Summary

There has been close to no ghost activity in Amity Park as of late, worrying Danny to no ends. He decides to take a peek in the Ghost Zone for a solution, but falls through a dimensional hole, sending him straight into another universe right out of the comic books. Now, he's faced with the dilemma of being unable to find a way back...as well as having to face the darkness inside his own mind. Will the Teen Titans be able to help?
It was nighttime in the city. There were no stars or even a moon; it was cloudy. The great buildings had all but shut down for the night. There were a few fast food chains, restaurants, or pubs open. It was quiet except for the noises of some late cars or random thugs.

Or almost quiet.

Right by some shop lay something hidden in the shadows. It wasn’t visible but one could hear it snicker. It also glowed slightly, silhouetting it to be something almost circular.

It snickered once again before coming out of the shadows. The light from a nearby lamppost fell on it, revealing its form to be a…cake. A floating, glowing, and snickering cake to be more exact. It even had arms and legs.

“Three…two…one…” it whispered gleefully, “…BANZAI!”

Something hurtled out of the air next to it and crashed into the shop window, sending glass flying everywhere and setting off the alarm.

“FREE THE SWEETS!” it shouted, waving its stick-like arms frantically. It was then revealed that the shop was a bakery. Inside, things started floating and then zoomed out to hover next to the cackling cake. “BWAHAHAHAHAHA! Now I can conquer the world!”

“With sweets?” Five dark shapes appeared. “Dude, that’s totally original but doesn’t make sense.”

The five figures were revealed to be the Teen Titans, superheroes of Jump City. Robin, the boy wonder with spiky black hair and a mask, was in the middle; Starfire, an alien with reddish-orange hair, stood next to him; Cyborg, a half-human half-robot combo stood on Robin’s other side; Beast Boy, the shape-shifter and the one who had spoken, stood next to Starfire; Raven was the dark and silent member of the Titans and was floating above them all.

“What are you?” Robin asked.

“It’s a cake,” Beast Boy supplied helpfully.

“I see that, Beast Boy,” Robin said. “What’s its name, though?”

“I AM THE CAKE GHOST!” the sweet declared. “BEHOLD MY AWESOME POWER AT MAKING OTHER PEOPLE SICK!”

There was brief silence.

“I think that was the worst line I’ve heard a villain use,” Cyborg finally said.
“Even my jokes aren’t that bad!” Beast Boy said.

“What is a ‘ghost,’ Robin?” Starfire inquired.

“Ghosts don’t exist, Starfire,” Robin answered.

“Then what is that?” Raven said in a dry voice. “It’s a floating cake. There aren’t a lot of options to pick from.”

“FEAR MY POWER!” the Cake Ghost cackled, bombing the small group of five with its sweets. Robin snapped into action. “Titans, GO!”

The Teen Titans sprang into action. Starfire took off into the air, green orbs forming around her hands; Robin jumped in with a staff whirling in circles over his head; Cyborg ran ahead with his right arm transforming into a cannon; Beast Boy transformed into a raven and fluttered next to Starfire; and Raven stayed behind, preferring to watch for now.

“CAKE! BWAHAHAHA!” The Cake Ghost kept throwing sweets at the approaching superheroes. “FEEL SICK!”

Robin leapt up high and attempted to smash it with his staff. It would’ve worked splendidly if his staff hadn’t slid through it like it was butter.

“What the—?” Robin fell to the ground and performed a quick flip to end up on his feet. “What happened?”

“Beast Boy! Heads up!” Cyborg called, his arm cannon glowing.

With a loud caw, the raven Beast Boy had become veered straight up, leaving the Cake Ghost vulnerable to Cyborg’s sonic cannon.

“Boo-yeah.” Cyborg grinned as his sonic cannon fired up. It started whirring as the power built to a maximum. Suddenly, a loud noise signaled it had fired.

Everyone waited expectantly for the attack to show. Nothing happened. One could’ve heard crickets chirping.

Beast Boy changed back to normal as he landed. “Dude, is your cannon defective?”

“No.” Cyborg looked inside it. “Hey!” He glared up at the Cake Ghost. “Why you—”

“BWAHAHAHA!” the Cake Ghost cut him off. “CAKE RULES!” The Cake Ghost threw another sweet right in Cyborg’s face.

“It blocked it with cake,” Raven said. “And it fired.”

“So?” Cyborg tried to clean it out.

“ Doesn’t that mean it should”—the tart the Cake Ghost had stuffed in it suddenly exploded in Cyborg’s face—“explode?” Raven finished.

“Friend, are you all right?” Starfire asked anxiously.

“Oh, I’m all right; but it’s not gonna be when I’m through with it!” Cyborg’s face was red.
“Anyone know where Robin is?” Beast Boy inquired.

A loud yell answered his question. “Hyah!” Robin had jumped from the bakery’s roof to attack the Cake Ghost.

“There goes our surprise attack,” Raven commented.

Robin hit the ghost head on...before it dissolved into a bluish see-through form. He fell straight through it and landed on the ground face-first.

He got to his elbows. “How’d it do that?”

“CAKE IS THE ULTIMATE WEAPON!” The Cake Ghost showered Robin with sweets before disappearing.

“Where’d it go?” Cyborg whirled around in a circle.

“It has vanished!” Starfire cried, her hands glowing again.

“Beast Boy the owl is on the job.” Beast Boy morphed into a barn owl and looked around with huge, tawny eyes.

“I can’t see it but I can sense it,” Raven said.

Robin got up, covered from head to foot in sweets. “Beast Boy?”

Beast Boy morphed back. “I can’t see *anything* about it. It’s not even in the shadows.”

Robin turned to the cloaked teen. “Raven?”

“It is here,” Raven said simply.

“But where?” Cyborg scanned the night sky.

“RIGHT HERE!” All five superheroes whirled around to see the Cake Ghost materialize out of thin air.

“How’d it *do* that?” Beast Boy gaped.

“FEEL SICK!” Something exploded from under the Cake Ghost’s floating form and into the teens, throwing them backwards.

Robin slammed into a lamppost; Starfire crashed into a clothing store; Beast Boy into a wall; Cyborg got stuck onto a car; and Raven blew into another building.


There was silence among the stuck teens.

Then Beast Boy finally spoke. “Anyone else feel stupid ‘cause we got beat by a cake?”

What does this mean, Robin?” Starfire asked, emerging from the store, her hair caked with a dark mass.

Robin’s eyes narrowed as he broke free from the lamppost. “Something’s wrong.”
“Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* also played a large part in riling up the colonists. He stated that it was simply ‘common sense’ for the colonists to be free from Britain…” Mr. Lancer was once more in one of his droning speeches. And, as per to tradition, almost everyone was asleep or in a daze.

But one thing that was out of the norm was Daniel Fenton, or Danny Phantom. The raven-haired sixteen-year-old was paying extreme attention to the bald teacher’s lecture. Even his friends weren’t paying attention. Samantha Manson, or Sam, was doodling aimlessly in her notebook and Tucker Foley, mayor of Amity Park, was secretly beeping around on his PDA.

Mr. Lancer turned back to the class at the end and sighed once he saw the state they were in. “*Common Sense, people!*”

Everyone jumped. Dash Baxter, school bully and jock, dropped the pen he had been hugging during his nap.

“*Can anyone* tell me who wrote *Common Sense*?”

Danny raised his hand much to everyone’s amazement.

Mr. Lancer himself raised an eyebrow. “Yes, Mr. Fenton?”


“Th-that is correct, Mr. Fenton.” Mr. Lancer looked slightly dumfounded, but also pleased. “Very well. Now, who here knows what the Minute Men were? Mr. Baxter, perhaps?”

Danny ducked his head, trying his hardest not to laugh as Dash stammered his way through the answer. He would’ve answered the question himself, but Mr. Lancer had called on Dash, leaving him free to enjoy the show.

“They’re, uh, men…who, er, were a…minute tall?” Dash blurted.

Mr. Lancer sighed at Dash’s stupidity as Danny did his best to stifle his laughs. “That is not correct. Minute Men were men who were supposed to be ready for battle at a minute’s notice.”

Dash scowled. “How was I supposed to know that?” he muttered. “They’re called *Minute Men*!”

Just then, the bell rang, signaling that it was time for everyone to jump up and make a mad stampede for the exit. Danny and his friends were only slightly slower, not wanting to be run over.

“Don’t forget your homework, people!” Mr. Lancer called over the din. “Pages four-fifty to four-sixty-five! Pop quiz tomorrow so make sure you read!”

Cue the groans and dark mutterings. Some stopped to note this down, but the rest just kept on barging out. Danny and his friends were at the end, taking their time.

“Did he forget that a pop quiz is supposed to be a surprise?” Tucker whispered to Danny.

Danny shrugged, not particularly caring. “At least we know.”

“Point.” Sam smiled and slipped her hand into Danny’s. “Since when do you pay attention?” she teased. “Should we expect some sort of calamity to happen?”

“Yeah. Don’t you normally sleep in class?” Tucker smirked.

“Come off it, guys.” Danny rolled his eyes. “There weren’t any ghosts last night so I was actually
able to sleep.”

“No ghosts?” Sam sounded incredulous. “Seriously?”

“Seriously. It’s like they’re all on holiday or something.”

“But it’s Tuesday,” Tucker said. “Shouldn’t they take Sunday off?”

“This is just weird,” Sam said. “Not even the Cake Ghost?”

“Not even the Cake Ghost,” Danny replied. “And that guy’s always around.”

Sam frowned. “ Weird. Have you talked to Valerie about this?”

Danny shot her a look. “What’s she supposed to know? She’s still in that wheelchair. Besides, I don’t want to worry her.”

“She’ll still want to know,” Tucker said.

“It’s not her problem,” Danny insisted. “I need to figure out what’s going on. It’s like you said, Sam.”

“Speaking of weird,” Tucker added, “it’s weird that I’m getting reports of missing furniture. One minute it’s there, and the next it’s gone.”

“Furniture thieves?” Danny suggested.

“Not unless they can cart away a whole fence in five minutes without anyone spotting them.”

The trio was now outside in the bright, pre-autumn weather.

It had been relatively two weeks since the showdown between Danny and his future self and repairs were mostly done. Once the trouble had been taken care of, Danny had expected the ghosts to return to their old, antagonistic selves. But much to his surprise, there had not been many attacks.

Sure, for the first week or so there had been some of Skulker, Technus, the Box Ghost, and of course, the Cake Ghost and some of the Lemonade Ghost, too. The Pumpkin Ghost hadn’t been seen at all but that wasn’t very consoling for Amity Park’s favorite ghost fighting teen since the Cake Ghost gave him more trouble by showing up every other hour. But anyway, as of late there had been few to no ghost attacks at all, leaving Danny Phantom with an empty plate and plenty of time.

And speaking of time…

“How’s Clockwork doing with that thermos?” Tucker whispered to Danny. He was whispering because Danny still hadn’t revealed the ghost’s identity to the public. All they knew was that the ghost had been highly dangerous and that Danny Phantom had taken care of it.

“Do you think I take off every day and ask?” Danny retorted. “I’m sure it’s fine.”

“You never did tell us how you’re doing,” Sam said. “What with always talking to reporters or kicking the ghosts back to the Ghost Zone.”

“I’m fine.” Danny shrugged.

“I thought we were past all this secrecy!” Sam hissed. “I thought you keeping the last fight with him from us was the last of this! Why are you still holding back on us, Danny?”
“Whoa, whoa!” Danny put up his hands, a gesture of peace. “Look, Sam. I’m not really holding anything back from you. Honestly and sincerely, I’m fine. I was - to put it mildly - really upset that he had the audacity to dump you all in the future and tie you the boiler again but beyond that, I’m fine.”

Sam backed off slightly but there was still a glint of suspicion in her lilac eyes. “I mean mentally. How did fighting him affect you mentally?”

Danny was silent for a moment. “Well, he said slowly, “he did try to play around with my head a bit. And the key word is ‘try.’ He didn’t get very far with me ’cause I managed to defeat him. If it had gotten through to me…well”—he smiled soberly—“you guys wouldn’t be standing here.”

“And?” Sam pressed. “That’s not everything, Danny.”

“And I’ve decided that he has nothing to do with me anymore,” Danny continued. “I’m not turning into him. But even though I’ve decided that…I’m still afraid of him.”

“But that’s—” Sam started.

“Let me finish.” Danny put up a finger and waited for Sam to quiet. He went on. “I meant that I’m scared of him like I’m scared of Pariah. I’m not scared of turning into him anymore.”

Sam grinned. “Jazz’ll be happy.”

Danny frowned for a moment. “You didn’t!”

“You wouldn’t listen to her so she asked us,” Tucker said for Sam, since she was laughing too hard. “She’ll be happy to hear that you’re in a healthy state of mind. She’s been really worrying about you.”

“Greeaat.” Danny rolled his eyes upwards and smiled. Inwardly, though, he was feeling twinges of guilt. He hadn’t entirely told them the truth.

The fight between Phantom and Danny had been violent. Especially after the evil ghost had found out that he no longer needed Danny to exist. Both ghosts had given it their all but Danny had finally managed to overcome Phantom with the aid of his parents’ new and untested weapon, the Specter Power Eliminator, similar to the Plasmius Maximus in more ways than one.

But his evil self had left one last nasty parting remark.

“Just because I don’t need you anymore to exist doesn’t mean you’re scot-free, Danny. You can turn evil.

“And you know it’s true. Deep inside, you’re scared of me. You’re scared of knowing what you could be. Knowing that one bad choice could be your downfall.”

That alone he could’ve pushed off but then there was the matter of the other ghost…

Flashback:

Danny gave a gasp of surprise, tripped over his chair as he tried to retreat, and fell on his butt, now looking up at the girl in shock. Had she teleported?

“You’re scared,” she said matter-of-factly, her voice sounding even stranger in the Specter Speeder.
“No. You shocked me,” Danny said truthfully.

“No of me,” she said. “Of **him.**”

Danny froze, his mouth open in shock. He swallowed and managed to say, “Why would I be scared of...him?”

She looked slightly amused. “You don’t want to change.”

“Ch-change into what?”

“But you’ve already changed,” she added.

“N-no, I—”

“You can’t stop it,” she said. “It’s already done.”

“B-but that can’t—” Danny tried to say.

“If you want to find them,” she went on, ignoring Danny, “you know where to look.”

“—that can’t be – er, what?” Danny jumped from one sentence to the next, gaping at the new turn of the conversation. “How would I know where to look?”

“You do,” she answered. Her form started to fade.

“W-wait!” Danny cried. “What did you mean that I can’t stop it?”

She continued to fade. “You can’t. It’s already done.” Her voice echoed as she disappeared entirely.

*End Flashback*

The girl alone had been disconcerting enough. With the rapid change from asking him if he wanted to play dolls to warning him that he already changed, Danny hadn’t managed to adjust and his brief peace had been shattered. If it could even have been called peace...

Now, Danny was no longer sure whether or not he would ever turn into Phantom. He wasn’t sure of anything anymore. He had promised his friends, family, and teacher that he would never turn into that monster, but Phantom’s words kept poisoning his mind.

In his darkest hours, he kept entertaining the notion that Phantom *was* right and that even though his future self no longer needed Danny to exist, he could still turn into something evil and despicable. But during times like these, when he was around with his friends and having fun, he could almost forget all that had happened and shove it in the back of his head. Almost.

But then there was the matter of the disappearing ghosts to tend to...

*Chapter End Notes*

If you're wondering why and how the Cake Ghost defeated the Teen Titans, don't forget
that most of the time on the show, they almost always get defeated by the bad guy(s). It isn't until the second fight that they defeat them. That's why the Cake Ghost defeated them. That, and the fact that its powers took them completely by surprise.
“Yo, Robin, you sure you’re not just making a mountain out of a molehill?” Cyborg asked the silent team leader.

“Yes. I’m sure.”

Both Titans were still covered with cake, the remnants of their fight with the Cake Ghost. And they were also walking down a hall in Titan’s Tower. Just as they reached the end of it, an automatic door slid open, revealing their living room/kitchen area.

“Don’t you think this could wait until after a shower?” Cyborg said.

“You go if you have to,” Robin replied. “I need to check something.”

“If you’re looking for the floating cake in our database, I can already tell you that you won’t find it in there,” Cyborg said.

“It’s not that. I’m getting the feeling that something’s up,” Robin said.

Both of them were in front of a large monitor that normally served as their TV. A huge control panel stretched out under it. This was where Robin pressed a button, causing the screen to flicker to life.

Cyborg waited behind him. “Like what?”

“At this point I’m not entirely sure.” Robin flicked through sites quickly, leaving the monitor a blur of color.

“Then what are you looking for?” Cyborg swatted away an errant fly.

“That…Cake Ghost was unusual. I’ve never seen anything like it,” Robin mused.

“So what if he’s new to the neighborhood? We meet new villains every day,” Cyborg pointed out.

“I know,” Robin answered. “But still…a ghost? We don’t get many of those.”

“We don’t get many Beast Boys either,” Cyborg said. “And thank God for that. I don’t know how many stupid wisecracks I can take.”

Something popped out of midair next to Cyborg. “I heard that! My jokes aren’t that bad!” It was Beast Boy, having morphed back from the fly. He was also decked out in a new outfit – which was the same as before.

“You know what I mean.” Robin drew up a map of Jump City. “Not only did he call himself a ghost, he had all the attributes and more.”

“Controlling sweets is a ghost attribute?” Beast Boy wondered. “Who knew?”

“Well, now we know who kept breaking into all those bakeries for the last so many nights,” Cyborg said.

“The problem is that we don’t know anything about ghosts,” Robin said, ignoring their comments. “We know they can fly, be invisible to the naked eye, and phase through things. What we don’t know are their offensive capabilities, if any. But from seeing this Cake Ghost – if he is a ghost – we
know they can fight if they want to. We just need to know their abilities.”

“I thought ghosts were generally intangible,” Cyborg objected. “I know this ghost we fought earlier could fight by tossing sweets, but aren’t they normally intangible and impervious to harm?”

“This ghost was solid,” Robin said confidently. “Solid until it became intangible.”

Cyborg looked slightly skeptical. “How do you know that? Nothing hit him!”

“He looked solid, right?” Both Cyborg and Beast Boy nodded. “It was only when I attacked him that his form changed, becoming see-through. That means he can turn intangible voluntarily,” Robin explained.

“Off the record, why are we calling a cake ‘him?’” Beast Boy asked. “Cakes don’t have genders.”

“And they don’t talk either, Beast Boy,” Robin said. “He sounded like a man”—Beast Boy snickered—“so I dubbed him ‘him.’”

He then realized they had gone off-track. “Regardless of that, I’m saying we don’t know anything about them.”

“And how does this tie in with your earlier statement?” Cyborg queried.

“It really doesn’t,” Robin admitted. “It’s just a feeling I have.”

“And you should trust your instincts,” a new voice said. All three turned to see a clean Raven walking down the steps. The hooded teen approached them.

“Do you think something’s up, Raven?” Robin asked.

“I’ve been sensing some erratic energy as of late,” Raven said. “Besides that and the floating cake, I haven’t seen anything odd.”

“You can’t base an assumption off of that,” Cyborg said once she had finished.

“I can base an assumption off of my own feelings,” Robin insisted. “I’ve been right before.”

“And you’ve been wrong. What about that time when you thought you were seeing Slade and he wasn’t there after all?”

“That wasn’t a feeling. That was an assumption based on my own eyes,” Robin said flatly.

“He’s got a point,” Raven said.

“I just know something’s up,” Robin stated. “And I’m going to find out what.”

“Perhaps you should take a shower?” a small voice volunteered. All heads turned to see Starfire approaching their group by the monitor. “You do still look dirty.”

“Now she’s got a point,” Beast Boy said, grinning.

“I’ll take a shower later.” Robin turned back to the monitor. “Right now, I need to study these readings.”

“Which mean what?” Beast Boy peered over their leader’s shoulder. “It looks like a load of garbage to me.”
“Sniff it out,” Cyborg joked.

Just as Robin was about to explain, a loud alarm cut all hopes of a further conversation off. Red lights flashed in the living room/kitchen, alerting all the Titans to a new crime in the city.

“This can wait. Titans, go!” Robin dashed up the steps, flanked by the rest of the team. Not one of them noticed the flashing readings on the screen that suddenly jumped and settled again.

“Hey, Danny, you all right?” Tucker asked his friend.

Danny looked up, his hand on the doorknob of his house. He had been preoccupied in his thoughts. “Yeah. I’m fine. I was just thinking.”

Sam raised an eyebrow. “Must be some thinking.”

“Yes,” Danny said, not really thinking about his answer.

Both Sam and Tucker shared concerned looks. Danny had been acting strange ever since the fight. He’d been quieter, moody, and even spaced out now and then like he had just done. But both of them knew that if something was bothering him, he’d let them know. After that last big secret involving older Danny, he’d promised to not keep secrets like that indefinitely. They just had to hope that he’d tell them soon.

“You guys wanna come in, right?” Danny said, turning around. “It’s just been a bit crazy…”

“Sure, Danny!” Sam insisted. “You know that we know that your parents are obsessive about ghosts.”

Danny shook his head. “It’s not about ghosts. Although it leads back to ghosts…”

“What do you mean?” Tucker couldn’t recall Danny’s parents ever doing something that didn’t involve ghosts directly.

“Well… I meant to tell you guys two days ago but I forgot ’cause of the Box Ghost…”

“Just say it, Danny,” Sam said, her patience wearing thin.

“Em…” Danny still had a hand on the doorknob. While he was trying to put his dilemma into words, this turned out to be a bad thing as the door suddenly opened, jerking him inside. “Agh!”

“Be right back, Maddie!” Jack Fenton, a huge man in an orange jumpsuit, was calling over his shoulder. “I just have to—” He caught sight of his son lying at his feet. “Danny! Why are you lying on the floor like you fell in?”

“Because I did,” Danny said, getting up.

“Oh.” Jack had the grace to look embarrassed. “Sorry about that. But you weren’t doing anything so I didn’t know you were out here.”

“He was about to,” Sam said, sidestepping around Jack’s huge frame. She gave Danny a sharp look to which he responded with a shrug.

“What were you doing, Mr. F.?” Tucker asked, curiously.

“Well—” Jack started.
“Jack?” A hooded woman in a blue jumpsuit and with enormous red goggles covering her eyes appeared from the kitchen doorway. “You’re still – oh, hi, Danny!” She flipped off her hood, revealing reddish-brown hair. “Were there any ghosts at school, sweetie? We didn’t get any alarms so we assumed you’d taken care of them quickly.”

Danny frowned. “No ghosts? Not even one who poked his head through the portal to say ‘boo’?”

“Not one,” Madeline Fenton confirmed. She looked puzzled. “Are they all on vacation?”

Danny raised an eyebrow. “I thought ghosts didn’t take vacations ’cause they’re too busy wreaking destruction.”

“That’s normally what we’d say but we’ve been reevaluating our theories,” Maddie explained. “So we’re forming new ones.”

“But the ghosts are stealing furniture!” Jack said excitedly. “So we’ve been rigging alarms for furniture! See?” He threw Danny a lamp that he’d been holding in his hand, which he caught by reflex. Instantly, the whole thing glowed green and then exploded, leaving Danny with a shell-shocked expression.

Jack frowned. “That’s not supposed to happen.”

“Did you calibrate it to reject ecto-signatures?” Maddie asked sternly. “You know that we’re supposed to include human DNA, too! We’re not one hundred percent sure about the thieves being ghosts.”

Jack looked sheepish. “Oops.”

“Any particular reason why?” Sam asked.

Maddie looked at her soot-blackened son. “You didn’t tell them?”

Danny rubbed the back of his neck. “I meant to, but it kinda slipped my mind after the Box Ghost disappeared on me and I couldn’t find him.” He shrugged. “Sorry.”

“Was that what you were going to tell us?” Sam said to Danny.

“Yeah.” Danny smiled sheepishly.

“Why don’t you tell them then, sweetie?” Maddie encouraged, drawing up her hood. “Jack and I anyway have to run out to check on things.” She gave Danny a kiss on his head and left with her husband, leaving the three alone.

Sam raised an eyebrow at her boyfriend. “Well?”

Danny cleared his throat. “Remember when Tucker was complaining about the missing furniture? Well, my parents started getting calls about making specialized alarms so it wouldn’t happen anymore.”

“Why not call their security companies?” Sam interrupted.

“The people suspect ghosts, but also asked for something that’ll protect them from regular thieves,” Danny explained. “Mom and Dad are the only ones who can really make a shield for both. And that’s why I said earlier that it doesn’t really deal with ghosts directly.”

“I didn’t know your parents could get normal jobs,” Tucker admitted.

Sam rolled her eyes. “Joy,” she muttered sarcastically.

The three friends walked by Jazz’s door and stopped in front of Danny’s. Before he could open it, though, Jasmine Fenton appeared, smiling broadly.

“Hey, guys,” she said cheerfully. “How’d school go?”

“Boring,” all three answered.

“No ghosts again?”

“Other than the Box Ghost two days ago, I haven’t seen anything,” Danny confirmed.

“You didn’t catch him, did you?”

Danny frowned. “That’s the weird part. I was right on his tail when he suddenly rounded a corner and disappeared. I searched all over for him but couldn’t find him at all, which is really weird considering how he loves attention.”

“Did he go back into the Ghost Zone?” Tucker suggested.

The ghost boy snorted. “Since when do ghosts go back voluntarily?”

“You’ve got a point,” Tucker admitted.

“It’s a problem,” Jazz said. Then she changed the subject. “How’re you feeling, Danny?”

“Fine.”

Jazz shared a look with Sam and Tucker which Danny intercepted.

“And Sam and Tucker know I’m fine, too,” Danny said dryly, enjoying Jazz’s look of surprise. “You set ’em on me, didn’t you?” He was just confirming this since he already knew this from his friends.

“What can I say?” Jazz looked embarrassed. “You weren’t telling me anything and I was worried.”

“He really is fine, Jazz,” Sam said. “He has a perfectly sound mind.”

Danny shot her a glare, which she returned with a sweet smile.

“In that case, why don’t you guys go do your homework?” Jazz said, smiling again.

“We were gonna do that anyway,” Danny muttered, shoving his two friends into his room before closing the door in Jazz’s face.

They’d been working for a solid thirty minutes when Danny suddenly slammed his book shut and blurted out, “I just can’t do it.”

Sam looked up from her Calculus homework. “Can’t do what?”

“I just can’t focus on homework! I’ve been staring at the same stupid line of Wuthering Heights - which is completely boring - for the last ten minutes and not even absorbing it!”
“Maybe that’s because you’re holding your Calculus book,” Tucker commented, looking at the book his friend had shut.

“But I still can’t concentrate!” Danny said, waving his Calculus book around. “All I’ve been thinking about is those stupid ghosts!”

“What about them?” Sam sat up, crossing her legs. Her Calculus homework lay forgotten.

“I’ve been wondering what’s going on. Why they haven’t been showing up,” Danny said. “I need to know. Are they missing? If so, where? It’s just not normal!” he cried, frustrated.


Danny did, breathing heavily. “Sorry about that. I’m just so…worried!”

“If you’re so worried, why don’t you go into the Ghost Zone or something?” Sam suggested. “Maybe that’ll quell your fears.”

Danny stared at her, a light shining in his blue eyes. “That’s a great idea, Sam.”

“Really?” Tucker said. “In that case, when do you want to go?”

“How ‘bout now?” Danny grabbed both of his friends’ arms and dragged them to the door before they started protesting.

“Whoa, whoa, Danny!” Sam objected, stopping her boyfriend by placing a hand on his shoulder. “Don’t you think this is moving a bit fast?”

“Not really.” Danny shrugged. “Mom and Dad are out and probably not gonna be back in a while, Jazz is just studying in her room for some research paper, and we don’t have anything to do besides homework. What harm can it do to just go in and out of the Ghost Zone to check things out?”

Sam raised an eyebrow. “A lot.”

“The first time you went into the Ghost Zone you ended up being caught by Walker,” Tucker reminded him.

“But that was my first time!”

“And the time after that you freed the Fright Knight,” Sam went on.

“That was my first year as a half-ghost, remember?” Danny objected.

“And don’t forget the time when you got us lost ’cause you couldn’t read your map!” Tucker barreled over Danny.

“I admit, that was an accident…”

“Or the time when you went into the Ghost Zone to gather up all the ghosts as a human!” Sam continued.

“You were there, too, you know,” Danny argued.

“Or the time after that when you went into the Ghost Zone as Danny Phantom with a huge net, the ghosts broke out of it, turned on you, and then the Specter Speeder crashed into a mountaintop, leaving us to believe you were dead!” Tucker finished.
Danny waited for the next statement. “You done yet?”

“Yep,” Sam confirmed.

“You’re missing one,” Danny pointed out dryly.

“And which would that be?”

“The time when I went into the Ghost Zone to consult Frostbite about whether or not he’d seen my future self,” Danny said. “Nothing happened then. Oh. And nothing happened when we left Clockwork’s place either.”

“That’s two,” Tucker said.

“I know.” Danny brushed it off with a wave of his hand. “Anyway. I get your point, guys. The Ghost Zone’s dangerous and you shouldn’t go in there without help and blah blah blah.” He stopped kidding around and stared at his friends seriously. “But we have gone in there, remember? And if we leave a note—”

“That’ll work,” Sam interrupted, rolling her eyes.

“—they’ll know where we went,” Danny continued, ignoring her interruption. “I need to know this, guys. Amity Park has never gone this long without ghost attacks before. And it isn’t even Christmas!”

“No, it isn’t,” Tucker agreed. “We’d know from your attitude.”

Danny glared at him. “The point is that we’ve got experience in going into the Ghost Zone. When have Mom and Dad ever gone in the Ghost Zone?”

“Zero times,” Sam admitted.

“Exactly,” Danny said. “We’re the ones with the experience when it comes to these things. If it makes you feel better, we can take Jazz. But this’ll be her second time in the Ghost Zone…”

“Now that’s a great idea!” Tucker said. “Let’s go get her!”

A few minutes later, Tucker was knocking on the eighteen-year-old’s door. Another minute later and it was opened by the reddish-orange-haired teenager.

“Jazz, we’d like you to come into the Ghost Zone with us,” Danny said immediately before Jazz could open her mouth.

Jazz opened her mouth, shut it, and opened it again. “Wh-what?”


“Oh!” Jazz looked slightly embarrassed. “Ah, sorry. Um…why not?”

“That’s great!” Danny beamed.

Both Sam and Tucker shared concerned looks behind their friend’s back. He was acting more cheerily than usual and neither of them could figure out why. Was it because he was going into the Ghost Zone? Or because he was finally going to do something that he liked to do?

‘Come to think of it, his weird mood started after the ghosts disappeared gradually,’ Sam thought.
'Does hunting ghosts make him happy?' Tucker wondered. ‘He’s always been complaining how he can never get enough sleep or do enough schoolwork.’

‘Maybe it’s the normality of it?’ both of them thought simultaneously.

Meanwhile, Danny was bugging Jazz while she was trying to get her stuff gathered up fast enough. Her only excuse was that they couldn’t go into the Ghost Zone unprepared.

“We’ve done that tons of times, Jazz,” Danny said impatiently.

“What?”

“Dude, what is that?” Beast Boy sounded absolutely stunned and astonished. “Is that…a floating TV?”

“TVs don’t float,” Cyborg said confidently.

“Then what am I seeing?” Beast Boy pointed to the floating TV that was hovering by the ceiling. “And am I imagining all that stuff clamping itself onto it?”

“It’s a floating TV,” Robin said matter-of-factly.

“That’s what I said!” Beast Boy shouted, waving his arms like a hummingbird.

“And it’s got feelings,” Raven said.

“Perhaps it is a friend?” Starfire suggested hopefully.

“BWAHAHAHA!” The TV screen flashed green and a maniacal face with black sunglasses appeared on it. It only had the sunglasses, nose, and mouth displayed though.

“Guess not,” Robin said, whipping out some circular disks.

“I am Technus!” the TV face announced. “Master of all things electronic, wizard master of gadgetry, ghost master of science, and the hottest TV face to exist since Lassie!”

There was silence after that announcement.

“Wasn’t Lassie a dog?” Beast Boy said finally.

“And you’re just a regular TV,” Cyborg added. “Nothing special about that.”

Suddenly, all the gadgetry and electronics that had accumulated on the TV flashed green, blinding everyone. When it vanished, they all saw a towering giant made out of electronics, with the original TV serving as a face.

“What is it?” Robin asked.

“It’s a ghost,” Raven said. “It called itself ‘ghost master of science.’”

“But ghosts don’t—” Cyborg started.

“Exist?” Technus interrupted. “Ah, but blue child, I am a ghost!”

“My name’s Cyborg!” Cyborg protested.
“Are you a friend of the Cake Ghost?” Starfire queried.

Technus’s whole body flickered with electricity. “The Cake Ghost? Why would I be friends with that imbecile?”

“I guess it wouldn’t be smart to mention that the guy completely kicked our butts,” Beast Boy murmured. “If the cake’s an imbecile, I don’t wanna know what this guy is.”

“I am Technus!” the TV face said, having heard Beast Boy’s last sentence. “Ghost master of science, and wizard master of gadgetry! I am also—”

“The master of long-winded introductions,” Robin said, narrowing his eyes. “And you’re just about to get frozen!”

Technus cackled. “What can you hope to do to me? The Cake Ghost defeated you!”

The Titans shot their smallest member glares.

“Oops,” Beast Boy said weakly, drawing in on himself. “I’ll just, uh, turn into a T-Rex?” To prove his point, he morphed into a green tyrannosaurus and roared.

“Interesting!” Technus’s huge fingers tapped his “chin” thoughtfully. “Have you ever thought about becoming a zoo animal?”

An anime mark appeared on Beast Boy’s head and he roared again, evidently mad about the ghost’s remark. He jumped towards Technus, fully intending to sink his huge teeth into the giant’s arm. The only problem was that wires sprouted out of Technus’s chest, wrapping up the green T-Rex completely and leaving Beast Boy as a mummy with only his eyes peeking out. Technus whirled around in several circles, Beast Boy following and becoming dizzier by the second. Then, the wires snapped and the green dinosaur was sent flying into a wall, which burst open and revealed the street.

Beast Boy morphed back into his normal form, the wires becoming a huge mass on the ground covering a very small lump.

“Beast Boy!” Starfire called out in alarm.

“He’ll be fine!” Robin said. “Titans, go!”

The Titans ran forward in their usual attack style, minus Beast Boy, who was currently shaking off the wires and clearing his head.

“Azarath Metrion Zinthos!” Raven’s hands glowed black and a few other articles in the store glowed black, too, floating in the air. Eyes visible as a black light under her purple hood, she floated about two feet off the ground as she waved her arms, sending the items she had possessed towards the gigantic robot.

They crashed into it, not causing much harm besides denting the electrical appliances Technus had used for his body.

“Hey!” Technus objected. “That’s brand new!”

“That’s ’cause you stole it!” Cyborg shouted, firing his sonic cannon up.

“Hey, Cyborg!” Robin cocked several small disks in his fingers, raising an eyebrow at his teammate. “You got the sonic?”
Cyborg grinned broadly. “Oh yeah! Let’s go!”

Without another word, the two Titans ran along parallel sides of an aisle, jumped onto a rack, and leapt up into the air, crossing in midair and firing their sonic cannon and disks respectively.

What happened next was a huge explosion that rocked the entire electronics store to its core and blew out several windows.
“So, everything accounted for?” Danny asked, already in the Specter Speeder and peering out at the others. “Come on.”

“In a minute, Danny,” Jazz said, sifting through the contents of her navy blue backpack. “Okay. We’ve got everything.” She slid into the seat next to Danny. “I call shotgun.”

“That’s where I usually sit!” Sam objected.

“Who says?”

“I say!”

“Guys!” Danny interrupted a potential argument. “Can we go before either one of your parents calls up? Mom and Dad aren’t going to be gone forever.”

Tucker hopped into the seat behind Jazz and leaned over her shoulder. “Ready.”

Sam rolled her eyes at Tucker’s position and was just about to get in when a dark and morbid tune rang out. She sighed. “Sorry. It’s my phone.” Slinging her backpack off her back, she fished out a small purple cell phone with a spider emblazoned on the back of it. “Hello?”

The other three could hear a small high-pitched voice emit from the speaker and nearly burst Sam’s eardrum. The Goth held her cell phone away from her ear, grimacing dramatically. “Sorry,” she mouthed.

Danny shrugged and waited, fidgeting at the controls. He was still in human form.

A minute later, Sam clapped her cell shut and gave the others an apologetic glance. “Sorry, guys. My mom’s freaking because I’m not back at home sweet home. She’s been getting all riled up with the disappearing stuff and thinks I’ll be next.” She raised an eyebrow at her boyfriend. “Is that okay?”

Danny nodded. “Can’t be helped. Tomorrow maybe?”

“That’ll work after school,” Sam agreed. “See you.” She waved at Tucker and Jazz and dashed up the stairs. “Don’t go into the Ghost Zone without me, Danny!” she called down when she was out of sight.

“Why would I?” he muttered, reluctantly phasing through his side of the Specter Speeder. He looked hopefully at Tucker. “Do you think you could—”

At that moment, Tucker’s cell phone gave off an upbeat cheerful tune with a perky voice singing something neither Jazz nor Danny could understand. Tucker looked rather embarrassed and answered it as quickly as he could. “Hello?”

“Great.” Danny sidled over to Jazz’s side of the Speeder. “You free for tonight?”

“You don’t have anything to do?” Jazz raised an eyebrow disbelievingly.

“The ghosts took up all my time,” Danny explained. “Now that they’re gone I don’t have anything to do besides homework and that’s almost done.”

Jazz opened her mouth but was cut off by Tucker. “Danny, mayor emergency came up at the office.
Sorry about that. I’ll see you tomorrow, ’kay?”

“Have fun,” Danny said, grinning.

“You kill me,” Tucker said in mock complaint. “Ciao.” He gave a quick wave and followed in Sam’s footsteps.

“Jazz?” Danny turned to his older sister.

“I’ve got a really big report coming up,” Jazz said apologetically. “I was already studying for it when you dragged me out for a trip to the Ghost Zone.”

“Oh. Okay.” Danny shrugged, managing a smile. With nothing else to do, he figured that he would soon sink back into his depressing thoughts. “I’ll…just stay down here…and clean up.” He nodded towards a lab table filled with overflowing beakers of green stuff.

Jazz placed a hand on her hip and narrowed her eyes. “You’re not thinking of going into the Ghost Zone alone, are you?”

“No,” Danny said hastily.

“Promise me, Danny, that you won’t do anything stupid like going into the Ghost Zone alone,” Jazz said seriously.

“Jazz…”

“Promise, Danny.”

Danny sighed. “Fine. I promise.” He put up his hands. “It’s not like I would’ve gotten anywhere without you guys.”

“Now I can sleep easier,” Jazz murmured, shooting Danny a stern look. “You promised, little bro. No going in there alone, in your ghost form, or in the Specter Speeder.”

Danny put a hand over his heart. “Promise, Jazz. I’ll just stay and clean up.”

“Good night then. I’ll see you at dinner.” Jazz placed a kiss on Danny’s head which promptly earned her a “eww” from her brother. She smiled and went upstairs.

Danny watched her go and turned to look back into the swirly greens of the Fenton Ghost Portal. His eyebrows furrowed as he contemplated it. ’Really. Where did the ghosts go?’ He sighed and picked up a rag and a bucket from next to a waste bin. ‘I promised.’

Just as he was starting to wipe up some of the green goo that he really didn’t want to think about, a sudden release of blue air from his lips caused him look up. “A ghost? Finally!” He transformed into Danny Phantom via two bluish-white rings. “Wow. Never thought I’d see the day when I was glad to see a ghost.”

“Whelp.” It was Skulker with guns blazing. “Doing menial chores?”

“Sure!” Danny floated up to meet the hunter. “After all, there’s only so much a guy can do with the ghosts on leave. Where have you been anyway?”

“The ghosts aren’t on leave,” Skulker said. “They’ve been disappearing.”

“Is that so?” Danny cocked an eyebrow.
“It is.” Skulker fired up an ecto-gun where his arm used to be. “But you really won’t be interested for much longer.”

“We’ll see about that!” Danny let loose a ghost ray, which exploded in mid-air upon meeting Skulker’s attack. He zoomed in close for an upper cut, but was kicked aside by Skulker’s metal boot, not having seen or sensed it. “Ow!”

Skulker quickly released another blast from his gun, hitting Danny in the chest and pushing him through the portal and into the Ghost Zone.

Danny flipped around to meet his enemy, realizing where he was. ‘Oh great. Jazz is going to kill me.’

“You’re calling him a ‘he?’” Cyborg asked.

“This time I can actually tell the gender,” Raven replied. “And you called him a ‘him.’”

“Quiet!” Robin ordered, looking into the wrecked electronics store. “I hear something.”

Then followed a large explosion that threw the still woozy Beast Boy back, whipped off Raven’s hood, revealing a purple head of hair and purple eyes with a stone set in the forehead, and pushed the other three back.

“You hear something? How about seeing it!” Cyborg cried, raising an arm to cover his face from the wreckage.

“BWHAHAHAHA!” a loud cackle came from within the store. “I, Technus, master of all electronics and ruler of computer wizardry have emerged unscathed!” All the Titans gaped at the sight of Technus’s form stepping out from the wreck of the store. “Who’s your Daddy?”

“My’s evil,” Raven answered, even though she knew the question was rhetorical. “And you’re certainly not one I want. Azarath Metrion Zinthos!” She whipped her hand around and a car flew into Technus’s TV face.

The ghost turned into a bluish transparent form and the car flew straight through the TV and landed in the pile of debris behind him. The face displayed on the screen grinned even wider.

“You’ll have to be faster than that, witch girl!” Technus taunted, raising a hand in turn. In his case, a pile of electrical devices glowed green and floated to surround his towering figure.

“That hurts,” Beast Boy said, having recovered enough so he could speak. “And I really hope he isn’t planning on doing what I think he’s doing with that stuff.”

“Doing what?” Starfire asked.

“Upgrading his form to the next level,” Beast Boy responded.
“I wasn’t going to, but that’s a great idea!” Technus declared. “You should be a tutor!”

All the Titans shot glares at Beast Boy, who looked nervous.

“Face my upgraded wrath!” Technus shouted to the heavens; all the green objects attached to his form, which started glowing green.

“I think this guy has a tendency to shout out what he’s doing next,” Cyborg said quietly to Robin.

“And now,” Technus was saying, “I have enough power to wipe out the entire city’s power supply! BWAHAHAHA!”

“He does,” Robin agreed, narrowing his eyes to inspect Technus’s new form. “But that makes it all the easier for us since we know what he’s going to do next.”

Technus reached out for a power line and clasped the wires. They sparked violently and the energy streamed into the pile of electronics that made up the ghost’s body. Bars appeared on almost all of the appliances and streamed up until 100% was marked on each one of them. Technus’s face reappeared on the TV, grinning evilly.

“Okay. Did he say he was going to do that next?” Cyborg asked, watching as Technus fed on some more power.

“No.” Robin grabbed a staff and whipped it out, twirling it several times. “Titans, GO!”

Robin ran forward and jumped on Technus’s shoe, which was made up of a Mercedes. He jammed his staff between a TV and a radio and bent backwards. The staff bent back with his weight, and when Robin released it, the built up momentum propelled him upwards to waist area.

As he started slowing down, Robin grabbed something else at his waist that was shaped as a bird. His index finger pressed a trigger and a grappling hook shot out from the tip, diving into a stereo and wedging into the crook between the stereo and a video recorder.

While Robin was making his way upwards the hard way, Starfire was flying straight up to Technus’s eye level and shooting star bolts. The green bolts crashed into various areas on Technus’s body and destroyed small, meaningless electronics.

“That stings!” Technus swatted at Starfire but the Tamaranean sped around his large, mechanical hand and shot eyebeams at the ghost. They hit the mark by cracking the TV screen. “Why, you!”

“Eep!” Starfire was then hit by a beam of electricity that Technus shot out of a frayed cable. She slammed into the ground and raised a huge dust storm, creating a mini-crater.

“Starfire!” Robin cried, seeing her fall out of the corner of his eye. “Aargh.” He gritted his teeth and dug into his tool belt to take out a screwdriver and a hammer. The screwdriver went into his mouth and he held the hammer in his right hand as he held onto Technus with his left. Robin brought the head down on the screen of a TV and shattered the glass.

He covered his eyes and looked up, trying to see if that small injury had done anything to hinder the ghost. Looking even grimmer upon noting that Technus hadn’t even noticed the injury, Robin now took it on himself to take apart a car that was appearing decidedly battered for being the “thigh” of the body.

Cyborg, meanwhile, was firing sonic beams after sonic beams from his cannon and not causing much damage aside from wrecking certain areas on Technus’s body near the head. Technus did
notice these injuries on his person and revenged himself on Cyborg by shooting electrical beams from various cables that were situated on him. Cyborg had his work cut out for him dodging those and shooting back in turn.

Raven wasn’t having much better luck since all the stuff she kept throwing at Technus either bounced off harmlessly, got fried, or joined the mass on the ghost’s body. A water hydrant she had thrown into the middle of his back had gotten stuck, changed colors to green, and started shooting water at her even though there shouldn’t have been any water in it. She was then thoroughly drenched and disgruntled.

“Cyborg!” Beast Boy morphed back from the elephant he had been. “Try hitting it from the feet!”

“What good’s that gonna do?” Cyborg yelled back, still firing his sonic cannon. He had half an eye on his power levels.

“It’s simple physics! Knock out the feet and the body follows!” Beast Boy explained loudly, running up besides Cyborg.

“That makes sense. But…I can’t do it with Robin in the middle of that,” Cyborg said, pointing to a spot about halfway up the robot. Their leader was still dismantling the car. “Besides, if he fixes that car the way he’s aiming to we might have an easier time of defeating this guy.”

“I’ll help,” Beast Boy decided, morphing to a raven and taking off.

“How are you going to help? You can’t even fix my car without blowing up the engine!”

“Would you let him fix your car?” Raven landed besides Cyborg.

“No,” Cyborg admitted. “But it was an example.”

“He’s going to help by blowing up the car,” Raven said.

“Well, that makes sense,” Cyborg agreed, watching the green raven join Robin on the ghost’s body. “I just hope he doesn’t explode Robin as well.”

‘Well, Jazz said I wasn’t to go into the Ghost Zone alone. I’m not alone so I guess I didn’t break her promise. But something tells me this wasn’t exactly what she had in mind.’ Danny fired off another ghost ray in Skulker’s direction, but the ghost hunter ducked and retaliated, meaning it was Danny who had to duck now. ‘Yeah. Probably not.’

“Submit, whelp!” Skulker demanded, firing a barrage of ecto-energy at the teen.

“Never, you fiend!” Danny cried valiantly, internally cringing at the phrasing he had used.

“Interesting choice of words,” Skulker commented, holding back for a moment.

“Interesting choice of action!” Danny fired an enormous ecto-blast at Skulker’s torso and it burnt a hole straight through the machinery. “Maybe that’ll teach you to not stop attacking me!”

“My armor!” Skulker cried, amazed.

“That’s all?” Danny snorted. “No ‘I shall avenge my grievance!’ or ‘Prepare to die!’? Too bad.” His whole body glowed green and he disappeared to reappear instantaneously behind Skulker. “You won’t have a chance to do so.” He turned his hand intangible and shoved it into Skulker’s head,
pulling out a small green ghost with small arms and legs. “Pity. I thought you might’ve gotten a makeover.”

“Let me go!” the small Skulker squeaked. “I am Skulker!”

“Yeah, yeah.” Danny fried the rest of the suit and kicked the remnants into the distance. “Now, you have the option of staying here and doing nothing or flying away as fast as you can and escaping the rest of the nasty ghosts in here.”

“There are no nasty ghosts!” Skulker said, folding his miniscule arms. “They’ve all gone!”

“Where to?” Danny held the tiny ghost up to his face, a full foot away from his nose.

“No one knows!” Skulker said. “But you shall soon find out!”

“Why?” he asked.

“Because of her!” Skulker pointed behind Danny, grinning rather wickedly for such a small ghost.

Danny twisted his head and saw Ember floating behind him with her guitar strapped to her back. “Ember?”

“Drop him, dipstick,” Ember ordered.

“You’re still boyfriend and girlfriend?” Danny raised his eyebrow in disbelief. “Even though he’s absolutely minuscule?” He held up the ghost in question.

“I said drop him,” Ember repeated, bringing her guitar around.

“I’m really not in the mood for this,” Danny grumbled, shooting a look at the Fenton Ghost Portal. He sighed once he saw that he would have to go through Ember to get back. Jazz was so going to kill him.

“Too bad!” Ember strummed her guitar, which was now in the playing position and shot a pink fist at Danny.

“Watch it!” Skulker squeaked as Danny dodged to the side.

“I’ll watch it; tell your girlfriend to watch it!” Danny objected, flying the other way to avoid Ember’s wrath.

“Let me go and then she’ll watch it!” Skulker challenged.

“Hmm. Tempting but no,” Danny said, flying past purple doors and rocky ledges. “You’re the only ghost that I can actually hold and interrogate. And one that speaks properly, too.”

“There are other ghosts that talk!” Skulker protested.

“But you’re the only one that I can hold with one hand that talks properly.”

“Drop him, dipstick!” Ember called again.

“Get new lines!” Danny retorted.

“Let me go!” Skulker demanded.
“I already told you no,” Danny replied, annoyed.

“You asked for it!” Ember yelled.

Danny heard a loud noise presumably from Ember’s guitar strings. To avoid being pelted by unpredictable attacks, Danny dashed behind a purple door and watched several pink fists fly by.

“Your girlfriend’s got a temper,” Danny informed Skulker quietly, listening to Ember’s ranting.

“Only because you won’t put me down.”

“Answer me this: why haven’t the ghosts been attacking?”

Skulker’s minuscule form raised an eyebrow. “You always complain when we do.”

“And you never listen. So when you guys don’t show up there’s obviously a problem. Well?”

“We’re disappearing,” Skulker admitted. “At first it was only in your world that it happened so we stopped attacking. But it’s been happening here, too.”

Danny was silent for a moment. “Is that why I can’t hear Ember anymore?” The screaming from the upset rock star had disappeared.

“What?” Skulker squeaked, alarmed.

Danny peeked around the door but didn’t see the fiery-haired ghost anywhere. “Huh. She really is gone. Where to, I wonder?”

“Let me go!” Skulker commanded. “I must see!”

Skulker struggled so violently that Danny let him go. For a minute he watched the small ghost zip around before something from behind knocked into him forcefully. Taken completely off-guard, Danny hurtled forwards into the green nothingness.

His eyes widened when he saw the green start swirling and felt a vacuum-like force suck him in. Something again hit him from behind, but this time on the head.

The last thing he saw before blacking out was zooming colors and then a night sky.

“Beast Boy!” Robin looked up from breaking into the engine of the car he was attempting to hack into. “What are you doing here?”

Beast Boy morphed back into his normal form and grabbed onto some electronics next to Robin. “Helping you explode the car. You know my handy talents around them.”

“You explode them,” Robin said matter-of-factly.

“Isn’t that the point? Now try not to do anything and watch me at work.” Beast Boy morphed into something that Robin couldn’t see but then turned back. “Oh, and you might want to be somewhere far away when I’m done.”

Robin had no time to reply as Beast Boy vanished again. But he did take his teammate’s advice seriously and used the grappling device he had shot earlier to lower himself down. He was not a moment too soon for when he was only a foot above the ground the car he’d been working on exploded, dislodging his grappling hook and sending him free-falling the last twelve inches.
If he was worried about his friend there was no need as the changeling appeared next to him almost instantaneously.

“See?” Beast Boy placed both fists triumphantly on his hips and grinned. “I’m a master around cars.”

“But not the type that Cyborg admires.” Robin watched for Technus’s reaction to the loss of the car.

“What the heck is going on?” Technus shouted, looking down at his collapsing leg. “My leg!”

“And now your shoulder!” Cyborg shouted, too, shooting his sonic cannon. “Take that, ghost!”

His shot hit the mark and destroyed a huge stereo that had made up Technus’s right shoulder. The arm glowed green and dissembled into the separate components and crashed into the street, sparkling and crackling.

“Boo-yeah!” Cyborg crowed.

“NOOO!” Technus shrieked, pin-wheeling his remaining arm as he tried to stay upright. Unfortunately for him, he completely toppled over and shook the entire neighborhood of shops. “Ow!”

“He’s down!” Robin exclaimed. “Titans, go!”

“And do what?” Raven asked, restraining Robin from jumping forward by her words.

“Subdue him,” Robin answered, though he had no idea how to do so. “Somehow.”

“Get the TV maybe?” Beast Boy suggested.

“I shall do so,” Starfire volunteered, looking none the worse for having crashed into the street. She flew over to wrest free the TV that had served as Technus’s head.

“Careful, Star,” Cyborg warned. “He might still be conscious.”

Before Starfire could touch the TV, the whole mass of electronics glowed green. The green energy separated from the junk and collected above it to form a figure.

“Bwahahaha!” it cackled. The light died away to reveal a green-skinned man with a cape, sunglasses, and white hair that was slicked back in a “cool” look. “You cannot defeat me, Technus, so easily, children!”

“I thought it was a TV!” was all Beast Boy could say.

“He possessed them,” Raven said grimly.

“I am Technus!” Technus proclaimed. “Cower before my electronic wrath!” He lifted his hand, which was glowing green.

The Titans looked over their shoulders and saw that the power and telephone wires were wiggling like snakes. It was now completely dark save for the stars, moon, and Technus’s ghostly glow.

“That’s not good, is it?” Beast Boy asked, watching the wiggling wires warily.

“Robin?” Starfire waited for the boy wonder’s signal.

Robin dug around in his tool belt and came up with disks. “Let’s go!”
But before they could attack, Technus had struck, binding them with the glowing wires.

“Standing around debating does no one good, does it?” he taunted, grinning.

Raven’s eyes sparkled eerily. “Azarath Metrion Zinthos!”

The wires around her became black and burst, freeing her. She then enchanted a car and hurled it towards Technus. But all he did was raise a hand, a stereo stopping it in its tracks.

Raven reached for something else, but was stopped when the wires she had broken earlier wrapped around her ankles and electrocuted her.

“AAARGH!” Raven fell to the ground, momentarily senseless and twitching.

Technus cackled once more. “Now I, Technus, am free to rule this world!” He pointed to the bound Titans. “Watch me suck every last bit of power from this city!”

Laughing madly and floating high above the heroes’ heads, Technus summoned the power from every electrical device in the city.

Meanwhile, the Teen Titans could only watch as the wires that bound them crackled ominously.
“Uungh,” Danny groaned, rolling over. “My head.”

He curled up shortly, rubbing the back of his sore head. Then he slowly opened his eyes, remembering that he had been in the Ghost Zone. When he saw his surroundings he jerked into an upright position, ignoring the pain in his head.

“What the—?” Danny exclaimed, looking shocked and amazed. “Where on earth am I?”

He was no longer in the Ghost Zone or even in Amity Park. In fact, he had no idea what street he was on or what city he was in. Everything looked far more modern and shiny than laid-back Amity Park.

Confused and wary, Danny got to his feet, wondering how he’d gotten there from the Ghost Zone. Or maybe he was just imagining the whole thing and was lying unconscious in the Ghost Zone. But the wind nipping at his cheeks and the dirt in his scratches made him think otherwise. His dreams were usually nowhere this vivid – outside of his nightmares, of course, and this was nowhere near a nightmare. Yet.

But if this wasn’t a nightmare…where was he?

“An unknown area of the Ghost Zone that I stumbled across?” he muttered, inspecting his surroundings more closely. “But the sky isn’t green… And I’m not falling through the ground.” Danny looked down to prove his point.

He sighed wearily. “Jazz is so going to kill me. And Sam… Tucker, too, maybe.”

Still confused, Danny made his way down the street, curious about his whereabouts. He had never really been in such a big city before. His parents were normally so ghost-obsessed that they’d never gone anywhere outside of conferences with other ghost-obsessed scientists and he couldn’t tag along with them.

Danny had passed a closed restaurant when his familiar ghost sense went off. Not hesitating since no one else was around, he instantly transformed, on the look-out for the ghost. He took to the air when he didn’t see anything on the ground.

“Where’s the ghost?” Danny murmured, still not seeing anything. “It should’ve shown itself by now. They’re normally so eager to prove themselves…”

All his senses suddenly tingled and he found himself reflexively turning intangible as he felt and smelled the air behind him burning. Shocked, he saw a bolt of green lightning shoot through his chest and hit the cement below him. Danny whirled around and saw a large satellite dish which was crackling.

“Technology.” Danny mused, scrutinizing the area around him a bit better. “Bingo.” He smiled, pleased with himself as he found what he was looking for. “Technus.”

“Does this guy yell out his every move like an idiot?” Raven muttered to herself, bound to a lamppost after her most recent attempt at stopping Technus.

“And now every TV in this city is under my control!” Technus cackled like a maniac, attached by
large “pipes” to different commodities such as telephone wires and a broadcasting studio. He was still not in robot form but green streams of energy flowing from his hands ensured that he remained connected to the TVs and other items he had taken over.

“That’s getting annoying.” Raven’s bonds glowed black as she managed to successfully dispel them. She flew up behind Technus, gearing for another attack.

Her thoughts fell back to her friends, still bound. After she had recovered from being electrocuted, she had narrowly stopped Technus from squashing them. But before she could undo their bonds, the ghost had kicked her into the air with a car and across the city, away from them, before coming after her, deeming her the bigger threat. She had had no chance to go back, instead being occupied otherwise.

“The sky is at my command!” Technus boasted suddenly for seemingly no reason.

‘It hasn’t struck me down yet,’ Raven thought, summoning her dark powers. She whispered, “Azarath Metrion – aargh!”

Something had hit her from behind, striking her to the ground. It was a bolt of electricity from a nearby satellite dish. And for the second time that night Raven found herself paralyzed by the electricity coursing through her muscles.

“HA!” Technus had seen her now. “You can no longer attack me from the sky!” He was smirking widely. “No one can!”

“Wanna bet, Technus?” a new and unfamiliar voice asked. “I’m still floating here last time I checked.”

“What are you doing here?” Technus demanded, turning to the meet the figure floating above him.

Raven wearily raised her head and caught sight of a boy with snowy white hair in a black and white jumpsuit. He had unnaturally green eyes and seemed to be carrying a tool belt of sorts.

“Same thing as you are, I guess,” the boy said casually in answer to Technus’s question. Raven stiffened at the thought of a new enemy until he added, “Except I’m just hanging out and you’re going for city domination.”

“World domination!” Technus corrected.

“That so?” The boy raised an eyebrow. “And you intend to do that through the media? No offense, but I think you watch too many cartoons.” He paused for a moment. “Actually, that was an insult. Never mind.”

“Raven!” The Titan turned her head to see the others rush to her, having managed to free themselves. “Are you all right?”

“Fine.” Raven got to her knees, still a bit shaky. “Do you guys know who that kid is up there? Do we have him in the database? I’ve never seen him before.”

Cyborg looked up. “Not a clue, Robin?”

“If I knew him I would’ve told you,” Robin replied. “Besides, Technus is attacking him.” They saw Technus shoot a beam of light at the boy, who artfully dodged. “I say we wait and see what happens. If the other is a bad guy, we attack.”
“If we can’t defeat Technus and he can, how do we defeat him?” Beast Boy asked.

“We observe his fighting style and form strategies accordingly,” Robin responded instantly.

“And if he merely keeps dodging?” Starfire inquired.

“It means he’s passive and probably not an enemy,” Raven declared, on her feet now.

“We’re not making the same mistake we made last time,” Robin said firmly. “That cost us too much.”

“Hey, you!” A shout made them look up and they saw the white-haired boy staring at them. “Get out of the street! It’s dangerous!”

“For you, ghost child!” Technus swiped at him with a pile of wires but missed because he deftly moved out of the way. “You shall not stop me from sucking the power of this city and then connecting to every other city in the world!”

“Boxers or briefs?” the kid shot back much to the Titans’ bemusement.

“Br – none of your business!”

“Briefs? Seriously?” The teen cocked his head, looking amused.

“I thought I fixed that!” Technus appeared dismayed.

“Why did he inquire as to the ghost’s choice of undergarments?” Starfire asked curiously.

“They seem to know each other,” Robin observed.

“I think you’ve caught a bug!” the teen shouted, a grin flickering across his features. “Or did you downgrade? Was the mullet not cutting it for you? But you still have a mullet so I guess that’s not it…”

“Why you—!” Technus seemed too incensed to say anything coherent. “You will fry, ghost child!”

“I’d say ‘fry’, too, but I don’t do fire.” The “ghost child” shot something green out of his hands that hit Technus in the chest and pushed him backwards into a building.

“Nice,” Cyborg muttered appreciatively. “He’s got some power.”

“He’s another ghost, isn’t he?” Beast Boy guessed.

“Did the term ‘ghost child’ give that away?” Robin said sarcastically. “Now we know we can’t trust him. All the other ghosts have been dangerous so far.”

“Perhaps he is different,” Starfire objected.

Robin didn’t answer because at that moment Technus emerged from the building, looking angry. He raised his arms and various electronic items all around him lifted up into the air. But before he could do anything with them, the white-haired teen had shot dozens of small green orbs at the items, exploding all of them. The Titans were left scrambling for cover. When they were sure that the danger was over, they poked their heads out from their hiding places to watch the fight.

“I told you guys to move!” They saw Ghost Child glaring at them. “This isn’t a tourist attraction!”
“You should’ve caught me when you had the chance!” Technus succeeded in punching Ghost Child through a building by throwing a stereo at him. And by “through”, I mean the kid literally fell through the building.

“He’s a ghost,” Robin confirmed blandly, jumping out from behind a car. “There’s no doubt about it now.”

With that said, the Titans waited anxiously for his reappearance. Technus was still on the loose.

Danny had caught sight of a green-skinned floating figure with a large cape that was definitely Technus. No one else could have such an ugly mullet and horrible sunglasses. No wonder Jazz called him Sunglass Freak.

As he was approaching he saw a black figure behind Technus. Danny wondered if whoever it was was a ghost since he/she wasn’t glowing and was decked out in a uniform of sorts.

“The sky is at my command!” Technus shouted, raising both fists, green energy still streaming from them. He hadn’t noticed Danny yet since the halfa was invisible.

‘Really?’ Danny thought back to the satellite dish. ‘Well, that explains that.’ Catching sight of another one behind the robed figure, he winced. ‘And that’s gonna hurt.’

Sure enough, the satellite dish released a burst of energy and struck the flying person, who had started to glow an eerie black. “Aargh!”

‘That sounded like a girl.’ Danny flew up and over Technus, who still hadn’t noticed his close call, to check on her. ‘It looks like she’s still alive but that could just be the remnants of the electricity coursing through her muscles.’

Technus then whirled around. “HA! You can no longer attack me from the sky! No one can!”

Danny took this as his cue and turned visible. “Wanna bet, Technus? I’m still floating here last time I checked.”

Technus caught sight of him, astonishment flooding his face. “What are you doing here?”

“So polite,” Danny muttered so quietly that no one could hear him. Then he answered casually, “Same thing you are, I guess.” He took note of the person on the ground under Technus, who was looking up at him. The thought crossed his mind that his earlier statement could be interpreted in the wrong way and he added, “Except I’m just hanging out and you’re going for city domination.”

“World domination!” Technus corrected.

‘Let the torture begin.’ Danny repressed a grin. “That so?” He settled for raising an eyebrow to remain casual. “And you intend to do that through the media? No offense, but I think you watch too many cartoons.” He paused for dramatic effect. “Actually, that was an insult. Never mind.”

A cry from the ground drew his attention elsewhere. ‘Did I hear ‘raven’?’ He saw four teens in colorful costumes rush to the person. ‘You have got to be kidding me. Is that kid green? Did he really dye his skin that color?’

Danny was trying to eavesdrop on their conversation in hopes of finding out more about what was going on when Technus attacked. A beam shot out of a floating TV, going directly towards him. He simply did a half-circle in the air, letting it fly by him.
“Your aim sucks!” Danny taunted him. “Is TV rotting your brains?” He looked down but they didn’t seem to have noticed the interaction since they were chatting amongst themselves.

“I’ll show you TV!” Technus promised, shooting more beams at the young half-ghost.

Danny dodged them all effortlessly before occupying his time with evading the ghost’s attacks of wires and other weird objects. It wasn’t until he looked down again that he saw the five teens still standing in the street, gawking.

He briefly considered the notion that they were all idiots before yelling, “Hey, you!” Having caught their attention, he proceeded to shout a warning. “Get out of the street! It’s dangerous!”

But he hadn’t factored in Technus. “For you, ghost child!” Thanking his lucky stars that his parents had insisted on such grueling practices, Danny nimbly moved and watched the ghost’s next beam of electricity fly by. The singeing air had alerted him to the danger.

“You shall not stop me from sucking the power of this city and then connecting to every other city in the world!”

“Boxers or briefs?” Danny retorted, catching Technus off-guard. He remembered the last time he had asked that, inwardly grinning.

“Br—none of your business!” Technus had caught himself in time.

“Briefs? Seriously?” Danny cocked his head, amused. He had worn briefs earlier himself after the Egyptian fiasco but switched back to boxers after various newspaper articles. In his opinion, they were much more comfortable.

“I thought I fixed that!” Technus appeared dismayed.

“I think you’ve caught a bug!” Danny said cheerfully, grinning and implying two things at the same time. “Or did you downgrade? Was the mullet not cutting it for you? But you still have a mullet so I guess that’s not it…”

“Why you—! The technology-obsessed ghost looked as if he’d have steam pouring out of his ears. “You will fry, ghost child!”

“I’d say ‘fry’, too, but I don’t do fire,” Danny shot back. ‘And thank God for that.’ He summoned low-level ectoplasm to his hands and fired at Technus, hitting him in the chest and pushing him into a building.

Before he could follow in and take care of Technus, voices distracted him and he looked downwards. He was shocked to see that the teens were still there. Even Amity Park’s citizens weren’t this stupid!

“I told you guys to move!” Danny glared at them. “This isn’t a tourist attraction!” ‘Although I might be.’

“You should’ve caught me when you had the chance!”

Danny had no time to spin around as a stereo hit him in the back, sending him hurtling straight forwards into a building. For a moment his sense of direction was completely screwed up. Only when he felt something hard and uncomfortable graze the back of his jumpsuit did he instantly turn intangible, falling through the building and not into it. A few months ago and the two of them would have been violently introduced.
Dazed, he lay there for a few moments before snapping back to attention. Technus was still out there. With that in mind, Danny ran his hand over his belt, grabbing the weapon he wanted when he found it. Equipped and ready to go, he poked his head out through the wall, finding his enemy instantly.

Technus was looking triumphant. “Ha! Finally I, Technus, ghost master of gadgetry, computers, and ruler of—”

“Long-winded introductions!” Danny cut him off impatiently. “Still here, you know! Don’t start celebrating just yet!”

“Not for long!” Technus raised his arms.

“Likewise!” Danny raised his weapon, the Jack o’ Nine Tails, and lifted it over his head before letting it fly. “Meet my friend!”

The Jack o’ Nine Tails, emblazoned with Jack Fenton’s face and cheesy grin, opened up and crackled dangerously. Technus had no time to move as it pinned his arms to his sides and electrocuted him. As he screamed and writhed, Danny grabbed the Fenton Electrifier from his belt and flew up to the ghost. He pressed the button and aimed it at Technus’s chest.

Then, something happened.

Technus broke free of his bonds (he had to get his parents to update that invention) and grabbed his end of the Electrifier. Before Danny knew what hit him, electricity was coursing through him, setting his hair on end and making him double over in agony. He was dimly aware of Technus also being electrocuted.

“AAAAAAAAHHH!” But the electricity had set off something else, opened something in his body. Something that he wasn’t familiar with at all. Something that scared him.

The next thing he was aware of was that the pain had disappeared. The only thing he felt was a light tingling. Opening his eyes, he saw that both he and Technus were still being “fried”, even though he couldn’t feel anything.

But wait. He could feel something. Something uncomfortable was growing in his chest, something that was prickling him from the inside. It made him remember his lessons with Frostbite, so he concentrated on letting whatever it was out.

He expected something to happen. What he didn’t expect was a sudden increase of the sparks surrounding him. Then, the prickling sensation coursed through his arm, gathering around the Electrifier. His eyes widened when he saw the weapon be completely covered with greenish electricity until a loud explosion blew the two apart.

Shocked, Danny dropped the Electrifier, staring wide-eyed at it as it clattered to the street. It looked completely blackened; it seemed safe to say that it would no longer operate as Danny had fried it. But how?

Technus was keeled over for only a split-second before straightening up and pointing to Danny. “Ha! You think you can use technology on me, the master of technology? You wish! Be glad that I didn’t destroy you!”

All Danny could do was stare at the fried Fenton Electrifier, still dumfounded at what had happened. Worse still, he felt that same uncomfortable prickling build up in him. And this time, he was afraid to let it out. Afraid to see what it was. Because if it was what he thought it was, he was in big trouble.
“Are you listening, insolent ghost child?” Technus demanded, his hands in fists at his shoulders. They were flaring green. “You have interfered in my plans long enough!”

Technus zoomed in towards Danny, intending to engage the halfa in hand-to-hand combat. Reflexively, Danny blocked the ghost’s punch by grabbing his hand. But in doing so, the prickling built up to an unbearable amount. Before he knew what was happening, electricity was coursing through his hand and into Technus.

Danny dropped Technus immediately, backing off. The ghost fell to the ground, sizzling.

‘No. Please no,’ Danny pleaded, looking at Technus in fear.

“What did you do?” Technus looked at his hands, which were no longer glowing. “I can’t use my powers anymore!”

Danny’s breath caught in his throat. ‘No.’

He was only dimly aware of the five teens next to the ghost. But their sudden chattering alerted him to the peril and he numbly groped for the Fenton Thermos at his waist. Before Technus could attempt to escape, Danny had already pressed the button and sucked the powerless ghost in. Floating to the ground, all he could do was think over what had just happened.

‘No. I’m…turning into him.’
Danny was still holding the thermos in his hands but made no move to put it away. His mind was still replaying what he had just done.

He had conjured electricity, something he had done. And this electricity had taken Technus’s ghost powers, just like him. What did it mean? Was he turning into him? Even without Vlad? But how could that be? He wasn’t evil…was he?

“But you’ve already changed.” Her words echoed in his mind, taunting him. “You can’t stop it. It’s already done.”

But something else was breaking through his reverie. An annoying voice. Rather gratefully, Danny came out of his confusing and depressing thoughts. Still, he knew it wasn’t over. Not yet.

“Excuse me!” The voice wasn’t just annoying. “Are you listening?” It sounded annoyed. “Ghost Child!”

That snapped Danny back to attention. “Excuse me? Ghost Child?” Didn’t they know him?

“Your name, right?” A spiky, black-haired teen was staring at him impatiently. Mildly, Danny considered suing him for stealing his haircut before noticing that the teen’s hair was shorter than his. “We’ve got questions.”

“My name is not Ghost Child,” Danny said in answer.

“He called you Ghost Child,” the blue guy behind the black-haired teen said.

Danny sighed. “Someone else calls me ‘dipstick’ but that doesn’t mean that’s my name.”

“What is it then?” the first teen asked.

“Yours first, please, color-blind guy,” Danny said.

The teen bristled. “I’m not color-blind!”

“Your choice of clothes says otherwise,” Danny pointed out dryly. “They hurt my eyes.”

“Yo, Rob, no fighting,” the other guy warned, placing a hand on Rob’s shoulder. He then addressed Danny. “I’m Cyborg. This here’s Robin. Raven’s the dark and morbid one, Starfire’s next to her, and Beast Boy is our spinach guy.”

“Danny Phantom,” Danny said, sticking to his ghostly persona. He’d reveal Fenton once he was sure he could trust him. He still couldn’t believe that they didn’t know who he was. Had they been hiding under a rock during the last so many months?

Beast Boy, standing next to Robin, had been squirming while Cyborg introduced him. Now he blurted out, “I’m not the spinach guy!”

“You’re green,” Danny cut in. “You know that there’s no need to dye your skin, right? There are plenty of other ways to grab attention.”

“Hey! I’ll have you know that this is my natural color!” Beast Boy snapped.

“Enough,” Robin said, shooting the green teen a glance. “Danny Phantom?” he asked Danny.

“Call me Danny.” The halfa shrugged, hooking the thermos back onto his belt. ‘Do these guys seriously not know me?’

“Are you a ghost?” Robin said bluntly.

Danny almost keeled over in shock. Had they never heard of ghosts before? Were these teens completely ignorant as to the ways of the outside world? He thought that the fight between he and Technus had been answer enough to wake them out of their little world. But that brought up unwanted memories so he immediately derailed his mind from that train of thought.

“Have you…never heard of ghosts before?” Danny managed to say.

“Should I have?”

“We’ve seen two in the last so many hours, Robin,” the dark girl, Raven, said. “This is number three.”

“I’m right here,” Danny interjected. Then something struck him. “What do you mean you’ve seen two? Two ghosts?”

“Ghosts are mythical creatures,” Robin stated despite a glare Danny was sending his way.


“You’re like Beast Boy,” Robin said, moving his right hand slightly to indicate the green teen.

“Dude!” Beast Boy stopped Robin from proceeding any further. “That was a one-time thing! I could’ve died! There are more than one of him anyway! There are three like him and one like me! Or have you seen any other shape-shifters around here? There’s no way they’re all like me!”

“Why not?” Robin retorted, turning to glare at Beast Boy and ignoring Danny. “They’re not all the same. One controlled cakes, the second electrical devices, and he”—glance at Danny—“shoots green orbs like Starfire and manipulates electricity! How is that alike?”

Danny flinched slightly at the mention of his new ability as Starfire spoke up. “Robin, his bolts are not like mine. Mine…are warm and his…” She struggled to find the words.

“Are cold,” Danny finished. “Right? They should be, seeing as how they’re made of ectoplasm.”

“What’s ectoplasm?” Cyborg inquired.

“It’s the substance ghosts are made of, right?” Raven replied, surprising Danny.

“Yeah.” Danny looked at her curiously. “How’d you know that?”

“I read a lot,” Raven responded.

Then Danny backpedaled, remembering something Robin had said. “Did you fight a ghost that controlled cakes?”

“The Cake Ghost,” Cyborg confirmed, grimacing. “It’s a complete idiot.”
“Do you guys have it?” Danny said.

“No.” Beast Boy sounded glum. “It…kinda whooped our butts…”

Danny looked at him incredulously for one moment before breaking into a fit of coughing that sounded suspiciously like laughter.

“What?” Beast Boy demanded.

Danny managed to catch his breath to choke out, “Seriously, the Cake Ghost defeated you? No offense but that guy’s a real pain in the neck. To think it beat you…” He shook his head amusedly.

“Enough,” Robin finally cut in. He shot Danny a stern look. “What are your intentions?”

Danny looked him straight in the eye, dead serious now. “My intentions are honorable.”

“For whom? For you?”

“For the both of us,” Danny clarified. “I don’t harm civilians unless they happen to be insane megalomaniacs and shooting for world domination.”

“We get plenty of those around here,” Raven commented. “But most aren’t exactly human.”

“All mine are ghosts,” Danny said. He changed the subject. “What city is this?”

Robin studied him for a moment before answering. “Jump City.”

Danny’s brow furrowed as he tried to recall his geography. He had never heard or seen a Jump City before, on the news or on a map. “Where?” he finally decided to ask.

“It’s on the coast,” Beast Boy replied. “Dude, even I know that!”

“And he learns geography off a cereal box,” Raven added.

“Hey!” Beast Boy appeared indignant.

“Are you lost?” Starfire said kindly. “We have maps.”

“Starfire!” Robin hissed in warning. “We don’t want a repeat!”

“I’m not sure,” Danny said uncertainly, overlooking what Robin had said. “Which coast? The Pacific or the Atlantic? ‘And how did I get from the middle of the U.S. to the edge?’”


Danny’s eyes widened. How had the Ghost Zone dropped him off here? Sure, there were random portals all over the place but he would’ve known if he had fallen through a portal like that into a different city. Whatever he had fallen through had not felt like the average portal.

Besides, these teens didn’t even seem to know him. He was pretty sure that unless they all had amnesia—which was highly unlikely—there was no way they could not know him. Plus, even though his geography wasn’t up to par, he was pretty sure he had never heard of a Jump City.

Danny finally spoke again. “And, um, one more question. Why are you guys all dressed up?”

Beast Boy jumped in here. “You’ve never heard of the Teen Titans before?”
“No.” Danny shook his head. He was starting to feel that uncomfortable prickling again and tried to squash it. “Are you guys famous or something?”

“Have you been hiding under a rock for the last year?” Beast Boy asked incredulously.

‘I could ask the same,’ Danny thought.

Beast Boy continued, “Everyone knows who we are!”

“I don’t,” Danny said at the same time as Raven contradicted, “Maybe not everyone, Beast Boy.”

“Japan knew who we were!”

“But that was Tokyo, BB,” Cyborg said. “And that’s a big, popular city along with being the capital of Japan. Danny here might be from a smaller place.”

“I’m right here,” Danny said, annoyed.

“Where are you from, Danny?” Starfire inquired.

Danny figured it couldn’t do any harm to tell them. “Amity Park.”

“I guess it’s our turn to say that we’ve never heard of it,” Robin said.

Danny divulged something else. “Ghost capital of the U.S.?”

“I’m pretty sure I would’ve heard of something like that,” Raven said. “I’m well versed in everything spiritual.”

Before Danny could say anything else, his ghost sense went off. At the same time, the prickling sensation spread throughout his whole body, just begging to be released.

“What was that?” Beast Boy had seen the blue mist.

“Ghost,” was all Danny could say as he focused on suppressing his new power.

“How do—” Cyborg started.

“FOUND YOU!” A loud cackle followed that statement. “YOU SHALL NOW FACE THE WRATH OF THE ALL-POWERFUL CAKE!”

A familiar and annoying ghost popped up behind the Titans. Only Danny could see it until the Titans whirled around at the sound of the Cake Ghost’s voice. Robin had a pale staff in his hand.

“You’re going down, tart!” Beast Boy proclaimed.

“I AM THE CAKE GHOST! FEAR MY POWER—”

“At making other people sick,” Danny finished, sighing. He winced as his fingers started tingling like nuts.

“You know it?” Raven inquired.

“Unfortunately,” Danny murmured, hiding his hands behind his back. He could feel sparks dancing at the edge of his fingers.

“He also has the worst lines I’ve ever heard a villain use,” Cyborg added.
“ Enough talking!” Robin snapped. “ We have to—”

A bluish-white torpedo of light enveloped the Cake Ghost, pulling it over the Titans’ heads and behind them. They turned around to see Danny capping his thermos, looking rather pained.

“I feel embarrassed,” Cyborg muttered.

Starfire noticed Danny’s pained face and approached him. “Are you all right?” She made as if to touch him.

“Don’t!” Danny jerked back but it was too late. Starfire’s hand landed on his shoulder. The ecto-electricity, which he had barely been containing, immediately transferred to the Tamaranean.

“Starfire!” Robin instantly leapt forwards, pushing Danny aside and catching Starfire. He was mildly shocked but shook it off, checking to see if his friend was all right. “Are you all right?”

“I-I’m fine,” Starfire stammered, shaking slightly from the shock. “H-how is D-Danny?”

“About to pay,” Robin promised, shooting Danny a glare.

The ghost boy’s breaths were labored as he struggled to control the power surging through his body. He couldn’t believe that he had just involuntarily attacked a well-meaning stranger! Sure, it was involuntary but he had still attacked her! He could still feel the ecto-electricity under his skin and it was only a matter of time before it became too much to handle again.

His decision made, he really hoped that it wouldn’t look too much like he was running. But with his luck, that would be exactly what they would think.

Before the Titans could do anything to him, Danny had teleported in a flash of green light.

Panting heavily, Danny reappeared on the top of a building. He was on his knees, eyes screwed shut as he tried to control the torrent of power coursing through his body. But he wasn’t having much success.

Worse still, he knew he was alone in trying to bring this new power under wraps. After all, who would go to his future self for help, the only other person with this power? Frostbite was an ice master, not an electricity master. And Vlad, the other person even remotely capable of understanding his plight, was in outer space, far away from any human. Besides, Vlad’s ecto-electricity powers didn’t short out other ghost powers. Danny knew that first-hand.

He was alone. Alone and without friends. He had no clue where he was and would have to wait until morning to have a chance to find out. And even if his friends were here, what could they do besides offer support? They didn’t have ghost powers; he did. He was completely alone.

But he could do one thing.

Slowly, Danny transformed back into his human self, knowing that his new power would be a bit more suppressed. After all, that had been the case with his ice powers.

Once he’d transformed back, the prickling sensation decreased to a mild itching under his skin, something that he would have to get used to.

Still shivering, Danny hugged his knees and waited for daybreak. Maybe his outlook on life would look a little brighter then.
It wasn’t until later that he realized that he’d left the fried Fenton Electrifier with those strange teens. He hoped that nothing bad would happen to it. But knowing his luck, something would.

“I insist, Cyborg, that I am fine. I was only mildly stung.”

“I think you mean shocked. That was not mild.” Cyborg had Starfire hooked up to a large monitor. “Besides, you know Robin.”

“Are your powers still there?” Beast Boy asked. “You saw what happened to Technus after he got zapped. He totally crashed!”

“Bad pun, Beast Boy,” Cyborg said absently, studying the readings before him.

“My powers aren’t gone.” To prove her point, Starfire lit up the whole room with a starbolt. “Where is Robin?”

“Studying that weird contraption the kid dropped,” Cyborg said. “I don’t think he’ll get too far, though. It looks too advanced for his gadgets.”

“Where’s Raven?” Beast Boy sat on a bed, swinging his legs back and forth.

“In her room, I think.” Cyborg unhooked Starfire from the monitor. “You’re all right. But I’d like to know why your powers are still here while Technus’s vanished.”

“It could have been the fluke,” Starfire suggested.

“Something tells me it wasn’t that,” Cyborg disagreed. “But we can’t find out more unless he answers more of our questions.”

“How do we catch him, though?” Beast Boy asked. “He teleported! Plus, he flies, shoots green disks, and electrocutes people!”

“He’s powerful,” Cyborg admitted, “but every villain has a weakness.”

“He might not be bad,” Starfire protested. “What he did to me was an accident. He tried to warn me but I did not heed him.”

“So he can’t control his powers?” Beast Boy mused.

“We’ve already had someone like that and it turned out to be a disaster,” a new voice put in. They saw Robin enter the medical ward. “We don’t want another repeat of what happened to Terra.”

“He feels good, Robin,” Starfire said. “I can feel it…in here.” She placed her hands over her heart.

“What about Terra? We thought she was good, too.”

“She was, Robin,” Beast Boy argued. “It wasn’t until the second time we met that she was under Slade’s leadership.”

“Regardless, whether he’s good or bad we know he’s dangerous,” Robin insisted. “And he’s a ghost. All the ghosts we’ve fought so far were evil. We need an expert on this.” His eyes drifted over to the window, where the rising sun was painting the sky pink.

He eventually turned towards his teammates after a long silence. “We need Raven.”
Raven was in her room, surrounded by volumes of books. She had one on her lap and was flipping through it quickly, scanning the pages. Eventually, she slammed it shut and ran a hand through her purple locks, completely frustrated.

The Titan had looked through all her books concerning the spirit world, but none of them had anything similar to what they’d gone up against earlier. According to her books, spirits were otherworldly spirits that almost no one could see and didn’t have any effect on the mortal world. In any case, these were ghosts, not spirits. But looking up ghosts in her library hadn’t drawn up anything conclusive either. True, they were made of ectoplasm but they generally didn’t have any color. They also didn’t have the offensive abilities these ghosts had.

While she hated to admit it, these ghosts had her stumped. The ability to produce electricity, shoot green bolts like Starfire’s, and teleport were out of the norm for ghosts. Even Technus and the Cake Ghost were like nothing she’d heard of before.

And then not only were his abilities peculiar, Danny Phantom as a person was also extremely interesting. Raven recalled with perfectly clarity how certain details in that fight had her intrigued.

**Flashback:**

Danny Phantom had thrown something with strings that were connected by a face with a cheesy grin. The weapon crackled with green electricity and hit Technus before the ghost could react, binding his arms to his sides and electrocuting him. Then Danny whipped out something else, a green and white stick with something written on it that Raven couldn’t catch.

While Technus was still struggling in the other device, Danny attacked him with the stick. Raven expected the stick to hit Technus; she hadn’t expected Technus to break free and grab the other end, electrocuting both ghosts in the process.

All the Titans were paralyzed at the sight of both ghosts being shocked by the little device that the two were holding. Then suddenly the white-haired ghost stopped screaming, even though he was clearly still being electrocuted. Raven saw confusion paint his green eyes as he opened them and rested his gaze on the stick connecting the two. His eyes widened.

The Titan looked, too, but at first didn’t see what was out of the ordinary. Then she saw it. It was subtle but still there. The sparks were increasing in number around the strange device, seeming to come from the boy holding it. The electricity increased tenfold for no reason and then it exploded, pushing both ghosts violently apart.

Something clattered to the street, but Raven had eyes only for Danny. He seemed paralyzed, shocked at what had just happened. His eyes were trained on whatever he had dropped, which Raven now looked at. It was the stick, but it was completely unrecognizable, being blackened to the point that Raven thought it was a simple stick from a tree.

“Ha! You think you can use technology on me, the master of technology? You wish! Be glad I didn’t destroy you!”

Danny didn’t look up to the ghost, though, still staring at the destroyed stick. Raven knew something was working behind those petrified green eyes. Something had scared him completely.
“Are you listening, insolent ghost child?” Raven glanced up at Technus to see that his hands were flaring green. “You have interfered in my plans long enough!”

The Titans automatically took a step back as Technus assaulted Danny, his hand drawing back as if he was intending to throw a punch. Before the ghost’s fist could touch the teen, though, Danny had grabbed it and, to Raven’s surprise, electricity zapped out from Danny’s gloved hand and hit Technus, completely ruining the ghost’s hairstyle.

Most people Raven knew would have kept electrocuting their opponent, but Danny dropped the ghost two seconds after he had shocked him, looking completely shocked and scared.

As Raven examined the ghost more closely since he was no longer floating, she noticed that he was no longer glowing and seemed to be staring at his hands, stunned, too.

“What did you do? I can’t use my powers anymore!”

Raven thought Danny would look triumphant but instead, he looked completely terrified.

“He took away Technus’s powers?” Robin sounded stunned. “How did he do that? Just by electrocuting him?”

“No,” Cyborg disagreed. “If that were the case, he’d have lost his powers, too. It has to do with how the kid electrocut ed the other guy personally and not with the fried stick.”

“That’d be wicked,” Beast Boy muttered, looking rather awed. “I could just imagine turning off Aqualad’s power.” A shifty glint came into his eye.

“Do that and no video games or TV for an indefinite amount of time,” Robin said much to Beast Boy’s outrage.

Then, a bluish-white light attracted their attention to Technus. The ghost vanished, being sucked into a thermos that Danny had on his waist on a belt filled with other high-tech devices. Raven thought the teen looked dazed and disbelieving as he floated to the ground.

“OK. Now come our questions,” she heard Robin mutter under his breath, inspecting the ghost before them thoughtfully. “Let’s see if he can answer any of them truthfully.”

“He doesn’t seem like the typical bad guy,” Beast Boy argued. “He’ll probably answer them.”

Robin ignored him. “Hey!” he shouted at Danny, despite the fact that he was only ten feet away. “We’ve got some questions for you.”

Danny didn’t respond, still staring blankly into space. Raven thought he looked horrified, as if some terrifying revelation was being made to him and only him. It was a pity that she couldn’t read minds…

Robin’s patience was running short. “Excuse me! Are you listening? Ghost Child!”

‘I do not think that is his name,’ Raven thought wryly as this snapped Danny back to attention. A flash of annoyance sparked in his eyes momentarily.

“Excuse me?” Danny had quoted Robin. “Ghost Child?” He sounded insulted.
Then Robin did something that proved he really was dense. “Your name, right? We’ve got questions.”

‘If someone repeats a name incredulously, it usually means that it’s not their name,’ Raven mused, waiting for Danny’s answer.

Danny confirmed Raven’s suspicions. “My name is not Ghost Child.”

Cyborg decided to add his two-cents. “He called you Ghost Child.”

The ghost sighed, seemingly exasperated. “Someone else calls me ‘dipstick’ but that doesn’t mean that’s my name.”

“What is it then?” Robin asked.

“Yours first, please, color-blind guy,” Danny said, inadvertently insulting Robin’s fashion sense.

‘I think that’s the first time someone’s called mention to Robin’s choice of colors,’ Raven thought, amused, raising an eyebrow in the shadows of her hood.

Robin glared at Danny. “I’m not color-blind!”

“Your choice of clothes says otherwise,” Danny said dryly. “They hurt my eyes.”

Luckily, Cyborg stepped in before it could blow into a fight; he placed a calming hand on Robin’s shoulder. “Yo, Rob, no fighting.” He looked pointedly at Danny. “I’m Cyborg. This here’s Robin.” Raven didn’t miss the squeeze Cyborg gave Robin when he introduced the boy wonder. “Raven’s the dark and morbid one, Starfire’s next to her, and Beast Boy is our spinach guy.”

Raven didn’t mind his description of her—she was observing Danny’s reactions. Her eyes narrowed briefly when she caught a short moment of hesitation before the teen proceeded to introduce himself. “Danny Phantom.”

End Flashback

‘Danny Phantom.’ Raven mused over the name. ‘It’s not terribly inventive. Why the emblem, though? Do boys have to have something on themselves that screams to the world who they are?’ She flashed on Robin’s personality. ‘Okay. I guess they do.’

She pushed the book off her lap and stood next to her window, which she normally had closed with curtains. Raven pulled them open, looking out at the dawn. Several questions still bothered her. Why had he seemed so terrified of his abilities? Everyone she knew took their abilities in stride, not questioning it when something new happened. Even Beast Boy hadn’t said anything when that vat of chemicals had been dumped on him, changing his personality for the worse.

‘Being able to short out other powers even temporarily is a good thing but he seemed absolutely petrified of this. And then he wasn’t even able to control it.’ She remembered Starfire being shocked when she had tried to touch the ghost boy. ‘It’s too reminiscent of Terra. But she at least pretended she knew what she was doing. He didn’t bother to hide his surprise. But then…Robin and the others didn’t notice anything out of the ordinary. Was I the only one who noticed?’
Starfire’s and Danny’s voices echoed in her mind. “Are you all right?”

“Don’t!”

‘I’m sure Starfire noticed that he didn’t want her to touch him before he accidentally electrocuted her. I wonder if she’s voiced this opinion to Robin yet. Knowing him, nothing will get through that thick skull of his until it’s either beaten into it or it’s proven by facts, not feelings.’

She was broken out of her reverie by a knock on her door. Raven glided to the door and slid it open, staring ominously through the crack and right into Robin’s masked face. “What do you want?”

“We need to talk, Raven,” Robin said, jumping straight to the point. “Like you said earlier, you’re the spiritual expert here. What can you tell us about ghosts and their powers?”

“Absolutely nothing,” Raven said flatly. “I’ve scoured every book that I have but there’s nothing here beyond the usual ‘Ghosts are mythical creatures’ or ‘They’re spirits of the dead trapped in the plane of the living and have no effect on what humans do’. Obviously ghosts are not mythical creatures and they do have an effect on what we do.”

“Then why were you standing next to your window?”

“Thinking.”

Robin looked like he was debating something for a short moment. His arm moved towards Raven’s door before he seemed to change his mind. “What were you thinking about?”

“About the enigma that is Danny Phantom,” Raven explained. “Looking back at that fight, I don’t think he’s bad. Do you remember how shocked he was after he electrocuted Technus?” Robin looked like he was about to object but Raven barreled over him. “And if you recall correctly, he never wanted to electrocute Starfire. He warned her before she touched him.”

Robin furrowed his brow, thinking back. “I guess you’re right,” he admitted rather reluctantly. “But we still can’t trust him,” he added firmly.

“Didn’t say we should. But I say give him a chance.” Raven shrugged. She opened the door wider and Robin stepped back, letting her come out of her room.

“Was there anything else that you wanted to share with us?” Robin asked, gazing at her back as she strode away.

“How about we take a look at those readings you were talking about earlier,” Raven suggested. “There are some more observations I’d like to toss around.”

“I think you’re talking my language now.”

It’s was nine o’clock and Danny was getting hungry. He was also still on top of the roof and debating whether or not he should get off to get himself some breakfast. He faced the small problem of having forgotten his wallet back in Amity Park, though.

‘Great. The one time Mom and Dad can’t embarrass me by dancing to music from the Stone Age I forget my wallet.’ Danny sighed and ran a hand through his black hair. ‘I guess I could always get a job until I find out exactly where I am…’

Danny got to his feet, wandered over to the edge of the building, and looked down, inspecting the
height. He looked glum. “Darn it. Either I phase through the roof, scare the hell out of whoever’s under this, or transform and fly down.” He considered both options before deciding on the former and turning intangible, slipping through the roof.

When he landed on the floor, he remained invisible and quiet, looking around. Luckily, the room was dark, meaning that no one was there. He took a deep breath and phased through the rest of the floors invisibly before walking out and reappearing nonchalantly next to an alley. Already the city was bustling and teeming with life, the exact opposite of Amity Park.

‘Can I find a job here?’ Danny watched the shops and the pedestrians zoom by him, a thoughtful expression on his face. The itching under his skin was still bearable at the moment. He had his belt hidden under his shirt. ‘Guess there’s only one way to find out.’
“Sixteen. I’m sixteen.” Danny held up six fingers.

“Eh? Six, you say?” A grumpy old man behind the counter squinted at him. “You don’t look six.”

Danny rolled his eyes. “SIXTEEN!” he shouted.

The old man cringed, rubbing his ears. “All right, all right. No need to shout…” He kept grumbling.

Danny sighed tiredly and repressed a groan. This was getting old. He had spent the last half hour trying to get the man to give him a job in the antique store he was in: ROBINSON’S FINE ANTIQUES. He was guessing that the old man was Mr. Robinson but it was hard to know seeing as how the man was almost stone deaf and kept misinterpreting everything he said.

“Come again as to why you’re here?” the old man asked, finally getting to business again.

After briefly considering writing it down before realizing that the old man would probably be insulted, Danny sounded it out clearly. “I’d like a job.”

“You’d like a bob?” The old man furrowed his brow in confusion. “I don’t cut hair, kid.”

“A job,” Danny said loudly. “There’s a sign outside saying you need help.” He jabbed a finger to the window to emphasize his point.

“And I don’t sell corn here either,” the old man said. “The supermarket’s a while away.”

Danny sighed, resisting the urge to shake his head in frustration. He caught sight of a writing pad and reached for it, taking a pen, too.

He studiously wrote, I’m looking for a job. I saw the sign outside. Hopefully the old man wasn’t blind, too.

The old man read the pad and looked up at Danny. “What’s your name, kid? And why couldn’t you tell me this like a normal person?”

My name’s Danny. I tried to but I think your hearing aid’s missing. Danny rubbed the back of his neck nervously as the man read what he wrote. He hoped he hadn’t crossed any lines. You never knew with these people.

The man’s face screwed up in thought for a moment before he seemingly had a momentous revelation. “Ah-ha! Hold on a moment…”

Danny watched, confused, as the old man went through a door in the back wall. He heard some rustling before the old man came out again, smiling smugly.
“Ha! Well, now that I’ve found my sneaky aid I’ll return to business. Now, what can I do for you?” He beamed at Danny. “Before I forget, I am Mr. Robinson, the owner of this fine store.”

The ghost teen blinked in bemusement for a moment at the sudden turnaround of the man’s personality. ‘Whoa. Did the hearing aid possess him?’ He smiled inwardly at the thought and said aloud, “My name’s Danny. I saw the sign outside that said you were looking for help.”

Mr. Robinson leaned against the counter, studying Danny through his blue eyes. “Do you have any experience?”

“No. Do I need some?” he asked nervously, really hoping that he wouldn’t be turned away. Another disappointment would be too much for him to handle. On top of that, he still hadn’t eaten breakfast. Or rather brunch. It was getting rather late.

The store owner again stared at him; this time Danny felt distinctly uncomfortable under his scrutinizing gaze. His eyes shifted to the countertop before meeting Mr. Robinson’s again. He resisted the urge to do something stupid such as doodle on the writing pad that was still laid out between them.

Finally, Mr. Robinson spoke, turning his back to Danny. “I think you’ll do fine here…Danny, you say?”

Danny let out a breath he hadn’t even known he was holding. “Yes.” Then his brain registered what Mr. Robinson had said. “Er, are you serious?”

Mr. Robinson gave a chortle. “Of course. I may be hard of hearing but I’m certainly not blind. I can see that you look like a trustworthy young lad.”

“Don’t you want to know how old I am?” Danny asked, secretly hoping that he didn’t. The last so many jobs he’d asked for had turned him away because of his age.

“You did say you were six, didn’t you?”

Danny gaped at him, his mouth working frantically as he tried to find his voice. Mr. Robinson chuckled at his bafflement. “Relax. I know you’re old enough for the job. It doesn’t require much besides helping customers out and handling antiques.” Then it seemed as if a thought struck him; he eyed Danny speculatively. “You can handle antiques, right?”

The question made Danny laugh. Of course he could handle antiques! He hadn’t lost control of his powers since he’d first gotten them. But then the recent incident with his new ecto-electricity powers snuck into his mind. The tingling that he could still feel beneath his skin made him suppress a shudder and he shoved the issue out of his mind, trying to focus on something more lighthearted. Such as the fact that he still couldn’t handle beakers.

“Do you see where they jump right here?” Raven murmured, pointing to the screen before the team. “I think that’s right before we left to confront Technus.”

Robin checked something and nodded. “You’re right. But what do they mean? I correlated this to pick up energy signals but what kind of energy is this?”

“Judging from the ghosts we’ve been fighting I’d say the readings pick up the energy the ghosts give off.”

“Which would be ectoplasm?” Robin asked.
“That’s right.” Raven looked at Robin, surprised. “How much do you know about ghosts?”

Robin shrugged. “Only the basics: they fly, they float through walls, they moan – although that might not be accurate – and that they’re made of ectoplasm.”

“You’ve got the gist of it. In fact, that’s about as far as I can get in my books.”

Beast Boy’s ears perked up. “Whoa! You can’t find anything in your books?”

Raven looked like she didn’t want to know where this was going. “No.”

“Someone call the police!” Beast Boy jumped all over the place. “Raven’s books have failed us!” He fainted dramatically on the spot, swooning over the coach.

Cyborg shared a look with Robin while Starfire just looked mildly bemused; Raven was ignoring the green changeling and was instead devoting her time to studying the readings. She flicked through them, the date on the upper right corner of the screen turning back through time.

“What are you looking for, Raven?” Robin looked at the time. It read 1:54 A.M. “Isn’t that when we went to fight the Cake Ghost?”

“It is,” Raven answered. “Look at how the readings are abnormally high around the time we fight him. And”—she went back several minutes—“how they’re low here. It matches up with the bakery robberies of the last few nights.”

“How do you know this? I didn’t have the scanner up then,” Robin said.

“I was meditating around that time,” she explained.

“Is there a time you aren’t meditating?” Beast Boy asked.

“When you’re annoying me,” Raven shot back while still managing to sound completely dry at the same time.

“I think she got you, BB,” Cyborg remarked, folding his arms and grinning at Beast Boy.

The changeling shot him a glare, steam coming out of his ears.

“What exactly did you find, friend Raven, while meditating?” Starfire inquired, looking curiously at Cyborg, who had Beast Boy under his arm and was rubbing his knuckles into Beast Boy’s hair.

“Random bursts of spiritual energy,” Raven replied, turning to face her friends. Cyborg and Beast Boy had stopped their bickering to listen. “They were sporadic and didn’t occur often. They were more centered in the nighttime, around when the bakeries were broken into. I didn’t think anything of it until we met the Cake Ghost a few hours ago. After studying these readings my suspicions were confirmed: I’ve been sensing ghosts around here.”


“He’s new,” Raven admitted. “I haven’t sensed or seen someone like him before.”

“He’s dangerous,” Robin stated. “We can’t trust him.”

“But, Robin—” Starfire started.

She was cut off by Raven. “I don’t think that’s true, Robin. Yes, he electrocuted Starfire but I think
that was an accident.”

“*You think?*”

“Yes, I think,” she said firmly. “Did you see his face? He was appalled. I think what we have is a case similar to Terra.”

Beast Boy was silent at this, remembering his crush. “I miss her,” he said quietly, his ears drooping.

The other Titans studied the ground in silence for a moment out of respect for their friend.

Robin finally spoke. “We do, too, Beast Boy. But we can’t afford to make the same mistake we made with Terra.”

“While the saying goes ‘those who don’t learn from history are doomed to repeat it,’ I don’t think you should follow it too stringently,” Raven said. “Give Danny a chance. He—”

“I feel that he is nice!” Starfire interrupted. She placed both hands over her heart. “I can feel it in my heart. He did not mean to hurt me. He tried to warn me but I did not listen.”

Robin was still stubborn. “But—”

“He was shocked, horrified.” Raven picked it up from Starfire. “Did you see how out of it he was before you managed to grab his attention? He hadn’t expected that attack on Technus at all.”

“Besides, I don’t think villains answer questions the way he did,” Cyborg added.

“I still don’t think that we should trust him,” Robin insisted, his arms folded across his chest.

“We trusted Terra,” Beast Boy spoke up. “Just because we made a mistake when it came to her doesn’t mean we have to turn away every person who has a mishap with their powers!”

“But he’s also a ghost,” Robin pointed out. “So far, all the ghosts we’ve met are evil.”

“There’s an exception to every rule,” Raven pointed out. “Would you call every hunk of rock out there in outer space a planet?”

“No, but they’re objects,” Robin objected. “I’m talking about ghosts; they’re *alive*…or as alive as they can be.”

“But just like not every rock in outer space isn’t a planet, not all ghosts are evil,” Raven argued. “The same applies to humans. We have so many villains; do we call all humans evil?”

“Raven is right,” Starfire proclaimed. “Robin, please give Danny a chance. He *is* good.”

After a heavy silence, Robin sighed, defeated. “Fine,” he said. “We’ll give him a chance. But *one* wrong move, *one*, and we take care of him, all right?”

“Thank you, Robin!” Starfire gave her boyfriend a great big hug.

“But we still don’t know where he lives,” Robin managed to get out through his girlfriend’s death grip.

Starfire realized she was squeezing off his air supply and let go, smiling apologetically but still beaming. “I apologize, Robin!”
“It’s fine.” Robin stretched his muscles out, trying not to grimace.

Beast Boy looked out the window and then started jumping up and down. “Dudes! Do you know what time it is?”

“Eleven in the morning?” Cyborg said, confused.

“Time to go out and do something!”

“We’re all exhausted, Beast Boy,” Cyborg complained. “Go out and do something yourself if you have to. We stayed out the entire night fighting that stupid cake and that insane egomaniacal green ghost with the horrible hair.”

“And I still haven’t finished taking apart that weapon the gh – Danny dropped,” Robin said.

“Relax for a bit, Rob,” Beast Boy said. “You have time to take apart that fried stick later.”

“Is going out at this time in the morning considered ‘chilling’?” Starfire inquired.

“Eating a meat-free lunch is considered chilling!” Beast Boy grinned broadly. “Come on!” He grabbed his teammates by their arms and dragged them out of the room singlehandedly.

Raven was out of his grasp, following behind the group absentmindedly. Her mind was still on Danny. ‘How can he not have heard of the Teen Titans? And why did he act like we should know where Amity Park is?’

Scrape! A box was pushed to the back of a shelf as Danny made room for another one. He was already working at “Robinson’s Fine Antiques” because, as he said, “I don’t have any place to be since my parents are out of town.” The old man had given him a strange look but gave him a white apron to wear to guard against the dust that was in the back of the store with all the antiques that weren’t displayed.

‘It’s a good thing I managed to find this job,’ Danny mused, opening another box. He winced when he cut himself on the knife his employer had given him. Sucking on his finger as he waited for it to heal, he continued thinking. ‘I hope to find out more about where I am. Maybe Mr. Robinson can help me some.’

He couldn’t help but remember his last few failed attempts to find a job as he waited for his cut to heal.

Flashback:

“The sign says you’re looking for help,” Danny said to the man behind the counter. It was a restaurant that sold pizza for food. It was eerily similar to Pizza Hut or Dominoes except for the fact that it had a balcony.

“That I am,” the dark-haired man said. He studied Danny. “Do you have any experience with working with people?”

‘Do major political people count?’ Danny briefly smiled at the thought before he answered. “I do.”

The man looked slightly interested. “How old are you, kid?”
“I’m sixteen,” Danny replied.

He got a sinking feeling in his stomach when the man leaned back, sighing heavily. “You have to be eighteen to be able to work here.”

“Why? It’s not like it’s some fancy Italian diner!” Danny protested.

The man raised an eyebrow and pointed to the sign. “Joe’s Pizza: The Best Italian Pizza You’ll Find Anywhere!” it read.

Danny repressed a groan and ran a hand through his hair, the smell of the food getting to him. Maybe it was a good thing he was too young. “I understand,” he muttered, walking off and pushing the door open, disappointed.

Next probable job:

“I like reading. A lot,” Danny added as an afterthought, feebly grinning. He hated reading. Jazz was constantly trying to get him to read something or another but he’d much rather stick to Cliff Notes; of course, lately he had had too much time on his hands.

“Do you really?” The old lady scrutinized him carefully, her beady eyes narrowing. “Boys never read. Why are you any different?”

“My sister got me into it,” Danny half-lied.

He smiled innocently as the old lady inspected him even more closely. His hands were close to a computer. The next thing he knew was that sudden jolt ran through him, setting his hair on edge. Blinking frantically, he tried to clear his system of the charge that had surged through him; the lady was still staring at him suspiciously.

Just as she opened her mouth to say something, the computer buzzed loudly and said in an obnoxious voice. “The order for Gone With The Wind has arrived.”

The lady snapped her gaze from Danny to the computer, her mouth hanging open in shock.

“The delivery will arrive in five seconds,” the computer added.

Five seconds later a delivery man came in with a clipboard in his hands. The lady gave Danny a strange look and screamed, running into the back room. The ghost teen was left behind with an alive computer, a confused delivery man, and with no job.

‘Darn my ecto-electricity powers. Who knew they could bring technology to life? Thank goodness Tucker isn’t here.’

“I was just going to tell her that her order has arrived,” the delivery man said, staring at Danny bemusedly. “Do I look scary?”

Danny stared at the huge bulky man. “Um…”

Next probable job:

“You don’t look sixteen,” the girl with the blonde pig-tails said, looking at Danny with her
head to one side. “You’re too…prepubescent.”

Danny flushed angrily. “Am not! I am so totally sixteen!”

“If you’re sixteen you’d have a driver’s license,” the girl said, leaning back against the countertop that was adorned with fruits, vegetables, and cereal boxes. “Do you?”

“I didn’t take the test.” Who needed driving if he could fly?

The girl smirked. “Right. Everyone knows that driving is the epitome of teenage life. Who doesn’t take the driving test the moment they turn sixteen?”

“Fifteen,” Danny said.

“Huh?” The girl gave him a blank look.

“Fifteen,” Danny deadpanned. “You get the driver’s permit when you’re fifteen. And for your information, the epitome of teenage life is when one’s finally old enough to vote. So I guess you don’t know everyone.”

The girl gaped at him for a moment before her jaw snapped shut and she was in full-on glaring mode. “Do you know who I am?” she asked in a menacing voice.

“The owner’s daughter?” Danny guessed. He had several other, not-so-nice comments on the tip of his tongue. But he really needed this job so he kept his mouth shut.

“I am the owner!” the girl hissed. “My parents gave me this store when I turned eighteen!”

Danny stared at her blankly. “You sure you’re eighteen? You look too…prepubescent.”

Now it was the girl’s turn to flush angrily. She opened her mouth, about to shoot off a heated reply, when another voice interrupted them. “Mary! What on earth are you doing?”

‘Mary? Why’s a girl like her called MARY?’ Danny tried not to look too confused as an equally blonde-haired mother pranced into view. ‘And…what’s up with the prancing?’

Mary’s mother shot him a look. “Who is this, Mary? A boyfriend?”

Danny didn’t say anything; he was too shocked. Mary gagged in reply. “Yeah, right! He came in looking for a job.”

The mother looked him up. “He’s too young.”

“That’s what I said!”

“You don’t sell alcohol here, do you?” Danny asked, sure that he’d only be too young if they sold alcohol.

“You’re underage, kid,” the mother said. “Of course we sell alcohol here! What kind of supermarket would it be if we didn’t sell alcohol?”

‘These two could rival Paulina and her cronies any day,’ Danny decided, staring at the two in disbelief. “So…I don’t have the job?” He already knew he didn’t, he just thought he’d make
Mary glared at him. “Do I look like I’d hire an idiot like you?”

“I’d rather not answer that…”

Next and final job:

“ROBINSON’S FINE ANTIQUES”

Danny looked up at the sign, at the small store under it, and back up at the sign before sighing. Who knew that he’d go in an “old people’s” store? He really hoped that this would be the last stop. He was getting really hungry and it was only eleven. But then, he had missed dinner last night.

‘Why are all those stores open so early in the morning?’ Danny shook his head at the thought and walked inside, studying the old desks, pictures, lamps, vases, and chairs lying around the store. One side of the store even had a couple of bookshelves with huge books. He looked for the counter and found it behind a gigantic suit of armor.

Danny spent the next five minutes looking for the owner until he saw an old man snoring in a chair behind the counter. He rang the bell that was provided but the man didn’t even move.

“Excuse me?” Danny tried talking. “Excuse me, sir?”

There was still no movement from the old man other than a loud snore. Danny pondered for a few moments before he leaned over the counter and yelled, “EXCUSE ME!” If he had to be rude he could at least be polite.

This time it worked. The old man jumped awake and blinked blearily. “Huh?” He caught sight of Danny, who was standing behind the counter innocently. “Who’re you?”

“Danny,” Danny said. “I’m looking for a job.”

“A gob?”

‘Oh, Lord, no…’

End Flashback.

Danny came out of his reverie and smiled, looking at his now healed finger before opening up the box he had abandoned earlier. Who knew that the almost stone deaf man he had woken up so roughly would hire him? It actually seemed like fun, too. Of course, he still hadn’t eaten so that didn’t help matters.

He picked the box up and walked out to clear up the antique dolls that were inside. Danny raised an eyebrow at Mr. Robinson, silently asking where the dolls went. The owner nodded to the window, where Danny saw stands for the dolls to be put on.

“Put those on display,” Mr. Robinson said. “The ones that are there can be put on different shelves for now.”

“Yes, sir.”
Danny looked at the dolls that were on display. They were all gorgeous with the huge frilly dresses one would expect to find in the Victorian era. Their eyes were fringed with huge lashes and they had plump lips that were a rosy red. Danny raised an eyebrow at the various colors they wore: black, red, blue, and even green. The red and blue dresses looked really nice but the black and green were a tad out of place.

He took them out of the display and put on the ones that were in the box. These had masks on and there seemed to be a change of dresses in the box as well.

Danny was almost finished cleaning out the box when he stopped short at seeing something in the box that shocked him. His hands trembling, Danny reached in and lifted a doll as if it were made of glass. It was an ordinary doll – but then it wasn’t. It was the same doll the mysterious ghost girl had held. Nervously, Danny looked at the doll’s eyes; they were a shocking green. Its dress was a faded blue and its hair was black, curled into huge ringlets.

‘Why is this doll here? Why does it look exactly like the one the girl held?’ Danny shot a look at Mr. Robinson, who was scanning through a magazine on the counter. ‘I’ve got a weird feeling about this.’

Danny was still holding the doll ten seconds later, internally debating on what he should do with it. Mr. Robinson noticed the silence and looked up to see what was the matter.

“Something wrong, Danny?” Mr. Robinson asked, coming out from behind the counter and approaching the silent teen. He noticed the doll Danny was holding. “Ah. I see you’ve found little Alice there.”

“Alice?” Danny wondered if that was the girl’s name.

“That’s right.” Mr. Robinson nodded, appearing lost in his memories. “It’s had a long and fruitful history, that doll. I’ve held it for a long while; I thought I’d lost it with the last move.” He took it from Danny’s grasp, studying the doll’s strange features.

“Do you know who it belonged to?” Danny inquired, trying to be inconspicuous.

Mr. Robinson shot Danny a strange look. “Why do you ask?”

‘Yipe!’ “N-no reason,” Danny stammered. “I thought it seemed familiar.”

Mr. Robinson scrutinized Danny for another long moment before nodding with finality. “I see. To answer your question, the doll’s owner was a small girl. I don’t know her name; this doll is quite old.”

“It’s lasted for all that time?” Danny stared in amazement at the antique.

Mr. Robinson smiled mysteriously. “It’s special.”

Before Danny could ask what he meant by that, Mr. Robinson patted his shoulder and beamed. “Well,” he said jovially, “let’s keep working, shall we?” He looked at Alice for a few more moments before saying, “I don’t think I’m quite ready to part with Alice here. I’ll be taking her, all right?”

Danny was confused but he agreed. “All right.”

Mr. Robinson walked away, humming quietly under his breath. Danny mused for a couple more seconds over the strange doll before shaking himself out of it and rummaging through the box. There was one last doll in it. Danny picked it out and then nearly dropped it in shock.
‘No. Freakin’. Way.’ Danny stared at the exact imitation of the ghost girl he was holding in his hands. There was one big difference though: her eyes were blue, not green. ‘How can that be? How can this be? I met her in the Ghost Zone!’

He shot a look at Mr. Robinson, who was again scanning the magazine. Alice lay next to him. After another second’s contemplation, he put the doll back in the box and closed it. He wasn’t going to do anything about it. Not yet anyway.

“Finished with the box, son?” Mr. Robinson called, seeing Danny stand up with the almost empty box.

“Yes,” Danny lied. “Anything else?”

“You can go ahead and dust those jewelry boxes,” Mr. Robinson said, nodding towards the bookshelves in one corner of the shop.

Danny shoved the box in the back room and looked at it. He was going to devote some time to finding out who that ghost girl was. Just not now. On his way out, he grabbed a cloth and started wiping off the extremely dusty boxes.

Ten minutes later, he was almost finished with cleaning the jewelry boxes when he came across an unusual one. It was unusual in the fact that it was blood red in color but still appeared to be made of wood. Curious, Danny opened it carefully and stared at its contents. There was nothing in there other than the compartments to store jewelry in. The inside was made out of red velvet.

Disappointed, Danny made to close it until he caught sight of a small lever right under the lid. He pulled it to find that the wood popped off, revealing a faded black and white photograph. His breath caught in his throat when he saw who was in it. The mysterious ghost girl was in it with a couple that he could only assume were her parents. Right in her arms was the doll Mr. Robinson had called Alice.

‘Is Mr. Robinson connected with this girl?’ Danny snuck a glance at the store owner, who was currently stretching his old muscles. He flinched when a particularly loud crack issued from Mr. Robinson’s back and turned back to the jewelry box. ‘Should I take the photo?’ Internally, he debated the pros and cons of taking the photo. If only he could somehow make a duplicate of it!

Danny sighed, folded the photo carefully, and tucked it into his pant pocket. He could almost hear Sam or Jazz scolding him for stealing something from the store. But, if you wanted to get technical, it wasn’t necessarily stealing because he doubted Mr. Robinson knew it was in the jewelry box.

“You hung up on that red jewelry box?” Mr. Robinson asked, making Danny jump about a foot in the air.

“U-uh, y-yeah,” Danny stammered, trying not to look guilty. He wasn’t sure if he was succeeding. But judging from Mr. Robinson’s face, it didn’t look like the man suspected anything. “It’s a real… unusual color.”

“A sad color,” Mr. Robinson murmured, looking at the box, “fitting for a sad family.”

“Excuse me?”

Mr. Robinson sighed and took the jewelry box out of Danny’s hands. “Why don’t you go into the back and organize it a bit, hmm?” he suggested, avoiding Danny’s question. “I haven’t been able to keep as tidy as I’d like. Let me know if you need help.”
“Okay…” Danny dropped the dirty rag in a laundry basket – he had no idea why there was a laundry basket – and flicked the light on in the back room. ‘Weird. What’s he hiding? But then…I'm hiding something, too. Two something’s,’ he thought guiltily, flashing back to the picture that was hidden in his pant pocket.

He had just gotten started on the left side of the room when he heard the bell ring, signaling that someone was entering the shop.

‘Mr. Robinson will deal with it.’

He heard muted chattering outside as he shifted through a couple of smaller boxes. He didn’t think anything of it until a familiar name caught his attention.

“Looking for books again, Raven?”

‘Raven?’ The cloaked figure from the previous night popped into his head. ‘Can it really be her? But shouldn’t she have a secret identity or something?’

“Danny, will you come out here for a moment?”

When Danny saw who Mr. Robinson was talking to, he really knew that fate hated him.

“Danny, this is Raven; Raven, this is Danny, my new helper,” Mr. Robinson introduced the two.

Standing in front of the counter was the Teen Titan Danny had met while fighting Technus.

“Aw, come on, people! We haven’t even eaten lunch yet!” Beast Boy pleaded, putting on huge puppy-dog eyes. “Can’t we go to this really great place that’s just opened up?”

“I’m not eating tofu,” Cyborg stated, folding his arms adamantly.

“Who says the place serves tofu?”

“Knowing you it does.”

“I haven’t even looked at the menu! The place is called The Number One Vegan Friendly Place!”

The Titans stared at Beast Boy. The changeling looked sort of nervous under the penetrating stares of all his friends. Most of their expressions were incredulous; Cyborg’s was merely exasperated.

“What’s it called, Beast Boy?” Cyborg asked very slowly, as if he was speaking to a mentally disabled child (although he could’ve been for how Beast Boy normally acted).

“The Number One Vegan Friendly Place?”

“What word is in it?”

“Vegan?” Beast Boy knew where this was going.

“And what does that mean?” The rest of the Titans waited expectantly for Beast Boy’s reply.

Beast Boy tried again. “That it serves vegan food?”

“That it’s vegan friendly,” Cyborg explained slowly. “I don’t eat tofu; Robin doesn’t eat tofu; Starfire doesn’t eat tofu; and Raven doesn’t eat tofu. You’re the only one. You can either go by
yourself or not at all. I’m not in the mood to discuss any further.”

“I could have made the lunch for us at the tower,” Starfire said, covering a yawn.

Robin and Raven, who were right next to the Tamaranean, automatically took two steps to the side away from the alien. They were all aware of how...exotic Starfire’s cooking was. They had experienced lunch and dinner and did not want to go through another Tamaranean lunch.

“Actually, I don’t think I’m up for lunch at this time,” Raven said.

“It’s eleven thirty-seven! How can you not be up for lunch at this time?” Beast Boy asked indignantly.

“Two reasons. Number one: I slept for three hours; two: I had a cake bath last night. I lost my appetite after that.”

“How can you lose your appetite after a cake bath?” Cyborg looked at Raven disbelievingly. “I actually felt ravenous after it.”

“I just did,” Raven said dryly. “It’s not particularly appetizing to be caked in head to foot in cake that was splattered against a wall in a robe that hadn’t seen a wash in a couple of days.”

“If Raven’s out, who else wants to come?” Beast Boy asked hopefully. “Some of you guys have to be hungry!”

Robin shrugged; Cyborg folded his arms sternly; and Starfire looked between her two friends before shrugging as well.

“Oh come on!” Beast Boy waved his arms frantically. “If you guys don’t want lunch then what do you want to do? We’re in the city!”

“You dragged us here,” Robin said.

“But we’re still here!”

Robin let out a gusty breath and shared a glance with Starfire. The alien just gave a shrug to show she was neutral. The boy wonder didn’t even have to look at Cyborg to know the half-robot was against the plan. All he did was finally shrug (again) and say, “It’s fine with me. Don’t expect us to eat with you.”

Cyborg’s jaw hit the floor. “What?”

While the others were arguing over breakfast, Raven was studying the antique store they were standing outside. It was one that she regularly visited for new – or old – books. The furniture they had there also wasn’t bad. But most particularly, the books old Mr. Robinson had in there always caught her eye. They weren’t exactly reliable material but they were...queer with how they approached their subjects. Perhaps queer was what she needed with the new ghosts in town.

So with the others still fighting over where to eat breakfast – Cyborg and Beast Boy making up most of the commentary – Raven slipped away and opened the door into the shop. She took a glance at the window and noted that the ever present “HELP NEEDED” sign had vanished. Mr. Robinson was rather...eccentric, and that coupled with his horrible hearing had made it difficult to find help. Was it possible that he’d found someone?

She found the old store owner at the counter in the back and walked up to him, her robe swishing
around her ankles. “Good morning.”

Surprisingly, Mr. Robinson looked up and beamed at her. “Why good morning! Busy night?”

“Very. We had some newcomers.” Raven turned her head to the window. “Did you finally manage to get help?”

“Ah yes.” Mr. Robinson nodded. “A very nice young lad, too. Didn’t run out the first time I misinterpreted his age.”

Raven smiled. Mr. Robinson was almost stone deaf without his hearing aid, causing him to constantly mix up your words with something that wasn’t even related to what you wanted. This was probably a main reason that he had so much trouble finding help. A second reason would most likely be that most teenagers or adults didn’t want to work in an old antique store that hardly saw any business alongside an old man that could sometimes be very cryptic.

“How old did you think he was this time?”

“Six,” Mr. Robinson admitted, grinning craftily. “He finally gave up and wrote on paper to tell me what he wanted. Made me realize I’d forgotten my hearing aid, too.”

“Where is he?” Raven asked.

Mr. Robinson pointed over his shoulder. “He’s in the back helping me organize it a bit.”

“‘Helping’?”

“He’s doing the work. It’s what I pay him for,” he said shamelessly. “So…what can I do for you?”

“I’m looking for something,” she said, throwing a glance at the books in the corner.

Mr. Robinson chuckled, having caught her eyes in the act. “Looking for books again, Raven?”

“It’s what I always do, isn’t it?”

“Of course. I’ll have Danny help you out.” Before Raven could say that it really wasn’t necessary, Mr. Robinson had turned and called, “Danny, will you come out here for a moment?”

There was no reply but two minutes later a black-haired teenager of average build came out of the back room, brushing his hands off. His blue eyes widened upon seeing Raven but he didn’t say anything.

“Did you get any progress done in the back, Danny?” Mr. Robinson asked pleasantly.

“A little, sir,” Danny said, his eyes still on Raven.

‘Hasn’t he ever seen me before?’

“Ah, yes. Danny, Raven; Raven, Danny.” Mr. Robinson made the necessary introductions. “Danny, Raven here is looking for some books. Help her out, will you?”

Danny gave a small start when he heard that he’d be helping the Titan. “S-sure.”

Raven watched as Danny ran his fingers through his messy hair, leading her to the books. She could have insisted that she didn’t need help but she was curious about the teen that Mr. Robinson had finally managed to hire. Anyone who didn’t run at Mr. Robinson’s eccentric behavior and horrible
hearing earned points in her book.

Raven tried to open a conversation. “Danny, is it?”

Danny looked at her out of the corner of his eye and nodded. “Yeah. …Raven, right?”

“So are you new to Jump City?”

“I am.” Danny gave a small smile that to Raven seemed really nervous. “So, uh…what can I do for you? Mr. Robinson said you were looking for books?”

“Yes. I don’t really need help, though. I’ve done this myself.”

“Let me help.” Danny shot a glance at Mr. Robinson from behind the bookshelf. “It’s part of my job.” He added something under his breath that Raven almost didn’t catch, “I wish it wasn’t when it comes to superheroes that don’t even have to hide their identities.”

Raven raised an eyebrow but didn’t ask him to clarify. It was obvious that Danny didn’t want her to hear it. But if that was the case, why didn’t he just keep it in his head? Mumbling stuff was going to get you into trouble, especially if other people managed to catch whatever it was you said.

“What kind of books are you looking for?” Danny asked, skimming through the dusty collection on the shelf at his level. He sneezed once as he raised a small cloud. “Darn. Haven’t dusted this yet.”

“Anything to do with the supernatural,” Raven responded.

How he responded shocked Raven. He jumped several inches into the air and nearly dropped a book that was still shelved. The commotion raised more dust, causing him to sneeze again.

“I never knew I was allergic to dust,” he muttered shortly. He then turned to Raven, plastering a smile on his face. “What category of the supernatural? There are a few here to pick from.”

“You seem nervous,” Raven commented, inspecting him closely.

Danny squirmed under her gaze. “Sorry. It’s just nerves. This is my first job and my parents are out of town.”

Raven thought his explanation seemed a bit too convenient. “How long have you been here?”

Danny shifted, scratching his neck. “We just moved.” Gesturing to the books behind him he persisted, “Which kind?”

“The spirits,” Raven answered, deciding to give him a break. He didn’t seem to be harmful.

As Danny perused the shelves, looking for books on Raven’s topic, the Titan scrutinized him closely. His clothes seemed rather shabby and his hair appeared like it could use a cut. There were small bags under his eyes and his hands were callused. He also kept jumping at every sound or even when there was complete silence, as if he was expecting something any moment.

‘Is Danny just a teenager?’ Then the name struck her. ‘Danny?’ Struck by the similarities between the two names, she took an even closer look at Danny, taking in every detail on the young teen’s face and body.

‘The body structure is the same. The eyes are different but then so is the hair. I can’t imagine anyone walking around with that hair color anyway.’ Beast Boy flashed across her mind. ‘But then again, I guess someone would.’ She returned to her inspection. ‘I can’t be sure but I think he’s lighter. Is the
“Okay.” Danny’s, voice brought her out of her reverie. “I think I found some books that have to do
with what you’re looking for. Keep in mind that I’m not sure how accurate these are,” he stressed.

Raven took the books from Danny and looked at the titles. Otherworldly Spirits, Spirits of Every
Kind, Guide to Ghost Hunting, Encyclopedia of Spirits, Tales of The Other Side, and Do Spirits
Exist? The Evidence were what Danny had picked out from the shelves.

“Not these,” Raven said immediately, taking Do Spirits Exist? The Evidence, Tales of The Other
Side, and Guide to Ghost Hunting out of the pile.

“What about these?” Danny waved the remaining stack of books in his arms.

“Let me take a look through these two.” Raven flipped through the pages of Encyclopedia of Spirits
before shelving it and picking up Spirits of Every Kind. She put that one under her arm. “I’ll take this
one and Otherworldly Spirits.”

Danny shelved the remaining books and rang up her purchases while Mr. Robinson watched and
directed his actions.

Raven wished her friend a good day before stepping out into the late morning air.

‘Danny’s a strange one. I should keep an eye on him.’

‘Just because the books she bought were about the supernatural doesn’t mean it’s about ghosts. Just
because the books she bought were about – gah! Who am I kidding? She’s so totally researching
ghosts!’ Danny was hyperventilating while trying to hide it from Mr. Robinson. ‘Okay. Calm down.
What are the chances that the books she got have information on my kind of ghosts? Think
logically.’

“You okay, Danny?” Mr. Robinson asked, concerned. He had noticed Danny’s breathing; the boy
was breathing in and out deeply in an effort to calm himself down.

“Mm-hmm.” Danny was still thinking. ‘Think this through carefully. She didn’t know who you were,
that’s obvious. Besides, the world knows your secret now and nothing’s happened…yet. Oh crud.’
He started to think about the worst possibilities again. ‘What if these heroes are anti-ghost? They
obviously don’t know a thing about me.’

“You sure?” Mr. Robinson prodded. Danny was becoming too pale for his liking.

Danny jerked out of his thoughts and worked on making a convincing attempt on lying to his
employer. “I’m fine. Thanks for asking.” He scrambled for a logical excuse. “I can’t believe that
a”—What had they called themselves again?—“Titan came in here! Is she a regular customer or
something? You seemed to know her pretty well.”

Mr. Robinson seemed satisfied with Danny’s excuse. “Raven comes here frequently to see what
antiques I get in here. She buys books more frequently here than anything else.”

“I heard that there are four more with her. Can you tell me more about them?” Danny asked. “Since I
live here now I’d like to know everything I can about them.”

“The other four are Robin – he’s the leader – Starfire, Cyborg, and Beast Boy,” Mr. Robinson
explained. “I would call Starfire Robin’s girlfriend; Cyborg is more of second-in-command and I’d call Raven a close third. I’m not too sure about the green changeling, though. He’s more of a joker than anything else although he’s a tough fighter.”

“What are their specialties?” Although Danny knew that he was taking a round trip to find out his possible-enemies’ powers and weaknesses, he didn’t want to go through a painful fight to figure it out.

“Robin doesn’t have any special abilities but he’s a master at hand combat. His belt has dozens of gadgets on it to help him through any hard spots.” Mr. Robinson stroked his chin, which had stubble on it. “From what I’ve gathered, Starfire is an alien not from this world. Raven is more of a sorceress; her magic deals with the darker side of nature. She’s quiet and doesn’t smile very often but her serious nature makes for a good head in the team besides Cyborg and Robin. Cyborg is another level head in the Titans; he does fight often with Beast Boy, though.” He smiled, obviously remembering some event. “He’s half-robot from what I’ve seen and incredibly good with technology.”

‘Just like Tucker,’ Danny couldn’t help think.

“And as I’ve said before, Beast Boy is more of a trickster. You have to watch your feet around that one. He can be serious when he wants to be, though. I suppose his power – the ability to shift into different animals – fits with his personality. That’s it I suppose.”

“I noticed that Raven purchased books about the supernatural,” Danny said, trying to be nonchalant. “Is she really interested in that stuff?” ‘Maybe he’s heard of ghosts?’

“Her powers deal with spirits,” Mr. Robinson said. “She’s an avid reader and doesn’t just deal with topics about the supernatural. Next time you see her you should ask how many languages she knows. There are a lot.”

“Wow. I only know one,” Danny grinned. “English, of course.”

“Most of us do.” Mr. Robinson winked, making Danny laugh.

“So are they seen really often around here?” Danny brought the subject back to the Titans.

Mr. Robinson nodded. “Oh, yes. They don’t just deal with the common burglars around here – that’s more a job for the police, of course – but a super-villain comes along every few weeks or days to wreck havoc. That’s when they really come in handy.”

“What about other cities?”

Mr. Robinson sat back in his chair, thinking. “I’ve heard of another branch of the Titans calling themselves the Titans East but I’m not too sure where they are. There are other random superheroes scattered throughout America and the rest of the world and the Titans know almost every one. Of course, for every superhero there is there are also the villains. I don’t know where those live but they’re always attracted to the cities where heroes live.”

‘I’ve noticed that,’ Danny thought disgustedly. ‘You’d think that they’d just go bother a different city but no, they have to challenge the big hero and prove their worth. But I guess it makes it easier for the hero to keep track of them.’

“Anything else you want to know?” Mr. Robinson asked, raising an eyebrow. “You’re a curious one.”

“I can stop asking questions if it bothers you,” Danny said quickly.
“Oh keep going.” Mr. Robinson waved him on. “A curious mind is always better than one restrained, I say.”

‘Here goes...’ Danny took a breath before diving in a topic that might dig him into a hole he couldn’t get out of. “Do you believe in ghosts?”

Mr. Robinson seemed taken aback at the change in topic but accepted it. “Ghosts? Do you mean ghosts or spirits? There’s a difference between the two.”

“Ghosts, I suppose,” Danny said, resisting the urge to say “guess”.

“I’d have to say that I’m not too sure about ghosts. Spirits I would say yes.”

Danny raised an eyebrow. “There are superheroes walking among us every day and you say that you don’t believe in ghosts?”

“There might be ghosts around,” Mr. Robinson said, “but all the evidence is either fake or so weak that one can’t really believe it without taking a leap off the cliff.”

“What about spirits?” Personally, Danny didn’t see the difference.

“We have spirits inside of ourselves.” Mr. Robinson touched his chest. “This spirit leaves the body when we die.”

‘Huh. Well, I guess I can see the difference.’ “What’s your definition of ghosts?”

“People that haven’t moved on. Ectoplasmic beings that are still roaming the world. In my opinion, they’re close relatives to poltergeists,” Mr. Robinson replied.

‘Okay. I think I can name quite a few ghosts that would be insulted to be related to a poltergeist. Me included.’ Danny noticed that Mr. Robinson seemed to be hesitating. “There’s more, isn’t there?”

“Good eye,” Mr. Robinson complimented. “Yes, there is more. Unlike spirits, ghosts can actually be seen on some level. They have so much energy from emotions that their molecules manage to form on the level of the human plane. For those with exceptionally high spiritual energy – your sixth sense, you could say – they can see spirits. Raven would be one of these people.”

Danny knew he was pushing it but he still had to ask one more question. “Are there any cities in the United States claiming to be crowded with ghosts?” ‘Please say Amity Park, please say Amity Park.’

“From the top of my head I’d have to say no,” Mr. Robinson said, looking at Danny curiously. “The Internet might tell you more, though,” he added charitably.

“Thanks,” Danny said, rather depressed. ‘How can it be that no one has heard of Amity Park? Pariah Dark’s rampage was broadcast nationally and everyone saw the Disasteroid! Unless...’ He flashed back to what had happened to him before he woke up in Jump City in horror. ‘What if I’m not in my world at all?’

Just as he reached his horrifying revelation, his ghost sense went off. He snapped his mouth shut, hoping Mr. Robinson hadn’t noticed the blue whiff of air. The old man was really observant.

‘Crud. Now I’ll have to formulate some excuse.’
Raven found herself at the restaurant Beast Boy had adamantly insisted they go to. Cyborg, from what she heard, had put up a valiant fight until suddenly giving up on convincing Beast Boy otherwise. He said he was tired of arguing; Raven suspected he was simply too tired to come up with any witty retorts other than, “I don’t eat tofu! Neither do the rest of us!”

“Don’t you guys think this food simply awesome?” Beast Boy asked, shoveling food down his throat like there was no tomorrow. His lunch consisted of water, veggie pizza, veggie chili, and a whole plate full of odd vegetables. The others had nothing before them. Robin was looking heavily disgruntled and appeared to be wishing that he was back in the tower; Starfire was sleeping upright in her chair, a bottle of mustard before her; and Cyborg was glaring at Beast Boy.

“It looks wonderful,” Raven said, stressing “looks” to bring to Beast Boy’s attention that he was the only one eating. It didn’t work. She rolled her eyes and returned to skimming through the books she had gotten from Mr. Robinson’s store.

Cyborg sighed exasperatedly and slumped down further in his seat. Starfire awoke and rubbed her eyes tiredly, staring at the bottle of mustard before as if wondering what it was. Robin was still scowling. Beast Boy continued to shovel food down his throat.

“Mustard, Starfire?” Beast Boy offered, pointing to the yellow bottle on the table.

Starfire shook her head, still rubbing her eyes. She was too tired to care about the entire bottle standing before her.

“You finished, Beast Boy?” Cyborg asked impatiently. “We’re all tired and would like to get some sleep.”

Beast Boy swallowed a large mouthful and opened his mouth to say something. What he was about to retort with was never heard as a loud blast of noise and screams distracted them.

“It might be a rock concert,” Beast Boy said uncertainly.

Another blast of noise was heard along with more screams.

“Or maybe not,” Robin said, leaping to his feet. “We should go.”

“Blast,” Beast Boy groaned, wistfully looking at the remnants of his lunch.

“Come on.” Raven put her books somewhere where only she could get them and grabbed Beast Boy before taking off. The changeling transformed into a raven in a second, leaving Raven free to fly off after Robin and Starfire.

Cyborg threw the money on the table, hoping that it’d be enough. He ran off then, following the other Titans.

So much for a peaceful morning…
Back Home

Sam flopped herself down on her bed, staring morosely at her ceiling. Her cell phone lay next to her and her laptop on the desk by her bed. A screensaver depicting ghosts, vampires, and haunted houses was flashing across the screen. The clock by her read 6:00. Her curfew had been changed to five by her overreacting parents.

‘Stupid furniture thieves,’ she thought, scowling. ‘Couldn’t they pick another place to steal furniture from? You would think that my parents would let me stay out late since I’m friends with a half-ghost but no! They have to call me in even earlier!’ Her curfew had been pulled back to nine after the whole Phantom incident when she’d deliberately tricked them and stayed in Amity Park to help her friend.

Sam rolled over on her stomach, staring at her laptop. She smiled rather wickedly. ‘At least there’s one thing I can do here at home.’

She grabbed it and set it on her bed. There was a webcam attached to it and she activated it, contacting Tucker. Danny wasn’t available for some reason.

‘Must be busy cleaning up the lab,’ she figured. ‘It was a mess when I left.’

Tucker appeared on her screen, his face taking up the entire space. “Sam?” he asked. “Who else?” Sam retorted. “What did your folks say?”

“My curfew’s been changed,” Tucker reported, shrugging. “What about you?”

“I have to come in at five!” Sam grumbled. “You’d think that they’d at least let the sun set first before calling me in!”

“That’s too bad,” Tucker said sympathetically. “My curfew’s been changed to seven.”

“Lucky,” Sam said enviously. “You weren’t grounded after that, were you?”

“No. Like I said, my folks understood what I had to do,” Tucker said. “It’s too bad your folks didn’t.”

“I think it might have had something to do with the fact that the robot nearly electrocuted my mom at the hotel pool she was in,” Sam said, smiling innocently.

Tucker laughed at that. “I guess she shouldn’t have forced you to go in.” He then became serious. “Hey, Sam, what do you think’s been up with Danny lately?”

Sam sighed. “I don’t know, Tucker. He’s been moody lately, hasn’t he?”

“I thought it was just me,” Tucker admitted. “It’s gotten worse after the ghosts stopped appearing, right?”

“That’s weird, though,” Sam said, crossing her legs and making herself comfortable. “Doesn’t he usually complain about his busy schedule with ghosts?”

“I think he actually likes it,” Tucker said, sounding scarily like Jazz. “He probably does feel annoyed on the surface about it but it’s become such a daily routine that he’s just accepted it. The lack of
action probably threw him off.”

“But he’d normally jump at a vacation!” Sam argued. “Besides, it just isn’t Danny to actually wish for trouble.”

“No, you’re right,” Tucker agreed. “It all started after Phantom escaped and nearly destroyed everything.”

“You’re right,” Sam murmured, looking off into the distance. “But why?”

“We don’t really know what went on between those two,” Tucker pointed out. “Danny still hasn’t given us all the details. Phantom could have said something that completely threw him off.”

“But he said that Phantom didn’t succeed!” Sam recalled Danny’s earlier words. “He wouldn’t actually lie to us, would he? He promised!” Her violet eyes flashed with indignation.

“Let’s look at this from a different angle,” Tucker said. “Maybe he was telling the truth about Phantom not getting to him. But what about a different ghost?”

“I’m listening.”

“There are other ghosts out there that now know about Danny’s evil future self,” Tucker went on. “What if one of them managed to mess with Danny’s head? There are a ton of ghosts with different abilities.”

“But he hasn’t left our sight since we came back!”

Tucker raised an eyebrow, waiting for Sam to realize what she was implying.

Sam understood a second later. “Ugh, no! Not like that, Tucker! Get your mind out of the gutter!”

“You were the one saying it,” he muttered.

“I was saying that he hasn’t actually done anything since everything wrapped up!” Sam struggled to find words. “Oh, you know what I mean!”

“I guess I do,” Tucker agreed. “I just wanted to see you squirm for a moment.”

Sam scowled briefly before resuming a worried expression. “Regardless, we haven’t ever seen or heard of a ghost with the ability to mess with heads.”

“There are tons of ghosts that we’ve never seen before,” Tucker said. “Look at all the ghosts Danny recruited for the Disasteroid. We didn’t see half of them before.”

“Most of them were green blobs, Tucker.”

“It doesn’t necessarily have to be a ghost that just messes with heads – or minds. ‘Heads’ sounds too weird…”

“Tucker!” Sam snapped.

“Okay, okay! Back to the subject. Anyway, I’m saying that it could just as well be Desiree. You know that she grants wishes and a wish like this would be right up her alley.”

“But wasn’t Desiree sent off with the rest of the ghosts in the Specter Speeder?” Sam asked.

“Besides, we were all under a truce of sorts when Phantom attacked. It’d be breaking it if she granted
“I know. I’m just saying that it could be Desiree,” Tucker said. “It was only a possibility. It could just as well be Ember – you know that she has those freaky powers with that guitar of hers.”

“Both possibilities are unlikely at this point of time,” Sam said, sighing. “They were under the truce, remember?”

“We’re debating a topic that we’re not even sure is an issue,” Tucker said, trying to comfort her. “Danny said he’s fine. If there really is a problem he’ll let us know eventually. He promised, right?”

Sam chewed her lip. “But promises can be broken.”

“Not Danny’s,” Tucker said, making an attempt to lighten the mood. “You know how seriously he takes his promises.”

“Not working, Tucker. Not working.”

“Okay, then…” Tucker searched for a different topic. “Why don’t we talk this over with Danny tomorrow after school? We’ll have a ton of time then.”

“If no ghosts show up.”

“I highly doubt that, Sam.”

Sam rolled her eyes. “Whatever. Let’s just finish our homework and get to bed.”

Tucker glanced at something that wasn’t on the screen. “You sure about that? According to my PDA, it’ll only take us about an hour to finish, leaving us to go to bed at eight.”

Sam hid her face in her hands. Sometimes her friend could be so aggravating. But at least his actions took her mind off Danny’s strange behavior.

‘Tomorrow,’ she promised herself, reaching for her textbooks. ‘We’ll talk to him tomorrow.’

It was seven-thirty in the morning and bright when Sam and Tucker met at Danny’s house. He wasn’t outside, which didn’t ring any alarms in their minds because they assumed that he was still getting ready. Sam rang the doorbell and waited for it to open.

“Why don’t you just barge in the way we normally do?” Tucker asked. “It’s not like they don’t know us.”

“It’s polite, Tucker,” was all Sam said as the door opened, revealing Jazz.

“Oh, hi, guys!” Jazz greeted them. “I thought you’d already be off with Danny.”

“He’s not here,” Sam answered. “Is he still in his room?”

“If he is he’s awfully quiet,” Jazz said. “I can’t hear a thing. Besides, I checked in there this morning and it was empty. Unless he’s teasing me I don’t think he’s here.”

“You mean he’s not here at all?” Sam asked worriedly.

“He could’ve gone ahead,” Jazz suggested, even though she didn’t really believe that herself.
“You know he doesn’t do that, Jazz,” Tucker disagreed. “Are you positive he’s not here?”

“I’m pretty sure,” Jazz said, “but I could be wrong. Come on. We’ve got some time before you guys are late for school.”

“You’re not going, Jazz?”

“Nope. Day’s off for the seniors and I can get to work on my college applications.”

“I thought you already sent off about twenty of those,” Tucker said, starting on the stairs to Danny’s room.

“You can never have too many,” Jazz said wisely, holding a finger up.

“Hey, Danny?” Sam had reached her boyfriend’s door. “It’s Sam. Open up, will you?” When no reply came she repeated her request again, a bit impatient. “Come on, Danny. We can go into the Ghost Zone after school. There’s no need to”—she twisted the doorknob—“sulk!” But the moment she opened the door it was clear that no one was in the room. “Danny?”

“He’s not here,” Tucker observed, looking from under Sam’s arm.

“Thank you, Captain Obvious!” Sam snapped, whirling around to glare at Jazz. “Where is he?”

“I don’t know!” she said defensively, putting her hands up. “Danny was here last night and stayed down in the lab to clean up.”

“After that?” Sam demanded.

“Well, he didn’t come up for dinner,” Jazz murmured.

Sam squeezed her eyes shut before opening them, fire blazing in her amethyst eyes. “I can’t believe it!” She had to fight not to raise her voice. Danny’s parents were out for the day. “He went into the Ghost Zone by himself! That jerk just—”

“No, Sam, he didn’t!” Jazz cut her off. “I made him promise not to go into the Ghost Zone alone. He keeps his promises!”

“Then where is he?”

“I have an idea,” Tucker spoke up. “You guys arranged a system to tell each other when you’re busy, right?” he asked Jazz.

“Yeah, we did,” Jazz replied. “Are you saying that Danny might’ve left a note?”

“That’s what I’m saying,” Tucker said. “Is it downstairs on the fridge?”

Two minutes later, they were all huddled around a board stuck with dozens of pins that was hanging on the fridge. Sheets littered the surface and they were all searching for Danny’s telltale handwriting.

“There’s nothing here!” Sam cried, frustrated.

“But there’s something under this notice for more fudge,” Tucker said, pointing to one of Jack’s notes.

Sam peeled Jack’s note off and revealed Danny’s familiar handwriting. It read: Hey, guys, I’m really sorry to tell you like this but I need to go out and clear my head. A lot’s happened in the last few
weeks and it’s been getting to me. I figure that a day just flying around will help me put things in better perspective. Don’t worry about me, all right? I’ll come back soon.

“Well, that explains a lot,” Jazz said, relieved. “I told you guys he wouldn’t just up and break a promise like that, no matter how moody he’s been lately.”

“You’ve noticed, too?” Sam and Tucker said at the same time.

“Duh!” Jazz said. “He’s my brother! What kind of sister would I be if I didn’t notice his odd moods?”

“The same sister who never noticed ghosts existed until a hornet attacked the school?” Tucker suggested.

Jazz glared at Tucker. “Fine!” she allowed. “But I have been paying attention to him lately and he’s been really moody. That’s why I set you two on him.”

There was silence for a few moments as Sam and Tucker absorbed this new information. Jazz looked at the clock.

“Agh!”

Her shriek of surprise sent both Sam and Tucker jumping two feet in the air.

“You guys are going to be late! It’s already seven forty-five!” Jazz grabbed the two and pushed them outside. “Shoo! Danny will be back later so don’t worry too much!”

“Impossible,” Sam muttered.

Still, the two listened to Jazz and sprinted towards Caspar High. They were just hitting the steps when the first bell rang.

“Lunch?” Sam asked Tucker.

“Ugh…lunch,” her friend agreed, panting heavily. “Gah…I’m gonna…go now, okay?” Tucker smiled reassuringly at Sam. “We’ll see him later, Sam, all right?”

Sam looked grim but nodded firmly. “We will,” she said decisively.

With three minutes left before the late bell rang, the two sped to their lockers, grabbed their books, and ran off into their classes, just sliding into their seats as the late bell rang. With that, classes began.

Sam looked up at the blue sky, trying to find any sign of her boyfriend. It was blue with the exception of the few clouds and birds. She sighed, depressed, and stared down at her salad, having absolutely no appetite.

Tucker noticed and laid a reassuring hand on her shoulder, smiling. Then, the two looked up, both searching the sky for a figure that they knew they wouldn’t see.

“Mr. Foley, Miss Manson, would you two kindly explain as to why your friend isn’t here today?” Mr. Lancer asked in a dry tone, flipping through a clipboard that held the students’ names.

“Danny’s been having a tough time, Mr. Lancer,” Sam replied, trying to keep the ire out of her tone. “He took the day off to clear his head. I don’t know when he’ll be back.”
“Will he be all right?” Valerie Gray, the second best ghost hunter after Danny, inquired, worried. She still had a cast on her left arm and right leg but was healing well. She had been out of school for the last so many weeks because of her injuries but had finally been well enough to come back just that day.

“He’ll be fine,” Tucker assured her, grinning slightly. However, in the back of his head he just knew that it would be a while until he knew for sure that Danny would be fine.

“I will be expecting you two to give Mr. Fenton his assignments as soon as he gets back,” Mr. Lancer said sternly.

“Yes, sir,” they said, looking at each other out of the corner of their eyes.

“Come on in, Tucker,” Sam said, opening her door. “You’re sure that you’ve got time here, right? The office isn’t calling?”

Tucker shook his head and held up his PDA. “They know how to reach me. Besides, nothing important’s going on anyway.”

“You sure?” Sam didn’t seem to believe him.

“Positive, Sam,” Tucker said, irritated. “Let’s just get going on our homework, all right? We want to be able to talk to Danny as soon as he gets back.”

The two were working steadily on their homework by the time the clock reached five thirty. Tucker was still there because Sam had adamantly refused to kick him out by five simply because her parents insisted that a curfew was a curfew. She had reminded them that he was the mayor and obviously wasn’t dangerous.

They were just checking over their pre-Calculus homework when Sam’s cell phone rang. She reached over and saw it was Jazz calling. Raising an eyebrow questioningly, she flipped it open and was just about to say “hello” when a panicked voice immediately started talking.

“You’ve got to come over now! There’s something really wrong!”

Sam tried to speak through Jazz’s frantic pleas. “Wait; slow down, Jazz. What do you mean that there’s something wrong? Is Danny—”

“It’s Danny! He’s still not here!”

“I know. He left a note—”

“Just come over! Try to make it fast!”

Before Sam could say anything else, Jazz had hung up. Obviously it was urgent if she had just hung up without giving Sam any room to argue.

“What’s up?” Tucker asked.

“There’s something up with Danny according to Jazz,” Sam said, getting off her bed and opening a cabinet with bed sheets in it. “We’ve got to hurry. You go down, pretend nothing’s up, and wish my parents a good night. I’ll be escaping through the window.”

Tucker packed up his books in record time and walked out. Sam was tying together sheets at a rapid pace. She heard her friend wishing her parents a good night by the time she tied the last sheet and
attached it to her bed leg. Shimmying down in no time, she met her friend on the curb and they ran off to see what was up with Jazz.

This time they didn’t bother knocking. They ran up and found Jazz in the kitchen, stark white and clutching a sheet of paper in her hands. The phone lay on the kitchen table.

“What’s wrong, Jazz?” Sam asked, on one side of Jazz.

“What’s that sheet of paper you’re holding?” Tucker tried to see what it was.

“Danny’s missing,” was all Jazz said, sounding rather numb. “That note wasn’t right.”

“What do you mean the note wasn’t right?” Sam said, beginning to panic.

“It was behind my dad’s note for more fudge,” Jazz continued, straightening the note she held in her hands, letting the two friends read what was written on it. “But look…look at the date.”

Both of their hearts skipped a beat when they read the date on Jack’s note. It was September 20th, a week before Danny had even attempted to enter the Ghost Zone. But then…where was Danny?

“How did you know?” Sam asked unsteadily.

“I thought something was wrong with the timing,” Jazz explained, crumpling the note up and staring ahead blankly. “He didn’t come down for dinner, which I already thought weird today. Also, there was a day about a week and a half ago when Danny went missing. You guys weren’t here; Tucker was at the office for an emergency and you, Sam, had gone shopping with your parents. We never bothered to check the board and when Danny came back he had to explain what he did. I didn’t remember until an hour ago. I’ve been panicking ever since and then thought to call you.”

“Does that mean he actually went into the Ghost Zone?” Sam demanded.

“He shouldn’t have!” Jazz replied automatically. “He promised!”

“But promises can be broken,” Sam persisted.

“But not Danny’s! You know how strict he is with those!”

“He’s been so moody lately, Jazz. There’s no telling what he’ll do lately!”

“Why don’t we just go down into the lab and check it out?” Tucker said reasonably, breaking into the argument.

Neither of them answered. Sam turned on her heel and immediately ran down the stairs, Jazz only several inches behind her.

“Well,” Tucker said quietly, entering the lab after the two, “it’s obvious that Danny didn’t manage to clean anything up.”

“But he tried,” Jazz added, pointing to a green rag that was lying on the floor next to a trashcan filled with broken beakers. “But what happened?”

“The Specter Speeder’s still here,” Sam said, looking at the vehicle. “And the portal’s closed. There aren’t any clues here.”

Tucker could tell that this was leading somewhere. “And?” he said warily.
“We need to go into the Ghost Zone and see if we can find anything in there.”

“But that’s insanity!” Jazz instantly protested. “We have no way of protecting ourselves!”

“You were there when Danny used the Speeder’s offensive capabilities in the Ghost Zone,” Sam said. “It’s got more than enough ammo for a while. We need to go in and see what we can find out before your parents come home and see that Danny’s missing.”

“But Danny wouldn’t just go into the Ghost Zone,” Jazz insisted. “He promised me and I know for a fact that he doesn’t break promises easily.”

“That’s the key word there, Jazz. He doesn’t break promises \textit{easily}. What if he was forced to? We need to go in and find out what we can.”

After thinking it through for a few seconds, Jazz agreed. “All right. But let’s try not to get into anything \textit{too} dangerous, please.”

Sam smirked. “Honey, when you’re traveling with us, everything’s dangerous.”

“You sounded seriously creepy there for a moment, Sam,” Tucker muttered, climbing into the seat next to the driver’s. “You’re driving.”

It wasn’t three minutes until they were in the Ghost Zone and among the green surroundings. The dimension itself didn’t surprise them. What shocked them was the stark emptiness of it. There wasn’t a single sign of a ghost anywhere.

“Where are they all?” Sam guided the Specter Speeder through a group of ledges. “It’s so weird that it’s empty. You’d normally see the small ones flying around.”

“You mean like that one?” Jazz asked, pointing straight ahead. “It looks pretty small to me.”

Sam figuratively screeched the Speeder to a halt, causing everyone to fly into their seatbelts before settling down. “That’s Skulker!”

Tucker peered at the small blob. “Without his suit? Wow. That’s not a sight one normally sees.”

“Which is odd,” Sam said. “He might know what happened to Danny since he’s obviously without his suit. Maybe he tried to capture him again.”

Moving the shuttle so that it was parked right next to the ledge where Skulker was on, Sam unbuckled her seatbelt and opened the Speeder’s door, hopping down on the ledge and looming ominously over Skulker.

“Hello,” she said softly.

Skulker had already seen the Speeder and was now floating at eye level. He crossed his tiny green arms and tried to look defiant. “What do you want?” he asked squeakily.

“Where’s your suit?” Tucker asked before Sam could get a word in. “Did someone wreck it or something?”

“‘Did someone wreck it?’ ‘\textit{Did someone wreck it}?’ I’ll say!” Skulker shrieked, pumping his arms. “That insolent whelp completely fried my armor and left me without as much as a spare part to build a new one!”

“You’ve seen Danny?” Sam accused. “Where is he?”
“Well…I don’t know,” Skulker admitted.

“But you have to know! You just said he wrecked your suit!”

“I said he *wrecked* my suit, not that I know where he is,” Skulker said, crossing his arms and trying to look menacing. It didn’t work.

“What happened?” Jazz queried. “Danny didn’t come into the Ghost Zone by himself, did he?”

“Why should I tell you?” Skulker glared at them.

“Maybe because if you don’t I can easily trap you in the Fenton Thermos, string it up in the wind, and leave you in it for a month.” Sam smiled sweetly at the ghost. “Or I can lock you up in the lab and leave you to the mercy of Danny’s parents. Your pick.”

Skulker noticeably gulped. “Fine. He didn’t go into the Ghost Zone by himself. I went through the portal and found him in the lab. He was ready to fight!” he said defensively when Sam glared at him. “He even seemed happy to see me! I thought Plasmius would submit to me the day the ghost child would be happy to see me hunt him.”

“Maybe he did,” Tucker commented wryly.

“Shh!” Sam and Jazz scolded him, both staring at Skulker as the ghost continued his narrative.

“I shot him into the Ghost Zone but then *he* shot a hole in my suit with just one ghost ray! *One!*” Skulker seemed indignant at this fact. “Then he vanished, reappeared instantly behind me, and snatched me out from my control seat and fried my suit!”

Sam restrained herself from throttling the ghost; his self-centered shouting was getting on her nerves. “And what happened to Danny?”

“No clue,” Skulker said. “He vanished just like every other ghost here’s been doing.”

“What do you mean?” Sam demanded. “What’s been going on?”

“Random portals have been opening up, sucking ghosts into them and they’re never to be seen again,” Skulker explained. “The first time a ghost disappeared was in your world and then it started happening more frequently, leading to everyone hiding here. But now here’s not safe either.”

The three looked around nervously, half expecting a portal to open up right then and there and suck them in.

“Relax,” Skulker scoffed. “I’d say we’re safe now. There’s been a quiet interlude for the last so many hours for some strange reason.”

“What else happened? You have to know where Danny went! You’re the one that kicked him here!” Sam persisted.

“He grabbed me and started interrogating me the same way you three are doing.” Skulker placed two fists on his nonexistent hips and studied the three. “Ember began chasing us but the whelp hid behind a door. The next thing we knew was that Ember had disappeared. I left him behind to look for her and when I turned around he was gone as well.”

“You didn’t notice anything?” Tucker asked, dismayed. “Anything at all?”

“Well, there was one thing…”
“What?” all three shouted.

“I thought I saw what seemed like a portal closing when I turned around. Perhaps the ghost child was sucked in.” Skulker shrugged. “My apologies.” But he didn’t sound very sorry. “He might turn up sooner or later. Maybe with a limb missing or something or – hey!” He was cut off abruptly when the three spun around and jumped into the Speeder. “I was still talking!” he cried indignantly.

“Thanks, Skulker!” was all that was heard as the Speeder vanished.

“Stupid brats,” Skulker muttered. He scowled. “If only I could find my hideout! Dratted portals!”

“Um, guys? The clock says it’s six thirty.”

“So?” Sam was flooring the Speeder, her knuckles white on the steering wheel.

“So it means my mom and dad are home,” Jazz said.

“And?” They were just entering the Fenton Ghost Portal.

“We’re in trouble,” Jazz finished, sighing when she saw her parents in the lab.

“Great,” Sam grumbled, hopping out.

“Hi, Mom; hi, Dad.” Jazz grinned nervously, sidling closer to Sam. “How you doing?”

‘Smooth,’ Sam and Tucker thought.

Maddie’s hood was down and her arms were folded across her chest; she was scowling ferociously. Jack wasn’t smiling but he also wasn’t frowning.

“Where have you been?” Maddie demanded. “No, scratch that. I just saw you coming back from the Ghost Zone. What on earth were you doing in there?”

“We have a good reason, Mrs. Fenton,” Sam said, stepping forward.

“Was it to try out our new Specter Speeder?” Jack asked eagerly. He was jabbed in the side by his wife. “Ow!”

“Wait.” Maddie had noticed their missing member. “Where’s Danny? Isn’t he always with you?”

All three shared rather guilty looks.

“Well,” Tucker said reluctantly, “that’s the thing. We don’t know.”

“How can you not know where he is?”

“He disappeared last night, Mom,” Jazz tried to explain.

“Disappeared?”

“We know Skulker got to him…” That was Tucker.

“What? Danny’s been captured?”

“No!” Sam shouted, cutting into the din. “Let us explain before assuming anything!”
“Make it quick,” Maddie allowed. “I can’t believe you three didn’t say something sooner!”

“We just found out for sure about an hour ago. Look,” Sam said, “Danny was cleaning down here when Skulker came. The two tussled in the Ghost Zone before Skulker ran off and Danny disappeared.”

“That’s it?” Maddie asked skeptically.

“That’s the condensed version. But it’s all we know.”

“Danny wouldn’t run away!” Jack proclaimed.

“He didn’t,” Tucker assured him. “There have been portals opening up and taking ghosts. Danny might have gotten caught in one. Skulker isn’t sure himself even though he was the last person – or ghost – to have seen him.”

“You mean like our ghost portal?” Jack guessed.

“Not like that,” Tucker disagreed. “We’re not sure what they are.”

Maddie was pacing the lab agitatedly. “But how are we supposed to find him?”

“We’ve got time,” Tucker tried to reassure her. “We’ll find—”

“Time!” Sam suddenly shouted. “I know who we can see!”

“Clockwork?” Tucker said. “But why would we—”

“Think about it! He’s got a portal in his castle, right? Plus, he’s all-knowing! He’s got to know where Danny is!”

“I don’t trust him,” Jazz protested. “How do we know he’ll help us?”

“Hold on a moment,” Maddie interrupted. “Is this Clockwork the same ghost who helped Danny with Phantom?”

“Yes,” Jazz affirmed. “And I don’t trust him. He could’ve kept Phantom trapped but instead let him go and wreck havoc here.”

“For the good of all of us!” Sam argued.

“We nearly died, Sam! I don’t call that ‘for the good of all of us!’”

“He’s helped Danny plenty of times before!”

“For his own agenda!”

“Stop it!” Tucker shouted, cutting both girls off. “Screaming and throwing accusations aren’t going to help us find Danny at all! We need to decide on something now instead of debating about it or arguing!”

Sam and Jazz looked at their feet, abashed. Maddie and Jack had been following their argument with confusion since no one had told them much about Clockwork; they were now listening to Tucker.

“Good,” Tucker said in a softer tone once he knew he had their attention. “You guys are listening. My opinion is that we should go see Clockwork.”
“But—” Jazz started.

“He doesn’t have any reason to deny us answers,” Tucker said immediately. “Sure, he’ll be cryptic but that’s about it.”

“Thank you,” Sam breathed.

“All right,” Jazz said, defeated. “We’ll go.”

“Will you two stay here?” Tucker asked Jazz’s parents.

Maddie instantly frowned in protest. “Now listen here, young man.” She was firing up for a rant that only mothers could pull off. “Under no circumstances are any of you going in there alone.”

“With all due respect, Mrs. Fenton,” Sam said, “but have you ever actually been in the Ghost Zone excluding when Amity Park was dumped in it?”


“We’ll be fine, Mom,” Jazz said. “We know how to handle ourselves.”

“Come on, Maddie,” Jack said softly, resting a hand on her shoulder. “Even though I really wanna go in there and whoop some ghost butt”—everyone smiled at that—”you have to admit that they’ve been at this longer than we have.”

“We promise to keep in touch,” Tucker added.

Maddie looked torn; she bit her lip. “Oh, all right,” she conceded, sighing. “But you three had better keep in close communications with us!” she threatened.

“We promise,” all three replied dutifully, smiling at each other.

Ten minutes later, they were all outfitted with headphones and flying through the Ghost Zone. Tucker had programmed the navigator to find Clockwork’s castle, the coordinates of which he had gotten the last time they’d left it.

“Unless it flies around and changes locations,” he had said, “the navigator should lead us straight to it.”

They didn’t meet a single ghost on the way, only seeing empty rock ledges and purple doors. It was seriously disturbing. Not much later and they were flying up to the castle’s front door.

“That was too easy,” Jazz said, stepping onto the stones. “Shouldn’t it have been harder?”

“He’s expecting us,” Sam said simply, just walking through the doors.

“Kids? Have you gotten there?” It was Maddie.

“We’re here, Mom,” Jazz said reassuringly. “We’ll let you know if anything bad happens, all right? Just try and keep quiet for now.”

“Okay. Be careful.”

“Don’t let those ghosts get the better of you!” That was Jack.

“Sure, Mr. F,” Tucker said, grinning at the other two.
“I think this is the room,” Sam called, waving the other two over to a large room with a green orb in the center.

“You think?” Tucker walked up to the swirly greens in the orb. “This is the same room we fought Clockwork in the first time, remember?”

“And when we talked to him weeks ago,” Sam recalled, looking around.

“But where is he?” Jazz turned in a full circle. “I don’t see him!”

“Look,” Sam breathed, pointing to the orb. “It’s…showing us pictures.”

And indeed it was…

There was an older Danny just lying on a bed in a dark room. He had dark shadows under his eyes and his figure was rugged, toned with both muscles and scars. He looked incredibly tired and weary, both emotionally and physically. A blue wisp of air escaped his lips and he sighed, getting slowly to his feet.

“Dratted ghosts,” he mumbled. When he transformed into his ghostly persona, the glow was weak and his green eyes dull.

He encountered a bigger version of Skulker. He had huge guns and even sharp spears attached to the suit.

“Hello, whelp,” the new version of Skulker said. “Pleased to see me?”

“Hardly,” Danny said. “What are you doing here already? I thought I put you in the Ghost Zone just yesterday.”


Danny said nothing to that. Instead, he merely fired up a ghost ray and created a large hole in Skulker’s shoulder plate. The ghost retaliated by firing a gun at the halfa. Danny vanished from the spot and reappeared behind Skulker, punching the ghost into a building.

“You done yet?” Danny said, raising an eyebrow.

“Hardly,” Skulker sneered. “You’re pathetic. How long has it been since you’ve given anyone a decent fight?”

“I dunno. Yesterday, maybe?”

“Years! How can you ever measure up to anything?”

Danny said nothing to that; he merely lowered his head and stared at the ground. “Perhaps you’re right,” he finally said. “But despite that, it’s still my duty to rid Amity Park of pests like you.”

“You’ve changed,” Skulker said as if stating a fact. “You changed years ago.”

A barely noticeable wince crossed Danny’s face. “I know.” Then, he blasted Skulker once more and sucked him into a thermos.

When the scene disappeared, all three stared at each other in horror.
“He wasn’t even himself!” Sam said, horrified. “He looked so…so…”

“Depressed!” Jazz finished. “But how could that be?”

“Skulker said he changed years ago,” Tucker said. “How far in the future do you think that was?”

“I have no clue,” Jazz whispered, still staring at the screen. “But it looks like he was in his twenties.”

“There’s something else coming up,” Sam pointed out.

The screen was changing once more, showing another future.

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“Hey, Danny!” Sam was laughing in the park, calling to a tall black-haired man hiding behind a tree. “I see you!”

“No, you don’t!” was the childish reply. The man that was Danny vanished from view.

“No fair!” Sam shouted, pouting as she saw the empty space where her boyfriend had been. “You can turn invisible and I can’t!”

“Quiet, Sam,” Danny suddenly hissed into her ear. “There’s a ghost.”

Sam whirled and grabbed her friend by the forearms. “Do you need help?”

“No. I’ve got it.” In a bright flash of light, Danny Phantom phased out of her grip and flew upward.

He faced off against an upgraded version of Technus. This one sported a weird white afro and had huge round sunglasses.

“Still haven’t upgraded, Technus?” Danny called out, smirking. His white aura was slowly changing to green.

“Foolish child! Today is the today that you shall bow to Technus, ghost master of science, technology, computers, and gadgetry!”

“Wow. That’s gotta be a really short introduction for you,” Danny remarked, his mouth curling into a sneer. He vanished and reappeared behind Technus. “Got anything else to add to that?” he whispered into Technus’s ear.

Before the ghost could do anything, Danny had fired a powerful ecto-blast and thrown Technus into the park, creating a decently sized mini-crater. Then he flew, flying so fast that he was a mere blur, coming to a stop above Technus only two seconds later.

“Too fast for you?” Danny taunted, his fists flaring. “I have to say I’m disappointed.”

“Don’t let your guard down!” Technus suddenly flew up, a hand drawing back for a punch.

“I didn’t. You did.” Danny twisted out of the way, grabbed Technus’s arm, and pulled it behind the ghost’s back, ignoring his struggles. “Nice try. But you should know by now that you can’t trick me.”

“Release me!”

“I’m sorry? You’re asking me to release you? Please tell me, what reason do I have to release a ghost like you? I already gave you all fair warning as to what happens when someone tries to fight
me. Or have you already forgotten about what happened to Skulker?"

Technus’s green skin lost all its color. Whatever had happened to Skulker must’ve been bad. “Release me at once!” His struggles became frantic.

“I don’t think so,” Danny did something that caused Technus to glow. “You engaged me and have to pay the consequences. I’d say it was nice knowing you but then I’d be lying.”

A green orb formed in Technus’s middle and exploded outwards, forming a shockwave that passed harmlessly through the half-ghost. The ghost of technology was gone. Danny merely brushed his hands off before landing on the ground. Sam ran up to him, pale-faced and shocked.

“What did you just do, Danny?”

“The same thing I did to Skulker, Sam. What else?” Danny turned to her, his hands on his hips.

“But…you know what that means!”

“I know. He won’t be bothering us anymore. I gave them a warning, Sam. They chose not to listen.”

“You warned them with Skulker’s remains! This…this isn’t like you, Danny! What happened to the Danny I became friends with?”

Danny’s eyes suddenly flashed. “He changed, Sam! I changed! You can’t expect me to be the same naïve fourteen-year-old that became a half-ghost! What happened to the girl I became friends with? The strong, independent girl who would do anything to defy the rules?”

Sam was shaking her head. “Not anything, Danny, not anything. That was never me. And you were never naïve.”

Danny gave a harsh laugh. “Never? I’d say not.”

“You promised, Danny! You promised that you wouldn’t use that power anymore on ghosts! Why did you go back on your word? The Danny I know wouldn’t—”

“I can’t keep my promises, Sam!” Danny shouted. “I’m trying but it’s impossible! Do you want the ghosts to overrun Amity Park?”

“No!”

“Then what do you want me to do? Just stand by and take it?”

“Not that either! We’ve been doing this for years without ever destroying them! Can’t we just continue?”

Danny’s eyes hardened. “Tried and done that. You know it never works. They just keep coming back.”

“And you keep fighting back! Violence like this isn’t the answer! You’re strong! Strong enough to keep them in the Ghost Zone instead of just annihilating their existence!”

“Stop it!” Green energy shot out of Danny’s eyes and hit Sam in the chest, blasting her backwards and into a tree. She didn’t move to get up.

Seconds passed by and the energy flaring around Danny died. He stepped back and stared at his hands in horror. “No, no, no,” he kept muttering. “No! Sam!”
He transformed back and rushed to her. “No, Sam! I’m sorry! I didn’t mean it! Come back to me! Please! Sam!”

This time no one said a word as the future vanished into green smoke. They were all speechless at what they had just seen. Sam gulped heavily and turned to her friends, her eyes wide with shock.

“What…was that?” she managed to whisper.

“Two possible futures out of many that your friend is flicking between,” a deep voice answered for them. “Young Danny does have the talent at shrouding his future.”

“Clockwork!” Jazz marched up to the ghost, an old man. “What did those futures mean for my brother? Why was he horribly depressed in one and then completely sociopathic in the other?”

“Your friend is facing an inner battle,” Clockwork said, shifting to a child. “This inner battle has the potential to take him on several paths, two of those that you have just viewed.”

“Where is Danny?” Sam demanded, standing by Jazz. “He’s been missing since last night!”

“Your friend is safe,” Clockwork replied. “You have no need to worry.”

“Why wouldn’t we have a need to worry? Danny is missing and we’ve just seen two futures that show my little brother in a negative light! How can we not be worried?” Jazz jabbed the child in the chest. She automatically took a step back once Clockwork morphed into an adult.

“As I said before, they are merely two possibilities. Two dark possibilities that your friend may head down,” Clockwork said.

“But why would Danny have futures like that?” Tucker asked. “I thought that was fixed with the capture of his future self! He’s not getting out again, is he?”

“Only time can tell whether or not he will escape again. His capture merely closed the door on one future,” Clockwork said, floating over to the orb. “It did, however, open the door to countless others. Danny faces questions that make him doubt himself. He needs to face his fears before he can ever truly become the hero he wishes to be.”

“You still haven’t told us where Danny is!” Sam accused.

Clockwork raised an eyebrow, his face impassive.

Sam sighed, reading what the older ghost was telling her. “You’re saying that it’s not time for us to know, right? So all you’ll say is that he’s safe?”

Clockwork nodded, smiling slightly in his old form.

“But what about the ghosts?” Tucker queried. “They’re disappearing, too! What’s up with the portals?”

“The worlds are merging,” Clockwork said.

“What’s that mean?” Jazz demanded.

“It’s being taken care of” was all Clockwork said in answer.

“And what about Danny? You can’t just say that he’s being taken care of, too!”
“Your brother will be fine,” Clockwork repeated. “He will come back safely.”

“When?”

“Who knows?” Clockwork shrugged in child form.

“You do,” all of them said simultaneously.

“Perhaps I do,” Clockwork said. “Regardless, there’s nothing for you three to worry about.”

“You mean that there’s nothing we can do,” Sam corrected.

Clockwork inclined his head as an adult.

“All right. We’ll go now,” Tucker said, holding his friends back. “Thanks for your help.”

“Of course.” Clockwork watched them leave.

Several minutes later, two ghosts with only one eyeball apiece floated in. They had capes on and no mouths. These were the Observants, the ghosts that constantly annoyed Clockwork.

“Clockwork,” one of them said, “why did they see those two futures?”

“You know that it is against the law for humans to view the future!” the second scolded.

“They had to see indirectly what is running through their friend’s head,” Clockwork said, shifting to a child. “No harm will come from this.”

“And what of your charge?” Observant #1 asked. “Is it safe for him in their world?”

“Perfectly safe,” Clockwork reassured them. “It is exactly where he needs to be at the moment.”

“Says who?” Observant #2 said.

“Perhaps no one,” Clockwork said, shrugging. “After all, who can tell what paths the future takes?”

“Do not jest, Clockwork,” Observant #1 commanded. “What have you seen in the boy’s future?”

“Absolutely nothing that perhaps you two aren’t aware of,” Clockwork answered smoothly, an adult now. “Everything is as it should be. Now, will you two care to observe the door?”

“What of his future self?” Observant #2 asked, ignoring Clockwork’s order. “Did you lie?”

“Now why would I do that?” Clockwork twisted the clock on his staff.

Knowing that their questions would likely not be answered, the Observants floated out, leaving Clockwork to his means. The ghost master of time turned to his time portal, the green clouds clearing to show Danny Phantom fighting a flying rock star with five teens on the ground, watching.

“Everything is as it should be,” Clockwork intoned, smiling mysteriously. “Young Danny Phantom is exactly where he needs to be.”

“So we still don’t know where Danny is but Clockwork says there’s no need to worry. And if he says that, I can say that we shouldn’t worry,” Sam finished, sighing as she leaned back in the couch she was currently occupying.
“We’re not supposed to worry?” Maddie cried disbelievingly.

“I know.” Sam shrugged. “We’ll still worry.”

“Danny will be fine, Maddie,” Jack said reassuringly, holding Maddie close to his side. “The boy’s a Fenton!”

“Mr. Fenton’s got a point this time,” Tucker pointed out. “Danny’s a tough fighter, Mrs. Fenton. He’ll manage wherever he is.”

“I hope you’re right, Tucker,” Maddie murmured, stress lines on her forehead. “I really hope you’re right.”

“At least the ghosts won’t worry us,” Sam said brightly, smiling falsely.

Everyone stared at her.

“I was joking,” Sam said, aggrieved. “Just…never mind. Let’s just worry in peace.”

She looked at the ring on her left hand that Danny had given her. ‘Please, Danny. Be safe. For us.’ ‘Come back soon.’
Ember, You Will Remember!

“That’s right, people! Ember is back!” Ember had her guitar out, ready, and was blasting passer-bys with her pink fists of doom. Most of the people were screaming as they tried to find some sort of shelter from the ill-tempered ghost but whatever they managed to find was soon squashed by Ember.

This was the sight that greeted the Titans when they managed to get there. None of them had any time with which to categorize their new opponent as Ember saw them and immediately assaulted them with a cacophony of noise. All of them fell to their knees as they held their suddenly pounding temples, their eardrums ringing from the noise.

“Gee. You humans sure are dumb.” Ember seemed disgusted at the cringing Titans as she idly strummed the strings. “Don’t you know by now that if you hear a disturbance you should be running away from it and not towards it?”

“There’s one small problem with that!” Robin managed to shout, getting to his feet. “Not all of us are humans!”

He whipped out his staff and twirled it around between his fingers. “Titans, show her what I mean!”

Beast Boy morphed into a ferocious green lion and roared viciously. He then transformed into a raven and flew up. Starfire’s eyes were a solid green and her fists blazed with energy. Cyborg’s arm was already in cannon mode and he was running after Robin. Raven was still at the back, intending to observe for the first few minutes instead of charging in headlong the way Robin preferred to.

Starfire engaged Ember in a small aerial fight, her starbolts being exchanged with Ember’s pink fists. The two kept dodging each other’s attacks and it seemed as if it would be a stalemate until Beast Boy landed on Ember, turning into a python and trying to squeeze the life out of her.

“Hah!” Ember first attempted to wiggle out of his coils but when that didn’t work, she turned intangible and slipped out. Beast Boy’s eyes popped wide open in surprise and he was about to fall to the hard ground when he transformed into a raven and flapped his wings frantically, staying in the air.

“Have a nice helping of music, dipstick!” Ember knocked Beast Boy to the asphalt by hitting him with a whirlwind of noise that made him transform back into his normal form.

“Your line sucks!” Cyborg shouted, beginning to shoot at the rock star. “Can’t you think of a better catch phrase?”

Ember spent half a minute just dodging both Starfire’s attacks and Cyborg’s before she got fed up with it and sped over behind Starfire. The alien had no time to react before Ember sent a spinning kick right into her back. Unfortunately for Cyborg, he was right underneath the falling Tamaranean and received the full brunt of her fall.

Ember had no time to gloat over her small victory because Robin sent several small disks her way. They hit Ember and exploded on contact. The smoke hadn’t even cleared when something fell to the ground with a loud crash. Starfire and Cyborg had recovered from the fall and both rushed over to the scene with Raven, Beast Boy, and Robin.

They couldn’t even look into the crater before an explosion of energy threw them all back. Ember floated above them all, glaring down at them. Just visible was a block of ice, which she had phased through.
“You’re so going to pay for that, dipstick!” Ember snarled, glaring figurative daggers right at Robin. Her fingers danced across her guitar as she prepared for a big attack.

Robin barely had time to jump back when a loud barrage of noise and multiple fists slammed into the ground where he had been just a moment before. It created a sizeable crater and Robin twisted his mouth when he saw it, fully aware that this ghost packed the same kind of punch like Technus. The only advantage with Ember was that her attacks became rather predictable as they had only seen pink fists and sonic barrages.

The boy wonder made up his mind on a half-formed plan. “Beast Boy, transform into something small but fast and get her from behind. We’ll distract her from the front.”

“Do you mind me asking what the point is?” Beast Boy asked. “You can’t really keep her pinned with that phasing thing she’s got going on.”

“We’ll deal with that when the time comes,” Robin answered, taking out a couple of disks from his belt. “Just go! Starfire, help him out if he needs it.”

Beast Boy morphed into a hummingbird, his tiny wings a blur as he darted forward and from side to side. Cyborg distracted Ember from noticing the green changeling’s disappearance by shooting sonic blasts at her. In the meantime, Starfire had kept track of Beast Boy’s progress and had her starbolts ready. Raven was standing behind them, not really having a job but observing until she felt she was needed.

‘These ghosts all seem to have the same basic power,’ she thought, seeing Ember turn intangible to let a sonic blast from Cyborg pass through her abdomen. ‘Intangibility’s one power I’ve seen all of them use. Not too surprising considering as how ghosts are all inherently intangible in the first place. But what about invisibility? Or is that just isolated to the Cake Ghost?’

Ember, meanwhile, had noticed Beast Boy’s absence despite all the hindrances the other Titans were throwing her direction. She couldn’t see him but decided to give him tit for tat by turning invisible. All the Titans stopped their attacks, momentarily stunned at Ember’s rapid disappearance.

“Did she teleport?” Cyborg cried, trying to see her.

“No,” Raven said grimly. “She turned invisible. Beast Boy had better not – DON’T!”

Her cry of warning came too late as Beast Boy had stopped flying for a quick moment in surprise. Raven took off before the others moved, fully intending on trying to determine Ember’s location. She couldn’t get a very clear feeling from the ground but knew that she was somewhere behind Beast Boy.

Out of nowhere came a sudden pink blast that hit the fluttering Beast Boy right in the back. Stunned, Beast Boy transformed back and crashed into Raven, throwing the two down into the asphalt. Ember reappeared two seconds later, smirking broadly.

“You thought you could get me with the oldest trick in the book?” she crowed. “Ha! You’d better pull newer and more original tricks out of that belt of yours, dipstick!”

“Come up with a better insult, ghost!” Cyborg snapped, shooting at her.

Ember bent double, letting it fly over her head. “That’s getting old, too, dipstick!” She grinned widely. “You better take a look at your teammates. They seem rather…occupied at the moment if you catch my drift.”
Against all logical reasoning, the three of them looked. What they saw made their jaws drop. Raven
had gotten to her feet but was having trouble engaging in any sort of battle at the moment seeing as
how Beast Boy was clinging to her neck.

“Get off,” Raven said in a low voice.

“Don’t want to!” Beast Boy chirped, grinning rather stupidly. Then, he suddenly planted a great big
kiss right on Raven’s lips, freezing all the Titans in their tracks in shock.

Raven herself had gone completely stiff, her hands frozen in midair and trembling in either shock or
disgust. This merely lasted for a minute; her eyes glowed black and she threw Beast Boy back, wrapping
black magic around him and pinning him to a lamppost.

Robin was the first to snap out of his stupor after that. “What did you do to him?” he demanded,
glaring at Ember.

“He’s under some sort of spell,” Raven said before Ember could, wiping her mouth with a hand.
“You four stay back for now. Let me take my shot at handling this ghost.”

This time it was Starfire who started to protest. “Raven, perhaps that would not be wise?”

The dark Titan ignored her friend, taking off into the air and blocking her friends behind a dark
shield of magic. She thought she had a good idea about what Ember’s attacks were made of.

‘Her attacks are predictable. Now I just have to see if my magic is capable of handling this
particular kind of ghosts.’

“One on one, huh?” Ember asked, grinning smugly. It was evident that she thought this would be
real easy. “You’re pretty confident, dipstick.”

“I don’t normally agree with my friends but I have to say that your insult is getting really old,” Raven
commented, enchanting a car on the ground. She threw it at Ember. “Can you come up with some
better insults?”

The blue Beatle flew straight through Ember as the ghost simply turned intangible. She was smirking
when her form became fully solid. “You’ll have to do better than that!”

‘Obviously doesn’t have much of a brain.’ Raven dove to the side, the fist Ember sent at her crashing
into the ground. ‘But she does pack firepower.’

“That all you can do, dipstick? Dodge? This is just lame!”

Ignoring Ember’s taunts, Raven cast another spell on a lamppost, bringing it up and around. She
swung it like a baseball bat, fully intending on hitting a home run. However, she hadn’t paid enough
attention to what Ember was doing in the meantime and the mistake cost her. She was pummeled by
a well-aimed fist just as her enchanted lamppost hit an unsuspecting Ember, smashing her into the
side of a building. Raven didn’t fare much better, crashing into a building on the opposite side.

She heard her friends’ alarmed cries but paid them no heed, focusing on Ember’s reappearance from
the rubble of the wall. Raven latched onto a nearby hydrant and threw it at the ghost, sending water
flying everywhere. Ember dodged the hydrant and shot Raven a loud barrage of noise. The Titan
avoided it by sinking into the wall behind her, her black magic enveloping her body.

Ember whirled around, fully aware of how most surprise attacks tended to take place from behind.
She wasn’t disappointed, seeing Raven emerge from the ground near the end of the block. Her guitar
aimed some more noise towards the teen but it was absorbed into a dark shield the Titan conjured. She didn’t expect the sudden attack from behind and flew forward into the ground.

“You might want to watch your back,” Raven commented dryly, having teleported from behind the black shield while Ember was occupied with watching her attack go to waste.

Ember merely growled, getting to her feet and hitting her strings once more. This sent a literal tornado of noise right at the floating Titan. Raven knocked it aside with a shield of magic but didn’t notice Ember zipping up behind her. By the time she turned around with a car ready to throw it was too late as the rock star had already pounded her with a pink fist.

The car went flying wide and crashed into the black shield she had formerly erected to protect her friends. The pink fist crashing into her at such a close-range threw her halfway across the block and right into the intersection.

“You’ll have to try harder than that, dipstick!”

‘Great.’ Raven managed to get to her feet, her arm up defensively in case of any further attacks. ‘She’s already getting back to the insults.’

“You last attack went so wide that I didn’t even see it!”

Raven narrowed her eyes, a quick plan forming in her mind. Her magic wrapped around a red car that was upside down and she flung towards the ghost, hoping that her idea wouldn’t go to waste. She knew that Ember would most likely turn intangible but was banking on the fact that maybe her magic would do the job.

Her eyes gleamed with triumph when the car collided with Ember even though the ghost had turned intangible. ‘Gotcha!’

“Oomph!” Ember went down with the car, hitting the street with a loud crash.

Raven knew it wasn’t over yet, though. ‘Wait for it…’

Ember phased through the red car, looking rather scratched up. The Titan noted that she was literally fuming, her hair flaring with the intensity of her anger. ‘Note to self: Some ghosts have physical manifestations of their emotions.’

“You’re going to pay for that, dipstick!” Ember snapped, her hand reaching for her guitar, which was also looking rather battered.

“Try it!” Raven answered, grabbing a blue Expedition. She brought her arm forward, the car following the motion.

“With pleasure!” Ember attacked Raven with a loud attack that threw the Titan off-guard and dropped the car to the ground, smoking.

Raven had expected fists, not the loud whirlwind of noise that drove her to her knees and left her temples pounding. Her hands flew to her ears, too late as her head was already splitting from an overload of noise.

“Gotcha!” Ember crowed, grinning broadly. “Maybe next time you won’t be so confident!”

Raven fully intended on getting back up and fighting. Something wanted to prevent that, however. And that something came in the form of a large green gorilla who suddenly pounced on Raven and
enveloped her in a gigantic bear – er, gorilla hug.

She instantly realized who it was and knew that all the shields she had cast before had fallen with the previous attack. “Beast Boy!” She started squirming, trying to get out of his death hug but it wasn’t working. “Let go!” The headache wasn’t helping matters either.

“Love troubles?” Ember asked sympathetically. “You should go in for couple counseling. I’ve heard it does wonders!”

Raven half-expected to see her friends right next to her any second now but hadn’t expected the new and rather familiar voice. “And what would you know about healthy relationships, Ember? The last time I checked your boyfriend was a tiny ghost in a robot suit!”

Ember whirled around, instantly seeing the same white-haired ghost that Raven had seen appear out of nowhere mere seconds ago. “You!”

“Me,” Danny Phantom said rather smugly. “Nice to see you haven’t forgotten me. Although, I am sad to hear that you’ve already given out that awful nickname to some other people. Seriously, are you still sticking with ‘dipstick?’”

‘That’s what he meant before,’ Raven thought randomly, remembering his earlier comment about someone else calling him dipstick but that not being his name. She noted her friends running under the two ghosts and sliding to a halt next to her and Beast Boy. Starfire was in the air and had stopped flying upon seeing Danny Phantom engaging Ember.

“You’re going down!” Ember declared, her eyes narrowing dangerously at Danny.

“I’d like to see you try, Ember!” Danny shot back, his smile growing dangerous.

Only Raven noticed the flickering green electricity at his fingertips and wondered what it would mean as Ember initiated the first attack. She still had a more pressing issue currently wrapped around her, however. “Get off, Beast Boy.”

“Yo, BB!” Cyborg tugged at the green gorilla’s arm, only to get a snap of the teeth for his effort. “Snap out of it!”

“He’s under a spell!” Raven repeated. “Unless one of us can lift it, I’m afraid he’s going to be stuck this way.”

“Yo, BB!” Cyborg tugged at the green gorilla’s arm, only to get a snap of the teeth for his effort. “Snap out of it!”

“You can’t release it?” Robin asked, looking up at the aerial battle going on above their heads. Ember was currently on the losing side of it, poking Robin’s irritable side. “Why is it that he’s having an easier time of facing her?”

“In answer to your first: No, I can’t release it because I don’t know what kind of magic it is. Second: He’s faced her before and therefore knows her weaknesses better than we do,” Raven replied. Her mouth twisted in the shadows of her hood. “Back off for a minute.”

Neither Robin nor Cyborg understood Raven’s strange comment until her black magic pried Beast Boy’s arms apart, freeing her. This lasted momentarily until Beast Boy morphed into a large python and wrapped around her, trapping her arms to her side and leaving her to steam in his “embrace”.

“Terrific,” Raven groused, figurative steam pouring out of her ears.

A loud shout from above made them all look up, except for Beast Boy. “Get out of the way!” They caught sight of Starfire barely being able to dodge an attack from Danny that had missed the intended
Danny was then next to Ember, holding her guitar in both hands. “Starfire, right?” He grunted slightly as Ember twisted to one side to try and get the guitar out of his hands. “I know that you can fight but I’d rather that you – ugh—”—Ember had kicked him in the side—“get down to the ground!”

Starfire hesitated shortly before following Danny’s advice and landing on the ground, standing next to the other four Titans.

“Is Beast Boy fine?” Starfire asked rather anxiously, seeing the green python still wrapped around Raven, who had given up hope of escaping his grasp.

“Clearly not for now,” Cyborg said. “Oh, look!”

Danny had gotten the guitar away from Ember and flung it into the distance, inciting the wrath of the rock star. She aimed to punch him right in the face but it was blocked by Danny’s gloved hand. Then a sudden wince crossed his face, just as green electricity coursed out of his hand zapping Ember.

“Aargh!” Ember plummeted to the ground as soon as Danny had managed to wrench his hand away.

Her hair sticking out in various directions, the ghost glared up at Danny. “What did you do to me?” she demanded, her words coming out in a near snarl. “I can’t feel my powers anymore!”

Danny looked torn for one full second before his features morphed into a determined countenance. “I did what I had to do,” he said, his voice a monotone. “Now maybe you’ll cooperate.”

“What makes you think I will?”

Without another word, Danny grabbed the thermos on the belt at his waist and sucked the ghost in. The Titans heard a final shriek of fury before the ghost boy capped it, a stony expression still covering his face.

“What do you want us to do?” Cyborg asked quietly, glancing askance at Robin.

Their leader looked torn, locking eyes with Raven for a moment before sighing and murmuring, “Nothing for now. We need to talk without tossing threats back and forth.”

Raven gave a firm nod, silent in her support for Robin’s decision. Now if only Beast Boy would snap out of it…

Just as he reached his horrifying revelation, his ghost sense went off. He snapped his mouth shut, hoping Mr. Robinson hadn’t noticed the blue whiff of air. The old man was really observant.

‘Crud. Now I’ll have to formulate some excuse.’

Still reeling from his unwanted epiphany, Danny was lost as he racked his brains for a plausible excuse that he could use to disappear for an appropriate amount of time. The bathroom excuse was slightly old and it would just seem weird if he was gone for half an hour…

He strained his ears, trying to hear any kind of disturbance that would signal a ghost attack. In the attempt of looking out the window, his eyes landed on the clock. He was extremely relieved upon seeing the glaring time of 12:25.
‘A lunch break would be the perfect excuse!’ he thought, opening his mouth to say something. But he then shut it, uncertain about how he should go about asking about his lunch.

“Is there something else?” Mr. Robinson asked, having seen Danny open his mouth and then shut it. Danny scrambled for an excuse and landed on one. “Yeah. I was wondering if you hear anything?” It was a gamble but if it worked…

Mr. Robinson frowned, trying to find what Danny was talking about. “I’m afraid I can’t hear what you’re hearing.” Then he pointed to his ear to signal that he was hearing impaired.

Danny wanted to bite his tongue off. “Oh. Right. Sorry about that.”

Mr. Robinson gave a rather lopsided smile. “No problem. People tend to forget unless I advertise it, which I normally don’t.”

The halfla nodded, even though he was still searching for a good excuse to leave and transform. ‘What if I ask about it in a roundabout way? I still don’t know my schedule so that’s a good point to bring up.‘

Just as Danny was about to do this, a loud crash and a symphony of discordant notes blasted their eardrums. This was merely a prelude to what happened next: The whole front of the store exploded. The two would have been crushed had it not been for Danny’s quick reflexes taking over. He grabbed the store owner and threw the two of them behind the counter. Rubble pushed the counter roughly towards the back wall, trapping the two in the small space between the wall and the space under the counter.

“Are you all right?” Danny asked anxiously, letting Mr. Robinson go.

The old man coughed in response because of the dust the crash had raised. “I’ll be fine,” he finally said. “Thanks to your quick thinking that is.”

“It’s nothing,” was all Danny said as he twisted around to try and free themselves from the prison. Prying the side of the counter from the wall with his arms didn’t work so he braced his back against the wall and shoved hard with his legs. The counter gave an inch but refused to budge after that.

“We should wait,” Mr. Robinson suggested. “The Titans should be able to deal with whatever threat is out there.”

Danny sincerely doubted this but kept his mouth shut. The Titans couldn’t even deal with the Cake Ghost! He simply doubled his efforts, keeping in mind the discordant notes that he had heard before the explosion. There was only one ghost he knew that used music as a weapon.

When his side of the counter still didn’t give, he suddenly got an idea. It would require a great deal of luck, something that he wasn’t necessarily filled with.

‘But it’s still all I got,’ Danny thought, determined. He turned to his new employer and asked, “Could you see if that side will budge any? I’m really stuck over here and it’s possible that that side is freer.”

Despite what he had said earlier about the Titans, Mr. Robinson nodded and began pushing, turning his head and taking Danny out of his line of sight.

‘Now!’ Danny summoned his intangibility power and focused it in the soles of his feet, turning the part he was touching intangible. With this done, he gave one big shove and pushed the counter right
into whatever was blocking it from moving. Danny promptly dropped his intangibility, leaving the counter stuck in the middle of what seemed to be a bookshelf.

Mr. Robinson noticed the sudden shift. “Danny?” He saw the strange sight of the countertop right in the middle of the bookshelf and stared in shock.

“It budged!” Danny said weakly, not having thought this far ahead. Before Mr. Robinson could say anything else, he hurriedly went on. “You better stay here, all right? I’ll be right back.”

Without another word, Danny turned and scrambled out of the small space he had been given. What he saw rendered him completely speechless. The entire front wall of the antique store had been pushed inward, crushing the displays in the windows. Bookshelves, chairs, desks, and other furniture pieces lay strewn about on the floor. The countertop itself was pinned to the back wall because of a bookshelf and on top of that was a large piece of what had previously been a wall.

Danny swore softly before picking his way through the rubble. He heard grunts from behind him and picked up the pace, not wanting Mr. Robinson to detain him. He knew for certain that the Titans couldn’t handle a ghost like the one that had caused this amount of damage.

Too late.

“Danny?” It was Mr. Robinson, having seen Danny make his way to the front of the store. “What are you planning on doing?”

The ghostly hero turned his head to look at his employer out of one eye, contemplating what he should say. “Taking my lunch break,” he said finally. “Don’t worry. I’ll be back before”—he checked the clock which was lying on its side merely seven feet away—“one-thirty. Stay safe.”

Ignoring whatever Mr. Robinson might have had to say, Danny jumped behind a bookshelf and part of a wall, turning intangible to phase through the rubble barring his exit. He emerged on the street to find the street clear aside from wrecked and smoking cars, streaming hydrants, missing lampposts, and gaping holes in the buildings. He ran now, about to turn into Phantom.

The bluish-white rings had already appeared and were starting to separate when something crashed right into the street before him, the rush of air throwing him backwards and canceling the transformation when his focus faltered in the shock. He flew through the air, roughly landing behind an upside down red car that was extremely dented.

“You’ll have to try harder than that, dipstick!”

So it was exactly who he thought it was. Ember had somehow turned up here as well.

“Your last attack went so wide that I didn’t even see it!” She was taunting someone.

Having a bad feeling about who she was taunting, Danny got his knees and peered over the top of the car, seeing a dark robed figure getting up from the mini-crater in the asphalt that was only several feet from the car he was behind. Above Raven – he had no doubt that it was her – floated Ember, smirking in gleeful triumph. Her fiery hair flamed – what else would it do? – and there wasn’t a single scratch on her, although Danny knew that they had most likely healed.

Suddenly, the car he was hiding behind turned pitch black and rose up, seeming possessed by some supernatural force. Danny jumped back in alarm, only then seeing what Raven was doing. Her right hand was black as well; with a sudden movement, the car was flung forward straight towards the floating rock star.
Realizing that he was straight in the open, Danny turned invisible before anyone could notice his presence. The car that had previously been his refuge seemed to hit Ember but Danny fully expected it to sail through the ghost as Ember had already turned intangible. To his extreme surprise, however, the black car didn’t do that at all.

“Oomph!” Even in her intangible state, the car had hit Ember directly, shocking both of the ghosts present.

‘Note to self: Raven is a real threat when it comes to fighting,’ Danny told himself. He watched apprehensively as Ember phased through the now red car, scratched up and fuming. ‘Maybe she can deal with Ember after all.’

He started to doubt that when he heard the venom in Ember’s next statement. “You’re going to pay for that, dipstick!”

“Try it!”

He saw the same black energy cover a blue Expedition with Raven’s challenge. ‘She said exactly what I would’ve said. Maybe she can…’—Ember blasted Raven with a loud cacophony of noise and the car dropped to the asphalt like a stone—‘…or maybe not.’

The Titan fell to her knees, her hands covering her ears as she tried to soothe the probable headache Ember’s “music” had most likely given her. Danny could completely relate, having had the same headache himself multiple times after Ember had developed that attack.

“Gotch’a! Maybe next time you won’t be so confident!” Ember was wearing that grin that Danny absolutely hated. Good God…couldn’t ghosts do anything other than constantly gloat over whoever they managed to strike down for the moment? Even Vlad – a half-ghost – loved gloating!

‘If Raven doesn’t get up in the next five seconds, I’m going to take care of her myself,’ he decided firmly.

That half-hope was soon crushed when a large green gorilla suddenly flew out of nowhere and landed on Raven, enveloping her in a huge hug. Danny’s eyebrows flew up in surprise.

“Beast Boy!” Raven wasn’t very happy about it. “Let go!”

‘All right. Time to get going. Raven’s not going to be able to get out of Beast Boy’s hug easily, I think.’ Still invisible, Danny’s transformation rings flew over his body, transforming him into his ghostly persona. He winced as his new power immediately made itself known, complaining about having been locked up for so long. He hoped no one had noticed the green electricity sneaking up on a fire hydrant and causing it to turn into a mutated ghostly version of one.

Just as he was flying up behind Ember invisibly, he heard her taunt Raven one last time. “Love troubles? You should go in for couple counseling. I’ve heard it does wonders!”

Danny decided that this would be an excellent time to make his entrance before Ember decided to further pound the two Titans below. And that would be with a quip: “And what would you know about healthy relationships, Ember? The last time I checked your boyfriend was a tiny ghost in a robot suit!”

“You!” Ember had obviously not expected to see him there. Not surprising considering as how they were probably not even in the same world.

“Me,” was all Danny said. There wasn’t much he could say to that anyway. “Nice to see you haven’t
forgotten me. Although, I am sad to hear that you’ve already given out that awful nickname to some other people. Seriously, are you still sticking with ‘dipstick?’"

He half noticed the other Titans meeting up with Raven and Beast Boy. Starfire was flying on the ghosts’ level, looking torn between them and her friends.

Ember soon grabbed his attention. “You’re going down!”

“I’d like to see you try!” Danny retorted, smiling fiercely. He could feel power coursing through his veins, tingling under his skin and nearly making him shiver. It promised him that this fight would be easy, ridiculously easy if only he would – no! Danny’s eyes hardened and he snapped back to real time, ignoring the ecto-electricity still whispering to him, if ghost powers could even whisper.

He’d snapped out of it on time, raising a shield to block the pink fist Ember blast at him. His brow furrowed when he saw the edges of it crackling a bit, as if electricity was imbued in it. He didn’t have any time to deal with it, however, as Ember engaged his attention once more, trying to hit him with a cacophony of noise.

Danny dodged it by teleporting right behind Ember. He shot a ghost ray at her but it was blocked by Ember’s guitar, which by chance had happened to swing around at the exact time he’d fired. Normally this wouldn’t have caused a problem. But then, normally he wouldn’t have had other people in the air with him that he didn’t want to bring harm to. His ghost ray hadn’t been absorbed by Ember’s guitar: it had been deflected and was shot back at him.

His reflexes enabled him to dodge but Starfire wasn’t so lucky. Danny saw in slow-motion the ghost ray head straight towards her; she floated there, motionless in shock or surprise – he wasn’t sure which. It didn’t matter.

He shouted at her: "Get out of the way!"

Danny’s voice snapped her out of any stupor she might’ve been in and she barely managed to dodge, the ecto-beam clipping her hair. A split-second later and Danny had teleported right by Ember and grabbed her guitar, attempting to wrestle it away from her by sheer force. It was just too bad that all ghosts shared the same super strength because otherwise it would have been over seconds later.

A quick glance over Ember’s shoulder showed that Starfire was still floating in the air. She had to get out of there. Despite the fact that he was very nearly out of breath, Danny spared some to try and warn her. “Starfire, right?” The small distraction nearly cost him the guitar when Ember twisted to one side. With a grunt, he managed to keep it in his hands and he continued talking. “I know that you can fight but I’d rather that you – ugh—”—Ember had kicked him in the side—“get down to the ground!”

Much to his relief, she only considered his words for a moment before landing and watching from the ground. Free from any further distractions, Danny raised his left leg and kicked Ember in the side. The sudden pain made her gasp and she loosened her grip on her instrument for a second, enough time for Danny to wrench it away and chuck it into the distance.

He had no time to celebrate over this small victory as Ember tried to punch him in the face. His training kicked in and he blocked it. A strange sense of déjà vu hit him then as he remembered what had happened with Technus. ‘Blast it!’ The electricity that had been running under his skin all this time suddenly spiked, making him wince in pain. At the same time, his new power decided to make an unwelcome appearance by zapping Ember.

Danny yanked his hand away as if he had been burned. But seeing as how he was the only thing
keeping her in the air, Ember plummeted to the ground like a stone. “Aargh!”

If he hadn’t been so shocked, he might’ve found it amusing that her normally fiery hair was sticking out in all directions and that her eye was twitching as she snarled at him. “What did you do to me? I can’t feel my powers anymore!”

What should he tell her? That his power was out of control? That he had short-circuited her ghost powers for the time being? Or should he just play it cool?

‘Play it cool,’ Danny decided. ‘That’s how I normally act, isn’t it?’ It was getting harder to remember how he had acted before the whole Phantom incident, which had completely thrown his world off its axis. The one thing he couldn’t remedy was his voice, which was coming out like a robot. “I did what I had to do. Now maybe you’ll cooperate.” He still had some questions to ask her after all.

“What makes you think I will?”

Quietly and decisively, Danny grabbed the Fenton Thermos and sucked her in, ignoring the shriek of fury she gave out. Capping the thermos, he glanced over at the Titans without moving his head, wondering what he should do about them. They hadn’t attacked him yet, which he figured was a point for them. Unfortunately, he couldn’t do anything as he didn’t know them well enough to decide anything. It would have to be them who made the first move.

He could hear them confer but he didn’t pay attention to anything they were talking about. He was only interested in the end result. Finally, he saw Robin sigh heavily and say something. With that, the other Titans relaxed, even if it was only minutely.

To make it easier, Danny landed on the asphalt, hooking the thermos back on his belt. Just as he did so, Robin opened his mouth to say something. It looked like this would go peacefully.

Then: ‘Crud. I forgot about Mr. Robinson.’
Tentative Allies

To make it easier, Danny landed on the asphalt, hooking the thermos back on his belt. Just as he did so, Robin opened his mouth to say something. It looked like this would go peacefully.

Then: 'Crud. I forgot about Mr. Robinson.'

Danny was fretting over Mr. Robinson just as Robin began to speak. “Thanks for taking care of the ghost.”

“No problem,” Danny replied automatically. It had sounded an awful lot like Robin had to bite out that thanks. Still, at least he had even bothered to thank Danny. Most people instantly attacked him even after he took care of the problem. But that was before the whole asteroid fiasco. Now they all cheered.

“You didn’t have to do it,” Robin went on. “We had it all in hand.”

Danny raised an eyebrow, astonished. “You had it in hand? From where I stood, it sure looked like you guys were getting your butts handed to you.”

Robin flushed angrily, opening his mouth but shutting it when Cyborg nudged him in the side. “We were getting the job done,” he said through gritted teeth, sounding somewhat polite.

It was then that Danny noticed that Raven was still entangled in Beast Boy’s loving embrace. “You guys good over there? Raven doesn’t look too comfortable.”

As he was joking around, Danny quickly made an invisible duplicate, sending it off to check on Mr. Robinson. The way things were going here, it was obvious that he would have to be extremely lucky to get to him soon. His parents’ practices were coming in handy here…

“Thank you for noticing,” Raven said sarcastically. “Ember placed a spell on Beast Boy and I can’t lift it.”

Danny recognized it as being the love spell he himself had fallen under. “I know the love spell you’re talking about. It’s not exactly one of Ember’s better known tactics but it’s still annoying.”

“Do you know how to free Beast Boy from it?” Starfire asked.

“Sure. Since it looks like he’s fallen for Raven, all it really requires is that she has to seem to ‘like’—he used the quotation marks here—‘another guy.’”

He couldn’t tell but it looked like Raven was faintly disgusted. “Are you serious?”

“Sadly enough,” Danny replied, shrugging. “I had a problem with it myself. The only way I snapped out of it was when the friend I’d fallen for kissed another guy.”

“So I have to kiss one of my friends?” She was definitely disgusted now.

“I think hugging might work, too,” Danny said thoughtfully. “It’s only happened once before as far as I know.”

Beast Boy transformed back then, still hugging Raven ferociously. “Hey, dude,” he said lazily, showing Danny the “peace” sign. “How’s it going?”
“Do you mind letting go of me?” Raven asked, a dangerous tone creeping into her voice.

“But I don’t want to!” Beast Boy whined, sounding like a little kid. “You’re so warm!”

“I’d do it now,” Danny advised, seeing that Raven was slowly losing her temper. “Especially if you don’t want to hurt him for something that he’s not even in control of.”

With that thought in mind, Raven twisted out of Beast Boy’s arms in one fluid movement and went straight up to Starfire, flipping her hood back and kissing the alien on the cheek, wrapping her arms around the teen in a tight hug. Danny was momentarily taken aback until he saw Beast Boy’s reaction to the sight.

The green changeling had huge eyes and was gaping at the scene before him. “Wh-what?”

Raven drew away from Starfire, looking at Beast Boy. “Did it work?”

“I…don’t think so,” Danny said slowly, still observing Beast Boy.

“Why not? I did kiss another—”

“Dude! She’s even sweeter now!” Beast Boy jumped up, pumped a fist in the air, and leapt for Raven.

“Ugh!” Raven sidestepped him and went for Cyborg, yanking the surprised half-robot’s head down and kissing him smack on the lips. She drew back a second later, wiping her mouth clean. “Done?”

It was done all right. Beast Boy looked heartbroken, staring at Raven as if she had just betrayed him. “But…but…no way!” He started waving his hands around. “How can she like Cyborg? She doesn’t even get along with him!”

Danny went up to Beast Boy, seeing as how the other Titans weren’t sure how to handle him. He placed a gloved hand on Beast Boy’s shoulder, careful to keep his ecto-electricity in check. “Back yet?”

Beast Boy seemed confused, answering Danny without even thinking. “What happened?”

Danny looked at the others but none seemed willing to offer any information. He hedged a bit on replying. “I don’t think you want to know.”

“Why does Raven look creeped out by me?” Beast Boy was disconcerted. “And why does my chest feel like it was torn in two and randomly patched together?”

“Do you not remember anything?” Danny asked cautiously. ‘I remembered everything.’

“Dude! It’s you!” Beast Boy’s eyes bugged out upon seeing Danny.

“Oh…yes?” Danny was taken aback. ‘Did he not recognize me earlier?’

“You can give my brain a jump start!” Beast Boy gestured wildly.

Danny took several steps back. “No, thanks.” Upon remembering his new power, which had temporarily been forgotten, he could feel it under his skin again. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Back off, Beast Boy,” Robin said, stepping forward. “It’s not important if you remember.”

Beast Boy turned around, looking at his friends. His eyes landed on Starfire before they went back to
Raven. He repeated this movement several times. Then he spoke. “Hey, was it my imagination or did Raven hug and kiss Starfire?” He saw Cyborg and jabbed a finger in his direction. “She kissed you!”

“Not what I wanted to do,” Raven murmured, grimacing as she remembered it.

Even the good-natured arguing among the Titans couldn’t distract Danny enough. There was only one thing left to do and he hoped it would work. “Would you guys excuse me a moment?”

Before Robin could object or agree, Danny had teleported to a lamppost. He touched it, releasing the ecto-electricity that had been building up. The light bulb flickered green and then exploded, raining shards on the street. The rest of the lamp soon followed in color but not with exploding. Instead, the head whipped around and hit Danny, only to slide through his suddenly intangible lower body.

All the Titans’ jaws were touching the ground at this scene. An animated lamppost? It didn’t seem possible, even after everything they’d seen in the last twenty-four hours.

What was even stranger was how Danny just sucked it up in his thermos, looking tired. He teleported back to the group.

“Sorry. I hope its disappearance won’t inconvenience you.” Danny shrugged apologetically, putting the thermos back on his belt. He was feeling much better now. This ecto-electricity was going to become a problem if he couldn’t learn how to control it.

“I-it’s fine,” Robin stammered, still recovering from the shock.

“If you don’t mind me asking,” Raven said, “how did that happen?”

“I don’t know,” Danny replied honestly.

“How can one not know how one’s powers work?” Cyborg inquired incredulously.

Danny hesitated slightly here. He couldn’t tell them what he feared. He didn’t know them at all and it could just make things worse. He finally settled on a shrug.

Robin frowned. Danny’s reply was another black mark against him in his book. Who wanted to keep something hidden unless it was worth it?

Raven was kinder, having seen the wary look in his eyes. She could fully sympathize with him about feeling wary against a group of teens that he had just met. The case was eerily similar to Terra’s but not quite. Something was missing. A key piece that just kept evading Raven.

It was Starfire who finally broke the tense silence. “It is quite all right, friend,” she said kindly. “No one entirely knows how their powers work.”

“Yeah. Thanks,” Danny said, relieved. His method of cracking jokes to relieve the tension probably wouldn’t have bowled over well at all.

“Do you think you can come to the tower with us?” Robin asked, sounding as if he’d rather order Danny than just ask him politely.

Danny’s first thought was ‘Tower?’ before he saw what they were talking about. ‘Wow. Talk about obvious. It’s practically screaming, “I’m right here!”’

“Well?” Robin said impatiently, the five second delay too much for him.

“I…don’t see why not,” Danny answered cautiously. ‘I don’t think I’ll have to work. Besides, my
duplicate can take care of that if I do.’

Starfire bounced over to Danny much to Robin’s alarm. “Terrific!” She beamed at him. “We will have much fun!”

“Yes?” Danny was at a loss for what to say. That reminded him. Had she called him “friend?”

He took a closer look at the Titans, suddenly apprehensive. Maybe going in with them wasn’t such a good idea after all.

“Oh yeah,” Cyborg said, staring sternly at Danny. “Hands off my babies. I don’t want them turning alive.”

Danny blinked. “Huh?”

Beast Boy stood next to Cyborg, grinning. “He means his electronics!”

Okay… Maybe not such a good idea at all… Danny gulped.

The duplicate Danny that had been sent off landed behind a car and transformed back. He was right in front of the shop. A look at his surroundings showed that Mr. Robinson hadn’t made it out, a worrying fact.

Danny ran over to the entrance, which was a gaping hole, and looked inside. It was being blocked off by bookshelves, concrete, and a jumble of stuff he couldn’t identify.

“Mr. Robinson?” he called nervously. “Are you all right?”

There was no sound for a couple of moments. Then, just as he was starting to get really worried, he heard a series of racking coughs.

“Mr. Robinson!” Danny went to the jumble of stuff, trying to find his employer.

“I’m perfectly fine,” came a reply. “The dust just got into my lungs.”

“I’ll get you out,” Danny promised, inconspicuously shifting objects using his intangibility.

“Oh no!” Mr. Robinson protested. “You shouldn’t try to move anything!”

“Too late.” Danny moved a broken chair and walked into the shop, literally stumbling into the shopkeeper when he tripped over something. “Oof!”

He caught himself before falling onto Mr. Robinson. Then he began inspecting him for injuries.

“I am quite fine,” Mr. Robinson assured him. “But I must ask about you. I hope you didn’t fight.”

“Oh, I didn’t,” Danny lied. “I had a fine lunch break. I even came back before I said I would. See?” Sure enough, the clock said 1:29.

Mr. Robinson looked at him. “In that case, I hope the Titans dealt with whoever made this atrocious mess.”

“They did. It was over before I knew it.” Danny thought about saying that he couldn’t even finish his meal but decided against it. That would be laying it on too thick.
“Hmm.” Mr. Robinson scrutinized Danny. “Are you sure?”

‘Does he suspect something?’ Danny barely stopped himself from shifting nervously. “Absolutely.”

Mr. Robinson opened his mouth, only to break into a fit of coughing.

Danny took this as his cue. “Come on,” he urged. “Let’s get outta here.”

The old man didn’t protest, just stopping long enough to pick up the doll that was still worrying Danny. If Mr. Robinson noticed Danny’s look he didn’t say anything. He was quiet until out in the open. Both of them took deep breaths; one of relief and the other simply to enjoy.

It therefore came as a surprise when Mr. Robinson spoke. “I won’t ask about anything yet, Danny. Just know that this old man has his share of secrets as well and knows that you didn’t just take a lunch break.”

Danny hid a gulp, inclining his head to show he’d heard. ‘This is not good.’

Mr. Robinson smiled at Danny before turning back to the shop. “This is going to take a while to fix.”

“What about the other shopkeepers?” Danny asked. “Are they stuck inside their stores?”

Mr. Robinson shook his head. “These are apartments. The shops are behind us across the street.”

‘Apartments in the middle of the city like this? Jump City is weird…’ Danny remained quiet as Mr. Robinson began muttering about repairs and money. ‘And what did he mean about his own secrets? I better keep an eye on him.’

As Danny fixed this resolve in his mind, he wondered how to tell the original the news. He hoped things were going well. Better than here, anyway.

He hated math…

“Wow.” Danny stared at the huge living room/kitchen they were in. “You guys have an amazing view.”

“And a cool TV!” Beast Boy added, pointing proudly to the gigantic screen in the middle of the windows.

“Yeah. That, too.” Danny didn’t have much time to watch TV. And when he did, it was offset by his dad always watching either the food or supernatural channel. And the supernatural channel always got everything wrong. ‘I wonder if he noticed my lack of enthusiasm regarding the TV.’ He observed Beast Boy hanging on to Cyborg. ‘Nah.’

“Do you want anything to eat, friend?” Starfire asked, hovering around the kitchen.

Danny’s first reaction was to say “Yes!” but shakes and wild gestures from the other Titans prompted him to hesitate. “Uh…” Beast Boy was mouthing “no” along with shaking his head and waving his hands. “No?”

“But I was planning on making the Tamaranean meal for new friends!”

‘What’s a Tamara?’ Danny scratched the back of his neck, not knowing what to say to that. ‘I’m really getting hungry…’
Robin saved him from having to find an answer. “Sorry, Starfire. He needs to come in for an interrogation.”

“Didn’t we already do that?” Danny said, thinking that Robin sounded really grim.

“You’re coming in,” Robin said, a lightning bolt striking over his head, thunder accompanying it. His cape whirled.

Danny blinked, and then looked behind the leader to see that Cyborg was stimulating a holographic projector for the lightning and thunder; Beast Boy was using a fan for the wind. The other two didn’t even notice, apparently just taking it in stride. Danny did think he saw Raven rolling her eyes, though.

“I thought I already proved that I’m not a threat,” Danny protested, folding his arms across his chest. “There’s no need to bring me in for an interrogation in that case. We can sit down and speak civilly.”

“We don’t know whether or not you’re a threat,” Robin said. “True, you helped us with Ember but we still don’t know your motives. Why did you suddenly appear out of the blue? And how do you know how to defeat all these ghosts that we can’t handle?”

“Okay. First off, I’m pretty sure that you guys also appeared out of the blue when first settling in this city,” Danny said, ticking off items on his fingers. “Second, I know how to deal with these ghosts because I’m a ghost and I’ve faced them before. Third, you guys can’t handle them because while you’re a team, these ghosts aren’t like other enemies you’ve faced. Raven here seems to be the only one among you with abilities that affect them while intangible.”

“When did you notice that?” Raven asked.

Danny shrugged. “I was invisible and observing from a rooftop.” A small half-lie never hurt anybody… “I thought you guys might be able to handle her until Beast Boy pounced on Raven.”

Beast Boy flushed heavily, looking askance at Raven but looking away quickly when he saw that she was giving him the cold shoulder.

Robin did not look happy at Danny’s clever responses. He tried another angle. “How is it that you’ve never heard of the Titans?”

“How is it you’ve never heard of ghosts?” Danny countered, getting slightly irritated. “I’ll tell you right now, Robin, I’m no threat to you. I work against these ghosts, not with. The people you will have to worry about are the other villains that you face on a regular basis. They might very well team up with the ghosts and cause a lot of havoc.”

“We’ve had this same problem before,” Robin said, using his last resort.

“Robin!” Beast Boy cried, knowing where he was going.

“What problem?” Danny asked, suddenly feeling his new power getting very agitated with his rising emotions. It took him all his willpower to squash it and pay attention to what Robin was saying next.

“Your uncontrolled powers.” Robin folded his arms.

“I don’t see how that can be a problem,” Danny said, clenching his hands. The sparks were dancing wildly across his fingers. The fear that he might hurt somebody was getting bigger by the second.

“Robin,” Raven said, a warning in her tone. “We went over this.”
“No, we didn’t,” Robin said firmly. “You just said that I should give him a chance. Well, I am.”

“I don’t see how this is giving him a chance,” Raven said. “You’re berating him.”

‘Wow. A girl I don’t even know is standing up for me,’ Danny thought incredulously. His hands relaxed minutely as the fear abated marginally. The ecto-electricity retreated slightly.

“I’m talking with him,” Robin argued.

“In my dictionary, talking would be just that: talking. It’s not about asking questions concerning my loyalty,” Danny said dryly. He thought he could feel his hair prickling.

Robin ignored Danny. “What do you want me to do?” he asked of Raven. “Just accept him with open arms?”

“Hey!” Danny protested, annoyed. “I’m right here!”

“Be friendlier,” Raven advised, raising a hand to signal for Danny to be patient. “You’ve done—”

Something happened then that cut her off. Danny, being extremely annoyed by now at Robin’s pigheadedness, had grabbed his belt in frustration. Or, more specifically, he had grabbed an ecto-gun and Fenton Finder. Being in such close contact with other devices that used a modified form of ecto-electricity proved to be very bad for Danny. Without any warning at all, he felt a sudden sizzling at his hands and warmth at his waist. There was a loud crackle and a sudden electrical discharge that created a bright flash of green light. Almost everyone was left temporarily blinded as a result.

Danny’s eyes remained unharmed for some strange reason. He looked down to find two perfectly good inventions ruined and still sparkling with green electricity. Rather guiltily, Danny took them off his belt and sighed, not sure what to do with them. His thinking was interrupted by Robin’s exclamation.

“He can’t control his power!”

“Why don’t you try, wise guy?” Danny snapped. “Being a ghost isn’t exactly the best thing.”

Cyborg and Beast Boy, who had been quiet throughout the entire exchange, were sitting on the couch, watching the interchange like it was a very interesting tennis match. Starfire was standing at the side, biting her lip nervously and wringing her hands. She didn’t agree with her boyfriend but couldn’t say anything because Robin had raised some valid points.

Raven had no such patience on hand. She knew firsthand how it felt to not be able to control a dangerous power. Danny was no different from her.

“He’s like how I was,” she told Robin quietly, stepping in front of Danny. “While his power may be uncontrolled as of yet, it can be controlled given time. He doesn’t deny not being able to control it, which is a plus. Terra ran off the moment you pointed it out.”

Robin clenched his hands but didn’t say anything. He knew that Raven was right. In the end, all he could do was incline his head. “Fine then.” He looked at Danny, who appeared very pale all of a sudden. “Raven will help you with that…if it’s all right with you.”

Danny thought quickly. ‘There are so many things wrong with this. But there’s not much I can do at this point. Mom and Dad are nowhere around; Sam and Tucker aren’t here either; and Jazz has no clue about this sort of stuff. While I doubt that Raven understands entirely what’s happening right now, she might be able to get this under control. I guess all I can do is give her a chance.’ His
decision made, Danny nodded firmly.

“Good.” Robin turned around, walking towards the doors. “Raven, you can show him his room.”

With that, the leader of the Titans left a very befuddled Danny alone with four other Titans and with two fried inventions in his hands that he had no clue what to do with. Upon remembering them, Danny looked, thinking they might at least be salvageable. The ecto-gun gave a last fizzle before completely turning black, squashing any hopes he had of using it; the Fenton Finder didn’t even react when he pushed the button, simply remaining quiet.

“You can give those to Cyborg,” Beast Boy suggested, seeing Danny look at his weapons forlornly. “He’ll fix those in no time.”

Danny’s eyes went from Cyborg to the objects in his hand and then back again. “He could,” he allowed. “But these are slightly different from the average piece of technology. They run on the same sort of energy that I’ve been generating lately.” It couldn’t hurt to let them know that it was a new power and not an old…

“Cyborg’s a whiz at technology,” Raven said. She did acknowledge Danny’s choice of phrasing. ‘So this power has just manifested? So he’s not like Terra. He has control over every other power but this one, which is also interesting.’

“Yeah, but…” Danny held up said technology. “It’s kind of fried.”

“He can fix almost anything.”

“Who says I can fix almost anything?” Cyborg protested, raising an eyebrow.

Raven merely shrugged, not wanting to take the bait. Cyborg scowled, resting back in the cushions with a pouting expression on his face. Danny thought that this relationship was much like the one Sam and Tucker shared. Some things never changed between friends it seemed.

“So,” Danny said lightly, resolving to put his fried inventions somewhere else so Cyborg wouldn’t get his hands on them, “what about that lunch?” He was too hungry to think about the warnings the other Titans had previously given him.

Starfire immediately brightened up, while the other Titans shrunk in their respective positions.

“Excellent!” she said proudly. “I shall prepare the Knabberlog!” Starfire zoomed about the kitchen getting whatever she needed.

Danny stared at her. “Do I want to know what that is?”

“No,” was the simultaneous reply.

Danny gulped. ‘What have I gotten myself into?’

“Hey, do you mind telling me what’s up with Robin?” Danny asked, walking behind Raven. He’d just managed to choke down the meal that Starfire had cooked so eagerly. He suspected that he would have to throw it up later; it was inedible in his book and his stomach was already complaining. In fact, the other Titans had gaped in astonishment as Danny managed to eat the entire thing that Starfire had made without a single complaint; he’d just turned green. Starfire hadn’t noticed; she’d been beaming too proudly that somebody finally liked her cooking.
Raven was silent for a moment, debating on what to tell this unknown teenager. “Robin has issues with trust,” she said finally. “We took in one other person with a problem like yours and she ended up siding with an enemy.”

“But I’ve heard that you’re friends with lots of other superheroes.”

“Those superheroes are not like Terra. They have an excellent reputation and are well known.”

“So this Terra completely spoiled your image of other superheroes with trouble controlling their abilities?” Danny said, working through the vague information Raven was giving him.

Raven turned a corner, thinking about what Danny had just said. “Robin’s in any case,” she answered at last. “He’s never been particularly fond of working in a group.”

“But yet he works with you four.”

“Because the situation at the time demanded it,” Raven said, remembering the alien invasion. “One lone hero could not have dealt with the problem we were faced with then. Because he saw how well we worked together we became a team. But this hasn’t done anything to help him with outsiders. Most earn his trust and eventually friendship. For those already known among the humans as heroes Robin deems them Titans.”

“Let me get this straight then: Because I’m an ‘unknown factor’ so to speak, Robin doesn’t trust me?”

“Exactly.” Raven stopped in front of a room. “This will be yours for the time being.”

“Thanks.” Danny saw that the door didn’t have any handles. “Er… how do I open this?”

“The door is programmed to open electronically from the outside.”

“So why didn’t it?”

“My guess is that Cyborg didn’t add it to the mainframe as of yet.”

Danny frowned, thinking that he really didn’t have the time to wait for that to happen. He thought for a moment before focusing. His hand began to glow green, the door corresponding. Then, moving his hand from right to left, the door slid open without any protest, revealing the room within.

Raven simply stared, astounded. “How…?” She found herself unable to finish, thinking it might insult him.

“Telekinesis,” Danny said simply, raising an eyebrow. “Isn’t that your power?”

“Something along those lines,” Raven said, finding her voice. “Although, to be honest, I didn’t know ghosts could be so diverse.”

Danny thought there was something lacking in her explanation. “I don’t exactly understand.”

Raven considered that for a moment. “Tell you what: Answer my questions as a trade for me answering yours.”

Danny shrugged, taking a look at his room. It was extremely bare. Making a mental note to get furniture if he was going to be staying here, he responded, “Sounds fair.” It did sound very fair. Besides, most knowledge about ghosts was pretty common in his world. It wouldn’t make much of a difference here.
“Good.” Raven stepped inside with Danny, closing the door behind her. “All right, before we start, I’m going to explain how this door works.”

“I don’t really mind if he doesn’t do anything with it,” Danny said before she could say anything. “Locks don’t really work too well from my experience. Besides, I can just phase through the door or open it like I just did.”

“And any visitors you might get?”

Danny shrugged. “Open it the same way I just did.”

“All right.” Raven looked for something to sit on but only found a dusty chair that didn’t look very comfortable at all. She simply settled for standing. “First question: How is it that your kind has so many powers?”

Danny frowned in thought, flying the fried ecto-gun and Fenton Finder over to the chair via telekinesis before floating in the air and crossing his legs. “It’s just natural,” was what he finally came up with. “I’ve never given much thought to it.”

“Okay…” Raven followed suit with Danny’s position, wondering why she hadn’t thought of it. “Second question: Your kind is different from spirits. Is there any particular reason? Your kind is also different from any detail I can find in books.”

“What about the ones you just bought?” Danny asked silently. Aloud: “Ghosts are manifestations of ectoplasm. But not like spirits. My kind is made from emotions that are given shape by ectoplasm.”

“Is that all the information you have?” Raven said, dismayed. He wasn’t proving to be very helpful at all, although Raven thought this was more due to ignorance than anything else.

“Pretty much,” Danny admitted, wishing he’d paid more attention to his parents. “I do know that we’re not dead, though. We ghosts have a home in the Ghost Zone, which has a ton of ectoplasm. I don’t know the specifics but this ectoplasm gives form to the emotions from dead people.”

“So you’re a different species,” Raven said, seeing where he was going with it.

“I think.” Danny smiled apologetically. “Sorry I’m not more help to you. I think any other ghost could be more useful, especially some of the older ones. I’m still kind of new to this thing.”

“You haven’t been a ghost for very long?”

“About two years, give or take,” Danny said. “Didn’t pay much attention to the time since I was fighting ghosts.”

“Why do you fight your own kind?” Raven inquired, interested.

“It’s always this question,” Danny thought, amused. He said, “Because someone has to. Ghosts just love wreaking havoc in the human realm, and my hometown had a manmade ghost portal that just kept letting ghosts in. The ghost hunters there aren’t very proficient”— ‘Sorry, Mom; sorry, Dad.’—“so that left me.”

“I see” was all Raven said, apparently in deep thought.

That left the two of them in deep silence. And silence was not good in Danny’s opinion. Talking had kept his mind off the growing fear, and his uncontrollable power. Silence brought it back to the forefront of his mind, making the ecto-electricity that much harder to control. He wished that Raven
would speak up quickly before he lost control.

Thankfully, she did. “I think that’s it for now. We should go outside.”

“Any reason why?” Danny said, relieved. His problems were marginally pushed to the back of his head.

“Robin would not appreciate it if I slacked off of teaching you how to control that power of yours,” Raven answered, unfolding her legs and standing on her feet.

“Makes sense,” Danny said, remembering the leader’s personality. ‘Doesn’t seem like a very nice guy. But then, first impressions aren’t everything, right?’

“I’ll lead you through the rest of the tower,” Raven said. “If you’re going to be staying here, you need to know your way around.”

With that, Danny opened the door once again and Raven led him down through the Tower’s many corridors. The halfa made a private note to explore further when he had another chance because it was too confusing. At the moment, though, Raven had just opened a door that was in the garage.

“Don’t touch Cyborg’s car,” Raven warned, meaning the blue and white car parked a short distance away. “He’s really protective of that.”

“Got it.” Danny followed the Titan out of the garage and into the sunlight. He found himself on a small stretch of land that surrounded the tower. It was filled with nothing but dirt and there was a small hill with grass growing on it right above their heads.

“You’ll be training here,” Raven explained, turning around to face the half-ghost. “This place has obstacles in the ground that come out when it’s on but at the moment you’re not ready for that. We’re just here for control. Skill can come later.”

Danny wasn’t happy about this at all. “What if I hurt you? I really don’t know how to contain this!”

“That’s why you’re here with me,” Raven said. “My shields can hold against most kinds of attacks. Yours won’t be any different. Control is of an essence if you’re going to stay in Jump City.”

“What if I won’t?” Danny said obstinately, still not wanting to do it.

“You’ll be a liability wherever you go,” Raven instantly replied. “If you ultimately decide to stay here with us, we can’t use someone who doesn’t know how to control his own power. It can be dangerous.”

“Fine then. How are you supposed to help me control this anyway? As far as I’ve seen, you don’t deal with electricity.”

“No matter what kind of power it is, the basics are the same,” Raven said. “There is always a certain level of control needed before one can move on to skill. Powers such as yours, mine, and Starfire’s require a mindset that can only be achieved through training. Cyborg’s is programmed into him and Beast Boy’s comes only when he thinks about transforming into the animal he needs.”

“I’ve already tried that,” Danny said, meaning his ice powers. “I had training before for a certain power that was out of control and transferred the same techniques to this one. It doesn’t work.” As if on cue, he could feel a strong current running under his skin.

‘That should not be the case.’ Raven remembered the fear in Danny’s eyes during the fight against
Technus. Fear that should never be there when trying to control a power. Fear made things uncontrollable and prevented them working the way they should. She strongly doubted that he had been afraid of this previous power he mentioned. ‘*Now is not the time to mention it. I should let him do this his own way until he realizes it.*’

“Why don’t you try again?” she suggested. “I’ll just watch and see what happens.”

Danny couldn’t find anything to say to that because of how perfectly logical it sounded. He just waited until Raven flew up to the grassy hill right above their heads.

Taking a deep breath, he focused on what Frostbite had told him regarding his ice powers. Control was universal throughout all powers she had said. In that case, he had better get started.

One second later, and all of Danny’s built-up power was released.

Inside a rather dark room at a metal table was a certain black-haired boy in eye-popping colors. He had various tools laid out before him and a blackened stick in his hand. A screwdriver was in his hand and he was carefully picking apart a screw that he had found in one end. The stick was being particularly obstinate with not wanting to open up and reveal its insides.

‘*Come on!*’ Robin bared his teeth as he gave the screwdriver a final yank. The screw popped out; he waited eagerly for something to happen.

Nothing did.

Growling in frustration and about to hurl the screwdriver to the table – he wouldn’t wreck the stick, after all – he was stopped by the sound of a door opening. Robin turned and saw Starfire entering, her hands clasped together.

“Is everything all right, Robin?” she asked, coming up to him.

Robin turned back to the table, placing both the stick and screwdriver on it but keeping his hands curled around them. “Fine.”

“You do not sound fine,” Starfire disagreed, standing beside him. “You are doing the stress too much.”

Robin smiled bitterly at his girlfriend’s incorrect grammar. But, she did have a point. “Maybe I am,” he admitted. “But this is something I have to do.”

“Why?”

“This stick electrocuted the ghost he was fighting,” Robin said, holding the stick up for Starfire to see. “Then he developed powers of electricity himself. Was it coincidence or was it the weapon he was using? I have to know. Phantom is dangerous, even if he doesn’t tell us.”

“He does not seem dangerous,” Starfire argued. “He is merely troubled. He did not wish to harm me, if that is what you are still thinking of.”

“Neither did Terra! She was an innocent girl when we first saw her but she was hiding the fact that she was constantly being chased by *Slade*!” He spat out the name as if it was a curse. “She ran away the moment I brought up the fact that she didn’t know how to control her abilities and then we see her with *him*!”
“She was afraid that we would not accept her,” Starfire said calmly, placing a hand on Robin’s arm. “So was I at first. And so was Raven. But does it truly mean that we have to treat Danny harshly? He has done nothing bad so far. He has not denied that he has troubles controlling his power.”

“He might be lying about everything else.”

“What, Robin? He has done nothing but fight against the enemies we were fighting against. He has cooperated with your questioning and has even come with us to the tower. And now he is with Raven, doing exactly what Terra would not. You must also remember that Danny is not Terra. He has never even known her.”

Robin considered her words for a long moment. Trusting Phantom went against every one of his instincts. He was too much like Terra. But then, Starfire had also given arguments for the contrary. Phantom was not Terra, no matter how much he could try to compare the two. Phantom was his own person, not the ghost of somebody that continued to haunt Robin even now.

Having thought it through properly, Robin gave Starfire a small smile. “I have been treating him harshly. Raven told me to give him a chance yet I didn’t. It’s time I do.”

Starfire smiled brilliantly, giving her boyfriend a kiss on the cheek. “Thank you, Robin. It was all I asked.”

Robin couldn’t remember that. “Did you?”

“Perhaps not with the exact words,” Starfire admitted, still smiling.

“No,” Robin agreed, smiling, too.

The two leaned in, about to kiss when the door opened once again. Robin whipped his head around to see who it was; Starfire looked momentarily crestfallen before resuming a stoic expression.

“Cyborg,” Robin said evenly.

“Sorry for interrupting,” Cyborg apologized, seeming properly chastened. He had seen the position the two were in. “I just wanted to make sure you were doing all right.”

“Much better now,” Robin said, taking Starfire’s hand and giving it a squeeze in thanks.

Cyborg caught sight of the blackened stick on the table surrounded by a virtual army of tools. Some of them looked rather dented and bent out of shape; the stick, on the other hand, was unharmed except for the fact that it was fried.

“You don’t seem to have gotten very far with that thing,” Cyborg commented, returning Robin’s attention to his work.

“No. It doesn’t want to open.”

“The stuff you have isn’t advanced enough for something like this,” Cyborg said, picking it up and inspecting it. “If you want, I can take a look at it with my stuff.”

Robin smiled at Starfire again, saying, “Thanks but no.”

Cyborg was taken aback. “What made you change your mind? I thought you were fixed on breaking into this thing!”

“I was. But I’ve decided that I’d rather ask Danny instead of trying to break into it,” Robin said,
using Danny’s name for the first time.

Cyborg threw Starfire a look; she merely beamed in response, proud of her boyfriend for making an effort. The half-robot grinned at his friend. “All right, Robin.”

‘Huh. So all of them were for giving him a chance. I was outvoted from the start,’ Robin figured, internally raising an eyebrow.

The comfortable silence was broken suddenly by a loud fizzling. Then the lights went out, leaving them in complete darkness. This only lasted a minute until Cyborg put on a flashlight that came out of his shoulder.

“I have a feeling that Danny is going to be giving me a lot of extra work,” he groused, scowling at the light switch next to the door.

The only response he got was a flickering of the lights above their heads before they went out again.

Hands on knees and face hidden underneath a mass of snowy-white hair, Danny was panting heavily, completely exhausted yet getting more frightened by the second. Electric power was still coursing under his skin. And this had been the fifth time he’d let it all out in hopes of releasing the excess energy.

He couldn’t understand why Frostbite’s advice wasn’t working. Sure, it had been for his ice powers but Raven said that control was universal. Why was it that it wasn’t working with his ecto-electricity powers? Why was it that they kept returning even stronger than ever? It was scaring him. He could feel the power coursing through his body. Power that seemed to be taunting him for his inability to control it.

Danny gave a frustrated growl and slammed his fist into the ground, releasing ecto-electricity in the process. The ground absorbed it without missing a beat. He did feel something rumble underneath him, though, and assumed that one of the obstacles Raven had talked about earlier had been short-circuited. He couldn’t care less. What he did care about was his inability to control it.

In the meantime, Raven dropped the shield she had brought up for Danny’s most recent attempt. The last flash of electricity had been so bright and the backlash so powerful that she was sure it had short-circuited the power in the tower behind her. But she didn’t spare much thought for that. Her focus was on the frustrated ghost before her.

There was no doubt about it that Danny’s emotions were getting in the way. It wasn’t overconfidence or cockiness that had him unable to control his power; it was fear. He was getting more agitated with every single release of his energy and the backlash was in turn getting more powerful as his fear increased.

Fear could be a powerful motivator. But it was also the worst way to learn how to control a new ability. Raven herself could attest to that fact. Her magic only worked perfectly when she had a tight rein on her emotions. Being on an emotional rollercoaster like most other teens would not bode well for her magic at all. But Danny wasn’t on an emotional rollercoaster of random emotions; he was on a rollercoaster of fear. Fear that wouldn’t let him focus properly.

And it was time that she called attention to that fact.

“Enough,” Raven ordered, stopping Danny from releasing his ecto-electricity again. She flew down to his level and landed beside him, her skin immediately tingling from the energy that he was radiating. “I’ve seen enough.”
“Your advice isn’t working,” Danny said, glaring at her. “You said that the same basic level of control works for everything. But it doesn’t.”

“For you it doesn’t,” Raven agreed. “But that’s because you’re scared.”

Danny hesitated for only a moment before denying it. “I’m not.”

“Yes you are. I know what I saw when you fought Technus. You were paralyzed with fear. Fear is the worst possible emotion to have when learning to control a new power.”

“I’m not scared,” Danny insisted.

“Then why is it that I can feel the tension pouring off of you in waves?” Raven countered. “I can read the fear in your eyes and in your stance. You’re afraid. But you’re afraid of something far bigger than simple electricity.”

“How do you know?” Danny barely stopped himself from flying away. She was getting too close to his secret.

“Your body language says it all. Electricity is so common that there’s no reason to be afraid of it. You were using weapons that manipulated the energy. It was only when you were generating it that you became scared.” Raven stared Danny down, ignoring the unnatural prickling in the air that was becoming extremely uncomfortable.

“What are you going to do about it?” Danny asked quietly, giving in.

At least he wasn’t denying it anymore. Raven almost smiled but she kept her face stoic. “I can’t do anything until you give me details. What is it that has you so scared of yourself?”

This question stopped Danny in his tracks. What could he tell her? He hadn’t even told his friends about his fear and here he was, so close to spilling his darkest secret to a girl he barely even knew. Something about it was just wrong. Why should he tell an almost complete stranger about something he hadn’t even told his friends? But then she was the only one with the ability to help him. It went both ways.

Should he tell her or not?
Telling or Not Telling

Should he tell her or not?

Danny was torn terribly. It went against every one of his instincts to tell a complete stranger one of his darkest secrets. Perhaps if he’d already told his friends he wouldn’t even be having this big of an internal conflict. But then his friends would have helped him through it, meaning that he wouldn’t even be facing Raven at this moment. Meaning that he would still be at home, perhaps joking around Tucker and holding hands with Sam and – stop! Danny derailed his brain from that train of thought. It wasn’t helping him any.

Raven saw Danny’s hesitation, the fear crossing his face, and the doubt. She remembered her own fear and doubt when it came to telling her friends her secrets. It seemed that Danny was in the same predicament now.

For Danny, Raven’s interruption into his tormented thoughts was a blessing.

“You don’t have to tell me now.”

This startled him; he looked at her. “What?”

“Think about it. I know what you’re going through – the doubt, fear, hesitation… It’s not easy but it has to be done.”

Wide-eyed and disbelieving, Danny continued to listen, hearing Jazz’s wisdom in her voice.

“None of us will judge you for whatever you’re hiding.” Raven smiled at him when skepticism crossed his features. “It’s true. We all hid secrets and then had them accepted when the time came. Robin still has his.”

Danny swallowed heavily, suddenly feeling tired. “I’ll think about it,” he whispered.

Raven heard him. “All right. Let me know when you’re ready to talk. You should be able to find my room.”

She walked back to the tower, leaving Danny uncertain as to whether he should follow her. Thinking that phasing into the tower would probably be considered rude, Danny unthinkingly floated after Raven, landing once having caught up.

The door clicked shut behind them, putting them in the relative dark of the garage. “Relative” because Danny’s ghostly glow and green eyes easily lit up a circle of about a foot around the two.

“Is that how bright you normally glow?” Raven inquired curiously.

“No. I can do brighter.” Danny shrugged, smiling shyly. “The more powerful a ghost the brighter they glow and the better they can control it. You might have noticed that the Cake Ghost wasn’t very bright at all.”

“So you’re saying that you’re a powerful ghost.”

‘Yipes!’ Danny hurried to rectify his mistake. “No, sorry; I’m not. I was merely repeating something I heard from ghost experts.”

Raven highly doubted that was the entire truth but decided to let it be. Obviously Danny wasn’t
comfortable talking about his power.

The ghost teen squirmed slightly under Raven’s penetrating stare, rubbing the back of his neck nervously. The gesture struck Raven as oddly familiar, although she couldn’t place it.

“Come on,” she said abruptly, striding towards the door entering the lower level of the tower.

Danny walked up the steps after her, entered a dark hallway, and then followed her through the corridors.

“Where are we going?” Danny asked, trying to keep the turns in his head and failing. “Do you guys have a map?”

“We’re going to the living area. You’ll have to ask Cyborg for the map, but I can’t see why you need one.”

“Why’s that?”

“You teleport, don’t you?”

“…Yeah.” They entered another dark hallway. “But I can’t teleport just anywhere. I have to know where I’m going.” Danny thought back to earlier. ‘I just wanted to get away then. I didn’t care where I ended up, just that I escaped.’

He rubbed his arms nervously, releasing some electricity. Lights flickered, making Raven stop.

“Looks like a fuse blew,” she just said.

Then, without waiting for a reply, Raven turned left into a hallway and approached the doors that Danny presumed entered the living room/kitchen. She paused before them, seeming to ponder something.

“It’s odd that they’re closed,” she finally said for Danny’s benefit, realizing that he was feeling uncomfortable. “Normally when there’s a power outage Cyborg keeps these doors open because they’re automated.”

“You can ask,” Danny said, standing several inches behind her. He was just an inch taller.

“First I’ll have to bypass the security system,” Raven said, holding her hand up. It glowed black and a panel slid open on the wall on the right side. There were a bunch of buttons and a small screen.

Before Raven could do anything, Danny had turned both of them intangible, closed the panel, and slipped through the obstacle. He reverted back to tangibility once in the light. This startled the Titans standing before the windows.

Starfire was the first to greet them. “Hello, Raven. Hello, Danny. I hope everything went well?”

Danny hesitated, giving Raven the green light. “We made some progress.”

Raven caught the halfa’s eye, letting him know what she’d just done. Unsure of how to respond, Danny shifted his eyes elsewhere.

“And I was wondering what happened to all the lights,” Raven continued. “It was completely dark save for Danny.” She looked around the living room/kitchen. “Where’s Cyborg?”

“Here.” Cyborg popped out from under the counter. “It’s pleasant news to hear that the one guy who
glows in the dark is the one who blew out the lights in the first place.”

Danny had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. “What do you mean?”

“Your power blew out the fuse box and then some,” Cyborg explained, getting to his feet. His hands, which had been fine tools, turned back into fingers. His eyes landed on the doors behind Danny and Raven, which were still closed. “I thought those were open.”

“They’re not,” Raven stated.

“They closed suddenly a moment ago,” Beast Boy said from his spot on the couch. “I think it happened when the lights flickered on. I thought that was you.” He was referring to Cyborg.

Danny flushed slightly. “Sorry about that. It was me.”

Everyone stared at him, causing him to shift nervously. He caught Raven raising an eyebrow questioningly and he explained further. “I rubbed off some electricity accidentally.”

Just as the silence was becoming unbearable, Robin spoke. “It’s no problem, Danny,” he said, smiling at him. “Cyborg’s great at fixing these things.”

It took most of Danny’s willpower to stop his jaw from dropping. Had Robin been possessed by a ghost? Wasn’t he vehemently opposed to Danny just an hour or two ago? And what was up with him addressing him so familiarly? He had been calling him “Phantom” before!

Not wanting to seem rude, Danny observed the other Titans, remaining quiet. None of them had reacted oddly to Robin’s strange – to Danny – behavior. And he could have sworn he heard Raven mutter, “Finally.”

There was another awkward silence for a moment.

“So…” Cyborg broke it. “I think I’ve fixed what was busted. Let me double check.” Cyborg flipped something.

They all waited for a minute. Just as Cyborg frowned and was about to do something, loud music made them all jump a foot in the air.

Robin was about to comment on the TV being on when it changed to black and blessed silence fell. But only for a moment.

“No!” Cyborg fell to his knees. “It fried again!”

Everyone turned to see Danny trying to calm his hair, which was sticking out in all directions like a bad case of bed hair. He felt the presence of multiple eyes on him and abandoned the attempt, grinning apologetically.

“Sorry. It startled me.”

Robin took a deep breath, caught the stares of all his teammates, and smiled broadly, going right up to Danny. “If you have time, do you mind coming with me for a moment? I’ve got a couple of questions about something.”

Slightly panicked, Danny looked for help. But the only help he got were looks of encouragement. No other choice open to him, Danny let Robin lead him out like they were best of friends (the doors were open again). All the while, Danny was focusing on his ecto-electricity powers, never noticing
the looks exchanged between those in the room.

Left in silence, Beast Boy, Cyborg, and Starfire turned to Raven.

“Did you find anything out about him?” Beast Boy asked eagerly.

Raven thought for a moment. It would be violating Danny’s privacy if she said anything now. The best thing to do would be to wait for Danny to come clean on his own terms. If everyone else knew, it would pressure him and he would probably run. Raven didn’t want that.

Only a ten second delay followed after the original question. Not long enough for suspicion.

“Only that he glows in the dark,” she finally answered, picking a safe subject.

Cyborg didn’t look surprised. “That makes sense. My sensors have been picking up that he lets out a constant flow of energy.”

“Ghosts glow naturally,” Raven argued.

“Maybe they do but like you said yourself, these ghosts are different. I’m guessing that the energy he lets out turns into that glow he was giving off in the dark.”

Under the glances of Starfire and Beast Boy, Raven remained quiet.

Cyborg scratched his head, shrugging. “In any case”—his face morphed into aggravation—“now I’ve got to fix this…again.”

Grumbling, Cyborg disappeared from view.

Raven turned to the other two. “Did you talk to Robin? He was acting differently.”

Starfire beamed. “Robin has agreed to give Danny a proper chance!”

The purple-cloaked Titan smiled, pleased. “That’s great. That’s really great…”

“I’m sorry if I gave you the wrong impression earlier,” Robin apologized. “I was just…” He couldn’t seem to find a word that wouldn’t insult Danny.


“Got?”

He’d caught that… Danny went for the truth. “I get it less frequently now because people know who I am. But there’s still the occasional ghost hater…” He shrugged, smiling like it wasn’t a big deal.

Robin was silent for a moment. “I see.”

‘Do you?’ Danny stopped walking as Robin did. ‘No. I don’t think you do.’

“This is where I normally work,” Robin said, leading Danny to the room he’d been working in earlier.

Danny blinked at all the newspaper articles on the walls. Pictures of a man with one eye particularly jumped out at him. ‘Wow. Obsessed much?’
Robin didn’t explain the pictures. He just walked over to a bench with a toolbox on it and a blackened stick.

The boy wonder picked it up, holding it out for Danny. “You dropped this earlier.”

After looking at it as if it might be diseased, Danny delicately took it. “Thanks. Why are you giving me this?” He held it up to his eyes. “It looks like someone took several screwdrivers to it.”

“I did,” Robin confessed unashamedly.


“You can’t fix it?” Robin asked, surprising Danny.

“Sadly, no. I didn’t make it.”

“Where do you get those contraptions from?” Robin waved a hand at Danny’s silver belt.

“Ghost hunters gave them to me,” Danny replied truthfully.

“You associate with ghost hunters?” Robin sounded disbelieving.

‘It does sound far-fetched.’ Danny shifted his weight. “They know me.”

Robin’s face remained blank; he turned to face a wall full of pictures of the one-eyed man. The lighting was bad as only Danny’s ghostly glow was there; Cyborg’s tech skills hadn’t kicked in yet.

“His name is Slade,” Robin said suddenly, startling Danny.

‘Eh?’ Danny stayed quiet, waiting for an elaboration.

“He gave us trouble for a long time,” Robin went on. “He died once…”

Danny couldn’t stop himself. “‘Once?’”

“A demon resurrected him and he went after Raven. More I can’t tell you.” He placed a hand on a picture. “We had a friend named Terra.”

“Had?”

“She couldn’t control her powers. When I found out, she thought we would throw her out. She didn’t wait for an answer and just ran away.”

Robin faced the white-haired hero. “She returned as an apprentice of Slade. We didn’t know until Beast Boy found out. Only a short while later and the two tried to take over Jump City. They very nearly succeeded.”

The Titan was silent for a long while, staring at the ground, although Danny sensed the story wasn’t over yet. He didn’t press Robin, knowing full well how such a story could take a toll on the person narrating it.

His patience was soon rewarded.

Still keeping his gaze on the ground, Robin continued. “‘Beast Boy was the one that turned Terra around. But during it all, her power nearly caused an earthquake. She stopped it, buried Slade in
lava, and turned to stone. We still haven’t found a way to turn her back, although Beast Boy is
convinced she’s back, just with amnesia.”

Robin’s masked eyes met Danny’s electric green ones. “Do you see why I told you this?”

“I—”

“I didn’t trust you before because you are a ghost. On top of that, you are a ghost that can’t control
his own power. I… I kept seeing Terra in your place, something I shouldn’t have done. It took all my
friends to tell me I should give you a chance. But tell me this: Is it wise for me to give you a
chance?”

Taken slightly aback, Danny studied Robin, noting his flushed cheeks and barely aggressive stance.
‘I really wish Jazz were here. She’d tell me what to say.’

Making up his mind, Danny carefully formulated his answer. “I understand why you couldn’t trust
me. When I first started hunting ghosts, my entire town didn’t trust me. It took time for me to gain
that trust. I can’t say that I’m not glad you’re giving me a chance. I wish I could say ‘Trust me’ but I
know that the words of someone you mistrust won’t help you much. The only thing I can say is to
trust your friends and believe in them.” He smiled, remembering Sam and Tucker. “They’re the best
you have when you have nothing at all.”

Robin tilted his head forward, acknowledging Danny; his face was shrouded in shadows. “I can’t
trust you right now,” he finally said. “But I’m giving you a chance to earn it.”

Danny smiled, relieved. “That’s all I’m asking.”

Robin smiled at him, too. “Good.”

The lights flickered on then, bathing the two in brightness.

“Great.” Robin turned a cheerful face to Danny, creeping the half-ghost out since he wasn’t used to
seeing such an expression on Robin. “I have to say that I’m glad for that. Your glow is just slightly
creepy.”

Danny didn’t know what to say to that. “…Thanks.” In his mind: ‘That face of yours is creepy, too.’

“You up for joining us?” Robin offered.

“Thanks but…I think I’m gonna go lie down. I have to think some about what you and Raven told
me.”

“Sure.”

Danny stepped out of the room, pausing then. He turned embarrassedly to Robin. “Er…I hate to ask
this but…do you have a map?”

It was quiet in his room. Too quiet. He caught himself wishing to go back to the Titans before he
reminded himself that he was here to think. So he needed the quiet.

But…now that he was alone he could almost hear his new power whispering to him, promising him
great things if only he’d give in. Or was that just in his imagination? Danny wasn’t sure. It all seemed
to meld together in his tired brain.

‘I need to turn back. But what about cameras?’ Danny almost called himself paranoid before
reminding himself that he needed to be careful in this environment. He couldn’t afford feeling too secure.

These thoughts in mind, Danny scanned the room. He could seem to sense every electrical pulse and tell where they were coming from. As far as he could tell, nothing like a camera or even a microphone was in his room.

Letting out a heavy sigh, Danny released his ghost half, turning into a very tired Danny Fenton. He dropped the sleeping bag Robin had thoughtfully given him and collapsed on it, grunting when his bones came into contact with the floor.

Tiredly rolling over, Danny looked once at the map Robin had expertly drawn. Really, the guy wasn’t so bad once you were on friendly terms with him.

“A map? I don’t see why that would be a problem. This tower can be confusing.”

“Thanks.”

“I’ll also get you something to lie on since the room doesn’t have anything. You may not sleep but ghosts do like to relax, right?”

“Right…”

Come to think of it, since nobody knew he was half-ghost, it would have been awkward explaining why he needed a mattress or a sleeping bag.

Staring blankly at the ceiling, Danny folded the map up for later use. He lay spread-eagle on the sleeping bag, desperately wanting to sleep. His mind wouldn’t let him.

Adjusting his belt to fit more comfortably, he rolled over on his side again, running through everything Raven had told him earlier.

‘She says I can trust them, but can I really? I don’t think anyone’s ever had a secret like mine.’

A loud voice shouted in his head. “Stupid! Think it through properly!”

Danny gasped loudly, jolting upright. “Sam?”

No one answered.

Disappointed, Danny sank back. ‘No. Just in my head.

‘Still… I have to think it through better.’

The ghost teen sat upright to get his blood flowing, his knees drawn up. He leant forward, thinking.

‘Secrets are always different. No two are the same. But they all have the same significance to those hiding them. Who am I to assume my secret is better? It’s definitely more dangerous but it’s not better…’

Danny remembered his evil future self electrocuting him before throwing him to the ground; he shivered. ‘But I’m not ready for that to be revealed. Not yet. Maybe I can start small…’

He called everything Mr. Robinson had told him. ‘None of them besides Robin are fully human. So I guess that being half-ghost may not be that big of an issue.’ He remembered what Raven had told him regarding his fear. ‘I am afraid. But I can’t seem to help it. No matter what I do, it’s like a
disease; it keeps growing. How can she help?’

This question left Danny at a loss and with a sick feeling in his stomach. The kind of feeling that hit you only when you felt utterly helpless and clueless. Danny had felt that several times before but never in such magnitude. He hated the feeling.

‘There’s nothing I can do.’ Danny swallowed helplessly. ‘But maybe…maybe telling them what I am will make things easier. Especially if I tell all of them.’

Already feeling greatly relieved, Danny lay back. ‘After a good night’s sleep, though.’

No sooner had he decided this did something else strike him. What about his duplicate?

“Is everything all right, Robin?” Starfire asked as Robin entered. “Where is Danny?”

“He’s in his room,” Robin replied calmly. “He said he needed to think.”

“You didn’t say something rude, did you?” Beast Boy inquired suspiciously.

“No.”

The silence dragged out for five minutes.

“Well?” Cyborg finally prompted.

“What we discussed is between us,” Robin said, evading the subject. “For now anyway.”

“But you’re giving him a chance,” Raven said to make sure.

“I’ll tell you guys this much: I can’t trust him yet. But Danny has agreed to earn it.”

Raven exhaled loudly. “All right. I guess that’s the best we can do for now.”

The leader of the Titans looked completely disgruntled. A dark storm cloud hung over his head.

“So while Danny is chilling in his room, what do you guys want to do?” Beast Boy asked brightly. They all looked at him strangely.

“I’m going to sleep” was all Raven said. She left the room.

“Same here,” Robin said, exiting after Raven.

“I am tired as well.” Starfire floated after Robin.

“Here, too.” Cyborg covered a large yawn and left, leaving Beast Boy alone.

His ears drooped slightly before perking. He struck a heroic pose. “All right. That leaves me free to —” He yawned loudly. His mouth snapped shut and muttered disgustedly, “That leaves me free to go to bed. Blast it….”

“Do you have any place to stay for the night, Danny?”

“I do,” Danny lied, nodding his head. “My parents didn’t leave me without housing. If you don’t mind me asking, sir, what about you?”
“I’ll be fine. My apartment was elsewhere anyway.”

“Good,” Danny said, relieved. “But what about your shop?”

Mr. Robinson looked at his ruined antique store, sighing heavily. “I’ll salvage what I can, have it repaired, and then open it up again. I am sorry about your job.”

“No problem.” Danny shrugged casually, hoping the real Danny had found something by now. “If you need me I’ll be around. This is my number.”

Mr. Robinson took the slip of paper offered, smiling kindly. “Many thanks, Danny. Have a good night.”

Danny smiled back at the old man who was just slightly smaller. “You, too, sir.”

He waved goodbye and walked around the corner, stopping by a huge pothole. He sincerely hoped that the number he gave Mr. Robinson worked. By some stroke of luck he did have his cell phone on him. He just didn’t know if it worked. The real Danny didn’t know he had his cell phone: It had been a recent discovery.

‘I need to let him know.’ Concentrating intensely, the duplicate tried sending everything that had happened to his real counterpart. To his immense relief, he felt a small response of acknowledgement.

His job done, Danny #2 dissipated into green smoke.
“Wow. That sure was weird last night…” Danny got up from his sleeping bag, blinking slowly. “I never knew that duplicates could do that. I guess there’s a lot I still have to learn.”

He got up and stretched, his shirt riding up and revealing his belt. Yawning, Danny pulled his shirt down and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. He was soon jolted awake by a sudden ripple throughout his body that electrified his muscles and sent his hair on edge.

“Oh!” Danny snapped his hand away from his eyes, shaking off stray sparks. “Damn it…”

Never minding the fact that his language had deteriorated, Danny was more concerned with the appearance of his ecto-electricity in human form. But it was to be expected. Even his ice powers had done so after a certain amount of time (in fact, Sam still hadn’t forgiven him for freezing her beloved fly-snapper or whatever it was called). It didn’t mean he liked it, though.

‘Don’t worry about it now.’ Danny took a deep breath to calm himself down. ‘First things first: Tell the Titans. Then we can deal with this problem.’

This resolve fixed in his mind, Danny summoned his ghost half, bringing forth the rings. They had just separated when he remembered that his duplicate had “told” him about the cell phone number he had given Mr. Robinson. He canceled the transformation to rummage in his pockets; he brought his cell phone out a second later and flipped it open to see if it was active. To his great surprise, it was.

“I guess they still have AT&T here,” Danny murmured, scrolling through his list of contacts. “And the phone numbers of my parents and friends are still in here…”

Guiltily, Danny realized that he had been gone long enough for everybody back in Amity Park to be extremely worried. ‘I guess I better call them and let them know I’m all right. Sam first.’

His finger pressed the call button on Sam’s number and he held the earpiece to his ear. It didn’t ring. Instead an automated voice chimed in his ear.

“The number you have dialed is not available. If you feel that you have reached this message in error, please check the number and dial again.”

‘Say what?’ Danny stared at his cell phone in disbelief. ‘Not available? That makes no sense!’

Ignoring a tiny sense in his brain that said it did indeed make sense, Danny dialed his parents’ number. The same message played in his ear. It played again for Jazz’s number and Tucker’s. Finally, desperate and refusing to believe the truth, he pressed Valerie’s number. For one moment he thought for sure the message would play…until it rang once…and then twice.

‘Thank God.’

Danny sent a tiny prayer of thanks just before the phone was picked up and an unfamiliar voice said, “Hello?”

His mouth dry, Danny asked, “Valerie?”

There was a pause. Then the female voice came again, apologetic this time. “I’m sorry. You must have dialed the wrong number. There is no Valerie in residence here.”

“No problem. Have a nice day.”

“You, too,” Danny whispered just as the phone disconnected. He flipped his cell phone close, his brain disengaged from the real world.

This wasn’t real. It wasn’t happening to him. How could it be that he couldn’t reach anybody at all? All of their numbers were completely valid the last time he had checked. In fact, he had called Sam up just the day before, asking if she was open for a movie. It made no sense… No sense…

‘But it does,’ a small voice in Danny’s head reminded him. ‘We’re not home anymore.’

The word suddenly had more of an importance to him. Home… He really wasn’t home after all. He was…lost. Displaced in a world that he wasn’t familiar with at all.

Numb and not caring that he would probably ruin the lamp that was sitting in a stray corner of the room if he lost control of his powers, Danny flumped down on the floor, his head in his hands. What was he going to do?

“Aaaaahhh.” Cyborg gave a huge yawn, stretching his shoulders. “Good morning, everybody.”

“Morning,” almost everybody said. The one person who hadn’t was Raven. She was reading a book.

“Is Beast Boy actually up before twelve?” Cyborg stared disbelievingly at the green Titan, who was frying himself a tofu breakfast.

Beast Boy whirled around, poking his steaming spatula in Cyborg’s direction. “I’ll have you know that I do get up before twelve. Besides, there’s somebody else who isn’t up yet either.”

Cyborg looked around, confused for a moment. All the Titans were there and most of them were eating breakfast. Starfire was chugging down a large bottle of mustard with her scrambled eggs and Robin was looking rather green, simply nursing a glass of orange juice. Raven had nothing next to her except for what looked like an empty bowl of cereal. Nothing seemed to be missing…

“Danny isn’t here,” Raven finally said, enlightening Cyborg when Beast Boy did nothing.

“Oh. Right.” Cyborg went to the fridge to get out a carton of milk. He turned around. “Do ghosts sleep?”

“Not according to this book,” Raven said, holding up a heavy tome. “But they do like to nap for fun and rejuvenate themselves with ectoplasm. They eat, too.”

Most of that flew over Cyborg’s head; he was staring at the carton of milk. “This expired five months ago. What is this still doing in the fridge?”

“Oh!” Starfire perked up from her eggs, swallowing down a large mouthful. “I am growing something in there! I must have forgotten it in the recent excitement.”

Cyborg immediately put it down and backed off several feet. “Do we have any orange juice? I just lost my taste for milk.”

“It is nothing dangerous, Cyborg,” Starfire assured him. “Simply an herb to use for cooking.”

“A Tamaranean herb?” Raven asked, not even looking at the kitchen.
“An herb that grows best in cold climates and fertilizes in milk,” Starfire said, looking at the container fondly. “It is from a package of seeds that I brought back from my home. It helps with hair growth and your muscles.” She cracked it open. “It must be ready by now.”

A rancid smell immediately filled the living room/kitchen area, turning Robin – who had partly recovered from his girlfriend’s chugging down of mustard – green again. He ducked down under the counter. Five seconds later, retching could be heard. Beast Boy’s white tofu promptly turned green, complimenting the chef – who was now gaping at his ruined breakfast. Raven simply held her cloak up to her nose, making a private note to get nose plugs for future escapades like this.

Cyborg, who was right next to Starfire, got the full blast of it along with the alien. Starfire was undisturbed by the smell, although the half-robot became a sickening shade of green. It was with great effort that he didn’t throw up.

“That smells bad, Star,” he managed to say.

“That smells delicious!” Starfire said happily, shocking everybody present. “I will make a dish with this herb for lunch!”

An awkward silence filled the air. Nobody knew how to tell Starfire that the herb she had grown so carefully – or not – for five months was inedible by the common population of Earth. Robin was just summoning his courage to tell his girlfriend that when the doors opened, distracting the Titans from the matter of the herb.

Danny Phantom came in, seeming rather pale despite his dark skin. His white hair was a blinding white in the early light of the morning; on top of that, his whole body radiated light that made him seem even more otherworldly. Several blinks later on the Titans’ part and his hair was back to normal along with his body.

“Sorry,” Danny apologized, ruffling his hair, which looked rather unkempt. “I wasn’t thinking there.”

“Was that your ghostly glow?” Beast Boy asked excitedly, leaning over the stove.

“Yeah.” Danny walked down the steps. He stopped at the foot of them, furrowing his brow. “What’s that smell?” He stared at Beast Boy’s ruined and moldy tofu eggs. “And are those things…green?”

“You really don’t want to know,” Raven said before anybody else could. She closed her book, getting up from her sitting position. Her cereal bowl, surrounded by a black aura, levitated in the air next to her; it floated over to the sink and gently dropped down. She studied Danny, who was fidgeting rather nervously. “Are you all right?”

Danny jumped slightly, his hand reaching for his neck before he seemed to think better of it. He dropped it to his side. He swallowed, his eyes resting on the view beyond the windows for a moment before he scanned the room.

Robin watched him cautiously, trying to keep his paranoid nature under control. Starfire, Cyborg, and Beast Boy were all crowded around the boy wonder, being there because of Robin’s unpredictable nature and because they were curious. Raven waited patiently for whatever Danny would say. She knew that he had had a lot to think about from yesterday and wanted to hear what he had to say.

“I’ve been thinking,” Danny blurted. In his hands was a green spatula that he kept twirling anxiously. A largo logo was branded on it, although Raven couldn’t read it because of how fast he
was spinning it. “And…I have something to tell you guys.”

‘He really wants to tell all of us?’ Raven thought, confused. ‘And he was so worried yesterday.’

“I didn’t tell you the entire truth about me,” Danny continued, his green eyes on the cooking utensil in his hands.

“What do you mean?” Robin demanded, unable to stop himself. He instantly fell victim to four glares. “Sorry,” he grumbled, quailing slightly.

Danny seemed oblivious, although the spatula was whirling faster now. “It took two years for my secret to be revealed back where I come from. It happened before then but I managed to reverse it—don’t ask me for details ’cause it’ll take too long. Alternate dimension…long story.” He took a deep breath here, realizing he was rambling. “What I’m trying to say is that my secret is kind of delicate. Or at least it was where I’m from. It may not be here but I don’t know because it’s so different and all and—”

“Danny,” Raven interrupted firmly. “You’re rambling.”


Everybody silently gaped at him. They hadn’t expected that.

Danny hurriedly continued before he could change his mind. “I’m half ghost. I got into an accident with my parents’ ghost portal when I was fourteen. I’ve been this way ever since.”

Raven found her voice. “This way?” She gestured at Danny’s ghostly form.

The spatula was a blur now. “N-no.” Danny took a deep breath. “I mean this way.”

Without any further warning, a bluish-white ring formed at his waist, splitting into two and moving apart. All of the Titans jumped at the sudden flash; Robin even reached for his belt. They realized there wasn’t any danger when the rings moved slowly over Danny’s body, changing his black and white jumpsuit into a red and white shirt, blue jeans, and red sneakers. His electric green eyes turned into a sky blue and his hair morphed into black. His skin, which had been a light brown, became whiter in color.

When the rings disappeared, the teenager that stood before them looked completely different from the ghostly hero of several seconds earlier. And yet, for Raven he looked completely familiar.

“Danny!” she exclaimed.

Beast Boy shook his head in amazement. “Yeah. Seriously, dude. That’s just amazing.”

Raven ignored him. “You’re Danny. The boy who was helping Mr. Robinson. No wonder you looked so familiar; I just couldn’t place you.”

Danny smiled sheepishly, his hands still busy with the spatula. “I get that a lot.”

“Why were you working there?”

He shrugged. “I needed a job since I was fresh out of money. That was the only place that would accept me.”

Robin got up from his seat by the counter. “Why’d you lie?” His voice was cold.
Danny didn’t meet his eyes. “I was scared. Wouldn’t you be?”

“No.”

Now Danny did meet his eyes. “I bet that Raven didn’t tell you all her secrets right off the bat. And when she did, she did it reluctantly and only because she had to.”

Robin looked like a lightning bolt had struck him.

“I bet the same thing happened with the rest of your friends,” Danny went on, seeing that he had hit the right note. “And if you don’t know how it feels, you probably haven’t told them everything yet.”

The others looked at Robin, who was dead silent, before looking back at Danny, who had stopped twirling the spatula.

“Half-ghosts in my world are uncommon. There are only two others than me. And once revealed, they are hunted down by ghost hunters, scientists, or the government because of how ‘unstable’ they’re deemed to be. I was lucky because of the unique circumstances surrounding me.” Danny shook his head, half-smiling. “I was so worried that my parents wouldn’t accept me. But they did, along with the rest of the world. I now realize that my parents would always have accepted me for who I am, no matter what.”

“I’m sorry, Danny,” Starfire started, “but why do you say ‘my world’? Are you from a different planet?”

Danny smiled wryly, plopping himself down on the steps. “Don’t I wish. That’d make things a lot simpler.”

“What do you mean?” Cyborg asked. “You’re not from a different planet?”

“And you’re not from here either?” Beast Boy inquired.

Danny shook his head, and then held it in his hands. “No. I tried ringing my friends and family up but their numbers are unavailable here.”

“You didn’t know before?” Raven asked gently.

“I think I did… I just didn’t want to accept it. Those phone calls really brought it home.”

There was a morbid silence then. Nobody knew how to break it. Even Robin was depressed. He just couldn’t be mad at a teenager who looked human, sounded human, and certainly didn’t act like a ghost anymore. On top of that, he was missing his friends and family. He would have to be one cold-hearted bastard before he could dress Danny down for lying.

Danny looked uncertainly up from the floor, not sure what his reception would be. His nervousness was returning. “So… are you guys good?”

“Good with what?” Robin asked, surprised at the question.

“Good with me being half-ghost,” Danny said, confused. So they were really okay with it? Absolutely okay with it?

“I don’t see why we wouldn’t be okay with it,” Robin replied, trying to be sensitive to Danny’s feelings. “You’re just… half-human.”

Danny seemed slightly taken aback; the others were shaking their heads at Robin’s tactlessness.
Even when he tried to be sensitive it completely failed.

“So…you are okay with it?” Danny asked again, not sure whether or not Robin had actually meant it as an insult.

Before Robin could butcher his opportunity, Raven stepped in. “We are, Danny. You remember what I told you yesterday, right?”

Danny did. “None of us will judge you for whatever you’re hiding.”

He smiled. “Yes. I do.”

“I bet that this has something to do with one of Raven’s cryptic statements, huh?” Beast Boy asked suspiciously.

Danny shrugged. “I wouldn’t know.”

“Are those all the secrets you’re hiding?” Robin folded his arms.

“No,” Danny replied bluntly, his hands gripping each other tightly. He stared ahead fixedly. “But I’m not prepared to tell you the rest of them yet.”

In his mind, clips from his fight with his future self kept playing. The words that he’d tried so hard to put behind him echoed in his ears, taunting him. He squeezed his eyes shut and pressed his fingers to his temples, trying to stop his mind from torturing him. It didn’t help.

‘Whatever this is, it has something to do with his uncontrollable power,’ Raven thought, studying him. ‘He’s let go of one secret. How many more does he have?’

“Do you have work today?” Raven suddenly asked, surprising Danny and the others.

Danny’s eyes met hers. “No. His store got trashed thanks to Ember. I don’t know when I’ll be able to work there again.”

“How’d you manage to get away from him?” Her questions were confusing the rest of her friends. Question marks were dancing above their heads.

Danny smiled. “Secretly being a half-ghost for two years has given me some tricks I’d rather not reveal. Let’s just say that all the times I spent lying to my parents and sister finally paid off.” ‘Even though I still managed to get Mr. Robinson suspicious.’

“So the ghost hunters who gave you all that stuff?” Robin gestured towards Danny’s belt and the spatula lying next to him.

“My parents.”

“Back up a second.” Beast Boy held up his hands. “You’re saying that your parents are ghost hunters? How did that work out?”

“It caused a lot of trouble at first,” Danny admitted. “They really hated my ghost half because they thought he was a villain. I had to keep lying low until they didn’t have any choice but to trust me. Then my sister told them who I was.”

“Do you mind telling us the full story?” Cyborg asked. “It sounds like a good one.”

‘I don’t really see the harm in it…” Danny half-considered it before discarding the idea. It wasn’t a
good idea considering he was still keeping some things secret. Maybe if he told them his other secrets he could begin considering it. “I’m sorry,” he finally said. “I’m not ready for that yet.”

“We understand, Danny,” Starfire said, stepping up to him. “We will wait for you to be ready.”

Danny blinked at her odd phrasing, nodding hesitatingly. “Thanks…”

“But in the meantime,” Starfire continued brightly, “would you do me the honor of joining me for the grand art of shopping?”

“Huh?” was Danny’s articulate reply.

Starfire beamed broadly. “Excellent! We will go immediately once you have eaten the breakfast!” She whizzed into the kitchen. “I will make a Tamaranean breakfast with my newly grown herb!”

Danny and the other Titans gulped.

‘I really don’t want to eat her food,’ Danny thought, turning a faint shade of green upon remembering the meal she had made for him yesterday. Out of courtesy he’d eaten it and marveled over its excellent taste, but he’d had trouble keeping it down until Raven had left him in the room and he could throw it up.

He couldn’t get her proud smile at his praise out of his head. Refusing this breakfast would be very hard…

‘How did this happen? Oh right… Because she dragged me into here and started piling this stuff into my arms. Then she shoved me into a changing stall and ordered that I change.’ Danny sighed. ‘All right. I better do it before she blows a fuse.’

He tugged the high collar of the shirt he was wearing. It was itching him terribly. Now he knew how his father felt outside of his jumpsuit. After another adjustment of his tight black pants, which were far too tight for his comfort as they prevented leg movement, he unlocked the door and headed out of the men’s changing rooms.

“Are you done yet?” Starfire asked immediately upon Danny’s exit. She caught sight of Danny’s outfit. “Oh!”

“It feels awful,” Danny complained, pulling the collar again. “Plus, I don’t think white’s my color.”

“You wear a white shirt,” Beast Boy said from his seat at the side. He was hugging the back of the chair.

“Yeah but it has red in it. This is plain white…with buttons. I don’t do formal.”

“But you must!” Starfire said. “You never know when some grand occasion may arise. Even Robin has a tuxedo!”

“Don’t remind me,” he muttered, shuffling in embarrassment as he remembered that disastrous prom he had been forced to go. (Although, dancing with Starfire at the end had been nice.)

“I have to say,” Raven said, “that it doesn’t exactly suit you. Especially the pants. You don’t do emo.”

“Thank you!” Danny put his hands up, feeling a seam tear. He immediately brought his arms down, hoping no one had noticed. “Can I take this off now?”
After a moment’s consideration, Starfire agreed. “White is not exactly your color. I shall return this to the rack. When I return, I hope to see you in the next outfit.”

“Let me take it off first.”

Danny went back to the changing stall, took off his shirt, pants, and chucked it over the door. Then, knowing that Starfire would return quickly, he put on the next shirt and pulled out a pair of comfortable looking jeans. Now these he would like wearing.

“Danny?”

He zipped the pants up. “Coming!”

Halfway out of the changing rooms he tripped over his feet and fell flat on his face, startling the rest of his…could he call them friends?

Danny sprang to his feet, embarrassed, only to step on something that made him fall sideways into the doorframe. Without thinking, he phased right through it until only his lower half was visible. There was a noticeable thunk!

None of the Titans knew how to respond. They were saved from worrying about Danny’s well-being when his upper half emerged from the wall, rubbing the back of his head nervously.

“I’m sorry about that,” he apologized. “I didn’t mean to turn intangible.”

“Your ghost powers apply to you when human?” Raven asked curiously.

Danny shrugged. “Always. I assume that it’s for all of my powers but I only use a select few in human form. I haven’t had practice in using the others.”

It was then that they noticed what he was wearing.

“Dude,” Beast Boy said, “what is that?” He covered his eyes. “It hurts my eyes!”

“That has got to be the ugliest shade of yellow I have ever seen,” Cyborg commented, staring at the gaudy yellow shirt that Danny was wearing.

“I think your pants are too big,” Raven added helpfully.

“You tripped over them,” Robin inserted graciously.

Danny just now saw that the pants were too big, extending for more than an inch below his feet. On top of that, the pants were a size too large, there being an inch of space between the pant and his waist.

“Does anybody have a belt I could use?” he asked, holding his pants up as he stood. He didn’t want them slipping down and revealing his underwear.

“Belts are not cool,” Beast Boy said before Starfire could.

“Hey!” Robin protested indignantly, turning red. His right hand gripped his own belt.

“Excluding Robin’s,” Beast Boy added hastily. “His belt is totally cool.”

Robin glared at Beast Boy, allowing Starfire to finally comment on Danny’s outfit.
“Yellow is not your color,” she said, looking at the raven-haired teenager. “And those pants do not fit you. Try on something different,” she commanded.

“I don’t have anything else,” Danny said, lifting a shoulder in half shrug. “And, er, may I ask as to why I need new clothes? I was fine with my old ones…”

“They’ve been tossed,” Starfire said dismissively.

“What?” Danny looked horror struck. “Why’d you do that?”

“They smelled horribly and were torn up.” Starfire turned and vanished to scour the shop for something else.

“I don’t remember them being torn up…” Danny said to a nonexistent Starfire.

Cyborg sidled over to Danny and whispered into his ear. “Dude, I’d let her do what she wants to do. She can be pretty firm if she wants to be. Besides, you don’t have any clothes left, do you?”

“No…” Danny sounded extremely reluctant to admit this fact.

“Then let her buy you something nice. It’s her way of saying thank you.”

Danny was confused now. “Thank you for what? I didn’t do anything special for her.”

“For helping us get rid of Ember,” Beast Boy said, having heard Danny.

“That and the fact that you pushed her away from the fight,” Raven said.

“Although you did electrocute her,” Robin added casually.

Danny flushed. “I’m sorry about that. It was an accident.”

“Don’t tell me that. Tell her.”

Starfire came back then with a small pile of clothes in her arms. “I’m sorry it took me so long.”

‘That was long?’ Danny thought, bemused.

“But I had to ask them if they could do something to these clothes,” Starfire continued.

“Do what?” Danny asked, hoping it wasn’t anything elaborate.

“You will see once you put them on. You can give me those clothes”—she indicated the horrible yellow shirt and baggy pants Danny was wearing—“once you are done.”

“Uh, Starfire?” Danny started hesitatingly as Starfire dumped the clothes in his arms. “I really appreciate what you’re doing for me but I don’t have any money to pay you back. I kind of left my wallet back home.”

“There is no need to pay me back,” Starfire reassured him. “I am doing this out of friendship. I bought clothes for every one of my friends after I first discovered the joy of shopping. But they just wanted copies of what they were already wearing.”

The rest of the Titans shrugged shamelessly at Starfire’s subtle accusation.

“For you, however, I get to pick out something new to wear!” Starfire continued happily. “It is my
treat then, Danny.”

Danny swallowed and said with a dry mouth, “But I hurt you.”

Starfire laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. “That was an accident. I know you did not mean to shock me. It was my fault for insisting on initiating contact.”

Danny was slightly taken aback at the odd phrasing but nodded. “Thanks,” he managed, his head whirling at Starfire’s quick brushing off. ‘Wow. No one I just met would do that so casually.’

Starfire smiled happily. “I will be waiting for you!” She turned Danny around and gave him a push into the changing rooms.

The pants nearly tripped him up again but Danny managed to stumble into the changing stall before any harm could befall him. Gladly discarding the horrible yellow shirt and the rude pants, he pulled on a loose pair of black pants that just went down over his ankles and a long-sleeved black shirt.

A look in the mirror surprised him. The black pants had chains looping through the belt buckles. These chains hung down low on one side of his hip. The shirt, much to his surprise, had his logo emblazoned on the chest. It fit him loosely but not too loose, just enough that it dropped over his pant and partly covered the chains. In fact, he realized that if he put the belt on that held all of his parents’ inventions, the shirt would hide it from view.

‘This actually looks good on me.’ Danny caught sight of a black and white cap lying with some gloves. ‘But that’s just overkill.’ He picked up the gloves. ‘Black gloves?’ The cap had the DP emblem on the front, white outlining the edges, and it was black for the rest. ‘I don’t even like caps! Or hats… Actually, anything on top of my head stinks.’

Sighing, Danny put the cap on his head, instantly hating the fact that it made his head feel trapped. The gloves went on next. Another look in the mirror revealed that the cap didn’t look bad on him; the gloves were just a tad too much, though.

Knowing that Starfire would have the last say, Danny snapped on his ghost fighting belt, tucked it under the black shirt, and picked up the rejected outfit before leaving the stall for his inspection.

Absolute silence met him as he exited the changing rooms. He stood there nervously for a moment, feeling like a deer caught in headlights.

“Well?” he finally asked. “How do I look?”

“You look good,” Cyborg complimented, finding his voice. “Those clothes look a lot better on you than what you were wearing before.”

“I liked what I was wearing before,” Danny protested, stung.

“This looks much better on you!” Starfire said, barreling over Danny’s protest.

“The gloves are a bit much,” Danny said, holding up his hands, which were feeling hotter by the second.

“I have to agree,” Raven said. “Other than that, you did a good job, Starfire.”

“Those shoes don’t match it,” Robin criticized much to Danny’s surprise. “They’re too red.”

“And what are you wearing?” Danny retorted, raising an eyebrow. “Your entire outfit is nothing but
“Mine is in synch; yours isn’t,” Robin replied smoothly, almost daring Danny to say otherwise.

The ghost teen held his tongue, though, knowing that Robin would just bat aside anything he said. The Titan was too thick.

“You can leave the gloves,” Starfire said, cutting into the broiling argument.

“What about the cap?” Danny took it off. “I hate the trouble you went to putting the emblem on and everything but I don’t like wearing them.”

“You never know when you might need one,” Starfire said cryptically. “You do not have to wear it.”

“Thanks,” Danny said, relieved. He was still holding the yellow shirt and pants.

“But we do need to get you new shoes,” Starfire observed, noting Danny’s red shoes. They didn’t match the rest of his black outfit at all.

Danny sighed, not looking forward to this at all.

And people wondered why he never went shopping…

They were sitting at the Titans’ favorite pizza parlor, and currently debating which pizza to order. Beast Boy was for veggie, Cyborg for meat, and the others were neutral. Danny wasn’t even paying attention, instead inspecting his new black shoes. They were sneakers, not dress shoes. He’d put his foot down on that one.

Starfire had even considered getting him boots but he’d gotten a nasty feeling that Skulker would have a laugh at that. So without telling her the details, Danny simply told her that boots weren’t for him. She’d moved on to dress shoes then before Danny pointed out that his clothes weren’t formal. After that, she couldn’t decide what to get him. He had suggested that he keep his old sneakers but she’d promptly grabbed them and fried them with a starbolt, preventing him from wearing them again.

Danny shot her a glance. She was looking at the menu while Cyborg and Beast Boy argued about whether to order a meat or veggie pizza. A small shiver ran down his spine as he remembered the shoe frying incident. She had seemed particularly vicious when it came to his poor sneakers. Her only explanation had been that they were completely worn through.

She’d gotten him the hat, too. It was on the chains that were attached to his belt and was currently sitting on his hip.

“I’m telling you right now that we’re going to order a veggie pizza!” Beast Boy said, jabbing his finger at one specific entry on his menu.

“No, we’re going to order meat!” Cyborg countered. “You’re the only one here that likes a veggie pizza!”

Danny sighed at the ongoing bickering, thinking about the similarities the two had with Sam and Tucker. It really was strange…

Their waitress, a pretty brunette, stopped by their table. “So have you guys decided yet what you’re going to order?”
Beast Boy and Cyborg both turned on her. “No!”

She involuntarily took a step back. “O-okay,” she said nervously. “I’ll be back in a few minutes then.”

“No, wait,” Danny said, surprising the Titans and the waitress. “Do you guys make soy cheese?” he asked her.

“Yes,” she replied, wondering what he was going to do.

“We’ll take a medium pizza with soy cheese, half of it covered with whatever you’ve got for meat and the other with veggies,” Danny ordered. Then he rethought it. “And we’d also like large pizza with just plain cheese and pepperoni,” he added, looking at the menu Robin was holding. It wouldn’t do to isolate the others who probably didn’t like veggies or meat.

“Of course,” the waitress said, scribbling down what Danny was ordering. “I’ll bring it as soon as it’s ready.” She left before Cyborg and Beast Boy could protest.

As it was, the two were speechless and gaping at Danny.

The half-ghost found himself under five pairs of eyes that were all astounded. “Was that too much?” he asked anxiously.

“That was good,” Raven complimented, snapping Beast Boy’s mouth shut. “In fact, I don’t think Cyborg can complain.”

Cyborg proved her wrong. “I don’t like soy cheese,” was all he said.

“It tastes just like regular cheese,” Danny said. “Believe me, I’ve tried it. My girlfriend is a veggie like Beast Boy. She doesn’t eat meat or anything made out of dairy.”

“You have a girlfriend?” Starfire asked instantly, eager to know more about her new friend. “Is she pretty?”

“Insanely so,” Danny said, smiling as he remembered Sam. “She only wears black and a teensy bit of purple because she’s a Goth. In fact, you remind me a lot of her,” he told Raven.

“I trust that’s a good thing,” Raven said.

“Very,” Danny said, smiling wryly. “She’s an animal rights activist and doesn’t stand for anything that she deems unfair. You’d be amazed at some of the things she’s pulled together.”

“Do you miss her?” Robin asked.

“A lot. She’s been there for me from the start – ever since I turned half-ghost.”

“Man,” Beast Boy said. “I wish I had somebody like that.”

“You’ll find somebody,” Danny said, although he wasn’t sure if this was true. “Kind of hard to not see you matching up with somebody.”

“Yes!” Beast Boy pumped his fist into the air.

“So the green guy is able to get somebody while I’m left in the dust,” Cyborg grumbled, leaning on his elbow which was on the table.
“You’ll find somebody, too,” Danny said. ‘When did I become the guy who reassures others that they’ll find somebody?’

“You and I have already done the matching up,” Starfire said proudly, linking Robin’s arm in hers.

Robin smiled at her. “That we have. I haven’t regretted it one bit.”

“There’s nothing to regret,” Raven said. “It was so obvious from the start that you two liked each other. I’m just surprised it took so long.”

“Aye,” Beast Boy and Cyborg chorused.

Danny smiled at his new friends – he could call them that now. They really were a nice bunch to get to know. Maybe a bit weird but nice.

“One large veggie-meat pizza with soy cheese and one medium pepperoni pizza!” Their waitress set their steaming pizzas down on the table. “Hope you enjoy!”

“Yes! Food!” Beast Boy immediately dug into his side of the pizza with enjoyment.

Cyborg took the other side a bit reluctantly, unsure of how it was going to taste. Raven, Robin, Starfire, and Danny helped themselves from the pepperoni pizza.

While his new friends started to eat, Danny held back, thinking about how the waitress had treated them all so familiarly. He understood that they were frequent customers to this place but it wasn’t just here that they were treated like normal people. It was also everywhere else.

Starfire had easily been able to buy his new clothes and shoes without a problem. (The teenager at the cash register had gawked at her but instantly looked away once receiving Robin’s glare.) Nobody in the mall had paid them another glance other than the initial one that most people gave, something that shocked Danny considering their status as Jump City’s heroes.

He decided to ask them about it. “So I was wondering... Why does nobody rush and crowd you guys all at once when you get out into the city?”

Robin swallowed his mouthful. “What do you mean?”

“You guys are Jump City’s protectors, right? You regularly save this place from bad guys. Doesn’t that make you guys – I don’t know – famous or something? From my experience, famous people normally get mobbed.”

The five friends looked at each other for a moment, shrugging at once.

“It’s always been that way,” Robin said. “We don’t think about it.”

“Is it different for you?” Cyborg asked.

Danny set his slice down. “Completely. I can’t go to school without a crowd of girls running after me with marriage proposals or demands for my autograph. And when I look at you guys, you can go shopping without people gawking at you. It must be nice.”

“Where are you from again?” Robin took another bite.


“It’s not very famous if you ask me because none of us have heard of it,” Beast Boy said through a
mouthful of pizza.

“I already told you that I’m not from here. In fact, I get the feeling I’m from a different dimension or something. Sorta like something out of Kingdom Hearts.”

Raven snapped to attention. “Are you sure about that?”

Danny nodded, feeling rather morbid. “Absolutely. Remember when I said that those phone calls I tried confirmed my suspicion?”

“That stinks,” Beast Boy muttered, stopping his manic chewing for a moment to reflect on that. “So you’re completely alone here.”

“You have us now,” Starfire said, trying to comfort Danny. “We are your new friends.”

“And I’m glad for that,” Danny said, smiling at her. “But forgive me if I’m still rather awkward around you guys. I’ve never had a group of people accept me so quickly for who I am – other than my friends and family, of course. I get the feeling that the rest of my world is more for my fame than anything else.”

“That tends to be the case,” Cyborg said wisely.

“We understand if you’re still awkward around us,” Raven said. “I’d feel awkward, too, and I’m a part of this team.”

Danny smiled and took a bite of his pizza, feeling more at ease now. It looked like he had found a place he belonged to. Even more so than Amity Park. The thought made him feel slightly guilty.

He tried to push it to the back of his mind and enjoy what was right in front of him. Who knew how long he would have it for?
They were back in the tower. Danny was currently watching Beast Boy race Cyborg on their enormous TV and was cheering the latter on. He would’ve been racing himself if not that his ecto-electricity power had mutated one of the controllers. He’d been at a loss for what to do until Raven took care of it by un-mutating it with her black magic. The controller had been a wreck after that.

Then he had remembered the thermos. Raven’s response to that had been that he should save space for more worthwhile ghosts. She hadn’t listened when he insisted the limit wasn’t anywhere close at the moment.

But that was in the past. This was the present…

“Get him, Cyborg!” Danny cheered, watching Cyborg squeeze past Beast Boy’s car to take the lead.

“Dude!” Beast Boy complained. “Why are you cheering for him?”

“He’s racing for me,” Danny replied simply. “So doesn’t that mean I’m still racing you?”

Beast Boy scowled but said nothing. He simply focused more on his race.

Raven sat in a corner of the couch, engrossed in a book. Robin and Starfire were at the kitchen counter, enjoying the show.

“Are you glad that you are giving him a chance?” Starfire asked quietly.

“Very,” Robin admitted in the same tone. “He’s…a nice guy.”

Starfire beamed. “Most definitely!”

“But I still get the feeling he’s hiding something,” Robin continued, gazing at Danny thoughtfully.

“So are you,” Starfire said rather jokingly, even though she was really serious.

Robin caught it; he turned to smile reassuringly. “I’ll tell you eventually. Don’t worry.”

Starfire smiled, too, although with a tinge of worry. “Good.”

Robin gave her a one-armed hug, trying to comfort her. He just wasn’t ready to tell his secrets; he hoped Starfire would understand.

In that way he and Danny really were alike.

‘I can’t fault him too much for keeping secrets,’ Robin thought ruefully. ‘I’m in the same position.’

This peaceful atmosphere continued for a while longer until the Titans’ alarm went off. It made Cyborg lose control of his car for long enough so that Beast Boy crossed the finish line by a hair.

“Yes!” the changeling crowed, seemingly oblivious to the alarm. “I won! I beat Cyborg!”

“Leave it,” Cyborg said, dropping his controller to stand. “We need to go.”

“Oh, all right.” Beast Boy got up, too.

“Titans, let’s go!” Robin cried, already at the doors.
Danny stood at the foot of the steps while everybody ran past him. “Can I come with?”

“It’s safer here,” Robin said, Danny’s unstable power at the forefront of his mind.

“But it’s a ghost,” Danny insisted.

“How do you know that?” Cyborg asked.

“My ghost sense went off at the same time as the alarm.” He lifted up his shirt, revealing his utility belt. “You’ll need my help with that.”

After another second’s hesitation, Robin made his decision, hoping he wouldn’t regret it. “Fine. But stay behind.”

He whirled and left the room, his friends on his heels.

Danny remained behind, staring at the “GAME OVER” sign flashing on the screen. It reflected his life. His life could be over so quickly…just like a video game.

“PLAY AGAIN?”

But he wouldn’t get a second chance.

Shaking his head clear of these morbid thoughts, Danny jumped on the bottom step, ran up two, and transformed in midair. He flew off after the Titans, leaving behind the flashing game screen.

“PLAY AGAIN?”

No second chances...

“A warehouse?” Danny sounded confused.

They were standing in front of a gloomy looking warehouse. The windows were boarded, the paint gray and peeling, and there were rusty tractors lying around the entire place.

It looked…haunted.

“The disturbance is here,” Robin said firmly. To Danny: “Stay back and try not to be noticed.”

“And if it’s a ghost?” Danny objected.

“In that case, feel free to go ahead. But if it’s one of our enemies then I’d like to have you be an ‘unknown factor’ so to speak.”

Danny’s ghost sense went off again. He raised an eyebrow.

“Perhaps he should go ahead,” Starfire suggested.

“Invisibly then,” Robin allowed.

Danny nodded once and vanished from view. He started towards the entrance, deliberately raising a dust cloud by scuffling his feet so that the Titans could see where he was.

“Going in,” he warned quietly, opening the door.

The disembodied voice caused shivers to run down the Titans’ backs.
All of them were tense upon entering. They knew that a ghost could come out at any moment. What they didn’t know was if another person was with it.

Danny couldn’t see a ghost, although all his senses were telling him that one was most definitely present (he ignored the fact that it might be his new power sending shivers through his body). His mind was running through all the ghosts he knew. Only two of them would actually haunt a warehouse…

And one popped out from behind a huge wooden crate. “Beware!” It was the Box Ghost.

His sudden appearance startled the Titans; Danny was just annoyed. In fact, he forgot to drop his invisibility.

“Oh,” he started. “You have got to be kidding me—”

He was broken off by the explosion of the crate. The spot where it had stood was glowing green; a cauldron stood there. And standing by the cauldron was one of the oddest figures Danny had ever seen – which was saying something: an animated puppet.

With literally no strings attached and a golden crown on top of its black “hair”.

Danny didn’t say anything, just stunned to see what looked like an animated puppet. The Titans reacted, though.

“The Puppet King!” Starfire cried.

“Dude!” Beast Boy backed up a step. “Totally not fun!”

Danny was confused. ‘What’s the big deal?’

He soon found out.

While the Puppet King said nothing, merely leering at the five (Danny was invisible) menacingly, the Box Ghost’s eerily diabolical laughter made it very spooky.

“Rob, I think we better back up,” Cyborg warned. “You remember what happened last time.”

Ssssshhaaaaaa…

The strange noise made all of them take another step back.

Then, without warning, green smoke struck each of the Titans, causing Danny to almost jump out of his skin with shock and fright. None of them had noticed it sneaking around their ankles, having emerged from the cauldron’s depths.

It was over so quickly.

Robin, Beast Boy, and Cyborg had no chance. The moment the green smoke seeped into their bodies different colors (Robin red, Cyborg whitish-blue, and Beast Boy green) came out of their mouths to fly to several objects the Puppet King was holding. Even though Raven and Starfire attempted to take to the air and escape, Starfire went down first. Raven fought back with her magic until she was overpowered. Their respective colors had been yellow and blue.

When it was all over, each of their eyes glowed green.

Danny was frozen to his spot, too stunned to do anything. His mind was blank.
“Run, Danny!”

That sounded like Raven, even though her voice sounded weird. Which was odd considering that…

Danny’s eyes widened when he saw the menacing smoke approach him, only to shrink back at the last second, confusing him.

‘Huh?’ Still invisible, Danny slowly began to retreat, trying to form a plan of sorts. ‘Gotta do something. Think…’

“Psshhht…”

The Puppet King’s voice sent shivers down Danny’s spine.

“Useless.” The Puppet King got up, his joints creaking. He seemed to look straight at Danny with strange eyes. Half of his right was green and seemed to fade to red. The left was completely red. “I can see you.”

“What?” Danny jerked back. ‘How…? I’m still invisible!’

“No matter.” The Puppet King pointed a finger straight at Danny, who was frozen to his spot. “This will work.”

“Run!”

Danny’s limbs were still frozen when something seemed to knock out all the air in his lungs and pull at his molecules. The force threw him back and he was flying through the air, feeling suddenly empty. What he saw next was possibly the most shocking sight that he had ever seen: The glowing ethereal figure of what seemed to be his ghost half stood/float for one moment before seemingly being sucked into a vacuum.

‘No way.’ Danny closed his eyes just before he hit the wall full force and slid down to the dirty ground. ‘What just happened?’

His last sight was the malevolent face of the Puppet King leering at him with those horribly mismatched eyes. Eyes that seemed horrifyingly familiar to him.

A very human Danny Fenton passed out in the warehouse, completely at the mercy of the Puppet King…and the Box Ghost.

He woke up to the voice of the Box Ghost, something he never wanted to do again. That ghost was annoying.

Danny felt strange, and very confused. ‘What just happened? And why do my hands and feet feel like they’re tied up?’

Cautiously, he opened one eye, only to open both upon seeing the familiar figure of Robin standing in front of him.

He started to say Robin’s name – his mouth was open and everything – but he choked on his own words when he saw Starfire’s eyes. They had always been a shade of green; but now they were a…ghostly green. Quick glances around him showed that the other Titans also had the same shade of green eyes.

Suddenly, everything came rushing back to him. ‘Oh crud! Not good at all!’
He looked at his two enemies, who were only ten feet away behind some other crates. This wasn’t good at all. What he absolutely had to do was find some way to escape from all this. But he couldn’t make it seem obvious. He needed to be sneaky. Which he could do. He hadn’t survived the last two years by not being sneaky.

So, by being very sneaky about it, Danny attempted to phase his wrists through his bonds. It didn’t work.

‘Are these ropes ghost proof or something?’ Trying not to panic, Danny tried again, only to further chafe his wrists. ‘Why isn’t it working?’

He registered the fact that he was feeling different. Somehow the feeling was familiar to him, even though it had been months since he’d felt this way.

‘This is exactly how I’d felt after getting rid of my powers,’ Danny thought with growing horror. ‘How…?’ He remembered seeing what he knew now had been his ghost half. ‘On top of that being a really bad thing, this is going to make things a lot more complicated.’

“You promised me boxes!”

Danny looked up to see the Box Ghost annoying the Puppet King. A glow to the right of the evil mannequin caught his interest as he tried to make out what it was.

‘Is that…?’ Danny couldn’t believe it. ‘It is!’

Hanging off the Puppet King’s shoulder was a small puppet with strings. It looked exactly like his ghost half! Next to it were the motionless “bodies” of the Titans, illuminated by the Phantom puppet’s white glow along with the cauldron’s eerie green one.

Danny thought that the Raven puppet was staring straight at him, which shouldn’t be possible. Or… maybe it was.

Wasn’t that his ghost half? If it was, then odds were that the Titans’ spirits were also in the puppets. His ghost half wasn’t with him, meaning that it was somewhere else. He knew that there wasn’t a chance that the Puppet King already had a puppet looking exactly like his ghost half, meaning that the villain had cast some sort of spell.

Sheesh… He sounded like some pompous prince in a fairytale…

‘Think. There has to be something I can do.’

In frustration, completely forgetting that he was human, Danny tried to turn intangible and break free. It didn’t work. But something else happened.

He could’ve sworn that his puppet changed colors into that bluish-white typical of intangibility.

‘Can it be? Is it possible that I’m still linked to my ghost half?’ A plan began forming in his head. ‘All right… But I better be careful. I can’t afford to slip up now.’

Biting his lips, Danny turned invisible. To his delight, the puppet did so. Then he focused on a power that was still relatively new to him. Hopefully he could keep up the invisibility, too. This was new grounds for him.

‘Please work,’ he prayed.
Danny could see his puppet even though it was invisible. So he could also see it turn green when he focused on teleporting it. It was a far safer bet than telekinesis.

Breathing in deeply, Danny focused on reappearing where he was sitting. He almost dropped his invisibility when he felt the puppet land in his lap in an invisible green flash.

Feeling a small tug in his body that he disregarded, Danny finally dropped the invisibility. Unfortunately, he’d forgotten that it glowed. He quickly turned invisible again, holding his breath and hoping that the Puppet King hadn’t noticed.

All that happened was that he conked the Box Ghost in the head after the ghost poked him. He hadn’t noticed the disappearance and sudden decrease in weight.

Exhaling in relief, Danny turned intangible, spreading it to himself this time. It was odd, having to direct his powers through something else.

‘But it’s teaching me a lot about finesse,’ Danny thought, pulling his wrists and ankles free. He rubbed his sore wrists, dropping the intangibility.

‘Stage two now.’

Spreading the invisibility to cover himself, Danny silently stood up, looping his ghost half around his neck so that it hung like a purse at his side. He crept between the Titans without tipping any of them off.

One good (and possibly the only) side effect of having mindless drones as guards was that they weren’t very bright.

‘But they will notice my absence if they turn around. It’s too bad duplication won’t work right now.’ He was bending really low, creeping closer to his foes.

The Box Ghost was sulking now. Suddenly the ghost looked up.

‘Please don’t notice, please don’t notice…’

“He’s gone!” the Box Ghost cried.

‘Drat!’ Danny screwed his eyes shut, then opened them, determined.

The Puppet King sprang up, looking at where Danny was supposed to be. “No!”

The voice sounded different, although Danny had no time to reflect on it. Grabbing an ecto-gun off his belt, which hadn’t been taken since his new shirt hid it (‘Thank you, Starfire.’), he sprang up, firing two shots in rapid succession. They hit their marks, knocking the Puppet King and the Box Ghost back.

Jumping over the crate between the two groups, Danny turned visible when he landed. With his black clothes and hair, smoking ecto-gun, and the glowing puppet by his side, Danny appeared terrifying in the light of the cauldron.

“Danny!”

He saw the Robin puppet moving its mouth. ‘Whoa.’ None of his surprise was evident on his face.

“Why didn’t you run?”
“Quiet!” the Puppet King snapped, shaking the Titans’ puppets.

“I don’t abandon my friends,” Danny replied coolly, meeting the Puppet King’s black dot-like eyes.

Wait…

‘Weren’t they red and green before?’ Danny remembered the terrifying glow of those mismatched eyes. ‘What is going on? Even his voice sounds different!”

“Very noble of you,” the Puppet King said. “But you have something that belongs to me.”

“This?” Danny held his puppet firmly. “Ha. Don’t think so. This is me, for your information. Besides, I’m pretty sure that those are my friends that you’re holding.”

“The ones behind you, you mean?”

Danny felt something shooting straight for his head and ducked, seeing Robin’s body behind him. Thinking quickly, he landed on the floor and swiped Robin’s legs out from under him. The boy wonder toppled over just as Danny stood upright to sidestep a furious cheetah.

“Down, kitty!” Danny ordered, catching sight of three more Titans approaching him menacingly. He also saw a four feet high crate just several feet away.

Reaching it in two steps, Danny hopped on top of it and grabbed the mini-Fenton Foamer, remembering its sticky abilities. He flipped the power on as high as it could go, knowing that he would need a big punch in order to keep the Titans’ bodies out of commission.

“Get him!” the Puppet King ordered.

“Get him!” the Box Ghost echoed. This earned him a vicious glare. “Eep!”

Danny shot five times with this ecto-gun, hitting the three boys. Raven and Starfire jumped aside because of their flight abilities. But they were all plastered to a wall or the floor in the next minute as Danny fired the Foamer.

‘That should keep them for now.’

Hitching the Foamer back on his belt, Danny leaped off the crate, landed in front of the Puppet King, and tackled it head on, shocking the villain.

“Ungh!” The Puppet King’s head made an ugly sound upon contact with the floor.

“I’ll take my friends back, thank you very much!” Danny deftly phased the Titans’ puppets off the Puppet King’s body before jumping off and retreating. He put some crates between them, not sure what else the villain was capable of. In the meantime, the Titans joined his ghost half’s puppet.

“Can you handle him, Danny?” Cyborg called, startling Danny.

“I should be able to,” Danny answered truthfully, readying his ecto-gun.

“But your ghost half is down here!” Beast Boy objected.

“Trust me!” Danny shot the Puppet King in the knee as it was getting up. Not his style but anything went in this fight. “How do you think I got it on me?”

“Behind you, Danny!” Raven warned.
Danny whirled, only to get hit by a wave of black magic that threw him up off the ground. “Oof!”

“Danny!” they all cried.

“I’m fine!” Danny bit out, seeing Raven’s body fly up towards him. ‘Although I might not be fine in a minute!’

Desperate, Danny pulled the trigger of his weapon. He never expected Raven’s black magic to seize the ecto-beam, wrench the gun out of his hands, and redirect his attack back at him. The force threw him right into the roof where he stuck. “Agh!”

He coughed, trying to get air into his lungs.

Just as he opened his eyes, he saw Raven about to deliver a powerful attack. Squeezing his eyes shut in horror, he waited for the end, only to suddenly feel very disoriented. His eyes opened in time for him to see a warp around him dump him on the floor, very far away from the roof.

At the same time, he felt another, more powerful tug in his body. In addition, his limbs felt weighted down.

“Roll!” he heard Robin cry.

Then his limbs were as light as they usually were; Danny rolled quickly to the side and jumped to his feet, seeing a large piece of the roof crash into the ground where he had been lying. There was a large hole in it about the size of his back.

“Close call,” Beast Boy said, relief evident in his voice. “Thanks, Robin.”

‘I must’ve turned intangible up there so I wouldn’t hurt my back,’ Danny realized. ‘Or my ghost half did.’ He looked down to see it just staring ahead, although its glow seemed dimmer. ‘It teleported me out of there, too.’

“Watch out, Danny!” Starfire shouted, jerking Danny out of his thoughts.

 Reflexively, Danny jumped away from his position, landing on a crate six feet away and ten feet high. He was seated a bit like a frog with one hand on the wooden top to steady himself.

“You flew!” Starfire said, amazed.

A sharp pain in Danny’s chest prevented him from answering. ‘Ow…’

He saw Raven fly at him again. He managed to spin away, landing on the ground and facing the now-destroyed crate. Dizziness hit him then. He gagged, trying to stop himself from prematurely getting rid of his lunch.

“Are you all right?” Cyborg asked, sounding alarmed.

“Will be,” Danny managed to say.

A sudden chill touched his side. Knowing what it had to be, Danny snatched the Fenton Foamer and blindly fired behind him, his eyes still on the very dangerous Raven.

He was awarded by a yelp from the Box Ghost. Sparing himself one minute, Danny grabbed his thermos, the one he had in human form. Uncapping it, he then remembered that hadn’t powered it or used it in months. He grabbed his puppet and channeled energy from it, feeding it to the thermos.
The bluish-white energy ensnared the Box Ghost, who had managed to dodge Danny’s initial attack. “No! I will escape, Phantom! No cylindrical container can trap me!” he wailed, spinning his legs as he tried to run/fly away. He was gone a second later.

Even though he normally would’ve given a clever quip then, Danny staggered, feeling his stomach turn itself out as pain shot through his muscles. He saw Raven’s hand miss the back of his head as he leaned over a crate, losing his lunch in the process as he did so.

‘Ugh.’ His feet slipped out from under him when he tried to sidestep Raven’s next attack; her leg passed through the air where his head had been. ‘What’s going on?’

“Get up, Danny!” Robin urged.

Sluggishly, Danny turned on his stomach, feeling the ground shudder next to him. Aware that he was very close to being seriously injured or even killed, Danny recovered enough to somersault himself to his feet and slide behind another crate using his kinetic energy.

“Why is it just you, Raven?” he panted.

“I’m the only one capable of escaping ectoplasm,” Raven explained. “The others could, too, but they need brains.”

“Joy.” Danny unhooked the chain that was looped through his belt buckles. “I’m sorry, Raven. This might hurt a bit.”

The chain ready to go, Danny leapt out from behind the crate, meeting Raven head on with a swinging chain ready to unleash some pain. He knocked her hand aside with his own and kicked her in the chest, causing her to stagger back.

Then, with the still swinging chain, Danny took a step back and threw it. His cap was still on one side, giving it added weight. The chain looped around the off-balanced Raven. Danny ran around her, tightening it, and then pulled.

Raven fell with the pull and into another open crate. Knowing that wouldn’t hold her, Danny grabbed the mini-Fenton Bazooka from his belt. Acting only on a hunch, he shot it at her. Raven was instantly sucked into a portal, although he noted that wasn’t green in it.

He only had a few minutes before the portal dumped her here upon seeing that there was no Ghost Zone in the vicinity. Danny ran towards the Puppet King, clambering over crates as he did so.

“Your ghost half is losing power, Danny!” Raven warned. “Be careful!”

Danny saw the flickering glow of his puppet. ‘So that’s why I’ve been feeling bad.’ This came with another realization. ‘If I use up my puppet’s power…I’ll die.’

His already surging adrenaline was given a boost by this revelation and he jumped over a final crate to land in front of the Puppet King.

Okay…now he had no clue what to do.

“The remote control he has!” Raven said. “Throw it in the cauldron!”

Danny saw the cauldron, which was being lit by nothing. Candles with green flames surrounded it in a circle. It looked like some eerie ritual was being performed. He looked for the remote; then he saw it in the Puppet King’s hands, something that he hadn’t noticed before.
How could he get it?

“You’ve been a nuisance,” the Puppet King growled, his voice echoing.

‘The echo!’ Danny looked at its eyes, which were mismatching again. ‘That’s – that’s not the Puppet King! That’s something else!’

“I would’ve gotten rid of you sooner but I had to recuperate. No matter. This will fix you!”

His mouth hinged open, releasing a thick green smoke very similar to the Fenton Foamer’s.

Sssshhhaaa...

It was that same noise. And this time it was accompanied by that chill at his side; shooting pains ran through his muscles, causing him to cringe.

‘Great! My ghost sense is involuntary!’ Danny clutched his chest, scowling. ‘But then...’ Out came his thermos and he immediately uncapped it, unleashing its suctioning power. “Take that, ghost!”

“Ghost?” Beast Boy asked.

“Aaargh!” The Puppet King’s strange eyes began fading to black as Danny continued to suck the smoke in. “You will pay for this!” His voice faded towards the end as the smoke completely disappeared.

The Puppet King’s body collapsed and Danny took the opportunity to run towards his body. Raven would return any second now.

He bent down quickly and scooped up the remote, throwing it into the cauldron. Immediately there was a huge explosion that threw Danny back. He hit a crate and lay there, feeling his chest tighten for a moment before he watched in a sort of horrified fascination as what seemed like a face emerged from the fire. It was twisting as the smoke that made it up twisted. It had a lopsided malevolent grin on its face, one that seemed familiar to Danny, although it looked different, too.

Then, after a gigantic whoosh of air occurred that pulled Danny forward, it vanished, leaving the cauldron still filled with a glowing blue fire. Danny stayed sitting there, horrified, as he wondered what to do next.

He felt an enormous amount of energy – dark energy – and knew that Raven was back. Getting to his feet quickly, he stepped over the Puppet King’s body, which he felt stir.

“What do I do?” he demanded, kneeling down before the cauldron. He looked back and saw the Puppet King starting to get to his feet.

“That should have worked!” Robin said.

“But it didn’t!”

“Put out the flames!” Raven suggested quickly, feeling Danny’s panic.

‘How? If I were in my ghost half I’d use my ice powers but...’

Danny heard crackling, a sign that Raven was gearing up for an attack.

‘No time!’ Danny crouched down, clutching his puppet, knowing that this was the only way.
“No, Danny!” Raven protested.

“I don’t have any time!” Danny snapped. “This is the only way!”

Then, before anybody could object further, Danny froze the flames, putting out the cauldron as his ice melted quickly in the abnormally hot flames, creating water that doused everything. The minute he did so blinding pain crippled him. He couldn’t scream; his lungs were immobilized. It was all he could do to keep breathing.

He felt rather than saw Raven stop her attack. He felt the Puppet King collapse a final time. He felt the Titans’ spirits leave their puppets.

And then, he felt his own puppet disintegrate.

His body was on fire. He couldn’t breathe; couldn’t see; couldn’t hear… It felt like the accident all over again. Except that he couldn’t even scream now.

Then he felt something hit him; every molecule in his body burst into sheer agony.

Then, finally, he screamed.

Raven didn’t want Danny to use his ghost powers. The white-haired puppet’s light was flickering, an ominous sign. Add the fact that Danny was slowing down significantly whenever doing anything like a ghost and it didn’t look good.

But he was right. There was no time. Already she could sense her body’s malevolent energy seeping into the warehouse.

The puppet’s light winked out like a candle when Danny used the last of its power to put out the cauldron. Raven abruptly found herself back in her body, reigning in her power and looking down on a seizing Danny Fenton.

She landed hurriedly, looking for her friends until she remembered what Danny had done to keep them out of his way. They would be a while then.

Raven next tried to grab Danny’s puppet. But to her great alarm, it dissipated.

“No!” she cried. She stretched a hand out to Danny but was repelled by a green light that had surrounded him in a tightly compacted ball of spinning energy. It pushed her back further, claiming a circle of five feet around Danny.

Her eyes were wide by the time the green energy completely obstructed Danny from view.

“Raven!”

That was Robin. She couldn’t tell if he was free or not, nor did she care. Danny was more important.

The green energy suddenly seemed to collapse in on itself and get sucked right into Danny’s body like a black hole. The seizing stopped and he started rising in the air, a green outline around his abnormally still body.

Raven thought the worst was over until the noise hit. It was a horrible wailing, just like hundreds of ghosts moaning at once. It was so loud she couldn’t hear herself think. It was so powerful that the ground and the warehouse were shaking.
And it was coming from Danny, who was clearly screaming for his life.

‘That horrible sound can’t be coming from him. ...But it is...’ The power was whipping Raven’s cloak around; she put a hand up to keep her hood on. ‘So powerful...’

Danny’s hair was fading to white and his clothes were morphing into his jumpsuit. He was transforming into Phantom, in what seemed to be a very painful way.

It seemed to take forever until he completely turned into Phantom. Then the wailing stopped, leaving the warehouse and its foundation worse for the wear. Finally, a ring formed around Danny’s waist, splitting to turn Phantom into Fenton.

Raven felt frozen to her spot until Danny dropped from the air. She managed to catch him midair and landed once again.

This time she was joined by her friends, who were all covered in a sticky green substance. They were quiet, most likely from shock.

“What,” Robin finally said, voice hoarse, “was that?”

Raven looked down at an exhausted Danny, who was still breathing heavily. “I don’t know, Robin; I don’t know.”
Two Halves

Danny wasn’t hurting anymore. He felt peaceful. Almost – dare he say it – blissful in fact. He hadn’t felt this way in a long time, if ever. It couldn’t last, he knew that. Peace like this never lasted.

And he was already awake. So why not just open his eyes and get it over with?

Reluctantly, Danny opened his eyes and saw the green sky above him.

Hang on…

Green?

Danny sat up abruptly, taking in his weird surroundings. He was in Amity Park’s park, next to the fountain where Sam had wished that she’d never met Danny. Happy times…

He could see the rest of Amity Park. That looked normal. What didn’t look normal was the sky, looking like an upside down version of Amity Park, except that it was ruined and seemed to be in the Ghost Zone. There were ledges and purple doors, but no ghosts.

Danny got up and walked over to the fountain, peering at his reflection. “Weird. What is going on?”

He touched the water, which was cool to his skin. “Last I remember is nothing but pain. And before that…” He frowned. “I was fighting the Puppet King and…Raven? Was that all a dream?”

“…No. The pain was real enough; I can still feel it.” He shivered. “Am I dead?”

“If you were dead we wouldn’t be here,” a new voice said, startling Danny.

“Who’s that?” Danny whirled, looking for the speaker.

“Who’s that?” Danny whirled, looking for the speaker.

There was a soft laugh. “Look down. I’m you.”

Unwillingly, remembering the last time somebody had told him that, Danny gazed at his reflection in the water. Except that it had white hair. And green eyes. And tanned skin…

And was sporting a cocky grin that Danny currently was not.

Danny yelped as his ghost half popped out of the water, sopping wet.

“Hey.” Danny Phantom, now floating in a sitting position with crossed legs, continued to grin at Danny Fenton.

“W-wha?” Danny was at a loss for what to say. What does one say to one’s other half when you actually meet them? Finally: “Who’re you?”

He felt incredibly stupid after saying that. Seriously? “Who’re you?” He must be demented!

Phantom just grinned wider, though. “I’m you. You’re me. We’re the same person.”

This time Danny had a better reply. “Sorry if I’m having a hard time believing you. If you were really me and I’m meeting you now, why not beforehand?”

“Because we were too tightly bound together. Our thoughts were one, our feelings one, and our
minds one. How am I supposed to do anything if we’re one being? Our perspectives are exactly the same!” Phantom paused for effect. “Or rather…they were.”

“What changed?” Danny asked skeptically.

“The fact that the Puppet King pulled me out of you and into a different body might have something to do with it.”

“But what about before? With the Fenton Ghost Catcher this didn’t happen at all!”

“That was specifically designed to separate ectoplasmic entities, or energy, from people.”

“So? What’s the difference?”

Phantom looked reluctant as he admitted, “I really don’t know. Just ask the Titans when you wake up.”

“Then I apologize if I don’t believe you. I’ve already had one ghost tell me that he’s me.”

Phantom frowned. “Right. Him.”

A sudden cold breeze whipped through the park, chilling Danny to his bones. Thunder flashed; Danny looked up to see his face in the clouds, smirking malevolently. The sight momentarily caused Danny to stop breathing.

“He’s a sad excuse for a ghost.” Phantom’s presence right next to Danny made him jump a foot in the air. The white-haired teen kept talking. “He did nothing but wreak destruction.”

Danny could think of nothing but remember what even the good ghosts he knew did. Dora had wreaked a ton of destruction (although maybe she was more ambivalent than good?), Wulf had, too, and so did Frostbite, even if unintentionally. Heck, even he wreaked destruction, although it was more because he was fighting another ghost. “Isn’t that what ghosts normally do?”

Phantom smiled ruefully. “Let me clarify: He’s a sad excuse for being our future self. Our ex-future self. We might destroy things on accident, but he did it for the fun of it.” His voice hardened. “Nothing we do should ever be purely ‘for the fun of it.’”

Danny ignored the last bit. He was still a teenager, even though he’d stopped using his powers for fun…mostly… “How can you be so sure that he’s our ex-future self?” Danny asked in a hushed voice. He shot him a suspicious look. “Are you really me?”

“I am. We’re two halves of the same DNA structure. As for my certainty, I’m your ghost half.” Phantom sounded like he’d left out a “Duh.”

“So?” Danny still needed more proof that Phantom really was his ghost half. He might’ve looked exactly like him but looks didn’t matter.

“I don’t worry myself too much about fears like this because I’m the one supposed to have gone rogue. I don’t feel like it now so I don’t worry.” Phantom shrugged casually. “You shouldn’t either.”

Danny raised his eyebrows incredulously. “I shouldn’t worry about myself turning evil?”

“May the Force be with you,” Phantom said mysteriously.

Danny blinked, stumped. “Huh?”
“You don’t remember the reference? Think about Anakin Skywalker in relation to his son. Why didn’t Luke turn evil?”

“Everyone kept warning him and comparing him to his father.” Danny stopped. “Are you saying I’m Luke?”

“Your mindset is the same.” Phantom scratched his neck, pulling the collar of his jumpsuit away.

“But I wasn’t stupidly cocky like Anakin either!” Danny objected, thinking about his self in the timeline when he had turned evil. He definitely hadn’t been cocky then…

“No,” Phantom admitted, frowning. “I guess the Star Wars metaphor was a bad one then.”

Danny rolled his eyes.

“Okay. I got something else. What about our ghostly wail?” Phantom had a glint in his eyes.

“What about it?”

“You didn’t gasp in fright and run away when you first used it.” Phantom folded his arms, cocking an eyebrow.

“That was different,” Danny protested.

“How different from the ecto-electricity power you have now?” Phantom challenged. Danny didn’t really have an answer to that. He tried something else. “With the ghostly wail it meant things were changing. He hadn’t gotten it until he was way older. I thought of it like that then.”

“What about now?”

Danny swallowed. “I started giving it more thought, especially after he came back. I wouldn’t have developed it if I wasn’t going to turn into him. Now I’ve got something else that he has.”

Phantom sighed loudly. “Did you ever think that maybe you’re developing these powers because we’re getting stronger?”

 Danny looked at him blankly. “Huh?”

“Obviously not. Think: Vlad didn’t have all his powers when he first became half-ghost. He got ’em as he grew in strength. He didn’t worry about becoming evil.”

“That’s because he was already a twisted fruit loop.”

“Point taken. But my point is: you guys already share so many powers.”

“Why are you referring to me as ‘you’ if we’re the same person?” Danny asked.

“It’s less confusing,” Phantom said. “But you’re avoiding the point.

“We both have ecto-rays”—he shot one into the green sky—“invisibility, intangibility, flight, etc.” He used each power as he mentioned it. “Then comes duplication”—two Phantoms appeared—“and my favorite one: electricity!” Phantom conjured a ball of electricity and threw it. It hit the fountain, making the statue explode.

Danny had taken a step back at this. “But his electricity doesn’t take away ghost powers!”
“And neither will ours with time and practice,” Phantom assured him.

“And what about my – our telekinesis and teleportation abilities? Or our ice powers?”

“Every ghost has a different core. Vlad’s is heat; which is why his rays are pink and our future self had a heat core. Why his ecto-beams were green and Vlad’s pink I have no idea but I digress.”

Now Phantom smiled broadly. “Our other ectoplasmic powers are because our strength is growing. We’re strong, Danny. Vlad knew that, which was why he acted like that so many months ago. That was why he pushed us – pushed you to lose your ghost powers, or me.”

“But that doesn’t change the fact that I’m scared,” Danny whispered.

“Anybody would be scared in your position. The important thing is to not let that fear overwhelm you.”

That sounded familiar to Danny. “What do you mean?”

For the first time Phantom looked exasperated. “You know what I’m talking about. Remember, don’t let fear control you.” He started manipulating green electricity, shocking Danny. “If you don’t, control will come naturally.” He smirked. “It’s in your genes.”

Danny frowned at the reference, knowing that his ghost half, which was made up of ectoplasm, was bonded to his DNA, making it a part of his genes even though it hadn’t been there when he was born. He knew that he was half ghost; he just didn’t like to be reminded of it, instead preferring to think of himself as a human with special powers.

As Danny was thinking this, the place he was in suddenly seemed to warp. Colors were becoming fainter and he could no longer see Phantom as clearly.

“It’s time to wake up, Danny,” Phantom said, smiling. “It’s been nice talking to you.”

“What do you mean?” Danny tried to hold on to the world he was in. “You’re not disappearing, are you?”

Phantom laughed. “Oh, come on! I’m you, remember? I can’t just disappear! I’m a part of you; everything that I think and feel is you. You won’t notice that I’m not talking to you.”

“Then why are we able to talk now?” The world behind Danny was turning black. Soon it was just him and Phantom standing there in what seemed to be infinite darkness. Only Phantom’s ghostly glow provided any light.

“Because I had to be reincorporated in your DNA after the Puppet King took it out of you,” Phantom said. “That’s why it was so painful. You were reliving what happened in the portal.”

“Then what was that place we were in?”

Phantom smiled broadly. “Your mind, of course. Unique, isn’t it? But then, so are we.

“Don’t worry if you don’t see or hear me. This was a one-time thing. It’s going to go back to how it was before.” Phantom was becoming faint.

Danny was immobilized, unable to move from his spot. His eyes were flashing all over the place and he was unable to tell what was up or down. There was complete silence for a moment until Phantom’s voice echoed one last time.
“Oh yeah. One more thing: Try not to be surprised if something new happens, okay?"

With that, Danny shouted out loud as he found himself falling. Falling into what seemed like a vortex of darkness.

A vortex of darkness that was overcome by the sound of maniacal laughter.

Danny’s eyes snapped wide open as he jolted upright in bed, pins and needles spreading throughout all his limbs. The feeling made him squint his eyes shut and rub his arms. He opened them a second later, looking at his surroundings.

He was lying in a white bed with steel railings. Large flashing monitors were set against one wall of the large room he was in. There were rods placed in the ceiling for curtains. His bed wasn’t closed off against the outside world and neither were any of the others. He wasn’t hooked up to anything, which defied popular belief regarding hospitals.

Or was he in a hospital? He could see the ocean through the windows and the rest of Jump City. It would seem that the Titans had a mini-hospital themselves, which made sense. No regular hospital would be able to accommodate Beast Boy, Starfire, or Cyborg.

Still rubbing away the pins and needles feeling that his limbs persisted to have, Danny noticed something else that he hadn’t before. In a bed directly opposite him lay Starfire, who was sleeping with her feet on the pillow and her hand hanging off the opposite end. Beast Boy was sleeping in yet another bed next to Starfire, but in what looked to be an even more uncomfortable position than Starfire. His head was hanging off the bed, as was his right arm. The rest of his body was on the bed, albeit in a precarious position.

Wondering slightly about Starfire’s and Beast Boy’s presence (and their unusual sleeping positions), Danny looked to see if there was a clock in the room. As he was doing this, he heard the sound of automatic doors sliding open.

“Glad to see you’re awake,” Cyborg said, stopping to stand by Danny’s bed. “You slept through the whole night and most of the morning.”

“When was I out?”

“Yesterday around…” Cyborg checked his arm for something Danny couldn’t see. “…five. Do you remember anything?”

Danny rested his forehead in his hand, looking ahead as he tried to jog his memory. For some reason, the image of a familiar white-haired ghost in a weird place that looked a lot like Amity Park popped up in his head. That didn’t seem relevant so Danny continued to try and remember.

It hit him then: Blinding pain that had ripped through his entire body and rendered him senseless. Before that had been the Puppet King.

Danny remembered. What he couldn’t figure out was why it felt like he had a gap in his head where something important had been. It was something that had to do with…he couldn’t remember. Frustrated, Danny gave up on that subject.

“I remember,” he said, looking up at Cyborg. “But there’s still a lot I don’t understand.”

“We were kinda hoping you could also fill in a couple of the blanks for us,” Cyborg admitted. “But you probably have more questions than us anyway. I’ll just go get Robin and Raven. They were in
the middle of something when I left to check up on you.” Cyborg seemed irritated at something, although Danny didn’t probe. If it was important Cyborg would most likely bring it up eventually. If not, there was no need to pry.

As Cyborg left the mini-hospital, Danny was looking at Starfire and Beast Boy, wondering whether he should wake them up or just leave them. He was saved from making this decision when Cyborg returned five seconds later with the two other Titans in tow.

“They were done with their discussion,” Cyborg explained, seeing Danny’s raised eyebrow. “I met them in the hallway.”

“Are you feeling all right?” Raven asked, standing on the opposite end of the bed than the other two boys.

Danny considered that. The tingling was gone; his head was clear; and nothing else hurt. “Yeah. I feel fine.”

“Vitals are good,” Cyborg commented, giving Danny a slight shock. He turned his head to see Cyborg at one of the monitors and looking at a body scan with millions of numbers next to it.

They were joined by Beast Boy and Starfire. Beast Boy was rubbing his eyes and popping his back, grimacing slightly. Starfire looked just slightly teary-eyed from a recent yawn.

“Are you feeling all right, Danny?” she promptly inquired, echoing Raven.

“Fine,” Danny replied. “But I’m gonna ask, why were you guys sleeping in here?”

“We were worried,” Starfire said. “We did not want you left alone during the long night. Beast Boy and I did the volunteering to stay the night. The others went to do some discussing about the… issues.” She also seemed slightly irritated; Danny could see that this time it was aimed at Robin, who looked to be in a foul mood, even though he was trying to hide it.

But still, Danny was touched. That two of his new “allies” had wanted to stay with him while he recuperated was beyond nice. He would have been safe alone but they still wanted to stay with him.

He smiled at them, feeling a little heat warm his face. “Thanks. You really didn’t have to do that. I would’ve been fine.”

“That was debatable,” Cyborg said, showing Danny a paper with a bunch of high-tech language that he couldn’t understand. “We couldn’t get a decent check-up of you at first because something kept interfering with the readings. The energy shorted out twice before I managed to make sure you’d be all right. And even then it was necessary to keep an eye on you to be sure it wouldn’t happen again.”

“Do you know why that was?” Raven asked.

Danny shrugged. “I honestly have no clue since I only have half the picture at the moment. Maybe you guys could explain a bit more about this Puppet King of yours and I’ll have a better idea.”

“You guys weren’t working in cahoots?” Robin broke in, sounding as if this thought had been running through his head for positively ages.

Danny blinked, shocked. “…What? What gave you that idea?”

“Robin is under the impression that since you weren’t affected the same way as the rest of us you made some sort of deal with the Puppet King,” Raven explained, annoyance underlining her tone.
Danny kicked off the covers, feeling hot. “That explains a lot,” he said, remembering the irritation of Cyborg and Starfire. “But I can tell you honestly that I’ve never met the Puppet King before.” He looked straight at Robin. “You were the one saying that I had to earn your trust. If you don’t give me that chance I can’t do it.”

Sheepishness crossed Robin’s face now. “Sorry,” he mumbled, ashamed. He turned away slightly, scratching his head.

That issue partly solved, Danny looked at each of the other Titans now. “So…answers?”

Raven began speaking, taking down her hood much to the surprise of Danny. He saw that she had purple hair, eyes, and a jewel-like thing on her forehead. “First of all, we just want to say thank you. We would still be puppets if it weren’t for what you did back in that warehouse. You risked your life and for that we are all grateful.” Raven reached into her cloak and pulled out something that Danny recognized: the chain from his belt; the hat was still at the other end of it. She laid it next to Danny. “Thank you.”

Danny felt uncomfortable. “Um…there’s really no need. It wasn’t that big of a deal…”

“But it was,” Starfire objected. “Last time Raven and I managed to overcome the Puppet King. This time it was just you and you were pushed for time. On the top of that, there was something odd about the Puppet King’s cauldron.”

“Which we’ll explain later,” Beast Boy added.

Danny almost objected this until what Cyborg said drove it out of his mind.

“What you might not understand is that you almost died,” Cyborg said. “From what Raven told us, your ghost half and your human half are linked. If something happens to your ghost half your human half is gone. The same goes for the other way around.”

“But that’s not true,” Danny protested. “I took away my ghost powers one time and I was just fine.”

“Were there any unusual side effects?” Raven asked. “Did you feel different?”

“Like how I felt when battling the Puppet King: I felt human.” Danny looked down at the DP emblem on his hat. “I didn’t realize then how important my ghost half was, though. When it came back I was relieved.”

“You say that you took away your ghost powers,” Raven said. “Yet you also say that your ghost half returned. Are they the same thing?”

Danny frowned. “Well, yeah. To me they are. Without the ghost powers I don’t have a ghost half.”

Raven pulled up a chair from seemingly nowhere. “You need to understand, Danny, that your ghost half is different from your ghost powers. Your ghost half is a part of you; your ghost powers come with your ghost half. You can still have your ghost but not have your powers. But if you take away your ghost half, then your powers are gone as well. Having no powers doesn’t mean you’re still not half-ghost; but not having your ghost means you’re human. With this in mind, can you clarify what happened when you took your ghost powers?”

Even though his head was spinning with everything that Raven had told him, Danny managed to sort through it and answer. “I went into the same ghost portal that gave me my…abilities originally. Only this time, I’d gone into it with the intention to turn back into a human.”
“Why?” Beast Boy interrupted, confused. “They’re really cool!”

Danny sighed, recalling the conflicting emotions back then that had played such a big factor in his decision. On one hand, he had enjoyed being able to turn into a ghost-fighting ghost but on the other he had wanted a normal life. Add to that the Masters’ Blasters and you had a teenager that didn’t want to do it anymore.

“I was tired of it all. My double life, my enemies, my archenemy who was the mayor”—that raised eyebrows—“and the new ghost fighting team that was sponsored by him. I was just sick of having to deal with everything and wanted a normal life. So even though my friends and sister were against my decision, I recreated the accident and became human. The only difference was that I had a white streak in my hair.” Danny touched the place where it had been. “My parents thought I had dyed it; I didn’t know why it was there. It just was. What I did know and was glad for was that I was finally normal. I didn’t have to deal with it anymore.”

“That sounds a lot more complicated than what we have to deal with,” Cyborg said after a moment’s thought. “A double life, enemies – although we have those, too – and a mayor for an archenemy.” He frowned on that one. “How does that go anyway? Aren’t your enemies ghosts?”

“That’s a long story I’d rather not go into right now,” Danny said, smiling sheepishly.

“But if you were normal then,” Starfire said, “how is it that you are a half-ghost again?”

“I thought the ghost fighting team that had popped up could handle everything. And since the town seemed happy to have humans for heroes I figured Danny Phantom could go. But when the Earth was threatened by an asteroid that ghosts couldn’t turn intangible I had to do something. My plan was that if we could recruit enough ghosts to turn the Earth intangible then we wouldn’t have to worry. I went into the Ghost Zone, or the ghosts’ home, with my friends and sister to try and get them to help.” Danny smiled wryly, remembering the incident. “It failed miserably and they attacked us. I ejected my friends in a pod and tried to escape. The ghosts combusted the vehicle I was in and continued to hit me with their ecto-rays. I don’t know what happened after that except that I was suddenly in my ghost form. I managed to fight off the ghosts then.”

There was silence for several minutes. Each of the Titans was watching Raven, who was looking at Danny’s cap.

She touched the emblem before meeting Danny’s eyes. “Once a half-ghost always a half-ghost.”

Danny was silent, waiting for her to go on.

“While there are certain exceptions to that kind of a rule,” Raven continued, “in this case it’s suitable. You were human then…sort of. That white streak in your hair showed that you still had your ghost genes; they were simply dormant.”

“Genes?” Robin interrupted.

Raven frowned at the boy wonder. “Don’t interrupt, Robin. You’re the one always pushing for answers.”

Robin didn’t look too sorry. “Just wondering how his being a half-ghost is in his genes when he got his abilities due to an accident.”

“My parents always say that ghosts are made of ectoplasm,” Danny said, remembering one of his dad’s long rants. “They’re a different species so they have DNA, which is made of ectoplasm. The ghost portal that my parents built and that I activated on accident – hence receiving my powers – ran
on ectoplasm. I was inside the ghost portal when I activated it, meaning that I got the full brunt of it.”

“Forgive me for asking but why were you in a ghost portal when activating it?” Cyborg asked immediately.

“My dad put the on button inside it,” Danny said, shrugging. “He’s put it outside now since the last time it was wrecked and since I told him but at the time it was inside so everybody – or me – who activated it got electrocuted by ectoplasm. In any case, that ectoplasm was bonded to my DNA, giving me my ghost half. Therefore, my ghost half is in my genes.”

“Exactly my point,” Raven said, taking over now. “Your DNA isn’t easily changed. It takes a great deal of power, or even magic, to do anything with a DNA strand. But once it’s radically changed, like your receiving ghost genes, it can’t easily be reversed. The damage, or benefit, has been done. So when you went back into your ghost portal to try and reverse what happened, your ghost genes went dormant. The attacks from other ghosts gave the ectoplasmic DNA enough energy to become active again.”

“I remember thinking that I would die if my puppet’s light went out. I still don’t understand the details, though.”

“If your DNA dies, so do you,” Raven explained. The other Titans remained silent as she continued to speak. “So if even half your DNA dies, you die, too – or you’re at least horribly handicapped. The glow your puppet had was how much energy your ghost half had left without being bonded to your human DNA. Because it was really only ‘half’ a ghost, it needed more energy to be able to survive like a regular ghost does.

“Every time you used a ghost power of yours you sapped energy from your puppet, diminishing the glow. If the glow had gone out, you would have died because your ghost half would have died.”

“But weren’t my two halves separated? Or were we still linked even though my ghost half was a puppet? I know you guys didn’t have control over your bodies.” Danny stopped talking, frowning as he tried to figure it out. “How does this Puppet King’s magic even work?”

“We don’t know a ton about him,” Robin said. “This is just the second time we’ve come face to face with his magic. And then his magic was completely different. For one, his cauldron was green and then it turned blue once you destroyed the remote. And then he didn’t use his remote to take out our souls. That was done by some mist that wasn’t there the last time.”

Danny thought for a moment. “Okay then… What was the same then?”

“I read up on his magic after our first encounter with him,” Raven said. “His magic deals with our spirits, or ectoplasm, and how to pull it out of our bodies and give control of them to the caster. Because ghosts are also made out of ectoplasm, when his spell targeted you it immediately pulled out the strongest source of ectoplasm in your body: your ghost half.”

“But that wasn’t my actual spirit,” Danny said. “It doesn’t give me life. Shouldn’t the Puppet King have managed to trap my spirit in a puppet if he tried again?”

“What we’re guessing is that the Puppet King’s magic only works once on a specific individual,” Robin said. “He didn’t try and take Raven’s and Starfire’s spirits after his first failed attempt. So after his magic only pulled out half of you, he was just left with your human half and had to tie it up.”

“What happened after I destroyed the cauldron?”

The Titans shared looks, something that Danny found foreboding. Nobody shared looks in answer to
a question unless it was really bad.

“You doused the flames,” Raven said slowly, sounding cautious. “But that sapped all the energy from your ghost half. You’re lucky that your effort was enough to stop the Puppet King from doing anything else.”

“We returned to our bodies,” Starfire said, also sounding like she was trying to think through what she was saying. “But only Raven was free to see what happened.”

“Was it bad?” Danny asked, dreading the answer. “You guys sound like somebody died.”

“You almost did,” Raven said. “Your puppet disintegrated before I could do anything. Then, as I was trying to do something that would stabilize your human half, you did something strange.”

Danny remembered the blinding pain that had prevented him from doing absolutely anything. He had felt when his puppet disintegrated. And now he realized that the feeling had been familiar. It had been a pain deep in his core; a pain that had come from his very molecules as something else was being bonded to them once again.

“My ghost half was reintegrated into me,” Danny whispered, feeling the truth of those words sink into him. It felt like he’d heard those words before, spoken from a different mouth; he just couldn’t remember where.

“What do you mean?” Beast Boy asked. “Do you know what happened?”

“Maybe.” Danny stared off into space. “I just remembered that the pain I felt then was familiar. It was something that I’d felt when I first had my accident. And now, I think that because the Puppet King had literally pulled out my ghost half, and maybe even half of my DNA in the process, it wasn’t easy for it to join my normal DNA again. I must’ve gone through a second ‘accident’ in order to reincorporate my ghost DNA.” He looked up at Cyborg. “That must’ve been why you couldn’t get any readings on me at first. My ghost energy was still fluctuating too much.”

“That makes a lot of sense,” Raven said, seeing Cyborg slowly nod.

“Since that matter’s cleared up, could you explain to us about the ghost that was accompanying the Puppet King?” Robin inquired.

“In case you didn’t hear him scream his name out, that was the Box Ghost. He’s in a category similar to the Cake Ghost.”

“So he’s not very dangerous,” Beast Boy guessed.

Danny smiled, remembering Pandora’s Box and what had come from that. “No. But he wishes he was.” Then he remembered the Box Ghost from the future and what kind of damage he had wrought. Repressing a shiver, Danny turned his thoughts to the present. “Does that cover everything you guys wanted to know?”

“I think so,” Robin said.

“Great.” Danny swung his legs over to the side of the bed. He noted that he was wearing something akin to a hospital gown. “Now, could somebody get me some real clothes? I’m really getting hungry.”

Starfire brightened up. “Victory feast! I shall do the preparing!”
Everyone turned green at that.

Thankfully, there was no victory feast of Starfire’s making. Somehow or another, Robin had managed to distract her enough that Danny could make himself a couple of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Cyborg accompanied him and made some omelets even though it was no longer morning.

By the time Danny was halfway through his first sandwich, he was accompanied by the rest of the Titans. Raven sat next to him, apparently to say something that Danny was waiting for. Cyborg was scarfing down his omelets; Beast Boy was doing the same but with tofu; and Robin and Starfire were lounging on the coach.

Raven finally spoke. “You really feel normal?”

Danny swallowed his most recent bite. “Definitely. You wouldn’t believe what happened to me after my original accident. I dropped everything. Random parts of me kept turning invisible at impromptu times. Then I couldn’t figure out how to make myself solid or visible again. In addition to all that, my ghost fighting was so bad that even the Box Ghost beat me at first.”

“I can sympathize with you when it comes to being unable to control your abilities,” Raven said. “Unless I keep my emotions under strict control, I will do something that I don’t intend.”

“Yeah.” Beast Boy leaned over to Danny. “You should’ve seen her after we watched this horror movie. She kept insisting she wasn’t scared. That same night, we were all attacked by these horrible monsters straight from the movie. Robin finally got the idea that it was Raven—” His plate smacked him in the face, cutting him off from saying anymore. When it slid down into his lap, his green face, dripping with runny tofu, was scowling heavily at Raven.

Raven had absolutely no expression on her face from what Danny could tell. Thinking that he could guess what had happened, Danny continued to eat. It was when his last sandwich only had a couple of bites left that he finally said what had been on his mind since the fight.

“I don’t think that was the Puppet King.”

Everyone stopped doing what they had been and sat at the table with Danny.

“What do you mean?” Robin asked.

“Did you see his eyes? They weren’t the same color. I know what ghost eyes look like and he had them. But they were the strangest eyes I’ve ever seen.” Danny shivered as he recalled them. They had looked evil. “And there was that green mist. I know that was a ghost. Of sorts…”

“That green mist was a ghost?” Robin had his usual serious face on.

“My ghost sense went off. I felt my puppet grow cold when the Puppet King released it that second time. That’s when I knew. Then there were your eyes. After you guys were mindless zombies, your eyes glowed green.”

“That was not the case last time,” Starfire said, looking at Raven. “Our friends’ eyes had only a faint hue about them. It was simply because they refused to talk that we knew they were not our friends.”

“You were all overshadowed then,” Danny said. “And…” He remembered what that mist had done when approaching him. It had stopped. He didn’t know what it meant, just that it wasn’t good. Not wanting to tell them that information yet, he said something else. “And the Puppet King’s voice had
echoed. That’s a characteristic ghosts have.”

“But the Puppet King isn’t a ghost,” Cyborg protested. “We know that ourselves.”

“He must’ve been overshadowed then,” Danny said, bringing up the thermos that was on his waist. “I know that once I sucked in all that green mist he collapsed. I also know that he had been the Puppet King for a short time in that fight; whatever it was that was overshadowing him told me that it had to recuperate.”

“I remember it saying that,” Starfire said.

Danny nodded. “That leads me to believe that it was a ghost doing the work and not the Puppet King. Then, the other things you guys are telling me also lead me to believe that it might’ve been a ghost. I saw a face in that green fire; a face that I know belonged to a ghost. Whatever ghost it was, I can tell you right now that I don’t know which ghost it was. I may be familiar with a lot of ghosts but I know that I haven’t met all of them. But what I do know is that if the Puppet King was overshadowed by a ghost, it explains a lot of things.”

“So we’re facing a new threat,” Robin said. It sounded almost like a question.

“It’s in the thermos.” Danny shook it. “I don’t think we’ll have to worry.”

But something told him that he would have to worry. And that he would have to worry very soon. He didn’t know what that something was. He just knew that it wasn’t over.

Not yet.
Even though Danny felt completely normal at the moment, he knew that such normality wouldn’t last. In fact, he hadn’t felt this normal since the fight with Technus. There was no ecto-electricity creeping under his skin or anything else bugging him. The only thing that was slightly out of the ordinary was the company he was keeping but even that was becoming more and more familiar.

He felt at home here, even though his real home was in Amity Park, with Sam and Tucker. The fact that he could feel so at home in a different dimension without his friends with him made him feel guilty.

‘Why does everything always have to be so complicated?’ Danny thought.

“Black or white, Danny?” Starfire called, looking at bed sheets.

Danny sighed. “Neither,” he answered. “Do you have any blue anywhere?”

They were in a department store for furniture. Starfire had seen that Danny needed a bed, bed sheets, pillows, etc. Pretty much, he needed everything that man needed in order to have a comfortable room. Accompanying them were Beast Boy and Raven, the latter with her hood down (Danny was privately wondering why she’d kept it on for so long if she was keeping it down now). The other two were outside enjoying the sunny day.

“Do you like blue?” Beast Boy asked.

“Yeah. My room back home is blue.”

“Will this do?” Starfire chimed, showing Danny a package of light blue sheets.

“Great. Now I’d like a pillow and blanket like that.” Danny pushed forward the cart he was maneuvering. “And nothing with the emblem,” he added. For some reason, Starfire loved the DP emblem Sam had designed.

“Are you sure you do not wish for a new mattress?” Starfire inquired.

“Nah. The spare one Beast Boy has is fine.” Danny didn’t notice the queasy looks the two girl Titans shared. He dropped a package of dark blue pillow sheets into the cart. “And I don’t know how long I’ll stay.”

“What do you mean?” Starfire didn’t sound happy.

“This isn’t my home. It’s not even my dimension. I don’t belong here, Starfire, even if I feel like I do.” There. He’d finally said one of the things that was bothering him.

“So you feel at home here with us.”
“I do,” Danny admitted guiltily. “Much more than in my own world.”

Raven reappeared then, depositing something that matched what Starfire and Danny had picked out earlier. “And you feel guilty about that,” she said simply, interpreting Danny’s emotions correctly.

Danny said nothing, merely inspecting his shoes.

Raven nodded and turned to Starfire. “We’re done here. Let’s just buy the stuff and leave.”

After a quick check-out and no gawks – something which Danny still marveled at – the four met Robin and Cyborg outside the store.

“Got everything?” Robin asked, getting up from his motorcycle, which was parked by the curb.

“Yes,” Starfire answered, not sounding as chipper.

Robin had been about to glare accusingly at Danny when Raven mouthed, “Later.” Cyborg gave the team leader a sharp nudge in the shoulder before relieving Danny of his bags and putting them in his car’s trunk. It was parked behind Robin’s motorcycle.

Feeling awkward among the five Titans, especially since he had caught Robin’s accusing face, Danny moved slightly away from the group to look into a different shop. They still had time because as Cyborg was kindly clearing away the shopping bags, Starfire and Robin were quietly talking off in a little corner and looked to be taking a while. Raven and Beast Boy were just standing around, although Raven had now taken out a book and was flipping through the pages.

Danny looked into the closed shop’s window. It wasn’t anything interesting. It was a tiny furniture store with limited selections. He was guessing that it was more for the elite because of the high class exhibition pictures offered for view in the window display. Large numbers next to the different styles supported this guess.

Feeling Beast Boy join him now, Danny had been about to turn around when it seemed to suddenly become very cold. Danny shivered, feeling the wind tear at his clothes. He brought his hands up, trying to warm them. To his surprise, his breath his chilled his hands even more.

Then, just as quickly as it had come it was gone. The air felt as warm as it had ever been. Thinking it very weird, Danny caught sight of his reflection. His hair seemed shaggy, almost too long. In the reflection his black shirt seemed almost like a sweater. But what really startled him were the eyes. His blue eyes seemed darker…almost shadowed.

Beast Boy was pressing his nose to the glass, squinting as he tried to get a better peek at the inside. He seemed oblivious to Danny’s reaction to his reflection.

Swallowing, Danny caught sight of the reflection of a figure on the other side of the street, directly outside a store for video/DVD rentals. Whoever it was had huge shoulders and a tall frame. The dirty and rather ragged hoodie that he was wearing seemed too small with that kind of a frame. As Danny watched, the figure disappeared into the store it had been standing outside of.

Barely a minute after the figure had entered did Danny get a slightly apprehensive feeling. It was too peaceful…too ordinary. From Danny’s experience, it was never truly peaceful or ordinary. There was always something going on underneath the surface. Besides, he was familiar with this feeling, even though he hadn’t felt it since before the disasteroid. It was the type of feeling that he got when a hard test was looming on the horizon. That meant that it wasn’t going to be too bad but still…

Danny shifted positions, keeping the Titans at his back. He wouldn’t have to worry about an attack
from that direction. That left three more; he didn’t trust the store to not hide a couple of thieves.

Beast Boy noticed Danny’s tenseness. “You all right?”


Two minutes later and Danny was beginning to feel silly. ‘Maybe it really is nothing. I’ve been wrong before…’

No sooner did he think this did the sound of gun shots break the air.

“Freak! Get out of here!”

The gun shots and the harsh yell had all of them start approaching the video/DVD store, where it had come from. Danny was at the forefront, even though Robin was now attempting to push him back.

Cars had stopped driving and people were getting out, having heard the gun shots. They were all quiet, just simply waiting.

The Titans were still in the middle of the street when the hooded figure Danny had seen earlier was thrown through the door. He flew right past them, something Danny found odd but didn’t have time to dwell on.

None of the Titans noticed; they were occupied with the appearance of an overweight red-haired man with shadows under his eyes. His scraggily red hair seemed unwashed and extended past his shoulders. He was sporting a black overcoat and a long rifle. On his arm was a bag, most likely filled with stolen goodies.

“Oh, dude!” Beast Boy moaned, catching Danny’s attention. “Not him again!”

Danny studied the opposition. “He doesn’t look that bad. He needs a diet, though.”

“Wait until you get a taste of what he does,” Cyborg warned. “He can pack a mean punch.”

“Stay back, Danny,” Robin ordered. “To Control Freak you’re just a pedestrian. Let’s keep it that way.”

Remembering Robin’s reasoning from last time and not seeing or sensing any ghosts around and therefore no reason to stick around, Danny turned on his heel and ran back in the direction he came from. He stopped for a second to see if the large man was there but he was gone. As he did so, he saw that the people who had been waiting by their cars had fled, not wanting to be part of this newest fight of the Teen Titans.

Wondering where the man could have gone so quickly and also about how the people of Jump City felt about these disruptions, Danny hid under Cyborg’s car, wanting to keep an eye on the Titans. It was getting heated.

“It is time that we meet again!” Control Freak announced. “This time you won’t win!”

Danny couldn’t believe the guy’s attitude. He was like a typical villain. Not to mention, his outfit seemed copied.

“We’ll see about that,” Robin said firmly. “Last I remember, you weren’t very dangerous.”

“You had your butt handed to you!” Beast Boy added, grinning.
“Yeah, well, you won’t be successful this time!” Control Freak insisted. “I have the ultimate power in my hands!” He snickered at them and waved his bag around, gloating at the Titans. “It’s even better than the last invention!”

“A rifle and a bag of goodies. I can’t see why that’s better than the other one you were using before,” Cyborg said. “We’ve seen worse.”

“Enough talking,” Robin said, taking out his long staff. “We don’t know if anybody needs help in there and so don’t have luxury of wasting time. Titans, go!”

Danny watched as the Titans took on Control Freak. The guy had legs, Danny would give him that much. But his aim with the rifle was atrocious, rivaling that of Jack Fenton’s. Although in his dad’s defense, it was improving.

Speaking of improving, it seemed like Control Freak was missing on purpose. He was aiming randomly at spots on the ground, although Danny couldn’t tell if the Titans were seeing the same thing. On the other hand, the Titans were having terrible luck when it came to nailing Control Freak. Everything they threw at him was missing, something Danny found odd.

‘But what can I do? They obviously know that guy better than I do. Besides, they’re willing to leave the ghosts to me; I should do the same when it comes to their enemies.’ Danny chewed his lips, debating. He couldn’t stand just sitting around and doing nothing. He’d had enough of that during the brief time he was human and the Masters’ Blasters had done everything.

Then he remembered that Robin had said there could be people inside that store that needed help. Help that the Titans would be unable to provide at the moment. But he could help.

‘If they’re busy fighting that guy, I’ll try and help in there.’ Danny crept forward, intending on dashing out and running into the shop. ‘I need to get in there.’

Then, all of a sudden, he was. It was lucky that he hadn’t been standing because otherwise he would’ve fallen to the carpeted floor.

‘Whoa.’ Danny got to his knees, looking at the darkly painted store. It was empty and a complete wreck. DVDs and videos were everywhere; the racks where they had been lay on their sides in places where they shouldn’t have been. One was even stuck halfway through the ceiling, something Danny didn’t get in his confusion.

He shook his head, trying to clear it from the disorientation that his sudden displacement had caused. ‘Did I just teleport without meaning to?’ He checked to see if he was a ghost. Nope, still human. ‘That’s never happened before.’

Danny heard a moan coming from his right. Alarmed, he turned to find an elderly man lying by the store counter. He had a stomach wound that was bleeding profusely.

“Crud!” Danny scrambled over to him. “Are you okay? No, wait, you’re bleeding from your stomach so of course you’re not okay! What do I do, what do I do?” He was babbling.

Panicking and trying to get the babbling under control, Danny did the first thing he could think of. He looked for a first aid kit. He found one in a drawer under the cash register and jumped over the counter, landing next to the man and unlocking the kit in one movement. He unpacked the kit, trying to find the white gauzes that he knew would help stem the bleeding. Once he had them unwrapped he began to apply pressure to the wound, remembering that they always did that in the movies.

Danny tried to think of what he could do next. ‘I can’t treat this guy by myself. But I can’t leave him
here either. He’ll die.’ He could only see one solution. ‘Do I bring him to a hospital?’

“Where’s the dog?”

“Huh?” Danny looked down to see that his patient was awake. “Dog?”

“There was a dog,” the man said hoarsely, his face as white as a sheet. “In a jacket. Is it gone?”

Even though Danny didn’t fully understand what the man was getting at, he did the natural thing: lying. “It’s gone. Don’t worry; I’ll get you help.”

His mind made up, Danny grabbed hold of the man, about to go ghost and teleport to the hospital. But as soon as the intention of teleporting there entered his mind, he was in the middle of the ER, stunning and blinding almost everybody present with the blinding flash of green light. A nurse accidentally poked a patient in the shoulder with the needle she was brandishing.

Danny swallowed heavily, ignoring the instinct to flee. “Hi. I’ve got a guy with a gunshot wound here.” He laid him on an empty bed, giving the old man’s hand a reassuring squeeze. “Okay…” There was no reaction other than the thumb sucking of a nearby toddler who hadn’t been bothered by Danny’s miraculous teleportation. “I’ll be going now.”

‘Back to where I came from.’ Danny took a step back, intending on exiting the ER when he found himself back in the store he’d just left a minute ago. He fell over backwards, trying to get his bearings. “Whoa. Head rush.”

After shaking his head a couple of times and getting to his feet, Danny ran out of the store, turning ghost and feeling an explosive rush of power as he did. When outside, he saw something that made sense of what the old man had said.

‘Duh. Dog in jacket. Who else could it be?’

“Titans, go!”

As if rehearsed, they all sprang forward to engage Control Freak. Beast Boy was first, having morphed into a cheetah. Unfortunately for the green changeling, Control Freak jumped aside at the last moment and ran off, the Titans on his tail.

Starfire tried to hit him with starbolts but they kept missing their mark. Cyborg was doing the same with his sonic cannon. Raven and Robin were holding back. Raven because she felt like it and Robin because he wasn’t close enough. Beast Boy was missing, having vanished after first missing his target.

On Control Freak’s end, he was having bad luck with his rifle. His shots peppered the ground at the Titans’ feet, nowhere close to their intended targets.

Just as Control Freak reached the corner, Beast Boy pounced from the side. In his lion form he should have overcome the villain easily. But for some reason, he ended up hitting the traffic light post instead, transforming back once hitting the ground. Stars swirled above his head and he didn’t get up as Control Freak ran down the street where Beast Boy had hidden.

“It’s like he’s got some sort of force field around him!” Cyborg cried, running around the corner with Robin.

The two stopped running when they saw Control Freak had stopped. He was holding a DVD up in
the air. Some sort of device was on his wrist.

“You wonder why nothing can hit me? It is because of this!” The device on his wrist glinted in the sun. “It imitates the powers of any TV superhero/villain that I have in my hand!”

“But that’s just a DVD,” Raven said.

Beast Boy caught up with them, still looking kind of woozy. “Not just any DVD!” He shook his head, clearing it from the stars that were still in his eyes before saying, “That’s X-Men!”

“That’s Jean Grey’s power then,” Cyborg said. “This isn’t going to be easy.”

“Got that right!” Control Freak crowed. “I’m gonna—” A loud ferocious growl cut him off, his face appearing extremely confused.

The Titans looked at Beast Boy, who just shrugged. “That wasn’t me.”

Starfire started, “Then who—”

Simultaneously with another growl, the Titans saw a large wolf in a hoodie and pants behind Control Freak. Its fur was black, the eyes a solid green, and it was glowing. On top of all that, it was salivating.

“Stop that growling!” Control Freak demanded, not having noticed the wolf. “Or I’ll laser beam you all!”

“I would recommend that you don’t move,” Robin said.

“Why?” Control Freak wasn’t listening.

“Because of that thing behind you,” Beast Boy supplied.

“I’m not falling for that trick!” Control Freak sneered. “Do I look stupid?”

“I’m going to refrain from answering that,” Raven said.

Beast Boy saw the strange wolf getting ready to pounce. Remembering the force field around Control Freak, Beast Boy decided to try and help.

“Uh…” Everyone but the wolf looked at him. “Boo!” He instantaneously morphed into a green copy of the wolf that was standing behind Control Freak and howled loudly.

This shocked and scared Control Freak so much that he dropped the DVD; his bag slid down on his arm. The wolf pounced then, landing right on top of his enemy, who was screaming like a girl. Control Freak had lost the rest of his DVDs and videos, meaning that he would no longer be able steal powers from TV heroes/villains. Much to the Titans’ surprise, the two melted through the ground.

“Whoa!” Cyborg shouted. He didn’t know what to address first: Beast Boy or the fact that the wolf had phased through the ground with Control Freak. He chose the easier one. “Beast Boy!”

The changeling morphed back, grinning. “That was fun.”

“Great.” Robin turned to his friends. “Now we have absolutely no idea where they are.”

There was a bloodcurdling scream at that moment, startling all of them. It was followed by another
and this time they followed the sound back to the original scene. What they saw stopped them in their tracks.

“Easy, Wulf, easy!” Danny Phantom was trying to calm the wolf down, which was standing on two legs and pinning Control Freak to the wall like a human would.

The animal said something nobody could catch but Danny.

“I know, Wulf. But it’s gone now, right?” Danny was smiling rather nervously, laying a hand on the wolf’s – Wulf’s – burly arm. “I think you should probably drop the guy. He’s fainted from fright.”

It was true. Control Freak was foaming at the mouth and only the whites of his eyes showed.

On Danny’s suggestion, Wulf dropped him, letting Control Freak lie at his feet.

Danny relaxed, smiling at his friend. “Thanks. It’s great seeing you again.”

Wulf gave Danny a huge bear hug, making all the Titans’ jaws hit the floor.

“You know him?” Robin asked, disbelief coloring his tone.

Danny pulled away from Wulf, rubbing his back. “Oh yeah. We go way back. Which is about two years to be honest.”

“Friends,” Wulf said in a guttural voice, grinning.

“Friends,” Danny agreed. He looked at Control Freak. “What are you guys going to do with him?”

“Let the police handle him,” Robin answered.

Danny frowned slightly. “How often would you say you guys face your enemies?”

“Pretty often. We see the same faces,” Cyborg said. “Why?”

“Shouldn’t the police be able to keep these guys locked up?” Danny nudged Control Freak with a boot. “I mean, this guy is human. It can’t be that hard.”

“He does have a point,” Starfire said.

“We’ll look into it,” was all Robin said. “They do their best.”

“Kaj ĉu vi far la laboro,” Wulf said, confusing everybody but Danny, who just nodded.

“What did he say?” Robin demanded.

“Just that you guys do all the work. But I can see the point when it comes to guys like the Puppet King.”

Wulf said something unintelligible. Again, only Danny seemed capable of understanding.

“Long story,” Danny said. He bent down and slid something off Control Freak’s wrist. Getting up, he showed the Titans the strange device. “Is this important? A light on it was blinking.”

Cyborg took it from him. “Almost forgot about that. I’ll have a look into it to see how it works.”

“Do you think you can make us something like that?” Beast Boy asked eagerly. “That would be totally cool!”
Danny and Wulf had question marks floating over their heads.

“No, Beast Boy,” Robin said firmly. “We’re going to lock that thing up.”

“I don’t get it,” Danny said, confused.

“You don’t want to know,” Raven told him. “Trust me.”

Control Freak stirred then. When no one reacted he began to sneak away. Wulf stepped on his back, stopping him in his tracks.

“The police coming soon?” Danny asked. “Wulf isn’t very happy with the guy.”

Wulf snarled angrily, punctuating Danny’s point.

Control Freak passed out again.

They were back in the tower, having been relieved of Control Freak. There had been a small transportation issue but Danny soon had it resolved by flying back with Wulf. He’d had to go extra slow, although he said nothing and the other ghost didn’t notice.

In the living room, Wulf immediately curled up on the couch, sighing loudly.

Danny smiled, transforming back. He was startled by how different he felt. It was a lot like how he’d felt during the first few days after his accident and he adjusted to having a ghost half.

Shaking the shock off, Danny walked over to the couch and sat on the back rest right next to Wulf.

“How’s Walker doing?” Danny asked Wulf. “I haven’t seen him since I helped with rebuilding his prison.”

Wulf got up then, facing Danny as he did so. “Walker missing.”

Danny sat up straighter at that. He swung his legs around and slid down to sit on the couch next to Wulf. “What do you mean?” He was completely serious.

“Is something wrong?” Robin asked, coming back from wherever he had been.

“Wait,” Raven told him, standing on Wulf’s other side behind the couch.

The other three joined them as Danny listened to Wulf speak in a strange language. He was nodding, a small frown on his face as he used his limited knowledge of Esperanto.


“What about you?” Danny asked.

“Mi trovis min tie ĉi kvar antaŭ kelkaj tagoj ..ite ensuĉiĝ en ..n portalo. Mi estis ten kaŝa ĝis Mi vidis la malbonodoran iun rigardanta trompema.”

“Smelly one?”

“He might mean Control Freak,” Beast Boy suggested, hanging over the couch beside Danny. “He does kind of stink.”
Danny nodded. “Go on.”

“Mi iris en post li. Li debatis mian kapuĉon en la interbatiĝo kaj pafvund mi.” Wulf touched his chest.

“He was shof?” Beast Boy dashed in front of Wulf, inspecting him. “But he seems fine.”

“Ghosts heal quickly,” Danny said, rather confused. “You understand Esperanto?”

“That’s Esperanto?” Cyborg asked just as Beast Boy said, “A little. I tried getting Cyborg to learn it with me but he kept saying it’s a dead language like Latin.”

Cyborg seemed disgruntled, probably because he had been proven wrong.

“He understands our language, does he not?” Starfire inquired.

“Yeah. I don’t quite understand how that works since he can’t really speak English but anyway…” Danny shrugged. “We can understand each other so it doesn’t matter. Ĝusta, Wulf?” he asked Wulf, grinning.

“Right,” Wulf replied in English.

“So, getting back to where we were, that’s when I saw you, right?”

Wulf nodded; he looked at Beast Boy. “Mi dankas vin pro la helpo.”

Beast Boy beamed. “Ne probleme.”

Robin cut in then. “All right; enough of the foreign language. Danny, give us something we can work with. What’s the story?”

Danny repeated everything Wulf had told him, adding, “That’s pretty much exactly what happened to me.”

“We’re talking about an inter-dimensional portal then,” Raven said. “Is that common where you live?”

“Only between the Ghost Zone and my world,” Danny said. “They’re so closely linked that my parents built a portal accessing it. Along with that there are a ton of natural portals.” He thought for a moment. “It’s been going on for a while, even in my world.”

“Portalo de la Fantomo Zono malferm kaj alia aliĝita al ĝi. Bariloj kaj meblo(j) estis ensuĉiĝ,” Wulf said.

“That explains Tucker’s furniture thieves,” Danny muttered, mystifying those who heard him. Louder: “But why do these portals suck things in? Normally you actually have to fly into one in order to go anywhere.”

“From what I know, inter-dimensional portals take a lot of energy to open, maintain, and close,” Raven said. “If somebody had the potential to transcend dimensions but no knowledge of how to control it, it’s possible that portals would keep opening after the initial one was opened. The suctioning comes from the desire for energy. If not enough energy is taken, the portals will keep opening until enough is.”

“What is enough energy?” Danny asked. “Ghosts have a lot.”
“Comparable to an atomic bomb…” Raven paused, thinking for a moment. “But I think it’s less. That book didn’t have very reliable information when it came to numbers.”

“Do ghosts have that much power?” Robin sounded wary.

Danny thought for a moment. His parents hadn’t said much on the matter so he wasn’t sure. They were in the middle of making something to measure how much power a ghost had but so far all attempts had failed. One of their tries had even suggested that Danny was a baby ghost and should be put to death unless something horrible should happen as a result. Danny had fried that invention with a ghost ray, much to the dismay of Tucker, who had wanted to keep it for fun.


Danny translated for the others, slightly relieved. He hadn’t wanted an answer that would put him in a bad light. Robin was already mistrustful, even though he had said he would work on it.

“What do you think?” Cyborg asked Danny.

“We don’t have a way to close the portals then,” Danny said slowly. “Ghosts aren’t enough and it’s already taken a lot of them.”

“Duonofantomoj estas la plej potenca. Ili, kaj egale Pario Malluma, ..us sufiĉa energio fermi portalon kiel tiun, kiun Via amiko priparol. Mi pensas ke ili havas fermitan hodiaŭ,” Wulf said.

Danny swallowed heavily, asking what seemed like a stupid question. “Why?”

“Vi trapas,” Wulf said. “Kaj mia ligo mia hejmo diras al mi.”

Danny decided not to press for details about the link. It sounded complicated. What he didn’t like hearing was how much power he possessed. And his future self had already been so powerful.

‘Stop. Don’t think about him.’ Danny drew his hand into a fist. He gave the waiting Titans Wulf’s explanation. Robin was as still as a statue by the time Danny had finished, exactly the reaction the halfa had been dreading.

“That’s good news, isn’t it?” Beast Boy said once Danny concluded his speech. “Raven has the details about these portals and can help. She once opened a portal 5,000 years into the past to get Cyborg back one time. We can easily get you guys back.”

Danny looked at Raven. “Can you really?”

“Theoretically, I could,” Raven said. “But I have to do some more research first. The time portal was into our past; this is one into a whole different dimension and one that I’m not linked to.”

“You’ve done one of those, too!” Beast Boy blurted.

Raven turned a cold glare on him, freezing him in his spot. She wasn’t ready to tell Danny that. Or even talk about it in general. “It’ll take time,” she repeated, still with that ice cold glare.

Danny found it creepy. ‘Whoa. Sam has got nothing on that glare.’

“Not that simple,” Wulf said, drawing everybody’s attention.

“What do you mean?” Starfire inquired. “Raven has already agreed to help. I am also willing to help, even though it saddens me to say goodbye to a friend.”
Wulf spoke to Danny, speaking so quickly that Danny had trouble understanding it all. When he finally processed everything it didn’t sound good at all.

“Well?” Cyborg pressed after a short moment. He looked at Robin, who was still mute. The half-robot frowned worriedly, not liking what it bode.

Danny swallowed as he said, “There was somebody talking to Walker before he disappeared. Or it might have been threatening. Either way, the ghost who overheard said that person wanted Walker to do something. Something that didn’t make much sense.”

“To you or the ghost?” Cyborg asked instantly.

Danny didn’t think how weird it was that Cyborg was asking the questions and not Robin. He was too preoccupied. “The ghost. But…that’s not all. The ghost saw what it was.” Danny took another moment to speak. “It was a green mist. A mist that was shaped almost like a person. And the eyes…” Danny remembered the Puppet King’s eyes. “They were exactly like the Puppet King’s…”

“Are you serious?” Cyborg demanded. This time he stepped on Robin’s foot; the black-haired boy shuffled away, scowling blackly.

“Completely. Wulf said that the ghost wouldn’t stop ranting about them.”

“Which means what?” Raven almost didn’t want to hear the answer.

“They were evil. Pure evil.”
A Misty Interrogation

“They were evil. Pure evil.”

After an intense silence, Beast Boy moved to break it. “Okay. So what do we do now?”

Robin finally spoke, earning himself a sharp look from Cyborg as he did so. “Nothing. The problem is elsewhere so it’s not like we can help.” Cyborg’s unrelenting stare got on his nerves. “Stop staring at me!”

“You and I need to have a talk,” Cyborg said, grabbing Robin’s cape. He hauled him off without another word, his victim complaining the entire way; neither of them noticed that the others were staring after them.

Cyborg went into another room and dumped Robin in a chair at a metal table. There was a single light bulb attached to the ceiling. The room was an imitation of the standard police interrogation room that one would normally see on movies running on stereotypes.

“We could have talked in the other room,” Robin grumbled, resting his head in one hand. The elbow of that hand was on the table.

Cyborg crossed his arms, the very image of a stern and imposing cop. “No, we couldn’t. What I’m going to talk about is your attitude concerning Danny and I don’t want him listening in.”

Robin didn’t look happy but he said nothing.

“I don’t get it,” Cyborg started. “You were acting just fine towards Danny before the whole deal with the Puppet King. What changed? You promised to give him a chance; you even talked with him and said you worked a deal out! Yet the moment you hear that Danny might be powerful, you clamp up and start acting cold. I saw his face; that was exactly what he didn’t want.”

Robin was silent. He really didn’t have an answer; there was something about Danny that was setting off all his alarms ever since he’d faced the Puppet King.

“You really don’t have an answer?” Cyborg asked disbelievingly. “Or do you just don’t want to admit that you’re a big baby who can’t change his habits?”

That got a rise out of Robin. He slammed his hands on the table and stood up angrily. “I’m not a baby! I don’t know what it is but there’s something not right about Danny. I didn’t feel it before; now I do and it’s setting off every single one of my internal alarms. I said nothing about it before because I thought it would pass. But now that…Wulf has shown up and we hear that Danny is really powerful I know that it won’t pass. And it especially won’t pass quickly.”

“I don’t get you, Rob. Danny is a genuinely nice guy. Even Raven thinks so and she’s normally so hesitant to trust anybody.”

“She’s made mistakes,” Robin said, referring to the one incident with a magic book. “Remember the dragon?”

“That was emotionally involved for Raven,” Cyborg said. “She was having trouble with accepting who she was. When she found somebody else that was like her and could relate, it was natural for her to trust. Wouldn’t you?”
Robin started, “I—”

Cyborg bowled over him. “But Danny’s a whole new ball game. She’s not emotionally involved with him. He didn’t come from a book that she was reading; he came out of nowhere when we were fighting a ghost. She wouldn’t have helped him if you hadn’t told her to. And that time with him has told her something about him that he hasn’t shown us yet. If Raven can trust him, I don’t see why you can’t.”

“I already said: There’s something about him that sets off all my alarms. But that’s only been since the Puppet King so I don’t know what’s up.”

Cyborg sighed. “Why don’t you talk to him about it then?”

Robin gritted his teeth. “Are you crazy? Why would I talk to him about an issue of trust? I don’t trust him!”

“Why don’t you talk to him about it then?” Cyborg replied calmly. “I’m just saying that since you worked out a deal with Danny you should try and keep it instead of letting it go to waste. Danny can tell that you don’t trust him and it puts him on edge. You should explain what’s worrying you and Danny can give you an explanation. Don’t keep quiet and let it boil over; that’s what leads to break ups.”

“I’m not together with him,” Robin said, his jaw clenched. “And you’re forgetting a vital fact: Bad guys lie.”

Cyborg shrugged. “Sure they do. That’s what they do. But you can normally tell when they do. Try and think of Danny as a good guy instead of a bad guy and look for the positive signs. Chances are, when he’s nervous he’s probably going to exhibit a lot of the negative traits. Look for positives; bad guys never have them when lying and they have all the negative traits. Danny might only have a few and then you’ll blow those out of proportion. Like you promised earlier, Robin, give him a chance.” He gave Robin a meaningful look.

Robin looked down at his feet for a long moment. Then, he nodded. “All right. I’ll talk it over with him.”

Cyborg smiled. “That’s my man.” He clapped Robin on the shoulder. “You’ll come through, Rob. Danny is a great guy; trust me.”

“That’s what I’m worried about,” Robin muttered, rubbing his shoulder.

The others were silent during Robin’s and Cyborg’s absence. Although it wasn’t an easy silence; it was so heavy that Starfire, Beast Boy and Wulf were aware of it pressing down on their shoulders. They shared looks, having noticed that Raven hadn’t stopped staring at Danny, who was deep in thought. Both his hands were clutching at something under his shirt. Wulf, not trusting Raven, moved closer to Danny, who seemed oblivious to the tension.

This strange scene was the first thing that Robin and Cyborg saw when joining them again. Both stopped, frowning slightly as they absorbed Starfire’s and Beast Boy’s worried expressions, Wulf’s protective stance over a thoughtful Danny, and Raven’s penetrating stare towards the boy. It dissolved, though, when the others registered who had come back.

Danny got up, his face set. He walked up to Robin, surprising everybody; Raven finally blinked. “Do you have a containment room I could use?” he asked, his brows furrowed.

“For what?”
“For this.” Danny held up a thermos that had been under his shirt. “You might not remember but I sucked in that mist from the Puppet King in here.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“I want to interrogate it.”

There was dead silence for one flat minute.

Finally: “You want to interrogate mist,” Robin stated, his voice emotionless.

“It’s not necessarily mist,” Danny argued. His eyes were guarded. “I know a ghost who has a shadow that can follow orders. I’m sure that this is in the same classification as that.”

“You’re saying it’s a ghost. But it’s a ghost that doesn’t speak,” Robin objected.

Danny smiled. “Oh yes it does. Wulf told us, remember?”

“It’s probably not the same ghost,” Cyborg protested. “That’d be impossible considering it was in your dimension to start out with.”

“Something tells me it is. You haven’t seen a ghost duplicate yet.” Danny glanced at the thermos before meeting Robin’s masked eyes. “So do you have a room for this?”

Robin looked at Cyborg quickly. “First, Danny,” he began, “would you mind talking with me?”

“And me, too, for that matter?” Raven asked, surprising both of them. “I get the feeling Robin and I have similar concerns.”

‘Concerns?’ Danny wondered. Yet he didn’t see any harm. “’Kay. No problem.”

“We will be waiting,” Starfire said as the three left.

Robin turned. “All right. Thanks, Star.”

When the doors closed behind the three, Danny stopped walking. “Okay. Where do you guys want to do this?”

“The roof?” Raven suggested before Robin could. “It’s a lot brighter than a lot of the rooms in here.”

No sooner had Raven mentioned the roof was Danny gone in a flash of green light. It happened so quickly that the two didn’t have time to blink. Robin was about to say something when Danny flashed back again, giving his two friends dancing green lights in their eyes.

Robin rubbed his eyes. “Ow…”

Danny reached a hand out, unsure of what to do. “I’m sorry,” he apologized. “That green flash is something that happens when I teleport. Which has been happening to me when I don’t want it…”

The last part was muttered as an afterthought.

Raven squinted, trying to see Danny clearly. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that I’ve been teleporting to places just by thinking of them.” Danny seemed to be concentrating on something. “I have to be sure to not associate a ‘want’ with them, so to speak. But it’s kind of hard since I do it casually…”
“That’s a new thing?”

“Yeah. First time it happened was when I teleported out from Cyborg’s car to the store to help that old guy in there.” Danny fixed his gaze on Robin’s “R” on his costume. “It’s never happened to me in human form before.”

“So,” Robin tried again, getting a meaningful glance from Raven. “Roof?”

This time, because Danny was paying attention, he felt the rush of power. He grabbed Robin and Raven, teleporting them to the roof with him. Both of them seemed slightly disoriented by the sudden displacement. He, on the other hand, was getting used to it.

“What?” Raven put a hand to her head. “That’s faster than my way of traveling.”

Robin shook his head so fast that it seemed to become a blur. He stopped, looking kind of green.

“You okay?” Danny asked, concerned.

“Yeah,” Robin managed to say. “I’ll be fine. Just got an…” He swallowed heavily. “…an upset stomach.”

“Breathe,” Danny advised, remembering that Jazz had done that after her first teleporting experience.

After Robin was sufficiently recovered, the two Titans faced Danny and began talking.

Robin looked at Raven. “Should I start?”

“I’ll do it,” Raven said, stepping forward slightly. “All right, Danny. I apologize in advance if this seems foreboding. It’s just important we get it out now.”

“Shoot,” Danny said, clasping his hands behind his head. He rocked back on his heels nervously.

“I’ve been sensing that something’s different about you,” Raven said flatly.

Danny frowned, releasing his hands. “What…exactly do you mean?” he asked carefully.

“I can’t really explain it,” Raven said. “But…it feels almost like you’re…hosting another entity.”

Robin pounced immediately. “Are you?”

Danny blanked. He had absolutely no idea what to say. Hosting another entity? How…? “I… don’t…” He couldn’t go on; his tongue had frozen.

“Danny?” Raven’s voice was gentle, even though Robin was completely stiff.

Danny’s tongue loosened slightly. “I don’t…I don’t know.”

“You don’t feel any different?”

Danny thought for a moment. “Well…there’s one thing: My ghost half has been feeling stronger.”

“Do you feel your ghost half actively, you mean?” Raven queried, stepping on Robin’s foot. The Titan had been bristling.

“No, sorry. I meant that when I transform, I feel stronger than I used to. I’m not sure since I haven’t done anything special but…” He shrugged. “Other than that, I really do feel normal; my new power
“Isn’t even acting up.”

“All right.” Raven looked at Robin. “Do you have anything to add?”

“Yes.” Robin dove straight into it. “I’ve been set off by you ever since the Puppet King. What Raven just said might explain why. But are you telling the truth when you say you don’t know?”

Danny smiled wryly. “I don’t have any reason not to. You guys know my secret.”

“Yet you still keep secrets.”

“So do you,” Danny retorted nonchalantly. “I don’t see the others complaining.”

Robin held his tongue, holding back the snappy remark he’d wanted to make. After a short pause he bit out an apology. “I’m sorry,” he said finally. “You’re right.”

Raven’s eyes widened at this blatant admission. Then she smiled; Robin had just taken a huge step, although he probably didn’t realize this.

Danny inclined his head, trying to hide a relieved smile. “Is that it?”

“Yes,” Raven said, seeing Robin’s affirming nod. “You can get to what you want to do with that… thing.”

Danny smiled, his eyes turning a brilliant green, shocking both Titans out of their wits. “Sure. Point the way.”

There was a faint echo in his voice that sent shivers down the Titans’ backs.

Danny noticed; his eyes changed back as he asked, concerned, “Are you guys all right?”

Robin was completely composed, even though goose bumps were all over him. He’d seen a lot of strange and scary things but this was…just downright eerie. “Completely fine,” he replied coolly. “It’s this way…”

“You’re back!” Starfire said happily, her hands clasped together. She was standing in front of a window that looked into a completely tiled room with a stronghold door at the other end. Below the window were a bunch of controls. Opposite Starfire were the two Titans who had just entered. Starfire noticed the absence. “But where is Danny?”

Raven walked past her and stood next to Cyborg, who was sitting in a seat at the controls in front of the window. She peered through. “He should be outside that door.”

They all looked at the silver door in the wall. A large metal frame held it sturdy. This frame suddenly moved inwards into the room.

The Titans braced themselves. Wulf just blinked, confused. Nobody had bothered to explain it to him.

Danny stood outside a large metal door with a spinning lock like a ship’s steering wheel. This was the door to the containment/interrogation room. Robin had told him that there were no holes in it; it was one hundred percent safe. Of course, Cyborg hadn’t factored in ghosts when designing the room so it was probably seventy-five percent safe against a regular ghost and ninety against the Box Ghost.
Smiling grimly, he looked at the Fenton Thermos he was holding. He had no clue what would happen if he released the strange ghost it held.

Danny gritted his teeth, his eyes flaring green. ‘Just do it.’

Determination giving him resolve, Danny transformed with a bright flash. Using his ghostly strength, he easily spun the lock and unlocked it. He pushed the door open, seeing his reflection in the mirror directly across from him.

Ignoring the feeling that he was being watched, Danny uncapped the thermos while keeping a foot outside the room for a quick escape. His gloved thumb flicked the release switch and the thermos let out thick green smoke that filled up the room. Upon hearing a familiar and annoying wailing, Danny blew at the opening, blowing out the rest of the mist before capping the thermos and trapping the Box Ghost.

Chills wracked his body then and a dark blue mist erupted from his mouth, freezing his throat in the process. Danny coughed, stepping out of the room as he did so. He pulled the door shut and spun the wheel in three seconds flat, all with one hand. Then, still shivering and blowing out a stream of blue air, he teleported into the semi-dark room with the Titans and Wulf.

He ignored the startled looks he received, blew out the rest of the cold air trapped in his lungs, and went straight to the controls. Pressing the talk button, Danny looked into the room, seeing the mist poke into all the corners. It was spread thin but Danny could see that it would be as thick as clam chowder if bunched together.

He spoke into the mic, keeping his voice calm. “It’s useless. That room is completely sealed.” He slammed the thermos down on the window sill, making everybody jump. He hoped that the ghost wouldn’t try phasing; there wasn’t a single ghost shield to contain it and he hadn’t thought to ask Cyborg to try and see if he could make one.

The mist drew back from the walls a bit and hovered, as if thinking about what to do next.

“I know you’re a ghost,” Danny continued. He was sure that the strong chills were attributed to his sense, although he’d never felt that cold before. “My ghost sense went off. So you have a form other than this.”

Now the mist gathered in a swirling pool just above the floor. It began twisting up, forming what could’ve been a humanoid figure. It had eyes but no mouth. The right half of the “head”, directly above the greenish-red eye, was misty but the left was solid and the outline of a “hairstyle” was barely visible. It seemed oddly familiar to Danny, although he pushed it aside. The body looked a lot like Raven’s when she was completely cloaked and floating eerily in the air; it connected to the whirlpool.

Its eyes – its mismatched eyes – were looking right at Danny. He simply stared back, trying not to penetrate them too deeply. He didn’t want to know what kind of atrocities the ghost had committed in its life.

High-pitched maniacal laughter filled the room. Robin couldn’t help but think that sounded a lot like the Joker, somebody he had tried his best to forget. But none of them could figure out where it was coming until they all realized that it was coming from the ghost, which now had a mouth. The space inside it was pitch black and there were no teeth. The sight and sound sent shivers down all of their spines. Wulf hunched down in the shadows, keeping his glow at a minimum so that he was almost invisible. The ghost had an evil aura that was setting his fur on edge.
“Smart little Phantom.” The ghost giggled crazily, causing Danny to subconsciously straighten.

The mad laughter subsided. “Poor little Phantom,” the ghost crooned. “All alone…”

“Danny,” Beast Boy whispered, shivering, “this ghost is really creeping me out.”

A bead of sweat trickled down Danny’s temple as he clenched his jaw. The ghost was insane; that much was clear.

“Danny,” Robin hissed, his mouth right by the halfa’s ear.

Danny tilted his head towards Robin’s.

“He’s acting different.”

“I know,” Danny said softly. His glove was covering the mic. “Just…” He met Robin’s eyes with his left one. “Just stay back.”

Swallowing, Robin stepped back into the shadows by Wulf, pulling Starfire with him. He had sounded serious. This was obviously a dangerous ghost.

Danny opened his mouth, closed it, and then spoke firmly. “Joke’s over.”

This made the ghost start laughing harder. “Joke’s – over? Ah ha ha ha… I think not, little Phantom. Poor lost Phantom…” It started giggling. “No…” Its eyes met Danny’s. “The joke is on you.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ll see what we mean. See very soon…” The ghost grinned malevolently, nothing but blackness where the mouth was.

“I’m getting a really bad feeling, Danny,” Raven said from the back of the room.

Danny said nothing. But he was getting an increasingly sick feeling in the pit of his stomach, as if its contents were churning in a bad way. “You know that your words don’t scare me,” he said. “Especially if you don’t have anything to back them up.”

“Anything to back them up?” The ghost grinned wider, its eyes flashing red. “I don’t need to. It’s all right there.”

“Right where?”

“Right there of course…” It ducked its head so that Danny couldn’t see its face anymore. Its voice suddenly changed to become deeper and hoarse; it picked its head up to meet Danny’s eyes just as it said, “Right where your friends are.”

Danny leaned forward. “What do you mean? What about my friends?”

He didn’t notice a small dial on the control that was dancing madly across a scale. Cyborg did. “Danny, be careful. It’s doing something.”

Its voice changed again. “How long are they safe for? Are they safe forever? Or are they only safe for a few minutes? An hour?”

“Stop playing around!” Danny demanded, his eyes flaring. The needle on the dash sped to the red zone before returning to the middle.
“No one’s playing. No one is playing at all…” The ghost grinned. “No one but Phantom. Phantom sees all.”

A shiver ran down Danny’s spine. “What…”

The ghost was still grinning, saying, “Phantom sees everything.”

“Is it…is it talking about you?” Starfire asked.

“Who are you?” Danny demanded, trying not to let the ghost rattle him. It didn’t seem to be talking about him anymore but he had no clue what it was talking about. “What do you want?”

“Games, tricks, and names… The name…” The voice changed. “My name…”

“Talk sense, will you!”

The ghost was growing in size. It was filling up the entire room it was in. Even through the thick wall that was between them Danny could feel the malevolent energy it was giving off seep into the room they were in.

“Danny…” Robin said, stepping forward. Raven and Starfire were on his heels.

Danny knew what was going to happen next; he could feel it in his bones. “Stay back!” he cried, throwing his arms back. Green energy flew out from them and crashed into the Titans and Wulf, slamming them against the wall and sticking them to it.

At the same time, a loud roar and the sound of howling wind hit them as the evil ghost bolted forward into the room, destroying everything in the process. Its entire body hit Danny, throwing him back above the Titans.

He couldn’t see a thing except the green mist that was rushing through his body and escaping through the wall behind him.

A voice was whispering in his head. “I’ll see you soon, Danny Phantom. Your home is where it all starts. Can you save the ones that are precious to you? Or will you fail?”

‘No!’ Just as Danny thought this, the last of the mist passed through him and left the room empty and ruined with the smashed controls and broken glass. The ghost obviously hadn’t bothered to turn intangible.

A loud cackle was heard and there seemed to be a silent explosion. Directly after that, Raven immediately noticed a difference: The tower seemed clean. There was no evil entity in it. Not anymore. And Danny…

He noticed that his stomach seemed lighter. But he also felt extremely weak. So weak that his transformation rings passed over him, turning him back into his human form. He slid down the wall and lay there, passing out with the sound of his friends’ screams ringing in his head.
Nightmares

Chapter Notes

The research on MPD that Raven spouts here is complete and utter garbage, okay. Just clearing that up before anyone begins citing it as fact.

It was so dark… So horribly dark. And the worst part about the darkness was that he wasn’t alone. Not entirely. He couldn’t see anybody else but…there was that feeling. That feeling that somebody was watching him…watching him and not doing anything. It sent shivers down his spine and he could do nothing about it.

Malevolent laughter filled his ears; he whirled around to see where it had come from. Nobody was there.

Danny narrowed his eyes, trying to peer through the darkness to find the person he just knew was there. A sick feeling settled in his stomach, the kind he’d been feeling far too often lately.

A voice from behind him made him whirl around again. “Looking for me?”

Danny’s breath caught in his throat when he saw him. The one ghost he absolutely despised…and feared.

“I must say,” Phantom mused, “this is a rather dull place to convene.” He smirked. “Why don’t we make it more interesting?”

To Danny’s horror, the scene shifted to a familiar place: the Nasty Burger in the future where Phantom had reigned. It was absolutely still with the only movement being the flickering flames of Phantom’s hair. Danny warily took a step back, not sure what would happen.

Was this even real?

Seemingly reading his mind, Phantom rolled his eyes. “Oh, please, Danny. What else could this be?”

Danny pursed his lips, still not willing to answer. He didn’t trust his evil alternate future self as far as he could throw him, which was pretty far.

“If you’re not interested in listening then I might just as well move on to the real show,” Phantom said, sounding bored. His mouth twisted once more into a cruel smirk. “Do enjoy. We send our love.”

The word came out half-strangled. “We?”

Phantom did nothing but laugh as Danny’s surroundings spun around, eradicating the other ghost in the process but leaving the echoes of his laughter still ringing in Danny’s ears.

His surroundings kept spinning and spinning until his feet crashed into something hard. The sudden impact caused him to topple over. Danny lay there for a moment, stunned, until he got to his knees. When he looked to see where he was he had trouble suppressing his surprise.
The Ghost Zone’s eerie purple doors and empty rock ledges floated by him as he tried to absorb what had happened. Was he back in his own dimension?

Suddenly, he heard that insane laughter he’d been hearing not too long ago. And it was right in front of him. Danny tried to see the ghost but his eyes immediately stung with pain. Reflexively, they filled with tears.

“Aargh!” Danny covered them with his hands.

“No looking,” the voice chided him. “No looking… Not yet at least.” It snickered. “Want to have some fun?”

“Stop it!” Danny snapped his head up, fully prepared to glare at the insane ghost before him. He wasn’t prepared to feel a sudden weight in his arms as his surroundings shifted to a cloudy and desolate Amity Park. Looking down, his face turned ashen when he saw Sam’s blank eyes staring straight into his own. There were purplish finger marks on her throat.

Danny started panicking and shook Sam. “Sam? Sam? Sam!” He checked for breathing but there was nothing. “No, Sam! Please! Sam!” The ring he had given her was still on her finger, but the stone was cracked.

Horror washed through his body. He couldn’t believe that Sam, Sam was dead. It seemed impossible. The girl that had been so full of life was just…gone. Gone as if she’d never existed in the first place. His head bowed in grief, Danny closed her eyes, not wanting to look into her empty lilac eyes anymore.

Something liquid fell to the ground, causing Danny to look up from Sam. His breath caught in his throat when he saw a mass of green ectoplasm plastered against a building wall. Carefully putting Sam down, he stepped over her and approached, trying to ignore the instinct that told him to turn and run as fast as he could in the opposite direction.

Although the ectoplasm was covering almost everything, it didn’t cover the shoes or the one arm of the person that it had smothered. Even though a long sleeve covered most of the arm, Danny recognized the dark color of the hand that was limply hanging out. Something dark and red was running down the hand and dripping onto the street, creating the sound he had heard. Bile rose in his throat when he put a name to the puddle that was lying beneath the…corpse.

‘Not Tucker,’ he pleaded. ‘Please not Tucker.’

He didn’t want to get closer for the fear that he would recognize his friend’s face. He didn’t want to see what kind of emotion had been plastered on Tucker’s face when he died.

His heart thundering in his ears, Danny thought it couldn’t possibly get any worse. At least, until he saw the scorched marks on the street besides Tucker’s grave. Dreading what he would see, Danny approached the crossroads and the side of the building. He had just enough courage to look…before immediately wishing that he hadn’t.

The mutilated and blown up corpses of his parents were lying there. Lying there in what must have been their last stand.

Their last stand against what? He didn’t know and wasn’t sure if he wanted to. He hoped that there was one person who had survived the carnage. The one person that he trusted more than his two best friends. He kept hoping…until he saw what was lying only a short distance away from his parents.

‘The exo-skeleton… What is that doing here?’ Danny only saw the torso at first; his eyes then caught
sight of the helmet and other limbs scattered around it. He wondered where the wearer was for a short moment.

That’s when he realized…the wearer was still inside it. A strangled cry escaped his mouth before he could stop it.

‘No… Please let it be somebody else. Please…’ Danny couldn’t summon the courage to check, to see the face that he knew would be staring through the helmet’s visor. He couldn’t see Jazz’s sightless eyes staring up into his own.

His breathing was harsh as he struggled to take it all in. To take it all in and not lose his mind. How much could one person take before breaking? How much? Would he find out now?

A voice whispered to him. “Do you know who killed them, Danny? Do you?”

Danny whipped his head back and forth, refusing to believe it. “No! St-stop it!”

“It was you, Danny. You.” The voice echoed eerily in the air around him. “Look up, Danny,” it hissed. “Look up.”

Unwillingly, Danny did so. He saw his reflection in a nearby store window and his heart skipped a beat. He could hear it thundering in his ears and his every breath seemed to be magnified tenfold. It couldn’t be true.

Staring back at him was Phantom. His future grinned at a horrified Danny. “Missed me?”

Before Danny could make a sound other than a strangled gasp, he was lost in blackness. Heat coiled up from within Danny’s stomach, causing him to gasp in pain. He curled in on himself, trying to contain whatever was scalding him. Something seemed to explode.

The explosion burned him from the inside out. He couldn’t think, couldn’t breathe, couldn’t speak… His eyes snapped open…but he saw only darkness. His hearing suddenly snapped back into place, overloading his senses.

“Miss me, Danny?” his future self’s voice taunted him. “I’ve missed you. So many things I have in store for you… So many things…” Maniacal laughter filled his head.

The high-pitched voice of the ghost he had interrogated earlier was next. “All your fault, all your fault! Can’t blame your friends, can you? Where were you when they needed you? Where?” The voice broke off into giggles.

‘No! Stop it!’ The voices kept hammering at him no matter how much he pleaded. ‘Stop it… STOP IT!’

There was no end...

“I can’t believe it,” Cyborg said, sounding numb. “What happened?”

“The ghost happened,” Raven responded grimly.

The Titans were currently standing among the wreck that had been their secure interrogation room. The control panel was beyond salvaging as the ghost had gone straight through it and demolished it.

“I have trouble believing that we fought that thing in the Puppet King,” Robin said. “It was far too
unstable.”

“I read that people who have MPD can find stability when committing to someone,” Raven said. “It’s a relatively new study.”

“You’re saying the ghost likes music?” Beast Boy asked, squinting incredulously.

Raven sighed exasperatedly. “MPD stands for multiple personality disorder. It is also known as dissociative identity disorder.”

“So you’re saying the ghost had different personalities,” Robin said.

“Yes. There were two extreme personalities: one completely insane and the other malevolent.”

“All right. I’ll buy that. How does this relate to the study?”

“The ghost was part of the Puppet King,” Raven explained. “I’m theorizing that that gave its mind the stability needed so that it didn’t behave the way we just saw.”

“Okay. You’ve proven your point.” Robin kicked a piece of the control panel into a wall. “That still doesn’t tell us who it is. Danny won’t be any help either as he doesn’t know.”

“Speaking of Danny,” Raven said, picking up the mic he’d been using, “he feels clean now. It’s like he’d been filthy before and I didn’t even notice.”

Question marks floated above the heads of the other people. Only Robin seemed aware of what she was talking about. He was frowning.

“But I can’t figure out why he’d feel like that in the first place,” Raven continued, irked.

“Now that you bring it up, I remember that my alarm bells stopped ringing around him,” Robin said slowly. “He doesn’t feel dangerous to me anymore.”

Beast Boy broke in, completely frustrated by now. “Hold on! What are you guys talking about? Danny felt off? In what way?”

“After the Puppet King I noticed that he felt slightly different,” Raven said. “I wrote it off as him having been separated from his ghost half.”

“My alarms were going off around him,” Robin said. “I confronted him on it.”

“And of course,” Raven said snidely, “Danny didn’t know what was up. He only knew that Robin was being antagonistic again and was worried. All he could say was that his ghost half was feeling stronger.”

“You promised, Robin,” Starfire accused her boyfriend. “You said you’d give him a chance.”

“I know.” Robin sounded ashamed. “I did apologize after Raven knocked some sense into me.”

“Kio misigas Danny?”

“Nothing,” Beast Boy answered, noting the others’ rather confused looks with a hint of smugness. “Raven and Robin are just saying that he felt strange.”

“Kio okazis?”
“Hang on, guys,” Beast Boy told his friends. “Just gotta explain something real quickly.” He turned to Wulf. “Long story short, we fought a guy named the Puppet King. He can suck our souls out and put them in puppets. He sucked out Danny’s ghost half and Danny nearly died trying to save our bodies from being forever soulless. It then turned out that it wasn’t even the Puppet King we were fighting; it was a different ghost who had possessed the Puppet King.”

Beast Boy shrugged. “So it’s pretty screwed up. Since then, Raven and Robin have apparently been feeling something off about Danny. Robin, being the macho guy he is”—a thunder cloud formed over Robin’s head as he glared at shape shifter—“had to confront Danny on it. Now they’re saying that he feels ‘clean’ and isn’t contaminated anymore.” He shot a look at Raven to see if his story corroborated with hers and she nodded. “Okay. I think that’s it.”

Wulf remained in thought for a couple of minutes, leaving the Titans to shuffle around in the debris rather nervously. Then he hesitantly told the green changeling something that left him blinking.

“What did he say, Beast Boy?” Robin asked impatiently.

“He said,” Beast Boy said, turning to Robin, “that Danny could have been possessed.”

Before Raven could protest the absurdity of the statement, Wulf was talking in rapid Esperanto. Beast Boy seemed to be having trouble keeping track of it all.

“Okay…” he started hesitantly. “According to Wulf, it’s called overshadowing, not possessing. He also said it must not have been a proper overshadowing as Danny was behaving normally. He thinks that when Danny was fighting the ghost in the Puppet King some of it ended up in him. When the ghost escaped and went through Danny, it took that piece, explaining why he feels normal now.”

Raven absorbed that information, thinking it explained almost everything quite nicely. What it didn’t explain was why Danny said that about his ghost half.

Cyborg began, “Okay—”

CRASH!

All six looked for the source of the sound but couldn’t find it until Starfire wordlessly pointed to the floating chunk of glass. It was glowing green. At the same time, the lights went out, leaving the teenagers and ghost in almost complete darkness save for Wulf’s glow and the green glow of the glass.

There was no warning as the glass exploded into millions of smaller pieces intent on murdering anybody that stood in their way.

“Duck!” Raven barely managed to snap up a black shield that saved their hides from grisly deaths. She did not release it as other things started shattering.

Everything was by now floating and shattering, sometimes simultaneously. In turn, the smaller pieces broke up into even smaller pieces until a fine rain of dangerous dust coated everything.

“Out!” Robin ordered.

Still behind Raven’s shield, the six rushed out of the room to still find themselves in darkness with the overhead lights sparkling. Wulf’s glow was barely enough light until Starfire lit up a starbolt, casting them in an eerie green light.

“What was that?” Cyborg demanded, shivering from the close brush with death.
“Danny!” Raven hissed, feeling the energy crackle in the air. Her hairs were standing on end from the power she could sense. “Stay here!” She dashed off into the darkness, letting the palpable energy guide her way.

“Raven!” she heard Robin call.

‘No time!’ Raven was almost there. ‘We’re lucky he hasn’t brought the whole tower down by now!’ She skidded to a stop in front of Danny’s door, banging on it. “Danny! Open the door!”

“Raven! Wait!”

Raven took a step back and lifted both hands, her eyes glowing black. With a powerful wrench, Danny’s door whooshed open, smashing Raven into the opposite wall with the force of the energy that the room had just unleashed. She slid down, dazed.

“Raven!” Robin knelt by her. “Are you all right?”

“Fine,” Raven bit out, getting to her feet. “We have to get in.”

“Dude, how?” Beast Boy gaped at the solid opaque shield that was obstructing the doorway.

Wulf reached out to touch it, only to be violently shocked. He shrunk down by Starfire, whimpering.

“Let’s see if I can’t discharge this.”

Cyborg was about to try something when Raven cried, “Don’t!”

He looked at her. “What do you propose we do?”

“My powers nullify ghosts.” Raven stood barely five feet from the crackling green shield. “I’m the only one that can get in.”

“It’s too dangerous!” Robin protested.

“We’re lucky he hasn’t brought down the tower yet!” Raven snapped. “I’m going in. You’ll know when it’s safe.”

Her hand flaring black, Raven pushed it through the shield with minimal resistance. Before any of her friends could stop her, Raven covered herself with black magic and pushed through, finding it more difficult than just pushing her hand through.

She found herself instantly dodging to the side as a lamp crashed into the shield she had just come through. A black shield immediately snapped into place, shielding her from the room’s errant objects, leaving her free to absorb her surroundings.

Danny was still, floating about five feet above the mattress he had gotten from Beast Boy; he was covered in a greenish aura. Around him the room’s various objects were floating, covered in either white or green ice.

‘Only some are glowing?’ Raven flinched as electricity coursed through all of the objects. ‘Why are the ones that aren’t also floating?’

Without warning, the floating ice covered not-glowing chair exploded, the wooden pieces smashing harmlessly against Raven’s shield.
She swallowed heavily before yelling, “Danny! Snap out of it!”

Her words seemed to break something as Danny’s back suddenly arched and his hands clutched his head. He was screaming now.

“Danny!” Raven shouted. “Wake—” She gasped as his emotions and thoughts rammed into her. Her shield collapsed and her knees buckled as the onslaught destroyed her concentration.

“Danny,” Raven gasped, her eyes and mind locked on him. “St-stop.”

But it was too late. Danny’s mind had latched onto her own (wasn’t she in control?) and dragged her into a whirlwind of thoughts, emotions, and memories.

There was so much fear. Raven could hardly think through the fear that was clouding her senses. Along with the fear was guilt and anguish. She couldn’t think through the haze of emotions that was clouding her thought processes.

“Miss me, Danny?” She didn’t recognize the voice.

“You and I are one and the same, Daniel.” That accent was fake, wasn’t it?

“I don’t know who you are anymore, Danny!” Who was that girl?

“How can you be my brother? You’re a freak!”

Insane laughter rang in her ears and a figure loomed in front of her. The DP emblem was the first thing that drew her attention. But then she saw the flaming hair, the blue-tinged skin, and the red eyes. This wasn’t Danny.

The unknown ghost smirked at her. “You can’t save them, Danny.”

‘DANNY?’ Raven jerked in surprise. ‘How – of course!’ Her eyes widened. ‘I’m seeing this from Danny’s perspective!’

After this epiphany, Raven was hurled into a whirlpool of memories. She saw a destroyed restaurant, a boiler, a red-suited person on a hoverboard, and the ghost from before. Then five faces flashed right in front of her in rapid succession before the boiler appeared with the same five people tied to it. A second later the whole thing exploded. A wave of anguish, sorrow, and guilt tore at her heart as she watched.

Raven crossed her arms to shield her face, although she felt nothing. She dropped them a moment later when a face twisted into view.

It was the ghost.

And he had a message.

“I’m you.”

Raven’s eyes widened. Before she could think, a wave of panic hit her and sent her reeling. She clutched her head, unable to stop a cry of pain from escaping her lips.

Her voice seemed to smash her surroundings like a mirror. She felt her whole being jerk violently and then she was back in Danny’s room, shivering crazily. She was barely aware that she was covered in ice and freezing.
She blearily noted that the room’s objects had stopped floating and that her harsh breathing was accompanied by Danny’s. She’d apparently been kicked out of his mind.

*His mind…*

That brought to mind the ghost she’d seen.

“I’m you.”

“Raven?” she heard Danny ask tentatively. His voice seemed weak. “Are you all right?”

Her reply was an intelligent and witty “Ahh…”

Danny took that very badly. “Oh God, Raven. I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” he apologized repeatedly. “I never meant it. I’m sorry, I’m—”

“Shut up,” Raven managed to say, shutting Danny up nicely. Her voice was too weak for her liking. And also for her friends’.

Robin was banging on the door. “Let us in!”

Cyborg was talking over Robin. “Danny, open the door!”

“Please, friends! We are worried!”

“Open the door!” That was Robin again.

Raven idly wondered when the door had closed. Hadn’t it been open before?

Danny looked pale but he waved a hand. A split-second before he’d even moved the door glowed green and opened. Danny seemed alarmed and disconcerted by this.

Raven couldn’t be bothered to care as she was developing what would be the mother of all headaches. That and her friends barging in distracted her.

They crouched by her first. “Raven!”

Robin was the closest and had a hand on her shoulder. “Is everything all right?”

“How long?” Raven asked, raspy. She cleared her throat and repeated in a clearer voice, “How long was it?”

“Five minutes, give or take,” Robin responded. “Then the shield disappeared and the door slammed shut before we could do anything.”

After making sure that Raven had suffered no lasting harm, Starfire was now attending to a very white Danny, not heeding the enormous ghost that was crouching over him. “Are you all right, Danny?”

“I’ll be fine.” He looked anxiously at Raven. “Is Raven all right?”

No sooner did Robin look at him did Danny start apologizing again. “I’m sorry. I don’t know what happened. I’m really, really sorry.” He kept apologizing.

“What happened, Raven?” Robin asked, ignoring Danny’s profuse apologies. “It looks like… it looks
like a tornado hit the room.”

Raven shook her head, not sure herself what had happened. “I…I don’t know.”

“…sorry. I’m really—”

Beast Boy broke Danny off. “You’re babbling, dude. Take a deep breath and relax.”

Danny took several and looked much better for the effort. That was all Robin needed before he turned once again to the ghost teen.

“All right, talk,” Robin ordered. “What happened?”

“I…” Danny frowned. “I don’t know.” He looked around at the wreck that had previously been his sparsely furnished room. “Did I do this?”

“Yes,” Robin said bluntly. “Are you honestly saying that you don’t know anything about what just happened? You nearly killed us!”

Danny looked properly alarmed now. “What? How? I wasn’t even with you guys!”

“You nearly killed us with glass,” Robin said impatiently, standing over Danny. To his defense, the raven-haired teen glared back defiantly. That was when Robin realized he was doing something wrong. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Okay, sorry. Let me start again. Are you aware of what happened while you were unconscious?”

Danny frowned as he thought back. He couldn’t remember anything after the ghost he’d been interrogating blasted through the glass and through him. “No. I…I remember that the ghost escaped but that’s it.”

“What happened while you were unconscious?”

Danny seemed wary now as he realized that Robin was trying to find out what he’d been dreaming. “Do you mean in my dreams?”

“Did something happen?” Robin demanded.

Danny scrambled to his feet, swaying slightly before straightening up. “Nothing,” he said defensively. “They aren’t important.”

Robin raised an eyebrow, challenging that statement. Danny said nothing, merely holding his ground against the leader of the Titans. Only Raven noticed the panic that was flickering in his eyes.

“I’m you.”

Raven shivered at the memory of that cold evil ghost. Whoever he was, he had an enormous impact on Danny.

‘I’ve got to find out.’ Raven used the wall to support herself as she got back on her feet. She ignored Cyborg’s hand on her shoulder. “Robin, leave.”

Robin turned back to her, confused. “Why?”

“Just leave, Robin,” Raven said firmly, staring straight at Danny. She had answers to get and she intended on getting them.
“Raven, I really don’t think you should be doing anything right now,” Cyborg protested.

“Guys,” Raven ground out through her teeth. “Leave.” Her eyes flickered black, showing her friends that she was serious.

They all filed out of the room in five seconds, Wulf giving Raven a warning growl that told her there’d be hell to pay if she did anything to Danny. It didn’t worry her as she wasn’t planning on doing anything harmful to Danny. If he cooperated that was…

Raven turned to him, closing the door behind her as she did. “Okay, Danny. No beating around the bush. I know that you know I was there watching it all.”

Danny wouldn’t meet her eyes; his breathing picked up a hitch. “What—what do you want?”

She remembered all the other times that Danny had been hesitant to answer. She’d been willing to wait for him then, knowing that it was hard to reveal something so personal and scary. She had a secret like that herself. But she couldn’t wait. Not anymore. They had been lucky that Danny hadn’t brought the tower down and next time they might not be that lucky.

“I’ve been willing to wait for you to be ready to tell me on your own terms,” Raven said. “But I can’t do that anymore. We got off easy this time. What happens the next time you get a nightmare?”

“This,” Danny said forcefully, “has never happened before. I don’t know why it happened today but this is the first time it has. It shouldn’t—”

Raven cut across him, seeing what he would say. “How can you promise anything like that? Your powers are already surprising you. What’s to say this won’t surprise you, too?”

Danny’s mouth was dry. She’d already seen him, hadn’t she? Shouldn’t that make it so much easier? She already knew of his existence. All he had to do was explain. That was all.

*Then why was it so hard?*

It was like something was stuck in his throat. How could he explain anything? He didn’t even know her half as well as he knew Tucker and Sam. And he hadn’t even told them! He would’ve eventually but he hadn’t – not by the time he’d been so rudely transported to this dimension.

No… How could he?

Raven saw the indecision flash through his eyes. For a moment she thought he’d say something but the moment passed and she knew he wouldn’t say anything.

“Danny, I really don’t want to do this.”

Danny’s head snapped up. “Do what?”

“But I don’t know if you’re safe,” Raven continued. “If you don’t tell me, I will have to break into your mind and find out for myself.”

She was half-bluffing and was hoping that he’d call it. She didn’t want to break into his mind. It was a private place for people and her breaking into it would ruin any trust they had established. But at the same time she knew that she could break into it if she had to. But only if she absolutely had to.

Danny’s first instinct was to transform. A sparkle of bluish-white light formed at his waist before he ruthlessly quelled that thought. Running away wouldn’t solve anything. No…it’d only make things
‘Break into my mind?’ Danny stared at her, hoping that she was bluffing. He couldn’t tell. What he did see was the resolution to do it if need be. “I…”

‘Would her looking for it make it easier?’

Danny decided to take a chance and trust her. “Have you…have you ever had a secret that’s so frightening you can’t tell anyone?” he whispered. “One that scared you so much you couldn’t tell anyone because you’re scared of how they’ll react?”

Raven nodded slowly, her eyes on Danny’s socked feet. “Yes,” she replied softly. “I have.”

Danny met her eyes. “Then you know how I feel.”

“I do,” Raven said reluctantly. “I know exactly how you feel. You feel cornered…like you can’t trust anybody…like you have to handle this on your own. It’s like you’re the only one who can deal with this information.”

He nodded. “Yeah…”

“But that’s the thing,” Raven continued, gathering strength from her words. “You can’t deal with it on your own. And you shouldn’t try. You need your friends by your side. They’re the ones who will help you through it.”

Danny thought of Sam and Tucker with a pang. She was right. They were his friends. And he could trust them. With his life. And he’d done so on many occasions. Then why couldn’t he trust them this time? Why? What made this so different?

‘Because it’s yourself you’re worried about,’ a voice whispered in the back of his head. ‘You’re not worried about something else. You’re worried about you.’

“Did you tell your friends?” Danny asked, feeling lost.

“No.” Raven smiled wistfully. “Maybe if I had, it would’ve played out differently. As it was, they found out at the worst possible time and came through for me and for the world. If it weren’t for them, neither of us would be standing here.”

“What should I do? My friends aren’t here.” Danny looked at the blank stretch of wall by the window. “And even if they were, I don’t know if they’d understand. They haven’t faced him. They don’t know what it’s like. What they’d say is what they can say; they don’t understand.” He sounded frustrated.

“Do you trust me?” Raven asked tentatively.

Danny blinked in surprise at the question. “Er…yeah. I guess I do.”

“Then why don’t you tell me? Chances are, I’ll understand.” Raven hoped she wasn’t pushing too hard. “As you know…I had a bad secret myself.”

“What was it?”

Words stuck in her throat. Should she tell him now? Maybe Danny’s secret wasn’t even as bad as he thought it was and it was a normal teenage overreaction. Maybe – no! Danny wasn’t even an ordinary teenager. He was half-ghost for crying out loud! There was no way that this secret was
“I’ll tell you later,” Raven promised, hoping she wouldn’t regret it. “Right now, we need to focus on you.”

Danny thought he should get the words out fast. “I’ve faced him twice before.”

Raven blinked at the sudden change. “Who?”

“Him.” Danny’s voice was a mere whisper. “And each time my friends and family nearly died. One time they did.”

‘They did? How are they still alive?’ Raven thought incredulously. “How…?”

Danny shook his head frantically. “No. The story… it’s too long.”

“Then… what did he mean? ‘I’m you’? Why did he say that?”

Danny flinched at the mention of those words.

For a moment, she thought he wasn’t going to say anything. Then she heard him say something in such a low voice she couldn’t be sure he had. “What?”

He was louder this time. “You… you said you can look into my mind, right?”

“Yes,” Raven answered slowly.

“Can you?”

“Can I what?” Raven had never felt so stupid.

“Can you look into my mind?” Danny blurted. “It’s easier than me having to explain everything.”

Raven exhaled slowly. “Sure. Sit down.”

Danny did, taking a deep breath as he did so. He was jittery with nerves.

Raven sat down in front of him, crossing her legs. “Close your eyes and focus on the memories,” she instructed, placing her hands on his head.

Danny became very still.

“Ready?”

There was a small pause before Danny’s voice sounded, strong and steady if low. “Ready.”

Then, with a rush of sound and a sudden displacement, Raven saw.
Raven saw a plump balding man address a crowd from a podium. “As most of you have probably forgotten, you will be taking the Career Aptitude Test on Saturday.”

Flash.

Raven saw a human Danny with a reddish-orange-haired teenager in a kitchen. “Okay, I get it! You’re brilliant, and I’m stupid, and I’ll never be able to get as high a score as you! So far, I’m not even qualified to scrape the grease off the Nasty Grill!”

Flash.

Raven saw Danny Phantom hold up a folder in the air. “Hello, great future!”

Flash.

“I’m his friend, not his mom. He wants to cheat, he can cheat.”

Flash.

“I’ve been charged with the task of eliminating your future, so that never happens.” There was the image of the evil Danny destroying buildings and cars while people screamed and ran away.

Flash.

“Man! If this is what we have to look forward to, I’m definitely not taking the C.A.T.” There was a destroyed city and three teens in the middle of the street.

Flash.

“I have a really bad feeling I’m the one responsible.”

Flash.

“Sam, Tucker? It’s not possible! This is a trick! You can’t be alive!”

Flash.

“The big explosion at the Nasty Burger; you, Tucker, Danny’s family. And it was all your fault!” Raven saw a red-suited dark-skinned young adult angrily accuse Danny.

Flash.

Raven saw the chilling sight of the evil Danny address Danny and his two friends. “You know, if I had an ounce of humanity left in me, this would be a very touching little reunion. But of course, I surrendered my human half a long time ago.”

Flash.

“Sam, Tucker – RUN!”

Flash.
“Strange how one massive fireball of highly combustible condiments can ruin your whole future.”

Flash.

“It doesn’t matter if I go back in time or not. I’ll never turn into you! Never!”

“Of course you will. It’s only a matter of time.”

Flash.

Raven saw a strange mechanical ghost with a second face in the abdomen area. “You’re responsible for the horrible things that happened to your world and ours.”

Flash.

Raven saw Danny address a grizzled old man with weary grayish-blue eyes. “What happened to you?”

Flash.

“All you wanted was to make the hurt go away. I honored your wishes.”

“What happened to my human self?”

“Some things, my boy, are better left unsaid.”

Flash.

“Maybe that’s all anybody needs…a second chance.”

Flash.

“Don’t worry; I won’t turn into that. Ever! I promise…”

Flash.

“What are you gonna do, waste me? What happens to you then?”

“You don’t get it, do you? I’m still here! I still exist! That means you still turn into me.”

Flash.

Raven saw the evil ghost split into four. “Your time is up, Danny. It’s been up for ten years.”

Flash.

“What makes you think you can change my past?”

“Because I promised my family!” Raven saw Danny unleash a powerful attack that threw the other ghost back.

Flash.

“I guess the future isn’t as set in stone as you think it is.”

Flash.
“You’ve given everyone else in your life a second chance. Why not you?”

Flash.

Raven saw Danny Phantom kneeling over an injured girl on a rooftop in a rainstorm. “‘You…can’t escape the inevitable.’”

“He’s free?”

Flash.

Raven saw the older ghost from before standing up on a rooftop. “Ironic, isn’t it? You defeated me here…and we meet again.”

Flash.

“You can’t escape from the facts, Danny. When are you going to learn?”

“That may be true but even if you are me, I won’t turn into you. When are you going to learn?”

Flash.

“Are you afraid you’ll snap and kill me? Oh right. I forgot. You can’t because then you’ll die. Kind of defeats the point, doesn’t it?”

“If I’m still here, doesn’t that mean nothing happens? It means you don’t die. It means you still turn into me. It means that everyone else dies.”

Flash.

“He’s not here anymore, is he?”

Flash.

“It looks like I don’t need you after all. But that doesn’t mean I can’t make your life a living hell.”

Flash.

“Just because I don’t need you anymore to exist doesn’t mean you’re scot-free, Danny. You can turn evil.

“And you know it’s true. Deep inside, you’re scared of me. You’re scared of knowing what you could be. Knowing that one bad choice could be your downfall. Accept it.”

Flash.

Raven saw the evil ghost being overcome by the familiar bluish-white of Danny’s Fenton Thermos. “The doubt and despair will turn you evil. It’s only a matter of time.”

Flash.

Raven saw a ghost girl floating with Danny in a small confined space. “You don’t want to change. But you’ve already changed. You can’t stop it. It’s already done.”

Flash.

Raven saw the evil ghost’s face looming over her, laughing cruelly. “Ah ha ha ha! Hahahaha!” He
stopped to smirk at her. “Miss me, Danny?”

Still smirking, the evil ghost lifted a black gloved hand and fired a powerful green ecto-blast at her.

“Aargh!”

She was forcefully thrown out of Danny’s mind and fell back several feet, shivering. Her eyes were wide as she struggled to absorb the implications of what she had just experienced in Danny’s mind.

“Raven…” Danny crouched before her, his face ashen and his blue eyes stricken. “Are you all right?”

Inhaling shakily and rather noisily, Raven got up abruptly, her hands clenched into fists. She needed to get away. She needed to…

“I… I need to think.”

Raven didn’t know where she was headed until she burst onto the rooftop. Then only after she had inhaled deeply for several seconds did her head clear enough for her to think.

Then it began hurting all over again.

No wonder Danny had never wanted to say anything. No wonder! On a scale of one to ten – one being good and ten being bad – Danny’s secret was easily an eight or a nine, maybe even a ten.

It was horrifying… but she understood. After all, finding out that you were supposed to help your demonic father destroy the world did earn you some points. And it was very similar to Danny’s dilemma. Very similar.

‘I have to tell him.’

Oh yes, she did… She’d promised him after all.

But it didn’t answer her question about what she’d tell Danny regarding his future. He was obviously worrying himself sick over it and her running out on him couldn’t have helped. She’d be surprised if he wasn’t panicking at the moment.

‘Maybe he’ll understand after I tell him. He’s worried that he can’t change the future…but he can.’ Raven tucked a lock of hair behind her ear, feeling the wind brush against her. ‘All I can do is try.’

It was so peaceful now. Raven closed her eyes and stepped onto the ledge of the rooftop, letting the wind billow through her hair and clothes.

She felt so free…

It was only right that she give Danny this same freedom.

Lost in her thoughts and the wild wind, Raven never noticed the black and white blur diving into the ocean.

Danny was sitting on the side of the wall of the tower, hugging his knees to his chest. A bitter wind nipped at his cheeks and swept his white hair back. The sideways view was slightly disconcerting but gave his busy mind something else to focus on other than what he had just done.
What he had just shown Raven.

How could he have done something like that? How could he have shown her everything from A to Z? Including what his friends didn’t know? How could he?

Easy… He didn’t want to deal with it alone. He’d dealt with it by himself for far too long. And the pressure and despair had weighed him down so much that he couldn’t even act normally.

But why hadn’t he told his friends? Why? They were his friends. The ones that had been with him from the very beginning of his journey as a half-ghost. The ones that had never left his side even once during his very tumultuous two years as Amity Park’s ghostly hero. The ones that had forgiven him for every foolish act and every thought of stupidity.

His friends…

‘They couldn’t have understood,’ Danny reminded himself, closing his electric green eyes. ‘They didn’t know…didn’t know what he was – is capable of. But then I didn’t tell them.’

He bit his lip, scrunching his eyes even tighter together. His ghostly glow flared brightly before he managed to control his rocky emotions and exhale shakily. His eyes opened slowly and he let himself drop off the tower and towards the rocks that bordered this side of the tower.

‘They couldn’t have understood…’

Danny free fell until only a few feet above the craggy rocks. He angled out his dive and skimmed the surface of the ocean, watching his reflection fade in and out of focus. It settled down as he drifted further away from the Titans’ tower.

‘I’m glad…’ Danny realized with a jolt of surprise. ‘I’m glad that I told her.’ He dropped a gloved hand into the water, letting it slide through the element as he continued flying. ‘But…’ His teeth clenched and his eyes screwed shut as he suddenly plunged into the freezing water, barreling through the clear ocean at such a speed that his surroundings blurred. ‘But why did she act like that? Why?’

“I…I need to think.”

“R-Raven?”

“…It’s okay, Danny. I…I just really need to think.”

She’d practically run out of the room before he could say anything else. That was it. Just an “I need to think” and she’d left without a word of reassurance.

Danny abruptly stopped his flight and punched a craggy rock into bits. He didn’t notice the green energy that left his fist. ‘She said she’d understand!’ His feet hit a large piece of the rubble from the rock; he immediately kicked it into dust. ‘She said she’d understand!’

He opened his eyes, just realizing that he’d closed them before punching the innocent rock into smithereens. Blowing out a stream of bubbles, he flipped over to float aimlessly through the water on his back, staring vacantly upwards. A large gray fish swam lazily above him, ignoring the halfa in its midst.

‘She only needed to think…’

Danny covered his face and curled up into a ball. Then blowing out another stream of bubbles he exhaled his last bit of oxygen, knowing that he would need to come up soon now that he no longer
had any more air in his system. Still, he let himself sink down to the sandy floor, not minding the ever increasing pressure as he ventured deeper into the ocean.

He lay there for a long while until he noticed the ever increasing pain growing in his chest. A stray thought crossed his mind. ‘How long have I been down here?’ He placed his feet under him, preparing to push off. ‘Long enough…’

With an explosion of sand Danny blasted out of the water and into the sun, feeling the rays warm his face. Water trickled from his hair into his face and he whipped his head back and forth, letting a thousand crystal drops fall back into the blue expanse. Inhaling deeply, Danny filled his lungs with much needed oxygen.

He was much calmer now but still apprehensive. It was a good thing that being in his ghost half meant that he could hold his breath as long as he had oxygen in his lungs. He still had to exhale but at a much slower rate than the average human.

Unconcerned, Danny drifted in the air on his back, letting the sun dry him off. When he felt sufficiently dry enough he decided that it was time to head back.

‘Where am I?’ Danny looked around him, trying to determine how far away he was from his temporary home. He couldn’t see the tower anywhere; for all he knew he was in the middle of nowhere, hovering above an endless expanse of the ocean.

“I know I didn’t fly that long,” Danny murmured, disconcerted. He shaded his eyes, trying to see if there were any black dots on the horizon. “Where the hell is that tower?”

He wanted to be back there. And then he was. Danny stumbled in the air, blinking in amazement at the tower that had suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

No… Not out of nowhere.

He had teleported inadvertently. He had simply wanted to be there and he was, without any conscious act on his part.

This was getting too confusing for his taste.

‘What is up with my powers?’ Danny stared at his gloved hands. For a moment they were too bright to stare at. Then they faded back to their normal hue. “Huh,” he muttered. “Freaky…”

Swallowing out of nervousness, Danny flew back to where his room was. He’d expected to get there in a couple of minutes at the leisurely pace he was flying at. Instead, he got there in thirty seconds and nearly rammed into the window. As it was, only his intangibility reflexes saved him from an ungraceful splat.

Danny braced to a halt inside his room, scratching the back of his neck as he pondered the recent development. If he’d flown so fast at that moment without realizing it, what did it mean for how fast he had been flying/swimming in the ocean?

He frowned as the math slowly worked out. ‘No way… So that means I really was in the middle of nowhere.’ Danny looked at himself in the reflection of the room’s only light bulb. The distortion made his ghostly features look strange. “What is going on?”

It was a horrible mess. But it had been worse before. Even Danny could tell that much from the bags of rubbish lying at the side. There was a fine coat of dust covering everything and many of the things
made out of glass, even the windows, were gone. The result was a permanent wind that kept blowing through papers and dislodging the lighter weights in the living room/kitchen.

“Danny!”

He flushed when Starfire dashed over to him. *He* was the one responsible for the damage. So why did she seem so happy to see him?

“Raven was asking for you,” Starfire continued, oblivious to Danny’s thoughts. “She did not stay to help us do the cleaning up for she said you and she had the unfinished business.”

Danny’s head jerked. Had he been gone that long? He looked for the clock but saw that it lay in pieces on the kitchen counter…next to the remnants of the poor sink.

“What time is it?” Danny asked uncertainly.

Starfire started, “It is—”

“About five,” Danny finished after a glance outside, garnering a curious look from Starfire.

“Dude!” Beast Boy popped out from under the couch, completely dusty. “How’d you know? The clock’s broken.” He pointed unnecessarily to the sad state of the clock.

“Yeah.” Cyborg emerged by the sink; he looked rather wet. “Starfire didn’t even say.”

Danny shrugged, uncomfortable under the scrutiny. “I’ve always wanted to be an astronaut,” he said as an explanation.

Robin jumped down from somewhere Danny couldn’t ascertain, landing next to the ghost teen and causing him to flinch in surprise. He was nodding decisively. “That explains it. It’s a useful skill to have,” he complimented.

Shuffling his feet, Danny changed the subject. “Um…you said R-Raven’s asked for me?” He cursed himself for the stutter. ‘Nice going, Fenton. Now they’ll know that something’s up.’

Starfire studied him for a long moment.

Danny squirmed slightly. “What?”

“You need not worry,” the alien stated.

Danny started at that. “Worry?” He gave a nervous laugh. “Oh no, I’m not—”

Beast Boy cut him off. “Don’t worry about it. Raven won’t bite…”

Danny thought it sounded rather like he’d left off a “much.” “It’s not that…” He couldn’t help but flush again as he saw the cracked plasma TV. It was swinging in the wild wind.

Beast Boy saw the look. “And don’t worry about the TV either. Cyborg’s wanted to get a new one anyway.”

The Titan in question came up behind Danny. “It’s true. This’ll just put a jumpstart in my plans.”

“There’s…just so much.” Danny confessed, shooting a glance at an overstuffed garbage bag. “Even the windows are gone and it looks like they’ve been pulverized into dust.” He rubbed the back of his neck, scuffing the ground. The dust looked suspiciously shiny. “It’s all my fault.”
“That it is,” Robin agreed charitably, earning himself glares from his friends. “But like Beast Boy said, I wouldn’t worry too much about it. We’ve had worse.”

Danny had trouble believing that. “Okay…”

“Seriously,” Beast Boy spoke up. “If you’re upset about a loss of control, I’ll let you know that the same thing happened to me after I got exposed to a vat of dangerous chemicals.” He grinned bashfully, lifting a shoulder.

Danny inclined his head. “That’s part of the reason,” he admitted.

“Is it because of what you and Raven talked about?” Starfire shrewdly guessed.

Danny bit his lip and nodded slowly.

“Whatever it is, Raven will understand,” she assured him. “She has gone through much.”

“All of us have,” Robin muttered. That earned him a conk on the head from Cyborg. “Ow!” He rubbed the spot, scowling.

“I’m just worried about my future,” Danny said in a low voice.

“The rest of us are, too,” Starfire responded.

She clasped her hands together, her thumbs flicking each other nervously. “I once saw a disturbing one of my friends,” she continued, her eyes fixated on her thumbs. “It’s what would have happened if I wasn’t there.” Her eyes closed. “Robin was working alone; Cyborg couldn’t leave the tower; Beast Boy was in a carnival side show; and Raven…” Here her voice dropped. “…Raven had lost her sanity.”

Danny’s eyes widened. “What?”

Starfire’s green eyes met his own and she smiled sadly. “It was not a good future. I was scared it would come to pass…but the future Cyborg told me it was only because I had disappeared…disappeared into that future.” She reached out and took Robin’s hand, her smile happier now; Robin was also smiling. “I don’t have to worry now because I changed it.”

Looking at their intertwined hands, Danny missed Sam. He missed her vibrant and sarcastic personality; she always knew how to lift him up…even though she hadn’t been particularly successful at that lately.

Still, Danny could see how similar Starfire’s story was to his own. Yet he was unable to say anything as Raven appeared then.

“Oh good,” she said, standing at the top of the stairs, the wind making her cloak billow around dramatically. “I’ve found you.”

“This is my room.” Raven let Danny in before closing the door behind her. “Ignore the mess. I haven’t gotten around to cleaning up the books.” Even as she said this, her magic was closing books and putting them on bookshelves.

Even though Danny was surprised to see this, he was more preoccupied with the many queer and fascinating objects Raven had accumulated. He was particularly taken with a pair of masks – one sad and one happy. It reminded him of the lectures Mr. Lancer had given on the Greek actors.
Raven allowed Danny a few more minutes before starting to speak again. “I promised you that I would tell you my story.”

Danny snapped his eyes back to her figure. She was by a desk that had a mirror attached to it. Her reflection showed her looking down. Curious, Danny went up behind her to see what she was looking at.

It was an ivory mirror. The strange thing about the mirror was that there was no reflection, just empty black. An involuntary shiver traveled down his spine as he recalled being trapped in that same black in his recent nightmares.

Raven noticed. “Are you all right?”

Danny mentally shook himself. ‘Geez, Fenton, get a grip! They’re just nightmares!’ He inhaled before answering, “Y-yeah. I’m listening.”

Raven gave Danny a long considering look. “I was born on a different world; the world called Azarath,” she finally said. “My mother and father were from two different races. My mother was a human and my father…”

Danny saw four red eyes blinking at him from the mirror. “Agh!”

Raven had her eyes closed. “…my father was a demon.”

As she said these words, Danny found himself sucked into the mirror. “Aaaahhh – ow!” He’d landed on his face on something hard and cool. Picking himself up, he found himself staring at Raven’s feet. “Er, Raven?”

“I probably should have warned you.” Raven smiled apologetically, watching Danny climb to his rather shaky feet. “The mirror that we were standing by in my room is a portal into a reflection of my mind.”

“Okay…” Danny turned in a full circle, absorbing his surroundings. It was unnaturally dark and yet he could see himself and Raven as clearly as if it were day. They were on a craggy stone path that seemed to be suspended in the darkness like the stone slabs in the Ghost Zone. Every now and then Danny could see what seemed to be arches on the pathway. “It’s…nice.”

Raven stepped over to the edge, looking into the blackness. “You don’t have to lie.”

“I’m not.” An incredulous raised eyebrow from Raven made Danny quickly add, “Okay so I was stretching it a bit. Seriously, though, it reminds me a lot of the Ghost Zone so it’s kind of familiar. Minus the green. And the floating doors.” Danny realized he was going off track. “Anyway, you were saying?”

Raven gave a small smile before looking out again into the blackness. “When I was born a prophecy was made that after my sixteenth birthday I would destroy the world. My father would use me as a portal…and I would inadvertently be the cause for the destruction of the world.”

“That’s crazy!”

“Is it?” Raven smiled at him wearily. “In order to escape my fate, I left Azarath and arrived on Earth. I’d meant to spend my days alone but instead found my friends and joined the Titans. I never told any of them about my past. They still don’t know the full story.”

There was a long silence as she seemed to collect her thoughts. “On my sixteenth birthday Slade
came to claim me on my father’s orders. Robin probably told you about him.”

“Slade? Yeah, he did. Sounds like a real nice guy.”

“In any case, I tried to fight him. It only resulted in Slade branding me as the jewel that would be the portal for the world’s destruction. He showed me a vision of the world turned to rubble, with my friends turned to stone in the middle of it.”

Danny swallowed thickly, rubbing his arms. A sudden cold seemed to have hit him.

Raven didn’t appear to have noticed. “Robin promised me that they would do everything to fight the prophecy, even though I warned him it was useless. Eventually, despite my friends’ best efforts, it did come to pass. My father entered Earth through me and laid waste to the planet in a mere few hours.”

Suddenly, out of the blackness, a large face with four glowing red slanted eyes emerged. The face was red skinned and the mouth was filled with fangs. The hair was white and framed the face. It snarled once at Danny.

“Aah!” Danny leaned backwards in alarm and fell over.

Then, the face disappeared.

Danny stared blankly at the space it had been in. “Huh?”

Raven had a hand on her arm and her eyes closed. “Don’t worry. Whatever images are here is just what my mind makes up. What you just saw was my father.”

“Your…” Danny swallowed. “…father.” He climbed to his feet, wiping his forehead with an arm. “You said he destroyed your world. How…”

“My friends again.” Raven had a rare warm smile on her face. “Robin refused to give up and joined forces with Slade and the rest of the Titans to try and fight my father. They found me as a small child and almost completely amnesic. Even at that small age I kept insisting it was impossible to defeat him. It wasn’t until I saw the courageous efforts of my friends that I garnered the courage to muster enough power to defeat my father.”

Danny had crouched down on the edge of the stone path next to Raven. “So your friends helped you.”

“If it weren’t for them, this world wouldn’t exist. You’d probably be dead or fighting my father.”

For some reason, a shiver ran up Danny’s spine thinking about that. “Your dad…”

“Trigon.”

“Trigon…he was an evil demon, wasn’t he?”

“One of the worst,” Raven agreed.

“And this prophecy…” Danny sounded uncertain. It sounded too much like Clockwork and his viewing mirrors.

“Meant absolutely nothing after it actually happened. I thought I couldn’t change my future and accepted it at the last moment.” Her eyes closed. “It’s not something I’m proud of. I practically gave up; only my friends kept fighting for me and for the world.”
“So you changed your future, even though it was already predetermined.”

“No, Danny. Our futures are what we want them to be. Prophecies are just maybes, things that might happen.”

“Yours did happen.”

“Because I let it,” Raven said simply. “If I hadn’t…if I’d fought against it…it might never have come to be.”

‘Like me and my future.’ Danny looked down at his shoes. ‘If I hadn’t promised my family I wouldn’t turn into him, it might actually have happened. If I hadn’t fought…if things had turned out the same way…’ He voiced his thought quietly, “You and I are really alike.”

“We are, aren’t we.” It wasn’t a question. “And it should tell you that your future isn’t set in stone, no matter what your future self says.”

“But then…why do I still have the powers that he has? The ghostly wail…ecto-electricity…” Danny swallowed. “Why would I have them if I can change the future?”

Raven looked like she was choosing her words carefully. “Your ghost half is in your genes and your powers develop as you grow and become stronger. Like muscles, you can make them stronger or weaker, depending on how you use them. When you’re small…” She paused for a moment. “…you’re weak and can’t do much because you don’t know how. But as you grow you become more used to using your body. And depending on what kind of sports you do, your body becomes specialized in certain avenues.”

Raven brushed a hand through her hair. “You’ll develop these powers as you get stronger.”

“Did you ever think that maybe you’re developing these powers because you’re getting stronger? That we’re getting stronger?” Danny blinked as the memory filtered into his brain. His ghost half had stood before him then…

“Danny?” Raven looked at him concernedly.

“Wait…” He sounded dazed, remembering more and more of the conversation that he’d had with his ghost half.

“Vlad didn’t have all his powers when he first became half-ghost. He got ’em as he grew in strength.”

“Control will come naturally,” Danny said slowly, repeating what his ghost half had said before.

“Exactly,” Raven said, slightly confused. It was slightly off topic but Danny had been gazing off into space mere moments before. “Danny?”

“So it’s just because I’m getting stronger. Not because I’m turning into my future self.” Danny seemed to be figuring things out.

Raven tilted her head forward in acknowledgement, still wondering what had caused this breakthrough for Danny. “So you understand?”

Danny smiled, looking like a great weight had been lifted off his shoulders. “Yeah. I think I do…”
The next day…

“Oh, oh! A little more to the left, Danny!”

“No, to the right!”

“Aargh! Why are you guys helping him?”

Cyborg and Danny were playing a racing video game on the brand new plasma TV Cyborg had somehow managed to get in the short span of the time since the last one had been destroyed. It was securely fastened to the wall and the wind that was still rushing through the living room/kitchen was unable to budge it. The windows that had been around the TV were replaced, as was the clock, sink, and mini-fridge. The many other windows had yet to be replaced, though.

Back to the video game…

Currently, Danny was winning by a nose hair. The rest of the Titans were at his back and egging him on to win much to Cyborg’s disgruntlement.

Cyborg suddenly managed to get the lead after a hairpin turn. “Hah! Who’s the better one now?”

Danny grinned and rammed right into Cyborg during the next turn, sending the half-robot’s car flipping right over the edge.

“Wha—? No fair!”

Danny flew – figuratively – over the finish lane and leapt to his feet in triumph. “Yes! I won!”

“Great job, man, but watch the controller!” Beast Boy warned.

Because Danny had earlier mutated one of the controllers and completely wrecked it, he was only allowed to play under the condition that he put them down when he became too emotional. Raven had told him that even if he couldn’t feel the ecto-electricity now, emotions played a large role in controlling powers. So far, he hadn’t mutated anything.

“Ah…right.” Danny placed the controller on the couch before giving Beast Boy a high five. “That was awesome! I’ve never played a racing game like that before!”

“Man, Cyborg!” Beast Boy turned to his friend. “You got owned there!”

“I was going easy on him!” Cyborg claimed.

“At a personal new best?” Beast Boy pointed to the time at the top left corner of the screen. “You’ve never gone that fast! Just admit it: Danny’s better!”

“It’d be so much easier if I could actually race the car myself!”

While Beast Boy and Cyborg kept arguing back and forth, Cyborg’s remark had actually stirred an old memory in Danny’s brain about actually being in the game to take care of Technus.

“What are you thinking?” Raven asked, recognizing that far off look in Danny’s eyes as a sign that the teen was thinking.

“Huh?” The rest of the Titans collectively looked over from the spat between Beast Boy and Cyborg to see what Raven was talking about.
“This is going to be fun,” was all Danny said. He then grabbed Cyborg’s controller and started a new game.

“Fun to rub it in?” Cyborg snatched the controller back. “Don’t get so cocky. This time I’m going to win.”

But before the game could start, Danny paused it on his controller.

“Hey! What’s the deal?” Cyborg protested.

“You can’t race without the game being on,” Robin said, wondering what Danny was playing at.

“Yeah, I know.” Danny transformed via a bright flash of bluish-white light. “But what I have in mind is so much cooler.”

Without another word of explanation, Danny grabbed Cyborg, turned both of them intangible, and phased into the TV.

The rest of the team was stunned silent for a long moment, staring at the screen which still showed a paused video game.

“Okay…” It was Beast Boy who spoke. “Am I the only one who didn’t get what just happened?”

Danny was discovering that phasing into a TV to play the game was very different from phasing into a computer. Luckily for Cyborg, he knew what he was doing and they appeared in the video game with no problem.

Once he was on stable ground Cyborg immediately peeled himself away from Danny to demand, “What the hell was that?”

Danny grinned at him. “Look around you.”

It took Cyborg another moment to register that he was in the digital world and among the cars he had only dreamed of racing. “No way…”

Danny laughed at the awestruck look on Cyborg’s face. “You said you actually wanted to race the cars, right?”

“But how is this possible?”

“Actually,” another voice said, “I’d like to know that, too.”

“Yagh!” Cyborg stumbled backwards at the miniature screen above them that showed the rest of the Titans peering in.

Danny was only mildly surprised, having expected something like that. “Okay. That’s new.”

“You’ve done this before?” Robin asked, his voice echoing.

“Just once when chasing after Technus. It was a really cool experience but I haven’t done it since.” Danny shrugged at the incredulous looks they were shooting him. “You’ve gotta admit, actually being in a role playing game makes it unfair for the other players. Especially if you’ve got ghost powers.”

“I never thought about that,” Cyborg said as Starfire squealed, “How chivalrous!”
“Er, thanks, Starfire.” Danny turned to Cyborg. “Just hop in your car. Then we can get going.”

“Oh man…” Cyborg stepped up to the car he had previously only been remotely controlling. Tears shone in his eyes. “This is like a dream come true.”

Danny grinned and hopped into his, a green and black race car with an open top. Cyborg’s was blue and white and covered.

“So…” Cyborg reverently opened his door, slid in, and closed it. “What are the rules?”

“No holds-barred race?” Danny offered. “Any and all powers acceptable?”

Cyborg frowned. “You’ll cream me with your powers!”

“All right…” Danny pretended to think. “I’ll just stick with my basic ghost powers. How about that?”

“Sounds good to me,” Cyborg agreed, not knowing what kind of powers Danny was talking about.

“Okay… So intangibility, invisibility, flying, and ghost rays are good to go,” Danny said cheerfully.

“Yeah,” Cyborg agreed. Then it seemed to register what Danny had said. “Hey!”

“You’ve got all your gadgets!” Beast Boy’s echoing voice reminded the half-robot.

“All right!” Cyborg grinned at Danny. “This time, you are so going down!”

Danny shot him a wink and gave a thumbs up to their audience. “You can play it!”

With a loud blare, the game was on. Cyborg immediately floored his car, gaining the edge on his opponent. “Booya! This is awesome!”

Ghostly laughter floated around him. Danny materialized next to Cyborg, neck to neck with the half-robot’s car, showing that he had just turned invisible.

He gave Cyborg another grin and shifted a gear, pulling ahead suddenly.

“Oh. Bad idea,” Cyborg muttered, noting that a turn was coming up. He gave his car a little more gas and transformed his right arm into a cannon.

The moment the two entered the turn, Cyborg unleashed his attack.

“Ha!” The blue attack hit the halfa’s car dead on, knocking it right over the edge. “Yes, baby! I’ve still got it!”

“You have got good aim. I’ll give you that much.” Danny rose up, driving next to the street. “But you probably want to check to be sure I’m down for the count.”

“What the—!” Cyborg gawked at the sight. “You’re flying!”

Yep.” Danny curved with the street, lifting his left hand, which was flaring green. “And so are you.”

“Huh?” Cyborg didn’t appear to register the mild threat until Danny’s ghost ray hit him on the side and tipped him rich over the edge of the barricade. “Agh!”
'That was more powerful than I meant to make it,' Danny thought, slightly confused. ‘It shouldn’t have tipped him that far over.’

While falling, Cyborg experienced a sudden displacement and abruptly found himself about ten meters behind Danny and still racing. From experience, he knew that he had two lives left.

He transformed his right arm back into a cannon and fired directly at Danny’s behind. Because he’d been absolutely quiet and hadn’t said a word, he didn’t expect the car and Danny to turn intangible, allowing the sonic shot to shoot off into the distance.

‘How did he?’ Cyborg mentally ran over everything he’d done. ‘There’s no way he could’ve known I’d do that unless he’s psychic!’

Danny, of course, wasn’t psychic at all. The whirring of the cannon had alerted him to Cyborg’s intentions and he’d simply gone intangible. This was turning out to be more fun than he’d thought. He had to do this with his friends once he got back.

The aggressive revving of the engine behind him informed him that Cyborg was getting impatient. The course they were on was almost finished and the Titan wasn’t eager to lose again.

Maybe a small taunt would get him more fired up…

“Hey, Cyborg!” Danny called over his shoulder. “Did you know that this is my first time actually driving a car? Never really had to before since I could fly everywhere.”

That did the trick, as Cyborg cut the next turn so close that he caught Danny up.

“Race to the finish?” Danny asked, not taking his eyes off the track.

“You bet! Except it’s not gonna be much of a race!” Cyborg aimed his cannon again at Danny.

Danny acknowledged the challenge. “Wicked!”

Then, moments before the finish line, as Cyborg shot and Danny turned intangible, their world went black.

“Are they…inside the TV?” Robin gaped at the screen, where Danny and Cyborg had very clearly reappeared.

“What the hell was that?” They all jumped at hearing Cyborg’s voice come from the TV.

The white-haired ghost on screen grinned. “Look around you.”

Cyborg did and seemed stunned. “No way…”

Danny laughed. “You said you actually wanted to race the cars, right?”

“But how is this possible?”

“Actually,” Robin murmured, “I’d like to know that, too.”

The sound of Robin’s voice seemed to startle Cyborg, as he let out a yell and stepped backwards in alarm.

Danny simply looked mildly surprised as he looked right at the onlookers. “Okay. That’s new.”
Robin, being the boy wonder he was, caught onto the insinuation. “You’ve done this before?”

When Danny answered affirmatively they all gaped at him. He simply shrugged. “You’ve gotta admit, actually being in a role playing game makes it unfair for the other players. Especially if you’ve got ghost powers.”

As Cyborg talked and Starfire squealed loudly about Danny’s chivalry, Beast Boy muttered enviously, “I wouldn’t care. It’d be awesome being in Kingdom Hearts.”

“Danny’s got a streak of fair play about a mile wide,” Raven said in response to Beast Boy. “He wouldn’t take advantage of something like that ability because he’d be more in control than the other players. This is different as they’re both in the game.”

“So not fair,” Beast Boy groaned, watching Cyborg hop into the car. “I want to do that.”

“Ask him then,” Raven suggested unthinkingly.

The two players were in the middle of outlining the conditions of their race. Danny was saying, “I’ll just stick with my basic ghost powers. How about that?”

Raven remembered the talk she’d had with Danny about ghost powers and sighed as Cyborg quickly agreed. “He has no idea what he’s getting into.”

“What do you mean?” Starfire asked.

Danny answered the question for her. “So intangibility, invisibility, flying, and ghost rays are good to go.”

“Oh.” Starfire seemed rather subdued. “That doesn’t seem particularly fair,” she added softly, seeing Cyborg’s stunned surprise as he fully realized what he’d gotten himself into.

“I said Danny has a wide streak of fair play but he does like to have fun,” Raven said as Beast Boy encouraged Cyborg. “Playing tricks and confusing his opponents are two ways to do so.”

They saw Danny give Cyborg a wink before looking back at them, giving a thumbs up. “You can play it!”

Before any of them could reach for the controller, the game started. They turned around to see who had done it, keeping half an eye on the race. They were surprised to see that it was Wulf, who had woken from his nap.

“Loud,” he said in a guttural voice. He continued in Esperanto. “Aŭd li diras ’play’ tial mi faris.”

Naturally, the only one who understood was Beast Boy. “Aŭd li diras ’play’ tial mi faris.”

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Naturally, the only one who understood was Beast Boy. “You know how to handle a video game controller?” he asked, surprised. He almost missed the surprise Cyborg had when seeing Danny suddenly appear next to him.

“Press play.” Wulf held it out, demonstrating. “Simple.” He gave a shrug.

“Whoa!” Robin exclaimed. “Wasn’t that overkill, Cyborg? You have no clue if he’s going to survive that!”

“What?” Beast Boy looked at the screen and saw that Danny was missing. “What happened? I can’t believe I missed that!”

“Fantoma estos monpun,” Wulf asserted.
Sure enough, Danny popped up next to Cyborg, flying next to the track.

“See?” Wulf grinned wolfishly.

The Titans – except for Beast Boy – glanced among each other, not sure what Wulf had said before except that it had been about Danny.

“Man!” Beast Boy gripped Raven’s arm so tightly she winced. “Danny just knocked him straight off!”

“Cyborg did the same to him,” Starfire said. “And he is uninjured.”

“But has two lives left,” Robin observed. “I wonder what happens when they run out.”

They saw Cyborg try to launch his failed sneak attack on Danny.

“Is he psychic?” Beast Boy asked, confused. “Cy didn't make a sound!”

“Cannon loud,” Wulf commented. “Phantom heard.”

“That makes sense,” Raven said. “I wonder what other talents he has.”

“Did you know that this is my first time actually driving a car? Never really had to before since I could fly everywhere.”

“That was mean,” Starfire said, hugging her arms. “He was…rubbing Cyborg’s face.”

“Fantoma estas fama por liaj humuraj rimarkoj en batalo,” Wulf said. “Estas lia metodo por ..i ekscitaj liaj oponantoj.”

As he was the only one there who understood Esperanto, Beast Boy was relegated to the role of translator.

“Well, it seemed to work,” Raven said. “Cyborg is back in the race.”

“And about to fire again!” Robin pointed out unnecessarily, leaning forward.

“Danny can see that happening!” Starfire said, also leaning forward.

“They’re almost at the finish line!” Beast Boy gushed, his fingers digging into the couch. Raven had moved in order to spare her arm the agony.

Then, all of a sudden, the video game abruptly shut off. The screen flashed black and the turned on again to an emergency news broadcast.

An announcer with squinty eyes and a really big mouth stood there behind a desk with Jump City in the background. “We interrupt your program to bring this emergency news broadcast. The dangerous criminal Mumbo Jumbo has escaped and is on the loose.” Next to the announcer’s head were two photos: one of an innocent looking balding guy and the other of a blue-skinned masked man with a devilish grin and black top hat. “Caution is advised. The criminal is considered armed and dangerous.”

“We have to go after him!” Robin said immediately as the screen turned black again.

“What about Danny and Cyborg?” Starfire said worriedly. “They are still in the TV!”
“How are we supposed to get them out?” Beast Boy started inspecting the TV. “We’re not ghosts!”

Their dilemma was solved as Danny exited the TV with Cyborg in tow.

“Sorry,” he apologized, letting Cyborg go. “I didn’t expect that to happen.”

Starfire glomped both of them. “You are all right! We were all worried!”

“Erk…” Cyborg gasped. “Can’t breathe…Starfire.”

“There’s no time to celebrate, though,” Robin said, standing by his girlfriend as she stepped back hurriedly and apologized. “Mumbo is on the loose.”

“Mumbo?” Danny raised an eyebrow, rubbing his sides as he did. “Seriously? And they have trouble keeping a guy named like that locked up?”

“He’s a dangerous criminal,” Robin said with a slightly defensive tone.

“Who apparently needs to be locked up in the loony bin,” Danny muttered. “We going then?”

“We’ll be going. You’re staying,” Robin said. “Mumbo is our business.”

Although he really wanted to object, Danny could see the sense in what Robin said. He was about to let the subject drop when a stream of cold air forced its way past his lips, giving the impression that he was smoking. At the same time he felt horribly cold.

“What is that?” Beast Boy asked.

“M-my g-ghost ssse-ense,” Danny stammered, blowing out more blue air. “B-but this…” He coughed, expelling out the last of it. “…is new.”

Raven’s eyebrows disappeared into her hairline. Now that was interesting. Why would his sense suddenly change? “How new?”

“I first noticed when Wulf appeared. Then it really made an appearance with that ghost.”

“So only after the Puppet King,” Raven mused.

“Do you have a reason why?”

“Maybe. I need to think some more.”

“But first, we’ve got that Mumbo Jumbo to take care of,” Cyborg said, looking at something on his arm. “He’s downtown.”

“Mumbo Jumbo,” Danny muttered disbelievingly. “Now I’ve really heard it all.”

“All right, Titans,” Robin announced, “move out!”

“I’m coming with,” Danny declared. “I’ll handle the ghost.”

“Mi estas rezultanta ankaŭ,” Wulf said, standing directly over Danny.


Danny and Wulf shared a glance as the Titans left the living room/kitchen. Then they both flew out of the tower via the windows.
Although the Titans knew where Mumbo was, they would have to look for the ghost.
“He was last seen in the vicinity of the magic store!” Cyborg said, speeding through an intersection. He was talking into the Titan’s yellow com that was in Beast Boy’s hand, who was sitting next to him.

“All right, then.” Robin’s voice was firm. “You know the drill with this guy.”

“You mean don’t run into his wand?” Beast Boy asked. “Because, dude, that thing is nasty.”

“We all know what he’s capable of,” Raven said, her voice static-filled through the com. Her dry voice and the com didn’t seem to mix together.

Beast Boy noticed. “Rave, there’s something wrong with your voice.”

“Really? Because from up here, I can’t hear a thing besides the wind and your voices.”

“Oh yeah? From in here I can’t see a thing besides the car’s windshield and the com!”

“Give me that.” Cyborg snatched the com out from Beast Boy’s hand. “You got anything else besides that, Rob?” he asked, ignoring the death glares Beast Boy was sending him.

“We’ll get through it,” was Robin’s only reply. “Just – aagh!”

Starfire was the first to respond worriedly. “Robin? Is everything all right?”

“Snakes, snakes! I can’t stand snakes!” was the only reply they got before the com abruptly shut off.

“If you’re not going to tell us what’s wrong, I will.” Cyborg shouted. “流淌 something!”

“Since when?” Beast Boy asked, confused.

“Good question, BB. But not one we’ll find an answer to—”

His car buddy cut him off. “Dude, watch out!” Beast Boy grabbed the wheel from his friend and jerked it to the side, narrowly missing a mailbox that was innocently sitting in the street.

“What the hell was that?” Cyborg cried, too surprised to berate Beast Boy about touching his baby. He stopped the car abruptly, twisting around to see the mailbox still sitting there. “A mailbox in the middle of the street?”

“Maybe we should keep driving?” Beast Boy suggested, getting a creepy feeling.

“No way.” Cyborg checked the street signs. “We’re close to that magic store. Mumbo might have done something here.”

“This isn’t Mumbo’s style. He’s more flambi,” Beast Boy argued.

Cyborg stopped in the middle of opening his door, staring incredulously at Beast Boy. “‘Flambi’? What’s that?”

“You know! He likes being big!” Beast Boy got out of the car, meeting Cyborg’s eyes over the roof.

“You mean flamboyant?” Cyborg closed the door, locking the car with a beep.

“Yeah, that!” Beast Boy agreed, nodding.
Cyborg was spared from having to lament at Beast Boy’s deplorable vocabulary when the mailbox suddenly developed arms and a ferocious mouth where the letter drop entrance was. Razor sharp white teeth added to the stunning effect.

“What the hell?” was all Cyborg managed to say.

Beast Boy’s “Dude” wasn’t much more eloquent.

The two Titans had no chance to say anything else as the mailbox attacked with a deluge of letters. And if you try to say that they’re wimps for screaming and dodging, you haven’t felt the pain of a paper cut.

“I hate envelopes!” Cyborg shouted, shooting his sonic cannon left and right and incinerating dozens of envelopes.

“Since when?” Beast Boy shouted back, dodging under a nearby Lexus as Cyborg’s sonic cannon blast went too close for comfort. “Watch it!”

“Since now!” Cyborg shot back, sending two dozen envelopes to meet their maker in tree heaven. With the path momentarily clear, he immediately aimed at the mailbox, hitting it with pinpoint accuracy.

The bluish-white blast smashed into the possessed object and sent it flying down the street. When it finally crashed into a lamppost, it was blackened and looked quite normal – if dented. All the letters flopped down to the ground, giving the impression of a hailstorm.

“Is it back to normal?” Beast Boy asked, peeking out from under the car. He sneezed as paper particles went up his nose. “Ew.”

“As normal as it gets,” Cyborg confirmed, turning his arm back to normal. “What on earth was that?”

“I dunno.” Beast Boy made his way to Cyborg’s side to stare at the remnants of what had used to be an innocent mailbox. “I wish we could find out, though.”

Green smoke started to swirl around their feet and a soft and seductive voice said in a rhythmic voice, “So you have wished it, so it shall be!”

The two Titans’ eyes bugged out when a beautiful green-skinned black-haired woman with red eyes materialized out of nowhere, a wicked smile gracing her red lips. She had no legs but a long shimmery blue tail that reminded them of Danny’s tail in ghost form. Her only clothing was a blue bra and pieces of jewelry on her arms. A faint glow surrounded her form.

“Who’re you?” Beast Boy blurted.

The woman stopped smiling to frown. “You can see me?” Her voice echoed slightly. There was a small beat before she grimaced in realization. “The wish was to find out what happened. Ugh. But who cares. It’s not like you can stop me.” The wicked smile was back on her face.

Cyborg and Beast glanced at each other, not sure what the woman was talking about.

Cyborg took the incentive to step forward and take an offensive stance. “Who are you?”

The woman’s smile widened even more if that was possible and her red eyes gleamed malevolently. “Who am I? I’m Desiree”—her hands glowed green—“the genie. And you two have just fallen underneath my spell.”
Cyborg and Beast realized they were in deep trouble when the street below their feet began cracking and the sewage pipes emerged with horrible deformities.

Who knew a gorgeous woman could cause so much trouble?

“Aargh! Snakes!” Robin was currently in a bind – pun intended. Green slithery snakes were wound around his torso, arms, and legs. They were hissing something fierce.

He was so busy trying to free himself from the icky things that he almost missed the sudden appearance of the villain he had come to stop. Only the crazy high-pitched laughter of Mumbo alerted him to the presence.

“Mumbo!” he snarled, stopping his struggles to glare at the wizard.

“You look to be in a bind, Robbie!” Mumbo said jauntily, twirling his black wand through his fingers. He had a large hooked nose and a mask similar to the one Robin had. His black top hat and magician’s cape completed the ensemble. His light blue skin was the only oddity. “Mayhap you could use some help?” He burst into laughter at this as if he had told some crazy joke.

Robin’s only response was an inarticulate roar as he whipped out his staff and gave it a swirl. He fully intended on taking Mumbo down, snakes or no snakes.

“Ah ah ah…” Mumbo waved a long gloved finger. “Abracadabra!” With a swish of his wand and an evil smirk, the staff Robin held turned into a long snake.

“Agh!” Robin let go of the snake without thinking and it flew towards Mumbo’s open hand, where it promptly turned into a staff again.

“Nice staff!” Mumbo cackled, twirling it so fast it was a blur. “But it’d be better like this!” He gave the staff a tap with his wand and it turned into a beautiful pink flower. “Flower?” he offered Robin, who was getting redder by the second. A virtual volcano was storming above his black hair.

“Mumbo…” Robin growled. The volcano that had been storming suddenly erupted. “That’s it! You’re going down!” Heedless of the snakes still on his body, Robin sprinted towards Mumbo, fully intending on taking the mad wizard down with his bare hands.

All Mumbo did was cackle and drop the flower to the ground. He paused, still grinning maniacally, to swish his wand and say, “Mumbo jumbo!”

Robin realized that the ground beneath his feet was giving way just before he felt someone grab him under the arms and save him from an untimely demise. A look revealed it to be Starfire. “Thanks,” he grumbled, still stewing.

A second later the snakes glowed black and unraveled from Robin’s body. The doer of this marvelous deed was revealed to be Raven as she undid the spell with a mere wave of her hand. “You looked to be in a bind,” she commented dryly.

“I hate snakes,” was all he said.

Starfire turned around, Robin still in her hands, and faced Mumbo Jumbo. The villain was on the streets and glaring up at the three Titans. Behind him lay the remnants of the street where Robin would have plunged to his doom.

“That’s strange,” Raven said slowly, her violet eyes taking in the damage. “His spells aren’t normally
“I think that was the aim.” Raven drifted by Robin, brushing a hand along his arm and wiping off something white. “Those snakes were poisonous. You’re lucky they didn’t bite you.”

Robin couldn’t repress a shudder even as his eyes narrowed. “He’s going down,” he promised in a low voice.

As they were talking, Mumbo had been fingering his chin with his wand. Just as Robin had promised vengeance on the wizard, he swished his magical stick and aimed it at the trio.

“What is he doing?” Starfire asked. “He did not even – oh!”

Her exclamation was mirrored by Robin (although Raven emitted a mere grunt) as they all glowed green and plummeted to the ground. They landed heavily and Robin tried his best to soften the fall for his girlfriend. Once they were sure they had no broken bones, they rolled to their feet and assumed battle stances.

“What was that?” Robin demanded.

“I cannot fly!” Starfire said agitatedly, jumping up and down. Raven came to the same conclusion after she jumped up once only to come back to the ground.

“Answer me!” Robin demanded again, stepping protectively in front of his flightless girlfriend. “What did you do to them?”

“Me?” Mumbo said innocently. “Absolutely nothing! People can’t fly, you know. Perhaps they’ve gone a bit”—he lowered his voice—“loco.” He expressively twirled his finger by his temple in the sign for “crazy.”

“Funny. I’d say the same thing for magic,” Raven shot back, lifting a glowing black hand. On cue, the blocks of the demolished street behind Mumbo levitated.

Robin took out a spare staff and gripped it tightly in his hands. Starfire’s hands were covered by green orbs. Before Mumbo could act, Starfire had flung the orbs in his direction. Mumbo cackled madly and, with a sweep of his robe, disappeared from view. He reappeared a short distance away, completely unscathed.

“You have just witnessed the magnificent Mumbo Jumbo teleport!” he announced grandiosely. “You shall now see his next great magic act!” Grinning maniacally, he twirled his wand. “Abracadabra!” The unearthed sewer pipes glowed green and began snaking through the air, spewing brown water everywhere.

Starfire gasped. “That…is not normal.”

Raven narrowed her eyes, making a mental note of the green color the pipes had glowed. “No. It’s not.”

Robin’s eyes were flicking from pipe to pipe as his quick mind calculated any options available to them. The rocks were still floating around them. “Raven…what are you planning on doing with those rocks?”

Raven shot him a look, raising both hands, which were glowing black. “This.” With a yell, she
swept them downwards, unleashing the rocks towards the insane magician.

“Raven!” Starfire gasped.

“If he’s trying to kill us, then I don’t have any problem with retaliating in kind,” Raven said grimly. “Unless you want to die?”

Starfire didn’t answer as she was busy dodging a rampant sewer pipe that slammed into the street where she had been standing. Robin dove to the ground and rolled to his knees, sprinting forward under another sewer pipe. Raven’s attack had simply seemed to set off the sewer pipes.

Raven put up black shields that the sewer pipes bounced off of, her violet eyes narrowing in on Mumbo. The man was completely unfazed by her violent attack. Before Mumbo could do anything else, she had sunken through the street. Two seconds later, she rose from the street in a swirl of black.

Before she could do anything, however, a sewer pipe attacked in a split second, knocking right into her and flinging her into a building. Black enveloped her, cushioning what would have been a grievous blow.

It didn’t stop Starfire from fearfully exclaiming, “Raven!”

Mumbo cackled gleefully. “You should be more concerned with yourself! Ridikkulus!”

Ignoring the blatant Harry Potter rip off, Robin and Starfire scrambled for cover as dangerous knives shot towards them. For the record, that was so not funny. Starfire managed to roll under a Buick. Robin was more unfortunate as a stray knife buried itself in his calf.

“Aargh!” His high pain tolerance allowed him to hop forward a couple of steps before falling down and gripping his leg. He pulled the knife out with a squelch, applying pressure as he did and grunting in pain.

Starfire crawled out from beside the car. “Robin!”

Mumbo wasted no time in waving his wand and sending another wave of knives towards a hapless Starfire.

Raven, recovering from her earlier bout with the wall, saw her plight. “Starfire, watch out!”

Starfire turned her head at the warning, eyes widening at the hail of sharp and very shiny knives headed her way.

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After leaving the tower, Danny and Wulf had to fly over the city in search of the ghost that had set off Danny’s ghost sense. They wasted fifteen minutes doing so without a trace of the ghost. Danny had swept through the streets and buildings, leaving Wulf to more sedately inspect the areas where he was.

When the two met up again, they both had to admit that they couldn’t find the ghost or any trace of it.

“I wish I hadn’t fried the Fenton Finder,” Danny complained, sighing. He scratched the back of his neck, green eyes scanning the rooftops.

From his place on a roof, Wulf barked out a short stream of Esperanto. Danny listened and furrowed
his brow thoughtfully. “Use my ghost sense to track the ghost?” He smiled wryly. “Why didn’t I think of that before? Thanks, Wulf.”

Wulf grinned wolfishly, saying, “Welcome.”

Although he had never done this before, Danny closed his eyes in an effort to find his center, that cold spot where his ice powers dwelled. Since his ghost sense was an extension of this power, he hoped he could use this to find the ghost. A sense of coldness flashed through him for a moment before he just knew where the ghost was.

His eyes snapped open. “Got it. Come on, Wulf!”

Without thinking, Danny bolted off. He didn’t see Wulf’s dumbfounded blinks after the black and white blur that had disappeared in the blink of an eye. He knew where the ghost was and was headed straight for it.

Beast Boy and Cyborg had their hands full. Despite her feminine look, Desiree was no piece of cake to deal with. But then again, Cyborg reasoned, neither was Jynx. At least she was on the good side now. The same couldn’t be said for Desiree.

“Why are there enormous rats?” Beast Boy screamed, scampering up a light pole to avoid being chewed up by the rats that were the size of go-karts. He was an animal-lover, but some things went only so far. For him, giant mutated green versions of rats broke that limit.

Cyborg blasted five rats away from him in quick succession, stifling a gag at how they looked. It was enough to give anyone nightmares for months.

For her part, Desiree was smugly floating in the air, admiring her handiwork. She’d been aiming for the green changeling when she cast the spell, but couldn’t complain about the effects.

“Cyyyybooorg!” Beast Boy shrieked, promptly turning into a raven and flying off the pole to escape some particularly acrobatic rats.

“What?” Cyborg snapped, busy with his own pests. He had clambered on top of a Ford Expedition and was fighting from there. He looked disgruntled at the form Beast Boy had taken. “That’s real nice of you! Thanks for leaving the dirty work to me!”

The raven gave a loud croak and morphed into a Tyrannosaurus Rex. The giant dinosaur stomped into the midst of rodents and began squashing them.

Desiree frowned and raised a hand. It glowed green and Beast Boy glowed in response, suddenly shrinking to a third of his size. Needless to say, he was now just as big as the nearest rat. His eyes bulged and he morphed back in time to dodge a snap of sharp teeth.

“Not cool!” Beast Boy screamed in a higher-pitched voice.

Cyborg noted in alarm that his miniaturized friend was about to become rat food as another green rat that was missing half of its face began to pounce. “BB! Behind you!”

Beast Boy failed to turn around in time. Cyborg thought he would have to see his best friend be eaten but a black and white blur zipped through, snatching Beast Boy from the jaws of death – pun intended.

The blur solidified to reveal Danny Phantom, his hair windswept and with Beast Boy in his arms. “Is
it just me or are you smaller?”

Beast Boy ignored the question in favor of gratefully exclaiming, “Dude! You saved me!”

“No prob.” Danny narrowed his eyes at Desiree, who had widened hers upon seeing the half-ghost appear. “I didn’t know you liked rats, Desiree. You always struck me as the kitten type.”

“Phantom…” Desiree clenched her hands into fists.

“So she is a ghost?” Cyborg asked, stopping his attack on the rats.

“She’s a genie ghost,” Danny explained, letting Beast Boy drift to the car Cyborg was one. Cyborg raised his eyebrow at the impressive feat of telekinesis. “Did either of you wish for rats or something?”

“Just BB,” Cyborg said. “That’s when we saw her.”

“I didn’t wish for rats!” Beast Boy protested indignantly. He barely came up to Cyborg’s waist. “And even if I had, I wouldn’t wish for such giant ones!”

“That was me,” Desiree proclaimed, a sinister smile on her face.

“Then I suppose we’ll have to take care of that,” Danny declared, a hand gripping the Fenton Thermos. He uncapped it and pointed it towards Desiree. “I wish you’d go in the thermos!”

There was a long drawn out silence as Desiree remained motionless and Danny kept pointing the thermos at her. After a moment, the only sound was that of a dying rat as Cyborg kicked it off the car and into a lamppost.

Danny frowned. “Why didn’t that work?”

Desiree smirked. “You cannot trap me with that wish!”

“Could’ve fooled me,” Danny muttered, capping the thermos. “Wasn’t that how I caught you the last time? And the time before that?”

“Specific wishes that deal directly with me I am not allowed to grant,” Desiree said, grinning evilly. “But I can cast spells of my own.”

“If that’s the case,” Danny said, “then I’ll have to deal with you some other way!” His hands flared a bright green.

Just as Desiree conjured a large baseball bat behind him, Danny teleported directly behind her, blasting her in the back with an ecto-beam. The attack smashed her into a building ten feet away. The baseball bat disappeared.

Cyborg was having trouble of his own. “Danny! Little help here!”

“On it!” Danny landed on the street and turned to the side. He whipped around, a stream of ice arcing out from his hands. The ice sheet froze the rats and the car the Titans were on. Cyborg blasted off a stray rat and Danny finished the job with an ice blast that froze it solid.

“Those are the biggest and ugliest rats I have ever seen,” he declared, casting an eye over the carnage. He was a bit disturbed at how much ice he had managed to generate, but shook it off.

“You said it,” Cyborg agreed, sliding down the Expedition onto the street. Beast Boy did the same.
but slipped and fell flat on his back.

Their attention was distracted by Desiree emerging from the rubble of the building Danny had shot her into. Her red eyes were gleaming angrily. “You’ll pay, Phantom!”

“Sorry. I left my wallet back home. Do you take credit?”

Saying nothing, Desiree shot a wave of gleaming knives towards Danny. Sparing half a thought as to why she’d conjured knives, Danny teleported behind her with a mere thought, pushing her down into the street with a gloved hand. His eyes caught sight of a burn mark on her back and he frowned, remembering the earlier attack. Had his ecto-beam been so strong?

A second later, he was distracted from this thought by a torrent of sludge that erupted into the air from his right over a building. An awful stink began permeating the air.

“Ugh! What is that?” Beast Boy groaned, clapping two hands over his sensitive nose.

“If I had to guess, that’d be the sewer pipes,” Cyborg said, looking over. “I think that’s where the others are. Mumbo must have done something.”

Listening, Danny didn’t react in time to Desiree phasing through the street. He had no time to turn around before what seemed like a giant snake enveloped him in its coils. A quick glance upwards confirmed it: it was an enormous boa constrictor about twice its normal size. Sam would have a bone to pick with Desiree if she could see this.

Desiree hovered in front of him. “Tied up, Phantom?”

Danny smirked, eyes flaring. “Hardly.” He concentrated briefly, building energy in his chest, and then released it in a large burst, incinerating the snake and throwing the genie ghost backwards. His eyes flicked over to the area where the other Titans were supposed to be and he zipped over to Desiree, grabbing her before she could react and dragging her into the air. The action took place in a second and left Cyborg and Beast Boy blinking as they tried to discern his location. His voice caused them to look up.

“I’ll meet you over there!” Danny pointed with his head and flew off, a dazed Desiree in tow.

Beast Boy and Cyborg glanced at each other.


“Danny just whooped her butt. That’s what happened,” Cyborg said, folding his arms.

They were distracted with the arrival of a panting Wulf, who slid to a halt in front of them and took a spill. The action made them consider a conundrum: with Beast Boy so small, how were they supposed to traverse the slippery ice?

It took Danny less than a second to arrive at the place where the sludge had erupted from. He let Desiree drop, knowing that her status as a ghost would prevent any grievous injuries. With his burden gone, he quickly assessed the situation.

The cause for the eruption was the dislodging of a large sewer pipe that was positioned directly before Starfire. Imbedded in the pipe were dozens of knives. Robin was lying next to another pipe and was clutching his leg. Raven was the only one standing in the open and was facing a blue-skinned man in a tuxedo and top hat. Danny had to assume that this was Mumbo Jumbo.
A half-formed plan quickly popped into his mind and he created an invisible duplicate, knowing that Danny #2 would interfere when needed. Then, five seconds from when he had dropped Desiree, he landed on the street in front of Robin, feet set out in a battle stance.

“Danny!” Robin sounded surprised. “What are you doing here?”

Danny glanced at him, taking in the calf that Robin was clutching. “I was going after Desiree but saw that fountain of sewer water. I figured you guys might need some help.”

Robin half sat up, a hand on the sewer pipe next to him. “I thought you were just supposed to deal with the ghost?”

Danny shrugged, keeping an eye on Mumbo. “She’s over there.” He pointed to the ghost, who was shaking her head and glaring at him. The effect was lessened by the sludge she was covered with since he had dropped her into a giant puddle.

Mumbo took that opportunity to shriek at Desiree. “What are you doing here? You were supposed to deal with the others!”

Disgruntled, Desiree floated over to him, going intangible to let the disgusting water slide off onto the street. “I did. Then he interfered.” She shot Danny a baleful look, to which he responded with a cheeky wave and grin.

“Who is he?” Mumbo demanded, shooting Danny daggers. Though not literally, Danny could see him backing that glare up with the ammo necessary.

“Danny Phantom,” Danny said before Desiree could. “I think you owe the city a couple dozen rats.”

“Those rats were of my own creation,” Desiree ground out.

“Like I said, I see you more as the kitty type.”

The comments had the Titans glancing at the two ghosts in confusion. Only Mumbo seemed unaffected. In fact, steam was pouring out of his ears and his face was quickly turning red.

“I thought blue skin turned pink?” Danny asked Robin, who simply shrugged in response.

“You told me that you could handle them!” Mumbo shouted, jabbing his wand at Desiree’s chest.

“And so I did,” Desiree retorted, shoving the wand away.

“Then why are you here?”

Desiree scowled furiously, glaring at Danny. “Why do you think?”

Mumbo followed her eyes to also glare at the white-haired half-ghost. “Him? He’s even scrawnier than the bird boy!”

Danny raised his eyebrows, not taking the insult personally. Although he was scrawny for his age, he had grown and was by no means as weak as his figure suggested. In fact, even his human form had grown stronger under training from his parents. He suspected Mumbo was just saying that to rile him up.

In the meantime, Starfire had crept over to Robin to inspect his wound. She was still shaking from the attack, but thanked Raven’s timely interference with a pipe. She brushed off Robin’s protest and looked at the hole in his leg, brows furrowing in concern when she saw it was still bleeding.
She tore off a strip of Robin’s cloak with ease due to her super strength and began applying a tourniquet. In a quiet voice, she caught Danny’s attention. “Friend Danny, Robin is most grievously injured.”

Danny didn’t look back, wary eyes glued onto a still arguing Desiree and Mumbo. “Can you fly off and get him help?”

“I cannot. Mumbo Jumbo cast a spell.”

Danny narrowed his eyes, looking at the wand the magician was again poking at Desiree’s chest. “What are his weaknesses?”

“Snap the wand and he returns to normal,” Robin said.

Neon green eyes stared at the wand. That ugly black and white plastic looking stick was the root of Mumbo’s power? While he’d heard that a magician got his power from a wand, Danny hadn’t expected for that to be so literal.

Catching sight of Raven, who was edging behind the two quarreling villains, Danny decided to distract them so she could do what she wanted to. “Hey, Mumbo!” When he’d caught his attention, he smirked and continued, “I was wondering what kind of a name is Mumbo Jumbo. Did your mom really hate you or something? That’s gotta be the dumbest name I’ve ever heard of and believe me – I’ve heard some dumb ones. Party Dude really took the cake, but I have to say that Mumbo Jumbo is a close second.”

Mumbo growled threateningly, his eyebrow ticking angrily. “You know what, kid,” he said slowly, gripping his wand tightly.

Danny raised an eyebrow, taking a slight step back in anticipation. “No, I don’t.”

“You’re dead!” Mumbo roared, whipping his wound in a fancy figure eight. “Jingulo kadabra!”

An eight composed purely out of fire formed in mid air and hurtled towards the startled half-ghost and the two Titans behind him. Danny snapped up a green shield without a second’s thought, feeling slight vibrations as the fire attack hit it. With an exhale, he switched to ice and immediately filled the vicinity with steam. He used the distraction to turn invisible and carefully maneuver over to where Mumbo was.

Without warning, he was flung to the side by a powerful gust of wind that swept away the steam and revealed Raven wrestling with Mumbo. Sparing a thought to wonder why Raven was wrestling with the magician, Danny was distracted with Desiree trying to hit him with a baseball bat.

He ducked under the swing, grinning impishly. “Strike!”

Desiree bared her teeth and transformed the bat into a giant sword. The sharp blade hacked through the air towards Danny. The half-ghost turned intangible in the nick of time, letting the blade fly through him. Instinctively, he flung out a hand and stopped the blade in its tracks.

“What?” Danny peered in confusion at the sword. It wasn’t glowing but he just knew that he had used his telekinesis power to hold it still. But it was under Desiree’s control so how did he manage to stop it? Judging from Desiree’s furious and perplexed look she was thinking the same thing. Shrugging the mystery off, Danny flicked the blade towards Desiree with another thought.

Desiree was hardpressed to turn the blade into an innocent feather in time before it sliced through her. Granted, the feather was humongous, but it was still innocent compared to the sharp sword of
Before.

Taking advantage of the off-guard ghost, Danny dashed forward, only to be hit by a gush of water that slammed him into a sewer pipe jutting out from the ground. “Ow!” He almost plunged into the darkness below the street, but stopped his plunge with a pain-filled grimace. Shaking it off, he zipped around the baseball bat that Desiree had just whacked at him.

He saw Mumbo trying to cast a spell at him and Raven now throwing a chunk of rock at the magician. Apparently the wrestling hadn’t worked out too well for her. The entire scene seemed to occur in slow-motion as he flew around the bat. It continued to act in slow-motion as he tackled Desiree and threw both of them into Mumbo before Raven’s rock could hit him.

Time seemed to speed up as Danny had to stop his forward trajectory. He caught sight of Mumbo’s wand behind Desiree and pushed forward to reach for it. It brushed against the tip of his gloves before he was pushed off by Desiree’s ghostly tail. He landed on the street on his back with an oomph, but rolled to his feet and pushed off, demolishing the already ruined street he had pushed off.

Before either villain could react, Danny had slammed into Mumbo again and wrenched the wand from his grasp. “I’ll take that,” he said, slightly breathless from the several close shaves. Jumping backward from the stunned magician, Danny snapped the wand in two before being hit by an ecto-beam from Desiree, who had now resorted to regular ghost powers in her frustration.

The attack threw him to the ground and made him hit his head against the street. Dazed and with stars bursting in his head, he didn’t see Desiree’s hands flaring a bright green in fury.

Raven had recovered from the shock of seeing a black and white blur tackle Mumbo and Desiree in the last couple of seconds and then decisively take Mumbo – now an old man – out for the count. The whole incident had transpired so quickly she hadn’t blinked once and exhaled five times. Judging from Robin’s and Starfire’s stunned expressions, they were similarly affected.

She’d just seen Danny snap the wand in two before being hit in the side by Desiree’s green beam. Therefore, she was also able to see Desiree about to attack Danny further while he was dazed from the head blow. Reacting quickly, her black magic enveloped the ghost and forcibly drew her away from the ghost teen.

“Witch!” Desiree bit out, glaring at her.

“I could say the same,” Raven retorted calmly. “But in much nastier language.”

Desiree was still glaring at her when three new arrivals came on the scene. From the air, Wulf landed on a relatively stable portion of the street with Cyborg and Beast Boy on his back. The two climbed off, gaping at the mess.

“Looks like a giant mole went through and dug up everything,” Cyborg managed to say after closing his mouth.

“A giant mole?” Robin asked, helped over by his girlfriend. She had regained her power of flight with the snapping of Mumbo’s wand.

“Don’t ask,” Cyborg said firmly, shivering slightly.

“That’s why I un-shrunk!” Beast Boy exclaimed, pointing at Mumbo, who was trying to sneak away. “His wand was snapped!”
“You shrank?” Robin and Starfire simultaneously asked.

Beast Boy shrugged as Cyborg shot a net from his hand and captured Mumbo before he could escape. With that problem taken care of, they turned to Raven, who still had Desiree in her magic. Danny was slowly sitting up, his face pale.

Desiree sneered at them. “You fools!”

“You fools!” Raven bade. “Why are we the fools?”

“I’m a genie,” Desiree said, grinning evilly. “I thrive on magic!” Cackling madly, her body glowed green and absorbed Raven’s black magic. She correspondingly grew three times in size. Wulf growled threateningly in response.

“Well, damn,” was all Raven said.

Desiree cast her red eyes on the Titans and ghost wolf. “Now you shall face my wrath!” Before she could carry out the threat, there was a sudden crackling and green electricity arced around her. “Aargh!” she shrieked, convulsing with the attack. Her hair frizzed madly and she shrunk back down to normal, collapsing onto the ground.

The Titans looked at Danny, who was just getting up and uncapping his thermos. It glowed bluish-white and sucked in Desiree.

“If you didn’t do that, who did?” Robin asked, confused.

Danny smiled, hooking the thermos back onto his belt. “Technically, I did do that.” A second Danny materialized next to him and grinned before evaporating into a green haze and being reabsorbed into Danny. “Or my duplicate did. I thought that might come in handy.”

“Why didn’t you do that before?” Cyborg demanded. “It would have saved us a lot of grief!”

“And rats!” Beast Boy added.

Danny blinked. “It’s not like I’ve always had this power. Besides, I don’t like relying on one trump card. It might not always work.”

“It’s worked so far,” Beast Boy argued.

“But he’s right,” Raven said. “Becoming a one-trick pony is never a smart idea.”

“What she said,” Danny said, pointing at her. He looked over at Wulf. “There you are, buddy.”

“Tro rapide,” Wulf said.

Danny opened his mouth in surprise. “Oh. Sorry. But you’re all right?”

Wulf nodded while Raven walked behind him. “We should be asking you that. How’s your head?”

Danny shrank away from her. “Fine. I heal quickly. Besides, I’ve had worse. I’m more worried about Robin.”

For the first time, Cyborg and Beast Boy registered the makeshift tourniquet around Robin’s leg and the hole in his calf.
“Is that made from your cape?” was all Beast Boy managed to ask.

“We did not have many supplies,” Starfire defended. “But Danny is right: Robin requires the medical aid. He cannot have the tourniquet on for too much longer.”

As the team doctor, Cyborg took a quick critical assessment of Robin’s condition. “She’s right. He’s too pale. How much blood did you lose, Robin?”

“I’m fine,” Robin said defensively.

“The puddle of blood beside that pipe says otherwise,” Danny pointed out. “You don’t want that wound to get infected.”

“That said, I don’t know how we’re supposed to get to the tower to treat that in time,” Cyborg admitted, looking around at the mess. “My car’s a wreck and I don’t think Rob’s bike is any better.”

“It’s under the street,” Robin acknowledged reluctantly.

“I could teleport you all there,” Danny offered, rubbing the back of his neck. “That wouldn’t take a second.”

“I notice you didn’t teleport while saying that,” Raven remarked.

Danny flushed. “I’ve already gotten used to it. Sort of comes with the job.”

Raven acknowledged that fact. As someone with dangerous powers, she knew how important it was to have a handle on any new ones that happened to crop up.

“I’ll take that offer,” Cyborg accepted, glancing at Robin’s blanched expression.

Nodding, Danny reached for Starfire’s shoulder and Cyborg. “Anyone else who wants to just needs to grab on.”

“I’ll make sure this guy is taken care of,” Raven said, nodding towards Mumbo, “so you guys go ahead.”

Beast Boy and Wulf latched onto Cyborg and Danny respectively before the ghost teen disappeared in a flash of green light. Left alone, Raven gazed contemplatively at a nervous Mumbo Jumbo.

She was quite sure Danny couldn’t fly so fast before…
“You’re really lucky that the knife didn’t go all the way through,” Cyborg said, bandaging Robin’s calf.

“It felt like it,” Robin said, his eyes on the bandage.

“If it had, you would have lost a lot more blood. As it is, your tibia has a huge hole in it.”

“You mean it’s fractured.”

“Well, fractured or not, is he going to be okay?” a human Danny asked, peering at the sheets of medical jargon Cyborg had laid out next to the bed. “Will he be able to walk?”

“If he stays off his leg he’ll be fine,” Cyborg answered, shooting Robin a warning look. “When Raven gets back I’ll have her take a look and see what she can do.”

“The last time she did anything regarding broken bones I had to wear the cast for weeks afterward!”

“Yeah, but then that weird kid showed up and fixed it so it doesn’t count,” Cyborg countered.

“Weird kid?” Danny asked curiously.

“He looked like a mini-Robin,” Beast Boy explained. “It was creepy.”

Danny cocked his head, picturing the image and had to agree. No offense to Robin, but that was creepy. He turned his head to the doors when they slid open and let Raven in.

“How’s it going?” she inquired, stopping by Cyborg’s side.

“He’ll be all right,” Cyborg said. “I just need you to take a look and see what you can do.”

“Hmm.” Raven placed a glowing black hand over the bandages and quickly assessed the damage. There was silence for a minute as the group let her work. When the glow finally subsided she said, “It’s been reduced to a minor fracture now but you’ll still—”

“Have to wear a cast, I know,” Robin finished, disgruntled. “For how long?”

“Couple of weeks, I’d say.”

“Is there any reason you can’t heal it completely?” Danny asked, coming up besides Raven’s shoulder.

“It’s better if I let it heal by itself,” she explained. “If I try to force the healing by magic, there’s an increased likelihood that it’ll snap again. All I really did was lessen the damage and straighten the bone out.”

“Okay. I get that. But why don’t you check on it in like a week and try healing it some more? I mean, you already healed it some. A lot can happen in a week, right?” Danny rubbed his elbow.

“How did that kid manage to heal Robin’s arm then?”

“He shifted reality,” Raven said. “So it wasn’t really healing. It was more like changing it so that it never happened in the first place. But anyway, I don’t see why not,” she continued, seeing Robin’s hopeful face. “Robin goes stir crazy so it’s just as well.”
Danny smiled wryly. “I’d also go stir crazy.”

Starfire bounced into the bay at that point. “Friends! I have just finished the repairs.”

Danny shot her a confused look. “Already? I thought the windows still needed to be done?”

Starfire beamed. “They were inspired!”

“And by that she means they were scared out of their wits,” Raven muttered, making Danny stifle a laugh.

He coughed to hide his amusement. “But, um…speaking of repairs, what’s going to happen to the street where we fought?”

“The city’ll take care of it,” Robin answered, grimacing as Cyborg fitted a cast on his leg.

Danny raised his eyebrows. “And they don’t complain? At all?”

“Do they complain when you fight?” Beast Boy asked.

Flashing back to when he had fought his future self, Danny sighed. “The last major fight I had ended up with the sewer system getting wrecked and the street as well. A couple of buildings also collapsed. My friend had to really pull his weight so that I wouldn’t have to pay.” He shrugged. “Even fame has its limits.”

“I don’t know what it’s like where you’re from, but here damage from superhero and supervillain fights gets calculated into the city budgets,” Cyborg said, flicking Robin’s knee so he’d stay still and quit squirming. “Stop moving.”

“It’s because a lot of cities around the world have to deal with it,” Raven added.

Danny tapped his fingers against the bed railing. “I might have to bring that up with Tucker and see what he says. It would definitely help with the damage from the ghost fights I get into.”

“Are you friends with your town’s government?” Cyborg inquired.

“He is the government – or at least the mayor,” Danny said, grinning. “I still can’t figure out how he did it since he’s my age, but I’m not complaining.” He shrugged in response to the incredulous looks he was receiving.

Starfire was now looking at Cyborg’s handiwork on Robin’s bum leg. “Will he be all right?” she asked concernedly.

“Like I said two times before, he’ll be fine. Raven’s already looked at it and will look at it again later.” Cyborg bundled up the tape and stowed it away in a drawer. “I’m gonna go and take a look at the job the guys did.”

As Cyborg left, Raven leaned in towards Danny. “Do you want to talk?”

Danny seemed surprised. “What about?”

“Your ghost sense for one. And your apparent increase in flying speed.”

“Flying speed?” Danny flashed back to his excursion in the ocean. “Am I faster than usual?”

“That’s what I’d like to find out,” Raven stated. “Do you know how fast you can fly?”
Danny furrowed his brow, thinking back to the last training session he’d had before landing in Jump City. To his chagrin, the last one he’d had was with Sam and Tucker before his future self had attacked. “The last time I checked was a couple of months ago. I was clocked at two hundred and twenty-three mph.”

Raven raised an eyebrow. “Impressive. Do you want to see how much you’ve improved since then? I’d like to test this theory of mine.”

Danny peered at her. “You aren’t going to tell me before I do this, are you?”

“Nope.”

“Darn.”

“You know, I don’t think we’ve ever used these grounds for this kind of a training session before,” Cyborg commented, setting up some weird gizmos on the ground.

“There’s a first time for everything,” Raven said, cloak billowing in the slight breeze. “Is it ready?”

“As ready as it can be,” Cyborg said. “You know it’s kind of short notice to test a ghost’s powers.”

Raven waved it off. “You ready to go, Danny?”

The white-haired teen looked wary as he inspected the course Cyborg had set up. “What’s the plan?”

Lying on a beach chair with a curious Starfire by him, Robin also seemed curious as to what was going to happen. Wulf was in the tower and sleeping in Danny’s room. The ghost wolf had tired himself out running around in the city.

“You told me that ghosts have several powers and you told me what your powers are. I want to compare something,” Raven explained. “What were your stats last time?”

Cyborg handed Danny a clipboard and he scribbled down everything he could remember. When Raven read through it, she “hmmed” appreciatively. “Let’s see how much this has changed.”

Danny looked extremely wary now. “Meaning what?”

“Let’s test your flight speed first,” Raven said, evading the question. “Cyborg?”

The half-robot waved to Beast Boy, who was manning a high-tech device.

The changeling nodded in response. “You can take off when ready, Danny!”

Danny exhaled heavily. “Here goes nothing.” Gearing up, he blasted off, leaving an explosion of air behind that whipped Raven’s hair and cloak. Grass fluttered and there was a small dent in the dirt.

But all eyes were fixed on the black and white blur that was zipping around in a circle. After a second, Danny screeched to a halt in front of Beast Boy, floating in front of him.

Beast Boy’s eyes bugged at the reading. “No way!”

“What is it, BB?” Cyborg asked, pen tapping against the clipboard. Raven had stolen what Danny had written so he was stuck with being left in the dark.

“Three-ninety!”
“Three hundred ninety?” Cyborg and Danny repeated incredulously.

Beast Boy showed it to them and Cyborg wrote it down, hearing Danny’s amazed muttering.

“Try your strength next,” Raven directed.

Danny shot her a wary look. “With what?”

“Those iron blocks look good,” Raven pointed out, meaning the obstacles in the ground.

“Raven, if you pull those out, you’re responsible for putting them back in,” Cyborg warned.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea anyway,” Danny objected.

After a second’s thought, she had to agree. “All right. Try your”—she checked the sheet—“ghost rays now.”

“Just so you know, it’d work better if these were ghost proof,” Danny said, his hands flaring green. He shot the strongest beam he could manage at an obstacle. The heavy metal obstruction was instantly incinerated.

“Wicked, dude!” Beast Boy shouted, jumping from his spot next to Raven.

Danny looked shaken but turned to the Titan. “I could punch one of those?” he offered. “It might give a good estimation of my strength.”

Raven glanced at Cyborg, who seemed slightly disgruntled but nodded. “He already destroyed one.”

Danny flushed and muttered, “Sorry.” He floated in front of a still standing metal obstacle and drew his fist back. “Hah!”

The punch dug right into the metal and poked a hole through it, causing a startled Danny’s momentum to leave him with his arm stuck in it up to the shoulder. “Ack.” Grimacing, he shoved backward, unintentionally using more strength than he intended to. The result was the metal bending under his other hand and him losing his balance. Fed up, he phased out and gave the thing a kick. To his shock, the whole thing keeled over like a drunken man with a loud creak. “Oops.”

“Just so you know, I’m not doing any arm wrestling matches with you!” Beast Boy told a chagrined Danny.

“Anything else you want him to wreck?” Cyborg demanded Raven after writing the observations down. The demand was half-hearted, though, and Raven knew it.

“Yes,” she responded blandly without batting an eye. She turned to Danny, who was floating in front of her now. “I already know that your teleportation has changed.”

“You want me to test my telekinesis?”

“Yes.”

Danny scoured the surroundings and smirked when he saw something he could use. Without warning, Robin and his beach chair lifted up, freaking Starfire out. They weren’t glowing and Danny hadn’t moved.

“Hey!” Robin protested. “Not funny, Danny!”
Danny obligingly put him down with a mere thought. “The last time I did something like that I was running on adrenaline and they still glowed green.”

“We’ve still got ice,” Raven began.

Danny grinned and took off before she could specify. Within a minute, a beautiful ice sculpture of Titan Tower and the Titans stood before them. He reappeared in front of them, grinning.

“Impressive,” Raven remarked dryly. “But maybe something offensive?”

Danny didn’t hesitate as he turned to the ocean. He slammed his hands down on the ground and froze an entire section of water and ground in less than a minute. When he turned around, his breath was visible and his eyes were fading from blue back to green.

“Nice. We can ice skate,” Raven said sarcastically.

“Don’t diss the power of a slippery ground,” Danny defended.

“He’s right,” Cyborg said, remembering the fight earlier.

“What about that duplication thing?” Beast Boy asked before Raven could say anything.

Danny closed his eyes and tried to create as many as he could. When he heard gasps, he opened them and looked. He promptly couldn’t look away. A dozen of him looked back.

One of them even said, “I think we can make more if we try not to focus on individual characteristics.”

“…Okay?” Danny got out, stunned.

“You could probably make up your own soccer team with that many duplicates!” Beast Boy exclaimed.

Danny reabsorbed them, shrugging. “Not too big a fan of soccer. In fact, I don’t really like any sport.” He made a face. “Seeing your parents argue about who’s overshadowed by a ghost and who’s not kind of sucks the fun out of it.”

“That must be difficult,” Starfire sympathized.

“What’s the use about arguing who’s overshadowed?” Cyborg asked.

Danny scratched the back of his neck, grinning sheepishly. “I guess to them it’s the same thing as doping. But I’ve never understood why ghosts would overshadow athletes in the first place so it’s just rubbish.”

“That aside,” Raven broke in, “there’s one more thing I’d like to see.”

Danny promptly took a step back, putting his hands up. “No.”

“There’s one more thing on here,” she insisted, holding the sheet up.

“Do you have any idea how destructive that is? And that was before! You saw how much damage just a ghost ray did. I’m not using that here. It stays a last-ditch resort.”

“What are you talking about?” Cyborg tried to steal the sheet from Raven, but she held it out of his reach. “Come on, Raven!”
“What could be worse than that ghost ray?” Robin inquired warily, leaning forward. Starfire had confiscated his crutches since he’d been using them too much and not resting his leg.

Danny winced, looking at his boots. “It’s my ghostly wail.”

“It sounds like a wail?” Starfire guessed.

“Well, yeah. But it causes a lot of damage. I knocked down a building one time. I don’t want to know what would happen now.”

Raven peered at him for a long moment. Then she nodded slowly. “All right, Danny. We won’t use it.”

Danny sighed, relieved. “Thanks.”

“Instead, I’d like to test your reflexes,” she continued, tucking the sheet into a hidden pocket.

“How?” Danny stepped around her as she walked onto the training grounds.

Without warning, Raven flung the metal obstruction Danny had knocked down earlier at him and the Titans behind him. Yelping, Danny snapped up a green shield in time for it to bounce off of. He dropped it a moment later only to have to knock aside a beam that had served as a goal post. His arm smarted slightly from the brutal contact but he ignored it to move away from the stunned Titans behind him.

“What are you doing, Raven?” Cyborg shouted, waving his clipboard around frantically. “You could have killed us with that!”

“I didn’t,” was the blasé reply. Raven then grabbed onto a large rock that was lying in the water and levitated it.

Danny floated in the air, arms up in a defensive position. Given the destructive power of his ecto-blasts, he really didn’t want to attack Raven. When Raven flung the rock at him, he turned intangible and let the rock fly behind him. Before it hit the ground, though, he grabbed it with his own telekinesis powers. He flung his arm forward and the rock hurtled toward Raven.

Again noting the lack of green covering it, Danny watched Raven be buried under it. “Raven!” he cried, alarmed.

He was both startled and relieved to hear a familiar voice from behind him. “Don’t let down your guard.”

Danny whirled around in time to see Raven unleash a stream of black magic toward him. He needed to get away!

And then he was behind Raven and grabbing her arms. She evaporated into black smoke and left him clutching thin air. When she materialized next to him a second later, Danny had had enough.

“That’s it!” Not thinking, Danny moved his arm in a sideways arc. A stream of green exited his fingertips and hit a startled Raven, knocking her backwards and into the ground. Danny was surprised to see the green still coating her and keeping her pinned to the ground.

“Nice,” Raven called out, trying to get off the ground but failing. Whatever Danny had fired at her had really sticky capabilities. It was stickier than the thing she had seen him fire at her body during the Puppet King. “Think you can get rid of it?”
Landing and carefully approaching her, Danny inspected what he had shot her with. He had to swallow hard when he recognized the restraints his future self had used on his friends and family with the boiler.

‘Remember, it’s because you’re getting stronger,’ he reminded himself sternly, freezing the binds before shooting a very low powered ghost ray at them. They shattered and Raven stood up, brushing off her cloak. He warily stood back, remembering the surprise attack she had done at the beginning.

“Not too worry,” she said reassuringly, catching the movement. “I’m done.”

“Oh good. I was afraid you’d be after my head.” Danny grinned wryly. “Sorry about that, by the way.”

Raven took out the sheet she had tucked away, allowing Cyborg to finally see what was written on it. He had approached them while they were talking. “So that’s another power besides your electricity.”

“You could only go two hundred and twenty-three before?” Cyborg asked, looking up from the sheet Raven had in her hand. “That’s a pretty big jump.”

“Everything is,” Danny muttered, shuffling uncomfortably. He transformed back, ruffling his now black hair.

“That cover everything, Raven?” Robin asked, leaning back into his chair. “I think Danny’s about done.”

Danny shot her a sheepish grin. “Are you?”

Raven looked over Cyborg’s clipboard with a critical eye. “I should think so. Just let me get everything straightened out.” She turned and headed back to the tower.

Danny stared after her before realizing he didn’t have anything to do. He turned to Cyborg. “You want me to help out or something?”

“Well you mention it…”

It was quiet and dark in her room and exactly what she needed to think about the information she had gathered that afternoon. The clipboard glowed black and floated in the middle of the room. In the meantime, Raven flitted from shelf to shelf, perusing books before discarding them or adding them to the other floating books around the clipboard.

When she was sure that she’d gathered all the books on ghosts and spirits from her extensive library, Raven began to look more closely at the books she had gathered while floating in the air in a cross-legged position. Most of them were instant garbage once again and she stacked them in a pile next to a bookshelf. A few of them had some valid points but were useless in the context of the matter.

Sighing, Raven pulled the clipboard towards her and viewed the stats again. Then she mentally reviewed everything she’d gathered so far. Before, Danny’s top flying speed had only been 223 and it was now 390, a drastic jump in only several months. His strength had improved tremendously, but the stats would be a more accurate measure if the sheets he had punched were ghost proof. Telekinesis- and teleportation-wise there was no comparison to several months earlier: he had drastically improved his control in leaps and bounds.

Everything led right back to the Puppet King. Following that was when Danny had said his ghost
half felt stronger and when his abilities skyrocketed in power. So she had the why. But how did it even happen?

The problem was that since half-ghosts were an anomaly, no book she had would give any information on their genetic makeup. Plus, there was also the fact that the books she did have were useless when it came to Danny’s species of ghosts. So this was all going to be guesswork and hypothetical.

“What happens when you rip half of one’s DNA out and then it reincorporates itself?” Raven bent her head, covering her eyes with her hands as she mentally puzzled out the problem. ‘Theoretically speaking, it wouldn’t merge itself in the same way as before. Genetic testing has proven that. So what? Does that mean it binds itself even more tightly to the existing structure to ensure it doesn’t happen again? Like a defense mechanism?’

Her sixth sense niggled at her, telling her that she was on the right track. ‘If that’s the case, then the Puppet King extracting Danny’s ghostly DNA resulted in it binding more tightly to his human DNA. That could result in his ghostly abilities experiencing a jump in strength. But then, this is all hypothetical.’

Blowing out another sigh, Raven unfolded her legs and stood on the ground. It wasn’t what she wanted but at least she had some sort of explanation for why Danny’s ghost half was stronger than before. If – when he got back to his home world, his parents could run tests to figure out the actual cause.

Taking the clipboard with her, Raven left her room and began to descend into the bowels of the tower. She knew Danny was down there after searching for his aura. It was so bright that it was blinding.

When she came to the garage, she stopped in the doorframe to watch Danny help Cyborg with his car. He was using his telekinesis power to keep it afloat in the air while Cyborg stood underneath and tinkered with the underbelly and the tires.

“You getting tired yet?” Cyborg asked.

“I could make the car do flips and rolls if you wanted,” Danny offered, one hand in the air to make sure the car stayed steady.

“Try that and I’ll throw this at you,” Cyborg threatened, waving a wrench at the ghost teen.

The white-haired ghost shrugged, a quirky grin playing at his lips. “It’ll just fly through me.”

“Unfair,” Cyborg muttered, making a hand motion.

Raven saw Danny slowly lower his hand; the car came down to Cyborg’s level. He opened the door and grimaced when it fell off.

“Shucks,” Danny sympathized. “What happened to it?”

“You saw the rats, yeah?”

“The ones the size of go-karts and looking like zombies? Yep, I did.”

“They happened.”

“What? They chewed it up? It just looked like a building fell on it.”
“The sewer pipes did,” Cyborg said, carefully placing the broken-off door on the ground. His eyes landed on Raven then, who was still lurking by the doorframe. “Raven! What are you doing down here?”

Danny’s green eyes flicked towards her before his focus returned to the car and he gently set it on the ground.

“I think I came to some sort of conclusion,” Raven said, holding the clipboard up to indicate what she was talking about.

“Should I be worried?” Danny asked.

“No.” Raven neglected to mention the fact that everything she’d come up with was purely hypothetical.

After making sure that his baby would be all right, Cyborg followed the other two upstairs into the living room/kitchen. Robin, Starfire, and Beast Boy were already there, hanging out in front of the TV.

Beast Boy’s head snapped around as he heard them come in. “You fix your car yet, Cy?”

“Not yet. It’s going to take a while.” Cyborg sounded disgruntled.

“I could take Desiree out and ask her to fix it,” Danny said half-jokingly. “Or Technus. I’m sure he’d go gaga over fixing that.”

“The time I’m letting any ghost you’ve fought near my baby is the time that I find out vampires are for real,” Cyborg said, shooting Danny a mock glare.

“They sparkle,” Danny said sarcastically.

“And drink animal blood,” Robin added from his spot on the couch.

“I thought it was cute!” Starfire objected.

There were groans from the rest of the Titans and Danny.

“Don’t,” Danny pleaded. “They were awful. Sam wouldn’t stop ragging on them for days after reading the series and forced me to read them, too.”

“I thought they were really fluffy,” Beast Boy said, grinning sheepishly. “I wasted a week reading them.”

Raven grimaced at the mention of Twilight and steered the conversation back to where it was supposed to be. “I didn’t bring you up here to debate whether Meyer’s Twilight is really bad or really good. I just wanted to say that I have a reason for why your abilities have developed the way they have.”

Danny waved her on, taking a seat in midair. Cyborg blinked, disconcerted at the sight but didn’t comment, instead leaning back against the black couch.

Raven took it into stride, instead walking over to Danny’s side to show him the clipboard. “You said that it was after the Puppet King that your ghost half felt stronger. Since then, your abilities have skyrocketed from two hundred and twenty-three mph in flying speed to three-ninety and your control and finesse have also improved greatly.”
“It sounds like you’re just primping up your speech,” Beast Boy called. He received a slap in the head with a glowing black towel for that remark. “Ow!”

Aside from that, Raven ignored him. “One thing that struck me was that since the Puppet King literally removed half of your DNA, it had to merge back with your human half.”

“I went through the accident again,” Danny agreed, grimacing as he remembered the pain.

“Exactly. In this case, your DNA merged more tightly so that future occurrences wouldn’t happen so easily. It’s a defense mechanism.”

“Wait… So I’m more half-ghost than before?” Danny looked faintly ill at that thought.

“No. Your DNA is just more tightly bound, thus giving you a jump in abilities. It also explains why you suddenly have a new power. Your DNA was extracted and then reintegrated. It mixed around your growth rate.”

“That’s because once DNA is taken out, it’s not put back in the same way,” Cyborg mused thoughtfully.

Danny looked between Cyborg and Raven. “How much of this is speculation and how much is fact? I don’t think you have books giving you detailed descriptions on the genetic makeup of half-ghosts.”

“I don’t,” Raven admitted. “Really, most of this is hypothetical. I just have a feeling that it’s right. When you get back, you can have your parents check to see if anything’s changed.”

Danny sighed, unfolding his legs to land on the ground. He transformed back into his human form. “So what now? You said when I get back. Do you have a plan for that?”

Raven shook her head. “Not yet. It’s going to take a while for me to gather the materials necessary. In the meantime, you’ll have to stay here with us.”

“I don’t mind.” Danny gave a small smile. “I’m just wondering what I’m going to be doing aside from teaching Wulf English.” The ghost wolf was still in his room, sleeping.

Robin volunteered information then. “I saw you fight during the Puppet King. You know some martial arts, right?”

“My mom’s a ninth-degree black belt. She’s taught me some since finding out I’m half-ghost.”

“I could teach you some more,” Robin offered. “It would come in handy.”

“And we can play video games!” Beast Boy said rambunctiously, jumping up on the couch.

“You can help me fix up the car,” Cyborg said, smirking.

“We can go shopping!” Starfire said gleefully.

“And I can teach you more about control and finesse,” Raven said, smiling at the befuddled look on Danny’s face. “That’s when I have time, of course.”

A slow smile broke across Danny’s face and he met the eyes of every Titan in the room. “Thanks.”

Beast Boy suddenly procured a gigantic grayish-green ball that was dripping foul green stuff. An evil smirk was plastered across his green face. “Stinkball!” he shouted, flinging the ball in Danny’s face.
Danny turned intangible before it could touch him, causing the ball to hit Raven instead and splatter
her with something foul and stinky.

Danny paled upon seeing the mess. “Sorry. That was habit.”

Raven didn’t respond except to grab a mass of gunk from the sink with her magic and aim it towards
Danny. This time Danny teleported out of the way, leaving the mess to splatter against Cyborg.

Cyborg wiped the gunk off his face, glaring at a smirking Raven and a sheepish Danny, who was
hovering by the ceiling in his ghost form. “It is on.”

With that declaration, all six were immediately engulfed in a full-on stinkball war. When Wulf joined
them five minutes later, he instantly found himself the recipient of a glowing green stinkball courtesy
of Danny. He promptly joined the fight, resulting in more chaos and the kitchen sink blowing up.

No one ever said that a game of stinkball involving the Teen Titans and two ghosts would be clean.
Your Worst Nightmare

“Clop. Clop. Clop.” A tissue later and Sam pulled up the neck covering of her black turtleneck sweater to ward off the chilly wind. Her boots continued to make a clopping sound as she walked down the empty street. An occasional car whooshed down the road but she was alone for the most part.

It was nearing winter in Amity Park and was currently a Saturday. Over a week had passed since they had gone to Clockwork for answers and Danny was still nowhere in sight. For that matter, nor had any ghosts made an appearance. The citizens of Amity Park had remarked on the unusual lull in activity, but simply went about their business as usual, not thinking too much of it.

But today was slightly different as they were all converged in the town hall for a meeting with the mayor – or Tucker in this case – to discuss some new laws. This was the reason for the empty street and why Sam was walking down by herself when Tucker would normally be tagging along.

Twisting the ring Danny had given her around on her finger, Sam closed her eyes briefly before opening them. She had no desire to be in the middle of so many people who could never understand how she felt. The only people who had the slightest idea of how she felt were Danny’s family and Tucker. They were the only ones who missed Danny as much as she did.

The rest of the world hadn’t even noticed that their savior hadn’t made an appearance in over a week. Only Casper High had noted Danny’s conspicuous absence, but had stopped asking questions when given the excuse that Danny had caught some kind of ghostly illness and couldn’t be around other people.

Seeing a lone newspaper blown across the gray pavement by the cold wind, Sam couldn’t help but feel even more forlorn. Although normally a rather emotionally stable person, Sam had been down in the doldrums more and more frequently this past week without the slightest clue of where Danny was. The vague word of a ghost who could control time was not much of a consolation.

The weather was certainly doing a rather marvelous job of fitting her mood.

Stifling another sneeze as her hair tickled her nose, Sam rubbed it in irritation and continued to make her way to the park. It was one place where she could be granted some serenity as nature always made her feel at home.

This thought was only reinforced as she passed a dank alley and heard a soft howling that sent shivers down the back of her spine.

Passing it off as a trick of the wind, Sam rubbed her hands over her arms and bent down to pick up a stray soda can, cursing the lazy body who didn’t have the decency to find a trash can. Another howl sounded from behind her and she froze, heart thudding in her ears.

‘It’s just the wind, isn’t it?’ Mouth dry, Sam shot a wary glance behind her. There hadn’t been any ghosts since Danny had gone, but that didn’t mean there weren’t still some around. Granted, she’d never felt this freaked out when it came to ghosts, but after two years she knew she still hadn’t seen everything there was to see.

When she didn’t see anything besides the empty street, Sam mentally shrugged off the noise and tossed the can into the nearest recycle bin. Pursing her lips, she looked up at the cloudy sky and wished the sun would make an appearance. It would at least help her warm up and lighten the chill
from the wind.

She’d just taken another step when another noise broke her hearing threshold. Freezing in place once again and tensing her muscles, Sam strained her ears. It was only a moment before she knew she hadn’t imagined the soft eerie laughter.

“Who’s there?” she demanded loudly, swiftly turning around. The street looked completely empty, but she knew that didn’t mean much.

There was no answer, but she hadn’t expected anything. Even the laughter had stopped and the wind had died down, leaving a chilly silence in its wake. There was a rustling sound and Sam whirled, only to see the newspaper from before flutter across the pavement.

Exhaling slowly, she chastised herself for being so on edge. “Get a grip, Sam. Nothing’s happened so far and why should that change simply because you’re walking alone?”

Hearing herself speak did nothing to alleviate the sense of unease that rested on her shoulders. Still worried, Sam turned to continue on her way when a sudden shriek hit her eardrums.

The unearthly noise barely gave her any time to react as a black figure darted across the street directly towards her. It was inside the pavement.

Whatever it was swooped under Sam’s feet and knocked her flat on her back, jarring her teeth and bruising her elbows. Twisting to her knees and jumping to her feet, Sam bounced on her toes, eyes primed for the nearest sight of danger.

‘What the heck was that?’

Her question was no closer to being answered as the shadow attacked her again. This time Sam jumped up in the air, drawing her knees up. The shadow swept under her suspended figure, but she was shocked to see it suddenly jump out at her, revealing a shapeless mash of sharp teeth.

In the air as she was, Sam couldn’t do much more other than snap her legs down and squash the ghost into the street. Then, as she was completely without any weapon, she fled down the street to make her way to Fenton Works.

‘Always carry a ghost fighting weapon around, stupid! Haven’t you learned anything from the last two years?’

A loud growling noise alerted Sam to the fact that her mysterious pursuer was hell bent on having something for lunch that involved a black turtleneck sweater and black jeans. Chancing a glance back over her shoulder, Sam immediately wished she hadn’t as her one attacker was now joined by two others.

She had no weapons on her person, all of Amity Park was crammed inside the town hall, and she was alone on the street being chased by a trio of bloodthirsty things she’d never seen before. In fact, she was 99.9% sure that these things weren’t even ghosts.

In short, if Sam Manson didn’t come up with some sort of miraculous plan in the next five seconds, she was screwed.

Air burning on the way down her throat and cheeks flushed with the exertion of running, Sam grabbed onto a light post and made a sharp right turn. She pressed flat against the side of the building, hoping the things would miss her and give her an extra few seconds. When they didn’t immediately make an appearance, Sam knew something had happened.
They’d been right on her toes.

Cautiously peeking around the corner, Sam was instantly greeted by the sight of three gaping mouths of sharp teeth.

This time an undignified yelp escaped her mouth and she made a one-eighty turn on her heels to sprint down the street. She’d barely taken two steps before something slammed into her back and sent her sprawling with a mouthful of asphalt.

‘Oh God… Am I going to die right here in the middle of the street without even a stupid weapon?’

Screwing her eyes shut against what she figured was the end, Sam was half-hopeful and half-terrified when it didn’t immediately come. Instead, what she heard was a very familiar sound of ghost rays firing and a whooshing sound of someone flying through the air.

Leaping to the first logical conclusion, Sam twisted her body around. “Danny!”

“Yes?” a distinctly feminine voice answered, its owner brushing her long white bangs out of her eyes. “You okay, Sam?”

Sam found herself disappointedly staring into the green eyes of Danielle Phantom, or Dani. Quashing the hope that had risen in her, Sam made herself nod and smile at the young half-ghost. “Yeah, thanks. What are you doing here, Dani?”

“Just thought I’d visit,” Dani said, shrugging and adjusting the foothold she had on the three things she’d slammed into the street. “I didn’t expect to see you being chased down the street by these things, though.” Frowning, Dani considered her silent prisoners. “You know what they are?”

“They’re not ghosts?”

“No. My ghost sense didn’t go off.”

“So I suppose a weapon wouldn’t have done any good then,” Sam mused, folding her arms across her chest.

“I dunno. My ghost rays took care of them pretty handily.”

Unfortunately, the two girls found that Dani had spoken too soon as her three prisoners sank into the pavement and began swirling around them in a threatening manner.

“Oh dear,” Dani squeaked, her eyes widening in alarm.

“Get us out of here!” Sam demanded, hastily side-stepping as one of them made a swipe at her feet.

Dani didn’t say a word, simply grabbing Sam under the arms and taking to the skies. Shrieks from behind and below them alerted them to the fact that the things had escaped the pavement to pursue them in the air as well. “You have a thermos on you or something?”

“If I did I would’ve taken care of them myself!” Sam looked back to see them dogging them determinedly. “Can you fly any faster?”

“Hold onto your skin,” Dani muttered, suddenly pouring on the speed and making Sam’s eyes water.

Without warning, she suddenly deposited Sam on a rooftop and made a sharp turn to fire ghost rays at their pursuers. The attacks hit the monsters dead on, but Dani didn’t stop there as she continued with a barrage of ecto-beams that seared the black bodies of the monsters and punched holes through
their forms.

“Try making a really bright light!” Sam shouted.

Dani squinted up at the sky, found she wouldn’t have any help from that section, and began working on creating a super bright ecto-ray that would hopefully scare these not-ghosts off.

“All right, uglies!” Dani focused all the power she could into the growing ball of green light in her palm. “Let’s see how much you like this!”

Before the monsters could scatter around the two girls, Dani pointed her hand directly in front and let the energy go. It exploded outward in a blinding flash of green light, causing Sam to flinch backward and cover her eyes. It had a worse effect on the monsters, since they all gave off loud shrieks of agony.

By the time the light dissipated from Dani’s little “flash bomb,” the girls couldn’t see a single trace of the monsters.

“Yes!” Dani pumped her fist triumphantly. “That took care of that!”

In the meantime, Sam had pressed a hand to her chest, trying to calm her pounding heart. That had been far too close for comfort. It was also the last time she would ever go anywhere without a weapon. Never mind that she was friends with a half-ghost (or two); she needed to be able to defend herself properly if rabid ghosts – monsters like that showed up again.

Dani landed on the building next to Sam. “You all right?” she asked worriedly.

“I’ll be fine,” Sam said, dropping her hand to fold her arms over her chest. “It’s just…” She couldn’t hold off a shudder. “Oh God…”

“They were creepy,” Dani agreed, glancing around the area for a moment. “Thanks for the tip.”

Sam shrugged. “They looked like Johnny’s shadow, even if they weren’t ghosts. They were fried by your ghost rays. Wasn’t too much of a leap to think that their weakness was light.” She inhaled slowly. “So, what brings you to Amity Park? I thought you were exploring the world?”

Dani beamed. “He told you that, didn’t he? Oh, it was absolutely amazing! I must have explored most of Europe over the last few months. I decided to come back ’cause Danny said I can stay here whenever I want.” Her brow furrowed. “Where is he anyway? I would have thought he’d notice something like that!”

And that was all it took to send Sam down into the dumps again.

Meanwhile, deep in the Ghost Zone, so deep that the green surroundings of the Zone weren’t simply a light green anymore but rather a dark foreboding one, numerous dark shadows were converging. They were shapeless for the most part, except for certain points where one could catch glimpses of what could pass for a face: two empty holes for eyes and a gaping maw of sharp teeth. Then it disappeared, leaving only the impression of a writhing, crawling mass of something.

These shadows converged around a floating rock ledge. A few daring ones came close to a pair of white boots before darting away as a silver metal staff slammed down on the rock, the sound echoing through the empty expanse.

“Hnh…” a high-pitched and manic voice hummed. “Didn’t it work?”
One shadow seemed to give a negative flick before it dashed away.

“Not to worry… It was a long shot.” The ghost crouched down, clutching the silver staff in his gloved hands as he looked out at the seething mass of dark shadows that surrounded the ledge. A giggle escaped the misshapen mouth, the right half of which was rather shadowy. “Will have time to redeem yourselves…in time…”

The ghost dunked the top half of the staff into the mass of shadows. Its presence resulted in the shadows giving the ledge an even wider berth. The ghost giggled gleefully, straightening in a smooth motion and stepping to the edge of the ledge. The staff remained inside the mass of shadows.

“Remember what is at stake,” he said in a low voice. The tone was utterly different from before. “Remember who you owe your existences to. I do not”—the ghost was snarling now—“accept failure. Get Danny Phantom’s friends and family to me…alive.”

Elsewhere in the Ghost Zone, Clockwork was being harangued by the Observants. Or rather…he would be harangued by the Observants. At the moment, he was simply watching his portal into time.

The view screen flickered past a scene of four teenagers in a blue bedroom, one of them being a female half-ghost. It then rested on the image of another half-ghost being thrown onto a wrestling mat by a masked black-haired teen. Following this, it spanned out to hold the picture of a silver staff. The top end was a claw and in the middle floated a smoky black orb. A white gloved hand snatched out and the image disappeared into green swirls.

Just as this happened, the Observants flew into the room, their white cloaks swirling around them dramatically. Any humor was lost, though, as their single eyes were wide with panic.

“Clockwork! The staff has been stolen!” they shouted simultaneously.

Clockwork shifted into a man, turning around slowly. His own staff was held tightly. “I am aware.”

“Why did you not tell us?” one Observant demanded.

“I presumed you knew,” Clockwork said mildly.

“How long has it been gone?”

“I heard of it,” Clockwork said, “a short while ago.”

“What is being done?” the second Observant demanded. “Do you know what it does? Our world is in peril! Why did you not think to alert us—”

“The situation is being taken care of,” Clockwork interrupted, a mild tinge of annoyance coating his tone. “If you were not aware of the staff being taken, this is through no fault of my own. Are you not supposed to watch the door?”

“The door!” the first Observant blustered. “It does no good to observe the door when the theft occurs elsewhere!”

“The door observes everything everywhere regardless of location,” Clockwork said, a definite icy tone in his voice now. “It shows everything of importance, unless it has been asked to observe something specific. What was the door asked to observe that it failed to show you the staff?”

The Observants seemed to flush a darker green in embarrassment. Their single eyes locked
momentarily before their gaze flickered back to Clockwork.

“I see,” Clockwork said quietly.

“Do you, Clockwork?” the second Observant asked.

“I see everything…unlike certain entities.” Clockwork shifted into an old man, his face set into a mask of disapproval. “As I have said time before, and as you have insisted on repeating, young Danny Phantom remains under my guardianship. The path he is on has been planned. It is not a result of mistimed circumstance.”

“Mistimed circumstance? Did you plan for the staff being stolen? Knowing what it does?”

“I see everything,” Clockwork repeated, not precisely answering their question. “Perhaps you should ask the actual wielder of the object your questions?”

“The wielder”—the first Observant’s tone was dismissive—“is not present.”

“Really? How…odd…” Clockwork morphed into a child as he said this. “Perhaps…he is doing what he should be?”

“Playing around in the dimensions?” the second Observant sneered.

“Keepers will have their fun. It is what keeps the job from getting tiresome.” Clockwork screwed the knob on his staff; as he did so, the scene on the viewing screen behind him kept shifting dizzily from one timeline to the next. In one particular scene, the two Observants in front of him were wearing togas and fluffy pink feathery boas.

The first Observant didn’t even grant the scene the dignity of his attention. “As the Time Keeper, Clockwork, what are you doing to prevent the timelines from disintegrating?”

“Didn’t I say?” Clockwork twisted the knob one final time, and the scene landed on Danny Fenton helping a red-haired alien girl cook.

“Danny Phantom? After he already made a mistake?”

“He is only human,” Clockwork said, observing his charge try to help the girl from burning water. “Do humans not make mistakes?”

“He is a half-ghost child,” the second Observant snapped.

“Who defeated Pariah Dark, defeated his own worst enemy, and saved our world from annihilation,” Clockwork reminded the Observants. “If he is not a hero, I would – to use a human expression – eat my hat.”

“You don’t have a hat,” the first Observant corrected mutinously. “And you haven’t said: how is Danny Phantom supposed to protect the timelines?”

Shifting into a man, Clockwork answered, “The thief is someone intimately familiar with him. As you are no doubt aware, ghosts that are intimately familiar with Danny Phantom tend to cross paths with him.”

“And they fight,” the second Observant continued. “Yet the property damage…who is to say the staff will not be destroyed?”

The scene behind Clockwork landed on an antique store with dolls on display in the windows.
“There is a being on the job.”

“You are not telling us everything, Clockwork,” the first Observant accused. “We are your employers—”

“My employers, not my Keepers,” Clockwork corrected. “What concerns my job concerns you. Outside my job…I am guaranteed a modicum of privacy, am I not?” He raised an eyebrow as if to dare them to deny his claim.

The Observants appeared taken aback, glancing at one another.

When it appeared that no response would be coming on their end, Clockwork prompted, “If you are done, perhaps you should be doing what you should have been doing all along?”

“This is not over, Clockwork,” they threatened simultaneously. They then imperiously turned around and floated out of the room.

Shifting his form to that of an old man, Clockwork turned to look into a dark room just off the side, his red eyes fixating on something that only he could see. “Oh, I know…” he murmured. “It’s just beginning.”

“Any chance you’ll tell me what’s going on?” Dani asked, letting Sam down in her room. She landed on the floor and transformed back into her human form, which possessed black hair and blue eyes just like the boy she had been cloned after. The difference was that she preferred to wear a hat and had a ponytail.

“In a moment,” Sam muttered, whipping out her cell phone. She sent off a text. “I’d rather wait until Tucker gets here. I’ve enough of a headache already.”

Sitting down on Sam’s purple bedspread, Dani blinked, perplexed. “Why?”

“Because of everything that’s been happening around here,” Sam said, sighing. She collapsed on the bed next to Dani, flinging an arm over her face. “Make yourself at home. We’ll be waiting until Tucker finishes at the town hall.”

Dani looked around at the very fancy bedroom. “Wow. You’re loaded!”

“Don’t remind me,” Sam groaned, snatching a pillow and pressing it against her face.

Dani cocked her head to the side. “Is that…is it a bad thing? To be loaded, I mean?”

“The money’s not really an issue.” Sam’s voice was muffled. “It’s my parents.”

“Problem?”

“Let me put it this way: if it was the fifties, they’d fit right in.”

That didn’t help. If anything, it made Dani even more confused. “What do the fifties have anything to do with your parents?”

It took Sam a moment to remember that this was a clone of her boyfriend who’d probably never gone to school. She lifted the pillow off her face. “You know how this is the twenty-first century, yeah? I’m talking about the nineteen-fifties, when women wore dresses and men wore suits and there was a lot of hairspray involved.”
Dani considered that. “Oh.” She made a face. “I can see how that’s not a good thing.”

Sam snorted. “How about awful!” Her phone chimed a text alert and she checked it. “Tucker should be here in a little bit.”

“Okay.” Dani was silent for a moment. Then she glanced over at Sam. “Got any food?”

Fifteen minutes later found Tucker joining Sam and Dani in eating peanut butter sandwiches in Sam’s opulent bedroom. He was still wearing a suit and a top hat, though he took the latter off and hung it up on Sam’s bedpost.

“Sam, I think your new butler hates me,” Tucker complained, snatching a sandwich off the plate between the two girls. “Hey, Dani.”

“He hates everyone,” Sam said dismissively.

“Hi, Tucker!” Dani said cheerfully through a mouthful.

“No talking while eating,” Sam said, nudging Dani’s ankle with her boot. “Tucker, do you want to do the honors or should I?”

“About what?”

“Where’s Danny?” Dani asked.

Tucker stared at Dani for a solid moment. “Oh. Oh.” He turned to Sam. “You haven’t told her?”

“I was attacked. By monsters with really sharp teeth. And before you ask, no, they weren’t ghosts.” Sam rubbed her eyes. “I didn’t want the headache of explaining a really sticky situation to Danny’s ‘cousin.’”

Tucker was still hung up on the “monsters with really sharp teeth” comment. “Monsters with really sharp teeth? Where—”

“Never mind that!” Dani interrupted. “Where’s Danny?”

“Danny…has been gone for a while,” Tucker said slowly. “We’re not quite sure where he is, but we’ve gotten news that he’s all right.” He shook his head. “Look, I know you’re worried about him. We all are. But I’m a bit more concerned about this ‘monsters with really sharp teeth’ thing. We can’t deal with Danny, but if we have monsters right here in the middle of Amity Park, I’d like to know.”

Dani gave Tucker a disgusted face but acquiesced. “They didn’t set my ghost sense off, even though they were shadows. They could fly, but that’s about all the resemblance they had with ghosts. I fried them with a really bright ghost ray.”

“They were after me,” Sam added. “Or maybe they weren’t since I was the only one there, but they were chasing me. I would’ve been a goner if Dani hadn’t shown up.”

Tucker considered that for a moment, chewing his sandwich as he did. “All right. We’ll have to tell the Fentons. With Danny out of the town and Valerie still healing, we’re going to need the town’s resident ghost hunters on the job if this is going to be a problem. They’re going to need to meet you, too,” Tucker told Dani.

“I’m not telling them that Vlad Plasmius cloned their son,” Sam said.

“They don’t know about me?” Dani sounded confused. “I thought they knew about Danny now.”
Tucker and Sam shared a glance. Tucker’s clearly said, “Oh no. This is all on you now.”

Sam pursed her lips and turned to the young half-ghost. “Danny… has issues. He tells us just about everything but he still hasn’t told his parents most of what happened since he became a half-ghost. That includes you and most of what Plasmius did. It’s not that he’s ashamed of you. It’s just that it’s an awkward conversation to have with your parents. If you’d shown up earlier while he was still here, he wouldn’t have had a problem with introducing you.”

“The problem we have now,” Tucker said, “is that Danny isn’t here. And that means the Fentons are going to be kind of…”

“Suspicious,” Sam finished. “Even Jazz doesn’t know.”

Tucker snorted. “Are you kidding me, Sam? Danny hates her psychoanalyzing him on a regular basis anyway. Why would he give her even more fodder?”

“I’m just saying. Even his own sister doesn’t know about you,” Sam told Dani. “So it’s not—”

“It’s not me, it’s him?” Dani rolled her eyes. “I have to say, I get it. It’d be awkward telling people I’m his clone.”

“Cousin,” Sam corrected. “He always talks about you as his cousin.”

“Course, that wouldn’t fly with the Fentons.” Tucker glanced down at his watch and popped the last bit of his sandwich in his mouth. “All right, Sam. We’d better go and tell them.”

“You mean you’re going to tell them,” Sam said.

Dani simply swiped the two remaining sandwiches off the platter.

When Sam and Tucker (no longer in a suit now) entered Fenton Works, Dani remained behind them, not wanting to shock her cousin’s parents.

Maddie and Jack were downstairs in the lab. Jazz was in the kitchen and she saw the trio first.

“Sam, Tucker!” She cocked her head in surprise when she saw the girl behind them. “Who’s this?”

“One of the things we have to talk about,” Sam said. “Are your parents in the lab?”

“They’re working on some sort of goggles,” Jazz confirmed. “I think it’s to imitate ghost sight.” She went to the staircase that led to the lab. “Mom! Dad! Sam and Tucker need to talk to you!” Glancing back at the three, she added, “I’m guessing our guest will be more comfortable while not surrounded by weapons designed to hurt ghosts.”

“Is something wrong, Jazz?” Jack thundered up the stairs. “Is it a ghost?”

Maddie was only a second behind him. “None of our alarms went off, Jack! It can’t be a ghost!”

“I thought your alarms detected half-ghosts?” Sam asked, confused.

Maddie and Jack shrugged.

“Danny spends a lot of time in the lab, and it’s a bit tiresome having to turn the alarms off because he always sets them off,” Maddie explained. “We just calibrated them to his ecto-signature, so they recognize him as ‘friendly.’ They’ll detect any other half-ghost that decides to show up.”
“Well, that’s convenient,” Tucker said, glancing back at Dani. “Because you’re wrong. There is a ghost here.”

Jack brightened. “Where?”

Dani gave a small cough, stepping to the side next to Sam. “Hi. I’m Dani.”

Maddie started. “Danny?”

Dani shook her head. “No, sorry. It’s…um… Dani with an ‘i.’ I’m Danny’s cousin.”

“His cousin?” Maddie and Jack chorused simultaneously. For her part, Jazz simply looked very, very confused.

“To be entirely accurate, Dani isn’t really Danny’s cousin,” Tucker inserted smoothly. “She’s…erm…” He made a face. “To be blunt, she was made by Plasmius using Danny’s DNA.”

“What he’s trying to say is that I’m his clone,” Dani said bluntly.

“Oh!” Jazz was staring at Dani. “So that’s why you’re a girl? Because two Xs were more stable than an X and a Y chromosome?”

Dani shrugged. “I wouldn’t know. I wasn’t very stable at the start either. Danny stabilized me some time ago.”

Maddie and Jack looked at Sam and Tucker, who shook their heads.

“He was by himself for that,” Sam explained. “He didn’t go into a lot of detail either.”

“He and Valerie came to a bit of truce at that time, he said,” Tucker said. “Something about Dani appealing to Valerie’s womanly nature.”

Sam rounded on Tucker. “He never told me that!”

Tucker seemed to realize he had just committed a grave faux pas. “Oops.” He put up his hands defensively. “Don’t blame me, Sam! I’m just the messenger!”

“I think she thought I was just a girl,” Dani said defensively.

“You are,” Sam and Tucker said simultaneously.

“I’m half-ghost!”

“Like Danny?” Maddie asked.

Dani gazed at her uncertainly, nodding. “Yeah. We were all half-ghosts, or somewhat close. You don’t…mind, do you?”

The adults smiled at her.

“You’re one of Danny’s friends,” Maddie said. “In fact, you’re his cousin. Of course we don’t mind, sweetie.”

“I’ve always wanted a second daughter!” Jack proclaimed, beaming broadly.

“You have?” Jazz asked.
“I wasn’t really planning on staying, though,” Dani said hurriedly. “It was more of a stop, since Danny said I could. But…well…there were some…not-ghost things.”

“Back up.” Jazz looked hard at Dani. “You’re here because Danny said you could stay here. But you’re not planning on staying. But something happened?”

“There were some black shadow-like monsters,” Sam said. “I was out walking to the park when they started chasing me. Dani managed to get them.”

“Ghosts?” Maddie asked, one restraining hand on her exuberant husband.

“No.” Dani shook her head. “I have a ghost sense, and it didn’t go off at all.”

“I didn’t have a thermos with me, so we didn’t catch any of them,” Sam lamented, running a hand through her hair. “But damn if those weren’t the weirdest things I’ve ever seen. They were right in the sidewalk until Dani took me flying.”

“And you guys have never seen something like that?” Jazz inquired.

“If we did, it would’ve been in the files we gave you,” Sam said. “It’s something new.”

“But why now?” Jazz sounded frustrated. “Danny isn’t here. So why would these things show up now?”

“Maybe that’s why,” Tucker suggested. “Danny isn’t here so what better time to do so?”

“But they’re not ghosts!” Sam cried. “Ghosts have a bone to pick with Danny Phantom, not random things!”

“Ghost or not, they’re an issue, aren’t they?” Maddie interrupted the quarrel. “How often have you seen them?”

“Just today, Mrs. Fenton,” Sam said, sighing heavily. “But that’s enough, isn’t it?”

“We’ll give you kids some weapons,” Jack decided, running critical eyes over the three teens’ bodies. He turned to Dani. “You probably don’t need them.”

“I’m half-ghost,” Dani said matter-of-factly. “If I can’t do something, weapons probably can’t either.”

“I’d like the Fenton Wrist-Rays,” Sam requested. “They’re easy to cart around.”

“They have a limited charge,” Maddie mused. “Something a bit bigger would be a better idea.”

“Can I have both?”

“Come down into the lab!” Jack grinned happily. “You can see what we have and pick something out.” He winked at Dani. “You’ll really enjoy what we’ve got down there!”

Dani looked alarmed. “I’m a ghost!”

“But your ecto-signature is similar to Danny’s, isn’t it?” Maddie said kindly. “It’s why none of our alarms went off when you entered the house. They register you as him.”

“Joy,” Dani muttered, not sounding particularly happy about this fact.
Sam shot Dani a critical look, but kept silent. She thought she knew what Dani was upset about. As a clone, Dani would have things in common with Danny. But she wasn’t just a clone. She was her own person. Yet facts like her having the same ecto-signature as Danny and even wearing clothes similar to Danny detracted from this fact; heck, even her ghost half looked similar to Danny’s! As a girl who lived to be her own unique individual, Sam could completely understand where Dani was coming from.

When this mess sorted itself out, she was going to take Dani out and get something that the girl could call her own.

In the meantime, though, she was headed downstairs to get protection. She didn’t know how well that protection would work considering that these things weren’t ghosts, but since Dani’s ecto-beams had wreaked damage, she figured that regular ghost weapons would also do the trick.

‘Oh, Danny…’ Sam sighed mentally. ‘If you were here…’

It didn’t matter that she and Tucker had been fighting ghosts with Danny for the last two years. They still didn’t hold a candle to the knowledge Danny possessed on fighting ghosts, as he was actually half a ghost himself. Furthermore, Sam suspected that Danny didn’t release all the details when it came to telling them what he got up to by himself. Case in point – his trip to stabilize Dani.

“Is that the Fenton Lipstick?” Tucker snatched it up. “I call it!”

Refraining from rolling her eyes, Sam picked up the Fenton Wrist-Ray and attached it to her wrist, rolling up the sleeve of her sweater as she did.

“Take these as well.” Maddie tossed the two ecto-guns and holsters. “The holsters clip onto your pants.”

“At least I’m not in a suit anymore,” Tucker joked, clipping the holster on. He holstered the ecto-gun in it, checking how quickly he could draw it. “Man, I feel like James Bond!”

“You just need the watch and the fancy car,” Sam said, checking that the gun was in working condition.

“I already have a fancy car, Sam.”

“It’s a limo. James Bond has cars that can race.”

“Do you want a Fenton Thermos?” Jack asked Dani, proudly holding it out to her. “We’ve also got a belt that was specially designed for Danny. It holds this thermos and a bunch of our other babies.” He procured a silver belt from seemingly thin air. “It’s magnetic, see?” He demonstrated this property by attaching the thermos to it. “Nothing will fall off unless you specifically grab it.”

“You’re really giving this to me?” Dani asked, slightly stunned. “But—”

“No buts, sweetie,” Maddie said, placing a hand on the girl’s shoulder. “You’re family. Jack and I are going to grill Danny on the details eventually, but consider yourself part of our family now.”

Dani smiled broadly, taking the belt. “Then thanks!” She transformed into Dani Phantom without a second’s thought and clipped the belt on. It was slightly loose.

“That can be fixed,” Jack assured her before anything could be said. He some sort of scanner and applied it to the belt. A hum was heard before the belt just seemed to shrink.
Dani blinked, amazed. “Wow, talk about high tech!”

Jack grinned unashamedly. “That’s just the start. There’s our portal, a connection right to the Ghost Zone!” He nodded to the Fenton Ghost Portal that was built into the wall. It was currently bolted shut due to the fact that Danny wasn’t present.

Floating over to it, Dani inspected it. “It doesn’t look very different from Plasmius’s,” she commented. “Does it work the same way?”

“There’s a genetic lock on it,” Maddie explained. “Only a Fenton can open it.”

“And us,” Sam added. “We’re always hunting with Danny so we’re also keyed into it.”

“If anyone ever manages to sneak into here, we don’t want them poking around that,” Jazz said, clipping on a Wrist-Ray as well as taking an ecto-gun.

“Is there any good in keeping it locked like this, though?” Dani asked. “I mean, there are a bunch of natural portals around. Ghosts won’t stop coming here just because an easy access point is closed. I can’t tell you how many ghosts I’ve come across while touring Europe. The Tower of London is crawling with them!”

Jack brightened. “We need to go to London, Maddie!”

“That’s nice, Jack,” Maddie said soothingly, handing Tucker a second Fenton Lipstick. “But we’re not going anywhere until Danny is back.”

Dani shared an amused glance with Sam, Tucker, and Jazz before turning fully around to face the rest of the lab.

Sam saw her glance around the lab, taking it in. She made her own inventory of the space, noting that it was much neater than it used to be. But then, it would have to be considering that the Fentons were aware that their son was half-ghost. Before it didn’t matter, but now a careless mistake could be very dangerous for Danny.

Never mind that he’d been dodging danger for two years. It was just safer.

Her eyes drifted past the staircase to look at Jack pushing an ugly pair of goggles on Jazz before she quickly snapped her attention back to the stairs. Had she seen something?

Narrowing her eyes, Sam unconsciously lifted her wrist to an ideal firing position. Her eyes didn’t waver from the stairs and she caught it: a shadowy movement.

Tucker noticed her preoccupation. “Sam?”

“There’s…something there,” Sam murmured. “Some sort of…thing.”

This time Sam could definitely see something shift in the shadows. “There!” She caught the adults’ attention as well. “Did you see it?”

“It could just be a bad bulb,” Tucker said uncertainly.

“After what happened earlier? No way.”

Maddie and Jack lifted up some bulky ecto-guns, fingers on the trigger.

Dani flew over to the stairs, firing up a ghost ray as she did. “I…don’t see anything,” she said
uncertainly. “But then…”

There was a loud inhumane shriek, cutting Dani off before she could say anything else. Something leapt out of the floor, pouncing on her and throwing her to the floor. The ghost ray in her hand fired off harmlessly to the side, hitting the ceiling.

“Dani!” Sam tried to get a good lock on the creature, but couldn’t for fear of hitting Dani.

“Hell, there are more!” Tucker began firing on the floor, where writhing black shadows were darting about.

“On the counters!” Maddie jumped on the counter, trying to hit one of them but failing and simply hitting the floor.

Dani let out a loud scream before the thing covering her seemed to grow and just cover her entire form. In another instant it sank into the floor and disappeared, taking Dani with it.

“Oh my God!” Jazz gasped, shocked. “Oh my God! What the hell was that? Dani, Dani!”

“Hell, no!” Sam snarled, taking out her ecto-gun and shooting like mad. None of her shots had any effect.

In fact, none of them could seem to hit any of the shadows. Eventually, Sam felt something clutch at her ankle. She tried to shake it off but failed.

It was only a moment before a writhing black mass of something swarmed over her, making Sam’s skin crawl. It was slimy and cold and utterly disgusting. Yet Sam didn’t spend more than a minute in it before she found herself lying flat and supine on a gravelly floor, gasping for air she didn’t even know she’d been denied.

“Sam? Sam? Are you all right?”

Sam turned her head sideways to see Dani looking worriedly at her out of electric green eyes. “Fine,” she managed to rasp. She cleared her throat. “You?”

Dani shrugged. “Yeah. But we’re in a dome of sorts. I don’t know what. Whatever brought us here left right after. You…just popped out of the floor in a black mass.”

Sam pushed herself to her knees, noting that she still had her weapons and that she was apparently in a transparent dome that was flickering green. It was approximately about fifteen feet in diameter. Outside of the dome seemed to be the inside of an extraordinarily large building with a rounded ceiling and pillars around them; the whole area had a very Lord of the Rings vibe to it. “Oh God…” She shuddered in disgust. “That was…awful.”

There was no time to further elaborate on that as four more black shapes pushed out of the floor, peeling back to reveal the forms of Maddie, Jack, Tucker, and Jazz. They promptly burst into gasps, having been similarly deprived of oxygen.

“What – the hell”—Tucker coughed—“was that?”

A high-pitched and manic voice spoke. “My clever pets. Did you like?” It gave off an insane giggle.

“Who’s there?” Sam demanded. She got to her feet.

“Behind you,” the voice sang.
Sam and Dani whirled around, being the only two on their feet. The others simply twisted around to see who had spoken. They were struck dumb by the sight.

It was Dani who managed to speak first. “What…who…”

“What the hell are you?” Jazz blurted out.

The ghost giggled again before breaking into frantic laughter. He had white hair and was wearing what resembled a black and white jumpsuit. His eyes were an odd mixture of colors; the right had an iris that was green fading into red, while the left was entirely red. What was strange about the ghost was that the entire right half of his head seemed rather shadowy, as if the head was having trouble holding itself together. It faded in and out of view.

What was most startling was the jagged emblem on the chest. It wasn’t entirely whole and seemed to have been partly ripped off, but it could clearly be seen that it had been the famous emblem of Danny Phantom.

The ghost finally stopped laughing to grin mirthlessly. “Who am I?” His voice changed to become harsh. “I’m your worst nightmare.”
“No! You’re having me on, aren’t you?”

“And then, right in the middle of all those people, Raven’s face shows up on an electronic billboard…advertising gum!” Beast Boy burst into laughter, falling off the sofa as he did.

“Gum?” Danny asked Raven, who was reading a book on the sofa next to the boys. “Seriously?”

“It was the only thing in English that I found and the only thing I could read,” Raven responded dryly. “Besides, as gum went, it wasn’t bad.”

“How many languages do you know?” Danny asked.

“Six. But Japanese isn’t one of them.”

“Six?” Danny’s mouth fell open. “I’m failing Spanish!” He made a face. “Though Esperanto probably counts, doesn’t it?”

“It’s a language that has a completely different grammatical structure and comes with its own culture. I’d say it’s foreign.”

“No way Lancer’ll buy that.” Danny leaned back into the couch, rubbing his face. “It’s Spanish, French, or Italian at Casper High.”

Beast Boy spluttered, popping up from behind the sofa. “Casper High? As in ‘Casper the friendly ghost’ Casper?”

Danny grinned amusedly. “It’s Amity Park, the ghost city of America. I suppose whoever founded it had a real sense of humor and believed in ghosts. Not everyone did until my parents made that portal. My sister didn’t until a giant green hornet attacked her in school. Even then she was kind of skeptical, at least until I phased the hornet through the wall.” He shrugged, fondly reminiscing with a small grin.

Beast Boy blinked. “Your sister saw a gigantic green hornet—”

“That glowed,” Danny added.

“—and she didn’t believe it was a ghost?” Beast Boy goggled. “Is she dense or something?”

“Just really opinionated. I think some would call her a realist. Ghosts weren’t something she could easily believe in, so she didn’t. She just thought our parents were crazy.”

“And you being half-ghost.” Beast Boy shook his head. “Must have been a riot, huh?”

“Nah.” Danny shrugged. “It was a relief. My parents were ghost hunters that were suspicious of everything. It was rather nice not to have to be afraid that Jazz would suspect I was a ghost. ’Course, when she found out it was even better, since I had someone in my camp who was able to give excuses when I was out way past my curfew because of a ghost.”

“But you don’t have that problem anymore?”

“Thank God, no.” Danny screwed his face up and slid down to lie flat on the couch. “But revealing my secret resulted in other pains…like reporters.” He shuddered dramatically. “I still can’t go out to
the Nasty Burger without worrying that someone’s going to snap a photo!”

“Nasty…Burger…” Beast Boy sounded lost. “You guys go to a place called the Nasty Burger?”

“It used to be Tasty Burger, but someone stole the ‘T’ and replaced it with an ‘N,’” Danny explained. “It’s been the Nasty Burger ever since, and it does its best to have the best burgers.”

“Yeah, okay but…meat!” Beast Boy groaned in disgust.

“Better get used to it, BB!” Cyborg announced, dumping a picnic basket on top of Danny, who winced as the heavy basket bounced off his stomach; he clutched it before it could make a mess. “We’re going on a picnic right now!”

Danny jolted upright. “What? When was this decided?”

“Since yesterday!” Cyborg chirped cheerfully. “We all figured that Raven needs a break and that we should show you more of the town. Just kicking butt doesn’t show off Jump City’s best, you know.”

“I’m busy,” Raven protested.

“You’ve been busy the last two weeks!” Cyborg pointed out. “It’s time to relax and have some fun! ’Sides, Wulf agrees with me.”

Wulf popped up next to him, wearing a chef’s hat and a big grin. “Jes,” the ghost agreed.

“Have you been cooking?” Danny said incredulously.

“Is easy,” Wulf explained.

“Yep!” Cyborg threw an arm around the wolf ghost. “He just about cooked everything that we’re going to be eating!”

“Have you forgotten that there’s a vegan here as well?” Beast Boy cried in protest.

“Relax, BB,” Cyborg said. “There’s tofu, too, though you’ll be making that yourself.”

Danny perked up. “A barbecue? Without ectoplasm coating the grill? Count me in!”

The others stared at him.

“Ectoplasm…” Cyborg said slowly, “…on the grill?”

“My parents are ghost hunters, remember? There’s ectoplasm practically everywhere in the fridge. My mom made a Cake Ghost – the one that you guys fought earlier – and my dad made a Lemonade Ghost by infecting some lemonade my mom made. Both of them are a royal pain.” At the end of his tirade, Danny made a face. “’Course, none of it was on purpose.”

“I don’t want to know,” Beast Boy proclaimed. “I really don’t.”

“Best not,” Danny agreed.

Cyborg shook his surprise off to plaster another grin on his face. “Yeah, well, we’ll be rounding up Robin and Starfire from wherever they’ve gone. C’mon, Wulf!” He bounded off, the wolf in tow, conveniently forgetting to pick up the picnic basket Danny was still holding.

“Should I be afraid?” Danny asked, weighing the basket in his hands.
“Of Cy’s cooking? Nah.” Beast Boy shook his head. “But I don’t know about Wulf’s…”

Thinking of Starfire’s attempts at cooking, Danny wasn’t too sure he wanted to know how a ghost’s cooking would be. “Neither do I.”

Beast Boy grinned toothily. “Meet you downstairs in the garage, yeah?” He promptly transformed into a cheetah and sprinted off, narrowly avoiding slamming into the doors as they didn’t slide open fast enough.

Raven flicked through the book on her lap. “You should go.”

Danny cocked his head to the side. “So should you.”

“I’m in the middle of finding a way back home for you.”

“You’ve been looking for the last two weeks,” Danny said. “I’m sure you’re working as fast as possible, right?”

“I’ve hit a block,” Raven admitted. “I was able to reach back and get Cyborg from five thousand years ago but that was in our dimension. I can even access my own, which is an entirely different dimension, but I was born there so I’m linked. Yours is unknown. The only factor that links any of us to that dimension is you and the ghosts you’ve caught.”

“Jazz always said that if you can’t figure something out after going at it over and over again, the best thing to do is sleep on it. Since I think you’ve already slept on this problem for the last two weeks, the best thing to do is probably kick back and relax.” Danny raised an eyebrow, grinning as he flapped the top of the picnic basket back and forth. “I think a picnic will do that, don’t you?”

“You do want to get home, don’t you?”

“Well, yeah. But it’s not gonna happen in the next five minutes. And it’s not going anywhere.” Danny shrugged. “Taking a break can only be beneficial, I figure.” He pulled the book away from Raven. “So take the afternoon off and enjoy the sunny day.”

“Do I look like someone who enjoys the sun?” Raven didn’t even have to point to her black and purple outfit.

Grinning, Danny phased backwards through the couch, straightening. “No more than Sam. But I figure you’ll be a better sport about it.”

Raven narrowed her eyes. “And why’s that?”

“Because you’re not getting your book back otherwise.” Smirking, Danny raised his empty hands, showing that he had secreted the book to some hiding place.

“Oh no, you didn’t.” Raven stood up, her cloak billowing around her. “Give. It. Back.”

“You’ll get it back tonight and no sooner.” Laughing, Danny phased through the floor before Raven could grab him, leaving the picnic basket as he did.

“Danny!”

Raven didn’t manage to catch Danny until she found him down in the garage with the other Titans. When she did, all she received was a cheeky grin.
“Here,” she said sourly, dumping the picnic basket into Danny’s arms. “You left this behind.”

“Now that playtime is over,” Cyborg announced, rubbing his hands together, “and everyone is here”—Robin and Starfire looked rather embarrassed as he said this; Danny wondered what they had been doing—“we can get going! Boo-yeah!”

He opened the door of his newly repaired car and hopped inside. Beast Boy hopped in with him and Wulf climbed into the back. He’d really bonded with the two Titans.

“We’re all getting our own rides, are we?” Danny said dryly, transforming into his ghost half. He phased the picnic basket through the passenger door window and left it in Beast Boy’s lap. “Good. I could use the fresh air.”

“Me whooping your butt outside not enough for you?” Robin asked, grinning.

“To relax,” Danny corrected, sending Robin a half-hearted glare.

In the meantime, Cyborg had been opening the garage door. He suddenly poked his head out of the window and yelled “Race you to the park!” before flooring the gas and zooming off with a screech of tires.

“How many parks are there in Jump City?” Danny asked Raven.

“Just the one,” she said, smiling. “It’s pretty noticeable.”

His legs disappearing into an ethereal ghostly tail, Danny grinned mischievously. “I’d like to see him outdrive this.” Without a sound and in a blur of black and white, Danny sped off, easily outstripping the top speed of Cyborg’s baby.

“None of us are going to be able to top that,” Robin commented, putting his helmet on, “but we can try to get Cyborg!” He kicked his motorcycle into gear and drove out, Starfire on his heels.

In the meantime, Raven considered the empty garage, no desire in her to participate in the inane race Cyborg had cooked up. ‘Why...do I have this feeling like something is going to go wrong?’

Flying at top speed meant that Danny had some trouble making out various landmarks. His eyesight was good enough to catch the big picture, but he couldn’t catch the small details like words on the billboards or the fact that there were only a few cars on the streets. He could tell that when there was a building or some other obstacle due to an undefined sixth sense and his ghost sense had developed to the point that he could tell where a ghost was without too much difficulty, but he couldn’t make out many small details.

Either way, he didn’t need to know the small details to know where the park was. It was the only large green area there in Jump City. Only two minutes after he’d sprinted out from the tower, he touched down in the middle of the park where a bunch of picnic tables were located.

Transforming back, Danny decided to practice his ghost powers a little more while he waited for his friends to catch up. Focusing, he floated in the air and took a sitting position, all while still in human form. He ignored the townspeople around him; two weeks of exposure to how the Teen Titans handled going out in public had changed his attitude a lot. He was no longer as shy about using his powers in public for one thing.

As he inhaled the fresh air, Danny closed his eyes and meditated, using another trick Raven had taught him to better focus his powers. As they had grown so rapidly (or rather “leveled up” as
Tucker would be sure to say), he was unused to them. Meditating helped focus his center and made sure that he wouldn’t accidentally punch a hole in a tree while in his human form if some of his ghostly strength leaked through (it had happened the second day after Raven’s test run).

“Oh, dude! No fair!” Beast Boy’s breathless voice brought him out of his meditation. “Teleportation isn’t allowed in a race!”

Danny cracked an eye open, seeing Beast Boy and Cyborg panting in front of him, apparently having run after parking the car; Wulf was inspecting the picnic tables. “I didn’t teleport; I flew. You forget that I can go over three hundred miles per hour and that I don’t have to take the streets.” He opened his eyes fully upon seeing Robin race up, followed shortly by Starfire.

“How much earlier did they get here?” Robin asked Danny, pointing to the two Titans and the ghost.

“’Bout a minute,” Danny answered, placing his feet on the ground. “Where’s Raven?”

Starfire shook her head. “I do not know.”

“Hold your horses.” Raven landed on the ground next to Danny. “Unlike the rest of you, I wasn’t in a hurry.”

“Since you came in last, you can set up the tables!” Cyborg shoved the basket into Raven’s arms.

Raven glared daggers in Danny’s direction, who gulped and grinned sheepishly.

“Would it help that I didn’t know you’d come in last?” he offered.

“I wasn’t even racing,” Raven grumbled, stalking to the tables to begin setting up.

In the meantime, Cyborg had somehow procured an entire barbecue grill from somewhere. The laws of this world sometimes completely baffled Danny, though he found that he couldn’t really say anything as – hey – he was half-ghost! And that came with its own set of rules.

“What do you guys normally do on these outings?” Danny asked Robin and Starfire.

“Depends.” Robin flicked out a Frisbee he had secreted away on his person. “We usually play Frisbee.” He raised an eyebrow. “Think you can play? Without your ghost powers?”

“What about the others?” Danny gestured to encompass Raven, Starfire, Beast Boy, and Cyborg.

Robin smirked. “You’re half-ghost. It’s an unfair advantage, especially since you can fly too fast for any of us to keep up with. Think of it as practice.”

A devilish look came over Danny’s face as his eyes flashed green. “Bring it on, boy wonder.”

“Yo! Heads up!”

Hearing a slight whooshing sound coming from behind him, Danny sidestepped and lifted his hand to catch a flying football. “Watch it!” he called to Beast Boy.

“You caught it, didn’t you?” Beast Boy said, unashamed. “Throw it back!”

Danny raised his eyebrows, shooting an amused glance in Robin’s direction. “This enough practice for you?” Eyes flaring green, Danny held the football over his foot before letting it drop and kicking it directly over Beast Boy’s head and sending it hurtling across the park.
Beast Boy’s arms pinwheeled as he chased after the ball. “Duuuude! No fair! I can’t fly that fast!”
He morphed into a falcon and took off after the football.

“You did ask for it, Robin,” Starfire told her boyfriend, who was goggling after the flying football, which was still airborne and not coming down anytime soon.

“I thought we agreed not to use your powers for evil?” Raven asked from the tables.

“He’ll catch it,” Danny said, watching Beast Boy frantically chase the football. “I think,” he added rather more dubiously. “Sides, this is more of a recreational use.”

“Burgers are done!” Cyborg called. “Get ’em while they’re – no, Wulf! Don’t eat all of them!”

Danny took pity on the half-robot and went to help him rescue the burgers from Wulf. It would’ve been amusing if Wulf had eaten all of them but he was also hungry.

He stopped upon seeing how some of the burgers on the grill looked rather suspiciously on the greenish side. “Did Wulf help make some of these?”

Cyborg was currently holding Wulf off with a single hand while holding a platter full of burgers in the other. “Yeah. Why?”

“You don’t want to eat these,” Danny said, grabbing another plate and piling the green burgers on it. “They’ve got ectoplasm mixed in. Here, Wulf. These are yours.”

“Senefikaj?” Wulf asked, blinking.

“Ah, no, that’s not it.” Danny looked down on the burgers. Personally, he wouldn’t eat these even if they were the only food available; he didn’t know what his half-ghost constitution would do. But he couldn’t tell Wulf that, could he? “They look great. It’s just that I don’t think the others can eat ectoplasm.”

“Ah.” Abandoning Cyborg, Wulf took the platter of ectoplasm-infected burgers from Danny. “Thanks, friend.” He licked Danny and bounded off to the table, sitting next to Raven. He promptly started devouring the meat, ignoring the condiments laid out around him.

Raven stared straight ahead, ignoring the ghost’s bad manners. “Nice. And I just set the table up.”

Wulf stopped eating for a moment to look at Raven. “Thanks,” he informed Raven. He then licked her as well, causing her to stiffen and her hair to stick up as saliva clumped it together. He turned back to his food, not noticing stiff posture of the Titan next to him.

“Ew.” Raven grabbed a handful of paper towers and began trying to clean her hair.

Stifling laughter, Danny put down some more burgers in front of her. “Want some?” he managed to ask with a neutral tone.

Raven glared at him, though it had no heat. “My hair is filled with saliva… dog saliva.”

“I could wash it out?” Danny offered. “Course, my ice will just freeze it first…”

“Forget it.” Raven grabbed a water bottle and dumped the entire thing over her head, making sure to bend over to the side so that her clothes remained dry.

As the other Titans helped themselves to the burgers, Beast Boy finally landed next to Danny, transforming back from the falcon he’d been. The football was lying on the ground in front of him.
“Not cool!” Beast Boy complained to Danny. “Do you know how long that thing was flying for? It
was over the town before it started coming down!”

“Really?” Danny blinked. “I’d been aiming for a round the world trip. Maybe if I’d kicked it in ghost
form…”

“No!” Beast Boy clutched the football to his chest. “Do you know how long it took me to find a
football that wasn’t made out of the hides of animals? You’re not sending this around the world!”

“BB, the tofu’s in the basket whenever you want it,” Cyborg said, cutting into argument and
slathering his burger with ketchup, onions, lettuce, and any other condiment he could get his hands
on. The only thing he couldn’t touch was the mustard, as Starfire had confiscated it and was drinking
it down like it was water. “Did we bring any extra mustard?” A large furry paw handed him a small
mustard bottle. “Ah, thanks.” He promptly drowned the burger in mustard, slapped the other half of
the sandwich on it, and began chowing down.

As Beast Boy headed off to commandeer the grill, the “vegan” football still in his grasp, Danny
helped himself to a burger. Having seen Starfire guzzle down the mustard like it was the best thing
since the Nasty Burger he’d rather lost his taste for the dressing.

“Looking forward to an awesome game of Ultimate Titan Frisbee?” Cyborg waggled his eyebrows
at Danny, having gulped down over half his burger in the meantime.

“You’re on,” Danny said, grinning maniacally as he empathically slapped his burger closed. He took
a big bite to prove his point.

“It’s not an eating competition,” Raven commented dryly, taking smaller bites out of her burger. Her
damp hair was shining in the sunlight but at least it was clean.

Danny managed to swallow his bite, making a mental note to never take that big a bite again. “Your
point being?”

“Don’t try to match his eating habits,” Raven said, nodding to Cyborg, who was guzzling down a
second hamburger like it was nothing. “I heard that he ate an old shoe filled with wasabi in Tokyo at
an all-you-can-eat restaurant. He was eventually kicked out because he ate too much.”

“It was all-you-can-eat!” Cyborg protested, thankfully swallowing his mouthful. “I was just living up
to it!”

“An old shoe?” Danny said incredulously.

“It was food!”

“It’s a shoe!”

“And?” Cyborg took in the rest of his burger in one bite while staring at Danny.

Danny stared at the impossible feat, as there had been half a burger left before the action had been
committed. “I give up. If you ever meet Sam, I’ll sic her on you.”

Cyborg hastened to swallow his gigantic bite. When he managed, he gasped out, “No way! I admire
your spirit, Danny, but I’m not going anywhere near her.”

Danny glared at him. “What’s wrong with Sam?”
“Nothing! She just seems extraordinarily opinionated!”

“So?” Danny threateningly pointed the ketchup bottle at Cyborg.

“I don’t think I’m up to facing her,” Cyborg said hastily, eyeing the red bottle with trepidation.

Danny grinned evilly, a glint in his eye. “Why do you think I’m going to sic her on you?”

Cyborg considered that for a moment before he apparently deemed the argument a lost cause. He suddenly filched the Frisbee from Robin and flicked it in Danny’s direction. “Go get it!”

Not having any time to dodge, Danny flinched, closing his eyes as the Frisbee flew through him as he reflexively turned intangible. When he was sure the danger had passed, he snapped his eyes open and glared at Cyborg, eyes flaring green.

“You want a fight?” Danny stood up on the bench, burger still in hand. “I’ll give you a fight.”

Flashing an evil grin in Cyborg’s direction, he held out a glowing green hand behind him and took hold of the Frisbee with his telekinesis. Not looking away from Cyborg, who was sporting a deer-in-the-headlights look, Danny twisted his wrist as if he was throwing the Frisbee.

Cyborg had just enough time to duck before a glowing green Frisbee hurtled through the air where his head had been a split-second before, having been phased directly through Danny. “Watch it!” He stood up, glaring imperiously at Danny. “We’re not capable of turning intangible like you!”

“I thought that in a game of Ultimate Titan Frisbee that all powers were permissive,” Danny said innocently, his glowing hand by his side. “Unless you’re changing the rules?”

Cyborg stared at Danny for a solid moment before a small volcano erupted above his head. “All right, that’s it! Titans, let’s play!” He grabbed a stymied Beast Boy, who had just come over from the grill with his tofu, by the scruff of his neck and also hauled Wulf off.

“I haven’t finished eating yet!” Robin protested. A moment later he was forced to leave his half-eaten burger behind as an extended blue hand snatched out and grabbed his cloak, yanking him off the bench.

“For the record,” Raven told Danny, finishing off her food, “I blame you.” She floated into the air before anyone could coerce her into joining the game.

Starfire slurped down the last of her mustard and beamed at Danny, who was quickly finishing his food before the game started (ghost fighting had taught him to take in nourishment whenever possible). “I look forward to playing the game with you!”

From his spot on the bench, Danny looked out at the Titans. Raven and Starfire were floating in the sky. Beast Boy had sulkily relocated himself to a tree, nursing the empty plate where his tofu had been located before Cyborg had accidentally thrown them to the ground. Robin had escaped Cyborg to situate himself opposite the half-robot. Wulf was crouched by the ground, under the Frisbee.

The Frisbee was now glowing in midair approximately in the middle of the Titans; Danny was slightly on the outskirts.

“Here goes!” With a small grin, Danny let the Frisbee rip with a random flick of his wrist, sending it loose in a wild erratic flight.

“I got it!” Beast Boy morphed into a hummingbird and tried to match the Frisbee’s erratic flight.
He was nearly beaned by Starfire, who swooped down to catch the Frisbee. She twirled around and threw it to Robin, who jumped in the air to catch it. He ran forward three steps before leaping into the air and twisting around to fling it towards Cyborg.

“No teams?” Danny called, jumping off the bench to join the fray.

“There are teams,” Cyborg said, throwing the Frisbee to Raven. “It’s us against you!”

Danny’s eyebrows flew up to disappear behind his bangs and he threw a glance towards Wulf, who seemed to be solely on Cyborg’s team (the traitor). “Oh, really? Guess you’re lucky I can’t yet duplicate in this form!”

Focusing, he jumped off the ground to fly after Raven, who threw him a smirk before flicking the Frisbee to Beast Boy, who was on the ground. It took all of Danny’s concentration to not just drop to the ground and break an ankle. Instead, he landed on the ground with a tuck and a roll, jumping at Beast Boy, who morphed into a cheetah, holding the Frisbee in his mouth.

With a thought, Danny teleported next to Beast Boy, who nearly jumped out of his skin with fright. The half-ghost yanked the Frisbee out of the changeling’s mouth and ran off, dodging Wulf’s pounce by ducking.

“Hey, three steps only!” Cyborg hollered.

“I’m a one man team!” Danny retorted. “I’m throwing that rule out the window!”

“Friend Danny,” Starfire said, flying above the black-haired, “I have heard the saying that there is no ‘I’ in ‘team’. Perhaps I can join you?”

“No fair, Star!” Robin shouted.

“The teams are the eclectic!” Starfire proclaimed.

“Thanks, Star!” Danny grinned, flicking the Frisbee up vertically to the alien.

“The rule is back in the window!” Cyborg demanded, pointing an accusing finger at Danny. He was promptly smacked in the face with the Frisbee.

“I apologize, Cyborg!” Starfire called. “I did not mean to aim it for your face!”

“Where did you aim it then?” Cyborg spluttered, reaching for the toy.

Before he touched it, it glowed green and whipped away, swerving around Robin, who stretched for it but missed. This time the Frisbee hit Beast Boy in the stomach and flattened him, as the green Titan hadn’t been quick enough to dodge. Wulf screeched to halt next to him, snuffling the changeling’s dark green hair.

“Sorry!” Danny called, wincing. “I thought you’d move!”

Beast Boy waved weakly from his spot on the grass, avoiding Wulf’s sharp teeth. “I’m okay,” he choked.

Suddenly the glowing green Frisbee glowed black, freeing it from Danny’s control. Raven called the Frisbee to her hand, smiling unapologetically at the half-ghost.

“If you can use your telekinesis, mine is also fair play,” she pointed out smugly, waving the Frisbee around.
Starfire swooped towards her, aiming to guard the half-demon and hopefully steal the prize.

As she did so, a gust of wind blew through the clearing, ruffling Danny’s hair and lifting his shirt up. The sudden chill made him shiver and pull down his shirt, grateful for the black color and the long sleeves. He reached up to brush his hair out of his eyes – he really needed to get a haircut – and froze as he glimpsed something out of the corner of his eye. Something that was most decidedly not normal.

His attention off the game, Danny barely noticed as the Frisbee changed hands from Raven to Wulf, who had snatched it out of the air. He was more focused on the writhing black shadows by the trees. He’d never seen such a thing in nature; the only thing that even resembled that was Johnny 13’s shadow, but that was a ghost, meaning his ghost sense should have gone off.

The wind blew again, chilling Danny and sending goose bumps along his skin. That was when his instincts really started screaming at him.

He never got goose bumps, especially not since he’d become half-ghost. He was pretty much immune to most creepy stuff by now.

When the Frisbee flew by him without him glancing at it, Starfire stopped above him. “Danny, what is wrong?”

“Am I the only one who sees something over there?” Danny pointed to the trees.

“The shadows?” Raven asked, floating by Starfire.

“They’re…writhing.” Danny unconsciously spread his feet in a fighting position. “That’s not normal.”

It happened in a instant. Danny barely had time to blink before part of the mass of shadows by the trees broke off, sprinting toward them. It leapt out of the grass and he only caught sight of a mass of gleaming white teeth before he flinched backwards and blasted a ghost ray at it.

The powerful attack tore through the shadow, leaving nothing but black shreds.

“What the hell was that?” Beast Boy demanded, breathing heavily from chasing the Frisbee, which lay forgotten on the grass by now.

No one had a chance to answer as that single attack seemed to be the signal for the free-for-all. It seemed like a tsunami as the entire shadow line of trees swept outward, headed directly to the Titans and the two ghosts.

Wulf growled low in his throat, drawing Danny’s eyes to him. “Danĝera.” The ghost’s fur was rippling as the muscles underneath tensed in anticipation.

“Whatever they are, we’re not going down easily. Titans, go!” Robin cried.

“Robin, we can’t just go in blindly!” Raven objected, her objection falling on deaf ears as Robin charged forward with a yell, throwing bombs at the ground.

Danny transformed quickly as the two bluish-white rings of light separated over his body. His ghostly glow flared briefly before he got it under control. Then he was off, diving into the ground to try and see if he could chase the shadows out.

He got only several feet ahead before he was met with an eyeless face and a mouthful of gnashing
teeth. With a silent yell, he phased out of the ground, half a dozen shadow creatures on his tail.

“Jeez!” Danny craned his head around to see that he had an entourage of shadows behind him. “Not what I expected!”

Starfire screamed as a shadow jumped on her. She managed to fend it off with a blast of energy but it didn’t dissipate the way the other had when hit with Danny’s ecto-beam. It dove back at her, but met its demise at the hands of an ecto-beam Danny shot its way. The small but highly concentrated beam of energy fried it from the inside out.

“Thank you!” Starfire called to the ghost teen.

But Danny was unable to reply, finding that it seemed most of the horde had decided to concentrate its efforts on him, deeming him the greatest threat.

‘Damn it. How am I supposed to get rid of these things without hitting everyone else?’ Danny thought furiously, eyes scanning his surroundings. Using a widespread ecto-beam just to eradicate his stalkers wouldn’t help because it would also hit his friends. The raw power he now possessed at his fingertips was still too new for him to be able to control it with the finesse he had had before.

Deciding that distance would do the trick and trusting that his friends could manage for themselves (Wulf was trying to fish the shadows out of the ground but not really succeeding; Robin’s bombs were having close to no effect but he’d teamed up with Cyborg’s sonic cannon; Raven was attacking them with black magic, though it was nigh impossible to see if her attacks were having any effect; Beast Boy was stomping on the ground in elephant form, which wasn’t having any luck), Danny sped off, keeping his speed low enough that the horde on his tail could keep up.

When he was high enough, Danny twisted around, a powerful ecto-beam already building up in his right hand. With a yell he released it in a wide flash of green light, throwing it through the mass of shadow monsters. The entire horde released horrid shrieks of agony that seemed to echo through Danny’s head as they tore apart into hundreds of shreds of black shadow, which then dissipated in the bright sunlight.

Breathing heavily as adrenaline (or the ghostly equivalent anyway) rushed through his ghostly veins, Danny brushed his hair back. Shaking himself mentally and trying to clear his head from the horrid shrieks that were still ringing through it, Danny headed back to the ground.

It took him a moment to realize that it wasn’t because of him missing the small details that he was seeing the field as empty. It actually was empty.

None of the Titans were there. Not even Wulf could be seen and Danny stretched his ghost sense to try and sense if he was elsewhere.

His breath raggedly filling his ears, Danny frantically scanned the park. It was completely empty. The only signs that a battle had taken place was the scorched grass where Robin and Cyborg had attacked the grass, the singed treetops from Starfire’s energy beams, and the missing chunks of ground where Raven had uprooted solid earth.

But there was not a single sign of the Titans or Wulf.

Danny shook his head in denial. No. No.

The last time something like this had happened, Phantom had attacked. But Phantom wasn’t out; that thermos his parents had invented would guarantee it.
Then who?

The mist? How could mist – no matter how clever or insane – pull something off like this? Those shadows weren’t ghosts, no matter that they possessed intangibility and the power of flight.

Try as he might, Danny couldn’t think of anyone who could pull something like this off. Furthermore, he wasn’t sure if he even could. Jump City was a completely different world from what he was familiar with. There was no Ghost Zone and no one he could ask. If he was home, he could just head into the Ghost Zone for his answers.

But he wasn’t home. So now what?

Still breathing heavily, Danny almost didn’t notice when the atmosphere suddenly chilled again. He did notice when his ghost sense went off, sending plumes of bluish wisps of cold air from his mouth into the atmosphere. Turning to the right, where he sensed the ghost to be, he froze upon seeing it.

‘What…the hell?’

After Danny had left with a practical horde of shadow monsters on his tail, Raven quickly found that they were on the losing side. Before, it seemed like they were on somewhat of an even playing field. But the moment Danny had left for a wider area so he didn’t have to worry about hitting anyone else, the shadow monsters apparently stopped holding back.

Suddenly, there was a loud trumpet from Beast Boy and he was shrouded in black. Whatever had blanketed him sank into the ground, taking the changeling with it.

Starfire had seen it happen and had frozen in shock. Before she could react, the shadows she had been fighting wrapped around her like a glove and threw her to the ground. In a moment she was gone as well.

Robin couldn’t miss the sight of his girlfriend simply being swallowed by the ground like that. “Starfire!” A second later he yelled out in shock. A shadow had caught hold of his leg and was pulling him into the ground.

Within five seconds, Robin was gone and Cyborg followed almost immediately after, managing to hold off for only a second by firing his cannon.

Wulf turned intangible to escape his captors but one approached from behind and sunk him through the grass in a split-second.

Raven was the only one left, watching all this happen with a dry mouth and a frantically pounding heartbeat. She’d been holding her attackers off with a black shield that was surrounding her like a dome. But she couldn’t hold it up for long as it was under stress from the countless shadows attacking her.

Her only hope was that Danny would finish his horde off and come back.

Just as she thought this, there was piercing shriek that pierced through her head. Shocked, her shield flickered for a moment.

That moment was all the shadows needed as they pounced on her. Raven scarcely had time to gasp for air before she was enveloped by something cold, slimy, and thoroughly disgusting. Her sixth sense felt something shift around her before the shadows covering her slipped away.
She found herself gasping for air and facedown in something that resembled concrete but not quite. It was far smoother and more like a stone. Her fingers convulsively grasped the ground and she pushed herself to her knees, trying to jump to her feet but failing as her muscles shook in shock. She fell backwards on her butt, finding herself in a transparent dome that flickered green.

“What…” she gasped, “…happened?”

“What happened to us,” an unfamiliar voice said.

Raven whirled around to see a black-haired girl in a black sweater, black jeans, and combat boots. She had lilac eyes, purple lipstick, and her hair was half tied up in a green scrunchie. Next to her was a dark-skinned boy in a red beret, a yellowish looking sweater, and blue jeans. His hair was in a buzz cut and black while his eyes were a teal color that were framed by black glasses.

“Who are you?” Raven asked, noting that the rest of her friends had also made it here and seemed just as shaky as she was. The only person missing was Wulf, yet Raven had no time to devote to asking why he was missing.

“I’m Sam. This is Tucker.”

Raven could hardly believe it. “Sam Manson? Tucker Foley?” She looked behind them to see a white-haired girl who seemed to be a ghost and clad similarly to Danny Phantom, two adults in jumpsuits, and another female teenager who was clad in an aquamarine jacket, sneakers, and what resembled a pair of dress pants. “I assume that you are…” She pointed to each of them as she named them, “Madeline Fenton, Jack Fenton, and Jazz Fenton?” She left the ghost girl nameless, not sure what her name was and not wanting to think it was something similar to Danny Phantom, especially considering the emblem on her chest.

“How did you know?” Sam sounded surprised.

“We have a friend in common,” Raven said.

“Danny will be pleased to know we have found you!” Starfire exclaimed.

“How?” they all exclaimed in various tones of shock, worry, and surprise.

“You know him?” Sam demanded.

“Where is he?” Jazz demanded.

“How do you know him?” Tucker added.

“He’s been staying with us for the last couple of weeks,” Robin explained, looking as bowled over as Raven felt.

“I wouldn’t say we found them, Starfire,” Cyborg said. “It doesn’t do us much good if Danny isn’t here with us.”

“Where is he?” Maddie demanded, her tone frantic with worry. “Where is my boy?”

The Titans were a bit gob smacked at hearing about the strong-willed teen they had become extremely familiar with called a boy.

Raven glanced around the dome for a moment to see that Danny really wasn’t here. “Well, I guess he’s the only one of us who didn’t manage to get caught.”
“Were they shadows?” the ghost girl piped up, eyeing them all a bit warily. “That’s what got us, too.”

“Yeah. Cold, slimy, and disgusting.” Beast Boy shuddered for emphasis, though it wasn’t faked.

“Who are you?” Starfire asked the girl. “You seem very similar to Danny, but you are not.”

The girl straightened, her green eyes flashing. “My name is Dani Phantom; Dani with an ‘i.’ I’m Danny’s cousin.”

Extending her senses, Raven could tell there was more to that story. Her aura was far too like Danny’s to just be a cousin. It was slightly different, but fundamentally it was the same, almost as if they came from the same…

Oh! A result from Danny’s archrival? Danny had mentioned something about a cloning experiment during one of their many meditating sessions.

“Danny wasn’t caught by them?” Dani sounded slightly proud of this. “How? None of my attacks had any effect!”

“His ghost ray fried them upon contact!” Starfire said exuberantly, demonstrating with a punch.

“He left because he had to take care of them somewhere else,” Raven said. “It was too dangerous.”

“Danny wouldn’t do that!” Sam objected.

Raven shook her head. “He’s been through several changes since you last saw him. Trust me, he did it to keep us safe.”

“What happened?” Tucker demanded. “Sam’s right; Danny wouldn’t do something like that no matter how many ghosts are around!”

“It’s not my story to tell,” Raven said firmly. “When Danny gets here, he’ll let you know.”

“You’re saying that as if you expect him to be caught,” Jazz said, cocking an eyebrow.

Raven gave a smile. “Are you telling me that he won’t eventually show up?”

There was a short silence.

“Point,” Jack finally said, a grin growing on his face.

Raven could tell that he was the kind of man who normally grinned a lot; his face had the evidence as it spread into the grin with absolutely no problem at all. She wondered how slim and athletically muscular Danny had this huge and bulky father; then she glanced at Maddie’s slim form and found her question answered.

“So what’s the deal?” Robin asked. “You’ve been here longer, haven’t you? What’s going on?”

Danny’s friends and family shared nervous glances, evidently unsettled by what had happened.

“It—” Sam started only to break off, shaking her head. “It makes no sense. He never gave us a name, but—”

“He looks almost like Danny!” Tucker blurted out.
Raven stiffened. “Bulky, flaming white hair, red eyes, and a cape?”

Sam gave Raven a sharp look. “No. But how do you know about him?”

Raven’s lips pursed. “We ran into certain events that required an information transfer. Regardless, you’re saying that this ghost isn’t him?”

The other Titans and Dani glanced back and forth between Raven and Sam, not knowing what was being discussed.

“No, it isn’t,” Tucker said when it turned out Sam wasn’t going to respond. “He’s completely different.”

“His body structure is like Danny’s and so is his facial structure. But his eyes and his voice are completely different,” Jazz described slowly. “And…it’s like he has two completely different personalities.”

“One manic and one more serious?” Robin suggested.

“Yeah.” Jazz looked at each of the Titans in turn. “You’ve met him then?”

“As a mist,” Raven said. “Tell me what he said. What happened after you were brought here?”

“Raven’s our expert on ghosts,” Robin explained. “Aside from Danny, of course.”

“And Wulf,” Beast Boy added. His ears drooped. “But he’s not here!”

“Wulf?” Tucker cocked his head to the side. “You mean Wulf, as in the ghost Wulf? Really big, black, and furry, wearing a jacket?”

“Yeah, he was staying with us, too,” Beast Boy agreed. “I was really getting to practice my Esperanto on him.”

“Never mind that,” Raven interrupted impatiently, keeping her eyes on Sam. “Tell me what he said.”

Looking back at the nods she was receiving from the others, Sam took a breath and began.

**Flashback:**

“Who am I?” The ghost’s voice dropped. “I’m your worst nightmare.”

Sam’s hands curled into fists. “That doesn’t answer our question! Who the hell are you?”

The ghost snickered, his mismatched eyes piercing through Sam’s. “The girlfriend’s got spirit. Do you…think…”—his voice had a sing-song quality now—“…that…you deserve…to know? Weaklings…that you are?” He broke into laughter, the sound sending chills down the spines of the Fentons and Sam and Tucker. “I’m…someone…intimately familiar with you.” He opened his arms wide, brandishing the staff clutched in his left hand. It was silver and topped with what resembled a claw; in the middle was a smoky black orb. “I know your lives…I know your history…I know who you are.”

“You’re not Danny,” Jazz proclaimed firmly, eyes narrowed at the ghost. “You aren’t. If you were, you’d be rubbing our faces in it. But you’re not, so you’re not Danny.”

“Then who are you?” Tucker demanded. “You’ve got Danny’s emblem—”
The ghost suddenly roared, resulting in all of them flinching back, *“DON’T SPEAK TO ME OF THAT!”* Before their very eyes, the emblem seemed to reform, only to have the ghost dig the fingers of his left hand into the symbol and tear it off, managing half of it before the rest stuck. “Do not…”—his voice was ragged—“speak…to me…about…that.” His mismatched eyes were manic, gleaming with insanity.


“You won’t tell us who you are, will you?” Dani said, her face stoic. Her green eyes were glinting stonily. “It’s all just a game to you, isn’t it? ‘Let’s see Danny Phantom’s friends and family caged… Let’s see what the ghost boy does next…’ That’s it, isn’t it? Is that what it is to you? Just a game?”

The ghost simply smiled, revealing a row of gleaming white teeth that seemed at odds with the rest of his face. “Clever you… An unknown factor…yet a weak one…”

Dani bristled at that, but didn’t say anything.

“You—” Maddie started, only to break off when Jazz grabbed her wrist, shaking her head firmly.

“Let us do the talking,” Jazz whispered, not looking away from the ghost. “We’ve been doing it longer.” She gave Jack a quick glance to make sure he received the message, and then looked back at the ghost.

“So if it’s a game,” Sam said, not budging from her spot, “then I presume Danny will join us soon?”

The ghost broke into manic laughter, the deep tone falling off into something more high-pitched. “Danny, Danny, Danny,” he sang. “Danny Phantom, the half-ghost; Danny Phantom, the protector of the human realm; Danny Phantom, the clueless one”—Sam and Tucker flinched at their old nickname for their friend—“who is he really? Who…is…he… really?” The ghost twirled his staff, the smoky black orb in the middle of the claws swirling like a mini-whirlpool, and cocked his head to the side, a crazy grin on his face. “Why…don’t we find out?”

“You’re not going to answer any of our questions, are you?” Jazz said wearily.

“Won’t we have such fun?” the ghost said in response, his eyes rolling up to the ceiling. The entire right half of his body flickered out of view for a second before solidifying. “Won’t we have…such…fun?” He pointed the staff to the right of him, opening a swirling vortex of darkness and sending a chill through the room; shadows dripped out and fell onto the stone floor, crawling around his feet. “See…you soon…”

Then, with a manic burst of laughter, the ghost slipped into the vortex, the portal closing behind him with a hiss. What remained were the shadows, but they crept off to the shadows of the vast area the captives found themselves in.

Jazz and Sam turned to the others, one stoic and one trembling with rage.

“Well,” Jazz said wearily, “that didn’t answer any of our questions.”
“That’s it?” Raven asked once Sam had finished.

“We tried, you know,” Sam said bitterly. “But he’s a ghost and the rest of us are just humans, aside from Dani. But it’s not like we could do anything.”

“He was bonkers, completely and utterly bonkers,” Tucker said adamantly.

“He never gave us a straight answer,” Jazz added. “Just…word games.”

“But he didn’t know about me,” Dani said. “He didn’t. ‘An unknown factor.’”

Raven pursed her lips, thinking. “He’s not the only one. The other one didn’t know about you either. That’s because the accident happened before…”

“What?” Sam demanded. “You’re saying they’re linked? Danny defeated him! We saw him with our own eyes! He was the only one there! He wasn’t the kind of ghost to share!”

“Okay, who the hell are you talking about?” Robin burst out, having had enough of this lopsided conversation.

“Someone Danny told me about weeks ago,” Raven said, not looking in Robin’s direction. “I won’t tell you who; it’s Danny’s business.”

“You’re not getting anything out of the rest of us either,” Tucker said firmly.

Robin threw his hands up in frustration. “All right! But if this lack of information results in something unexpectedly bad happening, I’m not taking responsibility for it!”

“We’ve been taken captive by an insane ghost with a split personality,” Cyborg pointed out. “Isn’t that bad enough already?”

Robin glared. “You know what I mean!”

“It is Danny’s business, Robin,” Starfire said, placing a hand on her boyfriend’s shoulder. “We should trust his friends and family.”

“Yes,” Raven agreed. “Now, we need to—”

She was broken off as the ground underneath them began shaking. A loud noise was heard, as if the stone ceiling above them was cracking. The pillars in the area visibly vibrated.

But over everything was the horrible sound of hundreds of ghosts moaning.

With the gut sensation that had never served her wrong before, Raven had the sudden feeling that everything was just about to go to hell.
The Unspoken Promise

‘What...the hell?’ This, along with numerous other exclamatory statements and swearwords were currently running through Danny’s mind. All the while his eyes were fixed on the ghost who had appeared by the trees to his right.

It made no sense. He really couldn’t understand it. He’d never seen a ghost like this in his lifetime, nor had he heard of one like this.

“What...the hell?” Danny demanded, turning to face the unknown ghost head on. His hands balled up into fists.

The ghost, who wore a jumpsuit similar to his own except that the emblem on the chest was half torn off, cocked his head to the side. His white hair flickered oddly on the right side, almost as if it was having trouble staying solid. For a moment, the entire right side flickered out of view before solidifying. As it did, Danny saw the ghost’s mismatched eyes, which were an exact copy of the mist’s eyes.

“Why...” the ghost spoke, “does everyone...ask that?” The ghost spread his arms, brandishing the silver staff he was holding. There was a claw on the top end with a smoky black orb in the middle. “Who...am I?”

“It’s a logical question,” Danny said sharply, narrowing his eyes. “You look like me. But I don’t know you and you don’t act like me. So that leads to the question: who the hell are you?”

The ghost’s voice was cold. “What’s...in a name? ‘A rose by any other name...would smell...just as sweet.’” A smirk stretched the ghost’s mouth. “Do...you really need to know?”

“That’d be really great, thanks,” Danny said lightly, only the shift in his stance revealing his tension. “Right now, you’re just ‘the ghost’ in my head.”

The smirk widened. “Can’t you sense it?”

“Sense it?” Danny frowned in confusion. “You...”

“Go on.” The ghost laughed, the light tone sending chills running down Danny’s spine. “You’re so...curious...”

Hoping that he’d read the situation right and that the ghost meant his ghost sense, Danny focused his senses inward, closing his eyes as he did. He didn’t think the ghost would attack him until whatever it wanted from him was done with.

He’d never used his ghost sense like this so he was moving blindly. First he took in the sense of his own presence, which was rather chilly. Then he expanded his senses outward, trying to sense the other ghost. The moment he did, he instantly recoiled.

The sense of pure insanity coating the other ghost was almost unbelievable. But that wasn’t it. He had to go deeper.

Repressing a shudder, Danny forced his sense forward. Gritting his teeth, he poked and prodded at the other ghost, finally finding what seemed to be his ecto-signature as it seemed very like his own sense of self.
That was when he paused, slightly disconcerted. ‘No way… It feels… almost identical?’

There was a slight difference on the outside but fundamentally, the ghost felt the same. It was as if he and Danny had sprung from the same root but had become different leaves.

His eyes sprang open, meeting the gloating eyes of his enemy. “What… who… You’re not me… but… almost?” He shook his head, thinking furiously. “You’re from another timeline, aren’t you?”

The ghost broke into snickers, clapping his hands together twice. “Well done… Clockwork… is so careless… with his things… isn’t he?” Rustling around his waist for a moment, the ghost held up a gleaming medallion with the initials CW inscribed on it.

Danny barely refrained from rolling his eyes. “Why am I always given the time-traveling ghosts to deal with? Do I have a poster on my back or something that says I deal with time-travelers?”

“Don’t joke!” the ghost snarled, his sudden outburst causing Danny to step backward in surprise. “You…” The ghost started giggling. “Would you believe me… Father?”

The title made Danny’s eyes widen. “W-what? F-father?” His head was shaking in denial. “No way. There’s no way.” But he couldn’t deny the facts: the ghost was almost a carbon copy of himself. “… How?”

“A small… accident.” The ghost spit the words out. “Involving highly combustible ingredients… and a boiler.”

“And that gave birth to you?” Danny laughed incredulously. “Sorry to say this, but I’ve already faced that future. And I’ve got to say that you’re not in it. He would’ve rubbed my face in it if he’d had a son!”

A second later found him ducking an ecto-blast shot in the direction of his head. He got ready to fire his own but held off upon seeing that the ghost wasn’t doing anything else.

“You’re not listening,” the ghost snarled. “An accident occurred… and you went to Plasmius. You ripped us apart. But we merged…” The ghost laughed maniacally. “We merged and became… so powerful. No one could stand in our way.”

“I’m sensing there’s a ‘but,’” Danny said, unable to repress his innate sarcasm.

“But”—the word was growled, warning Danny he was walking dangerously close to the edge—” you were poisonous. We had to… rip… you out.”

Like a flash of light, Danny understood. “You… you were a part of him. He thought he was getting rid of something that made him weak, didn’t he? And he got rid of you. And whatever happened… it turned you into this?” He laughed bitterly. “Now I get it. ‘Father’ indeed.” Thinning his lips, Danny tilted his head slightly to the side. “But you’re not from the same timeline I met him. You’re from sometime completely different.” His eyes narrowed. “You’re too similar to me to have been from ten years in the future.”

“Clever, Phantom,” the ghost complimented, grinning maniacally. “Well reasoned… clueless one.”

Danny didn’t flinch. “It stands to reason you’ve got my memories. You’re not going to freak me out using nicknames Sam and Tucker have given me.” He smirked. “You don’t even know what’s happened in my timeline. I’m guessing you’re just as clueless – if not more so – than my actual future self.” He sighed heavily. “Or should I say, former future self. I’m not turning into that monster, so I’ll never ‘give birth’ to you.” He spread his arms questioningly. “So I suppose the
question is…what kind of grudge do you hold against me?”

The ghost’s tone was incredulous. “You…really think…that just because you decree…it won’t happen…that it won’t?”

“It won’t,” Danny confirmed confidently.

“Suppose it won’t…what does it change?” the ghost challenged, his face an ugly parody of Danny’s own, twisted in hate as it was. “You’re still the same…the same half-ghost…the same person. You…ruined us.”

Danny was getting the sneaking feeling that he’d been a little too naïve in dealing with this insane ghost. He’d forgotten that being insane meant not being able to reason like a sane person. That meant none of his reasoning would get through to this ghost.

But he could still try, right? “Now just wait a minute—”

“You caused us pain!” the ghost roared. “All this…we did to destroy you!”

That caused Danny to pause, realization striking him. “Wait…you mean you’re the reason for the ghosts disappearing from the Ghost Zone? For why I ended up here?” His eyes landed on the staff the ghost was brandishing like a weapon. “Is it that staff?”

The ghost never responded; his eyes were without reason as he swung the staff in Danny’s direction. A stream of black jettisoned out of the smoky black orb. Suspecting that getting hit by that would be really bad, Danny teleported behind the ghost with a mere thought. The stream of black swept across the field and didn’t stop until it hit the picnic tables. The tables were immediately gobbled up and the black stream dissipated.

“You can’t escape!” The ghost whirled around, trying to hit Danny with the staff.

Danny ducked under it, lifting a hand to try and grab it. He missed as the ghost jumped back, grinning widely as he unleashed another stream of black.

“Damn it!” Danny blasted off the ground into the air, able to maneuver better while airborne. He unleashed an ecto-beam, not bothering to modulate the intensity.

The green was blinding as it rushed to the ghost. But it never came into contact, as a swirling black vortex opened up, swallowing up the energy before it sealed shut with a hiss.

‘I have to get that staff!’ Danny’s eyes narrowed as the ghost’s right half flickered out of view again. ‘He doesn’t seem very stable. Then again, nothing about him is stable. Ripped out of him without any consideration, he doesn’t even have a name. And he wasn’t sane enough to give himself one either. He just knows that he doesn’t have one…and he doesn’t care either.’

Heedless of Danny’s momentary lack of action, the ghost cackled gleefully and opened a gigantic vortex to his right. Numerous shadows dripped out of it.

“Oh,” Danny breathed, eyes tracking the monsters as they sank into the ground.

“Like my pretties?” The ghost’s voice was high-pitched now. “So friendly, aren’t they?” He giggled maniacally, throwing his head back. “Get him!”

Danny didn’t budge from his spot, instead gritting his teeth. As the shadows converged on him, he let out a yell and unleashed a mass beam of energy that incinerated the mass horde.
“Did you forget?” Danny asked, glaring at the ghost. “Those things are useless against me. You’ll have to face me yourself. Unless you’ve grown too reliant on that magic staff of yours?”

He was well aware that he was playing with fire. But experience had taught him that the angrier someone became, the easier they were to take down because they became irrational and made stupid mistakes. He’d fallen prey to that same weakness himself. Anger might make him more powerful, but it also made him more foolish.

Danny’s comment did the trick as the ghost’s eyes flashed in anger. A split-second later he leapt towards Danny, taking flight. Danny danced out of reach, using his speed to avoid the swipes of the staff and wincing as inarticulate snarls escaped from the ghost.

“Think you can run forever?” The ghost jabbed the staff forward, not coming close to hitting Danny.

Danny furrowed his brow. “What was that supposed to do?”

When he felt a sudden chill at his back and what seemed to be a sudden suction, Danny inhaled sharply, reading the ghost’s cruel intentions in his face.

“I’m not going without you!” Danny snapped, whipping his hand out and grabbing hold of the staff.

The ghost had no time to pull back as the portal that he had opened up behind Danny pulled both of them into blackness.

Danny spent a brief and terrifying moment in blackness so deep that his only ghostly glow lit up the area around him, revealing the ghost he had pulled in with him, the unearthly light casting his insane face in dark shadows. Then there was brief flicker from the smoky black orb in the staff and another portal opened, pulling both of them through.

He had time to register burning heat before the ghost yanked the staff out of Danny’s hand and darted back. Then Danny looked down and around to see that the entire world seemed to have turned into molten lava; they were flying directly over a steaming, bubbling volcano, and all around them were countless other volcanoes.

There was no such place on Earth, Danny knew. ‘Oh God…a staff that travels through dimensions?’

There was no time to further think on this as the ghost opened another portal and disappeared into it. Danny reacted, bolting forward and into the portal just before it closed. He found himself suddenly floating in water and directly before a larger-than-life shark, which had its gaping maw open, revealing dozens of deadly sharp teeth.

He released a stream of bubbles in a shocked shout as he scrambled backward. The shark chomped down on empty water and twisted to the side, its beady black eye glaring at Danny hungrily.

Danny wasted no time in darting away from the shark. As he did, he opened his senses for the ghost. He was not going to stay in a dimension where there were huge sharks that were way too big for Earth. Plus, there was the whole issue of not being able to breathe. As far as he could tell, there was nothing but water around him.

When he found the ghost, he teleported directly to where he was located. He ended up behind the ghost, but any surprise he would have had was gone as the green flash alerted the ghost to his whereabouts.

The ghost whirled around, mouth open in a wordless snarl. The staff whipped at Danny but he
grabbed it, stopping it in its tracks.

Danny almost yanked it out of the ghost’s grip but was stopped by a boot to the stomach that let out another stream of bubbles.

‘Great…running out of air!’

There was an evil smirk on the other ghost’s face as he opened another gaping vortex. A mini-whirlpool formed as water poured into the rip in space. The ghost was sucked in first, while Danny was caught in the slipstream. He tumbled into black space, completely disoriented and sopping wet.

The only warning he had before something hit him in the back was an insane yell. “See you!”

The powerful whack sent him tumbling head over heels in empty space. Closing his eyes, Danny focused on the other ghost’s location and teleported.

Being in nothing but blackness, the green flash of light was more disorienting than helpful this time. Danny took the opportunity to grab the staff and tear it out of the ghost’s grasp. He promptly sped backwards, staff in hand and panting heavily, water still running down his face in streams.

The ghost let out a wordless scream of rage. “THAT’S MINE!”

Danny shook his head, holding the staff behind him with his left hand. “I don’t think so.”

The negative reply sent the ghost rushing to Danny, fury written over every aspect of his countenance. Danny ducked under him and sent an ecto-beam in his direction, hitting the ghost in the stomach and ripping a scream of pain out of him.

Green ectoplasm sprayed Danny in the face and he recoiled backward, momentarily blinded. As a result, he felt the ghost grab hold of the staff and try to pull it away.

‘I just tore a hole in his stomach and he’s still fighting?’ Danny wiped the ectoplasmic blood off with a hand, not giving the staff an inch. His eyes met those of the ghost, which were manic with pain. His stomach was a gaping hole that was knitting itself closed before Danny’s very eyes. As it did, though, the ghost’s right half became slightly transparent before becoming opaque.

“Pain…” the ghost breathed, tugging at the staff and grinning maniacally, “…means nothing.”

“You have a hole in your stomach,” Danny retorted, pulling the ghost forward as he pulled back on the staff. “I’d say pain means something, but you’re too thick to feel it.”

“Tell me, Danny Phantom,” the ghost said, not resisting. As a result, he was directly in Danny’s face. “Have you ever…been ripped in half…by a hole in space?”

Danny stared at the ghost in confusion. “What?”

There was no reply aside from a widening grin. Then the ghost jerked the staff so it pointed to the side, as Danny’s grip had loosened in the ensuing confusion. The smoky black orb flickered and opened a portal directly next to the two fighting ghosts.

Neither had any time to react (though the ghost didn’t even look away from Danny’s surprised green eyes) before they were pulled through and thrust into the interior of some kind of building. Danny impacted with a pillar, losing his breath and reflexively loosening his grip on the staff.

The ghost darted away to the side, sneering as Danny coughed, trying to get his breath back from the
sudden collision.

“You won’t…be keeping that,” Danny informed the ghost in-between coughs, wiping his face clean of what remained of the ghost’s ectoplasm. Taking a deep breath, he assumed a sitting position on the extremely dented pillar.

“Care to…back that up?” the ghost challenged, grinning.

Danny’s eyes flared green. “With pleasure!”

He erupted from the pillar in a blur of black and white, crashing into the ghost with a loud smack! The impact hurtled both of them into the ground of the building, creating a mini crater.

Panting, Danny pushed himself off the body of the ghost, who was still grinning despite the debilitating impact to the ground. The ghost’s figure was entirely solid with no hint of flickering.

“Thank you,” the ghost giggled, ectoplasm staining his teeth. He spit a mouthful in Danny’s face, causing him to flinch backward in disgust.

The ghost kicked Danny off, getting to his feet with a loud cracking of his spine.

Danny rolled to his feet, scarcely able to believe his eyes. “You…you’re inhuman!”

“Brilliant…observation.” The ghost wiped his mouth, showing Danny the green ectoplasm on his glove. “I’m…a ghost. And you…feed me!”

“…What?” Danny narrowed his eyes. “Feed you? I know you’re completely crazy, but make some sense!”

“What do fathers do?” The ghost opened his arms, baring his body to the half-ghost. His figure was entirely solid, with no hint of flickering. “They nourish…their children.”

Remembering how the ghost had looked before, with his right half flickering out of view, and comparing it with how the ghost looked now, completely solid, Danny realized with horror that he had been feeding him – however unintentionally. Whenever he’d hit the ghost with an ecto-beam, the energy had been feeding into the ghost, giving him strength. And what he’d done just now had brought the ghost into full contact with his own body, giving him even more energy.

“Realize it now?” The ghost grinned. “And…there’s nothing…you can do about it.”

Danny thinned his lips, thinking. “You really think so?”

“Every attack…just feeds me,” the ghost said, dropping his arms to his sides. “Your own body…betrays you.”

“Ecto-beams feed you; my ghost half might inadvertently give off energy,” Danny said coldly, making up his mind, “but you’re forgetting a critical fact.”

“Oh?”

“There are some attacks…that are nothing but destructive.” Taking a deep breath and focusing his energy in his throat, Danny released his ghostly wail.

Ordinarily already very powerful and capable of taking down entire buildings, Danny’s ghostly wail was significantly even more powerful since the Puppet King. The attack ripped up the stone floor, sending debris flying into the air and scattering to the sides. The energy didn’t just spiral towards the
ghost; it also encompassed the rest of the building, cracking the stone ceiling and threatening to
demolish the pillars.

The ghost didn’t have time to move before the destructive energy of the ghostly wail hit him, sending
him flying backward. The attack ripped up the floor where he had been standing.

Danny stopped the attack a few moments after unleashing it to take a quick inventory as to the
destructive potential of it now. It was the first time he’d used it since his “leveling up” and he had no
idea how it had changed since then.

Upon noting the fact that the floor looked like a powerful earthquake had come and gone and that the
pillars and ceiling had cracks running through them even though the building looked very sturdy,
Danny’s lips tightened even as his eyes hardened in determination.

His eyes fell on the groaning figure of the ghost, who was struggling to his feet on a rocky sledge of
floor that looked like a mini-boulder. “Liked it, did you?” he asked shortly. “I have more where that
came from.”

“You”—the ghost’s voice was a rasp—“you didn’t…have that…”

“Different timeline, remember?” Danny said, flying over to the ghost. “I can’t help but notice that
you don’t think ‘pains mean nothing’ now. Did my wail change your mind?” He folded his arms
across his chest. “I have to thank you, you know, for the Puppet King. It’s your own doing.”

“The…puppet?”

“What did you think would happen if you ripped someone’s ghost half out?”

The ghost managed to get to his feet but he was noticeably more shakier than before, having to
struggle to keep his balance on the uneven floor. “…Fool,” he snarled.

“Most minions are,” Danny said, looking down at the ghost.

“What…made you think…I was talking about him?” The ghost smirked at Danny. “You are the fool.
This place…what is it?”

Danny furrowed his brow. “A building?”

“A dimension.”

“This building is a dimension?” Danny said incredulously.

“Nothing outside…but empty space,” the ghost said, cocking his head to the side. “Everything…torn
apart…in a war.”

“Get to the point!” Danny snapped. “I doubt you brought us here just to give me a history lecture on
the dimension!”

“Your friends…family…where do you…think they are?”

The halting manner of the ghost’s speech was on the verge of driving Danny insane. “My friends?
My family? How the hell am I supposed to know? You’re the nutcase who took them!” His eyes
narrowed. “Wait… You’re telling me that you took my family?”

The ghost’s grin widened. “Is nothing safer…than a building…in empty space?”
Danny’s eyes widened as the implications of that statement sank in. And he’d just unleashed a
ghostly wail in here!

“You put them in here?” Danny shout echoed in the building with a hint of power behind it. The
energy slammed into the ghost, throwing him into a pillar.

Danny hastened to calm down, shoving the energy back into his core where it belonged. After he’d
done so, he flew over to the ghost, yanking him out of the rubble and pinning him to the upper half
of the pillar by the collar. “Where are they?” he demanded.

The ghost didn’t reply except to grin. “Why don’t you…find them?”

A flicker out of the corner of his eye made Danny turn his head to look at the staff the ghost was still
clutching. The orb had flickered and that meant…

A roar erupted from behind him, sending vibrations through Danny’s entire figure. Whirling around,
Danny’s jaw dropped open upon seeing the gigantic…shadow monster behind him. It easily reached
up halfway to the ceiling, which was roughly about the height of an eight story building.

It was eyeless but something was dripping out of its eyes and dripping onto the ground. The mouth
was open, revealing a gaping maw of sharp teeth that were stained with things Danny would rather
not think about. Its skin was not just black; it was writhing and seemed to be crawling like it was
made up of countless shadow monsters that were swarming over it.

“Damn,” Danny swore, his grip loosening on the ghost’s collar.

“Get him…” the ghost breathed in Danny’s ear, his voice echoing through the area, “…pet.”

With a roar, the shadow monster pounced. Danny didn’t think, bolting to the side and sprinting off,
legs fusing into a ghostly tail. There was no question about fight or flight; every instinct in him was
screaming to get the hell away.

The shadow monster was absolutely silent except for its rancid breath, which reminded Danny of the
times the Lunch Lady had used rotten meat, except that it was a hundred times worse.

‘These things are in-between dimensions?’ He swooped to the side, dodging around a pillar to come
out behind the shadow monster.

To his great surprise, it didn’t work. All of a sudden he was faced with another gaping maw of teeth
as the shadow monster slammed into him with those same teeth, sending him hurtling through the air
with his entire body stinging from the contact with the sharp pieces of bone.

He crashed through several pillars before he recovered enough to turn intangible. He flew through
one pillar before he tried to bring his flight to a halt by teleporting to the ground. It worked…to a
point.

He ended up teleporting into the ground with the full force of inertia instead of teleporting on it the
way he had planned. Groaning, he managed to float out of the crater he’d formed, wincing as the
movement tore at the numerous holes the monster had left in his skin. Ectoplasmic blood was
running into his eyes and he wiped at it in irritation, needing to see.

“Danny!”

The sound came from behind him and was so familiar he turned around without thinking. He blinked
in surprise upon seeing the Titans, his friends, his family, and Dani inside a transparent green dome.
“You guys…you are actually here?” he asked, surprised. He wiped off some more ectoplasm, noting how Sam, Tucker, Dani, and his family winced on seeing the ghost blood drip to the ground.

“Never mind that!” Sam said, eyes running over him.

“Are you okay?” Maddie demanded.

“What happened to you?” Dani exclaimed. “It’s like you had a run-in with a bunch of ice picks!”

Danny lifted an arm to see the wounds the monster had inflicted healing over with no scars, noting that Dani’s comparison had merit. “I will be in a moment.” He wiped his forehead one last time to get rid of any residue, noting that his face had already healed. “I had an accident”—he winced in remembrance—“with a jaw of teeth.”

“You weren’t caught, though, were you?” Raven said sharply. “How did you end up here?”

Danny opened his mouth to reply, only to close it when he smelled the rancid breath of the monster. He whirled around to see the gigantic monster leap at him from between two pillars.

“Oh hell!” he heard Cyborg shout.

“What is that?” That was Tucker.

This time there was no conflict in his mind either. His friends and family were behind him, meaning that he couldn’t run away.

Firing up a powerful ecto-beam in his hand and feeding as much power into it as he could, Danny released it with a yell. Packed with even more power than usual, the ecto-beam exploded outward. It hit the shadow ghost and poured outward, disintegrating parts of the pillars and even the floor before it finally dissipated altogether.

When he was sure the shadow monster was gone, Danny turned back to the dome and flew over, stopping right before it and landing on the ground. “Are you guys all right?” he asked.

They were just blinking at him, rather shocked.

“Danny,” Sam finally said, “that…was that easy?”

Danny shrugged, glancing behind him. “No harder than before. I just put more power in it. Judging from the size of that thing, it needed it.”

“You’re not even winded!” Tucker burst out.

“Do we have to have this conversation now?” Danny hissed, feeling for the ghost’s presence. “We’re about to have company!”

“The ghost?” everyone asked simultaneously.

A manic giggle sounded then, rounding off the chorus. “How…nice… You’re all…expecting me…”

The ghost appeared in the area where Danny had destroyed the monster, manic eyes roving over the entire group.

“We could do without you,” Danny said sharply, ignoring the warning hisses from behind him.

The ghost’s eyes widened comically. “But we’re…not done yet…Danny Phantom.”
“If I had it my way,” Danny said, his fist flaring green, “we’d be done now!” He fired it in the ghost’s direction.

The ghost didn’t move, but it wasn’t an ordinary ecto-beam Danny had shot his way. The energy struck the ghost head on and threw him backward into a pillar, sticking him to it.

Danny then split into two, giving the duplicate a nod before it headed off to deal with the ghost. He turned back to the dome, eyes scanning the group.

“Wulf isn’t here?” he asked.

“He wasn’t from the start!” Beast Boy confirmed. “And he won’t tell us!” he added loudly, pointing in the direction of ghost, who had phased backwards through the pillar and was now being harassed by the duplicate.

“Danny, are you all right?” Jazz asked hastily before anyone else could speak. “We haven’t seen you for days! I told you not to go into the Ghost Zone by yourself!”

Danny frowned. “For the record, Skulker threw me into the Ghost Zone. I was just fine with staying in the lab. Besides, I didn’t plan on being thrown through a portal!”

There was a mini-explosion from somewhere, signaling that the duplicate had blown something up.

“But are you all right?” Maddie asked frantically. “You’re covered in blood!”

“Am I?” Danny brushed a hand through his hair, noting that it had some resistance. His hand came away with a faint green tinge and he made a face. “I don’t think that’s mine.”

“That wail earlier, that was you?” Sam said.

“I wouldn’t have done it if I had known you guys were here,” Danny asserted, frowning. “I didn’t know how much damage it would do. Luckily I didn’t use it at full power.”

“That was your ghostly wail?” Raven sounded surprised. “I suppose it’s a good thing you insisted on not doing it.”

Danny smiled wryly. “Yeah, well…it’s a bit of a last-ditch resort. I just used it because anything else is something he feeds on, giving him more energy. He’s solid now, did you know? He was flickering earlier…”

“We saw him,” Dani said, her hands clenched into fists. “He never told us who he was.”

Danny grinned at his “cousin.” “Hey, Dani. Sorry about meeting up like this.” He didn’t bat an eye upon hearing another explosion.

“Is that normal?” Jack asked, trying to see if he could watch the fight.

“He’s probably just throwing ghost rays around,” Danny said. “It’ll keep the ghost on his toes.”

“He didn’t tell you who he was?” Robin demanded.

“The impression he gave off was that he wouldn’t tell us because we’re weak,” Jazz said hotly.

“He is not a nice ghost,” Starfire said adamantly.

“That and he’s completely insane,” Tucker added.
Danny hesitated, thinking about what the ghost had told him. “He did tell me. He doesn’t have a name…but that’s because he was never supposed to be.”

“What does that mean?” Sam said. “Never supposed to be?”

“Never supposed to be, you mean?” Raven clarified. “As in, never supposed to be a being?”

“Yeah.” Danny gave off a flinch as his duplicate suddenly fizzled out. “Oh damn. There goes my duplicate.” He got a faint sense of sharp teeth and rancid breath. “Great…cause of death – another shadow monster.” He didn’t see the confused looks his friends and family from Amity Park gave him.

“Focus on him for now,” Raven said hurriedly, catching Danny’s attention. “We’ll be all right. I’ll focus on finding a way out, okay?” She gestured to the dome separating them from Danny.

Danny nodded. “Yeah. I’ll try and see if I can’t take this fight to another dimension.” He looked around the area with a faint sense of unease, noting the damage his ghostly wail had done even here. “Somewhere more open.”

Tucker blinked, disconcerted. “I never thought I’d hear you talking about dimensions like they’re just another neighborhood.”

“With that staff,” Danny said, “they might just as well be another neighborhood. Stay safe, all right?”

“Be careful, Danny,” Sam said fiercely. “All right? Don’t go doing anything foolish. We want you back home. Do you promise?”

Danny gave her a smile, not answering her in the affirmative. “I want to be back home, Sam.”

Giving the others a final nod, he bolted off in the direction where he could sense the ghost was. He used his sixth sense to fly through pillars and didn’t even flinch when he ran into the second shadow monster, instantly annihilating it with a bright flash of energy.

Slowing down now, he didn’t miss the sitting figure of the ghost on a pillar. He floated in front of him, eyes narrowed.

“Regardless of what happens,” Danny said calmly, ghostly tail flicking to the side, “this ends now.”

The ghost tilted his head sideways. “You…speak of death.”

Danny smiled mirthlessly. “I think we both know how this is going to end.” He clasped the thermos on his belt. “I don’t have an empty thermos on me and even if I did, I would never lock you in one. I locked him in one and he escaped. And he was saner than you will ever be. What would an insane ghost do when locked in a thermos?” The rhetorical question hung in the air between the two. “So, there can only be one way to end this.”

The ghost’s eyes glinted. “Annihilation?”

Danny thinned his lips. “I don’t kill, even if the ghost deserves it.” He eyed the staff the ghost was holding. “Even as insane as you are, perhaps you can guess?”

The question posed, Danny didn’t give the ghost any time to reply, darting forward to grab the staff. As expected, the ghost didn’t let go, swinging with the staff as Danny jumped off the pillar into the air, flying up to the ceiling now.
Then he took the initiative, channeling as much harmless power into the staff as he could, focusing on opening a portal elsewhere. He didn’t know how it worked but he was determined to try.

When he did, the ghost’s eyes widened in surprise and realization before narrowing in determination. Suddenly, Danny felt his power being suppressed by the ghost’s crazier energy, which caused the orb to flicker.

A portal formed and Danny didn’t even think about it, pulling both of them into the rip in space. When their surroundings righted themselves, Danny froze upon realizing that he was in a very familiar area. It looked like Amity Park, but it was completely and utterly wrecked. There was not a single standing building, plumes of smoke were rising from various sites, and the sky was an ashen gray.

What’s more was that there was not a single sign of life anywhere.

Danny’s shock let the ghost pull away from him, still holding the staff.

“Recognize…the place?” the ghost asked, seeming to enjoy Danny’s horrified shock. “Like…what I…did?”

Danny turned on the ghost, eyes narrowed. “You did this? What about him? The one who created you? He doesn’t seem like the kind to let someone like you run around scot-free!”

The ghost bared his teeth angrily. “Him? He’s gone! Thought he could live without me! But he couldn’t – he couldn’t!” He was laughing maniacally. “He tore me out”—he was speaking rapidly—“he tore me out but couldn’t stay! I was him and he was me.”

Danny gave a short laugh. “So he fell victim to his own pride, huh? Decided he didn’t need you, but it turned out that without you he just – what? – destabilized? I bet that just was a riot for you, wasn’t it? The ultimate irony: he threw away what he really needed.” He smiled ruthlessly. “Does it bother you? Knowing that he threw away what was absolutely necessary? Knowing that he considered you so worthless that he didn’t think twice about tossing you when he could?”

He watched as the ghost’s aura started to flare angrily, continuing coolly, “I bet it does. And you know why? Because you went after me. If it didn’t bother you, you would’ve just stayed here. But instead you found Clockwork, saw that there were other timelines, saw me, and decided that I just had to pay. You hated it so much that you were just thrown away that you went after me.” Danny raised an eyebrow. “Did I miss anything?”

His words had done the trick.

With a wordless roar, the ghost rushed to him, his aura blinding in his fury. Danny didn’t flinch, batting aside several punches and fielding the ghost’s kicks. He waited for a brief break in the ghost’s guard before he swooped in with a hand, grabbing hold of the staff.

“I bet”—he barely flinched as the ghost kicked his stomach—“that you’ve figured out what I want to do now, huh? I can’t confine you via normal means”—he blocked a punch—“I can’t destroy you because it’s just not in me to do that”—his eyes hardened—“I can’t use this staff because I don’t know how and I know you’ll never teach me”—his head turned intangible as the ghost tried to head butt him—“but I can destroy it, and lock us both in this dimension. You won’t disturb anyone ever again.” His eyes bore into the insane ghost’s, absolutely no hesitation in them. “It’ll be just you and me.”

The staff was now directly in-between the two of them. Neither of them was moving – Danny
because he was waiting for some kind of confirmation and the ghost because he’d frozen.

Without a word, the ghost’s eyes flickered down from Danny’s to the staff. Danny felt power suddenly seep into the staff; the smoky black orb flickered.

It seemed to sink into the staff, which began to vibrate furiously.

The whole thing took a second and by now the ghost’s hand was a viselike grip over Danny’s, preventing him from moving.

Realizing with calm clarity what would happen in just another second, Danny closed his eyes, exhaling slowly.

With a silent implosion, the staff exploded into a vortex.
The Keepers

As Danny flew off in a blur of black and white and faster than Sam had ever seen him fly before, she turned around to the others, her face in a mask of shock.

“He didn’t,” she said numbly.

“He didn’t what?” the masked teen asked.

“He didn’t promise,” Sam whispered. She grabbed a rather white Tucker shakily by the forearms. “He didn’t say he’d come back!”

“That doesn’t mean anything,” the half-robot with them said hastily. “He might not have had time.”

“No,” Tucker said, shaking his head. He gripped Sam back. “It’s…with Danny…a promise is our guarantee that he’ll do something. And if he didn’t—”

“He’s not planning coming back,” Sam murmured.

“Don’t say that!” Jazz scolded sharply, seeing the stricken faces on her parents. “Don’t!”

“Danny wouldn’t give up like that!” Dani agreed, her eyes shining. “He wouldn’t!”

Sam hid her face in Tucker’s sweater, trying to control her rapid breathing. ‘Get a grip!’ Inhaling sharply, she jerkily pulled away, swallowing thickly. “Okay,” she whispered, “I’m okay.”

“He’s going to be okay!” Dani shouted, grabbing everyone’s attention. Her ghostly aura flickered. “Just because he didn’t say anything – it doesn’t mean he won’t come back! He said it! He said he wants to be home, too!”

“There’s a difference,” the teenage girl in the purple cloak said softly, catching everyone’s attention. “He said he wants to be home. But…he didn’t say he would.” Her eyes were glittering. “What would he do…if he were backed into a corner?”

“He was kicking that ghost’s butt!” Jack proclaimed, holding Maddie close. “Danny wouldn’t—”

“I took the opportunity to sense that ghost’s aura,” the teen said slowly, sitting on the ground and folding her legs. “It’s almost identical to Danny’s. There’s just a small difference that shows he isn’t identical, but it’s alike enough to show they’re somewhat the same. And there were traces of Danny’s own power laced in it, bolstering it. Danny’s power is strengthening the ghost. He said he’s solid now because it’s feeding off of him. If he didn’t have any other choice, what would he do?”

“He’d protect us,” Jazz said immediately. “Danny wouldn’t think of anything else.”

“It’s his hero complex,” Sam muttered, looking right at Raven. “He’d do anything to protect us.”

“He mentioned the staff,” the cloaked teen continued evenly, “saying that the dimensions are like neighborhoods to it. I can’t be sure, but if Danny had the option, would he isolate the ghost so it couldn’t hurt anyone else?”

“Yes,” Sam and Tucker answered instantly.

“But can he do that?” the masked black-haired teen asked.
“Not by himself,” the other teen said, shaking her head. She closed her eyes and began levitating off the ground.

Sam blinked but then looked at half-robot and the green-skinned boy with pointy ears and figured this wasn’t the weirdest thing to happen. It would turn out that her boyfriend would fall in with a group of superheroes, though. Danny just had the weirdest luck.

“What are your names?” Tucker asked the masked boy. “I don’t think we ever heard.”

“I’m Robin,” the boy said. “This is Beast Boy”—he pointed to the green-skinned boy—“Starfire”—the red-haired girl waved—“Cyborg”—the half-robot gave a two-fingered salute—“and Raven’s the one floating. We’re the Teen Titans.”

“Superheroes?” Tucker said, giving a small smile. “You have special powers?”

“I don’t and Cyborg’s half-robot, but the others do,” Robin said.

“I’m half-ghost,” Dani said, standing by Beast Boy. “What do you do?”

“I shape shift,” Beast Boy said, shifting into a cute kitty with enormous eyes to prove his point. He gave a meow.

“How cute!” Dani crouched down. “How come you’re green?”

Beast Boy morphed back, also in a crouching position and sulking now. “I’m green! I can’t help it!”

“Nothing wrong with it,” Dani said hastily.

Before anyone could say anything else, Raven gave a hiss. “Shh! I’m trying to concentrate.”

“What’s she doing?” Jazz whispered to Starfire.

“She is likely looking for a way out,” Starfire whispered back. “Raven has the power to traverse the dimensions. She was looking for a way home for Danny, but had not succeeded. I think she is trying now.”

Raven’s eyes snapped open, glowing white under her hood. “Ah… Found it. Azarath…Metron…Zinthos!”

“Everyone hold on,” Robin called out, holding onto Starfire’s hand.

Black swirled out from underneath Raven, spreading out to cover the entire dome and rendering everyone sightless if it were not for Dani’s ghostly glow.

There was no sound for a moment save for breathing. Then something ripped open in the middle, unleashing a howling wind that nearly uplifted everyone off their feet.

Tucker grabbed hold of Sam and she did the same, both of them clutching each other by the wrists. Jack had taken hold of Maddie and Jazz, who had grabbed Dani and brought her into the middle. Cyborg was holding onto Beast Boy and Robin was crouched over Starfire. Raven was the only one relatively untouched, though her cloak was billowing wildly.

“What’s happening?” Sam saw Tucker say, though she couldn’t hear him.

She gave him a helpless shake of her head, signaling that she didn’t have a clue.
Suddenly, a blinding flash of white light caused her to flinch and shut her eyes reflexively. Then the wind stopped, nearly knocking her over as she abruptly lost the force she was bracing herself against. Only Tucker’s grip on her wrists prevented her from falling over.

Cautiously opening her eyes, Sam met Tucker’s, who was blinking at her confusedly.

She looked around, seeing nothing but green around her and what looked like a ledge beneath her. In fact, her surroundings looked very familiar.

“Are we in the Ghost Zone?” Jazz exclaimed from behind her.

Sam whirled to see that Jack, Maddie, Jazz, and Dani were also on the ledge with her and Tucker. The only ones who weren’t there were the Teen Titans. And that didn’t make any sense, as Raven had brought them here.

“Raven wanted to bring Danny home, didn’t she?” Tucker said slowly, looking around. “So doesn’t it make sense that she’d bring us here?”

Jack was looking over the ledge in fascination. “Ooh, ghosts! And furniture!”

“What?” Sam, Tucker, and Jazz rushed over to look and gazed down.

As they did, what they saw was a virtual ocean of ghosts. In fact, it seemed that all the ghosts that had been missing from the Ghost Zone were floating down there, either dazed or unconscious. And sure enough, there was a bunch of furniture and even pieces of fences floating around.

“Raven didn’t do that,” Sam pointed out, looking at Tucker.

“So if she didn’t,” Jazz said, “then who did?”

“I didn’t see anything!” Dani proclaimed, shaking her head. “What I did see was a rip right in the middle and there was that wind.”

“If we’re in the Ghost Zone,” Maddie said, looking round in a sort of wonder, “then how are we supposed to get back?” Her face pinched in worry. “What about Danny?”

Sam’s breath caught in her throat as she frantically ran over all the reasons why the Titans wouldn’t be with them and a virtual ocean of ghosts and furniture was beneath them. “Do you…”—her voice was a whisper—“…do you think that it was because of Danny that we’re here?”

“But he’s not here!” Dani objected.

Sam agitatedly ran her hands through her hair. “He didn’t say he would be!”

“That doesn’t mean anything!”

“He didn’t promise us!” Sam yelled, startling some of the ghosts that were beginning to float up. “He…sounded sorry! He said he wanted to be home, not that he would be home!”

“Oh God…” Jazz’s voice was choked. She stumbled over to the edge of the ledge and abruptly sat down, burying her face in her hands. “Danny…”

Dani looked around frantically, seeing nothing but stricken faces. “Stop it! Stop it!” she shouted desperately. “Danny wouldn’t just give up like that!”

“What if he didn’t have a choice?” Sam cried, rubbing her face and trying to ignore the prickling in
her eyes. Goths didn’t cry. “You heard Raven! She laid it out completely logically for us. Danny would do anything to protect us. And if that meant not coming home”—her voice thickened—“then he would do that, too.”

“But he wasn’t the danger! It was the other ghost!”

“The other ghost was feeding off of Danny!” Sam could feel her composure beginning to crack. “Nothing he did worked, he said that himself! He resorted to the wail because he had to. Then he said he’d go to a different dimension.” She rubbed her eyes. “But the wail is completely destructive. It destroys everything it comes into contact with. If he meant to use it to defeat the ghost and it was holding the staff…don’t you see? The staff will be destroyed, too.”

“And if the staff is the object that travels through dimensions,” Tucker realized, his face ashen, “Danny will be trapped.”

“But it’s all hypothetical!” Dani insisted. “We don’t know that it’ll happen like that. For all we know, Danny could be on his way right now!”

And it hit Sam like a lightning bolt. “Clockwork…” She looked up from her hands, meeting Tucker’s eyes with a sudden hope. “If Danny’s alive, Clockwork will know, won’t he?”

“We’re nowhere near Clockwork’s, Sam,” Tucker said, rubbing his forehead tiredly. “How are we—”

“We call him. He sees everything, remember?” Sam straightened up, shifting her shoulders back. “He’s probably watching us right now. He knows that we’re here.” She took a breath and shouted, “CLOCKSWORK!”

Her yell threatened to deafen the others, who cringed and covered their ears.

“I know you can hear me! You’re probably watching us now, aren’t you?” Sam continued shouting. “Tell us if Danny’s all right!”

Then, hoping like mad, they all waited.

Raven never expected the sudden interference in her spell. The sudden rip in the middle of her spell threatened to throw everything off and it took everything she had to prevent everyone from being flung off into the void.

Even then, she didn’t anticipate the blinding white flash of light that occurred that completely disrupted what remained of her spell and ripped it into tatters. When she opened her eyes, she found the Titans and herself on the top of Titan Tower. But there was no sign of Danny’s friends and family.

“What the hell was that?” Beast Boy demanded, whipping his head around in shock. “That wasn’t you, Raven, was it?”

“No,” Raven admitted, standing up. She inhaled deeply and stretched her senses out. For some reason, the easy access she’d had earlier to the other dimension was gone. It was as if a door had closed. She could still sense it, but it was further away. “It wasn’t me,” she repeated. “And I don’t know what it was.”

“Where are the others?” Cyborg asked. “I thought they’d be with us.”
His comment struck a chord within Raven. “But they shouldn’t have been. They’re not from here. I meant to go to Danny’s dimension, but we all ended up here. If we came here, it stands to reason that they went to their own dimension. In that case, the reason my spell was interrupted is because something happened to the staff.”

“What does that mean for Danny?” Robin wondered.

Raven shook her head, worry making her heart heavy. “I don’t know, Robin. He might have destroyed the staff either by accident or on purpose – I’m guessing the latter – and that will leave him trapped in whatever dimension he wended up in.”

“Can you find him?” Starfire asked.

She hesitated. Theoretically, she could find him. She’d been in his mind; she was intimately familiar with his aura. There was no reason she couldn’t. But would she be able to?

There were countless dimensions, and if the staff did what she suspected it did, then Danny could be in any of them. To go rooting around in every single dimension was an almost impossible task to ask of anyone. There was no guarantee she would find the dimension Danny had wound up in, just like there was no guarantee she wouldn’t find it.

“I don’t know,” she finally admitted. “It’d be like looking for a needle in a haystack. If I used a locating spell, it might be easier, but it would need some sort of focus. Even if I focused in on Danny, the locater spell is general and wouldn’t tell me the exact dimension he’s in. And then there’s the question of connecting to the dimension, which I might not be able to do.”

“But he is our friend!” Starfire cried. “If he is stuck somewhere with that ghost, we cannot just leave him!”

Raven gritted her teeth. “I know, Starfire! But that doesn’t mean I can just pull him out of thin air! He might just have destroyed the staff, and who knows what that did! The backlash might have annihilated the dimension he was in, and you know what that means—”

“Raven!” Robin barked, cutting her off.

Raven reared back, noting the stricken look on Starfire’s face, the downturned ears on Beast Boy, and the solemn faces on Robin and Cyborg. She realized she’d gone a bit too far and shook her head.

“I’m sorry,” she muttered, stalking to the edge of the roof. “I need to think.”

There was utter silence on the roof for several minutes, save for the soft whooshing of the wind.

Eventually, Raven took a final deep breath, bringing her roiling emotions under some control. It would take a lot of meditation for her to sort through everything that had happened today and she didn’t know when she could start.

Turning around, Raven started to speak when her jaw dropped open in shock.

In the middle of the air a black vortex was opening, yet it was surrounded by a shimmering blue.

There was nothing but blackness and utter cold. There was no sight, no sound, no smell…there was absolutely nothing.
Was this death?

He’d never been particularly religious, but he hadn’t thought that death would be a void of nothingness with him still retaining his sense of self. Maybe it was all messed up because he was half-ghost.

He’d anticipated dying while fighting this ghost, especially during the end. He anticipated dying during every single ghost he fought. But it had never been such a stark reality the way it had been now. He’d stared death in the eye and lost.

His only relief was that his friends and family were all right and that that insane ghost would never harm them again. They’d probably never know what happened to him but at least they were safe. Raven would find a way out of wherever they were and bring them home.

So, he’d accepted himself and he’d made peace with the fact that he was dead. He supposed that all that remained was for him to just lie back and float in the nothingness for eternity.

Just as he’d decided this, a feminine giggle sounded through the space. The sound made him startle and whirl, even though the action was utterly useless.

A voice rang through the blackness, but it was utterly garbled and impossible to make out.

As he figured that maybe he was imagining the sounds and that he was just as insane – if not more so – than the ghost he’d been fighting, something opened up in front of him and he fell through it, falling head over heels onto the ground, coming to a stop with a small “oof”.

Realizing that he was most definitely not dead, Danny kept his eyes shut for a moment longer before gathering the courage to open them, only to find himself staring into a large pair of glowing green eyes several inches away from his. “Ah!” He rolled to the side and sprang to his feet, only to wobble as his muscles threatened to give out.

“Careful,” an amused voice spoke. “You have just returned from the dead.”

“So I was dead?” Danny asked far more calmly than he figured he should. He turned his head to see Clockwork floating several feet away in his adult form.

“Most definitely dead,” another voice confirmed.

Danny looked to see a familiar ghost girl. It was the girl with the doll. “It’s you!”

The girl tilted her head to the side; the motion gave Danny shivers. “It is,” she said calmly. “Were you expecting someone else?”

“To be honest, I wasn’t expecting anyone,” Danny confessed. “I was…well…expecting to be dead.”

“You were,” Clockwork said, a small smile on his face, “but as Time Keeper, I interfered.”

“Time Keeper?” Danny had never heard that term before.

“There are Keepers,” Clockwork continued, “that control various aspects. I am the Time Keeper, or master of time as I have told you. There is also the Space Keeper, keeper of the dimensional spaces. And the Death Keeper – he owed me a favor…” He shifted into an old man.

“Which is why I’m standing here now and not currently dead,” Danny finished slowly, not wanting to know what kind of favor Clockwork had done for the Death Keeper to owe the Time Keeper a
favor. “Then”—he shot the girl a glance—“who is she?”

“But Fatima,” the girl said, her green eyes seeming to look straight through Danny. “I am the Fate Keeper.”

“You take care of everyone’s fates?” Danny guessed. When he received a slight head tilt in confirmation, he turned back to Clockwork. “You’ve only mentioned a few, but I’m guessing there are more. You’ve only mentioned these because they’re somehow involved, aren’t they?” He thought it through. “I’m guessing the Death Keeper has other things to do and he just owed you a favor. You’re here because you interfered; she’s here because…” He paused, not thinking of anything as to why the Fate Keeper would be here. “I have absolutely no idea,” he admitted, “but the Space Keeper? Where is he? That was his staff, wasn’t it? The one”—he flushed darkly—“that was destroyed?”

“It would have been destroyed,” another familiar but completely unexpected voice broke in. “But I am the Space Keeper. What kind of keeper of space would I be if I could not manipulate it to my own ends?”

“Mr. Robinson?” Danny could scarcely believe his eyes. But it was true. Mr. Robinson appeared to melt out of the shadows, holding a familiar staff in his hands. “Not quite, Danny,” he said, smiling.

Then, before Danny’s very eyes, he morphed into a ghost. A black cloak appeared to cover the upper half and black leather gloves covered the hands; the pants he was wearing morphed to become a beige-colored tunic, with the legs covered by skintight leggings that were white; soft leather boots covered his feet. The face remained the same, though the eyes changed to a ghostly green. Additionally, there was now a ghostly glow surrounding him. An echo permeated his voice as he spoke next, “You see, I like to take on a human guise when I live in the various dimensions.”

“So that’s how you knew about her!” Danny pointed to Fatima. Then he frowned, realizing something. “Wait”—he looked at Fatima—he said that you were alive. But ghosts aren’t from dead people – at least, my kind of ghosts aren’t. So how is it that you’re here?”

“I wanted to be alive,” Fatima said, shrugging. “So I was. It was nice, to experience life for a short time. But I’ve always been the Fate Keeper; I just decided to take on a human life for a short time.”

“Fatima and Beobachter”—Danny realized that was Mr. Robinson’s actual name and that it was pronounced oddly, like “bey” with an “o” and “Bach” with a “ter”—“usually work together,” Clockwork said.

“Fate works for everyone, regardless of dimension,” Fatima said, smiling.

“But if you’re usually in a different dimension, and that ghost came from my dimension, how did he end up with your staff?” Danny couldn’t figure it out. “It’s incredibly powerful; how did he get his hands on it? He wasn’t exactly the straightest tool in the box – if you get my meaning.”

Clockwork shared a glance with Beobachter and Fatima. “Do you remember, Danny, what you asked me last time?”

Last time? After he’d rescued his friends and family from that alternate future?

Oh. Oh.

“It was for the best, wasn’t it?” Danny said, grinning ruefully. “Did you plan it out?” He glanced
between the three ghosts. “I’m guessing you conveniently left it somewhere in your lair, where he could find it?”

He shook his head, giving up on understanding the minds of omniscient ghosts. “I suppose you meant for me to end up in Jump City, too, right? Was it because I’d find someone there – someone who understood?”

“Did you not?” Clockwork asked gently.

“Yes,” Danny said softly, thinking of Raven, “yes, I did. And more.” He thought of the Titans, and how they understood what it meant to be a superhero while still managing to enjoy life.

“So it was all for the best, was it not?” Beobachter said cheerfully. “And everything turned out just fine. You’re not dead”—Danny blinked owlishly—“the staff is back where it belongs, and Clockwork’s Observants can go stuff themselves—”

“You are aware that there are countless more than the two that always appear, are you not?” Clockwork interrupted dryly, turning into a very unimpressed looking child.

“Semantics,” Beobachter retorted, throwing a baffled Danny a wink.

“This is too weird,” Danny muttered, shaking his head.

“Keepers will have their fun,” Fatima informed him, smiling serenely. “It’s what keeps the job from getting dull.”

“What do you see?” Danny asked. “As Fate Keeper, what does that mean?”

“I see everyone’s fates,” she said simply. “I know what they can do, what potential they can reach. It’s my job to make sure that they reach that fate.”

Danny saw that Beobachter and Clockwork were watching him. “If you’re the Space Keeper,” he said to the other ghost, “does that mean you know everything that’s going on in every single dimension?”

“Not like Clockwork,” Beobachter said; “he’s aware of everything, regardless of where and when it is. I don’t know how he does it; I have enough on my hands just keeping track of the now when it comes to my responsibility.”

“My own power only extends to fates,” Fatima said. “It does not apply to their past, or different timelines.”

“What does that mean? That alternate timelines aren’t as real as the actual one?”

“The timeline you speak of is nonexistent, Danny,” Clockwork responded. “The staff has been missing for a long time, long before your former future self escaped and that future was decisively wiped.”

Danny looked sharply at him. “So it has been wiped from the time stream? I don’t have to worry about it anymore?”

Clockwork simply smiled enigmatically.

Beobachter clapped his hands together, catching Danny’s attention. “Well, this has been fun, hasn’t it? I think it’s about time I return you to your home, Danny. Your friends and family are getting
worried.”

“Wait.” Danny put up a hand. “Before I go, can I see the Titans?”

Beobachter raised an eyebrow. “Who did you think I was talking about?”

Danny gaped. “But…you said family.”

“Are they not?” Beobachter tapped his nose knowingly and cupped his hand around his staff.

A swirling black vortex opened up before them, but there was a shimmering blue outline around it.

“And that is how my staff should be used.” Beobachter sniffed. He nudged a shocked Danny in the back. “Well, go on.”

Taking an anxious breath, Danny stepped through the vortex, and put his foot down on the rooftop of Titan Tower. He met the surprised faces of the Teen Titans.

He felt Clockwork, Beobachter, and Fatima exit the portal after him but didn’t turn around. His focus was on his friends.

“Danny?” Starfire’s voice was shocked. “Is it really you?”

Danny cracked a grin, throwing his arms out. “Hey, Star.”

With a joyful squeal, Starfire pounced on him and promptly began squeezing the life out of him. He was abruptly grateful that he was in ghost form at the moment.

“We thought you were dead!” Starfire exclaimed, talking directly in his ear. “Raven said that the staff had most likely been destroyed, and that the backlash probably destroyed the dimension you were in, and that meant that you were – that you were – oh!” She hugged him even tighter.

“But you’re not!” Beast Boy stood next to Starfire, a crooked grin on his face. “You’re all right!”

“Mostly,” Danny gasped, pulling Starfire off him. He pushed her away, smiling at her even while his ribs smarted. “I’m glad to be alive.”

“But you didn’t anticipate it, did you?” Raven asked, standing a distance away from the other Titans. Her face was rather blank. “You thought you’d die.”

Danny swallowed, recognizing that Raven was on the edge of an emotional cliff. “I…thought I would, Raven. In fact…I did.”

The other Titans gasped and made exclamations of shock.

“You look alive to me!” Beast Boy declared, pinching Danny’s arm and receiving a wince for his efforts. “Unless you’re all ghost now?”

Danny transformed back to prove he was still only half a ghost. “I really did.”

“Then how—” Robin started. He broke off when he saw the ghosts floating serenely behind Danny. “Is it because of them?” He blinked when Clockwork abruptly shifted into an adult.

Danny shifted his head, seeing Beobachter make a “go on” motion at him. He turned back to the Titans. “They’re my friends,” he said. “Clockwork is the master of time, Beobachter is the master of dimensions, and Fatima is the master of fate.” He gestured to each one as he introduced them. “And,
yeah…Clockwork is the reason I’m standing here right now, decidedly alive.”

“The master of time saved you from death?” Cyborg gaped in surprise.

“Well, to put it the way he would probably say it, it wasn’t my time,” Danny said, shrugging lightly. He wasn’t going to mention that Clockwork and Beobachter had planned the whole thing out; he didn’t think Raven’s temper would stand for that.

“You should talk to Raven,” Starfire whispered to Danny, echoing Danny’s worried thoughts. “She was very worried.”

Exhaling slowly, Danny nodded. He gave the other Titans significant looks and walked past them to approach Raven, who had returned to gazing out over the sea. The sun was setting, creating a magnificent view.

There was short silence for a moment.

“I’m sorry,” Danny finally said, keeping his voice low. He ignored the chatting Titans behind him, who were talking to the three Keepers.

“It’s not your fault,” was Raven’s rather blank reply.

“But it was,” Danny said, sighing. “I…sort of expected it, toward the end. I couldn’t really see a way out of it, other than destroying that staff. I wasn’t going to cram him in the thermos because it wasn’t empty and I couldn’t just destroy him – it isn’t in me to do that. Maybe someday…no, not even then,” he decided, shaking his head. “With those options out the window, I was only able to think of destroying the staff. I couldn’t use it – I didn’t know how.”

“You don’t have to explain, Danny,” Raven said softly, closing her eyes. “I get it, I do. I faced that same situation myself one time.”

Danny was silent for a moment, realizing she was talking about her father. “I see.”

“Yes. And I realize…that’s it’s awful to be on the other side of that situation.” Raven glanced back at her friends. Beast Boy was currently trying to flirt with Fatima, and failing. “I never knew how my friends felt.”

“You shouldn’t have had to face that situation,” Danny disagreed. “And I’m sorry I put you through it.”

“It’s in your nature,” Raven said, smiling as she looked at Danny. “Sam called it your ‘hero complex.’”

Danny winced. “Yeah…she got that out of *Harry Potter* and decided it suited me. Especially after the incident with my former future self.”

Raven nodded slightly, silent for a moment. “So…who was he?” she asked.

Exhaling heavily, Danny took a seat on the edge of the roof; Raven joined him. “He called me ‘father,’” he said. “From what I could understand, the same accident happened and my ghost half merged with Plasmius’s. But something changed, as he decided he needed to rip out his humanity – or something like that. He kept saying ‘you,’ but I don’t think he really meant *me*, per se. Anyway, the end result was that he was ripped out of my future self. My future self then destabilized because he’d ripped out something essential to him.” He grinned self-deprecatingly. “End result: one crazy ghost with a vendetta against me.”
“And that’s the last of them?”

He couldn’t help it; he burst into laughter. “No, I don’t think so,” he said, laughing. “There’s always going to be another one. But hopefully the next one won’t be related.”

Calming down, he sighed. Smiling rather shyly, he turned to Raven. “So…am I forgiven?”

“Forgiven for causing me to worry and wonder whether you were dead? Yeah, I think so.” Raven smiled back, her cheeks tinged pink. “But I’m still going to do this.”

“Wh—” Danny broke off as Raven drew him into a crushing hug, burying her face into his neck and inhaling deeply.

It was only a moment later that she broke it, face flushed a dark pink. “Okay, that’s—”

Scoffing, Danny drew her into another hug, pressing his face into her hair. The unexpected motion caused Raven to startle and they ended tipping over the ledge with startled exclamations.

Danny transformed in an instant and kept them afloat, a big relieved grin nearly splitting his face in two. “Thank you, Raven. Thank you.”

Raven blushed again, acknowledging what he wasn’t saying. “You’re welcome, Danny.”

Danny floated them up to the roof and set her down, landing by her. “So, friends?”

“Always,” Raven confirmed.

They were approached by the other Titans, who sensed that their conversation was over.

“You know, that girl really isn’t half as cute as your cousin is,” Beast Boy informed Danny with an injured scowl.

Danny blinked, digesting that statement. “Okay, eww… That’s a bit too much information there.”


“Technically, she isn’t his cousin; she’s his clone,” Raven said, causing Beast Boy to blush beet red. Danny wondered how that was possible considering his skin was green.


“If it helps, she isn’t me,” Danny said, taking pity on him. “She just has my DNA. She’s completely different.”

“But that means I like you!” Beast Boy blurted out, before keeling over in a dead faint. Starfire leaned over him, poking his face to see if he really was unconscious.

Robin caught Danny’s attention next; he was wearing a smile on his face that Danny hadn’t seen on him before. “You know that you’re a friend of ours, right?” the boy wonder asked.

“Yes,” Danny said slowly.

“We were talking this over a couple days ago,” Robin said, his hand rustling at his belt. “And we decided on something.”

“Something good, I hope,” Danny said blandly.
Grinning, Robin held out a Teen Titan communicator. “Welcome to the Teen Titans, Danny Phantom.”

Danny stared at the communicator, not comprehending what it meant. “Wait… You mean you’re… You mean I’m…”

“You’re officially a Titan, bro!” Cyborg announced, beaming. “And that means you get a hug!” He wrapped his arms around a startled Danny, lifting him right off the ground.

Gasping, Danny phased out Cyborg’s grip a moment later, grinning sheepishly as he floated out of reach of a smirking half-robot. “I’ll do without, thanks.”

“Well?” Robin held the communicator out, his smile still in place. Danny took it, scarcely able to believe what it meant. “You’re…actually serious? Even though I’m not from here?”

“Whether you belong here or not,” Robin said, “it doesn’t change the fact that you’re our friend. It also doesn’t change the fact that you’re a hero. Believe me, Danny, you wouldn’t have gotten it if we didn’t think you deserve it.”

“You can keep in touch with us,” Starfire said, smiling. “I did something so you can,” Raven confirmed before Danny could say anything. “All you have to do is flick it open and decide who you want to comm. It’s pretty straightforward.”

“And it hooks onto your belt, too,” Cyborg said, indicating Danny’s belt.

“I also noticed that you have duplicates of whatever weapons you have on your belt, so that they’re there regardless of whether you’re in ghost form,” Raven said. “That communicator doesn’t need a duplicate, because it shows up whether you’re in ghost form or human form.”

Danny clipped the communicator on his belt and transformed back. He lifted his shirt to see that while the belt had changed, the communicator was still there. “Okay…that is seriously cool.” He grinned at the Titans, transforming into Phantom again. “I’ll keep in touch, yeah?”

“I want to hear everything that’s going on!” Beast Boy said. “And don’t let the fan girls get to you, all right?”

Danny winced in remembrance. “I’ll sic ’em on you if I figure out how.”

Starfire’s eyes were watering. “Oh, I will miss you!” She jumped on Danny, hugging him fiercely for a moment. Pulling away a moment later, she planted a kiss on his cheek, leaving his cheeks tinged with green as he blushed. “Stay safe,” she pleaded.

“Let Wulf know we’ll miss him,” Cyborg said, shaking Danny’s hand. “He was getting to be a great cook.”

“Tell him thanks for the Esperanto,” Beast Boy said, eyeing Cyborg mischievously.

Danny looked at Robin, who grinned sheepishly. “I’ve got nothing other than to tell you to kick ghost butt.”

“Not a problem,” Danny said dryly.

Finally, he turned to Raven, who seemed to be blushing lightly.
“You’ve become one of my closest friends,” she said softly, looking down and to the side, seemingly unable to meet his eyes. “I’m going to miss you.”

“I’ll miss you, too,” Danny said quietly, placing a hand on her shoulder. The action caused her to look up and meet his eyes. “But we’ll talk, yeah?” He smiled. “After all, you gave me a working communicator that’ll traverse the dimensions.”

“Just make sure you’re the one holding it,” Raven said, placing the same hand that Danny had on his arm. “It runs off your energy.”

“I’ll make sure,” Danny confirmed.

Then, closing her eyes, Raven drew Danny into one last hug that seemed to last a lifetime. When she drew away, she hastily wiped her eyes. She looked up at him out of clear eyes and smiled.

“Good luck, Danny Phantom,” she said.

Danny smiled back sadly. “Thanks.”

His goodbyes said, Danny turned to the Keepers, who were waiting patiently. “I’d like to go back home now.”

“You’ll always have a home here, Danny,” Beobachter said, placing a hand around the orb in his staff.

A glance back at the Titans confirmed this statement as they were all nodding. Everyone except for Raven and Robin looked rather teary now.

“I know,” Danny said softly, looking back at his friends one last time before he stepped through the vortex and back home.

The spot on the collar where Raven had pressed her face was wet with tears.
The entire Ghost Zone was frozen when Danny stepped through the vortex — frozen in time that is. He wouldn’t have noticed ordinarily, except that he stepped onto a ledge and noticed that his friends and family were suspiciously motionless.

Then he took a closer look at their body positions and his heart sank.

Sam’s hands were clasped together and her head bowed, eyes squeezed tightly shut. Tucker was right by her, a hand on her shoulder and face paler than he’d ever seen it. His parents were clutching each other and his mom’s face was buried in Jack’s chest; Jack looked stoic, but his eyes seemed suspiciously shiny. Jazz was sitting on the edge of the ledge, face hidden in her hands. Dani was standing in the middle, head bowed and hands clenched into fists at her side.

“She just called for me,” Clockwork said, catching a stunned Danny’s attention.

“Sam?” Danny whispered, taking in the silent picture’s expression of agony. “Why…did you stop time?”

“Keepers are a myth amongst ghosts,” Clockwork said.

“Clockwork’s existence is suspected but it has never been confirmed,” Beobachter elaborated for Danny’s benefit. “The rest of us are considered a bedtime story.”

“So none of you can just pop up in the middle of the Ghost Zone, yeah?” Danny concluded, sighing.

“Yes.” Clockwork shifted into an old man, placing a hand on Danny’s shoulder. “Now, as humans would say it, ‘good luck.’”

Danny nodded in thanks, giving the Keepers a small smile. “Thank you…all of you.”

Beobachter opened another portal, into which Fatima disappeared. “It’s our job,” he said, winking at Danny before he also left.

“I know I’ll see you around again,” Danny told Clockwork with a feigned air of weary acceptance.

Clockwork just smiled mysteriously. “Will you?” Then, stepping back into the portal, he gave Danny a farewell tilt of his head before the rip in space closed, leaving only the swirling green of the Ghost Zone.

“Time in,” Clockwork’s voice echoed.

Time restarted as if it had never stopped in the first place. He could hear the confused murmurs of the ghosts around him as they recovered from traveling through whatever dimension they had been stuck in. His ghost sense threatened to go into overdrive, and he resolutely pushed the chill into his core, knowing he would have to expel the cold at a later time to avoid getting frozen the way he had during Undergrowth’s attack.

It was Tucker who saw him first, as he’d been keeping his head up. His face slackened in disbelief, before pure happiness and relief washed over it. “Danny?” he whispered, his voice as clear as day to
Danny grinned sheepishly as Sam’s head snapped up. “Hey.”

“Danny!” Sam rushed to him, jumping up and pulling him down into a desperate hug that he reciprocated (though far more delicately, as he’d probably crush her). “You’re all right!”

She stepped back, only to be replaced by Jazz, who was examining Danny’s face in disbelief. Exhaling sharply, she hugged him tightly. Danny barely had time to blink before they were enveloped by Maddie’s arms and then Jack’s enormous figure.

When they had drawn away, Danny was given a rather surprising hug by Tucker, who held him tightly for a short moment before drawing away, rather embarrassed.

Then Dani was there, staring at Danny in what seemed to be a mixture of pride and relief. “I knew it,” she whispered. “I knew you’d come back. I told them that you would!” She flew at him in a rush, almost bowling him over as she hugged him fiercely.

Rather guiltily, Danny hugged her back, thinking that he didn’t deserve her confidence. If it hadn’t been for Clockwork, he wouldn’t be here. He never would have come back.

Dani drew away, smiling shyly. “Oh and,” she said, eyes twinkling, “they know who I am.”

Danny put her down, meeting the eyes of his parents and Jazz. “I would’ve introduced you the next time you came,” he insisted.

“I know; Sam and Tucker told me.” Dani smiled beatifically. “I just wanted to see what you would say.” Her face suddenly morphed into a frown and she squeezed Danny’s arms threateningly. “Don’t ever do something like that again, do you hear me?”

“I’m sorry,” Danny apologized, sighing, “but that’s something I can’t promise.”

“You were a jerk, you know,” Sam said, her voice sounding unusually thick. “You just left, saying something about wanting to be home but not saying you’d come back.”

Danny looked guilty. Yes, he’d said that, but it was the only thing he could. He didn’t think he would’ve been able to come back. As it was, he almost didn’t. But that wasn’t a conversation he could have here in the Ghost Zone with ghosts listening in.

“I’m sorry.” It seemed to be the only thing he could say. He was sorry for scaring them but not sorry for going off to fight the ghost.

“You keep saying that.” Sam stared hard at him. “You weren’t here a moment ago. You just appeared. Are you really all right?” She grasped his arms in alarm. “You’re not…full ghost?” Her voice had dropped to a whisper.

Exhaling slowly, Danny shook his head. “Just…hold on a moment.”

He grabbed the thermos at his waist and uncapped it, pointing it away from them. Pressing the release button, the Cake Ghost, Technus, Ember, a monstrous lamp post, and Desiree were ejected. Having been stuck in the thermos for so long, they were very disoriented and simply floated for a whole before managing to fly off, still dazed. The lamp post garnered incredulous stares from all the ghosts, until it snarled and snapped at them, sprinting off into the distance.

Attaching the thermos to his belt, Danny turned back to the others. Then, he released his ghost form,
making sure to keep the transformation slow so that they could see. When it finished, he said, “There, see? I’m still—”

He was cut off as Sam threw her arms around his neck again. “Thank God,” she breathed against his neck. “Thank God.”

“Dude, what’s up with your clothes?” Tucker blinked at him. “You’ve gone all Goth.”

Danny chuckled, pulling back from Sam so everyone could see. “Yeah, that was all Starfire. She incinerated my other ones so I didn’t really have a choice.”

Sam ran a hand over the emblem on his shirt. “Let me guess: she liked your jumpsuit?”

“She just really liked the color black on me.”

“You even have a hat!” Tucker lifted the hat attached to the chain looped through the belt loops on the pant. “You hate hats!”

“I don’t wear it, but it makes for a great lasso,” Danny said by way of explanation. They stared at him.

“There’s a joke there that we’re missing, isn’t there?” Tucker asked finally.

“What happened, Danny?” Maddie asked. “Where were you?”

“Here is really not the place to have this conversation.” Danny looked around, seeing the numerous ghosts around. He lifted his shirt up a bit and pulled off the second thermos, releasing the Box Ghost this time. “Okay, I think that covers everyone.”

“You’re really going to tell us everything?” Sam asked, sounding slightly skeptical. “Everything?”

Thinking of Raven and everything she had helped him with, Danny smiled. “Yeah. Everything.”

Jazz looked at him, eyes narrowed. “You seem different,” she finally observed.

“I guess you could say that I’ve had a life changing experience,” Danny said, smiling crookedly. “I’ll tell you guys everything…even if you might not want to hear it.”

“So that means there’s something we won’t want to hear?” Dani accused.

Thinking of how he had died, Danny managed to refrain from wincing, instead nodding slowly. “Yeah. But like I said, the Ghost Zone really isn’t the place to have this conversation.”

“So, home?” Tucker suggested.

Danny smiled, taking Sam’s hand and looking round at his friends and family. “Yes. Home.”

Clockwork, Beobachter, and Fatima watched Clockwork’s viewing screen, where the small group of half-ghosts and humans taking off through the Ghost Zone and to the human realm could be seen. A moment later the screen faded to green.

“There are still things planned for Danny, are there not?” Beobachter asked, turning to Clockwork.

“Danny has a very long future ahead of him,” Clockwork acknowledged. As he said this, the screen
changed to show an older Danny with longer hair that extended over the back of his neck flying through a very futuristic looking city. He was taller, athletically muscular and streamlined, and with a grimmer face than the Danny Phantom the three ghosts had just left behind.

“That wasn’t what I meant and you know it,” Beobachter said peevishly. “You’re the one who came to me about the ghost, saying that he would steal my staff the next time I came to visit and that I should let him.”

“Was it not fun?”

Beobachter winced. “Fun? Watching him tear through the dimensions like they were paper rather than doors? Ah…it was interesting…but I wouldn’t call it fun.” He shook his head, watching Clockwork shift to an adult. “But tell me, you still have more in store for Danny, don’t you?”

Clockwork didn’t answer but the screen shifted images. This time the scene was that of a mini-asteroid hurtling toward Earth. The scene shifted to a starry night sky where a shooting star was streaking. A second later a small fireball impacted the earth, burying itself in a crater in the middle of a forest. Changing again, the scene was now that of Danny Phantom curiously inspecting the crater but finding nothing.

“His fate is intertwined with someone else’s,” Fatima said, smiling as she watched the next scene, that of Danny fighting a blue-skinned vampire-looking ghost. “I asked Clockwork to make the path easier.”

“I see.” Beobachter observed the viewing screen showing a sinister black coffin on top of a flight of stairs; a pumpkin and a sword sticking in it sat by the bottom. “My, my…playing with fire, Clockwork?”

Coughing slightly, Clockwork morphed into a small child just as the two Observants floated into the room. Beobachter instantly threw his hood over his head, throwing his face into blackness. He also snuck Fatima a small doll, which she held to her chest.

“Clockwork!” The Observants stopped upon seeing that Clockwork had guests.

“Beobachter!” the first Observant snapped. “What are you doing here?”

The master of dimensions turned to the Observants, his face completely hidden in the black shadows under his hood. “Can’t a ghost visit his old friend?”

Fatima floated over to the Observants, smiling rather vaguely. “Want to play dolls?” she asked, holding out the doll she was holding.

“No, thank you,” the second Observant said. “How are you, Fatima?” His voice was kind.

“Want to play,” Fatima said, her face set in a pout.

“You can play later, Fatima,” Beobachter said, resting a hand on her head. He gave the Observants a dismissive look. “We just came to tell Clockwork hello, and to retrieve my staff.”

“You found it?” both Observants asked simultaneously, staring at the staff.

“Danny Phantom was most helpful,” Beobachter said, tracing a finger over one of the silver spikes that made up the claw. “Tell him hello the next time you see him, will you?” he requested Clockwork. He didn’t wait for an answer, instead floating out. “Come, Fatima,” his voice drifted back into the room.
The first Observant looked rather sour, though this was hard to make out as his entire face constituted of only an eye. “Did he say *Danny Phantom* was helpful?”

“We watched the fight! The staff exploded!” the second Observant exclaimed. “And it was his fault!”

“The staff seemed intact to me,” Clockwork said, raising an eyebrow as he shifted to an adult. “Unless that was an imitation?”

“We trust there will be no more surprises?” the first Observant said, his tone making it clear it was not a request.

“Can you not see?” was Clockwork’s reply. He waved to the viewing screen, which remained stubbornly green.

“We see,” the second Observant said; “but you are not doing your job.”

“Am I not? I am the keeper of time and I have been…keeping time.” On cue, one of the clocks in the tower struck, its chimes ringing throughout the entire room.

“Then what of the elder half-ghost?” the first Observant demanded. “Are you doing anything about him?”

“Everything is fine,” Clockwork intoned, his viewing screen revealing Danny Fenton and his friends and family sitting in the living room and talking. “Everything is exactly as it should be.”

“Be it on your head, Clockwork!” the Observants chorused. Then, as one, they turned around floated out the same doorway Beobachter and Fatima had exited.

“Oh yes,” Clockwork murmured, smiling as the screen changed to the image of the shooting star streaking across the sky and landing in the forest of Amity Park. “Everything is exactly as it should be.”

The shooting star hit the ground and the image exploded into green flames. It then zoomed out to reveal Danny Phantom facing the screen head on, taking a deep breath, and releasing his ghostly wail; immediately, the image broke into fragments that morphed into green smoke, eventually merging to form the familiar green swirls.

Chapter End Notes

A sequel is being planned for this story, and the series will be a trilogy. I'm uncertain as to when the sequel will be finished, but I started it over a year ago. I keep picking at it in-between other projects, but we'll see how it goes. I want to finish it before I start posting so you don't have to suffer through long periods of inactivity.

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