it was too late.

The thought sent an ache through him he didn’t want to handle, so he pushed it down as he phased
through the inn. It only took him a second to find the three in the room with the larger bed, and he
hovered above them, filling his incorporeal lungs with air before he shouted at them, wasting no
time.

“WAKE UP!!!”

Sans, for his part, startled awake, sat up in the bed with his magic flaring.

*What in the...?*
Toriel sat up and rubbed her eyes. What in the world was going on?

Frisk’s soul popped out in front of them as they sat up in bed, likely as a result of being startled awake. They cupped it in their hands gently in surprise before looking up at the pink ghost floating above them.

Frisk managed to make a startled noise and quickly tugged on Sans’ arm and shook their head, indicating not to attack. Frisk had never seen this particular ghost before, but having read the journals of Napstablook’s cousin in a prior timeline, they had a pretty good suspicion of who it was.

Sans glanced at the kid, brow bone furrowing before he looked up to the ghost again, seeming to calm.

...That is until he spoke up again.

“You have to help!!” the ghost said quickly. “Something happened in the capital – Monsters going crazy! Papyrus is in danger!!”

At the bit about Papyrus, Sans immediately shifted and jumped out of the bed, shoving his feet into his sneakers as he addressed the pink ghost. He didn’t care about explanations – he’d worry about that when his brother was safe.

“where exactly is he?” Sans demanded, slipping his arms through the sleeves of his coat.

“The capital library! It’s near the center, I—”

As soon as the word “library” was spoken, Sans was already gone in a flash of blue magic, leaving a faint fizzling feeling in the air.

Meanwhile...
Papyrus yelled in extreme pain as he felt his backbone collide with a bookshelf behind him, knocking it over as he fell to the ground. His shirt and pants were dirty and had a few tears in them now from fighting against this monster. He struggled to get back up to a crouching position, picking himself off of the floor.

He’d lost a lot of HP attempting to defend against the bear, but he wasn’t out for the count yet. Papyrus really didn’t want to fight, but how was he to get that evil aura to leave the monster alone?

Papyrus winced. The pressure on his soul was really starting to get to him.

Grinning with glee, the bear monster lunged while Papyrus was down, raising their weapon high above their head and swinging it toward the skeleton’s skull just as a blue glow erupted in front of Papyrus. The air seemed to warp in on itself in that split second before Sans materialized in front of him, bringing a hand up with blue magic blazing around it to dampen the blow as he caught the blunt length of broken furniture in his hand.

Gripping it tightly, he “dinged” the bear’s soul blue in order to fling him back across the room, eye sockets narrowing as he heard gurgled laughter coming from where they had landed.

“are you okay, bro?” Sans asked without looking at him – worry deep and real but not daring to take his eyes off of what resonated with that aura.

It was another horcrux.

Papyrus winced before grinning up at his brother, “THIS IS NOTHING THAT A FUTURE ROYAL GUARDSMAN CAN’T HANDLE! I’M GLAD YOU’RE HERE, SANS.”

He got back up into a standing position, holding the long bone at the ready in one hand.

“SANS, WHAT’S HAPPENED TO HIM?” Papyrus asked, watching the bear. “THERE’S A HORRIBLE PRESSURE ON MY SOUL.”

“he’s possessed,” Sans answered grimly, glancing to the side now that Papyrus was standing while being sure to keep the bear in his peripheral as they shifted, getting to their feet with eyes glinting again. “there’s gotta be something around here that’s causin’ it. probably something on them...we need to find out what it is.”

The shorter skeleton frowned, turning his attention back to the bear fully – hand he had used to block the earlier attack lightly clenched in his pocket as bloody marrow leaked from the cracks in the bone.

“use your blaster, paps. i know you don’t want to fight, but it can double as a pretty good shield.”

“BROTHER...YOUR HP...!” Papyrus winced, seeing that Sans was hurt.

Seeing the bear about to attack Sans again, Papyrus mustered up his magical energy to summon a blaster which positioned itself in front of Sans and shielded the elder skeleton brother.

Damn. He’d noticed.

‘Course he had... Papyrus was more observant than people gave him credit for.

Luckily, the newest attack wasn’t as harsh as it could have been; Sans had kept the wooden weapon when he’d thrown the bear back, and it now lay in the rubble by the skeleton brothers’ feet. As such,
when the attack came it was in the form of a clawed swipe that left scratch marks across the surface of bone on Papyrus’ blaster, extending from an eye socket down to the nose opening.

He had to stall the monster until he could think of a strategy, until he could figure out what the horcrux was, and how to destroy it without hurting the bear monster who was just as innocent as Toriel had been when she’d clutched that damned knife.

Focusing again, he grabbed hold of their opponent’s soul once more, jerking his hand out of his pocket and moving it upward, causing the bear to shoot up into the air again and remain there suspended as he struggled to get free.

What could it be...?

yes. that’s right, keep struggling. let me get a better look at you...

Nothing seemed really extraordinary about him...except for that particularly gaudy ring he wore on an otherwise unadorned, plain ensemble.

A ring with the Dreemurr house crest on it.

ah ha. gotcha.

“it’s gotta be the ring, paps... think you can focus your magic enough to get it off of him while i keep him still?” Sans asked.

Papyrus focused his magic on the ring and he could sense it slowly sliding off of the bear’s finger.

But...that pressure... Papyrus was finding it extremely difficult to focus.

“just a little more, paps!” Sans encouraged, focusing on the monster with full intensity to try and slam his hand down in order to help the ring come off, forcing the bear’s hand open and to keep from clenching past the magic.

Almost...

Papyrus tried to focus as much as he could and the ring clattered to the ground with a tinkling noise. Before Sans could warn him though, Papyrus tried to pick up the ring and hand it over to his brother.

“papyrus, DON’T –”

WHAT, WHAT IS THIS!?

Papyrus found himself wandering in darkness.

“HELLO!? CAN ANYBODY HEAR ME!?!” Papyrus shouted, cupping his hands up to his mouth again. “SANS! WHERE ARE YOU!?”

“But nobody came...”

Papyrus turned on his heels, alarmed. He saw a tiny human that reminded him a bit of Frisk, but... those eyes. Those blood red eyes...

“WHO ARE YOU, HUMAN? WHERE IS THIS PLACE?” Papyrus asked.

The figure giggled childishly.
“I guess you could say we’re inside your mind,” they explained. “As for me? My name is Chara and we’re about to have loads of fun.”

Chara made a motion with their hand and something like a pane-less window appeared.

Papyrus turned to look through it and gasped. He could see a horrified Sans facing their direction. The image panned down and the two could see skeletal hands. One holding a long bone as a weapon, and the other wearing a ring.

Papyrus now understood why his brother was horrified. The vision he was seeing WAS his vision. Whatever happened to that bear monster was now happening to him and he had no control over his body.

Papyrus tried running over to Chara, but he couldn’t seem to get anywhere. He ended up falling to his knees instead.

“PLEASE! DON’T DO THIS!!” he begged desperately.

Chara just cackled, “What makes you think you have any control?”

Sans had his hand outstretched, trying to stop his brother but he was too late. All Sans could do was watch in horror, as the ring ended up on his hand. The bear monster who had been possessed before was spent, and out cold on the floor. Sans took a few steps back from his brother as a deep dread crept into his soul.

No. No, no, no... not Papyrus... he couldn’t... there was no way...

He couldn’t fight his brother. He couldn’t...

“...papyrus...bro... come on, you have to fight this... just. take the ring off...”

Papyrus watched in horror as his body raised the bone weapon to attack Sans.

“BROTHER! RUN AWAY PLEASE!!” he shouted futilely.

To his relief, Sans’ dodging ability didn’t fail him and his attack missed.

Papyrus turned back towards Chara.

“PLEASE!” Papyrus got back down on his knees and pleaded with the human. “DON’T MAKE ME HURT MY BROTHER!!”
The Ring

In this moment, Sans knew a couple of things.

One. That if even a single hit was landed on him in a central location or on his skull, he’d be dust. He already had a fraction of damage on his meager amount of thankfully sleep-raised HP from the cracks in his hand and arm, and though such injuries to his extremities weren’t likely to kill him, it he sustained any more the pain and instability created by the blows would slow him down. He’d need to avoid all contact.

Two. That his brother was completely out of control. If Chara’s soul shard had managed to warp him enough to attack him, he knew that Papyrus was likely unreachable. But he also knew that regardless, he wouldn’t stop trying to get through to him.

Unfortunately, he couldn’t hear Papyrus’ warning...and he wasn’t going to run. Not yet. All he wanted to do was get that ring off and free him from this cruel takeover, though he knew it would be hard. Even with just a shard, a human soul was still more powerful than a single monster’s.

With every opportunity, Sans moved further away, trying to figure out how to do this without hurting his brother. The taller skeleton’s HP was already so low from what it normally was. Sans couldn’t even afford any deflecting blows having the chance of hitting him. With Sans’ endless love for his brother and Papyrus’ strength with magic and attacks, this was incredibly bad for both of them. Sans just had to hope that Chara wouldn’t know how to control the taller skeleton’s magic.

“come on, papyrus, deep breaths... i know you don’t wanna do this,” he tried, dodging another attack. “all you have to do is get that ring off.”

Papyrus could hear Sans. He wanted so badly to be able to follow his brother’s request and tried concentrating. It was his mind, he should be able to do something.

In reality, Sans could see Papyrus halt his advance and could see the hand with the ring shaking.

In the mindscape, Chara frowned. No way was this skeleton monster overpowering their control. Chara ran over to Papyrus and slammed into his side, knocking him back down on to the ground. Because Papyrus had been focusing on his hand however, this sudden action on Chara’s part accidentally triggered Papyrus’ gravity magic and Chara saw some books go flying toward Sans’ direction.

“Oh, that’s right. You have that magic too, don’t you?” the twisted child grinned. “I think this got a bit more interesting.”

Chara looked out at the vision of Sans and placed their hand in front of them.

“He can’t dodge if he can’t move!” Chara said with glee.

A horrified Papyrus picked himself off of the ground and tried once again to run to where Chara was. It felt like he was in a dream though, where running seemed to be impossible. He could only watch helplessly as his brother’s soul turned blue.

“SANS!!!” he screamed.

The hopeful glint that the smaller skeleton had gained when he saw Papyrus hesitate was short lived. He had been prepping to try and remove the ring with his magic as soon as Papyrus’ fingers
straightened enough to make it a possibility, but those plans were crushed.

If Sans had a corporeal organ that functioned as a heart does, it would’ve stopped in that moment when he felt that familiar pressure gripping his soul, dread filling him. He knew exactly what this was. He felt his body grow heavier, weighing him toward the ground as if gravity had centered around him and increased exponentially. Like he had been wearing too much clothing while sloshing through water.

He had managed to dodge the first books that had flown his way, but now... he knew he wouldn’t even be able to do that.

Shaking slightly as he tried to reverse what had been done, gathering his magic, Sans looked toward Papyrus with one eye black and the other flickering blue, perspiration visible on his skull.

“wow, chara,” Sans said, struggling to get the words out. “i knew you played dirty, but this... well. i guess i’m not surprised.”

Against his will, Papyrus summoned a Gaster Blaster and took aim at his brother. Internally, Papyrus was screaming for Sans to somehow break free and run. Chara just ate every minute of this scenario up.

To everyone’s surprise though, the blaster missed its intended target...because someone was determined enough to push Sans out of harm’s way at the last possible second and break Papyrus’ magic grip on him.

As the dust and debris settled, Papyrus could see a figure lying on the ground, not moving, as their soul floating above them, on the verge of breaking.

“FRISK!”

Sans hit the ground, not as hard as he’d expected to as the grip weighing his soul down was broken, but it still hurt.

It took him a second to figure out what had happened through his disorientation, but the second he spotted the kid on the ground he moved to go to them, picking them up to cradle in one arm while shielding their soul from further damage as he teleported outside onto the street now that he could again.

Sans knew that Chara could pursue them out there, but... damn it, where was Toriel? He thought she’d have been close behind the kid. In a way, he was relieved that she wasn’t there, that she couldn’t get hurt. But Frisk needed help.

“h-heya, buddy... that looked like it hurt. damn, i... i know you’ll be okay, but... hang on?”

Frisk barely opened their eyes and struggled to raise a hand up. They simply spelled out four letters:

L-O-A-D.

Their hand fell back onto their chest as they closed their eyes as their breathing ceased. The soul floating above them split down the middle and shattered.

Soul aching, Sans took hold of the kid’s hand before hugging them to him. Holding them, even as he saw them die.

He knew very well that this wasn’t permanent...but watching people you cared about get hurt and
suffer such things was never easy, no matter how long it lasted.

The scenery surrounding the two faded out of view and Sans now appeared to be cradling the dead Frisk in his arms in the void.

Words seemed to float in the air above them.

LOAD                                     RESET

When Sans felt the odd but familiar sensation of reality folding around him, he assumed the kid had done whatever it was that they did to go back, and was confused when Frisk didn’t fade from his arms.

Blinking a few times, he looked up, gaze focusing on the glowing words that somehow existed in this space.

Load... Reset? Was this what the human always saw?

The skeleton hesitated, looking back down at them, “...kid?”

There was no response. Sans couldn’t have been aware that at that moment, Sans’ determination was higher than the human’s and thus placed him in charge of this decision. Because of Sans’ emotional state from having to face his brother in battle in combination with having used the save points, Frisk had had a hunch that this would happen and that’s why they had signed the word to Sans in the first place.

It took several more seconds of hesitation in the quiet of that space before Sans moved to get to his
feet, still holding the kid in his arms. He became aware of the random patch of lush grass underneath them. Odd, out in the void.

But really, what could be considered “normal” about this whole situation, where powerful barriers created time loops where one could control events – save, reset and reload, as if they were playing a simple video game?

The kid was still gone.

...so...did that mean that this was up to him, then? They had spelled out “load”, but he had assumed they’d meant that they’d be fine because they’d wind up back at the last “save point”.

Feeling curious and a little unnerved, Sans stepped over to the “LOAD” button and, shifting a little, took hold of Frisk’s hand to brush it against the glowing letters at the same time as he pressed his bony fingers to the same spot.

He wasn’t sure what he expected, but he sure hoped this worked.

When Sans came to, he was lying back in bed in the Snowdin Inn. Toriel had a light on and was reading that book he saw her reading earlier that night. Frisk was leaning against her side.

Immediately, Sans sat up, wide awake. He turned to look at Toriel before his gaze shifted down to Frisk, and he touched the kid’s shoulder, nudging them lightly. Seeing them still lifeless in the void had disturbed him, and he needed to see them breathing again...needed to be sure that he hadn’t broken something somehow by being the one to trigger the reload. After all, who knew how all of this crap really worked.

“kid?”

Frisk rubbed their eyes, coming back into reality. Let’s see...they had saved prior to going to bed and after the alert went out on Undernet that Mettaton was seen smooching his new boyfriend. After a few hours, Mettaton’s ghost form woke them all up and Sans teleported to the library where Frisk later caught up to him and saw Papyrus try to attack him. They shoved Sans out of the way and died as a result. Sans must’ve been able to load a save after all, although they were quite puzzled that they weren’t outside with Sans at the Snowdin save point then. They supposed Sans’ magic must’ve altered the loading state somehow.

Frisk looked over at Sans before sliding over and hugging him.

Toriel gave the two an affectionate smile seeing the embrace.

Sans hugged his kid back, letting out a relieved breath as he rubbed their back gently.

“thanks, frisk. you didn’t have to do what you did... i’m glad you’re okay,” he said. Sans looked back at Toriel, knowing how random this probably was sounding to her. “i think we’ve got some explaining to do and a library to get to before someone else does.”

Frisk nodded and slid out of bed to go change back into their regular clothes.

Toriel looked at the two with confusion.

“Burning the midnight oil by studying?” she questioned, placing a bookmark in her novel and setting it on the bedside table.

Sans moved to get off of the bed as well, putting his sneakers on and sliding his hoodie over his arms.
as he spoke, “not exactly. we know where to find another horcrux.”

The skeleton stepped around the bed and over to Toriel and took her hand, rubbing it in an affectionate, yet concerned manner considering the subject.

“i know you know about the timelines now, but this is still weird to explain. we went to sleep and were woken up by mettaton sayin’ papyrus needed help at the library in new home. someone found the soul shard in a ring and got possessed by it. long story short that i can elaborate on later if you want, things didn’t turn out well, we had to come back to this point to fix it, and now we’re gonna try and prevent it before it had a chance to happen.”

Toriel slid out of the bed and brushed the wrinkles out of her dress a bit.

“We should get going then,” she responded, a still bit bewildered by the explanation, but accepting it none the less.

Frisk finished changing out of their pajamas and turned to look towards their mother, not stopping her from joining the trip to the library this time. They had ran immediately to the river person following Sans’ departure in an attempt to get to the library to help, not waiting for her at all, even as Toriel called out after them, mostly because they knew a load was likely, seeing as this scenario had never been encountered before. They assumed this new event in the timeline was likely due to Frisk having extended their stay in the ruins. It threw everything else off a bit. The horcrux was likely not discovered before because in other timelines everyone was gone or were otherwise set free to the surface rather quickly.

Now that the group knew roughly what to expect, it would be useful to have Toriel around to help destroy the horcrux. As far as Frisk could tell, they were far enough back in time to prevent anyone from picking up the ring.

Sans watched Toriel with some amount of admiration along with his concern for her emotional wellbeing. Despite everything, how unbelievable it was, she was so strong, so willing to believe and trust them, so brave to actively place herself with them as they tackled this whole problem with the horcruxes. Determined through love, he’d say.

Frisk tapped the toes of their boots on the floor to ensure that they were completely on before looking at Sans and signing, ‘Teleport express?’

With a faint distracted softer expression in his eyes, Sans looked toward Frisk when he caught the movement from their hands and nodded, stepping out onto a clearer part of the floor and holding out his arms to Frisk and Toriel both.

“yep. everyone aboard... please be sansible and keep your arms and legs close to the skeleton until the ride comes to a complete stop,” he grinned at them both, already focusing his magic for the bit of extra effort it’d take to transport two other people instead of one. “...in other words, hold onto me as tight as you can until i let you go.”

Frisk hugged Sans around his waist while Toriel, being much taller, hugged Sans around his shoulders from behind. A bit of disorientation later, the trio found themselves on the capital streets.

“okay, it’s safe,” Sans spoke, bringing a hand up to gently ruffle his phalanges through the kid’s hair as he leaned into Toriel a bit. All of this hugging and affection was doing good things for his soul, even though the knowledge that he was getting used to it disturbed his fears about everything being taken away again.
Oh well. He’d believe in how well things were going and hope that they’d continue that way. As soon as he could, he’d need to find Papyrus and give him a big, long hug too. After that whole ordeal, seeing his brother free and himself again was something he really needed.

“as soon as any of us feels anything weird, we’ll let each other know, deal?” Sans addressed the group. “the horcrux is a gold ring with the dreemurr house crest on it. it’s essential that none of us touch the thing ‘cause that’s when the possession happens. when we find its basic location, i’ll hover it out with my magic and we’ll get rid of it then.”

Frisk and Toriel nodded before stepping into the library. It was far more grand in scale than the one in Snowdin, Frisk noted to themself. They had been so preoccupied with protecting Sans that they hadn’t really noticed the then destroyed interior.

When the three entered it was quiet, as libraries are more often than not. A couple of monsters were walking about, some with stacks of books they planned on checking out piled in their arms or off to the sides in the reading areas.

A stout bear monster that Sans recognized as being the possess-e from the previous time he had been here shuffled up to them, smiling pleasantly as he spoke in a quiet, gravelly voice, “Welcome to the New Home Grand Library. I’m the assistant librarian here. Please let me know if you have any questions and I’ll be happy to direct you.”

Sans nodded to the bear, “thanks, pal. actually, i have an odd question for you. have you found any old, gold rings anywhere?”

“Uh...” the libearian responded, taken by surprise by the question. “No, not that I can recall. Did you lose one?”

“yeah. don’t worry about it though, we’ll find it. here’s a tip though. if you do find it, don’t touch it,” Sans warned. “it’s...cursed. unless you wanna have a bad time, leave it where it is and come get one of us, got it?”

“C-cursed?” the bear responded, alarmed. “Huh, all right. I will.”

Looking a little disturbed, the bear monster left them alone again.

Sans honestly didn’t want to scare the guy, but despite the risk of putting the ring on his mind, it was important to know that he didn’t already have it.

Sans was about to turn back toward Toriel and Frisk when he picked up on a chill that spread through his soul, and he instead focused deeper into the library.

“...maybe we won’t need to split up. i feel somethin’,” he said.

Frisk could feel it in their soul as well. Indeed, the chill seemed to be coming from a place much farther from the entranceway and they began making their way in that direction.

Wary, Toriel followed suit, noticing the area they were all heading towards was suspiciously absent of other monsters. The patrons of the library may have moved away from the area sensing that something wasn’t quite right. She supposed it may have been one of the wary library guests who had advised the libearian to check and figure out the source of the oddity in the previous series of events.

With caution, keeping his focus despite the pressure on his soul, Sans stepped further into the abyss of books, walking past shelves and ladders and librarian carts. As he did, the dark feeling was getting stronger, and not for the first time, Sans wondered how a child could accumulate this much evil in
their soul. What had happened to Chara to push them this far?

Sans couldn’t believe that anyone could be born evil, but he wouldn’t condone everything the adopted Dreemurr had done, no matter what they’d been through. Despite everything, you still had a choice to be you or let the world warp you. Chara might not have started out dark, but they’d certainly ended up that way.

Frisk waved their hand towards the books on the opposite side of the shelf Sans was currently near. They could sense magic coming from behind the books and carefully began picking up a few and placing them on the floor.

Sans went to Frisk without hesitation, frowning when the darkness increased. Yeah, this was definitely it. Left eye flickering blue, he raised his hand and gently scooted Frisk back with his magic before several books came floating out of the shelf and began piling into neat stacks on the tiles.

Once that area of the shelving was completely clear, Sans stepped over and looked along the lengths of stone that had been used to create the structures since wood was a rare thing in the Underground outside of the area around Snowdin.

There, in the normal dust, glinting from a crack in the back was a gold ring.

Sans focused on it, attempting to levitate it out. There was no way he was touching the thing and risking being forced to attack Toriel and the kid.

Frisk backed further away as Sans levitated the ring out of the crack, accidentally bumping into Toriel, who placed her hands on their shoulders.

Their mother gave a gentle smile at them before looking back up to see what Sans was doing. Spying the ring through the halo of blue magic, Toriel recognized the ring as the one she’d given to Chara many, many years ago. She unintentionally tightened her grip on Frisk’s shoulders.

Frisk gently patted one of her hands with their own and walked free from her grasp in order to help divert any curious monsters in the library out of the way.

Leaving the books on the floor, Sans walked after Frisk, reaching with his right hand to take Toriel’s as he passed her, the ring still levitating over his left.

He turned his head to look at her, concerned. What with the ring having the Dreemurr house crest on it, he’d already assumed that it would be something she’d recognize. He squeezed her hand lightly, and if she seemed likely to walk with him, he’d keep a hold of it as they left the library. But he would also understand if she needed a minute.

Toriel appreciated the gesture and followed the other two quietly, holding Sans’ hand.

A few monsters gave curious glances towards the trio and their odd floating object, but then continue perusing the shelves in the pursuit of knowledge.
Papyrus wasn’t sure why, but he felt that odd sensation of falling back into bed after a strange dream. The sensation almost made him lose his balance.

When the skeleton almost tipped, Mettaton let out a startled sound and gripped onto him a little tighter in confusion. Was the weight of his metal body becoming too much over this extended period of time?

“Papyrus?” Mettaton asked, “Are you all right?”

Papyrus blinked a bit, coming to his senses.

“UH...YES...I THINK?” he said, unsure.

What was that dream he had? It was like a nightmare. He had attacked his brother in the dream, but if he was carrying Mettaton now, when had he fallen asleep? The area the nightmare took place looked familiar though. The capital’s library, he was certain of it. Something in his soul told Papyrus he needed to go there urgently.

“...I’M NOT SURE WHY, BUT I HAVE A FEELING THAT WE’RE SUPPOSED TO GO TO THE LIBRARY.”

The robot in the skeleton’s arms blinked, more confused than he had been a moment before, but he accepted the statement anyway with a smile. If that was another place Papyrus wanted to see before they left the capital, Mettaton wasn’t going to deny him that.

“The library?” Mettaton clarified. “All right, darling. If that’s the case then I’ll be happy to accompany you~”

Papyrus leaned down and nuzzled Mettaton’s cheek.

“THANK YOU,” he said before adjusting his hold on Mettaton, picking up the pace and heading for the library.

Meanwhile, Sans, Frisk, and Toriel made it past the dozens of bookshelves and the assistant libearian and found themselves looking back out on the main capital street.

Once they were outside, Sans squeezed Toriel’s hand again before letting it go and breathing out slowly. He then started down the steps toward the center of the empty street. If he needed to, he could use his blaster here as long as he aimed away from the buildings on either side and everything would be okay. After how much the other horcruxes had resisted, he was preparing for the worst.

“okay. time to take care of this,” Sans said to himself.

The ring floated higher, and Sans stepped back from it more. With a combination of Toriel’s fire magic and his blasters, they should be able to handle it.

Catching on to the plan, Toriel summoned her fire magic to her hands, concentrating as Frisk stood a safe distance back.

Papyrus continued carrying Mettaton through the capital streets until the library was in sight. There he spotted Sans, Frisk, and Toriel appearing to be in the middle of doing something, and right in the
middle of the road, no less.

Upon seeing his robot-toting brother enter the street, Sans hesitated before turning the other way so that they were behind him and wouldn’t be in the way of any blaster shots he might have to send out, before he glanced over and nodded to Toriel while making sure that he was also out of her line of fire.

“ready when you are.”

Toriel nodded back and took a deep breath before focusing her fire magic at the floating ring.

Frisk watched as a Gaster Blaster and extremely powerful fire disintegrated the cursed ring into nothing. A mysterious warm energy like that from when the book horcrux had been destroyed floated and made its way into Frisk’s soul. They pressed a hand to their chest as the warmth dissipated.

Upon the horcrux’s destruction, Papyrus felt strange and put Mettaton down before holding his head in his hand. The sensation disappeared before he could pinpoint what on Earth it was.

“I’M OKAY,” Papyrus said, as he saw Mettaton looking at him with concern. “I JUST HAD A WEIRD FEELING ALL OF A SUDDEN. IT’S GONE NOW.”

The robot reached out a hand, placing it on Papyrus’ arm and rubbing gently. He didn’t know why the monsters down the street were using attacks, but he was more concerned about his new boyfriend.

“Are you sure you’re all right, darling?” Mettaton asked. “You’ve been acting disoriented...”

Now that the ring was reduced to nothing, Sans looked back over toward Mettaton and his brother with a relieved smile.

“hey, bro,” he called over to them, raising a hand in a lazy wave. “what brings you two down this way?”

Papyrus rubbed the back of his head in confusion as he and Mettaton walked over to meet up with the others.

“ACTUALLY, I’M NOT SURE. IT WAS LIKE SOMETHING IN MY SOUL WAS TELLING ME WE NEEDED TO BE HERE,” Papyrus admitted, thinking hard about it. “...I GUESS BECAUSE MY FAMILY IS HERE!”

“heh. must be,” Sans said, stepping over to the two and grinning at Mettaton before putting his arm around his brother, hugging him. “sorry. just need to borrow him for a sec.”

Papyrus was still a bit confused but happily returned his brother’s hug. Although Sans tried to hide it, Papyrus picked up on Sans’ concern.

“ARE YOU OKAY, SANS?”

Hugging a bit tighter before he let go, Sans grinned up at the taller skeleton, more and more tension easing from his soul with the destruction of the horcrux and Papyrus being back at full health.

“yeah, i’m okay. i think i need to talk to you about something sometime soon, but it can wait until you’re finished hangin’ out with your boyfriend,” he winked, knowingly.
Papyrus blushed and rubbed the back of his skull in embarrassment, before walking back to Mettaton and holding one of the robot’s hands, clearly very happy.

Mettaton gave a soft chuckle, linking his fingers with Papyrus’ when the skeleton took his hand.

Frisk smiled. Papyrus didn’t need to know that it was because he was remembering events that had been, thankfully, averted. Failing to stop it, the child let out a yawn and covered it with their hand.

“Ah, I saw that,” their mother said.

Frisk winced, turning to look at Toriel.

Toriel gave them an amused look in return, “I think it’s time for bed.”

Sans glanced over to Frisk and Toriel with a smirk, having caught that little exchange.

“welp. like i said before, if you need a lift back to snowdin tonight, give me a call and i’ll come back for you,” Sans patted Papyrus’ arm before stepping back over to the human.

“OKAY!” Papyrus nodded and waved goodbye with his free hand as Frisk waved back sleepily.

The child was relieved they were able to help out in preventing tragedy from occurring on such a nice evening. Frisk was especially happy for Papyrus and Mettaton. Their relationship hadn’t even gotten this far even when they had managed to make it to the surface. It really was lucky for the two that things had been different this timeline – that they still had the faint memories of fondness and familiarity from the past one. Usually when they made it to the surface, Mettaton had always been far too distracted to pay attention to any possible love interests. But now, he already had a romance growing, with another monster who made his soul resonate like no one else ever had.

Sans stood close to Toriel and slid an arm around her waist, before holding his free one out for Frisk to hold onto him as they prepared to return to their hotel room at the Snowdin Inn.

Frisk smiled up at Sans and held his hand as Toriel wrapped an arm around Sans’ back. The trio felt the magic sensation again and ended up floating temporarily above the hotel bed before harmlessly bouncing onto the mattress surface. Frisk giggled once their bouncing stopped.

Sans just let himself flop when they appeared, laying on his back with his eyes closed for a minute before he leaned up and removed his shoes, tossing them off of the bed. He knew that they’d probably need to rearrange how they were laying one they started getting settled. Right now due to the way they had teleported, he was in the middle with Frisk on his right and Toriel on the left.

The skeleton stretched lightly before looking over to the kid, curious about something. When their soul had popped out of their chest when Mettaton’s ghost had shown up, he’d noticed something, but he’d been too distracted to double check that he’d been seeing things right.

As he focused on them, Frisk was able to feel a familiar probing on their soul that usually only happened when they reached the judgment hall. Like someone was looking through them, but more tangible than that.

The skeleton’s brow bone furrowed some.

“...kid. your hp...”

Frisk looked over at Sans, confused.
Frisk 0ATK 5DEF

30 HP

The eighth human to fall into the Underground.

Toriel looked over Sans’ shoulder, after performing her own CHECK, curious about Sans’ reaction.

“Where did the extra come from?” she asked. “We haven’t slept yet.”

“That’s what I’m wondering about,” Sans responded, looking thoughtful. They hadn’t gotten any EXP somehow; they were still LVL 1. “So you got the rest of your hp back somehow, and then some, with what happened in the hall I’d guess it has something to do with the horcruxes, but... having extra? Not sure what to make of that.”

Frisk closed their eyes and concentrated, their soul appearing before them. They could hear Toriel gasp in surprise. Opening their eyes, they could see why.

There was a strand of white color on their soul now.

Sans’ eyes went a little wider as he hesitated, confused.

“That’s... not normal,” the skeleton blinked, reaching a hand out before hesitating again and looking to Frisk. “May I?”

Frisk nodded and delicately passed their soul to Sans, feeling a prickle of magic energy which caused goosebumps on their skin when it floated above Sans’ hand.

The skeleton cupped his hands below it carefully, making sure not to actually touch it. Sans could feel the power emanating from it just from this proximity. He focused on it more, one brow raising in mild disbelief.

“...this is pretty much what it looks like,” he spoke finally, after several seconds of observation.
“you’ve got... part of a monster soul linked with yours.”

Frisk’s eyes widened at this explanation.

Toriel, hearing what Sans said, shifted on the bed and placed a hand above Frisk’s soul, closing her eyes as she felt the energy coming from it. Her eyes opened once more, and she retracted her hand, bringing it to her chest, clutching at part of her dress.

“...Asriel,” she said softly.

Asriel?

Sans turned his head toward Toriel, watching her. She was serious. He hesitated once more, thinking this over.

“...that could actually make sense,” he said.

Frisk carefully retrieved their soul from Sans and pressed it gently back to their chest where it disappeared from sight. They had to agree. This energy felt familiar to them.

Sans let Frisk take their soul back with only a glance toward them, quickly looking back to Toriel afterward and placing a hand on her arm.

“...i know this had been a lot of process, repeatedly. are you okay...?” he asked.

Of course she wasn’t okay. Who would be, with so many negative revelations, reminders of the past, and now knowing that her deceased child’s soul was fragmented and clinging somewhere else? He felt like his question was insufficient, but... hell. She really deserved to know more about what was going on.

Toriel felt tears in her eyes. She was so very confused. Her child, her dead child, was somehow partially alive in Frisk’s soul? What happened that day so many years ago?

Toriel felt hands wrap around her waist, bringing her out of her thoughts. She looked down to find Frisk giving her a hug of support.

Frisk pulled away in order to sign, ‘I think I might be able to save Asriel this time.’

“‘This time’?” Toriel questioned. “Frisk, sweetie, Asriel died long before you were even born...”

Frisk shook their head.

‘I can’t really explain it, but I’ve seen him before, in a different timeline,’ they signed.

Sans wasn’t sure what he could add to this. For the moment, he opted to listen and watch, quietly, letting the kid explain if they were going to. There was no doubt Toriel would have even more questions than ever now.

‘Dad told you we all managed to get to the surface, right?’ Frisk asked.

Toriel nodded, confirming.

‘I’m not the one who broke the barrier. Asriel did.’

“But...how?” Toriel asked.
Frisk moved their hands to start explaining, but then stopped. Something might have gotten horribly screwed up if they explained this to her.

‘...I’m sorry. I can’t tell you,’ they apologized but then quickly brought their hands back up. ‘But he does come back, temporarily. I couldn’t save him last time, but now I think we’ll be able to.’

They placed a hand on their chest over their heart.

‘The color of my soul is a step in the right direction, I think.’

Yeah, telling Toriel her kid’s consciousness still existed inside a sadistic flower without a soul, and that he stole the soul of every monster in the Underground probably wasn’t the best thing to do right then, Sans agreed, regardless of whether or not that was why Frisk had stopped.

Sans hoped that Toriel and Papyrus wouldn’t resent him for everything he’d withheld from them. How many secrets he was keeping. Especially since Toriel now knew that he was keeping them.

“...like i told you before, frisk,” Sans spoke up. “i’m going to do everything i can to help make that happen. i’m with you all the way on this, if there’s anything at all that i can do.”

Toriel leaned forward and hugged both Sans and Frisk to her.

“...Thank you...”

Even if this dream never became a reality, Toriel thought to herself, it was nice to have some hope that a wrong could be righted and the two closest to her were willing to try.

Sans returned the embrace, arms also around both of them.

“i promise i’ll do whatever i can,” the skeleton repeated to Toriel this time, lightly rubbing at her back.

There it was, another promise. But he’d already made up his mind before now to try and help Frisk. Now it just seemed more plausible.

Frisk felt another yawn escape from them and before Toriel could say anything, they kissed Toriel and Sans on their cheeks and took back their spot in the middle of the bed and lay down, lazily signing, ‘Goodnight.’

“Goodnight, my child,” Toriel leaned over and kissed the child’s forehead.

The kiss on his cheek gained the kid a sort of touched, fond smile with a very faint blue tinge from Sans.

“heh. guess we should take their hint,” he suggested.

Still grinning at the human, he gently brushed his hand over their hair before shifting to take off his hoodie. He then leaned over to hang it on the round wooden post connected to the headboard on his side of the bed.

Sans settled under the covers after that, head turned toward Toriel. He was still concerned about her, but... what could he do for her, besides what he could to save her child?

He reached a bony hand over Frisk, taking and squeezing the goat monster’s hand.

“don’t worry, tori... i’m sure it’ll all work out. i’m not gonna give up on this,” Sans promised.
Toriel turned to look at him and squeezed Sans’ hand back before lifting it to her lips and kissing it.

“Thank you,” she smiled at him. “Goodnight, Sans.”

Sans’ expression softened a bit and he reluctantly brought his hand back when she released it. The feel of her lips on his metacarpals had been nice. Not as much as on his face, but still nice.

“g’night, tori.”

The skeleton raised his hand again, this time moving a finger up before flicking it down, his magic taking hold of the little pull chain on the lamp near the foot of the bed and clicking it off, casting a comfortable darkness over the room.

He settled back more then, pulling the covers up over him and letting out a slow, quiet breath, gaze set on the ceiling. His mind was too full of thoughts…concerns…worry. Guilt. Inner distractions he’d been shrugging off. He wasn’t sure if sleep would come easy.

Frisk slept peacefully next to him, unaware of what Sans was currently thinking. They were filled with hope and determination of saving Asriel.

Sans remained on his back next to the human, one hand coming up to absentmindedly rub against his hand where he could still feel the magical tingling from Toriel’s kiss.

It was really peaceful. He could hear both Frisk and Toriel breathing quietly to his left, bed shifting ever so gently as one of them moved in their sleep or to preposition how they were laying. There was definitely something bonding and familial in this, and though Sans enjoyed the feeling of closeness and comfort, the skeleton couldn’t get himself to relax. He couldn’t get the noise to clear from his skull. He’d just have to wait this out until sleep finally overtook him.
Back in the capital, Mettaton walked hand-in-hand with Papyrus, a little off course from the way into the MTT Resort. He led the skeleton through a back area and up a flight of stairs which opened up into what looked like a private lobby with four doors branching off to the sides. From a basic guess, one could probably determine that they were now above the resort, in an area that wasn’t open to the general public.

“Here we are, darling,” Mettaton said brightly. “It’s much more comfortable up here than in the rooms at the resort~ Three of these doors lead to permanent apartments for myself, the manager of my resort, and my filming crew when they’re up this way. The fourth is free. I know it’s late, so you’re welcome to stay there if you don’t feel like making the trip back to Snowdin...”

The robot hesitated, glancing toward his door. Normally he’d never even consider inviting someone in to his own away-from-Waterfall abode this late at night. He didn’t think he’d be able to tolerate anyone’s company for so long. But... he found himself still wanting to spend time with Papyrus, and everything about the tall skeleton screamed sincerity. Their souls resonated. He was familiar, despite how short of a time they had seemingly known each other.

“...Or, you could stay with me. There’s more than enough room,” he added.

Papyrus blushed at the offer.

“IF...YOU WANT ME TO, THEN CERTAINLY,” Papyrus agreed.
It was a good kind of strange, how well their souls resonated with each other despite having really known one another for a little over two days. Papyrus wondered if this had anything to do with the dreams he’d had before. Sometimes they seemed so real.

“Well...it won’t be the first time we’ve shared a room, will it?” Mettaton teased, clasping Papyrus’ hand a little tighter before he led him over to one of the doors and unlocked it, flicking the light on before stepping inside.

The first area looked like a small living room with a large TV mounted against one wall and a comfortable looking purple couch opposite from it. Pink wallpaper was everywhere around them, along with pink carpeting and other accents ranging from purples to the aforementioned pink. Everything was clean, neat, and tidy. It seemed Mettaton was as much a stickler for organization as Papyrus. ...Well. Except for the stack of colorful diaries next to the couch.

“Welcome to the MTT Dream Apartment, darling~”

Papyrus looked around and took it all in. It certainly was a lot to see!

“WOW! EVERYTHING LOOKS FANTASTIC! DID YOU DESIGN EVERYTHING?” Papyrus asked, noting the obvious touches Mettaton made to the room.

“I did!” Mettaton confirmed, pleased by the positive response. “It’s much like the inside of my house in Waterfall...only more updated. I suppose my tastes haven’t changed so much despite how different my life is now. I’m glad you like it~”

Papyrus smiled at Mettaton before taking a seat in a nearby chair.

“SORRY FOR SCARING YOU EARLIER,” he said suddenly. “I FELT LIKE I’D FALLEN ASLEEP? I GUESS THAT DOESN’T MAKE SENSE.”

“Fallen asleep? While walking?” Mettaton asked, keeping a hold of the skeleton’s hand, concern returning to his expression as he looked down at him now. “And then you randomly felt the need to go to the library?”

Papyrus nodded.

“IT WAS A VERY VIVID DREAM. WE WALKED NEAR THE LIBRARY WHEN WE SAW IT HAD BEEN ATTACKED BY...SOMETHING. MY MEMORY IS A LITTLE FUZZY, BUT YOU SAVED ME AND THEN WENT TO FIND MY BROTHER,” Papyrus explained.

“...You dreamed while falling asleep while walking? Darling, you were mid-sentence talking about the Royal Guard when you nearly stumbled...”

Mettaton’s synthetic brow was furrowed. This was very odd, but Sans and the human had been there when they’d gotten to the library. Maybe this had something to do with the “timelines” the shorter of the skeleton brothers had mentioned to him? He only knew the very basics of it. Something about Sans knowing what he was experiencing, and assuring him that things were okay this time. ...Timelines...alternate...things. Sans hadn’t really seemed like he’d wanted to explain in depth, but the idea had seemed plausible.

“Wait, I saved you?” Mettaton asked, curious.

“YES!” Papyrus nodded quickly. “WHATEVER WAS ATTACKING KNOCKED DEBRIS ON TOP OF ME. YOU PUSHED ME OUT OF THE WAY.”
Papyrus remembered how close he was to being turned to dust in his dream. He was very thankful that the dream version of Mettaton had saved him.

“That does sound awfully detailed for a millisecond-length daydream...” Mettaton mused, before he moved closer to the skeleton and sat in his lap, smiling at him encouragingly. It really couldn’t be helped~ Papyrus had gone and sat in a one person chair, and this was better than merely sitting next to him, anyways. “What happened then?”

Papyrus blushed from the contact of Mettaton sitting on his lap.

“I COULDN’T GET YOUR BODY OUT FROM UNDER THE DEBRIS WHILE STOPPING WHATEVER WAS ATTACKING US. YOU LEFT TO GO GET MY BROTHER,” Papyrus paused and rubbed the back of his skull with a hand. “A-AH, I DIDN’T SEE ANYTHING THOUGH. THE...BEAR? THAT’S RIGHT. IT WAS A BEAR MONSTER, WAS ATTACKING STILL.”

Mettaton seemed to be more comfortable in this current body, so Papyrus didn’t want to embarrass him in case he was concerned about being seen in his ghost form.

“Bear monster...? Hmm, I think one of the librarians is a bear,” Mettaton hesitated. “But, uhm... I left my body...? You didn’t see anything? I’m curious about how your dream vision would have shown me... ah well.”

The robot smiled softly.

“I’m glad I was so gallant... I’d hate to see you get hurt,” Mettaton said.

Papyrus took hold of one of Mettaton’s hands in his own.

“YOU WERE EXTREMELY BRAVE, BUT I’M MORE RELIEVED THAT YOU WEREN’T HURT.”

With a lean closer, Mettaton placed a kiss on the bone ridge of Papyrus’ nose, clasping his hand around the other monster’s in return.

“I think we can both agree that it’s a good thing that events turned out differently... I’m certainly pleased with where we are now~”

Papyrus gave Mettaton’s hand another squeeze before kissing him as he had done earlier on the bench. He was definitely in agreement that this turnout was far better than his nightmarish dream.

Mettaton returned the kiss, smiling through it. He wondered... if this felt good now, how much better would it be when he was fully fused with this body? When the magic of his soul absorbed into the metal and synthetics and he could truly feel as though he had been “born” as a robot – when the body was fully him. Truth be told, he was really looking forward to finding out.

Papyrus broke the kiss to embrace Mettaton in a hug. Everything about them being together like this just felt...right.

“Mmm,” Mettaton sighed contentedly, nuzzling his face against the other’s skull and leaning into the embrace. “Sorry, darling... I think my charge is running down. I have a specialized plug in the bedroom – would you mind helping me out again?”

“OF COURSE!” Papyrus agreed, kissing Mettaton’s cheek.
Papyrus slipped his hands underneath Mettaton and seemed to effortlessly carry him to the bed. Papyrus found the aforementioned plug and followed the directions Alphys had given him previously to charge Mettaton. Once he finished, he sat down on the end of the bed next to Mettaton.

“DOES THAT FEEL RIGHT?” he asked.

“Yes,” Mettaton replied. “Everything seems to be connected correctly. Thank you, Papyrus.”

The robot extended his cord a bit before crawling to the side of the bed and leaning over toward his dresser, pulling it open and grabbing a couple of articles of clothing before shutting it again and offering the bundle to the skeleton.

“I can’t imagine it’d be comfortable to sleep in that suit... these might be a little loose on you, but you’re welcome to use them, if you’d like,” Mettaton offered.

Papyrus nodded and stepped away to change. He came back a short while later wearing the shirt and pajama pants he’d been handed and put his suit neatly hung up on a clothes hanger he’d found in a closet.

When Papyrus returned, Mettaton was lounging on the bed wearing his own loose shirt and fuzzy pink pajama pants, scarf still tucked around his neck. He smiled at the skeleton before beckoning him over.

“Of course you’re handsome in everything,” Mettaton complimented.

“YOU LOOK VERY NICE AS WELL, METTATON,” Papyrus replied with a smile as he walked over to the bed.

“Aww, thank you, darling~” Mettaton said, before he leaned into the mattress a little more, looking only halfway coherent. “Mm... I think Alphys was right in this needing to be a normal sleep schedule thing. I should probably power down.”

Papyrus leaned over and kissed Mettaton’s cheek.

“HAVING A REGULAR SLEEP SCHEDULE IS A GOOD THING TO MAINTAIN,” he agreed. “IT KEEPS EVERYONE AT THEIR BEST!”

“We’d better both follow that, then,” Mettaton smiled, pink tinge on his face as he scooted over to make room before patting the bed beside him. “This is much more comfortable than anywhere else in the apartment, if you’d like to join me.”

“I-IF IT’S OKAY WITH YOU, I’D LIKE THAT,” Papyrus replied, blushing bright orange.

“Of course.”

The robot slipped under the covers before holding them open for Papyrus. Goodness his blushing was adorable.

Papyrus slipped under the covers and rested his skull on the extremely soft pillow on his side of the bed before turning to look at Mettaton and smiling.

“WE’LL HAVE TO GO ON ANOTHER DATE SOMETIME. I’VE HAD A REALLY GREAT TIME BEING WITH YOU, METTATON.”

“I’d be happy to,” Mettaton smiled back, reaching a hand out to gently brush against the side and
back of his skull. “And don’t you even worry about my being busy, either. I’ll make time for you.”

“WOWIE!” Papyrus grinned. “I REALLY AM THE LUCKIEST SKELETON IN THE WORLD!”

Papyrus kissed Mettaton again on his metallic lips.

“GOODNIGHT, METTATON.”

Mettaton returned the kiss before leaning closer to him, putting an arm over the skeleton contentedly as he powered down.

“Goodnight, darling.”
The golden light was everywhere. Filtering in through large stained glass windows that shone down on two figures standing in a long hallway lined with pillars, illuminating one side of them and leaving the rest in silhouette.

It was quiet. Golden flecks of dust – the normal kind, appeared like lazy sparkles in the air as they filtered through the light between and around the two, giving the atmosphere a deceptive calm.

Slowly, a pair of white dots of light drifted down the other being’s form, lingering on the white powder clinging to their clothes – the red crusted on their shoes, their sleeve and flecked across the rest of their clothing. Eye sockets narrowed easily as he let out a slow breath, hands in his pockets.

“heya. you’ve been busy, huh?”

Silence pervaded when the faint echo of Sans’ voice died out, leaving the chamber still again.

“......so, i’ve got a question for ya. ...do you think even the worst person can change...?”

Papyrus did. They were his friend. They were his friend, and they had severed his head from his spinal column and walked through his dust without even giving a second glance.

“...that everybody can be a good person, if they just try?”

The shorter and last remaining of the skeleton brothers refocused his gaze onto the human when they took a step forward with the knife they clutched glinting in the golden glow... Sans’ calm relaxed exterior not showing the anxiety he felt underneath. Instead, he laughed – humorlessly, but... quiet and easy, with a hint of a bitter undertone.

“heh heh heh heh...all right. well, here’s a better question.”

Fear. That was the only thing the resetters responded to. The lights from Sans’ eyes vanished, replaced by a dark void as he watched the small human, who had once also been his friend. Whom he’d once hugged, comforted, guided. Sat with and joked with. His soul ached.

“do you wanna have a bad time? ...’cause if you take one more step forward...you are REALLY not gonna like what happens next.”

Another step, and the human progressed closer to him, unshaken.

“welp. sorry, ‘old lady’. this is why i never make promises.”

The nostalgia of the sentiment in that sentence was broken by the situation. The first joke Toriel had ever told him... he’d always remember it, even if she was now dust. Even if he would be soon, too.
With a lurch, the human’s soul was drawn from their chest, red glow mixing with the gold of the hall.

“it’s a beautiful day outside.”

Sans began, bitterness and fear all mingling in his mind.

“birds are singing, flowers are blooming...”

He’d never wanted to hurt this kid.

“on days like these, kids like you...”

Oh well.

“Should be burning in hell.”

The second Sans lifted his arm, everything changed – blue magic blinking into his eye socket messing up his vision for a split second before he was jolted, feeling like everything had been sapped from him. He was kneeling now... there was a puddle of blood pooling around his kneecaps. By the overwhelming pain in his chest, he assumed it was from his own wound, but no – there was too much blood. Numbly, the skeleton looked up – eye sockets widening and pupils vanishing into nothing as he saw the piles of bodies.

Hundreds of them. All Frisk. All horribly mutilated, disfigured, broken. Jagged bones sticking out of them grotesquely. He’d killed them so many times, and they’d kept on coming... he’d had no choice... he...

He became aware of a figure standing in front of him. Had they been there before...? Looking over, he saw the kid...but...not the kid. Their features were twisted into a sinister smile, red eyes glinting like Sans’ own blood on their knife.

“Hey, dad,” they spoke darkly, sounded amused. But it didn’t sound like Frisk’s voice had in the void.

...He had heard Frisk’s voice? When had that happened? He tried to move, tried to stand up, but he couldn’t. It was then that he became aware of the vines wrapping around his arms and feet, tightening and constricting, thorns scraping painful abrasions into his bone as they tore his shirt and invaded into the cracks in his rib cage... tightening enough around his neck to begin separating the segments of bone, squirming, scraping into his eye sockets... the pain was excruciating – even if the skeleton didn’t have corporeal organs or much inside of his skull, the forceful invasion through the magic that coursed through his intangible innards hurt like nothing he’d ever experienced. ...Or something he had, more than a few times. Things seemed to get hazy after so many repeats.

He jolted, breath coming in short, pained breaths as the vines strained against the inside of his ribcage, cracking the bone and pushing it outward.

“Thanks for the playdate. I’ve had a great time.”

The blade came down just as Sans managed to move his head enough to look up at the kid again, cracking through the bone of his skull and gouging into the marrow, sending a blinding pain through him as he felt himself starting to crumble into dust.
Sans shot up in bed, gasping and shuddering, hands clenching the front of his shirt in desperation as he choked out a sob. Despite the glow in his eye, he realized it was a dream now... another one... but the pain still felt real in his chest, twisting and stabbing.

He wasn’t sure when he had managed to fall asleep, but it had clearly been a mistake to allow himself to when his mind had been in such a state. Trying to focus, the skeleton teleported, vanishing from the room to anywhere else he would be alone for a while – shoes, socks, and hoodie left where they had been tossed a few hours before.

Sans found himself back in the Waterfall area, in front of a statue playing a music box tune as water droplets fell from above. The horned statue held a pink umbrella in one hand, blocking it from getting rain upon its head.

The sound of the music box playing was an immediate and graciously distracting thing. Eye sockets black, the skeleton stared at the statue, listening to the tune... slowly sinking down until he ended up sitting in the blue-toned dirt that spread through Waterfall.

He hadn’t really cared where he’d ended up as long as there was no one else around, so this served his purpose. Taking in a shuddering breath, the skeletal monster turned his head enough to wipe his face on the sleeve of his shirt, feeling lingering edges of panic, pain, guilt, and frustration all at once and trying to push it back down. Trying to numb it again.

He hoped he hadn’t woken Toriel or the kid up. He hadn’t been coherent enough to check before he’d fled.

Sans was left alone with only the sound of the music box resonating down the corridor as company. Looking at the statue a bit closer, it seemed impossible to see the expression on the figure’s face. The horns seemed familiar though.

Sans sat like that on the ground for what must have been close to an hour before he finally gained the
ambition to stand up again, expression still strained but feeling more himself again.

Curiously, he stepped closer to the statue, tilting his head to look under the hood. He’d been by here before, of course, but he’d never really looked closely at the stone figure. The figure’s eyes were closed and no mouth appeared to have been carved, leaving its expression up to the viewer. The statue was clearly meant to represent the same type of monster as Toriel and King Asgore though. Perhaps an older version of the prince who died young?

Sans stepped back from the statue again, moving to put his hands into his pockets and pausing when the pockets weren’t there. Instead, he just let his arms hang at his sides, feeling the dampness of the blue dirt under the bones of his bare feet.

It was pretty likely that this had been meant to be something for the royal child. It made sense...in a painful, sad sort of way. No one had ever gotten to find out what he’d be like now, had he had the chance to keep living with his consciousness and soul together like they were meant to be. Instead, all of that was gone, thanks to the hatred and selfishness of one human child – the first of the fallen.

Heh. Flowey must be pretty angry that Sans had made it out of the void. The skeleton smiled a little, though there was no real emotion beyond apathy behind it. Quite honestly, he hated the flower. He hated him and everything he’d done. Becoming their friend, then murdering them all, repeatedly. Sans wasn’t sure if he could forgive him for that.

...But Asriel at least deserved a hold of complete judgment until he got his soul back.

It was then that Sans could hear the sound of a piano playing in the distance, over top of the sound of the music box. It caught his attention, and Sans hesitated before turning in the direction it was echoing from. He knew that there was a piano up that way. Who’d be messing with the old thing at this hour? Not that monsters had more than a general concept of night and day, but still.

Sans walked toward the origin of the sound, any noise made by his quiet footfalls drowned out by the rushing water all around this particular area.

Maybe it was Shyren...?

To his surprise, turning the corner, it was not. It was Gaster attempting to play along to the music from the music box but he seemed to be continuing to mess up on the last two notes. He didn’t hear Sans enter the room.

Sans watched the older skeleton for a few minutes, curious about whether he’d get it down and not really wanting to startle him.

Gaster finally fixed the last two notes and to both skeletons’ surprise, a door opened up. The expression on Gaster’s face could only be described as, ‘FINALLY.’

Sans blinked, raising a brow. Huh. That was different.

Knowing he’d probably be seen anyway when his dad turned to examine the doorway, Sans decided to speak up, “…whoever hid that was rather lax on security."

Gaster made a sound that could be interpreted as “Hah!”.

‘I SUPPOSE YOU’RE RIGHT!’ Gaster signed to his son. ‘WE’LL HAVE TO SEE WHAT’S IN THERE.’

Gaster made a motion for Sans to follow him into the newly opened door.
Grinning, Sans followed Gaster. He was more than aware of the traps monsters had traditionally set throughout the ages. They needed to be cautious in case this was rigged with one of them.

“it’s good to see you again, dad. we need to get you a cellbone so we can keep connected,” Sans joked. “...also, i know you’re excited, but let’s take this exploration thing easy.”

Gaster mock pouted at the idea of taking exploration slowly but then smiled as they walked into the room.

‘IT’S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, MY SON. BUT WHAT IN THE UNDERGROUND ARE YOU DOING WITHOUT SHOES ON THIS LATE AT NIGHT?’ the scientist asked.

There was a smirk in response to the fake pout, and Sans shrugged a bit at the question that came after.

“oh, you know. just thought i’d sock it up and let my bones get some air for once. does the sole some good to get footloose now and then.”

The shorter of the two looked around the place as they entered, gaze stopping and lingering on a faintly glowing orbish object on the far side of the room.

Gaster looked at a plaque on the wall that simply labeled the object as a “legendary artifact”.

No sooner did he finish reading it than a super-fast white puppy practically absorbed the artifact and ran off past Sans near the entrance to the room.

Gaster blinked before signing, ‘AH. SO THAT’S WHY FRISK ONLY SOLVED THIS PUZZLE ONCE.’

“what,” Sans stared at the dog in disbelief, brow bone furrowed. “...dog gone it. i wanted to see what that thing was.”

‘IF I HAD TO HAZARD A GUESS,’ Gaster signed. ‘A VERY ELABORATE PRACTICAL JOKE IN THE FORM OF A BRIGHT RED RUBBER BALL.’

Sans let out a snort of a laugh at that.
“elaborate is right. sorta makes me wonder if there’s more to this place, though...” he said, turning his head to look around again, trying to feel for anything odd or magical as he walked over to the wall and ran his hand across it. “yknow – like a decoy to make people think this whole thing is stupid and turn back.”

Gaster watched Sans as he felt around for any unusual energy.

‘I FELT THE LOAD EARLIER. IS EVERYONE OKAY?’ he asked, once he caught Sans’ line of sight.

Hand still on the wall, Sans hesitated before nodding, trying not to look as tired as he felt.

“yeah,” he replied. “well, they are now. ...random question, but do you know what horcruxes are?”

Gaster paused and closed his eyes in thought, trying to recall something.

‘PIECES OF A SOUL, ARE THEY NOT?’ he replied.

“yep. more specifically, pieces that were intentionally ripped away. it's done by taking someone else's life in order to create a disconnect large enough to bind the piece to something else. it's human magic- really dark stuff,” Sans explained.

Gaster continued watching Sans and signed, ‘I TAKE IT ONE OF THOSE WAS THE CAUSE OF THE RELOAD?’

“you guessed right.” Sans sighed. “papyrus and mettaton found one... and when i got there, paps and i were teamed up for a while before he touched the horcrux and it possessed him. forced him to attack me. frisk... jumped in the way and took a hit that would've ended me. they died as a result, and... i... actually reloaded.”

Sans ran his hand over the wall once more before opting to lean against it instead, watching Gaster before continuing, “then we went to where the horcrux was and took care of it before all of that could happen.”

Gaster looked at his son.

‘ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? I KNOW YOU TRIED PLAYING IT OFF EARLIER, AND YOU PROBABLY DON'T REMEMBER THIS, BUT YOU USED TO DO THE SAME THING WHEN YOU WERE VERY SMALL. IF YOU HAD A NIGHTMARE YOU WOULD LEAVE EVERYTHING TO GO OFF BY YOURSELF. I ASKED YOU WHY AND YOU WOULD SAY HOW I LOOKED TIRED FROM WORK SO YOU DIDN'T WANT TO CONCERN ME OR WORRY PAPYRUS.’ Gaster gave him a gentle smile. ‘BUT YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT I AND MANY OTHERS CARE ABOUT YOU AND YOU SHOULD KNOW IT'S OKAY TO RELY ON US. THAT'S PART OF WHAT BEING A FAMILY IS ABOUT.’

Sans had partially looked to the side after Gaster smiled, though he kept his eyes mostly forward so he could catch the rest of what the former royal scientist was saying. He took in a deep breath and let it out, corners of his mouth twitching up a little.

“wow,” he replied. “even when i was a babybones, huh?”

When his own smile faded, Sans looked uncomfortable... haunted, even. He brought a hand up to rub over his face, before pushing away from the wall and walking over to the slab of rock the “artifact” had once been kept on, sitting on it tiredly.
“...i gotta ask,” Sans said quietly. “how much did you see in the void? how much did you see of what happened to papyrus and me, throughout the different resets?”

'I WASN'T ABLE TO SEE EVERYTHING, BUT I DID SEE A LOT,' Gaster paused. 'THE HUMAN JUST WANTED TO TRY MAKING EVERYTHING RIGHT. THE FIRST RESET HAPPENED AT THE VERY BEGINNING.'

Gaster knew Sans knew exactly why; he’d seen it for himself in the void.

‘FROM THERE, THEY BECAME DETERMINED TO FIND A PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO ANY CONFRONTATION THEY ENCOUNTERED. BUT NO MATTER WHAT, THEY COULDN'T AVOID FIGHTING THE KING. THEY ACCEPTED THEIR FATE AND FOUGHT, AND MUCH TO THEIR RELIEF IT SEEMED LIKE THINGS WOULD BE OKAY. THEN THE FLOWER ATTACKED.'

Gaster recalled seeing the horror on Frisk's face from his spot in the void.

Sans had seen that too.

‘FRISK HAD GIVEN UP HOPE OF MAKING THINGS RIGHT AND WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE ON THEIR OWN, BUT THEN A MOST PECULIAR THING HAPPENED. THEY RECEIVED A PHONE CALL.’

Sans “listened” with his eyes as he watched Gaster's hand movements, recalling this stuff.

“yeah, i remember the phone calls after they vanished,” Sans said. “they didn't respond, 'cause... they don't speak, but i think they were listening. but...what do you mean by ‘a most peculiar thing?’”

‘I'M NOT SURE IF YOU RECALL EVERYTHING FROM EACH RESET, BUT DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU SAID?’ Gaster asked.

“yeah, i remember. basically, anyways,” Sans confirmed with a half frown.

‘YOU TOLD THEM NOT TO GIVE UP, AND IT WAS THIS COMBINED WITH WORDS FROM THE FLOWER THAT CAUSED THEM TO REGAIN THEIR DETERMINATION.’

“words from the flower?” Sans questioned. “i guess he can be motivating in a twisted way.”

‘THANKS TO THAT, FRISK RELOADED, ENCOUNTERED ASRIEL, WHO BROKE THE BARRIER, SENDING ALL OF YOU TO THE SURFACE. BUT FRISK KEPT RETURNING TO THE UNDERGROUND TO VISIT THE FALLEN PRINCE. THEY ARE ONLY A CHILD AND CANNOT ACCEPT THE UNFAIRNESS OF THIS WORLD,’ Gaster explained. ‘FOR SOMEONE TO DIE AT THEIR AGE AND BE FORCED TO LIVE AN EXISTENCE BEYOND THEIR CONTROL AND WITHOUT A SOUL IS A PUNISHMENT NO ONE, ESPECIALLY AN INNOCENT, SHOULD HAVE TO SUFFER. THEY RESET WITH THESE EMOTIONS TAKING OVER...AND THAT'S WHEN CHARA TOOK OVER.’

“what was it? somethin about their state of mind..? or...”

Sans got a weird look on his face as a thought came to him.

“...so the kid was intent on finding asriel's soul and returning it to him, right? that was their main goal of resetting everything after we got to the surface, yeah? ...guess what we found out recently?” Sans asked, looking at Gaster. “turns out asriel's soul has been intertwined with chara's horcruxes, somehow. with the kid so determined to get asriel's soul, maybe that's part of what let chara in.”
‘IT SEEMS LIKELY,’ Gaster nodded. ‘AT FIRST, FRISK WAS POWERLESS TO DO ANYTHING. BUT EACH TIME CHARA FACED YOU, FRISK FOUGHT BACK AS WELL. LEADING TO ALL OF THOSE RESETS UNTIL THEY FINALLY REGAINED COMPLETE CONTROL. I THOUGHT THEY’D FINALLY GIVEN UP THEIR GOAL OF RESCUING THE PRINCE THIS MOST RECENT TIME YOU ALL WENT TO THE SURFACE, BUT THEN THE UNTHINKABLE HAPPENED THERE, AND CHARA TOOK OVER WHILE FRISK WAS ON THE SURFACE, LEADING TO THIS MOST RECENT RESET AND WHAT VERY MAY WELL BE FRISK’S LAST CHANCE AT FREEING THE PRINCE.’

“it all makes sense. more and more of it adding up...” Sans said as he brought his legs up onto the stone he was sitting on, leaning against the back wall. “…but, real quick, so you don’t think i’m ignoring ya... you said you don’t know how much i remember about the resets, but that’s the problem you were asking me about. i remember it all.”

Sans looked emotionally drained.

“every time i’ve killed them – frisk and ‘flowey’, as the prince’s consciousness calls himself now. every time they’ve... killed papyrus. and me. sometimes it decides to refresh my memory when i’m tryin’ to sleep. that’s why i’m out here.”

Gaster listened silently before stepping over to his son and embracing him in a hug, as he wished he could’ve done every time he saw the tragedies unfolding from within the void.

Sans returned this embrace, lightly at first, before his grip tightened and he buried his face in his father’s shoulder, prolonging it.

“...even with as hard as it’s been, i’m glad it happened again. one more time. we have a chance to save a child who never deserved the state he’s in, and... i got my dad back. i’m so glad you’re okay...that you’re here again. it must have been so hard for you, trapped in there for so long... m’sorry i didn’t get to you sooner,” Sans apologized.

Gaster shook his head and pulled away to sign, smiling, ‘I AM PROUD OF YOU, SANS.’

Sans had to take a moment to wipe some gathering moisture from his socket again, smiling widely in return.

A couple things had crossed Sans’ mind. Reasons for why Gaster shouldn’t be proud of him, but Gaster had been in the void. He already knew of Sans’ flaws. His shortcomings. How many times he’d given up – at least from what glimpses he’d gotten. Sans wasn’t sure. But hearing those words from a parental figure – someone who understood, who’d been there for him since his existence began was comforting and encouraging.

“thanks, dad. …that means a lot to me.”

Gaster smiled again before looking at their surroundings.

‘IF YOU HAVEN’T FOUND ANYTHING YET, I THINK MY HYPOTHESIS OF THIS AREA JUST BEING A RATHER ELABORATE JOKE IS CORRECT,’ Gaster signed.

“nothing yet. i think you might be right on that... but still,” Sans said as he brought a hand down to run over the smooth surface of the stone slab, phalanges dipping into the groove where the orb had sat not long before. How long had this place been like this?

On a whim, he tried harder to extend his magic around him, trying to pick up any hints of anything unusual. It wouldn’t be illogical to hide something valuable here with a decoy to cover it up...
something, like, say... a horcrux. He’d be unwise not to check every place he could for more of the things.

“usually i like a good joke, but i don’t find this setup all that *humerus.*”

Sans moving his hand around the pedestal finally shook a piece of paper loose which fell to the floor unceremoniously.

Gaster picked it up, read it, and made a noise like he was trying to hold back laughter.

**HUMAN! YOU HAVE JUST BEEN THOROUGHLY JAPED BY**

**Undyne! (YEAH!)**

**AND THE GREAT PAPYRUS! NYEH HEH HEH!**

Gaster handed the paper over to Sans to read for himself.

Sans stood up on the stone slab, about to lean over toward Gaster to read it too before it was handed to him. He blinked, taking the piece of paper and staring at it for several seconds before he cracked up too, shaking his head in mild disbelief.

“ha haha, wow, paps... i’ll have to tell him he got us,” Sans laughed.

Gaster, still greatly amused, nodded his head in agreement just as both skeletons heard the sound of running footsteps heading their direction.

Gaster and Sans turned in the direction of the sound and saw Frisk, still in their pajamas but wearing their boots, trying to catch their breath.

Upon seeing Sans, Frisk immediately ran to him and hugged him tightly.

When Sans saw the human coming, he hesitated before jumping down off of the stone slab and returning the kid’s hug when it came, frowning a bit in concerned guilt.

“sorry, kid...” he apologized. “i probably... shouldn’t have stayed out for this long.”

Frisk continued hugging him super tight. They knew he must’ve had a nightmare, considering he must have left quickly, leaving his coat and such behind.

The skeleton rubbed their back gently, glad they didn’t seem angry at least, even though he’d understand if they were. In the circumstances they were in, leaving them like that with no word wasn’t the kindest or most responsible thing to do.

“i’m okay, frisk...” he tried to assure them. “you’re really out of breath. sorry, i didn’t mean to scare ya.”

Gaster noted the presence of leaves from the ruins clinging to part of Frisk’s pajama bottoms. They must’ve started their search there and continued on, planning on checking everywhere until they found Sans.

Frisk backed away and took one of Sans’ hands, gently tugging, indicating that they should go back to the inn.

Sans clasped the kid’s hand back, but not quite letting them pull him away yet. He looked to Gaster.
“do you want to come back with us? or... where do you think you’ll head, now...?” Sans asked.

'I THINK I SHALL CONTINUE MY EXPLORATION. IT HAS BEEN FAR TOO LONG SINCE I LAST SAW THE CAPITAL,’ Gaster replied.

A thought occurred to Frisk and they pulled a cellphone out of a dimensional box. They had received another from Alphys recently and had held on to it for the next time they encountered Gaster. They handed the device over to him.

Gaster accepted the phone graciously and smiled at the new dad and their child.

'REST WELL, SANS.’

“okay,” Sans replied, stepping closer to hug the taller skeleton with one arm, still so grateful to have him back. After he pulled back, he used his magic to levitate the phone Gaster held to him.

“lemme borrow this for a sec,” he said, and moving his digits quickly, Sans typed a number into it before hitting “save” on the menu. He then added a second before giving the phone back.

“there. now you can text me and papyrus whenever,” Sans grinned. “we’ll meet up again soon.”

Gaster gave his son another hug.

‘UNTIL THEN, TAKE CARE MY SON,’ the scientist signed.

Gaster then turned and set off towards the direction of Hotland, preferring to enjoy the leisurely stroll there as opposed to using the river person’s services.

Frisk, continuing to hold Sans’ hand, led the way back to the Snowdin Inn.

Sans watched Gaster go while letting the human led him, gently clasping his hand around the smaller, softer one.

When they got into the room where Frisk usually met with Shyren, Sans hesitated and paused, looking down at their head of brown hair.

“...are you okay, frisk?” Sans asked. “you haven’t signed a word since you got here... and, i can port us back. you still look pretty tired.”

Frisk looked up at their dad.

‘But you’re tired too, and you destroyed the horcrux earlier. I’m okay!’ they signed, giving him a smile, but they weren’t very good at hiding their exhaustion.

“all right, come on,” Sans said, letting go of the kid’s hand before stepping in front of them and crouching down with his back to them, waiting expectantly. “climb on. even if we don’t port back, i’m not gonna let you walk when you’ve already booked it all this way to find me.”

Frisk nodded tiredly, deciding not to argue, and carefully climbed onto Sans’ back. They rested their head on one of their hands that they had placed on Sans’ shoulders.

Sans let his kid get situated before carefully taking hold of their legs under the knees to hold them secure as he stood up fully and started walking again. Luckily, though he was bony, his body wasn’t nearly as ridgey as a normal human skeleton would be. His bones were more smooth with less sharp edges. Even without his hoodie to provide a buffer, the monster shouldn’t have been too uncomfortable to be so close to.
Sans walked in silence, bare feet on uneven ground. It didn’t seem to bother or slow him down though.

Honestly, he still had more than enough magic to teleport them back to the hotel room, but he’d wait until they got to the border of Snowdin where it started getting colder. If he were to be honest, despite his tiredness he really didn’t feel like trying to sleep again.

Frisk, in the meanwhile, was lulled back to sleep on Sans’ shoulder. They seemed contented, having found Sans safe and sound.

The walk was peaceful and gave Sans a little more needed time to sort his mind out.

When he started seeing patches of ice and snow, Sans stopped and took a second to focus before the two blipped out of existence for a split second, ending up back at the inn. He then tried to enter the room quietly so he wouldn’t wake Toriel is she was still sleeping.

Toriel was sound asleep, the note left behind by Frisk explaining what they had gone out to do, untouched. Frisk must have managed to get out of the inn without waking their mom.

Frisk shifted their head slightly in their sleep, still resting on Sans’ shoulder.

Shutting the door quietly behind them, Sans stepped into the room and over to the bed, pausing to think about how he’d maneuver the kid from his back to the bed without disturbing either of them.

In the end, Frisk ended up surrounded by a blue glow and being lifted into the air and under the covers. Sans removed their shoes for them before climbing back into the bed himself, and settling back with his skull against the pillow.

Time for attempt number two.

Unaware of their movements in their sleep, Frisk ended up curling close to Sans, their soul resonating a peaceful, calming aura. It seemed subconsciously that they were trying to help Sans be able to sleep.

With Sans’ exhaustion and Frisk’s unconscious efforts combined, the skeleton’s eyes closed before he had much time to ponder on the calming warmth that moved through him. After that, it really didn’t take much of the soothing feeling for the monster’s soul to latch onto the positive energy and lull him into a deep sleep.
In the morning, Frisk was the first to wake up. Rubbing their eyes, they thought a bit about the dream they had had. They had dreamt about life on the surface, living together with Sans and Toriel. Papyrus, Mettaton, and Gaster were around too...and so was Asriel. Everyone had been happy and smiling. It was such a pleasant dream, Frisk could only hope that they’d be able to turn it into a reality.

Careful not to disturb their parents, Frisk maneuvered down the middle of the bedspread and hopped off the bed, padding quietly over to the nearby table to remove the note they had left for Toriel. There was no sense in worrying her over what had happened the previous night with Sans.

It seemed like Sans was still out cold – but in a warm, content, and snuggly sort of way. His breathing was quiet, face partially turned into his pillow. The skeleton looked extremely relaxed. Whatever loving, peaceful vibes Frisk’s soul had magicked his way had really seemed to do wonders for soothing the tension and stress that had been plaguing him.

Frisk looked back at their parents sleeping peacefully in the bed, in particular at Sans, relieved that he seemed to be sleeping well now. They knew Sans always tried to hide it, but they were certain Sans was constantly stressed. It’s why he kept ending up with nightmares, they were certain of it. They were glad that seeing Gaster seemed to have helped him as well. Dads, at least from Frisk’s experience, always seemed to know just what to say.

Sans continued to snooze, and would until something shifted the bed or made noise. When this skeleton was in a relaxed state, he really slept. He did shift a little, however, drawing a deep breath into magical incorporeal lungs and letting it out when he settled lying on his back. If he were CHECKed now, he’d be at 5HP. Not great, but definitely better than his usual.

Frisk, still the only one up, was left alone to their thoughts. They still believed that another horcrux was located somewhere in the ruins to have been able to take them over the moment they reset after fighting Asriel and not being able to save him.

They still wondered if maybe it was present in a save point there. Monsters couldn’t see them naturally. What better place to hide a piece of a soul? It was good, logical thinking. If Chara had found some way to interweave their soul shard with the magical distortion, it’d be nearly impossible for anyone who didn’t have a determined soul to locate, and it’d provide a convenient attachment point for latching onto anyone who could.

Chara might have been deranged, but they were also clever; a very dangerous combination.

Sans knew this better than any other monster in the Underground. It was lucky his thoughts weren’t on this currently though, or his sleep wouldn’t be nearly as restful.

Frisk determined that the ruins would have to be the next place to look. In the meanwhile, they had found some paper and a pencil in a dresser drawer and decided to doodle while waiting for the parents to wake.

The loss of the warmth from where Frisk had been lying along with the gentle shuffling from the human’s artistic endeavors eventually stirred the skeleton on the bed, and he blinked his eye sockets open halfway, taking a moment to fully come out of his sleep before he stretched while letting out a content yawn.
Despite not having slept well for the first portion of the “night”, he felt better waking up now than he had in quite a while. Sans sat up slowly, rubbing a skeletal hand over his eye sockets before blinking again and focusing on the kid seated at the table. With a glance at Toriel – well, what had been meant as a glance – he couldn’t help but stare at her for a minute, gaze lingering on her peaceful face. He considered kissing her, but he didn’t want to wake her.

So for now, he slowly and stealthily scooted to the end of the bed, still halfway wrapped up in covers as he propped his head up, watching the kid.

“heya,” he said quietly, before bringing his hands up when they looked his way to sign instead for the sake of quietness. ‘whatcha drawing?’

‘My dream from last night,’ Frisk responded. They proceeded to hold up their pencil sketch. Frisk seemed to be a bit more skilled with a pencil than they did with chalk, but the figures were still simplistic, yet recognizable.

There was Papyrus standing next to Mettaton, with Gaster nearby...Toriel and Sans holding hands standing next to each other...and Frisk standing next to Asriel in the very front. Everyone had a smile on their faces.

Frisk realized something and put the drawing back down to sign, ‘I didn’t see Undyne and Alphys, but I bet they were off watching anime.’

Sans let out a quiet “heh” sound before signing back again, expression softened at the sight of the drawing, ‘that sounds like them. it looks like it was a pretty good dream.’

Frisk smiled and nodded in agreement.

‘It looks like you slept a little better,’ they commented.

‘feels like i did too,’ Sans replied.

The skeleton laid his head back down onto the bunched up covers around him as he signed again with a sort of guilty expression, ‘sorry again about last night. didn’t mean to cause a panic.’

Frisk walked over and hugged the hunched over Sans and gave him another smile.

‘We’ve got your backbone. You know you can rely on us,’ they signed.
The skeleton monster returned the hug with one arm and chuckled quietly at the pun, seeming appreciative, ‘thanks. it means a lot.’

Toriel finally stirred and upon seeing the two at the foot of the bed, smiled.

Frisk went over to hug her once they saw that she was fully awake and Toriel kissed their forehead in response.

“I guess I’m the sleepyhead today,” Toriel said, amused.

“it’s okay, tori,” Sans rolled back onto his back to look over at them from where he was still lounging at the bottom of the bed. “we know you’ve goat to get your rest, too.”

Toriel chuckled at the pun before responding with her own, “True, but I can’t be a lazybones all day.”

“why not? i do it all the time,” Sans grinned widely, bringing his hands up behind his head as he continued to recline – making his own point in the process.

Frisk stepped aside so that Toriel could slip out of the bed.

Toriel stretched her arms a bit before walking over to the table where Frisk’s drawing rested. Picking it up, she took a moment to identify everyone in the picture before gently smiling.

“I wish for this to become a reality,” she said.

The skeleton watched Toriel as she walked over to the table, waiting quietly when she looked at the kid’s drawing. He shifted then, finally sitting up and untangling himself from the blanket so that he could sit with his legs over the end of the bed, bare bones feet still scuffed and a little dirty from his adventure several hours before.

He hoped what was depicted on that piece of paper would become a reality too.

...More importantly, a lasting one.

‘I think we should check the ruins,’ Frisk signed to their parents. ‘We might’ve missed something.’

Toriel nodded in agreement.

Taking that as a cue, Sans moved off of the end of the bed before walking around the side to get his socks and put them on, followed by his shoes, and then finally his blue hoodie. After he was done, he put his hands into his pockets and lay back on the bed again while he waited for the other two to get ready, feet off of the side and eye sockets closed.

He idly wished he could swap the old mattress in his room for this one.

Toriel was all ready to begin with, so Frisk stepped away to swap into their day clothes. They were still happy that they were able to incorporate colors and motifs that reminded them of their family into the outfit. They felt extremely fortunate to have found it at the store. The color choices may have seemed strange to a fashionable human, but to Frisk, they were all perfect together.

After a moment, Sans sat up, letting his feet fully touch the ground before he stepped off of the bed and walked over to Toriel, lightly brushing his fingers against hers.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.
Toriel smiled gently and linked her fingers with his.

“I am feeling well. How are you? Are you feeling sansational?” she punned.

Sans chuckled – that one was always good. Grinning up at Toriel as he clasped her hand, Sans pulled on it gently to get her to bend down so he could kiss her, affectionate and sweet.

“...after that, i’d have to say yes, definitely.”

Toriel kissed him back. Yes, she could definitely get used to this.

Frisk tapped on the doorframe of the room to get their lovebird parents’ attention to let them know that they were ready. They had put their pajamas into a dimensional box.

Sans looked over to the young human, still holding Toriel’s hand as he grinned again.

“heya kid. are you wantin’ to walk to see if we find anything along the way, or do you want to port straight to the ruins?”

‘Let’s walk,’ they signed in reply.

“okay,” Sans agreed. “let me know if you get cold though, all right?”

Sans headed for the door, pretty sure that they had everything they needed from the hotel room. Well, except for... he paused, stepping back over before picking up Frisk’s drawing from the table and looking at it again fondly.

“don’t wanna leave this behind.”

Frisk nodded in agreement and placed the drawing in the dimensional box for safe keeping. They slipped on Sans’ older hoodie he had given them and zipped it up to prepare them for the cold of Snowdin and its surrounding locale.

The trio headed down the stairs, saying their goodbyes to the rabbit mother and her child and began their walk past the sign welcoming them to the cute little town.

The snow crunched under their feet in a familiar way for Sans, what minor cracks there were in the mountain up above allowing the light from the surface world to reflect on the vast expanse of white they trudged through.

It still wasn’t nearly as bright as the surface world was, but it allowed them to see a lot better when the sun was up beyond their view.

“ice day out,” Sans commented as they started over the natural stone formation of a bridge that had only been painted to look like wood.

“Yes! Snow wonder, it seems it’s sunny on the surface,” Toriel chimed in.

Sans chuckled, shrugging halfway as they reached the other side and passed some more pine trees.

“seems so. it’s a shame we can’t break a bigger hole up there though – some more light would really spruce up the place.”

“And then maybe this area would be evergreener!” Toriel added as they walked past the trees.

That did it. Sans cracked up, much more than a chuckle this time. He had to take a moment to
recover, putting one arm around the taller goat lady and hugging her to him as they walked.

“you know, i’d definitely saw we’ve got good chemistree,” he joked.

Toriel was trying to hold back her own laughter.

“Did I catch you with the element of surprise?” she asked.

Sans continued to laugh, incredibly impressed with Toriel’s quick pun wit.

“you caught me a long time ago, tori,” the skeleton grinned fondly, arm still around her waist as he brought his free hand over to take hers and lift it to his face, kissing it. “and i don’t want to escape.”

Toriel bent down to kiss the top of his skull.

Frisk pretended not to hear their parents swooning over each other.

After Toriel kissed his skull, Sans turned to face her, catching her for a kiss on the lips before she leaned back up again, and then continued walking with her.

Swooning was a good word for it. Sans had never been this romantic with anyone before.

“heh...i guess paps must’ve had a good night. he never called me to pick him up,” Sans said.

“He must have!” Toriel chuckled.

Frisk overheard Sans’ comment and smiled. Papyrus and Mettaton were good for one another, and they hadn’t gotten this far in their relationship on the surface in the previous timeloop.

As they got further down the expanse of the snowy path that led toward the ruins, a few monsters Frisk had befriended along the way when they had run through back and forth trying to find Sans the previous night waved and smiled at the three travelers, seeming completely okay with the little human.

Most of them had only been fighting out of fear and desperation in the first place – once they’d each decided that the kid was nice, their will to hurt them was gone and they’d allowed the fights to end.

Frisk’s gentle and patient determination did wonders. ‘Course, most of them knew Sans too, so that doubled the friendly greetings that came their way.

Overall it was turning out to be a pretty pleasant walk.

The trio eventually made it to the door to the ruins and stepped in, away from the snowy cold they left behind.

Frisk signed that they didn’t sense anything on the walk over, which they were relieved about. They didn’t want to see a repeat of the libearian incident happen again with the Snowdin residents they’d befriended.

Upon moving through the door into the ruins, Sans took a moment to brush the small amount of snow that had settled off of the shoulders of his hoodie.

“had to brace myself for walking in here after last time;” the skeleton commented, grinning a bit. “glad it leads to the ruins again instead of the void.”

Frisk nodded and brushed some snow off of the top of their hair. They were relieved Sans’
unexpected trip into the void ended up for the better though. Frisk stepped forward and continued leading the way up the stairs into Home proper, Toriel following close behind them.

Sans followed, keeping alert and trying to sense for anything out of place. Anything with any hint of that darker aura they were searching for.

As they walked across the cracked purple stone flooring, Sans’ thoughts wandered back to Flowey from his own mention of the door to the void he’d been lured to. He’d met the flower on quite a few occasions... and as time had gone on, Flowey’s magical aura had seemed to taint. Sans had noticed it at the time, but he had just thought it was part of the effect on the plant’s soul from turning murderous. ...But Flowey didn’t have a soul.

What could cause a child, who’d been so kind at first, soul or no soul, to change so drastically? The lack of being able to love or feel remorse would definitely be a factor. But Chara’s what had taken over Frisk and possessed them to start doing what Flowey had been for so long before the kid showed up and overrode his determination levels... could Chara have something more to do with Flowey’s behavior, beyond being the reason he was trapped as a flower? Could Chara be influencing him before they had his soul woven with their horcruxes, somehow? Or did Flowey have a horcrux on him...? It could be either, or both. It would make sense.

He’d have to run this by Frisk when he got a chance.
Heading past the foyer and stepping into the children’s bedroom, Frisk checked over the dusty toys and opened all of the dresser drawers. They paused upon seeing Chara’s clothing once more. To their relief, it didn’t seem to trigger anything, so they shut the drawer and continued on.

Toriel, in the meantime, was checking through her own bedroom, on the off chance there was anything there. She smiled a bit seeing the diary she wrote down Sans’ puns in on her desk.

While the other two checked their respective bedrooms (although for Frisk it had been a much shorter stay than Toriel), Sans wandered down the hallway, pausing when he reached the door with the renovations sign on it.

He tried the knob, but finding it locked decided to just take a moment with his hand against the wood, trying to feel for anything inside. He could try teleporting in, but he’d never been there before, and he didn’t want to end up with his legs halfway fused with a desk or something. Not only would that be incredibly painful, but he’d also need some major reconstructive healing, if even that could fix the problem. That, and it’d be a huge invasion of the privacy of Toriel’s home.

Frisk walked out of the small bedroom and saw Sans standing in front of the closed door in the hallway. They knocked lightly on the wall to get his attention and signed that they thought the room might have been Asgore’s room in Home.

“...ah,” Sans hesitated, raising a brow bone. He’d heard of married monsters have separate beds before, but entirely separate rooms? Had Asgore and Toriel ever been particularly close? “...well, i don’t feel anything weird in there energy-wise, so i think we’re safe to leave it alone.”

Frisk nodded in agreement just as Toriel exited her room.

“I didn’t sense anything,” she reported, carrying her diary in one hand. She figured she should keep it with her to write down the puns she and Sans had been sharing as of late.

“That’s half of the house then,” Sans said, before turning to head toward the living room and the kitchen. He paused when he passed Toriel, curious about the blue book she held. “What’s that? A diary?”

It was fairly easy to hazard a guess by the unmarked cover and the size of it.

“Oh!” Toriel blushed. “You could say that.”

Frisk signed to Sans from behind Toriel’s line of sight, ‘Told you the book existed,’ referring to when they had told him previously about Toriel’s punbook.

Sans grinned a bit more when he caught the kid’s signing, the faintest hint of blue tainting over his own face. If it was that book, the one she’d written stuff down in, filled with their jokes... heh. It felt good to know that she liked him and their goofing off so much.

“Heh. Well, what do you say we check out the rest of the house and then book it so we can cover more ground?” he asked.

The other two nodded and headed to the kitchen and living room areas to search. Frisk checked the bookshelves while Toriel checked the cupboards in the kitchen. After searching from top to bottom, both didn’t seem to find anything though. It seemed that Home was clear of any and all horcruxes.
While the two searched, Sans stood in the living room, wandering over to the reading chair and running a bony hand over the soft brown fabric as he continued to try and sense anything weird. He moved over to the fireplace and bent down to look into the flue; those things could be hidden anywhere.

He was relieved that none of them seemed to be here though. The thought of Toriel spending all of those years alone here with such an evil thing was undesirable, to say the least.

The trio met back in the foyer.

‘Let’s check the puzzle rooms,’ Frisk suggested.

Sans led the way out of Toriel’s house, stepping into her “yard” and heading over to the old tree. He placed a hand on it briefly, wondering if the leaves always falling off had anything to do with anything dark.

Although the tree definitely had a magical quality about it of some sort, it wasn’t the negative energy released by a horcrux.

“Let’s just hope we don’t have to search the entire city of Home,” he commented as he brought his hand back to his pocket and started walking again.

The city here was huge. Not as expansive as New Home, but there were so many streets, buildings, passageways... it’d take forever to go through it all if they didn’t find anything on the main path.

Frisk took the lead of the group, ignoring their chalk drawings on the various walls, a bit embarrassed of them, particularly of the one on the returning side of a wall where they had drawn their frustration of constantly being forced to watch Chara fight Sans.

Upon passing the drawing Frisk was pointedly trying to ignore, Sans turned his head back to glance at it again, a slight frown tilting at his mouth. As much as he’d been through, Frisk was still a child. Being forced to do all of that, it had to have left some scars.

Sans sped up his pace a little to walk beside the kid, reaching a bony hand out to take theirs and hold it as they walked before giving them an encouraging smile.

Frisk appreciated the gesture and continued holding hands with Sans as they made their way over the main pathways. They didn’t let go until they reached the mouse hole save point room. They stepped over to it but couldn’t sense any evil or malicious energy coming from it.

Toriel looked puzzled at the human seemingly waving their hand over nothing.

“My child, what is happening?” she asked, assuming there must have been a reason.

Sans looked over to Toriel, deciding to explain so Frisk could concentrate, “there are weird magical distortions everywhere in the underground – somethin’ to do with the timeloops and resets. not quite sure how they’re here or completely why they work like they do, but they act as ‘save points’ that the kid can go back to if something bad happens. like how i told you we came back to bein’ at the hotel room before going to the library. one of these things is how we did it.”

Toriel simply accepted the explanation. Crazier things had happened in her many years of being alive, after all.

‘It’s not this one,’ Frisk signed, finally. ‘Let’s keep going.’
They decided to go back to holding Sans’ hand, which was good, because it gave them the opportunity to lead him through the spike puzzle rooms later much like Toriel had first done with them when they fell into the Underground.

Toriel smiled fondly at the memory upon realizing Frisk’s actions.

Sans let the kid lead him. The first time he’d come through here when following Toriel to the place where Frisk first fell into the Underground, he had just teleported past the spikes, and then followed Toriel through on the way back. He wouldn’t have remembered the correct path himself.

The group walked through the switch and button rooms to finally arrive in the room with the staircases, just before the room where Frisk had fallen and Sans and Toriel had listened to the night sky.

Frisk let go of Sans’ hand once more and walked down the stairs to the save point. The second they waved their hand near it, they could feel the energy. So Chara had been sneaky enough to use a save point after all. Even worse was that this had been the first one Frisk always encountered during their actions through the Underground.

They were thankful the energy had left them alone this time, but what were they supposed to do about it? After all, if they touched it, they thought the two monsters would be able to maybe see it for a brief moment, but then Chara might take them over this time, having missed their opportunity.

The second he saw Frisk’s hesitation and felt the darkness, Sans “blinked” the rest of the way down the stairs and held out his left hand toward the “save point”, taking a step back as he focused his magic into forming a hollow orb where he was pretty sure it was, trying to “trap” the distortion. Right hand on the kid’s shoulder, he encouraged them to back away with him before glancing over at Toriel.

“not sure if this will work, but it’s worth a shot,” the skeleton stated. “tori. can you try to fill that orb of my magic with your fire?”

Toriel looked over at where Sans’ magic was floating in midair and moved closer to him.

“I’ll give it a try,” she said.

Toriel closed her eyes and concentrated, feeling the fire magic flow from her fingertips. She then directed the energy towards Sans’ floating orb, setting the distortion she couldn’t see with her own eyes ablaze.

Frisk bit their lip, anxious to see if this would work. Or would there be a catch to this?

Sans was bracing himself. He hoped this would do the trick, but he wasn’t sure it’d be so easy with something semi-intangible like this. So he focused, watching, waiting to see what would happen. Accepting Toriel’s magic into the orb and making an attempt, regardless.

Toriel and Sans heard a loud shattering noise while in addition to that, Frisk saw the save point star shape crack like glass and break into an innumerable amount of pieces.

Frisk gasped as they felt an overwhelming amount of energy flow into their soul. Pressing their hand to their chest, their eyes widened in alarm. Something major had happened.

“My child, are you all right?” Toriel asked, looking concerned over at the human.

Feeling a surge of magical something to his side, Sans’ gaze darted from the “save point” to Frisk,
eye sockets widening a bit as the orb he had been focusing on “popped” and dissipated.

There was definitely more than one soul there now. Not just a smidge.

Concentrating on the kid like he had in the judgment hall so many times, and like he had back in the inn to CHECK their HP not long before, Sans tried to take a closer look without being invasive and drew the kid’s soul out.

**Frisk**  
0**ATK**  5**DEF**

62 **HP**

*The eighth human to fall into the Underground.*

Frisk seemed a bit jumpy from hearing Sans read that number aloud and had a thought cross their mind. They ran up the stairs as fast as they could, leaving their parents behind.

Toriel and Sans exchanged looks before Toriel headed up quickly to follow Frisk.

Sans ran after them as well, surprised, curious and a little disturbed despite his best efforts. The only time he’d seen the kid’s HP anywhere near that high, they’d been under Chara’s control and killing to get it. He knew that absolutely wasn’t the case this time, but it still left an uneasy edge on the revelation.

Toriel and Sans followed Frisk past the switch puzzles and the long hallway. Once they both reached the room with Frisk that had the leaf piles, Sans finally stopped, catching his breath as he looked at the human. Frisk was staring at a leaf pile in disbelief and didn’t sign anything to their parents.

Concerned, Toriel stepped forward, wanting to reach out and put a hand on Frisk’s shoulder, but decided to give them their space instead.

“Frisk?” Toriel asked hesitantly.

Frisk turned around, still alarmed and looking distraught.

‘*It’s gone,*’ they signed.

“What’s gone?” Toriel said, confused.

‘*The save points. They’re...gone. Not just the one. All of them.*’

“all of them?” Sans repeated the kid’s signing out loud, brow bone furrowing as he thought through what this could mean.

“...we’ve gotta be extra careful, then,” he concluded. Who knew what would happen if they tried to go back to a save point and it wasn’t there to receive them?

They could just end up trapped in the void. Or... well, none of the possible consequences sounded like something he wanted to find out about.

Frisk nodded slowly. At this point, it was save Asriel or die and have no choice but to reset while trying. Chara must’ve planned this so even if someone tried stopping them from coming back then the odds would be against them, forcing the attacker to reset all of their efforts.

Toriel stepped closer and hugged Frisk, who returned the embrace.
The child would be lying if they said they weren’t terrified of the unknown task ahead of them.

Sans joined the two, hugging them both as he frowned to himself. At least the kid had more HP now... but he’d have to be sure to stay with them at all times. He rubbed at Frisk’s back like he usually did when trying to comfort them.

“we’re here with you all the way, frisk. you’ve got all of your friends backing you up... we’re gonna make it through this,” he said.

Frisk nodded as the trio broke the hug. Putting a hand up to their chest, Frisk felt the energy flowing from their soul. Asriel was there, they were sure of it. Now they just needed to find Flowey to get the rest of Asriel’s consciousness.

...Or perhaps they didn’t need to look at all.

Before anyone could react, a vine wrapped around Frisk’s leg and dangled them precariously upside down from the ceiling. The child let out a sound like a yelp in surprise.

“FRISK!” Toriel yelled out, prepared to use her fire magic to get the vine off of them.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you!”

Frisk stopped struggling with the vine wrapped around their ankle and could see Flowey on the ground near a rather large hole. In their shock at discovering the vanishing of all save points, they had failed to notice the large opening.

“You see, you might just injure the human!” Flowey threatened. “They’re wrapped up quite tight at the moment.”

As he said that, a few more vines wrapped around Frisk’s torso and arms, preventing them from moving them anymore. Their wand fell out of their hand and clattered onto the ground below. They must have tried getting it out of their pockets to try and free themself with their own magic.

Sans’ left eye flared with magic, and his left hand shot up as two giant canine-looking skulls with blazing eyes fragmented into existence on either side of the flower, massive teeth-lined maws opening with a dangerous crackling of magic filling the air.
“Let. The kid. Go,” the skeleton half growled, voice low and dead serious.

“How ’bout...no,” Flowey replied, pointing a leaf upwards at Frisk, indicating a vine wrapped around Frisk’s neck.

Frisk was still able to breath, but it was evident to all that any false movements would result in tragedy.

Toriel looked absolutely horrified.

“If you want them back, bring everyone to that king of yours and ask him for the human souls. Then once I have those in my possession, maybe I’ll return them to you!” Flowey said, giving his ultimatum and retreating back into the nearby hole, taking Frisk, still wrapped up tight in his vines.

“FRISK!” Toriel cried out.

Sans’ blasters fragmented into nothingness again as he ran forward, stopping at the edge of the hole and staring down into it, eye sockets dark as his hands clenched into fists at his sides.

That damn flower. Damn it...

“Frisk...” Toriel collapsed to her knees and picked up Frisk’s forgotten wand.

Sans stood there silently for several seconds, seething with anger and concern before he took in a breath and turned toward Toriel, walking over to her before crouching down and placing his hands on either side of her face, gently stroking before he pulled her to him, hugging her close.

“.........guess we’ve got no choice. we’ll get the kid back, tori... we’ll get them back.”

Toriel hugged him back, moisture gathering in her eyes. She wiped her tears away with a hand.

“We need to get going,” she said, gaining resolve.

Right. There was no point in crying now. They needed to get their child back. No way was Toriel going to lose them.

Sans knew basically what was going to happen if they gathered everyone there at New Home. They’d all lose their souls, and it’d be up to the kid to stick it out and save them all again.

Knowing this, it was hard to fathom purposefully placing the entire Underground in harm’s way. He was torn between the fact that Toriel deserved to know more and not wanting to burden her with it all, like he was...

...How could he ask Toriel... Papyrus and every other monster they passed to go to the castle, knowing that they were going to get hurt? That if Flowey won somehow, it’d all be over, for all of them?

Sans felt sick.

He knew that the kid was strong, knew that they were determined. But there was still a huge risk to all of this.

“yeah,” the skeleton agreed, gently running his phalanges over the fur on Toriel’s head. He stood after a second, then, holding out his hand toward her said, “let’s go.”

Toriel grasped Sans’ hand firmly. She was unaware of the thoughts passing through his mind, but
could sense his uneasiness. She gave his hand a squeeze and bent down to kiss him.

“Everything will be all right. I’m sure of it, somehow,” Toriel told him.

Sans kissed her back, closing his eye sockets briefly as he leaned into it. He breathed out after they broke it off, giving a small smile to Toriel.

“at least we know frisk’s still alive,” he attempted to give her back some small assurance. “as long as this timeline remains stable, we’ll know for sure that they’re okay. let’s... let’s go find everyone.”

Toriel nodded in understanding and the two took off running through all of the pathways in the ruins.
Back at Mettaton’s apartment, Papyrus woke up suddenly, sat up in bed, and placed a hand over his chest. He thought he felt something strange. It wasn’t quite the same as like when he felt the sudden urge to head for the capital library, but it was similar somehow. Papyrus wondered if something had happened with the human.

When Papyrus moved, Mettaton stirred, slowly blinking awake. He was fully charged now, but he’d been snoozing, snuggled up against the tall skeleton.

“Mm...Papy...?” he asked, sleepily.

Papyrus looked down at his boyfriend curled up beside him. He moved a bony hand to intertwine his fingers with one of Mettaton’s metallic ones that was resting beside him, and brought the hand up to kiss it, deciding to mimic something he’d seen Sans do with Toriel.

“SORRY TO WAKE YOU, METTATON,” Papyrus apologized.

“I don’t mind, darling...” Mettaton responded, smiling at him warmly and blushing a bit when the skeleton kissed his hand. Papyrus’ sense of concern had him hesitating however, and the robot sat up to get a better look at him. “...Is everything all right?”

“I’M NOT SURE, I FEEL LIKE I’M SENSING SOMETHING,” Papyrus replied, closing his eye sockets as he tried to concentrate on the sensation.

“Sensing something...? Like what?” Mettaton asked.

“IT’S NOT QUITE LIKE BEFORE THOUGH. IT’S PROBABLY JUST ME THOUGH,” Papyrus explained.

Mettaton brought a hand up to place on the skeleton’s back.

“You had a hunch before and it turned out to be right – we found your brother and the human. Maybe we should investigate whatever you’re feeling?” he suggested.

“YOU’RE RIGHT. WE SHOULD!” Papyrus smiled before leaning over to kiss his boyfriend, appreciating his support.

Mettaton kissed him back, thrilled by the emotions that ran through him. He was feeling more connected to this body the more he and Papyrus spent in contact with one another, and it just made the whole spark between them feel that much more perfect and right.

Once it was over, Mettaton detached his charging cable from his back panel before turning back to the skeleton, looking awake and ready.

“All right. Where do we need to go?” Mettaton asked.

“...THE PALACE OF NEW HOME...IT SEEMS,” Papyrus said, concentrating on the feeling. “I JUST HOPE EVERYONE’S OKAY.”

Papyrus got out of the bed and stepped away for a moment to change back into his “battle body” outfit. He had taken advantage of a dimensional box back when he first got his date outfit and had stored it in there previously. He took another moment to move his suit from the previous night in the
box for safe keeping. There was no telling what awaited the two, and it’d be a shame to ruin the suit.

Papyrus folded the pajamas Mettaton loaned him neatly and placed them in the dresser.

When Papyrus returned, once again Mettaton was also changed back into his normal attire – with one alteration.

The pink scarf was still wrapped fashionably around his neck, and he didn’t seem likely to be removing it. The flashy robot walked over to take the skeleton’s hand, ready for the day’s adventure with his new boyfriend.

“New Home, here we come~”

Papyrus gave him a smile and intertwined his fingers with Mettaton’s once more as they stepped out of the room, looking like an extremely cute couple to everyone who would see them.

At the same time as Papyrus waking up in the apartment, Alphys too, stirred from her sleep. She rubbed her eyes a little bit before reaching up on a drawer for her glasses. She found the maneuver to be slightly difficult, as she was hindered by Undyne with her arms wrapped snuggly around Alphys’ waist.

The scientist turned bright red upon realizing this. Not that she minded the physical contact. On the contrary, she loved it. She just needed a little more time still to get adjusted to the fact that Undyne loved her as much as she loved Undyne and that the two were now officially dating.

Unknown to Alphys, the fish lady was already wide awake, just lying there with her good eye open and her mouth thinned into a contemplative line.

When the smaller yellow monster looked toward her, she gave the other female a toothy grin, though she seemed a little distracted.

“Morning, babe,” Undyne greeted.

“M-m-morning, Undyne!” Alphys replied, managing to put on her glasses. “Did you sleep well?”

“Heck yeah. Best night I’ve had in a while. You’re a pretty good heater, nerd,” Undyne smirked, kissing the scientist’s face.

Undyne’s body temperature tended to run a little lower than the norm, so it was pretty pleasant for her to be curled up against a warmer sort. Either way though, she’d still enjoy it because it was Alphys.

Alphys kissed Undyne back lovingly. It definitely was nice to have been able to sleep next to her, and she hoped they could continue doing so in the future. Maybe forever, a wishful thought crossed her mind.

Alphys looked over from their sleeping place to the TV screens across the way. They must’ve fallen asleep together watching their anime marathon...although she was pretty sure she remembered the anime getting forgotten halfway through as Undyne had started making out with her instead. Few things distracted Alphys from anime; Undyne kissing her was most definitely one.

Alphys pressed a button on a remote control to flip the static of the TV screens to that of the camera feeds. She looked puzzled as she spotted Sans and Toriel racing through the various screens as other monsters began to follow them.
“What on Earth...” she commented, watching the odd sight.

Looking at a different screen, she could see Papyrus and Mettaton walking and oddly even more monsters doing the same thing. Everyone was going in the same direction.

Undyne’s brow furrowed in confusion before she shifted to sit up as the “monster migration” played over the screen.

“......This is going to sound crazy, but I was having a feeling I needed to be somewhere too. What the hell...?” Undyne said, bewildered.

The fish monster moved again as this seemed to convince her of what she had to do, kissing Alphys on the top of her head before she got up and stretched. She’d already been at Alphys’ lab before they’d headed off to the resort the night before, so she already had her normal set of clothes there.

“Sorry babe, I need to find out what’s happening with this,” she explained.

Undyne would’ve rather stayed and continued snuggling with the scientist, but her duty-bound soul and instincts were edging her on. So, not seeming to care that Alphys was in sight, she quickly began changing back into her casual clothes.

Alphys turned away out of politeness and slipped on her own regular clothes and her lab coat.

“I-I’m coming too,” Alphys told her. “...I-I sense something too.”

“I don’t like the feel of this,” Undyne commented, accepting Alphys’ statement with a nod.

She waited for her girlfriend to walk over to her before they headed out to investigate. Undyne returned the scientist’s unspoken sentiments from before; they needed to have many more nights and mornings like the last one... only without the odd pull to the capital.

Alphys walked over to Undyne and reached out to hold her hand.

“T’m nervous, but if you’re with me, I think everything will be okay,” she said, looking up at her much taller girlfriend. “Let’s figure out the source of this anomaly!”

Clasping Alphys’ smaller hand back with a reassuring smile, Undyne strode out of the lab and took a moment to view the sight ahead of them. Monsters were traveling together toward the path that led to the elevator in Hotland.

To save on time (and to not lose Alphys in the crowd), Undyne bent over and scooped the lizard monster up into her arms, heading for the elevator, which was already crammed full when she butted in.

“’Scuse me, got to get up there ASAP!” the Captain of the Royal Guard voiced, feeling that if monsters were gathering at the castle, due to her position it was important for her to be there too. It’d drive her nuts to wait for all of these nerds when she could be needed by Asgore RIGHT NOW.

...Speaking of Asgore, the King of Monsters was currently standing in his throne room, confused by the increasing amount of Hotland and New Home citizens who were appearing in front of him. He finally had to ask them to filter through to the next room for fear that they’d trample his entire garden, all being in there at once... honestly, what was the occasion? No one seemed to know why they were here.

...He could never hope to make tea for this many monsters at once.
Papyrus and Mettaton made their way towards the front of the crowd, most monsters recognizing Mettaton and his now famous boyfriend Papyrus and cleared a path before reforming back to a large grouping immediately after they’d passed.

The two stepped into the throne room and Papyrus gave a polite bow to Asgore before speaking, “YOUR MAJESTY, HAS SOMETHING HAPPENED?”

“Ah...Papyrus, was it?” Asgore spoke, recognizing him as one of Undyne’s trainees. The king looked perplexed but still pleasant, glancing to the side as a moldsmal slimed its way through the flowers.

“I am not certain... one moment, I was watering my flowers, and the next, monsters started arriving. No one seems to have an explanation. It is not my birthday...” he said, before returning his attention to Papyrus and Mettaton fully. “…And yet, I feel as though they should be here. Strange, is it not?”

Papyrus nodded in agreement as both he and Mettaton heard gasps from the crowd of monsters behind them. Turning around, they could see dozens of monsters clearing the way.

Walking regally down the pathway was Toriel and his brother Sans. Papyrus overheard a few monsters whispering in hushed tones, “It’s the queen!” “She’s returned!!”

“Q-Q-QUEEN?” Papyrus stated aloud, perplexed. Ah, so that’s why Toriel had looked like Asgore’s clone... only more feminine.

Asgore’s gaze was transfixed on the two walking up the path – mainly the one he recognized most, surprise and hope slipping into his demeanor.

“Tori... you came back...!”

The tall goat monster took a step forward, having no idea what was about to hit him.
Toriel took a deep breath before responding, “No, Asgore. I have not.”

She kept her hands clasped down in front of her, making no motion towards her ex-husband.

“Our relationship had been falling apart even before what happened to our children. You know this,” she said.

Sans recalled the separate bedrooms in Home and Frisk indicating that they thought the other closed room belonged to Asgore.

Toriel finally made eye contact with the monster king.

“I’m afraid I am still unable to forgive what you have done. I am here in order to prevent a loss of life,” Toriel said, pausing before continuing. “...I must ask you for the human souls you’ve collected so far.”

As Toriel spoke, Asgore’s hands lowered back to his sides from where he’d raised them with his prior step forward, and he swallowed, brows knit together in guilty concern. He knew that she’d likely never come back to him. But the hope had still remained, after so long.

He’d argued this with her, so many time... how he was doing what he had to, for the good of the people. But he could never really sound convincing when he didn’t believe in the methods being used either. Maybe he was a coward. Probably. But...well. No matter what his reasons were, he knew that it was wrong. Toriel was right. Asgore took in a deep breath and let it out through his mouth, looking ashamed. ...It was nice to see her again, anyway.

“...Toriel. Why do you want the souls? What would you do with them?” he asked.

Toriel brought a hand to her chest, clutching the fabric of her dress a bit.

“Please...” she requested. “It’s the only way I can save Frisk.”

“FRISK?” Papyrus overheard the conversation and was immediately concerned, stepping forward slightly. “FRISK IS IN DANGER?”

Asgore looked confused again, not really following. He could see that this was important to Toriel, but he couldn’t just give away the six human souls they had taken hundreds of years to obtain. All of monsterkind depended on him.

“He’s a kid who needs help, right now. but the only way to help them is if you show us the human souls. you don’t even have to give them to us, just show us where they are. i know it sounds farfetched and we don’t really have a lot of time to explain, but i really don’t think you’ll find anyone here who will object to this.”

Asgore looked perplexed again, and he hesitated to look around the room at his subjects, all of which were filtering to stand closer to Toriel and the others.
“......This will really help to save this child you’re speaking of? I do not understand, but...” he trailed off.

“ASGORE!” a booming female voice sounded from the doorway, and Undyne ran in, still toting Alphys. She wove around the crowd of monsters, finally stopping at the king’s side.

“I heard what was just said, and if this will help Frisk, then... I think you should do it,” Undyne said.

“Ah... well... I...” Asgore paused. “...if this is what everyone wants then... follow me.”

Turning, Asgore made his way to the doorway leading out of the back of the throne room, past the second large chair covered by a sheet and into the next room. He still really didn’t understand what was happening, but despite his hesitance, it felt like something that was supposed to happen.

Most of the monsters stayed further away, but Toriel, Sans, Undyne, Alphys, Papyrus, Mettaton, and even Gaster (who seemed to have appeared from out of nowhere) moved closer to the front and stood behind Asgore. A few of the monsters Frisk befriended, including Monster Kid, moved closer as well.

Toriel held her breath, waiting anxiously. They just had to save Frisk. They had to.
When they got to the barrier, Asgore stood there briefly, watching its massive, rippling surface. He seemed to take a moment to consider this again before he took a deep breath and focused his magic into the ground... turning to face them all as six full glass containers trapping six colorful souls slid out of the ground and into view – myriad of colors casting an incomplete rainbow along the walls... and against the glass of a seventh, which sat empty.

He hadn’t wanted Toriel to see these... not ever. But it seemed he had no choice.

“...Here they are.”

No sooner had he said that then suddenly a multitude of vines escaped from the ground underneath everyone, knocking them all off balance. Toriel fell into the arms of Sans who seemed to have used his gravity magic to keep himself steady. Papyrus caught Mettaton and held the robot in his arms. Undyne used her spear as an anchor and held Alphys steady to her. Gaster used his magic much like Sans to remain on solid ground.

“What’s happening!?” Toriel exclaimed.

Suddenly out from under the ground, everyone could see Flowey suspended in the air by his vines and a large bundle of vines next to him. Unwrapping the vines slightly revealed...

“FRISK!!!” Toriel cried out.

The human child seemed to be unconscious, and scuffed up from their trip under the Underground. They still had a vine menacingly wrapped around their neck, preventing anyone from making any sudden movements.

“Howdy! It’s me, Flowey the Flower! I’m so glad all of you could come today on this momentous occasion! You all should be happy! The final human soul is in our possession!” Flowey cheered gleefully. “What are all of you doing? You should be attacking them to get their soul to break the barrier!”

The monsters Frisk befriended along the way that weren’t part of their family shared glances with one another, but no one could seem to bring themselves to attack the human. Frisk had shown them kindness and mercy. To take away their life now...it just seemed wrong, somehow.

Flowey growled, frustrated, “What is WRONG with you idiots!? Freedom is within your grasp and you toss it away over a stupid little KID!?”

“YES!” Papyrus regained solid footing and shouted out towards his ex-friend. “AND I’D DO IT EVEN IF ANOTHER HUMAN NEVER STEPPED FOOT IN THE UNDERGROUND AND WE REMAINED TRAPPED HERE FOREVER!”

“F-frisk gave me courage I never thought I had!” Alphys chimed in, linking her hand with Undyne’s standing next to her. “Thanks to them, I realized I’m fine just the way I am!”

Hearing the words below them seemed to cause Frisk to slowly stir. Their vision was blurry due to their constricted airway. They could feel tears coming to their eyes, touched by the words of the monsters.

Asgore had shifted, giant red trident clutched in his hand as he tried to position himself protectively
between the murderous flower, the souls, and the rest of the monsters present. He’d tried to draw the capsules back underground, but Flowey’s roots had messed up the system, cracking the earth. There was no way he could hide them again now.

Undyne’s hand tightened on Alphys’.

“You’re more than fine, babe,” she told the small scientist before turning to glare at the flower. “I used to think that was the only thing to be done with them too, but you know what!? Frisk’s a good kid, and they go to insane lengths not to hurt anyone! There’s already enough damned blood and dust coating that barrier. What good is it breaking it if we lose ourselves in the process?”

Several monsters were nodding, eyes gleaming with the beginnings of what felt like determination.

Sans helped Toriel right herself, one arm around her waist in a protective manner as he watched, trying to figure out what he could do without getting the kid killed.

“Y-yeah!! Don’t hurt my friend!” a certain small monster child agreed from the side, bravely striding up to stand beside Undyne.

Mettaton grasped Papyrus’ hand, boldly standing with him again now that he had his balance back.

“Unbelievable!!” Flowey started laughing hysterically. “All this over a tiny insignificant human! Oh well, it’s not like I had any intention of breaking the barrier for your sakes anyway!”

Flowey waved a leaf and the human soul containers were crushed by his vines, the souls floating one by one up towards him. He opened his mouth, revealing sharp teeth, and swallowed the souls whole.

Toriel covered her mouth in horror and disgust.

“Mmm, tasty! I think there’s room for one more though,” the flower remarked, turning his sights on Frisk.

Before anyone could attempt helping the human, Frisk let out a scream of pain as their soul was forcefully removed from them.

“FRISK! NO!!” Toriel tearfully cried out.

It was too late. Flowey devoured their soul too and dropped Frisk’s nearly lifeless body to the ground.

Papyrus sprang into action, jumping away from Mettaton to catch Frisk in his arms. If they didn’t get Frisk’s soul back somehow, the child would surely perish.

If Sans’ skull could get any whiter, it would have paled – eye sockets dark as he watched Frisk’s soul get eaten, unable to do anything to stop it.

Asgore took a step back from the abomination of a plant, still standing between him and the rest of his people, trying to defend them despite the horror in his own soul.

“Halt! Stand down!” Asgore demanded. “Surely, we can resolve this...”

Shifting, Sans blinked out of existence before appearing next to Papyrus and the kid’s limp body, grabbing onto them and blinking back next to Toriel, trying to get them out of harm’s way. He knew it was a somewhat futile gesture... if the previous times stayed true, Flowey was about to take all of
their souls too...but at least he could try and prevent them from being physically injured.

Toriel carefully took Frisk from Papyrus’ arms as she kneeled on the ground, placing them against her lap as she attempted to use healing magic on them. Her sight was blurry from her tears as they fell.

Mettaton immediately ran over to Papyrus, staying next to him as Undyne moved in front of Alphys.

Sans was livid. Angry, stressed... wondering how the hell they were going to get through this without the kid. He was the only one here besides Frisk who had fought Flowey and lived to tell the tale before. But if the souls had been able to hear Frisk, like he’d seen in the void... if they were able to turn on him and fight back... then maybe...

“frisk,” Sans spoke, gently squeezing Toriel’s arm and stepping away from her, closer to the flower. “come on, kid. i know you can hear me, somewhere in there. stay strong, okay? just...don’t give up, wherever you are. we’re not giving up on you.”

He expected to be laughed at. Taunted. Jabbed at. But it didn’t matter. Despite what Flowey thought, Sans knew that if the other souls had the determination to fight back, Frisk’s sure as hell had more. And he was going to encourage that.

With seven human souls, Flowey had no need to take the rest of the monster ones. They were so weak in comparison. He’d obliterate anyone stupid enough to get close.

The human souls finally took hold in Flowey’s body and suddenly everything grew dark, like being in the void.

“Finally...”

Toriel looked up from her sobbing over Frisk’s lifeless body hearing that familiar voice.

“I was so tired of being a flower...”

Toriel continued cradling Frisk in her arms, looking up at the small figure floating above, “A-A-...Asriel...?”

Asriel clutched his head suddenly as a different force took over. Asriel transformed, looking older and taller. His outfit looked like Toriel and Asgore’s, but on his chest...

“Asriel’s locket!! That’s it! That’s the missing piece!!” Toriel shouted towards Sans, knowing he’d understand what she meant.

“Silence, mother!” Chara’s voice came out from Asriel. “Once I’m rid of all of you, I will break the barrier and destroy humankind. It will be easy! Like taking candy from a baby, or taking a soul from a pathetic halfblood weakling of a wizard. What a fool they are! They’re still trying to take over control as I speak!”

“Frisk...FRISK!!” Toriel cried out trying to reach the human.

“...but nobody came!” Chara-Asriel cackled.

Asgore had taken another couple of steps back, eyes wide with shock, disbelief, and pain.

“Asriel...?” he said quietly. “My son? ...Chara? What is this...?”

His hand still clutched his trident, but in a mostly nonthreatening way. He didn’t understand what
was happening.

“My children...”

Undyne had sprang to action during all of this, ushering as many monsters as she could back and away from the danger, trying to prevent as much damage as she could. Once she had gotten all but the most stubborn souls back and further from harm’s way, she turned, summoning her spears again and moving to stand by Asgore, pumped and ready to fight.

Sans let out a dark chuckle at Chara-Asriel’s words, left eye blazing brighter as he raised his hand.

“except you’re completely wrong on that, chara. everyone came, for frisk. we’re here, kid... we’re all rootin’ for you.”

With a quick jerk of his hand upward, Sans attempted to grab hold of the locket with his magic, trying to pull it off of the offending creature and fling it wherever it chose to land, if successful. For now, he just had to get it off of them.

Chara’s magic was still too powerful though. They summoned Asriel’s star themed magic to act as a shield against Sans’ magic. While the human souls were aligned with Chara against their will, it didn’t seem like magic attacks would work.

Gaster stepped forward. He had been further back, assessing all that had been occurring before taking any action. He’d seen what Frisk had done many times before to call out to their friends who’d been trapped. He recalled them playing the snowball game in Snowdin, achieving every possible outcome. The colors from the game matched the color of the souls. Calling to Frisk wasn’t helping, so what if they tried reaching the others first?

Gaster closed his eyes and concentrated. A trait came to mind. How long was it he had to wait to be rescued? He didn’t give up on his faint glimmer of hope that someday he’d get out.

When he opened his eyes, he was floating in what seemed to be the void again. He momentarily panicked before remembering that this had been what Frisk had seen too. Looking around, he saw a little boy sitting on the ground, a ribbon tied like a bow on his dress shirt and a toy knife by their side. It seemed like the child before falling in the Underground must’ve been pretending to be a pirate but had lost the rest of their outfit on the way down. A cyan colored aura surrounded them.

“Oh! Are you here to rescue me? I’ve been waiting so long,” the child said, seeing Gaster.

‘I'M IN NEED OF YOUR HELP, PATIENT ONE,’ Gaster signed.

“To help the new kid right?” he asked.

Gaster nodded.

“Then I’ll come with you! They seem like a nice kid. It’s too late for me, but I will lend you my aid,” the child said.

Gaster closed his eyes and when he opened them again, everyone, including Chara was surprised to see the cyan aura surrounding him.
‘ONE DOWN, SIX TO GO,’ he signed, smirking at Chara who wasn’t the least bit amused.

Noticing what had happened with his father, Sans caught on quickly, having seen the kid do this once before in the void – and he focused, trying to connect with the energy he felt resonating from the other souls.

The only thing on his mind were a desperation to protect the people present and to rescue Frisk.

This injustice of the resets and possession and pain had gone on for long enough.

*come on... anyone who can hear me... help us.*

It was worth a shot.

When Sans opened his eyes, he too found himself in a void-like area. A different little boy, no older than 10, dressed in a cowboy hat and carrying an empty toy pistol in a kid sized gun belt answered Sans’ plea.
“You rang, pardner? I’m not a real sheriff,” the kid commented, indicating the plastic badge on his cowboy getup, “but if someone’s being unfair, I’ll help enforce the rules.”

It took a moment, but Sans focused on the boy with a pang of sympathy in his soul when he saw how small he was. They really were just kids. Were all of them this young?

Grinning some, though his expression showed an amount of his stress, Sans nodded to the boy.

“heya. i’m sans...and, kid...you might not be a real sheriff, but right now you’ve got the opportunity to help save an entire race and who knows how many innocent humans.”

Sans approached the boy in the void, holding out a bony hand in invitation for a shake. The child seemed like he had a good soul.

“What do you say? will you help us out, partner?”

“Darn tootin’ I will,” the boy grinned in response and shook Sans’ hand.

When Sans opened his eyes again, he was surrounded by a bright yellow aura: the color of justice.

Unfortunately, Chara was beginning to catch on to everyone’s scheme and began summoning Asriel’s Star Blazing attack to stop the group from being able to focus on the other human souls.
Papyrus summoned a Gaster Blaster to shield Mettaton and himself from an incoming attack. He kept himself in front of Mettaton to prevent him from receiving any damage.

Gaster moved closer to his youngest son, summoning his own enormous blaster which had increased in size and power thanks to the human soul amplifying his magic energy.

Asgore stepped forward, still closer to the front and began using his trident to try and intercept as many of the attacks as possible, Undyne fighting by his side. They were both slowly losing HP, but going strong regardless, with the help of Undyne’s magic shield.

Feeling a new surge of power and energy within him, Sans took a deep breath and let it out.

“thanks, sheriff,” he spoke, quietly enough that only he could hear – and in effect, the small cowboy who had agreed to help him. He’d never felt the rush of having a human soul giving power to him before, and it definitely helped. He halfway couldn’t believe that had worked.

Summoning his own blaster to protect Toriel along with Frisk’s limp form, Sans stepped over to them both, behind the giant skull.

“tori! this is gonna sound weird, but i need you to concentrate on chara. like... try to call out to them with your soul, but to any good force who will answer. we’re trying to appeal to the other souls... i’ll protect you in the meantime.”

Toriel looked up at Sans, amazed at the amount of power he was using to fight back. Call out to the human souls? Toriel closed her eyes and gave it a try.

She remembered all of the children. Her children. She recalled the kindness she showed them before they all left her behind, never to be seen again. It left her heartbroken.

When Toriel opened her eyes, Frisk was no longer in her lap and she was in a dark area with no one else around. She stood up in a panic. Where was Frisk?

“Please, someone! Anybody! Please help!” she cried out.

“Ms. Toriel?” a quiet voice responded.

Toriel turned to look at the source of the voice. Toriel remembered this child. This particular little girl had loved baking alongside her and had remained with her the longest before leaving. Her apron was stained from rubbing her dirty dough covered hands on it, and they carried a frying pan in one hand. The preteen girl seemed to have a green aura surrounding them.

Toriel could sense tears coming to her eyes seeing this child again. If only she had been able to prevent her from leaving the ruins, this young child never would have had to die.

The girl gave Toriel a gentle smile.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t repay you, Ms. Toriel,” she said.

Toriel blinked back her tears.

“Whatever do you mean, my child?”

“You were so kind to me, and taught me so much about baking and cooking. I wanted you to be able to come to the surface so you could see and try all the ingredients the surface had to offer. It’s been too long since you’ve had fresh fruit, right, Ms. Toriel?” the girl asked, smiling.
Toriel covered her mouth hearing these words, deeply touched and saddened. This kind child had
gone forward, knowing what would happen...to help her?

“Please don’t cry, Ms. Toriel. I don’t regret what I did. I wasn’t able to do it by myself, but now,
with the help of the others, we can. We all want to help you.”

Toriel finally remembered what she had come for.

“Please! I need your help to save my children!” Toriel requested.

The girl smiled again.

“The new kid is putting up quite the fight protecting the prince. I will gladly help you, Ms. Toriel.”

The scene faded out and when Toriel opened her eyes again, she was seated upon the ground with
Frisk in her lap once more, and could see a faint green glow surrounding her. She felt a burst of
energy aiding her in her healing abilities. Toriel used the newfound energy and channeled it into
Frisk’s lifeless body. This would hopefully buy them more time as they tried to recover Frisk’s soul.

Sans grinned at Toriel encouragingly, squeezing her arm before turning and focusing more energy
into the giant skull protecting his girl and his kid. After that was done, he vanished from beside them
and ended up next to Papyrus and Mettaton.

The robot was doing what he could to help Papyrus – keeping an eye out for attacks and warning the
skeleton when something came too close – pulling him out of the way, once or twice. Honestly he
was seriously considering leaving his metal body... but their enemy was using magic attacks, and it
would hurt him anyway. His robot form was just an extra shield at this point – like in Papyrus’
“dream”, he’d sacrifice it in a heartbeat if it meant the other monster would be safe.

“hey bro,” Sans said once he could get a word in, in between the attacks. “listen... i need you to do somethin’ for me.”

At the front, Undyne let out a loud yell of “NGAAAHHH!!!!” when Asgore was hit dead center by one of the incoming starfalls, stepping in front of him while he recovered from the blow enough to stand again. She brought one of her spears up, magical energy crackling through the air as she took a swing, batting against another energy star and sending it shooting back at Chara-Asriel, dauntless grit and courage pulsing through her soul.

She’d give everything to protect these people – to protect Asgore, Alphys, Papyrus, everyone, the boldness of her bravery shining through.

There was no way in hell anyone was going to keep her down!!

“YEAH! YEAH!!” a boy’s voice cheered.

Undyne turned around and found herself standing in darkness, and saw a boy surrounded by an orange glow. He was rooting for her, pumping his boxing gloved hands in the air, a bandanna tied around his forehead.

“That’s the way to do it!! Show no fear and protect those you care about!!” the boy gave her a huge grin.

A little taken off guard, Undyne took one look at the boy before she case a wild glance around her – focusing back on him when she confirmed that Asgore, who had just been beside her and everyone else who had been behind them both were gone.

What the... another human?

“Hey! How did I get here?” Undyne asked. “Where are the others!?”

“Whoa! Calm down, lady. You’re just as fierce as that kid trying to protect the prince. We’re all rooting for them. And besides, you’re the one who called out to me,” the kid responded.

“I did?” Undyne’s brow furrowed. What the... she’d just been fighting with purpose, intent on protecting everyone...

...It was unnerving and she was anxious to get back to the fight, but something about this seemed to calm her soul a little. There was some sort of familiarity here... she felt like this human really got her. And, oddly, she felt truth ring in his words.

The things this kid had said before... yeah, she liked his mindset. Giving a slow grin full of sharp teeth, the fish lady raised her spear to point it toward him.

“You’ve got SPUNK, kid!! I still don’t know what this is about, but I like your attitude! You’re saying you’re here to help?”

The kid pounded his gloved fists together, returning Undyne’s grin, “YES! Let’s get going!!”
Undyne found herself back on the battlefield, an orange glow around her, refreshed with a rush of new energy.

Elsewhere on the field, Papyrus and Mettaton listened in to what Sans wanted Papyrus to do.

“listen, papyrus – i know this’ll sound weird, but you’ve gotta trust me on it. you’ve got to try and connect with the human souls that were taken. see if you can get any of them to help us out. they’re still conscious, they can hear us if we call out. we’re weakening flowey... chara... them. we’ve gotta get more of the souls on our side if we’re gonna save frisk,” Sans explained.

Sans was hoping this would continue to work. The attacks that rained down on them were getting more extreme – no doubt the floor would be covered in dust by now if the majority of the monsters gathered hadn’t been lead back to safer distances.

Feeling another surge of power flickering to life, Sans glanced toward the front to see Undyne standing tall, dancing and parrying, hitting attacks back at the enemy with what looked almost like orange fire wisping from her eye.

The skeleton grinned as he raised his gaze to Chara-Asriel, hope and maybe a bit of spiteful glee moving through him. They were winning. Maybe they could actually do this. There were only three souls left now, counting Frisk’s.

Papyrus shielded Mettaton from another attack before trying to focus on doing what Sans asked. Focus on the humans, right?

...Why did the humans have to perish and give up their souls to break the barrier anyway? Monsters were civilized beings! Papyrus felt they should have been able to simply ask for the humans’ assistance in breaking the barrier. Papyrus’ strong sense of integrity was what kept him believing in everyone until the bitter end.

Everything went dark and Papyrus was face to face with a girl about 12 years of age, dressed in a tutu and ballet slippers, dancing on pointe. Papyrus watched the girl pirouette, balancing on her toes,
in awe.

“You’ve gotten this far by sticking to your morals and principles,” the child stated aloud as she continued to dance, “much as I did when I was still living.”

“PLEASE, MISS, WILL YOU HELP US?” Papyrus asked, remembering the task Sans had given him.

The girl gave the mime for “dance with me” before curtseying to the skeleton.

“You are a kind and honest soul, much like the child fighting to protect the prince. I shall assist you.”

Papyrus awakened to find Mettaton had pushed him out of the way of another attack. Looking down at himself, Papyrus saw that he was now wrapped in a soft blue aura: the color of integrity.

Papyrus used the energy boost to charge the Gaster Blaster and eliminate Chara’s latest attack. He saw that while he was out of it, Mettaton seemed to have been scuffed up from their attack.

“OH NO! METTATON, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?” he asked, concerned.

“Hf...I’m fine, darling – it’s just a few scrapes, nothing I can’t handle!” Mettaton smiled at him. “Wait... why are you... glowing blue?”

And why was Sans glowing yellow, for that matter? There were differences in shade, but it was almost like the skelebros had somehow swapped magic colors.

“heh. don’t worry about it, buddy. i can explain it later,” Sans spoke before he turned to face the front again, eye sockets narrowing in contemplation. They had five of the souls on their side now, if Undyne being surrounded by that orange aura was any indication. Each color had corresponded with each monster’s values that they had joined. Papyrus was integrity... Sans wasn’t the least bit surprised about that.
He tried to think back on his time spent with Gaster in the lab, working with the souls to try and make some progress on getting everyone free from the Underground. They’d isolated the traits from the resonance they had felt from them. And from what he could tell...

Purple was left. Perseverance.

Who here most represented that? It could be Asgore... Toriel, but she already had the green one. Could even be Mettaton... could be Sans, himself, through putting up with so many timeloops. But that wouldn’t be right – Sans had given up and fallen into pain and then apathy so utterly in some of those resets that he’d quit right after Papyrus died. And from the power Sans felt flowing through him, he knew that having more than one of these souls aiding any one of them without fully absorbing it would put too much strain on their bodies. No. These kids deserved to be free after this, to move on to wherever human souls ended up after death. It wasn’t right to keep them trapped for any longer.

It had to be Alphys. Sans knew all about her past. The experiments, the pressure, the pain, the fear... and how even after she gave up on the determination project, she kept living and persisting for the sake of the amalgamates. He knew she was suicidal. There had been resets in which she’d taken her own life. But it was only after having been pushed to the absolute edge of everything. Sometimes during Flowey’s reign of terror, when she’d realized that something she’d helped to create had murdered everyone... and once so far in Chara’s forced resets, that he knew of.

Alphys was stronger than she herself seemed to believe, but one soul could only take so much, no matter how much perseverance it was driven by.

The attacks were coming down in such ferocity now that stepping out from behind any of their shielding would have quickly ended any of them, so Sans glanced around, looking for Alphys, hoping she was still okay.

When he finally spotted her near Toriel, he used his magic to tap on her shoulder she she’d look over to him, knowing there wasn’t much space left behind the protection of his blaster that he’d left with the former queen.

Alphys looked up from ducking in the shrinking zone of safety at Sans. She was clearly petrified from fear of this situation.

Now that he had her attention, Sans brought his hands up, making sure she was focused on them before he signed across the gap, ‘try to connect with the human souls. ask them for help. focus yourself into it. i know you can do it, alph. deep breath.’

Connect with a human soul? Logically, it didn’t make sense, but what about this situation made sense anyway?

Alphys took a deep breath as instructed and concentrated.

*Please, someone, anyone, help us!*

When Alphys opened her eyes, she saw a small girl surrounded by a purple aura scribbling equations furiously in a notebook, pausing occasionally to push her glasses back up on the bridge of her nose. Alphys jumped slightly when the child let out a yell of frustration, running her hands through her hair.

“No, no, no! This isn’t going to work at all!! No matter what, by myself, I don’t have any way to help the new kid!!” she shouted before realizing Alphys was standing there. “It’s no use... I should
just give up.”

Alphys stepped cautiously over towards the child and looked down at the equations.

“Um...if I can say something...” Alphys started quietly. “H-have you tried looking at it from another angle?”

“Another angle?” the girl questioned.

Alphys nodded.

“My friends are being helped by your friends,” she explained. “If we work together...”

The girl was suddenly struck with inspiration and wrote a new equation. Her eyes widened upon completing it.

“Yes! This is it!” she cheered. “If everyone helps, we’ll be able to help the new kid protect the prince!!”

“Perseverance really is key!!” the girl said, looking back up at Alphys and extending a hand to her. “I’ll go with you!!”

Alphys smiled and shook the girl’s hand with a claw.

When Alphys opened her eyes again she was surrounded by a purple glow and Chara-Asriel was looking absolutely FURIOUS.

Grinning darkly, despite the still dangerous situation, Sans’ eye sockets narrowed as he ported again, only this time he ended up fragmenting back into reality in front of Undyne and Asgore and facing the enemy, flickering in and out as he dodged an attack or two. The skeleton lifted his left hand and snapped his fingers, surrounding Chara-Asriel with a blue and yellow aura that if effective, would restrict them temporarily – only enough to try and distract them while he called out to the others.

“okay, guys. LET’S GET OUR KID BACK!”
With everyone’s attention and purpose successfully focused on getting Frisk’s soul back, Sans jolted his hand up again, once more attempting to remove the locket from Asriel with his magic.

...He didn’t get to see if it worked, though.

Instead, he was thrown momentarily off guard as a bright golden light flooded the darkness of the void.

Three bell chimes resounded through the air. Sans recognized those noises, as well as where they were.

The others looked around, puzzled. Only the six who had called out to the human souls were present and accounted for. They were in the void with the colored auras still surrounding them, and yet...

“This is...” Toriel remarked, Frisk missing from her lap, as she stood up, looking around at the light pouring in from the windows in the hall. “In front of New Home?”

Sans glanced behind him at the other five of the monsters present, gaze moving from his brother, to Toriel, to Gaster, and the rest. He turned forward again, corner of his mouth twitching at the sick irony of what this place looked like.

Toward the center of the hall, a semi-transparent form floated above everything, half curled up into themselves. It was a small white furred child wearing a green and yellow striped shirt.

Ignoring them for now, Sans’ eye flickered with blue and yellow mingling flame-like energy before three blasters appeared around the little group, all protectively facing outward in a circle. The skeleton couldn’t see anyone else yet, but he knew they were here. He could feel it.

“...heh. interesting choice of venue, pal. this a tribute?” he commented darkly.

Leaping into view of the middle of the hallway, was Chara carrying a knife as well as Frisk, armed with nothing. Despite this, a bright red aura was clearly present around the child. Frisk seemed to be out of breath. They’d been dodging Chara this entire time.

Toriel moved to go towards them when she was stopped by a multicolored barrier. Using her fire magic that was powered up by the kindness soul on it only succeeded in removing the green band of color from the barrier for a temporary amount of time.

Alphys walked toward it to examine.

“I see,” she said. “This is like a locked magic door in a video game! We need to focus our energy on the barrier at the same time!”

The group heard a yelp of pain from Frisk in the distance.

“And hurry!” Alphys quickly added.

Immediately, Sans brought his hand up and one of the blasters swiveled, turned, and fired at the multicolored barrier just as Undyne stepped forward summoning multiple spears to hurl toward it
with a loud, “NGAAAH!!”

...apparently the two were too eager to simply “focus” their energy. Toriel’s fire had worked previously, so they figured this was good enough.

Gaster, Toriel, Papyrus, and Alphys all summoned their magic and attacked the barrier when they saw that Undyne and Sans had started. The barrier blocking the hallway dissipated after a moment.

Frisk had not noticed the group yet as they were distracted by dodging Chara’s relentless attacks. Frisk’s determination to protect and save Asriel was extremely strong, but they still had quite a fight ahead of them.

The next time the demon moved to attack, magic crackled in the air around Frisk as two giant canine skulls fragmented into reality on either side of them – both immediately opening their serrated maws and firing dual beams of pure scorching energy at the incoming Chara.

Sans had teleported closer to the kid ahead of the rest of the group to defend them. They might have still had a ways to go, but they were not alone.

Chara gave an animalistic growl at this intrusion and jumped back dodging Sans’ attack. They’d fought him many times, after all.

Frisk looked surprised and happy to see everyone come into the room and Sans standing by them.

“Everyone...” they signed quickly, as just in the void from before Frisk’s voice was heard. “You’re here...”

Not letting Chara out of his sight, Sans turned his head very slightly in Frisk’s direction – just enough for them to catch his grin.

“What? did you really think we were gonna let you deal with this maniac on your own?” he joked.

Looking intent and furious, Undyne skidded to a stop on Frisk’s other side, one large blue spear crackling with orange energy clutched in her hand – grin big and intimidating and voice confident and sure as she made her profound entry statement, “I don’t know what the hell is happening BUT I AM READY TO STAB SOMEONE!!”

Sans snorted in a half-laugh, turning his blue and yellow one-eyed gaze fully forward again as he fully focused on his enemy. The one who had caused all of this.

Testingly, he chanced a tug at Chara’s diminished fragment of a soul, attempting to turn it blue to give him more control over their movements.

To the monster’s complete surprise, Frisk leapt out in front of Chara with their arms outstretched, almost like they were protecting them. This didn’t stop Sans’ magic from affecting the evil inclined child, as they were raised up into the air.

“Where are you aiming, bonehead?” Chara smirked.

When Frisk motioned, Sans raised his gaze upward before hesitating. ...Oh. Carefully, he pulled Chara a couple of inches to the side and watched as Asriel was pulled too.

Welp. That wasn’t gonna work.

He chuckled a little, looking up at the demonic youth, “you’re using skeleton puns against me? only
thing that’s gonna do is encourage me, pal.”

Sans kept a hold of Chara’s soul shard as he motioned for Frisk to get away from them again. He wasn’t going to have them get hit because of him.

Frisk backed away and moved towards Sans now that they indicated why fighting Chara was a bit more difficult than any realized.

Toriel stepped forward and placed a hand on Frisk’s shoulder, using healing energy on them where they had suffered an attack previously.

Frisk continued watching Chara. How were they supposed to defeat them if their attacks hurt Asriel too?

Continuing to watch Chara, Sans’ skull tilted to the side slightly, slow, curious grin moving across his face.

He cast his gaze upward again to look at the little goat child, prodding at his soul to get his stats.

Asriel Dreemurr                  0ATK  10DEF

40 HP

The Prince of Monsters.

...LV 1.

Lowering his head again, Sans watched Chara intently, before scraping bone against bone to make a popping sound as he clicked his fingers together in the equivalent of someone snapping.

Sans summoned a hail of bones around them, energy filling the air as they shuddered and turned a pulsing purple color. He then let them loose, doing what he could to hold Chara into place as the karmic retribution magic assaulted them, carefully controlled to not exceed the goat child’s maximum HP, just in case.

Chara was the guilty one here. With any luck, this magic would only latch onto the deserving offender.

Chara yelled in pain as the attack hit them, the magic however, couldn’t seem to destroy them.

Frisk looked down and saw that Toriel had their wand in her hand. The child retrieved it and pointed it up at Asriel.

“Accio locket!”

Asriel was left alone as the locket slipped off from around his neck and down towards Frisk. This being the final horcrux, Frisk supposed everyone would probably need to hit it all full force.

With Asriel having been curled in on himself and the evil aura permeating this entire space in the void, Sans had failed to spot the locket himself. So that’s why this wasn’t working – despite Chara being present here, their horcrux was still bound by the locket. Like the other time in the actual golden hallway, where they’d had to destroy the knife and the other locket.

He had to let go of Chara’s soul as the demon child willed themself closer to him and regained their footing on the floor, but Sans was unable to throw them back because of Asriel. Focusing, he sent waves of blue-movement-activated bones at them while taking a step back, trying to keep them
occupied. The skeleton wasn’t sure if he’d dust in one hit here, with the human soul of justice backing him up, but Chara’s intent to harm was intense enough that it was a legitimate concern.

He was too busy concentrating on dodging Chara and trying to keep them away from the group behind him to help with the horcrux immediately.

Frisk signed and a voice spoke aloud, “Everyone! Hit the locket with everything you’ve got!!”

Frisk placed the locket on the ground. Toriel concentrated and summoned her fire magic, its power amplified by the kindness soul as Gaster fired his blaster shots. Alphys concentrated her electrified attack with the aid of the perseverance soul, as Undyne also focused her magic, joining the others as Sans continued to try keeping Chara at bay.

Papyrus, however, aided Sans in summoning blue bones, seeing Chara still inch closer to the skeleton who seemed a bit exhausted from the excessive amount of magic usage.

“BROTHER, ARE YOU READY?” Papyrus called out.

When he heard Papyrus speak, Sans gave a nod, summoning one last wall of bones to shield him and his brother before he spun around and raised his left hand high in the air, focusing one final blaster into existence above the group and watching as it swiveled to point straight downward. Its maw cracked open, firing a concentrated beam of blue and yellow energy straight down onto where the locket lay on the golden checkered ground.

It was a gamble – he’d had to leave himself open for that split few seconds – counting on the attack to do its deed and stop Chara before they could get through his bone barrier and take advantage of it.

It was enough. The attacks succeeded and the locket shattered.

“AUUUGGGHHHH!!!”

Frisk turned their attention to Chara as they fell to the ground in a heap, beginning to fade from existence.

“So. That’s it huh...?”

Chara used what was left of their strength to flip over to lay on their back, looking up at Asriel who remained floating above them, for the last time.

“Asriel...” they said. “…for what it’s worth...you really were my best friend. I never intended on including you in my plan.”

Frisk said nothing to the child and just listened. They showed Chara no pity.

Seeing Chara vanishing, Sans couldn’t help the feeling of bitter victory that moved through his soul. He was with Frisk on this one – the first fallen had done too much for redemption. Especially when they didn’t even seem to feel remorse for it.

“Goodbye, Asriel,” Chara said, as their body faded from existence, leaving nothing behind. No dust, no soul, no clothing.

Frisk turned their attention to Asriel above them and saw him move slightly. Frisk then looked back down at the others.

“Everyone, thank you,” Frisk signed, as their voice echoed within the void.
The other children’s souls’ essence left their monster counterparts and floated in the air next to Frisk.

“It’s time to wake up.”

Frisk gave the group a smile as the hall faded from view and everyone returned to their spots back at New Home.

When the little group ended up back where the fight had begun, an excited and relieved gasp was heard from Mettaton as he ran over to Papyrus.

“Papy! Alphys! There you are – what happened? I was so worried, you just vanished and... are you all right??”

Papyrus hugged Mettaton tightly.

“SORRY I FRIGHTENED YOU, METTATON.”

Toriel looked down and saw Frisk’s body in her lap, but they were still barely hanging on. Where was their soul?

Gaster saw Toriel’s panicked face and motioned over towards a bed of golden flowers.

Asriel was there, awake, and standing, facing towards the barrier. He had a rainbow glow surrounding him.

Toriel and the others watched in amazement as Asriel floated up in the air and summoned the energy from all seven human souls. The barrier shattered and was no more. The child then floated back down and six of the human souls left from his presence, but one determined one stayed behind and hovered in front of him.

He walked over to his shocked mother, and kneeled in front of her, carefully returning Frisk’s soul to them. The human’s heartbeat returned to normal and their color improved.

“This is the way it should be,” Asriel said, reaching out and holding one of Frisk’s hands, as tears formed in his eyes.

Toriel felt tears coming to her own.

“Without the souls, I’ll go back to being a flower,” Asriel explained quietly. “It’s best if you all just forg–”

Without hesitation, Toriel reached out and hugged her son to her with one arm, still holding onto Frisk with the other, cutting him off from finishing his sentence.

“Asriel, my son. Don’t you dare say we should forget you. That is never going to happen. We love you too much for that. No matter what,” she said, tears falling from her face.

Unable to hold back, Asriel sobbed into his mother’s embrace, his tears falling on her lap.

Sans watched Asriel and Toriel with some amount of hesitation, giving them a few moments. He only approached after the prince’s sobbing seemed to calm a little, crouching down next to the three and gently placing a bony hand over Frisk’s sternum, just above where their soul usually manifested. He breathed out, relieved that the human seemed like they’d be fine... before he lifted his gaze to settle onto Asriel.

“...heh. don’t count yourself out just yet,” Sans said.
He could sense that Frisk was stirring, slowly trying to return to consciousness.

The child woke up, Toriel and Asriel backing away from each other slightly so they could sit up. Frisk’s face brightened up seeing Asriel and they hugged him tightly.

“Frisk, you’re okay!” Asriel said as he hugged them back, looking relieved, knowing their name simply from having held their soul temporarily within him.

Frisk smiled before pulling away to sign, ‘I have something that belongs to you.’

Asriel tilted his head slightly at this, looking confused.

Frisk placed a hand over their heart and summoned their soul forward. The soul had a pink tinge to it, an indication that Frisk’s red determination soul had been in contact with a white monster soul. Concentrating, Frisk gently placed a hand over the soul and, a bit like a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat, pulled out a monster soul out of their own.

“Frisk...that’s...” Asriel’s eyes widened.

‘Your soul was trapped by Chara’s horcruxes. We found pieces of it when we defeated them,’ Frisk explained.

Once Frisk finished signing, their own soul returned to them and they gently held Asriel’s soul to him where it finally returned after its extremely long absence. To help prove this, Frisk ran a CHECK on him.

\[
\text{Asriel Dreemurr } \quad 0\text{ATK} \quad 10\text{DEF} \\
82 \text{HP}
\]

The Prince of Monsters.

Asriel felt tears in his eyes again and hugged Frisk tightly.

Frisk had a huge grin on their face and hugged him back just as tight, their eyes wet with tears as well. They’d finally saved him.

“My son...Asriel...” Asgore said, on his knees near Frisk and his child, where he’d sunk when his mind came out of its shock after having stepped closer to them. He outstretched his arms toward the small goat child, tears in his eyes.

Asriel ran over and hugged his father, glad to see him, and able to feel every emotion once again.

Toriel smiled at Frisk sitting on her lap as Asriel continued hugging Asgore. She kissed the top of their head and Frisk happily hugged their mom in return.

Bringing a hand up to rub the back of his neck vertebra, Sans stepped back a bit to give them all room again, grin wide from all of the good feelings circulating but not really sure what to do with himself. Undyne had picked up Alphys and was spinning her around in her arms in proud excitement. Papyrus was busy with Mettaton, and Toriel had just gotten two of her children back. They’d need a moment.

The skeleton monster reached out to touch and gently squeeze Toriel’s shoulder, smiling down at her where she was still seated on the ground, before he took a couple of steps over to Gaster. He looked up at him before turning to gaze toward the long, dark cavern that reached out toward the light.
somewhere above, barrier gone and a warm breeze flowing down over them all in its absence.

“looks like you finally get to come with us,” Sans said to his father.

‘IT SEEMS SO,’ Gaster agreed, looking at the expanse before them before turning to face Sans. ‘I HAVE SAID IT BEFORE, BUT I AM PROUD OF YOU, MY SON.’

He hugged Sans after signing that last word.

The shorter skeleton hugged Gaster back, some moisture gathering in his eye sockets.

“aww... c’mon, dad... you’re gonna make me start feeling like a babybones here.”

Despite that comment, Sans held on a little tighter, emotions and overwhelming hope from all of this flooding through him.

To think that they had come so far... that it could actually be over, while everything was finally truly beginning. That they could all move on and actually live now... it was incredible.

Reality was new again.

Frisk excused themself from Toriel’s lap and ran over to Sans, hugging him tightly, once Sans had stopped hugging Gaster. They gave him a huge grin.

Barely having any time to dry one of his eyes, Sans laughed a little when the kid flew into his arms, hugging them back and squeezing gently in return. He grinned back at them while blinking a few times, wiping his face on his blue hoodie sleeve.

“...heh. sorry, i think it’s raining in here somewhere...”

Frisk smiles and hugged him again, a bit gentler this time. Looking past Sans’ shoulder they suddenly had a surprised look on their face and ran up to where the cliff outlooking the rest of the surface world was.

A beautiful sunrise was visible... and there was a save point at the exit.

Without a moment of hesitation, Frisk saved, knowing now, without a doubt, they’d never have to reset ever again.

Sans blinked a few times, bringing his now damp sleeve down from his face and grinning wider, seeing the slight rippled distortion Frisk was touching. He wasn’t sure how it happened. Maybe something to do with the magical release when the barrier was broken? It didn’t matter. What did matter, is that it was there. And it represented security.

Taking in a deep breath, Sans grinned at Gaster before walking over to Papyrus and hugging him tightly. He tried to blink back more moisture as he then looked to the rest of the monsters gathered.

“well. this is it, everyone. ...let’s go meet the sunlight.”

Mettaton took Papyrus’ hand, linking his fingers through the tall skeleton’s bony ones and smiled at him fondly. Undyne grinned down at Alphys and reached toward her, also clasping her own hand around the smaller yellow one.

Asgore released Asriel, tears still in his eyes as he very gently and lovingly moved a large hand over the goat child’s head, saying, “This is a miracle... I don’t know how this has happened, but I have missed you so much, my son. And now we can finally show you the surface world.”
Asriel looked up at his father and followed him up and out into the sunlight. He shielded his eyes and rubbed them a little, adjusting to the extreme difference in light. Moments later, he managed to put his hand down, taking in the sights.

“...Whoa...”

Whoa was right. The other monsters stepped out into the light and took a wide eyed look around. It looked... AMAZING.

Papyrus grinned before kissing Mettaton on the cheek.

“WE MADE IT!” he cheered.

Asgore picked up Asriel and held him as they gazed down together over the vast expanse of mountainous landscape and lush green valleys, reveling in the sheer vastness of the space they were now in. The world stretched out for forever before them, blue sky seemingly without limits wide and free above them.

“Isn’t it beautiful, everyone?” the king said.

Not paying attention to Asgore’s words and wanting more of what Papyrus had just done, Mettaton moved to kiss the tall skeleton monster full on the mouth, grinning widely after.

“First monsters to smooch on the surface, baby~” the robot said flirtingly after, looking extremely pleased with this.

Undyne took this as some sort of a competition and scooped Alphys up again to kiss her, sweet and passionate before retorting with waggling eyebrows.

“FIRST MONSTER GIRLFRIENDS to smooch on the surface, hah!” she shouted.

Amused, Sans turned his gaze away from the growing amount of PDA and shook his head with a light chuckle, his fingers brushing Toriel’s as he took her hand. He looked at Frisk then, fur lining his hoodie rustling in the breeze as the fresh air swelled around them and the sunlight warmed his bones.

“good job, kid.”

Frisk grinned widely at Sans before heading over to stand next to Asriel as the king had lowered him back down on the ground.

Toriel interlocked her fingers with Sans’.

“It’s been so long...” she said quietly.

Asriel could see his mother and Sans out of the corner of his eye but made no comment. He was aware of their flirtation when he was without a soul. It would take some getting adjusted to, but he didn’t seem to take any issue with the two being together.

Knowing that would be a relief to Sans. He’d been holding back on showing her more affection until she could explain things to Asgore and the prince, so it wouldn’t be such a slap in the face to either of them. Asgore had still seemed like he was holding on to hope, even after all the time Toriel had been gone, and Sans was showing tact.

“it is quite the view,” the skeleton said quietly enough for anyone not standing right next to him to
hear anything besides a mumble.

She was so beautiful. Eyes shining, standing tall and alive, white fur glowing in the light of the sun... It was difficult not to kiss her. ...Right. Tact.

The amazed gasps and shouts of joy and wonderment from the multitude of other gathered monsters sounded from behind them. Monsters hugging, crying, laughing... they were free.

They were finally free.
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